



Russia 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Moscow

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Assault; Murder-for-hire; Burglary; IEDs; Cyber; Terrorism; Anti-American sentiment; Riots/Civil Unrest; Hate Crimes; Employee Health Safety; Surveillance; Drug Trafficking; Extortion

Europe > Russia; Europe > Russia > Moscow

1/27/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The overall economy in Russia continued to decline throughout 2015, resulting in increased unemployment, inflation, and general crime. The mainstay of the Russian economy is oil, which, as of January 2016, plummeted to its lowest price per barrel in 13 years. The devaluation of the Russian ruble has mirrored the fall in oil prices, trading at the lowest level since December 2014.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

While the overall crime threat is comparable to that of other large cities around the world, the official 2015 crime report released by the Ministry of the Interior states that the crime rate in Russia has risen 8.6 percent compared to 2014. According to this and other reports, almost

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half of all crimes were related to theft or robbery and the number of crimes against foreign citizens increased by 17.5 percent from 2014. Damages related to criminal activity have totaled more than 350 billion rubles (4.5 billion USD), which is an increase of 16 percent over 2014. In Moscow, pickpocketing, muggings, and similar personal crimes frequently take place on metros, areas with heavy pedestrian traffic, and tourist sites. According to the Moscow City Police, since the beginning of 2016, robberies/thefts of food, alcohol, and car parts have spiked. Some media outlets, citing police sources, note that this type of criminal activity is reminiscent of the 1998 Russian financial crisis.

Auto theft remains common, and many stolen cars are shipped out of Moscow and resold by sophisticated organized crime groups.

The Embassy also continues to receive periodic reports of ATM and credit card fraud.

Criminal groups continue to target individuals carrying large sums of cash or high-value luxury items. According to open source reports, thieves regularly target individuals who have withdrawn hundreds of thousands of rubles from local banks in the center of Moscow. This type of crime is sometimes violent and can involve the use of firearms. On a recurring basis throughout 2015, the police reported instances of criminals breaking the windows of private vehicles parked or stopped in heavy traffic and robbing the occupants of significant sums of money. In December, thieves smashed a window of a parked vehicle and stole dozens of fur coats valued at 720,000 rubles (10,000 USD).

Frequenting bars or clubs late at night or early in the morning in Moscow involves additional risk to personal safety. U.S. citizens may be targeted for robbery, assault, or another type of crime, especially if senses are diminished due to alcohol use. In July and August, there were

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three separate incidents of U.S. Embassy employees being assaulted while returning home late at night in central Moscow. In the first two incidents, the victims were struck physically, briefly lost consciousness, and were robbed of their valuables. The third incident involved two U.S citizen employees who appeared to have been drugged and robbed of their valuables; both awoke in different parts of the city, one by the edge of the Moscow River.

In August 2015, a U.S. citizen employee of an American company in Moscow was shot at while on his way to work in a chauffeur-driven vehicle, sustaining non-life-threatening injuries. Although the perpetrators were never caught, the employee believed that he was not targeted because he was American, but rather as a result of a personal dispute with other employees of the company.

RSO received a limited number of reports detailing violent home invasion robberies in Moscow in 2015. For example, in September, several men impersonating undercover police officers forced their way into an American citizen's apartment. Once inside, the men attacked the American and her Russian citizen husband; both victims suffered serious injuries. Based on additional details about the crime, it appears that the victims were targeted for carrying a significant amount of cash.

Violent crime, including incidents backed by organized crime, is not uncommon. In December 2015, two people were killed and 12 injured during a shooting at a café-bar near the Russian White House. Witnesses, including an Irish expatriate, claimed at least 20 rounds were discharged on a public street between two highly trafficked metro stations.

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Also in December, an improvised explosive device injured five people at a bus stop in central Moscow. The police arrested a suspect who reportedly was attempting to kill a local businessman over a construction dispute.

In January 2016, three unidentified individuals fatally stabbed a private security guard during an attempted burglary of a small market near the Barrikadnaya metro station in close proximity to the U.S. Embassy. The assailants fled on foot and have not been apprehended.

Cybersecurity Issues

The cybercrime threat is significant, pervasive, and rarely investigated or prosecuted by the local authorities. Cyber attacks utilizing the surreptitious introduction of malicious code, theft via malware, spam e-mail, sophisticated spear phishing, and social engineering attacks are common.

