



Brazil 2016 Crime & Safety Report: São Paulo

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Burglary; Financial Security; Kidnapping; Carjacking; Summer Olympics; Human Trafficking; Cargo Security; Cyber; Floods; Other Threat / Incident; Anarchist; Riots/Civil Unrest; Employee Health Safety; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Counterfeiting; Drug Trafficking; Fraud

Western Hemisphere > Brazil; Western Hemisphere > Brazil > Sao Paulo

3/7/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

Crime is the principal threat to visitors in Brazil. The general crime rate in Brazil is above the U.S. national average. Crime is a major concern in Brazil -- especially in large cities such as São Paulo. Current statistics indicate that crime in São Paulo has not decreased since the last presidential elections in February 2015. Law enforcement and press sources report an increase in crime after several consecutive years of decreasing crime trends. Recent increases in criminal activity have been noted in other major Brazilian cities, even as the official homicide rate for São Paulo continues to decrease. In fact, in many areas throughout the state of São Paulo, crime levels remain high and continue to rise. All neighborhoods within the city of São Paulo are susceptible to crime.

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In São Paulo, robbery, assault, burglary, and theft are concerns for foreigners and Brazilians alike. Public transportation hubs, hotel sectors, and tourist areas have the highest crime rates. Many criminals use weapons when carrying out illicit activities, and crimes are often accompanied by gratuitous violence.

While crime is a problem throughout the year, there are noticeable increases in reported incidents throughout Brazil during December and January – likely attributed to: Brazil’s liberal system of prison furloughs, which allows for leave during the holidays; a higher percentage of police officers on annual leave; and the fact that citizens receive a “13th month” bonus in December and have more disposable income. Vacant homes and apartments are targeted for burglary during these two months with a greater frequency than seen throughout the rest of the year.

Foreigners are not immune to acts of crime, and American citizens – both private and official - have been victimized. In April 2015, a Consulate employee and her family members were driving adjacent to a park frequented by Brazilians and international tourists. The employee stopped at a red light and was surrounded by other vehicles that halted at the traffic signal. A thief on a motorcycle approached her vehicle and began banging a pistol on the driver-side window, attempting to commit a carjacking. Luckily, the employee was able to maneuver her car and evade the area.

Foreign visitors may be susceptible to targeting for certain crimes in part because visitors may be less likely to file a police report and/or return to testify at criminal proceedings should perpetrators be apprehended by police.

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Street crime is a problem, especially in the evenings and late at night. Caution is required when travelling at night through more rural areas and satellite cities due to the significant potential for roadside robberies. A phenomenon called “quick-napping” is an ongoing criminal activity in which ATM users are kidnapped at gun point and taken to several ATMs to withdraw cash.

Laptop computers are the number-one target of thieves and criminals in São Paulo.

Violent crimes (murder, kidnapping, carjacking, armed assault, burglary) occur with frequency. Armed street robberies are common in São Paulo. There are daily reports of armed robberies, which continue to occur regularly in the affluent residential sections of Jardims, Morumbi, Campo Belo, and Moema where a number of government and business leaders and a majority of the U.S. Consulate employees reside. Much of São Paulo’s crimes and violence can be attributed to street gangs and organized crime groups operating throughout the state.

Crime will be a major concern for visitors during the 2016 Summer Olympics. Although the police have made some gains in combatting the crime rate during certain periods, like the World Cup in 2014, Post anticipates a high rate of opportunistic street crime against tourists. Thieves will target people at Fan Fests, near stadiums, and on buses, subways, and in other areas where tourists congregate.

Residential burglaries pose a constant threat and concern. According to the police, residential burglaries are carried out by mobile street gangs, originating from neighboring countries

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(Paraguay, Argentina) where borders are porous. Other perpetrators are from the surrounding satellite cities and travel by metro, bus, or car into the neighborhoods looking for targets of opportunity. São Paulo also has its share of street gangs that often target the more affluent residential areas. Most residential properties, especially single family homes, utilize security alarm systems. These systems are monitored by local security companies who respond along with local police. Some neighborhoods employ static guard posts to monitor activity on the streets adjacent to their homes. Larger properties and commercial sites generally employ 24/7 security guard services.

RSO has been very involved with Rio's Anti-Fraud unit of the Civil Police, who together, uncovered a Syrian human trafficking ring operating since at least early 2014. More than 78 cases have been uncovered, and some arrests have been made. Ahead of the 2016 Olympics, this case as drawn serious attention from the U.S. and Brazilian governments as well as other countries in Latin America.

