



Mexico 2019 Crime & Safety Report: Tijuana



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Consulate in Tijuana, Mexico.

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

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

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The Department of State divides its roles and responsibilities in Mexico among 10 consular districts. The consular district for the U.S. Consulate General in Tijuana comprises the states of Baja California and Baja California Sur.

Crime Threats

There is serious risk from crime in Tijuana. Tijuana is a large city of more than 1.6 million inhabitants with an ever-present, critical crime problem. Pickpockets mostly target large crowds on public transportation and at tourist attractions. Pickpockets normally operate in pairs or small groups, and generally carry a knife or handgun. These criminals tend to target victims based on an appearance of vulnerability, prosperity, or inattention. Criminal activity and violence, including homicide, are a primary concern throughout Baja California. While most homicides appear targeted, criminal organization assassinations and turf battles have occurred in areas U.S. citizens frequent. Bystanders have been injured or killed in shooting incidents.

Violence is largely limited to Tijuana's outlying areas and not concentrated in tourist zones, although targeted killings involving Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) occurred in tourist areas in 2018. TCOs do not tend to target U.S. citizens who are not involved in drug trafficking. Tijuana's Tourism Police tends to flood these zones in the aftermath of an incident, and have increased their presence in locations vital to tourism in a push to maintain order.

TCOs are involved in narco-trafficking and human smuggling. Three rival cartels battle for control of Baja California criminal operations: the Sinaloa Cartel, the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG), and remnants of the Arellano Félix Organization (AFO). Infighting is common, and increases insecurity; drug-related violence in Baja California and Baja California Sur typically affects those involved with the drug trade.

Crime is targeted and involves small criminal cells and independent operators. After Sinaloa leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's arrest and extradition to the U.S., CJNG infighting resulted. Street-level drug-trafficking crimes (*narcomenudeo*) between rival factions have grown and led to Baja California's unprecedented 3,150 homicides in 2018, a 36% increase over 2017. Tijuana alone recorded 2,518 homicides in 2018.

Mexican government statistics reveal that the five Baja California municipalities – Tijuana, Mexicali, Ensenada, Rosarito, and Tecate – all had a record number of homicides in 2018. Mexicali and Rosarito recorded a slight increase in homicide, while Ensenada recorded a 29% increase and Tecate a 66% increase. All five municipalities reported a slight increase in reported rape, except for Rosarito. Robberies increased in Tijuana and Tecate. There was a decline in robberies for Mexicali, Ensenada, and Rosarito.

In Baja California Sur (BCS) the majority of U.S. interests are concentrated in Los Cabos and La Paz. BCS reported a significant 77% decrease in homicides in 2018, based on data from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System. The murder rate is now below the national average.

BCS reported more stability in 2018. Stronger law enforcement efforts and the presence of Mexican Navy (SEMAR) resulted in several successful operations against the drug cartels. BCS has a unified command structure that incorporates the SEMAR, federal, state, and local police to establish public order. The majority of homicides in BCS occur in outlying areas and not in tourist zones. Illegal drugs are for sale widely throughout tourist locations. Visitors should be vigilant against crime and petty theft.

A new criminal justice system implemented in 2016 has brought with it a steep learning curve. The new accusatory system, designed to overhaul Mexico's justice system, focuses on procedure and transparency, which favors public trials over written arguments. Mexico's transition to an oral accusatorial justice system is widely supported.

Cybersecurity Issues

Cybercrime is a concern. Take precautions to protect sensitive computer-based programs and operations. Private corporations or government agencies fall victim to hackers or other cyber-related attacks regardless of their location worldwide.

Other Areas of Concern

Organized crime elements are present in local bars, nightclubs, restaurants, and casinos in Tijuana, especially in the Zona Norte "red light" district. Avoid traveling after dark on remote roads or isolated highways not frequently patrolled by police.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Tijuana is the largest city in Baja California and connects to greater San Diego, California through the San Ysidro Port of Entry (POE), the Otay Mesa POE, and a pedestrian bridge from the Tijuana International Airport known as the Cross Border Xpress (CBX). Ports of entry in Baja California are San Ysidro, Otay Mesa, Tecate, Calexico East, Calexico West, and Andrade. For more information, review OSAC's Report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Exercise caution, avoid traveling at night, and should use toll (*cuota*) roads rather than the less secure free (*libre*) roads whenever possible. Maintain at least half of a tank of fuel, and top off the tank whenever possible during extended road trips because of possible fuel shortages. U.S. government employees must avoid travel between cities after dark. For information on self-driving, review OSAC's Report [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

