Ghana 2015 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Hotels; Burglary; Cyber; Fraud; Racial Violence/Xenophobia; Maritime; Employee Health Safety; Counterfeiting; Drug Trafficking

Africa > Ghana; Africa > Ghana > Accra

5/6/2015

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats

One of the greatest threats is street crime. Most reported incidents are crimes of opportunity for immediate gain (pickpocketing, petty theft, snatch-and-grab), and visitors and residents become victims. Street crime is a serious problem, especially acute in Accra and other larger cities. U.S. travelers have reported these types of theft at crowded markets, beaches, parks, and tourist attractions. Expatriates may find themselves at a higher risk of petty crime, as there is a perception that expatriates are richer than most Ghanaians. Pickpockets and thieves often operate on city streets in crowded areas and from vehicles idling in traffic. There have been numerous reports in 2014 of bags/purses being snatched from people walking on the street, especially at night, by men on motorcycles.
Hotel safes can be accessed by hotel personnel even when locked. There have been several reports of valuables left out in hotel rooms being stolen.

Incidences of violent crime (armed robbery) are on the rise, including reports of armed robberies in expatriate residential areas. There have been burglary attempts against expatriate residences, but perpetrators generally lack the sophistication to overcome home alarm systems and static security guards.

Thefts from vehicles are very common. The potential for carjacking exists, but there were been no reported occurrences in 2014.

Motor vehicle accidents, drowning, and water-related accidents due to Ghana’s rough surf, muggings, and other violent attacks, and sexually-transmitted diseases—including HIV—are health and safety concerns that have been reported by U.S. citizens and can be at least partially mitigated by using common-sense safety precautions.

Cyber

Perpetrators of business fraud often target foreigners, including Americans, using the Internet. Fraud schemes are prevalent throughout West Africa, including Ghana.
Transportation-Safety Situation

U.S. citizens may encounter travel conditions that differ significantly from those in the U.S. This information is provided for general reference only and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Primary roads are generally paved and acceptably maintained. However, some side roads in major cities and many roads outside of major cities are in poor condition. Travel in darkness, particularly outside the major cities, is extremely hazardous due to poor street lighting and the unpredictable behavior of pedestrians, bicyclists, and farm animals (goats, sheep). Aggressive drivers, poorly maintained vehicles, and overloaded vehicles pose serious threats to road safety.

One of the greatest threats is road accidents; the road from Accra to the Cape Coast continues to be the site of many accidents. If a visitor is involved in a traffic accident and settlement cannot be reached at the scene, the accident must be reported immediately to the traffic police, who will respond and conduct an investigation.

Travelers should check with local authorities before venturing off main roads in outlying areas. Due to poor driving conditions and the poor mechanical state of many vehicles, vehicle travel after dark outside of urban areas is not recommended.
If you see something suspicious, be prepared to react quickly. Allow sufficient distance between you and the vehicle ahead of you while stopped in traffic. If you believe you are being followed, do not drive to your intended destination, but rather detour to a public or illuminated/guarded area and seek assistance. Leaving vehicles unlocked for even a short period or leaving items in plain sight inside a locked vehicle is highly discouraged. Vehicles should park in illuminated areas. Drivers must possess an international driver’s license (available from AAA and the American Automobile Touring Alliance). Foreign nationals should carry photocopies of their identity documentation (passport, visa).

Public Transportation Conditions

The safety standards of the small, private “tro tros” buses that transit roads and highways are uncertain. Travelers are encouraged to consider this when making travel arrangements.

Avoid travel in communal taxis.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

All arriving passengers are screened with thermal cameras to identify passengers with potential Ebola symptoms. Customs officials reserve the right to search any bag that comes
into Ghana.

Other Travel Conditions

Travelers are routinely stopped at police checkpoints, and vehicles and passengers may be searched.

Incidents of armed banditry have been reported on roads in rural areas. There are also occasional reports of clashes between government forces and criminal groups; however, foreigners are normally not affected.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Ghana is a stable democracy that has had six elections since 1992 and two peaceful transitions of power between political parties. The most recent election took place in 2012 and resulted in victory for President John Dramani Mahama, a member of the National Democratic Party (NDC), over the New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate. While there was some sporadic election-related violence, particularly between grassroots supporters of the two major parties, politics takes place in a generally peaceful context.

