



## Travel Warning: Mauritania

Travel Health and Safety

Africa > Mauritania > Nouakchott

11/30/2012

The U.S. Department of State warns U.S. citizens of the risks of traveling to Mauritania, and urges extreme caution for those who choose to travel to Mauritania, because of activities by terrorist groups in the region, including al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). AQIM continues to demonstrate its intent and ability to conduct attacks against foreign nationals, including U.S. citizens. This replaces the Travel Warning for Mauritania, issued May 24, 2012, to update information on security incidents and remind travelers of security concerns.

The U.S. Embassy in Nouakchott recommends against all non-essential travel to the border regions of Guidimagha, the Hodh El Charghi and Hodh El Gharbi regions of southeastern Mauritania, the eastern half of the Assaba region (east of Kiffa), the eastern half of the Tagant region (east of Tidjika), the eastern half of the Adrar region (east of Chinguetti), and the Zemmour region of northern Mauritania because of the security risk and the threat of kidnapping to Westerners by terrorist groups.

As noted in the Department of State's Worldwide Caution, AQIM has been designated as a terrorist organization by both the United States and the European Union.

As a result of perceived Western involvement in counterterrorism efforts, AQIM has declared its intention to attack Western targets. AQIM attempts at retaliatory attacks against Western targets of opportunity cannot be discounted. While anti-terrorist military intervention has

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pushed terrorist operations to the Malian border regions, AQIM-affiliated support systems for logistics and information remain present in Mauritania. Additionally, the rebellion and subsequent coup in Mali has given terrorist groups the opportunity to establish territorial claims in the contested region of northern Mali. This, coupled with the influx of tens of thousands of Malian refugees into Mauritania, presents additional safety and security concerns.

AQIM and terrorists believed to be affiliated with AQIM have been operating in Mauritania since at least 2005. Actions include kidnapping and murder of Western tourists, aid workers, and Mauritanian soldiers, as well as attacks on foreign diplomatic missions in Mauritania. This culminated in the June 2009 attempted kidnapping and murder of a private U.S. citizen in the capital city of Nouakchott.

While there have been no known direct attempts against U.S. citizens since 2009, AQIM continues to threaten Westerners. A French citizen was kidnapped in southwest Mali, near the border with Mauritania, on November 20, 2012. AQIM has also focused its actions on Mauritanian military installations and personnel. The Mauritanian military continues to actively engage in action against AQIM elements, particularly along the border regions with Mali.

In August 2010, a suicide bomber attacked a Mauritanian military barracks in Nema. In February 2011, Mauritanian security forces successfully prevented a car bombing in the capital city, Nouakchott, by intercepting and destroying a vehicle containing large quantities of explosives. In July 2011, AQIM attacked a military base in Bassiknou, near Nema, in southeastern Mauritania. In December 2011, AQIM abducted a Mauritanian gendarme from his post near the eastern border with Mali.

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As a result of safety and security concerns, some NGOs, private aid organizations, and Peace Corps withdrew staff and/or temporarily suspended operations in Mauritania. Peace Corps officially closed their program in July 2011. Faith-based organizations operating in Mauritania, regardless of location, may be particularly targeted.

Travel by U.S. Embassy staff members outside of Nouakchott requires advance approval from the U.S. Embassy's security office. Travel by U.S. Embassy staff is subject to cancellation at any time. Travel to the eastern half of Mauritania occurs only with Mauritanian government escorts.

U.S. citizens should remain aware of their surroundings at all times and maintain good personal security practices, including always locking their homes and cars, varying routes and times of travel, and maintaining a low profile by not drawing attention to themselves. When going out, they should avoid being part of large, highly visible groups of Westerners, and refrain from sitting in areas that are easily visible from the street when in restaurants or cafes.

U.S. citizens should be particularly alert when frequenting locales associated with Westerners, including hotels, cultural centers, social and recreation clubs, beach areas, and restaurants. Additionally, U.S. citizens should avoid demonstrations and highly publicized events/venues with no visible security presence.

U.S. citizens driving in Mauritania are reminded to heed warnings to stop at security checkpoints, and should be particularly vigilant when traveling by road outside of populated areas, even when traveling along main routes and highways. U.S. citizens should not venture outside urban areas unless in a convoy and accompanied by an experienced guide, and even then only if equipped with sturdy vehicles and ample provisions. Driving after dark outside of urban areas is strongly discouraged. There have been reports of banditry and smuggling in the more remote parts of Mauritania. Note also that landmines remain a danger along the

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border with the Western Sahara. Travelers should cross borders only at designated border posts.

The U.S. Embassy in Nouakchott strongly encourages U.S. citizens who travel to or remain in Mauritania despite this Travel Warning to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive the most up-to-date security information. Please keep all of your information in STEP current. It is important when enrolling or updating information to include multiple phone numbers and email addresses to facilitate communication in the event of an emergency.

U.S. citizens should consult the Country Specific Information sheet for the Republic of Mauritania and the Worldwide Caution, both located on the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs website. Follow us on Twitter and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on Facebook as well. If you don't have internet access, current information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States, or for callers from other countries, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

The U.S. Embassy is located between the Presidency building and the Spanish Embassy on Rue Abdallaye. The postal address is B.P. 222, Nouakchott, telephone (222) 4-525-2660/2663, 4-525-1141/1145, or 4-525-3038, and fax (222) 4-525-1592. For after-hours emergencies, please call (222) 4-525-3288 or visit the U.S. Embassy Nouakchott web site. In the event of an emergency that interrupts mobile phone (SMS) or Internet communication in Mauritania, U.S. citizens may call the Embassy's dedicated Consular emergency recording at (222) 4-525-3707 to receive the most up-to-date instructions.

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