

# Express Kidnappings in Latin America

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Traveling or living in Central and South America should be, and usually is a wonderful experience. With its vast cultural and environmental resources Latin America offers something for every traveler and expatriate. Thousands of individuals especially Americans live permanently as expatriates throughout the region because they have been captivated by its beauty and its citizen's hospitality. Unfortunately throughout the Latin American a dangerous and deadly reality is can also make living in paradise a potential hazard if not careful, "express kidnappings".

Today it is estimated that 85% of all kidnappings throughout the world occur in Latin America. It is also not uncommon for corrupt law enforcement personnel to be criminally involved in kidnapping operations. It is estimated that a large percentage of all express kidnappings go un-reported.

An express kidnapping occurs when a victim is abducted and is forced to withdraw money out of ATM's. Kidnappers will also take possession of all valuables such as watches, credit cards, cash, cellular phones, and jewelry. It is also common that family members are also ordered to make ATM withdraws in order settle the abduction. Once the kidnapper is satisfied the victim is usually released.

Another technique that is utilized is where the kidnapper abducts a victim and negotiates with family members for a smaller amount of money. The goal is to earn a quick and easy payoff without protracted and complicated negotiations. Violence has been used in express kidnappings to impose a fast payoff. The victim is again usually released after payment.

Even though these are alarming facts there are steps that can be taken to protect yourself or a loved one from becoming a victim of an express kidnapping.

Here are some prudent tips:

- 1) Dress conservatively. The flashier you dress the more likely you stand out as a possible target. Blend in with the environment as best as possible.
- 2) Be aware and alert to your surroundings at all times, especially when using an ATM. Know who is around you and what's going on in your immediate area. Look for signs that a possible attack is imminent. Never withdraw money from an open ATM at night. Be prepared to REACT.
- 3) Limit what valuables you have on your possession to a minimum. Keep the expensive watch and multiple credit cards at home.
- 4) Use only well-established facilities to withdraw money and only during day light hours and in populated areas.

5) Avoid traveling alone if possible. This makes the kidnapper's plan much easier to execute. Multiple individuals present a harder target.

6) Do not become confrontational; your life is worth more than a few dollars, or a watch. NOTE: Each situation will be different. You have to gauge your immediate position and determine if escape or fighting back is to your advantage. This can and will potentially be a life changing decision especially if you have little to no combative skills and training.

7) Take personal security training courses or seminars when possible. Learn about awareness, avoidance, and attack recognition skills.

8) Do not become complacent. Just because you have not been a victim of a violent attack does not mean that you should just disregard fundamental security concepts.

Individuals traveling or living throughout Latin America should always exercise an increase level of awareness regardless of their familiarity with the region.

It is too easy to just say that "nothing ever happened so why do I need security". Being prudent and aware will always be the best course of action. Your experience should be one filled with wonderful memories and experiences. It is up to you to be prepared for the unexpected. Remember security is your responsibility.