

Common Crimes in Urban Towns in Kenya

A new scam uncovered in Nairobi and Mombasa reveals, identity thieves who pause as police officers and target people who have withdrawn cash from banks. They literally pounce on victims bundle them in a waiting car strategically stationed outside the bank, the victim is then driven off to an unknown location where all his/her valuables are stolen including the money withdrawn which assailants seem to have prior knowledge of the exact amount. Other common related crimes witnessed in the recent past include:

1. “*Swift grabs*” – where the assailant swiftly grabs a purse when stopped at a traffic light or in a traffic jam and demands for valuables through an open vehicle’s window and flees (commonly during evening hours on certain streets).
2. “*Street Assault/Mugging*” – This is where assailant(s) demand money and valuables at knife/gun point (often 2 to 3 assailants are involved).
3. “*Express kidnapping*” – where assailants kidnap victims for a short period with the purpose of having them take out their daily bank limit from ATM's or abduct their victim, go into hiding and demand for a ransom from victims family – this can happen in taxis, own vehicle or while walking. The frequency of the express kidnapping is on the rise in major towns in Kenya.

Personal Safety Measures

A series of recommendations are included below and if implemented diligently, the different security risks can be significantly reduced.

- Avoid obvious indications of personal wealth and, if applicable, foreign status – avoid wearing and displaying expensive watches, jewelry or valuables and avoid wearing flashy clothes.
- Play down your financial status and image wherever you stay.
- Avoid people who may themselves be potential targets.
- Avoid obvious display of cash and endeavour to limit the quantity carried.
- Minimize carrying credit and bank cards – if possible reduce the use of gold or platinum cards (including corporate cards) as they demonstrate personal wealth.
- Make sure you know your credit / bank card PIN number – in case of quick kidnapping involving bank machine.
- Keep money in front pockets or money belt, do not carry wallet in back pocket.
- Do carry some cash – in case of assault it is better to be able to provide some money or valuables to the assailant so that he may spare your life.
- Avoid carrying any documents with home and family information such as addresses as well as family pictures.
- Avoid carrying bank machine receipts which show bank account balance.

- Offer no resistance and remain calm – do not fight back or struggle and do as the assailants say.
- Do not visit isolated, crime prone or suspect areas, especially at night.
- Avoid daily routines – easy for potential assailant to learn your movements. Vary timing of arrival and departure on daily journeys and attendance at meetings, social or sporting activities.
- Always carry cell phone as it can be used in case of emergency – know emergency contact numbers (stored in phone memory)
- Always carry the appropriate coins to operate public telephones in the event that your mobile phone is stolen.
- Use code names for house and family phone contacts speed dials.
- Do not talk on cell phone while walking on the street.
- Avoid eye contact with strangers and don't look like a lost tourist or a person paranoid – don't stand out – be relaxed and blend into the surrounding.
- Avoid contact (talking etc) with unknown persons who may show interest in you.
- Avoid using bank machine at night (there is a greater risk of assailant observing and waiting for a person to leave the machine with money).
- Use only bank machines that have security guard(s) or have indoor ATMs.
- Use extra precaution when exiting parties, bars and discotheques – especially expatriates as they may be observed and waited on.
- Avoid discussions that can be overheard in public places and which may attract attention and raise your profile.
- Avoid conversing about future movements of oneself when in public place such as bar and restaurant as assailant may over hear and be waiting for that person – it is often a team situation when the waiter would tip the assailant of ones future movements.
- Be extra careful of luxury establishments i.e. restaurants – assailants often case upscale establishments knowing persons utilizing such places have money and thus are good “targets”.
- Women should be aware and careful when shopping and exiting malls – assailant often cases person inside a mall and follows them out to their vehicle to rob them.
- Avoid having a high bank account balance – it is possible that bank employees inform assailants of your worth based on balance and thus make one a high “target”. If you have a high bank account balance, do not have an ATM card for your account. Open a 2nd account with a less balance and have an ATM card for this account only.
- Don't trust national police, often crooked or fake.
- Consider changing accommodation if the visit is long term – do not give advance warning of such change.