

Then, no more than a minute later, a distressed woman was circling the empty area where her bags had been. She told us she had only left them for a short time to get some information from an airline counter, only 20 feet away. We told her about the cops' quick grab, and then the last we saw of her was when she went dashing, crying and cursing up the escalator.

Later, as we made our way to the security area, cops told us what had happened. They assured us that every square foot of the entire Las Vegas terminal was covered by at least one camera and human observer, and the woman had committed the offense of leaving her bags unattended, even if it was for a minute or less. They said it cost her a fine of \$500 to get her bags back.

That's just one example of what you can expect whenever you enter an airport terminal. You can avoid trouble by just following the posted rules and the cameras and eyeballs will be there to protect you. Disobey the rules, and they'll nail you.

Of course, the most critical moment each traveler must face in airport security is when going through the frisking and searching ordeal along with the x-ray machine area. It is vitally important that understand what is expected of you when you're in that line, especially what you may not take on your flight. The list changes frequently, so keep up on the information.

On another recent flight, after my spouse's suitcase went through the x-ray, she was pulled aside by two stern-looking guards. They did the magic electronic stick search of her entire body, and then began on her opened suitcase. Clothing and other items went flying all around, as they seemed to be looking for something very dangerous. Other cops came over and joined in the clothing-in-the-air toss.

I had visions of visiting my wife in Alcatraz for carrying something evil in her suitcase. Finally, I got one of the cops to talk to me. He said the machine detected mercury, a banned substance, somewhere in her suitcase. Mercury is often used in explosives, hence my wife was a suspect in transporting dangerous materials.

Moments later, one of the cops triumphantly held up the offending article ... a medical thermometer. With nervous laughs all around, and without the thermometer, we were permitted to go to our gate and board our flight.

Whenever you fly today, you can expect delays and searches because of security. But don't curse the airport security crews. They're there to protect us. Security is so tight because a small group of suicidal religious maniacs are holding millions of world travelers hostage in every airport because the nutcases believe blowing up commercial airliners and themselves is their way to qualify for their 72 virgins.

We should be thankful to those airport security people for keeping flying safe, and to our GIs, who are sending potential terrorists to join their virgins before the nutcases can try to blow up airliners.

