



Somalia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Religious Terrorism; Stolen items; Riots/Civil Unrest; NGO; Maritime; Disease Outbreak; Diplomatic Missions; Crime; Anti-American sentiment; Aviation; Improvised Explosive Device

Africa > Kenya; Africa > Somalia; Africa > Somalia > Mogadishu

8/9/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. government recommends U.S. citizens avoid travel to Somalia.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

The general crime rate is well above the U.S. national average. Pervasive and violent crime is an extension of the general state of insecurity in Somalia. Serious, brutal, and often fatal crimes are very common. Kidnapping and robbery are a particular problem in Mogadishu, other areas of the south, and in Galmuduug and Puntland.

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Pirates and other criminals have specifically targeted and kidnapped foreigners working in Somalia.

No area in Somalia should be considered immune from violence, and the potential exists throughout the country for hostile acts, either targeted or random, against U.S. and other Western nationals at any time. A strong familiarity with Somalia and/or extensive prior travel to the region does not reduce travel risk.

Other Areas of Concern

While Somaliland has experienced a level of stability not present in other parts of Somalia, the Department of State continues to warn U.S. citizens against all travel to Somalia, including the self-proclaimed Independent Republic of Somaliland - see the Travel Warning. Travelers insisting on visiting Somaliland despite the Warning should check conditions in Somaliland before embarking on a journey. Terrorist attacks have occurred against international relief workers, including Westerners, throughout Somalia, including Puntland and Somaliland. In every year since 2008, there have been violent kidnappings and assassinations, including suicide bombings, of local and foreign staff working for international organizations. Additionally, there have been threats against Westerners in Somalia, including Somaliland. On April 7, 2014, two foreign UN employees were shot dead on arrival at an airport in Galcayo. Despite improved security in Mogadishu, insurgents conducted an increasing number of high profile attacks in 2013 and 2014, many of which targeted government officials and foreigners. These attacks consisted of complex assaults, improvised explosive device (IED) detonations, and suicide bombings. Insurgents targeted various Somali government facilities in Mogadishu, including the airport and compounds that house a majority of international aid workers and diplomats.

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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions differ significantly and do not meet U.S. standards. Traffic lights are a rarity, and roads are not well-maintained, causing poor conditions and making driving hazardous. Additionally, little street lighting exists; therefore, night driving can be dangerous and often leads to vehicle accidents involving pedestrians. Traffic enforcement is minimal. In many areas, there is also a risk to drivers of IEDs or landmines.

Public Transportation Conditions

There are few if any formal travel services or organizations that provide travel throughout the country. Illegal roadblocks, banditry, and other violent incidents/threats to U.S. citizens and other foreign nationals can occur in any region of Somalia.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The U.S. continues to be concerned about the risks to U.S. civil aviation operating in the territory and airspace of Somalia due to the hazards associated with terrorist and militant

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activity. As there is no direct commercial air service to the U.S. by carriers registered in Somalia, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed the government's Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards. Additionally, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has prohibited U.S. civil aviation from flying below flight level 260 in the territory and airspace of Somalia. For additional background information regarding FAA flight prohibitions and advisories for U.S. civil aviation, consult the FAA's Prohibitions, Restrictions, and Notices.

On February 2, 2016, an airplane departing from the Mogadishu International Airport (MIA) was targeted by an al-Shabaab operative using an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). The mid-air detonation severely damaged the airplane and resulted in one fatality and two other injuries. Open source media depicted the alleged perpetrators passing the IED to a passenger within the MIA commercial terminal undetected by airport security services.

Other Travel Conditions

While piracy rates have reduced recently, U.S. citizens are urged to avoid sailing near the coast of Somalia, as attacks have occurred as far as 1,000 nautical miles off the coast in international waters. Merchant vessels, fishing boats, and recreational craft all risk seizure and having their crews held for ransom in the waters off the Horn of Africa, including in international waters. Somali pirates captured and killed four U.S. citizens aboard their boat on February 22, 2011. If transit around the Horn of Africa is necessary, it is strongly recommended that vessels travel in convoys, maintain good communications contact, and follow guidance provided by the Maritime Security Center – Horn of Africa (MSC-HOA). Consult the Maritime Administration's Horn of Africa Piracy page for information on maritime advisories, self-protection measures, and naval forces in the region.

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Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Critical

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The security situation remains unstable and dangerous. Terrorist operatives and armed groups in the region continue to attack Somali authorities, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and other non-military targets. Kidnapping, bombings, murder, illegal roadblocks, banditry, use of indirect fire, and other violent incidents/threats to U.S. citizens and other foreign nationals can occur in any region of Somalia.

While some parts of Somalia are now under government control with the military support of AMISOM forces, al-Shabaab, an al-Qai'da affiliate, that has demonstrated the capability to carry out attacks in government-controlled territory with particular emphasis on targeting government facilities, foreign delegations' facilities/movements, and commercial establishments frequented by government officials, foreign nationals, and the Somali Diaspora. In February 2012, al-Shabaab announced it merged with al-Qai'da.

