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Paraguay 2007 Crime & Safety Report

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Americas - Paraguay

19 Mar 2007

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Crime has increased in recent years with criminals often targeting those thought to be wealthy. Many Paraguayans perceive U.S. citizens, whether missionaries, school teachers or businesspeople, as prosperous. Although most crime in Paraguay is nonviolent, there have been cases where assailants have used extreme violence. Armed robberies, car thefts and burglaries are common in both urban and rural areas. Street crime, including pocket picking and mugging, is prevalent in the cities, particularly in the downtown area of Asuncion and on public buses. Robbery by drugging also occurs in downtown Asuncion, and usually entails prostitutes drugging and robbing their clients. Incidents of pilferage from checked baggage at both Paraguayan airports and bus terminals have also been reported.

Drivers in Paraguay should be prepared to drive defensively. Only minimal standards must be met to obtain a Paraguayan driver's license, and driver education prior to licensing is not common. Drivers throughout Paraguay routinely ignore traffic regulations and many Paraguayans drive without any insurance coverage. Furthermore, most urban streets consist of cobblestones over dirt. Some roads in Asuncion and other large cities are paved. However, these roads frequently develop potholes that are left unrepaired for several months at a time. Nearly all rural roads are unpaved, and during the rainy season (November-April) they may be impassable. Road signs indicating hazards, such as sharp curves or major intersections, are lacking in many areas. Driving or traveling at night outside of Asuncion can be dangerous because animals and vehicles without proper lights are often on the roads.

Political Violence

The political violence is always a possibility in Asuncion. Protests, demonstrations and roadblocks by Campesino (landless peasants) organizations, student groups, unions and government employees are common. Although these demonstrations are typically nonviolent, there have been incidents of violence. In December 2006, anger erupted in response to the judgment against three individuals accused of murder associated with the 2004 Ycua Bolaos Supermarket fire in which 365 individuals perished. In anger in response to the verdict, approximately 400-500 people rioted for five hours leaving

52 civilians and 16 police officers injured.

Visitors to Paraguay should avoid locations where crowds have gathered to protest. Demonstrations typically occur in the downtown area near Paraguayan government buildings. In the interior of the country, various groups have been known to protest by establishing illegal roadblocks. Visitors to Paraguay should avoid going through roadblocks and should either wait for the roadblock to end or find an alternate route.

Currently, there are no political groups or parties in Paraguay that specifically target U.S. interests. However, due to the presence of members and supporters of extremist terrorist groups in the Tri-border region (where Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina meet), visitors cannot discount the possibility of terrorist activity, to include random acts of anti-American violence. On December 6, 2006, the U.S. Department of Treasury designated nine individuals and two entities located in the Tri-border region as having provided financial and logistical support to the Hezbollah terrorist organization. This designation was taken pursuant to Executive Order 13224, which is aimed at shutting down the financial flows supporting terrorism. Accordingly, it is recommended that American visitors to the Tri-border area remain especially vigilant and maintain a low profile.

In December 2006, the Paraguayan government convicted 12 individuals associated with the militant wing of the Patria Libre political party for the 2004 kidnapping and murder of Cecilia Cubas, daughter of a former Paraguayan President. Earlier in 2006, the militant wing of the Patria Libre was responsible for the killing of a local police officer, as well as the attack and burning of a local police station located in the Concepcion Department. Although the militant wing of the Patria Libre has not specifically targeted U.S. interests in the past, its ideology is intrinsically anti-American. Visitors to Paraguay should be aware that small armed groups believed to be part of the militant wing of the Patria Libre have been reported to be operating in the Concepcion, San Pedro, Canindeyu and Caaguazu Departments.

Post-specific Concerns

Paraguay does not have a history of natural disasters, but cyclical floods do occur. In early 2007, the Paraguayan Ministry of Health issued an epidemiological warning due to the outbreak of Dengue Fever in Paraguay. Dengue Fever, a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes, is present in both urban and rural areas.

Road Safety is a major concern in Paraguay. Bus crashes are common throughout the year and are often caused by negligence and bad judgment. The level of driver training and safety awareness in Paraguay does not meet minimum U.S. standards.

According to Paraguayan National Police statistics, in 2006 there were only four kidnappings in Paraguay. These statistics do not include express kidnappings or virtual kidnappings extortion attempts.

Paraguay is a transit country for cocaine and a producer of marijuana. The Department of Amambay, where the city of Pedro Juan Caballero is located, continues to suffer from violence associated with drug trafficking. Narcotics traffickers operating in the Amambay Department often use violence as a means of settling disputed between rival groups. It is believed that members of the Brazilian organized crime gang First Capital Command (PCC) are operating in Pedro Juan Caballero and Ciudad del Este.

