



Vietnam 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Ho Chi Minh City

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Significant Events; Burglary; Rape/Sexual Violence; Financial Security; Drug Trafficking; Counterfeiting; Extortion; Riots/Civil Unrest; Hurricanes; Surveillance; Bribery; Faith-based Organization; Disease Outbreak

East Asia & Pacific > Vietnam; East Asia & Pacific > Vietnam > Ho Chi Minh City

5/13/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats

Most travelers in Vietnam feel relatively safe, and the level of crime is generally comparable to similar cities of the same size throughout the world. Pickpocketing, snatch-and-grab robbery, and petty theft are the most frequent types of crime reported in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) where foreigners frequent (major hotels, tourist sites, public parks). HCMC is experiencing a steady increase in petty criminality. During 2015, there were numerous reports of permanent, temporary duty, and vacationing U.S. government employees losing their cellular phones, bags, and purses to thieves. The most common modus operandi is for criminals to use motorbikes during their assaults. Often, the thieves' motorcycle is traveling at the same speed or faster than street traffic. One common method of theft involves two individuals riding a motorcycle, with the passenger snatching a victim's bag, camera, cellular phone, etc. This can be especially dangerous if the straps of the victim's bag are over the shoulder or around the

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neck, as the victim can be pulled down or dragged by the strap until it breaks. In other instances, a knife or other sharp cutting instrument is used to cut the strap or to make a hole to reach in and steal valuables.

Violent crimes (murders, armed robbery, kidnapping) remain very rare, especially for the expatriate community.

Given the past increase in crime, particularly during and in the lead up to the Tet holiday, the government began sending additional police officers to HCMC to ensure a safe holiday season for local residents and foreign visitors.

In general, the safety and security of guest rooms in quality hotels is adequate. In 2015, there was one report of a U.S. government employee who had money and items stolen from a hotel room.

There have been a few reports of residential break-ins at expatriate residences through the HCMC OSAC constituent network. Generally, these reports are submitted to the responsible property manager, security personnel of the compound, and/or the respective company security office. None of the reports involved U.S. government personnel.

Although sexual assaults are relatively uncommon, in March 2015 a “xe om” (motorbike taxi driver) reportedly attempted to sexually assault a female passenger when she hired him to take her to her hotel.

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In November 2014, a skimming device was discovered on an international bank ATM.

U.S. citizens who formed small business ventures with Vietnamese partners have reported threats from their partners/employees if the business relationship deteriorated. Some foreign business people have faced threats, vandalism, and harassment in connection with their business dealings but have not reported acts of physical harm.

Some organized criminal elements do exist and usually concentrate their activities in the manufacture and distribution of drugs and counterfeit goods and extortion against informal businesses.

Overall Road Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Two of the most dangerous activities in Vietnam are crossing the street and driving/riding in traffic. The road system is chaotic, and traffic laws are widely ignored. Police officials admit that they have a considerable problem controlling the steadily growing number of motorcycles and vehicles on their streets. It is estimated that, with Ho Chi Minh City's population approaching 10 million, there are still fewer than 800 traffic enforcement police on duty. The

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lack of open sidewalks and adequate traffic controls (stoplights at all intersections) creates a precarious situation for pedestrians and motorists.

Motorcycle accidents are very common and serious since motorcyclists generally have less training than car/truck drivers, and some are unlicensed. Travelers should be aware that a motor vehicle accident can quickly draw a crowd of observers, with occasional heated arguments between those involved; meanwhile, extensive traffic will continue to move around the accident site, increasing the potential for additional risks. By Western standards, the comparative death toll due to traffic accidents is staggering. Even though the government enacted a helmet law in December 2007, it did not specify acceptable quality standards for helmets, leading to the prevalence of substandard/poor quality helmets that offer little/no protection. If you plan on riding a motorbike or bicycle, you must wear a helmet, and it is recommended that you bring a U.S. Department of Transportation approved helmet.

Public Transportation Conditions

Do not take “xe om” or motorcycle taxis/cyclos/pedicabs at night. If you are out late at night, take only metered/marked taxis, preferably from the larger registered taxi companies (Mai Linh Taxi, Vinasun).

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

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Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The political situation is stable.

