

International Bicycle Fund

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A non-governmental, nonprofit organization promoting bicycle transport, economic development, international understanding and safety education.

Increasing Your Personal Security While Traveling

Here is a review of all the good advice you have heard so you can have more fun and less problems while you travel.

At All Times, In All Place:

- As much as possible, blend into the local culture; especially in your dress and appearance. Avoid an obvious tourist appearance.
- When sightseeing, look interested but not overwhelmed by the attraction. Keep cameras and video equipment in a bag when not in use; avoid walking around with such items hanging from your neck.
- Leave expensive jewelry at the hotel, or better yet at home, unless needed for a specific occasion.
- Avoid viewing maps in plain view; step inside a hotel, restaurant or other building while trying to get your bearings. Thieves prey on travelers who seem lost or disoriented.
- Do not discuss personal matters with strangers, including your itinerary, others in your group, place of lodging or mode of transportation.
- Do not accept food or drink from strangers, even a child; would-be criminals often try to drug their victims through food and drink to facilitate a robbery. Intercity transport, local buses and trains are common places for these activities.
- Ignore attempts by locals to provoke an argument. Change the topic of discussion and, if possible, remove yourself from the situation.
- Make two photocopies of the biographic/identification page of your passport. Leave one copy at home with friends or relatives and carry the second copy with you for identification and purposes.

At Your Hotel:

- Lock your hotel room, connecting room and balcony doors, and all windows.
- Know the local emergency assistance phone number and how to use the local phone system.
- Store all unneeded personal documents and excess cash in the hotel or room safe.
- Meet people, especially strangers, only in the hotel lobby and not in your room.

Getting Around:

- Have hotel management call for a taxi rather than trying to hail one yourself.
- Be attentive and watchful of your belongings and luggage at airports, railway and bus stations, when making calls from public telephones and while traveling on public transport.
- Be knowledgeable of any restricted areas requiring entry permits, and attain these documents before traveling to such locations.
- Do not photograph police stations, military installations, government buildings, airports, ports, train stations or bridges, without first determining whether photography is permitted. If in doubt, ask permission from someone in authority before taking any photographs.

On the Street:

- Know what part of town you are walking in. Do not take shortcuts or go off well-traveled roads.
- If disoriented, ask for directions only from uniformed officers or individuals of obvious authority.
- Do not accept rides from strangers or new acquaintances.

- Avoid all demonstrations or other civil disturbances; leave the area immediately if caught in an impromptu assembly.
- Seek immediate shelter from violent situations; hotels, large restaurants, museums and police stations are good places to take refuge.
- Withdraw money from ATMs only during daylight hours and preferably only in banks or hotels.
- Only carry the amount of money and credit cards you will need on visits to markets, shopping trips and going out to restaurants.
- Pick-pockets and purse-snatchers will often work in teams of two with one person acting as a diversion; from creating a scene, to a bump or to putting a piece of paper in your face asking for pledges. Typical muggings can involve a group of young males surrounding and overwhelming their victim in a public area. Be alert; try not to be tempted by distractions and break out of groups as soon as they start to form.
- Many scams start with "sob story" or fundraising "pledge sheet". Generally there are other resources available to the truly destitute than foreign visitors and you don't want to get entangled with a scam artist, so disengage yourself.
- Another scam starts with you being a witness to some valuable being found. It is probably bait and was never really lost. If your good fortune is too good to be true, it probably is. Disengage yourself from the situation.
- At night, avoid walking alone. Stay on well-lit main streets when possible. Walk in the road if traffic is light.
- Report suspicious activity to your hotel's management, the police and/or your Embassy or Consulate.

Business Fraud

Perpetrators of business fraud often target foreigners. The scams pose a danger of both financial loss and physical harm.

Typically, these scam operations begin with an unsolicited communication (historically by letter and fax, but now more commonly by e-mail) from an unknown individual who describes a situation that promises quick financial gain, often by assisting in the transfer of a large sum of money or valuables out of the country. A series of "advance fees" must then be paid in order to conclude the transaction: for example, fees to open a bank account, or to pay certain taxes. In fact, the final payoff does not exist; the purpose of the scam is simply to collect the advance fees. A common variation is a request for someone to pretend to be the next-of-kin to a recently deceased local who left a fortune unclaimed in a local bank. This variation generally includes requests for lawyers' fees and money to pay taxes to withdraw the money. Another common variation of this scheme involves individuals claiming to be refugees or other victims of various who contact foreign citizens to request their help in transferring large sums of money out of the country. Another typical ploy has persons claiming to be related to present or former political leaders who need assistance to transfer large sums of cash. Other variations include what appears to be a legitimate business deal requiring advance payments on contracts. An on-street version of this is some appears to find a large sum of money in your presence. If you provide the advance fee to file the police report you get part of the money.

The best way to avoid becoming a victim of advance-fee fraud is common sense - if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. Any unsolicited business proposal should be carefully checked out before any funds are committed, any goods or services are provided, or any travel is undertaken. For additional information, please see the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Advance Fee Business Scams," available at the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at <http://travel.state.gov>.