

A portable travel expert called Wanda

ITM launches a new app that offers travellers real-time health information.

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Dit is de omschrijving

From now on travellers can carry a world of health information in their pocket. The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp has developed a new app that keeps travellers informed about the health risks at their destination. The app is called [Wanda](#) and is available in Dutch, French and English. In addition to developing this new app, ITM has also given its travel medicine website a complete makeover.

The numbers speak for themselves: the ITM travel clinic is becoming ever more popular among globetrotters. Almost 20,000 people visited the clinic for travel advice and vaccinations in 2018 – 3000 more than in 2016. As a growing number of people carry a smartphone, ITM, an internationally renowned expert and the national reference in the field of travel health, developed an app that focuses on travel health. Wanda is free, user-friendly and contains up-to-date information that can also be found on the Institute's revamped travel medicine website. Most of the information is also available offline and ITM can even send travellers a specific message in case of an outbreak in their country of destination.

Dr Patrick Soentjens, head of ITM's outpatient clinic, and Dr Mieke Crougns, Wanda's project manager, are the brains behind the app. "Despite the increasing number of visitors to our travel clinic, we noticed that certain groups do not visit our website and clinic before undertaking their journey," says Dr Soentjens. "There are several reasons for this. For example, they find that the website has too much text, they may have difficulties finding what they are looking for, or they visit their country of origin and believe that they therefore do not need to be vaccinated or take precautionary measures. The app is free and easily accessible, the information is brief and to the point. This way, we hope to reach even more travellers." Dr Crougns adds: "It enables us to accompany holidaymakers during their trip as well. Once abroad, people don't always know where to find reliable information, and they may no longer have the paper brochure "How to travel and stay healthy", which they received during their visit to our outpatient clinic. Wanda offers a practical solution."

Dr Crougns emphasises that the app is purely informative: "An app only provides general information that applies to everyone. We cannot take the specific health risks of the individual traveller into account because we do not know the person's medical background and the way in which he or she travels. Wanda is not intended to replace a face-to-face consultation in the clinic," says Dr Crougns. "Before travelling, you can consult the app, for example to find out what vaccinations or medication you need. When something happens during your trip you can check the app to find out what to do next. It's then up to the traveller to take the necessary steps," concludes Dr Soentjens.

The ITM travel clinic is well-known in Belgium. Every year almost 20,000 people make an appointment to get travel advice and/or vaccinations while some 5,000 patients receive medical follow-up for a travel-related illness after coming home. The travel medicine website receives about 450,000 hits a year.