



Guatemala 2019 Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City, Guatemala.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Guatemala at Level 2, indicating travelers should exercise increased caution.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

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Please review OSAC's [Guatemala-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 serious risk from crime in Guatemala City. Crime in Guatemala generally stems from widespread corruption, an inadequate justice system and the prevalence of both gang and narco activity across the country. The most common crimes against expatriates include petty theft and armed robbery. Many victims have been robbed during daylight hours while walking or driving in well-known, well-traveled areas, including markets, public parks, and popular restaurant districts. Even the most upscale residential and commercial areas of Guatemala City (Zones 4, 10, 14, 15, and 16) experience violent crimes in broad daylight. These trends are not isolated to one specific part of the country. No area in Guatemala is immune to crime, including the most popular tourist destinations such as Antigua and Tikal. The U.S. Embassy Regional Security Office (RSO) continues to advise all U.S. citizens to be very vigilant of their surroundings and report any crime incidents promptly to the police.

Theft and armed robbery are the most common problems encountered by U.S. citizens. While criminal elements do not specifically target the expat community, foreign citizens present in country for either business or tourism can be targeted due to a perceived display of affluence or by not following sound personal security practices. According to official statistics released by the National Board of Tourist Assistance (PROATUR), there were 195 recorded instances of crimes against tourists in Guatemala in 2018, with approximately 2.4 million registered tourists having visited the country during the year. Although expatriates seem shielded from the worst of the violence, falling victim mainly to petty theft, 2018 saw several instances of expat victims of armed robbery, physical and sexual assault and even murder. Among these instances are:

- In March 2018, two U.S. Embassy employees were robbed in separate incidents while walking in Zone 14 during daylight hours on busy streets. In one assault, a motorcycle pulled onto the sidewalk in front of the employee while a second assailant carrying a pistol approached from the rear. The assailants took the employee's cell phone. In the second incident, two assailants on foot approached the employee, pulled out knives and stole the individual's wallet from her purse.
- In July 2018, an Embassy employee's spouse and child were victims of an attempted armed robbery while driving on Avenida Reforma, three blocks from the Embassy.
- In August 2018, armed criminals robbed patrons at gunpoint at a Zone 4 restaurant popular with the expatriate community in broad daylight. At least one victim was a U.S. citizen.
- In November 2018, two female Japanese missionaries were severely beaten and raped in Los Angeles de Santa Ana, Peten. One of the victims died from her injuries. The victims had filed a *denuncia* with the Public Ministry months before, regarding repeated sexual harassment.
- On November 2018, several men beat and robbed a U.S. government-affiliated contractor at a bar in Zone 10.
- The RSO also received reports of at least four U.S. females living and working in Guatemala who were victims of varying degrees of sexual assault.

Trends and Analysis

A common trend in the commission of armed robberies is the use of motorcycles by assailants. Typically, two men on a motorcycle accost the driver of a car or pedestrian and demand valuables and cell phones. Often, a second pair of armed individuals accompany the assailants and act as lookouts. If the assailants encounter any resistance, they escalate the situation through extreme violence (stabbing, shootings). The use of motorcycles allows the assailants to flee quickly; police rarely apprehend them. Additionally, pickpockets and purse-snatchers are active in all cities and tourist sites. Petty criminals frequently target high-traffic tourist areas for petty crime. Markets, national parks, crowded venues, and shopping areas are all major areas of operation for criminals.

Although Guatemala historically has had one of the highest violent crime rates in Central America, the trend has been positive over the past several years. Guatemala's homicide rate peaked at 45 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2009, but by the end of 2018 dropped to about 22. In 2018, the police reported approximately 3,881 homicides, 4,246 aggravated assaults, and over 2,500 missing persons. Despite the slight downward trend, Guatemala remains among the most dangerous countries in the world, according to several security providers. Endemic poverty, an abundance of weapons, a legacy of societal violence, and the presence of organized criminal gangs Barrio 18 (18th Street) and Mara Salvatrucha (MS13) all contribute to the violent crime. Guatemala's alarmingly high murder rate appears driven by narco-trafficking activity, gang-related violence, a heavily armed population, and police/judicial system unable to hold many criminals accountable.

