



The Gambia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Assault; Financial Security; Fraud; Drug Trafficking; Separatist violence; Floods; Maritime; Coup d'etats; Riots/Civil Unrest; Counterfeiting; Cyber; Hate Crimes; Disease Outbreak; Employee Health Safety; Hotels

Africa > Gambia, The; Africa > Gambia, The > Banjul

4/12/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Threat Rating: High

Crime Threats

As tourism is The Gambia's major industry, the government puts great effort in providing for the safety/security of visitors. This effort is mainly visible in the heavily-trafficked tourist areas. However, crimes against visitors still occur. Most reported crimes against Americans are non-violent crimes of opportunity that are often preventable. Westerners walking along the beach or in the Senegambia tourist area are often approached by vendors, "bumsters" or local young men offering their services ranging from tour guide to sexual partner, or by common street criminals looking for a potential victim.

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Over the past few years, reported residential crimes are increasing. Police attribute much of the criminal activity to third-country nationals. The poor economy and food insecurity has also been attributed to the increased crime rates. The full spectrum of criminal activity can be found in Banjul, especially during hours of darkness. Official Americans, business persons, and visitors are victimized primarily by crimes of opportunity (pickpocketing, purse snatching, theft of valuables from vehicles, assaults, residential burglaries).

Credit cards are accepted at the major hotels, but in few other establishments. Credit/debit card fraud, while less frequent than other West African cities, is a concern in Banjul. Credit card fraud and related scams are primary concerns and due care must be given. Skimming is the primary means of credit fraud and is often not detected until fraudulent charges appear on statements.

Violent crime is rare but does exist.

Drug-related crime does take place in The Gambia. Illegal drugs (methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, synthetic drugs) exist; however, narco-violence remains rare.

Cybersecurity Issues

Cybercrime is not a major concern. Use of computers by the local population is low, and the level of sophistication with computers is also low.

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Other Areas of Concern

There are no travel restrictions in The Gambia.

The armed resistance of the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) against the government of Senegal is the longest running active separatist movement in Africa. Since 1982, MFDC rebels have been fighting for independence for the southwestern region of Senegal between The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, known as the Casamance, primarily targeting military installations, convoys, and personnel in an attempt to destabilize the region. Civilians living and traveling in the Casamance have been targets of opportunity for the rebels and bandits that support the group. American personnel should be cognizant of the border between Senegal and The Gambia and make a concerted effort not to accidentally stray into the Casamance. Although there is a de-facto ceasefire in place between the two sides, the danger in the area has resulted in an Embassy policy severely restricting travel into the Casamance and adherence to U.S. Embassy Dakar's guidance on the area.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

The most prevalent danger posed to Americans in Banjul is vehicle accidents, especially at night. Drivers in The Gambia are aggressive, unpredictable, and untrained. Poor traffic

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markers, limited street lights, poor road conditions (major flooding during the rainy season), and pedestrians walking along the road are normal. In the rainy season (June-October), many roads may become impassable or the travel lane becomes very narrow, often shared with oncoming traffic. Extreme caution should be taken when travelling on unknown roads during the rainy season, as roadside assistance is not easily located. Taxis and buses are often in poor working condition, often have faulty brake lights, and make sudden maneuvers without signaling. Road conditions outside of Banjul can be even more dangerous. Few paved roads and no emergency services have resulted in an Embassy policy prohibiting driving at night between cities.

Bars and nightclubs are often open until 5 or 6am. Driving during the very late night hours is fraught with the additional peril of sharing the road with drivers under the influence of alcohol. Drunk driving accidents occur with regularity.

If driving, do not offer rides to strangers.

Public Transportation Conditions

Police checkpoints, particularly in Banjul and surrounding cities, are frequent, with police officials checking primarily for identification, vehicle registration and insurance. Military checkpoints occur at all regional borders, Denton Bridge heading into Banjul, entry to the "Senegambia strip," and can pop up unannounced when the president is travelling or in response to a perceived national security threat. Police checkpoints occur nightly and intermittently during the day. The Gambian military has several checkpoints at regional borders and sometimes search vehicles looking for contraband or weapons. Travelers may be required to exit the vehicle and permit a search of the vehicle and its contents. Travelers may

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also be required to produce identification. Travelers should always stop at these roadblocks, present the requested documents and submit to the vehicle search.

