



Fiji 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Assault; Rape/Sexual Violence; Drug Trafficking; Financial Security; Cyber; Maritime; Coup d'etats; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Hurricanes; Landslides and mudslides; Employee Health Safety; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Counterfeiting

East Asia & Pacific > Fiji; East Asia & Pacific > Fiji > Suva

7/11/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats

Crime is a continuing problem, the majority of which occurs in more densely populated urban areas. Although tourists, in general, and U.S. citizens, in particular, do not appear to be disproportionate victims of criminal activity, foreigners attract more attention than local citizens and are perceived to carry more money and, therefore, have been targeted in armed and unarmed robberies/assaults. These crimes have occurred with some frequency in certain areas of downtown Suva, less guarded tourist hotels, and remote regions of the country.

Most crimes are property crimes (robbery, burglary, petty theft). Street robberies and pickpocketing, especially those targeting tourists in western tourist towns, do occur. Criminals

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usually work in pairs but have operated in larger groups. Most assaults and robberies occur at night in/around restaurant/nightclubs. Often, the perpetrators and/or victims are intoxicated. Areas, including resorts, that are near impoverished settlements have a higher rate of burglaries. On this note, the settlements are ubiquitous and difficult to avoid.

Street crimes occur predominantly at night. Most burglaries are surreptitious and do not involve violence. There are very few firearms in Fiji; therefore, other weapons -- cane knives (similar to a machete), other sharp objects, or blunt instruments -- are used in the commission of crimes. It is common to see people carrying cane knives, as they are a routinely used agricultural tool. Many burglars do not hesitate to enter an occupied residence/business and have brandished weapons. In such cases, the burglaries appear to be planned and carried out by groups of 2-10 people (Although multiple assailants could meet the definition of a organized crime/gang, these groups lack an organizational hierarchy, long-term vision, and generally operate on an ad-hoc basis). Criminal elements have been known to break through security bars and solid wood doors. Some businesses are targeted for robbery due to lax cash handling procedures.

Violent crimes (assault, armed robbery), although less common than in many large metropolitan cities in the U.S., do occur. Sexual assaults are a concern for women traveling alone. The U.S. Embassy recorded three events in 2015.

There are some elements of Asian organized crime involved in illegal gambling, prostitution, and narcotics distribution. However, U.S. citizens/enterprise would not be directly affected unless they were involved in illegal activities or associated with such criminal groups. In recent years, outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) have attempted to establish a presence, but they have not caused any significant criminal-related issues.

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Cybersecurity Issues

Fiji has increasing cyber security concerns in regard to ATM/credit card scams. In 2015, there was a noticeable increase in the use of ATM skimmers. Most of the skimmers are easily spotted, but many people fail to recognize them.

E-mail and social media fraud schemes are also increasing; these scams range from romance schemes to variations of the Nigerian fraud scams.

Other Areas of Concern

Hotel beaches, while public by law, are accessed mainly by hotel guests and are generally safe. Beaches, particularly those in less frequently-trafficked areas, should be avoided after dark.

Visitors wishing to travel to tribal villages should check with local authorities for permission before making arrangements. If visiting a tribal village, visitors should become familiar with local customs prior to the visit.

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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions in urban areas are generally fair; rural area conditions can be poor. In both areas, unfenced livestock, stray pets, unwary pedestrians, and numerous large potholes make driving dangerous and particularly hazardous during nighttime hours. Drivers are urged to make an extraordinary effort to drive defensively.

Due to increased number of police vehicles, the enforcement of traffic laws has become more frequent but is still minimal at best.

Visitors should limit driving outside of the cities after dark. If driving, keep your doors locked and wear seat belts. Park in illuminated, secure areas and do not leave items of value in plain view or in an unlocked car. Street thieves commonly walk a line of parked cars to locate an unlocked one.

Public Transportation Conditions

Due to frequent, and sometimes violent, crime directed against taxi drivers, travelers are advised not to allow taxis to pick up other passengers while en route and not to enter a taxi

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that already possess other passengers. In addition, many taxis lack seatbelts and are in poor mechanical condition. When using a taxi, use a reputable taxi service.

