

Crime Prevention News

Travel Safety for Women

This edition of the Crime Prevention News is dedicated to women who travel and safety tips to provide helpful information to help to reduce the risks associated with travel. Although the title of this edition is "Travel Safety for Women." We hope this edition can also provide helpful information to anyone who travels regardless of age or gender.

Mental Preparedness

No one wants to be victimized. Yet, despite our best efforts, there is a chance we might be victimized at some point during our lives. This is why it is imperative for us not only to take tangible steps to reduce our chances of confrontation and victimization, but intangible steps as well. One of the most effective and least expensive ways to do this is to be mentally prepared, as much as possible, for criminal confrontations.

Levels of Awareness

A level of awareness can be defined as the degree to which you observe what is going on around you. What activities are people involved in? What is the environment like? What sights, sounds, and smells do you pick up on? What is your intuition telling you?

Most people's daily routines take them into a variety of environments and put them into contact with many different types of people. You may know some environments and people well and consider them to be safe. Others may be new and a little unnerving to you. Accordingly, your level of awareness will, and should, vary.

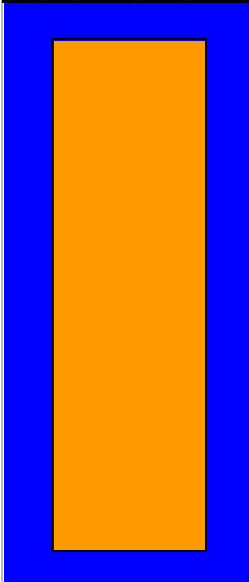
A low level of awareness may be in order when you are watching a movie in the comfort of your well secured home. A moderate level of awareness may be in order when in a public area with which you are familiar, but which is bustling with people unknown to you. A high level of awareness may be in order when you are in an area which is new to you and is known to have a high crime rate.

Mental Conditioning

Take a moment to think about the various types of criminal confrontations in which you could find yourself involved in. It could be a theft, robbery, assault, car jacking, or even an abduction. Think about some of the ways you could react to those types of confrontations. Some of the reaction options could include: calling the police, passively complying with the criminal, calling attention to the confrontation in order to attract help, fleeing, or fighting.

It is to your advantage to decide in advance how you will react during a confrontation. During a confrontation you will likely be frightened and agitated, and your adrenaline will be pumping. This is not the best time to start thinking about how to react.

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University of Iowa
Police
323 S. Madison St.
Iowa City, IA. 52242
Ph. (319) 335-5022



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Ramifications and Outcomes

All actions taken during a criminal confrontation have ethical, legal, moral and physical ramifications. Ask yourself the following questions: Is the action justified? Is it fair? Are there any other options? Would the action be considered reasonable by a normal person or lawful in a court of law?

Travel Security

People are especially vulnerable while traveling. Travelers are often putting themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, dealing with strangers or casual acquaintances, operating in different or unusual circumstances and following tight time schedules. All of these factors can be distracting and stressful to the traveler. Under such pressure, personal safety and security precautions can easily be forgotten. The following safety tips can be vital to your personal protection.

Airport Security

When you travel keep your safety in mind at all times. Take the following precautions at the airports that you will be using. Use a luggage tag that has a flap over it to help conceal your name and address. Or, put your name and address card inside the luggage tag backwards so that only the blank side is visible.

Your business address is safer to use than your home address, especially if your luggage is stolen and it's inspected by a criminal. However, if you use your business address, be sure to caution your fellow workers not to reveal your location to anyone. Ask them to take messages for you, and also assure the callers that you will call them back as soon as possible. Do your part, too. Check in with your office periodically to get your phone messages.

Possibly the best solution would be to not use your home address or your business card- instead use a mailbox service company to get a temporary address that you can put on your luggage tags (and all your personal property such as cameras, MP3 players, etc.).

Packing your Luggage

Select well-constructed luggage, but avoid expensive-looking sets. Fancy, high quality leather luggage may identify you as someone to target. Travel lightly. Don't take too much jewelry, luggage, or expensive clothing. You don't want to look overly affluent and attract a criminal's attention.

Never put anything truly valuable or irreplaceable (such as medicine or jewelry) inside luggage that will be checked- you may never see your luggage again due to theft or careless handling by the airline. Place all of your valuables in your carry-on luggage.

While packing, be sure to make a list of contents of each piece of luggage. If your luggage is lost or stolen, you will need to file an insurance claim that lists all of the missing items. Don't put the list inside your luggage. Make two copies and keep one copy on your person and the other one at home.

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Packing your Luggage (cont.)

If you choose to take any kind of personal protection with you (pepper spray etc.), be sure that you know all applicable laws and regulations. Commercial carriers may restrict the carrying of such devices. The city, county, or state to which you are traveling may also have prohibitions concerning these devices.

Ticket Counters and Security Checkpoints

When you are waiting in line at ticket counters or security checkpoints, keep your luggage in front of you, never at your side or behind you. It only takes a few seconds for a thief to temporarily distract you, while the thief's accomplice walks away with your luggage.

When going through a security checkpoint, don't put your personal property on the conveyor belt until the last possible second. After you put it on the belt, keep a close eye on it until you have reclaimed it. Don't be distracted by anything!

Checking Luggage

When you check luggage with a skycap, be sure to see your luggage deposited on the moving belt system. If your luggage is simply placed on a cart and then just left there, anyone can walk up and remove it.

Waiting Areas

Whether you are reading a book in the waiting area, having a cup of coffee in a restaurant, or finding other ways to pass the time while you are waiting for your flight or train, keep your luggage in front of you at all times. If you have a small travel bag, briefcase, laptop computer case, or a purse, keep the strap around your arm while you are sitting. Don't become so engrossed in what you are doing that a thief can walk off with your possessions.

