



# Libya Risk Rating 4

(Risk Rating 1-4)

## General Information:

**Capital:** Tripoli  
**Religion:** Islam  
**Calling Code:** +218

**Language:** Arabic  
**Time Zone:** UTC +1  
**Drives on the:** Right

### Currency: Libyan Dinar (LYD)

Libya is a cash society. Credit cards are not widely used although Visa and Mastercard are accepted in some places. There are a few reliable ATMs in Tripoli. Money transfers can also be arranged through some banks.

## Country Overview

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all travel to Libya due to the ongoing fighting, threat of terrorist attacks and kidnap against foreigners, including from Daesh-affiliated extremists (formerly referred to as ISIS), and a dangerous security situation throughout the country.

The civil war that began in the aftermath of the ousting of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 has transformed the operating environment in Libya. An unstable security environment, frequent labour disputes and divided government institutions have created a volatile and unpredictable climate.

The country has recently become a hotbed for terrorist elements, with extremist groups such as Ansar al-Sharia, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Daesh being present and in some areas controlling large swathes of land. With increasing pressure on Daesh mounting in Syria, the group have increased and at times moved fighters to Libya, and enjoy considerable freedom of movement.

Crime has increased significantly since the end of the civil war. With little to no security force in place, organised crime and smuggling has become rife within the country. With few employment opportunities, many will choose criminal activities to fund themselves, with car-jackings and fake check points being used. There is also a high threat of kidnapping, with foreign diplomats previously being targeted.

The threat of civil unrest remains high, particularly in urban areas including Tripoli and Benghazi. Tensions between rival groups, political parties and tribes can and will intensify the levels of violence and protests, often policed by militia groups and many of the different faction's member will be armed. Corruption is rife in Libya and is present within the government, security forces, local businesses and the medical sector. Political corruption is a severe problem in Libya and also impacts business to business activity in the country. It is a major consideration for investors and if not managed could expose companies to bribery litigation in their home countries.



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## Crime

Crime rates in Libya have increased significantly since the end of the civil war. The deterioration of national security forces, escape of thousands of prisoners during the conflict and stalling economy have all contributed to rising crime. Organised crime is extremely high and Libya has become a major smuggling route across Africa. Weapons smuggled out of Libya have strengthened militant groups and contributed to instability in several neighbouring countries. The country's law enforcement capability is weak, prone to corruption and often motivated by political goals. Response times to incidents are inconsistent and there is a high level of impunity for criminals, with prosecution procedures weak. Militia groups at times act more like vigilantes, imposing their version of law and order on pre-determined targets.

Libya has become a major supplier country for illicit weapons and arms proliferation throughout the country is high. Armed groups, including some linked to the state are thought to be involved in illegal trafficking activities. Human trafficking has also emerged as a major concern, with tens of thousands of migrants travelling via Libya to Europe. People smugglers often use poorly equipped vessels which sink before they reach European shores, resulting in mass drownings and necessitating major rescue operations by foreign naval forces in the Mediterranean.

Murder rates are high and targeted assassinations are common across Libya, particularly in the east. This is a result of the significant increases in the number of robberies and other violent crimes. Weapons are easily accessible and armed robberies occur frequently, with many incidents unreported due to the weakness of local authorities.

Carjackings have also increased in both urban areas and at checkpoints outside of cities. Security along key roads is poor, resulting in frequent robberies and kidnapping attempts along heavily used routes such as the coastal highway between Tripoli and the Tunisian border. In July 2014, a convoy carrying British diplomats was targeted in an attempted car-jacking on the road between Tripoli and the Ras-al Jadir border crossing with Tunisia. Authorities in the southern city of Sebha came under pressure to respond to a surge in crime and carjackings in May 2015, with more than 10 such incidents reported within the period of a few weeks. A method frequently used by thieves is to pose as militia and stage fake checkpoints, robbing victims after they have stopped.

