



Ghana 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Burglary; Financial Security; Carjacking; Riots/Civil Unrest; Elections; Racial Violence/Xenophobia; Counterfeiting; Drug Trafficking; Disease Outbreak

Africa > Ghana; Africa > Ghana > Accra

4/13/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

The Republic of Ghana is a developing country in West Africa. It is comprised of 10 regions with Accra as its capital. Tourism can be found in most of the regions, but the infrastructure is lacking, turning the shortest of trips into longer ordeals. Despite a short era of economic growth in 2000-2009, the country remains vulnerable to external economic pressures.

Crime Threats

Street crime is a serious problem, especially acute in Accra and other larger cities. Pickpockets and thieves often carry out crimes of opportunity (snatch-and-grab attacks) on city streets, in crowded areas, and from vehicles idling in traffic. Pickpocketing, purse snatching, and various types of scams are the most common forms of crime confronting

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visitors. U.S. travelers have reported these types of theft at crowded markets, beaches, parks, and tourist attractions.

Incidences of violent crime (armed robbery) are on the rise, including reports of armed robberies in expatriate residential areas. There have been burglary attempts against expatriate residences, but perpetrators generally lack the sophistication required to overcome home alarm systems and static security guards.

Vehicle theft is a major concern, including stolen vehicles being shipped from overseas into Ghana for resale. Thefts from vehicles are very common. The potential for carjacking exists, but there have been no reported occurrences in 2015.

Cybersecurity Issues

Credit/debit card fraud is a concern, as credit card fraud and related scams are common. Skimming is the primary means of credit fraud and is undetectable until fraudulent charges appear on statements. It is very common for credit card terminals to be tampered with. Many Ghanaians fall victim to this type of fraud.

Other Areas of Concern

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The Ghana Police Service (GPS) has labelled areas as “flashpoints” because of the amount of crime, the lack of police presence, and factors that make it dangerous for everyone, including the police. Travelers should exercise caution in flashpoint areas and in other crowded areas, especially in the Jamestown area, which is a large area of historical importance where policing is inconsistent and where spontaneous flare-ups of violence occur.

Travel to tourist and historic areas of the country are popular and generally safe, although incidents of armed banditry occur on rural roads. There are occasional reports of clashes between government forces and criminal groups; however, foreigners are normally not affected. Travelers should check with local authorities before venturing off main roads in outlying areas.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

You may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the U.S. Primary roads are generally paved and well-maintained. However, side roads in major cities and many roads outside the cities are in poor condition and add significant time to a trip. While travel during daylight hours on both paved and unpaved roads is generally considered safe, a combination of road conditions, lack of lighting, violent criminals, and obstacles make travelling at night very dangerous. Roads outside of main roadways tend to be poorly maintained and inadequately marked. Travel in darkness outside the major cities is extremely hazardous due to carjacking attempts, the potential for armed robbery, a lack of street lighting, hazards posed by broken-down vehicles in the road, and the unpredictable behavior of stray/farm animals and pedestrians. Road lighting is inadequate at best and nonexistent

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outside of cities. Excessive speed, unpredictable local driving habits, pedestrians/livestock in the roadway, and the lack of adherence to basic safety standards for vehicles are daily hazards. Many vehicles are unlicensed, and many drivers lack basic driver training or insurance. Emergency services are limited or nonexistent in many parts of the country. Drivers should carry spare tires, fuel, and tools on long trips, as there is no roadside assistance. Due to poor driving conditions and the poor mechanical state of many vehicles, vehicle travel after dark outside of urban areas is not recommended. There have been increased reports of vehicular fatalities over the past few years.

Travelers are routinely stopped at police checkpoints throughout Ghana, and vehicles and passengers may be searched. Drivers must possess an international driver's license (available from AAA and the American Automobile Touring Alliance). Foreign nationals should carry documentation of their status (passport, visa).

