Spring Break Safety Tips

West Virginia University students will be on spring break March 23-27, and as they prepare for the well-deserved break, the University Police Department encourages them to plan safe and happy break, and to keep safety in mind while traveling.

**On the road:** Buckle up, disco dancers! Also take turns behind the wheel, and whoever rides shotgun should stay awake to keep the driver company. Make sure everyone has a valid driver's license and the vehicle registration and proof of insurance is in the car before driving off. Bring sufficient money for gas, food and any unexpected emergencies.

**In hotels:** Ask for a room that's above the 1st floor but below the 6th floor. Why? First floor rooms are easier to break into, and rooms above the sixth floor are sometimes too high for fire ladders to reach. If safes are provided, definitely use them to store any valuables. Keep doors and sliding doors locked, and don't let anyone into your room unless you can trust them. Make a mental note of where the nearest fire exits and stairwells are located in case you need to evacuate.

**At the ATM:** Try to go the ATM in groups, but avoid getting overly complacent about safety just because you're traveling in numbers. Try to go during daylight hours. When you approach the ATM, do a full 360-degree scan, looking completely around you to see if anyone is hanging out where they shouldn't be. When punching in your PIN, cover the keypad with your other hand. Always be on the lookout for anyone suspicious. If someone is creeping you out, go to another ATM. (There are plenty of them, especially in vacation spots!)

**If you choose to drink:** Do us all a favor (including yourself) and party smart. Be responsible. Pace yourself and avoid hard alcohol or other powerful drinks that have fast effects. (And remember that drunk = easy target.) Also be aware of alcohol poisoning. Research shows 75 percent of college males and 43 percent of females reported being intoxicated on a daily basis during spring break. If you do decide to drink, know the liquor laws of wherever you'll be vacationing. Drinking and driving is always a dangerous situation, so avoid this by having your safe mode of transportation home planned before you go out. Click here for more tips and facts about drinking alcohol at the BACCHUS website. Access a helpful tool right from your cell phone by visiting B4UDrink.Mobi and estimate BAC (blood alcohol concentration) levels anywhere and everywhere you take your mobile phone.

**On the beach:** Drinking + sun can equal bad sunburn and an even worse hangover. Sun can maximize the effects of alcohol so keep this in mind if you party on the beach. Take it slowly and stay hydrated by drinking lots of water. If you start feeling faint or light-headed, get shade and water immediately. And don't be a lobster. Use sunscreen of at least SPF 15 and reapply often. Pay extra special attention to ears, nose, face and shoulders. Fair skinned friends should wear sunglasses and even a hat. Avoid sun exposure during the hottest hours of the sun's rays and remember you can burn even when it's cloudy.
**In the water:** Jumping into the water without a lifeguard is putting you at risk. Even the most experienced swimmer can get caught in an undertow. In case you get caught in a rip current, don’t bother swimming against it. Instead, swim parallel to shore until the rip passes. Try to stay within the designated swimming area and always swim with a buddy. Also know the flag system for water safety:

- Red Flag: Stay out of the water because of strong undertow and riptides.
- Yellow Flag: Use CAUTION in the water. There are some undertow and riptides possible.
- Blue Flag: Calm water.

Swim safely.

**In the hot tub:** Drinking in the hot tub might sound like a good idea, since pretty much every MTV video makes it look glamorous. But lo and behold, MTV is not an educational resource. Alcohol can dilute blood vessels and lower blood pressure to dangerous levels; the effects of alcohol are felt sooner and stronger in a hot tub. It can lead to unconsciousness and drowning.

**Going out:** Make your cardinal rule to go out with your friends, and go home with your friends. It’s one of those things that keeps you a whole lot safer, and eliminates about 98 percent of the bad drama. This way you can look out for one another, and get a friend home who is too intoxicated to be out. Also be on the lookout for signs of predatory drugs: extreme wooziness, confusion, difficulty standing and slurring speech. If you notice these symptoms in yourself, find your friends immediately and tell them to get you outta there. If you see these signs in a friend, do your friend duty and take them back to the hotel or to a hospital if symptoms are severe.

**Hooking up:** No, not everyone is doing it. (Don’t believe the hype.) But if you do choose to have sex, make sure it’s protected. Stock up on protection before you leave home so you never find yourself in a compromised situation. Decide before even going on spring break what you’re willing to do, and then get to work setting your boundaries early and often. If you meet someone and decide to shack up, be up front with them if sex isn’t in the plan. Try something like, “Hey good looking. I’ve had fun this evening, but no fornication tonight.” How’s that for smooth? But seriously, don’t ever let anyone talk you into doing something you’re uncomfortable with. [Click here](#) for more safe sex tips from SmarterSex.org.

**Leaving the country:** First things first, safety has a lot to do with what you pack when traveling abroad. Don’t bring flashy valuables (like expensive jewelry) and dress conservatively so you don’t stick out too much. And do your homework beforehand about your destination, keeping in mind you are subject to the laws of the country you visit. To get a full list of tips for traveling abroad (as well as travel warnings for certain countries) check out the Bureau of Consular Affairs website by clicking here.

**Gone cruising:** Vacationing on a cruise ship is a blast, but there are a whole different set of rules when you have a few thousand people aboard a boat. Stick with your friends, and watch your pockets when you get off the boat for stops. There are many cases of people being pick pocketed by island residents who prey on tourists. For a whole list of tips about cruise safety, [click here](#).