



## Uzbekistan 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Financial Security; Religious Terrorism; Anti-American sentiment; Riots/Civil Unrest; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Surveillance; Hate Crimes; Drug Trafficking; Bribery; Disease Outbreak

South Central Asia > Uzbekistan; South Central Asia > Uzbekistan > Tashkent

4/5/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Medium

### Crime Threats

The government does not release official crime statistics; therefore, most data is received through informal sources. Violent crimes against Americans and other foreign persons are rare. Crimes of opportunity (muggings, pickpocketing, snatch-and-grabs, theft of unattended bags, purse snatching) are common throughout Uzbekistan, especially in crowded places (bazaars, public transportation). In general, Americans and other foreigners are perceived to be wealthier than the local populace and are prime targets for financially-motivated crimes.

Every year, the government releases thousands of prisoners in a nationwide amnesty program. The majority of those released are women, underage offenders, men over age 60, and individuals convicted of petty criminal offenses (robbery); however, those convicted of

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crimes of moral turpitude could be released under certain circumstances. Offenders are often released into a depressed economic situation with high unemployment, and many return to their criminal ways. The recidivism rate is especially high for those who commit thefts.

Similarly, in 2015, many Uzbek citizens were deported from or ordered to depart Russia. The exact number of these returnees is unknown; however, these newly returned Uzbek nationals may impact the job market negatively. Those unable to obtain employment may resort to crime.

Unofficial news outlets and informal sources continue to report violent crimes in some of the more impoverished areas of Tashkent, including some parts of Sergeli, Chilanzar, and Hamza districts and the Chorsu Market (also known as the Old City). Unsolved property and violent crime are more common in these areas.

Food and fuel prices have continued to increase during 2015, as the local currency (Uzbek Soum) continues to lose value in relation to the U.S. dollar (USD). Black markets for the USD are widespread in bazaars and throughout Uzbekistan. Although the black market exchange rate of the dollar is substantially higher than the legal exchange rate, the practice is illegal, and people engaging in black market currency exchange may receive counterfeit bills when exchanging Soum for dollars. Uzbekistan is a cash economy. Outside of major hotels, U.S. ATM cards are not accepted in Uzbek automated teller machines.

Unofficial reports advise that vehicle theft (including carjacking) exists.

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Corruption is endemic in both the government and in the private business sector and is often closely tied to criminal mechanisms. Criminal links can be found throughout Uzbek society.

### Other Areas of Concern

There are no regional travel concerns or restrictions for Americans in Uzbekistan; however, road, rail, and air transportation can be risky due to poor maintenance of Uzbekistan's transportation infrastructure. Depending upon security conditions, Americans could expect restricted personal movement to certain parts of the country, including the closing of roads to traffic and frequent vehicle and personal identification checks. There are no known closures.

Forced labor remains prevalent during the annual cotton harvest, when college students and adults are mobilized to pick cotton. There have been significant improvements in the use of child labor, as the government has prohibited the use of children under 18 in the fields, although reports of isolated cases of child labor persist. Additionally, the government has made significant progress in recent years addressing trafficking-in-persons, including those trafficked for sexual exploitation and labor migrants.

### Transportation-Safety Situation

#### Road Safety and Road Conditions

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Traffic safety is a major concern. Roads are poorly maintained with large pot holes everywhere, traffic lights frequently malfunction, street names are not marked, and local drivers exhibit a general lack of respect for traffic rules and regulations. Secondary roads are rarely illuminated, so driving at night is not recommended.

Local drivers disregard lane markings, drive on the opposite side of the street, make sudden lane changes without signaling, pull over without warning to pick up passengers or make purchases from roadside stands, and often make turns from any lane. It is common for local drivers to drive at night without lights, especially outside of Tashkent. U.S. Embassy Tashkent recommends drivers stay alert and drive defensively.

Minor and moderate traffic accidents are frequent. Officially, those involved in an accident should summon the police and exchange insurance information; in practice, such cases are often resolved on the street by a cash payment by the offending party. This is a normal, albeit illegal, practice, as formal investigations and compensation procedures are bureaucratic and cumbersome. Rampant corruption with respect to traffic citations and accident investigations exists.

Drunk drivers are also a concern, although there is a no tolerance policy.

Uzbek pedestrians frequently stand in traffic to hail a taxi and attempt to cross the street where there is no pedestrian crossing. They often wear dark clothing and can be difficult to see at night. Many drivers are inattentive to the presence of pedestrians. This leads to frequent and serious pedestrian injuries from motor vehicles. This is especially true at night. As a pedestrian, exercise extreme caution while crossing any street.

