

**Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies
with Kelsi from PointSisters**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Alex: Do you feel like this hobby only works if you have a dedicated player two like a spouse or a partner? Well, we're happy to say that is not the case at all. Listen in today as our special guest talks all about how to kill it in points and miles as a solo traveler.

Welcome to *Points Talk with the Travel Mom Squad*. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points. Today, we have a very special guest joining us, Kelsi Sullivan, who is one half of Point Sisters on Instagram, is here to talk all about solo travel. And Devan, Kelsi's sister, the other half of Point Sisters was previously on episode 70 talking all about her honeymoon on points with the around the world ticket, but RIP around the world. It is no more.

So, we're not going to, we're not going to go back to that episode because, I mean, you can go back and hear about Devan's amazing honeymoon. You just won't, She has some great stuff. You just won't be able to use the strategy that she used to book something similar for yourself. Point Sisters, I don't know, if you've ever messaged us on Instagram or on our Facebook group and said, I have all these points. I don't want to book this myself. I want someone else to book this for me. Do you do that? We always say no, but we have friends who do, and we point you to Point Sisters. And so they are, while they won't be booking anymore around the world tickets, they do just general award bookings, and they are our go-to source to refer people if that is something that you are interested in.

[Points Talk with the Travel Mom Squad](#)

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

Alex: Okay, so Kelsi, tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got started in points miles. I know you have like just a different upbringing in general too and some unique experiences. So tell us a little bit about that and then how that kind of got you started in points and miles.

Kelsi: Yeah, of course. Well, first of all, thank you both so much for having me today. I'm so excited to be on your podcast. And I love your backgrounds. It's really giving me inspo for what I need to do in the future. Like the map behind you just, just loving it. So yeah, a little bit about me. I am, as you said, one half of the Point Sisters and by day I work in for a large beverage manufacturing company and by night I am a points award Booker/I'll post kind of random stories on the internet at night. Um so it's definitely like my side gig, not my full-time thing and like Alex said, I grew up in Puerto Rico and Mexico and I moved to the United States as an adult. It's kind of a long story there. I lived in Asia for a little bit um after college and kind of in my twenties. But now I live in sunny San Diego with my sister and I spend most of my free time at the beach or dancing.

And you know, growing up abroad, I think that, well, there's kind of two facets. Like growing up abroad, we traveled a lot because my parents are American, but we never lived in the United States. And so we always took the opportunity to come to the United States just to know our extended family, but then I think being positioned in Mexico, we took a lot of trips to like Central and South America growing up and to the Caribbean just because of proximity and I think cost for my family. But we got into points and miles because my grandpa was a pilot for American Airlines. So my mom always had a little bit of miles hanging around.

And it wasn't until much later in life that we got super involved with it. Devan and I got really into the FI community, financial independence. I think this is a piece of the story we don't always share so much, but it was actually the FI community that led us to points and miles in a very aggressive way. And so, yeah, and then I found this community probably six years ago and I was like, wait, other people are doing this? Like other people are just as obsessed. Um, and it's just been

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

such a welcoming community and we kind of doubled down ever since and that's how I'm got here today.

Alex: I love it. You know what's interesting is I kind of learned about points and miles first and then I heard about all like the FI community and stuff. So it's kind of like happened in opposite order, which is interesting. And I think it's really cool with the FI community that there are a lot of them who are in points and miles because, you know, it used to be all the old school Dave Ramsey stuff of like, no credit cards, that is terrible. And, you know, people who can use their, who are responsible with their finances, points and miles is perfect for you. So for the FI community, it's like, yes, points and miles like we know how to manage our credit cards. We know this like it is like a match made in heaven.

Kelsi: Yeah, it's like the ultimate unlock. It's like you're on this path to FI and then you're like, wait a minute, I can travel in luxury while I do this. It's like, yeah, I think once you get there, you're like, there's just no going back. I mean, there's no other option. Like you have to do it.

Alex: And if anyone listening if you're like, what are we talking about? FI is like financial independence and then like you can expand on that and it's FIRE, financial independence, retire early. So are you doing the whole fire thing, retiring early or just not?

