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The James W. Foley Legacy Foundation developed the JWFLF **Traveler Safety Guide** to help prepare Americans when traveling internationally or domestically. This traveler safety guide, authored by Foley Foundation board member Doug Patteson with contributions from former Foley Foundation fellow Sam Goodwin and Tom Durkin, director of the foundation’s Education Program, is designed to help travelers understand the safety risks they may confront while traveling.

Please know that these are tips, not mandates. Statistically, the most likely negative experience you will face while traveling is a late plane, a poor waiter, or rude travelers. You likely have a higher risk of being pickpocketed or losing your wallet, maybe even getting mugged, but short of visiting Mosul, Yemen, or other potentially high-risk spots, you are probably going to be safe. However, we all buy auto and home insurance, not because we are certain we will have a need for them, but because we might. And when we really need insurance, it is too late to get it. Security preparation can be thought of similarly.

**Your best tool is your brain and your experienced judgment.** Anything you do that impairs your brain will hinder its use as a tool. Being in an unfamiliar environment will hinder your ability to use that tool so be very cautious about adding impairments (drugs, alcohol, etc.).

While this guide will mostly deal with international travel, the risk mitigation tactics hold true no matter where you are.

This book is not for security professionals or those with
extensive experience traveling, but for those who want to be better prepared as they head to new destinations.

At the core of everything we teach is “The Rule of the Stupids”: Don’t do stupid stuff, with stupid people, in stupid places, at stupid times of the day, especially at night. Late nights in bars, unfamiliar parts of towns, being with people who have bad judgment: These all fuse to potentially get you into trouble. Any one of the “stupids” by itself can have some consequence, and by adding multiple stupids together, your risk begins to multiply exponentially. So mitigate your risk by avoiding the stupids. See the appendix for more information.

Have a great trip, whether for work or a new experience. But be smart. Be cautious without being paranoid.
Before you go, there are a few things you need to learn, a few things you need to do, and a few things you will want to bring with you. You already bought your tickets, right? And you have your passport and visa? So, we will not cover those things.

First, do some research on your destination, specifically related to crime and security statistics, health and sanitation challenges, and any relevant laws that may impact you. Consider travel insurance if your trip involves some risk or includes multiple flights and hotels. It may be worth your time to research this.

When preparing to travel abroad, start with the U.S. Department of State’s website (travel.state.gov). There you will find important country-specific information about security and health challenges you may encounter. Additionally, you will find information about how to enter the country (e.g., Do you need six months validity left on your passport for entry? For Germany, yes. For Morocco, no. Also, how long can you stay?).

You will also find some information on significant differences in the laws of your destination compared with American laws. Understand the differences as they may be subtle but have significant impact. For example, pseudoephedrine, an over-the-counter medication in the U.S., is a controlled substance in Japan subject to limited quantities. Adderall, a commonly prescribed drug for ADHD, is prohibited outright in certain countries. American
businesspeople have been arrested for possessing what is legal in the U.S. Likewise, many Americans carry pocket knives with a locking safety mechanism; those same knives in Britain are outlawed. And so on.

Finally, through the Department of State’s website, you can obtain the contact information for the U.S. Embassy in your destination country. Remember, one of the primary purposes for U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad is to provide support for Americans traveling and living overseas. They cannot spring you from jail, but they can help put you in touch with a lawyer, communicate with your family, help replace lost passports, loan you money and more. There is an American on staff 24/7 in case of emergencies. View the American Citizen Services section of the embassy.

The rules for medicines vary from country to country. What may be over-the-counter in one place may be a controlled substance in another. In 2015, Carrie Russell, an American teaching English in Japan, was detained for 18 days after Japanese authorities intercepted a package containing legally prescribed tablets for the medication Adderall.
website and take note of any warning notices to Americans living in that nation.