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Drivers should keep car doors locked and the windows rolled up. Valuables should be kept in the trunk or out of sight. When driving, strictly obey traffic regulations and carry your registration and license with you.

### Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation in Tashkent consists of a basic underground metro system, buses (large and micro-buses), and limited tram service. The metro is fairly clean and is guarded by armed police. If you take public transportation in the rush hours or visit crowded places, try to hold up your bag in front of you, not behind. Those carrying bags are usually searched, and it is not uncommon for guards to review identification documents. Buses and trams are generally crowded and offer pickpockets easy targets.

The U.S. Embassy advises its employees to use radio-dispatched taxis or well-marked taxicabs. Taxis may pick up additional passengers while you are in the vehicle. This is a common practice and should be expected when taking local taxis. Do not patronize unmarked/private taxicabs or enter any taxi carrying unfamiliar passengers. Always use a commercial or official taxi service. When you are in the car, sit in the back seat, lock the doors from the inside, and do not allow the driver to accept additional passengers.

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

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Tashkent International Airport maintains relatively robust security. Upon arrival, travelers should be prepared for long lines, line jumpers, and an extremely crowded baggage retrieval area. Departing via the airport is generally a better experience for travelers. Customs regulations allow only for limited hard currency removals equal that introduced upon arrival.

Regional airports maintain similarly robust security, although amenities are substandard.

## **Terrorism Threat**

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

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

In the late 1990s, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which began in Uzbekistan but was pushed out of the country in the early 1990s, launched a number of small, cross-border raids into Uzbekistan. The IMU in the summer of 2001 allied itself with the Taliban government in Afghanistan (where most IMU fighters were based) and engaged U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the IMU appears to have become less active in Uzbekistan and, over the past decade, increasingly has been degraded. The government remains concerned about IMU activity in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, resulting in additional security resources along the Tajik border. Terrorist bombings, blamed on the IMU and splinter groups, have occurred sporadically, including multiple, simultaneous attacks in

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Tashkent in 1999 that narrowly missed President Karimov, suicide bombings in 2004 of the U.S. and Israeli Embassies, and the detonation of explosives at a suspected terrorist hideout near Bukhara. In May 2009, a suicide bombing in Andijon and an assault on a border post near Khanabad on the Kyrgyz border led the government to temporarily increase its border security with Kyrgyzstan and in several towns in the Ferghana Valley.

In May 2005, gunmen in Andijon attacked a police station, seized weapons and stormed a prison, freeing members of a local Islamic organization accused by the government of extremism. In events whose details remain controversial, the attackers gathered in Andijon's main square. Thousands of local residents also gathered in the square. Shooting erupted between government forces and the insurgents, and a large, undetermined number of individuals were killed. The government, which put the death toll at 187, rejected European and U.S. calls for an independent international investigation. Unofficial death toll estimates range as high as 800. The government has not held anyone publicly accountable for the civilian casualties.

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

The U.S. government continues to receive information indicating that terrorist groups may be planning attacks, possibly against U.S. interests, in Uzbekistan and Central Asia in general. Supporters of terrorist groups (the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, al-Qai'da, the Islamic Jihad Union, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement) are active in the region. Members of these groups have expressed anti-U.S. sentiments and have attacked U.S. government interests, including U.S. Embassy Tashkent, and may attempt to target U.S. public or private interests in Uzbekistan. Terrorist groups do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. As security is increased at official U.S. facilities, terrorists and their sympathizers often seek softer targets (facilities where Americans and other foreigners congregate or visit, including residential areas, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, schools, hotels, outdoor

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recreation events, and resorts). These groups have been known to conduct kidnappings, assassinations, and suicide bombings.

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

Uzbekistan has no meaningful political opposition. Since 1991, virtually all prominent opponents of the government have fled or have been arrested. Pro-government media outlets (radio, TV, newspaper) control all local reporting on political events. Editors and journalists who have broached politically-sensitive topics have experienced repercussions, including criminal libel charges and loss of employment, leading to self-censorship, rather than risk losing their jobs. The government blocks access to websites of opposition parties based outside of the country, independent media, and others critical of official government policy. President Karimov faced nominal opposition when he was re-elected in 2015.

In mid-June 2010, up to 100,000 ethnic Uzbek refugees fled from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan following ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan. The government worked closely with international organizations to provide food and shelter to the refugees until they returned to Kyrgyzstan in late June 2010.

The most significant human rights problems continue to include: instances of suspected torture and abuse of detainees by security forces; denial of due process and fair trial; and widespread restrictions on religious freedom, including harassment of religious minority group members and continued imprisonment of believers of all faiths.

