



## Armenia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Earthquakes; Employee Health Safety; Hate Crimes; Drug Trafficking; Disease Outbreak

Europe > Armenia; Europe > Armenia > Yerevan

5/10/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

### Crime Threats

Armenia is generally considered safe and relatively free of random acts of violent crime. The crime rate is lower in comparison to the U.S. and Europe. Crimes committed against Americans remain relatively infrequent. Most crime against Americans involves petty theft (pickpocketing, vehicle break-ins to steal objects left visible inside). The frequency of vandalism and vehicle theft has been low. Serious violent crimes can and do occur in Yerevan.

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## **Criminal Offense**

### **2013 Registered Crimes**

### **2014 Registered Crimes**

### **2015 Registered Crimes**

#### Murder

48

53

52

#### Attempted Murder

25

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28

35

Assaults

1,412

1,321

1,095

Rape

19

20

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39

### Traffic Violations

1,050

847

845

### Hooliganism

185

200

184

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## Banditry

73

69

54

## Robbery

184

220

237

## Theft

4,659

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4,620

5,294

#### Vehicle Theft

51

51

57

#### Trafficking

14

8

8

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## Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs

1,052

1,025

926

## Corruption

782

599

616

## Bribery

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80

66

97

Total Crimes\*

18,333

17,546

17,043

\*This total crimes number includes all crimes reported to the police. Note: There is a continuing effort for police precincts to maintain better records of all criminal offenses.

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Organized crime does exist; and though it occasionally takes on violent manifestations, it normally is score settling within or between organizations. There is no significant risk of backlash against U.S. interests.

### Other Areas of Concern

The Embassy recommends to its staff that they avoid casinos and the Persian Mosque.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are engaged in an ongoing dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. There are regular ceasefire violations in the vicinity of the militarized line of contact and at areas along their international border. The Embassy has restricted travel to its personnel to the Nagorno-Karabakh region and is unable to provide emergency consular services to Americans there.

Due to increased tension in the security situation along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in Tavush province, travel is restricted for all Embassy personnel and dependents. This area has experienced cease-fire violations over the years, including small arms and sniper fire. Villages and their connecting border roads include, but are not limited to, Berekamavan, Azatamut, Vazashen, Paravakar, Varagavan, and Aygepar. This restriction also includes the segment of the frequently traveled route between Yerevan and Tbilisi on M-16/H-26 from Azatamut through Jujevan to the Georgian border.

### Transportation-Safety Situation

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## Road Safety and Road Conditions

Vehicles are largely left-side drive, and traffic moves on the right side of the road. Besides a few well-maintained vital arteries, Armenia's roads are often riddled with potholes and poorly illuminated. Potholes are common and are large enough to cause serious tire damage. In rural areas, paved roads can degenerate into narrow, gravel tracks. Response times for emergency services can be long, especially outside of Yerevan. Winter travel is particularly hazardous, especially at higher elevations, due to the country's long, icy winters and mountainous terrain. Embassy personnel are forbidden from traveling on the roads outside Yerevan after nightfall.

Left turns at intersections are legal only when specifically marked, and there are no right turns against red lights. To turn left, a driver must continue straight through the light, proceed until they can make a legal U-turn at designated locations as noted by signage, and then return to the light from the opposite direction to then make a right during a green light. Caution should be used when approaching intersections. Traffic signals are sometimes out of commission and can be poorly positioned, causing hazardous conditions.

Armenians often drive erratically and with little regard to local traffic laws. Drivers of expensive cars drive especially aggressively and can become belligerent if confronted. Drivers can also act particularly aggressive following traffic accidents. Be wary of drunk drivers, especially at night and on weekends.

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With the recent installation of speed cameras around Yerevan, traffic stops by police have declined. The installation of the speed cameras have also had a positive impact on lowering speeds throughout the city.

The majority of the population walks or takes public transportation. Many intersections have crosswalks and pedestrian lights, but many do not work properly. While pedestrians have the right-of-way in crosswalks, they should exercise caution. Stay aware of your surroundings, as most vehicles will not necessarily give pedestrians the right-of-way. Pedestrians are also cautioned that vehicles sometimes drive on sidewalks and against traffic. Buses and marshrutki generally will stop anywhere with little/no notice, so pedestrians should be cautious as they step into the street. Several U.S. citizens have been seriously injured while attempting to cross the street, so caution is advised.

Lock valuables out of sight in vehicles.

### Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation is unreliable and unsafe, especially mini-buses called “marshrutki.”

