



## Colombia 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Bogota

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Surveillance; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Financial Security; Fraud; Burglary; Carjacking; Extortion; Cyber; Left-wing; Right-wing; Narcoterrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Volcanoes; Extreme heat/drought; Wildfires; Oil & Energy; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Counterfeiting; Hate Crimes; Kidnapping; Bribery

Western Hemisphere > Colombia; Western Hemisphere > Colombia > Bogota

2/15/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

### Crime Threats

The perception of wealth is a primary reason why criminals target Americans and other foreign nationals. The most prevalent threat to Americans is street crime. The most common types of crime include, but are not limited to, muggings, assaults, cell phone theft, credit card fraud, and burglaries. Vehicle break-ins, thefts, and carjackings are also a common risk. Criminals are quick to resort to violence and commonly use knives and firearms; it is not uncommon for a victim to be seriously injured or killed when resisting a robbery.

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Thefts and assaults occur frequently on public buses in urban and rural areas.

Extortion is a significant security concern. The FARC, ELN, and criminal groups extort all types of commercial entities in their areas of operation. Violence, including bombings, may be used if extortion demands are not met.

One common and particularly dangerous method that criminals use in order to rob a victim is through the use of a variety of drugs. The most common drug used has been scopolamine, which can render a victim unconscious for 24+ hours and in large doses can cause brain damage and death. Unofficial estimates put the number of annual scopolamine incidents in Colombia at approximately 50,000. It is often administered by liquid or powder into foods and beverages. Many incidents occur in nightclubs and bars where men perceived to be wealthy are targeted by young, attractive women.

## Cybersecurity Issues

Contacts from the public and private sectors indicate that cyber threats remain a significant security concern. Politically-motivated incidents have included a breach of President Juan Manuel Santos' email account and the illegal monitoring of Colombia's peace negotiations with the FARC, both revealed in February 2014. Authorities also report an increasing number of financially-motivated attacks as Colombia extends Internet access and Colombians increasingly depend on the Internet. 47 percent of Colombian respondents to a June 2015 Unisys Security Insights survey believed their personal data would be accessed by an unauthorized person within the next year. In order to further develop its institutional framework and capacity to address cyber threats, Colombia is preparing an updated cybersecurity policy

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in consultation with the Organization of American States, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and other partners.

## Other Areas of Concern

Americans serving at the U.S. diplomatic mission to Colombia and their families must ask for permission to travel throughout much of Colombia. They are required to fly to most major cities. All Americans in Colombia are urged to follow these precautions.

## Transportation-Safety Situation

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

The general information provided below concerning Colombian road conditions is for reference only and may not be accurate in all locations or circumstances.

In general, road conditions in the major cities are adequate but not good for vehicle travel. Traffic in Bogotá is exceptionally congested, and road conditions are often poor, contributing to traffic accidents and creating opportunities for criminals to rob vehicles. In rural areas, roads can be substandard and dangerous (no emergency lanes, poor lighting), and landslides frequently close roads. Accident response in rural areas will be slow.

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Traffic laws, including speed limits, are often not obeyed/enforced, creating chaotic and dangerous conditions for drivers and pedestrians. The penalties for drunk driving are severe and very expensive. Texting and driving is illegal. Seat belts are mandatory for front-seat passengers in a private vehicle. Car seats are not mandatory for children, but a child under 10 may not ride in the front seat.

In Bogotá, the Colombian National Police (CNP) and military have a large presence on the major roads, especially during rush hour traffic. Police will deploy sobriety checkpoints, especially in urban areas, and can require sobriety tests during traffic stops. The government deploys extra security to promote road travel throughout the country during holidays. Outside of these periods and in rural areas, terrorists and criminals can make road travel dangerous. In areas where the government does not have a strong presence, terrorist and criminal groups have set up roadblocks to rob and kidnap travelers. Embassy official Americans and their families are not permitted to travel by road outside of urban areas at night.

In case of a vehicle accident, Colombian law requires that the vehicles remain in place and all parties remain at the scene until the police arrive and complete their preliminary investigation. In addition, traffic accidents can be staged by criminals and may attract a crowd that could turn hostile. Drivers who feel threatened and leave the scene should immediately contact their insurance company and the police. In an accident involving an injury, the police will require a sobriety or blood-alcohol test and the driver may be taken to the police station.

