



China 2015 Crime and Safety Report: Beijing

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Surveillance; Nationalist; Stolen items; Theft; Financial Security; Fraud; Assault; Rape/Sexual Violence; Counterfeiting; Cyber; Information Security; Aviation; Separatist violence; Earthquakes; Winter weather; Landslides and mudslides; Floods; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Drug Trafficking

East Asia & Pacific > China; East Asia & Pacific > China > Beijing

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Rating: Low

Crime Threats

Beijing, with a population of almost 20 million people, is generally safe when compared to other major urban areas. The police and security service presence serves to deter most serious crimes, while petty crimes do occur with some regularity. The income disparity in Chinese society has been a source of social friction and has been identified as a root cause of much of the economic crime in Beijing. This includes pickpocketing, credit card fraud, and various financial scams, often targeting Americans and other foreigners. The most common criminal incidents are minor petty crimes. Pickpocketing on public transportation, at shopping areas, and at tourist sites is quite common. Thieves also commonly target cell phones, cameras, portable electronic devices, and other high-value items. At tourist sites, thieves are generally more interested in cash and will abandon credit cards. In shopping areas, both cash and credit cards are sought.

Violent crime is less common but does occur. These types of incidents garner significant media attention but are not considered the norm. Violent crimes (assaults) at the workplace are less common, but they do occur. Violent crime affecting the expatriate community most often occurs in bars and clubs. Bar fights are common, and 2014 has seen an increase in reports of violence against Westerners. Cultural miscommunication, xenophobia, and alcohol use often contribute to these fights, with certain bars garnering reputations for violence. Bouncers often play a role in the violence and have been physically aggressive with patrons. The legal age for consuming alcohol is 18; however, most establishments do not require identification. Some bars are overcrowded, and safety standards are not routinely enforced.



Prostitutes and drugs are known to be present in some clubs.

In a limited number of cases, foreigners have reported being sexually assaulted, have had their luggage stolen, or have been charged exorbitant fares while patronizing “black” taxis. Luggage theft typically involves a taxi transporting individuals to or from the airport and the driver intentionally leaving the scene before bags have been unloaded.

The distribution of counterfeit Chinese currency plagues official and private Americans. Unsuspecting Americans are passed fraudulent notes at restaurants, stores, and taxi cabs. Large numbers of 100 RMB and 50 RMB counterfeit notes circulate, while even fake 10 RMB and 20 RMB (roughly U.S.\$2 and 3, respectively) denominations have also been introduced.

Cyber

China has sophisticated capabilities (spear phishing, targeting mobile devices, and social networking manipulation) to target Westerners.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

For the most part, the roads in China’s larger cities are good; in contrast, driving conditions in rural areas are usually poor. Beijing adds some 1,200 registered vehicles to the roads every day, causing already congested roads to come to a standstill during rush hour. There were approximately 5.5 million vehicles registered in Beijing in 2014, quadruple that of 2000. Chinese often refer to Beijing as “Shoudu,” or capital of traffic jams. According to the Beijing Transportation Research Centre, the average weekday congestion time in the first half of 2014 was 100 minutes, 30 minutes more compared to the same period in 2013. During peak travel times near Chinese holidays, traffic jams can stretch for dozens of miles and make road travel practicably impossible. For example, during the May holiday in 2014, there was a traffic jam of over 30 miles heading out of Beijing. Employees who reside in U.S. Embassy housing in the suburbs report commutes of two hours for a single trip on a near-weekly basis in 2014, whereas prior years saw these multiple-hour trips occur only a handful of times per year. The chaotic traffic situation makes it extremely slow, difficult, and stressful to travel even short distances around the city. The rapidly worsening traffic also contributes to social isolation.

Additionally, there are a great number of pedestrians and bikers who weave through traffic, creating a hazardous mix of conditions. Busy roads often lack shoulders, so drivers have to contend with many bicycles in driving lanes. Traffic patterns and driving habits make crossing



the street in Beijing a routine danger, as pedestrians do not have the right of way. Limited numbers of crosswalks, poorly maintained sidewalks, and bike lanes that are not respected by motor vehicle drivers make all forms of non-vehicle transportation very risky.

