



## Malaysia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Burglary; Financial Security; Fraud; Cyber; Maritime; Floods; Religious Terrorism; State Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Hurricanes; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping; Counterfeiting; Disease Outbreak; Employee Health Safety

East Asia & Pacific > Malaysia; East Asia & Pacific > Malaysia > Kuala Lumpur

2/29/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

#### Crime Threats

Petty crime is fairly common, while violent crime remains relatively uncommon. There continued to be a noticeable increase in crime, including several reported assaults and robberies, sometimes involving weapons, in Kuala Lumpur in 2015. Petty theft (purse snatching, pickpocketing, smash thefts, residential burglaries) is the most common crime committed against foreigners. Other types of non-violent criminal activity include credit card fraud, automobile theft, and cybercrime.

In most purse snatching incidents, two thieves on a motorcycle speed up from behind a victim, and the passenger on the back snatches a purse, handbag, or cellular phone. Thieves have

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conducted these snatch-and-grab thefts while leaning out of the passenger side of moving vehicles. Increasingly, robbers have physically confronted victims. These types of thefts can occur at all hours and often in front of large groups of witnesses, even in upscale neighborhoods frequented by expatriates. Women walking by themselves or with small children are the most common targets, but men walking/jogging alone have also been targeted. Victims have been injured and killed after falling and being dragged by thieves in cars or on motorcycles. More recently, thieves carrying knives or machetes have slashed and cut the victim in order to shock him/her into immediately releasing valuables.

Taxi drivers in downtown Kuala Lumpur have been involved in recent incidents of violent crime against foreign tourists and local residents.

Credit card fraud continues to be a problem. Unauthorized charges may not show up on a credit card account for several months and can be U.S.\$10,000 or more. Employees in retail stores swipe the credit card in a legitimate transaction under the counter, where account information is "skimmed" into a machine that either transmits the information or stores it for reproduction. In some cases, more sophisticated criminals have tapped into data lines of legitimate establishments to obtain account information. ATM cash withdrawals are generally safe as long as the ATMs are associated with reputable Malaysian or international banks.

Residential break-ins do occur and are more frequent in single family homes; these break-ins generally do not result in confrontations or injuries to the occupants. While uncommon, some burglars have entered when occupants were home, tied-up residents, and threatened them with weapons. In 2013, a U.S. citizen was killed in an apparent home burglary. Gated apartment complexes with 24-hour guards and electronic access control systems have a much lower burglary rate than other residential units, and apartments in general are burglarized less often than stand-alone residences. Major international hotels typically have

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adequate security and, as a result, experience a low incidence of crime.

Prostitution is illegal but common in some areas.

### Areas of Concern

While most streets are safe to walk, downtown areas around bars and discos tend to become populated with less desirable people after midnight. If possible, avoid these areas late at night. There have been reports of foreigners who frequent nightclubs being drugged and robbed and possibly being sexually assaulted.

Due to continuing security concerns, U.S. government employees under Chief of Mission authority are prohibited from travelling to the coastal regions and outlying islands of eastern Sabah without prior permission from the Regional Security Office (RSO) and the Ambassador. U.S. citizens are advised against travel to coastal resorts and outlying islands in eastern Sabah from Kudat to Tawau, including the resort islands of Selingan, Lankayan, Mabul, Pom Pom, Kapalai, Ligitan, Sipadan, and Matakang. The government has designated the entire eastern portion of Sabah (extending from the town of Kudat in the north to Tawau district near the border of Indonesia) as the Eastern Sabah Security Zone and established the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) to coordinate security forces' activity there. There is a significant police/army presence in the area, and road checkpoints have increased. Malaysian law enforcement officials have enacted land and water-based curfews in the coastal areas of eastern Sabah. Curfew schedules for the affected areas are subject to frequent change; upon arrival to the eastern Sabah region, travelers should check local media or ask local police for the most recent curfew information.

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The government has also enhanced efforts to patrol its maritime border with the Philippines, yet the area's size and remoteness continue to make the region vulnerable to security incidents.

Inland road travel to the Tabin Wildlife Reserve and Danum Valley should be arranged through reputable travel companies and should take place during daylight hours.

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

You may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the U.S. The information below concerning Malaysia is for general reference only and may vary based on location or circumstance.

Traffic moves on the left side of the road, and most vehicles are right-side drive. Motorcyclists attempt to circumvent traffic blockages by weaving in/out of traffic, temporarily using vacant on-coming traffic lanes, and running red lights. This poses a hazard for drivers and pedestrians. Drivers should use turn signals well in advance to alert motorcycles of their intent.

