

## safe community



by David Thomas

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David Thomas is a former Assistant Commissioner of the Hong Kong Police, consultant to INTERPOL and the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*. He has recently formed ISECA, the *Independent Security Agency* here in the Algarve, to help authorities and the community prevent crime. This is his first in a series of articles about crime prevention.

# Turning the tide on beach crime

Beaches are a lovely place to relax, but for some criminals these provide an ideal place to commit crime.

Basically there are two types of beach crime in the Algarve. The most common of these is the theft of items from cars parked close to beaches and, to a lesser extent, the theft of unattended items on beaches themselves.

For many beach goers their first priority is to leave the car as quickly as possible and take the children and all the beach equipment – umbrellas, towels, beach balls etc – and dash off to the beach as quickly as possible. Then having deposited all these items on the beach, they make a world record breaking 100 meter sprint into the sea.

However, criminals are wise to this as well and watch closely whether 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 as well as computers and mobile phones.

Their attention then turns to the beach itself. The criminal tends to watch out for those who have left their items unattended on the beach whilst in the sea, particularly in an area where there is no one else close by.

## Before setting off

It's probably clear from what I have said so far that most beach



crime is preventable. This starts from the time you leave your home or hotel.

Firstly, is it really necessary to take your Rolex watch and all your credit cards to the beach? After all a gypsy selling belts does not normally accept a credit card! Likewise, unless the 100 meter dash is to be recorded in the *Guinness Book of Records*, does it matter if your watch was purchased from a local market? It makes sense to

leave these items in the hotel safe or safe at home.

## In the car park

For those items you don't need please ensure that they are not left on view in your car. It is better to take these with you to the beach rather than leave these in the car, simply because the likelihood of crime is greater in car parks. Of course ensure the car doors and windows are locked before you go to the beach.

When you remove items from the boot, do not let people observe you transferring items to your beach bag. Be aware of people approaching you when loading and unloading as they may attempt to distract you and then make off with your car.

## On the beach

It is good advice, particularly if you go to the beach on your own, not to be too far away from others. When setting out your towel etc, try not to unpack and subsequently repack valuable items. This also avoids

the possibility of something like car keys becoming lost in the sand!

When paying for items on the beach, it is better to take small amounts of money from your pocket rather than produce your purse or wallet.

When alone on the beach, keep your valuables in a bag and use this as a pillow. If you fall asleep it makes it difficult to steal items unnoticed.

Again, if you are alone and want to go into the sea, it is normally a good idea to ask someone close by who appears trustworthy (families are a good bet) if they would keep an eye on your belongings for a short while and then return the favour later.

As a last resort when you go for a swim, if you do have some valuables, keep them either on your person, in a waterproof pouch, or hidden in your bag where it can be easily seen by you.

Lastly, the GNR do undertake beach operations during the summer, so help them and yourselves by using these simple crime prevention tips.

## TOP TEN BEACH CRIME PREVENTION TIPS

1. Unless needed, leave valuable items in the safe in your home or hotel.
2. Do not park anywhere where your vehicle may obstruct others – as you may find when you return it has been damaged
3. Do not leave valuable items that you cannot leave at home or in your holiday accommodation, in your car parked near a beach.
4. Take care to minimise the risk of being observed when opening your car boot. Be aware of distraction crime.
5. Ensure that no items are left on display in a parked car. Disconnect the Sat Nav and take it with you.
6. Ensure that car windows and doors are locked
7. If alone, find a beach space in the view of others
8. Do not display your wallet or purse on beaches - take money from a pocket.
9. If alone and wanting to swim, ask someone if they would keep an eye on your belongings.
10. Avoid displaying valuable items on beaches.



■ A GNR officer patrolling the car park near Galé beach

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