

Backpacker Hostel Fire Safety Guide

... if you can't get out of the building, you'll die. Simple as that. Would you know what to do?

It's 3am. You're sleeping off a few beers and great party in a hostel. Suddenly you're woken by terrifying screams, panic, flames, no lights (electricity has gone), thick smoke and everyone shouting in foreign languages (backpackers panic in their own language, not English!)

You have no idea how to get out - you checked in, dumped your stuff and within five minutes you were sipping beers with your friends in a local bar - the hostel layout is a mystery. Window security bars stop a jump, anyway you're too high. The corridor is half full with smoke. People run by in both directions, stooping below the smoke, screaming. You are terrified. You need to choose left or right. Unbelievable panic sets in as you think you'll never see your family again.

In the next two minutes you will either survive or die. Simple as that. Would **you** know what to do?

Backpacker Hostel...

FIRE SAFETY GUIDE

by Tom Griffiths, Founder of gapyear.com

would you know what to do?



Hostel Fires: Why Should I Care?

- Every year over 1,000 people are involved in hostel/hotel fires on their travels
- 50-100 die, almost all from smoke inhalation (not from the flames, which we all fear)
 - **Many die trying to 'beat the smoke'** i.e. they try to run through it, but get trapped in it (unknown to most your eyes slam shut in smoke and will not open again, so they get lost, panic and then have to breathe in)
 - It can only take two deep inhalations and 10 seconds to die of smoke inhalation

The bottom line: If you know roughly what to do you are likely to survive a hostel/hotel fire

What to do in a fire...

STEP 1 **Don't panic!** Take two seconds to think. You're going to be shit scared, but you need to stay calm to get out alive.

STEP 2 Feel the wall / door with the back of your hand. If very hot **don't go out!** There is a fire behind it



If you **CAN'T** leave the room

Consider lowering yourself out of the window

- You should survive a 2 floor jump onto tar/concrete. Anything higher is questionable
- Ideally throw a mattress out first to land on. Don't launch yourself out of the window, but hang down by your arms before dropping to the ground to minimise your fall. Bend your knees when you land
- Do NOT break the window until you're about to jump as you can't stop smoke coming in afterwards

If a window jump is impossible

- Fill the bath/basin with water and use dampened bed sheets, towels or clothes wedged in door cracks to stop smoke entering. Wet the walls and doors. No water? Pee on them!
- Then signal to rescuers from the window using a torch or a white sheet



If you **CAN** leave the room

- Take the room key with you if it's to hand. You may need it to rush back in
- Smoke rises and so will be high, filling down to the floor. Keep low or better still crawl where the oxygen is
- Stay close to the walls to avoid panicking guests and to count doors to the fire exit
- DO NOT use lift/elevator – that's an oven you don't want to be trapped in!
- DO NOT RE-ENTER UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES until told it is safe by the fire brigade. (Better to lose a backpack than your life)



Most important rule:

Is the exit corridor filled with smoke?

DON'T try and cover your mouth and run through it unless you can guarantee a maximum five second clear run to the outside (if you have walked the route when you checked in you will know if you can make it or not).

If the smoke gets in your eyes they will shut and not open again. If you get trapped the smoke will then kill you, so don't try and beat it. Head back to your room.



Basic check list...

OK, the problem with the check list below is that most people feel like an idiot asking the questions, counting doors etc.

If this is you, then think about it this way:

On a plane they show you how to get out in an emergency and you take note, because in your mind it is possible that it may just happen.

Statistically you are probably more likely to be involved in a hostel fire than a plane crash, yet because the person at reception doesn't point out the fire exits and tell you how to get out in a fire, it's not real. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't know.

Some hostels are predominantly wood, others have thatch, and many have no sprinklers, extra security / burglar bars on the windows and can become a death trap within 10 minutes of a fire taking hold.



So, don't be stupid, get into the habit of doing this stuff below.

One day you may thank me...

1. Ask if the hostel has fire alarms and smoke detectors. Consider staying elsewhere if not (do not take a room above the second floor if no fire alarm system)
2. Ask where ground floor fire exits are and work out how to get to them from your room
3. Walk the fire exit routes and check the final exit doors before unpacking or going out for a beer
4. Ideally sleep in a room below the second floor with a burglar bar-less window
5. Do a quick count of the doors from your room to the emergency exit. Note if it's left or right out of your room to the exit. If you turn the wrong way out of the room in a panic it may be your last mistake
6. Sleep with a torch close to hand, vital not just for when you want to pee at 4am
7. For extra peace of mind consider buying a travel smoke detector such as FlareSafe or the Cavius model.



Things to look out for in hostels

- Lack of fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, alarms, notices, emergency 'route maps'
- Fire exits blocked with beds, junk, storage
- People smoking late at night near obvious fire hazards

Travel safely. Thank you for listening!

