



## South Africa 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report: Johannesburg

Burglary; Carjacking; Riots/Civil Unrest; Counterfeiting; Country Council Meeting; Crime; Fraud; Information Security; Stolen items; Terrorism; Theft; Threats

Africa > South Africa > Johannesburg

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### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security rates Johannesburg as a "critical" crime threat. Crime continues to be a key strategic concern for the South African government, as well as for U.S. government employees and visitors. In general, crimes range from petty muggings to ATM scams to armed residential home invasions. These crimes occur with great frequency, increasing sophistication on the part of well-armed criminals, and throughout every neighborhood. Although Americans are not specifically targeted due to their nationality, they can become victims of crime when they are caught in the crossfire of an armed attack, do not pay attention to their surroundings, and/or make themselves "easy targets."

### *Crime Threats*

The major crime concerns that dominate the environment in South Africa, and which present a serious concern to U.S. government employees and visiting Americans, are the full range of violent, confrontational crimes. These crimes include home invasion robberies, burglaries, carjackings, street muggings, smash-and-grabs, organized attacks on commercial and retail centers (shopping malls and outlets), and attacks on cash-in-transit vehicles/personnel (i.e., armored car/personnel). Crime statistics for 2010 are available at: [http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2010/crime\\_stats.htm](http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2010/crime_stats.htm)

Of particular concern for American citizens living in South Africa are home invasion robberies. These crimes are often violent in nature and can occur at any time of the day. In many cases, criminals prefer that the occupant is home as 1) the residential alarm is off and, 2) the occupant can identify where valuables are located. The recently released South African Police Force (SAPF)(formerly South African Police Service) 2010 crime statistics indicate that the number of home invasions remains at an alarmingly high rate, with a total of 8,051 reported in Gauteng Province alone (Gauteng Province includes the cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria). In 2010, 8,122 were reported. Measures to combat home invasions include several layers of residential security, such as perimeter walls, alarms, and grills on windows. Vehicle gates



should also be equipped with anti-lift brackets, as criminals have been known to use crowbars and pneumatic jacks to lift gates off their tracks.

Another crime trend throughout South Africa is the rise in business robberies by bands of well-armed criminals, with restaurants, jewelry shops, grocery stores, and other business establishments being the prime targets. Apart from raiding the till, these take-over style robberies allow robbers to relieve customers of cash, cell phones, and other valuables. Any resistance can result in physical harm and, in the most extreme cases, murder. These attacks on business and retail stores are generally carried out by gangs of up to 12 individuals carrying automatic weapons. Often, the primary target of these criminal syndicates are the cash-in-transit vehicles and personnel (armored cars and personnel), with store patrons being a secondary target. It is recommended that armored cars (and their uniformed personnel) be avoided, especially when they are making deposits or picking up cash receipts.

Perhaps the most vulnerable point for any resident in South Africa is the residential driveway. Criminals use the driveway as a choke point, attacking victims when they are waiting for the vehicle gate to open. These types of crimes can result in armed robberies and/or carjackings. According to SAPF, the majority of all carjacking incidents in South Africa occur as the victim arrives home and pulls into the driveway, with the carjackers pulling up behind the victim in order to block an escape path. Victims who resist or fail to comply with demands may be killed or seriously injured. In some cases, robbers force the victim into the house, rob the house of its valuables, and drive away with the loot. The consulate advises official and private Americans to be aware of surroundings and notice if anyone may be following when approaching the residence. Vehicles should wait in the street until the vehicle gate is open before pulling into the residence.

Other crimes that occur frequently in South Africa include smash-and-grab robberies at major intersections and highway off-ramps. When driving, all doors should be locked, no valuables should be left in plain view, and car windows should be kept up.

Pick-pocketing is common and travelers should safeguard their passports, wallets, and other valuables at all times.

Regardless of the type of crime being committed, what distinguishes the crime in South Africa is 1) the level of gratuitous violence associated with these crimes, as criminals are not hesitant to use lethal weapons in the course of carrying out their activities, and 2) the fact that crimes permeate throughout the entire country, regardless of the socio-economic status of a particular neighborhood. Common practice throughout South Africa is to never resist if confronted by an armed individual. The majority of victims of robberies -- and other violent



crimes -- have reacted negatively to criminals' demands.

