Jerusalem 2018 Crime & Safety Report: Jerusalem, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Terrorism; Religious Violence; Political Violence; Intellectual Property Rights; Crime; Anti-American sentiment

Near East > Jerusalem

6/18/2018

According to the current U.S. Department of State Travel Advisory at the date of this report’s publication, Jerusalem has been assessed as Level 2: Exercise Increased Caution

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

U.S. Consulate General Jerusalem does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The American Citizens’ Services unit (ACS) 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 Jerusalem as being a MEDIUM-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Please review OSAC’s Jerusalem-specific webpage for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

U.S. citizens should consult U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv’s website for travel advisories when transiting southern and northern Israel or near Gaza, and reference the Israel 2018 OSAC Crime & Safety Report.

The security environment in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza remains complex, and tensions remain high. U.S. citizens should be aware of the risks posed by travel in these areas. The Government of Israel (GOI) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) both make...
considerable efforts to police major tourist attractions and ensure security where foreigners frequently travel. Every year, large numbers of U.S. citizens visit Israel and the West Bank for tourism without incident. Random attacks (stabbing, shooting, bombings, vehicle attacks) and mass demonstrations in Jerusalem and the West Bank continued in 2017. There is no indication that U.S. citizens have been specifically targeted in attacks because of their nationality, but recent demonstrations, predominantly in the West Bank, have taken on an anti-American sentiment following the December 6, 2017, announcement by the President of the U.S. recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, to include several demonstrations at U.S. Consulate General facilities. The demonstrations have been coupled with calls by several designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) to target Americans for attacks. The large number of Americans in Jerusalem and the West Bank increases the likelihood that Americans may be affected by crime, terrorism, or political violence.

Prior to December 6, U.S. government direct hire employees and their dependents regularly visited both Jericho and Bethlehem for personal and official travel; however, due to recent heightened tensions and anti-American sentiment, U.S. government direct hire employees and their dependents are prohibited from traveling to all of the West Bank, except for official business. The security environment will continue to evolve, so please contact U.S. Consulate General Jerusalem’s Regional Security Office for up to date information.

All U.S. government direct hire employees and their dependents are forbidden to travel to Gaza, and the Department of State strongly urges all U.S. citizens to avoid travel to Gaza. U.S. Government consular staff is unable to offer direct assistance to U.S. citizens in Gaza. U.S. citizens electing to travel to Gaza in spite of the Department of State’s Travel Advisory should maintain a very low profile while moving within the Strip and should be aware that they likely will face difficulties when attempting to exit Gaza.

Crime Threats
In Jerusalem, most petty thefts occur in crowded tourist locations, including the Old City and its environs. In 2017, there were continued criminal incidents affecting U.S. citizens near several gates to the Old City. Crime tends to increase in the Old City and the Sherover/Haas Promenade areas after dark.

Avoid public parks after dark, as they are poorly illuminated and may attract criminals.

Be alert to street vendors who may aggressively harass tourists.

Only use ATMs that are in well-established locations (banks). For more information, please review OSAC’s Report, “The Overseas Traveler’s Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud.”
The Palestinian Civil Police’s (PCP) most recent report on crime in Areas A and B of the West Bank indicated that 2017 experienced a general reduction in crime from 2016, although there was an increase of non-terror-related suicides and cybercrime. Additionally, traffic accidents continue to be a major area of concern and led to a large number of recorded injuries. There are no reliable sources of information that cover crime statistics in Gaza.

Other Areas of Concern
U.S. citizens should exercise caution in neighborhoods, such as Issawiya, Silwan, and Al Tur, where clashes between Israeli Security Forces (ISF) and the public frequently occur.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions
Major roads and highways in Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank are in relatively good condition, but they tend to be crowded, especially in urban areas. Signs on major roadways are usually posted in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. Most routes in/out of the West Bank are controlled by Israeli checkpoints. Travelers should be cautious when approaching checkpoints and should follow the instructions of security personnel. Travelers should be sure to have their passports, as ISF may ask them for identification while transiting the checkpoints. Vehicles have on occasion been the target of rocks, Molotov cocktails, burning tires, road blocks, barricades, and gunfire on Jerusalem and West Bank roads.

