



Liberia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Riots/Civil Unrest; Floods; Employee Health Safety; Drug Trafficking; Disease Outbreak; Fraud; Financial Security

Africa > Liberia; Africa > Liberia > Monrovia

5/25/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Since the signing of the 2003 peace accords, Liberia has made steady progress rebuilding its institutions, although much work remains in rebuilding basic infrastructure and educating a workforce who had few opportunities to develop skills during the prolonged civil war. Other challenges include recovery from the world's most devastating Ebola epidemic, a weak global economic environment, widespread unemployment (over 85 percent), illiteracy, corruption, and pervasive land disputes.

GDP growth in 2015 was flat, and the government is eager to see investors and technical experts return so that it can restart development programs. Approximately 75 percent of the growing population is under age 35, and many remain traumatized by its brutal civil war. Most Liberians live on less than US\$1/day and have very limited access to health care, education, or other government services.

Post Crime Rating: High

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Crime Threats

U.S. travelers are potentially exposed to crime and safety issues involving robbery, burglary, and mob violence following traffic accidents. But, Americans are not specifically targeted for criminal activity. Petty crime is common anytime. Electronics, wallets, and cellphones are most commonly targeted by thieves. The majority of the criminal element is unarmed, save for machete (cutlass)-type weapons.

Cybersecurity Issues

As most Liberians do not have access to electricity or the Internet, Liberia is not known to be particularly susceptible to cyber crime.

Other Areas of Concern

Travelers are cautioned when visiting the areas of greater Monrovia known as Red Light, Waterside, Congo Town, ELWA Junction, and all market areas. Petty crimes do take place, and these areas are extremely crowded and should be avoided after dark.

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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

In general, the main roads in/around Monrovia are in acceptable condition. In rural areas, approximately 6.9 percent of the country's roads are paved (this area is commonly referred to as Upcountry). A six-month rainy season contributes to rapid deterioration of unimproved roads. Many regions are inaccessible even with well-equipped 4x4 vehicles

Drivers must also pay particular attention to pedestrians, motorcyclists, and taxi operators who often demonstrate blatant disregard for rules of the road and the safety of others. Transportation accidents occur frequently for several reasons, including poor maintenance of vehicles, hazardous road conditions, aggressive drivers, and widespread disregard for traffic laws. The most prevalent danger posed to Americans is vehicle accidents, especially at night.

There have been repeated occurrences of mob violence taking place following traffic accidents with motorcycle (Pehn-Pehn) operators. Regardless of fault, motorists must exercise extreme caution after a motor vehicle accident and immediately seek the intervention of the Liberia National Police (LNP) if the situation cannot be defused. Toward the end of 2013, the government enforced new restrictions that limit the access of motorcyclists to central Monrovia. This was in reaction to a deadly collision in October 2013 involving a motorcycle and a commercial bus. This accident led to a physical confrontation between LNP and a group of motorcyclists and resulted in the bus being burned and a LNP vehicle sustaining damage.

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When driving through populated areas (markets), keep windows rolled up and car doors locked. Carjacking is not prevalent, but snatch-and-grab robberies do occur.

Official Americans are not allowed to drive outside of Monrovia at night due to poor lighting and infrastructure.

Public Transportation Conditions

Official Americans are prohibited from using commercial taxis, buses, and motorbike taxis.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The International Airport is Roberts International Airport (ROB). It is approximately 55 km east of Monrovia on a paved road. Travel time varies based on traffic but is often 1.5-2 hours. The road is not illuminated at night, so travelers must be careful. Taxi service from the airport is unreliable, and visitors are advised to pre-arrange transportation to Monrovia.

Arrival at the airport can be confusing and overwhelming for the average traveler. The terminal is crowded and poorly designed, resulting in long lines to clear immigration and

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frequent pushing/shoving in the baggage area, as passengers try to retrieve their luggage.

Spriggs Payne Airport is approximately 5 km east of downtown Monrovia on a paved road. Small aircraft and UNMIL helicopters use this airport.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There exists a real and growing threat of regional terrorism due to the operational presence of known terrorist groups in the region. Liberia has been spared terrorist attacks but remains vulnerable due to its porous borders, increased regional instability, and the increased terror activities of AQIM (al-Qai'da in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb).

