



Russia 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Vladivostok

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Anti-American sentiment; Theft; Burglary; Bribery; Extortion; Cyber; Financial Security; Fraud; Other; Winter weather; Earthquakes; Tsunamis; Economic Espionage; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Surveillance; Drug Trafficking

Europe > Russia; Europe > Russia > Vladivostok

1/15/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats

Vladivostok, with a population of just over 600,000 people, experiences moderate levels of crime compared to other major Russian urban centers. The police are able to deter many serious crimes, but petty crimes still occur with some frequency and remain a common problem as in most large urban centers. Pickpockets are talented and active, although to a lesser degree than in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Pickpocketing on public transportation, at shopping areas, and at tourist sites does occur. Thieves commonly target wallets, cell phones, computers, tablets, cameras, and high-value items.

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As a general rule, lesser developed areas in major cities have higher crime rates. Additionally, more crimes of opportunity occur during early morning hours; individuals who frequent bars, nightclubs and similar establishments are more likely to be involved in physical altercations after midnight. Traveling alone and in unfamiliar areas can leave one vulnerable and make one a more appealing target to criminals.

While residential break-ins and thefts occur, these typically take place during daylight hours when the residents are not at home. Confrontational home invasions with residents present are not common.

While legal private handgun ownership is limited and well-regulated by police, there remain unlicensed firearms in circulation. Pneumatic/"Traumatic" weapons -- a non-lethal means of defense -- are also regulated by police but have been used in crimes. While officially declared "non-lethal," individuals have died from injuries received from these weapons.

Corruption continues to be an issue and is not limited solely to the law enforcement sector. The solicitation and payment of bribes occurs with some frequency and is widely accepted as a practical business transaction.

Organized crime groups and related violence have not targeted Americans or other foreigners. The rate of auto theft connected to organized crime is high. Automobile theft occurs regularly with low rates of recovery or prosecution of criminals. A portion of Vladivostok's economy involves car importation, vehicle customization, and the sale of car parts. Stolen vehicles are generally transported out of the city or are broken down into parts. Thieves are particularly interested in visible currency, GPS navigation systems,

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iPods/iPhones, and other loose valuables. Theft of these valuables from cars remains more common than theft of the actual cars.

Cybersecurity Issues

Incidents of credit card, Internet, and ATM fraud are common. Credit cards are accepted by most retailers and dining/entertainment establishments. Large scale hotels are generally considered safe for credit card use.

Other Areas of Concern

There are several closed cities and regions in Russia. If you attempt to enter these areas without prior authorization, you may be subject to arrest, fines, and/or deportation. You must list on the visa application all areas to be visited and register with authorities upon arrival at each destination. The list of restricted areas is subject to frequent changes, so travelers should check with their sponsor, hotel, or the nearest office of the Russian Federal Migration Service before traveling to unfamiliar cities and towns.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

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Road conditions and driver safety norms differ significantly from those in the U.S., especially outside of major metropolitan areas. Road conditions throughout the region are poor. Asphalt quality varies widely, and roads outside of cities are often poorly illuminated. In addition to ice and snow concerns, poor road construction results in numerous and dangerously large potholes on major streets. To avoid even small potholes, drivers commonly make violent, unexpected lane changes without signaling or checking other lanes. Collisions are common. In the Russian Far East, many vehicles have the steering wheels and pedals on the right side of the car even though they are driven on the right side of the road. This affords the drivers limited visibility on two-lane roads.

Roadside checkpoints are commonplace. They are ostensibly to detect drunken driving, narcotics, alien smuggling, and firearms violations; however, they are sometimes used by traffic police to extract cash bribes in the form of “fines.” The Russian Federation has also expanded the use of camera enforcement for traffic and parking violations.

Exercise great care while walking, as vehicles sometimes fail to yield to pedestrians.

Russia enforces a 0.16 mg BAC policy with regard to alcohol consumption while driving. For 2015-2016, the maximum punishment is a two-year suspension of a driver’s license and fine of 30,000 Rubles. A second violation (within a 12 month rolling period) can expect three-year suspension, 300,000 Rubles fine, and imprisonment for up to two years. An intoxicated driver may be detained until s/he is deemed sober.

