



Georgia 2020 OSAC Crime & Safety Report



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

Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Georgia at Level 1, indicating travelers should exercise normal precautions. Do not travel to the Russian-occupied regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia due to risk of crime, civil unrest, and landmines. 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 Tbilisi as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Crime in Tbilisi is comparable to a moderate sized U.S. city. Georgian police maintain a visible presence throughout the city and other major urban areas. According to official statistics, there was a 14.6% overall increase in crime in 2019 compared to 2018 based on January through September 2019 reporting by the Georgian Internal Affairs Ministry (MoIA). In 2018, there was an approximate 58% increase in crime events, which the MoIA attributed to increased reporting and trust in law enforcement institutions. Georgia experienced a slight increase in violent crimes in 2019, primarily occurring between Georgians. Drug-related offenses and property crimes, including petty theft and other crimes of opportunity, remain a concern, as well as a reported increase in crimes against human rights and freedoms.

U.S. nationals and other Westerners have been victims of crime in Georgia. The number of crimes involving U.S. nationals in 2019 was similar to the number in 2018, and included reports of aggravated assault, sexual assault, credit card fraud, and robbery.

Refuse invitations from strangers to come into bars or nightclubs. These ploys lure individuals into small bars, where hustlers extort travelers for large amounts of cash; they threaten physical harm if they refuse to pay for exorbitantly priced drinks. Review OSAC's Report [Shaken: The Don'ts of Alcohol Abroad](#).

There continue to be reports of street children begging from, hassling, and behaving aggressively toward foreigners. The Embassy is aware of incidents where groups of street children approach and distract unsuspecting U.S. national travelers. Organized crime remains an issue; high-profile arrests of Georgian nationals involved with transnational criminal groups continue to occur throughout Europe. Street gangs and drug dealers are common in Tbilisi and other urban areas of Georgia. These groups do not specifically target foreigners.

Reports of armed robberies have decreased in 2019 compared to 2018, based on MoIA statistics. Georgian authorities have seized illegal weapons caches to include handguns, rifles, and hand grenades. Georgia is a post-conflict nation with weapons remaining in the country relating to the fall of the Soviet Union as well as two internal conflicts (involving the Russian-occupied Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia). There is no indication of a correlation between the seized caches and crime.

Financial crimes in the form of credit card fraud against individuals and larger targeted attacks against banks and other financial institutions are not uncommon. Georgian law enforcement agencies continue to put substantial resources into combatting financial crimes and continue to make arrests in this area. Review OSAC's reports, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#) and [Taking Credit](#).

Cybersecurity Issues

According to MoIA official crime statistics for 2019 between January and September, there was a nearly 100% increase in cybercrime in Georgia. Georgia remains a location for cryptocurrency mining, and criminal actors continue to exploit the current environment in country to perpetrate cybercrime. In October 2019, Georgia experienced a large-scale cyberattack, where cybercriminals took down homepages of several thousand websites, replacing them with a politically divisive image. Avoid using publicly available internet terminals, as they may be compromised. 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

Georgia has the highest per-capita accident rate of any country in Europe; correspondingly, the leading cause of death in Georgia is traffic accidents. Two U.S. Embassy employees have died in motor vehicle accidents since early 2018. Local drivers pay little attention to speed limits or lane discipline, and regularly encroach into oncoming traffic. Intoxicated drivers are a problem, especially in the evenings and on holidays. Anyone operating a motor vehicle should maintain an acute level of situational awareness, drive defensively, and wear seatbelts. Georgian law requires use of seat belts in the front seats.

Due to poor lighting and dangerous driving conditions, avoid traveling at night outside cities except in emergencies. There is also a heightened vulnerability to crime during vehicle malfunctions or stops at night.

Free-ranging livestock on the roads may pose a danger to drivers.

There is little access to emergency medical services outside of Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi. The effectiveness of emergency response to traffic accidents depends on resources, or lack thereof, and the level of training among medical personnel varies. 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

Exercise caution while using the underground Metro, *marshrutka* mini-buses, and any other form of public transportation.

