



## Haiti 2014 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Kidnapping; Burglary; Rape/Sexual Violence; Carjacking; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Floods; Hurricanes; Drug Trafficking

Western Hemisphere > Haiti; Western Hemisphere > Haiti > Port-au-Prince

5/28/2014

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Haiti is unique in the Caribbean for its relative lack of tourism, scarcity of foreign investment, and inferior infrastructure.

Reliable crime statistics are difficult to come by; Haitian National Police (HNP) numbers indicating a modest drop in crime during 2012 were undercut by those from other security entities operating in-country that continued to show a steady rise since 2010. A comparative analysis of figures from various police/security entities operating throughout Haiti reflects a continuation of the trend in which incidents of crimes are inaccurately or under-reported. Haiti's perennially weak judiciary exacerbates an already unsteady security environment.

### Crime Threats

Crimes increase during holiday seasons and before school sessions begin due to the belief

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that people are in possession of more cash for gifts and school fees.

The most frequently reported crimes against Americans in Port-au-Prince are aggravated assaults, kidnappings, and robberies. Home invasions also remain an item of concern in some parts of Port-au-Prince. Crimes against persons, including gender-based violence, remain a serious problem. Haitians still lack basic policing services, so many residents do not report assaults, rape, and other crime because of lingering -- and too-often justified -- perceptions of police apathy, incompetence, and corruption. Traditional tourist-oriented crimes, such as pick pocketing and purse snatching, are less frequently reported in Haiti.

Robbery-related shootings continued during 2013, and there are frequent reports of random gunfire throughout Port-au-Prince. The prevalence of guns remains a key security concern, as disarmament efforts, such as the UN's Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program and the Government of Haiti's Commission for National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (CNDDR) program, have yielded only modest results over the past few years. There has been an increase in reports of crimes being committed by persons carrying/brandishing firearms. Knives or similar weapons also remain popular among criminal elements.

Residential theft (burglaries/home invasions) trends over the past couple of years have suggested a decline in traditional criminal burglary and a rise in robbery/kidnapping. In Port-au-Prince particularly, almost all home invasions were conducted for the dual purpose of kidnapping and robbery. While night time burglaries remain the norm, there are frequent reports of daytime attempts, probing, and actual burglaries. There was a continuation of home invasions in the more affluent areas of upper Port-au-Prince throughout 2013. There were several reported incidents involving armed men forcing entry into homes in the middle of the night. Criminals have placed heavy emphasis on performing home-invasion kidnappings in the middle-class neighborhoods of Vivy Mitchell, Pelerin, Laboule, Thomassin, and Kenscoff,

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situated on the mountainside south of Petionville. Criminals are known to overwhelm/assault household staff and tie them up while looting high value items and cash during the day. The same tactics apply at night, but with more potential for violence as the residents are normally home and criminals continue to press for more currency and valuables during their looting. Reports of such events lasting over several hours are not uncommon. Of particular concern is the ability of some criminals to bypass residential security features, such as perimeter walls, guards and alarm systems. Burglars have little fear of resistance from residential occupants and do not appear to consider whether a residence is occupied. There were a number of reports of attempted entries into UN compounds, where criminals know armed officers reside. Certain elements are not reluctant to use violence to either get across a point or when confronted, however, the vast majority will simply brandish a firearm/weapon, fire it randomly, tie up their victim/s, and get away with the foreign currency or vehicle. Criminals, neither violent or passive, do not seem overly concerned with police response, as they know none will be quickly dispatched. Armed and/or strong-arm robberies against motorists and pedestrians remain a concern. 2013 saw a large number of people killed or wounded by during robberies by gangs after leaving banks in Port-au-Prince, including several HNP officers and at least two American citizens. Most statistics show that other violent crimes (such as homicides) stayed at roughly the same level as 2012.

Organized crime appears in the form of small, organized, criminal gang activity, such as kidnapping gangs.