Kelsi: No, that's the plan, Alex. Like, wish me luck. I do live in Southern California, so you know, it's, it's just expensive. you know, a really high cost of living, but really high quality of life. Um, so there's a trade-off there. So, yeah, I mean, that's that's the plan. Can't I can't be on the grind forever. So.

Alex: Well, I support it. I like that plan.

Jess: There's too much of the world to see, right? You can't even.

Kelsi: It's like, I always tell people, I'm like, honestly, my job, and I love my, like full transparency, I love my job. I love what I do. I love my team. Like I think I

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

work for a really excellent organization, but it's like my job gets in the way of me living my best life. I'm like, I can't be confined to this like 25 days of vacation. Like I can't live like this.

Alex: You're ready to start your Pam, Pam retirement.

Kelsi: Oh my gosh, yes. If I could retire like her, mm-mm.

Jess: All right, so getting into the whole solo travel thing, we hear from so many people who are not married or maybe they are a single parent and they think, okay, I'm not going to be able to do points and miles because I don't have a partner and someone that I'm like opening cards with and referring cards for. And so points and miles isn't going to work for me. And I always say, yeah, but you need, you only need half as many points, you know? Because you're only you're only paying for one person instead of two. But you are just like exhibit A of how this is totally doable with just one person primarily opening the cards to earn the points and redeeming the points. So like, just tell us about your experience with points and miles and like how you approach it as a primarily solo traveler.

Kelsi: Yeah, it yeah, you're you're totally right. And Jess that's kind of how I think about it too. I think there's like two key parts here, right? Like how you earn points, but I think almost more importantly is how you spend them. Right? Because I think if your redemption strategy is efficient, then you don't need to earn as many points in the first place. Like you said, right? Like you need two business class seats. I only need one. Um, and actually there's a lot more availability for one than there is for two. So in that sense too, I think, um, the flexibility of being a solo traveler is super helpful.

But it, you know, kind of in that same line, you're right, not having a traditional P two or points partner makes earning a little bit slower, but I really think that over time, like if you do this long enough, you know, through sign-on bonus, regular sign-on bonuses, smart card usage, like really optimizing your multipliers and your spend categories and just general optimization. And then like kind of like

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

the other freebies, like time share presentations, it's like, you know, slowly, you know, slowly but surely you become a points millionaire and then it's like you don't really spend them fast enough. you know, like I only have.

Alex: I totally know what you mean.

Kelsi: Yeah. So I think it's just kind of getting to that baseline. Kind of getting to like your points FI if you will. So yeah, I do think it tends to balance out. Um so I'm, you know, kind of taking that concept right. I'm very intentional about how I spend my points. Things like for instance, as a solo traveler hotels, unless it's like a 12,000K Hyatt or something like that, um, I reserve my points for domestic, US domestic hotels because I think domestic travel has gotten, you know, really out of control in terms of cash expenses.

And then I'll use, but I won't use it for domestic airline travel because I still feel like there's a lot of really good cash fares and just as somebody who lives in the southwest of the United States, I have a lot of Southwest points and there's just really high value there. So even though it's not like flying in comfort, if I have these kind of short segments, I'll use Southwest points for that. So I think I'm very intentional with domestic travel and then I reserve really all my other points for, you know, I save these big chunks for international business class deals. Um, and I always try to get a really good promo, you know, um, just as like a more concrete example, I went to Tanzania in January and I had purchased that on Turkish Airlines while they were running some 30% off promo and I was able to get, I think, I think it was one way for 70 or 75,000 points in business class and which is pretty good for Africa.

Jess: Really good. Yeah.

Kelsi: Yeah, and then I have, um, two round the world trips, which again, unfortunately, RIP, ANA around the world, but I use those pretty strategically. So I have two around the world trips and they were between 85 and 115,000 and what I did was I positioned them throughout the year so that it would cover two trips a year. So like for my first around the world, it starts in October and it's I'm

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

going to the Philippines, but then I will find kind of a last minute flight home and I'll fly economy or premium economy or business, whatever opens, I'll fly myself back and then I'll continue my trip later next year. So I'll reposition myself on the other side.

And so in that way, it's like, okay, yeah, I spent 85,000 points on this trip and I will have to get one-way segments and reposition myself to wherever I need to go, but it is kind of a way to optimize earning. So I got kind of two trips out of that single trip.

