

Vacation Safety - Boating



More people die in boating accidents every year than in airplane crashes or train wrecks, but a little common sense can make boating both enjoyable and safe. If you are going to go boating, make sure the captain or person handling the boat is experienced and competent.

Alcohol and water still don't mix. One third of boating deaths are alcohol related. Alcohol distorts a person's judgment no matter where they are — but that distortion is even greater on the water. The U.S. Coast Guard warns people about a condition called boater's fatigue, which means that the wind, noise, heat, and vibration of the boat all combine to wear you down when you're on the water.

Because there are no road signs or lane markers on the water and the weather can be unpredictable, it's important to be able to think quickly and react well under pressure. If you're drinking, this can be almost impossible.

Personal flotation devices. It's always a good idea for everyone on the boat to wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket, whether the boat is a large speedboat or a canoe — and whether you're a good swimmer or not. Wearing a life jacket (also known as a personal flotation device, or PFD) is the law in some states for certain age groups, and you could face a stiff penalty for breaking it. Your state may also require that you wear an approved life jacket for water skiing and other on-water activities. Wearing a PFD is like wearing a helmet while biking. It may take a few minutes to get used to it, but it definitely can be a lifesaver. Don't leave land without it.

Stay in touch. Before going out on a boat, let somebody on land know where you are going and about how long you'll be out. That way, if you do get into trouble, someone will have an idea of where to look for you. If you're going to be on the water for a long time, it's a good idea to have a radio with you so you can check the weather reports. Water conducts electricity, so if you hear a storm warning, get off the water as quickly as you can.