

Tips to Avoid Pickpockets and Theft While Traveling

April 2, 2019 | [Travel Tips](#) by Melissa Hogan



HOW TO KEEP YOUR STUFF SAFE ABROAD

I was poking around a travel store the other day, looking for a carry on bag that will fit in the overhead bin of a Q400, when I overheard a woman talking to the store clerk about money belts. The clerk pointed out that they also had Pacsafe bags. I couldn't help myself. I really couldn't.

"You carry PacSafe? Oh I'd go with that over a money belt!" I interjected.

And then proceeded to tell the woman how I own two money belts and have never worn either one. Her teenage daughter was getting ready for her group trip abroad and Mom was nervous about keeping her and her stuff safe. I told her about my travel purse and general purse habits along

with a couple examples of common scams pickpockets use, but then decided to butt out and let her shop.

I'm not sure if she ended up buying the money belt or not (and trust me, her daughter won't use it) but it got me thinking about tips I would share with people for keeping their stuff safe during their first trip abroad.

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KEEP YOUR WITS ABOUT YOU

I think one of the best tips I can share is to just be aware of your surroundings and your things. I know it's so easy to get lost in the moment when you're wandering through a city like Paris, that you've only seen in photos and the movies. Or, oppositely, you may have your face in your phone texting your BFF about how amazing the gelato in Rome is. But you need to stay aware of the people around you.

One thing that's become habit is to keep my bag in front of me and a hand on it when I'm in public spaces like on transit. A pickpocket can't sneak a zipper open if my hand is covering the zip tab. Also, and this should go without saying, don't keep your phone in your back pocket unless it's got a closure like a snap or zipper. You may think it's safe because you'll feel it but I had an uncle who had his phone stolen from his unsecured back pocket on the metro in Barcelona and he never even realized until later.



READ UP ON COMMON SCAMS

There's not much new under the sun these days and pickpockets like to try the same tricks over and over on tourists. Do an online search of "common scams in [city name]" so that you're familiar with them before you land.

Don't get too worked up about what you read, instead know that having

that prior knowledge will give you more power to protect your possessions.

For instance, in Paris I had three kids approach me to sign a petition, which I knew from my research, was bogus. If I had taken the time to sign just to make them stop pestering me I knew that either they would've then demanded money or one of them may have tried to pick my pocket while I was distracted. Instead I kept my hand on my purse and forcefully told them No in English, French, and finally Korean (I think I confused them) before they cursed at me but walked away.

CARRY THE RIGHT KIND OF PURSE

You don't need to have a heavy duty safe of a purse when you travel, but it can certainly give you some peace of mind. At the bare minimum I recommend a crossbody style, preferably leather or another tough fabric, with a zipper.

If you want to go all in there are some stylish options. For the past five years I've carried a medium sized [PacSafe Citysafe](#) and I highly recommend it. On top of checking my three basic requirements it also features slash proof fabric and strap, a lockable zipper, an RFID blocking pocket, and a security hook that allows me to secure my bag to a table, chair, or other object. It's given me a lot of peace of mind.



MONEY BELTS

I think every traveller I know has a [money belt](#) that they've never used. They might seem like a good idea, but honestly, I don't think you're going to use that money belt like you think you will.

If you decide to buy one anyway, don't let anyone see you use it. The whole idea is that you're concealing your valuables, so if you treat it like a coin purse and pull cash from it at a store, you just look silly and the money belt no longer has any concealment value.

Instead, only carry a day's worth of cash on you and keep the rest locked up at your accommodations and only consider putting on your money belt

those times when you'll have all of your possessions with you like on inter-city bus rides or ferries.

STASH IT AROUND

Don't keep your cash in one place. Should your purse get stolen, it'll be a big relief to know that you still have cash on hand. Keep some in your purse, some locked up in your carry on, some in your checked luggage, etc. Or better yet, if you're travelling somewhere like London or New York where credit cards and ATMs are common, travel with very little cash at all and, instead, make use of cashless transactions. Bonus: you can score reward points when you use your credit card.



DUPLICATE IT

If possible, travel with a backup debit and/or credit card should something happen to yours while you're travelling. Be sure to keep your back-up cards separate from your regular cards. In case of a missing wallet, you'll still have a way to pay for things until you get home.

Theft isn't always the issue here either. Back in 2014 I had my MasterCard crap out on me with a few days left in my vacation. I called to try to fix it to no avail. Thankfully I had another credit card with me I could use or I would've had to keep using ATMs.

BACK IT UP

If you're travelling with electronics, be sure to backup all of your data to either a device you're leaving at home, the cloud, or both before you leave. Also consider automatically storing all of your photos in the cloud, so that if anything happens to it, you won't lose those precious memories.



INSTALL ANTI-THEFT SOFTWARE

If someone does swipe your laptop or you forget your phone on the subway, if you have anti-theft software installed, you still have a chance at getting it back. I have [Prey](#) installed on my laptop, iPad, and iPhone. Should my device fall into someone else's hands, I have several tools available.

Just like Find My Phone, Prey can track the location of your device (as long as the device is on), but it goes beyond simple tracking. I can also remotely lock my phone or laptop, send a message to the screen, or sound a 30 second alarm that can't be muted (to help you find it).

If it doesn't look like you're going to get the device back you can still retrieve files and remotely wipe cookies, email data, documents, local cloud storage files, and custom directories on lost devices. Finally, you can run reports that will capture images from the device cameras and record information like location and IP address to help law enforcement recover your stolen property.

PACK LOCKS

If your accommodations don't have a safe, bring your own locks. You should also know that hostels almost never provide locks for their lockers so it's good practice to travel with your own anyway. And pack a couple.

If your suitcase doesn't have a built in lock, use one of your new locks to keep the zipper tabs secured. I also have one lock that [came with a long cable](#) that I can use to secure my bag to something fixed like a bed frame or some other large item, that makes taking off with my bag super inconvenient, and thus, not very attractive.

DON'T FORGET THE TRAVEL INSURANCE

Finally, if you followed the tips above but still [encountered some misfortune](#) on your travels, you'll be glad to have travel insurance. Travel insurance typically doesn't cover stolen cash (though it's an option with some plans) but they can cover your stuff so that you can replace them.

While having to replace a phone or laptop will always be a pain, assuming you backed up your data before you hopped on the plane, and bought a comprehensive insurance package, it at least won't be a financial burden.

In the end, don't let the worry of pickpockets or thieves keep you from travelling. **Stuff can be replaced but the good memories you'll make travelling will last a lifetime.**