



Venezuela 2012 Crime and Safety Report

Murder; Theft; Stolen items; Kidnapping; Assault; Carjacking; Burglary; Fraud; Drug Trafficking; Transportation Security; Anti-American sentiment; Contingency Planning; Elections; Earthquakes; Landslides and mudslides; Oil & Energy; Riots/Civil Unrest; Left-wing; Religious Terrorism; Money Laundering; Diplomatic Missions; Aviation

Western Hemisphere > Venezuela > Caracas

9/21/2012

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Department of State rates the criminal threat level for Caracas as CRITICAL. In 2010, Caracas became the deadliest capital in the world with the highest murder rate in the world, averaging one murder every hour. Much of Caracas's crime and violence can be attributed to mobile street gangs and organized crime groups. Caracas continues to be notorious for the brazenness of high-profile, violent crimes such as murder, robberies, and kidnappings. Armed assaults and robberies continue to be a part of everyday life. Every Caracas neighborhood is susceptible to crime. Reports of armed robberies occur regularly, day and night, and include the generally affluent residential sections of Chacao, Baruta, and El Hatillo, where host government, business leaders, and diplomats reside. Studies and reports cite a variety of reasons for the critically high and constant level of violent criminal activity in Caracas including: a sense that criminals will not be penalized; poorly paid and often corrupt police; an inefficient politicized judiciary; a violent and overcrowded prison system; overworked prosecutors; and the presence of up to 25 million illegal weapons in the country.

Crime Threats

Crime is by far the principal threat in Caracas, affecting both locals and foreigners. According to the Venezuelan government, the murder rate in Caracas was 91.71 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011. However, according to the Venezuela Violence Observatory, a non-governmental organization (NGO), the murder rate in Caracas in 2011 was 200 per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest rates in the world. Nationwide, at least 19,336 people were killed in 2011, an average of 53 per day. Venezuela had a murder rate of 67 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011. That compares to 32 per 100,000 last year in neighboring Colombia (22.7 per 100,000 people in Bogotá), 14 per 100,000 in Mexico, and 14 per 100,000 in São Paulo, Brazil's largest city. Venezuela had more murders than Mexico (18,601 murders in 2011), which has four times



the population (Mexico's population: 113.4 million, Venezuela's population: 28.8 million). Most violent crimes in Caracas, especially murder and kidnapping, involve firearms. There is no evidence to indicate criminals and gang-related activities specifically target U.S. citizens.

Crime in Venezuela can be attributed to several factors: impunity from prosecution, a dysfunctional judicial system, poverty, retribution, politics, gangs and drugs. Caracas suffers from areas of extreme poverty, which provide gangs and criminal elements with an environment conducive to crime and is subsequently difficult to police. The majority of violent crimes in Venezuela take place in areas of extreme poverty; however, due to their proximity to affluent areas/neighborhoods and the extremely low cost of gasoline, it is relatively easy for gangs and criminal elements to infiltrate these areas as well. Police are unable to protect less affluent neighborhoods, and as a result, crime is quite common, and criminals operate with impunity.

The majority of crimes that tend to dominate Caracas are "express" kidnappings, carjackings, robberies, and home invasions. Recently, there has been an alarming up-tick in organized gangs' targeting travelers using the Simón Bolívar International Airport (CCS).

Home invasions involve large groups of heavily armed criminals who take over houses or apartment complexes and rob the owners and occupants. Home or apartment complex invasions are usually well planned and involve the use of a person on the inside or a scam (such as impersonating police, delivery personnel, or utility company personnel) to gain access. These attacks do not appear to target any one location or person specifically; police report that criminal gangs randomly target a location because of the perception that the occupants are wealthy. Home invasions have occurred in buildings where U.S. Embassy employees reside. Levels of gratuitous violence are on the increase, and the majority of criminals use lethal weapons in the course of carrying out their activities.

The majority of victims of robberies who have resisted criminal demands have been seriously injured as a result. Therefore, it is common practice in Caracas not to resist an attempted robbery. The best defense to these types of criminal gangs is not to open your doors to anyone that you are not expecting and do not know. It is important to instruct your family members, domestic staff, and apartment-complex vigilantes (guards) not to open the doors or accept deliveries from strangers. The Embassy recommends that apartments have functional alarm systems and strong deadbolt locks on all exterior doors.

