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FOUNDATION

# **LGBTQ+ Travel and HIV: Navigating the World Safely**



The long-standing mission of IGLTA, the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association, is to advance LGBTQ+ travel worldwide. One of the ways our charitable IGLTA Foundation supports that mission is by creating resources that focus on the safety of our traveling community, which often desires to explore more of the world than the general population. Just as many countries present added considerations for LGBTQ+ travelers, many also require unique precautions for travelers with HIV. This guide is designed to assist LGBTQ+ travelers with HIV with all stages of travel planning. As global tourism returns within the pandemic and beyond, we hope this contributes to your safe, healthy travels.



# Safe Travel

Just as the world is now a much friendlier place than it once was for LGBTQ+ travelers, it's also far friendlier for travelers with HIV. But since entry restrictions and challenges do still exist in some countries for people with HIV, it's important to know the complete details in advance if you're heading to one of these countries.

## Can I go?

HIV entry restrictions needn't be a concern anymore for the vast majority of international travelers, but several countries around the world do continue to restrict or forbid the short-term entry of foreign travelers with HIV. Until 2010, this even applied to the United States—but thanks to the hard work of global health advocates, the U.S. and many other countries have finally lifted these restrictions over the last decade or so. “Whilst some countries refuse work or residency visas for people with HIV, most do not restrict those with HIV from traveling for holidays, short visits, or those in transit,” says Dr. Tristan Barber, Consultant in HIV Medicine at London's Royal Free Hospital, and Chair of the Education and Scientific Subcommittee of the British HIV Association (BHIVA). Still, some very restrictive holdouts do remain, including Jordan, which expressly denies entry to any foreigner with HIV. Others like Bhutan, Iraq and the Solomon Islands permit entry for most short stays, but require an HIV test for slightly extended stays (more than 10 days in Iraq and the Solomon Islands, or more than 14 days in Bhutan). In a couple of countries, namely Equatorial Guinea and Papua New Guinea, the rules governing HIV testing for short-term travelers are not entirely clear, and may differ depending on age, nation of origin, and place of visa procurement. Russia does not require HIV tests for single-entry short-term visas, but it does for multi-entry visas.



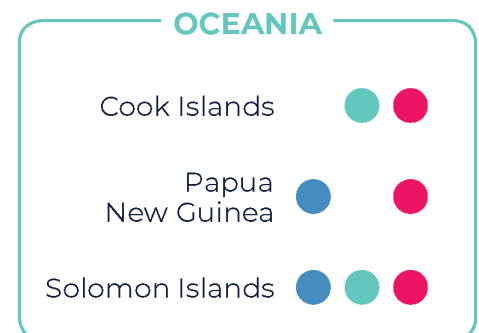
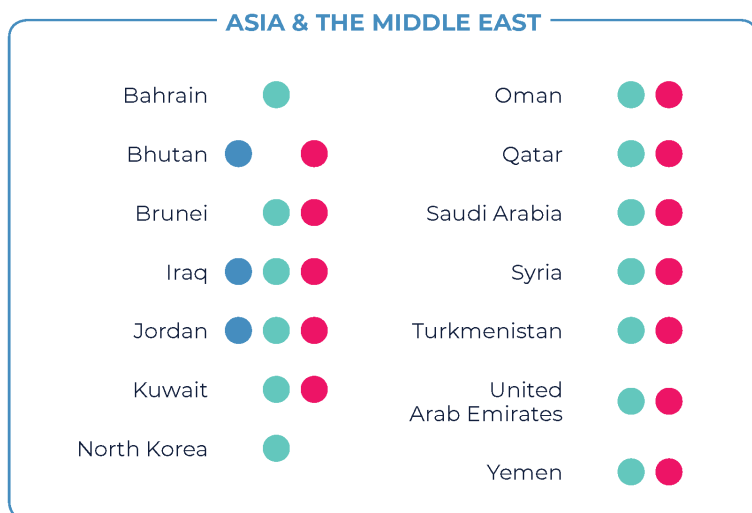
## Can I stay for longer?

Many additional countries do require applicants for longer-stay visas—including most student, work and residence visas—to take an HIV test. These nations include [Israel](#), [Egypt](#), Russia, and all countries on the Arabian Peninsula. In [Australia](#), visa applications to work or study in the medical field require HIV testing, as do permanent residence visa applications. A positive HIV status will not necessarily disqualify such applicants, but will be factored into consideration as a chronic health condition.

## Will I be safe?

Just because you're allowed into a country doesn't necessarily mean that your HIV status won't become an issue while you're there—and of course, just being openly LGBTQ+ can still put you at great risk in many places. Nearly 20 countries are known to deport travelers if officials become aware of their positive HIV status—and while deportation rules in some of these nations are only sporadically enforced, you should be aware of, and prepared for, the risk involved should you choose to visit one of those countries. Furthermore, and crucially, travelers should always remember that gay and trans conduct is still criminalized in more than 70 countries around the world—and in more than a dozen, it's even punishable by death.

## Country Advisories for HIV+ Travelers



- Countries that at least partially restrict entry for short-term travelers with HIV
- Countries that may deport foreigners with HIV
- Countries that also have laws potentially endangering LGBTQ+ people



# Smart Travel

Once you've determined that you can travel safely to your destination, there's still plenty more you should do to make sure that you also travel smartly.

