



## Haiti 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Rape/Sexual Violence; Murder; Burglary; Floods; Riots/Civil Unrest; Elections; Hurricanes; Earthquakes; Kidnapping

Western Hemisphere > Haiti; Western Hemisphere > Haiti > Port-au-Prince

3/1/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Haiti is unique in the Caribbean for its relative lack of tourism, scarcity of foreign investment, and inferior infrastructure.

### Crime Threats

Crime statistics are woefully underreported by the Haitian National Police (HNP), and reports indicating that Haiti is statistically safer than other countries in the Caribbean are inaccurate.

Traditional tourist-oriented crimes (pickpocketing, purse snatching) are less frequently

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reported than elsewhere in the region.

The most frequently reported crimes against U.S. citizens in Port-au-Prince are aggravated assaults and robberies. A typical mugging in Port-au-Prince involves a group of young males who surround and overwhelm their victim in a public area. Reports of robberies of Haitian-Americans visiting Haiti appear to increase around the popular holiday seasons, but that appears to correlate with an overall increase in visitor traffic. Armed robberies against motorists and pedestrians remain a serious concern. In recent years, a number of people have been robbed as soon as they departed Port-au-Prince's Toussaint L'Ouverture airport. Banks continue to be a frequent location for armed robberies. Motorcycle-mounted assailants frequently follow their victims a short distance from the bank in order to stop and rob them in a less public area. Shootings during these incidents are common.

Vehicle break-ins and thefts from vehicles, occupied or empty, occur frequently. Unattended vehicles with visible valuables are subject to break-ins. There have also been reports of pedestrians opening unlocked doors of idling vehicles and snatching valuables.

Crimes against persons, including gender-based violence, remain a serious problem.

Violent crime appears to remain predominantly gang-related or robbery-related. Gang-related violent crime continues to be centralized in specific areas of Port-au-Prince, in particular Cité Soleil, but these areas are not traditional tourist or business areas. Organized crime appears as small, organized, criminal gang activity, such as that of kidnapping gangs.

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Homicides continue to be a major concern in Haiti. In 2015, there were 1,071 reported homicides, with 70 percent occurring in Port-au-Prince.

Residential theft (burglaries, home invasions) trends over the past few years have suggested a decline in traditional criminal burglary and a rise in home invasions. There was a continuation of home invasions in the more affluent areas of upper Port-au-Prince throughout 2014 and 2015. The bulk of these crimes occur in middle-class neighborhoods (Delmas 75, Delmas 83, Laboul, Pelerin) outside the traditional expatriate residential areas. Assailants have little fear of resistance from residents and do not appear to consider whether a residence is occupied when committing crimes. Certain elements are not reluctant to use violence to either get across a point or when confronted; however, the vast majority will brandish a firearm/weapon, fire it randomly, tie up their victim(s), and abscond with the foreign currency or vehicle. Neither type of criminal, violent or passive, seems overly concerned with police response, as they know none will be dispatched quickly.

#### Areas of Concern

Cite Soleil remains an area of particular difficulty for UN and HNP forces to rein in. Other areas of concern include Belair, Carrefour, Fort National, Simon Pele, Martissant, and Grand Ravine.

Embassy policy strictly prohibits U.S. government employees from driving at night outside of major metro areas.

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## Transportation-Safety Situation

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions, particularly in Port-au-Prince, have continued to improve in 2015. There have also been significant improvements to the road network in parts of the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. However, driving conditions can still be chaotic. Many roads outside of the main cities are either topped with gravel or are poorly maintained dirt roads.

Driving requires extreme caution, particularly in the evening. Road safety remains a significant threat to the average visitor. Travel at night outside of main cities is ill-advised due to poor lighting and unpredictable road conditions that may result in an increased risk of not seeing pedestrians, broken-down vehicles, and oncoming traffic. Vehicles, including large buses and trucks, are known to travel at high rates of speed, especially on provincial roads.

In rural or mountainous areas, drivers should expect a lack of guard rails, few traffic signs and road markings, and little/no vehicle or road lighting. Drivers should use caution when driving around bends, as it is common for vehicles coming from the other direction to pass slower vehicles or for vehicles to drive in the middle of the road, even around blind turns. People traveling outside of Port-au-Prince should do so during daylight hours if possible, and in tandem due to both the security situation and road conditions.

