Pirates

Is there really such a thing as a modern-day pirate?

You may think pirates are merely the subject matter of myth and legend in the 21st century and they only appear in history books about life centuries ago. Think again! There are examples of modern-day pirates operating around the world and they pose a real, grave threat to sea vessels globally. Pirates may no longer fly Jolly Roger flags and steal chests of treasure, but they are no less dangerous. Their goal is the same as their seafaring ancestors: to intimidate and steal from crew members on passing sea vessels. In the same manner in which they attacked through history; pirates will go to great lengths to steal from their victims. They will resort to assaulting and marooning victims if necessary.

A Golden Age pirate ship

A human threat in our seas

Modern-day pirates are more common than you may realise: international losses due to piracy cost companies an estimated £10 billion globally every year. This is an increase of 75% in the last decade, which means incidents of piracy are increasing. In 2019, there were 119 piracy incidents worldwide according to The International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau (IMB).

Use of technology

You may wonder what weapons modern-day pirates would use and how they would go about planning an attack. No longer would they rely on cutlasses and muskets; rather, modern-day pirates are armed with firearms like machine guns. These guns are used to instill fear in their victims to gain compliance.

In history, pirates would rely on a cartographer's maps and charts to navigate the seas. Now, pirates can use advanced technology such as GPS tracking systems and night-vision goggles to help them navigate and track other ships at any time of the day, in any part of the world. In some ways, this makes the work of a pirate more targeted and deadly. Modern pirates would still use rocket launchers to target ships from a distance in a similar way to historical pirates.

One of the most fearsome and famed elements of pirate culture has always been the vast array of weapons they brandish and use. Despite the fact modern-day pirates have a great reliance on technology, their weapons are arguably no less scary to other seafarers.

Attacking from the coastline

Most pirates throughout history lived the majority of their lives on board ships out at sea. This is in contrast to modern-day pirates, who are largely based on land and attack specific sea vessels they have been tracking by using speedboats to travel to their exact location.

If there were issues or fall outs on historical pirate ships, they would maroon members of their own crew. Now, it is more common that pirates would maroon their victims and steal their ships. In some scenarios, modern-day pirates take hostages for ransom.

Cruise ship attacks

Modern-day pirates usually focus on attacking cargo vessels, but there have been numerous reports of them attacking private yachts and cruise ships. They have been known to steal personal belongings of crew members and passengers, especially on wealthy yachts.

Luxury liner, Seaborne Spirit

In 2005, a luxury liner Seaborne Spirit was off the coast of Somalia when three boats of heavily-armed pirates appeared and attacked the ship. They used grenades and bullets to intimidate the ship's crew and to try to take possession of the ship. At the time, there were thousands of wealthy passengers on board and they were ordered to gather in the ship's ballroom for their own safety. The quick-thinking crew on board used a loud, piercing sound from a special device to deter the pirates. Thankfully, there were no casualties and the cruise passengers were able to continue on with their holiday.

Where in the world would you still find pirates?

In some areas of the world, piracy is still almost non-existent as the waters and territories are closely monitored and surveyed, while in other parts of the world, it is much more commonplace. The area off the Somali coast (in-between Red Sea and the Indian Ocean) is one of the most notorious places in the world. Other areas where piracy has been reported are South America, the Caribbean, East Africa and in the South China Sea.

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