Border crossings are relatively easy. The Gambia shares a land border with Senegal. U.S. citizens are not required to have a Senegalese visa for trips less than 90 days in duration. Travelers should confirm updated visa requirements with the Senegalese Embassy before travel into Senegal. Vehicle and luggage searches are uncommon but may be conducted based on the current security climate.

Use taxis, not public transportation. Do not allow anyone on the street to direct you to a taxi. Make taxi arrangements through the hotel.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

There is one airport in the country. Airport security operations are similar to those found in most other countries but are generally less stringent than you would encounter in the U.S. The few large international carriers run mostly on time, but smaller, regional carriers are routinely late and cancel flights frequently.

Other Travel Conditions

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There are two ferry crossings in the Gambia: Banjul and Farafenni. The ferry crossing in Banjul is relatively reliable but may be prone to long delays if one of the two ferries is not running. The ferries are routinely overcrowded and filled to capacity with vehicles and pedestrians. The Farafenni crossing, three hours away, is smaller but crosses much more quickly, as the river is much narrower. The use of small fishing boats and pirogues to cross the river are highly discouraged due to the high rate of accidents and poor safety conditions.

Presidential motorcades generally are accompanied by military personnel along the intended driving route. Drivers on the road are expected to pull off of the road quickly and entirely in advance of the motorcade's arrival. Failure to do so may result in the vehicle being forced off the road and the driver arrested. Do not take video or photos of the passing motorcade.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There are no known indigenous terrorist organizations, and The Gambia is not a known base of support/sympathy for terrorists. While recent regional terror attacks in West Africa have not affected people directly in The Gambia, all visitors should be familiar with the contents of the Department of State's regularly updated worldwide cautionary statement. This statement expresses the Department's concern about continued threat of attacks, demonstrations, and

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other violent actions against American citizens and American interests abroad.

There exists a real, growing threat of terrorism regionally as demonstrated by recent attacks in Mali and Burkina Faso. The Gambia has been spared any direct terrorist attacks but does remain vulnerable due to porous borders, increased regional instability, and the increased terror activities of AQIM (al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb). The conflict in Mali increased these concerns, as various groups have threatened governments that support France and Mali through the contribution of troops.

Boko Haram does not operate in the area, but as religious extremism in general grows within the region, The Gambia should be expected to proportionally increase its number of supporters as well. The Gambia and neighboring Senegal have each arrested "extremist" religious leaders in 2015 in an attempt to stem the rise of religious extremism in the area.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Most Gambians regard Americans and Westerners in a positive manner and are friendly to foreigners.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

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The Gambia's President Yaya Jammeh came to power by a non-violent coup in July 1994. He was first elected president in an internationally-challenged election in 1996 and re-elected in 2001, 2006, and November 2011 to five-year terms. The next scheduled presidential election is December 1, 2016. Previous elections were considered credible despite numerous shortcomings.

In March 2006, the government thwarted a reported military-led coup attempt. The alleged coup attempt was put down without violence. Around 50 people were detained for their alleged roles in the coup plot; many detainees were released, with the remainder convicted and sentenced to life terms. The President continues to shuffle government leaders capriciously, reducing the likelihood of any single actor gaining too much political power.

In December 2014, there was an unsuccessful coup perpetrated by Gambian dissidents at the State House. As a result, The Gambian government arrested/detained/questioned countless individuals in an effort to locate conspirators and identify those perceived to be in opposition to the government. The resulting crackdown inspired fear in many Gambians. The government seized the opportunity to arrest those that have taken opposing views. It has even arrested family members (including young children) of coup plotters and is known to torture those in custody during interrogation.

Over the past several years, politically-motivated arrests have become more frequent and arbitrary, and the government has cracked down on the independent press and others who are seen as opposing the government.

Post Political Violence Rating: High

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Public protests, demonstrations, and strikes rarely occur, as the government requires permits and rarely issues them. Americans should avoid large political gatherings, as peaceful gathering can turn violent quickly if police involvement occurs. In advance of the December 2016 presidential election, political rallies are expected to occur throughout the country, occasionally with senior officials present with additional security. Opposition parties may or may not be issued permits, potentially resulting in unapproved rallies.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

During the rainy season (June-October), Banjul experiences significant flooding. Roadways and side streets are often impassable for short periods. Four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

There have been no reports of recent economic espionage or major intellectual property theft issues. Pirated movies and merchandise are readily available on the street for purchase.

