



In today's often turbulent travel world, seniors need to prepare for the unexpected in airports and other destinations. They must anticipate political unrest, weather delays, glitches, rip-offs and other problems that savvy younger travelers face and solve every day. Several scenarios of what first-time and infrequent older travelers may encounter:

Don't advertise your travel inexperience in unfamiliar settings. Avoid being targeted by rip-off thieves. While at sea, you can strut into the cruise ship dining room all gussied up in your finest. However, when ashore in that quaint little seaside village, don't wear bright, gaudy clothing, big hat, designer sunglasses, shining jewelry and bulging handbag. All while yakking on your smartphone, held by your dainty fingertips. Dress sensibly, similar to what middle-class local folks wear. If you look, sound and act like an obvious tourist, you may as well paint a target on your back.

Before visiting unfamiliar areas, find websites that tell of both the positive and negative aspects of those destinations. What are the oldest scams in New Delhi? What specific dangers are there on the streets of Mexico City? What neighborhoods should you avoid in Paris? Where do muggers operate in Bangkok? How do you smartphone London bobbies for instant help?

Keep valuables in a tight-to-the armpit purse or inner-clothing money belt. Be sure ID cards, passport and other valuable items are well tucked in zippered or buttoned pockets. Don't take them out for anyone other than recognizable officials. Be aware of pickpockets, including that group of charming little Parisian kids who want to hug tourist you real tight.

Carry a minimum stash of cash. Leave the big bills locked in the hotel or ship's room safe. Buy travelers checks, and use them in cities where you know the financial company has offices. Do currency exchanging at American Express or a reliable bank.

Use credit cards sparingly or not at all. Those restaurant receipts you sign in Venice could be easy targets for thieves to use in making 24 hours or more of heavy illegal purchases before you find out and notify your credit card company.

Stay in well-lighted areas. No matter how attractive they look or are recommended by a friendly taxi driver, don't wander off highly-visible public areas into questionable neighborhoods. In some cities, such as Bangkok and Amsterdam, where drugs are easily available, innocent-looking street teens may approach you for hand-outs. Then in their desperation for

cash to buy drugs, could instantly turn into violent muggers.

Use the buddy system. Remember way back in your summer camp days, when you couldn't swim in the lake without keeping your buddy in sight? As a vulnerable senior traveler, take at least one buddy along wherever you go in unfamiliar areas. Muggings are less likely if you're with another person, or better still, as part of an escorted group.

When in a foreign country, know local official phone numbers and where police protection is quickly available. If a U.S. citizen, carry a wallet card with phone numbers of nearest American officials' offices.

Never booze it up heavily in a foreign city. The buddy system is necessary when your excursion will involve more than just one glass of local wine. If with a group, at least one should be a non-drinker. Be sure any wine or booze product you use has authentic labels and comes in factory-sealed bottles.

Don't buy homemade food or juices from street carts. It looks tempting when you see a TV food gourmet chomp down on stuff from a Hong Kong street vendor. However, before the camera was on him, you can bet he made sure the food was super clean and thoroughly cooked.

If you're an older traveler, you should know senior stomachs are not as forgiving as young ones. You don't want to spoil your travels with midnight sessions in the hotel bathroom, or worse, an emergency trip to the hospital.

If a taxi driver, guide, vendor or smiling native in a strange city appears to be too eager and friendly, be on your guard. Or just walk away. If an offer seems too good to be true, it is too often neither good nor true.