



## Kyrgyzstan 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Surveillance; Religious Terrorism; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Drug Trafficking; Fraud; Financial Security; Cyber; Winter weather; Landslides and mudslides; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Racial Violence/Xenophobia; Bribery; Employee Health Safety

South Central Asia > Kyrgyzstan; South Central Asia > Kyrgyzstan > Bishkek

3/28/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

### Crime Threats

Although uncommon, there have been reports of violent muggings and assaults of foreigners in downtown Bishkek at night. Other non-violent crimes (pickpocketing (markets, Internet cafes, on public transportation)) occur regularly. Foreigners, including Americans, have been targeted, as they are perceived to have more money than locals.

Organized crime and narco-trafficking are widespread in the south, in particular in Batken and Osh provinces.

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There is a high incidence of petty theft and pickpocketing in local open-air markets, bazaars, and any crowded places.

### Cybersecurity Issues

Incidents of credit card, Internet, and ATM fraud are common.

In the last couple of years, there have been significant incidents of cyber attacks on government websites. Servers were reported to have been infected with malware as a result. Media occasionally reports attacks by foreign government hackers. Exercise caution with your electronic devices, try to keep them in your possession at all times, keep firewalls and anti-virus software active, and utilize private virtual networks to protect your devices from unauthorized access.

### Other Areas of Concern

The U.S. Embassy advises U.S. citizens to exercise caution in urban areas of Kyrgyzstan due to the high rate of violent crime against foreigners.

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Visitors should exercise caution near the southern borders. The U.S. Embassy restricts travel of Embassy employees to Batken Oblast because of concerns that terrorist groups are able to travel through the region from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Rugged terrain and a lack of resources prevent authorities from controlling the borders adequately in this region. Kyrgyz law restricts movements by foreigners in some border areas that are seen as vital to national security or are otherwise sensitive; mineral mines owned/operated by foreigners are required to submit names of foreign visitors to the State Committee for National Security (GKNB) if they visit their location. There have also been reports of detention/harassment by local law enforcement/security forces of U.S. citizens working as journalists and individuals who are hunting or trekking in certain areas, even if they are on guided tours, have permission, and possess the proper documentation.

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Roads in Bishkek are generally in poor condition. Asphalt quality varies widely, and roads outside of cities are often poorly illuminated. In addition to ice and snow concerns in winter, poor road construction results in numerous and dangerously large potholes on major streets. To avoid even small potholes, drivers commonly make violent and unexpected lane changes without signaling or checking other lanes. Collisions are common. There are many right-side drive vehicles due to cost (the steering wheel and pedals are on the right side), even though they are driven on the right side of the road. This affords drivers limited visibility on two-lane roads.

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Road conditions often make driving difficult and dangerous. Year round, driving is impacted by the lack of street lighting, local driving patterns, and poor conditions of rural roads, which are the sight of regular livestock crossings. Plowing and sanding of city streets is limited. Severe winter weather (October-April) makes driving in mountain passes treacherous and nearly impassable. Avalanches and mudslides in the winter and spring make driving in high mountain passes a challenge.

Aggressive driving is very common in Bishkek and may lead to violence. In 2015, there were several hit-and-run accidents, resulting in multiple pedestrian deaths. Drivers targeted other drivers to cause an accident to extort money, while police target out-of-town and out-of-country drivers to extort fines. A targeted aggressive driving attack against a U.S. Embassy vehicle occurred when a motor pool driver stopped at a traffic light and got harassed by a local route bus (marshrutka) for preventing the bus from crossing the intersection as the light was changing. The bus driver sped through the light and sideswiped the Embassy vehicle, knocking off the left mirror. The driver fled the scene but was caught. Through the use of a dash camera, the bus driver was brought to justice and agreed to pay for the damages. In general, most aggressive driving can be minimized by not escalating the situation (do not yell, curse, or give rude hand signals) and by avoiding vehicles that are driving recklessly.

Roadside checkpoints are common. These checkpoints are often used by traffic police to extract cash bribes in the form of "fines." Traffic police often use personally owned vehicles without police identification or special signals to set up the checkpoints.

Exercise great care near traffic while walking, as vehicles oftentimes fail to yield to pedestrians.

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When driving, adhere to all local driving regulations. Avoid excessive speed and, when possible, do not drive at night outside of major cities. Be prepared for sudden stops or lane changes without a signal.

