



Swaziland 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Murder; Rape/Sexual Violence; Riots/Civil Unrest; Extreme heat/drought; Natural Disasters; Drug Trafficking; Disease Outbreak

Africa > Swaziland; Africa > Swaziland > Lobamba; Africa > Swaziland > Mbabane

6/7/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

The general crime rate is above the U.S. national average. Although criminals considered Mbabane and Manzini prime grounds for operation due to the number of people, businesses, and affluent areas, the rate of crime reported in small towns and rural areas increased in 2015. There are some local crime gangs but no organized crime.

Congested urban areas are particularly dangerous at night; and, occasional daytime larceny has been reported. The presence of pedestrians should not be taken as an indication of a secure/safe environment, but mob justice exists. Suspects have found themselves pursued and beaten by by-standers.

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Residential burglary and petty theft are the most commonly reported crimes. The most reoccurring crimes involve robbing victims on the streets, particularly in residential areas, regardless of the time of day. Criminals are generally interested in cellular phones and cash. Most residents take residential security seriously and attempt to protect their homes accordingly. Most break-ins occur at homes without security guards and/or centrally monitored home alarms. Residential break-ins are very common, even when the tenants are at home.

Criminals usually brandish edged weapons (knife, machete) and occasionally firearms and will resort to deadly force if victims resist. The general modus operandi of robbers is to target residences or businesses that have little/no security measures in place, steal cash or items that can be liquidated easily, and escape without physically harming victims, but they will use force if necessary.

While the number of murders per capita remains lower than some African countries, Swaziland experiences violent deaths on a frequent basis. Some of the murders have been particularly gruesome. Victims have been found decapitated, and body parts were mutilated or removed. Some are a result of disputes among criminal groups.

Rape is a frequent crime. Rape tends to be perpetuated on isolated/desolate urban and rural areas or roads.

Other Areas of Concern

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Parks should be avoided at night and visited as a group (more than two people) during the day. At night, criminals have been known to loiter in parks. Parks are also often the rally point for marches and demonstrations.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic moves on the left, which requires some drivers to exercise particular caution. Due to numerous hazards, special care should be used when driving, especially at night and in rural areas. Major highways are generally well maintained, paved, and adequately marked. Most major thoroughfares in cities are paved, though in various states of repair.

Traffic accidents are one of the greatest dangers. Use extreme caution when on the road, as drivers are prone to excessive speeding and reckless behavior. Other road hazards include: poor lighting, poorly maintained city roads with large potholes, failure to obey traffic signals, presence of pedestrians and livestock/animals on roadways, slower moving vehicles on the road, large trucks delivering heavy cargo frequently flipping over (usually caused by brake failure), drunk drivers, vehicles park on the roadside without using emergency flashers/warning signs, drivers texting/talking on cell phones (illegal), and extreme weather (heavy fog, rain, hail).

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Keep automobile doors locked and windows rolled up. Do not roll down your window if someone approaches your vehicle. Ignore persons outside your vehicle and drive away if you feel uncomfortable. Always wear your seatbelt. Keep belongings out of plain view. While idling at a traffic light (called a robot) or stop sign, leave adequate space between your vehicle and the one in front of you so that you can quickly depart should the need arise. Park in well-illuminated areas (parking lots with security guards), as the number of carjackings/break-ins of unattended vehicles increased drastically from 2013 to 2015. Carjackers have the technical capability to block a vehicle's remote locking mechanism signal, leaving the vehicle unlocked after you remotely "lock" it. Double check that your vehicle door(s) are locked if you use a remote locking device.

Do not stop your vehicle if you encounter barriers (rocks, logs) in the road. This is a technique used by robbers in Swaziland and South Africa to force vehicles to stop. Either drive around the barriers or turn around. Do not stop to assess the situation. Rather, report the situation to the police.

Swazi traffic police use marked police vehicles and are always in uniform. If travelers are uncertain of the legitimacy of a police vehicle, signal to them that you are aware of their presence by turning on your hazard lights, travel at a safe speed, and pull off into a well-lighted public area or proceed to the nearest police station.

Public Transportation Conditions

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Local ground transportation, known as kombis, are minibuses that transport passengers around cities and from town to town. Every year, there are serious, fatal accidents involving kombis. Many of the kombis are overcrowded and lack proper safety equipment (seat belts, headlights). Kombi drivers are known to be reckless, make frequent unauthorized stops to pick up passengers, and speed from one stop to the next.

Never hail a taxi that already has passenger(s). If you take a taxi, ensure it is a reputable taxi.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

In 2015, there were no acts of terrorism in Swaziland and no known terrorist organizations. Through the Swazi Suppression of Terrorism Act of 2008, the government deemed several local political organizations as terrorist groups.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

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Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Civil unrest is limited to public protests. Civil servant demonstrations and strikes are fairly common. These demonstrations, which are widely advertised in local media, are usually in response to labor/political disputes. One particularly violent protest by sugarcane workers resulted in thousands of dollars in property damage and police vehicles being overturned.

When a demonstration is pending, the Royal Swaziland Police Service (RSPS) is called out to monitor. Americans are cautioned to stay away from demonstrations, as the police use force to control and disperse protestors; teargas and rubber bullets (shot at close range) are the most common forms of crowd control. Police do not distinguish between innocent bystanders and protestors, and the possibility of becoming a collateral casualty should be of concern to anyone in close proximity to a demonstration.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

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During the summer season, torrential downpours can cause severe damage to homes and infrastructure. Thunderstorms produce winds strong enough to rip roofs off buildings. Extremely strong winds tore the roof off the Central Bank of Swaziland.