Be cautious when traveling on roads. Do not allow others to control your movement. If you see something suspicious, be prepared to react quickly. Allow sufficient distance between you and the vehicle ahead of you while stopped in traffic. You should be able to see the rear tires of the vehicle ahead of you in order to allow for a minimal amount of safe operating distance. If you believe you are being followed, do not drive to your intended destination, but rather detour to a public or well-illuminated, guarded area and seek assistance. There have been reports of highway robbery (carjackings) by armed bandits outside urban areas. Some incidents have been accompanied by violence. Limit road travel outside major towns or cities to daylight hours and travel in convoys, if possible, in case of breakdowns. Keep your doors locked and the windows rolled up. Keep bags, purses, and valuables out of sight to prevent theft. Do not carry unnecessary items in your bag. Do not open your doors/windows to give money to beggars or street vendors. Leaving vehicles unlocked for even a short period of time or leaving items in plain sight inside a locked vehicle is highly discouraged. Try to park in guarded, illuminated areas at night and do not park far from your destination.

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Be wary of other motorists warning you of a mechanical problem or a flat tire. This may be a ruse used by thieves to get you to stop the vehicle. Be alert and aware of your surroundings to ensure that you are not being followed.

Maintain awareness when entering/exiting your vehicle. Always have your car keys ready as you approach your car and be on the lookout for individuals who may be waiting close to your car. Move directly from your car to your destination. Check the front and rear seats of your vehicle before entering and lock your doors immediately after entry.

If you are involved in a vehicular accident, a large crowd may gather and could become hostile/aggressive. If you fear for your safety, go to the nearest police station. If settlement cannot be reached at the scene, the accident must be reported immediately to the traffic police, who will respond and conduct an investigation. Normal investigative procedures require the police to conduct an on-scene investigation, after which all involved parties go to the Traffic Department for a vehicle inspection and provide details about the accident for a final report. If possible, obtain the names and contact information of all persons involved in the accident and make a note of the extent of any injuries. Make a note of any registration information (tag number) of other vehicle(s) involved. Exchange registration/permit data with the other driver and provide it to the police upon request.

Public Transportation Conditions

Public transport is unregulated and unsafe. If travelers do use public transport, they should use taxis, not tro-tros. The safety standards of the small, private buses "tro-tros" that transit

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roads and highways are uncertain. Travelers are encouraged to consider this when making travel arrangements.

Avoid travel in communal taxis.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Arriving/departing Kotoka International Airport in Accra can be chaotic and intimidating. Renovations make retrieving luggage in the baggage claim a more streamlined process. Although the arrival area has also been renovated, you can experience long lines at immigration and delays in getting luggage, as there is still a shortage of personnel. The delays are exacerbated by multiple flights landing at the same time.

Security in the baggage claim area is randomly enforced and is sometime limited to customs inspections. RSO recommends travelers pre-arrange with their hotel or company for transportation and assistance from the airport, as strangers attempt to assist you with your luggage, and taxi drivers have a reputation for taking passengers on circuitous routes or for charging excessive fares.

Other Travel Conditions

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There are a number of tour organizations that arrange travel throughout the country, with varying degrees of service. None are deemed off-limits.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There have been no terrorist acts specifically targeting U.S. interests/citizens in Ghana. However, there exists a growing threat of terrorism. Ghana has been spared any direct terrorist attacks but does remain vulnerable due to porous borders and regional instability. Newspapers have reported on ISIL training camps and other extremist groups in Ghana.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Ghana is a stable democracy that has had five elections since 1992 and two peaceful transitions of power between political parties. The most recent election took place in 2013 and resulted in victory for President John Dramani Mahama, a member of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), over the New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate. While there was some sporadic election-related violence, particularly between grassroots supporters of the two major parties, politics generally takes place in a peaceful context, and defeated candidates have

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stated that any grievances they have regarding the legitimacy of the election would be handled in the courts.

