



## Israel 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Tel Aviv

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Religious Terrorism; Religious Violence; Theft; Financial Security; Rape/Sexual Violence; Assault; Drug Trafficking; Fraud; Burglary; VBIEDs; Winter weather; Aviation; Employee Health Safety; Kidnapping

Near East > Israel; Near East > Israel > Tel Aviv

2/17/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Medium

### Crime Threats

Local press and police reports reveal that persons in Israel are subject to the same criminal threats as they would encounter in any other developed country, ranging from financial crimes, organized criminal activity, sexual assaults, drunk driving, narcotic and gambling violations and confidence swindles.

Over the past three years, U.S. government personnel have sporadically been the victims of the following crimes: residential burglaries and property theft, theft of unattended personal items left in public places, motor vehicle thefts and break-ins, and stolen bicycles.

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Vehicle theft is a common occurrence. In most cases, the stolen vehicles are not recovered, as they are quickly conveyed by the thieves and disposed of in neighboring countries and territories. The vast majority of vehicle owners in Israel have taken precautions and invested in security alarm, tracking and disabling systems to protect and recover their vehicles from theft.

The threat of street crime is greatest in areas that attract large crowds, particularly places frequented by tourists or pilgrims. A crowd allows a thief (or thieves, since local thieves often operate in groups) the opportunity to select and approach a potential victim without attracting attention. Reports of petty theft are not uncommon, to include unattended items left in vehicles and public places. The Embassy receives frequent reports of such occurrences from both private American citizens and Embassy employees. Crime increases in the Old City after dark. Be alert to street vendors who often aggressively harass tourists.

Residential burglaries are a common occurrence, especially in affluent neighborhoods. The Embassy frequently receives reports of residential burglaries targeting both attended and unattended residences. In most cases, burglaries of attended residences tend to be perpetrated by non-confrontational burglars using surreptitious means under the cover of darkness. Day-time burglaries of unattended residences are also not uncommon. Typically, burglars prefer to slip in, steal items, and slip out without confrontation. During 2015, the U.S. Embassy community experienced four residential burglaries and frequently received reports of burglaries targeting private homes in close proximity to our residences.

Organized crime activity has reportedly increased in Israel during recent years. While the INP is expanding its efforts to combat organized crime, its historical focus has been on the prevention of terrorism. In a few incidents involving organized crime, stolen military ordnance

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or vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) have been used in furtherance of criminal activity (most often small bombs placed by organized criminals for the specific intent of targeting rival criminal gangs). Examples of this type of violent criminal activity include: vehicular explosions in Tel Aviv in January 2016, Givatayim in April 2015, and in Ness Tziona in December 2015. Typically these explosive are made, placed, and detonated to minimize the threat of collateral casualties and only target the intended individual.

The Israeli National Police (INP) has yet to release violent crime statistics for 2015, but INP's crime statistics for 2014 are available at:  
[http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/?Mlval=%2Fcw\\_usr\\_view\\_SHTML&ID=192](http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/?Mlval=%2Fcw_usr_view_SHTML&ID=192).

#### Other Areas of Concern

Due to reportedly higher crime rates, travelers should exercise caution while in or around villages surrounding East Jerusalem.

West Bank: U.S. government personnel and their dependents are prohibited from traveling to most of the West Bank except for Mission-essential business or other approved purposes. Travel to Bethlehem and Jericho is authorized for U.S. government employees after receiving additional security briefings. Such travel is carefully monitored by the Consulate General in Jerusalem and subject to restrictions. Additionally, U.S. government personnel and their dependents are authorized limited road travel through the West Bank using only Routes 1 and 90 in order to reach the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge, the Galilee, the Sheikh Hussein Bridge, or the Dead Sea coast near Ein Gedi and Masada. While traveling on Routes 1 and 90, U.S. government personnel are allowed to stop at roadside facilities. Travel to Qumran is permitted as well. All other roads and locations within the West Bank remain strictly off-limits to personal

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travel for U.S. government personnel and their dependents. Due to the fluid security environment, additional restrictions can and have been put into place, temporarily restricting these locations. Such changes will be made available to the public in Consular Affairs Messages. Travel to other locations in the West Bank is authorized for U.S. government employees only in armored vehicles with security support. The largest threats for many of these locations are the roads near or at the actual checkpoint into the area, which is where many violent protests and clashes occur, and along major West Bank thoroughfares due to rock-throwing, small arms fire, and Molotov cocktails (fire bombs).

