

## **Bahamas 2012 Crime and Safety Report**

Maritime; Theft; Stolen items; Burglary; Surveillance; Counterfeiting; Murder; Drug Trafficking; Assault; Rape/Sexual Violence; Transportation Security; Human Trafficking; Hurricanes; Travel Health and Safety

Western Hemisphere > Bahamas > Nassau

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### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

The Bahamas is a renowned tourist destination with cruise-line ports of call and numerous luxury resorts. The Bahamas has over 700 islands that make up the archipelago and are roughly equivalent in size to California. The combined population of the islands is approximately 310,000. Only 25 of the 700 islands have significant populations, and about two-thirds of all Bahamians live on the small island (7 x 21 miles) of New Providence, where the capital Nassau is located and what is the center of commerce.

### **Crime Threats**

The U.S. Department of State rates the criminal threat level for New Providence Island as CRITICAL. The U.S. Department of State rates the criminal threat level for Grand Bahama Island, which includes Freeport, as HIGH. New Providence Island, in particular, has experienced a spike in crime that has adversely affected the traveling public. Armed robberies, property theft, purse snatchings, and general theft of personal property remain the most common crimes against tourists. There has been a dramatic increase in general crimes in 2011.

In previous years, most violent crimes involved mainly Bahamian citizens and occurred in “over-the-hill” areas, which are not frequented by tourists. However, in 2011 there were numerous incidents reported that involved tourists or have occurred in areas in tourist locations. These incidents have specifically occurred in the downtown areas, to include the cruise ship docks (Prince George Wharf) and the Cable Beach commerce areas. Residential security also remains a great concern as the number of incidents involving house burglaries and break-ins has also increased.

Criminal activity in the outlying family islands does occur but to a much lesser degree than on New Providence Island. The Embassy has received reports of burglaries and thefts, especially thefts of boats and/or outboard motors on some of the family islands.

The Bahamas has experienced a spate of armed robberies at gas stations, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, banks, and residences. Perpetrators of these types of crimes typically conduct pre-attack surveillance by watching the intended victim. There were several reports in 2011 of victims being followed home after closing the business in an attempt to steal the nightly deposit. Several victims were severely injured. This underscores that common activities can directly impact personal security.

Counterfeit and pirated goods are available in The Bahamas. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under Bahamian law. Bringing such products into the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines.

There were 127 homicides in The Bahamas in 2011, up from 94 in 2010, with nearly all the victims being Bahamian. This is a 35 percent increase from 2010. The police report that many of the homicides were a result of drugs, domestic violence, and retaliation/retribution crimes with firearms being the weapon of choice. While the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF) works closely with U.S. law enforcement agencies to combat drug trafficking, police attribute most murders to drugs and domestic violence, and they assert that many of the high numbers of home invasions and robberies are also related to drugs.

In late 2011, there have been numerous reports by cruise ship tourists and others regarding incidents of armed robberies of cash and jewelry. These incidents were reported during daylight and nighttime hours. In several cases, the victims were robbed at knifepoint, and gold necklaces and jewelry were taken. Cash-for-gold is a new business in The Bahamas that may have resulted in the increase of these types of crimes.

The U.S. Embassy has received reports of assaults, including sexual assaults, in diverse areas such as casinos, outside hotels, or on cruise ships. In several incidents, the victim had reportedly been drugged. The Bahamas has the highest incidence of reported rape in the world according to a 2007 United Nations report on crime, violence, and development trends. The number of reported rapes increased 37 percent from 78 in 2010 to 107 in 2011. Two American citizens were murdered in Nassau in 2009, both in residential areas. Home break-ins, theft, and robbery are not confined to any specific part of the island.

The upsurge in criminal activity has also led to incidents, which, while not directed at tourists, could place innocent bystanders at risk. In 2011, there was an armed robbery at a well-known downtown department store when many tourists were in the area. Automatic assault weapons were used in this robbery and have been reported to be used in other robberies. In previous years, several daytime robberies in Nassau led to exchanges of gunfire on the busy streets.

The Embassy has not received reports of harassment or hate crimes motivated by race, religion, or citizenship. However, the Embassy does receive frequent reports about discrimination against and harassment of Haitians. In previous years, there have been reports of harassment and killings of persons based on sexual orientation. In addition, women have reported incidents of verbal harassment and unwanted attention.

Vehicle thefts (including motorcycles, boats, and personal watercraft) do occur, with vehicles usually being taken immediately to chop-shops and disassembled for parts or shipped to other islands of The Bahamas.

