

# **Staying Safe in London: Essential Tips to Navigate the City with Confidence**

## **Episode 148 of the UK Travel Planner podcast shares tips on staying safe in London**

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Tracy: In episode 148 of the UK Travel Planner podcast, I'm sharing tips to help you stay safe during your trip to London. From avoiding common scams and pickpockets, to handling money securely and getting around with confidence, this episode is full of practical advice to help you travel smarter and, feel more prepared. Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracey shares destination guides, travel tips and, itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands. And from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

## **UK Travel Planner shares tips on how to stay safe and avoid scams**

Hello and welcome to another episode of the UK Travel Planner Podcast. Today we're tackling an important topic for anyone visiting London. How to stay safe and avoid scams. Now, first of all, I'll say that London is one of the most exciting cities in the

world, packed with history, culture and iconic landmarks. We know this and it's generally a safe place to visit. But London is a major city and like any major city, it has its fair share of petty crime and tourist targeted scams. So in this episode I'm going to share my top safety tips for navigating London with confidence, protecting yourself from pickpockets and avoiding some of those most common scams that you will, you may see. So these are the same precautions I take on every visit and I can confidently say that I've never fallen victim to crime in London. So let's dive in. So first, while crime does exist, London is considered safer than cities you might ordinarily consider safe, such as Malmo in Sweden or Hamilton in New Zealand, and has a rating of 44.8 on the Numbeo crime index. So there you go. So with the right precautions, you can enjoy a hassle free trip to London. So these are my top general safety tips. When you're going out for the day, plan your route before leaving your hotel. So because if you're looking lost with a paper map in your hand or you've got your phone out, this can make you a target. So walk with confidence and purpose. If you do need to use online maps, I would recommend nipping into a shop or another building to do so so you don't look too conspicuous. If even me, who knows London really well, I will plan out my trip. So I know exactly if I'm going from A to B, where I'm Going how I'm going to get there and you know, if I'm going to change tube trains, where I'm going to change and I usually write them on a piece of paper so I know exactly what I'm doing. So that's, that's how I plan. And I know London really well. So if you're going to be out and about at night, just stick to busy, well lit areas. So avoid empty streets and shortcuts through, unfamiliar places and neighbourhoods. Also keep an eye on your belongings. Pickpockets operate in tourist hotspots, so always be aware of your surroundings and who is around you and use common sense. If something feels off, trust your instincts and remove yourself from the situation. So those are kind of my general things to consider.

## **Research where you're going to stay and if you're not sure, ask**

Now let's talk about staying safe at your accommodation. So you've got to think about choosing the right place to stay. That's a big part of staying safe in London. So here's a few key tips for that. Research the area so you can join our Facebook group for recommendations from other travellers. You'll find out what other travellers like, about where they've stayed, what they thought about the area. We also have articles on our website that recommend the best areas of London to stay in. We actually have dedicated articles to each of the main kind of areas in central London with accommodation recommendations. So do take a look at that. So research where you're going to stay and if you're not sure, ask on our Facebook group. Read reviews. This is really, really important before you book a hotel and you can check as well on Google Maps. I go onto Google Maps and check the area around where I'm going to stay. What does it look like? But read the reviews as well. I always do this, you know, check, read all of the reviews. Like, I generally will never book any accommodation unless it has an 8 and above on booking dot com. That's where I use for my bookings and I always check that it's 8 or above and I check how old the reviews are. You know, try and find the reviews written by other travellers that are like you. So if you're a solo traveller, try to find those mature travellers or visitors with kids so that you can see what they think about their accommodation. Now one thing we always try to do as well is make sure that there's a hotel safe wherever we go so that we can keep our valuables, locked up in there. don't leave them lying around. Never ever leave your luggage unattended outside your room or in the hotel for you, you know, always have an idea where your things are. and if you are staying somewhere that doesn't have a safe in your room, it's always

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worth asking at reception if they have a safe and then you can leave your valuables there. I would recommend not. Not, leaving them in the. In your room. If you're, you know, unsure, just don't leave them lying around. Obviously keep them with you or keep them secure. Make sure you lock doors and windows. So always double check that your accommodation is secure. So if you're staying in a vrbo, for example, or apart, like we are at the moment, actually we're in Spain, it's in an apartment, but we always make sure that before we go out that the windows are secure, for example, that nobody can climb over the balconies and get in through sliding doors. Make sure that the doors, you know, unlocked before that you go out and double check those sorts of things also, which is really important as well know the fire exit route, so familiarise yourself with evacuation procedures in case of an emergency. and again, I can say we. Doug and I were staying in Cardiff in September and the fire alarm went off at 3, it was about 3am M and it kept going off. So we got up, got dressed, went out. We kind of had already, you know, I always check which is the safe way out of the building, what is the. The exit route in case of fire. So just familiarise yourself with that. If that's on the back of the door so that, you know, if you need to get out in case of emergency, where you're going now, if you get somewhere. And we have had this before, we've been contacted people who've gone to a hotel and they're just didn't. Didn't feel like somewhere they wanted to stay. And it's just the best thing to do is find alternative accommodation, really. If something a hotel, Airbnb or vb, it doesn't feel safe. Don't just find an alternative accommodation. Trust your instincts. you know, and then contact. Contact booking.com or Airbnb or whoever you booked it through, contact them through and say that's you didn't feel safe at that particular accommodation. so that's something that always worth considering. and I know actually we on a PODC first episode I did recently on the global travel panel podcast where Interviewed chatted with Shelley, who does a lot of solo travel around the world, and she's had this happen before where she's been dropped off, at an Airbnb and did not feel safe. So then she managed to, she just said, you trust

