



A recent news item told of the arrest of a group of employees at a major U.S. airport for thefts from baggage. Unfortunately, this kind of crime can happen at airports anywhere in the world. How does a senior traveler avoid it?

Of course, the best way is never check your luggage, and travel with carry-ons. Once out of your control, suitcases are vulnerable to being stolen or pilfered. Cutting back on clothing and other items may be difficult for some senior travelers, but worth trying. Consider wearing coats with roomy inner and outer pockets and/or backpacks.

Keep your eyes on your carry-ons. When approaching security with a companion, one person goes ahead through the electronic doorway to meet the bags as they roll along to the end of the chute. That way, except for when the bags are actually within the x-ray machine, they're in eyesight.

Never, ever leave your bags unattended while you shop in an airport store, use the restroom or for any other reason. Not only are they vulnerable to being stolen, but they may also cause roaming airport security to confiscate them as potentially dangerous.

Pack your carry-ons neatly and know where each item is. If you are called aside by a security guard for individual inspection, keep the bag in sight at all times, and while the bag is open, closely watch if any of the items are lifted out.

Take few or no valuable items when you travel. Costume jewelry can be just as attractive as the real deal, but not as missed if stolen. Unfortunately, airport thieves who are also carry-on checkers can be very adept at quickly slipping out small jewelry items.

Before you leave the airport after going through security or after your flight and go to pick up checked luggage, immediately inspect it. If anything is missing, report it as soon as possible at the airport. When possible, make your report directly to the police and then to airport security officials. If you need advice, call your insurance broker and/or travel agent with the information.

During travel, use your credit card and carry a modest amount of cash. Travelers checks that can only be redeemed by you are accepted virtually everywhere in the world at banks, hotels, casinos and restaurants. Bank cash machines are also widely available.

There's no way to totally prevent loss or pilfering of baggage at airports. However, with a few sensible steps, it's possible for the senior traveler to make it more difficult for potential thieves to succeed.