The two primary gangs in Guatemala, Barrio 18 and MS-13, terrorize businesses and private citizens through targeted extortion attempts. Extortion is incredibly common and affects all sectors of society with public bus and taxi drivers being the easiest and most common victims. However, small businesses, the U.S. private sector as well as local national employees of the U.S. Embassy were all frequent targets in 2018. The gangs also target schoolchildren, street vendors, and private citizens. Although in recent years the number of reported extortions increased, most incidents are still unreported. Gang members usually punish non-compliant victims with violent assault or murder, and their family members are also victimized as punishment. Examples of extortion related violence include:

- At least 28 extortion related homicides and 20 assaults involving injuries against operators of public transportation services (e.g. bus drivers, microbus drivers, taxi drivers) in calendar year 2018.
- On January 21, 2019, an IED exploded on a public bus in Guatemala City, approximately 3.5 miles from the Embassy, as part of gang-related extortion punishment against the bus driver. Reports indicate five passengers were injured. Six days later, the police rendered safe an IED nine miles south of Guatemala City. Police said the gang Barrio 18 intended to attack taxi drivers to pressure them to pay extortion fees.

RSO uses official police crime statistics database for this report. However, the police do not count homicides if the victim left the crime scene alive but subsequently died from injuries elsewhere. INACIF (*Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses de Guatemala*), the government agency responsible for tracking all deaths in country, shows homicide rates 8-16% higher than police homicide rates.

Home invasions by armed groups continue to occur in upscale neighborhoods. Thieves gain access by enticing a resident to open the door for a delivery or rushing in when family or staff open the door. Another commonly held belief is that household staff could be complicit in home invasions. There were 511 reported residential robberies in 2018 compared to 628 in 2017, an 18% reduction.

According to official government crime statistics, sexual assault numbers slightly decreased from 551 in 2017 to 527 in 2018. The Embassy believes, however, that the actual numbers of sexual assaults are far greater; cultural stigmas and sporadic police presence in rural areas cause significant underreporting.

Other Areas of Concern

A particularly serious concern in less-developed regions of the country is vigilantism, including stoning, lynching, and immolation. The lack of police presence in rural communities, as well as the enduring influence of the traditional indigenous justice system, can result in villages taking justice into their own hands, resulting in brutal attacks and deaths. Local populations often block roads leading into and out of their towns after an incident in an attempt to catch the perpetrators to subject them to vigilante justice.

- In July 2018, local residents shot at the vehicle of a U.S. diplomat after the diplomat failed to stop at a makeshift checkpoint manned by local residents wearing black masks and armed with rifles. The diplomat was returning with his family from a day trip to the Pacaya volcano, a popular tourist destination, in a diplomatic-plated vehicle.

Police in remote areas are often understaffed and poorly equipped, and will not typically interfere in deterring vigilantism out of fear for their own safety.

- In January 2019, more than 200 police officers became isolated in the town of El Naranjo, located in an extremely remote area of Peten only accessible by ferry. Local residents seized control of the only ferry after police arrested four local residents. Another group of residents blocked the only road leading to the town, preventing police and military from responding to the incident. The locals also threatened to burn down the police station. The residents freed the officers only after the police released the detained individuals.

Rural communities have also increasingly taken over their local municipalities through road blockades or in some cases, holding elected local officials hostage until demands are met.

- In August 2018, local residents kidnapped the mayor of Coatepeque in an attempt to have electricity restored to the entire town. Residents held the mayor for two days until he agreed to restore the power. The government has not arrested or prosecuted anyone for this incident; similar situations occurred throughout Guatemala after the “success” of this effort.

Transportation-Safety Situation

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

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Overall Road Safety Assessment: Fair

Urban road conditions/maintenance: Fair

Rural road conditions/maintenance: Fair to poor

Availability of roadside/ambulance assistance: Fair to poor

For the period January-September 2018, the *Observatorio de Transito de Guatemala* reported 4,718 motor-vehicle accidents, 1,100 deaths, and 5,995 injuries.

Drivers will encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the U.S., and vary widely across the country, with more development within urban areas. The transportation infrastructure diminishes rapidly the further motorists travel from the capital. Many city streets have lighting, although poor, but secondary and rural roads have little to no illumination. Among the risk to motorists are local residents passing blindly on winding roads, poorly designed surfaces, unmarked hazards, landslides, and precarious temporary highway repairs.

