



Brazil 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Rio de Janeiro

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Other Threat / Incident; Theft; Drug Trafficking; Assault; Cyber; Financial Security; Fraud; Cargo Security; Riots/Civil Unrest; Summer Olympics; Floods; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Kidnapping; Disease Outbreak

Western Hemisphere > Brazil; Western Hemisphere > Brazil > Rio de Janeiro

2/15/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The State Department divides its roles and responsibilities in Brazil between four Consular Districts (one for the Embassy and each of the three Consulates General). This Crime and Safety Report focuses on U.S. Consulate General Rio de Janeiro's district, which is comprised of the states of Rio de Janeiro, Espirito Santo, Minas Gerais, Bahia, and Sergipe. For more information regarding the security environment in other areas of Brazil, please reference the OSAC Crime and Safety Reports for Brasilia, Sao Paulo, and Recife.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

The Critical Crime Rating means that the crime level in Rio de Janeiro has a major impact on the work and life of the community. Crime is the principal threat to visitors in Brazil. There is

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no evidence that Americans or U.S. government employees are being directly targeted for any criminal activity in Rio de Janeiro. The Rio de Janeiro Policia Militar (PMERJ) and Policia Civil (PCERJ) are proactive and responsive when dealing with all types of criminal activity in Rio de Janeiro.

Organized crime in Rio de Janeiro is controlled by major drug gangs, operating mainly in the favelas (slums). Low-level criminal activity continues to plague visitors and businesses alike. Drug-dealing, petty theft, and vehicle break-ins are common. Occasional incidents of violence have been reported as well. In addition, aggressive pan-handling has been identified in areas visited by foreign business travelers. The crime in Rio's favelas is certainly a product of organized crime, mostly centered on narcotics trafficking. In Rio de Janeiro, a "favela pacification program" was begun to systematically bring favelas under government and police control. Recently, the security services secured the symbolically criminally-hardened Mare favela (which straddles two major traffic thoroughfares: Avenida Brasil and Linha Vermelha) and have occupied over 30 smaller favelas (located mostly in the southern part of the city). There have been instances of large-scale gun battles in and around the favelas during some of the police operations. In addition, there have been incidents of specific targeting of police officers by criminal elements located with certain favelas.

Assaults are common on beaches or in parks after dark.

Cybersecurity Issues

Brazil is one of Latin America's leading digital nations. Over 50 percent of Brazilians are active Internet users, and Brazilian financial institutions were early adopters of online services. Cyber security and online fraud are major concerns, with annual losses reaching billions of

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dollars. Government websites have been defaced and taken offline by "hacktivists" in recent years. The army is responsible for defending critical cyber infrastructure, including in the context of major events (Olympics), and Brazil's Computer Emergency Response Team monitors and addresses general cyber security incidents. Given Brazil's highly networked economy and the fact that authorities are developing cyber doctrine and capabilities, analysts note critical infrastructure risks.

Brazil continues to rank as one of the most pervasive cybercrime environments worldwide. Brazilian cybercriminals have grown more brazen, stealing billions of dollars annually despite new legislation and official efforts to stop malicious activity online. The banking sector has been the primary target of these operations; however, cybercrime in Brazil also affects daily Internet users, private-sector organizations, and short-term travelers. With the upcoming Olympic Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro, public- and private-sector organizations are posturing themselves for a possible influx of malicious cyber activity. OSAC constituents traveling to Brazil or operating in-country should maintain awareness of popular schemes to avoid becoming cybercrime victims.

Rio de Janeiro has major security concerns regarding cybersecurity in regards to ATM/credit card scams. The use of credit card cloning devices and radio frequency interception (RFI) at restaurants, bars, and public areas is epidemic in Rio. The World Bank reports that Brazil has one of the highest concentrations of ATM terminals worldwide. Local cybercriminals are also known to target hardware (terminals) to obtain credit card and banking information. Trend Micro observed hackers compromising portable point-of-sale systems to obtain the information stored in the magnetic strip of a credit card as it is swiped for payment. Because this scheme often requires access to the payment hardware, researchers noted it requires insider access. Cyber security companies often note that, while still vulnerable, Chip-and-PIN cards are more secure and harder to clone than magnetic swipe cards.

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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions in Rio de Janeiro are similar to those found in large U.S. cities. Visitors driving in Rio de Janeiro should expect traffic congestion and delays at any time. Due to the topography of Rio de Janeiro (mountain ranges surrounding the southern part of the city), there are multiple vehicular chokepoints spread throughout the city caused by tunnels. Most drivers are not trained, properly licensed, or insured, all of which leads to stressful driving conditions. Major roadways can run through, or next to, favelas, which have the potential for violent crime to spill out onto the roadways causing potential tremendous traffic delays.

