



Maldives 2019 Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which oversees security for Maldives.

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

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

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

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

Crime Threats

There is minimal risk from crime in Malé. Most visits to Maldives surrounding the tourist resorts on remote islands remain relative trouble-free. However, there have been incidents of petty theft of goods left on beaches or in hotel rooms. Be aware of your surroundings, especially when traveling to Malé.

There has been an increase in gang activity, particularly in Malé and in Hulhumalé. Police have increased efforts to curb gang violence in Malé, but young protestors often gather in groups to roam the streets of Malé at night. Malé saw a spate of gang violence in 2014, with several attacks involving the use of edged weapons.

U.S. citizens are subject to local laws. If local laws are violated, even unknowingly, visitors may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Some laws are also prosecutable in the United States, regardless of local law.

Other Areas of Concern

Maldives experiences strong seasonal ocean currents. The currents can cause strong undertows and riptides that lead to a significant number of drownings each year. Five tourists died in a single week in January 2019 due to these strong currents. Exercise increased caution in the water. For more information, review OSAC's Report, [Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Abroad](#).

Transportation-Safety Situation

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

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Only a few of the islands are large enough to support automobiles. Roads in Malé and the airport island are brick and generally well-maintained. One-way streets may not be clearly marked, and occasionally change direction without notice. There are currently no car rental services in Malé, due to tourist resorts being located on remote islands. Animals and pedestrians can make driving on unlighted roads at night hazardous. During the two monsoon seasons, roads can often become flooded. Resorts keep dirt roads on resort islands in good condition. Roads can become traffic-congested and narrow.

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

Public Transportation Conditions

Most transportation in Maldives is by boat or seaplane (air taxi). Maldives has good safety standards for land, sea, and air travel. Transportation in Malé is either by foot, by bus, or by readily-available taxis that charge a fixed fee for any single journey. Maldives announced in January 2019 that it is introducing meters in taxis. However, it has not yet established a timeline. While meters are not available, agree on a price before departing to your destination.

Velana International Airport (MLE) is the primary point of entry in Maldives. It is located on a separate island, connected to Malé by road. Transportation between the airport and Malé, as well as to nearby resort islands, is mostly by motorized water taxi and speedboat. Many resorts stop boat transfers between the airport and the resort island after sunset. Visitors to distant resorts arriving in the country at night can expect to stay overnight at a hotel in Malé or at the airport hotel. Arrange for transportation, in advance, through your hotel or resort.

There are several buses in Maldives that transport passengers from the airport to the adjoining island, Hulhumalé, every thirty minutes. Not every bus may be able to hold luggage.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

As there is no direct commercial air service to the United States by carriers registered in Maldives, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed the government of Maldives' Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards. Find further information on the [FAA's safety assessment page](#).

At the airport, there have been reports of items stolen from checked baggage or lost. Maintain awareness of belongings at all times, use Transportation Security Administration (TSA) approved locks, and retrieve checked bags as soon as possible.

Terrorism Threat

There is moderate risk from terrorism in Malé. Terrorist groups may conduct attacks with little or no warning, targeting tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, and local government facilities.

Attacks may occur on remote islands, which could lengthen the response time of authorities. Since 2014, al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has elevated the threat landscape in South Asia. The same month that AQIS announced its formation, ISIS released a recorded call for the killing of U.S. citizens and anti-ISIS coalition members, encouraging lone-offender and target-of-opportunity attacks. There have been reports of Maldivian fighters traveling to Syria to fight alongside militants, including ISIS and AQ-affiliate al-Nusra Front. Dozens of Maldivians have died fighting in Syria. An estimated 200 Maldivians, out of a population of approximately 400,000, were fighting in Syria and Iraq, making Maldives the world's second largest supplier of foreign fighters per capita, after Tunisia.

U.S. citizens traveling to Maldives should be aware of violent attacks and threats made against local media, political parties, and civil society. In the past, there have been killings and violent attacks against secular bloggers and activists.

The transnational capabilities of select terrorist groups, ease of international travel, and the availability of black-market weapons/explosives require U.S. travelers to be vigilant in their personal security practices, especially at locations Westerners frequent.

