



United Arab Emirates 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Abu Dhabi

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Rape/Sexual Violence; Drug Trafficking

Near East > United Arab Emirates; Near East > United Arab Emirates > Abu Dhabi

2/12/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

U.S. Embassy Abu Dhabi's RSO utilizes open source reporting to gather information provided and also speaks with other embassy officials and private citizens. Criminal statistics are difficult to measure due to host government's policy of not releasing crime information.

Post Crime Rating: Low

Crime Threats

In comparison to similarly sized cities worldwide, Abu Dhabi's crime rate appears to be significantly lower. However, U.S. nationals should not be lulled into a false sense of security due to a lower crime rate. Crimes such as pickpocketing, petty theft, scams, assault, and sexual harassment do occur, although these crimes are often non-confrontational in nature, and weapons are rarely used.

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Petty thefts do occur often within the large expatriate workforce, which accounts for more than 85 percent of the population. However, most Western travelers are not impacted by crime, and while violent crimes and crimes against property do occur, they are infrequent.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic accidents are a leading cause of death in the UAE, and unsafe driving practices are common. Reckless drivers, fog, unmarked speed bumps, and drifting sand create unsafe road conditions.

Police patrols and cameras are located at most intersections, and traffic enforcement is taken very seriously. Law enforcement targets speeders, erratic drivers, and those using cell phones while driving; fines are expensive. Red light offenses are especially serious, resulting in large fines, points on a driver's license, and possible jail time combined with impounding the offending vehicle for up to 30 days. Drinking and driving and alcohol-related incidents are considered serious offenses and can result in arrest, jail time, heavy fines, and deportation. Any trace of alcohol is illegal and punishable.

Traffic lights go from green to red quickly, and due to the presence of police cameras, drivers often come to an abrupt stop, causing rear-end collisions at intersections. Vehicles frequently

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turn from non-designated turning lanes at major intersections, and taxis make frequent stops in undesignated locations to pick up passengers, so it is important to pay close attention to surrounding traffic. Traffic circle behavior is counterintuitive, as right turns are taken from the second lane in.

Always keep your vehicle doors locked; do not leave valuables in plain view.

Persons involved in accidents in which another party is injured automatically go to jail until the injured person is released from the hospital. In addition, if the Saaed officer (road service contracted by the Abu Dhabi police to respond to accidents) at the scene cannot determine who is at fault, an Abu Dhabi traffic police officer will be contacted to resolve the situation. If fault is still not determined, both parties will be taken to the local police station to resolve the situation. Even relatively minor accidents may result in lengthy proceedings, during which both drivers may be prohibited from leaving the country.

Public Transportation Conditions

Use caution when riding in taxicabs. Do not sit in the front seat and do not engage in idle conversation. Being too friendly with the driver may cause the driver to misunderstand your intentions. Tell the driver where you want to go and end the conversation. Abu Dhabi law requires the taxicab to use the meter. If the driver refuses, do not enter the taxi or get out. If there are any incidents, taxicabs have the driver's name and ID number posted on the back of the driver/passenger seat or on the computer screen on the dashboard. Record the information, call the police and report the incident. As of 2014, the mobile phone application-based private car hire company Uber became available in Abu Dhabi but is finding

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its footing with local regulation.

Terrorism Threats

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The Department of State remains concerned about the global threat of terrorism, including the continuing possibility of terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens and interests in the Arabian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. The continued threat posed by various terrorist groups seeking to target U.S. interests requires Americans working or traveling in the UAE to remain vigilant, maintain a low profile, and vary routes, times, and routines while in the UAE.

The security threat remains high in the Middle East, exacerbated by tensions and instability within the region. Additionally, in 2015, the UAE has undertaken a more prominent role in countering extremism within the greater Middle East. As such, the continued elevated regional security threat has the potential to affect security in the UAE.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

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The UAE has not experienced political violence in 2015.

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Political demonstrations are rare and must have prior approval from the government.

Post-specific Concerns

Personnel-Background Concerns

The UAE's large expatriate population, which includes several million Indian and Pakistani nationals, increases the possibility that activities in their native countries could impact security in the UAE. However, the UAE's South Asian community is generally law-abiding and disinclined to commit criminal acts that would risk arrest, deportation, and the loss of employment.

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While the UAE is less traditional in its outlook than some other Islamic countries, the local culture is conservative, and Americans should be careful not to offend local (Islamic) sensibilities. Western females are occasionally harassed. Dress should be respectful and appropriate for the given location (i.e. more conservative in nature while touring holy sites, tourist attractions, formal events, or during local holidays). Females are also advised to avoid sitting in the front seat of a taxi and limiting conversation to only providing relevant information. Public display of affection should be avoided and is considered a violation of local law.

