



France 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Religious Terrorism; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Burglary; Assault; Cyber; Riots/Civil Unrest; Floods

Europe > France; Europe > France > Bordeaux; Europe > France > Lyon; Europe > France > Marseille; Europe > France > Paris; Europe > France > Rennes; Europe > France > Strasbourg; Europe > France > Toulouse

2/23/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

It is estimated that over three million U.S. citizens visited France in 2015.

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Paris is generally a safe destination for tourists, students, business travelers, and others. Violent crime is relatively uncommon; however, street crime is a concern, most notably in areas frequented by tourists. Consular officials throughout France report that U.S. citizens are frequently pick-pocketed, robbed, or victimized in a variety of scams. Pickpockets are by far the most significant problem. Wallets, passports, smart phones, and small electronic devices are particular targets. In Paris, pickpockets can be any gender, race, or age but are commonly children under 16 because they are difficult to prosecute. Pickpockets are very active on the

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rail link (RER B) from Charles de Gaulle Airport to the city center. In addition, passengers on the Metro line 1, which traverses the city center from east to west and services many major tourist sites, are often targeted. A common method is for one thief to distract a tourist with questions or disturbances, while an accomplice picks pockets, a backpack, or a purse. Thieves often time their pickpocket attempts to coincide with the closing of the automatic doors on the Metro, leaving the victim on the departing train.

ATMs in Paris are relatively safe. Thieves have successfully installed both magnetic stripe readers to capture account information and small CCTV cameras to capture PIN codes in some ATMs.

Other types of crimes experienced by U.S. citizens involve residential break-ins, bicycle theft, and other forms of theft with minimal violence. However, robberies involving physical assault do occur in Paris and other major urban areas. Criminals routinely operate at tourist sites (museums, monuments, parks) and the public transportation system. Crimes against visitors are generally crimes of opportunity, though these crimes are more likely to involve violence late at night or when the victim resists the criminal.

In August (when most French residents take summer vacation) and in December, there is generally an increase in the number of residential break-ins. The majority are attributed to residents not using security measures (failing to double lock doors and lock windows) already in place. Burglaries are frequently preceded by phone calls to see if the resident is at home. Often thieves who gain access to an apartment building will knock on apartment doors to see if anyone answers, claiming they are taking a survey or representing a utility company.

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The Paris Police Prefecture publishes a pamphlet entitled "Guide to staying safe in Paris;" it can be found at: [Guide to staying safe in Paris](#), under the "Publications" header, and provides practical advice and useful telephone numbers for visitors.

Cybersecurity Issues

WI-FI hot spots should not be trusted; criminals will configure "man-in-the-middle" access points that appear free so that they can intercept communications from anyone who connects. This means hackers could have access to any sensitive information appearing on the user's screen, including bank accounts, social security numbers, etc. It also provides a mechanism from which a hacker can gain control of the connecting device.

Owners of public Internet cafes may install key logging software that enables theft of sensitive information, to include email passwords, bank account passwords, etc. Smart phones and computers -- specifically Apple products -- cost more in France than in the U.S. and are targeted by local petty thieves. Be wary of where your laptop or smart phone is used or stored.

France has a capable national police force; however, transnational organized crime (TOC) operatives reside in France. TOC syndicates are technically savvy and conduct many of their schemes via cyber platforms.

Other Areas of Concern

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It is advisable to avoid public parks after dark, particularly Bois de Boulogne, as they are frequented by drug dealers and prostitutes, raising the risk of assault.

Visitors to adult entertainment districts, such as the Pigalle area of Paris, should take particular care at night. Many of the nightclubs in these areas engage in very aggressive marketing, charging exorbitant rates for drinks. Hidden charges of 500-600 euros for drinks are not uncommon, and there have been reports of threats to coerce customers into paying these charges by physically preventing customers from leaving until the tab is settled.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Public Transportation Conditions

Use only authorized taxis. Authorized taxis in Paris include several Uber and traditional livery services. Legal Uber services include: Uber: X, Uber: taxi, Uber: Black, Uber: SUV, Uber: LUX. Authorized traditional livery services will have the following equipment: an illuminated "Taxi Parisien" sign on the roof; a meter showing the cost of the trip; a display at the rear of the vehicle and visible from the exterior that enables the monitoring of the daily duration of use of the vehicle; and a plate fixed to the front fender bearing the license number.

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There has been an increase in sexual harassment and assault of women by taxi drivers in recent years. Women may want to consider having another individual walk them to a taxi and, in plain view of the driver, note the license number of the vehicle, or call a friend while in the taxi and communicate the license number. Letting the driver know that others are aware of your trip and the license number of the taxi may reduce the chances of becoming a victim.

Other Travel Conditions

There is a high incidence of smash-and-grab robberies from vehicles in areas of heavy traffic. Thieves on motorbike will approach a vehicle stopped in traffic, smash a window, reach in to grab valuables, and then flee. Travelers are advised to keep vehicle doors locked and valuables out of sight.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

French and U.S. authorities are concerned about European citizens traveling to Syria to wage jihad and then returning to France to conduct terrorist acts, as well as individuals radicalized in France. The borders are relatively open, and there are a significant number of supporters of

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terrorist organizations residing in country. Terrorist attacks by foreign fighters are considered the most lethal threat in France. Foreign fighters and homegrown extremists are difficult to detect and counter. France was victimized by significant terrorist plots and attacks in 2015 to include the January attacks that targeted the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a Paris supermarket and the coordinated attacks in Paris of November 13 that resulted in the death of 130 people (1 U.S. citizen) and more than 350 injured (four U.S. citizens).

