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# ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL GUIDE

Tips and Resources For Traveling with Mobility Issues



## 2024 EDITION

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## INTRODUCTION

Let's face it: traveling can be a challenge for people who rely on mobility assistance equipment. If you have a motion disability, it is essential to make sure you're fully prepared before your trip.



For example: what type of transportation will you be taking to your destination? What hotel are you staying at? What restaurants are in the area? Which sights do you want to see? How will you be getting around? All of these questions require a significant amount of attention and pre-planning, but there are a lot of small things you can do in advance to help your vacation go smoothly. It takes some extra research and decision-making, but it's better to be prepared.

Luckily, there are many online resources that provide information, tips, and advice for traveling with mobility issues, as well as a number of helpful social media groups where you can post questions. With the right planning, you can ensure your trip is an adventure to remember, rather than a major headache!



# Make a list...

Making lists is a great way to keep your planning organized – and you can make a list for just about anything. Some great list ideas include:

1. **Your budget** for the trip, including a daily spending limit
2. **Packing list** to make sure you don't forget anything important
3. **Restaurants** you would like to try:
  - Coffee shops for a dose of caffeine to start your day
  - Local diners and hole-in-the-wall restaurants
  - Pubs (if you enjoy that kind of thing)
4. **Attractions** to visit:
  - Historical monuments and buildings
  - Museums – art, history, science, etc.
  - Local landmarks
5. **Hotels** in the area (once you pick one, you can list out the contact and reservation information as well)
6. **Transportation** information: rental cars, shuttles, taxis, rideshare services, etc.
7. **Tours** you're interested in taking, as well as contact information for the guide companies
8. **Potential day trips**
9. **Mobility equipment service or repair shops**
10. **Pharmacies** in the area (if you require a medication refill while you're on your trip)
11. **Hospitals** in the area (include contact information in case of emergencies)
12. **Important documents** to take with you, such as:
  - Medical information
  - Primary care doctor's contact information
  - Prescription information
  - Boarding passes
  - Identification documents (including passport if you're traveling internationally)
  - Hotel reservations



## TOP THINGS TO PLAN BEFORE YOU GO



# WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

It might seem obvious, but if you're planning a vacation this is usually the biggest question of them all. Deciding where you want to go and what you want to see is the first step. Once you've got a few destinations in mind, you'll want to check out what attractions and sights the area offers. Do some research online to find out how wheelchair accessible the city and surrounding area is. [Some cities are far more accessible than others](#), so doing a bit of investigation can mean the difference between a good trip and a great trip. You'll also want to take your budget into consideration when picking a destination. Hotels tend to be more

expensive in bigger cities, but the transportation options are typically better than they are in smaller cities or towns.

With international travel there are extra things to take into consideration. For one thing, you'll need to make sure you have a passport! Look into information regarding customs requirements for handicapped individuals. Also, be sure to double and triple check the accessibility of the country you are visiting – a little research can go a long way.





## TRAVELING TO YOUR DESTINATION

Are you going to be flying, taking a train, or even a bus? Either way, it's essential to get in touch with the transportation company you've made reservations with and speak to them about your needs. There are also several travel agencies that concentrate on special needs and handicap travel. These agencies can help you book the most accessible trip possible, which takes some of the stress and worry out of vacation planning. Remember: take stock of your needs beforehand and make sure those needs are met while you're traveling. This will make your trip enjoyable and hassle-free.

Start by asking yourself some questions about your needs. Make a list of all the things you will require on the trip and then start making phone calls to hammer out the details. Will you need help getting on and off the plane? Perhaps you'll need someone to help you transfer into the high-back

airport wheelchair in order to board? What about assistance carrying your luggage? All of these questions and more need to be answered before you leave for your trip. There are plenty of online resources to help you plan, and sometimes it's as simple as making a phone call to the airline, train station, or bus company. Planning for each type of transportation is a little bit different – each takes a lot of thought, careful consideration, and phone calls – but in the end your trip will be much better if you've got all the details accounted for.

The following pages include several tips to help get the ball rolling on your trip planning.





# TRAVELING BY AIRPLANE

Air travel offers the fastest and (usually) the most direct method of getting where you want to go. When taking an airplane, there are several things to take into consideration, including the length of your flight and whether or not the restroom will be accessible. Make sure that you know your rights regarding air travel according to the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA). If you're on a flight that has connecting flights and layovers, make sure to leave yourself plenty of time to get from one plane to another – at least 90 minutes if possible. Review the layout of the airports you'll be departing from and arriving to, and see what services they offer. Once you're at the gate, you will be required to transfer out of your mobility device into a high-backed aisle wheelchair in order to get on the plane.

Get in touch with the airline, as well as the airport, and let them know what type of wheelchair or mobility device you will be traveling with: a manual wheelchair, electric wheelchair, or a scooter. If you are traveling with a manual wheelchair, remember to remove the leg supports and any cushions. Put these into your carry-on bag instead, as they can sometimes get damaged and/or lost during the travel process. It's also a good idea to attach a set of instructions for disassembling and assembling your wheelchair or scooter before you turn it over to airport staff. Under the ACAA, if a wheelchair or scooter is disassembled for transport, it must be returned to the passenger correctly assembled. Having written assembly instructions readily available simplifies this process.