Some mini-bus, bus, and taxi drivers drive recklessly and do not always adhere to traffic laws. There have been reports of some drivers operating public conveyances while under the influence of alcohol/kava. Many of the buses are older models, and there were several reports in 2013 and 2015 of buses catching fire. There were no reports of bus fires in 2014.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The airports are relatively free of crime, but there have been reports of items being stolen from checked baggage. This trend was less significant in 2015 compared to previous years.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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There are no known indigenous terrorist groups operating in Fiji. Fiji is a non-aligned country with no significant enemies and is not targeted by any known radical groups. There is no known localized terrorist threat in Fiji.

Government and community leaders have stated their support for the U.S. efforts in the Global War on Terrorism. Although the Fiji Military Forces has participated in UN peacekeeping operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and numerous Fijian nationals have served as private contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan, there have been no known specific threats directed against Fiji from international or transnational terrorist groups. No known international or transnational terrorists groups operate in Fiji. However, the threat from transnational terrorism cannot be ruled out because of the porous borders and deficiencies in the immigration system. The police actively investigate any suspected terrorist activity and generally share terrorist threat information with the Embassy and other diplomatic missions. Fiji developed an international terrorism unit in late 2010. This unit is very active in investigating elements with possible terrorist links.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

In December 2006, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) overthrew the democratically-elected government and installed Commodore Voreqe "Frank" Bainimarama as prime minister.

On September 17, 2014, Fiji held its first national democratic election since the coup. Prime Minister Bainimarama's Fiji First party won 59 percent of the 496,364 votes cast, and he was sworn in as the democratically-elected prime minister. Fiji's 50-member parliament is comprised of 32 seats for Fiji First, 15 seats for SODELPA, and three seats for NFP. The

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elections were deemed credible by the international community. A Multinational Observer Group (MOG) co-led by Australia, Indonesia, and India sent more than 90 observers to polling stations. Nine U.S. observers participated in the MOG's efforts and supported the MOG's conclusion that elections were credible and broadly reflected the will of the Fijian people. Fiji has taken notable steps in returning to a democratic country.

Despite this progress, Fiji is still emerging from the legacy of its coup-era government policies. The Bainimarama government has made efforts to court international investors and has prioritized social stability. International investors must conduct sufficient due diligence to assess judicial transparency, government accountability, and avenues for recourse under the law. Political stability and accountability should increase as the government continues on its path of democracy.

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Avoid political or large gatherings of protestors.

Penalties for seditious acts and encouragement of political violence are severe. In 2011, the Viti Revolutionary Front promised political violence and claimed responsibility for the burning of two police buildings and painting of anti-government graffiti around Fiji. Alleged members of the group who conducted the burning of the buildings were brought to trial and imprisoned. The alleged members responsible for the graffiti have still not gone to trial and have been

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released on bail. Although daily life appears to be calm, history indicates civil unrest could erupt with little advance notice.

There were two peaceful protests in 2013. Several protestors were detained for violating the decree against having signs that were critical of the government. No one was criminally charged or harmed during these detentions.

In 2014, there were several gatherings that some could be construed as protests. However, these events were permitted by the government, and no one was arrested or detained.

In 2015, several individuals were arrested for allegedly planning subversive activities and are in the judicial system. This group is assessed as having the desire but not the means to present a legitimate threat.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Fiji is subject to many natural disasters: cyclones, earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, landslides.

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Although the probability of a major earthquake or tsunami occurring during a particular trip is remote, small-scale earthquakes have occurred. There were two major earthquakes that hit New Zealand in 2010. In 1953, an earthquake triggered a tsunami that killed three people in Fiji.

The cyclone (hurricane) season is November-April. Travelers should expect that public services (water, electricity, transportation) could be unavailable for a significant period following a powerful cyclone. Cyclone activity frequently causes flooding in the coastal or low lying areas, often cutting off resorts, roads, and villages.

In December 2009, Fiji was struck by a Category Two cyclone that caused large-scale power, water, and supplies outages.

In 2010, Fiji received cyclone-like rain falls, which flooded many coastal areas.

In January and December 2012, tropical cyclones caused severe flooding that claimed several lives and displaced thousands. In both instances, airports and ground transportation were disrupted for several days.

