



## Slovakia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Burglary; Cyber; Winter weather; Terrorism; Anti-American sentiment; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Floods; Right-wing; Hate Crimes; Drug Trafficking

Europe > Slovakia; Europe > Slovakia > Bratislava

1/27/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Medium

### Crime Threats

The general crime rate is below the U.S. national average. Most reports of crime are generated in Old Town Bratislava.

Most of the crimes reported to the Regional Security Office involve petty theft (purse snatching, cell phone grabbing, pickpocketing), vehicle break-ins, or vandalism. The individuals most often targeted for purse snatchings are newly-arrived personnel and tourists who are unfamiliar with the local environment. Local pickpockets are professional and most active in the summer and during holiday season. Pickpockets tend to utilize distraction techniques to confuse their target. They prefer locations like shopping centers, markets, public

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transportation (in the vicinity of Old Town), near major hotels and tourist sites, and overnight trains to Prague and Warsaw.

While not a frequent occurrence, purse snatchings do occur in Bratislava. Purse snatchers typically work in crowded areas and in teams, allowing them to cut straps of purses and run away in the crowd.

While not as endemic as in some neighboring countries, incidents of credit card, internet, and ATM fraud have been reported.

While not a frequent occurrence, automobile theft does occur. Many stolen vehicles are quickly transported out of the country for resale in neighboring countries. Preferred targets for the auto thief are up-market European and American cars. Theft from cars is more common than theft of cars in Bratislava. Vandalism to vehicles can also occur, even on well-traveled streets.

While residential break-ins and thefts are relatively uncommon, those that do occur typically take place during daylight hours when it is believed the residents are not at home. There have been several incidents of thieves gaining access to residential parking garages and subsequently breaking into storage units and vehicles.

Both indigenous and foreign organized crime groups are well established. These groups are involved in legal and illegal businesses. Many crime figures have business interests in Bratislava's Old Town. Power struggles, which can be violent, within the organized crime

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syndicate do occur, mostly outside of Old Town Bratislava. They do not target U.S. or other foreign individuals and tend to co-exist peacefully in the tourist district so as not to scare away tourist dollars. Organized crime activities include trafficking in narcotics, persons, cigarettes, and weapons. These groups are also involved in auto theft, financial fraud, gambling, prostitution, public corruption, protection rackets, and cyber crime. The rate of auto theft connected to organized crime is high. High-end European and American cars are preferred targets of theft. Slovakia is actively fighting the trafficking of illicit goods/people and illegal migration as part of its role in protecting the EU's external border with Ukraine. Slovakia has also recently taken action to tighten regulations regarding the sale and transfer of "demilitarized" weapons.

#### Other Areas of Concern

The congregation of tourists in Old Town Bratislava leads to the influx of criminal elements eager to rid a visitor of their valuables. The two train terminals in Bratislava (Hlavna Stanica and Petrzalka) are rife with individuals seeking an opportunity to target an unwary traveler.

#### Transportation-Safety Situation

##### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Roads are typically safe, though sometimes not well-maintained. Four-lane highways exist in/around Bratislava; however, most roads outside of built-up areas are two-lanes. As a result, aggressive drivers attempting to pass at unsafe speeds can pose a serious hazard. Due to

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poor lighting and narrow, winding roads, nighttime driving outside of well-developed areas is not recommended.

Traits of aggressive drivers include continual horn honking, screaming at other motorists, tailgating, and making rude hand gestures at other vehicles or people. When such behaviors result in actual physical or vehicle-to-vehicle altercations, aggressive driving can turn to road rage. Once it becomes apparent that the aggressive actions of another driver are intentional, you should make every attempt to avoid and distance yourself from them. You should do the same for erratic drivers or anyone else who is driving in a manner that is of concern.

From November-March, there is often heavy snowfall, and many rural roads are not adequately cleared. Roads in the mountainous north are particularly prone to hazardous conditions during the winter. During this time, winter tires are required by local law. Driving under the influence of alcohol is strictly prohibited. The blood-alcohol tolerance level is zero percent.

Residents and visitors are encouraged to remove all valuables from their vehicles, even if parked in a garage. Thieves are particularly interested in money, GPS navigation systems, smart phones, tablets, iPads, and other valuable items. Valuables should never be left in a vehicle. At night, use a garage if possible or at least a lighted parking area on the street. Never leave keys in the ignition or leave your car with the engine running. Doors should be locked while driving, the driver and all passengers should wear seat belts, and windows should be down only as far as ventilation needs require. The use of alarm systems or anti-theft devices is strongly recommended.

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## Public Transportation Conditions

Taxi companies generally provide reliable, safe, and economical services. Avoid independent cabs that do not prominently display a company name. Visitors should be alert to the potential for substantial overcharging by taxis, particularly in areas frequented by tourists. Higher charges can be expected when a cab is randomly stopped in the street or is idling at a taxi stand. Radio-dispatched taxis are often much more reliable. The cheapest and best option is to call ahead and negotiate a price before entering the cab.

## Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

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

There are no known indigenous terrorist organizations present. There have been several incidents of homegrown "lone wolf" actors who conducted or were planning to conduct terrorist incidents. In December 2011, an individual in Kosice detonated a small improvised explosive device in a trash can outside of a Western fast food restaurant. The blast resulted in no injuries; however, some minor property damage was reported. The perpetrator was arrested and later determined to be an emotionally disturbed person with no terrorist group association. In addition, in January 2010, the police announced the arrest of an individual who reportedly was planning to detonate homemade bombs during church services around the country. The individual was detained by police prior to committing any act and claimed to be

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motivated by his hatred of organized religion. Following the November 2015 attacks in Paris, the police posted additional police officers at government buildings, diplomatic missions, and public venues. The police continued this additional presence through the 2015 holiday season in order to ensure a safe environment for Slovak citizens and foreign visitors.

Although there are no known, specific threats to U.S. interests in Bratislava, U.S. citizens and U.S. interests abroad remain at risk of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a designated terrorist organization in Syria and Iraq, al-Qaida, its affiliated organizations, other terrorist groups or homegrown "lone wolf" actors. These individuals do not distinguish between official and civilian targets.

The threat from international terrorism remains high in the EU and is diversifying in scope and impact. While there have been no incidents of international or transnational terrorism in Slovakia, there have been terrorism-related arrests in neighboring Austria, to include two suspected accomplices to the November 2015 Paris attacks. Slovakia's membership in the Schengen zone could easily allow a terrorist to transit into Slovakia from any Western European country without having to pass through any border, immigration, and/or customs checks.

#### Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

There are elements within Slovak society that tend to be both anti-NATO and anti-American. The members of these groups tend to be older and generally hold a pro-Russian outlook. In September 2015, one of these groups sponsored a joint anti-Islam and "anti-Imperialism of the United States" protest in Bratislava with 700 participants. This protest was peaceful, and

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the police maintained a substantial presence around the protest.

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

The government is politically stable.

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Public demonstrations are common though typically peaceful. Demonstrations must be pre-approved by the city government and are generally small, numbering less than 150 participants, although a handful of protests have featured much larger numbers.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

Environmental Hazards

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Although situated in a zone classified as being at moderate risk for seismic activity, Slovakia has not had any earthquakes in recent memory.

Over the last few years, eastern and central Slovakia has experienced heavy spring and early summer floods. The floods have resulted in several deaths and millions of Euros in property damage.

#### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

In 2010, an explosion occurred at an industrial chemical factory in the Bratislava suburb of Ruzinov. The blast and subsequent fire released smog into the air, but safety officials determined the levels of chemicals in the air were not dangerous.

#### Personnel-Background Concerns

Small, fractional fringe element groups of neo-Nazis, skinheads, and other far-right wing extremists continue to be present in Slovak society but rarely impact foreigners. In many cases, these elements may be found within other right-wing protest groups. Although U.S. citizens are not specifically targeted, any non-Caucasian individual could be targeted. Skinheads also target members of the Roma minority. Laws have been enacted to fight the racially-motivated attacks that include stiffer penalties than the "normal" assault statutes, yet the issue remains a difficult crime to prosecute. Therefore, it is not uncommon for prosecutors to charge the offender under the more easily proven 'simple assault' statutes to increase the chance of a successful prosecution; the perpetrator avoids a heavier penalty carried by the

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hate-crime statutes. Nevertheless, hate-related crimes rarely occur, though some U.S. citizens have reported being the target of comments or actions because of their perceived nationality or race.

While reported incidents of violence and harassment targeting gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual communities are rare, during Slovakia's first Gay Pride Parade in May 2010, 50 skinheads/neo-Nazis staged a counter-demonstration and attempted to disrupt the celebration by chanting slogans, attempting to infiltrate the group, and tossing several "smoke-bombs" toward the crowd.

A June 2015 anti-immigrant protest had approximately 8,000 participants, some of whom attacked a family of tourists from Saudi Arabia. The police arrested more than 140 people in connection with this protest.

## Drug-related Crimes

As with other countries in Central Europe, Slovakia has been identified as a transit country for illegal drugs coming from Turkey, the Balkans, Asia, and Afghanistan. There is very little violence associated with the drug trade. The police have made some headway in seizing shipments of heroin, cocaine, and marijuana. In addition, law enforcement reports increasing problems associated with the domestic manufacture and abuse of methamphetamines. Slovakia does not have the same restrictions on precursor chemicals or over-the-counter drugs used in the production of methamphetamines as are seen in neighboring EU nations.

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## Police Response

While competent and professional, police forces suffer from a lack of manpower, resources, and equipment. Police responsiveness to criminal incidents depends on the type and severity of the crime involved and often, the social status of the complainant. The government has announced plans for additional hiring of police officers following increasing security concerns in Europe.

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

Should you be arrested, immediately inform the police that you would like to contact your Embassy. Report all incidents of police detention to the U.S. Embassy's American Citizen Services office at +421 2 5443 0861 (Mon-Fri during normal working hours or after-hours) at +421 2 5922 3393 (after-hours and weekends).

