



## Kuwait 2014 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Rape/Sexual Violence; Fraud; Financial Security; Embezzlement; Drug Trafficking; Stolen items; Theft; Riots/Civil Unrest; Employee Health Safety; Faith-based Organization; Maritime; Other Threat / Incident

Near East > Kuwait; Near East > Kuwait > Kuwait City

2/25/2014

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Department of State assesses the current threat level for crime in Kuwait to be Low, although the official crime statistics for 2013 have not been published. Media reporting indicates there has been an increase in crime incidents in 2013 compared to previous years. Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MOI) maintains a visible police profile with uniformed and plainclothes officers deployed in key locations for response and deterrence. Each district and governorate has police stations operating under the direction of the MOI Directorate of Public Safety.

### Crime Threats

Recent reporting indicates that there was an overall decrease in criminal activity in Kuwait as compared to recent years. However, an unusual and high-profile violent crime occurred in September 2013 in a shopping mall frequented by Westerners where one local male was fatally stabbed after an altercation. Three local males were charged with this crime. This was the second such incident; the first occurred in an upscale shopping mall in December 2012.

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The third country national (TCN) community, including approximately 50,000 U.S. citizens, comprises approximately two-thirds of the population. It is probable, particularly among TCN victims of lower income/status, that a high percentage of crimes in the TCN community go unreported. Violent crime also occurs between Kuwaitis and/or by Kuwaitis against foreign workers (domestic staff) but often goes unreported or is not fully investigated.

There have been reported and anecdotal incidents of harassment and sexual assault of TCN/expatriate women. Rape is perceived to be not fully enforced. Women traveling alone have been harassed while driving and when in public, even at upscale shopping malls in Kuwait.

Other reported crimes include, but are not limited to, various types of immigration and residency fraud, ATM/credit card theft, white collar fraud, embezzlement, possession/trafficking of illegal narcotics, and property theft. In 2013, media outlets reported several seizures of large quantities of illegal narcotics by local authorities at the maritime ports and at the Kuwaiti International Airport due to enhanced monitoring and enforcement measures.

Although several districts within Kuwait City are known to have high incidences of crime, only a few areas are of sufficient concern that official Embassy personnel are asked to exercise particular caution when visiting. The RSO recommends avoiding the following areas, especially during nighttime hours: Jleeb Ash Shuyoukh, Hasawi, and Abbasiya, located on the outskirts of Kuwait City International Airport.

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There are reports of petty thefts in the popular outdoor markets or shopping malls frequented by tourists and Westerners living in Kuwait. The opportunity for such crimes exists, especially in high-traffic shopping areas, as in any urban area. There have been very few reported incidents of ATM/credit card fraud; however, the potential of becoming a fraud victim is increasing.

## **Overall Road Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Apart from periodic sandstorms and rain, road conditions and weather are favorable most of the year, but drivers must remain on the defensive and alert to the hazards posed by others that neglect to yield in merges, cut across lanes to exit, drive aggressively and at excessive rates of speed, pass on shoulders, and often operate without headlights at night.

The most dangerous daily threat that residents face comes from driving. The MOI has taken proactive steps toward increased traffic law enforcement and has begun implementing traffic safety measures (camera and radar systems) as well as delivering public awareness campaigns. The use of seat belts is mandatory. The use of handheld electronic devices while driving is illegal, but the law is frequently ignored. Non-payment of traffic and parking fines may result in travel bans for individuals.

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Speed is the primary cause for traffic fatalities. Kuwait has an excellent highway system, but many drivers drive in excess of the posted speed limits and weave through traffic at high rates of speed; the danger is compounded by many others who drive well below the speed limit across all lanes of traffic. A general rule is to avoid driving in the far left lane on highways due to the prevalence of high-speed drivers. These “number one lane” drivers may exhibit aggressive behavior, such as flashing headlights rapidly or tailgating to get a slower drivers to change lanes, if blocked. Night driving is particularly dangerous because some drivers do not use headlights.

Road rage, pursuit, extremely aggressive and reckless driving, and vehicle gamesmanship -- in which vehicles play a form of high-speed cat and mouse on the freeways -- often end in disaster when a vehicle is forced off the road or has a collision with another vehicle on the crowded highways. Remnants of a horrific accident, usually in the form of a mangled car chassis, are common alongside the highway.

If involved in a vehicle accident, law mandates that the individuals immediately notify the police and file a report. There are no Good Samaritan laws, so assisting may expose the responder to liability. Kuwaiti nationals are often perceived to be afforded preferential treatment by the police, including when the police are called to resolve a traffic accident or criminal matter.