Alex: That's like next Jess next level planning ahead. Like Jess books trips way in advance and you're like, I just booked like a whole around the world for multiple trips.

Kelsi: Yeah. And that's not my forte. And so I was strategic about that. I chose flights that I knew I would take even if I had to change the dates because you can change the dates pretty easily. So like one of my segments is Munich to San Diego. It's like, I live in San Diego. I've taken that flight multiple times. You know, I know that even if I don't take it for the day that I booked it for, I will take this at some point. And so I kind of late like took off those small little segments, but those are just some kind of concrete examples.

Jess: I have a related question for you that I think people will be curious about just because you're so good at what you do and at finding these flights and these deals. Which, if any, services or search engines do you personally pay for? Like alert either award alert emails or award search engines, what are you paying for?

Kelsi: Uh, we only pay for Seats.aero.

Alex: Okay. Do you know what? That was going to be my guess because Seats.aero is like, if you know how to work it, it can unlock a lot. And the key is if you know how to work it. Yeah. But like, I'm barely scratched the surface. I'm like, okay, I know there's a lot here. Maybe that could be your next business,

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

start a tutorial for Seats.aero and sell a guide on how to do Seats.aero. But then I guess you would sell yourself out of your own business of award flight search engines. Or searching for people.

Kelsi: Or Seats.aero would sue me, which I'm just not feeling up to at this point in my life. But I will say you make a really good point, Alex because I get a lot of coaching calls and a lot of coaching calls, I'm like, they're like, we already pay for this thing called Seats.aero and like I would say 90% of the time my coaching call is just like, this is how you can use Seats.aero. But it's just, it's so multi-faceted, so many layers and even though I used to use other search engines in the past, I think that I'm so fast with like singular platforms, like, you know, if I need an Iberia flight and I need to cross reference something, I feel pretty quick at just using the Iberia site and I will just to get a quick answer. I'll go straight to Iberia, but it's after I've done a ton of leg work with Seats.aero.

Jess: And then as far as email alerts, so you don't subscribe to like Thrifty Traveler or any of those other award alert services?

Kelsi: Yeah, we, I think we have worked with Thrifty Traveler in the past and I believe they give us the subscription.

Jess: Okay.

Alex: I bet I bet that they do. They, they gifted us one as well.

Kelsi: Yeah, they're great. Um, I love them.

Alex: But that is one I would pay, I would pay for if it wasn't gifted to us. And I do and we do pay for Seats.aero. I have that one as well.

Kelsi: Yeah, I love that one. I love, um, the points analyst, Kevin Zanes. His is great too. Um, we no longer pay for it or have it, but when I did have it, I thought it was great. Um, just kind of good gaps between Thrifty Traveler. And then if

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

you're looking for cash, I think Ashley does a really awesome job. I just due to flexibility and cash and I never really book cash anymore.

Alex: Well, you're on your path to FI. You don't have that money just laying around. You're like, I have, I have some investing I need to be doing right now.

Kelsi: Yeah, good point, good point. I hadn't I hadn't connected the dots, but you're right.

Jess: Okay, my next question for you is really subjective, but I'd like your opinion on it. So one of the big hurdles for people who are interested in traveling solo is safety, especially for women. They're like, I want to do it, but I'm nervous to be by myself in another country. So like what are some places you've been where you felt really safe or that you would recommend as like, hey, this would be a great first or second destination for you to visit to like dip your toes into solo travel.

Kelsi: Yeah, I loved this question because I did a little brainstorm. I really like a good opportunity for self-reflection and it's such an important topic, you know, and like you said, it's so subjective. I think it requires a lot of personal self-reflection and ultimately, I think everyone has a different threshold for safety based on probably mostly what type of society they grew up in. And I think the narrative that society gives you will ultimately help you, it ultimately determines whether or not you inherently think a place is like safe or not, right?

So in terms of like where I've been where I felt safe, I think that growing up in Mexico, I've always felt very safe in Mexico and Latin America in general, and I would say that I feel very safe in major cities, more so than like rural areas. And I think it's, you know, I grew up in a very, very large cosmopolitan city and just knowing that there are people around me at all times, knowing that there's like a functional metro system, knowing that there's like emergency services. I think that gives me like peace of mind. But I also recognize that like, you know, when you travel, a lot of safety is like language, right? So like if you go somewhere

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

and you don't speak the language, you automatically feel less safe, just because you don't know what's going on.