While on the State Department or embassy website, go ahead and **register for the Secure Traveler Enrollment Program** (STEP) (currently at https://step.state.gov/step/). This lets an embassy know about Americans traveling in the country and allows them to send those travelers the same warning notices and travel advisories it provides Americans living there. Additionally, in the unlikely event of a major incident, this provides a mechanism for communication that can facilitate information-sharing or even evacuation procedures.

Let your **bank** know you will be traveling, especially if you intend to use your credit or debit cards. That way they will not block your account in the middle of paying your dinner bill or buying those souvenirs.

Lastly, do you remember that contact info you found on the embassy website? Print it out and take it with you, then enter the same info in your phone. **Always have hard copies of your info when traveling** — phones die, get stolen, lose connectivity. Back-ups are important. You want to have ready access to that information before you need it. So have the embassy contact info.

**Other things** to take include a physical copy of your itinerary and boarding passes, your confirmation number, a card with medical information

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**REAL WORLD SITUATION**

In 2022, WNBA star Brittney Griner was detained in Russia on charges of smuggling hashish oil in vape cartridges. While some national security advisers questioned whether Griner really was in possession of vape cartridges, she was detained for over 10 months. This is a stark reminder to be aware of where you are traveling and that country’s laws pertaining to medicine and recreational drugs.
(blood type, known allergies, etc.) and insurance, physician contact, and emergency contact information. If you are traveling with medicines, keep them in the original bottle and, if possible, have a copy of your prescription. Now is not the time to save weight by only putting the eight white pills you will need in a little Ziploc bag. We also recommend you take a copy of your birth certificate and passport, but keep them separate from your actual passport in case you lose it.

Bring a **flashlight** with you either in your carry-on or on your person. Power in many parts of the world can be sketchy. Hotel hallways and stairwells are often poorly lit and windowless. A good flashlight with fresh batteries is invaluable. And in a pinch, it can serve as a defensive tool.

Remember to leave an **emergency folder** with a trusted friend or family member at home that includes your itinerary, passport copy, important passwords, your will, insurance information, etc.
CHECKLIST

☐ Does your passport have more than six months left before expiration? Some countries won’t let you in if it does not.

☐ Do you have the right documents?

☐ Do you need a visa in advance? Can you get one on arrival? Do you know how long you are allowed to stay?

☐ Do you know what restrictions you have on your stay?

☐ Can you work? Volunteer?

Things to consider leaving at home

- Weapons (should be self-evident)
- Self-defense sprays (rules are all over the map on this one)
- Knives (even multi-tools can get you in trouble in places like the UK)
- Over-the-counter medications (buy them there)
- Export-controlled items
- Chewing gum (if going to Singapore, it’s illegal to import it there — for real!)

Things you should take with you

☐ Paper copy of your itinerary (the author once couldn’t get into an Indian airport without it because he had not gotten his boarding pass yet)

☐ Copy of passport and visa pages

☐ Copy of birth certificate

☐ Copy of insurance information and any allergies, prescriptions, your blood type, etc.

☐ Emergency contact information
Transitional spaces are public spaces with lots of activity. While traveling, you pass through many of these spaces. Public parking garages, bus and train stations, and airports are the most common. Transitional spaces bring with them increased risk — lack of familiarity, managing multiple variables (luggage, family members, crowds, etc.), lots of unknown individuals, and often the pressure to get where you are going on time.

Airports, railroad terminals, and trains are easy targets for pickpockets, thieves, and terrorist bombers. Pay attention to what is going on around you. When carrying luggage, keep it within view or touch. While checking in at the airport, or registering at the hotel, position your luggage against your leg or on the counter to make sure you keep

REAL WORLD SITUATION

The 2017 bombing outside of the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England is a textbook example of the risks inherent in transitional spaces. The bomber set up in a public area between the arena and the Manchester train station. Thousands of individuals transited that space that night, going to and from the concert, catching trains, or just heading out with friends. Someone standing waiting with luggage is normal in that context. The bomber knew traffic flow would be heavy and that security would likely only consist of CCTV cameras. Getting through those spaces as quickly as possible is the best plan of action, remaining alert for odd behaviors and other threat signals.
your eyes on it. Too often, we focus our attention on the clerk with whom we are speaking and run the risk of our luggage being taken because our attention has shifted.

