



## Philippines 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Carjacking; Kidnapping; Assault; Maritime; Left-wing; Separatist violence; Anti-American sentiment; Elections; Political Violence; Natural Disasters; Drug Trafficking

East Asia & Pacific > Marshall Islands; East Asia & Pacific > Micronesia; East Asia & Pacific > Palau; East Asia & Pacific > Philippines; East Asia & Pacific > Philippines > Manila

2/19/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

### Crime Threats

Crime is a significant concern in urban areas of the Philippines. According to the Philippine National Police (INP) Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management, theft, physical assault, and robbery were the most common crimes reported to local authorities in 2015.

Robberies committed by taxi drivers and/or individuals using stolen taxi cabs were reported to local police in 2015, although the vast majority of taxi services remain safe and reliable.

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Other common criminal acts include: pickpocketing, confidence schemes, and credit card fraud. Carjacking, kidnappings, robberies, and violent assaults also occur sporadically.

## Areas of Concern

Due to the security concerns highlighted in the State Department's Travel Warning, U.S. government employees must seek authorization for travel considered essential to Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and the Sulu Sea.

## Transportation-Safety Situation

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic is dense, chaotic, and unpredictable. The road system is frequently congested, and drivers are often undisciplined. Drivers regularly fail to yield to emergency vehicles. These factors can combine to impede the ability of emergency vehicles from reaching the scene of an accident in a timely fashion. Driving off the national highways and paved roads is particularly dangerous, especially at night, and should be avoided.

### Public Transportation Conditions

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Transportation safety involving maritime ferries tends to be substandard compared to U.S. standards, and Embassy personnel are advised to avoid using them. Accidents involving ferries occur relatively frequently and often result in the serious injury/death.

Never share a taxi cab with a stranger. If there are any other passengers in the vehicle, do not enter the taxi and wait for the next one. Before getting into any taxi, always check to see if the meter is functioning. If the taxi does not have a functioning meter or if the driver refuses to use the meter, do not use that taxi and wait for one with a functioning meter. Always use extra caution when hailing taxis on the street. The safest way to travel using taxi service is to ask the hotel, restaurant, and/or business establishment to call a reliable taxi cab service for you. Upon entering a taxi, consider texting or calling a friend or local contact and providing the name and number of the taxi and the driver.

## **Terrorism Threat**

Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

For the last several years, the Department of State has warned U.S. citizens of the risks of terrorist activity in the Philippines. Terrorist groups and criminal gangs continue to operate

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throughout the Philippines.

The communist New People's Army (NPA) has targeted foreigners and could threaten U.S. citizens engaged in business or property management activities. The NPA frequently demands "revolutionary taxes" from local and foreign businesses. Members of the group also threaten and conduct attacks on infrastructure (power facilities, telecommunication towers, bridges, etc.) to enforce their extortion demands. In 2015, the NPA was very active. The group targeted, attacked, damaged, and destroyed mining and road construction equipment and set buses on fire. The NPA also carried out complex, lethal attacks against the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippines National Police (PNP) on numerous occasions, killing and wounding security forces and Filipino soldiers.

Since 2008, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and rogue elements formerly associated with the MILF have also clashed with the AFP in the Mindanao provinces of North Cotabato, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Zamboanga, Zamboanga Sibugay, and the Sulu Archipelago. On October 15, 2012, the MILF and the government signed a Framework Agreement, which calls for the creation of an autonomous political entity called the "Bangsamoro," replacing the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The agreement provides the potential for peace between the two parties. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), a MILF splinter group, continues to confront the AFP and other groups in Mindanao. On September 8, 2013, MILF and MNLF forces launched a large-scale siege of Zamboanga City. Multiple hostages were taken, and much of the city was burned to the ground. It took several days for the AFP to regain control of the city.

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) continues to operate in Mindanao, chiefly in Zamboanga and the Sulu Archipelago as well as the Sulu Sea. In 2015, ASG members and affiliates conducted numerous raids against the AFP and PNP elements, kidnapped civilians, and

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detonated explosives in these regions.

### Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Small scale, anti-American demonstrations held in front of and in the vicinity of the U.S. Embassy are common. Demonstrations are organized by various groups (Filipino college students, the Communist party of the Philippines, labor and socialist organizations). All of these demonstrations contain anti-American sentiment, and each group's goal is to reach the U.S. Embassy. Most of the protest groups are intercepted by the PNP before reaching Embassy grounds. The number of demonstrators is usually under 100 people. Injuries are rare though demonstrators have assaulted the police and have defaced the walls and Embassy main gate by throwing red paint.