## **Overall Road Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

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Road safety remains a significant threat to the average visitor. There has been a marked deterioration of the infrastructure since the January 2010 earthquake. Driving requires extreme caution, particularly in the evening hours. Road conditions are extremely poor. Very few roads are paved, and the ones that are generally are in a state of disrepair. A majority of the roads outside of the main cities are either topped with gravel or are poorly maintained dirt roads. There are a few road improvement projects underway, but roadways remain hazardous. Travel at night outside of main cities is ill-advised due to a significant reduction in vision, resulting in an increased chance of not seeing pedestrians, broken down vehicles, and oncoming traffic. Embassy policy strictly prohibits U.S. government employees from driving at night outside of Port-au-Prince.

Driving in Port-au-Prince requires particular caution and fulltime attention. Traffic rules and courtesies are not observed or enforced, and traffic in Port-au-Prince is often gridlocked. The congestion that was found in the downtown area is now more prevalent in the rest of the city, as displaced persons from the earthquake have relocated throughout the eastern suburbs, including to Petionville. Piles of trash in the streets and missing manhole covers contribute to the threats to traffic, including gaping ditches and pot holes, wayward and oblivious pedestrians, and small animals. Street lighting is sporadic and of poor quality in Port-au-Prince and relatively non-existent outside cities. Due to the sharp economic decline, many vehicles are not well maintained and often lack headlights. Incidents of accidents/collisions involving drunk drivers are also on the rise. Street signs are also lacking in certain areas, adding confusion to the casual traveler. Vendors have taken over the sidewalks and in some cases much of the roadway, so the only way for a pedestrian to pass down many streets is by walking in the street.

Roads around Cite Soleil, primarily Route National #1 and #9, are safer than in years past but should still be considered dangerous areas. Care should also be used when traveling around Carrefour, particularly along Route National #2 through Martissant, as well as travel in the vicinity of Cite Militaire and along La Saline Boulevard (Port Road) due to continuing concerns of criminal activity and proximity to known gang areas. During September and October 2013,

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Route National #2 between Petit Goave and Mirogoane was particularly dangerous due to almost daily incidents of highway banditry. However, due to regular HNP and UN patrols, the number of incidents declined markedly by the end of 2013.

In rural or mountainous areas, drivers should expect a lack of adequate guard rails, few traffic signs and road markings, and little to no vehicle or road lighting. Drivers should use caution when driving around bends, as it is common for vehicles coming from the other direction to pass slower vehicles or otherwise drive in the middle of the road, even around blind turns. Travel outside of Port-au-Prince should be done during daylight hours if possible and with two or more vehicles due to both the security situation and road conditions. While carjackings and armed robberies are not uncommon in many urban areas, they are less common in the countryside.

Drivers should be conscious that accidents can draw angry, and potentially violent, crowds in a very short period. It is recommended that anyone involved in an accident resulting in the formation of a mob proceed directly to a safe place (e.g. police station) to resolve the situation.

Drivers should take note of added safety risks during the rainy season (April-November) when roadways can become impassable quickly. It is not uncommon for flooding to reach the doors of an average SUV. The mountainous areas pose even greater challenges to road travel due to weather conditions frequently involving rain and foggy conditions. The narrow, unpaved roads are also blocked by muddy surface conditions.

The local transport known as "tap-taps" are the primary form of public transportation for most Haitians. Tap-taps are usually pick-up trucks modified with additional seating in the cargo bed.

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The use of tap-taps by Westerners is dangerous, as robberies and accidents are common. Embassy policy prohibits the use of any public transportation in Haiti for U.S. government employees.

General vigilance should be used at all times on all roads, as there is no area immune from crime. There have been reports of attacks on stopped vehicles on the Route National #1, Route National #9, and other areas of Port-au-Prince. Instances of "smash and grabs" and attempted carjackings continue, especially in downtown traffic and at night. In the case of vehicular robberies (i.e. "smash and grabs") and attempted carjackings, a group of street criminals (hidden in the grass or in ditches) often wait for vehicles to stop in traffic or at traffic lights. They rush the vehicle and attempt to open the target's doors. If the doors are locked and the driver fails to take immediate action, the group will attempt to break a window to violently gain control. Occurrences of these incidents increase at night and occur frequently in heavy mid-day traffic from which it is difficult to escape. The road from the Port-au-Prince International Airport is particularly targeted. Vehicle thefts also remain a problem in many areas; however, they continue to be more commonly committed in conjunction with kidnappings/carjackings. The trend over the course of the past couple of years has been the theft by force of a vehicle or motorcycle, which is then used in a kidnapping, and later abandoned on the side of the road.

