



Burkina Faso 2020 OSAC Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Ouagadougou. OSAC encourages travelers to [use this report](#) to gain baseline knowledge of security conditions in Burkina Faso. For more in-depth information, review OSAC's [Burkina Faso 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 Burkina Faso at Level 4, indicating travelers should not travel to the country due to terrorism, crime, and kidnapping. Do not travel to the 11th Arrondissement of Ouagadougou (Karpala, Balkiui, and Rayongo/Dayongo neighborhoods) due to terrorism and crime. Review OSAC's report, [Understanding the Consular Travel Advisory System](#).

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Burkina Faso is an "adults only" post; minor family members of U.S. government employees may not travel to the country.

Instability has increased across country, particularly after the emergence of extremism in eastern Burkina Faso in 2018, which has since spread to other parts of the country. Prior to 2018, extremist activities were prevalent mainly in Burkina Faso's northern Sahel region. However, 2019 saw an exponential increase in extremist activities, which has expanded to the east, west, and southern portions of the country. Terrorists target civilian and military targets alike. Armed criminality and intercommunal violence driven by economic desperation, food insecurity, and competition over land and water resources have fueled violent extremism and antigovernment grievances, further exacerbating instability. Burkina Faso's borders remain extremely porous and hard to police, factors criminal actors and terrorist groups may exploit. Natural population movement occurs between Burkina Faso and its neighbors. Growing insecurity and extremist activity has led to an exponential increase in the number of internally displaced people.

The Government of Burkina Faso has maintained a state of emergency in the entire East and Sahel regions, the provinces of Kossi and Sourou in the Boucle de Mouhoun region, the province of Kenedougou in the Hauts Bassins region, the province of Loroum in the North region, and the province of Koulpelogo in the Center-East region. Active military operations, curfews, and movement restrictions, including bans of motorcycles and other vehicles are ongoing or could occur in these areas. The Burkinabè military has undertaken operations to combat terrorism in the north, east, and southwest.

Crime Threats

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Ouagadougou as being a **HIGH**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Ouagadougou experienced an increase in the number of armed robberies in 2019. Street crime (especially pickpocketing, purse snatching, and backpack/cell phone theft) is pervasive in major cities. Cellular telephones, jewelry, laptops, money, and other items of value are frequent targets of thieves. Most street crime occurs after dark and involves one or two individuals on motorbikes. Street crime typically increases in Ouagadougou around the holidays, the West African Movie Festival (FESPACO), and the Regional Craft Festival (SIAO).

While most streets in Ouagadougou are safe and non-threatening during daylight hours, they become less so at night, especially in isolated areas around bars/nightclubs that tend to attract unsavory individuals after dark. Crime occurs in affluent residential areas such as Ouaga 2000, Zone du Bois, and Koulouba. United Nations Circle and Avenue Kwame Nkrumah are also high-crime areas. Criminals often attempt to establish rapport with Westerners in order to later rob or defraud them, or intimidate them into paying money. Bribery and fraud are prevalent. Review OSAC's reports, [All That You Should Leave Behind](#).

Ordinarily, thieves do not threaten victims with weapons, although there have been cases of theft and attempted theft involving firearms and knives, and the number of armed robberies increased in 2019. Criminals in urban areas may carry an edged weapon to cut straps on bags, purses, or backpacks. Criminals can become violent if the victim is noncompliant.

Rape and sexual assault occur periodically in smaller towns and in Ouagadougou.

Hotel security is generally adequate against petty crime, but residential thefts/home invasions occur occasionally in expatriate residential areas (e.g. Ouaga 2000, Koulouba, and Zone du Bois) and in other parts of Ouagadougou. Thieves have entered residences at night surreptitiously, avoiding direct confrontation with the occupants. Most perpetrators exploited an unlocked door or window. Review OSAC's reports, [Hotels: The Inns and Outs](#) and [Considerations for Hotel Security](#).

Roadside banditry has been a nationwide problem in previous years. Bandits have fired warning shots and attacked vehicles that did not stop. Local police label the Eastern Region beyond Koupela (toward Fada N'gourma) as banditry-prone due to its isolated location and intermittent cell phone coverage. According to police statistics, more than half of all reported roadside banditry incidents occurred in this area.