Public Transportation Conditions

Travelers are more vulnerable to petty crime in crowded and confined places with unknown individuals, which applies to use of shared public transportation. When using a transportation service such as Uber, compare the photograph of the driver in the Uber application to the person picking you up to ensure that the person, not just the vehicle, is legitimate. U.S. government employees must avoid hailing taxis on the street, instead using dispatched vehicles, including from app-based services like Uber, or those from regulated taxi stands, which do not pick up additional passengers.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Tijuana's airport (TIJ) is relatively modern and located within a 10-minute drive from the Otay Mesa Border Crossing. Visitors should use the airport's dispatched transportation services. Only CBX-ticketed passengers flying through the TIJ may use the CBX enclosed pedestrian bridge that connects the U.S. port of entry directly to the terminal. CBX serves approximately 2.5 million passengers annually who cross the border as part of their travels, helping them avoid delays at congested San Ysidro and Otay Mesa land ports of entry. Bridge users can access more than 30 destinations within Mexico and many other international connections from TIJ.

Other Travel Conditions

Do not hitchhike or give rides to strangers. Use caution when visiting desolate areas and follow local camping regulations.

U.S. citizens should be mindful of entry requirements and permits when traveling into Mexico, to include entry by water via private boat. The U.S. Consulate advises that all individuals on board vessels used for sport fishing, including passengers on commercial and charter boats, understand Mexican entry requirements and permits needed before travel. In addition, be aware of weather conditions when traveling aboard a vessel.

Terrorism Threat

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is minimal risk from terrorism in Tijuana. There is no current evidence of any transnational terrorists residing or transiting through this region; however, the nature of the border and the ready access to both human smugglers and fake documents continue to make this area a potential transit point for international terrorists

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

Northern Mexico has strong family and commercial ties to the United States. U.S. citizens, either official or non-official, are seldom targets of anti-U.S. sentiment.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is considerable risk from civil unrest in Tijuana. Violence in the consular district is mainly associated with TCOs. Because of the risk of a peaceful protest turning violent, avoid protest activity and keep informed of protest activity through news sources. Public protests and demonstrations do occur for various economic and political reasons, but they are typically peaceful. U.S. interests are generally not targets of political violence, although migrants from Central America have protested U.S. immigration policies outside the Consulate.

Thousands of Central American migrants moved in masse through Baja California to the U.S. border in 2018; there were three temporary POE closures in 2018. Protests both in support of and against the migrants have carried on into 2019 as new caravans head towards Baja California. The public can stay informed via Customs and Border Protection's San Diego Sector's [Twitter](#) feed and local media.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

There were no major earthquakes in Baja California or Baja California Sur in 2018. Due to Tijuana's proximity to the San Andreas Fault, the possibility of a large earthquake remains high.

The region experiences tropical storms. Significant destruction last resulted in 2014. Stay current with weather conditions when traveling throughout the peninsula, especially in Baja California Sur between May and November, and plan accordingly. This includes monitoring the risk of heavy rainfall and its potential for causing flooding in urban and rural areas.

Weather events can severely affect critical infrastructure in both Baja California and Baja California Sur. Depending on the severity of the weather event, access to electricity, potable water, and operable roads may be affected. Although Tijuana and other cities in the consular district are relatively modern, many buildings do not meet U.S. seismic standards.

Personal Identity Concerns

Same-sex sexual relations are legal in Mexico. The law provides for protections against discrimination based on gender identity. Travelers will find more openness and acceptance in urban areas, and conservative stances in rural areas.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping occurs, with targets including non-Mexicans; kidnapping-for-ransom is an established criminal activity. Official nationwide numbers for kidnappings were 1,149 in 2017 and 889 in 2018, but unofficial estimates of kidnapping levels vary wildly. In most cases, kidnappers set the victim free after receiving the ransom. Affluent residents in Tijuana often have bodyguards and armored vehicles for their families to protect against kidnapping.

Another kidnapping tactic is telephonic or virtual kidnapping. Prison inmates using smuggled cellular phones often place these calls. The methodology is the same as in other parts of Mexico. Social media can also play a role in this type of extortion by providing personal information. It is increasingly common for extortionists to call prospective victims, frequently posing as law enforcement or other officials, demanding payments in return for the release of an arrested family member or to forestall a kidnapping. Those receiving these calls should be wary, as many such demands/threats are baseless; attempt to contact the family member as soon as possible. For more information, review OSAC's Report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Police Response

The ability of local police varies, but there have been strides made in recent years, especially in Tijuana. The Tijuana police continue to demonstrate a desire to gain the citizens' trust and pursue recruiting and outreach activities. Increased reliance on technology and anonymous reporting may serve to improve reliance on law enforcement. It may also decrease the general perception that the majority of crime victims do not report crimes due to fear of police reprisal, the belief that police are corrupt, or the feeling that nothing would come from such reports. To file a complaint, it is helpful (but not absolutely necessary) to have the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number. If you are not able to obtain that information, it may still be possible to identify the officer based on physical appearance and the time/place that the event occurred.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Cooperate with the police if they stop and question you. Police officers cannot accept cash payment for fines; offering a bribe to an officer is a serious crime.