## Terrorism

There is a high threat from terrorism in Libya. Ansar al-Sharia, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Daesh are known to be present within the country and have the ability to move freely in large areas they control. Politicians, diplomats, senior security personnel and other prominent individuals, including journalists and aid workers, have been murdered in targeted attacks across Libya. Security forces are likely to come under continued attack as they struggle to control competing militias.

IS has also demonstrated both the intent and capability to target energy infrastructure and personnel as evidenced by multiple attacks on the oil and gas sector in 2015. In October 2015 IS claimed an attack on a checkpoint at the Es Sider oil terminal and the group also said it was behind an August 2015 car bombing outside the Tripoli headquarters of Mellitah, a joint venture between Italy's ENI and Libyan state oil firm NOC. IS has also targeted other infrastructure in Libya, including airports.



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Ansar al-Sharia in Libya also has the capacity to stage attacks. The group has strongholds in Benghazi, where it has battled pro-government forces for control of territory since 2014. In September 2012, US Ambassador Chris Stevens was killed at the US consulate in Benghazi during an attack that has been attributed to Islamist extremists based in Libya. In 2013 multiple other foreign diplomatic missions and personnel were also attacked by gunfire or car bombs in Benghazi and Tripoli. Foreign nationals have also been victims in multiple targeted attacks in the eastern city. In 2014, a Chinese engineer was killed by gunmen in May, while in January, a UK national and New Zealander were shot and killed on a beach near an oil and gas facility in Mellitah.

It is worth noting that the US State Department have warned that civilian aircraft may come under attack, as a large proportion of anti-aircraft missiles are still unaccounted for.

## Civil Unrest

There is a high threat of civil unrest in Libya, especially in Tripoli and Benghazi. The 17 February celebrations of the revolution in Libya will continue to generate large public gatherings. Domestic and international political developments, regional disputes, economic issues and the provision of basic services all inspire unrest. Incidents of industrial unrest will remain high as the political and economic situation in Libya evolves. Protests are often violent and demonstrators may be armed. Militia policing and tensions between rival groups can often intensify levels of violence at protests.

Libya has continued to experience regular unrest, motivated by continued terrorism, corruption, lack of security and poor infrastructure. Demonstrations taking place to support or denounce armed groups frequently end in violence against demonstrators. In Derna, at least seven people were killed and 30 others were wounded in June 2015 when militant supporters fired on demonstrators protesting against the presence of the Islamic State group. Major political developments and events are also potential flashpoints for unrest. In October 2015, several hundred people in Benghazi protested against a UN-backed proposal that would establish a unity government. A mortar fired at the demonstrators killed six people and wounded 35 others.

In Benghazi anti-Western demonstrations can occur, for example following the airing of the "Innocence of Muslims" film in 2012 and the US military raid in Tripoli in October 2013. Protesters in the city often congregate around Freedom Square. In April 2014, residents of the city declared a three-day general strike that saw widespread disruptions to business and travel, with blockades of major roads and even the local airport. The strike was intended to draw attention to the deteriorating security situation in the city.

In Tripoli the National Congress building and Martyr's Square are the usual sites of demonstrations. Protests over political issues are common, also often targeting individual ministerial buildings. Protesters are often armed and have at times forced entry into buildings or intimidated political targets to exert their demands. In March 2014, Libya's parliament moved from its official building to a hotel after armed protestors overran the building, ransacking it and assaulting officials. In 2013 armed militia sieged government buildings, including the Defence Ministry, to demand the passing of the Political Isolation Law. Protests over the Libyan parliament's decision to extend its term have



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led to violence amid clashes between pro- and anti-government militias in the capital. Militia groups have also previously tried to occupy Tripoli airport.

Members of the minority Berber community (who make up approximately 10 percent of the population) have held several protests over alleged discrimination and lack of rights in Libya. They have previously managed to storm the parliament building in Tripoli and in 2013 shut down an oil pipeline in Jebel Nafussa to highlight their cause.

## Natural Disasters

Libya does not suffer from any major natural disasters. Any seismic activity is rare and usually a low intensity. Sandstorms are the most prevalent environmental incident that may happen, and have been known to disrupt business continuity and travel, suspending flights and road movements.

