



Mali 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Religious Terrorism; Stolen items; Hotels; Theft; Assault; Carjacking; Burglary; Kidnapping; Bribery; Improvised Explosive Device; Disease Outbreak

Africa > Mali; Africa > Mali > Bamako

5/26/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Despite Mali's 2014 rise out of the bottom 10 countries in the world according to the Human Development Index, long-standing problems of unemployment, food insecurity, and long-term economic underdevelopment persist. Mali is far from being able to combat the economic drivers that lead individuals to banditry, still the largest disruptive force against organizations operating in the north.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

Although most crimes are of an opportunistic nature, criminals can be violent. Victims face threats from firearms and violence and regularly report motorcycle thefts. The majority of reported attacks have targeted unaccompanied individuals and ranged from muggings at

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gun/knife point to physical assaults.

In recent years, several expatriates have been victims of attempted carjacking. There are been multiple reports of suspects posing as police officers pulling vehicles over under the auspices of a traffic stop, during which they attempt to extort money under threat of violence.

There are periodic reports of nighttime robberies of commercial establishments (restaurants, convenience stores, small businesses) in Bamako. Residential break-ins are not common, although proper locks and solid doors are warranted.

Other Areas of Concern

Market places and popular public spaces in downtown Bamako are gathering places for criminals and prostitutes, and visitors are reminded to be vigilant and exercise caution in these areas during the night. There have been reports of drug trafficking and prostitution in some restaurants and hotels in Bamako.

All travelers are advised to avoid the northern parts of the country due to extremist activities, threats of kidnapping, ongoing military operations, and criminal activity. Northern Mali remains desolate, difficult to patrol, and continues to provide sanctuary for extremists groups.

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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Driving is a major safety concern. Enforcement of existing traffic laws is practically non-existent. However, traffic police made visible efforts to help control traffic flows and respond to road accidents in 2014. Automobiles share the road with mopeds, motorcycles, bicycles, donkey carts, and pedestrians, many of whom do not look before they venture into the street. Many drivers lack rudimentary driving skills, and many vehicles, including public transportation vans and taxis, are poorly maintained, overloaded, and break down frequently. Americans are advised to drive defensively and expect the unexpected from drivers.

Driving at night in Bamako can be hazardous, as many vehicles lack headlights, and roads are poorly illuminated.

Mali continues to improve paved roads leading from Bamako to most major cities in the south; however, this has resulted in many accidents due to speeding. The rainy season (June-September) can make many of the roads outside the capital impassable. Deep sand and ditches are common on the major routes. Four-wheel drive vehicles with spare tires and emergency equipment and/or roadside assistance kits are recommended. Travel overland is best done in convoys and with long-range communications capability. Cellular phone coverage is limited in many areas, and satellite phones are advised, if practicable. Travelers are strongly urged to limit overland travel to daylight hours to avoid the risk of banditry, which typically occurs at night, and on poorly illuminated roadways.

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Legitimate police security checks are frequent and usually comprised of two or more police officers and located at main intersections or near bridges.

Traffic police are routinely slow to respond to accidents, and drivers often resolve the accident by mutually agreeing on a sum of money to cover damages in order to settle the accident without the assistance of the police. Motorists involved in an accident resulting in injury are expected to pay for the immediate medical treatment of the injured regardless of who was at fault. Crowds commonly gather at the scene of an accident/altercation. Crowds have become involved in the situation in support of either party involved and have the potential to threaten the safety of the parties. Vigilante justice is common. Most common accidents occur between cars and motorcycles, often resulting in injury of the motorcyclist. Malian law dictates that able parties "assist someone in danger," despite who is at fault for causing the accident, and refusal to do so is not only contrary to local customs, but also a violation of law. Westerners are widely perceived as being the 'able party' in these circumstances.

Drivers can expect police to request cash bribes on site.

Public Transportation Conditions

The Embassy does not recommend the use of local taxis, but taxis are widely available in/around Bamako. Taxis can be in poor mechanical condition, and the skills of the drivers vary. If taxis are used, extreme care should be taken, and passengers should negotiate a rate with the driver before getting into the vehicle. It is common for foreigners to be charged a

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higher fare.

Streets are not widely marked and named and addresses are not normally used in Bamako, and passengers should be prepared to give detailed instructions of where they want to go if the driver is unfamiliar with the destination.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Because there is no direct commercial air service to the U.S. by carriers registered in Mali, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed Mali's Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization safety standards. Several major international carriers (Air France, Royal Air Maroc, TAP airlines) do fly directly to Bamako. Bamako-Senou International Airport is open, and flights operate on a daily basis. Malian customs and security forces installed a passenger screening system to enhance air transit security monitoring. Travelers are advised to allow a minimum of three hours for check-in and screening procedures.

