

## Tips For Travelers

*The following may be useful as you prepare to travel overseas, it is adapted from some original work by Phil Kenney Colombia Security Coordinator for SIL*

General Comments: Most of us look forward to air travel. We pray, we plan, we sort, we pack, we say our good-byes and we finally leave for the airport. When we leave for the airport, we do our final check and we hope we haven't missed anything. We probably haven't left the proverbial iron or the coffee pot on, but is there something we may have forgotten after all? I hope there isn't, but it can sure be easy to let your guard down at the airport. This security bulletin is to remind all of us of the importance of being alert and practicing good security procedures, all the way to grandma's house.

### **I. Basic Tips For Air Travel**

These are "common sense ideas that will help you avoid problems at the airport.

#### A. Luggage

1. Luggage should be ordinary, "middle of the road" style. Do not use luggage that may display wealth or that calls attention to yourself.
2. Luggage should be free of "frequent flier" indicators. Stickers and old luggage tags imply that you have money to travel a lot, which could make you a target for theft.
3. You should avoid using a title on your luggage tag. Do not use your business card as your luggage identification tag.
4. Avoid using your home address on your luggage identification tag. Using your business address would be more appropriate. This prevents a thief from knowing where you live, but allows the airline company to get in touch with you if your luggage is misplaced or mis-routed. Be sure to include a telephone number on the luggage identification tag.
5. Use covered luggage tags that do not easily reveal your identity.
6. Secure your luggage with a lock. Small padlocks serve well on luggage with zippers. Although locking luggage does not guarantee against theft, it does provide a deterrent.
7. Using a strap that tightens snugly around luggage helps prevent loss from rough handling. It also helps you identify you luggage on the baggage claim belt.

## B. Dress Appropriately, Arrive on Time, Do Not Take More Than You Can Handle

1. Avoid the “American look.” Dressing very casual in clothing such as shorts, t-shirts, baseball hats, like a cowboy, or generally unkempt is inappropriate. Do not display things such as flags or stickers that announce you are American.
2. Wear simple jewelry that does not ~attract attention.
3. You should not take more carryon luggage than you can easily handle.
4. Arrive at the airport early for check-in.
5. Remember your ticket, passport, identification (cédula), money and credit cards.

## II. At the Airport Terminal

Airport Terminals are among the most crime plagued in the world. The most common crime is theft, especially carryon bags.

### A. Leaving the Vehicle and Entering the Terminal

Leaving the vehicle and entering the terminal is one of the most awkward and vulnerable times of your trip. The following are tips that will help you avoid problems.

#### 1. Transporting Your Luggage from the Car to the Terminal

If you are using the services of an airport baggage carrier, be sure he is dressed in the proper uniform. You can identify the proper uniform by observing what the other baggage handlers are wearing. The baggage handler may help you after you enter the check-in line if you offer to pay him for the additional work. Be prepared to pay the baggage handler an appropriate tip. Have the money ready before you arrive at the airport. The money you use for tips should be kept separate from the money in your wallet. You should not open your wallet in the airport. The wrong kind of people are very observant and notice when people are carrying a lot of cash.

2. Do not accept offers of help from strangers presenting themselves as “good Samaritans.” If you do accept help you are obligating yourself to pay for their “services.”

3. If bags are being x-rayed at the door, be sure you or a member of your family is at the receiving end of the machine when your luggage is exiting.

**Note:** One of the popular scams in the U.S. is the theft of carryon luggage from the x-ray belt. The items most often targeted are notebook computers. Other items targeted may be cameras, electronic planners, jewelry or other expensive items.

Scam 1: The two people in the x-ray line directly ahead of you may be working this scam.) The person just ahead of you will have keys, change or something in his pocket that sets off the metal detector. You may have already placed your luggage on the belt, anticipating that you will pass through quickly. While the attendant is checking out the second person, the first person walks away with your carryon luggage. Unless you are aware of what is going on, you may never realize the two people were working together.

Scam 2: The second scam is similar to the first. There are two people working together, but neither one of them is going through the x-ray line. The first person is the employee working at the x-ray machine. The second person is waiting a ways off to the side. The two of them

have a set of signals worked out. The first watches your bag go through the line on the x-ray screen. As he sees it on the screen, he signals to the second person. The second person moves quickly, takes your bag and leaves before you have time to react. Unless you are very alert, it is practically impossible to pick out the signals.

