



Paraguay 2012 Crime and Safety Report

Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Fraud; Transportation Security; Elections; Left-wing; Riots/Civil Unrest; Floods; Travel Health and Safety; Threats; Drug Trafficking; Bribery

Western Hemisphere > Paraguay > Asuncion

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

Crime in Paraguay continues to be a serious concern, with crime levels rising each year since 2008. According to the Paraguayan National Police (PNP) Department of Statistics, overall crime rose nine percent in 2011. The two crimes with the greatest level of increased occurrences in 2011 were theft (21 percent increase) and violent theft (52 percent increase). The PNP concedes that many crimes go unreported due to lack of confidence in the judicial process.

Most economic gains are achieved by the proportionately small upper class, while a large segment of Paraguayans face extreme poverty. There is no pervasive anti-American sentiment in Paraguay; however, criminals frequently target those believed to be wealthy. U.S. citizens are perceived to be wealthy and, therefore, are targeted.

Crime is generally non-violent, but the common use of knives and firearms in muggings and street crime creates the possibility for serious harm. Armed robberies, car thefts (occasionally including carjacking), and burglaries are common in both urban and rural areas. Residences with augmented security -- perhaps due to the indication of wealth -- are not immune from burglaries. Many burglaries occur during the day when occupants are not at the residence or easily manipulated household staff fails to use appropriate security protocols. In many cases, police officers and security guards, with their detailed knowledge of security procedures, are themselves involved in the crimes.

Street crime, including pick pocketing and mugging, is common in downtown Asuncion as well as at the bus terminal and on public buses. Groups of children have been known to mob pedestrians and steal purses and wallets. Subterfuge, such as masquerading as a police officer or a businessman, has been used to lull victims into situations where the mugger has control and possibly the assistance of accomplices. Increasing incidents of muggers using



motorcycles to approach their victims have also been reported. One tactic becoming more common is a thief breaking the passenger window of a vehicle stopped at a traffic light or in traffic, grabbing a purse or bag from the car seat, and escaping on the back of a waiting motorcycle.

Road Safety

Defensive driving is a requirement, as traffic is extremely congested and unpredictable. Only minimal standards are required to obtain a driver's license, and driver's education prior to licensing is uncommon. Drivers routinely ignore traffic regulations, and many drive without any insurance coverage. Many traffic lights are inoperable or difficult to see.

Paraguay has seen a marked increase in the prevalence of motorcycles. Paraguayans can obtain motorcycles for very little money and with no formal training. Motorcycles pass on both sides of vehicles - often in a very dangerous manner and sometimes on sidewalks. Due in large part to a lack of enforceable traffic and safety regulations, a majority of traffic deaths occur in accidents between a vehicle and motorcycle.

Furthermore, most urban streets consist of cobblestones over dirt. Some roads in Asunción and other large cities are paved; however, these roads flood during heavy rains, making them impassable at times. Potholes appear suddenly and often remain without repair for several months. Nearly all rural roads are unpaved, and during the rainy season (November-April) can be impassable. Road signs indicating hazards, such as sharp curves or major intersections, are lacking in many areas. Driving or traveling at night outside of Asuncion is not recommended due to the amount of vehicles without proper lights.

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

Paraguay has a long history of political violence, with decades of dictatorial rule enforced by the police and military. However, the election of Fernando Lugo as president in 2008 ended 62 years of Colorado Party domination of the political scene. Democracy and civilian control of the military now appear to be firmly entrenched with Lugo firing the leadership of both the police and the military repeatedly in 2009, 2010, and 2011. However, political unrest continues with the regular occurrence of protests, demonstrations, and roadblocks by campesino organizations, student groups, unions, and government employees.