Other Areas of Concern

The most vulnerable areas for petty crime include underground walkways (“perekhods”) and the subway, overnight trains, train stations, airports, markets, tourist attractions, and restaurants.

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The Department of State maintains an active Travel Warning for Ukraine, alerting U.S. citizens of the risks of travel to eastern Ukraine and Crimea (<https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=18726>, updated December 14, 2015). Russia-backed separatists continue to control areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, where violent clashes have resulted in 9,000+ deaths. A ceasefire agreement established a de facto dividing line between Ukrainian government-controlled and separatist-held areas of Ukraine, with numerous checkpoints controlled by government and separatist forces. The Department of State warns all U.S. citizens to defer all travel to the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine. There have been multiple casualties due to land mines in areas previously controlled by separatists, and separatist leaders have made statements indicating their desire to push the front line to the administrative borders of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Individuals, including U.S. citizens, have been threatened, detained, or kidnapped for hours or days after being stopped at separatist checkpoints. The government of Ukraine has stated that foreigners, including U.S. citizens, who enter Ukraine from Russia through separatist-controlled territory will not be allowed through checkpoints into government-controlled territory.

The current status of Crimea prevents official Americans from traveling to that area. As a result, the U.S. government's ability to assist U.S. citizens who travel or reside in Crimea is extremely limited.

More information about travel to the Ukrainian Border Region and Crimea can be found at: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/ukraine-travel-warning.html>.

Due to continued civil and political unrest throughout much of the North Caucasus, the Department of State continues to warn U.S. citizens against travel to all areas of the North Caucasus, including Chechnya, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Stavropol, Karachayevo-Cherkessiya, and Kabardino-Balkariya. In 2015, the Russian security services

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conducted multiple counter-terrorist operations in the North Caucasus, reportedly targeting extremists. Historically, local criminal gangs have kidnapped Russian citizens and foreigners, including U.S. citizens, for ransom. In 2014, Chechen militants with suspected ties to the Islamic State attacked, occupied, and destroyed buildings in Chechnya's capital, Grozny, leading to gunfights with security forces in several locations. Having close contacts within the local population does not guarantee safety. Due to the ongoing security concerns, official U.S. government travel to the region is very limited. Although there is no active Travel Warning, the U.S. State Department still publically advises U.S. citizens residing in these areas to depart immediately. The U.S. government's ability to assist U.S. citizens who travel to the North Caucasus region is extremely limited. More information can be found at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/russia.html>.

Mt. Elbrus is a popular destination for adventure travelers wishing to climb the highest mountain in Europe; however, the security situation in the regions surrounding the mountain remains highly unstable. The U.S. Embassy recommends against attempting to climb Mt. Elbrus, as it can only be done by passing close to volatile and insecure areas of the North Caucasus region.

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. There is no centralized list or database of the restricted areas, 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

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Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions and driver safety norms differ significantly from those in the U.S., especially outside of major metropolitan areas. Even thoroughfares marked as major routes on maps can be nothing more than two-lane roadways. 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. Asphalt quality varies widely, and roads outside of cities are often poorly illuminated. In some areas, roads are practically nonexistent. In rural areas, it is not uncommon to find livestock crossing roadways. Learn about your route from an auto club, guidebook, or government tourist office.

When driving, adhere to all local driving regulations; these are strictly enforced, and violators are subject to severe legal penalties, as well as to extortion of bribes by corrupt traffic police. Avoid excessive speed and, when possible, do not drive at night outside of major cities. Construction sites or stranded vehicles are often not marked by flares or other warning signals. Sometimes, cars have only one working headlight, and many cars lack tail lights, while bicycles seldom have lights or reflectors. Be prepared for sudden stops. Exercise great care near traffic while walking, as vehicles frequently fail to yield to pedestrians. Roadside checkpoints are commonplace. These checkpoints are ostensibly in place 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.

Russia practices a zero-tolerance policy with regard to alcohol consumption prior to driving. The maximum punishment is a two-year suspension of a driver's license. An intoxicated driver

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may also be detained until s/he is deemed sober.

To avoid highway crime, try not to drive at night, especially when alone, and do not sleep in your vehicle on the side of the road. Do not pick up hitchhikers; they pose a threat to your physical safety and put you in danger of being arrested for unwittingly transporting narcotics.

Have your vehicle serviced and in optimum condition before you travel. It is wise to bring an extra fan belt, fuses, and other spare parts. In the Far East, most vehicles are right-side drive and are driven on the right side of the road. This affords drivers limited visibility on two-lane roads.

