



Portugal 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Maritime; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Floods; Wildfires; Counterfeiting; Drug Trafficking; Fraud; Financial Security

Europe > Portugal; Europe > Portugal > Lisbon

2/12/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Portugal is a developed and stable democracy with a modern economy, just emerging from several years of economic crisis.

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Portugal has a relatively low rate of violent crime, but low-level street crime is common. Petty thefts and other crimes of opportunity (muggings, purse snatchings, vehicle theft, pickpocketing) occur frequently, particularly in the major cities. Thieves often loiter in tourist locations, near beaches, and transportation hubs (metro, bus, train stations) to take advantage of disoriented/distracted travelers. Pickpockets take advantage of crowds getting on/off of all forms of public transportation, using the jostling of the crowd as a distraction.

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Wallets and cellphones are particularly vulnerable.

Each spring, the Ministry of Internal Administration publishes a comprehensive security report that contains detailed information on the state of law enforcement along with criminal analysis and statistics, and covers statistics from the PSP, GNR, PJ, and SEF. The current report (2014) is on the Ministry's webpage: <http://www.portugal.gov.pt/media/6877606/20150331-rasi-2014.pdf>. Crime reporting typically increases during the summer months and over the winter holidays, primarily due to the increase in tourism. Criminal incidents occur with less frequency in the Azores and Madeira than in mainland Portugal.

Domestic violence cases increased in 2015.

Thieves reportedly scout parking areas alongside tourist attractions and beaches, watching for rented cars.

Vice activities (gambling, prostitution, narcotics) exist. Overall, organized crime is not a major issue, but smaller groups do operate and run security at popular night clubs and discos. Eastern European criminal organizations are present and predominantly engaged in racketeering, extortion, and vice-related criminal activity. Other gang activities are generally limited to immigrant ethnic groups and focused on narcotics, petty crimes, and turf protection.

Other Areas of Concern

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Pickpocketing and purse snatchings in the Lisbon area are most likely to occur in buses, hotel lobbies, restaurants, the airport, trains, train stations, and trams, especially onboard tram number 28 to the Castle of São Jorge. You should take special care in the Oriente, Santa Apolonia, Entrecampos, Marques do Pombal, and Rossio metro and train stations, the Sete Rios bus station, the Alfama, Baixa and Bairro Alto districts, and the tourist area of Belém.

Outside Lisbon, thefts have been reported in the popular tourist destinations of Sintra, Cascais, Mafra, Obidos, Fatima, Coimbra, Setubal, Porto, and in the Algarve. You should take special care when parking at the Moorish Castle and Pena Palace in Sintra; and at the beachfront areas of Peniche, Nazaré, Guincho, Cabo da Roca, and Boca do Inferno. In the Algarve, there have been some reports of robberies in vacation homes, and tourist vehicles have been broken into while shoppers are visiting pottery shops. Pickpocketing, while infrequent, may occur in the Old Town and Santa Catarina Park areas of Funchal in Madeira.

On São Miguel Island, in the Azores, the areas between Ponta Delgada and Lagoa, and Ribeira Grande, while infrequent, have reports of crimes of opportunity and drug use/sale.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

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Highways are exceptional, and secondary roads are generally of good quality and well maintained. In remote locations and in historic city centers, traffic lanes are very narrow and can be difficult to navigate. Traffic enforcement is limited, but the use of speed cameras is on the rise. The police in continental Portugal have the authority to fine on-the-spot, and most of their vehicles have portable ATMs to facilitate immediate payment. Particularly problematic are failures to properly merge, yield, and safely change lanes – and include running traffic control lights – especially in urban areas. Motorists, especially motorcyclists, often drive excessively fast and violate traffic codes. Motorcyclists/Scooters are permitted to split lanes and go to the front of traffic at stoplights, all of which can be disconcerting for unexpected drivers. All highways have tolls, and most require an electronic device or pre/post payment when using.

Incidents of serious traffic accidents in the Azores and Madeira are rare. High speed, bad weather, and unskilled drivers contribute to accidents, including rollovers and those involving multiple vehicles and often resulting in serious injuries or fatalities. In the Azores, driving can be challenging due to narrow cobblestone streets, blind curves, blind corners, and livestock on country roads. In contrast to the situation on the Portuguese mainland, payments are not made on the spot; traffic violations are registered by radar and later forwarded to the offender via the postal service.