Financial and identity theft crimes are also prevalent throughout South Africa and include ATM scams, credit card scams, and the "419" scam. ATM fraud is prevalent throughout the country and can include the placement of a skimmer device on the ATM machine itself, or a "helpful citizen" who offers to assist you. The consulate advises that individuals always thoroughly inspect any ATM machine for suspicious attachments or devices and use a machine in a controlled area such as a mall. Also, never allow anyone to provide assistance and never give out PIN codes. Credit card scams are also popular, and residents and travelers should ensure that credit cards are not taken to a "back room" for processing; most businesses have portable credit card machines that they will bring to payers. There has also been a marked increase in the so-called "419" scams originating in South Africa. A 419 scam is an advance fee fraud scheme where the victim is requested to provide advance money in order to pay up-front costs associated with receiving a substantial monetary windfall. This type of scam can be initiated under the guise of a seemingly legitimate business proposition. Bogus websites are set up to dupe the victim who is seeking a specific business opportunity. Based on the information contained on the bogus website, the victim then contacts the scammer and agrees to travel to South Africa in order to negotiate a business deal. The trap is sprung when the victim arrives in the country. Upon arrival, the unwary victim can be kidnapped for ransom or bilked out of funds until he/she has no more. When individuals fall victim to the type of scam, SAPF will not pursue the case to prosecution unless the victim is willing to file a formal complaint and testify in open court. For more information on these types of scams, peruse the SAPF website at: [www.saps.gov.za](http://www.saps.gov.za) and search "419 scams." If OSAC members receive such a solicitation, please visit the Federal Bureau of Investigation's website before providing any personal/financial details or making a financial commitment at: [www.fbi.gov/majcases/fraud/fraudschemes.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/majcases/fraud/fraudschemes.htm).

### *Road Safety*

South Africa's highway system and toll roads are generally in good condition. Secondary roads are often poorly maintained and frequently marked by potholes. Roadway policing mainly consists of speed traps and checkpoints where officers check for mechanical malfunctions and operator compliance with license restrictions. When traveling in South Africa and stopped at one of these checkpoints, individuals may be required to provide a valid driver's license as well as a passport with a current visa or visitor's permit. If stopped by the police without valid identification or a current visa, individuals of any nationality can be subject to arrest, detention, and deportation.



Toll roads have call boxes for emergencies as in the U.S., but many of them are inoperable due to poor maintenance. Highway lighting is also limited outside many cities and towns. South Africa has many fatal traffic accidents throughout the country. During the 2010/2011 holiday season, KZN led the country in traffic fatalities, with 232. Many of these fatalities are due to pedestrians being struck by motorists. Unsafe driving, vehicles in disrepair, excessive speeding, unlicensed drivers, and drivers under the influence of alcohol or drugs cause many of the traffic accidents in South Africa.

Incidents involving police impersonators in the vicinity of O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg have been reported. These impersonators use normal vehicles with a police light in the dash board and attempt to pull over other vehicles. If a vehicle stops, the occupants are robbed of their belongings. Vehicles should not stop on the highways in the vicinity of the Johannesburg international airport, but instead drive to a well-lit area such as a mall, gas station, or police station. Officers in legitimate, unmarked police vehicles will also be in uniform and will present identification.

In June 2010, a portion of the Gautrain railway was opened, establishing a rapid rail link between Johannesburg's international airport and the commercial/business district of Sandton. This is a safe and efficient alternative to travel between the two locations. Construction and development of additional rail lines that will also connect Pretoria are under way. More information on the Gautrain can be obtained at: <http://www.gautrain.co.za/>.

Criminals have been known to target vehicles on the highways. Gangs will place debris in the road during the night and wait for a vehicle to stop after hitting the object, at which point the passengers are robbed of their belongings. Other tactics employed on the highways include dropping rocks or paint from bridges onto vehicles passing underneath. If forced to pull over for any reason, drive to an area that is well lit, such as a gas station or police station.

Motorists should always travel with a fully charged cell phone and be aware of their general geographic location. Highway signage in South Africa can be inconsistent. This is especially true when traveling on secondary roads and in Durban, where many of the street names have changed in the past two years. Motorists should travel with, at the very least, a South African road atlas and consider using a GPS navigation system if unfamiliar with the South African highway system. Motorists should have numbers for the South African Automobile Association (AA), which recognizes U.S. AAA membership, or other roadside assistance service phone numbers. AA and other roadside assistance companies can provide armed response units that will wait with motorists until the vehicle is repaired or towed to a service center. Visit South Africa's AA website: <http://www.aa.co.za/>.



## **Political Violence**

### *Historical Perspective*

Celebrating over 16 years of independence after the end of apartheid, the South African government (SAG) has established a vibrant democracy and a market-based economy. Despite inequality in income and educational opportunity, persistent poverty, a severe HIV/AIDS pandemic, and violent crime, South Africa remains the continent's best prospect for establishing a successful democratic society and boasts a robust civil society, and a dynamic free press. South Africa has a stable, democratic government under the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC). The threat of political violence is relatively low.