Russian law requires that vehicles involved in an accident not be moved until police arrive. If a driver moves his vehicle at all, he can be found at fault for the collision, regardless of any contributing factors. In the event of an accident and to avoid potential liability, vehicles should not be moved from the scene.

Public Transportation Conditions

Moscow has an established public transportation system that may consist of subway (Metro), bus, trolley lines, and streetcar lines.

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Taxis also operate in Moscow. The U.S. Embassy discourages the use of unmarked taxis (sometimes called “gypsy cabs”), as passengers have been victims of robbery, kidnapping, extortion, and theft. Criminals using these taxis to rob passengers often wait outside bars or restaurants to find passengers who have been drinking and are, therefore, more susceptible to robbery. Robberies may also occur in taxis shared with strangers. You should always use authorized services when arriving at a major airport.

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. According to Russia’s Interstate Aviation Committee (IAC or K), which investigates air accidents in Russia and Commonwealth of Independent States, for the Russian Federation, the aviation accident rate in 2015 remained the same as in 2014, about 40 accidents occurred with mostly general aviation aircraft and helicopters. No fatal accidents were recorded with heavy (over 10 tons flight weight) transport aircraft during commercial passenger operations. Further information may be found in the IAC’s annual flight safety analysis reports issued by the IAC Air Accident Investigation Commission, which will be published in February/March 2016. There were no major issues with Russia’s airport safety.

Terrorism Threat

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Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

On September 30, 2015, Russia initiated military operations in Syria. In response, the Islamic Group of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and affiliated terrorist organizations have issued threats vowing retaliatory terrorist attacks in Russia. These threats, combined with ISIL's terrorist attack in Paris in November 2015, prompted the Russian security services to enhance security measures at many public venues, including tourist sites. Following Russian military action in Syria, ISIL members made numerous threats of retaliation, including publishing a video in November threatening "that soon blood will spill like an ocean" in Russia, and beheading a citizen of Chechnya in December. On December 29, 2014, Russia's Supreme Court issued a ruling recognizing ISIL as a terrorist organization and banned its domestic activity. With the ruling, participation in ISIL activities became a criminal offense under Russian law. At the end of 2015, the government estimated 2,900 Russian citizens were fighting with ISIL in Syria and Iraq. During the year, authorities convicted at least 80 individuals for fighting with ISIL or the "opposition" against the Syrian government, according to open sources. In December, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Director announced that in 2015, 20 sworn terrorist leaders had been neutralized in the North Caucasus region.

The FSB reported no terrorist attacks in the Russian Federation in 2015. However, on October 31, a Russian charter plane exploded in mid-air over Egypt due to an improvised explosive device on board. All 224 people – including 219 Russian nationals -- on board were killed. Russian authorities, in addition to the U.S. and U.K., determined the incident was an act of terrorism. As the charter plane was registered in Ireland, it is excluded from Russian jurisdiction based on the 1963 Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed On

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Board Aircraft.

In October, multiple media outlets reported that the FSB had foiled a terrorist plot against the public transportation system in Moscow. Several suspected terrorists were arrested during an apartment raid, and five kilograms of explosives were seized.

In the last decade, Moscow and St. Petersburg have been the targets of terrorist attacks. Bombings have occurred at Russian government buildings, airports, hotels, tourist sites, markets, entertainment venues, schools, residential complexes, and on public transportation (subways, buses, trains, and scheduled commercial flights).

Since the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, bomb threats against public venues in Moscow have dramatically increased, with multiple, large evacuations reported every week. To date, all of these threats have been unfounded, but security services have been diligent about evacuating and clearing all areas (shopping malls, train stations, government buildings). If you are at a location that receives a bomb threat, follow all instructions from the local police and security services.

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

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

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The U.S.-Russian bilateral relationship remains strained due to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and U.S./European imposed sanctions, generating significant anti-American and anti-Western sentiments throughout Russia, especially in the official media. Despite this strain, there were no incidents of wide-scale violence specifically targeting American citizens.

The level of anti-American and anti-Western sentiment continues to be high throughout Russia, especially in certain media outlets. Two U.S. Embassy employees were the subject of implied physical threats disseminated via social media and websites. The U.S. Embassy received several reports of American citizens being verbally harassed and physically assaulted in 2015; it is unclear if these incidents were related to the strain in U.S.-Russian relations.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

Street demonstrations over social matters occurred in 2015. Large groups of people gathered throughout the year over issues such as the murder of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, the sentencing of the Navalny brothers, and socio-economic concerns (wage arrears and newly

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imposed taxes/fines). Some of these protests caused street closures and disruptions to public transportation, and there were reports of arrests at some demonstrations.