Throughout Brazil, road conditions outside of the main cities vary greatly. Traveling in rural areas, as well as in satellite cities, drivers also must pay close attention to pot holes and speed humps. Road conditions range from extremely poor to good, and accidents are always a concern outside of major cities. Lighting, traffic signals, and road markings vary from good to poor.

Brazil uses automatic photo-ticketing systems to discourage speeding, and tickets are mailed to the owner of the vehicle.

Utilizing tinted windows, keeping windows rolled up, and keeping valuables out of sight are

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the best recommendations against possible random criminal activity.

Public Transportation Conditions

Rio de Janeiro utilizes a bus system (public and private), taxis, and a metro system. While none are off limits, RSO recommends that, especially in the northern region of the city, they are utilized as little as possible in order to reduce the possibility of being a victim of crime.

Buses are plentiful and generally keep to a regular schedule. RSO recommends avoiding city buses when possible. Protest and demonstrations targeting the bus and mass transit systems often leaves this form of transportation to be less than desirable, as buses are often burned, robbed while in transit, and the source of many protests.

Although taxis are plentiful, there are still high rates of illegal/pirate taxis looking for potential targets of opportunity. Only use legitimate, well-marked taxis, which are white or silver with green and yellow stripes. Most Brazilians know how to spot a legal taxi. Taxis and private vehicles are recommended to be used when moving within the city of Rio de Janeiro. Even while driving, motorists can be vulnerable to armed bandits on motorcycles who prey on potential victims waiting at traffic lights or in traffic. Private car services, such as Uber, also provide a relatively safe option for travelers. Only use legitimate, well-marked taxis at taxi stands, arranged via smart phone apps, or have your hotel call one for you.

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“Gypsy vans” are private transportation used by the local populace to move from neighborhood to neighborhood in Rio. These cabs have had numerous criminal issues, are not regulated, and are not recommended for use by Westerners.

The metro system is often crowded, and there are often reports of citizens suffering loss of personal items and of females being groped and touched inappropriately.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Reports of cargo theft, from both overland shipments and from storage facilities, occur frequently. Airports countrywide inaugurated supplemental security measures, in part to thwart criminal activity targeting aviation facilities.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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There are no known indigenous terrorist groups operating in Brazil. Brazil is a non-aligned country with no significant enemies and is not targeted by any known radical groups.

The tri-border area where Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay come together is home to a large Arab community. To date, no incidents directed against official or non-official Americans have occurred in this area. Accordingly, it is recommended that American visitors to the area, to include Foz de Iguazu, remain especially vigilant and maintain a low profile.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

Political violence is possible in any of the major cities. Economic conditions may contribute to civil unrest, protests, and strikes, as Brazil is experiencing its longest and deepest recession since the 1930s. After contracting 3.8 percent in 2015, the economy is projected to contract by another 3.5 percent in 2016 that could drive official unemployment above 10 percent. Inflation has already risen above 10 percent, and with additional tax increases proposed by the government to resolve a budget deficit, middle class and other economically vulnerable groups will experience greater economic stress in 2016. There were extremely large protests in the past year in Brasilia, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Sao Paulo. While the majority of these protests are peaceful, violence occasionally occurs. Visitors should avoid areas where large

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crowds are gathering or protests are on-going.

Political violence in the form of protests occurs throughout Brazil,- especially in the capital and major cities. These protests are held for various reasons -- from work conditions, poor wages, anti-government, to the environment. While protests are generally non-violent, some have resulted in property damage and minor injuries. Protests tend to increase in numbers and intensity during the visits of high-profile foreigners and coinciding with major events.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

There are no known religious or ethnic violence disparities within Brazil. Brazil boasts a wide variety of ethnicities, and the majority of the people are Christian/Catholics, followed by a distant second of Protestant.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Most natural disasters are not a major concern in Brazil, although significant flooding does occur during the rainy season. Flooding, and associated mudslides, have recently become a serious problem in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

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Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

The risk of economic espionage is not particularly high in Brazil, but other intellectual property rights (IPR) issues continue to challenge U.S. companies. Brazil is on the U.S. Trade Representative's Special 301 "Watch List" due to high levels of counterfeiting and piracy, including online piracy. Illicit goods enter Brazil over its extensive land and sea borders, with the tri-border area near Paraguay and Argentina a particular concern. Some local police forces make concerted efforts to combat sales of counterfeit and pirated goods at physical markets, but offenders frequently are let off with minimal penalties. Concerns also persist with respect to Brazil's inadequate protection against unfair commercial use of undisclosed test and other data generated to obtain marketing approval for pharmaceutical and agricultural chemical products.

