

London Report February 2007

## The “Greta Garbo” Travel Trend

It is over ten years since Brigit Jones summed up everything that was miserable about being a desperate single female in London. Back in 1996 it was even estimated by Newsweek that a single woman of 40 was more likely to be killed by a terrorist than to get married. Today, the outlook and image of city singles is still shaky – and the long-term die-hard singles are defining and defending their status not so much as a curse, but as a lifestyle choice.

But rather than sitting at home and being miserable, singles today it seems want to travel – and one of the big boom areas that have taken the travel industry by surprise over the last few years has been solo travel. Compared to ten years ago, the figures for single travel has almost doubled, with some travel agencies reporting up to 70% increase in single bookings over the period of a year. This is not perhaps surprising when you look at the demographics – according to Mintel, the largest growth area of singles in the new few years will be the 24-35 age group, who have postponed marriage and children, are both affluent and increasingly travel hungry. Not only have people (and especially women) become bolder about travelling alone, according to the chairman of the Association of Independent Tour Operators, but also there is increasing pressure on hoteliers to build more single rooms to accommodate increasing demand.

Some independent travel companies in the UK reported nearly 70% increase in single bookings last year, while others are struggling to keep up with demand for so-called “Greta Garbo Breaks”. These “i-just-want-to-be-alone” breaks are either taken by singles, or by someone whose partner has very different interests. Adventure tour operators have also profited handsomely from increasing demand from singles – and companies such as Explore or Exodus typically today have 70% singles on their trips. One of the biggest growth areas within this market is the female sector, and specialised single tour operators often find themselves struggling to find enough men to balance out the groups. As one travel agent said, “women today see being single as an opportunity to travel rather than a hindrance”. Already hot on the trail of this trend is Cold Fusion, a chalet company that offers ski holidays in Chamonix exclusively for “individuals” (with the emphasis on a guarantee of “no families and no children”).

Although most of these companies do not advertise themselves explicitly as having partner finding potential, some do little else. Speedbreaks is a speed dating agency that openly offers the opportunity to travel and find “the one” for the 25 to 45 age group who want to have fun. Offers include weekend trips to Barcelona.

The greatest change is in the perception of the single travellers – they are no longer seen as second class citizens, but are beginning to be treated as the cash cow of the travel industry of the future. Despite this one of the main sticking points with single travel is still are the single occupancy supplements that singles have to pay. Already there is a Single Travellers Action Group who provide lists of companies that don’t charge these supplements. Also companies like Solos Holidays offer packages where this is waived. At the moment many singles however still find they have to search and bargain to avoid being penalised, but when this changes, the single travel market will, say experts, really take off.

### ***Trends in the travel industry***

Greta-Garbo breaks

Increasing single rooms in hotels

Abolition of single supplements

“individual” as opposed to “single” status

Speed dating abroad

[www.speedbreaks.co.uk](http://www.speedbreaks.co.uk)

[www.coldfusionchalets.co.uk](http://www.coldfusionchalets.co.uk)

[www.soloholidays.co.uk](http://www.soloholidays.co.uk)

[www.exodus.co.uk](http://www.exodus.co.uk)

[www.explore.co.uk](http://www.explore.co.uk)

[www.solotravelonline.co.uk](http://www.solotravelonline.co.uk)