

Keep your home safe while on holidays

RACV RoyalAuto magazine

Many people leave their homes vulnerable to thieves when they go on holidays simply by revealing their absence on social media.

Holidaymakers love to use online platforms to share information such as the dates and locations of holidays and check-ins at airports and hotels, as well as posting holiday snaps.

But without understanding the security settings on social media accounts, many are unwillingly broadcasting that their homes are vacant and therefore vulnerable.

“Facebook has more than 1.7 billion users across the globe and many people share personal information assuming only their list of friends can view it, but this is often not the case,” says RACV general manager of home services Aaron Flavell.

A recent study by the Australian Institute of Criminology and Edith Cowan University found that 78 per cent of former burglars strongly believed that thieves used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to get status updates and target homes for burglary.

Nearly three-quarters of the ex-burglars said that in their “expert” opinion, Google Street View was playing a role in contemporary home thefts, allowing thieves to ‘scope out’ properties from the comfort of their own homes.

RACV’s Aaron Flavell says: “It only takes five minutes to update your privacy settings and ensure that your posts, updates and photos are not visible to anybody but your friends list.

“We also encourage people to avoid posting their home addresses publicly on social media even if sharing it with a friend or family member. There are private messaging functions on most social media sites that will allow you to do this safely,” Aaron says.

But ensuring your social media settings are secure is only one step in protecting your home, Aaron says.

Burglaries generally increase over summer when many homes are empty. Fairfax Media has reported that burglaries surge in the month of January, up eight per cent on the monthly average over the past 14 years.

Aside from obvious steps such as ensuring all doors and windows are locked and making sure no valuables are visible to passers-by, a key to reducing the likelihood of your home becoming a target is to make it appear occupied.

“Things such as an overflowing letterbox, rubbish bins remaining on the street and unopened newspapers in the driveway are signs a house is vacant, and some thieves will monitor houses over a period of time if this seems the case,” Aaron says.

He says that asking a family member or neighbour to enter the house every few days can be a deterrent for thieves. But if that's not possible, then timers that will switch on lights and appliances such as your TV each day are a small investment that can have big benefits.

Story: Kathryn Kernohan

The most effective safeguard against burglary is installing a back-to-base monitored home security system and CCTV system. RACV Home Security provides a range of security solutions to protect your home and family. For details, go to racv.com.au/homesecurity or call 13 27 56.