



Uganda 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Disease Outbreak; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Hotels; Rape/Sexual Violence; Cyber; Fraud; Financial Security; Carjacking; Religious Terrorism; Rebellions; Riots/Civil Unrest; Religious Violence; Floods; Counterfeiting; Information Security; Drug Trafficking

Africa > Uganda; Africa > Uganda > Kampala

5/17/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Uganda continues to strive to improve its security situation by focusing efforts toward combating crime and terrorism.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

A comparative analysis of figures from police/security reflects a continuing trend of crimes inaccurately or under-reported. Most experts agree that crime is generally low in provincial towns and rural areas.

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Crime can occur anywhere and at any time. Americans are not singled out as victims of crime. Victimization by criminals is based upon the perception of the victim's affluence and whether s/he presents an appealing "target of opportunity." Common crimes are generally crimes of opportunity, including, but are not limited to: thefts from vehicles, thefts of property from residences, residential break-ins, strong-armed robberies, pickpocketing, and theft from hotel rooms.

Petty street crime (vehicle robberies, vandalism), increased in 2014 and continued to increase in 2015 despite a larger deployment of police in the metropolitan areas. A high unemployment rate and low wages are also major contributing factors in the increase in crime for 2015. Several U.S. Embassy employees were the victims of petty crime in 2015. Pickpocketing, snatch-and-grab thefts (from occupied and unoccupied vehicles), and vehicle vandalism along with other petty, opportunistic crimes were the primary types of activities reported in Kampala. These crimes rarely involve violence unless the perpetrators are met with resistance. Most petty crimes do not involve the use of weapons. However, there has been an increase in armed robbery and sexual assaults.

In 2015, the U.S. Embassy received reports of street crime, sometimes violent, in proximity to areas where U.S. citizens congregate/reside. Outside of Kampala, there were occasional reports of violent crime sprees in the Karamoja Region near the Sudan border. Gulu region experienced some violent crime against private citizens. The Lira region also experienced a wave of violent crime against business owners that prompted the Inspector General of Police to replace the police leadership in the city and to visit the city himself in an effort to reassure local residents.

Uganda does not have large organized crime elements; organized crime appears more frequently on a small scale (two or more individuals planning and executing a home invasion). In 2015, however, Kampala and its environs saw an increase in incidents involving small

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organized groups carrying out crimes that could be attributed to poor living conditions, high unemployment, and low local wages.

Uganda signed legislation against money laundering in October 2013, but the bureaucratic structures are still not in place to fully implement the bill.

Cybersecurity Issues

Sophisticated crimes like computer and credit card fraud are becoming more frequent, and it stands to reason that identity theft will follow. There is also a moderate level of financial fraud cases involving credit cards, personal checks, and counterfeiting. The rate of these types of crimes has increased in recent years. Skimming, which is a practice to capture personal identification information from ATM terminals, has increased in the region recently.

Other Areas of Concern

In November 2015, the U.S. Embassy lifted its travel restrictions to Karamoja region after U.S. Embassy personnel determined that the security conditions had improved. However, travel in that region remains somewhat hazardous due to poor road conditions, lengthy reaction times by the police, and the lack of widely available medical services. It is advised to travel to Karamoja in a four-wheel drive vehicle with a well-stocked emergency kit, food, and water. Knowing where to access the nearest police and medical facilities is also recommended.

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Travelers should exercise caution when traveling to any remote area of the country, including the borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. Rebel groups operate freely in the eastern DRC, posing a potential risk along Uganda's western border. The northern border with South Sudan has a limited security presence, and recent events in South Sudan have exacerbated an already challenging security situation. The remoteness of the border with Kenya makes it difficult to police, although main roads and border crossings may have a consistent police presence.

Transportation-Safety Situation

The information below is provided for general reference only and may not apply in all circumstances.

Road Safety and Road Conditions

U.S. citizens will encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the West. Driving requires particular caution and full-time attention. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Uganda has one of the highest rates of traffic fatalities per vehicle in the world. Roads are poorly maintained, inadequately marked, and poorly illuminated. Street signs are lacking in certain areas, adding to the difficulty of finding one's way in unfamiliar areas. Road travel outside Kampala is dangerous during the day and treacherous at night. It is Embassy policy that personnel under Chief of Mission Authority are not authorized to travel on roads outside of the Kampala/Entebbe metropolitan area after dark. The road lighting in

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larger cities is inadequate and virtually nonexistent in smaller towns.

