

PASSPORT TO PANIC

STREET crime involving passports, money and other valuables continues to rise in Spain.

And Britain's Iberian consulates this week warned tourists and expats alike to be especially vigilant when visiting busy urban areas.

They emphasise that a stolen bag leads to frustration, extra costs and lost holiday time as victims deal with the consequences.

The British Consulate in Barcelona issued 1,320 emergency travel documents (ETDs) in 2012, 75% of which were the result of stolen passports. That's 19% up the previous year.

Meanwhile in Madrid, the British Consulate issued 362 ETDs last year – the equivalent of one a day – up 23% from 294 in 2011. During January and February this year another 50 were issued, a 10% increase on the 45 during the same period last year.

An ETD – which enables a traveller to return to the UK if they have lost their passport – currently costs €115 (approx £100).

Dave Thomas, Consular Director for Southern Europe, said: "Unfortunately we have seen increases in pickpocketing and distraction thefts. We urge holidaymakers to keep an eye on their belongings at all times."

"We want to reduce the numbers of British visitors who come to us for help over stolen passports and belongings, so they can get on with enjoying their Easter breaks instead of spending their precious holiday time in our consular offices".

Tourists warned as street crime sends stress levels soaring



The three main methods used by city criminals are:

- Pickpocketing on public transport and in busy areas.
- Distraction techniques (asking victims for help or directions, spilling something on clothes and offering to help).
- Unattended bag / handbag snatching in hotels, restaurants, cafés, airport and train stations.

Anyone can be a victim of city crime. Julie Crossley, a family careers support advisor from Hemel Hempstead in Herts, and a regular visitor to Spain, said: "We have been travelling to Reus airport for the last nine years and had

never experienced any crime against us or anyone we know.

"So it didn't even enter our heads that we would become victims ourselves at such a relatively quiet airport."

"My husband was looking after our bags as I visited the ladies, was distracted by someone asking where the exit was, and had no idea our travel wallet had been taken. And we would say we are seasoned travellers. Don't be complacent".

Albia Begum, a travel journalist from Lancashire recalled: "I was playing a game with people at one of my favourite hostels in the heart of Madrid, and I left my bag under the table to go outside for five minutes. When I returned the game was over and my bag was missing. I had lost my passport, personal possessions and a huge amount of cash."

"I had to apply for an emergency travel passport, pay for my visa again to go to Mauritania in Africa, and use more money to pay for my stay at the hostel. No matter where you are in the world, you or your personal possessions are not safe, even for a second..."

RYANAIR IN NEW ALICANTE FURY

RYANAIR stands accused of jeopardising airport safety at Alicante after two pilots risked disaster by landing without asking air traffic controllers.

The British and Dutch pilots admitted they simply forgot to contact the control tower before landing a Boeing 737 from East Midlands Airport with 174 passengers on board.

They only realised their mistake when they saw

the night landing lights had not been switched on as they taxied to the gate, the final item in their pre-landing checklist.

They apologised to the tower, but air traffic controllers told them the tower was being supervised by the Spanish military.

The tower had tried to radio the aircraft on a standard emergency frequency but the pilots had

turned the volume down. Ryanair told Spanish investigators the practice was "routine" among its pilots to avoid "distractions".

Spain's Civil Aviation Accident and Incident Investigation Commission (CIAIAC) last week told Ryanair it had jeopardised the safety of the airport and also criticised the ATCs for their part in the fiasco.

CIAIAC found all cockpit voice recordings and other flight data had been erased from the plane's black boxes prior to the inquiry, even though they are supposed to be kept for 60 days.

The 22-year-old British co-pilot was flying as it neared Alicante two hours later. The skies were dark but clear as air traffic control at Valencia Airport cleared the flight for its

final approach.

At that point the aircraft should have been handed over to Alicante, but the pilots claimed they "could not recall" that happening.

Investigators said the captain had attributed the error to a "momentary distraction" in the cockpit, but he "could not provide a specific reason".

However, investigators also found Alicante controllers failed in their duty to check where the plane was.

The captain, a 47-year-old Dutchman, said: "I totally apologise for that. Can I talk to you or your supervisor there to explain the situation?"

When told the military was overseeing operations due to a "state of alarm" in Spain at that time, the captain replied: "My company will explain the situation to them, I promise this will never happen again."

