



Brazil 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Recife

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Maritime; Carjacking; Kidnapping; Murder; Burglary; Cyber; Riots/Civil Unrest; Floods; Landslides and mudslides; Cargo Security; Drug Trafficking

Western Hemisphere > Brazil; Western Hemisphere > Brazil > Recife

6/7/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The State Department divides its roles and responsibilities in Brazil between four Consular Districts (one for the Embassy and each of the three Consulates General). This Crime and Safety Report focuses on U.S. Consulate General Recife's district, which includes states of Pernambuco, Alagoas, Sergipe, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceara, Piaui, and Maranhao. For more information regarding the security environment in other areas of Brazil, please reference the OSAC Crime and Safety Reports from Brasilia, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

The general crime rate in Brazil is above the U.S. national average. Pickpocketing, armed robbery, vehicular theft, and petty street crime are more common than violent crimes (express kidnappings, kidnapping-for-ransom, random shootings) due to the government's proactive

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intervention. Many criminals use weapons when carrying out illicit activities, and crimes are often accompanied by gratuitous violence.

Foreign tourists are likely to be targeted for petty street crime. Although the risk for petty crime is greater at night, it does occur during the day. Expensive watches, high profile jewelry, and all electronic devices may attract attention from criminals. The incidence of crime against tourists is greater near the airport, hotels, bars, nightclubs, Recife Antigo, and other establishments that cater to visitors. Visitors should be alert while on the beaches or other gathering places, as robberies may occur in daylight, including in the Boa Viagem beachfront neighborhood. Public transportation hubs and tourist areas have high criminal activity. Incidents of theft on city buses are frequent. However, taxis are not immune from crime. Criminals often strike in an organized manner and will use a motorcycle to evade police. For example, a perpetrator will approach an unsuspecting victim from behind or enter a convenience store and burglarize the victims and escape before police can be summoned. In 2015, the gas station convenience store near the Consulate was burglarized on two consecutive Fridays at approximately the same time, possibly by the same perpetrators. One of the robbers jumped off a motorcycle and walked inside brandishing a handgun while his partner kept the motorcycle running. Police never caught the suspects.

A crime trend known as “arrastões” (dragnets) occur when many perpetrators act together, simultaneously mug pedestrians, sunbathers, shopping mall patrons, and/or vehicle occupants stuck in traffic. Arrastões and random robberies may occur during big events (Carnaval), soccer games, or during peak beach hours.

Carjackings and express kidnappings – where an individual is kidnapped and forced to withdraw money from his/her bank accounts in order to be released -- also occur.

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Violent bank robberies have occurred with greater frequency, sometimes resulting in gunfire exchange between criminals, bank security guards, and responding police officers. Criminals also target bank ATMs, often times using explosives to rip open the machines to steal the cash. Brazen attacks on armored money trucks are also common. In 2015, an armored truck attempting to deliver money at a popular shopping mall was attacked by an organized group of armed criminals.

The Secretaria De Defesa Social de Pernambuco (SDS), the senior body for law enforcement in Pernambuco, reported that the overall rate of homicide has decreased by 58 percent between 2007-2014 in the Recife metropolitan area. However, the Pernambuco 2015 homicide report showed an increase of 13 percent. This was the second consecutive year with an increase. The press and public began to question if "Pacto Pela Vida" (Pact for Life - the government's crime-fighting program) was really helping to reduce crime. As a result, the General Commander of Military Police for Pernambuco was relieved of his duties while the Secretary for SDS received criticism for not controlling the most violent crime and reducing homicides. A UN report that ranked the 50 most dangerous cities in the world based on homicide rates included all of the eight capital cities of the northeast: 12. Fortaleza, 13. Natal, 16. João Pessoa, 18. Maceio, 21. São Luís, 30. Teresina, 37. Recife, 38. Aracaju.

The shortage of jail space in Brazil and prisoner furloughs contribute to the cycle of violence. Brazil's criminal justice system is also characterized by lenient sentencing and low conviction rates.

Although there have been no reports by American employees of residential break-ins and burglaries, residential burglaries do pose a constant concern.

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In the Recife metropolitan area, there are over 645 surveillance cameras to monitor/deter crime. These surveillance systems are monitored by the SDS, which responds by dispatching military/municipal police. In neighborhoods near Boa Viagem, there are static guards posted to monitor for crime in residential areas.

There is significant and sustained organized criminal activity throughout Brazil, particularly in major cities.

There have been recent instances where criminals have installed sophisticated “skimming devices” to steal card user information from ATMs. The information is then used to withdraw money from the victims’ accounts. There have been reports of individuals who attempt to withdraw money from ATMs that appear to be empty; when in actuality there is an improvised device stopping the money from being dispensed. The criminal returns to the ATM later to retrieve the stuck money.

