

Burglars look to bag bargains during December and January

Auckland, 13 December 2021 – Don't be tempted to drop your guard during December and January, warns AA Insurance. They're the busiest months in the year for thieves, regardless of lockdown levels.

From attempted car break-ins at beaches, parks, and campgrounds, to cars being stolen while owners are away on holiday, along with their shiny, new Christmas gifts and other items from their homes, burglars remain keen on doing their own style of Christmas shopping.

"Every year we see a peak in content claims in January for stolen property including Christmas gifts, alongside claims for lost or accidentally damaged items like phones and tablets," says Amelia Macandrew, Customer Relations Manager, AA Insurance. "So, we're asking Kiwis to be mindful of where they keep their belongings, whether at home or out and about, to help reduce the chances of someone stealing them."

Burglaries and break-ins

Last year, Christmas was ruined for some customers by opportunistic thieves, she says. One customer came home from celebrating Christmas Day to find his front door open and over \$14,000 worth of his belongings taken, including a GoPro camera, Bluetooth speakers, and jewellery as well as some of his Christmas gifts.

According to the 2021 AA Insurance Lifestyle Survey, which interviewed 1,100 Kiwis aged 18+ years, 55% of burglaries happened when the household was out for the day or for a short period, like grocery and gift shopping. When respondents were asked if they had ever had a break-in, Aucklanders came out ahead at 29%, followed by Cantabrians, at 27% and Wellingtonians at 22%.

Of the 55% of thefts that happened when the occupants were away for less than 24 hours, 71% were away for three hours or less. Another 26% of burglaries occurred when respondents were on holiday or away for the weekend and, worryingly, 19% occurred while they were home.

In one example, an AA Insurance customer had a house sitter in her home while she was away over Christmas. When the house sitter went outside on the morning of Christmas Eve, she found the



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utility shed broken into, and over \$10,000 worth of equipment stolen, including a ride on mower, chainsaw, and hedge trimmer.

Two-thirds of Kiwis are becoming serious about protecting their property once a break-in has occurred however, with 34% installing new locks, 26% an alarm, while 11% are setting their alarm more regularly when leaving home. Yet 33% did nothing at all, and only half (51%) of those with an alarm always use it.

“After a year of regional lockdowns, Kiwis are excited about getting out and about this holiday season, as are thieves, so it’s no time to forget the security basics,” says Amelia Macandrew, Customer Relations Manager. “It sounds obvious but it’s important to always lock your home and turn on the security alarm when you leave, even if you’re not going for long – because they only work if you use them.

“If you haven’t already, install deadbolts and locks to your doors and windows, so even if burglars can get in, they will be limited in how much they can take. And keep your grille door locked if you want to open your front door to air the house on those warmer days. An open front door can prove a great temptation to opportunistic thieves, especially if they can see valuables near the door, gifts under the tree, or tell-tale packaging on the kerb side.”

Other tips for keeping your property safe include being home to receive online purchase deliveries or have them sent to where you will be. Alternatively, take advantage of the courier companies that let you have your deliveries hidden in a special place, at the neighbours, or at a drop off point that you can collect from later.

“Keep enticing items away from the doorstep, gate or overstuffed letterbox and out of view – because out of sight is out of mind,” says Amelia. “This sentiment can be applied when unloading shopping, including groceries, from your car too.”

Car security

According to the survey, 89% of us always lock our car, yet around a quarter of us have had a car broken into, with 72% of those respondents having had their possessions stolen after leaving them in their parked cars, as two customers found out on Boxing Day.

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The first customer had his car broken into and items stolen when he stopped off at a mall on the way home from a fishing trip. His fishing and diving gear were taken along with eyewear, photography drone, and GoPro valued at almost \$13,000. The second customer left his car at the Palmerston North races overnight. When he returned early the next morning his car was one of several with smashed windows. Thieves had made off with his laptop, Christmas presents, shoes, clothes, and toiletries valued at over \$3,000.

“It’s these kinds of events that can really put a damper on your holiday,” says Amelia. “So, as you would with your home, keep your valuables hidden if you must leave them in your car – preferably in the boot, under the seat, or, better still, take them with you.

“The holiday season can be a stressful time, so while we’re always here for our customers when unexpected things go wrong, we’d rather help them prevent these things from happening,” continues Amelia. “That means taking a few simple precautions with your belongings and security, so you get through the summer holidays safely and enjoyably.”

AA Insurance’s 10 top tips for a safer holiday

Burglaries

1. Gifts under the tree are tempting for thieves so make sure they, and other valuables, can’t be seen from outside the home. Also, be careful when disposing of any tell-tale packaging.
2. Don’t advertise you’re not at home by leaving messages on your answering machine or on social networking sites, or having parcels delivered to an empty house.
3. Let your neighbours know if you’re going to be away, give them your contact phone number, and ask them to clear your mail, put washing on the line, or park in your driveway.
4. Make it difficult for someone to break into your home – lock your shed, put away your tools and wheelie bins, and trim trees and shrubs so there are no places for burglars to hide. Don’t leave a spare house key in obvious places for you, Santa, or thieves to find.
5. Consider security options for your home that complement each other, such as alarms, security lights, and deadlocks on doors and windows. Remember they’ll only work if you use them – even if you aren’t out for long.

Theft from cars

1. Lock your car, no matter where it’s parked and keep your keys with you. Try to park in open, well-lit areas, or an attended, secure parking building.

2. It's preferable that you take shopping and other valuables (e.g. wallet, sunglasses, mobile, iPods) with you. If you wouldn't leave the equivalent amount in cash in your car, then you shouldn't leave your items.
3. If you've shopped 'til you've dropped, and you need to leave items in your car, then keep them in the boot where they can't be seen. Don't have them on display.
4. Remove the GPS cradle and mobile charger.
5. Install additional security to your car such as an alarm, or immobiliser, to help deter thieves.

ENDS

About AA Insurance

AA Insurance is an independently operated, New Zealand-based joint venture between the New Zealand Automobile Association (NZAA) and Vero Insurance New Zealand Limited (VINZL). Since 1994 we have demonstrated trusted expertise in home, contents and car insurance in New Zealand, and in 2018 introduced commercial small business insurance. We underwrite our own policies and sell direct to New Zealanders. Our 930+ staff look after over 480,000 customers with 970,000 policies.

We proudly partner with Eden Park and have been consistently recognised by: Reader's Digest Most Trusted Brands (11 consecutive years since 2011) and Quality Service Awards for Car, and Home and Contents Insurance (since 2015), Kantar Customer Leadership Index (since 2019), Canstar Blue Most Satisfied Customers (2011-2018), and the Colmar Brunton Corporate Reputation Index (since 2015) that recognises New Zealand's most successful companies. Last year, AA Insurance was also named Consumer NZ People's Choice award winner for car, home and contents (since 2019).

AA Insurance has an A+ (Strong) Insurer Financial Strength Rating given by Standard and Poor's (Australia) Pty Ltd. For further information visit aainsurance.co.nz.

For more information please contact:

Rachael Joel, Botica Butler Raudon Partners, (09) 303 3862, 021 403 504 or rachaelj@botica.co.nz

Amanda Fifield, AA Insurance, 021 406 1787 or amanda_fifield@aainsurance.co.nz