

10 common *travel scams* and tips on how to avoid them



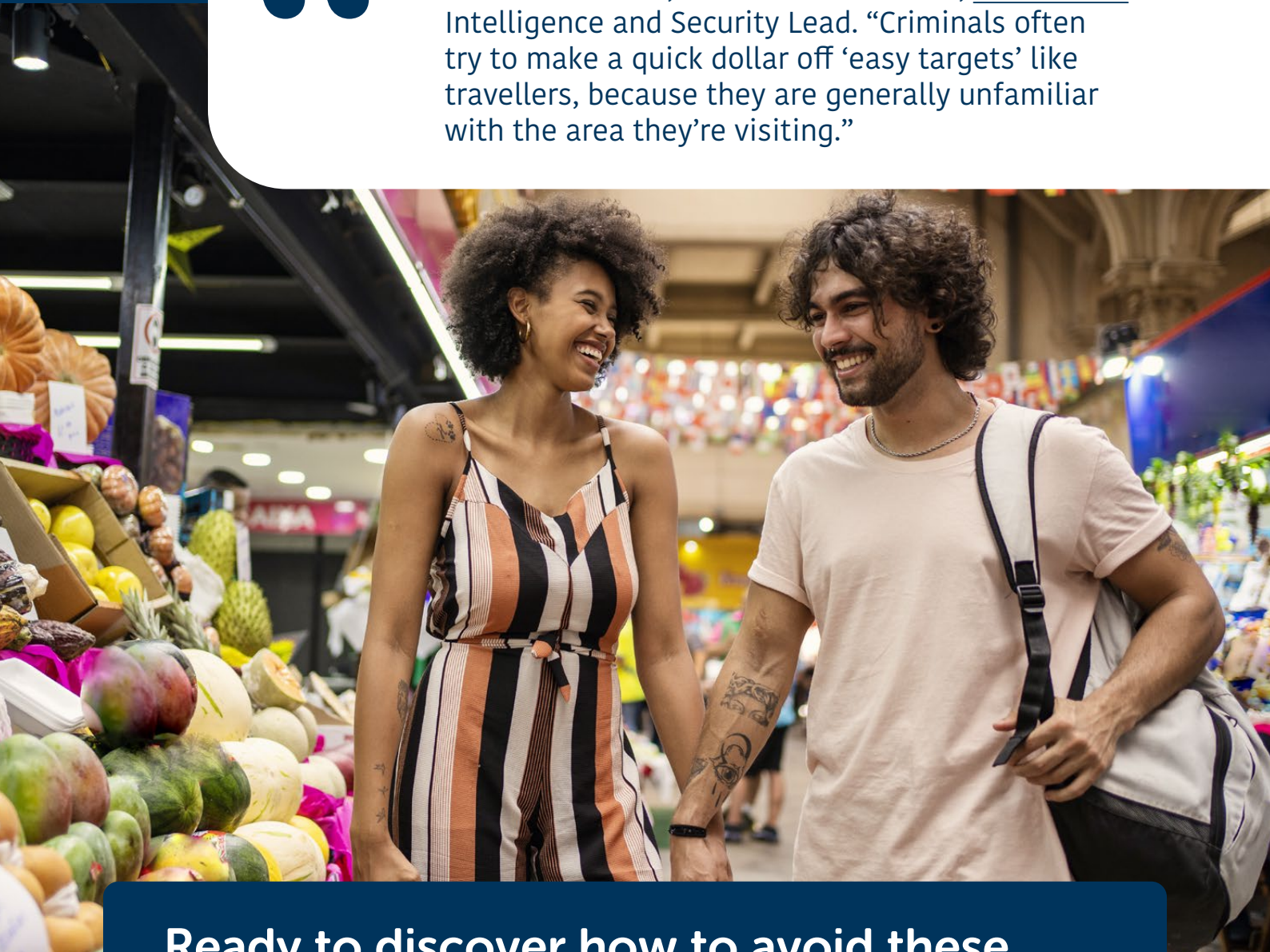
Think tourist scams are a myth?

Sadly, scammers targeting travellers is more common than you may realise. To help you travel smarter – and safer – here are helpful tips on how to avoid travel scams on your next holiday.

It's easy to understand why travellers can get caught out by scammers looking to take advantage of tourists: we're often wrapped up in the excitement of being on holiday and focused on having fun.

