



Tunisia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Revolutions; Assault; Murder; Theft; Financial Security; Fraud; Burglary; Drug Trafficking; Extreme heat/drought; Religious Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Floods; Kidnapping

Near East > Tunisia; Near East > Tunisia > Tunis

3/8/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Tunisia's crime and safety situation continues to remain an ongoing and serious security concern for the country. Since the 2011 revolution, security has deteriorated in certain parts of the country, especially along the borders with Algeria and Libya.

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Reliable crime statistics are difficult to obtain, but violent crime involving the use of firearms (assault, homicide, armed robbery) is rare. According to official statistics from the Ministry of Interior (<http://opendata.interieur.gov.tn/fr/catalog/statistiques-des-faits-criminels-sur-tout-le-territoire-de-la-republique-durant-l-annee-2014-en-comparaison-avec-l-annee-2013>), theft and property crimes showed a slight decrease from 2013 to 2014, while there was a marked increase in the

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number of financial crimes/scams during that same period. Data for 2015 is not yet available. A significant rate of violent crimes (homicides, sexual assaults, personal robberies, residential break-ins) and nonviolent crimes (financial scams, vehicle thefts, petty drug offenses) exists in Tunis and other large/tourist cities.

Most reported criminal incidents against foreigners are crimes of opportunity (pickpocketing, purse snatching, petty theft). The selection of targets tends to focus on people who appear unfamiliar with their surroundings or on those who dress expensively, wear Western-style clothing, or who draw attention to themselves by not speaking the local language. Cases have been reported of young men on motor scooters targeting Western-looking females and attempting to snatch valuables during both day and night. Snatch-and-run tactics include speeding by an unsuspecting pedestrian on a scooter and grabbing a dangling purse.

More serious crimes (armed robbery) do occur but much less often and, typically, involve a knife or machete rather than a gun. Many incidents of assaults, vehicle theft, and vehicle break-ins have occurred against both Tunisians and foreigners. The area of West Le Kram in Tunis is particularly well-known for theft.

Anecdotal evidence suggests a slight uptick in residential burglaries during 2015 in areas of Tunis frequently inhabited by expatriates. Most residential burglaries occur during the day, when most people are at work, and happen in both expatriate and Tunisian neighborhoods. Burglaries also occur at night, when there are obvious signs that no one is home; however, break-in burglaries are reported to have happened while occupants are home as well. Most home burglars are young males (ages 17-25) looking for small, expensive items (cash, jewelry, watches, laptops, cell phones) that can be converted to cash easily. Although home burglaries may seem like a random occurrence, they actually involve a selection process. Burglars are likely to choose an unoccupied home with the easiest access, the greatest

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amount of cover, and the best escape routes.

Tunisia is largely a cash-based economy. Credit cards are gaining acceptance at establishments in larger tourist cities, and ATMs can be found in many places in the capital. There have been reported incidents of people getting mugged while at the ATM and being watched while paying bills at restaurants. Even though the Embassy has not seen a high level of credit card fraud among Americans, there are numerous financial scams reported by authorities.

Areas of Concern

The Tunisian National Guard requires persons traveling into the desert areas south of Tataouine to register their travel plans beforehand and obtain a “desert pass” for access.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road safety poses one of the greatest risks to foreign travelers. According to the National Road Safety Observatory, there were more than 7,100 recorded traffic accidents, approximately 1,400 deaths, and well over 10,000 injuries in 2015. These figures illustrate the need to become well aware of the neighborhoods, local traffic patterns, and road culture

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before renting a car or self-driving. Drivers will likely encounter road conditions, driving patterns, traffic laws, and signs that different from those in the U.S. Local drivers often fail to obey traffic signs/signals, drive on the wrong side of the road, and go against the flow of traffic. Locals use the road shoulders or turning lanes to pass or ignore traffic lane markings. Also, do not assume that pedestrians are aware of oncoming traffic or that they will be given the right-of-way, even at a designated pedestrian crossing. Bicycles, mopeds, and motorcycles are operated without sufficient lights/reflectors, making them difficult to see as they dart in/out of traffic.

Uniformed police officers are generally at major intersections in major cities. Police officers may stop drivers for inspection for no reason at any time, and drivers should comply. Police pay particular attention to rental cars (all rental cars have blue license plates). Police officers conduct random traffic stops. Drivers and passengers are required to show their Tunisian identity card or resident's permit and vehicle registration.

