

On nearly getting pickpocketed in both Lisbon and Madrid

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My trip to Lisbon introduced me to another tourist phenomenon: pickpockets. It was around 10:30 in the morning, and I got on the train to head into town, planning to climb the steps through the Alfama district to visit the castle which looms over the city. The morning rush was over, and the Metro car was nearly empty. Just before the doors closed, a group of about four twentysomething guys stumbled onto the train, walking unsteadily and talking quite loudly among themselves. I found this immediately suspicious. They are acting drunk, but who is drunk at 10:30 in the morning? At 10:30, you're *hung over*, not drunk. And even if you are drunk, you are drunk in the comfort of your home, not stumbling around the subways. Even though the subway car had only about three people, and there was plenty of room to spread out, this group of pretend-drunks hung around close to me. I went on high alert. A few seconds later, one of the guys "stumbled" into me and thrust his hand into my pants pocket. I immediately grabbed his hand and yanked it back out, making sure he didn't get anything, adding a shout of "Hey!" (I don't speak Portuguese, so I couldn't say anything more eloquent.) Still keeping up the ruse of just being a bunch of loud-mouthed drunks, the group of would-be pickpockets stumbled off the train just as the doors closed. Well, three of them did. One of them didn't quite get off in time and stood with his face against the wall until the train reached its next stop, at which point he ran off. After Lisbon, I headed over to Madrid, and on the Metro I was on one of the long escalators connecting between two train lines, and I caught the person behind me surreptitiously trying to unzip an outside pocket on my shoulder bag. He hadn't made much progress, but just to make sure he didn't get anything, I said hello and shook his hand. **Bonus chatter:** Getting targeted by thieves in Europe seems to be a tradition for me. During the Berlin phase of a previous visit to the continent, a thief tried unsuccessfully to steal the camera out of my hand. Sweden treats me well, though. I don't get targeted by pickpockets; just people trying to recruit me into some sort of organization.

[Raymond is currently away, possibly being pickpocketed this very moment.]

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