



## Mongolia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Rape/Sexual Violence; Financial Security; Eco-terrorism; Winter weather; Oil & Energy; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Counterfeiting; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Surveillance; Racial Violence/Xenophobia; Drug Trafficking; Employee Health Safety

East Asia & Pacific > Mongolia; East Asia & Pacific > Mongolia > Ulaanbaatar

6/7/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

### Crime Threats

The general crime rate in Mongolia is below the U.S. national average. Crime in Mongolia has increased in recent years, although it may be leveling off. Mongolia's National Police Agency's (NPA) statistics show that overall incidents of crime in 2015 had increased by 1.6 percent for all of Mongolia and 4.3 percent for Ulaanbaatar over 2014. Reports of violent crime, however, were generally lower than for 2014.

(see attached for Countrywide Crime chart)

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The NPA reported the following countrywide statistics among the major crime categories (as defined by NPA standards) for 2015:

## **INDEX**

**2013**

**2014**

**Change (%)**

**2014**

**2015**

**Change (%)**

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Murder

204

211

**3.4%**

211

204

**-7.7%**

Rape

344

300

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**-12.8%**

300

279

**-7.0%**

Very Serious Crimes

434

529

**21.9%**

529

515

**-2.6%**

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Infliction of serious bodily injury

7,564

8,132

**7.5%**

8,132

8,064

**-0.8%**

Theft (overall)

1,574

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1,686

**7.1%**

1,686

1,561

**-7.4%**

Robbery

620

686

**10.6%**

686

537

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**-21.7%**

Pickpocketing

426

586

**37.6%**

586

621

**6.0%**

Fraud

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1,231

1,843

**49.7%**

1,843

2,067

**12.2%**

Reports of crime in Ulaanbaatar's city center "Sukhbaatar" district increased by 18.9 percent over 2014. Reported thefts in Sukhbaatar conspicuously deviated from the national downward trend although violent crime in the district decreased, consistent with broader observations. The Sukhbaatar district contains many of Mongolia's government institutions and foreign diplomatic missions and is the site of many of Ulaanbaatar's tourist attractions, including the expansive Sukhbaatar Square and expatriate-oriented restaurants and hotels.

(see attached for Ulaanbaatar Crime Reports chart)

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Street crime remains common in Mongolia, with victims seemingly targeted at random. Crimes committed against foreigners have increased roughly in proportion to the overall increase in crime. Locations that attract thieves include the Narantuul covered market (the “Black Market”); the State Department store (a name derived from Mongolia’s socialist past); the Mercury food market shopping center; the Seoul Street restaurant/bar district; the section of Baga Toiruu (Little Ring Road) between the Urgoo Cinema and Ulaanbaatar Hotel; and crowded sporting events.

There are no criminal provisions specifically covering sexual harassment, though in December Parliament passed a law criminalizing domestic violence and sent it to the President for signature; that law would be effective September 1, 2016. The Law on Gender Equality in Mongolia includes a definition of sexual harassment and charges employers with taking steps to combat sexual harassment in the workplace, but the criminal code includes no penalties for sexual harassment. In 2015, according to NPA statistics, reported sexual assaults declined nationwide by seven percent from 2014.

Most local businesses accept credit cards, but credit cards issued by banks outside Mongolia, especially cards without embedded computer chips, may be rejected. Credit cards issued by Mongolian banks are widely accepted, especially in Ulaanbaatar. In spite of the rapid increase in credit card use, crimes involving credit card fraud are not prevalent. Travelers will find that acceptance of international credit cards is quite common in Ulaanbaatar but extremely limited in the countryside. ATMs are becoming common at Ulaanbaatar hotels, major banks, some restaurants, and supermarkets. Hotels and banks provide official currency exchange, and exchanging relatively small amounts of major foreign currencies in Ulaanbaatar is quite easy. Mongolian Tugrik (MNT) are not easily exchangeable outside Mongolia.

The police report that there are no known organized criminal groups/gangs operating in Mongolia. However, in September 2013, three gunmen associated with the environmental

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organization "Fire Nation" entered the Government House in central Ulaanbaatar north of the main square and fired rounds from hunting rifles in protest of an environmental bill under review by Parliament. Members of the group were also held responsible for planting an explosive device that did not detonate in a high-rise building across from the main square. The perpetrators were arrested and imprisoned. Incidents such as these are extremely rare.

## Areas of Concern

There are no regions recognized as especially dangerous or restricted. However, due to extreme weather and the absence of roads in much of rural Mongolia, travelers are urged to use GPS and to avoid traveling outside of Ulaanbaatar or other city centers after dark.