The government maintains a threat rating system, known as “Vigipirate.” There are two threat levels: “Vigipirate” and “Vigipirate/Alerte Attentat,” which indicates the higher level of threat for a terrorist attack or may be issued if an attack has occurred. The early January 2015 terrorist attacks raised the national threat level to Vigipirate Alerte/Attentat. Most parts of France remained at the “Vigipirate Alerte/Attentat” level throughout 2015. As a result of the terrorist attacks and other concerns, the government augmented police with military and paramilitary personnel and increased the visible security presence at airports, train and metro stations, schools, major tourist attractions, religious facilities, and government installations. Authorities continue to speak publicly about the heightened threat conditions for terrorist attacks in France and throughout Europe. Information is routinely shared between the U.S. and France in order to disrupt terrorist plotting, to identify and take action against potential operatives, and to strengthen defenses against potential threats.

The government enacted a state of emergency following the November attacks that was extended through late May 2016. It allows the government to prevent the circulation of individuals and to create zones of protection and security. There are reinforced security measures throughout the communes in the Ile de France region. These allow for house arrest of any person whose activities are deemed dangerous, the closure of theaters and meeting places, the surrender of weapons, and the possibility of administrative house searches. The government is considering legislation to extend some emergency measures.

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Although U.S. citizens have not been specifically targeted in terrorist attacks in France within the past few years, terrorist organizations continue to aspire to attack American interests worldwide. Travelers should remain vigilant. Immediately report unattended packages observed in public places or any other suspicious activities to law enforcement authorities. They are proactive and will respond immediately. Please see the latest Worldwide Travel Alert at the following link for more information:
<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings/worldwide-travel-alert.html>.

The Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) terrorist organization has supporters in France. However, there have been no attacks by the ETA since the group announced a “definitive cessation of armed activity” in 2014.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

French military involvement in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali, Somalia, and CAR; a ban against wearing of the veil in public buildings and state schools; and the publication of anti-Muslim cartoons in the French weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo have all fueled protests and incited terrorist acts in France in recent years.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

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Civil Unrest

Protests routinely occur throughout France, especially in Paris and major cities. These protests range from work conditions/wages to the environment. While protests are generally non-violent, some have resulted in property damage and minor injuries. For instance, in June 2015 taxi drivers protested against “Uber pop” service with minor skirmishes between taxi drivers and Uber pop drivers and resulted in major disruptions to traffic. Likewise, some sporting events (soccer matches) have degenerated into street violence. Large demonstrations generally result in traffic congestion and may cause serious transportation disruptions. It is always advisable to avoid demonstrations, as even peaceful demonstrations may turn violent.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Flooding is a concern. In October 2015, a flash flood in southeastern France resulted in the death of scores of individuals.

Personnel-Background Concerns

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France is generally considered a safe place to visit for travelers based on gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, or disability.

Police Response

Crime Victim Assistance

In an emergency, dialing 17 will connect the caller to the police. You can also dial the Europe-wide emergency response number 112 to reach an operator for all types of emergency services. Non-French speakers may experience a delay while an English speaker is located.

For non-emergency assistance, visitors should go to the nearest police station (commissariat) in order to file an official report.

Police/Security Agencies

Public safety and security are maintained by three forces: Municipal Police, National Police, and the military Gendarmerie. These services are professional, competent, and pro-active in

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fighting crime and violence and maintaining security.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care is comparable to that found in the U.S. In an emergency, dialing 15 will connect the caller to emergency medical services. You can also dial the Europe-wide emergency response number 112 to reach an operator for all types of emergency services (similar to the U.S. 911 system). Non-French speakers may experience a delay while an English speaker is located.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

U.S. Embassy Paris maintains a list of English-speaking doctors and hospitals with English-speaking staff at:
http://photos.state.gov/libraries/france/45994/acs/usc_paris-medical.pdf.

Recommended Insurance Posture

You cannot assume your insurance will go with you when you travel and you should ask your insurance company if your policy applies outside the U.S. and if it will cover emergencies (like a trip to a foreign hospital or an evacuation). Your regular U.S. health insurance may not cover doctors' and hospital visits in other countries. If your policy does not cover you when

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you travel, consider taking out another policy for the duration for your trip. Except for emergency services, individuals and insurance companies may be required to pay for service prior to receiving treatment in France. Individuals lacking the ability to pay for service may be refused routine care under local law.

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/france>.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Paris Country Council holds General Meetings biannually. The Regional Security Officer serves as Council co-Chair. OSAC France Country Council can be reached at OSACFrance@state.gov. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

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U.S. Embassy Paris

2, avenue Gabriel

75008 Paris

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel. +33 1 43 12 22 22

Regional Security Officer Tel. +33 1 43 12 21 19

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

Nearby Posts

Consulate Bordeaux: <http://bordeaux.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Lyon: <http://lyon.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Rennes: <http://rennes.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Toulouse: <http://toulouse.usconsulate.gov/>

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Consulate Marseille: <http://marseille.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Strasbourg: <http://strasbourg.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

For updated information, please consult the websites of the Consular Bureau of the Department of State (www.travel.state.gov) or of the U.S. Embassy. You are also encouraged to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive security messages and make it easier for the Embassy to locate you in an emergency.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Confidence schemes in Paris include asking pedestrians to sign a petition or take a survey and then soliciting money to support the cause. Other schemes involve presenting a gold ring or a friendship bracelet, and as soon as one takes the jewelry in hand, the con artists demand payment. These schemes can also be ruses to distract for pickpockets.

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors should use ATMs that are well-illuminated and at a reputable bank. If the ATM takes your card and does not give it back, go into the bank to report it immediately!

Travelers must be aware and attentive to their surroundings particularly in congested areas at train stations, airports, and subways.

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