



Serbia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Assault; Other Threat / Incident; Drug Trafficking; Cyber; Winter weather; Anti-American sentiment; Riots/Civil Unrest; Hate Crimes; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Floods; Employee Health Safety; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Kidnapping; Bribery; Fraud

Europe > Serbia; Europe > Serbia > Belgrade

2/17/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats

Most crimes against visitors are crimes of opportunity. Often, criminals work in groups, and distraction is part of their modus operandi. Pickpocketing in popular Belgrade sites is common, especially in the Knez Mihailova pedestrian street (also known as the "Walking Street") and on the various public transportation systems.

As economic conditions have failed to improve and the income disparity grows, there has been a significant increase in residential crime. Many diplomatic missions have reported burglaries within their housing pools. Upscale neighborhoods are not immune; home

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invasions have occurred in the Banovo Brdo and Dedinje neighborhoods, where many foreign diplomatic personnel with families reside.

Serbia is known for its vibrant nightlife, and Belgrade has become a major spring break destination for partygoers. There are numerous pubs, bars, floating discos (“splav” in Serbian), and clubs. Violent assaults, sometimes involving weapons, have occurred at social establishments. The chances of an intoxicated aggressor targeting victims simply because they are foreigners increases as alcohol is consumed. American diplomats have been targeted in a violent confrontation at a popular night club. These incidents often escalate quickly and without warning. A number of these establishments are also owned by Balkan organized crime elements and serve as social clubs and bases of operation for criminal gang members who carry out the day-to-day criminal activities of their respective clans.

Serbia has a large contingent of sport clubs that support professional sports teams. Members of these fan clubs are often 15-25 years old and are commonly referred to as “football hooligans.” A number of these fan clubs have very strong ties to criminal, right-wing, and ultra-nationalist organizations. Authorities often struggle to curb violence inside sporting events and around their venues. In the past few years, there have been instances of foreign fans being assaulted violently and, in one case, killed. This risk also extends to sports pubs where patrons or passersby have been attacked for wearing the “wrong” colored jersey.

Organized crime, and associated violence and corruption, remains a concern. Recent successes in combating drug trafficking have increased violence directed at competing factions and internal suspicions within criminal organizations. A risk of collateral damage inflicted on the general population by attacks between rival members of organized crime exists and could occur anywhere, including in popular business and restaurant areas. Recently, a known member of a criminal organization had a bomb placed and detonate under

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his car in Banavo Brdo, just a few kilometers from diplomatic residences.

Military weaponry is readily available to criminals but is normally not used. Recently, a gunman attacked a prominent businessman in a neighborhood near diplomatic residences.

Cybersecurity Issues

Cyber crime appears to be related to financial crime. However, some cyber “hacktivism” has been reported where cyber groups engage in unauthorized computer access activities to promote a political agenda/cause.

Relatively high Internet access rates and high unemployment make cyber crime a viable employment alternative. Anecdotal evidence indicates that employees of prominent companies are targeted by cyber criminals due to the perception of wealth. Once targeted, any electronic data accessible by a traveler is potentially at risk. This data ranges from personal identifier data, credit card data, business operational data, and strategic plans, to intellectual property and finances. The skill level of cyber criminals varies widely; however, a subset is skilled and can pose a threat to American travelers and businesses with inadequate security postures.

Other Areas of Concern

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U.S. Embassy employees are allowed to cross the Serbia-Kosovo border on personal travel. However, Serbia generally will not allow travel of foreigners from Kosovo to Serbia if the traveler did not cross a Serbian border (by air or by road) first. Serbia does not recognize the borders of Kosovo as international borders and, therefore, has no mechanism to allow foreigners to enter Serbia from Kosovo without a prior arrival in Serbia.

Unexploded land mines and ordnance from the 1990s Balkan conflict remain an ongoing concern, and there are areas in Serbia that are off-limits. In August 2012, two Serbian soldiers were killed while clearing unexploded ordnance from the 1999 NATO bombing campaign. A civilian explosive ordnance disposal technician was killed by a mine in September 2012. Both incidents occurred on Mount Kopaonik, a popular ski resort. In general, stay on established paths, especially in areas that were part of the conflict.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Within Belgrade, roads are poorly maintained and marked and are littered with potholes. Roads are often too narrow for larger vehicles (city buses, minivans, utility vehicles imported from abroad) to drive within the marked lanes. Parking is also difficult due to small spaces. Roads, including newly built highways, are not designed or engineered with safety in mind, and many intersections, traffic circles, and major highways have little/no merge areas, multiple intersecting roads, and poor traffic signals. Some secondary roads, particularly in the mountainous south, are in poor repair and during the winter months are not cleared of snow or are closed entirely. Serbia's road network is estimated to have an asset value of about US\$13

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billion, but connectivity and road conditions need improvement to support economic growth.

