

Mental Health & Travel

International travel can be an exciting experience; however, it can also be physically and mentally demanding. Stressors such as separation from family/friends, dealing with a new culture, unfamiliar language, disruptions in daily routine, time zone changes/ jet lag, etc. can trigger changes in mood such as depression and anxiety as well as uncharacteristic behaviors. Although this can occur in anyone it can be worsened in those with a prior mental health condition. Anticipating problems and planning ahead can help ensure an enjoyable trip.

Research your destination country before leaving to familiarize yourself with the culture and language. Understand that attitudes about mental health differ between countries- stigma and/or discrimination may occur. Determine the level of medical care (including mental health services) at your destination and how to access services in case of emergency. Other management tips:

Before your trip:

- ☆Consult your healthcare provider/therapist to see if travel is right for you at this time
- ☆Know your mental health needs & limits
- ☆Discuss coping strategies with your healthcare provider/therapist & create a travel management plan.
- ☆Realize some management strategies may be unavailable or inappropriate at your destination, practice any new strategies in advance if possible
- ☆Discuss the possibility of staying in touch with your provider/therapist during the trip via phone, skype, etc.
- ☆ Consider sharing your mental health diagnosis with a travel companion (trip leader) so they can provide assistance if you begin to decline or are in crisis
- ☆Register with the US embassy/consult in case of emergency- they can notify family/friends & help arrange healthcare

During your trip:

- ☆Maintain a regular schedule as much as possible & try to integrate a few familiar activities from home
- ☆Remember good health practices such as healthy diet, adequate exercise & sleep
- ☆Limit alcohol & caffeine/ avoid illegal drug use
- ☆Have realistic expectations
- ☆Remain flexible & open-minded
- ☆Travel with family/friends; if traveling alone consider periodically checking in with those at home
- ☆Continue taking your regularly prescribed medication **
- ☆Get help early if you feel your symptoms are worsening

**Traveling with prescription medications can be complex & confusing since rules & regulations vary from one country to another & aren't always consistently enforced. Medications that are considered legal in the US may not be legal in other countries, including some over-the-counter medications. Narcotic & psychiatric drugs are of particular concern. Contacting the US embassy at your destination before departure can be helpful in some instances in determining medication regulations (<http://www.usembassy.gov>). Some general guidelines for traveling with prescriptions:

- ☆carry a letter from your healthcare provider on letterhead indicating the medical necessity of the drug
- ☆keep all medications in the original, labeled packaging
- ☆carry enough medication for your personal use for the length of your trip
- ☆carry your medication in your carry-on luggage in case your checked luggage is lost