



## Gabon 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Hotels; Burglary; Maritime; Floods; Aviation; Elections; Riots/Civil Unrest; Counterfeiting; Bribery; Disease Outbreak

Africa > Gabon; Africa > Gabon > Libreville

5/25/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Libreville and Port Gentil account for most of Gabon's 1.6 million population and are home to the country's most affluent citizens.

Post Crime Rating: High

### Crime Threats

Crime is more commonplace in Libreville and Port Gentil than in rural areas. The majority of crimes against foreigners are non-violent confrontations and are most often crimes of opportunity, though there have been some reports of foreigners being robbed at machete-point. These crimes include muggings, theft of unattended possessions, and pickpocketing. The items stolen most frequently tend to be cash and electronic items (cell phones). Theft of unattended items is the most common crime reported by Americans. Being

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in a crowded area does not ensure one's security. Some victims report being robbed in broad daylight in the presence of witnesses.

Foreigners are seldom harmed when they comply with the perpetrator's demands, but criminals will resort to force, if necessary, in order to carry out a robbery. Gangs and other groups are not deterred by confrontations with their intended victims.

Mob justice exists, and suspects can find themselves pursued and beaten by bystanders.

Hotel rooms have been prime targets for theft, though the very best hotels in Libreville have policies in place to discourage employee theft and are quick to identify and remove perpetrators. Many hotels have basic security standards in place (24-hour guards, locking doors, safes).

Residential burglaries continue to be a problem in Libreville and Port Gentil. Burglaries and home invasions are occurring more frequently. In the past few years, U.S. Embassy Libreville received numerous reports regarding residential break-ins, including several homes of Americans. Gangs, armed with knives/firearms, target homes they suspect possess cash/valuables. While most perpetrators prefer to strike while residents are away, criminals have entered residences while the occupants were asleep.

Violent crime directed toward expatriates or foreign tourists is infrequent.

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## Other Areas of Concern

The U.S. Embassy does not restrict travel for its employees. Caution should be taken when visiting popular Libreville night spots. Visitors should be particularly aware of their surroundings in congested urban areas (open-air markets, beach). Beaches should be avoided at dusk, dawn, and during the night. While these areas are more dangerous at night, daytime incidents have also been reported.

Travelers should consult the State Department online resources prior to visiting Gabon's neighbors in the central Africa.

## Transportation-Safety Situation

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

The quality of roads varies. In Libreville and Port Gentil, the major roads are paved but are in poor condition. Road improvement projects have largely stalled due to decreased financial constraints.

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Minor roads in Libreville and Port Gentil, and many roads outside of large cities, are nothing more than dirt tracks, and conditions vary depending on rainfall. Outside of the cities, many roads are inadequately maintained and become significantly more hazardous during the rainy season. Gabon does have a system of highways that lead to the major metropolitan areas. Once travelers leave these major arteries, a four-wheel drive vehicle is recommended. It can be difficult to locate compatible spare tires for a vehicle outside of major cities, and with tire blowouts a problem on poor roads, spare tires are highly recommended. Visitors should consider a spare tire or two, jack and tire iron, tire plug kit, and an air compressor as the minimum equipment when traveling outside of the major cities. Tow straps, medical supplies, food/water, and cell/satellite phone are also recommended for trips. Visitors should avoid driving at night outside of Libreville and in deserted areas with low population density. Rural and suburban areas alike are poorly illuminated and pose additional safety hazards due to pedestrians and animals crossing the road. The availability of gas and diesel at a destination should be considered before embarking.

Traffic accidents are one of the greatest dangers to visitors. Visitors should exercise extreme caution as both a driver and a pedestrian, as enforcement for speeding and reckless driving is not vigorous. For the most part, pedestrians do not have the right-of-way. Road hazards include: poor street lighting, failure by drivers to obey traffic signals, a lack of marked pedestrian crossings, livestock/animals on roadways, slow moving vehicles, large trucks, inebriated drivers, poorly maintained roads, and erratic stopping by taxis/mini-buses. Many local vehicles are not well-maintained, and some lack headlights. Large trucks sometimes park on the roadside without using emergency flashers or warning signs.

Visitors should always drive defensively. Belongings should be kept out of view. Visitors should ensure that the doors are locked, seat belts fastened, and windows rolled up. While stopped in traffic, drivers should scan rearview mirrors to identify potential trouble. If idling at a stop light/sign, drivers should leave adequate maneuver room between vehicles to allow for a hasty departure if necessary. Drivers are cautioned to park only in well-illuminated areas,

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preferably in parking lots with a security guard.

Visitors can anticipate police checkpoints with a loose purpose of ensuring that vehicles and drivers are carrying the necessary paperwork. The reality is that these checkpoints are too often used to extort money.

### Public Transportation Conditions

Visitors should strongly consider other transportation options before taking minibus or unregulated taxi. Every year, there are a number of serious, fatal accidents involving minibuses and taxis. Many of them lack proper safety equipment (seat belts, headlights), are overcrowded, and drivers may be unlicensed. Drivers are often reckless, making frequent stops to pick up passengers, and speeding from one stop to the next.

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Domestic air travel can be frustrating for even the most seasoned traveler. Planes are often delayed or cancelled, sometimes for days. Travelers are warned to pack in a carry-on any required medicines, important documents, or valuables. Baggage frequently goes missing and may or may not ever be found. Local airlines are not required to pay restitution. There was one reported airline accident in 2012: a privately-chartered plane crashed in the interior.

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## **Terrorism Threat**

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

### Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Gabon suffers from extremely porous borders. Trafficking in wildlife and natural resources is a problem for local security forces and may be carried out by well-armed foreigners. There exists the potential for these same trafficking routes to be used to facilitate terrorism.

