Guatemala 2013 Crime and Safety Report

Murder; Assault; Stolen items; Theft; Carjacking; Rape/Sexual Violence; Kidnapping; Burglary; Transportation Security; Narco-Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Volcanoes; Hurricanes; Landslides and mudslides; Maritime; Cargo Security; Employee Health Safety; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Drug Trafficking; Travel Health and Safety; Extortion; Insurgencies

Western Hemisphere > Guatemala > Guatemala City

4/12/2013

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Guatemala is a developing country with wide income disparities. Violent crime is a serious concern due to endemic poverty, an abundance of weapons, a legacy of societal violence, and weak law enforcement and judicial systems.

Crime Threats

Guatemala has one of the highest violent crime rates in Central America. The violent crime rate is rated by the U.S. Department of State as “Critical.” In 2012, Guatemala reported an average of 99.5 murders per week. While the vast majority of murders do not involve foreigners, the sheer volume means that local officials, who are often inexperienced and underpaid, are unable to cope with the problem. The number of violent crimes reported by U.S. citizens and other foreigners has remained high, and incidents have included, but are not limited to, assault, theft, armed robbery, carjacking, rape, kidnapping, and murder, even in areas of Guatemala City once considered safe, such as Zones 10, 14, and 15.

Recently-released government statistics showing a drop in the country’s murder rate for the third year in a row belie the very real crime and security concerns that affect those living or traveling in Guatemala. Guatemalan and international media and the government touted the January 1, 2013, release of end-of-year crime statistics for 2012 that showed a drop in the murder rate to 34.5 per 100,000 residents, down from 38.5 in 2011. This is the third consecutive annual decrease since the murder rate peaked in 2009, but the 2012 figure still translates to 5,174 murders. Statistics provided by the Policia Nacional Civil (PNC) are the ones most commonly used by the government and international organizations for reporting purposes. In the case of homicides, the PNC does not count homicides if the victim left the crime scene alive and subsequently died as a result of injuries. INACIF (Instituto Nacional de
Ciencias Forenses de Guatemala), the government agency responsible for tracking all deaths in country, shows homicide rates 8-16 percent higher than PNC homicide rates for these time periods, with 2012 being the biggest difference at 16 percent. Guatemala’s worrisome murder rate appears driven by four key factors: an increase in narco-trafficking activity, growing gang-related violence, a heavily-armed population (upwards of 60 percent possess a firearm), and a police/judicial system that remains either unable or unwilling (or both) to hold most criminals accountable. Well-armed criminals know there is little chance they will be caught or punished.

At the same time the murder rate has decreased, the number of missing persons cases reported to the government increased 156 percent from 2009 to 2012. While migration could account for some of that increase, it is unlikely that family and friends would undergo the cumbersome process of filing a denuncia (complaint) if they knew or suspected the persons had disappeared voluntarily. The U.S. Embassy is aware of the disappearances of several U.S. citizens, all of which remain unsolved.

According to recent reporting, robberies of cell phones increased 40 percent from 2011 to 2012, with most by force or threat of force. That translates into 142,745 cell phones in 2012, up from 101,664 in 2011, or one cell phone every four minutes.

Government figures indicate the closing months of the year were the most violent of 2012 — a trend that is not uncommon during the holiday season, when people are believed to have more money and are more likely to be out-and-about. That trend continued into January 2013, which was reported as one of the most violent months in recent years.

According to government crime statistics, sexual assault rates were 63 percent higher in 2012 than in 2009. In most known cases, women traveling/driving alone were targeted specifically.

Theft, armed robbery, and carjacking are the most common problems encountered by American citizens. No area is immune to daytime assaults, including the upscale shopping, tourist, and residential areas of zones 10, 14, 15, and 16 in Guatemala City. There have been numerous reported incidents of bank patrons being robbed outside banks after withdrawing large sums of money, suggesting possible complicity of bank personnel on the inside. A particularly troubling trend is the use of motorcycles for armed robbery. Typically, two men on a motorcycle accost the driver of a car and demand the driver’s cell phone. Armed robberies to steal a cell phone have turned violent. In May 2009, a new law mandated that only the operator is allowed on the motorcycle. The law also says that the motorcycle license plate must be printed on a sticker on the back of the motorcycle driver’s helmet. This law was used
effectively in Colombia in the late 1990s. However, criminals in Guatemala have adapted tactics to include two men on two or more motorcycles. In addition, enforcement has lagged.

The Embassy has no reason to believe that U.S. citizens are being targeted specifically, other than the suspicion that U.S. citizens and their relatives have more money than average Guatemalans. Longer-term residents and dual nationals are more likely to become victims of serious crimes, as they tend to be integrated into local society and may not reside in the safest areas. Tourists seem to be largely shielded from the worst of the violence, instead succumbing principally to pickpockets and purse-snatchers. That said, U.S. tourists have also occasionally been victims of rapes, sexual and physical assaults, and murders.