On November 25, 2015, a demonstration took place in front of the Turkish Embassy in Moscow to protest the Turkish military's downing of a Russian SU-24 fighter jet over the Turkish/Syrian border on November 24. The protest quickly grew and became violent. Participants attacked the Turkish Embassy with rocks, paint-filled bottles, and eggs, resulting in numerous broken windows and colored pock-marks. The sidewalk outside the Embassy was covered with stones and glass shards. Police on the scene reportedly made no attempt to stop the protestors from attacking the Embassy, nor did they detain any protestors. According to multiple open sources, the radical nationalist, pro-Kremlin Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) organized the event through social media.

Most rallies are sanctioned by the Russian government and monitored by local law enforcement groups. Nevertheless, U.S. citizens should avoid public demonstrations, whether authorized or not, and avoid any large crowds and public gatherings that lack enhanced security measures. Occasional peaceful demonstrations near the U.S. Embassy do not generally interfere with public services, but U.S. citizens should also avoid them.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Embassy receives recurring reports of ultra-nationalists targeting minorities, especially Central Asian and ethnic Caucasian migrant workers. There have been reports of unprovoked attacks against other foreigners/non-Russians, with many of these incidents captured by video surveillance cameras showing groups of young Russian males brutally

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assaulting unsuspecting passersby.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

The Russian Federation experienced fewer natural disasters in 2015 than in previous years. Forest and peat fires in Buryatia and Zabaikal'e affected approximately 817,000 hectares and took significant time to extinguish.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Russia continues to experience industrial accidents resulting from inadequate enforcement of safety and health standards in the workplace. Aging infrastructure and endemic corruption in regulatory bodies have also contributed to several well-publicized disasters. Fines and facility closures are normally enforced only after an accident has occurred.

In 2015, a military barracks in Omsk collapsed, resulting in 23 deaths and many injuries. A fire in a mental hospital in the Voronezh region resulted in 23 deaths. In early December, a gas explosion and collapse of part of an apartment building in Volgograd resulted in four deaths.

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Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

American businesses are susceptible to economic and industrial espionage. Information theft, especially from insufficiently protected computer networks, is common. It is recommended that businesses employ counter-surveillance techniques (video monitoring devices, alarm systems, computer network protection programs).

Privacy Concerns

OSAC constituents have no expectation of privacy. Telephone and electronic communications are subject to surveillance, which can potentially compromise sensitive information. The Russian System for Operational-Investigative Activities (SORM) legally permits authorities to monitor and record all data that traverses Russia's networks. A "SORM Factsheet" is available on the OSAC.gov website.

Travelers should assume all communications are monitored. Most people rely on their cell phones, laptops, and other electronics to stay in touch with friends and family. Therefore, 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

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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.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is widespread; harassment, threats, and acts of violence targeting the LGBT community are also prevalent. Small demonstrations in support of LGBT rights often are dispersed, sometimes violently, by nationalists claiming to be defending traditional Russian values.

Drug-related Crimes

Drug-related crimes continue to increase. Russia is both a transit and consumer country for Afghan opiates (heroin, opium), which are transported from Afghanistan through Central Asia to Russia. In addition to opiates, Russia has experienced an increase in the amount of cocaine being imported and seized in recent years. Cocaine shipments are brought into Russia from South America through various means, including seaports, and delivered to organized crime/drug trafficking groups throughout Russia. Investigators have reported that some of the drug trafficking groups are using the proceeds of the transactions to finance terrorism. Additionally, abuse of various types of smoking blends or "spice" have been reported throughout many regions of Russia; financial transactions for the worldwide sale of these illegal substances has been identified and linked via cyberspace to criminal organizations based in Russia.

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Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings occur infrequently. The motives for kidnappings range from monetary (ransom) to political. There is no information to suggest U.S. citizens are being targeted as kidnap victims.

Police Response

The quality of assistance from local law enforcement varies. The U.S Embassy has received reports that police officers were unprofessional or unwilling to deal with incidents of crime. In some cases, local law enforcement officers failed to take action, even when they witnessed crimes in progress. Over the last several years, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) has enacted reforms and has focused on a professionalized law enforcement service. There have been public campaigns initiated to punish endemic bribery and corruption among the police services.

