



In our travels, we've sometimes been where streets are full of noisy people because of a festive holiday or the local sports team had just won a tournament.

Other gatherings were more dangerous, such as angry political, religious or social protests. Unfortunately, stories about dangers of uncontrolled street violence seem to be in the news almost every day.

It Happened In London: At a Piccadilly restaurant one night recently with other senior tourists, we heard shouting. We went outside to see what was happening. Lesson 1: Not a smart idea. A large group of foreign students marched by with signs and banners to protest increased tuition at the nearby British university.

Some demonstrators rushed along the sidewalk handing out printed material to bystanders. In his eagerness, one ran into and knocked me down. Startled, he reached to help the old guy up. Suddenly, two London bobbies appeared and dragged the student away. I yelled it was an accident, but they were gone. Lesson 2: When things may become violent, older tourists should seek safety.

Violence Can Escalate: While my London incident was relatively minor, street demonstrations can escalate. Normally well-behaved people can get caught up in mob hysteria and become violently out of control. Worse still, criminals often use the confusion to attack and rob vulnerable tourists.

Ways To Protect Yourself: When scheduling visits to a busy city, check latest official information about current street disturbances or other potential hazards. For updates from the U.S. Department of State, go to www.state.gov/travel

Common Sense: If the information indicates potential danger during a trip you're considering, simply change your plans. There are many peaceful places where you will be welcomed in safety.

Don't Make Yourself A Target: When on the city street, don't advertise that you're a tourist. Blend in with modest clothing and behavior. Unsecured jewelry, purses, wallets, cameras and smart phones are favorites of thieves.

Find Safety: Even the most peaceful streets can suddenly erupt in unexpected violence. At the first indication, get away as quickly as possible. Don't stand around rubber-necking or become involved in any way.

If there are police there, don't panic and run. You could be mistaken for a demonstrator and become a target. As danger increases, walk away at a steady pace. Avoid confrontation by keeping your head down, arms at your sides and mouth shut.

When Violence Strikes: If you see or hear street fighting, gunfire or explosions, hit the ground fast and crawl behind a barrier. If with companions, use the buddy system. Stay together, keep each other in sight and seek immediate medical aid in case of injury.

When it's safe enough, go to the police, show your ID, and ask for help in getting away. Always be prepared with a smart phone on city visits, and if caught in an emergency, use it to get help and contact your embassy or consulate.