



## **Brazil 2015 Crime and Safety Report: Recife**

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Financial Security; Cargo Security; Floods; Anti-American sentiment; Riots/Civil Unrest; Landslides and mudslides; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping; Fraud

Western Hemisphere > Brazil; Western Hemisphere > Brazil > Recife

1/5/2016

### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

The State Department divides its roles and responsibilities in Brazil between four consular districts spread across the country (one for the Embassy and each of the three Consulates). This Crime and Safety Report focuses on Consulate General Recife's district, which covers the states of Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Sergipe.

For more information regarding the security environment in other areas of Brazil, please reference the OSAC Crime and Safety Reports from the following consular districts: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Brasília.

Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

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Crime is the principal threat to visitors in Brazil. Pickpocketing, armed robbery, vehicular theft, and petty street crime are far more common than violent crimes like express kidnappings, kidnapping for ransom, and random shootings. This is due to the government's proactive intervention. Since 2007, the government of Pernambuco has engaged in a concerted effort to reduce crime levels through the initiative of "Pacto Pela Vida," a state program whose main objective is the promotion of social peace. So far, it has reportedly reduced crime rates each year. The Secretary of Social Defense (SDS), the governing body of law enforcement in Pernambuco, reported that the overall rate of homicide has decreased by 58 percent between 2007-2014 in the Recife metropolitan area. The 2014 homicide report does show an increase of homicides by 9.5 percent compared to the previous year in Pernambuco.

One trend is called "arrastão," in which a gang performs multiple, simultaneous robberies during congested traffic or on the beach. "Arrastões" and random robberies may occur during major events (Carnival, soccer games, and even during peak times at the beach). Individuals in vehicles stopped at traffic lights are also targets.

The incidence of crime against tourists is greater in areas surrounding the airport, hotels, bars, nightclubs, and other establishments that cater to visitors. Although the risk is greater at night, street crime also occurs during the day, and safer areas of cities are not immune.

There have been instances where criminals have installed sophisticated "skimming devices" to steal card user information from ATMs. The obtained information is then used to withdraw money from the victims' accounts. There have been reports of individuals who attempt to withdraw money from ATMs that appear to be empty; when in actuality there is an improvised

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device stopping the money from being dispensed. Enabling the criminal to later return to the ATM and retrieve the stuck money.

Cargo theft remains a major security issue throughout Brazil. Organized criminal gangs target trucks and vans carrying finished goods. Cargo theft has made many companies employ expensive countermeasures, including armed security escorts for high value loads and the use of satellites to track truck movements.

There is significant and sustained organized criminal activity throughout Brazil, particularly in major cities.

#### Areas of Concern

Tourists should take special care while on the beaches, as robberies may occur in broad daylight, especially in the Boa Viagem neighborhood.

All favelas (slums), especially those that do not have a full-time police presence, should be avoided.

#### Transportation-Safety Situation

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## Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions range from poor to very good, with secondary and rural roads being among the worst. Most roads in large cities are paved; however, roads flood during heavy rains, making them impassable. Potholes often remain unrepaired for several weeks. Nearly all rural roads are unpaved and can be impassable during the rainy season (November-April). Defensive driving is a requirement, as traffic can be congested and unpredictable. The level of both public and private driver training and safety awareness does not reach minimum U.S. standards.

Brazil has a very high level of vehicle accidents and death rates due to accidents. Visitors are strongly encouraged to drive with caution and always wear seatbelts.

Crime on the roads remains a problem for both visitors and local residents, especially during evening commutes and traffic jams. Travelers are advised to use caution during evening traffic to avoid roadside robberies that target passing and stopped vehicles. It is important that drivers pay attention to their surroundings and keep doors locked and windows rolled up when stopped in traffic.

Recife has a zero tolerance law for drinking and driving ("Lei Seca"). Roadside checkpoints are a routine. Consequences can vary from a fine to being arrested.

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## Public Transportation Conditions

Incidents of theft on city buses are also frequent; making taxis a safer method of travel. Avoid city buses and other public transportation. Many pass through high crime areas and are susceptible to robberies. Only use legitimate, well-marked, taxis.

## Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political Violence Rating: Medium

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

There are no known indigenous terrorist groups operating in Brazil. Brazil has no significant enemies and is not targeted by any known radical groups.