Pickpockets and purse-snatchers are prevalent in major cities and tourist sites. Those who offer no resistance when confronted by armed thieves are usually not hurt.

Home invasions by armed groups occur from time to time in upscale neighborhoods. Thieves gain access by enticing a resident to open the door for a delivery or rushing in when family or staff open the door. Residential crime rates for 2012 are up 24 percent over 2011 rates.

**Overall Road Safety Situation**

Safety of public transportation: Poor  
Urban road conditions/maintenance: Fair  
Rural road conditions/maintenance: Fair to poor  
Availability of roadside/ambulance assistance: Fair  
Overall Road Safety Assessment: Fair

U.S. citizens will encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. Most city streets are lit, but secondary and rural roads have little to no illumination. Driving demands one's full attention, requiring that safe drivers be defensive to avoid dangerous situations. Cars and trucks are often stalled or parked in the middle of the road. Tree branches are sometimes placed in the road a hundred meters or so before the stalled vehicle to warn approaching traffic of the hazard. While driving in or near large cities, be vigilant of pedestrians who unexpectedly dart across roads, even in heavy traffic, due to the lack of cross walks. Speed limits, lane markings, and stop signs are often ignored. Drivers often drive at the absolute maximum speed their vehicle can handle. These drivers share the road with slow vehicles, some barely able to manage 20 miles per hour, creating a hazardous mix of velocities. Winding and/or steep mountain roads, poorly designed surfaces, randomly placed speed bumps, unmarked hazards, and buses that are poorly operated and maintained
present additional risks to motorists.

Traffic rules are only casually observed. Many drivers do not use their turn signals to alert other drivers. Instead, a common custom is for a driver or passenger to stick a hand out the window and wave it to indicate that they will be taking an unspecified action. Speed limits, lane markings, and stop signs are frequently ignored. Passing blindly on winding and/or steep mountain roads, poorly designed surfaces, and unmarked hazards, including frequent landslides and precarious temporary highway repairs, present additional risks to motorists. Lethal head-on collisions are common.

Drivers are supposed to use the right-hand side of the road, and speed limits are posted depending on the condition of the road. Turning right on red is not permitted unless otherwise posted, and drivers must yield when entering a traffic circle. Seat belts must be worn, but there are no laws regarding the use of child safety seats. It is against the law for drivers to operate cellular phones while driving, although this is not widely enforced. People found driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are arrested and may serve jail time.

There are no roadside assistance clubs; however, a roadside assistance force (PROVIAL) patrols most of the major highways. PROVIAL can be contacted by calling 1520. Their vehicles are equipped with basic tools and first aid supplies, and their services are free.

Police patrol the major roadways and may assist travelers, but the patrols are sporadic and may be suspended due to budget constraints. For roadside assistance, travelers may call the police by dialing 110 or 120 or the fire department by dialing 122 or 123. Cellular telephone service covers most areas frequented by tourists. Some recent reports of highway robberies include accusations that police, or assailants dressed as police, have been involved. A few have included sexual assaults of victims.

Driving outside of urban areas at night is dangerous and not recommended. The Inter-American Highway (CA-1) and the road from Guatemala City to the Caribbean coast (CA-9) are especially dangerous due to heavy traffic, including large trucks and trailers, and poorly maintained vehicles that oftentimes lack properly functioning lights.

The main road to Lake Atitlán via the Inter-American Highway (CA-1) and Sololá is safer than the alternative secondary roads near the lake. Specifically, the main road is preferable to the alternative road through Las Trampas and Godínez to Panajachel (RN-11) where robbery, rape, and assault are known to have occurred. Armed attacks have occurred on roads between Guatemala City and Petén, as well as between Tikal and the Belize border.
Visitors to the Mayan ruins at Tikal are urged to fly to Flores and then travel by bus or tour van. Violent attacks have occurred in the Mayan ruins in Petén, including in the Cerro Cahui Conservation Park, Yaxha, the road to and inside Tikal Park, and in the Tikal ruins, particularly during sunrise tours. However, tourist police (DISETUR) patrols have significantly reduced the incidence of violent crime inside the park, and there have been no reports of armed assaults on tourists there in the past year. Travelers should remain in groups, stay on the principal trails leading to the Central Plaza and the Temple IV complex, and avoid remote areas of the park.

Minor traffic incidents can quickly escalate to violence when one or both parties are carrying firearms that they are not hesitant to use. All drivers involved in accidents resulting in injury may be detained and held in protective custody pending investigation. In several instances, police officers have been posted outside hospital rooms of drivers who were injured, and they were not allowed to depart the country without judicial intervention. Such cases require the assistance of private local attorneys.

Carjackings and vehicle thefts continue to be a serious problem. Cargo and transportation theft is a major problem for companies operating in Guatemala. Particularly attractive to thieves are trucks carrying shipments of electronics or gasoline. Theft of items from occupied vehicles is becoming more common. Often assailants are on motorcycles and pull up alongside a car stopped at a traffic light. The passenger on the motorcycle is armed, and the assailants are able to flee the scene quickly. In some cases, the vehicle occupants were visibly using their cell phones or other handheld devices prior to the theft. Leaving cars unattended in many parking lots can also invite break-ins in spite of the presence of armed guards, who oftentimes may be there for decoration only.

