



China 2016 Crime & Safety Report: Guangzhou

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Surveillance; Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Assault; Cyber; Counterfeiting; Separatist violence; Religious Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Landslides and mudslides; Hurricanes; Employee Health Safety; Economic Espionage; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping

East Asia & Pacific > China; East Asia & Pacific > China > Guangzhou

7/6/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

The income disparity that exists in Chinese society has been a source of social friction and has been identified as a root cause of much of the economic crime experienced in Guangzhou.

Crime Threats

Guangzhou, while one of the largest cities in the world, is generally safe when compared with other urban areas of similar size. Police, security services, and private security guards are heavily present and serve to deter most serious crime; however, petty crimes do occur with

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some regularity. This includes pickpocketing, bag snatching, credit card fraud, and various financial scams that often target foreigners.

The most common criminal incidents are economic. Victims are often targeted because of their perceived wealth. Pickpocketing on public transportation (the subway, on buses, in shopping areas, at tourist sites) is quite common. At tourist sites, thieves are generally more interested in cash and will abandon credit cards. In shopping areas, both cash and credit cards are sought. Thieves have also targeted cell phones, cameras, and other electronics.

Confidence schemes are common, and criminals often view foreigners as wealthy and gullible targets. Americans who are approached on the street or contacted by email should remember that offers that sound too good to be true often are.

Violent crime is less common but does occur. There was an attempted burglary of a consulate residence in 2013, during which the burglar was armed with a club.

Violent crime affecting the expatriate community most often occurs in bars and night clubs. Statistically, more crimes of opportunity transpire during early morning hours; for example, individuals who frequent bars, nightclubs and similar establishments are more likely to be involved in physical altercations after midnight. While the legal age for consuming alcohol is 18, most establishments do not require identification. Some bars are overcrowded, and safety standards are not routinely enforced. Prostitutes and drugs are known to be present in some clubs and Karaoke bars.

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Cybersecurity Issues

China is known for having sophisticated capabilities to target Westerners using spear phishing, targeting of mobile devices, and social networking manipulation.

Areas of Concern

The distribution of counterfeit Chinese currency is an issue in Guangzhou. Unsuspecting expatriates can be passed fraudulent notes at restaurants, stores, and in taxi cabs. Large numbers of 100 RMB and 50 RMB counterfeit notes continue to circulate, and even fake 20 RMB and 10 RMB (roughly US\$3 and 2 respectively) denominations are encountered as well.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

The physical road conditions in larger cities are generally good to excellent. Driving conditions in rural areas are usually poor. However, the roads in Guangzhou are extremely crowded, and many drivers are new to operating a motor vehicle. One must obtain a Chinese driver's license before driving in China. Drivers are often either overly cautious or aggressive, resulting in numerous accidents every day. Traffic laws are rarely adhered to, and policing is

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done remotely by video camera (mainly speed traps). Yielding to oncoming traffic/pedestrians and signaling one's intentions in advance is virtually unheard of. Traffic signals are absent at key locations, stop signs are non-existent, and road closures are poorly/not marked.

Commercial transportation accidents involving motorized vehicles are not uncommon. Trucks are often overloaded, and drivers are poorly trained. Poor driver training, overloaded buses, and the lack of safety checks are major contributors to accidents. Most accidents, however, are minor and are resolved on the scene. Cars must remain at the scene of an accident; do not pull off to the side of the road. In traffic accidents involving foreigners, the foreigner is often ruled at fault, regardless of the actual cause of the accident. The police should always be called, and people should not try to make unofficial agreements or argue with the other party regardless of who is responsible. If an accident involves a vehicle (or bicycle) and a pedestrian, the driver is assumed at fault. An ambulance responding to the scene will not take a pedestrian to the hospital unless the driver rides along to ensure payment for treatment.

Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation in major metropolitan areas is comparatively modern. Buses, subways, and taxis are of relatively new design. However, buses and trains are often crowded, with individuals employed specifically to "wedge" additional passengers into conveyances that are already loaded well beyond recommended capacity. Bus accidents are also common.

Marked taxi cabs are generally safe, inexpensive, and relatively reliable. While taxi cabs come in a variety of colors, they are easily identifiable. Personnel are encouraged to use the "two tone" cabs and not unofficial cabs. Passengers should insist that the cab driver use the meter.

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In a limited number of cases, Americans have reported having their luggage stolen and some have reported being charged exorbitant fares.

Uber has become increasingly popular, and many expatriates report using this service without incident. However, conflicts between Uber and other taxi services or law enforcement have been reported.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Luggage theft typically involves a taxi transporting individuals to or from the airport and the driver intentionally leaving the scene before bags have been unloaded.

