

Text Two

Know How the Criminal Mind Works

Think like a criminal

NEXT TIME you see a “Beware of Pickpockets” sign, beware of your own behaviour: clever criminals often linger by the signs and watch passers-by. When they see the sign, people unconsciously move their hand to where they’re keeping their valuables, to make sure they’re safe. This shows pickpockets exactly where to aim for, often indicating a supposedly secure waist belt, which can be removed without the wearer feeling anything.

Other tactics to be aware of include potential thieves standing behind you in a queue at a cash machine watching your fingers, or even pretending to video friends but actually recording you keying in your identification number, to use when they steal your credit card later.



Richard Lefler was walking down a street in Madrid in late 1999 when a passer-by dropped coins at his feet. Instead of reaching down to help the man, Mr Lefler, an expert on pickpockets, immediately grabbed his back pocket – and found he was holding hands with a criminal.

“I don’t know who was more surprised – me or the guy who had his hand on my wallet,” says



Mr Lefler. But it was a classic example of how such gangs operate – one person distracts you, whilst the other slips nimble fingers into your purse, your pocket, your bag.

Never let go of your bag – even in your home town. Attach the strap to your ankle in a restaurant rather than over the back of your chair; hold your bag in front of you in crowded areas, not on your back like a rucksack.

Thieves are constantly reinventing their craft, adding new twists to old tactics. New criminal strategies and danger areas include the following:

Motorbike Snatch and Grab

One of the most common – and potentially dangerous – types of theft, from Malaysia, Thailand and Taiwan to Europe, is when two thieves on a motorbike take bags from pedestrians. There are reports of serious injuries to victims, including a woman whose arm had to be amputated after an attack, according to a Hong Kong-based security firm. Many snatches occur in crowded market or shopping areas.

Since the ploy depends on

thieves coming from behind, always walk against traffic and carry your bag away from the road.

Distraction Tactics

Be it dropped coins, splattered ketchup on a shirt, or a stray child asking for change, thieves are adept at drawing your attention away from your valuables. Tourists are perfect targets, not only because they usually carry more cash, but also because in an unfamiliar place they are easier to distract. If something unusual happens while you are travelling, there’s probably a reason for it.

Pickpocket teams operate on public transport, especially buses. Whoever takes the wallet, usually passes it to someone standing behind them. By the time the victim notices, the accomplice is already out of the bus or tram.

Credit Card Copying

Thieves have come up with another way to steal the information on your card using waitresses, hotel and shop staff. When customers hand over their credit cards for payment, during the processing a copy is made which is later used for a spending spree. Customers are advised to keep their card in sight at all times.

