



Mexico 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Tijuana

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Murder; Narcoterrorism; Human Trafficking; Drug Trafficking; Maritime; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Floods; Kidnapping; Extortion

Western Hemisphere > Mexico; Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Tijuana

3/7/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The Department of State divides its roles and responsibilities in Mexico among 10 consular districts spread across Mexico. The Consular District for the U.S. Consulate General in Tijuana comprises the states of Baja California and Baja California Sur. For information regarding the security environment in other areas of Mexico, please reference the OSAC Crime and Safety Reports from the following Consular Districts: Ciudad Juarez, Nogales, Hermosillo, Mexican Federal District, Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Monterrey, Guadalajara, and Merida.

The majority of U.S. corporations in Baja California can be found in Tijuana and Mexicali with the bulk of the remaining U.S. commercial and tourist interests found in/around Ensenada and Rosarito. Tijuana is the largest city in Baja California and is connected to greater San Diego, California, by the San Ysidro Port of Entry, the busiest land border crossing in the world. In Baja California Sur, the majority of U.S. interests are concentrated in Los Cabos and La Paz.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

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Crime Threats

Tijuana is a very large metropolitan city with an ever-present, very real crime problem. Pickpockets and purse snatchers are present and mostly target large crowds on public transportation and at tourist attractions. Credit/debit card fraud and telephone card fraud is common.

Common criminals normally operate in pairs or small groups, and they generally carry a knife or handgun. These criminals select victims based on an appearance of vulnerability, prosperity, or inattentiveness. Within the Consulate community, Mexican employees fall victim to crime far more frequently than their American employee colleagues do. However, U.S. Consulate staff members are not immune to the effects of local violence, as crimes have occurred within close proximity to Consulate residences.

On January 19, 2016, the U.S. Department of State updated its Travel Warning for all of Mexico. A continued increase in homicides in Baja California Sur, specifically in/around La Paz, resulted in the Warning to include the following language for Baja California Sur: "Exercise caution in the state capital of La Paz. According to the Department of Interior of Mexico, Baja California Sur registered its highest homicide rate ever as of October 2015. Many of these homicides have occurred in La Paz, where there has been an increase in public acts of violence between rival criminal organizations." Recently published statistics from the Department of Interior of Mexico show 2015 homicide rates for the state higher than any previously published rates, further supporting the warning to exercise caution.

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The proximity to a major U.S. city with a massive border crossing places Tijuana in an important and lucrative location for Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs), narco-traffickers, and human smuggling organizations. Mexico is the primary route for the transport of illegal drugs into the U.S, and Tijuana is the gateway to southern California. As a result of its highly strategic location, violent crime continues to be a part of everyday life. Organized crime occurs on virtually a daily basis by TCOs. Drug-related violence in U.S. Consulate General Tijuana's consular district, for the most part, is confined to those involved in the drug trade. While U.S. citizens not involved in criminal activities are generally not targeted, innocent bystanders are at risk from the violence in the streets of border cities and nearby towns.

The majority of both states remain primarily under the control of the Sinaloa Cartel from an organized crime perspective. However, police have arrested members from every cartel in Mexico throughout Baja California and Baja California Sur, and there has been a consistent increase of activity involving rival cartels, specifically Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG), in Baja California. Reasons for this are varied but primarily revolve around the potential illicit money to be made in this key corridor. Criminal deportees from the U.S. to Tijuana continue to be a problem since often, due to a lack of options, they begin working with local criminal organizations. As law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border succeed in arresting high level members of TCOs throughout Mexico, unrest and power plays among the lower ranks tend to ensue.

Unlike 2007-2010 when there was a blatant "narco war" between the incumbent TCO, the Arellano Felix Organization (aka AFO, Tijuana Cartel) and the Sinaloa Cartel, crime now continues to involve smaller cells within the Sinaloa Cartel and independent operators. It is also believed to be part of the Sinaloa business model to not allow any of its operators to get too powerful. Thus, they are set up in small cells and often have skirmishes among themselves, although they all report back to the same parent organization. In 2015, there was

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a noticeable increase in public announcements (normally done by placing banners in public places or near/on murdered bodies) by self-proclaimed members of rival cartels (AFO and CJNG) against the Sinaloa cartel and conversely boasts from the Sinaloa Cartel of their continued dominance over the “plaza.” Homicides continue to be mostly connected to these rivalries and power struggles, but the increase in public displays of violence in 2015 and the frequency of homicides are the main cause for continued concern.

