



Honduras 2018 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Crime; Cyber; Financial Security; Other; Maritime; Political Violence; NGO; Faith-based Organization; Natural Disasters; Oil & Energy; Economic Espionage

Western Hemisphere > Honduras

4/3/2018

According to the current U.S. Department of State Travel Advisory at the date of this report's publication, Honduras has been assessed as Level 3: reconsider travel.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa 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 Tegucigalpa as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

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

Tens of thousands of U.S. citizens visit Honduras each year for study, tourism, business, and volunteer work without incident, but the government lacks the resources to address crime and violence fully.

Crime Threats

The U.S. Department of State has issued a Travel Advisory for Honduras since 2012 to caution American travelers about high crime rates. Most resort areas and tourist destinations

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have lower levels of crime and violence than other areas of the country, though still high by international standards. While citizen security is the government's highest priority, it continues to face difficult challenges. The majority of serious crimes, including those against U.S. citizens, are never solved. There are no areas in major urban cities that are deemed free of violent crime. Notably dangerous locations in Tegucigalpa include: the area surrounding Suyapa Cathedral and Comayaguela on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa.

Crime and violence are serious problems. The location and timing of criminal activity is unpredictable. There is no information to suggest that criminals specifically target U.S. citizens and other Westerners. Tourists traveling with tour/missionary groups report fewer criminal incidents. However, the San Pedro Sula area has seen armed robberies against tourist vans, minibuses, and cars traveling from the airport to area hotels. Further, NGOs have reported some threats and violence when visiting some rural communities.

Since 2010, Honduras has had one of the highest murder rates in the world. The National Violence Observatory (NVO), an academic research institution based out of Honduras' National Public University, reported the following murder rates over the past six years:

86.5 per 100,000 people

2011

85.5 per 100,000 people

2012

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79.0 per 100,000 people

2013

66.4 per 100,000 people

2014

60.0 per 100,000 people

2015

59.0 per 100,000 people

2016

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Not available at printing time

2017

Since 2010, the U.S. Embassy has recorded 52 murders of U.S. citizens; several U.S. citizens have been murdered in San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba shortly after arriving in the country. These murders may have been based on tips from sources at airport arrival areas. In 2017 and through January 2018, there were six murder cases of U.S. citizens.

Most of Honduras' major cities (Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba), as well as several Honduran departments (a geographic designation similar to U.S. states) have homicide rates higher than the national average, including:

DEPARTMENT, CAPITAL

Atlántida, La Ceiba

Colón, Trujillo

Cortés, San Pedro Sula

Francisco Morazan, Tegucigalpa

Yoro, Yoro

Honduran law enforcement frequently report highway assaults and carjacking by criminals posing as Honduran law enforcement, including in remote areas of Choluteca, Olancho, Colon, and Copan departments. Criminals set up road blocks or checkpoints and wear partial police uniforms and equipment that are often mismatched and inconsistent with genuine uniforms.

Several U.S. citizens have reported being robbed while walking on isolated beaches. The effect and threat of violent crime, including in neighborhoods where many Americans live/work, leads to the curtailment of some normal outdoor activities.

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Armed robberies, home invasions, and extortion also occur, and closely-guarded officials, business persons, and diplomats are not immune from these attacks. Even in neighborhoods with heightened security, there is street crime.

In January 2017, an U.S. citizen NGO employee was the object of an attempted robbery/kidnapping by four armed individuals in Tegucigalpa while leaving her office.

In April 2017, an Embassy driver was robbed of his personal and official cell phones at gunpoint by a motorcyclist while driving a U.S. government vehicle in traffic, during office hours.

In September 2017, a U.S. government employee waiting at a stoplight in his personal vehicle was robbed of his cell phone and cash at gunpoint by a motorcyclist.

In November 2017, an Embassy employee was robbed of his cell phone at gunpoint while driving his personal vehicle.

Many people report receiving threatening phone calls or extortion attempts, especially during Christmas and Easter holidays. Typically, these are random calls that originate from imprisoned gang members using cell phones.