Lower speed accidents predominantly occur in the cities and urban areas, and particular caution should be exercised when traversing intersections, as motorists often accelerate in an attempt to beat the traffic lights or become impatient sitting in a line and disregard the traffic light altogether. While traffic congestion is notable and predominantly in Lisbon, Porto, and surrounding metropolitan areas, long queues during rush hours are commonplace, yet incidences of road rage are rare.

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Drivers and passengers are required to wear seatbelts, must use hands-free headsets for cell phones, and are encouraged to drive defensively. Small children must be in child safety seats in the rear seat with the seatbelts fastened. Rental cars and vehicles with out-of-town or foreign license plates are frequent targets for break-ins, particularly when parked at popular tourist destinations and beaches. When parking, store valuables and merchandise out of sight i.e. inside the trunk, and park in illuminated areas, preferably in public areas. Always drive with your windows up and doors locked, especially when stopped at intersections. In Lisbon and other large cities, be mindful of beggars or street performers at intersections.

In 2014, Portugal passed new traffic laws; the main changes are listed on the Autoridade Nacional Segurança Rodoviária website: <http://www.ansr.pt/Legislacao/Pages/default.aspx>. An English FAQ can be found here: http://www.ansr.pt/Pages/FAQs_en.aspx.

For traffic accidents and emergencies, dial 112. Portuguese law requires you to leave your vehicle where it is and immediately notify the police. Other safety precautions are necessary – please refer to local laws.

Public Transportation Conditions

Be careful on public transportation. Electronics and unattended luggage are particularly vulnerable to theft. When walking into train and metro stations at night, only enter well-illuminated and well-traveled stations.

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Taxis are a reliable means of transportation, though you should be alert to possible discrepancies between the meter fare and the amount requested by the driver. Always ask the taxi driver to use the meter. Always use a taxi from the queue or kiosk; do not utilize someone who walks up to you and offers you a ride.

Buses are reliable.

In the Azores, taxis do not have meters; the fare consists of a base fee plus a posted rate per kilometer traveled. Public buses are inexpensive. Bus services begin at 7 a.m. and generally operate until 8 p.m., depending on the destination.

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 Portugal's air carrier operations. Further information may be found on the FAA's safety assessment page. <http://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/iasa/>

High winds can temporarily close airports in the Azores and Madeira.

Terrorism Threat

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Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

While Portugal has been largely free of major terrorist incidents, it maintains open borders with its neighbors, allowing the possibility of terrorist operatives to enter/exit with anonymity. Law enforcement and security officials, in close cooperation with neighboring countries, maintain an effective anti-terrorism effort and a welcoming environment for tourism and business. Authorities remain alert to recruitment and radicalization of religious converts, and they work closely with U.S. and European partners to counter associated risks.

The call for self-radicalization, whether disseminated on extremist forums or via the broader approach via social media, continued to be a global concern. It is difficult to determine which message will inspire a violent extremist or sympathizer.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

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Civil Unrest

Prior police approval is required for all public demonstrations, and police are present to ensure adequate security for participants and passers-by. Portugal has experienced a notable period of political and social tranquility; however, recent economic uncertainties have resulted in civil discontent manifesting in generally peaceful protests, on average about five or six protests a day, according to government statistics. Even demonstrations that are meant to be peaceful can become violent and unpredictable; you should avoid them if at all possible.

Sometimes fights occur in the time leading up to and just following a soccer match. Be cognizant of local culture and team colors when traveling in the area of or attending a game.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Portugal is a multi-ethnic/religious country, and a harmonious relationship generally exists between all groups. Occasionally, inter-ethnic disputes may arise in depressed neighborhoods owing more to socio-economic pressures rather than an outright ethnic conflict or clash of political/religious ideologies.

Post-specific Concerns

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Environmental Hazards

Portugal experienced an estimated 8.7 magnitude earthquake in 1755 accompanied by large tsunami that killed thousands of people and left Lisbon in ruins. A 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck the Azores in 1980 and caused property damage and loss of life. In recent years, quakes measuring 3.5 to 6.7 have been recorded both on land and in Portugal's territorial waters. The implementation of improved modern construction techniques in accordance with contemporary EU seismic protocols for large, multi-storied structures are noteworthy; however, many smaller buildings and dated residential dwellings do not incorporate such features and are susceptible to collapse in an earthquake. Consult with the U.S Geological Survey (USGS) websites for information on earthquakes including preparedness <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/index.php?regionID=63> and <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/prepare/links.php>.

Mainland Portugal and its outlying islands of the Azores and Madeira are prone to occasional storms. Storms in the islands created flash floods that can cause deaths, significant damage, and considerable erosion. For updated local weather, consult the Portuguese Institute for Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA) <http://www.ipma.pt/en/index.html> (English page).