Local law requires that vehicles involved in an accident to remain in place until police arrive. If a driver moves his vehicle, he can be found at fault for the collision, regardless of contributing factors. In the event of an accident, to avoid further potential liability, vehicles should not be moved from the scene. Additionally, it has been reported that there has been a rise in the number of vehicles driving without license plates in order to avoid being linked to traffic incidents. Police seem reluctant to stop these vehicles due to widespread corruption and the belief that these vehicles belong to ranking members of the government or their family members.

### Public Transportation Conditions

After dark, travelers should exercise caution when taking public transportation. Pickpockets are active on public transportation and are adept at slicing through purses, backpacks, and clothing without alerting the owner.

The U.S. Embassy advises its employees to avoid the use of unmarked or “gypsy” cabs; use radio-dispatched taxis and sit in the back seat. Attempt to use a seatbelt; however, be cautioned that not all taxi cabs have functional seatbelts. Visitors are advised to arrange for the use of a reputable, registered taxi service through their hotel. When getting a taxi on the street, agree on the price with the driver before getting in; otherwise, the price may be significantly higher than in metered cabs. It is customary to negotiate a price with a taxi driver,

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as they often quote double what the metered tariff actually is. Visitors are also cautioned to avoid getting into taxis that already have a passenger.

Try to avoid marshrutka (route) buses, as drivers make a profit by taking in as many passengers as they can fit. Additionally, in an attempt to pick up passengers, drivers drive aggressively and rarely abide by the traffic rules.

#### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Travelers arriving at Manas International Airport should arrange transportation in advance. Foreign travelers have been the victims of extortion by some airport taxi drivers who appeared to be colluding with airport personnel to identify victims.

#### Other Travel Conditions

Border crossings for foreigners who do not carry Central Asian passports are often difficult, and unexpected border closures should be factored into travel plans. Many borders crossings do not permit non-Central Asians to cross.

#### Terrorism Threat

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Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

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

There were no terrorist attacks in Kyrgyzstan in 2015. However, security forces conducted several special operations against terrorist organizations, capturing individuals possessing explosive devices and extremist literature. Some of the caches included heavy automatic machine guns, detonation cords and detonators, grenades, and shoulder-fired rocket launchers. The porous mountainous borders, particularly in the south, make Kyrgyzstan a potential safe haven for terrorists. Due to the exit of Coalition Forces from Afghanistan in 2014, the Kyrgyz government is concerned that terrorist and extremist groups may move north into Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Supporters of extremist groups (the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), al-Qai'da, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)) remain active in Central Asia. Throughout 2015, there were many reports that young males were going to fight in Syria. Local media reported that the state security services arrested several returned fighters from Syria and some IJU fighters who returned from Afghanistan.

In the summer of 2015, Kyrgyzstan's security forces killed four alleged terrorists and detained five others in an operation that reportedly targeted an unspecified international terrorist group at a private residence in suburban Bishkek; the suspects opened fire on security forces after refusing to surrender. According to reports, there were at least 20 explosions during the incident, resulting in four officers being wounded but no civilian casualties. Officials provided

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little detail about the suspects; however, local media reported that Kazakhstan nationals purportedly belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) were part of the group. While Kyrgyz authorities have arrested individuals attempting to recruit for ISIL, operations like this have been uncommon. Some analysts suggest that the raid was in response to a potential attack planned for July 17, the last day of Ramadan.

In October 2015, nine alleged terrorists (seven serving life sentences for terrorism/violent extremism) escaped from jail outside of Bishkek, resulting in the death of four corrections officers. Six of the group were either killed during the manhunt that ensued or died in jail; the remaining three were detained. One police officer was killed during these operations.

#### Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Extremist groups express anti-U.S. sentiments and may attempt to target U.S. government or private interests in the region, including in Kyrgyzstan.

#### **Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

Overall, 2015 was considerably more stable than previous years. Parliamentary elections were peacefully received, and multi-party coalitions were formed.

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Post Political Violence Rating: High

### Civil Unrest

Kyrgyzstan has the propensity for small, local, violent, and/or non-violent events to occur spontaneously with the potential to spread rapidly into wide-scale, violent demonstrations and general disorder.

Instances of civil unrest in 2014 took place in Barskoon village, Issyk Kul province, near the entrance to the Kumtor Gold Mine. Hundreds of well-organized protestors gathered and blocked the road to Kumtor, stopping all traffic on the southern road in Issyk Kul.