There are numerous domestic and international flights out of Baiyun International Airport. In addition, there are two direct flights to the U.S. operated by China Southern Airlines (Los Angeles and New York). Like much of mainland China, flight delays are common at Baiyun International Airport.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

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Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

China's counterterrorism efforts remain primarily focused against the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM, aka East Turkestan Islamic Party (ETIP)), a Pakistan-based terrorist group that seeks independence for the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of northwest China. In public statements, government officials singled out the "Three Evils" (extremism, separatism, and terrorism) in Xinjiang as the main terrorist threat to the nation and characterized Uighur discontent as terrorist activity. Human rights organizations maintain that China used counterterrorism as a pretext to suppress Uighurs, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group that comprises a large percentage of the population of the XUAR.

The most notable terrorist activity affecting the official American presence in China occurred in the fall of 2010 when a Chinese national threw a Molotov cocktail at the U.S. Consulate Chengdu perimeter wall. The man was quickly apprehended by police. Though his motive was not clearly identified, local police assessed the man as mentally ill and released him. Authorities do not detain the mentally ill, even if they prove to be potentially dangerous. Several months after the incident at the Consulate, the same man threw burning oil on a group of European visitors in the center of Chengdu, severely injuring a young woman. Again, his motive was not clearly identified, and he was again released by the police.

On March 1, 2014, eight attackers armed with knives killed 29 people and wounded 143 at a train station in Kunming. The government labeled the incident a terrorist act and blamed Islamic extremists from Xinjiang. Four of the attackers were shot and killed, three were sentenced to death, and one was sentenced to life in prison.

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On May 1, 2014, two assailants set off explosives and stabbed passersby outside Urumqi's largest train station, killing themselves and one other person and injuring 79. Official media labeled it a terrorist attack by religious extremists.

On May 6, 2014, a knife wielding man wounded six, including one Westerner, at a train station in Guangzhou. However, the government did not label this as a terrorist event.

On May 22, 2014, two sport utility vehicles with five assailants drove into a busy market in Urumqi, the capital of XUAR, and threw explosives at shoppers. The vehicles crashed into shoppers and then collided with each other and exploded. The attack resulted in 43 dead, including four of the assailants, and wounded more than 90. One attacker was arrested. Official media labeled it a terrorist attack.

On September 30, 2015, a series of parcel bombs targeted public buildings in Liuzhou, Guaxi province, killing 17 people and wounding approximately 50 others. The government attributed the bombings to the actions a lone criminal.

Due to government control over media and information, threat information is often limited. As a result, many look to questionable online media outlets. This often generates unverifiable threat reporting.

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Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Protests outside of official U.S. facilities occasionally occur, but gatherings have remained small, very often a single individual, are relatively peaceful, and are generally focused against the Chinese government. Geo-political events often influence the occurrence of political demonstrations, but such demonstrations are rarely out of the control of security services.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

While Chinese society overall remains stable, there has been a noticeable uptick in civil unrest over certain issues. In 2015, labor disputes, environmental concerns, and contested land seizures gave rise to several large-scale protests in southern China. Protestors, regularly numbering in the thousands, often clashed with large numbers of riot police.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

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The government remains focused on maintaining social stability and preventing civil unrest over economic and social grievances. In recent years, the largest and most violent incidents have taken place in ethnic minority areas (Tibet, Xinjiang) where grievances over human rights abuses and discriminatory policies have resulted in spontaneous outbursts of violence targeting the government and Han Chinese interests. The frequency of large-scale violent incidents in Xinjiang has increased significantly in 2015. While the majority of violent incidents occur in Tibet and Xinjiang, the knife attack in Kunming illustrates that other areas are not immune to religious/ethnic violence. The government has been preventing people from crossing the border in Guangxi, and Vietnam has been increasingly remanding primarily Uighur border hoppers to Chinese custody.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Natural disasters are not uncommon.

A 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck Sichuan province in May 2008, killing more than 69,000 people and leaving nearly five million people homeless.

China's southern coast is subject to heavy rainfall, flooding, and monsoons, usually July-September. Southern China experienced massive mudslides in 2010, causing significant property damage. On December 20, 2015 a landslide in Shenzhen caused by construction

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waste and attributed to human negligence destroyed 33 buildings and killed approximately 69 people.

Super Typhoon Rammasun struck Hainan Island and Xuwen county in Guangdong province in July 2014, resulting in 14 deaths. Thousands were evacuated, and widespread property damage and power outage were reported on Hainan Island. It was the strongest storm to hit Hainan since 1973.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Accidents and fatalities continue to plague China's heavy industries. Worker safety and quality assurance are lacking.

