



Honduras 2019 Crime & Safety Report



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

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Honduras at Level 3, indicating travelers should reconsider travel to the country due to crime. Do not travel to Gracias a Dios Department due to crime.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The ACS Unit cannot recommend a particular individual or location and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

Review OSAC's [Honduras](#)-specific webpage for proprietary analytic reports, Consular Messages, and contact information.

Crime Threats

There is serious risk from crime in Tegucigalpa. The U.S. Department of State has cautioned travelers to Honduras due to its high crime rates since 2012. While there are no areas in major urban cities free of violent crime, notably dangerous locations in Tegucigalpa include the areas surrounding Suyapa Cathedral and Comayagüela.

The location and timing of criminal activity is unpredictable. There is no information to suggest that criminals specifically target U.S. citizens or foreigners. However, the San Pedro Sula area has seen armed robberies against tourist vans, minibuses, and cars traveling from the airport to area hotels. International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and USAID implementing partners have reported threats and violence when visiting some rural communities. Those traveling with tour/missionary groups report fewer criminal incidents.

Most major cities (e.g. Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba) have homicide rates higher than the national average, as do several Honduran departments (a geographic designation similar to U.S. States) including Atlántida, Colón, Cortés, San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, and Yoro.

Since 2010, there have been at least 60 murders of U.S. citizens in Honduras. Several incidents in San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba involve U.S. citizens murdered shortly after arriving in the country. These crimes may have been the result of tips from sources at airport arrival areas. From 2018 through January 2019, there were eight murder cases involving U.S. citizen victims.

Occasional highway assaults and carjackings involve criminals posing as Honduran law enforcement, including in remote areas of Choluteca, Olancho, Colon, and Copan departments. Criminals have set up roadblocks or checkpoints while wearing partial police uniforms and equipment that are often mismatched or inconsistent.

Several U.S. citizens have reported being robbed while walking on isolated beaches. The threat of violent crime, including in neighborhoods where many U.S. citizens live or work, leads to the curtailment of some normal outdoor activities.

Armed robberies, home invasions, and extortions occur; closely guarded officials, businesspersons, and diplomats are not immune from these attacks. There is street crime even in safer neighborhoods, commonly referred to as *Barrio Seguros*, with heightened security

- In July 2018, a thief stole the mobile phone of a USAID implementing partner visiting a project.
- In August 2018, a thief stole cash from a USAID implementing partner, damaging a computer in the course of the robbery.
- In September 2018, a thief stole two mobile phones from a USAID implementing partner visiting a project.
- In October 2018, a thief stole the mobile phone, personal documents, and a backpack of a USAID implementing partner.

Many people report receiving threatening phone calls or extortion attempts, especially during Christmas and Easter holidays. Typically, these are random calls that originate from imprisoned gang members using mobile phones.

There are an estimated 7,000-10,000 gang members in a country with an approximate population of eight million people. The 18th Street and MS-13 (*Mara Salvatrucha*) gangs are the most active and powerful. Gangs are not reluctant to use violence, and specialize in murder-for-hire, carjacking, extortion, and other violent street crime. Gangs control some of the taxi services. Violent transnational criminal organizations are also involved in narcotics trafficking and other illicit commerce.

Roatán and the Bay Islands are geographically separate from and experience lower crime rates than the mainland and other Caribbean islands. However, theft, break-in, assault, rape, and murder do occur. According to the Roatán authorities, criminal events decreased in 2018 compared to previous years.

Cybersecurity Issues

Credit card skimming is common. Embassy employees and others have experienced skimming at well-known restaurants, hotels, and retailers. There is often a spike in skimming in December and June, when the working population receive Christmas and mid-year bonuses in the form of one extra month's salary.

Extortion threats commonly originate through social engineering. Criminals sometimes obtain personal information through social media, the internet, or a victim's family member. NGOs have reported anonymous attacks via social media, alleging that civil society actors are engaged in, or supportive of, criminal activity in Honduras.

