



Malaysia 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report: Kuala Lumpur

Burglary; Carjacking; Crime; Kidnapping; Maritime; Natural Disasters; Stolen items; Theft

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

The overall crime rate in Malaysia is designated as medium, and violent crime against expatriates is relatively uncommon. Most criminal activity directed against foreigners is limited to non-violent crimes such as petty theft, purse snatching, and credit card fraud. Residential break-ins do occur and are becoming more frequent but have not resulted in injuries to the occupants.

Robberies occur at all hours, in front of witnesses, and even in upscale neighborhoods. Purse snatching is a frequently reported crime against expatriates and Malaysian citizens. The usual *modus operandi* (MO) is one or two males on a motorbike approaching the target from the rear and snatching a purse, handbag, or cell phone. This type of snatch-and-run tactic has even been executed by occupants leaning out of an automobile. At times, victims have been injured or even killed after being dragged by robbers attempting to snatch their shoulder bags. The most common targets are women walking alone. Incidents where motorbike riders smash the passenger window of occupied vehicles stopped at traffic lights and snatch purses or other valuables on the passenger seat are also increasing.

Credit card fraud continues to be a problem in Malaysia, although enhanced technology has somewhat reduced reported instances of fraud. Unauthorized charges may not show up on a credit card account for several months but can appear in amounts of 5000 USD or more. One of the more common MOs is for employees in retail stores to swipe the credit card in a legitimate transaction under the counter, where account information is "skimmed" into a machine that either transmits the information or stores it for reproduction. In some cases, more sophisticated criminals have tapped into data lines of legitimate establishments to obtain account information. ATM cash withdrawals are safe as long as the ATMs used are associated with reputable Malaysian or international banks.



Residential burglaries in Kuala Lumpur (KL) occur, and stand-alone residences in neighborhoods with large expatriate communities are common targets. Some burglars have entered when occupants were still at home and have threatened the occupants with weapons. RSO has not received any reports to date of injuries to these victims. Vehicular burglaries also occur, targeting vehicles parked at residences or on city streets. As in any burglary, criminals usually hit soft targets with obvious vulnerabilities and/or with valuables in plain view. Gated apartment complexes with 24-hour guards have a much lower burglary rate than other residential units, and apartments are burglarized less often than stand-alone residences. Major international hotels have good security and enjoy a low incidence of crime.

Road Safety

Vehicles in Malaysia are right-hand drive, and traffic moves on the left side of the road. Roads, especially highways, are generally well maintained. Monsoon rains, however, can flood roads in low-lying areas, usually outside of KL. Traffic in Malaysia is very heavy, especially in and around KL.

Motorbikes are numerous and weave in and out of traffic, cross into oncoming traffic lanes, and run red lights. This poses a major hazard for both drivers and pedestrians who are unfamiliar with Malaysian traffic patterns. Drivers should be vigilant for motorbikes at all times, but especially when turning or changing lanes.

Road rage does occur on occasion. Drivers are advised to avoid confrontational behavior, especially when involved in vehicular collisions. If threatened, drivers should leave the area and report the incident to the police within 24 hours.

Police operate sobriety checkpoints in many entertainment districts frequented by foreigners. At these checkpoints, drivers are required to submit to a breath alcohol tests and are subject to arrest if the police officer determines the breath sample to be over the limit. Malaysian drinking and driving laws are strictly enforced with serious penalties.

Political Violence

Since 1969, political violence in Malaysia has been almost non-existent.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

There are two main terrorist groups in the Southeast Asia region, Abu-Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), both of which have suspected links with al-Qa'ida. There have



been numerous terrorist attacks in the region outside of Malaysia, but so far Malaysia itself has not had any significant terrorist activity.

Civil Unrest

Over the last five years, Malaysia has experienced an increased number of demonstrations over racial tensions, political divisions, and US policies in the Middle East. These demonstrations are generally peaceful; however, avoid large gatherings and protests in Malaysia.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Malaysia's location makes it less susceptible to earthquakes and tsunamis than other countries in Southeast Asia. Tropical monsoon season lasts from November to mid-February in Malaysia. During this period heavy rains and thunderstorms occur almost daily. Urban areas with poor drainage and other low-lying areas can suffer flooding. In less-developed rural areas this flooding can cause landslides.

