



Traveling with Disabilities

If you are a person with disabilities or are traveling with a person with disabilities, preparation before you begin your trip is essential to help you ensure that your travel will be accessible, safe and enjoyable. Think about your needs throughout your trip and conduct research in advance. Individual countries have their own standards of accessibility for travelers with disabilities. We recommend that travelers with disabilities review the information on www.travel.state.gov, consider the following tips, and discuss the trip with your health care provider.

1. Know Before You Go: The first consideration in traveling abroad is the preparation you need to travel. If you don't travel much, speak to someone with a similar disability who has travelled abroad before. Think of questions you should consider if your disability requires additional assistance and write them down. For example, some questions to consider:

- If you use a wheelchair, what type of assistance will you need?
- Can you walk from the door of the plane to your seat or do you need an aisle seat?
- Can you transfer from your wheelchair to your seat or do you need assistance?
- If you will transfer planes, how much time do you need during the transfer?
- If you are traveling with a guide dog explain to the travel agency or ticketing agent any assistance you will need. If you use a ventilator, are you sure the appropriate plugs are available?
- If you have special dietary needs, does the airline or hotel have the food you need?

*Making reservations: Contact airlines, hotels, etc. and clearly state what accommodations you may require. Some airlines have personnel to assist a disabled person in making airline reservations – ask when you call to make the reservations. In all cases, ask that your needs and requests be documented as part of the reservation, ask for the confirmation number, and take down the name of the agent. That way, if there is a problem, you may be able to quickly show that you are entitled to the service you requested. Consider contacting disability organizations overseas where you plan to visit (<http://www.miusa.org/ncde/link/onlinedirectorios>).

*Travel Smart: The additional physical activity undertaken during travel is strenuous, and sudden changes in diet and climate can have serious health consequences for the unprepared traveler, young and old. Allow ample personal time, whether to adjust to the current time zone or to enjoy another travel site.

*Accommodations: Determine wheelchair access, to areas such as a swimming pool, public rooms, restaurants, bars, toilets, etc. Find out if the equipment you may need is available—such as back rests, bathing equipment, hoists, ramps, and special mattresses. Determine if shopping and entertainment are accessible. Determine voltage requirements in each country—whether an adapter is necessary, and what the plug configurations are.

*Airlines: The Air Carrier Access Act and its amendments have resulted in the Department of Transportation (DOT) instituting regulations to ensure that persons with disabilities are treated without discrimination in ways consistent with the safe carriage of all passengers, domestically and internationally. Carriers are prohibited from imposing charges for providing facilities, equipment, or services to an individual with a disability that is covered by DOT's Air Carrier Access regulations. Travelers with disabilities should review the Department of Transportation pamphlet [New Horizons for the Air Traveler with a Disability](#) for more information about the Air

Carrier Access Act. For further information about travel for individuals with a disability, please see the DOT website, www.dot.gov.

Check in early and label all of your luggage. Check toilet accessibility and find out whether the airline can accommodate special dietary restrictions. Determine whether a wheelchair or other bulky devices require special handling. Most airlines allow you to pre-board if you are traveling with a wheelchair or an electric scooter. Consider measures to safeguard your wheelchair or scooter while it is in the cargo area. Book direct flights whenever possible and allow enough time for transfers between planes and other forms of transportation. Ask what assistance may be available at the airport such as at check-in, throughout the terminal, and upon boarding and disembarking. Make sure to inform the cabin crew of any potential problems or concerns you may have transferring from a wheelchair to your airline seat. Consider whether you need a personal assistant. Arrange in advance to have accessible transportation to and from the airport.

If you have a hearing impairment and will require assistance at the airport, inform your travel agent or the airline company as soon as possible to make the necessary arrangements. You will not be required to remove hearing aids or the exterior component of a cochlear implant at security checkpoints. Please wear your hearing device while going through the metal detector.

You can also arrange for someone to help you at check-in, custom controls, and baggage check. Additionally, you can request that airline staff inform you personally as soon as information is announced regarding your flight. When you check in, confirm with the agent how you would like to be informed that your flight is ready for boarding and other pertinent information. The majority of public address systems at airports should include induction loop facilities, which will amplify the sound when you use the 'T' switch on your hearing aid. In many airports, text telephones and public telephones fitted with induction loops are available.

On the plane, ensure with the cabin crew that you will receive any important announcements made during the flight. Information videos shown on the plane should have subtitles, and you may be able to use an induction loop to listen to public announcements. Some airlines allow deaf passengers to board first so that the cabin crew can explain the safety procedures to them before other passengers board.

