Egypt 2017 Crime & Safety Report: Cairo

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Terrorism; Political Violence; Crime; Natural Disasters; Religious Violence

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation
U.S. Embassy Cairo does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The ACS Unit 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 CAIRO AS BEING A MEDIUM-THREAT LOCATION FOR CRIME DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Please review OSAC’s Egypt-specific webpage for proprietary analytic reports, Consular Messages, and contact information.

U.S. citizens are urged to remain alert to local security developments, avoid demonstrations, and be vigilant regarding their personal security. U.S. citizens should also carry identification and a cell phone or other means of communication, and it is advisable to pre-program the U.S. Embassy’s telephone number and email address into the device.

Crime Threats
The vast majority of criminal acts against foreigners tend to be crimes of opportunity (purse snatching, pickpocketing) that are often carried out by young males. Semi-professional
thieves target unaware visitors in popular restaurants and shops stealing purses, phones, and purchased goods. There are a number of reports citing criminals using weapons, although such cases remain infrequent. There have been several instances where individuals passing on a motorbike have grabbed a woman’s handbag, sometimes inadvertently injuring the victim. Women have also reported attempted purse snatchings from drivers as they enter into taxis. There are growing reports of criminal ruses against foreign visitors often employing feigned concern over a stain/spill on an article of clothing; while helping to wipe the clothing, the criminal will lift a wallet from a purse or pocket. Other Areas of Concern Travelers should be aware that the highest concentrations of World War II-era unexploded landmines are located along the Mediterranean coast west of Alexandria, the Eastern Desert between Cairo and the Suez Canal, and much of the Sinai Peninsula.

**Transportation-Safety Situation**

**Road Safety and Road Conditions**

Vehicle accidents remain a significant safety concern. Egypt has one of the highest occurrences of road fatalities in the world. Driving Cairo’s busy streets can be extremely challenging for those used to a culture of structured rules and regulations. Even seasoned residents must use extreme care and situational awareness to navigate the hectic streets of the capital. Traffic rules are typically ignored by impatient drivers and are unpredictably enforced by police. Drivers should be prepared for vehicles with no lighting at night, few if any road markings, vehicles traveling at high rates of speed, vehicles traveling the wrong way on one-way streets, divided highways and connecting ramps, a high volume of pedestrians dodging traffic, and a variety of domesticated animals wandering the roadways. For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC’s Report “Driving Overseas: Best Practices” and “Road Safety in Africa.” Pedestrians should also exercise extreme caution when traversing roadways, especially in high-volume/high-velocity streets like Cairo’s Corniche, which follows the eastern bank of the Nile River. Crosswalks exist, but motorists have the right-of-way, and pedestrians should exercise extreme caution. Motorists should be especially cautious during rare winter rains, which can cause extremely slippery road surfaces and localized flooding.
Intercity roads are generally in fair condition but unmarked surfaces, stray animals, sandstorms/fog, and disabled vehicles without lights or reflectors are among the many hazards present on highways, especially after dark.

Public Transportation Conditions
Taxis and car-sharing services remain an efficient use of public transportation in large cities (Cairo, Alexandria). Embassy members are authorized to travel in taxis or other car services. Foreigners can often be targets for higher taxi fares, and some drivers often claim their meter is broken. Some females have found it helpful to refrain from engaging in conversation, beyond basic pleasantries, with taxi drivers. Women should always sit in the back seat of the taxi.

The use of public buses, microbuses, and the metro system is prohibited by U.S. Embassy personnel, and visitors are discouraged from using them. Cairo’s metro system is a common form of public transportation for Egyptians. Overcrowded metro stations and trains can be a common area for opportunistic crimes (pickpocketing, sexual harassment).

There are frequent train accidents that sometimes involve mass casualties.

Aviation/Airport Conditions
On October 31, 2015, a Russian Metro Jet crashed shortly after takeoff from Sharm el Sheik, a popular tourist destination in the Sinai. Although Egypt has not officially announced the findings of its investigation, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, publishing a photo of what it says is the improvised explosive device that brought the aircraft down.

International air carriers have enhanced security measures. Since the Metro Jet incident, the international community and Egypt have made significant improvements in airport security. Domestic flights have generally more relaxed security procedures, especially passenger screening.

At Cairo International Airport, large crowds tend to gather outside terminals waiting for arriving passengers. They can become unruly. Arriving U.S. Embassy personnel typically arrange for an expeditor and/or trusted transportation company to pick them up inside the terminal. Taxis are available at the terminals at all airports, but travelers should be aware of unauthorized chauffeurs and “set fare” taxis.