If drivers are involved in a motor accident that results in death or serious injury, the police may take them into protective custody until they are absolved of responsibility. This situation can mean a driver spends days to months in detention. Drivers involved in traffic accidents not involving physical injury are not required to file a traffic report.

Visitors should avoid driving after dark outside Tunis or major resort areas. Travel in the desert areas of southern Tunisia presents additional challenges. Many roads are not paved, and even well-traveled routes are subject to blowing sands that can create hazards. Persons driving off the major paved roads are encouraged to ensure that their vehicles are appropriate for off-road driving conditions and are equipped with appropriate spares/supplies (water, food). Groups should generally travel in multiple vehicles. Desert regions are subject to extreme temperatures, from sub-freezing evenings in the winter to dangerously hot days in

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the summer. In addition, many areas in the southern desert regions have little or no cellular telephone service.

Refrain from using your mobile phone while driving. Keep your vehicle windows closed, doors locked, and valuables concealed.

Public Transportation Conditions

Taking public buses or minibuses (known by locals as “louage”) is strongly discouraged. Bus drivers often drive at excessive speeds and have poor safety records. Buses are usually overcrowded, and women have been harassed.

Americans on official business are not authorized to take taxis. However, taxis are authorized for home-to-work and personal business. Tunis’ official taxis (yellow cabs) can be hailed legally from the street or at designated spots in prominent places (hotels, restaurants). The white and red roof sign will have a four digit serial number. All fares are metered and have a minimum charge. Do not use a taxi that will not use the meter or claims “the meter is not working,” as these drivers will charge unsuspecting passengers exorbitant rates. Depending on what time and place you catch the taxi, additional charges may apply. Do not enter a taxi that is already carrying passengers, and do not allow your driver to pick up additional passengers. Taxi fares are relatively inexpensive.

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The streetcar system, known as “Metro,” consists of five lines between downtown Tunis and nearby suburbs. In two separate accidents in November 2013, individuals were hit and killed by the Metro.

Trains depart from Tunis to many cities (Sousse, Sfax, Gabes, El Jem) and offer a safer alternative to driving. However, there have been several major train accidents over the past several years. In June 2015, 18 people were killed and 98 were injured near the town of El Fahs. Other major accidents include a collision between two trains near Sidi Rezig in 2012 where 55 people were injured and a two-train collision in 2010 at Bir El Bay, killing one person and injuring 57.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Critical

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

A state of emergency was put in place after a November 2015 terrorist attack on security forces in downtown Tunis. This state of emergency is set to expire on March 22. The government expanded its counterterrorism efforts in 2015, particularly after several high-profile attacks; some major terrorist incidents in 2015 included:

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On February 17, four National Guard service members on patrol died in a terrorist attack in Boulaaba, close to Mount Chaambi. The terrorists fled with service members' weapons. AQIM-affiliated Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade claimed responsibility.

On March 18, two terrorists attacked the Bardo museum, killing 21 foreign tourists and a Tunisian civilian and injuring more than 40 civilians. The perpetrators and a member of the Antiterrorism Brigade (BAT) died in the ensuing operations. ISIL and Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade claimed responsibility. The perpetrators had been trained in Libya. For more on this incident, please see OSAC's report on this attack.

On April 7, a group of terrorists, reportedly armed with Kalashnikovs and RPGs, ambushed an army patrol in the Kasserine region, killing four soldiers and injuring nine.

On June 26, a lone terrorist opened fire on tourists at two resort hotels in Sousse. Some 39 tourists, mostly Brits, died in the attack. The security forces killed the terrorist who was trained in Libya. ISIL claimed responsibility. For more on this incident, please see OSAC's report on this attack.

On November 24, a terrorist killed 12 Presidential Guard members in a suicide attack on their bus in downtown Tunis. ISIL claimed responsibility.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

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Cities have experienced periodic or spontaneous demonstrations. All areas of demonstrations or protests should be avoided completely. If a large concentration of people is observed, it would be wise to leave the area immediately. In January 2016, there were numerous demonstrations in cities around the country protesting what some individuals believed to be unfair government economic and social policies. The demonstrations featured varying degrees of violence, ranging from burning tires and impeding pedestrian/vehicular access to severely damaging government facilities and attacking government security forces.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Tunisia is considered to be in an active earthquake zone. Most buildings do not meet U.S. construction criteria.

During the winter, extended downpours have been known to overwhelm Tunis' storm drains and result in street flooding. The city can shut down because of washed-out roads when alternate routes become overburdened by diverted traffic.