Reports of cargo thefts, from both overland shipments and from storage facilities, continue to plague the city.

Cybersecurity Issues

A growing area of concern is the rise in cyber crime. Credit/debit cards should be used with great caution throughout São Paulo. Numerous reports are made daily by victims of credit/debit card scams that result in the compromise of credit card information and the fraudulent use of the cards. Withdrawing money from ATMs not located inside of banks, restaurants, hotels, or airports pose serious risks to the carrier. Even with local merchants and

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restaurants, most use handheld credit card machines to facilitate sales.

Other Areas of Concern

Throughout Brazil, favelas are common and are easily recognizable. Crimes, assaults, and drug-related issues are frequent in these low-income communities. These areas are off-limits to Chief of Mission personnel and should not be frequented during visits to the country. Taxi services have been known to drive through favelas; this can be dangerous.

Parks and recreational areas frequented by visitors and citizens alike have experienced severe crimes (assaults, thefts, sexual assaults) mostly at night. It is best to depart these public areas before sundown to reduce the possibilities of becoming a victim. Although assaults and thefts are also common during the day, higher rate of crimes and rapes are often reported during nighttime hours.

Border areas of Brazil, including the Tri-Border Area (TBA) where the Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay frontiers meet, have been subject to illegal activity. Travelers should exercise caution when traveling to these areas. No incidents directed against official or non-official Americans have occurred in the TBA. It is recommended that American visitors, including to Foz de Iguazu, remain vigilant and maintain a low profile. The TBA is a smuggling hub.

Transportation-Safety Situation

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Road Safety and Road Conditions

Throughout Brazil, road conditions outside of the main cities vary greatly. Brazil uses automatic photo-ticketing systems to discourage speeding, and tickets are mailed to the owner of the vehicle.

The surface conditions of the roads in Brazilian cities are generally poor, with numerous pot holes, some of which, during the rainy season, can cause significant damage to a vehicle's suspension system. Lighting, traffic signals, and road markings vary from good to poor depending on the city/state.

Flooding is a huge problem throughout the country. On January 8, 2015, as he was leaving Post for the evening, a Consulate employee traveled less than ¼ mile from Post when he encountered heavy rains followed by severe flooding that almost instantly rendered his car useless as it stalled. Flooding happens often and quickly, leaving the operator very little time to get to higher grounds.

Crime on the road remains a problem for both visitors and local residents, especially during evening travel and traffic jams. Travelers are advised to use caution during evening travel to evade roadside robberies that target passing and stopped vehicles. It is important that drivers pay attention to their surroundings and keep doors locked and windows rolled up when stopped in traffic. The city is inundated with motorcycle and moped drivers and riders who have been responsible for snatching items from open vehicle windows. Arriving passengers at

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Guarulhos international airport are frequently targeted for robberies either on the road to São Paulo or upon arrival at their residences.

Even while driving, motorists can be vulnerable to armed bandits on motorcycles who prey on potential victims waiting at traffic lights or in traffic. Utilizing tinted windows, keeping windows rolled up, and keeping valuables out of sight are the best defenses against this type of random criminal activity.

Public Transportation Conditions

São Paulo offers taxis and both a bus and metro system. While none are off limits, RSO requests that, especially outside of the western region of São Paulo, they are utilized as little as possible to reduce the possibility of problems arising.

Although taxis are plentiful, there are still high rates of illegal/pirate taxis on the roads that are looking for potential targets of opportunity. Most Brazilians know how to spot a legal taxi. Taxis from official taxi stands or taxi services and private vehicles should be used within the city of São Paulo. Only use taxis at taxi stands, or have your hotel call one for you directly.

Avoid city buses and other public transportation. Many pass through high crime areas and are susceptible to robberies. In 2006, a public bus was highjacked near the Consulate, and all the occupants on board were robbed. The incident ended in a shoot-out with police. A similar incident occurred in 2010, but no shoot-out occurred. Buses are plentiful and generally keep a steady schedule. However, protest and demonstrations targeting the bus and mass transit

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systems often leaves this form of transportation to be less than desirable, as protestors sometimes burn buses. Moreover, bus riders are sometimes robbed in transit.

