

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

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

December 19, 2014

*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 that we are in the holiday season which is a prime time for pickpockets and thieves. U.S. citizens in the Philippines should remain aware that while you may become a victim simply because you find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time, foreigners may also be targeted because they are perceived to be affluent. The Embassy receives regular reports of U.S. citizens who have been the victims of both violent crime and crimes against property, such as theft, burglary and robbery.

Review your personal security plans; remain aware of your surroundings, including local events; and monitor local news stations for updates. Maintain a high level of vigilance and take appropriate steps to enhance your personal security. We offer the following suggestions to help reduce your odds of becoming a victim of crime:

#### **CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

- Maintain a low profile and do not bring undue attention to yourself. Do not display lavish amounts of jewelry.
- Always carry some type of identification.
- Do not carry around large amounts of money. Take with you only what you will require for the moment and keep it in the front pocket of your pants or skirt. A good rule of thumb: Do not take more with you than you can afford to lose.
- If you carry a purse, consider carrying it across your body, with bag in front of you. Purses with long straps may be grabbed off your shoulder.
- Do not resist armed criminals to avoid injury.
- Pay attention to your surroundings, realizing that crime can occur anywhere, anytime. Be cautious about traveling after dark, especially alone or in unfamiliar areas. There is always safety in numbers. Know where you are going.
- If you notice suspicious individuals approaching you, make an attempt to avoid them. In the event they continue to follow or harass you, walk to the nearest establishment and seek assistance from the security guard or door escort. Pickpocket gangs often appear to be homeless and begin by demanding money. They will sometimes aggressively follow the victims until they eventually swarm around them and begin to surreptitiously grab personal items from the victims, such as wallets and cell phones.
- Be aware that public transit like Jeepneys, Light Rail Transport (LRT) and the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) systems are prime venues for pickpockets.
- Do not consume excessive alcoholic beverages, which could make you an easy target.

## **VEHICLE SECURITY - CAR THEFTS**

- Drive defensively at all times.
- ALWAYS drive with the windows rolled up and the doors locked.
- Use a supplemental anti-theft device that locks either the steering wheel or the gearshift. These are not fail-safe, but they require valuable time and effort on the part of the perpetrator.
- DO NOT park in deserted or isolated areas. At night, park in well-lighted areas. Take advantage of guarded, paid parking.
- Do not leave personal items openly displayed in the car—you are inviting a smash-and-run thief to remove them.
- Always maintain copies of your driver's license and vehicle registration in your vehicle. Avoid surrendering the original document to police.
- If you are involved in an accident, attempt to summon police or medical assistance, if necessary. Try to remain calm.

## **RESIDENTIAL SECURITY**

- Control the keys to your residence. A thief with a key has a much easier time.
- Anytime you leave your residence, make sure that all doors and windows are secured.
- During the day, keep the doors locked, even though you and your domestic help may be inside the house.
- Know visitors or other individuals, such as repair men, who may ask to enter your home. Ask for ID. Keep repair men under observation while they are in your home.
- Secure valuables and important personal documents. Do not leave them lying around.
- During extended periods of absence, consider asking a neighbor or friend to keep an eye on your residence.
- If you are home during a burglary, DO NOT confront the perpetrators. They may very well 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.
- If you live on a residential compound or in an apartment building, know your area and be aware of the security and safety rules, especially rules for visitor and vehicle access.

## **SUSPICIOUS ITEMS**

- If you see a suspicious object or package, do not disturb it. Immediately notify an appropriate official, such as a police officer or building security staff, and leave the area.
- If you are in the vicinity when a security threat occurs, leave the area immediately. Do not approach the scene of a bombing or remain in the area.

## PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS

Demonstrations in the Philippines are generally peaceful. However, even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence. You should avoid areas of demonstrations, and exercise caution if in the vicinity of any large gatherings, protests, or demonstrations.

The Embassy recommends carrying a means of communications at all times. If you feel that you are in danger, seek assistance from security personnel or the local authorities. Holidays are a joyful time, and basic security awareness and precautions can decrease the likelihood of an unfortunate occurrence spoiling your holidays.

The Department of State offers tips for travelers abroad on our main website. A U.S. citizen in trouble can always call the Embassy at (02) 301-2000 and ask to speak to the American Citizen Services unit during business hours or with the Embassy Duty Officer after duty hours.

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The U.S. Embassy in Manila is located at 1201 Roxas Boulevard, and is open 07:30 to 16:00, Monday through Friday. The Embassy's main telephone number is (632) 301-2000. U.S. citizens needing to speak to the Embassy can dial this number and ask to be connected to the American Citizen Services (ACS) unit. You can also contact the ACS unit through email at [ACSInfoManila@state.gov](mailto:ACSInfoManila@state.gov) or through the Embassy Facebook page. Please visit our website for information on all services offered by the ACS unit. **If you are a U.S. citizen in need of urgent assistance outside of business hours, call the Embassy's emergency after-hours number (632) 301-2000 and ask for the Embassy Duty Officer.**

We strongly recommend that U.S. citizens traveling to or residing in the Philippines enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov). STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates, and makes it easier for the U.S. embassy or nearest U.S. consulate to contact you in an emergency. If you don't have Internet access, enroll directly with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Regularly monitor the [State Department's website](#), where you can find current Travel Warnings, (including the [Travel Warning for the Philippines](#)), Travel Alerts, and the Worldwide Caution. Read the [Country Specific Information for the Philippines](#). For additional information, refer to the "[Traveler's Checklist](#)" on the State Department's website.

Contact the U.S. embassy for up-to-date information on travel restrictions. You can also call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) to have travel information at your fingertips.