There are no commercial in-country flights, although charter planes are available. The UN Humanitarian Assistance Services (UNHAS) offers infrequent air service to humanitarian workers to Mopti, Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal regions.

Terrorism Threat

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Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA), established in July 2013, is usually the target for terrorist attacks, as they are located in the areas where terrorism is most prevalent.

There was a significant increase in rocket attacks and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) incidents in Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal regions in the latter half of 2014.

MINUSMA came under direct assault by terrorist elements and engaged militarily against aggressive action by combatants in the north in 2015.

The clearest example, though, is the attack against the MINUSMA camp in Kidal in February 2016, when a combined truck bomb and simultaneous indirect fire killed seven peacekeepers and wounded over 30 others. In the UN peacekeeping mission with the highest number of casualties in the world, this attack underscores that the security situation in northern Mali remains tenuous.

Armed conflict continues in the north, and there is an active local insurgency in the Mopti region, where in 2014 there were no attacks and in 2015 there were over 30 reported attacks. Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) and other security services are heavily targeted by terrorist attacks and are usually, but not always, the main target. The frequency of IED detonations in northern regions increased significantly in 2015, targeting both MINUSMA and Malian military convoys. Violent extremist elements have demonstrated their persistent ability to carry out a

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variety of operations in northern Mali, including vehicle-borne and person-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED and PBIED); convoy ambushes; targeted IED operations; and coordinated assaults on military installations. Training camps and weapons caches continue to be discovered.

While southern Mali was largely isolated from terrorist attacks in 2014, there were at least four known attacks in southern Mali: La Terrace restaurant and Radisson Blu hotel in March and November 2015 and two attacks along the Cote d'Ivoire border in Misseni and Fakola in May and June 2015. These were the first reported terrorist attacks in southern Mali.

With the restoration of democracy and advances in the peace process in 2016, the possibility for terrorist attacks and/or violent civil unrest continues to exist, resulting in a security situation in which vigilance and caution are warranted. Despite the significant successes of French offensive and counter-terrorist operations, extremist groups persist in targeting Malian and Western assets, and sporadic fighting continues between the military and northern armed groups.

Although the security situation in Bamako remains relatively stable, terrorist attacks in Bamako raise concerns that security forces are struggling to adapt to asymmetric attacks.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

As Mali continues down the path of national reconciliation with armed groups in the north, public perception of the neutrality of MINUSMA and/or French forces plays an important role

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in the potential for civil unrest against Western interests. Local populations have demonstrated both for and against MINUSMA activities. American citizens should be sensitive to the latest public sentiments toward these forces.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Although the government signed a peace accord with representatives of the northern armed groups in June 2015, the government has not taken meaningful action to implement the accord. 2015 concluded without the resolution of key political issues, such as the holding of credible municipal and local elections, the appointment of transitional administrators, and progress toward key security mechanisms of the accord (mixed patrols in the north and the start of the disarmament, demobilization, and reinsertion process). Extremists and criminal groups, operating predominantly in northern Mali, continue to act as spoilers to the peace process and threaten those seeking to return government authority or deliver humanitarian services. Mali saw an increase in the overall number of attacks in incidents throughout Mali in 2015, and extremist groups conducted operations in central and southern Mali during the year. The terrorist attacks at the La Terrace restaurant and the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako in March and November 2015, respectively, provide examples that terrorist actors in Mali seek to target foreigners in addition to their continued efforts to undermine the national reconciliation process. Thousands of military and civilian personnel working at the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA), the European Union Training Mission to Mali (EUTM), and EUCAP are making concerted efforts toward security sector reform with assistance from the international community. Yet, much work remains in order for the Malian security services to be capable of controlling extremist and criminal organizations. Some government and financial services returned to the northern regions of Timbuktu and Gao, though mostly only in the capitals of those regions. As accord implementation slows, impediments to the return of government services to northern Mali expand.

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International donors expressed concern about Mali's financial management following a scandal involving defense contracts. The government addressed these concerns, cancelled erroneously approved contracts, and changed involved Ministers that prompted international donors to resume assistance.

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Post-specific Concerns

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping remains an ongoing threat in northern Mali, and the State Department released a worldwide security alert in 2015 identifying security concerns in Mali.

One Swiss citizen, who was a long term resident in Timbuktu, was abducted in her home inside the city in January 2016.

An Australian couple, who were also longtime residents of that area, was abducted in northern Burkina Faso along the Mali/Niger border and may have been held in Mali. One member of this kidnapped couple was released in February 2016.

There is also one South African and one Romanian citizen reportedly being held in Mali.

