



Lithuania 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Cyber; Financial Security; Winter weather; Riots/Civil Unrest; Counterfeiting; Hate Crimes; Drug Trafficking; Bribery; Fraud

Europe > Lithuania; Europe > Lithuania > Vilnius

2/9/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Criminal elements typically exploit easy targets of opportunity and operate primarily in congested areas (on public transportation, at malls, and at tourist locations (Vilnius' Old Town). Pickpocketing and thefts from coats, purses, and bags left unattended or on the backs of chairs at restaurants and cafes are the most common threat.

Residential thefts due to open windows, unlocked doors, and weak security features are also common.

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Vehicle break-ins usually are the result of valuables being left in plain sight.

The majority of violent encounters occur between 10 p.m.-6 a.m. and involve individuals who are alone and/or inebriated.

Organized crime poses a large problem and is the focus of several Lithuanian law enforcement entities. Organized crime groups are typically involved in gambling, smuggling, and nightclubs/bars. Newer areas of business include cybercrimes and financial schemes. Due to its membership in the Schengen Area and location between Belarus and Kaliningrad, which are significant sources of criminal activity, Lithuania is a transit state for smuggling activity. The State Border Guard Service has registered an increase in smuggling activity consisting primarily of cigarettes, alcohol, and petrol/gas on the Kaliningrad-Lithuania and Belarus-Lithuania borders.

Cybersecurity Issues

Officials report an increase in cybercrimes with several Lithuanian entities being subjected to attacks. A notable incident occurred against the news portal DELFI on September 3, 2014, that interrupted service for legitimate customers. In early December 2014, Lithuania's parliament, the Seimas, passed a comprehensive cybersecurity law to enhance the protection of the country's cyber space.

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Areas of Concern

Various crimes are reported in the vicinity of the Vilnius train and bus stations. Travelers should avoid the train and bus station areas late at night. Most reports of crime are generated in Old Town Vilnius. The congregation of tourists in Old Town leads to the influx of criminal elements.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions are generally up to Western European standards. Outside of city centers and off major throughways, the road conditions often deteriorate. In addition, the roadways typically are poorly illuminated. Motorists should exercise care when driving after dark outside of city centers.

Drivers can be aggressive; driving defensively is recommended. Travel at night by car or legitimate taxi.

Lithuania often receives an above-average snowfalls. Road conditions can deteriorate quickly with a heavy accumulation of snow. Conditions can be further exacerbated in the winter, as

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there are less than six hours of daylight per day.

Police have a zero-tolerance to drinking and driving, and penalties are severe, as a result of Lithuania leading the European Union (EU) in the yearly number of accidents caused by alcohol. Police increasingly use random roadblocks, speed traps, and breathalyzer tests. Drivers in vehicles departing ferry terminals are often subjected to breathalyzer tests.

In addition to a valid U.S. driver's license, American citizens must possess an International Driving Permit. This permit allows driving in Lithuania for 185 calendar days. After 185 days, travelers need to obtain a Lithuanian driver's license. Lock your vehicle's doors and ensure no items of value are exposed. Park in illuminated, safe areas.

If involved in a traffic accident, drivers are advised not to move vehicles from the accident site; under Lithuanian law, such actions could constitute an admission of guilt or be considered a hit-and-run violation.

Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation (bus, trolleybus) companies generally provide reliable, safe, and economical services. The bus service consists of a network of lines serving Vilnius and the suburbs. Additional urban transport systems include a transnational train system. Although there are some concerns about the consistency of timetables and speeds of travel, the public transportation system provides several alternatives to personal vehicle usage.

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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.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration has assessed the government's Civil Aviation Authority as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization aviation safety standards for oversight of Lithuania's air carrier operations.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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There are no known indigenous terrorist organizations in Lithuania, which is not a known base of support or sympathy for terrorists. Lithuania faces the same threat of international terrorism as other European countries. Lithuania became a member of the Schengen Area on December 21, 2007. Lithuania is a staunch ally in the U.S. fight against terrorism and has implemented aggressive measures to protect itself.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Most Lithuanians regard Americans and Westerners in a positive manner and are friendly to foreigners. There have been a few, small, entirely peaceful demonstrations in front of the U.S. Embassy over the past several years.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience are generally limited and peaceful. Recent demonstrations have occurred to protest government policy on pensions, social benefits, and education relating to minority groups, especially ethnic Poles. Demonstrations are typically identified in advance via the government's permit process and are closely monitored by law

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enforcement authorities. Permits are required for public demonstrations involving more than 15 persons, and most public demonstrations are generally small, numbering less than 100 participants.

Post-specific Concerns

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

The main intellectual property issues are copyright infringement and the sale of counterfeit trademarked merchandise. According to industry sources, bulk distribution of counterfeit goods has dropped in recent history, but distribution of counterfeit goods by using small packages is on the rise.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Small, fractional fringe element groups of neo-Nazis, skinheads, and other far-right wing extremists continue to be present but rarely impact foreigners.

