



Argentina 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Counterfeiting; Financial Security; Fraud; Burglary; Hotels; Anarchist; Riots/Civil Unrest; Improvised Explosive Device; Floods; Earthquakes; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping

Western Hemisphere > Argentina; Western Hemisphere > Argentina > Buenos Aires

3/7/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

Crime is a serious problem in Argentina, but most U.S. citizens visit Argentina without incident. Officially reported, country-wide full range crime statistics are not available, and when an occasional statistic is released, the information varies widely. Crimes reported to the U.S. Embassy by U.S. citizens reveal they are most often victims of theft or non-violent robbery, principally in the tourist neighborhoods. An increase in robberies at currency exchange houses has been noted.

Street crime in the larger cities (greater Buenos Aires, Rosario, Mendoza) is a constant problem for residents and visitors alike. Criminals are often well-dressed, and crime can occur anytime during the day at any location. Visitors to Buenos Aires and popular tourist

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destinations should be alert to muggers, pickpockets, scam artists, and purse-snatchers. Thieves specifically target expensive looking jewelry, watches, cell phones, cameras, and backpacks/bags; take unattended purses, backpacks, laptops, and luggage; and will often distract visitors for a few seconds to steal valuables. Thieves on foot and motorcycles, “motochorros,” regularly nab purses, backpacks, laptops, and luggage, and criminals will often distract visitors for a few seconds to steal valuables.

In the older, traditional neighborhoods (San Telmo, Recoleta, La Boca neighborhood (home to the famous “Caminito” street and “Boca Juniors” soccer stadium)) reports of violent robberies have been occurring with increasing frequency.

Long-term residents have greater exposure to criminal activity while living in Buenos Aires. RSO has received increased reports of home invasions and robberies to include apartment buildings and businesses. Favorite targets for armed robberies are banks, restaurants, and businesses dealing in cash or high-value merchandise.

Criminals regularly employ target-of-opportunity tactics. Many home invasion gangs seek the hoard of cash many Argentines are thought to keep in their homes. The tactic most commonly used is to attack victims upon entry or exit of their residence, forcing their way inside. One trend is for criminals to go through neighborhoods and apartment buildings waiting for delivery people bringing food to the doors of the tenants. The RSO office has received reports of victims being followed home from popular restaurants or school events.

Criminals target individuals withdrawing cash from bank ATMs and are known to target customers when exiting banks or change houses. The typical tactic is either an overt act where the criminal challenges an individual directly or a scam that involves altering basic ATM

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functions, causing the individual to believe the machine failed to dispense the cash and may be out-of-order.

In the countryside, there have been robberies in isolated areas and occasional burglaries of hotel rooms and rental cars in resort areas, including while stopped at convenience stations. Highway robbery largely affects commercial vehicles. Hijacking of inter-city buses is uncommon.

Argentina is a hub for counterfeit currency, with both fake U.S. dollars and Argentine pesos circulated in significant numbers throughout Buenos Aires. Traditionally, fake currency is brought in from neighboring countries, but in 2015, Argentine law enforcement located and shut down a currency mill producing fake dollars and pesos. Fake peso notes typically look and feel wrong upon close inspection. RSO has also received several reports of receipts of counterfeit U.S. dollars when persons have attempted to sell an item on "Mercado Libre" a version of Craig's List. The victims attempt to sell an item and receive counterfeit currency in payment.

Other Areas of Concern

While crime occurs at all times of day, tourists who go to La Boca should limit their visit to the designated tourist street during daylight hours only. Visitors should be aware that "villas" or shanty towns are present throughout Buenos Aires and other major cities, even in tourist zones, and should avoid entering these areas.

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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic accidents are common, especially in Buenos Aires. Pedestrians should be vigilant when crossing streets and remember to look in both directions, regardless of whether the street is designated one-way or the traffic light indicates right-of-way for the pedestrian.

Road conditions are moderate, but traffic is fast throughout the country and heavy in the big cities. Almost all highways are two-lane with no separation between traffic travelling in opposite directions. Drivers are very aggressive and often oblivious to lane designations and many other traffic laws. The accident rate is very high.

