



## Have a Safe Trip ... Really

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By Paul Eisenberg

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Think about how many times during the course of a month you say "Have a safe trip" to loved ones, coworkers, even total strangers. Next, ask yourself how often you take your own advice.

Having been around the block as much as you have, perhaps travel safety is second nature. Just in case, here are a few things to consider the next time you hit the road.

### **Share your itinerary with friends.**

In an era when people can reach us instantly on our mobile devices, distributing an itinerary in advance may seem passé, but take five minutes to tap out the basics of your trip — flight, car rental, and hotel info, as well as the land and cell numbers of anyone you might be staying with — and e-mail it to friends and family. If you're driving, AAA recommends that you also tell some folks back home when you're leaving, where you're going, your route, and when you plan to arrive and return. Further, if you're unfamiliar with the destination, contact someone there and "find out from them which areas are unsafe," says John M. Wills, a former Chicago police officer and retired supervisory special agent for the FBI. And don't think you're insulting friends or colleagues in the destination by suggesting that parts of their beloved hometown might have safety issues; they have the same assumptions about where you live, too.

### **Watch your mouth.**

Sometimes, we unwittingly give out way too much information while we're on the road, particularly on airplanes. There's a false intimacy that tends to develop among passengers and "there are bad people who will take advantage of that," suggests longtime flight attendant Toni Vitanza, who regularly witnesses one passenger learning a great deal about a seatmate who in turn doesn't even know her questioner's name. She notes that she might be "in the jump seat, eight feet from a passenger who will ask 'how long is your layover, where do you live, how often do you fly,' and suddenly you realize this guy knows or wants to know where you're staying."

Hotel lobbies are also not the best places to share sensitive information, says former flight attendant and [Traveling Mamas](#) blogger Beth Blair, who says that single women in particular should never say their hotel room numbers in public. "Write the room number down to exchange it with friends or family on the trip," she suggests. It's also become standard front desk policy to write down, rather than verbally communicate, guests' room numbers upon check in. If a hotel staffer does announce your room number within earshot of other guests, it's well within your rights to request a different room.

### **Follow a closed door policy.**

As soon as you walk into your hotel room, double check that the locks work on the front door as well as any balcony doors, Blair says. And if you lose your hotel room key card, most hotels are accommodating about making you a new one. But err on the side of caution and have the entire family's cards reissued, she says, on the off chance your card was stolen — say, while you were working out at the hotel gym, which she suggests might be "the perfect time to have you card swiped and your room robbed, since you're obviously not there."

Travel writer and mother of two Lisa Oppenheimer admits that she's "one of those crazy folks who actually reads the emergency evacuation info posted on the inside of the door," noting that a hotel where she and her daughter stayed recently "was a veritable maze; every time we left the room, we had to stop and think which hall led us to the hall that led us to the elevators that led us to the lobby. Definitely not something I'd want to be wondering about on the very off chance the halls were filled with smoke." Blair concurs about the potential confusion, noting that it's prudent to show your family where the stairwells are and to count the doors that separate your hotel room from an exit, just in case.

### **Be car smart.**

If you're using a rental, don't flash its key ring, as it'll have the rental company logo prominently displayed, sending a signal to others that you're just visiting, Wills warns. Further, he says, don't get provoked into a traffic incident. "If you accidentally cut someone off, don't be drawn into an altercation. If you do get involved and the driver refuses to let it go, call 911."

Whether you're using a rental or your own car, consider maintaining a AAA membership in case you need their roadside assistance. When AAA members do call up, "the biggest safety concern they have is knowing what to do when a vehicle is disabled in or near heavy traffic," says Geoff Sundstrom, director of AAA public relations. "Although we normally ask members to remain in or near their vehicle, so our road service providers can easily locate them, we first ask if they are in a safe location. This can sometimes mean exiting the vehicle and standing a safe distance from the roadway and perhaps remaining behind a roadside barrier if one exists."

### **Walk like you mean it.**

Periodically scanning 360 degrees while you're strolling around your destination is a good way to stay alert and let others know that you're aware of your surroundings, Wills says. If you want to go jogging, he adds, do it in the daytime only, please, and only in well-populated areas. In all cases he advises "ditch the portable music player once you get off the plane. Walking around with it lowers your reaction time," and lets potential attackers know you're a target.

If things do get hairy and you are confronted, Wills urges that "the worst thing that you can do is to be compliant. Yell, scream 'NO!' and then run in the opposite direction. The bad guy is counting on your cooperation. He's not looking for a fight. If he wants your car, throw the keys in one direction and you run in the opposite direction."

When traveling with kids, Blair notes how all-too-easy it is to lose track of one of them. As a father of three I'll admit to losing one temporarily, which even for a few seconds in a hotel gift shop is not the kind of life-changing experience you ever hope to have. A good precaution on the road, Blair says, is having your child wear an ID tag with pertinent information. You can fashion the tag yourself, or get it from a company like [Spot Me ID](#), which not only makes ID lanyards and bracelets for kids, but also manufactures temporary tattoos that once affixed to your child's skin, allows parents to write in whatever they choose – phone numbers, emergency care information, or perhaps the statement, "My dad is usually a much better parent than this."