Terrorism Threat
THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED CAIRO AS BEING A CRITICAL-THREAT LOCATION FOR TERRORIST ACTIVITY DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns
There are a number of terrorist organizations known to be operating in Egypt, and terrorist attacks can occur anywhere in the country. Since 2015, terrorist attacks have targeted Egyptian government/security forces, public venues (tourist sites), civil aviation/modes of public transportation, and a diplomatic facility. Responsibility for terrorist attacks has been attributed primarily, but not exclusively, to jihadists operating out of the Sinai Peninsula, which remains a particularly restive area. Terrorists are active in Egypt's western desert -- the large, mostly isolated area west of greater Cairo and the Nile Valley -- including in the vicinity of various oasis towns. There are active military operations against terrorist elements in this region. There are also active military operations being conducted in Egypt's border areas with Gaza and Libya.

The Egyptian government maintains a heavy security presence at major tourist sites, especially Sharm El-Sheikh, and the many temples and archaeological sites located in/around Cairo, Luxor, Aswan and Abu Simbel.

On December 11, a suicide bomber struck Sunday Mass at the Saint Peter and Saint Paul’s Church in Cairo’s Abbasiya district, killing 29 people and injuring 47 others. On December 13, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. While the attack does not indicate that extremist elements are looking to target private-sector interests, the expansion of attacks targeting civilian interests raises concerns about wrong-place, wrong-time violence leading to collateral damage and the possibility that targeting preferences may continue to expand.

**Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED CAIRO AS BEING A HIGH-THREAT LOCATION FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS.

Civil Unrest

In 2016, the size and frequency of demonstrations decreased markedly. Egypt's demonstrations law prohibits gatherings of more than 10 people without advance notification to the Ministry of Interior. Demonstrations have led to violent clashes between police and protestors, resulting in deaths, injuries, and property damage. Peaceful demonstrators and bystanders may be subject to questioning, detention, arrest, and conviction for participating in or being in proximity to unauthorized demonstrations. The police often maintain a large presence at Tahrir Square in central Cairo during significant anniversaries to deter anti-government mobs from gathering and sporadically close access to vehicular traffic. While there may be periods when the crowds appear celebratory or non-threatening, criminal acts are committed under the shroud of anonymity a large crowd provides. In some cases,
protestors have turned over alleged criminals to police or military units positioned near the square’s perimeter. Peaceful demonstrations have also turned violent with no notice, making them unpredictable and potentially dangerous.

Religious/Ethnic Violence
Sporadic sectarian violence between Muslim and Christian communities remains a concern, most notably in the Nile Valley governorates of Asyut and Sohag, located between Cairo and Luxor. However, this has not impacted Westerners. These governorates, along with the adjacent governorates of Minya and Qena, have long been considered areas prone to extremist activity and sectarian strife. Also, the attack on the Coptic church tracks closely with ISIS’s activity, as it seeks to increase tensions between religious groups and undermine perceptions that host governments protect these communities. ISIS has conducted attacks against Christian communities in the Middle East and North Africa, including in the Levant and Libya. ISIS had also claimed the targeted killing of a Coptic priest in Sinai over the summer and the February 2015 execution of 19 Egyptian Copts in Libya.

Post-specific Concerns
Environmental Hazards
Egypt is a geologically active region, and seismic activity occurs. Although earthquakes are rare, damage can be severe, especially to older buildings due to lax building codes and shoddy construction. The last major earthquake that resulted in damage was in 1996.

Personal Identity Concerns
The laws do not explicitly criminalize same-sex sexual activity, but LGBT persons have been arrested on charges of debauchery, prostitution, and violating the teachings of religion, providing for prison sentences of up to 10 years. Reports of arrests have increased in recent years. Gay men and lesbians faced significant social stigma and discrimination in society. Individuals with disabilities may find accessibility and accommodation very different from in the U.S. Businesses and institutions generally do not make accommodations for persons with disabilities, and Egyptian authorities do not enforce laws mandating access to transportation, communication, and public buildings by persons with disabilities. Pedestrian sidewalks and walkways are limited, uneven, high, and sometimes used by cars and motorcycles. Females regularly report instances of sexual harassment (staring, improper comments, touching). A number of women, including foreigners, have reported being sexually harassed and assaulted in taxis, isolated streets, and while transiting crowded protest areas. The majority of incidents occur on busy city streets but also inside a victim’s home by
maintenance/delivery workers. Female travelers are also likely to be affected by religious and cultural beliefs. Foreign women are advised to dress conservatively in public. At night, women and teenage girls may want to exercise additional caution and not travel alone.

Women, especially those traveling alone, should exercise particular care in crowds, on public transportation, in rural areas, and in isolated sections of temple and pyramid complexes. Women have been groped in taxis and while in public places.