Automobile Rentals

It's best not to let strangers know that you are a tourist. Why? Because they know that you are probably unfamiliar with the area, can become lost or disorientated more easily than a resident, are probably somewhat distracted by the reasons of your visit (sightseeing, business, etc.) and most likely are carrying valuables and extra cash with you. All in all, you could make a great target for a criminal.

Be sure that the rental car that you use does not readily identify you as a tourist. Can the car be identified as a rental by any exterior markings or by window stickers? How about the license plates? Some rental companies use special license plates that the criminals know belong to the rental car agency.

Be sure that you have clear directions to your destination before leaving the rental counter. Having a good (current) map is also a good idea. The directions that seemed clear to you at first might possibly contain a few errors or omit important information. The map can serve as an important back-up to keep you from getting lost.



Automobile Rentals. (Cont.)

Before driving, familiarize yourself with the automobile and its safety equipment. Check the gas gauge to verify that you have sufficient gasoline in the tank. If you need to pull off the road at any time, be sure to find a well-lighted gas station or shopping area where other people are present.

Accommodations

Before booking a room in a hotel or motel, call the location itself (not a national reservation number) to ask questions about the security of your accommodations. Such questions should include:

1. What kind of door locks does your room have-deadbolt, security chain or bar, etc.?
2. Does the door have a viewer or peephole?
3. What about door keys- does the door have a magnetic entry card or key that is customized for each new guest?
4. Does the entry card or key unsafely display your room number on it or on an attached tag?
5. Will you be located on the ground floor?
6. If so, are the windows located high enough on the walls to discourage an intruder?
7. If you won't be located on the ground floor, will you be located any higher than the tenth floor? Often, fire ladders won't reach above the tenth floor.
8. What kind of locks do the windows have in order to defeat an intruder who obtains a ladder or uses a fire escape, etc.?
9. If your room has a balcony, can it be reached from the balcony of another room? Is the door of the balcony equipped with a good lock?
10. What is the area around the hotel like? Is it safe and highly populated?
11. Is there good exterior lighting to help ensure your safety at night?
12. Does the front desk have 24-hour staffing to help you in case of an emergency?
13. Does the hotel or motel have a security staff? Is the security staff on duty at all times?
14. Are room safes available? Does the front desk have safety deposit boxes or safes available to guests?

When you check in, ask the staff not to give out your name or room number to anyone. You may want someone on the staff to escort you to your room. You may also want them to enter your room before you and check it out before you enter.

Be aware of various ploys that criminals may use to gain entrance to your room. For example, there are documented cases in which criminals used courtesy phones inside hotels or motels to dial various room numbers at random. If a female occupant answered the phone, the criminal posed as a hotel maintenance worker and asked her to check her fire alarm, thermostat, or some other device within the room. If the woman asked the caller to wait while she checks it, rather than asking someone else in the room to check it, the caller assumes that the woman is alone. When the woman returned to the phone after checking the device the caller told her that the building was experiencing mechanical problems with the devices. The criminal then told her to expect a maintenance repair person to arrive at her door within a few minutes. Upon knocking on the door a few minutes later, the criminal was admitted by the woman without any questions.



Accommodations (cont.)

Purchase an auxiliary lock that is specially designed to be used on hotel and motel doors. This type of lock requires no drilling, attaches easily to the inside of the door by clamping quickly around the existing door lock, and does not require the use of a key. Such travel locks will help to ensure that no one enters your room (either with a pass key or by picking the lock) while you are inside.

Traveling to a Foreign Country

Avoid carrying excessive amounts of cash. Instead, opt for traveler's checks. Traveler's checks are accepted in most countries and offer peace of mind. Should you lose or misplace them, they can be replaced. Pick up a guidebook and translation dictionary prior to your departure. Learning a few key words and phrases can help you avoid problematic situations and get help if necessary. Phrases such as "call the police," "I need assistance" and "please help me" can be valuable if you find yourself in a crisis situation. Keep in mind that the cell phones that we all rely upon so heavily for those situations will not be operable in a foreign country unless you have a international calling plan.

Purchase a good (current) map of your destination. Note the location of nearby hospitals and police stations. If an American embassy or consulate is located in your destination city, note its location. Learn about your destination's culture. Certain clothing and behavior accepted in American society may be improper, or even illegal, in the country you are visiting.

Learn about your destination's laws. Some personal protection devices which are legal in your home town may be prohibited under the laws of your destination.

Research your destination's current crime statistics. Are there specific crimes which are occurring frequently? Has the country's government taken any steps to combat those crimes? Find out if there are specific areas or places that you should avoid while visiting. A good source for information is the U.S. Department of State which issues travel warnings. To obtain current travel warnings, call (202) 647-5225 or visit <http://travel.state.gov/> This is a great website for more safety tips for traveling abroad.

Immediately upon arriving in another country, learn how the phone system operates. If an emergency arises and you need to call the police or the hospital, you won't want to waste time.

Don't Forget Back Home

While you are away from home have a trusted friend, neighbor, or relative take the following actions to keep your home from looking unoccupied:

Park a car in your driveway

Visit your home at irregular intervals

Put trash out at your collection point

Mow your lawn if necessary

Pick up your mail on a regular basis (you may want to consider having the post office hold your mail while you are away)

Make a periodic inspection of the premises

Remove all flyers, circulars, doorknob hangers etc.

Suspend all newspaper subscriptions until you return.