



Kazakhstan 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Astana

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Information Security; Theft; Assault; Hotels; Financial Security; Fraud; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Extortion

South Central Asia > Kazakhstan; South Central Asia > Kazakhstan > Astana

4/5/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

Crime Threats

While the majority of reported crime is non-violent, the country does experience a full range of criminal activity. The reported numbers of incidents in all categories of crime is statistically on par or lower than any average major city in the U.S. Those that do take place, most often occur in urban areas. Moreover, crime does not usually impede the operations of American private businesses in Astana.

While violent crimes do occur, very few Americans have become victims. Generally, crimes against foreigners, especially Americans, are not common. The most common crimes foreign tourists encounter are purse snatching, pickpocketing, assaults, and robberies. Pickpocketing

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and robberies occur most frequently in the vicinity of Western hotels, tourist sites, public transportation sites (particularly bus and train stations), and at open air markets.

Drunken and disorderly behavior does occur, most often in bars and nightclubs. Incidents involving assaults, thefts, robberies, driving altercations, 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 robbed or physically assaulted at popular bars and nightclubs in Astana and Almaty.

Passports are valuable documents. Given concerns with criminals targeting foreign visitors to steal their passport, the U.S. Embassy has an agreement with the government to allow U.S. citizens to carry a certified copy of their passport and visa rather than the original (leaving the original passport and visa in a safe place).

Kazakhstan remains primarily a cash economy. Major credit cards are increasingly accepted. Financial fraud (ATM skimming) is increasing, but such fraud does not appear to be a widespread problem.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

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Driving in Kazakhstan can be dangerous. Not only are traffic laws significantly different from American laws, but drivers tend to be more aggressive. Drivers sometimes disregard traffic signals, disobey traffic laws, drive after excessive alcohol consumption (despite official “zero-tolerance”), drive into oncoming lanes of traffic, and move at excessive speeds—including during adverse weather. Severe winters may cause roads outside the major urban areas to close due to lack of snow removal equipment.

Furthermore, many drivers “buy” their licenses and, therefore, have received little/no driver’s education. Likewise, road rage is common; it is not unusual to see people confront one another over perceived traffic offenses.

Pedestrians sometimes wear dark clothing at night and cross streets without checking for traffic. Pedestrians always have the right-of-way at marked cross walks, even at busy avenues or highways; therefore, most pedestrians do not even check the road before venturing out into the street. Travelers should cross streets only in marked crosswalks and use crosswalks that offer functioning “Walk/Don’t Walk” signals when possible. Even if you have the right-of-way, be mindful of poor observance of drivers’ traffic safety practices. Additionally, some crosswalk signals are not synchronized with the traffic lights; a green “Walk” signal does not guarantee that it is safe to cross the street, so always check for traffic before you leave the curb.

In the countryside, farm animals are common on the roadways; black cattle at night on a dark highway can be particularly hazardous.

RSO recommends travelers do not attempt to drive. RSO recommends visitors use a taxi or arrange for private transportation with an experienced local driver. Travelers who do intend

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to drive are strongly encouraged to obtain adequate, local liability insurance and maintain parallel insurance with a U.S. carrier and to ensure you have all required vehicular paperwork by law (proof of insurance, technical vehicle passport, registration).

Public Transportation Conditions

Travelers should avoid riding overly crowded buses, minibuses, and trolleys whenever possible in order to avoid pickpockets.

Taxis are inexpensive, safe, and reliable but make sure your taxi has a meter and that the driver activates it upon departure. Travelers should never enter a taxi if there is already a passenger in the vehicle and should attempt to get out if the driver stops to pick up another passenger. There is a local custom of hailing private vehicles ("gypsy cabs") on the street and negotiating a fee with the driver on the spot. U.S. Embassy Astana highly discourages taking unlicensed "gypsy cabs." This applies especially to travel from the airport to the city upon arrival, where drivers posing as "meet and greet" airport facilitators have lured foreigners into cars. At the airport, U.S. citizens should not leave with anyone who does not show pre-arranged identification, even if the person is holding a sign with the traveler's name.

Trains tend to be slow and relatively safe. An overnight express train runs between Astana and Almaty several times a week. If you book a compartment on this train, be aware that unless you book the entire compartment, other passengers will be sleeping there. There have been several reports of American females traveling solo who were harassed by male passengers on this train. International trains service Russia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Urumqi (China); most of these are on a weekly schedule.

