



Botswana 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Extreme heat/drought; Disease Outbreak

Africa > Botswana; Africa > Botswana > Gaborone

5/24/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

Expatriates, visitors, and residents should be aware criminal incidents can occur regardless of location. The biggest crime threats remain crimes of opportunity (purse snatching, snatch-and-grabs, smash-and-grabs (from parked cars and in traffic), residential burglaries). Cell phone, laptop computer, and iPod thefts are commonly reported. Criminals can be confrontational.

Reporting indicates incidents of both non-violent residential burglaries and violent home invasions. Incidents can affect the local population, expatriates, and visitors. Criminals are often armed. Botswana has strict gun-control laws; however, criminals have been reported to smuggle firearms from neighboring countries where weapons are cheap and readily available.

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There is a public awareness campaign highlighting this issue and requesting citizens report illegal firearms to the police.

Cybersecurity Issues

Visitors should use caution when logging onto public wifi and avoid conducting personal or financial matters online in public.

Other Areas of Concern

Exercise caution near the Gaborone Dam and Kgale Hill areas during times when there are few hikers. A number of recent armed robberies targeted single or hikers in pairs and have occurred at midday and dusk.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic circulates on the left. Major roads are tarred and in good condition, but some lack substantial shoulders for emergency pull-offs. Most secondary roads are graveled or

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hard-packed earth. Vegetation can grow up to and over the edges of roads, particularly during the rainy season, causing a lack of visibility at bends and concealing hazards at the side of the road.

Driving can be challenging and sometimes dangerous. There are a high number of traffic accidents often owing to poor driving habits, long tedious stretches of two-lane highways (often without shoulders), excessive speeds, poor/nonexistent street lighting, non-functioning traffic lights, and animals on the roads. Cows, donkeys, and goats are often found feeding along, crossing, or standing in the road. On some stretches of highway, drivers will also encounter herds of elephant and other wildlife. Calves, foals, and young goats represent a particular danger, as they are skittish and may suddenly rush onto the road.

Alcohol and excessive speed are significant contributing factors in many accidents. The maximum speed limit outside of cities/towns is 120 kph (75 mph), but be aware some people drive far above or below the limit.

Drive defensively and keep your doors locked and your windows up. Thieves can, and do, snatch valuables, even cellphones in use, through car windows. Carry a cell phone and have emergency numbers handy, but talking on a cell phone while driving is illegal. If you carry valuables in your car, keep them out of sight and locked in the trunk or under a seat. Be aware of your surroundings when leaving/entering your residence and when stopped at traffic lights/stop signs. Always leave enough space between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you to create an escape route, especially while at traffic lights/stop signs. Do not get out of your car if there are suspicious-looking persons nearby or if someone is coaxing you out of your vehicle; leave the area. Be suspicious of anyone who tries to get your attention while you are in or near your car. Do not pick up hitchhikers. Wear seat belts.

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Due to road conditions and poor visibility, visitors are strongly encouraged not to drive after dark outside of the major cities. Use a GPS navigation system outfitted with the appropriate software to check your route, particularly the locations of police stations, hospitals, shops, and gas stations. However, when traveling long distances or to remote locations always have an area map. Plan a trip so you leave and arrive in daylight. Dusk and dawn are hazardous due to low sun and the contrast between a dark road/landscape and a bright sky. Livestock are particularly hard to spot at these times of day.

Public Transportation Conditions

Buses, mini-vans, and taxis are popular means of transportation, as they are relatively inexpensive and plentiful. However, as a visitor, one should take care if you board a bus or mini van (known as a combi). Many combis are overloaded and may not be roadworthy. Incidents of pickpocketing of foreigners have been reported as has overcharging by taxis. Make sure you have appropriate change. If there is no meter, negotiate ahead of time. All combis and taxis should have a blue license plate.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Take care when packing your suitcases and never place any high-value items or medicines in your checked baggage. Bring a small bag or backpack to transfer items to if ground staff determines your roll-on suit case is too large.

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Other Travel Conditions

Ensure you have appropriate travel documents, to include a driver's license, if renting a car, and medical evacuation insurance and certified copies of unabridged birth certificates for children if traveling to or from South Africa. Additional forms are required if traveling with only one parent.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The Department of State remains concerned about the continued threat of terrorist attacks, demonstrations, and other violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests overseas. Indigenous terrorism is not an issue in Botswana. However, terrorist threats know no boundaries, and visitors should always remain alert to threats.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

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Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Drought conditions have on occasion caused water outages.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

If you do not have roaming on your cell phone, it is worth unblocking your phone so you can buy a local SIM card. They are inexpensive, and network coverage is good on the major routes and in most towns. Use a local number because the rates are cheaper and your number will be displayed on the cell phone of the person you are calling, allowing them to call you back in the event of an emergency. Satellite phones are useful when visiting remote areas beyond the range of normal cell phones.

Police Response

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The police are well-intentioned and active in their efforts to prevent and combat crime. However, personnel and resource shortages limit the police's operational effectiveness. Vehicle and foot patrols in residential and commercial areas are infrequent, and the police mobile response capability is limited.

