



Hungary 2011 Crime and Safety Report

Riots/Civil Unrest; Crime; Terrorism

Europe > Hungary

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Hungary 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report

Overall Crime and Safety Situation:

Crime Threats

Budapest is rated as a MEDIUM threat post for crime. Hungary's overall crime rate for 2010 was slightly higher than 2009 levels. Property crimes (theft) increased by 17 percent. Violent crimes increased by 13 percent from 2009 to 2010. Crimes committed against Americans are generally crimes of opportunity, not crimes targeting Americans specifically.

Street crimes, particularly pick-pocketing, petty thefts from persons, thefts from unattended vehicles, and vandalism are the most frequently reported. Budapest's major train stations and the public transportation (tram, subway, and bus) systems are popular venues for such thefts. Residential crimes are also a significant issue and continue to be on the rise, with most people employing alarm systems and other security measures as a deterrent.

In 2010, the Embassy Consular Section received reports from private American citizens who were victims of the following crimes:

Stolen Passports:	70
Scams:	4
Sexual Assault:	1
Aggravated Assault:	2
Theft/break-ins:	8

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Road Safety

Driving in Hungary can be challenging, as drivers are extremely aggressive. Recently, the government introduced harsher penalties for speeders and traffic violators. Traffic incidents have decreased, but speeding and reckless driving remains a concern. Drunk driving arrests reportedly slightly decreased in 2010.

Political Violence:

Historical perspective

Hungary enjoys a relatively stable security environment but saw an increase in often violent political unrest between September 2006 and July 2009. Since August 2009, this violent political unrest has significantly subsided. Small, fractional fringe element groups of Neo-Nazis, Skinheads, and other far right wing extremists continue to be present in Hungarian society, but rarely adversely impact foreigners. Their activities, particularly rallies and demonstrations, are strictly limited and monitored by police.

Regional terrorism and organized crime

In the past, an indigenous, right wing extremist group, the Hungarians' Arrows National Liberation Army, has claimed responsibility for firebombing the homes of several Hungarian politicians and the home of the then-government minister who headed the National Security Services. To date, the majority of its members have been arrested or are under house arrest. The Government of Hungary considers the Arrows an indigenous terrorist organization but lacks the ability to designate them as such under current Hungarian law.

Organized crime groups in Hungary control most prostitution, stolen car rings, gambling, and narcotics trafficking. The organized crime division of the Hungarian National Police, in partnership with a U.S. Embassy-supported task force of U.S. law enforcement officers, continues to combat the problem of organized crime.

International terrorism or transnational terrorism

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There have been no acts of terrorism directed against American interests in Hungary. Public announcements and worldwide cautions alerting U.S. citizens traveling and residing abroad to potential safety concerns are regularly issued. Travelers are encouraged to visit the Embassy website at www.usembassy.hu for the most current information.

Civil unrest

Between September 2006 and July 2009, large-scale demonstrations against the Hungarian Government occurred. These demonstrations began in the fall of 2006 in response to the release of an audiotape in which the then-Prime Minister admitted lying to the public about the economy. Occurrences of violent civil unrest have subsided significantly since August 2009.

The Magyar Garda (Hungarian Guard), established in August 2007 by the right wing political group Jobbik, continues to intimidate and conduct anti-Roma activity throughout Hungary. In December 2008, the Budapest Municipal Court dissolved the Magyar Garda Society because of its anti-Roma activity. Jobbik appealed the ruling which was sustained by the Metropolitan Court of Appeal. In November 2009, a law was passed fining anyone 50,000 HUF for wearing a Magyar Garda Uniform. However, the Magyar Garda still operates despite the court ruling and fines. In the April 2010 elections, Jobbik won 26 seats and currently has representation in the Parliament.

Post-Specific Concerns:

Environmental hazards

In recent years, along the Danube and Tisza Rivers, spring flooding has closed roadways and affected low lying towns and areas.

On January 29, 2011, an earthquake centred near Oroszlány damaged buildings in Komárom-Esztergom county and was felt in Budapest. The quake in the town 44km west of Budapest measured 4.8 on the Richter scale. Minor cracks reportedly appeared in buildings, and chimneys were tilted in Komárom, Pest, and Fejér counties. There were no injuries or evacuations in the quake.

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Industrial and transportation accidents

On October 4, 2010, the reservoir at the Ajkai Timfoldgyar alumina factory released a wave of toxic sludge that measured up to 3 meters (9 feet) high in places and inundated the nearby towns of Kolontar, Devecser, Somlovasarhely, Somlojeno, Apacatorma, Tuskevar, and Kisberzsenyc. Some 600,000-700,000 million cubic meters (158-185 million gallons) of sludge were released, affecting 40 square km (15 square miles) along the path of the sludge flow. At least eight people were killed, and more than 123 others were injured, many with severe chemical burns. According to officials, the released amount represented only about 2-4 percent of the total amount in the reservoir. (Information obtained from the following source: http://www.ijet.com/sludge_spill/index.asp)

Kidnappings

Kidnappings are not a significant issue affecting Americans in Hungary at this time.