In 2019, the Georgian government implemented new regulations for the taxicab industry, which include, but are not limited to, vehicle inspections, mandatory registration of taxis, standardized color (white) for all cabs, and a requirement that all taxis maintain and use a visible sign on the roof to indicate occupied/vacant. In the past, most taxi drivers were private individuals who use their personal vehicles as unofficial cabs as a source of income. Despite the increased oversight, the Embassy continues to advise its staff to use official taxicab companies whenever possible, especially companies offering an online booking platform, and to negotiate a fare before using a local taxi. Established taxi companies employ dispatchers, often with English language abilities; their vehicles use fare meters and have permanent painted exteriors listing the company name and number. Many major hotels in Tbilisi and Batumi offer their own private cab services or can refer guests to a trusted service provider. Passengers should instruct taxi drivers to slow down if they do not feel comfortable with the operating speed. Only patronize taxicabs with functional seatbelts.

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

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Tbilisi as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Georgia's proximity to Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Russian North Caucasus region (all of which have experienced some measure of recent terrorist-related activity) continues to be of concern. While Georgia has made strides with respect to border control and integrity, its geographic location makes it a natural transit area for individuals from these regions. Foreign fighters from Georgia, or who transited Georgia, have joined ISIS and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.

Georgia substantially updated and expanded its counterterrorism legislation in 2015. In 2018, authorities detained, prosecuted, and sentenced several Georgian nationals affiliated with Chechen ISIS member Akhmet Chataev, following his death in a 2017 State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG)-led counterterrorism operation. Operations in Tbilisi and Pankisi led to the detention and conviction of eight individuals on terrorism charges. In 2019, MoIA reported 11 acts of terrorism.

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

The country faces two separate and distinct streams of anti-U.S. sentiment: U.S.-Russian relations, and anti-U.S. rhetoric that originates within small Islamist groups. There have been no direct cases of violence solely attributed to anti-U.S./anti-Western sentiment.

A sizeable minority prefer alignment with Russia. Georgia also continues to deal with the geopolitical effects of the 2008 war with the Russian Federation.

Georgia's population is 10% Muslim, concentrated in several areas adjacent to predominantly Muslim countries or territories (i.e. Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russia's Chechen Republic). While there have been no direct threats against U.S. interests by Georgian-based Islamist groups, some members of these groups have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight on behalf of ISIS.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Tbilisi as being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. There is no known threat of political violence directed specifically against U.S. nationals.

In 2008, an exchange of gunfire/artillery between Georgian and separatist forces in South Ossetia escalated into a full-blown war between Georgia and Russia. Since 2008, Russia has stationed forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This includes the Akhagori region of South Ossetia, which was not previously part of the conflict zone and occupied only starting in 2008, and the Kodori Gorge area of Abkhazia, which Georgia controlled before the war. Russian forces withdrew from Perevi, near the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia, in 2010.

During the 2016 Parliamentary Elections, there was an assassination attempt against a prominent political leader. In addition, a car bomb exploded in front of the United National Movement (UNM) political party's office on Kolmeurne Square, near Rustaveli Avenue and Freedom Square. The suspected target of the attack was a senior UNM official.

Civil Unrest

In 2019, large demonstrations occurred in downtown Tbilisi, some of which resulted in violence and property damage. In June 2019, following the appearance of a Russian Duma member in the Chair of Georgian Parliament, a large demonstration occurred outside of Parliament along Rustaveli Avenue. Clashes between police and demonstrators resulted in approximately 240 injuries and started an ongoing series of protests by opposition groups which formed after the event. Protest activity continues to ebb and flow with events in Georgia. Two protesters lost eyes and sustained other injuries due to the police's use of less than lethal riot control measures, including rubber bullets.

Demonstrations in Tbilisi have the potential to draw large crowds in a short amount of time, which significantly affects traffic and pedestrian movement. Large rallies can cause substantial logistical difficulties for businesses in the area, including western brand chain hotels along Rustaveli Avenue near Parliament. To date, there has not been any protest-related acts of major violence reported against U.S. nationals in Tbilisi.

Embassy Tbilisi continues to warn its personnel and all U.S. nationals to avoid areas of demonstrations and to exercise caution near large public gatherings when possible, as even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence. Review OSAC's report, [Surviving a Protest](#).

