



India 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Kolkata

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Surveillance; Cyber; Anti-American sentiment; Religious Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Floods; Other; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Rape/Sexual Violence; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping; Fraud

South Central Asia > India; South Central Asia > India > Kolkata

4/1/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Crime is relatively low for a major city with over 15 million inhabitants. Criminal acts are not common but can occur at local markets and tourist areas. Though Kolkata does experience a full range of criminal activity, most of the crime is generally non-violent. Petty crime (theft of personal property) is common and occurs regularly in local markets, tourists' sites, and on public transportation (buses, auto rickshaws). Foreigners are favorable targets because they often carry a considerable amount of cash and are easily distracted by the sites.

Violent crime is rare.

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Cybersecurity Issues

Travelers should be wary of using free WiFi in Kolkata and should assume all electronic media communications are monitored. In addition, electronics should be secured in a hotel safe to prevent theft or loss of data.

Other Areas of Concern

Certain parts of India are designated as "restricted areas" by the government and require special advance permission to visit. These areas include the states of:

Mizoram *

Manipur *

Arunachal Pradesh

Nagaland *

Sikkim*

*On January 1, 2011, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced that American citizens traveling as tourists would no longer need Restricted Area Permits to visit Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland. The implementing regulations have not been clarified; however, so American

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citizens are advised to seek clarification before traveling to these areas.

More information on travel to/in restricted areas can be found at India's Bureau of Immigration; <http://www.boi.gov.in/>. You can obtain "Restricted Area Permits" at Indian embassies and consulates abroad or from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Foreigners Division) at Jaisalmer House, 26 Man Singh Road, New Delhi. The states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim all maintain official guesthouses in New Delhi, each of which also can issue Restricted Area Permits for their respective states for certain travelers. The Foreigner Registration Office in Kolkata is located at 237 Acharya Jagdish Chandra Bose Road, Kolkata - 700 020.

Visitors to India's Northeast states (Assam, Manipur, and Meghalaya) are cautioned to avoid trains, crowds, and travel outside major cities at night.

You should limit trekking expeditions to routes identified for this purpose by local authorities. You should solicit assistance only from registered trekking agencies, porters, and guides; suspend trekking after dark; camp at designated camping places; and ideally travel in groups of 8-10 people rather than individually or with one or two companions.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

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Travel by road is dangerous. Transportation is a major problem in a city with some of the largest slum areas in the world. In Kolkata, road direction changes twice a day to accommodate huge inflows and outflows of vehicles during rush hours. Drivers should be aware of these changes and exercise caution. Traffic moves on the left. Traveling at night is particularly hazardous. The safest driving policy is to assume that other drivers will not respond to a traffic situation in the same way you would in the U.S. Road rage is common and caution should be used while driving. Buses and trucks often run red lights and merge directly into traffic at yield points and traffic circles. Cars, auto-rickshaws, bicycles, and pedestrians behave only slightly more cautiously. Use your horn or flash your headlights frequently to announce your presence. It is both customary and wise. Protective equipment and helmets should always be worn on motorcycles and bicycles.

It is important to be alert while crossing streets and intersections, especially after dark as traffic is coming in an unexpected direction. You should exercise extreme caution when crossing streets even in marked pedestrian areas.

Outside major cities, roads are often poorly maintained and congested. Even main roads frequently have only two lanes, with poor visibility and inadequate warning markers. On the few divided highways, one can expect to meet local transportation traveling in the wrong direction, often without lights. Heavy traffic is normal and includes (but is not limited to): overloaded trucks/buses, scooters, pedestrians, animal carts, bicycles, and free-roaming livestock.

Traffic accidents, major and minor, are a regular occurrence. Emergency response capabilities are limited. If a driver hits a pedestrian or a cow, the vehicle and its occupants are at risk of being attacked by angry mobs. Such attacks pose significant risk of injury or death to

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the vehicle's occupants or at least of impounding of the vehicle. If it is unsafe to remain at the scene of an accident, one should try to reach the nearest police station.

Protestors often use road blocks as a means of publicizing their grievances, causing severe inconvenience to travelers. Visitors should monitor local news reports for any reports of road disturbances.