Fires in northern Portugal, especially in the summer, can be devastating and occur with little warning. Stay on top of local media weather reporting or refer to the National Authority for Civil Protection (ANPC): <http://www.prociv.pt/sites/en4/Pages/default.aspx>.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

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Two main bridges connect Lisbon to the southern part of Portugal, which if targeted could cause major disruptions to movement in and out of the city.

A Galp refinery is in Sines, which is the fifth largest port in Europe (about 1.5 hours south of Lisbon).

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Do not buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal to bring back into the U.S., you may also be breaking local law.

Privacy Concerns

Portugal has strict privacy laws that govern the release of personal information. It is against Portuguese law to record police or military personnel, unless part of a special ceremony or at a tourist location. It is always best to ask prior to taking a photo or video.

Personnel-Background Concerns

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If you are a woman traveling abroad, please review travel tips for Women Travelers found on <http://www.travel.state.gov>.

There are no legal restrictions on same-sex sexual relations or the organization of LGBT events in Portugal. For more detailed information about LGBT rights in Portugal, you may review the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012. For further information on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) travel, please read the LGBT Travel Information page.

While in Portugal, individuals with disabilities may find accessibility and accommodation very different from in the U.S. General information is available on the website of Portugal Tourism Board. Public transportation vehicles in general have specially reserved seats for individuals with disabilities, but some vehicles may not be equipped to load and secure wheelchairs mechanically.

The State Railway Operator, Caminhos do Ferro Portugueses (CP) has a service called "integrated mobility service" (SIM) aimed at helping passengers with reduced mobility. English-speaking customer service representatives can be reached at 351 808 208 746 (7 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Monday-Friday). SIM staff provide for train and station accessibility; assistance during boarding/exiting or during the train ride; and they also assist with trip planning. Some train stations are equipped with elevators. Note that while SIM service is free of charge, requests for information or assistance must be made at least 48 hours before travel. Additionally, CP offers discounts to residents of Portugal of up to 25 percent upon presentation of the "cartão do deficiente" (disabled person's card). The card is available from CP ticket offices and is valid for two years. To qualify, applicants must have a Portuguese

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taxpayer ID number and provide certified proof of disability and proof of annual income. For additional information, please visit CP's website.

Thirty-one of Lisbon Metro's 52 stations offer full accessibility to people with disabilities. There are no reduced fares for passengers with disabilities. There are, however, elevators and moving walkways at main stations that provide access from the platform to street level, as well as payment machines adapted for passengers with disabilities and/or visual impairment. Passengers with visual disabilities can travel with their guide dogs as long as their service animals are leashed and muzzled. Check Lisbon Metro's website for more information.

Porto's metro system affords accessibility for passengers with disabilities system-wide with a network of elevators, ramps, and spaces for wheelchairs onboard metro cars. Check Porto Metro's website for more information about accessibility.

All Portuguese airports provide wheelchairs and bathrooms to accommodate disabilities.

Parking for people with disabilities, designated with a wheelchair symbol, is available in most supermarkets and commercial centers. Some lots offer free parking to vehicles displaying a disabled parking sign. There are no discounts for street parking.

The National Help Line for the Disabled (Linha Nacional de Apoio à Deficiência) can be reached at 35121 795-9545 (10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. – 5 p.m. Monday – Friday). Assistance is only available in Portuguese.

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Drug-related Crimes

Although neither a center of drug production nor a significant source of drugs destined for the U.S., Portugal is a gateway for drugs entering Europe, particularly from South America and western Africa. In addition to direct shipments from South America, traffickers use former colonies (Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde) as transshipment, refueling, and storage points for cocaine-laden vessels from South America en route to Europe through the Iberian Peninsula. While cocaine is the most significant drug threat, ecstasy, hashish, and heroin are also readily available.

Drugs are often sold at night, in the downtown area, especially near the bars and restaurants, and travelers are sometimes approached by drug dealers. Do not be surprised if you are offered drugs on the street. Drug trafficking of any amount is illegal.

Drug possession is prohibited even though since 2001 "personal use" quantities of drugs have been decriminalized. Individuals found by law enforcement to have "personal use" amounts are referred to the Drug Addiction Dissuasion Commission, consisting of multi-disciplinary teams charged with assessing users and deciding the appropriate sanction and referral to educational or treatment programs.