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Though rare, violence or threatening behavior motivated by religious or ethnic differences occurs occasionally. The Prime Minister and other leaders have stated the government would not tolerate religious or ethnic prejudices, and have condemned such acts in the past.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Georgia is in a seismic zone. Numerous earthquakes registering less than 5.0 on the Richter scale occurred in 2019 throughout Georgia, some of which shook Tbilisi. Seismologists stress that Georgia's fault lines are extremely active, and could result in a more significant earthquake causing significant structural damage if it occurred in a populated area.

Weather in the mountains of Georgia can change quickly, even in the summer months, with low overnight temperatures and unexpected snowstorms. There have been reports of lost hikers in the mountains in snowy/stormy weather, and there have been fatal accidents. Flash floods in spring or summer can be hazardous or deadly, and often wash out sections of road in remote areas.

Eight known venomous snake species are endemic to Georgia; you are more likely to encounter them between March and October. For more information, review OSAC's Report [When Wildlife Attacks](#).

Critical Infrastructure

Georgian law requires new construction to meet seismic standards, but enforcement is uneven. Many buildings, new and old, have inadequate anti-seismic construction. Gas leaks and explosions have occurred in old and new buildings alike, causing injuries and death, especially during the winter.

Economic Concerns

Completing due diligence activities is difficult. Fraudulent bank documents, employment records, and fake seals and stamps are common. Government offices easily identify fraudulent civil documents, but such documents are readily available and still encountered. The government is working to arrest and prosecute document vendors, but the investigation and prosecution process can be lengthy, and criminal penalties minimal.

Foreigners should safeguard sensitive information. Pirated software, music, and films are widely available on the black market.

Personal Identity Concerns

There continue to be periodic reports of violence and intimidation against foreigners in bars, nightclubs, and similar venues, especially against members of the LGBTI+ community. Events or issues involving the LGBTI+ community in Georgia remain a potential source of conflict, as demonstrated during the lead-up to Tbilisi's planned Pride Week in June 2019, as well as the release of the film "And Then We Danced" in November 2019. Both periods resulted in an aggressive anti-LGBTI+ media campaign via numerous anti-LGBTI+ groups. Of note, anti-LGBTI+ groups often allege that the United States and other Western nations promote or organize LGBTI+-related events. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [LGBTI+ travelers](#).

Accessibility and accommodations in Georgia are different from those in the United States. Georgian administrative code mandates access to buildings for persons with disabilities; however, in practice very few public or private facilities are accessible. Public transportation offers no accommodation for persons with disabilities. There are few sidewalks outside of Tbilisi or Batumi. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [travelers with disabilities](#).

Drug-related Crimes

Georgia is a transit point and an end-use destination for various illicit drugs. In 2018, Georgia's Constitutional Court abolished the mandatory prison sentence and administrative fines for marijuana use and possession (up to 70 grams). Harsh penalties remain in effect for marijuana distribution and for all other illegal narcotics use, possession, and distribution. In 2019, MoIA crime statistics reported a 29% increase in drug-related criminal activity.

Georgia continues efforts to increase border security with the support of the U.S. government, the European Union, and international donors. Georgian police have a special emphasis on counter-narcotics work, with a special division to combat international narcotics trafficking.

Kidnapping Threat

The threat to U.S. nationals of kidnapping exists, particularly in the Russian-occupied Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There was one report of a parental abduction in Georgia involving a U.S. minor, which authorities investigated. Review OSAC's report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Other Issues

The Department of State strongly warns U.S. nationals against travel to the Russian-occupied Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These regions are not under the administrative control of the Georgian government. Tensions remain high between the de facto authorities in these regions and the Georgian government. Russian troops and border guards continue to occupy both regions. Entering the occupied regions without proper documentation can lead to arrest, imprisonment, and/or fines. Russian forces or de facto officials may also detain and/or fine travelers who do not obtain "visas" or other documents from the de facto authorities. The U.S. Embassy restricts its personnel from travel to Abkhazia or South Ossetia, even in the case of emergencies involving U.S. nationals.

As an added precaution, U.S. Embassy personnel may not travel within five kilometers of the administrative boundary lines (ABLs) dividing Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Tbilisi-administered territory unless on approved official business and by means of a fully armored vehicle. The Embassy allows personal travel on major highways that cross within the five-kilometer border zone.

