

PERSONAL SECURITY IN HOTELS

By: Orlando Wilson

It is inevitable that in the close protection business you will spend time in domestic and international hotels of some description. Always do your research online before booking a hotel; research crime statistics, ratings from others who have stayed there and check out the area with Google Earth. If your hotel has been booked for you by your company still research the place and if you find potential issues get them to change it. ►

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Over the years I have stay and worked in a wide variety of hotels from five-star to minus-star and boutique to roach house. The standard or security in most hotels is very low and it is not hard for non-hotel residents to go up onto the hotel floors. It's concerning that most travelers expect and believe the hotels they are staying in to be secure, I tell my clients they should take the same precautions inside hotels as they would on the street.

A lot of hotels do not have security personnel, a lot of times they give the security job title to the concierge staff so, on paper they have security personnel and can keep the insurance costs down for the hotel. Even in large five-star hotels they usually only have one security person on duty at a time. In my experience, the standard of hotel security personnel can range from good to appalling. There is one large high profile London hotel where the only reason they have a security team is to keep their insurance costs down. The hotel has 14 miles of corridor, over 1000 rooms, multiple entrances and there is only one

unmotivated security person on at a time- in a place like this you are on your own. Security is usually low on a hotels managements list of priorities, as they are more interested in keeping their rooms full. Most hotels will only do the minimum to comply with local security regulations and keep their insurers happy.

One story that highlights the failings of hotel security happened in the late 90's at a five-star hotel on the exclusive Sloane Street in central London. The hotel policy was that when the female maids were cleaning the guest's rooms they had to leave the room doors open for their own personal security, they were not supposed to be in a room alone with a guest.

An experienced hotel thief was in the hotel and walking the floors; he was dressed in a decent suit with a brief case and looked very corporate. He entered a room which was being cleaned and ask the maid to finish up as he wanted to take a shower, the maid thinking the thief was the guest who was staying in the room finished and left. In a lot of five-star hotels

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staff won't challenge guests as it is not polite to do so, it's all about service.

