



Honduras 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Murder; Assault; Carjacking; Maritime; Burglary; Extortion; Narcoterrorism; Drug Trafficking; Financial Security; Fraud; Riots/Civil Unrest; Hurricanes; Floods; Landslides and mudslides

Western Hemisphere > Honduras; Western Hemisphere > Honduras > Tegucigalpa

3/14/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Thousands of U.S. citizens visit Honduras each year for study, tourism, business, and volunteer work without incident, but the government lacks the resources to fully address crime and violence. While citizen security is the government's highest priority, it faces difficult challenges.

Crime Threats

The U.S. Department of State has issued a Travel Warning for Honduras since late 2012 to caution American travelers about high crime rates. Crime and violence are serious problems and can occur anywhere and at any time. Most resort areas and tourist destinations have lower levels of crime and violence than other areas of the country, though still high by

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international standards. The vast majority of serious crimes, including those against U.S. citizens, are never solved.

Since 2010, Honduras has had one of the highest murder rates in the world. The National Violence Observatory (NVO), an academic research institution based out of Honduras' National Public University, reported a murder rate of 86.5 per 100,000 people in 2011, 85.5 per 100,000 people in 2012, and 79 murders per 100,000 people for 2013. The government reported that the rate had fallen to 66.4 per 100,000 as of December 31, 2014 (2015 final statistics have not been published at this time). Most of Honduras' major cities and several Honduran "departments" (a geographic designation similar to U.S. states) have homicide rates higher than the national average, including: La Ceiba (Atlántida department); Trujillo (Colón department); San Pedro Sula (Cortés department); Tegucigalpa (Francisco Morazan department); and Yoro (Yoro department). Since 2010, the U.S. Embassy has recorded 42 murders of U.S. citizens; several U.S. citizens have been murdered in San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba shortly after arriving in the country. These may have been based on tips from sources at airport arrival areas. In 2015, there were two murder cases of U.S. citizens.

U.S. citizens are victims of crime at levels similar to those of the local population. There is no information to suggest that criminals specifically target U.S. citizens and other Westerners. Tourists traveling with tour groups report fewer criminal incidents. However, the San Pedro Sula area has seen armed robberies against tourist vans, minibuses, and cars traveling from the airport to area hotels.

Honduran law enforcement reports frequent highway assaults and carjackings, including remote areas of Choluteca, Olancho, Colon, and Copan departments. Reporting indicates that these assaults are frequently executed by criminals posing as law enforcement. This criminal activity occurs frequently enough to present security challenges for anyone traveling in remote

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areas.

Several U.S. citizens have reported being robbed while walking on isolated beaches. The effect and threat of violent crime, including in neighborhoods where many Americans live/work, leads to the curtailment of some normal outdoor activities.

Armed robberies, home invasions, and extortions also occur, and closely guarded officials, business persons, and diplomats are not immune from these attacks. Even in neighborhoods with heightened security, there is street crime. In November 2015, two Embassy employees were held up at gun point at about 2:00 p.m. by two individuals while they were entering their car directly outside an Embassy residence and inside a secured neighborhood.

Many people report that they have received threatening phone calls or extortion attempts, especially during the Christmas and Easter holidays. Typically, these calls are random calls that originate from imprisoned gang members using cell phones.

Roatan and the Bay Islands are geographically separated from and experience lower crime rates than the mainland; however, thefts, break-ins, assaults, rapes, and murders do occur.

In a country of approximately eight million people, there are an estimated 7,000 street-gang members. The 18th Street and MS-13 ("Mara Salvatrucha") gangs are the most active and powerful. Gangs are not reluctant to use violence and specialize in murder-for-hire, carjacking, extortion, and other violent street crime. They are also known to control some of

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the taxi services. Violent transnational criminal organizations also conduct narcotics trafficking and other illicit commerce throughout the country.

Cybersecurity Issues

Credit card skimming is common. Individuals, including Embassy employees, have been victimized at well-known restaurants, hotels, and retailers. There is often a spike in credit card skimming in December.

Extortion threats are made through social engineering. Personal information is sometimes obtained through social media, the Internet, or a victim's family member.

Other Areas of Concern

There are no areas within Tegucigalpa or in other major urban areas that are deemed free of violent crime. Notably dangerous locations in Tegucigalpa include: the area surrounding Suyapa Cathedral and Comayaguela on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa.