Privacy Concerns

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International express delivery services can provide service to Tunisian addresses through the Tunisian “rapid poste” system. Tunisian customs routinely opens express mail for inspection. Although the U.S. Embassy knows of no cases of theft/loss of material related to express mail delivery addressed to Americans, American business representatives should be aware of the possibility of review or loss of corporate proprietary information when using these services.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Modern Standard Arabic is the official, national language; however, the local dialect is the most commonly-used language in daily activities. French is widely spoken. English is understood by few and usually only at high-end establishments (hotels, restaurants).

Women face no specific dress restrictions but wearing conservative clothing helps avoid attracting undue attention or harassment.

Dual citizens originally from Tunisia are typically recognized as Tunisian citizens and must enter/exit on their Tunisian passports.

Homosexuality is illegal and can be punished by imprisonment.

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Drug-related Crimes

Use/possession of illegal drugs, and drug trafficking are serious offenses. Individuals arrested for drug-related crimes can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.

Kidnapping Threat

There is a general threat of kidnapping not only directed at Westerners but also against Tunisian nationals. In one of the most high-profile kidnappings, armed Libyans kidnapped 80 Tunisian nationals in the border zone in April 2012.

Police Response

Police are reasonably well-trained and professional. Many senior police officials have received advanced training in Western Europe or the U.S. In an effort to maintain its image and protect the tourism industry, police are generally responsive to visitors in need of assistance. Since the 2011 revolution, however, there have been some reports of delayed or inadequate police responses, especially in rural areas. The police presence is particularly high in tourist areas and other areas frequented by foreigners. The police often set up after-hours checkpoints.

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Visitors should always have a copy of their passport and their immigration card completed upon entry with them. You will need the small perforated card for Tunisian immigration upon departure.

All visitors must adhere to local laws at all times. Possession of pornography is illegal and can also lead to imprisonment. Insulting or arguing with the police is illegal, and people have been imprisoned for it.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Foreign visitors who are briefly detained by the police are encouraged to remain cooperative and patient. This behavior will assist in expediting a quick resolution to an arbitrary police stop. U.S. citizens taken into custody should immediately request that the police inform the U.S. Embassy of their whereabouts.

Crime Victim Assistance

Crimes should be reported immediately to the nearest police officer/station. Hotel desk clerks, store owners, shopkeepers, and taxi drivers can direct you to a police officer or summon one for you. American citizens should also report criminal incidents to the U.S. Embassy's Consular Section.

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Police: 197

Fire Department: 198

Towing: 71 801 211, 71 840 840

Police/Security Agencies

The national police provide security in major urban areas, and the paramilitary National Guard is responsible for other areas, including the nation's roads. Police and National Guard officers are generally responsive to the needs of visitors but speak limited English.

There are no known private security firms that have trained personnel who can provide executive protection services to visiting business persons. Additionally, the Tunisian Ministry of the Interior does not allow its off duty police officers to act in this capacity. The U.S. Embassy is unaware of any private security or law firms licensed to conduct private investigations in Tunisia.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care is adequate from a number of new private 'polyclinics' that function as simple hospitals providing a variety of procedures. Specialized care or treatment may not be available. Medical facilities that can handle complex trauma cases are virtually non-existent.

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Public hospitals are overcrowded, underequipped and understaffed. Nursing care in all clinics is very underdeveloped and in some cases nonexistent. While most private clinics have some physicians who are fluent in English, French is primarily used by the medical establishment. Doctors and hospitals will expect immediate cash payment for health care services, although some hospitals may accept credit cards.

Well-equipped ambulances may not be available outside of urban areas. Even in urban areas, emergency response times will be much longer than in the U.S.

Allo Docteur-Allo Ambulance, Tunis: 71-959-000, 71-959-884 and 71-959-200.

Echifa, Tunis: 71-585-999, 71-502-000 and 98-243-552

Amen, La Marsa-Ambulance, La Marsa: 71-749-000

Some over the counter medications are available. Travelers should bring a full supply of medications needed on a regular basis. The U.S. Embassy maintains a list of doctors who can be contacted for emergency prescriptions.

CAMU: Centre d'assistance Medicale Urgent (poison control), Tunis: 71-335-500

CAMUR Centre d'assistance medicale urgente et reanimation: (intensive care) 71-249-014

SAMU (ambulances) 190

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The U.S. Embassy assumes no responsibility/liability for the professional ability/reputation of or the quality of services provided by the medical professionals, medical facilities, or services listed below. Names are not listed in any particular order.

