



Burkina Faso 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Bribery; Theft; Fraud; Rape/Sexual Violence; Burglary; Religious Terrorism; Coup d'etats; Riots/Civil Unrest; Floods; Employee Health Safety; Hate Crimes; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping

Africa > Burkina Faso; Africa > Burkina Faso > Ouagadougou

4/29/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Burkina Faso is a land-locked country in the center of West Africa with one of the highest poverty rates in the world. The government maintains friendly relations with the U.S. and receives aid and development assistance from several U.S. governmental agencies, NGOs, corporations, and private charities.

Post Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats

While most streets in Ouagadougou are safe and non-threatening during daylight hours, they become less safe at night, especially in isolated areas around bars and nightclubs that tend to attract unsavory individuals after dark. Crime is known to occur in affluent residential areas such as Ouaga 2000, Zone du Bois, and Koulouba. The United Nations Circle and Avenue

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Kwame N'Krumah are also high crime areas.

Criminals in urban areas may carry a knife or other edged weapon in order to cut strap on bags, purses, or backpacks and can become violent if the victim is noncompliant. Ordinarily, thieves do not threaten victims with weapons, although there have been thefts and attempted thefts involving firearms and knives. Street crime (pickpocketing, purse snatching, backpack/cell phone theft) is pervasive in major cities. Cellular telephones, jewelry, laptops, money, and other items of value are the frequent targets of thieves. The majority of street crime is committed after dark and is often perpetrated by one or two individuals on motorbikes.

Street crime typically increases in Ouagadougou around the holidays, the bi-annual West African Movie Festival (FESPACO), and the bi-annual Regional Craft Festival (SIAO).

Bribery and fraud are prevalent.

Rape and sexual assault continue to periodically occur in smaller towns and in Ouagadougou.

Residential thefts/home invasions occur occasionally in the expatriate community (Ouaga 2000, Koulouba, Zone du Bois) and in other parts of Ouagadougou. Thieves generally surreptitiously entered residences at night and avoided direct confrontation with the occupants. Most of these perpetrators used an unlocked door or window.

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Hotel security is generally adequate against petty crime.

Roadside banditry continues to be a problem, and banditry can take place anywhere along the country's roads. Bandits generally do not harm compliant victims, but they have been known to fire warning shots or even attack vehicles that do not stop. The Eastern Region beyond Koupela (toward Fada N'Gourma) is cited by local police as banditry-prone due to its isolated location and intermittent cell phone coverage. According to police statistics, more than half of the reported roadside banditry incidents occurred in this area.

Other Areas of Concern

The U.S. Embassy and other diplomatic missions restrict their employees from traveling to two specific areas: the northern Sahel region and Parc National du W.

The northern Sahel region is marked by the area to the north of the towns of Djibo, Dori, and the connecting east-west road, inclusive of these locations.

Parc National du W is located in the far southeastern section of the country, and it transcends the borders with Niger and Benin. The entire park is restricted for embassy personnel, as consistent with guidance promulgated in Niger and Benin.

Transportation-Safety Situation

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Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic and road conditions in Ouagadougou make driving difficult and hazardous and result in most expatriates experiencing at least one vehicle accident. In addition to regular car and truck traffic, there is a huge volume of mopeds, pedestrians, bicycles, donkey carts, hand-cranked wheel chairs, and hand-pulled wagons on main thoroughfares. As a result, the average safe speed is 25-30 MPH, making for long commutes.

Pedestrians and mopeds dash in/out of traffic, often directly in front of oncoming vehicles. Drivers selectively obey traffic laws, often engaging in unsafe driving practices. Mopeds have the right-of-way, so operators drive with complete disregard for their own or others' safety. The law requires moped operators to carry driver's licenses and wear helmets, but the police do not enforce it. As a result, it is quite common to see accidents involving mopeds, often with injuries/fatalities. Drivers must go well beyond the norms of defensive driving. European rules of the road are theoretically followed.

