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The issue of theft while blue water cruising illustrates the importance of a tight knit local community and what a difference this makes to law and order

iveaboard sailing is, in general, actually a pretty safe lifestyle to adopt. If you steer clear of pirate hotspots (so not Somalia) and don't dip down to the huge seas of the southern ocean (brrrrr!) you can coast around in a warm, temperate climate of relatively straightforward tropical sailing indefinitely.

But what about personal safety and security? Okay, let's forget about pirates and all their associated swashbuckling, cutlass-wielding caricatures. I'm talking about real situations of potential robbery or violence to crop up and spoil your seemingly endless boating holiday from the 'real world'.

Thefts in the Caribbean are common. They're almost the aquatic equivalent of schoolboy hijinks, consisting for the most part of opportunistic stealing.

A dinghy goes wandering, an outboard goes missing, etc. More often than not it's no nastier than that and in many cases the stolen items are recovered.

What's far more sobering are the incidents that involve forced entry onto a boat or crew, couple or families, being threatened or harmed. Fortunately, in our experience at any rate, such incidents are rare but the stories spread like wildfire among the cruising community, causing all sailors to be on the alert. And being on the alert is no bad thing. As sailors we train ourselves to be on the lookout for all types of trouble from the forecasts so developing a weather-eye for potential crime can be very wise.

While dawdling at anchor in Panama we got wind of an incident where a couple had been attacked in the night by local young boys. The news tore through the cruising fleet leaving all of us shaken and feeling nervous. We started shutting and locking ourselves in at night, a shift in our personal freedom that felt wretched and rather than continue to do that we decided it would be far better to simply change cruising grounds and sail on.

Such issues reared their ugly heads yet again when we were sailing in the Western Pacific. Many sailboats avoid the Solomon islands and Papua New Guinea entirely due to reports of crime against boats there. But, rather than skip these wonderful cruising grounds altogether and potentially miss out on some fantastic exposure to traditional village ways of life we opted to do our homework and



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Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com

simply prepare for eventualities or problems the same way that we prepare for every passage.

When you research into theft and violent crime in these places the rather endearing and slightly too lenient term "rascal" or "raskol" is often used. Crews are advised to consult the village chief or elder about known rascals in the area and what measures to be taken to avoid trouble with them. This rather blanket term, which sounds more akin to "loveable scamp" than someone trying to force their way onto your boat with a machete and demand money or goods to go away, seems to cover all manner of indiscretions.

However, we duly prepared for the rascals, avoiding certain islands where there had been reports of incidents, never leaving loose, tempting items on our deck and locking the boat fully

when not aboard. Some boats go much further, installing motion-activated security lights, alarms or even cameras to discourage thieves. We were also warned away from the mainland in Papua New Guinea and anywhere else where extraction industry, mining or logging, had brought workers from outside. The issue with such places is that people have moved away from their local chief-led society which acts as effectively as law-enforcement in most places.

In a typical island village, if anyone were to steal something from a yacht, the whole community would know about it as the stolen items are clearly foreign and yacht crew would report it to the village leader. The guilty party would quickly be discovered and publicly shamed and ostracised, on occasion even formally punished. So consequently, in a properly well-functioning village, such crimes simply can't happen.

And this was most certainly our experience in sailing for many months in both of these beautiful countries. Of course, we took our precautions and were wary at times but it's also important to remember just how curious and friendly the locals in these places are. In the same way that we were desperate to explore their village and get a glimpse into the way they live so too were they amazed to see just how many people called this strange yacht home and what it looked like inside. Did we feel safe? Yes, most definitely. But perhaps what's far more important than that is that we felt welcome.