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Aviation/Airport Conditions

Astana International Airport has an excellent safety record; the Aviation Safety Network (<http://aviation-safety.net/database/airport/airport.php?id=TSE>) shows no accidents in their database. Astana's airport is serviced by several major carriers. Major carriers also have local code-share affiliates, whose safety practices are closely monitored. Some of the other smaller, regional/domestic carriers are banned from EU travel. Travelers are advised to consider their flight options.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

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In order to hold a demonstration, organizers must file a petition with the local authorities and receive a permit. In general, most demonstrations involve 20 participants or less. Occasionally, groups organize demonstrations without permits, and more often than not, the police disperse participants quickly and peacefully. While demonstrations are rare, U.S. Embassy Astana strongly recommends you avoid all demonstrations and public political gatherings. Most demonstrations are relatively peaceful. Even peaceful demonstrations have the potential to become confrontational and may escalate to violence. Additionally, large, jostling crowds may be an especially attractive target for pickpockets and a potential target for terrorists.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Central Asia is periodically hit by earthquakes, and four of its five capitals are in areas of high seismic risk. According to the 2010 list of "Level of Seismicity at Foreign Service Posts and Consular Agencies," Astana is a Level 1 (Low), while Almaty is a Level 4 (Very High) (on a scale of 1 to 4). The Almaty area regularly experiences earthquakes ranging from 3.0-6.0, most centered well outside the city center. The most recent significant seismic event occurred May 30, 2012, when a 5.7 quake hit eastern Kazakhstan (148km east of Almaty). At this magnitude, the quake was officially classified as "moderately dangerous." U.S. Embassy Astana strongly encourages residents and visitors to think about what supplies, tools, information, and resources they would need in the event of an earthquake or other natural disaster (to include pandemic flu or other outbreak). Basic advice for emergency preparedness is to plan, prepare, and practice, as well as to stock up on non-perishable food

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items, water, and emergency supplies. A useful resources regarding emergency preparedness can be found on U.S. Embassy Astana's website: <http://kazakhstan.usembassy.gov/emergency.html>.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Central Asia is vulnerable to earthquakes or natural disasters of large magnitude because substandard Soviet-era infrastructure as well as the type of infrastructure and construction commonly used today. Moreover, while emergency response in major metropolitan areas is improving, authorities would be challenged to handle a major mass casualty incident.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Avoid vendors selling knock-off designer products and counterfeit DVDs; the U.S. government does not condone violations of Intellectual Property Rights agreements, and U.S. Customs will enforce these laws upon re-entry to the U.S.

Police Response

The 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 cities is substantially less. Many officers outside of

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Almaty, Astana, Aktau, and Atyrau are not experienced in dealing with foreigners and seldom speak English. A working knowledge of Russian is recommended when contacting any emergency services.

Police response varies depending upon the location and type of incident. Investigators are often forced to follow procedures that seem to have little relation to the crime committed. Police 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 police service and to curb corruption. Despite reforms, extortion from traffic police continues to be a problem.

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 or a certified copy) to an officer upon request. Identification checks by the police are common practice.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

U.S. citizens detained by the police should immediately contact U.S. Embassy Astana's Consular Section during working hours (8-7172-70-2200) and the Duty Officer when the Embassy is closed. In addition, any incidents of harassment should be reported to host-nation police. Many Americans, especially those who do not speak Russian, perceive identification checks as harassment. There have been cases of Americans getting stopped for an

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identification check, resulting in a temporary delay. Americans who did not have identification on them experienced a significantly longer delay than those with documents.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you become a victim of any type of crime, report it to the local police. Victims of personal crime (assault) are advised to give statements to police as soon as possible and to contact the Embassy's American Citizen Services (ACS) section. Only a certified, Kazakhstani-licensed physician may collect physical evidence from victims for use in judicial proceedings. The victim must also be available for police interview during investigation and provide testimony if the case comes to trial. The U.S. Embassy in Astana and Consulate General in Almaty are available 24-hours a day to assist Americans in distress.

