India 2013 Crime and Safety Report: Chennai

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Threats; Anti-American sentiment; Religious Terrorism; Bombing; Left-wing; Separatist violence; Insurgencies; Stolen items; Religious Violence; Floods; Information Security; Improvised Explosive Device; Hotels; Financial Security; Faith-based Organization; Employee Health Safety; Economic Espionage; Disease Outbreak; Cyber; Theft; Rape/Sexual Violence; Murder; Burglary; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Kidnapping; Extortion; Fraud

South Central Asia > India > Bangalore; South Central Asia > India > Chennai

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This report focuses on the Chennai AOR (area of responsibility), which includes the states and territories of: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, Andaman, and Nicobar Islands. For information on other states, please refer to the reports submitted by Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, and New Delhi.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The greater Chennai metropolitan area contains approximately eight million people, making it the fourth largest urban area in India.

Petty crime, especially theft of personal property, is common, particularly on trains or buses. Pickpockets can be very adept, and women have reported having their bags snatched, purse- straps cut, or the bottom of their purses slit without their knowledge.
Southern India is known for being conservative and traditional. Western women report incidents of verbal and physical harassment by men. Known locally as “eve-teasing,” these incidents can be quite frightening. While India is generally safe for foreign visitors, rape continues to be the fastest growing crime. Government studies show a 9.2 percent increase during 2011 over the previous year in rape cases nationwide. Although most victims have been local residents, recent sexual attacks against female visitors in tourist areas underline that foreign women are also at risk and should exercise vigilance. The Consulate notes that country-wide, crimes of violence against women are estimated to be significantly underreported.

Criminal acts commonly occur at local markets and tourist areas. Foreigners are favorable targets because they often carry a considerable amount of cash and are easily distracted by the sites.

Some vendors sell carpets, jewelry, gemstones, or other expensive items that may not be of the quality promised.

Violent crime, especially directed against foreigners, has traditionally been uncommon.

TAMIL NADU STATE
In an April 2012 media report, the Home Department of the Tamil Nadu state assembly reported that besides family quarrels and personal disputes, “love affairs and sexual causes” were the major reasons behind the 1,747 homicides committed in 2011. The specific homicide causes listed are: family quarrels (440); wordy [sic] quarrel (325); personal enmity (421); and love affairs and sexual causes (347). For comparison, the state of Tamil Nadu recorded 1,715 homicides in 2010. The 2012 annual crime report is expected to be made available in April 2013.

Chennai


Chennai had 76 reported rapes. (For comparison, New Delhi reported 572 rapes although actual numbers are expected to be higher as many cases are suspected to go unreported.)

Two daylight bank robberies were reported from Chennai in 2013. The first happened on January 23, when four armed men entered a Bank of Baroda branch near Perungudi and stole approximately Rs. 1,900,000. On February 20, another bank robbery took place in a branch of the Indian Overseas Bank at Keelkattalai. The four armed men who entered the branch got away with approximately Rs. 1,400,000. On February 23, the five people suspected to be behind the armed bank robberies were killed in an early morning police encounter with the Chennai police.
Chennai reported 20 dowry deaths.

Coimbatore District

As many as 271 burglary and robbery cases in the Coimbatore district (comprising Coimbatore rural and city police limits) were reported in 2011, the fourth highest in Tamil Nadu. Of the 271, 169 were robbery cases, which is the third highest in the state.

According to the NCRB report, the Coimbatore district had the lowest figures with only 65 homicides recorded.

Coimbatore reported only three dowry deaths.

Coimbatore district also had fewer reports of crimes against women: 14 rape cases in 2011.

Salem

Salem, a much smaller economic center, had 58 reported rapes. According to the NCRB,
Salem recorded 98 homicides and Tirunelveli 116.

Dowry deaths were much higher in cities like Madurai (106) and Salem (135).

KARNATAKA STATE

In 2011, 1,820 homicides were reported in Karnataka state. Bangalore listed 232, followed by Belgaum (136), Bangalore district (105), Tumkur (101), Gulbarga (93), Ramanagaram (75), and Mandya (71). Fewer slayings were reported in Kolar Gold Fields (14), Udupi (22), and Mangalore city (22).

In a separate 2011 study by the Karnataka State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB), Mangalore city had the overall highest crime rate. Nevertheless, this is a decline in the incidences of crime in the state compared to the previous year. The data pertains to crimes registered under the provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) like murder, robbery, dacoity (the Hindi term for robbery by a band or gang), and rape. This does not include crime covered by special laws like those related to dowry, money-lending, passports, arms, and explosives. The internal state-led study covered the four police commissionerates and all the districts within the state. In all, 137,600 IPC cases were reported from the state (In 2010, the total reported cases were 142,322.). The highest crime rate was reported from Mangalore city, followed by Bangalore city, Mysore city, and Hubli-Dharwad. In terms of quantity, Bangalore city reported the most (32,954) IPC cases, followed by Mysore city (3,354), Hubli-Dharwad (2,445), and Mangalore city (2,821). Bangalore also accounted for 22 percent of the total crimes in the state.
The detailed crime statistics for 2011, published annually by the NCRB, reveal that Karnataka’s crime rate (crimes registered per 100,000) has declined. In real terms, the quantity of crimes reported decreased from 242 in 2010 to 225 in 2011. In fourth position after Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka accounts for 6.7 percent of the total number of crimes reported in the country for 2011. When compared to the national average of 192.2, Karnataka’s reported 225 crimes is high for national averages.