Driving is a challenging experience; impatient drivers coupled with high speed, reckless/aggressive driving, and a sometimes ambiguous concept of lanes make for a dangerous mix. Many accidents are caused by driving under the influence, violent/aggressive driving, and not respecting a pedestrian's right-of-way. Angry drivers have been known to follow and taunt other drivers and, if given the opportunity (stopped at a light), may get out of the car to escalate a conflict further. With Serbia being a popular transit country, foreign motorists driving long hours also pose a risk, as they may fall asleep at the wheel. Among Serbians, it is considered common knowledge that transiting foreigners driving under these conditions are responsible for the most serious accidents.

Parking laws are strictly enforced; paying for parking can be completed via cell phone text messaging. Serbia has also established new traffic legislation to conform to EU standards. However, if an accident takes place in a rural location, emergency medical response may be delayed significantly and may not meet Western standards.

Secondary locking devices (steering wheel, transmission locks) and fuel kill switches are recommended for vehicles. Thieves can easily overcome vehicle alarm systems. Audible vehicle alarms are generally ignored. Packages, bags, or any other items of value (GPS devices), should not be left in view inside of vehicles. Failing to do so may lead to opportunistic smash-and-grab crimes. Do not leave keys in plain sight. Open doors and windows are an invitation to thieves. Vehicles should be parked where there is ample lighting.

Public Transportation Conditions

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Belgrade and some other large cities have public transportation networks.

Buses are often crowded, and some lines and vehicles are poorly maintained. There is intercity bus and train service for many locations.

Unregistered taxis have meters set to calculate exorbitant rates. Most of these taxis are unmarked, but even those with electronic meters have been known to charge unsuspecting passengers 5-10 times the normal fare.

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 Serbia's air carrier operations. Further information may be found on the FAA's safety assessment page.

Terrorism Threat

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Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Because Belgrade sits on the land route between the Middle East and Western Europe, transnational/international terrorism concerns are on par with the rest of the Balkans. Authorities are sensitive to, and intolerant of, transnational terrorism encroaching. However, Serbia continues to be a transit route to Western Europe from Africa and the Middle East, and the country's attempts at robust border control have shown mixed results.

The conflict in Syria is a source of concern to Serbian and regional authorities. The conflict has attracted fighters from a variety of Muslim communities in the Balkans, and there is a general concern that combatants may return radicalized, creating possible terrorism concerns locally. The police and security services are monitoring these events closely, and there is extensive media coverage of the participation of Serbian nationals in the Syrian fight. Several Serbian nationals have died fighting in Syria.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

There is widespread anti-American sentiment. There are a number of nationalist organizations, with varying levels of xenophobia, directed against U.S. citizens and other foreigners. Anti-American graffiti can be seen in Belgrade. Reactions of some taxi drivers, upon realizing their fare is an American citizen, can range from rude to threatening. Other

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reported examples of anti-American hostilities include physical assaults and verbal attacks

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

Demonstrations by political parties, unions, and other groups occur frequently in front of government buildings, protesting government policies, economic issues, and sometimes regional concerns (the acquittal of Croatian generals who many Serbians feel are war criminals). Even if demonstrations begin peacefully, they quickly can turn violent and, in general, should be avoided.

Serbia held its first Gay Pride parade in Belgrade in October 2010, in close cooperation with police authorities. After a Gay Pride parade was disrupted by violent protestors in 2001, it was attempted again in 2009 but cancelled because of security concerns. Even with months of preparation by event organizers, officials could not avert widespread violent clashes between radical anti-gay groups and police. The Ministry of Interior reported that 5,600 riot police clashed with over 6,000 protestors; rioters threw petrol bombs and stones at armed police, who responded with tear gas and force in numbers. Damage to the city was estimated at over 1.5 million Euros, and over 100 policemen were injured. Subsequently, authorities cancelled the 2011, 2012, and 2013 Gay Pride parades at the last minute because of concerns of

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widespread violence. In September 2014 and 2015, the parades were held without incidents.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Immediately following Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia in early 2008, over 150,000 demonstrators rallied in Belgrade to denounce the bid by Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority to create their own state. Groups twice broke away from larger demonstrations and attacked embassies of countries, including the U.S., that had recognized Kosovo. During the violence, several hundred protestors battered down the entrance to the U.S. Embassy, gaining access into the building. The U.S. Embassy suffered considerable damage, and one protestor died in an ensuing fire. Security forces are conscious of their failure to protect foreign missions during these attacks and have pledged that such incidents will never occur again. Kosovo remains a political flashpoint, but progress in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and advances in Serbia's path to EU membership have reduced the likelihood that widespread violence will erupt again. Ethnically-mixed areas in southern Serbia remain tense.