While reported incidents of violence and harassment targeting lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities are rare, the LGBT community is not widely accepted.

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There have been reports of unprovoked harassment and violent attacks against persons who, because of their complexion, are singled out. U.S. citizens most at risk are those of African, Asian, Hispanic, or Middle Eastern descent.

Drug-related Crimes

Combating drug-related crimes is a priority for the police agencies. The rate of illegal drug use has increased in recent years; however, it decreased by 24.2 percent in 2015 and has resulted in a decreasing number of high-risk crimes by 12.4 percent. Nonetheless, Lithuania is primarily a transit country to import/export heroin and cocaine.

Police Response

Police are professional and competent but suffer from a lack of resources and low salaries. Although the national police department totals approximately 9,500 police officers and 2,500 civil (non uniform) servants, severe budget constraints have limited their efficacy in deterring crime. Police skills, tactical skills, resources, and emergency response capabilities still fall short of American law enforcement standards in many respects. Emergency police and medical responses are often hampered by significant traffic congestion and delays. Police response times can vary from several minutes to an hour, depending on the nature of the call, time of day, call volume, and resource constraints. In order to respond to the needs of visitors, police concentrate most of their patrols (vehicular and foot) in tourist and highly-populated areas.

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Due to the regional scope of organized crime networks and activities, law enforcement cooperate closely with counterparts in the EU, the Baltic countries, Russia, and, to a lesser degree, Belarus.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Incidents of police harassment and unjust detention are rare, but solicitation of bribes by authorities and highway police is a concern. Drivers stopped by highway police for speeding infractions are subject to official adjudication with final payment, if necessary, to be made through a bank. Under no circumstances should money be paid directly to a police officer.

In the event a foreigner is detained or harassed by police, the person should comply with police instructions. However, a request for an interpreter and a representative from the individual's embassy should be made immediately.

Crime Victim Assistance

Visitors who become victims of crime should report it immediately to the local police station. The police emergency number is 112 (all emergencies services). After reporting the incident to the police, victims should contact their embassy to report the crime and request assistance, if desired. If you are an American citizen and need to report a crime and are unable to

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communicate with authorities because of the language barrier, please call the U.S. Embassy (+370 5) 266 5500 and ask to speak to the Consular Duty Officer.

Medical Emergencies

In the event of a medical emergency, dial 112 for an ambulance. Most medical services are usually available in larger cities (Vilnius, Klaipeda, Kaunas). The quality of these services, however, may not be up to Western standards. Outside major cities, the quality and variety of medical aid compared to the U.S. standard is much lower and more limited.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

For up-to-date information on medical providers in Lithuania, check the U.S. Embassy website at: http://vilnius.usembassy.gov/medical_information.html.

Available Air Ambulance Services

There are no regular, emergency air ambulance services in Lithuania. In extreme cases, military or State Border Guard Service resources have been used.

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Recommended Insurance Posture

There is no recommended insurance posture, however, some general travel insurance with medevac is always recommended.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/lithuania>.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Embassy does not have an OSAC Country Council. Additional information can be obtained from the American Chamber of Commerce:

J.Tumo-Vaižganto str. 9/1-63a

LT-01108 Vilnius, Lithuania

Tel: +370 5 2612 102

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E-mail: info@chambers.lt

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

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Vilnius

Akmen g. 6

Vilnius, Lithuania LT-03106

Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm. Closed for American and Lithuanian Holidays

Embassy Contact Numbers

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Tel: (370-5) 266-5500

Fax: (370-5) 266-5510

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

Embassy Guidance

Americans living in or visiting Lithuania are encouraged to register with the Consular Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in the Lithuania and obtain updated information on travel and security in the Lithuania by visiting the U.S Embassy website at: <http://vilnius.usembassy.gov/>. Embassy guidance can also be obtained by emailing the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius at: WebEmailVilnius@state.gov.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Travelers are warned to refuse invitations by strangers met on the street to come into local bars. This is a ploy to lure individuals into small bars where they can be extorted for large amounts of cash for supposedly purchased drinks with the threat of physical harm if they refuse to pay. The scam is normally run by young women and men who speak excellent English.

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Pay attention to your surroundings and avoid trouble spots and crowds. Increase your attention in high threat areas (public transportation, tourist areas). Travel in groups, especially at night. Avoid dimly-illuminated parks and streets at night. Avoid displaying items of value in public. Maintain control of your possessions and do not leave valuables unattended. Care should be taken when using ATMs. If possible, cash transactions are preferable to ones by credit card. Minimize your risk by not traveling with excessive money, credit cards, types of identification, and sentimental items in the event an item, wallet, or purse is stolen. Inform family and friends of travel plans and maintain backup resources for emergency contact information. Develop a personal plan for how you will respond to an emergency prior to one occurring. At home, lock your doors and windows. During the summer, only open windows that are not accessible from the outside.

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