Philippines 2017 Crime & Safety Report
Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Crime; Maritime; Terrorism; Political Violence; Elections; Natural Disasters

Created: 1/14/2017
Revised: 4/1/2017
Revised: 4/13/2017

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HANDLE WITH EXTREME CARE
I. Overall Crime and Safety Situation
ARC has assessed Manila as being a high-threat location for crime directed at or affecting foreigners.

a) Criminal Threat
i. Crime remains a significant concern in urban areas throughout the Philippines. Theft, physical assault, and robbery were the most common crimes reported to local authorities in 2016, according to the Philippine National Police Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management. Other common criminal acts include pickpocketing, confidence schemes, and credit card fraud. It is advised to use credit cards at major retail facilities/banks and always check bills or statements for suspicious charges.

ii. Credit or debit card use at local bars or establishments is not advised as there are numerous reports of these establishments spiking the bill. Their argument, if authorities are called is that the victim has been drinking and therefore has forgotten the purchases being charged.

iii. Date-rape drug use has also been reported and travelers should never leave a drink unattended or accept drinks already opened from a stranger (other than the waiter or waitress). There are organized gangs who prey on foreigners, particularly lone male travelers. The modus operandi is to introduce an attractive women who suggests going back to the victim’s room. At an opportune time, a drug is given to the male who will subsequently pass out. When they awake all possessions will be gone. If taking a stranger back to the hotel, it is highly advised to register the “guest” with the front desk.

iv. Carjacking, robberies, and violent assaults also occur sporadically. Reports have identified incidents in which criminal gangs have rear-ended the bumper of a targeted vehicle. Once the driver gets out of the car to check for damage, the suspects rob the driver and steal the vehicle. The modus operandi for these incidents typically involves dark streets or isolated areas in metro Manila. It is highly advised to not drive in areas wherein you are unfamiliar.

v. In 2016, robberies committed by taxi drivers and individuals using stolen taxi cabs declined from 2015. Despite one instance in which the driver of a ride sharing service was accused of rape, crime associated with ride sharing services in 2016 was minimal. It is therefore recommended to use taxis that are registered with high-end hotels or use taxi services such as UBER or Grab.

b) Areas of Concern
Due to the security concerns related to terrorism and unchecked criminal activity such as kidnaping and/or extortion, ARC strongly recommends...
foreigners residing, visiting or with business in the Philippines do not travel to Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and the Sulu Sea. The US Government also publishes regular travel restrictions on their website (https://ph.usembassy.gov). This list should be reviewed often and ARC is prepared to discuss any concerns or issues concerning travel in any region of the Philippine Archipelago.

c) Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions
i. In most cities in the Philippines, and in Metro Manila in particular, traffic is dense, chaotic, and unpredictable. Poorly maintained roads are frequently congested, and drivers are often undisciplined. Drivers regularly fail to yield to emergency vehicles and drive erratically and commonly do not use signaling lights. Vehicles are also poorly maintained and it is common to see bald tires and non-functioning head-lights, tail-lights, and break-lights. These combined factors can impede the ability of emergency vehicles from reaching the scene of an accident in a timely fashion. Roads, even newly laid, do not commonly have emergency lanes and traffic is easily snarled by one broken down car. People (including beggars) often walk in the road as sidewalks are populated with kiosk of vendors (that are mostly illegal businesses). Nationals roads are poorly lit and local drivers will often ride with high beams on continuously. Roads that are not national highways are often have no lighting and are particularly dangerous and should be avoided. Travelers unfamiliar with the routes to destinations should refrain from driving. Drivers are encouraged to keep their vehicles in good working order and maintain a good first aid kit in the boot of the car. It is also recommended to attend and complete a defensive driver’s training course before driving in the Philippines.

Public Transportation Conditions
i. Always use extra caution when hailing taxis on the street. The safest way to travel using a taxi is to ask the hotel, restaurant, or business establishment to call a reliable taxi service. Consider calling or texting a friend/local contact and providing the name of the company, the license plate number, and name driver upon entering the taxi. The vast majority of taxi services remain safe and reliable. Never “share” a taxi cab with a stranger. If there are any other passengers in the taxi, do not enter that taxi cab and wait for the next one. Before getting into any taxi, always check to see if the meter is functioning. Do not patronize a taxi that does not have a functioning meter or if the driver refuses to use it.

