



Ghana 2020 OSAC Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Accra. OSAC encourages travelers to [use this report](#) to gain baseline knowledge of security conditions in Ghana. For more in-depth information, review OSAC's [Ghana country 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.

Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Ghana at Level 1, indicating travelers should exercise normal precautions. Exercise increased caution in urban areas, on intercity highways after dark, and areas near the northern border in the Upper East and Upper West regions, due to crime. Exercise increased caution in parts of the Bono, Bono East, North East, Northern, Savannah, and Upper East regions due to civil unrest. Review OSAC's report, [Understanding the Consular Travel Advisory System](#).

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Accra as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Violent crime is on the rise, including armed robberies in expatriate residential areas. Most cases occur at night. Nationwide, violent crime results in more than 500 deaths per year. Criminals frequently carry weapons; the most prevalent are locally manufactured pistols, rifles, and shotguns. Reliable sources estimate that there are 1.2 million unregistered guns in Ghana. Victims of robbery should comply with perpetrator demands, as resistance may cause the situation to escalate to violence.

Street crime is a serious problem throughout the country, and is especially acute in Accra and other large cities. Pickpocketing, purse snatching, and various scams are the most common forms of crime expatriates encounter. Most frequently, criminals target travelers in crowded areas and secluded beach areas.

Victims of opportunistic and violent crime are more likely to be targets based on perceived affluence and/or perceived vulnerability, not based on nationality. Avoid walking alone, especially after dark and in poorly illuminated or isolated areas; doing so may increase risk of criminal targeting. Opportunistic crimes targeting motorists and passengers in vehicles are common. Criminals may exploit unlocked car doors or open windows to steal belongings from vehicles stopped in traffic. Motorists should exercise caution and heightened awareness if opening doors/windows to give money to beggars or street vendors. Review OSAC's reports, [All That You Should Leave Behind](#).

Travel to tourist and historic areas of the country is popular and generally safe, but highway robberies are common on rural roads, especially near border areas. Bandits typically place obstructions in the road or simulate a crash/broken-down vehicle to stop traffic to steal vehicles or belongings. There are occasional reports of clashes between government forces and criminal groups, but these seldom affect foreigners. Check with local authorities before venturing off main roads into outlying areas.

In Accra and other urban areas, thieves and armed robbers target motorists using ruses to extort money. In some cases, robbers have intentionally caused minor accidents or pretended to be hit to get vehicles to stop. Others have attempted to “warn” drivers of a mechanical problem or flat tire. Maintain sufficient distance between your vehicle and the one ahead while stopped in traffic to enable evasive action and to avoid being in a situation where criminals box you in.

Property crimes against foreigners remain a concern, especially residential burglaries and vehicle theft. Carjacking occurs sporadically; on average fewer than ten incidents occur each month nationwide, half of which occur in Greater Accra. There have been burglary attempts against expatriate residences, but perpetrators generally lack the sophistication required to overcome home alarm systems and security guards. Guard dogs have also been known to scare off intruders. Robbers may wait outside houses to ambush residents as they enter or exit the property. Review OSAC’s reports, [Hotels: The Inns and Outs](#) and [Considerations for Hotel Security](#).

The Ghana Police Service (GPS) has labeled certain areas as “flashpoints” because of the large amount of crime, the lack of police presence, and other factors in the area that make them dangerous for everyone, including the police. The U.S. Government has limited ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in these areas, as U.S. government employees may not travel at night outside of major cities. These flashpoints include:

- **Accra City:** Madina & environs; Adenta & environs; and Dansoman & environs.
- **Ashanti Region:** Adum & Asafo areas, and Ejura-Manpong-Yeji Highway
- **Bono Region:** Sankore; Hwidiem; and Kenyasi
- **Bono East Region:** Kintampo-Buipe-Tamale Highway and Atebubu-Prang-Yeji Highway
- **Eastern Region:** Kibi (aka Kyebi); Akim Oda; and Kwahu Afram Plains (usually highways)
- **North East Region:** Masia-Bulgataya Road
- **Northern Region:** Tamale (primarily robberies at fuel stations)
- **Savanah Region:** Sawla- Damongo- Ffulso-Highway
- **Tema City:** Ashaiman & environs; Community 25; and Golf City
- **Upper East Region:** Bolga-Wa Road
- **Upper West Region:** Sawla-Tuna Highway
- **Volta Region:** Aflao
- **Western Region:** Tarkwa

Rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence remain significantly underreported. Rape is punishable by 5-25 years in prison, though police often lack capacity to investigate and prosecute cases effectively. While domestic violence is a crime punishable by up to two years in prison and/or a fine, police rarely respond to reports of domestic violence. Avoid sharing itineraries with strangers, including on social media, and be alert to anyone following you to your accommodations. If someone is following you, proceed to a police station or other public venue and do not continue to your original destination. Police rarely respond to reports of domestic violence. Review the State Department’s webpage on security for [female travelers](#).

Credit/debit card fraud and related scams are common. Skimming, the primary means of credit fraud, is undetectable until fraudulent charges appear on statements. Exercise caution when using credit cards; a growing number of travelers have been victims of credit card fraud. If you use a credit card anywhere in Ghana, monitor credit card activity closely. Review OSAC's reports, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#) and [Taking Credit](#).

Four telecom operators offer mobile money transactions in Ghana. Fraudsters have taken advantage of the expansion of mobile money platforms to scam users of the service. Most scams involve someone alerting you to a transaction "made in error" and asking to reverse the charges. Often the caller claims to be an employee of the telecom company or a vendor with whom you have recently transacted. Mobile money users should never disclose their PIN to anyone, never approve any transaction they have not initiated, and call **100** if you want to verify any information. This number connects to the customer service department for any telecom in Ghana.

Cybersecurity Issues

U.S. citizens frequently consult the U.S. Embassy regarding questionable business offers originating or claiming to originate from Ghana. Perpetrators of business fraud often target foreigners, including U.S. citizens. Such fraudulent schemes are now prevalent throughout West Africa. Business scams typically begin with an unsolicited communication (usually by e-mail) from an unknown individual who pitches a business opportunity promising quick financial gain. These "opportunities" usually involve the transfer of a large sum of money or valuables out of the country and the payment of a series of "advance fees," such as fees to open a bank account or to pay certain taxes in order to complete the transaction; however, the final payoff never occurs. The purpose of the scams is to collect money from the victim through these fees. The Embassy has received reports of fraudulent charities soliciting contributions via the internet or direct mail. If you receive business offers or charity requests, particularly unsolicited ones, carefully check out the requesting entity before committing any funds, providing any goods or services, or undertaking any travel.

Email spear-phishing campaigns originating or claiming to originate from Ghana also frequently target U.S. citizens. Spear-phishers make contact under the guise of a business contact or possible future business associate, and attempt to pass information via emails that contain questionable links. Unwitting recipients click on these links, compromising their email accounts and making personally identifiable information readily available to cyber criminals. Many of these operations link to internet cafés in Accra, with some cafés developing reputations for certain types of fraud based on trends in schemes originating from their location. Victims in Ghana have recently reported ransomware attacks, common throughout the world. Take necessary precautions, including vetting IT staff, preventing unauthorized access to servers, installing a virtual private network (VPN), controlling administrator passwords, and updating software and anti-virus programs.

Multiple variations of internet romance or friendship scams target Westerners through various dating and social networking websites. Scam artists use fake social media profiles, steal photos and identities from other social media accounts, and swindle victims out of thousands of dollars. Some perpetrators may claim to have a U.S. visa; often these are fake, even when they provide images. The perpetrators, once in a virtual relationship, typically ask for money for hospital expenses, travel expenses, visa costs, or expensive gifts. Do not travel to meet internet romantic partners or friends who have requested large sums of money; doing so may increase risk of kidnapping for ransom.

In recent years, U.S. citizens have reported substantial financial losses from questionable transactions allegedly involving the purchase of gold and other precious metals. The Government of Ghana maintains strict regulations on the sale of these natural resources; all agents must have licenses and all transactions must be certified.

Review OSAC's reports, [Cybersecurity Basics](#), [Best Practices for Maximizing Security on Public Wi-Fi](#), [Traveling with Mobile Devices: Trends & Best Practices](#), and [Satellite Phones: Critical or Contraband?](#)

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Travelers may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. Primary roads are generally paved and well maintained; however, side roads within major cities and many roads outside of urban areas are in poor condition. Poor road conditions may cause delays, making travel times variable.

