



FACT SHEET

Travel Information for People with Disabilities

by NLLIC Staff (Revised 2008)

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This Fact Sheet provides general travel information and advice for amputees and other travelers with disabilities. However, since airport guidelines and carry-on restrictions are continually updated and/or amended, we strongly suggest you contact the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for specific current guidelines if you plan to travel.

For questions about traveling for people with disabilities, what items are permitted and what items are prohibited, and for other general questions or concerns, please contact the TSA Contact Center in one of the following ways:

Phone: 866/289-9673 toll-free

E-mail: TSA-ContactCenter@dhs.gov

TSA Web site: www.tsa.gov

TSA Web page for travelers with disabilities:

www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, over 49 million Americans — nearly 20 percent of the population — are living with disability. And of these 49 million Americans living with a disability, 1.7 million are amputees. Considering these numbers, plus the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it's no wonder that most firms involved in providing transportation and housing for travelers have made special arrangements to cater to the needs of people with disabilities.

Unfortunately, travelers with disabilities cannot afford to be nearly as carefree in making their travel arrangements as can able-bodied people. Travel-related firms simply don't provide the same quality of special-needs services in all locations. Therefore, the challenge for travelers with disabilities is to foresee their special needs in detail and check carefully to ensure those needs are met every step of the way. The watchwords are: plan, check, and double-check. Unfortunately, even when this is done, things don't always turn out as anticipated. Travelers should know how to protest and assert their rights when things go wrong.

National Limb Loss Information Center, a program of the Amputee Coalition of America

900 East Hill AVE, Suite 205
Knoxville, TN 37915-2566

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888-267-5669 (888-AMP-KNOW)
www.amputee-coalition.org

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What to Do Before Your Trip

Check Your Prosthesis

You wouldn't think of getting in your car and starting a long trip without first getting the car serviced and being certain that it's in good operating condition. Why do less with your prosthesis?

Socket – Clean the socket with a mild, nonperfumed soap, using a washcloth. Allow it to air-dry or gently dry it with a soft cloth. Avoid using alcohol or commercial cleaners. If the prosthesis has a removable liner, take it out and check for small tears or glue separations at the seams. If you use a silicone suspension system, clean and inspect it in the same way.

Suspension – Inspect Velcro® for frayed edges or weakness in grip. If it has picked up lint, use a brush to remove foreign particles. If your limb relies on a strap to secure it, check for signs of wear or fraying. Also check to see that the rivets holding it to the prosthesis are tight. Check loops or rings for indications of wear, rust or loose stitching.

Cover – Check for tears or loose glued areas. Since corrosive salt air and the sun's ultraviolet rays can damage covers, depending on where you travel, you might want to bring along prosthetic skin.

General Maintenance – Check a lower-extremity prosthesis for looseness at the knee and foot. Listen for odd sounds that might indicate a worn or broken component. If you use an upper-extremity prosthesis, check for wear in the cable and harness.

Extra Things to Pack

- Extra prosthetic socks
- Extra socket liner
- Duct and filament tape to repair strap or buckle breaks
- Antibacterial cream for abrasions from overuse
- Screwdriver with interchangeable bits
- Spare suction valve
- Plastic bags to protect your prosthesis if you wear it around water or sand
- Phone numbers of certified prosthetists and prosthetic facilities in the area in which you are vacationing (you can get these by calling ACA).

Check Your Wheelchair

If you rely on your wheelchair for more than casual use, it should receive a maintenance check also.

Prepare for Repair – If your chair has a history of maintenance problems, you may want to take some spare parts. In the worst case, you will need expert repair services. You can usually get service at a medical equipment supply store where you are; if not, a bicycle shop may be able to get you rolling again.

Insure Your Wheelchair – If wheelchairs checked as baggage are damaged, the carrier's liability is usually limited to a very small amount. Wheelchairs listed as personal property on your homeowner's insurance are covered, but only for theft or loss by fire. The best practice is to purchase commercial loss and damage insurance for the chair's full value.