Per official government of Mexico statistics, crime and homicide rates remained largely unchanged in Ensenada and Mexicali. In 2015, both Rosarito and Tecate saw increases in homicides compared to 2014. Although robberies and assaults in Tijuana went down in 2015 compared to 2014, homicides increased by a staggering 45 percent. This increase of violence received media attention and has many worried about its possible impact on the general populace.

Other Areas of Concern

Organized crime elements are present in local bars, nightclubs, and the casinos in Tijuana. Due to the presence of criminal activity there, people should use extreme caution after dark in old Zona Centro near “Avenida Revolución, Zona Centro.” For about eight blocks, Avenida Revolucion is lined with shops, bars, and restaurants, many aimed at day-trip tourists. Visitors should be careful (or aware) in walking too far north on Constitucion Avenue, one block west of Revolucion, and going below Juarez (Segunda), as it will abruptly lead you into the “red light” district.

Visitors should exercise extreme caution when visiting Playas de Tijuana after dark, as there

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is an increased criminal element.

Visitors are highly encouraged to avoid traveling after dark on remote roads, isolated highways, or throughways that are not frequently patrolled by police.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Travelers should exercise caution, avoid traveling at night, and should use toll (“cuota”) roads rather than the less secure “free” (“libre”) roads whenever possible. Keep your car doors locked and your windows up while driving in town. When in heavy traffic or when stopped in traffic, leave enough room between vehicles to maneuver and escape if necessary.

Prior to road travel, ensure that your vehicle is in good operating condition, paying particular attention to the engine, tires, brakes, head/tail lights, spare tire and jack, horn, and fluid levels. The head/tail lights are held in place by easily accessible screws. Install grilles around the lights or tap out the heads of the screws holding the lights in place. If your tire is mounted outside, secure it with chain/padlock or similar device. If this is not possible, keep it at home, reinstalling it only for extended trips outside the city. Theft of the vehicle’s operating computer and sound systems are common. The installation of a car alarm is strongly recommended. Also, if you purchase a car radio, look for models that can be removed locked away. Keep your vehicle sterile, storing anything that would entice a thief out of plain view. Replace one lug nut on each wheel with a specially-keyed bolt that locks or can only be removed with a

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special attachment to the tire iron. Secure emblems with rivets. Avoid leaving your vehicle on the street. Park inside a residential compound, in a parking lot with an attendant, or at least within view of the location of your visit. If this is not possible, take a taxi. When parking within a shopping facility lot, be sure to park as close as possible to the store entrance but away from dumpsters, bushes, or large vehicles. Be sure to lock your doors, close windows, and hide purchases in the trunk, out of sight.

Particularly on long trips to remote areas, try to travel with other vehicles, and advise someone of your travel plans, including anticipated arrival/departure times and contact numbers. The following items are recommended for extended road trips: Cellular telephone with charger (although some areas between cities lack coverage); A satellite tracking device; An extra spare tire; Portable can of gasoline with funnel; Potable water; Non-perishable food items; First Aid kit; Camping gear (sleeping bag, blanket, stove, etc.); Fire extinguisher; Jumper cables; Flares/reflectors; Collapsible shovel; Emergency tool kit (flashlight with additional batteries; battery operated radio; extra fan belt/drive belt; extra fuses, spark plugs, and light bulbs; duplicate ignition key; screw driver (regular and Phillips head); socket wrench set; pliers; wire; and electrical tape).

Public Transportation Conditions

You are more vulnerable to petty crime in crowded and confined places with unknown individuals, this applies to use of shared public transportation.

Other Travel Conditions

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U.S. citizens should not hitchhike with, accept rides from, or offer rides to, strangers anywhere in Mexico. Tourists should not hike alone in backcountry areas, nor walk alone on lightly-frequented beaches, ruins, or trails.