Vehicles should be locked at all times. Driving in Kolkata can be highly stressful and difficult for most foreigners to adjust to safely. To self-drive, you must have either a valid Indian driver's license or a valid international driver's license. It is recommended that travelers hire a professional driver. Driving defensively is the best course of action. It is not recommended to drive in rural areas after dark.

Public Transportation Conditions

Buses and trams are overcrowded and poorly maintained.

Buses, patronized by millions of Indians, serve almost every city. However, they are usually driven fast, recklessly, and without consideration for the rules of the road. Accidents are quite common. Crime is covert and involves pickpocketing.

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Another popular mode of transportation is the train. Train accidents occur more frequently than in other countries, especially at night. Theft aboard trains along popular tourists' routes is common. Criminals can drug food/drink offered to passengers. Where possible, lock your compartment. If you must sleep, position your luggage so that you are awakened if someone attempts to tamper with it. Alert authorities if you feel threatened. Extra police are often assigned to ride trains on routes where crime is a serious problem.

Travelers are strongly advised to use metered taxis or hotel vehicles for transportation. Try to use pre-paid taxi booths for hired transportation. If a metered taxi is not used, travelers should agree on the fare prior to embarking. Only take taxis clearly identified with official markings, and beware of unmarked cabs. It is preferable to obtain taxis from hotels rather than hailing them on the street. Seat belts are not common in taxis; if possible, select a vehicle with seat belts in both rear and front seats and ask the driver to maintain a safe speed. Never take the advice of taxi drivers regarding your stay or tourism in Kolkata.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Crime is not common in the airport due to the strong police presence. Caution should be used when taking public transportation from the airport. Never accept rides from individuals claiming to be taxis. Generally, reputable hotels will arrange for airport pickup and delivery. If public transportation is going to be used, it is best to utilize the pre-paid taxi service from the authorized taxi stand located just prior to exiting the airport near exit 4A and 4B.

Terrorism Threat

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Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is a high threat from terrorism, and terror attacks are a serious threat to U.S. citizens. While insurgents have not specifically targeted U.S. citizens, there is a risk visitors could become unintended victims. Because the locations of the attacks included luxury and other hotels, trains, train stations, markets, cinemas, mosques, and restaurants in large urban areas, it is difficult to modify one's behavior to lessen the growing risk. Attacks have taken place during all hours, in markets, and other crowded places. In 2008, several coordinated terrorist attacks occurred in major cities (New Delhi, Mumbai, Patna, Kolkata, Burdwan). The U.S. government continues to receive information that terrorist groups are planning attacks that could take place in locations throughout the Kolkata consular district and India as a whole.

Incidents of violence (bombings of buses, trains, markets) by ethnic insurgent groups are common in parts of Assam, Manipur, and Meghalaya. Security laws are in force, and the central government has deployed security personnel.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

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Coordinated attacks in Mumbai in November 2008 and July 2011 targeted areas frequented by Westerners. This highlights the risk of U.S. citizens becoming victims of terrorism in India. Anti-Western terrorist groups and Islamist extremist groups (Harakat ul-Mujahidin, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e Tayyiba, and Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami), some on the U.S. government's list of foreign terrorist organizations, are active in the Kolkata consular district.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

Demonstrations can occur spontaneously and escalate rapidly, posing risks to travelers' personal safety and disrupting transportation systems and city services. Authorities occasionally impose curfews/restrict travel. Political rallies and demonstrations have the potential for violence, especially immediately preceding and following elections. U.S. citizens are urged to avoid demonstrations and rallies.

Americans are encouraged to heed U.S. travel advisories (please visit www.travel.state.gov for the latest) and avoid political demonstrations. While most political demonstrations have been peaceful and orderly, destruction and/or damage of public municipal transportation is common during bandhs (general strikes), which usually call for the total shutdown of all services for some period (usually for a day) as a political protest.