Driving hazards at night include: broken-down vehicles, pedestrians, drunk drivers, stray animals, poor road conditions, and the possibility of armed robbery. Under normal driving conditions, drivers contend with excessive speed, unpredictable local driving habits, pedestrians/livestock, commuter bus drivers who ignore traffic laws, and vehicles that are not roadworthy (including lack of brake/indicator lights). While general vehicle travel during daylight hours is considered relatively safe, varying conditions of the roadways (potholes) combined with excessive speed can lead to serious accidents. In some areas, piles of trash, missing manhole covers, gaping ditches/potholes, wayward/oblivious pedestrians, and animals are threats to vehicular safety. In the market areas, vendors have taken over the sidewalks and in some cases much of the roadway, forcing pedestrians into the streets.

There have been occasional reports of highway robbery, including carjacking, by armed bandits outside urban areas. Some incidents have been accompanied by violence. People should travel outside of Kampala only during daylight hours if possible, and in tandem due to both the security situation and road conditions. Travelers should educate drivers and other staff to maintain safe driving speeds and never encourage or condone risky passing on Uganda's roadways.

In rural areas, drivers should expect a lack of guard rails and few traffic signs/road markings. Drivers should use caution at bends, as it is common for vehicles coming from the other direction to drive in the middle of the road, even around blind turns.

The Ugandan Police Force's efforts to improve road safety have been minimal at best. The general lack of an immediate police/emergency response to traffic accident scenes often

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results in delayed emergency service response. As a result, accident victims rely on bystanders as first responders. For this reason and considering the lack of adequate medical care in the majority of districts, travelers should maintain equipment and training needed to perform first aid. Finally, accidents can draw angry, potentially violent crowds in a very short period. It is recommended that anyone involved in an accident immediately notify the police.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed Uganda's Civil Aviation Authority as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of Uganda's air carrier operations.

Terrorism Threat

Most communities in northern Uganda have returned to relative normalcy following the 23 years of insurgency at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) that ended in 2006.

Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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The largest international terrorist threat comes from the Somali al-Shabaab and al-Qai'da East Africa (AQEA). The threat stems in part from Uganda's support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

The twin suicide bombings in July 2010 in Kampala, in which 76 people were killed, was al-Shabaab's first successful operation outside of Somalia and showed that al-Shabaab was ready, willing, and able to launch attacks outside of Somalia. Al-Shabaab has vowed to continue to attack the interests and citizens of countries supporting AMISOM, to include Uganda and the U.S. The threat posed by al-Qai'da and al-Shabaab will continue for the foreseeable future.

The 2013 terrorist attacks at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, and the al-Shabaab cell that was disrupted in the midst of an imminent attack in Kampala on September 13, 2014, are stark reminders that the threat is ever-present.

Regional terror organizations continue to threaten Uganda and the region. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), originally a Uganda-based rebel group, operates in eastern DRC. In 2007, the ADF made incursions into western Uganda along the Muzizi River, near Semliki National Park in Bundibugyo district. A military response resulted in the killing/capture of ADF fighters. The government, which believes the ADF has links to Muslim extremists, continues to monitor the group closely.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

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While Uganda is generally viewed as a safe, secure, and politically stable country, its extensive and porous borders are inadequately policed, allowing for a robust flow of illicit trade/immigration.

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

The threat of civil unrest, public protests, strikes, demonstrations, and political violence occur at a moderate rate, and police are quick to resort to the use of batons, rubber bullets, tear gas, and occasionally gunshots into the air to disperse crowds. Politically- or economically-motivated demonstrations can occur with little/no warning. Protests mainly revolve around power struggles between parties, students protesting school fees, taxi drivers protesting taxation, and those fighting over land rights issues.

Demonstrations occasionally take place in response to world events or local conditions. These demonstrations can often escalate if police response is not swift and appropriate. It is advisable to avoid demonstrations if possible and to leave the area.

Staying current with media coverage of local events, continually evaluating one's surroundings, and planning to avoid problem areas will usually mitigate these risks. Developing communication strategies on security issues with local staff can provide an early warning system for demonstrations.

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Religious/Ethnic Violence

The Muslim population is primarily Sunni. Unknown assailants killed two Muslim leaders in 2015, and three Muslim clerics escaped armed attack. In total, at least nine Muslim leaders have been killed since 2012.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Rapid-onset disasters can range from short-term food security crises to flash floods, infectious disease outbreaks, and political crisis/conflict situations. Slow-onset disasters stem primarily from food insecurity due to drought, with a number of other factors contributing to root causes.

The vast majority of people in northern Uganda live in rural areas and are engaged primarily in subsistence-based livelihoods, living largely at the mercy of the production capacity of the land and the whims of the weather.

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Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Regulations for the processing and transportation of dangerous chemicals do not meet U.S. standards, and such chemicals could pose a risk. In addition, training and equipment available to emergency response teams remain inadequate to deal with a major catastrophe.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Intellectual property theft is pervasive with respect to digital media and similar products.