Traffic laws are not routinely obeyed, and vehicles often travel at excessive speeds. A report produced by the non-governmental organization Luchemos por la Vida (www.luchemos.org.ar) states that there was an increase in traffic deaths throughout the country: 7,896 people died in vehicle accidents during 2013 as opposed to 7,485 deaths in 2012. In Buenos Aires city, the number of fatalities also increased from 98 deaths (2012) to 137 (2014). The province of Buenos Aires has the higher rate of traffic-related deaths at 2,457.

Use the seatbelts, lock the doors, and keep windows up. Do not place your purse or other valuables on the seats, in plain view from the outside, or leave them unattended. Checkpoints

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are common, especially around Buenos Aires, and drivers must have all documentation, including a copy of passport or Argentine identification card, driver's license, vehicle registration, and proof of third-party liability insurance.

Public Transportation Conditions

Travelers should not leave their bags in the care of a taxi driver while they run in to a bank or other location.

A number of scams involving yellow and black taxis have been reported at international airports and around town.

The most frequently reported include a "handler" at the airport requesting hundreds of pesos (an amount that far exceeds the likely fare) from the traveler as they get into the cab. The traveler assumes they are paying a flat rate up front. When the cab ride is finished, the driver demands the fare for the ride, stating he has no association with the handler at the airport and that the passenger paid a fee to get placed in the cab.

Another version involves the taxi breaking down on the side of the freeway and another cab coming to pick the passenger up. The first driver demands payment for the whole fare to the destination, and so does the second driver who completes the trip.

To avoid these issues, either pre-arrange transportation or select one of the flat rate "remis" services located at designated counters inside the airport terminal. In town, radio taxis from a reliable location (hotel) should be utilized whenever possible. After dark, radio taxis or private "remise" taxis should be called from a reliable location. The following, in order of preference, is recommended: 1) Call for a remise or taxi, 2) take one from an established stand, 3) hail

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one on the street (but not in front of a bank).

Remises (hired car and driver) are the best and safest form of public transportation. They normally charge by the kilometer and are reasonably priced. Hotels, many restaurants, and shopping centers can call one from an established service. A number of Remis companies have stands inside the Ezezia airport that offer a set fee for transport into the city. They can be hired just as you exit Customs. The fee is paid at the airport and not to the driver. These companies are well established and used by a number of embassy employees.

Radio taxis are the next best choice. Taxis are black and yellow in the capital and are white with blue lettering in the provinces.

Avoid black and yellow taxis with the word "Mandataria" on the door. These taxis are rented on a daily or hourly basis and are often involved in criminal acts.

Do not take rides offered by people on the street or outside an airport.

Subways, buses, and trains are generally safe but watch out for pickpockets and be ready for work stoppages.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

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In Argentina, officials have publicly acknowledged the systematic theft of valuables and money from checked baggage at Buenos Aires airports.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is no recent or significant operational terrorist activity in Argentina. International terrorists used car bombs to destroy the Israeli Embassy in 1992, killing 29 persons, and a Jewish cultural center (AMIA) in 1994, killing 85 persons and injuring hundreds.

Individuals and organizations providing financial support to extremist groups reportedly operate in Ciudad del Este and along the tri-border area between Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina.

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Since 2009, there have been multiple minor bombings that purportedly involved indigenous anarchist groups. These bombings occurred during the early morning hours and have resulted in one death and two injuries.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

U.S. interests are occasionally targeted based on current events, such as U.S. policy toward Cuba or Syria. U.S. companies are also sometimes the targets of labor protests. Despite the negative perception of various U.S. government policies, Argentines are friendly to Americans, and visitors are unlikely to experience anti-American sentiment.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Neither the government of Argentina nor its agents have committed any known politically-motivated killings. There were reports that police were involved in killings involving unwarranted or excessive force. Authorities investigated and, in some cases, detained, prosecuted, and convicted the officers involved.

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

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There are frequent demonstrations in greater Buenos Aires and in other major cities. Most protests are related to domestic economic and political issues, including labor disputes and inadequate utility services. The largest and most disruptive protests, ranging from dozens to tens of thousands of participants, usually feature "piqueteros" (a collection of social activist groups whose main tactic is to block roads).