Traffic congestion in urban areas and the highways leading out of the capital is extremely heavy, and severely impacts travel time between destinations. Traffic is often at a standstill for hours at a time; such congestion exacerbates the threat to motorists from armed criminals on motorcycles. The RSO recommends the following precautions:

- Do not use handheld mobile communication devices while in traffic
- Always drive with the windows rolled up.
- Lock all doors and leave at least half a car length of space in front to maneuver.
- Only pull over in a well-illuminated area with high visibility or a public place.
- Use vehicles with all windows tinted. Criminals often look for drivers using cell phones at night and easily identify their targets due to the illumination of smartphones or tablets.

For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC's Report [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

Emboldened armed robbers attack vehicles on main roads in broad daylight. Travel on rural roads increases the risk of encountering a criminal roadblock or ambush. Driving outside of urban areas at night is dangerous and not recommended. Avoid intercity travel after dark, as it is extremely dangerous. Caravan with at least two cars when traveling outside of Guatemala City. The Inter-American Highway (CA-1) and the road from Guatemala City to the Caribbean coast (CA-9) are especially dangerous due to heavy traffic, including large trucks and trailers, and poorly maintained vehicles that often lack properly functioning lights. The main road to Lake Atitlán via the Inter-American Highway (CA-1) and Sololá is safer than the alternative secondary roads near the lake.

In the recent past, armed attacks occurred on roads between Guatemala City and Petén, as well as between Tikal and the Belize border. Travelers should plan their routes and do their research prior to departing for their destination. Although many commercial GPSs and GPS applications work in Guatemala, they do not accurately reflect road conditions. Roads and routes identified on a GPS may be nothing more than a poorly built dirt road accessible only by 4x4 vehicles. GPS applications trying to minimize travel times can also route drivers through gang-controlled neighborhoods.

Travelers must also be aware of the high frequency of demonstrations/protests in Guatemala. A number of highly organized groups are capable of drawing thousands of people to support their cause. One of the most common demonstration tactics is the blocking of major routes throughout the country. The most successful groups have blocked up to 30 major routes at once – bringing the country's road network to a standstill. A good resource for updated information regarding traffic concerns throughout Guatemala is [PROVIAL](#), a roadside assistance force that routinely tweets significant issues related to accidents, traffic conditions and road blockades.

Drivers in Guatemala must remain on the defensive, as the local population only casually observes traffic rules. Drivers frequently ignore speed limits, lane markings, and stop signs. Many drivers do not use their turn signals. Instead, a common custom is for an occupant to stick a hand out the window and wave it to indicate that they will be taking an unspecified action. Drivers often drive at the maximum speed their vehicle can handle. The quality of vehicles on the roads ranges from high-end luxury to barely functioning vehicles that would not pass U.S. safety inspections. A lack of proper sidewalks and crosswalks force pedestrians to walk on the roadway or attempt to cross roads even in heavy traffic.

Motorcycles are the most popular form of transportation in Guatemala; motorcycle operators do not practice much traffic safety, weaving in and out of traffic with little regard. It is common to see entire families, including small children, traveling on one motorcycle without any safety equipment.

Many people also use motorcycles to transport large cargo. Many motorcyclists do not have functioning lights, and can be difficult to see at night.

Cars and trucks often stall or park in the middle of the road. Drivers often place tree branches in the road before a stalled vehicle to warn approaching traffic of a hazard. It is against the law to turn right on red unless otherwise posted, and drivers must yield when entering a traffic circle. Motorists must wear seat belts. It is against the law for drivers to operate cellular phones while driving, although this is not enforced.

Many motorists commonly drive under the influence of alcohol. Law enforcement will arrest people found driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs and offenders may serve jail time, but it does not deter the amount of drunk driving taking place in Guatemala. This risk further increases in small towns and rural areas away from population centers.

Minor traffic incidents can escalate quickly to violence. Many motorists carry machetes and other weapons, including firearms in their vehicles. Police may detain drivers involved in accidents resulting in injury, holding them in protective custody pending investigation. Such cases require the assistance of private local attorneys.

There are no roadside assistance clubs; however PROVIAL patrols most of the major highways; contact them by calling 1520 from a local phone. Their vehicles are equipped with basic tools and first aid supplies, and their services are free. Police patrol the major roadways and may assist travelers, but the patrols are sporadic. For roadside assistance, travelers can call the police by dialing 110 or 120 or the fire department by dialing 122 or 123. Cellular telephone service covers most areas frequented by tourists. Some reports of highway robberies include accusations that police, or assailants dressed as police, have been involved.

