



The Bahamas 2014 Crime and Safety Report

Product of the Research & Information Support Center (RISC)

The following is based on open-source reporting.

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The Bahamas is a prominent tourist destination with cruise ship ports of call for Nassau and Freeport as well as an abundance of luxury resorts, including the world famous Atlantis and the soon to be developed Baha Mar. Over five million U.S. citizens visit or reside in the country each year. Approximately 80 percent of the tourists visiting The Bahamas are U.S. citizens.

The Bahamas is an archipelagic nation of more than 700 islands that cover a geographic region roughly comparable in magnitude to California. At the closest points - Bimini and Grand Bahama - the country is only 50 miles from the United States. As a result, the country is sometimes referred to as the “third border” of the United States. According to the 2010 census, the Bahamas has a population of 353,000. Seventy percent of the population lives on the island of New Providence where the capital, Nassau, is situated. Another 15 percent live on Grand Bahama, which has the country’s second largest city, Freeport. The rest of the population is dispersed over two dozen outer islands (commonly referred to as the “Family Islands”).

Crime Threats

While there has been a slight reduction in 2013 in some crime categories as reported by the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF), violent crime remains above the 2012 level. Since July 2013, the government has not published national crime statistics. The Bahamas continues to have a high crime rate, particularly on New Providence Island, which has continued to experience escalated levels of violent crime. Home break-ins, theft, and robbery are not confined to any specific part of the island. Generally, most reported crimes were perpetrated against local Bahamians in areas of saturated criminality not typically frequented by tourists.

The Bahamas has experienced a wave of armed robberies at gas stations, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, banks, and residences. Perpetrators of these types of crimes typically conduct pre-attack surveillance. There were several reports of victims being followed home after closing the business in an attempt to steal the nightly deposit. Several victims were severely injured.

The RBPF enacted a particularly forceful presence on New Providence Island in 2013, which included 12-hour police shifts, random armed police checkpoints, and a crime reduction plan in tourist areas. However, despite formidable anti-crime initiatives enacted by the government and specifically executed by the RBPF, during the past several months New Providence has witnessed a significant increase in violent crimes in locations frequented by U.S. citizen tourists. In some instances, these incidents have resulted in fatalities. In 2013, the police reported several incidents that either involved tourists or occurred in well-established tourist locations.

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Specifically, crimes were reported close to the cruise ship port (Prince George Wharf) and the Cable Beach resort areas. Of particular note, in May 2013, a U.S. citizen was shot and killed in New Providence during a violent altercation; in June 2013 a U.S. Embassy employee was robbed and suffered minor injuries while on the way to a Sunday worship service; in October 2013, the brother of a local political leader was shot and killed in a deliberate act of murder; and in December 2013 four locals were killed and 10 wounded in a hasty drive-by shooting using an automatic weapon. The upsurge in criminal activity has also led to incidents that could place innocent bystanders at risk.

Armed robberies, property theft, purse snatchings, and general theft of personal property remain the most common crimes perpetrated against tourists. Many criminals carry firearms, machetes, or knives. Unless provoked, criminals engaged in property crimes do not generally engage in gratuitous violence. There have been several reported armed robberies using a knife where the assailant assaulted the victim after the victim fought back and resisted. Many of these armed robberies were snatch-and-grabs involving purses, jewelry, and gold necklaces.

Residential security also remains a great concern, with the police reporting a large number of home burglaries and break-ins, including the December 2013 robbery of the Acting Prime Minister at his residence. A number of armed home invasions that occurred in both New Providence and Grand Bahama in 2013 occurred very close to U.S. Embassy residential housing.

Criminal activity in the Family Islands occurs less frequently. The Embassy has received reports of burglaries and thefts, especially thefts of boats and other watercraft. Grand Bahama is somewhat of an exception, in that criminality has increased on that island, notably crimes involving the use of machetes (large blades).

The U.S. Embassy has received an increase of reports of assaults, including sexual assaults at residences, hotel rooms, casinos, outside hotels, and on cruise ships. In some sexual assault incidents, the victim had reportedly been drugged.

