



China 2016 Crime and Safety Report: Beijing

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Surveillance; Stolen items; Theft; Financial Security; Fraud; Assault; Rape/Sexual Violence; Counterfeiting; Cyber; Separatist violence; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Winter weather; Hurricanes; Employee Health Safety; Economic Espionage; Drug Trafficking

East Asia & Pacific > China; East Asia & Pacific > China > Beijing

4/29/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

Crime Threats

Beijing, with a population of almost 20 million people, is generally safe when compared to other major urban areas. While petty crimes do occur with some regularity, the police and security service presence serves to deter most serious crimes. The income disparity in Chinese society continues to be a source of social friction, and has been identified as a root cause of most economic crime in Beijing. By far, the most common incidents against foreigners are minor petty crimes: pickpocketing (on public transportation, in shopping areas, and at tourist sites), credit card fraud, and various financial scams. Thieves also commonly target cell phones, cameras, portable electronic devices, and other high-value items. Burglaries or theft of larger items (bicycles, motor-scooters) are less frequent.

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Violent crime is less common but does occur. These types of incidents garner significant media attention because they are outside the norm. While violent crimes (assaults) at the workplace are also rather uncommon, they seem to be occurring with more frequency.

Violent crimes against the expatriate community most often occurs in bars and clubs. Bar fights happen, and they can include reports of violence against Westerners. Cultural miscommunication, xenophobia, and, most often, alcohol use, often contribute to these fights, with certain bars garnering reputations for violence. Bouncers often play a role in the violence and may be deliberately aggressive with patrons. While the legal age for alcohol consumption is 18, most establishments do not require identification. Bars are often overcrowded, and safety standards are not routinely enforced. Prostitutes and drugs are known to be present in some clubs.

Prostitutes occasionally take foreigners to a room, where they are assaulted and robbed by small-time organized criminal rings. In such instances, victims are forced to use their credit or debit cards to access additional cash. Such robberies usually begin in bars and clubs frequented by foreigners.

In a limited number of cases, foreigners have reported being sexually assaulted, have had their luggage stolen, or have been charged exorbitant fares after using "black" taxis. Luggage theft typically involves a taxi transporting individuals to/from the airport and the driver intentionally leaving the scene before bags have been unloaded.

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The distribution of counterfeit Chinese currency is a common risk. Unsuspecting Americans are passed fraudulent notes at restaurants, stores, ATMs, and taxi cabs. Large numbers of 100 RMB and 50 RMB counterfeit notes circulate, while even fake 10 RMB and 20 RMB denominations have been introduced. One common tactic involves drivers switching the passenger's authentic 100 RMB note with a counterfeit bill, and then "returning" it as counterfeit and demanding a genuine note. This can be repeated until individuals have lost several hundred RMB worth of genuine currency.

Cybersecurity Issues

China has sophisticated capabilities (spear phishing, targeting mobile devices, social networking manipulation) to target Westerners.

Transportation Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

All drivers must possess a Chinese driver's license; international or U.S. licenses are not valid.

For the most part, the roads in larger cities are good; driving conditions in rural areas are usually poor. Beijing adds some 1,200 registered vehicles to the roads every day, causing

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already congested roads to come to a standstill – and not just during rush hour. Chinese often refer to Beijing as “Shoudu,” or capital of traffic jams. During peak travel times near Chinese holidays, traffic jams can stretch for dozens of miles and make road travel practicably impossible. Employees who reside in U.S. Embassy housing in the suburbs report commutes of up to two hours. The heavy traffic conditions are made more stressful by little/no enforcement of traffic laws.

Additionally, there are a great number of pedestrians and bikers who weave through traffic. Busy roads often lack shoulders, so drivers contend with bicycles in driving lanes. Traffic patterns and driving habits make crossing the street in Beijing a routine danger, as pedestrians do not have the right-of-way. A limited numbers of crosswalks, poorly maintained sidewalks, and bike lanes that are not respected by motor vehicle drivers combine to make all forms of non-vehicle transportation very risky.