In Buenos Aires, demonstrations most commonly occur downtown and often end up at the Plaza de Mayo, Casa Rosada, Congress, or the obelisk on Avenida 9 de Julio. Protestors generally come from labor unions, unemployed/underemployed/landless movements, student groups, and the political left. While most protests are peaceful, there are hooligan elements who periodically show up to fight the police and/or engage in vandalism. Furthermore, the use of sound systems, fireworks, and musical instruments is a common occurrence, as is the burning of tires, effigies, and flags.

From December 2001-December 2013, there was annual looting of stores throughout Argentina. In 2013, Argentina saw some of the worst looting and violence ever. Numerous people were killed and injured throughout the country, as police were on strike in various provinces (for more information, please see OSAC Reporting, "Seasonal Looting Returns to Cordoba, Argentina"). The government took various countermeasures – both police and humanitarian – following these events, and since 2014 the December looting has not recurred.

Pipe bombs or incendiary attacks attributed to or claimed by anarchist groups have been occasionally used. In 2013, there was only one bomb-related attack when an improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated outside of a social security office after hours within

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Buenos Aires city, resulting in minimal property damage and no casualties. Targets in previous years have included bank branches, municipal/public utility offices, and other commercial businesses. In 2012, there were three bomb-related attacks: Two in Buenos Aires city and one in the suburbs. In Buenos Aires city, the European Union Offices and the Federal Department of Corrections were the target of low-power bombs that resulted in property damages, both during early morning hours. A third explosive device was deactivated by the Federal Police EOD Team in a theater in the downtown area of Buenos Aires city, where former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe would deliver a lecture. The explosion in the suburbs (a municipal office in the greater Buenos Aires) was the most serious bombing: a member of the Buenos Aires Provincial Police EOD Team who was trying to disable a IED was seriously injured when the explosive went off. In 2011, there were four known anarchist-related attacks in Buenos Aires proper and one in a nearby suburb. The majority of the explosions result in property damage and generally occur during the very early morning hours. Personnel are always advised to maintain vigilance while paying particular attention to any unattended baggage and suspicious behavior.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

One media report of the use of Molotov cocktails and gun fire was noted in early 2015 in the Chubut province. This was an anti-Semitic attack related to some local residents against an Israeli hostel owner and Israeli tourists staying at the hostel. No serious injuries were reported.

Post-specific Concerns

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Environmental Hazards

Argentina experiences occasional heavy rains and flooding along the coast (including parts of Buenos Aires) and in low-lying parts of the interior (Santa Fe province).

Western/northwestern provinces (San Juan, Mendoza, Salta, Jujuy, Tucuman) periodically have earthquakes.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Industrial accidents do occur. In early 2013, a container fire in the port of Buenos Aires released a chemical cloud over the parts of the city.

Drug-related Crimes

According to official Argentine government figures, U.S. DEA reporting, and open source information, significant amounts of cocaine are imported into Argentina from Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia. The use of cocaine products in Argentina has increased concurrently, as the country has increasingly been used as a transshipment zone for cocaine from South America to supply expanding cocaine markets in Europe, Africa, and to a lesser extent, the Far East. The use of drugs is on the increase.

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Cocaine use has risen sharply, and the country has the second largest internal cocaine market in South America after Brazil. Cocaine remains by far the leading drug for which Argentines seek help at treatment centers, and the use of cocaine base is a growing problem among economically disadvantaged members of society. Cocaine trafficking is the most challenging drug threat faced by Argentine authorities. The counternarcotics efforts in Mexico and Colombia are pushing traffickers into Argentina, according to Argentine officials. Large seizures of cocaine in Europe have been linked to Argentina, and individual carriers of small quantities from Argentina to Europe are regularly discovered. There is evidence of increasing use by traffickers of light aircraft to bring drugs into the country across the borders with Bolivia and Paraguay. The 2013 United Nations Office of Drug Control (UNODC) World Drug Report named Argentina as the third “most frequently mentioned countries of provenance for individual drug seizure cases, by drug type (all modes of transportation), 2001-2012.”

A cheap, readily available, and mentally debilitating drug “paco” (a derivative of cocaine production similar to crack) is consumed in Argentina’s poorer neighborhoods. The UNODC World Drug Report 2013 placed Argentina cocaine abuse at just under one percent for users 15-65 years of age. However, according to the same report in 2011, Argentina had the highest prevalence of cocaine use (2.6 percent) in South and Central America among the same age group. Based on UNODC estimates, Argentina is home to 25 percent of the cocaine users in South and Central America (675,000 users), second only to Brazil.