On August 12, 2015, a series of explosions at a container storage station at the Port of Tianjin killed 173 people and injured nearly 800. The initial blast, caused by unknown hazardous materials in shipping containers in a warehouse, triggered a series of secondary explosions that continued until August 15.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

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Business travelers should be particularly mindful that trade secrets, negotiating positions, and other business sensitive information may be taken and shared with competitors, counterparts and/or Chinese regulatory/legal entities.

Additionally, counterfeit products are readily available, but it is illegal to import them into the U.S. U.S. Customs officials have the authority to seize suspect goods and impose fines on travelers caught attempting to enter the U.S. with counterfeit items.

Privacy Concerns

Visitors have no reasonable expectation of privacy in public or private locations. U.S. Embassy/Consulates regularly receive reports of human and technical monitoring of U.S. private businessmen and visiting U.S. citizens. The areas around U.S. and other foreign diplomatic facilities and residences are under overt physical and video surveillance ; dozens of security personnel are posted outside of facilities and around residences, while video cameras are visible throughout diplomatic quarters (offices and residential neighborhoods). Overt microphones and video cameras are common in taxis.

All hotel rooms and offices are considered to be subject to on-site or remote technical monitoring. Hotel rooms, residences, and offices may be accessed without the occupants' consent/knowledge. Elevators and public areas of housing compounds are also under continuous surveillance.

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Embassy/Consulate employees are warned not to discuss sensitive information in their homes, vehicles, or offices. Members of the private sector should take similar precautions to safeguard sensitive, personal, and/or proprietary information.

All means of communication are likely monitored. The government has access to the infrastructure operated by the limited number of Internet service providers (ISPs) and wireless providers. Wireless access to the Internet in major metropolitan areas is becoming more common. As such, the Chinese can more easily access official and personal computers. The government has publicly declared that it regularly monitors private e-mail and Internet browsing through cooperation with local ISPs. Some bloggers are subject to particular scrutiny as such activity is often carefully monitored and in some cases, depending upon the subject matter, blocked. Common Western social media websites, including Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter, are blocked.

Drug-related Crimes

The government is concerned about domestic drug use, and enforcement efforts are widespread. The government has been active in conducting drug busts in 2015 and seized an unprecedented amount of drugs. The government is also making examples of high-profile people ensnared in drug busts. Jackie Chan's son was arrested in a drug bust in Beijing in the summer of 2014 and was sentenced to jail time. Even so, drugs (marijuana, stimulants) are easily accessible to foreigners, especially around bars and night clubs frequented by expatriates.

Kidnapping Threat

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Kidnappings occur mostly over business disputes and might better be categorized as “unlawful detentions,” often in the office or hotel room of the victim. Victims are generally allowed to use their mobile phones (in order to arrange the resolution of the dispute) and should immediately call the police for assistance. Some local businesspeople who feel that they have been wronged by a foreign business partner may hire “debt collectors” to harass and intimidate the foreigner in hopes of collecting the debt. Foreign managers or company owners have been physically “held hostage” as leverage during dispute negotiations. In addition, travel bans have been placed on foreigners involved in business disputes, preventing them from leaving the country. The Embassy/Consulates have no legal or law enforcement authority and cannot get involved in private disputes nor give legal advice.

Police Response

Police response for foreign victims of crime depends upon the type of infraction, where it transpired, and the social status of the victim (private citizen, diplomat, VIP). Urban forces are better trained and equipped, especially in Guangzhou and other first-tier cities, where authorities spend millions of dollars on security-related infrastructure. Local police are somewhat effective at deterring crime. Most responses to alarms and emergency calls are sufficiently prompt if the police are informed that the victim is a Westerner or person of importance. In many cases, local police authorities will serve as a mediator between the victim and criminal to agree upon financial compensation; sometimes in lieu of jail time.

Travelers who do not have their passport with them may be taken in for questioning.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

China gives the police the authority to detain and deport foreigners for a wide variety of reasons. If an American is arrested, the U.S.-China Consular Convention requires authorities to notify the U.S. Embassy/nearest Consulate within four days. If a traveler holds the citizenship of any other country and entered China using a passport of that country, authorities are not required to notify the U.S. Embassy/Consulate. Typically, the police will not allow anyone other than a consular officer to visit the traveler during the initial detention period. Bail is rarely granted, and persons can be subject to detention for many months before being granted a trial.

Police officers have the right to assess fines on the scene of an incident. This is sometime perceived as soliciting for a bribe, but it is not.

Crime Victim Assistance

If U.S. citizens become the victim of a crime, they should contact the police by dialing 110 (English-language capabilities will vary significantly).

They may also contact American Citizen Services (ACS) at the Embassy/Consulate for assistance. ACS officers can recommend appropriate medical facilities, provide contact

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information for local attorneys, notify family members, and explain how to transfer funds.

