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TRAVEL

Moving Through Mourning: How Travel Can Help Those Dealing With Grief

Group trips, wellness experiences and retreats offer ways to cope with loss

By Kate Loweth, AARP, Published April 09, 2025



Traveling doesn't minimize your loss, but it can help process the grief.

TARA ANAND

When Beth Benoit lost her wife to cancer in 2021, the shift from “we” to “I” was challenging. One of the questions in her mind was how she would travel again without her partner of 35 years.

“I had a long list of places I had wanted to go after we both retired, but traveling to them alone was not appealing,” says Benoit, 65, of Chelmsford, Massachusetts. “I had grown children who had their own life partners; I didn’t want to ask them to vacation with me.”

Many people face this quandary of [how to move forward after the death of a loved one](#). “For some, being in our usual routine after a loss can be difficult, as it can highlight the absence of our loved one,” says Charlotte Russell, a clinical psychologist and founder of The Travel Psychologist, a blog. “Sometimes being away from our usual places and routine can provide a little space. It certainly doesn’t remove the sense of loss but can at least give us a different focus while we are beginning to process the grief.”

Grief travel is a way to process loss. Some people travel to a beautiful place to scatter the ashes of their loved one, or hold a memorial ceremony in a place the deceased person enjoyed visiting. Bringing a [memorial item on a trip](#) is another way to keep loved ones close to us while traveling. Traveling to avoid being home for triggering dates, such as birthdays, death anniversaries and Mother’s or Father’s Day, is common among people in grief.

Maura Schoo, 56, of Westchester, Illinois, grew up in a family that traveled a lot, and their shared experience formed fond memories that she cherishes today. When the

Group trips offer a way to travel solo, but not alone

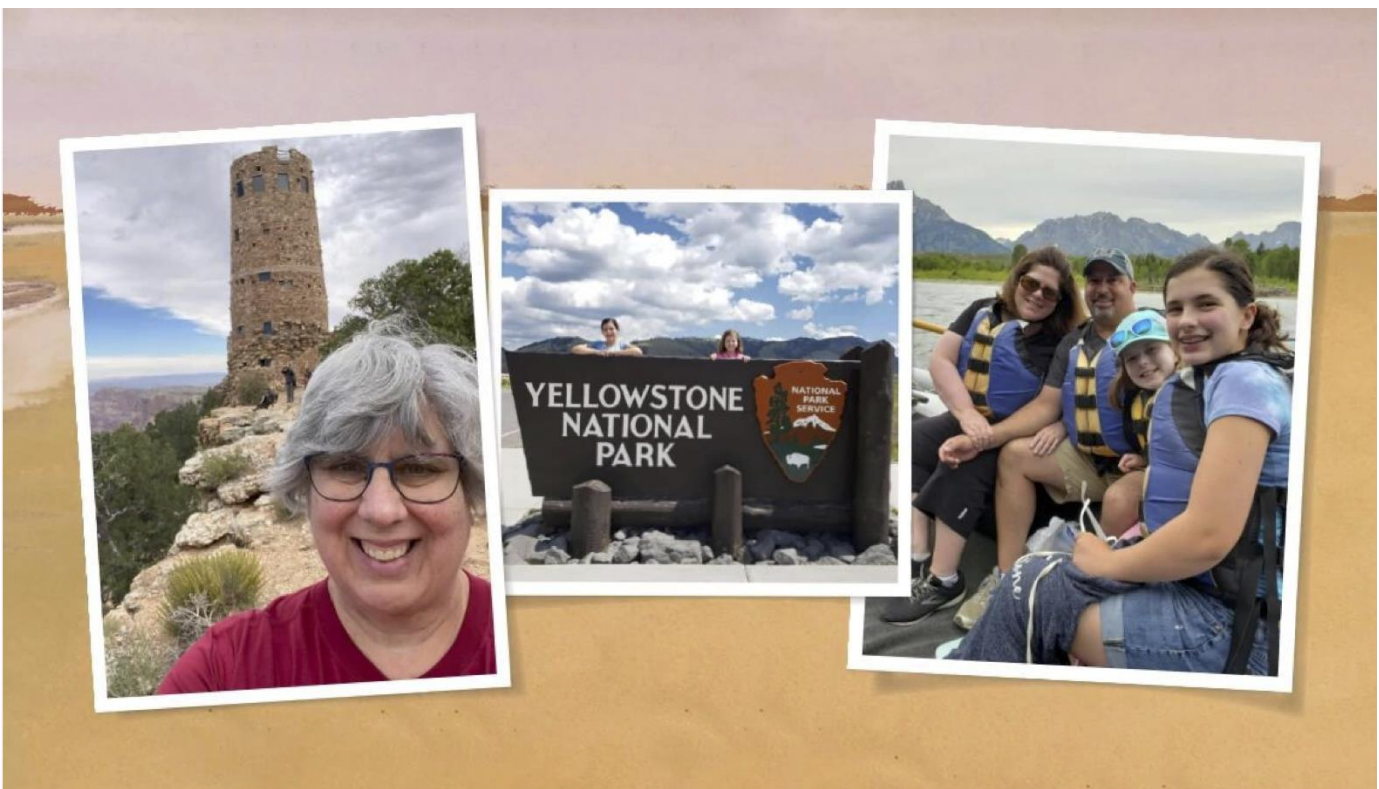
According to the [AARP 2025 Travel Trends survey](#), 95 percent of respondents believe travel is good for their mental health. Six percent of respondents plan to take a solo domestic vacation in 2025, while 11 percent plan a solo international trip. It’s not always as easy as just planning the trip. For people who have lost their travel partner, taking the step to [travel solo](#) may seem overwhelming.

