



Staying safe and healthy: Tips for LGBTQ travellers

[OCTOBER 16, 2019 \(HTTPS://WWW.IAMAT.ORG/BLOG/STAYING-SAFE-AND-HEALTHY-TIPS-FOR-LGBTQ-TRAVELLERS/\)](https://www.iamat.org/blog/staying-safe-and-healthy-tips-for-lgbtq-travellers/)

Travel is for everyone

It's never been easier for LGBTQ travellers to see the world. As visibility and acceptance of the LGBTQ community grows, travellers have more options for independent travel. There are also an increasing number of LGBTQ-focused companies specializing in tours, cruises, and custom trips that offer adventure, luxury, family fun, or simply a safe space to be yourself. According to [OutNow Consulting \(https://www.outnowconsulting.com/latest-updates/press-centre/lgbt-travel-market-annual-spend-now-exceeds-usd\\$218-billion.aspx\)](https://www.outnowconsulting.com/latest-updates/press-centre/lgbt-travel-market-annual-spend-now-exceeds-usd$218-billion.aspx), LGBTQ travellers spent \$218 billion dollars on travel and tourism in 2018 alone.

In this blog, we highlight what LGBTQ travellers should keep in mind when planning a trip, including tips on staying safe, the importance of researching LGBTQ laws and cultural attitudes, and what to do if you need to see a doctor abroad. Currently, there are limited resources out there about what LGBTQ travellers (particularly trans folks) should consider when seeking

medical care during travel. We try to fill the gap by providing some guidance with help from travel writer [Bani Amor](https://baniamor.com/) (<https://baniamor.com/>), who shares their tips for trans travellers throughout the article.

Research, research, research

The more you know, the easier it is to plan a safe and healthy trip. Keep these travel health basics in mind:

- **Make an appointment with your health practitioner 6 weeks before your trip.** This gives you enough time to get vaccinated and have prescriptions refilled if necessary. (Travelling on a budget? See our [Travel Vaccines on a Budget series](https://www.iamat.org/blog/category/vaccinations/travel-vaccines-on-a-budget/) (<https://www.iamat.org/blog/category/vaccinations/travel-vaccines-on-a-budget/>), for advice on keeping costs down.)
- **Find out about health risks at your destination.** (<https://www.iamat.org/country-health-advice/>) If insect-borne diseases like Dengue are a risk at your destination, pack insect repellent and [learn how to prevent insect bites](https://www.iamat.org/insect-bite-prevention/) (<https://www.iamat.org/insect-bite-prevention/>).
- **Choose safe food and water.** Food and water can become contaminated with pathogens that cause travellers' diarrhea and other illnesses. Always wash your hands frequently and thoroughly before eating. Remember, the rule of thumb for food is: Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it! [Check out our Food and Water Safety Tips](https://www.iamat.org/food-and-water-safety/) (<https://www.iamat.org/food-and-water-safety/>), for all the do's and don't's.
- **Be prepared for safer sex.** (<https://www.iamat.org/blog/sexual-health-and-travel-5-things-to-know/>) Pack an adequate supply of condoms – regardless of whether you intend to have sex or not. The availability and quality of condoms may vary at your destination.

Tips for trans travellers: What should I consider when planning a trip?

Bani Amor: As this is focused on health and medical care, I'll mostly address trans folks who are medically transitioning. First, consider everything you're going to need for the duration of your trip – hormones, packers, binders, gel inserts, etc. and count how much is needed with the aim that you'd bring more than enough with you. Then separate what you can get on your trip versus not. This requires research.

Is there a place where you can get free or cheap clean syringes at the rate at which you'll need them for the duration of your trip? Do you really need to bring a lot of alcohol wipes or can you just buy them elsewhere? And will you have to either bring a cooler to keep liquid hormones refrigerated or have access to one for the duration of your trip?

If you can't bring everything with you, look up local laws and see what you'd need to bring to be able to possibly get gender-specific medical care abroad. Do you need a note from your doctor or psychiatrist?

Staying safe as an LGBTQ traveller

Learn about cultural attitudes toward LGBTQ people at your destination, which may be different from what you're used to. Research your destination and talk to other LGBTQ travellers and locals to find out about their experiences.

Some countries also have laws that put LGBTQ people at risk. [Anti-LGBTQ laws often use vague terms](https://ilga.org/state-sponsored-homophobia-report) (https://ilga.org/state-sponsored-homophobia-report) like ‘immorality’ or ‘indecent’. As a result, LGBTQ people can be targeted for many different reasons including their appearance, public displays of affection, expressing support for the LGBTQ community, or communicating on same-sex dating apps. Penalties for breaking these laws can include imprisonment or even the death penalty. It’s definitely possible to travel in countries with anti-LGBTQ laws, but staying safe begins with learning about local laws and how they are enforced. [Here’s an example](https://skift.com/2019/04/02/travel-advisors-serving-lgbtq-travelers-must-know-all-the-nuances/) (https://skift.com/2019/04/02/travel-advisors-serving-lgbtq-travelers-must-know-all-the-nuances/) of how David Rubin, who runs an LGBTQ-focused travel company, would advise a gay couple going on their honeymoon:

...For a few of the places you are visiting in the north of Ethiopia it is really better that we book you a room with two separate beds and it’s better if you go under the radar. With that in mind, let’s have you go there. In Dubai, open displays of affection, not a great idea. Sharing a bed and being open in the hotel, fine...I’m not going to tell a client they shouldn’t go somewhere, but I am going to be very careful in sharing what the laws are, what the norms are and what acceptable behavior would be. Then the client can decide.