ii. Another option for travelers is ride-sharing services connecting drivers and passengers through smart phone applications. In 2016, the use of ride sharing services surged in metropolitan Manila. These services have proven very efficient and successful in Manila. Ride sharing services often negate the need for cash.
d) Other Travel Conditions

i. Public utility vehicles in the Philippines are known as “jeepneys.” The jeepney has a long history associated with Americans and General Douglas MacArthur after WWII. However, colorful the story is, the jeepney is an unsafe vehicle and often the major cause of traffic and accidents. They should be avoided by foreigners. Jeepneys are also targets of robbery by local thieves.

ii. Transportation safety involving maritime ferries tends to be substandard compared to other countries and it is therefore advised to avoid using them. Accidents involving ferries are relatively frequent and have resulted in the serious injury and death of passengers.

e) Terrorism Threat

ARC has assessed Manila as being a high-threat location for terrorist activity directed at or affecting official government interests. Presently, the following terror groups are operating in various parts of the Archipelago:

- Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)
- Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)
- ISIL
- Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)
- Maute
- Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)
- Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)
- New People’s Army (NPA)
- Rajah Sulaiman movement

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

i. For the last several years, the embassies of several countries have warned their respective citizenry of the risks of terrorist activity in the Philippines. Terrorist groups and criminal gangs continue to operate there.

- In 2016, an improvised explosive device (IED) was discovered several hundred meters from U.S. Embassy Manila. The device was deactivated by the Manila Police Department Explosive Ordnance Division.

- The communist New People’s Army (NPA) has targeted foreigners and could threaten U.S. citizens engaged in business or property management activities. The NPA frequently demands “revolutionary taxes” from local and foreign businesses. Members of the group also threaten and conduct attacks on infrastructure (power facilities, telecommunication towers, bridges, etc.) to enforce their extortion demands. The group has targeted, attacked, damaged, and destroyed mining
and road construction equipment and set buses on fire. In 2016, the NPA appeared to seek constructive dialogue with the Philippine government, with the group’s leadership expressing a desire to establish a lasting peace.

- Since 2008, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and rogue elements formerly associated with the MILF have clashed with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in/around Mindanao, including the provinces of North Cotabato, Lanao Del Sur, Lanao Del Norte, Zamboanga, Zamboanga del Sur, and the Sulu Archipelago. The peace process with the Philippine government and MILF continues, with prospects for its completion uncertain.

- In 2016, armed rebels with links to the MILF allegedly attacked a jail in the southern Philippines and freed their leaders.

- The Maute Group, named after founder Abdullah Maute, is a radical Islamist group composed of former MILF guerrillas and a handful of foreign fighters. The group (Dawlah Islamiya, the “Islamic State” in Lanao) was involved in a clash with Philippine troops in February 2016 that ended with the capture of its headquarters in Butig, Lanao del Sur. The Philippine National Police (PNP) suspects that the Maute Group may be responsible for several IED incidents throughout the Philippines, including a December 2016 explosion in Leyte Province, where 32 people were injured and the IED found near the U.S. Embassy.

- The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), a MILF splinter group, continues to confront the AFP and other groups in Mindanao. The BIFF was linked with the MILF in the 2016 attack on a jail in the southern Philippines that facilitated the escape of over 150 prisoners.

- The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) operates in Mindanao, chiefly in Zamboanga and the Sulu Archipelago, as well as throughout the Sulu Sea. This group has pledged its allegiance to ISIS. ASG is notorious for its kidnap-for-ransom operations.

- In January 2017, ASG militants reportedly released a South Korean and a Filipino national after holding them captive for more than three months.

- In 2017, the AFP announced a campaign plan to eliminate all terror groups in the Philippines, the ASG and Maute Groups in particular.

- Small-scale, anti-U.S. demonstrations held in front of and in the vicinity of U.S. Embassy Manila are common. Demonstrations
are organized by various groups (Filipino college students, the Communist Party of the Philippines, labor/socialist organizations). All demonstrations contain an element of anti-American sentiment, and each group’s goal is to reach the grounds of the Embassy, though most are intercepted by the PNP. The number of demonstrators is usually under 100 people. While injuries are rare, demonstrators have assaulted police and defaced the walls and Embassy main gate by throwing red paint.

• In October 2016, a demonstration held near the Embassy grew aggressive as approximately 1,000 protestors attempted to surge toward the Embassy walls. Several police officers and demonstrators were hurt before police regained control.