Marijuana, the bulk of which is imported from Paraguay and used for domestic consumption, continues to be the most widely abused illegal drug in Argentina.

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There was also a large confiscation of ecstasy in Buenos Aires.

Kidnapping Threat

Along with conventional muggings, "express kidnappings" have been increasingly reported. Victims are targeted by their appearance and the vehicles they drive. In some scenarios, they are made to withdraw as much money as possible from ATMs, and then their family or co-workers are contacted and told to deliver all the cash that they have on hand or can gather in a couple of hours. Once the ransom is paid, the victim is usually released unharmed. There have been some foreign victims. Visitors are particularly advised not to let children and adolescents travel alone.

Virtual kidnappings (fake telephone kidnappings) are very common. Criminals use stolen phones or otherwise obtained personal data to contact family members and co-workers claiming to have kidnapped the owner of the phone. This has happened while the alleged kidnapping victim is in the movie theater on an international flight or when their cell phone has just been stolen. Memorizing important phone numbers and if robbed immediately finding a phone and letting family members know you are alright are important in interrupting this cycle. U.S. citizens have been victim of this crime in 2014 but were not targeted due to nationality.

Police Response

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

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Argentine law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observes these prohibitions; however, there are reports of the police arresting and detaining citizens arbitrarily. Individuals detained by the police should ask to contact the Embassy. Any irregular police procedures (demands for bribes, etc.) should be reported to the Embassy.

Expatriates can generally expect better police response and less harassment than in many other Latin American countries.

Crime Victim Assistance

In Buenos Aires, the Tourist Police (office within the Argentine Federal Police) are generally very responsive and assist many tourists with language services to file police reports.

For all police emergencies: 911 (CABA & PBA)

Police/Security Agencies

PFA - Argentine Federal Police: Switchboard: 4-346-7000, 911. HQ Departamento Central

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de Policía Av. Moreno 1550 - CABA – Buenos Aires City.

PFA- Bomberos (Fire Department): 911/100; Av. Belgrano 1547, CABA – Buenos Aires City

PFA - Tourist Police (Comisaría del Turista): 4346-5748; Av. Corrientes 436 - CABA – Buenos Aires City

PNA - Prefectura Naval Argentina (Coast Guard): Switchboard: 4318-7000/7400/7500/7600; HQ's Edificio Guardacostas Av. Eduardo Madero 235; CABA – Buenos Aires City

Medical Emergencies

Contact Information For Local Hospitals And Clinics

Capital Federal (City of Buenos Aires):

- SAME (Municipal Emergency Medical Service, for transport to a public hospital): 107/911 or 4923-1051/9
- Ambulance Service: Vittal: 0810-333-8888/4-000-8888 /4805- 4545. Provide full name & passport number.

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- Sanatorio Trinidad: 4- 127-5555; Cerviño 4720, CABA – Buenos Aires City
- Sanatorio de los Arcos: 5-239-4525; Av. Juan B. Justo 909, CABA – Buenos Aires City
- Hospital Fernandez (Public Hospital): 4-808-2600; Cerviño 3356, CABA – Buenos Aires City
CABA – Buenos Aires City. Emergencies 24/7. Accidents, Floodings, etc.

Buenos Aires Province (San Isidro, suburbs):

- Sanatorio Las Lomas (Tricare Approved), 4-708-5000, Diego Carman 555, San Isidro – PBA.
- Sanatorio de la Trinidad: 4898-6700; Av. Fondo de la Lengua 851, San Isidro – PBA.
- Hospital Municipal de San Isidro (Public Hospital): 4-743-0956; JJ Diaz 818, San Isidro – PBA.
- Sanatorio San Lucas: 4742-8888; Belgrano 369, San Isidro - PBA
- Hospital Zonal de Agudos y Crónicos Dr. Cetrángolo (Public Hospital); 4-791-2090; Italia 1750 Vicente López – PBA.
- Clínica Olivos; 4-796-3000, Av. Maipú 1661; Olivos – PBA

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

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OSAC Country Council Information

Buenos Aires has an active OSAC Country Council. For information on upcoming meetings and how to join please contact the RSO Mathieu Souliere at 54-11-5777-4298 or BUERSO-US@state.gov. 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