Bangalore

Bangalore maintains a tenth of the State’s population and has a crime rate of 356.3 per 100,000 residents. Overall, Bangalore ranks 16 among the 53 cities surveyed in terms of quantity of cases registered. Ahead are New Delhi, Kanpur, and Mumbai which have accounted for 9.9 percent, 7.3 percent and 6.7 percent of the 475,000 cognizable crimes reported in 2011 under the Indian Penal Code. Bangalore has reported the highest incidence of cheating (3,155 cases), robbery (783 cases), and ‘preparation and assembly for dacoity’ (342 cases) among the larger cities.

Among the 53 cities surveyed by the NCRB for reported crimes against women including rape, Bangalore accounted for 5.6 percent (1,890).

Of the 214 dacoity (robbery by a band or gang) crimes in the state, Bangalore city accounted for the most with 43, followed by Bangalore district (18), Tumkur and Ramangaram districts (13 each), and Shimoga, Hassan, and Mysore districts (10 each). Kolar Gold Fields, Davanagere, Udupi, and Karwar accounted for a dacoity each, while no such incident was reported in Dharwad and Gadag districts.
As to robberies, Bangalore city reported 783 of the 2,123 cases registered in the state. Following the state capital were Mysore city (196), Hassan (99), Tumkur (89), Belgaum (83), Gulbarga (83), and Bangalore district (81). Gadag and Yadgir districts accounted for seven robberies, Dharwad six, and Karwar two.

In cases of house break-in thefts (HBT), the pattern was similar. Of the 6,136 burglaries in Karnataka, Bangalore city accounted for 1,313, followed by Mandya (307), Hassan (290), Belgaum (284), Bangalore district (277), Tumkur (248), and Gulbarga (252).

Karnataka is also facing a new challenge of dealing with cyber crimes (Cyber crimes include obscene publications/transmissions in electronic form, such as derogatory comments on social networking sites, and reports of this category of cyber crime have increased 51 percent nationwide.), with Bangalore continuing to see a rapid rise in the numbers in the past four years. According to police, the state registered 26 cyber crimes in 2009, 144 in 2010, 240 in 2011, and 388 in the first 11 months of 2012. Bangalore city topped the list with 268 cyber crimes reported through October 30, 2012 as compared to 102 registered cases in 2010. Udupi and Mysore came in second with 13 cyber crimes each.

KERALA STATE

Kerala’s statistics for 2011 include 365 murder cases, 1,132 rape cases, 71 dacoity cases, and robbery cases 741.
In Kochi, jewelry snatching incidents have increased by 40 percent in 2011 compared with 2010. Over the last three years, a total of 115 cases have been reported in the city.

**Overall Road Safety Situation**

Roads in Chennai are in moderately good condition, but the city’s infrastructure struggles to keep pace with its rapid growth. There is traffic congestion throughout Chennai. Accidents are common due to lack of traffic enforcement and general disregard for traffic laws by undisciplined, aggressive motorists. Driving in Chennai can be highly stressful and difficult for most foreigners to adjust to safely. Surveyors found that motorists in Chennai drive in desperation and hurry. The city lacks basic facilities such as pedestrian crossings, grade crossings, and pavements on many roads, compared to smaller cities such as Bhubaneswar and Pune. Low scores in motorist behavior and availability of crossings reflect the time it takes to cross a road, which also ranks it as dangerous. On certain roads, it takes more than seven minutes to cross because there are no traffic signals and motorists blatantly disregard traffic laws and signals.

According to the results of a comparative study on ‘Walk-ability in Indian Cities’, by the Delhi-based Clean Air Initiative (CAI), Chennai pedestrians are at a high risk. The study gives Chennai an overall score of 40 out of 100, behind all other cities surveyed, including Indore (42), Surat (43), Bangalore (45), Bhubaneswar (50), and Pune (54). The study took nine parameters into consideration: motorist behavior, grade crossing safety, availability of crossing, security from crime, availability of walking path, and disability infrastructure. Chennai scored the lowest or second lowest on six parameters, including disability infrastructure, motorist behavior, grade crossing and walk-ability. The ratings directly point to lack of safety.
for the city’s pedestrians, many of whom feel intimidated and threatened by motorists, said researchers.

Outside major cities, main roads and other roads are often poorly maintained and congested. Even main roads frequently have only two lanes, with poor visibility and inadequate warning markers. On the few divided highways, one can expect to meet local transportation traveling in the wrong direction, often without lights. Heavy traffic is normal and includes (but is not limited to) overloaded trucks and buses, scooters, pedestrians, bullock and camel carts, horse or elephant riders en route to weddings, bicycles, and free-roaming livestock.

