

In today's often turbulent world, inexperienced travelers need to prepare for the unexpected. They should expect delays, glitches, rip-offs and other problems that well-seasoned travelers meet and solve every day. And, unfortunately, they should also be aware of the predators. Here are several scenarios of what first-time and infrequent travelers may encounter:

Don't advertise your travel inexperience: Avoid being targeted by rip-off thieves by dressing down. On a cruise, you can strut into the dining room all gussied up in your finest clothing. However, when you go ashore to that quaint little seaside village, don't wear bright, gaudy clothing, big hat, designer sunglasses, shining jewelry, heavy handbag, camera at the ready, all while yakking on your cell phone. Dress sensibly, similar to what middle-class local folks wear. If you look, sound and act like an obvious tourist, you may as well put a rob-me sign or paint a target on your back.



Do your homework: Before you visit unfamiliar lands, find websites that tell of both the positive and negative aspects of those countries. What are the oldest scams in New Delhi? What specific tourist dangers are there in Mexico City? What neighborhoods should you avoid in Paris? Where do muggers operate in Bangkok? How do you call the bobbies in London?

Protect yourself at all times: Keep your valuables safe everywhere with a tight-to-the body purse or under-clothing money belt. Be sure ID cards, passport and other valuable items are well tucked in zippered or buttoned pockets. Don't take them out for anyone other than recognizable officials, and never in crowded areas. Be aware of pickpockets, including that group of loving little Parisian Gypsy kids who want to hug you real tight.

Carry a minimum stash of cash: Leave the big bills locked in the hotel's or ship's room safe. Buy travelers checks, and use them in cities where you know the company has offices. Do currency exchanging at American Express or at a reliable bank. Use credit cards sparingly or not at all.

Those restaurant receipts you sign in Venice could be easy targets for thieves to use in making 24 hours of heavy illegal purchases before you can notify your credit card company.

Stay in lighted areas: No matter how attractive they look or are recommended by a friendly taxi driver, don't wander off well-lighted public areas into questionable neighborhoods. In some cities, such as Bangkok and Amsterdam, where drugs are easily available, innocent-looking street teens may approach you for hand-outs, then in their desperation for cash, may quickly turn into violent muggers.

Use the buddy system: Remember back in your summer camp days, when you couldn't swim in the lake without your buddy? If you're a new traveler, take at least one buddy along wherever you go in unfamiliar areas. Muggings are less likely if you're with another person, or better still, as part of an escorted group.

Keep a list of emergency numbers: When in a foreign country, know local official phone numbers and where police protection is quickly available. If you're a traveling U.S. citizen, carry a wallet card with phone numbers of American officials' offices. When in a foreign city, it may be good to visit one of the U.S. offices for the latest information before you go on your touring.

Drink with moderation: Never booze it up heavily while a tourist in a foreign city. The buddy system is certainly necessary in these situations when you know your excursion will involve more than just one glass of local wine. If you're with a group, and you want to spend the evening celebrating, it's a good idea for at least one person to be a non-drinker. Make sure any wine or booze product you use has authentic labels, unopened or opened within sight.

Don't buy food or juices from street carts: It looks tempting when a TV food gourmet chomps down on stuff from a Hong Kong street vendor. However, before the camera was on him, you can bet he made sure the food was super clean and thoroughly cooked. If you're an older traveler, you should know senior stomachs are not as forgiving as young ones. You don't want to spoil your travels with midnight sessions in the hotel or cabin bathroom, or worse, an emergency trip to the hospital.

If it looks too good to be true ... If a taxi driver, guide, vendor or smiling stranger in a strange city appears to be too eager and friendly, be on your guard, or in most cases, just walk away. If any offer seems too good to be true, it definitely is neither good nor true.