

Be Safe

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Informational Shorts on Travelling Safe

The Grandmother (Travel) Scam

Lately we've been hearing on the news about unscrupulous people (a.k.a scam artists) who contact senior citizens, pretend to be relatives, and end up asking for money. According to police forces in Ontario, this is a legitimate concern that has robbed seniors to the tune of 1 million each year. Known as the Grannie Scam, this has been practiced - as it relates to travel - for many years.

A scam artist obtains the home information of a traveller. They may have stolen a wallet and found a driver's license or a passport, or in some cases, the wallet is stolen, the information is removed and then the wallet is returned, without the victim even knowing anything took place! The scam artist then contacts someone at the traveller's home and claims to be the traveller's friend.

The call may sound something like this: Hi, this is John and I'm a friend of Jenny. In fact we've been travelling together for the past few days. There was a problem outside a bar last night and Jenny was wrongly accused of being involved and they've put her in jail. She is ok-but very scared and she has to share a cell with other older people. I spoke with the police and they said they can release her if I can come up with \$1000.00. I don't have that kind of money. I only have a few hundred dollars. I told Jenny I would contact the Embassy but she asked me to call you to see if you can help and then she can get out of jail and call you to let you know that she's alright.

This works in many cases. The money is wired to the caller. Jenny of course knows nothing about this; in fact she doesn't even know that her documentation is missing. She is having a great time on her vacation. The lesson in this is to have an arrangement with the traveller.

The Lesson

Some people settle on a secret code word. If Jenny is really in trouble, then she would pass the code word to the "friend" who could relay this to the "family" so they would know that Jenny's predicament is real. Or there is an arrangement for the traveller to call collect once a day or every two days - the call is refused - but that is the "signal" that everything is OK. But it's usually a very good idea for you to contact Canadian Foreign Affairs if you hear of any friend or relative who is supposedly in trouble, and they can then look into the matter.

We are delighted to partner with Steve Gillick (President of Talking Travel / www.talkingtravel.ca) who has been in the travel industry for over 30-years and is a well-respected speaker and travel educator. These are designed to give you information about travel scams and how scam artists work. The goal is to be aware and informed. Still, there is no guarantee that, despite all precautions, you can completely avoid scam artists. We hope you enjoy these and that you travel safe.



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