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...at home



...away

A POCKET GUIDE FOR GAY MEN
WHO ARE PLANNING TO TRAVEL

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOKLET IS FOR
GAY MEN WHO ARE
TRAVELLING – EITHER
WITHIN AUSTRALIA OR
OVERSEAS – BUT IS
USEFUL READING FOR
ALL GAY MEN.
IT IS INTENDED FOR
BOTH HIV NEGATIVE
AND POSITIVE MEN.
THE INFORMATION
COVERED INCLUDES
SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR
WHILE TRAVELLING,
PLANNING YOUR TIME
AWAY AND ISSUES
AROUND HIV
TREATMENTS WHILE
TRAVELLING.

★★★★ TRAVEL ★★★★★

WHY?

Gay men travel for many different reasons – for work, to visit friends or family or lovers, or just for fun. Travel can be on your own, with friends (gay or straight or both), or with a partner. These things all affect the way you approach travel and even the way you behave.

I love travel, love meeting new people, love immersing myself in the local culture. Most of the time when I have travelled overseas I have been with a partner. I don't know necessarily if my sexuality makes any difference.

TONY

Many gay men travel to feel part of, and be part of, a larger gay community or world.

I went away to get used to being gay actually. I went to Europe to observe the gay life.

CHRIS

WHERE?

Just as there are many different reasons for travel, there are many different places to go.

Some places also offer opportunities for adventures and experiences that are not available at home. Many gay men choose travel destinations based on their ideas about the kinds of sex and sexual partners that will be available. Organised sex tours, especially to Asian destinations, are also common. However, sex may just be an incidental part of travel – an added bonus when and if it happens.

I love going to London for the sex and the bars and all of that, and everywhere has got a dark room. Even in Paris and Spain and other places that I went to as well, you know, it's not hard to find the bars that have got the dark rooms and I love 'em.

BASIL

In Japan for example, and other Asian countries, I have more sex than I do here at home. It is not unusual for an older man in a cruising situation to go home with the hunkiest number.

HOWARD

As a gay man you may also want to find out about laws related to homosexuality for the countries you intend to visit, or about the cultural and social acceptability of gay men.

TRAVEL TIP

Avoid making assumptions about the HIV status of sexual partners. These can often be incorrect. Many gay men, both HIV positive and negative, think that if someone is willing to fuck without a condom, they must be the same HIV status as them.

If you are engaging in sex work – either as a client or a worker – you should be aware of the laws governing this in the country you are visiting. It's also important not to make assumptions about the health status of men you have sex with, based on the known prevalence of HIV or sexually transmissible infections (STIs). However, it's good to be aware of common STIs in the places you are visiting.

FREEDOM

Part of the freedom of travel is being in a different place from where you live – where you don't know anyone (or only a few people). You may also seek anonymity so that you can try things you wouldn't at home.

Many men say that they feel more confident about approaching people, either generally, or in a sexual sense, when they are on holidays. This may mean being more likely to abandon the rules you usually apply to your own behaviours, including safe sexual behaviours.

I would stick my head out a bit more...if I'm travelling I'd be into more experiences... because you've got limited time.

JEFF

TRAVEL TIP

Make a conscious decision that you're going to use condoms for sex when you are away from home. If you leave it up to someone else to take the initiative, then it's less likely you will end up having protected sex.

I'm not generally that outgoing in any kind of a social situation but when I'm travelling I force myself to, even if don't know the language.

DAVID

Part of the fun of travelling is having new and different experiences. However, sometimes the desire to be adventurous can tempt you to do things that you wouldn't do at home. The sense of freedom you have, the anonymity, as well as the increased sexual opportunities can play a role.

Your usual decision-making processes may also be influenced by the use of alcohol and recreational drugs, the location you're in and the people with you.

I'd never had a sauna experience before I went overseas. I haven't been since I've been back either, but that was what I felt was adventurous. It was something that I had never even considered.