In early 2016, a British citizen working for Kumtor caused a protest by posting a culturally-insensitive remark about a national dish on social media. The individual was arrested by law enforcement officials for inciting national, racial, religious, or interregional hatred and was deported several days later. This was a first incident of this type involving a foreigner.

### Religious/Ethnic Violence

There were no large-scale inter-ethnic clashes, like those seen in June 2010 in Osh city; however, the potential remains, especially in the south. The government has yet to investigate the events of 2010.

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There is a longstanding dispute between Kyrgyz and Uzbek border guards that sometimes results in skirmishes on the border of the Sokh enclave in Batken province; skirmishes have resulted in a few deaths and casualties.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

### Environmental Hazards

Kyrgyzstan is located in an active seismic zone and is subject to frequent tremors and occasional strong earthquakes. Buildings and homes often do not meet U.S. seismic standards. It is highly recommended to store water, food, and medical supplies to last at least three days. In 2015, Kyrgyzstan had at least 50 registered earthquakes of various magnitudes, some causing property destruction in the southern provinces.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

The Ministry of Emergency Situations states that there are a number of uranium mine tailings scattered throughout Kyrgyzstan from previous mining activity. The uranium mine at Kara Balta (about 50 kilometers west of Bishkek) is active.

### Privacy Concerns

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Local security services watch foreign visitors and may place them under surveillance. Hotel rooms (including meeting rooms), offices, cars, taxis, telephones, Internet usage, and fax machines may be monitored onsite or remotely, and personal possessions (computers) in hotel rooms may be searched without consent or knowledge. Business travelers should be particularly mindful that trade secrets, negotiating positions, and other business sensitive information may be taken and shared with competitors, counterparts, and/or regulatory and legal entities.

OSAC constituents have no expectation of privacy. Telephone and electronic communications are subject to surveillance, which can compromise sensitive information. Travelers should assume all communications are monitored. All travelers are encouraged to weigh their desire to stay connected with the risks and take precautions to keep personal information protected.

When utilizing local services for banking, security, and medical treatment, U.S. citizens should ensure that the providers are reputable organizations. Be cautious in the amount of information that you make available to these institutions. It is not uncommon for employees of these organizations to pass sensitive personal medical, financial, and banking information to criminal elements.

## Personnel-Background Concerns

Discrimination against ethnic groups, especially ethnic Uzbeks, remains a problem.

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## Drug-related Crimes

While the use of narcotics and illegal drugs is relatively low, it is a problem. Because of porous borders and close proximity to Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan is a transit country for illegal drugs, which are smuggled to Russia, Europe, and occasionally North America. Corruption and lack of training/equipment for law enforcement agencies hamper efforts to control the flow of drugs.

## Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping foreigners is very rare with no recently reported incidents. A historical practice of bride-napping is common in rural areas, although it is sometimes staged based on a pre-agreement with bride.

## Police Response

Police and security forces are poorly paid, poorly equipped, and often corrupt. The quality of police service may vary significantly, and one must usually speak Russian or Kyrgyz to converse with local authorities. Police officers rarely speak English.

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Vehicle and pedestrian stops of local nationals and foreigners are frequent. Travelers are advised to have proper identity documents or a certified copy of their passport and visa with them at all times and to cooperate with police authorities if stopped for questioning.

Officials have been known to solicit bribes in the course of their official duties to supplement their insufficient incomes.

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

If you are detained or harassed, you should contact American Citizen Services at the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy. Harassment/extortion by police and people who purport to be police officers take place occasionally. U.S. citizens should not act upon requests by people, whether in civilian dress or in police uniform, if they have no official identification. U.S. citizens should not get into cars with anyone they do not know, even if the person claims to be a police officer.

#### Crime Victim Assistance

The local the emergency number is 102. There are no victims' assistance programs.

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## Police/Security Agencies

The MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) is the central law enforcement body. The MVD is essentially a national police agency in charge of investigation of all types of crimes.

The Traffic Police (GAI) is the MVD entity responsible for the regulation of traffic and investigating traffic accidents.

The State Committee for National Security (GKNB) is Kyrgyzstan's main federal security agency with broad functions akin to those of an intelligence gathering and a law enforcement agency, specializing in counter-intelligence and counter-terrorism activities. The GKNB combines functions and powers similar to those exercised by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. National Security Agency.