Travel by road in Chennai is dangerous. The biggest concern for Chennai’s road users seems to be accidents. According to statistics in the recently released report, “Accidental Death and Suicides in India” (ADSI 2011), prepared by the National Crime Records Bureau, Chennai recorded 9,845 road accidents in 2011. This was the highest among 53 cities in the country and has almost doubled from 5,123 in 2010. Following Chennai is Delhi, a distant second with 6,065 road accidents, and Bangalore with 6,031. Some 1,399 lives were lost in road mishaps in Chennai, while Delhi recorded 1,679 fatalities. Accidents on Chennai’s roads left 7,898 persons—6,280 males and 1,618 females— injured. Records indicate that motorcycle riders made up a major share of the cases. Motorcyclists were followed by commercial trucks, cars, private buses, and vans. Some 112 road accidents involved government vehicles and one involved a bicycle, according to the report.

A preliminary 2012 report says Chennai city has more deaths in traffic accidents than any other city in the country. According to traffic police statistics, 1,390 people died in road accidents in Chennai in 2012. The same report has New Delhi and Bangalore as a distant second and third, with Chennai recording 40 percent more deaths than the other metropolitan cities.
Traffic moves on the left. It is important to be alert while crossing streets and intersections, especially after dark as traffic is coming in the "wrong" direction. Travelers should remember to use seatbelts in both rear and front seats where available and to ask their drivers to maintain a safe speed. One should exercise extreme caution when crossing streets even in marked pedestrian areas and try to use only cars that have seat belts. Seat belts are not common in public transport. Helmets should always be worn on motorcycles and bicycles.

Accidents were also highest between March and September. Other major cities in Tamil Nadu do not compare to Chennai as far as road incidents are concerned. Coimbatore reported 1,131 cases while Madurai recorded 685 and Trichy 781. Travel at night is particularly hazardous. Statistics in the report infer that motorists should be more vigilant during dark hours as the largest numbers of accidents occur between 9 pm and midnight (1,626), although “rush hour” between 3 pm and 6 pm comes close (1,614).

In order to drive, you must have either a valid Indian driver’s license or a valid international driver’s license. Because of difficult road and traffic conditions, travelers may wish to consider hiring a local driver. The safest driving policy is to assume that other drivers will not respond to a traffic situation in the same way you would in the United States. Also, “might makes right”, and buses and trucks epitomize this fact. For instance, buses and trucks often run red lights and merge directly into traffic at yield points and traffic circles. Cars, motorcycles, auto-rickshaws, bicycles, and pedestrians operate with only a bit more caution but are just as aggressive as any other vehicle operator. Use your horn or flash your headlights frequently to announce your presence. It is both customary and wise.
If a driver hits a pedestrian or a cow, the vehicle and its occupants are at risk of being attacked by passersby. Such attacks pose significant risk of injury or death to the vehicle’s occupants or at least of incineration of the vehicle. It can be unsafe to remain at the scene of an accident of this nature, and drivers may wish to seek out the nearest police station.

One common complaint is that the transport department will not cancel a single driver’s license despite traffic police taking formal action. The department has, in the past three years, cancelled the licenses of only two of the 478 motorists that the traffic police recommended action against. During the same period, only 12 motorists lost their licenses for drunken driving though the traffic police sought action against 391 people. Additionally, police may only request license revocation after a court pronounces a final verdict against an individual, which on average takes several years.

Vehicle thefts are infrequent, but proper security measures should be taken. Vehicles should be locked at all times. For the third consecutive year, the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu has registered the highest number of vehicle thefts. There were 450 cases reported, compared to Chennai’s 425.

For bicyclists, Tamil Nadu’s roads are considered quite dangerous. 1,412 cyclists--an average of four a day--died in accidents throughout the state in 2011, the second highest number of fatalities among all states in the country. Only Uttar Pradesh, with 2,338 deaths, recorded a larger number of cyclist fatalities on the road last year. A total of 6,824 cyclists died in accidents across the country in 2011.

Buses and trams are overcrowded and poorly maintained. Crime is covert, and pick-pocketing of patrons using public buses is common. Reports of harassment of women on crowded
buses are also common. The Consulate has also received a number of anecdotal reports of women being improperly touched and harassed on buses. Buses, patronized by millions of Indians, are the only available public transportation for many, but the safety record is dismal. They are usually driven fast, recklessly, and without consideration for the rules of the road. Accidents are quite common. In Chennai, on June 27, 2012, a Metropolitan Transport Corporation bus carrying 39 passengers was speeding around a sharp curve and smashed through the concrete railing on the ramp of Gemini Flyover and tumbled onto the road below. On July 25, 2012, a six-year old girl fell through a hole in her school bus. She was killed when she was run over by the rear wheels of the bus. On December 10, 2012, four schoolboys were fatally crushed when caught between a speeding city bus and a truck. The boys were hanging on to the bus’s rear footboard, when the bus passed the truck. Police said the bus driver failed to factor in the passengers hanging from the rear footboard.

Trains are safer than buses, but train accidents still occur more frequently than in other countries. Theft aboard trains along popular tourist routes has occurred.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The 2012 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace, has ranked India as the fourth most ‘terror affected’ from 158 nations (Iraq was ranked number one, followed by Pakistan and Afghanistan. Yemen placed fifth.). The GTI ranks the countries based on the number of terror incidents, number of fatalities resulting from terrorism, total number of injuries sustained in terror strikes, and estimated damage to property as a...
result of terror attacks.