U.S. Embassy Buenos Aires

Av. Colombia 4300

(C1425GMN) Buenos Aires

Argentina

Embassy Contact Numbers

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Embassy Operator: 54-11-5777-4533/4534

Emergency After-Hours Telephone: +(54)(11) 5777-4873 and during working hours +(54)(11) 5777-4354

Fax: +(54)(11) 5777-4240

Regional Security Officer: RSO Mathieu Souliere at 54-11-5777-4298;
BUERSO-US@state.gov

Consular Affairs: Consul General Brendan O'Brien at 54-11-5665-6213;
BuenosAires-ACS@state.gov

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

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

MUSTARD ON THE BACK SCAM: Unknown to you, a liquid is squirted on your back. After a few steps, someone (often a middle-aged woman) will inform you that you have something on your back and offer to help clean it off. Meanwhile, she or an accomplice picks your pockets. This scam has been used regularly in tourist areas (San Telmo, La Boca, 9 de Julio, Recoleta, Florida Street) for decades. This is one of the least confrontational crimes; just say "NO" and walk away.

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Be aware of the fake peso exchange, which often occurs in taxis. This happens when the customer pays the driver, and the driver quickly exchanges the good note for a fake one and then declares that a fake note has been passed to him. Visitors should watch the driver's hands at all times and avoid paying with large bills.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Crime can be managed with common sense precautions and investment in security countermeasures. Use common sense and remain vigilant. Travel in groups when possible. Always stay in illuminated, populated areas and avoid parks after dark.

Watch your bags at airports, bus, and ship terminals. Travelers should exercise continued care and caution. Do not place handbags on the back of your chair or on the floor at a restaurant; instead, keep them in your lap. There are numerous reports of robbery of bags off chairs and from in between feet by persons posing as well-dressed patrons. If you are in a restaurant or other business that gets robbed, follow the instructions of the robbers and hand over valuables on demand.

Be alert to pick pocketing in tourist and shopping areas. Do not flash large amounts of cash, or carry expensive-looking bags, briefcases, or laptop cases in public. Wallets should go in front pockets. Thieves may target visitors wearing expensive watches or jewelry, or carrying laptop computer cases. While most U.S. citizens are not physically injured when robbed, criminals may be armed and are known to use force when they encounter resistance. There have been violent and even fatal attacks on foreigners carrying valuables. Criminals

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frequently resort to violence if they perceive a victim is being uncooperative. If confronted, offer no resistance and immediately hand over everything demanded.

When staying in a hotel or apartment, it is a good precaution to call the front desk or security to identify uninvited individuals before giving them access. There have been a small number of reports of the use of date rape drugs in bars.

Your passport is a valuable document and should be guarded. Passports and other valuables should be locked in a hotel safe, and a photocopy of your passport should be carried for identification purposes. The U.S. Embassy has observed an increase in reports of stolen passports.

Do not buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal in the United States, if you purchase them you may also be breaking local law.

Visitors should seek banks and ATMs and avoid street money changers. Travelers should use caution entering/exiting financial institutions and when using ATMs. Thieves have been known to target persons coming in and out of these locations. Use ATMs in public places (hotel, shopping mall, event venue). If the booth has a door, make sure it closes behind you. Pay attention to your surroundings. Pay with exact change as much as possible. If you pay for a small item with a large bill, you risk being shortchanged or getting counterfeit in change. Only take pesos as change. Use credit cards only at the hotel, major stores, and restaurants. Many locations have gone to cash only and will not accept credit cards. If planning to go to a specific restaurant, check with the hotel concierge and with the host/hostess upon arrival to see if credit cards are accepted. There have been reports of credit card skimmers at touristic destinations including Foz de Iguazu Park. Watch your bill carefully for fraudulent charges and

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have information available if you need to contact your credit card company in case of theft or fraud.

Visitors should lift suspected counterfeit bills to the light and look for watermarks. One should see a defined watermark of the face of the ex-president printed on the bill and below the printed face, the initials of the name of the president. As one observes a note, a silver line will appear vertically. When held to the light, the silver line will turn solid black and have micro printing upon it. On fake notes, the black line will become dotted. Serial numbers should be different on all notes. Additional currency recognition features can be viewed here: (<http://www.bcra.gov.ar/pdfs/comytexord/A3208.pdf>).

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