## **Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

Gabon is a relatively peaceful democracy that has had multi-party elections over the past 20 years. Opposition politicians often contest the fairness of Gabon's electoral process, and the chance of political unrest leading to violence remains a serious issue as the 2016 presidential election approaches.

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

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## Civil Unrest

Gabon has faced protests by unions and students over salaries, payments, and scholarships. A number of political groups have held marches and demonstrations against the current government, and other groups threatened to protest over various grievances. Americans should avoid large crowds, political gatherings and demonstrations. Political gatherings and demonstrations have the potential to turn violent or for police and security forces to disperse crowds using tear gas or other force.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

During the rainy season, torrential downpours can cause severe damage to villages and bridges. There are areas of Libreville that flood during heavy rains. There have been no major natural disasters in recent history.

### Privacy Concerns

U.S. citizens should practice the same protection of personally identifiable or private information that they would in the U.S. There have been reports of laptop computers and

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other electronic devices that contain sensitive employee or client information stolen from businesses.

### Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

There is an abundance of pirated merchandise readily available from street vendors.

### Police Response

The police and security forces often lack communications equipment, weapons/ammunition, and vehicles, all of which limits their ability to respond to routine and emergency calls. Many gendarmes and police stations have only one vehicle and often rely on personal cell phones to coordinate police response. In both urban and rural areas, any response is often slow and generally limited to writing a report or taking statements.

### How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

There are frequent allegations of police corruption. Incidents of police or security force harassment or detention of foreigners are rare but do occur. U.S. citizens who become victims of police harassment should be polite and cooperative. U.S. citizens detained by police should ask that the U.S. Embassy be notified immediately.

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## Crime Victim Assistance

In the event of an emergency, the local police are typically the first point of contact. However, police response is sometimes slow, and investigations are often never opened. Prosecutions are very slow, if they are even initiated.

The police in Libreville may be reached at +241.01.73.90.00.

The police in Port Gentil may be reached at +241.07.29.63.89.

The U.S. Embassy Libreville American Citizens Services (ACS) Officer may be reached at +241.01.45.71.00. In the event of an after-hours emergency involving an American citizen, callers should dial +241.01.45.71.00 and request the duty officer.

## Police/Security Agencies

The Gendarmerie, a branch of the Ministry of Defense, is the agency principally in charge of law enforcement.

The National Police are responsible for traffic enforcement and security at major events.

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The Police Judiciare are responsible for conducting criminal investigations directly related to prosecution.

## Medical Emergencies

There is limited adequate medical care. Traffic and poor road conditions make for unpredictable travel times to reach a hospital. Availability of doctors and access to hospital facilities is unreliable, medical equipment does not function or lacks trained operators, medicines and surgical tools may not be available, and sanitary conditions may be sub-standard. Emergency responders and medical personnel likely do not speak English.

## Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Libreville

Polyclinique Chambrier:

Tel: 241-01-76-14-68

Address: Montagne Sainte, B.P. 2230 Libreville

La Polyclinique EL-Rapha

Tel: 241-07-98-66-60 or 06-82-78-51

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Address: Les Trois Quartiers B.P. 256 Libreville

Hopital d'Instruction des Armees Omar BONGO ONDIMBA

Emergency Room Tel: 241-01-79-00-00

Location: Melen, Libreville

Port Gentil

CHR Port Gentil (Govt Hospital)

Tel: 241-01-77-37-69

Clinique Mandji

Tel: 241-01-55-35-56

Available Air Ambulance Services

African Medicale Assistance: +(241) 07 41 11 11

Recommended Insurance Posture:

Medical insurance may not cover any procedures. You should be prepared to pay up to US\$400 cash in local currency for emergency services. In the event of a traumatic injury or

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medical emergency, temporary stabilization and medical evacuation, if possible, should be considered.

## Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Malaria and serious infectious tropical diseases are endemic.

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/gabon.htm>.

## OSAC Country Council Information

The Embassy does not have an OSAC Country Council. To reach OSAC's Africa team, please email [OSACAF@state.gov](mailto:OSACAF@state.gov).

## U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

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The Embassy is located on Martin Luther King Boulevard across the street from the Hotel Onomo in the Sabliere neighborhood of Libreville.

The Consular Section is open to U.S. citizens on Tues, Wed, and Fri from 8:30 am-12 pm. For an emergency appointment, contact the Embassy and request the American Citizen Services (ACS) Officer. After-hours, request the Duty Officer.

#### Embassy Contact Numbers

Embassy Operator: +241.01.45.71.00

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

#### Embassy Guidance

If you are going to reside in or visit Gabon, please take the time to tell the Embassy about your presence in-country. If you enroll, you can keep up to date with important safety and security announcements. It will also help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. To enroll your stay or visit, click the STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program) button at <http://travel.state.gov>.

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## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

U.S. citizens should practice good personal security measures as they would in any major city. Remain alert and aware of your surroundings and avoid drawing unnecessary attention to yourself. It is generally not necessary or advised to carry around multiple credit/debit cards, but rather a piece of identification and an appropriate amount of cash. It is prudent to travel in groups and to avoid deserted/poorly illuminated areas. Walking around at night, either alone or in a group, is strongly discouraged.

Pedestrians are cautioned not to wear jewelry or carry expensive items in open view. It is not advisable to display large amounts of cash, jewelry, expensive clothing, or electronics. Resisting an armed assailant risks escalating an economically-motivated crime to a violent encounter.

Visitors should make all travel and hotel reservations in advance. Visitors should ensure that all hotel doors and windows are secured when arriving or leaving.

Many residents take residential security seriously and protect their homes accordingly. For citizens with means and many expatriates, perimeter walls, security guards, security lighting, window grilles, and alarm systems with security response teams are common.

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