Medical Emergencies

Western medical standards generally do not exist in Kazakhstan. Serious long-term care is not a viable option in Astana.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Astana SOS International Clinic

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8 Beibitshilik, in Grand Park Esil hotel building

8-7172-58-09-37 (24 hrs) and 8-701-745-9876 (24 hrs)

Website: https://www.internationalsos.com/en/about-our-clinics_kazakhstan_313336.htm

The Astana SOS International Clinic is a small facility with two beds for more seriously injured patients. The clinic has agreements with larger local medical facilities for diagnostics and hospitalizations. There are locally-trained physicians who are on-call 24 hours daily.

Available Air Ambulance Services

The companies listed below do not imply a commercial endorsement by the U.S. government or U.S. Embassy Astana:

Healix House, Ltd.:

<http://www.healix-international.com/services/international-medical-assistance/>. Has offices in UK, U.S., Singapore, New Zealand, Australia, and Kenya.

Global Rescue Services: <https://www.globalrescue.com/>. Has a office in U.S. and maintains facilities in Pakistan and Thailand.

Recommended Insurance Posture

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When time and injury allow, it is recommended that those seeking medical treatment be stabilized and medically evacuated. RSO recommends visitors purchase medical insurance that includes a provision for medical evacuation. Air evacuations are prohibitively expensive. Private medical evacuations can cost more than \$100,000, which may be demanded up-front. Travelers are encouraged to review the terms of their medical insurance to ensure that they have adequate coverage for medical emergencies, including possible evacuation. It is also important to be aware that Medicare does not provide coverage outside the U.S. Anyone planning to visit Kazakhstan should purchase both medical and medevac insurance for the duration of their visit.

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/kazakhstan>.

OSAC Country Council Information

There are two established OSAC Country Councils in Kazakhstan: one in Almaty and one in Atyrau. For more information on these Councils, visit <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/CountryHome.aspx?CatalogLocationId=357>. For more information on OSAC Country Councils in general, visit <https://www.osac.gov/>. To reach OSAC's South and Central Asia team, please email OSACSCA@state.gov.

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U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Astana

Rakhymzhan Koshkarbayev Avenue, 3

Astana, Kazakhstan 010010

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

Embassy Contact Numbers

24-hour switchboard: 8-7172-70-2200

In the event of an emergency after business hours, on holidays or weekends, Americans are advised to call U.S. Embassy Astana and ask to speak with the Embassy Duty Officer.

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

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Nearby Posts

Consulate Almaty: <http://almaty.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

Certified copies of official documents can be obtained from either the U.S. Embassy's Consular Section in Astana or the U.S. Consulate General in Almaty during American Citizens Services hours.

Americans should regularly review travel warnings 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 Embassy's ACS section regularly issues messages to American citizens via e-mail to registered citizens. Americans are strongly encouraged to report all suspicious activity to the American Citizen Services section for review by the Embassy Regional Security Officer and other Embassy officials.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Travelers should exercise the same precautions concerning personal safety and protection of valuables as they would in any major U.S. city. Using good judgment and avoiding high-risk areas can further reduce the crime threat. U.S. citizens are advised to exercise caution in the vicinity of hotels, bus/train stations, and when shopping. Visitors should make arrangements to be met at the airport by their sponsor or hotel.

Americans are advised to monitor local news reports, vary their routines, work schedules, commuting times, routes and social activities to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of terrorist/extremist-related violence. Consider the level of security present when you visit public places (including religious sites) or when choosing hotels, restaurants, and entertainment/recreation venues. Americans are also 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.

Pay special attention to your actions and your surroundings to avoid becoming a victim of pickpocketing. If you carry a wallet, put it in a front pocket and put your hand in your pocket to hold onto it. Leave your unneeded wallet with your driver's license and U.S. department store credit cards at home or in the hotel safe. When walking with a purse/bag (including a shopping bag), make sure it is closed and keep it tucked under your arm. Do not leave your purse/bag over the back of your chair at a restaurant, watch that no one kicks your bag/purse out from under your table at a restaurant, and be particularly vigilant of where you place your belongings when at a sidewalk café.

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The U.S. Embassy strongly recommends that U.S. citizens do not carry large sums of money on the street. It is inadvisable to use credit cards for incidental purchases; each use increases the chance of compromise. Avoidance is a good strategy, but if you must use an ATM, use only those attached to banks (not free-standing ATMs).

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