Papua New Guinea 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report

Riots/Civil Unrest; Crime; Disease Outbreak; Kidnapping; Natural Disasters; Rape/Sexual Violence; Theft; Threats

East Asia & Pacific > Papua New Guinea > Port Moresby

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

Crime rates in Papua New Guinea (PNG) are considered some of the highest in the world. *The Economist* recently ranked PNG's capital Port Moresby as one of the five worst cities in the world to live in based on stability, health care, education, infrastructure, culture, and environment. A 2008 report issued by The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) states that the country as a whole has one of the world's highest rates of sexual violence. The report points out that eight percent of woman in the country have been raped, but this number is likely low due to underreporting. Furthermore, according to the U.S. Department of State's Consular Affairs Country Specific Page on PNG, carjackings, armed robberies, and stoning of vehicles are problems in and around major cities, but can occur anywhere. The crime situation is not surprising, given that PNG has less than 4,000 national police charged with enforcing law in a country of nearly six million.

Most Americans living and working in PNG do so without any direct exposure to criminal activity. However, a number of recent incidents have garnered worldwide attention due to their brutal nature. These criminal incidents offer some perspective on the serious security threats Papua New Guinea faces today.

Road Safety

Traffic in PNG moves on the left. Travel on highways outside of major towns can be hazardous. Motor vehicle accidents are a common cause of serious injury. Whether the driver

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or a passenger, you should wear a seatbelt at all times. There is no countrywide road network. Roads, especially in rural areas, are in a poor state of repair. Other common safety risks include erratic and drunk drivers, poorly maintained vehicles, and over-crowded vehicles. During the rainy season, landslides occur on some stretches of the Highlands Highway between Lae and Mount Hagen. Criminal roadblocks on the Highlands Highway are often encountered during the day and widely after dark. Travelers should consult with local authorities or the U.S. embassy before traveling on the Highlands Highway. Potholes and road erosion necessitate that vehicles travel slowly, and vehicle accidents are often reported from vehicles traveling on the wrong side of the street trying to avoid potholes. Incidents of robbery and carjacking can be coordinated based on known choke points where road conditions impede expedient travel.

Police roadblocks checking vehicle registrations are a regular occurrence at night in Port Moresby. As a driver, you should ensure that your vehicle registration and safety stickers are up-to-date in order to minimize difficulties at roadblocks.

For specific information concerning PNG driving permits, vehicle inspection, road tax, road safety, and mandatory insurance, please call the PNG's Motor Vehicle Institute Limited at 675-325-9666 or 675-302-4600.

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

Since gaining independence in 1976, PNG has struggled politically. Despite a wealth of natural resources, the country struggles to provide basic education, health, and infrastructure services to its population. Intense dispute between its politicians often gridlocks parliament while inadequate resources, understaffing, and corruption erode services provided by lower government.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

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Tribal warfare occasionally resembles indigenous terrorism but is usually carried out on an individual-to-individual scale rather than an indiscriminant incident aimed at generating widespread fear.

Sophisticated criminal enterprises do exist in PNG. Their capability often exceeds that of local enforcement authorities.

International and Transnational Terrorism

Terrorism is not a tactic that receives much play in PNG. Outsiders do not blend well into PNG culture; therefore, attack planners may find it difficult to carry out an attack.

Civil Unrest

There is a reasonable amount of civil unrest. Tribes often battle each other with traditional and conventional weapons over land, water, livestock, and marriages. One act of violence often draws a retribution attack.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

PNG is an island in the South Pacific that lies on the Pacific Rim of Fire. It does regularly experience earthquakes, volcanic activity, cyclones, and occasionally is threatened by tsunamis.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Crowds can react emotionally and violently after road accidents. Crowds form quickly after an accident and may attack those whom they hold responsible, by stoning and/or burning vehicles. Friends and relatives of an injured party may demand immediate compensation from the party they hold responsible for injuries, regardless of legal responsibility. People involved in accidents should go directly to the nearest police station, instead of stopping at the scene of

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the accident.

