Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. government rates Haiti as “Critical” in the threat categories of Crime and Political Violence. Haiti is unique in the Caribbean for its relative lack of tourism, scarcity of foreign investment, and inferior infrastructure. As a result, traditional tourist-oriented crimes, such as pickpocketing and purse snatching, are less reported than in other countries in the region.

The most frequently reported crimes against Americans in Port-au-Prince are carjackings, kidnappings, and robberies. Home invasions also remain an item of concern in some parts of Port-au-Prince. Kidnapping and other crimes increase during holiday seasons and before school sessions begin due to the belief that people are in possession of more cash for gifts and school fees.

Crimes against persons, including gender-based violence, remain a serious problem. Reliable statistics are difficult to come by; Haitian National Police (HNP) numbers indicating a modest drop in crime during 2012 were undercut by those from other security entities operating in-country that continued to show a steady rise since 2010. Haiti’s perennially weak judiciary exacerbates an already unsteady security environment.

Crime and road safety remain RSO’s main concerns for the security of employees and visitors.

Crime Threats

The prevalence of guns remains a key security concern, as disarmament efforts, such as the UN’s Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program and Haiti’s Commission for National Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (CNDDDR) program, have yielded only modest results over the past few years. Robbery-related shootings continued during 2012, and there are frequent reports of random gunfire throughout
Port-au-Prince. Anyone visiting or residing in Port-au-Prince for more than a few days is likely to hear gunfire. There has been an increase in reports of crimes being committed by persons carrying/brandishing firearms. Knives or similar weapons also remain popular among criminal elements.

Armed and/or strong-arm robberies against motorists and pedestrians remains a concern, and reports of simple non-violent robberies against U.S. citizens rose in 2012, according to American Citizen Services’ records at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince.

Residential theft (burglaries/home invasions) trends over the past couple of years have suggested a decline in traditional criminal burglary and a rise in robbery/kidnapping. In Port-au-Prince particularly, almost all home invasions were conducted for the dual purpose of kidnapping and robbery. As with other crimes, there was a continuation of home invasions in the more affluent areas of upper Port-au-Prince throughout 2012. There were several reported incidents involving armed men forcing entry into homes in the middle of the night. Criminals are known to overwhelm/assault household staff and tie them up while taking their time looting high value items and cash during the day. The same tactics apply at night but with more potential for violence, as the residents are normally home, and criminals continue to press for more currency and valuables during their looting. Reports of events lasting over several hours are not uncommon. Of particular concern is the ability of some criminals to bypass residential security features, such as perimeter walls, guards and alarm systems. Criminals have placed heavy emphasis on performing home-invasion kidnappings in the middle-class neighborhoods of Vivy Mitchell, Pelerin, Laboule, Thomassin, and Kenscoff, situated on the mountainside south of Petionville. Burglars have little fear of resistance from residential occupants and do not appear to consider whether a residence is occupied when committing their crimes. There were a number of reports of attempted entries into UN compounds, where criminals know armed officers reside. Certain elements are not reluctant to use violence to either get across a point or when confronted; however, the vast majority will simply brandish a firearm/weapon, fire it randomly, tie up their victim/s, and abscond with foreign currency or a vehicle. Neither type of criminal, violent or passive, seems overly concerned with police response, as they know none will be dispatched quickly.

**Overall Road Safety Situation**

Driving requires extreme caution, particularly in the evening hours. Road conditions inside and outside the major cities are extremely poor. Very few roads are paved, and the ones that are are generally in a state of disrepair. A majority of the roads outside of the main cities are either topped with gravel or are poorly maintained dirt roads. There are a few road improvement projects underway, and roadways remain hazardous. Traffic rules and
courtesies are not observed or enforced, and traffic within Port-au-Prince is often gridlocked. Embassy policy strictly prohibits U.S. government employees from driving at night outside of Port-au-Prince.

Piles of trash in the streets and missing manhole covers add to the threats to traffic that include gaping ditches and pot holes, wayward and oblivious pedestrians, and small animals. Street lighting is sporadic and of poor quality in Port-au-Prince and relatively non-existent outside cities. Street signs are also lacking in certain areas, adding confusion to the casual traveler.