We hear those announcements in airports and train stations about unattended bags. This often becomes background noise. But unattended baggage is a real risk. Many attacks have been launched using unattended bags, including the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing.

Notice how very few attacks happen on the other side of security at the airport. That’s

REAL WORLD SITUATION

In 2007, Sam Goodwin, who has traveled to every country in the world (yes, every country!), had his iPod pickpocketed while walking through the train station in Milan, Italy. In a rush, Goodwin hastily placed his iPod in a side pocket of his backpack instead of the usual inside pocket. While this didn’t create a security risk for Goodwin, he was out an iPod.
because the security in large part works. At the airport, **maintain a low profile**. Do not delay in the main terminal area — go through the security controls to the secure area as quickly as possible. If an incident occurs, take as much cover as possible behind a solid object such as a pillar or stairwell.

There is a reason flight attendants remind passengers where the **exits** are. Statistics point to a significantly increased probability of surviving a plane crash if you know where the exits are. Virtually any public venue you go to will have multiple entrances and exits. Don’t just remember the one you went through to get there. Locate at least one of the other exits.

You cannot make yourself an impossible target, but you can certainly make yourself a less attractive target for criminals. In today’s world, **Americans tend to be more attractive targets** than other people of other nationalities. So make that harder for others to know. For instance, if you are traveling on business, you may wear a blazer or nice jacket, (don’t want to pack it, it’ll get wrinkled), with a corporate logo shirt (want to represent!), jeans (want to be comfortable) and tennis shoes (lots of walking on travel days). Not only can everyone tell you are American, you are giving away other information about yourself (i.e., where you work). Don’t be that person. Think about what you want to look like, where you are going, and how to blend in a little, while still being comfortable.

While we are at it, consider using a **travel neck wallet** — small pouch with a loop to wear around your neck — to carry passports, other forms of
identification, and emergency cash. You can carry your emergency contact and medical information in there as well. This makes it harder to identify your nationality.

If possible, use lockable, hard-sided luggage. Nylon luggage is easy for someone to slash open with a knife. Be sure to use a closed named tag that contains your name, phone number, and full street address so no one can see that information. The last thing you want is someone on the subway seeing your luggage, having access to your address, and knowing you are likely leaving on a trip. Keep your laptop computer as carry-on baggage — never check it with other luggage and, if possible, remove or control storage media.

The airplane is not an appropriate place to discuss sensitive subjects. Conversations can be overheard, and papers read by unauthorized persons. The national airline of at least one friendly foreign country is known to collect intelligence by bugging the seats of passengers.

Remain alert for distractions that are intentionally staged to set up a pickpocket or luggage thief, especially while passing through travel venues such as airports and train/bus stations.

U.S. Army Col. Jeff Cooper was the first to use the color-coded system of mental or situational awareness. One of his tenets was that it takes time to move from one level of awareness to the next. This inhibits reaction time. When in another city or country, you should automatically be at a more heightened level of awareness than when at home. While actually traveling, you should be at an even higher level of awareness to reduce the time it takes for you to develop a response to any potential issue. See the appendix for more information on Cooper’s color-coded system of mental or situational awareness.
Remember to think about possible points of egress in case of emergency. Identify at least one other door besides your entry point or locate windows that could be used to escape. In 2003, the Station nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island caught fire and was engulfed in smoke and flames in 5 ½ minutes. Of the 462 people in a club with capacity for only 404, 100 died and 230 were injured. When the fire began, people panicked and fled blindly, trying to exit through the one door that they had all used to enter the facility while ignoring three other exits.
When checking in to your hotel, remember to be alert to the same distractions you might come across in other transitional or transitory spaces. In many countries, the hotel clerk will take your passport and make a copy of it to provide to the local police. In some countries, the hotel may even keep your passport for the duration of your stay. Again, know the rules and regulations of where you are traveling and have copies of your passport on you at all times.

