TRAVELING THE WORLD SAFELY: AIRPORT SECURITY IN 2019

In spite of not having a major security incident or terrorist attack recently, security remains a concern when at an international airport. Church Security is producing this document to inform Church travelers on the best ways to remain safe while in airports. Far and away the highest risk at an airport is criminal activity, not a terrorist incident. The points mentioned below will help travelers in either situation. The vast majority of suggestions are applicable domestically as well as internationally.

Petty corruption will always be a problem among customs and security personnel at some airports. The demand for fictitious fees and/or fines remains an issue. If an airport official of any kind demands the payment of a fine or violation, never use the term “bribe,” as it is seen as highly belligerent. Instead, always refer to the payment as a “fine” or “fee” when questioning an official about such a payment. You can challenge such a payment, and risk getting into more trouble, or pay it. The decision is yours.

BEFORE ARRIVING AT AIRPORT

- Reduce the content of wallets and purses, particularly cards denoting affiliations, memberships, accounts, etc.
- Dress as inconspicuously as possible and avoid ostentatious displays of wealth. Avoid displaying money, wearing jewelry, or carrying valuables such as laptop computers or expensive-looking cameras. Expensive diamond wedding rings can be replaced by simple wedding bands to reduce risk when traveling.
- Pack luggage in compliance with regulations so as not to impede the process at check-in.
- Don’t fly large numbers of members/employees/young volunteers on the same aircraft.
- Before leaving for the airport, confirm that flight times have not changed.
- Do not share your travel plans with anyone who does not have a ‘need to know.’
- Prepare for the security checkpoints by ensuring that you’ve taken out any electronics and mobile devices before you enter the security line. Be prepared to remove any items of clothing the particular airport requires (overcoats, suitcoats, belts, shoes, etc.)

LUGGAGE

- Travel light; do not take unnecessary valuables. Traveling with carry-on luggage is advisable if arriving at airports with lengthy waits for baggage and poor security. Pack essential items in your carry-on luggage, and keep an eye on your carry-on the entire time you’re at an airport. Never, ever leave a carry-on unattended.
- Once packed, keep your bag in sight at all times. Luggage that is serviceable but inconspicuous is less likely to attract attention and is, therefore, recommended. Check your luggage before you arrive at the airport; avoid moving things around while there.
• Pack important documents, glasses or contact lenses, prescription drugs (in the original packaging with a copy of the prescription) and a change of clothes in carry-on luggage.
• Label luggage with a personal email and/or work addresses only so the airline can contact you, but without giving away unnecessary personal information.

ARRIVAL AT AIRPORT

• Arrive at the airport early when lines are shorter.
• If traveling with a large group, split into several smaller groups for processing.
• Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
• If you see something odd, say something. Report to airport authorities anything out of the norm or anything that causes your senses to elevate your concern.
• Check your ticket and/or baggage claim receipt to ensure it has the correct destination.
• During security screening procedures, keep your laptop in view.
• Minimize the time spent in “landside” (pre-security) areas; get to the “airside” (post-security) area as quickly as possible. These are generally safer than more public areas.
• Avoid glass wall areas and airport coffee shops that are open to the concourse or public areas.
• Be polite and stay calm when dealing with airport security officials. If you are selected for increased screening for whatever reason, continue to remain polite and calm. Getting angry and/or abrasive will only hurt you in the long run.

IN-FLIGHT

• Avoid providing anyone with whom you may get into a discussion with any personal information. Keep any conversation light; avoid controversial issues.

ARRIVAL

• Find out about airport formalities and immigration procedures (if traveling internationally) before you arrive. Most international airports have good websites with this information.
• Continue to be alert and aware of your surroundings.
• Be polite and stay calm when dealing with police and immigration officials, even those who can be self-important and heavy-handed. Remember, they are the country’s official agents and can cause you many inconveniences.
• Do not use your cell phone until you exit the immigration and customs areas.
• If necessary, change some money inside the airport, but just enough for a taxi if your transport does not arrive. Do not display cash in public areas. (This is more an issue on international travel.)
• Arrange to be met and ensure that you will be able to recognize the person sent to meet you. Ensure that you have a contact number for your hotel or host. Alternatively, use a hotel courtesy bus. Taking a taxi from the airport is a last resort. (This is a very important issue when traveling to developing countries.)
• Do not allow airport employees to walk away with your baggage. Supervise the loading of luggage into buses or taxis – do not leave it to the driver. Keep important items with you.
• Do not leave the airport with anyone whose identity is in doubt. If in doubt, ask an airport official.
• Display an air of confidence and/or a sense of purpose. This is not the time to sightsee.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE FOR FEMALE TRAVELLERS

• Observe and respect local clothing customs. Dress modestly to avoid drawing attention.
• In some countries, a lone female traveler is a source of curiosity: you may be stared at if traveling alone. As a precaution, avoid eye contact with strangers, especially on the street and on public transport. If traveling alone, eliminate evening entertainment to business-class hotels or membership clubs. (This is more an issue on international travel.)
• A wedding ring – even a fake one – can reduce levels of unwanted male attention. Expensive wedding rings can be replaced by simple wedding bands to reduce risk.
• Decline politely but firmly any invitations which make you feel uncomfortable, even if faced by amicable pressure to accept.
• Ignore suggestive and/or inappropriate comments.

IN THE EVENT OF AN INCIDENT

• Head in the opposite direction of any commotion. DO NOT GET INVOLVED!
• Be careful about taking photographs. Find whatever safety you can.
• In the immediate aftermath, make reasonable attempts to account for other members of your party. If you are in a group, stay together.
• Have a predetermined rallying point if traveling with a group in case of any emergency or unintended separation.
• Make an immediate and sustained attempt to communicate out. Mobile communications might break down as the volume of traffic increases following an incident. A text message or a landline phone are alternatives.
• If you can, get away from an affected area to a place of safety, such as a major international hotel, a diplomatic mission, hospital, or known office location.
• If necessary, medical assistance should be sought without delay. Any injured people should be accompanied to hospital and you should find out where any injured people will be taken. If you can, seek advice on any private medical facilities.
• Once at a place of safety, continue to communicate. Even when telephone lines are down, email and broadband links sometimes stay in operation. If communications have failed altogether, take whatever steps you can to get a message to the nearest diplomatic mission.

• Do not leave the place of safety without notifying someone of your plans. Attempt to identify other foreigners similarly affected, stay together and pool resources. In general, avoid the temptation to relocate, certainly without ensuring that the route is clear and informing someone outside of your plans.

• The priority at this stage is security and communications, not extraction.

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