Hazards on side roads can be worse than on main thoroughfares. Commercial areas are overcrowded with pedestrians, taxis, trucks, hand carts, innumerable vendors, and even beggar children. Most of the country's roads are gravel surfaces or dirt tracks. On neighborhood roads, drivers may encounter young children at play in front of homes and businesses, dogs scavenging in trash piles, and livestock grazing. Exposed rocks, loose gravel, potholes, broken concrete/tile, and scattered pieces of wood often litter the deeply rutted dirt roads. The streets in the neighborhoods where many of the Embassy staff live may be paved, but the asphalt may be crumbling in places, especially at the edges.

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Paved roads between major cities are used by pedestrians, bicyclists, motorbikes, livestock, donkey carts, cars, buses, and trucks. Any vehicle on the road may be overloaded or in a state of disrepair. There may be long stretches between major cities on which one must detour to an unimproved road.

Night driving can be especially challenging. Many cars and motorbikes do not have or use their headlights, reflective clothing is unheard of, and many areas do not have streetlights. Bicyclists and pedestrians in dark clothing are practically invisible. The same carelessness and general lack of safety consciousness among daytime drivers becomes more dangerous at night. In some neighborhoods, packs of domesticated dogs roam the dark streets. All these factors combine to create very taxing and perilous nighttime driving experience.

There is no roadside assistance; in the event of a mechanical breakdown, it could be hours before help arrives. Personnel are instructed to carry plenty of food/water when traveling outside the cities. Embassy personnel are advised to have a well-maintained vehicle, two good spare tires, and many have had to purchase new car batteries because Burkina Faso's intense heat drains battery life.

While driving, you should always scan the area in front of you and pay particular attention when approaching choke points (areas with limited egress or restricted traffic flow). In traffic, always attempt to leave space between you and the vehicle in front of you to allow room to maneuver in the event of an emergency. Drive defensively, keep doors locked, windows up, and use seat belts. Yield to aggressive drivers and maintain a cool head in traffic – even if you have the right-of-way. If you have an accident, do not move your vehicle until instructed to do so by a police officer. If you feel like you are being followed, drive to a safe place (police

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station, hotel, or gas station), and immediately call the police for assistance. Avoid leading the person back to your residence.

Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation (buses and green taxis) are discouraged from use by the Embassy as much as possible. Buses on the highways have been involved in catastrophic accidents and are commonly the target of roadside bandits. The green taxis are often mechanically unsafe, allow multiple patrons during one trip, do not normally possess a fare meter, and have been connected to criminal activity targeting passengers (although rare during 2015).

However, the handful of yellow taxi cab services are acceptable. The associated companies include: Allo Taxi, Chic Taxi, City Cab, and Taxi Jaune. All of these services utilize centralized dispatchers, fare meters, seatbelts, and are relatively well-maintained automobiles.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The airport in Ouagadougou was built in the 1960s and has almost certainly outgrown its capacity constraints. It is located in the center of the city, approximately 1.5km southeast of the main commercial area. The airport site itself is approximately 4.8km in length, 0.5km in width at its narrowest point, and covers an area of approximately 426 hectares.

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As there is no direct commercial air service to the U.S. by carriers registered in Burkina Faso, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed the government's Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards. Although subject to change with little to no advance warning, Ouagadougou has flights to/from Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, Casablanca, Tunis, Addis Ababa, and several other cities in Africa.

Other Travel Conditions

Few streets are named, and some street names have changed in recent years, sometimes repeatedly. When navigating the city, it is useful, if not essential, to note landmarks (neighborhood pharmacies, specific buildings, permanent signs, roundabouts). The majority of paved roads do not have adequate markings; this leads to confusion among drivers.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Burkina Faso has seen an uptick in extremist activity in 2015 and since the October-November 2014 popular uprising. Most prominently was a coordinated attack

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involving at least three militants against two popular Western establishments in Ouagadougou in January 2016. At least 30 people from 18 countries were killed in the attack, and another 50 were injured. Al-Murabitoun, a branch of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack marked the first of its kind in Burkina Faso, a Muslim-majority country. Up until this point, the terrorist threat had involved mainly kidnapping/target of opportunity in remote locations of the country. A complex attack targeting Westerners in the capital is a significant elevation in Burkina Faso's security environment.