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Unfortunately, tourist scams are all too common across the world,” reveals Paul Trotter, Cover-More Intelligence and Security Lead. “Criminals often try to make a quick dollar off ‘easy targets’ like travellers, because they are generally unfamiliar with the area they’re visiting.”



Ready to discover how to avoid these common travel scams on your next trip?

Travel scam #1: The 'friendly' local

The top tourist scam is when someone approaches you under the guise of being a friendly local, and offers to help you with directions, recommendations for restaurants and attractions, or to show you around town. While this may seem harmless, it's often an attempt to get close to tourists and pickpocket or steal belongings.

"It can often be tricky to determine if your interactions with a local is genuine or a tourist scam. If you're approached by someone who seems to be friendly, be sure to keep your guard up, ensure your belongings are secure, and don't let them get too close," warns Paul.

"If you do catch someone trying to steal from you, it's best to draw attention to yourself – and them. Loudly ask what they are doing or make an exclamation and they will often retreat quickly. That said, if the person appears like they may harm you it's best to comply. No belongings are worth risking your safety."



Travel scam #2: The 'free' bracelet

Ever been offered a 'free' bracelet or necklace? You're not alone – it is one of the most common travel scams across many European cities.

In this scam, someone approaches you on the street and offers to put a bracelet or necklace on you for free. However, once the jewellery is on, they will quickly try to add more and more, then demand payment for these 'free' items.

“This common travel scam happens quickly – and the scammers can become aggressive if you don't pay up, which can be quite confronting for tourists. If you are approached by someone offering these 'free' items, just keep walking and don't engage with them,” advises Paul.





Travel scam #3: The 'unofficial taxi'

This tourist scam unfolds when a taxi driver picks you up at your hotel or the airport, and then takes you to a nearby ATM so you can take out cash to pay them. The scamming driver will usually say this is because credit cards are not accepted, or they don't have change for your large bill. Once you get cash out of the ATM, they grab the money and drive off without taking you to your end destination.

How can travellers avoid travel scams like this? Only take licensed taxis or use pre-paid ride services, and don't let the driver take you to an ATM.