Alex: It's like you almost just feel less safe and everything could be safe, but you might not feel safe because you feel out of your comfort zone. You just don't feel comfortable. And I feel like those can kind of blend sometimes where maybe don't feel safe, but you're like, it's just, I'm out of my comfort zone.

Kelsi: Absolutely. It's like, right, like if you don't know what's going on and you're relying maybe on like a stranger to tell you what's going on, you're like, wait, this is still a stranger. And so yeah, I mean, I think dipping your toes, I mean, my first recommendation for social travel would always be something like domestic that you're comfortable with. Also just for like longevity because I think people, you know, the first people thing people always ask me is, don't you get sick of being by yourself? And I was like, well, you kind of build up to it, right? Like you kind of spend three or four days in, you know, Savannah or something on your own and then kind of go.

But I think, you know, Europe is a great place to start. I think Mexico is a great place to start. The Caribbean is a great place to start. Like these are all places that I would consider very safe for female travel, very well connected, right? Like in Mexico, there will be people that speak English. In a lot of Latin America, there will be people that speak English. And, you know, Europe, of course, if you're in Western Europe, a lot of Western Europe speaks English. So I think those are kind of maybe good places to start.

Jess: Is there anywhere you've been, and I know you've been, I feel like you've been, you're very well traveled. And so I feel like your, your threshold for, I feel unsafe is probably different than like Alex or I might experience just because you have so much experience and you've and you've done so much of it. But is there anywhere you've been where like it gave you pause? Like I, I don't feel safe here or like I would not return here as a solo female traveler.

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

Kelsi: Yeah, that's a great question, um, because I spent a little bit of time thinking this, thinking through this and part of me was like, oh my god, do I have like early onset like dementia or something? Like, I'm like, of course, I was like, I can't even remember where I've been. Um, but I don't remember going anywhere I felt super, super unsafe, but I do have two incidents that kind of came up for me when I was doing this like thought, um, this brainstorm.

And one was when I was in Europe and I know that is maybe controversial because people love going to Europe. And I think that most people would consider it, you know, very much like the Western world, very developed countries, um, but there are parts in Europe where there's a lot of petty theft. And I remember being in Poland and I was not alone actually. I was with my sister. Um, oh, it's also good to note that both of these incidents happened in darkness, like which I always think is like, uh, like it's just so unfortunate that we still live in a world like this, but I think as a woman, you just have to be extra cautious in the dark because people just get seedy in the dark.

But in Poland, we had, you know, I don't know, again, looking back, I was in my twenties, I don't know whether it was like a miscommunication, like did not speaking Polish, not doing things correctly, but we were stopped by the police and it felt targeted, it felt unsafe, it felt not real. Like, I, I don't know what it was. Um, ultimately we were able to like pay a bribe and leave the situation, which was fine. I mean, unfortunately they took all of our Polish money, which was kind of disappointing for us in our twenties, but I remember Devan and I eventually got to our hostel and we immediately kind of discussed like, we feel very unsafe.

And I was kind of reflecting on that and I was like, actually in a lot of Europe, I feel like kind of this like low key anxiety to like always have my purse next to me because there is so much petty theft. And I've seen it so many times. I mean, I was just in Madrid and I saw somebody literally on the metro have their bag swiped off them and everybody on the metro started screaming like running after the guy, but I just always, I don't feel like physically unsafe that someone's going to attack me, but I feel like, you know, when you have this like low key anxiety

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

that you always have to be watching your stuff, it's like, it's kind of uncomfortable.

And then, um, the other incident was Morocco. Now, I don't think that I would not go back to Morocco. I think that I would, but I do think this...

Alex: Well, I'm going in uh, September, so I hope I don't have whatever happened to you.

