

SCAM

NOT ME

SAFE TRAVEL PLANNING CHECKLIST & SCAM PREVENTION GUIDE

CONTENTS

1. Pre-Trip Planning Checklist
 2. Documents & Financial Safety
 3. Common Travel Booking Scams
 4. Accommodation & Housing Scams
 5. Destination-Specific Scams
 6. Transportation Safety & Scams
 7. Digital Security While Traveling
 8. Emergency Preparedness
 9. Resources & Helpful Contacts
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1. PRE-TRIP PLANNING CHECKLIST

3-6 Months Before Travel

- Research destination safety (government travel advisories, recent scams)
- Check passport expiration date (must be valid 6+ months beyond return date for most countries)
- Verify visa requirements and application deadlines
- Research required/recommended vaccinations and health precautions
- Purchase comprehensive travel insurance (medical, cancellation, belongings)
- Book flights through legitimate websites (airline direct or reputable agencies)
- Research accommodation options on trustworthy platforms

1-2 Months Before Travel

- Make copies of important documents (passport, visa, insurance, itinerary)
- Register with your country's travel advisory program if available
- Notify bank/credit card companies of travel dates and destinations
- Set up travel alerts on credit cards to detect fraudulent charges

- Research local transportation options and common scams
- Check your cell phone's international capabilities and costs
- Download offline maps of your destination
- Research emergency numbers and embassy/consulate locations

1-2 Weeks Before Travel

- Double-check all reservations (print confirmations or save digitally)
- Secure your home (stop mail, set timers, notify trusted neighbor)
- Prepare a small amount of local currency for immediate needs
- Download translation apps if traveling to a country with a different language
- Share itinerary with trusted family member or friend
- Schedule bill payments that will be due during your trip
- Back up all devices you're bringing on your trip
- Check weather forecasts and pack appropriately

Last Few Days

- Reconfirm all reservations directly with providers
- Check airline baggage policies and restrictions
- Secure valuables left at home
- Prepare a packing checklist including medications
- Charge all electronic devices and power banks
- Set up out-of-office email responses if necessary
- Check in online for flights if available

2. DOCUMENTS & FINANCIAL SAFETY

Important Documents

- Store physical copies of documents in different locations (suitcase, day bag)
- Keep digital copies in secure, encrypted cloud storage
- Email copies to yourself and a trusted contact
- Consider a password-protected document folder on your phone

Essential Documents Checklist:

- Passport and visa documentation
- Flight/train/bus tickets and confirmations
- Accommodation confirmations
- Travel insurance policy and contact information
- Driver's license and/or International Driving Permit
- Vaccination records if required
- Prescription information for medications
- Emergency contact information

Financial Safety

- Bring multiple payment methods (2+ credit cards, debit card, some cash)
- Keep payment methods in separate locations
- Use money belts or hidden pouches for larger amounts of cash
- Know your daily ATM withdrawal limits
- Use credit cards with no foreign transaction fees when possible
- Keep receipts to verify all transactions
- Monitor accounts regularly for unauthorized charges

ATM Safety

- Use ATMs inside banks when possible
- Shield PIN entry from view
- Inspect card readers for skimming devices before inserting card
- Avoid standalone ATMs in isolated areas
- Be aware of your surroundings when withdrawing cash
- Decline offers from strangers to "help" with transactions

3. COMMON TRAVEL BOOKING SCAMS

Fake Travel Websites

How It Works: Scammers create websites mimicking legitimate travel agencies or airlines offering heavily discounted deals.

Prevention Tips:

- Book directly through airline/hotel websites or established travel portals
- Be suspicious of deals that are significantly cheaper than market rates
- Verify website legitimacy (secure connection, legitimate contact information)
- Check website URLs carefully for misspellings or slight variations
- Research company reviews before booking
- Pay with credit cards for better fraud protection

"Free" Vacation Offers

How It Works: You receive a call, email, or social media message saying you've "won" a free vacation but must pay fees or taxes upfront.

Prevention Tips:

- Remember that legitimate contests don't require payment to collect prizes
- Be wary of unsolicited vacation offers, especially if you didn't enter a contest
- Never provide credit card information to claim a "free" prize
- Research the company offering the "free" vacation

Bait and Switch Accommodations

How It Works: You book a specific property, but upon arrival are told it's unavailable and directed to an inferior alternative.

Prevention Tips:

- Book through platforms with verified reviews
- Screenshot property descriptions, amenities, and promised features
- Get all guarantees in writing before paying
- Research the cancellation policy before booking
- Use credit cards that offer purchase protection

Fraudulent Vacation Rentals

How It Works: Scammers list properties they don't own or that don't exist, collect payment, then disappear.