Drivers and passengers should always be aware of their surroundings, lock doors, roll up windows, and keep valuables/packages out of sight. Briefcases, bags, and other belongings should always be placed in the vehicle's locked trunk. Criminals, sometime masquerading as

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vendors, may reach into cars at intersections to steal items and may tear off car parts (side mirrors, antennas, windshield wipers). Due to the possibility of being caught in a traffic jam, gasoline tanks should always be kept above half full. Car keys should be separated from house keys. Vehicles should be parked in designated parking lots and garages with valuables out of sight.

### Public Transportation Conditions

Taxis are available, but passengers need to exercise caution. Do not flag down taxis on the street or accept rides from strangers. Taxis should be called via phone or web app or taken from a taxi stand. Airports, hotels, and some restaurants/shopping centers have taxi stands or will call taxis for customers. When a taxi is called by phone or app, the passenger will be given the number of the taxi and a two digit code, usually the last two digits of the passenger's phone, to give the driver. Smart phone applications (Uber, Tappsi) are popular and provide the passenger with information to verify the taxi that is sent.

Taxi-related crimes commonly involve a cab hailed from the street by a lone passenger. After the passenger enters, the driver will stop, and armed robbers will enter the vehicle, sometimes taking the victim to ATMs over several hours to take out as much cash as possible. In 2013, a DEA agent was killed during this type of robbery. In 2015, four non-official U.S. citizens were killed by criminal activity.

In rural areas, public and private buses have been attacked by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) terrorist groups and organized crime elements known as *Bandas Criminales* (BACRIM). Buses are sometimes burned by terrorists, criminals, and demonstrators. Major accidents involving inter-city buses

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are common, sometimes resulting in death and serious injury. Embassy official Americans and their families may not use inter- or intra-city bus transportation.

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

El Dorado International Airport (BOG) is approximately 9.3 miles (15 kilometers) west of the city center. It is the largest airport in Colombia and a major hub for passenger and cargo airlines. Security measures are on par with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards.

Jose Maria Cordova International Airport (MDE) is located in Rionegro, approximately one hour (in light traffic) east of Medellin. It is the second largest airport in Colombia and serves various passenger and cargo airlines. Security measures are on par with ICAO standards.

Alfonso Bonilla Aragon International Airport (CLO) is located in Palmira, 12 miles (19 kilometers) east of Cali. It is Colombia's third largest airport and serves various passenger and cargo airlines. Security measures are on par with ICAO standards.

El Eden International Airport (AXM) is located in La Tebaida about 20 minutes southwest from Armenia. It serves various passenger and cargo airlines. Security measures are on par with ICAO standards.

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Matacaña International Airport (PEI) is located in the city of Pereira. It serves several passenger and cargo airlines. Security measures are on par with ICAO standards.

Rafael Nuñez International Airport (CTG) is located in the center of Crespo, a neighborhood in northern Cartagena approximately 2.5 miles (4 kilometers) northeast of the tourist district and approximately 6 miles (10 kilometers) northwest of the city center, serving various passenger and cargo airlines. Security measures are on par with ICAO standards.

Ernesto Cortissoz International Airport (BAQ) is about 7 miles (12 kilometers) from the center of Barranquilla, serving various passenger and cargo airlines. Security measures are on par with ICAO standards.

## **Terrorism Threat**

Post Terrorism Rating: High

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

Colombia is in the midst of a decades-long conflict, pitting the government against two leftist terrorist organizations, the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), and organized crime groups (BACRIMs) that evolved from demobilized right-wing paramilitary organizations. The FARC, ELN, and BACRIM are well-organized criminal enterprises that regularly carry out

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kidnappings, extortion, assassinations, bombings, and other terrorist activities throughout Colombia. Throughout the conflict, over 225,000 Colombians have lost their lives, and 6 million have been forcibly displaced from their homes.

U.S.-Colombian counterterrorism cooperation remained strong. In 2015, Colombia experienced overall decreased terrorist activity due in large part to a unilateral cease fire declared by the FARC. In terms of military pressure, the Colombian government continued military operations against FARC insurgents, although it gradually reduced military actions over the course of the year, including certain periods when it suspended aerial bombardments against FARC targets. The FARC's self-declared unilateral ceasefire that started on July 20 remained in place through the end of the year. In the ongoing peace negotiations, the two sides have reached tentative, partial agreements on land reform, political participation, drug trafficking, and victims' rights (including transitional justice); although no overall bilateral peace agreement or bilateral ceasefire had been concluded by the end of 2015. Conversely, the government continues exploratory talks with the ELN, although formal peace negotiations had not started by the end of 2015. The military has intensified strikes against the ELN, especially in response to an October 26, 2015, ELN attack on a military patrol escorting election workers and ballots that resulted in the death of 11 soldiers and one police officer and the kidnapping of two soldiers (who were released several weeks later). The military and police have also intensified operations against major organized crime groups.

