

## Break Time

Tips, warnings for spring breakers help make traveling safer

BY STEPHEN WELLS  
The Battalion

It's happening all over again. Students skip their final class before the weekend begins. The cars still left in the parking lots are being packed up with spare underwear and junk food, leaving little room for passengers.

Spring Break has descended upon the student body of Texas A&M, who cannot wait to bare their bodies at the beach or ski down the slopes. Whether or not a student chooses the pre-assembled package tour or the chaos, spontaneity and bail money of a road trip, the feelings of freedom associated with the absence of lecture for nine days tie each Spring Break experience together.

For some students, packing up the car for an old-fashioned, Griswold-style string of random events remains the best value in town for spending a week dodging responsibility.

Heather Alexander, a junior agricultural development major, said the random nature of a road trip is its greatest selling point.

"I think it's best to just take off and not know where you're going until you get there," Alexander said. "It's just that there's a complete randomness to going on a road trip."

"You never know what's around the corner, so why bother spending a lot of time planning? You can go to the river or go camping if you bring camping stuff. I've gone through Austin to party on Sixth Street and been on the road to camp out on a beach the next day. The only limits are your imagination and your gas money."

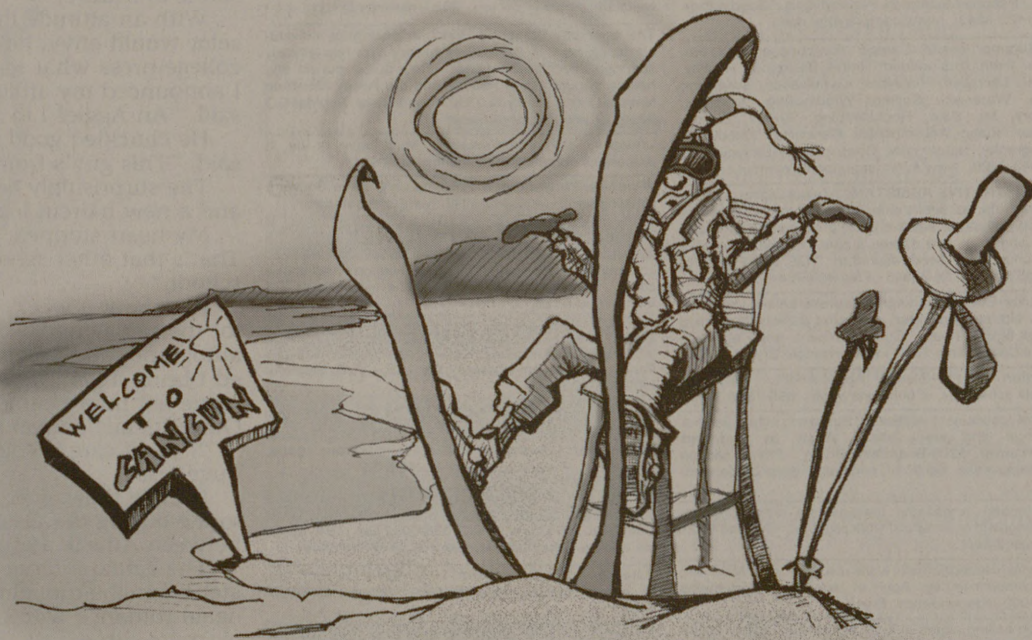
One risk students run while on an unplanned trip is not realizing where the worst areas of travel are.

Wanda Paris, a travel agent for A&M Travel, said while this may not be a problem in places like Aspen, other popular destinations have their seamier side.

"If you go to Cancun, you definitely need to know where you are going and be aware of where you are," Paris said. "It's just like riding the subway in New York City. There are some places that are safer than others."

Another popular student alternative is the half-planned trip. Scott Carrol, a senior biology major, said the thrill of going on an extended trip without actually booking a hotel room is enough to keep the half-planned trip a staple in the student vacation diet.

"My friends and I once went down to [South] Padre for four days without buying any beer or paying for a hotel room," Carrol said. "The first day we slept in our car, but we met some people my friend knew on the second day and just crashed with them for the rest of the trip."



MARK MCPHERSON/THE BATTALION

"During the day, we'd look for kegs on the beach and just go from one to the next, and we'd crash on the floor of the hotel at night. It ended up just costing us about \$50 or \$60 for food and a little money for the floor space," he said.