Gaza: In view of the threat in/around Gaza, U.S. government personnel must provide advance notification of travel to Sderot or the vicinity of any Gaza Strip boundaries in order for a security assessment can be made of the intended travel. Additional resources, such as the use of armored vehicles, are used to support such travel. U.S. citizens are strongly warned against travel to the Gaza Strip; the U.S. government does not permit American employees to conduct official or personal travel there.

Travel to the areas around Gaza: Travelers to areas in the vicinity of the Gaza Strip should be aware of the risks presented by small-arms fire, anti-tank weapons, rockets, and mortars launched from inside Gaza toward Israeli cities and towns. Gunfire, rocket, and mortar attacks in the regions immediately bordering Gaza are a regular occurrence and can come with little warning. Visitors to these areas should remain aware of their surroundings and of the location of bomb shelters and should take note of announcements and guidance provided by the Home Front Command. Added security measures for U.S. government personnel, such as the use of armored vehicles, are commonly used for such travel.

Southern Israel: As a result of concerns about the area of southern Israel near the border with Egypt, as well as the rugged terrain in the area, U.S. government personnel are required to provide advance notice to the Embassy's Regional Security Office of any official or personal

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travel south of the city of Be'er Sheva. Added security measures for U.S. government personnel, such as the use of armored vehicles, are commonly used for such travel. U.S. government personnel are restricted from travel on Israel routes 10 and 12, which keeps them well clear of the Sinai border region.

Travel to northern Israel (Golan Region and Galilee Region): U.S. citizen employees of the U.S. government are required to notify the regional security office 48-hours in advance of any travel to the Golan Heights, defined as the area north and east of the Sea of Galilee/Lake Kinneret. Additionally, due to the fluid security situation along Israel's northern border, the Regional Security Office occasionally implements other restrictions on travel by U.S. government personnel to the Galilee Region and Golan Region, specifically in close proximity to the Syrian and Lebanon border areas. U.S. government personnel are already prohibited travelling east of Route 98 in the Golan Region. Visitors to the Golan Heights are cautioned that due to unmarked or poorly marked minefields, they should only walk/travel on established roads or trails and must pay close attention to warning signs and notices. U.S. government personnel are restricted from traveling east of Israel Route 98, which keeps them well clear of the immediate Syrian border region.

Due to the occasional small-arms and rocket cross-border incidents, official and personal travel by U.S. government personnel is restricted within 1½ miles of the Lebanon border region.

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

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Israel's roads and highways are in good condition but are often heavily congested during peak travel hours. Signs on major roadways are generally posted in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. All drivers are required to carry a valid international or local driver's license, vehicle registration, and proof of insurance.

Visitors are encouraged to drive defensively and be aware of erratic and aggressive motorists. Local motorists are prone to sudden stops and maneuvers, especially in the right lane. Motorists should use caution, as Israel has a high rate of motor vehicle fatalities. Scooters and motorcycles are common, often passing on the left or right (in between vehicles and frequently at high speeds) regardless of traffic. Israeli law requires the use of seat belts for all occupants of a motor vehicle. The use of cell phones while driving is prohibited unless a hands-free device is employed. It is recommended that persons involved in a traffic accident contact the INP.

During the winter, head lights must be used for all intercity travel during both day and night and during inclement weather. During the winter, cold weather conditions and precipitation can cause ice and snow accumulation on road surfaces, especially in elevated areas, resulting in perilous driving conditions, traffic congestion, and in some cases road closures. During a winter storm in February 2015, Routes 1 and 443 were closed intermittently in and out of Jerusalem as a safety precaution. During winter storms in 2013 and 2014, large numbers of motorists were rescued on Routes 1 and 443 by the Israel Defense Forces when they became trapped on impassable roads resulting from sudden blizzard conditions.

During periods of heavy rainfall, many roadways are susceptible to standing water and

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flooding.

## Public Transportation Conditions

Buses and bus terminals remain off-limits to U.S. government employees throughout Israel.

## Aviation/Airport Conditions

Ben Gurion International Airport, Israel's primary international gateway, employs one of the most comprehensive security screening programs for travelers in the world. Accordingly, security-related delays are not unusual for travelers carrying audio-visual or data storage/processing equipment, and some travelers have reported that their laptop computers and other electronic equipment were confiscated during the screening process. While most items are returned prior to the traveler's departure or permitted to travel as checked baggage, some equipment was retained by the authorities for lengthy periods and has reportedly been damaged, destroyed, lost or never returned.

