

30 Tips and Ways to Stay Safe While Traveling

BY STEVE HANISH

Safety is a big topic when talking about traveling. I'd like to give you some practical advice with these tips and ways to stay safe while traveling which are applicable all over the world.

Before I start I'd like to point out that I wrote this article based on my experience of traveling around Europe, South America and northern Africa – on my travels I have been a victim of a violent robbery in Argentina, my credit card got copied and I talked a lot with other travelers who had been in similar situations.

Generally, there are no “good” or “bad” countries as crime happens all over the world – sometimes just a few simple tips can improve your safety and make your travel experience more enjoyable.

1) Learn the language

If you plan to stay longer in a certain region I highly recommend learning the language – not only does it enrich the travel experience it also helps you when you run into problems.

Speaking about South America there are not as many English speakers as in other parts of the world – without speaking Spanish you are often lost in translation. It helped me a lot to speak Spanish, especially when the robbery happened and I had to talk to the police, doctors at the hospital and the dentist afterwards.

Tip: I used an online language course to learn Spanish – it took me only 3 months to achieve a good basic level I could use to get around with. You can try the same course for free.

2) Be informed about your destination

In big cities you should know the areas which are safe and those which are dangerous for tourists. As a citizen from Europe or North America you are easy recognizable in Africa, Asia or South America – in metropolitan areas the poor and the rich live close to each other, therefore you should check beforehand which areas are safe to stay in if you choose your accommodation.

If you are at your hotel/hostel/apartment you should talk to the receptionist as these guys know the city better than you do and can give you some advice where to go.

3) Travel insurance

When you plan to be abroad for a while I highly recommend getting travel insurance to ensure emergency medical and evacuation assistance and 24/7 support

when you need it most.

4) Keep an eye on your belongings

Especially when being in transfer mode (= traveling from one spot with all your luggage to another) you should always keep an eye on all your stuff – when traveling with a backpack you could use a rain-cover to protect yourself from getting pick-pocketed.

Big stations, airports or busy spots are favorite places of pickpockets therefore you should never leave your luggage unattended.

Tip: Pacsafe offers a wide range of anti-theft travel gear e.g. the popular Backpack bag protector.

5) Withdrawal only in banks

Skimming is a common practice all around the world – ATMs are manipulated and your card data are copied unnoticeably. It happened to me in Chile and in Uruguay, afterwards those people tried to steal money from my bank account.

Well..you need cash when traveling therefore you should withdraw money only inside banks during the opening hours because ATMs get skimmed mostly during the off-peak-hours and in public areas like shopping malls.

6) Choose a solid travel card

In emergency situations you should have a card from a provider/bank who offers 24/7 support and comes with some sort of safety mechanism. When my card got copied a mechanism noticed the misuse and blocked the card, moreover, I got contacted by my bank within minutes.

When you decide to get a credit card have a look at the safety section or ask you bank.

7) Don't show your valuables around

Walking around with your 1000€ DSLR around your neck could be a problem in some places – especially if you think about the fact that the value of your camera could be 3 times the local monthly income.

Therefore you should put your valuables like expensive technical devices in a day pack and only take it out when you really need it.

8) Know the phone number to block your cards

If you get mugged or you notice a misuse of your card you should immediately call your credit card provider to block your card. Mostly this certain phone number is displayed on the back of your card: make sure to write it down separately.

9) Carry passport and cards close to your body

I used a money belt to secure my most important items underneath my clothes – it is not visible for others and almost impossible to access for pickpockets.

10) Use a wallet to pay

It may sound a bit weird after reading the previous tip but: if you pay in shops, on the street or markets you should always use a normal wallet where you carry around only the money you need for this day.

In case you get mugged you always have something you can give to the muggers.

The guys at the reception of your hostel/hotel are happy to help you – also with safety tips for their country and city!

11) Be aware of Scams

There are various types of scams all over the world therefore you should check beforehand which scams are popular at your destination to notice it before you get pick-pocketed.

The mustard scam is a very popular one: somehow some mustard gets sprayed on your shirt/jacket, suddenly some helpful guys appear and offer to clean it for you – meanwhile they steal your valuables while cleaning your shirt.

12) Only carry valuables you need for the day

If you're not in transfer mode you should use the safe/locker in your hotel/hostel to store your credit cards and passport. For sightseeing, day tours or a day at the beach you only need some cash and a copy of your passport (13).

13) Copy of your passport and login data

Losing your passport will get you into trouble therefore you should only carry it around if you really need it (transfer mode / to cross borders) – in most situations you only need to have a copy of your passport (hostel, your operators...).

Furthermore, I also wrote down all my login data for EMail, Facebook etc. – it helps if you happen to forget your logins or if your laptop gets stolen.

14) Travel light

The less you carry around, the less can get lost. If you travel a lot through busy areas it is a great advantage if you only need to take care of a small bag/backpack and your hands are free – especially in trains and buses it is much easier to keep an eye on your belongings.

15) Don't play the hero

If you run into a situation where you get mugged you should act wisely and follow the instructions. In those situations resistance often leads to more violence – it

is much better to give away your camera than your health.

16) Enjoy the nightlife in a group - incl. the way home

When it gets dark it also gets more dangerous in many places. If you want to enjoy a night out it's always a good idea to go out as a group and take care of each other.

