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WOW

LIST 2018

SET OFF ON A SOLO ADVENTURE

YOU CAN GO YOUR OWN WAY

Words: Sam Aldenton, travel writer, Flight Centre

▶ LEFT TO
RIGHT: Ice
cracks on the
surface of
Lake Baikal in
southern Siberia;
intrepid teenage
Jade Hameister is
all smiles.



➤ **CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** The trek to Everest Base Camp is an achievable goal; go wild with a safari adventure in Africa; life's good when cruising the clear waters of Koh Roi, Thailand.



➤ Women travelling solo certainly isn't a new concept, though these days, it's not all *Eat Pray Love*-style journeys of self-discovery; raw, wild and authentic travel adventures are what many women want.

Flight Centre bookings illustrate that the age of solo female travellers is moving beyond the post-high school, gap-year crowd as younger female travellers head off on lengthier trips to Central America and its off-the-beaten-path destinations in search of new experiences.

Adventure travel experts agree that a variety of factors have contributed to the notable increase in solo female travellers, such as greater coverage of female adventurers on TV, social media, advertising and in magazines.

"Social media has been a fabulous and powerful platform to share tales of adventure from solo women adventurers," says Monique Farmer, founder of Women Want Adventure.

The sentiment is echoed and embraced by 16-year-old Melbourne schoolgirl Jade Hameister, who has spent the past few years training to become the youngest person to complete the polar hat trick (navigating the North Pole, South Pole and Greenland Crossing) – and she's already ticked off the North Pole and Greenland.

"I think when women see other women taking risks and focusing more on what they can do, rather than on how they appear, we expand our beliefs of what's possible for us to achieve," Jade says.

It seems the domino effect of women seeing other women conquering challenges is what gives others the confidence to believe they can do the same.

The growing interest in this style of travel is opening up the horizons of what sort of travel is possible, whether women prefer to explore on their own or are doing so to avoid the alternative of not seeing the world at all.

"I always try to remind myself that really, the best travel companion you can have is yourself and that being on your own means you don't have to make compromises. Also, I try to see any twinge of loneliness as a push from the universe to get out and meet someone new," says Nina Karnikowski, a freelance travel writer who has visited more than 45 countries.

Much of the focus of adventure travel is placed on completing a challenging

physical feat, such as trekking Everest Base Camp, cycling Vietnam or embarking on a walking safari in Africa. However, Monique of Women Want Adventure thinks there is much more to it.

