

Travel safety tips

Unwary tourists can make easy targets for thieves because they stand out in a crowd, are unused to their surroundings, and are generally carrying money, credit cards and valuables like cameras. You can reduce your risk of being mugged or robbed by taking a few simple precautions. It is a good idea to research the safety of your intended destination with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This government department keeps an updated bulletin on travel destinations, covering factors such as political unrest or criminal activities that target tourists. You could also consult with your travel agent, or talk to friends who have already visited your intended destination.

General safety suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Keep your travel plans, including accommodation details, to yourself.
- Don't hitch hike.
- Try not to travel at night.
- Avoid 'seedier' areas of the cities you visit, especially at night.
- Ask your hotel manager for advice on 'safe' versus 'unsafe' local areas.
- As a general rule, city streets that include children and women suggest the area is safe for families.
- Carry with you at all times the contact details of the Australian embassy. If your city doesn't have an Australian embassy, find out which other country's embassy is available to help you, such as the British embassy.
- Keep a photocopy of your passport and all other important documents in a safe place.
- Use ATMs during the day, when there are people around.
- Try to rely more on credit cards and travellers cheques than cash.
- If you are mugged, don't fight back. It is better to lose a few dollars and a wristwatch than get injured.
- Avoid incidents such as fights, riots or civil disturbances at all times.

Transport safety suggestions

Suggestions include:

- At the airport, watch for your suitcase as it appears on the carousel. Don't hang back and wait for the crowds to disperse - you might find that someone else has already taken your bag in the meantime.
- Avoid changing money at airports, as thieves could be watching you.
- Consult with your hotel manager or tourist information centre about the public transport in your area. Make sure you know what official taxi cabs look like. A thief may pose as a taxi driver to lure you into their car.
- Don't share taxis with strangers.
- Carjacking is a problem in some cities. When driving, keep all doors locked and windows up. Make sure your boot is locked too.

Hotel safety

Suggestions include:

- If possible, choose accommodation that has unmarked 'swipe cards' rather than numbered keys for each room. If you lose your swipe card or if it is stolen, the thief won't know which room to rob.
- Take note of emergency exits, stairwells, fire escapes and emergency plans, just in case.
- Always lock your hotel door when retiring for the night. If there is a chain included, use it.
- When arranging to meet people you've never met before (such as business associates), wait for them in the lobby. Don't ask them to come up to your room.

Don't stand out in a crowd

Suggestions include:

- Even if you're not sure where you're going, walk like you've got a purpose.
- Match your dress style to that of the locals. Don't wear an obvious 'tourist' outfit like a loud shirt with a camera slung around your neck.
- Be discreet when map reading.
- Notice the people around you. Be wary if someone seems to be taking more than a passing interest.

Don't make yourself an attractive target

Suggestions include:

- Don't wear expensive jewellery on obvious display.
- Wear valuables (such as traveller's cheques and credit cards) on a belt worn under the clothes and next to the skin.
- If feeling particularly vulnerable, wear your money belt somewhere other than around your waist. Thieves know all about money belts too.
- Consider carrying a 'dummy' wallet holding a small amount of cash. If you are directly confronted by a mugger, you can hand over the dummy wallet and avoid further distress.

Beware of scams

Thieves devise inventive ways to rob you. Some of these may include:

- Posing as a police officer and asking to check your money for counterfeit bills.
- Posing as a tour guide and offering to show you the sights of the city.
- Slipping sedative drugs into your food or drink.
- Thieves in different cities tend to favour different scams. Ask your hotel manager or local tourist information officer for more information.

Where to get help

- Travel agent
- Australian embassies
- Local police
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Tel. (03) 9221 5555

Things to remember

- Research the safety of your intended destination with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Carry with you at all times the contact details of the Australian embassy.
- For up-to-date information on 'safe' and 'unsafe' areas of the city, consult with your hotel manager or local tourist information officer.
- Try to blend in with the locals and avoid looking or acting like a tourist.
- If you are mugged, don't fight back. It is better to lose a few dollars and a wristwatch than get injured.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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