Be wary of persons representing themselves as police officers or other officials. When in doubt, ask for identification. The U.S. Consulate General will sometimes receive reports of extortion by supposed police officers in Baja California and Baja California Sur. Sometimes the perpetrators are actual police officers, and sometimes they are criminals using fake police uniforms and credentials.

Crime Victim Assistance

The national emergency telephone number is 911. Callers can report criminal activity from anywhere in Mexico or the U.S. Interested parties can call the Baja California Secretary of Public Safety anonymous tip line at 1-866-201-5060 from anywhere in the U.S. to report any crime-related information. Bilingual operators will forward the report to the proper authorities for action; from Mexico, dial 089 to make an anonymous tip.

American Citizen Services assists U.S. citizens in the consular district. Business hours are 0730 to 1600 Monday through Friday. In case of an after-hours emergency involving U.S. citizens, contact the Duty Officer. Call 1-619-692-2154. This number is for emergencies only. Travelers may contact the Consular Section at the U.S. Consulate General Tijuana for assistance in dealing with the local police. If involved in a traffic accident or you are the victim of crime, police may require you to accompany the investigating officer to the local police station to file a complaint or respond to questions. Should a police report be required for an insurance claim, officials will charge a nominal fee.

Police/Security Agencies

The Tijuana Municipal Police Department is the largest police force in the state of Baja California. They serve a preventive police role, patrolling and handling immediate response to criminal incidents within their jurisdiction. The Baja California State Preventive Police (PEP) serves a similar role for the entire state. Similarly, the Federal Police (PF), and to an extent the Mexican Army (SEDENA) and Mexican Navy (SEMAR), patrol more broadly, including public highways, airports, and the border regions.

In both states, the Attorney General's Office at the federal level (PGR) and state level (PGJE) are responsible for the investigation and prosecution of crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of federal and state courts respectively.

Medical Emergencies

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is available [online](#).

Emergency Services 911

Red Cross (Cruz Roja) Ambulance 608-6700

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Contact information for medical facilities and practitioners throughout the consular district are available [online](#).

Available Air Ambulance Services

The following ambulance services offer full service to all of Baja California.

U.S.-BASED

[Aeromedevac](#): Gillespie Field, 681 Kenney Street, El Cajon, CA 92020

Tel: 619-284-7910, 1-800-462-0911, e-mail: flightrequest@aeromedevac.com

[Stat Air International](#): San Diego, CA

Tel: 619-754-6550, 1-800-557-5911, e-mail: service@statair.com

MEXICO-BASED

TransMedic: Ensenada, BC
Tel: 1-800-026-3342 or 646-178-1400

Recommended Insurance Posture

Health insurance is an important consideration. Travelers are responsible for ensuring they have adequate health coverage while in Mexico.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Food and potable water standards are different from those of the United States. Take precautions with regard to drinking water, eating fresh fruits, vegetables, and salads. For more information, refer to OSAC's Report, [I'm Drinking What in My Water?](#)

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

OSAC Country Council Information

The Baja Country Council was the Americas Regional Council Winner for the 2018 OSAC Country Council Achievement Award. It currently meets quarterly in Tijuana and holds conferences in Baja California Sur. Contact OSAC's [Western Hemisphere](#) team with any questions or to join.

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

Consulado Americano, Paseo de las Culturas s/n Mesa de Otay Tijuana, BC 22425
Hours of Operation: 0730 - 1615 Monday-Friday

Consulate Contact Numbers

Consulate switchboard: 664-977-2000 (from the U.S., dial 011-52-664-977-2000)
After-hours emergency Duty Officer cellular phone: 619-692-2154 (US), 664-628-1762 (Mex)
Email: ACSTijuana@state.gov; Website: <http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/>

Nearby Posts: [Embassy Mexico City](#), [Consulate Guadalajara](#), [Consulate Hermosillo](#), [Consulate Matamoros](#), [Consulate Mérida](#), [Consulate Monterrey](#), [Consulate Nogales](#), [Consulate Nuevo Laredo](#)

Consulate Guidance

U.S. citizens should register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the Department of State's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known. See [Consular Affairs Guidance for Travel to High Risk Areas](#).

Additional Resource: [Mexico](#) Country Information Sheet