



Malaysia 2012 Crime and Safety Report

Transportation Security; Surveillance; Stolen items; Floods; Landslides and mudslides; Information Security; Financial Security; Burglary; Theft

East Asia & Pacific > Malaysia > Kuala Lumpur

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

The overall crime rate in Malaysia is designated as MEDIUM, and violent crime against expatriates is relatively uncommon. Most criminal activity directed against foreigners is limited to non-violent crimes of opportunity such as petty theft, purse snatching, and credit card fraud. Residential break-ins do occur and are becoming more frequent in standalone houses. These break-ins generally do not result in confrontations or injuries to the occupants.

Purse snatching is the most frequently reported crime against expatriates and Malaysian citizens. The usual modus operandi (MO) is one or two males on a motorbike approaching the target from the rear and snatching a purse, handbag, or cell phone. The most common targets are women walking alone. These types of robberies occur at all hours, in front of witnesses, and even in upscale neighborhoods. At times, victims have been injured after being dragged by robbers attempting to snatch their shoulder bags. Also, incidents where motorbike riders smash a vehicle passenger window stopped at traffic lights and snatch purses or other valuables sitting on the passenger seat have been reported.

Credit card fraud has decreased in recent years but continues to be a problem. Although reports of credit card fraud have decreased, unauthorized charges may not show up on a credit card account for several months and can unexpectedly appear in amounts of US\$ 10,000 or more. One of the more common MOs is for employees in retail stores to swipe the credit card in a legitimate transaction under the counter, where account information is "skimmed" into a machine that either transmits the information or it stores the information for reproduction. In some cases, more sophisticated criminals have tapped into data lines of legitimate establishments to obtain account information. ATM cash withdrawals are safe as long as the ATMs are associated with reputable Malaysian or international banks. Individuals should only use ATM machines in well lit, safe locations.



Residential burglaries in Kuala Lumpur (KL) occur mostly in stand-alone residences in neighborhoods with large expatriate communities. Some burglars have entered when occupants were at home, tied the residents up, and threatened the occupants with weapons. RSO has not received any reports of injuries to these victims. Vehicular burglaries also occur, targeting vehicles parked at residences or alongside city streets. As in any burglary, criminals usually hit soft targets with obvious vulnerabilities and/or with valuables in plain view. Gated apartment complexes with 24-hour guards have a much lower burglary rate than other residential units, and apartments in general are burglarized less often than stand-alone residences. Major international hotels have good security and enjoy a low incidence of crime, although valuables should not be left unattended and should be locked up in the hotel safe.

Road Safety

Vehicles are right-hand drive, and traffic moves on the left side of the road. Roads, especially highways, generally are well maintained. Monsoon rains, however, can quickly flood roads in low-lying areas, usually outside of KL. Traffic is very heavy, especially in and around KL. Motorbikes are numerous and weave in and out of traffic, cross into oncoming traffic lanes, and run red lights. This poses a major hazard for both drivers and pedestrians who are unfamiliar with Malaysian traffic patterns. Drivers should be vigilant for motorbikes at all times but especially when turning or making a lane change. Road rage does occur. Drivers are advised to avoid confrontational behavior, especially when involved in vehicular collisions. If involved in an accident, drivers should report the incident to the police within 24 hours.

Police operate sobriety checkpoints in many entertainment districts frequented by foreigners. At these checkpoints, drivers are required to submit to a breath alcohol test and are subject to arrest if the police officer determines the breath sample to be over the limit. Malaysian drinking and driving laws are strictly enforced with serious penalties.

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

Since 1969, political violence in Malaysia has been almost non-existent.

International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism

There are two main terrorist groups in the Southeast Asia region, Abu-Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), both of which have suspected links with al-Qai'da. There have



been numerous terrorist attacks in the region outside of Malaysia, but Malaysia has not had any significant terrorist incidents.

Civil Unrest

Over the last five years, Malaysia has experienced an increased number of demonstrations over racial tensions, political divisions, and U.S. policies in the Middle East. These demonstrations are generally peaceful; however, it is advisable to avoid large gatherings and protests. In light of Malaysian national elections likely being held in 2013, it is possible demonstrations and political rallies may increase. A draft law currently being considered by the Malaysian government makes it illegal for non-Malaysians to participate in these protests.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Malaysia's location makes it less susceptible to earthquakes and tsunamis than other countries in Southeast Asia. A tropical monsoon season lasts from November to about mid-February. During this period, heavy rains and thunderstorms occur almost daily. Urban areas with poor drainage and other low-lying areas can suffer flooding. In less-developed rural areas, this flooding can cause landslides.

