

Staying Safe in Hotels

Most criminals search out targets who are vulnerable, and usually, people are more vulnerable when on the road than at home. If you are staying in a hotel, here are five things you can do to maximize your safety.

1. Book a hotel in a safe location. Here are some questions to ask when making your reservation: Is there a police station nearby? Is the front desk staffed 24/7 with multiple people? Are there hotel security personnel? Is the parking lot well lit? Does the hotel use security cameras? Does the hotel use programmable cards instead of physical keys? Is access to the hotel limited to specified entrances and is access restricted after hours?
2. Guard your information. Use your first initial rather than your first name, especially if you are a female traveling alone. As an alternative, a female traveling alone could make the reservation in the name of Mr. and Mrs. XXXX. When checking in, don't place your credit card on the counter; hand it to the clerk so a bystander cannot see your name, expiration date or security number. Do not allow the clerk to state the location of your room out loud; it should be written down. Don't post information about your trip on social media while you are on your trip; wait until you return home.
3. Protect your belongings. Do not leave your bags unattended. Maintain physical contact with them at all times, either holding them between your legs or keeping them at your feet. If you have valuables you want to store in a safe, do not use the safe in your room. A thief can carry the safe from the hotel and open it at his or her leisure. If you must carry valuables with you, use the hotel's main safe and write a list of what's being stored there. When you leave the room, turn on the lights and TV.
4. Staying safe in your room. When checking in, ask for a room near the elevator since foot traffic in the area will deter would-be thieves. Do not tell strangers your room's location and why you are staying there. Hotel bars are notorious places for intelligence collection so ensure what you say about yourself doesn't identify you as an attractive target. Have your key in your hand before entering your room. Searching for it distracts you from your immediate surroundings and makes you vulnerable to predators. Do a quick search of your room every time you enter to look for signs of entry. Leave the "Do not disturb" sign on your door at all times. Cover the peephole with a sticky note and always use the security chain in addition to the deadbolt lock on the door. Keep the curtains drawn. Program the hotel's telephone into your cell in the event you need it in a hurry. Know the locations of the elevator and stairways relative to your room in the event you need to leave in a hurry. Finally, do not open the door for strangers, even if they say they are associated with the hotel. If in doubt, call the front desk whose staff can confirm if an employee is at your room.
5. Be careful on the elevator. Try to be the last to enter an elevator and wait until everyone had entered theirs before entering yours. Position yourself near the push-button pad so you can push any floor if you need to exit in an emergency. Be the last person to leave the elevator. Always check to make sure you are not being followed. If you are, call reception and return to a communal area, such as a restaurant, the front desk, etc.

Remember: situational awareness is the single most effective security strategy you can pursue. Predators are always searching for easy marks. Don't be one; empower yourself!