# London’s mobile phone theft crisis deters tourists and hits economy, says hotel chief



In a chilling revelation, London’s escalating mobile phone theft crisis is driving away potential tourists, warns Greg Hegarty, co-chief executive of PPHE Hotels. As phone snatching incidents surge in the capital, Hegarty highlights the urgent need for enhanced security measures, putting pressure on Mayor Sadiq Khan to address rampant crime that threatens both visitors and the local economy. The hotel executive has underscored an alarming trend: tourists increasingly feel unsafe carrying their devices in popular areas such as the South Bank and Oxford Street.

Mr Hegarty's comments come against the backdrop of stark statistics released by the Metropolitan Police, which reported nearly 66,528 mobile phones stolen over a year, equating to an average theft every six minutes. Astonishingly, earlier statistics revealed a total of approximately 91,000 mobile thefts across London in 2022, reiterating the severe impact of this crime wave. The £50 million-a-year trade in stolen phones has been characterised by brazen tactics involving scooter-riding thieves blitzing urban areas, leaving victims—some as young as four—in distress and despair.

Amidst these rising concerns, Hegarty has stated that his company has doubled security spending since the onset of the pandemic, acknowledging that crime is a fundamental worry for both holidaymakers and corporate clients. “I want our customers to feel safe and valued,” he told a national newspaper, emphasising the relationship between perceived safety and business viability. The anecdotal evidence is striking; online reviews now frequently mention fears of theft, impacting the reputation of local hospitality sectors.

In their efforts to combat the mobile theft epidemic, the Metropolitan Police have launched significant crackdowns, with over 1,000 handsets seized in one week alone and 230 arrests made, targeting those involved in the illicit trade. Undercover operations have intensified, with plain-clothed officers deployed in crime hotspots such as the West End and Westminster, where nearly 40% of phone thefts occur. The police's approach is multifaceted; they are employing advanced tracking technology to recover stolen devices and dismantle organised crime networks.

Furthermore, the Government has promised to expedite the destruction of stolen scooters and e-bikes used in these crimes, shifting from a two-week to a 48-hour timeline to dispose of these vehicles. This decisive action is aimed at disrupting repeat offenders who might otherwise reclaim their stolen property. Justice Secretary Dame Diana Johnson has stated, “Anti-social behaviour, whatever form it takes, will not be tolerated in our local communities,” signalling a robust governmental stance against the issue.

Nonetheless, the low recovery rate for stolen phones—only 2% of reported thefts see the devices returned—highlights the urgent need for collaborative efforts from both law enforcement and technology providers. The Metropolitan Police have called upon mobile phone manufacturers to implement more deterrent features, reducing the potential rewards of theft. With London's allure as a tourist destination wavering under the shadow of crime, there is heightened pressure on authorities to enhance public safety initiatives.

The pervasive issue of theft has not only impacted general public confidence but has also left individual victims reeling from their experiences. Among them, actress Genevieve Chenneour shared her traumatic encounter with a thief whilst enjoying a coffee, stating she was left “concussed and traumatised” after her phone was forcibly taken. Such traumatic episodes underline the emotional toll of rising crime in a city that prides itself on being a vibrant hub for visitors.

As these alarming trends continue, it remains clear that the interplay of public safety, tourism, and local business viability in London hinges on urgent and effective responses. The broader implications for local economies necessitate a concerted strategy from both civic leaders and the community to restore confidence and ensure a safe environment for residents and visitors alike.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769189/Hotel-boss-London-phone-theft-epidemic-scaring-tourists.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-66442069)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769189/Hotel-boss-London-phone-theft-epidemic-scaring-tourists.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g39ldprr3o), [[4]](https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-seizes-one-thousand-stolen-phones-in-a-week-493558)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/met-police-phone-theft-crackdown-london-b1209407.html), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-65105199)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.euronews.com/travel/2023/12/14/pickpocketing-on-the-london-tube-theft-soars-by-83-with-popular-tourist-destinations-key-targets)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769189/Hotel-boss-London-phone-theft-epidemic-scaring-tourists.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-66442069), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-65105199)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769189/Hotel-boss-London-phone-theft-epidemic-scaring-tourists.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-66442069> - In 2022, the Metropolitan Police reported that nearly 91,000 mobile phones were stolen in London, averaging one theft every six minutes. This surge in phone thefts has prompted calls for mobile phone manufacturers to implement features that deter such crimes. The Metropolitan Police and Mayor Sadiq Khan have urged the mobile industry to develop solutions that make phone theft less rewarding. The data highlights the need for increased security measures and public awareness to combat the growing issue of phone theft in the capital.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g39ldprr3o> - The Metropolitan Police have intensified efforts to tackle the £50 million-a-year trade in stolen phones across London. In a recent crackdown, 230 individuals were arrested, and over 1,000 handsets were seized within a week. The operation focused on those involved in stealing, handling, and supplying stolen phones. Plain-clothed officers were deployed in hotspot areas, including the West End and Westminster, and tracking technology was used to recover phones and apprehend criminals. This initiative aims to disrupt the organized crime networks driving phone thefts in the city.
4. <https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-seizes-one-thousand-stolen-phones-in-a-week-493558> - The Metropolitan Police have seized over 1,000 stolen phones in a week-long operation targeting the £50 million-a-year trade in stolen devices. The crackdown resulted in 230 arrests and focused on individuals involved in the theft, handling, and distribution of stolen phones. Increased patrols and plain-clothed operations were conducted in areas such as the West End and Westminster, where nearly 40% of phone thefts occur. The operation also utilized phone-tracking data and intelligence to pursue those handling stolen devices, aiming to dismantle the criminal networks behind the thefts.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/met-police-phone-theft-crackdown-london-b1209407.html> - In a concerted effort to combat the escalating phone theft epidemic in London, the Metropolitan Police have seized over 1,000 stolen mobiles in a single week. The operation led to 230 arrests and targeted individuals involved in stealing, handling, and supplying stolen phones. Plain-clothed officers were deployed in high-crime areas, including the West End and Westminster, and tracking technology was employed to recover phones and apprehend criminals. This initiative underscores the police's commitment to addressing the £50 million-a-year trade in stolen phones affecting the capital.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-65105199> - In 2022, London experienced a significant rise in mobile phone thefts, with 91,000 reported incidents, averaging one theft every six minutes. The recovery rate for stolen phones was notably low, with only 2% of reported thefts resulting in the return of the device. The Metropolitan Police acknowledged the challenges in policing this crime and emphasized the need for ongoing operations to address the issue. The data highlights the urgency for enhanced security measures and public vigilance to combat the growing problem of phone theft in the city.
7. <https://www.euronews.com/travel/2023/12/14/pickpocketing-on-the-london-tube-theft-soars-by-83-with-popular-tourist-destinations-key-targets> - Between April and September 2023, pickpocketing incidents on the London Underground increased by 83%, with popular tourist destinations being primary targets. Stations such as King's Cross St Pancras, Leicester Square, and Oxford Circus were identified as hotspots for thefts. The Northern Line was the most targeted route for on-train thefts. Transport for London (TfL) has responded by deploying plain-clothes police patrols and utilizing CCTV to track down offenders. Passengers are advised to remain vigilant, use secure bags, and report any suspicious activity to authorities.