



The Bahamas 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Murder; Burglary; Rape/Sexual Violence; Financial Security; Fraud; Counterfeiting; Floods; Maritime; Riots/Civil Unrest; Hurricanes; Drug Trafficking; Disease Outbreak

Western Hemisphere > Bahamas; Western Hemisphere > Bahamas > Nassau

3/1/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The Bahamas is a very prominent tourist destination with cruise ship ports of call for Nassau and Freeport and an assortment of luxury resorts including the world renowned Atlantis resort. Over six million U.S. citizens visit each year. The Bahamas is an archipelagic nation of more than 700 islands and cays that cover a geographical region approximately equivalent in scale to the state of California. At its closest point, The Bahamas is only 50 miles from the U.S. As a result, the country is considered the “third border” of the U.S. Approximately 80 percent of the tourists visiting The Bahamas are U.S. citizens. According to a 2010 census, The Bahamas has a population of 353,000, but current estimates indicate these figures have increased by 15 percent to approximately 406,000. Some 70 percent of the population (approximately 285,000) resides on the island of New Providence – where the capital, Nassau, is situated. Another 15 percent live on Grand Bahama, which has the country’s second largest city, Freeport. The rest of the population is dispersed over two dozen outer islands (commonly referred to as the “Family Islands”).

Post Crime Rating: Critical

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Crime Threats

The government has not made public comprehensive updated national crime statistics since July 2013. However, the murder rate increased by 22 percent in 2015. Police recorded 149 murders in 2015, up from 122 in 2014. For the fifth consecutive year, the murder count surpassed 100 (in 2010, there were 94 murders).

2015 was the most deadly year in Bahamian history. The Bahamas sustained remarkably high levels of violent armed crimes in 2015. The Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF) continued administering policing methods, which included indiscriminate armed-checkpoints and a robust crime reduction plan in tourist areas. The preponderance of violent crimes reported were perpetrated against local Bahamians, and these occurred in areas of saturated criminality and not typically frequented by tourists. Nevertheless, despite strenuous anti-crime incentives sanctioned by the government of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas during the past year, New Providence witnessed a substantial increase of violent armed crimes in locations that are also heavily frequented by U.S. citizen tourists. In many instances, these incidents resulted in fatalities. Armed robberies, property theft, purse snatchings, general theft of personal property, and sexual assaults remain the most common crimes perpetrated against tourists.

In 2015, several incidents were reported that either involved tourists or occurred in well-known tourist locations. Specifically, crimes were reported near popular tourist areas close to the cruise ship port (Prince George Wharf) and the Cable Beach resort areas. While there is no indication that U.S. citizens have been targeted directly, criminals have become more brazen and creative in their methods. For example, several armed robberies of U.S. citizens have occurred in daylight hours in heavily frequented tourist areas. Armed assailants have placed

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random items in the street as impromptu roadblocks so unassuming drivers would stop and could be robbed. In separate instances, four Embassy employees were victims of a robbery.

Many criminals in The Bahamas carry firearms, machetes, or knives. Unless provoked, criminals engaged in property crimes do not generally engage in gratuitous violence. However, during 2015, there was an increase of reported armed robberies using a knife and gun where the assailant assaulted the victim after the victim resisted. Many of these armed robberies were snatch-and-grabs involving purses, jewelry, and gold necklaces and also home invasions.

Foreigners residents have periodically been victimized by residential burglary. Crimes ranging from theft of personal watercraft, lawn furniture, vehicles to home invasions occur, even within gated communities. Residential security also remains a pronounced concern, with the RBPF reporting a large number of house burglaries and break-ins. Home invasions in Nassau have become more numerous and violent. A number of armed home invasions, which occurred in both New Providence and Grand Bahama, were conducted within direct proximity of Embassy residential housing, to include an Embassy residence in Nassau. Although forced entry of residences is a concern, the combination of a residential alarm, anti-burglar grill-work, neighborhood watches and roving security patrols have proven an effective deterrent. Home invasions, theft, and robbery are not confined to any specific part of the island. The upsurge in criminal activity has also led to incidents that could place innocent bystanders at risk.