Tunis:

La Soukra Clinic: 71-758-888

Polyclinic El Amen de La Marsa: 71-749-000

Clinic El Manar: 71-885-000

Clinique Hannibal: 71-137-500 (reception) or 71-137-400 (operator)

Other cities:

Nabeul: Clinic Ibn Rochd: 72-286-668, 72-220-000 and 72-224-585

Sousse: Clinic des Oliviers: 73-242-453, 73-242-708, 73-242-709 and 73-242-711

Sfax: Clinic Annafis: 74-215-000.

Bizerte: Clinic Raouebi: 72-427-399, 72-426-403 and 20-440-036

Djerba: Clinic Chifa: 75-655-007 or 75-650-511

Gafsa: Clinic El Amen: 76-210-750

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CDC 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/tunisia?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

The OSAC Country Council was formed in April 2014. For further information on membership, meeting times, and contacts please email tunis-osac@googlegroups.com. To reach OSAC's Near East team, please email OSACNEA@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Tunis, 1053 Les Berges du Lac, Tunis, Tunisia

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Embassy Contact Numbers

If dialing from abroad, the Country Code for Tunisia is +216.

U.S. Embassy Tunis, Tunisia: 71-107-000

Regional Security Office: 71-107-341 or TunisRSO@state.gov

Consular Section: 71-107-000 or ConsularTunis@state.gov

Economic and Commercial Office: 71-107-000 or TunisCommercial@state.gov

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

Embassy Guidance

For the latest security information, U.S. citizens traveling abroad are encouraged to review and regularly monitor the Department of State's Internet website at travel.state.gov where the Worldwide Caution, Country Specific Information, Travel Warnings, and Travel Alerts can be found.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

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Scams

Be aware of distraction techniques (a staged fight, an intentional bump). Travelers should be wary of unsolicited offers of assistance and refuse offers that sound too good to be true.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Common sense and good security practices are the best way to ensure an incident-free visit. Remain aware of the surroundings and carefully guard personal belongings. Presenting a positive, confident attitude is one of the best ways to avoid crime. If you feel that you are being followed, do not drive home; go to a safe area (police station, public area such as a shopping mall). Make noise and draw attention to yourself to ward off a suspicious person(s). Try to get a license plate number and a description of the vehicle.

Visitors should be extra cautious in high traffic tourist areas (Tunis Medina, central market area, the medinas of other large cities). Keep your purse/bag in a place where you can see/feel it. Carry your purse or shoulder bag over your shoulder with the opening toward your body. Do not hang it over the back of a chair, place on the floor, or hang on the door when in the restroom. Avoid carrying your wallet in your rear pocket. Use a front pocket, inside jacket pocket, or money belt. Do not use a jacket pocket if you are likely to take the jacket off. Carry a minimum number of credit cards and cash. Put them in separate pockets. Do not display large amounts of cash, and be sure to control the visibility of cash at all times. If you are confronted by an assailant displaying a lethal weapon or threatening violence, attempt to

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de-escalate the situation by immediately turning over your valuables without comment.

Vary your schedule and places of activities. Carry your mobile phone and keep it readily accessible. Know the location of the nearest police station. Have emergency numbers pre-programmed in your mobile phone. Tell someone when you are out, where you are, and how you can be contacted. When out, take note where you might go if you are followed or what you might do if cornered or confronted.

Control the keys to your residence. If you give a key to domestic staff, consider using secondary locks. Use light timers when away from home and be sure to lock all doors and windows. Discourage children from answering the door/gate bell. Do not open the door/gate until you have identified the visitor. Domestic staff and dependents should be instructed to do the same and to report all unusual activity. If you will be away from home for any length of time, have a friend check on your house. Inspect your home periodically to identify vulnerabilities or inoperative security features. It is recommended you “harden the target” of your residence and make your home difficult to enter. The U.S. government provides well-secured residences for its employees. Residences have a high level of physical security upgrades, including solid-core entry/service doors with high-quality locks and sliding deadbolts, a peephole installed in external entry doors, grilled windows, safe haven doors, and perimeter walls up to nine feet high, emergency lighting, and monitored alarm systems.

Men and women should travel in groups, especially in remote areas during nighttime hours.

If someone approaches you claiming to be a police officer, ask for identification and be vigilant.

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Protect your PIN number when using ATMs. Try to use an ATM that is attached to a bank branch.

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