

Let's Be Careful Out There

Everyone in the travel value chain – companies, travel managers and travelers – has a part to play in duty of care



According to a recently-released survey from SAP Concur, nearly one third (31 percent) of business travelers prioritize their own safety as the most important factor when taking a business trip, yet over half (54 percent) believe safety is not their companies' top priority.

Among the 7,850 business travelers surveyed globally, both men and women expressed concerns about personal safety while on the road. Among all respondents, more than half (52 percent) cite travel safety as the most valuable training their company could provide.

But for female travelers, the risks are particularly acute; more than three in four female business travelers report having suffered harassment while traveling. Consider having your organization's travel program include practical steps to focus specifically on duty of care for your women travelers. Among these guidelines, Christopherson Business Travel advises:

1. Partner with properties that have female-friendly rooms designated for safety, which are rooms on the third level or higher, close to the elevator, not at the end of the hallway, and are never near fire escapes or exterior entrances;
2. Avoid booking late meetings for female travelers that require them to return to the hotel after dark;
3. Use a car service and secure transport between all locations;

4. Provide safety training before trips, particularly when your female travelers are headed to areas of the world that are more dangerous for women;
5. Add communication requirements to your duty of care and risk management plans. Make sure female travelers know what to do and whom to contact if a safety incident occurs;
6. Provide reliable communication methods, e.g., cell phones and cell service, wherever a woman is traveling in the world.

Every business traveler should be able to feel safe while on the road for your company. Making sure you have a comprehensive duty of care program in place, and training your travelers in both the policy and its practical application are essential steps to create a traveler-centric environment.

However safety and security is a team effort. Policies and processes are part of the equation, but individual travelers on the ground and in the air should also remain aware of and alert to the risks to their personal safety.

The following essay by Stephen Barth and Marilyn Faz of HospitalityLawyer.com details steps that every individual business traveler – and especially women travelers – should bear in mind when on the road. The article is available free to download at businesstravelexecutive.com/travelersecurity. We invite you to share this information with your travelers as part of their pre-trip planning.

TRAVEL SAFE/ STAY SAFE



A take-along safety & security briefing for every traveler

By Stephen Barth and Marilyn Faz

Traveling for business or leisure can be both rewarding and distracting – taking your attention away from potential dangers that come with it. If you often travel for business, the repetition or tediousness of travel can desensitize you to the risks.

For some, however, travel safety is always at the forefront of their minds. This can be particularly true for female travelers; a 2018 online survey conducted by AIG Travel, Inc., and the Global Business

Travel Association found 83 percent of women travelers experienced a safety-related event within the prior year.

Whether travel safety never crosses your mind or risk mitigation is all you can think of while packing, the tips and tricks outlined below are simple and easy precautions to ensure your safety while traveling for business or pleasure.

Pre-Trip

Even though some shared service providers like Airbnb have made strides in

assuring safety, for women traveling alone, hotels are still the much better option.

As a general rule, the higher the level of service, the more likely additional layers of security are provided. Check out ratings and review sites, such as TripAdvisor, to glean the wisdom of the crowds – but be mindful that this is only one source of information.

On a business trip, ask if your company has a relationship with a travel advisory service such as World Aware, Global Guardian or ISOS. These organizations can provide pre-trip intelligence and safety/security guidance throughout your trip.

In the cities you'll be visiting, Google "high crime areas" and avoid any potential trouble spots. Also for international travel, download and utilize the Smart Traveler App provided by the US Secretary of State's office which will send you travel alerts and provide the location of the US Embassy.

If at all possible, avoid hotels that allow smoking or e-cigarette/vapor use, as the risk of fire is much greater at hotels where this is allowed on the premises.

Once you have narrowed down your hotel selection, find out if the hotel has an electronic locking system, and ask if they have a dedicated security staff, which is always a plus.

When booking your reservation, whenever possible, choose the third or fourth floor as these floors are considered by safety experts to be best for personal safety and evacuation if necessary.

If you are a celebrity or experiencing domestic/stalker challenges, consider using an alias to book your room, but be sure to let the hotel staff know your real name for security and billing purposes.

Plan to use your phone to access your preassigned room if that technology is available to bypass the front desk and the necessity of having a key card.

Travel/Transportation

Ridesharing services such as Uber or Lyft are common these days. However, it's always advisable to take precautions. Most importantly, do not get into a car until you have verified the car's make, model, color, license plate and driver's name with the information on your mobile app.

No matter how safe your surroundings appear, be sure to ask the driver, "What is



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your name?" Do not ask, "Are you Stanley?" If anything seems wrong or does not match the information on the app, cancel the ride and order another one.