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Religious/Ethnic Violence

Tensions between castes and religious groups can result in disruptions and violence. The Gorkhaland statehood movement in the northern-most district of Darjeeling, West Bengal, is a political movement for the creation of a new state primarily along ethnic lines. Road blockages and disruptions to public transportation have been more frequent than in other areas in the region, and there is a heightened potential for civil unrest that affects travelers.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Northeastern India is highly susceptible to earthquakes. In September 2009, there was a 6.3 earthquake in Assam.

In February 2011, a 6.4 earthquake hit in Manipur, and a 6.9 earthquake struck Sikkim in September 2011. These earthquakes were felt in Kolkata and continue to cause serious concern for future events.

In April 2015, an 8.1 earthquake hit Nepal (that has been called the worst natural disaster since the 1934 Nepal-Bihar earthquake) and seriously affected northeast India, specifically causing serious damage in Sikkim and Darjeeling

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During the June-September monsoon season, Kolkata receives heavy rainfall, overwhelming the underground sewage and drainage system. There is a history of major flooding in Assam and West Bengal during the monsoon periods.

You should exercise caution if you intend to swim in open waters along the coastline, particularly during the monsoon season. Trained lifeguards are rare along the beaches, and the surf can be turbulent. Heed warnings posted or advised at beaches and avoid swimming in the ocean during the monsoon season.

India offers opportunities for observation of wildlife in its natural habitat in Assam and West Bengal, and many tour operators and lodges advertise structured, safe excursions into parks and other wildlife viewing areas for close observation of flora and fauna. However, safety standards and training vary, and it is a good idea to ascertain whether operators are trained and licensed. Even animals marketed as “tame” should be respected as wild and extremely dangerous. You should keep a safe distance from animals, remaining in vehicles or other protected enclosures when venturing into game parks.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

There have been occasional industrial accidents in Kolkata.

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Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

India has long been in disagreement with other industrialized nations over intellectual property rights. Police view these crimes as a low priority, and there is an abundance of software and music piracy. Do not buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal in the U.S., you may be breaking local law too. Licensing policies favor the country's generic drug manufacturers.

Privacy Concerns

India's Constitution does not guarantee a right to privacy for foreigners or Indian citizens.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Women have been subject to targeting of sexual harassment and assaults in Kolkata. Women continue to report incidents of verbal and physical harassment by groups of men. These incidents can be quite frightening and can cross the line into criminal behavior. Women are advised to be careful when traveling in/around Kolkata and to maintain heightened awareness and to maintain strong personal security habits.

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Drug-related Crimes

There has been an uptick in the amount of illegal drugs transiting India. In addition, the use of "club drugs" is on the rise. Most of the drugs that are illegal in the U.S. are also illegal in India. Some drug laws are stricter than those in the U.S. Officials conduct major anti-drug operations especially at transportation hubs (airports, train stations). Plain-clothed narcotics officers' frequent clubs and hotels in attempts to apprehend drug users and dealers.

Kidnapping Threat

Tourists whose first language is not English have been targeted for express kidnappings, where travelers are befriended by locals who speak their native language and then are held for days while the perpetrators empty the victim's bank account. There are reports that some women were held for weeks and allegedly repeatedly raped.

Police Response

Overall, police assistance is fair for local citizens, with a typical response time of 30+ minutes. Even when a suspect is arrested, it may take several years for a case to be heard in court.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

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In case of police detention or harassment, please contact the U.S. Consulate General in Kolkata at +91-33-3984-2400 and ask for American Citizen Services (ACS). If you are arrested, you have a right to notify, or have officials notify, the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate upon your arrest. Insist on this as a right since it is often overlooked. Though the Embassy and Consulates may not intervene in legal matters, they can provide information on lawyers, the local justice system, can visit you on a regular basis, and can serve as a liaison with parties approved by you.

Crime Victim Assistance

The local emergency line in India is 100.

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If your possessions are lost/stolen, report the loss immediately to the local police. The Consulate General can assist you with understanding local police procedures. If your passport is stolen, the nearest U.S. Consulate can help you replace it. You should immediately report the theft/loss to the police where your passport was stolen. A police report, called an "FIR" (First Information Report), is required by the government to obtain an exit visa. Although the Consulate is able to replace a stolen or lost passport, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs and the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) are responsible for approving an exit visa. This process can take three to four working days. If you are a victim of crime, you need to obtain a copy of the FIR from local police at the time of reporting the incident. A copy of this report is helpful for insurance purposes in replacing lost valuables. Local authorities generally are unable to take any

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meaningful action without the filing of a police report. Keep a copy of the police report for insurance claims.

