



Portugal 2015 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Drug Trafficking; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Maritime; Floods; Wildfires; Fraud; Financial Security; Hotels

Europe > Portugal; Europe > Portugal > Lisbon

4/12/2015

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Portugal is a developed and stable democracy with a modern economy, just emerging from several years of economic crisis. Criminal incidents occur with less frequency in the Azores and Madeira than in mainland Portugal.

Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Portugal has a relatively low rate of violent crime, but low-level street crime is common. Petty thefts (muggings, purse snatchings, vehicle theft, pickpocketing) occur frequently, particularly in the major cities. Thieves often loiter in tourist locations, near beaches, and transportation hubs (Metro (subway), bus, train stations) to take advantage of disoriented/distracted travelers. Crime reporting typically increases during the summer months and over the winter holidays, primarily due to the increase in tourism.

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Each spring, the Ministry of Internal Administration publishes a comprehensive security report that contains detailed information on the state of law enforcement along with criminal analysis and statistics. The current report (2013) is on the Ministry's webpage: <http://www.portugal.gov.pt/media/1391220/RASI%202013.pdf>.

Vice activities (gambling, prostitution, narcotics) exist. Overall, organized crime is not a major issue, but smaller groups do operate. Eastern European criminal organizations are present and predominantly engaged in racketeering, extortion, and vice-related criminal activity. Gang activities are generally limited to immigrant ethnic groups and focused on narcotics, petty crimes, and turf protection.

Areas of Concern

Lisbon: Pickpocketing and purse snatchings in the Lisbon area are most likely to occur in buses, hotel lobbies, restaurants, the airport, trains, train stations, and trams, especially onboard tram number 28 to the Castle of São Jorge. At restaurants, items that hang over the backs of chairs or are placed on the floor are particularly vulnerable. Unattended luggage can be stolen at the airport. You should take special care in the Oriente, Santa Apolonia, Entrecampos, Marques do Pombal, and Rossio metro and train stations, the Sete Rios bus station, the Alfama, Baixa and Bairro Alto districts, and the tourist area of Belém.

Outside Lisbon: Thefts have been reported in the popular tourist destinations of Sintra, Cascais, Mafra, Fatima, Coimbra, Setubal, Porto, and in the Algarve. Thieves reportedly scout

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parking areas alongside tourist attractions and beaches, watching for rented cars. You should take special care when parking at the Moorish Castle and Pena Palace in Sintra; and at the beachfront areas of Guincho, Cabo da Roca, and Boca do Inferno. In the Algarve, there have been some reports of robberies in vacation homes, and tourist vehicles have been broken into at pottery shops. When renting vacation lodging, make sure to assess the accommodation's security systems

Madeira: Pickpocketing, while infrequent, may occur in the Old Town and Santa Catarina Park areas of Funchal.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Highways are exceptional, and secondary roads are generally of good quality and well maintained. In remote locations and in historic city centers, traffic lanes are very narrow and can be difficult to navigate. Traffic enforcement is limited, but the use of speed cameras is on the rise. Particularly problematic are failures to properly merge, yield, and safely change lanes -- and include running traffic control lights -- especially in urban areas. Motorists, especially motorcyclists, often drive excessively fast and violate traffic codes. Motorcyclists/Scooters are permitted to split lanes and go to the front of traffic at stoplights, all of which can be disconcerting for unexpected drivers. All highways have tolls, and most require an electronic device or pre/post payment when using.

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Incidents of serious traffic accidents in the Azores and Madeira are rare. High speed, bad weather, and unskilled drivers contribute to accidents including rollovers and multiple vehicles, often resulting in serious injuries or fatalities.

Lower speed accidents predominantly occur in the cities and urban areas, and particular caution should be exercised when traversing intersections, as motorists often accelerate in an attempt to beat the traffic lights or become impatient sitting in a line and disregard the traffic light altogether. While traffic congestion is notable and predominantly in Lisbon, Porto, and surrounding metropolitan areas, long queues during rush hours are commonplace, yet incidences of road rage are rare. Drivers are required to wear seatbelts, must use hands-free headsets for cell phones, and are encouraged to drive defensively.

