

FAKE MONKS ARE RIPPING OFF TOURISTS IN TOKYO



Japan is generally considered a safe destination for travelers, but it's important to remain cautious about potential crime.

Japanese monks are known to be holy men who do not commit any wrongdoing. However, there have been reports of crooks posing as monks and using deceptive methods to steal money from tourists. A shrine in Tokyo, the Japanese capital, has warned about this issue as experts warn about the increasing fraud cases.

In 2016, fake monks targeted travelers at the shrine and were later identified as Chinese citizens arrested in 2017. Now that the number of travelers is increasing again after the pandemic, the fake clergy are believed to have returned to the site, and tourists must be alert.

How the scam works

Monks who are criminals sell religious items like prayer beads and use them to collect donations for restoring a shrine. They dress like real pilgrims and approach visitors to give them amulets. At first, the visitors are happy to receive the gift until the fake monks insist on payment, asking for a price of 10,000 yen (about US\$67). This irritates visitors, who think the money supports the local community.

While most criminals in this case are men, there have also been reports of women wearing blue robes following a similar pattern. Witnesses have observed that these criminals arrive in Taito in civilian clothing and change into robes in a nearby public restroom. An organized gang is suspected of operating in dedicated areas, with some members approaching tourists while others keep a lookout.

Even the employees of the affected shrine have difficulty identifying the fake monks among the visitors, as they blend in so well. As a result, shrine staff have begun patrolling the site and warning visitors of danger. Travelers are advised to be cautious, avoid accepting any items offered, and only purchase authentic goods from the official shops of the temples.

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