If possible, try to pick a hotel room on the third, fourth, or fifth floor. Often, the first and second floors are low enough that entry from the outside can be easily accomplished so protect against that. And floors above the sixth floors are typically out of reach of most fire ladders in the event of a fire emergency or other catastrophic event.

When you get into your room, check the window locks to see if they can be opened in an emergency and that you also can securely lock them. Occasionally they are permanently locked.

Now is a good time to learn how to call local emergency services. It likely isn't 911. In England, it's 999, mainland Europe is 112, and in some countries like Brazil, it varies based on which service you are calling (police, fire, or ambulance). Take a minute to learn these numbers when you arrive at your destination.

While in your room, use all the locking devices on your room door. Check locks
on any sliding glass doors, windows, or connecting room doors. Remember that the hotel's emergency keys may override deadbolt locks. Other techniques worth considering are using clips to shorten the lock chain or traveling with a rubber door stop that can be used to keep the door closed. One risk to these additive measures is that, if you are not familiar and well-versed in using them, they might slow you down or even prevent you from leaving your room in the event of an emergency.

**Don’t advertise to others when you are out of your room.** You may wish to put the “Do Not Disturb” sign on your door and keep the TV on to give the impression that the room is occupied when you are out. You do

REAL WORLD SITUATION

In 2009, while in a Russian hotel, a U.S. Embassy employee was covertly filmed in his room. That video, later doctored with additional footage purporting to show the employee engaged in a sexual liaison with a prostitute, was released on the internet to embarrass this employee and have his employer question his judgment and reliability. In some countries, you have little to no reasonable expectation of privacy, even in your hotel room. Do not engage in behaviors, even behind closed doors, that are illegal or may harm your reputation.
not really need to have your room cleaned and towels changed every day. If the room requires a hotel key card to keep the lights on, a few spare business cards or pieces of heavy cardboard often do the trick.

Keep your **luggage locked** whenever you are out of the room. At night, lock your passport and other valuables (including your laptop and camera) in your luggage or room safe.

**Do not store valuables in the room safe while you are out.** Either take them with you or store them in the hotel safe deposit box. Hotel staff often have a master key they can use to open the room safe (someone must help business travelers who forget the combination they set) and most hotels reject any responsibility for items left in the room safe. You are better off locking items in the hard-sided, lockable luggage you brought. If you truly have something valuable you are uncomfortable taking with you or locking in luggage, better hotels will often hold the item for you, taking responsibility for it, issuing you a receipt, and locking it in the hotel safe. An even better idea is to leave those valuables at home if at all possible.

As a general rule, **keep your phone, laptop, and other electronics with you** at all
times. With the large number of hotel staff and local security personnel who have access to your room, there is no way to guarantee the safety of your items if they are not with you.

Remember that **hotel Wi-Fi networks are open** (that little log-in you have to do with name and room number merely gives the impression of security) and often the routers used on those networks also have significant vulnerabilities (both to criminals and security services).
So, you’ve gotten to your destination safely, checked in, freshened up or changed clothes, and now you want to explore, shop, or get a bite to eat. Great! Before you head out, take a minute to think about the environment. What time is it? What is in the immediate vicinity?

Use your common sense and trust your instincts. They are actually pretty well-honed. Ask yourself, “Would I do this thing/go to this place/leave with this person/take this risk at home?” If the answer is no, think about why you would do it overseas. If your gut says no, or little alarm bells are going off, listen to them. Don’t be afraid to say no. And be aware that it is hard to listen to that inner voice if you have had too much to drink or taken something that may impair your decision-making.

