



## **Kazakhstan 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Almaty**

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Financial Security; Assault; Riots/Civil Unrest; Racial Violence/Xenophobia; Earthquakes; Employee Health Safety; Extortion

South Central Asia > Kazakhstan; South Central Asia > Kazakhstan > Almaty

4/1/2016

### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

Post Crime Rating: Medium

#### Crime Threats

The reported numbers of incidents in all categories of crime (violent/petty) are statistically on par or lower than any average city in the U.S. Crime does not impede the operations of American private businesses. Petty theft, while not common, continues to be the most likely crime perpetrated against American citizens. Pickpockets tend to frequent tourist sites, open air markets, and heavily-traveled public transportation, especially buses.

Credit cards are becoming more widely accepted. Reports of ATM skimmers are more prevalent, but such fraud does not appear to be a widespread problem.

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The U.S. Consulate has received reports about vehicle break-ins known as smash-and-grabs. These have occurred in well-populated and well-illuminated areas day and night. The perpetrators smash in windows to steal items in plain view.

Drunken/disorderly behavior is common, particularly in bars and nightclubs. Incidents involving assaults, petty theft, robberies, driving mishaps, and violent verbal exchanges can often be traced to alcohol. The U.S. Embassy and Consulate are aware of several incidents where foreigners, including U.S. citizens, have been drugged, robbed, and physically assaulted at popular bars and nightclubs in Almaty and Astana.

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Driving is extremely dangerous, particularly for those coming from the U.S. where drivers tend to drive defensively and in accordance with driving laws. The opposite is the norm in Kazakhstan. Many drivers “buy” their licenses and have received little/no driver’s education. Drivers tend to be aggressive and routinely disregard traffic laws, do not obey signals, drive in oncoming lanes of traffic, and move at excessive speeds, even during adverse weather conditions. Road rage is common; it is not unusual to see people get out of their cars to confront each other over perceived offenses. People will regularly drive and park on sidewalks, especially during peak traffic hours when drivers’ patience runs thin.

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Another concern for drivers is pedestrians, who can be equally unpredictable and reckless. Most pedestrians wear dark clothing at night and cross streets at will, not checking for oncoming traffic. Pedestrians always have the right-of-way on marked crosswalks, even on busy avenues/highways; therefore, they may not even check the road before venturing out into the middle of the street on the crosswalk. It is up to the driver to slow down and pay extra special attention for pedestrians at crosswalks.

If possible, arrange for private transportation with an experienced local driver. Visitors who intend to drive are strongly encouraged to obtain adequate, local liability insurance and maintain parallel insurance with a U.S. carrier. If you own a private car, ensure you have all required vehicular paperwork (insurance, technical vehicle passport, registration). Do your best to drive defensively and always keep your windows up and doors locked. Americans are cautioned to not to leave items of value in plain view. Kazakhstan has a “zero tolerance” policy on drinking and driving. Any consumption of alcohol paired with driving could result in criminal charges being filed, fines, and/or imprisonment.

## Public Transportation Conditions

Travelers should avoid riding overly crowded buses, minibuses, and trolleys whenever possible.

Many foreigners follow the local custom of hailing private vehicles (so called 'gypsy cabs') on the street and negotiating a fee with the driver on the spot. Use of such cabs is strongly discouraged. Visitors should never get into a cab if there is already a passenger in the vehicle

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and should attempt to get out if the driver stops to pick up another passenger. Fiterally have been drugged, robbed, beaten, and left at out-of-the-way locations.

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Tourists arriving at the airports are encouraged to make prior arrangements for a hired car or taxi via a sponsor or hotel if possible. Otherwise, take marked taxis that have already dropped off passengers. Always negotiate fares before getting into a cab and never board a cab that already has a passenger or allow the cab driver to take on additional passengers during a commute.

### Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

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

In 2011, Kazakhstan experienced a spike in terrorist-related activity during a six-month period, with the government as the primary target.

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## Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

### Civil Unrest

Civil unrest/protests are rare. There have been a few clashes between foreign construction workers and their Kazakhstani counterparts in a few cities. In these cases, Kazakhstani construction workers publicly complained that their wages were less than those paid to the foreign workers. In December 2011, there were riots in the Mangistau Region in the west, where there was rampant destruction, and protestors were shot and killed by authorities.

In order to hold a demonstration, organizers must file a petition with the city and receive a permit. In general, most demonstrations involve usually less than 20 participants. Occasionally, groups organize demonstrations without permits; police generally disperse the participants quickly and peacefully.

The best practice is to avoid demonstrations. If you see a demonstration, go in the opposite direction and report it up your chain-of-command so other people can avoid it. If the demonstrations turn into riots, stay inside and away from windows until the violence has died down.

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## Religious/Ethnic Violence

Occasional clashes have erupted among ethnic Kazakhs, Chechens, and Uighurs in rural villages outside of Almaty, resulting from tensions over local issues and corruption.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

The most significant concern in Almaty is the threat of earthquakes. Almaty sits on a major fault line and experienced a sizeable earthquake in the early twentieth century that destroyed most of the city center. Resident Americans are urged to stock up on non-perishable food items, water, and emergency supplies in the event of an earthquake or other natural disaster (to include disease outbreak).

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

In the event of an earthquake of large magnitude, Almaty could suffer significant damage due to substandard Soviet-era infrastructure; there could also be a large number of fatalities.

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Emergency response in major metropolitan areas is improving, but is still inadequate to handle a mass casualty incident.

