**For the widowed, travel can be a healer**

*Although widows may have a hard time getting started, they often find that travel helps redefine who they are.*

BY SUSAN SPANO

Los Angeles Times

I like to think of travel as a cure for everything. But there is at least one problem it cannot correct: the death of a beloved partner. For the 2.6 million American men and 11 million American women who have been widowed, time is the true healer. Yet supportive families, hobbies and work often play a role, and I’d add travel to that list. Many widows have found that travel helps them redefine who they are, makes them feel strong and accomplished and gets them out in the world.

For widows who often journeyed with their spouses, travel is an old friend. For others, homebound in the past by families or husbands who preferred to stay put, the urge to travel arises anew. But it isn’t always easy to get started, widows say.

Marilyn Mason, a psychologist based in Santa Fe, N.M., thinks “invisibility” is on of the biggest shocks for older widows who spent most of their lives in traditional marriages and learned to define themselves as someone’s husband/wife.

“It’s easy to stay inside and get depressed, because they think no one will notice,” Mason says. The idea of taking a trip can seem intimidating and difficult, particularly if they’ve grown accustomed to having a spouse handle the money and luggage.

Jeanne Lauf Walpole, a travel writer from Reno, Nev., says her brain was like oatmeal on trips with her husband. She never worried about tipping or security until after his death four years ago., when she went to South America with three widowed friends. As they were leaving the Miami airport, an unlicensed cab driver tried to hustle them into a car. She realized then that hucksters often view older women as easy marks.

Seventy-five-year-old Frances weaver, who speaks and writes about reinventing oneself in old age, took a Panama Canal cruise after her husbands death 20 years ago. An all-inclusive cruise is a good first trip for an older widow, she says, because you don’t have to worry about money and can decide for yourself whether to participate in activities or be alone. Elderhostel, which offers affordable educational trips for people 55 and older, is another good way to start seeing the world.

Travel writer Walpole didn’t seem to have much trouble finding a companion for the trip. She and her three travel mates to South America started out by taking short trips to Palm Springs, CA.

At first her solo status saddened her, she says. But the group ultimately had so much fun that she got over the sadness and now sees those jaunts as part of the grieving process.

Psychologist Mason advises recently widowed women/men to avoid revisiting places they and their husbands/wives loved because such return trips tend to open up barely healed wounds.

Travel mates who are satisfactory may be hard to find. Judy Rawl, 59, of Calabassas, CA was widowed last summer. She wants to keep traveling, as she and her husband did, to places such as Africa and India. But lately, the only offer she’s gotten had been from another widow who wanted to go to Las Vegas.

Rawl is an experienced enough travelr to strike out on her own eventually. For younger widows, tour companies such as Women Traveling Together and Women’s Travel Club, founded in 1992 by Phyllis Stoller, are options.

“ We get women of all kinds- young, old, divorced, married- who want to travel on their own,” Stoller says. “It makes no difference why. So a widow is not going to be seen as the pathetic one who lost her husband.”

By joining womens trips, widows often get hooked on travel and meet other women who join the for future adventures.

There’s no need to worry about this addiction, though, because, as a friend of mine says, travel is a growth hormone. For widows, that’s the next best thing to a cure.

**Older people must prepare to ward off effects of jet lag**

**By: Dr. John Morley**

The good news for many older adults is they have the time and money to vacation to exotic places halfway around the world. The bad news is jet lag worsens as you get older. Jet lag most often occurs when a person travels on a plane to a location more than five time zones away. Its most common symptom is sleeping when you’re not supposed to- you sleep during the day or are awake in the middle of the night. Other symptoms include irritability, fatigue, problems in functioning or concentration, disorientation, mild sadness, headaches, constipation and/or diarrhea. It’s worse for frequent travelers and those who don’t sleep enough during a flight; are flying east or crossing multiple time zones. Adjusting your normal sleeping times a few days before leaving can help reset your time clock. If you’re traveling to Europe, go to bed two hours earlier and soak up some sunlight early in the morning. If you’re flying west, try going to sleep two hours later and be in bright light in the evening. When you arrive at your destination, get out in the sunlight as much as possible in the morning. During your flight, drink as much water as possible and avoid caffeine and alcohol because dehydration worsens jet lag symptoms. Try to sleep on the plane so you do not arrive exhausted. If you are going to use a sleeping pill take a short acting one, such as Sonata, instead of a longer acting one, which may make you groggy and disorientated. For the first few days after you arrive at your destination, try taking a power nap- less than an hour- when you are most tired. Go to sleep at night as late as possible. If you cannot get to sleep, consider taking a sleeping tablet but avoid over-the-counter sleep medications. Melatonin in a dose of 0.5 mg just before bedtime also may help you sleep. Higher doses may cause some disorientation and dizziness. Don’t let jet lag ruin your vacation of a lifetime. With simple adjustments, you can be ready to enjoy your time away. Bon Voyage!

**Save money when traveling abroad by paying with cash**

**By: Rick Steves**

After decades of traveling to Europe, I have found that the cheapest, safest way to go is to pay with cash for most items. The reason? To cut down on fees and fraud. I realize fees aren’t an interesting topic- until you get your bank statement after your trip. Over the last few years, banks have dramatically increased the fees they charge for overseas transactions involving credit and debit cards. While these fees are legal – some are even under- standable- many are contrived simply to write a few more dollars out of tourists. But by traveling smart and doing a little research up front, you can cut these expenses.

Banks may levy a flat $2 to $5 transaction fee each time you use your ATM card, plus an additional 1 percent to 3 percent for currency conversion. The machine you use might charge you, too. Visa and MasterCard impose a 1 percent fee on international transactions, and the issuing banks may tack on an additional currency conversion or foreign transaction fee of 1 percent to 2 percent.

Before a trip, call your bank or credit card company to find out what you’ll pay when using their cards overseas. It they charge exorbitant fees, consider getting a card just for your trip. Bankrate has a helpful comparison chart of major credit cards and their fees at tinyurl.com/r2u5m7. Most credit unions have low or no international fees. Capital One has a good reputation for no-fee international transactions on its credit cards and its ATM- accessible money market accounts (capitalone.com).

If your bank charges a flat fee per transaction, cut down on ATM visits in Europe by withdrawing larger amounts, if the machine refuses your request, try again and select a smaller amount (some cash machines limit the amount you can withdraw- don’t take it personally). If that doesn’t work, try a different machine. Be sure to stow your cash safely in a money belt worn around your waist under your clothes.

Because businesses must also pay fees to credit card companies, some merchants and hoteliers – particularly in southern Europe – may give you a better deal if you offer to pay cash with their currency.

Anytime you use a debit or credit card, beware of scammers. When entering your PIN, cover the keypad so that thieves can’t see what you’re typing. Shoulder surfing is a common problem. Use your credit card sparingly. Restaurant servers and shop clerks might try to steal your information, sometimes by swiping your card through a special machine that reads it (a technique called “skimming”) or by surreptitiously snapping a photo of it with a cell phone.

In order to protect against fraud, some European countries, including Britain, France, the Netherlands and those in Scandinavia, have started using chip and PIN technology for their credit and debit cards. These smartcards come with an embedded microchip, and cardholders must enter a personal identification number (PIN) instead of signing a receipt. Though most merchants should be able to run transactions without a PIN, some might insist no one. For this reason, it’s smart to know the PIN for your credit card; ask your credit card company before you go.

Some merchants will ask if you want to be charged in dollars. Politely refuse. Usually the dollar price is based on a lousy exchange rate, and your credit card issuer may impose a foreign transaction fee. You could pay up to a 6 percent premium for the “convenience”.