The U.S. Embassy has received an increase of reports of assaults, including sexual assaults, at residences, hotel rooms, casinos, outside hotels, and on cruise ships. In some sexual assault incidents, the victim had reportedly been drugged. The Embassy issued five separate Security Messages for U.S. Citizens in 2015 (Spike in Crime, Recent Armed Robberies, Credit Card/ATM Fraud, Jet ski Sexual Assaults, and Crime during the Holiday Season). Police recently warned women to be extra vigilant after a recent spike in the number of reported

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sexual assaults in Nassau. The water sports rental industry is only loosely regulated; and in 2015, there were reported sexual assaults of U.S. citizens, including minors, by jet-ski operators. The majority of these sexual assaults were reported to have occurred on relatively “safe” beaches within the confines of Paradise Island and heavily frequented by tourists and Embassy personnel. As a result of this trend, on January 6, 2016, Embassy Nassau put the use of jet-skis operated by local nationals in New Providence off-limits to all Chief of Mission personnel/agencies domiciled in The Bahamas.

The Bahamas has experienced a wave of armed robberies at gas stations, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, banks, outside of places of worship and residences. Perpetrators of these types of crimes typically conduct pre-attack surveillance. There were several reports of victims being followed home after closing the business in an attempt to steal the nightly deposit. Several victims were severely injured.

Opportunistic crimes (petty thefts, vehicle theft) and the fraudulent use of bank and credit card account numbers occur. There have been numerous reports of credit and debit card numbers being compromised and unauthorized charges being placed on the card holder’s account from other countries to include the U.S. and Europe. During the past year, there were significant reports of credit card and bank fraud cases wherein approximately 75 percent of the Embassy community reported being a victim of credit card fraud.

Criminal activity in the outlying Family Islands does occur but to a lesser degree than on New Providence Island. The Embassy has received reports of burglaries and thefts, especially thefts of boats and other watercraft. Grand Bahama is somewhat of an exception, in that criminality has increased on that island, notably crimes involving the use of machetes.

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Counterfeit and reproduced goods are accessible. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under Bahamian law. Bringing such products into the U.S. may result in forfeitures and/or fines.

Some systematized crime activity is believed to occur in The Bahamas, primarily related to the illegal importation and smuggling of illicit drugs, weapons, or human trafficking. The Bahamas, due to its numerous uninhabited islands and cays, has been favored by smugglers. Most visitors would not have any interaction with organized crime elements; however, persons who operate their own water craft or aircraft should be alert to the possibility of encountering vessels operated by armed smugglers engaged in illicit activities on the open seas or air space in or near The Bahamas.

Other Areas of Concern

There are no specific travel concerns in The Bahamas or restricted travel zones or areas.

Areas of Nassau referred to as "Over the Hill" by locals should be avoided by tourists after sunset unless you are intimately familiar with these areas. Much of the violent crime on New Providence Island happens in non-tourist areas referred to locally as "Over the Hill." These areas are generally south of the downtown Nassau area south of Shirley Street. These areas are not clearly defined but encompass the lower income areas on New Providence. Visitors should avoid these areas, especially at night.

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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic moves on the left side of the road. Traffic circles are a common feature, and traffic in the circles has the right-of-way. Traffic congestion in Nassau is prevalent, and drivers occasionally display antagonistic tendencies and sometimes drive recklessly, passing on the right into oncoming traffic. Many motorists disobey traffic control devices to include stop signs, speed limits, and traffic signals.

Police enforcement of traffic laws has increased during the past year but is still considered minimal, and visitors driving on the roadways should exercise extreme caution. While it is against the law, drinking and driving is common. The legal ban is infrequently enforced, resulting in numerous traffic accidents and fatalities including those involving tourists and scooters.

Bahamian law requires individuals who intend to stay in country longer than three months obtain a Bahamian drivers license. Any individuals over the age of 18, who are driving, must obtain a drivers license. Third-party liability insurance is also required for individuals residing in The Bahamas.

Traffic accidents pose a safety hazard in some parts of The Bahamas, primarily due to intolerant drivers speeding and driving recklessly on two-way, two-lane roads not designed for high-speed travel and, in some cases, in need of maintenance. Some major streets do not

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have adequate shoulders or even passable sidewalks, compelling pedestrians to walk in the right-of-way. Motorcyclists frequently swerve through slow traffic and drive between lanes of moving vehicles. It is not uncommon to see poorly maintained or excessively loaded vehicles on roadways. Passengers regularly ride in the bed of trucks without any safety restraints. Roads on the outer Family Islands can be narrow, winding, and in poor condition.

If involved in a traffic accident, the police require that the vehicles not be moved until a police officer arrives to investigate the accident. The police can sometimes be slow to respond to vehicle accidents. The police will issue a "Notice of Prosecution" form letter to each driver involved in the accident with an initial court hearing to be held within a week of the accident to determine who is at fault.