In a country of approximately eight million people, there are estimated 7,000-10,000 street gang members. The 18th Street and MS-13 ("Mara Salvatrucha") gangs are the most active and powerful. Gangs are not reluctant to use violence and specialize in murder-for-hire, carjacking, extortion, and other violent street crime. They are also known to control some of the taxi services. Violent transnational criminal organizations also conduct narcotics trafficking and other illicit commerce.

Roatan and the Bay Islands are geographically separated from and experience lower crime rates than on the mainland and other Caribbean islands; however, thefts, break-ins, assaults, rapes, and murders do occur.

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Credit card skimming is common. Individuals, including Embassy employees, have been victimized at well-known restaurants, hotels, and retailers. There is often a spike in skimming in December. For more information, please review OSAC's Report, "The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud."

Cybersecurity Issues

Extortion threats are made through social engineering. Personal information is sometimes obtained through social media, the internet, or a victim's family member. Some U.S. and other international NGOs reported anonymous attacks via social media in 2017 alleging the civil society actors are engaged in, or supportive of, criminal activity in Honduras.

Other Areas of Concern

The U.S. Embassy has restricted U.S. government personnel travel to Gracias a Dios, due to credible threat information against U.S. citizens. U.S. citizens intending to travel to Gracias a Dios should consider postponing travel. There are no reliable crime statistics for the department of Gracias a Dios; however, it is a remote location where narcotics trafficking is frequent and where infrastructure is weak, government services are limited, and police/military presence is scarce.

Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, please review OSAC's Report, "Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights."

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Honduran road conditions differ significantly from those in the U.S., and driving can be very dangerous. Roads are poorly illuminated and marked. Because of a lack of enforcement of traffic laws, drivers must make an extraordinary effort to drive defensively. If traffic signals are working, they are often ignored, and passing on blind corners and curves is common.

Vehicles are often driven at night without adequate illumination, and animals/people wander onto the roads at all hours. Traffic signs, even on major highways, are often inadequate, and streets in the major cities are often unmarked. Major cities are connected by an inconsistently maintained, two-lane system of paved roads, and many secondary roads are unpaved. A significant percentage of vehicles are in disrepair, under-powered, beyond their lifecycle, and do not meet U.S. road safety standards. However, the government is in the process of modernizing some of the main transportation road networks to four-lane highways, which can lead to increased travel times due to ongoing construction.

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For these reasons, and because of the high incidence of crime, the U.S. Embassy strongly discourages car and bus inter-city travel after dark. Motorists should avoid traveling long distances at night. For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC's Report "Driving Overseas: Best Practices."

Public Transportation Conditions

Travelers are warned to avoid all public transportation. The public transportation sector is a critical target of extortion and experiences higher levels of homicides than many other sectors. There are multiple incidents of city buses and taxis being destroyed by gang members; passengers are often robbed, assaulted, raped, or kidnapped.

Passengers on public buses are sometimes robbed en route, at roadblocks, and at bus stops, even during daylight hours. Some would-be muggers and gang members are known to keep to a daily schedule, riding city buses from one stop to the next, committing criminal acts with impunity.

Travelers should not use collective taxis, which are taxis that pick up multiple riders.

In 2017, Embassy employees have been robbed, assaulted, and kidnapped while using city taxis and collective taxis (small buses).

Other Travel Conditions

Cruise ship passengers should take safety precautions, avoid unfamiliar areas, and book only with reputable tour companies during their stopover. Cruise lines and port agencies have approved tour companies offering packages. Port agencies have worked to improve taxi service to/from ports. The vast majority of cruise line passengers experience no problems, but incidents of armed robbery and carjacking have been reported.

