



GENERAL AIR TRAVEL TIPS

Keys to Successful Travel:

- Planning! Planning! Planning!
- Know what your rights are. It will give you more power.
 - Air Carriers Access Act
 - Americans with Disabilities Act
- Be persistent and assertive.
- Be flexible and have a sense of humor. Something will likely go wrong. How you deal with problems you encounter can make or break your trip.

Planning your Trip:

- Do research on your destination. You can contact the Chamber of Commerce or Board of Tourism for that particular city/country and find out services that are available for individuals with disabilities.
 - Other sources of information about a particular destination include:
 - Travel guides developed by national publishing companies such as Fodor's
 - Travel magazines specifically designed for individuals with disabilities such as Access to Travel or New Mobility (which has an article on travel in each monthly issue)
 - The internet, which provides access to a broad range of information sources for travel such as the Savvy Traveler
 - Organizations or individuals who advocate for and have experienced accessible travel, such as the Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality
 - The local Center for Independent Living, which can provide information on services for individuals with disabilities, including transportation options
 - Make an itinerary of your planned attractions. Contact these locations well before your trip to inquire about general accessibility, accommodations they could make, and programs that they may have.



Making Airline Reservations

- You can make reservations yourself, but if you feel like you need help, use a travel agency that has experience booking travel arrangements for individuals with disabilities.
- Make sure to tell the agent what type of assistive device you use (walker, wheelchair, etc.).
 - Will be added in the computer in your file with your reservation.
 - If your flight is changed, make sure this information is carried over to the new file.
 - The reservation may need to record the dimensions of the equipment you will be bringing aboard, so have information ready.
- If not flying first class or business class, request the BULKHEAD seat in the coach section.
 - This is the first row behind first class and has more leg room.
 - Good for transfers, weight shifts, and people having to get into seats past you in the row.
 - If bulkhead is an exit row, you may not be able to sit there due to FAA regulations.
- If you cannot get the bulkhead seat, request an AISLE seat with an armrest that raises.
 - Helps in transfers, reducing risk of skin injury if trying to transfer over the armrest.
- Try to get a direct flight unless you need a layover for bowel or bladder care.
 - If not possible, request a “meet and assist” with your reservation.
 - This ensures that airline personnel will help you meet your connecting flight.
 - If you have a layover, request that your own chair be brought to you for the layover.
 - More independence, less risk of equipment getting lost or damaged.
 - Make sure you have enough time in between connecting flights (at least an hour and a half).
- If you are self-bowel and bladder, and may need an on-board chair on the plane, make sure you request this during your reservation to make sure that it is available and on your flight.
- Find out what type of plane you are traveling on.
 - Let them know the dimensions of your wheelchair to be sure it will fit in the baggage hold of the plane – smaller planes have smaller doors!
 - Some newer, larger ones have accessible bathrooms.
 - If so, ask about assistance available from the flight attendants.
 - Usually only transfers and pushing the aisle chair.
 - Not required to help while in the bathroom.
 - If no accessible bathroom, find out about alternatives to do your own I.C.
 - It’s always smarter to do I.C. prior to boarding, but not always possible.



- If flying somewhere with a smaller airport, confirm types of planes you will be flying on.
 - Some airports do not have jet ways and will board via stairs from the ground.
 - Find out procedures for boarding you in these cases.
 - Being carried up the stairs may not be the safest choice and is against the law (Air Carrier's Access Act).
 - Most domestic airlines have an electric elevator to get you to the door of the plane.
- Confirm your reservations and assistance requests approximately 48 hours prior to your trip.

Packing for Your Trip

- ALWAYS carry extra medications and personal care supplies on board with you in case your luggage is lost or your flight is delayed.
- In your carry-on luggage, make sure you pack a list of all your medications, physician's names, numbers, and addresses, medical diagnosis, and insurance information in case of emergency.

Arriving at the Airport

- Arrive at least 1.5 hours prior to departure time.
- Check baggage as normal. DO NOT CHECK YOUR CHAIR! It is important to stay in your own chair.
 - Using an airport chair may decrease level of independence, especially if you use a power chair.
 - Airport chairs do not have the stability and cushioning of your own chair.
 - Could cause skin issues.
 - The longer you remain in your chair, the less likely for it to be misplaced, lost, or damaged.
 - You never know when your flight could be delayed or for how long.
- If you need assistance, airport personnel are available to escort you from the check-in counter to the plane.
 - Including: pushing your chair, helping with tickets, and baggage tags, etc.
 - This service is called "meet and assist" and can be requested in your reservation.
- You can request to have a TSA Passenger Support Specialist escort you through the security checkpoint so TSA can ensure you will be provided with the appropriate level of assistance you need.
 - TSA CARES can be contacted about 72 hrs. before travel at 1-855-787-2227



