Pakistan 2017 Crime & Safety Report: Islamabad

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Terrorism; Political Violence; Natural Disasters; Employee Health Safety; Crime; Anti-American sentiment

South Central Asia > Pakistan; South Central Asia > Pakistan > Islamabad

1/31/2017

Overall Crime and Safety Situation
U.S. Embassy Islamabad does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The ACS Unit cannot recommend a particular individual or location and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED ISLAMABAD AS BEING A MEDIUM-THREAT LOCATION FOR CRIME DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Please review OSAC’s Pakistan-specific webpage for proprietary analytic reports, Consular Messages, and contact information.

Crime Threats
Islamabad is a security-controlled environment with permanent and impromptu police and military checkpoints throughout the area. Low-level criminal activity takes place in Islamabad but not to any extent more than any other large city around the world. A comparative analysis of figures from police/security entities operating throughout Pakistan indicates that incidents of crime are both inaccurately- and under-reported. The under-reporting is due in large part to insufficient police presence and response capabilities as well as the public’s negative perception of the police.

Petty theft and vehicle break-ins do occur but are not commonplace in the Embassy community. Aggressive pan-handling tends to take place at busy vehicle intersections and in the vicinity of the larger marketplace areas. There is no evidence that Americans or U.S. government employees are being directly targeted for any criminal activity in Islamabad. Crimes against persons, including gender-based violence and kidnapping, remain a concern for U.S. citizens and Westerners throughout Pakistan. In 2016, the Embassy received reports
of American citizens being victims of sexual assaults and robberies. The Embassy was also notified of a significant number of incidents regarding domestic violence and family abductions against women, particularly women who are dual-nationals but also women who were visiting or residents with a Pakistani background.

Cybersecurity Issues
Islamabad has minor security concerns regarding cybersecurity in regards to debit/credit card scams. Crime of this nature seems to be directed mostly at locals and rarely affects Embassy personnel or Westerners.

Other Areas of Concern
The security situation in many rural areas is extremely hazardous. U.S. citizens who do not also possess Pakistani citizenship, including Embassy officials, are required to obtain advance permission from local or federal authorities to travel to the FATA, large parts of KP province, and the Baluchistan province. U.S. officials in Islamabad are instructed to restrict the frequency and minimize the duration of trips to public markets, restaurants, and other locations. U.S. citizens are strongly urged to avoid hotels that do not apply stringent security measures and to maintain good situational awareness, particularly when visiting locations frequented by Westerners.

Transportation-Safety Situation
Road Safety and Road Conditions
Road conditions differ significantly from those found in the U.S. Road conditions in urban areas (Islamabad) tend to be better than rural parts of Pakistan. Vehicles drive on the left side of the road. Roads tend to be very crowded; drivers are often aggressive and poorly trained. Vehicles include large trucks and buses, and many of them are poorly maintained. Donkeys, cattle, horse carts, and even camel can pose roadside hazards. Overland travel can be dangerous. Roads including most major highways also suffer from poor maintenance and often contain significant potholes, sharp drop-offs, and unmarked barriers. Drivers should use extreme caution when traveling at night, as many vehicles do not have proper illumination. Most of the roads lack proper illumination and signage; often road signs and traffic lights are non-functional. Driving without experienced local drivers or guides is not recommended. Traffic lights at intersections are often out. Proceed through intersections with caution. Drivers will encounter many checkpoints throughout the city. Drivers are cautioned to slow down and do not proceed through a checkpoint until directed to do so. Always wear your seatbelt and insist that a safe speed is maintained. Driving can be extremely dangerous. Whether you are driving or riding as a passenger, use extreme caution, expect the unexpected, and drive
defensively. For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC’s Report “Driving Overseas: Best Practices.”

Public Transportation Conditions
It is strongly advised that all U.S. citizens avoid public transportation, as it is extremely hazardous. For safety and security reasons, personnel under the authority of U.S. Embassy are prohibited from using any form of public transportation. Taxis, buses, shared ride vehicles, and “tuk-tuks” are often poorly maintained, overcrowded, and lack safety equipment. Vehicle maintenance, driver skills, and a general lack of road safety awareness by operators, who often drive in an over-aggressive fashion, are all of significant concern. The Embassy reminds its personnel that they should be aware of their surroundings to ensure their personal security.