Taxi Seguro can be reached at 2312-4243, and may not always be available, especially late at night. Taxis Amarillo Express is a radio-dispatch taxi service, and can be reached by dialing 1766. The Guatemalan tourist assistance agency, PROATUR, may be able to provide additional information, and can be reached by dialing 1500.

Common public transportation is by local brightly-painted recycled U.S. school buses, which serve almost every town. Criminal activity and frequent fatal accidents, however, make the low-priced inter-city buses particularly dangerous. Modern inter-city buses offer some security from highway violence, but armed attacks are increasing, indicating that all buses are vulnerable. Several travelers have been attacked on first-class buses on highway CA-2 near the border areas with both Mexico and El Salvador, and on highways CA-1 and CA-9 near the border with El Salvador, and in the highlands between Quetzaltenango and Sololá.
A number of travelers have experienced carjackings and armed robberies after just having arrived on international flights, most frequently in the evening. In the most common scenario, tourists or business travelers who land after dark are held up by armed men as their vehicle departs the airport, but similar incidents have occurred at other times of the day. Private vehicles, taxis, and shuttle buses have all been targeted. Typically, assailants steal money, passports, and luggage, and in some cases, the vehicle as well. In other cases, assailants have been wearing full or partial police uniforms and have used vehicles that resemble police vehicles, indicating that some elements of the police might be involved. Armed robberies have occurred within minutes of a tourist’s vehicle having been stopped by the police. Recently, many of these attacks have taken place far from the airport, just as travelers were arriving at their homes, or in less busy areas of the city. Victims who did not resist the attackers were not physically injured.

Emboldened armed robbers have attacked vehicles on main roads in broad daylight. Travel on rural roads increases the risk of being stopped by a criminal roadblock or ambush. Widespread narcotics and alien-smuggling activities make remote areas especially dangerous because criminals look for any opportunity to strike.

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

**Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns**

There are no known terrorist organizations in Guatemala. Narco-trafficking and transnational organized crime groups and gangs pose a real and dangerous threat to local, regional, and international interests.

**Civil Unrest**

Large demonstrations occur, often with little or no notice, and can cause serious traffic disruptions. Although most demonstrations are peaceful, they can turn violent. The use of roadblocks and/or blocking of public facilities, including the international airport, may delay or prevent tourists from reaching their destination.

In the past several years, Guatemalan citizens' frustration with crime has led to violent incidents of vigilantism, including stoning, lynching, and burning, especially in isolated rural areas.

**Religious or Ethnic Violence**
Guatemala has many different and firmly held local beliefs and customs. Particularly in small villages, residents are often wary and suspicious of outsiders. Guatemalan citizens have been lynched for suspicion of child abduction.

**Post-specific Concerns**

**Environmental Hazards**

Guatemala is a geologically active country.

Visitors should be aware of the possibility of earthquakes at any time and the need for contingency plans.

Guatemala has four active volcanoes, whose activity has forced evacuations of nearby villages. In September 2012, increased activity of Vulcan Fuego caused the evacuation of several villages. The May 2010 eruption of Pacaya Volcano near Guatemala City briefly closed Guatemala City’s international airport. Tourists planning to climb Pacaya and Agua volcanoes during Guatemala’s rainy season should plan their climb for the morning hours when thunderstorms are less likely to occur. Climbers should monitor the weather situation and return to the base of the volcano as quickly and safely as possible if thunderstorms gather. INGUAT has organized an active community-based tourism program in San Vicente Pacaya to minimize the risk of armed robbery on Pacaya. Climbing volcanoes in groups is still highly advisable to reduce the risk of assault.

Both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts are vulnerable to hurricanes and tropical storms from mid-May through November. Mudslides and flooding during the rainy season often kill dozens of people and close roads. General information about natural disaster preparedness is available locally from the National Disaster Reduction Coordination Office (CONRED) and from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Please consult CONRED for updates on natural disasters or tropical storms and hurricanes.

Beware of strong currents, riptides, and undertow along the Pacific coast beaches. They pose a serious threat to even the strongest swimmers. In July 2011, a U.S. citizen drowned as a result of the undertow in this area, and two U.S. citizens drowned in the same area in February 2012. Signs warning of treacherous surf are rare and confined mostly to private beaches owned by hotels. Lifeguards are rarely present. For specific information regarding current conditions, go to visit Guatemala’s national weather and geographical authority at: http://www.insivumeh.gob.gt/.
General information about natural disaster preparedness is available from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) at http://www.fema.gov/.