Kelsi: No, you won't. It honestly, Morocco is the people are lovely, it's super clean, it's really well connected. Like I loved Morocco, but I remember I went out to the main square maybe at like dusk or dark for dinner, and everybody because it's an Arabic country and it's hot during the day, everybody is in the center at night, like everybody and all of their grandchildren and everyone they'd ever known, they're all in the like center square. And I just remember feeling like I really stuck out and people kept kind of coming up to me and I felt unsafe. Was I? I have no idea, but I felt unsafe. I felt out of control. I felt like I didn't know what was going on. I didn't like know my surroundings very well. And so I remember like finding this kind of restaurant in an alcove somewhere and I just like kind of sat myself down like relaxed and like figured out how to get an Uber or whatever it is I use to get there. Was I actually unsafe? I don't know. So I don't think it was necessarily Morocco or maybe rather me not like thinking about circumstances, like it being dark, not knowing where I was, like not speaking Arabic, like things that I probably should have considered.

Jess: But I think that's a key thing that like as a solo female traveler is like when you do have those feelings, you've got to follow them. Like you have to be like, okay, I'm not feeling safe right now. So let me like remove myself from the situation where I will feel better. Because you, I mean, you don't know. Like, it could have just been what you were just saying, like feeling out of place, but it could have been something. And so it's good that you at least followed your intuition. You're like, okay, I don't have to figure out if it would have been unsafe. I'm safe now.

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

Kelsi: Yeah, totally. That's so true. And actually kind of in that same line, like knowing when to ask for help and not, right? Like being able to really check in with yourself and be like, okay, am I actually unsafe and should I say something or am I over, am I not unsafe and I'm okay? Because I think too what happens sometimes to women, especially women is we're, you know, if we, you know, are discomforted or we speak up, we're we're like, oh, we're hysterical. She's being hysterical. It's like, well, no, am I being, I'm not being hysterical.

Like, you know, and I think sometimes women are like, no, you're safe. Don't, don't say anything. Don't be hysterical. And then they get themselves into a situation where they should have said something. They should have spoken up. They should have been loud. They should have been hysterical, you know, um, and I think that's really just like an internal thing. It's like, okay, what's my threshold? Like when should I say something? And when should I be like, okay, wait, maybe it's just because I'm a little disoriented. Has what are the facts versus like the stories I'm telling myself. Like, has anyone accosted me, sexually harassed me? Has anyone taken money for me? It's like, no. So like facts versus stories, I think can be really like grounding maybe?

Jess: Yeah. Yeah. No, that totally makes sense.

Alex: I think so too sometimes I, I don't really, I don't know, buy into the narrative so much like this place is unsafe and this place is safe. I think it's like the situations that you're in can be safe and unsafe. Like I feel unsafe in a parking garage at nighttime by myself in Salt Lake City. I'll be going to be okay, but like anywhere at night, like you said, nights can be a little scary. I'm not going to feel safe as a female alone at night, probably anywhere. And so I just, I think you just have to be careful of, not necessarily I think maybe where you're going, but what situations you're putting yourself in those destinations.

Kelsi: Absolutely. Yeah.

Alex: So if you follow Kelsi and Devan on Instagram at the Point Sisters, then you might have seen some of Kelsi's solo travel. She's definitely the solo travel

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

queen. I forget where you were at. I want to say it was somewhere in Asia and you were riding a bus all over the place.

Kelsi: Oh, Sri Lanka.

Alex: Yes. And I was like, oh my gosh, how is she like, did they have, you'll have you'll have to tell us about that bus ride. But did it have doors or seats?

Kelsi: It had seats. Or was it just really crowded? Unclear. Unclear. It was just so crowded.

Alex: And it was hot, right? And you were going a long ways and I was like, I couldn't do that for 10 minutes, let alone hours. Like, I was like, Kelsi is much stronger person than I am.

Jess: I think she texted me. I think she was like, oh my gosh, you have to go watch Kelsi's stories. Like, she's on this bus.

Kelsi: Oh my god. I so I, I would not recommend. Oh no. Solo travel in Sri Lanka is totally fine for women. But I lived in Sri Lanka for three years so I felt super safe. But yeah, the bus rides in Sri Lanka are always a trip. They're just like insane.

Alex: So maybe not a for maybe not like your first solo trip ever should be to Sri Lanka.

Kelsi: No, I'm not feeling like that's like, that's not where you're going to start.