Aviation/Airport Conditions
Airport and aviation conditions are less than ideal. All Embassy personnel are required to travel to/from the airport in armored vehicles and are required to have an airport expeditor during arrival/departure procedures.

Other Travel Conditions
Police and emergency response to traffic accidents, especially in rural areas, may take a significant amount of time. As a result, accident victims rely on bystanders as “first responders.” For this reason and considering the lack of medical care in rural areas, travelers should maintain equipment and training to provide first aid in an emergency. Drivers should be conscious that vehicle accidents may draw angry and potentially violent crowds. It is recommended that anyone involved in an accident immediately notify the Pakistani police.

Terrorism Threat
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED ISLAMABAD AS BEING A CRITICAL-THREAT LOCATION FOR TERRORIST ACTIVITY DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns
While the level of security in Islamabad remains higher than other areas of Pakistan, the prevalence of Pakistani government buildings, government officials and foreigners also make it a high profile target for terrorist attacks. The government of Pakistan continues its efforts to combat terrorism and improve security. Pakistani military forces continue to conduct military action against extremist elements throughout the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and parts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. Militants will likely use Pakistan’s counterinsurgency campaign as justification to carry out additional future terrorist attacks.
In October 2016, militants conducted an overnight assault on a police training college near Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan. At least 61 people were killed, most of them cadets. One of the largest and most significant attacks to occur in recent years happened in December 2014 when terrorists attacked an Army Public School in Peshawar, murdering over 140 people, mainly children, and injuring scores of others. The Pakistani Taliban publicly claimed responsibility for this attack. The Pakistani government responded by swiftly reinstating the death penalty for terrorism and carrying out new anti-terror operations.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

U.S. citizens and U.S. interests continue to be a target for the numerous transnational and indigenous terrorist organizations operating in Pakistan. Terrorist organizations continue to carry out and demonstrate a willingness to conduct future attacks against U.S. and Western interests. There has been no evidence of a decreased terrorist threat against U.S. interests in Pakistan in 2016.

Anti-U.S. and Western protests have occurred and are more than likely to continue. In certain areas of Pakistan, anti-American sentiment is high, and individuals should remain cognizant of this if they travel to Pakistan.

Maintaining a low profile is important. Avoid wearing clothing that identifies you as an American.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED ISLAMABAD AS BEING A HIGH-THREAT LOCATION FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Impromptu and planned political demonstrations occur frequently. These demonstrations can be very large and can be crippling to the infrastructure. During some protests, clashes can occur between protestors and police, resulting in property damage and injuries. Civil unrest is always a major concern.

Political violence, assassinations, and bombings occur on a regular basis, often targeting government authorities (police checkpoints, military installations). Public areas, shopping centers, mosques, and other places of worship have been, and will likely continue to be, targets. Following are some of the incidents that occurred in Pakistan in 2016 (this is not an inclusive list, as there were hundreds of separate distinct terror incidents occurring throughout Pakistan in 2016):
January 3: A Remote Controlled Improvised Explosive Device (RCIED) with a yield of four kilograms was detonated, targeting Pakistani security forces near Peshawar – 3 injuries reported.

January 13: Injuries resulted at a news agency in Islamabad when two men entered the offices and threw some type of explosive device followed by what sounded like gunshots. No fatalities were reported, and the two assailants fled the scene on motorbike.

February 12: Unidentified assailants abducted a high ranking Afghan government official in Islamabad’s F-7 sector near Rana Market. The official was later released.

March 1: An Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack on members of the Pakistani Anti-Narcotics Force convoy resulted in 2 deaths and multiple injuries. 

March 16: An explosion on a private charter bus transporting Pakistani government employees in Peshawar resulted in 15 deaths and wounded another 30.

March 28: Suicide bomber explodes at a park in Lahore, with approximately 50 killed and more than 200 injured.

July 26: During an attempted robbery, a man was shot and killed in Islamabad during the early morning hours after he was confronted and assaulted by several individuals.