Heavy rains causing flooding are rare however can prove significantly damaging and dangerous impacting security and travel. Large cities tend to have poor drainage and sewage systems and can be easily overwhelmed. This can lead to public health emergencies and the spread of infectious diseases.

## Health & Wellbeing

Healthcare in Libya is on the whole below the standard available in the UK. Visitors to the country should ensure vaccinations for hepatitis A and B, as well as typhoid are up to date. There are not, however, any prevalent diseases in the country that foreign nationals are especially vulnerable to.

There are private clinics in Tripoli. If treatment is needed, it may be necessary to be evacuated to Malta or mainland Europe. Adequate travel health insurance and accessible funds will be required to cover the cost of any medical treatment abroad and repatriation. Medical help in remote areas may not be available. Despite a travel or insurance company having arrangements with an international air ambulance provider, they may not be allowed to carry out a rescue operation within Libya due to the ongoing security situation. The current status of Libyan rescue services is uncertain.

Although not common in Libya, there were confirmed cases of malaria in the south-eastern city of al-Kufra in 2010.

## Local Travel

**The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all travel to Libya due to the ongoing fighting, threat of terrorist attacks and kidnap against foreigners, including from Daesh-affiliated extremists (formerly referred to as ISIS), and a dangerous security situation throughout the country.**

A Libyan visa issued overseas may not be recognised in some areas, due to the current political conflict. Passports showing previous travel to Israel are not accepted for travel to Libya.

Driving standards are poor and regulations are regularly ignored, making driving hazardous. There is a high threat of unexploded ordnance remaining in Libya following the civil war. This continues to present a threat in many rural and urban parts of the country, especially some areas where heavy



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fighting occurred, such as the outskirts of Sirte, Misrata and Bani Walid. Information detailing where explosives were planted during the conflict is limited.

There have been reports of violence and armed robberies targeting vehicles seeking to depart Libya by road, including to Tunisia. You should not attempt to depart Libya via southern Algeria, Chad, Sudan, or Niger due to the very high threat of kidnapping in those areas. Borders may also be closed at short notice.

Flying to and from Libya can be regularly disrupted by violence and civil unrest. Tripoli International Airport is closed. Other airports may close at short notice. Airlines have ceased flying over Western Libya following clashes between armed groups in the region. Contact your airline for information on flight disruptions.

## Laws & Customs

- The rule of law has not been re-established in Libya. You should not assume that police services are fully operational in all parts of the country.
- Local laws reflect the fact that Libya is an Islamic country. You should respect local traditions, customs, laws and religions at all times and be aware of your actions to ensure that they do not offend other cultures or religious beliefs, especially during the holy month of Ramadan (6<sup>th</sup> June – 5<sup>th</sup> July) or if you intend to visit religious areas.
- You should dress modestly. Sale and consumption of alcohol is against the law. Police sometimes object to photography without prior permission.
- Sexual relations outside of marriage are illegal in Libya and punishments include imprisonment.
- Visitors are required to carry identification documents at all times.
- Don't use cameras close to military or official sites.
- Do not criticize the country, its leadership or religion. Harsh penalties may be imposed.
- Penalties for possession, use or trafficking of illegal drugs are strict. Convicted offenders can expect detention or other penalties.
- Foreigners involved in business disputes may have their passports confiscated and/or may not be permitted to depart Libya until the dispute has been settled.

## Business

The security situation has had an immediate impact on business decisions in Libya and has prompted major oil and gas companies to reduce operational presence in the country. The operating climate for businesses in Libya remains challenging as a result of a volatile political situation and an opaque regulatory regime. In some cases, the government imposed exceptionally tough terms on some international operators, which have served to deter international investment. The Libyan government has demanded up to 90 percent of income generated from crude oil sales in some contracts. Such high rates of taxation combined with the fragile security situation and vulnerability to industrial action have deterred some investors.



