China 2013 Crime and Safety Report: Shanghai

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Threats; Surveillance; Stolen items; Separatist violence; Religious Terrorism; Insurgencies; Floods; Landslides and mudslides; Earthquakes; Winter weather; Maritime; Information Security; Hotels; Financial Security; Economic Espionage; Cyber; Assault; Theft; Racial Violence/Xenophobia; Counterfeiting; Fraud; Extortion

East Asia & Pacific > China > Shanghai

2/7/2013

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Shanghai is a safe city overall. When compared with large urban areas in other countries, Shanghai fairs as a very safe city. The 98 percent conviction rate enjoyed by the judicial system, the flexibility of their law, and a large police and security service presence throughout the city serves to deter most crimes. However, petty crime does occur with regularity. The income disparity has been a source of social friction and is a root cause of much of the city’s economic crime, which includes pick pocketing, credit card fraud, and various financial scams, often targeting foreigners.

The most common criminal incidents are economic in nature. Victims are often targeted because of their perceived wealth. Pick pocketing on public transportation, at shopping areas, and at tourist sites is quite common. Small pick pocketing groups of ethnic Chinese minorities are becoming more common. At tourist sites, thieves are generally more interested in cash and will abandon credit cards. In shopping areas, both cash and credit cards are sought.

Violent crime is less common, but there were isolated incidents. For example, in September, the maritime territorial disputes between China and Japan sparked protests throughout major cities. These protests turned violent with the smashing and burning of Japanese businesses. Additionally, American citizens who are or appeared to be of Japanese descent reported harassment while in the public. The harassment ranged from taxi refusal to assault. Also in September in two separate incidents, two Westerners were stabbed walking in the Wai Tan area. These types of incidents garner significant media attention but are not considered normal.

Violent crime affecting the expatriate community most often occurs in the bars and clubs of the nightlife districts. Bar fights have occurred due to cultural miscommunication, xenophobia,
and alcohol. The legal age for consuming alcohol is 18; however, most establishments do not require identification. Some bars are overcrowded, and safety standards are not routinely enforced. Prostitutes and drugs are known to be present in some clubs.

**Overall Road Safety Situation**

The use of unregistered, or “black,” taxi cabs continues to be of concern. In a limited number of cases, foreigners have reported being sexually assaulted, have had their luggage stolen, or have been charged exorbitant fares. Luggage theft typically involves a taxi transporting individuals to or from the airport and the driver intentionally leaving the scene before bags have been unloaded. Other examples of problems with taxis include rigged taxi meters that can charge up to double the going rate. The Regional Security Office (RSO) recommends that travelers contact the hotels where they will stay to inquire as to the normal cost of a taxi. Use official taxis (for example, two-tone sedans) that employ meters.

The physical road conditions are generally good to excellent; in contrast, driving conditions in rural areas are usually poor. The number of vehicles on the street has multiplied at a faster rate than the roads are being built.

The greatest road hazard remains the Chinese driver; most have little experience operating motor vehicles and are either overly cautious or aggressive, resulting in accidents every day. Traffic laws are rarely adhered to, and policing is done remotely by video camera (mainly speed traps). Traffic control devices are oftentimes blatantly disregarded. Yielding to oncoming traffic or pedestrians (even in crosswalks) is virtually unheard of, as is signaling. Additionally, the large number of motor bikes (both electric and gas) disregard traffic laws, using both the roads and the sidewalks. Pedestrians must be on the alert for bicycles and motorbikes operating on the sidewalk.

RSO receives dozens of reports of traffic accidents on an annual basis; most are minor and are resolved on the scene. In many cases, bicyclists strike a static or moving vehicle. In traffic accidents involving consulate vehicles, the official American often is ruled at fault, regardless of the actual cause of the accident.

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

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

During 2012, the government characterized two incidents in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) as terrorist attacks. Nine "religious extremists" and "terrorists" armed with
knives on February 28 attacked a crowd in Kashgar prefecture, reportedly killing 15 and injuring 16 pedestrians. Seven of the attackers were reportedly killed in the ensuing clash with police, and the alleged "ringleader," an ethnic Uighur, was sentenced to death. On June 29, six ethnic Uighur men attempted to hijack a Chinese airliner en route from Hotan to Urumqi, reportedly using aluminum pipes from a dismantled pair of crutches and injured 10 passengers. According to official media, three ethnic Uighurs were sentenced to death and one received life in prison after reportedly confessing to the crimes of "organizing, leading, or participating in a terrorist group," "hijacking," and attempting to detonate explosives on an aircraft.

The Consulate is unaware of a significant transnational terrorist presence in China.