Traffic laws are routinely ignored. Policing is done remotely by video camera (primarily through speed traps). Yielding to oncoming traffic or pedestrians is virtually unheard of, as is using turn signals. Traffic signals are absent at key locations, and road closures are either poorly marked or not marked at all. Local drivers frequently operate motor vehicles under the influence of alcohol. Where there are shoulders, cars generally use them as another travel lane, especially on crowded highways. It is common to see drivers back up on the highway to get to an exit they missed, stop on the side of the highway to drop off passengers and then slowly turn back into high-speed travel lanes, or veer horizontally across several lanes of traffic to get to an off ramp.

Most drivers are inexperienced drivers since private ownership of vehicles was not allowed until the last decade. According to China's official English-language newspaper, China Daily, nearly one-half of the accidents in Beijing are caused by drivers who have less than three years of driving experience. According to China Daily, traffic accidents were the leading cause of deaths for those under 45 years of age. The greatest road hazard is the inexperienced Chinese driver – most have little experience operating motor vehicles and are either overly cautious or aggressive, resulting in several accidents per day.

The Regional Security Office (RSO) responds to dozens of traffic accidents on an annual basis; most are minor and are resolved on the scene. In many cases, bicyclists strike a static or moving vehicle. In traffic accidents, the foreigner is often ruled at fault, regardless of the actual cause of the accident. RSO encourages U.S. citizens not to argue with the other party involved in a traffic accident regardless of who is responsible. U.S. citizens are encouraged not to react to aggressive driving by local nationals and to defuse the situation in a safe and expeditious manner.

Public Transportation Conditions

As one of the world's most populous cities, all forms of public transportation in Beijing are crowded, and they can become dangerously so during peak times (notably, the morning and evening commutes).

Few U.S. Embassy personnel take public buses, as they are often overfilled to dangerous levels, have poor temperature controls, and do not provide route information in English. Bus



accidents are also common.

While the subway system is fairly extensive in the city center, many of the lines that serve the U.S. Embassy community are among the most crowded. Families with small children cannot safely take the subway during even moderately busy periods. For those employees who reside outside the city center, riding the subway to work involves two transfers of at least a 10-minute walk, and the closest subway station to their home is not close enough to walk to on a regular basis. As a result, almost no employees residing outside the city center use public transportation to commute to the U.S. Embassy or the city on weekends.

Inter-city train trips can be quite long due to the large distances between most major cities, and train safety remains a concern as a result of the rapid expansion of high-speed rail lines. Additionally, trains and train stations are extremely overcrowded during holiday travel periods. In 2014, 266 million travelers rode the country's rail system during the Lunar New Year, surpassing the Hajj Pilgrimage as the world's largest annual population movement. In 2013, train stations became targets for minority groups of several terrorist incidents in western and southwestern China that created a tense environment at stations across the country.

Beijing taxi fare is artificially suppressed, which make taxis reasonably priced but difficult to hail, as supply falls far short of demand during peak times. Taxis often refuse to stop for foreigners, particularly those of African descent. Stories abound of foreigners who have been stranded for long periods because they could not get a taxi or the taxi demanded a huge surcharge. Most drivers understand no English and are not well-versed in local destinations, so the probability of getting lost is high unless the passenger knows the exact destination and can explain it in Chinese. Further, taxi drivers often refuse to take fares that require them to leave the center of the city, making it very difficult for the large percentage of U.S. Embassy families who live in the suburbs to rely on taxis. Taxis almost never have working seatbelts for passenger use. Individuals are encouraged to use official taxis (two-tone sedans in Beijing) that employ meters. If a driver refuses to use a meter, exit the vehicle and use another taxi. Some hotels can provide guests with taxi cards written in English and Mandarin that include the hotel name/address and several common points of interest. The use of unregistered or "black" taxi cabs with freelance drivers continues to be of concern. These drivers negotiate fares ahead of time but then often change their minds and increase their fares to exorbitant amounts and refuse to let their passengers leave the vehicle until the higher amount is paid. The RSO advises against taking black cabs.

RSO receives reports of foreigners taking rickshaws or pedi-cabs at tourist sites in Beijing and being driven through hutongs where they were shaken down for money. Typically, however,



the victims are left relatively unharmed. These incidents have taken place at tourist sites, such as Tiananmen Square and Houhai Park.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Air travel out of Beijing, both domestic and international, is quite expensive, as prices and competition are regulated by the government. Moreover, flight delays are normal, making travel planning particularly difficult and often too unpredictable for weekend trips. According to FlightStats, Beijing's international airport ranked last in the world in terms of on-time percentage in 2013 with almost 80 percent of flights delayed. Often, these delays are the result of sudden military closures and are not announced or explained to passengers.