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

In the past few years, there has been little serious or widespread civil unrest. There have been numerous peaceful protests and occasions where isolated violence has broken out, particularly between rival ethnic groups in northern Ghana.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Ghana has numerous chieftaincy disputes every year, some of which result in localized violence. There is tension between and within certain ethnic groups in northern regions, in particular, that can and on short notice, become violent. Nonetheless, government authorities are working to reduce the level of tension and violence in these areas.

Post-specific Concerns

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Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under local law. In addition, bringing them into the U.S. may result in forfeitures/fines.

Drug-related Crimes

Ghana has become a significant trans-shipment point for illegal drugs, particularly cocaine from South America and heroin from Afghanistan. Ghana has taken limited steps to combat illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Trafficking has fueled increasing domestic drug consumption. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has an office in the Embassy and works closely with the Narcotics Control Board (NCB), which coordinates government counter-narcotics efforts. These activities include enforcement and control, education, treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. The use of illegal drugs procured in Ghana may have life-threatening consequences. There have been several deaths of U.S. citizens resulting from the use of locally-procured narcotics.

Police Response

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The Ghanaian Police Service (GPS) is almost solely a reactive force and demonstrates moderate proactive techniques or initiative to deter or investigate crime. Police often lack the equipment, resources, training, and personnel to respond to calls for assistance or other emergencies. The police have a poor record of investigating and solving serious crimes. There is a visible police presence in Accra, and the Embassy receives good support from the GPS and the Special Police Units that protect U.S. government facilities.

Persons violating Ghanaian laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned.

Crime Victim Assistance

The Central Police Headquarters telephone number is +233-0302-773-906. The Police Information Room can be reached at +233 0302 787-373 or via cell phone at 0244 313 820. The local emergency line is 191.

If you are the victim of a crime, you should contact the local police and the U.S. Embassy. This includes the loss/theft of a U.S. passport. The Embassy staff can provide a list of local doctors, contact family members/friends, and explain how funds may be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime are solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and provide a list of local attorneys, if needed.

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Police/Security Agencies

Ghana maintains a specialized Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) within the Ghana Police Service to assist victims of domestic violence, especially women and children. In addition to its law enforcement responsibilities, the Unit can refer victims to medical providers and counselors, as well as to community support services.

Although there are a number of security and private guard companies throughout Ghana, it is advisable to research any prospective security company for quality and reliability when considering hiring their services.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are limited, particularly outside Accra. Motor vehicle accidents, drowning, and water-related accidents due to Ghana's rough surf, muggings, and other violent attacks, and sexually-transmitted diseases—including HIV—are health and safety concerns that have been reported by U.S. citizens and can be at least partially mitigated by using common-sense safety precautions.

Travelers should carry adequate supplies of any needed prescription medicines, along with copies of their prescriptions, the generic name of the drugs, and a supply of preferred over-the-counter medications. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report, "Traveling with Medications."

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Hospital Name

Telephone Numbers

Physical Address

West African Rescue Association
(WARA)

(233) 024 366 6111

Abafun Crescent, Labone, Accra, Ghana

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37th Military Hospital

(233)-0302-777-595
(233)-0302-786 103
(233)-0302-670-545

Mills Rd, Accra, Ghana

Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital

(233) 0302-673-033
251-11-551-1211

Guggisberg Avenue, Accra, Ghana

Lister Hospital

(233)-0302-812-325

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Nii Martey Tsuru St, Accra, Ghana

Available Air Ambulance Services

The West Africa Rescue Association (WARA) operates a local ambulance service and an air ambulance service. WARA is associated with International SOS Clinics. For air ambulance service (recommended for severe injuries or illnesses best treated in the U.S.), AEA International (International SOS) at 800-752-4195.

Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious illnesses/injuries often require travelers to be medically evacuated to where adequate medical attention is available. 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 US\$40,000 to \$200,000.

For international treatment and medical insurance: AEA International (International SOS), +27 (0) 11 541-1300.