The U.S. Embassy has restricted U.S. government personnel travel to Gracias a Dios due to credible threat information against U.S. citizens. U.S. citizens traveling there should consider postponing their travel. There are no reliable statistics for the department of Gracias a Dios;

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however, it is a remote location where narcotics trafficking is frequent and where infrastructure is weak, government services are limited, and police/military presence is scarce.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Honduran road conditions differ significantly from those in the U.S., and driving can be very dangerous. Roads are poorly illuminated and marked. Because of a lack of enforcement of traffic laws, drivers must make an extraordinary effort to drive defensively. If traffic signals are working, they are often ignored, and passing on blind corners is common. Vehicles are often driven at night without adequate illumination, and animals and people wander onto the roads at all hours. Traffic signs, even on major highways, are often inadequate, and streets in the major cities are often unmarked. Major cities are connected by an inconsistently maintained, two-lane system of paved roads, and many secondary roads are unpaved. A significant percentage of vehicles are in disrepair, under-powered, and beyond their lifecycle, and do not meet U.S. road safety standards.

For these reasons, and because of the high incidence of crime, the U.S. Embassy strongly discourages car and bus travel after dark. Motorists should avoid traveling at night and always drive with their doors locked and windows rolled up to deter potential robberies at traffic lights and on congested downtown streets. Additionally, travelers should always try to carry a cell phone in case of an emergency, and exercise extreme caution while driving on isolated stretches of road and passing other vehicles on mountainous curves.

Police detention is a common practice for most automobile accidents where there is personal injury and for cases in which someone is accused of a criminal act. Travelers are reminded to

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seek legal representation before admitting or signing any legal form that acknowledges culpability.

Public Transportation Conditions

Travelers are warned to avoid all public transportation. Passengers on public buses are sometimes robbed en-route, at roadblocks, and at bus stops even during daylight hours. Some would-be muggers and gang members are known to keep to a daily schedule, riding city buses from one stop to the next, committing criminal acts with impunity.

Travelers should not use taxis that pick up multiple riders, referred to as collective taxis. In 2015, an Embassy employee was robbed at gunpoint while in a taxi while the taxi was stopped at a traffic light. The intruder forced his way into the vehicle by pulling the window down, then opened the door. The employee was on her cell phone, which added to her attractiveness as a target and diminished her situational awareness. The intruder stuck a pistol in the driver's ribs, then proceeded to rob the driver and the employee of valuables and cash.

Other Travel Conditions

Cruise ship passengers should take safety precautions, avoid unfamiliar areas, and book only with reputable tour companies during a stopover in Honduras. Cruise lines and port agencies have approved tour companies offering packages. Additionally, port agencies have worked to

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improve taxi service to/from the ports. The vast majority of cruise line passengers experience no problems, but incidents of armed robbery and carjacking have been reported.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There are no known international terrorist groups operating in Honduras. Honduras does not appear to be utilized as a terrorist safe haven. There were no legal cases involving instances of terrorism affecting U.S. citizens or facilities brought before the Honduran judicial system, nor were there any judicial developments that would appear to have an impact on U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

The CA-4 agreement among El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, allows for the inspection-free movement of citizens among these countries and reduces overall inspection at land crossings. The limited nature of inspections could facilitate movements of terrorists.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

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Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

Public demonstrations, protests, and strikes are common. Most demonstrations are concentrated in/around city centers, public buildings, and other public areas. Most protests have been peaceful; however, on rare occasion, there have been violent confrontations between the police and demonstrators. Additionally, there have been demonstrations and road blockades along key routes (e.g. the road leading to the international airport in Tegucigalpa).

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Periodically, Honduras is hit by tropical storms and hurricanes. The rainy season usually runs May-November. There have been approximately nine significant tropical storms/hurricanes that have affected Honduras since 1995. Two of the most damaging storms were Hurricane Mitch (1998) and Hurricane Stan (2005). While hurricanes are a concern, much of the damage to infrastructure is a result of flooding and rock/mudslides.

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Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings and disappearances affect both the local and expatriate communities, with victims sometimes paying large ransoms for the prospect of release. Kidnapping is believed to be underreported. Since January 1, 2012, four cases of kidnapped U.S. citizens were reported to the U.S. Embassy; all kidnapping victims were released.

Police Response

The government lacks resources to investigate and prosecute cases properly, and police often lack vehicles or fuel to respond to calls for assistance. In practice, this means police may take hours to arrive at the scene of a violent crime or may not respond at all. As a result, criminals operate with a high degree of impunity. Honduras is in the early stages of substantial reforms to its criminal justice institutions.

The government has special police forces in areas frequented by tourists (the Copan Mayan ruins, Roatan island). The government is implementing similar programs for other locations (La Ceiba, Trujillo), and major hotels and other tourist installations have increased private and police security. The government has also begun implementing a series of police reforms that it hopes can tackle the crime situation, such as the creation of an Inter-Agency Security Task Force to combat crime.