Aggressive driving is common. Driving in conservative Jewish neighborhoods on Shabbat is considered offensive and can result in heckling, spitting, and having objects, including stones, thrown at one’s vehicle. For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC’s Report “Driving Overseas: Best Practices.”

Smash-and-grab thefts do occur.

Public Transportation Conditions
U.S. citizens should exercise caution when using public buses and trains. U.S. government direct hire employees and their dependents are prohibited from using public buses in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel, as they have been the targets of terror attacks. Bus stops or stations have also been the scene of random attacks or attempted assaults (stabbings, bombings, vehicle attacks).

The Jerusalem light rail transit system is authorized for use by U.S. government employees;
In April 2017, a Palestinian man armed with a knife attacked and stabbed to death a British woman on the light rail train in downtown Jerusalem (on Jaffa Street). Security personnel on the train immediately overpowered the suspect and took him into custody. The victim was a tourist visiting Jerusalem. There is no indication she was attacked due to her nationality.

Terrorism Threat
The Department of State has assessed Jerusalem as being a HIGH-threat location for terrorist activity directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns
There are several groups designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) by the U.S. government that operate in the West Bank and Gaza: Hamas, the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). These groups have been in conflict with Israel for decades and routinely express anti-Israeli and sometimes anti-American sentiments. There are a number of splinter groups that operate in the area with a degree of autonomy, and many do not differentiate between military and civilian targets. In Gaza, there are a number of small Salafist groups, some of which are ISIS-inspired. Hamas continues to exercise de facto security and civil control in Gaza. Compared to the previous two years, 2017 experienced an increase of rockets fired from Gaza; however, the numbers are still substantially less than those recorded during 2014’s Operation Protective Edge. Additionally, a large percentage of recorded rocket attacks occurred in December 2017, soon after the U.S.’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. A general pattern regarding rocket attacks is that they are followed by a response – usually an airstrike targeting locations within Gaza – by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The IDF strictly enforces the “exclusion zone,” an Israeli-enforced buffer area along the eastern and northern edge of the territory, taking lethal measures against individuals who enter the zone. RSO continue to see “lone wolf” attacks targeting ISF in Jerusalem and the West Bank, but the numbers of attacks are significantly lower than during their height from October 2015-March 2016. Most attacks have been perpetrated with vehicles, knives, and improvised firearms by Palestinians against Israelis. The majority of attacks targeted ISF at checkpoints,
or targets of opportunity such as bus and light rail stops, and certain entry gates to the Old City of Jerusalem. Attacks also targeted Israeli civilians. In response to most lone wolf attacks, ISF and/or armed civilians typically respond with firearms. During a number of responses, innocent civilians and responders were injured by errant small arms fire. When encountering such an incident, leave the area quickly or take cover behind a hard object.

Some examples of notable attacks in 2017 include:

December: A Palestinian man armed with a knife attacked and stabbed a private security guard at the Central Bus station in Jerusalem. The suspect was overpowered by a police officer and a bystander. The victim suffered critical injuries but survived the attack.

November: A Palestinian rammed his car into an elderly man at the Efrat South Junction and then into a second person at the Gush Etzion Junction in the West Bank. He was wounded by IDF soldiers after getting out of his car and attempting to stab them. The elderly victim, a U.S. citizen, sustained serious injuries.

August 2017: A Palestinian woman armed with a knife attacked and attempted to stab an ultra-Orthodox Jewish man. The victim fled the initial attack; the suspect moved on to attack a second victim, a Palestinian from east Jerusalem. This incident occurred along Suleiman Street, just outside the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City. The suspect was arrested without incident.

