



Madagascar 2013 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Coup d'etats; Floods; Extreme heat/drought; Hurricanes; Maritime; Improvised Explosive Device; Elections; Disease Outbreak; Bribery; Theft; Burglary

Africa > Madagascar > Antananarivo

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The biggest crime threat to Americans is petty theft, though more serious crimes such as home invasions continue to occur, especially in areas with limited police or gendarme presence. Current political instability since a coup in 2009, the installation of a transitional government soon after, and the uncertainty of future elections, combined with the deteriorated economic situation have resulted in an increase in crimes in 2012, particularly violent and brazen crimes. The second half of the year resulted in a reduction of protests against the government, but as long as the economic situation continues to deteriorate, the possibility for civil disturbances remains high.

Most crimes coming to the attention of the RSO involving American citizens have been thefts and personal robberies. There have been incidental reports of harassment by police attempting to extort bribes. While there have been numerous reports of residential break-ins and home invasions in 2012, the majority appear to be perpetrated by Malagasy-on-Malagasy households, though a small number of victims were foreigners. Accurate government statistics are not available. The RSO maintains a crime database based on local news reports, post incidents, and incidents reported by American citizens in country.

Skilled pickpockets are very active in downtown Antananarivo. Although they primarily target jewelry or mobile phones, identification papers have also been stolen. Since these crimes are primarily for financial gains, there have been no reports of reusing identification for other crimes or reasons.

Overall Road Safety Situation

Road conditions range from minimally acceptable to terrible. Within Antananarivo, the roads are relatively well-maintained, but drivers have to compete with cattle, human-propelled carts, scooters, and "taxi-be" buses, any of which may swerve or stop at a moment's notice. The



roads in most other major cities show signs of wear, including potholes and other obstructions. Power and phone lines may block roads or intersections for days or weeks before being moved or repaired. Many vehicles do not meet minimal safety standards and lack working lights. Further, certain roads in Antananarivo have restrictions on tractor trailers during the day. These trucks use the roads at night and do not always follow the traffic rules.

Accidents, while frequent, are usually not fatal, unless scooters or motorbikes are involved.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Madagascar has suffered through numerous coups, some of which toppled existing governments and led to new elections. Most of the regime changes were peaceful by African standards, but all involved violence to a certain degree, most notably the most recent one in 2009. The current regime was briefly challenged in a November 2010 coup attempt. The U.S. government does not recognize the current regime, the High Transitional Authority, which came to power in a coup in 2009. In November 2011, the regime reconstituted itself as a "Government of National Unity" following the September 17 signing of a "Roadmap for Ending the Crisis in Madagascar" brokered by the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Most terrorist acts, such as the detonation of explosive devices, can be linked directly to political violence. The most recent bomb detonation was in August 2012 when a small bomb attached to the vehicle of a military officer exploded, injuring four people, in the city center. To date, none of these attacks have targeted American interests, though some French interests have been targeted.

Chinese organized crime has penetrated Madagascar, to include likely money laundering, heroin trafficking and related illicit activity.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Wanted Comoran terrorist Harun Fazul reportedly had been sighted in Madagascar on numerous occasions, prompting a concerted "Rewards for Justice" campaign to track him down. Since his death in Somalia in June 2011, Madagascar has not figured prominently as a transit point or domicile for national or international terrorists.

Civil Unrest



Due to the regime's perceived lack of legitimacy and the deteriorating economic situation, there is a constant possibility of civil unrest. In November 2010, a group of military officers attempted a coup, but the regime remained in power. At that time, there were controlled rallies and protests, though some devolved into violence, including one that resulted in the burning of vehicles and buildings and the detonation of small explosive devices in the capital.

The possibility of civil unrest continues to grow. There were no major incidents in 2012, though there were several minor ones, including a demonstration in May that required dispersal through the use of tear gas by the police and gendarmes. The Embassy did receive reports that live fire was used as well. 2012 started in a similar fashion with protests. An attempted mutiny at the Ivato Antananarivo in July resulted in the closure of the airport until the threat had passed.