Testing the generosity of others can prove to be a risk as well as a boon to cash-strapped spring breakers.

"Be careful around other students from other schools," Paris said. "One hundred thousand students a year go to Cancun on Spring Break. You can meet students from another campus and party with them and have fun with them, but never go out alone. You'll never see them again after your trip, so be careful around others."

Flying to any location the week of Spring Break can be made better if students' think ahead.

"A lot of people don't know that Spring Break flights are always overbooked," Paris said. "You want to be at least two hours early for an international flight and at least one hour early for a flight in-country, or you might be out of luck."

For some, planning ahead means giving a large sum of money to a package tour, but tours are not without their risks.

"Those places thrive on Spring Break business, and to make money, they have to deal in volume," Paris said. "I remember two days before one of my groups was going to go on their trip, the hotel, which was overbooked by about 600 people, canceled all of our reservations. It might seem on the poster that a student gets a great deal, but they should remember that when they are traveling, they get what they pay for."

Students visiting a foreign country must take into account how far away from home they are and try to remember they are guests in a foreign land.

In the Bahamas, three or four girls I knew were partying with the locals," Paris said. "One got so drunk she found herself lying on a pier with no purse and no ID, passport or anything."

"I always keep my ID in my front pocket and other valuables in a safety deposit box. If you get in trouble with no ID, nobody knows who you are, and it can be a nightmare trying to get help."

## Luck of the Irish

St. Patrick's Day rooted in rich traditions

BY HINA PATEL  
The Battalion

There are the leprechauns, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow and pinching someone when they forget to wear green on March 17.

However, there is a bit more to St. Patrick's Day than legends and folklore.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, Saint Patrick, also known as the patron saint of Ireland, was not from the Emerald Isle, and his name was not Patrick, it was Maewyn.

Maewyn considered himself a pagan until age 16. At this point he was captured by Irish pirates who sold him and his fellow countrymen into slavery.

During this time, he became closer to God. He went to Gaul to study, acquired his Christian name of Patrick and returned to Ireland as second bishop to convert the people to Christianity.

He died March 17, 461, which was then proclaimed a saints day. Many pilgrims still go to Downpatrick, where St. Patrick is supposedly buried to visit the tombstone bearing the letter "P," which may or may not be the site.

There are a great number of stories associated with St. Patrick's Day. Some say Patrick raised people from the dead.

Jason Abernethy, a freshman biology major and a student of Irish descent, said there are also the more well-known stories.

"Patrick supposedly gave a sermon from a hilltop that drove all the snakes from Ireland," he said.

Among the symbols of St. Patrick's Day is the shamrock.

According to the *Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things*, an Irish tale relates how Patrick used the three-leaved clover to present living proof of the Trinity and how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit could all exist as separate elements of the same entity.

After the death of St. Patrick, his followers wore the shamrock as a symbol in remembrance of the saint. This later became the national flower of Ireland.

The color green became asso-

ciated with St. Patrick's Day because it falls just before spring when everything turns green. Other believe green is the color of hope.

Nina Caris, head of the department of biology, said St. Patrick's Day came to America when the Irish fled from their homeland because of the potato famine.

"It's amazing to realize that a microscopic organism actually brought the Irish to America," she said. "Many people of Irish descent would not be here if it weren't for the potato blight."

Although St. Patrick's Day started as a Catholic holy day, it has developed into a widely recognized holiday. It was first celebrated in Boston in 1737.

It has also become a tradition for the president of the United States and the Irish prime minister to meet on St. Patrick's Day to participate in a ceremony, which includes a parade ending in front of the White House.

Parades take place in 30 states, the largest being in New York City, which paints the center stripe down Fifth Avenue green.

Abernethy said Chicago, which has the largest Irish population in America, goes to greater extremes.

"I know that in Chicago, they dye the Chicago River green on Saint Patrick's Day," he said.

Heather Dunn Cantrell, a senior biomedical science major, said others celebrate the holiday by drinking green beer.

"I don't know about the Catholic roots of St. Patrick's day," she said. "But, I know now people seem to see it as an excuse to go out, drink lots of beer and have fun."



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