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

Post Political Violence Rating: High

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## Civil Unrest

In 2015, there were numerous demonstrations with most occurring in Bogotá. Universities have active leftist student organizations that frequently stage protests, sometimes with an anti-American message. Protests center on social and economic reforms and are usually led by unions or student groups. Protestors will often march on major roads, disrupting traffic. These protests can turn violent, and protestors may use Molotov cocktails and homemade improvised explosive devices, called “papas explosivas” (pamphlet bombs), against the police. The police often respond with tear gas.

## Religious/Ethnic Violence

Ethnic minorities have been disproportionately affected by the armed conflict.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

Natural disasters include earthquakes and volcanic activity. Many parts of Colombia are suffering from severe drought conditions and large scale fires are common. In other areas, heavy rainfall causes landslides that block roads, damage infrastructure, and can leave

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travelers stranded for 24+ hours.

Good emergency preparation includes setting aside emergency supplies and having a plan for what to do during and after a disaster. Your planning should take into account that help may not be available for 72+ hours. Employees and their dependents are encouraged to have the following items on hand: flashlights with spare batteries, a portable commercial radio with spare batteries, fire extinguishers, food, and water. Have important documents (current passport for each family member, driver's license, credit cards, checkbooks, country of residence identification papers, vaccinations records, inventory of household effects for insurance purposes, and sufficient cash for family expenses for a reasonable amount of time) centrally located in the event of an evacuation. Stockpiling supplies is useful for any situation in which municipal services (power, water) are temporarily interrupted.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

The government continues to advance its ambitious Fourth Generation (4G) program, a US\$17 billion effort to modernize the country's outdated primary road infrastructure. The aging primary road network means that travel between large cities, such as Bogotá and Barranquilla, a key port city, can take up to three days. Travel at night is also dangerous due to the potential for accidents along mountain roads and violence from criminal groups.

The FARC and ELN have also been known to attack oil pipelines, power stations, and roads with explosives.

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## Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Colombia's institutional Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) framework was established in April 2010 and created the National Intellectual Property Administrative System. While the government has made progress on IPR in recent years, key challenges remain. Persistently high levels of contraband and piracy as well as shortcomings in enforcement and market access continue to plague the country's IPR efforts. The National Customs and Tax Directorate (DIAN) estimates the annual amount of counterfeit and pirated imports at US\$200 million and illegal trade at US\$7 billion. Internet access has been growing steadily, and with it Internet-based piracy. The Business Software Alliance reported in 2014 that annual software piracy losses reached US\$400 million and noted that 52 percent of software installed and commercialized in Colombia in 2013 was illegal. On enforcement, in 2014, more than 2,800 formal complaints were reported to the National Police, but only 94 (three percent) ended in convictions. Cases where merchandise is valued under US\$12,000, which is the majority, cannot be prosecuted. According to the Superintendency of Industry and Commerce (SIC), trade secret theft is a minor problem, and charges are typically mentioned tangentially and are accompanied by other unfair competition charges (deception, confusion, clientele diversion, intentional disruption of normal operations). Only one case, in 2011, has been tried involving trade secret theft.

## Personnel-Background Concerns

Colombia's anti-discrimination law specifically prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, or social status. Gender, sexual orientation, and ethnically motivated crimes, including homicide have been reported. The Attorney General's Office and NGOs report some attacks, including homicides, in which

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prejudice regarding race, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity was a factor.

## Kidnapping Threat

The police and army have effective anti-kidnapping/anti-extortion units called GAULAs around the country. Although government efforts have dramatically reduced the number of kidnappings over the last 10 years, the threat of kidnapping remains a concern. Between 2002-2015, official statistics report that the number of kidnappings dropped more than 90 percent. Kidnappings can be spontaneous, and criminals/insurgents have kidnapped persons at roadblocks on the outskirts of major cities. Foreigners are potential targets for kidnappers due to their perceived wealth. Americans may also be targeted because of their potential political significance for terrorist groups. However, most kidnappings now fall into the category of “express” (“paseo millonario”), in which victims are robbed of their belongings and taken to ATMs until they can no longer withdraw cash. Victims are often abducted after hailing taxis on the street. Express kidnappings may last up to 48 hours.