In response to shortfalls, the police have "community policing" programs in many neighborhoods. These have been effective at deterring criminal elements when they have the active support of private citizens.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

All visitors are subject to local law, and U.S. citizens are also subject to U.S. laws. All travelers are advised to keep some form of official identification on their person in the event they are stopped and questioned by law enforcement officials. Be respectful and courteous in your interaction. If you are cited for a traffic violation, ensure you are provided an official government receipt.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Should a U.S. citizen encounter any difficulties, call the following:

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U.S. Embassy Switchboard: +267-395-3982 (Business Hours)

U.S. Embassy Marine Post One: +267-373-2222; 267-395-7111 (After Hours) 71-609-955 (cellular)

U.S. Embassy Duty Officer: +267-71-754-585 (24/7)

Crime Victim Assistance

Police: 999

Fire: 998

Ambulance: 992

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are adequate and staffed by trained physicians, but services are limited outside Gaborone. Gaborone has a number of large pharmacies that carry many prescription medications.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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Gaborone

Bokamoso Private Hospital: +267-369-4000

Gaborone Private Hospital: +267-368-5600

Princess Marina Hospital: +267-362-1400

Maun

Maun Hospital: +267-687-9000

Francistown

Nyangabwe Hospital: +267-241-1000

Available Air Ambulance Services

Professional private emergency rescue services operate air and ground ambulances throughout the country, but care is rendered only after a patient's ability to pay is established.

Medical Rescue International (MRI): 992; +267-390-1601

Rescue One: 993; +267-392-3249; 71-282-634

Emergency 991: 991 +267-74-692-400

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Okavango Air Rescue (Maun-based): 995; +267 6861616

Recommended Insurance Posture

Medical evacuation, which is expensive, to South Africa is often the only option for serious medical emergencies.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Malaria is prevalent only in the north, particularly around the Chobe and Okavango National Parks.

Tuberculosis is endemic. Individuals who plan to be in Botswana for extended periods are advised to obtain a tuberculosis skin test prior to arrival and upon departure.

Approximately one-quarter of the population is infected with HIV. Visitors are advised to exercise precautions if engaging in sexual activity or if they are exposed to a blood source other than that supplied by a hospital for transfusion purposes.

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

OSAC Country Council Information

U.S. Embassy Gaborone is seeking to establish an OSAC Country Council. If you are interested, please contact: RSO Travis A. Bartlett (Tel: +267-373-2259, E: BartlettTA@state.gov). To reach the OSAC Africa team, please email OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Embassy Drive, Government Enclave, Gaborone, Botswana

0800-1700 Mon-Thurs; 0800-1330 Fri

Embassy Contact Numbers

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Regional Security Office: +267-373-2256/8/9

Embassy Operator: +267-395-3982

Medical Unit: +267-373-2229; 2230

Consular Affairs: +267-373-2201

Political/Economic Section: +267-373-2272

MSG Post One: +267-395-7111 267-373-2222 or 71-609-955 (cellular)

U.S. Embassy Duty Officer: +267-71-754-585

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

Facebook: www.facebook.com/U.S.EmbassyGaborone

Consular Information: <http://botswana.usembassy.gov/acservices.html>.

Embassy Guidance

If you are a U.S. citizen visiting or living in Botswana and you have not already registered online with the embassy, we strongly encourage you to do so with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Whether you will be in Botswana for a short holiday or living and working in Botswana for an extended period, registration will help keep you "in the know." It only takes a few minutes to create an account, which can be updated whenever and wherever you travel. You may also register in person at the U.S. Embassy's Consular Section during routine U.S. Citizen Service hours: Mon & Fri: 9:00 AM-12:00 PM; Thurs: 1:30 PM-4:00 PM. The U.S. Embassy frequently provides security and general information to the U.S. Citizen

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community in Botswana through email messages based on the STEP registrations, which include a valid email address. The Embassy is also working toward including SMS messaging as an additional method of distribution. Be sure to update your STEP account with your departure date when you leave Botswana to automatically dis-enroll from our mailing list.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors are urged to take personal security seriously. Remain vigilant and take common sense security precautions. Always remain alert and aware of your surroundings. Avoid hiking and walking alone; there is safety in numbers. Visitors are advised not to walk at night.

Try to limit what you carry on your person. If women must take an entire purse, keep them secured, zipped, and in front of them at all times. Keep money, credit cards, wallets, and other valuables in front pockets. Cell phones should be kept separate from bags and purses so that, in the event of a robbery, you will still have a way to call for assistance. Wear the shoulder straps of bags across your chest when possible. Avoid ostentatious displays of wealth and keep a low profile. Keep cell phones and iPods out of sight and only use them in safe locations.

Persons living in Botswana, especially in the major cities, are strongly encouraged to upgrade security at their residences to reduce their vulnerability to home invasions. Intrusion alarms, electric fences, perimeter lighting, a telephone/camera intercom system, and window and door

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grilles are key components of a comprehensive and robust residential security program. Dogs can be good deterrents to criminal incidents.

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