Police checkpoints are not unusual. Uniformed and plainclothes police have the authority to make traffic stops but must identify themselves with their identification credentials, which are printed in Arabic and English. The RSO advises individuals to remain in their own vehicles with the doors locked and to lower the window only enough to receive the person's police identification. While checking the credentials as best as possible, individuals are advised to use their mobile phone to alert his/her sponsor or a trusted person of the situation. Ask the sponsor or trusted person to come and meet them. U.S. citizens should inform the officer of

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their nationality. Individuals are advised against riding in police vehicles but, if instructed, should agree to follow the officer in their own vehicle to a police station. Before going to the police station, request the officer to specify the name of the police station, keep the mobile phone connected so the sponsor or trusted person can know and hear the destination. Lastly, relay the license plate number, make, model, and color of the officer's vehicle to your sponsor or trusted person on the phone.

Public intoxication and driving while under the influence of alcohol are treated as serious offenses, and because alcohol is illegal, any trace of alcohol found in the blood is unlawful. Offenders will be detained, arrested, and, if found guilty, serve a prison sentence, pay heavy fines, and/or be deported.

The government-owned Kuwait Public Transportation Company operates bus service and is used mostly by low-income TCN labor force. Marked taxis are widely available at major hotels. It is recommended to use only metered and marked taxis.

Vehicle break-ins occasionally occur when valuables are left in plain view.

## **Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

Kuwait is a close partner and major non-NATO ally of the United States. The relationship has been particularly close since the U.S. role in the 1991 liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. Where there are disagreements with U.S. policy, these are most usually manifested through Kuwaitis' exercise of free speech in the vibrant local media and in

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Kuwait's traditional diwanias – private social gatherings where issues are openly discussed. The close partnership yields excellent cooperation on matters of mutual interest.

### Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There have been no lethal attacks on U.S. personnel since 2002, and the U.S. Department of State assesses the terrorism threat in Kuwait to be Medium. The U.S. Embassy continues to receive threat information indicating that official and private U.S. citizens may be targeted for terrorist attacks. Soft targets such as shopping malls, hotels, and restaurants can be considered vulnerable to terrorist attack, although many are making improvements to their perimeters and internal security.

### Civil Unrest

Kuwaiti law permits freedom of assembly as long as organizers of public gatherings of more than 20 persons obtain advance approval from the MOI. Several anti-government demonstrations and marches took place in 2013 related to political and social issues. For example, Kuwaitis organized both unlicensed and licensed demonstrations and marches to protest a new electoral law. The MOI exercised restraint during unlicensed demonstrations and marches and, when necessary, used non-lethal measures to disperse protestors who were disrupting residential neighborhoods and traffic.

Bidoons (stateless residents in Kuwait) also held unlicensed demonstrations demanding

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citizenship rights in Kuwait.

Controlled and generally peaceful demonstrations also took place in front of the U.S. Embassy.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

### Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Kuwait has vast oil fields, oil refineries, water desalination plants, ammonia plants, and other industries. Health and safety standards are generally not maintained at a Western standard; thus, workplace accidents may be common. Please keep apprised of local media coverage and official announcements. Embassy employees are advised to keep Shelter-in-Place kits in their residences with sufficient food and water supplies to last several days.

Exercise care and caution before chartering any local watercraft (such as dhows or motor boats) for recreational excursions, particularly when operating close to shore in congested waterways. There may not be accessibility or availability of life jackets on vessels, for example. The Gulf's waters are heavily traversed by commercial and military vessels. It is not unusual to be stopped by the Kuwaiti Coast Guard.

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## Regional Travel Concerns and Restricted Travel Areas/Zones

The following areas are considered off-limits for official U.S. government personnel who must seek special permission to travel in these areas in order to conduct official duties: Kuwait/Iraq border – north of Mutla'a Ridge, the tank graveyard (Near Ali Al Salem base), and the city of Jahra.

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) from the 1991 Gulf War remains present in some desert areas. U.S. Embassy Kuwait urges caution if traveling off paved surfaces outside of Kuwait City. UXOs have also been discovered in piles of sand used at construction sites, including at Camp Arifjan, the largest U.S. military facility in Kuwait. A contributing factor to the local population's exposure to UXO is a tradition of desert camping. During the cooler months (October-March), Kuwaitis head to the desert to camp. Many of these campgrounds are very close to the major roadways, but some Kuwaitis travel long distances from built-up areas to camp in relative isolation. Camping in well-used areas mitigates some risk of contact with UXO, but camping or outing invitations to areas far from population centers should be politely declined because of the higher chances of coming into contact with hazardous items.

