

Kidnapping Info

The kidnapping and occasional executions of travelers by such groups as the PKK in Turkey, Al-Faran in Kashmir, FARC in Colombia, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, make big headlines but don't reflect the real dangers of kidnapping. Even the recent kidnappings of nuns in Sierra Leone, oil workers in Yemen, researchers in Irian Jaya, journalists in Chechnya, or UN workers in Tajikistan don't properly convey the real threat of being kidnapped. The reality is that only one out of 10 kidnappings become public knowledge. Also, it generates extremely good business. If you happen to find yourself as one of the 200 foreigners who get kidnapped every year, there's little for you to do but hope that you'll be well treated.

Kidnapping is an ancient sport designed to generate cash, embarrass your enemies, find wives and/or force political action. Of the 8000 known kidnappings worldwide, 6500 were in Latin America with over half occurring in Colombia. There are, on average, ten people kidnapped in Colombia every day. The numbers increase dramatically when narco/terror groups like FARC kidnap an entire army garrison as they did last year. Some are multi-million dollar deals with nobody the wiser, and some are quick street abductions with \$5000 payoffs the same-day profits.

The ideal victim of a kidnapping is a mid- to high-executive professional working for a multi-national corporation overseas. Foreign executives in Colombia will fetch \$500,000-\$2 million (depending on your point-man's negotiating skills), usually in a quick insurance-funded payoff. In Yemen over 100 foreigners have been kidnapped by tribesmen since 1993. Most are released safely. They target Italians tourists (over 1000 Italians visit Yemen every year) and businesspeople. Recently one tourist was shot and injured when a busload of 18 inconsiderate Italians ran a kidnapper's road block and were fired on.

Kidnappers can come in all shapes and demeanors. For example, Mexicans demand big ransoms, Peruvians and Brazilians like quick and easy grabs, Filipinos and Venezuelans prefer grabbing kids for cheap bucks, Colombians and Chechens go for convoluted, treacherous negotiations, Yemens and Tajiks treat you like visiting royalty but they are demanding political concessions not your wallet. There is an entire business category run by ex-spooks and ex-military intelligence folks that do nothing but return hostages, and most Americans, still putting their picture on a milk cartons, will get them back safely.

Give the Chechens a gold star for creativity during the war, commandeering buses, airplanes or even ferryboats. Now they snag just about anyone who has a logo on his hat. In the Philippines about 200 people are kidnapped each year. Around 10 percent of them are found dead even after the ransom has been paid.

Latin America is the most dangerous place in the world for kidnappings. More than 6000 people are kidnapped in Latin America every year. Colombia accounts for 4000 of those. Just under half of those kidnappings were carried out by FARC and ELN. The kidnapping business is estimated to be a \$200 million a year, tax free business in Colombia. Brazil accounts for 800 kidnappings a year with 104 in Rio alone. In Mexico, there are as many as 2000 kidnappings a year where the average ransom is around \$5000 for regular folks, but in the multi-million dollar range for bankers and businessmen. About 100 people are grabbed in Guatemala-mostly children of wealthy families and foreign workers. Ecuador and Venezuela each report around 200 kidnappings a year, and Peru estimates 100 hostages taken annually. In Honduras, primarily around the city of San Pedro Sula former Salvadoran guerillas have formed 10 gangs that kidnap about 120 people a year.

Keep in mind that all these statistics don't represent unreported snatches. Colombian groups are considered to be a major exporter of kidnapping to surrounding countries. Their twist is killing the families if they don't get the ransom. If kidnapping slows down they could always work for a credit card collection agency.

Although the media reports the big cases, most victims are ranchers and small businessmen. Foreign executives who work in the oil and energy industries are tops on most kidnapers' wish lists but aren't numerically high because of the security provided. The new trend is to snatch regular folks and then force their relatives to use their cash card to pay the ransom.

These days, Chubb, Fireman's Fund, AIG and Lloyds of London will write policies designed to make sure you come back alive if you get abducted. The premiums run from US\$2500 to \$100,000 a year, depending on where you plan to go and how long you plan to stay. Lloyds of London has experienced a 50 percent jump in policies written over the last five years, and more insurance companies are looking into offering the coverage. What do you get for your money? Actually quite a bit. Insurers will pay the ransom payment, medical treatment, interpreters and even your salary while you are involuntarily detained. The services of a security company to help spring you, (sorry no Rambo for Rent here) is included in the coverage.

Chubb has the best deal in town; annual payments total about US\$1000 for every \$10 million of ransom payments released. If you are deemed to be "high profile" or the target of previous kidnapping attempts, the premium skyrockets to US\$25,000 a year. Kidnapping and ransom insurance for dangerous countries like Colombia cost around \$20,000 a year for a million dollar policy, but expect to pay \$60,000-\$100,000 for a decent sized policy. Coverage is about half that for Brazil. In addition to insurance, armored cars and armed bodyguards are big in Latin America. Expect to pay between \$60,000-\$150,000 for an armor plated Suburban or Lincoln. Armed bodyguards should run you about \$90-\$250 a day depending on the country you're in. One alarming development is the increase in kidnapping of small children of wealthy victims. The only positive note is that the ransom for kidnapped children is a cheap \$2000-\$5000 with usually same day turnaround to avoid expensive diaper bills.