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

There have been no specific, credible threats (or attacks) directed against U.S. citizens or interests in Maldives. However, a number of Maldivian nationals have traveled to Iraq and Syria to join or fight alongside ISIS. This could have an impact on anti-Western sentiment and activities if/when these individuals return to the Maldives.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is moderate risk from civil unrest in Malé. Maldives has a history of political protests. Gangs of young men frequently stage spontaneous protests throughout Malé, often at night. Some of these protests have involved use of anti-Western rhetoric. There are no reports of unrest or demonstrations on the resort islands or at the airport. Travelers should not engage in political activity in Maldives.

In 2015, authorities arrested a former President and the sitting Minister of Defense on terrorism-related charges, leading to a string of violent protests and a two-week state of emergency. While the state of emergency is no longer in force, there remains considerable government instability, with the potential to inspire civil unrest.

Visitors should exercise caution, particularly at night, and should avoid demonstrations and spontaneous gatherings. Those who encounter demonstrations or large crowds should avoid confrontation, remain calm, and depart the area quickly.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Maldives experiences severe coastal flooding brought on by the northeast monsoon (October-December) and the southwest monsoon (May-July). The heavy rains can be unpredictable and often flood the narrow streets in Malé and the remote tourist islands. As an island nation in the Indian Ocean, Maldives remains vulnerable to tsunamis. However, the last major tsunami to affect Maldives was in 2004.

Critical Infrastructure

Most smoke detectors and fire suppression equipment are concentrated on the popular tourist resorts, but are sporadic on Malé. However, there have still been several major fires at resorts and in Malé. A fire burned down several tourist villas in January 2019; the cause remains under investigation. A hardware store fire in 2016 created concern over the lack of building safety codes and the readiness of authorities. For more information on fire safety in hotels, review OSAC's Report, [Fire Safety Abroad](#).

Economic Concerns

Maldives is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), although it has not implemented any intellectual property rights legislation of its own. Authorities enforce intellectual property rights by printing cautionary notices in newspapers and attempting to gain sufficient public recognition. Stores may continue to sell pirated copies of movies, television shows, music, counterfeit clothing, jewelry, and other luxury goods.

Maldives uses the Maldivian rufiyaa (MVR) as its currency. ATMs are available at the airport, in Hulhumalé, and at major tourist destinations, but dispense only MVR. An ATM at the Bank of Maldives dispenses U.S. dollars, but only to Bank of Maldives cardholders. Merchants do not accept credit cards widely, outside of resorts. There have been reports in recent years of credit card scams using card skimming devices. For more information, review OSAC's report, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#).

Personal Identity Concerns

Domestic violence and discrimination remain a problem in Maldives. Maldives has presented progressive ideals abroad, but does not enforce many instances of sexual harassment and discrimination within its borders. A Gender Equality Law enacted in 2016 legislated equal employment opportunities for women, but remains largely ineffective due to the lack of implementing policies.

Women face disproportionate punishment for charges of adultery, and can face stiff penalties including flogging and death by stoning.

Same-sex sexual activity remains illegal in Maldives due to Islamic Law, which serves as the foundation for the Maldivian Penal Code. Exercise caution by avoiding public displays of affection, especially on larger islands.

Maldives is an ethnically homogenous society. There have been no reports of internal ethnic conflict.

While in Maldives, individuals with disabilities may find accessibility and accommodation very different from what you find in the United States. The Maldivian constitution provides for the rights and freedom from discrimination of persons with disabilities, and parliament passed a Disability Act in 2010. The new law requires public places such as supermarkets and parks to have facilities that will enable access for people with disabilities. Despite the law, most public places do not yet have access for the disabled, and implementation of the law may take some time.

Maldivian law prohibits public observance of any religion other than Islam. Religious gatherings such as Bible study groups are illegal; however, a family unit may practice its religion, including Bible readings, within its residence. It is against the law to invite or encourage Maldivian citizens to attend these gatherings. Offenders may face jail sentences, expulsion, and/or fines. Although Maldivian law prohibits importing “idols for religious worship,” tourists traveling to the resort islands generally may bring items and texts used for personal religious observances.