Other Travel Conditions

According to IBM's most recently published "Commuter Pain Index", Beijing ranked number one in world for worst commuter experience based on a measure of the economic and emotional toll of commuting.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political Violence Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

China's domestic counterterrorism efforts remain primarily focused against the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM, East Turkestan Islamic Party, ETIP), a Pakistan-based terrorist group that seeks independence for the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of northwest China. The vast, resource-rich region, which was rocked by inter-ethnic riots that killed around 200 people in 2009, is hit regularly by violent flare-ups between Chinese authorities and the mainly Muslim Uighur minority. In public statements, government officials singled out the "Three Evils" of extremism, separatism, and terrorism in Xinjiang as the main terrorist threat to the nation and characterized Uighur discontent as terrorist activity. Human rights organizations maintain that China uses counterterrorism as a pretext to suppress Uighurs.

In May 2014, at least 31 people were killed and more than 90 wounded when assailants threw explosives and ploughed two off-road vehicles through a crowd in Urumqi.



In April 2014, an explosive device was detonated at a railway station in Urumqi (Xinjiang), injuring a number of bystanders. According to witness reports, the explosion was centered around some unaccompanied luggage between the station exit and a public bus stop.

On March 1, 2014, at least 33 people (29 victims, four attackers) were killed and 130 wounded at a main station in Kunming, the capital of southwest China's Yunnan Province. The attack began just after 9:00 p.m., when approximately 10 men dressed predominately in black and carrying large knives entered the train station (one of the largest in southwest China) and indiscriminately stabbed and slashed victims. China's national news service, Xinhua, indicated that authorities referred to the attackers as "Uighur separatists from Xinjiang." Witnesses reported that the attackers entered the train station shortly before many of the nighttime trains were scheduled to depart for popular Yunnan tourist destinations (Lijiang, Dali). Additionally, train stations in the southwest are often busy at that time of year, as migrant laborers return to east coast jobs after the Chinese New Year holiday and students return to university after winter break. The Kunming attack also came at a sensitive time for national politics, as the National People's Congress annual meetings were scheduled for the following week in Beijing.

A November 16, 2013, attack against a police station in Lukqun township, Turpan prefecture, XUAR, in which two workers and all nine attackers were killed, was not officially characterized as terrorism.

On October 28, 2013, a vehicle careened into an ornamental bridge on Tiananmen Square and exploded, killing two tourists and the vehicle's three occupants and injuring 38 others. It was the largest security incident in central Beijing in the last decade. Characterizing the incident as a "terrorist act," the government focused on suspects with Uighur-sounding names and stated that the incident was part of a plot by ETIM to cause instability just days ahead of a major Chinese Communist Party political meeting in Beijing. A group calling itself the East Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIP), which Chinese authorities say is the same as ETIM, claimed responsibility for the incident a few weeks later.

24 police officers and civilians were killed, along with 13 attackers, in a June 26, 2013, attack on the same police station in Lukqun. Chinese authorities called it a "violent terrorist attack." Three ethnic Uighurs were sentenced to death and one received life in prison after reportedly confessing to the crimes of organizing, leading, or participating in a terrorist organization.

On April 23, 2013, 14 individuals armed with knives reportedly attacked a group of police officers and community workers in Bachu county, Kashgar prefecture, XUAR, killing 21



people. Six attackers reportedly died in a clash with police, and two alleged ringleaders were sentenced to death after being convicted of organizing and participating in a terrorist group.

Post is unaware of a significant transnational terrorist presence in China.

Terrorism Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

The government remains focused on maintaining social stability and preventing civil unrest over economic and social grievances. In recent years, the largest, most violent incidents have taken place in ethnic minority areas (Tibet, Xinjiang), where grievances over human rights abuses and discriminatory policies have resulted in spontaneous outbursts of violence targeted at government and Han Chinese interests. The frequency of large-scale violent incidents in Xinjiang has increased significantly over 2014.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Natural disasters are not uncommon in China. In May 2008, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck in the Sichuan Province, killing more than 69,000 people and leaving nearly five million people homeless. Severe weather, such as large snowstorms, has brought parts of the country to a virtual standstill. Even smaller-scale storms often lead to multiple traffic accidents; snow removal is typically slow and is accomplished by employing thousands of laborers armed with shovels and brooms. China's southern coast is subject to heavy rainfall, flooding, and monsoons. Southern China experienced massive mudslides in 2010, causing significant property damage.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Accidents and fatalities continue to plague China's heavy industries. Worker safety and quality assurance are lacking.