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

### **Civil Unrest**

Travelers are reminded of the potential for spontaneous protests and public demonstrations, especially in Port-au-Prince, that can occur at any time and may result in violence.

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Demonstrations are frequently held in Port-au-Prince and other outlying areas for various reasons, to include dissatisfaction of infrastructure and utilities to disapproval with government entities or UN presence. Any demonstration can turn violent, and innocent bystanders or travelers can be caught up in a clash between demonstrators and the HNP, rock throwing, and tire burning road blocks. Travelers are advised to avoid all demonstrations and be prepared to seek alternate routes should one be encountered.

Violent political protests occur regularly in downtown Port-au-Prince around the National Palace, the Champ de Mars, and the State University campuses, along with sporadic incidents scattered throughout the city. These protests have been frequent, averaging multiple incidents per week since mid-2009. The demonstrations have been motivated by a variety of political and social movements, ranging from minimum wage to school curriculum to the presence of UN forces to cholera response to the presidential elections. They share a common trend in that protestors are quick to barricade streets and regularly stone the windows of passing motorists' vehicles. The most recent noteworthy protests include political demonstrations in Port-au-Prince in November 2013 and quality of life protests in northeastern Haiti in late January 2014.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

### **Environmental Hazards**

Haiti can be affected by hurricanes and other storms. Hurricane season runs from approximately June 1 to November 30. Driving during these times has additional risks. During 2012, Haiti was adversely affected by two severe tropical storms (Isaac and Sandy) that resulted in severe flooding and washed out roads in many areas. The southern areas were hit

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the hardest, with a number of deaths and countrywide food shortages resulting from the destruction.

Due to severe deforestation of the mountains, even modest rains can cause flash flooding and other life threatening hazards.

A 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti near Port-au-Prince on January 12, 2010. Much of the physical infrastructure of Port-au-Prince was destroyed, and it will take years to recover from the catastrophic damage. Services -- lodging, health care, and other basic services -- have been greatly reduced but are seemingly making small comebacks in certain sectors.

#### Industrial and Transportation Accidents

The economic section of the U.S. Embassy may be contacted concerning issues of industrial and transportation safety (509.2229.8000). Before using smaller airlines, one is advised to research recent history. Those that have a shoddy appearance are very likely to be remiss on safety standards.

#### Regional Travel Concerns and Restricted Travel Areas/Zones

Cite Soleil continues to be an area of concern for security forces despite the successful efforts of the HNP and UN security forces to eradicate criminal control of this area. This was

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especially true during the final quarter of 2013 when gang violence in the area rose dramatically.

### Drug-related Crime

Drug trafficking organizations actively work to make Haiti a known transshipment country. Haiti has been reported as a major transshipment point for South American narcotics to the United States; however, the threat of narcoterrorism is not a major issue.

### Kidnapping Threats

Although the number of kidnappings in general and kidnappings of U.S. citizens in particular dropped drastically in 2013, U.S. citizens traveling to and residing in Haiti are reminded that greater Port-au-Prince remains a leading venue for criminal kidnappings of Americans. Kidnapping of U.S. citizens should be reported to the Haitian National Police and the American Citizens Services (ACS) section of the U.S. Embassy (509.2229.8000). As the lead U.S. law enforcement agency in Haiti, the Regional Security Office (RSO) plays an active role in responding to kidnappings of American citizens and coordinates closely with Federal Bureau of Investigation entities.