Avoid nighttime travel outside the major cities due to armed banditry, hazards posed by disabled vehicles, lack of street lighting outside of urban areas, inadequate road markings, and the unpredictable behavior of farm animals and pedestrians in the roadway. Daytime travel between cities is generally safe, though armed robbery does occur on intercity highways, even during daylight hours.

Local drivers do not abide by the rules of the road, and police enforce traffic laws unevenly, even in major cities. Excessive speeding, unpredictable driving behavior, and lack of adherence to basic safety standards for local vehicles are widespread. Many vehicles are unlicensed, and most drivers lack basic driver training or insurance. Use defensive driving techniques, including maintaining sufficient following distances to avoid accidents.

On average, six pedestrians die each day in Ghana. Pedestrians must maintain awareness of dangers at all times: large commercial vehicles are slow to brake, vehicles may swerve into oncoming traffic to avoid potholes, motorcycles travel between vehicles and on shoulders and sidewalks, and drivers often pull out or turn despite oncoming traffic. Drivers should be prepared to avoid pedestrian crossings and expect sellers and panhandlers to mingle with traffic.

Due to poor driving conditions, unsafe driving behaviors, and the poor mechanical state of many vehicles, vehicle accidents are common and often result in serious injury and/or death. Reports of vehicular fatalities over the past few years have increased. Emergency services are limited or nonexistent in many parts of the country in case of vehicular accident or breakdown. Drivers should carry emergency medical supplies, spare tires, fuel, and tools on long trips, as emergency medical response may be delayed and there is no roadside assistance. If possible, use convoys to mitigate breakdown issues.

Those involved in a traffic accident while in Accra who cannot reach settlement at the scene should report the accident immediately to the traffic police, who will respond and conduct an investigation. Large crowds may gather at the site of an accident and could become hostile and aggressive against those they perceive to be at fault. If you fear for your safety, go to the nearest police station. Normal investigative procedures require the police to conduct an on-scene investigation, after which all involved parties go to the Traffic Department for a vehicle inspection and provide details about the accident for a final report. If possible, obtain the names and contact information of all persons involved in the accident and note the extent of any injuries and damage; note of any registration information (tag number) of other vehicle(s)

involved; obtain the other driver's permit data; and give similar information or registration/permit data to the other driver and to the police upon request.

Police routinely stop travelers at checkpoints, and may search vehicles and passengers. Foreign nationals should carry identification and documentation of their immigration status. Drivers must possess an international driver's license.

Review OSAC's reports, [Road Safety Abroad](#), [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#), and [Evasive Driving Techniques](#); and read the State Department's webpage on [driving and road safety abroad](#).

Public Transportation Conditions

Public transport is unregulated and unsafe. If travelers do use public transport, they should use taxis, not *tro-tros* (small private buses). *Tro-tros* do not meet Western safety standards and often transport more passengers than is safe. Avoid communal and shared taxis due to greater risk of robbery. U.S.-based rideshare companies offer service in the cities of Accra and Kumasi, and are a preferred option for public transportation. Factor public transportation safety into travel plans, and pre-arrange travel with trusted transportation service providers when possible.

Review OSAC's report, [Security In Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The newly constructed Terminal 3 at Kotoka International Airport (ACC) has greatly improved the arrival and departure experience in Accra. Only arriving passengers may enter the baggage claim area, and drivers or others greeting arriving passengers must wait in a cordoned area just outside the terminal main doors. Pre-arrange with your hotel or company for transportation services from the airport, and confirm the identity of drivers before entering vehicles; criminals posing as drivers have robbed travelers. Taxi drivers have a reputation for taking newly arrived passengers on circuitous routes and charging excessive fares.

Theft of luggage and pickpocketing occurs at the airport. Do not leave luggage unattended. Ensure that identification documents, wallets, and portable electronics are secure. Impostors posing as airport porters and strangers offering assistance with luggage have stolen belongings. Remain wary of unsolicited help unless offered from uniformed airport staff with visible ID cards bearing their name and photo.

Armed robbers have targeted travelers leaving the airport, including following them to accommodations to rob them there. A common tactic is to deliberately cause a minor accident to stop a car and then rob the occupants. If another car hits yours, or you suspect someone is following you, drive to the nearest police station and report the incident.