Drug-related Crimes

The UAE continues to advance and promote its national drug strategy by intensifying security at airports, land routes, seaports, border crossings, and coastline patrols. The UAE continues educational campaigns, harsh judicial penalties, and rehabilitation to reduce the demand for illegal drugs. The UAE acts swiftly to punish violators in drug-related offenses. Drug trafficking groups continue using the UAE as a collection and distribution point, as opposed to merely a transit point, and they are utilizing more female smugglers from European, Asian, and African nationalities in an attempt to diversify their methods of operation.

The possession, use, or trafficking of illegal drugs can result in long jail sentences, heavy fines, and even the death penalty if convicted for drug trafficking.

Police Response

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Investigative resources, including sophisticated equipment, are available to assist police investigators. The police use biometrics (fingerprints, iris scan technology) and have created a national registry for expatriates living and working in the UAE. Local police will conduct name and record checks if the individual being investigated is present at the police station and has fingerprints taken. Police will not provide data with only name and date of birth.

During life threatening emergencies, it is prudent to remember that police and emergency services may have lengthy response times. Non-routine decisions will be handled by a UAE national police supervisor, generally the ranks of lieutenant and above. Police officers below the rank of lieutenant are expatriates and are often reluctant to make independent decisions. English fluency is rare for expatriate police officers, and English speaking officers are generally assigned to investigative units. Non-Arabic speaking U.S. nationals should request an English speaking officer when contacting the police department. English-speaking officers may not be readily available during the UAE weekend (Friday, Saturday).

If approached by a police officer, be prepared to show your identification that permits your presence in the country (Passport or Emirates ID).

U.S. citizens are subject to this country's laws and regulations, which can differ significantly from those in the U.S. and may not afford the protections available to individuals under U.S. law. Among the seven Emirates, four (Ajman, Fujairah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain) share a federal judicial system. However, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Ras al-Khaimah each have an independent judicial system, legal procedures, and penalties independent from the other Emirates. Violating Emirati law can result in arrest, prison, fines, and deportation.

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Consuming, possessing, or transporting alcohol without a Ministry of Interior alcohol permit is illegal. The legal blood alcohol limit for drivers is 0.0 percent, so one can be arrested even if s/he has an alcohol permit from Ministry of Interior. Several arrests in 2015 included an additional charge of consuming alcohol without the requisite permit. In each instance, although initial charges were later dropped, the charge of consuming alcohol without a permit remained with lengthy prison sentences being levied upon the accused. For further information on criminal penalties, please visit <http://travel.state.gov>.

There are laws against taking photos in areas designated "No Photography Zones:" the Embassy District, government buildings, military bases, and key infrastructure sites. Also, taking photos of women or individuals in public locations may also result in confrontation or reaction by security personnel or police. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report "Picture This: Does and Don'ts for Photography."

Weapons, weapon parts, ammunition, body armor, handcuffs, and/or other military/police equipment are illegal. Violations can result in lengthy jail sentences and large fines. Violators' passports are normally held until judicial cases are resolved. The U.S. Embassy strongly advises travelers, including all U.S. government personnel and those transiting UAE airports, to avoid the transport of any arms or items that may be considered law enforcement or military equipment without prior written approval from the UAE Ministry of Defense. Such items include, but are not limited to: weapons, weapon parts/tools, ammunition, (even one bullet or shell casing), body armor, handcuffs, and any other military or police equipment. Transport of these items into or through the UAE is considered a violation of UAE law. Persons found to be carrying such items, even in the smallest quantities, will be arrested and face strict criminal penalties, including imprisonment, large monetary fines, forfeiture of the items, and deportation. U.S. citizens transporting such weapons/equipment without the express written authorization of the UAE government have been arrested and jailed, even though airlines and U.S. authorities allowed shipment on a U.S.-originating flight.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

U.S. nationals detained or arrested should request that the authorities contact the Embassy consular section. The Abu Dhabi American Citizen Services phone number is (+971) 2 414-2200 and the Dubai American Citizens Services phone number is (+971) 4 309-4000.

Crime Victim Assistance

The Abu Dhabi emergency response telephone number for police, fire, and medical service is 999. Emergency operators/dispatchers speak a variety of languages, including English. When calling for emergency assistance, the caller should provide a detailed description of the location and type of emergency. Most streets in Abu Dhabi are identified by name and/or number; however, many have been re-named/re-numbered and may be known by several names. The vast majority of residential properties are not numbered. Identifying landmarks or businesses at the scene of an incident is essential in assisting emergency personnel.