First stop: the hotel concierge if your lodging has one. Concierges have a wealth of knowledge and often have handy local maps. Spend a few minutes talking with them about the area, local restaurants, places to walk or jog, and other questions about the area. This initial conversation to gain area familiarization will greatly smooth your introduction to your new locale.

While it may not always be possible, we are big believers in the buddy system. Traveling with a partner can be very helpful. Two sets of eyes, two brains help process what is going on around you. This is especially helpful for women travelers. Two women traveling together are safer than one, that is just a fact. If you are a solo traveler, look for folks...
with whom you can pair up at each destination. Solo travel has its benefits and may offer more freedom when deciding where and when to go, but it definitely carries higher risks.

As you head out, keep a couple of things in mind. Continue to choose patterns of dress that help you blend in with others. Now, if you are walking the streets of Lahore and you are a red-headed Irishman, we are not suggesting you run out in sandals and shalwar kameez hoping to pass as a local. We are, however, suggesting you lower your profile through your attire so you don’t stand out as a tourist and an easy mark. And women, we would strongly suggest following local customs. If women in the country you are visiting cover their hair for modesty, it would be prudent for you to do so as well. Now is the

When working in a North African country, a Navy SEAL and the author were providing guidance to an international film production. While traveling through local markets and rural areas, one of the actresses was insistent on wearing revealing clothing and making her blond hair readily visible to all despite the ever-more aggressive comments and stares from the local male populace. The situation grew more stressful until they were able to get out of the area just before dusk.
time to display awareness of cultural norms. Rather than insisting on dressing how you might back home, following the cultural norms will save you lots of hassle.

Be aware of **pickpockets** on the street, in transitional spaces, even in hotels. If you are a male, keep your wallet in your front pocket. And spread your cash among multiple locations/pockets.

If you are wearing a backpack, carry it so that you have a line of sight to the **zippers**. Pickpockets are notorious for their ability to access a backpack while you are walking down the street or standing on public transport.

**REAL WORLD SITUATION**

Many years ago, a young intelligence officer arrived in a Middle Eastern capital to begin language training. As was her custom at home, she awoke the next morning, put on her running gear and headed out of the hotel for her morning run. Much to her shock, within a few blocks a couple of local men began to yell at her. A few blocks further on, some men start chasing after her. Increasingly fearful, she ended her run early and found her way back to her hotel. As it turns out, the shorts and running singlet she typically wore in the U.S. drove a different reaction among Arab men. A less than positive one. And she narrowly escaped.
Many backpacks have two zippers on each pocket to open in either direction. Secure the zippers with small clips by clasping them together. In a pinch, a paper clip can do the job. If you plan to be away from your bag for any time, a small lock adds security.

Women, carry your purse with the strap across your body with the purse in front of you, not on your side or behind you. Pick a purse that has a zipper for closing rather than one with snaps or buttons.

Be aware of how and when you use your phone. Staring at your phone, you lose sense of your surroundings. In unfamiliar areas, you may not recognize traffic patterns and walk right into traffic. More importantly, you lose situational awareness about the people and activity around you.

The best way to avoid trouble is by being aware — you can’t do that with your head down. If you must check your phone, stop walking and step to the side. If able, put your back up against a building or other solid object.

Your phone itself may be a target. Nice phones are worth good money and may be easier to grab than jewelry. Secure your phones when out and about. Backpacks or luggage can be stolen so it is recommended to carry your phone in the front pocket of your pants or jacket. For added security, keep your hand in your pocket with your phone. Avoid continually pulling your phone out in large crowds or walking with your phone in your hand at your side. That makes it easier to grab. In short, be deliberate when using your phone.

Make sure that you know the local currency. Fumbling with a wad of unfamiliar bills or coins makes you a target for any potential thief. We have witnessed kids literally rip money out of someone’s hands and run off because that person was unfamiliar with the bills. Take some time to learn the currency and understand the basic conversion formulas so you are not standing in public distracted doing math in your head while holding cash in your hands. Remember
to carry enough cash for an emergency cab ride that is separate from other cash (in shoes, socks, a bra, etc.).