Driving in Port-au-Prince requires particular caution and fulltime attention. Vendors have taken over the sidewalks and in some cases much of the roadway, so the only way for a pedestrian to traverse any given street is by walking in the street. The congestion that was in the downtown area is now more prevalent in the rest of the city, as displaced persons from the earthquake have relocated throughout the eastern suburbs, including Petionville.

In rural or mountainous areas, drivers should expect a lack of adequate guard rails, few traffic signs and road markings, and little to no vehicle or road lighting. Drivers should use caution when driving around bends, as it is common for vehicles coming from the other direction to pass slower vehicles or otherwise drive in the middle of the road, even around blind turns. People traveling outside of Port-au-Prince should do so during daylight hours if possible, and with one or more other vehicle due to both the security situation and road conditions. While carjackings and armed robberies are not uncommon in many urban areas, they are less common in the countryside.

Drivers should also take note of added safety risks during the rainy season (April-November), when roadways can become impassable quickly. It is not uncommon for water in the roads to reach the doors of an average SUV. The mountainous areas pose even greater challenges to road travel due to rain and foggy conditions. The narrow, unpaved roads are also blocked by muddy surface conditions, causing unsafe driving conditions.

Drivers should be conscious that accidents can draw angry and potentially violent crowds in a very short time. It is recommended that anyone involved in an accident resulting in the formation of a mob proceed directly to a safe place (e.g. police station) to resolve the situation. Remaining at the scene of an accident can be a risk to one’s safety.

Roads around Cite Soleil, primarily Route National #1 and #9, are safer than in years past but should still be considered dangerous areas. Care should also be used when traveling around Carrefour, particularly along Route National #2 through Martissant, as well as travel in the
vicinity of Cite Militaire, and along La Saline Boulevard (Port Road) due to continuing concerns of criminal activity and proximity to known gang areas. General vigilance should be used at all times on all roads, as there is no area that should be considered immune from crime.

Vehicle theft remains a problem in many areas; however, they continue to be more commonly committed in conjunction with kidnappings/carjackings. The trend over the course of the past couple of years has been the theft by force of a vehicle or motorcycle that is used in a kidnapping and later abandoned.

Instances of "smash and grabs" and attempted carjackings continue, especially in downtown traffic and at night. Situational awareness remains the key to avoiding these incidents or extracting one’s self from them. Visitors who are victims of crime are targeted by criminal elements not because they are Americans but because they are perceived as being wealthy. Foreign currency, electronics, vehicles, and weapons are items most sought after by the criminal element.

The local transport known as "tap-taps" are the primary form of public transportation for most Haitians. The use of tap-taps by Westerners is dangerous, as robberies and accidents are common. Embassy policy prohibits the use of any public transportation by U.S. government employees.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The U.S. government rates Haiti as “Low” for Indigenous Terrorism. There have been no terrorist acts specifically targeting American interests or citizens in Haiti.

Organized crime appears more frequently in the form of small, organized, criminal gang activity, such as that of kidnapping gangs, than in the form of large-scale racketeering. Drug trafficking organizations are present and actively work to make Haiti a known transshipment country.

The U.S. government rates Haiti as “Medium” for Transnational Terrorism. There have been no terrorist acts specifically targeting American interests or U.S. citizens in Haiti.

Civil Unrest
Demonstrations are frequent in Port-au-Prince and other outlying areas for various reasons, to include dissatisfaction of infrastructure and utilities to disapproval of Haitian government entities or UN presence. Any demonstration is capable of turning violent, and innocent bystanders or travelers can be caught up in a clash, rock throwing, and tire burning road blocks between demonstrators and the HNP.

