



## Kuwait 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Embezzlement; Drug Trafficking; Burglary; Rape/Sexual Violence; Cyber; Improvised Explosive Device; Extreme heat/drought; Maritime; Riots/Civil Unrest; Oil & Energy; Employee Health Safety; Counterfeiting; Human Trafficking; Kidnapping; Faith-based Organization

Near East > Kuwait; Near East > Kuwait > Kuwait City

2/12/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

### Crime Threats

The general crime rate in Kuwait is below the U.S. national average.

Kuwaiti authorities have not posted official crime statistics for 2015 as of the time of this report. Media reporting indicates there was a significant increase in criminal activity compared to 2014. Third-country nationals (TCN), including around 50,000 U.S. citizens, comprise approximately two-thirds of the population. It is probable, particularly among TCN victims of lower income/status, that a high percentage of crimes go unreported. Violent crime occurs between Kuwaitis and/or by Kuwaitis against foreign workers (domestic staff) but often goes

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unreported or is not fully investigated. Crime does not affect most travelers provided they practice personal security measures to mitigate the possibility of becoming a victim.

Petty theft has been reported in the popular outdoor markets and shopping malls frequented by tourists and Westerners. Property crimes (pickpocketing, purse snatching) are more likely to take place in shopping areas and other high-traffic locations where foreign visitors congregate.

Crime victims have also reported various types of immigration and residency fraud, ATM/credit card theft, white-collar fraud, embezzlement, possession/trafficking of narcotics, and property theft.

There were several reports of residential burglaries in neighborhoods where expatriates reside. There were no injuries reported, and it appears the primary motivation was financial gain. The exact number of break-ins is undetermined, as many victims may not report incidents to law enforcement authorities.

While Kuwait is in many ways a tolerant country, conservative customs and dress are the norm. Kuwaitis may often consider it offensive to photograph women. U.S. citizens should keep in mind the cultural differences among the nationalities that coexist and should be cognizant that certain actions may invite unwanted attention. There are reports of harassment and sexual assault of TCN/expatriate women. There is a perception in the expatriate community that authorities do not fully investigate or prosecute crimes of rape. Women have reported suffering incidents of harassment while traveling alone, in public, and at shopping malls.

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## Cybersecurity Issues

Spearphishing for information and spoofing business leaders' email addresses with the intent of moving money is an area of concern. Individuals with limited computer skills have been able to purchase sophisticated state-sponsored malware kits and use them to cause significant damage to private companies and governmental institutions. Social media continues to be an information target rich environment for criminals and other actors to gain information about individuals. RSO encourages individuals to exercise caution when using social media.

## Other Areas of Concern

Although several districts in Kuwait City have high incidences of crime, only a few areas are of sufficient concern that Embassy personnel are asked to exercise particular caution when visiting. The RSO recommends avoiding Jeleeb Al Shuyoukh, located on the outskirts of Kuwait City International Airport, especially during nighttime hours.

Further, Embassy policy places Kuwait/Iraq border north of Mutla'a Ridge and the city of Jahra off-limits for official U.S. government personnel without special permission.

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Unexploded ordnance (UXO) from the 1991 Gulf War remains present in some desert areas. The Embassy urges caution if traveling off paved surfaces outside of Kuwait City. Workers have discovered UXO in piles of sand used at construction sites. A contributing factor to the local population's exposure to UXO is a tradition of desert camping. The majority of these campgrounds are very close to the major roadways, but some Kuwaitis travel long distances from built-up areas to camp in relative isolation. Camping in well-used areas mitigates some risk of contact with UXO, but camping in areas far from population centers increases the chances of coming into contact with hazardous items. In addition, heavy rains wash away sand, exposing UXO.

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Apart from periodic sandstorms and rain, road conditions and weather are favorable for driving most of the year.

The most dangerous daily threat residents face is driving. Drivers must remain on the defensive. Locals often drive aggressively, pass on shoulders and emergency lanes, and operate without headlights at night. Speed is the primary cause of traffic fatalities. Kuwait has an excellent highway system, but many people drive in excess of posted speed limits and weave through traffic. An average of 303 traffic accidents occurred daily in 2015. Media outlets reported 423 people died in traffic accidents in 2015. Many of the reported accidents were due to negligent driving.

