



Thailand 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Bangkok

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Surveillance; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Assault; Rape/Sexual Violence; Religious Terrorism; Maritime; IEDs; Riots/Civil Unrest; Significant Events; Earthquakes; Floods; Drug Trafficking

East Asia & Pacific > Thailand; East Asia & Pacific > Thailand > Bangkok

2/19/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Generally speaking, Bangkok is a safe place for those wishing to conduct business or take part in tourism.

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Most criminal activity is limited to "non-confrontational" street crimes and crimes of opportunity including: purse snatching (including drive-by snatchings from motorcycles), pickpocketing, petty theft, jewelry schemes, and tourism fraud. Many U.S. citizens have had passports, wallets, and other valuables stolen in Bangkok's Chatuchak Weekend Market, on Khao San Road, and at other crowded areas. Pickpockets and thieves typically cut into purses or bags with a razor and remove items surreptitiously. Additionally, U.S. citizens across Thailand have

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been robbed of their valuables and other possessions after soliciting the services of commercial sex workers. Thieves may also victimize travelers on long-distance bus routes.

Credit card fraud and identity theft also regularly occur in Thailand. There have been recent instances in which international criminal organizations based in Malaysia, Ukraine, Russia, and elsewhere have installed sophisticated “skimming devices” to steal card holder information from ATMs. The obtained information was then used to withdraw money from victim accounts.

Violent crimes (murder, rape, assault) against Americans and other foreigners are relatively rare. Those that do occur typically happen at night, often when victims (both male and female) have been drinking and are separated from their travelling companions. These crimes are most common in Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, and tourist areas in southern Thailand, including Phuket, Koh Samui, Koh Phangan, and Krabi. Sexually-motivated violent incidents, committed by both Thai citizens and visitors, are most likely to occur at parties, discos, or beaches, such as the Full Moon Party on Phangan Island. There have also been reports of criminals using scopolamine or other “date rape” drugs to spike drinks and rob their victims.

There are numerous international and indigenous organized crime elements operating throughout Thailand, but they are mainly concentrated within the major cities. Their activities include illicit drugs, human trafficking, prostitution, document fraud, production of counterfeit goods, etc.

Areas of Concern

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Periodic violence directed at government interests by an indigenous insurgency continues to plague the southernmost provinces. This includes indiscriminate attacks in public places that present the risk of collateral injury. For this reason, U.S. citizens are urged to defer all non-emergency travel to the provinces of Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. The U.S. Embassy requires all official travel to the southern regions to be reviewed and approved in advance by the Regional Security Officer and the Deputy Chief of Mission. Persons wishing to travel to the border areas should check with Thai Tourist Police or visit <http://www.travel.state.gov> for the most up-to-date travel warnings for U.S. citizens.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Paved roads, many of them four lanes wide, connect Thailand's major cities. On the country's numerous two-lane roads, however, slow-moving trucks limit speed and visibility. Speeding, reckless passing, and failure to obey traffic laws are common, as is the consumption of alcohol, amphetamines, and other stimulants by drivers of commercial vehicles.

Traffic moves on the left, although motorcycles and motorized carts often drive (illegally) against the traffic flow and have been known to use sidewalks to bypass traffic congestion. Traffic in Bangkok is a major safety problem with a mixture of motorcycles, cars, trucks, buses, and three-wheeled tuk-tuks.

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Accidents involving pedestrians and vehicles are the greatest safety/security concern for visitors. Serious bus crashes occur frequently, especially on overnight routes, sometimes resulting in fatalities. Motorcycles tend to weave in/out of traffic, and the skill and proficiency of drivers are poor. As a result, motorcycle-related deaths in Bangkok are a daily occurrence. The accident rate is particularly high during long holidays when alcohol use and traffic are heavier than normal. During the annual Songkran (Thai New Year) holiday in April, the problem is further exacerbated by people throwing water at passing vehicles as part of the traditional celebration.

Congested roads and the scarcity of ambulances can make it difficult for accident victims to receive timely medical attention. U.S. citizen motorists should consider that it is customary in a traffic accident for the more affluent driver, even if not at fault, to pay the expenses of the other party. Authorities determine fault in accidents, and frequently, in cases involving major accidents, those involved are brought to the local police station. Once there, senior officers will discuss the accident with drivers, insurance representatives, the police officers, and others in an effort to determine fault.