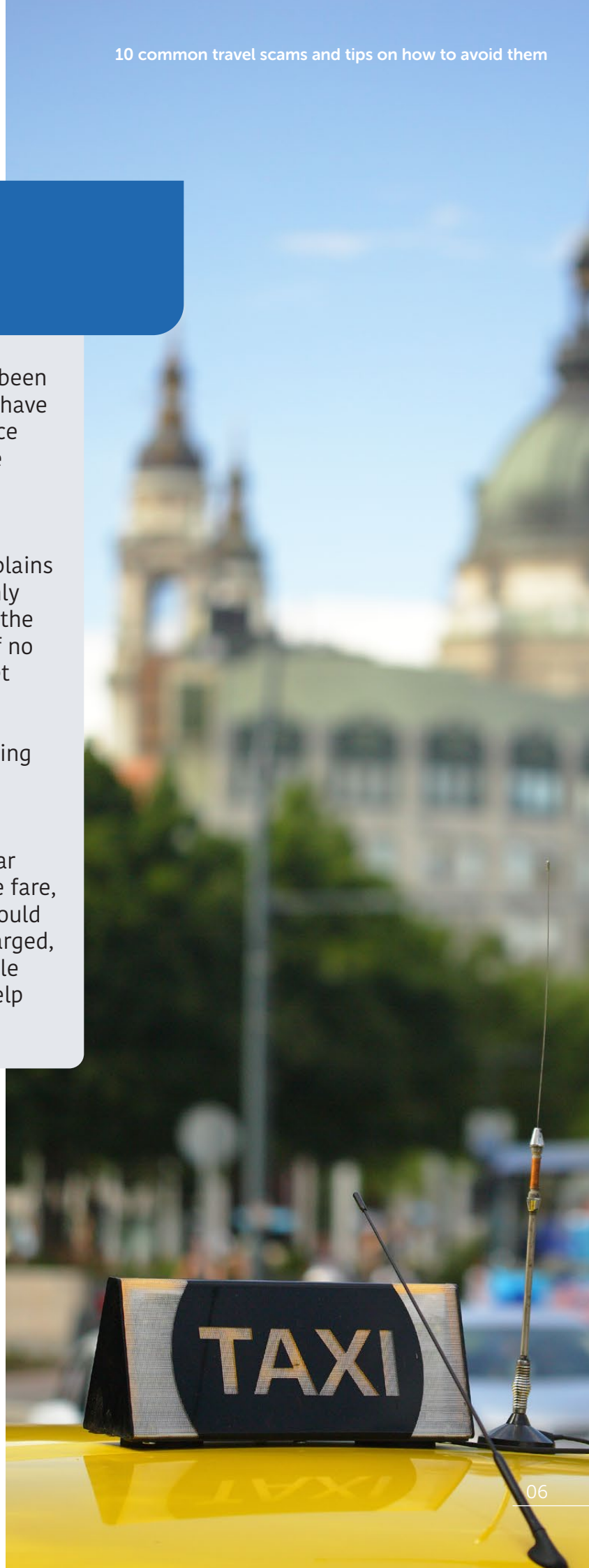
Travel scam #4: 'Broken' taxi meter

Have you ever stepped into a taxi and been told the meter isn't working and you'll have to pay a set price? If so, there's a chance you were taken for a ride by one of the most popular tourist scams.

"Unfortunately, this travel fraud is widespread throughout the world," explains Paul. "It's easy to avoid by choosing only licensed taxis and refusing to get into the taxi unless the meter is switched on. If no other taxis are available, agree on a set price before getting in."

To understand what you should be paying for taxi services on your trip, do your research before you leave home.

"Drivers may prey on tourists unfamiliar with the local area and offer a flat-rate fare, which is significantly higher than it should be. If you know what the locals are charged, act as though you're walking away while negotiating," suggests Paul. "It may help you save money on the fare."



Travel scam #5: The attraction you're going to is 'closed'

So, you planned to spend the afternoon at a popular museum or tourist attraction, but now your taxi driver or guide is claiming your intended destination is closed. Don't let this scenario fool you – it's a common travel scam.

After sharing this information, the seemingly well-meaning guide or driver will usually offer to take you to a different location instead; a location that earns them money. For example, you may be led around a shop (controlled by their relatives or friends) or taken to an attraction and forced to pay an exorbitant entrance fee.

“Our first instinct while travelling is to accept help and advice from others. If tourist scams like this happen to you, play it nice and polite, thank them, and insist that you are delighted to go back to your starting point,” recommends Paul.

“Before heading out for the day, ask your hotel or accommodation provider or research online for recommendations for popular tourist attractions. If there are in fact any closures or facts you should know before visiting these sites, they will most likely inform you.”

