Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The crime rate in The Bahamas reportedly fell about 18 percent from 2005 to 2006, although the crime rate in crowded New Providence Island rose by as much as 40 percent in certain categories. Most violent crimes involve only Bahamian citizens. Notably, 50 of the 60 murders committed in The Bahamas in 2006 occurred on New Providence Island.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF) attributes most murders, home invasions, and robberies to drugs and domestic violence. Areas frequented by tourists comprise a small fraction of New Providence Island, but produce nearly 30 percent of all arrests. However, foreign visitors and tourists are very rarely the victims of murder or serious injury by criminals. Violent crimes do occasionally affect Americans in high tourist areas. The RBPF patrol these areas heavily.

Foreigners residing in The Bahamas have periodically been victimized by residential burglary. Most thefts are of small items, such as lawn furniture, and occur even within gated communities. Forced entry of residences is a concern, but residential alarms and roving security patrols have proven a relatively effective deterrent.

Vehicle thefts, primarily of 4-door economy sedans, occur, and the vehicles are usually taken immediately to chop-shops and disassembled for parts or shipped to other islands in The Bahamas. Traffic accidents pose a safety hazard in some parts of The Bahamas, primarily due to speeding and reckless driving on roads not designed for high-speed travel.
Tourist areas produce significant volumes of non-violent crime. Outside the tourist areas, New Providence Island records all varieties of crime. Meanwhile, other islands in The Bahamas archipelago have relatively low crime rates.

Political Violence

In The Bahamas, there is little to no threat facing Americans from domestic (Bahamian) terrorism, war or civil unrest. The threat from transnational terrorism is exacerbated due to porous borders; however, there do not appear to be any Middle Eastern terrorist groups currently active in The Bahamas, and terrorist groups native to the western hemisphere do not typically operate in the Northeastern region of the Caribbean. Public protests and demonstrations are rare and do not tend to be violent in nature. Strikes are generally limited to "industrial actions" or "work to rule" actions, which, on occasion, have caused some minor disruption to public services.

Post-Specific Concerns

Hurricanes and tropical storms frequent The Bahamas from June through November. Travelers and U.S. businesses are advised to consider devoting resources and time to necessary emergency planning for the possibility of inclement weather, particularly during hurricane season. The Bahamas is a major transshipment point for narcotics traffickers. U.S. businesses or citizens should be mindful not to conduct business with questionable persons or enterprises. It is lawful for the RBPF to conduct sting operations using entrapment techniques.

Police Response

The police generally respond quickly to hotels and establishments frequented by foreigners, but they are slower to respond to residential areas. Police have few emergency vehicles, and streets and houses are generally unmarked, inhibiting responders from locating affected residences. To ensure quick response to a residence, victims should go to the local police.
post and provide transportation to the site. If detained by the police one should cooperate, identify oneself as an American citizen and request to make contact with the U.S. embassy immediately. Police harassment of Americans is rare. Attempting to bribe an officer of the RBPF is a serious offense. Visitors should not attempt to "tip" police officers for their services. The local police emergency numbers are 911 or 919.

Medical Emergencies

For emergency medical care, foreigners should plan carefully and purchase medical evacuation insurance coverage before coming to The Bahamas, especially when considering travel off New Providence Island and away from Nassau. Some private clinics offer basic primary care, but in medical emergencies, air travel is generally the only way to get to help quickly. Travelers should always carry basic medical supplies and personal prescription medications. HIV/AIDS is a growing health concern in The Bahamas.

Medical facilities in The Bahamas are generally limited and not equipped to handle many emergencies, especially those requiring surgery. Outside Nassau and New Providence Island, hospitals are scarce and offer only basic service. For serious cases, treatment in even the best of hospitals would probably require medical evacuation after stabilization. In cases where serious surgery is necessary, the local blood bank is limited though considered safe from blood-borne pathogens. Contact information in Nassau is as follows:

General emergency numbers: 911 or 919
Ambulance service: (242) 322-2221, 394-3388 or 394-2582
Air ambulance services: (242) 327-7077, 362-1606 and 394-3388
Doctor's Hospital (a private hospital on New Providence Island, Nassau): (242) 322-8411 or 322-8414
Princess Margaret (public hospital New Providence Island, Nassau): (242) 322-2861

SOS emergency air flight services
Alarm center - Philadelphia
Open 24 hours for International SOS Assistance, Inc.

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How to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Crime

All Americans are urged to register with American Citizens Services (ACS) at the embassy. Register online at https://travelregistration.state.gov.

The use of universal security tips and good common sense go a long way in helping to avoid some of the crimes commonly faced by Americans. Do not engage in high risk behavior. Do not leave valuables on the beach or poolside while swimming. If you are in an area that makes you feel uncomfortable or you do not see other tourists, you are probably in the wrong area of town. Visitors should protect themselves as they would in any large or major metropolitan city.

Opportunistic crimes such as petty theft, home invasions, armed robbery and vehicle theft occur in The Bahamas, as does fraudulent use of bank and credit card account numbers. Home invasions can be deterred by use of residential alarms, guards, and a good emergency plan. Should you be confronted by a group or person demanding money or valuables, you should comply with their demands and make the encounter as brief as possible. In The Bahamas, many criminals carry firearms. By following related common sense rules, visitors can avoid becoming victims:

- When hiring domestic staff, check references and obtain a police clearance.
- Give domestic staff and guards specific written instructions with regards to access to residences and compounds and insist on compliance.
- Use a residential alarm system.
- Install non-man-passable grillwork on accessible windows and doors.
- Get to know the neighborhood, neighbors, and local police.
- Use all security devices available in your residence.
- If your residence is isolated, create a safe-haven equipped with a steel door.
- Do not carry or display large amounts of cash.
- When confronted by criminals, surrender valuables.
- Do not go out alone at night.
- Treat people, especially those you hire, with respect.
- Always let someone know your travel plans, especially if traveling outside the cities.
- Carry a medical kit and water whenever traveling.
- When renting vehicles with drivers, insist on vehicles with seatbelts, conduct at least a visual inspection of the vehicle, and ensure the driver has a valid license.
- When driving, lock all doors and keep windows up.
- If you suspect you are being followed, do not immediately go home, rather go to a public place and seek assistance.
- Upon exiting an establishment, survey your surroundings for suspicious activity or surveillance.
- In hotels, use safety deposit boxes.
- Do not throwaway cancelled checks, or any paper bearing account numbers. The use of a shredder is recommended.

When visiting an area for more than several days, contact local police or civil authorities who can provide an overview of existing conditions and useful local emergency contact information.

Several companies in The Bahamas provide security services that vary in type of services offered, though quality is generally good. Police license security guards and may be consulted prior to engaging security services. Many security companies are headed by retired senior officers from the Royal Bahamas Police Force.

Further Information and OSAC

As of 2007, there is no OSAC Country Council in The Bahamas, though efforts are underway to establish one. U.S. Embassy Nassau has an economic/commercial officer. For further information, please contact the American Citizen Services section, Consular Officer, Economic Officer, or Regional Security Office at U.S. Embassy Nassau.

U.S. Embassy switchboard: (International dial) 242-322-1181