Traffic laws are routinely ignored. Policing is done remotely by video camera (primarily speed traps). Yielding to oncoming traffic or pedestrians or using turn signals are virtually unheard of. Traffic signals are absent at key locations, and road closures are either poorly/not marked. Local drivers frequently operate motor vehicles while under the influence of alcohol. Where there are shoulders, cars generally use them as a travel lane, especially on crowded highways. It is common to see drivers back up on the highway to get to an exit they missed; stop on the side of the highway to drop off passengers, and then slowly turn back into high-speed travel lanes; or veer horizontally across several lanes of traffic to get to an off ramp.

Since private ownership of vehicles was not allowed until the last decade, most drivers are inexperienced. According to China Daily, nearly one-half of the accidents in Beijing are caused by drivers who have less than three years of driving experience; the paper also

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reported that traffic accidents were the leading cause of deaths for those under 45 years of age. These inexperienced drivers are often either overly cautious or overly aggressive.

Although the Regional Security Office (RSO) responds to dozens of traffic accidents on an annual basis, congestion can significantly delay response time; most accidents are minor and can be resolved at the scene. In most traffic accidents, the foreigner is ruled at fault, regardless of the actual cause of the accident. RSO encourages U.S. citizens not to argue with the other party involved in a traffic accident, regardless of who is responsible. U.S. citizens are encouraged not to react to aggressive driving by local nationals and to defuse the situation in a safe and expeditious manner.

Public Transportation Conditions

All forms of public transportation are crowded and can become dangerously so during peak times (notably, the morning and evening commutes).

Few U.S. Embassy personnel take public buses, as they are often overfilled to dangerous levels, have poor temperature controls, and do not provide route information in English. Bus accidents are also common.

While the subway system is fairly extensive in the city center, many of the lines that serve the U.S. Embassy community are among the most crowded. Families with small children cannot safely take the subway during even moderately busy periods. For employees who reside

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outside the city center, riding the subway to work involves two transfers of at least a 10-minute walk.

While inter-city train trips can be quite long because of the great distances between most major cities, use of high-speed rail lines in western China has been rather safe, much safer than driving. According to the New York Times, since an accident in 2011, the rail system has maintained a good safety record. That said, trains and train stations can be extremely overcrowded during holiday travel periods. In 2015, the rail system transported 2.5 billion passengers, 295 million of whom rode during the Lunar New Year holiday season, surpassing the Hajj pilgrimage as the world's largest annual population movement.

Beijing taxi fare is artificially suppressed, making taxis reasonably priced but difficult to hail, as supply falls far short of demand during peak times. Taxis often refuse to stop for foreigners, particularly those of African descent. Stories abound of foreigners who have been stranded for long periods because they could not get a taxi or the taxi driver demanded a huge surcharge. Most drivers do not understand English and are not well-versed in local destinations, so the probability of getting lost is high unless the passenger knows the exact destination and can explain it in Chinese. Further, taxi drivers often refuse to take fares that require them to leave the center of the city, making it very difficult for the large percentage of U.S. Embassy families who live in the suburbs to rely on taxis. Taxis almost never have working seatbelts for passenger use.

Travelers are encouraged to use official taxis (two-tone sedans) that employ meters. If a driver refuses to use a meter, exit the vehicle and use another taxi. Some hotels can provide guests with taxi cards written in English and Mandarin that include the hotel name/address and several common points of interest. The use of unregistered or "black" taxi cabs with freelance drivers continues to be of concern. These drivers negotiate fares ahead of time but then often change their minds and increase their fares to exorbitant amounts and refuse to let

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their passengers leave the vehicle until the higher amount is paid. The RSO advises against taking black cabs.

RSO has received reports of foreigners taking rickshaws or pedi-cabs at tourist sites (Tiananmen Square, Houhai Park) and being driven through hutongs (or alleyways) where they were shaken down for money. Typically, however, the victims are left relatively unharmed.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Air travel, both domestic and international, is quite expensive, as prices and competition are regulated by the government. Moreover, flight delays are very frequent, making travel planning particularly difficult and often too unpredictable for weekend trips. Beijing International Airport has only about a 40 percent on-time record for 2015, often making rail a preferred and more dependable mode of transportation. Often, flight delays result from sudden military closures and are not announced or explained to passengers.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

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Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Domestic counter-terrorism efforts remain primarily focused on the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), an organization that China alleges maintains influence in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of northwest China. China continues to escalate its security and surveillance in Xinjiang to prevent additional unrest, including by implementing stricter security controls and curbs on religious practice. Government officials often characterize China's security clampdown in Xinjiang as an effort to prevent acts of terrorism.

