



## **Cambodia 2011 OSAC Crime and Safety Report**

Bombing; Crime; Improvised Explosive Device; Natural Disasters; Political Violence; Stolen items; Terrorism; Threats

East Asia & Pacific > Cambodia > Phnom Penh

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### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

Criminal activity in Cambodia remained high in 2010 with an increase in both the level of violent crime and the number of incidents involving U.S. diplomatic personnel.

#### *Crime Threats*

The majority of the crimes committed in Cambodia are for financial gain. While the chances of being a victim at night were much greater than during the day, daytime robberies are very common: pick pocketing and purse- or bag-snatching is rampant. Corruption within the Cambodian National Police (CNP) combined with very low police wages result in criminals roaming the streets of all major cities and towns. This has been a factor in an upward trend in the number of armed robberies and shootings in Phnom Penh and the provinces.

Youth gangs comprised of wealthy, teen-aged males, continue to operate in Phnom Penh. These gangs can be violent and typically attack each other over turf battles and perceived insults. Gang fights have occurred in front of the embassy. Occasionally, innocent civilians have been injured or killed after getting caught in the middle of these battles.

The ineffectiveness and corruption in the CNP leads to vigilante justice. A recent killing by gang members resulted in no prosecution because, as was quoted in the newspaper, the police stated the victim was also "a gangster." Organized crime continues to take advantage of government corruption and police incompetence.

Violent crimes, especially strong-arm and armed robberies, continue to occur. Westerners continue to fall victim to these crimes. There was an increase in the past year of the number of reports the RSO received from embassy personnel, NGOs, and expatriates of snatch thefts, residential break-ins and harassment (rocks being thrown at Westerners). Armed robberies with hand guns continued to be frequent. A government effort to control access to firearms has had very little success. While military weapons are no longer sold openly in the



city, they are still available to criminal elements. Random gunfire in Phnom Penh is very common. The government has prohibited military and off-duty police from using their issued weapons while moonlighting as security guards, but the sub-decree appears to be ineffective, as the frequent random gunfire incidents often includes guards.

Thefts of motorbikes, auto parts, and other petty thievery continue at previous high levels, with any resistance being met with violence, often killings. There were numerous reports of fatal shootings during armed robberies of motos throughout the year.

Counterfeit U.S. dollars of very high quality continues to be a concern.

Americans who follow sound personal security procedures, to include employing 24-hour residential guards and adequate physical security measures, are victimized far less often than the general population.

### *Road Safety*

The road infrastructure in the city is good, but Americans must be extremely cautious when driving late at night, when the roadways are clear of heavy traffic. These open roadways bring drivers that operate their vehicles at high speeds and very often under the influence of alcohol. The speed and alcohol result in many vehicle accidents and fatalities. Additionally, diplomatic members are prohibited from driving outside the city during hours of darkness. In many regions of the country, the paved roads are deteriorating as a result of flooding during the rainy season. The roads outside the city lack lighting, painted dividing lines, and proper guard rails. Furthermore, local vehicles are likely to be driven without operational headlights, and ever-present livestock create hazardous driving conditions.

### **Political Violence**

#### *Historical Perspective*

The government continues to function and provide an outward appearance of stability. Demonstrations are less common and are, for the most part, peaceful and controlled by government forces. Labor and land dispute demonstrations occasionally became violent, but 2010 was peaceful. The police lack training in controlling demonstrations and can be heavy-handed in their response.

Cambodia's national elections in July 2008 were conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner. There is very little obvious evidence of anti-American sentiment among the Cambodian



people. Violence in Cambodia is common, and it is often difficult to differentiate politically motivated violence from personal disputes. Military weapons are sometimes used to settle personal disputes, injuring or killing innocent persons.

### *Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime*

In September 2002, the U.S. embassy closed for approximately one month due to specific terrorist threat information. In November 2006, the government arrested six alleged domestic terrorists who planned to conduct an attack during the annual Water Festival. In July 2007, three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were planted at the Vietnam-Cambodia Friendship Monument in Phnom Penh. One of the IEDs partially exploded, but the others failed to detonate and were recovered by Cambodian authorities. No one was injured, primarily because the explosion occurred during the early morning hours. Police subsequently arrested several individuals suspected of constructing the devices and planning the bombings. In January 2009, three explosive devices were found near the Ministry of National Defense in downtown Phnom Penh. One of two alleged suspects was later arrested. While there is no indication these incidents were directed at U.S. or other Western interests, the possibility remains that further attacks could be carried out, harming innocent bystanders. The group responsible for these incidents has been identified as the Tiger Head Movement; the 2006-2009 incidents were not anti-Western in nature but rather meant to embarrass the ruling political party.