The worst natural disaster in 2013 was a landslide that closed a highway between Nabouala and Dreketi. In 2014, a landslide interrupted Suva's water supply, causing a significant water shortage for several days.

There were no major events that directly affected Fiji in 2015.

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Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Industrial accidents occasionally occur, usually in the form of fires at warehouses/commercial facilities. Often, these structures do not have fire alarms installed or fire suppression equipment in close proximity. Most tourist hotels in the tourist centers have fire alarms and evacuation plans.

Water and power outages do occur but are not frequent or long term. These outages are usually weather-related.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

The government has made improvements in its enforcement of intellectual property rights and has made public declarations that it is committed to adherence of international law. As a result, the availability of pirated items has declined. Notwithstanding, some stores still openly sell pirated movies, television shows, music, and counterfeit clothing, jewelry, and other luxury goods.

Personnel-Background Concerns

There are some concerns relating to personnel-background for gender, sexual orientation,

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and race.

Fijians are generally polite to women, but there are instances of physical abuse and sexual assaults. The majority of the physical abuse is related to families, as gender-based domestic violence is prevalent. Sexual assaults usually have one of three commonalities: 1) the victim is most often attacked by a guardian; 2) other instances of sexual assault often involve intoxication, or 3) the victim is in an isolated area.

Sexual orientation is generally accepted in Fiji, but the local populace does not use politically-correct terms. There have not been any reports of violence related to sexual orientation.

Fiji's ethnic groups include indigenous Fijians (also called iTaukei and constituting roughly 57 percent of the population), Indo-Fijians (37 percent), and several smaller groups of European, Asian, and other Pacific Islander descent. Fiji has seen strife between ethnicities. Several of Fiji's major political parties were created along ethnic lines, and in 2000, extreme indigenous nationalists supported by elements within the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) committed a coup against a popularly-elected government headed by an Indo-Fijian Prime Minister. In times of political turmoil surrounding earlier coups, ethnic violence perpetrated by indigenous nationalists targeted the Indo-Fijian population. The Bainimarama government, during the years of the coup-led government and after democratic elections, prioritized the elimination of race-based politics and called for a multicultural, inclusive Fijian national identity. Despite some improvements, tensions still exist in some areas between iTaukei, and Indo-Fijians, and to a lesser extent people of Chinese descent. The RFMF remains more than 90 percent iTaukei, though the police force is much more ethnically-mixed.

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Drug-related Crimes

Drug addiction does contribute to some of the petty crimes in Fiji.

Kidnapping Threat

There are limited cases of kidnapping; most are family-related issues.

Police Response

The Fiji Police Force is generally a professional, albeit under-resourced, law enforcement organization. Recent years has seen an improvement in training and accountability and greater regional cooperation. However, police generally do not have vehicles to respond to calls; therefore, it is highly unlikely that police will arrive in time to disrupt a crime in progress.

Fiji law permits police officers to search any person, building, vehicle, cargo, or baggage that s/he has reasonable grounds to believe is connected to any offense against public order or the crime decree. Obscene material (pornography) is illegal, and the interpretation as to what constitutes obscene materials is loosely defined. Penalties for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs (including marijuana), are severe and convicted offenders can expect long jail

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sentences and heavy fines.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed in theory, but some restrictions exist in practice. The government enforces the Media Industry Development Decree, which allows for fines when journalists are deemed to report on issues that are determined to be against the poorly-defined "public interest." The government has prosecuted media outlets and civil society organizations for republishing or quoting material that was deemed to question the independence of Fiji's judiciary. Individuals, media outlets, and civil society organizations practice varying degrees of self-censorship in order to avoid undue government attention and possible repercussions.

Travelers are strongly urged to carry a copy of their passport, as police will almost always ask for identification for all parties involved in any type of incident.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Local laws allow police to detain someone for up to 48 hours for administrative processing without charge and for an additional 14 days upon approval of the Police Commissioner. In the case of a military detention, there is no guarantee that the Embassy would be allowed to visit the detained citizen. There are no legal rules on military detention. U.S. citizens detained by the police or the military should demand to speak to a U.S. Embassy representative. Arrested or otherwise detained foreigners have been generally treated well by the police. Except in some very rural locations, police are aware of a U.S. citizen detainee's right to contact the Embassy. Travelers should be aware that the assistance the Embassy can provide is limited to making sure U.S. citizens are not being mistreated and providing them

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with a list of local attorneys. The Embassy cannot secure the release of or act as legal representation for U.S. citizens.