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By law, all passengers must use seatbelts and are prohibited from using their cell phones while driving unless on hands-free. Turning left at a red light is not legal unless otherwise marked. Laws against drinking and driving are strictly enforced and carry serious penalties. Police operate sobriety checkpoints in many entertainment districts frequented by expatriates. At these checkpoints, all drivers must submit to alcohol breath tests. Those who fail breath tests will be arrested.

Traffic is heavy during the morning and afternoon rush hours and slows down considerably when it rains. Monsoonal rains can quickly flood roads located in low-lying areas. Bottlenecks are common in major cities, as infrastructure development has not kept pace with the proliferation of motorized vehicles. Multi-lane highways often merge into narrow two-lane roads in the center of town and cause added congestion. Many streets are narrow and winding.

The targets of smash-and-grab robberies are typically motorists who are stuck in traffic or stopped at a light. The usual scenario is that a pair of thieves on a motorcycle identifies a car with a lone passenger and with visible valuables. The thieves use a hammer or crowbar to smash the window of the car, grab the bag, and speed off. If the motorist's windows are already open, the motorcyclists simply reach in and take bag(s) off the seat. You can prevent these crimes by keeping valuables out of sight or removing them from the car (including from the trunk) when parked. GPS monitors should not be left on the windshield or dashboard.

## Public Transportation Conditions

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There have been fatal and other serious accidents involving long-distance tour buses, particularly at night or in adverse weather conditions. If you plan to travel by bus, choose a reputable company and avoid overnight routes.

Taxis are not permitted to stop to pick up additional passengers. Some drivers, particularly in tourist areas, refuse to use the meter despite a law requiring that they do so. A useful app, "My Teksi," allows smart phone users to book on-line. Single women travelers are advised to book taxis in downtown shopping areas by phone, rather than hail taxis from the street, particularly after dark. Before entering the taxi, passengers are advised to confirm that there is a license (with a photo) on the dashboard or the seatback, and that the driver matches the photo. Any problems with taxis should be reported immediately to the Land Public Transportation Commission (Suruhanjaya Pengangkutan Awam Darat or "SPAD") via telephone at +6180-088-7723, email at [aduan@spad.gov.my](mailto:aduan@spad.gov.my), or online [www.spad.gov.my](http://www.spad.gov.my).

## Other Travel Conditions

Reports of late-night road rage incidents, especially after midnight, are rising. If you are a driver involved in an accident, avoid confrontational behavior. If you are threatened, leave the scene and file a report with the local police within 24 hours.

## Terrorism Threat

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Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

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

The Department of State remains concerned about the possibility of terrorist attacks against American citizens in Southeast Asia. Extremist groups in the region have demonstrated the capability to carry out attacks in locations where Westerners congregate, and these groups do not distinguish between civilian and official targets.

Since April 2014, authorities have arrested more than 150 supporters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), including many individuals who planned to fight in Syria and Iraq. The U.S. government has designated Southeast Asian extremist groups Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. JI is linked to al-Qai'da and other regional terrorist groups and has cells operating throughout the region.

An incursion into the state of Sabah in February and March 2013 by several hundred gunmen asserting a territorial claim from the southern Philippines was characterized by the Malaysian government as terrorism, and dozens of suspects are on trial on charges of waging war and other national security offenses.

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

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Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

### Civil Unrest

Over the last five years, Malaysia has experienced demonstrations over political divisions, racial/religious tensions, and international developments (U.S. policies in the Middle East). Since 1969, actual violence associated with political demonstrations has been generally uncommon.

Public demonstrations do occur in Kuala Lumpur and are sometimes arranged at short-notice via social media. There is usually a police presence, although "illegal" protests occur occasionally.

While most protests are peaceful, the Embassy advises U.S. citizens to exercise caution and to be aware of their surroundings, particularly around large crowds or gatherings. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence with little/no warning. You should avoid areas that may be targeted for demonstrations and exercise caution if within the vicinity of any demonstrations or large gatherings. Additionally, local law prohibits non-Malaysians from participating in public protests. Travelers should monitor local media to stay up to date on the latest information about demonstrations and areas to avoid.

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## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

The tropical monsoon season is November-mid-February. During this period, heavy rains and thunderstorms occur almost daily. Urban areas with poor drainage and other low-lying areas can suffer flooding. In less-developed rural areas, this flooding can cause landslides.

Malaysia's location makes it less susceptible to earthquakes and tsunamis than other countries in Southeast Asia.

### Drug-related Crimes

Malaysian legislation provides for the death penalty for convicted drug traffickers. Individuals in possession of 15 grams (one-half ounce) of heroin or 200 grams (seven ounces) of marijuana are presumed by law to be trafficking in drugs.