Violent political protests occur regularly in downtown Port-au-Prince around the National Palace, the Champ de Mars, and the State University campuses, along with sporadic incidents scattered throughout the city. These protests have been frequent, averaging multiple incidents per week since mid-2009 and with 360 total in 2011. The demonstrations have been motivated by a wide-variety of political and social movements, ranging from minimum wage to school curriculum to the presence of UN forces in the country to cholera response and the Haitian presidential elections. They share a common trend in that protestors are quick to barricade streets and regularly stone the windows of passing motorists’ vehicles.

The most recent noteworthy protests involved students in early December 2012 and quality of life protests in Cap Haitian in October. Other notable protests that stymied safe travel occurred in Jeremie, Saint Marc, Gonaives, Grand Goave, and Jacmel.

Travelers are reminded of the potential for spontaneous protests and public demonstrations, especially in Port-au-Prince, that can occur at any time, day or night, and may result in violence.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Haiti can be affected by hurricanes and other storms. Hurricane season runs from approximately June 1-November 30. Driving during these times has additional risks. Due to severe deforestation of the mountains, even modest rains can cause flash flooding and other life threatening hazards.

During 2012, Haiti was adversely affected by two severe tropical storms (Isaac and Sandy) that resulted in severe flooding and washed out roads. The southern areas were hit the hardest, with a number of deaths and countrywide food shortages.

A 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti near Port-au-Prince on January 12, 2010. Much of the physical infrastructure of Port-au-Prince was destroyed, and it will take years to recover. There has been a marked deterioration of the infrastructure since the earthquake. Services
such as lodging, health care, and others have been reduced but seem to be making small comebacks in certain sectors.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

The Economic section of the U.S. Embassy may be contacted concerning issues regarding industrial and transportation safety (509.2229.8000). Before using smaller airlines, one is advised to research recent history. Those that have a shoddy appearance are very likely to be remiss on safety standards.

Regional Travel Concerns and Restricted Travel Areas/Zones

Cite Soleil continues to be an area of concern for security forces despite the successful efforts of the HNP and UN security forces to eradicate criminal control of this area.

Cite Soleil, Carrefour, Martissant, and the Croix Des Boquets areas are considered to be of high risk to U.S. Embassy personnel. As a result, Embassy employees are only authorized to travel to these areas in armored vehicles and under armed escort.

Drug-related Crimes

Haiti has been reported as a major transshipment point for South American narcotics en route to the United States; however, the threat of narco-terrorism is not a major issue.

Kidnapping Threats

U.S. citizens traveling to and residing in Haiti are reminded that greater Port-au-Prince remains a leading venue for criminal kidnappings of Americans.

Most kidnappings are criminal versus political, and kidnappers make no distinctions of nationality, race, gender, or age. All persons who are perceived to have wealth or some family connections with assets, either in Haiti or abroad, are vulnerable. The breakdown in reported kidnapping victims from the last few years is spread fairly evenly among men, women, and children. While most cases were resolved through the payment of ransom, many kidnappings include physical or sexual assaults. Depending on the motive, gang, and/or knowledge of the kidnappers by the victim, some incidents do result in the death of the victim.

While December 2012 saw a sharp decrease in kidnappings compared to the previous year due to the success of several law enforcement operations targeting gangs, most statistics
agree that kidnappings rose overall from 2011, as did homicides, robberies, and other violent crimes. The U.S. Embassy’s Consular Section reports that nine Americans were kidnapped in 2012.

Kidnapping of American citizens should be reported to the HNP and the American Citizens Services (ACS) section of the U.S. Embassy (509.2229.8000). As the lead U.S. law enforcement agency in Haiti, the Diplomatic Security Service/Regional Security Office plays an active role in all kidnappings of American citizens and coordinates closely with Federal Bureau of Investigation entities.

**Police Response**

Haitians lack basic policing services, and many residents do not report assaults, rape, and other crime because of lingering, and too-often justified, perceptions of police apathy, incompetence, and corruption.

