

The U.S. Consulate General in Guadalajara wishes to inform American Citizens that the Regional Security Office has received information on recent criminal tactics that have been seen in Guadalajara in which criminals deliberately invade personal space to distract or fluster the victim, making it easy to take their belongings or personal information. Please be aware of these schemes and take appropriate precautions.

Switching Debit Cards at Bank ATMs

An individual (“Jerry”) stopped at a bank to withdraw funds. The person at the ATM in front of Jerry finished his transaction and appeared to leave the building. Jerry walked up to the now-empty ATM and inserted his debit card. The person who had just left the ATM did not actually leave the building, but quietly stood behind Jerry. Once the debit card was inside the machine, the individual leaned over Jerry’s shoulder, took the card out of machine and said, “The card has to go in this way.” He removed the card, flipped it around and appeared to have put it back into the machine and walked out of the bank – however, he actually had taken Jerry’s card and replaced it with an old, expired card. When Jerry entered his PIN, another person surreptitiously watched. Before Jerry realized what had happened, the two “bystanders” used the card and PIN at another bank. Don’t use an ATM in a place where people are near you or are able to see you key your PIN.

Blocking Grocery Carts

While criminals have a history of snatching valuables from grocery carts, the newest trend is for teams to work together to block a specific aisle in a grocery store. The carts are positioned so that an unsuspecting patron has to move the carts or navigate between the individuals to continue down the aisle. While the patron is distracted, one of the team members will take the opportunity to relieve the patron of their belongings. Don’t leave your belongings in a cart; always keep a hand on them.

Express Kidnapping and Child Lock on Passenger Taxi Doors

Yellow “sitio” taxis (taken from a stand) are the recommended taxi options in Guadalajara. UBER, the app-based ride service, is also an excellent option. Hailing a cab from the street or getting in a private car (unless previously arranged

with a known driver), increases your risk of being a victim of express kidnapping or a unique form of pick-pocketing.

Express kidnappings occur when a taxi driver detains their passengers and takes them from ATM to ATM until the passenger's bank account has been drained or they have reached their withdrawal limit for the day.

Another tactic is the taxi driver locks the door or closes it so the passenger cannot let themselves out. Once the person realizes they are trapped, the driver will offer to assist. The driver stays in the driver's seat and leans over the passenger to open the rear passenger door from inside the car. While the passenger's focus is on the door, the driver's free hand can search for a wallet or other valuables. Always tie or zip bags or purses closed while in a taxi, and keep your belongings on your lap.

The "Monkey Gang"

This particular tactic is referred to as the "Monkey Gang" because two or three criminals take advantage of large trees covering the streets. They climb the trees, hide and wait. When individuals are stopped at the intersection, it is easy to climb out of the tree and either steal the car or rob the unsuspecting pedestrian casually walking to their next destination.

Mustard on the Back of Your Shirt

While at a local restaurant, a well-dressed man and woman approached a customer ("Sarah") eating at the restaurant. They "helpfully" told her there was a food stain on the back of her shirt and offered to help clean it up. Thinking the two individuals were being kind, Sarah said yes and allowed one of the two individuals to wipe the excess food off of her back. While Sarah was distracted, the second individual who was not "cleaning" the stain took all of the cash and the debit card from Sarah's wallet and returned the empty wallet to its place.

A variation of the above is for the "bad guy" to trip, drop, spill, or otherwise physically distract someone. If someone is focused on the current disaster, they are less likely to notice someone removing a wallet from a pocket or a purse.

Phone Snatchers

Motor scooter drivers or their passengers snatch belongings – often cell phones - from people walking along the street. The easiest targets are individuals who are

currently talking on the phone and unable to hear the motor scooter driving behind them on the side walk. As the scooter passes, the passenger on the bike reaches out and snatches the phone from the person's hand or phone clip while the driver speeds away.

Virtual Kidnapping Telephone Calls

Although these types of calls vary in style, the methodology is the same: the virtual kidnapper calls a family member (the target) claiming to have kidnapped a family member when in reality, the family member has not been kidnapped. Before hearing the kidnapper, the target hears a crying/pleading voice immediately after answering the call. By subjecting the target to crying and pleading from the supposed kidnapped family member, the kidnapper hopes to confuse the target and get him or her to give away important information. For example, if the crying voice sounds like the target's child in any way, and the target calls out that child's name, the kidnapper now knows the name of the child and will use this knowledge against the target. The criminals try to use fear and timing against you. For example, they plan their calls to coincide with times when it will be difficult to contact the supposed victim immediately (e.g., when children are either on their way to or from school).

Another tactic is for the criminals to obtain two cell phones of two family members. They call both victims at the same time and claim to have kidnapped the other relative. They use fear and the threat of harm to keep both victims on the line while they demand a "ransom." Once the kidnappers are satisfied they have obtained as much money as they can and the family has paid a ransom, they end the call- leaving both family members poorer and confused.

Other variations on this scam use callers who claim to be lawyers or Mexican police claiming to help get one of your family members out of jail (or some other bad situation). They pressure you to pay them to waive charges or pay off alleged corrupt officials in order to free your loved one and avoid a long and expensive judicial process.

Often the callers will make statements to suggest surveillance such as: "We saw you at the school in your truck." The statement is very vague but implies they have been watching your family. By capitalizing on fear and everyday routines, they reinforce the threat of the kidnapping.

If you become the target of one of these calls and you think the call is a hoax, simply hang up.

Leaving the Airport... With a tail

There have been reports of cars following people leaving the Guadalajara airport late at night. While nothing has resulted from this particular activity so far, the indication is that the car will at some point stop the people leaving the airport to rob them.

If you feel a car is acting suspiciously, continue to drive on large streets and in public areas. Do not go home or anywhere connected to you personally. Once the suspicious car disappears, continue to drive in a general area for a few minutes. Adding turns or U-turns into the route will help identify if someone is still following you.