

Who pays when things go wrong? Research reveals the risky business of Schoolies trips

More than half of young Australians (52 per cent) aged between 18 and 29 who travel overseas incorrectly believe the Australian Government would arrange and pay to get them home in a medical emergency, new research reveals.

The research has uncovered that almost one million Australians expose themselves to unnecessary risks while travelling, with young Australians twice as likely to travel without insurance.

These alarming statistics come as tens of thousands of school leavers make their travel plans for Schoolies – a rite of passage for Year 12 graduates across Australia.

Other key highlights of the joint research project between *smartraveller.gov.au* and *UnderstandInsurance.com.au*, undertaken by *Quantum Market Research*, include:

- One in seven 18 to 29-year-olds went overseas without travel insurance on their last trip
- Almost twice as many travellers who are under 30 admit to doing risky things while overseas (74 per cent compared with 40 per cent of those 30 and over)
- More than a third (38 per cent) had experienced an event while away that could have been covered by travel insurance
- 36 per cent of those under 30 who had insurance did not look at the product disclosure statement to check it met their needs
- More than a third (40 per cent) were unaware if their insurance covered them for medical expenses

With figures from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) showing Bali, Fiji, Vanuatu, Thailand and Cambodia as increasingly popular destinations for Schoolies, *Understand Insurance* spokesperson Campbell Fuller urges school leavers – and their parents – to make sure they have the right insurance cover before going away.

“If you plan well and make smart choices, your Schoolies trip can be the experience of a lifetime. But the consequences of travelling without insurance can be financially devastating, and the Australian Government does not pick up the pieces if something goes wrong,” Mr Fuller says.

“Most travellers don't realise that in a worst-case scenario, travel insurance can mean the difference between financial oblivion and financial recovery.”

Jon Philp, First Assistant Secretary from DFAT says: “Travel insurance is as important as your passport when travelling abroad. When you leave Australia, you leave behind the support systems, emergency services and medical care we take for granted, so an injury or illness can have a devastating financial impact.

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“And if you have an incident overseas, the bills stack up very quickly and could set you back hundreds of thousands of dollars for expenses such as emergency hospital costs, air evacuations, extended stays, cancellations and alternative accommodation, all of which can be covered by travel insurance.”

Understand Insurance recommends school leavers buy travel insurance at the same time as booking their flights, and consider the risks they plan to undertake when comparing policies.

“If you’re planning an extreme sport or high-risk adventure while you’re on Schoolies, make sure your policy covers the adventure travel or specific outdoor activities that you’re planning. These may include surfing, skiing, rock climbing, kite surfing, riding motorbikes and scuba diving,” Mr Fuller says.

“Essentially, we should all purchase a policy as soon as we have paid for any trip, whether it's overseas or domestic, and read the product disclosure statement to be fully aware of what is and isn't covered.”

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Editors note: For interviews and case studies contact Andrew Holmes 0411 024 405 or andrew@truthagency.com.au.

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Top tips for Schoolies:

- Buy travel insurance when you book your trip – that means you can be covered for many things that could go wrong before you leave. You can insure for a domestic or overseas trip
- Invest the time to compare policies. Read the product disclosure statement and understand what's covered, what's not covered and the limits that may apply to some items.
- Often excluded from policies is injury or financial loss due to the influence of alcohol or drugs
- The cheapest policy isn't always the best one for you
- Speak to the insurer if you're planning to do adventure sports. Though not all policies will cover them, many insurers will offer cover for an additional premium
- Most insurers will not cover riding motorcycles or scooters, or will do so under limited circumstances – check first
- Buying insurance when overseas for a one-off activity is usually expensive
- Many policies won't cover you for pre-existing medical conditions, but some will, so check first

Did you know:

- A day in a US hospital can cost \$10,000
- Medical evacuation to Australia from Asia can cost \$100,000