

Tourism and Crime: key themes

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Edited by

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Violent crime and tourists

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

3 Violent crime and tourists

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This chapter includes the following elements:

- ◆ An overview of the key themes in the research literature about the violent victimisation of tourists in general
 - ◆ Specific discussion of the research on particular sub-groups of tourist victimisation, including that against young people, homicides, and politically motivated attacks
 - ◆ The application to violent crime victimisation against tourists of a model derived from a range of theoretical accounts of crime victimisation in criminology (routine activities theory, opportunity theory and rational choice theory). This allows a fuller understanding of how violent victimisation varies according to potential rewards for the offender, victim status, guardianship and accessibility.
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Introduction

Given limitations of space, this chapter is restricted to a conventional legal definition of violent crime as involving harm or the intent to harm. Even using this restricted definition, though, violence can take many forms, varying for example according to motive or the extent of injury. Perhaps for this reason, evidence of an overall relationship between tourism and victimisation is less clear-cut than in the case of property crime. This chapter therefore focuses on three scenarios which involve tourists as the victims of violent crime:

- ◆ Teens and 20s holidays
- ◆ Homicide, especially but not exclusively against backpackers
- ◆ Politically motivated attacks against tourists and tourist centres.

Using the model introduced in the previous chapter, it is argued that disproportionate risk might be explained in terms of: rewards, victim status, guardianship and accessibility.

Risk of violent crime victimisation

As was demonstrated in Chapter 2, tourists have almost universally been found to experience relatively high risks of property crime. However, the evidence on violent crime is more equivocal. Some studies, including those by Chesney-Lind and Lind (1986) in Hawaii and our own *Holiday Which?* survey (Mawby *et al.*, 1999), have found tourists to suffer more violent crimes than locals. Others, including that by de Albuquerque and McElroy (1999) in Barbados, found that tourists had lower rates for non-acquisitive violent crimes. This may be partly explained by the variation of offences subsumed under the heading ‘violent crime’, some of which may be more closely associated with tourism than others. It may also relate to the point made in the previous chapter: that different subgroups of tourists may, through their contrasting vacation styles, attract different levels of risk.

On the first point, while some criminologists include within their definition, corporate crimes that result in harm to employees and consumers, including tourists (Tombs, 2007), and the media and policy-makers often use the term emotively to incorporate damage to property, here the focus is on conventional legal definitions of interpersonal violence involving physical harm or the threat of injury. Even using this restricted definition, though, violent crimes may be distinguished on a number of dimensions, including:

- ◆ Seriousness/harm done, ranging from threats to homicide
- ◆ Use of a weapon
- ◆ Relationship between victim and offender, with the British Crime Survey (BCS), for example, distinguishing between stranger violence and acquaintance violence (accounting for 40% and 33% of incidents respectively), and domestic violence (14%) and muggings (robberies and snatch thefts) (Walker *et al.*, 2009)
- ◆ Motive, including personal, political, racist/sectarian, sexual and economic.

The BCS suggests that males, younger people, single persons and those frequenting bars are most at risk, and that a high proportion of offenders are judged by victims to be under the influence of alcohol (47%) or drugs (17%) (Walker *et al.*, 2009). Given that tourists, especially younger adults, are more likely to spend evenings in bars and other entertainment venues, we might therefore expect tourists, younger ones in particular, to be more at risk of violent crime, especially where the offender is a stranger or casual acquaintance. On the other hand, domestic violence is less likely to increase among tourists.

In the previous chapter, routine activity theory, opportunity theory and rational choice theory were adapted to explain the almost universally accepted higher level of risk from property crime experienced by tourists. It was argued that tourists experienced above average levels of property crime because they offered potentially higher rewards to the offender, their victim status could be discounted,

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