



Mexico 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Nuevo Laredo

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Kidnapping; Narcoterrorism; Drug Trafficking; Murder; Extortion; Rape/Sexual Violence; Riots/Civil Unrest; Floods; Financial Security

Western Hemisphere > Mexico; Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Nuevo Laredo

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Critical

While the violence and kidnapping rates remained level in 2015 compared to the previous two years, the security environment did not improve substantially. The absence of a municipal police force and the inability to form a reliable, vetted state police force capable of maintaining law and order (without federal support) remain glaring signs that Nuevo Laredo, and Tamaulipas in general, has a ways to go before the security situation can be deemed improved. The situation in northeast Mexico remains fluid; the location and timing of armed engagements cannot be predicted.

Crime Threats

This region remains a critical threat environment for crime. Although the primary security threat within the region stems from the Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs), street

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crime and thefts within urban areas is common. Since 2006, the government has engaged in an extensive effort to combat TCOs, which have been engaged in a struggle with each other for control of lucrative drug trafficking routes. In order to prevent and combat violence, the government has deployed military troops and federal police throughout the country. The vast majority of those killed have been members of TCOs and, to a lesser extent, the federal forces who are fighting them; however, innocent bystanders have been killed in shootouts either between TCOs and law enforcement or between rival TCOs.

Violent crime (kidnappings, extortions, homicides, sexual assaults, personal robberies, residential break-ins) and non-violent crimes (financial scams, vehicle thefts, petty drug crimes) continue to be a serious concern for those living or transiting Tamaulipas. In 2015, firefights took place throughout the Consular District (Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras). Gun battles have occurred in broad daylight, on public streets, and close to public venues.

Areas of Concern

A consistent level of violence and persistent security concerns have prompted the U.S. Department of State to urge U.S. citizens to defer unnecessary travel to many parts of Mexico, including Tamaulipas and Coahuila. Continued concerns regarding road safety along the Mexican border have prompted the U.S. Embassy/Consulates in Mexico to impose certain restrictions on U.S. government employees transiting the area. The Department of State advises U.S. citizens residing/traveling in those areas to exercise extreme caution. Since July 2010, Embassy/Consulate employees and their families have not been permitted to travel by vehicle to/from any Post in Mexico. U.S. government personnel are prohibited from traveling overland into the interior of Mexico from the Texas border except for those instances that have been deemed mission essential. Travel between Nuevo Laredo and other cities in the Consular District is primarily accomplished by entering into the U.S., traveling along the

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border, and re-entering at the nearest port of entry.

Travelers should defer unnecessary travel on Mexican Highway 2 between Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo and from the Columbia International Bridge crossing west toward Piedras Negras due to violence reported on these routes. Travel outside of Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña is likewise discouraged. Criminals have followed and harassed U.S. citizens in their vehicles in these border areas.

Official Americans living in Nuevo Laredo are under travel restrictions and a curfew from 2400-0500. All adult entertainment centers and casinos in the Consular District are off limits to U.S. government personnel. Travelers are advised to avoid known high crime areas (Zona de Tolerancia (red light district)) and bars and clubs favored by narco-traffickers.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road safety is of particular concern.

Avoid travel at night, especially along highways connecting major cities. The highways (cuotas and libres) are generally well-maintained in the region, but their isolation leaves travelers vulnerable to crime. The Monterrey-Nuevo Laredo highway has undergone construction in

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certain areas and this, combined with the lack of proper lighting and poor road conditions, has led to major accidents and even deaths. Use toll roads when possible, plan routes ahead of time, and notify family and friends of your itinerary. Travelers are advised to keep a charged cell phone with them and to know how to reach friends and family in an emergency. Travelers should ensure they use road-worthy vehicles and maintain a full size spare tire in case of a flat.

Theft of the vehicle's car sound systems is common. The installation of a car alarm is strongly recommended as a precaution in deterring vehicle thefts and thefts of interior contents. Also, store items in your trunk and keep your vehicle interior free of anything that would entice a thief to break into the car. Avoid leaving your vehicle on the street whenever possible. Park inside a residential compound, in a parking lot with an attendant, or at least in view of the location of your visit. When parking at a shopping facility, be sure to park as close as possible to the store entrance but away from dumpsters, bushes, or large vehicles. Be sure to lock your doors, close windows, and hide shopping bags and gifts in the trunk, out of sight.

If involved in a traffic accident or victimized by crime, you may be required to accompany the investigating police officer to the police station or state prosecutor's office to file a complaint or respond to questions. Should a police report be required for an insurance claim, a nominal fee will be charged.

Public Transportation Conditions

Within the cities, taxis are generally considered safe. It is recommended that travelers negotiate the price before boarding since meters are not used.

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City buses are best avoided due to their crowded nature and lack of safety equipment.

U.S. government personnel are prohibited from utilizing public transportation.

