



Vanuatu 2019 Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office (RSO) at U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, which oversees security for Vanuatu.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Vanuatu at Level 1, indicating travelers should exercise normal precautions.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The American Citizen Services unit (ACS) cannot recommend a particular individual or establishment, and assumes no responsibility for the quality of services provided.

Review OSAC's [Vanuatu-specific page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Crime Threats

There is minimal risk from crime in Vanuatu. While Port Vila is a relatively safe city by regional standards, exercise personal and environmental awareness at all times.

Although violent crime is rare in Vanuatu, the risk of exposure to other types of crime exists. When in public, avoid carrying purses, jewelry, briefcases, or other valuable items that are likely to draw unwanted attention. Do not carry large sums of money on your person.

Cybersecurity Issues

Vanuatu has made advances in its cybersecurity roadmap. The country participated in the inaugural Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON) event in April 2018 funded by the Australian government to enhance cyber resilience in the region. Vanuatu has also launched its own Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) to improve the security infrastructure and monitor/manage threats and vulnerabilities. Exercise normal security precautions when using public computers, ensuring you have logged off all accounts before leaving the terminal.

Other Areas of Concern

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) from WWII can be found on both land and underwater throughout the country. Exercise caution when walking or hiking off marked roads, and conducting activities in the water. If you discover UXO, do not touch it, move it, or try to collect it as a souvenir.

Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, please review OSAC's report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Road Safety and Road Conditions

The road quality in Vanuatu is fair. There are paved roads in Port Vila and Luganville, but outlying area roads are usually unpaved. Animals and pedestrians make driving at night hazardous. Road conditions can change drastically after natural destructive events such as cyclones, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes. Exercise caution when walking at night as drivers have very limited visibility in most part due to a lack of roadway illumination.

A valid domestic driver's license or international driver's license is acceptable for driving in Vanuatu. For more information on self-driving, review OSAC's report, [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

Public Transportation Conditions

Numerous taxis and car rental services are available in Port Vila and Luganville. Identify taxis by the red 'T' on their license plates. Taxis do not have meters; a passenger must agree on a price with the driver before departing to the destination.

There are several minibuses in Port Vila, identified by the red 'B' on their license plate. Passengers must flag down public buses, rather than waiting for them to stop at designated locations.

Inter-island travel using the domestic airline Air Vanuatu can be expensive and subject to delays. Sea travel is cheap, but can be infrequent and unreliable, and the seaworthiness of watercraft is questionable.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Bauerfield International Airport (VLI) serves as the major airport in Vanuatu, with flights from New Zealand, Fiji, Australia, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, and Papua New Guinea, as well as domestic stops within Vanuatu. Maintain awareness of belongings at all times while traveling. Use Transportation Security Administration (TSA) approved locks, and retrieve checked bags as soon as possible.

Terrorism Threat

There is minimal risk from terrorism in Vanuatu.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

There is minimal risk from civil unrest in Vanuatu. Civil disorder in Vanuatu is rare; however, avoid public demonstrations and/or political rallies if they occur.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Vanuatu is an island nation subject to natural disasters, including cyclones, earthquakes, floods, sudden tidal movements, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. Although the probability of a major earthquake or tsunami occurring during a particular trip is remote, small earthquakes occur regularly due to its proximity to the New Hebrides Plate.

In 2018, the volcano on Ambae Island erupted causing the declaration of a state of emergency and the evacuation of all the islands inhabitants. Volcanos in Vanuatu pose a very real risk as exemplified by Lopevi volcano on Paama Island (Alert Level 2) and Marum and Benbow volcanoes on Abrym Island.

The South Pacific cyclone season runs between November and March. However, tropical cyclones may occur all year. Cyclone activity frequently causes flooding along the coastline, which in turn causes destruction of infrastructure and delays in essential services. Public services (e.g. water, electricity, and transportation) are likely to be unavailable for a significant period following a natural disaster, as was evident in the aftermath of Cyclone Pam in 2015.

General information regarding disaster preparedness is available via the Internet from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Critical Infrastructure

Many buildings in Vanuatu do not have fire alarms or fire suppression equipment in close proximity. This is especially true in remote rural areas. Fire alarms at tourist hotels are not often installed and evacuation plans are not practiced or do not exist. When checking into your hotel, become familiar with all of the fire exits on the premises during the check in process. For more information on fire safety in hotels, review OSAC's report, [Fire Safety Abroad](#).

Economic Concerns

Vanuatu is a member of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the WTO. Vanuatu has increased its enforcement of intellectual property with the enactment of the Customs Act in 2015. As a result, the prevalence of pirated items has declined.

Vanuatu uses Vanuatu vatu (VT) as its currency, with ATMs accessible in Port Vila and Luganville.

