

Safety and security

The vast majority of overseas holidays pass without incident, however, very occasionally we receive reports from members who have been the victims of robberies or attempted robberies. Taking sensible precautions and being aware of the “scams” can greatly reduce the risk of your holiday being disrupted.

On the Road

We would recommend that you always come off motorways to find overnight sites. Unfortunately, as you may have seen in the trade press including our own Club Magazine, it is becoming more and more of a problem that caravans and motor caravans parked overnight on service stations are targeted by thieves who are not deterred by the fact that people are asleep inside the vehicles. Motorways provide convenient service stations and areas for a rest and a picnic en route but try not to leave the outfit unattended at any time and find a proper site for an overnight stop for your own safety.

In Southern France, Spain, and Portugal the following “techniques” have been used to part members from their money/property:

At service stations members have returned to their vehicles to find that they have a flat tyre, whilst they are changing the tyre “a good Samaritan” offers help and advice and whilst you are distracted their accomplices steal from your vehicle.

On motorways / dual carriageways members have reported other vehicles trying to “flag them down” suggesting that there is a problem with the car/caravan, and in some instances thieves have thrown a small object at the vehicle to try and encourage the drivers to pull over.

You should also be wary of approaches by bogus police officers, in plain clothes and travelling in unmarked cars. In all traffic-related matters police officers will be in uniform. Unmarked vehicles will have a flashing electronic sign on the rear window which reads "Policia" or "Guardia Civil", and normally have blue flashing lights incorporated into the headlights, which are activated by the Police when they stop you.

We do not want to discourage members from travelling, and there are a few things you can do to reduce the chances of your holiday being disrupted:

- Only pull over on the motorways and dual carriageways if you are requested to do so by a marked police car. It is very rare for plain clothes policeman in un-marked cars to do traffic stops. If you have any doubts, ask to see identification and call 112.
- If you are waved at by another vehicle encouraging you to pull over, do not! Only pull over if your outfit/vehicle feels un-safe to drive, and if you do pull over, lock all of your valuables in the glove compartment and then lock your vehicle.
- When using busy service stations try not to leave your outfit unattended; if you are not driving solo, take it turns to use the facilities and whilst one person pays for the fuel the other person should stay with the vehicle(s). If you notice that you have a flat tyre, make sure all your valuables are out of sight and secure before changing the tyre.

Finally, if you are a victim of this type of robbery or attempted robbery please report it by calling 112, if you are in Spain you can call 902 10 21 12, this number is manned by English speaking staff who will take your statement in English, translate it, then fax/e-mail it to the nearest police station, they will also advise you where the nearest police station is so you can go in and sign your statement.

Unfortunately, we occasionally receive reports of thefts on campsites abroad, even on those where there are security measures in place, so we therefore recommend you take the following precautions:

- Do not leave wallets/handbags/valuables out in the open.
- Do not keep all your cards and cash together in one place.
- Where possible always ensure any windows, ventilation grates and doors are kept firmly fastened or locked.

On site

Safety matters from the moment you drive on to your pitch; never drive at more than a walking pace on site. A walk round the site can be a relaxing way to start your break. Even if you've been there before, the layout and facilities may have changed since your last visit.

Use your walk to make a note of the things you might need in an emergency - for instance, where is the nearest payphone? Is there a list of local hospitals and doctors? If not, find the information in case you need it in a hurry.

Your children may want to visit the playground while you set up your caravan. Check that play areas are safe and find out if there are any age limits or other rules for any of the apparatus. Bear in mind that play areas are generally unsupervised - and remember it is your responsibility to know where your children are at all times.

If the site has a swimming pool, check the depth at the deep and shallow ends - and make sure everyone in the family knows which is which! Watch out for slippery surfaces and other hazards and look for safety equipment. Find out when (or even, if) the pool is supervised.

Water slides need careful supervision, by parents and professionals, and make sure you know the depth of water in the landing area before using them. Read all the warning notices in the slide area, particularly about the correct position to adopt - usually sitting down, feet first. Remind everyone that they shouldn't swim directly after a meal or when they have been drinking alcohol. The rule applies to swimming in pools and in the sea, of course.

Beachside sites have other hazards, too. Read warning notices and make sure you know the exact meaning of safety flags or signs that could indicate unsafe bathing areas, strong tides or an area patrolled by lifeguards. Find out about strong currents if you are swimming and wind strength and direction if you are sailing or windsurfing.

Fire is awful and something none of us likes to contemplate. Fortunately fires on site are extremely rare, but that's no excuse for ignoring the danger. Apart from taking common-sense precautions inside your own caravan, make sure everyone knows the correct drill should the worst happen. Find out where the nearest fire-fighting equipment is. Make sure everyone knows how to call the emergency services. Reinforce the fact that personal safety comes first.

Be especially careful if you are on a site that allows barbecues. Keep your barbecue away from other caravans, hedges and other inflammable material and keep a bucket of water handy for emergencies.

Remember on farm sites that the animals are not pets. Don't approach any animal without the farmer's permission and keep children supervised. Make sure they wash their hands after touching any farm animal.

Natural disasters are rare but always think what *could* happen. A combination of heavy rain and a pitch by a river or in a valley could lead to flash flooding, for instance. Would you and your family know the site's evacuation procedure? Hopefully you'll never need it ... but who knows?