Disability Certification

Although most providers of services and discounts you encounter while traveling won't require written certification that you have a disability, some may. Rather than taking off your leg and showing it to them, which you will probably be tempted to do, you should take along a letter from your doctor. As long as you are doing this, you might also ask your doctor to include information about your medical history, allergies to medications, and current treatment information including a medication list. Include your doctor's telephone number in case you should have a medical emergency or need to refill your medication. If you are insulin-dependent, the certification should mention that you need to possess syringes. This could save you a lot of time and trouble if your syringes are discovered in a customs inspection.

Medications

Take two sets of prescription medications with you: one in your carry-on and one in your checked suitcase. This will provide an extra supply in case your trip is prolonged by unexpected delays. If you have diabetes and use insulin, bring several unopened vials and store them in at least two or three places. This way you'll always have an extra supply if you break a bottle. You might wish to take an insulated lunch bag to carry them in. You will also need a lidded can, jar or Tupperware-type container for disposal of used syringes.

[Please see www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds for a list of permitted carry-on items.]

Air Travel

[Please see www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds for specific air travel guidelines for travelers with disabilities.]

Using Airport-Provided Wheelchairs

When you book your flights, ask your travel agent to tell the reservationist that you will need wheelchair assistance. To be on the safe side, you should also tell the desk agent when you check in and check your baggage and the flight attendant before you arrive at your destination. Allowing an airport employee to push you to and from your flight is a good idea for several reasons.

- It can save you a long walk in large airports, even if you are willing and able to walk.
- The attendant knows exactly where your gate is located, a significant advantage when you need to make quick connections.
- If you have to go through customs, the attendant can push you to the head of the line.

Walk-Through Security Metal Detector

If you choose to walk through the metal detector, be prepared to set the buzzer off and then have to explain to the attendant that you have an artificial limb. Some of them may still not understand and you may have to show your limb. It may help to announce that your prosthesis is going to set off the alarm before you walk through.

[Remember that each airport has tightened security and increased checks. The TSA is working to make this process as easy as possible for both parties, and they are also researching new detection methods that will be less intrusive for all. For more information on the current screening processes, updates on new screening strategies, and for a list of approved carry-on items, please see their Web page for travelers with disabilities at www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds.]

Preferred Seating

When booking your flights, ask for bulkhead seating. Those seats are at the front of the section, facing a wall rather than the backs of other seats. There's a lot more space there, making it much easier to get in and out. Most major airlines block these seats for persons with special needs and will be glad to assign one to you, if available. If the bulkhead seats are filled, ask that you not be assigned a seat on an emergency exit row. Instead, ask for an aisle seat as close to the front of the plane as possible. Some aisle seats have arm rests that swing up out of the way. This can be a great advantage when getting into and out of your seat, especially if you will need to transfer from an aisle chair. Since all planes are different, the reservationist may not be able to guarantee you such a seat but it's a good idea to try anyway.

If you failed to get a bulkhead seat when you booked your flight, you can try again when you board the plane. Ask the flight attendant if he or she can relocate someone so you can have a bulkhead seat. They will usually try to do that, especially if an able-bodied person is seated there.

Crutches

Crutches must be stored under the seat or in the overhead compartment. Failing that, the flight attendants will be required to stow them in another location, and you'll have to ask for them if you need to use the restroom. For this reason, forearm or collapsible crutches, which will fit under or over your seat, are best for air travel.

Wheelchairs

If you travel with your own wheelchair, you may take it down the walkway to the plane but not onboard. Airline personnel will transfer you to a special aisle chair to take you to your seat. They will put your chair in the baggage compartment and will have it ready for you again when you arrive. (Sometimes a small chair will be placed in the cabin closet.) For the same reason that you put your identification on your luggage, make sure your name and address is on all equipment that is being stowed below. If you have to change planes, request that your chair be returned to you quickly. Since wheelchair users are the last to leave the plane, allow enough time to make your connection.