There are about 21 million female solo travelers over the age of 55 in the United States, according to a recent survey from JourneyWoman, a publication focused on women’s solo travel. The survey conducted with Collette, Intrepid Travel and Aurora Expeditions found that solo travel represents 61 percent of the female 50-plus market in the U.S. and Canada.

Group trips allow a grieving person to travel solo, but not alone. Benoit went on a Road Scholar trip to Rome during the Christmas holiday, while her children traveled to their in-laws’ homes. “A trip to a place I had always wanted to see was much better than spending the holiday alone with my memories,” she says. Not only did she experience Rome, but Benoit also met two other widows on the trip, and they’ve traveled together since then.

Road Scholar trips are designed for travelers 50 and up, providing a welcoming space for older travelers. The group notes 30 percent of its travelers are solo travelers. The tour group Explore Worldwide also caters to the 50-plus community, offering group trips with around half singles and the remainder traveling as part of a couple or group.

Group travel provider G Adventures takes this idea to the next level with its Solo-ish Adventures program. These group trips are exclusively for solo travelers, offering peace of mind that they won't feel left out as the only solo person in a group of couples. As 68 percent of its solo travelers are female, G Adventures only offers female-led Solo



(From left) Beth Benoit, seen at the Grand Canyon, went on a group trip after her wife died. It allowed her to travel solo, but not alone. Maura Schoo's family went ahead with their trip to Yellowstone after her father died. They toasted him every night.

COURTESY BETH BENOIT AND MAURA SHOO

Grieving people may also be coming off months or years of [caregiving for a sick relative](#). To acknowledge this sacrifice, Road Scholar offers grants to caregivers to offset the cost of attending one of its programs. The grants are available for current caregivers and those who have lost a loved one in the past two years.

Grief-focused wellness experiences

People dealing with grief may be interested in trying one of the wellness opportunities offered by resorts and retreat centers. These grief-focused wellness experiences have become more prevalent since the pandemic.

All three Miraval Resorts in the U.S. offer Grief & Loss Journeys, where guests can participate in solo and group wellness experiences such as remembrance rituals, soothing spa treatments and forgiveness meditation sessions. These programs are customizable and complemented by the resorts' focus on healthy dining, which is included with every stay.

Visitors to the tranquil Art of Living Retreat Center in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina can choose from a variety of wellness retreats. For example, The Love Never Ends retreat focuses on developing a spiritual connection with departed loved ones. Guided meditation and sound baths are a small part of the experience, as grieverers can connect with others in similar circumstances over shared meals.

The Omega Institute for Holistic Studies in Rhinebeck, New York, offers various retreats to support people while navigating grief, such as Grief to Grace and Conscious Grieving. Group discussions and activities, such as forest bathing and grief journaling, help participants during this challenging life event.

Tips for traveling while grieving

Russell recommends that grieverers give themselves some time before traveling. "When you do feel ready to travel, allow yourself more downtime than you usually would, and certainly don't try to pack too much into your itinerary," she says. She also recommends setting expectations with your travel partners that you might need to tap out of activities if you don't feel up to them.

"There is no quick or easy way out of the pain and suffering that we endure as a result of losing someone or something that we love dearly," says Bonnie Mitchell, a licensed professional clinical counselor and clinical director at Healthy Life Recovery, an addiction treatment center. "Grief isn't something we get over or get past, but it is something we can get through. Travel can be a healthy and healing coping mechanism."

Kate Loweth is a Northern California-based freelance journalist specializing in family travel.