As of early 2016, Swaziland was experiencing a severe drought, and water rationing was being conducted in Mbabane.

Drug-related Crimes

Drugs, especially dagga (marijuana), are present. Dagga is grown throughout Swaziland by small-time farmers primarily as a cash crop. Occasionally, passengers are arrested attempting to smuggle relatively small amounts of other drugs (heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines) through the international airport or Swaziland's porous borders.

Police Response

Police response to incidents is slow, if at all, unless the police are in the general area where the incident occurred. Police consider a 30-minute response time adequate, even in urban areas. Police are generally willing to assist but often lack the transportation and resources to properly respond to, and investigate, crimes.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

U.S. citizens are advised to call the American Citizens Services at the U.S. Embassy at +268-2404-6441.

Crime Victim Assistance

Victims of any crime are encouraged to report the incident to local authorities. Without proper documentation of an incident, the chances of recovering stolen items or arresting the suspects are minimal. Lack of a police report will hamper the U.S. Embassy's ability to work with the police on your behalf.

Emergency: 999 and 9999 (The response time is usually long, and callers may be redirected to other police offices for assistance.)

Hhohho District +268-2404-3022/7996/3023

Lubombo District +268-2343-4422

Manzini District +268-2505-2504/2861/2591

Shiselweni District +268-2207-8226/7

Emergency Domestic Violence: 975

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Phone numbers/lines change from time to time – sometimes as often as twice year -- and calls to police stations occasionally go unanswered.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are limited throughout Swaziland and emergency medical response capabilities (including ambulance transport) are almost non-existent. For advanced care, U.S. citizens often choose to go to South Africa where better facilities and specialists exist.

Most prescription drugs are available locally or can be imported from South Africa, but travelers are advised to bring sufficient quantities of their own required medication. A doctor's note describing the medication may be helpful if questioned by authorities. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report, "Traveling with Medications."

Emergency: 999

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Although the Mbabane Clinic in the capital is small, it is well-equipped and well-staffed for

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minor procedures, as is the Manzini Clinic in Matsapha.

Mbabane

Mbabane Clinic

Tels: +268-2404-2423/5 or +268-2404-7016

Government Hospital

Tel: +268-2404-2111

Manzini

Mkhiwa Clinic

Tel: +268-2505-9299/3

Manzini Clinic

Tel: +268-2505-7430

RFM Hospital

Tel: +268-2508-4000

Available Air Ambulance Services

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Trauma Link

Tel: +268-7606-0911/0912

Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious illnesses/injuries often require travelers to be medically evacuated where adequate medical attention is available. Such "medevac" services are very expensive and are generally available only to travelers who either have travel insurance that covers medevac services or who are able to pay for the service in advance. The cost for medical evacuation may range from US\$40,000-\$200,000.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Tuberculosis is an increasingly serious health concern. For further information, please consult the CDC's information on TB.

Malaria is present in the lowveld in eastern Swaziland.

You can find detailed information on vaccinations and other health precautions on the CDC website. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the World

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Health Organization (WHO) website, which contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information. For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/swaziland.htm>.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Embassy maintains a list of U.S. Wardens, NGOs, businesses, faith-based organizations, and local schools with U.S. students and meets at least annually. However, there is no formal OSAC Country Council. Organizations meeting the OSAC requirements for membership may contact the Regional Security Officer for additional information:

RSO Mark Richardson

Tel: +268-2404-6441 ext. 2239

Email: RichardsonME@state.gov

ARSO Kathryn Huffman

Tel: +268 2404-6441 ext. 2102

Email: HuffmanKE@state.gov

To reach the OSAC Africa team, please email OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

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Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

7th Floor, Central Bank Building

Mahlukohla Street

Mbabane, Swaziland

Business hours: Mon-Thurs 07:30-17:00; Fri 07:30-13:30

There is normally a 6-12 hour time difference between the U.S. and Swaziland. 6 hours later from the Eastern Time Zone during the summer daylight savings time, to 12 hours later than the standard local time in Hawaii.

Embassy Contact Numbers

U.S. Embassy Operator (during business hours): +268-2404-6441

Duty officer after hours (emergencies only): +268-7602-8414

Regional Security Office: +268-2404-6441 ext 2239

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

Embassy Guidance

A passport is required. Visas are not required for tourists and business travelers arriving in Swaziland for short visits (less than 30 days) on standard U.S. passports. Travelers visiting Swaziland generally enter through South Africa. Visit the website of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Swaziland at 1712 New Hampshire Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20009; phone (202) 234-5002, for the most current visa information.

Travelers to South Africa should have several unstamped visa pages in their passports upon each entry into the country. South Africa requires two unstamped visa pages, excluding amendment pages, to enter the country. Visitors who do not have enough blank visa pages in their passport risk being denied entry and returned to the U.S. at their own expense. South Africa has passed new legislation requiring additional documentation for children traveling to/from/through the country. Travelers are strongly encouraged to review these new travel requirements.

Travelers who are transiting South Africa should note that if they are transiting a country with yellow fever (U.S.-Johannesburg flight that transits Senegal, potentially even when passengers remain on the plane), they must have proof of yellow fever vaccination.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors should always be aware of their surroundings and maintain visual/physical contact with their belongings.

Although walking around populated areas in groups of two or more during daylight hours is generally safe, walking around at night at all is strongly discouraged.

Whether you are residing in a hotel or at a residence, ensure that the doors and windows are locked, particularly at night. Perimeter walls, security guards, window grilles, and centrally monitored alarm systems supported by security response teams are essential for ensuring the safety of residents and homes. Although residential guard dogs commonly serve as a deterrent, they should not be a resident's only line of defense.

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