



TRAVEL LIKE A PRO

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Revised and updated

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CHAPTER SAMPLE

Sample Chapter # 28 SECURITY

Extremely important! Do not become a “mark” for thieves. There have been countless reports of vacationers being ripped off by purse snatchers and pickpockets. The latest data from the US Department of Justice shows a marked increase in pocket-picking. Though we could not obtain statistics for Europe,, one could expect that it is worse than in the U. S. because of the huge influx of people escaping poverty found in many Third World countries. Personal theft, which includes pocket-picking, purse snatching, and attempted purse snatching has increased 13.9% since 2001 to over 204,000 incidents. This was one of the most striking features of the latest National Crime Victimization Survey report. With pocket-picking on the rise, this would be a good time for travelers and residents alike to consider the use of anti-theft devices.

The following story illustrates why this is a good practice. On a beautiful, sunny day in the middle of May, three of us were in Siena entering the Piazza del Campo. It was crowded, packed in fact. Too crowded for the three of us to walk side-by-side. My daughter walked ahead, right hand on her shoulder purse. Bear in mind she has a black belt in karate and is an expert kick boxer. We walked directly behind her. Something distracted her. She turned to look, removing her hand from her purse. At that precise moment, the man on my left shot his right arm out, knife in hand about to cut her bag’s shoulder strap. A small boy quickly moved to my daughter’s right side and would have taken off with the handbag, while the man with the knife would seem all too innocent of the deed. Moving quickly, I stopped the would-be thief in his tracks, thus saving her purse and all the hassle that would go with its loss. Perhaps I also saved his life as my daughter would have acted in a far more aggressive manner than her father did.

This personal experience proves that you cannot be too careful. You must remain ever aware of potential people problems, especially in crowds. Anyone could be a thief, though it must be stated that almost everyone we have encountered over decades of traveling appeared to be honest, decent human beings. In any city, in any country, this sort of thing can happen, just as frequently on the streets of Siena as on the streets of San Francisco.

The following is a technique that several people I know employ. They carry an extra wallet with a small amount of cash and a few very local (home) credit cards of no importance. That wallet can be handed over to a thief in the event of a robbery, thereby leaving the good wallet safe. Do not carry unnecessary credit cards on your trip and the “stuff” that bulges your wallet. NEVER carry your “good” wallet in your back/hip pocket. It is an open invitation for theft. This is good advice even when you are not traveling.

You can avoid these problems by carrying a security wallet. There are many versions, but the one we like comes from Travel Security Accessories. Call them at 800 932-4465 for a catalog. Their assortment of travel products are made of good quality leather. My favorite item is a wallet with a strong, leather-covered clip that attaches to the inside waistband of skirt or pants. This hidden wallet is for items that you want to carry with you but that you do not use all the time. Specifically, I place our passports, medical health cards, drivers’ licenses, credit and excess cash in it, then slip it onto the inside of my pants on the waist, roughly at my hip. It is impossible for a thief to remove and yet easy for me to get to. In another small wallet that I carry in a front trousers pocket is one of the two credit cards I use and a small amount of cash. A thick rubber band is wrapped around it making it quite difficult, if not impossible, to remove without my being well aware of it.

If you want to thief-proof the strap on your purse, computer case, camera case or fanny-pak, buy about three feet of heavy picture wire from an art supply store. Starting at one end, thread the wire through the strap or sew it every few inches onto the shoulder strap using heavy carpet thread and then enclose the wire with a heavy ribbon stitched to the main strap. Not easy, but it will save you untold grief. I do not travel without a wire security strap on my over-the-shoulder, take-it-with-me, bag which holds my camera, reporter's notebook, pens and a few other personal items.

Wire Security Cables in Handbags

There are a couple of sources for over-the-shoulder handbags with straps that have steel cables through them. See Chapter 7 - Catalogs. Some of that information, for your convenience, is repeated here. We learned about this resource from a person who took our class, Pack Like a Pro. When we demonstrated how to thread heavy picture wire through a handbag strap. Magellan's catalog and Web site offers six types of these over-the-shoulder bags with a steel wire security strap. They also have a tote and a waist-pak with a similar steel wire security strap. Their over-the-shoulder bags with a steel security wire come in microfiber priced at \$34.85 and in leather at \$89.85. Like all of the other sources mentioned, you can shop on-line or request a catalog. www.magellans.com, 800 962-4943. Travelsmith <http://www.magellans.com> also has a microfiber shoulder bag in two sizes with a steel security wire in the shoulder strap. The large size (13" x 9 1/2") shoulder bag is item # 1467. The medium size (8 1/2" x 3") shoulder bag is item # 1468. www.travelsmith.com, 800 950-1600.

We suggest not using purse-type back-packs. They are hidden from your sight and a thief can slit them open and make off with the contents. Fanny-paks have their own risk as the belt can be cut if it does not have a security wire. Keep your hand on your shoulder bag, especially in crowded areas. The shoulder strap on any over-the-shoulder bag should also have the security wire.

Some Tips on Self-Protection

In the story above about my daughter almost losing her purse, I used my left elbow to strike the side of the head of the man with the knife. Your elbow is one of the strongest parts of your body and the use of it as a deterrent is taught in most martial arts studios. If you are approached by a would-be robber who asks for your wallet or purse, do not hand it over but rather throw it away quickly and then run as fast as you can in the opposite direction. When getting into your car, lock the doors right away and this act will stop any thief from getting your car. Start your engine and drive off. Ignore threats. If per chance the intruder has a gun and points it at you while in your car, do not drive off. Instead, as fast as you can into anything other than a human being. A tree, building, a wall, another car, anything. Your air bag will save you. The intruder will not want to steal your car and will leave quickly. You will be safe and your insurance company will probably take care of the damage.