Road Safety



Incidents of reported carjackings and car robberies remain a common occurrence in Caracas. In 2010, 27,977 vehicles were stolen in Venezuela, making it the second most common crime behind physical assault in the country. Statistics on car robberies in 2011 are not available. The Embassy has received reports of carjackings and robberies in areas near the Embassy. They often occur during peak traffic hours and at entrances and exits of major roadways. Perpetrators target four-wheel-drive models for carjackings. Armed bandits have stopped and robbed multiple travelers along the Caracas-La Guaira road, which connects the capital region with La Guaira port and Simón Bolívar International Airport, approximately 20 miles north of downtown Caracas.

Traffic jams are common in Caracas (regardless of the hour) and are frequently exploited by criminals. Armed motorcycle gangs often operate in traffic jams and tend to escape easily. Be particularly vigilant when stopped in traffic jams. Cases of armed robbery by motorcyclists and theft of other motorcycles have increased and may result in death if the victim does not comply.

Peak holiday travel occurs during summer and winter school breaks and major civil and religious holidays, including Carnival, Easter, Christmas, and New Year's holidays. Lengthy delays due to road congestion are common during these peak periods. It is advisable that, prior to any road travel, travelers ensure that their vehicle is in good operating condition, paying particular attention to the engine, brakes, tires, head and tail lights, spare tire and jack, horn and fluid levels. On trips to outlying and/or isolated areas, keep extra water and oil in the trunk. Extra fuel should only be kept in the trunk and in approved-for-use metal containers.

The following items are recommended for extended road trips:

- cell phone with charger
- potable water
- non-perishable food items
- tools (screwdriver, wrench, pliers, etc.)
- first-aid kit
- jumper cables
- spare tire
- flares/reflectors
- flashlight

If possible, avoid leaving your vehicle on the street when parking. Park inside a residential compound, in a parking lot with an attendant, or at least within view of the location you are visiting. When parking within a shopping facility lot, be sure to park as close as possible to the store entrance and away from dumpsters, bushes, or large vehicles. Be sure to lock your doors, close windows, and hide shopping bags and gifts/valuables in the trunk, out of sight. If



there are no secure parking areas, select a well-lit and non-isolated spot as close to your lodgings as possible and, if possible, away from trucks, buses, dense shrubbery, or small buildings that might conceal thieves.

Driving regulations are similar to those in the United States, although many drivers do not obey them. Defensive driving is an absolute necessity. Motorcyclists often weave in and out of lanes, so caution is advised. Outside the major cities, night driving can be dangerous because of unmarked road damage, repairs in progress, unlighted vehicles, and livestock. It is a common practice to ignore red traffic lights in the evening. Even in urban areas, road damage is often marked by a pile of rocks or sticks left by passersby near or in the pothole or crevice, without flares or other devices to highlight the danger. Many roads are unsafe, as rock slides are common. Traffic fatalities are common. Stopping at National Guard and local police checkpoints is mandatory. Drivers should follow all National Guard instructions and be prepared to show vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and passports. Vehicles may be searched.

If you are involved in a traffic accident, Venezuelan law requires that you do not move the vehicle until the traffic police arrive on the scene. It is recommended that you do not leave the scene of an accident unless you feel you may be in danger.

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

The threat of political violence remains an ever-present possibility. Civil disruptions are common in Venezuela and even small and seemingly peaceful rallies can rapidly deteriorate into violence without warning. Political marches and demonstrations are frequent in Caracas and around Venezuela. Harassment of U.S. citizens by pro-government groups, Venezuelan airport authorities, and some segments of the police occurs but is limited. Venezuela's most senior leaders, including President Chavez, regularly express anti-American sentiment. The Venezuelan government's rhetoric against the U.S. government and American culture and institutions has affected attitudes in what used to be one of the most pro-American countries in the hemisphere.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

Cross-border violence, kidnapping, drug trafficking, smuggling, and cattle-rustling occur along the 1,000-mile long Venezuela-Colombia border. Some kidnap victims have been released after ransom payments, while others have been murdered. In many cases, Colombian



terrorists or local guerrillas are believed to have been the perpetrators. Because of this threat, unofficial in-country travel by Embassy employees within a 50-mile area along the entire Venezuela/Colombia border is generally prohibited and only undertaken with the approval from the Chief of Mission. The State Department warns American citizens not to travel within this same area. U.S. citizens who elect to visit areas along the border region could encounter Venezuelan military-controlled areas, may be subject to search and arrest, and may be at increased risk from the Colombian-guerrilla terrorist threat.