## **BEFORE YOU GO**

### **Visit your doctor**

As with all medical decisions, your best game plan starts with your doctor. "People with HIV may want to take extra precautions before traveling internationally, such as discussing the medicines and vaccines they may need with their health care provider at least 4 to 6 weeks before travel," says Dr. John T. Brooks, Senior Medical Advisor for the Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention at America's Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Brooks says travelers should also know their own medical conditions, blood type, and current medications, ideally also translated into the local language where they'll be traveling. "Do also make sure you receive any necessary vaccinations before you go," says Barber, adding that most vaccines are safe for people with HIV—though some experts advise that special care be taken with vaccines containing live viruses.

### **Stock up on medications**

It goes without saying that you should take enough medication with you to last throughout your journey—but since travel rarely goes exactly as planned, it's best to take more medication than you think you'll need, lest you find yourself chasing down expensive medicines and/or forced to take unfamiliar substitutes. "Travelers with HIV must ensure they have enough medication for their trip, with extra in case of travel delays or disruptions," says Barber.



**SAFE & SMART CHECKLIST**  
FOR TRAVELERS WITH HIV

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**BEFORE YOU TRAVEL**

- Find out if your destination country has HIV travel restrictions
- Visit your home doctor for prescriptions, vaccines and advice
- Stock up on medications
- Confirm and/or upgrade your medical insurance coverage
- Research pharmacies and medical facilities at your destination

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**CARRY AS YOU GO**

- Medications
- Prescriptions
- Medical insurance info

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**ONCE YOU ARRIVE**

- Stay on schedule with your meds
- Mind your diet



## **Confirm your medical insurance**

It's important that international travelers with HIV determine whether their regular medical insurance will properly cover them while abroad—and that any additional travel insurance they purchase covers people with HIV. “Most policies should not now exclude those with HIV,” says Barber, “but it is worth checking with your insurance company.”

## **Research your destination's medical services**

Medical emergencies can happen while traveling, so it's best to get at least some sense of the services at your destination before you go, especially since stress and language differences could make on-the-spot crisis research more difficult. “The level and availability of medical care and pharmacies varies among countries and even within countries,” advises Brooks. “Before going abroad, travelers should consider researching and identifying potential health care providers and facilities at their travel destination.”



## **AS YOU GO**

Experts strongly advise that a few items should be carried with you as you travel rather than sent along in your checked luggage: medications, prescriptions, and proof of insurance. “It is recommended that travelers keep medications in carry-on luggage rather than checked bags for flights, in case luggage goes missing,” says Barber, adding that pills shouldn't be transferred into unmarked bottles, as this may arouse suspicion. “Most countries do not require a letter or prescription regarding your medications, but some may ask for this,” he says. Brooks agrees, and suggests carrying prescriptions with you just in case. “Travelers should carry copies of their prescriptions, and if needed, wear medical identification jewelry,” he says. Proof of all medical insurance policies should also remain with you as you travel.

## **WHILE YOU'RE THERE**

### **Stay on schedule with your meds**

People with HIV should continue to take their daily medications while traveling, and stick to their usual schedule as much as possible. “Travelers with HIV should continue to take care of themselves and protect others by taking their medications on schedule,” says Brooks. Barber agrees, adding that for those traveling across time zones, switching to local times is recommended as soon as possible rather than staggering doses. “If you always take your medicines before bedtime, take them before bedtime at your new destination,” he says. “If you are stable on treatment with an undetectable viral load, then being a few hours early or late with your doses will not cause problems. If you are traveling frequently, or far, or are very worried about this, then speak to your HIV clinic for further advice.”

### **Mind your diet**

Eating abroad can be an adventure for anyone, but those with HIV are advised to take special care with their diet in order to avoid disease-causing bacteria or parasites. “Travelers with HIV should stick to safe eating and drinking habits,” says Brooks, “as the food and water in some developing countries may contain germs that could make you sick.” Foods and drinks to avoid include raw and undercooked meat, raw vegetables and fruit you haven’t peeled yourself, street food, and tap water and ice made from it.

### **Find a doctor or pharmacy**

Should you find yourself in need of medication or medical services as you travel, let locals guide you to the best facilities. “Seek local advice on good pharmacies or hospitals if possible,” says Barber. “If you have an accident or a problem clearly unrelated to HIV then you may not need to disclose your HIV status, but do bear in mind that if you take or are prescribed any new medicines, you must be sure these do not interact with your HIV medicines.” Barber suggests that if you’re in doubt and/or unable to obtain interaction advice locally, you can contact your HIV clinic, or use the University of Liverpool’s HIV drug [Interaction Checker](#). Global travelers should also remember that tuberculosis is very common worldwide, and can be severe in people with HIV. Those with HIV should therefore avoid hospitals and clinics where coughing tuberculosis patients are treated, Brooks advises.

Sources & further information:

[Traveling with HIV \(CDC\)](#)

[Vaccination guidelines \(BHIVA\)](#)

[Yellow Book \(CDC\)](#)

[Traveling Outside the U.S. \(HIV.gov, U.S. State Department\)](#)

[What vaccinations are recommended for people with HIV? \(NAM Aidsmap\)](#)

Award-winning LGBTQ travel and culture journalist Dan Allen contributes to numerous outlets including NBCNews.com, CBS Watch, EDGE Media Network, Passport and the Los Angeles Blade. A Michigan native and NYU graduate, he’s currently based in Los Angeles, where he also serves as Membership Director for GALECA, the Society of LGBTQ Entertainment Critics.