Other Areas of Concern

The U.S. Embassy has restricted U.S. government personnel travel to the Gracias a Dios Department in eastern Honduras due to credible threat information against U.S. citizens. Those planning travel to Gracias a Dios should consider postponing their travel. Gracias a Dios is a remote location where narcotics trafficking is frequent, infrastructure is weak, government services are limited, and police/military presence is scarce.

Transportation-Safety Situation

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

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Driving can be very dangerous despite improving road conditions. Roads have poor lighting and markings. Due to the lack of enforcement of traffic laws, make an extraordinary effort to drive defensively. If traffic signals are working, drivers often ignore them. Passing on blind corners is common. Vehicles often drive at night without adequate lighting. Animals and people wander onto the roads at all hours. Traffic signs, even on major highways, are often inadequate; streets in major cities are often unmarked. Major cities connect via an inconsistently maintained, two-lane system of paved roads, with many unpaved secondary roads. A significant percentage of vehicles are in disrepair, underpowered, beyond their lifecycle, and do not meet U.S. road safety standards. The Honduran government is in the process of modernizing some of the main transportation road networks to four-lane highways, which can lead to increased travel times due to ongoing construction. For more information on self-driving, review OSAC's Report [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

The U.S. Embassy strongly discourages intercity car and bus travel after dark. Avoid traveling at night, and always drive with doors locked and windows rolled up to deter potential robberies at traffic lights and on congested downtown streets. Always carry a mobile phone in case of emergency. Exercise extreme caution driving on isolated stretches of road and passing other vehicles on mountainous curves.

Public Transportation Conditions

Avoid all public transportation. The public transportation sector is a regular target of extortion, and experiences higher levels of homicide than many other sectors. There have been multiple incidents of gang members destroying city buses and taxis; they often rob, assault, rape, kidnap, or murder passengers.

Passengers on public buses have been the victims of robbery at roadblocks and bus stops, during daytime and nighttime hours. Due to the threat, some passengers opt to travel armed when using public transportation. This results in armed confrontations where innocent bystanders are injured or killed in the crossfire. Some would-be muggers and gang members keep to a daily schedule, riding city buses from one stop to the next, committing criminal acts with impunity along the way.

Do not use collective taxis, which are small buses that pick up multiple riders.

- In 2018, several incidents involved Embassy employees robbed, assaulted, or kidnapped while using city taxis and collective taxis.
- In 2018, a child died in the crossfire during a bus robbery when an armed passenger engaged the robbers with a firearm.

Other Travel Conditions

Cruise ship passengers should take safety precautions, avoid unfamiliar areas, and book only with reputable tour companies during their stopover in Honduras. Cruise lines and port agencies have approved tour companies offering packages. Port agencies have worked to improve taxi service to/from ports. The vast majority of cruise line passengers experience no problems, but there have still be reports of armed robbery and carjacking.

Terrorism Threat

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is minimal risk from terrorism in Tegucigalpa. There are no known international terrorist groups operating in Honduras. The country does not appear to be a terrorist safe haven. There are no legal cases involving instances of terrorism affecting U.S. citizens or facilities brought before the Honduran judicial system, and no reports of judicial developments that would have a negative impact on U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

The CA-4 agreement among El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras allows for the inspection-free movement of citizens among these countries, reducing overall inspection at land crossings. This limiting of inspections could facilitate movements of terrorists. Nicaragua used to be part of the CA-4 agreement, but in late 2017 began requiring travelers to register their travel purpose and destination online seven days in advance. Honduras decided in late 2018, based on reciprocity, to institute the same reporting requirement. As a result, there is no longer free travel between Honduras and Nicaragua.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is considerable risk from civil unrest in Tegucigalpa. Public demonstrations, protests, and strikes are common. Most demonstrations are concentrated in or around city centers, public buildings, and other public areas. Most protests remain peaceful, but demonstrations have escalated into violent confrontation with police. Additionally, there have been demonstrations and road blockades along key transportation routes, to include the roads leading to the international airports in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

Land titling can be a significant challenges and source of conflict. The Bajo Aguan Valley region in Atlántida department has seen serious conflict among agricultural workers and businesses over land rights.