Terrorist attacks have targeted public places frequented by the general public (including Westerners) such as hotels, trains, train stations, markets, courthouses, mosques, sporting events, and restaurants. Attacks have mostly taken place during the busy evening hours in crowded places but can occur at any time. In May 2008, several coordinated terrorist attacks occurred throughout India, to include New Delhi. And the November 26 attack in Mumbai resulted in over 170 people killed, including six U.S. citizens.

Anti-Western terrorist groups, some on the U.S. government's list of foreign terrorist organizations, are active in India, including Islamist extremist groups such as Harakat ul-Mujahidin, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, and Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami. The U.S. government continues to receive information that terrorist groups are planning attacks that could take place in locations throughout India.

There continues to be concern regarding violence from indigenous Islamic radical groups, most notably the Indian Mujahideen (IM), which is believed to be a compilation of native Indians belonging to various groups (Student Islamic Movement of India and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba). IM has been implicated in a number of attacks, including the December 2010 bombing in Varanasi and the serial bombing attacks in Delhi in September 2008.

Terrorist and terrorist-related incidents in 2012 included:

January 30: police defused a home-made bomb on a railway track toward Tambaram, Chennai.
May 1: a low intensity bomb attached to a bicycle went off at Sree Ram temple complex in Madurai.

June 14: police recovered 12 bombs from an unused plot in Kannur, Kerala, near Taha Auditorium in Thazhe Chockli.

July 9: police seized a home-made bomb from a house in Kotturpuram, Chennai.

November 2: police found a high intensity bomb planted inside a ‘cave-like’ structure between the Kasi Viswanatha shrine and the Hazrath Sulthan Sikkanathar Badusha Dargarh atop the Thiruparankundram hill, located nearly 10 km from Madurai city.

Tamil Nadu has experienced a number of terrorist attacks, including the detonation of a small bomb under the Gemini Flyover near the U.S. Consulate in January 1998 and a series of 19 bomb explosions in Coimbatore a month later.

In April 2010, two bombs exploded outside a cricket stadium in Bangalore, Karnataka, as crowds headed into the facility to attend an Indian Cricket League match. The two explosions injured 10 people and blew out a portion of the outer wall.

Maoist extremist groups, or “Naxalites,” are active in east central, and some sporadic activity has been reported pockets in south India (Karnataka), primarily in rural areas. The Naxalites are active from eastern Maharashtra and northern Andhra Pradshesh through western West Bengal. They are particularly active in rural parts of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand and in border regions of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Orissa. The Naxalites have a long history of conflict with state and national authorities, including frequent attacks on local police, paramilitary forces, and government officials and are responsible for more terrorist attacks in the country than any other
organization. Their campaign of violence and intimidation is on-going. Naxalites have not specifically targeted U.S. citizens but have attacked symbolic targets that have included Western companies and rail lines. While Naxalite violence does not normally occur in places frequented by foreigners, there is a risk that visitors could become unintended victims of indiscriminate targeting by such violent extremists.

A number of terrorist groups operate in Jammu & Kashmir, targeting security forces particularly along the Line of Control (LOC) separating Indian and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, and those stationed in the primary tourist destinations in the Kashmir Valley: Srinagar, Gulmarg, and Pahalgam.

Incidents of violence by ethnic insurgent groups, including bombngs of buses, trains, rail lines, and markets occur with a degree of frequency in parts of Assam and Manipur (to the east of Bangladesh).

Civil Unrest

Large religious ceremonies that attract thousands of people can result in dangerous and often life-threatening stampedes. Local demonstrations can begin spontaneously and escalate with little warning, disrupting transportation systems and city services and posing risks to travelers. India generally goes on “High Alert” status prior to major holidays. Authorities occasionally impose curfews and/or restrict travel.
Tensions between castes and religious groups can also result in disruptions and violence. In some cases, demonstrators block roads near popular tourist sites and disrupt train operations in order to gain the attention of authorities; occasionally vehicles transporting tourists are attacked in these incidents.

In December 2012, India’s principal communist parties led a protest rally against the entry of Wal-Mart in Chennai. The protestors were led by the State Communist Party of India and Communist Party Marxists leaders who laid siege to a commercial/residential complex where “Bharti-Wal-Mart,” the Indian joint venture of the U.S. retailer has a marketing office.

In late 2011, local opposition to the construction of the Kudankulam nuclear power project in southern Tamil Nadu surged. Several factors contributed to the sudden intensification of anti-nuclear agitation, including the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan and a series of trial drills at Kudankulam that scared the local villagers. In October 2011, protests reached a critical stage, with demonstrators blocking the entry points to the construction site and temporarily trapping workers and their families inside. Protests resurfaced in September 2012 when 4,000-5,000 people attempted to block movement to the nearly operational nuclear plant. These protests, however, were directed at the plant and were confined to the village of Idinthikarai, 5 km from the plant. Work on the facility continued uninterrupted despite threatening text messages sent in December 2012 to personnel working at the facility. Anti-government nuclear activists and local fishermen who led the opposition to the project warn that the movement could again turn violent if the central government resorts to force against the protestors.