For violent crimes, the Consulate can help you find appropriate medical care, contact family/friends, or help them send you money if you need it. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime are solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

Police/Security Agencies

The Kolkata Police Department and local police throughout northeast India are a professional police force; however, training and equipment may not be up to the same standard as in the U.S. Police typically are limited in their ability to respond to emergencies due to the lack of transportation and communications systems.

Medical Emergencies

For medical emergencies, the number for ambulance service number in Kolkata is 102 (local), and the fire service can be reached by calling 101. Ambulances are not equipped with state of the art medical equipment. Local traffic does not yield to emergency vehicles. It is often more timely to proceed to the hospital using private transportation than to wait for an ambulance response.

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The quality of medical care varies considerably. Medical care is available in the major population centers that approaches and occasionally meets Western standards, but adequate medical care is usually very limited or unavailable in rural areas.

Medical tourism is a rapidly growing industry. Companies offering vacation packages bundled with medical consultations and financing options provide direct-to-consumer advertising over the Internet. Such medical packages often claim to provide high quality care, but the quality of health care is highly variable. For more information, please refer to OSAC'S Report "Medical Tourism Surging." Anyone interested in traveling for medical purposes should consult with his/her local physician before traveling and refer to the information from CDC.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The U.S. Embassy and Consulates maintain lists of local doctors and hospitals, all of which are published on their websites under "American Citizen Services."

Available Air Ambulance Services

International SOS: <https://www.internationalsos.com/>

Europ Assistance: <http://www.europ-assistance.com/en>

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Recommended Insurance Posture

You cannot assume your insurance will go with you when you travel. It is very important to find out before you leave the U.S.: 1) Does my policy apply when I am out of the U.S.? and 2) Will it cover emergencies like a trip to a foreign hospital or an evacuation? In many places, doctors and hospitals expect payment in cash at the time of service. Your regular U.S. health insurance may not cover doctors' and hospital visits in other countries. If your policy does not go with you when you travel, it is a very good idea to take out another one for your trip.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Altitudes in popular trekking spots can be as high as 25,170 feet (7,672 m); please make sure that you have had a recent medical checkup to assure that you are fit to trek and cycle at these altitudes. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report "Traveling in High Altitude."

Good information on vaccinations and other health precautions is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or by calling the hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747). For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO website also contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information. These websites provide useful information, such as suggested vaccinations for visitors to India, safe food/water precautions, appropriate measures to avoid contraction of

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mosquito-borne diseases (malaria, Japanese B encephalitis), suggestions to avoid altitude sickness, etc. Further, these sites provide information on disease outbreaks that may arise from time to time – outbreaks of mosquito-borne viral diseases (dengue fever, chikungunya) occur in parts of India each year. You should check these sites before traveling to India. Further health information for travelers is available from the WHO.

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/india>.

OSAC Country Council Information

U.S. Consulate Kolkata has an active OSAC Country Council chapter that meets on a regular basis. If you would like more information please contact the Regional Security Office at RSOKolkata@State.gov or call: +91-33- 3984-2400.

To reach OSAC's South and Central Asia team, please email OSACSCA@state.gov.

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

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The U.S. Consulate General in Kolkata (Calcutta) is located at 5/1 Ho Chi Minh Sarani, Kolkata, 700071 and is open to American Citizen Services Mon-Fri, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Consulate Contact Numbers

Tel: +91-33-3984-2400

Fax: +91-33-2282-2335.