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

Counterfeit U.S. currency is appearing at a growing rate. Specifically, US\$50 notes have been expertly counterfeited and passed in large quantities in Kampala and around tourist destinations.

Privacy Concerns

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Identity theft and privacy issues have not yet become a major concern. Discarded papers are sometimes collected and sold in bundles in the city market, making the exploitation of personal information possible. Organizations and individuals should take measures to protect personally identifiable information and sensitive records. Shredding of sensitive documents and records is always advisable.

Drug-related Crimes

Uganda does not play a major role in the production, trafficking, or consumption of illicit narcotics or precursor chemicals associated with the drug trade. However, Uganda is strategically located along a major narcotics transit route between Middle Eastern, Asian, and West African heroin markets, and the amount of drugs transiting Uganda is increasing. Illicit narcotics transit Uganda for markets in Africa, Europe, and the U.S., primarily due to Uganda's good airline connections between those markets and Asia. Cannabis is grown throughout Uganda and is rarely policed, allowing for large cannabis crops to flourish in remote rural areas. Even with an ill-equipped Police Drug Investigative Unit, seizures of illicit drugs are up, and illegal exports are rising. The Ugandan Counter-Narcotics Unit maintains an interdiction team at the international airport. Uganda is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

Kidnapping Threat

Except for a couple of isolated incidents, U.S. citizens have not been targeted specifically for

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kidnapping.

In September 2008, a group of NGO workers was taken just south of Arua (in West Nile) into the DRC and held for six hours before being released.

In 2013, the U.S. Embassy received one report of a private U.S. citizen being the victim of a kidnapping. After being held for ransom for less than one day, the U.S. citizen was rescued by the Uganda Police Force.

Police Response

The Uganda Police Force (UPF) maintains heavy police deployments in metropolitan areas, specifically Kampala, in an effort to thwart criminal and terrorist activities. They are making efforts to “right size” their deployment and deploy more officers outside the metropolitan area. While the UPF has made significant strides toward professionalization and modernization, a lack of resources and discipline problems (corruption, human rights violations) still plague the UPF.

The under-reporting of crime is due in large part to insufficient police presence and response capabilities and public perceptions of police investigative abilities. Many communities do not have the means to report crimes. In addition, when crimes are reported they are not adequately documented in a standardized reporting format.

U.S. citizens are subject to the host country's laws and regulations. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the U.S. Persons violating Uganda's laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Ugandan law strictly prohibits photographing

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police/military personnel/installations, industrial facilities, government buildings, and infrastructure (roads, bridges, dams, airfields); sites are rarely marked clearly. Guides, police, and officials can advise if a particular site may be photographed. Photographing prohibited sites may result in the confiscation of film/camera and being questioned by authorities. For more information, please review OSAC's Report "Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography." The importation and use of drones and surveillance equipment may result in this action as well.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you become the victim of a crime or lose your passport, you should contact the local police and the U.S. Embassy. Embassy staff can provide you with a list of medical care providers, contact family members/friends, and explain how funds may be transferred to you. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you understand the local criminal justice process and provide you with a list of attorneys.

The local emergency line is 999, but the emergency response is not equivalent to an emergency response in the U.S. Generally, reporting a crime directly to the nearest police station will result in a quicker emergency response than relying on dialing 999.

Police/Security Agencies

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General Duty Police is the largest police presence and is tasked with providing general law and order functions. The General Duty Police maintains most of the various police posts and is the operational arm of the UPF.

There are many other units within the UPF: the Counter Terrorism Police, VIP Protection Unit, Criminal Intelligence Division, Forensics Division, Traffic Police, Marine Police, Tourism Police and newly created Fuel Police who guard the oil exploration sites in western Uganda. These units fill specific functions and perform limited duties related to their specialty.

Other security elements include the Internal Security Organization, which is the equivalent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Special Forces Command that provides protective security to the president and other Cabinet-level officials.

Medical Emergencies

Health facilities are very limited and are generally inadequate outside Kampala. Even the best hospitals in Kampala suffer from inadequate facilities, antiquated equipment, and shortages of supplies (particularly medicines). Visitors are advised to carry their own supplies of prescription drugs and preventive medicines, as well as a doctor's note describing the medication and its generic name. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report, "Traveling with Medications." There is a shortage of qualified physicians, and emergency assistance is limited. Quality psychiatric services are almost nonexistent.

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Contact Information for Hospitals/Clinics

Below are some facilities with which the U.S. Embassy is familiar. The U.S. Embassy assumes no responsibility or liability for the professional ability or reputation of, or the quality of services, these medical professionals or medical facilities may provide. For additional information, please see the following website:

http://kampala.usembassy.gov/medical_practitioners.html.