GREG

You get to a place and you go out to a bar or a sauna or somewhere like that. So you've met the person in different circumstances and you're in a different sort of environment. That doesn't necessarily mean any more or less that I would go and do unsafe sex. But it's just the fact that it is different so you have to be aware.

STEPHEN

TRAVEL TIP

If you're on HIV treatments, pack enough for your entire trip. Carry your pills in your hand luggage. Use alarms, dosette boxes, etc. to remind you about dose times if you think you'll have trouble remembering.

I mean I'm not, nowhere near in the celibate league, but yeah I think I'm just a bit more reckless about who I fuck when I'm on holidays.

CON

Travelling may be a time when you live on the edge a bit. It is often an opportunity to abandon the rules, routines and restrictions of our everyday lives. Sometimes you may do things you wouldn't do back home. This sense of adventure also means being less careful about what you do when you're away from home, and this makes you more likely to take increased risks. This may include being more likely to have sex without a condom when you are travelling.

The freedom of travel, however, doesn't mean freedom from consequences. HIV transmission can occur anywhere. Many HIV positive gay men in Australia believe that they acquired their infection when they were away from home – either in another Australian state or outside the country.

Apart from the feeling that you can do things while you're away that you might not usually do at home, sometimes there are situations that you might find yourself in, that may affect your behaviour and how you assess risk.

Remembering to take condoms with you is an important factor in having protected sex with casual partners while you are on holiday. Being determined to only have protected sex also helps in maintaining condom use while you are away from home.

You can just go and you totally let go of all your inhibitions and just throw yourself in and have a fantastic time... and no there weren't any condoms.

SEBASTIAN

I just didn't want to bother about safe sex – I was enjoying myself too much.

RICHARD

I'm probably more open to having unsafe sex on holidays. Yeah, just more open to it. If someone doesn't say anything and you don't say anything either then you're just more open to it. Whether I actually do or don't depends on the night.

EMILE

ROMANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Travel can include romance, but often it's "Mr Right Now" who is more important than "Mr Right".

Likewise, if the guys you meet don't seem to want to know you after sex, it may be that they are simply being realistic about the difficulties in pursuing a relationship with someone who lives far away. It's not necessarily personal. And if you meet them at a sex venue or a beat, etc. then it may not be realistic to expect much either. Most guys go to places like that because they want to get off, they are not necessarily there looking for a relationship.

Most of the time that's all that people want, they don't want to know about lunch the next day, they don't want to get to know you.

ALESSIO

You try and meet someone meaningful if you can, but otherwise it's you know, just quick fun.

PETER

I had a lot of casual sex. Although I did meet somebody and we did have a great time together and it got too deep, too fast. Spun him out, spun me out. I wasn't expecting that. But it would have been nice to pursue that.

HAROLD

★★★★★ **NEGOTIATING SEX** ★★★★★

HIV

Although many gay men who have unprotected sex believe that the guy they are fucking with is the same HIV status as them, this is rarely discussed in casual sex situations.

In most cases, beliefs about HIV status are based on assumptions about the other guy.

What I find easier about casual or anonymous sex is that I don't have to tell them I'm positive.

IVAN

Yep. It's very easy. People don't even ask. They just start probing with their dick and you just let them do it or vice versa. You probe and they let you do it. So, they just don't even ask.

ADAM

I don't disclose. I simply don't see it as necessary because I am having safe sex anyway.

KEITH

I have had a couple of occasions present themselves when I was in Italy where there were no condoms and it was made abundantly clear that no condoms were needed or wanted. Whether they were positive or negative, I have no idea.

MARCO

Some HIV positive men choose to fuck without condoms with other positive men. Sometimes this is discussed, and agreed, beforehand. However, some positive men presume that other men who are willing to fuck without a condom must also be HIV positive.

Some HIV negative men, on occasion, also choose not to use condoms with other men they believe to be HIV negative. These decisions are sometimes made after discussing HIV status. However, they are often based on assumptions eg "He'd tell me if he is HIV positive – especially if he's not going to use a condom". However, this is not necessarily the case.