Travelers who have had personal property damaged due to security procedures may contact the Commissioner for Public Complaints at the airport for redress by fax: 972-3-9752387. In such circumstances, travelers should have no expectation of privacy for any data stored on devices. In order to facilitate the security screening process for business travelers, Ben Gurion Airport security officials established a prescreening program called the Mokdan Process. It is highly recommended that travelers check with the company or sponsor to see if they have a certified representative who can validate this Mokdan prescreening service. The contact

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information for sending a representative to become accredited and issue prescreening Mokdan is:

Email: Mokdan\_iaa@gov.il

Phone: 03-9750560

Fax: 03-9750561

It is recommended to contact them by email and ask to join the Mokdan Process.

## **Terrorism Threat**

Post Terrorism Rating: High

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

While security forces are effective, security threats can be difficult to predict. In 2015, terrorist attacks included shootings, stabbings, and vehicular attacks. Several designated foreign terrorist organizations ( Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Hezbollah) have been in conflict with Israel for decades and repeatedly express anti-American sentiment and calls for the destruction of Israel. A few dozen Arab citizens of Israel have reportedly left the country to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) ranks in Syria. In 2015, both Hamas and ISIL publicly supported and encouraged acts of violence and terrorism targeting Israel.

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Gaza-based organizations ( Hamas, PIJ the Popular Resistance Committees (PRCs)) are among the most active terrorist organizations in the region. These organizations carry out asymmetrical attacks (rocket/missile fire, the use of snipers) around Israel's boundaries with the Gaza Strip and other acts of terrorism in the West Bank.

Both Hamas and the PIJ are designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the U.S. government; the PRCs are splinter groups whose attacks have grown in scope and lethality since 2008. While some Palestinian groups, particularly those based in the West Bank, have recognized Israel's right to exist and negotiate with it, Hamas PIJ, and other factions remain publically committed to the destruction of Israel and do not distinguish between attacks on civilian or military targets. The government of Israel routinely responds to these attacks with military operations directed at terrorist leaders, their infrastructure, and rocket launching teams.

The situation in Syria is of major concern to Israel. The Syrian regime is struggling to maintain control of the country; terrorist groups (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the al-Nusra Front (ANF)) are vying to overthrow the Assad regime, consolidate control over portions of the country (to include adjacent to the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights), and expand their control and influence to other portions of the country. In September 2014, ANF overran multiple UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) positions and took a large number of the UN military observers captive. While this situation was resolved with the negotiated release of the captive personnel, UNDOF vacated many of the observation posts they had maintained on the Syrian side of the border, thereby leaving this area less secure. Israel maintains strong security at this border.

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On April 24, 2015, a Palestinian teenager was shot and killed by Israeli security forces during a security incident at a checkpoint in the West Bank. This incident was followed by a round of violence that escalated with increased security incidents throughout April and May 2015. While most of the violence (stone throwing and petrol bombs on Israeli-controlled highways) occurred in the West Bank, some areas within “Green Line” Israel also experienced incidents of protests and riots (notably in Arab population centers).

During the summer of 2015, sectarian and ethnic tensions rose again over access to the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif (a site in Jerusalem’s Old City that is religiously important to both Muslims and Jews). Additionally, there were attacks followed by reprisals between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank. Since then, over 35 Israelis in Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank have been killed by “lone wolf attacks”, and over 150 Palestinians have been killed during clashes with Israeli security forces.

These “lone wolf attacks” are committed by young Palestinians targeting uniformed Israeli law enforcement, security, and military personnel and Jewish-Israeli civilians at religious sites and near Israeli settlements located in the West Bank. In addition to the stabbing attacks, there have been several instances of motor vehicles used as a weapon to run down pedestrians at bus stops or on the side of the road. These “lone wolf” attacks are often encouraged by social media. In addition, there have been some incidents of actions by Israeli-Arabs, Bedouins, or Palestinians who travel to Israel with or without permits. While these attacks are frequently praised by various groups, the assailants commit them on their own, outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group.

