



Sao Tome and Principe 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Maritime; Aviation; Elections; Diplomatic Missions

Africa > Sao Tome and Principe; Africa > Sao Tome and Principe > Sao Tome

5/26/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The island nation of Sao Tome and Principe (STP) has a population of approximately 190,000 people; the majority live on Sao Tome.

Post Crime Rating: Low

Crime Threats

Violent crime is rare, though there are isolated incidents of violence in the commission of robberies. Violent crime directed toward expatriates or foreign tourists is infrequent. The most common crime reported by expatriates is theft of unattended items.

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Most hotels in Sao Tome city and resorts on the outlying islands have safeguards in place that match security standards (providing 24-hour guards, locking doors and safes in each room) found in Western countries.

There are some local gangs that are involved in robberies, hold-ups, and thefts.

Other Areas of Concern

The U.S. Embassy does not restrict travel for its employees. Caution should be taken when visiting popular Sao Tome night spots.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

There are no main highways in STP. Local roads provide access to most villages. These roads are poorly maintained and narrow. Avoid driving at night in deserted areas or those with low population density. Rural and suburban areas alike are poorly illuminated and pose additional safety hazards due to pedestrians and animals crossing the roads. Vehicles are not well-maintained and often lack headlights.

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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. 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 and other vehicles.

Visitors should always drive defensively. Belongings should be kept out of plain view. Visitors should ensure that the doors of vehicles 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.

Public Transportation Conditions

Many residents utilize motorcycle taxis. Visitors should strongly consider other transportation options. Every year, there are a number of serious accidents involving these motorcycles. Drivers often lack helmets for passengers and drive recklessly.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

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Travel by air to/from STP and between the islands can be frustrating for even the most seasoned traveler. Planes are often delayed and cancelled, sometimes for days. Travelers are warned to carry-on any required medicines, important documents, or valuables. Baggage frequently goes missing and may not ever be found. Local airlines are not required to pay restitution to travelers whose bags go missing.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

In 2015, there were no acts of regional, international, or transnational terrorism in STP and no known terrorist organizations. STP's borders are considered porous and could be used as a corridor for terrorists to pass through the country.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

STP is a relatively peaceful democracy. It was a Portuguese colony and had a peaceful transition to independence. In recent years, there was a coup attempt that resulted in a special military unit disbanding. In 2012, a parliamentary shake-up led to confusion regarding who legitimately held power, but there was no violence. STP has a history of peaceful

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transition of power. Presidential elections are scheduled for July or August 2016. Violence is not expected.

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

When there is protest activity in the capital city, it general occurs in the Riboque neighborhood near the Vitoria F.C. soccer stadium.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

During the rainy season, torrential downpours can cause severe damage to villages and bridges.

Privacy Concerns

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U.S. citizens should practice the same protection of personally identifiable or private information that they would in the U.S.

Police Response

The police and security forces often lack communications equipment, weapons/ammunition, and vehicles/gasoline, all of which limits their ability to respond to routine and emergency calls. Any response is often slow and limited generally to writing a report or taking statements. Prosecutions are very slow, if they are even initiated.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Incidents of police or security force harassment or detention of foreigners are rare. 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 in Libreville, Gabon, be notified immediately.

Crime Victim Assistance

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In the event of an emergency, the local police are typically the first point of contact. The national police in Sao Tome may be reached at +239.2.222.222.

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 national police are responsible for traffic enforcement, security at major events, and criminal investigations.

Medical Emergencies

There is limited adequate medical care. 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. Travelers are advised to have available local currency to pay in advance for any procedures.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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The hospital Central Ayres de Menezes in Sao Tome may be reached at +239.2.221.222.

A few clinics also exist, but the service provided is very basic.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

African Medicales Assistance : +(241) 07 41 11 11 (This service is in Gabon.)

Recommended Insurance Posture

In the event of a traumatic injury/medical emergency, temporary stabilization and medical evacuation, if possible, should be considered. Medical insurance may not cover any procedures.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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

OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council in STP. To reach OSAC's Africa team, please email OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

There is no U.S. Embassy in STP.

STP receives diplomatic representation from the U.S. Embassy in Libreville, Gabon. The Embassy is located on Martin Luther King Boulevard in the Sabliere neighborhood and is across the street from the Hotel Onomo.

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The Consular Section is open to U.S. citizens on Tues, Wed, and Fri from 8:30 am to 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: Phone: +241.01.45.71.00

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

Embassy Guidance

If you are going to reside in or visit Sao Tome and Principe, please take the time to tell Embassy Libreville about your presence in-country. By enrolling with the Embassy, 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>.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

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U.S. citizens should practice good personal security measures. Remain alert and aware of your surroundings, avoid drawing unnecessary attention to yourself/group, and exercise caution at night. It is generally not necessary or advised to carry around multiple credit/debit cards, but rather identification and an appropriate amount of cash. Walking around alone at night is strongly discouraged. It is prudent to travel in groups, particularly at night, and to avoid deserted/poorly illuminated areas. Beaches should be avoided at dusk, dawn, and during the night.

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/leaving.

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