In 2014, Portugal passed new traffic laws; the main changes are listed on the Autoridade Nacional Segurança Rodoviária website:
<http://www.ansr.pt/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=989qAAcJYM0%3d&tabid=36&language=en-US>.

If driving, store valuables and merchandise out of sight i.e. inside the trunk, and park in well-lit areas preferably in public areas. Always drive with your windows up and doors locked.

For traffic accidents and emergencies, dial 112.

Public Transportation Conditions

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Taxis are a reliable means of transportation, though you should be alert to possible discrepancies between the meter fare and the amount requested by the driver. Always ask the taxi driver to use the meter. Always use a taxi from the queue or kiosk; do not utilize someone who walks up to you and offers you a ride. In the Azores, taxis do not have meters; the fare consists of a base fee plus a posted rate per kilometer traveled.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political Violence Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

While Portugal has been largely free of major terrorist incidents, it maintains open borders with its neighbors, allowing the possibility of terrorist operatives to enter/exit with anonymity. Law enforcement and security officials, in close cooperation with neighboring countries, maintain an effective anti-terrorism effort and a welcoming environment for tourism and business. Authorities remain alert to recruitment and radicalization of religious converts, and they work closely with U.S. and European partners to counter associated risks.

Terrorism Rating: Medium

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Civil Unrest

Prior police approval is required for all public demonstrations, and police are present to ensure adequate security for participants and passers-by. Portugal has experienced a notable period of political and social tranquility; however, recent economic uncertainties have resulted in civil discontent manifesting in generally peaceful protests, on average about five or six protests a day in 2014, according to government statistics. Youths held a few, spontaneous “meets” (social gatherings with no stated purpose) during the summer of 2014, one quite large at the Vasco de Gama shopping mall in Lisbon, where a few people were injured and arrested. Even demonstrations that are meant to be peaceful can become violent and unpredictable; you should avoid them if at all possible.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Portugal is a multi-ethnic/religious country, and a harmonious relationship generally exists between all groups. Occasionally, inter-ethnic disputes may arise in depressed neighborhoods owing more to socio-economic pressures rather than an outright ethnic conflict or clash of political/religious ideologies.

Post-specific Concerns

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Environmental Hazards

Portugal experienced an estimated 8.7 magnitude earthquake in 1755 accompanied by large tsunami that killed thousands of people and left the city in ruins. A 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck the Azores in 1980 and caused property damage and loss of life. In recent years, quakes measuring 3.5 to 6.7 have been recorded both on land and in Portugal's territorial waters. The implementation of improved modern construction techniques in accordance with contemporary EU seismic protocols for large, multi-storied structures are noteworthy; however, many smaller buildings and dated residential dwellings do not incorporate such features and are susceptible to collapse in an earthquake. Consult with the U.S Geological Survey (USGS) websites for information on earthquakes including preparedness <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/index.php?regionID=63> and <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/prepare/links.php>.

Mainland Portugal and its outlying islands of the Azores and Madeira are prone to occasional storms. Storms in the islands created flash floods that can cause deaths, significant damage, and considerable erosion. For updated local weather, consult the Portuguese Institute for Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA) <http://www.ipma.pt/en/index.html> (English page).

Fires in northern Portugal, especially in the summer, can be devastating and occur with little warning. Stay on top of local media weather reporting or refer to the National Authority for Civil Protection (ANPC): <http://www.prociv.pt/sites/en4/Pages/default.aspx>.

Drug-related Crimes

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Although neither a center of drug production nor a significant source of drugs destined for the U.S., Portugal is a gateway for drugs entering Europe, particularly from South America and western Africa. In addition to direct shipments from South America, traffickers use former colonies (Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde) as transshipment, refueling, and storage points for cocaine-laden vessels from South America en route to Europe through the Iberian Peninsula. While cocaine is the most significant drug threat, ecstasy, hashish, and heroin are also readily available. Do not be surprised if you are offered drugs on the street. Drug trafficking of any amount is illegal.