In December 2011, protests erupted along the border between Tamil Nadu and Kerala after a series of low intensity tremors heightened fears about the safety of the 116-year old Mullaperiyar Dam. The two state governments remain at odds over the issue of control of the dam and the question of safety—both of which have implications for contested water
distribution--exacerbating the tensions with emotional rhetoric aimed at their domestic political constituencies. Local television stations broadcast images of protestors ransacking property on both sides of the border and reported sporadic incidents of violence against religious pilgrims and others traveling between the two states. Politicians in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala continue to make aggressive statements that could inflame public opinion and could incite further violence.

In December 2010 and January 2011, sporadic civil unrest erupted in Andhra Pradesh (to the north of Tamil Nadu) over creating a separate state called Telangana. Until the issue is resolved, there may continue to be tension, especially in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, which includes the districts of Rangareddi, Warangal, Medak, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Adilabad, Khammam, Nalgonda, and Mahbubnagar.

Religious or Ethnic Violence

On September 14, 2012, the U.S. Consulate in Chennai sustained over $100,000 in damages by violent demonstrators in protest against “The Innocence of Muslims” film. Cameras captured footage of individuals scaling the Consulate walls, tearing down U.S. government property, and throwing rocks and debris at and onto the U.S. compound.

Religious violence occurs, especially when tensions between religious communities are exacerbated by groups pushing chauvinistic agendas. Violence against Indian Christians in a remote part of Orissa (well to the northeast of Tamil Nadu) in 2008 resulted in the displacement of thousands of villagers and the deaths of 40 people.
There are active "anti-conversion" laws in some Indian states, and acts of conversion sometimes elicit violent reactions from Hindu extremists. Foreigners suspected of proselytizing Hindus have been arrested, attacked, and/or killed in conservative, rural areas.

On January 1, 2011, two foreigners were the victims of mob violence after they attempted to enter a local Hindu temple without removing their shoes and other alleged inappropriate behavior, to include charges of drunkenness. Agitated over this, a local group attacked and beat them until the police intervened. The two foreigners were arrested and charged with hurting religious sentiments. The charges were later reduced to misbehaving in a public place; they were ordered to pay a fine of Rs 1,500 and sentenced to one day imprisonment.

**Post-specific Concerns**

**Environmental Hazards**

Natural disasters can and do occur in the region. During the monsoon season (June-September), parts of southern India can receive heavy rainfall. In January 2011, Tamil Nadu’s southern district and Puducherry sustained extensive damage from a seasonal typhoon. In the 2010 monsoon season, heavy rains created flooding in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry that lead to the deaths of over 200 people. In Chennai, streets can see temporary, low-level flash flooding that hampers travel and causes heavy traffic congestion and delays.

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Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in India is complex with challenges such as huge workforce in a largely unorganized sector, availability of cheap labor, meager public spending on health, apathy of stakeholders, and infrastructure problems. Mr. V. B. Sant, Director, National Safety Council said, “…Even in factories, mines, ports and construction, where there is an existing framework for OSH, the conditions are still not satisfactory.”

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

U.S. citizens are cautioned against buying counterfeit and/or pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal in the United States, the purchase may be breaking local law too.

Regional Travel Concerns and Restricted Travel Areas/Zones

It is strongly recommended to avoid travel to Jammu & Kashmir (with the exception of visits to the eastern Ladakh region and its capital, Leh) because of the potential for terrorist incidents and violent public unrest. U.S. government employees are prohibited from traveling to Jammu & Kashmir (except for Ladakh) without permission, which is only granted by the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi in exceptional circumstances. When traveling to Kashmir, U.S. official travelers
attempt to lower their profiles, limit their lengths of stay, and exercise extreme caution.

The State Department recommends avoiding travel to areas within 10 kilometers of the border between India and Pakistan.

U.S. government employees are prohibited from traveling to the states of Assam and Manipur without permission from the U.S. Consulate in Kolkata. When traveling to these areas, U.S. official travelers attempt to lower their profiles, limit their lengths of stay, and exercise extreme caution.

Certain parts of India are designated as "restricted areas" by the government and require special advance permission to visit. These areas include:

States of Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim.

Portions of the states of Himachal Pradesh near the Chinese border; Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal) near the Chinese border; Rajasthan near the Pakistani border; Jammu & Kashmir near the Line of Control with Pakistan and certain portions of Ladakh.

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands

The Union Territory of the Laccadives Islands (Lakshadweep)

The Tibetan colony in Mundgod, Karnataka

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More information on travel to/in restricted areas can be found at India’s Bureau of Immigration. You can obtain “Restricted Area Permits” at Indian embassies and consulates abroad or from the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (Foreigners Division) at Jaisalmer House, 26 Man Singh Road, New Delhi. The states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim all maintain official guesthouses in New Delhi, each of which also can issue Restricted Area Permits for their respective states for certain travelers.

Trekking expeditions should follow trekking routes identified by local authorities. Visitors should solicit assistance only from registered trekking agencies, porters, and guides; suspend trekking after dark; camp at designated camping places; and ideally travel in groups of eight to ten people.

Visitors should exercise caution if swimming in open waters along the coastline, particularly during the monsoon season. Every year, several people in Goa, Mumbai, Puri (Odisha), the Bay of Bengal, and other areas drown due to the strong undertow. It is important to heed warnings posted or advised at beaches and to avoid swimming in the ocean during the monsoon season. Trained lifeguards are very rare along beaches.