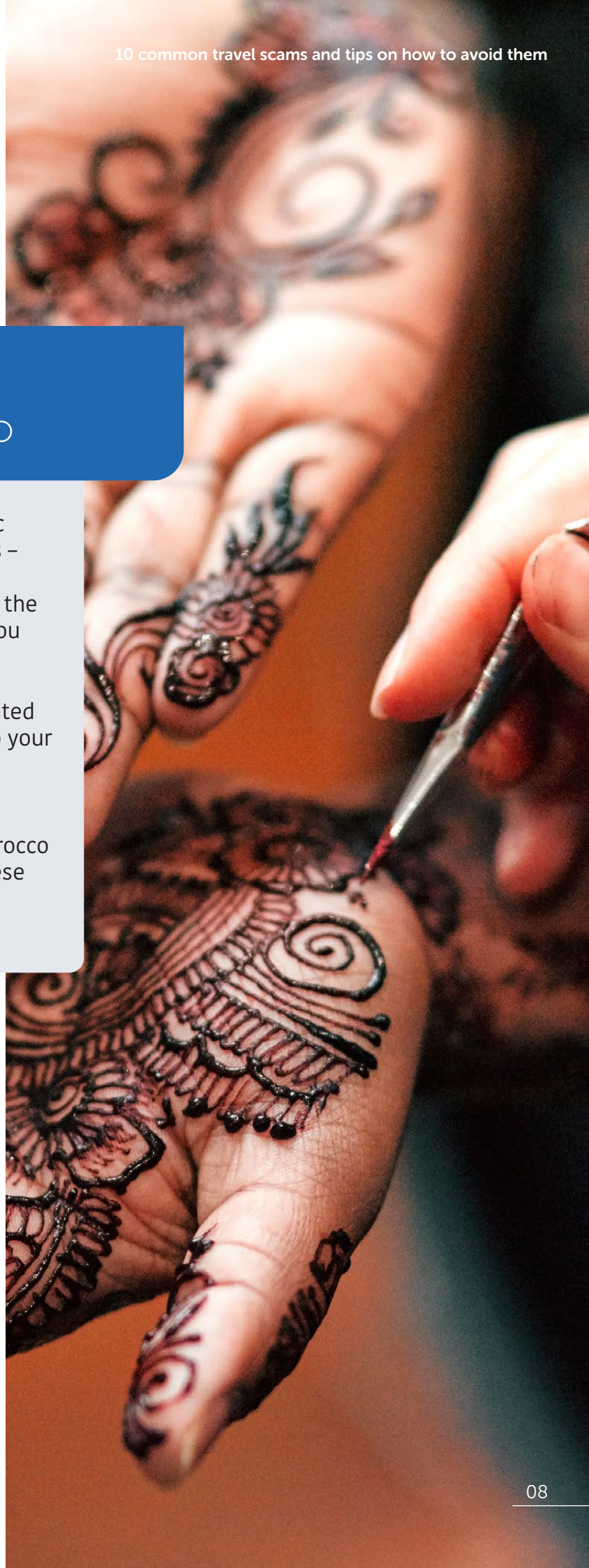


Travel scam #6: The 'free' henna tattoo

To earn a quick buck, scalpers in Arabic countries may offer free henna tattoos – usually notable by their poorly done designs. They'll then ask for money for the tattoo and can become aggressive if you don't pay up.

To avoid getting roped into this unwanted ink, be firm with your decline and keep your hands in your pockets so you look less approachable.

This scam is especially common in Morocco and Egypt, so if you're travelling to these popular tourist destinations, pay extra attention to offers from locals.





Travel scam #7:

The 'filled straight from the tap' jig

In certain countries, it's a common practice for entrepreneurial types to collect empty water bottles from trash cans, fill them with tap water, and sell them icy-cold from a tub of ice at popular tourist sites.

While not as harmful or costly as other common travel scams, this one might make you ill if you drink unsafe local water, such as in regions including Southeast Asia, Africa, and South America.

"Make sure the bottle of water you're buying has been properly sealed; otherwise, don't buy it," advises Paul.



Travel scam #8: The boy and the biscuits

This trick sounds like the title of a bizarre theatre production – and it almost plays out like one. If you spend enough time in busy squares or plazas while you're travelling overseas, you might become a victim or perhaps part of the audience.

In this tourist scam, a vendor (usually a young child) will have their items knocked over by an inconsiderate passer-by. There will be some commotion, the seller will be devastated and cry over the ruined goods...before the guilty-feeling tourist parts with some money to cheer them up.

If you wait in the area long enough, you'll often see the child return, selling the same biscuits they collected from the ground prior.



Travel scam #9:

The unofficial tourist guide

One of the tourist scams travellers often fall for is being approached by a so-called 'guide' outside an attraction, who tries to convince you that you need their help.

Travelling scams like this are popular worldwide, but particularly in countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Egypt.

If you accept the person's help and don't agree on a price upfront, they may end up charging you a large amount of money.

"The best way to avoid this scam is to see what other people are doing around you before agreeing to anything," explains Paul. "In many cases, you won't need a guide at all – simply taking an information brochure or grabbing an audio headset will suffice."





Travel scam #10: The sauce trick

Tourist scams like this aim to divert your attention away from your valuables by focusing on something else. For example, you're suddenly splashed or squirted with sauce by a fellow diner or passer-by. They will then point it out and offer to clean it off for you. Meanwhile, they or an accomplice will steal your valuables while you're distracted.

“Other methods pickpockets may use to fool you include being jostled by local kids, someone pretending to faint, being wooed by a local, or having a cat or young child thrown at you,” explains Paul. “The key is not to react too quickly when anything seems unusual and suspicious.”



These are only a few of the many common travel scams used on tourists as they explore the world. And while you may not be able to escape them all, doing adequate research before you travel – and familiarising yourself with common local scams at your destination – may help you avoid becoming a victim.

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“If you are ever approached by someone suspicious, just keep walking and don't engage,” recommends Paul. “It's the simplest way to avoid being scammed while travelling.”



Cover your *holiday* with travel insurance



Falling victim to a common travel scam is just one of the things that can go wrong on holidays. And while travel insurance can't prevent bad things from happening while you're travelling, it may help make your life easier – and provide financial reimbursement – when things do go wrong.

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