



Estonia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Financial Security; Fraud; Cyber; Winter weather; Riots/Civil Unrest; Floods; Employee Health Safety; Hate Crimes; Drug Trafficking

Europe > Estonia; Europe > Estonia > Tallinn

2/15/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Pickpocketing, theft, and other petty street crimes do occur, particularly in areas where tourists and foreigners congregate. In the summer, pickpockets are very common, often working in teams in crowded areas, particularly in the area of Tallinn's Old Town. The police monitor the most high risk areas with surveillance units, but incidents do occur.

Crimes against persons mainly occur in congested areas (malls, seaports, tourist areas, around public transportation, bars/nightclubs, restaurants, etc.). Theft from vehicles and vandalism of vehicles can occur almost anywhere, but these crimes are mostly concentrated in poorly-illuminated areas, unsecured parking locations, and in the vicinity of the port. Predictably, criminal elements exploit soft targets. The threat of thefts from vehicles, personal

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robberies, and residential break-ins are generally in the classification of “crimes of convenience.”

For calendar year 2015, Estonian MOJ crime figures show 32,575 crimes were reported in 2015, a drop of 14% from 2014 with 46% of those being crimes against property. Violent crimes, of which there were 7,889 in 2015, increased by 5% percent from 2014. Just over 38% of all violent crimes were classified as “domestic violence”. Homicides, 40 of which were reported in 2015, decreased 5% from 2014. Theft figures in 2015 dropped by 28% to a reported 11,354 cases. *Note: This significant decrease may be due, in part, to a change in Estonia law – stolen items must now be valued at €200 or more to qualify as a criminal theft. Estonia boasts a 63% closure rate for all cases.

A limited number of small, organized crime groups operate in Estonia. Organized crime groups are typically involved in traditional businesses of gambling, trafficking, and nightclubs/bars but are also active in vehicle theft.

Several law enforcement agencies investigate transnational credit card fraud cases that have either originated in Estonia or transited Estonian institutions. The bulk of these crimes do not occur in Estonia; rather, criminal elements use technically savvy Estonian criminals to commit crimes elsewhere. ATM use is generally safe.

Cybersecurity Issues

Cyber crime does not represent a major threat to individuals or foreign businesses operating in Estonia though it continues to be a major issue in neighboring countries.

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Other Areas of Concern

Tallinn and Ida-Viru county, the area that contains the Estonia-Russia border town of Narva, remain the leaders in per capita criminal incidents. The three highest crime areas in Tallinn are: Lasnamäe, Väike-Õismäe, and Kopli.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions are generally good and approach Western European standards; however, the winter (October-April) provides a unique set of challenges. Estonia often receives heavy snow fall and sub-freezing temperatures during these colder months, and road conditions can deteriorate quickly with a heavy accumulation of snow/ice. City streets, even the main thoroughfares, are often poorly plowed and difficult to negotiate. Main arteries in the country have been shut down due to drifting snow, stranding passengers in their vehicles for extended periods. Additionally, there are fewer than six hours of daylight per day in the winter further impacting visibility and exacerbating the already poor driving conditions. Estonian laws require the use of winter or studded tires from December 1- March 31. Tires should bear the mark "M+S" to indicate they are approved winter tires.

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The streets are often poorly illuminated, and motorists should exercise care when driving after dark outside of the city centers. In rural areas, wild animals and icy road conditions can create unexpected hazards. One should also watch out for dark-clothed or intoxicated pedestrians along unlighted roads or darting across dim streets or highways. Estonian law requires the use of personal reflective devices from December 1-March 31.

Estonian drivers can be aggressive, and the U.S. Embassy recommends that visitors drive defensively. To avoid vehicle-related incidents (theft, vandalism), vehicles should be parked in secured, well-illuminated parking lots, and an alarm or anti-theft device (steering wheel lock) should be used. Visitors who drive should also be cognizant of the areas in which they are traveling and the road conditions.

Estonian law enforcement authorities have a zero-tolerance approach to drinking and driving, and penalties are severe. Police are increasing the use of random roadblocks, speed traps, and breathalyzer tests. Drivers departing the ferry terminal are often subjected to breathalyzer assessment.

Additionally, an International Driving Permit, and a valid U.S. driver's license, is required to operate a motor vehicle in Estonia. Estonian police levy hefty fines on individuals not properly documented to drive.

Public Transportation Conditions

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The overall transportation system is effective. The local transit system is made up primarily of trains, trams, and buses that are widely used.