Drugs and Narco-terrorism

Like most of the other countries in Central Europe, Hungary has been identified as a transit country for illegal drugs coming from Turkey and Asia to various destinations in Europe. Police also report that Hungary is increasingly becoming more of a consumer for illegal drugs, particularly among teens.

Police Response:

How to handle incidents of police detention or harassment:

Report all incidents of police detention or harassment to the US Embassy Budapest, American Citizen Services, at telephone (36)-1-475-4164, Monday thru Friday during normal working hours, or after hours at (36)-1-475-4703/4924.

Where to turn for assistance if you become a victim of a crime and local police telephone

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numbers:

If you are the victim of a crime, call the local police at telephone number (107) or (112). It is also recommended that you notify American Citizen Services at the numbers provided above.

Additionally, the Hungarian Economics Ministry and the Hungarian National Police have a hotline for tourists who are scammed at restaurants and clubs. The hotline number is 438-8080 and operates 24 hours a day with both English and German language capability. There is also a tourism information line operating 24 hours a day which is toll free (06-806-60-044) from Hungary and (605-50-044) from abroad. During the peak tourist season, police patrolling major tourist areas are often accompanied by multi-lingual students who assist with problems or complaints. Police also have a tourist information office that operates every day from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. It is located downtown at Suto Street 2, District 5, and they are able to receive complaints and render assistance in both English and German.

Countrywide Police Emergency Telephone Numbers:

Police Response: (107)

Police, ambulance and fire emergency assistance also have a consolidated telephone number: (112)

Medical Emergencies:

Contact information for local hospitals and clinics

For emergency/non-emergency patient transportation (311-1666) can be used. Fonix SOS Ambulance Service can be used for transportation service only in Budapest (200-0100). Hospitals and clinics in Budapest include the Trauma Hospital (299-7700) and the National Hematological Institute (466-5877). Additional, updated information is available from the Embassy health unit at (475-4092) during regular business hours.

Air ambulance services

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Air ambulance services are operated by the Hungarian National Ambulance Service. The need to transport via air ambulance will be determined by medical professionals at the scene.

Countrywide Emergency Telephone Numbers:

Emergency Ambulance Service: (104)
Fire Emergency: (105)
Police Response: (107)

Police, ambulance and fire emergency assistance also have a consolidated telephone number: (112)

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Reports of overcharging at some restaurants, clubs, and nightspots, especially in those areas of the city frequented by tourists, are not uncommon. The consumption girl scam is still a popular practice in which "recruiters" seek men out to meet with women in the clubs (or the women themselves approach their victims). Those who choose to buy drinks or spend time with the clubs' women are usually charged exorbitant fees. U.S. citizens have reported that club bouncers are intimidating and have escorted club patrons to ATM machines or back to their hotels to obtain money to pay the bills. In 2009, the owner and the bouncer at one of these clubs were both charged with assault after they battered two Dutch tourists for not paying their bill. Also in 2009, police shut down three clubs for this type of activity. If someone becomes a victim of this activity, the police should be called immediately; however, that will not necessarily mean that the customer does not have to pay the bill. Before entering these clubs, customers should always ask about prices.

In Budapest, as in any major cosmopolitan area, a little common sense goes a long way. As a general rule, people should be alert to their surroundings and keep control of all personal belongings, especially when in crowded public places such as public transportation areas and open markets.

The Embassy strongly recommends that American citizens avoid large public gatherings,

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especially political rallies and demonstrations, due to the potential for violence.

Additional information regarding the above scams, as well as other useful security and safety information can be obtained from the following link on the US Embassy Budapest internet site: http://hungary.usembassy.gov/tourist_advisory.html#clubs

Further information:

US citizens are encouraged to report any situations where they are the victims of personal crime in Hungary to the US Embassy in Budapest. The telephone numbers are:

475-4164 (Ask for American Citizen Services during regular business hours.)

475-4703/4924 (After-hours and on weekends.)

Embassy operating hours are Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. but some sections within the Embassy may have different hours. All offices are closed on Saturday, Sunday, and on American and Hungarian holidays.

Mailing Address:

Embassy of the United States of America

Szabadság tér 12

H-1054 Budapest

Hungary

Telephone:

During office hours: (36-1) 475-4400 (Local time: GMT +1)

After-hours emergency calls (for American citizens only): (36-1) 475-4703/4924

Facsimile: (36-1) 475-4764

OSAC Country Council:

This post does not currently have a formalized OSAC country council, but the Regional Security Office (RSO) is readily available whenever a US company wants to discuss security/crime issues. The RSO also works with the Embassy's Foreign Commercial Service section on matters affecting the US business community.

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