



## Mexico 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Nogales

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Narcoterrorism; Drug Trafficking; Theft; Murder; Assault; Burglary; Carjacking; Floods; Riots/Civil Unrest; Kidnapping

Western Hemisphere > Mexico; Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Nogales

6/7/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Consulate General Nogales Consular District covers only the northern one-third of the state of Sonora. Please see the OSAC Crime and Safety Report for Hermosillo for information about the security and safety situation in southern Sonora.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

### Crime Threats

The general crime rate in Nogales is above the U.S. national average. In 2015, the overall level of crime in Nogales showed a slight decline. However, the State Department crime rating was raised to "critical" midway through 2015 based on the sharp increase from 2014-2015. There is no pattern or evidence indicating the targeting of a specific area. No area of Nogales is immune to violent crimes. The area between El Periferico highway and Avenida Obregon is considered to be a little safer; however, violent crimes often occur there, with a higher

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frequency after dark.

For 2015, petty theft and muggings not associated with drug trafficking organizations occur with similar frequency as past years but with a slight increase from 2014.

The Sinaloa cartel has infiltrated many levels of society in Nogales. Drug cartel-related homicides and violence has occurred throughout the Nogales consular district (Caborca, Altar, Agua Prieta, Sonoyta) but not at the same level as in Nogales. Non-drug cartel related street crime (armed robberies, assaults, burglaries) continue at high rates and show a slight increase from 2014. There is no evidence to indicate that criminal/narco trafficking elements are specifically targeting U.S. citizens or foreign visitors. However, anyone who projects the perception of wealth and is unfamiliar with the area can become vulnerable to crime by being a target of opportunity or by being in the “wrong place at the wrong time.” The criminal concern for visitors is being caught in the crossfire of cartels in-fighting.

In 2015, Nogales saw a slight decline in the number of homicides. According to media reports, there were 51 homicides in 2015 compared to 74 in 2014.

Due to Mexican laws that prevent individual firearm ownership, the vast majority of firearms are in the possession of law enforcement, military, or criminal/narco trafficking elements. A vast majority of the narco-trafficking elements possess a great deal of firearms (assault rifles, grenades, belt-fed machine guns) and use them when committing major drug-related crimes. That said, not all violent crimes in the consular district were committed with firearms. Consulate staff has experienced the impacts from small arms (7.62, 9mm) against their homes and near the Consulate with no injuries.

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Residential burglaries, including residential burglaries in the more affluent neighborhoods, occur often and are most common during the day and on weekends/holidays when houses are vacant. Thieves often gain entry through unsecured entryways, by tricking domestic employees, or using force to access homes that appear to be vacant.

The theft of vehicles, carjacking, and the theft of parts from parked vehicles are other common crimes. Vehicle theft is by far the most common crime reported in Nogales consular district. Drug trafficking organizations and criminals covet vehicles as high dollar items, as there is a high number of mid- to high-end vehicles (especially pick-up trucks and SUVs) that transit the consular district given the proximity to the U.S. border. Heavy duty trucks and SUVs are used extensively by drug trafficking organizations because of their ability to carry heavy loads at high speed.

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Driving requires vigilance, a defensive attitude, and Mexican automobile insurance. Local drivers are generally not very experienced and often have cars that are poorly maintained or in disrepair. Be alert for slow moving vehicles and for vehicles speeding through traffic signals at the last minute. Road signage and traffic lights are improving but are not always clear, contributing to the hazardous driving conditions. Drivers should give a wide berth to public buses, which are known for their erratic driving practices. Pedestrians, including small

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children, jaywalk seemingly with disregard for their personal safety, and pedestrians commonly dart into the street.

Travel on highways can be precarious, due to the safety and security situation especially at night. Because many drivers may not have functioning headlights and because after dark the probability of crime increases, travelers should avoid nighttime travel. Drivers are encouraged to use inter-city toll highways whenever possible during daylight hours.

Keep your doors locked and windows up. Check the interior and exterior of your vehicle prior to getting in. Look for things that are out of place or abnormal. Always leave space in which to maneuver. Always leave yourself an exit. Avoid choke points in travel. Be wary of diversions. If you are being followed or harassed by another driver, try to find the nearest police station, hotel, or other public facility to call the police. Never lead the person back to your home or stop and get out.

### Public Transportation Conditions

The use of public transportation is advised in the Nogales consular district based on the lack of viable security vetting and the depth of narco-trafficking influence over the taxis. Although public buses are influenced to a much lesser degree, the safety aspect of the public bus system make it an unsafe option.

