

South American theft groups, also known as **crime tourists** or **Chilean tourist burglars**, are an ongoing phenomenon of organized crime. [These groups originate from South America and specifically target wealthy households in foreign countries before returning to their home country¹](#). Here are some key points about these theft groups:

1. **Modus Operandi:**

- These groups arrive in a foreign country posing as “tourists.”
- They often use false identities and acquire rental cars.
- Communication within the group is facilitated using burner phones.
- Their primary targets are wealthy neighborhoods and empty homes.
- They specialize in stealing watches and jewelry.

Origins:

- The bandits frequently originate from **Chile** and sometimes **Colombia**.
- [They exploit the Electronic System for Travel Authorization \(ESTA\), which grants 90-day visa waivers to citizens of member countries, enabling their criminal activities in the United States¹](#).

South American theft groups employ specific strategies when selecting their targets. Here are some common methods they use:

1. **Observation and Research:**

- These criminals often scout neighborhoods in advance.
- They observe patterns, such as when residents leave for work or go on vacation.
- They research the wealth and lifestyle of potential targets.

2. **Wealthy Areas:**

- They focus on affluent neighborhoods where residents are likely to own valuable items.
- Luxury homes with expensive cars parked outside are prime targets.

3. **Empty Houses:**

- They prefer unoccupied houses.
- Vacation periods or extended trips provide ideal opportunities.
- They look for signs like piled-up mail, uncut grass, or darkened windows.

4. **Avoiding Confrontation:**

- These groups usually avoid confrontations.
- They strike when no one is home to minimize risk.
- Quick in-and-out burglaries are their modus operandi.

5. **High-Value Items:**

- They specifically target valuable items like watches, jewelry, and electronics.
- These items are easy to carry and resell.

6. **Escape Routes:**

- They plan escape routes in advance.
- Rental cars allow them to move swiftly and avoid detection.

Remember, these criminals operate with precision, exploiting vulnerabilities for financial gain. Vigilance, home security measures, and community awareness are essential in preventing such thefts.

South American theft groups employ several tactics to avoid detection by law enforcement:

1. **Disguise as Tourists:** These criminals pose as tourists, blending in with the local population. They often arrive in foreign countries with valid travel documents, making it difficult for authorities to identify them as criminals.
2. **Unarmed Approach:** Unlike armed robbers, these groups operate without weapons. This reduces the risk of confrontation and minimizes attention from law enforcement.
3. **Rental Cars with False Identities:** They acquire rental vehicles using fake identities. These nondescript cars allow them to move around inconspicuously.
4. **Burner Phones:** To communicate, they use disposable or “burner” phones. These devices are harder to trace, making it challenging for authorities to intercept their conversations.
5. **Target Selection:** They focus on wealthy neighborhoods and empty homes. By avoiding areas with heavy police presence, they decrease the likelihood of detection.
6. **Swift Operations:** These groups execute their plans swiftly, minimizing the time spent at the crime scene. This reduces the chances of encountering law enforcement.
7. **Loot Selection:** They primarily steal high-value items such as watches and jewelry. These items are easy to transport and sell, allowing them to maximize profits.
8. **Origin Countries:** Many of these criminals come from Chile and sometimes Colombia. Their familiarity with the region and language aids in their covert operations.

1. Strengthen Your Home's Exterior:

- **Survey Your Home:** Walk around the exterior and identify vulnerable spots. Think like a burglar and address any weaknesses.
- **Secure Windows and Doors:** Install sturdy deadbolt locks on all exterior doors. Ensure hinges are inside the house to prevent easy removal. Lock doors even when you're away for a short time.
- **Trim Shrubs and Bushes:** Keep shrubbery near entrances and walkways well-trimmed. Eliminate hiding spots for potential thieves.
- **Install Fencing:** Consider installing a fence, preferably chain-link or ornamental metal. Secure it into concrete to prevent lifting.

2. Make Your Home Look Occupied:

- **Lights On:** Leave lights on when you go out, especially during evenings. A well-lit home deters burglars.
- **Timers:** Use timers for lights, TVs, or radios to create the illusion of activity when you're away.
- **Ask a Neighbor:** If you're going on vacation, ask a trusted neighbor to collect mail, park in your driveway, and keep an eye on your property.

3. Protect Valuables:

- **Keep Valuables Out of Sight:** Avoid displaying expensive items (electronics, art, furniture) near windows.
- **Secure Important Documents:** Store passports, financial statements, and sensitive documents in a locked, fireproof safe or a safety deposit box.
- **Shred Mail:** Regularly check your mailbox and shred mail containing personal information.

4. Invest in Security Measures:

- **Visible Alarm System:** Install a visible alarm system. It sends a clear message to potential intruders that your home is not an easy target.
- **Security Cameras:** Consider installing security cameras around entry points.
- **Motion-Activated Lights:** Install motion-activated lights near entrances and dark areas.

5. When You're Away:

- **Don't Broadcast Your Absence:** Avoid posting vacation plans on social media. Burglars may monitor such posts.
- **Lock Everything:** Lock all doors, windows, and gates before leaving.

- **Neighbor Watch:** Inform a trusted neighbor about your absence and ask them to keep an eye on your home.