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Stella's Sisters Tips - Solo Travel in Your Airstream

Charissa Wyatt had seen much of the world. She'd visited 36 countries and lived in Germany for six years — her two children were born there.

So in the midst of a divorce at age 59, Charissa anticipated continuing to travel, with her mom as her companion. But when her mother suddenly passed way, Charissa was faced with the choice of going alone or not going at all.

Of course, not going at all wasn't really an option. Charissa is a curious person — she tries to learn something new every year, from golf to calligraphy to composting. Her work as a trauma nurse in her 20s also taught her to make the most of every day. And she realized that she hadn't seen much of the continental United States.

"I decided that the best thing for me was a long walk in the woods," Charissa said. "And so I bought the truck on a Wednesday and I bought the Airstream on a Friday."

That was six years ago. It took her just two to see the entire country, but along the way Charissa fell in love with the lifestyle, and she still calls the Airstream home.

"I did national parks and presidential libraries and museums, and I love odd roadside attractions," Charissa said. "But mostly I was just learning how to grieve and move forward, and not camp out in the valley of the shadow. You don't get to helicopter over, but you also don't want to camp out. You want to keep walking. And so I did a lot of miles. I saw our country, and it's beautiful."

Solo travel — and specifically solo female travel — is a source of massive growth in the travel industry. [optional link: <https://www.statista.com/topics/9322/solo-travelers/#editorsPicks>] The first trip is often the result of a significant life transition. The beauty of experiencing a place on their own terms often compels women to venture solo again. But going alone comes with a unique set of challenges for women; particularly the kind of travel that requires checking lug nuts and staying in remote locations.

A new subset of the Airstream Club International seeks to support women who want to roam alone. Stella's Sisters Intra-Club, named for Airstream founder Wally Byam's wife, is open to all members of the club, but is designed particularly for female members who tow their own Airstreams or share the driving with a spouse or partner. Stella's Sisters hopes to help build skills, know-how, confidence and friendships for women who are new to towing or traveling alone.

We asked the officers of Stella's Sisters for their tips on taking a safe trip. They offered a wealth of information on self-sufficiency, a plethora of practical know-how, and a heavy dose of can-do and encouragement. The recommendations below are only an excerpt of the wisdom that they so generously shared. Make no mistake — they know their stuff. Between YouTube, talking to other women and trial and error, they've figured out ways to wander smartly and safely that can save you hours and heartache.

BEFORE YOU GO

- Be sure your tow vehicle and travel trailer are in excellent condition for travel. Lynda
- Check your tire pressure. A tire pressure monitor makes this quick and easy. Chari (Good tires are a must. I have a tire pressure monitoring system on my trailer. Lynda)
- Check your Airstream's lights before pulling out. And ensure that your bikes are not blocking the Airstream turn signals/brake lights. Jeneen
- Have a plan. I plan out my trip using RV Trip Wizard and include some special sights along the way. I like to stay at Harvest Hosts that offer more than one spot so that I am not alone in the middle of nowhere. Jeneen
- Print (and/or email to yourself/save to your phone) travel plans in case there's no/low internet connectivity or a software company decides to update their app in the middle of a travel day. Jeneen
- I download a Google Map of my travel plan in case there's no cell service. And I always have an atlas in my tow vehicle and trailer. Lynda
- I usually leave a travel plan with someone. Lynda (I share my travel plans with my kids back home. Jeneen)
- I always have food with me so I don't have to make stops and in case no food is available. Lynda (Pack all food items in hard, clear, reusable plastic containers like Rubbermaid Brilliance. These will allow you to see the food, save you from battling mice/ants/roaches later and be easy to store your rig at the end of the trip. Chari) (I keep bottles of water for me and my pups in the trailer. Jeneen)
- I usually research my list of friends along the way in case of emergency. Lynda
- Make lists for hitching and unhitching and other procedures. It's easy to miss a crucial step. If you followed a list, you won't get a mile down the road and ask yourself if you remembered to turn off the water pump, lock the shower door, turn off the propane, etc. Chari (If someone is helping me, I recheck my pre-departure checklist. Never assume that someone else did all the important items. Jeneen)
- Update your emergency packet with information on your insurance policy for your Airstream, your RV and truck roadside assistance services, your health insurance and doctors' contact information, cellular service provider in case your phone is lost, your dog's vet and current immunization records, and your own personal information — I am aware that I may forget something during a traumatic situation. Jeneen
- Print medical information, contact information and other vital demographics and store it all in a baggie on a shelf inside your refrigerator in case of emergency. This is where nurses/ENTs will look for insulin. Chari