Public Transportation Conditions

Safety of public transportation: Poor

The most common form for public transportation in Guatemala is the network of informal bus lines. These bus routes are serviced by brightly colored, poorly maintained, recycled U.S.-style school buses. The drivers' qualification levels vary, creating an untenable safety situation. Additionally, these bus lines are prime targets for extortions and robberies. Criminals habitually assault and murder bus drivers because of non-compliance with extortion demands. The official U.S. government community in Guatemala is NOT allowed to use public buses as a means of transportation.

Taxis are also unsafe. A number of unlicensed taxis and unprofessional companies serve metropolitan areas. The U.S. government prohibits its personnel present in Guatemala from hailing taxis on the street. Taxi drivers can be targeted for or complicit in criminal activity. Taxi Amarillo Express is a radio-dispatch taxi service accessible at 1766 on a mobile phone. Reach Taxi Seguro at 2312-4243; it may not always be available, especially late at night.

Uber operates in Guatemala City, Antigua, and some other urban areas. RSO considers Uber a safe and reliable source of transportation, and U.S. government personnel may use the service. It is important to note, however, that local taxi operators do not support Uber and have engaged in physical confrontations with Uber drivers. Of note, in August 2018 a U.S. Embassy officer reported that local taxi drivers accosted his Uber driver when picking him up at the central square in Antigua. The local police in Antigua sided with the taxi drivers and issued a summons to the Uber driver. Also in 2018, RSO received reports of local taxi drivers luring Uber drivers to fake pickups in Guatemala City, where they were then violently attacked. RSO recommends waiting in a secure location for an available Uber, and to expect that the driver may request a passenger ride in the front seat to mask the appearance of being a car service. For more information on ride-sharing, please review OSAC's Annual Briefing Report [Safety and Security in the Share Economy](#).

Aviation/Airport Conditions

La Aurora International Airport (GUA) offers direct flights to/from the United States. On occasion, the airport temporarily shuts down due to severe weather and/or volcanic activity. However, flights on major commercial airlines face few issues other than delays and re-routing.

La Aurora is in Zone 13, which the latest Consular Travel Advisory assesses as Level 3 indicating that travelers should reconsider travel to the area. Remain cautious when leaving the airport, as assailants may steal money, passports, or luggage. In some cases, taxi drivers rob travelers of their possessions. RSO recommends that travelers make transportation arrangements to and from the airport ahead of time using pre-screened, vetted transportation services, including Uber. A pre-screened, vetted taxi service is available at the airport. Travelers can hire a vetted driver at the kiosk under the "SAFE" sign. In the past, assailants have worn full/partial police uniforms and have used vehicles that resemble police vehicles, indicating that some elements of the police might be involved.

Small, privately owned aircraft present a number of safety concerns. Since 2015, the Civilian Aviation Authority investigated over 35 small aircraft accidents. Accidents involve both fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft. Maintenance for these aircraft in Guatemala does not meet International Standardization Organization (ISO) requirements. Operators of small aircraft could be poorly trained and inexperienced. U.S. government personnel in Guatemala are prohibited from using Guatemalan-owned rotary winged aircraft as a means of travel.

Terrorism Threat

There is minimal risk from terrorism in Guatemala City. There are no known transnational or domestic terrorist organizations present in Guatemala.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Although there were no known terrorist incidents or significant threats in Guatemala in 2018, President Jimmy Morales publically endorsed the U.S. Embassy relocation to Jerusalem and announced plans to move the Guatemalan Embassy in Jerusalem shortly after the U.S. decision.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is moderate risk from civil unrest in Guatemala City. Large demonstrations occur, sometimes with little/no notice, and can cause serious traffic disruptions. Although most demonstrations are peaceful, they can turn violent. The use of roadblocks and/or blocking of public facilities, including the international airport, may delay or prevent tourists from reaching their destination. Pro and anti-government demonstrations have increased throughout Guatemala since an August 2018 decision to cancel the mandate of the UN International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and subsequent actions to further limit its authority. RSO expects demonstrations to continue throughout the 2019 election cycle. Avoid demonstrations when encountered.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Guatemala is a geologically and climatologically active and dynamic country prone to seismic activity, volcanic eruptions, severe and unpredictable weather, and unstable terrain. General information about natural disaster preparedness is available locally from the National Disaster Reduction Coordination Office ([CONRED](#)) and from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Guatemala lies on a major fault line known as the Motagua / Chixoy-Polochic fault complex: the convergence of the Caribbean and North American plates. In 2018, Guatemala registered 58 seismic movements measuring 3.5 or higher, with the most powerful being a 5.7 centered in the Esquintla area. Guatemala has experienced a number of historically significant earthquakes above 7.0.