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

Nearby Posts

Embassy New Delhi: <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate Chennai: <http://chennai.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Hyderabad: <http://hyderabad.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Mumbai: http://mumbai.usconsulate.gov

Virtual Presence Post Bangalore: <http://bangalore.usvpp.gov/>

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Consulate Guidance

American citizens register in the State Departments "Smart Traveler Enrollment Program" (STEP) in order to receive information from the U.S. Consulate in event of an emergency. Travelers can enroll at <https://step.state.gov/step/> or <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/step.html>. In addition, country-specific information can be found on India at <http://travel.state.gov/> and <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/india.html>. Download free Smart Traveler App available through iTunes and the Android market to have travel information at your fingertips. Calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free within the U.S. and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Travelers should be aware of a number of scams that target foreign travelers. The scams generally target younger travelers and involve suggestions that money can be made by transporting gems or gold (both of which can result in arrest) privately or by taking delivery abroad of expensive carpets, supposedly avoiding customs duties. Most schemes require that the traveler put up a "deposit" to either show sincerity or as a down payment or as the wholesale cost. All travelers are strongly cautioned that the schemes invariably result in the traveler being fleeced. The gems/gold are nearly always counterfeit; if they were real, the traveler could be subject to arrest. Such schemes often pull the unsuspecting traveler in over

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the course of several days and begin with a new friend who offers to show the traveler the sights, so that the friend or new acquaintance can practice his English. Offers of cheap lodgings and meals also can place the traveler in the physical custody of the scam artist and can leave the traveler at the mercy of threats or even physical coercion. Travelers should deal only with reputable businesses and should not give their money unless they are certain that goods being shipped to them are the goods they purchased.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Be especially cautious in areas where you are likely to be victimized:: train stations, tourist sites, market places, festivals, and marginal areas of the city. Avoid short cuts, narrow alleys, poorly-illuminated streets, and traveling alone at night. Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances. Keep a low profile; avoid loud conversations or arguments. Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers. Do not accept food/drink from strangers.

Preplan your destination regarding your stay and tourism. Have ground transportation prearranged at your destination. Have the phone numbers of local friends/contacts readily available and/or saved to your mobile phone. If you schedule a meeting with a potential client, research the company and the individual with whom you are meeting. Meet in a public place.

Keep your hotel door locked at all times. Meet visitors in the lobby. Do not leave money and other valuables in your hotel room while you are out. Use the hotel safe. Let someone know when you expect to return if you are out late at night. Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room. Know how to report a fire. Be sure you know where the nearest fire exits and alternate exits are located. Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit. This

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could be a lifesaver if you have to crawl through a smoke-filled corridor.

Travelers should always exercise modesty and caution in their financial dealings to reduce the chance of being a target for robbery or other serious crime. Do not flash large amounts of money when paying bills. Make sure your credit card is returned to you after each transaction. Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money, buy airline tickets, or purchase souvenirs. Do not change money on the black market.

Burglaries tend to occur when there are security vulnerabilities. It is recommended that all American residents install window grilles and solid core doors with deadbolt locks on exterior doors. Proper perimeter walls and, if necessary, guards should be in place at residences.

On leaving the airport building, passengers should take precautions because of the large crowds and chaotic atmosphere, which is ideal for pickpockets. Passengers are also cautioned when coming out of the airport to stay away from anyone offering cheap residential accommodation/transportation.

Women are cautioned not to travel alone. Women should observe stringent security precautions (avoiding using public transport after dark without the company of known and trustworthy companions, restricting evening entertainment to well-known venues, and avoiding walking in isolated areas alone at any time of day). Women should also ensure their hotel room numbers remain confidential and insist the doors of their hotel rooms have chains, deadlocks, and spy holes. It is advisable for women to hire reliable cars and drivers and avoid traveling alone in hired taxis, especially during the hours of darkness.

The contents of this (U) presentation in no way represent the policies, views, or attitudes of the United States Department of State, or the United States Government, except as otherwise noted (e.g., travel advisories, public statements). The presentation was compiled from various open sources and (U) embassy reporting. Please note that all OSAC products are for internal U.S. private sector security purposes only. Publishing or otherwise distributing OSAC-derived information in a manner inconsistent with this policy may result in the discontinuation of OSAC support.



Extra vigilance should be exercised in major tourist areas, overnight trains, rail stations, and at airports. Americans are urged to always practice good security, including maintaining a heightened situational awareness and a low profile. American citizens should monitor local television, print media, or utilize the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. Consulate social media tools for further information about unstable situations.

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