



# Sleep Tight: Tips on Hotel Security

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by Sallie Brady | Published February 2009 | Condé Nast Traveler

## Minimizing Your Risk At A Hotel Begins When You Book

### Before You Arrive

In choosing a hotel, treat safety and security as you would any other amenity. Make sure that you (or your travel agent or tour operator) consider the following before reserving a room:

Have hotel staff undergone security and emergency management training in the past year?

Does the hotel have an emergency evacuation plan?

Are background checks performed on all members of the staff?

Does the hotel have security personnel on duty 24/7?

Confirm that the hotel has sprinklers in every room. (Check out [safeplace.com](http://safeplace.com) for other crucial fire-safety tips.)

Avoid rooms facing busy streets or with ground-level windows. Sliding doors that front pools or beach areas should also be avoided. If rooms are directly over the lobby, stay on the fourth floor or higher).

Reserve a room located between the third and seventh floors—away from prowlers who can gain access from the street and within reach of most fire-department ladders.

Women traveling alone should avoid staying in rooms by stairwells and elevators. In off-hours, they should not hesitate to request that a hotel employee escort them to their room.

Don't stay next to government offices, embassies, landmarks, or religious centers, especially in destinations where there's been recent unrest or that have been the subject of a U.S. State Department travel warning or alert.

Only stay at hotels with electronic key-card access. In high-crime cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Mexico City, make sure the property's elevators also require key cards.

### At Check-In

Did the hotel receptionist announce your room number? If so, experts say you should request another room. Properly trained employees will show you your room number—and never broadcast it.

Request a map of the hotel and your floor. Have the bellboy show you to your room and point out all elevators and emergency exits and evacuation routes. Then, on your own, count the number of doors between your room and the exits, in case you need to escape in smoke or darkness.



## During Your Stay

Don't indicate that you're a solo traveler or are not in your room. Instead of hanging the please make up this room card on the door, call housekeeping to request maid service. Also avoid leaving a room-service breakfast-order card on the doorknob that is clearly for just one person. Instead, phone room service before going to bed.

Use valet parking, especially if the hotel's garage is dimly lit or the destination has a high crime rate.

Always ask the concierge about the safety of any area you're setting out to see. Neighborhoods can change and new threats can emerge since the last time you visited or since the guidebook you're using was printed.

## In an Emergency

iJet, a risk-management firm, had 40 clients in Mumbai during the attacks, 11 in the two hotels under siege. iJet representatives talked these travelers through the same instructions they use in the event of a hurricane, a tornado, a biological or chemical attack, or, as was the case in Mumbai, being trapped in a building with armed assailants. Here are key points to follow:

**Avoid windows:** Many were killed after the initial Islamabad Marriott blast because they rushed to see what happened.

**Double-lock your door and barricade it with heavy furniture.**

**Drag the mattress to the center of the room and hunker down under it—the mattress will provide a buffer in case of gunfire.**

**If there is smoke, stuff wet towels under the door.**

**Don't broadcast your whereabouts.** The temptation, of course, will be to call loved ones on your cell phone, but chatter can alert attackers to your presence. While trapped in the basement of the Taj in Mumbai, Judy Hevrdejs, the dining editor of the Chicago Tribune, listened in horror as people screamed into their cell phones to family abroad, "