If a large truck or van pulls up close to the driver's side and you are about to enter your car, go around to the passenger side to enter. If you are a woman and a man is sitting alone in a car next to you, keep walking or contact a guard or police officer to walk you back to your car.

In a building, take the elevator and not the stairs, even if you want the exercise.

Register Your Travel Plans

A free registration service is now available from the U. S. Government which permits you to record your travel information so you can receive their assistance during an emergency because they will know where to reach you. This is especially important when traveling in the Middle East and many Third World countries. All you need to do is to list your travel itinerary, passport detail and e-mail addresses. Visit <http://travelregistration.state.gov>.

Security Precautions:

1. Prepare an itinerary sheet showing where you will be staying with the dates of your stay , with the name, address, phone number and e-mail address of each hotel. Place a copy on the top inside of every bag that you take with you with additional copies distributed to friends and family at home so that they can reach you in case of an emergency.
2. Also, if your bag is lost while you are traveling, you can be contacted enroute and have the bag returned to you while on your trip rather than having it shipped home, leaving you on vacation without your clothes.
3. Make two copies of your driver's license, your passport and plane and train tickets. Give one copy to a friend and retain another for yourself which you should keep with you. Do not leave it in your hotel room.
4. Compile a list of the credit cards, debit cards, and check numbers you are taking with you and make sure you also add the telephone numbers to use in case you need to call if any of these items are lost or stolen. Maintain a copy of this information for you and give a copy to a friend or relation. If there is a loss or theft and you cannot call the company or bank yourself, you can contact the friend or relative and have them call.. Carry your copy in a place other than where you carry the originals, but never leave the list in your checked luggage or in your hotel room. Important! Along with your itinerary and list left with friends or family, give them a letter authorizing them to make contact with your credit card company or bank on your behalf when you are abroad. In rare situations, this letter may make the difference between their being able to resolve the problem or not.
5. Do not take all of your credit cards with you. Select one or two. It is always a good idea to contact your credit card issuer and your bank, if using checks, advising them when and where you will be going so that they will honor those transactions while you are gone. Some banks may insist upon your using debit cards, so plan accordingly.
6. Copy of all important telephone numbers from your I-Pod, Blackberry or address book and carry in two different places.
7. Avoid fanny-paks unless you wear them in the front center and have a security wire running through the strap. Keep your hand on it, especially when in crowded areas. Your camera bag strap should also have a metal security wire running through its length.
8. Women! Use good judgement when encountering men who display amorous tendencies.
9. Women! When lost, walk deliberately as if you know where you are going, and play it safe by asking for help from a policeman, family with children present, or a woman who appears to be a local.
10. Always keep the zipper on your handbag closed.
11. Make it difficult for a pocket-picker. The Zip-R-Lok, a recently developed and patented product by Tecco, attaches to a bag or pocket zipper closure and prevents it being unzipped. Visit www.ziplok.com or E-mail david@teccocorp.com for more information.
12. Be aware that thieves frequently do something to distract you, such as bumping into you, spilling a drink on you, or dropping something right in front of you then stooping down to pick it up thus blocking your way. All the while they will be voicing great apologies while a compatriot steals your purse.
13. If a taxi has two people in the front seat, find a different cab.
14. When you see Americans gathering a large groups, move on, so that you do not join a large target of people who may be marks for theft or even worse.
15. Maintain a low profile by blending in with the local people.
16. Learn enough of the language of each country that you visit to request assistance in that specific language. Spanish and Italian are fairly close.
17. Never take any unlicensed taxi, water taxi in Venice, or unlicensed cab in Mexico City unless you are certain they are not going to overcharge you and /or steal your wallet and belongings.
18. Keep luggage tag information hidden from view with a cover.
19. Whenever possible, book nonstop flights and leave the airport as soon as possible.
20. If traveling in a high risk country, contact the U. S. Embassy on arrival.

21. Never open the door to your hotel room unless you know who is knocking and if you want added security you can use a rubber door stopper or the Door Stop Alarm from Magellan's, item # SP643 @ \$11.85.

22. If you leave anything valuable in the drawers in your hotel room, consider using travel drawer locks. However there are two points of view concerning the use of drawer locks. They may slow the potential thief down, but they also indicate to a thief where valuables are kept.

23. Driving in a crowded area of a risky neighborhood? Keep the car windows closed and the car doors locked. Never keep your elbow on the door with an open car window.

24. Leave all of your expensive and showy jewelry at home.

25. Maintain a low profile and do not get into an argument. Walk away. Always.

26. If you plan on traveling in a high-risk country, contact the U. S. Department of State for Travel Warnings and Public Announcements.

27. When entering a country ascertain if an exit departure tax is required and how much it is. You will want to reserve that amount of cash so your exit is hassle-free.

28. Your passport should be protected and never, never left in your hotel room. Do you know that an American passport is worth thousands of dollars on the black market? Your charming bellboy or helpful housekeeper can earn a year's income by stealing it.

29. Count the number of items you are carrying when entering a taxi and make sure they are all with you when you exit. Items in the trunk such as purses or cameras can be hidden from view by the driver covering them with a cloth thereby hiding them from view. The trunk may appear empty, but you have left something behind. This happened to friends in Rome. . Before the taxi driver had the chance to leave the scene, they realized that their camera was not with them and queried the driver who "discovered" their camera in the taxi's trunk. The driver was most apologetic.