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Avoid driving in the far left lane on highways due to the prevalence of aggressive drivers, who may flash their headlights rapidly, tailgate in order to get the slower drivers to move to the right, or pass on the left shoulder if blocked. Night driving is particularly dangerous because some drivers do not turn on their headlights. Passing on the left shoulder lane is legal but extremely dangerous due to aggressive motorists traveling at high rates of speed changing lanes quickly.

Road rage, aggressive driving, and vehicle competitiveness often end in disaster. It is quite common to see remnants of traffic accidents alongside the highway. It is advisable to avoid confrontations, refrain from making hand gestures or eye contact with other drivers, and to move away from anyone acting aggressively. Never lead such persons back to your home or to a secluded area.

Kuwaiti authorities treat public intoxication and driving while under the influence of alcohol as serious offenses, as alcohol is illegal. Any trace of alcohol found in the blood is unlawful. Kuwaiti authorities will arrest and prosecute offenders. Offenders may be sentenced to prison, pay a fine, and/or be deported if found guilty.

Kuwaiti law mandates that individuals involved in traffic accidents immediately notify the police and file a report. There are no Good Samaritan laws, thus assisting at the scene of an accident may expose the responder to liability. Expatriates perceive that the police afford Kuwaiti nationals preferential treatment when investigating accidents.

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The Ministry of Interior (MOI) has taken steps toward increasing traffic law enforcement, implementing traffic safety measures (camera/radar systems), and delivering public awareness campaigns. The use of seat belts is mandatory, and the use of handheld electronic devices while driving is illegal, but drivers frequently ignore these laws. Non-payment of traffic and parking fines may result in travel bans for individuals. Vehicle break-ins occasionally occur when drivers leave valuables in plain view.

Randomly-placed police checkpoints are frequent. Uniformed and plainclothes police have the authority to make traffic stops but must identify themselves with police identification credentials printed in Arabic and English. The RSO advises individuals to remain in their own vehicles with the doors locked and to lower the window only enough to receive the person's police identification. While checking the credentials as best as possible, individuals should use their mobile phone to alert his/her sponsor/trusted person of the situation and ask the sponsor/trusted person to meet them. U.S. citizens should inform the officer of their nationality. Do not ride in a police vehicle. If possible, drive your own car to the police station. Before going to the police station, individuals should request the officer to specify the name of the police station, and keep the mobile phone connected so the sponsor/trusted person can know and hear the destination. Lastly, anyone stopped by the police should relay the license plate number, the make, model, and color of the officer's vehicle to his/her sponsor/trusted person on the phone, if possible.

## Public Transportation Conditions

The government-owned Kuwait Public Transportation Company operates a bus service used mostly by low-income TCN labor force.

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Marked taxis are widely available at major hotels, and the RSO encourages visitors to use only metered and marked taxis. Marked taxis have the driver's name and ID number posted on the back of the front seat. Note that information and call the police at 112 to report an incident. Establish the fare before entering the vehicle. Do not enter a taxi that already has other passengers. Do not permit taxi drivers to pick up other passengers. U.S. citizen passengers should always sit in the back seat and avoid making eye contact or engaging in needless conversation.

#### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Kuwait International Airport (KWI) is the only public airport in Kuwait. As of January 2016, United Airlines no longer operates in Kuwait. Kuwait Airways has the only direct flight to/from the U.S. Many Gulf and European airlines operate out of KWI. Security at the airport is problematic, but conditions are improving. There are continuing efforts to train KWI security personnel on how best to keep customers and infrastructure safe and secure.

#### Other Travel Conditions

Exercise care and caution before chartering any local watercraft (dhows, motor boats) for recreational excursions, particularly when operating close to shore in congested waterways. There may not be accessibility/availability of life jackets on vessels. Commercial and military vessels traverse Kuwait's coastline. The Kuwaiti Coast Guard routinely stops vessels passing through.

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## Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

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

There have been no lethal attacks on U.S. officials since 2002. The U.S. Embassy continues to receive threat information indicating possible targeting of official and private U.S. citizens for terrorist attacks. Soft targets are vulnerable to terrorist attack, although many are making improvements to their perimeters and internal security.

