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## Be alert for spring break travel scams

NEW YORK (3/7/11)--Spring break is supposed to be fun; you're not inclined to spend much time thinking about tourist scams. The fact is, as a tourist, you become a target for scam and rip-off artists. Spend a little time incorporating scam protection into your travel preparations (*MainStreet* March 1).

Look out for several scams.

*Pick-pocket diversion.* These scammers usually work in pairs, with one partner diverting your attention while the other takes your wallet, backpack, or purse. Examples: Some disgusting substance like ketchup or bird dirt splats on your shirt, an old woman or child falls in front of you, or you get a flat tire.

**What to do:** Protect your valuables by keeping your wallet close to you and checking it while you're helping strangers. Better yet, wear a money belt around your waist. If you really need to carry a purse, get one with a long strap you can cross over your body. If you use a backpack, hide the important stuff in the most interior location, close to your body. Beware: Like a purse, a backpack is easy to snatch if you drape it over one arm or the back of a chair at a restaurant.

*Razor cut.* Do you travel with a large duffel or book bag? One common trick is to target travelers with these containers while they use public transportation. The criminal stands behind you, slices the bottom of your bag with a razor, and steals the bag's contents as they fall out.

**What to do:** If you must travel with a bag, find one designed to protect against razor cuts. Such bags have a wired braid frame so, even if the bag is cut, the contents are secure.

*Smash and grab.* You don't have to travel abroad to be a smash and grab victim. Just leave your purse "hidden" on the passenger side of your parked car while you're running an errand, and you might have the "smash and grab" experience. Thieves look for victims, usually female, who are either driving alone in vehicles or taxis, and wait until they are stuck in traffic. They quickly break the car window, grab the bags or purse, and run.

**What to do:** If driving, leave a half car length in front of you at stop lights so you have room to maneuver if you need to make a quick escape. Use your mirrors to look around at all times. When you're at a stop light or check point, don't fiddle with the radio, daydream, or allow yourself to be distracted while waiting. Don't leave your valuables in plain view in the car, either while parked or driving. Use the trunk or other secure, out of sight places in the vehicle.

*"You have a flat tire, ma'am."* Thieves target expensive-looking foreign cars and rental cars for this, pulling alongside and gesturing to indicate a flat tire. Whether or not you really have a flat, protect yourself. This is a common scam that results in you being robbed.

**What to do:** Make an effort to use a car that resembles local cars. Lock the doors and roll up the windows while driving. Don't pull over until you're in a safe, public place.

For more help with safe travels, listen to "Keep Credit Cards and Personal Information Safe on Vacation" in the *Home & Family Finance Resource Center*.

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### Resource Links

[U.S. State Department Travel Information](http://travel.state.gov/) -

<http://travel.state.gov/>

[U.S. State Department, Spring Break 2011](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/safety/safety_2836.html) -

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/safety/safety\\_2836.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/safety/safety_2836.html)

[Home & Family Finance Resource Center](http://www.cuna.org/finlit/hffrc.html) -

<http://www.cuna.org/finlit/hffrc.html>

[Plan It](http://www.cuna.org/finlit/plan_it.html) -

[http://www.cuna.org/finlit/plan\\_it.html](http://www.cuna.org/finlit/plan_it.html)

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