

## TRAVEL RISKS & REALITY



How should one address personal safety concerns while travelling? The issue is a somewhat complex one, but primarily a function of three variables: **individual circumstances**, **areas of travel**, and **personal perceptions**:

**Individual Circumstances:** Generally speaking, a woman is more at risk than a man, a weak person more at risk than a strong one, and a tourist more at risk than a local; these are things that we can do little about, other than recognize them as risk factors and adjust our expectations and preparations accordingly. Other factors are more under our control. People who appear confident, pay attention to their surroundings, and move briskly & purposefully are less likely to attract trouble than those who seem nervous, inattentive, confused, or aimless.

**Areas of Travel:** Some parts of the world are inherently more risky than others. These locations (and their boundaries) change with the political winds, so apprise yourself of the current situation before venturing into any regions that you do not know to be politically stable. The consular offices of major governments are good sources of current information.

**Personal Perceptions:** Different people exhibit different levels of risk tolerance. Some are comfortable in (or give little thought to) quite risky situations; other see dragons around every corner.

Additionally, there are powerful political and commercial forces that find advantage in frightened people, and we live in times when increased communication capabilities and decreased analysis skills make this an even greater concern than it has historically been. Few people these days take the trouble to educate themselves as to the true nature of any risks presented by the various scenarios that are being "sold" to them.

## Some safety suggestions:

Here are few travel safety suggestions which deserve your attention:

**To the extent possible attempt to blend in:** The more you look like a tourist, the more you look like a target.

**Be especially careful when purchasing "antiques":** As you may well be dealing with an art thief or a museum burglar. Reputable citizens do get arrested for trafficking in stolen antiquities. Anyway, do you really need something more to carry? Take a photo of it.

**Understand the local currency thoroughly:** Practice identifying the various denominations (coins and notes), and making change. Fumbling with change invites people to "help" you; it also draws attention to your tourist status.

**Learn useful local phrases:** "Please", "thank you", and "excuse me" should go without saying, other than these also learn some more local phrases.

**Be ever alert for street scams:** Most of these involve some sort of diversionary designed to occupy your attention while someone else is relieving you of your valuables. Develop the habit of immediately putting your real valuables in your security pouch & hands in your pockets whenever something "interesting" or unusual suddenly occurs. Stay well away from any street gambling activity they are sucker propositions.

**When abroad, know how to reach your local embassy:** Should this ever be needed, it will probably be due to a lost or stolen passport, but it's also the go-to place in case of natural disasters.

**Helpline no.:** Know the special telephone hotlines of the country you are travelling to.

**Vigilance:** Be extra vigilant when navigating traffic in unfamiliar places.

**Take particular care when in the vicinity of airports and train stations, especially in larger cities:** These are very exposed areas, filled with confused/distracted people, and invite professional criminals. So research the layout of such places in advance (easily done online), know where you're going, and move purposefully.

Above all else, simply pay attention, and don't allow yourself to be preoccupied by that meeting you're attending or tourist site you're visiting.