Jess: Yeah. So share with us though, like your top three trips that you did solo. And then maybe like if you can go into detail on one of them in particular, like a little bit of the strategy behind of, how you redeem the points, maybe what points you use and then a little bit more information about the trip itself.

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

Kelsi: Okay, so I went to, I'll just kind of do like, I'll go backwards. So I went to Tanzania in January. And I think that this was like one of my favorite trips ever. Um I went to Tanzania for, I think it was there for like two weeks and I hiked Mount Kilimanjaro. I went on safari and then I flew to Zanzibar. So I think that one was so fun. And I would say that one was half tourism, half travel. You know, it felt more tourism based than like my travels. The second trip that was so fun was India and Sri Lanka. Uh full transparency, I, a friend did end up meeting me in India, so I wasn't alone the whole time in India.

Alex: Oh, it doesn't count then, Kelsi. I'm just kidding. I'm totally kidding. That totally counts.

Kelsi: Got yourself to India by yourself.

Jess: Yeah, okay.

Kelsi: Um, and then my third one was Chile, which I went to maybe last year or the year before. But getting into more detail on one of those, I feel like I already kind of talked about Tanzania. So maybe I'll talk about India and Sri Lanka. So my strategy here was I wanted to fly Q Suites and in order to get AA points, I had the AA Barclay's card. Um, it they were running a pro, I was on an airplane, um, and they always run good promos on the airplane, which is really annoying because then you can't get like referrals or anything. Not that they always even have referrals, but they had this referral, you know, it was like, if you sign up now on the airplane, we'll give you 70 or 80,000 after you spend \$1. And I was like, yeah, okay, sign me up.

Alex: Take my \$1.

Kelsi: Yes, here's my dollar. Uh I was like, this is like the easiest thing I've ever done. And I was eventually able to downgrade it after I called like 18 times to downgrade because I wanted to reapply for it. I wanted the opportunity to reapply for it. And concurrently at some point, I'm not remember timeline very well, I had also opened up the Citi AA card. So anyway, I had a nice little stack of

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

AA points and I really wanted to use it for Q suites because I think I had only flown a short segment on Q suites prior to that just because, you know, as a single solo traveler, like I really try to be intentional about how I spend my points.

And so I found a great deal. I feel like it was, you know, 70 plus five or whatever to get from Texas to Doha, Doha to Colombo. That was super fun. And I spent probably 10 days in Sri Lanka and I actually ended up doing kind of half and half, like I paid cash for some things and I stayed with some friends for the other. So I spent essentially nothing on hotels, but I did look for redemptions and honestly, it's just one of those countries that is so reasonably priced for, you know, westerners and people earning in the American dollar that it just it wouldn't have made sense to even spend points, um, even if I had wanted to. It really, you know, kind of looking at the valuation, it just made sense to do cash. And I think there's even a couple properties, like really luxury properties.

Again, as a solo traveler, I don't spend a lot on hotels, but like if you are a couple traveling or you do kind of want to splurge on yourself, there's a couple Aman properties in Sri Lanka that are probably like aside from China, the cheapest Aman properties you'll ever get to try. So I went to high tea at one of them. I love it. I was like, I will I will pay for \$40 high tea and not like \$700 a night. Anyway, so that was really fun. And then I flew myself from Sri Lanka to India. I went up to Delhi and I would never do this, but I was just feeling like wealthy or something, but I did end up booking a flight from Colombo to Delhi and I did do business class on Air India and I booked it for like 15,000 points on Air Canada Aero plan. And the reason I did it was because I was like, whatever, like 15,000 points, Aeroplan always runs a promo, you know, and like, why not? And I was the only person in business class. So it's like maybe a four-hour trip, which again, I would never do business class for four hours, but the guy...

Alex: For 15,000 points though, that's crazy.

Kelsi: Right? I was like, come on. Um, and the guy was like, you're the only person here and we have 27 breakfasts. So why don't you try all of them? And I was like, sir. And he was like, do you want to, do you want mimosas? I'm like,

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

no, it's okay. Like, you know, I love a mimosa but it's like 7:00 AM like, it's like, no, no, you got to have a mimosa. I was like, this man is just great. So that was fun. Um and then India kind of same thing. Like cash just made more sense. Um I had a friend for a large chunk of that time and um I think I stayed at one Hyatt in Mumbai, you know, really cheap. Um but otherwise cash just made sense and then I flew home on Turkish. So uh and Turkish I used directly with my capital One points and um again, I probably booked that when there was some sort of promo. I can't remember how much I paid, but it was under 60,000 points. So I'm not really sure if I talked a lot about my strategy or maybe it was just luck, but.