Al-Shabaab-planned assassinations, suicide bombings, and indiscriminate armed attacks in civilian populated areas are frequent.

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On December 25, 2014, al-Shabaab conducted an attack within the Mogadishu International Airport secure perimeter, resulting in the deaths of at least eight individuals, including one U.S. citizen. Al-Shabaab remains intent on conducting attacks at popular restaurants, hotels, and convoys.

In 2015, there were at least four prominent hotel attacks located in the heart of the Somali capital. One U.S. citizen was killed in those attacks.

In January 2015, a suicide car bomber killed at least six people in a strike apparently aimed at a Turkish government convey the day before that country's president was to arrive in Somalia.

Separately, in late April 2015, a car bomb detonated adjacent to a favorite eatery frequented by government ministries and presidential palace officials.

In late-June 2015, a car bomb targeted UAE military instructors near a military hospital, killing at least three Somali soldiers.

Kidnappings and larger assaults (assassinations, grenade attacks) remain daily threats. Beyond the high profile attacks noted above, al-Shabaab has also claimed responsibility for other regional terrorist attacks.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

There is a particular threat to foreigners in places where large crowds gather and Westerners frequent, including airports, government buildings, and shopping areas. Locally-established courts operating under a combination of Somali customary and Islamic Shari'a law may be hostile toward foreigners.

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Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Critical

Civil Unrest

Violent demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience are common.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Inter-clan and inter-factional fighting can flare up with little/no warning.

Post-specific Concerns

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

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Do not buy counterfeit and pirated goods even if they are widely available. Not only are counterfeit goods illegal in the U.S., their purchase does not always comply with local law.

Kidnapping Threat

In January 2012, a U.S. citizen was kidnapped while on work-related travel in Somalia, and in October 2011, a similar incident occurred with a U.S. citizen aid worker living in Somalia. In these cases, as well as in recent kidnappings of other Westerners, the victims took precautionary measures by hiring local security personnel, but those hired to protect them may have played a role in the abductions.

Police Response

Law enforcement are understaffed, ill-equipped, and fail to receive training commensurate with U.S. standards. They also struggle to provide consistent basic law enforcement services. Enforcement of criminal laws is haphazard/nonexistent.

Persons violating Somalia's laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs are severe, and convicted offenders can expect jail sentences and heavy fines.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In some places, you may be taken in for questioning if you do not have your passport, if you take pictures of restricted locations, or if you drive under the influence. For more information, please review OSAC's Report "Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography." The consistency of enforcement and subsequent criminal penalties vary dramatically.

Police/Security Agencies

Broadly, the Somalia National Police (SNP) service is responsible for crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of Federal Government of Somalia, including any activities in violation of the draft Constitution that may endanger the Constitutional order, public order, hooliganism, terrorism, trafficking in persons and transferring of drugs.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are extremely limited. Travelers should carry personal supplies of medications with them, as many health clinics lack a doctor/nurse and carry sub-standard supplies. In addition, many pharmacies stock ineffective counterfeit medications. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report, "Traveling with Medications." Credit cards are typically not accepted for medical care in Somalia.

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Available Air Ambulance Services

The closest medevac company is based in Nairobi, Kenya, and would take on average 4-6 hours to get to Mogadishu.

AMREF “Flying Doctors”

Wilson Airport

Langatta Road, P.O. 18617 -00500, Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254-20-699-2000; 699 2299; +254 733639088; +254 722314239

Recommended Insurance Posture

U.S. citizens considering travel to Somalia, including Somaliland and Puntland, are advised to obtain kidnap and recovery insurance and medical evacuation insurance prior to travel.

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

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from U.S.\$40,000-\$200,000.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

All routinely recommended immunizations for the U.S. should be up to date. Measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, pertussis, and chicken pox are much more common than in the U.S., especially among children. Additionally, hepatitis A, typhoid, and rabies immunizations are recommended for all travelers.

Travelers should use insect repellents containing either 20 percent DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535. Treating clothing and tents with permethrin and sleeping in screened/air conditioned rooms under insecticide-impregnated mosquito nets will help diminish bites from mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, chiggers, etc, some of which may also carry diseases.

Malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease that is highly prevalent throughout Somalia in all seasons. Antimalarials are recommended for all travelers. Before traveling, discuss with your doctor the best antimalarial medication to take and ensure you bring an adequate supply with you. For information that can help you and your doctor decide which of these drugs would be best for you, please see CDC's "Choosing a Drug to Prevent Malaria." If you become ill with a fever or flu-like illness for up to one year after returning home, seek immediate medical attention and tell the physician your travel history and what antimalarials you have taken.

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Yellow fever is very rare and even rarer among travelers. It can be severe/fatal in about 10 percent of those infected. Yellow fever risk is absent in the northern regions, but there is some risk from the Galguduud to the southwest along the Kenya border. Vaccination is not recommended except for highly risk-averse travelers and long-stay travelers.

Dengue fever causes fever, chills, severe headache, and body aches. There is no vaccine or treatment for dengue. The illness can be severe/fatal.

