

Solo Serenity in South Dakota

By Suzanne Wright

Not many people make South Dakota a destination. But in my quest to see all 50 states-- I've been to 47—I needed S.D. So late last summer I used Delta Frequent Flyer miles to go to a state most people can't place on a map. I booked a cabin in the Badlands, a resort in the Black Hills and the historic Alex Johnson Hotel in Rapid City. I watched *North by Northwest* in anticipation of my trip. I planned to visit Mount Rushmore, Crazy Horse, and the kitschy Corn Palace. Alone.

September is just about the perfect time of year for a single gal to spend five days in the Southwest Plains. Warm, dry days and clear, cool nights are standard issue. Because I went on a Tuesday and returned on Saturday, I had most places nearly to myself.

Some people assumed I was a mom on hiatus or an exasperated wife; I let them draw their own conclusions. Curiosity about my solitary status meant several kindnesses: a hotel clerk upgraded my room; a middle-aged hippie photographed me in front Mount Rushmore; a shopkeeper threw in a mood ring with a purchase; a waitress bought me a glass of wine. If asked I told the truth: I like to travel alone and I'd always wanted to see South Dakota.

These were the highlights:

- Fields of sunflowers along Highway 80.
- Jogging at dusk in the eerily beautiful Badlands, with the sun setting on one side of the road and the moon rising on the other side, fragrant sagebrush filling my nostrils.
- Seeing a first-run movie for \$1.50 in a funky downtown bijou.
- Drinking bourbon under a starry sky and having deer for company.
- Eating an "Indian taco."
- Trading a cassette tape for marijuana-laced chocolate chip cookies (surprise!).
- An unexpected drive to nearby Devil's Monument in Wyoming.

You really can't call yourself a broad unless you've traveled alone at least once. And I don't mean tacking on an extra day to your conference in Florida. You have to answer the call of a place, and plan it just as you would a vacation with a lover or a friend. It is empowering and enriching and filled with lovely, surprising moments you'll never experience in company.

This summer I'm headed to Idaho.