Taxis are commonly used and are generally reliable and safe, particularly those from larger, more established companies.

Travelers who use the train or ferry services should not loiter at the port or main train station. Instead, travelers should arrive with adequate time to purchase a ticket and board. The port and main train station can attract criminal elements and alcohol/drug-dependent individuals.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Lennart Meri Airport in Tallinn is the main airport in Estonia. There are no direct flights to the U.S.; however, there are frequent daily flights to international hubs in large European cities.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

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Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There are no known indigenous terrorist organizations in Estonia, and Estonia is not a known base of support/sympathy for terrorists. Estonia faces the same threat of international terrorism as other European countries due to its participation in the EU's Schengen "visa-free travel" area. Its border with Russia, political alignment with U.S. foreign policy, and military cooperation with the U.S. increases its vulnerability as a target of international terrorism. The issue of foreign fighters is not a significant one for Estonia, with less than five total cases being reported.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Estonia has little anti-American sentiment. On March 30, 2003, at the start of the Iraq war, a demonstration turned violent at the U.S. Embassy and the Ambassador's residence, resulting in many arrests. In 2015, the Embassy was the site of a single, registered one-person demonstration and another four-person, unregistered demonstration with press coverage. There have been no major demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy recently.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

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Civil Unrest

Civil unrest has been rare. In the early morning hours of April 27, 2007, authorities relocated a Soviet Army war memorial in central Tallinn that resulted in protests that became violent. Criminal elements used this flash-point as a means to commit crimes in the city. An ensuing riot resulted in one death, dozens of injuries among police and demonstrators, and several hundred arrests.

Overall, demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience are generally limited and peaceful. Estonian law requires prior registration for public gatherings such as demonstrations. Demonstrations in 2015 were identified in advance via the government's permit process and were closely monitored by law enforcement authorities. These demonstrations are generally held near government buildings, significant landmarks, or other areas of significance to the ethnic Russian minority.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Falling ice from buildings can be a substantial problem in the winter/spring and has resulted in deaths, in addition to slippery roads and sidewalks.

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Flooding can be an issue in low-lying areas near rivers during the spring thaw.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Fire is a concern because, despite Estonia's infrastructure developing quickly, many of the Soviet-era buildings contain antiquated electrical/structural components. Visitors who are considering leasing or buying residential/commercial property should conduct a thorough inspection to ensure that the structural integrity is sound, the electrical system meets current safety standards, and that emergency egress routes are designed/retrofitted with features that facilitate quick and safe evacuation. When viewing multi-tenant buildings, potential renters/buyers should not only evaluate the dwelling itself but also the safety of the entire building. Many multi-tenant units have been renovated to appear new; however, the building's common areas contain outdated electrical infrastructure and other conditions that pose safety/security concerns.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Even though statistics indicate that incidents against individuals based on race, religion, or sexual orientation/gender identity are limited, the U.S Embassy noted an increase in reports of race-related incidents in 2015. This uptick appeared to coincide with Europe's refugee crisis; the Embassy continues to monitor this issue closely.

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Drug-related Crimes

Combating drug-related crimes is a priority for police agencies. Cross-border smuggling of drugs is a major problem for the Baltics. The rate of illegal drug use in Estonia has increased in recent years, with the rate of intravenous drug use among the highest in Europe. This contributes to an increase in the number of high-risk crimes.

Closely linked to the high rate of illegal, intravenous drugs, Estonia has the highest HIV rate in Europe.

Police Response

Police response times can vary from several minutes to an hour depending on the nature of the call, time of day, call volume, and resource constraints. The variable response times should not be misinterpreted as a lack of professionalism or competence on the part of local authorities. Police agencies are professionally-trained and competent, and police officers who speak English are very common. Police have become more respected and better trained in recent years, but they continue to deal with a lack of resources. Recent initiatives have resulted in increased wages, aiding in recruitment and retention, but this was accomplished by a reduction in overall staffing levels. In order to respond to the needs of visitors, police concentrate most of their patrols (vehicular, foot) in tourist and highly populated areas.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Visitors detained by police should comply with police instructions. Incidents of police abuse of power/position and corruption are very rare. Foreigners detained by police who experience a language barrier should request the presence of an interpreter and should not sign any documents until they are confident that the document's contents are consistent with the details of the incident or the victim's statement.

