



# OSAC Country Security Report Mauritania

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*This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State Mauritania Travel Advisory and [Mauritania Country Information Page](#).*

## Embassy & Consulate Contact Information

### U.S. Embassy Nouakchott:

Nouadhibou Road, Avenue Al Quds, NOT PRTZ; located at the intersection of Nouadhibou highway and Rue de l'Ambassade du Senegal.

Tel: +222-4525-2660; Emergency Consular Recording (messages during emergencies): +222-4525-3707.

Hours of Operation: 0800-1800 Monday-Thursday; 0800-1200 Friday.

## OSAC Country Chapter(s)

Nouakchott launched its Country Chapter in 2017. The Chapter is currently inactive.

Contact [OSAC's Africa team](#) with any questions.

## Mauritania Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers should reconsider travel to Mauritania due to crime and terrorism. The travel advisory suggests travelers do not travel to areas designated as off limits by the Mauritanian military due to crime and terrorism which includes all areas north of the Tropic of Cancer and all areas east of 08° longitude (West of Greenwich) situated within 100km of the Mali Border.

## Crime

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Nouakchott as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Crime "C" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Mauritania, indicating that there may be widespread violent crime and/or organized crime present in the country, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond to serious crimes.

The Mauritanian government reports an increase in violent (e.g., murder, assault, battery, robbery, occupied burglary, kidnapping, carjacking) and non-violent (e.g., theft, vehicle

burglary, vandalism, unoccupied burglary) crimes since 2015, all of which predominately affects Mauritians. Criminals tend to not target Westerners specifically, although U.S. nationals and other western expatriates have been the victim of crime in Nouakchott in recent years, including robbery and sexual assault. Criminal gangs are active in the main cities.

The Mauritanian government has taken small measures to mitigate crime. For example, the National Guard and Gendarmerie patrol the highest-crime neighborhoods, particularly in southern Nouakchott. It is difficult to verify governmental claims of progress in crime reduction initiatives.

Instances of street crime and crimes of opportunity are also on the rise in Nouakchott. Typical street crimes include pickpocketing, purse snatching, mobile phone theft, theft from vehicles, and mugging. There are also reports of pedestrians flagging down motorists (a common type of ride sharing) to steal their vehicle or belongings. Similar risks of crime exist in Nouadhibou, Rosso, and other Mauritanian cities, but data is not available.

Nouakchott's southern and eastern areas are more prone to criminality, and designated as "no walking areas" by the U.S. Embassy. The U.S. Embassy prohibits its employees from walking in these restricted zones, and walking after dark is restricted in the entire city.

The safer walking area, per the Embassy, is generally coterminous with the Nouakchott neighborhoods and suburbs of Centre Emetteur, F-Nord, E-Nord, Tevragh Zeina, Las Palmas, and Giz. These locations are clustered in the center of Nouakchott and include most embassies, major businesses, governmental administrative offices, the stadium, the most popular restaurants among Westerners, and all U.S. diplomatic residences. (Because a neighborhood is safer does not mean there is no chance of crime; continue to take appropriate precautions in all areas.) Of note, the international airport and Sultan beach are to the north of the safe solo walking area but can be reached by vehicle without significant safety concerns.

## Kidnapping Threat

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Kidnapping "K" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Mauritania.

Westerners are at an elevated risk of kidnapping in Mauritania, especially in the restricted eastern regions of the country. In 2005 and 2011, kidnappers took numerous Westerners, many of whom ended up in the hands of Mali-based terrorist groups. However, there have been no kidnappings of Europeans or U.S. nationals in Mauritania since 2011.

## Terrorism

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Nouakchott as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Mauritania, indicating that terrorist attacks have occurred and/or specific threats against civilians, groups, or other targets may exist.

From 2005 to 2011, Mauritania suffered from terrorist attacks and kidnappings by terrorist groups, but there have been no attacks in the country since 2011. Al-Qa’ida-linked groups are active in neighboring Mali; the recent increase of terrorist activity in Mali and Burkina Faso means there is a continued risk of spillover into Mauritania due to the country’s lengthy shared borders with Mali.

There have been numerous cases of Mauritians self-radicalizing and pledging allegiance to violent extremist organizations. Authorities have arrested and incarcerated those who have done so publicly. In 2016, Mauritanian security forces arrested three ISIS sympathizers in Nouakchott; 13 other suspected ISIS members are currently awaiting trial. The government works with the United States and other partners on programs to address violent extremism.

On March 5, 2023, four AQIM affiliated prisoners broke out of the Central Prison in Nouakchott after killing two prison guards. The prisoners led Police on a 6-day manhunt which culminated in a gunfight with the Gendarmerie in the desert near Adrar resulting in the deaths of three of the prisoners and the apprehension of the fourth. Additionally, a member of the National Gendarmerie was killed during the battle.

## Political Violence and Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Nouakchott as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Civil Unrest “U” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Mauritania. Civil unrest can develop quickly without prior notice, often interrupting logistics and services. Avoid demonstration activity, as even those planned to remain peaceful have the potential to turn violent.

