



Adjusting to Your New Home

by Carla Caldwell

A trip to Western Europe several years ago offered an eye-opening realization. There are criminals lurking among those monuments, masterpieces and majestic landscapes.

Sure, criminals have long preferred to hang out where tourists congregate since potential victims are often lost and easily distracted. But the incidences of crime on that month-long trip still seem unusually high. And conversations with others who've traveled the same area reveal similar experiences.

Mere seconds after arriving in Brussels and exiting the train station, a man ran past my companion and me straight to a woman loading luggage into the trunk of a car. Right after the woman placed her purse atop the bags to adjust other belongings, the man struck. He grabbed the purse and ran down the street. The woman screamed and chased after him. The commotion caught the attention of a cab driver leaning against his car. The driver tackled the thief to the ground, reclaiming the purse for its winded owner.

The following night in Amsterdam, my friend and I were walking not far behind a group of service members out for a night of relaxation. In a split second a criminal stepped out of the shadows, tucked his hand gently into a service member's back pocket and scored his wallet. The victim had no clue until we, and others in the crowd, yelled at the thief. The wallet snatcher ran off chased by the military group, but managed to escape in a dark, curving area that seemed to be way too familiar to the crook.

Less than a week later in Rome, one of the city's infamous gypsies was caught sticking her hand into my very own purse as we were jostled through the crowd exiting a train platform. I had been warned not to carry anything but a comb and lipstick in my bag, and had taken the advice, but, hey, that stuff costs money, too. And, I'd prefer not to replace it due to theft. All I could do in the thick crowd, was to turn and yell at her, and give her a sharp elbow which released her hand from my bag.

The same day, while standing outside a Rome train station looking over a map with a friend, a large group of gypsies (women and children) quickly encircled us rattling on inco-



Photo courtesy britainonview, VisitBritain

herently, apparently in an attempt to confuse and further distract us, as they got suspiciously close to our belongings. A police officer armed with a machine gun—as guards often are in Italy—stepped to our aid and basically shooed them away with a warning not to bother anyone else or he'd haul them in...AGAIN!

When the people at the travel goods/luggage store suggest that you get one of those flat pouches to fit inside your pants or skirt to hide money and passports, they aren't just trying to sell you another gadget. The awkward-feeling pouch is worth the few bucks.

Rome is known for its pickpockets. Be aware of your surrounding and continue to stay focused when addressing anyone asking for directions, or other information. And, it's truly sad to have to say this, but be suspicious of children, too. These crafty adults have trained their own children to do their dirty work.

Other general things to note while getting used to your new home:

Outlet Adapters

You've probably heard that appliances made for use in the U.S. won't work in most outlets in the U.K and other European countries. They don't.

And, you may have heard that it's necessary to buy an adaptor kit. Perhaps. Problem is, sometimes those don't work either, depending on the exact type of outlet in your new home, or hotel room, and the volts being transferred through the lines.

If the building is old, you could have a fire. If you do use an adapter and all seems to go well, (no flickering lights or smoke) still don't leave the appliance plugged in while you sleep or leave the room.

Better yet, if you plan to live in the U.K or other parts of Western Europe for any length of time, take the plunge and buy appliances there. TVs especially tend not to adapt well to life across the pond due to different broadcasting signals in Europe. Televisions typically display snow or a rolling picture when an attempt at a conversion is made. Check with the thrift shop on base for items being left behind by departing service members.

TV Taxes

In the United Kingdom, citizens must pay a license if they own a television set. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which provides television service, is a government agency that has the power to tax and enforce laws. The tax is how the BBC helps pay the bills.

The license for a color television is approximately \$190 U.S. dollars, and a license for a black and white TV is approximately \$40. The cost can go up each year and some lawmakers, prompted by howls of angry residents, are now considering if perhaps the BBC should make its money another way.

Church

If you move to Germany and plan to attend church, be prepared to have taxes subtracted from your income by the government tax collectors which will contribute the money on your behalf to your stated church of

choice. Rather than individual, personal contributions to churches like we make in the U.S., the German government's tax agency makes the contribution for you.

Sports Venues and Sports Fans

If you read the larger article about a move to the U.K or Western Europe, you probably read that it may be a bad idea to wear a soccer jersey out and about. It's true. If you do, you risk not being admitted to various pubs

and clubs that prohibit them to avoid fights among fans of rival teams. And, you risk contact with any one of the million over-the-top, and possibly intoxicated soccer fans who just might like a different team. Sure, you could take 'em, but why risk the potential consequences of a fist fight in a foreign country. I'm not saying don't buy a sports jersey, just wear it in the safety of your new European home.
Cheers. ●

Carla Caldwell is a freelancer writer living in Atlanta, Ga.