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Accra as being a **LOW**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. There have been no terrorist acts specifically targeting U.S. interests or citizens in Ghana. However, over the past year, terrorist groups have conducted a string of attacks throughout neighboring Burkina Faso. Consult travel advisories from the U.S. Embassy in Ouagadougou prior to crossing into Burkina Faso or visiting areas in close proximity to the Burkina Faso border.

Regional terrorist groups, including al-Qa'ida and ISIS affiliates in the Sahel have demonstrated their desire and ability to conduct kidnappings and active shooter-style attacks targeting Westerners. There have been multiple active shooter-style attacks on locations foreigners frequent in West African capital cities since 2015. Soft targets (e.g. hotels, resorts, restaurants), hard targets, security forces, and areas of congregation could also be targets. Road travelers and foreigners operating in rural areas have been the victims of kidnapping in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. None of the aforementioned acts have occurred in Ghana.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Accra as being a **LOW**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Ghana is a stable democracy that has held seven elections since 1992, with three peaceful transitions of power between political parties. The most recent election occurred in 2016. While there was sporadic election-related violence, particularly between grassroots supporters of the two major parties, Ghanaian politics generally takes place in a peaceful context. In recent years, vigilante groups (politically affiliated gangs) have disrupted local elections, public meetings, and court proceedings, and staged protests at government facilities. The Government of Ghana has set up a commission to address ways to disband political vigilante groups to head off potential violence. Elections scheduled for 2020 may increase inter-party tensions, creating a potential for increased political violence.

Civil Unrest

Protests are common but generally peaceful, and there has been little serious or widespread civil unrest in the past few years. Expect larger and more frequent demonstrations in the run-up to the 2020 presidential elections in Ghana. Avoid large crowds and demonstrations. Review OSAC's report, [Surviving a Protest](#).

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Ghana has numerous chieftaincy disputes every year that generally involve competition over limited resources. Some of these disputes have prompted episodes of localized violence. Increase caution when traveling to the Bono, Bono East, North East, Northern, and Upper East regions. Civil unrest due to chieftaincy disputes can occur at any time. While such disputes are typically non-violent, the likelihood for violence developing from a tribal dispute is greater in parts of these regions. Travelers to rural areas, especially in northern Ghana, should consult travel advisories before travel and remain aware of the potential for episodes of unrest.

Post-specific Concerns

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Building construction standards are often lower than those found in the United States. These lower standards have contributed to building collapses, fires, and electrical shock.

Environmental Hazards

Swimming in Ghana's coastal waters, especially along its southern beaches, is dangerous and strongly discouraged, even for excellent swimmers. The ocean currents along the coast are powerful and treacherous; several people drown each year.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Theft

Counterfeit and pirated goods (including pharmaceuticals) are widely available in Ghana. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under local law. In addition, bringing them back to the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines.

Personal Identity Concerns

Ghana's criminal code outlaws "unnatural carnal knowledge," which local authorities apply almost exclusively to consensual same-sex sexual relations. This is a misdemeanor in Ghana. OSAC is unaware of any prosecutions under this law within the last two years. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [LGBTI+ travelers](#).

Review OSAC's report, [Freedom to Practice](#), and the State Department's webpage on security for [faith-based travelers](#).

Ghanaian law explicitly prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, health care, air travel and other transportation, and other domains. The government does not systematically or overtly discriminate against persons with disabilities, but such persons may experience societal discrimination. The law provides persons with disabilities access to public buildings "as far as is practical." However, most buildings, transportation, and educational facilities do not provide for people with special needs. Because many streets are unpaved or not well maintained, and sidewalks are not prevalent, individuals in wheelchairs or who have difficulty walking face challenges. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [travelers with disabilities](#).

Drug-related Crime

Ghana has become a significant trans-shipment point for illegal drugs, particularly cocaine from South America and heroin from Afghanistan. Ghana has taken limited steps to combat illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Trafficking has also fueled increasing domestic drug consumption. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has an office in the Embassy and works closely with the Narcotics Control Board, which coordinates Ghanaian government counter-narcotics efforts. These activities include enforcement and control, education, treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Ghana are severe; convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. The use of illegal drugs procured in Ghana may have life-threatening consequences.