Crime Victim Assistance

Visitors who are victims of crime should report it immediately to the local police department. In 2015, Estonia shifted to a single number for all emergency services (112). After reporting the incident to the police, victims should contact the American Citizen Services Unit of the US Embassy (+372-668-8100) to report the crime and request assistance.

Police/Security Agencies

Estonian government security services are divided into two agencies. The Estonian Police and Border Guard serve as the first response police force. They investigate all levels of criminal activity, provide border security, and issue identity documents. The Estonian Security Police (KAPO) operates on a federal level to fight corruption, terrorism, and threats to national security.

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Several private sector security firms maintain formal agreements with law enforcement that allow private security firm personnel to intervene in the interest of public safety. These same companies offer contract personal security.

Medical Emergencies

The emergency telephone number is 112; all ambulances or emergency services are dispatched from this number. The use of English is less prevalent in the healthcare sector than in other parts of society, and communication could be difficult in hospitals for visitors who do not speak Estonian or Russian.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

In the event of a medical emergency, North Estonia Regional Hospital is the main hospital for all major medical emergency care:

North Estonia Regional Hospital (Põhja-Eesti Regionaalhaigla)

19 J. Sütiste Tee (Mustamäe neighborhood)

13419 Tallinn, Estonia

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Help Line: +372 617-1300.

Information line: +372 617-1995

Email: info@regionaalhaigla.ee

Fax: +372 617 1200

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/estonia?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-sing-le-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

Tallinn has an active OSAC Country Council. For additional information on the Tallinn OSAC Country Council, please contact the RSO via email at TallinnOSAC@state.gov or by +372 668-8163. To register for the Tallinn Country Council or obtain further information on OSAC Country Councils please visit the OSAC website at <http://www.osac.gov>. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

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U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Kentmanni 20

15099 Tallinn, Estonia

Monday – Friday, 08:30am – 5:30pm

Embassy Contact Numbers

Main: 372-668-8100 (Embassy Operator)

After-Hours: 372-668-8100, press 0 for Post One.

RSO: 372-668-8118

Duty Officer: 372-509-2129

Consular: ACSTallinn@state.gov

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

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Embassy Guidance

The geo-political situation in Eastern Europe has raised concerns that events, unrest, and tension there could indirectly or directly affect the Baltic countries. There is no indication of these broader regional issues extending to Estonia, but travelers would do well to stay abreast of current events in the news and Post-specific information available at www.travel.state.gov.

The Embassy urges all U.S. citizens, even those visiting Estonia for a short time, to sign up with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) through the Embassy's Consular Section. This is often referred to as "enrolling with the U.S. Embassy." In the event of an emergency, the Embassy will provide information and other critical assistance to U.S. citizens. Enrollment is the only way to guarantee that the Embassy is aware of your presence in the country and is able to contact you and assist you in such circumstances. U.S. citizens may now sign up online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs> or visit the Embassy's Consular Section in person. Enrollment in STEP is for U.S. citizens only.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Tallinn continues to feel the presence of organized crime in areas such as automobile theft rings and scams at bars in Tallinn. Though the instances of these scams are limited, U.S. citizens have been impacted. For example, an American citizen may be lured into a drinking

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establishment, become heavily intoxicated, and then see grossly inflated charges run on his credit cards.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Americans should maintain the same personal security awareness that they would in any U.S. metropolitan city. Most successful criminal acts occur against people who are unaware of their surroundings or who are not exercising the proper level of alertness.

Pedestrians should be aware of their belongings and surroundings at all times. Pickpockets use various diversionary tactics to distract victims; one method involves bumping the victim in an effort to draw his attention to one individual, while another takes his wallet. Victims should report the crime to the police and cancel their credit cards as soon as possible.

The majority of incidents reported to the RSO involved individuals who were alone and/or intoxicated between 10:00pm – 06:00am. Visitors who plan on consuming alcohol should exercise moderation and designate a sober member of the group to be in charge of security awareness.

Large amounts of cash and expensive jewelry should be secured in a hotel safe or left at home, and travelers should take standard safety precautions when using ATMs.

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For those residing in Tallinn, it is advisable to ensure that leased residences have adequate security equipment including, but not limited to, security lighting, high quality locks, and an alarm system with 24-hour monitoring service. Visitors should ensure they properly secure their residences by using locks and alarms.

All racially-motivated incidents, as well as any other incidents experienced by visitors, should be reported immediately to the U.S. Embassy.

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