International and Transnational Terrorism

The Embassy is unaware of any large-scale terrorist attacks carried out on Venezuelan territory.

Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) are designated by the Secretary of State as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Both groups use Venezuela as a safe haven.

The State Department has stated that the Lebanon-based terrorist organization Hezbollah is using Venezuela mainly for fundraising. However, Venezuelan media reports suggest Hezbollah is also active in training, money laundering, and arms trafficking.

Civil Unrest

Travelers should be aware that violence, including exchanges of gunfire and tear gas, has occurred at political demonstrations. Demonstrations tend to occur at or near university campuses, business centers, and gathering places, such as public squares and plazas. Marches generally occur on busy thoroughfares and attempt to disrupt traffic significantly. Most major tourist destinations, including coastal beach resorts like Margarita Island, have not been affected by protest actions. However, the city of Merida has been the scene of frequent demonstrations, some of them violent, including the use of firearms and tear gas. Travelers are advised to take common-sense precautions and avoid large gatherings and demonstrations, no matter where they occur.

There were reports of minor criminal activity during the Venezuelan parliamentary elections that took place on September 26, 2010. Presidential primary elections took place in February 2012, and the presidential election will be held on October 7, 2012.



On March 26, 2011, approximately 100 protesters demonstrated in front of U.S. Embassy Caracas against the U.S. involvement in Libya. Some protestors defiled Embassy property and physically assaulted two members of the Embassy staff; there was one minor injury.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Venezuela is an earthquake-prone country and is occasionally subject to torrential rains, which have caused landslides. The September 2009 earthquake near Caracas registered 6.3, injured 14 people, and damaged many buildings. A medium- to large-scale earthquake would quickly overwhelm local emergency response services.

Earthquake preparation tips include:

- Develop an earthquake safety action plan for your family, identifying places that can provide the highest amount of protection during an earthquake and an escape route and an off-premises meeting place.
- Teach family members how to shut off water, gas, and electricity to the house.
- Prepare an emergency supplies kit, including a three-day supply of bottled water and non-perishable food, as well as a manual can opener, paper plates, cups, utensils, first-aid kit, flashlight, and battery-operated radio with extra batteries.
- Secure heavy objects (e.g. television, stereos, computers, armoires) with brackets or safety straps.
- Secure picture frames, bulletin boards, and mirrors to walls using closed eye screws into wall studs.
- Anchor large appliances (e.g. refrigerator, stove) to walls using safety cables or straps.
- Tack down glassware, heirlooms, and figurines with putty.
- Install latches on kitchen cabinet doors to prevent items from falling.

During an earthquake

- Indoors: Remain indoors. Do not run outside unless the building you are in is determined to be unsafe. At the first sign of an earthquake, drop and take cover under a sturdy piece of furniture or against an inside wall away from objects that may fall on you. Get under a desk or table or in a corner. If there is no sturdy furniture nearby, kneel or sit next to a structurally sound interior wall away from windows, shelves, or furniture that could fall and place your hands on the floor for balance. Sit or stay close to the floor and hold on to furniture legs for balance. Use your arm to cover and protect your eyes. Stay indoors until the shaking stops and you are sure it is safe to exit.



- In a high-rise building: Stay away from windows and outside walls. Get under a table. Do not use elevators.
- Outdoors: Quickly move into the open, away from electrical lines, trees, walls, and buildings, if possible.
- Driving: Pull over to the side of the road and stop. Avoid overpasses and power lines. Stay in your car until the shaking is over. Do not stop on or under bridges, near or under power lines or road signs, if possible.
- In a crowded public place: Do not rush for the doors. Crouch and cover your head and neck with your hands and arms.
- If you are in a mountainous area or near unstable slopes or cliffs, be alert for falling rocks and other debris. Earthquakes often trigger landslides.

