



Kenya 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report

Carjacking; Crime; Information Security; Stolen items; Terrorism; Theft

Africa > Kenya > Nairobi

4/27/2011

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Kenya remains critically rated for both Crime and Transnational Terrorism. U.S. Embassy Nairobi updated the Travel Warning for Kenya in December 2010 to note that "U.S. Embassy security personnel recently expanded the restricted area to include portions of Lamu district. This designation is based on reports of Somali-based armed groups known to have crossed into Kenya to stage attacks or to commit crimes." The restriction does not apply to travelers not affiliated with the U.S. government but should be taken into consideration.

Crime Threats

Street crime is a serious problem and more acute in Nairobi and other large cities. Most street crime involves multiple armed assailants. In some instances, large crowds of street thugs incite criminal activity, which has the potential to escalate into mob-like violence with little notice.

Along with other crimes of opportunity, pickpockets and thieves often carry out "snatch and grab" attacks on city streets in crowded areas and from idle vehicles in traffic.

Visitors are advised not to carry expensive valuables such as jewelry, electronics, or large amounts of cash on their person, but rather store them in their hotel safety deposit boxes or room safes. However, it is not prudent to travel with such items at all, since hotel safes can be broken into or taken out of a room. These safes may also be accessible by hotel personnel even when locked.

Walking alone is not advisable especially downtown, public parks, beach areas, and other poorly lit areas especially at night.

Road Safety

The greatest threats in Kenya continue to be road safety/crime and terrorism. Vehicle travel is extremely hazardous under normal Kenyan conditions, but particularly so at night. Defensive



driving is a must for all drivers. Traffic laws are routinely ignored by most local drivers, who possess poor driving skills and/or training. In particular, many of the “matatus” or small passenger vans show little courtesy and drive erratically and dangerously. Many vehicles are in poor mechanical condition with worn tires, broken and/or missing tail lights, brake lights, and headlights. Road conditions are considered poor at best or even worse in outlying or rural areas especially after the rainy seasons when roads deteriorate at a rapid rate causing extensive potholes and other road hazards.

The most common crime in Kenya’s major cities and in particular Nairobi is car-jacking. In virtually every instance, carjackers use weapons to rob their victims. Most victims, if they are completely cooperative, are released unharmed with their vehicles. However, victims are sometimes tied up and put in the back seat or trunk of their own car. Criminals who commit these crimes will not hesitate to shoot a victim who is the least bit uncooperative or who may appear to hesitate before complying with their assailant.

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

Kenya is generally a peaceful and friendly country in terms of political activism, but it is common during elections, referendums and other political votes for sporadic campaign violence to occur around the country. In June 2010, during a political rally at Uhuru Park in Nairobi, a grenade detonated, killing six and injuring numerous others. Although there was some violence in June, there was relative calm during the August Constitution Referendum voting, and the days that followed as well as after the International Criminal Court’s announcement of the six individuals facing charges for the 2007-2008 post-election violence.

International or Transnational Terrorism

Terrorism remains a high priority concern for Americans in Kenya. The porous border with Somalia has been of particular concern as certain fundamentalist travel between Somalia and Kenya. Several persons (possibly tied to al-Qaida) suspected of involvement with the 1998 East Africa Embassy attacks and the 2002 Kikambala attacks in Mombasa remain at large and potentially dangerous to U.S. citizens and interests.

In December 2010, a suspected al-Shabaab member detonated a grenade at a bus terminal as passengers were boarding a Kampala-bound bus killing at least one person and injuring numerous others. There were also two incidents in the fall of 2010 involving suspected



al-Shabaab members attacking Kenyan law enforcement personnel with small arms and hand grenades as well.

Post-Specific Concerns

U.S. government personnel are restricted from traveling along a corridor in eastern Kenya without RSO approval. This corridor begins just north of Lamu and continues to the east of Dadaab and Wajir continuing north to the Ethiopian border.