According to local police sources, the country had also endured four other significant incidents believed to be extremist-related:

the first-ever kidnapping of a Westerner near the Tambao manganese mining site (April),

two cross border attacks on Gendarmerie outposts in Oursi (August) and Samorogouan (October) resulting in deaths, and

a complex attack on a gold convoy near Djibo (November) involving explosives, RPGs, and small arms.

Incidents such as these were nonexistent beforehand.

Regional Islamist elements that could impact Burkina Faso include: al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar al Dine, Ansar al Sharia, al-Murabitaoun, and Boko Haram. Such elements could be in-country or may easily access the country through the porous borders with Mali and Niger.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

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The Burkinabè people have a very positive attitude toward Americans and most all things from the U.S. Burkina Faso is generally very pro-American, and the U.S. Embassy shares an excellent working relationship with its Burkinabe counterparts. It is very common to see Burkinabè donning clothes with American flags or even the face of the U.S. President. Additionally, many vehicles hang an American flag air freshener from their rearview mirror or, in the case of larger trucks, display a mini American flag on their dashboard alongside the Burkinabè flag. Anti-Americanism is considered low.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

Following the 2014 popular uprising, Burkina Faso experienced a second straight year with significant civil unrest. September 2015 marked the start of a coup d'état, as elements of the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP) took control of the presidential palace and detained transitional authorities. Martial law was declared, a curfew installed, and the airport and land borders were temporarily closed. There were incidents of violence, road blockages, tire burning, and destruction of property throughout Ouagadougou, in Bobo-Dioulasso, and elsewhere. International mediation and the consolidated action of the loyalist military forces brought order to a chaotic situation and allowed for the reinstatement of the transitional authorities. While delayed by the putsch, the November elections were seen to be free, fair,

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transparent, and peaceful. The presidential inauguration in December also transpired peacefully.

Aside from the 2014 and 2015 unrest, demonstrations, marches, and other gatherings are common in Ouagadougou. Although most of these events are generally peaceful, there have been incidents of violence, looting, road blockages, tire burning, and destruction of property. Instances may arise where the best, safest course of action is to temporarily shelter-in-place. Protests/demonstrations may disrupt traffic and turn chaotic/violent with little/no advance warning. If you encounter a protest or demonstration, you should immediately leave the area. If you are in your vehicle, turn around and take an alternate route.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Burkina Faso is noted for its religious and inter-ethnic tolerance, and faith-based violence is rare. Burkina Faso is a predominantly Muslim country, with the majority of practitioners following moderate Sunni teaching.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

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Flooding has been a major problem during the rainy season in parts of Burkina Faso, severely damaging roads and buildings. Ouagadougou experienced its last major and destructive flood in September 2009 that caused extensive damage to roads, levies, and residential areas. A number of small villages on the outskirts of Ouagadougou were completely destroyed, and more than 10,000 people became homeless and were temporarily displaced. The central hospital sustained significant damage, and several Embassy residences were evacuated.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Occupational hazards do exist, including buildings not being constructed according to code or insufficient enforcement of safety standards.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

This type of activity may occur in isolated instances, but it does not appear to be significant or widespread.

Privacy Concerns

Burkinabe generally respect an individual's privacy, as they expect the same behavior in return.

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Personnel-Background Concerns

In February 2012, the Burkinabe Archbishop gave a widely-covered speech condemning homosexuality, claiming it on ruins family institutions, contributing to the isolation of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) community. The government considered criminalizing homosexuality in 2013. In 2015, a mob attacked members of the LGBT community in Bobo-Dioulasso, following another attempt to ban homosexuality by a political party. At minimum, members of the LGBT community find life in Burkina Faso extremely difficult, at worst, dangerous. Societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity remains an issue, and religious/traditional beliefs do not tolerate homosexuality. There are regular reports of verbal and physical abuse against members of the LGBT community. Past LGBT employees have passed partners off as relatives, even within the Embassy, to avoid the possibility of intolerant behavior.

No official requirements exist for women to cover themselves in this majority Muslim country, but women must dress conservatively to avoid harassment. At some local social occasions (weddings, dinners, church, and ceremonies) and at many official events, women and men are seated separately. This sometimes impacts negatively on the ability of diplomats to conduct business.