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When driving, adhere to all local driving regulations. Avoid excessive speed and, when possible, do not drive at night outside of major cities. In rural areas, it is not uncommon to find livestock crossing roadways. Construction sites or stranded vehicles are often not marked. Sometimes cars have only one working headlight, and many cars lack tail lights. Bicycles seldom have lights or reflectors. Be prepared for sudden stops. Learn your route from an auto club, guidebook, or government tourist office. Some routes have heavy truck and bus traffic, while others have poor or nonexistent shoulders; many are one-way or do not permit left turns. Even thoroughfares marked as major routes on maps can be nothing more than two-lane roadways. In some areas, roads are practically nonexistent.

At night, utilize a garage or secure parking lot, if possible. If one is not available, leave your vehicle in an illuminated area. Never leave keys in the ignition or leave your car with the engine running. The use of an alarm system or anti-theft device is strongly encouraged. Residents and visitors are encouraged to remove all valuables from their vehicles, even if parked in a "guarded" parking lot.

Russian law requires that vehicles involved in an accident not be moved until police arrive. If a driver moves his vehicle, he can be found at fault for the collision, regardless of any contributing factors. In the event of an accident, to avoid further potential liability, vehicles should not be moved from the scene. There are circumstances involving only minor damage and no claims from either party when both drivers may file insurance paperwork without traffic police being summoned.

Public Transportation Conditions

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Pickpockets are active on public transportation. Pickpockets are known to work buses and trams regularly and are adept at slicing through purses, backpacks, and clothing without alerting the owner.

The Consulate discourages the use of unmarked taxis (sometimes called “gypsy cabs”), as passengers are subject to a higher chance of criminal activity. Licensed taxi companies provide reliable, safe, and economical services. However, visitors should be alert to the potential for substantial overcharging by taxis, particularly in areas frequented by tourists. Always confirm the cost with the driver before the taxi departs. Travelers are recommended not to enter taxis with more than one person in it (the driver). The cheapest and safest option remains calling ahead and requesting a car from a legitimate dispatch taxi service or Internet application-based service, which are now readily available.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the government’s Civil Aviation Authority as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of Russia’s air carrier operations. Several Russian carriers have participated in the International Air Transport Association’s (IATA) Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) program, an industry-sponsored safety audit program.

Airport security procedures in Vladivostok involve pre-inspection/screening of passengers and luggage near the main entrance and a secondary detailed inspection after passport control. There was one instance in late 2015 in which the airport shut down for five-six hours due to a telephonic bomb threat, subsequently deemed to be a hoax.

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Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There are no specific indications that U.S. institutions or citizens have been targets of terrorist plans, but there is a general standing risk of U.S. citizens becoming victims of indiscriminate terrorist attacks.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

The socio-political unrest in Ukraine and the economic sanctions have led to increased political tensions between the Russian Federation and the U.S./Western nations.

Small demonstrations in front of the Consulate did occur sporadically throughout 2015 with various anti-Western themes. All protests were non-violent, monitored by police, and concluded peacefully.

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Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

In general, public rallies/demonstrations are sanctioned by the government and are monitored by local law enforcement. However, U.S. citizens should avoid any public demonstrations, whether properly authorized or not, and avoid any large crowds and public gatherings that lack enhanced security measures.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Vladivostok's location on the Pacific Rim subjects it to earthquakes and tsunamis. In the fall 2015, Vladivostok became the final landfall point for a large-scale typhoon, which was later downgraded to a tropical depression resulting in little/no damage.

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Grouped townhouses and large apartment buildings are very common housing structures, but many are perched dangerously along steep hills.

Black ice is common during winter months, and many roads become extremely dangerous to travel on, if not completely unsuitable for use.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

The Consulate notes that the Russian Ministry of Emergency Services has proven themselves highly capable of preparing for and responding to large-scale disasters.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Certain activities that would be considered normal business practices in the U.S. either violate the Russian legal code or are considered suspect by Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). There are particular risks involved in any commercial activity with the Russian military-industrial complex, including research institutes, design bureaus, production facilities, or other high technology, government-related institutions. Any misunderstanding or dispute in such transactions can attract the involvement of the security services and lead to investigation or prosecution for espionage. Rules governing the treatment of information remain poorly

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defined.