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Visitors should respect local laws/customs and avoid unauthorized gatherings or uncontrolled crowds. Sporadic disputes have occurred between local residents and authorities, but foreigners generally have not been involved.

One of the more common types of protest activity involves land rights activists who protest against land seizures by the government without equitable compensation. These demonstrations have been a common occurrence and on a few occasions have resulted in a disruption to Consulate operations. Generally, peaceful demonstrations have also occurred as a result of the territorial disputes between Vietnam and China in the South China Sea, but they have been tacitly sanctioned and heavily controlled by the local government. Demonstrations over the South China Sea turned violent for several days in May 2014, targeting businesses perceived as Chinese-owned. The government has since reassured

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investors that it will not allow incidents to threaten businesses.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Vietnam is situated in an area known to have environmental hazards (typhoons). In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan threatened to make landfall in Vietnam. In preparation, many persons were instructed to move away from coastal cities and to stock up on water, non-perishable food, and flashlights with spare batteries in the event of loss of power and the need to shelter-in-place.

Privacy Concerns

One should assume that all rooms, telephones, and fax machines may be monitored, and, all movements and activities may be subject to surveillance by government services. Personal possessions, media, and documents kept in hotel rooms, apartments, or at the workplace may be searched. Visitors and residents should be cautious when discussing sensitive or proprietary information.

Personnel-Background Concerns

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The government considers some persons born in Vietnam or born to Vietnamese parents to be Vietnamese citizens unless they have formally renounced their Vietnamese citizenship with the Vietnamese government. For this reason, Vietnamese officials may treat U.S. citizens of Vietnamese origin differently from other U.S. citizens. All U.S. citizens are encouraged to enter the country using their U.S. passport.

Drug-related Crimes

Drug use, particularly the increasing use of methamphetamine and intravenous drugs, contributes significantly to the crime rate and is an increasing problem. Another concern involves the growing use of synthetic and fake drugs that may contain unknown/toxic ingredients.

Police Response

Police are often under-funded and lack training in a number of areas. While the overall situation is gradually improving, some police have been openly solicitous of compensation, ostensibly to support local police efforts or to facilitate an investigation of a crime.

Individuals have been detained for traveling to sensitive areas and taking photographs of military installations or other sensitive areas/situations. Exercise care in taking photographs,

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as photographing military, police, or other government facilities may result in detention and questioning by the authorities, as well as possible confiscation of the film and/or camera. For more information, please review OSAC's Report "Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography."

The government maintains strict control over all forms of political speech, particularly dissent. Any individual engaging in public actions that the government determines to be political is subject to arrest/detention. Even private conversations can lead to legal actions. U.S. citizens have been detained/arrested for political activities (criticizing the government, its domestic/foreign policies, advocating alternatives to Communist Party rule; possession of political material; non-sanctioned religious activities, including proselytizing). U.S. citizens whose stated purpose of travel was tourism but who engaged in proselytizing have had religious materials confiscated and have been expelled. Sponsors of small, informal religious gatherings (Bible study groups in hotel rooms) have been detained, fined, and expelled, although these outcomes have become less common because of improvements to religious freedom.

In business disputes, local police may confiscate a U.S. citizen's passport/visa. On a few occasions, individuals have not been allowed to leave the country until the dispute is resolved.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Under its 1994 bilateral Consular Agreed Minute with the U.S., Vietnam is required to provide notification to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General no later than 96 hours after the arrest/detention of a U.S. citizen and to provide consular access to that individual within 48

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hours of notification. The government consistently fails to meet the notification target, and access is often delayed due to Vietnam's complex procedural requirements.

Crime Victim Assistance

In the event of an emergency, the police can be contacted by dialing 113 from a local telephone, though few operators speak English. Depending on the nature of the incident or ongoing situation, local citizens may assist foreigners in distress by contacting the police or medical authorities. If dialing 113 or requesting assistance from local citizens is not a viable option, one should try to get to a Western hotel where staff are more likely to speak English and are generally very helpful in emergency situations. If involved in a traffic accident, altercation, or other situation that draws a crowd, leave the immediate area if you believe your safety is in jeopardy and contact the police.

Police/Security Agencies

In 2008, the Ho Chi Minh Police established a Criminal Task Team to assist citizens who are victims of theft, fraud, assault, or threat of violence. They can be reached at 08-3838-7342 or 08-3920-1796 (fax).