U.S. citizens should be mindful of entry requirements and permits when traveling into Mexico, to included entry by waters via private boat. The U.S. Consulate recommends that all individuals onboard vessels used for sport fishing, including passengers on commercial and charter boats, understand the entry requirements and permits needed before traveling.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

While there do not appear to be any Middle Eastern terrorist groups active in Baja California, lax immigration controls, the ease in which fake Mexican travel documents can be obtained, and Mexico's geographic location make the country an attractive transit point for potential transnational terrorists.

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Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Northern Mexico is not anti-American but rather well-integrated with the U.S. by family and commercial ties. Anti-American sentiment is seldom expressed toward U.S. citizens, either official or non-official. American interests are generally not targets of political violence. Small, peaceful demonstrations in protest of various U.S. policies occur rarely at the U.S. Consulate General in Tijuana.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

Public protests and demonstrations do occur for various economic and political reasons, but they are typically peaceful. The government of Mexico's ongoing conflict with TCOs is the main cause for civil unrest in this consular district.

Post-specific Concerns

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Environmental Hazards

There were no major earthquakes in Baja California or Baja California Sur in 2015, but on April 4, 2010, a 7.2 earthquake struck with its epicenter 37 miles southeast of Mexicali, which suffered the most damage of any city in Baja California. The earthquake resulted in two deaths, serious infrastructural damage, and a suspension of public services in Mexicali. Although some buildings experienced structural damage, no casualties were reported in Tijuana (110 miles from epicenter). Due to Tijuana's proximity to the San Andreas Fault Line, the possibility of another large earthquake remains high.

In September 2014, Baja California Sur was struck by Hurricane Odile, the most intense landfalling tropical hurricane to hit the peninsula during the satellite era. Odile, a Category 3 hurricane, roared into Baja California Sur on September 14 with winds up to 125 mph and six hours of torrential rain, leaving 92 percent of the population without electricity or water. An estimated 10,000 U.S. citizens were evacuated from the impacted areas. In June 2015, Tropical Storm Blanca's center made landfall in the southern Baja California peninsula near Puerto Cortes, with maximum sustained winds estimated at 45 mph. Blanca was downgraded to a depression before moving on.

While particulars of El Niño effects are difficult to predict, in 2015 Baja California was already negatively impacted by some flooding due to heavy rain in the Tijuana area. This is expected to continue into 2016.

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It is recommended that travelers stay current with weather conditions when traveling throughout the Baja Peninsula, especially in Baja California Sur during May-November, and plan accordingly.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Weather events can severely impact critical infrastructure in both Baja California and Baja California Sur. Depending on the severity of the weather event, access to electricity, potable water, and operable roads may be impacted.

Privacy Concerns

There are privacy laws in Mexico that govern the release of personal information

Kidnapping

Kidnapping, including the kidnapping of non-Mexicans, occurs. Kidnapping-for-ransom is an established criminal activity. Unofficial estimates of kidnapping levels vary wildly, from 600 to 5,000 per year countrywide. In most cases, the ransom is paid, and the victim is set free. The usual practice is not to notify police authorities, as the popular belief is that the police may be involved or are unable to resolve the situation. Affluent residents in Tijuana often have

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bodyguards and armored vehicles for their families to protect them against kidnapping.

Another kidnapping tactic is the telephonic kidnapping (virtual kidnapping). Although the calls vary in style, the methodology is invariably the same: the virtual kidnapping call includes a crying/pleading voice immediately after the call is answered and before the "kidnapper" gets on the phone. In this manner, the criminals hope to confuse the victim and get him/her to give away important information. For example, if the crying voice sounds like a child in any way, and you call out your child's name, the caller then knows the name of a child who could be a kidnap victim, and they will use this knowledge against you. The voice of the "victim" will usually be crying/hysterical. This makes it difficult to identify and increases the likelihood that you will believe that it is your loved one. Criminals will try to use fear, tact, and timing against possible victims. For example, they plan their calls to coincide with times when it is difficult to contact the child or another adult immediately (e.g. when child is on their way to/from school). All calls demand money for the release of the loved one and stipulate no police involvement. Often times, the callers will give statements to suggest surveillance: "we saw you at the school with your camioneta (SUV)." This is very vague but implies they have been watching your family and uses fear and everyday routines against you to reinforce the threat of the kidnapping. One of the most important things for one to be aware of are the details of your family's travel and location. In addition, it is equally important that one ensures good communication with family members.

