



Singapore 2012 Crime and Safety Report

Stolen items; Theft; Fraud; Financial Security; Religious Terrorism

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

Singapore, a city-state of 5.1 million people, remains among the safest countries in the world, and while final numbers for 2011 are not yet available, statistics from the first six months (January – June) of 2011 show an overall decrease in reported crimes of -4.6 percent from the same timeframe in 2010. Specifically, statistics for the first six months of 2011 show a decrease in violent property crimes (-24 percent), housebreaking and related crimes (-27 percent), theft and related crimes (-7 percent), and crimes against persons (-7 percent). Commercial crimes (cheating, fraud, etc) rose again in the first six months of 2011, showing a 13 percent increase over the same period in 2010, with this increase largely attributed to an increase in credit card fraud. The Embassy's assessment remains that Singapore's rating of "low" threat for crime is accurate, but "low" crime does not mean no crime, and individuals should still take common sense precautions to avoid being victimized.

With the exception of crimes occurring in housing developments – generally between family members and/or neighbors – crime is generally non-confrontational and non-violent. Criminal acts are usually crimes of opportunity such as purse snatching, pick pocketing, or thefts of unattended property. Individuals should be especially alert in crowded buses, the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system, streets, markets, and night clubs. Additionally, valuables should never be left unattended in hotel rooms or in plain sight in vehicles.

Violent crimes are rare, yet if a weapon is involved, it is likely to be an edged weapon, as firearms are strictly controlled, and punishments for brandishing them – let alone using one – are severe. Specific areas of Singapore – Geylang and lower-cost government housing – suffer from more serious crimes such as muggings, loan sharking, and illicit drug use, although not on the scale of a similarly sized U.S. city. Geylang is also a known "red light" district, harboring prostitutes and reportedly enduring an increase in organized criminal gangs.



American and Singaporean authorities continue to receive complaints from small U.S. businesses victimized by credit card fraud using Singapore as a trans-shipment point for criminal enterprises elsewhere in the region. Small American businesses shipping goods to customers in Singapore should be aware that thieves may use fraudulent credit card information and Singaporean addresses to defraud a business of payment for goods by arranging a transshipment of the goods to points outside of Singapore. Some freight forwarding companies in Singapore may need to better scrutinize all requests to re-label U.S. express air shipments outside of Singapore. Although a shipment's ultimate destination may not be readily apparent, businesses should thoroughly research all buyers using a shipping address in Singapore to ensure the business is actually located in Singapore. The Singapore Police Force (SPF) Commercial Affairs Department investigates credit card fraud in Singapore.

Road Safety

Singapore is a left-hand drive nation, with first-world road conditions, which include well-lit, well-paved, English language thoroughfares and expressways spanning the island. Traffic and driving can be a bit more hectic than typical American driving, with drivers seemingly occupying two lanes at once, and motorcycles darting from lane to lane between cars. Traffic accidents appear surprisingly rare. Drivers should be cautious, as the police vigorously enforce speeding violations, and speed cameras are prevalent. Drivers should also recognize the difficulty posed by Singapore's frequent, sometimes violent, rain downpours that can dump inches of water on the roads in a short matter of time.

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

The government of Singapore is defined by the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore to mean the Executive branch of government, which is made up of the president and the Cabinet of Singapore. Although the president acts in his personal discretion in the exercise of certain functions as a check on the Cabinet and Parliament, his role is largely ceremonial. It is the Cabinet, composed of the prime minister and other ministers appointed on his advice by the president, that generally directs and controls the government. The political party that gains a simple majority in each general election forms the Cabinet. Singapore has one of the most stable governments in the world, with the People's Action Party (PAP) assuming power in an election before independence and returning to power in every general election (the most recent in 2011) and has formed the Cabinet since 1959. The government is generally perceived to be competent in managing the country's economy and largely free from political



corruption. On the other hand, it has been criticized for using unfair election tactics and violating freedom of speech, although the national elections in May and August 2011 were free, fair, and competitive and seen by many as the best in the nation's history.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