## SUMMARY OF 2010 and 2011 CRIME STATISTICS

<b>January 1- December 31, 2011</b>			
<b>National Reported Crimes – All Bahamas</b>			
<b>Crimes Against Person</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Murder	94	127	35
Attempted Murder	11	12	9
Manslaughter	3	1	-67
Rape	78	107	37
Attempted Rape	26	28	8
Armed Robbery	924	1000	8
Robbery	335	371	11
Attempted Robbery	31	43	39

<b>Crimes Against Property</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Burglary (Night Time)	380	338	-11
Housebreaking (Day Time)	3141	3237	3
Shoplifting	1192	941	-21
Stealing	1972	1928	-2
Stealing from Vehicle	1688	2488	47
Stolen Vehicle	1242	1330	7

### Road Safety

Traffic in The Bahamas moves on the left side of the roadway (i.e. opposite from that in the United States). Pedestrians need to remember that vehicular traffic comes from the opposite to what one would expect in the United States, as many tourists have been struck by cars after failing to check properly for oncoming traffic. Traffic circles are a common feature, and traffic in the circles have the right of way. Traffic congestion in Nassau is endemic, and drivers occasionally display aggressive tendencies and sometimes drive recklessly passing on the right into oncoming traffic.

Many motorists disobey traffic control devices, to include stop signs, speed limits, and traffic signals. Police enforcement of traffic laws is minimal, and visitors driving on the roadways should use caution.

Traffic accidents pose a safety hazard in some parts of The Bahamas, primarily due to impatient drivers speeding and driving recklessly on two-way, two-lane roads not designed for high-speed travel. Some major streets do not have adequate shoulders or even passable sidewalks, compelling pedestrians to walk in the right-of-way. Motorcyclists frequently swerve through slow traffic and drive between lanes of moving vehicles. It is not uncommon to see poorly maintained or excessively loaded vehicles on roadways. Rural roads can be narrow, winding, and in poor condition.

If involved in a traffic accident, the police require that the vehicles not be moved until a police officer arrives to investigate the accident. The police can sometimes be slow to vehicle accidents.

Flooding frequently occurs on roads in many areas, including Nassau and Freeport, during and after storms and hurricanes sometimes making roadways impassable. Drivers should be alert for unmarked or poorly marked construction zones.

Visitors should exercise appropriate caution when renting vehicles, including motorcycles, jet skis, and mopeds, in The Bahamas. Travel by moped or bicycle can be quite hazardous, especially in the heavy traffic conditions prevalent in Nassau. Those who choose to ride a motorcycle, moped, or bicycle in particular should follow Bahamian helmet laws and drive very defensively. The Embassy continues to see a large number of moped accidents each year resulting in injury and sometimes death as a result of driver inexperience, inattention by the moped operator, and other motorists. Wearing a helmet is highly recommended to avoid serious injury.

Rental of personal watercraft (jet skis) is very popular at many resorts and beaches in The Bahamas. Visitors should use extreme caution and not operate such watercraft unless you are experienced. Use of life jackets is highly recommended. The Embassy has seen numerous injuries and fatalities as a result of not following proper safety instructions by the jet ski operators.

Roadside assistance is also widely available through private towing services.

## **Political Violence**

### **Historical Perspective**

The Bahamas is a stable democracy that shares democratic principles, personal freedoms, and rule of law with the United States. There is little to no threat facing Americans from domestic (Bahamian) terrorism, war, or civil unrest. The Bahamas has been an independent country since 1973.

### **Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime**

Some organized crime activity is believed to occur, primarily related to the illegal importation and smuggling of illicit drugs or human trafficking. The Bahamas, due to its numerous uninhabited islands and cays, has been favored by smugglers and pirates. Most visitors would not have any interaction with organized crime elements; however, persons who operate their own water craft or air craft should be alert to the possibility of encountering similar vessels operated by smugglers engaged in illicit activities on the open seas or air space in or near The Bahamas.

### **International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism**

There is a moderate threat of trans-national terrorism due to the porous borders, though there are no known terrorist groups active in The Bahamas, and terrorist groups native to the western hemisphere do not typically operate in the northeastern Caribbean.

### **Civil Unrest**

Generally, public protests and demonstrations are rare and do not tend to be violent in nature. However,

limited Bahamian law enforcement resources make rapid response to public disorder difficult, particularly on islands other than New Providence. Visitors should protect themselves by avoiding demonstrations of any kind. Strikes are generally limited to “industrial actions” or work-to-rule actions, which, on at least one occasion, caused major disruption to the public road networks. The airports have also seen instances of “Go Slow” actions resulting in considerable delays by incoming and outgoing flights.

### **Post-Specific Concerns**

#### **Environmental Hazards**

Hurricanes and tropical storms frequent The Bahamas from June through November. Travelers and U.S. businesses are advised to consider devoting resources and time to emergency planning for the possibility of inclement weather, particularly during hurricane season. Travelers should pay close attention to the weather forecast during the hurricane seasons.

#### **Industrial and Transportation Accidents**

Although The Bahamas prides itself on keeping the country clean, there is minimal enforcement of environmental standards. Used automotive oil is routinely dumped in vacant lots, and there is no program for recycling.

