

Travel Tips for People With Disabilities

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Planning a trip? People with disabilities can travel almost anywhere as long as they plan ahead. Doing so makes trips easier and more fun. Here are some tips to help in your travel planning.

Before You Go

Ask about accessibility. People who use wheelchairs, walkers, canes, crutches or other mobility devices do best when the places they visit are accessible. This means that people with disabilities can easily use the parking lots, paths, hallways, doorways and bathrooms. To find out whether the places you are going to are accessible, you can call, check the Internet or contact a local chamber of commerce. Here are some questions to ask about accessibility:

- Do I need to make a reservation or is it “first-come, first-served”?
- How many accessible parking places are there?

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- Is the front entrance accessible?
 - What surfaces (such as brick, gravel, tile or carpet) are the paths and hallways made of?
 - Do personal care assistants pay admission? If so, is there a discount?
 - Are there accessible bathrooms, drinking fountains, and eating places?
 - Can I get a map of the accessible features?
 - What is the policy about service animals?

Have a medical exam. It is always a good idea to see your doctor or healthcare provider before you travel. This helps avoid or prepare for any health problems. Here are some things you can do:

- **Shots.** You might need immunization shots to protect you from certain diseases. Allow enough time to recover from any side effects of these shots.
- **Chronic diseases.** If you have any chronic diseases such as diabetes, make sure you know how to manage any health problems.

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- **Doctor’s letter.** Ask your doctor or other healthcare provider for a letter that clearly explains your health. This letter should include information about your diseases, medications, devices, and food or drug allergies. Make copies of this letter for you and those you are traveling with.
 - **Medical bracelet.** Ask if you should wear a medical bracelet with information about any of your health problems.
 - **Health phrases in other languages.** If you are going somewhere where people do not speak English, learn some simple health phrases in the local language. If you have diabetes, these might include phrases such as “I have diabetes” and “Please give me some orange juice.”
 - **Prosthetist.** Ask a prosthetist to check your prosthesis before you travel. This way, he or she can find and fix any problems.
 - **Medications.** Make sure to pack plenty of medication and medical supplies. It is a good idea to pack twice as much as you think you will need. Put half of this in your suitcase and the rest in a carry-on bag so you always have enough.

Take a carry-on bag. It is always a good idea to put your most important medical supplies in a carry-on bag that stays with you. If you have diabetes, your carry-on bag should include:

- Medications, such as insulin
- Supplies such as syringes, blood-testing meters, and extra meter batteries
- A medical identification card that says you have diabetes
- Food and medication to treat low blood sugar such as crackers, cheese, peanut butter, fruit, candy, and glucose tablets

Pack an amputee survival kit. Just like keeping a spare tire in your car, you should pack an amputee survival kit in case of problems with your prosthesis. Your kit might include small amounts of any of these items:

- Small pair of scissors to cut holes in socks
- Bandages or dressings for cuts and blisters
- Hydrocortisone for itching and lubrication
- Antibiotic cream to prevent infections
- Wipes or antibacterial soap to keep your residual limb clean

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- A small towel to dry your residual limb
 - Extra socks and liners
 - Stocking net and valve tool
 - Foot bolt and other wrenches
 - Duct tape for quick repairs
 - Thin-cell foam to reduce pressure on weight-bearing areas
 - Stump shrinker
 - Small bottle of baby oil

At the Airport

Everyone, even people with disabilities, must be screened by airport security when traveling by plane. Here are some tips to know:

- **Prosthetic and other orthotic devices.** Screeners need to see and touch your prosthetic device, cast or support brace but will not ask you to remove it. You can request a private screening (away from the security line). When you are screened, you can ask a friend or family member to go with you and request that the screener be the same gender (male or female) as you. Tell the screener if you need

help standing. He or she can let you sit down after you pass through the metal detector. The screener can also help you take off and put on your shoes, or check your feet if your shoes cannot be removed.