The lack of transparency and information provided by China about alleged terrorist incidents greatly complicates efforts to verify details of those and other violent acts. In many of the domestic incidents that China labels as terrorism, China alleges that ETIM influenced or directed violence through online propaganda. China also prevents foreign journalists and international observers from independently verifying official media accounts, which are often the only source of reporting on violent incidents in its territory. Foreign and non-state media access to information about 2015 incidents was heavily restricted and often limited to official accounts that were not timely and typically lacked detailed information.

In 2014, there were two terrorist attacks in Urumqi (Xinjiang province) and one in Kunming (Yunnan province), which resulted in over 30 deaths and left more than 100 people injured. Two of the attacks were against train stations (one of which employed explosives, the other involved a group of men using large knives) and one was against a police station (involving the use of an explosive device).

In 2013, there were three incidents in the far west and one in Beijing. A group calling itself the East Turkistan Islamic Party claimed responsibility for the Beijing attack, in which a vehicle

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careened into an ornamental bridge on Tiananmen Square and exploded, killing two tourists and the vehicle's three occupants and injuring 38 others. It was the largest security incident in central Beijing in the last decade.

RSO is unaware of a significant transnational terrorist presence in China.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

The government remains focused on maintaining social stability and preventing civil unrest over economic and social grievances. The largest, most violent incidents have taken place in ethnic minority areas (Tibet, Xinjiang) where grievances over human rights abuses and discriminatory policies have resulted in spontaneous outbursts of violence targeted at government and Han Chinese interests.

Post-specific Concerns

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Environmental Hazards

Natural disasters are not uncommon. In May 2008, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck in the Sichuan province, killing more than 69,000 people and leaving nearly five million people homeless.

Severe weather (large snowstorms) has brought parts of the country to a virtual standstill. Even smaller-scale storms often lead to multiple traffic accidents; snow removal is typically slow and is accomplished by employing thousands of laborers armed with shovels and brooms.

China's southern coast is subject to heavy rainfall, flooding, and monsoons. Southern China experienced massive mudslides in November 2015, killing dozens of people and causing significant property damage.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Accidents and fatalities continue to plague China's heavy industries. Worker safety and quality assurance are lacking. A landslide of construction waste occurred in Shenzhen on December 20, 2015. It destroyed and buried industrial buildings and workers' living quarters in a nearby industrial park. The death toll was reportedly 69 with an addition eight people reported missing. It is believed to have been an industrial accident caused by human negligence,

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rather than a natural disaster.

On August 12, 2015, at the port of Tianjin, a series of explosions occurred at a container storage station, reportedly killing 173 people and injuring nearly 800. The first two explosions occurred within 30 seconds. The second explosion was far larger and involved the detonation of about 800 tons of ammonium nitrate. Fires caused by the initial explosions continued to burn uncontrolled throughout the weekend, causing secondary explosions, with eight additional explosions occurring on August 15. The cause of the explosions was not immediately known, but Chinese state media reported that at least the initial blast was from unknown hazardous materials in shipping containers at a warehouse owned by a firm specializing in handling hazardous materials.

Commercial transportation accidents are not uncommon. Trucks are often overloaded, and drivers are poorly trained.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Business travelers should be particularly mindful that trade secrets, negotiating positions, and other business-sensitive information may be taken and shared with competitors, counterparts, and/or regulatory/legal entities. Embassy employees are warned not to discuss sensitive information in their homes, vehicles, or offices. Members of the private sector are strongly encouraged to take similar precautions to safeguard sensitive, personal, and/or proprietary information.

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Counterfeit products are readily available, but it is illegal to import them into the U.S. U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have the authority to seize suspect goods and impose fines on travelers caught attempting to enter the U.S. with counterfeit items.

