

Theme parks linked to increased crime risk, says study

November 6 2019



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Crime rates are likely to be higher in neighbourhoods near theme parks which are major tourist attractions, according to new findings published in the peer-reviewed journal *Justice Quarterly*.

The first known study into the geographical concentration of crime around prominent US amusement venues has focused on Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. The findings show offence rates increased by 198% in neighbourhoods within a mile of the [park](#) which attracts

more than nine million visitors a year.

Hotels, bars and restaurants are a major factor in this trend. The researchers found crime rates increased by around 19% in areas with just one of these 'attractors.'

The study highlights a need for more active policing strategies to combat the effect of crime on tourists, local residents, businesses and police. They say should new approaches should be used in neighbours 'influenced' by Universal Studios, not just within and around the [tourist attraction](#).

Reducing the number of places near [theme parks](#) that attract crime such as hotels and including safety tips for tourists on cash machines are among recommendations the researchers outline.

"This study highlights an important relationship between theme park tourism and crime," says lead author Dr. Alex Piquero from the University of Texas at Dallas, USA.

"Our results hold implications for understanding the relationship between tourism and crime, and for the practical implementation of police strategies.

"Theme park tourism stands to top record levels in successive years. These findings indicate the need for more active policing strategies, not only in the theme park areas but also more distant neighborhoods (sic) under the influence of the theme park."

Theme parks are major tourism destinations worldwide, attracting millions of visitors including tourists. A third of North America's entire theme park attendance occurs in Orlando, the city where Universal Studios is based.

Data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) shows crime rates in Orlando are higher than the national average. In 2017, a total of 6,198 violent and property crimes were recorded compared with 2,756 nationally.

Dr. Piquero aimed to investigate the effect of tourism—especially from a high-profile theme park—on crime rates of nearby neighbourhoods.

Data on low level street offences such as motor theft and assault was obtained from the Orlando Police Department. The incidents including motor theft, assault and drug violations occurred between 2015 to 2017.

This data was used by Dr. Piquero to establish crime rates at the level of census 'blocks', the smallest possible geographical areas for which population-related information exists. Crime patterns in these blocks were then analysed using various statistical techniques including geospatial mapping.

The study found the blocks where Universal Studios is located and areas nearby had higher [crime rates](#) than other parts of Orlando. Conversely, rates decreased by 14% for every 1km further away blocks were from the theme park.

The link between [crime](#) and certain types of venues such as hotels has been examined by earlier studies. Dr. Piquero says researchers believe they influence rates by increasing the number of potentially 'suitable' targets, such as people on vacation who take less precautions with property and safety.

More information: *Justice Quarterly* (2019).
www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/07418825.2019.1677935

Provided by Taylor & Francis

Citation: Theme parks linked to increased crime risk, says study (2019, November 6) retrieved 21 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-11-theme-linked-crime.html>

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