- Fill up your freshwater tank when it gets to about 30 percent. That way you have water no matter what if you end up boondocking. Sometimes Harvest Hosts cancel my reservations or the state park or RV park will have water issues when I arrive. Jeneen
- Check the weather for your route, and recheck it during travel. It can change suddenly, especially in the south where weather can be severe. Plan where you would go in the event of a tornado, flash flood, etc. Send a text to let others know where you're evacuating to. Chari (I use RV Weather. Lynda)
- Always carry blankets in your tow vehicle. Lynda
- Always have Gorilla tape, zip ties, extra fuses and leveling blocks. Include a fire extinguisher. Lynda
- Pack a "go bag" that you can grab quickly in the event of an emergency with essentials like water, snack bars, lace-up shoes, a flashlight, rain poncho, first-aid kit, a couple days' worth of medications, a medications list, etc. Chari (This is the basis for a great road trip emergency kit in your tow vehicle — I also like to include the 10 essentials. [<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/ten-essentials.html>] — Julianne, the author)
- Have a tire repair kit, air compressor and tool bar for changing a flat. And take collapsible emergency cones and flares. Lynda
- Keep a battery operated watch in case all else fails and bring a solar charger for your phone. Lynda
- Have a battery to jump start your tow vehicle if needed. Lynda
- Keep spare keys hidden and let someone know where they are hidden. Lynda
- Keep a baseball bat, knife, siren and wasp spray in your tow vehicle and trailer. Lynda
- Get plenty of rest the day before you start your travels. Lynda

ON THE ROAD

- I stop at a half tank and refill my tow vehicle. I fill it up at the end of the day so I can start the morning with a full tank. Lynda (If you're out west, plan fuel stops. It can be 100 miles between fuel stations. Chari)
- Ensure the tires are properly inflated and not running hot, and check tire treads when stopping for gas. And ensure that you have an easy exit BEFORE you enter gas stations. Jeneen.
- Check your trailer lug nuts every 1,000 miles. Chari
- Use multiple GPS programs to help navigate and make quick changes to your driving plan in the case of accidents, roadwork projects, road closures or rush-hour backups. I use my Garmin RV GPS, my Google GPS and Waze GPS, depending upon where I am. Jeneen
- If caravanning, have a meeting place in case you get separated and do not have cell service. Lynda
- Maintain a reasonable travel schedule. It's more enjoyable if you're not exhausted. I use the "3-3-3 rule": Travel 300 miles, arrive by 3 p.m. and stay three nights. Chari
- Plan a rest day each week for daily tasks like going to the grocery and post office, doing laundry, emails, banking and housekeeping. Chari
- Stop every 100 miles. This will help keep you from becoming exhausted. I like to use my rest stops during travel days for grocery shopping and housekeeping. Chari

- I keep water and snacks in the tow vehicle. It helps keep my sugars regulated while driving when it's difficult to find a place to pull over and get lunch and I'm not comfortable going into my Airstream at a truck stop for whatever reason. Jeneen
- Upon arrival at my destination(s), I try to get the lay of the land as quickly as possible. I will drive in if I feel that it's a safe area. If I'm uncomfortable, I will just get back onto the highway and continue on for a bit. There are always Cracker Barrels, Walmarts, Cabela's, and now Love's stations that will have space. Jeneen
- If I am at all concerned, I will not unhitch. I can then change my mind quite quickly and leave if needed. I keep my air horn and keys near me at all times so that I can hit a couple of alarms to 1) let everyone know that there is a situation and 2) surprise/confuse either a human or animal for a few minutes while I hop in the truck. Of course, I have bear spray in the Airstream and in my tow vehicle. Jeneen
- If anyone cancels my reservations, I have a Stella's Sisters network to reach out to. It is nice to know what areas I should stay away from when I'm picking new places to stay on the fly. Jeneen
- On arrival, post a note by your door with the campground name, site number, and the local contact for emergency and weather. Someday you're going to wake up and ask yourself, "Where AM I?" No need to ask me how I know this.... Chari
- I try to make friends with the RV park attendants and my immediate neighbors as quickly as possible. We then try to look out for one another. Jeneen (I also park near the park host if feeling kind of skeptical about a campground. Lynda)
- I review the materials provided by the RV park and update my dry erase board on my fridge with the appropriate information including RV park name, address, spot number, local emergency responders' numbers, etc. Jeneen
- I back up data on my mobile phone into the cloud in case it breaks or is lost. I will then have all of my information available upon replacement. Jeneen (The author, Julianne, would add that you must check to be sure it updates regularly or learn how to force it to make a backup; when you're on different wifi services, your phone and computer may not automatically back up.)
- If parked along a river or lake, be sure you know the weather report and weather upstream and have an emergency plan to exit quickly. Lynda
- I always know how to find a storm shelter if needed. And I always have my bicycle helmet with me in case of tornado. Lynda
- Always try to look out the windows before exiting your Airstream. I'm considering getting a Ring Camera. Jeneen
- I'm ALWAYS aware of my surroundings. Lynda
- I try not to take my dogs out for a walk too late at night. Jeneen
- Keep bikes locked up at all times! Jeneen
- I always put out a couple of chairs to make it look like I'm not alone. Jeneen (Some women put a pair of men's boots outside of their trailer. Lynda)
- If leaving: LOCK it up — door and hitch. Jeneen
- Stella's Sisters camping trips are wonderful because we park together. There is some added security when we all check up on one another. Jeneen (If traveling with another

woman in an unknown area, then we park our trailers where our doors are facing each other. Lynda)