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Tegucigalpa as being a **LOW**-threat location for terrorist activity directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The CA-4 agreement among El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua allows for the inspection-free movement of citizens among these countries and reduces overall inspection at land crossings. The limited nature of inspections could facilitate movements of

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terrorists.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Tegucigalpa as being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Civil Unrest

Public demonstrations, protests, and strikes are common. Most demonstrations are concentrated in/around city centers, public buildings, and other public areas. Most protests have been peaceful; however, there have been violent confrontations between the police and demonstrators. Additionally, there have been demonstrations and road blockades along key routes, including the road leading to the international airports in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

Land titling faces significant challenges and can be a source of conflict. The Bajo Aguan Valley region in Atlantida department has seen serious conflict among agricultural workers and businesses over land rights.

A 13-year old boy was reportedly shot to death in November 2017 while driving a horse carriage, allegedly as retaliation for transporting stolen palm oil fruit to his family.

The Bajo Aguan conflict has reportedly resulted in the death of over 150 people since 2010.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Indigenous and ethnic communities are frequently located in rural areas with lower levels of criminal activity. However, there can be communal tension over natural resource allocation and exploitation. These tensions have resulted in intense protests and other violence.

Several members of ethnic group organizations such as MILPAH, in the Intibuca/La Paz departments in mid-West Honduras, were killed in 2017 allegedly over their protests against the construction of a hydro electrical dam.

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Due to the remote nature of these areas, there is often limited government ability to respond to violence or other problems and limited access to medical facilities.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Honduras can be hit by tropical storms and hurricanes. The rainy season usually runs May-November. There have been approximately nine significant tropical storms/hurricanes that have affected Honduras since 1995. While hurricanes are a concern, much of the damage to infrastructure is a result of flooding and rock/mud slides.

Critical Infrastructure

The limited capacity of the government to enforce international standards related to natural resource exploitation has resulted in higher levels of conflict in the extractive and electrical generation industries. In addition to complying with local laws, companies involved in natural resource extraction or energy generation should ensure that communities are fully consulted in accordance with international standards. Honduras is a signatory to the International Labor Organization's 169 Convention, requiring free, prior, and informed consent from indigenous communities prior to any development projects, but the government has not yet approved a law regulating this process.

Economic Concerns

Patents and trademarks must be registered with the General Directorate of Intellectual Property (DIGEPIH) division of the Honduran Institute of Property. "Notorious" or well-known trademarks are protected under the Pan American Convention (1917), to which Honduras is a party. Illegal registration of a well-known trademark, however, must be contested in court. This regulation favors first registration over first use, and numerous cases have arisen of "squatting" on established trademarks, which the legitimate holder must either purchase or contest in court. Data protection is provided for five years, and Honduras also offers process patent protection.

Cable signal theft and falsified products are the most prevalent violations of intellectual property in Honduras. Falsified products are predominately found in the pharmaceutical and apparel industries but are not limited to these two areas. Falsified medicines are mainly found in the *pulperías* (private home-operated convenience stores) but have also been reported in *Farmacias del Ahorro*.

Counterfeit Honduran lempiras are common, especially in the 100 and 500 denominations.

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Counterfeit U.S. currency is also not uncommon.

Personal Identity Concerns

Discrimination against ethnic minorities and the LGBTI community has been reported.

Members of the LGBTI community have reported violent assaults due to gender identity and sexual orientation.

Some commentators have strongly criticized the Roman Catholic church and Evangelical churches for alleged involvement in politics. Jehovah's Witnesses have reported being refused medical treatment at some government hospitals after requesting treatment in accordance with their religious beliefs.

There are limited facilities for individuals with disabilities.

Drug-related Crimes

Drug trafficking and gang activity, which includes local micro-trafficking of narcotics and extortion, are the main causes of violent crime in Honduras. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking illegal drugs are strict, and convicted offenders can expect lengthy jail sentences and fines.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings and disappearances affect both the local and expatriate communities, with victims sometimes paying large ransoms for the prospect of release. Reports of kidnappings of U.S. citizens are not common. Since January 1, 2012, five cases of kidnapped U.S. citizens were reported to the U.S. Embassy; all kidnapping victims were released. Since families of kidnapping victims often pay ransoms without reporting these crimes to police out of fear of retribution, kidnapping figures may be underreported. For more information, please review OSAC's Report, "Kidnapping: The Basics."