Certain activities that would be considered normal business practices in the U.S. and other countries 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

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remain poorly defined.

Rigorous searches of baggage and strict enforcement of customs regulations against the exportation of items of “cultural value” can occur. U.S. citizens have been arrested for attempting to leave the country with antique items they believed were legally purchased from licensed vendors. Travelers should obtain receipts for all high-value items (including caviar). Any article (artwork, icons, samovars, rugs, military medals, and antiques) that could appear old or as having cultural value to the Customs Service must have a certificate indicating that it has no historical or cultural value. Certificates may not be granted for certain articles, either due to their cultural value or antiquity. Where certificates are required, they may be obtained from the Russian Ministry of Culture.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In 2015, the U.S. Embassy and Consulates continued to receive 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 based on liberal interpretations of immigration laws. In some instances, it is not clear which type of visa is appropriate for certain activities.

It is not uncommon for foreigners to become victims of harassment, mistreatment, and extortion by law enforcement and other officials. Police do not need to show probable cause in order to stop, question, or detain individuals. Random document checks and other official actions still provide opportunity for “on-the-spot” payment of fines. 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. Authorities are concerned

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about these incidents and have cooperated in investigating such cases. The U.S. Embassy recommends against the payment of bribes in any circumstance.

If detained by the police, contact American Citizen Services at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Crime Victim Assistance

The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line is 112. Although the emergency call system (especially outside of large cities) may not have English language capabilities, the Russian unified emergency call system is expanding the use of the European standard and eventually will have greater foreign language capacity. As of the end of 2015, “112” had not been activated in all regions of Russia, but the police and medical services can also be called directly at 102 and 103, respectively.

American citizens should report all crimes immediately to the police and to the American Citizen Services section of the Embassy or nearest Consulate.

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

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investigating traffic accidents. The MVD has formally changed the name of its police services from the Soviet-era “militsia” to “politsiya” (Russian:). The uniforms are black with red trim.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) is Russia’s 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.

American companies are encouraged to thoroughly vet all local hires. For additional advice, please contact the Regional Security Office.

Medical Emergencies

To summon an ambulance (“Skoraya Pomosh”), American citizens should dial 103.

Medical care in most localities is below Western standards due to shortages of medical supplies, differing practice standards, and the lack of comprehensive primary care. Facilities in Moscow and St. Petersburg with higher standards do not necessarily accept all cases. Access to these facilities usually requires cash or credit card payment at Western rates at the time of service. Elderly travelers and those with existing health problems may be at particular risk.

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Elective surgeries requiring blood transfusions and non-essential blood transfusions are not recommended, due to uncertainties surrounding the local blood supply. Most hospitals and clinics in major urban areas have adopted the use of disposable IV supplies, syringes, and needles as standard practice; however, travelers to remote areas might consider bringing a supply of sterile, disposable syringes and corresponding IV supplies.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

For routine medical care, we have compiled a list of medical service providers, which is available online: <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/list-doctors.pdf>.

Available Air Ambulance Services

The U.S. Embassy maintains a list of medevac services in Russia. In the event of an emergency, they will work with nearby providers to facilitate a medical evacuation. More information can be found at <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/list-doctors.pdf>

Recommended Insurance Posture

Travelers should purchase medical insurance that covers medical evacuation via air ambulance and that will reimburse for medical treatment provided in Russia. The U.S. Social

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Security Medicare Program does not provide coverage for hospital or medical costs in Russia.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Russia suffers from the legacy of pollution of land and groundwater that occurred during the Soviet era when lax environmental protections were in place. A recent study indicated that air quality in Moscow was similar to that of any large, industrial city; however, there have been episodes of a spike in foul-smelling emissions, particularly hydrogen sulfide, likely the result of refurbishing work at Moscow-area refineries. There have been no reports of long-term injuries from these releases. Some information about air quality is available in English on the websites of various Russian government entities, such as the Ministry of Emergency Situations. Some websites operated by independent organizations also publish information in English about global air quality, including in Russia (For example: www.aqicn.org). Travelers should consult EPA and CDC guidance for information on coping with air pollution.

