

NEWSWEEK: CULTURE

SIX TIPS FOR A HEALTHY SPRING BREAK

BY **DANIEL STONE** ON 2/21/08 AT 7:00 PM

Oh, spring break: the chance for hormone-fueled students suffering midsemester fatigue to leave their books and worries behind, and head to more tropical destinations. The travel industry estimates that more than 260,000 high-school and college kids head to sunny beaches and other party resorts for the weeklong sojourn. It's a big deal for the students, and big business for travel companies that head to campus to marketing all-inclusive getaways months in advance.

So what could go wrong while downing umbrella-topped drinks on a Mexican beach with hundreds of other students?

Too much sun can be taxing on your body, says Anne Banas, executive editor of SmarterTravel.com--not to mention the things you may be putting (or pouring) into it. But there are ways to have a great time without going off the deep end. A little pre-planning will ensure that when the party starts, you'll be set. And when it's over, you'll be left with good memories--not a bad sunburn, stomach ailment, or something worse. NEWSWEEK asked Banas and Student Travel Magazine publisher Eric Tiettmeyer for some tips.

Pre-party Planning: Nothing ends a vacation faster than getting sick before it starts. "There's a lot of recirculated air on airplanes, and it's easy to catch whatever's floating around," says Banas. To be on the safe side, start taking immunity boosters, like vitamin C supplements, the day you fly. And drink lots of water to stay hydrated. It may also be helpful to have the names of local English-speaking doctors and their phone numbers, just in case you have an unexpected medical emergency during your trip. You can access a list of them by contacting the U.S. [consular office](#) closest to you destination.

Tapping the Tap: Tiettmeyer says he doesn't mind drinking tap water, "but every part of the world has different water standards, and you won't know if the water will make you sick until after it does." If the water looks and smells funny or has been a problem for other spring breakers, stay away. That goes for ice cubes in beach cocktails, too. Pack a few bottles of water in your checked luggage and grab more later at a convenience store. Use it to stay hydrated and for things like brushing teeth and washing your face.

Bottoming Up: With a drinking age of 18 (and lower, at times) in heavily touristed parts of Mexico, it's no secret the kegs and mai tais will be out in full force. Each year in Cancun, Acapulco and other south-of-the-border spring-break hotspots, hospitals report an increase in deaths, rapes, injuries, assaults and arrests related to drinking during March and April when students fill the town. Calculate your limits with this blood-alcohol [calculator](#). Perform the calculations in reverse (using .08, the U.S. legal limit, as a benchmark) to figure out how much will be too much. (Of course, if you're not of legal age, you shouldn't be drinking alcohol at all.) Stay with your friends--don't go off on your own or with strangers--and consider having a designated sober person in the group to keep an eye on everyone and make sure they get home safe at the end of an evening.

Beaches and Cream: Do a quick once over of the beach when you arrive. "If there's no life guard on duty, check for any warning signs for rip currents or dangerous sea life," says Banas. And whether you're going for a dip or just sticking to the sand, don't forget to lather up the sunblock. The [American Academy of Dermatology](#) recommends a cream at least 30 SPF, reapplied every two hours. Getting a tan is great. But no one wants to go back to campus looking like a tomato. Even one bad sunburn can also greatly increase your risk for skin cancer.

The Munchies: "All inclusive" usually means "all you can eat." Overeating might be part of taking on vacation, but keep an eye on what's being served. Banas suggests staying away from sushi or anything uncooked and trying to get everything else piping hot. "If food looks like it's been sitting out for a while, don't eat it." And with fruits, only trust pieces that have a peel, like bananas or oranges.

Getting Registered: There are no statistics on how many students run into trouble during spring break. But if help is what you need--from getting sick to getting in other kinds of trouble--the U.S. government can help bring you closer to home. The State Department lets you register your trip [online](#) with department officials, who will keep you on temporary file in the nearest consular office should you need speedy assistance. Plus, they'll know how to get in contact if urgent circumstances might require you to evacuate.