- Remember GOAL: “get out and look.” Carla (Use arrival and departure checklists for every stop. Jeneen)
- I keep an assortment of tools and extra fuses to fix things. Jeneen
- When people ask if you are traveling alone, remember not everyone has the right to know your business. You can say something like “we are never alone on the road,” that other campers are joining you or that your partner is up at the office/bathroom/walking your Rottweiler. Or rather than answer, simply ask a question in return — most people won't even notice you failed to say whether you were alone. Chari (I never tell anyone I am traveling alone. Lynda)
- People will want to help you. There's no need to get offended or irritated. Just politely accept or decline, ask them to shout if you are about to hit something, or assure them that they can simply stand back and watch the magic of a solo traveler parking a rig. Chari
- Set up tracking with your family or friends with Life360, an Apple Watch, a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) or similar product in the event you slide off a trail, get lost or need emergency help. Chari
- Go slowly. Driving a 40- to 50-foot rig can be intimidating. It's not difficult, but it's not fast either. Other drivers can wait while you back up and go around you if you are slow; it's not a race and there is no prize waiting. Chari
- Be kind to yourself. Solo travel can be exciting and full of wonders. It can also be challenging and at times even difficult. When things go off plan, treat yourself like your best friend would treat you. Chari
- Have fun! I have met the most wonderful people who have invited me to dinner(s) or happy hours. It is such a great experience! Jeneen
- You might be solo, but you are never alone. It's okay to ask for help. Many of us are fiercely independent and want to do it on our own, but there is strength in asking for help when we need it. You might even make new friends. Chari
- Concerned about something? Ask one of these ladies. They are a wealth of information for sure! I learn something new every day from them. Jeneen
- Most things that go off plan are not emergencies. If you get into trouble, the first thing to do is stop and take a moment to assess the situation. Chari

The Stella's Sisters Leadership

Amy Fisher was experiencing a “midlife crisis” after her youngest two children moved to Australia. Between Covid lockdowns and not seeing them for more than two years, she was in search of bucket list moments and started shopping for trailers. After trying out a teardrop trailer and then shopping for a larger model, Amy and her husband ended up with their beloved Airlie, a Bambi22FB named after a small town in the Whitsunday's Island in Queensland Australia. Because Amy is still working full time, her plans include weekend and summer travel. For now.

Carla Daggett missed the true silence of the outdoors that she'd come to love after living in Alaska for 20 years. After a bit of shopping around in Texas, she ended up with a 2017 International 19CB. Though Carla was a skilled outdoorswoman and had owned a boat, she felt some trepidation about backing up her new Airstream. Her son and grandson went along on Carla's first trip, catching a ride to a ranch where they were joining a hunting excursion. They returned the next day with meat for the family freezer, and when she asked what she should name her new travel trailer, her grandson suggested Meat Wagon. Carla now owns a 2023 Flying Cloud 25', Meat Wagon IV.

Charissa Wyatt's experience working as a trauma nurse in her 20s taught her that life can change in an instant, so she made it a mission to learn one completely new thing each year. As her 59th birthday approached, she realized that she'd been to 36 countries but not every U.S. state. By August 2017, she had purchased a truck and learned how to hitch, tow and back up her new 2018 Airstream Flying Cloud 27FB Twin. In November 2019, she completed her 48th state solo in her Airstream. But she's not stopping — now she's taking each of her grandchildren on a tour of the country.

When she wasn't raising her children or caring for her mother, **Jeneen Townsend** spent her career helping the corporate world plan for disasters. She retired six months after her husband passed away in 2019, shortly before the disaster of a lifetime: the pandemic. She had just moved into a new home but felt restless, so she asked her daughter — already an Airstream owner with her husband — to shop for travel trailers with her. Jeneen and her pups set off with a new 2020 19' FBQ Caravel, first traveling with her daughter and family, then determinedly solo. It was lonely until Jeneen met other women traveling similarly and decided to found Stella's Sisters. She now owns a 27' International TFB with a bunk so that she can take her grandkids.