Additional References
FEMA:– Earthquake page: http://www.fema.gov/hazard/earthquake/index.shtm
Drop Cover Hold On: http://www.dropcoverholdon.org/
Terremotos: A California-specific site containing useful guidance in Spanish for earthquake preparedness: http://www.terremotos.org/
Red Cross – Earthquake Preparedness: http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_583_,00.html
Red Cross – Earthquake Preparedness (Spanish): http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/foreignmat/earthspn.html

Make a list of the following for all family members. Leave a copy of this list with a trusted contact at home. Update periodically and carry with you when moving from one locale to another:
- Passport numbers and dates of issue
- Bank account numbers
- Credit card numbers
- Insurance policy numbers
- Car registration, serial, and license numbers
- U.S. driver’s license numbers
- Social Security numbers (including children’s)
- Current prescriptions, including eyeglasses
- Contents and location of safe deposit box(es)
- Assets and debts
- Names and addresses of business and professional contacts

Locate a safe depository in the United States and put the following into it (making copies of the items if you will need them at post):
- Copy of will(s). Do not put original of will in safe depository. Originals should be left with lawyer or executor.
- Power of attorney (one of the originals)
- Birth and marriage certificates
- Naturalization papers
- Deeds
- Mortgages
- Stocks and Bonds (or leave with broker in case you want to sell)
- Insurance papers - life, car, house, medical, and household effects
- Current household and personal effects inventory
Execute a current power of attorney for each adult family member and have several originals made. Make several copies as well. These are needed to transact business on behalf of spouse or other adult.

Learn the current laws of your legal residence and place of domicile with regard to taxes and property.

Establish credit that will be adequate for emergencies. Obtain individual credit cards for employee and spouse.

Establish a joint checking account, or two joint checking accounts, enabling each spouse to work from either account in the event they are separated for a period of time.

Put checkbooks, bankbooks, credit cards, some travelers’ checks, and a small amount of cash in a safe (but easily accessible) place.

Keep a list of regular billing dates for all recurring expenses -- insurance, mortgages, and taxes.

Make and continually update an inventory of all your possessions, including jewelry and clothing.

Decide what to take to post and what to put into storage based on where you are assigned.

Consider personal property insurance.

Pack both winter and summer clothing, regardless of post.

Update scrapbook and photo albums. Consider leaving sentimental photos or negatives in safe deposit box.

Make duplicates of all personal address lists.

Discuss with your immediate and extended family what to do in case of an emergency (evacuation, hostage-taking, illness, or death).

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Keep up with the current security situation. Hold periodic family security meetings.

Make an inventory of what you have and keep it updated.

Learn some of the local language to help you in an emergency. In the local language, post a list of instructions and essential telephone numbers for household employees.

Make the acquaintance of your neighbors early in your tour.

Learn the location of the closest hospital, police station, and friendly embassy.

Keep immunizations up to date and recorded in your yellow shot card.

If you have children in local schools, check the school’s emergency evacuation plan. Become an involved parent.

If you have children, choose a surrogate parent and supply that person with a current power of attorney for medical or other emergencies in the event you need them to care for your children unexpectedly.

Maintain a separate emergency supply/first-aid kit to be used only for emergency situations. Decide which necessary items should be taken with you in the event of evacuation or
authorized departure and which items should be air freighted later.

**EMERGENCY SITUATIONS: WHEN AN EVACUATION IS A POSSIBILITY**

Discuss possible contingency plans with family members.

Make a list of items to pack in each suitcase (normally each evacuee is allowed one suitcase).

Make a list of items for carry-on baggage.

Update current household effects inventory of items at post.

Consolidate all personal records, financial documents, school records, etc.

Prepare your house for departure -- secure valuables, if possible.

Plan for pets. In almost all evacuations, your pets will not be allowed to go out on evacuation with you. Make advance arrangements for their care, food, etc. Keep the pets’ records updated.

Decide how money will be handled. Who will pay bills? Will you continue to use the joint checking account?

Pack luggage with suitable clothing and essential items. Remember seasonal changes/weather conditions.

Engage the children in packing their own backpacks or carry-on bags with toys, snacks, games, books, and other comforting items.

Make sure carry-on baggage includes the following items:

- Medications (prescription and over the counter)
- Medical/dental records, immunization cards
- Extra glasses and prescriptions
- School records, report cards, test scores, and current samples of work
- Current power of attorney
- Birth certificates, naturalization certificates, marriage certificates (if at post)
- Passports
- Driver’s license, auto insurance policies, auto registration, and title, if applicable
- Personal checks, check registers, latest bank statement
- Credit cards
- Bills/financial records
- Safe deposit box keys
- Address book
- Lists with names and addresses of doctors, dentists, lawyers, etc.
- Travelers checks; U.S. currency, if possible
- Household effects (HHE) inventory
- Household goods insurance policy
- Evacuation travel orders
- Personal items and a change of clothing for each traveler
Snacks, juice, books
Choose practical traveling clothes suitable to the climate of destination.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Safe storage of seized drug precursor chemicals is a challenge. The capacity to transport, treat, store, or dispose of such chemicals safely does not now exist within the government, though the government has tried to develop expertise, albeit with little progress. The Department of State is funding an Organization of American States (OAS) initiative to provide training and equipment to the government to address the safe storage, handling, and destruction of precursor chemicals.

