



Kosovo 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Assault; Human Trafficking; Financial Security; Fraud; Winter weather; Anti-American sentiment; Riots/Civil Unrest; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Employee Health Safety; Oil & Energy; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Counterfeiting; Drug Trafficking; Other

Europe > Kosovo; Europe > Kosovo > Pristina

1/27/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: High

Crime Threats

The lack of economic opportunity is a factor in crimes of opportunity, which are the most prevalent. Large, jostling crowds are an attractive target for pickpockets. Street crimes (theft, purse snatchings) are serious problems, especially in Pristina.

The expatriate community can be a target of crime, as criminals assume affluence. Expatriate community members' homes, businesses, and vehicles can be targeted for burglaries.

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Most incidents of physical assault occur in bars in downtown Pristina and are related to alcohol consumption. Typically, these assaults stem from a personal conflict, not from anti-American sentiment.

Criminals often commit crimes with handguns, as weapons are fairly easy to obtain. While violent crimes can and do occur, reporting about Americans as victims is limited. Recently, there has been an increase in reported robberies occurring during late night and early morning hours. Some of these reports have included the assailant utilizing a weapon in an attempt to gain small amounts of cash. The victims of these crimes appear to have been targeted because they were walking alone.

Trafficking of persons remains a problem despite government steps to address the issue.

ATM fraud is increasing. ATM skimmers have been found on keypads and utilized by criminals in country.

Cybersecurity Issues

Cyber crime is a growing concern throughout the region.

Other Areas of Concern

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There is a tradition of discharging firearms into the air for major holidays, especially New Year's Eve and Kosovar Independence Day. In Pristina, celebratory fire also often occurs the evening of major elections and after local soccer/football games. In addition, weddings can result in celebratory fire. Quite often, these incidents occur in conjunction with major fireworks displays. People have been injured (and, occasionally, killed) by falling bullets.

Due to ethnic tensions and the potential for political violence, care should be exercised if visiting the northern municipalities of Zvecan, Leposavic, Zubin Potok, and North Mitrovica.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Roads within larger metropolitan areas are typically in fairly good condition, but many are under a continual state of construction or repair. Be particularly careful at night, as lighting along roadways is limited. Roads often lack proper reflective markings and safety measures (lane markers, guardrails) normally seen on U.S. roads. Modern highways are under construction; the highway to Albania has been completed.

Driving is far more difficult than driving in the U.S. for many reasons: unfamiliar traffic patterns, largely unobserved traffic laws, stray livestock, horse-drawn carts, infrastructure

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problems, ongoing road construction projects, and even the occasional homemade vehicle. Defensive driving is a must. Always wear your seatbelt.

Many local residents frequently walk in the roadway and wear dark clothing, making it difficult to see them at night.

Ice and snow on the roadways can cause delays and dangerous conditions. Authorities take measures to clear the main roads, but large volumes of snow can delay clearance. Attempt to limit your driving to daylight hours when visibility is better.

Public Transportation Conditions

Taxis are generally an inexpensive, safe, and reliable means of transportation. It is recommended to use established taxi companies instead of a personally-owned vehicle converted to a taxi. Make sure the taxi has a meter and that the driver activates it upon departure.

Rail transportation is very limited, unreliable, and safety equipment is often lacking or outdated.

Buses are often overcrowded.

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Aviation/Airport Conditions

Pristina has a modern airport terminal and control tower. Well-known international airlines fly to Pristina on a regular basis. Flights can experience significant delays/cancellations due to weather conditions.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The international/transnational terrorism threat is similar to that faced by most European nations. Kosovo has seen a rise in Islamic extremism in recent years. In the summer of 2014, police arrested over 60 individuals on suspicion of participating in or supporting the fighting in Syria and Iraq. A number of citizens have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight with terrorist organizations. Kosovo lacks a strong visa program and has generally porous borders.