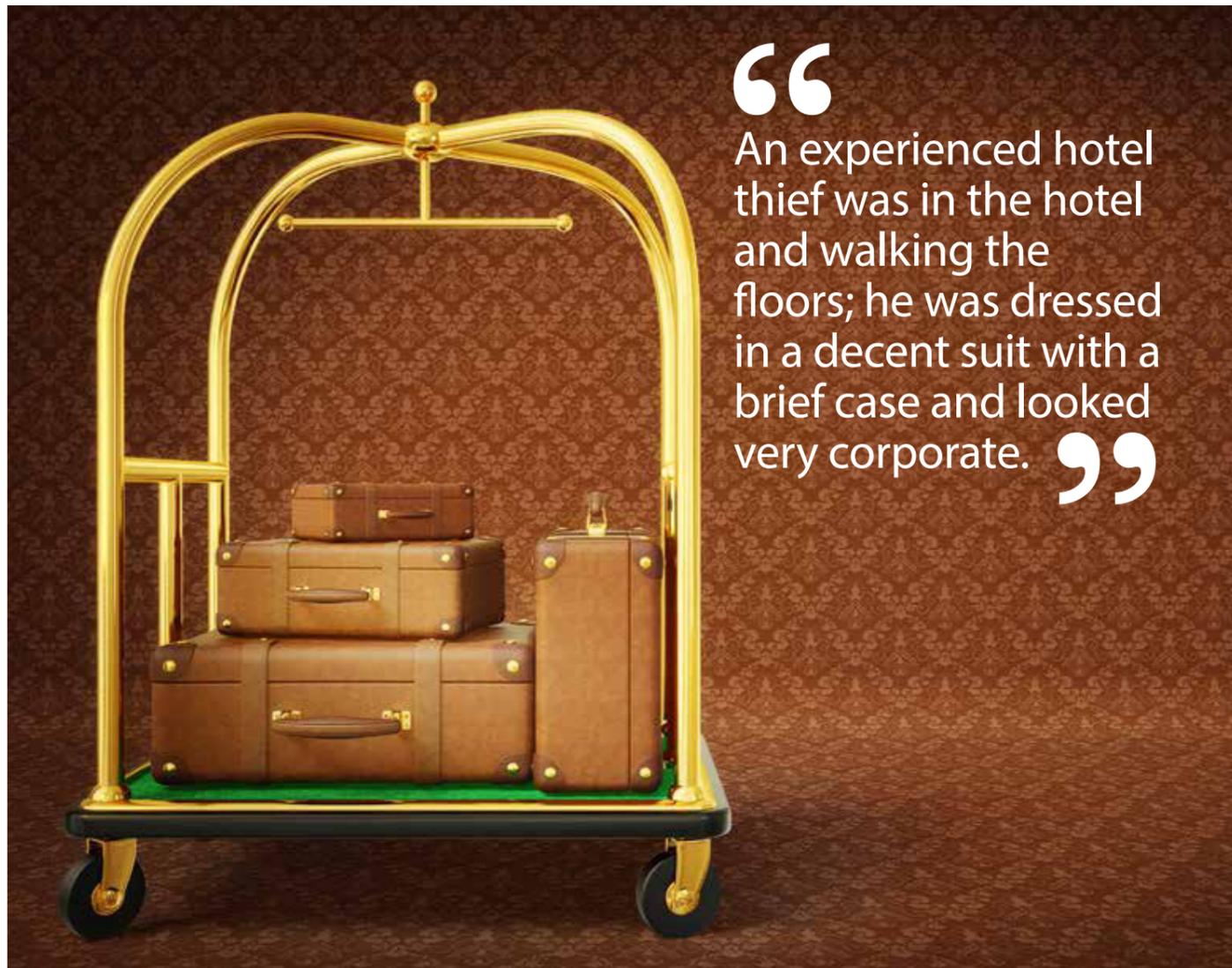
Now the thief was in the room and took anything of value, this guy was a professional and he did not finish there. He telephoned the hotel reception from the room phone and told them he had forgotten the combination to the safe in the room, guest forgetting combinations and safe's malfunctioning is something that happens quite often. So, reception got the duty security guard to go up and open the safe for the thief; the security guard believed the thief was a guest as he was in the room semi-dressed and watching TV. The guard opened the safe told the thief how to reprogram the combination and politely left room. The thief then emptied the safe and left the hotel.

This happened during the day, professional hotel thieves usually operate during the day when hotel guests are out sightseeing or doing business. When the Japanese guests who were staying in the room returned in the evening they found all their valuables were gone and were not ▶

very happy, especially when they found out that the hotel security staff had assisted the thief in the robbery.

It use to amuse me when I was working in the five-star hotels in central London how everything on the surface seemed to be of the highest standard but if you looked behind the scenes it was another story. Several of the

top hotels were using a temp agency that was renowned for using illegal immigrants to supply them with back of house staff such as dish washers etc. This temp-agency was cheap and it's all about saving pennies right? There would Royalty and Politicians upstairs eating Beluga caviar and undocumented workers downstairs opening the tins.



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I was once talking with a hotel security manager in London who had just taken over the security for a very prominent five-star hotel. He was stressed because he had gone through computer that was used for programming staff key cards and found there were over 50 master keys for hotel issued, that were valid and a lot unaccounted for. There should only have been about four master key cards on issue for the general manager, duty manager, security manager and duty security. The reason there were so many master keys on issue was because it was easier to program a card for all areas rather than the specific floors and rooms the individual staff members needed.

Most hotels use electronic key cards but how many reprogram locks and void lost key cards or those guests have not handed in when they checked out. So, combine the fact that anyone can walk into most hotels and they might have a valid key card they have found or bought from an employee how secure do you think you are in most hotels, same as if you're on the street.