Anyone who has been the victim of kidnapping/extortion or knows of a victim should immediately call the police at 165.

## Police Response

The Colombian National Police (CNP) is a professional organization recognized around the world for its success. However, the force is often overworked and occasionally lacks resources to deter crime. Response to alarms or emergency calls to disrupt burglaries or

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crimes in progress can be 15 minutes or longer. Police patrol on foot and in vehicles and are posted at Centros de Atencion Inmediata (CAI), which are police substations manned by several officers. Police and military personnel are also posted at important facilities and along major routes. The Embassy's American Citizen Services (ACS) section has documented some poor responses by CNP to crimes against private U.S. citizens, specifically failure to facilitate filing of police reports.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

The CNP is a professional force; however, corruption continues to exist. For example, an officer may request a bribe during a routine traffic stop. If you feel you are the victim of police harassment or corruption, report it immediately to the police emergency number and to the Embassy's American Citizen Services section. The police have a complaint line, called *Tranparencia Institucional*, at 166.

## Crime Victim Assistance

The 911 equivalent emergency numbers for Cundinamarca Department, including Bogotá, is 123.

The loss/theft of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the Embassy in Bogotá. If you are a victim of a crime, in addition reporting it to the local police, you should contact the Embassy. For American Citizen Services (ACS), assistance call the Embassy at (1) 275-2000. ACS also monitors email messages sent to [ACSBogota@state.gov](mailto:ACSBogota@state.gov)

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from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In the event of emergency, ACS can verify a U.S. citizen's previous passport issuance and issue emergency passports on the same day in the vast majority of cases.

### Police/Security Agencies

The CNP is a nationwide service responsible for enforcing Colombian laws. In urban areas, police are posted at neighborhood substations known as Centros de Atencion Inmediata (CAI). The police can be contacted at the following numbers:

General Emergencies: 123

Anti-kidnapping / Anti-Extortion (GAULA): 165

Complaints about the police: 166

Women's issues: 155

Road Safety and Transit: #767

Antiterrorism: 018000-919621

### Medical Emergencies

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Medical care is adequate in major cities but varies in quality elsewhere. Public hospitals are well below U.S. standards. Ambulance service in Bogota is frequently delayed due to traffic, and travelers should consider alternative options in a medical emergency.

#### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

##### Bogotá

Santa Fe Hospital (24 hours) Tel: (57) (1) 603-0303

Clinica de Country, Emergency Room Tel: 343-6600 Ext. 1105

City Emergency Medical Service (24 hours), Tel: 123

Prevention and Medical Emergencies, Tel: 310-7087

Accidents and Transit, Tel: 123

Red Cross Ambulance (24 hours), Tel: 437-6369, 310-260-2323

SETELMEC (24 hours), Tel: 634-9457/58

##### Barranquilla

Clinica del Caribe, (24 hours) Tel: (5) 356-4861

Clinica Portoazul, (24 hours) Tel: (5) 367-2600, (5) 367-2700

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Clinica La Asuncion (24 hours) Tel: (5) 368-1148

City Emergency Services (24 hours) Tel: 123

### Cali

City Ambulance Service, Tel: (2) 123 or (2) 132

Clinica Fundacion Valle de Lili (24 hours), Tel: (2) 331-9090/7474 Ext. 3276

Clinica de Occidente (24 hours), Tel: (2) 660-3000 and (2) 608-3200

### Cartagena

Medihelp Services Colombia, Tel: (5) 656-9400, (5) 656-9403

Hospital Naval de Cartagena (24 hours), Tel: (5) 665-1073, (5) 665-5360, (5) 665-5364

Hospital Bocagrande (24 hours), Tel: (5) 650-2800 Ext. 100, 113

City Emergency Services (24 hours), Tel: 123

### Medellin

City Ambulance Service, (4) 123

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Clinica las Americas (24 hours), Tel: (4) 342-1010 Ext. 1170

Available Air Ambulance Services

Europ Assistance

Global Response Center

+1-877-710-4082 or +1-240-330-1523

Email: [logistics@eausa.com](mailto:logistics@eausa.com) (Logistics Platform) or [ops@eausa.com](mailto:ops@eausa.com) (Operations Platform)

International SOS Assistance, Inc. (ISOS)

Philadelphia Assistance Center

3600 Horizon Blvd., Suite 300

Trevose, PA 19053

+1-800-523-6586 or +1-215-942-8226

Fax: +1-215-354-2338

Email: [phlopsmed@internationalsos.com](mailto:phlopsmed@internationalsos.com)