In June 2015, a terrorist bombing occurred at the Imam al-Sadiq mosque in Kuwait City, killing 27 and injuring hundreds more. The attack was perceived as an attempt to exacerbate Sunni-Shite tension. In August 2015, Kuwaiti authorities seized a large cache of weapons and explosives on a rural farm in Kuwait.

### Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Kuwait is a close partner and major non-NATO ally of the U.S., a relationship that has been close since the U.S.-led liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991. Kuwaitis occasionally disagree with U.S. policy, manifested through the local media and private social

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gatherings (diwaniyas). The close partnership between the U.S. and Kuwait yields excellent cooperation on matters of mutual interest.

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

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Kuwaiti law permits freedom of assembly as long as organizers of public gatherings of more than 20 persons obtain advance approval from the MOI. There were a small number of demonstrations and marches in 2015 related to political and social issues. A small protest occurred in front of the Embassy about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The MOI exercised restraint during unlicensed demonstrations and marches and used non-lethal measures to disperse protestors, who were disrupting residential neighborhoods and traffic. Bidoons (stateless residents) also held unlicensed demonstrations demanding citizenship rights in Kuwait.

The Embassy notes that participation by non-Kuwaiti citizens in demonstrations is illegal and strongly advises U.S. citizens not to participate in demonstrations and avoid areas of demonstrations and gatherings.

## **Religious/Ethnic Violence**

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The majority of the Kuwait population is Muslim. Unofficial estimates are that over 60 percent are Sunni and 30 percent are Shia. There is also estimated to be a Christian population of up to 700,000, made up mostly of expatriate and migrant workers. There are several officially recognized Protestant, various orthodox and Catholic faith churches, but there are also dozens of 'underground' churches that not officially sanctioned by the government. Kuwaiti society is tolerant of the religious diversity of its population and counts several hundred Christians among its citizens. Incidents of religious or ethnic violence are extremely rare.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

The summers can be stressful due to extreme heat; the summertime average daily high temperatures range from 42 to 48°C (107.6 to 118.4°F). Occasional dust storms reduce visibility. Kuwaiti winters are mild and pleasant.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Kuwait has vast oil fields, refineries, water desalination plants, ammonia plants, and other industries. Health and safety standards are not to Western standards; thus, workplace accidents are common. The Embassy advises Americans to keep apprised of local media coverage and government announcements. The Embassy also advises its employees to keep shelter-in-place supplies in their residences with sufficient food and water to last several days.

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## Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Kuwait is low threat for economic espionage. There have been reports of American disk-mounted software illegally reproduced and used by individuals. There have been no reports of any organization or country targeting American software; however, the possibility exists.

Pirated movies and music and the selling of counterfeit goods is rampant. Kuwait does have copyright and trademark laws; however, they are rarely enforced.

## Privacy Concerns

The government generally respects privacy of the individual, but it does monitor social media and Internet websites. Topics critical of the Amir and religion are off limits in the media and on social media, and the government prosecutes individuals who violate local media laws. Websites with morally offensive content are banned.

## Personnel-Background Concerns

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Trafficking in persons does occur, but the government is taking measures to reduce trafficking within its massive expatriate and migrant worker community. An overwhelmed judicial system and large black market labor pool contributed to worker abuses by Kuwaiti sponsors and other expatriate workers. Domestic workers are particularly vulnerable due to their isolated work locations, and several cases of severe abuse are reported each year.

There have been verbal and occasionally physical harassment of women. This generally occurs while shopping and sometimes driving, especially at night. Women can mitigate the potential of harassment by being cautious and conservative in dress and behavior. Ignore any taunting and do not respond to individuals involved. If you feel harassment is imminent, remain in a public place until you can contact local security or police.

### Drug-related Crimes

In 2015, media outlets reported several seizures of large quantities of illegal narcotics by local authorities at the maritime ports, Kuwaiti International Airport, and residences due to enhanced monitoring and enforcement measures. Possessing, using, and selling alcohol is illegal.