Physically disabled individuals would have a very difficult time in Burkina Faso, as facilities generally do not attempt to meet standards set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act or similar regulations.

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Drug-related Crimes

Illegal drugs are available; however, Burkina Faso is mostly known as a transit country for the illegal drug trade. There are no indications that illegal drugs are connected to narco-terrorism.

Kidnapping Threat

There continues to be a persistent threat of kidnapping in the Sahel region, and Burkina Faso had its first kidnapping incident of a Westerner in April 2015. Extremists have claimed responsibility, and the individual has not been recovered. Regional instability in Mali and Niger contribute to increased vulnerabilities in Burkina Faso.

Police Response

Law enforcement authorities take extra measures to protect Westerners and international business interests. However, while law enforcement makes every effort, its practices, procedures, and expertise often fall below the standards expected in developed countries.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

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Americans are advised to call the U.S. Embassy at 25-49-53-00 immediately and ask to speak with the Consular Officer or Duty Officer if they have been detained or harassed by local police. Although the investigation and prosecution of a crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help Americans understand the local criminal justice process and find an attorney if needed.

Crime Victim Assistance

National Police, 25-30-63-83, 25-30-71-00, or dial 17

Gendarmerie, 25-30-62-71 or dial 16

You may also dial 10-10, which will connect to the Ministry of Security. They will dispatch the appropriate law enforcement entity, but be advised that English comprehension may be limited.

Fire Department dial 18

Ambulance Service, 18, 25-30-66-44 or 25-30-66-45

Medical Emergencies

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Hôpital National Blaise Compaoré

Contact Person: Dr. Alexandre Sanfo

Tel: (226) 25-50-96-63

Centre Hospitalier National Yalgado Ouedraogo

Contact Person: Mr. BAGAGNE L, Director

Address: 03 BP 7035, Ouagadougou

Office Phone: (226) 25-31-16-55 / 25-30-66-43 / 25-31-53-07

Other Phone: (226) 25-31-35-07

Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Pédiatrique, Charles-De-Gaulle

Contact Person: Prof. Jean Kabore

Address: Boulevard circulaire

Office Phone: (226) 25-36-67-77 / 25-36-67-79 / 25-36-67-79

Centre National de Transfusion Sanguine (Blood Bank)

Contact Person: Mahamoudou Sanou

Address: Avenue d'Oubritenga

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Office Phone: (226) 25-32-46-95/ 25-42-23-95/ 70-26-79-06

Clinique du Cœur

Contact Person: Dr. Rene Traore

Address: Ouaga 2000

Office Phone: (226) 25-48-35-28 / 70-23-68-62

Primary alternative facility after Embassy, fully equipped ambulance.

Association International de Sante

Contact Person: Dr. Peter Mare, Critical Care

Address: 21 Avenue Nazi Boni Sur Faso Avenue

Office Phone: (226) 25-30-66-07

Emergency Phone: (226) 70-20-00-00 / 76-19-99-99

Medically equipped ambulance with a medical team. Hospital and referral, this Association can only handle basic illness.

Polyclinique Notre Dame de la Paix

Contact Person: Dr. Jean Baptiste

Ouedraogo, Chief of the Clinic

Address: 01 BP 5666, Ouagadougou 01

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Office Phone: (226) 25-35-61-55 or 53 / 25-36-71-06

Hospitalization 24/7, emergency surgical wards, Multiple physician specialties: orthopedist, x-ray, ultrasound, Laboratory, 24/7 on duty physician can handle emergencies, but unlikely more than 20 patients at the same time. Dr. Salifou Traore, OB/GYN, can be called for sexual assault examinations. Prof. Theodore Ouedraogo is a surgeon.

Polyclinique NINA

Contact Person: Dr Bernard Seidou Ouedraogo, Chief, and NDE Nina Ouedraogo

Office Phone: (226) 25-36-33-81 / 25-36-00-88

Emergency x-ray and ultrasound, surgical wards.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

SOS Medecins Senegal

Contact Person: Dr. Massamba Diop

Address: Baie de Soumbedioune

Rue 62 x64, BP 731, Dakar

Emergency/Office Phone: 00221-33889-15-15

Medical emergency assistance

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Probable Response time: 6 hours

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/burkina-faso.htm>.