Drug-related Crimes

Drug use is on the rise among young Maldivians. Authorities strictly enforce drug possession laws. Penalties for possession of any amount include fines and mandatory jail time. Authorities may construe possession of any amount of illegal drugs as trafficking, a charge that may carry a life sentence.

Kidnapping Threat

There is minimal risk from kidnapping in Malé.

Police Response

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

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In cases of police detention or harassment, attempt to take note of the badge numbers of the officers involved and notify the American Citizen Services (ACS) section of the Embassy as soon as possible at (94) 11-249-8686 or [via email](#). After hours, please contact the Embassy duty officer at (94) 11-077-725-6307.

Crime Victim Assistance

Victims of crime should contact the local police (+960-332-2111) and ACS. The Embassy staff can help you find appropriate medical care, contact family members/friends, and explain how to transfer funds. Consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and how to find an attorney if needed.

The **119** emergency response line is for the police only, and **191** is for maritime emergencies. There is no three-digit number for medical emergencies; you must use direct hospital numbers.

Police/Security Agencies

The Maldives Police Service (MPS) is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Approximately 3,000 personnel work at MPS headquarters in Malé and in 77 police stations across the archipelago. Some of the primary directorates or commands include:

- Commissioner of Police: The senior-most police official
- Professional Standards Command: Internal investigations
- Central Operations Command: Malé and Hulhumalé city police
- Divisional Operation Commands: Police presence in approximate 20 atolls
- Crime Investigations: Drug enforcement, serious and organized crime, family and child protection, economic crime
- Internal Security Command: Marine police, specialist and custodial operations
- Intelligence Directorate: Primary intelligence and counterterrorism department

Medical Emergencies

There are currently two hospitals in Malé: the government-owned Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH) and the privately owned Abdurahman Don Kaleyfan Hospital (ADK). The hospitals perform limited general and orthopedic surgery, but Maldives has no trauma units and a small number of ICU beds. Persons needing treatments not offered in Maldives will require evacuation (medevac) to the nearest adequate medical facility, such as in Singapore. Carry adequate supplies of any needed prescription medicines, along with copies of their prescriptions, the generic name of the drugs, and a supply of preferred over-the-counter medications. For more information, refer to OSAC's Report, [Traveling with Medication](#).

Emergency response may be limited due to the distance between tourist resorts and the hospitals. The quality of medical care in such instances may be uncertain, and most ambulances are ill equipped. Individuals requiring an ambulance must call the hospital directly; reach IGMH at (+960 333-5335) or ADK at (+960 331-3553).

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

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

Available Air Ambulance Services

Pacific Flight Services, Singapore, (65) 648-3756 owns two Lear jets and contracts with specialty medical teams in Singapore to respond to medical emergencies. Pacific Flight Services has a 24-hour call center.

International SOS, Singapore, (65) 63-387-800 does not own any planes, but contracts with other companies for the use of their planes. The company has its own medical teams and a 24-hour call center.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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

Five recompression chambers are available in Maldives. The largest and longest operating recompression chamber is on Bandos Island (15 minutes by speedboat from Malé). The others are located on Cinnamon Alidhoo Resort, Villingili Resort in Addu, Kuramathi Resort, and Kandholhudhoo Islands.

OSAC Country Council Information

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

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

210 Galle Road, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Embassy working hours: 0800-1730, Monday-Thursday, and 0800-1200 Friday

Embassy Contact Numbers

U.S. Embassy Switchboard: (94) 11-249-8500
Embassy Duty Officer: (94) 11-077-725-6307

Website: Virtual Post Presence Maldives: <http://mv.usmission.gov>, <http://lk.usembassy.gov>

Consular coverage for multi-post countries

RSO Colombo covers Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and the American Citizen Services Unit provides services to U.S. citizens visiting and residing in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

Embassy Guidance

Register with the Embassy in person or online with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). Additional Resource: [Maldives](#) Country Information Sheet