Civil Unrest

The threat level for political violence remains low. Protests outside of official U.S. facilities rarely occurred in 2012, and when they did, it involved one or two persons. They were relatively peaceful and were generally focused against the Chinese government. These protestors complained about corruption in the government and on perceived wrong doings to which they were victims. Violent protests, as seen during anti-Japanese demonstrations, are uncommon and usually quickly controlled by security services.

Religious or Ethnic Violence

China’s domestic counter-terrorism efforts remain focused primarily against the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) (aka East Turkestan Islamic Party (ETIP)), a Pakistan-based terrorist group that seeks independence for the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of northwest China. In public statements, government officials singled out the “Three Evils” of extremism, separatism, and terrorism in Xinjiang as the main terrorist threat to the nation and characterized Uighur discontent as terrorist activity. Human rights organizations maintain that China used counter-terrorism as a pretext to suppress Uighurs, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group that comprises a large percentage of the population of the XUAR.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Natural disasters are not uncommon; a 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck Sichuan province in May 2008, killing more than 69,000 people and leaving nearly five million people homeless. In
September 2012, a series of earthquakes occurred in Yunnan province. The two main shocks killed 81 people, injured 821 people, and damaged over 20,000 homes.

Severe weather, such as large snowstorms, can bring parts of the country to a virtual standstill. Even smaller-scale storms often lead to multiple traffic accidents; snow removal is typically slow and is accomplished by employing thousands of laborers armed with shovels and brooms.

China’s southern coast is subject to heavy rainfall, flooding, and monsoons. Southern China experienced massive mudslides in 2010, causing significant property damage. Even China’s major urban cities are vulnerable to heavy rainfall and flooding. In July 2012, Beijing suffered a devastating flood that killed nearly 80 people and destroyed over 8,000 homes. According to a recent study in the journal Natural Hazards, Shanghai is one of the most vulnerable cities to flood risks and land subsidence.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Accidents and fatalities continue to plague China’s heavy industries. Worker safety and quality assurance are lacking. In December 2012, there were several accidents that received a lot of media attention: three tenants were killed when a four-story building undergoing renovations partially collapsed; two workers were killed after a ladle of molten metal accidentally tipped over; and a department store aquarium burst, injuring 16 people.

Commercial transportation accidents involving motorized vehicles are not uncommon. Trucks are often overloaded, and drivers are poorly trained. In July 2011, a bullet train crashed near Wenzhou, killing 40 people and injuring 200. In September 2011, a subway train slammed into the rear of another train due to equipment failure, injuring 271 people.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

The distribution of counterfeit currency plagues official and private Americans. Unsuspecting Americans are passed fraudulent notes at restaurants, stores, and taxi cabs. Large numbers of 100 RMB and 50 RMB counterfeit notes continue to circulate, while fake 20 RMB and 10 RMB (roughly US$3 and US$2 respectively) denominations have been introduced around the country.

In 2012, the U.S. Consulate’s American Citizen Services observed an increase in the number of reported incidents of business disputes involving American companies where violence occurred or there was a threat of violence or intimidation. These incidents ran the gamut from
contract disputes to disgruntled employees and labor strikes. The local police were unwilling to become involved until the situation had deteriorated to the point where an American was in physical danger. Prior to that crisis point, the common police response was that they could not get involved in a business dispute. Oftentimes, the business disputes would result in exit bans until the dispute was resolved in Chinese courts.

Privacy Concerns

All visitors should be aware that they have no reasonable expectation of privacy in public or private locations. The Consulate regularly receives reports of human and technical monitoring of U.S. private businessmen and visiting U.S. citizens. Security personnel carefully watch foreign visitors and may place you under surveillance. Hotel rooms (including meeting rooms), offices, cars, taxis, telephones, Internet usage, and fax machines may be monitored onsite or remotely, and personal possessions, including computers, in hotel rooms may be accessed and searched without your consent or knowledge. Elevators and public areas of housing compounds are also under continuous surveillance. The areas around U.S. and other foreign diplomatic facilities and residences are under overt physical and video surveillance; dozens of security personnel are posted outside of facilities and around residences, while video cameras are visible throughout Shanghai. Overt microphones and video cameras are common in Chinese taxis.

All means of communication including telephones, mobile phones, faxes, e-mails, text messages, etc., are likely monitored. The government has access to the infrastructure operated by the limited number of internet service providers (ISPs) and wireless providers in China. The government has declared that it regularly monitors private e-mail and Internet browsing through cooperation with local ISPs. Some bloggers are subject to particular scrutiny. Common Western social media websites, including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, are blocked in China. Wireless access to the Internet in major metropolitan areas is becoming more common. As such, the Chinese can more easily access official and personal computers.

Drug-related Crimes

Narco-terrorism has not been an issue. The government is concerned about domestic drug use, and enforcement efforts are widespread; however, illicit drugs are available to both Chinese and expats.