Alex: That was kind of I got it. You're taking advantage of all of those. You're like, if there's a promo, that's when I'm booking. It sounds like you plan strategize booking around promos...

Jess: And get sweet spots in general. You know, like two suites from, you know, that's what I'm, I'm actually headed to Tanzania and Zanzibar in February for the first time and I'm flying Q Suite for the first time. So, it makes me so happy that Q suite and Tanzania and Zanzibar all made your top list.

Kelsi: Oh my god. Oh my god, so fun. Yeah, just so fun. And you're going to have the best time. Just, yeah, I'm so excited for you.

Jess: All right.

Kelsi: Do you have a tour? Sorry, this is an aside, but do you have a tour planned for Tanzania or?

Jess: We do. We booked it through like a, but I know you have a guide, don't you?

Kelsi: I have a guide.

Jess: But don't cancel your trip or like your guy, your guide, but.

[Points Talk with the Travel Mom Squad](#)

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

Kelsi: I have a guide. If anyone needs a guide, this guide is awesome. His name is Lucky.

Jess: We will link Kelsi's, we'll get their information and we will link that in the show notes in case anyone's looking for a guy in Tanzania. All right, so last question is, what are your, well it doesn't have to be five. What are your top tips for someone who is wanting to get started with solo travel? Like what are like the must do for anyone who's like, okay, I'm ready. I'm going to book my domestic solo trip to Savannah and see how it goes. Yeah, so like what are your top tips for those people?

Kelsi: So I think what you said is where I would start. So like my first tip would be start slow, right? Like a lot of solo travel can be like really impactful and I think it's an opportunity to discover who you are when no one is looking and when no one's judging and when you don't have to consider the needs or wants of anyone but yourself. And that's actually a much harder than it sounds, um, because a lot of our lives, especially as women, are centered around, um, being helpful to others and, um, uh, catering to the needs of others, um, whether that's like real or internalized by society. Like, I think it's all on a different level for women, but starting slow can be the best place because best place to start because, you know, a small quick trip for three days domestically, you're going to be like, oh my god, I have to decide what I'm going to do with every single minute of my day and it will feel totally overwhelming.

And I think it is good, but I wouldn't want you to like dive into like a 15-day trip in Sri Lanka and be so overwhelmed that you like, you're like, we're not doing this again, right? Like, so, yeah, I think that's probably one, just start like with something really small and like fun, like I've always wanted to go skiing in Aspen, like we're just going to go and do it. Like that's great. That's a great place to start.

I think the second one is like referrals or like a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend of a sister of a cousin of a brother of a mother of a sister, whatever, that's

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

always been like my go-to. Whenever I go places, I try to meet up with at least someone by referral, um, just so that I think maybe this plays in a lot to like your safety question, you know, just knowing that there's someone who lives there, whether they're actually from there or maybe like an immigrant to that country, you know, it takes a lot of the vetting process out, which is really nice.

That's not to say that, you know, every referral is going to be some magical person who's like blessed the earth. I still think you can proceed with caution, but I think that it's always been a really good opportunity to like get to know the culture a little bit better, um find good places to eat and just kind of feel safe and let them tell you what you're going to do, um, as opposed to like having to read through all the blogs.

So that's two, three is find other solo women that's feels so safe and so fun and I think that they're so interesting. This is not to say that like couples who I meet aren't interesting. I think that they're wonderful and just as interesting, but I think, um, there's just kind of more to connect on when you're traveling by yourself as a woman. And I have one particular one comes to mind, um, in Zanzibar, I met this girl at dinner. I was by myself at dinner and she also came and she was wearing like this like tiara, like this birthday tiara and she was also by herself and I was like, hey, I see it's your birthday. Like, it doesn't look like anyone's joining you. Do you mind if I buy you a drink for your birthday? And like, we had dinner together. Like I spend a lot of time alone, like one dinner, even if she turns out to be crazy, right? Like I will probably be okay.