Quite often, ATMs will give you the best exchange rate for currency and typically can be safe overseas. There are things to keep in mind though. First, when possible, use an ATM inside a bank or hotel. Street ATMs are great spots for muggers, pickpockets, and con men. If you must use a street ATM, have someone with you who can watch your back. Check that the card slot does not have a skimmer (a skimmer is rigged to an ATM and can access your PIN) by pulling firmly on the outside of the slot. Ensure that you cover your PIN entry and retrieve your card. Watch for distractions at these critical moments as thieves will try and use them to grab your card.

Do not use debit cards overseas except at ATMs. When using a debit card for other transactions, you risk everything in the account associated with that card. Instead, use a credit card (and do not forget you were supposed to let the bank know you would be traveling so the card continues to function). When using your credit card, inspect your card after using it to ensure yours was returned to you. A common scam involves returning a similarly colored but fake card to a patron, often while a distraction is taking place. Travelers may absent-mindedly put the card back in their purse or wallet without realizing that their real card is gone.

When walking, do not take shortcuts through alleys or off the beaten path. Be careful about walking around after
Be careful wearing jewelry, especially nice jewelry, while traveling. Thieves in Rio, for example, have been known to weave their way through traffic on motorbikes, looking for taxis with open windows (hard to keep the A/C going in traffic in a beat-up taxi). When able, they will quickly reach through the window, rip off watches and necklaces, and immediately scoot away while you remain stuck in traffic.

dark. If you are out taking in the city at night, stay in well-lit, populated areas. When possible, traveling by vehicle is advised. Use a dispatched taxi or one hailed from a major hotel.

When **traveling by vehicle**, your phone can serve as another layer of safety. Take pictures of strangers you are with, such as guides or drivers. Snap a picture of the license plate of your taxi or Uber. If asked why, tell your driver you are sending the picture to a loved one who wants to know where you are and with whom. This may dissuade an individual who has ill intent.

In the event of a **major civil disorder, stay in your hotel.** Avoid watching the activity from your window. If you have power, turn on your hotel TV to monitor the situation. Check the U.S. embassy website for security updates to determine when the threat has passed.

**Avoid street demonstrations.** Do not go outside to check them out. Large mobs are not rational and you can easily get caught up in the mess as a bystander. If you are overtaken by a demonstration, seek refuge in the nearest safe haven such as a large hotel or department store.

**Never resist armed robbery;** that may lead to violence. Money, jewelry, credit cards, and passports are all replaceable. Your life is not. If appropriate, look for exits from the confrontation. Remember, “The Rule of the Stupids” can go a long way to helping you avoid getting in a place or situation where this is a possibility.
The most negative bar or restaurant experience you are likely to have will be dealing with a drunk patron, a bad drink, or a case of Delhi belly or Montezuma’s revenge. Nevertheless, bars and restaurants can end up becoming high-risk areas.

The **buddy system** is important in bars and restaurants. Make sure you have a wing mate, if possible. This person can offer an extra set of eyes and ears and help provide accountability to prevent making bad decisions.

Purse snatchers and briefcase **thieves** are known to work hotel bars and restaurants. They wait for unknowing guests to drape these items on chairs or under tables, only to discover them missing when ready to depart. Keep items in view or "in touch." Likewise, restrooms are frequent locations for grab-and-run thefts.

Be aware of **distractions and decoys.** If someone unknown to you starts talking with you, check out who else is with the person. That person may have a friend trying to steal your purse, wallet, etc. If someone bumps into you, check your wallet or purse right away. Distractions (spilled drink or food, someone asking for help, asking you to take a photo) are common techniques used by petty criminals.