For safety, pedestrians are encouraged to utilize elevated walkways/pedestrian bridges whenever possible, especially in metropolitan Bangkok. Pedestrians should look carefully in both directions before crossing streets, even when using a marked crosswalk with a green "walk" light illuminated.

Public Transportation Conditions

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Buses and taxis are abundant and generally safe. Streets tend to be very congested, so passengers in taxis should only exit on the sidewalk side to avoid opening a door into an oncoming car or motorcycle.

Both the elevated Skytrain and underground subway (MRT) are clean, safe, and recommended to save time and prevent challenges navigating Bangkok's notorious traffic conditions.

The use of motorcycle taxis is not recommended. The U.S. Embassy has sent a notice to Embassy staff and family members strongly recommending that they refrain from using motorcycles (especially motorcycle taxis), mopeds, and tuk-tuks in Bangkok.

Registered taxicab drivers have a yellow placard with their name in English and their photograph on the dashboard. If this photograph does not match the driver, passengers should be wary of entering the vehicle. Taxis have meters, and their drivers usually use them, but taxis in some tourist areas do not have meters. Taxi drivers often refuse fares, especially during rush hour or to places they do not know well. Drivers may attempt to charge excessive fares at airports and near major tourist attractions.

Minor and major incidents of crime involving taxis or tuk-tuks can occur, especially in some tourist areas. Before entering a for-hire vehicle, individuals should either request that the driver use the meter or reach an agreement on the fare for the trip. Do not hesitate to ask to be let out of a taxi if the driver is acting suspiciously or driving erratically. Raising one's voice and using aggressive body language could be seen as a threat to the driver. Police will seldom intervene in incidents involving taxi drivers.

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In Phuket, drivers routinely charge fares that are much higher than those in Bangkok for comparable distances. Threats of violence may accompany excessive charges. In 2012, a German citizen was hospitalized after a severe beating by a group of tuk-tuk drivers following an argument about the fare. Local government officials attempted with limited success to introduce standard fares. Drivers have organized against attempts to provide alternative services. For instance, they have blockaded van and bus services during some U.S. Navy ship visits.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Air travel remains a relatively safe option. The last significant accident occurred on September 16, 2007, when One-Two-Go flight OG 269 crashed at Phuket International Airport, killing 90 people, including five U.S. citizens.

Other Travel Conditions

Ferries and speedboats used to transport tourists and local nationals to and from the islands are often overcrowded and carry insufficient safety equipment. In 2005, three U.S. citizens died when their over-crowded speedboat capsized and sank off the coast of Koh Samui. The Department of State encourages U.S. citizens to avoid travel on overcrowded boats and to ensure that proper safety equipment is available before boarding any boat or ferry.

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Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

While there have been no attacks to date with confirmed links to external terrorist organizations, U.S. citizens are advised to exercise caution and to remain vigilant with regard to their own personal security, especially in locations where Westerners and expatriates congregate (clubs, discos, bars, restaurants, hotels, places of worship, schools, outdoor recreation venues, tourist areas, beach resorts, other places frequented by foreigners). Soft target vulnerabilities could easily be exploited by transnational terrorist elements, which have been known to visit and travel through Thailand with relative ease. For more information on terrorist threats against U.S. citizens worldwide and steps to take as a result of these threats, please see the Worldwide Caution available at www.travel.state.gov.

On August 17, 2015, an explosion took place during the evening rush hour at the crowded Rachaprasong intersection in the central commercial district of Bangkok, killing at least 20 people and injuring more than 100. The blast occurred in an area popular with Thai nationals and foreign tourists, in close proximity to the Erawan Shrine, Central World mall, several major hotels, and the overhead bisection of the two Skytrain lines.

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On March 7, 2015 a hand grenade exploded in front of the Bangkok Criminal Court Building. No one was injured.

In February 2015, two small improvised explosive devices detonated in close proximity to the Siam Paragon Shopping Mall BTS entrance, slightly injuring two people. Both areas are popular with tourists.

