



Mexico 2018 Crime & Safety Report: Mexico City

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Threats; Stolen items; Political Violence; Natural Disasters; Financial Security; Employee Health Safety; Intellectual Property Rights; Cyber; Crime; Cargo Security

Western Hemisphere > Mexico; Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Mexico City

3/9/2018

According to the current U.S. Department of State Travel Advisory at the date of this report's publication, Mexico has been assessed as Level 2: exercise increased caution.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

U.S. Embassy Mexico City 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 Mexico City as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Please review OSAC's Mexico-specific webpage for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

The Department of State divides its roles and responsibilities in Mexico among 10 consular districts. This Crime and Safety Report focuses on the Embassy's district, which is composed of Mexico City, the southern tip of Tamaulipas State and the following 13 states: Chiapas, Estado de México, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz. For information regarding the security

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environment elsewhere, please reference the Crime and Safety Reports for Tijuana, Nogales, Hermosillo, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Monterrey, Guadalajara, or Merida.

Crime Threats

The general crime rate in Mexico City is above the U.S. national average, and crime varies widely. The low rate of criminal convictions contributes to the high rate of crime. Although there is no pattern of criminals specifically targeting foreign or U.S. businesses/personnel, criminals will target anyone perceived as lucrative and vulnerable. Criminals select victims based on an appearance of prosperity, vulnerability, or a lack of awareness. Armed robberies, kidnappings, car thefts, credit card fraud, and various forms of residential/street crime are daily concerns. Jewelry (including expensive watches) and cellular phones can be sold easily in vast illegal markets. Thefts of the vehicle's operating computer and sound systems are common crimes. Although Mexico employs strict gun-control laws, criminals are often armed with handguns or knives.

Organized criminal groups continue to cause significant levels of violence throughout parts of the country. The northern half of Mexico was considered a higher threat area, primarily due to organized criminal conflicts and competition for drug trafficking routes to the U.S.; however, recent statistics show that violence is on the rise in central and southern states, particularly in Guerrero, Michoacán, and Estado de México. One common practice is for gangs to charge protection fees or add their own tax to products/services with the threat of violence for those who fail to pay. Foreign and U.S. companies have been extorted, and some have been attacked for not responding to demands. Some criminal groups will mandate that individuals or even whole communities work for them as lookouts or couriers. Others will threaten municipal and state administrators into accepting corrupt practices. Beheadings, lynching, torture, and other gruesome displays of violence, as well as high numbers of forced disappearances, have become routine occurrences, including in the Mexico City metropolitan area. Numerous journalists and bloggers have been killed for reporting on these incidents. Mexico is experiencing a combination of conditions that collectively degrade the security environment in certain areas. The government has captured some of its most wanted criminals. Consequently, organized criminal groups are becoming much less organized and disciplined. Various groups have splintered into smaller gangs, which have branched out into different illegal business activities, and associated violence is spreading across Mexico. Cargo theft remains a key area of concern for U.S. and foreign companies. FreightWatch International ranks the level of cargo crime in Mexico as "severe," its worst ranking, primarily because the supply chain continues to face threats from cargo criminals, corrupt law

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enforcement personnel, and, to a smaller extent, organized crime. Mexico's Secretariat of Government estimates there were 7,286 cargo thefts in 2017, and FreightWatch has determined that cargo theft increased by roughly 19% compared with 2016 levels. Insurance policies have, therefore, experienced a cost increase, and some no longer provide coverage to overnight cargo travel.

There are numerous reports in which U.S. citizens have had their credit/debit card numbers skimmed and the money in their debit accounts stolen or their credit cards fraudulently charged. Skimming is the theft of credit card information by an employee of a legitimate merchant or bank, manually copying down numbers or using a magnetic stripe reader or using a camera and skimmer installed in an ATM. In addition to skimming, the risk of physical theft of credit or debit cards also exists. Try to use ATMs in bank branches during business hours. For more information, please review OSAC's Report, "The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud."