Flooding frequently occurs on roads in many areas, including Nassau and Freeport, as a result of storms and hurricanes. This flooding sometimes makes roadways impassable. Drivers should be alert for unmarked or poorly marked construction zones.

Visitors should exercise appropriate caution when renting vehicles to include motorcycles and mopeds. Travel by moped or bicycle can be quite hazardous, especially in the heavy traffic conditions in Nassau. Those who choose to ride a motorcycle, moped, or bicycle should follow Bahamian helmet laws and drive very defensively. Wearing a helmet is highly recommended to avoid serious injury. The Embassy continues to see a significant number of moped accidents each year resulting in serious injury as a result of driver inexperience or inattention by the moped operator and other motorists.

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Pedestrians need to remember that vehicular traffic comes from the opposite to what one would expect in the U.S.; tourists have been struck by cars after failing to check properly for oncoming traffic.

Roadside assistance is widely available through private towing services.

At night, park in lighted areas observable by shops, passersby, or attendants when possible. Avoid poorly illuminated areas where persons could hide and ambush. Use the buddy system and walk in groups. Keep your car doors locked and your windows rolled up, as you drive. Keep valuables out of site in your vehicles when parked. Utilize a car alarm or steering wheel locking device. In crawling traffic or in a stopped line of cars, leave at least a half a car length between your vehicle and the car in front of you. If you believe you are being followed, drive immediately to a safe location such as a police station, gas station, or a hotel and call the police. Keep your cell phone charged and with you at all times and use a GPS system if you are traveling in unfamiliar areas.

Public Transportation Conditions

Visitors should not accept rides from strangers or from unlicensed taxi drivers.

Other Travel Conditions

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Rental of personal watercraft (jet skis) is very popular at many resorts and beaches. Visitors should use extreme caution and not operate such watercraft unless they are experienced in using them. Use of life jackets is highly recommended. The Embassy has seen numerous injuries as a result of not following proper safety instructions by the jet-ski operators.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is a reasonable threat of transnational terrorism due to the porous borders in The Bahamas. Terrorist groups native to the Western Hemisphere do not typically operate in the northeastern Caribbean.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The Bahamas is a parliamentary democracy and a member of the British Commonwealth. The governor general holds a largely ceremonial role and represents Queen Elizabeth II, who is the head of state. The Bahamas is a stable democracy that shares democratic principles, personal freedoms, and rule of law with the U.S. The Bahamas has been an independent

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country since 1973. There is little threat facing Americans from domestic (Bahamian) terrorism, war, or civil unrest.

Civil Unrest

Public protests and demonstrations are infrequent and do not tend to be violent in nature. However, limited law enforcement resources make rapid response to public disorder difficult, particularly on islands other than New Providence. Visitors should protect themselves by avoiding demonstrations. Strikes are generally limited to “industrial actions” or work-to-rule actions and slowdowns. The airports have also seen instances of “Go Slow” non-protest actions resulting in considerable delays by incoming and outgoing flights.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Hurricanes and tropical storms frequent The Bahamas from June-November. Travelers and U.S. businesses are recommended to consider devoting resources and time to necessary emergency planning for the possibility of inclement weather, particularly during hurricane season. Travelers should pay close attention to the weather forecast during the hurricane seasons.

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Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Although The Bahamas prides itself on keeping the country clean, there is minimal enforcement of environmental standards, and recycling is not a common practice.

Personnel-Background Concerns

The Embassy has not received reports of persecution or hate crimes motivated by race, religion, or citizenship in 2015. In previous years, there have been reports of harassment and killings of persons based on sexual orientation.

Drug-related Crimes

The Bahamas has a long history of being a route for smugglers of narcotics, illegal immigrants and weapons. Drugs, including marijuana, are illegal. U.S. businesses should be attentive to not conduct business with questionable persons or enterprises. There have been numerous reports of visitors being arrested for possession and use of drugs in The Bahamas. Individuals who are arrested may be expected to serve prison time and/or pay a substantial fine.

Kidnapping Threat

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There have been very few reports of kidnappings in The Bahamas. The U.S. Embassy has received several reports of home invasion robberies at both residences and hotels in Nassau.

Police Response

In general, the RBPF is receptive to reports of crime and takes the threat of crime against tourists seriously. However, the police response is sometimes reduced by a lack of resources or by the physical constraints imposed by geography, infrastructure, and traffic.