The capacity of the government to respond to chemical or industrial accidents is extremely limited, and small incidents typically go unreported. The government is also very limited in its technical ability to monitor watershed runoff or air pollution from industrial processes, the most controversial being mining.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

The U.S.-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement provides for improved standards for the protection and enforcement of a broad range of Intellectual Property Rights that are consistent with U.S. standards of protection and enforcement as well as emerging international standards. Enforcement of IPR laws, however, has been inconsistent. A number of raids, cases, and prosecutions have been pursued; however, resource constraints and lack of coordinated government action impede efficient enforcement efforts. Piracy of works protected by copyright and infringement of other forms of intellectual property, such as trademarks including those of some major U.S. food and pharmaceutical brands, remains problematic. However, economic espionage does not appear to be a major problem.

Regional Travel Concerns and Restricted Travel Areas/Zones

Due to uncontrolled drug and alien smuggling, the border with Mexico (and in particular the northwestern corner of Petén) is a high-risk area. The border areas including the Sierra de Lacandon and Laguna del Tigre National Parks are among the most dangerous areas in Guatemala due to drug trafficking activity. The U.S. Embassy takes extra precautions when U.S. government personnel travel to the region.

Drug-related Crimes
Narcotics-related crimes certainly factor into the precarious security environment, but polls have shown that average Guatemalans are more concerned about general criminal violence, which is also what most directly affects U.S. citizens. Certain neighborhoods of Guatemala City are essentially controlled by criminal gangs who have walled off their territories with concrete barriers and whose permission is required to enter. In spite of regional initiatives to combat drug trafficking and gangs, they continue to be a concern in Guatemala City and rural areas, though they have a far greater impact on Guatemalans than on foreigners. Narco-traffickers and gang members are very well armed. Emboldened armed robbers have attacked vehicles on main roads in broad daylight. Travel on rural roads increases the risk of a criminal roadblock or ambush. Widespread narcotics and alien smuggling activities can make remote areas especially dangerous.

Kidnapping Threats

Kidnapping gangs who are often connected to narcotraffickers, are a concern in both Guatemala City and rural Guatemala. Gang members are often well armed with sophisticated weaponry, and they sometimes use massive amounts of force to extort, kidnap, and kill. There have been “express” kidnappings in recent years, primarily in Guatemala City, in which kidnappers demand a relatively small ransom that they believe can be gathered quickly. Some kidnapping gangs are known to kill their victims whether or not the ransom is paid.

Police Response

The Policia Nacional Civil (PNC) lack sufficient personnel to accomplish their mission. In addition, the PNC suffers from a lack of logistical supplies (vehicles, fuel, ammunition, etc.) with little improvement from year-to-year. However, what the PNC lacks most is manpower. The PNC lacks training in many areas.

More often than not a police investigation fails to result in an arrest, much less a conviction. Apart from impunity, a principal reason that the government is unable to respond to the needs of crime victims of all nationalities, or to prevent them from becoming victims in the first place, is that the PNC is significantly under-trained and under-funded. The average PNC officer should have at least a high school degree but often times has much less education, is often equipped with as little as six months of police training before being sent out on the streets, and receives only $570 per month as salary. Moreover, the PNC’s annual budget of 2.5 billion quetzales (approx. U.S. $312 million) is nowhere near adequate to support its personnel, vehicles, training and other infrastructure needs.
The government recently announced a reduction in the impunity rate for homicides in Guatemala City from 97 percent in 2010 to 70 percent in 2012. While that is a tremendous improvement, it still means that 70 percent of murders in Guatemala City go unpunished.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Some PNC members have been involved in criminal activities. There have also been several recent incidents where individuals dressed in police uniforms have been implicated in robberies.

U.S. citizens detained by the police can contact the Embassy for assistance at (502) 2326-4000; after working hours the Embassy’s Duty Officer is available via the 24 hour emergency number - (502) 2331 2354.

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

Crime victims are often asked to pay for gas so that the police, if they have a vehicle available to them, may visit the crime scene. Victims of crime should contact the following phone numbers for assistance:

Police (911 equivalent): 110 or 120
Fire Department: 122 or 123
Tourist emergency assistance: 502 2421-2810
Tourist Assistance (PROATUR): 1500

PROATUR is a joint national police/INGUAT initiative and is present in all major tourist destinations.