- **Wheelchairs and scooters.** The screener will look at and touch your wheelchair or scooter. He or she will also swab (wipe) its cushion to test for explosives. Ask to stay in your wheelchair or scooter if you cannot stand up.
- **Walkers, crutches, canes and other mobility devices.** The screener will look at these devices plus anything attached to it. If it fits, your device must go through the X-ray machine. If it does not fit, your device will be screened with a hand-held machine.
- **Service animals.** Tell the screener if yours is a service animal, not a pet. You most likely will go to the front of the line as the screener will need to spend extra time with you. The screener is trained to search service animals. He or she will ask permission before touching your animal and will not take the animal away. Your job is to keep your service animal under control.

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- **Special equipment.** Tell the screener if you have any special medical equipment on, or in, your body. Medical equipment includes insulin pumps, pacemakers, feeding tubes, and ostomy or urine bags.
 - **Medical supplies.** Tell the screener if you have medications or medical supplies with you. You can ask the screener to inspect these supplies by hand rather than putting them through the X-ray machine. Label all supplies and pack them in a pouch that is not part of your baggage.
 - **Ways to learn more.** Screening rules sometimes change, so it is always a good idea to check ahead. To learn more, you can call the airport or go to your airline's Web site. You can also call the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at 866/289-9673 and request a copy of their booklet, "Screening Tips for Persons With Disabilities."
 - **Problems at the airport?** If you feel you are not being treated fairly, ask to speak with the screener supervisor or call TSA at 866/289-9673.

Travel Tips for People Who Use Wheelchairs

People with wheelchairs can travel on most types of transportation as long as they plan ahead. Here are some tips to know when traveling by:

Airplane

- Write a list of instructions about how to handle your wheelchair.
Tape this list where all baggage handlers will see it.
- Remove or secure any loose or moveable wheelchair parts.
- Pack a wheelchair repair kit. Put this kit in your checked luggage so airport screeners do not think it includes weapons.
- If you have a motorized wheelchair, bring paperwork with you about the wheelchair battery
- You should know that you might need to transfer a few times.

Many airplanes have narrow aisles, so you might need to transfer from your wheelchair to a narrow “aisle chair,” and then to a plane seat. A few airlines have hydraulic aisle chairs that let you simply slide from wheelchair to plane seat.

Train

- Some trains have discounts for people with disabilities. To get this discount, you must show proof of your disability such as a transit system card, disabilities membership card, or letter from your doctor.
- Ask about wheelchair space, transfer seats or other accessible accommodations when you make a train reservation.
- Many trains let you stay in your wheelchair, but you may need to keep the brakes on if there is no place to lockdown (secure) your wheelchair. You will need to stow (put away) your wheelchair if you prefer to sit in an accessible seat.
- Most trains have ramps or lifts to help people in wheelchairs get on and off the train.

Bus

- Call the bus company at least two days before you travel and tell them about any special needs. These needs could include help getting on and off the bus, assistance with baggage, or safe storage of your wheelchair.

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- Ask if there is a discount fare for your personal care assistant.

Ship

- Most new cruise ships are accessible to people with disabilities, but often the gangways to get to these ships are not.
- Call ahead to discuss ways you will get on and off the ship.

Wishing you many happy travels!

Ways to Learn More:

Access-Able Travel Source

www.access-able.com

American Automobile Association

www.aaa.com

Americans with Disabilities Act

Call: 800/514-0301

www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm

Aviation Consumer Protection

Call: 800/778-4838

airconsumer.ost.dot.gov

Gimp on the Go

gimponthego.com

National Organization on Disability

www.nod.org

Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality

Call: 212/447-7284

www.sath.org

Transportation Security Administration

www.tsa.gov

U.S. Chamber of Commerce

www.uschamber.com/chambers/directory

Translated from **Planes, Trains and Automobiles**

www.amputee-coalition.org/inmotion/mar_apr_06/planes_trains_automobiles.html