Although ‘lone wolf attacks’ most often targeted uniformed Israeli service personnel and persons perceived to be Jewish Israelis, non-military uniformed persons and some foreigners have also experienced serious injuries and deaths during these attacks. These attacks have been conducted at a Synagogue, on public buses, bus stops, terminals, shopping malls, and

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local streets. The Old City of Jerusalem has been a flashpoint for attacks, especially Lion's, Damascus, and Herod's Gates. Most often, "lone wolf attacks" occur with little to no advance warning and involve a lone assailant who quickly stabs a victim. Some of these attacks have involved the use of a firearm, which the assailant either brought with him or snatched from an Israeli police officer or soldier during the course of the attack. These attacks typically end in gun fire by responding Israeli security forces, usually killing the assailant. The possibility of being hit by errant or mistaken targeting gun fire is a serious concern. There have also been occasions in which groups of Israeli citizens have mob-attacked alleged perpetrators and innocent bystanders mistaken for involvement following some of these incidents.

Most of the attack locations throughout Israel, the West Bank, and Jerusalem have taken place at soft targets of opportunity with transportation areas (bus stops, light rail stations, other public transit terminals) being the most commonly attacked by knife, gun, or vehicle. Israeli-Jewish Orthodox, soldiers, and uniformed service personnel (law enforcement, military) are the most common victims of "lone wolf attacks" because they are easily identifiable to attackers. First responders (uniformed Israeli law enforcement/security services personnel and armed Israelis) typically respond quickly, assume control of the attack location, and subdue the attacker with live fire, often killing the attacker. Innocent bystanders have been injured and killed during the emergency response and confusion following these attacks.

The security environment in Israel can quickly deteriorate as witnessed in 2014. In response to Hamas' increase in firing mortars and rockets from Gaza toward/into Israel, Israel launched a large-scale ground/air military operation into Gaza known as Operation Protective Edge (OPE). During OPE, over 5,000 projectiles (rockets, mortars) were fired by terrorist groups operating in Gaza toward/into Israel. Additionally, there were several infiltration attempts by Gazan militants into Israel via an extensive network of tunnels. Through the course of the operation, 32 tunnels were destroyed. Gaza is 37 miles from the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. While Israel's Iron Dome Missile Defense system intercepted a very high percentage of rockets launched at Israeli territory, its successful interception rate significantly decreased in the areas closer to Gaza due to diminished warning and response time. When a rocket alarm

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sounds, persons in Tel Aviv and central Israel have approximately 90 seconds to seek protective shelter, which are located in most buildings. While Gaza has been quiet since August 2014, extremist groups occasionally fire rockets from Gaza, and the threat is monitored closely.

Throughout 2015, there have been intermittent instances of rockets and mortars fired into Israel; however, the level of rocket attacks has not been anywhere near the frequency or severity as the summer of 2014. As a result of the continued threat of rocket attack, travelers and persons residing in Israel are advised to be prepared for the possibility of in-coming rocket fire from terrorist groups in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. Prudent preparations include having accommodations for protective shelters immediately available in your place of residence and work and knowing the whereabouts of the nearest protective shelters in public places. Additional information to prepare for the potential of rocket attacks can be found at:

The Israel Home Front Command has considerable information regarding emergency planning in general, to include rocket attacks: <http://www.oref.org.il/894-en/Pakar.aspx>

The Red Alert Application free is a free “app” for both iOS and Android smart phones that provides real-time alerts when missiles or rockets are fired into Israel: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/red-alert-israel/id873642097?mt=8>.

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, has led to fighting between the Syrian military and Syrian opposition forces. There has been fighting between rival groups in Syria near the Disengagement Zone adjacent to the Israeli border in the Golan Heights. In August 2014, terrorist groups operating in Syria encroached into the Disengagement Zone near the Quneitra border crossing and took captive several dozen Fijian and Filipino soldiers assigned to the UN peacekeeping force. Sporadic gunfire has occurred along the Disengagement Zone with Syria and border region with Lebanon. There have been several incidents of errant mortar shells and small-arms fire impacting on the Israeli-controlled side of the zone as a result of spillover from the fighting in Syria. The IDF have augmented their positions on the

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Golan and have been accused of undertaking air strikes in Syria to target possible threats and destroy weapons transfers between Syrian elements and Hizbollah.