With the 2013 presidential election already on the horizon, it is possible the level of protests and demonstrations may increase in the coming years. Demonstrations are typically non-violent and coordinated with authorities and police, but there have been incidents of violence, including the shooting of a protestor in November 2008.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

There are no political groups or parties that specifically target U.S. citizens or interests. A small leftist armed resistance group called the EPP (Ejercito del Pueblo Paraguayo - or the Paraguayan People's Army) is active in the Departments of Concepcion and northern San Pedro. The EPP is relatively small, with estimates putting the group's active strength at 15-20 members, but it does have significant local support. The group primarily targets wealthy landowners for kidnapping and extortion. In late 2009, the EPP kidnapped a well-known rancher and held him for 94 days before releasing him in January 2010, reportedly in exchange for a ransom of \$500,000. During 2010, the EPP had several engagements with NPN, killing two police officers in an ambush in June but later suffering losses with members being killed in police operations in July and September. The EPP resumed operations in January 2011 with an improvised explosive device wounding four police officers in Horqueta, Concepcion Department, and the bombing of a government television station in downtown Asuncion that injured none. In September 2011, the EPP attacked a police station in Capitan Jimenez, Concepcion Department, and killed two police officers. The EPP appears to be increasing its competency and its ruthlessness. Besides the demonstrated explosives capability the group also has intercepted PNP radio communications and may have a trained sniper.

International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism

Supporters and sympathizers of extremist terrorist groups are present in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) comprised of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. The United States government remains concerned that Hezbollah and Hamas are raising funds in the TBA by participating in illicit activities and soliciting donations within the sizeable Muslim communities in the region. There is no corroborated information that these or other Islamic extremist groups have an operational presence in the area. However, it is recommended that American visitors to the TBA remain especially vigilant and maintain a low profile.

Civil Unrest

Throughout 2011, there were numerous demonstrations held in various parts of Asuncion and throughout the countryside. Most protests and demonstrations are held by various groups of



workers demanding more money and benefits. "Campesinos" also come into Asuncion to protest a lack of jobs, land, and homes. This group can sometimes turn violent. Violence between the police and protesters is not the norm but has occurred.

A common tactic used by protesters is to congregate on major roadways in order to block traffic and disrupt normal operations in the city. Visitors should avoid going through roadblocks and either wait for the roadblock to end or find an alternate route.

Visitors should avoid locations where crowds have gathered to protest. Demonstrations typically occur in the downtown area near Paraguayan government buildings and near the Paraguayan Presidential residence (across the street from the United States Embassy).

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Paraguay does not have a history of natural disasters, but there have been cyclical floods.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Public transportation safety is a major concern. Public bus accidents occur relatively frequently caused primarily by negligence and bad judgment on the part of the driver. The level of both public and private driver training and safety awareness does not reach minimum U.S. standards. In 2011, at least 1,278 deaths were attributed to traffic accidents.

Kidnappings

There were no U.S. citizens reported kidnapped in 2009 or 2010. In April 2011, a U.S. citizen minor who resides in Paraguay was kidnapped on the way to school in Coronel Oviedo, Caaguazú (approximately 100 miles west of Asuncion). The kidnapped child was able to free himself after a few hours and ran home. The kidnapers were arrested and await trial in prison.

Several other foreign nationals reported being the subject of kidnapping threats. No nationality is immune to the ever-present kidnapping threat. Most agree that the majority of kidnappings are not reported and are handled exclusively by family members of the victims. A high profile kidnapping of a Paraguayan woman took place in Asuncion in September 2011. All visitors and businessmen/women should always maintain situational awareness when in Paraguay.



Drug and Narco-terrorism

The Departments of Alto Parana, Amambay, Canindeyú, San Pedro, and Concepcion continue to suffer from violence associated with narco-trafficking. Paraguay is a transit country for cocaine and the hemisphere's second largest producer of marijuana. Narcotics traffickers use violence to settle matters between rival groups and it is believed that members of the Brazilian organized crime gang named First Command of the Capital (PCC) are operating in Pedro Juan Caballero (Amambay), Salto de Guairá (Canindeyú), and Ciudad del Este (Alto Parana).

Police Response

The PNP suffer from a serious and ongoing lack of resources and training. As a result, police response times vary greatly, and investigations rarely result in successes. In addition, in many cases, the police form part of organized criminal elements. Due to the lack of resources and the overall cultural and professional tolerance for corruption, the PNP generally cannot be counted upon, and standards remain far below those considered acceptable in developed countries. Although the U.S. government continues to assist the PNP and the Ministry of Interior with equipment and training, there has been little substantive improvement so far that reaches to the level of the citizenry.

