

I live in Southern New Mexico so I get friends all the time making road trips through Santa Fe to visit me. A friend of mine came down to see me last month and was thrilled to show me her new turquoise necklace draped around her neck. It was utterly amazing with big blue turquoise nuggets with spider web-like veins running through it. Only problem was it was fake. The necklace she just got off of a street vendor were probably either dyed howlite or magnesite, two completely different minerals that in their natural state are white but which polish like turquoise. Either can be died to any color under the rainbow and can make a very convincing turquoise. Magnesite especially because it includes the black veining that is often found in the most sought after turquoise beads and nuggets mined in the southwest.

To be fair to howlite or magnesite they really are a lovely mineral. In either their natural states or died, howlite and magnesite beads can make some beautiful jewelry. The problem is when it's passed off as something else, like turquoise.

And these two aren't the only two used to rip people off. Glass and plastic beads can of course be passed off as turquoise, but so can turquoise itself. Another type of fake is called "reconstituted turquoise" and is essentially all the little pieces of genuine turquoise that have been discarded during the process of polishing or shaping the real stuff. Manufacturers will take these bits and grind it into a fine dust, then add an epoxy and cast pieces of turquoise so convincing that sometimes experts can't even tell.

So how do you tell? Well, the starting point is the price. How much did it cost? My friend's turquoise nugget necklace on any street in the U.S. (even allowing for the 'Santa Fe markup') was probably worth in the thousands if it were authentic. So the fact that she bought it at about \$900.00 was certainly one tip-off.

Another way to find out is to carefully study the beads. Look for uniformity in genuine turquoise beads. While there will be some color fluctuation, a turquoise nugget, turquoise bead, or turquoise chip will display a generally similar color that runs throughout its entirety.

Look in the hole for another clue. Sometime people making fake turquoise will dye the nuggets (or beads) and then drill the holes. It's a dead give-away if you glance at the bead's hole and inside it's snow white.

Finally, just be careful. If you make your own jewelry then establish a relationship with the bead vendor. If he says its U.S. (or even Chinese) turquoise, get it in writing. And if it's just too good to be true (like my friend's necklace), then it probably is!