## **Police Response**

The overall police presence is significant, and regular law enforcement personnel are augmented by Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) conscripts on compulsory military service. The size and professional caliber of police in smaller regional cities is substantially less than that of their metropolitan counterparts. Many officers outside of Almaty, Astana, Aktau, and Atyrau are not experienced in dealing with foreigners and seldom speak English.

The level of competency and professionalism of law enforcement entities may vary but does not pose a significant obstacle to American private businesses. Police response varies depending upon location and the type of incident. Investigators are often forced to follow procedures that seem to have little relation to the crime that was committed. Police officers have been very diligent in their efforts to solve some of the more severe forms of crimes committed against Americans.

Police continue to implement reforms to create a more professional service and curb corruption. One example of improvements made in Almaty was the introduction of police traffic stops to be conducted only by police patrol vehicles and not by static police posts randomly pulling over vehicles. Despite such reforms, extortion from traffic police continues to be a problem.

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## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Visitors should be aware that police have the authority to stop individuals without reasonable suspicion or probable cause. All citizens and visitors must present an official form of identification (passport, certified copy) to an officer upon request. Many Americans, especially those who do not speak Russian, perceive identification checks as harassment. However, failure to produce identification can result in temporary detention or arrest. In some cases, the policeman's intent is to extort money; more often than not, Americans are released without incident once the police become aware of their citizenship.

## Crime Victim Assistance

Victims of personal crime (assault) are advised to give statements to police as soon as possible and contact either the U.S. Embassy in Astana or U.S. Consulate General in Almaty American Citizen Services (ACS) sections. Only a certified Kazakhstani-licensed physician may collect physical evidence from victims for use in judicial proceedings. Further, the victim must be available for police interview during the investigation and provide testimony if the case comes to trial.

Victims of crime should contact the police at 102. The U.S. Embassy Astana's ACS Unit may be reached at 8-7172-70-21-00 and the U.S. Consulate General Almaty's ACS Unit may be reached at 8-727-250-4900. In the event of an emergency, after business hours, on holidays or weekends, Americans are advised to call either the U.S. Embassy (8-7172-70-22-00) or the U.S. Consulate General Almaty (8-727-250-4892) and ask to speak with the Duty Officer of

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either mission.

## Medical Emergencies

Quality Western medical care is generally not available. Serious long-term care is not a viable option in Astana or Almaty.

### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

#### SOS International Clinic

11 Luganskogo Street, corner of Satpayev Street, Almaty

8-727-258-19-11 (24 hrs)

8-701-744-1111 (24 hrs)

Website: [www.internationalsos.com](http://www.internationalsos.com)

The SOS clinic is a combination ambulatory facility with two beds for more seriously injured patients; there are x-ray and laboratory facilities available and a Western-trained physician is on-call 24 hours daily. It offers immediate care and stabilization before being medically evacuated.

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## Recommended Insurance Posture

It is recommended that visitors purchase medical insurance that includes a provision for medical evacuation. Air evacuations are prohibitively expensive. Depending on the patient's condition, private medical evacuations can cost more than U.S.\$100,000, which must be paid up front. Medicare does not provide coverage outside the U.S. Anyone planning to visit should purchase both medical and medevac insurance for the duration of their visit. When time and injury allow, it is recommended that those seeking medical treatment be stabilized and then medically evacuated.

## CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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

## OSAC Country Council Information

There is an OSAC Country Council in Almaty that meets as needed and is led by the Regional Security Officer. For more information on meeting topics/events, please contact the RSO. To reach the OSAC South/Central Asia team, please email [OSACSCA@state.gov](mailto:OSACSCA@state.gov).

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## U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

### Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate General Almaty

Samal -2

97 Zholdasbekova Street

Almaty, Kazakhstan 050059

A-2 entrance

Mon-Fri from 9:00am to 6:00pm, with the exception of American and Kazakh national holidays.

### Consulate Contact Numbers

Regional Security Officer (Almaty): 8-727-250-4892

American Citizen Services (Almaty): 8-727-250-4900

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After hours (Almaty): 8-727-250-7612

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

Nearby Posts

Embassy Astana: <http://kazakhstan.usembassy.gov>

Consulate Guidance

Americans should regularly review Consular Affairs messaging for Kazakhstan and other Central Asian republics issued by the Department of State to obtain the latest threat information. Registering with the American Citizen Services (ACS) Section at <https://travelregistration.state.gov> is strongly recommended. The Consulate's ACS section regularly issues warden messages via e-mail to registered citizens.

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

Situational Awareness Best Practices

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Travelers should be mindful of their wallets as they make for tempting targets; avoid carrying the typical American “fat wallet.” Credit cards and cash should be kept to a minimum. A single form of identification (preferably a certified copy of your passport), small amounts of cash dispersed throughout your pockets (separating large from small bills), and perhaps a credit/debit card should be sufficient to get you through the day.

Use credit cards only in major hotels, supermarkets, and restaurants. Visitors are encouraged to use ATMs that are located at banking institutions. Citibank maintains a number of ATMs in Almaty and Astana that have proven to be reliable. Take precautions as you would in the U.S. when visiting an ATM and avoid isolated locations. Be aware of nearby personnel who could be out to “skim” your card data.

Visitors are advised to avoid any confrontation and leave night clubs, bars, and restaurants should one sense trouble or witness a fight break out.

Americans are advised to vary their routines, work schedules, commuting times, routes, and social activities to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of terrorist-related violence. Americans are strongly encouraged to report all suspicious activity to the ACS section for review by the Regional Security Officer and other post officials.

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