It is increasingly common for extortionists to call prospective victims on the telephone, often posing as law enforcement or other officials, and demand payments in return for the release of an arrested family member or supposedly to forestall a kidnapping. Prison inmates using smuggled cellular phones often place these calls. Persons receiving such calls should be wary, as many such demands or threats are baseless, and should attempt to contact the family member as soon as possible. If you cannot reach the missing individual, and believe s/he may have run afoul of criminals or of the law, you may contact the Consulate, the Embassy, or the Department of State for assistance.

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Police Response

The ability of police varies from city to city, but there have been many strides made in recent years, especially in Tijuana. Police response and confidence continues to generally improve in Tijuana, although police corruption still exists. The Tijuana police continue to demonstrate a desire to gain the trust of the populace and continue to pursue outreach activities. The general perception was that the majority of crime victims do not report crimes due to fear of reprisals by the police, the belief that police are corrupt, or the feeling that nothing would come from such reports. This is slowly changing. Reporting crime is an archaic, exhausting process and is widely believed to be a waste of time except for the most serious of crimes or where a police report is required for insurance purposes. To file a complaint, it is helpful, but not absolutely necessary, to have the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number. If you are not able to obtain those, it may still be possible to identify the officer based on physical appearance and the time/place that the event occurred. Many records of crimes are not even kept by the police; the Rosarito Police Department is especially known to do this, as police departments have a desire to keep their crime statistics down for political and other self-serving reasons.

You can minimize your vulnerability by obeying Mexican law. You can be arrested in Mexico for: disturbing the peace or being a public nuisance; drinking in public; fighting; nudity or immoral conduct; use, production, or sale of false documents; possession, introduction, or use of any weapon (including pocket knives); possession, introduction, or consumption of restricted drugs including medical marijuana (most drugs that are restricted in the U.S. are also restricted in Mexico); drunk driving or driving under the influence of drugs; and causing an auto accident or injuring someone.

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U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with the police if stopped or questioned. If you are stopped by a police officer, they cannot accept cash payments for fines and offering a bribe to an officer is a serious crime. In addition, tourists should be wary of persons representing themselves as police officers or other officials. When in doubt, ask for identification.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

The U.S. Consulate General in Tijuana will sometimes receive reports of extortion by supposed police officers in Baja California and Baja California Sur. Sometimes, the perpetrators are actual police officers, and sometimes they are criminals using fake police uniforms and credentials. If you are the victim of police extortion, please contact the U.S. Consulate. If you file a complaint, Consulate staff will assist you in every step of the process.

Crime Victim Assistance:

The police emergency telephone number is 066, though whether they arrive at all is questionable. Callers can report criminal activity from anywhere in Mexico or U.S. Interested parties can call 1-866-201-5060 24/7/365 to report any crime-related information to bilingual operators who will forward the report to the proper authorities for action. This hotline was set up by the Baja California Secretary of Public Safety so that anyone wishing to report criminal activity in Mexico can do so anonymously from anywhere in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. A similar tip line "089" has been available since 2005 in Mexico to make an anonymous tip and enjoys a sizable call volume.

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U.S. Consulate General Tijuana's American Citizen Services provides assistance to American citizen's in our consular district. The Consulate's business hours are 7:30am to 4:00pm Monday through Friday. In case of an after-hours emergency involving U.S. citizens, please contact the Duty Officer. From Mexico dial 001 (619) 692-2154, from the U.S., call (619) 692-2154. This number is for emergencies only.

Travelers may contact the Consular Section at the U.S. Consulate General Tijuana for assistance in dealing with the local police. If involved in a traffic accident or victimized by crime, one may be required to accompany the investigating officer to the local police station to file a complaint or respond to questions. Should a police report be required for an insurance claim, a nominal fee will be charged.