Kidnapping Threats
Kidnappings are not common. However, rumors--claiming that a businessman was held against his will in a hotel room while being forced to pay some debt or that a cab driver drove a client to an unknown location and forced him/her to pay some fee under threat of injury--abound. However, these events have never been reported officially to RSO.

Police Response

Police response for foreign victims of crime depends upon the type of infraction, where it transpired, and the social status of the victim. Urban forces are better trained and equipped, especially in Shanghai and other first-tier cities, where authorities spend millions of dollars on security-related infrastructure. Local police are semi-effective at deterring crime; most responses to alarms/emergency calls are sufficiently prompt if the police are informed that the victim is a Westerner or person of importance. In some cases, local police authorities will serve as a mediator between the victim and criminal to agree upon financial compensation (sometimes in lieu of jail time).

Investigative training and forensic equipment are improving but remain substandard in comparison with those of Western countries. Despite repeated formal requests, reports of investigations are never provided to RSO; however, cooperation between Chinese security officials and the Consulate continues to increase.

Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime

If private U.S. citizens become the victim of a crime anywhere in China, they should contact the police by dialing 110 regardless of location (English-language capabilities will vary significantly). They may also contact American Citizen Services (ACS) at the Embassy or nearest Consulate for assistance. ACS officers can recommend appropriate medical facilities, provide contact information for local attorneys, notify family members, and explain how to transfer funds to China.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care continues to improve in many urban areas. Shanghai has several acceptable Western style medical centers. Some conditions that previously led to a medical evacuation can now be treated safely in-country. U.S. citizens should use Western medical centers whenever possible or, when necessary, seek out a hospital’s VIP section (“gao gan bing fang”) where there are more likely to be Western-trained physicians and more modern medical equipment.
International SOS maintains a 24-hour alarm center for visitors to China. SOS representatives will advise on the availability of care in most urban areas. Collect calls are accepted. Contact information is as follows:
Beijing: 86-10-6462-9000
Hong Kong: 852-2528-9900
USA: 215-942-8226

Both municipal and private ambulance service remain substandard. Response time is typically very slow, and transport to the nearest hospital can take a considerable amount of time due to congested traffic conditions. Most ambulances are poorly equipped and staffed by individuals lacking EMT training akin to that found in the U.S. or Western Europe.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Air ambulance service varies by city. International SOS is the main Western air ambulance provider along China's east coast. MEDEX also provides regional air ambulance services; its representatives can be contacted at http://www.medexassist.com/.

Medical evacuation by air is expensive: $60,000 - $100,000 per flight depending upon the patient's condition and final medevac destination. Visitors are strongly encouraged to purchase medical evacuation insurance prior to traveling to China.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams/Crimes

The following techniques are commonly used against foreigners:

Tea/tea ceremony: Foreigners are approached and asked if they are interested in Chinese culture. The scammers then offer to assist the foreigners in buying tea at a local tea shop or to partake in a famous tea ceremony. The tea is of low quality and overpriced (sometimes in excess of 1,000 RMB). Foreigners are threatened that the local police will arrest them if the bill is not settled.

Take a picture/Practice English: Foreigners are approached by two or more Chinese (mostly good looking females). The two ask the foreigners to take a picture of them. The conversation develops where the foreigners are invited to practice English over a drink at either a tea shop or bar. The bill ends up being overpriced, and foreigners are threatened that the local police
will arrest them if the bill is not settled.

Begging: Foreigners are sometimes approached by beggars with small children. Recent news expositions revealed that in many cases these beggars are part of a larger underground network that sometimes takes children from villages and puts them on the street to beg. In some instances, these networks will even physically deform a child in the hope of generating more sympathy money.

Criminals are using SMS messaging and emails more frequently to send fraudulent bills and traffic tickets to trick people into paying money. The newest text messaging scam is from an individual claiming to be the landlord who is traveling overseas and requests that the monthly rent be deposited into a bank account. Other techniques involve criminals posing as police and levying fake criminal charges against their victims and then extorting money from them.

Areas to be Avoided and Best Security Practices

Travelers are strongly encouraged to be aware of their surroundings. Continued vigilance is necessary to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. As a general rule, lesser developed areas in major cities have a higher rate of crime. Statistically, more crimes of opportunity transpire during early morning hours; for example, individuals who frequent bars, nightclubs, and similar establishments are more likely to be involved in physical altercations after midnight.

Visitors should disperse money on their person, taking care to separate small and large denominations. Men should place their wallets in front pockets, while women should drape the shoulder straps of purses across their body, keeping them in view and under positive control at all times. If you use a backpack, do not place items of worth inside. Hotel safes should be used but are not a failsafe method to safeguard your belongings.

