



## Mexico 2015 Crime and Safety Report: Merida

Stolen items; Theft; Narco-Terrorism; Extortion; Transportation Security; Travel Health and Safety; Riots/Civil Unrest; Hurricanes; Maritime; Oil & Energy; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping

Western Hemisphere > Mexico; Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Merida

1/5/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

More than four million Americans visit the Yucatán Peninsula each year due to its numerous tourist destinations.

Crime Rating: Medium

### Crime Threats

The three states in the peninsula (Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatán) have not suffered the same level of escalating violence seen in other parts of Mexico. There is some narco-related violence in Quintana Roo, particularly in the non-tourist areas of Cancun and Playa del Carmen.

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Non-narco-related crime varies in type and frequency throughout the peninsula but is generally low. While there is no evidence indicating that criminals specifically target American citizens, crime victims are usually chosen based on perceived wealth, vulnerability, and inattentiveness. Most incidents of crime affecting U.S. citizens involve the excess consumption of alcohol.

The Yucatan Peninsula has experienced an increase in the number of telephonic extortions and frauds. These scams come in many variations, including “virtual kidnappings,” which is an extortion by deception scheme wherein a victim is contacted by phone and coerced (by threat of violence) to remain isolated and to provide phone numbers for the victim's family or loved ones. The victim's family is then contacted and a ransom for the “kidnapped” person extracted. While this crime mostly affects Mexican nationals, consular officers have received several reports from resident U.S. citizens and tourists experiencing similar calls within the Merida consular district.

## Areas of Concern

There are no travel restrictions or warnings imposed by the Department of State for the states of Yucatán, Campeche, and Quintana Roo. The latest country specific information and travel alerts for Mexico can be found at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_970.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_970.html).

## Transportation-Safety Situation

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## Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions in the Yucatán Peninsula are different than those encountered in the U.S. Extra care should be exercised when passing a vehicle or being passed. Non-toll roads between major cities can be poorly illuminated, narrow, and vary in conditions. Toll roads are generally wider and better maintained. Drivers should beware of unmarked speed bumps in populated areas. Driving at night outside of major cities is not advisable due to the lack of adequate street lighting. Federal highway 307, connecting Cancun and Playa del Carmen, has had the greatest number of accidents involving U.S. citizens. Most accidents are caused by excess speed, alcohol, or a combination.

Prior to road travel, ensure your vehicle is in good working condition and that fluids are at the correct level. When traveling long distances, it is best to travel in tandem. Ensure that there is enough fuel to reach larger cities or towns, as some smaller communities may not have service stations. The following items are recommended for road trips: cellular phone/charger; spare tire; portable gas can with funnel; potable water and non-perishable food items; first aid kit; jumper cables; flares/reflectors; tool kit; and a spare key.

Do not leave valuables in plain view and unattended in your vehicle. Avoid leaving your car on the street. When possible, park your vehicle inside residential compounds or parking areas with attendants. In traffic, always attempt to leave space in which to maneuver. Always leave yourself an exit. Be prepared to take evasive action at any time. Avoid choke points in travel. Be wary of diversions.

## Public Transportation Conditions

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Public transportation, in the form of buses and taxis, is readily available in most cities and towns. However, drivers can be untrained and do not always follow the rules of the road. Accidents are common. Whenever possible, travelers should use taxis arranged by hotel staff or located at designated stands and avoid hailing taxis on the street.

#### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Airports are modern and provide numerous domestic and international travel options. Cancun's International Airport is Mexico's busiest airport for international arrivals and second in total arrivals for the country.

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

The level of political violence in the Yucatan Peninsula has historically been low.

Political Violence Rating: Medium

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

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There are no known indigenous terrorist groups in the Yucatán Peninsula. Unlike many parts of Mexico, there is no single transnational criminal organization in the region, so it is difficult to definitively state which is in “control” of the area. Open source reporting indicates the presence of Los Zetas, Cartel del Golfo, and Sinaloa Cartel operating out of Quintana Roo, specifically in Cancun and Playa del Carmen. This has resulted in some narco-related homicides and acts of violence throughout the state. Additionally, Quintana Roo leads the nation in reported cases of extortion.

There is no evidence to suggest that international terrorist groups are operating in the Yucatán Peninsula.

Terrorism Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

While demonstrations have occurred in Merida, they have generally remained peaceful and were not directed at U.S. interests. During 2014, a number of cities in the Yucatán experienced demonstrations related to domestic policy issues. These protests were occasionally disruptive, blocking major roadways, and had the potential to turn violent. No major incidents of civil unrest have been reported within the last 12 months.

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## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

The Yucatán Peninsula is impacted by the Atlantic Hurricane season (June 1-November 30). Quintana Roo tends to suffer the greatest effects from hurricanes; however, storms have caused flooding and disruption of utility services throughout the Yucatán. Travelers are advised to keep abreast of developing weather conditions during the hurricane season and to avoid the paths of storms when possible.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

While there has been no large scale industrial incident in the past 12 months, Mexico's nationalized petroleum Company, PEMEX, conducts off-shore oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. Ciudad del Carmen in Campeche is one of the cities that support these off shore oil platforms.

### Drug-related Crimes

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The Yucatán Peninsula is strategically close to narcotic smuggling routes of Central America and parts of the Caribbean. Most of the violent crimes reported over the last 12 months are the result of various narco-trafficking groups fighting for control of these smuggling routes.

### Kidnapping Threat

Traditional kidnappings in the Yucatán Peninsula remain an anomaly. “Express” kidnappings, in which the victim is abducted for a short time and forced to withdraw money (usually from an ATM) occur with more frequency but are still uncommon. There has been a substantial rise in “virtual kidnappings.”