Police Response

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The authorities are professional. Portugal places a premium on privacy rights and individual freedoms; reports of unlawful detention, intimidation, harassment, and graft, etc. are rare.

Portuguese law requires that everyone carry official identification at all times. This ID must be displayed upon request to any police official. U.S. citizens who are not residents will need to present a U.S. passport.

Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different than our own, and criminal penalties will vary. If you break local laws, your U.S. passport will not help you avoid arrest or prosecution.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Based on the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, bilateral agreements, and customary international law, if you are arrested, you have the right to request that the police, prison officials, or other authorities alert the U.S. Embassy/Consulate of your arrest and to have communications from you forwarded to the Embassy/Consulate. To ensure that the U.S. is aware of your circumstances, request that the police and prison officials notify the U.S. Embassy or nearest Consulate as soon as you are arrested or detained.

If improprieties are encountered, seek legal counsel for appropriate assistance and report

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incidents to the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. The emergency number is 112, and English speaking operators are available on request. For social welfare emergencies (domestic violence, child abuse) dial 144. English-speaking operators are available. The government takes crime against tourists/visitors seriously and overall attempts to reinforce the presence and visibility of all law enforcement entities in the streets and within the communities.

The U.S. Embassy can assist with the following:

Replace a stolen passport;

Help you find appropriate medical care if you are the victim of a violent crime (assault, rape);

Put you in contact with the appropriate police authorities and assist in contacting family members or friends; and

Help you understand the local criminal justice process and direct you to local attorneys, although it is important to remember that local authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting the crime.

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Portugal has a crime victim's assistance program, administered through an organization known by its acronym, "APAV."

APAV – (Lisbon)

Rua José Estêvão, 135 A, Pisos ½

1150-201 Lisboa

Portugal

tel. 21 358 79 00

fax. 21 887 63 51

email: apav.sede@apav.pt

Serviços de Sede (Porto)

Rua Aurélio Paz dos Reis 351

4250-068 Porto

tel. 22 834 68 40 | fax. 22 834 68 41

Office hours in Lisbon are weekdays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and 2 to 5:30 p.m.; tel: 351 21 358 79 00, and in Estoril, near Cascais, the office hours are weekdays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and 2 to 7 p.m. and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; tel: 21 466 42 71. English speakers are available to help you.

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There is also an SOS immigrant line with English speaking operators ready to help you in case of emergency. You may contact them at 351 808 257 257 between 8:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m.

Police/Security Agencies

Law enforcement is the main responsibility of four bodies:

Polícia de Segurança Pública (PSP) - Public Security Police. PSP is a civilian police force that works in larger urban areas and has tourist units to provide additional assistance. PSP is tasked with safeguarding internal security and the rights of citizens. The PSP is the leading agency responsible for maintaining public order, countering violent acts, and performing tactical intervention.

Guarda Nacional Republicana - National Republican Guard. The national guard is a military police office with civilian policing responsibilities (gendarmarie) that work predominantly in rural areas too small to warrant the PSP, and they provide a national highway patrol.

Polícia Judiciária (PJ) - Judicial Police. Overseen by the Public Ministry, the PJ's mandate focuses on prevention, detection, and investigation of violent, organized, and financial crime.

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Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF) – Immigration and Borders Service. SEF's fundamental objectives within the internal security policy include border control of persons, permanence and the activities of foreigners in Portugal, and the study, promotion, coordination and execution of measures and actions related to these activities and migratory flows.

Medical Emergencies

Quality medical facilities are widely available. Hospitals may not have staff members who are fluent in English. Calls to 112 are free from any phone. The operator will put you in contact with the emergency service that you require.

Medical emergency (ambulances): 112

National Police/Security Police/Fire Service: 112

Sea Rescue: 214 401 919

Maritime Police (plus pick-up boat service): 210 911 100

Maritime Police (24hrs emergency): 210 911 155/49

Pan-European emergency number: 112

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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The Embassy's Consular Section maintains a list of English-speaking doctors.

