



Uruguay 2019 Crime & Safety Report



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

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Uruguay at Level 1, indicating travelers should exercise normal precautions.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

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

Review OSAC's [Uruguay-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 considerable risk from crime in Montevideo. Since January 2018, Uruguay has experienced a dramatic increase in crime to include armed robbery, carjacking, homicide, vehicle break-in, theft, residential break-in, and assault. Criminals are armed, brazen, and do not hesitate to resort to violence if victims resist or if the police attempt to intervene. In 2018, 382 homicides occurred in Uruguay, signifying a 35% increase from the 283 homicides in 2017. According to the [Interior Ministry](#), in the first six months of 2018, the crime rate increased 56% for armed robberies (*rapinas*), 27% for theft (*hurtos*), and 67% for the use of firearms to commit crimes in Montevideo.

During the summer tourism season, crime typically migrates with the population to other popular destinations (e.g. Punta del Este, Colonia del Sacramento). Criminals prey on targets of opportunity: tourists openly carrying valuables, motorists stopped at traffic lights with valuables visible within the vehicle, vacant homes, and unattended parked vehicles. Criminals operate in all parts of the capital, including popular tourist areas such as Ciudad Vieja, Avenida 18 de Julio, Plaza Independencia, and Mercado del Puerto; as well as other popular areas within the country. Police increase patrols during periods of high tourist activity in these areas, especially during cruise liner visits in the summer.

Travel in pairs or in small groups, especially in tourist areas such as Ciudad Vieja, Mercado del Puerto, and Plaza Independencia. Though Uruguayans are very friendly, be alert to those who might be intent on creating distractions for pickpockets.

Criminals commonly use motorcycles when committing robberies in Montevideo. *Motochorros* is the term used to describe a criminal who uses a motorcycle to commit a robbery, combining the words for motorcycle and thief. *Motochorros* generally work in pairs. The driver will approach a victim while the companion steals wallets, purses, phones or other items and escapes. During recent incidents, *motochorros* targeted victims at stoplights, parking lots, and ATMs, as well as individuals waiting for transportation outside of hotels. *Motochorros* have also targeted vehicles traveling to Punta Del Este by puncturing a victim's tires and waiting for them to pull over.

Residential burglaries remain a problem in Uruguay. Single-family residences are more vulnerable to burglary than apartments. The Carrasco, Punta Carretas, and Pocitos neighborhoods have recently been targets of residential burglaries due to the presence of many affluent residents. Most incidents occur while the occupants are away, during both day and night, though burglaries of occupied residences are not uncommon.

Towards the end of 2017, Uruguay experienced a sharp increase in gas-induced ATM explosions affecting international and Uruguayan banks. Since then, there have been at least 78 ATM explosions, a significant increase from years past. In response to this criminal trend, some banks in Uruguay have implemented countermeasures such as removing funds from their ATMs between 1900 and 0700, as well as establishing agreements to collocate ATMs with local police stations. Exercise increased caution when using ATMs, especially during non-daylight hours.

Other Areas of Concern

While there are no "off limits" areas in Uruguay, there are neighborhoods within the Montevideo metropolitan area where a majority of violent crimes (e.g. homicide, carjacking, armed robbery) occur. These areas are 40 Semanas, Bella Italia, Borro, Casavalle, Casabó, Cerro, Cerro Norte, Hipódromo, La Teja, Marconi, Malvín Norte, Tres Ombúes and Villa Española. U.S. Embassy employees avoid these areas.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Uruguay continues to experience a high rate of transit-related fatalities. Poor illumination, inadequate pavement markings, and substandard road surfaces are contributing factors to traffic accidents throughout the country. Exercise extra caution when travelling outside of Montevideo. There is a reduced level of police patrols and first-responder availability in rural areas. Primary routes between Colonia, Montevideo, and Punta del Este are particularly dangerous due to heavy traffic that creates greater opportunity for speed-related accidents. The incidence of traffic accidents typically increases during the summer months due to an increased volume of tourists and holiday-related alcohol consumption. For more information on self-driving, review OSAC's Report [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

Public Transportation Conditions

Taxis, public buses, ride share services, and remise (private car) services are safe. The use of clearly marked taxi stands and online apps such as voyentaxi.uy and Uber are preferable to hailing a cab on the street. There have been no issues reported with the use of Uber. For more information on ride sharing, review OSAC's Report, [Safety and Security in the Share Economy](#).