Travelers are encouraged to make copies of their passport photo page, visa, and card numbers (to include telephone contact information in the event the card is stolen); these copies should be stored in the hotel or residence in the event the actual items are stolen. Travelers should not flash large amounts of money, jewelry or electronics, all of which can be an indicator of wealth.

Public payphones are becoming less common in urban areas. Long-term visitors should purchase cellular telephones, and short-term travelers should contact their cellular phone provider to determine if it provides coverage in both mainland China and Hong Kong. Chinese
SIM cards with pay-per-minute plans are inexpensive.

Individuals are encouraged to use official taxis that employ meters. Avoid any taxi with a license plate beginning with "X." If a driver refuses to use a meter, exit the vehicle and use another taxi. Since the majority of taxi drivers have limited proficiency in English, travelers are encouraged to have the address written in Chinese characters.

RSO encourages employees and dependents involved in a traffic accident not to argue with the other party regardless of who is responsible. Employees are encouraged not to react to aggressive driving by local nationals and to defuse the situation in a safe and expeditious manner.

Counterfeit products are readily available, but it is illegal to import them into the U.S. U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have the authority to seize suspect goods and impose fines on travelers caught attempting to enter the U.S. with counterfeit items. Use exact change as often as possible to avoid receiving counterfeit currency.

Business travelers should be mindful that trade secrets, negotiating positions, and other business sensitive information may be taken and shared with competitors, counterparts, and/or Chinese regulatory and legal entities. Consulate employees are warned not to discuss sensitive information in their homes, vehicles, or offices. Members of the private sector should take similar precautions, including on personal computers, PDAs, and cell phones, to safeguard sensitive, personal, and/or proprietary information.

**U.S. Embassy/Consulate Location and Contact Information**

Normal hours of operation are 8:00 -5:00, Monday-Friday. Facilities are normally closed for U.S. federal and Chinese holidays.

U.S. Embassy Beijing
Address: No. 55 An Jia Lou Lu, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100600
Telephone: 86-10-8531-4000 (24 hours)
Post One: 86-10-8531-4444
Fax: 86-10-8531-4000 (American Citizen Services)
Email: amcitbeijing@state.gov.
Internet: http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/service.html
Medical Unit: 86-10-8531-4777
Consular Affairs: 86-10-8531-3333
U.S. Consulate Chengdu
Address: 4 Lingshiguan Road, Section 4, Renmin Nan lu, Chengdu 610041
Telephone: 86-28-8558-3992, 8558-9642; after hours: 86-0-137-0800-1442
Fax: 86-28-8558-3520
Consular Section Fax: 8558-6229
E-mail: consularchengdu@state.gov

U.S. Consulate Guangzhou
Address: 5th Floor of the Tianyu Garden Building, 136-146 Lin He Zhong Lu, Tianhe District, Guangzhou 510133
Telephone: 86-20-8518-7605; for after hours emergencies, please call 86-20-8121-8000.
Fax: 86-20-3884-4410
Email: GuangzhouACS@state.gov

U.S. Consulate Shanghai
Main Address: 1469 Hauihai Zhonglu, Shanghai 200031
Telephone: 86-21-6433-6880
Post One: 86-21-6433-2270
Consular Section
Address: 8th floor of the Westgate Mall, 1038 Nanjing Xi Lu, Shanghai 200041
Telephone: 86-21-3217-4650; after hours 86-21-6433-3936
Consular Section Fax: 86-21-6217-2071
Email: Shanghaiacs@state.gov

U.S. Consulate Shenyang
Address: #52, 14 Wei Road, Heping District, Shenyang 110003
Telephone: 86-24-2322-1198; after hours 86-24-137-0988-9307
Fax: 86-24-2323-1465
Email: ShenyangACS@state.gov

U.S. Consulate Wuhan
Address: New World International Trade Tower I, N. 568 Jianshe Avenue, Hankou, Wuhan 430022
Telephone: 86-027-8555-7791
Fax: 86-027-8555-7761
Email: chenz@state.gov (Consul General’s assistant)
For the latest security and other information, Americans living and traveling abroad should monitor the Department’s Bureau of Consular Affairs at http://travel.state.gov, where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings can be found, as well as important information for Americans who face emergencies abroad. U.S. citizens residing or traveling in China are reminded to register in the Department’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program by entering their travel itinerary and contact information at: https://step.state.gov/step/. In case of difficulties registering online, please contact the closest U.S. embassy or consulate for assistance.

OSAC Country Council Information

Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai all have active OSAC Country Councils. The initial point of contact for each Council is the Regional Security Officer who can be reached via the numbers listed above or email addresses as follows:
RSO James Lemarie (Beijing): LemarieJD@state.gov
RSO James Reynolds (Guangzhou) ReynoldsJM@state.gov
RSO Miguel Eversley (Shanghai): EversleyMA@state.gov
RSO Scott Kim (Shenyang): KimSP@state.gov