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Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Americans are generally well-received, particularly in Kosovo-Albanian communities, but there is a small population that can be considered anti-American/anti-Western. Some ethnic Kosovar Serbs remain suspicious of the U.S. due to the NATO bombing of Serbia during the war. Returning foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria are usually anti-American.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

Protests occur regularly in Pristina, often in the downtown area near government or international organization buildings. The frequency of protests increases during times of political tension. In the past year, Kosovo has experienced minor civil unrest in the form of violent political demonstrations, resulting in arrests and injuries due to stone throwing and Molotov cocktails

Avoid all demonstrations and public political gatherings. While most demonstrations are relatively peaceful, every demonstration has the potential to become confrontational and may

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escalate to violence. Large, jostling crowds are an attractive potential target for terrorists.

Vetëvendosje, an ethnic Albanian nationalist political movement, and some other opposition parties organize protests against the government and international (including U.S.) organizations in Kosovo. These protests have sometimes involved physical intimidation and violence.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Religious and ethnic tensions remain in many areas of Kosovo. Annual pilgrimages to Gjakovë/Djakovica have resulted in protests and sporadic violence. In other areas of Kosovo, protests are more likely in ethnically-divided areas or areas with ethnic tension.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Kosovo is susceptible to earthquakes. There are three principle seismic zones: Prizren-Peje/Pec, Ferizaj/Uroševac-Viti/Vitina-Gjilan/Gnjilane, and Kopaonik. Within the available data range, the highest Richter Scale reading for the Gjilan/Gnjilane zone was 6.6 (in 2002), for the Ferizaj/Uroševac-Viti/Vitina-Gjilan/Gnjilane zone was 9.0 (in 1922), and for the Kopaonik zone was 6.0 (in 1980). Between 1900 and 2000, records catalogued the

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following earthquakes by intensity: 82 earthquakes at >5.0; 34 > 6.0; 12 > 7.0; 10 > 8.0; and 3 > 9.0. The most recent significant earthquake occurred in April 2002, centered in Gjilan/Gnjilane at a 6.6 and killed one person and injured at least 60 people. A recent earthquake between 4.6 and 5.2, centered in Istog/Istok (60 km/37 miles northwest of Pristina), occurred with no significant reports of damage. A series of three tremors were felt in Pristina in November 2013.

Air quality during the winter months is notably poor, mostly due to coal burning in homes and businesses in/around Pristina. There is often visible smoke and smog in the air that results in respiratory issues for residents.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

The Pristina municipality estimates that 70 percent of new private construction (primarily single-family homes, new apartment blocks) built since 1999 does not comply with established construction standards. A major earthquake would likely result in significant damage to many of these structures.

Kosovo experiences frequent electrical failures. Power generation facilities are in need of upgrades/replacement. The Kosovo Electricity Corporation (KEK) is a public utility and the sole public supplier of electricity to consumers. Its coal-fired power plants (Kosovo A and Kosovo B) are near Pristina. These generating units are nearing or past their planned operating life.

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Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) is poor. The government has made several efforts to improve the legal basis for IPR protection, including adopting new legislation and regulations. Despite these initiatives, the government has yet to take concerted action to ensure enforcement of its IPR-related laws and regulations. A number of counterfeit consumer goods (CDs, DVDs, clothing items) are openly traded.

Privacy Concerns

Kosovo has developed an EU-compliant legal framework to protect the integrity of personal information for citizens and residents. Implementation of these safeguards remains uneven. American investors should be aware that the business environment depends heavily on family and regional connections. Personal or proprietary information may be available to a broader audience.

Drug-related Crimes

Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. The police make arrests of people in possession of significant amounts of marijuana and heroin. Western experts consider Kosovo "primarily a transit country for Afghan drugs destined for Europe." Major shipment

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seizures are indicative of organized crime activity, but there is no evidence of narco-terrorism.

Police Response

A working knowledge of Albanian/Serbian or a translator will be necessary when contacting host-country emergency services.

While in Kosovo, U.S. citizens are subject to Kosovar laws. They will be detained and have their documents confiscated if found to be in violation of those laws.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

U.S. citizens arrested by the police should immediately contact U.S. Embassy Pristina's Consular Section for American Citizen Services during normal business hours or the Embassy duty officer.

The Embassy is not aware of incidents of police or governmental harassment of U.S. citizens. Any incidents of police corruption, bribery, or harassment should be reported to U.S. Embassy Pristina.