Cybersecurity Issues

A growing area of concern is the rise of cyber crime and security. Brazilians are frequent victims of identity theft involving credit/debit cards. Police have reported that merchants are sometimes involved in the theft of account information. Recent ARSO-I investigations have revealed that hackers compromised banks' security countermeasures, resulting in the theft of thousands of account numbers. The hackers sold some of the information to other criminals to

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manufacture cloned credit/debit cards. Some of the thieves are U.S. visa holders who travelled to the U.S. making fraudulent charges and cash withdrawals.

Other Areas of Concern

All favelas, especially those that do not have a round the clock police presence, should be avoided.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions vary greatly. Most roads in large cities are paved; however, many roads outside greater Recife are in very poor condition. Many roads flood during heavy rains, making them impassable. Greater Recife has poor water drainage systems that are easily clogged with debris. Deep potholes appear suddenly and often remain unrepaired for several weeks. Many rural roads are unpaved and can be impassable during the rainy season (April-August). Defensive driving is a requirement, as traffic can be congested and unpredictable. The level of both public and private driver training and safety awareness does not reach minimum U.S. standards. Crime on the road remains a problem, especially during evening travel, traffic jams, and travel into rural areas. It is important that drivers pay attention to their surroundings, and keep doors locked and windows rolled up when stopped in traffic.

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Roads are not well-maintained, and street lighting is unpredictable. Vehicle accidents, including those involving pedestrians and bicyclists, are also common. In Recife, there is a severe lack of parking that results in congestion. Peddlers and beggars create additional hazards in roadways and particularly at intersections. Bicyclists ride along same roads as cars and sometimes ride counter flow. It is also not uncommon to see horses on the roads.

Brazil has a zero tolerance for drinking and driving and has enacted a law to combat drunk driving known as “Lei Seca” (Dry Law). Frequent unannounced checkpoints are set up in most major metropolitan cities. Brazil uses automatic photo-ticketing systems to discourage speeding, and tickets are mailed to the vehicle’s owner.

Public Transportation Conditions

Personnel are discouraged from using public transportation because of a high threat of crime. Avoid city buses and other public transportation, as many pass through high crime areas and are susceptible to robberies. Only use legitimate, well-marked taxis.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

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Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

There have been protests throughout the country in 2015. While the majority of protests in Recife are peaceful, they can become confrontational. Visitors should avoid large crowds or ongoing protests. Activist groups such as Movimento Sem Terra (MST) and other domestic political groups with an political agendas occasionally conduct acts of civil disobedience and may enter into violent confrontation with police.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Flooding and mudslides are a seasonal problem in Recife.

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Recife's beaches are also known for shark attacks. Warning signs are posted along the beaches. In 2015, Recife beaches registered two shark attacks: both victims survived but lost limbs.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Cargo theft remains a major security issue on Brazilian roads. As a result, many companies employ armed security escorts for high value loads and use satellites to track truck movements.

Drug-related Crimes

The major cities experience the effects of addiction to illicit drugs. Brazil is the number two consumer of cocaine in the world, behind the U.S. As such, many street crimes are drug-related.

Kidnapping Threat

While kidnappings-for-ransom have become less common in recent years, these incidents do occur. One tactic of organized gangs is to target individuals observed withdrawing money from ATMs or exiting banks. These gangs operate in teams and are armed. Using ATMs in

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major tourist hotels reduce the odds of being targeted by criminals.

Police Response

Police response, from the military and civil police, varies in Recife. Police officials frequently cite lack of resources, staffing/ basic equipment shortages, and morale as reasons for widely varying response times and unsolved crimes. Law enforcement entities continue to look for creative strategies (community policing, cops on motorcycles/Segways, extensive implementation of surveillance cameras in urban areas) to overcome infrastructure challenges to crime prevention. Since 2007, the government of Pernambuco has engaged in a concerted effort to reduce crime levels through the Pacto Pela Vida initiative.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Visitors should inform the U.S. Consulate in the event they encounter problems while traveling in Brazil, including detainment or arrest by the police.

American Citizen Services (ACS) - M-F, 7:00AM to 4:00PM, (+55) (81) 3416-3080

After hours Duty Officer emergency line - 4:00PM to 7:00AM and on weekends: (+55) (81) 9916-9470

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Crime Victim Assistance

Recife Emergency Services

Phone #

Medical Emergency (*Ambulância*)

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Fire Service / Sea Rescue (*Corpo de Bombeiros*)

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Tourist Police Station (Delegacia do Turista)

(81)3322-3122

Civil Police (*Polícia Civil*)

197

Federal Police (*Polícia Federal*)

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Traffic Police - CTTU

0800-081-1078

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Transit Department - DETRAN

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Airport (Guararapes)

(81)3464-4188

Police/Security Agencies

Larger properties and commercial sites generally employ 24/7 private security guard services.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care at private clinics is considered to be quite good. Cash payment in advance is normally required for medical care at private facilities.