Powered Chairs and Scooters

If you plan to take a powered chair or a scooter with you, it is best to use gel- or foam-filled batteries, also known as dry cells. Standard acid-filled batteries or wet cells must be removed by the ground crew and packed in special containers for transport. Remove seat cushions and any parts that could come off and get lost and

carry them onboard with you. Attach instructions on scooters or power chairs detailing how to disconnect the batteries, as well as any other disassembly or preparation for transport that might be necessary. These instructions will also assist personnel who will reassemble the unit at your destination. Supervise these processes if you can. If you have a large power chair or scooter, be sure to check cargo size limitations when making your reservation.

Restrooms

Try to use an airport restroom before boarding your flight. This may save you a painful trip to the tiny restroom on the airplane.

Airline Security and Consumer Protection Links

- AirSafe.com - www.airsafe.com
- Aviation Consumer Protection Division – airconsumer.ost.dot.gov
- Federal Aviation Administration - www.faa.gov
- Homeland Security—Travel and Transportation - www.dhs.gov/xtrvlsec
- Northwest Airlines Current Airport Procedures - www.nwa.com/features/update_airport.shtml
- Transportation Security Administration - www.tsa.gov

Major Airline Telephone Numbers & Web Addresses

Alaska	800/252-7522	www.alaskaair.com
American	800/433-7300	www.aa.com
Continental	800/523-3273	www.continental.com
Delta	800/221-1212	www.delta.com
Northwest	800/225-2525	www.nwa.com
Southwest	800/435-9792	www.southwest.com
United	800/864-8331	www.united.com
US Airways	800/428-4322	www.usairways.com

For a complete list of airline reservation numbers see http://www.airguideonline.com/airline_telres.htm.

Train Travel

Amtrak is the major rail transport company in the United States. They provide a host of accommodations to travelers with disabilities. Information concerning the accessibility of their trains and stations can be obtained by contacting a reservation representative at 800/USA-RAIL (800/872-7245) or by visiting their Web site at www.amtrak.com.

Reservations - If you will need an accessible bedroom accommodation, transfer seat, or wheelchair space, even if you are traveling on an unreserved train, you should make reservations early. Such spaces are limited, and they will be held only for people who need them until 14 days before departure, after which they will be made available to the general public. You can also make an advance request for seating near accessible restrooms and lower-level seating in bi-level rail cars. Although Amtrak does not offer assigned seating, they will attempt to accommodate these requests on a first-requested, first-served basis.

Discounts - Amtrak offers a rail fare discount for passengers with disabilities. To receive the discount, you are required to provide written documentation of disability at the ticket counter and when boarding the train. Types of acceptable documentation are an identification card that many transit systems provide, a membership card for a disability organization, or a letter from a doctor. (Note: Because you might qualify for another discount that might exceed the disability discount, you should question the agent carefully about this when making your reservation.)

Stations - Most Amtrak stations are accessible to passengers with disabilities, but some will not be accessible until the year 2010. To determine accessibility of the stations you will be using, check with an Amtrak reservation sales agent. If you will need assistance at the station, you should make such a request when you make your reservation. Wheelchairs and wheelchair lifts are available at most staffed stations. Amtrak employees can provide help to and from restrooms and help with stairs. Contact the Customer Service office, available at larger stations, for more information. To assure you receive the help you need, you should arrive at the station at least one hour before departure time.

Boarding and Detraining - The assistance you may need when boarding or detraining will depend on the type of train and the station. Some stations have high platforms that are level with the train door; bridge plates are available if needed. Other stations that have low-level platforms provide station-board lifts (weight limit: 600 lbs.). Trains operating with bi-level Superliner and California cars board on the platform level using a wheelchair ramp that is carried onboard the train.

Train Accommodations - Amtrak trains currently have at least one coach car with reserved accessible seating and an accessible restroom. Overnight trains offer accessible seating and restrooms in at least one coach car and one accessible bedroom in each sleeping car. Accessible seating includes space for a passenger using a wheelchair, a transfer seat, and storage for the wheelchair. (Because there is only one accessible bedroom in each sleeping car, you should reserve early.)