Kidnappings

With an influx of expatriate workers supporting the extractible industries technically and administratively, it is feared that the frequency of kidnappings will increase. A spike in the trend in 2008 and 2009 lent credence to these fears, and the kidnappers were often paid as a result. In most cases, the amounts extorted were low and, therefore, not worth refuting.

Police Response

If you are a victim of crime, you may report or register a complaint at any police station in the jurisdiction where the crime occurred. There are no special police officers to assist foreigners. File a police report as soon as possible after a crime has been committed. If you, as the victim, are not capable of reporting the crime in person, someone else may file a police report on your behalf. You will be given a copy of the report after paying required fees. The police will provide an interpreter, if needed. You can report a crime to the PNG Embassy in the U.S. if you have already left the country. The U.S. embassy may also file a complaint on your behalf. If you have difficulties filing your police report with an official, please contact the U.S. embassy immediately You may need a police report to file for crime victim compensation or insurance reimbursement. If you do decide to file a report, please send a copy to the U.S. embassy, along with your address and phone number. While the U.S. embassy is not authorized to act as your legal representative, prosecutor, or investigator, the office can help you track the progress of your case and advise you of any developments.

If you are arrested, PNG authorities are required to notify the embassy. If you are concerned that the Department of State may not be aware of your situation, you should request the police or prison officials notify the closest U.S. embassy or consulate of your arrest.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities vary between hospitals in Port Moresby and the larger towns, to aid posts (including some missionary stations) in remote areas. Medical facilities vary in quality, but those in the larger towns are usually adequate for routine problems and some emergencies.

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However, equipment failures and sudden shortages of common medications can mean even routine treatments and procedures may be unavailable. A hyperbaric recompression chamber for diving emergencies is available in Port Moresby. Pharmacies are typically small and may be inadequately stocked. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for medical services. Please see the Embassy's website for a list of medical facilities in PNG at http://portmoresby.usembassy.gov/.

In recent history, cholera cases have been reported in Morobe, Madang, East Sepik, West Sepik, Southern Highlands, National Capital District, and in Daru, Western Province. A number of deaths have resulted from the outbreak. Anyone visiting the affected areas should exercise strict hygiene precautions including careful and frequent hand washing. Local water supplies can be interrupted or polluted. The embassy advises you to drink water only from known safe sources such as bottled, chlorinated, or boiled water; to avoid ice cubes and raw and undercooked food; and to maintain strict hygiene standards while traveling in PNG.

Medical evacuation companies could charge thousands of dollars for transport to Australia or the U.S. The most commonly used facilities are in Brisbane and Cairns, both in the Australian state of Queensland. If you anticipate the possible need for medical treatment in Australia, you should obtain entry permission for Australia in advance. Entry permission for Australia can be granted by the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby, but it is easier to obtain prior to leaving the United States.

Before traveling overseas, ensure your insurance covers you outside of the U.S. For more information visit the State Department's medical insurance overseas page.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Realize that PNG poses significant crime threats. You are more vulnerable to robbery or rape when traveling alone; travel in groups or with a guide. Be cautious of displaying affluence; do not carry anything with you that you are not willing to part with when confronted. Be particularly cautious of pickpocketing when in crowded public places. Conversely, visiting unguarded public sites such as parks, golf courses, beaches, or cemeteries can also be dangerous.

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Contact Information

U.S. Embassy Port Moresby is located on Douglas Street, Downtown. The local phone number is +675 321-1455. The 24 hour Duty Officer's number is +675 7200-9439.

OSAC Country Council Contact Information

PNG's Country Council consists of approximately a dozen constituents including corporate interests, NGOs, and faith-based missionary groups. The Council meets the first Wednesday of each second month. For more information, please contact Regional Security Officer Daniel Bleakmore at extension 2145.

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