- Because many disabilities are not visual, all TSA officers are required to ask any passenger in a wheelchair “are you able to stand, is your party able to assist you with standing or lifting and/or are you able to use upper body strength to lift yourself?” (to check the cushion).
- Let the screening agent know what you are able to do and what you are not able to do so that they can provide the most thorough screening – this is for your safety as well as everyone else’s.
 - If you are unable to remove your shoes or need to keep your shoes on for positioning or skin integrity, let the screening agent know and they can do additional screening techniques while your shoes remain on your feet.
 - If you are traveling with liquids/gels which you use for personal care or medical needs but exceed the 3oz limit, identify those items at the start of your security screen so they will know and can perform alternative testing to ensure items are safe to pass through security.

Getting Ready to Board

- Make sure your chair is GATE TAGGED so it will be brought to you at the gate upon arrival.
 - Make sure to remove any removable parts of your chair and take them on the plane with you. Otherwise be sure they are each tagged with your name and contact information in case they become separated from your chair in the baggage compartment.
- Request to board plane first to give you additional time for transfer and get adjusted in your seat. The airline is required to allow you to pre-board if you identify yourself at the gate as needing to do so.
- Remain in your chair until you reach the end of the jet way in front of the door of the plane.
 - You will then be required to transfer to the aisle chair in order to board.
 - Make sure you do the following:
 - Be assertive in letting the staff know how best to help you.
 - Do not assume the staff know how to transfer you.
 - Tell them how you like to be transferred (spotting, sliding board, two-man lift, etc.)
 - Let staff know what parts of your body are sensitive so they can take appropriate precautions when assisting you.
 - Remove your cushion from your chair and bring this on the plane with you.
 - Although airline seats are cushioned, it does not provide the correct pressure relief that your own cushion will.



- If you have an air-filled cushion, you may want to remove some air. Airplanes are pressurized, so air-filled cushions will expand. Make sure to refill to appropriate level after landing.
- If you have difficulty with balance, make sure you advise the staff not to let go of you and move away after the transfer is complete until the safety straps are in place. Make sure they apply chest and waist straps around you for safety.
- Once on the plane, you will transfer from the aisle chair to your assigned airline seat.
 - Again, be assertive and let the staff know the best way to assist you.
 - Raise the armrest.
 - If it doesn't raise, place a blanket or pillow over it to protect you during the transfer.
- Put seatbelt on immediately. If you need a chest strap, you can use a gait belt or body bracer wrapped around you and the seat. Ask the transfer personnel to assist you by lowering the tray table behind you, wrapping the strap around your seat, and then putting the tray table back in place.
- Make contact with a member of the on-board flight crew.
 - Get their name and ask about emergency evacuation procedures that pertain to you.
 - Getting their name will help ensure accountability and also give you someone to reference in the event you need assistance.
- Please note that airline staff are there to help you with general needs but are not allowed to help you with personal care (eating, medication management, using the restroom, etc.).
- Enjoy the flight!

Getting Ready to Land

- Approximately 30 min. before landing, request that the flight attendant radio ahead to remind the ground crew that your chair is to be brought up to the gate upon arrival.

Landing

- You will be the last person off the flight. Sit back and relax!
- When the transfer personnel arrive with the aisle chair to help you off the plane, make sure your wheelchair is waiting for you on the jet way before you transfer into the aisle chair.



- Remember to advocate for your needs with the transfer personnel- let them know they best way to assist you.
- Inspect your chair and all of its parts before you get into it and then also ensure it works properly after you are in it.
 - If anything is wrong, contact airline personnel before leaving the airport.

What to Do If You Have a Complaint

- If you find ANY damage, document it immediately.
 - Get a claim number and phone number for follow-up contact on getting your chair repaired.
- Keep a record of all names of who you deal with, from flight personnel to general airport personnel.
 - Keep all tickets, receipts, dates and times.
 - The more accurate information you have, the better off you will be.
- All airlines in the U.S. are required by law to have a Complaint Resolutions Officer (CRO) available at all times by phone or direct person to person contact.
 - If you are not satisfied with how the airline personnel are handling your situation, ask to speak with the CRO.
- Complaints must be made to the CRO within 45 days of the date of occurrence. The CRO then has 10 days to respond to your accusation by way of written statement. In addition, the CRO has 30 days to complete an investigation into the complaint.
- Also obtain a copy of the resolution in writing for your personal records.
- You may also file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Transportation's Aviation Consumer Protection Division (ACPD):
 - Aviation Consumer Protection Division, C-75
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590
(202) 366-2220
[transportation.gov/airconsumer/file-consumer-complaint](https://www.transportation.gov/airconsumer/file-consumer-complaint)
- Know what your rights are in terms of the airlines' liability for making repairs and replacing damaged chairs.
 - Laws have been changing to ensure a fairer retribution for the damage.