Commercial transportation accidents are not uncommon. Trucks are often overloaded, and drivers are poorly trained.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts



Security personnel carefully watch foreign visitors and may place you under surveillance. Business travelers should be particularly mindful that trade secrets, negotiating positions, and other business sensitive information may be taken and shared with competitors, counterparts, and/or regulatory and legal entities.

Embassy employees are warned not to discuss sensitive information in their homes, vehicles, or offices. Post strongly encourages members of the private sector to take similar precautions to safeguard sensitive, personal, and/or proprietary information.

Privacy Concerns

All visitors should have no expectation of privacy in public or private locations. The U.S. Embassy regularly receives reports of human and technical monitoring of U.S. private businessmen and visiting U.S. citizens. The areas around U.S. and other foreign diplomatic facilities and residences are under overt physical and video surveillance. Dozens of security personnel are posted outside of facilities and around residences, while video cameras are visible throughout diplomatic quarters (offices and residential neighborhoods) of Beijing. Overt microphones and video cameras are common in taxis.

All hotel rooms/meeting spaces and offices are considered to be subject to on-site or remote technical monitoring at all times. Further, personal possessions, including computers, in hotel rooms may be searched without your consent or knowledge. Hotel rooms, residences, and offices may be accessed at any time without the occupants' consent or knowledge. Elevators and public areas of housing compounds are also under continuous surveillance.

All means of communication – telephones, mobile phones, faxes, e-mails, text messages, etc. – are likely monitored. The government has access to the infrastructure operated by the limited number of internet service providers (ISPs) and wireless providers operating in China. Wireless Internet in major metropolitan areas is becoming common. As such, the Chinese can more easily access official and personal computers. The government has publicly declared that it regularly monitors private e-mail and Internet browsing through cooperation with local ISPs. Some bloggers are subject to particular scrutiny where such activity is carefully monitored and in some cases, depending upon the subject matter, blocked. Common Western social media websites include YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

Drug-related Crimes

Narco-terrorism has not been an issue. The government is concerned about domestic drug



use, and enforcement efforts are widespread; however, illicit drugs are available in Beijing.

Police Response

Police response for foreign victims of crime depends upon the type of infraction, where it transpired, and the social status of the victim (private citizen, diplomat, VIP, etc.). Urban forces in Beijing and other first-tier cities are better trained and equipped because authorities spend millions of dollars on security-related infrastructure. Local police are semi-effective at deterring crime; most responses to alarms/emergency calls are sufficiently prompt if the police are informed that the victim is a Westerner or person of importance. In some cases, local police authorities will serve as a mediator between the victim and criminal to agree upon financial compensation (sometimes in lieu of jail time).

Investigative training and forensic equipment is improving but remains substandard in comparison with Western countries. Local police cooperation with the RSO remains scant, and requests for assistance from the RSO are often not met.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime, contact the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. The Embassy can:

- Replace a stolen passport.
- Help find appropriate medical care.
- Put you in contact with police authorities and can contact family members or friends.
- Help you understand the criminal justice process and direct you to local attorneys, although authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting the crime.

The local equivalent to “911” is “110;” however, very few English speakers staff this hotline. The local police can be reached only by calling “110” from the location where the crime occurred. Victims may also contact American Citizen Services (ACS) at the Embassy or nearest consulate for assistance. ACS officers can recommend appropriate medical facilities, provide contact information for local attorneys, notify family members, and explain how to transfer funds to China.

If a passport is stolen, the victim must not only apply for a new passport at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate but must also apply for a new visa. To receive the new visa, Chinese visa officials may require that you file a police report about your stolen passport at the police



station nearest to where the theft occurred. You may also be directed to file a report at the local Entry/Exit Bureau. If someone steals your passport, file the police report right away.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care continues to improve in many urban areas. In Beijing, some medical facilities provide acceptable Western-style medical care. Some conditions that had led to a medical evacuation can now be safely treated in-country. It is recommended that American citizens use Western medical centers whenever possible or, when necessary, seek out the VIP section ("gao gan bing fang") of the hospital where there are more likely to be Western-trained physicians and more modern medical equipment.