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Armed robberies are not uncommon in many urban areas; however, they are less common in the countryside.

Drivers should be conscious that accidents can draw angry, potentially violent, crowds very quickly. If a mob forms as a result of an accident, proceed directly to a safe place (police station) to resolve the situation. Remaining at the scene could be a risk to one's safety.

U.S. citizens should take special care to ensure they do not become stranded in remote regions or accidentally enter certain areas deemed unsafe, especially within Port-au-Prince. Avoid driving at night outside the low-density, suburban areas. Rural and suburban areas are poorly illuminated and pose additional safety hazards due to pedestrians and animals crossing the roads. Keep car doors locked and windows up. While stopped in urban traffic, scan the side and rearview mirrors to identify potential trouble. While idling, leave adequate room to maneuver. Secure all items out of view by either placing them in the trunk or under the seat. In the case of vehicular robberies (smash-and-grabs) and carjackings, a group of street criminals (hidden in the grass or in ditches) often wait for vehicles to stop in traffic or at traffic lights. They rush the vehicle and attempt to open the vehicle doors. If all doors are locked and the driver fails to take immediate action, the group will attempt to break a window to access the vehicle and gain control violently. Occurrences of these incidents increase at night and occur frequently in heavy mid-day traffic. The road from the Port-au-Prince International Airport is particularly targeted.

### Public Transportation Conditions

If at all possible, avoid travelling by local or public transportation. Embassy policy prohibits the use of any public transportation for U.S. government employees. Many vehicles are poorly

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maintained and often lack working equipment (headlights, reliable brakes). The local transport, known as "tap-taps" are the primary form of public transportation for most Haitians. Tap-taps can be dangerous, as the vehicles are frequently poorly maintained, and accidents and robberies are common.

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Travelers arriving at the airport should refrain from taking public transportation, safeguard their belongings, and remain alert after departing the airport. Before using smaller airlines, one is advised to research recent history. Those that have a shoddy appearance are very likely to be remiss on safety standards.

### Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

### Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

In general, Haitians are very pro-American. In 2015, the U.S. Embassy only experienced a handful of demonstrations targeting the Embassy. The majority of these demonstrations involved demonstrators marking the 1915-1934 presence of U.S. Marines in Haiti. These

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protests never reached more than a couple dozen protestors.

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

Post Political Violence Rating: Critical

### Civil Unrest

The legislative and presidential elections and their associated security problems (increasing gang-related violent crime, political violence, kidnapping) continue to be a key security concern. A number of small-scale incidents of unrest or political violence tied to Haiti's scheduled elections have occurred. This unrest has been motivated by a variety of political and social movements, ranging from the current Haitian political situation, minimum wage concerns, school curriculum, to the presence of UN forces. They share a common trend in that the protestors are quick to barricade streets and regularly stone the windows of passing vehicles.

Civil unrest, either motivated by political causes or socio-economic issues, occurs frequently in downtown Port-au-Prince around the National Palace, the Champ de Mars, and the State University campuses, along with sporadic incidents scattered throughout the city. These protests have been frequent, averaging multiple incidents per week throughout the second half of 2015. The most noteworthy protests include the multiple times per week political demonstrations in Port-au-Prince during Q3 and Q4 of 2015; the transportation and political

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strikes in Port-au-Prince of February/March 2015; and a protest in Ounaminthe in May 2015 that resulted in the murder of an off-duty Chilean soldier attached to UN forces.

While most people are friendly and peaceful, travelers are reminded of the potential for spontaneous protests and public demonstrations. Any demonstration is capable of turning violent, and innocent bystanders/travelers can be caught up in a clash between demonstrators and the HNP, rock throwing, tire burning, or road blocks. Travelers are advised to avoid all demonstrations and be prepared to seek alternate routes should one be encountered. U.S. citizens are advised to take common sense precautions and avoid any event where crowds may congregate.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

### **Environmental Hazards**

Haiti can be affected by hurricanes (June 1-November 30) and other storms. Driving during these times has additional risks. During 2012, Haiti was adversely affected by two severe tropical storms (Isaac, Sandy) that resulted in severe flooding and washed out many roads. The southern areas were hit the hardest, with a number of deaths and country-wide food shortages. The 2015 hurricane season was mild with only one tropical storm, Erika, passing by northern Haiti.