Privacy Concerns

Local security services carefully watch foreign visitors and may place them under surveillance. Hotel rooms (including meeting rooms), offices, cars, taxis, telephones, Internet usage, and fax machines may be monitored onsite or remotely, and personal possessions in hotel rooms, including computers, may be searched without your consent or knowledge. Business travelers should be particularly mindful that trade secrets, negotiating positions, and other business sensitive information may be taken and shared with competitors, counterparts, and/or Russian regulatory and legal entities.

OSAC constituents should have no expectation of privacy. Telephone and electronic communications are subject to surveillance, which can compromise sensitive information. The Russian System for Operational-Investigative Activities (SORM) permits authorities to monitor and record all data that traverses Russia's networks. A "SORM Factsheet" is available on OSAC.gov. Travelers should assume all communications are monitored. All travelers are encouraged to weigh their desire to stay connected with the risks, and take precautions to keep personal information protected.

When utilizing local services for banking, security, and medical treatment, U.S. citizens should ensure that the providers are reputable organizations. Be cautious in the amount of information that you make available to these institutions. It is not uncommon for employees of these organizations to pass sensitive personal medical, financial, and banking information to criminal elements.

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Drug-related Crimes

Russia is both a transit and consumer country for Afghan opiates, which are transported from Afghanistan through Central Asia to Russia. According to Russian news sources in September 2015, there was a “particular jump” in the number of crimes committed by people under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.

Police Response

The quality of assistance from local law enforcement varies. Russian police and security services have been very impressive during large-scale and international events. In support of the Asia Pacific Economic Council Summit in 2012, police created special inter-department/agency task force units dedicated to protecting and responding to the needs of foreign guests. The responsiveness and performance of these task force units was effective.

Americans visiting the Russian Federation are urged to abide by local laws and monitor the local news. Police do not need to show probable cause in order to stop, question, or detain individuals.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Throughout 2015, the Consulate received reports of U.S. citizens being detained by the Federal Migration Service for entering the Russian Federation on the wrong type of visa or failing to register properly. The people who were detained faced legal repercussions, including deportation or re-entry bans based on interpretation of immigration laws. In some instances, it is not clear which type of visa was appropriate for certain activities.

It is not uncommon for foreigners to become victims of harassment, mistreatment, and extortion by law enforcement and other officials. If stopped, obtain the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number, and note where the stop happened, as this information assists local officials in identifying the perpetrators. The Consulate recommends against the payment of bribes in any circumstance. If you find yourself in this situation, immediately inform the police that you wish to contact your Consulate. Report all incidents of police detention or harassment to the U.S. Consulate's American Citizen Services office at +7 423 230 0070 Mon-Fri during normal working hours (09:00-17:00) or after-hours/weekends at +7 4232 710 067.

Crime Victim Assistance

If U.S. citizens become the victim of a crime, s/he should call the police at 02 (or 102 from cellular phone). Police attempt to provide English-speakers when possible, but travelers should not assume that an English speaker will be provided. If they do not speak Russian, travelers are strongly encouraged to locate a Russian-speaking friend or colleague who can assist them in their interaction with police.

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American citizens should report all crimes immediately to the police and to the Consulate's American Citizen Services section.

Police (Emergency): 02 (102 from cell phone)

Police (Non-Emergency): Varies by location (002 for traffic police)

Fire: 01 (101 from cell phone)

Ambulance: 03 (103 from cell phone)

Police/Security Agencies

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) is the central law enforcement body. State Inspection for Traffic Security (GIBDD) is the MVD entity responsible for the regulation of traffic and investigating traffic accidents.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) is the main domestic security agency. The FSB combines functions and powers similar to those exercised by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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The private security sector is a thriving industry in the Russian Far East. As with any business venture, care should be taken to choose a reputable company when selecting a security service. American companies are encouraged to thoroughly vet all local hires.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are available in the Russian Far East, although the quality has been below Western standards. Medical personnel in hospitals are generally well-trained, but equipment and facilities limit their capabilities. Only a limited number of doctors speak English. The Consulate notes that new facilities, which opened operation in 2014, have changed this dynamic to some degree.