## Transportation-Safety Situation

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Driving in Ulaanbaatar is hectic and dangerous. The annual increase in the number of motor vehicles far exceeds the pace at which new, improved roads are brought into service; this has given Ulaanbaatar some of the worst traffic jams in the world.

Mongolia may be the only country in the world that has a high proportion of right-side-drive motor vehicles navigating uniformly right-lane-drive roadways, which leads to a very high

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incidence of head-on collisions on high-speed, two-lane roadways outside congested Ulaanbaatar. A recurring trend involves the driver of a right-side-drive vehicle attempting to pass a slower-moving vehicle. Due to limited visibility, the driver is unable to see the oncoming vehicle until nearly fully entering the passing lane, which is often too late to avoid a collision.

The vast majority of local drivers and passengers do not wear seatbelts, inevitably increasing vehicular accident injuries and fatalities. Mongolian drivers often disregard traffic laws and drive wherever there is an opening in traffic, even if that means jeopardizing the safety of other drivers. This haphazard style of urban driving leads to very frequent, typically minor, accidents. Drivers in the countryside should still exercise caution, as the decrease in traffic can still allow for high speed accidents.

(see attached for Traffic-related fatalities chart)

Vehicle Hit and Run (failure of driver to provide emergency aid to the injured)

**2013**

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**2014**

**2015**

Ulaanbaatar

552

360

**413**

Bayangol district

124

75

76

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## Bayanzurkh district

103

77

60

## Sukhbaatar district

110

48

51

## Songinokhairkhan district

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94

70

110

Khan Uul district

40

37

32

Chingeltei district

71

42

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72

Baganuur district

6

3

9

Bagakhangai district

0

1

0

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Nalaikh district

4

7

3

**Countrywide**

**681**

**533**

**565**

Driving at night is extremely dangerous outside of Ulaanbaatar due to poor road conditions, reduced visibility, drunk drivers, harsh winter weather, and limited emergency response

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services.

Despite a “zero-tolerance” law for drinking and driving, drunk drivers are a serious threat with alcohol-related accidents sharply increasing during holiday periods, especially during end of year celebrations.

Mongolian law specifies that drivers not move their vehicles after an accident until police have arrived and investigated. Foreign drivers may be subject to a less than fair accident investigation by responding traffic police. Frequently, foreign drivers have complained of biased investigations where the foreign driver is assigned fault, even when the evidence suggests a local driver was likely responsible.

Travelers are strongly advised to avoid renting a vehicle without a reputable local driver and seat belts. Cellular phone coverage outside of the major cities is spotty at best; travelers may consider a satellite phone if planning to stay in remote regions. Foreign visitors wishing to travel outside of Ulaanbaatar (or other sizeable cities) should make travel/transportation arrangements through recognized, reputable travel agencies/operators.

Pedestrians should exercise extreme caution when crossing streets. Vehicles routinely do not yield to pedestrians, even at crosswalks, and are known to ignore red lights. Pedestrians have also been killed or seriously injured falling through open manholes or by falling debris from construction sites. Pedestrians must be extremely cautious around Ulaanbaatar’s construction sites.

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## Public Transportation Conditions

Marked taxi cabs are considered safe and reliable. Mongolians very commonly hitchhike with the expectation that private drivers will be compensated with 1,000 Tugrik, the generally accepted rate for short trips within the city. Individuals who have used unregistered cabs or private vehicles, however, have reported being robbed and physically assaulted. One confrontation in 2014 erupted after a disagreement over a fare and ended with the victims requiring treatment at a hospital. Visitors are strongly advised against adopting this practice.

Although bus transportation is generally considered safe, overcrowding to dangerous levels remains a concern. Foreigners using public buses are at serious risk for theft, especially pickpocketing. Women have reported instances of inappropriate physical contact on buses.

A north-south railroad line connects Ulaanbaatar to Russia (Ulan Ude-Irkutsk) and China (Erlian-Beijing). Rail travel is considered safe, and no major accidents were reported in 2015.

## Aviation/Airport Conditions

Mongolia is a landlocked country with limited transportation connections. International flights from Chinggis Khaan International Airport (ULN), just outside of Ulaanbaatar, provides year-round service to Berlin, Moscow, Istanbul, Seoul, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Beijing. Air travel is generally considered safe, and no major accidents were reported in 2015.

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## **Terrorism Threat**

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

### **Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns**

There have been no reports of terrorist attacks or indigenous terrorist groups operating in Mongolia. Authorities are cognizant that porous borders might allow transnational terrorists to enter the country and closely monitor visitors from countries that are believed to host transnational terrorists.