Taxis often drive erratically and at excessive speeds. Many taxis are not equipped with seatbelts or other safety features; and drivers sometimes lack good driving skills. Despite local norms and the advice of most taxi drivers, the Embassy urges travelers to always use available seatbelts. Use established taxi companies and/or professional private drivers for

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travel.

## Aviation/Airport Conditions

Armenia has two international airports: Zvartnots in Yerevan and Shirak in Gyumri. Zvartnots handles the vast majority of commercial flights into/out of Armenia. It is a recently-built facility with good infrastructure; however, the flight scheduling is less than ideal with many flights arriving/departing in the early hours of the morning.

## Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

## Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

## Civil Unrest

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Over the past two years, the government has shown improvements in its ability to control crowds without the use of violence. Recent parliamentary elections were peaceful, as were large, opposition party demonstrations. In January 2015, during large protests in Gyumri, police used crowd control techniques effectively to end the disorder with minimal injuries to police and protestors.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

Investing and conducting business can be risky. A lack of transparency in the tax and customs services can have a serious and detrimental effect on how taxes and customs duties are levied and can affect the profitability of business ventures. Other pitfalls can include unscrupulous local business partners, difficulty in enforcing legal judgments, and an often lengthy and unproductive legal process.

## **Environmental Hazards**

Armenia is located in a seismically unstable zone, at the juncture of the Arabian and Eurasian plates; small tremors periodically occur in the region and the risk of catastrophic earthquakes exists. In 1988, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck Spitak and the surrounding region, resulting in 22,000 deaths. The most recent seismic activity was a minor 4.0 tremor in September 2015. Armenia has made significant improvements to inform the public about the dangers of earthquakes. The 911 center at the Ministry of Emergency Situations employs English and Armenian speakers. The Ministry continues to plan and train to respond to natural

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disasters.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

In 2006, new laws were implemented to ensure safer building standards; however, many buildings remain unsafe.

There is concern for an industrial or nuclear emergency from various aging Soviet industrial complexes (Metsamor nuclear power plant located 18 miles from central Yerevan).

### Personnel-Background Concerns

Armenia in general is a tolerant country. However, there are no laws protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals, though there are no legal impediments to the organization of LGBT events. Traditional cultural attitudes result in LGBT individuals often facing de facto discrimination and harassment by state and private actors.

### Drug-related Crimes

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Armenia's drug culture is developing. The seizure of dangerous drugs at the airport and border checkpoints, particularly from the south, increase every year. The government works with partners to fight the drug trade into Armenia. The potential for Armenia to develop into an active transit area for drug traffickers exists but is not yet widely exploited. Narcotic cases rose to over 1,100 cases in 2015. While drug seizures are relatively low, penalties remain fairly stiff.

## Kidnapping

In 2013, there was one reported kidnapping of an American citizen, having to do with dealings with an unscrupulous business associate.

## Police Response

Police response is generally slower than in Western countries. A mixture of reporting suggests that the police are improving in some areas, though they continue to lack interest or willingness to investigate in some situations. Law enforcement officials often lack the sensitivity training required to investigate some crimes (domestic violence, rape). There are reports that officers use coercion during questioning and tend not to remain objective.

Law enforcement officials have identified the need for greater English language skills due to the increase in foreign contacts. Still, many law enforcement officers do not speak any English and only wish to communicate in Armenian. This adds to the difficulty in trying to

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communicate with policemen. New community policing programs are being implemented in Yerevan and other cities.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

There are no recent reports of physical or mental abuse of American citizens by law enforcement. According to Consular Affairs, American citizens arrested are afforded access to legal counsel and consular services. If you are detained, incarcerated, and/or harassed by local law enforcement during business hours (Mon-Fri, 9 am-6 pm), contact the American Embassy Consular Section for American Citizen Services (ACS) support. ACS may be contacted at (374-10) 49-45-85 or [http://armenia.usembassy.gov/acs\\_emergency.html](http://armenia.usembassy.gov/acs_emergency.html). For after-hour emergencies please call (374-10) 49-44-44.

## Crime Victim Assistance

If you are the victim of a crime, immediately contact the police emergency line at 102 and/or proceed to the nearest police station to complete a police report. If further assistance is needed, contact the American Embassy Consular Section for American Citizen Services (ACS) Support.