Police Response

The Paraguayan National Police suffers from a serious and ongoing lack of resources that contributes to the widely varying response time and poor track record in resolving investigations. There is a lack of professionalism in the Paraguayan National Police, and general standards remain far below those considered acceptable in developed countries. However, there have been some improvements in the past few years. In December 2003, the Paraguayan National Police introduced a nationwide emergency response system. This program is now operating in most major cities in Paraguay. In May 2006, the Paraguayan National Police 911 system went operational with 74 surveillance cameras installed in the city of Asuncion. These surveillance cameras are aimed at crime prevention and are an attempt to combat street crime.

In February 2007, the Interior Ministry deployed approximately 250 members of a newly created community policing organization, Policia Urbana. The Policia Urbana will be deployed in the downtown area of Asuncion and will provide

assistance to the Paraguayan National Police against street crime.

American citizens are instructed to contact American Citizen Services in the consular section of the Embassy at (595) (21) 213-715 in the event that they encounter serious problems while traveling in Paraguay.

The following are other emergency numbers for use in the Asuncion metropolitan area:

Emergency Police: 911
National Police Fire Emergency: 131
Volunteer Firemen of Paraguay: 132
Volunteer Firemen of Asuncion: (595) (21) 225-400
Medical Emergency: (595) (21) 204-800
Police Headquarters: (595) (21) 445-858

Medical Emergencies

Paraguayan public hospitals, especially those outside of the Asuncion metropolitan area, often do not have facilities or personnel that meet minimum U.S. medical standards. The following local hospitals and clinics have been identified as suitable for use by American visitors in Paraguay:

Sanatorio San Roque
Eligio Ayala c/ pai Perez
Tel: (595) (21) 212-499

Sanatorio Medico La Costa
Avenida Artigas #1500 (300 meters from General Santos)
Tel: (595) (21) 200-900 & 202-900

Centro Medico Bautista
Argentina c/ Campos Cervera
Tel: (595) (21) 600-171/4
Emergency Tel: (595) (21) 600-994

Sanatorio Migone Battilana
Eligio Ayala 1293 c/ Curupayty
Tel: (595) (21) 498-200

Ambulance Services:
EME: (595) (21) 206 - 660
SASA: (595) (21) 610 - 629
GEMA: (595) (21) 600 - 274

It is also recommended that visitors consider purchasing private air medical evacuation insurance before traveling to Paraguay.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Visitors should practice common sense preventive security measures, just as they would in any large city in the U.S.

- Do not carry or wear valuable items that will attract the attention of thieves. If you need to wear expensive jewelry or carry a camera, conceal it or keep it out of sight until reaching your destination.
- Be aware of the street environment and avoid contact with those who may be looking for potential targets. If your route takes you near a group of suspicious looking individuals, go into a store or bank, or simply cross the street.
- Do not physically resist any robbery attempt. While this is a personal decision, statistics show that resistance leads to injury. Many criminals are armed with guns or knives, and recent statistics indicate a growing willingness to use

them.

- Do not answer your hotel room door until you positively confirm who is on the other side. Look out the peephole, or call the front desk to confirm the visitor.
- Avoid downtown plazas, especially after dark. The plaza areas often have many resident street thugs, prostitutes, and other undesirables that may look at you as a potential victim.
- Avoid city buses. Many pass through high crime areas and are susceptible to robberies.
- Avoid the "Chacarita" area of downtown Asuncion. Chacarita is a high-crime area where even local police refrain from entering.

For Further Information

U.S. Embassy Asuncion
1776 Mariscal Lopez Avenue
Asunción, Paraguay
<http://paraguay.usembassy.gov>

Embassy: (595) (21) 213-715
Regional Security Officer: (595) (21) 213-715 x2026
Embassy Operator: (595) (21) 213-715 x0
Embassy Marine Security Guard: (595) (21) 213-715 x2210
Embassy Nurse: (595) (21) 213-715 x2025
Embassy Consular Affairs: (595) (21) 213-715 x2273
Embassy Economic Section: (595) (21) 213-715 x 2015

The [Asuncion Country Council](#) is located on Avenida 25 de Mayo 2090, Asuncion, Paraguay. Contact numbers are as follows: Tel: (595) (21) 222-160 & 221-525 & 222-265 & 221-926; Email: comercial@pamcham.com.py

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