Various Police/Security Agencies

Security escorts for tourist groups and security information are available from the Tourist Assistance Office (PROATUR) of INGUAT (the Guatemalan Tourism Institute) at 7a Avenida 1-17, Zona 4, Centro Cívico, Guatemala City. INGUAT’s PROATUR division has 24-hour/seven days per week direct telephone numbers for tourist assistance and emergencies. You may call them at (502) 2421-2810, fax them at (502) 2421-2891, or simply dial 1500 in Guatemala to reach INGUAT Tourist Assistance. You can also contact INGUAT by email at operacionesproatur@inguat.gob.gt. PROATUR also maintains regional offices in all major domestic tourist destinations, and the regional delegates provide rapid and appropriate assistance to crime and accident victims. Travelers may also wish to visit
INGUAT’s website at: http://www.inguat.gob.gt/ (Spanish only).

Tourist groups are advised to request security escorts from INGUAT. There have been no incidents of armed robbery of groups escorted through the Tourist Protection Program. The request should be submitted by mail, fax, or e-mail and should arrive at INGUAT at least three business days in advance of the proposed travel. Requests should be directed to the attention of the Coordinator of the National Tourist Assistance Program and should provide the itinerary, names of travelers, and model and color of the vehicle in which they will be traveling. Travelers should be aware that INGUAT might not be able to accommodate all requests.

Medical Emergencies

A wide range of medical care is available in Guatemala City, but medical care outside the city is limited. Public hospitals frequently experience serious shortages of basic medicines and equipment. Care in private hospitals is generally adequate for most common illnesses and injuries, and many of the medical specialists working in them are U.S.-trained and -certified.

There are some aerial medevac services; however these services are extremely expensive and frequently require payment before the service is rendered. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can be costly. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services, although most private hospitals accept major U.S. credit cards. They do not typically enter into payment plan agreements. Travelers should be aware that they may have to pay in advance and seek reimbursement. It is very important to find out BEFORE you travel whether your medical insurance will cover you overseas.

Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics

Neither the Embassy nor the Department of State can assume any responsibility for the accuracy of any of the data provided, the integrity, or the professional ability of any of the hospitals listed (source: U.S. Embassy Guatemala Consular Website).

PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN GUATEMALA CITY AREA

Hospital de las Americas
10a. Calle 2-31, Zona 14
Phone: 2384-3535 Fax: 2384-3535 Ext. 1028
info@hospitaldesdeguatemala.com
Hospital Herrera Llerandi
6a. Avenida 8-71, Zona 10
Phone: 2384-5959 Emergency: 2334-5955
Healthinfo@herrerallerandi.com

Cedros del Libano
8a. Avenida 2-48, Zona 1
Phone: 2230-6274/6/8, 2220-1356/2230-6274
Fax: 2253-6879
www.hospitaldeguate.com
info@hospitaldeguate.com

Centro Medico
6a. Avenida 3-47, Zona 10
Phone: 2279-4949 Fax: 2331-7533
www.centromedico.com.gt
info@centromedico.com.gt

PUBLIC HOSPITALS IN GUATEMALA CITY AREA

Hospital Universitario Esperanza
6a. Avenida 7-49, Zona 10
Phone: 2362-8626 Fax: 2362-8657
cesazo@hospitalesesperanza.com
Private foundation, affiliated with Francisco Marroquin University School of Medicine

Hospital General San Juan de Dios
1a. Avenida 10-50, Zona 1
Phone: 2321-9191 / 2253-0423
Affiliated with University San Carlos School of Medicine IGSS

Instituto Guatemalteco de Seguridad Social
9a. Calle 7-55, Zona 9
Phone: 2332-1009, 2332-4031, 2332-1278, 2332-3252, 2332-1312, 2332-0063.
You have to be registered at IGSS to use its services.
Nuestra Senora del Pilar
3a. Calle 10-71, Zona 15
Colonia Tecún Umán
Phone: 2420-0000
www.sanatorioelpilar.com
Private, run by Asociacion Española de Beneficiencia by nuns of the Anunciata.

Roosevelt Hospital
Calzada Roosevelt, Zona 11
Phone: 2321-7400
Hosproos@terra.com.gt
Affiliated with University San Carlos School of Medicine

Hospital General de Accidentes - IGSS
13 Avenida 1-51 Col. Monte Real, Zona 4, Mixco
Phone: 2437-9625-29
www.hgadirec@itelgua.com
You have to be a member to use its services

Ambulances

Alerta Medica
Direct: 502-2332-9422
Work: 502-2327-7171
After Hours: 502-2327-7100
Description: EMT and paramedic on board at all times. All ambulances are fully equipped to respond to cardiac, respiratory, and trauma events. Typical response time can vary from 5-15 minutes, and all vehicles can access any private and/or public hospital.