And so, yeah, we had, um, you know, a drink for her birthday and like we had our dinner together and it turns out she was like staying at my hotel and there was another like solo traveler and it was just, it was just really fun. Um, they gave really good, uh, recommendations and like we were able to kind of connect throughout the rest of our trip together. Um, so I think that was really nice.

The fourth one, and I wrote my little list here. Prioritize like how you like to spend money and when it's important for you. So, yes, I am 34 years old and sometimes I still stay at a hostel. And it might be because I'm just feeling the

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

need to be social or I don't want to spend a lot of money or I know that it's like a safe, clean hostel, but other times I feel like I need alone time and I want like a hotel, I want peace, I want serenity, I want to be alone. Um so really knowing like when to spend your money and like what's important for you and when it's important for you, I think it's just good for mental health when you're alone because sometimes you're like, oh my god, if I have to talk to one more person, like I'm going to, I don't know. But then the flip side is true, right? It's like, oh my god, I've spent 10 days by myself. Like, should I go like have a drink with someone or like go grab a coffee with someone, you know, like, so I think that's good to know.

And then the fifth, I think is just really more on like a more personal reflection, like taking the time to address fears. Um, you know, where did this fear come from? Why do I have it? Is it real? You know, I think a lot about like personal responsibility and like being a global citizen and like being a good steward like a good steward of the of the earth, um, and like the information that I share and I think like, you know, this comes to mind especially like when I went to Tanzania, like, oh my god, you went to Africa as a woman alone. I'm like, you know, why do you think that going to Africa would be any more or less dangerous than going to Europe?

And I, you know, it's not to shame, but it's really just to reflect, right? Like why do I have this fear? Where does this fear come from? Is it real? You know, is this a good opportunity to kind of dismantle stereotypes and really encourage tourism and travel to places that maybe um, we have othered in the media or in our society. So I think that's really important to me as a solo traveler and I think it's, I mean, you're alone anyway. So why not just think about it? Like, right? Like, like you got nothing else to do. So, um, and I think those are kind of my top five. Did I miss anything that's maybe like really important?

Alex: No, I think that was great. Like I love that list. I love like, I feel like being, I'm, I've not solo traveled, but I can only imagine from what you've shared and just as I know you as a person that traveling solo can really give you a lot of perspective and you can have so much personal growth as like a person by

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

doing that by putting yourself out there and like having those new experiences. And I love that how you ended it with reflecting on those experiences as well.

Jess: And I think it's important to point out that if it's something you want, moms deserve solo travel too. You don't have to wait until your kids are out of the house. I, I have not done a ton of solo travel, but I did, you know, I drove from Houston to Austin and I stayed at Miraval on my Hyatt points and I did the whole like wellness thing by myself. I brought a book and I like sat alone at dinner and I read my book and I was like, man, this is really nice, you know, like to have alone time and to like take time for yourself, you know, and so I don't think if you're interested in solo travel, even if you are married or have a family, I don't think that should stop you from pursuing it if it's what you want to explore.

Alex: Yep, I totally agree.

Kelsi: Oh my god, I love that you did that because you're right, like, I mean, yes, you're a mom and a wife and a business owner, right? But like you're also just Jess and it's like, how do you really, like you need to take time for her too, right? Like not all your other kind of hats that you wear. So I love that and what a fun trip.

Jess: Yeah, it was great.

Kelsi: Especially Miraval, oh my god, I'm jealous. We went to, Devan and I did Alila Ventana Big Sur, but Miraval is on my, if I ever work up the courage to spend the points on it.

Jess: All right, well, if you go to the one in Austin, hit me up, I'll meet you there. It won't really be solo travel, I guess, but.

Kelsi: No, that's fine though. We'll do the Zen Garden together.

Jess: Yes.

Ep #136: Solo Travel Tips & Points Strategies with Kelsi from PointSisters

Alex: Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Kelsi for joining us on the show today. Make sure that you follow Kelsi and Devan on Instagram at Point Sisters. We hope you felt inspired by her travels as we have. And if you enjoyed this episode, please leave us a review and share it with your friends and family.

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