The Superliner accessible bedroom is a lower-level room that provides ample space for a wheelchair. The room measures nine feet, five inches by six feet, six inches. This room occupies the entire width of the train and is designed for use by a passenger with a mobility impairment and a companion. Two beds are provided: one upper berth folds from the wall, and the lower berth is formed from the two facing seats. The restroom is separated from the rest of the room by a privacy curtain and features hand grips and space for full wheelchair turning radius. There are attendant call buttons in both the bedroom and restroom areas, and the room is completely accessible from the outside aisle.

The Viewliner accessible bedroom is also designed to accommodate wheelchairs and is designed for a maximum of three adults; however, it is most comfortable for two people--one with a wheelchair and one without. The room measures seven feet, one inch by six feet, eight inches. This bedroom provides a sofa with seating for three, plus a lower and upper berth for sleeping. There is also space for wheelchair storage. The toilet and combined shower are in a private annex to the room and are wheelchair accessible. There are attendant call buttons in the bedroom and the restroom.

Amtrak trains can accommodate most wheelchairs in use today, provided they meet the ADA definition of a common wheelchair (up to 30 inches wide by 48 inches high, manual or powered). If you wish, you can stay in your wheelchair while en route. If you choose to transfer to a seat, powered chairs can be checked as baggage and manual chairs can be stowed in the car or as baggage. If you don't need your wheelchair while on the train, Amtrak's baggage service will accept both manual and powered wheelchairs.

Meal Service - Meal service is available to all travelers with disabilities. You can order from the menu and have your meal served to you in your room, at your seat or, if you make arrangements to transfer to and from the lounge car at appropriate station stops, in the lounge car. If you are traveling in a sleeping accommodation, your meals are provided as part of the cost of your travel.

Canine Companions - Trained service animals are allowed in all customer areas in stations, trains, and Amtrak Thruway motor coaches free of charge. If the train schedule permits, Amtrak will allow time to walk your service animal at station stops provided that you stay within reasonable proximity to the train and reboard promptly. You should notify the conductor when you first board the train if you will need to walk your animal.

[Due to increased security concerns, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has implemented new measures for passenger and baggage checks. For more information concerning this and any other railroad travel concerns, please see the FRA home page at www.fra.dot.gov or call 202/493-6000.]

Railroad Security and Consumer Protection Links

- Amtrak - www.amtrak.com
- Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) - www.fra.dot.gov
- Rail Europe - www.raileurope.com

Bus Travel

The Greyhound Line not only has the most extensive routes but also one of the best programs for accommodating the needs of travelers with disabilities.

Before Your Trip - To help Greyhound arrange for the assistance you need, you should contact Greyhound's Customers with Disabilities Assist Line at 800/752-4841 at least 48 hours before departure. If possible, you should see Greyhound's "Customers with Disabilities" Web page at www.greyhound.com.

Personal Care Attendants - If you require a personal care attendant (PCA) to travel with you, that attendant may be allowed to travel at no additional charge. A ticket will be issued to the PCA only at the time of travel. PCA tickets are one-way only. Customers requiring a return ticket for their PCA must request one at the departure location on the day of travel. If an adult PCA is traveling at no additional charge with a minor that has a disability, the minor will be charged a full adult fare.

Service Animals - If you travel with a service animal, such as those provided by Canine Companions for Independence, it may travel with you. It must ride in the coach within your space and may not sit or stand in the

aisle of the coach, nor occupy a seat.

Priority Seating - For people with disabilities, the front seats on either side of the coach are designated as priority seating. If these seats are taken, the bus driver, upon request, will ask the seated customer to move to another seat. (However, if the request is refused, Greyhound personnel cannot displace the seated customer.) You will then be seated as close to the front as possible and moved forward as seats become available.