The World's Most Dangerous Places for White-Collar Expats	
These 10 countries are the locations for 90 percent of all kidnappings	
Colombia	Italy
India	Mexico
Pakistan	Peru
Philippines	Spain
Brazil	Venezuela

Expats who live in foreign countries are at most risk, while the casual tourist or in-and-out business visitor are almost risk free. Travelers who journey to remote regions in drug areas face a higher risk.

Kidnapping usually involves a group of men hustling you off the street into a car. They grabbed you because for some dumb reason you were profiled in the local paper as an "important executive and rising young star of Widget Exports." You also have a predictable routine for

leaving work at the same time and walking the last few blocks from the train station. This makes it easy for the kidnapers to be ready with their car, engine running, gaffers tape at the ready.

You will most likely be blindfolded, gagged and bound. If you squirm or bite they'll thump you a few times to settle you down. Your first destination is a house or country hideout where you are kept in a room with no windows. To prove their point, they may photograph you with a Polaroid or record your voice on a cheap hand-held recorder. They may interrogate you to find out just how much you're worth. Then you will sit and wait, and wait and wait. If they don't get their initial demands, they may cause you pain or remove body parts (little fingers are popular) to get their point across. What will eventually happen? It depends.

According to Control Risks Group of London, about 40 percent of all hostages are released safely after the ransom is paid. Not very good odds. Having an insurance policy will make your chances of generating the necessary number of bucks a lot easier. But you won't have a choice should someone try to storm the joint in a rescue effort. About 34 percent of hostages are rescued from their captives before the ransom is paid. Being saved is perhaps a hostage's greatest threat. Let's say your right wing, NRA supporting, big game hunter boss (who voted for Ross Perot) says "Get my boy outta there now!" He sends in a highly trained team of hand picked ex-SEALS, kicked into action by a cigar smoking buzz cut. Oops, he just screwed up.

Approximately 79 percent of all hostages are killed during rescue attempts, according to Kroll Associates. Montesino's annihilation of the guerillas at the Japanese embassy without major casualties was extremely unusual.

So what if your wife won't return the kidnapper's calls and your boss figures he has really no need for you because the temp is generating twice the business you did. Nearly 11 percent of kidnapping victims are released without payment, either through negotiation or the abductors' realization that he or she will not be paid. In Colombia a mere 3 percent of kidnapers are convicted compared to 95 percent in the U.S.

How to Survive a Kidnapping
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Force yourself to be calm and compliant; there is little you can do by reacting violently.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do whatever your captors tell you to do without argument.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate with your captors to make them understand that you want to stay alive.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take control of your mental and physical state. Develop a routine that will include mental and physical exercise.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you think you can escape, do so, but stop if you are under threat of death or being shot.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you are being rescued by armed troops or police, stay flat on the ground.

Make it difficult for your captors to drag you away, but do not resist. The greatest risk of death is during a rescue attempt.

Want to know how to avoid being kidnapped? Stay away from suspect places, vary your routine, keep a low profile, stay out of the local papers, avoid society bashes, live low key, use a driver/bodyguard and stay on top of the local threat assessment.

The most dangerous phases of a hijacking or hostage situation are the beginning and, if there is a rescue attempt, the end. At the outset, the terrorists typically are tense and high-strung and may behave irrationally. It is extremely important that you remain calm and alert and manage your own behavior.

Hostage Etiquette/Survival

- Avoid resistance and sudden or threatening movements. Do not struggle or try to escape, unless you are certain of being successful.
- Make a concerted effort to relax. Breathe deeply and prepare yourself mentally, physically and emotionally for the possibility of a long ordeal.
- Try to remain inconspicuous; avoid direct eye contact and the appearance of observing your captors' actions.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages. Consume little food and drink.
- Consciously put yourself in a mode of passive cooperation. Talk normally. Do not complain, avoid belligerency, and comply with all orders and instructions.
- If questioned, keep your answers short. Don't volunteer information or make unnecessary overtures.
- Don't try to be a hero, endangering yourself and others.
- Maintain your sense of personal dignity, and gradually increase your requests for personal comforts. Make these requests in a reasonable low-key manner.
- If you are involved in a lengthy, drawn-out situation, try to establish a rapport with your captors, avoiding political discussions or other confrontational subjects.
- Eat what they give you, even if it does not look or taste appetizing. A loss of appetite and weight is normal.

- Think positively; avoid a sense of despair. Rely on your inner resources. Remember that you are a valuable commodity to your captors. It is important to them to keep you alive and well.

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