Terrorism Rating: Low

## Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

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The tri-border area where Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay share borders is home to a large Arab community. To date, no incidents directed against official or non-official Americans have occurred in this area. While the Consulate does not specifically discourage travel to the area, some anti-American sentiment has been expressed in the region. American visitors to the area, to include the Foz do Iguazu waterfall, should remain vigilant and are encouraged to maintain a low profile.

## Civil Unrest

Political violence and protests occur throughout Brazil, especially in the capital and major cities. There have been numerous protests in the past year throughout the entire country. Locals protest for various reasons, including work conditions, wages, the environment, and political corruption. While protests in Recife are generally nonviolent, some have resulted in property damage and physical injuries. Visitors should avoid large crowds or ongoing protests and should depart the area immediately. The threat of violence is possible throughout Brazil.

Groups such as Movimento Sem Terra (MST), Black Bloc, and other domestic political groups occasionally conduct acts of civil disobedience and have confronted police violently.

## Post-Specific Concerns

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## Environmental Hazards

Natural disasters are not a major concern, although significant seasonal flooding and mudslides occur during the rainy season.

Recife's beaches are a popular tourist attraction, but due to the numerous accounts of shark attacks, it is ill-advised to venture too far from shore. There are numerous signs warning swimmers of this danger.

## Drug-related Crimes

The major cities experience the effects of persons addicted to illicit drugs. Street assaults, robberies, and other criminal activity generate proceeds to support their addictions. Brazil is the number two consumer of cocaine in the world, behind the U.S. As such, a large proportion of crime is drug-related.

## Kidnapping Threat

While kidnappings for ransom have become less common in recent years, these incidents do occur. One tactic of organized gangs is to target individuals observed withdrawing money from ATMs or exiting banks after making a withdrawal. These gangs frequently operate in

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teams and are armed.

## Police Response

Police response, both from the military and civil police, varies. Police officials frequently cite a lack of resources, staffing shortages, basic equipment, and morale as reasons for widely varying response times and unsolved crime. Law enforcement entities continue to look for creative policing strategies to overcome infrastructure challenges to crime prevention, such as community policing, cops on motorcycles, and extensive implementation of surveillance cameras.

In the Recife metropolitan area, there are over 645 surveillance cameras to monitor and deter crime. These surveillance systems are monitored by the SDS, which responds by dispatching military and/or municipal police. In neighborhoods near Boa Viagem, there are static guards posted to monitor activity in most residential areas. Larger properties and commercial sites generally employ 24/7 security guard services.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Visitors should inform the nearest Embassy or Consulate in the event they encounter problems while traveling in Brazil, including detainment or arrest by the police.

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American Citizen Services (ACS) - M-F, 7:00AM to 4:00PM, (+55) (81) 3416-3080

After hours Duty Officer emergency line - 4:00PM to 7:00AM and on weekends: (+55) (81) 9916-9470

Crime Victim Assistance

### **Recife Emergency Services**

**Phone #**

### **Medical Emergency (*Ambulância*)**

192

### **Fire Service / Sea Rescue (*Corpo de Bombeiros*)**

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193

**Military Police** (*Polícia Militar*)

190

**Civil Police** (*Polícia Civil*)

197

**Federal Police** (*Polícia Federal*)

194

**Traffic Police - CTTU**

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0800-081-1078

### **Transit Department - DETRAN**

154

### **Recife Airport (Guararapes)**

(81)3464-4188

### **Tourist Police Station (Delegacia do Turista)**

(81)3322-3122

## **Medical Emergencies**

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Medical care at private clinics is quite good. Cash or credit card payment at the time of service is normally required for medical care at private facilities. Public hospitals provide a lower standard of care and are often overcrowded and understaffed, but they generally do not require prepayment and are able to deal with medical emergencies.

#### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

##### Real Hospital Portugues de Beneficencia em Pernambuco

Avenida Governador Agamenon Magalhães, 4760, Paissandu, Recife

Tel: (81) 3416-1122

##### Hospital Santa Joana

Rua Joaquim Nabuco, 200, Derby, Recife

Tel: (81) 3216-6565

##### Hospital Esperança

Rua Antonio Gomes e Freitas, 265, Ilha do Leite

Tel: (81) 3131-7878

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Hospital Unimed Recife

Av. Lins Petit, Nº 35, Praça Chora Menino, Ilha do Leite, Recife

Tel: (81) 3231-3111

The Embassy's website posts a larger list of medical providers here.