• On 9 April 2017, several embassies (including the US, Australian, and British missions) issued a travel warning for their citizens cautioning travel to Cebu and Bohol islands and the surrounding waters. On 11 April 2017, PNP and AFP surveilled two fast craft boats (with a total of 10 suspected ASG militants) entering a river from the sea into Bohol. Once they had cornered the boat up river, a firefight ensued that lasted more than 8 hours and resulted in the deaths of 7 ASG militants including one of their leaders, Abu Rami. Rami was allegedly the mastermind to many kidnappings and carried out several beheadings.

f) Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

i. ARC has assessed Manila as being a high-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting business interests.

ii. It is not unusual for the period leading up to Election Day to be marred by violence between the factions of competing candidates. Elections have led to drive-by shootings, IEDs, and grenade attacks designed to settle scores and eliminate political rivals (especially candidates for local offices). Typically, this does not result in civil disturbances or large-scale clashes by partisan groups.

iii. The 2016 presidential election, which saw Rodrigo Duterte elected, was largely absent of civil disturbances or partisan violent clashes. Barangay (village) and Sangguniang Kabataan (youth Barangay sector) elections are scheduled to be held in October 2017.

iv. As a result of a 2009 politically-motivated massacre, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) instituted a gun ban prior to all election cycles in an attempt to curb violence among political rivals and to curtail politically-related activities of armed partisan groups.
g) Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

i. The Philippines is particularly vulnerable to typhoons, floods, earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. These disasters can easily set back development and economic gains by causing disruptions to communication and transportation. These events have also led to considerable casualties.

- In 2016, several typhoons caused loss of life, homes, and electrical power in various parts of the Philippines.
- On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan hit with record-breaking sustained winds of over 195 miles per hour and sea level storm surges of over 13 feet. Over 16 million people were affected by the storm, which left at least 6,000 dead, and over 27,000 injured.

h) Drug-related Crimes

i. The production, trafficking, and consumption of illegal drugs remain issues of concern. Trafficking and abuse of methamphetamine remains the foremost drug-related problem, followed by marijuana and, to a lesser extent, cocaine, and Methylendioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, ecstasy). Transnational organized crime groups exploit both under-staffed and under-resourced law enforcement and a weak judicial system to establish clandestine drug laboratories and import wholesale quantities of methamphetamine to supply the domestic market. Authorities have raided methamphetamine laboratories throughout the country, including major urban centers like Manila. Regionally, the Philippines has been identified as a source of methamphetamine for Guam and a transit point from Africa to Southeast Asia. Penalties for drug-related crimes can be severe, with sentences of 40 years in prison to life not uncommon for drug couriers.

ii. Drug trafficking has become a priority issue for the government of the Philippines under President Duterte. Though the ongoing anti-drug campaign has focused primarily on arrests and enforcement operations, the government has indicated that it intends to expand treatment and rehabilitation activities. Additionally, proposed legislation under Philippine congressional review is seeking to revive the death penalty for drug traffickers.

iii. According to PNP statistics, 5,927 deaths linked to the “war on drugs” in the Philippines occurred from July 1-December 12, 2016. Of the total, 2,086 people were killed in police operations, and 3,841 deaths were attributed to extrajudicial or vigilante-style killings. More than 40,000 suspects had been arrested for drug-related crimes since July 1.
i) Kidnapping Threat
   i. The PNP Anti-Kidnapping Group (AKG) is primarily responsible for kidnapping investigations.
      - In 2016, there were 22 reported kidnappings, predominantly of local citizens. Thirteen of these incidents occurred in Mindanao.
      - AKG officials report that kidnapping incidents in Mindanao are most often perpetrated by Muslim insurgent/terrorist organizations (ASG, MILF, the Lawless MILF Group). Kidnappings remain prevalent in western Mindanao, particularly in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao; on the Zamboanga Peninsula; in the provinces of South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat; in the Chartered Cities of Zamboanga, General Santos City, Cotabato, Iligan, Cagayan de Oro; and throughout the Sulu Sea. Several militant groups see kidnap-for-ransom as a way to fund their operations, and foreigners are often targeted.
      - The AFP stated that the ASG was holding 13 foreign hostages kidnapped between February 1, 2012 and April 15, 2016. Although, the vast majority of the kidnapping victims are Philippine nationals, the period of 2014-2016 saw a marked increase in foreign hostage-taking. In 2016, ASG was linked to the kidnappings of one Norwegian, one Korean, two Canadian, and two Malaysian nationals. AFP indicates it is aware of at least 18 foreign citizens being held hostage throughout the southern Philippines by ASG and other KFR groups.
      - On 26 February, ASG militants beheaded a Norwegian hostage taken in 2016.