The following are emergency numbers for use in the Asunción metropolitan area:

Emergency Police: 911

National Police Fire Emergency: 131

Volunteer Firemen of Paraguay: 132

Volunteer Firemen of Asunción: (595)(21) 225-400

Medical Emergency: (595)(21) 204-800

Police Headquarters: (595)(21) 445-858

American citizens are also instructed to contact American Citizen Services (ACS) in the consular section of the Embassy at (595)(21) 213-715 in the event that they encounter serious problems while traveling in Paraguay.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

While not commonplace, if during a traffic stop or other detention the police demand a bribe, visitors should refuse to pay the bribe. If detained or harassed by the police, visitors should



contact American Citizen Services in the consular section of the Embassy (595)(21) 213-715.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care in public hospitals, especially away from the Asunción metropolitan area, is substandard. Hospitals and clinics often do not possess the facilities or levels of experience and training considered acceptable in the U.S. In addition, a shortage of nurses and doctors often leaves clinics staffed with unqualified personnel. The following local hospitals and clinics have been identified as suitable for use by American visitors in Paraguay:

Sanatorio San Roque
Eligio Ayala c/ Pai Perez
(595)(21)212-499

Sanatorio Medico La Costa
Avenida Artigas #1500 (300 meters from General Santos)
(595)(21)202-800 & 202-900

Centro Medico Bautista
Argentina c/ Campos Cervera
(595)(21)600-171/4
ER: (595)(21) 607-944

Sanatorio Migone Battilana
Eligio Ayala 1293 c/ Curupayty
(595)(21)498-200

Ambulance Services

EME - (595)(21) 211-454 211-453
SASA - (595)(21)610-629
GEMA - (595)(21)600-274

Air Ambulance Services

There is no longer any air ambulance service from Paraguay to any foreign destination. It is, therefore, recommended that visitors consider purchasing private air medical evacuation insurance before traveling to Paraguay.



CDC Guidance

The summer rains can result in dengue fever outbreaks in Paraguay. Dengue fever, a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes, is present in both urban and rural areas. In 2010, there were 13,553 suspected cases of Dengue with 3,529 cases confirmed. Dengue was not as prevalent in 2011. The Embassy also recommends that visitors to Paraguay obtain the Yellow Fever vaccination due to confirmed cases of Yellow Fever as recently as 2008.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Visitors should practice common sense preventive security measures, just as they would in any large city in the U.S.

Do not carry or wear valuable items that will attract the attention of thieves. If you need to wear expensive jewelry or carry a camera, conceal it or keep it out of sight until reaching your destination.

Be aware of the street environment and avoid contact with those who may be looking for potential targets. If your route takes you near a group of suspicious looking individuals, go into a store or bank or simply cross the street.

Do not physically resist any robbery attempt. Statistics show that resistance leads to injury. Many criminals are armed with guns or knives, and recent statistics indicate a growing willingness to use them.

Do not open your hotel room door until you positively confirm who is on the other side. Look out the peephole, or call the front desk to confirm the visitor.

Use clearly marked taxis with meters in lieu of public busses if possible. Many buses pass through high crime areas and are susceptible to robberies.

Areas to Avoid

Avoid downtown plazas, especially after dark. The plaza areas often have many resident street thugs, prostitutes, and other undesirables that may look at you as a potential victim.

Avoid the Chacarita area located in downtown Asuncion along the river. The Chacarita area is



a high crime area where even local police refrain from entering.

Further Information

Embassy: (595)(21)213-715

Regional Security Officer: (595)(21)213-715 x2026 x2274

Embassy Operator: (595)(21)213-715 x0

Embassy Marine Security Guard: (595)(21)213-715 x2210

Embassy Nurse: (595)(21)213-715 x2025

Embassy Consular Affairs: (595)(21)213-715 x2273

Embassy Economic Section: (595)(21)213-715 x 2033

OSAC Country Council

The Paraguay OSAC Country Council is located on Avenida 25 de Mayo 2090, Asunción, Paraguay. For further information please contact the RSO at the following numbers and email: (595)(21)222-160 & 221-525 & 222-265 & 221-926 - email: comercial@pamcham.com.py.