### *International or Transnational Terrorism*

Concern still exists over the potential for Muslim extremist-related terrorist activity in Cambodia. There were no anti-American terrorist attacks reported in Cambodia during the year, but very porous borders allow easy transit.

### *Civil Unrest*

Cambodian political activities have turned violent in the past, and the possibility for politically motivated violence remains. In January 2003, the police lost control of Phnom Penh for several hours as anti-Thai mobs sacked and burned the Thai embassy and rampaged through the city, burning Thai businesses.

2009 saw an increase in forced evictions in both urban and rural areas. In some instances, the government ordered the homes destroyed and increased the likelihood of additional civil unrest.



Following the July 2008 UNESCO World Heritage Site listing of the Preah Vihear Temple, thousands of Thai and Cambodian soldiers amassed in various areas along the Thai-Cambodian border, particularly near the disputed Preah Vihear temple area. Since then, soldiers have clashed near the temple resulting in deaths on both sides, but the outbreaks of violence have been isolated and lasted only a few hours. While both the Thai and Cambodian forces have pulled back from the disputed territory, the still unresolved territorial claims remain a potential source for civil unrest.

## **Post-Specific Concerns**

### *Environmental Hazards*

During monsoon season, May - October, heavy rains can cause sporadic flooding in parts of the country and along Phnom Penh's streets. During this season, many roads and bridges are often impassable. Mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, and Japanese encephalitis are common in all parts of Cambodia. Tuberculosis, hepatitis, and the threat of HIV/AIDS is omnipresent, especially among commercial sex workers.

### *Industrial and Transportation Accidents*

Traffic accidents are a significant threat. Although there has been increased regulation for vehicle safety standards, traffic accidents continued to be a primary cause of fatalities in Phnom Penh. In 2010, one mission member suffered life-threatening injuries, requiring medical evacuation and an indefinite recovery. Another mission member was in an accident, resulting in the death of a moto driver. Cambodians lack driver training, are extremely negligent, and often use high speeds. Vehicle travel to the provinces can be dangerous, especially at night. Livestock will sleep on the road, and motor vehicles are operated without headlights or reflective devices. Visitors operating a vehicle must have a Cambodian driver's license and local third-party insurance.

### *Drugs and Narco-terrorism*

Cambodia has a significant and growing illegal drug problem consisting of increased levels of consumption, trafficking, and production. Recent trends indicate that Cambodia produces narcotics destined for local and regional markets. Drug use, particularly of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) such as crystal methamphetamine ("ice"), is escalating and cuts across socio-economic lines. Marijuana, heroin, and ATS are readily available throughout the country.



## **Police Response**

The typical police officer in Cambodia is poorly paid, poorly trained, and lacks discipline and necessary resources and equipment to operate effectively. Foreign victims of crime receive little investigative support. Reporting a crime to the police is of no value and will only lead to an additional expense for the victim because he or she will be asked to pay a fee to have a report written.

### *How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment*

Corruption continues to be a major problem with police personnel often committing serious crimes themselves. Self-discipline is often lacking. Foreigners and Cambodians are continually stopped by police for real and alleged minor traffic violations and asked for a bribe. Even so, U.S. citizens should report crimes committed against them, when possible, to the local police station, and especially to the embassy's consular section. Foreigners should politely decline to pay for a police report.

### Local Police Emergency Numbers

Country Code: 855 (If calling from overseas, drop the 0 after the country code)

Phnom Penh: Municipal Central Command Post, 012-999-999/011-567-656

Siem Reap: 017-808-886 or 011-288-893

Sihanoukville: 012-884-828 / 016-884-828 / 077-222-277 or 097- 7222-277 (These are cell phone numbers, which may not prompt a meaningful police response.)

## **Medical Emergencies**

Ambulance services in Phnom Penh are minimal and well below U.S. standards. Dial 119 to access the local EMS system, but the Royal Rattanak ambulance system, which can be contact at 023-365-555, is recommended. While most ambulance services are operated by private hospitals, they only provide transportation – not emergency treatment.