(An extra thought: I am big on air quality, so as soon as the driver is identified, I call to ask if he or she smokes or vapes and if so, I cancel the ride. I find most drivers will reply honestly but that some will say, "I do not smoke in the car," indicating they are oblivious to the hazards of second- and third-hand smoke. In these cases, I cancel, requesting a refund if a cancellation fee is charged.)

When booking flights, aisle seats are best for personal security. Always stand up and move into the aisle when other passengers want to enter or exit your row. If you have the aisle seat, politely advise those in the inside seats to let you know if they need to exit, or to ask the flight atten-

dant to wake you if you're sleeping so that they don't try to climb over you.

Additionally, be mindful about overhead storage bins, as many people become injured by falling objects. Travel with a package of sanitizer wipes and wipe down the arm rests, seat belt buckles and food trays.

Hotel Arrival

Upon arriving at the hotel, the best way to ensure your safety is to be assertive and proactive. Verify with front desk staff that your room is on your requested floor. Only get one room key at a time and double check that the key does not have the hotel address or room number on it.

Most hotels will not announce your room number out loud and will instead write it down on a key cover or pocket card and show it to you. If your room number is



disclosed aloud or seen by others, request a different room and that this one be kept confidential.

Leave the key cover in your room, as it typically includes the name of the hotel (and now your room number), which

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means that if you drop it or lose it, and it contains the key... Well, you can see why that wouldn't be a good outcome.

If you do happen to lose your key, ask the front desk to create a new code before issuing you a new key. Never complain

about having to show an ID to obtain a key, as this is for your security.

Protect your information throughout your stay (i.e., name, room number, etc.). Do not say private information aloud (e.g., hand the front desk clerk your ID instead of announcing your name to the lobby) or in writing, such as at spas, workout centers, business centers, etc. Guest checks that include your name and room number need to be handed directly back to the server – do not leave the folio on the table or bar for anyone to see and pick up or photograph.

Upon arriving at your door, count the number of doors between your room and the emergency exit so that if a fire breaks out and you have to find the fire escape in a smoke-filled corridor, you know how many doors you have to pass to reach the stairs and safety.

When inside your room, always keep the deadbolt and/or security bar engaged. Some guests also travel with a door stopper that can be placed under the door. Travel with a sticky pad and place a note over the viewer.

Unless you are expecting a call, let all calls on the landline in the room go to voicemail.

Do not use the breakfast room service door hangers; call for room service instead. These hangers give strangers too much information and you have no way to confirm whether the form was retrieved by the hotel staff or someone else with bad intent.

If someone knocks on the door, check the viewer to see who it is and ask to confirm. If it is an employee and you are not expecting someone, call the front desk to be sure the visit is official and necessary.

The best practice is for you to be out of the room while housekeeping and maintenance are in it (assuming you secure your valuables, which can include creams, makeup and perfumes).

Remember, a concierge floor is not necessarily a more secure floor, so be mindful of the people in the elevator who get in after you. If you are uneasy, take the elevator to the concierge lounge floor and walk straight to the concierge lounge. A good practice is to be the last person to get on the elevator, that way you can easily wait for the next car if you are concerned about any of the occupants.

If you go to the hotel restaurant or bar by yourself, sit at a table rather than at the

bar. The table seating typically makes it more difficult for somebody to put something in your drink without you noticing. Wherever you are seated or standing, if you have a beverage, with alcohol or otherwise, keep the drink in front of you and have a small beverage napkin available. If someone engages with you, place a napkin over the drink while you are speaking to them. Always be mindful of how much alcohol is included in each drink and avoid ordering doubles or multiple shot drinks. Martinis are particularly potent these days, so beware.

When going for a stroll or run, if you must use earphones, only use one. Pedestrian accidents resulting in injuries and deaths are the most frequent kind of trip-related incidents. Stay alert to traffic,

Do yourself a big favor and take a self-defense class.

horns, and anyone who might be approaching you from behind.

One major thing that can improve your safety and security while on a trip is to already know many self-defense techniques. So do yourself a big favor and take a self-defense class. This will help you become more aware of your surroundings, develop a degree of confidence, and provide basic skills and tools that can keep a challenging situation from becoming tragic.

And Finally...

Whether your travels are for fun or work, always remember to keep safety in mind. Many tragedies we read about in the news would be preventable if travelers take the right precautions and go into situations knowing what can possibly go wrong. While you cannot prepare for everything, by managing the inherent risks of traveling, you can help to ensure that your trip is memorable for all the right reasons.

Hope for the best, plan for the rest! ■

Stephen Barth is the founder of HospitalityLawyer.com., a worldwide network of attorneys, and Marilyn Faz is executive administrative and marketing assistant. HospitalityLawyer.com brings together legal, safety, and security information, resources and solutions for the travel, tourism and hospitality industries.