



## Mexico 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Merida

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Extortion; Murder; Human Trafficking; Cyber; Fraud; Financial Security; Narcoterrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Hurricanes; Oil & Energy; Kidnapping; Counterfeiting

Western Hemisphere > Mexico; Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Merida

3/7/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

More than four million Americans safely visit the Yucatán peninsula each year due to its numerous tourist destinations.

Post Crime Rating: Medium

While the three states in the peninsula (Campeche, Quintana Roo, Yucatán) have not suffered the same level of escalating violence seen in other parts of Mexico, 2015 saw a significant increase in violent criminal activity in Quintana Roo, specifically in the non-tourist areas in Cancun and Playa del Carmen. From 2014-2015, the state of Quintana Roo saw a 40 percent increase in homicides and a 43 percent increase in violent robberies. Additionally, Quintana Roo ranks 5th nationally in reported cases of extortion (source: Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Publica). A recent study conducted by the Autonomous University of Monterrey ranks Cancun as the Mexican city with the highest levels of human trafficking activity for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

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While there is no evidence indicating that criminals specifically target American citizens, crime victims are usually chosen based on perceived wealth, vulnerability, and inattentiveness.

Non-narco-related crime varies in type and frequency throughout the Peninsula but is generally low.

Most incidents of crime affecting U.S. citizens involve the excess consumption of alcohol.

#### Cybersecurity Issues

The Yucatan peninsula has significant cybersecurity concerns, specifically ATM/credit card scams. This type of criminality is especially common in Cancun and Playa del Carmen where organized groups specializing in cloning ATM/credit cards have been detected and dismantled by local authorities.

#### Other Areas of Concern

When traveling in Quintana Roo, south of Felipe Carrillo Puerto or east of Jose Maria Morelos, serious communication challenges exist. Cellular and Internet service are virtually non-existent. The southern portion of Quintana Roo is very rural and lacks significant

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infrastructure and adequate medical facilities. Additionally, host-nation law enforcement agencies lack sufficient presence in large portions of southern Quintana Roo that results in delayed responses to emergency situations.

### **Transportation-Safety Situation**

Road conditions in the Yucatán peninsula are different than those encountered in the U.S. Extra care should be exercised when passing a vehicle or being passed. When travelling throughout the Peninsula, drivers should exercise extreme caution outside of major cities at night due to poor road conditions. Drivers should be prepared for poorly illuminated vehicles at night; few/no road markings; poorly illuminated roadways; and a variety of pedestrians/animals on the roads. Travel on toll-ways is strongly encouraged. Federal highway 307, connecting Cancun and Playa del Carmen, has had the greatest number of accidents involving U.S. citizens. Most accidents are caused by excess speed, alcohol, or a combination of both.

Prior to road travel, ensure your vehicle is in good working condition and that fluids are at the correct level. When traveling long distances, it is best to travel in tandem. Ensure that there is enough fuel to reach larger cities/towns, as some smaller communities may not have service stations. The following items are recommended for road trips: cellular phone and charger; spare tire; portable gas can with funnel; potable water and non-perishable food items; first aid kit; jumper cables; flares/reflectors; tool kit; and spare key.

Do not leave valuables in plain view or unattended in your vehicle. Avoid leaving your auto on the street. When possible, park your vehicle inside residential compounds or parking areas with attendants. In traffic, always attempt to leave space in which to maneuver. Always leave

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yourself an exit. Be prepared to take evasive action at any time. Avoid choke points in travel. Be wary of diversions.

### Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation, in the form of buses and taxis, is readily available in most cities and towns. However, drivers can be untrained and do not always follow the rules of the road. Accidents are common. Whenever possible, travelers should use taxis arranged by hotel staff or located at designated stands and avoid hailing taxis on the street.

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Airports are modern and provide numerous domestic and international travel options. Cancun's International Airport is Mexico's busiest airport for international arrivals and second in total arrivals for the country.

### Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

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

There is no evidence to suggest that international terrorist groups are operating in the Yucatán peninsula. There are no known indigenous terrorist groups in the Yucatán peninsula.

It is difficult to definitively state which transnational criminal organization (TCO) is in “control” of the area. Open source reporting indicates the presence of Los Zetas, Cartel del Golfo, and Sinaloa Cartel in the state of Quintana Roo, specifically in Cancun and Playa del Carmen.

## Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The level of political violence in the Yucatan Peninsula has been low.

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

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While demonstrations have occurred in Merida (largely in towns with a history of political demonstrations and agitation; i.e. Kanasin, Tinum, Piste and Peto), they have generally remained peaceful and directed at domestic policy issues rather than U.S. interests.