Here are a few resources on LGBTQ laws around the world to get you started:

- [Equaldex](https://www.equaldex.com/) (https://www.equaldex.com/) – LGBTQ rights by country
- [Destination Pride](https://destinationpride.org/) (https://destinationpride.org/), – LGBTQ laws, rights, and social sentiment
- [Human Rights Watch](http://internap.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt_laws/) (http://internap.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt_laws/), – Maps of anti-LGBT laws by country
- [The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association \(ILGA\)](https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws/) (https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws) – Maps of sexual orientation laws

Finding reliable healthcare abroad

Let’s say that despite your best efforts to stay healthy, you’re ill and need to see a doctor during your trip. Where can you turn?

University hospitals typically offer reliable medical care and often have English-speaking doctors on staff. Our [Medical Directory](https://www.iamat.org/medical-directory) (https://www.iamat.org/medical-directory) can also help you locate reputable, English-speaking doctors. Bringing a friend with you to the hospital or clinic can help you feel more comfortable and reduce anxiety.

If you have [travel health insurance](https://www.iamat.org/travel-health-insurance-overview) (https://www.iamat.org/travel-health-insurance-overview), you should also contact your insurer. Depending on your insurance policy, you may be limited to the doctors in their network.

Tips for trans travellers: Where can I find a doctor abroad?

Bani Amor: I would consider insurance first. If shopping for travel insurance, make sure that this question is addressed in your research. I would also look for LGBTQIA+ drop-in centers.

Make sure your legal documents are in order and translated. Try to have a friend with you if going to the hospital or even a pharmacy. As always, research what trans people from that place are saying online.

What if I need to buy medication?

It's best to purchase prescription and over-the-counter medication before you travel. If you need to purchase medication abroad, buy it from a licensed pharmacist. **Never buy medication from street markets.** [Fake medications are common worldwide \(https://www.iamat.org/blog/are-you-savvy-about-counterfeit-medications/\)](https://www.iamat.org/blog/are-you-savvy-about-counterfeit-medications/), and they can have deadly consequences.

If you're travelling with medication, a medical device, or medical supplies (such as syringes), ensure that your name on the label matches the name on your passport. Bring a letter from your health practitioner that includes the generic and brand name of your medication, the condition being treated, the dosage, and details of any medical devices or supplies if needed. If possible, have the letter translated into your destination country's language. This can help to prevent issues at border crossings. If you need a prescription refill while you're travelling, this documentation can help the doctor and pharmacist at your destination determine which medication and dosage to prescribe.

Keys to a healthy trip

Staying safe and healthy as an LGBTQ traveller takes planning, but it's worth it. Keep these 3 things in mind:

- Before your trip, make an appointment with your health practitioner to make sure you're fit to travel and get prescriptions refilled and travel vaccines, if needed.
- Research laws and local attitudes toward LGBTQ people. This will help you make informed decisions when planning the trip and during travel.
- Make sure you have documentation for any prescriptions, medical devices, and medical supplies. Double-check that your name on the documentation matches the name on your passport. Try to have your documents translated into the language of your destination country.

Now sit back, relax, and enjoy your trip!

More resources for LGBTQ travellers

[Beyond Borders and Binaries: A Trans Traveler Shares What It's Like to Navigate the World](https://www.afar.com/magazine/beyond-borders-and-binaries-a-trans-traveler-shares-what-its-like-to-navigate) (<https://www.afar.com/magazine/beyond-borders-and-binaries-a-trans-traveler-shares-what-its-like-to-navigate>) – Bani Amor, AFAR

[The LGBTQ Guide to Travel Safety](https://www.manaboutworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/LGBTQ-Guide-to-Travel-Safety.pdf) (<https://www.manaboutworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/LGBTQ-Guide-to-Travel-Safety.pdf>) (PDF) – Man About World, AIG Travel

[The Most Important Resources for LGBTQ Travelers](https://www.afar.com/magazine/the-most-important-resources-for-lgbtq-travelers) (<https://www.afar.com/magazine/the-most-important-resources-for-lgbtq-travelers>) – AFAR

[#TravelingWhileTrans: How to stay safe while seeing the world](https://matadornetwork.com/read/travelingwhiletrans-stay-safe-seeing-world/) (<https://matadornetwork.com/read/travelingwhiletrans-stay-safe-seeing-world/>) – Matador Network

[How to plan a safe trip for gay and transgender travelers](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/30/business/how-to-plan-a-safe-trip-for-gay-and-transgender-travelers.html) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/30/business/how-to-plan-a-safe-trip-for-gay-and-transgender-travelers.html>) – New York Times

[Tips for LGBTQ travelers to visit the world safely](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/18/travel/tips-for-lgbtq-travelers-to-visit-the-world-safely.html) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/18/travel/tips-for-lgbtq-travelers-to-visit-the-world-safely.html>),
– New York Times

[Equitable care for transgender travelers](https://athnablog.wordpress.com/2018/06/26/blog-25-equitable-care-for-transgender-travelers/) (<https://athnablog.wordpress.com/2018/06/26/blog-25-equitable-care-for-transgender-travelers/>), –
American Travel Health Nurses Association

[The International LGBTQ+ Travel Association](https://www.iglta.org/) (<https://www.iglta.org/>) – IGLTA

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