

# Summer Family Travel Safety Tips

By Sherri Bevan Walsh  
Summit County Prosecutor

It's been a long, rough winter in northeast Ohio! In just a few short weeks, school will be out for summer, offering a long-awaited respite from the strict routines we follow nine months out of the year. With summer vacation comes family vacations. Eager to embark on adventures in distant sunny locations, usually the last thing we think about is safety. Unfortunately, we can easily become targets for criminals in tourist locations, and cases of tourists victimized while on vacation are growing.

While traveling to your vacation spot or relaxing at your favorite destination, always remain cautious of your surroundings. Don't give in to a false sense of security just

because you are in an airport. Always be aware of people around you - in airports, on cruise ships, in hotels, rest stops, while waiting for shuttle buses and cabs as these are places where criminals watch for victims. Having a vacation safety plan ahead of time that clearly maps instructions for your children and others in your family can help prevent you from becoming an unwitting victim of tourist crime.

Here are some tips for family safety while on vacation:

## Hotel:

- If staying in a hotel, be sure to reserve a room on an upper floor (away from the elevators). Criminals are less likely to victimize someone staying on an upper floor of the hotel.
- Keep your hotel door locked

at all times. Use the dead bolt lock, and place the "do not disturb" sign outside the door once inside.

- Do not leave the door propped open while another family member runs for ice or to the vending machine. If possible, go in pairs to the vending area.
- Do not leave valuables in your hotel room when you leave. Lock valuables in the hotel vault behind the main desk. Although rooms have their own vault, the main vault is the only one that holds the hotel liable if your items turn up missing.
- If staying in a motel or lodge, be sure to inspect the room prior to check-in to ensure adequacy of door and window locks.
- Always use the main door of a hotel, store or restaurant - there may be video surveillance that can track your departure and identify any possible suspects, in the event that you/your family go missing.

## Airport:

- Talk to your children about "stranger danger" and the importance of staying close to you and not talking to or going with strangers.
- Develop a plan of action with your children should they get separated from you in the airport. Alert them to appropriate airport security who they can safely go to should they become lost.
- If passing through the airport x-ray machine and the alarm triggers, secure your bags from the belt with security before stepping to the side. Thieves often wait for these situations to quietly steal your belongings.

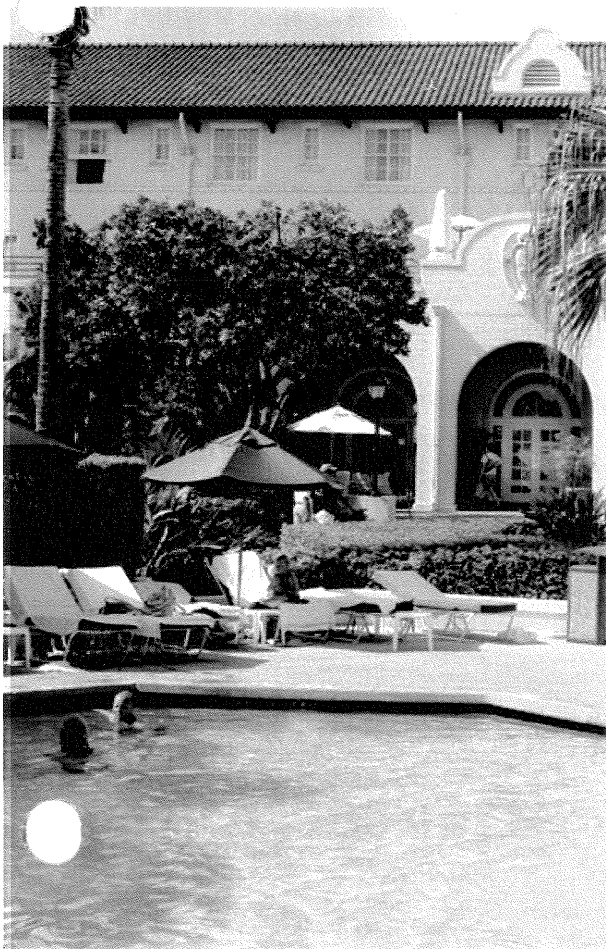
## On the road:

- Plan your travel route before leaving. Print directions from the Internet ahead of time, or take a GPS to prevent getting lost.
- If you do get lost, call a family member or AAA to

help navigate you to your destination - do not rely on asking for directions from a random stranger walking down the road!

- When stopping at rest areas, go as a group to the restroom. Lock your car door when you exit.
- Don't give money to strangers in rest areas. Many scam artists make a habit out of stopping at rest areas with claims of broken down cars and needs for money. Don't buy it! It's sometimes difficult to resist the urge to help someone, but in this case, it's best to be safe.
- Make sure someone at home knows your itinerary; and keep them abreast of any changes you make along the way.

Most of all, be alert - listen to your intuition; if something does not feel right, chances are it's not! Have a wonderful and safe summer vacation!



## SHERRI BEVAN WALSH Prosecuting Attorney County of Summit

Sherri Bevan Walsh has been our county prosecutor since 2001, having just won her third term this past November. In 2007, she was honored as Public Official of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers for her commitment to crime victims. In 2006, she was named Prosecutor of the Year by the Ohio Patrolmen's Benevolent Association for her aggressive prosecution of criminals. In 2005, the Child Support Enforcement Agency, a division of the Summit County Prosecutor's Office, was awarded the Most Improved Child Support Program in the Country for its outstanding work. This year, she is serving as President-elect of the Ohio Prosecuting Attorney's Association after having served on its Executive Board for the past eight years. She was also appointed by the Attorney General to Chair his State Victims Assistance Advisory Board.



In her position as Prosecutor, her goal is to aggressively prosecute criminals and ensure that victims receive support and assistance throughout the criminal justice proceedings. In 2008, her criminal division handled approximately 4,400 defendants who committed felony crimes in Summit County, with a conviction rate of 95 percent.

Walsh has been an attorney in the Summit County area for 23 years. She previously served as an Assistant Prosecutor for the City of Akron, a Magistrate in three Summit County courts, and as a Police Legal Advisor. She also was a partner for 10 years in the law firm of Bevan & Associates.

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