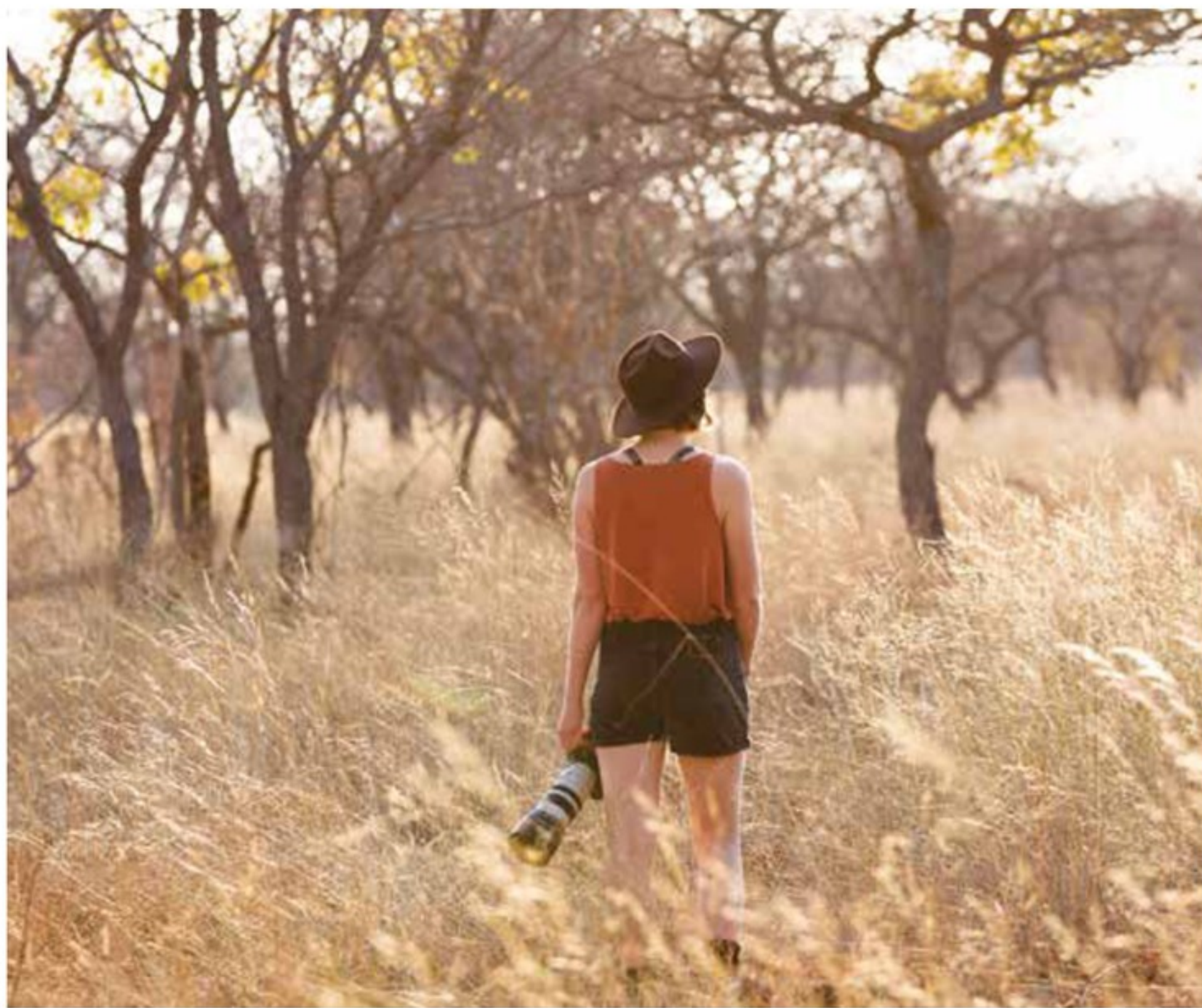
"What I believe to be more powerful is the emotional achievements. For many ladies to try something new or unknown is often confronting yet completely liberating," she says.

The fear of loneliness on the road is certainly something that can hold many women back, but any traveller should understand that loneliness is only temporary and pales in comparison to the rewards.

"Any sense of loneliness or related negative emotions is far outweighed by the empowerment of solo travel. Hiking up a mountain knowing that you've 'got this' and you don't need anyone else to make you feel safe, secure and confident, is the best feeling there is. You can always join a tour or hire a guide if you feel like you need support for a day or two along the way," says travel writer Nina.

Many of the intrepid female travellers interviewed agree that the first step to overcoming any self-doubt is to acknowledge what's holding you back, with an understanding that you will never feel 100 per cent ready.

"From a young age, girls and young women are told of the concerns of being out alone, and so a combination of these



“...raw, wild and authentic travel adventures are what many women want.”

factors results in the lack of confidence. There are lots of Facebook groups for females who travel alone that allow you to connect with, get advice from and meet up with women across the world," says Emma Walker, founder of She Went Wild, a community dedicated to supporting women in the great outdoors.

Jade is a teenager who is all too aware of the invisible barriers placed in front of girls when they're young but she wasn't prepared to let doubt or other people's limited expectations get in the way of her achievements. The motto she uses is that courage expands possibilities and fear shrinks them.

Mountain Designs CEO Caroline Machado Campos agrees that while more women are seeking solo adventure, it's a trend irrespective of gender.

"I think women and men are getting more active and looking to add fun and excitement back into their lives. We all need to break away from our busy lives at some point and venturing into the outdoors is the best way to revitalise and get inspired," Caroline says.

Whether it's trekking the Himalayas or camping in the Blue Mountains, whatever takes you a step outside your comfort zone is the perfect next (or first) adventure to take on. **FC**



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