Hospital de Santa Maria

AV. Professor Egas Moniz

1649-035 Lisboa

Telephone: 21 780 5000

*Designated Level 1 Trauma Center Hospital

**Accredited by the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB)

Hospital de S. José

Rua José A Serrano

1500-199 Lisboa

Telephone: 21 884 1000

Hospital de S. Francisco Xavier

Estrada do Forte do Alto do Duque

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1495-005 Lisboa

Telephone: 21 043 1000

*Designated Level 1 Trauma Center Hospital

Hospital da CUF

Rua Mário Botas, Parque das Nações

1998-018 Lisboa

Telephone: 21 002 5200

Hospital da Cruz Vermelha Portuguesa

Rua Duarte Galvão, 54

1549 Lisboa

Telephone: 21 771 4000

Available Air Ambulance Services

National Authority for Civil Protection (ANPC)

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Portugal under the Ministry of Interior

Av. do Forte de Carnaxide 2794-120, Carnaxide

Telephone: 21 416 5100

Recommended Insurance Posture

It is very important you ask your insurance company prior to departure if your policy applies when outside of the U.S. and if that insurance covers emergencies like a trip to a foreign hospital or an evacuation. In many places, doctors and hospitals still expect payment in cash at the time of service. Your regular U.S. health insurance may not cover doctors' and hospital visits in other countries. If your policy does not go with you when you travel, it is a very good idea to take out another one for your trip.

Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid programs do not provide coverage for hospital or medical costs outside the U.S. Check your insurance policy. If it does not cover you abroad, it is a good idea to consider purchasing a short-term policy that does. There are health policies designed specifically to cover travel. Many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas, including medical evacuations. The names of some of the companies offering short-term health and emergency assistance policies are listed under insurance information on the travel.state.gov website. <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/go/health.html#healthy.html>.

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Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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

OSAC Country Council Information

To learn more about the OSAC Mission Portugal Council, e-mail LisbonRSO@gmail.com. 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 Lisbon

Av. das Forças Armadas, Sete-Rios

1600-081 Lisbon

Portugal

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Hours of operation: Mon-Fri, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (except for American and Portuguese Holidays).

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: + (351) (21) 770-2122

Emergency After-Hours Tel: + (351) (21)-770-2122 or + (351) (21) 727-3300

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<http://www.facebook.com/AmCitsinPortugal>

Website: <http://portugal.usembassy.gov/index.html>

Consular coverage for multi-post countries

The Embassy's AOR includes mainland Portugal, the Azores Islands, and the Madeira archipelago.

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Nearby Posts

Consulate Ponta Delgada: <http://pontadelgada.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

All travelers should enroll in the STEP. The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service to allow U.S. citizens and nationals traveling abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Small groups of adolescents/young adults/women occasionally commit petty thefts and vehicle burglaries around common tourist spots (plazas, beaches, cafes, etc.).

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When parking on the street or in an unmarked lot, oftentimes men (young and older) will be there to “assist” you in parking your vehicle, and ask for one-two Euros. If the driver does not pay, often the vehicle gets scratched or damaged in some way.

If when returning to a parked vehicle, the traveler observes a flat tire and someone volunteering to assist with the repairs, use caution. While the “helpful citizen” distracts the traveler, an accomplice will steal unattended items.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

While Portugal is a generally safe country, travelers should exercise appropriate care. You should always be watchful and aware of your surroundings. Pay attention to the local news media reports. The best defense for pickpocketing is to limit exposure to wallets, purses, backpacks etc., and avoid unnecessary distractions. Thieves tend to “rush” the entrances to the buses or trams and can work in pairs or groups to offer distractions while the real thief steals your belongings. Do not leave your valuables in plain sight where a thief may spot them. At restaurants, items that hang over the backs of chairs or are placed on the floor are particularly vulnerable. Unattended luggage can be stolen at the airport. Travelers should continue to remain alert in the tourist areas, to include safeguarding your belongings at the beaches. Avoid parks at dusk and after dark, as they are used for vice activities.

Be careful walking into train and metro stations at night; only enter well-illuminated and well-traveled stations. Avoid parks during the late evening/early morning hours due mainly to vice activities.

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ATMs are widespread and accept most U.S. ATM cards for fund withdrawals. Avoid using ATMs in isolated or poorly lighted areas and on the street; instead, utilize ones inside bank alcoves with a friend standing watch while you secure everything before departing the bank area. Many local establishments will only accept credit cards with a chip or cash as a form of payment.

Refrain from carrying (or displaying) large amounts of money, flashy jewelry, or expensive electronics. Carry a cell phone and notify someone who is not accompanying you of your intended travel plans, to include a detailed itinerary.

Use hotel safety deposit boxes usually kept behind the hotel front desk – hotel room safes offer marginal levels of protection. Do not get off on your floor or go to your hotel room if you feel you are being followed. Go back down to the lobby and report the incident to the front desk. Do not open your hotel door to anyone you do not know; check with the front desk for verification if someone claims to be hotel staff. Know all entry and exit points in case of a fire.

When renting vacation lodging, make sure to assess the accommodation's security systems.

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