Generally, airport staff should be able to assist you with transferring into an airport wheelchair after you check your equipment. They will also assist with getting through security or giving you directions to your gate. A lot of airlines have priority boarding for those in wheelchairs, so definitely check into that before you leave!

For more information, check out this guide from Scootaround Powered by WHILL:

[scootaround.com/airplane-travel-guide](https://scootaround.com/airplane-travel-guide)





## TAKING THE TRAIN/RAIL

Traveling by train can be fun and exciting, but it does present some challenges for wheelchair users. Make sure you call the train company and/or train station to let them know about your specific needs for the trip. The spaces on train cars are usually small and confined, and there are specific things to plan before you go. For example, handicap accessibility varies between train companies. Some companies boast a full complement of services for accessible travel – from assistance boarding the train to accessible sleeper cars – while others have very few options.

It is important to find out if the departure and arrival stations are equipped with a wheelchair lift or high-level platforms. If there's not an available wheelchair lift at one or both of the stations, you'll want to let your rail carrier know the weight of your wheelchair, as some have weight or size limits to ensure there is room for storage. If you are unable to take your chair on the train because of these limits, you may want to consider renting a wheelchair, scooter, or power chair at your destination. It's also important to ask about the restroom situation on the train car. You'll want to find out if the doorways are wide enough for a wheelchair to fit through, and if switches and latches in the restroom are within reach while seated in a wheelchair.

For more information, check out this guide from Scootaround Powered by WHILL:

[scootaround.com/rail-travel](https://scootaround.com/rail-travel)



# HOPPING ON A BUS

As with train trips, traveling by bus can present challenges if a wheelchair (or other mobility device) is involved. Buses are usually equipped to handle most handicap accessible needs, but they may be short on space to store wheelchairs or other mobility aids. Get in touch with the bus company in advance to find out the specifics of the bus you will be on. Make sure to ask about options for boarding and exiting the bus. If there is a restroom on board, ask whether or not it is accessible. Again, if you are unable to take your chair due to space constraints – or for any other reason – consider renting a mobility device at your destination. Scootaround can have a scooter or wheelchair waiting for you at your hotel, residence, or convention center, and will pick it up once your trip is over.



For more information, check out this guide from Scootaround Powered by WHILL:

[scootaround.com/bus-travel](https://scootaround.com/bus-travel)



# LEAVING PORT ON A CRUISE SHIP

Cruise lines are becoming more accessible, but it still takes a little time to determine what facilities and services are available to make your trip on the ocean as smooth as possible. Since the cruise ship serves as both your transportation and hotel for the duration of the trip, you'll want to make sure your room is comfortable and meets all your needs. Check with the cruise line to ensure your wheelchair or scooter can fit through all of the necessary doorways on the ship, including your room and the restrooms, as well as the dining areas and entertainment rooms. Find out if there are raised areas, such as door sills, or if there are ramps and elevators to the different levels of the ship. It's also smart to ask about the accessibility of the restroom itself, including whether there are seats in the showers, grab bars for the shower and toilet, and if the shower controls are at an accessible height.

For more information, check out this guide from Scootaround Powered by WHILL:

[scootaround.com/cruise-travel-and-rentals](https://scootaround.com/cruise-travel-and-rentals)





## TAKING YOUR OWN EQUIPMENT VS. RENTING AT YOUR DESTINATION

Will you be taking your own wheelchair or power scooter with you, or do you plan to rent mobility equipment once you reach your destination?

If you're traveling within the United States or Canada, renting from [Scootaround Powered by WHILL](#) could be a great option for you. Renting equipment eliminates the stress of traveling with your wheelchair or scooter, and Scootaround has locations all across the continent (along with a number of worldwide cruise port locations), so finding a rental close to your destination is easy.

If you decide to take your own wheelchair with you, you'll need to familiarize yourself with how it will affect your travel. Keep in mind: when you are

traveling by airplane, your wheelchair or scooter will be taken at the gate, and you'll transfer to one of the airport's wheelchairs. Generally, a member of the airport staff will be available to assist you if you're traveling alone. If you are able to make small repairs (e.g. tightening screws), taking a basic repair kit would be prudent. If you are unable to make such repairs, research wheelchair repair shops and services around your hotel beforehand. Make a list of the closest repair shops, pricing, and services just in case you need it.



# HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

When traveling, your hotel room is your home away from home – and you don't want to find yourself in an uncomfortable or even dangerous situation because the hotel doesn't provide everything you need. Make a short list of the hotels you're interested in staying at and do some research. Find out if they are handicap accessible or not, and if they are, dig a little deeper. Just like when you made your transportation reservations, you'll want to call the hotel directly and talk to someone about your needs. It's important to make sure the hotel you pick meets all of your requirements. As always, a little bit of research and investigation can save you a lot of stress down the road.