your instincts and she managed to get an alternative accommodation. And I think that sometimes you've got to do that. You just have to trust how you feel and go for it and find somewhere else to stay.

## **Leave extra time for your journeys so you can travel slowly and without stress**

Now, getting around, let's talk about moving around London safely. So getting around London is easy. Streets are generally wide with lots of safe crossings for pedestrians and there's an extensive public transport network. However, it's really important, to be aware of your surroundings. Leave extra time for travel because if you're rushing around, that can lead to accidents or careless mistakes because if you're stressed out in a rush, you're not as aware of your surroundings. So leave plenty of time for your journeys so you can travel slowly and without stress. Be mindful when crossing the streets. Remember that Londoners drive on the left, so always check for cyclists before stepping out the road. London roads are busy, so make sure you cross at designated crossing points such as a pedestrian traffic lights or the zebra crossing. Those are the black and white striped crossings. you make sure that you do that. Be really careful because if you drive on the other side of the road, you're going to look in the wrong direction, you're going to look in the opposite direction, the one that you need to look at. So I always look both ways, and also be really. And when I say this about cyclists, I'd be really, really mindful of cyclists in London because they, they seem to go at a million miles an hour. And if it wasn't for Domi or London Photographer recently, I would have got knocked over myself because she pulled me back just as a cyclist whizzed past. I don't know what he was doing far too fast, but you really need to keep your wits about, about you when you're crossing the streets. I really, really want to stress that. Now stay

alert as well. So pickpockets are looking for those people who are distracted. So be mindful of your surroundings. Don't listen to headphones, don't have your head in your book on your phone. You need to just keep be vigilant about what is happening around with you. Keep, in touch with family or friends. So it's a good idea for all travellers, particularly if you're travelling solar. But let someone know what your plans or itineraries for that day. Check in with someone at the end of the day and especially after a night out, so that people know where you are.

## **Stay safe while dining out in London by choosing well reviewed restaurants**

Now let's Talk about staying safe in restaurants and bars. Now enjoying London's incredible food scene. why wouldn't you? Because it is amazing. here's how to stay safe while dining out. So choose well reviewed restaurants, look for good hygiene ratings and busy locations. If locals are eating there, it's usually a sign that it's good. When you are eating in a restaurant, make sure you keep your belongings secure. Don't leave your phone or wallet on the table. if you leave them lying around, encourage snatch and grab. so somebody might just try and snatch it away. Also I will say if you have your phone on your table and this happened to my daughter, somebody came in, put like a whole load of leaflets on top of her phone, picked up the leaflets and her phone and left. Actually it was her phone and it was a small handbag that she had. They took the phone,

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handbag, everything. She didn't realise for a couple of minutes she kind of looked

around and she realised that they picked them up. So really be aware of that. again make sure that you secure bag, loop your bag around a chair leg or keep it on your lap. I always do that. In fact I have cross body bags so I generally keep the crossbody bag on and don't put it on the chair at all. Also, beware of distractions. If a stranger starts causing a scene, it may be a setup for theft, so protect yourself. So don't drape your bag over the back of your chair, loop it around the chair or table legs, I've already said, or even your legs so that you're not you're not getting, they might be distracting so you look away and then they can grab your bag. So just be careful of that. don't accept drinks from strangers. It's always best to buy your own drinks. So those are things to consider when you're eating out in London.