Protests are occasionally disruptive, block major roadways, and have the potential to turn violent. During mid-term state elections in June 2015, violence erupted in Temax, Yucatán, resulting in two deaths and more than 20 injured.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

### Environmental Hazards

The Yucatán peninsula falls within the Atlantic hurricane season (June 1-November 30). The state of Quintana Roo tends to suffer the greatest effects from Atlantic hurricanes; however, storms have caused flooding and disruption of utility services throughout the Yucatán. Travelers are advised to keep abreast of developing weather conditions during the hurricane season and to avoid the paths of storms when possible.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

In the mid-1970s, Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche, was transformed from a fishing and shrimping city into a hub for oil when Mexico's nationalized petroleum company, PEMEX,

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discovered vast oil fields off the coast. Since then, Ciudad del Carmen has become a home for Mexican and foreign oil workers alike, and it now hosts numerous foreign companies performing PEMEX service contracts.

On April 1, 2015, an explosion and fire caused by a gas leak aboard a PEMEX oil platform in the Bay of Campeche killed four people and injured as many as 16 others.

On May 5, 2015, a rig operated by a PEMEX contractor collapsed in Campeche Sound, resulting in two deaths and the evacuation of over 100 workers. The incident also caused oil to spill into the Gulf of Mexico.

In August 2015, a portion of federal highway 307 in Quintana Roo collapsed when a sinkhole (10m x 2m) formed from a collapsed underground cavern. This road serves as the main artery for transportation between Cancun and Playa del Carmen.

## Drug-related Crimes

The Yucatán peninsula is strategically close to the narcotic smuggling routes of Central America and parts of the Caribbean. Most of the violent crimes reported over the last 12 months are the result of narco-trafficking groups fighting for control of these lucrative smuggling routes. During 2015, numerous local level plaza bosses were arrested, further splintering TCO leadership, and the non-tourist areas of Cancun witnessed a running gun battle between local authorities and elements of the Cartel del Golfo TCO. Additionally, a subject linked to drug trafficking was in possession of a RPG-29 rocket launcher at the time of his arrest in Chetumal, Quintana Roo.

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## Significant drug cartel-related arrests in the Yucatan Peninsula during 2015:

- On March 10, Victor Hugo Aguirre (aka "El Feo"), reported leader of the Cartel Independiente de Acapulco (CIDA), was arrested by federal authorities in Progreso, Yucatan. CIDA is a split-off group of the Beltran-Leyva TCO.
- On April 7, municipal authorities in Cancun, Quintana Roo, arrested Juan Daniel 'El Talibancillo' Velazquez Caballero, regional boss of the Cartel Del Golfo TCO.
- On April 9, Rodolfo 'El Fantasma' Arreola Sanchez, accountant of the Cartel Del Golfo TCO was arrested in Cancun, Quintana Roo.
- On April 11, federal forces apprehended Cesar Gastelum Serrano (aka "La Señora") in Cancun, Quintana Roo. He was a leading cocaine trafficker for the Sinaloa TCO.
- On July 11, high-ranking Los Zetas Cartel member Jesus Fernandez de Luna was arrested by Mexican Marines in Cancun, Quintana Roo. He is also the father-in-law of imprisoned Los Zetas leader Omar Trevino Morales (Z-42).

## Kidnapping Threats

The Yucatan peninsula experiences a high number of telephonic extortions and frauds. These scams come in many variations, to include "virtual kidnappings," which is an extortion-by-deception scheme wherein a victim is contacted by phone and coerced (by threat of violence) to remain isolated and to provide phone numbers for the victim's family or loved ones. The victim's family is then contacted and a ransom for the "kidnapped" person extracted. While this crime mostly affects Mexican nationals, Consular officers have received several reports from resident U.S. citizens and tourists experiencing similar calls within the

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Merida consular district.

Kidnappings-for-ransom in the Yucatán peninsula remain an anomaly. “Express kidnappings,” in which the victim is abducted for a short time and forced to withdraw money, usually from an ATM, occur with more frequency but are still uncommon.

Visitors can reduce their risk of becoming a victim of kidnapping by varying routes/times of travel and ensuring residences are sufficiently protected. (

## **Police Response**

Police corruption and involvement in criminal activity, along with fear of reprisals from criminal elements, discourages many victims from reporting crimes.

U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with police if stopped and questioned. If involved in a traffic accident or victimized by crime, one may be asked to accompany the investigating officer to a local police station to file a report. A complaint must be filed in the area where the crime occurred. Attempting to file a complaint once one has returned to the U.S. can be a difficult and time consuming process.