Israeli authorities are concerned regarding the terrorist threat posed along its northern border from Hizbollah or other groups operating in Lebanon. While the Israeli/Lebanese border has been an area of relative calm in recent years, the threat of rocket/missile attacks and small-arms fire persists, and tensions in this area have recently elevated. In 2015, there was an incident of cross-border violence, resulting in casualties among the IDF, UN, and Hizbollah personnel on both sides of the border. In late December 2015 and early January 2016, the IDF fired artillery across the Lebanese border during a four-day period reportedly due to increase of suspected "activity" on the Lebanese side. On January 4, 2016, an improvised explosive device detonated near an IDF armored vehicle on the Israeli-Lebanese border that Hizbollah (Martyr Samir Kuntar group) claimed responsibility for in reaction to the December 2015 assassination of Samir Kuntar in Damascus. As is typical for the Israeli response to increase in tension, area Israeli schools closed, and tourists were withdrawn from nearby Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights following this incident.

Israeli authorities have maintained a heightened state of alert along Israel's border with Egypt given the turmoil there. In October 2014, a terrorist attack occurred north of Har Harif in Egypt. During this incident, five IDF personnel were injured (two seriously) reportedly by small-arms and RPG fire from the Egyptian border. In July 2015, two rockets were fired from Egypt into Israel, impacting in unpopulated areas. A third rocket impact site was located in southern Israel. According to IDF statements and open source reporting, these rockets were fired by individuals affiliated with ISIL. An ISIL affiliate calling itself Sinai Province stated these rockets were fired in retaliation for Israel's articulated support of the Egyptian army. Other incidents in this area include: a October 22, 2014, incident in which five IDF personnel were injured when an IDF patrol came under small-arms fire from the Egyptian border; and a 2011 incident in which a terrorist attack killed eight and injured nearly 40 along Route 12 northwest of Eilat.

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Below is a list of other notable security incidents in 2015. While not all inclusive, it illustrates the local security environment and related issues. (Please reference the U.S. Consulate General Jerusalem's 2016 OSAC Crime and Safety Report for additional information regarding incidents in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.)

01/21/15: A Palestinian male residing illegally in Israel boarded a municipal bus in Tel Aviv during the morning rush hour and attacked/stabbed several passengers with a sharp object before being shot and detained by police. Over a dozen persons were wounded (to include six seriously).

04/20/15: An Arab Israeli male from northern Israel was stabbed in Herzliya. The attacker reportedly yelled "Death to Arabs!" prior to stabbing the victim. The victim was moderately injured, and the perpetrator was detained. The INP classifies this attack as a "hate crime."

10/7/15: A stabbing attack occurred at a shopping mall in Petah Tikva, moderately wounding one person. The attacker shouted: "Allah Akbar!" The perpetrator was apprehended.

10/8/15: A uniformed IDF soldier and others were stabbed near the IDF Headquarters in Tel Aviv. One victim was seriously wounded. The perpetrator tried to flee but was killed.

10/13/15: In Ra'anana, two separate stabbing attacks occurred at public bus stops. Five people were wounded, one seriously. Both perpetrators were apprehended.

10/18/15: A "lone wolf attack" at the Beer Sheeva Bus terminal resulted in 1 dead and 10 injured. The perpetrator was killed by police. This was followed by the mob lynching of an innocent Eritrean bystander who had been shot by security forces in the melee and was mistakenly thought by the mob to be a second attacker. He later died of his wounds.

11/18/15: Seven residents of Jaljulia, an Israeli Arab town near Kfar Saba, were arrested for planning to join and fight for ISIL in Syria.

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12/15/15: A Palestinian construction worker assaulted two persons at two separate but adjacent construction sites in Modiin. He was later arrested by police.

12/19/15: In Ra'anana, a Palestinian man stabbed three individuals and severely injured one of them. He tried to enter a synagogue but was caught by the INP.

1/2/2016: An Arab Israeli male opened fire with a machine pistol on patrons at a Dizengoff Street Tel Aviv bar/café, killing two and injuring eight. After the shooting, the assailant fled the area whereupon he killed a taxi driver and commandeered his taxi. The assailant remained at large (armed and dangerous) for the next week before being cornered by local authorities and killed by gunfire during a very volatile stand-off in Arara.