Travelers are strongly recommended to carry adequate medical evacuation insurance. The cost of a private medevac flight to Bangkok or Singapore can be extremely expensive.

In 2010, a holiday event ended with a crowd panicking, and the resulting stampede resulted hundreds killed and hundreds more injured. The lack of emergency treatment cost many lives



that may have been saved.

Contact information for local hospitals

Country Code: 855 (If calling from overseas, drop the 0 after the country code).

Royal Rattanak Hospital: 023-365-555

SOS International Clinic: 023-216-911, 023-215-911, 023-216-959

For both Medical and Dental Emergencies

Calmette Hospital: 023-426-948

(A local government hospital, not to Western standards.)

European Dental Clinic: 023-211-363, 023-362-656, 018-812-055

Naga Medical Center: 011-811-175

American Medical Centre: 012-891-613, 023-991-863

Air Ambulance Service can be arranged out of Bangkok through SOS International or Royal Rattanak Hospital.

### **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

Individuals are advised to only carry what they are willing to lose and to take the path of least resistance when confronted with an armed robber. Keep a low profile.

**Pickpockets:** Transportation centers, market areas, special events, river front area, and crowded buses traveling to the provinces are prime areas for pickpockets. Avoid carrying wallets or passports in back pockets. If possible, purses should not be carried. If a purse or bag is carried, keep it closed and in front of the wearer. Passports and ID should be photocopied, and the original kept someplace safe. Avoid wearing expensive looking jewelry. Wear and carry only those items you are prepared to lose.

**Robbers:** Do not walk the streets at night. Socialize at reputable restaurants and bars. Do not resist if you are the victim of a robbery. Criminals will typically use force, to include deadly force, when confronted with a victim that attempts to resist. Westerners have reported being



threatened or cut with knives despite complying with the robbers.

**Vehicles:** Avoid transport by moto-taxis. Lease a private driver for the length of your stay. There are few, if any, formal rental agencies. You may arrange for car rental through your hotel or a local travel office. There are two metered taxi services featuring English speaking dispatchers in Phnom Penh. Avoid taking taxis that are already occupied. Avoid driving alone after dark. Keep car windows and doors closed and locked. Avoid dimly lit areas. Always remove keys when you exit the vehicle. Vehicle break-ins are a frequent occurrence in Phnom Penh. Criminals will steal mirrors, spare tires, lights, trim, and accessories off of expensive vehicles to be sold for a profit. This requires the victim to travel to an auto repair shop to buy back or replace the stolen items.

**Money:** Credit cards are rarely used in Cambodia, except at major international hotels and restaurants, and it is best not to carry them with you. Avoid giving money to beggars and children. The children are typically forced to beg by their parents to support a drug habit. Word spreads fast and you may soon find yourself surrounded and under siege by other people wanting money. Many are pickpockets working in groups.

**Residential Security:** Install metal grills on all doors and windows. Keep all doors and windows closed and locked. Ensure the residence has adequate lighting around the perimeter. Know how to use alarm systems. Hire twenty-four hour guard protection from a reputable company.

**Travel Advisory:** The embassy issued a Warden Message in July 2008, regarding tensions on the Thai-Cambodian border (Preah Vihear Province in Cambodia and Sisaket Province in Thailand). While Thai and Cambodian troops have withdrawn, U.S. citizens are advised to defer travel to the area until the situation has been firmly resolved.

**Off Limits Areas:** The entire city of Phnom Penh is dangerous after hours. Late night movement around the city should be avoided. The "Heart of Darkness" club is off limits to Mission personnel.

**Other:** Report any incidents to the embassy's consular section. Always provide personal information, including travel plans, to the consular officer.

**Local Security Firms:** There are several private security services operating in Phnom Penh. None are associated with the U.S. Embassy Guard Force.

## **Further Information**



Embassy: 855-23-728-000  
Post One: 855-23-728-111  
Consular: 855-23-728-197  
Regional Security Office: 855-23-728-110  
Embassy after-hours Duty Officer: 855-12-814-800

### **OSAC Country Council Contact Information**

OSAC's Country Council meets quarterly. The points of contact are as follows:

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