Terrorism Threat

The presence of the TCOs and the movement of large sums of money through the area have had a decaying influence on civil institutions at all levels. Corruption stemming from narco-trafficking remains and has affected service levels delivered by some state and local governments.

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There are no significant regional terrorism threats. There is no evidence of transnational terrorists residing/transiting the region; however, the nature of the border and the ready access to both human smugglers and fake documents continue to make this area a potential

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transit point for international terrorists.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

Social services are administered to the populace, and protests that have occurred have been small and peaceful. Large-scale civil unrest in the region is uncommon. Most protests are local in nature and do not pose a threat to U.S. citizens. Even when protesting U.S. policies, demonstrators appear to be careful in distinguishing between U.S. policies and the American people at large.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

The region does not suffer from ongoing environmental threats; however, heavy rains can lead to localized flooding. Heavy rains also frequently lead to widespread power outages, but

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these are normally remedied within hours. Officials sometimes remove manhole covers in order to speed the evacuation of standing water. These areas are often not adequately marked and can lead to road hazards. The city has made great efforts to improve its drainage system, but it has yet to be tested by serious rainfall.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

These sorts of accidents are fairly rare owing to the isolation of the manufacturing areas from the city proper and the routing of HAZMAT materials to the more distant bridge crossing points. The city maintains civil emergency personnel, but their training and equipment are sub-standard in comparison to most major U.S. cities.

Drug-related Crimes

The security threat posed by TCO-related violence remains the most significant concern in this area. Firefights between federal forces and TCOs have occurred over the past several years.

In April 2010, a grenade was thrown into the Nuevo Laredo Consulate compound, causing some physical damage but no casualties.

In February 2013, rifle-grenades (RPGs) were fired within one block of the Consulate amidst a running gun battle through the city.

In October 2015, gun battles occurred within blocks of the Consulate compound on major

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thoroughfares.

Gun battles may occur at any time, as rival TCO gunmen engage in hit-and-run attacks, and as military and federal police encounter these TCO gunmen while on patrol. Since the escalation in TCO violence began, the government has increased the number of troops and federal police in the region significantly. Soldiers and federal police are frequently seen conducting patrols throughout the city.

Kidnapping Threats

Kidnappings in Mexico have included traditional, express, and virtual kidnappings, and kidnappings remain a serious, growing problem. Victims of traditional kidnappings are physically abducted and held captive until a ransom is paid for release. Express kidnappings are those in which a victim is abducted for a short time and forced to withdraw money, usually from an ATM, and then is released. A virtual kidnapping is extortion by deception wherein a victim is contacted by phone and convinced to isolate himself from family and friends until a ransom is paid. The victim is coerced (by threat of violence) to remain isolated and to provide phone numbers for the victim's family or loved ones. The victim's family is contacted and a ransom for the "kidnapped" individual is demanded. Some travelers staying at hotels have been targets of such virtual kidnapping schemes.

FBI statistics for 2015 for kidnappings place Tamaulipas as the region with the highest rates and risk of kidnapping in Mexico. The government's federal statistics rate Tamaulipas as number one in total kidnappings, a record held for two years in a row. In many of the instances, a victim was released after being kidnapped, and they reported to the Consulate that they were beaten, tortured, and threatened while being held. The overwhelming majority of kidnappings that occur are directly or indirectly related to the TCOs.

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Police Response

The local, state, and federal governments are organized similar to their U.S. counterparts, but law enforcement capabilities within these jurisdictions vary greatly. Local and state police are generally underpaid and poorly trained in comparison to their U.S. counterparts. The corruption of police and rule of law officials has been the most serious concern. A state police force, newly renamed “Policia Estatal Fuerza Tamaulipas,” began deploying to Nuevo Laredo in late 2013 although there are still concerns with the lack of vetted officers being hired.

Police corruption and police involvement in criminal activity, both of which are widely reported on, continue to be a problem in Mexico. Citizens are often indifferent to police authority, adding to the sense of lawlessness in the region. The general perception is that the majority of crime victims do not report crimes due to fear of reprisals by the police, the belief that police are corrupt, or the feeling that nothing would come from such reports. Reporting crime can be an archaic, exhausting process and is widely perceived to be a waste of time except for the most serious of crimes or when a police report is required for insurance purposes.

In July 2011, the entire Municipal Police force in Nuevo Laredo was disbanded among allegations of large-scale corruption. A local police force has not been reconstituted. The state of Tamaulipas is in the process of vetting and training new officers, but this has been a very slow and gradual process. The duties of the local police have been assumed by a state police force and military police. This group is supported by both the army and federal police within the city. All these groups conduct regular patrols throughout Nuevo Laredo.

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Travelers should contact the American Citizen Services (ACS) office at the U.S. Consulate in Nuevo Laredo for assistance in dealing with the State Police or the military. U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with the police and military if stopped or questioned.

