

MoneySense

Common travel scams and how to avoid them

Don't fall for 'the card game'



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Travel scams are the worst. There's no worse way to ruin your mood and vacation than getting ripped off. It doesn't matter where in the world you are, someone will try to take advantage of you. The good thing is, most travel scams are similar throughout the world, so you can protect yourself by doing a little bit of research before you depart.

Here are some common travel scams and how to avoid them.

Broken taxi meters

Despite the fact that everyone knows about them, broken taxi meters for some are still one of the most common travel scams. What happens is that cab drivers will tell you that the meter is broken and try to negotiate a (higher) fixed price. Negotiating isn't a problem if you already know how much the journey should cost you (ask your hotel in advance), but just get in a different cab if you're not sure. Remember, don't use unlicensed taxis ever. Also, if you're at the airport, only get in a cab at official taxi stands.

The accommodation is "closed"

Here's another travel scam that's related to taxi drivers. While on your ride to your hotel or hostel, some drivers will tell you that it's been closed for months, but don't worry they know a good place nearby. Why would cab drivers do this? They get a commission from the other hotel. Obviously, your accommodations aren't closed since you already reserved your room, however sometimes people who made a last minute reservation may think they made a mistake. You could always call your hotel in advance to confirm your reservation or use their shuttle service (if available). Alternatively, just keep telling your cab driver to take you there. They may still insist it is closed, but eventually, they'll stop putting up a fight (maybe).

Free charms/bracelets/rosemary

In many parts of Europe a friendly local will come up to you and chat or offer you some kind of friendly thing that goes on you. In some cases they may come right up and start putting a "friendship" bracelet on you, while in others may just hand you some "good luck" rosemary. A variation of this scam is someone who looks like a monk offering you a lucky charm with your fortune. Once they have the goods on you, they'll demand a tip. If you resist, they'll make a scene in hopes that you'll just pay up to avoid the attention. If anyone tries to put anything on you, give it back right away or resist. If you make a scene, they'll likely move on to the next person. Even if they do get something on you, just stand firm and refuse to pay.

Shopping deals

Many countries specialize in certain products such as papyrus in Egypt or silk in Thailand. There's nothing wrong with buying these things, just make sure you're not overpaying for them or buying low quality stuff. Research in advance of how much things cost and where the most reputable places to buy

them from are. Also, don't confuse haggling with being ripped off. In many countries, it's perfectly normal to haggle on the price. Again, research what's the accepted norm so you don't get ripped off.

The attraction is closed

Similar to the your accommodations is closed travel scam, this scam involves taxi drivers or tuk tuk drivers telling you **that the local attraction you're** interested is currently closed for lunch or for the day. Instead they offer to take you to some other local attraction while stopping at some stores along the way **where they'll make a commission off of anything you buy. Always double check the opening hours of attractions, and make sure you're at the right entrance. You may not realize that you're trying to get in from the closed back entrance.**

Messing with your money

Whenever you head to a new country, you'll want to become familiar with the local currency. Different bills and coins may sometimes look similar which presents an opportunity for merchants who are trying to pull a fast one on you. Always count your change before departing any store so you can make a complaint if **something doesn't add up. It's also a good idea to verbally confirm what bill you're giving people e.g. "Here's a 50" so they don't turn around and say you only gave them a 20.**

The card game

The card game is one of the most common travel scams, yet people still fall for it. Essentially there are three cards (or a ball under a cup / coin under a shell) and you have to guess where the right card is to win money. The people playing keep winning so you give it a try where of course you win too. When you start to **increase your bet, that's when they use sleight of hand to win. You'll always lose to this travel scam and the people around who seem to win every time are in on the scam. Don't waste your money here.**

Dynamic currency conversion

Although this not technically a tourist scam, dynamic currency conversion is something to watch out for since you can get ripped off. Dynamic currency conversion is when you get to select the local currency or your home currency when paying by credit. Always choose the local currency since the exchange rate is set by Visa or Mastercard. On the other, the rate for your home

currency is set by the merchant so they could up the exchange quite a bit. For more tips on currency exchange, [read my guide now](#).

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