Medical Emergencies

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Visitors and residents should be aware of the limitations of medical care. Even when adequate medical care is available at private clinics, it is often rather expensive. The quality of medical care in major cities is limited, and medical care in rural/provincial areas can be non-existent.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

SOS - 24-hour emergency clinic

167A Nam Ky Khoi Nghia St, District 3

Tel: 3829 8520

For appointments: 3829-8424

HCMC Family Practice

34 Le Duan Street, District 1

Tel: 3822-7848

FV Hospital

Nguyen Luong Bang Street, District 7

Tel: emergency: 5411-3500

For appointment: 5411-3333

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West Coast Dental

71-79 Dong Khoi, D1

Tel: 3825-6777

Recommended Insurance Posture

American or Western medical insurance with medical evacuation coverage is highly recommended. When traveling outside of major cities, emergency medical evacuation is limited to ambulances; there are not any emergency medical evacuations via helicopter.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Malaria is typically confined to rural areas, with the exception of the Red River Delta and the coast north of Nha Trang. There are rare cases in the Mekong Delta and no reported cases in Da Nang, Haiphong, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Nha Trang, and Qui Nhon. Individuals visiting areas that may have malaria are advised to contact their doctor for information on how to avoid getting sick. Some general best practices include taking a prescription anti-malarial drug; using insect repellent and wearing long pants/sleeves to prevent mosquito bites; and sleeping in well-screened rooms or using nets.

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More information on the risks of yellow fever and malaria can be found at:
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2012/chapter-3-infectious-diseases-related-to-travel/yellow-fever-and-malaria-information-by-country/vietnam.htm#5441>

For additional guidance on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:
www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/vietnam/

OSAC Country Council Information

Additional information on the HCMC Country Council can be obtained by contacting Regional Security Officer Whitney T. Savageau (SavageauWT@state.gov) or Assistant Regional Security Officer Marshall Flynn (FlynnMW@state.gov). To reach OSAC's East Asia-Pacific Team, please email OSACEAP@state.gov.

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate General

4 Le Duan Boulevard

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District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

Hours: 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m.; 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday

Closed on Vietnamese and American holidays

Consulate Contact Numbers

Tel: (84) (8) 3520-4200

Fax: (84) (8) 3520-4244

Duty Officer (24/7): (84) (8) 90-666-0475

Website: <http://hochiminh.usconsulate.gov/>

Nearby Posts

Embassy Hanoi: <http://vietnam.usembassy.gov/>

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Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Try to minimize any potential losses ahead of time. When you go out, bring only what is needed and only what you can afford to lose. If you are confronted by criminals, surrender whatever is being demanded, then immediately leave the area, and contact the police.

Valuables and important documents should be kept inside a safe in the room (provided by many of the better hotels) or in a safety deposit box at the front desk if the traveler feels it is appropriately secure. In order to avoid carrying identity documents, travelers and foreign residents should have scans/photos of their important documents in their email or smartphones for easy access if the documents are lost. If you must carry a bag, purse, or backpack, carry it in a manner that would allow you to quickly and easily release it in the event of a theft or emergency.

If on guided tours, secure your personal bags and, if possible, do not leave them on the tour bus/boat. If you must leave the bags behind, take all valuables with you.

When out on the streets, be as alert as possible to your surrounding area and the people around you. It is advised not to walk/run with headphones on or to text while walking. Watch out for distractions that facilitate criminal acts (kids surrounding you to sell something while picking your pockets, prostitutes trying to solicit sex by grabbing the arms of pedestrians but in reality stealing their watches). When traveling at night, it is best to go with someone you know

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and travel in areas that are illuminated and have other pedestrian traffic. Try to avoid staying out very late, as most crime occurs in the late night hours.

Watch out for unattended drinks in bars; drinks might be spiked in order to incapacitate a potential victim. Do not create a credit "tab" at a bar or nightclub, and always pay for meals and beverages at the time of delivery to avoid unauthorized charges or additions to your bill. Avoid unorganized/unauthorized gatherings (street races, demonstrations).

When using ATMs, be sure to use machines in illuminated, high-trafficked areas. Carefully examine the ATM card reader for any signs of tampering. If you notice anything odd, gently press your finger against the frame; if fake, the skimming device may fall off/out.

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