The city's underground rail system has also experienced mishaps throughout the years, including electrical outages and train stoppages. Over the past two years, an upscale in protest and civil unrest resulting from the government's desire to raise public metro and rail fares has caused substantial trouble for the metro industry in the form of sometimes disruptive and violent protests. The metro system is often crowded, and there are daily reports of citizens suffering loss of personal items as well as females being groped and touched inappropriately.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

São Paulo's two major airports, Congonhas (domestic) and Guarulhos (International), are safe and generally experience on-time services. During the 2014 World Cup, Guarulhos introduced an expanded, modern international wing that has served well and should serve the city well for the 2016 Olympics. However, a work stoppage in January 2014 saw air industry workers throughout the country threatening strikes to force an increase in salaries for airport and airline workers. This may become prevalent again before the 2016 Olympics take place.

São Paulo's International Airport is subject to crime. Reports of crimes against travelers along the road to the airport frequently occur, as criminals look to identify potential targets of wealth and affluence as they arrive and depart.

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Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There are no known indigenous terrorist groups operating in Brazil. Brazil is not targeted by any known international radical or terrorist groups. There are no known indigenous terrorist groups operating in Brazil. Brazil is a non-aligned country with no significant enemies and is not targeted by any known international radical groups. To date, no incidents directed against official or non-official Americans have occurred in this area.

Organized crime does exist in São Paulo on a large scale: The First Capital Command (PCC), a violent prison gang, which controls the majority of illegal contraband and drugs coming in and out of the prisons in São Paulo, remains an organization of great interest to the government of Brazil and the police.

In 2015, ARSO-I assisted Parana Civil Police with a large multi-city operation against PCC members operating in Parana state. Police served 757 arrest warrants across the state, 484 for members already incarcerated but exercising control from inside prison. The operation resulted in the U.S. Visa revocation of two attorneys for the group and over 700 look-outs placed in Consolidated Consular Databases for the remaining members.

In 2012, the state of São Paulo again saw a spree of PCC killings of police officers and

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corresponding extrajudicial killings as the state tried to rein in the PCC.

In 2006, São Paulo prison gangs revolted against state security forces, and criminal actions spilled into the streets. The violence was mainly the work of the PCC. The civil unrest resulted in the deaths of over 40 police officers and hundreds of criminals. Although civilians were not specifically targeted, police stations and municipal buildings were attacked while public buses, gas stations, and ATMs were randomly burned throughout the state and city.

São Paulo continues to face the threat posed by protestors using “Black Bloc” anarchist tactics. Black Bloc anarchists infiltrate otherwise peaceful demonstrations to cause chaos and violence between the police and protestors. Their tactics were seen during several demonstrations in 2015 against increases in transit fares. Protests against pending increases in transit fares resumed in early 2016, to include violent attacks on property. This trend is expected to continue in 2016.

Concerns exist that individuals among the TBA’s community have been engaged in facilitating transfers of money and people for terrorist organizations.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

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Protests occur on a daily basis in São Paulo. A 2014 São Paulo state report outlined that on average, about two protest per day occurred in the state.

Political violence in the form of protests occurs throughout Brazil—especially in the capital and major cities. The threat of political violence remains a possibility, as São Paulo periodically hosts public demonstrations. While the vast majority of these protests are peaceful, violence can occasionally flare up, resulting in disturbances, property damage, and increased police activity. All visitors and employees are urged to exercise caution when approaching crowds and avoid areas where protests are being held.

Since 2013, grassroots activists and political parties have exploited major sporting and political events as a platform to voice discontent with the government. Large-scale protests have taken place during the 2013 Confederations Cup, before the 2014 World Cup, and throughout 2015.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Flooding over several years has plagued São Paulo state and many other parts of the country. Over the last several years, severe rainstorms have occurred annually, causing

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flooding in São Paulo, with fatalities, homes destroyed, and bridges/highways closed. Since 2006, flooding has caused deaths and millions of dollars in property losses in the São Paulo area. Intense rain can cause severe gridlock.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

As the economic and commercial center of Brazil, as well as being the most populated region, São Paulo is subject to industrial and transportation incidents. Vehicle accidents involving hazardous chemicals are known to occur on the major highways, shutting roadways for significant periods until the area can be cleared and sanitized. In January 2016, a major environmental hazard occurred at the Port of Santos in São Paulo state, the largest sea port in South America when a container was left exposed to severe rainfalls over a period of several days. Rainwater seeped into containers carrying industrial strength ammonia, causing an explosion and the release of a toxic cloud of smoke, which led to one death and several dozen hospitalizations. The port has been the scene of other such environmental accidents.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Since 2012, many firms have raised concerns about intellectual property rights enforcement, including counterfeit goods and a deteriorating situation in São Paulo, which serves as the primary gateway to the country's other markets. Brazil's software industry consistently sees licensing compliance under 50 percent.