The U.S. Embassy prohibits U.S. Government personnel from personal travel to the Karpala, Balkiui, and Rayongo (also known as Dayongo) neighborhoods of Ouagadougou's 11th Arrondissement for security reasons.

Review OSAC's reports, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#) and [Taking Credit](#).

Cybersecurity Issues

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

Traffic and road conditions in Ouagadougou make driving difficult and hazardous. In addition to regular car/truck traffic, there are large numbers of mopeds, pedestrians, bicycles, donkey carts, hand-cranked wheelchairs, and hand-pulled wagons on main thoroughfares. Commercial areas are overcrowded with pedestrians, taxis, trucks, handcarts, innumerable vendors, and beggars. Most roads are gravel surfaces or dirt tracks. Hazards on side roads can be worse than those on main thoroughfares. Drivers may encounter young children at play, dogs scavenging in trash piles, and grazing livestock. Exposed rocks, loose gravel, potholes, broken concrete/tile, and scattered pieces of wood often litter deeply rutted dirt roads. The streets in the neighborhoods where many Embassy staff live may be paved, but the asphalt may be crumbling, especially at the edges.

Pedestrians and mopeds dash in/out of traffic, often directly in front of oncoming vehicles. Drivers of every type of vehicle obey traffic laws only selectively, and often engage in unsafe driving practices. Mopeds have the right of way; operators seem to believe this permits them to drive with complete disregard for their own or others' safety. The law requires moped operators to carry driver's licenses and wear helmets, but the police do not enforce this law. As a result, it is quite common to see accidents involving mopeds with serious injuries/fatalities.

Drivers must go well beyond the norms of defensive driving. Burkina Faso theoretically follows European rules of the road. Yield to aggressive drivers and maintain a cool head in traffic – even if you have the right of way. All personal vehicles in Burkina Faso must carry local third-party liability insurance.

Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorbikes, livestock, donkey carts, cars, buses, and trucks shared paved roads between major cities. Any vehicle on the road may be overloaded or in a state of disrepair. There may be long stretches between major cities where one must detour to an unimproved road.

The same carelessness and general lack of safety awareness among drivers presents even greater dangers at night. Many cars and motorbikes do not have or use headlights, and most areas do not have streetlights. Bicyclists and pedestrians in dark clothing are practically invisible in the dark. In some neighborhoods, packs of domesticated dogs roam the dark streets. All these factors combine to create a very taxing, perilous nighttime driving experience.

There is no roadside assistance; in the event of a mechanical breakdown, it could be hours before help arrives. Travelers must carry plenty of food/water when traveling outside the cities, and should have a well-maintained vehicle and two good spare tires. Many drivers have had to purchase new car batteries, because the country's intense heat significantly drains battery life.

If you have an accident and are not in immediate danger, do not move your vehicle until a police officer instructs you to do so.

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

The Embassy prohibits the use of all public transportation.

Buses on the highways have been involved in catastrophic accidents, and are commonly the target of roadside bandits.

Green taxis are often mechanically unsafe, and may stop to pick up additional passengers during one trip. These taxis do not have meters, are not subject to regulation, and are generally not roadworthy. Tourists have been victims of crime and involved in accidents when using local green taxis.

Some yellow taxi services may be acceptable. Such services use centralized dispatchers and have relatively well-maintained automobiles with fare meters and seatbelts.

Few streets have names. Some street names have changed in recent years, sometimes repeatedly. When navigating the city, note landmarks rather than street names. Most paved roads do not have adequate markings; the lack of signage and consistent naming leads to confusion among drivers.

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

Aviation/Airport Conditions

As there is no direct commercial air service to the U.S. by carriers registered in Burkina Faso, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed the government's Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards.

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Ouagadougou as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Do not travel to Burkina Faso, especially outside of Ouagadougou and other urban areas due to risk of terrorism, armed criminality, and kidnapping. Traveling at night may increase these risks. Terrorists or their proxies have routinely ambushed security forces and increasingly kidnapped road travelers – particularly foreigners – along transit arteries, including those connecting major cities. There has been a significant increase in the number of roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Terrorist groups continue plotting attacks in Burkina Faso, and may conduct attacks anywhere – even in Ouagadougou – with little or no warning. Targets could include hotels, restaurants, police stations, customs offices, areas at or near mining sites, places of worship, military posts, and schools.