According to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, in 2013, 194 cases of polio were reported in Somalia. These are the first wild poliovirus cases reported in Somalia since 2007. CDC issued a Level 2 Alert regarding polio in the horn of Africa, recommending travelers practice enhanced precautions ensuring they are fully vaccinated against polio. Additionally, adults who have received a full polio series in childhood should receive a one-time booster. The booster can be either IPV (available in the US) or OPV and should be recorded on the WHO international certificate of vaccination. Individuals living in countries or areas reporting indigenous wild poliovirus should have completed a full course of vaccination against polio, preferably with OPV, before travelling abroad. Such travelers should receive an additional dose of OPV 1-12 months before each international journey; this should be recorded on the WHO international certificate of vaccination.

Diarrheal illness is very common among travelers even in large cities and at luxury accommodations. Travelers can diminish diarrhea risk through scrupulous washing of hands and use of hand sanitizers, especially before food preparation and eating. The greatest risk is from contaminated food. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report, "I'm Drinking What in My Water?."

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For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the World Health Organization (WHO) website, which contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information. You can find detailed information on vaccinations and other health precautions on the CDC website. For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/somalia?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

The U.S. Mission to Somalia does not have an OSAC Country Council; however, the OSAC Country Council at osac-nairobi-@googlegroups.com may provide some additional information. To reach the OSAC Africa team, email OSACAF@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Mission Somalia is based out of U.S. Embassy, Nairobi, Kenya

United Nations Avenue Nairobi

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P. O. Box 606 Village Market

00621 Nairobi, Kenya

Business hours: Monday-Thursday: 7:30 AM - 5:00 PM; Friday: 7:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Kenya is GMT +3

Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone: +(254) (20) 363-6000

Emergency After-Hours Telephone: +(254) (20) 363-6170

Fax: +(254) (20) 363-6410

Email: NairobiPAS@state.gov

American Citizen Services: Kenya_ACS@state.gov

Telephone: 254 20 363-6000

Embassy Guidance

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Since the U.S. does not have any diplomatic presence in Somalia, including in Somaliland, the U.S. government is not in a position to assist or effectively provide services to U.S. citizens. Limited services for U.S. citizens are available at the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Djibouti.

If you are going to reside in or visit Somalia, please take the time to stay connected:

- Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program so RSO can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements.
- Follow the Bureau of Consular Affairs on Twitter and Facebook.
- Bookmark the Bureau of Consular Affairs website, which contains the current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and the Worldwide Caution.
- Follow the U.S. Embassy in Kenya on Twitter and visiting the Embassy's website.
- In the event of an emergency, contact us at 1-888-407-4747 toll-free within the U.S. and Canada, or via a regular toll line, 1-202-501-4444, from other countries.

A passport is required for travel to Somaliland and Puntland. Both regions require a visa and issue their own at their respective ports of entry. For travel to other parts of Somalia, a passport and visa are required. Visas are issued at certain Somali embassies, including in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Nairobi, Kenya. Single-entry seven-day validity visas are available for U.S. citizens on arrival at Mogadishu for \$50. Air and seaports are under the control of local authorities that make varying determinations of what is required of travelers who attempt to use these ports of entry.

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Travelers may obtain the latest information on visas and any additional details regarding entry requirements from the Permanent Representative of the Somali Republic to the United Nations, tel (212) 688-9410/5046; fax (212) 759-0651; emailsomalia@un.int, at 425 East 61st Street, Suite 702, New York, NY 10021. Persons outside the U.S. may attempt to contact the nearest Somali Embassy/Consulate.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Be aware of your surroundings. No area should be considered immune from violence, and the potential exists for hostile acts, either targeted or random, against U.S. and other Western nationals. Travelers are strongly advised to review their personal safety and security posture, to remain vigilant, and to be cautious when frequenting prominent public places and landmarks. Vary your travel times/routes. Travelers should maintain a high level of vigilance when in public and keep valuables out of plain-sight. Female travelers should be cautious if traveling alone. Always carry a copy of your passport.

Refrain from carrying credit cards, large sums of cash, or valuables that you are unwilling to give up in the event of a robbery. Leave them in a hotel safe or other secure place. Keep wallets and other valuables where they will be less susceptible to pickpockets. Avoid carrying handbags. Change direction or depart the area if you notice suspicious people, groups, or activity. If you are threatened with violence over money/belongings, RSO recommends complying with demands and attempting to end the confrontation as quickly as possible.

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The Somali shilling is the unit of currency except in Somaliland, which uses the Somaliland shilling. U.S. dollars are accepted everywhere else. Credit cards are not accepted in Somalia.

Carry your cell phone and have the U.S. Embassy Nairobi telephone number and emergency after-hours telephone number programmed on it. Inform others of where you are going, if possible. If you notice suspicious vehicles following you, take note of vehicle descriptions and license plate numbers.

Do not leave valuables or large amounts of cash in your house. These items are best kept locked in a secured area at work. Only give your keys to a trusted person; do not leave them in possession with others (guards). Keep your doors and vehicle locked even when you are at home. Identify a secure lockable area away from windows where you can hunker down in case of an intruder. Alarms, guards, and dogs are outstanding deterrents to criminals.

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