It's tempting to believe that men who are willing to fuck without condoms must be the same HIV status as you. But these assumptions can be wrong. You can't take it for granted that someone is HIV positive just because he is willing to fuck without a condom, or that someone who is HIV positive will tell you.

I don't even know if they are positive. I never ask. I have this thing that if someone is going to engage in unsafe sex, I will stall. But if they want to, then I will have unsafe sex.

JULIAN

TRAVEL TIP

If you are going somewhere new, find out about the legal status of homosexuality.

TRAVEL TIP

If you're travelling to somewhere you've never been before, take lots of condoms and sachets of lube with you. In some places they are difficult to find or are of a low quality.

TRAVEL TIP

If you're HIV-positive, find out whether the required vaccinations are safe for positive people.

Basically he just said, you know, to put it in him. I didn't want to say – or I was too scared to say – I can't because I'm HIV positive. So I actually didn't really say anything I just did it.

GEORGE

Telling a casual sexual partner you are HIV positive can be a very difficult and risky thing to do. Many HIV positive men have had bad experiences where disclosing their HIV status has led to rejection by potential sexual partners.

RESPONSIBILITY

Safe sex is the responsibility of both HIV positive and negative gay men. However, some people believe that HIV positive men should be responsible for safe sex, or at least should tell all their sexual partners about their HIV status.*

**Laws related to disclosure of HIV status vary in different countries and are also different in Australian states and territories.*

So, in situations where they are completely anonymous, many positive men feel the burden of this responsibility is lifted to a certain extent. This does not mean though that condoms won't be used in these situations, but it may be one factor that leads to this decision.

Of course, many HIV positive men choose to use condoms every time, no matter where they are.

I have to be responsible here, like I suppose I should be anyway, because everyone knows everyone here and it takes two seconds for a story to get around town.

TOM

I am a little more partial to people that are also positive. I don't know why. I don't have unsafe sex, I have been asked to but I just won't. It just won't happen.

ANDREW

Overseas I almost know that I can have unsafe sex if I choose. Whereas here, because you know people, you use a bit more discretion and judgment if you decide to have unsafe sex.

ADAM

Some men, positive or negative, sometimes fuck without condoms and follow strategies they believe will reduce the chance of getting, or passing on, HIV. For negative men these strategies include only fucking i.e. not getting fucked. For positive men, these include only getting fucked, or if fucking, pulling out before coming. **However, none of these approaches actually removes the risk of HIV transmission.**

It is important to know that someone you are having sex with may be prepared not to use condoms because he believes it is safe enough – either for himself or for you.

If you do fuck without condoms you should be aware that this is not an effective long-term strategy and consider whether this needs to be changed.

CONDOM USE

Introducing or suggesting condoms during sexual encounters can be difficult and for various reasons it may be even more difficult when you are away from home. Not all countries have the same kind of culture of safe sex that exists in Australia.

Suggesting condoms for fucking can sometimes be interpreted as a disclosure that you are HIV positive, even if this is not the case. Not introducing or suggesting condoms can also be interpreted in different ways.

Yeah, there was a guy who was dead keen on giving barebacks and I wouldn't – and I said to him, look, you know, what's the story? Because in Melbourne if you use a condom you're assumed to be HIV positive and in Sydney you're assumed to be HIV negative. Or vice versa, I don't know what the mythology is. And he couldn't tell me. He said, oh I don't know and I thought, oh you're a dickhead.

CON

One of the problems then, in about '89 or '90, was that if you did go into a cubicle with somebody and produced the condoms and the lube, the reaction was, oh there is something wrong with him. That would be the guy's reaction. Often the door would be opened and out they would scuttle like frightened rabbits.

MALCOLM

★★★★★ PLANNING YOUR TRIP ★★★★★

FINDING OTHER GAY MEN

For many gay men, finding sex – or at least finding other gay men – when travelling is not too difficult. Somehow instinct takes over, or a friendly local will point you in the right direction.

