

'False sense of security' makes tourists susceptible to heat-related illness, experts say

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People flock to Greece's islands to enjoy the sights and history. Rarely though do they consider the dangers.

Three tourists died this month in Greece while going out in temperatures over 100° from back-to-back heat waves. Five more tourists are missing.

It's not unusual for people to forget about the risk that [extreme temperatures](#) pose, especially while traveling, said Stephen Wood, associate clinic professor and program director of the extreme medicine certificate at Northeastern University.

But people should take extra precautions when traveling in climates much warmer than what they're used to, or else risk heat-related illness.

"There's frequently this false sense of security that when you're on vacation you're going to be taken care of in some form," Wood said. "But in reality, you're probably more at risk when you're on vacation for many different reasons."

For starters, many people are out of their normal routine on vacation: they may be drinking more alcohol or caffeine in lieu of water, Wood said, or plan daily hikes and activities that keep them more active than usual.

And they might be more focused on their itinerary than the weather and go out without preparing adequately for hot temperatures. Wood said many people don't look ahead when planning their trips or are left without proper supplies if they're not packing the right clothes and equipment.

In several of the missing person cases out of Greece, officials said the person in question was last seen going out on a hike or walk in the heat and left with little water.

"When people are on vacation, they are not paying attention to those kinds of things," Wood said. "They're paying attention to how they can

maximize their trip. They're not likely to pay attention to heat advisories or other warnings. That makes them more susceptible."

People also tend to overestimate their own abilities and underestimate the effects of heat, Wood added. At least one missing tourist in Greece knew the local hiking trails he was taking well, officials said, and opted for a 12-mile route on the day he went missing.

Our bodies are also acclimated to the environment we know best, Wood added, so people traveling from areas that don't often experience high temperatures are more prone to illness when traveling in a [heat wave](#).

All these things place people at risk of heat-related illness like [heat stroke](#) or heat exhaustion. One of the symptoms of these can be disorientation, which a Greek spokesperson said could be the culprit behind the country's spike in missing hikers.

"The problem of missing hikers is not new—we have it every year," Constantina Dimoglidou, a police spokeswoman, told the New York Times. "But this year, it seems more people became disoriented during the heat wave."

Many heat advisories warn of non-exertional heat illness that affects very young people or elderly people, even when they're not exerting themselves. But anyone can suffer from exertional heat illness when pushing themselves in extreme temperatures.

"To witness that, all you have to do is go to any hiking trail," Wood said. "A lot of people feel prepared for that environment. They're young, they're healthy, but they just don't have the right equipment and gear. They're not paying attention to advisories and they get themselves into trouble."

To avoid this, Wood says to do as the locals do when traveling in the heat.

"If they're wearing wide brim hats and loose fitting clothing, then that's probably what you should be wearing as well," Wood said.

Wood said it's also beneficial to avoid wearing dark colors—because they absorb more heat—as well as caffeinated beverages and alcohol since they can cause dehydration. Instead, drink plenty of water and wear lighter colors along with sunblock.

He also recommends people adjust their vacation itineraries to avoid being outside between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m, when the sun is most intense.

"That's the time you want to limit your activities to being indoors in an air conditioned area or being in a pool," he said.

If you are out and about during these times, bring water with you as well as a fan. And be sure to know your limits as well as the sign of heat-related illness. Heavy sweating, weakness, a rapid pulse and cramps can all be signs you need to get out of the [heat](#).

"When you're on vacation, you feel infallible, and you don't worry about these things," Wood said. "You shouldn't have to, but use the same sense that you would use anywhere else."

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