While kidnappings occur throughout the country, the majority of incidents in Manila and areas north of Mindanao appear to be criminal in nature. The perpetrators appear to target local business people and individuals who are perceived as affluent. Criminal groups also tend to negotiate for a ransom within a relatively brief period (days/weeks). Victims are often returned to their families after a ransom has been paid.

j) Police Response
   The Philippine National Police (PNP) are capable but limited in their capacity to respond to and assist the victims of crime and traffic accidents due to a lack of response vehicles, radios, and other essential equipment.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment
   i. Foreigners should remain calm and polite when interacting with police to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication. Reports of corruption and
bribery, to include crimes apparently committed by PNP officers, are widespread. Please learn your government's policy of pay or condoning bribes to government officials. In most countries paying bribes are illegal and doing so could expose you to criminal charges (even if outside your home country). If you feel you are being extorted by the police, ARC encourages you to contact your embassy and report the incident. In the event of arrest or detention by the police, you should contact (or request that authorities contact) your embassy at once.

**k) Crime Victim Assistance**
All incidents of crime should be reported to the PNP. The National Emergency Number is 117.

**l) Police Contact Numbers**
- Manila: 523-3378 (District Tactical Operations Center)
- Makati City: 843-7971 (Tactical Operations Center)
- Pasay City: 831-1544 (Tactical Operations Center)
- Quezon City: 925-8417 (District Tactical Operations Center)
- Fire Contact Numbers: For fire within the National Capital Region, the Central Operations Center Hotline can be reached at 410-6319. Emergency/fire alarms will be relayed to the respective district by radio.
  - Manila: 527-3627 and 527-3653
  - Makati City: 818-5150 and 816-2553
  - Pasay City: 843-6523 and 844-2120
  - Quezon City: 924-1922 and 928-8363

**m) Private Security Agencies**
There are many reliable, local companies that provide private security services.

**n) Medical Emergencies**
Adequate medical care is available in major cities, but hospitals may not meet the standards of care, sanitation, and/or equipment that is provided in other countries. There are many Western-trained Filipino doctors who are capable of providing quality medical care, even when they have sub-standard medical facilities.

Most hospitals will require a down payment of estimated fees at the time of admission and full payment prior to discharge. In some cases, public and private hospitals have withheld lifesaving medicines and treatment for non-payment.

**o) Contact Information for Available Medical Services**
A completed list of doctors and medical facilities can also be found on the webpage of the U.S. Embassy Manila (https://ph.usembassy.gov).
  - ** Makati Medical Center**
    #2 Amorsolo Street, Makati City
    Phone: 888-8999 or (011-63-2) 815-9911
  - **St. Luke’s Global Hospital**
E. Rodriguez Avenue, Quezon City
Phone: 789-7700 or (011-63-2) 722-6161 or 723-0301

- **Manila Doctors Hospital**
  U.N. Avenue, Ermita, Manila
  Phone: (011-63-2) 524-3011

- **Asian Hospital**
  Filinvest Corporate City, Alabang Muntinlupa
  Phone: (011-63-2) 771-9000/9001/9002

**Available Air Ambulance Services**

- International SOS-Philippines (Air Ambulance): 687-0909

**Insurance Guidance**

- Travelers should verify the validity of their medical insurance prior to personal travel. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to another country can be quite expensive and therefore if there is a potential for emergency evacuations due to a pre-conditioned medical issue(s), you are encouraged to seek insurance that provides this service in the policy.

**Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance**

- The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for the Philippines.

**p) Philippines Security Risk Rating**

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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Risk Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>NCR National Capital Region</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Ilocos Region</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>II Cagayan Region</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>III Central Luzon</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>IVA CALABARZON</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>IVB MIMAROPA</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
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<tr>
<td>V Bicol Region</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI Western Visayas</td>
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<tr>
<td>VII Central Visayas</td>
<td>Red</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIII Eastern Visayas</td>
<td>Red</td>
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<tr>
<td>IX Zamboanga Peninsula</td>
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<tr>
<td>X Northern Mindanao</td>
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<tr>
<td>XI Davao Region</td>
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<td>XII SOCKSARGEN</td>
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<td>XIII CARAGA</td>
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<td>XIV CAR Cordillera Administrative Region</td>
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<td>XV ARMM Autonomous Region in</td>
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While there are large swaths of low risk areas, please be reminded this map is an indicator of acts of terrorism or unchecked criminal activity. Indicators could change anytime and therefore, readers are encouraged to seek advice prior to any travel.

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