Privacy Concerns

A bill in Brazil's congress has aroused privacy concerns by proposing to force Internet users to divulge their identities when visiting websites. Meanwhile, Brazil is developing sweeping legislation addressing the use and protection of individuals' personal data; the current draft bill appears to strike a middle ground between the EU's restrictive model and the more commercially permissive U.S. approach.

Personnel-Background Concerns

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Brazil's federal law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, but several states and municipalities have administrative regulations that prohibit such discrimination and provide for equal access to government services. Social discrimination remained a problem, especially against the transgender population. Violence against LGBT individuals remained a serious concern in 2014.

The law prohibits racial discrimination, specifically the denial of public or private facilities, employment, or housing, to anyone based on race. The law also prohibits the incitement of racial discrimination or prejudice and the dissemination of racially offensive symbols and epithets and stipulates prison terms for such acts. The 2010 census reported that for the first time white persons constituted less than half the population of 202.6 million, since approximately 52 percent of the population identified themselves as belonging to categories other than white. Despite laws and a high representation within the general population, darker skinned citizens, particularly Afro-Brazilians, frequently encountered discrimination.

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities in employment, air travel, and other transportation, education, and access to health care, and the federal government generally enforced these.

Drug-related Crimes

The majority of city's drug-related issues are based upon those persons addicted to illicit drugs. Street assaults, robberies, and other criminal activity generate proceeds to support

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their addictions. Brazil is the number two consumer of cocaine in the world, behind the U.S. As such, a large proportion of crime is drug-related.

Kidnapping Threat

While kidnappings for ransom in Rio have become less common in recent years, these incidents do occur. One tactic of organized gangs is to target individuals observed withdrawing money from ATMs or exiting banks after making a withdrawal. These gangs frequently operate in teams. Another version of this, called "quicknapping," is an ongoing criminal activity in which ATM users are kidnapped at gun point and taken to several ATMs to withdraw cash. While Brazilians are most often targeted, all foreigners are vulnerable to this crime.

Police Response

Police response, both from the military and civil police, varies. Police officials frequently cite a lack of resources, staffing shortages, basic equipment, and morale as reasons for widely varying response times and unsolved crime. Law enforcement entities continue to look for creative policing strategies to overcome infrastructure challenges to crime prevention, such as community policing, cops on motorcycles, and extensive implementation of surveillance cameras.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

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Visitors should inform the nearest Embassy or Consulate General in the event they encounter problems while traveling in Brazil, including detainment or arrest by the police. The contact information for American Citizen Services (ACS) at Consulate General Rio de Janeiro is:

Tel: +(55)(21) 3823-2000

Emergency After-Hours Tel: +(55)(21) 3823-2029

Fax: +(55)(21) 3823-2093

acsrio@state.gov

Crime Victim Assistance

As in the U.S., members of the community should dial 190 for police emergencies, 192 for an ambulance, and 193 for the fire department.

Police/Security Agencies

The PMERJ is typically the first law enforcement responder in the case of any emergency.

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The Military Police units (Policia Militar, a.k.a. Military Police), are not actually associated with the Brazilian Military Forces, but are rather then U.S. equivalent of uniformed state police officers. They have their own formations, rules, and uniforms and are responsible for maintaining public order across the state. Deployed solely to act as a deterrent against the commission of crime, units do not conduct criminal investigations.

Detective work, forensics and prosecutions are undertaken by a state's Civil Police (a.k.a. Policia Civil). Each state has its own "Civil Police Department," which carries out investigative work, forensics, and criminal investigation, and acts as a state bureau of investigation, while the Military Police (Policia Militar) carries out preventive police duties.

The Federal Police are responsible for crimes against federal institutions, international drug trafficking, terrorism, cyber-crime, organized crime, public corruption, white-collar crime, money laundering, immigration, border control, airport security and maritime policing. It is subordinate to the federal Ministry of Justice.

