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How to Avoid Pickpocketing

By [Heather Huntington](#) on March 30th, 2010 – [Edit](#)

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I just got back from a terrific 10 day vacation in Guatemala. Terrific save for one thing: we got pickpocketed.

Both my husband and I are seasoned travelers, and we both have lived abroad. We thought we pretty much had the ‘how not to get pickpocketed thing down.’ Then we went to the highland market in Chichicastenango, Guatemala and came out one wallet lighter.

From this I have deduced the following: If someone **really** wants to pickpocket you, they have a pretty decent chance of succeeding. I overheard one traveler telling another that when he got out of a similar crowd, he discovered that every single one of his pockets had been razored open—the thieves kept going until they found the right one, and he had no idea while it was happening. Still, there are some things you can do to make yourself less of a target, or, if nothing else, minimize the damage:

1. Open purses, back pockets, backpacks = bad.

For carrying \$\$ at least. You want your money somewhere as close to your body as possible, with the highest likelihood you’d notice if a hand went in. This mostly means in the front of your body. Although, even front pockets with zippers aren’t fail safe—my husband’s wallet went missing from the zippered front cargo short pocket.

2. Money belts = good.

The flat kind that goes around your waist and under your pants/shorts. They might make you look a little less slender than you’d wish, but it’s actually not that bad, and it’s better than losing everything. Obviously not great if you’re wearing a dress. Also there is the kind that hangs under your shirt around your neck, although I’ve heard it can be easy for thieves to cut the strings from around your neck so the goodies drop to the ground.

3. Safety pins.

Use them to pin said money belt to your shorts/shirt in the event of just such strap cutting as mentioned above.

4. Spread your money out.

One of the things that saved us was that we didn't keep everything in one place. If they get the money you have in your front right pocket, they might think they have scored and therefore not get the stuff in your money belt. Helps minimize the damage.

5. Leave what you don't need at the home.

That is to say your passport, driver's license, and any credit cards/bank cards that aren't absolutely necessary should be left at the hotel in a locked safe or locked bag. Once again, that way if one credit card goes missing, you'll still have the stuff back there to work with.

6. Make copies of your cards/IDs.

This should include your credit card/passport/etc. numbers, as well as the phone numbers and websites you would need to contact them to cancel them. You should bring a paper copy with you wherever you go, and scan a copy and email it to yourself. My husband and I were able to use a hotel computer and phone to cancel our stolen credit cards within the hour, and that buys a lot of peace of mind.

7. Use what nature gave you.

Men might get to pee standing up, but women have the ultimate advantage when it comes to pickpocketing: the bra storage area. After the theft, people told us that local women often kept their money in their bras, and I immediately leaped on the bandwagon. I might not feel it when someone slips a hand into my pocket, but you damn well better believe I'd feel it if someone jammed their hand into my bra.

Note: lined, underwire bras work better for this, as a wad of cash in a lace bra might look a little lumpy through your clothes. Bras like [Wonderbras](#) with the inserts for the, er, wonder, are the best cause of the built-in pouches (for the inserts) that work perfectly. Obviously, use your discretion as to whether you should go this route or not. I'm not sure I'd be thrilled pulling out a wad of euros from my boobs to gain entrance to the Louvre, but it was perfectly suitable for Guatemala.

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