### Other Areas of Concern

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During the rainy summer (July-September), localized flash flooding may occur on many of the main and side streets in the consular district, primarily in Nogales. Blvd. Tecnológico is notorious for flooding; it can experience rushing water up to 2-3 feet deep in places, making the street inaccessible. Flash floods leave many vehicles stalled in the middle of streets and intersections. Cars being washed into deeper water is one of the most common dangers of the rainy season. During heavy rain storms, avoid driving/walking in flooded streets. Because of the rapid onset of flash flooding, city emergency workers rarely place road closure signs. During each rainy season, large sinkholes develop; bridges wash out, and individuals have been trapped/injured by flash floods. Resulting road damage is not always quickly repaired, leaving potholes that can damage your car, cause drivers to swerve into your lane, or brake unexpectedly. Visitors should be wary when traveling roadways during the rainy season and pay attention to weather forecasts.

## **Terrorism Threat**

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Lax immigration controls, the ease with which fake Mexican travel documents can be obtained, and Mexico's geographic location to the U.S. make Mexico an attractive transit point for potential transnational terrorists.

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

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

Over the past several years, there have been several demonstrations, taking place at/near the Deconcini Port of Entry or the fiscal corridor heading to the Mariposa Port of Entry. These demonstrations are generally orderly and peaceful.

## **Post-specific Concerns**

Environmental Hazards

During the rainy season (July-September), flooding of residential areas and city streets can occur in all areas of the Consular District.

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### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Given the large number of corporations and manufacturing plants in Nogales, hazardous materials mishandling is a viable possibility. Although there were no reported incidents in 2014 or 2015, it remains a potential that the local government and the private sector monitor closely.

### Drug-related Crimes

In 2015, some drug cartel in-fighting occurred in Agua Prieta and Caborca. However, the violence did not reach or exceed the magnitude of 2014. Police and media reports have indicated that drug cartel violence does not usually target innocent civilians or bystanders. 2015 saw a reduction of violence in heavily-populated areas.

In 2007, military personnel began counter-drug cartel operations along the smuggling routes of both Mexican coasts. Accordingly, the routes into the U.S. market have shifted to the land routes including the two ports of entry in Nogales. Drug cartel-related violence in Nogales increased exponentially in 2009 as the Sinaloa cartel and the remnants of the Beltran Leyva cartel fought. While nearly all the violence has been between warring cartels, there have been innocent people caught in the crossfire.

Organized crime-related activity occurs on virtually a daily basis and often involves drug trafficking organizations. There is no evidence to indicate that American citizens are specifically targets of these organizations for political or economic gain.

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## Kidnapping Threat

There were no reports of express kidnappings in Nogales for 2015. Express kidnappings are a common type of abduction and are based on the 24-hour withdrawal limit placed on ATM cards industry-wide. The victim is generally held for 24-48 hours and is forced to withdraw funds from a series of ATMs. The term "express kidnapping" is also applied to the kidnapping-for-ransom of victims held for brief periods where only small ransom amounts are demanded. A typical scenario may last for several hours and be settled for the peso-equivalent of a few thousand dollars.

Kidnapping-for-ransom is an established criminal activity nationwide. Over the past few years, cartel-related kidnappings have occurred in Nogales and throughout Sonora. Victims include U.S. and Mexican citizens who are and are not involved in the drug trade. Overall, the amount of kidnapping in Sonora is very small compared to other areas. In 2015, Nogales police reported only two kidnappings.

## Police Response

Police response to emergencies is generally timely; however, in other consular district cities, it may not be. A degree of police narco-trafficking influence and complicity to criminal activity does go on throughout Mexico, and parts of northern Sonora are no exception. With the exclusion of several special units, law enforcement, especially at the local levels, lack professional development in comparison with U.S. standards. Many police are eager to serve but do not have the training and equipment necessary to serve effectively. Also, given that

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many of the local police grew up and live in the area with their families, they commonly acquiesce to threats of narco-trafficking violence. Morale is poor, pay is low, and giving in to narco-trafficking threats all create an overall negative image of the police to the populace and visitors to Sonora.

The high number of arrests and the low rate of criminal convictions are also responsible for low police morale. However, in 2015 Sonora began a major change to its criminal justice system. Courts are switching from the written correspondence-based system to a much faster U.S.-style Oral Adversarial System (courtroom hearings). Nogales is the last area to transition to this new judicial system but is scheduled have it fully integrated by the end of 2016. This should streamline the judicial/ criminal justice system.

For the most part, law enforcement agencies in Sonora have been responsive to the U.S. Consulate's and commercial ventures' requests for assistance. In May 2014, the Consulate received credible information concerning threats made by the local cartel plaza leader to Americans traveling in Nogales or surrounding areas. Also in May, the Consulate also received credible information concerning threats against its employees made by the local cartel and a few municipal police officers. The Consulate worked with local authorities to investigate and prevent such actions. 2015 did not see any threats directed at Consulate personnel or the U.S. government.