Police Response

The government lacks resources to investigate and prosecute cases, and police often lack vehicles/fuel to respond to calls for assistance. This means police may take hours to arrive at the scene of a violent crime or may not respond at all. As a result, criminals operate with a high degree of impunity.

The government has specially trained police forces in areas frequented by tourists, such as the Copan Mayan ruins and Roatan. The government is implementing similar programs for other locations such as La Ceiba and Trujillo, and major hotels and other tourist installations have increased private and police security. The government has also begun implementing a

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series of police reforms, such as the creation of an Inter-Agency Security Task Force to combat crime, that it hopes can tackle the crime situation.

The government does have a police investigative unit dedicated to investigating violent crimes against the LGBTI and other vulnerable communities; however, it has limited resources and functions primarily in the major urban areas.

U.S. citizens are subject to the laws of the country in which they are traveling.

The Honduran National Police, along with the Ministry of Defense Military Police (PMOP), routinely establish checkpoints and review documentation (driver's licenses, vehicle registration). The Honduran National Police wear blue uniforms while the PMOP normally wear green camouflage uniforms. Their uniforms and vehicles are all clearly marked.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

U.S. citizens detained by the police should insist on speaking to U.S. Embassy representatives as soon as possible. Detained foreigners are 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.

Local law allows the police to detain someone for up to 24 hours for administrative processing. This is a common practice for most automobile accidents where personal injury occurs and for cases in which someone is accused of a criminal act. The assistance the Embassy can provide is limited to making sure U.S. citizens are not being mistreated and providing them with a list of local attorneys. Travelers are reminded to seek legal representation before admitting or signing any legal form that acknowledges culpability.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime, you should contact the local police and U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa. If you are in Tegucigalpa or San Pedro Sula, you can reach the local police by dialing 911; other smaller cities/rural areas have their own local police assistance numbers.

For fire and public safety emergencies, dial 911.

Fire Department Headquarters: (504) 2231-1667 (operations department)

U.S. Embassy, Tegucigalpa, American Citizens Services Unit is open to walk-in services Monday-Friday, 0730-11:00 and can be reached directly at:

Tel: (504) 2236-9320 ext. 4400

After Hours: (504) 2236-9320 ext.4100 or Duty Officer (504) 9990-1372

Email: usahonduras@state.gov

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Medical Emergencies

Medical care is limited. Emergency services, even in Tegucigalpa, generally are basic. There are few, if any, U.S.-educated physicians in Tegucigalpa.

Red Cross ambulance: 911, (504) 2227-7474 or (504) 2227-7575. The ambulance does not have paramedics or emergency medical equipment; they function as transport to hospitals.

Bomberos: Fire Department Ambulance is fully equipped with emergency medical supplies and medical staff. Dial 911 for emergency or call (504) 2232-4092.

Contact Information for Available Hospitals/Clinics

For medical assistance, please refer to the Embassy's Medical Assistance page.

Available Air Ambulance Services

Air Ambulance Service: (305) 535-7380

(International SOS, Mount Sinai Hospital, Miami Beach, Florida)

Insurance Guidance

State Department resource for international insurance

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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

OSAC Country Council Information

The Honduras Country Council meets monthly on a rotating basis in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's Western Hemisphere team with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Tegucigalpa

Avenida La Paz

Tegucigalpa

Hours of Operation: Mon-Thur, 0730-1630; Fri, 0800-1500

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: (504) 2236-9320

After Hours: (504) 2236-8497

Website: <https://hn.usembassy.gov>

Nearby Posts

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Consular Agency San Pedro Sula:

<https://hn.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/spsca/overview/>

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens who live in or who are visiting Honduras are strongly encouraged to register with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).

Additional Resources

Honduras Country Information Sheet

Department of Commerce's Country Commercial Guide

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