Terrorism Threat

There is minimal risk from terrorism in Montevideo.

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

While there is anti-U.S. sentiment in some circles, this sentiment rarely, if ever, takes a violent form. Occasional political protests target the U.S. Government, but political violence against the Embassy or other U.S. interests has been minimal to non-existent in recent years.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is minimal risk from civil unrest in Montevideo. Demonstrations, some expressing anti-U.S. sentiment, regularly occur in Uruguay, particularly near the U.S. Embassy, Legislative Palace, Independence Plaza, City Hall, Parque Batlle, Plaza Libertad, and the universities in Montevideo. While most demonstrations are peaceful and non-violent, avoid large gatherings or events where crowds have congregated to demonstrate, protest, or cause damage as a byproduct of celebrating an event, such as after soccer matches. Although public law requires a permit to demonstrate, local police typically do not enforce the rule.

Post-specific Concerns

Critical Infrastructure

Visitors should stay at reputable hotels in the Punta Carretas, Pocitos, or Carrasco areas of Montevideo. Outside of Montevideo, use reputable hotel chains. The hotel should provide private security and rooms with safes, and adequate locks on all doors and windows. Although the quality of hotel safes varies, always secure extra cash, credit cards, and passports in the safe. For more information on fire safety in hotels, review OSAC's Report, [Fire Safety Abroad](#).

Personal Identity Concerns

Uruguay is LGBT friendly. Same-sex sexual activity is legal, as is same-sex adoption and marriage.

Uruguayan law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, but the government does not effectively enforce these provisions. Transportation services are generally not equipped for access by persons with disabilities. Sidewalks and crosswalks are often in need of maintenance and/or accessibility ramps and can present challenges to persons with disabilities.

Drug Concerns

Recent changes in legislation allow Uruguayan citizens and permanent residents of Uruguay to purchase limited amounts of marijuana at government-approved pharmacies, join a registered marijuana club, or grow a limited amount of marijuana for personal use. It remains illegal for foreign visitors in Uruguay to purchase and consume marijuana. Police may arrest and prosecute anyone who purchases or consumes marijuana, and who does not fit into a legal category of use.

Police Response

The Uruguayan National Police have a trained and capable response force. They have significantly increased their use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras throughout the country to monitor potential criminal activity. Their approach to policing is largely reactive, and does little to deter street crime and burglary. Police may face shortages of resources and funding.

Unified Central Command (CCU) is the national 911 system of Uruguay. The CCU continues to improve its capabilities to respond to incidents, but suffers from high volumes of non-emergency calls. These calls frequently result in wait times of up to five minutes before a caller with a true emergency can connect to a dispatcher. Additionally, there is limited availability of English-speaking dispatchers. Once dispatched, police response time to incidents is generally fast. Most police officers, particularly those assigned to patrol duty, speak only Spanish.

Crime Victim Assistance: Police/Fire/Ambulance - Call 911

Medical Emergencies

Ambulance Services

- SEMM: 159 or 598-2-711-1111
- SUAT: 133
- UCM: 147

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

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

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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

OSAC Country Council Information

There is an active OSAC Country Council in Montevideo. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's [Latin America Team](#) with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

1776 Lauro Müller, Montevideo 11200; Hours: 0800-1730

Embassy Contact Numbers: Embassy Switchboard (24-hours) 598-2-1770-2000

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

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens traveling to Uruguay should register with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to ensure they receive pertinent security updates and notices.

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