Don’t let anyone buy you a drink unless you can watch
the bartender pour it. Don’t let that person go to the bar to get it for you. And don’t leave your drink alone. Carry it with you even if you go to dance or to the bathroom. If you set it down, even momentarily, get a fresh drink. No one is immune to “knock-out” drugs being placed in a drink.

Don’t drink too much. See “The Rule of the Stupids.”

REAL WORLD SITUATION

In 2017, a recent American college graduate was beaten to death after getting into a bar fight on a Greek island. Alcohol, a late-night bar, and an argument over a woman combined to create a hostile environment that led to 10 to 15 men beating the American to death in under a minute.
The most common type of confrontation involves ego/social drive, often starts in a bar, and includes the pursuit of companionship and/or alcohol. It is worth noting that most negative experiences with locals can be avoided or de-escalated with strong social skills and relating on a human level. Your best tool is your brain. Use it to avoid getting into conflict situations. If you do find yourself in a confrontation, de-escalation is your best path. The most prudent course of action is to smooth out the situation with apologies and grace, and then physically leave the vicinity as soon as possible.

When traveling, you need to maintain control of your senses.

**Prostitutes** take advantage of travelers around the world through various ploys, including the use of "knock-out" drugs and theft from the victim's room. Many a traveler has awakened in their room with their money, clothing, passport, and luggage gone. It's highly recommended to refrain from inviting people you do not know well back to your room.
Do not act afraid. Walk with purpose, know your surroundings. If you have the opportunity before traveling, take a good self-defense class to be prepared to defend yourself. This is especially important for women. Men in other countries may have dramatically different attitudes towards women. They may act physically aggressive towards women, especially when drinking. We’ve all seen the romance movies where someone finds the love of their life while traveling. We suggest, however, leaving the local women and men alone to avoid a fair bit of trouble. Go out of your way to avoid fights or confrontation.

Cyber and personal electronic security is complicated and deserves a separate guide, but in the meantime, here are a few things to think about. If traveling to countries that restrict and/or monitor cyber usage, arranging a cyber security awareness briefing is suggested. Cyber security awareness is designed to educate computer users on current cyber trends and topics while promoting safe cyber security practices. Several private companies offer briefings. You can also check in with the U.S. Department of Defense to learn more about cyber security.

Try to keep your phone, laptop, and other electronics with you at all times. With the large number of hotel staff and local security personnel who have access to your room, there is no way to guarantee the safety and integrity of your items if they are not with you.
On a short trip, enable your **phone for international service**, at least for voice and SMS. For a longer trip, consider picking up a local mobile phone or buying an international SIM card for your U.S. phone. Consider enabling **Find My iPhone or Find My Friends** on your phone. Make sure your location is available to those you are traveling with as well as someone back home.

Encourage all those in your group to use a reliable **encrypted communication tool**. **Wire, Signal,** and **WhatsApp** are all commonly used and reliable. As long as both parties to the communication are using the app, then the communication will remain encrypted. Make sure you have a communication plan with scheduled check-ins with someone back home, too, as well as with a travel buddy, if possible.

Be alert that in some countries use of encrypted communications is illegal. You could be arrested and at a minimum draw the unwanted attention of host country intelligence services. **Pay attention to local laws.**

As previously mentioned, remember hotel **Wi-Fi networks are open** (that little login you have to do with name and room number merely gives the impression of security) and often the routers used on those networks also have significant vulnerabilities as well (both to criminals and security services). If you do need to use public Wi-Fi, please do so through a VPN, or tether to your phone and access via cellular data.

If possible, **avoid online banking while traveling**. If you must, at least use a mobile app on your phone over cellular. **NEVER** use a public computer terminal to access your online banking. Those terminals are often loaded with viruses and key stroke loggers.

