

Surviving Vacation

It seems like just yesterday was Christmas, but Summer is fast on its way. That means kids will be out of school, allowing families to go off on their summer vacations, a chance to get away from it all and unwind. Different families have different ideas about how to spend their vacation time, but pretty much all travel, going someplace different than where they live, even if they do the same things that they would do if they had stayed home.

But just because we go on vacation doesn't mean the rest of the world does too. Nature doesn't care if you're on vacation or not; she's going to do what she's going to do. If that messes up your vacation, that's just too bad; she really doesn't care. Man-made disasters, like wars, chemical spills, and wildfires, don't take vacations into account; or much else for that matter. Then there are those who do pay attention to vacation time, seeing it as an opportunity. I'm referring to the thieves, pickpockets, and scam artists who will be hard at work during that time.

Police in vacation destinations can tell you horror stories about how criminals ruined different people's vacations, either stealing their money, their credit cards, or their cars. The lucky ones just lose a few hundred dollars; the unlucky ones have trouble even getting back home.

It doesn't take much to ruin a vacation; just ask the people who were on the Diamond Princess cruise ship when COVID-19 broke out early in 2020. Not only were they trapped and quarantined on the ship, but their close proximity put them in much greater danger of catching the disease. Or what about the people who were staying in the Hyatt Regency in Kansas City, Missouri, when the walkway bridge collapsed, killing 114 and injuring 216. Then there are all the people who get caught by storms, earthquakes, tornadoes, and wildfires while just

trying to enjoy some time off.

The truth is, if we go off on vacation like we're not going to have any problems, the chances are that we will have those problems. On the other hand, making an effort to prepare for the possibility of a problem while on vacation can help ensure that if something does go wrong, it doesn't destroy your family's good times. We're preppers, after all, and there's really no vacation from that.

A Little Prior Planning

Obviously, it's best to avoid problems altogether on your vacation, if possible. That's not always possible, but a little online research could provide information, letting you know what sorts of dangers are lurking out there. I certainly wouldn't go to Florida during hurricane season without checking the National Hurricane Center's website first. The same can be said for many other places.

Police will often post notices on social media about specific scams and crimes that are taking place in their cities. That is done as a public service, and it's something we should take advantage of. While I wouldn't change my travel plans due to one of those notices, I sure would keep my eyes open, watching out for the things they have warned about.

Every city has areas that are best avoided by people who don't want trouble. If you're like me, that can cause a problem when it comes to booking a hotel room. I try and get budget-friendly rates, but those hotels are often in the less desirable areas of town. Since I don't want to take up to find that my car has been broken into, I always check on the areas I'm looking to rent a hotel in to see if they are high crime areas. If they are, I'll choose a hotel elsewhere, even if it costs me more.

The idea here is to use the internet to do a little research,

find out what we can, to avoid potential problems. We all spend a lot of time online anyway, so why not use the resources available to us to get information that will help keep our family safe?

Taking Care of Financial Matters

One of the biggest things to destroy vacations is financial problems. Whether those financial problems come from the loss of a credit card, the theft of your wallet, or an emergency with your car, financial problems can turn an enjoyable time into a nightmare.

I always carry a fair amount of cash with me on any trip, but I don't carry more than \$100 in my wallet. The rest is hidden on my body in different places, depending on what I'm wearing. One of my favorite places is to carry it in a money belt under my clothing. I'm overweight enough that there's no way that's going to be seen, and all it takes is a quick trip to the bathroom if I need access to the rest of my cash.

I generally only carry one debit card or perhaps one debit and one credit card on me, even though I have multiple accounts. That way, if something happens to them, I don't end up locked out of all my accounts. Typically, I'll have another card along with me for emergencies; but it won't be on my person. I'll also have a list of all my cards co-located with that spare card, along with the emergency numbers to call all the issuing companies in case I need to report a lost or stolen card.

A few years ago, my wife bought me one of those minimalist wallets that's about the size of a credit card. Although 12 cards will fit in it, the only cards I have in it when I'm traveling are my driver's license, my debit card, one credit card, my insurance card, my concealed carry license, and my concealed carry insurance card. That's still quite a bit if I lose it, but I can't find a way to cut it down any more than

that. The best thing about it though is that I can carry it in my front pocket, where it is much harder for pickpockets to get to.

Is Your Vehicle Ready?

Making sure your vehicle is ready for the trip is one of the most important parts of your preparation, even more, important than packing your bags. Way too many people have car trouble on the road simply because they don't properly maintain their vehicles. Be sure to complete all the standard checks and preventative maintenance, especially keeping up on oil changes. Proper oil changes can drastically affect the life of an engine.