Fraudulent use of bank and credit card account numbers occur in The Bahamas. There have been numerous reports of credit and debit card numbers being compromised and unauthorized charges being placed on the card holder's account from other countries to include the U.S. and Europe.

The Embassy has not received reports of harassment or hate crimes motivated by race, religion, or citizenship. In previous years, there have been reports of harassment and killings of persons based on sexual orientation. There have been no such reports in 2013.

Some organized crime activity is believed to occur, primarily related to the illegal importation and smuggling of drugs, weapons, or humans. The Bahamas, due to its numerous uninhabited islands and cays, has been favored by smugglers. Most visitors would not have any interaction with organized crime elements; however, persons who operate water craft or aircraft should be alert to the possibility of encountering vessels operated by armed smugglers engaged in illicit activities on the open seas or air space in or near The Bahamas.

Overall Road Safety Situation Road Safety

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Road Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic moves on the left side of the roadway (i.e. opposite from that in the United States). Pedestrians need to remember that vehicular traffic comes from the opposite to what one would expect in the United States, as tourists have been struck by cars after failing to check properly for oncoming traffic. Traffic circles are a common feature, and traffic in the circles has the right of way. Traffic congestion in Nassau is endemic, and drivers occasionally display aggressive tendencies and sometimes drive recklessly, passing on the right into oncoming traffic.

Many motorists disobey traffic control devices, to include stop signs, speed limits, and traffic signals. Police enforcement of traffic laws is minimal, and visitors driving on the roadways should use caution.

The law requires individuals who intend to stay in country longer than three months to obtain a Bahamian drivers license. Any individuals over the age of 18, who are driving, must obtain a drivers license. Third-party liability insurance is also required for individuals residing in The Bahamas.

Traffic accidents pose a safety hazard in some parts of The Bahamas, primarily due to impatient drivers speeding and driving recklessly on two-way, two-lane roads not designed for high-speed travel and, in some cases, in need of maintenance. Drivers should also be alert for unmarked or poorly marked construction zones. Some major streets do not have adequate shoulders or even passable sidewalks, compelling pedestrians to walk in the right-of-way. Motorcyclists frequently swerve through slow traffic and drive between lanes of moving vehicles. It is not uncommon to see poorly maintained or excessively loaded vehicles on roadways. Passengers regularly ride in truck beds and in pick-up trucks without any safety restraints. Roads on the outer Family Islands can be narrow, winding, and in poor condition.

While it is against the law, drinking and driving is common. The legal ban on this activity is rarely enforced, resulting in numerous traffic accidents and fatalities, including involving tourists and scooters.

If involved in a traffic accident, the police require that the vehicles not be moved until a police officer arrives to investigate. The police can sometimes be slow to respond. The police will issue a "Notice of Prosecution" form letter to each driver involved in the accident with an initial court hearing to be held within a week of the accident to determine who is at fault.

Flooding frequently occurs on roads in many areas, including Nassau and Freeport, as a result of storms and hurricanes. This flooding sometimes makes roadways impassable.

Visitors should exercise appropriate caution when renting vehicles, to include motorcycles and mopeds. Travel by moped or bicycle can be quite hazardous, especially in the heavy traffic conditions prevalent in Nassau. Those who choose to ride a motorcycle, moped, or bicycle should follow helmet laws and drive very defensively. The Embassy continues to see a significant number of moped accidents each year, resulting in serious injury as a

result of driver inexperience or inattention by the moped operator and other motorists. Wearing a helmet is also highly recommended to avoid serious injury.

Rental of personal watercraft (jet skis) is very popular at many resorts and beaches. Visitors should use extreme caution and not operate such watercraft unless they are experienced in using them. Use of life jackets is highly recommended. The Embassy has seen numerous injuries as a result of not following proper safety instructions by the jet-ski operators.

Emergency ambulance service is generally available and can be reached by dialing 911 or 919. Roadside assistance is also widely available through private towing services.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The Bahamas is a parliamentary democracy and a member of the British Commonwealth. The Governor General holds a largely ceremonial role and represents Queen Elizabeth II, who is the head of state. The Bahamas is a stable democracy that shares democratic principles, personal freedoms, and rule of law with the United States. There is little to no threat facing Americans from domestic terrorism, war, or civil unrest. The Bahamas has been an independent country since 1973.

