



Ethiopia 2019 Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Ethiopia at Level 2, indicating travelers should exercise increased caution due to sporadic civil unrest and communications disruptions. Reconsider travel to the East Hararge region and the Guji zone of Oromia State due to armed conflict and civil unrest; the Benishangul Gumuz and the western part of Oromia State due to armed conflict and civil unrest; the Danakil Depression region in Afar due to crime; and border areas with Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Eritrea due to crime, armed conflict, and civil unrest. Do not travel to the Somali Regional State due to potential for civil unrest, terrorism, and landmines.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The American Citizens' Services (ACS) unit cannot recommend a particular individual or location and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

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

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a developing country in East Africa. It is composed of nine regional states and two city administrations (Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa). Tourism facilities can be found in the most populous regions, but infrastructure is basic. The overall security situation has been affected by internal unrest.

Crime Threats

There is considerable risk from crime in Addis Ababa. While statistics on crime against Westerners are not publicly available, anecdotal reports suggest that petty crime against Westerners remains elevated. Crime is generally opportunistic and non-violent/non-confrontational. Criminals can target foreigners (*ferengis*) for crimes; the assumption is that they possess valuables and are more susceptible to becoming victims. Criminals do target pedestrians and foreigners unaware of their surroundings most for crimes (e.g. pickpocketing, snatch-and-run thefts (including from occupied vehicles), and other petty crimes). Petty crimes (e.g. pickpocketing, purse snatching, and harassment by gangs of youths) occur at random in Addis Ababa. These incidents are more common in areas with large numbers of pedestrians. Exercise caution in crowded areas, especially in the Mercato open-air market.

Physical violence is uncommon but does happen. If you are threatened with violence over money/belongings, comply with demands and attempt to end the confrontation as quickly as possible.

Residential burglaries in areas populated by Embassy personnel and expatriates are not common, but do occur on an isolated basis. Keep valuables locked in a secured area at work. Only give your keys to a trusted person; do not leave them in possession with others (e.g. guards). Identify a secure lockable area away from windows where you can hunker down in case of an intruder. Alarms, guards, and dogs are outstanding deterrents to criminals.

There have been instances of local males sexually assault/groping Western females in both rural towns and large cities.

Cybersecurity Issues

Since April 2018, the Government of Ethiopia has minimized suspending internet and mobile data traffic, but has taken that action during previous localized periods of unrest. In 2016 to 2018, the Embassy experienced periods with difficulty in communicating with U.S. citizens during periods of unrest in Addis Ababa and outside of the capital. For more information, review OSAC's report, [How Government Oversight of Media and Communications Affects Operations in Africa](#).

Other Areas of Concern

Criminal violence and political violence in Addis Ababa and in southwestern and southeastern Ethiopia has resulted in numerous injuries and deaths. Due to serious safety and security concerns, U.S. government personnel and their families may not travel to the following areas:

- Ethiopia/Eritrea Border: Although Ethiopia and Eritrea are in the process of reconciliation and are demilitarizing their border areas, the border remains an area of concern. U.S. government personnel may not travel north of the Shire (Inda Silassie)-Axum-Adigrat road in the Tigray region. Personnel may not travel north of the road from Dessie through Semera to the Galafi border crossing with Djibouti. In 2017, unidentified gunmen shot and killed a European tourist at the Erta Ale Volcano in the Afar Region.
- Somali Region: U.S. government employee travel to Somali regional state is restricted, although essential travel may occur on a case-by-case basis. Since the mid-1990s, members of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) have conducted attacks on civilian targets there, particularly in predominantly Ogadeni zones, in which expatriates have died. Incidents of inter-ethnic and inter-clan violence continue. Al-Shabaab maintains a presence in Somali towns near the Ethiopian border, presenting a risk of cross-border attacks targeting foreigners.
- Gambella Region: Sporadic inter-ethnic clashes are a concern. While the security situation in Gambella town is generally calm, the rest of the region remains unpredictable, and there have been incidents of violence. Intensified conflict between Sudan and South Sudan has significantly increased refugee flows into western Ethiopia. Crime and intruders from South Sudan's armed Murile clan remain a concern. Refugee camps are strictly controlled. Pre-approve all access through the UNHCR and the Government of Ethiopia. Authorities have detained and deported journalists without proper permissions when attempting to access these refugee camps.
- Benishangul-Gumuz Region: Travel to the border areas in the Benishangul Gumuz Region (Assosa) is restricted due to inter-ethnic violence and military operations against the Oromo Liberation Army near the border with Oromia region.

