

SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN TRAVELING ABROAD

INTRODUCTION

Foreign travel is different from travel in the United States. Unlike travel we are all used to, foreign travel adds passports, visas, currency exchanges, different languages and cultures, all of which should be considered beforehand if want to make your travel enjoyable and safe.

This presentation will cover advance planning in preparation of travel. It will also identify specific areas where heightened security awareness must be practiced. These areas include: airports, hotels, local transportation, and sightseeing.

ADVANCE PLANNING

Time spent planning your trip is time well spent. If you have ever taken a vacation package through a travel agency, you are aware of how a well planned and coordinated trip can be more enjoyable than a trip without a set itinerary. Unfortunately, the federal government does not provide us with the same services as a travel agency. Most often, airline and hotel reservations are arranged, we are given an assignment, and told when and where to report. Little thought is given to the time spent off duty when in travel status. This is the time you should focus on your advance planning.

Some general rules to follow:

1. Learn something about the country you are visiting. Suggested sources are magazines such as Time or U.S. News & World Report, or Background Notes from the United States Department of State. The Background Notes are available via the State Department website (www.state.gov). These magazines cover what is happening in the world now. Other magazines such as National Geographic may identify places of interest, but when planning for a safe trip, other information is needed, such as:
 - a. What is the current attitude towards Americans?
 - b. Have there been any internal events where the U.S. has exerted pressure or had had direct involvement?
 - c. Will there be any major events or holidays in the country when you are there?
2. Review security related magazines in addition to the news magazines. Check with your library for magazines such as "Security Management" or "Security". These magazines sometimes include articles on executive or personal security.
3. Contact other government agencies. Although the Department of State is the best source of information about foreign travel concerns, other agencies may also be helpful. Consider contacting U.S. Customs. They have offices in many countries. Your local Customs agent may be able to provide information. Agencies such as Drug Enforcement Agency (www.DEA.gov), Federal Bureau of Investigations (www.FBI.gov), Secret Service (www.secretservice.gov), and the Central Intelligence Agency (www.CIA.gov) can be accessed through their respective websites.

If you contact the State Department, ask to speak to someone from the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. The agents from that branch serve as the Regional Security Officers (RSO's) in the American Embassies overseas. In that capacity, they are responsible for physical and personal security of Americans assigned to or on official business in a particular country.

4. Purchase a good travel guidebook for the country you will be visiting (Fodor's, Lonely Planet, AAA Travel Guides, Let's Go travel guides, etc.)

THE ACTUAL TRIP

Your concern for personal security should not be so great that you become paranoid. However, you must keep your best interests in mind throughout your travel. Too often, Americans traveling abroad go to extremes. Either they become hotel-bound or become too adventurous. Try to seek a happy medium. When you are out and about, keep the following in mind at selected locations.

1. Airports – arrivals are usually less dangerous than departures. Most incidents of terrorism have occurred in departure areas, not arrival areas. Incidents of crime are more likely to occur on arrival. Arriving travelers are easy victims. You may be overly tired after flying all night or are excited about being in a new country. Concerns here are losing luggage, passport, or money (pickpockets are more frequent outside the U.S.)

Exchange money at the airport or bring some of the local currency with you.

Hints on departures:

- a) arrive early
- b) don't linger in public areas
- c) don't carry bags for others
- d) expect different methods of security
- e) don't use official baggage tags

2. Hotels – Be aware that you may be asked to surrender your passport, hotels have different key systems, currency exchange rates are lower at hotels.
3. Local Transportation – ask about public transportation before using it. In some places it may be better than taxis. Watch how things are done before you do something that makes you stand out.

Always keep a matchbook or notepad with the name of your hotel printed on it. It may be needed to show the taxi driver your destination.

4. On the town – Read the guidebooks. Learn their definition of “nightlife”.

Don't go wandering alone, you may find the local version of Central Park.

Avoid large crowd events/festivals or use caution. Be aware of the nature and history of the event. For instance, soccer matches tend to draw hostile crowds.

5. Working with the Embassy – You may find long waiting lines in front of embassies. The people in these lines generally are waiting for visas or to see someone from American Services (lost passports, etc.) You should not wait in line.

Useful people to meet or terms to know:

RSO – Regional Security Officer

ARSO – Assistant Regional Security Officer

Legal Attache – Head of the FBI Office

COS – Chief of Station (CIA)

Attache – Non-Foreign Service Officer in charge of an agency (e.g. Customs Attache, Defense Attache, Commercial Attache)

Refer to section 402 of the travel guide for further information on U.S. Embassies.