## Police Response

### How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If arrested or detained, U.S. citizens should request to speak with a consular officer at the U.S. Embassy through the switchboard operator at (965) 2259-1001. Do not assume your

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arrest has been reported to the U.S. Embassy. A consular officer will visit the U.S. citizen within 24 to 72 hours of the initial notification. A local attorney will be required to assist in any civil or criminal proceeding. For a list of attorneys who have worked with U.S. citizens, please visit the Embassy's webpage: <http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/service/attorneys-for-u.s.-citizens>.

U.S. citizens are subject to the country's laws and regulations, which can differ significantly from those in the United States. Violating Kuwaiti law can result in the detention, arrest, prison sentence, fines, and/or deportation. Examples of crimes include: possession, use, or trafficking of illegal narcotics, pork, firearms, counterfeit goods, and alcohol. Humiliating or insulting a person, including a police officer or a public official, is a crime similar to disorderly conduct or harassment in the United States. Non-payment of traffic violations or other outstanding debts owed to Kuwaitis may result in travel bans preventing individuals from exiting Kuwait.

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

Dial 112 from any telephone to contact Kuwait's emergency services (police, fire, and ambulance services). Police response to requests for assistance to Americans is generally good. U.S. citizens who do not speak Arabic should request assistance from a bilingual Arabic/English switchboard operator. Be mindful that emergency switchboard operators receive prank calls frequently and may hang up if they do not understand the caller. In such cases, callers are advised to call again.

The Kuwaiti police accept crime reports at the police station with jurisdiction over the area where the crime occurred. If filing a crime report, it is advisable that the U.S. citizen be accompanied by a person who speaks Arabic and/or by a local attorney. Filing a crime report

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can take several hours, as a police investigator will take the victim's statement orally while composing his investigative report. In all cases of abuse, the victim must obtain a medical report from a Kuwaiti hospital in order to file a police report.

## **Medical Emergencies**

There are many government and private medical facilities available. Medical treatment costs are comparable or more expensive than in the United States.

U.S. citizens are urged to consult with their medical insurance companies prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policies apply overseas and whether they will cover emergency expenses, such as a medical evacuation. Most hospitals and doctors accept major credit cards. Additionally, cash is accepted up front for services rendered. Patients will need to contact their insurance companies for reimbursement.

Local ambulance service is available by dialing 112. Most ambulances do not carry life-saving equipment. It is advisable to have an understanding of where you are located in case an emergency situation arises. Without addresses and street names, places are difficult to find. You may cite the number on the nearest streetlamp post to the switchboard operator to assist the ambulance in locating you.

## **Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics**

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The following hospitals have been used successfully by official U.S. government personnel for routine and/or emergency care:

Al Amiri Hospital – 2245-0005, 2245-1442, 2245-0080

International Clinic - 2574-5111, 1886677

Al-Salam Hospital – 2223-2000/2222

Mubarak Al Kabir Hospital - 2531-2700 / 2709

Al-Sabah Hospital – 2481-2000, 2481 - 5000

Hadi Clinic - 2531-2555

Dar Al Shifa Hospital - 1802-555

New Mowasat Hospital - 2572-6666

Kuwait Dental Clinic - 2575-9044 / 45 / 46

Al-Fozan Dental Center - 2261-9557 / 2262-4152

Balsan Dental Center - 2575-5737 - 25755747

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## CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For vaccine and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/kuwait>.

## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

### Areas to be Avoided

The RSO recommends avoiding the following areas, especially during nighttime hours: Jleeb Ash Shuyoukh, Hasawi, and Abbasiya, located on the outskirts of Kuwait City International Airport.

### Best Situational Awareness Practices

Most travelers are not impacted by crime in Kuwait provided they practice personal security measures. Some fall into a sense of complacency. Travelers are urged to take the same security precautions in Kuwait that they would practice in the United States. The best practice to avoid being a victim is to maintain vigilance, remain alert, and be aware of your surroundings at all times. Criminals typically target distracted individuals because the element of surprise works in their favor. Pay attention and if something does not seem right about a situation, leave the area. Because newcomers are more susceptible to criminal activity when

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they are still becoming familiar with a foreign environment, visitors should maintain a high level of personal security awareness at all times.

When traveling during hours of darkness, ensure someone knows your itinerary and preferably travel with a buddy or group at night. To the extent possible, vary your travel routes and times for your work commute and your other activities around town.

