Fly Boy

On January 4, the United States opened its borders to inbound HIV-positive travelers. POZ spoke with one of the first men to exercise that new freedom.

April 1, 2010 By James Wortman

Global AIDS advocates rejoiced January 4 when President Barack Obama announced that the country's 22-year-old ban on HIV-positive travelers had been lifted. The Netherlands' Clemens Ruland, who was traveling with his HIV-negative partner Hugo Bausch, was touted as one of the first HIV-positive people to enter the United States following the ban's removal.

Before his January 7 arrival at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City, the 45-year-old Ruland spoke with POZ about what this historic journey meant not only to him, but also to those living with and affected by HIV worldwide.

How often would you travel to the United States before you were HIV positive?
I met my ex at the Gay Games in 1994 in New York. Our relationship ended in 1997. [During those three years] I would travel to the U.S. every six to eight weeks, but I didn't know I [was HIV positive] then. I found out after we broke up.

Have you been to the United States since your diagnosis?
I've been back once. In the beginning I didn't want to go back because it was too emotional. The city which I loved for all the good times [my ex and I] had when we were together was a little bit ruined by the fact that I didn't want this relationship to end in the first place. And it was even worse when I found out he had infected me, just because of [our] irresponsible behavior.

But I did come back once with my lover I'm with today. We went back to New York five years ago. I had to lie about being HIV positive. [Since] I had been an AIDS nurse in the beginning of the 1990s here at one of the major Amsterdam hospitals, I learned how to keep medication away from customs and immigration.

What message does lifting this ban send to the rest of the world?
It gets rid of some part of [America's] hypocrisy. It's like your president said lately when he signed the [Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Extension Act]. He said if [the United States] wants to be the leading country on stopping this disease, it had to lift this ban.

A lot of people weren't [even] aware that the United States had this travel ban.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/hiv-travel-ban-ruland-18189-5940