

# Tourism and Crime: key themes

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**Edited by**

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## **Property Crime and Tourists**

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

# 2 Property Crime and Tourists

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This chapter includes:

- ◆ A summary of the key themes in the research literature on the victimisation of tourists by different forms of property crime
- ◆ A discussion of the various methodological approaches to studying tourism and property crime, including those that draw upon official statistics and victimisation surveys
- ◆ A discussion of particular types of property crimes experienced by tourists
- ◆ An account of the ways in which particular criminological theories – in particular, routine activities theories, opportunity theory and rational choice theory – can help improve our understanding of patterns of property crime against tourists.

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## Introduction

This chapter<sup>1</sup> addresses the extent to which tourists are at risk of property crimes. It starts with a discussion of the difficulties of measuring crime risk that largely replicate those in mainstream criminology, but with the additional problem that the number of tourists – in the general population or who are victimised – is rarely distinguished. Accepting these limitations, police statistics, victim surveys, newspaper data, and offenders' accounts of their preferred targets are used to confirm that tourists are indeed overrepresented among the victims of property crime. This seems to apply across different offence categories, such as burglary, vehicle theft, robbery/theft from the person, and fraud. The final section attempts to explain the findings. Combining routine activity theory, opportunity theory and rational choice theory, four dimensions are identified that help explain why tourists constitute a high risk category: rewards, justifiability of target, guardianship, and accessibility.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter uses, in an updated and modified form, some of the material from Mawby, Barclay and Jones (2009).

## Tourist victimisation

Although property crimes far exceed crimes of violence, victim surveys show that in Western industrial societies only a minority of people suffer property crime in any one year. In England and Wales, for example, the British Crime Survey (BCS) suggests that about 17% of households experienced a property crime in 2008/09 (Walker *et al.*, 2009). Equivalent figures for the USA are slightly lower (Rand, 2009). However, these overall rates hide marked variations. Risk varies according to a number of variables: where within a country one lives, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. Explaining these patterns, victimologists have focused on citizens' behaviour and the way that the routine activities of victims lead to an increase or decrease in risk. As tourism becomes a more significant feature of modern-day living, it is therefore surprising that criminologists have largely ignored the extent to which temporary status as a tourist affects risk. Unlike tourism researchers, for whom crime and deviance appear to hold considerable attraction (Ryan, 1993; Pizam and Mansfeld, 1996; Brunt and Hambly, 1999; Mansfeld and Pizam, 2006), criminologists have, with a few notable exceptions, avoided discussions of tourist victimisation. Yet, intuitively, it would appear that the behaviour of tourists would affect their risk of crime. Where, for example, the 2004/05 International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) found that residents of Rome were nearly five times as likely as those living in Sydney, Australia, to have their vehicle stolen (van Dijk *et al.*, 2008), we might anticipate that tourists visiting Rome (as opposed to Sydney) would also experience relatively greater risk of car theft. However, which country – or which city – tourists visit is only one aspect of the 'routine activities' (or tourist activities) people adopt on holiday. The nature of the tourist resort which they choose, and precisely where and how visitors spend their time while away from home could affect risk.

This suggests that further consideration of tourist victimisation is important for at least two reasons. First, it might have a theoretical relevance in adding to criminologists' understanding of the relationship between lifestyle and risk. Second, it might have a practical importance in helping to inform the tourist industry and therefore help it adopt crime reduction initiatives that are relevant to tourists. To this end, this chapter is divided into three key sections. The first two focus on what we know about tourists' vulnerability to property crimes, and in particular, burglary, vehicle-related crime, robbery/theft from the person and fraud. The third relates these findings to criminological theories and attempts to explain why tourists appear to experience relatively high risk of property crime. Before addressing these issues, however, the following section considers different research approaches to identifying tourists as crime victims.

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