Another big area to be concerned about is brakes and tires, both of which are important for keeping out of accidents. Being forced to get a brake job on the road because it wasn't done before the trip can turn what should be about a \$70 repair and turn it into a \$400 one. Mechanics know when you're on the road traveling and can't do anything yourself. Many of them are quick to take advantage of that.

Vehicle preparation shouldn't stop at just making sure that the vehicle is mechanically sound. That's important, but not all mechanical or electrical problems are going to show up in an inspection, nor are all of them going to be fixed by preventative maintenance. You need to be ready to take care of repairs on the road.

I was on a trip one time and lost the head gasket on the minivan that I was driving while being out in the middle of nowhere. That's not the worst mechanical problem I've had on the road, but it was pretty far up the list. Fortunately, I had a basic kit of tools with me, other than a torque wrench. Even better, someone that I had met before came by and recognized me, so they took me to the auto parts store to get what I needed. After that, I was literally able to replace the

head gasket sitting in a field just off the highway.

A basic kit of mechanic's tools really doesn't take up that much space. All that's needed is wrenches, a socket set, pliers, and screwdrivers. Most repairs can be handled with just that. Few require any sort of specialty tools.

Security

Security can be one of the biggest challenges when traveling, although all it takes is a few basic measures to make you much more secure.

To start with, there's the question of carrying a firearm. As of this writing, 25 of the 50 states have some sort of constitutional carry, although, in some of those states, that's for residents only. I am fortunate enough to live in one of those states, but in reality, it hasn't affected me at all. That's because I've had a concealed carry license for years. Even with constitutional carry, it's worth the extra cost and effort to have the license because that allows me to carry in many other states as well.

Before taking a trip, I always check the states I will be in to see whether my state has a reciprocal agreement with them for concealed carry. I also check any state that I might find myself in, even though it's not part of my itinerary. A few years ago, a man was on an airplane flight that had to sit down in New Jersey because of a storm at his destination. His luggage was returned to him, and he was driven to a local hotel. A couple of hours later, police knocked on his door and arrested him.

Even though that man had no intention of being in New Jersey, he ended up there. Because his luggage was returned to him, his pistol, which had been checked in his luggage, had been returned to him as well. But he didn't have permission from the state of New Jersey to have that pistol; therefore, he was

breaking their law.

There are always going to be places where you can't carry a gun, so, some other alternative is needed. That could be a knife or even just a cane. A cane can be a very effective weapon, especially against someone who only has a knife if you know what to do with it. Just make sure that what you're going to carry is legal where you are.

I've spent a lot of time in Mexico, where I can't carry a gun. Being caught with one bullet in your possession is a 20-year jail sentence, and they don't feed you in their jails. Without family bringing you food or sending you money to buy food, you're in trouble.

My solution is to carry a cane sword. Yes, you read that right. I've got a Damascus steel cane sword, and because I'm a bit on the older side, I can get away with looking like I need it for walking. Knives and even machetes are legal to be carried in Mexico, and criminals, other than the drug cartels, are unlikely to be armed with anything more serious than a knife. So by carrying that cane sword, I'm one up on most of them.

But carrying that gun or other weapon is not the biggest part of my personal security. The biggest part is my situational awareness. Keeping a constant lookout as to who is around me and what they are doing makes me a very unappealing target to criminals because they are concerned that I might have seen their face and remember it. That's the last thing they want, a victim who can describe them to the police.

At the same time, keeping my head on a swivel does two other things for me. One is that it gives me advance warning of any suspicious-looking activity. That's why we do it, after all. But the other is that it helps me to really see the places I'm visiting. I often see things that those with me miss because I'm looking around instead of looking down.

Take a Kit

Finally, never travel without a complete survival kit. The kit I usually travel with when I'm driving is the equivalent of a bug-out bag. That provides my wife and me with everything we need to have, in order to survive, if we happen to get stuck somewhere, even off-road, in our vehicle. I have survival gear, the means to keep us warm, and enough food for several days.

It's a bit different when flying. Obviously, that pack would count as another suitcase, with the appropriate upcharge. Therefore, I don't carry it. Rather, I carry my EDC bag, which does double-duty as a get-home bag. It normally resides in the trunk of my primary vehicle, and while it doesn't have the food that the bigger bag does, it has pretty much all of the critical survival gear. Besides that, it will fit in my (large) suitcase, even with my pistol case in there.

I rarely go on a trip where that kit doesn't come in handy, even if it's for nothing more than toilet paper and a fork to eat with. While that may not seem to be its intended purpose, I carry it for any emergency; TP can be that emergency, especially when you don't have any.