Kidnappings

The Abu-Sayyaf terrorist group has kidnapped individuals in eastern Sabah in recent years. In 2010, two Malaysian fishermen were kidnapped off the coast of eastern Sabah and held for 10 months. Criminal elements are also responsible for kidnapping and piracy on the sea committed against foreigners. These acts of violence have occurred in the eastern islands and coastal areas of Sabah, close to the border with the Philippines. There are indications that both criminal and terrorist groups continue to plan acts of violence against foreigners in this area.

Police Response

The Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) is a national police force that is well trained and equipped. The RMP generally provide excellent law enforcement support to the U.S. Embassy and have consistently responded favorably to the needs of the US private sector and American citizens in general.

Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the U.S. for similar offenses. Persons violating the law, even unknowingly, may be fined, expelled, arrested or imprisoned.



Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Malaysia are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. Malaysia strictly enforces its drug laws. Malaysian legislation provides for a mandatory death penalty for convicted drug traffickers. Individuals arrested in possession of 15 grams (1/2 ounce) of heroin or 200 grams (seven ounces) of marijuana are presumed by law to be trafficking in drugs. If an American citizen encounters an incidence of police detention or harassment, the U.S. Embassy should be notified immediately.

Victims of crimes should call the national emergency telephone number: 999, the Malaysian equivalent of 911 in the United States. In tourist areas, the RMP have established small "Tourist Police" stations.

Medical Emergencies

Kuala Lumpur has modern medical facilities that are almost comparable, in terms of quality of care, to those in the U.S. In an emergency, a victim should be transported immediately to a hospital. The two recommended hospitals in the KL area are:

Gleneagles Intan Medical Center (preferred for after-hours emergencies): 2160-0000, 282 Jala Ampang

Prince Court Medical Center: 03 4255-2717, at the corner of Jalan Tun Razak and Jalan Kia Peng.

Local emergency medical services are unreliable and the staff is not trained to U.S. standards. However, if ambulance transport is required, two recommended services are:
St. John Ambulance: 03 4257-8726;
Red Crescent Ambulance: 03-9285-5294.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Crime

To avoid becoming the victim of a purse-snatching, be alert and aware of your surroundings. Pedestrians should walk facing traffic and keep a close eye on all vehicular traffic, particularly motorcycles. If possible, try to walk on the sidewalk away from the curb. Avoid poorly lit streets, shortcuts, and narrow alleys. Purses or shoulder bags should be closed and tucked under the arm. Do not wrap the strap around your arm or shoulder. If your purse or bag is snatched, immediately let go of it. Do not struggle with the attacker. Remain calm until the incident is over, and report it as soon as possible to the police. If you are driving, do not leave purses or other valuable in easy-to-reach areas such as the passenger seat.



Travelers in Malaysia should avoid using credit cards if possible, and credit card numbers should be closely safeguarded at all times. Travelers should watch retailers closely and any “under the table” transactions should be reported to the local police. If you must use a credit card in Malaysia, check your account information frequently for fraudulent charges.

While most streets are safe to walk, downtown areas around bars and discos tend to become populated with less desirable people after midnight. Prostitution is illegal in Malaysia but is still prevalent. There are reports of foreigners being drugged and robbed after enlisting the services of a prostitute.

Contact Information

Routine public inquiries from American citizens about security and safety in Malaysia should be directed to the American Citizens Services (ACS) section of the U.S. Embassy during normal business hours. For emergencies outside of normal business hours, call the U.S. Embassy main line and listen to the recorded instructions or call the US Embassy duty officer.
US Embassy:

Embassy main line: +60 3 2168-5000

Post One: +60 3 2168-4959

American Citizen Services: +60 3 2168-3300

OSAC Country Council Contact Information

The Regional Security Office (RSO) is currently re-establishing an OSAC Country Council in Malaysia. OSAC meetings are organized by the RSO and will be held quarterly. The OSAC point-of-contact within the Regional Security Office is Mr. Timothy Leeds, Regional Security Officer: +60 3 2168-5111, email: leedst@state.gov.