Prevention Tips:

- Use established rental platforms with secure payment systems
- Be wary of listings with limited photos or generic descriptions
- Avoid wire transfers, cryptocurrency, or cash payment requests
- Search the property address online to verify it exists
- Request a video call to see the property in real-time before booking
- Check the host's profile for verified reviews

4. ACCOMMODATION & HOUSING SCAMS

Vacation Rental Scams

How It Works: Fraudsters create listings for properties they don't control, sometimes using photos stolen from legitimate listings.

Prevention Tips:

- Use reputable booking platforms with buyer protection
- Verify property exists (Google Street View, property records)
- Never pay via wire transfer, cash apps, or cryptocurrency
- Look for listings with multiple detailed reviews
- Be suspicious of hosts who won't speak by phone
- Request additional photos or video of specific areas

Hidden Fee Fraud

How It Works: A property advertises a low rate but adds significant mandatory fees at checkout or arrival (resort fees, cleaning fees, amenity charges).

Prevention Tips:

- Always read the fine print before booking
- Ask specifically about all additional fees before confirming
- Get a written breakdown of all charges
- Check reviews for mentions of unexpected fees
- Use booking platforms that show the total price upfront

Property Not as Advertised

How It Works: The accommodation is significantly different from what was advertised (location, size, amenities, cleanliness).

Prevention Tips:

- Book places with numerous recent reviews
- Research the neighborhood independently
- Save or screenshot all property descriptions and photos
- Use Google Maps to verify location claims
- Contact the host with specific questions before booking

The "Hotel Is Full" Scam

How It Works: Upon arrival at your booked hotel, you're told there's a "problem" with your room and you're transferred to a lower-quality partner hotel.

Prevention Tips:

- Confirm reservations directly with the hotel before arrival
- Arrive earlier in the day when possible
- Have booking confirmation readily available
- Know your rights (many countries require comparable accommodations)
- Stand firm if you have a confirmed reservation

5. DESTINATION-SPECIFIC SCAMS

Tourist-Targeted Scams in Europe

The Friendship Bracelet/Rose Gift: Someone forcefully puts a bracelet on your wrist or hands you a rose, then demands payment.

- **Prevention:** Firmly refuse items, keep hands in pockets in crowded areas.

The Spill Trick: Someone "accidentally" spills something on you, then while "helping" clean up, pickpockets your belongings.

- **Prevention:** Keep distance from strangers, be wary of sudden contact, secure valuables.

Fake Police Officers: Individuals posing as police ask to check your wallet for "counterfeit money" or "drug checks."

- **Prevention:** Ask for official ID, suggest moving to a police station, know that real officers rarely ask to see your wallet.

Tourist-Targeted Scams in Asia

Taxi Meter "Broken": Taxi driver claims the meter is broken and charges an inflated flat rate.

- **Prevention:** Use ride-hailing apps, agree on price before entering, or insist on meter use.

Tea House/Bar Scam: Friendly locals invite you to a traditional tea house or bar, then you're presented with an exorbitant bill.

- **Prevention:** Decline invitations from overly friendly strangers, research price ranges beforehand.

Fake Tour Guides: Unauthorized guides offer special access or heavily discounted tours to attractions.

- **Prevention:** Book through official tourist offices or reputable agencies, check credentials.

Tourist-Targeted Scams in Americas

Unofficial Parking Attendants: Individuals claim to watch your car for a fee, implying it might be damaged otherwise.

- **Prevention:** Use official parking facilities with payment machines or attendant uniforms.

The Currency Confusion: Money changers or vendors take advantage of unfamiliar currency to short-change visitors.

- **Prevention:** Learn basic denominations before arrival, count change carefully, use cards when possible.

Resort Timeshare Presentations: Offered "free" activities or gifts in exchange for attending high-pressure sales presentations.

- **Prevention:** Understand nothing is truly free, value your vacation time, decline firmly.

6. TRANSPORTATION SAFETY & SCAMS

Taxi & Rideshare Scams

Long-Route Scam: Driver takes an unnecessarily long route to increase the fare.

- **Prevention:** Use navigation apps to follow your route, research typical journey times.

Fare Switching: Driver agrees to one fare then demands a higher amount upon arrival.

- **Prevention:** Agree on fare before starting journey, use metered taxis or app-based services.

Unlicensed Taxis: Unmarked vehicles posing as legitimate taxis, often charging excessive rates or creating safety risks.

- **Prevention:** Use designated taxi stands, verify official markings, pre-arrange airport transfers.

App Cancellation Scam: Rideshare driver arrives but asks you to cancel and pay cash instead.

- **Prevention:** Refuse off-app payments, report drivers who request this practice.

Rental Car Safety & Scams

Damage Pre-Existing: Being charged for vehicle damage that existed before your rental.