- The Bajo Aguan conflict has reportedly caused the death of over 150 people since 2010. In 2018, the police report a 30% reduction in the numbers of murders related to land disputes because of interagency task force efforts.
- After court-ordered forceful eviction operation in Bajo Aguan in August 2018, police and military clashed with the *campesinos* claiming ownership of private land held by others.
- In October 2018, *campesinos* in the same area ambushed and shot at a joint police/military contingent using AK-47 assault rifles, killing two members of the Honduran military.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Indigenous and ethnic minority communities are frequently located in rural areas, which enjoy lower levels of criminal activity. However, there can be communal tension over land ownership, natural resource allocation, and exploitation. These tensions have resulted in intense protests and other violence.

Due to the remote nature of these areas, the government's ability to respond to violence or other problems is often very limited, as is access to medical facilities.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Honduras has a long history of sustaining damage due to powerful tropical storms and hurricanes. The rainy season usually runs May-November. There have been approximately nine significant tropical storms/hurricanes since 1995 that have affected Honduras. While hurricanes are a concern, much of the damage to infrastructure is a result of the ensuing flooding and rock/mudslides.

Critical Infrastructure

The limited capacity of the government to enforce international standards related to natural resource exploitation has resulted in higher levels of conflict in the extractive and electrical generation industries. In addition to complying with local laws, companies involved in natural resource extraction or energy generation should ensure they fully consult with communities in accordance with international standards. Honduras is a signatory to the International Labor Organization's, 169 Convention, which requires free, prior notice and informed consent from indigenous communities before any development projects can begin; the government has not yet approved a law regulating this process.

Economic Concerns

For protection under Honduran law, register patents and trademarks with the General Directorate of Intellectual Property (DIGEPIH) division of the Honduran Institute of Property. The life of patents ranges from ten to twenty years, depending on the importance of the invention. Trademarks are valid up to ten years from the registration date. The Pan American Convention (1917), to which Honduras is a party, protects "notorious" or well-known trademarks. Regulations favor first registration over first use; numerous cases have arisen due to "squatting" on established trademarks, which the legitimate holder must either purchase or contest in court. Data protection lasts five years. Honduras also offers process patent protection.

Cable signal theft and counterfeit products are the most prevalent violations of intellectual property rights in Honduras. Counterfeit products are predominately in, but are not limited to the pharmaceutical and apparel industries. Counterfeit medicines are mainly found in *pulperías* (*private home-operated convenience stores*), but have also been reported in *Farmacías del Ahorro*.

Counterfeit Honduran lempiras (currency) are common, especially in the 100 and 500 denominations. Counterfeit U.S. currency is also common.

Personal Identity Concerns

Same-sex sexual activity is legal in Honduras. Discrimination occurs against ethnic minorities and the LGBTI community. Members of the LGBTI community have reported violent assaults due to gender identity and sexual orientation.

Some commentators have strongly criticized the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical churches for alleged involvement in politics. Jehovah's Witnesses have reported denial of medical treatment at some government hospitals after requesting treatment in accordance with their religious beliefs.

There are limited facilities for individuals with disabilities.

Drug-related Crimes

Drug trafficking and gang activity, which includes local micro-trafficking of narcotics and extortion, are the main causes of violent crime in Honduras. Penalties for the possession, use, or trafficking of illegal narcotics are strict; convicted offenders can expect lengthy jail sentences and fines.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings and disappearances affect both the local and expatriate communities, with victims sometimes paying large ransoms for the prospect of release. Reports of kidnappings of U.S. citizens are not common. During 2018, there was one case involving the kidnapping of a U.S. dual national reported to the police. The victim, an active MS-13 member, appeared in the San Pedro Sula airport following his release. Kidnapping figures are likely lower than reality, as families of kidnapping victims often pay ransoms without reporting these crimes to police out of fear of retribution. For more information, review OSAC's Report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Police Response

The government lacks resources to investigate and prosecute cases; police often lack vehicles/fuel to respond to calls for assistance. Police may take hours to arrive at the scene of a violent crime, or may not respond at all. As a result, criminals operate with a high degree of impunity.