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## REVA

1745 NW 51st Pl, Hanger 73, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309

POC: Brian Weisz, [bweisz@flyreva.com](mailto:bweisz@flyreva.com), 954-730-9300 Ext. 201

24-hour response center: +1-800-752-4195 or +1-954-730-9300

Email: [operations@flyreva.com](mailto:operations@flyreva.com)

Web: [flyreva.com](http://flyreva.com)

## Recommended Insurance Posture

It is important to confirm that your medical insurance provides coverage in Colombia, including treatment of complications from elective procedures or medical evacuation if necessary. It is recommended to purchase additional travel medical insurance, especially if your medical insurance does not provide coverage in Colombia or requires you to pay for foreign medical care out-of-pocket and seek reimbursed later. Uninsured travelers without financial resources may be relegated to seeking treatment in public hospitals where the standard of care is below U.S. standards.

## Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
[http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/colombia?s\\_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/colombia?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001).

### **OSAC Country Council Information**

For information on the Country Councils in Colombia, please contact the RSO or:

OSAC Bogotá Country Council: Patricia Parra, Deputy Executive Director, Council of American Enterprises (CEA), Tel: (57) (1) 610-6500

AmCham Medellín: Carlos Alfonso Quijano Llano, Tel: (574) 268-74-91

AmCham Cartagena: Diana De Lequerica, Tel: (575) 655-77-24

AmCham Barranquilla: Vicky Ibáñez, Tel: (575) 360-67-10

AmCham Cali: Ana Lucia Jaramillo, Tel: (572) 485-59-13

To reach the OSAC Western Hemisphere team, please email [OSACWHA@state.gov](mailto:OSACWHA@state.gov).

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## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Calle 24 Bis No. 48-50 (main entrance, working hours only)

or

Carrera 45 No. 24B-27 (back entrance, 24 hrs)

Bogotá, D.C. Colombia

Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri, 0800-1700 (closed on American and Colombian holidays)

### Embassy Contact Numbers

The general Embassy telephone number is (57) (1) 275-2000 during working hours.

Regional Security Office (RSO) can be reached at (57) (1) 275-2903/2458 during working hours.

The RSO Duty Agent, in emergencies, can be contacted 7 days a week, 24-hours a day through the Marine Security Guard at Post 1, (57) (1) 275-2701

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Website: [www.botoga.usembassy.gov](http://www.botoga.usembassy.gov)

## Embassy Guidance

American visitors should register with the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at <https://step.state.gov/step> and should check the Embassy Bogotá website routinely for messages regarding travel or security issues.

## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

### Scams

Criminals carry out a variety of street scams in order to rob people.

- For example, individuals may pose as police officers by presenting false police identification. They will ask to inspect a victim's money to verify that it is not counterfeit. They will issue the victim an "official receipt" for their "counterfeit" money and instruct the victim to proceed to a police station to reclaim legitimate currency. When they submit the "official receipt" to the

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police, they find out that their money was not counterfeit and that they were scammed.

- Gambling games on the street are also used by criminals to set up victims.

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

Following strict personal security practices is a necessity for Americans visiting and working in Colombia. Americans should practice good personal security at all times and especially maintain a low profile. Travelers should carry few items of value that display obvious signs of wealth. You should not wear flashy or expensive jewelry, carry large purses/bulky wallets, or use ATMs in the open (on the street). You should only carry items that are needed, and wallets and identification should be carried in a front pant pocket. Using a cell phone on the street makes you an easy target. You should avoid traveling alone, especially at night. If you are confronted by an armed assailant who intends to rob you and you are not in fear of your life or serious bodily harm, you should surrender your belongings.

Avoid going into bars or nightclubs alone. Do not leave bars, restaurants, or nightclubs with strangers. To avoid becoming a victim of scopolamine, one should never accept food/beverages offered by strangers or new acquaintances, nor leave food/beverages unattended. Victims of scopolamine or other drugs should seek immediate medical attention at one of the hospitals listed above.

In public, never leave personal items unattended or a purse/bag hanging on the back of a chair, where it easily can be stolen. Also, cell phones left on tables are an easy target for criminals. At restaurants do not sit along the perimeter fence or wall of the outside dining area.

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Instead, try to find a seat in an area away from the street.

Vary your routine (routes and times) and be unpredictable in your movements. Be alert to possible surveillance. Note and avoid any individual who appears out of place along your routes.

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