- Ethiopian/Kenyan Border: Banditry and incidents involving ethnic conflict are common. Security around Moyale is unpredictable.

Clashes between Ethiopian forces and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) have occurred in West and East Wollega zones, Kellem Wollega, Horoguduru and West Guji zones of Oromia.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Ethiopia has one of the worst rates of traffic fatalities in the world. Roads are poorly maintained and inadequately marked. Road lighting is inadequate at best and nonexistent outside of cities. Road travel after dark outside cities is dangerous and discouraged due to hazards posed by broken-down vehicles, pedestrians and stray animals, and the possibility of armed robbery. Excessive speed, unpredictable local driving habits, pedestrians and livestock in the roadway, and the lack of adherence to basic safety standards for vehicles are daily hazards. Many vehicles are unlicensed, and many drivers lack basic driver training or insurance. Emergency services are limited to nonexistent in many parts of the country. There is no roadside assistance. U.S. government personnel must limit road travel outside towns/cities to daylight hours and travel in convoys, if possible, in case of breakdowns.

In 2016, a U.S. citizen died while driving on the outskirts of Addis Ababa when two individuals threw boulders at the victim's car. One of the boulders penetrated the window and struck the victim in the head. While authorities do not believe that the victim was targeted based on citizenship, vehicles belonging to a number of diplomats have had stones pelted at them both in and outside of Addis Ababa.

Always have your car keys ready as you approach your car and be on the lookout for individuals waiting close to your car, especially at Bole Airport (ADD). Do not open your doors/windows to give money to beggars, which are prevalent in Addis Ababa. It is unlawful to use any electronic communications device (even hands-free) while driving, and the use of seat belts is required. Carry a valid Ethiopian driver's license, proof of comprehensive local insurance coverage, and your U.S. passport or Ethiopian Identification card. For more information on self-driving, review OSAC's reports, [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#) and [Road Safety in Africa](#).

If you are involved in a vehicular accident, it is recommended to remain at the scene of the accident until the authorities arrive; however, be aware that a large crowd may gather and could become hostile and aggressive. If you fear for your safety, go to the nearest police station. Special units of the traffic police investigate traffic accidents. Normal investigative procedures require the police to conduct an on-scene investigation, after which all involved parties go to the Traffic Department for a vehicle inspection and to provide details about the accident for a final report. If possible, obtain the names and contact information of all persons involved in the accident and make a note of the extent of any injuries; photograph vehicular damage; make a note of any registration information (tag number) of other vehicle(s) involved; and obtain the other driver's permit data, and give similar information or registration/permit data to the other driver and to the police upon request.

Public Transportation Conditions

Most public transport is unregulated and unsafe. Travelers requiring public transport should use metered taxis (not minibuses or large buses) and should ensure they are the only passengers in the vehicle. Carry Ethiopian currency (following the Ethiopian regulation of 1000 Birr or less) for taxi fare; fares are typically negotiated in advance with the taxi driver.

A light rail system exists in the capital city; petty crime occurs in the system. Beware of unattended baggage/packages.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Airport services may be slow or not up to Western standards. Currently, a project is underway to expand airport terminals. Ethiopian Federal Police patrol throughout the airport and parking lot areas, and can assist in an emergency. Watch out for unofficial porters who approach your vehicle with the intent to steal items during loading/unloading.

Terrorism Threat

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is moderate risk from terrorism in Addis Ababa. A number of al-Shabaab operatives and other extremists operate in/around the Horn of Africa. The latest major terrorist incidents in Addis Ababa occurred in 2013.

