

# Survival Guide

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# Scams

India has a deserved reputation for scams. Of course, most can be easily avoided with a little common sense and an appropriate amount of caution. Scams tend to be more of a problem in the big cities of arrival (such as Delhi or Mumbai), or very touristy spots (such as Rajasthan), though in Goa and Kerala they are rare. Chat with fellow travellers to keep abreast of the latest cons. Look at the India branch of Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree Travel Forum ([www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree)), where travellers post warnings about problems they have encountered on the road.

## Contaminated Food & Drink

➤ The late 1990s saw a scam in North India where travellers died after consuming food laced with

dangerous bacteria from restaurants linked to dodgy medical clinics; we've heard no recent reports but the scam could resurface. In unrelated incidents, some clinics have also given more treatment than necessary to procure larger payments.

➤ Most bottled water is legit, but ensure the seal is intact and the bottom of the bottle hasn't been tampered with. While in transit, try to carry packed food. If you eat at bus or train stations, buy cooked food only from fast-moving places.

## Credit-Card Con

Be careful when paying for souvenirs with a credit card. While government shops are usually legitimate, private souvenir shops have been known to run off extra copies of the credit-card imprint

slip and use them for phoney transactions later. Ask the trader to process the transaction in front of you. Memorising the CVV/CVC2 number and scratching it off the card is also a good idea, to avoid misuse. In some restaurants, waiters will ask you for your PIN with the intention of taking your credit card to the machine – never give your PIN to anyone, and ask to use the machine in person.

## Druggings

Occasionally, tourists (especially solo travellers) are drugged and robbed during train or bus journeys. A spiked drink is the most commonly used method for sending them off to sleep – chocolates, chai from a co-conspiring vendor and 'homemade' Indian food are also known to be used. Use your instincts, and if you're unsure, politely decline drinks or food offered.

## KEEPING SAFE

- A good travel-insurance policy is essential.
- Email copies of your passport identity page, visa and airline tickets to yourself, and keep copies on you.
- Keep your money and passport in a concealed money belt or a secure place under your shirt.
- Store at least US\$100 separately from your main stash.
- Don't publicly display large wads of cash when paying for services or checking into hotels.
- If you can't lock your hotel room securely from the inside, stay somewhere else.

## Gem Scams

This classic scam involves charming con artists who promise foolproof 'get rich quick' schemes. Travellers are asked to carry or mail gems home and then sell them to the trader's (nonexistent) overseas representatives at a profit. Without exception, the goods – if they arrive at all – are worth a fraction of what you paid, and the 'representatives' never materialise.