



Codice Palese

— THE HIDDEN RULES COMPANY

The 7 Hidden Rules That Scammers Pray You Don't Know

By a retired police officer living in Italy

“What Italians know – but tourists learn too late.”

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Hidden Rule #1

The fake police officer isn't police at all.

Where it happens:

Any tourist area – train stations, piazzas, even outside the Vatican.

What they do:

A well-dressed person flashes a badge (often just a shiny piece of metal). They say they are *Polizia* or *Carabinieri* and ask to see your wallet or cash – “to check for counterfeit money.” While you open your wallet, they steal bills or cards right in front of you.

The hidden rule:

Real Italian police never ask to see your wallet on the street. Never. If someone approaches you with a badge, hold up your hand and say firmly: “*Show me your ID card.*” Scammers will walk away immediately.

What to do instead:

Keep your wallet in a front zipped pocket. If a real police officer needs you (rare for tourists), they will take you to a police station – not your wallet.

Hidden Rule #2

The “friendly helper” at the ticket machine is a thief.

Where it happens:

Metro ticket machines, train station kiosks, bus stops.

What they do:

You look confused. Someone steps in, says “I help you,” takes your money, pushes a few buttons, gives you the wrong ticket, and keeps the change. Or they simply return a fake ticket and keep your €20.

The hidden rule:

Only buy tickets from official *Tabacchi* shops (sign with a big black **T**) or from the official app (e.g., TicketAppy for buses). Never accept “help” from a stranger at a machine. If the machine is broken, walk to the next one.

What to do instead:

Buy a day pass or a 72-hour transit card from a tobacco shop before you ever reach the station. No machine, no risk.

Hidden Rule #3

The “bracelet” or “rose” is a trap.

Where it happens:

Outside the Colosseum, Trevi Fountain, Piazza Navona, and any crowded landmark.

What they do:

A smiling man walks toward you with a bracelet, a small rose, or a “friendship string.” He places it on your wrist or hand before you can say no. Then he demands money – €20, €50, even €100. His friends appear to intimidate you.

The hidden rule:

Do not let anyone touch your hands or arms. Keep your hands in your pockets or clasped together. When you see them coming, look away and walk around them. Never make eye contact. If they still try, say loud and sharp: “**NO! VA VIA!**” (Go away). They will leave immediately – they hate attention.

What to do instead:

Walk with your hands in your jacket pockets or holding your own bag strap. Predators look for easy targets with dangling hands.

Hidden Rule #4

The metro “squeeze” – three people, one goal.

Where it happens:

Rome Metro, especially Line A during rush hour (Termini, Spagna, Ottaviano). Also on crowded buses like the 64 from Termini to Vatican.

What they do:

Two people block you at the door – one in front, one behind. A third person reaches into your bag or pocket. You feel trapped and distracted.

The hidden rule:

On any crowded public transport, your phone and wallet go into a **cross-body bag worn in front**, zipped closed. Never put them in a back pocket or an open tote. Hold the bag with both hands during boarding.

What to do instead:

Wait for the next train or bus if it's crowded. Tourists who look anxious and keep looking around are targeted. Act bored and keep your bag hugged to your chest.



Hidden Rule #5

The restaurant bill will double if you sit in the wrong seat.

Where it happens:

Any café or restaurant with tables facing a famous monument – Piazza Navona, Pantheon, Campo de' Fiori, or San Marco in Venice (same rule applies).

What they do:

The menu printed outside shows reasonable prices (€3 coffee, €12 pasta). But after you sit, the bill adds:

- *Coperto* (cover charge) – €6–8 per person
- *Servizio* (service fee) – 15% of the total
- Sometimes even “music charge” if there’s a street musician.

Suddenly your €20 meal becomes €50.

The hidden rule:

Before sitting down, ask clearly: “*Is there a cover charge or service fee?*” If they say yes, leave. Walk two streets away from the main square – prices drop in half and there are no hidden fees.

What to do instead:

Eat where Italians eat: look for places with plastic menus, no picture menus, and no one standing outside inviting you in.

Hidden Rule #6

The taxi at the station is a trap.

Where it happens:

Outside Termini Station (Rome), Santa Maria Novella (Florence), or any central train station.

What they do:

Taxis waiting at the official rank may refuse to use the meter. They quote a “fixed price” of €50 for a trip that should cost €15. Or they take a very long route.

The hidden rule:

Never take a taxi that is parked and waiting at a station. Instead, walk 2–3 minutes away from the station entrance and hail a moving taxi with a lit “TAXI” sign. Or use an app: **FreeNow** or **itTaxi** (works like Uber but for licensed taxis).

What to do instead:

Before getting in, ask: “*Meter, please?*” If the driver says “no” or gives a price, close the door and walk away.

Hidden Rule #7

The “broken ATM” trick.

Where it happens:

ATMs near tourist sites or train stations. Especially standalone ATMs (not attached to a bank).

What they do:

A “helpful” bystander watches you enter your PIN. The machine seems to eat your card. Then they offer to help, take your card from the “jam” – and later withdraw money from your account. Or they use a hidden camera to record your PIN.

The hidden rule:

Only use ATMs **inside a bank lobby** (open during bank hours) or attached to a real bank wall. Avoid any ATM that looks old, has loose parts, or is in a quiet alley.

What to do instead:

Withdraw larger amounts once in a safe location (e.g., €200–300) and keep cash divided in two different pockets. Never use a street ATM after dark.



Emergency numbers for Italy

| Service | Number |
|---|-----------------------|
| European emergency (police / ambulance / fire) | 112 |
| Tourist police (English spoken) | 112 – ask for English |
| US Embassy Rome emergency | +39 06 46741 |
| UK Embassy Rome | +39 06 4220 0001 |

Save these in your phone before you leave home.

Closing

I'm a 79-year-old retired police officer. I also ran a small tourism business here in Italy. I speak very little Italian – which means I know exactly what's confusing or dangerous for English-speaking visitors.

For a 30-minute personal video briefing before your trip (tailored to your cities, with extra rules not in this guide), contact me on at email: **Tony.H@codicepalese.com**

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