Both municipal and private ambulance service remain substandard. Response time is typically very slow and transport to the nearest hospital can take a considerable amount of time due to congested traffic conditions. Most ambulances are poorly equipped, staffed by individuals without English skills, and lack EMT training akin to that found in the U.S. or Western Europe.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

International SOS maintains a 24-hour alarm center for visitors to China. SOS representatives will advise on the availability of care in most urban areas. Collect calls are accepted. Contact information is as follows:

Beijing: 86-10-6462-9000
Hong Kong: 852-2528-9900
USA: 215-942-8226

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Air ambulance service varies by city. International SOS is the main Western air ambulance provider along China's east coast. MEDEX also provides regional air ambulance services; its representatives can be contacted via the Internet at <http://www.medexassist.com/>.

Recommended Insurance Posture

Payment of hospital and other expenses is the patient's responsibility. Before you go abroad, learn what medical services your health insurance will cover overseas. If your health insurance policy provides coverage outside the U.S., carry both your insurance policy identity



card as proof of such insurance and a claim form. Although many health insurance companies will pay "customary and reasonable" hospital costs abroad, very few will pay for your medical evacuation to the U.S. Medical evacuation can easily cost \$10,000 and up, depending on your location and medical condition. Visitors are strongly encouraged to purchase medical evacuation insurance prior to traveling.

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/china?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Criminals use various scams, including sending text messages and emails of fraudulent bills and traffic tickets, to trick people into paying money. Other techniques involve criminals posing as police and levying fake criminal charges against their victims and then extorting money from them.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Travelers are strongly encouraged to be aware of their surroundings. Continued vigilance is necessary to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. As a general rule, lesser developed areas in major cities have a higher rate of crime. Statistically, more crimes of opportunity transpire during early morning hours; for example, individuals who frequent bars, nightclubs, and similar establishments are more likely to be involved in physical altercations after midnight.

The U.S. Embassy recommends that visitors disperse money in more than one location on their person, taking care to separate small and large denominations. Men should place their wallets in front pockets, while women should drape the shoulder straps of purses across their body, keeping them in view and under positive control. If you use a backpack, do not place items of worth inside. Hotel safes should be used but are not a failsafe method to safeguard your belongings.

Travelers are encouraged to make copies of their passport photo page, visa, and credit card data (to include telephone contact information in the event the card is stolen). These copies



should be stored in a hotel or residence in the event the actual items are stolen. Travelers should not flash large amounts of money, jewelry, or electronics, all of which can be perceived as an indication of wealth.

Public payphones are becoming less common in urban areas. The U.S. Embassy recommends that long-term visitors purchase cellular telephones and that short-term travelers contact their cellular phone provider to determine if it provides coverage in both Mainland China and Hong Kong.

Counterfeit products are readily available, but it is illegal to import them into the U.S. U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have the authority to seize suspect goods and impose fines on travelers caught attempting to enter the U.S. with counterfeit items.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

No. 55 An Jia Lou Lu, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100600

Normal hours of operation are 08:00 to 17:00, Monday – Friday.
Mission facilities are normally closed for U.S. Federal and Chinese holidays.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone: 86-10-8531-4000 (24 hours)
Post One: 86-10-8531-4444
Regional Security Office: 86-10-8531-4111.
Medical Unit: 86-10-8531-4777
Consular Affairs: 86-10-8531-3333
Fax: 86-10-8531-4000 (American Citizen Services)
Email: amcitbeijing@state.gov.
Website: <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/>

Nearby Posts

Consulate Chengdu: <http://chengdu.usconsulate.gov/>
Consulate Guangzhou: <http://guangzhou.usconsulate.gov/>
Consulate Shanghai: <http://shanghai.usconsulate.gov/>



Consulate Shenyang: <http://shenyang.usconsulate.gov/>
Consulate Wuhan: <http://wuhan.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

For the latest security and other information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs at <http://travel.state.gov>, where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings can be found, as well as important information for Americans who face emergencies abroad. U.S. citizens residing or traveling in China are reminded to register with the U.S. Embassy or closest U.S. Consulate by entering their travel itinerary and contact information at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>. In case of difficulties registering online, please contact the closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance.

OSAC Country Council Information

Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenyang, and Shanghai all have active OSAC Country Councils. The initial point of contact for each Council is the Regional Security Officer:

RSO Gregory Levin(Beijing): LevinGJ@state.gov
RSO Julia Sweeney (Guangzhou): SweeneyJP@State.gov
RSO Miguel Eversely (Shanghai): EverselyMA@state.gov
RSO Dax Moss (Shenyang): LandryDL@State.gov
RSO Kevin Wynes (Chengdu): WynesKA@State.gov

To reach OSAC's East Asia Pacific team, please email OSACEAP@state.gov.