

Traveler's Safety Quick Reference Guide

Maintain Awareness of Unsolicited Requests

Recognize subtle approaches.

Experienced researchers may be approached at conferences, dinners, or through unexpected invitations. If an offer seems unusually generous or too convenient, take a moment to verify its authenticity.

Set professional boundaries.

Have polite ways to redirect discussions away from sensitive topics. For example: "That project is under review, I unfortunately can't share details yet."

Manage Travel Data Carefully

Use dedicated devices.

Consider bringing a dedicated travel laptop or phone with only the essentials. Keep critical unpublished data secure at home or on approved institutional cloud storage, rather than on travel devices.

Prepare safe-to-share materials.

Create versions of presentations that include only the information required for your audience.

Plan for Device Checks in Certain Regions

Expect inspections.

In some locations, devices may be examined at border crossings or security checkpoints. Keep devices free of sensitive data.

Scenarios to Learn from While Traveling

At a conference:

A Canadian professor attending a panel was invited to an informal dinner by new contacts. Questions arose about upcoming grants and collaborators. By steering the conversation toward already published work, they avoided disclosing internal timelines.

In a hotel room:

A researcher plugged their phone into a hotel USB port. Malware was silently installed, leading to a credential breach weeks later. The researcher now relies exclusively on personal AC adaptor chargers and power banks.

Regarding opportunities:

A visiting scholar program offered lab space and generous stipends but required signing over joint intellectual property rights. After consulting their institution's legal team, the researcher declined, preserving control over their work.