Laws related to homosexuality vary from country to country so it's a good idea to be familiar with the specific laws of the

countries you intend to visit. In some countries there can be heavy penalties for male-to-male sex. Also, where male-to-male sex is not illegal, age of consent laws for sex vary considerably, as do laws related to sex work. This is the case between the different states and territories in Australia too.

It is worthwhile doing some research before you go. This can be done through the Internet or using printed gay guides that are readily available in bookshops. Most cities with large commercial gay scenes will have weekly newspapers that list gay venues such as bars and nightclubs as well as sex venues such as saunas (bath houses) and cruising clubs.

The gay travel book, Spartacus, is pretty good. It's good enough to get you started and once you get started somewhere, then you're right. It's good enough to get your leg in the door somewhere, that's the main thing.

HARRY

So, you only need to find one gay pub from wherever you are and you're set.

HUGO

www links

<http://www.iglhrc.org> The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission site has news and updates on individual countries.

<http://www.gaystation.de/law/index.html> This site contains information on the legal status of homosexuality in individual countries.

Odysseus: The International Gay Travel Planner and *Spartacus International Gay Guide* both include information on laws related to homosexuality for individual countries

TRAVEL TIP

If you are having regular casual sex, have a general sexual health check up before you go away and again when you return home.

There's a thing on the Internet called 'Cruising for Sex' and I subscribe to that. They have listings for all countries.

JACKSON

WHAT TO EXPECT

Australian gay men often find it surprising that some

of the things they take for granted are not the same elsewhere. This goes for expectations about sex venues as well.

Even access to condoms and lube can be an issue. These are not always readily available, and in some sex venues they are not provided in the way they are in most places in Australia. Sometimes they are available, but you have to go to the front counter and purchase them.

In some countries it may not be possible to get access to the same quality condoms as those available in Australia. For these reasons it's a good idea to take a supply of condoms and lube with you when you are travelling.

And sure enough when I went to my first sauna... no condoms. I was in the room, the cubicle, and I reached up just expecting there to be condoms and lube and there was nothing. I said, "where are the condoms?", and he said "what?" Lucky I had some with me.

RICHARD

I always take a supply of condoms. I always have a bag with multiple pockets on it. I wouldn't even go away for a weekend without that bag, you know, and condoms and stuff like that will always be in it.

KEN

If I meet people at home and they come back to my place I know I've got a supply of condoms and lube and things like that. When I'm on holidays, I try and take condoms with me.

STEPHEN

TRAVEL TIP

Remember that there is still a risk of HIV transmission to the insertive partner ("top") during fucking.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG...

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, there is, in a few places, a treatment available that may prevent HIV infection. This is called post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP.

In Australia, at the time of writing, PEP is available for non-occupational exposures to HIV (such as through sex or injecting drug use) *only* in NSW, Queensland and the ACT, and through one hospital in Victoria. In many other countries it is not available at all, or you have to pay the full cost of the treatment.

PEP is a course of anti-HIV drugs taken at specific times of the day for a period of four weeks. PEP does not guarantee prevention of HIV infection. However, research shows that PEP may significantly decrease the chances of infection after exposure to HIV.

The drugs used are the same as those used to treat people who are already HIV positive. They can often cause unpleasant side effects.

PEP is most effective when taken immediately or within a couple of hours after exposure to HIV. However, PEP may still be effective if taken within 72 hours.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV you should seek medical advice as soon as possible. Where it is available in Australia, PEP can be accessed through sexual health clinics or doctors who specialise in HIV/AIDS, or through hospital accident and emergency departments. In other countries you could contact a local HIV/AIDS organisation or gay health service to find out if PEP is available. These are usually listed in gay newspapers, magazines and travel guides.