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Privacy Concerns

The government occasionally scrambles signals for Internet communication services in an effort to stem revenue losses to The Gambian government-owned telecommunications services.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Homosexuality is illegal in The Gambia. Consensual same-sex sexual relations are illegal in The Gambia. Prison terms can range from five years to life imprisonment, and there is strong societal discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals. The Criminal Code was amended in October 2014 to include Section (144A) entitled Aggravated Homosexuality, which sets out seven specific categories, including being “a serial offender,” for which a person is “liable on conviction to imprisonment for life.” A number of people have reportedly been arrested under this law. The President frequently uses violent, threatening public rhetoric to discourage LGBT individuals from travelling to The Gambia, and he participates in public protests against LGBT rights.

Drug-related Crimes

Due to the high tourist volume, demand for illegal drugs increases during the tourist season. As a coastal country, drug trafficking is an issue in The Gambia, as it serves as an

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access/transit point into/through Africa. There are no reports of drug-related crimes; however, several large drug seizures over the past few years highlight The Gambia's coordinated anti-drug campaign. Anyone found with drugs in his/her possession is arrested and prosecuted. Foreigners arrested for drug violations can expect to be prosecuted and if convicted sentenced to a minimum of two years in prison. Drug peddlers can still be found in tourist areas. Visitors should refrain from engaging drug peddlers in any conversation and should not purchase, possess, or use illegal drugs while in The Gambia.

Police Response

Except for regular checkpoints, there is limited visibility of police presence in Banjul and the surrounding areas. The ability of the police to respond quickly is also virtually non-existent. Police lack training, equipment, and resources (radios, vehicles (with fuel)). The vast majority of Gambian police are not armed. The Gambian Police Force is a reactionary force and cannot maintain large-scale or long-term proactive operations. When contacted, the police are normally helpful to visitors.

Do not take any photographs or videotapes of government facilities, personnel in uniform, or airports. It is against the law to take pictures or videotape embassies, including the U.S. Embassy.

The Gambia has strict laws regarding the use and possession of dangerous weapons. "Military style" firearms are illegal. Hunting weapons can be licensed by the police. Violators can be subject to arrest and incarceration.

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Americans should refrain from making political commentary. In The Gambia, it is illegal to speak out against the president. It is even illegal to speak negatively to a photo of the president.

Do not ignore a policeman's lawful or reasonable orders. Becoming belligerent will only exacerbate the situation and prolong detention.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

The National Intelligence Agency (NIA) routinely ignores treaty obligations to provide notification to the Embassy when American citizens are detained. The UN Special Rapporteurs preliminary report on The Gambia details how the NIA acts with impunity and regularly employs torture against prisoners in its custody. In 2013 and 2014, several U.S. citizens were detained by the NIA for up to several months without being charged of a crime. In addition, the government does not always acknowledge the detentions or arrests, provide notification to or access for Consular officials, family members, legal counsel, or any other outside parties, or follow its own laws regarding charging detainees within 72 hours. If arrested, ask to contact the U.S. Embassy. This request is not always honored expeditiously and may need to be repeated.

Crime Victim Assistance

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In the event of an emergency, you may call the Embassy. Countrywide, the police emergency number is 117. Response is not dependable.

To request police assistance, call:

Gambia National Police Headquarters – (220) 422-4914 (or dial 117)

Senegambia Police Station (Tourist Security) – (220) 358-1502

Bakau Police Station – (220) 449-5328

Some U.S. citizens report that police procedures appear to be less sensitive and responsive to a victim's concerns, particularly in cases of domestic violence or sexual assault or when the victim and the perpetrator are foreigners, compared to the procedures in the U.S. Few victim assistance resources or battered women's shelters exist. Investigations of sexual assault crimes are often conducted without female police officers present, and police typically ask about the victim's sexual history and previous relationships.

Police/Security Agencies

The Gambian Police Force (GPF) is responsible for investigating most crimes.

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency of The Gambia (NDLEAG) enforces drug laws.