2019 saw two of the deadliest terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso's history, each killing over 30 civilians. Extremist groups have conducted attacks in the northern and eastern regions of Burkina Faso, as well in the west and southwest, and in Ouagadougou. Extremist groups have the capacity to conduct complex attacks utilizing vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs) and large numbers of armed individuals. These groups are especially active in areas near the Mali and Niger borders. Terrorist groups have conducted high-profile attacks in Ouagadougou:

- 2018: Two groups of armed men attacked the Burkinabè military headquarters and French Embassy nearly simultaneously, attacking the former with a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED).
- 2017: A small group of armed men attacked the Aziz Istanbul restaurant in downtown Ouagadougou.
- 2016: Terrorists attacked the Hotel Splendid and Cappuccino Café.

These events are a stark reminder of the need to remain vigilant of one's surroundings and immediately report all suspicious activity to the local police or security forces. Terrorist groups continue plotting attacks in Burkina Faso. Terrorists may conduct attacks anywhere with little or no warning. Terrorist groups have demonstrated their intention to target Burkina Faso in retaliation for the Burkinabè government's participation in regional stabilization and counterterrorism efforts and support of Western interests, including France's military presence in the region. Burkina Faso actively participates in the recently deployed G-5 Sahel regional counterterrorism force and the UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Regional terrorist groups that could conduct activities in Burkina Faso include JNIM ("Group in Support of Islam and Muslims"), a coalition of four Mali-based terrorist groups that includes al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al Dine, al-Murabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front; ISIS in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS); and Ansaroul Islam, which is active in northern Burkina Faso, particularly in the Sahel region.

Burkina Faso's borders with Mali and Niger remain porous; elements terrorist groups may be able to move across the international borders easily.

Due to credible threat information and terrorist activity, the U.S. Embassy and many other diplomatic missions restrict employee travel outside of Ouagadougou. The U.S. government is unable to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens throughout most of the country.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Ouagadougou as being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Civil Unrest

There is risk from civil unrest in Ouagadougou. Demonstrations, marches, and other gatherings are common and may become violent at any time. Although most conclude peacefully, there have been outbreaks of violence, looting, roadblocks, tire burning, and destruction of property during demonstrations. Instances may arise where the best and safest course of action is to shelter in place temporarily. Review OSAC's report, [Surviving a Protest](#).

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Flooding has been a major problem during the rainy season (June-September), damaging some roads and buildings severely. Ouagadougou experienced its last major and destructive flood in 2009, with extensive damage to roads, levees, and residential areas. The floods destroyed small villages on the outskirts of Ouagadougou, displacing more than 10,000 people. The central hospital sustained significant damage, and the U.S. Embassy evacuated several residences.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Occupational hazards do exist, including buildings not constructed to code, and insufficient enforcement of safety standards.

Personal Identity Concerns

Members of the LGBTI+ community find life in Burkina Faso extremely difficult and, at worst, dangerous. Societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity remains an issue; religious/traditional beliefs do not tolerate homosexuality. There are regular reports of verbal and physical abuse against members of the LGBTI+ community. LGBTI+ employees have passed partners off as relatives, even within the Embassy community, to avoid the possibility of intolerant reactions. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [LGBTI+ travelers](#).

Women should dress conservatively to avoid harassment. At some local social occasions (e.g. weddings, dinners, religious ceremonies) and at some events, women and men sit separately. Such gender-based separation sometimes negatively affects the ability of diplomats to conduct business. Although the law prohibits violence against women, domestic violence, including spousal abuse, is widespread. Wives have limited legal recourse in cases of abuse. There is no reliable data on the extent of sexual assault, though it is a problem. Rape cases do not usually go to trial. Police generally investigate reports of rape, but victims often do not file reports due to cultural barriers and fear of reprisal. The law prohibits female genital mutilation/cutting, but the practice is widespread, particularly in rural areas, and usually performed at an early age. Child marriage is a problem. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [female travelers](#).

