**Travel Tips**

Safety tips from a solo traveler

**The Basics**

Scan your driver’s license, passport, and health card and email them to yourself and a friend or family member. If you lose your passport, it makes getting a new one much easier.

Always let someone know where you are going, when you expect to arrive, and where you are staying. When you arrive, confirm those details. If something should happen, at least one person knows where you are.
**Trust your instincts.** If someone approaches you and you feel uncomfortable, do not worry about being rude. There are many times I have ignored men who approached in a way that didn’t feel right. I keep walking and ignore them. I may sometimes be wrong, but it’s not a chance I’m prepared to take.

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**Smile.** When you appear to be friendly, other people will reach out to you to help you. A simple smile actually saved me from being robbed once. I gave a pregnant woman my seat on a bus while two other people were trying to convince me I should get off the bus early. The woman overheard the conversation and gave me a look that I knew meant something was wrong. They got off, and she told me that I didn’t need to get off and was going the right way.

**Transportation**

Public city transportation is ripe for pickpockets. Never carry anything in your back pocket, and always be aware of your surroundings. It’s not just young men that pickpocket, either. Sometimes it’s a group of women who will kindly bump into you or cram around you on a bus.

On longer rides, if you would prefer to sit next to a woman on a bus or train, simply ask. In some cases, the clerks have passenger information and are happy to help you.

On buses to other cities, I introduce myself to the bus driver and tell him where I’m going. It seems a bit silly, but a lot of the bus drivers will call my name when we reach my destination, and some pull my backpack off first and sit it next to them so no one else grabs it.

Lastly, find out how much a cab will cost from the bus station. I always find this out from a hostel. To double check, I ask the security guard inside the bus station where to find the best cabs so that when I walk outside, I’m confident on where to go and the price to ask.

**Walking Around**

My goal is not to blend in as a local (there are too many subtleties that I cannot learn), but I do aim to look as if I live there and know what I’m doing. My best hope is that thieves think I’m an expat and shift their attention to someone who looks easier to rob.

I have a very tattered bag that goes over my shoulder. On travel days, it carries my netbook, DSLR, and iPod, but you would never think electronics are in it because there are no special brand names on it or fancy padding. It’s a bag that has been torn and patched many times and never signals “expensive things are inside.”

Never wear your iPod while walking around. Not only does it make you less aware of your surroundings, but it makes you a target for thieves who will either pick pocket you or just confront you with a weapon.

Carry small change in one pocket and larger bills in your bra (or undies, men). Never flash big bills to anyone.

If you need to look at your map, never do it in a street. Pop into a store or restaurant—anywhere but on the corner.



**Accomodations**

When I arrive at a hostel, I try to be as friendly as I can at the desk. After I put my bags in, I ask the front desk if they have a map and can point out the bad areas of town. I also ask if there are common scams that I should know about. I’m shocked at how many people arrive in Buenos Aires without their hostel or hotel telling them about the many, common scams all the locals know about.

Carry the business card of wherever you are staying. Hostels and hotels have such generic names that it’s easy to forget and get lost, especially if you’re out drinking.

**One last word:**
If you’re traveling alone and you do get into a situation where people want something that you have, just give it to them. There are some very poor people in the world who do bad things, and unfortunately stealing is one of them. It does not mean they’ll go the extra step and harm you.

[**It’s why we have insurance**](http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/travel-insurance/). You can get another iPod or laptop or backpack. Don’t take a bad situation and make it worse by fighting back.

My goal is to be aware, not afraid. I take steps to minimize risk, but sometimes it’s all about luck.



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