The government places specially trained police forces in areas tourists frequent (e.g. the Copan Mayan ruins and Roatán). The government is implementing similar programs for other locations (e.g. La Ceiba, Trujillo) and major hotels; other tourist installations have increased private and police security. The government has also begun implementing a series of police reforms; it has formed groups such as the National Inter-Agency Security Task Force (FUSINA) and the National Anti-Gang Task Force (FNAMP) to combat crime.

The government has a police investigative unit dedicated to investigating violent crimes against the LGBTI and other vulnerable communities, comprised of Public Ministry prosecutors, members of ATIC (prosecutor's investigative agency), and the Honduran National Police; however, it has limited resources and functions primarily in the major urban areas.

The police, along with the Ministry of Defense's Military Public Order Police (PMOP), routinely establish checkpoints and review documentation (e.g. driver's licenses, vehicle registration). The Honduran National Police wear blue uniforms, while the PMOP normally wear green camouflage. Uniforms and vehicles are all clearly marked.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Detained U.S. citizens should insist on speaking to U.S. Embassy representatives as soon as possible. The police generally treat detained foreigners well. Except in some very rural locations, police are aware of a U.S. citizen detainee's right to contact the Embassy. Travelers should be aware, however, that the assistance the Embassy can provide is limited to making sure U.S. citizens are not treated differently from local detainees, and providing them with a list of local attorneys. The Embassy cannot secure the release or act as legal representation for any U.S. citizen. Local law allows the police to detain someone for up to 24 hours for administrative processing. This is a common practice for most automobile accidents where personal injury occurs, and for cases in which someone is accused of a criminal act. Seek legal representation before admitting or signing any legal form that acknowledges culpability.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime, contact the local police and U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa. Reach the local police anywhere in Honduras by dialing 911.

For fire and public safety emergencies, dial 911.

Fire Department Headquarters: (504) 2231-1667 (operations department)

U.S. Embassy, Tegucigalpa, American Citizens Services Unit is open to walk-in services Monday-Friday, 0730-11:00 and can be reached directly at:

Tel: (504) 2236-9320 ext. 4400

After Hours: (504) 2236-9320 ext.4100 or Duty Officer (504) 9990-1372

Fax: (504) 2238-4357

Email: usahonduras@state.gov

Medical Emergencies

Medical care is limited. Emergency services, even in Tegucigalpa, generally are basic. There are few U.S.-educated physicians in Tegucigalpa.

Red Cross ambulance: 911, (504) 2227-7474 or (504) 2227-7575. The ambulance does not have paramedics or emergency medical equipment; it functions solely as transport to hospitals.

Fire Department Ambulance is fully equipped with emergency medical supplies and medical staff. Dial 911 for emergency or call (504) 2232-4092.

Contact Information for Available Hospitals/Clinics

- Hospital Honduras Medical Center: (504) 2280-1500 / ER: 2280-1201
- Hospital Viera: (504) 2237-7136 or (504) 2237-3160, (504) 2238-0736, (504) 2238-0697
- Hospital Centro Medico: (504) 2225-0028, (504) 2225-4060 / (504) 2225-4117
- DIME: (504) 2239-9628/30 or (504) 2239-2598

Available Air Ambulance Services: 1-305-535-7380

Insurance Guidance

Health insurance is an important consideration. Travelers are responsible for ensuring that they have adequate health coverage while in Honduras. Please see the State Department resource for [international insurance](#).

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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

OSAC Country Council Information

The Honduras Country Council currently meets monthly on a rotating basis in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, and has approximately 25 members. Please contact OSAC's [Western Hemisphere](#) team with any questions or to join.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa, Avenida La Paz, Tegucigalpa
Hours of Operation: Monday-Thursday, 0730-1630; Friday, 0800-1500
Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: (504) 2236-9320

Fax: (504) 2236-9037

After Hours: (504) 2236-8497

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/embajadahonduras/>

Nearby Post: [Consular Agency San Pedro Sula](#)

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens who live in or who are visiting Honduras should register with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#).

Additional Resources

[Honduras](#) Country Information Sheet

Department of Commerce's [Country Commercial Guide](#)