July: Three Israeli-Arabs armed with improvised firearms and a handgun shot and killed two INP officers, wounded a third, and injured several bystanders near the Lion’s Gate entrance to the Old City. INP officers responded to the location and pursued the attackers onto the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound, where the officers shot and killed the suspects, who were from Umm al-Fahm. Also, a Palestinian man armed with a knife attacked a family in the Halamish settlement west of Ramallah, killing three individuals and critically wounding a fourth. A neighbor shot and wounded the assailant.
June: Three Palestinian men carried out two nearly simultaneous attacks targeting INP officers in the vicinity of the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City. In the attacks, two of the three suspects fired at INP officers with an improvised firearm. Officers responded by shooting and killing the two suspects. Moments later, as additional officers responded to the location, a third Palestinian man attacked and stabbed to death a female INP/Border Guard officer as she responded to the initial attack. Other officers shot and killed the third suspect.

May: A Palestinian woman armed with a knife attacked and attempted to stab an INP/Border Guard officer at the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City. The officer responded to attack by shooting and killing the suspect. Also, a male Jordanian national (of Palestinian origin) armed with a knife attacked and stabbed an INP officer inside the Old City. The officer responded by shooting and killing the suspect. The officer was stabbed multiple times yet survived. The suspect was in Israel on a tourist visa.

March: A Palestinian man armed with a knife attacked and injured two INP officers at a police booth near the Lion’s Gate entrance to the Old City. INP officers subsequently shot and killed the assailant. Also, a Palestinian woman armed with a knife attacked and attempted to stab an INP/Border Guard officer at the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City. The officer responded to the attack by shooting and killing the suspect.

January: A Palestinian man residing in East Jerusalem rammed a large utility truck into a large number of IDF soldiers at the Haas Promenade in Jerusalem, killing four IDF soldiers and wounding 15. IDF shot and killed the suspect. One of the deceased Israeli soldiers and two of the injured soldiers were Israeli-Americans.

None of these incidents targeted U.S. citizens because of their citizenship.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment
In recent years, U.S. citizens, including Israelis and Palestinians with dual citizenship, were injured and/or killed in Jerusalem and the West Bank from acts of violence. Perceived religious affiliation was a factor in some of the attacks. Following the December 6, 2017, U.S. announcement recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, demonstrations, predominantly in the West Bank, took on an anti-American sentiment, to include several demonstrations at U.S. Consulate General facilities. The demonstrations have been coupled with calls by several designated FTO to target Americans for attacks.

**Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**
The Department of State has assessed Jerusalem as being a **HIGH** threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

**Civil Unrest**
Isolated street protests, demonstrations, and violence can occur across Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. In particular, they can occur on the Gaza border, at checkpoints throughout the West Bank, in Jerusalem’s Old City, and some East Jerusalem neighborhoods (Issawiya, Ras al ‘Amud, Jabal Mukkabir, Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan) with little/no advance warning. If disturbances occur, U.S. citizens should leave the area immediately and avoid neighborhoods that are blocked by INP, as this may indicate either ongoing violent clashes or police operations. In Jerusalem’s Old City, where exits are limited, U.S. citizens should seek safe haven inside a shop or restaurant.

Maintain a heightened sense of awareness during religious holidays. During Ramadan, there is a significant increase in the number of people – upward of 200,000 – who worship at the Al-Aqsa mosque, particularly during Friday prayers. Ramadan 2018 will be from approximately May 16-June 15.

Travelers to Jerusalem and the West Bank should be aware that many security incidents and clashes occur in areas where Palestinians and Israelis live or travel in close proximity to one another. Civil unrest often occurs in response to current events, including but not limited to: demolitions of Palestinian homes, restrictions on Muslim worshippers at the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount (HAS/TM), and incursions by IDF into Palestinian areas. Additionally, demonstrations by the Jewish Ultra-Orthodox community can cause security incidents, as they sometimes turn violent. Oftentimes, the demonstrations are planned and well-known to local law enforcement; however, unplanned demonstrations do happen. Travelers should monitor the local news and consider how topical developments may affect
different areas they intend to visit or traverse.