2. Health and Safety Information: **A key resource for health information is the Travelers' Health** page of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>. Discuss with your health care provider the activities you have planned, your general physical condition, any immunizations, and medications—whether prescription or over the counter—that you might need for your trip. Consider any effects the local topography or climate may have on you. For example, if you are sensitive to altitude or humidity, consult with your health care provider. Carry a letter from your health care provider, preferably on letterhead, which describes your medical condition, medications, potential complications, and other pertinent medical information. Determine health care availability in the location where you will be traveling. Your doctor, health care provider, insurance company or the local U.S. embassy can provide the names and contact numbers of health care facilities at your destination. Make sure to carry medical alert information, preferably in a place that a health care provider or anyone who assists you will find easily (wallet card, necklace, or with your identification documents). Check to see if any natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or tsunamis occur at your destination and consider how these may affect you – consulting with your health care provider as necessary.

*Your medications: If you take prescription medication, make sure you have enough to last during your entire trip, including extra medicine in case you are delayed. Make sure to ask your pharmacy or physician for the generic equivalent name of your prescriptions in case you need to purchase additional medication abroad. Physicians and pharmacists abroad are more likely to be familiar with the generic name (also known as the chemical name) of medications. Pack your medication in your carry-on bag, since checked baggage is occasionally lost. Always carry your prescriptions in their labeled containers, not in a pill pack. Take a copy of your immunizations records along in your hand-carry luggage.

*Health and Evacuation Insurance: Make sure you have adequate and up-to-date health insurance coverage while abroad, including coverage for medical evacuation (not covered by most domestic policies). Medical treatment and hospital care abroad can be expensive, and medical evacuation to the United States can cost more than \$100,000. Check with your health insurance provider to see whether you will be covered overseas, in which countries you will be covered, and under what circumstances. Your health insurance provider may also require you to provide notification of your travel before you depart the United States and pre-approval may be necessary for some treatments. Ensure that anyone traveling with you also has adequate insurance coverage. Note that U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside of the United States. You can find the names of some of the companies offering short-term health and emergency assistance policies on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1215.html.

3. Service dogs and assistive equipment: If you intend to travel with a service dog, be sure to check on possible restrictions with the embassy or consulate of each country you will visit. If service dogs are permitted, find out about quarantine or vaccination requirements. Find out which documents and translations of documents are needed, including identification, international health certificates, and rabies inoculation certificates. Talk with your vet about tips for traveling with a dog. You may also want to ensure that hotels will accommodate your service dog, and that there will be an adequate area for your dog to relieve itself. Check on any other policies for devices such as wheelchairs, portable machines, batteries, respirators, and oxygen. Have a maintenance check done on your equipment to ensure that everything is in working order before you leave. You may want to research the availability of wheelchair and medical equipment providers in the areas you plan to visit.

4. Emergency Contacts: A secure way to maintain your contact information is to register at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This site stores your information securely and enables us to contact you, your family or friends in an emergency if you fill in their contact information. By registering, you will help us be able to contact you if there is a family emergency in the United States or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, we will not release information on your welfare and whereabouts to others without your express written authorization. Carry a copy of your written itinerary and directions for where you wish to go. Leave a copy of the itinerary, airline tickets, credit cards, serial numbers of your **traveler's checks, passport and contact details with a trusted family member or friend at home** and carry emergency contact information for your family in the United States with you. For both, include contact information for the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate at your travel destination(s). You can show these to people who might be able to help you should you get lost.

5. Scams: Beware of scams – scammers intend to get money from their victims by making the victims believe they will gain something of great personal value (financial gain, a romantic relationship, helping someone in trouble, the safe return of a friend, etc.). Financial scams

originating from overseas are a real and growing problem. Individual U.S. citizens have lost considerable sums of money on these scams, ranging from a few hundred dollars to hundreds of thousands of dollars. While confidence schemes have long existed, the advent of the Internet has greatly increased their prevalence, and the Department of State receives daily inquiries from victims. Scams may involve internet dating. Scammers operate primarily via the Internet, email, and phone.

For information about scams and what you can do to protect yourself (or what to do if you are the victim of a scam), please review our Fact Sheet on International Financial Scams at: http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/financial_scams/financial_scams_3155.html

6. Useful Links:

Medications: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/medications>

Traveling with a Ventilator: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/ventilator>

Disability Organizations Overseas: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/link/onlinedirectories>

Wheelchairs and Assistive Devices: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/powerchairs>

International Health Insurance: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/insurance>

Medications Abroad: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/medications>

Oxygen Abroad: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/oxygen>

Air Travel Service Complaints & People with Disabilities:
<http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/ACAComplaint.htm>

Common Questions Regarding Travel for People with Disabilities:
http://airconsumer.dot.gov/rules/FAQ_5_13_09.pdf

Flying with a Disability: <http://www.flying-with-disability.org/>

Safe Travel for People with Hidden Disabilities:
http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial_1374.shtm

For access information and resources for mature travelers and travelers with special needs:
<http://www.access-able.com/>

Information about cruising with a disabled: CruiseCritic.com

Listing of accessible travel specialists: <http://www.disabledtravelers.com/>

Resources and tips from disabled travelers: <http://www.globalaccessnews.com/>

News, fact sheets and destination access guides: <http://www.sath.org/>