#### **Kidnappings**

There have been very few reports of kidnappings in The Bahamas.

#### **Drug and Narco-Terrorism**

The Bahamas has a long history of being a route for smugglers of narcotics, illegal immigrants, and weapons into the United States. Drugs are illegal in The Bahamas. As a major transshipment point for traffickers, U.S. businesses should be mindful not to conduct business with questionable persons or enterprises. It is lawful for the Royal Bahamian Police Force to conduct sting operations using entrapment techniques. There have been numerous reports of visitors being arrested for possession and use of drugs in The Bahamas. Individuals who arrested may be expected to serve prison time and/or pay a substantial fine.

## **Police Response**

The police generally respond quickly to hotels and establishments frequented by foreigners who are victims of crime. 911 or 919 are the police/medical emergency numbers. There have been complaints that police are slow to respond to emergency calls in the residential areas and the 911 and 919 numbers often go unanswered. Recent changes in the police structure have promised a more proactive approach to deter crime. Police have few emergency vehicles, and streets and houses are generally unmarked, inhibiting responders from locating affected residences. To ensure quick response to a residence, victims may have to go to the local police station and provide transportation to the site.

Royal Bahamian Police Force officers are uniformed in bright white dress coats and blue trousers. Officers also wear a more subdued navy blue uniform with a black beret. Officers are regularly seen walking foot patrols or on bicycles in areas frequented by tourists. The local police emergency numbers are 911 or 919.

### **How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment**

If detained by the police one should cooperate, identify yourself as an American citizen and request to make contact with the U.S. Embassy immediately. Police harassment of Americans is rare. Attempting to bribe an officer of the Royal Bahamas Police Force is a serious offense. Visitors should not attempt to “tip” police officers for their services.

### **Where to Turn for Assistance if you Become a Victim of a Crime and Local Police Telephone Numbers**

Visitors are advised to report crime to the Royal Bahamas Police Force as quickly as possible. Early reports frequently improve the likelihood of identifying and apprehending suspected perpetrators. In general, the Royal Bahamian Police Force is responsive to reports of crime and takes the threat of crime against tourists very seriously. However, the police response is sometimes slowed by a lack of resources or by the physical constraints imposed by geography and infrastructure.

## **Medical Emergencies**

The Department of State strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to determine whether the policy applies overseas and whether it covers emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. Serious health problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can cost tens of thousands of dollars, and air ambulance companies generally require payment or an insurer’s guarantee of payment up front. Bahamian physicians and hospitals do not usually accept U.S. medical insurance policies and typically expect immediate cash or credit card payment/deposits for professional services.

Adequate medical care is available on New Providence and Grand Bahama islands. Medical care is more limited elsewhere. Some private clinics offer basic primary care. HIV/AIDS is a growing health concern in The Bahamas. Medical facilities in The Bahamas are generally limited and not equipped to handle many emergencies, especially those requiring surgery. For serious cases, treatment in even the best hospitals would probably require medical evacuation after stabilization.

There is a chronic shortage of blood at Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau, where most emergency surgery is performed. Travelers with rare blood types should know the names and locations of possible

blood donors should the need arise. The Lyford Cay Hospital has a hyperbaric chamber for treatment of decompression illness associate with deep sea diving.

Ambulance service is available but may not be able to respond quickly in the event of a major emergency or disaster.

### *Contact Information for Local Hospitals and Clinics*

General emergency numbers: 911 or 919 for police/fire/ambulance

#### New Providence Island

Doctor's Hospital (Private hospital on New Providence Island)

Ambulance Service: (242) 302-4747

Emergency Room: (242) 302-4658

General: (242) 322-8411 or 322-8418 or 302-4600

Princess Margaret (Public hospital on New Providence Island)

Ambulance Service: 919 or (242) 323-2586 or 323-2597

Emergency Room: (242) 326-7014

General: (242) 322-2861

Medical Walk-In Clinic – Colin's Avenue – Near Downtown Nassau

General: (242) 328-0783 or 328-2744

Medical Walk-In Clinic – Sandyport Business Center – Near Cable Beach

General: (242) 327-5485

#### *Grand Bahama Island*

Sunrise Medical Center (Private) (242) 373-3333

Rand Memorial Hospital (Government run hospital): (242) 352-6735

Lucayan Medical Center (Clinic West Freeport): (242) 352-7288

Lucayan Medical Center (Clinic East Freeport): (242) 373-7000

SOS (Emergency Air Flight Services) servicing The Bahamas. Alarm Center, Philadelphia, PA open 24 hours for International SOS Assistance, Inc. 1 (215) 942-8226 or 1 (800) 523-5686 or 1 (215) 245-4707

#### Air Ambulance Services

New Providence also has air ambulance services available. Air Ambulance: (242) 323-2186, 380-6666

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## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

Visitors should exercise caution and use good judgment at all times. Engaging in high-risk behavior such as excessive consumption of alcohol can be dangerous, as it greatly increases the vulnerability of an individual to accidents or opportunistic crime. Visitors should not accept rides from strangers or from unlicensed taxi drivers. Utilize universal security tips and good common sense. Do not leave valuables on the beach or pool-side while swimming. If you are in an area that makes you feel uncomfortable or you do not see other tourists, you are probably in the wrong area of town. Visitors should protect themselves as they would in any large or major metropolitan city. Visitors are strongly encouraged to travel in groups and use taxi cabs during the night.