Police/Security Agencies

The Tijuana Municipal Police Department is the largest police force in the state of Baja California. They serve a preventive police role, patrolling and handling immediate response to criminal incidents within their jurisdiction. The Baja California State Preventive Police (PEP) serves a similar role for the entire state. Similarly, the Federal Police (PF), and to an extent the Mexican Army (SEDENA), patrol more broadly, including public highways, airports, and the border regions.

In Baja California Sur, PF, SEDENA, and the Mexican Marines (SEMAR) share their security

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roles and responsibilities with state and smaller local municipal police forces.

In both states, the Attorney General's Office at the federal level (PGR) and state level (PGJE) are responsible for the investigation and prosecution of crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of federal and state courts respectively.

Medical Emergencies

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of States Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad," available on the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at <http://www.travel.state.gov>

Emergency Services-066

Red Cross (Cruz Roja) Ambulance-608-6700

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Contact information for some medical facilities in Tijuana are listed below (this listing is not all inclusive). Please note that the U.S. Consulate General in Tijuana assumes no responsibility or liability for the professional ability or reputation of, or the quality of services provided by, the

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following hospitals and clinics. Inclusion on this list is in no way an endorsement by the Department of State or the U.S. Consulate General Tijuana. The order in which they appear has no other significance. The information on the list on professional credentials and areas of expertise are provided directly by the services providers. You may receive additional information by contacting the local medical association (or its equivalent local licensing authority).

Del Prado Hospital/Centro Medico

Hospital Direct: 681-4900/681-4906

Address: Hospital y Centro Médico del Prado

50 Calle Bugambilias, Tijuana, Baja California 22440, 22160, Mexico

DIRECTOR - AUBANEL, MA. EUGENIA, Work: 681-4900

Angeles Hospital

Hospital Direct: 635-1900/635-1800

Address: 10999 Paseo de los Heroes, Tijuana, B.C. Mexico

DIRECTOR - EBERRI, PAULO, Work: 635-1800

Excel Hospital/Centro Medico

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Address: Centro Medico Excel

Avenida Paseo de los Heroes # 2507 Zona Rio, Tijuana, B.C. 22329

Direct: 634-3434/634-7001/03

These three local hospitals also have outpatient clinics:

Hospital Angeles

Avenida Paseo de los Heroes 10999

Zona Rio, Tijuana

635-1900/635-1800

Centro Medico Excel

Avenida Paseo de los Heroes 2507

Zona Rio, Tijuana

634-3434/634-7001/634-7002/634-7003

Centro Medico Hospital Del Prado

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Bugambillas 50

Fracc. Del Prado, Tijuana

681-4900/681-4906

Available Air Ambulance Services

These ambulance services offer full service to all of Baja California.

U.S. BASED

Aeromedevac, Inc.

Gillespie Field, 681 Kenney Street, El Cajon, CA 92020

San Diego, California

Toll Free from USA: 1-800-462-0911

Call Collect: 619/284-7910

Fax: 619/284-791

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www.aeromedevac.com

e-mail: flightrequest@aeromedevac.com

MEXICO BASED

TransMedic

Ensenada, BC, Mexico

1-800-026-3342

Tel. 646/178-1400

Fax 646/178-2891

Recommended Insurance Posture

For international treatment and medical insurance: International SOS, LA Office,
310-893-5280

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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CDC International Traveler's hotline - 24 hour info available at 888-232-6348 or 800-232-4636 or please see the latest information on the CDC's website at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/mexico.htm>.

OSAC Country Council Information

There is an active OSAC Country Council coordinated by RSO Tijuana. Meetings are held interchangeably between Tijuana, southern California, and Baja California Sur. If interested in participating, please contact RSO Maurilio Rojano-Garcia at 52-664-977-2102. To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email OSACWHA@state.gov.