Political instability, the possibility of food and gas shortages, the risk of natural catastrophes such as cyclones and disease, persistent rumors of possible coups, and scheduled elections in May indicate that 2013 will likely involve some level of civil unrest.

Religious or Ethnic Violence

Although protests and demonstrations had been sporadic throughout the year, a large disturbance in November 2011 (related to an alleged dispute between an individual of Chinese descent and a Malagasy) led to a crowd of over 6,000 people that the security services dispersed with tear gas. Malagasy are generally Christians with a small minority of Malagasy practicing moderate Islam, typically on the coasts. Madagascar typically does not experience issues related to religion or ethnicity.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Cyclones originating from the Strait of Mozambique or the Indian Ocean are distinct possibilities. Madagascar started 2012 with Tropical Storm Chanda battering its west coast and category 4 Cyclone Giovanna battering the east coast and crossing the island. In addition, flooding and draughts, which are not uncommon, are linked to other environmental issues, such as the spread of disease and swarms of locusts.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents



There is very little industry, although there has been modest growth in the mining and exploration sector. RSO has not received any reports about major industrial accidents.

Transportation accidents are commonplace, due to poor road and vehicle conditions.

Regional Travel Concerns and Restricted Travel Areas/Zones

The only Embassy restriction is that travel between towns on the country roads may not occur after dark or before dawn, due to the presence of animals on the road, poor road conditions, and the threat of violent crime by bandits and gangs.

Drug -related Crimes

Madagascar is a transit country for illegal narcotics but has no reported incidents of narco-violence.

Kidnapping Threats

Kidnapping for ransom is an issue for wealthy Malagasy and the Indian-Pakistani community. These kidnappings usually end with a ransom paid by family members and the safe release of the victim. To date, no Americans have been kidnapped for ransom.

Police Response

Although police and gendarme responses to an incident involving a foreigner are normally taken seriously and dealt with quickly, there are reports indicating a failure of law enforcement to respond when called. This is primarily due to the lack of staffing, training, and funding for the police/gendarmerie and reflects the broader economic deterioration of the country. Due to the lack of resources and equipment available, police and gendarme response to victims of a crime is often limited, slow, or nonexistent. The likelihood of the security forces responding to an incident would depend on availability of personnel and gasoline for vehicles. Most police officers only speak Malagasy or at best minimal French and rarely speak English.

Organized crime is not a major issue, due to poverty and lack of education, though there are reports that a wide-range of mid-level and senior military and government officials are involved in illegal activities, specifically cattle rustling in the south of the island. In addition, there have been allegations of security forces using their official weapons to conduct home invasions or loaning their weapons to criminal elements to do so on their behalf. At the upper



levels, senior government officials have been linked to the smuggling of raw materials, including gems, endangered animals, and rosewood.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

The extra-judicial killing of a judge by police officers at the end of 2011 exacerbated an already tense situation.

The Embassy has received reports of police harassment, primarily in the form of solicitation for bribes related to traffic stops or while walking in public areas. Pretenses such as stopping people in vehicles for incorrect data or visa paperwork is occasionally used as leverage to obtain bribes, but in some reported cases the police simply asked for “cadeaux,” or gifts. Harassment is not uncommon, but is typically related to bribe requests. RSO recommends not paying any bribes unless threatened and to report incidents of detention or harassment to the Consular Section immediately.

Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime

The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line is 117. The police can be reached in Antananarivo at 020-22-227-35 and 020-22-281-70. The Embassy recommended you use these numbers only if you speak Malagasy or French. The number for the U.S. Embassy in Antananarivo is 020-23-480-00 or 033-443-2000.

Various Police/Security Agencies

In major cities, the National Police is charged with maintaining peace and security. Outside of major cities, the Gendarmerie is primarily responsible for these duties.