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Personnel-Background Concerns

Hate-related crimes rarely occur, though some U.S. citizens have reported being the target of comments or actions because of their nationality or race.

Drug-related Crimes

São Paulo experiences the effects of persons addicted to illicit drugs. Drug use contributes to criminal activity, such as street assaults and robberies, which users commit to support their addictions. São Paulo experiences the harmful effects of illicit drug trafficking. Several cities are transshipment points for illicit drugs, especially cocaine. Crack cocaine use is increasing in São Paulo. Brazil is the number two consumer of cocaine in the world, behind the U.S. Brazil is the number one consumer of crack cocaine in the world. As such, a large portion of crimes have a nexus to narcotics.

Kidnapping Threat

Quicknapping continues to be an ongoing trend in Brazil. While Brazilians are most often targeted, all foreigners are also vulnerable.

Police Response

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Visitors should inform the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the event they encounter problems, including detainment or arrest by the police, while traveling in Brazil. See contact information below for U.S. Mission Brazil under U.S. Embassy/Consulate Location and Contact Information.

Crime Victim Assistance

National Emergency Services

Telephone

Medical Emergency (ambulância)

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Tel: 192

Fire Service (Corpo de Bombeiros)

Tel: 193

National Police (Polícia Civil)

Tel: 197

Military Police of São Paulo (Polícia Militar do Estado de São Paulo)

Tel: 190

Federal Police (Polícia Federal)

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Tel: (11) 3538 5000

Sea Rescue (Salvamento Marítimo)

Tel: (21) 2104 6119

Medical Emergencies

Service

Telephone

Drug Abuse/Narcotics Anonymous (Narcoticos Anônimos)

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Tel: (11) 3101 9626

HIV/AIDS (Disque Saude)
Monday to Friday 08:00-18:00

Tel: 0800 162 550

Alcoholics Anonymous (Alcoólicos Anônimos)

Tel: (11) 3315 9333

Child Abuse (Centro de Referência da Criança e Adolescente - CECRIA)

Tel: (11) 3104 4850

Defense of Abused Women (Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher)

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Tel: 180
Tel: (11) 5084 2579

Suicide/Crisis Line (CVV)

Tel: 141

Children's Helpline (SOS Criança)

Tel: 1407

Poison Control/Anti-Poison Centre (Centro de Controle de Intoxicações)

Tel: 0800 771 3733
Tel: (11) 5012 5311

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Hospitals

Telephone

HC Hospital das Clínicas

Av. Dr. Enéas de Carvalho Aguiar 255

Instituto da Criança do Hospital das Clínicas (Children's A&E department)

Tel: (11) 2661 0000

Tel: (11) 2661 1234

Hospital Alemão Oswaldo Cruz

Rua João Julião 331, Paraíso

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Tel: (11)3549 0000

Albert Einstein Hospital

Av. Albert Einstein 627/701, Morumbi

Tel: (11) 2151 1233

São Luiz Hospital

Eng. Oscar Americano St. 840, Morumbi

Tel: (11) 3093 1100

Hospital Santa Cruz

Rua Santa Cruz 398, Vila Mariana

Tel: (11) 5080 2000

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Hospital Samaritano

Rua Conselheiro Brotero 1486, Higienopolis

Tel: (11) 3821 5300

Hospital Bandeirantes

Rua Galvão Bueno 257, Liberdade

Tel: (11) 3345 2000

Beneficência Portuguesa

Rua Maestro Cardim 769, Paraiso

Tel: (11) 3505 1000

Sírio Libanês

Rua Adma Jafet 91, Bela Vista

Tel: (11) 3155 0200

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Hospital Santa Catarina
Av Paulista 200, Bela Vista 1

Tel: (11) 3016 4133

Hospital São Paulo
Rua Napoleão de Barros 737

Tel: (11) 5576 4036

Hospital Aviccena
Rua Pe Adelino 901, Vila Verde

Tel: (11) 2602 0000

Pronto Socorro Infantil Sabará (Sabará Children's Emergency Clinic)
Rua Dona Antonio Queiros 505 Consolação

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Tel: (11) 3155 2800

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/brazil?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

The U.S. Consulate General has a vibrant, proactive OSAC Country Council with over 100 members, including major U.S. companies in many industries. The Council meets monthly at venues throughout São Paulo. The RSO attends all Council meetings to engage in roundtable discussions with members. The Council takes an active role on all issues of crime and security in São Paulo and surrounding areas, including outreach to public officials for speaking engagements, training seminars, and an extensive email network to promote ideas and facilitate the exchange of information and contacts. Country Council information can be located, via password, at: www.osac.gov/countrycouncils, or by contacting the Regional Security Office via SAOPAULOALLRSO@state.gov. To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email OSACWHA@state.gov.