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

Post Political Violence Rating: High

### Civil Unrest

Spontaneous protests in and around the Old City periodically take place, especially after Friday prayers. This can often result in incidents of violence that have resulted in strong responses from the parties involved. Isolated street protests and demonstrations can also occur in areas of East Jerusalem, including Salah Ed-Din Street, Damascus Gate, Silwan, Ras al Amoud, Issawiya, A-Tur, Mount of Olives, and Sheikh Jarrah areas, as well as Jewish ultra-Orthodox areas such as Me'ah She'arim.

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Below is a list of notable incidents of civil unrest occurring during 2015. While not all inclusive, it illustrates the local security environment and threat conditions. While most occurrences of civil unrest take place in the vicinity of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem, demonstrations and violent incidents do occur and often take place in "Green Line" Israel without warning. (Please reference the U.S. Consulate General Jerusalem's 2016 OSAC Crime and Safety Report for additional information regarding incidents in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.)

04/27/15: During an arrest in Bat Yam, INP officers were videotaped aggressively handling an off-duty Ethiopian-Israeli IDF member. The incident resulted in numerous large and, at times, violent protests in response to mistreatment of Ethiopian-Israelis. These protests lasted into mid-summer.

06/16/15: The IDF and INP established a closed military zone in the northeastern Golan Heights following protests by members of the Israeli Druze community who demanded that Israel act to protect fellow Druze in Syria from ISIL or al-Qai'da-affiliated militants.

06/22/15: Israeli Druze from Horfesh village attacked a military ambulance transporting wounded Syrian civilians to a hospital. After the ambulance driver escaped from the attackers, they began chasing him while throwing stones and blocking his way. One of the attackers was injured during the incident, and the vehicle sustained minor to moderate damage.

08/15-16/2015: In Ashkelon, protestors supporting Palestinian hunger striker, Mohammed Allaan, became violent, threw rocks, and clashed with the INP.

10/6-7/15: In Jaffa, protestors clashed with INP, resulting in injuries. There were reports of rock and fire bomb throwing at INP vehicles.

10/7/15: In Lod, INP and Israeli-Arabs clashed, resulting in injuries.

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In the mid-2000s, Israel became a destination for a large number of African nationals who illegally immigrated from Sudan and Eritrea. In 2013, Israel completed construction of a border fence along its southern border with Egypt, effectively halting the stream of Africans crossing into Israel. While some African migrants departed Israel on their own accord, it is estimated that there are 50,000 African migrants in Israel. Many of these migrants live in south Tel Aviv, specifically in/around the Central Bus Station. Without legal status, many Africans are unemployed or work in temporary, low wage jobs in/around Tel Aviv. Israeli residents of south Tel Aviv complain of increased theft, assault, and vagrancy. As part of a growing movement to address the migrants' status, the African migrant and asylum community, with the assistance of several non-governmental organizations, organized numerous demonstrations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. During 2014, several large rallies and demonstrations in support of the African migrants took place in Rabin Square, near the U.S. Embassy, near the Knesset, and in public parks/streets in Tel Aviv.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

The Jordan River Valley constitutes the northern section of the Great Rift Valley that forms the tectonic border of the African and Asian plates. Accordingly, the region experiences regular seismic activity. The most recent earthquake of significance recorded in Israel occurred in May 2014. The event's magnitude was measured as 4.1 on the Richter scale with no injuries or damage reported. The last major earthquake in Israel occurred in 1927. Nevertheless, in recognition of the potential for a natural disaster, the government used an earthquake scenario in 2012 for its largest annual emergency preparedness exercise, Turning Point 6, held throughout the country.

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## Critical Infrastructure Concerns

In November 2014, a 60-ton container of ammonia gas at a factory in the Emek Hefer region leaked, resulting in the death of one firefighter and 20 others injured after inhaling the gas. The leak occurred when a 2-3cm breach opened in the pressurized container, which authorities believed was in danger of erupting. The surrounding area was cordoned off until the situation was under control.

In December 2014, millions of liters of crude oil gushed out of breached pipeline during routine maintenance work 12 miles north of Eilat (at the southernmost tip of Israel). Local officials categorized this incident as "one of the gravest pollution events in the country's history."

## Drug-related Crimes

Israel has drug problems similar to those of any Western country. There is prevalent use of heroin along with other recreational drugs (cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy, synthetic cannabis). Narco-terrorism has not historically been a consideration within Israel.

## Kidnapping Threat

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Kidnappings are generally not a widespread problem or issue within Green Line Israel. However, reports are common of potential terrorist operations in Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, or along the Sinai border to kidnap Israeli military personnel/civilians.