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Crime Victim Assistance

If Americans become victims of crime, they should contact the police and file a police report. If they experience obstacles to filing a police report or obtaining other police assistance, they may contact U.S. Embassy Pristina's American Citizen Services unit, which will monitor the incident but is unable to investigate, document, or otherwise interfere in legal procedures.

Police/Security Agencies

The Kosovo Police (KP) is the primary law enforcement entity. The KP works closely with the EULEX international police contingent. In the event of a security incident that the KP could not manage, EULEX would serve as the second responder, while NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) would be the third responder. As part of their routine duties, KFOR soldiers conduct border patrols and provide other security services, such as explosive ordnance disposal tasks, that cannot be handled by local authorities.

Medical Emergencies

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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The following medical facilities offer 24-hour emergency medical treatment:

University Clinical Center: Tel: +381 38 500 600 ext 2341 or 3572

American Hospital: Tel: +381 38-221-661, +377- 045-503-255 24-hour emergency room

Istanbul Medicine Hospital: For cardiac or vascular disease only, - 24-hour emergency room.
Tel. +381-38-500-601

Air Ambulance Services

The companies listed below do not imply a commercial endorsement by the U.S. government or U.S. Embassy Pristina. These companies are generally accessed by an ongoing contract with a business or individual but may also assist a non-member.

SOS International: Tel. +44 208 762 8008 (London), <http://www.internationalsos.com/en/>

Global Rescue Services: Tel. +1 617 459 4200 (US)

Recommended Insurance Posture

It is recommended to procure health/medical insurance recognized in Kosovo that covers routine/emergency care and medical evacuation for the duration of your stay.

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CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

According to a European Commission report, “air pollution in Kosovo causes 835 premature deaths, 310 new cases of chronic bronchitis, 600 hospital admissions, and 11,600 emergency visits each year.”

The U.S. Embassy Pristina does not consider the tap water potable. It is recommended to drink distilled or bottled water. It is recommended to follow food safety precautions to prevent food-borne illnesses. Foods should be cooked long enough and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause illnesses. Fruits and vegetables should be washed, peeled, or boiled prior to eating. The CDC recommends avoiding all unpasteurized dairy products.

The CDC recommends that all travelers be up-to-date on all “routine vaccines” and recommends vaccines for Hepatitis A and B and rabies for individuals with high occupational risks and for individuals who are likely to be exposed to rabies-infected wildlife. The CDC notes that tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) is prevalent in forested areas of Europe, and there have been documented cases of the avian bird flu (H5N1) in several Eastern Europe countries. The annual incidence rate of tuberculosis is high in some countries in the region. West Nile Virus was detected in Kosovo and neighboring countries in 2012. For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/kosovo?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-sing-le-001.

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OSAC Country Council Information

Kosovo has a limited active OSAC Country Council. You may obtain additional country specific information from the Kosovo page of the OSAC portal at www.osac.gov. To reach the OSAC Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Pristina: 30 Nazim Hikmet Street (Dragodan area), Pristina, Kosovo

Operating Hours: Mon-Fri, 0800-1700

Embassy Contact Numbers

Operator: (381) 38-5959-3000

Facsimile: (381) 38-548-614 or (381) 38-549-890

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Consular/American Citizen Services: +381-38-5959-3119, consularpristina@state.gov

Duty Officer Tel: +381 38 5959-3000

Regional Security Office: +381 38 5959-3114

Marine Post One: +381 38 5959-3114

Website: <http://pristina.usembassy.gov/>

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

People should be alert to their surroundings and keep control of all personal belongings, especially when in crowded public places (public transportation areas, open markets). Make an effort to blend in with your surroundings.

The Embassy strongly recommends that American citizens avoid large public gatherings, especially political rallies and demonstrations, due to the potential for violence.

During instances in which "celebratory" gun fire occurs, consider staying indoors or seeking

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overhead cover to avoid injury.

If you use an ATM, it is recommended to use one inside a bank as opposed to a free-standing ATM on the street. Always check the ATM for irregularities before use.

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