Guatemala has three very active volcanoes: Pacaya, Santiaguito, and Fuego. Fuego Volcano, located about 25 miles southwest of Guatemala City, erupted in June 2018. The eruption was Fuego's largest since 1974, and included a partial collapse of the crater. As a result, volcanic material reached areas considered safe under existing eruption scenarios. As of October 2018, CONRED reported the eruptions of Fuego Volcano and subsequent pyroclastic flows and lahars have caused at least 188 deaths, left 240 people missing, temporarily displaced nearly 13,000, and impacted more than 1.7 million people. Since the eruption, the U.S. Government has supplemented Guatemala's effort to assist displaced persons and is helping develop a lahar observation early warning notification system in order to mitigate the threats of deadly lahar mudslides that often follow volcanic eruptions.

INGUAT organized an active community-based tourism program in San Vicente Pacaya to minimize the risk of armed robbery or mishap on Pacaya. Climbing volcanoes in groups and with a guide is still highly advisable to reduce the risk of assault and to mitigate the dangers of volcanic and weather conditions. Visiting Guatemala's picturesque volcanoes can be dangerous for even experienced climbers. As recently as January 2017, six experienced expatriate climbers, accompanied by qualified guides, died due to exposure on the summit of the Acatenango volcano.

Flooding, mudslides, and landslides pose a major risk to urban and rural areas alike. Mudslides can easily overcome the poor road infrastructure. Drivers must exercise extreme caution and patience during these periods. Landslides and flooding have destroyed entire communities.

Additional References:

- [FEMA Earthquake page](#)
- [Drop Cover Hold On](#)
- [Terremotos](#): A California-specific site containing useful guidance in Spanish for earthquake preparedness
- Red Cross – [Earthquake Preparedness \(Spanish\)](#)

Migration Crisis

Compared to 2017, increasing numbers of Guatemalans abandoned the country to migrate illegally to the United States in 2018, returning to levels not seen since 2015 and 2016. The lack of employment opportunities is the primary driver of migration from Guatemala. Citizen insecurity is a contributing factor but not the main cause. Undergirding the issues of limited economic opportunities and violence is the problem of corruption, reflected in the low levels of public trust in institutions like the police and judicial system.

From October to November 2018, more than 8,000 migrants passed through Guatemala and into Mexico as part of a series of migrant caravans aiming to enter the United States. The majority of migrants crossed at or near the Tecún Umán border crossing along the Suchiate River, which divides Guatemala and Mexico. On October 28, tensions at the Tecun Uman border crossing, resulting in physical encounters between migrants and Guatemalan police officers. One Honduran migrant died in the incident, and six police officers were injured.

Constitutional Crisis

President Morales announced on August 31, 2018 that he would not renew CICIG's mandate in a televised press conference flanked by military and police officials. Two hours before the announcement, U.S.-donated J8 jeeps with security personnel operating .30 caliber machine guns stationed in front of the CICIG facilities in Guatemala City. On September 4, President Morales barred CICIG commissioner Ivan Velasquez from re-entering the country. The Constitutional Court (CC) then issued a provisional order on September 16 stating the CICIG commissioner must be allowed to enter Guatemala.

On January 7, 2019 President Morales announced that he would unilaterally terminate CICIG's mandate. The UN Secretary General issued a public statement on the same day noting that the UN expects the Guatemalan government to "fulfill its legal obligations under the Agreement" until the end of the mandate on September 3, 2019. The CC ruled in a 4-1 decision on January 9 to suspend the executive branch decision. The executive branch has given no indication whether it will abide by the CC ruling if CICIG personnel attempt to resume their duties. Prominent journalists, civil society and think tank leaders, and former government officials have characterized the executive branch's legal actions against the CC as a technical coup and a threat to the constitutional order.

Critical Infrastructure

Guatemala has a number of infrastructure concerns. Basic services, road infrastructure, emergency services, and medical services barely meet the needs of the still-growing population. The capacity of the government to respond to chemical/industrial accidents is extremely limited, and small incidents typically go unreported. The government is also very limited in its technical ability to monitor watershed runoff or air pollution from industrial processes, the most controversial being mining.