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

Historical incidents highlight the potential for political violence. Elections have led to acts of violence targeting particular candidates, especially candidates for local-level offices, but they typically do not result in civil disturbances or large-scale clashes by partisan groups. National and local elections will be conducted throughout the Philippines in May 2016. It is not unusual for the period leading up to Election Day to be marred by violence between the factions of competing candidates. Attacks have involved drive-by shootings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and grenade attacks to settle scores and eliminate political rivals. On November 23, 2009, a politically-motivated massacre took place in Maguindanao. The attack claimed the lives of 57 people, including 30 journalists, making it one of the worst election-related acts of violence in recent history. As a result, the Commission on Elections

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(COMELEC) instituted a gun ban prior to all election cycles in an attempt to curb violence among political rivals and to curtail politically-related activities of armed partisan groups.

Political Violence Rating: High

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

The Philippines is particularly vulnerable to typhoons, floods, earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. These disasters can easily set back development and economic gains and can cause disruptions in communication and transportation.

Some 15 typhoons impacted the Philippines' area of responsibility in 2015. On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan hit with record-breaking sustained winds of over 195 miles per hour and sea level storm surges of over 13 feet. Over 16 million people were affected by the storm, including at least 6,000 deaths and over 27,000 injuries. In 2013, USAID provided over US\$50 million in disaster assistance for Typhoon Haiyan.

### Drug-related Crimes

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The production, trafficking, and consumption of illegal drugs are issues of concern. Trafficking and abuse of methamphetamine remains the foremost drug-related problem, followed by marijuana, and, to a lesser extent, ecstasy and cocaine. Transnational organized crime groups exploit both under-staffed and under-resourced law enforcement and a weak judicial system to establish clandestine drug laboratories and import wholesale quantities of methamphetamine to supply the domestic market. Authorities have raided methamphetamine laboratories in Metro Manila and Luzon. Regionally, the Philippines is an identified source of methamphetamine for Guam and a transit point from Africa to Southeast Asia.

## Kidnapping Threat

While kidnappings occur throughout the country, the majority of kidnappings in Manila and areas north of Mindanao are primarily criminal and not ideological in nature. These criminals mainly target local business people and individuals who are perceived as affluent. Criminal groups also tend to negotiate for a ransom within a relatively brief period (days or weeks, rather than years). Victims are often returned to their families after a ransom has been paid.

The PNP Anti-Kidnapping Group (AKG) is primarily responsible for kidnapping investigations. In 2015, there were 38 reported kidnappings, predominantly of local citizens. Of these incidents, 20 occurred in Mindanao. AKG officials report that kidnapping incidents in Mindanao are mostly perpetrated by individuals/groups that are members or allies of Islamist extremist organizations (ASG, MILF, Lawless MILF Group (LMG)). Kidnapping remains prevalent in western Mindanao, particularly in the Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) area/provinces; the Zamboanga Peninsula; the Cotabato-Central Mindanao region, specifically in the provinces of South and North Cotabato, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat; the

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Chartered Cities of Zamboanga, General Santos City, Cotabato, Iligan, Cagayan de Oro; and the Sulu Sea.

Several militant groups see kidnap-for-ransom (KFR) as way to fund their operations, and foreigners are often targeted. In October 2015, an Italian citizen was abducted from his business in Dipolog City, Zamboanga Del Norte province, Mindanao. In September 2015, two Canadians, a Norwegian, and a Filipina citizen were abducted from a marina on Samal Island, which is close to the coast of Davao City, Mindanao. All are believed to be held by the ASG for ransom on Sulu Island. Two German citizens were kidnapped by the ASG while on board a boat in the Sulu Sea in April 2014. Both were released in October after ransom demands were reportedly met.

## **Police Response**

The PNP is capable but limited in its capacity to assist victims of crime and traffic accidents due to a lack of response vehicles, radios, and other essential equipment.

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

Reports of corruption and bribery, to include elements within the PNP, are widespread; it is U.S. government policy not to pay or condone bribes to officials. Should Americans feel that they are being extorted by the police, they should contact that officer's commander and report it to the Embassy. In the event of arrest or detention by the police, call the American Embassy

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at 63-2-301-2000. There is a duty officer available 24 hours a day.

### Crime Victim Assistance

All incidents of crime should be reported to the PNP. It is important that foreigners remain calm and polite when interacting with the PNP to avoid misunderstandings and to get a more desirable response.