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The Gambian Armed Forces would be called to assist in maintaining law and order in any region when there is a deteriorating security situation beyond the control of the police.

The Immigration Department and Customs Enforcement Office handle immigrations and customs issues respectively.

The National Intelligence Agency has investigative authority and arrest power and routinely arrests people for issues with no connection to national security or intelligence matters.

Medical Emergencies

Health facilities are very limited and are considered inadequate for most serious conditions. Local facilities often suffer from unsanitary conditions, outdated equipment, and shortages of supplies/medications. There is a shortage of adequately trained physicians and other qualified medical personnel. Emergency assistance is limited. Some hospitals have ambulance services, but these are limited, unreliable, are mostly a transport to the facility, and do not arrive with medically-trained personnel onboard. Psychiatric services and medications are very limited.

Travelers should carry their own supplies of prescription drugs and preventive medicines. Many prescription drugs may be purchased locally, but the drugs are often counterfeit and not

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easily discernable from the genuine drugs. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report, "Traveling with Medications."

In Banjul, you may dial 118 for fire and rescue services. Emergency services are unreliable and ill-equipped to handle most emergencies.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

For medical emergencies, Americans in The Gambia have used:

Dr. Adama Sallah

Lamtoro Medical Centre

Badala Parkway

Kololi

Tel: 446-2777 or 997-4418

Dr. Melville George (Dental)

New Smile

Bertil Harding Highway

The Village

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Tel: 3992402 or 8806177

Dr. Abubacarr Jah

Sharab Medical Centre

Kanifing Layout

Tel: 333-1100

Dr. Ulric Jones

Fajara Clinic

Fajara Booster Station

Tel: 4494772 or 9972123

Dr. Amadou Samateh

Edward Francis Small

Banjul

Tel: 769-9765

Dr. Omar Jagne

AFRIMED Clinic

Senegambia Junction

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Tel: 441-0685 or 773-9415

Dr. Musatouray

Gambia Bijilo Clinic

Senegambia Highway

Tel: 446-4868 or 666-5555

Dr. Suzanne Anderson

Medical Research Council

Cape Point Bakau

Tel: 4495442

Dr. Hassan Azadeh

Barfrow Clinic

Serrekunda

Tel: 4392427 or 7774469

Dr. Kebba Manneh

NIF Clinic

Burusbi

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Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious illnesses/injuries often require travelers to be medically evacuated where adequate medical attention is available. Westerners in serious condition will often require a medevac after being stabilized. Such “medevac” services are very expensive and are generally available only to travelers who either have travel insurance that covers medevac services or who are able to pay for the service in advance. The cost for medical evacuation may range from U.S. \$40,000 to \$200,000.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Diarrheal illness is very common among travelers even in large cities and luxury accommodations. Travelers can diminish diarrhea risk through scrupulous washing of hands and use of hand sanitizers, especially before food preparation and eating. The greatest risk of traveler’s diarrhea is from contaminated food. Eat only food that is cooked and served hot. Eat raw fruits and vegetables only if you have washed them in clean water or peeled them. Drink only beverages from factory-sealed containers. Most restaurants in tourist areas and Western hotels follow adequate food preparation procedures and use filtered ice.

Talk to your doctor about short course antibiotics and medications to take with you in case of diarrhea while traveling. Travelers are advised to update their shot records prior to travel, and be prepared to be screened for possible Ebola exposure at major points of entry. There have been no confirmed cases of Ebola in The Gambia. The Gambian government has established a hotline for inquiries pertaining to Ebola: 1025.

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All routine U.S. immunizations (measles, mumps, rubella, chicken pox, Hepatitis A, and tetanus) should also be up to date prior to arrival, all of which are more common in Africa than in the U.S. Tuberculosis is a serious health concern in The Gambia. Yellow Fever vaccination is required. Malaria is very common; travelers should arrive with prophylaxis. Travelers should be aware that The Gambia has a moderate prevalence of HIV/AIDS. The U.S. Department of State is unaware of any HIV/AIDS entry restrictions. Please verify this with The Gambian Embassy before you travel.

Rabies immunization is recommended for all travelers staying for more than four weeks or who will have remote, rural travel or expect animal exposure. Even in urban areas, dogs may have rabies, and bites/scratches from dogs, bats, or other mammals should be immediately cleaned with soap and water and medical evaluation sought to determine if additional rabies immunization is warranted.