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Public hospitals provide a lower standard of care and are often overcrowded and understaffed, but they generally do not require prepayment and are skilled at dealing with medical emergencies.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Real Hospital Portugues de Beneficencia em Pernambuco

Avenida Governador Agamenon Magalhães, 4760, Paissandu

Tel: (81) 3416-1122

Hospital Santa Joana

Rua Joaquim Nabuco, 200, Derby

Tel: (81) 3216-6565

Hospital Esperança

Rua Antonio Gomes e Freitas, 265, Ilha do Leite

Tel: (81) 3131-7878

Hospital Unimed Recife

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Av. Lins Petit, Nº 35, Praça Chora Menino, Ilha do Leite

Tel: (81) 3231-3111

Available Air Ambulance Services

For air medical evacuation services, RSO recommends visitors purchase private air medical evacuation insurance before traveling.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Travelers should consult with their medical providers regarding immunization and vaccination requirements prior to travel. Travelers should have a documented yellow fever card. For specific vaccination requirements to travel to Brazil please visit <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/brazil>.

OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council in Recife. U.S. companies are encouraged to contact the RSO in Recife for specific questions concerning the local security situation. There are OSAC Country Councils in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Please review their reports for additional

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details. To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email OSACWHA@state.gov.

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

Rua Gonçalves Maia, 163

Bairro Boa Vista

Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil 50070-065

The U.S. Consulate Recife is open Mon-Fri, 7:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., except for Brazilian and American holidays.

Consulate Contact Numbers

Regional Security Officer (RSO): (+55) (81) 3416-3114

American Citizen Services (ACS): (+55) (81) 3416-3080

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After hours Duty Officer: (+55) (81) 9916-9470

Emergencies and calls after normal business hours may be directed to Post One Brasilia: (+55) (61) 3312-7400.

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

Nearby Posts

Embassy Brasilia: <http://brazil.usembassy.gov/>

Consulate Rio de Janeiro: <http://riodejaneiro.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Sao Paulo: <http://saopaulo.usconsulate.gov/>

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

There are a variety of scams used by the criminals to rob victims that include:

An unknown individual calls to say that a person you know, possibly a family member, has been kidnapped and, unless you pay a ransom immediately, the person will be harmed. The

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ransom is paid, and it becomes clear that the kidnapping never occurred.

A similar scam is when an unknown individual calls and states an employee/family member has been in an accident and needs immediate medical attention. The individual states that payment must be provided in order for the injured individual to be treated. This scam often target household staff who react without verifying with their employer.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors should practice common sense preventive security techniques. Travel in groups of two or more persons. Do not walk on beaches or in parks after dark, as assaults are common in these areas. Do not carry or wear valuable items that will attract attention. If you need to wear expensive jewelry or carry a camera, conceal it until you arrive at your destination. Be aware of the street environment, especially at open markets or crowded areas, and avoid contact with those who may be looking for potential victims. If you feel unsafe seek a safer location. Go into a store, bank or simply cross the street. Victims are advised to comply with demands for valuables. Resisting increases the likelihood of serious bodily harm. While this is a personal decision, statistics show that resistance can lead to injury or death.

Do not answer your hotel room door until you positively confirm who is on the other side. Look out the peephole or call the front desk to confirm the visitor.

Consider renting or purchasing a cellular phone. Cellular phones are widely available, inexpensive, and generally reliable, especially in the major cities.

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The RSO recommends that residences have enhanced security countermeasures.

Be careful of cash transactions on the street. A hurried transaction for merchandise may leave the customer with shoddy/counterfeit goods or with counterfeit money. Travelers are advised to withdraw money only from reputable money exchanging services and use only trusted ATMs at banks/major shopping malls. Extreme caution should be used whenever using a credit/debit card. If using credit cards, never allow waiters/clerks to walk away with your card and make sure they only swipe your card once. Travelers are also strongly encouraged to monitor their accounts for the duration of their visit. Travelers should inform their banks of their travel plans to Brazil to monitor for any unusual charges.

Do not accept drinks from strangers and always watch your drink. Scopolamine, or similar drugs, may be added to your drink. People have awoken robbed of their valuables or sexually assaulted after accepting such a drink.

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