Singapore remains relatively free from civil unrest, political instability, and credible terrorism threats. The government of Singapore (GoS) frequently cautions its citizens that while the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) cell has been disrupted severely, it has by no means been eradicated. Over the last decade, JI cells have been disrupted in the midst of preparations to attack the U.S. Embassy, the American Club, the Singapore American School, and other locations associated with the U.S. The head of JI in Singapore and Singapore's most wanted terrorist, Mas Selamat Kastari, escaped from prison in Singapore in early 2008 and was captured over a year later just across the border in Malaysia, raising fears of a possible support network existing in or near Singapore. Singaporean press articles also continue to express concerns that home-grown, self-radicalized terrorists may become a security issue. In part to counter this concern, the GoS has continued to make use of the Internal Security Act (ISA), which grants it the authority to arrest and detain individuals without trial for up to two years in certain circumstances, against individuals suspected of potential involvement in terrorism.

Whether concerning organized crime or terrorist activity, businesses, schools, churches, and other locations where Americans assemble should take prudent measures. Travelers should be vigilant when using public conveyances such as buses, subways, trains, planes, and ferries. Singaporean officials frequently emphasize the importance of community involvement and preparedness as a critical element in national security, as well as the importance of the private sector in fighting both crime and terrorism. In 2005, the GoS provided counter-terrorist briefings to over 40,000 registered taxi drivers, encouraging them to report suspicious activities, passengers, and conversations in their cabs.

While organized criminal groups exist, their strength remains unclear, and it is believed that they focus on crimes such as prostitution, loan-sharking, and narcotics trafficking and rarely target foreigners (prostitution in Singapore is legal, but various prostitution-related activities are not. This includes public solicitation, under-age prostitution, pimping, living on the earnings of a prostitute, and maintaining a brothel. In practice, the police are believed unofficially to tolerate and monitor a limited number of brothels). It is also significant to note that while the overall number of loan sharking (unlicensed money lending and harassment) cases was down (-23 percent) in the first six months of 2011, compared to the same period in 2010, the total number of persons arrested for these crimes increased by 9 percent. The ongoing operation of Singapore's two extremely profitable casinos remains closely watched



by local law enforcement officials to see if this will fuel a rise in loan sharking or other related crimes.

Civil Unrest

Although Singaporean law allows for permits of assembly to be granted, the reality is that permits are generally not issued for any potential demonstration or gathering, regardless of the nature. The government did permit a demonstration earlier this year in support of women rights as part of the 16 Days of International Activism Against Violence Against Women. Singapore's laws prohibit gatherings of five or more persons for demonstration/gathering purposes without a permit, and the law was recently expanded to allow the police to apprehend individuals assembling in smaller groups if the intent is to circumvent the permit requirement for groups of five or more persons.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Singapore has not recently experienced natural disasters. Singapore was largely sheltered from the December 2004 earthquake and tsunami that struck Thailand and other areas.

During certain periods of the year, thick haze from burning brush land in Indonesian Sumatra drifts over the island, elevating health risks for certain segments of the population prone to respiratory problems.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Industrial and transportation accidents remained relatively constant from 2007 (59 industrial deaths) to 2008 (62 industrial deaths) to 2009 (70 industrial deaths), and to 2010 (55 industrial deaths) with most deaths occurring in construction, engineering, or maritime industries. Although final figures for 2011 are not available, statistics for the January – June timeframe revealed there were 30 industrial and transportation related deaths, in line with historical trends. Singapore's worst accident on record remains the 1978 explosion aboard the Greek tanker Spyros as it sat in the Jurong shipyard in Singapore. The explosion and subsequent fires resulted in 78 deaths. Transportation accidents, such as ferries capsizing, do occur in the waters near Singapore, and ferry disasters are common in nearby Malaysian and Indonesian waters despite repeated official promises to tighten and enforce safety regulations. A prominent case was the December 27, 2010 capsizing of an overloaded fishing vessel that



resulted in the deaths of four Singaporeans.

Kidnappings

Kidnappings remain rare, although kidnapping scams – where an individual calls a family and advises that a member of the family has been kidnapped and will be harmed unless a ransom is paid – are more common.