Across the Balkans, authorities have kept a vigilant eye on radical Islamists. Regional economic disparities, especially in minority areas in Sandzak and south Serbia, persist, fueling ethnic discord. There is a Muslim majority in these areas, and a strict branch of Islam (Wahhabism) is practiced by some communities. There has been an increase in religious extremism associated with this group, mainly in struggles over the control of certain mosques in Bosnia. During Bosnia's 1992-95 war between Croats, Muslims, and Serbs, a large number of volunteers from Muslim nations went to Bosnia to take up arms. Many of these fighters stayed in Bosnia and Serbia after the conflict. Some, in the mostly moderate Muslim community, have converted to the more radical Islam preached by several ex-mujahedeen.

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Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Belgrade is rated by Overseas Buildings Operations as a Level 2a (moderate) seismically active area. On November 3, 2010, a state of emergency was declared in central Serbia, following a 5.4 earthquake that killed two people and injured 60 others in Kraljevo.

Extensive flooding occurred in June and the latter part of 2010 in the municipalities of Trgovište, Mali Zvornik, Loznica, Prijepolje, Bogati, Priboj, Zajear, and Ljubovija. In May 2014, Serbia experienced massive flooding and landslides. Obrenovac was the hardest hit, but many villages and towns along the Sava River's watershed were also affected. Over 30,000 people needed to be evacuated and put into temporary shelters for several weeks while waiting for the flood waters to subside.

Embassy employees are encouraged to take steps to minimize the effect of a natural disaster by having current/complete emergency plans, including stockpiles of food/water. The main focus should be 100 percent accountability of employees, family members, and children at school (should an incident occur during a school day). Most natural disasters will cause disruption of critical infrastructure services (ambulance, fire, police response), so it is extremely important to formulate an emergency plan.

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Critical Infrastructure Concerns

According to Serbia's 2014 EU progress report, the country's physical infrastructure is under-developed and was further damaged by severe floods in spring 2014. Damage to national and local roads was estimated at US\$51 million and US\$32 million, respectively, while costs to railway infrastructure were estimated at US\$37 million.

In the inland waterways subsector, Serbia has implemented river information systems in both the Danube and Sava rivers and has completed a number of projects for enhancing navigation. Despite the progress made, the river infrastructure still needs enhancement. More investments need to be made for infrastructure upgrades. While severe weather conditions during winter months lead to the disruption of navigation due to river surface icing or thick fog, targeted large-scale investments in technology-intensive, innovative solutions, and collaboration between the neighboring countries could help overcome these obstacles. In addition, capital investments are needed to cover expenditures for modernization of the river ports, aiming at enhancing trade.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Serbia is not a highly-developed country, and production technologies typically lag two or three generations behind. Nevertheless, espionage can be a concern during tendering procedures. To this end, Parliament adopted the Law on Protection of Business Secrets in 2011 that defined business secrets and prescribed maximum penalties for revealing business secrets to around US\$30,000.

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Intellectual property right (IPR) protection is a much bigger concern, especially in the computer software, music, and film industries. Consumers have low purchasing power, which is one reason for high piracy rates. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) estimates the level of music piracy in Serbia around 80 percent. According to the 2014 Business Software Alliance Global Software study, as much as 69 percent of software in Serbia was obtained and used illegally in 2013, a decrease from previous years. The progress is largely a result of improved enforcement efforts of the Tax Administration and Market Inspection and increased educational activities of Business Software Alliance. Serbian IPR laws and regulations are almost fully in-line with European regulations; however, there is significant room to improve the enforcement of these laws.

Personnel-Background Concerns

There are problems related to discrimination and societal violence against minorities, especially Roma. Societal and domestic violence against women, children, and persons with disabilities also occurs. Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) issues remain controversial with the local populace, and a number of cases involving violent attacks on members of the LGBT community have been reported widely in local media.

Drug-related Crimes

Serbia continues to work to combat illegal narcotics trafficking. Law enforcement interdiction activities occur regularly. However, as the global economic crisis continues, so does illegal narcotics trafficking. 2014 saw a renewed push by police and political elites to conduct drug

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enforcement operations. Several police actions yielded over 100 arrests and the seizure of large quantities of drugs and weapons. There are conflicting reports that the most high-profile drug dealers escape operations because of corruption, but there is a general feeling that enforcement activities have increased.