Recovery tips include:

- Monitor public radio stations for emergency instructions.
- Expect aftershocks, which frequently occur minutes, days, weeks, and even months following an earthquake.
- Get everyone outside if your building is unsafe. Exit via the stairs. Aftershocks following earthquakes can cause further damage to unstable buildings.
- Be aware that fire alarms and sprinkler systems frequently go off in buildings during an earthquake, even if there is no fire. Check for and extinguish small fires. Exit via the stairs if there is fire. Fire is the most common hazard following earthquakes.
- Clean up spilled chemicals, gasoline, or other flammable liquids immediately.
- Open closet and cabinet doors cautiously. Contents could have shifted during the shaking and could fall, creating further damage or injury.
- Check the telephones. Cellular telephone equipment is subject to damage by earthquakes, and cell phones might not be able to get a signal, but land-line phones might work.
- Look for injured victims and administer first aid.
- Pay attention to damaged utilities. Avoid loose or dangling electrical power lines and report all gas and electrical problems to the proper authorities.
- Turn off any damaged utilities.
- Check for fire hazards and use flashlights instead of candles or lanterns.
- Wear protective shoes. Have them by your bed in case the earthquake happens in the middle of the night.
- If your building is sound, stay inside and listen for radio advisories.

Torrential rains resulted in multiple mudslides and road closures in late 2008. Caracas saw some of the worst flooding in years as a result of severe rainstorms in 2009. Highways were closed, and major roads and highways were submerged. In many cases, weather conditions, such as heavy rain, can cause severe gridlock within the city, sometimes turning a 50-minute



ride from the center of the city to Simón Bolívar International Airport into a three-hour marathon. Although it is difficult to predict when a landslide may occur, everyone is encouraged to review the basic steps below to include in your family's emergency plan. More information can be found at www.ready.gov.

Recognize landslide warning signs:

- Changes occur in your landscape such as patterns of storm-water drainage on slopes (especially the places where runoff water converges) land movement, small slides, flows, or progressively leaning trees.
- Doors or windows stick or jam for the first time.
- New cracks appear in plaster, tile, brick, or foundations.
- Outside walls, walks, or stairs begin pulling away from the building.
- Slowly developing, widening cracks appear on the ground or on paved areas such as streets or driveways.
- Underground utility lines break.
- Bulging ground appears at the base of a slope.
- Water breaks through the ground surface in new locations.
- Fences, retaining walls, utility poles, or trees tilt or move.
- A faint rumbling sound that increases in volume is noticeable as the landslide nears.
- The ground slopes downward and may begin shifting under your feet.
- Unusual sounds, such as trees cracking or boulders knocking together, might indicate moving debris.
- Collapsed pavement, mud, fallen rocks, and other indications of possible debris flow can be seen when driving (embankments along roadsides are particularly susceptible to landslides).

The following are guidelines for what you should do if a landslide or debris flow occurs:

- Move away from the path of a landslide or debris flow as quickly as possible.
- Curl into a tight ball and protect your head if escape is not possible.

The following are guidelines for the period following a landslide:

- Monitor your Embassy-issued E&E radio for instructions.
- Stay away from the slide area. There may be danger of additional slides.
- Check for injured and trapped persons near the slide, without entering the direct slide area. Direct rescuers to their locations.
- Watch for associated dangers such as broken electrical, water, gas, and sewage lines and damaged roadways and railways.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents



As the economic and commercial center of the country and the most populated city, Caracas sees its share of industrial and transportation incidents. Vehicle accidents involving hazardous chemicals on the major highways are not common but do occur, causing roadways to be closed for significant periods. Due to mountainous terrain, Venezuelan roadways employ multiple large tunnels. When accidents occur inside these tunnels, the flow of traffic is often blocked for hours until emergency response services can clear the accident.

Pursuant to United States law, the Transportation and Security Administration (TSA) is required to conduct technical security visits to all international airports from which U.S. and foreign airlines provide direct service to the U.S. With host-government collaboration, TSA reviews airport operations using standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization. TSA last visited the Caracas airport in January 2005 and those of Maracaibo and Valencia in November 2004. In September 2008, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) decided to post public notices at U.S. airports stating that TSA had been unable to assess the safety and security standards of Venezuelan airports; it also required carriers to notify passengers in writing of the situation.