### Kidnapping Threat

There have been no public reports of kidnapped American or Westerners. However, parental kidnapping is a problem. Kuwait is not party to the Hague Abduction Convention or a U.S. Treaty Partner on International Abduction. This can prove problematic if a Kuwaiti brings an

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American child from the U.S. without permission of the other parent. Once in Kuwait, American citizens are subject to the jurisdiction of the Kuwaiti legal system.

## Police Response

Kuwait's MOI maintains a visible police profile with uniformed and plainclothes officers deployed in key locations for response and deterrence.

U.S. citizens are subject to the country's laws and regulations, which can differ significantly from those in the U.S. Violating Kuwaiti law can result in detention, arrest, a prison sentence, fines, and/or deportation. Examples of common crimes include possession, use, or trafficking of illegal narcotics, pork, firearms, counterfeit goods, and alcohol. Photographing government and public buildings, military installations, and economic infrastructure is against the law. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report "Picture This: Does and Don'ts for Photography." Humiliating or insulting a person is considered a crime, as is insulting members of the ruling family. The former is similar to disorderly conduct or harassment in the U.S., the latter is treated much more seriously. Proselytizing is illegal, unless it is based on Sunni interpretations of Islam. Non-payment of traffic violations or other outstanding debts owed to Kuwaitis may result in travel bans preventing individuals from exiting Kuwait.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If arrested or detained, Americans should request to speak with the duty officer at the U.S. Embassy through the switchboard operator at (965) 2259-1001. Do not assume the Kuwaiti

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authorities have reported your arrest to the Embassy. A consular officer will visit the citizen within 24-72 hours of the initial notification.

A local attorney will be required to assist in any civil or criminal proceeding. The Embassy maintains a list of attorneys who have worked with U.S. citizens:  
<http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/service/attorneys-for-u.s.-citizens>.

### Crime Victim Assistance

Dial 112 to contact police, fire, and ambulance emergency services. Police response to requests for assistance to Americans is generally good. American citizens who do not speak Arabic should request assistance from a bilingual Arabic/English switchboard operator. Be mindful that emergency switchboard operators do receive prank calls and may hang up if they do not understand the caller. The Embassy advises callers to call again in such cases.

The police accept crime reports at the police station with jurisdiction over the area where the crime occurred. If filing a crime report, it is advisable that a person who speaks Arabic and/or a local attorney accompanies the U.S. citizen, as the victim must render all testimonies in Arabic. Filing a crime report can take several hours, as a police investigator will take the victim's statement orally while composing his investigative report. Although many police investigators are fluent in English, it is advisable for those who do not speak Arabic to have an Arabic interpreter present. In all cases of abuse, the victim must obtain a medical report from a Kuwaiti hospital in order to file a police report.

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## Police/Security Agencies

Each district and governorate has police stations operating under the direction of the MOI Directorate of Public Safety.

## Medical Emergencies

There are many government and private medical facilities available. Medical treatment costs are comparable to or more expensive than in the U.S. Most hospitals and doctors accept major credit cards and cash. Patients will need to contact their insurance companies for reimbursement.

Local ambulance service is available by dialing 112. Most ambulances do not carry life-saving equipment. It is advisable to have an understanding of where you are located in case an emergency arises. Without addresses or street names, places are difficult to find. You may cite the number on the nearest streetlamp post to the switchboard operator to assist the ambulance in locating you.

## Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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The following hospitals have been successfully used by official U.S. government personnel for routine and/or emergency care:

**Hospital Name**

**Telephone Numbers**

**Physical Address**

Al Amiri Hospital

2245-0005, 2245-1442, 2245-0080

25, Kuwait City, Kuwait

International Clinic

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2574-5111, 1886677

Salem Sabah Al Salem Al Sabah St, Mangaf, Kuwait

Al-Salam International Hospital

2223-2000/2222

Port Said St, Dasma 35151, Kuwait

Mubarak Al Kabir Hospital

2531-2700 / 2709

Street 103, Kuwait

Hadi Clinic

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2531-2555

Jabriya, Kuwait City, Kuwait

Dar Al Shifa Hospital

1802-555

Beirut St, Hawally, Kuwait

New Mowasat Hospital

2572-6666

Salem Al Mubarak St, Salmiya, Kuwait

Kuwait Medical Center Dental Clinic

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2575 9044

Salmiya, Kuwait City, Kuwait

Al-Fozan Dental Center

99959445 / 22657050 / 22657060

Hawalli Muthana/Beirut St int.