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

OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council in The Gambia. The nearest OSAC Country Council is in Dakar, Senegal. The RSO can provide country briefings for representatives of American

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businesses and organizations as requested. To reach OSAC's Africa team, please email OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Banjul

Kairaba Avenue

Fajara, The Gambia

Business hours: Monday-Thursday: 8:00 AM - 5:30 PM; Friday: 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Time zone: The Gambia is on GMT

Embassy Contact Numbers

Switchboard: +220-439-2856 or 220-439-2858

Fax: +220-439-2475

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Embassy duty officer (afterhours) +220-796-2710

Marine Guard (24 Hours): +220-437-5270

Email: DS_RSO_Banjul@state.gov

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

Embassy Guidance

If you are going to reside in or visit The Gambia, please take the time to tell our Embassy about your presence in-country. If you enroll, we can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements. It will also help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. To enroll your stay or visit, go to <https://step.state.gov/step/>. Consular information is available at: <http://www.travel.state.gov/>.

Travelers should check with their sponsoring organization to ensure they have the correct documentation in place or risk penalties, including detention, fines, and deportation. The government's regulations allow for similar penalties for those who assist others to reside or work illegally in The Gambia.

Travelers with tourist (blue) passports are required to obtain a valid Gambian visa prior to arrival. Gambian visas ARE NOT available at border crossings or the airport. Those travelling on U.S. diplomatic passports may be able to obtain an entry stamp good for 72 hours at the airport, but time permitting, they should obtain a visa prior to arrival. The Embassy of The

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Gambia is located at NW Georgetown Plaza, 2233 Wisconsin Ave #240, Washington, DC 20007 Phone:(202) 785-1379 website: <http://gambiaembassy.us/>.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Travelers are strongly advised to review their personal safety and security posture, to remain vigilant, and to be cautious when frequenting prominent public places and landmarks. Avoid areas such as dark alleyways and overgrown brush where assailants can conceal themselves. Travelers should maintain a high level of vigilance when in public, especially when walking at night. Change direction or depart the area if you notice suspicious people, groups, or activity. Keep valuables out of sight.

You should limit the amount of cash you carry and leave valuables (passports, jewelry, and airline tickets) in a hotel safe or other secure place. Keep wallets and other valuables where they will be less susceptible to pickpockets. If you have a cellular phone, carry it with you. Refrain from carrying credit cards, large sums of cash, or valuables that you are unwilling to give up in a robbery. Avoid carrying handbags. Make a copy of the first page of your passport and carry this as your identification. If you are threatened with violence over money/belongings, RSO recommends complying with demands and attempting to end the confrontation as quickly as possible.

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Foreign currency should be exchanged in authorized banks, hotels, and other legally authorized outlets, and proper receipts should be obtained for the transactions. If used, check your account activity early and often.

In your hotel, do not discuss your business or travel plans in public areas where they may be overheard. Do not entertain strangers in your hotel room. Do not leave valuables in your hotel room exposed or otherwise unattended even if locked in a suitcase. Always place valuables in a hotel safe deposit box. Familiarize yourself with escape routes in case of fire or other catastrophe. Use the door chain or bolt lock whenever you are in your room. Use the door viewer before opening the door to visitors. Keep your room neat so you will notice disturbed or missing items quickly. Report all suspicious activity to the hotel manager or security. Use hotel recommended taxis. Residences, including hotel rooms, should remain locked at all times and valuables should be kept in a safe or on your person.

Remain alert to your surroundings and assume a low profile. Avoid being the conspicuous tourist. Wearing identifying outerwear may attract unwanted attention. Avoid wearing clothing that stands out. Avoid isolated areas, streets, civil disturbances or demonstrations and involvement in local politics or political activity. Refrain from going on the beach during the hours of darkness. Beware of pickpockets when in large crowds or busy areas. Know what to do in emergencies. Do not walk alone particularly late at night or the early morning hours. Travel in groups of two or more whenever possible. Exercise caution with strangers. Walking outside at night away from populated tourist areas should be done with caution.

The U.S. Embassy recommends that its employees avoid use of credit/debit cards in country. If you must use your ATM/credit/debit card, accounts should be closely reviewed for fraud.

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