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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/ghana?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Embassy has an OSAC Country Council. Meetings are held every other month. To reach the OSAC Africa team, email OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located in the Cantonments neighborhood at #24 Fourth Circular Road, Cantonments, Accra. In the event of an emergency during business hours (Monday - Thursday, 7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; Friday 7:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.), the U.S. Embassy operator

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can assist American travelers in contacting the American Citizen Services (ACS) officers in the consular section.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Switchboard: +233 0302 741-000

Regional Security Office: +233 0302 741-550

Fax: +233 0302 741-389

Email: Questions related to citizen services should be sent to ACSaccra@state.gov.

American Citizen Services (ACS) unit will accept calls Mon-Fri, 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., closed on holidays, at +233 0302 741-570 or +233 0302 741-000, x1570.

US Marine Security Guard Post 1: +233 0302 741-775

After business hours and on weekends and holidays, the U.S. Embassy Marine Security Guard can assist American travelers in contacting the Embassy's Duty Officer for assistance with their emergency. The Marine Security Guard is there to assist in emergency situations only. All other calls should be placed during normal embassy business hours.

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

Embassy Guidance

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The Embassy operates a warden system to communicate with registered American citizens in Ghana. Periodic messages are sent to test the system so that it will be effective should an emergency situation arise. To register and for more information about the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), please visit: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>. 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. Consular information is available at: http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1113.html.

Travelers should check with their sponsoring organization to ensure they have the correct documentation in place or risk penalties, including detention, fines, and deportation. To avoid confusion or delays, travelers are strongly advised to obtain a valid Ghanaian visa at the Ghanaian Embassy prior to arrival.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Perpetrators of business fraud often target foreigners, including Americans. Such fraud schemes are prevalent throughout West Africa, including Ghana. American citizens frequently consult the Embassy regarding questionable business offers sent from Ghana. These are scams and typically begin with an unsolicited communication (usually by e-mail) from an unknown individual who describes a situation that promises quick financial gain, often by assisting in the transfer of a large sum of money or valuables out of the country. A series of "advance fees" must be paid in order to conclude the transaction (fees to open a bank

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account, to pay certain taxes). The final payoff does not exist; the purpose of the scams is simply to collect money from the victim. The Embassy has also received reports of fraudulent charities soliciting contributions through the Internet or direct mail. If you receive such business offers or charity requests, carefully check them out before you commit any funds, provide any goods or services, or undertake any travel.

U.S. citizens have also reported substantial financial losses from questionable transactions allegedly involving gold and other precious metals. The government maintains strict regulations on these natural resources. All agents must be licensed, and all transactions must be certified.

There are also multiple variations of Internet dating fraud perpetrated by English-speaking Ghanaians who target Westerners through various dating websites. They utilize fake social media profiles, steal photos/identities from other social media accounts, and swindle victims out of thousands of dollars. The perpetrators typically ask for money for hospital expenses, travel expenses, visa costs, or expensive gifts. A common ploy is for a perpetrator to claim he is a member of the special forces on a secret mission in Accra whose government has abandoned him. The perpetrator will ask for a laptop computer, expensive cellphone, or some other expensive "necessity." Many of these operations link back to local Internet cafes, and some cafes have reputations based on the type of fraud perpetrated from there.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Normal crime prevention methods will help lessen the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime while in Ghana. Being aware of one's surroundings has been the time tested method for avoiding becoming an inviting target of opportunity for crime. Walking alone is not advisable,

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especially at night or in poorly illuminated areas. Victims who resist attackers run a high risk of serious physical injury. Take security measures, such as traveling in groups and avoiding travel at night.

Use of credit cards should be avoided if possible, as a growing number of travelers have been victims of credit card fraud. If you choose to use a credit card anywhere in Ghana, RSO recommends that you monitor your credit card activity closely.

Travelers who limit their display of jewelry and handle their cash discreetly reduce their vulnerability to crime. Travelers are advised to carry limited amounts of cash and photocopies of key documents. Visitors are advised not to carry valuables or large amounts of cash on their person, but rather to store them in their hotel safety deposit boxes or room safes. However, it should be noted that hotel safes can be accessed by hotel personnel even when locked.

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