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## **Consider a Youth Hostel**

### **Youth Hostels - They aren't just for youth and they aren't hostile!**

The best advice I received during a trip around the world was from my friend Betty in New Zealand. After 3 months on the road, I was complaining about mid-trip loneliness and hotel prices. Betty suggested I join the Youth Hostel Association (Now known as Hostelling International or HI).

I must admit I was skeptical. As a single woman in my 40's, the thought of sharing a room or a hallway with herds of sweaty, overly enthusiastic, backpacking 20-somethings was not attractive. Betty said people from all walks of life utilize the hostelling networks. I could find people who shared my passion for travel, economical lodgings and excellent resource for "must-sees" in the area. Enough said. I was off to begin my membership and make my first reservation.

While I found several networks, I joined Hostelling International and paid \$40 NZ (about \$25 in US) for a 12-month membership. Membership entitled me to member rates at over 4000 hostels in 80 countries but also in-country discounts, access to travel agency services and a 20% discount on Lonely Planet books.

As I made my first reservation, I was pleased to see that there can be numerous options for sleeping accommodations. Rooms ranged from single sex bunk rooms sleeping 4-8, quad rooms, double rooms, family rooms that sleep 4-6 and my favorite, the single room sometimes with attached bathroom. I always had a single room and spent between \$40-\$80 per night depending on location. I found if I stayed over a certain number of nights, I received additional discounts or one night free.

Each country directory lists member hostels and the number and types of rooms, services offered and catering options including kitchens and/or restaurants. Reservations can be made on-line, through local travel agencies or by phone. A word to the wise - some of the locations are so desirable that reservations are encouraged well in advance, especially during vacation and holiday seasons. I missed out on HI hostel space in Sydney due to school vacation.

At check in, I was handed my key, linens and towels (sometimes after a small towel deposit) and given after hours access information. Sometimes I could purchase a small selection of breakfast foods from the front desk until I found the grocery store.

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My single room usually held two twin beds, locking cubbies for clothes, a desk and chair. My rooms were **always very clean**. When I did not have an attached bathroom, I went down the hall to the women's bathroom. Inside there were several sinks, toilets and locking shower cubicles. The bathrooms were pristine and some offered hairdryers.

HI hostels have common areas such as kitchens, TV rooms, dining halls, travel bulletin boards and laundry facilities. Generally they have computers with Internet connection, phones and, at some locations, a full-service travel agency.

I found the kitchens completely stocked with pots, plates, and utensils and generally offered complimentary tea and coffee supplies. There were 4-8 cooking areas, huge fridges for cold storage and open cubbies for dry goods. Guests label their food with name and departure date and store it in the fridge or cubby. **I NEVER** had my food disturbed. At times, foodstuffs left behind were available for anyone to use and included condiments, milk, cheese and butter.

After several months on the road, it was very homey (as well as economical) to be able to buy and cook a few meals for myself. As I cooked, I could look over the half wall into the next kitchen and ask the closest "chef" where they bought their vegetables and what they were making. Experienced travelers often created complicated sauces or big batches of food to be eaten during their entire stay.

Diners sat across from each other to chat and share travel stories. Some tables were filled with solitary eaters behind books, but usually there were lively conversations to join if I were so inclined.

The hostels tend to be located close to bus terminals and train stations. Taxis never had difficulty knowing how to get to the HI Hostel. Every hostel I visited was a wealth of information on what to do locally including the 100 things to do in town for free or when it rains. I would go to the front desk and befriend the staff member on duty, explain what I wanted and then listen as they offered multiple suggestions to fit my needs. Sometimes there were discounts offered to local theatres or sports events. Hostels usually have at least one TV room and often would screen a recent movie on the weekend. It was fun to curl up on the low couches or piles of pillows to watch TV.

Bottom line, I found the HI system of youth hostels an unexpected delight, True, they don't offer complimentary bottles of shampoo or chocolates on your pillow. What they do offer is clean, safe, economical accommodations and access to people who love to travel and are happy to their share stories/travel wisdom with you.

Hostelling International is based in the United Kingdom, but has national and regional offices around the globe. Membership can be initiated in your home country or while on the road. Individual and family memberships are available.

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Membership prices as of 6/1/08 in the US are:

YOUTH - under 18 years	FREE	ADULT - 18-54 years	\$28/year
SENIOR - 55+ year	\$18/year	LIFE - one-time fee	\$250

Contact them at [www.hihostels.com](http://www.hihostels.com) or [www.hiusa.org](http://www.hiusa.org)