Crutches, Walkers, and Wheelchairs - These are allowed inside the coach when they can be safely stowed in the overhead passenger compartment. Wheelchairs will be checked as baggage and stowed in the baggage compartment. If you travel with a powered chair, be sure to check first with the Customers with Disabilities Assist office at 800/752-4841 for size, weight, and other limitations.

Boarding and Deboarding Assistance - Greyhound has begun to add wheelchair lift-equipped buses to its fleet. With 48 hours advance notice and when wheelchair lift buses are not available, alternative boarding assistance, such as the Scalamobil or AisleMaster, will be provided. As a last resort, if you don't weigh more than 220 pounds, you can be lifted manually by Greyhound personnel using the two-person fireman's lift technique.

Bus Line Security and Consumer Links

- Greyhound Lines, Inc. - www.greyhound.com
Assistance for customers with disabilities - 800/752-4841
- TSA—Highway Resources - www.tsa.gov/travelers/highway

Cruising

Accessibility - Some cruise ships are fully accessible to those who use wheelchairs. They have spacious, accessible cabins with bathrooms that include grab rails, roll-in showers, fold-down shower seats, hand-held shower heads, and ample turnaround space for wheelchairs. They have elevators and ramps for getting around the ship. Other cruise ships have some accessible rooms but other areas of the ship aren't accessible; some ships aren't accessible at all. The best practice when making cruise arrangements is to deal with one of the many travel companies that specialize in dealing with people with disabilities. Accepting advice from an agent who uses a wheelchair and who has actually cruised on the ship being considered would be ideal. If you are the cautious type, you'll want to check very specifically with your travel agent or the cruise ship line itself to determine the availability of all your accessibility needs. For you, the following checklist may be useful.

- How wide is the entry doorway into your cabin and bathroom?
- Are there sills on doors leading to outside decks?
- Are all levels of the ship that provide activities and services accessible?
- Is there a lip into the bathroom? If so, will a portable ramp be supplied?
- Are grab bars installed next to the toilet and inside the shower stall?
- Is a shower seat available through your cabin steward?
- Are accommodations available for your special dietary requirements?
- Are restrooms located outside your cabin accessible with a wheelchair?
- Is the telephone in the cabin positioned at a lower level?

- Is a TV remote control available through your cabin steward?
- Should you travel with a collapsible chair, for better accessibility and maneuvering?
- Can you take an electric scooter aboard the ship? If so, what are the electrical requirements?
- How accessible are the ports you plan to visit? Remember, in the U.S. the needs of accessibility have been legislated, but this is not so in many foreign posts.
- Does the ship dock or tender at the ports it visits? If you need to disembark onto a tender instead of a dock, can that be done easily?
- Are wheelchair lift-vans or accessible motor coaches available at each port of call?
- The Cruise Lines International Association Web site at www.cruising.org has developed a search feature that allows you to locate ships that have the accessibility features you need.

Cruise Security and Consumer Protection Links

- Cruise Diva's Focus on Safety and Security - www.cruisediva.com/flying2.htm
- Guide for Wheelchair Travelers - www.cruising.org/planyourcruise/guides/wheelchair.cfm
- Cruise Ship Security - www.crimedoctor.com/cruise1.htm
- TSA—Passenger Vessels - www.tsa.gov/travelers/maritime
- United States Coast Guard - <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-m/cruiseship.htm>

Hotels and Motels

Accessible Rooms - Most modern hotels and motels advertise that they have accessible rooms, and many do. But because too many of these firms have relied on lawyers to tell them what room modifications are legal instead of asking people with disabilities to advise them what room modifications are really necessary, many accessible rooms simply are not. One traveler tells of having a bathroom with a roll-in shower, but she couldn't enter the bathroom because the door was 25 inches wide instead of the 32 inches specified by the ADA. At the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA) annual meeting in Chicago, I recall a friend who couldn't enter her bathroom in her wheelchair because the door swung the wrong way. I ended up borrowing a screwdriver and removing the door from its hinges because another room wasn't available.