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Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

### Civil Unrest

There is the potential civil disturbance; however, in general, demonstrations are rare. Demonstrations of typically less than a dozen people occasionally occur in front of the General Prosecutor's Office, Monument of Courage, the Supreme Court, and district courts in Tashkent, but they are quickly shut down by authorities. Larger demonstrations and road blockages, often up to 200 typically female participants, occasionally occur in protest against the lack of gas or electricity in winter. These too are quickly dispersed by authorities.

Civil unrest is uncommon due to the high degree of government control from the national level down to the local neighborhood associations (mahallas). When unrest has occurred, it has usually been rapidly addressed by strong police action.

### Religious/Ethnic Violence

The government severely represses those it suspects of Islamic extremism, including those suspected of any affiliation to organizations such as the banned extremist Party of Islamic Liberation (Hizb ut-Tahrir) or the more moderate Nurchilar (followers of Said Nursi of Turkey). Thousands of suspected extremists are believed to have been incarcerated since 1992. The exact number remaining in custody is unknown but may be several thousand. Strict laws against religious extremism are applied liberally, limiting free practice of religion for all

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religious groups. A large number of prisoners have reportedly died in custody, many from disease and other poor conditions and others from mistreatment and abuse. Political prisoners and suspected extremists are allegedly treated worse than ordinary prisoners.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

Uzbekistan is located on a major earthquake fault line, and tremors are frequent. In the summer of 2011, there was a 6.1 earthquake that damaged/destroyed at least 800 homes in the Fergana Valley. The reported death toll was 13, and more than 80 people were injured. Tashkent also experienced an earthquake in 2008 that caused some minor damage. The largest major earthquake struck in 1966, leveling significant parts of Tashkent.

U.S. Embassy Tashkent strongly encourages residents and visitors to think about what supplies, tools, information, and resources they would need in the event of an earthquake. Basic advice for earthquake or emergency preparedness is to plan, prepare, and practice. A useful resource regarding emergency preparedness can be found on U.S. Embassy Tashkent's website: <http://uzbekistan.usembassy.gov/emergency.html>

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

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Local housing does not always meet Western construction standards. Major Uzbek hotels reportedly have been designed to meet earthquake standards.

Industrial and transportation accidents are very common, as occupational safety and health standards and traffic regulations are often lacking or ignored.

### Privacy Concerns

Privacy in one's communications via phone or Internet should not be expected. It is believed that all Internet activity, text messages, and phone calls may be monitored. It is always a good idea to maintain direct control of all electronic devices.

### Personnel-Background Concerns

Same sex couples may experience discrimination and harassment by residence and police.

### Drug-Related Crimes

Uzbekistan has drug and narco-terrorism issues, given its geographic proximity to Afghanistan and its location within a major corridor of routes of movement of Afghan heroin and opium.

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Several times a year, Uzbek authorities announce the seizure of large drug shipments at border crossings, representing just a fraction of what is likely transiting the country. The drug addiction problem is likely much worse than acknowledged by the government. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that there are 10 times as many drug addicts in Uzbekistan as officially acknowledged. As with many criminal activities in the country, the expatriate community is not generally impacted by this issue.

### Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings have occurred; however, U.S. Embassy Tashkent is not aware of any instances involving the expatriate community.

### Police Response

Police training and equipment is often below U.S. standards. Police reportedly commonly solicit bribes in order to supplement their salaries or may readily accept bribes when offered. Very few local law enforcement officials speak English. While police response capability is available, there is little investigative ability to solve crimes primarily due to lack of training, funding, and equipment.

Prison conditions and the prevalence of torture remain problematic. The police force and the intelligence service reportedly use torture as a routine investigation technique. Travelers are advised to have proper identity documents or a copy of their passport with them and to

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cooperate with the police authorities if stopped for questioning. The risk of abuse while in police custody is a potential danger.

### Crime Victim Assistance

If an American citizen is the victim of a crime, s/he should immediately report the incident to the U.S. Embassy Consular Section, American Citizen Services Unit +998-71-120-5450.

Uzbekistan has an emergency response telephone system: dialing 102 on local phones for police services. Additionally, fire services can be reached by dialing 101 and medical services by dialing 103. Dialing 1050 reaches the Ministry of Emergency Situations where all other critical incidents can be reported.

### Medical Emergencies

The health care system is not adequate to meet the needs of many serious emergencies. There is a lack of basic supplies and little modern equipment. Emergency medicine is very basic.

Emergency medical services can be reached locally by dialing "103". Emergency dispatchers do not speak English; only Russian and Uzbek.

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## Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The Tashkent International Clinic (TIMC), tel: +998-71-291-0142/0726, meets Western standards. There is a physician on-site during the day and on-call during non-working hours. TIMC has basic diagnostic equipment, and has the ability to handle some trauma emergencies. More severe injuries require air evacuation. For mass casualty scenarios, Tashkent Emergency Hospital has been identified as the receiving institution for trauma care.