Due to the continued threat of terrorist attacks against U.S. government institutions, U.S. citizens overseas are encouraged to remain vigilant regarding their surroundings and to exercise caution. Americans should avoid large crowds, keep a low profile, and vary routes and times of all routine travel.

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

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Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Mongolia is generally a peaceful country with few incidents of political violence, violent demonstrations, or civil unrest. The political process is relatively stable and allows for expression of dissenting views. Presidential elections were held without violence or civil unrest in June 2013.

#### Civil Unrest

Peaceful protests do occur in the center of Ulaanbaatar, but the turn-out is usually small. There is a vocal resource nationalist movement that has staged small protests targeting international mining consortia, with fringe elements occasionally vandalizing foreign-owned businesses. Large-scale demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience have been uncommon since the country rejected Soviet-style socialism in 1990.

#### Post-specific Concerns

##### Environmental Hazards

The most recent earthquake of significance occurred in 1957 in the west. Seismic activity is low but does exist in Ulaanbaatar. In October 2015, three earthquakes registering in the 4.0 range were felt in Ulaanbaatar within a few days. According to the Mongolian National

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Emergency Agency (NEMA), seismic activity has increased in the past few years. There are concerns that even a relatively minor quake would be devastating to Ulaanbaatar due the number of apartment buildings built to low standards.

Mongolia becomes bitterly cold in the winter. From late-September to mid-May, temperatures fall well below 0F and settle in the -10sF for extended periods. Numerous deaths have been attributed to the harsh cold; a vehicle breakdown in an isolated location can quickly become a life threatening event.

#### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

There is no shortage of fuel due to the close proximity of coal mines outside of Ulaanbaatar. However, in the mid-1990s, power plants were on the brink of collapse from a lack of financial and technical support. Foreign donor assistance helped to refurbish the plants. Approximately 70 percent of the city's electricity and 50 percent of the city's heat is supplied by one power plant that needs renovation. The continued economic growth and resulting demand for power has placed severe strains on the city's power grid. Plans to add to generation capacity have yet to be finalized. A failure in this power plant would have catastrophic consequences for the residents of Ulaanbaatar during the winter.

#### Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Mongolia generally has an excellent record of protecting American trademarks, copyrights, and patents; however, tight resources limit the government's ability to act. In most cases,

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when the U.S. Embassy conveys a complaint from a rights holder to the authorities, they quickly investigate the complaint. If the government judges that an abuse has occurred, it will (and has), in every case so far, seized the pirated products under administrative powers granted by law. Pirated software and media remain problematic due largely to the sheer magnitude of material being distributed and general public acceptance of pirating.

## Privacy Concerns

Although there is no systemic government infringement on personal privacy, visitors should have no expectation of privacy (in public or private places). Hotel rooms may be accessed by hotel staff without the occupants' consent or knowledge, and visitors should take precautions to safeguard sensitive, personal, and/or proprietary information.

## Personnel Background Concerns

Though relatively infrequent, physical assaults against foreigners in Ulaanbaatar occur and, if not random, are often motivated by anti-foreigner sentiment or the expectation of financial gain. Many assaults have occurred during the evening hours and may have been committed by intoxicated/emotionally disturbed persons. There is a small nationalist, criminal element that does target foreign nationals. This group feeds on the fear that foreign businesses will exploit Mongolians and the country's natural resources. Foreigners have reported being subjected to unprovoked, serious physical assaults, even at some of the more upscale night clubs. Foreign national males are most at risk from these attacks/threats during the late evening hours at nightclubs and bars, especially if they are in the company of Mongolian women.

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Additionally, nationalist groups sometimes mistake Asian-Americans for nationals of China, Japan, Korea, or Vietnam, who are also known targets of such groups. In general, Mongolians are not well-disposed to ethnic Chinese.

Women are urged to be cautious when traveling alone, in isolated areas, and in situations in which alcohol consumption is prevalent. Women traveling alone may face instances of inappropriate and persistent sexual advances, often in concert with excessive alcohol use by males, particularly during the evening hours at night clubs or in bars.

### Drug-related Crimes

Drug addiction and trafficking are a minor, but growing, problem, as disposable incomes continue to grow. Mongolian National Police view drug trafficking as a serious threat, and foreign travelers in the possession of drugs can expect an uncertain, opaque judicial process if charges are filed. Conviction of possession of even so-called "soft" illicit drugs can lead to harsh penalties, including lengthy imprisonment.