#### B. Standing in the Check-in Line

Standing in the check-in line is one of the times you can be caught off guard. You normally have a lot on your mind and are asking yourself the usual questions about your ticket, passport, money etc. Other distractions can be family members, friends and small children.

1. Avoiding the theft of baggage at this stage of the trip is important. Luggage thieves do not usually take large bags, but rather take carryon luggage. One of the ways to avoid the theft of carryon luggage is to have a friend take you to the airport and watch your carryons.
2. If the police need to inspect the baggage you are “checking”, be cooperative. Remember to keep your carryon baggage with you while they are inspecting your baggage.
3. Be sure the airline people give you proper baggage claim tickets and that the number on your baggage corresponds with the number on the ticket that is fastened to your ticket folder.

Scam 3: A well-dressed man or woman will stop near the place you are standing in line and drop money on the floor. The money will often be U.S. dollars. Your first response may be to bend down and help the person retrieve the money. Resist the temptation to be helpful. What usually

happens is that while you are bent down helping, one or two individuals move in from the side and slip away with your carryon luggage.

Scam 4: An example of a scam used in South America but could be anywhere is this: A well-dressed man, pretending to be an airline employee came over to a couple standing in line at the airport and said in perfect English: “you have a telephone call at the ticket counter.” As she was leaving, her husband was watching her, that’s when the other people slipped in and took the baggage. When the woman returned to report to her husband that there was no phone call, they realized their luggage was missing.

#### C. After You Leave the Check-in Line

You’re finally checked-in and your ready to relax, have a bite to eat or something to drink. Don’t let your guard down yet. This is when and where many thefts occur at airports. Be careful in the waiting areas and in the restaurants.

##### 1. More Scams

Scam 5: Several people went into an airport restaurant. A well-dressed man, appearing to be a restaurant employee came and said: “sit right here.” As the people were sitting down, a lady, also well-dressed came by and left with a backpack containing a notebook computer, mail, and other valuable items. Restaurant workers said no one fitting the man’s description worked there.

Scam 6: Someone was sitting in a restaurant in an airport restaurant when a person passing by “accidentally” spilled their soft drink on the victim. While the passerby was “helping” clean up the mess, another person slipped in and made off with the carry-on luggage.

Scam 7: This scam is similar to number 6. Someone tells you that you have catsup on your clothes. It may be your sleeve, your back, or anywhere. You thank them and then go to the bathroom to get cleaned up. In some instances, if the catsup is on your back, the person will offer to accompany you to the bathroom to help you clean up. At any rate, the danger is in the bathroom, where your luggage is taken, or you are robbed of your billfold and passport. It is best to stay in a public area and clean up as best you can with a napkin.

#### D. The International Room Departure Area

You have finally entered the departure area. The next step is to board the airplane. That is, unless the police are there physically inspecting bags. The physical inspection is not usually a problem, unless you are not paying careful attention to the inspector.

**Note:** Do not leave your baggage in the departure area while you go to the rest room. Do not ask a stranger or airline attendant to watch your baggage. Do not leave your baggage where it could be taken by someone walking by.

### III. Arrival in The US or Another Country

#### A. Changing Planes or Reaching Your Final Destination

Many people returning to the U.S. from overseas change planes in New York, Miami or Houston. You will be required to clear customs there, before beginning the second leg of your journey.

1. Remember to take your carry-on luggage as you exit the plane. There may be airline employees present as you are leaving the passage way to give you gate information. Do not accept help from people who do not appear to be official airline employees. Do not let strangers help you with you baggage.

2. You will go to the baggage claim area, find your baggage and go through customs. If you are missing luggage, make sure you file the proper report with an official of the airline you are flying with. Official airport porters will be dressed in a uniform and should have an official identification tag.

3. Follow the crowd to customs. Be polite, don't argue with customs officials. Give concise information, but don't offer information that is not requested.

4. After you have cleared customs, you can usually re-check your baggage at the airline's nearest check-in counter. Make sure you are given the proper baggage claim tickets. Don't forget your carry-on luggage.

5. When you reach your final destination, follow the procedures previously outlined.

Have a good trip and remember, take time to rest.

In His Service,

Phil Kenney, BSC (modified for general use by Stuart Shepherd)