

## **OVERSEAS TRAVEL SAFETY TIPS**

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Traveling to a new country or one that you may have visited before can be a pleasant, informative and exciting event. However, with the high incidence of assaults, kidnappings and other criminal activity being directed at foreign travelers, some basic common-sense precautions should be followed by anyone contemplating a trip to another country. No longer are only diplomats and high ranking military personnel the sole target of terrorists and criminals. Recent kidnappings and assaults have been directed at members of religious groups, business people, security personnel, cultural exchange workers, college professors and students, and tourists.

As part of your initial decision-making of where to go, consider the political environment in which you will be traveling and the fact that some countries have a higher incidence of crime against foreigners than others. Consult the U.S. Department of State website ([www.statedept.gov](http://www.statedept.gov)), to determine if the country you are considering is safe for travel. Also check with your local libraries, tourist bureaus, travel agents, or airlines for information about the country you'll be visiting. Elicit information on luggage, customs requirements, sanitation, and safety tips for traveling, entering and exiting the country.

Once you've done your homework, start a security checklist and ensure that you discuss your travel plans with fellow travelers, (especially children who will accompany you), your family and friends at home. This checklist should include many things, from what to do prior to departing up until the time you return. A sample checklist, such as the following, would do fine as a start:

- Leave all unnecessary jewelry, credit cards and valuables at home;
- Make a personal information list and leave it with someone who would be handling affairs at home, in the unlikely event that something happened to you. Include a personal physical description (possibly including a very recent photo), information on insurance policies, bank accounts, wills, and other pertinent legal matters;
- Make photocopies of your driver's license, airline ticket, passport and itinerary. Take one copy with you and keep it separate from your official document. Leave the second copy with relatives or friends;
- Consider leaving a power of attorney and instructions regarding guardianship of any children, if they are to remain at home;
- Carry traveler's checks instead of cash. Once you cash them during your trip do not flash around large sums of money.
- If you carry currency have a few small bills in your pocket or purse for tips and miscellaneous expenses. Keep larger bills separate and secure (e.g. use a money belt or pouch or carry it in a sock or another location on your body);

- Carry valuables in carry-on luggage and distribute wallets, passports, and other important items to various locations on your body to preclude loss of all of them in the event of theft or unforeseen incident;
- If confronted by robbers, don't fight, give up your valuables;
- Travel as light as possible to avoid having to leave large amounts of unattended luggage while you search for a means to move it at airports. Ensure that you receive luggage claim checks for all checked luggage at the airport;
- Lock luggage and ensure that your name and address are put on the inside, in the event that it gets lost;
- Never leave valuables unattended at airports, in your hotel room or guarded by strangers;
- Never agree to deliver packages or items from people with whom you are not thoroughly familiar with. They may contain contraband and subject you to criminal prosecution;
- Deal only with authorized agents when purchasing tickets and souvenirs, or exchanging money. You may otherwise be guilty of black marketing, which is a crime in most countries;
- Avoid photographing military installations and personnel, police, border areas and transportation facilities, unless permission from appropriate authorities is obtained. Since it is often difficult to determine what appropriate authority is in many countries, you are probably better off to avoid these areas altogether;
- Women should carry shoulder bags in a secure manner (under their arm, with any flaps or openings against the body and opposite from the street side) and men should carry their wallets in coat pockets to prevent pickpockets and snatch-and-run type theft;
- Dress conservatively and don't wear items readily identifying your nationality or social status. Maintain a low profile;
- Avoid doing things that draw attention to yourself, and be polite when dealing with local nationals, especially authority figures. Remember that, except in cases of diplomatic immunity, the rules of the host country govern; not those of your country;
- Respect local customs and values and avoid discussions on potentially volatile topics (e.g. religion, politics, sex, and world issues). Also, educate yourself on social norms such as male/female protocol so that you do not offend anyone;
- Watch where you travel, avoid isolated or dimly lighted places and always travel with a companion that you know and trust;
- If you go sightseeing or are visiting a country where trouble is common, check in with the U.S. Embassy (consular section), to let them know where you will be and when you expect to return. When you return, notify them;
- Make note of emergency and important numbers (e.g. police, embassy/consular office, fire, and your hotel) and carry them with you while traveling;
- Remember that many foreign hotels do not have adequate fire prevention and detection devices, for that reason, try to book a room above the first floor (for security) and below the seventh (low enough for fire equipment to reach);

- Watch for suspicious persons who seem to be following or observing your moves for extended periods; and
- Be aware of locations of "safe havens," such as, police stations, hospitals, hotels, etc.

By observing these simple suggestions, planning, and doing a bit of thinking, you can experience one of the most interesting events of your life while ensuring that the memories which you bring home are fond ones. Bon Voyage!!

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