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is a moderate threat of transnational terrorism due to porous borders. Terrorist groups native to the Western hemisphere do not typically operate in the northeastern Caribbean.

Civil Unrest

Public protests and demonstrations are rare and do not tend to be violent. However, limited law enforcement resources make rapid response to public disorder difficult, particularly on islands other than New Providence. Visitors should avoid demonstrations of any kind. Strikes are generally limited to "industrial actions" or work-to-rule actions and slowdowns. The airports have also seen instances of "Go Slow" actions resulting in considerable delays by incoming and outgoing flights.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Hurricanes and tropical storms frequent The Bahamas from June through November. Travelers and U.S. businesses are advised to consider devoting resources and time to emergency planning for the possibility of inclement weather, particularly during hurricane season. Travelers should pay close attention to the weather forecast during the hurricane seasons.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Counterfeit and reproduced goods are accessible. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under Bahamian law. Bringing such products into the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines.

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Drug-related Crimes

The Bahamas has a long history as a route for smugglers of narcotics, illegal immigrants, and weapons. Marijuana and narcotics are illegal. U.S. businesses should be mindful to not conduct business with questionable persons or enterprises. There have been numerous reports of visitors being arrested for possession and use of drugs.

Kidnapping Threats

There have been very few reports of kidnappings. The U.S. Embassy has received several reports of home invasion robberies at residences and hotels in Nassau.

Police Response

The police generally respond rapidly to hotels and establishments frequented by foreigners who are victims of crime. 911 or 919 are the police/medical emergency numbers. In general, the RBPF is responsive to reports of crime and takes the threat of crime against tourists seriously. There have been complaints that police are slow to respond to emergency calls in the residential areas and the 911 and 919 numbers often go unanswered. Recent changes in the police structure have promised a more proactive approach to deter crime. The police response is sometimes slowed by a lack of resources or by the physical constraints imposed by geography, infrastructure, and traffic. Police have limited emergency vehicles, and streets and houses are generally unmarked, inhibiting responders from locating affected residences. To ensure quick response to a residence, victims may have to go to the local police station and provide transportation to the site.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

It is lawful for the Royal Bahamian Police Force to conduct sting operations using entrapment techniques.

If detained by the police one should cooperate, identify yourself as an American citizen and request to make contact with the U.S. Embassy immediately.

Police harassment of Americans is rare. Attempting to bribe an officer of the Royal Bahamas Police Force is a serious offense and should be strictly avoided. Visitors should not attempt to “tip” police officers for their services.

Unregistered firearms and ammunition are illegal. Check local laws before bringing any firearms in by boat or by plane. Possession of unregistered firearms can lead to arrest and imprisonment.

Individuals who are arrested may be expected to serve prison time and/or pay a substantial fine.

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

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Visitors are recommended to report crime to the Royal Bahamas Police Force as rapidly as possible. Appropriate reports may improve the prospect of identifying and apprehending suspected perpetrators.

Various Police/Security Agencies

Royal Bahamian Police Force officers are uniformed in bright white dress coats and blue trousers. Officers also wear a more subdued navy blue uniform with a black beret. Officers are regularly seen walking foot patrols or on bicycles in areas frequented by tourists. In some cases they will be armed with automatic weapons. The local police emergency numbers are 911 or 919. The Royal Bahamas Police Force is the primary agency that handles all law enforcement matters. <http://www.royalbahamaspolice.org/index.php> The police can be contacted in an emergency by calling 911 or 919. Telephone: 242-322-4444.

Royal Bahamas Police Force
East Street, North
P.O.Box N-458
Nassau, Bahamas
info@royalbahamaspolice.org

Medical Emergencies

The Department of State strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to determine whether their policy applies overseas and whether they cover emergency expenses, such as a medical evacuation. Serious health problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can cost thousands of dollars, and air ambulance companies generally require payment or an insurer's guarantee of payment up front. For serious cases, treatment in even the best hospitals might require medical evacuation after stabilization. Bahamian physicians and hospitals do not usually accept U.S. medical insurance policies and typically expect immediate cash or credit card payment/deposits for professional services.