The call for self-radicalization, whether disseminated on extremist forums, or via the broader social media approach, continues to be a global concern. It is difficult to determine which message will inspire a violent extremist.

Consider the risk of being at/near venues where Westerners gather on a routine/predictable basis. These can be targets for extremist or terrorist groups.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is considerable risk from political violence in Addis Ababa. Flash protests and incidents of civil unrest have occurred throughout Ethiopia; these protests often turn violent. In 2017, widespread demonstrations took place across towns in Oromia and Amhara regions. Some turned violent and resulted in casualties. Protests disrupted road travel in certain areas, affecting some Western organizations. In 2018, violent demonstrations and inter-ethnic conflict occurred around the country, including in Addis Ababa. Several incidents led to American citizens stranded in cities essentially shut down by unrest. Most occur with little to no warning and often turn violent.

Demonstrations can be large and may take place in/near city centers. The government must approve demonstrations in advance. Local police typically cover protest activity well. Avoid demonstrations and large gatherings.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

The government occasionally cracks down on demonstrations. Demonstrations have resulted in arrests, and violence has resulted in deaths of activists and law enforcement officers alike.

There have been reports of ethnic violence throughout the country, especially on the Oromo/Somali border regions, and Benishangul-Gumuz/Oromo border regions. Recent confrontation in the Oromia region involving the Oromo Liberation Army has resulted in casualties throughout the western parts of the region.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Ethiopia is located in the Rift Valley, and there is a risk of earthquakes, although none have occurred recently. Buildings are not built to earthquake safety codes and may collapse due to strong tremors.

Critical Infrastructure

Ethiopia does not conform to Western standards for workplace security. A primary example is in construction throughout Addis Ababa, where scaffolding is made from local timber with few safety features on construction sites.

The government controls communications (cell phone and internet), and has shut down both systems during periods of civil unrest. Telecoms are unreliable, and there are numerous dead spots for cell phone coverage. For more information, review OSAC's report, [Satellite Phones: Critical or Contraband?](#)

Economic Concerns

Ethiopia is primarily a cash economy. ATMs are readily available throughout the city, and major hotels and commercial centers accept major international credit/debit cards, although connectivity problems can limit availability. While credit cards are gaining acceptance, there have been reports of unauthorized charges; check ahead to ensure you have sufficient cash reserves.

Many hotels and establishments may not accept foreign currency, or may be reluctant to do so. Exchange foreign currency in authorized banks, hotels, and other legally authorized outlets, and obtain proper receipts for your transactions. Exchange receipts are required to convert unused Ethiopian currency back to foreign currency. Penalties for exchanging money on the black market range from fines to imprisonment. Some hotels and car rental companies, particularly in Addis Ababa, may require foreigners to pay in foreign currency or show a receipt for the source of foreign exchange if paying in local currency.

Resident and non-resident travelers can carry up to US\$3,000 in foreign currency in/out of Ethiopia with proper evidence of its source. Employees of embassies and foreign organizations or individuals entering into the country through embassies or foreign organizations on temporary employment (e.g., to attend seminars, training, etc.) may leave the country carrying more than US\$3,000 cash only when they can produce evidence that they were paid directly from a bank. Residents may carry foreign currency upon departure, but only by producing evidence that the currency was purchased from a bank or by producing a customs declaration not more than 45 days after it was issued. Travelers can carry up to 1000 Ethiopian Birr out of the country.

There is an abundance of pirated merchandise for sale, readily available from street vendors, which is illegal to purchase under U.S. law.

Privacy Concerns

The significant construction boom of high-rise buildings in Addis Ababa has led to an increase in privacy concerns for residents. Lack of zoning laws has resulted in tall buildings constructed in residential areas, which inhibits privacy.

Personal Identity Concerns

Female travelers should be cautious if traveling alone.

All same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Ethiopia, and is a prosecutable offense.

Authorities may stop, arrest, and detain individuals of Somali origin, regardless of citizenship, for an extended period with no charges. U.S. citizens of Somali origin should prepare for this contingency and carry copies of all important documents and the contact information for the U.S. Embassy.