The CDC recommends all travelers have current routine vaccinations as well as Hepatitis A, and some travelers should be inoculated against Hepatitis B, Japanese Encephalitis, and/or Rabies. 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

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U.S. Embassy Moscow has an active OSAC Country Council that meets periodically to discuss issues of mutual concern. Please contact the following individuals for information on the Council, including membership:

Regional Security Officer (RSO) Bart Gorman at Gormanb2@state.gov

Deputy RSO Vasilli (Billy) Alafogiannis at AlafogiannisVA@state.gov

Office Management Specialist Claudette Bergeron at BergeronC@state.gov

Telephone: +7-495-728-5000 x6040

To reach the OSAC Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Bolshoy Deviatinskiy Pereulok No. 8

Moscow 121099

Russian Federation

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Hours of Operation: The Embassy is open Mon-Fri from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., except on American and Russian holidays.

Consular Section

Novinskiy Bulvar, No. 21

Moscow 123242

Russian Federation

Embassy Contact Numbers

Embassy Switchboard: +7-495-728-5000

Regional Security Office: x6040

Marine Security Guard: x6666

American Citizen Services: x5577

Economic Section: x5179

Medical Unit: x5087

Political Section: x5030

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

Nearby Posts

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

Consulate General Vladivostok: <http://vladivostok.usconsulate.gov/>

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

Embassy Guidance

STEP is a secure online travel registration that allows U.S. citizens to record foreign trip and residence information that the Department of State can use to communicate and assist enrollees in case of an emergency. U.S. citizens can access this site either through a link on <http://travel.state.gov/> or directly at <https://step.state.gov/step/>. STEP allows U.S. citizens to register and update their contact information on the Internet at any time, making it easier to keep contact information current. The site also provides up-to-date travel information customized to the enrollee's unique travel agenda and itinerary. The data that is entered is secured behind Department of State firewalls, accessed only by cleared personnel in Embassies, Consulates, and the Department of State, and releasable only under the provisions of the Privacy Act. If you encounter any difficulties or have any questions about the STEP travel registration website, please send an email to CAIbrs@state.gov.

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Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

A common street scam is called the “turkey drop,” in which an individual “accidentally” drops money in front of an intended victim, while an accomplice either waits for the money to be picked up or picks up the money him/herself and offers to split it with the pedestrian. The individual who dropped the currency returns, aggressively accusing both of stealing the money. This confrontation generally results in the pedestrian’s money being stolen. Avoidance is the best defense. Do not pick up the money and quickly walk away from the scene.

A variation of the turkey drop involves a third individual who arrives on the scene, passing himself/herself off as a security/police official, often with a quick flash of a badge. This "police officer" is part of the scam, working to coerce you into exposing your wallet and passport. All of these scam artists are very adept at surreptitiously taking large notes from your wallet, even if it is out of your hands for but a brief moment. Foreigners in Moscow are frequent targets of this scam, particularly in/around the major hotels and tourist areas.

Staged vehicle accidents also present a problem. Perpetrators will usually attempt to extort money through intimidation. There have been cases in which accomplices have arrived at the scene posing as officials. In order to discern a true State Inspection for Traffic Safety (GIBDD) inspector from an impostor, one should look for black uniforms (never camouflage) and silver-red badges. Traffic police assigned to foot duty on streets and roads carry a black and white baton. Legitimate police should always provide their name and rank. A real traffic

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inspector should never show up alone or without a police car.

Reports of fraud committed against U.S. citizens by Internet correspondents professing love and romantic interest are common. Typically, the correspondent asks the U.S. citizen to send money or credit card information for living expenses, travel expenses, or "visa costs." The anonymity of the Internet means that you cannot be sure of the real name, age, marital status, nationality, or even gender of the correspondent. The U.S. Embassy has received many reports of citizens losing thousands of dollars through such scams. Never send money to anyone you have not met in person.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

U.S. citizens should be aware of their personal surroundings and follow good security practices. Travelers are safer in pairs or in groups organized by reputable tour agencies. In large cities, take the same precautions against assault, robbery, or pickpockets that you would take in any large U.S. city. Keep wallets in inner front pockets, carry purses tucked securely under arms, wear the shoulder strap of cameras or bags across the chest, walk away from the curb, and carry purses and other bags away from the street.

Foreigners who have been drinking alcohol are especially vulnerable to assault and robbery in/around nightclubs or bars or on their way home. Some travelers have been drugged at bars, while others have taken strangers back to their lodgings where they were drugged, robbed, and/or assaulted.

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Victims should report theft to the credit card company or issuing bank without delay.

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

U.S. citizens and companies should remain vigilant against cyber threats and actively use cyber security measures to minimize risks.

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