August 11: Police operations in parts of Rawalpindi (Punjab District) resulted in the arrest of 6 terrorists along with weapons and ammunition; including IEDs.

November 3: A Pakistan army major was shot dead by unidentified assailants who stormed his residence in Sector I-8 in Islamabad.

December 8: A ranking member of a major political party was shot at and injured by assailants near the Karachi Company Police Station in Islamabad. They began shooting at the individual and then fled on motorbikes.

Post-specific Concerns
Environmental Hazards
Pakistan is subject to earthquakes in the northern and western regions. The most recent earthquake that caused significant damage took place in October 2015. The epicenter was in Afghanistan, but the northern mountain region of Pakistan sustained significant damage, resulting in approximately 260 fatalities. Earthquakes of smaller magnitude can be felt on a regular basis throughout the country.
Seasonal and monsoon rains, inadequate public works infrastructure, and a lack of adequate disaster preparedness continues to overwhelm government response. International donations and humanitarian assistance are often affected by widespread corruption and the lack of transparency. Charities with ties to Islamic militants are often quick to step in to provide assistance, undermining the government’s fight against groups like the Taliban.

Critical Infrastructure
Industrial safety does not meet U.S. standards, and pollution from raw sewage and industrial waste in the water and air is widespread.

Economic Concerns
It is strongly recommended that U.S. citizens avoid purchasing counterfeit or pirated goods, even if they are widely available and locally accepted. These items are illegal in the U.S. and may also be in violation of local laws.

Drug-related Crimes
Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs are severe.

Kidnapping Threat
U.S. citizens have been kidnapped and will continue to be a high-profile target for terrorist and criminal elements. U.S. citizens and other foreigners face a serious risk of being kidnapped for ransom, although there were no reports of U.S. citizens being kidnapped in 2016. U.S. citizens who had been kidnapped in neighboring countries might have been held inside Pakistan during 2016.

In November 2014, a U.S. citizen was released after being kidnapped and held for over five months near Hangu, Pakistan.

In December 2013, a U.S. citizen was released after being kidnapped from his Peshawar neighborhood and held for two months.

In May 2013, a U.S. citizen was rescued by local police after being kidnapped and held for ransom.

The kidnapping of Pakistani citizens and other foreign nationals, usually for ransom, continues to remain a threat nationwide. Do not be time and place predictable when traveling. Varying routes and departure/arrival times is vital to safety. If you feel that you are being followed or threatened in any way, go immediately to a safe place such as a government building that has police or security forces.

Police Response

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Traditional crime fighting, community policing campaigns and other regular police services face severe deficiencies due to the security services' focus on counter-terrorism activities. Police services are below Western standards and are non-existent in some areas of the country. The federal and provincial governments have taken the initiative to computerize police records, but the process is on-going with only partial computerization of records complete in Islamabad. This database will only contain records that involve major offensives (acts of terrorism, corruption, human trafficking).

Corruption in the police and security services, especially the lower levels, is wide spread. The country is consistently rated very low when it comes to the amount of corruption at all levels of government. The major cause for corruption is the lack of accountability and low salaries. Payment of bribes to avoid charges is commonplace. The U.S. Embassy strongly discourages the payment of bribes.

Pakistani laws can differ greatly from those in the United States. In some places, it is common practice to detain people for failure to produce identification such as passports. Additionally, it is illegal to take pictures of government and military buildings, but the law is vague and is not applied uniformly. For more information, please review OSAC's Report “Picture This: Dos and Don'ts for Photography.”

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

While some countries will automatically notify the nearest U.S. Embassy/Consulate if a U.S. citizen is detained or arrested, that is often not the case in Pakistan. If detained, immediately request the police and or prison officials notify the nearest U.S. Embassy/Consulate as soon as you are arrested or detained in Pakistan. Please note that a consular officer might not be able to visit you for 20 working days or longer after your arrest has taken place.

Islamabad: (+92) 51-201-4000 or (+92) 51-201-5000

Lahore: (+92) (42) 3603-4000

Karachi: (+92) (21) 3527-5000

From the United States: 1-888-407-4747
Crime Victim Assistance

American citizens should report crimes committed against them, when possible, to the local police (the local emergency line is 15) and to the U.S. Embassy’s American Citizen Services (ACS) section at (+92) 51-208-0000.

