Mozambique 2013 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Surveillance; Stolen items; Floods; Information Security; Financial Security; Theft; Piracy; Drug Trafficking; Human Trafficking; Extortion

Africa > Mozambique > Maputo

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Mozambique is a developing country in southern Africa that has been steadily rebuilding its economy and civic institutions since ending a 16-year civil war in 1992. The Department of State classifies Mozambique as “Critical” for crime. The factors that contribute to the crime rate are generally related to the country’s continued rebuilding from the civil war.

Ranked near the bottom of the UN’s Human Development Index, poverty is endemic. Despite high economic growth rates in recent years, Mozambique remains among the world's poorest countries, with a GDP per capita of approximately $1,100. High unemployment rates, little investment in employment-generating industries, and low incomes associated with work in the informal sector create conditions of gross economic hardship. Tourism facilities in Maputo are steadily improving but remain limited in other areas, as many goods and services are not yet available. The official language is Portuguese, although English is spoken in some tourist areas; in some rural areas, only local languages are widely spoken.

The number of violent crimes is comparable to most other African countries. The chances of being victimized by crime are approximately the same as in most major U.S. cities. Assailants often use forceful tactics, operate in organized groups, and carry weapons to facilitate their activities—increasing the possibility of physical harm. Expatriates are frequent targets due to their perceived wealth.

The majority of crimes against Americans are non-violent confrontations characterized as crimes of opportunity (e.g., pick pocketing, theft of unattended possessions, and bag snatching). However, during the holiday season (December-January), there are increasing violent crimes in addition to opportunity crimes. This year, there were several incidents of assault on locally engaged staff and one incident of assault against a diplomat.
Overall Road Safety Situation

Driving is often a challenging and dangerous activity. Maputo's streets are narrow, crowded, and in constant disrepair. The lack of street lights, stop lights/signs, sidewalks, and guardrails, combined with potholes and unpaved road surfaces increases the risk of injury or death for drivers and pedestrians. Local drivers are impatient and exhibit little consideration for pedestrians, other motorist’s right-of-way, and general safe driving practices. Motorbikes weave in and out of traffic, will drive on any flat surface or section of the road, and rarely adhere to rules. Drinking and driving is also a continuing concern that poses a significant risk at all times. Roads outside of Maputo are unlit, poorly maintained, and can be hazardous to drive. The risk to drivers outside Maputo is heightened due to locals who are familiar with the road conditions driving at high speeds and the presence of numerous disabled vehicles, which are often parked in the middle of the road. U.S. Embassy personnel are highly discouraged from driving outside of Maputo during the hours of darkness. Fuel stations and police assistance, especially outside of Maputo, are rare, so motorists should plan accordingly.

Taxi cabs, motorbikes, and the ubiquitous mini-van transports (“chapas”) are poorly maintained, crowded, and drive erratically. These conveyances should be given a wide berth, and their usage is strongly discouraged to U.S. Embassy personnel. Other forms of public transportation, such as buses and trains, are also used but offer little consistency regarding scheduling and pricing while presenting similar risks to chapas, such as overcrowding and lack of preventative maintenance.

During the rainy season, mud, deep puddles, flooding, glare from oncoming headlights (if used), and occasional near-zero visibility present an even greater challenge for travelers. Depending upon the destination, several hours may be added to a trip. During the dry season, dusty conditions can also impair visibility.

Traffic law enforcement consists of stationary traffic police on foot, typically wearing a white short sleeve shirt, randomly flagging down vehicles to inspect vehicle and identification documents and to ensure the vehicle’s possession of required safety vests and emergency/warning triangles. There has been an increase in the use of speedometers used by stationary traffic officers to flag down vehicles driving over the speed limit.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The country stabilized following Mozambique’s first multi-party elections in October 1994, and the current president was re-elected in October 2009.
Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The threat of political violence against American interests in Mozambique is rated as “Medium.” There were no instances of political violence or terrorism directed against Americans in 2012. There is no known organization targeting American citizens or affiliated interests in Mozambique. There is little anti-American sentiment.

Civil Unrest

Although political demonstrations and rallies are normally peaceful, spontaneous rioting and attacks may occur. September 2010 saw violent unrest in and around Maputo due to the lifting of government subsidies on staples, affecting the street price of bread, gas, and other essentials. Police response to these protests was violent with reportedly dozens of protestors losing their lives.

In November 2012, a price hike in local chapa transportation fares was implemented, resulting in tensions that made chapa and transport drivers so fearful of public reaction against them that they suspended operations for nearly two days around Maputo. The build-up of this incident was similar to the September 2010 violent unrest but was handled in a much more orderly fashion by local authorities, leading to a relatively uneventful, yet tense, two-day period.

While the ruling FRELIMO party government has made some efforts to prevent future unrest, the possibility for renewed protests is ever-present.