Other Areas of Concern

According to the Procuraduria General de Justicia del Distrito Federal and the Secretaria Publica del Distrito Federal, the following city boroughs had the highest number of crimes reported in 2017: Cuauhtémoc, Iztapalapa, Gustavo A. Madero, Álvaro Obregón Venustiano Carranza and Coyoacan.

Travel for U.S. government employees is closely scrutinized due to violence associated with organized criminal groups. For a state-by-state assessment, visit the latest U.S. Department of State Travel Advisory for Mexico. The Embassy prohibits U.S. government employees' travel to several parts of the Embassy's district, including Guerrero and Michoacán.

Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, please review OSAC's Report, "Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights."

Road Safety and Road Conditions

U.S. citizens traveling on roads and highways may encounter government checkpoints, which are often staffed by military personnel. The government has deployed federal police and military personnel to combat organized criminal groups. However, criminal organizations have been known to erect their own unauthorized checkpoints and have killed/abducted motorists who fail to stop at them. Likewise, self-defense groups have established checkpoints in their communities and have shot and wounded travelers who fail to stop. When approaching a

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checkpoint, regardless of whether it is official or non-official, cooperate and avoid any actions that may be perceived to be suspicious or aggressive.

For more information on self-driving, please review OSAC's Report "Driving Overseas: Best Practices."

Public Transportation Conditions

The Embassy does not recommend using *libre* taxis, as they are poorly regulated and are often criminally-linked enterprises that pick up fares on the street after being hailed by customers. *Sitio* (radio-dispatched) taxis are far safer, more reliable, and are worth the added expense. These types of taxis cannot be hailed off the street and must be ordered by phone or met at a designated taxi stand. Twenty-four hour radio taxi service is available at 5516-6020 and 3626-9800 to 30. *Sitio* taxis in Mexico City are most often metered and registered by the government. In addition, the Embassy permits car services that can be requested online via phone/tablet applications, which allow consumers to verify the driver and vehicle number. For more information on ride-sharing, please review OSAC's Annual Briefing Report "Safety and Security in the Share Economy."

Visitors should travel by intercity bus only during daylight hours and only by first-class conveyance whenever possible. Although there have been several reports of bus hijackings and robberies on toll roads, buses on toll roads have experienced a lower rate of incidents than second- and third-class buses that travel on less secure, *libre* highways.

There have been occasional reports of significant security incidents (apart from theft) on tourist buses in/around Mexico City and to nearby tourist destinations.

In Mexico City, municipal buses and the Metro (subway) are generally safe to use. City buses and the Metro may be crowded, and passengers should be on the alert for pickpockets and other thieves, especially on the most crowded, busiest routes during rush hour. Non-municipal buses (*micros*) are not well regulated and are not recommended.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The Embassy advises that its employees fly, rather than drive, to many Mexican destinations. *Sitio* taxis from Benito Juarez International Airport are paid in advance in the terminal (at the *sitio* stands) and are well-regulated.

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Mexico City as being a **LOW**-threat location for terrorist activity directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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The U.S. Embassy/Consulates are focused on Mexico as a potential transit country for foreign terrorist groups to conduct operations against the U.S. There are no known foreign terrorist organizations operating in Mexico, and there is no evidence that any terrorist group has targeted U.S. citizens in Mexico. Mexico does not provide a safe haven to terrorists or terrorist groups.

The Mexican government remained vigilant against domestic and foreign terrorist threats in 2017 and passed amendments to its Federal Penal Code that strengthened the country's legal framework to address acts of terrorism, including terrorist financing. Authorities cooperate well with relevant U.S. government agencies on persons of interest. Criminal organizations have used terror-like tactics (car bombs, grenades) to attack each other and security forces. They also commit gruesome acts of violence designed to terrorize; however, the effects of these acts seem directed largely at rival gangs.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Mexico City as being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Civil Unrest

