

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?

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

Backpacker Hostel...

FIRE SAFETY GUIDE

would you know what to do?

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.



With special thanks to Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service

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 be thankful...

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



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!



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