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. has had close ties to Liberia since its 19th century establishment by freed American slaves. Since the country's 14-year civil war ended in 2003, relations with the U.S. remain

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very close. The U.S. is the leading donor to Liberia, with more than US\$1 billion in bilateral assistance since 2003 and an equal amount in assessed contributions to support the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), plus millions of dollars in health, logistical, and military assistance to support Liberia's Ebola response. The presence of UNMIL's approximately 3,487 military personnel has been critical to maintaining the initially fragile environment of peace and security. UNMIL has a multi-phase drawdown plan; the current phase is expected to end June 30, 2016, leaving approximately 646 police personnel and 1,240 military personnel in country. The Embassy continues to support the development of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the LNP, and both have matured, enabling UNMIL to draw down, with significant upcountry sections served only by government security services.

In October 2011, Liberia concluded presidential and legislative elections that were recognized by international and domestic observers as free, fair, and transparent. In December 2014, Liberia held senatorial elections that observers determined were largely free, fair, and transparent. Immediately following elections in January 2015, losing candidates in six of the 15 races filed petitions with the Supreme Court alleging election fraud. The Supreme Court delayed filling the six Senate seats, leading to concern that it could spark large-scale unrest. Liberia's next presidential election is in October 2017.

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

There is significant potential for rapidly evolving public protests and demonstrations.

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The 2014 Ebola crisis saw numerous instances of violence and civil disorder related to public dissatisfaction with the lack of access to health care services, imposition of quarantines, and pay disputes. However, security services were able to control and resolve all instances of civil disorder.

The Embassy recommends that Americans avoid large gatherings and demonstrations.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

The six-month rainy season (May-November) makes Monrovia the wettest capital in the world. The heavy rains can cause severe flooding and wash out most roads. Deep mud and puddles require 4x4 vehicles to travel outside Monrovia.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Liberia desperately needs investors and technical experts to return and support the country's development. Liberia has a limited utility infrastructure. The vast majority of homes and

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businesses have no electricity, and those who do depend largely on home generators. In addition, most institutions depend on trucks to deliver water.

Liberia depends on cellular phone networks for voice communications. Landline telephone service is virtually non-existent.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Homosexuality is generally not accepted by citizens or the government, and members of the LGBT community may be subject to discrimination and verbal/physical attacks. However, there is more of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” culture in Liberia than in other African countries.

Drug-related Crimes

Illegal drugs are present and are trafficked into Liberia from neighboring West African countries.

Kidnapping Threat

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Kidnapping is extraordinarily rare; however, in 2012, a U.S. citizen was returned safely after being held captive for a brief period. The victim was likely lured to Liberia as part of a financial scam.

Police Response

The primary law enforcement agency is the Liberia National Police (LNP). Due to a lack of resources, the LNP is very limited in its ability to respond to criminal acts or provide full services to crime victims. Travelers should anticipate that stolen property will not be recovered, nor will perpetrators be brought to justice.

RSO advises that Embassy personnel and visitors treat police officers in the same manner they would when interacting with a U.S. law enforcement official. Ignoring reasonable lawful orders, becoming belligerent, or showing lack of respect will exacerbate the situation and may result in your arrest.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Incidents of police harassment, detention, or misconduct should be reported to the U.S. Embassy at: Switchboard: +231 (0)77 677 7000 or Marine Post One: +231 (0)77 677 7001.

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Crime Victim Assistance

If you are a victim of a crime and need to contact the U.S. Embassy, you can contact the Consular Section for American Citizen Services at: ConsularMonrovia@state.gov or tel: +231 (0)77-677-7111.

The police can be contacted via the LNP Chief of Patrol at +231 (0)880-800-117.

Police/Security Agencies

The primary law enforcement agency is the Liberia National Police (LNP) and they have country-wide law enforcement authority.

Medical Emergencies

Prior to the Ebola crisis, medical facilities were poorly equipped and staffed and generally incapable of providing even basic services. The dismal level of medical services has been exacerbated by the Ebola outbreak. Medicines are scarce, and some are counterfeit and distributed beyond their expiration date. Doctors, clinics, and hospitals expect immediate cash payment for health services and, in many cases, before rendering service.

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The Embassy does not guarantee or recommend the services of any of the below facilities. The list is provided for informational purposes. The U.S. Embassy in Monrovia assumes no responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the institutions listed below or their staffs.