Travelers to the Andaman Islands should be aware that there have been 24 reports of salt-water crocodile attacks during the past 25 years on the Islands. There have been four fatalities, including a U.S. tourist in April 2010. Visitors are encouraged to seek advice from local residents about dangerous sea life before swimming and keep a safe distance from animals.

India offers opportunities for observation of wildlife in natural habitats, and many tour operators and lodges advertise structured, safe excursions into parks and other wildlife.
viewing areas for close observation of flora and fauna. However, safety standards and training vary, and it is a good idea to ascertain whether operators are trained and licensed. Even animals marketed as “tame” should be respected as wild and extremely dangerous. Visitors should keep a safe distance from animals at all times, remaining in vehicles or other protected enclosures when venturing into game parks. On July 24, 2012, the Supreme Court banned tourists from the “core areas” (or the inner parts of parks) where tigers are believed to breed and hunt in all 41 tiger sanctuaries, citing the danger posed to the animal by tourist traffic in parts of the reserves. In October, India’s Supreme Court lifted the ban and asked state governments to draw up conservation plans that follow the guidelines prepared by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Each state government has been asked to prepare a tiger conservation plan that adheres to the national authority’s guidelines. These guidelines limit tourism to 20 percent of the core areas of tiger reserves and national parks or the areas where tigers are believed to travel, breed, and hunt.

Kidnapping Threats

Gangs and criminal elements operate in major cities and have targeted unsuspecting business travelers and their family members for kidnapping and/or extortion.

Police Response

Police response in Chennai is variable. The Chennai police generally are effective in managing large scale protests and can be responsive to security requests. However, overall police assistance is mediocre by Western standards, with a typical response time of 30 minutes or longer. Even when a suspect is arrested, the length of time it may take for a case
to be heard in court is often several years.

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

U.S. citizens who become the victim of a crime abroad should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate (Chennai’s number is: 91-44-2857-4000). If a U.S. passport is stolen, the Embassy and Consulates can assist in replacing it. Theft or loss of a passport should be immediately reported to the police in the location where the passport was believed to be missing or stolen. A police report, called a FIR (First Information Report) is required by the government in order to obtain an exit visa in the event of a lost or stolen passport. Although the Embassy or Consulate is able to replace a stolen or lost passport, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) are responsible for approving an exit visa. This process can take three to four working days. Victims of crime need to obtain a copy of the FIR from local police at the time of reporting the incident. A copy of this report is helpful for insurance purposes in replacing lost valuables. Local authorities generally are unable to take any meaningful action without the filing of a police report.

For violent crimes, such as assault and rape, the Consulate can assist with helping the victim find appropriate medical care, contacting family members or friends, and helping them send financial assistance, if needed.

The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line in India is “100.” An additional emergency number, “112,” can be accessed from mobile phones.
How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In case of police detention or harassment, please contact U.S. Consulate General, Chennai at +91-44-2857-4200. U.S. citizens traveling in another country are subject to its laws; a U.S. passport does not exempt a visitor from abiding by local laws.

Per international treaty obligations, arrested U.S. citizens have the right immediately to notify, or have officials notify, the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate of the arrest. U.S. citizens should insist on this as a right since it is often overlooked.

Various Police/Security Agencies

Further information on the Chennai police can be found at www.tnpolice.gov.in.

Medical Emergencies

The quality of medical care varies considerably. Medical care is available in the major population centers that approaches and occasionally meets Western standards, but adequate medical care is usually very limited or unavailable in rural areas. In many places, doctors and
hospitals expect payment in cash at the time of service.

Travelers should not assume their health plans or insurance cover them outside of the United States. It is very important for travelers to find out their coverage BEFORE they leave the country. Emergency medical evacuation by air can be extremely expensive (over $25,000). Many companies offer limited term insurance for travelers to cover medical contingencies requiring air evacuation. Regular U.S. health insurance may not cover doctors’ and hospital visits in other countries or be accepted by the medical providers. If a traveler’s health insurance policy does not include provisions for outside of the U.S., supplementary travel insurance is recommended for the trip.

Medical tourism is a rapidly growing industry. Companies offering vacation packages bundled with medical consultations and financing options provide direct-to-consumer advertising over the internet. Such medical packages often claim to provide high quality care, but the quality of health care is highly variable. People seeking health care should understand that medical systems operate differently from those in the United States and are not subject to the same rules and regulations. Anyone interested in traveling for medical purposes should consult with a local physician before traveling and refer to the information from CDC.

Altitudes in popular trekking spots can be as high as 25,170 feet (7,672 m); visitors are advised to have to have a medical checkup or review their health conditions to assure that they are fit to trek and cycle at these altitudes.

Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics
The Consulate maintains lists of local doctors and hospitals at:

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

www.internationalsos.com

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

If you are arriving from Sub-Saharan Africa or other yellow-fever areas, health regulations require that you present evidence of vaccination against yellow fever. If you do not have such proof, you could be subjected to immediate deportation or a six-day detention in the yellow-fever quarantine center. If you transit any part of Sub-Saharan Africa, even for one day, you are advised to carry proof of yellow fever immunization.

