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Smart and Secure Traveling: Tips to Ensure you're not Robbed of a Great Vacation

Your dream vacation may involve beautiful beaches, inspiring art galleries and museums, gourmet food or ancient ruins. No one wants to spend this precious time on the phone to insurance companies back home, hanging out in government buildings replacing valuable documents or in a hospital waiting room. By following these tips, you can stay safe and secure while traveling so that your dream vacation remains just that.

Start smart. If you're going abroad, be sure that you visit your family doctor six to eight weeks before your departure. Depending on your destination, you may need vaccinations and medications, or simply a refill on your prescriptions. Certain countries make these vaccinations and medications an entry requirement so be sure to check your destinations regulations before you leave. Pack for any situation because preventative over-the-counter drugs for allergies, nausea, diarrhea etc. can sometimes be difficult to find.

Be prepared. Take the time before your trip to make paper and electronic copies of important documents including passports, visas, identification, driver's licenses and itineraries. Leave one copy with family at home and pack the other one with you, separate from the originals. Check with the appropriate government websites to find out if a travel advisory has been issued for your destination. If your existing insurance plan doesn't cover you out of the country, purchase a short-term policy. Otherwise, you may find yourself stranded somewhere with a sense of regret and an expensive bill.

Don't be a target. Unfortunately, being robbed of your wallet, camera and other valuables is an all too common traveling tale. Tourists stand out, so your best defense is to be inconspicuous. Nothing says "tourist" more than someone with their head glued to a map and a camera around their neck. Be aware of your surroundings, keep your valuables out of sight and don't carry excessive amounts of cash. One of the safest places to store things is in a money belt under your clothes. Better still; leave your valuables in a hotel safe.

Watch your food and water. You can catch dangerous diseases like hepatitis A and typhoid fever through contaminated food or water. Depending on the country you visit, you may need to:

- Drink only commercially bottled or boiled water and steer clear of ice cubes.
- "Boil it, cook it, peel it or leave it" when it comes to eating fruits and vegetables.
- Choose well-cooked food to lower your risk of getting sick.
- Avoid unpasteurized dairy products.
- Enjoy oceans and pools and instead of fresh water swimming.

Even if you're sticking closer to home, you might encounter tummy troubles if you're mostly eating on the road. Stick to lighter snack options such as fruits, vegetables and whole grain crackers and try to skip greasy drive-thru food options as much as possible.

Beat the bugs. Insects are carriers of disease in many places—even in North America. Protect yourself from bug bites by wearing insect repellent, wearing light colored clothing and covering exposed skin. Inspect your body for ticks, and if you're in a malaria zone, make sure you are taking prescribed anti-malarial medication. Your best defense against insect-borne disease is to not get bitten.

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Consider your transportation. Traffic accidents are actually very common among travelers. When possible, hire a local driver and try to avoid traveling alone. If you're renting a car, request a brand that you're aware of and ensure sure that it's reliable. Understand both the informal road laws and local traffic rules—which can even be different from province to province or state to state, and be particularly cautious in countries that drive on the opposite side of the road. Avoid overloaded buses and motorcycles and mopeds. Although they're popular with tourists, they are particularly dangerous options.

Although you need to be aware of risks while traveling, don't spend your entire trip in a state of paranoia. By learning about potential health risks before leaving and taking the necessary precautions while you're away, you can have the relaxing vacation you've been waiting for—and very much deserve.