Police Response

The authorities are professional. Portugal places a premium on privacy rights and individual freedoms; reports of unlawful detention, intimidation, harassment, and graft, etc. are rare.

Portuguese law requires that everyone carry official identification at all times. This ID must be displayed upon request to any police official. U.S. citizens who are not residents will need to present a U.S. passport.

While you are in Portugal, you are subject to its laws even if you are a U.S. citizen. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different than our own, and criminal penalties will vary. If you break local laws, your U.S. passport will not help you avoid arrest or prosecution. Do not buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal to bring back into the United States, you may also be breaking local law. Drug possession is prohibited even though since 2001 “personal use” quantities of drugs have been

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decriminalized. Individuals found by law enforcement to have “personal use” amounts are referred to the Drug Addiction Dissuasion Commission, consisting of multi-disciplinary teams charged with assessing users and deciding the appropriate sanction and referral to educational or treatment programs.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Based on the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, bilateral agreements, and customary international law, if you are arrested in Portugal, you have the right to request that the police, prison officials, or other authorities alert the U.S. Embassy/Consulate of your arrest and to have communications from you forwarded to the Embassy/Consulate. To ensure that the U.S. is aware of your circumstances, request that the police and prison officials notify the U.S. Embassy or nearest Consulate as soon as you are arrested or detained.

If improprieties are encountered, seek legal counsel for appropriate assistance and report incidents to the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. The emergency number is 112, and English speaking operators are available on request. The government takes crime against tourists/visitors seriously and overall attempts to reinforce the presence and visibility of all law

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enforcement entities in the streets and within the communities.

The U.S. Embassy can assist with the following:

Replace a stolen passport;

Help you find appropriate medical care if you are the victim of a violent crime such as assault or rape;

Put you in contact with the appropriate police authorities and assist in contacting family members or friends; and,

Help you understand the local criminal justice process and direct you to local attorneys, although it is important to remember that local authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting the crime.

Police/Security Agencies

Law enforcement is the main responsibility of three bodies:

Polícia de Segurança Pública (PSP) - Public Security Police. Civilian police force who work in larger urban areas and have tourist units to provide additional assistance. PSP is tasked with safeguarding internal security and the rights of citizens. The PSP is the leading agency responsible for maintaining public order, countering violent acts, and performing tactical intervention.

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Guarda Nacional Republicana - National Republican Guard. A military police officer with civilian policing responsibilities (gendarmierie) that work predominantly in rural areas too small to warrant the PSP, and they provide a national highway patrol.

Polícia Judiciária (PJ) - Judicial Police. Overseen by the Public Ministry, the PJ's mandate focuses on prevention, detection, and investigation of violent, organized, and financial crime.

Medical Emergencies

Quality medical facilities are widely available. Hospitals may not necessarily have staff members who are fluent in English. Calls to 112 are free from any phone. The operator will put you in contact with the emergency service that you require.

Medical emergency (ambulances): 112

National Police/Security Police/Fire Service: 112

Sea Rescue: 214 401 919

Maritime Police (plus pick-up boat service): 210 911 100

Maritime Police (24hrs emergency): 210 911 155/49

Pan-European emergency number: 112

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The Embassy's Consular Section maintains a list of English-speaking doctors.

Hospital de Santa Maria

AV. Professor Egas Moniz

1649-035 Lisboa 21 780 5000

*Designated Level 1 Trauma Center Hospital

**Accredited by the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB)

Hospital de S. José

Rua José A Serrano

1500-199 Lisboa 21 884 1000

Hospital de S. Francisco Xavier

Estrada do Forte do Alto do Duque

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1495-005 Lisboa 21 043 1000

*Designated Level 1 Trauma Center Hospital

Hospital da CUF

Rua Mário Botas, Parque das Nações

1998-018 Lisboa

21 002 5200

Hospital da Cruz Vermelha Portuguesa

Rua Duarte Galvão, 54

1549 Lisboa 21 771 4000

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Helicopters and Airplanes

National Authority for Civil Protection (ANPC)