Outbreaks of Avian Influenza occur intermittently in eastern India, including West Bengal, Manipur, Sikkim, and Assam. There have been no reported cases of Avian Influenza infections in human beings. Updates on the Avian Influenza situation are published on the Embassy’s website. For further information on Avian Influenza, please refer to the Department of State’s Avian Influenza Fact Sheet.
H1N1, also known as the swine flu, has been reported in India in travelers coming from or transiting through the United States and has spread locally throughout India. Individuals with flu-like symptoms should strongly consider delaying their travel until their symptoms have resolved for the protection of other passengers and the risk of being quarantined in a communicable public hospital upon arrival in India. H1N1 vaccine and seasonal influenza vaccine are available in India.

Tuberculosis is an increasingly serious health concern in India. For further information, travelers can consult the CDC’s Travel Notice on TB.

Rh-negative blood may be difficult to obtain as it is not common in Asia.

Monkey bites have occurred and can transmit rabies and herpes B among other diseases to human victims. Visitors should avoid feeding monkeys. If bitten, individuals are advised to immediately soak and scrub the bite for at least 15 minutes and seek urgent medical attention.

Good information on vaccinations and other health precautions is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or by calling the hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747). For additional health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/india.htm.
For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, travelers should consult the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO website also contains additional health information, including detailed country-specific health information. This website provide useful information, such as suggested vaccinations for visitors to India, safe food and water precautions, appropriate measures to avoid contraction of mosquito-borne diseases (such as malaria and Japanese B encephalitis), suggestions to avoid altitude sickness, etc. Further, the site provides information on disease outbreaks that may arise – outbreaks of mosquito-borne viral diseases such as dengue fever and chikungunya occur in various parts of India each year. U.S. citizens are advised to check these sites shortly before traveling to India. Further health information for travelers is available from the WHO.

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

**Crimes/Scams**

Major airports, train stations, popular restaurants, and tourist sites are often used by scam artists looking to prey on visitors, often by creating a distraction. Visitors should be wary of taxi drivers and others, including train porters, who solicit travelers with "come-on" offers of cheap transportation and/or hotels. Travelers accepting such offers have frequently found themselves the victims of scams, including offers to assist with "necessary" transfers to the domestic airport, disproportionately expensive hotel rooms, unwanted "tours," unwelcome "purchases," and even threats when the tourists try to decline to pay.

Travelers should exercise care when hiring transportation and/or guides and use only well-known travel agents to book trips. Some scam artists have lured travelers by displaying their name on a sign at the airport. Another popular scam is to drop money or to squirt...
something on the clothing of an unsuspecting traveler and during the distraction to rob them of their valuables. Tourists, particularly at train stations, have also been given drugged drinks or tainted food to make them more vulnerable to theft. Even food or drink purchased from a canteen or vendor could be tainted. To protect against robbery of personal belongings, do not accept food or drink from strangers.

Visitors are advised to deal only with reputable businesses and be judicious in providing credit card information. If a deal sounds too good to be true, it is best avoided. Most states have official tourism bureaus set up to handle complaints.

A growing number of foreigners have fallen prey to property scams, usually being convinced to invest in property along with an Indian partner. Rarely do the partnerships survive. The trend has the Indian partner using a pretext to make a claim on the entire property, generally after construction or restoration is complete or to offer the foreign partner an inadequate sum to buy out their share. Lacking knowledge of the Indian legal system in order to fight for what is rightfully theirs, the foreign partner often loses considerable sums of money.

A number of other scams against foreign travelers have been reported, particularly in Goa, Jaipur, and Agra. The scams generally target younger travelers and involve financial proposals for the visitor to transport gems or gold (both of which can result in arrest) privately or by taking delivery abroad of expensive carpets, supposedly while avoiding customs duties. The scam artists describe profits that can be made upon delivery of the goods and require the traveler to pay a "deposit" as part of the transaction.

Areas to Avoid
You should exercise caution while visiting Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) in Tamil Nadu as the Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Center, Kalpakkam, is located just south of the site and is not clearly marked as a restricted and dangerous area.

Best Security Practices

All travelers should use the same common sense when traveling overseas that they would at home. U.S. citizens should be especially cautious in areas where crimes globally more frequently occur, which include train stations, tourist sites, market places, festival locations, and marginal areas of city.

Know where you are going. Have ground transportation prearranged at your destination. Have the phone numbers of local friends and contacts readily available and/or saved to your mobile phone. Preplan your destination regarding your stay and tourism.

If you schedule a meeting with a potential client, research the company and the individual with whom you are meeting. Meet in a public place, such as a restaurant. Generally keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations or arguments. Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers.
When walking, avoid short cuts, narrow alleys, poorly-lit streets, and traveling alone at night. Exercise good personal security and situational awareness when visiting local markets and tourist areas. Beware of strangers who approach you, offering bargains or to be your guide. Do not accept food or drink from strangers. Criminals can drug food or drink offered to passengers. Visitors from the U.S. often have greater purchasing power compared to that of the general population in India. Travelers should always exercise modesty in dress and actions and caution in their financial dealings to reduce the chance of being a target for robbery or other serious crime. Do not flash large amounts of money when paying bills. Make sure your credit card is returned to you after each transaction. Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money, provide credit card information, buy airline tickets, or purchase souvenirs. Do not change money on the black market. Secure purses, backpacks and valuables on your person. For women, wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid purse-snatchers. Be judicious where you wear and display showy and expensive jewelry (a common crime are criminals on foot or motorbikes snatching necklaces or earrings from women often causing serious injury to the victim.) Use small locks on backpacks to deter pickpockets. Appear purposeful in your movements. Even if lost, act as if you know where you are going. When possible, ask directions only from individuals in authority. If confronted by someone trying to rob you, give up your valuables. Money, valuables and passports can be replaced, but you cannot. If your possessions are lost or stolen, report the loss immediately to the local police. The Consulate General can assist you with understanding local police procedures. Keep a copy of the police report for insurance claims.