How to Handle Incidents of Government Detention or Harassment

American citizens who are detained or harassed by government forces may seek assistance at the Consulate. A Consulate Duty Agent is available 24-hours a day by phone. It is particularly important to identify which agency was involved. A description of the vehicles and uniforms would be helpful. Being able to accurately describe what occurred, the time, date, location, and which agency was involved will greatly enhance the Consulate's ability to reach a satisfactory result from the complaint.

Crime Victim Assistance

American citizens in need of assistance due to crime or medical emergencies may call the U.S. Consulate in Nuevo Laredo and speak to the ACS office. The police emergency telephone number is 066.

Medical Emergencies

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The emergency line in Mexico is 066. The healthcare system is not directly comparable to U.S. health care standards; nonetheless, Nuevo Laredo facilities offer adequate care in an emergency or if getting to the U.S. is delayed.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

In a medical emergency in Nuevo Laredo, call 066 or contact one of the following hospitals, which have ambulances available:

Hospital Mexico Americano

Esteban Baca Calderon 4400

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas

Tel: 867-454-1000

Clínica de Especialidades

Obregón 3256

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas

Tel: 867-714-0805

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Hospital San Jose

Guerrero 3005

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas

Tel: 867-714-9160 / 867-711-2907

Recommended Insurance Posture

Health insurance is an important consideration. Travelers are responsible for ensuring that they have adequate health coverage while in Mexico.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:
http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/mexico?s_cid=nceid-dgmg-travel-double-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

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The Regional Security Office has established an OSAC Country Council for the Nuevo Laredo region. Any U.S. companies interested in joining should email contact details to the RSO at: DS_RSO_Nuevo_Laredo@state.gov. To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email OSACWHA@state.gov.

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate in Nuevo Laredo

Allende #3330, Colonia Jardín

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas

Consulate Contact Numbers

Tel: 867-714-0512 (RSO ext. 3121)

After hours, U.S. citizens needing emergency assistance from the Consulate may call the duty officer at Mexico: 867-100-0806

If are dialing from the U.S. or from a U.S. roaming cell, first dial +521 before the phone

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number.

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

Nearby Posts

Embassy Mexico City: <http://mexico.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate Ciudad Juarez: <http://ciudadjuarez.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guadalajara: <http://guadalajara.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Hermosillo: <http://hermosillo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Matamoros: <http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Merida: <http://merida.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Monterrey: <http://monterrey.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Nogales: <http://nogales.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Puerto Vallarta: http://guadalajara.usconsulate.gov/puerto_vallarta.html

Consulate Tijuana: <http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/>

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Should travel to this region be necessary, visitors are urged to remain alert and exercise extreme caution. If travel cannot be deferred, travelers should exercise extreme caution when visiting. U.S. citizens are urged to be especially aware of safety and security concerns when visiting the border region and to exercise common-sense precautions (only visiting legitimate businesses/tourist areas during daylight hours). Travelers should stick to well known, well-populated routes and should avoid traveling at night. Travelers should trust their instincts and be prepared to depart any establishment where they feel at risk. Travelers should carry a working cell phone with coverage in Mexico and should know where to go in case of an emergency.

Visitors should be aware of their surroundings, even when in areas generally considered safe. Travelers should leave valuables and irreplaceable items at home. All visitors are encouraged to make use of hotel safes when available, avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing, and carry only cash or credit cards that will be needed for each outing. Minimize valuables and do not carry large sums of money while in crowded, urban areas. Be aware of popular scams and robbery tactics used to distract your attention. Avoid wearing jewelry and carry a clutch purse or a neck purse instead of a shoulder bag. Carry a wallet in the front trouser/jacket pocket. Never leave shopping bags or merchandise unattended. Maintain a low profile: Do not advertise the fact that you are American. Dress casually, keep valuables out of sight, and do not draw attention to yourself with your actions.

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When hiring domestic help, vet potential employees to the greatest extent possible. Ensure that they are trained not to volunteer information to strangers or to allow access of workers without prior authorization.

Vary your routine: Be unpredictable in your movements, vary your routes and your departure/arrival times. Be alert to possible surveillance. Note any individual who appears out of place along your routes. Avoid sitting outside at restaurants. Instead, try to find a seat in an area not clearly visible from the street.

U.S. citizens should be cautious in general when using ATMs. Cloning/counterfeiting of debit/credit cards occurs, and travelers are advised to check their account activity regularly to detect fraudulent charges early. Visitors are also advised to avoid using bank machines in dark, isolated areas. It is recommended that visitors traveling into Nuevo Laredo on day trips use ATMs in Laredo, Texas, prior to crossing into Mexico, as U.S. currency is widely accepted.

The U.S. Consulate advises U.S. citizens to give security convoys a wide berth, as the TCOs have been known to engage them without regard to civilian casualties. Travelers are advised to remain cautious and to identify potential "safe havens" if violence breaks out in their area. Maintaining communication with travelers to this area is critical in case of an emergency.

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