Generally, adequate medical care is available on New Providence and Grand Bahama islands. Medical care is more limited elsewhere. Some private clinics offer basic primary care. Medical facilities are generally limited and not equipped to handle many emergencies, especially those requiring surgery.

Contact Information for Recommended Local Hospitals and Clinics

General emergency numbers for police/fire/ambulance: 911 or 919

New Providence Island

The Lyford Cay Hospital has a hyperbaric chamber for treatment of decompression illness associate with deep sea diving.

Doctor's Hospital (Private hospital on New Providence Island)

Located on Shirley Street in downtown Nassau
Ambulance Service: (242) 302-4747
Emergency Room: (242) 302-4658

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General: (242) 322-8411 or 322-8418 or 302-4600

Princess Margaret (Public hospital on New Providence Island): There is a chronic shortage of blood at Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau (the country's largest public hospital) where most emergency surgery is performed. Travelers with rare blood types should know the names and locations of possible blood donors should the need arise.

Located on Shirley Street in downtown Nassau

Ambulance Service: 919 or (242) 323-2586 or 323-2597

Emergency Room: (242) 326-7014

General: (242) 322-2861

Medical Walk-In Clinic – Colin's Avenue – Near Downtown Nassau

General: (242) 328-0783 or 328-2744

Medical Walk-In Clinic – Sandyport Business Center – Near Cable Beach

General: (242) 327-5485

Grand Bahama Island

Sunrise Medical Center (Private hospital) (242) 373-3333

Rand Memorial Hospital (Public hospital): (242) 352-6735 or (242) 352-2689

Lucayan Medical Center (Clinic West Freeport): (242) 352-7288

Lucayan Medical Center (Clinic East Freeport): (242) 373-7400

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Ambulance service is available but may not be able to respond quickly in the event of a major emergency or disaster. New Providence has air ambulance services available; however, this may require advance payment.

Air Ambulance: (242) 323-2186 (between the hours of 5pm and 8am) and (242) 380-6666 (between the hours of 8am and 5pm)

SOS (Emergency Air Flight Services) servicing The Bahamas. Alarm Center, Philadelphia, open 24 hours for International SOS Assistance, Inc. 1 (215) 942-8226 or 1 (800) 523-5686 or 1 (215) 245-4707

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

HIV/AIDS is a significant health concern.

Refer to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for specific vaccinations and medications that may be required for travel to The Bahamas. Dengue virus is present in all tropical and many subtropical areas worldwide. Travelers to The Bahamas should take precautions to prevent contact with mosquitoes. The mosquitoes that carry dengue bite most often in the morning and evening and during hot, wet times of the year. However, they can bite and spread infection all year long and at any time of day.

CDC Web link: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/the-bahamas.htm>

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Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Areas to be Avoided

Much of the violent crime on New Providence Island happens in non-tourist areas referred to locally as “Over the Hill.” These areas are generally south of Shirley Street in downtown Nassau area. These areas are not clearly defined but encompass the lower income areas on New Providence. Visitors should avoid these areas, especially at night.

Best Situational Awareness Practices

Visitors should protect themselves as they would in any large or major metropolitan city. Visitors should exercise caution and use good judgment at all times. Most crimes occur at night so think prudently about night-time travel. Inform someone of your travel plans and when to expect you. Engaging in high-risk behavior, such as excessive consumption of alcohol, ostentatious displays of jewelry or cash, or walking alone in unsafe areas after dark, can be dangerous, as it greatly increases the vulnerability of an individual to accidents or opportunistic crime. One should utilize universal security tips and good common sense. Do not display or wear expensive jewelry that may make you a target for criminals. Avoid wearing gold necklaces, bracelets, expensive watches, or other flashy jewelry. Keep your wallet or purse close to your body; never leave your purse or wallet unattended in a business or restaurant. Do not leave valuables on the beach or pool-side while swimming. If you are in an area that makes you feel uncomfortable or you do not see other tourists, you are probably in the wrong area of town. At night, park in lighted areas observable by shops, passersby, or attendants when possible. Avoid unlit areas where persons could hide and ambush. Use the buddy system and walk in groups. Visitors are strongly encouraged to travel in groups and use taxi cabs at night.