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

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Visitors should inform the Consulate in Merida or the Consular Agencies in Cancun or Playa Del Carmen should they encounter problems, including detainment or arrest by the police, while traveling in this part of Mexico.

### **Medical Emergencies**

Persons visiting the Yucatán should take normal tourist precautions with regard to drinking water, eating fresh fruits, vegetables, and salads.

Travelers should ensure that they have adequate health insurance while traveling throughout Mexico. Local hospitals generally require payment in advance. Many times, U.S.-based health insurance plans do not cover travelers in Mexico and small procedures can sometimes result in bills of several thousands of dollars.

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad is provided in the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad" available via the Consular Affairs web page at <http://www.travel.state.gov>

### **Available Air Ambulance Services**

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The Regional Security Office in Merida does not endorse any specific private insurance or air ambulance company. The following list is for informational purposes only:

For international treatment and medical insurance:

AEA International (206) 340-6000

Air ambulances that service the Yucatán:

Advanced Air Ambulance 800-633-3590 or 305-232-7700

Air Ambulance Professionals 800-752-4195 or 954-491-0555

STAT Air International - Air Ambulance Tel: 800-557-5911 or 1-619-754-6550

Trinity Air Ambulance International Tel: 954-771-7911

Air Compassion 1-866-270-9198 or 001- 883-270-9198

AIRMD Air Ambulance Services 800-282-6878 or 1-727-530-7972

Air Response 800-631-6565 or 303-858-9967

Critical Air Medicine 800-247-8326 or 619-571-0482

Air Ambulance 1 Direct: 1-832-608-4505 or International: 1-832-900-9000

Air Medical 210-945-8959

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Express Aviation Services, Inc. 1-800-304-8094

## 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/mexico?s\\_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/mexico?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001).

## OSAC Country Council Information

U.S. Consulate General Merida supports the OSAC Cancun Country Council. For more information, contact the Regional Security Office Merida, (011) (52) (999) 942-5719. To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email [OSACWHA@state.gov](mailto:OSACWHA@state.gov).

## U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate General Merida

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Calle 60 No. 338-K x 29 y 31, Col. Alcala Martin Merida, Yucatán, Mexico 97050

### Consulate Contact Numbers

Mexico Country Code: 52

Merida City Code: 99

Police Emergency: 066

Switchboard: (011) (52) (999) 942-5700 (dialing from the U.S.) or (01) (999) 942-5700 (dialing from within Mexico) or 942-5700 (dialing from within Merida)

E-mail: [meridacons@state.gov](mailto:meridacons@state.gov)

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

### Nearby Posts

Embassy Mexico City: <http://mexico.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate Ciudad Juarez: <http://ciudadjuarez.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guadalajara: <http://guadalajara.usconsulate.gov/>

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Consulate Hermosillo: <http://hermosillo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Matamoros: <http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Monterrey: <http://monterrey.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Nogales: <http://nogales.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Nuevo Laredo: <http://nuevolaredo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Tijuana: <http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/>

## Consulate Guidance

The latest country specific information and travel alerts for Mexico can be found at:  
<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/mexico.html>.

## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

### Scams

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

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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 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 react without verifying with their employer, as well as the elderly.

Do not accept drinks from strangers and always watch your drink, it is relatively easy for a criminal to put some form of drug into a drink. There have been incidents of people who have woken up robbed of their valuables or sexually assaulted after accepting such a drink.

Be careful of cash transactions on the street. A hurried transaction for merchandise often leaves the customer with shoddy/counterfeit goods or with counterfeit money.

## Situational Awareness Best Practices

Vary your times/routes to/from work, school, or activities. Do not become time and place predictable. Maintain a low personal profile; it is best to avoid activities that draw attention. Avoid wearing ostentatious jewelry or clothing that may bring unwanted attention. Be alert to surveillance. Criminals, even petty thieves, are known to watch the activities of their victims before they commit a robbery or assault. Advise colleagues and family of your daily plans and ensure they know how to reach you. Always be aware of your surroundings. Suspicious persons or activities in the neighborhood should be reported to the police immediately.

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Never give out your personal information (family member and household staff names, addresses, telephone numbers) in an open setting.

Be cautious about inviting strangers or casual acquaintances into your home. Ensure all of your family members are briefed on security measures. Perimeter doors should be substantial and equipped with deadbolts and a peephole, all reachable windows and openings should be grilled, and grounds around residences should be illuminated. Family members and household help should not allow anyone to enter the residential grounds without identification and prearranged appointments.

Travelers can reduce their chances of being the victim of a crime at tourist destinations by traveling with a trusted individual, and being cognizant of their alcohol consumption.

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