Kidnapping Threat

Most kidnappings appear to be within the Egyptian community and are often carried out to settle a dispute among neighbors, rivals, or tribes or simply target a person known to be affluent. Children are often victims, and these cases are generally settled through the payment of a ransom. Perpetrators are likely hoping for a quick monetary payoff and, therefore, avoid the scrutiny likely to rise from kidnapping a higher profile businessperson/foreigner. While unnerving and not to be dismissed, there is nothing to suggest that the threat of kidnappings should be of great concern within the expatriate community in Egypt’s major cities. Kidnappings have the potential to be more prevalent in the Sinai or Western Desert regions.

On July 22, 2015, Tomislav Salopek, a Croatian citizen employed by a French energy company, was kidnapped approximately 20 km west of Cairo’s 6th of October City. On August 5, a video posted on ISIS Sinai’s Twitter account claimed responsibility for the abduction and demanded the release of all female Muslims in Egyptian prisons within 48-hours in exchange for Salopek. He was killed, and ISIS Sinai claimed responsibility.

Police Response

Foreigners may experience a range of professionalism when dealing with police. Police are generally responsive to visitors in need of assistance and will initiate investigations based on the report of a crime. Emergency response times and the ability to conduct in-depth criminal investigations on petty crimes generally fall short of Western standards. While misdemeanor
crimes may not receive the attention a visitor would expect, police tend to pursue felonies more assertively.

Any item/souvenir that resembles an antiquity will be scrutinized closely by Egyptian Customs officials.

It is illegal to photograph police stations, military barracks, and certain other sensitive public buildings. For more information, please review OSAC’s Report “Picture This: Dos and Don’ts for Photography.”

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Police may detain a foreigner during a serious traffic accident until a statement is given. If you are arrested for any reason, make every effort to contact the U.S. Embassy. Although protocol requires the police services to notify the Embassy in the event of an arrest of an American citizen, this may not always be the case depending on the time, place and circumstances surrounding your arrest.

Crime Victim Assistance

The Embassy advises American citizens to contact ACS at U.S. Embassy Cairo at 2797-3300 should they require assistance.

The Embassy continues to receive reports of U.S. citizen women subject to domestic violence, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and rape. The Consular Section strongly encourages women who seek our assistance to take legal action against perpetrators in order to bring them to justice. Some Egyptian NGOs provide assistance to victimized women within the Egyptian community. Women victimized overseas may be entitled to receive compensation for counseling and/or other services such as relocating back to the United States.

Nationwide Emergency Telephone Numbers

Emergency Police
Ambulance
123

Fire Brigade
180

Tourism Police
126

International Call Services
120
Inter-Government Call Services

10

Telephone Directory

140. 141

International Telephone Directory

144

Railway Police

145
Public Traffic Admin. For Highway Accidents

012111000

General Security Services (criminal offenses)

115

Medical Emergencies
Medical care generally falls short of U.S. standards, but there are many Western-trained medical professionals. While medical facilities are adequate for non-emergency matters, particularly in frequently visited tourist areas, emergency and intensive care facilities are limited.

Most Nile cruise boats do not have a ship’s doctor, but some employ a medical practitioner of uncertain qualification. Hospital facilities in Luxor and Aswan are inadequate, and they are nonexistent at most other ports-of-call.

Ambulance Hotline – 123

Contact Information for Available Medical Services
The U.S. Embassy Cairo Regional Medical Office can provide a complete list of local hospitals and English-speaking physicians.
Cairo: El Salam International – 2524-0250
Alexandria: El Salama – 487-9999
Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance
The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for Egypt.

OSAC Country Council Information
The Embassy hosts OSAC Country Council meetings on a quarterly basis and ad-hoc meetings as necessary. Please contact OSAC’s Middle East & North Africa team if you are interested in being put in touch with the RSO.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information
Embassy Address and Hours of Operation
U.S. Embassy Cairo, Egypt
5 Tawfik Diab Street

Garden City, Cairo
Business hours: Sun-Thurs 0830 - 1700
Embassy Contact Numbers
Switchboard: 2 02-2797-3300
Consular Section: (20) 2-2797-2301
Fax: (20) 2-2797-2472
Email: consularcairoacs@state.gov
For after-hours emergencies involving U.S. citizens, call (20) 2-2797-3300.
RSO: (20) 2-2797-2208
Email: RSOCairo@state.gov
Website: https://eg.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/cairo/

Nearby Posts
Consulate Alexandria: https://eg.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/alexandria/
Embassy Guidance
U.S. citizens traveling in Egypt are encouraged to register in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). STEP is a free service that helps the U.S. Embassy disseminate information about safety conditions and contact travelers in an emergency.

Additional Resources
Egypt Country Information Sheet