Asistencia Medica, S.A.
Direct: 502-5203-0525
Work: 502-2332-1506
Work: 502-2332-6485
Work: asmesa@c.net.gt
Description: EMT on board at all times. Paramedic on board if requested. All ambulances equipped to respond to cardiac, respiratory, and trauma emergencies. Typical response time has been reported to be a minimum of 15 minutes. All vehicles have access to all public and private hospitals.
Rescate 911
Direct: 502-2361-4041
Work: 502-2362-5157
Work: 502-2362-5167
Work: info@rescate911.com.gt
Description: EMT and paramedic on board at all times. All medical providers are trained in Guatemala. Ambulances can provide intensive care quality transportation with equipment including continuous cardiac monitor, oxygen, infusion pump, incubator, and other medical supplies. Typical response time varies from 7-10 minutes, and all vehicles can access all private and public hospitals.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

AMERICAN
Aerovac Air Ambulance Direct: 001-800-423-5993
Other: 001-954-252-2744
Work: rskuf@bellsouth.net
Work: P.O. Box 291033 Davie, FL 333329-1033

Air Ambulance Network Direct: 001-800-327-1966
Other: 001-727-934-3999
Work: 905 Martin Luther King Jr. Dr., Suite 330, FL 34689

GUATEMALAN
Aerotaxis, Air Ambulance, Service Direct: 502-5709-7922
Work: 502-2331-3073
Work: 502-2360-4074
Work: aerotaxis@hotmail.com
Work: Avenida Hincapie y 18 Calle, Zona 13, Interior Aeropuerto, Hangar J-12

Aero Ruta Maya, S.A. Air Ambulance Service
Work: 502-2418-2727
Work: 502-2418-2700
Work: 502-2418-2710
Work: armsa1@intelnett.com
CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/guatemala.htm.

For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the infectious diseases section of the World Health Organization (WHO) website at http://www.who.int. The WHO website also contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Crimes/Scams

Extortion calls are commonplace, and many times originate within prisons. In recent years, the number of extortions has risen dramatically. In most cases, changing the phone number and not responding to the threats will resolve the matter. However, cases involving gang members must be taken seriously, as they will not hesitate to back up their threats with violence. In mid-2012, the U.S. Embassy received several dozen reports of cases in which people in the United States received calls allegedly from young relatives traveling in Guatemala and in urgent need of financial assistance. The scam victims collectively sent thousands of dollars before this trend diminished in August.

In another popular scam, robbers place a nail in a parked vehicle’s tire. Robbers who pose as “good Samaritans” then follow the vehicle until the tire becomes flat and the victims pull over. While “help” is being rendered, the contents of the car are stolen, often without the knowledge of the victims. However, in some cases, the robbers have threatened the tourists with weapons. Parking areas in and around the Guatemala City International Airport are particularly prone to this crime.

In another scam, victims are approached in a hotel, restaurant, or other public place by an individual who claims that there is some sort of problem with his or the would-be victim’s automobile in the parking lot. On the way to investigate the “problem,” usually in a remote or concealed area near the parking lot, the robber pulls a gun on the victim and demands cash, credit cards, and other valuables.
Areas to be Avoided and Best Security Practices

The Embassy does not allow U.S. government employees to stay in hotels in Zone 1 and urges private travelers to avoid staying in this area.

The Department of State urges U.S. citizens to take responsibility for their own personal security while traveling overseas.

Some best practices for travel safety include: Ensure that someone not traveling with you is aware of your itinerary. Coordinating arrival times with those picking up passengers, minimize time spent standing outside in the airport passenger pick-up area, and do not walk out of the airport with valuables in plain sight. Carry laptops inconspicuously in a backpack or other carry-on luggage. Avoid using electronic devices in traffic or leaving purses on seats in plain sight.

Rather than traveling alone, use a reputable tour organization. Stay in groups and stay on the main roads. Do not travel after dark outside of Guatemala City. Intercity travel after dark is extremely dangerous and should be avoided altogether. It is highly recommended to caravan with at least two cars when traveling outside of Guatemala City. It is preferable to stay in the main tourist destinations.

Pay close attention to your surroundings, especially when walking or driving in Guatemala City. Travelers should be conscious of their surroundings and watch for suspicious activity. Pickpockets and purse-snatchers are active in all major cities and tourist sites, especially the central market and other parts of Zone 1 in Guatemala City. In a common scenario, an accomplice distracts the victim while an assailant slashes or simply steals a bag or backpack. In recent months, U.S. citizens have increasingly reported to the Embassy information about armed robberies in Antigua, mostly at night but with some occurring in plain daylight, targeting pedestrians on less frequented roads. The Embassy advises tourists and residents to be very vigilant of their surroundings and report any crime incidents promptly to the police.

Tourists should carry money in a front pocket or put it in a zippered or buttoned back pocket. They should not display money, jewelry, a cell phone or other perceived valuables, and never leave a backpack or fanny pack unattended. Do not display items of value such as laptops, iPods, cameras, and jewelry and refrain from using a cell phone on the street. Limit the number of credit cards and other high-value items you bring with you. Carry a photocopy of your passport when out and about to avoid losing it to a robbery. Avoid carrying large sums of money. Do not resist if you are being robbed. Victims have been killed when they resisted or
refused to give up their money or other valuables. Assailants are often armed with guns and do not hesitate to use them if you resist.