## Available Air Ambulance Services

Air ambulance response times to Uzbekistan can easily stretch beyond 24 hours. This is mostly due to problems and bureaucracy obtaining aircraft clearances with the host government. If an air ambulance is needed for an expatriate patient, TIMC should be the first contact.

## Recommended Insurance Posture

Because of the high costs associated with an emergency medical evacuation, it is recommended that travelers obtain emergency medical evacuation coverage.

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## Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The following vaccinations are strongly recommended (but not required) by CDC for people traveling to Uzbekistan: hepatitis A and B, typhoid (only 70 percent protection); polio booster; and rabies. There is also the risk of exposure to multidrug resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB). More information about MDR TB can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/factsheets/drtb/mdrtb.htm>. Additional health information related to Uzbekistan can be found on the CDC's website: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/uzbekistan.htm>

## OSAC Country Council Information

Tashkent does not have an OSAC Country Council but does have an American Chamber of Commerce ([www.amcham.uz](http://www.amcham.uz)). To reach OSAC's South and Central Asia team, please email [OSACSCA@state.gov](mailto:OSACSCA@state.gov).

## U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

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American Embassy Tashkent

3 Moyqorghon Street

5th Block, Yunusobod District

Tashkent 100093, Uzbekistan

Hours: 0900 – 1800 Monday through Friday

#### Embassy Contact Numbers

Main Operator: +998-71-120-5450

Marine Post One (24 hours): +998-71-140-2222

Consular Affairs: +998-71-140-2215

Regional Security Office: +998-71-140-2347

Political/Economic Section: +998-71-140-2116

Medical Unit: +998-71-140-2461

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

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## Embassy Guidance

There are no travel restrictions for Americans in Uzbekistan. U.S. Embassy Tashkent strongly advises that travelers read the Consular Information Sheets and the current Travel Warnings and Public Announcements for nearby countries, including Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The U.S. Embassy in each of these countries can provide up-to-date information about local crime and safety issues. Information about how to contact each U.S. Embassy directly is available on the internet at the Consular Affairs home page: <http://travel.state.gov> or by calling the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent. The home page for U.S. Embassy Tashkent is <http://tashkent.usembassy.gov>. For the latest security information, U.S. citizens traveling abroad should regularly monitor State Department's internet website at <http://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

The U.S. Embassy advises U.S. citizens to exercise caution while traveling throughout Uzbekistan. In urban areas, travelers are urged to take the same precautions against crime that they would take in a large American city. If you are traveling at night, travel in groups, maintain a low profile, and do not display large amounts of cash. All travelers should pay close attention to their surroundings.

It is recommended that money be changed at official exchange outlets in local banks or at established hotels. Travel in groups and use radio-dispatched taxicabs rather than on public transportation.

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Always avoid using short cuts, narrow alleys, or poorly-illuminated streets. Before entering an underground pedestrian crosswalk, be aware of who is around. Be alert for gangs of youths, con artists, and beggars, including handicapped persons.

Travelers should maintain a low profile when possible. Travelers should attempt to dress down with minimal jewelry and avoid carrying large sums of cash and other valuable items. Be cautious in crowds and crowded areas (on public transportation, at train stations, open-air markets, and popular tourist sites). Be aware of being bumped or pushed. Pickpockets frequently jostle their victims to distract them. Do not put purse/wallet, keys, or other valuables (e.g. cellular phone) into external pockets of your clothes or other easily accessible places.

Do not invite people into your residence whom you do not know or do not completely trust.

When in a bar or restaurant, keep a close watch over your drink and do not accept a drink from anyone you do not know or trust. Criminals often attempt to drug drinks in order to steal money and possessions. A female criminal will often try to convince a man she has met in a bar to invite her back to his apartment and will then drug and rob him.

Carry a photocopy of your passport and visa with you but leave your passport in a safe place. Do not carry important documents (driver's license, credit cards, checkbook) that you do not need. Carry only as much money as you need. Do not let people see how much money you are carrying and never flash a wad of bills. If you are settling accounts with a salesperson, do

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not take out all your money from purse/wallet as this can attract unwanted attention.

When exchanging money, be aware of who is around you. If possible, exchange money only during daylight hours. Do not exchange money with private individuals on the street. Use only official exchange points such as banks and hotel cash desks.

Do not use credit cards in Uzbekistan except at major international hotels. Credit card fraud is rampant and you have a high probability of being victimized if you use them. Exchange dollars for local currency and use local cash for all other transactions.

Never accept a package or bag from an unknown person.

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