- **Prevention:** Thoroughly document (photos/video) all pre-existing damage before driving away.

Insurance Upselling: Pressured to buy unnecessary insurance products at pickup.

- **Prevention:** Research coverage needed beforehand, check your credit card's rental insurance.

Fuel Policy Tricks: Complex fuel policies that result in paying extra for fuel.

- **Prevention:** Understand the fuel policy fully, take photos of fuel gauge at pickup and return.

Hidden Fee Addition: Adding unexpected fees for services, additional drivers, or equipment.

- **Prevention:** Get a complete written quote before booking, review contract carefully before signing.

Public Transportation Safety

Ticket Inspector Scams: Fake ticket inspectors demanding immediate cash "fines" for invalid tickets.

- **Prevention:** Know that legitimate fines are rarely collected on the spot in cash.

Helpful Stranger at Ticket Machines: Someone offers to help with ticket machines but overcharges or gives incorrect tickets.

- **Prevention:** Seek help only from uniformed staff, shield PIN entry at machines.

Distraction Techniques: Creating commotion on public transport to facilitate pickpocketing.

- **Prevention:** Keep valuables secure, maintain awareness in crowded situations.

7. DIGITAL SECURITY WHILE TRAVELING

Wi-Fi & Public Network Safety

- Avoid conducting sensitive business on public Wi-Fi
- Use a VPN (Virtual Private Network) for all internet connections
- Disable auto-connect features for Wi-Fi networks
- Use cellular data for banking or sensitive information
- Log out of all accounts after using public computers
- Enable two-factor authentication on important accounts

Device Security

- Lock devices with strong passwords/biometrics
- Update all software before traveling

- Back up all data before departure
- Install a "find my device" app
- Consider travel-specific privacy screen protectors
- Minimize the number of devices you bring

Social Media Caution

- Avoid posting real-time location updates
- Wait until leaving a location before posting about it
- Review privacy settings before traveling
- Be cautious about revealing accommodation details
- Disable location tagging in photos
- Be wary of using public location-based check-in features

Digital Payment Protection

- Use credit cards rather than debit cards when possible
- Consider travel-specific prepaid cards
- Monitor accounts regularly for unauthorized charges
- Know your bank's international contact number
- Use trusted, official banking apps only
- Be cautious of card readers with suspicious attachments

8. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Health Emergency Preparation

- Research healthcare options at your destination
- Carry adequate supply of prescription medications
- Know how to describe allergies or medical conditions in local language
- Locate nearest hospitals/clinics to your accommodation
- Carry medical insurance information and emergency contacts
- Consider medical evacuation insurance for remote destinations

Crisis Response Plan

- Register with your country's embassy/consulate
- Keep embassy/consulate contact information accessible
- Know local emergency numbers (equivalent to 911)
- Establish communication plan with family/friends at home
- Identify meeting points if separated from travel companions
- Follow local news and government advisories for emerging situations

Financial Emergency Backup

- Have access to emergency funds in multiple forms

- Keep a small amount of cash in a separate, secure location
 - Know how to replace lost/stolen credit cards internationally
 - Have photos of important documents stored securely
 - Carry at least two different payment methods
 - Know Western Union/MoneyGram locations if wire transfers needed
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9. RESOURCES & HELPFUL CONTACTS

Government Travel Resources

- U.S. State Department: travel.state.gov
- UK Foreign Office: gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice
- Canadian Travel Advisories: travel.gc.ca
- Australian Smart Traveller: smartraveller.gov.au

Travel Safety Apps

- Smart Traveler (U.S. Department of State official app)
- TripWhistle (global emergency numbers)
- GeoSure (neighborhood safety ratings)
- TravelSmart (by Allianz, medical facility locator)
- App in the Air (flight tracking and airport navigation)

Travel Insurance Resources

- International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers: iamat.org
- Worldwide travel clinic directory: istm.org

Emergency Contacts

- International emergency number directory: 911.gov/international
- International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers: +1 716-754-4883
- Global Embassy & Consulate Directory: embassypages.com

Scam Reporting Resources

- International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network: icpen.org
- Better Business Bureau International: bbb.org/global
- Econsumer.gov (international consumer complaints)
- Report accommodation scams to booking platforms and local tourism boards
- Report credit card fraud to your card issuer immediately

REMEMBER:

- Trust your instincts—if something feels wrong, it probably is
- Research common scams specific to your destination before traveling

- Legitimate businesses don't pressure you to make immediate decisions
- When in doubt, walk away and research independently
- No deal is so good that you should suspend caution
- Prepare thoroughly, but don't let fear of scams ruin your travel experience

© 2025 - This guide may be freely distributed to help protect travelers from scams and ensure safe journeys.