### Police Response

The National Police Agency (NPA) continues to improve its emergency response system and has the ability in most instances to pinpoint the location of emergency calls, including those

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from a cell phone. The NPA does not have English speakers on duty at emergency dispatch call centers. Ulaanbaatar does not have a dedicated tourist police unit; nor does it have a centralized incident reporting system.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If detained or arrested, Americans should contact the U.S. Embassy as soon as possible. Most police officers are unaware of a foreign national's right to request consular assistance after an arrest, so the national may need to request multiple times to speak to a consular official. Foreigners subjected to a criminal investigation or complaint may be detained or be unable to leave the country pending legal proceedings even for petty crimes (shoplifting). Retaining legal counsel for even minor offenses is strongly encouraged, as the legal system is complicated for non-citizens to navigate. Foreigners may be required to retain and pay for the services of registered translators when they are victims of reported crimes or accused of crimes. The Embassy maintains lists of interpreters and English-speaking lawyers at: [http://mongolia.usembassy.gov/lawyer\\_list.html](http://mongolia.usembassy.gov/lawyer_list.html)

## Crime Victim Assistance

Visitors should report crimes to the police district responsible for the involved area. The emergency lines are 102 for the police department, 103 for a medical emergency, and 105 for the fire department.

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American victims of a crime in Mongolia should contact the local police and the U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar. The American Citizen Services section at the U.S. Embassy can:

Replace a stolen passport,

Help you find appropriate medical care if you are the victim of a violent crime,

Put you in contact with the appropriate authorities and/or contact family members/friends, and

Help you understand the local criminal justice process and provide you a list of local attorneys.

Local authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting crimes.

### Police/Security Agencies

The primary organization charged with maintaining peace and security is the National Police Agency.

Mongolia maintains and supports a military-oriented border police force and takes any attempted illegal crossing seriously. Travelers attempting to enter/depart Mongolia illegally can expect to be detained and interrogated.

### Medical Emergencies

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Few, if any, Mongolian hospitals meet Western standards. Ambulances are unreliable, and medical facilities in the countryside are substandard. While many over-the-counter drugs (cold, fever, painkiller medications) are available, visitors should consider bringing their own medications. Additionally, brand name drugs and medical supplies can be hard to find and are frequently out of stock at public hospitals. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report, "Traveling with Medications." Visitors and tourists with chronic medical conditions should weigh the risks carefully because specialty medicines are unlikely to be found.

#### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

##### United Family Intermed Hospital

Chingisiin Street 41, Khan-Uul District 15, Factory 17040

Phone: 7000-0203/working hours, 7000-0103/afterhours

Website: [www.intermed.mn](http://www.intermed.mn)

United Family Intermed Hospital is the only private hospital available with a 24/7 emergency room. Ambulance services are available and can be requested by calling the hospital directly. The hospital opened in May 2014 and gained a solid reputation for providing sound, quality care. Nearly 85 percent of the medical providers speak some English. Diagnostic equipment is high quality, though the ability of medical personnel to make accurate diagnoses is not. The hospital director and the clinical nursing director are Americans. Payment is expected at the time of service. Outpatient services are available for OB/GYN, dermatology, dentistry, general practice, and physical therapy.

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## SOS International

Phone (English): (976-11) 464-325 (main office); (976) 9911-0335 (cell phone)

Phone (Mongolian): (976) 9191-3122 (cell phone)

SOS International – a private, for profit health care provider – opened its Ulaanbaatar clinic in 2004. The clinic is expensive and requires payment upon receipt of services. SOS International accepts MasterCard, Visa, or cash as payment for services rendered. It is important that your health insurance be up-to-date. Filing an insurance claim for reimbursement is the responsibility of the patient.

## Available Air Ambulance Services

SOS International provides air ambulance services. However, the facility does not have a dedicated air ambulance assigned to Ulaanbaatar International Airport. Contact SOS International in the U.S. at 1-800-523-6586 for advice. SOS International medical evacuation insurance can be purchased online at [www.internationalsos.com/buymembership](http://www.internationalsos.com/buymembership). A patient suffering a severe medical emergency would be stabilized and monitored at the Ulaanbaatar SOS facility or other local hospital until an air ambulance could be flown into Ulaanbaatar.

## Recommended Insurance Posture

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RSO highly recommends that foreign visitors/tourists purchase emergency medical evacuation insurance for the duration of their visit. Medical evacuation can cost up to \$100,000.

### CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

In the winter, the air quality in Ulaanbaatar is among the worst in the world. Air pollution levels often reach hazardous levels as a result of emissions from coal stoves, power plants, boilers, and vehicles. The poor air quality may trigger health problems (asthma, allergies, upper respiratory illnesses). Though the government is taking measures to reduce pollution, there has not been significant, overall improvement, as growing urbanization and an influx of residents overwhelms efforts to reduce emissions at the individual household level. Winter visitors should use custom-fitted N95-complaint particle masks if spending extended periods outdoors in Ulaanbaatar. In June 2015, the U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar launched an air quality monitoring program, providing real-time air quality index (AQI) readings via a website ([www.stateair.mn](http://www.stateair.mn)) and Twitter feed ([twitter.com/USEmbUBAir](https://twitter.com/USEmbUBAir)).

For vaccination and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
[http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/mongolia?s\\_cid=ncezid-dgmgq-travel-single-001](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/mongolia?s_cid=ncezid-dgmgq-travel-single-001).

### OSAC Country Council Information

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To reach OSAC's East Asia Pacific team, please email [OSACEAP@state.gov](mailto:OSACEAP@state.gov).

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

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Ulaanbaatar

Denver Street #3

11th Microdistrict

Ulaanbaatar 14190, Mongolia

### Embassy Contact Numbers

The U.S. Embassy can be contacted during business hours at (976) 7007-6001 and for after-hours emergencies at: (976) 7007-6066.

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

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## Embassy Guidance

Visitors should always review travel alerts before traveling. For Mongolia-specific travel requirements & visa information please visit:  
<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/mongolia.html>.

Foreign citizens, to include U.S. citizens, have been subjected to exit bans for a variety of reasons (pending civil disputes, pending criminal investigation, or immigration violations). Once an exit ban is issued, it may not be lifted until the dispute is resolved administratively, a court has rendered a decision, or the office that requested the ban requests it be absolved.

## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victims

### Scams

Scams to take money from foreign drivers are common in Ulaanbaatar. The most typical is the car washing scam and occurs during the warmer months. Local males will observe drivers as they park their vehicles near restaurants and shopping centers. Once the driver is out of sight, they will begin washing the vehicle and demand money for their unsolicited service upon the driver's return. In some cases, the car washer will block the driver from entering his vehicle if he refuses to pay. The areas where this scam most frequently occurs are near the State Department store; along Seoul Street; and near the UB shopping mart, behind the Blue Sky Hotel; and next to the Chojijn Lama museum. In most cases, using the remote car alarm and

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plenty of loud noise will cause the unsolicited car washers to depart the scene.

## Situational Awareness Best Practices

Pay attention to your surroundings and be aware of what is around you. Persons distracted by phone calls or music are more likely to be targeted by pickpockets. Visitors walking around Ulaanbaatar are advised to use added caution when wearing backpacks, as they may attract pickpockets. Visitors should keep wallets in front pants pockets and carry only the money they need. Passports and valuables should be left in a hotel safe or other secure location. Visitors should be especially cautious at night, on public transportation, and in crowded public places. Stay away from isolated areas or places that are not well-illuminated. Be extra cautious during the night; avoid walking alone after consuming alcohol.

Watch for unusual body language or facial cues that indicate hostile intent/stalking. Emotionally disturbed persons and persons intending to engage in fights are especially apt to target people who draw undue attention to themselves by flaunting material possessions or by acting in loud manner. Always create distance between yourself and persons who are intoxicated or acting in an unusual manner, especially when they are in groups. Intoxicated persons can be unpredictable and sometimes violent. Do not try to stop and communicate with someone who is trying to get your attention or verbally insult you. Although confronting an aggressor with force is sometimes an appropriate self-defense action, you should first try to create distance. An aggressor may be armed or working with other individuals who might be trying to distract you. A physical confrontation should be your last resort when trying to avoid being harmed.

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Travelers should be extremely alert when using ATMs in public places and wary of anyone following them or striking up a friendly conversation in English after using one. Travelers are advised to bring newer or uncirculated U.S. dollars. Banks and currency exchanges often refuse to convert creased or heavily circulated currency.

The U.S. Embassy encourages U.S. citizens in Mongolia to exercise good judgment and consume alcohol responsibly when enjoying a night out. Avoid consuming “homemade” or counterfeit alcohol. Do not overdo it or try to compete with locals by matching their alcohol consumption. Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to accidental falls or leave a person more susceptible to criminal advances or to extreme weather exposure in the winter. This level of inebriation can lead to cultural misunderstandings, ruined business relations, or worse. It is not culturally offensive to decline alcohol politely. For more information, please refer to OSAC’s Report, “Shaken: The Don’ts of Alcohol Abroad.”

Be wary of overly friendly persons inviting you to isolated or unfamiliar locations. Never invite someone you are unfamiliar with into your place of residence, especially when staying in the countryside or “ger” camps.

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