Kidnappings

In 2010, two Malaysian fishermen were kidnapped off the coast of eastern Sabah and held for 10 months. Acts of violence have occurred in the eastern islands and coastal areas of the state of Sabah, closest to the border with the Philippines. Although no incidents have been reported since 2010, there are indications that both criminal and terrorist groups continue to plan acts of violence against foreigners in this area.

Police Response

The Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) is a national police force that is well trained and equipped. The RMP generally provide good law enforcement support to the U.S. Embassy and have responded favorably consistently to the needs of the U.S. private sector and to American citizens in general.

Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating the law, even unknowingly, may be fined, expelled, arrested, or



imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. Malaysia strictly enforces its drug laws. Malaysian legislation provides for a mandatory death penalty for convicted drug traffickers. Individuals arrested in possession of 15 grams (1/2 ounce) of heroin or 200 grams (seven ounces) of marijuana are presumed by law to be trafficking drugs.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If an American citizen encounters an incidence of police detention or harassment, the U.S. Embassy should be notified immediately.

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

Victims of crimes should call the national emergency telephone number 999, the Malaysian equivalent of 911 in the United States. In tourist areas, the RMP have established small "Tourist Police" stations to assist tourists in case of an emergency.

Medical Emergencies

Kuala Lumpur has modern medical facilities that are generally comparable, in terms of quality of care, to those in the U.S. In an emergency, it is recommended the victim be transported immediately to a hospital. The two hospitals in the KL area most frequently used by expats are:

Gleneagles Intan Medical Center (preferred for after-hours emergencies): 2160-0000, 282 Jalan Ampang;

Prince Court Medical Center: 03 4255-2717, at the corner of Jalan Tun Razak and Jalan Kia Peng

Air Ambulance Services

Local emergency ambulance services are unreliable, and the staff is not trained to U.S. standards. However, if ambulance transport is required, two recommended services are:

St. John Ambulance: 03 9285-5294;

Red Crescent Ambulance: 03-4257-8122.



Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Crime

To avoid becoming the victim of a purse snatching, be alert and aware of your surroundings. Pedestrians should walk facing traffic and keep a close eye on all vehicular traffic, particularly motorcycles. If possible, try to walk on the sidewalk away from the curb. Avoid poorly lit streets, shortcuts, and narrow alleys. Purses or shoulder bags should be closed and tucked under the arm. Do not wrap the strap around your arm or shoulder. People have been injured by being pulled to the ground by their purse straps as the robbers speed off. If your purse or bag is snatched, immediately let go of it. Do not struggle with the attacker. Remain calm until the incident is over and report the incident as soon as possible to the police. If you are driving, do not leave purses or other valuable in easy-to-reach areas such as the passenger seat. Instead, leave them on the floor or otherwise hidden from view. In short, do not leave any valuables in the vehicle unattended.

Travelers in Malaysia should safeguard their credit card information at all times. Travelers should watch retailers closely to ensure their credit card information is not “skimmed” and should report any issues to the local police. If you use a credit card, you are advised to check your account information frequently for fraudulent charges.

Areas to be Avoided

While most streets are safe to walk, downtown areas around bars and discos tend to become populated with less desirable people after midnight. If possible, avoid these areas after midnight. Prostitution is illegal in Malaysia but is still prevalent. There are reports of foreigners being drugged and robbed after enlisting the services of a prostitute.

Further Information

Routine public inquiries from American citizens about security and safety in Malaysia should be directed to the American Citizens Services (ACS) section of the U.S. Embassy during normal business hours. For emergencies outside of normal business hours, call the U.S. Embassy main line and listen to the recorded instructions.

U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur
Embassy main line: +60 3 2168-5000
Post One: +60 3 2168-4959
American Citizen Services: +60 3 2168-4997



OSAC Country Council

U.S. Embassy KL recently re-established the Kuala Lumpur Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) in Malaysia. OSAC meetings are organized by the Regional Security Office (RSO) and are held quarterly. Currently, the Kuala Lumpur OSAC chapter has three Steering Committee Members, 10 Standing Committee Members, and over 80 full time members of OSAC. The OSAC point of contact within the Regional Security Office is Mr. Timothy Leeds, Regional Security Officer: + (603) 2168-5111, email: leedst@state.gov.