Four Ways to Cope With Depression While Traveling

by SCOTT STE MARIE

Traveling With Depression

We most likely have had experiences where depression has held us back from what we wanted to experience. Our thoughts have told us it is too hard or our bodies haven't summoned the energy to make it out the door.

While these are all legitimate scenarios, I would like to invite you to leave all 'what if' situations behind you and take a leap towards optimism when thinking about travel, despite suffering from depression.

In my experience, I would argue that it is worth the mental stress, anxiety, and long preparation to walk out the door into new territory eventually.

Does Traveling Help Depression?

Yes, without a doubt in my mind. Depression shrinks our world and creates an inward feeling of hopelessness, worthlessness, and you begin to believe whole-heartedly that you do not belong in the world you experience.

Traveling opens up your mind and worldview, and you begin to notice the complexity of the reality in which you live. This may at first seem like a frightening thought, however, let's look at what the great philosopher Immanuel Kant referred to as 'The Enlarged Thought.' The way he viewed happiness was the act of widening our horizons and experiencing more of the world to be apart of this greater sense of humanity.

By meeting new people, exploring new cultures, eating different food and learning new languages, we belong to more of the world. We are no longer trapped within our narrow mind but can now see the world from outside of personal belief and ourselves.

Depression could feel like a reality we are trapped in with no escape. Our feelings dictate our experience, and therefore our routine and experience dictate how we feel. Traveling pushes us out of our routine and forces us to find the strength within ourselves to widen our horizon and show the world that we belong.

How to Cope With Depression While Traveling

Let's go over a few tips for traveling solo and what you can do to create a sense of wellbeing when you face the unknown.

Listen to Music and Play Your 'Happy' Playlist

We are so fortunate that modern technology allows us to fit thousands of songs in our pockets we can access at any time.

If music is one of your coping tools for depression, creating a 'Happy-feel-good' playlist for times with difficult

emotion may be just what you need to get out of bed and take that first step into exploration. Perhaps it's a motivational speech you listen to or a song that reminds you of a good time from your past.

Whatever comes through those headphones, make sure it's something that is useful to you and will help your mental state, if only temporarily.

Write in a Journal

Express how you are feeling in your journal. If you use this as a tool at home, it will prove beneficial during travel as well. It is also comforting knowing that you have something personal from home with you at all times and gives you a sense of trust in your ability to confront depression if it finds its way into your day.

If you have a moment, feel free to look into 'Thought Records' which are based off of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy that you can put in your journal.

In my experience, it always helps if I have a thought that isn't very useful or accurate, to challenge this thought and write down a more appropriate and realistic thought instead. This can be a great tool for your mental health travel toolbox!

Do What You Want

When traveling solo, the word 'freedom' doesn't quite do the experience justice. It is a feeling that only you will understand and no picture on your trip will be able to describe it. If you feel depressed during your travel, just remember that you can do what you want, and I mean this quite literally.

There is absolutely no pressure to please anyone else on your trip or to push yourself 100% all of the time. If you want to lie down in the park, do it. If you want to have a relaxing tea at a local shop, do it. If you want to read a book in your hotel or hostel room, do it. You have the power of choice on your trip, and that is what freedom is all about. Do what you want.

It's Okay to Not Be Happy in the Moment

Let's not pretend that you won't have a bad day or moment on your travel because that is a very realistic possibility. I've had my share of hard days on my backpacking trips, but I would like to share my perspective on these times.

The memories will be the same whether you were depressed or happy. Luckily for humans, we cannot recall pain from memory. Therefore, experience the things you would even though you are not having those euphoric, happy feelings. The memory of the experience will be there, but more importantly, you will prove to yourself that your feelings don't always control your actions.

I hope this inspired you and helped you realize that you are strong enough and brave enough to travel. In my experience, the memories of my travel and planning for future adventures widens my horizon and keeps depression away for longer periods of time.