**Ask questions about everything that is important to your specific mobility situation. Some questions that may be helpful:**

- Do they provide special disability services?
- Are the accessible rooms ADA compliant?  
If so, how?

- On which floors are the accessible rooms located? (this can be important for emergencies when elevators may be out of service)
- What is the height of the bed? Can you easily get in and out from a wheelchair?
- Is there a wheelchair accessible shuttle provided by the hotel?

Once you've chosen a potential hotel to stay in, be sure to check out their amenities and the surrounding area. Check how easy it will be to get around once you're there. Traveling with all the amenities of home helps ensure your trip is relaxing and rejuvenating, so find out if the hotel offers a free breakfast, Wi-Fi, laundry, and room service. Some hotels have also been renovating their pools to allow for handicap accessibility, so if that is something you're interested in, definitely call and ask!



Image: Rosedale Hotel Group



# TRANSPORTATION AT YOUR DESTINATION

One of the biggest obstacles when traveling with limited mobility is finding acceptable transportation options once you've arrived at your destination. You'll need to sort this out, especially if you are traveling by yourself. Check to see if your hotel offers a handicap accessible shuttle or van from the airport or train/bus station. Alternatively, depending on your destination, public transportation could be an option. A lot of city buses are handicap accessible or offer special pickup for wheelchairs.

If you are planning to rent a vehicle, there are several companies that offer wheelchair accessible vans. You can typically find a number of options by doing a simple search online. If you can drive (or have a traveling companion) and use a collapsible wheelchair, a regular rental car may also be an option, provided it has a large enough trunk to fit your chair. If you choose to rent a regular vehicle, it would be wise to call the rental company and discuss your needs with them. This way you can be certain they will reserve the right type of vehicle for you.

Handicap accessible taxis or rideshare services may be a good alternative to look into as well. Pricing and availability will differ depending on where you are of course, with bigger cities usually having better transportation overall. Be sure to research all your options in advance of your vacation – you don't want to be stuck at your hotel without a way to get around!





# LOCAL ATTRACTIONS AND THEIR ACCESSIBILITY

If you're planning a trip that involves a lot of sightseeing, it's important to look into the handicap accessibility of any attractions you would like to visit ahead of time. Historical monuments, museums, cathedrals, and even whole city centers all have vastly different levels of accessibility. For example, you wouldn't want to get to a museum ready to enjoy the art and history, only to realize there are no elevators. You can usually find accessibility information for major attractions online, but if you don't see what you're looking for, definitely make some calls and ask questions. Ask about the accessibility of the building and specific exhibits, or parts of the attraction that you are particularly interested in. Also, don't forget to inquire about handicap accessible parking and if shuttle services are available to you.

If you will be dining out while sightseeing, consider doing some research on the restaurants in the area. It's always a good idea to make sure the local hot spots or hole-in-the-wall diners are wheelchair accessible. Some restaurants and cafés may be too small for a mobility device to maneuver comfortably. You can check the restaurant's website for information, or just give them a call to confirm whether or not they will be able to accommodate your needs.







## GOING ON A TOUR

Taking tours can be a fantastic way to see a new city, or to learn interesting facts about a familiar place. If you decide to take a tour, you'll definitely want to get in touch with the tour company and ask some questions about the accessibility of their tours. This will allow you to determine whether or not they can accommodate your needs while you're traveling.

The price of a tour can often vary greatly depending on whether or not you're in a wheelchair, generally due to the extra

requirements and modifications that need to be made for the chair. If you can find a company that specializes in accessible tours, they will usually take you on the smoothest, flattest, and sometimes shortest tour routes, while still giving you a fantastic, memorable experience. It's also a smart idea to find out how long the tour is, what kind of tour it is (i.e. walking tour, bus tour, etc.), and what experience, if any, they have with providing tours to individuals with specific mobility needs.



### Some good questions to ask include:

- What route does the tour guide plan on taking?
- Will you be encountering curbs, steep hills, stairs, or other rough terrain (e.g. cobblestones and dirt paths)?
- Are handicap accessible restrooms available anywhere on the tour route?
- Will a guide be able to physically assist you if the need arises (such as pushing a manual wheelchair or helping you get up the stairs)?

- Will there be other tourists on the tour?  
If so, will you be expected to keep up with them despite your mobility requirements?

There are many different types of tours you can take depending on where you're traveling to. Historical locations, museums, natural wonders, castles, churches, and beautiful public gardens are all fantastic places to tour, with each offering new things to learn and see.



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With the correct preparation and planning, traveling with mobility needs can be a great adventure. Regardless of whether you're traveling with a wheelchair, scooter, or other mobility aid, there's always a way to ensure your trip goes off without a hitch. It might take a little extra time, but doing your research before the trip, making lists, booking ahead, and placing a few phone calls are all excellent ways to make sure your well-earned vacation is stress-free!