Due to government-mandated foreign exchange controls and artificially low, regulated ticket prices, domestic Venezuelan airlines have financial problems and may not be able to procure replacement parts and pay for regular repairs. Industry analysts estimate that of the 96 aircraft in the domestic fleet, only 43 are in service. Delays and flight cancellations are common in the domestic airline industry. When traveling with a Venezuelan airline carrier, travelers should review the airlines' safety records prior to use. Some serious incidents have occurred in recent years. For example, on March 22, 2010, a light airplane crashed due to engine failure in the northern residential area of Guarapiche, leaving seven dead. On August 23, 2011, a Laser Airlines flight was forced to return to the airport due to electrical problems in the cabin. On September 26, 2011, an Aeropostal passenger plane sustained substantial damage in a hard-landing accident at Puerto Ordaz Airport. Upon landing, the airplane touched down brusquely, causing both engine mounts to break from the fuselage. No serious injuries were reported. In another incident that same day, an Acerca Airlines DC-9 made an emergency landing after smoke was detected in the cabin.

Kidnappings

Kidnappings -- whether traditional, express, or virtual -- are a growing industry in Venezuela. Because groups that specialize in these crimes operate without fear of incarceration, entrepreneurial criminals operate freely. Statisticians and police have openly stated that only 20-30 percent of all kidnappings get reported to the police. In 2009, reported kidnappings



more than doubled from the previous year; an alarming 9.2 incidents of kidnapping per 100,000 inhabitants in Venezuela were reported.

Express kidnappings are a serious problem in Venezuela. Express kidnappings involved criminals forcing their victims to extract daily cash limits from ATM machines or credit cards until the card was shut off. Draining bank accounts was done while driving the victim around the city for several hours. However, changes in Venezuelan law restricting daily withdrawal amounts made this practice less lucrative. It has become more common for criminals to drive victims around for several hours to disorient them and allow time for family and friends to arrange ransom payments. There are reports of ransoms ranging from a few thousand dollars to US\$50,000. As opposed to traditional long-term kidnappings, express kidnappings last less than 48 hours. The Venezuelan government does not report kidnapping statistics, but kidnap-for-ransom rates in Caracas have risen significantly in recent years. According to data released by the Venezuelan government's Scientific, Criminal, and Forensic Investigation Agency (CICPC), 1,150 people were held hostage in 2011 in Venezuela. However, CICPC has openly stated that only 20 percent of all kidnappings get reported to the police. The NGO Venezuelan Violence Observatory claims that 9,000 to 16,000 kidnappings occur annually. Five abductions took place in Caracas every day during the last quarter of the 2011, police sources said. In March 2012, the U.S. Embassy in Caracas sent guidance to American citizens on how to react in express kidnapping situations.

Another common practice is for kidnapers to follow potential victims into building garages and kidnap them at gunpoint. Kidnappings of U.S. citizens and other foreign nationals from homes, hotels, unauthorized taxis, and the airport terminal do occur and are more frequently being reported to the Embassy.

Use ATMs located inside banks or hotels, rather than those on the street.

Both "virtual kidnappings" and "inside kidnappings" have been reported to the Embassy. U.S. citizens should be alert to their surroundings and take necessary precautions. Virtual kidnappings involve scam surveyors who collect contact information on minors that is then used to call parents for ransoms without the children actually being taken. "Inside kidnappings" involve domestic employees being paid large sums of money for keys and information to enter and kidnap children for ransom.

Drug and Narcoterrorism

The presence of Colombian narcoterrorists along the border region is of particular concern. Cross-border violence -- to include kidnapping, drug trafficking, and smuggling -- occurs with



impunity. Venezuela is a major drug-transit country. Lack of international counternarcotics cooperation and a shift in the trafficking patterns in Venezuela has enabled a growing, illicit drug transshipment industry. Venezuela has become one of the preferred routes for trafficking illicit drugs out of Colombia. While the majority of narcotics continue to pass through Venezuela to the U.S., a rapidly increasing percentage has begun to flow toward Europe. U.S. intelligence reports an increase of nine percent in cocaine volume departing Venezuela to other countries, from 130 metric tons in 2010 to 143 metric tons in 2011. The U.S. was the biggest importer of drugs in 2011, accounting for nearly 94 percent (134,394 metric tons). The movement of drugs has fueled the growth of crime and violence throughout Venezuela, evidenced by the continuing growth of violent crimes by organized criminal groups.