U.S.-South African relations are growing stronger through the Strategic Dialogue instituted by Secretary Clinton and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Mashabane. The U.S. government shares common objectives with the SAG on the African continent and beyond and works closely on many of them. With South Africa's return to the U.N. Security Council in 2011, there is a renewed effort to harmonize positions on global issues through bilateral cooperation to advance the U.S. global agenda.

### *Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime*

South Africa has served as an important transit and facilitation point for global extremists. The last significant terror campaign occurred in the Western Cape. The Western Cape based group PAGAD (People against Gangsters and Drugs) conducted an urban terror campaign of bombings, assassinations, and vigilante murders from 1997 to November 2001. These activities targeted SAG facilities and personnel, moderate Muslims identified as threats to the radical Islamic movement, and western-themed businesses (Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock Cafe) seen by PAGAD as symbols of the anti-Islamic west. The SAG's successful investigation and subsequent prosecution of PAGAD members has been largely credited with the suspension of further violence. No significant anti-western attacks have occurred in South Africa since 2001.

Factors that attract legitimate businesses, such as a relatively stable regime and first-world infrastructure, also appeal to organized crime. Large, well organized criminal syndicates also operate freely throughout the country. These gangs are known to target businesses and retail stores in coordinated, armed attacks.



### *International or Transnational Terrorism*

The majority of political violence in South Africa has its genesis in Islamic activism in the Western Cape. These activities are especially sensitive to U.S. government involvement in the Middle East. Though there is no indication that operational cells are present in South Africa, there is evidence that a nexus for recruiting, funding, and safe haven for international terrorists does exist.

### *Civil Unrest*

Civil unrest is a concern in Johannesburg, which has been the site for frequent anti-government protests and demonstrations. Gauteng Province (home of Johannesburg) remains the political and economic capital of the country and typically experiences more labor unrest than other provinces (although unrest can, and does, occur in any area). Labor unions in South Africa carry substantial political clout and can quickly mobilize thousands of people to initiate a protest or demonstration. Typical protests have included the blocking of major thoroughfares between Johannesburg and Pretoria (termed a "go slow") by vehicles, or grid-locking Johannesburg's Central Business District with sheer numbers of protesters. Sectors most often affected by labor unrest include retail, the civil service, the public taxi (mini-bus) industry, and manufacturing. Although protests are generally peaceful, they do occasionally involve some level of violence, which is generally met with non-lethal crowd control measures by SAPF. Protests by the military and minibus taxi industry have typically been judged by the local media to have the most potential for violence. 2010 also saw striking workers violently blocking access to some public hospitals and schools during strikes at those institutions.

U.S. Consulate General Johannesburg strongly recommends that visitors pay attention to local media reports on the location(s) of a proposed demonstration. Protests and demonstrations are not a spectator event, and they should be avoided when possible.

### **Post-Specific Concerns**

#### *Environmental Hazards*

Although South Africa's infrastructure is relatively stable, it is not without challenges. Consumer demand, insufficient power generation, and the theft of electrical wire and other needed equipment combine to interfere with the government's ability to produce an uninterrupted power supply. Due to the current worldwide economic downturn, consumption of electricity by the South African mining industry has dropped significantly, thereby creating a



more readily available energy supply. This steady supply of energy will most likely diminish once mining and smelting operations rebound.

During the rainy season, thunderstorms and lightning strikes or water damage often disrupt power to alarm systems, traffic lights, and other electronic equipment. Adequate surge protectors should be used to protect office and other electrical equipment. Residents may also wish to consider generators.

#### *Industrial and Transportation Accidents*

Road hazards are a danger affecting the entire population. Public transportation should be avoided, as accidents involving multiple fatalities, on urban and rural roadways, are common. Avoid use of unlicensed mini-bus "taxis." They are frequently in disrepair, and the drivers are often unlicensed. Taxi recommendations should be obtained from your hotel and reputable companies telephoned. They should never be hailed on the street.

Pick up and drop off at Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo International Airport should be done with a reputable transfer/shuttle service.

#### *Kidnappings*

Historically, Americans in South Africa have not been specifically targeted for kidnap in South Africa. Nevertheless, there have been a few reported cases over the last two years of American citizens seeking business opportunities in South Africa who were abducted by criminals misrepresenting themselves as legitimate businessmen. Scam artists who purported to be engaged in legitimate business enterprises lured unsuspecting entrepreneurs with promises of lucrative business deals. Once the victim arrived in South Africa and met his "business contact," he was abducted and ransomed for safe return. These abductions are motivated purely by greed and do not specifically target American citizens. American citizens in South Africa have not been the target of kidnap for political gain.