Hospitals

Duside Hospital - FIRESTONE

Contact Person: Lawrence Sherman, MD

Address: Firestone Hospital – Margibi County, Liberia (near Airport RIA – ROB)

Office Phone: +231 (0)886-578-615

ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC HOSPITAL

Contact Person: Lily Sanvee, MD

Address: Tubman Blvd., opposite 2nd Old Road Junction, Congo Town

Office Phone: +231 (0)886 226-207 or +231 (0)886 550-617

Clinics

Aspen Medical Liberia

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Contact Person: Country Manager, 231 (0)770 911 913

Address: Intersection of 16th Street and Russell Ave, Sinkor, Monrovia

Appointments/General Information: 231 (0)770 029 511

Clinic Emergency Number: 231 (0)770 911 911

Kingdom Care Medical

Contact Person: Dr. Martha Zarway

Address: Paynesville, off of Duport Road

Cell: +231 (0)5 647 588

Dentist

Hassan Ezzedine, DDS

Randall Street, by DITCO

Tel: +231 (0)886 510 565

Available Air Ambulance Services

International SOS Air Ambulance Service (ISOS)

Contact Person: Dirk Loreth, ISOS Aviation Manager Europe, Middle East, and Africa

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Address: From Frankfurt, Johannesburg, Accra or Dakar

Office Phone: +49-6102-3588-453/+49-172-7666923/+33-1-5563-3155

Emergency Phone: +49-6102-358-8100 (EUR) or +011-215-245-4707 (USA)

Alarm Center: Frankfurt-(49) 6102-358-8100; Paris-(33) 155-633-155; Europe-(44) 20-8762-8008

Aspen Medical Liberia

Contact Person: Country Manager, 231 (0)770 911 913

Address: Intersection of 16th Street and Russell Ave, Sinkor, Monrovia

Appointments/General Information: 231 (0)770 029 511

Clinic Emergency Number: 231 (0)770 911 911

Services Available: Medical Emergency Assistance/Stabilization

Probable Response Time: 4-24 hours depending on the city of departure

Recommended Insurance Posture

In the event of a serious emergency, medical evacuation is recommended, and medical evacuation insurance is also strongly recommended for those not covered by their employer.

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Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Malaria is endemic, and travelers should consult their physician for anti-malaria medication prior to traveling.

All travelers must have up-to-date immunizations and a yellow fever vaccination in their shot record.

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

OSAC Country Council Information

The POC for the Liberia OSAC Country Council is RSO Julia Hawley (RSOMonrovia@state.gov). OSAC Liberia does not have a Country Council but plans to hold elections in 2016. 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

U.S. Embassy Monrovia

502 Benson Street

Monrovia, Liberia

Hours of Operation: Mon-Thurs, 8:00a.m. - 5:30 p.m. and Fri, 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Hours for Consular Section: Mon, Tues, and Thurs, 2:00-4:00pm.

Embassy Contact Numbers

U.S. Embassy Switchboard: +231 77 677 7000

MSG Post One: +231 77 677 7001

Regional Security Office: +231 77 677 7000 Ext. 7112

Consular Affairs / American Citizen Services: +231 77 677 7111

Email: ConsularMonrovia@state.gov

Duty Officer: +231 77 723 1673

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

Embassy Guidance

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/liberia.html>

American citizens should have valid visas prior to traveling. Airport visas are not issued except in extraordinary circumstances and by pre-arrangement. American citizens should consult the Department of State's Country Specific Information (CSI) for more information and register with the U.S. Embassy Consular Section upon arrival or on-line at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Counterfeit U.S. currency and other money scams are common (Nigerian advanced fee fraud).

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Travelers can avoid being victimized by crime by taking appropriate personal precautions to manage their own safety.

While money changers operate on the street, visitors are encouraged to use the formal banking system. Liberia uses U.S. dollars but does not have U.S. coins. As of January 2016, the exchange rate was approximately 88 Liberia dollars to US\$1. Most prices in hotels and restaurants are denominated in U.S. dollars. Credit cards are accepted at a very limited number of hotels and shops; however, the RSO recommends travelers use cash due to a high incidence of fraud. Wire transfers through Western Union or MoneyGram are available. Several banks in Monrovia provide wire transfer services and will accept traveler's checks.

Avoid wearing flashy jewelry and handling large sums of money in public areas. Be mindful of confrontations with street beggars who while soliciting money may also attempt to snatch valuables. These types of crimes usually happen around shopping centers, parking lots, and at intersections where pedestrians wait to board commercial vehicles.

Due to the high crime level, walking outside at night is not recommended. Never walk alone at night or drive into unfamiliar areas.

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