## **Now how about handling money safely in London? Cash or card**

Now how about handling money safely in London? Cash or card? Here's what you need to know about handling money safely. So I'd say avoid carrying large amounts of cash. To be honest, I have really used contactless a majority of the time. I can't even think the last time I used cash in London, to be honest, probably a few years ago when I bought a scarf at Covent Garden and they wanted cash. So use contactless payment if you can. If you do need to pay in cash, try to hide your wallet or purse and only take out the ah, cash you need to pay with. So if you're flashing a wall of cash in your wallet or purse it would could potentially make you a target for thieves using ATMs to get money out. Choose ATMs inside banks rather than on the street. Street ATMs are generally okay, but do watch who is around you and hide your PIN and look out for any suspicious additions to the machine such as a camera. So generally speaking it is safe to use an ATM ATM inside a bank for these reasons. That's why we tend to do that. Obviously protect your PIN whether you know whether you're paying or withdrawing cash. Cover

the keypad when entering your pin. Now I have an RFID wallet so that protects against digital theft such as card cloning. and I do have a crossbody bag which also has that protection inbuilt. So if you want to know more about handloom money in the uk, do check out our previous episode on how to use money in the UK and our cash versus card payment. So we have got a previous podcast episode and we also have articles about cash versus contactless. So I will link to those in the show notes. Now if you use a phone for any money transactions or any Internet browsing, I would strongly recommend using a vpn. So that's a virtual private network. it's used for many things such as encrypting your Internet traffic but for travellers it's so useful for shielding your browsing and Internet usage when using public WI fi. So if you're using public WI fi in London for you know, accessing maps, checking timetables or whatever and it's always a good idea to use a vpn. I use one all the time. So all you need to do is download the app to your phone and switch it on before surfing the Internet. on public WI fi we always use VPN when we travel and we use our provider is surfshark. So again I can link to surfshark in the show notes.

## **Pickpockets are the most common crime affecting tourists in London**

Okay, I'm going to talk about pickpockets. It's, it's probably the most common crime affecting tourists in London and the hot spots you've got to be careful around are ah, Leicester Square, Trafalgar Square, Oxford Circus, at any crowded tube stations. So these are some things to do to outsmart the pickpockets is use an anti theft bag. These have got hidden zippers and locks that make you know, theft more difficult. If your bag looks unattractive to a thief they're probably more likely to move on to someone else. Now I always travel with an anti theft bag. I've got Loads of them. I also have, well usually by cross body anti theft bag, keep it in front of you, never on your back. So if



you're going to use a backpack, carry on your front and busy locations or on public transport or use again an anti theft backpack which we also have now. Another thing that don't travel without anymore is a phone lanyard or you can get a wrist tether. so the reason for this is there's been a lot of phone snatching going on in London. I think it's become pretty much a big problem. It's been in the, in the news and I was reading recently that it's, you know it's, it's really been endemic and I have read some cases where people have been on the phone and literally they go past these thieves on electronic bike, electric bikes and just snatch the phone out of your hand. So I use a phone lanyard but I'm still really careful because the last thing I want is somebody trying to snatch the phone with a lanyard and dragging me down. So you just still have to be really careful. So I don't, even though I've got it on a lanyard, I still don't hold it out. it's just that I kind of took it into my pocket and I'm still really careful when I use my phone. So you can, you obviously you can also tether it to your. I've got a tether that I can put it, attach it to on top of my jeans as well. So for me losing my phone would be a complete disaster because I've got absolutely everything on it. But

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really think about whether you want to use a lanyard or whether you want to use a wrist tether or just clip onto your clothes or keep it in your bag. Honestly it's probably the safest. So you know, consider m those things. as I say I use a kind of crossbody lanyard. so it's rather than being around my neck and just hanging around my neck, it actually goes across my shoulder and under my arm. So I think that's probably safer. But m, I would look into those as a way to you just keep your phone a little bit safer. But as I said you've got to be really aware of your surroundings and concentrate on, on what's going on around you. Don't keep valuables in your pockets. Use a secure wallet or pouch instead. Or you know, dog's got a crossbody pick pocket proof bag that he

uses. if you're on public transport, keep your bag in front of you, secured on your body and stay aware of those around you. So just make sure like if you're on an overland train leaving from London somewhere else, make sure that you can see your luggage at all times and pay particular attention station stops. If you use the overhead rack, keep your luggage slight in front so you can always see it. this isn't about London actually but I did have a time when I was in Paris on the underground. In fact I've seen this a couple of times in Paris and we got on the train, the metro at Montmartre. I got surrounded by a pickpocket gang. I literally could not move and they opened my, my ah, backpack. Now I hadn't secured it was it, it was a theft proof one but it had nothing in it, it had just my clothes because it was my dirty clothes to the weekend. That was all that was left in it. and I had my crossbody bag which I had close to me but I couldn't move. Look at the, didn't get, they couldn't get into the one that was in the front but they did manage to get into the one at the back. Well I'll just say I didn't secure it so my fault but as I say there was nothing in it but obviously they didn't know that and I couldn't move so you just have to be careful. That was in Paris and I have heard of other incidents in Paris where that's been a problem. And people have lost their passports, phones. Do not keep anything in your back pocket because honestly you, you won't keep it.