### Police Response

Police corruption and involvement in criminal activity, along with fear of reprisals from criminal elements, discourages many victims from reporting crimes.

U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with police if stopped and questioned.

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

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Visitors should inform the Consulate in Merida or the Consular Agencies in Cancun or Playa Del Carmen should they encounter problems, including detainment or arrest by the police, while in this part of Mexico.

Police Emergency: 066

Crime Victim Assistance

If involved in a traffic accident or victimized by crime, one may be asked to accompany the investigating officer to a local police station to file a report. A complaint must be filed in the area where the crime occurred. Attempting to file a complaint once one has returned to the U.S. can be a difficult and time consuming process.

## **Medical Emergencies**

Local hospitals generally require payment in advance.

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad is provided in the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad," available via the Consular Affairs web page at <http://www.travel.state.gov>.

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## Recommended Air Ambulance Services

The Regional Security Office does not endorse any specific private insurance or air ambulance company. The following list is for informational purposes only:

- Advanced Air Ambulance 800-633-3590 or 305-232-7700
- Air Ambulance Professionals 800-752-4195 or 954-491-0555

## Recommended Insurance Posture

Travelers should ensure that they have adequate health insurance while traveling throughout Mexico. For international treatment and medical insurance:

- AEA International (206) 340-6000

## CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Persons visiting the Yucatán should take normal tourist precautions with regard to drinking water, eating fresh fruits, vegetables, and salads. For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:

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[http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/mexico?s\\_cid=nceqid-dgmg-travel-sing-le-001](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/mexico?s_cid=nceqid-dgmg-travel-sing-le-001).

## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

### Scams

There are a variety of scams used by the criminals to rob victims, to include so-called virtual kidnappings.

A similar scam is when an individual calls and states an employee or family member has been in an accident and needs immediate medical attention. The individual states that payment must be provided in order for the injured individual to be treated. This scam is often targeted at household staff who react without verifying with their employer and the elderly.

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

Travelers can reduce their chances of being the victim of a crime at tourist destinations by traveling with a trusted individual and being cognizant of their alcohol consumption. Do not accept drinks from strangers and always watch your drink; it is relatively easy for a criminal to put some form of drug into a drink. There have been incidents of people who have woken up

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robbed of their valuables or sexually assaulted after accepting such a drink.

Visitors can reduce their risk of becoming a victim of crime by varying routes and times of travel and ensuring residences are sufficiently protected (perimeter doors should be substantial and equipped with deadbolts and a peephole, all reachable windows and openings should be grilled, and grounds around residences should be illuminated). Family members and household help should not allow anyone to enter the residential grounds without identification and prearranged appointments. Suspicious persons or activities in the neighborhood should be reported to the police immediately. Be cautious about inviting strangers or casual acquaintances into your home. Ensure all of your family members are briefed on security measures.

Be careful of cash transactions on the street. A hurried transaction for merchandise often leaves the customer with shoddy/counterfeit goods or with counterfeit money.

Vary your times/routes. Do not become time and place predictable. Be alert to surveillance. Always be aware of your surroundings. Report all suspicious activity to the proper authorities. Criminals, even petty thieves, are known to watch the activities of their victims before they commit a robbery or assault. Advise colleagues and family of your daily plans and ensure they know how to reach you.

Maintain a low personal profile; it is best to avoid activities that draw attention. Avoid wearing ostentatious jewelry or clothing that may bring unwanted attention.

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Never give out your personal information such as family member and household staff names, addresses and telephone numbers in an open setting.

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

### Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

Calle 60 No. 338-K x 29 y 31 Col. Alcala Martin Merida, Yucatán, Mexico 97050

### Consulate Contact Numbers

(011) (52) (999) 942-5700 (dialing from the U.S.)

(01) (999) 942-5700 (dialing from within Mexico) 942-5700 (dialing from within Merida)

E-mail: [meridacons@state.gov](mailto:meridacons@state.gov)

Website: <http://merida.usconsulate.gov/>

### Nearby Posts

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Embassy Mexico City: <http://mexico.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate Ciudad Juarez: <http://ciudadjuarez.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guadalajara: <http://guadalajara.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Hermosillo: <http://hermosillo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Matamoros: <http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Monterrey: <http://monterrey.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Nogales: <http://nogales.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Nuevo Laredo: <http://nuevolaredo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Tijuana: <http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/>

Consular Agency Cancun

Blvd. Kukulcan Km 13, Torre La Europea, Despacho 301 ZH Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77500

011-52-998-883-0272 (direct dial from the U.S.) 202-640-2511 (Vonage dialing from the U.S.)  
883-0272 (dialing from within Cancun)

01-998-883-0272 (dialing from elsewhere in Mexico)

Consular Agency Playa del Carmen

"The Palapa" Calle 1 Sur, Entre 15 Av. Y 20 Av.

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Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo, Mexico 77710

011-52-984-873-0303 (direct dial from the U.S.)

202-370-6708 (Vonage dialing from the U.S.)

01-984-873-0303 (dialing from outside Playa Del Carmen but within Mexico)

01-984-873-0481 (Alternate from outside Playa del Carmen but within Mexico)

E-Mail: [playausca@hotmail.com](mailto:playausca@hotmail.com)

### **OSAC Country Council Information**

There is an active OSAC Cancun Country Council. Contact the Regional Security Office Merida (011) (52) (999) 942-5719 or visit the Council online at <http://www.OSAC.gov>. To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email, [OSACWHA@state.gov](mailto:OSACWHA@state.gov).

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