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Police Response

Although willing to assist and provide a service, police are poorly trained, poorly paid, and lack resources to combat crime effectively. Problems of low-level police corruption remains endemic. Often times, police and emergency responders have requested money in return for providing what Americans view as routine police services. Calls to police stations for urgent assistance have often generated responses that no officers are available or that there is no gasoline for response vehicles. If the police do respond, many lack investigative skills to solve the most basic crimes or to identify and arrest suspects. The government maintains that the reform of Mali's security sector is a key policy priority and has – with support from the international community – initiated significant efforts to reform and rebuild Mali's security forces. Support from the international community is focused on improving police, Gendarme, and National Guard performance, capability, and institutional capacity. This support ranges from equipment provisions to national security strategic planning and crisis response development. The European Union Training Mission to Mali is heavily involved in the efforts to reform and restructure Mali's military.

Americans are strongly encouraged to carry with them copies of their passport data and visa pages in the event they are detained or stopped by police. Originals should not be handed over if at all possible.

Although it is not against the law to take photographs in general, individuals should request permission and exercise care in taking pictures/video. Photographs and video should not be taken of sensitive buildings (those belong to the police, military, or embassies, including the U.S. Embassy). MINUSMA headquarters in L'Amitie Hotel also prohibits photography;

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offenders have been arrested. For more information, please review OSAC's Report "Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography."

Police/Security Agencies

The organization of security forces starts with the Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection. This Ministry is composed of four main branches: the National Police, Civil Protection, National Gendarmerie, and the National Guard. The Gendarmerie and National Guard are military organizations that come under the Ministry of Defense but are affiliated with the Ministry of Security to reinforce police operations in major cities, particularly during riots/civil unrest. Law enforcement is the responsibility of the National Police. Police responsibilities are concentrated exclusively in urban areas, while the Gendarmerie is primarily responsible for rural areas.

Contracting local guards is a popular mechanism for protecting property and services, and many businesses and expatriates employ full-time guards to protect residences and office facilities.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care generally does not meet U.S. standards. For those traveling outside of Bamako, medical facilities are scarce and may be austere. All travelers are encouraged to prepare a medical emergency kit (first aid supplies, malaria prophylactic/treatment medications). There

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is no national capacity to deal with a mass-casualty incident.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The Pasteur clinic is a multi-specialty clinic with emergency capabilities and a small hospital. Although temporarily closed due to a minor Ebola case in 2015, the Pasteur clinic is a viable medical facility and a recommended source of medical care for Americans.

The Hospital of Mali opened on the east end of town in 2012 in the Missabougou area of Sotuba and offers limited medical services.

The Hospital Gabriel Toure is the largest facility in Bamako (t Avenue Al Quds, Medina Coure, city center, telephone (223) 2222-7122) and offers a range of emergency and medical services.

The hospitals are far from U.S. or European standards.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

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International SOS provides reliable air ambulance service but requires approximately 24-48 hours response time.

Recommended Insurance Posture

The U.S. Embassy cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of securing adequate medical evacuation insurance and bearing proof of that coverage.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Malaria is a common and potentially deadly infection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends taking antimalarial medication before, during, and after travel to Mali.

Other diseases that may affect travelers to region are dengue, schistosomiasis, polio, and lassa virus.

In October 2014, Mali detected its first case of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). As of January 2015, Mali was considered free of EVD but remains on high-alert for further cases.

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

OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council in Mali. The Regional Security Officer is available to meet with American private-sector representatives and provide information on the current security situation in country. To reach OSAC's Africa team, please email OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The Embassy is located in ACI 2000, Rue 243, Porte 297, Bamako, Mali

Business hours: Mon-Thurs, 07:30AM-5:00PM; Fri, 07:30AM-11:30AM

Embassy Contact Numbers

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Embassy Switchboard: +223-2070-2300

Regional Security Office: +223-2070-2552

Consular Section: +223-2070-2505

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

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens should enroll in the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), which can be accessed at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>. By enrolling, you will receive security updates, and the Embassy can contact you more easily in case of emergency.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors to Bamako are advised to practice the same personal security precautions they would in any large city. Visitors should be vigilant and maintain awareness in crowded areas (markets). Be aware of anyone who jostles you even if it appears innocent. This is often a ploy used by pickpockets, including children, to distract you. Do not carry, let alone display, large sums of money. Do not carry anything that cannot be easily replaced. Theft of unattended

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items is common.

Visitors should avoid wandering around in remote areas of the city by themselves, particularly at night. It is best to travel in groups and stay in illuminated areas as much as possible. Travel at night on foot should be avoided since the roads are often poorly illuminated, increasing the chance of being struck by a vehicle/motorbike.

Thefts from hotel rooms may occur. Visitors are advised not to leave anything of value in their room and to ensure that hotel room doors are locked while sleeping. Given a history of terrorist attacks against soft targets like hotels in Mali, visitors are advised to consider carrying their own door stop to secure their hotel room.

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