Medical Emergencies

Due to the lack of street addresses, emergency callers should provide directions to their residences based on prominent landmarks and must be prepared to meet the ambulance upon arrival. It is recommended that the caller verify and ensure the emergency operator understands the directions provided. Directions should be prepared and kept by the phone. It

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is important to know the quickest and shortest route to the main emergency facilities throughout the city. It is strongly advised that all U.S. nationals identify and select a primary care physician and a pediatrician prior to arrival in country or as soon as possible upon arrival.

Ambulances are staffed by trained paramedics and equipped with life-saving equipment. However, ambulances do not always respond quickly, and transportation by private vehicle is recommended when it can be done in a safe, secure manner. If an ambulance is required, call 999 and emergency personnel will transport you to the closer of the two hospitals listed below.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

For non-life threatening emergencies or routine consultations, there are several private medical centers and medical providers available. A list of medical resources can be found on the Embassy's web site (<http://abudhabi.usembassy.gov>).

For serious or life threatening emergencies, both Sheikh Khalifa Medical City (SKMC) near the Corniche and Mafraq Hospital (past the airport) have the best emergency rooms for trauma in Abu Dhabi. SKMC is located on Al Karamah street (24th) between Al Falah (9th street) and Hazaa bin Zayed the First (11th street). Mafraq is located off E11 going east and is on Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Road. Additionally, the Cleveland Clinic Emergency Room can handle minor trauma. The facility is located on Al Maryah Island, adjacent to Abu Dhabi Island.

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For life threatening OB/GYN emergencies, patients may contact their personal OB/GYN or go to the Corniche Hospital (+971-2-672-4900) located behind the Sheraton Abu Dhabi Hotel on Corniche Road. For less severe emergencies, BrightPoint Hospital on 4th street opposite Dusit Thani Hotel is an option. Also, Al Danat Emarat is another women’s hospital located at the intersection of 2nd and 3rd Streets near Abu Dhabi Gate City.

Travel outside Abu Dhabi puts the onus on the traveler to identify medical care and emergency facilities at their destination.

CDC 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/united-arab-emirates>.

OSAC Country Council Information

For more information about security overseas, log onto the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) website at www.osac.gov. There are two active Country Council programs in the UAE: Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Please visit our Country Council websites at www.abudhabi.osac.gov and www.dubai.osac.gov. For more information, please contact the Regional Security Office at +971-2-414-2200. To reach contact OSAC’s Middle East team, please email OSACNEA@state.gov.

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U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located in the Safarat (Embassies) District, Road 4, in Abu Dhabi.

The Embassy is open Sun-Thur from 0830-1700. The Embassy is closed on both UAE and U.S. national holidays.

Embassy Contact Numbers

The main Embassy phone number is +971-2-414-2200.

For assistance after duty hours, weekends and holidays, please call +971-2-414-2500.

For routine consular/American Citizen Services: +971-2-414-2550 (0800 to 1200, Sunday – Thursday) or email at abudhabiacs@state.gov. For non-immigrant visa questions, please email your questions to abudhabiniv@state.gov. For immigrant visa questions, please email your questions to abudhabiiv@state.gov.

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

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Nearby Posts

Consulate Dubai: <http://dubai.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

As the U.S. Department of State continues to develop information on any potential security threats to U.S. interests overseas, it shares credible threat information through travel warnings and travel alerts, available online at www.travel.state.gov. Travelers can also hear recorded information by calling the Department of State in Washington, D.C. at 202-647-5225. This site, and the Embassy's contain country-specific consular information, current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts and the State Department's Worldwide Caution messages.

The U.S. Embassy sends updated information regarding security threats via the warden message system to registered Americans within its consular district. The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) allows travelers and residents to receive the latest travel updates and security information. The RSO office encourages U.S. nationals residing or traveling in the UAE to register with the U.S. Embassy consular section at <http://travel.state.gov/STEP>.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Americans in the UAE should exercise a high level of security awareness. Failure to follow basic security measures as in any major city and complacency have resulted in theft and harassment cases. This includes basic principles such as locking doors, securing personal items, and maintaining situational alertness. Vary routes and times. Vary routines and places of activities.

Carry your mobile phone with emergency numbers pre-programmed and do not use your phone while driving. If possible, let a friend or acquaintance know when you are out, where you will be, how you can be reached and when you are expected to return.

Control the keys to your residence and lock doors even when home. If you will be away from your residence for any length of time, have a friend check on the residence. Leave lights on and ensure that doors and windows are locked.

If you are being followed, do not drive home. Go to a safe location (a police station or a familiar, populated area). Draw attention to yourself to ward off suspicious person(s). If being followed in a vehicle, try to obtain a license plate number and vehicle description.

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