#### Recommended Insurance Posture

For air medical evacuation services, we recommend visitors purchase private air medical evacuation insurance before travelling to Brazil.

#### CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Travelers to Brazil should consult with their medical providers regarding immunization and vaccination requirements prior to traveling to Brazil. Travelers should have a documented yellow fever card. For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/brazil>.

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## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

### Scams

There are a variety of scams used by the criminals to rob victims, which include:

An unknown individual calls to say that a person you know (possibly a family member) has been kidnapped and unless you immediately pay the ransom, the person will be harmed. The ransom is paid, and then it becomes known that the kidnapping never occurred.

A similar scam is when an unknown 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 often targets household staff that reacts without verifying the information with their employer.

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors should practice common sense preventative security techniques, just as they would in any large city. The following security tips should be followed in order to avoid becoming a victim of crime:

Travel in groups of two or more people.

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Do not carry or wear valuable items that will attract attention. Expensive watches, high profile jewelry, and all electronic devices will immediately attract unwanted attention from criminals. The goal is always to lower your profile and blend in. If you need to wear expensive jewelry or carry a camera, conceal it until you arrive at your destination. Be aware of the street environment and avoid contact with those who may be looking for potential victims. Be alert at open markets or crowded areas. If you feel unsafe, seek a safer location. Go into a store, bank, or simply cross the street. Do not physically resist any robbery attempt. While this is a personal decision, statistics show that resistance increases the chance of injury or death.

Do not answer your hotel room door until you positively confirm who is on the other side. Look through the peephole or call the front desk to confirm the visitor.

Do not walk on beaches or in parks after dark. Assaults are more common in these areas.

Consider renting or purchasing a cellular phone. Cellular phones are widely available, inexpensive, and generally reliable, especially in the major cities.

Do not accept drinks from strangers and always watch your drink. Scopolamine, or a similar drug, may be added to your drink to disorient or incapacitate you. People have woken up robbed of their valuables or sexually assaulted after accepting such a drink.

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

If using credit cards, never allow waiters or clerks to walk away with your card and ensure they only swipe your card once. Travelers are also strongly encouraged to monitor carefully their accounts for the duration of their visit, due to the possibility of having their cards cloned.

Visitors are advised to use ATMs in inconspicuous locations or those in major tourist hotels to reduce the odds of being targeted for kidnappings for ransom. Visitors are advised to withdraw money only from reputable money exchanging services, in addition to using only trusted ATMs in Recife. It is recommended to use ATMs at banks and/or in major shopping malls.

If you find yourself in a carjacking situation, surrender your vehicle immediately and offer no resistance. Do not allow yourself to be taken to another location by the assailant. If this occurs, odds greatly increase that you could be assaulted or killed.

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

### Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

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Rua Gonçalves Maia, 163

Bairro Boa Vista

Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil

The U.S. Consulate General in Recife is open Monday-Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; except for Brazilian and American holidays.

#### Consulate Contact Numbers

Regional Security Officer (RSO): (+55) (81) 3416-3114

American Citizen Services (ACS): (+55) (81) 3416-3080

After hours Duty Officer: (+55) (81) 9916-9470

Emergencies and calls after normal business hours may be directed to Post One Brasilia: (+55) (61) 3312-7400.

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

#### Nearby Posts

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Embassy Brasilia: <http://brazil.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate Rio de Janeiro: <http://riodejaneiro.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Sao Paulo: <http://saopaulo.usconsulate.gov/>

### Consulate Guidance

U.S. companies are encouraged to contact the Regional Security Officer (RSO) for specific questions concerning the local security situation. Information is also readily available from the RSO offices in Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, and Sao Paulo.

### OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council in Recife. OSAC Country Councils in Brazil are located in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Please review their Crime and Safety Reports for additional details. Country Council information can be located at the OSAC website at the following address: [www.osac.gov/countrycouncils](http://www.osac.gov/countrycouncils). To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email [OSACWHA@state.gov](mailto:OSACWHA@state.gov).

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