Ethiopia does not recognize dual nationality. The government has stated that Ethiopian-U.S. citizens, in almost all cases, be given the same opportunity to invest in Ethiopia as Ethiopians. Ethiopian officials have stated that they will treat dual Eritrean-U.S. citizens as U.S. citizens, and not subject them to arrest simply because of their ties to Eritrea. However, immigration officials do not allow dual Eritrean-U.S. citizens to obtain tourist visas upon arrival at the airport.

Kidnapping Threat

Remain cautious when traveling in/along the border with Somalia, where there is an ongoing al-Shabaab kidnapping threat to foreigners. A kidnapping threat against Westerners has been active in the Dolo Odo area of the Somali region since 2013. For more information, review OSAC's report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Police Response

Permits are required before exporting antiques or animal skins. Antique religious artifacts, including Ethiopian crosses, require documentation for export from the National Museum in Addis Ababa.

Ethiopian law strictly prohibits the photographing of military installations, police/military personnel, industrial facilities, government buildings, and infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges, dams, and airfields). Such sites are rarely marked clearly. Travel guides, police, and Ethiopian officials can advise if a particular site may be photographed. Photographing prohibited sites may result in the confiscation of film/camera and possible arrest. For more information, review OSAC's report, [Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography](#).

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

The government rarely informs the U.S. Embassy of arrested or detained U.S. citizens, even those detained at the airport by immigration or customs authorities. In some instances, authorities have detained U.S. citizens for weeks or months without Embassy notification. If you are arrested or detained, you have the right to request that Ethiopian authorities alert the U.S. Embassy in accordance with the 1951 Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations between the U.S. and Ethiopia. If you are detained or arrested, use whatever means of communication available to alert the U.S. Embassy of your situation.

Crime Victim Assistance

The emergency line for Addis Ababa Police is 991 or +251-11-111-0111.

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime, contact the local police and the U.S. Embassy. If your passport is stolen, the Embassy can help you replace it. For violent crimes, the Embassy can help you find appropriate medical care and contact family members or friends. Consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and find an attorney, if needed.

Police/Security Agencies

The Ethiopian Federal Police (EFP) are responsible for investigating crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of federal courts, including any activities in violation of the Constitution that may endanger the Constitutional order, public order, hooliganism, terrorism, trafficking in persons, or transferring of drugs. The EFP also maintains law and order in any region when there is a deteriorating security situation beyond the control of the regional government and a request for intervention is made; or when disputes arise between two or more regional governments and the situation becomes dangerous for the security of the federal government. The EFP safeguards the security of borders, airports, railway lines/terminals, mining areas, and other vital institutions of the federal government. The EFP delegates powers, when necessary, to regional police commissions.

Regional police handle local crime under their jurisdiction and provide officers for traffic control and immediate response to criminal incidents.

Medical Emergencies

Health facilities are very limited and are considered adequate only for stabilization and emergency care. Hospitals in Addis Ababa suffer from inadequate facilities, outdated equipment, and shortages of supplies/medications. There is a shortage of physicians and other qualified medical personnel. Emergency assistance is limited. Some hospitals have ambulance services, but these are limited, unreliable, and require an on-scene cash payment.

Psychiatric services and medications are very limited; there is only one psychiatric hospital, St. Yared, which requires payment prior to admission.

Travelers must carry their own supplies of prescription drugs and preventive medicines and a doctor's note describing the medication. If the quantity of drugs exceeds that which would be expected for personal use, a permit from the Ministry of Health is required. For more information, refer to OSAC's report, [Traveling with Medications](#).

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

The Embassy maintains a list of physicians and public/private hospitals that have ambulance services on their website. For medical assistance, refer to the Embassy's [Medical Assistance page](#).

Available Air Ambulance Services

Local air ambulances are available from:

[East African Aviation](#), Phone: +251-935-998-359, girma@eastafricanaviation.com

The closest international medical evacuation (medevac) planes are in Nairobi, and would take on average 14-16 hours to get to Addis Ababa due to delays in obtaining air space and landing permissions.