Tom

With special thanks to Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service

www.gapyear.com/advice

Other Downloadable Advice Guides

Guide to Travel Health by Dr Sebastian Kalwij

Dr Sebastian Kalwij is gapyear.com's travel health expert. He's been involved with travel health projects all over the World, and is now a GP in London. In this guide he takes you through the major health issues that you need to be aware of before you go and whilst on the road. There's information on everything from vaccinations to sun safety, but we have to stress that this is not a substitute for a visit to your GP!

Guide to Gap Year Work Experience by Elizabeth Clark

Gap years are about more than volunteering in the rainforest or sunning yourself on a beach in Australia. Alongside taking a year out to earn money to pay for university, one of the fastest growing types of gap year, is spending some time trying to get work experience that will help you work out which career is right for you and also, hopefully, give you a bit of a head start over everybody else.

Guide to Travel Photography by Lucy Cartwright

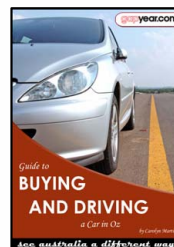
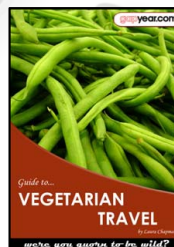
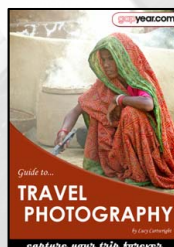
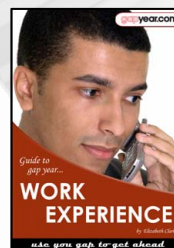
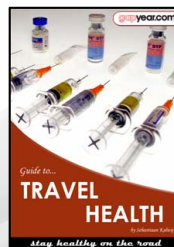
Want to come back from your gap year with some awe-inspiring photos? Just want to avoid blurry snaps of randoms with red-eye? Lucy Cartwright talks you through what kit to take, pre-trip preparation, lighting, framing and how to get the best from the situations you're most likely to encounter. You don't need a load of expensive gadgets to come back with a photo album to be proud of.

Guide to Vegetarian Travel by Laura Chapman

Quorn to be wild? Or, to put it more simply, like to travel but don't eat meat? You sound like the sort of person who could use this handy guide. Laura Chapman has covered all the major gap year destinations, rated them for veggie-friendliness and suggested some 'in case of emergency' dishes for each of them. Beats the hell out of eating Super Noodles for a year anyway.

Guide to Buying and Driving a Car in Oz by Carolyn Martin

The best way to see Australia is with the freedom of your own vehicle. Go where you want, when you want and stop off at every single novelty out-size fibreglass fruit along the way if you damn well see fit. If you like the sound of this, but are put off by the red tape and expense involved, this is the guide for you!



First Timer's Guide to Hostels by Rachel Ricks

Hostels are simple, fun, friendly, cheap and geared up for people like you. However, if this is your first time away on your own and you've never stayed in a backpacker hostel before, you've probably got a few questions that need answering. Rachel takes you through the etiquette, safety and security issues involved and, hopefully, reminds you that rustling plastic bags at 5am in a dorm is really quite irritating.

Guide to Buying and Packing a Backpack by Tom Griffiths, founder of gapyear.com

It might sound daft that we need to write a guide telling you, all perfectly sensible, grown up people, how to go out and buy a backpack and then how to put some stuff into said backpack, but it's actually a fine art. If you want to avoid back pain, fit everything in as efficiently as possible and be able to dress in lovely crease-free garments, then have a read...

Guide to Fundraising by Tom Griffiths, founder of gapyear.com

If you're heading off overseas to donate a few months of your time, the chances are you're going to need to raise a couple of grand. Whether your money is going to an organisation that is supporting your volunteering or whether you're independently going to help a cause of your choice and want to be able to make a financial contribution, we can all do with some ideas and tips on how to squeeze the most of of friends, family, colleagues and passers-by.

Guide to Becoming a Travel Writer by Rich Knight & Charlotte Hindle

Two-guides-for-the-price-of-one from former gapyear.com editor Rich Knight and Charlotte Hindle from Lonely Planet. These two experienced travel writers give you their personal views on how to make the most of your gap year to launch your career as the next Bill Bryson. They offer advice on how to appear professional, how to get noticed and the most effective ways of getting your article ideas in front of travel editors.

Traveller's Guide to Malaria by Rob Pineda

Backpackers die from malaria. It's a sad fact that too many people leave home without properly understanding the risks posed by this widespread disease. This guide gives you an idea of where you can get malaria, what it does to you and some basic tips on reducing the risks involved with travel in malarial regions. No need to freak out or anything, we just want you all to be properly clued up. We're sick of hearing the question: 'Can I get away without malaria pills? They're really expensive...'

