



You're walking in a crowd when suddenly a disgusting substance -- like bird poop or ketchup -- splats onto your shirt. A scam artist helps you clean up and helps himself to your wallet at the same time.

The solution: These travel scams work by diverting your attention away from your valuables and onto something else. Treat any unusual diversion -- a crowd of beggars jostling you, an old woman or child falling down in front of you -- as a pickpocket attempt.

Check your wallet and other valuables before and during any time you offer help.

#### **4. The "Valuable" Item Scam**

The scams: A stranger asks for directions and then thanks you with a valuable gift, an expensive leather jacket or some other precious item. Before leaving, your new "friend" asks you if he can borrow \$100. The gift turns out to be worthless.

A vendor makes a friendship bracelet right on your arm as part of a demonstration. When you can't remove it, you feel obligated to pay for it.

A stranger finds a valuable ring on the ground in front of you and offers to sell it to you. The ring is worthless.

The solution: These travel scams work by taking advantage of people's greed. Beware of precious item "deals." If something appears too good to be true, it probably is.

#### Getting More Information

Variations on these travel scams are numerous and ever changing. If you travel overseas frequently, informing yourself on some of the finer details about travel scams will pay off.

International travelers swap stories on such websites as Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree forum, which can be found here: <http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com>

Use the search function and type in "scams" for messages that deal specifically with travel scams.

The U.S. State Department's Bureau of Consumer Affairs also maintains a website that offers advice for overseas traveling, broken down by country. <http://travel.state.gov>

Click on their "Travel Information by Country" link and select the country you will be traveling to. The site summarizes crimes and travel scams common in that country as part of the information listed.

For more common travel scams, visit:

<http://www.scambusters.org/travelscams.html>

<http://www.scambusters.org/travelscams2.html>

Also check out these 10 tips to avoid being taken by travel scams: <http://www.scambusters.org/Scambusters87.html>