

Travel Medicine in Reverse: A mixed methods approach

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Background: Travel medicine has regained importance following the COVID-19 pandemic, due to increasing international travel. While travellers from the Global North visiting the Global South often receive structured pre-travel health advice, similar guidance is frequently lacking for young Africans relocating to the Global North. This study assessed their knowledge, attitudes, and preparation regarding potential health challenges after relocation.

Methods: A mixed-methods observational study was conducted between 2024 and 2025 in Ghana and Nigeria among adult prospective first-time travellers recruited at visa centres and hospitals. Data collection included questionnaires, focus group discussions, and one-on-one interviews with doctors. These methods explored travellers' knowledge, preparation, and perceptions regarding health risks and the need for pre-travel health advice.

Results: A total of 738 participants completed the questionnaire and 45 joined focus groups/interviews; 32% travelled for study. Over half (52%) did not seek pre-travel medical advice. Awareness of health risks was low: 83% were unaware of potential health challenges and 82% did not perceive infection risk. Although 72% were vaccinated at birth, 66% believed additional vaccinations prior to travel were unnecessary. Additionally, 24% reported not needing health insurance. Most (73.5%) did not anticipate mental health challenges, while 35% identified racism as a possible social challenge.

Conclusion: Prospective African travellers demonstrated limited awareness of travel-related health risks and notable misconceptions regarding malaria prevention. Strengthening pre-travel health education and targeted travel medicine interventions is needed to improve preparedness and risk awareness in this population.