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate Tijuana Address:

Consulado Americano

Paseo de las Culturas s/n Mesa de Otay Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico 22425

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Hours: 0730 - 1615 Monday-Friday

Consulate Contact Numbers

Mexico country code: 52

Tijuana area code: 664

Consulate switchboard: 664-977-2000 (from the U.S., dial 011-52-664-977-2000)

After hours emergency Duty Officer cellular phone: 619-692-2154 (US), 664-628-1762 (Mex)

Email: ACSTijuana@state.gov

Regional Security Office: ext. 2102, or 2271.

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

Nearby Posts

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

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

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

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

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

Consulate Merida: <http://merida.usconsulate.gov/>

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

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

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

Consulate Guidance

For additional information, travelers should refer to the Department of State's Country Specific Information for Mexico and the latest Travel Warning for Mexico, and the publication Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas.

If you are going to reside in or visit Mexico, please take the time to tell our Embassy about your presence in-country. If you enroll, we can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements. It will also help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. To enroll your stay or visit, click the STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program) button at <http://travel.state.gov>.

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Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Be aware of popular scams and robbery tactics used to distract your attention. Avoid con games by being aware of street-side requests for donations to charity.

Be cautious if asked for an "Expediter" fee, cons include persons who offer their services to facilitate your business and personal dealings for a fee.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Personnel are encouraged to be aware of their surroundings and remove themselves from locations that present security concerns. We suggest that you follow the same security measures you would in any large metropolitan city. Crime is a 24-hour concern but darkness and late night travel increases your chances of being a victim of crime. U.S. citizens are urged to be especially aware of safety and security concerns when visiting the border region and to exercise common sense precautions (visiting only legitimate business and tourist areas and only during daylight hours).

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Visitors should be aware of their surroundings, even in areas generally considered safe. Maintain a low profile. Do not advertise the fact that you are American. Dress casually, keep valuables out of sight, and do not draw attention to yourself with your actions. Avoid wearing jewelry and carry a clutch purse or a neck purse instead of a shoulder bag. Carry a wallet in the front trouser pocket or front jacket pocket. Minimize valuables and do not carry large sums of money while in crowded, urban areas. Never leave shopping bags or merchandise unattended. Avoid sitting outside at restaurants; instead, try to find a seat in an area not clearly visible from the street.

When walking, always travel in illuminated areas with at least one other person. Having a travel companion is encouraged. Do not travel in unfamiliar areas of the city, particularly after dark. Women traveling alone are especially vulnerable and should exercise caution, particularly at night. Victims, often those who are unaccompanied, have been raped, robbed of personal property, or abducted and then held while their credit cards were used at various businesses and ATMs.

Vary your routine. Be unpredictable in your movements; vary your routes from home, to the office, along with your departure/arrival times. Be alert to possible surveillance. Note any individual who appears out of place along your routes to regular activities.

U.S. citizens should be very cautious when using ATMs in Mexico. If an ATM must be used, it should be accessed only during the business hours at large protected facilities (preferably inside commercial establishments, rather than at glass-enclosed, highly visible ATMs on streets). When at an ATM, cover the key pad when entering your PIN. Protect your PIN. Some people make it easy for criminals by writing the PIN to their credit/debit card on something that they keep in their wallet, or even worse, writing it on back of the card itself. Commit the PIN to memory. Prior to inserting your card, check the card reader to make sure that it looks

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appropriate and is not altered. U.S. and Mexican citizens are sometimes accosted on the street and forced to withdraw money from their accounts using their ATM cards.

If possible, pay with cash and only use your credit card with reputable merchants. Never let someone take your credit card out of sight during payment. Keeping a low limit on your credit cards restricts the amount of money that thieves can steal. Although not exactly a prevention tactic, it will help if you fall victim. Sign all credit cards immediately upon your receipt of them. You can also write "Check ID" so that the clerk, if they read the back, will ask for ID for verification during a transaction. It is important to cancel all credit cards that you do not use and to monitor the ones that you do use. The first step to prevent skimming is to understand what is going on around you. Do not leave receipts at ATMs, teller windows, gasoline pumps, or with a clerk.

Be very careful any time you use your telephone card. If possible make telephone card phone calls from your hotel room. Keep an eye out for anyone who may be observing your card or your fingers as you dial your code. Avoid giving the number to local operators.

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