★★ TRAVELLING WITH HIV TREATMENTS ★★

BEFORE YOU GO

Being HIV positive can influence our decisions about travel in a number of ways. Many positive guys are cautious about travelling to places where they have reason to be concerned about their health, or where there is only limited access to quality medical services – especially with experience in HIV medicine.

Some countries also have restrictions on travel for people with HIV, even for tourists – for example the United States. Carrying treatments can therefore be a disclosure of being HIV positive and may result in you being denied entry. Some people choose to minimise this risk by posting their treatments ahead – either

to friends or to a PLWHA organisation that will hold the treatments for a short time. Remember that this does not always work – packages go missing or get held up. If you are posting ahead, do it in plenty of time and check that your treatments have arrived safely.

Entry and visa requirements for individual countries can be found on the PLWHA (NSW) website at: <http://www.plwha.org.au>

It restricts how long I can go overseas now. I can take a maximum of three months worth with me. If I wanted to stay longer I would have to either come back or get someone to mail them for me.

TAN

It is a lot easier to conceal a handful of tablets than boxes and boxes of them. I posted all my medication to the first city I was visiting and then was able to take it right across America with me without any problems.

KEITH

ON THE MOVE

Being on holidays means a big change to daily routines. Disruption or change to daily routines is one of the most common reasons for missing doses of HIV treatments.

Time zone changes and variations to normal daily routines are reasons for missing doses. If you have chosen a particular drug combination because it suits your lifestyle (around your eating, sleeping, and working patterns), travelling can upset this balance.

It's only two hours time zone difference but I just wasn't hungry at dinner, then I was hungry later. So I was taking some of my drugs before eating and then I was missing out the drugs I needed with food.

BEN

If I don't remember, it's because I consciously say I'm not taking it. Although when I came back last time I missed three doses, because of jet lag and sleeping. I slept through the night and didn't take my night pills.

MARCO

If you plan to stay in a new time zone for a week or more, you should consider changing your dose routine until it is in sync with the local time. This can be done by changing the dosing time gradually (by moving the dose slightly each time) until they fall at more convenient times. This is particularly important for drugs that need to be taken at regular intervals. Work out a schedule with your doctor.

If you are in a different time zone for only a few days, it may be easier to keep the same medication routine as at home. Book wake-up telephone calls or use an alarm clock to wake you for doses in the middle of the night.

I have a little pill case that's really flat and I can put it in my pocket. If I know I'm going to be out then I always make sure I take it with me.

JASON

If you are travelling with treatments, carry your prescriptions and a doctor's letter with you. The letter does not need to reveal that you are HIV positive, but it should include the words: "These medications have been prescribed for a medical condition," and a list of all the medications you are on. Keep the letter and prescriptions separate from your medications, so that if you lose one, you do not lose the other.

You do not need to declare your medications when you go through customs, but if a customs official checks your luggage and finds your medications, you may be asked to produce a doctor's letter and the prescriptions. Keep the medication in the original bottles with your name on them. Some countries have strict laws on drug labelling.

Ask your doctor or the Travellers' Medical and Vaccination Centre for a detailed guide on avoiding food-borne diseases when you are away. In countries with different food hygiene standards, it is best to avoid tap water, uncooked food (shellfish, salad and fruit dishes) and some meat products. Boiled or bottled water (sealed), thoroughly cooked food and fruit you have peeled yourself (with clean hands) are safest.

TRAVEL TIP

If you're HIV negative and you believe you may have been exposed to HIV, find out about the availability of HIV post-exposure prophylaxis or "PEP".

TRAVEL TIP

If you're looking for the local gay scene, use local gay guides or international ones such as *Spartacus*, or even the Internet.

TAKING A TREATMENTS HOLIDAY?

Going on holiday is also a time when many people consider taking a break from treatment – sometimes also called a drug holiday.