### Crime Victim Assistance

Many foreigners who have been the victim of crime will find their interactions with the police to be somewhat frustrating due to the language barrier, as few police officers speak English. The police do make an effort to staff their 24-hour emergency numbers with individuals who have some English-speaking capabilities. If you are the victim of a crime, you should contact the local police and the U.S. Embassy.

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Police (Emergency): 112 or 158

Police (Non-Emergency): 09610 11111

Fire: 112 or 150

Ambulance: 112 or 155

U.S. Embassy: +421 2 5443 0861 (normal business hours); +421 2 5922 3393 (after-hours and weekends); +421 903 703 666 (after-hours and weekends)

Police/Security Agencies

The security guard company sector is a growth industry in Slovakia. However, many of these companies reportedly have ties to organized crime. As with any business venture, care should be taken to choose a reputable company when selecting a security service.

## Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are available, although the quality and availability varies. For any emergency, including a medical emergency, call 112 free of charge. An English-speaking dispatcher should be available. According to the level of the medical emergency, the dispatcher may send an ambulance, which may be medically equipped and staffed by

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paramedics or a physician if the patient's condition warrants it. Only a limited number of doctors speak English. Doctors and hospitals expect cash payment for health services unless the patient can present an insurance number from the Slovak National Insurance Company. This includes ambulance service, for which the cost begins at 120 euro per transport for those without local Slovak health insurance. Local health insurance is required for anyone staying in Slovakia longer than the 90-day visa-free visit period.

Medical prescriptions issued in the United States are not valid in Slovakia. If a prescription is needed, a local doctor must issue it. Medicines are generally available locally at pharmacies, where customers ask the pharmacist for every product including over-the-counter medicines; if they are not available under the U.S. drug name, you should consult the pharmacist or a local doctor for a local substitute. Medicine brought into Slovakia for personal use may be subject to comparison against the list of those authorized by the Ministry of Health for use in Slovakia. The Slovak Privacy Act generally prevents health providers from releasing information about a patient to a third party.

#### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

University Teaching Hospital Kramare, Limbova 5 (largest hospital); phone: +421 2 5954 1111; contact person: MU Dr. Sebo cell phone +421 903 355 496

Children's University Teaching Hospital, Limbova 1; phone: +421 2 5937 1111; contact person: Marcel Brener MD cell phone +421 903 469 777

University Teaching Hospital of St. Cyril and Metod Petrzalka (Nemocnica Petrzalka), Antolska 11; phone: +421 2 6867 1111; contact person: MU Dr. Sykora +421 2 6867 2749

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The National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, Pod Krasnou horkou 1; phone +421 2 5932 0111; contact person: Ing. Msolly Mongi

Private Hospital Medissimo, Tematinska 5; phone +421 2 3230 3030; contact person: MU Dr. Paul Hnilica, MD cell phone +421 917 818 801

Hospital Hainburg, Holmeister Street 70, Hainburg, Austria +43 21 659 0501

#### Available Air Ambulance Services

Air Transport Europe (Airport Poprad-Tatry): phone +421 52 776 1911; emergency call: +421 18155

International SOS (London): +44 20 8762 8133

Air emergency service (Airport Bratislava): Karol Biermann; phone +421 2 4333 6608; or emergency dispatch center: 866-299-6870 or 305-514-0942

#### Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the U.S. can cost thousands of dollars or more. Special insurance may be needed for mountain hiking and skiing and is available from local providers.

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## 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/slovakia>.

## OSAC Country Council Information

Bratislava's Country Council successfully conducted several meetings with various business and/or company representatives in 2015. The RSO also works with the Embassy's Foreign Commercial Service section on matters affecting the U.S. business community. The point of contact is Regional Security Officer Dylan Ragan who can be reached at [RaganAD@state.gov](mailto:RaganAD@state.gov). To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email [OSACEUR@state.gov](mailto:OSACEUR@state.gov).

## U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

### Address and Hours of Operation

### U.S. Embassy Bratislava

Hviezdoslavovo námestie 4,

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811 02 Bratislava

Slovakia

Hours: Monday - Friday from 8.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. except Embassy Holidays.

#### Embassy Contact Numbers

All numbers should be preceded by the country code (421) and city code (2):

Telephone: +(421) (2) 5443 0861 or +(421) (2) 5443 3338

Emergency After-Hours Telephone: +(421) 903 703 666

Fax: +(421) (2) 5441 8861

Website: <http://slovakia.usembassy.gov/>

#### Embassy Guidance

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If you are going to reside in or visit Slovakia, please take the time to tell our Embassy about your presence in-country. If you enroll, we can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements. It will also help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. To enroll your stay or visit, click the STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program) button at <http://travel.state.gov>. Consular information is available at: [http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1113.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1113.html).

## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

A traveler can minimize the chances of becoming a victim by taking basic, yet necessary, personal security precautions one would take in any urban environment, including increasing public awareness of one's surroundings and properly securing valuables on their person or in a hotel room. Travelers should minimize the amount of valuables and money they carry on their person.

When dining in restaurants, particularly at locations with outside seating in the warmer months, visitors should not hang handbags or suit coats on the backs of chairs. Wallets and other valuables can/will be stolen if caution is not exercised.

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