When making your reservation, always talk directly to the people at the hotel at which you want to stay. The people at central reservations services simply don't have the answers to the questions you need to ask. The telephone numbers at the end of this section will connect you to central reservation services. They should be able to connect you with the local hotel or motel of which you are choosing to stay.

When contacting the hotel, tell them that you need to talk to someone who can give you some details about their rooms equipped for guests with disabilities. When you get someone on the line, the first question to ask is, "Have you been in these rooms?" If the answer is no, ask to speak to someone who has. Avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or no. For example, instead of asking do you have roll-in showers, ask them to tell you about the bathrooms.

If you have trouble getting the information you need, ask to speak with the head of engineering. He or she may have been involved in the design and construction of the accessible room(s) and may know a great deal about them. Another good source of accurate information is the head of housekeeping. If all else fails, ask for the general manager.

Never assume anything. You may find that your room is accessible but you could still be surprised to find that elsewhere in the hotel there are steps without ramps that inhibit your movement into the restaurant, or even into the hotel itself. If you plan to use the hotel's shuttle from the airport, be sure to ask about its accessibility. Also, you may want to reserve a room on as low a floor as possible. In an emergency, elevators are often turned off and you will have to walk down or be carried down the stairs.

Once you determine that the hotel will suit your needs, you can reserve the room. When you arrive at the hotel, however, require them to show the room to you before you check in. This should prevent any bad surprises and the potential for having to change rooms later.

The worst case is that you find that the room you reserved is not accessible after all or that you are told that the accessible room you reserved isn't available. Remember, this isn't your problem, it's the hotel's, and you have a right to expect that the hotel will resolve it in your favor by finding you an acceptable room, either there or at another property. First, ask what they are going to do about it. If the answer you receive from the desk clerk is not satisfactory, ask to speak to the manager. Be politely insistent, keep your cool, and the situation will generally be resolved to your satisfaction.

Small Hotels and Bed & Breakfast Accommodations - The ADA does not apply to lodging units that have less than 10 rooms, so you should inquire before you reserve a room at these kinds of locations.

Shower Seats - Some hotels may be able to furnish shower seats, but don't count on it. The best practice is to purchase a folding seat to take along.

National and International Reservation Links

- CentralR - www.centralr.com/forhotels
- CRS - www.reservation-services.com
- Hotel Direct - www.hoteldirect.com
- Hotels.com - www.hotels.com
- Reservations to Go - www.reservationstogo.com

Auto and Van Rentals

Most major auto rental agencies located at large airports can provide autos with hand controls, provided that at least 24 hour's notice is given. Left-foot accelerator extensions may be available. Hand control extensions will probably not be available, but you should be able to request a spinner knob to be attached to the steering wheel.

Since none of this will happen automatically, the safest thing to do is to call (or have your travel agent call) the rental desk at the actual location where you will be picking the car up (instead of making your reservation by computer or through the company's central reservation service) and discuss your specific needs with them.

If you use a wheelchair, you may prefer renting a two-door model. They usually have larger doors, providing extra space to get the chair in and out of the back seat and to transfer in and out of the car.

Rental Car Consumer Links

Yahoo! Directory of Adaptive Technology Vehicles –

dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Shopping_and_Services/Travel_and_Transportation/Disabilities/Adaptive_Technology_Vehicles

Yahoo! Directory of Rental Cars –

dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Shopping_and_Services/Automotive/Rentals

Van Rentals

There are several companies that rent vans with wheelchair lifts at major cities. A number of these companies are listed at mossresourcenet.org/vans.htm.

Accessible Taxis

Currently, there are no governmental requirements for taxis to be wheelchair accessible, nor is there an adequate listing of where accessible taxis are available in the U.S. This leaves the traveler on his or her own to find suitable inner-city transportation. The concierge at your hotel may be of assistance here.

National Accessible Travelers Database Search

Easter Seals Project ACTION maintains a National Accessible Travelers Database containing thousands of accessible transportation services reported by providers.

projectaction.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ESPA_travelers_database

Specialized Travel Agencies

Although almost any good travel agency can help you make transportation and lodging arrangements within the U.S. (especially if you're prepared to help, using the information provided in this article), using a travel agency that specializes in serving people with disabilities is especially recommended for foreign travel and for tours. The following is a list of some of these agencies.