Kidnapping Threat

In 2019, Ghana experienced a string of high-profile kidnappings of locals and foreigners alike. Although it is too soon to tell whether there is a clear change in risk to foreigners, reports of kidnappings and other violent crime trends are always something to track. Proactive or particularly concerned security managers with personnel or travelers in Ghana may want to review their kidnapping-related measures. Security managers responsible for younger or inexperienced travelers may want to review common security practices and stress the importance of situational awareness in high-crime environments, particularly those that, like Ghana, may seem comparatively safer and welcoming of travelers at first glance. Review OSAC's reports, [Recent Kidnappings and Risks to Foreigners in Ghana](#) and [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Other Issues

Public smoking is illegal in Ghana. The U.S. Embassy is aware of arrests for cigarette smoking in public places, but has not received reports of prosecutions.

Ghanaian law prohibits wearing military clothing or camouflage.

Piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea present ongoing challenges for regional maritime security.

Ghanaian law prohibits photography of sensitive installations, including military sites, government buildings, bridges, and the airport. Review OSAC's report, [Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography](#).

Read the State Department's webpage on [customs and import restrictions](#) for information on what you cannot take into or out of other countries.

Police Response

The emergency line in Ghana is **191**. Reach the Ghana Police Service Information Room (emergency services) at +233-0302-773-906 or +233-0302-787-373, or use MTN/Vodaphone short code **18555**. The Ghana Police Service (GPS) is almost solely a reactive force and demonstrates only moderate proactive techniques and ability to deter crime. Police often lack the equipment, resources, training, and personnel to respond to calls for assistance or other emergencies. The police have a poor record of investigating and solving serious crimes. Local police may lack the resources to respond to serious crime throughout the country, including areas of Accra. There is a visible police presence in Accra. The Embassy receives good support from the GPS and the Special Police Units that protect U.S. government facilities in Accra.

GPS maintains a specialized Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) to assist victims of domestic violence, especially women and children. In addition to its law enforcement responsibilities, the Unit can refer victims to medical providers and counselors, as well as to community support services. Download the State Department's Crime Victims Assistance [brochure](#).

Research any prospective security or private guard company for quality and reliability when considering using their services

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are limited, particularly outside Accra. Find contact information for available medical services and available air ambulance services on [the U.S. Embassy website](#).

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. If traveling with prescription medication, check with the Government of Ghana to ensure the medication is legal. Review OSAC's report, [Traveling with Medication](#).

Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation can cost thousands of dollars or more; they often require medical evacuation (medevac) to a location where adequate medical attention is available. Medevac services are very expensive, and are generally available only to travelers who either have travel insurance that specifically covers medevac services or who are able to pay for the service in advance. The cost for medical evacuation may range from US\$40,000 to \$200,000. The U.S. Department of State strongly recommends purchasing international health insurance before traveling internationally. Review the State Departments webpage on [insurance overseas](#).

Authorities require proof of yellow fever vaccination to enter the country.

Mosquito-borne illnesses (e.g., malaria, yellow fever, and dengue) are a significant problem; prevention of bites and proper yellow fever immunization are important throughout Ghana. Before coming to Ghana, consult with your physician regarding malaria prophylaxis and obtaining vaccinations. Carry and use insect repellents containing either 20% DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535; treat clothing and tents with permethrin; and sleep in screened or air conditioned rooms under insecticide-impregnated mosquito nets.

Meningitis is a concern within the northern parts of the country.

Diarrheal illnesses, including typhoid fever and cholera, also remain a concern, as are sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

Rabies, Tuberculosis, and Schistosomiasis are also prevalent. The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Ghana](#).

Review OSAC's reports, [The Healthy Way, I'm Drinking What in My Water?](#), [Shaken: The Don'ts of Alcohol Abroad](#), [Health 101: How to Prepare for Travel](#), and [Fire Safety Abroad](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Accra is active, meeting every other month. Contact OSAC's Africa team for more information or to join.

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

#24 Fourth Circular Road, Cantonments, Accra

Business hours: Monday-Thursday, 0730-1700; Friday, 0730-1230

Switchboard: +233 0302 741-000

US Marine Security Guard Post One: +233 0302 741-775 (Emergencies only)

Helpful Information

Before you travel, consider the following resources:

- [OSAC Risk Matrix](#)
- [OSAC Travelers Toolkit](#)
- [State Department Traveler's Checklist](#)
- [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#)