Economic Concerns

The U.S.-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement provides for improved standards for the protection and enforcement of a broad range of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) consistent with U.S. standards of protection and enforcement, as well as emerging international standards. Enforcement of IPR laws, however, has been inconsistent. A number of raids, cases, and prosecutions have been pursued; however, resource constraints and lack of coordinated government action impede efficient enforcement efforts. Piracy of works protected by copyright and infringement of other forms of intellectual property, such as trademarks including those of some major U.S. food and pharmaceutical brands, remains problematic. However, economic espionage does not appear to be a major problem.

Guatemala has one of the highest rates of income inequality. More than half the population lives in poverty, as poverty rates have increased since 2006. The creation of new jobs is not keeping pace with the country's young population, half of which is under the age of 25. Guatemala consistently ranks low in terms of ease of doing business due to a history of corruption, weak enforcement of laws, and poor infrastructure.

Personal Identity Concerns

Guatemalan law does not extend specific antidiscrimination protections to LGBTI individuals. Efforts to pass laws against discrimination, including a Gender Identity Law, encountered severe opposition among legislators. According to LGBTI activists, gay and transgender individuals often experienced police abuse. The local NGO National Network for Sexual Diversity and HIV and the Lambda Association reported that from April 20 through November 11, 2018 19 LGBTI persons were killed, including several transgender individuals the NGOs believed to have been targeted specifically due to their sexual orientation. In May, major media outlets reported that an unknown assailant shot and killed two LGBTI persons inside a home in Guatemala City. The NGO Somos reported 35 violent attacks against LGBTI individuals during the year. Several attacks targeted journalists for supposed LGBTI identification. LGBTI groups claimed women experienced specific forms of discrimination, such as forced marriages and forced pregnancies through "corrective rape," although these incidents were rarely, if ever, reported to authorities.

Drug-related Crimes

The bulk of narcotics-related crime occurs near the Mexican border region. Guatemalan criminal organizations usurp the territories of the more emboldened Mexican cartels. Narco-traffickers are heavily armed and operate with relative impunity. Limited Guatemalan resources make it difficult to combat narcotics trafficking problems.

Although there is widespread trafficking in Guatemala, most activity does not affect the general populace. There have been instances of homicides near clandestine airfields and areas in Peten near the Mexican border, particularly along CA-13 between La Libertad and El Ceibo. Narco-traffickers tend to avoid confrontation without provocation. According to U.S. law enforcement sources, approximately 18 tons of cocaine and approximately \$6 million USD were seized by Guatemalan authorities in 2018.

Of particular concern to businesses and landowners in remote regions of Guatemala is the threat of narco-traffickers forcibly seizing land to facilitate the landing and offloading of aircraft transporting large amounts of cocaine. Heavily armed narco-traffickers invade properties, restrain all residents and/or employees and clear an area to land aircraft. Narco-traffickers then release the families and employees and depart the area after offloading all drugs onto transport vehicles.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings are not as prevalent in Guatemala now as in the past. Given the complexity of kidnapping and police attention to this type of crime, kidnapping is not as viable a criminal enterprise as extortion. The kidnappings that do occur involve drug traffickers. In these instances, narco-traffickers will use brutal force to extort, kidnap, and kill victims. Some kidnapping groups kill their victims regardless of a paid ransom. In 2018, the police recorded 28 legitimate kidnappings. For more information, please review OSAC's Report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Police Response

Over the past year, the police have been debilitated by multiple waves of mass firings depleting the upper levels of experienced officers. In that time, the PNC has had three different directors general, four different deputies, five different investigations chiefs, four operations chiefs, and four logistics chiefs. The uncertainty caused by the recurring dismissals also hurt morale and thrust lower level, less experienced officers into senior positions ahead of schedule. Amid this weakening of the institution from within, there have been spikes in violent crime in Guatemala's red zones even as the nationwide murder totals have decreased.