International SOS Assistance operates from Johannesburg, South Africa.

[AMREF "Flying Doctors of East Africa"](#) is the closest company to Ethiopia and based in Nairobi. Phone: +254 (20) 699-2299

Insurance Guidance

All facilities require a cash deposit (dependent on the type of medical condition) before admittance, and forbid medical release until all accrued charges are paid.

Serious illnesses/injuries often require medical evacuation to a location with adequate medical services. Such medevac services are very expensive and are generally available only to travelers who either have travel insurance that covers medevac or who are able to pay for the service in advance. The cost for medical evacuation may range from U.S. \$40,000 to \$200,000. For more information, refer to OSAC's report, [Medical Evacuation: A Primer](#).

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

All routine U.S. immunizations (e.g. measles, mumps, rubella, chicken pox, hepatitis A, and tetanus) should be up to date prior to arrival.

Ethiopia is a mountainous country; the high altitude may cause health problems even for healthy persons. Addis Ababa is the fifth-highest capital in the world, at an altitude of 8,300 feet. Individuals with respiratory, high blood pressure, or heart conditions should consult with a health care professional before traveling. For more information, refer to OSAC's report, [Traveling in High Altitude](#).

Most Ethiopian bodies of water have been found to contain parasites. Schistosomiasis is caused by a parasitic worm that is spread by fresh water snails. The larval stage of the worm can burrow through your skin when in contact with contaminated fresh water. Avoid wading, swimming, bathing, or washing in, or drinking from bodies of fresh water. Significant risk exists throughout the country, except in Lake Langano. Highest risk exists in the Omo River and surrounding areas.

Ethiopia has a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in urban areas and along major trucking routes. The U.S. Department of State is unaware of any HIV/AIDS entry restrictions. Please verify this with the Ethiopian Embassy before you travel.

Ethiopia may have periodic meningitis and polio outbreaks. Meningococcal meningitis epidemic activity occurs in most regions but is predominant in the western half of the country. Those who anticipate prolonged contact with the local populace, as well as all children and health care workers should receive Meningococcal Meningitis Quadrivalent vaccine (A-C-Y-W135). All personnel assigned to the U.S. Embassy who have not been vaccinated for meningitis are advised against traveling to the affected areas during the peak meningitis transmission season.

Tuberculosis is an increasingly serious health concern in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has had outbreaks of acute diarrhea, possible cholera, typhoid, and other bacterial contagion; the conditions for reoccurrence continue in urban and rural settings. All travelers should receive typhoid immunization, but this is not required for entry. Diarrheal illness is very common among travelers, even in large cities and luxury accommodations. Talk to your doctor about short-course antibiotics and loperamide to take with you in case of diarrhea while traveling. Diminish diarrhea risk through scrupulous washing of hands and use of hand sanitizers, especially before food preparation and eating. The greatest risk of traveler's diarrhea comes from contaminated food. Drink only beverages from factory-sealed containers, and avoid ice (because it may have been made from unclean water). For more information, refer to OSAC's report, [I'm Drinking What in My Water?](#)

All travelers staying for more than four weeks or who will have remote, rural travel or expect animal exposure should obtain rabies immunization. Even dogs in urban areas may have rabies. Immediately clean bites/scratches from mammals with soap/water and seek medical evaluation to determine any need for additional immunization. Modern rabies vaccines are not readily available in Ethiopia. For more information, review OSAC's report, [When Wildlife Attacks](#).

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

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Addis Ababa meets biannually. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's [Africa team](#) with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation:

U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Entoto Road, P.O. Box 1014, Addis Ababa

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

Ethiopia is GMT +3

Embassy Contact Numbers

Switchboard: +251 11 130-6000

Marine Security Guard (24 Hours): +251 11 130-6911/2442

Website: <http://ethiopia.usembassy.gov>

Embassy Guidance

Take the time to tell the Embassy about your presence by enrolling in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) (STEP) to stay up to date with important safety and security announcements. It will also help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency.

Additional Resources

[Ethiopia](#) Information Sheet