Physically disabled individuals would have a very difficult time in Burkina Faso, as facilities are generally not accessible. Access to buildings, pedestrian paths, and transportation is extremely difficult for persons with disabilities. Most cafés, restaurants, hotels, and residential buildings have stairs at the entrance without wheelchair ramps. Buses and taxis do not have special accommodations for disabled persons. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [travelers with disabilities](#).

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

Drug-related Crime

Illegal drugs are available; however, Burkina Faso is mostly a transit country for the illegal drug trade. There are no indications that illegal drugs in Burkina Faso connected to narco-terrorism.

Kidnapping Threat

The threat of kidnapping remains persistent throughout Burkina Faso, including in Ouagadougou, and especially in the Sahel and Est regions. Burkina Faso had its first kidnapping incident involving a Westerner in 2015. Since then, there have been multiple high-profile kidnappings of Westerners – many of which coincided with the escalation of terrorist activity throughout more areas of the country over the last year.

- In May 2019, a hostage-rescue operation freed four international hostages, including a U.S. citizen, that kidnappers had taken in Burkina Faso and in neighboring Benin.
- In January 2019, kidnappers took and later killed a Canadian geologist working in the mining sector in Sahel region.
- In December 2018, kidnappers took two tourists (Canadian and Italian) from an unknown location in Burkina Faso – possibly while en route to Togo from Bobo-Dioulasso. Authorities recovered the hostages in Mali in early 2020.
- In September 2018, kidnappers took two mining employees (Indian and South African) traveling from the Inata mine to Ouagadougou while in Sahel Region.
- In addition, in September 2018, kidnappers took an Italian priest from a location just over the border in Niger, reportedly transporting him across the border into eastern Burkina Faso via suspected extremists.

Review OSAC's report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Other Issues

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

Local security and emergency response capabilities can be limited, especially in areas outside of Ouagadougou and other urban areas. Terrorists have ambushed security forces, including escorts and reinforcements, along major roads.

Burkinabè authorities take extra measures to protect Westerners and international interests. However, local law enforcement practices, procedures, and expertise often fall below the standards expected in developed countries.

Within Ouagadougou, emergency services numbers are as follows:

- Police: Dial **17** or 25-30-63-83, or 25-30-71-00 for emergencies, or 25-36-44-42 or 25-32-60-69 for administrative issues.
- Gendarmerie (Military Police): Dial **16** or 25-30-62-71 for emergencies, or 25-30-32-71 or 25-31-33-40 for administrative issues.

- Ministry of Security: **10-10** dispatches the appropriate law enforcement entity, but English-language comprehension may be limited.
- Fire Department: Dial **18** for emergencies, or 25-30-69-47 or 25-30-69-48 for administrative issues.

Download the State Department's Crime Victims Assistance [brochure](#).

Medical Emergencies

Within Ouagadougou, dial **18** for medical emergencies, or 25-30-66-44 or 25-30-66-45 for administrative issues. Find contact information for available medical services and available air ambulance services on the [U.S. Embassy website](#).

The U.S. Department of State strongly recommends purchasing international health insurance before traveling internationally. Review the State Department's webpage on [insurance overseas](#).

Burkina Faso is a malaria-endemic country; ensure you have adequate chemoprophylaxis. There is a risk of Zika infection in Burkina Faso. HIV infection is common throughout the country. Yellow Fever is a risk in Burkina Faso; CDC recommends this vaccine for travelers who are 9 months of age or older. You can get hepatitis A and typhoid through contaminated food or water in Burkina Faso. The following diseases are also prevalent: Dengue, Meningococcal meningitis, Schistosomiasis, and Tuberculosis.

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

Review OSAC's reports, [The Healthy Way](#), [Traveling with Medication](#), [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 Regional Security Office (RSO) re-launched the OSAC Country Council program in Ouagadougou in 2017. Contact OSAC's [Africa team](#) for more information or to join.

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

The U.S. Embassy Ouagadougou is located at Secteur 15, Ouaga 2000, Avenue Sembène Ousmane, rue 15.873, southeast of the Monument aux Héros Nationaux.

Monday-Thursday 0730-1700, and Friday 0730-1230, excluding U.S. and local holidays.

Switchboard: +226-2549-5300

After-Hours Duty Officer: +226-7720-2414

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

Helpful Information

Before you travel, consider the following resources:

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