Crime Victim Assistance

Victims of crime can expect to be treated fairly and with dignity. Victims can also expect to be frustrated by the relative inefficiency and overly bureaucratic judicial process.

Police/Security Agencies

Fire or Emergency: 911

Police Emergency: 917

For administrative calls to the local Fire and Police posts:

Korolevu Fire: 650-0516 Police: 653-0122

Labasa Fire: 881-1333 Police: 881-1222

Lautoka Fire: 666-0211 Police: 666-0222

Nadi Fire: 670-0475 Police: 670-0222

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Suva Fire: 331-2877 Police: 331-1222

Medical Emergencies

Medical care is limited, though usually adequate for routine medical problems. Emergency services, even in the capital, are very basic. Some physicians may have had a portion of their training in the U.S., Australia, or New Zealand, although the majority of their medical assistants and equipment are not up to U.S., Australia, or New Zealand standards.

Rural areas have extremely limited ambulance services: 911 or St. John's Ambulance (679-330-1439) can summon an ambulance.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Suva

Colonial War Memorial Hospital: 679-331-3444

Suva Private Hospital: 679-330-3404

Lautoka

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Lautoka Hospital: 679-666-0399

Savusavu

Savusavu Hospital: 679 885-0444

Available Air Ambulance Services

The local hospitals work frequently with international evacuation services. Int'l SOS NZ Ltd (New Zealand): ISOS requires membership before using their services. This could delay a medevac. Tel: +61 2 9372 2468 or Fax: +61 2 9372 2455.

Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious medical emergencies may require travel or medevac to the U.S., Australia, or New Zealand. The U.S. Embassy recommends all travelers have travel and medical insurance.

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/fiji?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-00

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OSAC Country Council Information

U.S. Embassy Suva does not have an OSAC Country Council. The Regional Security Officer will provide country briefings for representatives of American businesses and organizations as requested and can be contacted at: (679) 331-4466 extension 8131. To reach the OSAC East Asia Pacific team, please email OSACEAP@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

The U.S. Embassy is located at 158 Princes Road, Tamavua, Suva, Fiji.

The Consular Section does not provide a walk-in information service to the public. For U.S. citizen services, the section is open from 9:00 am-12:00 pm and 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, Mon-Thurs and 9:00-12:00 pm on Fri to appointment holders and persons requesting American citizen services.

Embassy Contact Numbers

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For emergency U.S. citizen inquiries, outside of normal working hours, please call (679) 331-4466 and ask for the duty officer.

Regional Security Office: (679) 331-4466 X 8113.

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

Nearby Posts

Virtual Presence Post Tonga: <http://tonga.usvpp.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

Visitors should register with American Citizen Services in-person at the Embassy or at: <http://travel.state.gov>. As the U.S. Department of State continues to develop information on any potential security threats to U.S. citizens overseas, it shares that information through consular information program documents.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

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You can mitigate the risk of being a victim of a crime by practicing good security awareness. The most effective tool to avoid becoming a victim is situational awareness and vigilance. Visitors should exercise the same security precautions as they would in any large metropolitan city in the world where crime is prevalent. Most important is to be alert and aware of your surroundings. Tourists can be targets and should use caution. Visitors should be aware of their belongings, to include at beaches. Women walking by themselves may be at a greater risk for general harassment and more serious crimes (groping, grabbing, other sexual assaults). Avoid walking after dark, in poorly illuminated areas, and do not walk alone in isolated areas at any time.

Secure valuables (remove from plain view), avoid secluded locations, properly secure residences/vehicles, avoid traveling alone at night, and do not frequent late-night bars and night clubs where the majority of assaults are known to occur.

It is recommended to keep a low profile and not carry large sums of cash or valuables. Keep valuables locked in a safe at the hotel and only carry what is necessary.

Avoid becoming intoxicated. Inquire at your hotel or about places to see and areas to avoid.

Travelers should verify credit card/bank statements often as a precaution. If using an ATM, search for one that has an indoor area with controlled entry and adequate lighting.

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