Travelers should be cautious when traveling and keep their hotel room numbers private and should select hotels in which the room doors have chains, deadlocks, and spy-holes. Keep your hotel door locked at all times. Meet visitors in the lobby. Do not leave money and other valuables in your hotel room while you are out; use the room or hotel safe. Let someone know when you expect to return if you are out late at night. Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room and know how to report a fire. Be sure you know where the nearest fire exits and alternate exits are located. Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit.
Travelers are advised to hire cars and drivers through known firms or established locations--such as at the hotel or pre-paid taxis at the airport--rather than hailing random taxis on the street. Beware of unmarked cabs (which may not be cabs at all) and only take taxis clearly identified with official markings. If the taxi or car does not have a operating meter, travelers are advised to negotiate their rate in advance to prevent disputes over the charges at the end of the trip. Never take the advice of taxi drivers or other casual acquaintances regarding your stay or tourism in Chennai. Travelers should avoid traveling alone in hired taxis, especially during the hours of darkness. Do not drive in rural areas after dark. Persons encountering threatening situations should dial “100” for police assistance.

U.S. citizens, particularly women, are cautioned not to travel alone. Women should observe stringent security precautions, including avoiding using public transport after dark without the company of known and trustworthy companions; restricting evening entertainment to well-known venues; and avoid walking in isolated areas alone at any time of day. Women traveling in southern India are advised to respect local dress and customs and dress modestly. Even wearing short pants in some areas can be viewed as provocative. For men, in certain areas common Western gestures, such as shaking hands with and/or addressing the opposite sex, may be viewed as disrespectful and incite negative, possibly even violent, reactions.

Public buses are not recommended for travel. If traveling by air, passengers need to be particularly careful with their bags in the arrival and departure areas outside airports. If traveling by train, passengers are urged to lock their sleeping compartments and take their valuables with them when leaving their berth. Where possible, lock your compartment. If you must sleep, position your luggage in manner so that you are awakened if someone attempts to tamper with the luggage. Do not be afraid to alert authorities if you feel threatened in any way. Extra police are often assigned to ride trains on routes where crime is a serious problem.

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Burglaries tend to occur when there are security vulnerabilities. For residents, installing window grilles and solid core doors with deadbolt locks on exterior doors is highly recommended. Residents are also recommended to have proper perimeter walls around the residences and, optimally, vetted guards.

Crime is not common at the airport due to the strong police presence. Upon leaving the airport building, passengers should take precautions because of the large crowds and chaotic atmosphere, which is ideal for pickpockets. Passengers are also cautioned when coming out of the airport to stay away from anyone offering cheap residential accommodation or transportation.

Refrain from taking pictures of government facilities, train stations, airports, power plants, or other key sites receiving protection from the government.

Because of the number and diversity of violence in India, Americans should be vigilant about security at all times. Travelers should avoid political rallies, demonstrations, and large crowds of any kind. U.S. citizens are reminded to monitor the situation via media sources, including TV, radio and via the internet. U.S. citizens should monitor local television and print media and contact the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. Consulate for further information about the current situation in areas where you wish to travel. In general, U.S. citizens and foreigners are not specifically targeted in protests or religious violence; however, all visitors and residents are advised to be extremely respectful of religious views, customs, and cultural practices. All visitors are advised to familiarize themselves with local norms. U.S. citizens should monitor local news and consider the level of security when visiting public places, such as religious sites, hotels, restaurants, or entertainment and recreation venues. U.S. citizens are advised to...
keep a low profile, avoid crowds and demonstrations, and maintain valid travel documents. Travelers should plan on added time to account for increased security, especially at hotels and airports. American citizens should exercise vigilance when in the vicinity of government installations, visiting tourist sites, or attending public events in Chennai. U.S. citizens are urged to avoid demonstrations and rallies as they have the potential for violence, especially immediately preceding and following elections and religious festivals (particularly when Hindu and Muslim festivals coincide). People should be aware of their surroundings, be alert for unattended bags or packages in these areas, and move away from and report any unattended bags to officials.

Visitors should monitor local news reports for any reports of road disturbances.

Caution should be exercised in traveling in these Tamil Nadu’s southern districts during the monsoon season.

U.S. Embassy/Consulate Location and Contact Information

Embassy/Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Consulate General in Chennai (Madras) is at 220 Anna Salai, Gemini Circle, 600006;
Operating hours are 8-5pm; M-Fri. except U.S. and local holidays

Embassy/Consulate Contact Numbers

telephone 91-44-2857-4000; fax 91-44-2857-4443.

OSAC Country Council Information


Chennai and Bangalore OSAC Chapters

Regional Security Office, U.S. Consulate General Chennai, Ph: 91-44-2857-4000