Peaceful demonstrations of all sizes gather regularly at the Monument to Independence (the Angel), which is near the U.S. Embassy, to protest government policies, labor, social issues, and, occasionally, U.S. policies. These protests often affect traffic during peak commute hours on and near Paseo de La Reforma, the city's primary avenue. Most demonstrations are peaceful. However, even demonstrations intended to be peaceful may turn confrontational and escalate into violence. Demonstrators frequently block city streets, major highways, or take control of government toll roads on major highways and may demand unofficial tolls from travelers. Groups associated with teachers' unions and those protesting alleged human rights violations in Guerrero have used checkpoints as a way of raising money for their causes. U.S. citizens are urged to avoid areas of demonstrations and to exercise caution if in the vicinity of any protests.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Earthquakes within the Embassy's consular district are routine, especially in the Pacific coast states. Mexico experienced an 8.2 earthquake on September 7, 2017, with epicenter off the coast of Oaxaca, and a 7.1 on September 19, 2017, with an epicenter in Morelos. Although

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there have been substantial improvements in building regulations and response planning since the 1985 earthquake, the 2017 earthquakes killed at least 441 people. Rebuilding costs are expected to exceed U.S.\$1.6 billion.

Active and dormant volcanoes are scattered throughout central Mexico. One of the country's largest volcanoes, Popocatepetl, is located 43 miles southeast of Mexico City and has had several low-level eruptions in the past several years. The government prevents access to the mountain and has closed it to climbers and hikers. According to public safety officials, travelers to the area should have N-95 filter masks available in case ash falls on them. Clouds of ash associated with volcanic activity can limit air travel and make evacuation by air difficult.

On November 23, 2017, Popocatepetl presented eruptive activity, which was considered the largest since 2013.

On October 5, 2017, authorities raised the volcano alert system to "Yellow Phase 2" following an impressive eruption from Popocatepetl.

From May to November, hurricanes may affect the Pacific and Gulf coasts of the Embassy's consular district. The coastal states tend to bear the brunt of these storms, but storms have caused flooding and disruption of utility services throughout the district. During September 2017, three hurricanes hit Mexico's coasts:

Katia (Category 1, hit Veracruz shore on September 8)

Lidia (Category 1, hit Baja California's Peninsula on September 1)

Max (Category 1, hit Guerrero's shores on September 14)

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Critical Infrastructure

On July 18, 2017, rains caused thousands of gallons of *jales* (water contaminated with waste from the mining extraction process) to spill onto farm lands and water streams in the municipality of Camargo Chihuahua.

In 2017, radioactive materials were stolen at different places:

October 16: X-ray equipment containing Iridium 192 was stolen from a parked vehicle in Nayarit.

August 1: A nuclear densimeter was stolen from an Universidad de Nuevo Leon vehicle in Nuevo Leon.

April 25: An ambulance containing iridium 192 (a radioactive material) was stolen in Jalisco.

In 2017, the Ministry of Labor (Secretaria del Trabajo y Prevision Social, STPS) and Institute of Social Security (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, IMSS) reported 158,808 (closed) cases of industrial and transportation accidents, including work illnesses.

Economic Concerns

Mexico was listed on the Watch List in the 2017 Special 301 Report, noting inadequate intellectual property rights (IPR) enforcement and the wide availability of pirated/counterfeit goods, mostly via physical and virtual markets. Criminal organizations are significantly involved in the counterfeit and pirated goods trade. Enforcement efforts suffer from weak coordination among federal, state, and municipal officials; limited resources for prosecutions; lack of long-term sustained investigations to target high-level suppliers; and the need for deterrent level penalties. The U.S. continues to encourage Mexico to provide its customs officials with *ex-officio* authority, to allow the Attorney General Offices the authority to prosecute transshipments of alleged counterfeit and pirated goods, and to enact legislation to strengthen its copyright regime, including the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

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Internet Treaties. The U.S. also continues to work with Mexico to resolve IPR concerns through bilateral, regional, and other means of engagement.

