



## Your Safety and Security Whilst Travelling

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It doesn't matter where you're headed this vacation season -- unless it's your own backyard -- travel scammers will be there, ready and waiting to catch you out.

Every year we encounter a fresh crop of travel scams. There's no shortage of ingenuity for the tricks these crooks play, as we'll demonstrate in the first part of this year's roundup.

Oftentimes, scammers have the same end game in mind but the way they get there is new and different enough to catch out even the most wary of travellers.

### **Distraction Scam Tactics**

For instance, one of the most common scams involves finding ways to distract victims' attention while an accomplice picks their pockets or rifles through their purses.

Sometimes, the simplest tactics work best.

That's why you may not think twice when you notice someone waving a newspaper at you. Or perhaps it'll be a whole group of kids, all doing the same thing.

But while you're wondering what's going on, one of the young crooks you didn't spot will be trying to relieve you of your wallet.

When the aim is to distract as many people as possible, a favourite trick currently running in European cities, including London is the so-called "falling lady" scam.

You, and just about everyone around you, can't help but be drawn into the drama when a seemingly old lady falls on the sidewalk.

It's not uncommon for crowds to gather around and for some onlookers to try to help her back on her feet.

It's the perfect pickpocketing scenario -- and that's exactly what happens.

As these two scams demonstrate, sometimes it's next to impossible to avoid becoming distracted.

So, when you're out and about, make sure your wallet isn't.

Keep your hand on it or, better yet, just have cash and one credit card with you and keep it totally out of reach -- even in your shoe if you have to!

### **Slash and Grab**

More brutal scammers have a much more direct way of getting their hands on your money or the contents of purses and travel bags.

On scooters or bicycles, they patrol the congested sidewalks and walkways at airports, looking for people with shoulder bags or long-handled purses.

Often travellers have other things on their minds -- like their suitcases, transportation, reading a map or just finding the main doors into the airport terminal.

In the commotion, these ruthless riders, sometimes with an accomplice, whisk past, using a sharp knife to slash the straps and then riding off with the loot.

For the victim, this could be about more than losing money. If your travel documents -- passport etc. -- are also in the bag, your vacation or your homeward journey plans could be devastated.

Worse yet, if you run after them, you may leave your main baggage unattended, ripe for harvesting by an accomplice.

Being alert to this risk is an important way of avoiding this crime. But you could also minimize the danger by storing your purse, documents and other essentials in a bag that securely and tightly hooks over the retractable handle of your suitcase -- then grip that handle like your life depends on it!

Watch out too for a variation of the ride-and-grab trick, in which cyclists try to snatch your phone as you check it. Stop and stand clear of the roadway to check your cell. In busy locations, keep your phone safely stored out of sight -- not in your back pocket!

### **Stranded Phonies**

Now, what do you do when you're in a non-English-speaking country and encounter a couple of "tourists" who do speak English and tell you they're stranded for one reason or another?

They're real Americans, Canadians, Brits or Irish, so your first inclination is to believe what they're saying.

You might encounter them at travel stops, such as freeway service stations, and they may have a couple of kids with them.

They spin a tale of woe that ends with a request for money to help them get back home. If you refuse, they may become threatening.

According to a British newspaper report, the scam is especially common in France. It quoted a French police spokesman as saying: "These gangs systematically target foreigners.

"Sometimes, they even write IOUs to the people whose money they take. But, of course, they will never see the money again.

Avoid getting drawn into this type of scam by politely brushing off these scammers, saying something like "Sorry, I can't help," and then hurrying away. Don't get drawn into a conversation.

If you're taking a nap in your car, ensure the doors are locked. If someone raps on the window and begins the "stranded" spiel, start up and drive away.

### **Keep Your Eyes Open!**

Finally, a general word of warning to all weary travellers: Stay awake.

One of the most common vacation scams of them all is the simple act of stealing from snoozing tourists.

We all get tired when traveling, so it's easy to fall asleep -- on the subway, at the airport, or at the bus station.

Thieves patrol these places in tourist locations. They're quick and they're experts at removing your wallet, purse or even large baggage without waking you.

Tough as it may be, try to stay awake when resting while traveling. Or, if you're with someone else, agree on napping shifts so one of you is always on the alert.