Your Guide to Extended Travel with Type 1 Diabetes

by ABIGAIL DAVID

Travel and Type 1 Diabetes

Whether you live with a chronic illness or not, preparing for extended travel can be stressful. It can feel like there are a million and one things to remember to bring and tasks to take care of before leaving that sometimes, preparation alone can be the reason one decides not to travel. Therefore, this guide is designed to help you navigate travel and type 1 diabetes!

Having type 1 diabetes on top of all the regular stresses that come along with preparing for a trip can leave one feeling even more discouraged. It's easy to let fear get in the way of pursuing our dreams and goals, especially when one lives with a chronic illness. Falling into a hole of self-pity and sadness is common when being diagnosed with a chronic illness. The mostly carefree life lived before getting diagnosed has been taken from us and that is extremely hard to come to terms with. It's common to let these feelings rule our worlds and let our disease control how we live our lives. But it's important to maintain the hopes and dreams we had pre-diagnosis.

Like most things, traveling with type 1 diabetes takes a little extra care and preparation, but is completely doable and enjoyable! This past summer I solo traveled for four months in Europe and had the best time! However, there were some things I did to prepare that really helped me feel safe and secure while on my journey. Below are some of these tips:

1. Medication and Prescription

Making sure you have enough medication and extra prescription forms is the most important thing to remember when prepping for a long trip. It's a good idea to start thinking about exactly how much you'll need at least a couple months in advance; that way, you can budget and plan out exactly how you will be getting your supplies. I personally took twice the amount of supplies I needed for my four-month trip, which served me well. I definitely had extra, but knowing I wouldn't be stressed if I wanted to stay longer or lost some supplies gave me a priceless peace of mind. I definitely recommend making a list of everything you need to bring as well. Keeping track of everything in your mind is a stress that is easily avoidable. Don't forget to ask for extra prescriptions from your doctor as well so that if you do lose your supplies, you can get them in the place you are traveling to.

2. Insulin

I was traveling between many countries in the middle of summer, so it was important that I had a way of keeping my insulin at a cold temperature at all times. I managed to do this by keeping everything in a cooler pack with freezer packs on the sides. When I would check into a new hotel or hostel, I would immediately put my insulin in their fridge and ice packs in the freezer, so I was prepped for my next travel day. I never had an issue at any hostel or hotel; sometimes it took a little more explaining because of the language barrier, but once they understood that it was extremely important, the personnel were always very happy to help.

3. Insurance

It is absolutely imperative to get travel insurance for an extended trip. You must call and purchase it before you leave. There are many different plans that you can get, and some credit cards have travel insurance included or for a lesser price.

4. Doctor's Office Appointment

There are many tools on our phones these days designed to help us with annoying tasks, such as finding the nearest walk-in clinic or hospital. That being said, there is an app for this now and it is very useful! It can be hard to know where a certified doctor is if you are in a country where you don't speak the language. Many of these apps have ratings for the clinics and reviews as well, which can totally make you feel more comfortable with going to a doctor in another country.

5. Packing Cubes

Dividing all your supplies into a few different packing cubes can make a huge difference in staying organized while on your trip. I personally bought four packing cubes from a backpacking store designed especially for organizing and saving space while backpacking. I was unpacking and repacking a lot and knowing all my supplies were in a specific spot was nice because I could always keep track of them.

6. Back-up Insulin Plans

This one goes along with packing supplies: it is a good idea to bring a backup plan with you in case your method of insulin delivery malfunctions or breaks down. Instead of waiting and scrambling to find supplies in the country you are visiting, having another way of getting insulin into your body is important. Whether that means calling your pump company and getting a loaner pump, bringing your old pump or bringing extra injections or pens. When it comes to travel and type 1 diabetes, being prepared for a worse-case-scenario is key.

7. Research the Hospital Safety

Make sure you are aware of the state of safety and cleanliness of the hospitals in the country you are visiting. If it makes you feel uncomfortable, consider going to a different country or even back home if you do need to get hospital care on your trip. This is easier if you're visiting countries that are closer together obviously, or if you aren't too far away from home. If you are going to a big country where going home or traveling to another country is not possible, find a hospital that you feel comfortable with, where they have someone who speaks your language and qualified health care professionals working.

Travel and Type 1 Diabetes: The Bottom Line

When the proper preparations are taken, extended travel and type 1 diabetes can be a total success. If there's something you want to do but you're a little nervous because of how it will affect your type 1 diabetes, do as much planning as possible and prepare for everything that could go wrong. This will allow you to move forward with your dreams with less fear and more excitement!