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HOLIDAYMAKERS WARNED NOT LEAVE COMMONSENSE BEHIND

As school holidays approach thousands of people are heading abroad to soak up the sun. And while enjoying the atmosphere abroad makes most people relax and let their hair down, holidaymakers are being urged not to leave their commonsense behind.

“Throwing caution to the wind can have devastating consequences,” says Denise Kitchener, chief executive of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL).

“Once the holiday feeling takes hold people tend to relax more than they would back home, but we are urging people not to ignore commonsense,” she says.

“We hear of some horrendous accidents which have happened because people behave differently on holiday. Being in a different country where everything is much more relaxed seems to make people believe they are immune to danger.

“At home most people wouldn’t consider riding a moped or motorbike without wearing a helmet,” says Denise, “but this seems to be a common cause of injury abroad.”

While on holiday on the Greek island of Zakynthos in 2000, APIL member Sam Firth from Manchester found out first hand that being overly carefree can lead to disaster, after he hired a moped but no helmet. After several days of what he describes as “carefree, sun-kissed exploration of the island,” fate intervened.

“I don’t have any memory of my accident or of the hours leading up to it but I’m told that another tourist – who was also riding with no helmet – pulled from a side road into my path,” he says. “I collided heavily with either my handle bars or the other rider before we were both thrown to the ground.”

Sam’s list of injuries were endless and he spent three months in a coma. “I am lucky enough to still be here to tell the tale,” he says. “But I can only imagine what my family went through that summer - when they flew out to Greece the doctor left them under no illusion that the first few days were critical for my survival and they should prepare themselves for the fact that they may have to bring my body back home.”

Sam says his advice to holidaymakers is simple.

“Hire a car not a moped because you can’t fall off a car. If you insist on hiring a moped, make very sure you hire a helmet to go with it. It could mean the difference between life or death. It is that simple.

“Nobody ever thinks it will happen to them, and this leads to a Russian roulette mentality,” he says. “Life is too precious a thing to gamble against the driving skills of holidaymakers, and the devil-may-care attitude some continental drivers adopt, when they are not familiar with anything half as rigorous as our Highway Code. It just isn’t worth the risk.”

Sadly, Sam’s story is not an isolated case. APIL member Nolan Mortimer, a solicitor who deals solely with accidents which happen abroad, says people throw caution to the wind and don’t stop to think about the consequences.

“People forget that the roads and motorists are different abroad and become blasé about safety,” he says. “I know of cases involving tourists who hire cars and forget which side of the road they should be driving on, for example. Another problem which crops up time and time again is that holiday makers don’t have sufficient insurance cover for activities such as jet skiing or parasailing, and this can lead to all sorts of problems.

“I know of two families who went on holiday together to a Caribbean island and hired some jet skis,” he says. “Following a short period of tuition, the two dads took to the water but one lost control and ploughed into the other, seriously injuring him. They had turned down insurance cover when they hired the jet skis, assuming their own policies would cover them. They were wrong – the policies excluded cover for ‘motorized or jet propelled vehicles.’”

Denise Kitchener says people don’t realise that many insurance companies won’t cover you for things they class as ‘hazardous,’ so if you are injured while taking part then you won’t be able to claim any compensation.

“If you think you may try your hand at anything which falls into this category, check your policy covers it,” she warns. “Top up your insurance before you go if you are unsure.

“The last thing we want is to put people off having fun, but taking simple precautions means people will have a better chance of remembering their holiday for all the right reasons.”

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Note to editors:

- APIL was set up in 1990 by a small group of solicitors who wanted to provide a voice for injured people, and is now a recognised voice within Government and other organisations. APIL’s SafetyWatch campaign aims

to highlight potential hazards to people in order to prevent injury. For more information contact Lisa Wardle, t: 0115 9388715

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