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The holiday destinations cracking down on vaping, with hefty fines, jail sentences and even caning

Bans on vaping and e-cigarette flavours are on the rise – and punishment in some countries is becoming increasingly severe

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Many countries are restricting the use of vapes, leaving tourists at risk of breaking the law Credit: Tatiana Buzmakova



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Mexico has passed a constitutional amendment banning vapes, becoming the latest country to crack down on e-cigarettes. Fears are mounting that the trade has fallen into the hands of the country's drug cartels, and

tourists found to be buying or bringing their own vaping devices now risk incarceration.

The move adds Mexico to the growing list of holiday destinations where vaping can carry strict penalties, many of which are in hotspots popular with British travellers like south-east Asia and the Americas.

It paints an increasingly limiting picture for those using vapes to try to quit smoking or who are simply partial to a puff of blueberry ice. Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicates that [more Britons now vape than smoke](#); one in 10, to be exact.



Vapers in Mexico are protesting the ban, but users face up to eight years in prison for flouting new laws Credit: Eyepix Group/Alamy Stock Photo

Could we see Britons who took e-cigarettes on holiday featured on future seasons of *Banged Up Abroad*? Enforcement is patchy, but with restrictions severe in some countries and perplexingly nebulous in others, vapers should be wary of falling foul of the law.

Mexico's ban

When I visited Mexico in 2023, the scariest thing about vaping was how much it cost. Paying triple the UK price for a disposable vape on the streets of Tulum was enough to make me text my friend, who was flying in at a later date, imploring her to “bring Elf bars”. Today, that scenario could land both of us a prison sentence of up to eight years.

The UK accounts for the third-most visitors to Mexico, surpassed only by the United States and Canada. Around 400,000 of us visited between January and November last year, which – if ONS statistics are anything to go by – suggests that the ban will impact significant numbers of British travellers.

Countries cracking down on e-cigarettes

Use and possession banned	Sale and import banned
Singapore	Argentina
Taiwan	Uruguay
Vietnam	Panama
Cambodia	Dominican Republic
India	Mauritius
Sri Lanka	Seychelles
Qatar	Australia (prescription only)
Gambia	Turkey (sale banned but import permitted)
Brazil	Antigua & Barbuda

Smoking is still legal in Mexico (though there are strict rules about lighting up in public) and, in 2022, the Mexican tobacco market was estimated to be worth \$4.5 billion. Banning vapes follows a wider trend of Latin American countries imposing vaping restrictions. Most of these, such as Panama and Uruguay, have kept use and possession in a legal grey area, making it mostly a customs issue for travellers. Others, like Brazil, have explicitly criminalised it, while Nicaragua reaffirmed a ban on vapes (including use) last month.

Experts have warned that prohibitionist measures simply play into the hands of criminal gangs, and a black market for vapes is already widespread in Argentina, for example, which banned sales in 2011.

Zero tolerance

Some places are taking an even more aggressive approach. E-cigarettes have been illegal in Singapore since 2018, but last year its government took a tougher stance and introduced heftier punishments including [severe fines, jail terms and even caning](#).

Christopher Snowdon, head of lifestyle economics at the Institute of Economic Affairs and editor of the *Nanny State Index*, which ranks countries by how much they interfere with people's lifestyle choices, said: "The World Health Organisation's campaign against vaping has been influential, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

"Bans on vaping and e-cigarette flavours, as well as e-cigarette taxes, have been steadily growing for years and it is important for travellers to be aware of what the rules are."



Prison sentences are on the cards for vapers in Hong Kong, where a ban on carrying vapes is due to be introduced on April 30 Credit: ZUMA Press, Inc/Alamy Stock Photo

Snowdon explained that this is particularly true of countries where the government owns or holds a stake in tobacco companies. Along Asia's backpacking routes, Thailand and Vietnam have state-owned monopolies of the tobacco industries and heavily enforce anti-vaping laws, particularly in tourist areas. Visitors to Thailand face up to [10 years' imprisonment](#) for possession of vapes.

Prison sentences will soon also be on the cards for vapers in Hong Kong. The region already prohibits the import and sale of e-cigarettes, but a further ban on carrying vapes is due to be introduced on April 30.

A maze of restrictions

Only a relatively small number of countries have such harsh penalties, but, nevertheless, anti-vaping measures mean users are having to navigate an ever-changing and confusing maze of restrictions.

For example, vaping is legal in Spain, but tourists could still be fined up to €2,000 for vaping on specific beaches in Barcelona, the Basque Country and the Balearics. Lithuania also allows it, but any e-liquid flavours (except tobacco flavour) are banned. Travellers can wander through Rome vaping to their heart's content, but must put devices away before setting foot in [Vatican City](#), where use is strictly prohibited.

Turkey tops the 2025 Nanny State Index

Rank	Country	Alcohol (Max 33.3)	Safer nicotine (Max 16.7)	Food/Soft Drinks (Max 33.3)	Smoking (Max 16.7)
Total (Max 100)					
13	Slovenia	7.4	7.3	1.3	9.7
25.7					
14	Croatia	7.1	4.6	2	9.6
23.3					
15	Romania	5.3	5.1	0	12.2
22.6					
16	Greece	4.6	6.1	0	10.7
21.4					
17	Slovakia	3.5	5	3.6	9
21.1					
18	Belgium	1.8	7.1	1.2	10.4
20.5					

Source: nannystateindex.org

“Vapers also need to be aware that they could be heavily fined for bringing an e-cigarette into Australia,” said Snowdon. The country banned vapes for recreational use, and devices containing liquid nicotine can now only be purchased from a pharmacy, with a prescription.

There are exceptions to this tide of vaping regulation, though. Highly conservative Saudi Arabia – despite forbidding alcohol – has surprisingly lax laws on it. Meanwhile, Norway plans to legalise e-cigarettes this coming July. But with the vaping crackdown picking up speed and legislation in regular flux, Snowdon warns that travellers should always check what the latest rules are before booking a trip.

“Caution is advised,” he said. “If all else fails, vapers can always go back to smoking for the duration of their holiday...”

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