Sometimes it is easier for some people to stop taking their pills altogether rather than having to plan ahead with doctors' certificates or sending the treatments beforehand for collection upon arrival. If you plan to stop taking your HIV medications while you travel, it is best to stop taking the whole combination of drugs all at once. Drug holidays are not necessarily recommended for all people on treatments. You should consult your doctor or your AIDS Council Treatments Officer before you stop. It is also best to keep your viral load and CD4 (T cell) count closely monitored after stopping treatments. Some doctors recommend taking extra blood tests at four weeks and then again at eight weeks after stopping treatments. After these extra tests it is recommended that you return to your usual three month cycle. You should keep this in mind if you are going to be travelling for an extended period of time.

VACCINATIONS

For overseas travel, tell your doctor where you are going and check for any special medication or vaccination requirements.

For people who are HIV positive it is important not to be given any "live" vaccinations. These usually include vaccinations for yellow fever, TB, measles, and typhoid oral dose vaccine. Some anti-diarrhoea treatment can be useful, but ask your doctor which ones are suitable for people with HIV.

MEDICARE AND TRAVEL INSURANCE

Australian residents are entitled to "immediately necessary medical and public hospital treatment" in the UK, New Zealand, Finland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Republic of Ireland and Sweden under reciprocal health care agreement with these countries.

HIV related conditions should be covered by this arrangement, however ongoing HIV therapy would be at the discretion of each individual country. The exact nature of the agreement between Medicare and each of these countries differs slightly.

For more info contact your local AIDS Council

ACT: 02 6257 2855

Gold Coast 07 5575 6966

NSW: Sydney 02 9206 2000;
1800 063 060

Sunshine Coast 07 5441 1222

W Sydney 02 9204 2400

SA: 08 8362 1611

Hunter 02 4927 6808

TAS: 03 6234 1242;

Illawarra 02 4226 1163

1800 005 900

Northern Rivers 02 6622 1555;

VIC: 03 9865 6700;

1800 633 637

1800 134 840

Mid North Coast 02 6584 0943;

WA: 08 9429 9900;

1300 658 878.

1800 671 130

NT: 08 8941 1711;

Australian Federation of

1800 181 888

AIDS Organisations (AFAO)

QLD: Brisbane 07 3017 1777;

02 9281 1999

1800 177 434

National Association of

Cairns 07 4051 102

People Living With HIV/AIDS

Townsville 07 4721 1384

(NAPWA) 02 9281 2511

For information regarding these agreements visit the Health Insurance Commission site at: <http://www.hic.gov.au>

To access emergency medical care under the reciprocal health care agreement, in any of these countries, you are required to present your Australian passport as well as your current Medicare card. Medicare also recommends taking travel insurance in case your situation is not covered by these agreements. Insurance is strongly recommended for the United States of America where the cost of health care is extremely high.

However, while most illnesses and conditions are covered by private travel insurance regardless of HIV status, illnesses directly related to HIV are not generally covered by private travel insurance.

Specific country information and hints and information for Australian travellers can be found through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade at: <http://www.dfat.gov.au>

Also People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) NSW provides information on entry requirements for people with HIV. This is at: <http://www.plwha.org.au>

The US Centers for Disease Control also provides information for travellers. This includes required vaccinations and other precautions for specific regions. It is located at: <http://cdc.gov>

Another site called Travel Health ONLINE at <http://www.tripprep.com> provides individual health and safety information for over 200 countries as well as travel medicine providers.

TREATMENT TIPS

- Pack enough medication for your entire trip. Carry it with you in your hand luggage rather than in your suitcase.
- Carry your prescriptions and a doctor's letter with you. The letter should include the words: "These medications have been prescribed for a medical condition," and a list of all the medications you are on. Keep the letter and prescriptions separate from your medications.
- When changing your dose times to suit a new time zone do this gradually by moving the dose times slightly each time until they fall at more convenient times.
- Use alarms, dosette boxes, etc. to remind you about dose times if you think you will have trouble remembering.
- Ask your doctor, AIDS Council Treatments Officer or local PLWHA organisation for the details of HIV/AIDS clinics in all the cities you are visiting.