

# Boston college students and the bus ride experience

[Life](#)



The hot Dominican sun beats down upon a large group of Boston College students as they mill around the open-air lobby of the Barcelo Dominican Beach Hotel. It's a little bit past noon, and their lively impatience, spurred by an excitement unique to college students on spring break, presents a stark contrast to the languid movements of the hotel employees that surround them. Yet, it is because these students act like a veritable subset of the human species that these same employees encourage their rowdiness, buoying those up that can speak broken Spanish, and offering endless fruity drinks to everyone sprawled across the deep red and yellow lobby armchairs.

Finally, the bus supplied by the resort arrives, and there is a great roar of enthusiasm and anticipation as the group beelines for seats, a blur of brightly colored bikinis, tropical-printed bathing suits, a smattering of BC sunglasses and the occasional spray of water droplets as a blue towel proves just a bit too damp. The group of fifty or so students boards two different buses that look more like rides at an amusement park: Red metal benches for seats, a collapsing set of stairs that doubles as the wall of the bus, and red metal bars that act as seatbelts. All in all, perhaps not the safest of contraptions, especially when a few students look up and notice the straw ceiling, but these college kids don't really care: they're going on a pirate ship for the afternoon, a big old party boat that will fulfill all their wildest fantasies about being Captain Jack Sparrow in the Caribbean.

The kids on board begin to demonstrate their impatience once more, the boys yelling in mock anger and pretending to push the bus forward. Finally, with a disturbingly loud creaking noise, the driver starts the ignition and the bus begins to roll away from the hotel to deafening cheers from the spring

<https://assignbuster.com/boston-college-students-and-the-bus-ride-experience/>

break vacationers. On board the bus, the students joke with one another, saying that the resort is probably glad to be rid of them for a few hours, and they reminisce about the past week in a happy daze. Many are tipsy since they've been drinking varying degrees of alcoholic drinks since they woke up, all sugary and colorful, some called the "Sammy Sosa," the "Miami Vice," or just those plain old strawberry daiquiris and Piña Coladas.

Yet, something shifts once the bus teeters off the resort property, and now the jokes that run back and forth are forced and stilted: Many of the students have been warned not to leave the resort, and have had to promise their parents they wouldn't as a condition of being allowed to go on this trip....

And now this fairly sheltered group of Boston College students understands the warnings they obeyed but mostly laughed off as nonsensical worrying.

It's a completely different world out of the comfort and relative wealth of the resort (and the Barcelo Dominican Beach is by no means a five star hotel).

There are shantytowns, dilapidated buildings at every turn, extreme poverty just feet from the place where they've been partying with ease. The very

sand and the heat feels more oppressive, looks downtrodden in the face of

the colorful bus. It's as if a cloud of dust (apart from the windblown sand and dirt) has settled upon this region, and the people have become a part of a

crumbling landscape from which they cannot escape. They walk barefoot in

the street, malnourished and leering at the kids on the bus. It's an eye-

opening experience for many on board, and as the bus rumbles along, the

backdrop, the surrounding environment, becomes more and more ominous.

The boys joke that they won't make it back to the hotel alive, that their

driver is really kidnapping them, while the girls become a bit more subdued,

<https://assignbuster.com/boston-college-students-and-the-bus-ride-experience/>

finally understanding the magnitude of the danger that could arise if they aren't careful, finally realizing that their dads weren't just being overprotective and that the horror stories of young women on spring break come from somewhere. It's evident in their eyes, the dark pupils that have widened almost unanimously across the red metal benches, the slightly downcast posture that reveals the sun-kissed highlighted heads of these normally excitable students.

However, as the bus gives a final grumble down a winding dirt path, the BC students perk up as they realize their destination is upon them. They rise with some difficulty from the hot metal seats, as their similarly sunburned skin is sticking to the surface, and disembark on the soft sand. Following the driver, they find they've arrived at an offshoot of the resort and immediately feel at ease once again. After donning bright orange lifejackets, the students board a large barge that will take them to their final destination. On the barge, the students eagerly cluster towards the port and starboard sides, feeling the cool breeze whip across their faces, the bright sun beat down on their bodies, and the clear blue water peak in white foamy waves as the boat cuts across the ocean. And then, in no time at all, they have reached the pirate boat: A large wooden ship adorned with skulls and flags, and painted black and red...and full of Caribbean pirates! The men are like English guards, never once breaking character as the college students step across a plank from the barge to the pirate ship. They're dressed in black, with bandanas and make-up, and are of course carrying swords. They climb the nets that hang from the crow's nest and that act as sails...and then they dance. Somewhere, Caribbean music right out of the Johnny Depp movie

begins to thump loudly across the ship, across the ocean, and young women appear carting trays of rum and coke while the pirates grab the students and swing them around, egging them on to dance.

At that point, the poverty through which they traveled to get there disappears, the pool and beach lounging seems long forgotten, as this group of students blends with the Caribbean pirates, forming an entirely new culture demonstrating the power of imagination (and drinks in the hot Caribbean sun): The pirates lead the huge group in dance after dance, rocking the wooden boards that create the ship floor, enlisting help in pretending to shoot off the huge cannon on board. It becomes one big party, the pirates looting drinks from the students, the students trying and failing to steal the swords. Finally, everyone gets too hot, and the kids jump in the ocean with the pirates following suit. The music still blares from the speakers, and the pirates in the water begin pouring rum into the mouths of eager students as they attempt to do the same dance steps in the water as they were doing on board. The water is so clear, so beautifully saturated – a blend of pastel blue, white, sea-foam green and azure – that anyone above must be able to see the swinging hips of college students and pirates alike, the former screaming the words to the songs in hoarse voices that used to resemble their own.

It's a crazy series of moments that turns into an afternoon unparalleled by anything this group has experienced all week in the Dominican. The students have survived an afternoon with pirates, made new friends, and enjoyed an endless supply of drinks and chips and fruit skewers. The poverty that

surrounds their bubble of resort fun has all but left their full stomachs and tipsy heads as they engage in one last group dance, led once more by the pirates. Everyone claps, moves side-to-side in time to the music, spins and twirls, and finally collapses in a giddy daze of exhaustion. The pirates call for everyone to gather round and hand out shots of Mamajuana – a unique drink made of rum, wine and spices – and they corral the students to the center of the ship to make a traditional Caribbean toast. Upon the last note of the toast, the small shot containers are raised in one mass of white plastic, and then heads are thrown back simultaneously as the similarly experienced pirates and college students gulp the shots in one fluid movement.

Finally, the day comes to an end, and in a flurry of traffic, orange lifejackets are donned once more as the barge approaches, and the pirates help the intoxicated students on board, still in character despite the constant prodding of boys full of delicious rum. As the barge slowly makes its way towards shore, the kids become aware of a wedding taking place on the beach, which oddly unmasks the poverty of the area, rushing it to the forefront: The bride in her long white wedding gown, and the groom in his fancy black tuxedo, look completely out of place amid the small boys harassing the people on the beach, imploring them for just one US dollar in exchange for some unknown substance or some interesting artwork or jewelry. The shacks and the decaying wooden structures behind the happy couple are so at odds with the picture-perfect beach weddings to which these college students have been previously exposed in the northeast of the United States. The students look a bit deflated and dejected as they make their way back to the bus, but they quickly rid themselves of those feelings,

<https://assignbuster.com/boston-college-students-and-the-bus-ride-experience/>

shaking them off as they did the water and the lifejackets. They board the bus, and proceed to “sing” - scream and shout - songs to which they all know the lyrics the entire ride back to the resort, this time ignoring the disrepair and scarcity filtering in through the open-air bus along with the sunny breeze.