Religious/Ethnic Violence
Jerusalem is made up of a wide variety of ethnicities and religions, and the Old City is divided into four quarters: Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Armenian. Violent acts frequently have religious or ethnic overtones. U.S. citizens visiting the area should be mindful of their location and be vigilant as they travel throughout Jerusalem and its environs.

In April 2017, a Palestinian man armed with a knife stabbed and injured two Israeli Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox Jews) men in the area of Al-Wad Street located inside the Old City. The assailant also stabbed and injured an INP officer who responded to the attack. The INP officer and other responding officers shot and killed the assailant.

Post-specific Concerns
Economic Concerns
Visitors should be aware of potential copyright infringement when purchasing any sort of name brand items, DVDs, or electronics in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, particularly when shopping at small vendors. Potential investors should be aware that Palestinian authorities lack experience and expertise regarding protection of intellectual property rights (IPR).

Privacy Concerns
All forms of communication may be subject to compromise. While there is no specific information on those gathering the information, it is better to assume it is occurring.

Personal Identity Concerns
On occasion, Israeli authorities have subjected U.S. citizen visitors to prolonged questioning and thorough searches upon entry or departure. Those of Arab, Middle Eastern, and/or Muslim origin; those who have been involved in missionary work or activism; and those suspected of affiliation with the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement may face additional, often time-consuming, and probing questioning by immigration and border authorities. They may even be denied entry into Israel or the West Bank.

Israeli border authorities do not generally place entry or exit stamps in passports. While the U.S. Consulate General cannot facilitate U.S. citizens’ entry into Israel or the West Bank, those who feel they have been wrongly denied entry or unnecessarily subjected to additional security screening should report their experiences to the Consulate General or to the American Citizen Services Unit of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. We recommend travelers...
Drug-related Crimes
Although drugs (marijuana, synthetic marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy) are present in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, narco-terrorism and narco-violence are not significant threats. The GOI and the PA deem all narcotics to be illegal and do not tolerate them. Hamas authorities in Gaza carry out separate, harsher penalties for narcotics possession/use.

Kidnapping Threat
The threat of kidnapping remains a concern for U.S. citizens and foreigners in Gaza and the West Bank, although the last documented kidnappings were:

In June 2014, Hamas kidnapped three Israeli teenagers near the Alon Shvut settlement southwest of Bethlehem. Two Palestinians abducted the hitchhiking teenagers and killed them. Search teams found the remains of the teenagers near Hebron two weeks later. Although one of the victims held dual American-Israeli citizenship, there is no information to suggest he was targeted because of his American citizenship.

In a July 2014 retaliatory incident, Israelis kidnapped a Palestinian teenager in East Jerusalem, forcing him into a car and later burning him alive. The Palestinian’s beaten and burned body was found hours later in a nearby forest.

For more information, please review OSAC’s Report, “Kidnapping: The Basics.”

Police Response
The INP and the PCP are generally responsive and act in a professional manner. In the West Bank, the policing duties are split between the Israelis and Palestinians dependent on the specific area – see further explanation below under “Police/Security Agencies.” In the major Palestinian cities in the West Bank, the PCP is responsive, but outside of those areas, its ability to respond is limited and will take considerable time and coordination. In the areas of the West Bank where the GOI is responsible for security, the INP is limited in its ability to

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respond in a timely manner.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

American citizens whom Israeli or Palestinian authorities have arrested are advised to be cooperative, to clearly identify themselves as American citizens, and to request the arresting authority notify the U.S. Embassy or U.S Consulate General regarding the situation (or request to make such a phone call themselves).