Medical Emergencies

There is minimal medical care available, especially outside city centers. Madagascar has emergency numbers (117 – police, 118 – fire) set up, but for medical emergencies it is better to know where local hospitals are and have direct numbers to call.

Some hospitals, such as the Polyclinic d’Ilafy in Antananarivo, provide ambulance services. Ambulance services are available in Antananarivo with Assistance Plus at 032-07-801-10 or 020-22-487-47; Polyclinique d’Ilafy at 022-425-73 or 033-11-458-48; Espace Medical at 020-22-625-66 or 020-22-481-73 or 034-05-625-66; and CDU (Centre de Diagnostic Medical



d'Urgences) at 020-22-329-56. However, due to traffic jams, response times are often dangerously slow.

Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics

Each city has independent hospitals and clinics. For emergencies in Antananarivo, the Polyclinic d'Ilafy Behoririka at 020-22-425-66 is centrally located and provides a variety of emergency services.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Assistance Plus (Tel: 032-07-801-10) is the most reliable air ambulance company located close to the airport. They have their own planes and can quickly evacuate to Reunion Island or South Africa. They can be called to visit a tourist in their hotel room to assess and stabilize them with 24/7 coverage until the person recovers or can be evacuated. They can also facilitate remote rescues from any part of the island.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/madagascar.htm>

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Crimes/Scams

The biggest problem likely to affect visitors will be pickpocketing and minor theft while walking through markets and other crowds.

Areas to be Avoided and Best Security Practices

Visitors should take normal precautions in wearing limited or no jewelry or carrying high cost electronic items (iPods, digital cameras, or high-end cell phones), carrying only the items necessary, and locking vehicle doors and driving with the windows up when moving around town--particularly around Avenue de l'Independence--and travel in groups. Valuable items should never be left in an unattended vehicle or at a hotel (unless locked in the hotel safe). Walking at night, whether alone or in a group, is not considered safe in urban areas, including in the vicinity of Western-standard hotels, restaurants, and night clubs in Antananarivo. Visitors are strongly discouraged from traveling outside of cities after dark, due to banditry,



lack of lighting, poor road conditions, and lack of security assets.

U.S. Embassy personnel travel throughout the country practicing solid security practices. While traveling in vehicles, remember to lock your doors and keep your windows rolled up at all times. Four-wheel-drive vehicles are strongly recommended, especially for travel outside major cities. Nighttime driving is hazardous and is not allowed for Embassy personnel outside of the major cities. Although usage of taxis is discouraged, if you do use taxis, select taxis from well-lit areas, ensure that taxis have a minimum of safety equipment, negotiate the rate before departure, do not enter a taxi that already has other people in it, and do not enter any taxis unless you feel comfortable with the driver.

Large crowds are volatile and should be avoided. In Antananarivo, they have formed near the Presidential Palace, along Avenue de l'Indépendance, and near Lake Behoririka. The 67th Hectare in Antananarivo is the site of Malagasy-on-Malagasy violence from time to time and can be dangerous. Areas outside tourist areas, both in downtown Antananarivo and elsewhere in Madagascar, should be avoided at night.

Embassy personnel are encouraged to keep a supply of water and food in their homes, as most businesses close in anticipation of storms, and supplies become scarce very quickly during emergencies.

U.S. Embassy/Consulate Location and Contact Information

Embassy/Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located at Lot 207 A, Point Liberty, Andranoro-Antehiroka, Antananarivo (105), Madagascar. The mailing address is B.P. 5253, Antananarivo (105) Madagascar; the telephone number is 020-23-480-00; the fax number is 020-23-480-35. Public hours are Monday through Thursday from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM and Fridays from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

Embassy/Consulate Contact Numbers

RSO: 033-443-2254

Embassy/Consulate Operator: 020-23-480-00 or 033-443-2000

ACS (after hours number): 020-23-480-00 or 033-443-2000

Marine Post One: 020-23-480-00 or 033-443-2407

OSAC Country Council Information



Madagascar does not have an OSAC Country Council.