## **London tourist hotspots attract scammers so be aware of common scams**

Now there are some common scams to watch out for as well. So unfortunately as we all know tourist hotspots attract scammers. So here are some of the most common scams that you may see in London. Street gambling scams. So don't fall for guess which cup the ball is under. Which is a scam commonly seen on Westminster Bridge that I've only seen that the last couple of years but that's been going there. I've also seen actually in

Paris as well near the Eiffel Tower. So I'll just mention if you plan to pop over to Paris, keep an eye out. So any scam where you bet on the outcome is not left a chance. It's manipulated by the scammer. So if you see someone else winning, don't trust them. They're usually in on the scam anyway and they're just trying to encourage you to part with your money. Another one to watch out for are fake charity collectors. Always check for official identification before donating anything. Under UK law charity collectors must be licenced and have a charity collecting permit. So if in doubt you can ask them to see that. You will see people selling the big issue magazine which is a long established magazine from which all profits go to support the capital's homeless population. But make sure the seller has an official licence, seller's badge. If not, wait till you see a seller who has. This way you know your money will go directly to the home homeless people who need it rather than an unscrupulous scammer. Free gifts Be careful. If someone offers you a flower or bracelet they'll just demand payment afterwards. Ticket scams Always buy theatre and concert tickets from official sources, not from touts. People selling tickets outside the theatres and menus. There are licenced ticket outlets all over London or you can use the official half price theatre ticket booth which is found in the middle of Leicester Square. So recommend that be careful about the unlicensed rickshaws. These colourful music blaring rickshaws are a fun way to grab a quick ride. Most drivers are genuine and trying to learn a living but these vehicles are unregulated and there have been reports of scams. So always agree on a price before riding to avoid being overcharged and make sure you get dropped off in a busy well lit area. And I will also say if you are paying by card, double check the amount that they are charging you. Absolutely be 100 sure what they're going to charge before and also afterwards impossible. That would be a time to pay cash so you know exactly what you're handing over. To be honest, I don't take them, I don't recommend taking them personally because it's, I just, I don't know. To me it feels that it's too easy to to be scammed with something like that.

## **London's transport system is generally safe but here are some essential safety tips**

Now staying safe on public transportation. London's transport system is generally safe but here are some essential safety tips. Hold on to your belongings. So if you're sitting with your bag on your lap, loop it through your arm or body again have a crossbody bag makes it more difficult for somebody to try and snatch and grab. Avoid rush hour if possible. Trains and buses are very crowded between 7:30 and 9:30am and from 5 to 7pm stand back from the

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platform, edge right you'll see Mind the gap. You'll probably hear that mind the gap when waiting for a train or tube and when getting on or off the tube don't rush to jump on the tube. If doors are closing you could get seriously hurt so just wait because there'll be another tube coming in a couple of minutes later. Avoid unlicensed mini cabs, especially at nights only use taxis from well reviewed companies, Ubers or obviously the famous black London taxis. Stay alert on Night Busters and the Tube. If you're travelling alone, sit near the driver. The Night Busters and Night tubes are cost effective to get home after a night out. But we do recommend using a pre booked taxi especially if you're a solo traveller. we recommend not driving in London if you can. Roads are busy, congested and you have to pay the extra. You've got the extra charge of the ulez zones which are restricted just cause going to charge you more money. Restricted parking, parking fees and one way systems to contend with. So honestly I used to drive in London. I would never drive in London ever, ever, ever. It was only because I happened to live in central London I had to. Please don't drive in London, please don't. If you have to make sure that you have good sat nav and up to date on UK and London

specific driving regulations. So if you're going to do that we recommend Trip B armo's driving guide to help you prepare for driving in the uk. So if you're really going to drive in London, honestly you must do the Trippiero course 100%. I would highly recommend that you do that. Really because you know I'm British, I've driven in London. Would I drive in London today? No, I wouldn't. So but follow the usual driving safety precautions. Don't leave valuables unattended or on display in cars and always lock your doors when driving. That's really important. Now London's an amazing city and with a bit of preparation you can explore it safely and with confidence and peace of mind. So let's do a recap. Stay away of your surroundings and who is around you. Be vigilant. Keep your belongings secure whether out and about in your hotel. Never leave bags unattended and report any bags that you see unattended because honestly if you don't, somebody else will because we're very conscious of bags that aren't unattended so that will get reported. So do not leave your bag unattended because honestly and be very careful in places like train stations. Plan ahead to avoid rushing, confusion and stress. Slow down and just be safe. Use reputable companies for taxis, tours and tickets. For example book your London Airport transfers and beyond with our partner Riz Avex for cars or tours via our partners. We personally vet all the companies we partner with so you know you will get the experience you expect. Use anti theft bags, phone lanyards and card covers. The RFID card covers just for extra protection. Now if you do need to contact any emergency service the numbers in the UK are 999 or 112. So thanks for Laura who asked this question on our Facebook group. So with the right mindset and thorough planning and preparation you'll have a fantastic worry free trip to London. And remember, trust your instincts and if something is too good to be true, it probably is.

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