### Kidnapping Threats

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U.S. citizens should consider the risks associated with travel to coastal eastern Sabah (eastern Malaysia) because of the threat of kidnappings-for-ransom and violence from both terrorist and criminal groups. The requirement for U.S. government employees to receive permission before traveling to these areas indicates a strong concern over safety, given recent kidnappings of foreign tourists in the region.

- In November 2015, ASG beheaded a Malaysian kidnap victim in the southern Philippines after a large ransom demand was not paid.
- In September 2015, ASG was suspected of kidnapping two Canadians, a Norwegian, and a Philippine national from a marina in southern Mindanao.
- In May 2015, ASG gunmen abducted two Malaysians from a popular restaurant located along the coast in Sandakan.
- In July 2014, at a diving resort on Mabul Island, armed men killed a Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) officer and kidnapped another officer. Also in June 2014, a Philippine and a Malaysian national were kidnapped from a fish farm in Kunak, 37 miles from Lahad Datu.
- In April 2014, a foreign tourist and a hotel employee were kidnapped by armed men from a water village-style resort a short distance off the coast near Semporna.
- In November 2013, a foreign tourist was killed and his spouse was abducted from a resort on Pom Pom Island.
- In August 2013, Malaysian officials reported an aborted attempt by an armed Filipino group to kidnap foreign tourists from the resort island of Mabul.

In addition to incursions on coastal or island resort islands themselves, criminal or terrorist groups may attempt to intercept boats ferrying tourists from the mainland to resort islands. In February 2013, armed intruders from the Sulu archipelago, who entered the area by sea from

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the southern Philippines, were involved in a violent confrontation with Malaysian security forces in Lahad Datu district and in the Seminul water village, located in Semporna.

## Police Response

The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) is a national police force that is well trained and equipped. The RMP provides good law enforcement support to the U.S. Embassy and has responded favorably to the needs of the U.S. private sector and to U.S. citizens in general. However, the RMP is sometimes limited in its effectiveness in investigations.

In tourist areas (Bukit Bintang, Petaling Street (Chinatown), Sri Hartamas, Bangsar in Kuala Lumpur and the main square in Malacca), the police have established small "Tourist Police" stations manned by personnel familiar with helping visitors.

Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the U.S. Persons violating the law, even unknowingly, may be fined, expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Malaysia actively enforces immigration regulations and may levy high fines or incarcerate foreigners with prolonged overstays. The court system is typically very slow, and there are often lengthy delays in trials.

Travelers should not buy counterfeit or pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are these products illegal in the U.S. and Malaysia, you are encouraging criminal activity if you buy them.

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## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

The RMP does not routinely inform the U.S. Embassy of the arrest of private U.S. citizens. If a U.S. citizen encounters an incidence of police detention or harassment, the Consular Affairs, American Citizen Services Section at the U.S. Embassy should be notified immediately.

## Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime

Victims of crimes should call the national emergency telephone number 999. In tourist areas, the "Tourist Police" stations can assist in case of an emergency. A police report is necessary for the Embassy to help victims follow-up on incidents of crime.

## Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities and services are adequate in the larger cities, where you can find Western-trained doctors. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services although major credit cards are accepted at some hospitals in larger cities. Psychological and psychiatric medical and counseling services are limited.

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Kuala Lumpur has modern medical facilities that are generally comparable in terms of quality of care to those in the U.S. In an emergency, it is recommended the victim be transported immediately to a hospital.

Malaysian ambulance attendants are required to obtain advance paramedic training or Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS) training; however, emergency response times may be slow, and the quality of care varies widely. Callers to Malaysia's "999" emergency number are connected to the Red Crescent (a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), and patients are directed to whichever hospital the dispatcher chooses.

Long-term travelers with known health problems are advised to investigate private ambulance services in the area and provide family and close contacts with the direct telephone number(s) of the services they prefer.

If ambulance transport is required, two recommended services are:

- St. John Ambulance: 03-9285-5294
- Red Crescent Ambulance: 03-4257-8726

Contact Information for Suggested Local Hospitals and Clinics

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In addition to those listed below, the U.S. Embassy can provide a list of English-speaking doctors and hospitals upon request.

Gleneagles Intan Medical Center (preferred for after-hours emergencies)

Address: 282 Jalan Ampang

Tel: 03-4141-3000

Prince Court Medical Center

Address: Corner of Jalan Tun Razak and Jalan Kia Peng

Tel: 03-2160-0000

#### Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the U.S. can cost thousands of dollars.

#### CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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Dengue fever is endemic. The Ministry of Health reported 114,419 cases in 2015 alone, resulting in 307 reported deaths. While an annual spike after the rainy season is common, it is important to be aware of the possibility of dengue and the ways it can be prevented.