Economic espionage activity is covered under misappropriation of trade secrets law in Mexico. The three sources of trade secrets law are the Industrial Property Law, Federal Criminal Code, and NAFTA, all of which provide fines and criminal penalties for misappropriation of trade secrets. There have been extremely limited prosecutions of trade secret misappropriation due to onerous legal requirements and evidentiary issues tied to proving theft of digital files.

Kidnapping Threat

The number of kidnappings reported throughout Mexico is of particular concern. The number of kidnapping incidents is difficult to determine because most of the cases are not reported to authorities, as the popular belief is that the police may be involved or are unable to resolve the situation.

The majority of cases reported to the U.S. Embassy have been kidnapping for ransom (KFR) cases. In some KFR cases, a ransom is paid, and the victim set free, but in other cases, the victims are killed despite having paid a ransom. Affluent residents in Mexico City often have bodyguards and armored vehicles for their families.

While kidnappings can occur anywhere, government of Mexico statistics state that 771 kidnapping cases were reported within Embassy Mexico City's consular district in 2017. States within the consular district with the highest number of kidnappings in 2017 were Estado de México, Veracruz, Guerrero, and Tabasco, representing a 3% decrease compared to 2016 statistics. Police (or former law enforcement officials) have been implicated in many of these incidents.

The FBI investigated 116 kidnapping events in Mexico in 2017. In 66 of them, the victim was a U.S. citizen, in 14 the victim was a Legal Permanent Resident, and in 36 cases the extortion/ransom call was placed to a number in the U.S. Of the cases, 81 were kidnappings for ransom, 25 were virtual kidnappings, and in 10 cases there was no ransom demand. Travelers are advised to vary routes/times and to be alert to possible surveillance, noting any individual who appears out of place. When hiring domestic help, vet them by identifying references. Ensure that they are trained not to volunteer information to strangers or to allow access of workers without prior authorization.

The number of reported express kidnappings is low. Express kidnappings are based on the 24-hour withdrawal limit placed on ATM cards industry-wide. Express kidnapping victims are held for 24-48 hours to maximize withdrawal amounts. A common *modus operandi* for

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express kidnappings in Mexico City is passengers using *libre* taxis who are often robbed by two or three armed accomplices who enter the taxi a few minutes into the trip. The term 'express kidnapping' is also applied to the kidnapping of random victims held for brief periods where only small ransom amounts are demanded. A typical scenario may last for several hours and may be settled for the peso-equivalent of a few hundred or thousand dollars. Few official U.S. government employees have suffered this type of crime, but many Mexican employees of the Embassy either have been victimized themselves or know a victim.

There appears to be an up-tick in virtual kidnappings. These extortion telephone calls vary in style, but the methodology is often the same. Callers say that they have kidnapped a loved one and often include a crying/pleading voice immediately after the call is answered but before the kidnapper gets on the phone. Callers intend to confuse the victim and trick them into giving away important information. The voice will usually be crying and/or hysterical, making it difficult to identify and increasing the likelihood that the victim will believe it is their loved one. Criminals use fear and timing against victims. They plan their calls to coincide with times when it is difficult to contact the victim (when children are on their way to/from school). Or, the callers will obtain two cell phones of two family members. They will call both victims at the same time and claim to have kidnapped the other. They use fear and the threat of violence to keep both victims on the line while they urge them to pay a ransom. Once the kidnappers are satisfied they have obtained as much money as they can, they end the call. They may demand that the ransom be delivered in person, which can turn into a real kidnapping, or that the money is sent electronically. Variations use callers claiming to be lawyers or police looking to get a family member out a bad situation. They pressure the target to pay them to waive charges or to bribe alleged corrupt officials to free their loved one and avoid a long, expensive judicial process.

Virtual kidnapping/extortion calls are made to Mexican and international numbers and often use information obtained from social networking websites. A variation affecting travelers at hotels is an extortion-by-deception scheme, wherein a victim is called and convinced to isolate themselves from family/friends until a ransom is paid. The victim is coerced (by threat of violence) to remain isolated and to provide phone numbers for the victim's family/loved ones. The victim's family is contacted, and a ransom is extracted. Often, the callers make statements to suggest surveillance.