Police Response

Police support varies, both at the national and municipal levels. Police authorities cite a lack of resources, under-staffing, payroll issues, and lack of response by the judicial and correctional systems among the key reasons why response times are delayed and a significant number of criminals go unpunished. While municipal police are often tasked with responding to crimes, the national police are responsible for investigating and prosecuting the cases. Challenging infrastructure problems and prolific corruption within law enforcement and the judicial system continue to be important factors in crime response and prevention. Venezuelan law enforcement entities look for creative policing strategies to overcome these obstacles, e.g. community policing base stations, motorcycle and bicycle patrols, and augmented traditional foot and vehicle policing. The Minister of Justice announced that police were involved in 15 to 20 percent of crimes in 2009, the last year figures were reported.

A study released in February 2010 revealed that 91 percent of all homicides reported go unpunished. The small chance of being arrested for committing murder may be responsible for the increase in violent crime. According to police contacts, armed robberies and assaults increased by 20 percent and 18 percent, respectively, during the first two months of 2012, compared with 2011 figures.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

While investigative follow-up is intermittent and perpetrators of crime are rarely caught, the police will generally respond to an emergency situation. While police harassment is not common with foreigners, you should report any incidents of harassment to American Citizen Services at the U.S. Embassy (contact information below).



Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime, and Local Police Telephone Numbers

If you are a victim of a crime, immediately contact local police by dialing 171, the designated local emergency response number.

Medical Emergencies

Contact Information for Local Hospitals and Clinics

Medical care at private hospitals and clinics is generally considered to be good. Cash payment is usually required in advance of medical care at private facilities or the patient will be referred to a public facility.

Public hospitals and clinics provide a lower standard of care and are often over-crowded and understaffed. At times, basic medical supplies are unavailable.

Long-term visitors should consider private ambulance service insurance because the public ambulance response services are unreliable.

Clinica El Avila
Av. San Juan Bosco, c/6ta. Transv.
Altamira Norte
Telephone: 276-1111
www.clinicaelavila.com

Centro Medico Docente La Trinidad
Ave. Intercomunal La Trinidad
Telephone: 949-6411
www.cmsit.edu.ve

Instituto Medico La Floresta
Ave. Principal de la Floresta and Fco.
Telephone: 209-6222
www.clinicallafloresta.com

Policlinica Metropolitana
Calle A-1, Caurimare



Telephone: 908-0100
www.pcm.com.ve

Clinica Urologica
Urb. Las Mercedes, Calle Chivacoa
San Roman
Telephone: 999-0111
www.urologico.com

Hospital de Clinicas Caracas
Av. Panteon con Av Alameda, San Bernardino
Telephone: 508-6111
www.clinicaracas.com

Centro Medico de Caracas
Av. Eraso, Plaza el Estanque
San Bernardino
Telephone: 555-9111
www.centromedicodecaracas.com.ve

Air Ambulance Services

AeroMed
Av. Libertador, Edf. Av. Libertador, PH-2B
Telephone: 761-6998

Aeroambulancias Silva
Av. Venezuela, Edf. EXA, PB Local 17
Telephone: 953-1195
www.aeroambulanciassilva.com.ve

Life Flight
Av. Orinoco C/Calle Mucuchies Centro Medico
Telephone: 992-3665
Lifeflight@cantv.net

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim



Visitors should practice common-sense preventative security techniques, just as they would in any large metropolitan city in the world where crime is prevalent.

Below are some of the more important tips visitors should follow to avoid becoming a potential crime victim.

- Do not carry or wear valuable items (such as jewelry and watches) that will attract the attention of thieves.
- Do not physically resist any robbery attempt. While this is a personal decision, statistics show that resistance is more likely to lead to severe consequences such as injury or death.
- Using public transportation is strongly discouraged, as buses and the subway pass through high-crime areas and are susceptible to robberies. In 2010, several public buses were stopped and robbed while on the road between Caracas and Simón Bolívar International Airport. All the occupants on board were robbed, and the drivers were killed. Criminals have begun to target subway platforms as well.
- Avoid using international credit cards while in Venezuela. Credit card fraud and scams have been reported to the Embassy, even at respected local restaurants and major hotel chains in Caracas. If travelers have to use a credit card, ensure that the credit card stays in your sight and remember to monitor the billing activity on that card for several months after you return home.
- Only use legitimate radio-dispatched taxis at designated taxi stands or have your hotel call one for you directly. Also, most centros comerciales (malls) have taxi stands, which have usually been reliable.
- Be aware of the street environment and avoid contact with those who may be looking for potential crime targets. Seek a safer location. Go into a store, bank, or simply cross the street and alter your route.
- Do not withdraw large amounts of cash from banks or ATM machines. If you need to withdraw a large sum of money, request a check. The Embassy has received reports of people who were targeted and robbed as they exited local banks.
- Use well-traveled, well-illuminated streets. Plan your routes before you leave for your final destination.