#### *Drugs and Narco-terrorism*

International drug trafficking organizations are found throughout the world, and South Africa is no exception. South Africa is both an importer and an exporter of drugs. It is the origin, transit point, and/or destination of many drug trafficking routes. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) recently reported that South Africa was the world's third-leading country in terms of cannabis seizures. While much of the cannabis is cultivated in South Africa, significant quantities are also grown in neighboring countries for export to South Africa. Large



seizures of compressed marijuana are frequently made at the O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg and are generally destined for the United Kingdom.

Cocaine frequently originating from Brazil, as well as other parts of South America, is regularly seized at the O.R. Tambo International Airport. Seizures at South African port cities have increased, and in November and December of 2010, 2,016 kilograms of cocaine was seized in two different incidents. The cocaine trafficking is mostly controlled by Nigerian syndicates, who have recruiters placed in South Africa and facilitators throughout South America. Recent trends indicate that Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO's) from China and the Balkans have developed a significant presence in South Africa. In addition to importing narcotics directly into South Africa, DTO's ship drugs into Maputo, Mozambique, and then truck the drugs into South Africa.

The SAPF has observed an increase in the number of clandestine drug manufacturing laboratories. These labs produce synthetic drugs largely for the domestic market. Heroin is also a drug of abuse in South Africa. The DEA's Pretoria Country Office has investigated a number of cases in which heroin is smuggled from Pakistan into South Africa and then onward into the U.S. According to a UN study, most of the heroin trafficked into South Africa is intended for domestic consumption.

There are pockets of corruption within the government, but as a policy, law enforcement frequently collaborates with U.S. agencies to target drug trafficking. Corruption is less prevalent in South Africa than in other countries in the region. While DEA has limited knowledge of narcotics trafficking financing terrorist activities, the Pretoria Country Office has no corroborated intelligence indicating widespread narco-terrorism in South Africa.

## **Police Response**

The South African Police Force (SAPF) and Metropolitan Police departments are well intentioned but suffer from a lack of equipment, resources, training, and personnel to respond to calls for assistance or other emergencies. In addition, law enforcement agencies in South Africa have lost many experienced officers and personnel to attrition and reorganization of command and administrative structures. Community policing such as that found in the U.S. or Western Europe has taken hold slowly, and SAPF efforts to respond to calls of a serious nature have improved. Many neighborhoods, especially affluent ones, are now covered by a roving reaction unit that responds to the more violent crimes (home invasions, business robberies, etc). Secondly, they attempt to respond to calls of prowlers and other potential crimes in the developmental stage. Far down on their list of priorities is response to property



crime after the fact.

For residential and commercial properties in the more affluent neighborhoods, the use of private security companies has become the norm for first response to a crime in progress. These private companies generally have one or two armed officers in response vehicles and can be seen patrolling the neighborhoods throughout the day.

The national police emergency number is: 10-111

#### *How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment*

While corruption exists within the SAPF, complaints of street level shakedowns for money or similar forms of harassment are uncommon among the American community. On occasion, motorists have been informed they can pay a fine directly to the officer after being caught in a speed trap or at a road-worthy checkpoint. If this occurs, the best course of action is to advise the officer to provide a citation, and the fine will be paid at a police station.

#### **Medical Emergencies**

The private health care sector in South Africa ranks amongst the best in the world. American government employees working in Africa are often evacuated to South Africa for medical treatment. The embassies and consulates in the area where individuals will be traveling can provide information regarding medical services specific to that location. Unitas Trauma Hospital in Pretoria is one of the best medical care facilities in South Africa and is designated as a regional evacuation point for trauma patients.

The nationwide emergency number to call for an ambulance is: 10-177.  
The police emergency number (10-111) may also be used.

Unitas Trauma Hospital (in Pretoria): 012-677-8000

Air Ambulance Services:  
SOS International - 011-541-1100  
Netcare - 011-254-1127  
MRI - 011-242-0112  
Africa Assist - 083-300-3927

#### *Vaccinations & Risk of Disease*



Being one of the countries most affected by HIV and AIDS, South Africa receives more U.S. *President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief* (PEPFAR) resources than any other nation. With approximately 5.7 million South Africans believed to be living with HIV and AIDS, South Africa has benefited from PEPFAR support since 2004 through partnerships among the South African government, non-governmental, and private organizations. By 2010, South Africa had received approximately \$6.2 billion (R19 billion) through PEPFAR. On World AIDS Day 2009, Ambassador Donald H. Gips announced that the U.S. would provide an additional one-time donation of \$120 million (R900 million) over two years for anti-retroviral drugs. PEPFAR is now moving from its initial emergency focus to an emphasis on developing sustainability of its programs, and seeks to build a platform for an integrated response to a broad range of global health needs. The focus will be on maternal, newborn, and child health.

