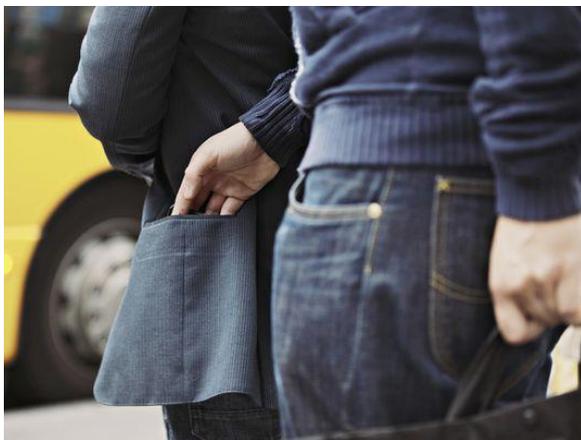


Five myths about pickpockets

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5 pickpocket myths exposed to help you travel safer



Think you know all the tricks to protect yourself from a pickpocket? Think again! These five myths will help keep you and your valuables safe. VPC



Many travelers are concerned about identity theft, worried about a thief using an RFID reader to get their passport info or watching an ATM to steal a pin code. But what about pickpocketing, one of the world's oldest crimes? It may not merit headlines, but it's still a threat to tourists in many parts of the world. The old-school "lift" approach can be as devastating to a traveler as the new-school "tech" approach. Here's a look at five myths about pickpockets.

1. I only travel to countries where pickpocketing isn't an issue.

Those countries don't exist.

"Pickpocketing is one of the most widespread crimes in the world," says Spencer Coursen, founder of the [Coursen Security Group](#). "Anywhere goods and services are exchanged for currency is an area of pickpocketing appeal."

Preparation for theft is a good idea regardless of where you're heading. That starts with making photocopies of key documents, such as passports, vouchers, rail passes and even prescriptions, making sure to leave a copy with someone at home. Having a couple of extra

passport pictures is also a good idea in case your passport needs to be replaced. You might also want to think about your choice of wardrobe.

“It’s an unfortunate fact that when you think about traveling somewhere, there will also be someone who thinks they can take advantage of your visit,” confirms Adam Rapp, founder and designer of [Clothing Arts](#), which makes pickpocket-proof pants and other travel clothing designed to foil common thieves.

2. I’d feel it if someone stuck his hand in my pocket or bag and tried to remove my wallet.

It’s highly unlikely that you’ll feel anything.

“It is a practiced profession, and like any sleight-of-hand demonstration, employs distraction, misdirection and even compassion to enable success,” Coursen says.

Coursen adds that “a skilled practitioner will use their environment to their advantage. Subway cars, busy crosswalks and crowded elevators are all normal ‘bump’ environments where we willingly participate with an expectation of normal crowd dynamics. In this environment, it’s very unlikely you would think twice about someone pressing up against your purse or pocket. “

Rapp agrees that pickpockets are very hard to spot and that the theft is almost always discovered too late. There’s every chance that the pickpocket is far more skilled at theft than you are at observation.

“Working pickpockets, the key word being ‘working,’ train to be very good at stealing from you and doing so without you noticing,” Rapp says. “They’ve done it to many before you and will continue to do so long after they’ve taken your wallet. Thinking that you’ll be sure to catch them trying to steal from you is like saying that you can predict when it will hail.”

Rapp’s product was inspired during a trip to Xian, China, in 2007, a much-touristed city “where theft is a major problem and where signs says ‘Beware of Pick-Pockets’ everywhere.” Walking in a tunnel beneath the giant Drumtower, a major tourist destination, “my companion felt a tug on her backpack. She turned around and spooked the team of pickpockets who were going for both of us at the same time. They disappeared into the crowded mass of people behind us. This is when I looked down at the wide open pockets of my chinos.” So he decided to create a product that puts “security right into the pockets of my travel pants.”

3. I always keep my money and passport in an inside pocket.

Inside pockets of jackets and front pockets of jeans are all commonly thought of as more difficult to access. But to a trained pickpocket, that won't make much of a difference. If they target you, it’s more than likely that they’ll get at your valuables.

“Pickpockets know exactly what you keep where,” says Coursen. “A good pickpocket will ‘mark’ their target in order to determine the likelihood of success. Many pickpockets will surveil retail shops, hotel lobbies, and popular areas of attraction to identify targets of opportunity. “

What are they looking for? Coursen says that ideal targets “are not local, alone, paying in cash or have recently visited an ATM, displaying an inherent vulnerability such as talking on the phone, wearing headphones, or carrying items in their arms.”

Old-fashioned money belts can be useful, says Rapp, since accessing them is difficult for both you and the pickpocket. They can be unwieldy, but offer a level of protection against pickpockets you can't get with standard pockets.

4. I always avoid crowds, so there's not much of a chance that I'll get pickpocketed.

While crowds certainly offer a pickpocket a better chance at anonymity, pickpockets don't limit their activity to crowds alone, Coursen notes. “Pickpockets often work in teams and will orchestrate a scenario to engage their mark. A common scenario may employ a ‘pick and roll,’ a ‘sandwich,’ or a ‘stall,’ where the target will be forced to stop suddenly and then be accidentally ‘bumped’ from behind by the ‘lift.’”

5. When I visit a new city, I avoid bad neighborhoods.

“Avoiding a neighborhood is not exactly going to prevent a good or bad experience from happening,” Rapp says. “Pickpockets will go where the tourists go. Planning your visit and being aware of your surroundings is the best way to not look like a tourist, plus make the most of your visit. “

Many of us know our home neighborhoods very well, Coursen points out, but it's not so easy to be so certain of unfamiliar environments. Street signs don't say "Bad Neighborhood Ahead."

“In most cases, it's an individual's own actions that make them a target,” Coursen observes. “Like lions in the wild, predators don't target the strongest among us, they target the weakest. Being aware of one's own environment is important. But acting with a positive protective posture is more so: Awareness + Preparation = Safety.”

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/advice/2016/05/11/pickpockets/84179812/>