Per Georgian law, it is illegal to undertake any type of economic activity in Abkhazia or South Ossetia, if such activities require permits, licenses, or registration with the de facto authorities. Georgian laws also ban mineral exploration, money transfers, and international transit via Abkhazia or South Ossetia. The Government of Georgia considers the sale of property (land and houses) in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia illegal. Its original owners could reclaim the property in the future.

The Department of State cautions U.S. nationals against travel to the Pankisi Gorge region (north of the villages of Matani and Khorbalo, to the border with Russia, including the city of Duisi) because of the current security environment and the potential for civil unrest. There are also restrictions on U.S. Embassy personnel traveling to this region. Terrorist recruiting has occurred in Pankisi in the past, and some known terrorists have confirmed ties to the Pankisi Gorge region.

Georgia's customs authorities enforce regulations concerning the temporary import/export of items such as alcohol, tobacco, jewelry, religious materials, art or artifacts, antiquities, and business equipment. 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 for the police in Georgia is **112**. Emergency services will respond to the best of their ability, but terrain, road, and weather conditions, as well as limited resources, could severely affect response times. In general, police are attentive and responsive to requests/calls for assistance from foreigners and U.S. nationals. However, their effectiveness is contingent on resources, or lack thereof, and the level of training among officers varies. Police response in Tbilisi can range from several minutes to more than one hour. Police response outside of Tbilisi can be considerably longer. For local first responders, refer to the Embassy's [Emergency Assistance page](#).

Although there has been much progress in the government's efforts to reform the police organizations and improve overall professionalism, work to effectively deter criminal activity and conduct effective post-incident investigations remains.

The most visible police presence is that of the Patrol Police, who patrol in marked vehicles throughout the country; they increase their visibility by patrolling with their emergency lights on. The Protection Police are a visible presence throughout the larger cities of Georgia near government buildings and crowded tourist areas.

Medical Emergencies

For all general emergencies, call **112**. Consider downloading the [112 Georgia](#) app, which has an emergency text and location identification feature. Western-standard medical care is limited, but healthcare continues to improve. There is a shortage of medical supplies and capabilities outside Tbilisi and Batumi. Elderly travelers and those with pre-existing health problems may be at risk due to inadequate medical facilities. Find contact information for available medical services and available air ambulance services on the [U.S. Embassy website](#).

Medical services in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are extremely limited. Hospitals have little to no infectious disease control capabilities and may lack medicine. There are no commercial airports in either region, making air ambulance evacuations (medevac) for medical emergencies impossible.

Many medicines legal in the U.S. are controlled/illegal in Georgia. There has been a notable recent increase in enforcement (and related detentions) of U.S. nationals related to the possession and importation of controlled substances. Travel with a doctor's statement and no more than a personal supply of any prescription medication. Review OSAC's Report, [Traveling with Medication](#).

Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment before rendering medical services. Hospitals do not accept credit cards or medical insurance. The Embassy highly recommends both short- and long-term travelers purchase overseas medical insurance and medevac insurance. Review the State Departments webpage on [insurance overseas](#).

The Embassy strongly recommends travelers who visit for at least two weeks get the Hepatitis A vaccine and the pre-exposure rabies vaccine series. There has been a recent measles outbreak, and tuberculosis is a serious health concern. Bring medicine to treat diarrhea, which regularly afflicts newcomers. Take care to cook food thoroughly to reduce the risk of food-borne illness.

Georgia has a high rate of Hepatitis C. Exercise caution if you plan to get a tattoo, piercing, dental work, or other procedure with potential for blood exposure. Ensure the provider uses proper sterilization procedures.

Anti-venom is available for some species of snakes in a small number of facilities. Treat all snakes as potentially venomous.

High levels of lead appear in [some spices](#) made in Georgia. Consider purchasing spices only from recognized U.S. or international manufacturers.

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

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

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Tbilisi is active, meeting quarterly. Contact OSAC's [Europe team](#) for more information or to join.

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

11 George Balanchine Street, Didi Dighomi, Tbilisi 0131

Regular hours: 0900 – 1800, Monday – Friday

Embassy 24/7 Main & Emergency Number: +995 (32) 227-70-00.

Website: <https://ge.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 \(STEP\)](#)