- Generally, airlines are liable for damages the cause, up to \$2,500.
- Prior to your trip, you may want to check your homeowner's insurance policy to determine the amount of coverage provided for any damages done to your chair during travel.

Miscellaneous Information

- If you are ambulating and only use a chair for long distances, it might be easier to leave your chair at home.
 - At the airport, you could use the airport chairs and other transportation services.
 - You could rent a scooter or chair at your final destination for use during your trip.
 - Scootaround
(888) 441-7575
Scootaround.com
 - Locator service that will find a scooter to fit your needs and deliver it to your destination.
- If you have a folding manual chair, you can request it be stored in the on-board stowage location.
 - There is only room for one, so this is a first come first serve basis.
 - Arrive early and request at check in.
- To be better prepared for any wheelchair emergencies, research the closest wheelchair repair services in the area that you are visiting.
 - Make an initial contact prior the trip to establish a relationship.
- To be better prepared for any medical emergency, consider getting the name of a physician or other medical professional in the area you are traveling.
 - Make an initial contact prior to the trip to establish a relationship.



Accessible Travel Services

Easterseals Project Action	Our mission is to promote universal access to transportation for people with disabilities under federal law and beyond by partnering with transportation providers, the disability community and others through the provision of training, technical assistance, applied research, outreach and communication.
Gimp on the Go	Provides information on airfare discounts, accessibility evaluations on various destinations, etc.
Emerging Horizons	Travel information for wheelchair users and slow walkers
AccessibleProperties.net	Handicap and wheelchair properties for sale and rent.
Sea Wheels	An organization dedicated to facilitating travel opportunities for persons with disabilities
Access At Last	We are presently the only website in the world advertising only accommodation with at least 1 room with a level access shower. We are making life accessible for people wanting to travel all over this beautiful world, no matter what physical ability a person has.
DisabledTravelers.com	A comprehensive listing of accessible travel specialists: Travel Agents, Tour Operators, Adventure Travel Companies, Accessible Cruise Specialists, Accessible Van Rentals & Equipment, Travel Companions, Home Exchanges, and Access Guides for wheelchair users and other disabled travelers.
Disabled Access Holidays	We are the experts in arranging holidays for disabled people with medical conditions and disabilities.
When We Travel	A travel web site that finally gives you the power to search for specific vacation and travel destinations, tourist attractions, activities, restaurants, hotel accommodations, and airfare based on your unique requirements.

Travel: Organizations

Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality	An educational nonprofit membership organization whose mission is to raise awareness of the needs of all travelers with disabilities, remove physical and attitudinal barriers to free access and expand travel opportunities in the United States and abroad.
Wilderness Inquiry	A non-profit organization that helps people from all walks of life to personally experience the natural world.



Travel: Knowing Your Rights

<p>Air Carriers Access Act</p>	<p>The Air Carrier Access Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in air travel. The Department of Transportation has a rule defining the rights of passengers and the obligations of airlines under this law. This rule applies to all flights of U.S. airlines and to flights to or from the United States by foreign airlines.</p>
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Travel: Magazines and Publications

<p>New Horizons Information for the Air Traveler with a Disability</p>	<p>Lists requirements for accessibility, advance notice for reservations, need for attendants, handling of assistive devices, etc.</p>
<p>Fodor's Great American Vacations for Travelers with Disabilities</p>	<p>A great travel guide providing solid, detailed accessibility information and on-target travel know-how.</p>
<p>New Mobility</p>	<p>The magazine for active wheelchair users</p>
<p>101 Accessible Vacations</p>	<p>An accessible vacation idea book with substance, this unique guidebook contains destination information on over 101 cities, lodging options, national parks, tourist attractions and recreational activities around the world.</p>

Travel Agencies

<p>Accessible Journeys</p>	<p>Offers group tours and finds travel companions</p>
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Unique Travel Services

<p>International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers</p>	<p>Lists English-speaking medical providers by country</p>
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