Ambulances

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into a Third World state. You see pictures of communities in Africa loading a very sick person on a board behind a bicycle or a motorbike and being taken miles to hospital. Is this how Spain is getting?"

Ms Bond questions whether the Valencian health authorities are also planning to cut night-time cover for cities where the majority of Spanish live.

She asked: "Will the health authorities terminate the ambulance service for the city of Orihuela? Of course not. They would not dare."

"Why? We all know why. Foreigners are not really wanted, only our money. We are second-class citizens definitely not respected."

"When will they realise we have had enough? We want to live in their glorious country and integrate. Not to be treated with utter contempt and fear death without emergency services being provided."

Norah is seeking an urgent meeting with the health authorities.

Is Torreveija really prepared for a big quake?

By HEIDI WARDMAN

LOOKING at the beautiful beaches, recreational areas and cultural buildings of the Vega Baja, it is hard to imagine that the entire zone was destroyed less than 200 years ago.

Yesterday, March 21, marked the 184th year since the horrific "Terremoto de Torreveija", the earthquake that left more than 400 dead and totally wiped out the towns of Torreveija, Guardamar

del Segura and Benejúzar, among several other Alicante populations.

With a magnitude measuring 6.6 degrees on the Richter scale, the 1829 quake is considered one of the worst episodes in the history of the country. In Torreveija nearly all homes were destroyed, Guardamar had to be completely redesigned and Almoradí, which was the area worst hit, ceased to exist.

A total of 2,965 houses were destroyed and another 2,398 houses

damaged during the event. Writers accounts describe how houses, as well as buildings towering several stories high, with no foundations, and supported only by weak wooden beams, simply toppled over into the streets, with their terrified inhabitants inside.

Naturally, the earthquake is still deeply rooted in the minds of local people, many of whom have family members who were affected by the

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Luis Suarez...antics



Alex Ferguson...snub

A long way from Saint Luis?

I'VE just read John McGregor's 'Suarez Player of the Year? Don't make me Laugh!' and can honestly say that was probably the most ridiculous, lazy, biased piece of journalism I ever had the misfortune to read.

Anyone who clearly believes Luis Suarez does not deserve Footballer of the Year for his on-field play rather than his off-field antics is nothing short of a moron.

Sir Alex Ferguson slammed Suarez for not shaking Patrice Evra's hand, claiming he had brought the game into disrepute and

that he should receive a hefty ban. Yet Sir Alex blatantly refused to shake Rafa Benitez's hand last week. Double standards, methinks, a bit like Mr McGregor's journalism.

PAUL DALZELL, Las Filipinas, Orihuela Costa

JOHN MCGREGOR replies: Hi Paul - well, that's certainly your opinion, and you're entitled to it. Can I ask who I'm biased against? Certainly not Liverpool, if you read the second part of the article - you did, didn't you? I also have friends who are passionate Liverpool supporters (is there any

other type?) who think that while Suarez is a great player he is also an "idiot". That's a fanatic supporter's words, not mine, because of the trouble he gets himself into. So I don't think I'm a "moron" with my obviously shared views.

I'm a lifetime Nottingham Forest supporter - there, I've said it. Brian Clough's highly-successful teams had their hard men, like Stuart Pearce, Kenny Burns and that well-known scouser Larry Lloyd, but they didn't grab the opposition by the throat, or refuse to shake hands before or afterwards. I like good football - hard, yes, competitive

every time - but not dirty, unduly aggressive and unsportsmanlike, which is where I get off with Suarez. I agree with you about Alex Ferguson, and would go even further, in that as manager of one of the greatest sides British football has produced he should always attend post-match interviews as well as shaking hands with the opposition - so no "double standards" there, Paul, eh? After all, football is a sport, not a war, we've had enough of them, haven't we? Thanks for your interest, that's what makes football such an interesting 'sport'.

RACIST SHAME OF MARKET CAR PARK

I'm on a Hi Di Hi about Di de Di...

I WAS given tickets by friends who couldn't go to see the Di de Di show at the theatre in San Miguel on March 16. What a treat we had!

The show had everything, excellent singing and dancing, story lines, great acting and oh how lovely the costumes were. Our friends missed a great night out.

Praise to all those concerned. I will certainly look out for shows from this very professional company.

LIZ PAGE
 I WANT to say a big thank you to Campoverde Theatre Company for their smashing show Di de Di. It had something for every one, great music and slick dancing, and a fun script.