In 2012, Royal Thai Police made a series of arrests and searches that uncovered a hidden cache of more than 4,000 kilograms of explosive materials. A suspected Iranian terror cell was discovered in 2012 when an improvised explosive device (IED) accidentally detonated in the house they were renting in the Ekamai neighborhood of Bangkok. A similar device was thrown at a passing taxi and a police officer. Royal Thai Police responded to the explosion and arrested two Iranian nationals within hours, and both were convicted.

In 2003, senior Jemaah Islamiyah/al-Qa'ida (JI/AQ) leader Hambali was captured just north of Bangkok.

The far south provinces of Songkhla, Yala, Patani and Narathiwat frequently experience criminally- and politically-motivated violence, including drive-by shootings, ambushes, and small bomb attacks attributed to armed local separatist and extremist groups that seek increased autonomy in furtherance of a separate state related to the partitioning of the Thai/Malaysia border in the early 1900s. There has been sporadic separatist violence over the last 100 years relating to this struggle. The latest round of violence, generally identified as beginning in January 2004, has involved arson attacks directed at schools and buildings associated with the government; the placement of bombs in public areas and near local government offices; the killing of police officers and other officials, including civilians

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suspected of cooperating with authorities; and the theft of weapons and explosives. Attacks in the south have increasingly targeted commercial areas where foreigners might congregate.

In 2005, two U.S. citizens were injured when a bomb detonated in the Hat Yai Regional Airport.

In 2006, a series of bombs detonated in a commercial district of Hat Yai, killing one U.S. citizen and injuring another.

Travelers should be aware that authorities have instituted special security measures (curfews, military patrols, random searches of train passengers) in affected areas. Americans are also encouraged to use caution and remain vigilant in areas with large public gatherings.

For a number of years, Thailand has also experienced limited violent incursions in the areas bordering Burma and Cambodia. Heavily-armed drug smugglers have also had deadly clashes with police in border areas near Burma.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

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Thailand has experienced cyclical domestic political confrontations for the past decade. In May 2014, the military enacted martial law and seized power, installing an interim government headed by Army Chief-turned Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha. Since the coup, military forces have banned protests and limited freedom of expression. The interim government is drafting the country's next constitution in the lead-up to yet-unscheduled elections.

In 2010, protestors occupied central Bangkok, leading to clashes with security forces in which over 90 people were killed.

In 2008, protests caused the temporary suspension of operations at Suvarnabhumi International Airport (BKK).

In 2006, the government was deposed in a bloodless, military coup that was followed by an extended period of violent political instability.

Political demonstrations occur frequently and are often scheduled on the anniversary of political events. Others protests may occur with little/no warning. Demonstrations can attract thousands of participants and often cause severe traffic disruptions, especially if they include processions from one site to another. If a demonstration is expected to pass near the U.S. Embassy or Consulate facilities, entrances and functions may be restricted. Demonstrations are unpredictable and can turn violent without warning. The Department of State advises all U.S. citizens to monitor events closely, to avoid any large public gatherings including protest sites, and to exercise discretion when traveling within the country.

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Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Thailand has several earthquake fault lines. Small earthquakes continue throughout the region, all of which cause little/no damage. In 2004, a major underwater earthquake off the coast of northern Indonesia caused one of the deadliest tsunamis in recorded history, resulting in over 200,000 deaths in the region. Thailand's popular Andaman Sea coastline, including the tourist island of Phuket, was affected by a 10-meter tsunami wave, which devastated the western coast.

Thailand can experience serious flooding during the rainy season (July-October). In 2011, Thailand suffered disaster-scale flooding as a result of heavy rains that plagued all of Southeast Asia. Many parts of the historic province of Ayudhya, along with surrounding central provinces, were submerged in three meters of water. Much of Bangkok's northern and western neighborhoods experienced at least a meter of flooding. Central Bangkok, with its tourist and commerce-heavy districts, remained relatively dry due to a series of canals and flood-control measures.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

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Thailand protects intellectual property rights via three main statutes:

The Patent Act 2522 (1979) grants an inventor or designer exclusive domain over their work product. Applicable patents must satisfy three conditions:

- 1.) The invention must be new. It must not exist in another country.
- 2.) The idea must involve an inventive step. This inventive step cannot be an application obvious to one who works in the field.
- 3.) The invention or design must have an industrial application.

