Your Unlocked Phone In A Stranger's Hand? It Might Happen When You Fly Internationally







line we have a security bin in our hands. It's all become so routine it's second nature.

Belts off, shoes off, keys, and pocket change in the bin.

On the one hand, we know it's a complete pain but on the other hand most of us have adopted an "it's better to be safe than sorry" stance on this matter.

When does it go too far? When does security cross the line from vigilance to invasion of privacy?

Is it when the TSA agents are giving you the kind of pat-down that your

unmentionables in your luggage?...

doctor wouldn't do? Is it when they're grilling you about every minute detail of your trip? Is it when an agent is rifling through the

...Or, maybe, it's when they're asking you to unlock your smartphone? You read that correctly. There is a staggering increase in the amount of searches where a traveler's phone is being accessed by agents. Does that

make you feel secure or violated?

about confidential company documents? What about your personal medical documents? Now think about what you keep on your phone. There is so much personal data on our phones. Data that we want to keep private. After all, that's why

Think about your pictures, your emails, your documents, and even your message chats.

To say that our phones hold all the information about our lives wouldn't be an exaggeration. Spend 30 minutes looking at someone's unlocked phone and you will gain a lot of insight into that person.

The rules that you think are protecting you aren't

Some of you may be tempted to dismiss this as a serious concern. After all it

seems like it's an illegal action being taken by overzealous border agents. And that's what the constitution is for.

The Fourth Amendment prevents illegal search and seizure.

If there's one thing most Americans are familiar with, it's the constitution.

The Fifth Amendment prevents self-incrimination. These are some of the bedrocks of the constitution and it protects the privacy rights for Americans. It also doesn't protect you in this case.

Decades ago the Supreme Court created an exception for border agents with regards to the Fourth Amendment. So technically they can search

whatever they want and there's nothing to stop them.

reasons why you don't think you should worry about this.

How is this possible? Well, the same way most questionable actions are

unlock your phone, it's perfectly legal for a border agent to do so.

So while it would be illegal for a police officer to stop you and ask you to

You might say to yourself "I'm a US citizen, this only applies to non-Americans". But unfortunately you'd be wrong about that. American-born citizens have had to turn in their phones at the border already.

journalists, and even military veterans (all of whom are American citizens)

So no one is immune from this scrutiny.

government revolution or terrorist attack?

but for 10 hours.

legitimized...by a loophole.

Even phones that were government-issued and might contain confidential

Another thing many people might say (wrongly) to themselves is the belief that "I've done nothing wrong so I've got nothing to hide". But it's never that simple.

Again, think about all the information that you have on your phone. Is it

Have you ever made a comment, seriously or in jest, about the government or the President? What if you're reading a fictional book about a

possible that a friend of a friend on Facebook is a criminal? What about the

They have the power, you have the control This situation sucks. The bad (and obvious) news is that you're left without a choice. Border agents have all the power in this situation and if you want to get back into the country you need to comply. The good news is that you do have a choice in how much information they get. As we've been known to say around here, awareness about an issue is the first step. So now that you're aware, you can prepare yourself. Here are some options that you can take before your next flight: • Don't take your devices with you: This might be easier said than done.

will be looking at essentially a blank device. When you return you can restore your backup so your phone is back to the way it was before your trip. • Buy/rent a temporary phone: If you really need a phone on your trip you can leave your main phone back at home and grab a rental or prepaid phone in your new destination. You'll get a number for people

who need to contact you and many of them come with a data plan as

well. You just use it for the duration of the trip and then return it once

you're done, or simply save it for your next trip.

Unfortunately this is where we're at in society.

how much information we want to give up.

These solutions might seem a bit extreme but keeping your data private is not a joke. It's just a fact of life that this is something you may encounter when it comes to flying. It's always important to be prepared and aware whenever there's a situation

where your private data might get accessed by someone you wouldn't want.

For better or worse security has taken us here, so it's up to us to determine

Ultimately it'll be up to each individual to decide if they're comfortable handing an unlocked phone to a complete stranger or not. If this is something you aren't comfortable with then at least you know what you're up against and you can take whatever steps you need.

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- Most of us know the routine by heart. Before we even get to the front of the
- Your smartphone is an extension of your life Do you go around handing photos of your kids to complete strangers? How
- we put passcodes and use thumbprint IDs to unlock our phones. Our phones are more than just a device to make calls. It's the one thing most of us use every day and carry with us wherever we go.
- So ask yourself, how comfortable would you feel with a stranger taking your unlocked phone into a private room for 30 minutes or more? That's the question many travelers are asking themselves lately.
- Yes, that's correct. The constitution doesn't protect you when it comes to your phone being searched when you're flying.
- What, me worry? As you read about this issue another temptation might be to come up with
- have recently had to unlock their phones when entering the country. data were subject to being searched at the border.

As a matter of fact, according to a recent lawsuit, NASA engineers,

people you follow on Twitter? Guilty by association, perhaps?

It might seem extreme but it doesn't take much for something innocent to

lead to further scrutiny. Suddenly your phone isn't just taken for 30 minutes

And for those of you that aren't American and are shaking their heads and

rethink that position. Similar scenarios have already happened in Canada

thinking "this would never happen in my country", you might want to

and there are reports of it occurring in the UK and Australia as well.

But for many people going on vacation, is it really necessary to bring your phone with you? If you need to take pictures you can bring a digital

Different story now isn't it?

to having to take your smartphone with you. • Restore your phone to factory settings: Just backup all the data on your phone so it's saved securely, and once it is you can restore your phone to its factory setting for your trip. All your files and apps will be off your phone and anyone who looks at it

camera, if you want to connect to the Internet then you can take

something like an iPod that has Wi-Fi capabilities. There are alternatives

data secured

Doors locked, oven turned off, private phone

Traveling comes with enough stress and anxiety, and the last thing you need to worry about is an invasion of privacy. By taking these steps you'll be

ensured that your vacation is smooth sailing all the way.

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compromising their privacy?

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