Recent changes in the police structure have promised a more proactive approach to deter crime. Police have limited emergency vehicles, and streets and houses are generally unmarked, inhibiting responders from locating affected residences. To ensure quick response to a residence, victims may have to go to the local police station and provide transportation to the site.

It is lawful for the Royal Bahamian Police Force to conduct sting operations using entrapment techniques.

Unregistered firearms and ammunition are illegal. Check local laws before bringing any firearms into The Bahamas by boat or by plane. Possession of unregistered firearms can lead

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to arrest and imprisonment.

How To Handle Incidents Of Police Detention Or Harassment

If detained by the police, one should immediately cooperate, identify yourself as an American citizen and request to make contact with the U.S. Embassy immediately.

Police harassment of Americans is rare.

Attempting to bribe an officer of the Royal Bahamas Police Force is a serious offense and should be strictly avoided. Visitors should not attempt to "tip" police officers for their services.

Crime Victim Assistance

Visitors are recommended to report crime to the RBPF as rapidly as possible. Applicable reports may expand the prospect of detecting and apprehending suspected perpetrators. The police generally respond rapidly to hotels and establishments frequented by foreigners who are victims of crime. 911 or 919 are the police/medical emergency numbers. There have been complaints that police are slow to respond to emergency calls in the residential areas and the 911 and 919 numbers often go unanswered.

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Police/Security Agencies

The Royal Bahamas Police Force is the primary agency that handles all law enforcement matters for The Bahamas (<http://www.royalbahamaspolice.org/index.php>). The police can be contacted in an emergency by calling 911 or 919. Telephone: 242-322-4444.

Royal Bahamian Police Force officers are uniformed in bright white dress coats and blue trousers. Officers also wear a more subdued navy blue uniform with a black beret. Officers are regularly seen walking foot patrols or on bicycles in areas frequented by tourists. In some cases they will be armed with automatic weapons.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities in The Bahamas are generally limited and not equipped to handle many emergencies, especially those requiring surgery. Generally, adequate medical care is available on New Providence and Grand Bahama islands. Medical care is more limited elsewhere. Serious health problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the U.S. can cost thousands of dollars. Bahamian physicians and hospitals do not usually accept U.S. medical insurance policies and typically expect immediate cash or credit card payment/deposits for professional services. Some private clinics offer basic primary care.

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There is a chronic shortage of blood at Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau (the country's largest public hospital) where most emergency surgery is performed. Travelers with rare blood types should know the names and locations of possible blood donors should the need arise.

The Lyford Cay Hospital has a hyperbaric chamber for treatment of decompression illness associate with deep sea diving.

General emergency numbers: 911 or 919 for police/fire/ambulance.

Contact Information for Local Hospitals And Clinics

New Providence Island

Doctor's Hospital (Private hospital)

Located on Shirley Street in downtown Nassau

Ambulance Service: (242) 302-4747

Emergency Room: (242) 302-4658

General: (242) 322-8411 or 322-8418 or 302-4600

Princess Margaret (Public hospital)

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Located on Shirley Street in downtown Nassau

Ambulance Service: 919 or (242) 323-2586 or 323-2597

Emergency Room: (242) 326-7014

General: (242) 322-2861

Medical Walk-In Clinic – Colin’s Avenue – Near Downtown Nassau

General: (242) 328-0783 or 328-2744

Medical Walk-In Clinic – Baha Mar Boulevard – Next to Scotia Bank Across from Baha Mar

General: (242) 327-5483

Grand Bahama Island

Sunrise Medical Center (Private hospital) (242) 373-3333

Rand Memorial Hospital (Public hospital): (242) 352-6735 or (242) 352-2689

Lucayan Medical Center (Clinic West Freeport): (242) 352-7288

Lucayan Medical Center (Clinic East Freeport): (242) 373-7400

Available Air Ambulance Services

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Ambulance service is available but may not be able to respond quickly in the event of a major emergency or disaster. Air ambulance companies generally require payment or an insurer's guarantee of payment up front. New Providence has air ambulance services available; however, this may require advance payment.

Air Ambulance: (242) 323-2186 (between 5pm-8am), (242) 380-6666 (between 8am-5pm)

SOS (Emergency Air Flight Services) servicing The Bahamas. Alarm Center, Philadelphia, open 24 hours for International SOS Assistance, Inc. 1 (215) 942-8226 or 1 (800) 523-5686 or 1 (215) 245-4707

Recommended Insurance Posture

The Department of State strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to determine whether their policy applies overseas and whether they cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. For serious cases, treatment in even the best hospitals would probably require medical evacuation after stabilization.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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HIV/AIDS is a significant health concern.

