

Gyno Report



The Scary Truth About Vacation Sex

When Margaret*, a 28-year-old nursing student in Chicago, traveled through Europe a few years ago, she did lots of things outside her comfort zone, like eat pot brownies, skinny-dip in an Italian river, and...bang a guy she barely knew on the hood of a parked car in Switzerland, sans condom. Margaret now blames that last move—and the case of chlamydia it led to—on #VacationVibes. “At home, I’d never have unprotected sex with someone I’m not in a relationship with.”

Research suggests this type of judgment lapse isn’t an isolated incident. Two recent studies, led by Liza Berdychevsky, PhD, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that women are much more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior when traveling (versus while hooking up at home), including unprotected sex and going back to a total stranger’s place.

“When people are on vacation, they often leave some of their usual boundaries behind,” explains Anna Kress, PsyD, a clinical psychologist in Princeton, New Jersey. This can, of course, feel liberating and wildly exciting, but if you don’t properly prepare (or exercise a little caution in the moment), a hot vacay fling can put you at risk.

WHEN SAFETY DOESN’T COME FIRST

Sexperimenting in new time zones can have more dangerous consequences than doing so in your real life, says Kress.



STIs make terrible souvenirs!

Your local drugstore stocks condoms and probably emergency contraception, but your all-inclusive resort Caribbean or European hostel may not, and locating these things quickly can be tough if you don’t know the language or lack transportation.

“Finding a condom or Plan B in an unfamiliar city or country can be extremely difficult,” confirms ob-gyn Sherry Ross, MD, author of *She-ology*. It doesn’t help that the latter goes by many different names abroad

(including NorLevo, Optinor, and Postinor, all brands of levonorgestrel, the drug that's in Plan B). In the UK and Mexico, you may need an appointment with a pharmacist to get it rather than simply grabbing it off the shelf.

Some countries, such as Costa Rica, don't have emergency contraception at all, and even your access in the U.S. can be spotty. One study found that just 23 percent of pharmacies in Colorado had Plan B completely accessible over the counter (and since it's most effective right after sex, a longer trek to get it means higher pregnancy chances).

Meanwhile, a visit to a foreign urgent-care center to squash that sextastic UTI may leave you with out-of-network medical bills.

And there's also your physical safety to consider. If you're solo (or abroad without a local phone number or contact), you may not have someone to call if you get a bad feeling from someone you've gone home with.

WHY GIRLS STILL GO WILD

Surprisingly, in one of the studies, 47 percent of women knew about these dangers but were still open to risky sex while traveling.

Yup, that YOLO mentality is strong. Study participants said being OOO made them more likely to experiment because they could do so anonymously, without fear of judgment. Sasha, 30, said hooking up with strangers while backpacking in Thailand made her feel sexually empowered: "It freed me from self-consciousness during sex." This is a good thing. But when you feel relaxed and happy on a trip, you're also less likely to think something bad might happen, says Kress, which can lead to unsafe choices.

The booze factor also contributes. Your being DTF in a hotel hot tub may be directly related to that third inhibition-squashing piña colada (many study participants didn't set out to go all the way, but drinks and chill vibes changed their plans). A separate 2016 study found that, on average, people on vacation drink twice as much as they normally do.

Bottom line: Vacay sex can be fun and empowering if you prepare. Always BYO sexy-time swag (see box, at right), and set boundaries (e.g., only get busy in your hotel room after telling a friend where you'll be). Do these things and you're less likely to make mistakes that outlast your jet lag. ■

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The percentage of women who admit to having had sex in a semipublic place, like a bathroom or elevator, while on vacation.

Get Laid, Not Laid Up

These four essentials will help you have all the fun with way less risk.

Contraception

Always carry your own condoms and, because they can break, Plan B. On the Pill? Stay on schedule regardless of your time zone by setting an alarm on your phone, and make sure you have enough pills to last your entire trip.

Antibiotics

If you're prone to UTIs, pack antibiotics and an OTC urinary-pain reliever, like AZO. Ask your doc for an antibiotic prescription for just-in-case situations.

Lube

Okay, so it won't prevent pregnancy or STIs, but being slippery during sex is still beneficial, since dryness can cause pain, vaginal tears, and burning sensations. Bring a condom-safe water- or silicone-based tube.

An Exit Strategy

Before leaving the bar with that hot dude, tell your friends where you're going. And consider sporting a discreet panic button, like the ORA (OraForYou.com), which sends an emergency bat signal to your crew if you need to communicate that you feel unsafe.

SOURCE: SHERRY ROSS, MD, OB-GYN AND AUTHOR OF SHE-OLGY