Personal Identity Concerns

Vanuatu is an ethnically homogeneous nation, predominantly composed of ethnic ni-Vanuatu peoples further divided into tribes in rural areas. There have been no recent reports of internal ethnic conflict between tribes. Non-native visitors will stand out as foreign, but report little if any bias or criminal targeting based on ethnicity.

Same-sex sexual relations are illegal in Vanuatu. However, there are no known incidents of the prosecution, targeting, or harassment of consenting adults. Vanuatu is a conservative country; all travelers should avoid public displays of affection.

There is no law specifically prohibiting discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities. There are no special programs to assist persons with disabilities and no legislation mandating access to buildings, information, and communications. In practice, most buildings in Vanuatu are not accessible to persons with disabilities, and disabled persons often rely on assistance from friends and family.

Drug-related Crimes

The Vanuatu Police are responsible for conducting criminal investigations as well as investigations conducted in cooperation with foreign law enforcement entities. Police strictly enforce laws concerning drug possession.

Kidnapping Threat

There is minimal risk from kidnapping in Vanuatu.

Police Response

Report all incidents of crime to the local police authorities. Remain calm and polite when interacting with the police to avoid misunderstandings.

The ability of local police to assist victims of crime is limited due to a lack essential equipment. Police support in outlying islands is extremely limited and often serviced regionally by a small office.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment and Crime Victim Assistance

Detained or arrested U.S. citizens should request to speak to a U.S. Embassy representative in Port Moresby.

Crime victims should contact the local police and the American Citizen Services section at U.S. Embassy Port Moresby. For emergencies requiring police, dial 111. For fire emergency, dial 113. For maritime emergency assistance, dial 114. For medical assistance, dial 115.

Reach American Citizen Services in Port Moresby at ConsularPortMoresby@state.gov, or the following phone numbers: Normal inquires + (675) 308-2100, Emergency inquiries: + (675) 7200-9439.

Port Vila and Santo are the only fire stations in Vanuatu. For administrative calls to local fire and police posts, dial:

Port Vila	Fire: (678) 22-333	Police (678) 22-222
Torba		Police: (678) 38-556
Santo	Fire: (678) 36-333	Police: (678) 36-222
Malampa		Police: (678) 48-408
Tafea		Police (678) 88-658

Medical Emergencies

Hospital and medical facilities in Vanuatu are limited, and treatment can be very expensive. The nearest reliable trauma treatment is in Australia or New Zealand. Vila Central Hospital and Santo Hospital are the main hospitals in Vanuatu. There is a hyperbaric recompression chamber in Luganville, on Espiritu Santo Island; however, diving-related injuries may require medical evacuation to Australia or New Zealand.

Malaria is prevalent in some areas. Malaria prophylaxis is not normally necessary for Port Vila, but the malarial risk increases in locals that are more rural.

Pharmacies in Vanuatu are usually only found in urban centers or at missionary clinics. Carry adequate supplies of any needed prescription medicines, along with copies of prescriptions, the generic name of the drugs, and a supply of preferred over-the-counter medications.

Drink bottled or treated water only; avoid tap water. For more information, refer to OSAC's reports, [Traveling with Medication](#) and [I'm Drinking What in My Water?](#)

Individuals requiring an ambulance in Port Vila or Santo should call 115 or Vila Central Hospital (+678 22-100) or Santo Hospital (+678 37-112). Pro Medical Vanuatu (+678 25-566) provides emergency paramedic services operated by personnel from Australia and New Zealand.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

For a list of available medical facilities, refer to the Embassy's [Medical Assistance page](#).

Available Air Ambulance Services

- Medical Santo, (678) 553-6400. Air Vanuatu provides medical evacuation (medevac) of non-critical patients by Boeing 738 to Brisbane, Sydney, or Auckland. A Queensland-based air ambulance evacuates critically ill patients with a medical team aboard.
- AMR Air Ambulance, +1 (720) 875-9183 operates its own aircraft and medical teams, and has a 24-hour call center.
- Angel MedFlight WorldWide Air Ambulance, +1 (480) 634-8017 operates its own aircraft and medical teams, and has a 24-hour call center.

Insurance Guidance

Emergency response is limited due to the distance between islands, and the infrequency of flights and ferries. Medical evacuation (medevac) outside of Vanuatu is extremely expensive. Purchase a good medical emergency and evacuation insurance plan. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for their services.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for Vanuatu.

OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council in Vanuatu. Interested private-sector security managers should contact [OSAC's Asia-Pacific team](#) with any questions.

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Port Moresby: Douglas Street, adjacent to the Bank of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby

Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone: + (675) 308-2100

Emergency: + (675) 7200-9439

Website: <https://pg.usembassy.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens traveling to Vanuatu should register with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to ensure they receive pertinent security updates and notices.