Persons carrying laptop computers and expensive cell phones are often targets for armed robberies. Visitors should avoid using a laptop in a public place, such as a cafe or in wireless zones. Areas that offer wi-fi computer services have been targeted. Several individuals have been killed and their laptops taken upon departure from these establishments after they were seen using their computers in public. Avoid carrying laptop cases or anything that resembles one, even if they do not contain laptops.

There have been a number of incidents in which foreigners have been robbed immediately after making a large withdrawal from local banks. Complicity by bank employees is strongly suspected in these crimes. There have also been incidents where persons are targeted for robbery after using ATMs.

Avoid hotels that do not have adequate security. Visitors should never give out their hotel key or tell strangers what hotel they are staying in. They should lock their valuables in the hotel safety deposit box; watch for suspicious activity as they enter the hotel and their room. Travelers should make sure to lock the door and do not open it for unknown people.

Drivers should lock their doors; leave their windows rolled up, and leave at least half a car length of space after the car in front of them to maneuver if something happens. If a driver has to pull over on the highway, he should do it in a well-lit area with high visibility or a public place (preferably within view of a police officer). It is also highly recommended that if individuals are driving, that they use a car with slightly tinted windows and not talk on their cell phones.

Women should be especially careful when traveling alone and avoid staying out late without an escort. Support for victims of sexual assault is lacking outside of major cities, and there are not enough trained personnel who can help victims either in the capital or outlying areas. Arrest and prosecution of assailants in sexual assault cases is uncommon at best and can be more difficult without private legal assistance.

Travelers should be aware that basic safety precautions commonly required in the United States for swimming, boating, and other outdoor activities may not be observed. Multiple boaters in the Rio Dulce area of the Department of Izabal have been victimized in violent armed attacks.
Indigenous activists have taken foreign tourists hostage in the Rio Dulce and Livingston area. Although all hostages have been released unharmed, tensions between indigenous activists and authorities remain. In January 2012, a group of National Geographic explorers, including U.S. citizens, were detained in Quiche by local residents when they jumped into a pond considered sacred in the Mayan tradition. The incident serves as a warning to be mindful of local traditional practices when visiting indigenous Mayan communities.

Hailing taxis on the street in Guatemala City is discouraged. Travelers need to exercise caution with personal items such as backpacks, fanny packs, and passports while riding buses, as tourists’ possessions are a favorite target of thieves.

Travelers should avoid areas where demonstrations are taking place. It is wise to avoid any public gathering of agitated citizens; persons attempting to intervene have been attacked by mobs. Keep informed of possible demonstrations by following the local news and consulting hotel personnel and tour guides. Confer with trusted local staff or associates, or check the mass media, before venturing out on trips within the country.

The Embassy recommends that U.S. citizens keep their distance from local children and refrain from actions that could fuel suspicions of child abductions. U.S. citizens are advised to be aware of and avoid activities that might unintentionally violate a cultural or religious belief. Avoid close contact with local children, including taking photographs, especially in rural areas. Such contact can be viewed with deep suspicion and may provoke panic and violence.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy/Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

Avenida Reforma 7-01, Zona 10, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Embassy business hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Mon-Thu and 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Fridays).

The Consular section is open for citizen services, including registration, from 7:30a.m. to noon and 1:00 to 3:30p.m. Monday-Thursday; and 7:30a.m. - 11:30 on Fridays, excluding U.S. and Guatemalan holidays. The second and last Fridays of each month, American Citizen Services is open only for emergency services.

Embassy/Consulate Contact Numbers
Telephone: (502)2326-4000
Emergency after-hours telephone: (502)2331-2354
Facsimile: (502)2331-3804
Website: http://guatemala.usembassy.gov

U.S. citizens living in or visiting Guatemala are encouraged to register at the consular section of the U.S. Embassy Guatemala City and obtain updated information on travel and security in Guatemala. American citizens may also want to register online through the State Department's registration system at https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/.

If you are going to live in or visit Guatemala, please take the time to tell the Embassy about your trip. Enrolling in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (https://travelregistration.state.gov/) will keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements and will help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. Those contemplating a visit to Guatemala for business or pleasure should read the Consular Information Sheet, or other relevant notices, found at http://www.state.gov/, before traveling. The Embassy home page, http://guatemala.usembassy.gov/, lists reported crimes against U.S. citizens and other foreigners.

Bookmark the Bureau of Consular Affairs website, which contains the current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and Worldwide Cautions.
Follow us on Twitter and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on Facebook.
Download our free Smart Traveler App to have travel information at your fingertips
Call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free within the U.S. and Canada, or a regular toll line, 1-202-501-4444, from other countries.
Take some time before travel to consider your personal security.

**OSAC Country Council Information**

The U.S. Embassy has an active Overseas Security Advisory Council that meets monthly at the American Chamber of Commerce's local office. Typically, OSAC will meet for a larger Annual Regional Security Conference in Antigua Guatemala, usually in May of each year. Information on the Council can be found at the following sites: http://guatemalaicity.osac.gov/. Please e-mail the Council at RSOGuatemala@State.gov or call at 502-2326-4317.