A comparative analysis of figures from various police/security entities operating throughout Haiti reflects a continuation of the trend in which incidents of crimes are inaccurately or under-reported. The under-reporting is due to a lack of sufficient police presence and response capability and/or lack of faith in any action by the police to investigate. In a country of approximately 10 million people, the HNP has about 8,500 officers, approximately two-thirds of whom are deployed in the greater Port-au-Prince metropolitan area (Port-au-Prince has approximately two million residents). Due to this deficiency, many communities do not have the means to report crimes, though most experts agree that there is not much crime to report in provincial towns and rural areas. In addition, when crimes are reported they are not adequately documented in any sort of standardized reporting format.

There is no vehicle patrolling by the HNP, and they have a very limited response capability. The HNP has minimal deterrent effect on criminals, who operate freely without fear of the mostly unarmed uniformed or traffic police. If the police are needed to interrupt a crime in progress or to investigate a criminal act that has already taken place, the victim normally must drive to the local police station and pick up an available police officer. The investigation of a crime is limited by lacking HNP resources.

An already depleted police force was greatly affected by the January 2010 earthquake, as many of their police stations were destroyed.
More local Port-au-Prince residents are defending themselves and property by upgrading their property and security systems, employing 24/7 and/or additional guards and/or obtaining firearms for personal protection.

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

If you are the victim of a crime, first get to a safe location and seek medical attention, if needed. Then, notify local authorities and the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince (509.2229.8000). You should immediately report the incident to the nearest police station. If it is an emergency and the police are not in the vicinity, police can be contacted by calling 114. Calling a phone number from a cell phone to a landline is sometimes problematic.

The Haitian National Police Information and Operations Center can be contacted at 509-3835-1111.

The U.S. Embassy’s American Citizen Services (ACS) section can assist you with such issues as: replacing a stolen passport; contacting family, friends, or employers; obtaining appropriate medical care; addressing emergency needs that arise as a result of the crime; obtaining general information about the local criminal justice process and information about your case; obtaining information about local resources to assist victims, including foreign crime victim compensation programs; obtaining information about crime victim assistance and compensation programs in the U.S.; and obtaining a list of local attorneys.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In all instances, visitors should be respectful and comply with police direction. U.S. citizens who feel they were harassed are encouraged to request to speak with the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince immediately. Call American Citizen Services (ACS) at the U.S. Embassy at 509.2229.8000. This number is manned 24 hours/day, and you can be put in contact with local authorities or with the Embassy staff. If you cannot reach the Embassy, try to contact someone locally who can.

Medical Emergencies

The Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. U.S. medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, health care providers do not accept U.S.
medical insurance. Medical professionals require a cash payment up front and will provide a receipt that can be provided to a U.S. insurance company. U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States. However, many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas, including emergency services such as medical evacuations. It is strongly recommended that those visiting Port-au-Prince carry medical evacuation insurance. For international treatment and medical insurance: AEA International, 206.340.6000.

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad," available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page.

Medical services are far below U.S. standards and can be difficult to obtain. Emergency medical care is not always readily available, as most hospitals do not have an emergency department staffed 24 hours/day. There are a handful of hospitals available, all of which are suitable in medical emergencies only.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Medical evacuation is required for most major medical care. There are several air ambulance companies based in the United States that service Haiti:
National Air Ambulance ( Ft. Lauderdale, FL) 1.800.327.3710,
Air Ambulance Networks 1.800.327.1966, and
Air Ambulance Professionals 1.800.752.4195.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance


Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Areas to be Avoided and Best Security Practices

American citizens are advised to take common sense precautions and avoid any event where crowds may congregate. Americans should also take special care and attention to ensure they do not become stranded in remote regions or accidentally enter certain areas deemed unsafe, especially within Port-au-Prince. Traveling in groups of three to four persons is highly
recommended, especially at night. Always remain aware of your surroundings and the activity around you. A typical mugging in Port-au-Prince involves a group of young males who surround and overwhelm their victim in a public area. An alert individual can often see this developing and initiate an appropriate evasive action. Do not resist if robbed or carjacked.

The Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy recommends against walking or jogging on any street in Port-au-Prince. Visitors are warned not to venture out after dusk unless they are in a vehicle and moving to another protected area.