Lynda Hallmark Gammage had no intention of buying an Airstream when she pulled into Camper Clinic in Buda, Texas, in September 2017. Without any research or planning, she bought a 2018 Airstream Basecamp on the spot. Her husband had passed away suddenly in September 2012; before then they loved road trips and long-distance driving. And Lynda had grown up backing up boats. So a travel-trailer seemed like the perfect new adventure. Her husband always called her a free-spirited gypsy, and her mother said her first word was "Go!" so that's exactly what Lynda continues to do.

Don't be afraid to try. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Find a friend with an Airstream you can learn from! Personally, I just decided to try it and figure it out as I went. Mistakes made and lessons learned — thankfully, none very expensive. — Carla Daggett

I am brand new to the solo traveler adventure. I have only made one trip, but learned a valuable lesson quickly: Stay where you feel comfortable. I planned to only drive 300 miles based on the recommendations of others. But it wasn't until I had traveled 460 miles that I found an overnight spot that felt safe. A Massachusetts Cabela's, in a well-lit plaza with a

security guard, was perfect for my first overnight adventure as I traveled to the International Rally in Maine. — Amy Fisher

Cash Is Queen

Jeneen offers these tips for money matters along your route.

- Carry a debit card from a large U.S. bank (non-regional) so that you can get quick access to cash.
- If you're going to Canada and have the ability, carry a Canadian bank debit card (BMO or CIBC) for cash withdrawals as well as parking apps (especially in Montreal). P\$ Service Mobile is an app used in Montreal; however, it will only use a Canadian bank for payment. Street signage is awful. Ask someone for help if you need it.
- Find a good hiding place in your Airstream and/or truck for cash.
- Get a supply of quarters from your local bank or from your piggy bank for washers and dryers. Also some RV parks have apps — one is CSCPay Mobile.
- Try to stick to bank ATMs instead of ATMs at gas stations or convenience stores. There is a larger risk for readers on these machines.

Apps You'll Be Happy to Have

Airstream recently published a descriptive list of Travel Apps that Airstreamers Love [<https://www.airstream.com/blog/travel-apps-that-airstreamers-love/>]. Jeneen has a few favorites that she keeps in a folder on her phone entitled "Airstream Stuff":

- RV Life Trip Wizard
 - I add Harvest Host stops to my schedule with "HH" before the business name and include any details regarding that specific stop that I should be aware of, such as whether they offer electric.
- Garmin RV GPS, Google GPS and Waze GPS
 - Garmin slows me down and is a bit too restrictive.
 - Google does not know that I am driving a big truck and towing a long Airstream.
 - Waze does not either but has nice notifications.
 - Apple Maps sometimes pops up.
- Google Earth
 - Useful when I want to see the lay of the land around a gas station to see whether I can get in and out, or when I want to see what's around a stop or RV park.
- Mopeka Pro Check propane monitors
 - This works from two monitors located at the bottom of my tanks. I can monitor how much propane I have at any time.
- The Weather Channel, Clime-NOAA, Windy.app and Drive Weather
- CAT Scale and Weigh My Truck
- GyPSyGuide
 - This offers fun self-guided tours of many areas and national parks. It's nice when you're alone.
- Opensignal
 - This shows me where the best internet connectivity can be found.

- Waggle
 - I can set it up to notify me on my mobile device when any pre-set thresholds are hit. If it gets too hot, I can run back to the Airstream. I will likely upgrade my thermostat in the Airstream to one that allows me to remotely make changes to the AC/heat settings.
- BringFido
 - Tells me places where I can bring my pups for dinner and such.
- Grupio
 - This is so that I know what activities are offered during Airstream rallies.
- CSCPay Mobile
 - Some RV parks use this app in lieu of quarters for washers/dryers.
- Good Sam
 - This gives me discounts at many RV parks. I do not carry RV insurance though them, but many people do and like them.
- LevelMatePRO
 - I LOVE THIS. It helps me to level my Airsteam while solo.
- RV Parky, Roadtrippers, Campendium, Hipcamp, ParkAdvisor, Overnight RV, KOA, Recreation.gov, the Dyrtr, Reserve America Camping, National Park Maps, Book Your Site, Jellystone Park (the grandkids love this place), CampsiteTonight
- Harvest Hosts
 - (Now merged with Boondockers Welcome.) I love this! I meet so many interesting people, and it is fun to see their places or businesses and purchase what I would have purchased at a store anyway. I try to fit in as many of these as I can on my trips.

Learn more about Stella's Sisters Intra-Club

Email: StellasSisters22@gmail.com & StellasSisters@Airstreamclub.org

FB Private Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/453199376716557>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/StellasSisters22/>

YouTube Channel: [youtube.com/@stellas.sisters](https://www.youtube.com/@stellas.sisters)

Zazzle Store Front: https://www.zazzle.com/store/stellas_sisters/collections

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