

SAFE COMMUNITY**David Thomas****SUMMER CRIME – REDUCING THE RISK**

YES, summer has arrived and now is the time of the year when criminals adapt to their “summer programme” by targeting areas and people who present easy prey and the takings are highest. Unfortunately, as in any country where there are tourists, it is the visitor who can present that easy target.

The main target areas are beaches, beach car parks, rented villas, bars and any crowded area, particularly markets. Criminals look for opportunities and that often means striking when least expected i.e. when your guard is down. Examples of this are when you are at a market stall and you place your handbag on the stall whilst you try on some clothes, or in a crowded area where you could be bumped into and suddenly discover that your wallet is missing. This latter type of crime is however more likely in the big cities such as Lisbon rather than here in the Algarve.

In fact, in the Algarve we are lucky, as the level of summer crime is low compared with most other countries in Europe, regardless of the fact we have a large summer influx of tourists.

In fact, looking at crime trends to date, there have been few reports, for instance, of beach crime and vehicle crime in beach car parks. This is not to say it has not occurred and I know of one case where valuables were stolen from a parked vehicle, despite repeated crime prevention advice not to leave valuables in cars. Maybe the cooler weather in May and early June is a factor. Safe Communities Algarve and the British Vice Consulate are working with the car hire industry and measures will be introduced shortly to remind drivers more effectively concerning these issues.

Villas

Like other crimes, theft from villas is mainly carried out by opportunists as a result of doors and windows being left open when occupants leave the villa and security

alarms not being set. If there is a safe in the villa, it should be used.

If it is a large property, when using the pool take care to close windows in other parts of the property that are not being used, especially those facing roads or open land. Opportunist criminals will look for valuable items that are left unattended on terraces and close to swimming pools whilst occupants are indoors, so do not leave such items on display. When leaving the villa in the evening, leave lights on in the hall, lounge and an upstairs room, and a radio switched on.

Beaches and beach car parks

For many beachgoers, their first priority is to leave the car as quickly as possible, take the children and all the beach equipment (umbrellas, towels, beach balls etc) and dash off to the beach. Then, having deposited all these items on the beach,

they make a world record-breaking 100 metre sprint into the sea.

However, criminals are wise and watch closely to check if you have locked your car and windows. Criminals tend to wander around car parks looking for those vehicles that are unlocked, windows that are open and valuable items that have been left on seats. Attractive items for criminals are, of course, cash, computers and mobile phones.

Illegal gambling

There has recently been worldwide publicity on the GNR operation at a bar in Albufeira leading to the detention of 28 persons for a variety of illegal gambling offences.

Gambling laws in Portugal are strict and include, say, bingo where there is an entry fee and prizes, and bar owners should be aware that gambling is not permitted without a licence. The only places where there

|| Top Summer Crime Prevention Tips

- Avoid carrying large sums of cash, valuables, credit cards, passports and travel tickets together.
- Keep important documents such as passports in a safe place. Make photocopies.
- Carry wallets in the front pocket. Handbags should be secured under the arm.
- When leaving your villa, ensure doors and windows are closed and locked, alarm (if installed) activated and valuable items locked in the safe if there is one.
- Make use of hotel safe or room safe, if provided, for storage of valuables. Avoid setting the combination to your year of birth.
- Ensure valuables are not left in cars when parked and that other items are out of sight.
- In markets and shops, do not place wallets and handbags on stalls and counters, and in restaurants handbags on the back of chairs.
- Beware of distraction crime, e.g. someone asks you for directions and whilst off guard someone else steals your handbag.
- Late at night be prudent, familiarise yourself with local surroundings and if walking alone avoid dimly lit and remote routes.
- After a late-night drinking session take a taxi (preferably accompanied) back to your villa or hotel.

is licensed gambling are casinos and a few other establishments.

Specifically, it is an offence in law to be present in premises where gambling is taking place, regardless of whether or not you are actually participating. Also, in accordance

with the law, police are not permitted to exercise discretion having carried out enforcement action as this rests with the courts. Safe Communities Algarve has recently met with the GNR, British Vice Consul and Turismo do Algarve on this topic and clearly it is important that more opportunities are taken to ensure visitors are forewarned of this.

Distraction crime

Criminals are becoming more ingenious it seems, and a typical summer crime often involves a distraction technique. Usually these criminals operate in pairs and one of them will distract you by asking for water or the time, or pointing to the ground where a bank note has been placed, and whilst your attention is diverted the other criminal steals a personal item. These are just a couple of examples but there are many more. It is advisable not to wear expensive jewellery or carry other valuables and large amounts of cash in the street.

Night life/bars

Although statistically very low in the Algarve, one type of crime that is sure to make headlines in the media is, unfortunately, violence against tourists. The scenario usually goes like this: “Mr X was

walking back to his hotel in the early hours of the morning and was suddenly set upon, beaten and robbed.”

The truth sometimes is more like: “Mr X, who had been drinking for many hours in a bar and had been involved in a dispute with others, was staggering back to his hotel alone and was suddenly set upon, beaten and robbed.” I appreciate this is not always the case, and some tourists were simply behaving normally and were unfortunately in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There are a number of lessons here. Firstly, try to avoid getting totally “smashed”. Getting into a dispute, particularly over women, can result in retribution – so try and avoid this. The best way of returning to the hotel or villa is by taxi or, if you do decide to walk, then walking in a group reduces the risk.

It’s all about “risk” and criminals know this – they are looking for easy victims. Bar owners also have a part to play through refusing to serve drinks to those who are clearly drunk, and offering to contact taxis for those in such a state who need to get back to their hotel or villa.

Unfortunately, a number of tourists do not make it easy for themselves, and it seems to be an increasing trend for them to get so drunk (often young women), when they have no idea where they are, what they are doing and have lost their friends who have abandoned them because they are so drunk; the risk of these persons becoming a victim of crime is high.

This article also includes the top crime prevention tips in order to have a Safe Summer – so please follow these. More tips on www.safecommunitiesalgarve.com

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