OSAC Country Council Information

Embassy Ouagadougou has a small OSAC Country Council due to the limited number of American-owned or -operated business interests. The Council generally meets annually or on an ad hoc basis. Regional Security Officer Jesse C. Thomas, Jr. continues to provide country briefings for representatives of American businesses, non-governmental organizations, academia, and faith-based organizations as requested. To reach the OSAC Africa Team, email: OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

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The U.S. Embassy Ouagadougou is located at Secteur 15, Ouaga 2000 Avenue Sembène Ousmane, rue 15.873, southeast of the Monument aux Héros Nationaux.

The hours of operation are Mon-Thur, 7:30 am to 5:00 pm, and Fri, 7:30 am to 12:30 pm local time, excluding U.S. and local holidays.

Embassy Contact Numbers

American Citizen Services (Consular Section) (226) 25-49-57-20

Regional Security Office: (226) 25-49-55-21

After-Hours Duty Officer: (226) 77-20-24-14

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

Embassy Guidance

The Embassy strongly recommends that U.S. citizens enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at <http://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en.html>. STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates and makes it easier for the U.S. Embassy or Consulate to contact you in an emergency. If you do not have Internet access, enroll directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. You should remember to keep all

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of your information in STEP up to date; it is particularly important when you enroll or update your information to include a current phone number and e-mail address.

U.S. government facilities worldwide remain at a heightened state of alert. These facilities may temporarily close or periodically suspend public services to assess their security posture. In those instances, U.S. Embassies and Consulates will make every effort to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens. U.S. citizens abroad are urged to monitor the local news and maintain contact with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Regularly monitor the State Department's website, where you can find current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and the Worldwide Caution. Read the Country Specific Information for Burkina Faso. For additional information, refer to the "Traveler's Checklist" on the State Department's website.

Contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate for up-to-date information on travel restrictions. You can also call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). Follow us on Twitter and Facebook to have travel information at your fingertips.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

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Although scams occur, they are not overly common, and most are easily avoidable by employing basic security practices. The few reported scams involve individuals attempting to exploit a foreigner's general desire to help someone in need. For example, an individual may come to your house unannounced and present a fabricated tragedy involving an ailing family member or close friend. A request for financial assistance, normally with a suggested amount, quickly comes. Usually these individuals are not aggressive, but they have been insistent. The easiest way to avoid this scam is not answer your door or inform the individual to leave and that you will call the police.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Be alert and aware of your surroundings, travel with a group of people if possible, and avoid poorly illuminated streets and narrow alleys. Be extra cautious when visiting higher crime areas, especially at night. Visitors are urged to carry only what they are willing to lose and to comply with criminals' demands in an effort to avoid violence and escalating the situation. Cell phones should be kept on your person or out of sight in briefcases and backpacks when not in use. Personnel should exercise caution while using credit cards and/or ATMs.

Care should be taken to ensure that you are not being overcharged or defrauded as you conduct your day-to-day business. Street vendors are notorious for charging a higher price to foreigners.

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All valuables should be secured in a hotel-provided lock box or safe.

Be wary of people who approach you. U.S. Embassy staff have reported encounters with con artists and persons seeking to intimidate them.

Women should avoid walking alone after dark and should be aware that sexual predators have been known to be both acquaintances and strangers.

The use of static guards, window/door grilles, residential alarm systems, and a conscientious use of door/window locks are effective countermeasures to residential crime. Residential doors and windows should remain locked, and no keys should be kept in keyholes. Use a residential alarm if you have one, when your home is unoccupied and at night while you sleep.

Secure items of value that are stored outside the house and lock car doors including overnight.

Private sector organizations should review their security profile and adjust as appropriate to render themselves difficult targets for regional terrorists.

Other best practices include ensuring that all of your staff have emergency evacuation plans in place. Such plans might include willingness to suspend operations when necessary, knowing where to obtain emergency travel arrangements, and pre-arranging planning care for

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your business, your residence, and your pets while away. Additionally, maintaining a three- to five-day supply of nonperishable food, bottled water, prescription medications, and other essential items is strongly suggested.

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