Medical Emergencies

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The following local hospitals has been identified by post as suitable for use by visitors to Rio de Janeiro:

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Hospital Samaritano

Rua Bambina, 98, Botafogo

Zona Sul

Tel: (21) 2537-9722

Clinica Sao Vincente

Rua Joao Borges, 204, Gavea

Zona Sul

Tel: (21) 2529-4422

Centro Pediatrico da Lagoa

Rua Jardim Botânico, 448, Jardim Botânico

Zona Sul

Tel: (21) 2535-7932

24-hour Pharmacies:

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Farmacia do Leme

Rua Prado Junior, 237, Copacabana

Zona Sul

Tel: (21) 2275-3847

Farmacia Cristal

Rua Marques de Abrantes, 27, Flamengo

Zona Sul

Tel: (21) 2265-3444

Available Air Ambulance Services

For air medical evacuation services, the Embassy recommends visitors purchase private air medical evacuation insurance before traveling. The Embassy can assist visitors with further information about obtaining services available.

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Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Major bodies of water in the Rio de Janeiro region have been tested and shown to be extremely polluted. Tourist areas of Lagoa, Ipanema and Copacabana beaches, and Guanabara Bay all have shown extreme contamination.

Brazil is undergoing a serious threat of mosquito borne illnesses in 2016. Please consult the Embassy web page or Center for Disease Control's webpage, www.cdc.gov, for additional information.

For vaccine and health guidance when traveling to Brazil, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/brazil?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

There is an active OSAC Country Council in Rio de Janeiro. To reach the OSAC Western Hemisphere team, please email OSACWHA@state.gov.

U.S. Consulate General Location and Contact Information

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Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate General Rio de Janeiro is located at Av. Presidente Wilson, 147 Bairro Castelo.

Consulate Contact Numbers:

Switchboard: +55 (21) 3823-2000

Emergencies and calls after normal business hours may be directed to Post One at +55 (21) 3823-2029

RSO: extension 2908

Fax: +55 (21) 3823-2003

Website: <http://riodejaneiro.usconsulate.gov>

Nearby Posts

Embassy Brasilia: <http://brazil.usembassy.gov/>

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Consulate Recife: <http://recife.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Sao Paulo: <http://saopaulo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guidance

U.S. companies are encouraged to contact the RSO in Rio de Janeiro for specific inquiries concerning the local security situation. For updated information, please contact the Consular Section of the American Consulate in Rio de Janeiro or consult the websites of the Consular Bureau of the Department of State (www.travel.state.gov) or of the United States Embassy in Brasilia. Information is also readily available from the American Chamber of Commerce and from the active OSAC Country Council operating in Rio de Janeiro.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim Scams

Scams

There are a variety of scams used by the criminals to rob victims, to include:

An unknown individual calls to say that a person you know, possibly a family member, has been kidnapped and unless you immediately pay the ransom the person will be harmed. The ransom is paid, and it becomes clear that the kidnapping never occurred.

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A similar scam is where an unknown individual calls and states an employee or family member has been in an accident and needs immediate medical attention. The individual states that payment must be provided in order for the injured individual to be treated. This scam often targets household staffs who react without verifying with their employer.

Scams involving credit cards are common as well. Travelers using personal ATM or credit cards sometimes receive billing statements with unauthorized charges after them in Brazil, or they discover that their cards were cloned or duplicated without their knowledge.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors should practice common sense preventive security techniques, just as they would in any large city. Visitors can reduce their risk of becoming a victim of crime by varying routes and times of travel. Traveling in groups of two or more persons may have a positive effect on deterring criminals. Do not walk on beaches or in parks after dark.

Do not carry or wear valuable items that will attract attention. If you need to wear expensive jewelry or carry a camera, conceal it until you arrive at your destination. Be alert at open markets or crowded areas. Be aware of the street environment and avoid contact with those who may be looking for potential victims. If you feel unsafe, seek a safer location. Go into a store or bank or simply cross the street. Do not physically resist any robbery attempt. While this is a personal decision, statistics show that resistance can lead to injury or death.

Do not accept drinks from strangers and always watch your drink. Scopolamine, or a similar drug, may be added to your drink. People have woken up robbed of their valuables or sexually

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assaulted after accepting such a drink.

Be careful of cash transactions on the street. A hurried transaction for merchandise often leaves the customer with shoddy/counterfeit goods/money.

In regards to residential security, the Regional Security Officer recommends that residences provide solid-core entry doors with quality deadbolts and a “peephole,” security grilles on all lower floor windows, 24-7 doorman for apartments, adequate external security lighting, and a monitored alarm system. Do not answer your hotel room door until you positively confirm who is on the other side. Look out the peephole or call the front desk to confirm the visitor. Family members and household help should not allow anyone to enter the residential grounds without identification and prearranged appointments. Suspicious persons or activities in the neighborhood should be reported to the police immediately.

Many residents and visitors find that renting or purchasing a cellular phone is very useful. Cellular phones are widely available, inexpensive, and generally highly reliable, especially in the major cities.

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