To reduce the likelihood of receiving a virtual kidnapping call, answer the phone with only a "hello" and make the other person ask for you by name and know the details of your family's itinerary and contact information (land-line and cell phone numbers). Never provide personal

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information to someone who calls or approaches you and do not post personal information on social networking sites.

For more information, please review OSAC's Report, "Kidnapping: The Basics."

Police Response

The government of Mexico has deployed security forces to various parts of the country and has created a new military unit known as the National Gendarmerie to augment security in certain areas.

Be aware that offering a bribe to a public official to avoid a ticket or other penalty is a crime. U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with the police if stopped or questioned.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In some instances, U.S. citizens have become victims of harassment, mistreatment, or extortion by law enforcement and other officials. Authorities have cooperated in investigating some cases, but one must have the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number to pursue a complaint effectively. U.S. citizens are advised to note this information if they have a problem with police or other officials.

Crime Victim Assistance

U.S. citizens may contact the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City for assistance in dealing with the police. If involved in a traffic accident or victimized by crime, one may be required to accompany the investigating officer to the local police station to file a complaint or respond to questions. Should a police report be required for an insurance claim, a nominal fee will be charged.

Host Nation Police Emergency: 911

Fire Department: 911

Ambulance: 911 (Red Cross)

Consejo Ciudadano de Seguridad Publica y Procuracion de Justicia del Distrito Federal (in Mexico City, takes complaints from those afraid to go to the police): 5533-5533

Police/Security Agencies

Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR): Office of the Mexican Attorney General that is responsible for investigating and prosecuting federal crimes.

Secretary of Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB): Oversees federal police forces.

The federal police are approximately 38,000 strong and are present in all states. They oversee the Mexican Immigration Service (INAMI), whose officers have the right to detain

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suspected undocumented aliens and may deport them without formal deportation proceedings.

Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público): Customs officers (Aduana) are deployed at borders and at international airports to interdict contraband.

The Bank of Mexico (Banco de México): Operates its own security division, which is charged with enforcing banking and monetary laws, including cases of counterfeiting, fraud, and money laundering.

Procuraduría General de Justicia (PGJ): The local Mexican Attorney in each state/city is in charge of investigating and prosecuting state and local crimes.

State Police: Each of the country's 31 states and the Federal District maintain both preventive and judicial police. State police are under the direction of the state's governor.

Municipal Police: Each state contains numerous municipalities, each of which maintains a municipal police force.

Military Forces: The army and navy have been heavily involved in anti-crime initiatives, as they combat organized criminal groups.

Medical Emergencies

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided Consular Affairs' website Your Health Abroad.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

For medical assistance, please refer to the Embassy's Medical Assistance page.

Available Air Ambulance Services

Advanced Air Ambulance 800-633-3590 or 305-232-7700

Air Ambulance Professionals 800-752-4195 or 954-730-9300

Recommended Insurance Posture

Please peruse Consular Affairs' website on Insurance Providers for Overseas Coverage.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for Mexico.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Mexico City is active, meeting monthly. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's Western Hemisphere team with any questions.

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U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Mexico City

Paseo de la Reforma, 305

Col. Cuauhtémoc

Mexico, D.F. 06500

Business hours: Mon-Fri, 0830-1730

Embassy Contact Numbers

Mexico country code: 52

Mexico City area code: 55

Telephone - 5080-2000 (24/7 switchboard operator)

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

Nearby Posts

Consulate Ciudad Juarez: <http://ciudadjuarez.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Guadalajara: <http://guadalajara.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Hermosillo: <http://hermosillo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Matamoros: <http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Merida: <http://merida.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Monterrey: <http://monterrey.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Nogales: <http://nogales.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Nuevo Laredo: <http://nuevolaredo.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Tijuana: <http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

It is prudent to leave a detailed itinerary, including local contact information and expected date of return, with a friend or family member, and to sign up for the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).

Additional Resources

Mexico Country Information Sheet

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