17) Avoid being totally drunk

When being in a foreign country massive drinking could lead to problems. Take it easy and don't drink too much otherwise you could be an easy target for criminals.

18) Take care of your drink

If you're partying you should always keep an eye on your drink or keep it close to you – it happened at many places that people put drugs or “roofies” in drinks of others.

19) Take a taxi after clubbing

Sometime plans don't work (16) and your group leaves you behind at the club. Now you should go for the safe option and take a radio taxi to get back to your hotel/hostel/apartment (see the following).

20) Registered radio taxis

Let's focus on South America: in some countries there are a lot of not registered taxis – for foreigners it's hard to recognize as they also have a “Taxi” sign. More often these private taxis are involved in muggings and it's recommended not to use them.

The safest option is to use so called registered radio taxis. You can call them or ask at your hotel, restaurant, bar or club to call them for you – they might be a bit more expensive but they are much safer.

21) tourist option = safe option

When traveling through Bolivia I got warned of the buses – streets here are very dangerous sometimes as most of them are still not paved, in the rain season a lot of landslides happen in the mountain regions. Furthermore, sometimes the bus drivers drink and drive or drive being overtired and cause accidents.

In those countries I decided more often to go for the more expensive tourist options e.g. when booking overnight buses – they mostly had 2 drivers and modern buses. In the end it the costs were only 10€ more (during the month I was traveling there around 60 people died in bus accidents).

22) Sometimes other travelers are dangerous

You can be well prepared and follow all the tips and recommendations but sometimes your fellow travelers can get you into trouble with their behavior. If you

decide to travel with somebody make sure you share the same travel philosophy in matters of safety.

If you run into trouble: talk with your friend and tell them about the situation – if they keep acting stupid you should split up with those who get you into trouble.

23) Trust your instincts

Sometimes there is nothing wrong about trusting your instincts when booking a tour, a bus ride or making a decision for the next travel destination. If something feels wrong it maybe is wrong – if in doubt: trust your instincts!

24) Don't change money on the street

In some countries like Argentina it is recommended to bring US\$ due to the fact that the unofficial exchange rate (called “Blue Dollar”) is much higher than the official one. Often strangers offer to change money for a very high rate (in Buenos Aires in the Calle Florida).

Please do not change money on the street, do some research by asking trustworthy locals or friends.

25) Pay with small amounts of money

To avoid getting fake money you should always try to pay with small amounts of money – after getting money out of the ATM try to change it in you hotel/hostel.

26) Have a list with emergency numbers

In case of an emergency you should always know the numbers to call: insurance, family, bank, doctor... Make a list of these numbers – for calling I recommend using a Skype-Account as it is cheap and you only need WiFi to call.

27) Get in touch with locals

Locals know their city best – getting in touch with locals is a good way to get to know a city. Couchsurfing is a great option as you can attend regular meetings (very popular in big cities like Sao Paolo, Lima, Santiago...) and meet locals. In Santiago, Lima and Buenos Aires I used the chance, got to know great people, made new friends and met up with them to discover the city like a local.

Quite often also the employees in hostels became my good friends and were happy to show me around after they finished their work: we shared drinks, I got great recommendations of things to do and some insider tips. If you read [my travel guides](#) you'll find a lot of these tips in there.

28) Be careful also at you Hostel/Hotel

Crime doesn't stop when leaving the street – things get stolen in hostels and hotels as well. Therefore you should use the locker or the safe.

If you happen to sleep in a dorm and you'd like to charge your tablet, smartphone or camera consider using a power bank – you can charge it and keep your devices with you and charge them later with the power bank.

29) Don't become careless

After traveling for 6 months through South America, 5 countries and a hitchhiking stretch of 1000km I felt very safe. I had the feeling I know how things are working and how to act – but I didn't realize that I became careless.

Exactly at that time I became a victim of a violent mugging

My recommendation: it doesn't matter how long you've already been there – being careless could get you into trouble. Be always careful and have a look around wherever you go.

30) Respect but no fear

Last but not least: this article isn't meant to scare you! I wanted to give you advice and tips how you can increase your safety while traveling and feel more comfortable by knowing how to act in certain situations. Like I said in the previous tip you should always be careful and respectful.

Crime happens all over the world, speaking about South America I had the impression that this region is much more safe than the media try to tell you. I had a great time over there and made a lot of good friends!

INTERNET SOURCE:

www.back-packer.org/30-tips-and-ways-to-stay-safe-while-traveling-the-world-and-south-america

EXERCISES:

1. Has ever your safety been threatened while travelling? Where were you at the time? What happened? How did you react? Did you manage to solve the problem? Do you think it was possible to predict the problem beforehand and avoid it? What would you have done differently?

- 2.** Can you think of some useful tips in terms of safety to give to a person going to another country? Discuss them with your partner/partners. Make together a list of precautions to take. Compare your list with the points mentioned in the article. Find the tips you did not include in your list.
- 3.** Take turns with your partner to quote one heading (1-30) at a time to check how much you can remember from the text without looking back at the section under this particular heading.
- 4.** Which tips do you find particularly useful? Why? Which ones do you think are a bit far-fetched? Why?
- 5.** Find 5 words in the article which you do not understand. Try to guess their meaning from the context. Check with a dictionary or ask your teacher.

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