Due to severe deforestation of the mountains, even modest rains can cause flash flooding and

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other life threatening hazards.

A 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti near Port-au-Prince on January 12, 2010. Much of the infrastructure of Port-au-Prince was destroyed, and it will take years for Haiti to recover from the catastrophic damage. Services (health care, basic services) have been greatly reduced but are seemingly making small comebacks in certain sectors.

#### Drug-related Crimes

Haiti has been reported as a major transshipment point for South American narcotics en route to the U.S.; however, the threat of narco-terrorism is not a major issue.

#### Kidnapping Threat

Q3 and Q4 of 2015 saw a slight increase in the number of kidnappings. This could be due to the pending national elections or the struggling economy. The number of kidnappings in general and kidnappings of U.S. citizens remains low when compared to previous years.

Most kidnappings are criminal in nature. Victims can vary in race, gender, and age, but all persons who are perceived to have wealth or some family connections with assets, either in Haiti or abroad, are vulnerable. U.S. citizens who are kidnapped are usually of Haitian descent. The breakdown in reported kidnapping victims from the last few years is spread fairly

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evenly among men, women, and children. While most cases were resolved through the payment of ransom, some kidnappings did include physical/sexual assaults. While it was less likely, depending on the motive, gang, and/or knowledge of the kidnappers by the victim, a few incidents did result in the death of the victim. The U.S. Embassy's Consular section reports that one U.S. citizen was kidnapped in 2015, but the victim was returned unharmed.

Kidnapping of U.S. citizens should be reported to the Haitian National Police and the American Citizens Services (ACS) section of the U.S. Embassy (509.2229.8000). As the lead U.S. law enforcement agency, the Diplomatic Security Service/Regional Security Office plays an active role in all kidnappings of U.S. citizens and coordinates closely with Federal Bureau of Investigation entities.

## **Police Response**

In a country of approximately 11 million people, the Haitian National Police (HNP) has about 13,500 officers total, approximately two-thirds of whom are deployed in the greater Port-au-Prince metropolitan area (Port-au-Prince has approximately three million residents). Current ratios put Haiti at 2.4 for Port-au-Prince but less than 0.5 outside of Port-au-Prince. Due to this deficiency, some communities do not have reliable means to report crimes, although experts tend to agree that there is much less crime in the provinces.

The HNP has a limited response capability, which hinders their deterrent effect on criminals, who operate without fear of the uniformed or traffic police. Investigations of crimes are frequently limited by this lack of HNP resources.

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Haitians, particularly outside of Port-au-Prince, lack basic policing services, and many residents do not report assaults, rapes, and other crimes. Underreporting or inaccurate reporting of crime appears to be an issue, partly due to the de-centralized nature of the HNP commissariats and to the perception that judicial or investigative follow up is ineffective. Progress in skill-building among the HNP has been noteworthy, and the HNP enjoys the highest level of trust among the general population when compared with other government agencies. However, investigative capacities are overtaxed and remain mostly centralized in Port-au-Prince. The judiciary system has struggled for decades to demonstrate strength and reliability.

Calling a phone number from a cell phone to a landline can be problematic.

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

In all instances, visitors should be respectful and comply with police authority. U.S. citizens who feel they are harassed are encouraged to call American Citizen Services (ACS) at the U.S. Embassy (Tel: 509.2229.8000). ACS advises that if you are arrested, request to speak with the U.S. Embassy immediately. This number is manned 24 hours/day. If you cannot reach the Embassy, try to contact someone locally who can contact the Embassy on your behalf.

#### Crime Victim Assistance

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If you are the victim of a crime, first get to a safe location and seek medical attention, if needed. You should immediately report the incident to the nearest police station. If it is an emergency and the police are not in the vicinity, police can be contacted by calling 114. Then, notify local authorities and the U.S. Embassy (Tel. 509.2229.8000).

The Haitian National Police Information and Operations Center can be contacted at 509-3835-1111.

