

Travel



14C** (Wb, S-15C, T, Ro-6C, F, *-8B)

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How a lady alone does it

At the Fontainebleau (sigh!) and dining alone (gasp!)

It's 8 p.m. at the Fontainebleau Hotel, a glamorous hotel on Miami Beach, but it could be any hotel anywhere in the world. If you are a vacationer or a business traveler who travels alone, you will recognize this moment, especially if you are a woman. It is time for dinner, but the dining rooms of the world don't seem to be set up for people travelling alone.

There are several eating areas in this beautiful renovated hotel — on the terrace, around the pool, in the lower lobby, disco, lobby bar, coffee shops, dining rooms. The outdoor eating places are closed now, so I really have four choices: the dining room, the disco-cum-steak house, the coffee shop, or my room.

Many single women eat alone in their room because they feel uncomfortable dining out alone, but in most cases that is a mistake — an expensive lonely mistake. The coffee shop is always safe, of course, but what if you want a nice dinner with the wine and ambience that only comes with an elegant dining room?

Most of us are experienced enough when it comes to visiting an expensive restaurant with a man or with a group of people. A thousand small fears interfere when we think of going to such a place alone. Will I feel out of place? Will I be lonely? Am I dressed right? Is



1-of-a-kind traveler
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It too expensive? Will I know how to order from the wine list, how to tip... how to handle the maître d', etc.

Most of these are small surface details, meaningless fears. Get over them and you will be able to enjoy the food, music, ambience, wine, service — all the things that you deserve as much as any couple or group enjoying a dining room.

HERE ARE A few tips. Dress up a little, in something simple enough to make you feel comfortable and dressy enough to make you feel part of the ambience of the room. A skirt and blouse, or a simple dress, with high heels.

Don't say, "Oh well, it doesn't matter," and go in your slacks. Your goal should be to make yourself as comfortable psychologically as possible. This probably doesn't mean "dressing up to

the nine's." It is only a dinner, after all, not a wedding.

Check out all the choices. The Fontainebleau has a steak-cum-bar room with booths and mirrored walls. Later in the night it will be a disco. I look in there, but I decide that I will feel more alone in that intimate, dark atmosphere than somewhere else. I can always come back if there is nothing better.

The lobby has an open bar area where you can drink, and order small fast-food meals or appetizers while looking out the window at the view. Very tempting, but I don't really want to be alone in a lobby bar. It feels too lonely. The Dining Galleries, visible through a glass wall, tempt me, but will I be comfortable in there?

I can see the room through the glass in a flicker of lights. One step takes me to the door, where a menu is posted so I know what I am in for financially. Two steps take me to the reservation desk. I ask if I can take another four steps and see the dining room itself.

THE MAIN GALLERY is a gallery of lights, crystal chandeliers, candles, gleaming glasses and mirrors, flowers and fruit piled high on a table, lighted busts of marble and fake bronze, soft music and the quiet rumble of voices over the sound of forks and china.

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What's really involved at this moment for most women is this: If I go in there alone, will I feel like a fool? One thing I learned long ago is that feeling like a fool, like any other minor failure, is the most painful but at least important thing that can ever happen to you in your life.

I ask for a table. One will not be available for half an hour. I sit down and order a glass of wine. That is a good idea, because suddenly I feel very comfortable and at home in this elegant dining room.

Life has so many times when you don't feel good about yourself, and a few well-deserved moments when you feel just fine. For all those moments when we are too old or too young, too fat, too unfashionable, there is another moment on the edge of a beautiful dining room, waiting to be seated.

I FEEL perfectly at home and comfortable, knowing that I am dressed ap-

propriately in my simple dress and high-heeled shoes, that I know how to order from both the menu and the wine list and that I can enjoy and be amused by the ambience created to impress me, as well as by the black tie maître d' hotel pacing pompously with their hands behind their backs.

I sign for the wine and leave a dollar tip as the maître d' leads me to a table up a few stairs behind the piano and violin. At that moment, the almost predictable feeling of deflation arrives. I am alone, a woman, and I am seated at a table for two on the narrow, raised gallery next to the service table. I try not to look at the crumbs on the floor, to look instead at the violins, but I am a little angry, the glorious moment of self-esteem dulled even as I look around and realize that in this dining room there is really no other place for me.

SINGLES are a minority. Dining rooms are set up for couples and groups. Maître d's and waiters are trained to be courteous and obliging, but they are also used to couples, groups, and men. Should I ask for another table? I decide that I am being paranoid and that I will enjoy my dinner.

Like many women, I don't always feel like a heavy meal on the road, so I

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order two appetizers, a dessert and half a bottle of wine. A good dining room is a sensory experience, not just the taste, but the dull roar of diners' voices; the sound of music and laughter. I was given a single rose as I entered the room, and I enjoy the texture of the rose between my fingers.

When dinner is over, I pause briefly at the lounge which is now a disco. Once again, uncertainty overcomes me. I am older than the other people in the room. Will I be out of place, uncomfortable? Being socially brave is something that grows on you, however, so I sit at the bar and order a drink, just to get the feel of it.

There may still be times when I will settle for the coffee shop or room service, but my general philosophy is this: why hide in your room and let the couples have all the fun. A hotel is your home, and you can get up and go back to your bed-book-and-television set anytime you feel like it.



Close to home

This is the time of year when conservatories all over the country are in their blooming glory. But one doesn't have to go far to visit one of the best — the Belle Isle Conservatory in Detroit. While on Belle Isle, the visitor should also drop in on the bird display in the Nature Center which has many scenes such as this one on the right.



Michigan travel tips

Leaf line: for fall colors

The Southeast Michigan Travel and Tourist Association has reinstituted its "Leaf Line" telephone service which carries information on fall color changes and tours.

By calling 585-7233, travelers can secure "up-to-date" information on the changing pattern of leaves in our area," said Sidney Baker, association president.

"We will have reports from key chamber of commerce stations around the region including Brighton, Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee, Monroe, Port Huron and Ypsilanti," Baker said.

"Fall is a beautiful time to travel — the pace is often less hurried and the air fresh and invigorating."

Free events book is available

The Travel and Tourist Association of Southeast Michigan has for distribution a "Fall/Winter Calendar of Events."

The 12-panel folder depicts many of the events scheduled to take place in the 11-county

region from October through March.

To obtain a free copy, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Fall/Winter Calendar," Travel and Tourist Association, P.O. Box 1550, Troy, MI 48069.

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