Police/Security Agencies
Many Americans and other Westerners employ private security-guard services for their residences and offices. They are less trained than those in the U.S. The following deficiencies are typical of security services: poor quality of personnel attributed to low wages, little training, and limited supervision. What the private security firms fail to provide in the way of equipment, the individual guards look to the occupant to provide (heaters, fans, water, supplemental income).

Medical Emergencies
Emergency medical care is only available in major cities. Most hospitals possess limited advanced life support equipment, and the level of care does not meet U.S. standards. Fire-fighting resources are lacking, and it is advised to stay in lower floors of high rise hotels.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services
Shifa and Kulsum are the main hospitals used by U.S. Embassy personnel in Islamabad. Shifa International is the preferred hospital in Islamabad because of its overall capabilities and proximity to the U.S. Embassy. It is a well-equipped Western-style hospital with a 24-hour emergency room. It is located approximately 3 miles (15 minutes) west of the Embassy. Many of the physicians have been trained in the U.S. or the UK. Shifa International is a good resource for general medical, surgical and trauma problems.

Shifa International Hospital
Sector H 8/4
Phone: (92-51) 460-3666
Emergency Room ext. 3010 / 3090
Kulsum Hospital is closer to the U.S. Embassy and located in the Blue Area of Islamabad. It is a good choice for minor medical problems; however, the emergency department is not as well equipped as Shifa Hospital.

Kulsum International Hospital

Blue Area, Jinnah Avenue

Phone: (92-51) 844-6666

Available Air Ambulance Services

Several air ambulance companies may provide service to Pakistan. Travelers are encouraged to research the availability of air ambulance services and to make an informed choice based on individual needs and requirements. Many different air ambulance services are available, and it is recommended to conduct internet or other research to identify an adequate air ambulance provider.

The Embassy has utilized International SOS and Europe Assistance.

Insurance Guidance
Travelers should arrange for medical evacuation insurance personally or through their sponsoring organization prior to arriving in Pakistan.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance
Water- and insect-borne diseases tend to increase in the aftermath of natural disasters (flooding, earthquakes). Air pollution, exacerbated in the winter months, is at levels that may cause severe irritation and discomfort to individuals who suffer from asthma or other respiratory disorders.

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for Pakistan.

OSAC Country Council Information
The Islamabad Country Council currently meets twice a year and has approximately 75 members. Please contact OSAC’s South and Central Asia team with any questions or to join. The Regional Security Office at U.S. Embassy Islamabad is actively working with the private sector in not only maintaining, but broadening, the Country Council in Pakistan. RSO Islamabad actively communicates with the American business community and is available to provide security briefings to U.S. private sector business personnel when requested. Consulates in Lahore and Karachi benefit from much closer ties to the business community through the American Business Council (Karachi) and the American Business Forum (Lahore). As such, the RSOs in those cities are traditionally more engaged with OSAC constituents.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information
Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Islamabad
Diplomatic Enclave, Ramna 5
Islamabad, Pakistan

Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri, 0800-1630
Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone: 011 92-51 201 4000
Consular Section Telephone: 011 92-51 201 5718
Fax: 011 92-51 233 8044

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Emergency Contact Information: 011 92-51 201 4000
Regional Security Office: 011 92-51 201 4400
Marine Post One: 011 92-51 201 4911
Website: http://www.islamabad.usembassy.gov/
Nearby Posts

Consulate Karachi: https://pk.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/karachi/
Consulate Lahore: https://pk.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/lahore/
Consulate Peshawar: https://pk.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/peshawar/
Embassy Guidance
For updated information, please contact the Consular Section of the American Embassy in Islamabad, the Consular Section of the American Consulate in Karachi, the Consular Section of the American Consulate in Lahore, or the Consular Section of the American Consulate in Peshawar, or consult the websites of the Consular Bureau of the Department of State or of the U.S. Embassy.
American citizens register in the State Departments “Smart Traveler Enrollment Program” (STEP) in order to receive information from the U.S. Consulate in event of an emergency.
Additional Resources
Pakistan Country Information Sheet