The State Committee for Drug Control of Kyrgyzstan is the agency responsible for intercepting drug couriers and limiting drug transit/trade throughout the country akin to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

## Medical Emergencies

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Medical care is inadequate, and there is a shortage of basic medical supplies (anesthetics, antibiotics). In the event of a medical emergency, travelers can call 103 for the Bishkek City Ambulance or 151 for commercial ambulance service. The operators and medical professionals have limited/no English language ability and will only understand Russian or Kyrgyz.

#### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

A list of health care facilities in Bishkek can be found at:  
[http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/medical\\_information.html](http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/medical_information.html).

#### Recommended Insurance Posture

The Embassy strongly recommends that travelers purchase medical evacuation insurance before traveling to the Kyrgyz Republic.

#### CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Public intoxication is prevalent among the local populace, especially during the winter. Food sanitation can be a problem, and the Embassy recommends that travelers in the countryside drink bottled water and avoid tap water.

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For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/kyrgyzstan><http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/kyrgyzstan>.

## **OSAC Country Council Information**

Embassy Bishkek has an OSAC Country Council with 15 members. POC for OSAC issues is Regional Security Officer William P Margulies (MarguliesWP2@state.gov). To reach OSAC's South and Central Asia team, please email OSACSCA@state.gov.

## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Bishkek

171 Prospect Mira

Bishkek 720016 Kyrgyzstan

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Hours of Operation: 0830 hrs – 1700 hrs

### Embassy Contact Numbers

Operator: 996-312-597-000

Marine Post One: 996-312-597-733

Consular Section: ext 7620

Regional Security Office: ext 7586

Political/Economic Section: ext. 7688

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

### Embassy Guidance

Passports are required for many transactions and situations (hotel check-in, inquiries by police).

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The free visa 60-day stay is available at the airport for short-term visitors and business travelers. This visa CANNOT be extended in-country. The visa for a 30-day stay is available for purchase at the airport for short-term visitors and business travelers. This visa CAN be extended while you are in-country. A five-year, multi-entry visa is available at any Kyrgyz Embassy abroad. Cost is US\$160 non-refundable with a US\$45 issuance fee (if approved). This visa allows visitors to stay in-country for up to six months for tourism or business travel. This visa CANNOT be extended in-country. All visitors in-country longer than 60 days must register with the local police department or registration office. None of these visas allow American citizens to work in-country. They must have a work permit and work visa. Please obtain visa and the registration in order to avoid being stopped and questioned by police.

Travelers are encouraged to check their visa to ensure it is valid through the length of their stay and are asked to register their trip with STEP at <http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/>. For additional security information on the region, consult the Country Specific Information and the Travel Warnings and Public Announcements for nearby countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan). The U.S. Embassies can provide up-to-date information about local crime and safety issues. Information about how to contact each U.S. Embassy is available on Consular Affairs home page (<http://www.travel.state.gov>). For the latest security information, U.S. citizens traveling abroad should regularly monitor the State Department's web site (<http://www.travel.state.gov>), where the current Worldwide Caution Public Announcement can be found.

## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

### **Situational Awareness Best Practices**

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Travelers should exercise the same common sense, good judgment, and caution in their activities as they would in any major U.S. city. Be aware of your surroundings, do not travel alone into unknown areas, and ask hotel staff or hosts for advice/information. Travelers are advised to avoid walking alone after dark, especially in parks and other poorly illuminated areas.

Avoid leaving drinks unattended, and never accept drinks from unknown persons, especially in nightclubs. Avoid inviting unknown persons into your residence or hotel room.

The Embassy recommends that travelers carry a certified copy of their passport on their person, including a copy of a valid visa, to produce for authorities if stopped. The U.S. Embassy may assist you with making a certified copy (fee is US\$50). It is also advisable to have at least two photocopies of your passport's photo page: one on your person and the other in a separate, safe location. If needed, your personal copy can be presented to officials while your actual passport can be produced upon further request. Your second copy can be used to facilitate the replacement of your passport in the event that it is lost or stolen.

Keep wallets, cash, and other valuables in the most secure (inner) clothing pockets available and avoid flaunting or displaying large sums of cash/jewelry in public.

If staying in a hotel, use safety deposit boxes or room safes for storing valuables and make use of the door locks.

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Visitors should take appropriate measures to safeguard their valuables in markets and bazaars. Purses and handbags should be carried with the flap or zipper side next to the body. If the bag has a shoulder strap, sling the bag crosswise over the shoulder.

Walking alone at night makes visitors an easy target and is not recommended. Keeping a low profile is advisable. Additionally, possessions should not be left unattended in public.

Exercise caution when using social media and making culturally-sensitive comments.

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