International Hospital Kampala, 24 Namuwongo, Kampala, 0312 200 400

The Surgery, Naguru, Kampala, 0414 256 003, Mobile 0772 256 003, Emergency Service (Mobile) 0752 756 003, Ambulance Service 0772 756 003.

Nakasero Hospital, 14 Akii-Bua Road, Nakasero, Kampala, 0414 346 150/2. Website: www.nakaserohospital.com

Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious illnesses and injuries often require travelers to be medically evacuated to a location where adequate medical attention is available. Such medevac services are available locally but can be very expensive and are generally available only to travelers who either have travel insurance that covers medevac services or who are able to pay in advance the considerable cost of such services (often in excess of US\$40,000). The State Department strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to determine whether the policy applies overseas and whether it covers emergency expenses

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such as a medical evacuation.

CDC Country-Specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Outbreaks of infectious diseases occur with some frequency.

In 2015, a large typhoid fever outbreak occurred in Kampala.

Cholera outbreaks have been reported in the western and eastern regions in 2015 and into 2016.

Ebola outbreaks in the Kibale district and Luwero district claimed approximately 26 lives in 2012.

In addition, there have been cases of Marburg hemorrhagic fever in the Kabale district resulting in 15 deaths with the most recent case having occurred in October 2014 that resulted in the death of a local man in Kampala. A swift response controlled the spread of the virus, and no other deaths occurred.

Cases of plague occurred during 2012 but on a smaller scale and isolated to upcountry villages with poor sanitation and access to medical care.

In 2013 and 2015, there were confirmed cases of Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever.

The government management of these outbreaks has been impressive, but travelers should be aware of the heightened threat posed by infectious diseases. Monitoring the press and following commonsense instructions on the Department of State and CDC websites for dealing with infectious diseases can significantly mitigate, if not eliminate, your risk of exposure.

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Malaria is prevalent, especially in rural regions. Travelers who become ill with a fever or flu-like illness while traveling in a malaria-risk area and up to one year after returning home should seek prompt medical attention and explain to the health care provider their travel history and which anti-malarial medicine they have been taking. It is highly recommended that all travelers remain on anti-malarial medications.

Travelers should avoid swimming in any bodies of water. All have been found to contain parasites, including schistosomiasis.

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

OSAC Country Council Information

An OSAC Country Council has been established. For more information or for advice and assistance on crime and safety, please contact the Regional Security Office (RSO). To reach OSAC's Africa team, please email OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

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Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Plot 1577 Ggaba Road, P.O. Box 7007, Kampala

Non-emergency services by appointment only: Mon, Thurs: 0800-1145; Fri: 0800-1045

Embassy Contact Numbers

Switchboard: +256 414-306-001

Cellphone: +256-772-200-506

Marine Security Guard (24 Hours): +256 414-306-001 Ext 6207

American Citizen Services email: KampalaUSCitizen@state.gov

RSO email: DS_RSO_Kampala@state.gov

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

Embassy Guidance

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Entry visas can be obtained at the airport or land port-of-entry, but to avoid possible confusion or delays, travelers are advised to obtain a valid Ugandan visa at the nearest Ugandan Embassy prior to arrival. For more information on entry and exit requirements, consult the Country Specific Information for Uganda at the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs website: <http://travel.state.gov>.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

U.S. citizens should exercise caution when visiting crowded areas (large open-air trading markets). Walking alone after dark is not advisable, and walking with another person during daylight hours is advised.

Foreign currency should be exchanged in authorized banks, hotels, and other legally authorized outlets, and proper receipts should be obtained for the transactions. Exchange receipts are required to convert unused currency back to the original foreign currency. Penalties for exchanging money on the black market range from fines to imprisonment.

Credit cards are not accepted at many hotels, restaurants, shops, or other local facilities, although they are accepted at the major chain hotels in Kampala. Visitors should conduct money transactions at brick and mortar banks, as opposed to stand alone ATMs in a mall or hotel. Visitors should set up alerts on their travel cards that include specific dates of travel to

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avoid incurring fraudulent charges beyond the travel period.

Visitors are strongly advised to review their personal safety and security posture, to remain vigilant, and lower their public profile when frequenting public places and landmarks. Visitors are advised to be cautious of unattended baggage or packages left in any location, including in mini-buses and private taxis. Visitors should limit the amount of cash they carry and leave valuables in a hotel safe or other secure place. Visitors should carry only the items and cash that they are willing to lose and keep wallets and other valuables where they will be less susceptible to pickpockets.

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