In June 2014, three Israeli teenagers (including one American citizen dual national) were kidnapped while hitchhiking near their residences in the West Bank. The Israeli authorities believed the teenagers had been killed and initiated Operation Brother's Keeper, a concerted effort to locate the victims and perpetrators. During the 11-day period, Israeli authorities arrested over 350 Palestinian leaders, including most of Hamas' leadership in the West Bank. In late June 2014, Israel released the identities of the perpetrators of the kidnapping, recovered the bodies of the three teenagers, and vowed a tough response to their deaths. Subsequently, a Palestinian youth was kidnapped in East Jerusalem. His charred remains were found a few hours later in the Jerusalem Forrest. Israeli authorities arrested six Jewish Israelis in connection to this crime. Three of those arrested confessed, while the other three were released as they were not involved. While this kidnapping was widely condemned throughout Israel, it was determined to have been conducted in retaliation for the three Israeli youths kidnapped in June.

## **Police Response**

### How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

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American travelers who have been arrested, are the victim of a crime, or need assistance may contact U.S. Embassy American Citizen Services at 03-519-7575 or after normal business hours at 03-519-7551.

Embassy Tel Aviv occasionally receives reports of police harassment. Generally, the Regional Security Office and American Citizen Services are notified by Israeli Immigration authorities if an American is detained or denied entry into Israel.

#### Crime Victim Assistance

Emergency services usually have English speaking operators. The following are emergency services telephone numbers throughout the country:

Police: 100

Ambulance: 101

Fire: 102

#### Police/Security Agencies

Israeli National Police (INP): Focus on common civilian issues such as auto accidents, burglaries, robberies etc. for Green Line Israel and in the Jewish Settlements.

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Border Police (BP): The BP is a division of the INP that focuses on border issues, smuggling, and crimes near/on Israeli borders. They are also responsible for security in the West Bank. BP officers are posted outside of several embassies and Ambassadorial residences, as they are considered sovereign territories.

Israeli Defense Forces (IDF): The Israeli military, focused on Israeli defense security and security within the Occupied Territories of the West Bank. Israel has three main branches of their military: Army, Navy and Air Force.

Israeli Security Agency (ISA/Shin Bet): Shin Bet is focused on internal Israeli security and intelligence issues as well as a regulator of security within Israel. Shin Bet also provides protection for the prime minister and president and several other key figures of the Gol.

## **Medical Emergencies**

Travelers should dial 101 for medical emergencies.

## **Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics**

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Ichilov Hospital (03-697-4444) is the largest hospital in Tel Aviv and central to the downtown metropolitan area, English speaking operators and medical staffs are usually available. Ichilov is a level 1 trauma center.

#### Available Air Ambulance Services

Orange Aviation, based at Moshav Ben Shemen, can provide air ambulance service within Israel or internationally.

Orange Aviation

Moshav Ben-Shemen 35

Israel 73115

Tel. +972 8 923 5751

Fax +972 8 923 5758

#### Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Visitors should have up-to-date routine vaccinations. CDC also recommends that visitors obtain the Hepatitis A and Polio vaccinations. For full information on these vaccinations and on CDC Israel-specific guidelines visit the following CDC web page:

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/israel>.

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## **OSAC Country Council Information**

Israel has an active OSAC Country Council. Questions regarding Tel Aviv's OSAC Country Council can be directed to Paul D. Brown, Regional Security Officer, U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv (BrownPD@State.Gov). To reach OSAC's Near East team, please email OSACNEA@state.gov.

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

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located at 71 Hayarkon Street, Tel Aviv, Israel.

The Embassy is open for business Mon-Fri from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM except on U.S. and Israeli holidays.

### Embassy Contact Numbers

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Tel: (Country Code 972) 03-519-7575

Regional Security Office, Consular Affairs American Citizen Services, Political, and Economic Sections can all be contacted through this number.

After Hours: (972) 03-519-7551

Outside of business hours, there is an Embassy Duty Officer who can offer assistance regarding emergencies involving an American citizen.