The police lack sufficient personnel and training to accomplish their mission. They suffer from a lack of supplies (e.g. vehicles, fuel, and ammunition) with little improvement from year to year. More often than not, a police investigation fails to result in an arrest, much less a conviction. Apart from impunity, a principal reason that the government is unable to respond to the needs of crime victims, or to prevent crime in the first place, is that the police force is significantly under-trained and under-funded. The average officer should have at least a high school degree, but often has much less, is equipped with as little as six months of police training before being sent out on the streets, and receives only \$535 per month as salary. Moreover, the annual police budget is inadequate to support its personnel, vehicles, training, and other infrastructure needs. Although some units are well-equipped and well-trained, they do not have the capacity to handle multiple taskings or cases at the same time.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

U.S. citizens detained by the police can contact the Embassy for assistance at (502) 2326-4000; after working hours the Embassy's Duty Officer is available via the 24-hour emergency number at (502) 2331 2354.

Crime Victim Assistance

Victims of crime should contact the following phone numbers for assistance:

Police (911 equivalent): 110 or 120

Fire Department: 122 or 123

Tourist emergency assistance: 502 2421-2810

Tourist Assistance (PROATUR): 1500

PROATUR is a joint national police/INGUAT initiative and is present in all major tourist destinations.

Police/Security Agencies

Tourist groups should request security escorts. Security escorts for tourist groups and security information are available from the Tourist Assistance Office (PROATUR) of the Guatemalan Tourism Institute (INGUAT) at 7a Avenida 1-17, Zona 4, Centro Cívico, Guatemala City. INGUAT's PROATUR division is available 24/7 for tourist assistance and emergencies:

Tel: (502) 2421-2810

Fax: (502) 2421-2891, 1500 in Guatemala

Email: operacionesproatur@inguat.gob.gt

Medical Emergencies

A wide range of medical care is available in Guatemala City, but medical care outside the city is limited. Public hospitals frequently experience serious shortages of basic medicines and equipment. Care in private hospitals is generally adequate for most common illnesses and injuries, and many of the medical specialists are U.S. trained and certified. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services, although most private hospitals accept major U.S. credit cards.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

For medical assistance, please refer to the Embassy's [Medical Assistance page](#).

Available Air Ambulance Services

American Aerovac Air Ambulance

Direct: 001-800-423-5993

Other: 001-954-252-2744

rskuf@bellsouth.net

<http://americanaerovac.com/info.htm>

P.O. Box 291033 Davie, FL 333329-1033

Air Ambulance Network

Direct: 001-800-880-9451

Other: 001-727-934-3999

<http://www.airambulancenetwork.com/>

3607 Alt 19 N., Suite A, Palm Harbor, FL 34683

Aerotaxis Air Ambulance Service

Direct: 502-5709-7922, 502-2331-3073 or 502-2360-4074

aerotaxis@hotmail.com

Avenida Hincapie y 18 Calle, Zona 13, Interior Aeropuerto, Hangar J-12

Aero Ruta Maya, S.A. Air Ambulance Service

Work: 502-2418-2727

Work: 502-2418-2700

Work: 502-2418-2710

armsa1@intelnett.com

Avenida Hincapie y 18 Calle Final, Hangar L-16, Interior Aeropuerto La Aurora, Zona 13.

Insurance Guidance

There are some aerial medical evacuation (medevac) services; however, these services are extremely expensive and frequently require payment before the service is rendered. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can be costly.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Guatemala](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Guatemala City is active, meeting bi-monthly. Additionally, the Guatemala Country Council hosts a Northern Triangle-focused OSAC conference every spring. Interested private-sector security representatives should contact OSAC's Western Hemisphere Team at osacwha@state.gov with any questions.

Country Council Public Sector Co-Chair:

Vasilli A. Alafogiannis

Regional Security Officer, U.S. Embassy Guatemala City

+502 2326-4317

AlafogiannisVA@state.gov

Country Council Private Sector Co-Chair:

Marco Tulio Saravia

Security Manager and IMCR, Coca Cola

+502 2499-1800

Marco.saravia@coca-cola.com.gt

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Avenida Reforma 7-01, Zona 10, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Business hours: 0800-1700 Monday-Thursday; 0800-1200 Fridays

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: +502 2326-4000
Emergency after-hours: +502 2331-2354
Website: <http://guatemala.usembassy.gov>

American Citizen Services Guidance

To contact ACS during normal business hours, please call: +502 2326-4000
Monday through Thursday from 0730 to 1130 & from 1300 1500, Friday from 0730 to 1000.
By e-mail AmCitsGuatemala@state.gov
After business hours: +502 2331-2354

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens living in or visiting Guatemala are encouraged to register with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). STEP will keep you up-to-date with important safety and security announcements and will help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency.

Additional Resources

[Guatemala](#) Information Sheet