Opportunistic crimes such as petty thefts and vehicle theft occur in The Bahamas as does fraudulent use of bank and credit card account numbers. There have been numerous reports in 2011 of credit and debit card numbers being compromised and unauthorized charges being placed on the card holder's account from other countries to include the U.S. and Europe. Persons using credit or debit cards should regularly check accounts for suspicious activity.

Home invasions, generally not random events, can be deterred by use of residential alarm systems, window grillwork, guards, substantial locks, lighting, and a good emergency plan. Although forced entry of residences is a concern, the combination of a residential alarm, anti-burglar grill-work, neighborhood watches and roving security patrols have proven an effective deterrent. Still, should you be confronted by a group or person demanding money or valuables, you should comply with their demands and make the encounter as brief as possible. Many criminals in The Bahamas carry firearms and knives. Unless provoked, criminals engaged in property crimes in The Bahamas do not generally engage in gratuitous violence. In 2011, there have been several reported armed robberies using a knife where the assailant assaulted the victim after the victim fought back and resisted. Many of these armed robberies were snatch and grabs involving purses, jewelry, and gold necklaces.

## **Areas to Avoid and Best Security Practices**

Much of the violent crime on New Providence Island happens in non-tourist areas referred to locally as "over-the-hill." These areas are generally south of the downtown Nassau area south of Shirley Street. These areas are not clearly defined but encompass the lower income areas on New Providence, often populated with a higher concentration of immigrants. Visitors should avoid these areas especially at night.

Americans can generally avoid becoming victims of crime by following common sense precautions they might use in any large U.S. city and not engaging in risky personal behavior. If confronted by armed criminals remember your vehicle or valuables are not worth your or anyone else's life. If confronted by criminals, try to remain calm, clearly display your hands, and do not make any sudden moves that could be interpreted as resistance. Armed criminals have become brazen and have resorted to violence and assault during reported robberies in 2011. Gratuitous violence is not the norm during home invasions in The Bahamas.

Always be vigilant – look for possible threats or what looks out of the norm in your surroundings.

Pay close attention to any unusual activity that may have occurred since leaving home. Things like an open gate; unfamiliar vehicles parked nearby, house doors forced open, or shattered windows.



Do not leave belongings unsecured at the residence or hotel room. Vehicles, bicycles, generators, and other property will attract criminals. If the items cannot be placed inside, then visibly secure them with a chain and lock as a deterrent. Secure your home. Use alarm systems regularly and be familiar with the emergency panic alarm codes. Close and lock all windows and doors. Consider purchasing timers to turn on outside and inside lights automatically at various times throughout the night. Check outside lighting and replace light bulbs if necessary. Do not forget to lock garage or gate doors. Visitors staying in hotels should secure valuable such as jewelry, passports, cell phones, or other high value items in a hotel safe or deposit box. Keep a TV or radio playing when not in the room and use your "Do Not Disturb" sign to deter would be criminals.

Keep your car doors locked and your windows rolled up as you drive. Do not put your windows down for unfamiliar persons. In crawling traffic or in a stopped line of cars, leave at least one car length between you and the car in front of you. This will allow you to move your vehicle in the event of an emergency and also prevent a three car accident if you are hit from behind. At night, park in well-lit areas observable by shops, passersby, or attendants when possible. Avoid unlit areas where persons could hide and ambush. Check your surroundings when getting in and out of your vehicle.

Arrange to have your lawn mowed periodically if you will be gone for an extended period of time. Arrange to have a friend or colleague check your home and pick up newspapers or other deliveries daily.

Most crimes occur at night so think prudently about night-time travel. Inform someone of you travel plans and when to expect you.

If you believe you are being followed, drive immediately to a safe location such as a police station, a gas station, or a hotel.

### **Further Information**

#### **Embassy Contact Numbers**

Regional Security Officer (242) 322-1181 ext 4267  
Embassy Operator (242) 322-1181  
Consular Affairs (242) 322-1181 ext 4519  
Political/Economic Section (242) 322-1181 ext 4206  
Marine Post One (242) 322-1181 ext 4311

#### **OSAC Country Council**

As of January 2012, there is no formal OSAC Country Council in The Bahamas.