Privacy Concerns

All visitors should have no expectation of privacy in public or private locations. Security personnel carefully watch foreign visitors and may place you under surveillance. The U.S. Embassy regularly receives reports of human and technical monitoring of U.S. private businessmen and visiting U.S. citizens. The areas around U.S. and other foreign diplomatic facilities and residences are under continual overt physical and video surveillance. Dozens of security personnel are posted outside of facilities and around residences, and video cameras are visible throughout the diplomatic district (including offices and residential neighborhoods) of Beijing. Overt microphones and video cameras are common in taxis.

All hotel rooms/meeting spaces and offices are considered to be subject to on-site or remote technical monitoring. Further, personal possessions in hotel rooms may be searched without your consent/knowledge. Hotel rooms, residences, and offices may be accessed without the occupants' consent/knowledge. Elevators and public areas of housing compounds are also under continuous surveillance.

All means of communication are likely monitored. The government has access to the infrastructure operated by the limited number of Internet service providers (ISPs) and wireless providers operating in China. Wireless Internet in major metropolitan areas is becoming common. As such, the Chinese can more easily access official and personal computers. The government has publicly declared that it regularly monitors private e-mail and Internet

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browsing through cooperation with local ISPs. Some bloggers are subject to particular scrutiny where such activity is carefully monitored and in some cases, depending upon the subject matter, blocked. Common Western social media that have been blocked include Google, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

Drug-related Crimes

Narco-terrorism has not been an issue. The government is concerned about domestic drug use, and enforcement efforts are widespread; illicit drugs, however, are easily available.

Police Response

Police response for foreign victims of crime depends upon the type of infraction, where it transpired, and the social status of the victim (private citizen, diplomat, VIP). Urban police forces in first-tier cities are better trained and equipped because authorities spend millions of dollars on security-related infrastructure. Local police are semi-effective at deterring crime; most responses to alarms/emergency calls are sufficiently prompt if the police are informed that the victim is a Westerner or person of importance. In some cases, local police authorities will serve as a mediator between the victim and criminal to agree upon financial compensation (sometimes in lieu of jail time).

Investigative training and forensic equipment is improving but remains substandard in comparison with Western countries. Local police cooperation with the RSO remains scant,

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and requests for assistance from the RSO are often not met.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime, contact the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. The Embassy can:

Replace a stolen passport.

Help find appropriate medical care.

Put you in contact with police authorities and can contact family members or friends.

Help you understand the criminal justice process and direct you to local attorneys, although authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting the crime.

The local equivalent to 911 is 110; however, very few English speakers staff this hotline. The local police can be reached only by calling 110 from the location where the crime occurred. Victims may also contact American Citizen Services (ACS) at the Embassy or nearest consulate for assistance. ACS officers can recommend appropriate medical facilities, provide contact information for local attorneys, notify family members, and explain how to transfer funds to China.

If a passport is stolen, the victim must not only apply for a new passport at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate but must also apply for a new visa. To receive the new visa, Chinese visa officials may require that you file a police report about your stolen passport at the police

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station nearest to where the theft occurred. You may also be directed to file a report at the local Entry/Exit Bureau. If someone steals your passport, file the police report right away.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care continues to improve in many urban areas. In Beijing, some medical facilities provide acceptable Western-style medical care. Some conditions that had led to a medical evacuation can now be safely treated in-country. It is recommended that American citizens use Western medical centers whenever possible or, when necessary, seek out the VIP section ("gao gan bing fang") of the hospital where there are more likely to be Western-trained physicians and more modern medical equipment.

Both municipal and private ambulance service remains substandard. Response time is typically very slow and transport to the nearest hospital can take a considerable amount of time due to congested traffic. Most ambulances are poorly equipped, staffed by individuals without English skills, and lack EMT training comparable to that found in the U.S. or Western Europe.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

International SOS maintains a 24-hour alarm center for visitors to China. SOS representatives will advise on the availability of care in most urban areas. Collect calls are accepted. Contact information is as follows:

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Beijing: 86-10-6462-9000

Hong Kong: 852-2528-9900

USA: 215-942-8226

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Air ambulance service varies by city. International SOS is the main Western air ambulance provider along China's east coast. MEDEX also provides regional air ambulance services; its representatives can be contacted at <http://www.medexassist.com/>.