## Elections/Political Stability

Mauritania has experienced more than ten coup attempts since attaining independence from France in 1960. In 2019, Mauritania experienced its first peaceful and democratic transfer of power since independence when President Mohamed Ould Abdel Asis departed office. However, many members of the former administration, including the former president, have been charged with corruption.

Mauritania will hold presidential elections in June 2024, where President Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani is running for a second, 5-year term.

## Protests & Demonstrations

Political and student organizations frequently hold demonstrations inside Nouakchott city limits. These demonstrations often focus on Israel/Palestine, the French government, or human rights issues. Despite thousands of demonstrators at a given event, the demonstrations are usually strongly regulated by the local government. Significant levels of violence at these demonstrations are uncommon. Since October of 2023, there has been a significant increase in the number of peaceful pro-Gaza protests/mass rallies in Nouakchott. Many of these have occurred at the U.S. Embassy.

While the vast majority of political protests in Nouakchott are peaceful, there were a number of violent protests in 2023 in response to two separate incidents where young men had died in police custody. These violent protests were generally limited to the southern and eastern neighborhoods of Nouakchott.

## Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

Sentiments towards U.S. nationals and the U.S. government are mixed. As the first country to recognize Mauritania's independence in 1960, and with a strong record of humanitarian and other support as Mauritania struggled in its early years, the United States continues to enjoy considerable goodwill. However, perceptions of U.S. policy as being anti-Islam and pro-Israel have led to sporadic protests and other displays of anti-U.S. sentiment. The U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move its embassy to Jerusalem was very unpopular and sparked protest. Additionally, there have been frequent pro-Gaza since October 2023. While they all have generally remained peaceful, some protestors have displayed anti-American sentiment via chants, banners, and flag burning (American and Israeli.) One local restaurant was also noted to have installed an American flag decal on the floor of their entrance, inviting patrons to walk over it when entering.

## Law Enforcement

The emergency lines in Mauritania are **116** for Gendarmerie, **117** for Police, **118** for Fire, and **119** for Traffic Police.

The National Safety Agency (*Sûreté Nationale*) is responsible for law enforcement and crime investigation in urban areas, and falls under the authority of the Interior Ministry. *Sûreté Nationale* is organized into commissariats, roughly the equivalent of U.S. police precincts.

Law enforcement activities in small towns and rural areas are the responsibility of the Gendarmerie, which patrols the major highways and operates most of the checkpoints throughout the country. The Gendarmerie is part of the Defense Ministry.

The National Guard (*Guard Nationale*) falls under the Interior Ministry, but is a part of the Mauritanian armed forces. The National Guard protects vital installations and ministries, VIP security, maintaining order, and prison management.

The General of Road Security Group (GGSR) is also under the Interior Ministry. Its responsibilities include urban vehicle control and searches, control of main roads, enforcement of traffic laws, management of vehicle documents, registration, and control of people transiting the country.

Although phone numbers for reporting crimes to local authorities do exist, visitors should, whenever possible, present themselves in person at the nearest police station or Gendarmerie brigade. U.S. victims of crime should also contact the American Citizens Services (ACS) section of the U.S. Embassy.

## Police Response

Police response in Nouakchott, especially in outlying areas, is slow at best. Police rarely have access to vehicles. In most cases, a victim must appear at a police station or give officers a ride to the scene of a crime to obtain law enforcement services.

Persons of Black African appearance may be subject to prejudicial treatment by Mauritanian authorities.

Very few law enforcement officials speak English; knowledge of French or Hassaniya is helpful to speak with police officers. However, U.S. citizens receive favorable treatment from Mauritanian law enforcement; most government agencies recognize the financial and infrastructure contributions provided by U.S. businesses and the U.S. government. As a result, law enforcement officials may extend some measure of additional courtesy to U.S. citizens.

There have been instances of authorities singling foreigners out for questioning and detention. All visitors should carry a passport or other form of official identification. If Mauritanian authorities detain or arrest you, cooperate fully and insist that they allow you to contact the U.S. Embassy immediately. Remain calm and respectful at all times in these situations.

## Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in Mauritania, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State's Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)
- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

## Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Risk of Wrongful Detention “D” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Mauritania.

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by government officials, but authorities do not enforce the law effectively, and officials often engage in corrupt practices with impunity. There are reports of government corruption. The law defines corruption as “all exploitation by a public agent of his position for personal purposes, whether this agent is elected, or in an administrative or judicial position.” Recently the country initiated its first-ever parliamentary investigation into corrupt practices under the previous regime.

## Cybersecurity

Mauritania passed its first-ever data privacy laws in 2017. The laws created a national authority for the protection of personal information. There is now a standard format and appropriate institution charged with maintaining the security and confidentiality of personal data, although statistics related to enforcement actions and agency effectiveness are not yet available.

## Import/Export Restrictions

Passengers caught attempting to import alcoholic drinks or pork products, including alcohol bought duty free on an inbound flight, may be subject to immediate fines, confiscation, and/or incarceration.

The local currency, the ouguiya, may not be imported or exported.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

*Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).*