Street crime

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Robberies

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**Crime**

Crime is a serious problem throughout Brazil. Rates of both petty crime and violent crime, including homicide, are highest in urban centres, including Rio de Janeiro (or Rio), São Paulo, Brasilia, Recife and Salvador, and particularly in areas adjacent to impoverished neighbourhoods (see Favelas, below). Foreign tourists are most commonly affected by theft but incidents of violent crime against tourists have occurred, due to the high prevalence of guns coupled with the willingness of criminals to resort to violence. To lessen your risk of becoming a victim of crime, you should remain aware of your surroundings at all times and comply with security directives imposed by local authorities.

Street crime, including pickpocketing, purse or bag snatching, theft from cars and mugging, is common in Brazil’s large cities. Tourists are a favourite target, mainly because they are perceived as being wealthy, easy targets. Remain vigilant when visiting tourist destinations such as public beaches, outdoor markets, hotel grounds, bars and nightclubs, as well as at airports and bus stations. Petty theft on buses and the metro is common and has increased significantly in Recife since 2015. Incidents of opportunistic crime increase significantly at large-scale, high-profile sporting events, international conferences and in the period leading up to and during public festivities where tourists gather, such as the annual Carnival and New Year’s (Reveillon) celebrations.

Tourists are more vulnerable to crime when they look and act like tourists, so try to blend in. Avoid showing signs of affluence such as expensive jewelry, watches, clothing and bags, and carry only small amounts of cash. Keep cameras and portable electronic devices, including cellphones, laptops and tablets, concealed as much as possible. Store your valuables and important travel documents in a hotel safe.

Be aware of ploys to distract your attention and remain cautious with new acquaintances who ask for information or offer friendship, hospitality or assistance. A common ruse used by criminals is the Good Samaritan scam, where a criminal offers to help a tourist who looks lost. If you are lost, go into a nearby business or hotel to ask for help. If someone spills something on you, do not let them clean it, as they are likely out to steal your wallet.

Mass mob or flash mob robberies (*arrastões*) have occurred sporadically on Rio’s city beaches and in other crowded tourist areas. This type of crime involves a group of thieves (often young children and youth originating from nearby favelas) that swarm an area and snatch valuable items such as cash, jewellery and cell phones. Never leave your belongings unattended on city beaches. Flash mob robberies have also been known to occur in crowded restaurants in São Paulo. Avoid sitting close to the entrance when possible.

Robberies occur regularly, even during the day, and are sometimes violent and at gun- or knifepoint. Armed robberies at restaurants are a growing concern, particularly in larger cities. Assaults are frequently perpetrated in unofficial taxis, which should be avoided. Hold-ups and robberies can occur on Brazil’s trains. If you are threatened by robbers, comply with their demands. Victims have been seriously injured or killed when resisting perpetrators, who may be armed and/or under the influence of drugs.

Exercise a high degree of caution at all times and avoid travelling alone, especially at night and in parks or central (downtown) areas of major cities. Be sure to use well-lit and well-frequented streets. Avoid walking on isolated and unsupervised beaches with poor visibility from the sidewalk. Use caution when travelling by car or by bus at night in the outskirts of major cities, where there is a risk of roadside robberies.

Express kidnappings, although rare, occur throughout the country, particularly in larger cities. Victims are picked up from the street, usually in the evening and at night, and forced to withdraw funds from automated banking machines (ABMs). Use only ABMs in well-lit public areas or inside banks and restrict withdrawals in between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. Be discrete when counting or putting your money in your wallet.

Credit card fraud is a major problem. When using credit cards, ensure that your card remains in your sight and retain your transaction receipt along with the carbon paper. Debit cards are also cloned, so check your bank account regularly to ensure that no unauthorized withdrawals have taken place.

Cybercrime, particularly banking scams and phishing, is a growing problem.  Perpetrators use various means of gathering information about potential victims, including monitoring social media sites and eavesdropping on your conversations when you are in the country. Do not discuss travel plans or any other personal information within earshot of strangers, and be cautious when posting information on social media. Be particularly vigilant in internet cafes.

Do not exchange money on the street. Use exchange centres at banks or kiosks, instead.

Incidents of sexual assault against male and female foreigners have been reported, sometimes involving the use of sedatives.

Criminal activity may occur in Brazilian coastal waters. Mariners are advised to take appropriate precautions and ensure that they can communicate with authorities easily, in case of emergency.

If you do become a victim of a crime, report it to the tourist police (Delegacia de Atendimento Ao Turista, or DEAT) to ensure that local authorities can conduct an investigation. In Rio de Janeiro, the tourist police station is located in the Leblon neighbourhood at 159 Afranio de Melo Franco Avenue and can be reached by telephone at (21) 2332 2924 or 2334 3802. To reach the tourist police in São Paulo, dial (11) 3120 4447 or 3151 4167. It is especially important to report the loss or theft of your identification documents, both to Brazilian authorities and to the Canadian embassy or one of its consulates (see [Assistance](https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/brazil#assistance)).

Due to labour disputes, the Civil Police in the State of Rio de Janeiro, including the tourist police, are not currently filing police reports. However, you may file police reports [online](https://dedic.pcivil.rj.gov.br/Home.aspx) (in Portuguese) for the following crimes: theft, missing person, physical assault, domestic violence, threat and defamation.

**Demonstrations and civil unrest**

Political and labour strikes occur regularly in a number of Brazilian cities and can cause traffic and public transportation disruptions. Roadblocks are sometimes erected during protests. Nationwide demonstrations occur regularly to protest against government corruption and the increase in costs to basic services, and tend to increase in numbers and intensity during major events that attract foreign visitors. In São Paulo, protests can cause delays along the main road to Guarulhos International Airport. In Rio de Janeiro, rallies protesting against criminals have occurred and criminal groups have threatened retaliatory action against protestors. Avoid all demonstrations and large gatherings, as they can turn violent without warning. Monitor local news reports and follow the advice of local authorities.

**Public transportation**

The subway systems in Rio and in São Paulo are generally safe during the day. Be extremely cautious using public transportation at night; take a licensed taxi instead. Do not use public vans. Bus accidents occur regularly.

Use licensed taxis from taxi stands. At night, it is safer to order a taxi by telephone or by using the taxi app (99 Taxi or EasyTaxi). Upon arrival to Brazil, purchase your fare from licensed taxi offices in the airport arrival hall or near the taxi queues. Only use official taxis to travel to and from airports. Taxis departing from airports or major bus stations charge fixed, pre-paid rates. Very few taxi drivers speak English or French.

Local law requires the use of the taxi meter to determine the legal fare; adding surcharges to a fare is illegal. Should taxi rates change and their taxi meters have not been adjusted, drivers may indicate these changes by showing an authorized paper with the new fares.

Many tourists hire “radio taxis”, also known as “commun taxis.” These taxis operate at a fixed price irrespective of the time of the day and the time it takes to arrive at your destination.

Follow the above guidance. I am not going to Rio, in Sao Paulo I will be escorted or take radio taxis organised by the Hotel. In Paulista area there are regular Polis patrols at night and it is safe to walk to restaurants etc. I have been to Sp many times and have a fair local knowledge. Florianopolis is the safest City in Brazil and I have very good local knowledge, having visited many times and have many contacts there.