U.S. citizens arrested by the INP and charged with crimes are entitled to legal representation provided by the GOI. They may request consular notification and visitation. In some cases, there is no notification or there are significant delays between the time of arrest and the time INP notifies the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv or the Consulate General in Jerusalem. There is no agreement between the U.S. and the PA regarding notification and consular access when PA security forces in the West Bank arrest American citizens. However, PA security forces normally notify, although not always in a timely manner, the U.S. Consulate General of arrests. The notification procedure may be expedited if the arrested U.S. citizen shows a U.S. passport to the police and asks the police or prison authority to contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General. If the GOI or PA delays or denies access to a detained U.S. citizen, the U.S. government can formally protest the lack of consular access.

Consular officers can help victims to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney, if needed. For more information about services for U.S. citizens overseas, visit the State Department’s Bureau of Consular Affairs website.

Crime Victim Assistance

The emergency phone number is 100 and works throughout Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. U.S. citizens should report crimes immediately to the police and the American Citizen Services Unit at either the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv or U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem. Timely reporting can greatly benefit an investigation, resulting in arrests and items being returned if applicable.

Police/Security Agencies

In Jerusalem, the INP has the primary responsibility for civil security inside the municipal boundaries of the city.

The West Bank is divided into three administrative and security zones: Areas A, B, and C. Israeli checkpoints control all entry to and from the West Bank and some movement within the West Bank. Area A contains most major Palestinian cities and is under PA civil and security control. Area B covers most populated, rural areas and is under PA civil control and shared Israeli and Palestinian security control. Area C is made up of Palestinian rural areas, such as

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land near roads or land adjoining Israeli settlements, as well as the Jordan River Valley; it is under full Israeli civil and security control. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs produces a yearly Humanitarian Atlas detailing the different zones and other important demarcations.

**Medical Emergencies**
Modern medical care and medicines are available in Jerusalem. However, some hospitals and clinics in Jerusalem and most hospitals in the West Bank/Gaza Strip are below U.S. standards. Emergency services usually have English-speaking operators. Emergency services telephone numbers work throughout Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza:
- Police: 100
- Ambulance: 101
- Fire: 103

**Contact Information for Available Medical Services**
For medical assistance, please refer to the Consulate’s Medical Assistance page. American Citizen Services staff can provide U.S. citizens with information to help them find appropriate medical care and contact family members and friends.

**Insurance Guidance**
If one’s health insurance policy provides coverage outside the U.S., it is important to carry both the insurance policy identity card as proof and a claim form. Medical evacuation can easily cost over US$10,000 depending on the travelers’ location and medical condition. Travelers should consider purchasing separate medical evacuation insurance. Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the brochure “Medical information for U.S. citizens traveling abroad,” available on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website.

**Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance**
Polio vaccination up to one year before travel is recommended.
The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

**OSAC Country Council Information**
For any OSAC or security-related questions, please contact U.S. Consulate General Jerusalem’s Regional Security Officer with any OSAC or security-related questions. Interested

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private-sector security managers should contact OSAC’s Middle East & North Africa Team with any questions.

**U.S. Consulate Location and Contact Information**

**Consulate Address and Hours of Operation**

U.S. Consulate General, Jerusalem
18 Agron Road, Jerusalem 94190
Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri: 0800-1700

**Consular Facility**
14 David Flussner Street, Arnona, Jerusalem 93392
Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri: 0800-1630 (public application hours are in the mornings)

**Consulate Contact Numbers**
Consulate General Operator: 02-622-7230
Consular Affairs: 02-630-4000
Website: [https://jru.usconsulate.gov/](https://jru.usconsulate.gov/)

**Department of State information line for Israel, Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza Strip**
Within U.S. – 1-888-407-4747
Overseas – 1-202-501-4444

**Nearby Posts**
Embassy Tel Aviv: [https://il.usembassy.gov/](https://il.usembassy.gov/)

**Consulate Guidance**
The U.S. Consulate General staff carefully monitors the ever-changing security situation and adjusts travel restrictions based on the security environment; changes are shared with the public through Consular notifications. Visit the Bureau of Consular Affairs for additional information.

U.S. citizens are advised to register with the closest Embassy or Consulate through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive updates directly.

**Additional Resources**
Jerusalem, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip Country Information Sheet