

Street level study in Malta

Some Internet holiday companies describe the Maltese islands, in the middle of the Mediterranean, as "crime free". Even the most gullible of travellers are likely to treat that claim with suspicion, and rightly so.

It is true that this heavily populated nation, consisting of three islands, is seldom troubled by high levels of major or violent crimes, but it probably suffers the same level of petty crime experienced by other popular tourist destinations around the world.

The police are responding in a modern way, having set up a website on which people can report small crimes and the loss of property.

Private security also has a role to play in helping to reduce criminal actions and G4S Security Services (Malta) is currently looking at implementing various options in response to a crime-mapping analysis conducted by Saviour Formosa*.

Property crime, though low, has been on the increase in recent years and theft of unattended personal belongings and car stereos from vehicles is now a common problem. Often, it is holidaying visitors who, having been lulled into a false sense of security, fall victim to these opportunistic crimes.

His academic study has enabled Formosa to create a dynamic GIS-based RISC model that shows whether a town or area is at risk. This is done by checking Malta's crime against world, EU and similar islands' crime rates, then taking it down further to national, district, local council,

street and even the exact reported location of a crime. The information is converted graphically onto an offence hotspot map.

A case study of the Maltese town of St Julian's, based on vehicle crime and criminal damage to property, has been of particular interest to G4S.

"It shows that such offences are directly linked to recreational areas and that the offences increase by distance from the town's retail areas," comments Yves De Barro, managing director of G4S Security Services (Malta). "San Giljan registers the highest rates of such crime on the island of Malta."

It is apparent from the study that the lack of official and secure car parks near to retail outlets has resulted in visitors' cars being parked in "buffer zones" in neighbouring roads and main streets. As well as higher crime rates in these buffer zones, the study also highlights a slight increase in burglaries in the neighbourhood.

"By showing a correlation between recreational and offence hotspots, Saviour Formosa's study helps us understand the causes of such crimes," Yves De Barro adds. "It also emphasises the need for increased on-street patrolling, mobile surveillance, an integrated CCTV system within both zones, and various other measures that we will be reviewing with our customers in those areas."

**Formosa, S (2007), "Spatial analysis of temporal criminality evolution: an environmental criminology study of crime in the Maltese islands", for PhD thesis.*