Well done to everyone concerned with this show.
IRENE SHEPHERD
 La Sienta, Torre Vieja

ON Saturday morning I went with three friends to see the new market in Los Montesinos as I had seen it advertised on the pages of Facebook.

I used to go to the market held at Algofra every Saturday, looking for bargains to help along at this time of 'crisis'. Now I wanted to see what Montesinos had to offer.

At the entrance, I was still in my car and the parking attendant girl was shouting "only members" while the man was saying in Spanish "por favor, no puedes entrar - solo ingleses" (you can't come in - only English people). I asked him "Are you British?" and he told me he was Bulgarian.

I parked on the main road and walked back to talk to them properly. The English lady was trying to speak to me in Spanish but not very well so I spoke to her in English.

I asked her why I could not go into the market and she replied: "It's membership only."

Then I said to her: "I do not want a stall to sell - I just want to buy", and she replied: "It's only membership."

"Then I cannot go in as I am Moroccan?"

"Yes".

I said to her that this was pure racism and she replied: "Yes".

I asked her who was in charge of the market or her boss and she replied "Talk to **** and ****"

I said to her you be ashamed to work for people like this."

She replied: "Don't have a go at me. I have a baby daughter to look after so **** off!"

By then the other man came to me and said in Spanish: "Please go because my boss does not want Moroccans here."

I said to him that this is racism and he said: "Yes, it's racism". My friends by then were saying "Let's go."

Looking for the police to be called I saw that the market



maker but they didn't want that and insisted: "Go, go, go!"

I left in anger and hit one of their advertising boards with my car.

That day was a normal Saturday for me. I go to the market and have a look around, and hopefully pick up a bargain or two if there are any.

Many people know me here in Spain. I've been here for over 20 years, I'm hard working and have four children, all born here and studying here.

The last thing I want is problems and I know everywhere you go you meet some "bad apples". But me and my friends are not like that.

AHMED REZZOUG SAN FULGENCIO
 We would welcome a response to these allegations but have been unable to establish who runs the market concerned. We would also like to emphasize that the market referred to by Mr Rezzoug has no connection

Biased Mac is jealous of Suarez

YOUR excellent paper is being ruined by the partisan rantings of John McGregor.

His bias towards all things Manchester United is embarrassing and distasteful.

His rant about Luis Suarez stank of jealousy...has his God Alex Ferguson never behaved badly on and around a football pitch?

He needs reining in or you will lose a lot more readers than just me.

PAUL HUBBARD
 I suggest you take a look at John McGregor's reply above to Paul Dalzell
 -EDITOR

EDITOR'S NOTE:
 Letters and emails will only be considered for publication in The Courier if an address and contact number are provided (not for publication)

It's the meal thing for lucky Kirsty

THE monthly draw held in the Age Concern Charity Shop in Montesinos was won by Kirsty Huhs. The prize was a meal for two at the Cooper Arms, Dona Pepe.

The prize for March is a voucher worth 20 euros from Davy's Coaches.

To enter this draw all you have to do is to purchase something from the shop then get a free draw ticket - or purchase a ticket for one euro.

Watch out for the next prize.

MAUREEN PAYNE, President

Is Torre Vieja really prepared for an earthquake?

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calastrophe. In Almoradi, residents mark the anniversary by taking to the streets carrying an image of the patron saint for earthquakes, San Emigdio, and pray to the memory of all victims.

Their fear of history repeating itself is so intense that when the earthquake of August 2008 hit, measuring only 3.8 degrees, the Council received endless requests

to take San Emigdio into the street, and thousands of people from all over the Vega Baja joined together to pray for safety and calm.

In spite of the extent of devastation caused all those years ago, experts still question whether any lessons were really learned from it. The immense reconstruction project forced Spain to improve the quality of housing, and paved the way for certain regulatory developments

within the construction sector, although little attention was given to public buildings, leaving them vulnerable.

Recent disasters such as that at Lorca and Jaén, have left experts, such as Roads and Highways Engineer and Technical Director for CYPE, Carlos Fernández, fearing that seismic regulations for this threatened area are still insufficient to cope with a similar event should it

strike again, and have even suggested that current strategies are less effective than those exercised in Colombia, Morocco and Algeria.

The simulation action plan which took place in Torre Vieja on March 5 was reportedly a huge success; but with the size and population of the city today, is it really enough to prevent an absolute catastrophe if the earth shakes so fiercely again in the future? Experts have their doubts.