**Al Muhallab Shopping Mall**

Balsam Dental Care Center

2575-5737 – 25755747

Salem Al Mubarak St, Salmiya, Kuwait

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## Recommended Insurance Posture

Americans are urged to consult with their health insurance companies prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policies apply overseas and whether they will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation.

## 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/kuwait?s\\_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/kuwait?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001).

## OSAC Country Council Information

Kuwait has an active OSAC Country Council, which meets monthly at pre-arranged locations. To find out more about the Kuwait OSAC Country Council, please visit the Kuwait webpage at [www.osac.gov](http://www.osac.gov). To reach the OSAC Near East team, please email [OSACNEA@state.gov](mailto:OSACNEA@state.gov).

## U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

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## Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located in Bayan on Masjid al-Aqsa Street.

Working hours: Sun-Thur, 8:00am - 4:30pm.

## Embassy Contact Numbers

The Embassy Switchboard is (965) 2259-1001.

U.S. citizens requiring emergency services should contact the Consular Section at 2259-1583 for immediate assistance during business hours.

In case of an emergency after business hours, call 2259-1001 and ask for the Embassy duty officer.

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

## Embassy Guidance

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Consular services, including services for U.S. citizens as well as visa applicants, are available by appointment only. Appointments for routine services such as passports, notariats, and citizenship documentation may be booked online via our website at the U.S. Citizens Services Appointment System. If you have any questions, please contact the Consular Section at [consularkuwaitm@state.gov](mailto:consularkuwaitm@state.gov).

All American travelers and expatriates are strongly encouraged to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) on [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) in order to receive consular messages. Refer to the Country Specific Information for Kuwait on the website for further guidance. Travelers should read the latest Country Specific Information for Kuwait prior to travel.

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

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

Some travelers fall into a sense of complacency and do not practice the same personal and residential safety measures that they would normally take in the U.S. The best practice to avoid being a victim is to maintain vigilance, remain alert, and be aware of your surroundings at all times. Americans must practice personal security and maintain a low profile. Criminals typically target distracted individuals because the element of surprise works in their favor. Pay attention and if something does not seem right about a situation, leave the area. Because newcomers are more susceptible to criminal activity when they are still becoming familiar with a foreign environment, visitors should maintain a high level of personal security awareness. The RSO recommends maximum awareness in shopping areas and other high-traffic

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locations where foreign visitors congregate. RSO encourages individuals to vary their daily routines and not become complacent.

When traveling during hours of darkness, ensure someone knows your itinerary and preferably travel with a friend or group. Always carry a charged mobile phone and government-issued photo identification.

For women, modest dress, not engaging in “small talk,” not making constant eye contact, and maintaining a low profile may deter harassment. Try not to travel alone, especially during hours of darkness. If a U.S. citizen is harassed, they should seek safe haven in a public area and contact authorities. Do not move to a secluded area or residence until the matter has been resolved. Visitors should behave and dress conservatively and maintain a respectful demeanor and low profile.

Only carry as much cash as is required for the day's business and store the remainder (along with passports, non-used credit cards, and other valuables) in a secure location. When carrying a large amount of cash is unavoidable, break it up in different pockets so as not to display it all when making a purchase. Individuals should check their credit card and bank statements monthly.

Keep hotel room doors locked at all times and store valuables in hotel safes. Visitors should instruct the hotel management not to divulge their room numbers over the telephone to any callers, and instead connect the call to their rooms or take a message.

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The U.S. Embassy urges all its citizens to be wary of unexpected visitors and pay particular attention to suspicious vehicles. American citizens should treat mail and packages from unfamiliar sources with suspicion. Report any suspicious activity to the local police as soon as possible.

The U.S. government advises U.S. citizens to avoid frequenting areas and apartment complexes where Americans or other Westerners congregate.

Stay apprised of local and regional media coverage and developments.

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