Excluded from patent protection are naturally occurring organisms, scientific methods, and mathematical equations. Legal action can take either criminal or civil form. Criminal proceedings may be prosecuted by law enforcement agencies and begin with a raid and seizure of property. The tort clause of the Commercial and Civil Code typically governs civil proceedings. In reality, few patent cases arise in Thailand.

The Copyright Act 2537 (1994) protects the creator of an original artistic or cultural work, and the protection vests once the work is published. The creator retains the copyright except in the following situations:

- 1) If the creator is an employee hired to create the work, in which case, the employer retains the copyright via prior agreement; or
- 2) If the work is commissioned, in which case the commissioner retains the copyright via prior agreement.

Copyright infringement is a significant issue. Pirated music and movies are sold readily on street corners. Therefore, litigation and enforcement are uncommon. Enforcement of intellectual property rights may proceed criminally or civilly. In addition to monies recovered in

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civil suits, copyright holders may be given 50 percent of fines levied in criminal enforcement.

The Trademark Act 2534 (1991) differs somewhat from the other intellectual property statutes. To be registered, a trademark must be distinctive, must not be prohibited by the act, and not be identical or confusingly similar to another registered trademark. This may include any picture, textual image, or color combination. The following may not be trademarked: the national, royal, or official flag of Thailand; royal names or monograms or abbreviations thereof; representations of the monarchy; international flags, or emblems; or any mark contrary to the public morale. Aggrieved parties may pursue criminal and civil enforcement action. Thai law views trademark infringement as a crime against the state. Therefore, proceeds from criminal fines remain with the government.

In recent years, Thailand has enacted several statutes intended to curb issues regarding intellectual property. Despite these efforts, counterfeit goods remain in the stream of commerce. Private enforcement options are available to aggrieved parties.

Privacy Concerns

Bangkok is a city of video surveillance and picture-taking citizens and tourists. Several sites, including the international airport and the Siam Paragon mega-mall, are among the most photographed public locations in the world. Most areas that are considered tourist zones are under constant video surveillance, managed by the Royal Thai Police (RTP). These cameras record images to computers at a central Police Center and are used by the RTP to investigate crimes. Many restaurants, bar rooms, and night clubs have video surveillance packages and will often present this footage as evidence when pursuing criminal charges against clientele.

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Drug-related Crimes

Thailand strictly enforces drug laws and penalties for the possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs. Thailand's enforcement efforts include the death penalty for drug smuggling. Convicted offenders can expect long prison sentences under harsh conditions and often heavy fines. Several U.S. citizens currently in prisons were arrested for trafficking illicit drugs. Some Americans have been duped into carrying a package with illegal drugs by the promise of a vacation to Thailand. Lack of knowledge of the contents of a package is not a legal defense.

Thai police occasionally raid discos, bars, or nightclubs looking for underage patrons and drug users. During the raids, they typically check the IDs of all customers and make each person provide a urine sample to be checked for narcotics. Foreigners are not immune from these checks, and anyone whose urine tests positive for illicit drugs will be arrested and charged. Although some civil libertarians have questioned the constitutionality of these forced tests, the Embassy is unaware of any successful challenge to the practice, and customers can be jailed if they do not cooperate.

The government continues to fight drug smuggling along its border with Burma and Laos. Heavily-armed drug smugglers have engaged in deadly clashes with Thai Border and Narcotics Police in these areas.

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Kidnapping Threat

Armed kidnappings are rare, but the potential threat exists.

Police Response

Response to calls for service is better in larger cities than in smaller towns and provinces. Police effectiveness and their ability to conduct follow-up criminal investigations are hampered by both a lack of funding and limited training. The local police are generally effective in assisting with minor crimes, but a lack of funding, inadequate training, corruption, and frequent rotations prevent them from operating with the effectiveness or professionalism one typically associates with a modern mega-city. Police officers outside the major tourist destinations frequently do not speak English.

Tourist Police are stationed in popular tourist areas and are typically multi-lingual. They are generally very helpful in assisting tourists with minor crimes, scams, or other problems. In 2013, Thailand created several Tourist Courts to deal with petty crime and complaints involving foreigners.