Most kidnappings continue to be criminal in nature, and the kidnappers make no distinctions of nationality, race, gender, or age. All persons who are perceived to have wealth or some family connections with assets, either in Haiti or abroad, are vulnerable. The breakdown in reported kidnapping victims from the last few years is spread fairly evenly among men,

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women, and children. While most cases were resolved through the payment of ransom, many kidnappings include physical or sexual assaults. Depending on the motive, gang, and/or knowledge of the kidnappers by the victim, some incidents do result in death of the victim. 2013 saw a sharp decrease in kidnappings compared to previous years due to the success of several law enforcement operations targeting gangs. The U.S. Embassy's Consular Section reports that five Americans were kidnapped in Haiti in 2013.

## Police Response

Underreporting of crime is due to a lack of sufficient police presence and response capability and/or lack of faith in action by the police to investigate. In a country of approximately 10 million people, the HNP has about 10,000 officers, approximately two-thirds of whom are deployed in the greater Port-au-Prince metropolitan area (Port-au-Prince has approximately two million residents). Many communities simply do not have means to report crimes, though most experts agree that there is not much crime to report in provincial towns and rural areas. In addition, when crimes are reported, they are not adequately documented in a standardized reporting format. An already depleted police force was greatly affected by the earthquake in January 2010, as many of their police stations were destroyed. Although there has been much improvement since 2010, the HNP is still beset with numerous problems.

There is no vehicle patrol by the HNP, and they have a very limited response capability. The HNP has minimal deterrent effect on criminals, who can operate freely without fear of the uniformed or traffic police. If the police are needed to interrupt a crime in progress or to investigate a concluded criminal act, the victim normally must drive to the local police station and pick up an available police officer. The investigation of a crime is limited by a lack of HNP resources. As a result, more local Port-au-Prince residents are defending themselves and property by upgrading their property and security systems, employing 24/7 and/or additional

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guards, and/or obtaining firearms for personal protection.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In all instances, visitors should be respectful and comply with police direction. U.S. citizens who feel they were harassed are encouraged to call American Citizen Services (ACS) at the U.S. Embassy. You can reach the Embassy by telephone at 509.2229.8000.

If you are arrested, ACS recommends that you request to speak with the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince immediately. The phone number is 509.2229.8000. This number is manned 24-hours/day, and you can be put in contact with local authorities or with the Embassy staff. If you cannot reach the Embassy, try to contact someone locally who can.

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

If you are the victim of a crime, first get to a safe location and seek medical attention, if needed. Then, notify local authorities and the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince. You can reach the Embassy by telephone at 509.2229.8000. You should immediately report the incident to the nearest police station. If it is an emergency and the police are not in the vicinity, police can be contacted by calling 114. Calling a phone number from a cell phone to a landline in Haiti is sometimes problematic. The Haitian National Police Information and Operations Center can be contacted at 509-3835-1111.

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The U.S. Embassy's American Citizen Services (ACS) section can assist you with such issues as: replacing a stolen passport; contacting family, friends, or employers; obtaining appropriate medical care; addressing emergency needs that arise as a result of the crime; obtaining general information about the local criminal justice process and information about your case; obtaining information about local resources to assist victims, including foreign crime victim compensation programs; obtaining information about crime victim assistance and compensation programs in the U.S.; and obtaining a list of local attorneys. Consular officials cannot, however, investigate crimes, provide legal advice or represent you in court, serve as official interpreters or translators, or pay legal, medical, or other fees for you. For more information about services available to victims of crime, please see the U.S. State Department website. Victims of crimes may be eligible for assistance or compensation from state crime victims assistance programs, which vary from state to state. Please click here for information about each state's program. In addition, information about sexual assault crisis hotline information, counseling services, and other services for crime victims is available here.

## Medical Emergencies

The Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses, such as medical evacuation. It is strongly recommended that those visiting Port-au-Prince carry medical evacuation insurance. U.S. medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, health care providers do not accept U.S. medical insurance. Medical professionals require a cash payment up front and will provide a receipt that can be provided to a U.S. insurance company. U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States. However, many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas. Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including

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overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad," available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page.

For international treatment and medical insurance: AEA International, 206.340.6000.

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

Medical services are far below U.S. standards and can be difficult to obtain. Emergency medical care is not always readily available, as most hospitals do not have an emergency department staffed 24 hours/day. There are a handful of hospitals available, all of which are suitable in medical emergencies only.

#### Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Medical evacuation is required for most major medical care. There are several air ambulance companies based in the U.S. that service Haiti:

National Air Ambulance (Ft.Lauderdale, FL) 1.800.327.3710,

Air Ambulance Networks 1.800.327.1966, and

Air Ambulance Professionals 1.800.752.4195.

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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/haiti>. CDC International Traveler's hotline - (404) 332-4559, <http://www.cdc.gov>.

## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

### Areas to be Avoided

Cite Soleil, Carrefour, Martissant, and the Croix Des Boquets areas are considered to be of high risk to U.S. Embassy personnel. As a result, Embassy employees are only authorized to travel to these areas in armored vehicles and under armed escort.

### Best Situational Awareness Practices

American citizens are advised to take common sense precautions and avoid any event where crowds may congregate. Protests and demonstrations occur frequently in the downtown Port-au-Prince area. As a result, U.S. Embassy personnel are only authorized to travel to this

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area during daylight hours and in armored vehicles. Avoid any and all political rallies or demonstrations. Be sure to read the Consular Information sheet on Haiti prior to travel for updated information and advice.

The Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy recommends against walking or jogging on any street in Port-au-Prince. Always remain aware of your surroundings and the activity around you. Traveling in groups of 3-4 persons is highly recommended, especially at night. A typical mugging in Port-au-Prince involves a group of young males who surround and overwhelm their victim in a public area. An alert individual can often see this developing and initiate an appropriate evasive action.

Americans traveling in Haiti should also take special care and attention to ensure they do not become stranded in remote regions or accidentally enter certain areas deemed unsafe, especially within Port-au-Prince. Visitors are warned not to venture out after dusk unless they are in a vehicle and moving to another protected area. Driving at night outside of Port-au-Prince is not recommended. Avoid driving at night outside the low-density suburban areas. Keep automobile doors locked at all times and the windows up. While stopped in urban traffic, scan the side and rearview mirrors to identify potential trouble. While idling at a light or stop sign, leave adequate room to maneuver between your vehicle and the one in front. Both when driving and when the vehicle is unoccupied, secure all items out of view by either placing them in the trunk or under the seat.

Full-time guards with adequate wall, gate, grillwork, and alarm security features remain the best deterrent to crime. Many residents of Port-au-Prince utilize guards, alarms, grillwork, electrical fencing, barbed wire, dogs, and/or personally owned firearms to combat residential crime.

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Situational awareness remains the key to avoiding vehicular crimes or extracting one's self from them. Visitors who are victims of crime are targeted by criminal elements not because they are Americans but because they are perceived as being wealthy. Foreign currency, electronics, vehicles, and weapons are items most sought after by the criminal element. Do not display or carry unnecessary valuables in public. Do not carry a cell phone on the waist or in other visible areas. Do not display large amounts of money.

Be alert to distractions. Purse-snatchers will often work in teams of two with one man acting as a diversion. One man may engage the target in conversation and bump him/her on the street while the other grabs hand-carried valuables, or boldly snatches jewelry from the victim in plain sight of security guards before fleeing.

Do not resist if robbed or carjacked.

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

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

American citizens are strongly encouraged to register at the American Citizens Services section at the Embassy, located at Tabarre #41, Tabarre, Haiti, or online at <http://travel.state.gov>.

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## Embassy Contact Numbers

Embassy Switchboard: 509.2229.8000

Regional Security Office: 509.2229.8061

Consular Section: 509.2229.8000

Marine Security Guard: 509.2229.8122

For background information on Haiti, or for information on how to avoid becoming a victim of crime please refer to the State Department's "Country Background Notes," "Consular Information Sheet," and "Travel Warning Information" located on the State Department website at <http://www.state.gov>

## OSAC Country Council Information

There is an active OSAC Country Council. All U.S. private sector organizations active in Haiti are encouraged to attend meetings. For more information, please contact the Regional Security Office at U.S. Embassy Port-au-Prince, or visit <http://www.osac.gov>.

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