Consider **travel-only electronic devices** — burner phones and loaner laptops used solely for travel that are then wiped clean and restored after each trip. Use two-factor authentication on your devices and a good password.
REAL WORLD SITUATION

According to the Department of State Overseas Advisory Council, technology in China is monitored by Chinese security services. All travelers should know that they have no expectation of privacy in public or private locations. All means of communication, including telephones, mobile phones, faxes, emails, and text messages are likely monitored. The Chinese government has publicly declared that it monitors private email and internet browsing through cooperation with the limited number of internet service providers and wireless providers in China. Many popular websites such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook are blocked.

There are many alternative Chinese applications that are ubiquitous; however, they have built-in features allowing the government to monitor and censor messages, access the device’s address book and photos, track the user’s location, and activate the microphone or camera. Chinese malware has been inserted into cellphones via Bluetooth and Wi-Fi, and those phones later infected computer networks in the U.S. In one of the more egregious examples, according to news reports in 2007, Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez flew to Beijing for trade talks and left his laptop unattended. Chinese agents were able to surreptitiously copy its contents.

Don’t advertise on social media that you are traveling. We know you want to update your Instagram and Facebook, but those posts can wait until you get back home. You do not need to advertise that you are not home nor do you want to tell the general public where you are going next. Hold off on the social media. And if you truly cannot restrain yourself, then only post where you have been, not where you are or where you are going.
Don’t let your guard down. **Stay vigilant and pay attention to the world around you.** If something seems out of place — or makes you feel off — there is probably a good reason for it. Security professionals often call this situational awareness, which is just a fancy way of saying that you understand the environment and events around you in relation to time and meaning, knowing what is normal and expected, and what is out of context and therefore noticeable. And if you notice something that looks out of place or your Spidey senses start tingling because you observe an unattended bag or an individual who is dressed inappropriately for the environment and looks uncomfortable, let someone in authority know.

We do not want you to live your life in fear. That’s what the bad guys want — whether bullies, criminals, or terrorists. Go out with friends. Attend concerts and movies. Travel. Live your life. We are just advocating that you go out in that life a little more prepared, and more aware of what the risks are or may be. A slightly harder target than the average person. Someone more likely to survive when faced with various threats. **This is possible because you have taken the time to pay attention, assess, build a plan, and be prepared to act on it.**
APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Research, Research, Research
Before traveling, develop a plan of what to see and do, and how to carry out that plan. One way to prepare for an upcoming trip is to communicate with other experienced travelers.

Medical Insurance Ahead
of any trip abroad, ensure that your medical insurance provides coverage in every destination you intend to visit.

Avoid Overpacking
Whether it is an extra pair of shoes or too many electronic accessories, overpacking makes travel more difficult. Make a checklist of what to bring and what can be left behind.

Get the Right Power Adapters
Electrical outlets differ around the world. Research the type of outlet used in each country. It is worth spending $15-20 on a universal power adapter to avoid the headache of not being able to charge a phone, laptop, etc. Plan ahead to know which type of outlets are used.

Learn a Few Words in the Local Language
Foreign languages can create obstacles when communicating. For those not fluent in the local language, learning a few simple words and expressions goes a long way. Locals often appreciate the effort, no matter how
small, and usually reciprocate with patience.

**Check the Current Exchange Rate**
Know the current exchange rate before traveling to any foreign country. Many apps, like Convert Lite and Xe Currency, provide this service. Avoid exchanging money at airports or near tourist sites — this is always the most expensive option since the facilitator of the transaction takes a cut.

**Trust Your Instincts**
Navigate uncomfortable situations by using common sense. As we have noted, if something does not feel right or feels like a trap or scam, there is a very good chance trouble is lurking.

**Avoid Local Conflict**
From peaceful demonstrations to more disruptive marches, civil unrest occurs around the world. Depending on the severity of these events, consideration should be given about whether to continue with a trip.

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All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the official positions or views of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) or any other U.S. Government agency. Nothing in the contents should be construed as asserting or implying U.S. Government authentication of information or CIA endorsement of the author’s views. This material has been reviewed by the CIA to prevent the disclosure of classified information.
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