These scenarios have the potential of becoming unruly, which can result in physical injury and possibly death.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Maputo, seasonally beset by torrential rains, lacks the drainage infrastructure to accommodate storm water runoff. As a result, low lying parts of the city and major vehicle thoroughfares flash flood during the rainy season (November-April). Familiarize yourself with and avoid these areas if possible. Travel in a 4x4 vehicle is preferable.
Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Great threats are posed by motor vehicles. Exercise extreme caution when near any road or motor vehicle traffic.

Regional Travel Concerns and Restricted Travel Areas/Zones

All borders, to include the eastern coast and airports, are porous, with varying levels of refugee traffic depending on the conditions in neighboring countries. While a lack of opportunity prevents most mala fide traffic from settling in Mozambique, the large, continuous flow of migrants brings with it a host of nefarious elements and businesses.

Piracy along Mozambican territorial waters remains a concern for all vessels in this region.

Drug-related Crimes

Narco-trafficking is an ongoing problem. Porous borders, coupled with endemic poverty and its proximity to South African markets, makes Mozambique vulnerable to organized criminal elements. Narco-trafficking and human smuggling represent a growing threat to stability and security. The considerable wealth associated with the drug trade, possibly aided by corruption and involvement of some government officials, could have a destabilizing impact.

Kidnapping Threats

The targeted kidnapping of affluent South Asian descent persons continues to be a problem, especially in Maputo. The goal of the kidnappers is a ransom for the release of the victim. Americans of South Asian descent have not been targeted in these kidnapping attempts.

Police Response

The Mozambique Police Force (PRM) suffers from limited resources and corruption. Police are under-funded, under-staffed, and poorly equipped. Police response is often slow and unreliable, and the quality of service declines as one moves farther from Maputo. Receiving police assistance can be especially difficult for Americans because: 1) local police stations do not have consistently working landline telephones. Most police officers rely on private cell phones for communication and these numbers are not publicized; 2) Mozambican police rarely understand English, 3) the police frequently lack transportation to respond to the scene of the incident, and 4) when transportation is available, fuel often is not, especially outside of
Maputo.

Most PRM officers lack conventional police equipment (two-way radios, restraints, defensive weapons, flashlights, etc.) required to be effective in their jobs. While the abilities of the PRM are on par with some other African nations, they do not compare to a U.S. police force in terms of capability, responsiveness, or professionalism. Corruption is a problem throughout the ranks of the PRM.

The investigative law enforcement (PIC) arm is equally under-funded and under-trained. Cases under PIC jurisdiction are often left unsolved. PIC cases often require constant “pressure” and inquiries from interested and affected parties to effect progress. PIC, as PRM, heavily relies on paper trail, with little usage of modern computer systems from which to access databases and archived information typical of well-developed law enforcement entities in other countries.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Low pay and morale create an environment in which even bribes of a few dollars can make allegations disappear. Tolerance of corruption breeds complacency in the PRM. All persons should attempt to cooperate and follow the instructions of police at checkpoints to avoid problems. It is not recommended to pay bribes or on-the-spot fines.

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

The U.S. Embassy’s Regional Security Officer (RSO) is available at (258) 21 49 2797 to render assistance to American citizens requiring local police services.

Various Police/Security Agencies

Security procedures and passenger screening precautions at the Maputo International Airport are improving but remain at a low level of dependable security.

Medical Emergencies

Medical facilities fall critically short of U.S. standards. People with serious medical conditions that require medications or frequent treatment are discouraged from traveling to Mozambique. Most medications are in short supply, of inferior quality, or are fraudulent. The cleanliness of medical facilities and quality of treatment is dismal. Misdiagnosis, unavailable treatment, and
improper use of drugs are commonly reported.

All travelers are advised to purchase insurance to cover medical evacuation in case of a serious accident, injury, or illness. Medical evacuation can cost thousands of dollars, depending on the severity of the situation, so all travelers should ensure their policies provide sufficient coverage.

Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics

Instituto Do Coracao
Av. Kenneth Kaunda, 1111
T: 21 41 4761/3

Hospital Privado Do Maputo
Rua do Campo de Golfe (opposite Portuguese school)
T: 21 48 3905

AMI Specialist Hospital
Av. Julius Nyerere, 2986
Bairo da Sommerschield
T: 21 48 5052/3

Clinica da Sommerschield
Rua Pereira do Lago, 52
T: 21 49 3924/5
Lab: 21 49 4278

Clinica Cruz Azul
Av. Karl Marx, 414 r/c
T: 21 30 5151, 21 30 5146, or 21 30 5147

Clinica Especial
Av. Eduardo Mondlane
T: 21 32 1349, 21 32 4633, or 21 32 9522

Hospital Central
Av. Eduardo Mondlane/Av. Agostinho Neto
T: 21 32 0011/8, 21 30 7136, 21 33 20826
SOS Netcare 911
Av. 25 de Setembro, 401
JAT Building – 2nd flor

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Travelers are advised to see a physician prior to travelling to ensure that appropriate immunizations and precautions are taken, including medications for malaria prophylaxis and yellow fever vaccination (which is required for entry into the country). Great threats are posed by malaria. Be sure to take properly prescribed anti-malarial prophylaxis. Please refer to the Center for Disease Control’s website (http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/mozambique.htm) for specific recommendations.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Crimes/Scams

Do not respond to any unsolicited opportunities to make money, including business opportunities that seem too good to be true.