Drugs and Narco-terrorism

Visitors should be knowledgeable of the severe penalties for narcotics trafficking, up to and including the death penalty. Despite these laws, drugs can still be found in Singapore, and individuals frequenting nightclubs should be particularly vigilant and remain aware of their surroundings. Incidents of individuals unknowingly ingesting a drug placed in a drink occasionally occur, and visitors should exercise the same amount of caution as they would in any major U.S. city.

Police Response

Police response to crime incidents is professional and generally effective. The police remain professional, and any report involving a criminal incident will be handled in accordance with the prescribed regulations. Firms assigning personnel to Singapore should conduct security and cultural awareness training for the employee and all family members. Rude and disorderly behavior, particularly directed against women, is prohibited. Inappropriate behavior toward woman, classified in Singapore as the offense of “Outraging the Modesty of a Woman,” is strictly enforced. Police harassment is not a problem in Singapore, as the force remains professional, competent, and technically proficient.

Police assistance can be readily obtained by dialing the Singaporean police emergency number of “999.” Every district has a dedicated neighborhood police center, and any neighborhood police center will accept the filing of a police report, not just the district where the crime took place. After-the-fact reports for events such as pick-pocketing can also be completed and submitted online.

Medical Emergencies

Local Hospitals and Clinics



Medical services are on par with those of the U.S. and other “first world” capitals. Singapore is a U.S. government regional medical evacuation destination, and private citizens from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia often travel to Singapore for medical treatment. Ambulatory services are available island-wide (although response times vary), and differing hospitals specialize in cardiology, oncology, or treating burn victims. Individuals should call “995” in the event of a medical emergency, as this is the Singaporean equivalent of “911” for medical services.

CDC Guidance

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) praised Singapore’s medical community during the SARS crisis for their honest reporting and heroic efforts in containing the virus. As a result, Singapore was among the first removed from the CDC’s list of countries to avoid. For information on Avian Influenza in Singapore use the home page:

http://www.moh.gov.sg/corp/hottopics/avian_flu/info.do

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Visitors should exercise the same level of caution they would in any large city regarding their personal safety and security. Avoid carrying excess cash and credit cards, and only use credit cards at reputable establishments. After using a credit card, check your receipts to ensure that only proper charges have been levied against your account, confirming these with your monthly statement. Always remain alert in crowded, public areas like hotel lobbies, subway stations, shopping centers or other tourist areas where pick-pocket or other petty crimes often occur. Do not leave valuables in plain sight. While staying in hotels, always use hotel safe deposit boxes or in-room safes to secure your valuables, and never leave personal or financial information unattended. Heed all warnings with regard to soft targets and potential terrorist threats. Know how to contact local emergency services for police, fire, and medical personnel. For fire safety, learn escape routes from your hotel room immediately upon checking-in. American visitors should register with the U.S. Embassy’s Consular Section for security and travel updates. Finally, if you are the victim of a crime, file a police report. The police must know that a crime has occurred in order to solve it and/or be more responsive to future problems.

Further Information

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RSO Tel: (65) 6476-9447

Business hours: 8:30 am - 5:15 pm Mondays to Fridays except on Singapore and U.S. holidays

Singapore police emergency operator: 999

Singapore fire and medical emergency: 995

Orchard Road shopping district police: (65) 6733-0000

Central business district police: (65) 6334-0000

For background notes and other U.S. Department of State services, use the Department of State home page at: <http://www.state.gov>

For travel advisories use the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at: <http://travel.state.gov/travel>

The Diplomatic Security Service has information at: <http://www.state.gov/m/ds/> and the U.S. Embassy Singapore operates a site at: <http://singapore.usembassy.gov/>

OSAC Country Council

U.S. Embassy Singapore has a very active OSAC Country Council chapter, which is loosely affiliated with the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) due to difficulties incorporating such organizations in Singapore. For specific information, contact the Regional Security Officer at the U.S. Embassy Singapore. Tel: (65) 6476-9100, fax: (65) 6476 - 9040. Also, visit the U.S. Embassy Singapore homepage listed above. One of the best sources for overseas security information is the OSAC electronic bulletin board. Travel advisories, country background notes, and links to other U.S. government travel and security services are also available on the Internet.