Accessible Journeys
35 West Sellers AVE
Ridley Park, PA 19078
800/846-4537
www.accessiblejourneys.com

Flying Wheels Travel
143 W Bridge ST
Owatonna, MN 55060
507/451-5005
www.flyingwheelstravel.com

Access Aloha Travel



414 Kuwili ST STE 101
Honolulu, HI 96817
800/480-1143
www.accessalohatravel.com

Easy Access Travel
5386 Arlington AVE
Riverside, CA 92501
800/920-8989
www.easyaccesstravel.com

Cruise Holidays
701 Carlson Parkway
Minnetonka, MN 55305
www.cruiseholidays.com

Gimp on the Go
4808 Moorland LN
Box 310
Bethesda, MD 20814
editor@GimpontheGo.com
www.gimponthego.com

More specialized travel agencies are listed at mossresourcenet.org/agencies.htm. Additional information about accessible travel is located at www.access-able.com and www.disabledtravelers.com/.

National and State Park Access

U.S. citizens or permanent residents with permanent disabilities can obtain a free “America the Beautiful – National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass – Access Pass” -- a free lifetime entrance pass to all U.S. national parks. To get a pass, go to any National Park Service facility that charges an entrance fee and show documented proof of disability (such as a physician’s statement). The pass admits the pass holder and up to three other adult passengers in a private vehicle. The passport also provides a 50 percent discount on some fees charged for facilities and services such as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching and cave tours. It does not cover concession fees. More information at store.usgs.gov/pass/general.html.

Complaining and Asserting Your Rights

U.S. Department of Transportation - The Air Carrier Access Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of handicap in air travel and requires air carriers to accommodate the needs of passengers with disabilities. In 1990, the U.S. Department of Transportation issued a rule defining the rights of passengers and the obligations of air carriers under this law. You should consider carrying a copy of this document with you. It will be very helpful should you need to lodge a complaint. A summary of the main points of this rule (Title 14 CFR, Part 382) is available at airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/publications/disabled.htm.

The U.S. Department of Transportation, Aviation Consumer Protection Division (ACPD), operates a complaint handling system for consumers who experience air travel service problems. You may call the ACPD 24 hours a day at 202/366-2220 (voice) or 202/366-0511 (TTY) to present your service complaint. If you write, your letter will be reviewed and, in most cases, will be forwarded to an airline official for further consideration. The mailing address is:

Aviation Consumer Protection Division, C-75
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

For more information, consult the Consumer Protection Web site at airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/problems.htm.

Federal Aviation Administration - Any person who believes that there has been violation of an aviation regulation may file a complaint with the following office:

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
Consumer Hotline, AOA-20
800 Independence AVE SW
Washington, DC 20591
866/835-5322

Complaint Resolution at Airports - Every air carrier is required to have at least one Complaints Resolution Official (CRO) available at each airport during times of scheduled carrier operations. Passengers with complaints of alleged violations of the Air Carrier Access rules are entitled to communicate their concerns to the CRO, who has authority to resolve complaints on behalf of the carrier.

Complaining in General - To help you obtain the treatment and services you deserve, you need to develop an assertive attitude. Please understand, an assertive attitude is not an antagonistic one. Assertiveness isn't anger. It doesn't require you to yell and scream. Assertiveness is a simple, calm insistence that your needs be met. Yelling and screaming can make an embarrassing scene and alienate the person to whom you are complaining. He or she is much more likely to respond positively to your complaint if you are calm, clear, and insistent.

These processes take time—maybe time you don't feel you have—and they will be a drain on your energy and patience. So always keep your ears tuned for a compromise you can live with. Let's face it. We don't always get what we want; but if we complain and ask for what we want in an appropriate way, we are more likely than not to arrive at a solution we can live with.