Recommended Insurance Posture

Payment of hospital and other expenses is the patient's responsibility. Before you go abroad, learn what medical services your health insurance will cover overseas. If your health insurance policy provides coverage outside the U.S., carry both your insurance policy identity card as proof of such insurance and a claim form. Although many health insurance companies will pay "customary and reasonable" hospital costs abroad, very few will pay for your medical evacuation to the U.S. Medical evacuation can easily cost \$10,000 and up, depending on your location and medical condition. Visitors are strongly encouraged to purchase medical evacuation insurance prior to traveling.

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CDC 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/china?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenyang, and Shanghai all have active OSAC Country Councils. The initial point of contact for each Council is the Regional Security Officer:

RSO Gregory Levin (Beijing): LevinGJ@state.gov

RSO Julia Sweeney (Guangzhou): SweeneyJP@State.gov

RSO Sean McClanahan (Shanghai): McClanahanSL@state.gov

RSO Dax Moss (Shenyang): LandryDL@State.gov

RSO Paul Higgins (Chengdu): HigginsPB@state.gov

To reach OSAC's East Asia Pacific team, please email OSACEAP@state.gov

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U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

No. 55 An Jia Lou Lu, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100600

Normal hours of operation are 08:00 to 17:00, Mon-Fri

Mission facilities are normally closed for U.S. Federal and Chinese holidays

Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone: 86-10-8531-4000 (24 hours)

Post One: 86-10-8531-4444

Regional Security Office: 86-10-8531-4111

Medical Unit: 86-10-8531-4777

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Consular Affairs: 86-10-8531-3333

Fax: 86-10-8531-4000 (American Citizen Services)

Email: amcitbeijing@state.gov

Website: <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/>

Nearby Posts

Consulate Chengdu: <http://chengdu.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guangzhou: <http://guangzhou.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Shanghai: <http://shanghai.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Shenyang: <http://shenyang.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Wuhan: <http://wuhan.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

For the latest security and other information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs at <http://travel.state.gov>, where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings can be found, as well as important information for Americans who face emergencies abroad. U.S. citizens residing or

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traveling in China are reminded to register with the U.S. Embassy or closest U.S. Consulate by entering their travel itinerary and contact information at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>. In case of difficulties registering online, please contact the closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Criminals use various scams, including sending text messages and emails of fraudulent bills and traffic tickets, to trick people into paying money. Other techniques involve criminals posing as police and levying fake criminal charges against their victims and then extorting money from them.

One common ruse involves locals approaching tourists asking to practice English over tea or inviting them to an art house or to see a traditional tea ceremony. After tourists go to the venue and drink tea, they are charged very high sums – up to US\$1,000; often with a group of threatening men demanding payment.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

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Travelers are strongly encouraged to be aware of their surroundings. Vigilance is necessary to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. As a general rule, lesser developed areas in major cities have a higher rate of crime. Statistically, more crimes of opportunity transpire during early morning hours; for example, individuals who frequent bars, nightclubs, and similar establishments are more likely to be involved in physical altercations after midnight.

The U.S. Embassy recommends that visitors disperse money in more than one location on their person, taking care to separate small and large denominations. Men should place their wallets in front pockets, while women should drape the shoulder straps of purses across their body, keeping them in view and under positive control. If you use a backpack, do not place items of worth inside. Hotel safes should be used but are not a failsafe method to safeguard your belongings.

Travelers are encouraged to make copies of their passport photo page, visa, and credit card data (to include telephone contact information in the event the card is stolen). These copies should be stored in a hotel or residence in the event the actual items are stolen. Travelers should not flash large amounts of money, jewelry, or electronics, all of which can be perceived as an indication of wealth.

Public payphones are becoming less common in urban areas. The U.S. Embassy recommends that long-term visitors purchase cellular telephones and that short-term travelers contact their cellular phone provider to determine if it provides coverage in both mainland China and Hong Kong.

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