One of the more infamous “narco-boss” fugitives, Darko Šaric, has been a prime target of international law enforcement. In March 2014, Šari was arrested and brought to Serbia to face charges.

Kidnapping Threat

Abductions have declined significantly in recent years; kidnapping of family members for failure to pay debts does occur, as does kidnapping by rival criminal organizations.

Police Response

Police capacity to deter and solve crimes is hampered by a lack of resources and training. The U.S. Departments of State and Justice and other Western European countries provide significant training in criminal investigation, organized crime, and anti-terrorist operations. However, the lack of modern equipment, technology, organization, and communication between units, as well as bureaucratic systems, long hours, and low pay for police are major challenges for law enforcement.

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Crime Victim Assistance

U.S. citizens who are victims of a crime should contact the local police. The U.S. Embassy can help contact the appropriate police authorities and can help visitors understand the local criminal justice system/process. The American Citizen Services number is (+381-11) 706-4000.

For police emergencies, dial "192" or from a cell phone dial "011-192."

For fire emergencies, dial "193" or from a cell phone dial "011-193."

For an ambulance, dial "194" or from a cell phone dial "011-194."

For road assistance, dial "1987" or from a cell phone "011-1987."

For Belgrade's Information Center, dial "1985" or from a cell phone "011-1985."

Please note that this service is only available in the larger cities in Serbia and is not universal. Response times vary greatly, and there are unconfirmed reports of first responders demanding bribes to provide services.

Medical Emergencies

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Although many doctors and health care providers are highly trained, medical facilities are limited and are not up to Western standards. Hospitals usually require payment in cash for all services and may not accept U.S. health insurance.

24 hour Pharmacies:

Prvi Maj

Kralja Milana 9, Belgrade

Tel: (381-11) 324-1349

Prima Pharmacy

Nemanjina 2, Belgrade

Tel: (381-11) 361-0999

For ambulance service, dial "194". This service is not available in large parts of rural Serbia.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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Military Medical Academy (For adults)

Crnotravska 17, Belgrade

Emergency Department/Urgent Care Center

Tel: (381-11)3608-157 or (381-11) 266-2755, ext. 31157 or 31532

Map with medical facilities link: <http://g.co/maps/J94GD>

Available Air Ambulance Services

International SOS (Frankfurt Service Center)

Tel: +49-6102-3588-100

Fax: +49-6102-202-644

International SOS Assistance Inc.

3600 Horizon Blvd., Suite 300

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Trevese, PA 19053

Phone: 267-716-2411

Web: www.internationalosos.com

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/serbia.htm>.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Serbia Country Council is the hub for security cooperation and information sharing between the U.S. private sector, the U.S. government, and the host government. The Council meets three times per year and offers presentations and discussions on security and safety matters. Attendance is open to representatives of American businesses in Serbia who wish to learn more about security issues, and the membership includes a variety of organizations, including large multi-national companies, smaller, local start-ups with American ownership or offices, and non-governmental organizations, including educational and religious organizations. The point of contact for all OSAC-related matters is the Embassy's Regional Security Office (tel: +381-706-4518, or email: ds_rso_belgrade@state.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

92 Bulevar kneza Aleksandra Karadjordjevica

11040 Belgrade, Serbia

Hours of Operation: 8:30 AM-5:00pm, Monday-Friday, except for American and Serbian holidays

Embassy Contact Numbers

+381-11-706-4000

For emergency assistance outside of normal business hours, please ask for the after-hours duty officer.

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

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Embassy Guidance

We strongly recommend that U.S. citizens enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates and makes it easier for the U.S. Embassy to contact you. U.S. citizens without Internet access may enroll directly with the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade.

Services for U.S. citizens, including passports and notarial services, are offered by appointment only. A duty officer is available 24-hours in case of a life or death emergency involving a U.S. citizen.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Visitors should always be cognizant of what they are being charged at nightclubs, bars, restaurants, and in taxis, as foreigners will often find they are purposely overcharged.

Embassy employees are advised to be cautious if approached for assistance or directions and to be leery of offers of "quick friendships" in crowded city areas.

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors should take the same precautions they would in any other large city. Visitors should be aware of their surroundings and try to blend into the population. Visitors should not display large amounts of money or expensive jewelry. Visitors should exercise caution during late evening and early morning hours and anywhere alcohol is served.

When dining, visitors should not hang handbags or coats on the back of chairs, or leave valuables on tables.

Given the level of violence often associated with particular sporting teams and fan clubs, the U.S. Embassy discourages attendance at public sports events.

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