The U.S. Embassy's American Citizen Services (ACS) section can assist you with: replacing a stolen passport; contacting family, friends, or employers; obtaining medical care; addressing emergency needs that arise as a result of a crime; obtaining general information about the local criminal justice process and information about your case; obtaining information about local resources to assist victims, including foreign crime victim compensation programs; obtaining information about crime victim assistance and compensation programs in the U.S.; and obtaining a list of local attorneys. Victims of crimes may be eligible for assistance or compensation from state crime victims assistance programs (<http://www.nacvcb.org/>). Consular officials cannot investigate crimes, provide legal advice, represent you in court, serve as official interpreter/translator, or pay legal, medical, or other fees for you. For more information about services available to victims of crime, please see the U.S. State Department website: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies\\_1748.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1748.html). In addition, information about sexual assault crisis hotline information, counseling services, and other services for crime victims is available at: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies\\_1748.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1748.html).

## Medical Emergencies

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The lack of top-quality, reliable, health care is a serious concern. Prescription pharmaceutical drugs are in short supply, and specialty care is extremely limited. Medical services are far below U.S. standards and can be difficult to obtain. Emergency medical care is not always readily available, as most hospitals do not have an emergency department staffed 24 hours/day.

Health care providers do not accept U.S. medical insurance. Medical professionals require a cash payment up front and will provide a receipt that can be provided to a U.S. insurance company.

#### Available Air Ambulance Services

There is one air ambulance service in Haiti: Ayiti Air Anbilans 509 3166-8197

Air ambulance companies based in the U.S. that service Haiti:

National Air Ambulance (Ft.Lauderdale, FL) 1.800.327.3710

Air Ambulance Networks 1.800.327.1966

Air Ambulance Professionals 1.800.752.4195

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## Recommended Insurance Posture

Medical evacuation is required for most major medical care. It is strongly recommended that those visiting Port-au-Prince obtain medical evacuation insurance.

The Department of State strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses (medical evacuation). U.S. medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the U.S. unless supplemental coverage is purchased. U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the U.S. However, many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas, including emergency services. Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad," available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page.

For international treatment and medical insurance: AEA International, 206.340.6000.

## CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
[http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/haiti?s\\_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/haiti?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001).

## **OSAC Country Council Information**

There is an active OSAC Country Council in Haiti. All U.S. private sector organizations active in Haiti are encouraged to attend meetings. For more information, please contact the Regional Security Office at U.S. Embassy Port-au-Prince at Tel: +509.2229.8061 or [DS\\_RSO\\_Port-Au-Prince@State.Gov](mailto:DS_RSO_Port-Au-Prince@State.Gov). To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email [OSACWHA@state.gov](mailto:OSACWHA@state.gov).

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

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Tabarre #41

Route de Tabarre

Port-au-Prince, Haiti

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Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri, 7:00 A.M. - 3:30 P.M

### Embassy Contact Numbers

Embassy Switchboard: 509.2229.8000

Regional Security Office: 509.2229.8061

Consular Section: 509.2229.8000

Marine Security Guard: 509.2229.8122

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

### Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to register at the American Citizens Services section at the Consulate or online at <http://travel.state.gov>.

Be sure to read the Consular Information sheet on Haiti prior to travel for updated information and advice. For background information on Haiti, or for information on how to avoid becoming a victim of crime, please refer to the State Department's Country Background Notes, Consular

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Information Sheet, and Travel Warning information on the State Department website at <http://www.state.gov>.

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

### Scams

Be alert to distractions. Purse snatchers will often work in teams of two with one person acting as a diversion. One person may engage the victim in conversation and bump him/her on the street while the other grabs hand-carried valuables or snatches jewelry from the victim, often in plain sight of security guards, before fleeing.

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

Always remain aware of your surroundings and the activity around you. An alert individual can often see criminal activity developing and initiate an appropriate evasive action.

Traveling in groups of three to four persons is highly recommended, especially at night.

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Do not display or carry unnecessary valuables. Cell phones, electronic items, and foreign currency are of particular interest to thieves. Do not carry a cell phone on the waist or in other visible areas. Do not display large amounts of money. Do not resist if robbed or carjacked.

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