Another example of hotel crime took place several years ago to my business partner in Caracas who was providing security for a lady who was visiting for several weeks; he picked her up from the airport and was escorting her around the city. She was staying in a very good hotel and when he was not with her she was in her hotel suite. After a week or so this lady started to get threatening text messages on her cell phone from someone asking for a large sum of money. This was baffling to us as the lady had been keeping a very low profile so, an operation was initiated and the potential extortionist entrapped. It turned out the extortionist worked in the hotel, he was the Fed-ex man and got the ladies cell phone number and details from a package she had received. This wannabe criminal was fired from his job and the police would have been happy to arrest him but the lady thought him losing his job was enough punishment and did not press charges, he was very lucky.

So, hopefully you are beginning to see that security is not high on

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most hotels priority list. A lot of shady business takes place in hotels and they are choice locations for prostitutes, thieves and fraudsters. When selecting a hotel find one that provides you with comfort and security, I don't need five-star services so, tend to choose the smaller and quieter places where it is easy for strangers and non-residents to be spotted.

Security considerations for a hotel stay

- Complete a threat assessment on the hotel before your stay.
- Check to ensure the hotel is not in or close to any high crime areas
- Make sure the hotel is not near any other building that could have a threat against them such as police or military barracks, etc.
- Have a security plan and make sure everyone traveling with you knows it.
- Liaise with hotel staff
- and find out what security procedures they have in place, if they have cameras where are they located, do they work and are they recording.
- Try to check out other guests, you don't want to be staying near a high-risk VIP's, as if they are targeted you might get caught up in the incident.
- Your rooms should be above the second floor and at the end of a corridor; high enough so nothing can be thrown through the window but still within easy reach of fire fighters' ladders. And at the end of a corridor so you are close to fire escapes and will not have to many people walking past your room.
- Locate possible criminal surveillance positions around the exterior of the hotel and monitor them.
- Keep an eye out for suspicious people in the public areas of the hotel.
- Search all rooms before occupation for electronic

surveillance devices or contraband that could have been left by the previous guest.

- If possible let no one into your rooms unattended, use the do not disturb sign to keep out the maids.
- Do not let anyone in your room without confirming who they are with the hotel reception. Think about it, if a man turned up at your door in a security uniform, with an ID badge claiming to be hotel security and needed to talk to you would you open the door, most people would.

Anyone can buy a uniform and you can make ID cards on your computer, always confirm someone's ID with the hotel reception.

- Work out how you can secure the hotel room, check to make sure the windows are lockable, if there is a balcony could someone climb or drop onto it. See if there is anything you can use to block the door such as a chair or table, if it won't stop an intruder it should at least be able to wake you up.
- There are numerous small and affordable security ►

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alarms on the market that can be used for a hotel room ranging from door and window alarms to motion detectors.

- If there is an incident are you going to fight or flee, is there a suitable safe room such as a bathroom and how long will you need to hold out until help arrives?
- Make plans for evacuating the hotel in the event of an emergency, remember do not use obvious evacuation routes as they could be booby trapped or ambushed.
- Check that your mobile/ cell phone works and you are not in a signal dead spot.
- Will you have internet access and will it be secure.
- Do not leave valuables in your hotel room; put them in the main hotel safe, if possible. Criminals can get master keys for hotel room safes.
- Do not throw sensitive information in the trash cans, soak and throw it away outside of the hotel or flush it down the toilet
- If your room has a fridge, do not use any ice cubes, as they could be spiked or poisoned as can any snacks and drinks.
- Always know where the nearest hospital is, what first aid equipment and first aid trained staff does the hotel have.
- Try to blend in with the environment and make plans for every emergency

Orlando Wilson has worked in the security industry internationally for over 25 years. He has become accustomed to the types of complications that can occur, when dealing with international law enforcement agencies, organized criminal and Mafia groups. He is the chief consultant for Risks Inc. and based in Miami but spends much of his time traveling and providing a wide range of kidnapping prevention and tactical training services to private and government clients.

THE PERILS OF LOOKING AFTER OTHER PEOPLE

Do you ever feel bogged down by other people's demands? Or as though, no matter how much you help someone, it's just not working? ►