RSO: 03-519-7400 or TelAvivRSO@state.gov (Routine matters during business hours)

Fax: (972) 03-516-4390

E-mail address: AMCTelAviv@state.gov

Website: <http://Israel.USEmbassy.Gov>

## Nearby Posts

Consulate Jerusalem: <http://jerusalem.usconsulate.gov/>

Virtual Presence Post Gaza: <http://gaza.usvpp.gov/>

## Embassy Guidance

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All travelers and American citizens residing in Israel are encouraged to consult the Department of State's Country Specific Information Sheet and Travel Warnings at <http://travel.state.gov> for current information concerning entry/exit requirements, safety and security, and medical information. The most recent Travel Warning was issued on December 16, 2015, although travelers should check frequently for periodic updates.

## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

### Scams

Recent cyber trends included an email phishing campaign involving a fraudulent diversity lottery and green card prize. In addition, the Embassy has received several complaints from Israelis who wired money to individuals posing as U.S. soldiers serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. Generally, Israelis met these individuals over chat rooms and other online social media sites.

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

In protecting oneself from crime locally, universal common sense measures prevail. Persons visiting Israel are well advised to exercise caution and be reserved as they should in any new and unfamiliar environment.

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Israel's fluid and dynamic security environment and related unpredictability underscores the importance of maintaining a high degree of "situational awareness." Visitors should be aware of their surroundings as the security environment changes constantly. This includes being constantly aware of your immediate surroundings; researching areas you are travelling in advance; being informed of planned demonstrations and avoiding them; staying informed of current events as they develop in country and the region. Good sources of news in English are:

YNet: <http://www.ynetnews.com/home/0,7340,L-3083,00.html>

Haaretz: <http://www.haaretz.com>

Jerusalem Post: <http://www.jpost.com>

Only carry with you what you need. Do not carry credit cards or other items that you do not need or do not intend to use. Whenever possible, keep cash and identification in your front pockets. It is recommended that handbags not be carried; however, if they are needed, they should be tucked into the crook of an arm. If carrying a bag with shoulder strap, do not allow the bag to hang freely; keep a hand over the bag. Travel in groups, do not hitchhike, and do not accept rides from strangers.

Personal belongings left unattended in parked vehicles, on public beaches, or in parks are targeted with some regularity. This problem primarily exists in the vicinity of national parks, public beaches, and other areas frequented by tourists. Personal belongings should be secured while shopping or visiting tourist attractions. Unattended belongings are considered suspicious items and are subject to confiscation or may be destroyed by INP bomb squads.

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When entering most establishments, be prepared to be physically searched and have your bag and/or vehicle inspected prior to entry.

The U.S. Embassy places restrictions on the travel of U.S. Government employees and family members due to the unpredictable nature of the security environment.

Travelers are cautioned to be especially careful when visiting tourist areas, additionally it is advisable to exercise precautions against street crime throughout Israel. U.S. government employees are cautioned to use discretion and good judgment when visiting crowded places such as shopping malls, restaurants, hotel lobbies, and entertainment and recreation venues. All visitors are also urged to exercise a high degree of caution and to use common sense when patronizing restaurants, nightclubs, cafes, malls, places of worship, bus stops, department stores, and theaters, especially during peak hours. Large crowds and public gatherings have been targeted by terrorists in the past. U.S. government personnel are directed to avoid all protests and demonstrations.

When traveling in Jerusalem's Old City, persons should remain vigilant and aware of surroundings at all times. There have been numerous instances of stabbing attack in the Old City, particularly near the gates.

The U.S. Embassy recommends that travelers to Israel, particularly those staying long-term, familiarize themselves with the locations of public bomb shelters or ensure that residences in which they are staying contain a hardened room that can serve this purpose. The government's Home Front Command publishes a wealth of useful contingency planning information, including recommended responses to rocket/missile attacks, floods, and

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earthquakes, on its website

Visitors should stay in hotels that have 24/7 armed security guard and attended lobby presence, and protective shelter accommodations. Visitors should ensure they stay in hotels where the local management is aware of the concerns for the safety of American and foreign personnel. Basic security features (safes, deadbolt locks, door viewers, smoke alarms) are generally available at all hotels. However, as a standard precaution, do not leave money, jewelry, passports, or valuables in your unoccupied room unsecured. The location of stairwells and fire extinguisher(s) should be located in case of an emergency.

Security alarm systems, security grilles/shutters, exterior lighting, security patrols, and sound residential security practices are all credited with reducing the occurrences of burglaries. Many local residences in affluent areas have multiple closed circuit television cameras to detect and deter crime as well.

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