Police Response

The Kenyan Police Service is almost solely a reactive force and demonstrates moderate proactive law enforcement techniques or initiative to deter or investigate crime. Police often lack the equipment, resources, training, and personnel to respond to calls for assistance or other emergencies. The police have a poor record of investigating and solving serious crimes. Inadequate legislation results in the lack of prosecution or large numbers of acquittals. Corruption occurs at all levels, which results in an ineffective legal and justice system.
Nairobi Area Control Room: 020 2724154; 020 3556771
Diplomatic Police Hotlines: 0716 000 559; land lines – 020 7625230/1/1/4/5
Police Headquarters: 020 341 411; 020 340731; 020 341416; 020 342305; 340225

Medical Emergencies

Kenya's country-wide emergency number is 999. There are three hospitals in Nairobi that U.S. personnel and other western expatriates typically use:
Nairobi Hospital: 254-20-284-5000/6002/5506/7/8
Aga Khan Hospital: 254-20-366-2025/374000/3662000/3750290
Gertrude Garden Children's Hospital: 254-20-376-3474/0137/0030/4097

The quality of care at each is considered good, and U.S. embassy personnel assigned to Kenya often uses their services. However, the blood supply in Kenya is generally considered unsafe, and the use of blood products is not recommended. Those needing blood should utilize trusted sources such as family or friends.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Normal crime prevention methods will help lessen the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime while in Kenya. Being aware of one's surroundings has been the time-tested method for avoiding becoming a target. Car-jacking, burglaries, and the occasional home invasion are the



most serious crimes in Kenya, but if the necessary measures are taken, they can generally be avoided. Perpetrators are likely to be armed and resistive behavior causes more violence by the attackers. Ensure vehicle doors and windows are locked at all times while traveling, even during daylight hours. The best way to avoid being a victim of a car-jacking is to be aware of your surroundings at all times, particularly at night or early morning hours, though car-jackings do occur during daylight hours.

If you see something or someone suspicious, be prepared to act quickly. Allow sufficient distance between you and the vehicle ahead of you while stopped in traffic. If you believe you are being followed, do not drive directly to your intended destination but rather detour to a public or well-lit and guarded area and seek help.

Limit the amount of valuables and cash you carry with you, specifically ATM or credit cards. Travelers should only use banks and ATMs in well lit locations and never at night. Credit cards can be used in certain establishments, such as major hotel chains and some local restaurants, but caution is advised and remember to check your statements shortly after the transaction. Should you be carrying ATM or credit cards, the criminal will prolong the detention so they can take the victim to multiple ATM machines even keeping you until the following day for additional withdrawals.

Although there are a number of security and private guard companies throughout Kenya's larger cities, it is advisable to research any prospective security company for quality and reliability when considering hiring their services.

Contact Information

The U.S embassy is located on United Nations Avenue, Gigiri, Nairobi, Kenya. The consulate's American Citizen Services Unit requires an appointment for all non-emergency services. Appointments can be made online at: <https://evisaforms.state.gov/acs/default.asp?postcode=NRB&appcode=1>. ACS is closed to the public the last Wednesday of every month and all Kenyan and American holidays.

Embassy Nairobi Switchboard: 254-20-363-6000

Consular Section/American Citizen Services: 020-363-6451 (M-TH: 0800-1600 Fri: 0800-1200)

American Citizen Services Email: Kenya_ACS@state.gov

Regional Security Office: 254-20-363-6301

Embassy 24 hr. Emergency: 254-20-363-6170



The Embassy operates a warden system to communicate with registered American citizens in Nairobi. Periodic messages are sent to test the system so that it will be effective should an emergency situation arise. To register your stay in Nairobi and ensure that you receive warden messages in an emergency, please visit our website at:
<https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>

OSAC Country Council Contact Information

RSO Nairobi does have an OSAC Country Council that meets on a quarterly basis. RSO POC is Regional Security Officer, Jeff Lischke 254-20-363-6301.