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

In 2015, there were no reports of police soliciting bribes from U.S. visitors. Visitors to the Nogales consular district may contact the consular section at U.S. Consulate General Nogales

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if they encounter problems with police. American citizens are advised to cooperate with police officials if detained and/or questioned.

### Crime Victim Assistance

To contact police, dial 066. In Nogales, this call is received by C-4, an equivalent of the U.S. 911 service. There will be at least one English speaker on duty; however, in other consular district cities, this may not be the case.

If involved in a crime, a visit to the local police facility with the investigating officer may be required to file a complaint or to be further questioned. There is usually a nominal fee required for an official police report regarding an insurance claim. Do not be surprised if you are told to return at another to receive a copy of an official police report.

### Police/Security Agencies

**Municipal Police:** Patrol and conduct crime prevention. They have no investigative authority. They are the primary responders when summoned through 066 to include traffic violations and incidents on local roads.

**Sonora State Police:** Investigate all crimes in the state. Posses a specialized anti-kidnapping unit.

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Federal Police: Primary function is highway patrol and airport policing. Special investigative units exist to investigate federal crimes.

## Medical Emergencies

For any medical emergency, dial 066. Ambulance service is reasonably reliable, although ambulance personnel are not as well trained as those in the U.S. The Cruz Roja de Mexico (Red Cross) also provides ambulance service.

### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Cento Medico de Sonora (private)

Ana Gabriela Guevara 71 Altos, Nogales

Tel:631-313-0916/26

Centro Medico del Estado de Sonora (public)

Tel: 631-313-3465

Hospital General (public)

Av. Alvaro Obregon and Calle I. Ramirez, Colonia Bolivar

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Tel: 631-313-0794

Hospital del Socorro (private)

Calle Hermosillo #425, Colonia Kennedy

Tel: 631-314-6061

Cruz Roja de Mexico (Red Cross)

Calle Plutarco Elias Calles S/N, Colonia Bolivar

Tel: 631-313-5801

Available Air Ambulance Services

In serious medical situations, drive across the border to Holy Cross Hospital at 1171 W. Target Range Road, Nogales, AZ 85621

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Please see the latest information on the CDC's website at:  
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/mexico.htm>

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## **OSAC Country Council Information**

The Nogales OSAC Country Council was inaugurated on January 10, 2014. The local point of contact is RSO Pablo Rojas (Rojaspj@state.gov) or Holanda Estrada (EstradaH@state.gov). The Country Council meets quarterly starting in January.

## **U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information**

### Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate Nogales,

Calle San Jose s/n

Fraccionamiento Los Alamos

Nogales, Sonora, Mexico

U.S. Consulate, Nogales business hours are from 8am to 5pm, Monday thru Friday.

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## Consulate Contact Numbers

631-311-8150 (within Mexico)

011-52-631-311-8150 (from the United States)

Regional Security Officer (RSO) Nogales

From Mexico, dial (631) 302-3257

From U.S., dial +52 (631) 302-3257

American Citizens Services (ACS)

[nogalesacs@state.gov](mailto:nogalesacs@state.gov)

Emergencies during normal business hours:

From Mexico, dial (631) 311-8150

From U.S., dial +52 (631) 311-8150

ACS After hours emergencies dealing with American Citizens:

From Mexico, dial 001 619-841-3203

From U.S., dial (619) 841-3203

U.S. Consulate, Nogales Duty Officer

From Mexico, dial (631) 318-0723

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From U.S., dial +52 (631) 318-0723

Website: <http://nogales.usconsulate.gov/>

### Nearby Posts

Embassy Mexico City: <http://mexico.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate Ciudad Juarez: <http://ciudadjuarez.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guadalajara: <http://guadalajara.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Hermosillo: <http://hermosillo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Matamoros: <http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Merida: <http://merida.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Monterrey: <http://monterrey.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Nuevo Laredo: <http://nuevolaredo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Tijuana: <http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/>

### Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

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### Situational Awareness Best Practices

U.S. citizens are urged to take the highest precautions regarding their safety and personal security in and around Nogales. Be aware that, even with the military assisting all levels of law enforcement, the violence continues as seen in recent cartel-related violence in Agua Prieta and Puerto Peñasco.

Conducting periodic personnel background checks on employees is a very good practice. Keep in mind that given the size and population of Nogales and the state of Sonora as a whole, it would be difficult to hire a sizable workforce that is completely insulated from the influence of drug trafficking organizations. Local private sector organizations advise periodic employee interviews and/ periodic background checks.

Vary your times and routes to and from work. Whenever possible, do not have a set day for shopping, errands and personal needs. Be unpredictable. Make sure colleagues/family members are aware of your plans and know how to reach you.

Maintain a low personal profile by not doing anything that draws attention to you. Always be aware of your surroundings. Never give out your personal information (family member/household staff names, addresses, telephone numbers) in an open setting.

Keep your doors locked and windows closed.

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