The National Emergency Number is 117

### Police Contact Numbers

Manila: 523-3378 (District Tactical Operations Center)

Makati City: 843-7971 (Tactical Operations Center)

Pasay City: 831-1544 (TOC)

Quezon City: 925-8417 (DTOC)

### Fire Contact Numbers

Manila: 527-3627 and 527-3653

NOTE: For fires within the National Capital Region, contact the Central Operations Center Hotline at 410-6319. An alarm will be relayed to the respective fire district by radio.

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Makati City: 818-5150 and 816-2553

Pasay City: 843-6523 and 844-2120

Quezon City: 924-1922 and 928-8363

Police/Security Agencies

For U.S. businesses and individuals interested in hiring private security, there are many reliable local companies that provide such services.

## **Medical Emergencies**

Adequate medical care is available in major cities, but hospitals may not meet the standards of care, sanitation, and equipment provided by hospitals in the U.S. Medical care is limited in rural and remote areas. There are many Western-trained Filipino doctors, who, in general, provide quality medical care even with sub-standard medical facilities.

Most hospitals will require a down payment of estimated fees at the time of admission and full payment prior to discharge. In some cases, public and private hospitals have withheld lifesaving medicines and treatment for non-payment.

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## Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

A list of doctors and medical facilities is on the webpage of the U.S. Embassy Manila at <http://manila.usembassy.gov>.

Makati Medical Center: 888-8999

St. Luke's Global Hospital: 789-7700

Manila Doctors Hospital: 524-3011

Asian Hospital: 771-9000/9001/9002

## Available Air Ambulance Services

International SOS-Philippines (Air Ambulance): 687-0909

## Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the U.S. can

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cost thousands of dollars.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For vaccine and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/Philippines>.

### **OSAC Country Council Information**

There is an active OSAC Country Council in Manila. The OSAC points of contact are:

Steve Cutler, Country Council Chairman

Tel: +63 (2) 844-7825 or +63(917) 509-1473

Email: [steve.cutler@osac.ph](mailto:steve.cutler@osac.ph) or [Steve.cutler@ogcc.biz](mailto:Steve.cutler@ogcc.biz)

Simoun Ung, Chairman and AmCham Security Disaster Resource Group

Tel: +63 (2) 884-1793 or +63 (917) 526-2475

Email: [simoun.ung@osac.ph](mailto:simoun.ung@osac.ph)

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To reach OSAC's East Asia Pacific team, please email [OSACEAP@state.gov](mailto:OSACEAP@state.gov).

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

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

#### U.S. Embassy Manila

1201 Roxas Boulevard

Manila, Philippines 1000

The American Citizen Services section (ACS) is open for routine passport and citizenship services by appointment only. The section is open for routine walk-in services from 7:30 AM - 12:00 noon daily. ACS is not open on American and some local holidays as well as Consular Training days (which occur on the first Wednesday of every month).

The Embassy also operates a Consular Agency in Cebu city which offers routine passport, citizenship and other services to Americans living in the central and southern Philippines. The Agency is located on the ground floor of the Waterfront Hotel in Lahug, Cebu City and is open on a walk-in basis from 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM daily.

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## Embassy Contact Numbers

The Embassy operator can be reached at 63-2-301-2000 and is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week to connect callers to the Embassy duty officer.

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

## Consular Coverage for Multi-post Countries

In addition to the Philippines, the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy Manila is also responsible for Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands.

## Nearby Posts

Virtual Presence Post Mindanao: <http://mindanao.usvpp.gov/>

## Embassy Guidance

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We strongly recommend that U.S. citizens traveling to or residing in the Philippines enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at [www.Travel.State.Gov](http://www.Travel.State.Gov). STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates, and makes it easier for the U.S. Embassy or nearest U.S. Consulate to contact you in an emergency. If you do not have Internet access, enroll directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Regularly monitor the State Department's website, where you can find current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and the Worldwide Caution, available at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en.html>.

Review the Country Specific Information for the Philippines, available at: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/philippines.html>.

For additional information, refer to the "Traveler's Checklist," available at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/go/checklist.html>.

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

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

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Criminals prey on people who pay little attention to their surroundings or do not take basic personal security precautions. Common sense and good situational awareness will keep most people out of harm's way. Americans should maintain awareness of their surroundings, exercise good judgment, and employ basic personal security habits.

Never show large amounts of cash in public spaces, avoid wearing expensive jewelry, and always use reliable transportation, such as registered taxi cabs with a functioning meter.

Credit card and ATM fraud does occur, so it is best to use credit cards at major retail facilities and banks. Always check bills and statements for suspicious charges and activity.

Date-rape drug use has occurred. Individuals should never leave a drink unattended or accept drinks from a stranger.

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