

Travel

Making holidays



When you are on holiday the last thing you expect or want to happen is to have an accident, but safety is often a concern which is pushed to the back of your mind.

Whether you are planning to spend your time motor biking, walking, cycling, on the water, or just relaxing by the pool, it's worth taking some time to plan ahead, ensuring that your holiday will be safe as well as enjoyable.

Elizabeth Walker highlights some key areas where British tourists have been harmed while on holiday and offers some key points to help you enjoy your holiday.

Four hundred and seventy five British tourists drowned on holiday between 2000 and 2005. The majority of these deaths occurred while they were swimming, or accidentally falling into water. Water sports and voluntary risk taking activity can be attributed to the next biggest number of cases.

The majority of deaths involved those aged 30-70 years followed by younger adults under 30 years. There were 57 child fatalities.

The events in detail show that almost a third of these drownings occur while victims are swimming. From the age of 15 the majority get into difficulty while swimming in the sea, or are swept away by strong currents and rip tides.

Children up to the age of 14 predominantly drown in swimming pools, often located at the hotel or a villa where the family are staying. Swimming, playing or accidentally falling in are the main causes. In virtually all cases a parent was in the vicinity.

A high number of these incidents seem to occur on the first or the last day of the holiday. Many of these drownings could have been prevented.

More than half of the victims were under four years old and the main cause of this seems to be a breakdown in supervision and ease of access to the hotel or villa pool.

Almost 20 per cent of the total cases relate to incidents where the victim took a voluntary risk during sports activity.

Water sports such as diving, snorkelling and kayaking are increasingly popular exactly because of the risk element and thrill of adrenaline. The majority of these were adults between the ages of 20 and 40 years.

A small percentage of fatalities (6 per cent) can be attributed to the ignorance of, or disregard of, risks. This mainly occurs to males aged between 20-25, is often connected with alcohol, and frequently relates to events such as stag parties. In line with events in the UK more than half of all the drowning fatalities are males across all ages and activities.

To put this into context, there are in the region of 65 million trips abroad each year, with Spain as the most popular European destination for UK travellers. The vast majority of these trips are for summer sun/beach holidays, about 8 per cent are specifically for activity holidays (including watersport holidays).

The vast majority of these trips are remembered for the right reasons. However, RoSPA believes that these 475 deaths are a significant number, especially the 57 families who returned to the UK without a child, especially in that many of the incidents could have been avoided.

Top Tips Sports and beach activities

If you are using a leisure operator for your activity, never assume that the leisure operator is operating safely and inside the legal requirements of the country.

RoSPA research has found through observing water sports operators that there are those who do not provide a safe environment or appropriate safety measures, which could potentially lead to serious injuries or even fatalities.

It was found that while there were safe and good operators, a number had poorly maintained equipment, operating procedures which were below average, and unsafe safety judgement.

It is worth checking a few basic things to make sure that your operator has your safety in mind.

- Look at the equipment and check that both the equipment and safety gear is stored well, away from elements which could corrode it
- Make sure you are provided with appropriate safety equipment and that it fits properly, for example, a lifejacket or helmet
- Ensure that you are kept apart from other conflicting activities
- Your operator should ask for your personal details. In case of emergency, they should

have your name, where you are staying, and any relevant medical conditions

The operator should ensure that you are confident with the environment and equipment you are using, and present you with a safety briefing

- Check that the safety procedures are effective. If there are staff accompanying you, are they wearing safety equipment? Do they have the ability to assist you or call for assistance in case of emergency?
- Check their ability to communicate back to their base. There should be enough staff to spot if you are having difficulties and be able to assist you?
- Look for safety equipment such as a first aid kit at the operator's base.

Before you go

The choices you make in advance, especially in terms of where you stay, what type of pool you have, the level of supervision on site all are factors which could have prevented many of the incidents we record, especially those relating children under 10 years old. There follow some key points for those with under 10 year olds to bear in mind:

- Be cautious about booking villas which do not have safety fencing
- Many of the incidents seem to be occurring on the first or last



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day of the holiday. Higher stress levels / tiredness / new surroundings all seem to play a part in losing supervision of young children who are naturally curious.

- Ask your travel company if the hotel pool has a lifeguard, and if you have a toddler is the small pool fenced off from the main pool or water area?
- Take children to water safety and swimming lessons in the run up to the holiday.
- Teach children never to swim alone.
- Take a first aid course – know how to resuscitate a child.
- Actively supervise all young children near water
- Choose pools which are fenced with locking gates
- Even if a pool has a lifeguard – know where your children are, and what they are doing in the water
- Let children take swimming classes while on holiday – they are a great way of gaining water confidence and learning essential water safety skills.
- Inflatables' are not a substitute for supervision or swimming ability.

Planning and participating

If you are planning to participate independently in water sports without using an operator, in many of the drowning cases the conditions were different and more severe than experienced at home. The following tips may be useful to consider:



- Brush up on your skills, take a course which helps you to prepare for the conditions, and try to get some practice before you go
- Have the ability to contact the base in case of emergency and ensure you are familiar with the national emergency telephone number
- Plan your route to determine potential hazards
- Check local weather forecasts and follow local knowledge about weather and environment conditions, ensuring you have the appropriate equip-

ment for these conditions

- Make sure you and others with you, particularly children, are competent and confident in the activity you are participating in
- Inform staff or friends of the time you are intending to return and a rough idea of the area you will be in
- Be considerate to others using the water - be aware that you have the potential to be a nuisance or even cause another person serious harm.

Further information and useful organisations

Foreign and Commonwealth Office website details advice and support offered to British nationals abroad: www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) – members are governed by a code of conduct aimed at ensuring high standards of service and safety. www.abta.com

The Royal Yachting Association – centre accreditation scheme looks at sailing centres worldwide: www.rya.org.uk/knowledgeBase/

boatingabroad

Department of Health – advice for travellers: www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellers/fs/en

Holiday Which? - Consumer advice and reviews: www.holidaywhichfreetrial.co.uk. Further information about child safety in swimming pools abroad can be found on a fact sheet the RoSPA website at www.rospa.com/waterandleisuresafety/childholswimpool_safety.htm.

What RoSPA is doing

The reduction of Britons drowning abroad is a key issue for the RoSPA leisure team. To this end we:

- Collate drowning statistics for Britons abroad to improve our understanding of a hidden problem, particularly regarding young children
- Work with European partners to improve safety and conditions especially in hotel swimming pools
- Would like to see a system of licensing and inspection of water sports operators in the EU.