Carefully protect all financial and personal information as incidents of financial fraud and identity theft crimes are increasing.

Thieves often attempt to distract a victim by asking questions, begging for money, bumping or jostling the individual, or offering to sell items. While the victim is distracted, an accomplice may take a piece of luggage or pick the victim’s pocket or purse.

Areas to be Avoided and Best Security Practices

Visitors are cautioned to avoid any large crowds, public gatherings, or demonstrations.

Drivers and pedestrians should be aware of their surroundings at all times and take extra care at night. The Marginal (coastal) Road is an area of increased criminal activity, and this popular area demands constant vigilance. Use of public transportation—including buses, taxis, and mopeds—is highly discouraged. Hiring a dedicated car and driver from a trusted and reliable source is recommended.

It is essential that visitors maintain heightened awareness and take the necessary security precautions. Be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times. Be alert to any unusual
surveillance or activity near the places you frequent. Vary your routes and times so that other cannot predict your schedule. When on foot, walk with a companion. Appear to walk with a purpose; do not give the impression that you are lost or wandering. There is evidence that criminals observe these vulnerabilities and target the individuals that display them. If you feel threatened or fear for your safety, leave the scene and go to the nearest police station. All American citizen visitors and those planning to reside are advised to follow common-sense guidelines to avoid becoming victims of crime.

Do not leave valuable items unsecured in your residence/quarters. Do not invite strangers into your residences. Do not keep excessive currency or other valuable items at your residence. It may attract the attention of criminals. Always keep the doors and windows to your residence or hotel room secured.

Avoid wearing flashy jewelry, clothing or carrying expensive cameras in public. Do not carry valuables in excess of immediate needs, and keep what you need in a secure place on your person. Practice good operational security if you are transporting valuable items into and around Mozambique. Ladies should avoid carrying large purses or bags, as they are enticing targets for criminals. Pick-pocketing is common. Maintain control of your personal items when in public areas and move away from anyone who you believe is acting suspiciously. Do not walk on the beach at night. Minimize outdoor activities during hours of darkness. Violent crime and the use of weapons in the commission of crime is commonplace. In the event an armed criminal confronts you, do not hesitate to hand over the desired property. Never carry anything that you are not willing to relinquish in a confrontation with a thief.

When traveling in a vehicle, keep your doors locked and windows secured. Keep valuable items out of sight. Always keep adequate space between yourself and the vehicle in front of you to ensure you can maneuver in the event of a situation requiring escape from the area. Be aware of what is taking place outside of the vehicle. Always park in secure, well-lit locations. Do not hitchhike or pick up hitchhikers. If you are involved in a vehicular accident, be aware that a large crowd may gather and could become hostile and aggressive.

Credit cards are sporadically accepted but to random effectiveness. When your card is swiped, do not let it out of your line of sight. Credit card machines operate over the cell phone system, so the machine should be brought to you. Credit cards are generally accepted at most stores, restaurants, and hotels.

Do not discuss travel plans or other business in a venue where others can hear you.
Always ask permission before taking a photograph. Do not photograph government buildings, embassies, military installations, airports, harbors or other locations or items of a possible security or intelligence interest. Cameras and film can be confiscated.

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

Embassy/Consulate Address and Hours of Operation

Embassy location: Av. Kenneth Kaunda, 193; Maputo, Mozambique
Hours: Monday-Thursday 0730-1730; Friday 0730-1230; Closed Saturday/Sunday

Embassy/Consulate Contact Numbers

Embassy Operator: (258) 21 49 2797
Post One: (258) 21 49 0723 or (84) 310 7190
Regional Security Officer: (258) 21 49 2797

All Americans should register with the Consular Section’s American Citizen Services online at https://travelregistration.state.gov prior to travelling or at the Consular Section upon arrival. The U.S. Embassy maintains a liaison with local law enforcement officials and is available to assist American citizens during their stay in Mozambique. The Consular section can be reached through the Embassy switchboard at: (258) 21 492 797 from overseas or (84) 312-8290 locally. However, you may reach the Consular Section in non-emergency situations via e-mail at MaputoConsular@state.gov.

All American citizens are advised to refer to the U.S. Department of State Country Specific Information (http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_976.html) for additional useful information. This resource provides information on a variety of issues intended to ensure your trip is safe and trouble-free.

**OSAC Country Council Information**

Mozambique has a formal OSAC Country Council. The RSO in Maputo will provide country briefings for representatives of American businesses and organizations as requested.