Dengue virus is present in all tropical and many subtropical areas worldwide. Travelers should take precautions to prevent contact with mosquitoes. The mosquitoes that carry dengue bite most often in the morning and evening and during hot, wet times of the year. However, they can bite and spread infection all year long and at any time of day.

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/the-bahamas?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

In February 2014, the Regional Security Office launched an OSAC Country Council in The Bahamas. To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email OSACWHA@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

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The Embassy is located at 42 Queen Street, Nassau, The Bahamas. It is located next to the McDonald's downtown and across the street from the British Colonial Hilton.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Embassy Operator (242) 322-1181

Regional Security Officer (242) 322-1181 ext 4267

American Citizen Services (242) 322-1181 ext 4519

Political/Economic Section (242) 322-1181 ext 4226

Marine Post One (242) 322-1181 ext 4311

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

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens are encouraged to sign up for the Smart Traveler Program (STEP). STEP is a free service provided by the U.S. government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State and the U.S. Embassy can assist you in an emergency. Follow

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this link to sign up: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Americans can generally avoid becoming victims of crime by following common sense precautions they might use in any large U.S. city and by not engaging in risky personal behavior.

Visitors should exercise caution and use good judgment. Always be vigilant; look for possible threats or what looks out of the norm in your surroundings. Engaging in high-risk behavior (excessive consumption of alcohol, ostentatious displays of jewelry/cash, walking alone in unsafe areas after dark) can be dangerous, as it greatly increases the vulnerability of an individual to accidents or opportunistic crime. Do not display or wear expensive jewelry that may make you a target for criminals. Avoid wearing gold necklaces, bracelets, expensive watches, or other flashy jewelry. One should utilize universal security tips and good common sense. Do not leave valuables on the beach or pool-side while swimming. If you are in an area that makes you feel uncomfortable or you do not see other tourists, you are probably in the wrong area of town. Visitors should protect themselves as they would in any large or major metropolitan city. Visitors are strongly encouraged to travel in groups and use taxi cabs at night.

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Make a copy of your driver's license and or passport photo page to carry with you while your valuables are secured at home, hotel room, or cruise ship. Scan a copy of your passport or photo ID and have it available via email.

Keep your wallet or purse close to your body; never leave your purse or wallet unattended in a business or restaurant. Avoid carrying large amounts of cash; use an ATM/credit cards when possible and check your credit card statements regularly for potential fraud or unauthorized charges. Persons using credit/debit cards should regularly check accounts for suspicious activity. Avoid using ATMs in isolated areas and consider using ATMs in shopping centers that have security coverage. Use the buddy system when using ATMs.

Should you be confronted by a group or person demanding money or valuables, you should comply with their demands and make the encounter as brief as possible. If confronted by armed criminals, remember your vehicle or valuables are not worth your life or anyone else's life. If confronted, try to remain calm, clearly display your hands and do not make any sudden moves that could be interpreted as resistance.

Home invasions, which are generally not random events, can be deterred by use of residential alarm systems, window grillework, guards, substantial locks, lighting, and a good emergency plan. Unplug appliances (televisions, stereos, personal computers). Consider purchasing timers to turn on outside/inside lights automatically at various times throughout the night especially if you are off island. Check outside lighting and replace light bulbs if necessary and use exterior lighting at night. Arrange to have your lawn mowed periodically if you will be gone for an extended period. Arrange to have a friend/colleague check on your home and pick up newspapers or other deliveries daily.

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Do not answer your door at your residence unless you know who it is. Use a door viewer or window to identify who is at the door before opening. Secure your home/hotel room. Secure valuables at home/hotel in a locked safe that is not easily removed. Close and lock all windows and doors. Do not forget to lock garage or gate doors. Have an escape plan for you and your family and know how to get out of the house/hotel room. Pay close attention to any unusual activity that may have occurred since leaving home and getting in/out of vehicles. Things like an open gate, unfamiliar vehicles parked nearby, house doors forced open, or shattered windows can be a sign of criminal interest or activity.

Do not leave belongings unsecured outside your residence or hotel. Vehicles, bicycles, generators, and other property will attract criminals. If the items cannot be placed inside, then visibly secure them with a chain and lock as a deterrent.

Avoid walking alone in dark, isolated areas, including parking lots. Walk in pairs or a group at night and use the buddy system.

Most crimes occur at night so think prudently about night-time travel. Inform someone of your travel plans and when to expect you.

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