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Conflict and violence remain serious impediments to investment and operations in Libya. Two rival governments have claimed to be Libya's sole legitimate authority, resulting in a contest for control over key institutions, such as the central bank and the state oil company. Uncertainty over political legitimacy and control increases the complexity of operating in Libya, and the conflict itself has prevented necessary reforms, dissuaded investors and polarised society.

The government has also introduced restrictions on foreign companies establishing limited liability companies in Libya and has restricted entities – both foreign and Libyan – from having more than a ten percent stake in joint stock companies. In 2012, the government introduced a decree restricting foreign joint venture companies from having more than a 49 percent holding. In some exceptional – and unspecified – circumstances, the Ministry of Economy may grant foreign companies a maximum 60 percent shareholding. Companies wanting 100 percent control over operations and profit are required to pay extremely high charges.

Libya will remain an unpredictable operational environment as long as government divisions and weak institutional capacity remain. The stability of parliamentary alliances is weak, unpredictable and disruptive to institutional development. These weak institutions have enabled widespread corruption and led to the inconsistent application of legislation.

### Business Tips

- Greetings are enthusiastic and warm.
- Handshakes can be long affairs and extended as long as the verbal niceties take to cover.
- Smiling and direct eye contact is important although the eye contact should be intermittent rather than constant.
- Men shake hands. A man must wait for a woman to extend her hand first.
- Titles are important. Use the honorific Mister and any academic or political title.
- Government officials will usually be addressed as "Your Excellency".
- Do not use only the first name unless invited to do so.
- Business cards may be given to those you meet. It is a nice touch to have one side translated into Arabic.
- Libyans prefer to do business with those they know and respect, therefore expect to spend time cultivating a personal relationship before business is conducted.
- Who you know is more important than what you know, so it is important to network and cultivate a number of contacts who may then assist you in working your way through the serpentine bureaucracy.
- Appointments are necessary and should be made as far in advance as possible and confirmed a day or two before the meeting.
- It is best to avoid scheduling meetings during Ramadan since Muslims cannot eat or drink during the day.
- Never try to schedule meetings on Friday between 11:15 a.m. and 3 p.m. since most companies close for prayers.



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- Try to arrive at meetings on time and be prepared to wait. Libyan businesspeople who are accustomed to dealing with international companies often strive to arrive on time, although it is often difficult for them to do so in such a relationship driven culture.
- In general, Libyans have an open-door policy, even during meetings. This means you may experience frequent interruptions. Others may even wander into the room and start a different discussion. You may join in, but do not try to bring the topic back to the original discussion until the new person leaves.
- Arabic is generally the language of business, although some companies use English. Check which language your meeting will be conducted in, so you know if you should hire an interpreter.

### Standing Travel Advice

- Take increased security precautions against kidnapping, terrorism and street crime.
- Anti-government protests and social unrest could occur with the potential to cause travel disruption. In the event of unrest, foreign travellers and expatriates are unlikely to be at direct risk, but may need to remain flexible in their travel arrangements.
- There is a high possibility of both small-scale opportunistic and large-scale terrorist attacks by Islamist extremists.
- Minimise time spent in the vicinity of likely targets; these include cultural and religious sites, government and military buildings, military facilities, Western embassies and foreign commercial assets. Be alert to suspicious behaviour and report any suspect packages to the authorities.
- Armoured 4x4 vehicles are suitable means of transport for business travellers.
- The quality of roads is poor, driving standards are variable and accident rates are high. You can self-drive if you are very familiar with local conditions. If you are involved in an accident, immediately report the incident to the police and do not move the vehicles until police officers have arrived at the scene. It is advised to drive in convoys and avoid driving at night.
- Be aware of the potential cultural sensitivities, which could be cause for concern.
- Watch and read news about the destination and region prior to travel.
- Be vigilant in public areas and places that attract foreigners and Westerners - embassies, hotels, restaurants, bars and businesses
- Look out for anything suspicious. Report it to the local authorities immediately – many terrorist attacks are foiled by the vigilance of ordinary people.
- Try to avoid routines that make you an easier target – vary the time and route of your regular journeys.