Political Violence Rating: Low
Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

Terrorism Rating: Low

Religious/Ethnic Violence

There have been numerous peaceful protests and occasions where isolated violence has broken out, particularly between rival ethnic groups in northern Ghana. Ghana has numerous chieftaincy disputes and land ownership disputes every year, some of which result in localized violence. There is tension between and within certain ethnic groups in northern regions in particular that can, at times and on short notice, become violent. Authorities are working to reduce the level of tension and violence in these areas.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Local beaches can have strong rip currents, and swimmers should avoid those areas.

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Critical Infrastructure Concerns

There have been two reported deaths by electrocution of expatriates in two hotels because of faulty wiring.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under local law. In addition, bringing them back to the U.S. may result in forfeitures and/or fines.

Personnel Background Concerns

Ghanaians are generally tolerant of all religious and racial groups.

Drug-related Crimes

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Ghana has become a significant transshipment point for illegal drugs, particularly cocaine from South America and heroin from Afghanistan. Ghana has taken limited steps to combat trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Trafficking has also fueled increasing domestic drug consumption. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has an office in the Embassy and works closely with the Narcotics Control Board (NACOB), which coordinates government counternarcotic efforts, including enforcement and control, education, treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Police Response

The Ghanaian Police Service (GPS) is primarily a reactive force, despite its recent efforts to incorporate more proactive techniques/initiatives to deter/investigate crime. Police often lack the equipment, resources, training, and personnel to respond to calls for assistance or other emergencies. The police have a poor record of investigating and solving serious crimes. There is a visible police presence in Accra, and the Embassy receives good support from the GPS and the Special Police Units that protect U.S. government facilities in Accra.

Persons violating Ghanaian laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in drugs are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. The use of drugs procured in Ghana may have life-threatening consequences.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment
If you are arrested or detained by the police, ask that they inform the U.S. Embassy of your detention. A Consular officer will arrange to meet with you to check that you are being treated humanely. They can also provide a list of local lawyers who can assist you with your legal situation.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you are the victim of a crime (including the loss/theft of a U.S. passport), you should contact the local police and the U.S. Embassy. The Embassy/Consulate staff can provide a list of local doctors, contact family members/friends, and explain how funds may be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime are solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and provide a list of local attorneys if needed. Ghana maintains a specialized Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) within the Ghana Police Service to assist victims of domestic violence, especially women and children. In addition to its law enforcement responsibilities, the Unit can refer victims to medical providers and counselors, as well as to community support services.

The Central Police Headquarters' telephone number is +233-0302-773-906. The Police Information Room can be reached at +233 0302 787-373 or via cell phone at 0244 313 820. The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line is 191.

Police/Security Agencies
Although there are a number of security and private guard companies throughout Ghana, it is advisable to research any prospective security company for quality and reliability before hiring their services.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities are limited, particularly outside Accra. Travelers should carry adequate supplies of any needed prescription medicines, along with copies of their prescriptions, the generic name of the drugs, and a supply of preferred over-the-counter medications.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Although there are several hospitals, Americans have used the following:

37th Military Hospital, (233) 0302 777 595, (233) 0302 786 103, (233) 0302 767 691,
Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital (233) 0302 673 033 or Cardio Thorasic Unit (233) 0302 670-545
Lister Hospital (233) 0302 812-325

Recommended Air Ambulance Services
An ambulance service is available through membership in the West African Rescue Association (WARA) at tel: (233) 024 366 6111. For international treatment and medical insurance: AEA International (International SOS), Tel: +27 (0) 11 541-1300. For air ambulance service (recommended for severe injuries or illnesses best treated in the U.S.): AEA International (International SOS) at Tel: 800-752-4195.

Recommended Insurance Posture

Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation can cost thousands of dollars or more; therefore, it is advised that Americans have travel insurance that covers medical evacuation.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Travelers must have a valid yellow fever inoculation card.


Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim
American citizens frequently consult the Embassy with questionable business offers from Ghana over the Internet. These are scams and typically begin with an unsolicited communication (usually by e-mail) from an unknown individual who describes a situation that promises quick financial gain, often by assisting in the transfer of a large sum of money or valuables out of the country. A series of “advance fees” must be paid in order to conclude the transaction (fees to open a bank account, certain taxes). In fact, the final payoff does not exist; the purpose of the scams is simply to collect money from the victim. The Embassy has also received reports of fraudulent charities soliciting contributions through the Internet.

Another type of fraud is committed by persons claiming to live in Ghana, or who claim to be traveling to Ghana on business, and who profess friendship/romantic interest over the Internet. Once a relationship has been established, the correspondent typically asks the American to send money for living expenses, travel expenses, or visa costs. Sometimes a “hospital” or “doctor” telephones to say that the friend has suffered an “accident” and needs immediate financial assistance to cover medical bills. There are other variations of this scam, but the common goal is to obtain as much money as possible from the victim. Americans have reported losing thousands of dollars through such scams. The anonymity of the Internet means that the victim cannot be sure of the real name, age, marital status, nationality, or even gender of the correspondent. In most cases reported to the Embassy, the correspondent turned out to be a fictitious persona created to lure Americans into sending money.

If you receive such business offers or charity requests, carefully check them out before you commit any funds, provide any goods or services, or undertake any travel. The RSO and U.S. Commercial Service advise visitors and potential business investors to consult with the U.S.
Embassy before traveling to Ghana for a business meeting or conducting business with Ghana-based companies.

Visitors should also be wary of overly-friendly locals offering tours, discounted lodging, or other services that seem too good to be true. Tourists are often targeted by touts and scam artists. Some Americans have been the victims of false criminal accusations and have found themselves separated from time and money as they seek to resolve these difficult situations.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Normal crime prevention methods will help lessen the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. Being aware of one’s surroundings has been the time-tested method to avoid becoming an inviting target of opportunity for crime. Victims who resist attackers run a high risk of serious physical injury. Take security measures, such as traveling in groups and avoiding travel at night. Travelers who limit their display of jewelry and personal mobile technology and handle their cash discreetly reduce their vulnerability to crime. Travelers are advised to carry limited amounts of cash and only photocopies of key documents. Use of credit cards should be avoided if possible, as travelers have been victims of credit card fraud.

Simple precautions such as not wearing expensive jewelry or watches, not displaying large amounts of cash or expensive mobile phones, driving with the doors locked and windows up, not walking after dark, and staying out of particularly high crime areas may help to mitigate the number of crimes committed against Americans. Visitors should take all necessary precautions and always be aware of their surroundings.
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U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located in the Cantonments neighborhood at #24 Fourth Circular Road, Cantonments, Accra.

Business hours: Monday-Thursday, 7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.; Friday 7:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Switchboard: +233 0302 741-000 (this number will also reach Marine Post One after hours)

In the event of an emergency during business hours, the U.S. Embassy operator can assist American travelers in contacting the American Citizen Services (ACS) officers in the consular section.

After business hours and on weekends/holidays, the U.S. Embassy Marine Security Guard can assist American travelers in contacting the Embassy’s Duty Officer for assistance with emergencies. The Marine Security Guard is there to assist in emergency situations only.
Regional Security Office: +233 0302 741-550

Telefax: +233 0302 741-389

E-mail: Questions related to citizen services should be sent to ACSaccra@state.gov.

American Citizen Services (ACS) unit will accept calls Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., closed on holidays, at +233 0302 741-570 or +233 0302 741-000, x1570.

Website: http://ghana.usembassy.gov/

Embassy Guidance

Travelers must secure a visa before they travel.

The Embassy operates a warden system to communicate with registered American citizens in Ghana. Periodic messages are sent to test the system so that it will be effective should an emergency situation arise. To register and for information about the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), please visit our website at: https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/.

OSAC Country Council Information
The OSAC Country Council meets quarterly at the U.S. Embassy, unless there is a reason to meet more frequently. The Regional Security Officer provides country briefings for representatives of American businesses when requested. For information on joining the Accra Council, attending Country Council meetings, or adding your organization to our electronic mailing list for security information, please contact Regional Security Officer James T. Suor at Tel: +233 0302 741-550/423, x1842 or Email: SuorJT@state.gov. To reach OSAC’s Africa team, please email OSACAF@state.gov.