

Hotel Security

Traveler Summary

Introduction

Where travelers choose to stay during international travel can play a critical role in personal safety and security. Factors beyond those typically considered for domestic accommodations should be taken into account, although many of these considerations apply domestically as well.

Risks vary by location and property and include both high-consequence, low-likelihood events (e.g., bombing, terrorist attacks) and more common lower-consequence incidents (e.g., petty theft, robbery).

Information below outlines key factors to support informed accommodation selection and preparedness.

Before Travel

- Research the surrounding area prior to booking: safety and security conditions vary by neighborhood.
- If possible, avoid accommodations immediately adjacent to major transit points, tourist attractions, or government centers: they are more likely to be targeted by extremist actors.
- Choose lodging with a visible security presence outside and in the lobby.
- Verify access control systems: key card-controlled elevators and stairwells can prevent unauthorized entry.
- Request a low- or mid-level floor (e.g., 3-6): lower floors allow easier access to attackers but higher floors may be beyond the reach of emergency response services (such as firetruck ladders).
- Choose accommodations with a large perimeter (e.g., space between the hotel and the road): a small perimeter offers less safety and protection from attackers.
- Look for physical security measures: vehicle barriers may provide an additional security layer.

During Stay

- Keep luggage within sight during check-in: items could be removed or misplaced if handled out of view.
- Plan for emergencies upon arrival: identify shelter-in-place locations and evacuation routes.
- Become familiar with building emergency exits: locate fire exits, alternate exits, and stairwells.
- Verify identity before opening the door: confirm visitors through a peephole or by contacting the front desk.
- Secure the room when inside: use door locks, security bolts, and chains. Consider traveling with a rubber doorstop and put it in place when sleeping.
- Store valuables and important documents securely: use in-room safes but remain aware that staff may have access.
- Vary daily routines: predictable patterns may increase vulnerability to targeting.
- Avoid public disclosure of accommodations: nonguests may use this information to gain unauthorized access to guest areas to engage in theft, sexual assault, or other criminal activity.
- Report suspicious activity promptly: unattended luggage, unconfirmed staff in room, or persons loitering in hallways may indicate security concerns.
- Verify hotel staff in-room: confirm identity with the front desk if staff presence is unexpected.
- Maintain essential supplies (e.g., bottled water, food, batteries, powerbanks, medicine, etc.): disruptions (e.g., extreme weather, natural disasters, security incidents, or world events) may require guests to remain in their rooms for extended periods.

After Stay

- Review charges at checkout and on statements; unauthorized or fraudulent charges may occur after departure.
- Inspect luggage before departure: items may be missing or luggage may show signs of tampering or contain unauthorized tracking devices (e.g., Bluetooth trackers).

Surveillance and Monitoring

- Assume hotel rooms may be monitored: technical surveillance (e.g., microphones, hidden cameras) or human observation may occur.
- Recognize host-government authority: laws in some countries permit monitoring of hotel guests.
- Expect hotel compliance with authorities: properties must comply with government requirements regardless of brand or ownership.
- Do not interfere with surveillance: interference may be illegal and result in penalties.
- Limit expectations of privacy: activities within hotel rooms may be observed or recorded.
- Follow local laws at all times: legal protections may be limited even within private accommodations.

Protests and Special Events

- Anticipate protest activity during major events: hotels hosting or believed to host foreign dignitaries (e.g., Olympics, UNGA, COP) may attract demonstrations.
- Prepare for restricted access: protests may temporarily block entry to or exit from hotel properties.
- Recognize potential escalation: demonstrations may become disruptive or violent with little warning.
- Expect security response measures: authorities may implement crowd-control tactics, including the use of anti-riot equipment (e.g., tear gas) if protesters do not disperse.
- Avoid entering or exiting during active protests: stay in a safe area away from crowds until the protest is over.
- Review the Safety and Security document for more information on how to handle protests while traveling.

Homestays (Airbnb, Vrbo, etc.)

- Recognize risks associated with homestay accommodations: security controls and oversight may be limited compared to professional hotel operators.
- Protect personal information: hosts in some countries may be required to collect passport images and other personally identifiable information, which may not be stored or handled securely.
- Secure valuables and important documents: hosts and others may have access to the property location despite the “home-like” setting.
- Remain alert for suspicious activity: risks may include hidden cameras or microphones, fraudulent listings, or false claims of damage or theft following the stay.
- Document the condition of the property: take photos when checking in and checking out to support dispute resolution if needed.
- Use secure payment methods: book with a credit card that offers protection against fraudulent charges.