Always be vigilant – look for possible threats or what looks out of the norm in your surroundings. Pay close attention to any unusual activity that may have occurred since leaving home and getting in and out of vehicles. Things like an open gate, unfamiliar vehicles parked nearby, house doors forced open, or shattered windows can be a sign of criminal interest or activity

Keep your car doors locked and your windows rolled up as you drive. Keep valuables out of site in your vehicles when parked. (cell phones, laptops, cash, GPS, or other valuable). Utilize a car alarm or steering wheel locking device. In crawling traffic or in a stopped line of cars, leave at least a half a car length between your vehicle and the car in front of you. If you believe you are being followed, drive immediately to a safe location such as a police station, gas station, or a hotel and call the police. Keep your cell phone charged and with you at all times and use a GPS system if you are traveling in unfamiliar areas.

Visitors should not accept rides from strangers or from unlicensed taxi drivers.

Avoid carrying large amounts of cash – use an ATM/Credit Card when possible and check your credit card statements regularly for potential fraud or unauthorized charges. Persons using credit or debit cards should regularly check accounts for suspicious activity. Avoid using ATMs in isolated areas and consider using ATMs in shopping centers that have security coverage. Use the buddy system when using ATMs.

Secure your home/hotel room. Close and lock all windows and doors. Do not forget to lock garages or gate doors. Do not answer your door at your residence unless you know who it is. Use a door viewer or window to identify who is at the door before opening. Have an escape plan for you and your family and know how to get out of the house/hotel room. Secure valuables in a locked safe that is not easily removed. Make a copy of your driver's license and or passport photo page to carry with you while your valuables are secured at home, hotel room, or cruise ship. Scan a copy of your passport or photo ID and have it available via email. Do not leave belongings unsecured outside your residence or hotel. Vehicles, bicycles, generators, and other property will attract criminals. If the items cannot be placed inside, then visibly secure them with a chain and lock as a deterrent. Consider purchasing timers to turn on outside and inside lights automatically at various times throughout the night especially if you are off island. Check outside lighting and replace light bulbs if necessary and use exterior lighting at night. Unplug appliances such as televisions, stereos, and personal computers. Arrange to have your lawn mowed periodically if you will be gone for an extended period. Arrange to have a friend or colleague check your home and pick up newspapers or other deliveries daily.

Home invasions, generally not random events, can be deterred by use of residential alarm systems, window grillwork, guards, substantial locks, lighting and a good emergency plan. Still, should you be confronted by a group or person demanding money or valuables, you should comply with their demands and make the encounter as brief as possible. If confronted by armed criminals remember your vehicle or valuables are not worth your life or anyone else's life. If confronted, try to remain calm, clearly display your hands, and do not make any sudden moves that could be interpreted as resistance.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The Embassy is located at 42 Queen Street, Nassau, The Bahamas. It is located next to the McDonalds downtown and across the street from the British Colonial Hilton.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Embassy Operator (242) 322-1181
Regional Security Officer (242) 322-1181 ext 4267
American Citizen Services (242) 322-1181 ext 4519
Political/Economic Section (242) 322-1181 ext 4226
Marine Post One (242) 322-1181 ext 4311

U.S. citizens traveling to The Bahamas are encouraged to sign up for the Smart Traveler Program (STEP). STEP is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State and the U.S. Embassy can assist you in an emergency. Follow this link to sign up: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

OSAC Country Council Information

There is an active OSAC Country Council based in Nassau. The Bahamas OSAC Country Council held their first meeting in February 2013, and meetings occur quarterly. For more

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information about participation in the Bahamas Country Council, please contact the U.S. Embassy Regional Security Officer (RSO) at 242-322-1181, ext. 4267.

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