Portugal under the Ministry of Interior

Av. do Forte de Carnaxide 2794-120

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Carnaxide 21 416 5100

Recommended Insurance Posture

It is very important you ask your insurance company prior to departure: Does my policy apply when I am out of the U.S. and will my insurance cover emergencies like a trip to a foreign hospital or an evacuation? In many places, doctors and hospitals still expect payment in cash at the time of service. Your regular U.S. health insurance may not cover doctors' and hospital visits in other countries. If your policy does not go with you when you travel, it is a very good idea to take out another one for your trip.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/Portugal.htm>

For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the World Health Organization (WHO) website, which also contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information. Consult with a doctor or health-care provider to determine what vaccinations and medications may be required, factoring health and immunization history, areas of the country you will be visiting, and planned activities.

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Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

If when returning to a parked vehicle, the traveler observes a flat tire and someone volunteering to assist with the repairs, use caution. While the “helpful citizen” distracts the traveler, an accomplice will steal unattended items.

Small groups of adolescents/young adults/women occasionally commit petty thefts and vehicle burglaries around common tourist spots (plazas, beaches, cafes, etc.).

Situational Awareness Best Practices

While Portugal is a generally safe country, travelers should exercise appropriate care. You should always be watchful and aware of your surroundings. Be alert, and pay attention to the local news media reports. The best defense for pickpocketing is to limit exposure to wallets, purses, backpacks etc., and avoid unnecessary distractions. Thieves tend to “rush” the entrances to the buses or trams (public transportation), and can work in pairs or groups to offer distractions while the real thief steals your belongings. Do not leave your valuables in plain sight where a thief may spot them (on the table, behind your chair at a café/restaurant). Travelers should continue to remain alert in the tourist areas, to include safeguarding your

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belongings at the beaches.

Be careful walking into train and metro stations at night; only enter well-lit and well-traveled stations. Avoid parks during the late evening/early morning hours due mainly to vice activities.

ATMs are widespread and accept most U.S. ATM cards for fund withdrawals. Avoid using ATMs on the street and utilize ones inside bank alcoves with a friend standing watch while you secure everything before departing the bank area. Many local establishments will only accept credit cards with a chip or cash as a form of payment.

Refrain from carrying (or displaying) large amounts of money, flashy jewelry, or expensive electronics. Carry a cell phone and notify someone who is not accompanying you of your intended travel plans, to include a detailed itinerary.

Use hotel safety deposit boxes usually kept behind the hotel front desk – hotel room safes offer marginal levels of protection. Do not open your hotel door to anyone you do not know; check with the front desk for verification if someone claims to be hotel staff.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

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Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Lisbon

Av. das Forças Armadas, Sete-Rios

1600-081 Lisbon

Portugal

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: + (351) (21) 770-2122

Emergency After-Hours Tel: + (351) (21)-770-2122 or + (351) (21) 727-3300

Fax:+(351) (21) 727-2354

conslisbon@state.gov

<http://www.facebook.com/AmCitsinPortugal>

Website: <http://portugal.usembassy.gov/index.html>

Nearby Posts

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Consulate Ponta Delgada: <http://pontadelgada.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

Portugal is a party to the Schengen Agreement. This means that U.S. citizens may enter Portugal for up to 90 days for tourist or business purposes without a visa. Your passport should be valid for at least three months beyond the period of stay. You need sufficient funds and a return airline ticket.

If you are going to live in/visit Portugal, please take the time to tell our Embassy about your trip. By registering with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), we can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements, and help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. Consular information can be found at: <http://portugal.usembassy.gov/service/emergencycontact.html>

OSAC Country Council Information

The Regional Security Office (RSO) at the U.S. Embassy in Lisbon is proud to host Portugal's OSAC Country Council. For more information on the Country Council, please e-mail: RSOLisbon@state.gov. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

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