

Rodwell Security Consulting & Training Ltd.

Don't add "Crime Victim" to your Resume

People are often the author of their own misfortune. I have spent most of my adult life looking at how people become victims of crime. In the vast majority of cases, the incidents were avoidable if people simply knew how crimes are committed and put a few security practices into their life.

Speakers and others who travel extensively put themselves in locations where criminals are often lurking looking for their next victim. These locations include train stations, airports, hotels and other areas frequented by tourists. Haven't we all been in a few of these locations lately? If you are fortunate enough to travel to international destinations, you could be exposing yourself to an even greater number of different types of crime than we experience in North America.

I hope this article will give you an awareness of the dangers and hazards that await the unwary and unprepared travelling public. I do not wish to create fear of travel, but simply ensure that one's traveling experience does not include being a victim of crime.

Pre-trip Planning

Let's begin by doing a few steps before you even leave your residence:

- Make a copy of your passport, banking cards (front and back), birth certificate, and medical insurance. Provide this list with someone you trust so they may be contacted to get information back to you if you lose or have stolen your wallet or purse. These trusted individuals need to always have the information handy when they receive your emergency call. If you feel you can also conceal this list where no one can ever find it, you can also keep a copy with you. Hint: rolled up in an old deodorant tube.
- If travelling abroad, do some research about potential problems on the locations you will be visiting. Our Canadian government provides great information in this area. Check out <http://travel.gc.ca/> The U.S. CIA also has a good site at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings.html>
- Photograph your valuables, jewelry and luggage. These pictures can help police find your articles should you become separated from them. Don't leave the digital pictures on the camera, as that will be one of the first items to disappear.

Accommodations

When it comes to where to stay, make sure you do your due diligence. Often your host/event planner will be arranging your accommodation. Check to make sure it meets your security needs.

Here are some tips to finding a good hotel accommodation:

- Your hotel ideally should have good security practices, like: being well lit no access to floors other than via the lobby, no access from parking garage direct to a room floor, not revealing your room number to anyone, no matter what the reason. Ideally access into the hotel should only be through the lobby. Criminals look for locations where they can enter the hotel undetected. It should preferably be in a safe location.
- Ask for a room between the 3rd and 6th floors. The reasons for this floor selection are ground and second floor rooms provide doors and windows for an intruder to easily enter. Upper floors have interior hallways which tend to be safer. Being close to the elevator is generally safer as well. Another reason, fire department ladders don't go higher than the sixth floor. If you had to walk down 33 flights of stairs during an emergency evacuation, you will appreciate lower floors.
- Good security starts with door locks, if possible make sure your hotel has modern electronic door locks. The majority of these types of locks automatically change the lock combination with every new guest so there is little chance of someone having a duplicate key to your room. If you lose or misplace your key, ask to have your room re-keyed immediately. For added door security, there are a number of personal devices that can be purchased to help secure or alarm a hotel door. A simple wood door wedge works very well.
- The room should be equipped with fire detection/suppression equipment. Ideally a peephole in the door, and a telephone with an outside line.
- When travelling internationally, check with the Canadian Consulate Resident Security Officer in the country you are visiting and they can alert you of areas to stay away from and are safer accommodations.

After you arrive

When you arrive at your hotel and checked in make sure that the door locks, phone work. Learn the emergency route from your room. Here is a list of some safe practices around a hotel:

- Make a habit of placing your room key in the same place every time. If you have to leave in an emergency, you can get it quickly and have it to re-enter the room.
- Keep your room door locked at all times, and put your door wedge in place when you are in the room.
- Carry a small flashlight for emergencies
- Leave your T.V. on and do not disturb sign on door when you are not in your room. It makes the room sound and appears occupied. If you need the room cleaned phone housekeeping and request the sign be replaced after they clean.
- Do not let anyone into your room that you are not expecting. Call down to front desk to confirm maintenance, security or anyone else who is required to enter your room.
- Be careful of frequenting hotel gyms and laundry rooms late at night. These

facilities are often in isolated areas of a hotel. Make sure there are others around in the area.

- Don't display your room key or give out your hotel room number in public places, i.e. pool area. Professional criminals will walk around a pool area, looking for room keys that are visible. After seeing a room number, they simply kick in the door, as they know you will be by the pool.
- When getting onto elevators, be aware of other passengers. If you don't feel safe getting on, wait for the next one. Stand by the controls, so you can push emergency button if necessary. In an emergency, just start pushing buttons. Keep your back to side wall. If someone suspicious enters then you exit.
- Use hotel security vaults for your valuables. Carry a minimum of cash for each outing and don't flash around money. Expensive jewelry and high priced clothing make you a target for robbery. Dress down or like the locals if possible.
- Invest in a good money belt or hidden compartment within your clothing to carry valuables. Here is where you hide your passport, which you never surrender to anyone. Some people carry a fake wallet with a few dollars and discontinued credit cards in them to hand over to robbers. If asked for your wallet, don't hand it to thief but throw it to the side of them, so they have to turn and move away from you to retrieve it. This is your opportunity to run, when they go to pick it up.
- At night, it is best to travel in groups and watch alcohol consumption. Criminals often target the intoxicated as they are the least capable of defending themselves. Women need to keep their purses close to the body and not dangling offering temptation to purse snatchers. Don't put strap of purse over your head, as you can be severely injured when a snatcher runs by and tries to rip the bag out of your hand.
- Carrying shopping bags from the big name stores might look nice, but it may set you up as a target for criminals. Carry a cheap plastic or generic bag from a grocery store, to put those fancy bags inside as you walk around.

This is just an abbreviated list of precautions that you can take to ensure your security and safety. Crime requires three elements: someone with a criminal intent, opportunity to commit the crime and the criminal's belief that they will not be caught. The travelling public can only control "opportunity". By knowing how crimes are committed and having few strategies and practices in place, you will greatly reduce your chance of being a victim of crime.

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