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U.S. citizens are subject to the laws of the country in which they are traveling. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking illegal drugs are strict, and convicted offenders can expect lengthy jail sentences and fines. Local law allows the police to detain someone for up to 48 hours for administrative processing.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

A U.S. citizen detained by the police should insist on speaking to U.S. Embassy representatives as soon as possible. Detained foreigners are generally treated well by the police. Except in some very rural locations, police are aware of a U.S. citizen detainee's right to contact the Embassy. Travelers should be aware, however, that the assistance the Embassy can provide is limited to making sure U.S. citizens are not being mistreated and providing them with a list of local attorneys. The Embassy cannot secure the release or act as legal representation for any U.S. citizen.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime, you should contact the local police and U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa. If you are in Tegucigalpa or San Pedro Sula, you can reach the local police by dialing 911; other smaller cities/rural areas have their own local police assistance numbers. For public safety emergencies, dial 911. For fire emergencies, dial 198 or contact the Fire Department Headquarters: (504) 2231-1667 (operations department).

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U.S. Embassy, Tegucigalpa, American Citizens Services Unit is open to walk-in services Mon-Fri, 8:00-11:30 am, and can be reached directly at:

Tel: (504) 2236-9320 ext. 4400

After Hours: (504) 2236-9320 ext.4100 or Duty Officer (504) 9990-1372

Fax: (504) 2238-4357

Email: usahonduras@state.gov

Medical Emergencies

Medical care is limited. Emergency services, even in Tegucigalpa, generally are basic. There are few, if any U.S. educated physicians in Tegucigalpa.

Red Cross ambulance: 195, (504) 2227-7474 or (504) 2227-7575. The ambulance does not have paramedics or emergency medical equipment; they function as transport to hospitals.

Rescate Medico Movil (Private Ambulance Service): (504) 2239-9999 or (504) 2221-4444.

Bomberos: Fire Department Ambulance is fully equipped with emergency medical supplies and medical staff. Dial 198 for emergency or call (504) 2220 7900

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Hospital Honduras Medical Center: 2280-1500

Hospital Centro Medico: 2225-0035/36, 2225-0028, 2225-4060

Hospital Viera: 2237-7136 or 2237-3160, 2238-0736, 2238-0697.

DIME: 2239-9628/30 or 2239-2598

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Air Ambulance Service: (305) 535-7380

(International SOS, Mount Sinai Hospital, Miami Beach, Florida)

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

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OSAC Country Council Information

There is an active OSAC Country Council that meets periodically in either San Pedro Sula or Tegucigalpa. 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 Tegucigalpa

Avenida La Paz

Tegucigalpa

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: (504) 2236-9320

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Fax: (504) 2236-9037

After Hours: (504) 2236-8497

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/embajadahonduras/>

Website: honduras.usembassy.gov

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens who live in or who are visiting Honduras are strongly encouraged to register with U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa. Citizens can register online at <https://travel.state.gov>.

The U.S. Consular Agency in San Pedro Sula is located on the eleventh floor of the Banco Atlántida building (across from Central Park). The agency is open to walk-in services on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 12:00 to 4:00 pm. Tel: (504) 2558-1580.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

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The majority of U.S. business persons conduct their daily activities without security-related incidents by following basic security precautions and exercising good judgment. The U.S. Embassy recommends that travelers exercise caution. U.S. citizens should be vigilant of their surroundings, especially when entering or exiting their homes, hotels, cars, garages, schools, and workplaces. Whenever possible, U.S. citizens should travel in groups of two or more. Keep a low personal profile. It is also advisable to avoid wearing jewelry and carrying large sums of money or displaying cash, ATM/credit cards, or other valuables (gold chains, distinctive jewelry, expensive watches). Carry a cell phone with emergency numbers programmed; however, cell phones are favorite targets of thieves, so keep them concealed as much as possible. It is important to maintain direct visual contact with your credit cards and regularly and closely check monthly statements. Be aware of increased vulnerability after consuming alcohol. Think about how you will react if confronted. Know nearby safe areas (hotels, malls, gas stations, and colleagues' residences) that can be used in an emergency. If you become a victim, do not resist. When safe, immediately call for help.

Visitors are strongly urged to exercise caution in discussing travel plans in public. Avoid disputes with local citizens. Exercise particular caution walking on isolated beaches, especially at night. Outdoor activities (walking, running) are strongly discouraged, especially in the bigger cities, like Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. Plan ahead and have an itinerary.

Even on the islands, U.S. citizens should exercise caution, especially at night. It is recommended that U.S. citizens book tours and sightseeing through resorts or reputable tour companies. Coxen Hole on the island of Roatan should be avoided after dark.

Be alert for two men on a motorcycle, as this is against the law. All should be considered armed and dangerous until proven otherwise.

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Do not lower your guard because armed security is present. They are not always reliable.

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