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U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

American Consulate General São Paulo is located at Rua Thomas Deloney, 381 Chacara Santo Antonio, São Paulo, 04710-110.

Consulate Contact Numbers

The telephone number is +55 (11) 5186-7000.

Emergencies and calls after normal business hours may be directed to post one at +55 (11) 5000-5373.

The RSO may be reached at +55 (11) 3250-5223.

Website: <http://saopaulo.usconsulate.gov/>

Nearby Posts

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Embassy Brasilia: <http://brazil.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate Recife: <http://recife.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Rio de Janeiro: <http://riodejaneiro.usconsulate.gov>

Consulate Guidance

U.S. companies are encouraged to contact the RSO in São Paulo for specific inquiries concerning the local security situation. Information is also readily available from the RSO offices in Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, and from the active OSAC Country Councils operating in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

There are a variety of scams used by the criminals to rob victims, which include:

An unknown individual calls to say that a person you know, possibly a family member, has been kidnapped and unless you immediately pay the ransom, the person will be harmed. The

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ransom is paid, and it becomes clear that the kidnapping never occurred.

A similar scam is where an unknown individual calls and states an employee or family member has been in an accident and needs immediate medical attention. The individual states that payment must be provided in order for the injured individual to be treated. This scam is often targeted at household staff who reacts without verifying with their employer.

Scams involving credit cards are common as well. Travelers using personal debit/credit cards sometimes receive billing statements with unauthorized charges or discover that their cards were cloned or duplicated without their knowledge.

Travelers should exercise extreme caution if they choose to visit São Paulo adult nightclubs. These clubs have been known to swindle patrons by tricking them into purchasing bottles of alcohol without disclosing the actual price of the drinks, at times running up to US\$1,000 per bottle. Patrons who refuse to pay have been physically harassed and their credit cards taken.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Travelers should seek to use alternative and concealable means of transporting information, such as thumb drives or CD/DVD ROMs. If laptops are brought to São Paulo, they should be stored discretely in luggage and/or placed in the trunk of a vehicle.

Do not accept drinks from strangers and always watch your drink. Scopolamine or a similar drug may be added to your drink. Like other countries where this drug has widespread use in

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Latin America, people have often awoken robbed of their possessions and/or sexually assaulted after accepting open drinks.

Visitors should practice common-sense preventive security techniques, just as they would in any large metropolitan city in the world where crime is prevalent. Do not carry or wear valuable items that will attract the attention of thieves. If you need to wear expensive jewelry or carry a camera, conceal it until you arrive at your destination. Do not physically resist any robbery attempt. Statistics show that resistance can lead to severe consequences (injury, death).

Traveling in groups of two or more persons appears to have a positive effect on deterring criminals. Visitors can reduce their risk of becoming a victim of crime by varying routes and times of travel. Be aware of the street environment and avoid contact with those looking for potential crime targets. Seek a safer location. Go into a store, bank, or simply cross the street and alter your route. Use well-traveled, well-illuminated streets. Always plan your routes before you leave for your final destination. Be alert at open markets or crowded areas.

Do not answer your hotel room door until you positively confirm who is on the other side. Look out the peephole, or call the front desk to confirm the visitor.

Do not walk on beaches or in parks after dark. Assaults are common in these areas.

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Many residents and visitors find that renting or purchasing a cellular phone is very useful. Cellular phones are widely available, inexpensive, and generally highly reliable, especially in the major cities.

The Regional Security Officer (RSO) recommends that residences provide solid-core entry doors with quality deadbolts, security grilles on all windows, adequate front and rear security lighting, and a monitored alarm system. Family members and household help should not allow anyone to enter the residential grounds without identification and prearranged appointments. Suspicious persons or activities in the neighborhood should be reported to the police immediately.

Pay close attention to credit/debit cards while buying in São Paulo. Afterwards, close monitoring of banking account information should automatically follow any sales transactions to ensure credit/debit cards and personal information has not been compromised.

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