Medical Emergencies

There are some Western-style medical facilities with international staff in Guangzhou, including a large modern hospital in Panyu, a southern district of Guangzhou. While the quality of care is improving, many still prefer to travel to Hong Kong, which is two hours by train, for even routine medical care.

Ambulances generally do not carry sophisticated medical equipment, and ambulance personnel may have little/no medical training. Traffic congestion can be severe, with no tradition of yielding to emergency vehicles. Therefore, injured or seriously ill Americans may be required to take taxis or other immediately available vehicles to the nearest major hospital rather than waiting for ambulances to arrive.

In rural areas, only rudimentary medical facilities are generally available. Medical personnel in rural areas are often poorly trained, have little medical equipment, or availability to medications. Rural clinics are often reluctant to accept responsibility for treating foreigners, even in emergency situations.

Payment of hospital and other expenses is the patient's responsibility.

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

International SOS maintains a 24-hour alarm center for visitors to China. SOS representatives will advise on the availability of care in most urban areas. Collect calls are accepted. Contact information is as follows:

Beijing: (inside China): 400-818-0767

(outside China): 86-10-6462-9100

Hong Kong: 852-2528-9900

USA: 215-942-8226

Available Air Ambulance Services

Air ambulance service varies by city.

International SOS is the main Western air ambulance provider along China's east coast.

MEDEX also provides regional air ambulance services; its representatives can be contacted via the Internet at <http://www.medexassist.com/>.

Recommended Insurance Posture

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Visitors are strongly encouraged to purchase medical evacuation insurance prior to traveling to China. Medical evacuation by air is expensive: US\$60,000-\$100,000 per flight depending upon the patient's condition and final medevac destination.

Before you travel, learn what medical services your health insurance will cover overseas. If your health insurance policy provides coverage outside the U.S., carry both your insurance policy identity card as proof of insurance and a claim form. Although many health insurance companies will pay "customary and reasonable" hospital costs abroad, very few will pay for your medical evacuation back to the U.S.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/china?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-double-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai all have active OSAC Country Councils. The initial point of contact for each Council is the Regional Security Officer:

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RSO Greg Levin (Beijing): LevingGJ@state.gov

RSO Julia Sweeney (Guangzhou): Sweeneyjp@state.gov

Questions should be directed to the Guangzhou Regional Security Office at 86-20-3814-5070.

RSO Sean McClanahan (Shanghai): McclanahanSL@state.gov

RSO Dax Moss (Shenyang): landrydl@state.gov

To reach OSAC's East Asia & Pacific team, please email OSACEAP@state.gov.

U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information

Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Consulate Guangzhou

43 Hua Jiu Lu, Zhujiang New Town, Guangzhou 510623

U.S. Consulate Guangzhou is open Mon-Fri 0800-1700. The Consulate is normally closed for U.S. Federal and Chinese holidays.

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Consulate Contact Numbers

Operator: 86-20-3814-5000

Regional Security Officer, Julia Sweeney: 86-20-3814-5006

Medical Unit: 86-20-3814-5884

Consular Affairs: 86-20-3814-5775

After hours emergencies, please call 86-139-2223-8711

Marine Post One: 3814-5444

Email: GuangzhouACS@state.gov

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

Nearby Posts

Embassy Beijing: <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/service.html>

Consulate Chengdu: <http://chengdu.usconsulate.gov/>

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Consulate Shanghai: <http://shanghai.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Shenyang: <http://shenyang.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Wuhan: <http://wuhan.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guidance

For the latest security and other information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs web site at <http://travel.state.gov>, where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings can be found, as well as important information for Americans who face emergencies abroad. U.S. citizens are reminded to register with the U.S. Embassy or closest U.S. Consulate by entering their travel itinerary and contact information at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>. In case of difficulties registering online, please contact the closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Crimes and scams most prevalent in Guangzhou involve street crime and counterfeit currency.

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Travelers are strongly encouraged to be aware of their surroundings. Continued vigilance is necessary to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. As a general rule, lesser developed areas in major cities have a higher rate of crime.

The Consulate recommends that visitors disperse money in more than one location on their person, taking care to separate small and large denominations. Men should place their wallets in front pockets, while women should drape the shoulder straps of purses across their body, keeping them in view and under positive control. Travelers with backpacks should maintain positive control and avoid placing expensive or hard to replace items in their bag.

Public payphones are becoming less common in urban areas. The Consulate recommends that long-term visitors purchase cellular telephones and that short-term travelers contact their cellular phone provider to determine if it provides coverage in both mainland China and Hong Kong.

Travelers are encouraged to make copies of their passport photo page and visa, as well as credit card numbers (to include telephone contact information in the event the card is stolen); these copies should be stored in their hotel or residence in the event the actual items are stolen.

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