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## 'TRAVELLING ALONE WAS A CHALLENGE - BUT GOT ME A JOB BACK AT HOME!'



**Wendy Mawson, 22, is an occupational therapist from Leeds. Last winter, she took a three-month career break in Brazil**

"When I finished university last year, my friends were applying for jobs and I was booking up flights to Brazil. I'd qualified as an occupational therapist but really wanted to go travelling before I started working full-time. I knew people who had taken gap years and their stories sounded really exciting.

*'I went to see famous sights and threw myself into the Brazilian lifestyle'*

Yet, at the same time, I didn't want to fall behind in my career ambitions.

I found out about Projects Abroad, who offer volunteering placements in rehabilitation centres, on the internet and thought they sounded perfect. I could spend three months in South America while getting some overseas experience in occupational therapy.

I was really worried about travelling on my own and so was my mum. She kept asking me if I was sure I wanted to go, and convinced me to only sign up for three months in case I didn't like

it. But we were both reassured when I was told I'd be met at the airport and given accommodation in a safe place.

It was amazing working in the centre in Rio. I looked after adults who'd suffered strokes and spinal injuries, and helped children with Down Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy. You learn that you don't need expensive materials and equipment to improve their lives - they can spend hours playing with bits of old newspaper.

I did get homesick sometimes, and, because I don't really speak Portuguese, even trying to catch the right bus was a challenge. I'd often find myself not knowing where I was!

I went to see famous sights, like the statue of Christ in Rio and the amazing Iguazu Falls, and I threw myself into the Brazilian lifestyle to try and make more friends.

The whole trip cost me over three grand, but it was worth it. I'm starting my new job as an occupational therapist this year and in my interview they asked me what I had that was special compared to other applicants. The answer was easy - I'd worked in Brazil!"



### TOP TIPS FOR SINGLE TRAVELLERS

- Try to blend in, so you don't look like a tourist and appear to know exactly where you're going, even if you're completely lost. You'll attract unwanted attention if you look vulnerable.
- Go to a hotel or somewhere official to ask for directions. If you go off somewhere alone, make sure you tell other travellers or someone where you are staying, your plans and when you expect to be back.
- If possible, try and arrive at a new destination when it's still daylight - that way you can get to know the area when everything is well-lit.
- Leave a copy of your itinerary, as well as copies of your passport, tickets and travel insurance documents with friends or family back at home. And keep a copy of these documents with you too - but in a separate bag to the originals.
- Keep in touch with family and friends back at home regularly, with texts, emails or on Facebook. Alternatively, keep a travel blog on sites like [www.travelblog.org](http://www.travelblog.org) or [www.travelpod.com](http://www.travelpod.com) to let them know your movements.
- Keep some change in a small purse for paying for taxis, drinks etc. That way you don't have to sort through huge wads of cash in public.
- Smile and don't be too afraid to talk to strangers - more often than not they will be friendly and happy to help you!
- For more help and advice on solo travel, contact Travellers Worldwide (01903 502595 or visit [www.travellersworldwide.com](http://www.travellersworldwide.com)); Projects Abroad (tel: 01903 708300 or visit [www.projects-abroad.co.uk](http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk)); Global Vision International (tel: 01727 250250 or visit [www.gvi.co.uk](http://www.gvi.co.uk)). Other useful websites include: [www.femaletraveller.co.uk](http://www.femaletraveller.co.uk), [www.solotravel.org](http://www.solotravel.org) and [www.girlstravelclub.co.uk](http://www.girlstravelclub.co.uk). ☐

