

7 Safety Tips for Senior Travelers (SMARTERTRAVEL.com)

From Liz Dahl co-founder of Boomer Travel Patrol, Steve Hanson senior editor of Senior Travel Expert and AARP.

You don't have to stop traveling just because you're getting older. If anything, it's when you are older that travel means more; a lifetime of knowledge allows you to fully appreciate the new experiences you're having. And if not for travel, what did you work so hard for all those years?

But being older does often mean that you can't travel the way you used to. We are not talking about upgrading from a hostel to a proper hotel. What we are referring to are physical limitations you might need to work around, as well as the fact that as an older individual you've become "numero uno" on a thief's hit list.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to protect yourself and your belongings:

1. **Get Insurance**

While travel insurance is important for people of any age, it truly is essential for older travelers who are more at risk of falling and hurting themselves, getting sick, or needing extra medication if their travel is interrupted or delayed. "Nothing is worse than to be in a foreign land and find yourself in a situation where you have fallen or run out of medication and not knowing what to do or if you'll be covered," Dahl said. She added that insurance usually costs an extra \$100-\$200, not a lot to guarantee that you'll be covered if something goes wrong.

2. **Don't Advertise Your Absence**

Though travelers assume hotels are safe places, the truth is that people with bad intentions can come and go quite easily in most hotels. But a few tactics can help older travelers, who are often seen as better targets, protect their belongings. One tip Dahl offers is this: Don't put the "clean my room" sign on your hotel door.

"Those signs are an open invitation to let people know that the room is empty," she said. Thieves know that travelers usually leave their passports, extra money and jewelry in their rooms and they know how to jimmy open locks. You don't want to advertise that you're not there. Instead, call the front desk on the way out and let them know you'll be leaving and that they can send someone up to clean the room.

A few other hotel tips recommended by AARP include engaging the security chain on your door whenever you are in the room, asking for a room near the elevator (more

foot traffic will deter thieves) and staying away from ground-floor windows where window entry is possible.

3. Watch What You Eat

Like it or not, older folks tend to have more sensitive tummies and are frequently on restricted diets. It's understandable to want to forget those facts while away from home, but doing so can have undesirable side effects. Forget the days you could eat a plateful of heavy bratwurst in Germany or spicy vindaloo in India. Unless you want to spend more time in your hotel room than out and about, you'll probably want to keep the heavy, spicy or cheesy items to a minimum.

Also Dahl points out that some medications don't interact well with certain foods. For instance, you don't want to eat bananas if you're on an ACE inhibitor. If you are taking any medication, call your doctor before you leave for a trip to find out if certain foods popular in your destination are off limits.

4. Mind Your Meds

Speaking of medication, Hansen says senior travelers need to take as much care with their medications as they do their money and passports. Don't pack them in checked luggage and don't leave them lying in the open in your hotel room. And always make sure you've got enough medicine to last you an extra day or two, just in case your flight home is delayed.

Hansen also advises keeping a paper with the names of any essential medicines you take and their dosages so you can try to replace them if needed. If you take brand-name medication, write down the generic name too. Even better, try to find out the name of the medication in the language of the destination you're traveling to.

5. Keep the Blink to a Minimum

One of the perks about getting older is that you can afford things you may not have been able to when you were younger. But carting items like nice jewelry, gold watches and fancy cameras makes you a target for thieves, especially as many "ne'er-do-wells believe – rightly or wrongly – that older travelers are less aware of their surroundings, more unsteady on their feet and basically all around easier targets. This applies to carrying cash as well. Hansen told IndependentTraveler.com, "Seniors are more likely to carry cash around...and more likely to have expensive jewelry and watches than younger travelers."

6. Keep Others in the Loop

If you are going to be traveling solo, AARP recommends that you keep others apprised of your daily itinerary, including your innkeeper or hotel concierge. Tell them where you are going and when you expect to be back; then stick to your schedule. Keep a cell phone on you at all times.

7. Stay Safe on Your Feet

Beyond wearing comfortable shoes in order to get through full days of walking and touring, wearing flats will also help older travelers to stay steady on their feet. Heels, even small ones, can make you more prone to spraining an ankle or falling. Dahl said, especially if you have any balance issues. Flats will help you stay comfortable and balanced. "They don't have to be ugly, just flat." Dahl added.