Do not leave your valuables in plain view in your vehicle, hotel room, or elsewhere. Property crimes like pick-pocketing and purse-snatching are more likely to take place in shopping areas and other high-traffic locations where foreign visitors congregate. Maximum awareness is recommended in these areas. Keep a low profile and avoid obvious displays of wealth or nationality. Carry only as much cash as is required for the day's business and store the remainder (along with passports, non-used credit cards, and other valuables) in a secure location. If you must carry a large amount of cash, break it up in different pockets so you do not display it all when making a purchase. Always carry a charged mobile phone and government photo identification with you.

Photographing government and public buildings, military installations, and economic infrastructure, particularly related to the oil industry, is against the law. Photographing women may be considered offensive.

Proselytizing is prohibited for all religions except Islam.

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While Kuwait is in many ways a tolerant country, conservative customs and dress are the norm. Harassment can be reduced if visitors behave and dress conservatively and maintain a respectful demeanor and a low profile. U.S. citizens should keep in mind the cultural differences among the many people who coexist in Kuwait and should be cognizant that unwitting actions may invite unwanted attention. Modest dress, not engaging in “small talk,” not making constant eye contact, and maintaining a low profile may deter harassment. U.S. citizens who find themselves harassed are advised to seek safe haven in a public area immediately, contact store management or security personnel, and not attempt to go to a secluded area or drive to their residences until the situation has been resolved.

Individuals are advised to avoid confrontations, refrain from making hand gestures or eye contact with other drivers, and to move away from angry, threatening, or aggressive persons. Never lead such persons back to your home or to a secluded area. Do check the interior and exterior of your vehicle prior to approaching or entering it. Look for any suspicious items.

U.S. citizens are urged to be wary of unexpected visitors and to pay particular attention to suspicious vehicles. Any suspicious activities or vehicles should be reported to the local police as soon as possible. U.S. citizens should maintain low profiles and treat mail and packages from unfamiliar sources with suspicion.

Use marked taxis with meters and establish the fare in advance of entering the vehicle. Do not enter a taxi that already has other passengers. U.S. citizen passengers should always sit in the back seat, do not make eye contact or engage in needless conversation, and do not permit other passengers to be picked up. Marked taxis have the driver’s name and ID number posted on the back of the front seat. Note down the information and call the police at 112 to report an incident.

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Hotel room doors should be locked at all times, and valuables should be stored in hotel safes when available. Visitors should instruct the hotel management not to divulge their room numbers over the telephone to any callers, and instead connect the call to their rooms or to take a message.

Avoid demonstrations and large public gatherings. U.S. citizens are advised to avoid confrontations when out and about. The U.S. Embassy notes that participation by non-Kuwaiti citizens in demonstrations is illegal. U.S. citizens are strongly advised not to participate in demonstrations and avoid areas of demonstrations and large gatherings.

Individuals are advised to check their credit card and banking statements every month.

U.S. citizens are advised to avoid frequenting areas and apartment complexes where U.S. citizens or other Westerners are generally known to congregate and live in large numbers. U.S. citizens must practice personal security, maintain a low profile, and vary routes and times for required travel, thus avoiding predictable schedules.

## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

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The U.S. Embassy is located in Bayan on Masjid al-Aqsa Street.

The Embassy's working hours are Sunday - Thursday, 8:00am - 4:30pm.

Consular services, including services for U.S. citizens and visa applicants, are available by appointment only. For information on all consular services, please visit the Embassy's website: <http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/index.html>.

American Citizen Services appointments for routine services (passports, notariats, and citizenship documentation) may be booked online at:  
<https://evisaforms.state.gov/acs/default.asp?postcode=KWT&appcode=1>.

## Embassy Contact Numbers

The Embassy Switchboard is (965) 2259-1001.

U.S. citizens requiring emergency services should contact the Consular Section at 2259-1583 for immediate assistance during business hours. In case of an emergency after business hours, call 2259-1001 and ask for the Embassy duty officer. If you have any questions, please

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contact the Consular Section at [consularkuwaitm@state.gov](mailto:consularkuwaitm@state.gov).

Travelers are urged to read the latest Country Specific Information for Kuwait prior to travel that can be found at <http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis>. Stay apprised of local and regional media coverage and developments. All U.S. citizen travelers and expatriates are strongly encouraged to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) on [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) in order to receive consular messages.

### **OSAC Country Council Information**

Kuwait has an active OSAC Country Council, which meets bi-monthly at pre-arranged locations. To find out more about the Kuwait OSAC Country Council, please visit the Kuwait webpage at: [www.osac.gov](http://www.osac.gov).

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