The Royal Thai Police and the Department of Special Investigations actively investigate organized crime syndicates, but due to corruption, resource limitations, and bureaucratic inefficiency, arrest rates are extremely low. Prosecution rates are even lower.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In the event of police detention or harassment, travelers should remain calm and ask for an English-speaking officer. Tourist Police generally speak English, and many metropolitan police also have some English-speaking ability. Since Thailand is not a signatory to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the U.S. Embassy does not learn of the arrest of U.S. citizens for minor drug offenses, particularly in southern Thailand, until several days after the incident. Please ask to contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General for assistance.

The Embassy or Consulate staff can assist you in finding appropriate medical care, to contact family/friends, and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, Consular officers can help arrested American citizens understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

Crime Victim Assistance

The general police emergency number is 191.

Local police may refuse to issue reports for foreign victims of theft, requiring them instead to travel several miles to a central Tourist Police station. U.S. citizens may request a police

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report, but police may require a small fee, approximately 50 baht (about USD \$1.50), in some instances.

Some victims of sexually-motivated crimes have found that authorities do not handle their cases with as much sensitivity or consideration for privacy as they would expect in the U.S.

Bangkok

Police, Routine (Metro): 02-280-5060

Tourist Police: 1155

Fire/Emergency: 199

U.S. Embassy: 02-205-4000

Chiang Mai

Police, Routine (Local): 05-327-6040

Tourist Police: 1155

U.S. Consulate General: 05-325-2629

Phuket

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Police, Routine (Local): 07-621-2115

Tourist Police (Local): 1155

Medical Emergencies

Contact the police in a medical emergency (191), and they will summon an ambulance to your location. Individual hospitals have ambulance services; however, in Bangkok, these services should not be relied upon due to severe traffic congestion. Taxis are commonly used to transport patients to hospitals. Drivers rarely yield to emergency vehicles traveling with lights and sirens.

Medical treatment is generally adequate. In Bangkok, excellent facilities exist for routine, long-term, and emergency health care. Smaller towns and outlying facilities lack the facilities, expertise, and various medical personnel resident in major metropolitan areas.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Bangkok

Bumrungrad Hospital: 02-667-1000

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BNH Hospital: 02-686-2700

Samitivej Hospital: 02-711-8000, 02-711-8181

Bangkok Hospital: 02-310-3000, 02-755-1000, Call Center 1719

Phuket

Phuket-Bangkok Hospital: 07-625-4425, 07-636-1000

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Helicopter medevac service is available on a very limited basis. Bangkok Hospital (02-310-3102, 02-755-1000, CALL CENTER 1719) advertises that it can assist in medevac situations.

CDC 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/thailand?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001.

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OSAC Country Council Information

The Thailand OSAC Country Council and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Thailand (AmCham) are based in Bangkok. The AmCham meets on a monthly basis and can be contacted through the Chamber of Commerce at 66-2-254-1041 or <http://www.amchamthailand.com>. To reach OSAC's East Asia Pacific team, please email OSACEAP@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy in Bangkok is located at 120 - 122 Wireless Road and 95 Wireless Road in Bangkok, Thailand.

Hours of operation: Monday - Friday, 7:00am to 4:00pm

Embassy Contact Numbers

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Embassy operator: 02 205-4000

NOTE: If calling from outside Thailand, add the country code for Thailand (66) and drop the first zero in the number being called.

Regional Security Officer: 02 205-4333

Medical Unit: 02 205-5508

American Citizen Services Duty Officer: 081 868 0530

Marine Post 1: 02 205-4108

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

Nearby Posts

Consulate Chiang Mai: <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

Travelers should carefully review the Safety and Security sections of the State Department's Country Specific Information sheet for Thailand available at www.travel.state.gov for additional information.

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Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Personal security measures and common sense should be exercised. At night, travel with someone and avoid walking on poorly illuminated streets and alleys. Travelers should be careful to safeguard their valuables. Extra caution is advised when walking in crowded markets, tourist sites, and bus or train stations.

Travelers are encouraged to bring cash to exchange directly at the airport or other reputable money exchanging services and to use only trusted ATMs in Bangkok.

Individuals traveling alone are advised to exercise caution, stay near other travelers, and ensure that friends or family know how to contact them. Travelers should also maintain awareness of their surroundings and travel with trusted friends or relatives to reduce their chances of falling victim to sexually-motivated crimes.

Do not leave drinks unattended, and do not accept beverages offered by strangers or at loosely organized parties. Victims of scopolamine or other drugs should seek medical attention immediately.

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