Burglaries/home invasions occur frequently in Port-au-Prince. While night time burglaries are normal, there are frequent reports of daytime attempts, probing, and actual burglaries. Full-time guards with adequate wall, gate, grillwork, and alarm security features remain the best deterrent. Many residents utilize guards, alarms, grillwork, electrical fencing, barbed wire, dogs, and/or personally owned firearms to combat residential crime.

Driving at night outside of Port-au-Prince is not recommended. There have been reports of attacks on stopped vehicles on the Route National #1, Route National #9, and other areas of Port-au-Prince. Travel at night outside of main cities is ill-advised due to a significant reduction in vision, resulting in an increased chance of not seeing pedestrians, broken down vehicles, and oncoming traffic. Avoid driving at night outside the low-density suburban areas. Rural and suburban areas alike are ill-lit and pose additional safety hazards due to pedestrians and animals crossing the roads. Due to the sharp economic decline, many vehicles are not well maintained and often lack headlights. Incidents of accidents/collisions involving drunk drivers are also on the rise. Keep automobile doors locked at all times and the windows up. While stopped in urban traffic, scan the side and rearview mirrors to identify potential trouble. While idling, leave adequate room to maneuver between your vehicle and the one in front. Secure all items out of view by either placing them in the trunk or under the seat.

In the case of vehicular robberies (i.e. “smash and grabs”) and attempted carjackings, a group of street criminals (hidden in the grass or in ditches) often wait for vehicles to stop in traffic or at traffic lights. They then rush the vehicle and attempt to open the doors of their target’s vehicle. If all doors are locked and the driver fails to take immediate action, the group will attempt to break a window to access the vehicle and gain control violently. Occurrences of these incidents increase at night and also occur frequently in heavy mid-day traffic from which it is difficult to escape. The road from the Port-au-Prince International Airport is particularly targeted.
Travelers are advised to avoid all demonstrations and be prepared to seek alternate routes should one be encountered. Protests and demonstrations occur frequently in downtown Port-au-Prince. As a result, U.S. Embassy personnel are only authorized to travel to this area during daylight hours and in armored vehicles. Be sure to read the Consular Information sheet on Haiti prior to travel for updated information and advice.

Be alert to distractions. Purse-snatchers will often work in teams of two with one man acting as a diversion. One man may engage the target in conversation and bump him/her while the other grabs hand-carried valuables or snatches necklaces/jewelry from the victim in plain sight of security guards before fleeing. Consequently, do not display or carry unnecessary valuables in public. Cell phones, electronic items, and foreign currency are of particular interest to local thieves. Do not carry a cell phone on the waist or in other visible areas. Do not display large amounts of money.

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

**Embassy/Consulate Address and Hours of Operation**

American citizens are strongly encouraged to register at the American Citizens Services section at the Consulate, located at Tabarre #41, Tabarre, Haiti, or online at http://travel.state.gov.

Working Hours: Monday-Friday, 7:00 A.M. - 3:30 P.M.

**Embassy/Consulate Contact Numbers**

Embassy Switchboard: 509.2229.8000  
Regional Security Office: 509.2229.8061  
Consular Section: 509.2229.8000  
Marine Security Guard: 509.2229.8122

For background information on Haiti or for information on how to avoid becoming a victim of crime, please refer to the State Department’s "Country Background Notes," "Consular Information Sheet," and "Travel Warning Information" at http://www.state.gov.

**OSAC Country Council Information**
There is an active OSAC Country Council in Haiti. All U.S. private sector organizations active in Haiti are encouraged to attend meetings. For more information, please contact the Regional Security Office at U.S. Embassy Port-au-Prince or visit http://www.osac.gov.

David Jesson  
Co-Chairman  
Cell: +509.4.755.7588  
djesson@samaritan.org  
www.samaritan.org

Michael G. Stitt  
Co-Chairman  
Cell: +509.3.728.8386  
MStitt@vddi.com

Regional Security Office  
Office: +509.2229.8061  
DS_RSO_Port-Au-Prince@State.Gov