As of early February 2016, Malaysia had not identified any persons infected with the Zika virus during the global outbreak, although the virus has been found in Malaysia in the past. U.S. citizens are encouraged to be vigilant, destroy mosquito breeding areas, and use mosquito repellent.

Air quality is acceptable most of the time. However, when Malaysia and nearby countries burn vegetation, especially from March-June and during September and October, air quality can become unhealthy, particularly for those with existing health conditions. Children, older adults, and people with risk factors for respiratory illness are advised to avoid outdoor activities and wear N95 respirators during periods of increased air pollution.

For additional health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/malaysia.htm>.

## **OSAC Country Council Information**

The Kuala Lumpur Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) Country Council consists of more than 100 members. Country Council meetings are organized by the Regional Security Office (RSO) and are held quarterly. The Country Council chapter has three Steering

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Committee Members, seven Standing Committee Members, and over 80 full time members.

The Kuala Lumpur Country Council point of contact within the Regional Security Office is Bernard J. Green, Regional Security Officer, who can be reached at +60-3-2168-5111 or by at [KLRSO@state.gov](mailto:KLRSO@state.gov). 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

#### Embassy of the United States

376 Jalan Tun Razak

50400 Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia

American Citizens Services hours are: Monday-Friday, 9:00 am-11:00 am.

Calls are taken from 8:00 am-12:00 pm and between 2:00 pm-4:00 pm each business day except Wednesdays.

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## Embassy Contact Numbers

Main Line: +60-3-2168-5000

American Citizen Services: +60-3-2168-4997, email: [klacs@state.gov](mailto:klacs@state.gov)

Marine Post One (24-hours): +60-3-2168-4959

Regional Security Office: +60-3-2168-5111, email: [KLRSO@state.gov](mailto:KLRSO@state.gov)

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

## Embassy Guidance

Routine public inquiries from American citizens about security and safety should be directed to the American Citizens Services section of the U.S. Embassy during normal business hours. For emergencies outside of normal business hours, call the U.S. Embassy main line and listen to the recorded instructions.

Travelers should consult the Department's Country Specific Information Sheet for updated information concerning travel to Malaysia, particularly to the coastal areas of eastern Sabah and southern Thailand. Travelers should also be aware of the Department's Worldwide

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Caution, which emphasizes to U.S. citizens abroad. The Country Specific Information Sheet and Public Announcements are available at: <http://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en.html>.

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

### Scams

U.S. citizens and businesses continue to be the victims of scams originating in Malaysia. Scammers and confidence artists contact U.S. citizens through the telephone and Internet, including through online dating sites. Scammers often pose as U.S. citizens who have unexpectedly experienced a medical, legal, or financial “emergency” in Malaysia and who ask the U.S. citizen in the U.S. to send money quickly. Co-conspirators pose as Malaysian “lawyers” or medical professionals to verify the story and the supposed urgent need for cash. There have also been cases of U.S. businesses being defrauded by investment scams.

The Embassy strongly encourages U.S. citizens to be very cautious about sending money to people they have not met in person and who claim to be U.S. citizens in trouble in Malaysia. If you become the victim of a scam and wish to make a formal complaint, please report it to the nearest Malaysian Embassy or Consulate in the U.S. that will accept it (in person or via e-mail) and transmit a report to the Malaysian police for follow-up. You can also report the crime to the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center ([www.IC3.gov](http://www.IC3.gov)). Resources on how to identify fraud, protect yourself, and report on business and financial fraud can be found in the Department of State’s publication, International Financial Scams. Additional resources can be found at [StopFraud.gov](http://StopFraud.gov) (a service of the Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force) and from the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

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## Situational Awareness Best Practices

To avoid becoming the victim of a purse snatching, be alert and aware of your surroundings. Avoid extended conversations on mobile devices while walking; it distracts one's attention from a potentially threatening situation. Pedestrians should walk facing traffic and keep a close eye on all vehicular traffic, particularly motorcycles. If possible, try to walk on the part of the sidewalk that is away from the curb. Avoid poorly illuminated streets, shortcuts, and narrow alleys but be aware that attacks may occur anywhere. Purses or shoulder bags should be closed and tucked under the arm. Fasten any closures on the bag. Do not wrap the strap around your arm or shoulder. People have been injured or killed by being pulled to the ground by their purse straps as the thieves speed off. If your purse or bag is snatched, report the incident as soon as possible to the police.

You should closely safeguard your credit card numbers at all times and use them only at reputable establishments. Travelers are advised to watch retailers closely and any "under the table" transactions should be reported to the local police. If you must use a credit card, you should check your account information frequently for fraudulent charges. ATM cards associated with reputable international and Malaysian banks are generally more secure.

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