The following emergency contact numbers are applicable across Armenia:

Fire Emergency: 101

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Police Emergency: 102

Emergency Medical Services (Ambulance): 103

### Police/Security Agencies

The Police of the Republic of Armenia are a national police force, located in 10 mars (districts), with each having its own separate divisions to handle various criminal offenses.

The Traffic Police of Armenia is structured in a similar way and conduct policing on Armenia's roads only. Armenia lacks a Western-style patrol division. The implications of this is the lack of timely police response, particularly during the evening hours.

The National Security Service (NSS) is the government's intelligence service. The NSS handles many crimes that involve the government (like the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation). The NSS involvement in cases is generally not highly visible.

Most private security companies provide little professional training and pay their staffs minimal salaries. Private security companies are not endorsed by the Regional Security Officer.

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## Medical Emergencies

Medical care is limited. Although basic medical supplies (disposable needles, anesthetics, standard antibiotics) are generally available, advanced medical care is not available outside the capital. Individuals with existing health problems may be at risk due to inadequate medical facilities and services.

Doctors and hospitals expect immediate cash payment for health services and often will not release persons from the hospitals without payment in full.

### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The American Embassy maintains a list of English-speaking physicians and other healthcare specialists at: [http://armenia.usembassy.gov/acs\\_medical.html](http://armenia.usembassy.gov/acs_medical.html).

Nairi Medical Center

21 Pronyan St.

Dr. Siranoosh Martirosyan

Cell: 091-400-495

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Dr. Narine Mamikonyan (English speaker) Hospital Administrator

Ph. #: 374 10 53-77-42/58-00-99

Emergency & Trauma Center

Erebuni Medical Center

14 Titogradyan St.

Armen Charchyan-English speaker

Tel: 374 10 47-35-72/47-24-00

Cell: (091) 41-17-88

#### Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Armenia is home to numerous stray animals, particularly dogs and cats. Each year, there are reports from Embassy personnel of aggressive street animals. Visitors should exercise caution and not feed or pet stray animals. If bitten by an animal, contact Nairi Medical Center. Although there has not been a registered case of rabies in five years, pre-exposure rabies vaccine is recommended only for those subject to occupational exposure. Post-exposure prophylaxis should be sought even in those already immunized. This is due to the large number of feral animals and the inability of the local health system to provide immunizations.

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Visitors are encouraged to ensure that their immunizations are current, including vaccines for hepatitis A and B. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommend having had a tetanus/diphtheria booster within the last five years.

It is recommended to carry a copy of one's immunization record.

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/armenia>.

## **OSAC Country Council Information**

The OSAC Country Council is expected to be in place in 2016. The Country Council remains in the development stage, and efforts are underway with American businesses and Chamber of Commerce to generate interest. POC for the Country Council is the Regional Security Officer, Zack Kendall (tel: (374) (10) 49-45-95, [KendallZT@state.gov](mailto:KendallZT@state.gov)). Secondary POC is the Assistant Regional Security Officer, Benjamin Hammond (tel: (374) (10) 49-43-06, [HammondBL@state.gov](mailto:HammondBL@state.gov)). To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email [OSACEUR@state.gov](mailto:OSACEUR@state.gov).

## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

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## Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

1 American Ave., Yerevan, Armenia.

M-F 9:00am – 6:00pm

## Embassy Contact Numbers

Country Code: 374

Yerevan City Code: 10

Embassy Operator: 46-47-00

Regional Security Officer: 49-45-95

Embassy Health Unit: 49-43-24 / 49-43-25

Consular: 49-45-85

Post 1 Marine Guard: 49-44-44

Website: <http://armenia.usembassy.gov/index.html>.

## Embassy Guidance

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U.S citizens are encouraged to register at the Consular Section of the U.S Embassy in Yerevan, where they may obtain updated information on travel and security in Armenia. For additional information on crime and political violence, please refer to post's Consular Information Sheet (CIS).

## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

The Embassy recommends visitors exercise the same precautions they would in large American cities (vigilance, use of common sense). Americans are advised to exercise situational awareness and take personal security precautions (maintaining a low profile, not walking alone at night in poorly illuminated areas, not flashing large sums of money in public, not wearing excessive jewelry). Pay particular attention to your surroundings in crowded market areas. Sidewalks are in poor condition, and stairwells are seldom illuminated and can be an area for attack. Visitors should avoid streets that are not well illuminated and be cautious when entering buildings, as they can be dark and hazardous.

Avoid any drug use, aggressiveness toward drivers, and maintain vigilance for vehicle/pedestrian traffic. Illegal drug use is prohibited.

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