Corruption at the Simón Bolívar International Airport is rampant. Both arriving and departing travelers have been victims of personal property theft and muggings. The Embassy has received multiple, credible reports that individuals wearing what appear to be official uniforms or other credentials are involved in facilitating or perpetrating these crimes. All travelers should be wary of all strangers, even those in official uniforms or carrying official identification, and should not pack valuable items or documents in checked luggage. Documents and valuable personal items should be kept in carry-on luggage. The Embassy has also received multiple, credible reports of victims of “uniformed” airport officials attempting to extort money



from travelers as they go through the normal check-in and boarding process for departing flights. Furthermore, the embassy has received reports that known drug trafficking groups work from the airport. Local media reports indicate officers of the Venezuelan National Anti-Drugs Office (ONA) and CICPC routinely arrest travelers attempting to smuggle illegal drugs. Travelers should not accept packages from anyone and should keep their luggage with them at all times.

The road between the Simón Bolívar International Airport and Caracas is a notoriously dangerous road. Visitors traveling this route at night have been kidnapped and held captive for ransom in roadside huts that line the highway. Because of the frequency of robberies at gunpoint, travelers are encouraged to arrive to and depart from the airport only during daylight hours. If not possible, travelers should use extra care both in and outside the airport at night.

In October 2011, an Avianca Airlines flight crew was en route to the airport from the Marriott Playa Grande Hotel at approximately 5:30 a.m. As the shuttle was approaching the international terminal, three armed individuals boarded and demanded that the driver keep driving and circle the airport. The crew was robbed of jewelry, money, and electronic devices. Afterwards, they demanded that the driver let them off at a pedestrian bridge and escaped to the nearby neighborhood called Barrio Aeropuerto.

Areas to Avoid and Best Security Practices

Pickpockets and grab artists operate in greater Caracas. However, they are mostly active in the historic city center downtown: around the Plaza Simon Bolivar, near the Capitolio, in the Sabana Grande area, in the Parque Los Caobos, and at crowded bus and subway stations.

The crime threat in Caracas is critical due to the violence and frequency of criminal activity throughout Venezuela. Crime continues to be the principal threat to locals and visitors. Armed street robberies are common in Caracas and most cities in Venezuela. Victims have been robbed at gunpoint while walking on the street and while driving. The high volume of vehicular traffic, combined with the poor conditions of roads, has created major traffic problems within Caracas. Armed bandits patrolling the streets on motorcycles prey on potential victims waiting at traffic lights or stuck in heavy traffic. Keeping windows rolled up and doors locked and keeping valuables out of sight (to include iPods, cell phones, Blackberrys) are the best defenses against this type of random criminal activity.

The poor neighborhoods that cover the hills around Caracas are extremely dangerous. These areas are seldom patrolled by police and should be avoided.



Further Information

U.S. organizations are encouraged to contact the Regional Security Office (RSO) in Caracas for specific inquiries concerning the local security situation. Information is also available from the active OSAC Country Council operating in Caracas.

In the event of an emergency during business hours (8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.), the U.S. Embassy operator can assist American travelers in contacting the American Citizen Services officers in the consular section. After business hours, on weekends, and holidays, the U.S. Embassy Marine Security Guard can assist American travelers in contacting the Embassy's duty officer to inform the embassy about their emergency. The Embassy duty officer may be able to assist in emergency situations only. All other, routine calls should be placed during regular business hours.

United States Embassy Caracas
Calle F con Calle Suapure
Urb. Colinas de Valle Arriba
Caracas, Venezuela

The Embassy telephone switchboard number is (58) (212) 975-6411.
The American Citizen Services section may be reached at (58) (212) 907-8581.

OSAC Country Council

Oscar D. Trujillo
Phone (58) (212) 957-2222 Ext. 6003
Fax (58) (212) 957-6204
e-mail: oscar.trujillo@marriotthotels.com