Both municipal and private ambulance services remain substandard. Ambulance response time is typically very poor, and transport to the nearest hospital can take considerable time due to traffic conditions. Most ambulances are poorly-equipped and are staffed by individuals without English skills and who lack Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training. Only a select few special ambulances possess life support and stabilization equipment with staff proficient in its use. Ambulances generally serve only a means of transportation to a hospital.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Falck Medical Center; 77 Ulitsa Zhaporozhskaya; Main/Dispatch - (423) 279-0790; Office - (423) 279-0146, (423) 246-4647

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Rusky Island Medical Center; FEFU Campus, Building #25, Ayaks village, Russkiy island
Main/Dispatch – (423) 223-0000

Primorsky Krai Clinical Hospital #1; 57, Aleutskaya street; Admission department-(423)
245-75-53

City Ambulance Service; Cell phone: 030; Landline phone: 03; 155, Okeansky prospect

City Clinical Hospital #2; 57, Russkaya street; Admission department (423) 232-63-46

The City Trauma Outpatient Clinic #1; 7, Utkinskaya street; (423) 245-86-89, 240-03-86

ALENKA --Pediatric outpatient service; l'licheva Street, BLDG. # 4; (423) 238-86-25; (423)
240-54-38

City Clinical Pediatric Hospital; 27, Ostriakova prospect; Admission department (423)
245-66-60

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

International SOS Medical Clinic; (4242) 46-29-11; (4242) 47-49-11 (Yuzhno-Sakhalin)

International SOS Russian 24/7 Hotline; +7 (495) 937 5760 (Moscow)

Recommended Insurance Posture

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Visitors are strongly encouraged to purchase medical evacuation insurance prior to traveling to Russia.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/russia>.

OSAC Country Council Information

While there is no Country Council in Vladivostok, Embassy Moscow has an active OSAC Country Council that meets periodically to discuss issues of mutual concern. To reach OSAC's Europe and Eurasia team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate Vladivostok

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32 Pushkinskaya Street

Vladivostok 690001

Russian Federation

The Consular section is open Monday-Friday, 09:00-18:00 with a lunch break from 13:00-14:00. The U.S. Consulate is closed on all Russian and American holidays.

Consulate Contact Numbers

Consulate Operator: + 7 423 230 0070 (normal business hours) or +7 4232 710 067 (after-hours and weekends)

Regional Security Office: + 7 423 230 0070 ext. 4504 (Office)

Consular Affairs: + 7 423 230 0070

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

Nearby Posts

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Embassy Moscow: <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate St. Petersburg: <http://stpetersburg.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Yekaterinburg: <http://yekaterinburg.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guidance

For the latest security and other information, Americans should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs at <http://travel.state.gov>, where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings can be found, as well as important information for Americans who face emergencies abroad. U.S. citizens are reminded to register with the U.S. Embassy or closest U.S. Consulate by entering their travel itinerary and contact information at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>. In case of difficulties registering online, please contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

U.S. citizens should be aware of their personal surroundings and follow good security practices. Constant vigilance is necessary to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. Visitors are encouraged to travel in groups, stay in populated and illuminated areas, minimize the display of personal wealth, and avoid confrontation when possible. They are

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urged to exercise good judgment and discretion when using any form of public transportation. When traveling, U.S. citizens may wish to provide a friend, family member, or coworker a copy of their itinerary.

Wallets should be kept in front pockets, while shoulder straps of purses should be across the body, keeping them in view and under positive control. If you use a backpack, avoid carrying high-value items inside. When dining in restaurants, visitors should not hang handbags or suit coats containing valuables on the backs of chairs. Be particular mindful of these items when traveling on public transportation. Use of hotel safes is encouraged to protect against robbery but is not a failsafe method to safeguard your possessions.

Travelers are encouraged to make copies of their passport photo page and visa, as well as credit card numbers (to include telephone contact information in the event the card is stolen). These copies should be stored in the hotel or residence in the event that the original items are stolen. Travelers should not flash large amounts of money, jewelry or electronics, all of which can be an indicator of wealth.

Travelers should be especially cautious when using ATMs for indicators of device tampering, card readers, low-profile video cameras, and for individuals loitering in the immediate area. Visitors are encouraged to use only reputable ATMs inside of major hotels, large supermarkets, or those located in card-reader secured vestibules inside brick-and-mortar banks. Use of ATMs located outside of buildings is strongly discouraged. In addition, care should be taken when accessing financial information or purchasing items via local Internet.

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