Due to South Africa's high HIV infection rate the embassy medical unit advises all personnel and visitors to seek immediate medical assistance in the event of a sexual assault or blood-borne injury.

### **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

The most prevalent scams in South Africa are both the "419" scams and ATM fraudsters.

There are no designated "off-limit" areas in South Africa, although "township" neighborhoods (poorer neighborhoods) should be avoided, particularly after dark, and unless traveling with an organized tour group or someone who knows the area. Visitors should increase their level of awareness in these areas during daylight, due to high crime rates and spontaneous protests often involving road blocks, burning tires, and demonstrators throwing rocks and other projectiles. Do not travel to an area you are not familiar with. Travel in groups whenever possible and minimize your movements after dark.

Be aware of your surroundings. Your vigilance may convince a would-be attacker to find an easier target. Maintain a low profile. Do not flash cash or wear expensive jewelry. Keep photocopies of your passport and other identity documents on your person, and keep the originals locked up in the hotel safe. Only carry as much cash as you are willing to hand over to a criminal. Should you be confronted by an armed individual, do not resist. Resistance or hesitation on the part of the victim can result in death or serious injury. Keep your hands visible and follow instructions carefully. Do not make any furtive movements that might startle your attacker. Give up your money and valuables.

Avoid public transportation, including mini-bus taxis. However, U.S. Consulate Durban recommends you travel by vehicle and only walk in "controlled areas" such as shopping malls



or other areas with a security presence. Rental cars are available, or hire a private taxi through the hotel concierge. If you are in a vehicle, keep the windows up and the doors locked. Make sure all valuables are out of sight to avoid becoming a victim of smash-and-grab. When stopped at a red light, leave room between the car you are in and the car in front of you in case you need to take evasive action. If you believe you are in danger, leave the area immediately. Stay on main roads and keep to well-lit public areas. If you think you are being followed, drive to the nearest safe area (police station, hospital, etc.).

Before entering an establishment, scan the area for any suspicious activity. This will reduce the chances of walking into a “robbery in progress.” Once inside the establishment, take note of the nearest fire exits or other avenues of escape. Drink responsibly; alcohol intake negatively affects your situational awareness.

Avoid walking/driving near money transport vehicles. They are frequently targeted by well-armed gangs who are not afraid to open fire, even in crowded public areas. If you hear shots fired, get down on the ground! Do not try to investigate or intervene.

If you need to use an ATM, do so from inside a controlled area such as a shopping mall or hotel. Avoid ATMs located on the street since these are often targeted by criminals who will attempt to “assist” you during your transaction. Criminals also blow up ATMs on a regular basis, although this usually only occurs during in the early morning hours in remote locations. (Note: This has become increasingly rare in KZN due to successful police efforts.) Credit card fraud is not uncommon in South Africa. Only use credit cards in reputable establishments. In order to prevent “card skimming,” you should physically watch your card being swiped. Check your credit card account for any unauthorized purchases.

Avoid confrontations with local residents. Many are armed, especially taxi drivers who carry weapons to ward off criminals and to battle with rival taxi gang members.

### **Contact Information**

U.S. Embassy Pretoria 12-431-4000  
Senior RSO Dan Weber- 012-431-4099  
MSG Post 1 - 012-431-4169/4620 (AFTER HOURS)  
RMO 012-431-4015  
Email: DS\_RSO\_Pretoria@state.gov

Consulate General:



Johannesburg - 011-290-3426, RSO Jeff Dee

The Consular Information Sheet for South Africa provides additional information for any traveler to the country: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1008.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1008.html)

It is also recommended that any traveler register with the U.S. Department of State: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>.

OSAC: American Chamber of Commerce in South Africa - 011-788-0265.

### **OSAC Country Council Contact Information**

South Africa's OSAC Country Council is based in Johannesburg, and the U.S. Consulate General Johannesburg manages (in close coordination with the American Chamber of Commerce) an extremely vibrant and proactive OSAC Country Council with over 65 members, to include major U.S. companies in a variety of industries. The council meets monthly at various venues throughout Johannesburg. The RSO attends all council meetings to engage in roundtable discussions with members. The council takes an active role on all issues of crime and security in South Africa, to include outreach to public officials for speaking engagements and training seminars.