



## **U.S. Embassy, Manila, Philippines**

### **Security Message for U.S. Citizens: Holiday Security Guidance**

**December 1, 2016**

*THE EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES IS TRANSMITTING THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AS A PUBLIC SERVICE TO U.S. CITIZENS IN THE PHILIPPINES. PLEASE DISSEMINATE THIS MESSAGE TO ALL U.S. CITIZENS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION OR NEIGHBORHOOD. THANK YOU.*

The Embassy wishes to remind U.S. citizens to take preventative measures to ensure their safety and security while traveling and residing in the Philippines. The holiday season is a prime time for criminal activity.

Remember, while victims can often simply be at the wrong place at the wrong time, they can also be targeted because they appear to be wealthy. In years past there have been incidents of robbery, pick-pocketing, property thefts from vehicles, and burglaries in unoccupied residences. The Embassy is issuing the following guidance that can help reduce your chances of becoming a victim of such criminal activity.

#### **CRIMINAL ACTIVITY:**

- Maintain a low profile and don't bring undue attention to yourself. Avoid displaying large amounts of gold or jewelry.
- Always carry some type of identification (ID).
- Don't carry around large amounts of cash. Take with you only what you will require for the moment and keep it in the front pocket of your clothing whenever possible. Purse snatching is common.
- Avoid resisting an armed criminal attempting to take your valuables. Good rule of thumb: Don't take more with you than you are willing to lose. Possessions can be replaced, people cannot.
- Pay attention to your surroundings. Crime can occur anywhere and at any time.
- When possible, avoid going out at night alone. There is always safety in numbers.
- Avoid walking in dark or isolated areas.
- Know where you are going and have your route pre-planned.
- Exercise caution when at public venues that have added pedestrian and/or vehicle traffic during the holidays (e.g., malls, churches, holiday concerts, etc.) as they can be prime targets of crime or terrorism. Maintain an awareness of your surroundings and have multiple points of egress.
- If you notice suspicious individuals approaching you, attempt to cross the street to avoid them. In the event they continue to follow or harass you, walk to the nearest establishment (shopping mall, hotel, restaurant, etc.) and seek assistance from the security guard or door escort. This includes pickpocket gangs, which are common and often appear to be homeless and begin by demanding money. They will sometimes aggressively follow victims until they eventually swarm around the victim to surreptitiously grab personal items such as wallets and cell phones.
- Be aware that jeepneys, buses, and the Light Rail Transport (LRT) and the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) systems are prime venues for thieves.
- Avoid excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages.

## VEHICLE SECURITY:

- Drive defensively at all times.
- ALWAYS drive with the windows rolled up and the doors locked.
- DO NOT park in deserted or isolated areas. At night, park in well-lit areas. Take advantage of guarded and paid parking lots with private security patrols.
- Do not leave personal items openly displayed in your vehicle. Smash-and-grab incidents are common when victims leave cell phones, backpacks, laptop bags, purses, and other potentially valuable items in plain view.
- Always maintain copies of your driver's license and vehicle registration in your vehicle. Avoid surrendering the original document to police.
- Remember that traffic leading up to Christmas progressively worsens. Give yourself more time traveling between locations to help minimize incidents of road rage and traffic accidents.

## RESIDENTIAL SECURITY:

- Control the keys to your residence.
- Make sure that ALL doors and windows are secured before going to sleep or before departing your residence.
- Always keep the doors to your residence locked (day and night), even when at home.
- DO NOT open your door to anyone until you have satisfactorily identified the visitor. This is very important for children and domestic help to understand.
- Make sure that all repairmen are properly identified. Always inform your household staff if you are expecting any visitors to the house while you are away. You or your domestic staff should keep any workers/contractors under observation. Be wary of any unscheduled visitors. If you are not expecting the visitors, feel free to turn them away.
- DO NOT leave gifts, valuables, or personally sensitive documents in close proximity to windows or glass doors. Thieves can quickly smash a window and grab items within reach. Always keep such items locked in a personal safe or filing cabinet with a strong lock.
- When planning a trip away from your residence during the evening, make certain to leave on some lights. For extended absences from your residence, consider using a timer to control lights at the residence, turning them on and off at alternating times of the morning and evening. Also consider leaving a radio turned on to give the impression that someone is at home at all times.
- If you are home during a burglary attempt DO NOT confront the perpetrators – they may be armed. Instead, either flee or lock yourself in a secure room and call the police.
- If your residence has an alarm, make sure you use it.

## SUSPICIOUS ITEMS:

- If you see a suspicious object or package, do not go near it or attempt to touch it. Immediately notify an appropriate official, such as a police officer or building guard, and then depart the premises.
- If you are in the vicinity when such an incident occurs, leave the area immediately. Do not approach the scene of a suspicious item such as a suspected explosive device.

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For further information:

- See the [State Department's travel website](#) for the [Worldwide Caution](#), Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and the [Philippines Country Specific Information](#).
- Enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive security messages and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.
- Contact the U.S. Embassy in Manila, Philippines, located at 1201 Roxas Boulevard, at +(63) (2) 301-2000, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. After-hours emergency number for U.S. citizens is +(63) (2) 301-2000.
- Call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).