

Chapter 13

TRAVEL

Travel for persons who have disabilities is becoming easier all the time. With some careful advanced planning to avoid potential problems, this leisure activity can be fun and interesting. Whatever your preferences, national or international, opportunities abound!

It is always helpful to travel light. You can always purchase small items, wash out clothes or find a laundry. Most people only really need only two or three changes of clothes. As for any personal equipment you may need get a small, inexpensive handbag or gym bag and keep it where it is handy. Carry all medications with you. Bring a list of your medications and copies of any pertinent information. Purchase travel insurance if you can.

Call the Telephone Operator and ask for the United State Public Health Service. Service connected veterans should get a copy of the V.A. 10-100 pamphlet from their Contact Officer before leaving. It contains all the VA hospital names and addresses where supplies and aid are available should you need them.

TRANSPORTATION

The Office of Protection and Advocacy publishes a brochure "[Accessible Travel.](#)" With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other disability rights laws, it just may be possible to "get there from here". This publication examines the rights of travelers and commuters with disabilities which enable them to travel to work visit friends and families, go shopping, and become active participants in the life of their communities and beyond.

Automobiles

Although there are many methods of travel, the automobile remains the most popular. This is primarily because it provides the most independence, is simple, the U.S. highway system is excellent and maps and travel guides are relatively inexpensive and easy to obtain.

You should consider planning trips in advance with the assistance of motor clubs such as the American Automobile Association (AAA – www.aaa.com, 1-800-842-4320) and its local branch, the Connecticut Motor Club. The Connecticut Motor Club has several offices throughout the state, but requires membership before providing service. These organizations can help locate the best routes, avoid construction areas, identify places of interest to visit, and identify accessible hotels, restaurants and recreational sites.

Automobile and Van Rentals

The three major car rental companies in the U.S. (Hertz, Avis and National) are all able to provide automobiles equipped with hand controls. The rentals are subject to availability, but are available in most locations.

Hertz, Avis and National require 24-48 hours notice. National and Hertz will only provide hand controls on full size cars. Avis may be able to provide hand controls on smaller vehicles and also offers wheelchair accessible vans. There are no extra charges for a car equipped with hand controls. If not returning the vehicle to the point of origin, there may be a drop off charge for Avis and Thrifty. You should discuss this prior to renting a vehicle.

Further information may be obtained by calling their toll-free numbers:

Hertz 1-800-654-3131
www.hertz.com

National, 1-877-222-9058
www.nationalcar.com

Enterprise, 1-800-261-7331
www.enterprise.com

Avis, 1-800-633-3469
www.avis.com

Thrifty, 1-800-541-7044
www.thrifty.com

There are various accessible van rental locations located around the country. The following are some available for the general public: Wheelchair Getaways (available Nationwide) 1-800-642-2042 www.wheelchair-getaways.com e-mail corporate@wheelchair-getaways.com and Accessible Minivan Rentals (Orlando-Tampa-Miami) 1-800-778-7953, www.discountmobilityusa.com.

Buses

Buses are not the most accessible method of travel for persons with

mobility impairments and frequently have inaccessible terminals. Due to the narrow aisle on the buses, wheelchairs and other assistive devices must often be stored in the baggage compartment, making it virtually impossible to utilize the bus lavatory. However, economic incentives may compensate for these difficulties.

Major bus lines, especially Greyhound and Peter Pan, will provide assistance with boarding and baggage handling, but prefer advance arrangements be made.

At the time of ticket purchase, most bus lines require persons with disabilities to present a written statement from a physician indicating that the person has either a permanent or temporary disability but is able to travel by bus if accompanied by an attendant to assist in boarding and traveling on the bus. This statement should be dated, signed by the physician, and include the name of the traveler as well as the name and address of the physician.

Greyhound and Peter Pan have fare reduction programs which allow a personal care assistant to travel for fifty percent off, with regular ticket purchase. The companion must be capable of rendering all necessary assistance and the pair must travel together throughout the entire trip. The reduction fares generally include all regularly scheduled routes in the U.S. and Canada. Most lines require 24-48 hours in advance to provide proper accommodations. Call the bus lines or a travel agency for details such as Greyhound, 1-800-752-4841, www.greyhound.com and Peter Pan, 1-800-343-9999, www.peterpanbus.com.

Trains

Amtrak suggests that any trip requiring accessibility arrangements begin with a toll-free call to their reservations and information number listed in the telephone directory under "Amtrak". The agent will then work with you and Amtrak's Special Service Desk to coordinate and confirm appropriate arrangements. Equipment used by Amtrak will vary from train to train, making some passenger cars more accessible than others. Old conventional coaches have been replaced on some runs with new coaches designed for the wheelchair traveler. They generally recommend that all passengers ride in the coach seat or sleeper accommodations, but a passenger may remain in a wheelchair if space permits. When making special arrangements with the

Amtrak agent, make certain to obtain detailed information about the accessibility of the train you plan to take. You should also inquire about station accessibility, boarding arrangements (they have some lifts for raising and lowering wheelchairs between platforms and passenger cars), available assistance, and any anticipated difficulties that may be encountered on board.

An Amendment of the Rail Passengers Service Act mandates that persons with disabilities and senior citizens (aged 65+ years) receive reduced fares on Amtrak. This discount fare is granted upon presentation of an acceptable form of identification such as a letter from a physician. The discount is available in either person or over the phone, not online, also should be called in advance to ensure availability. For more information go to Amtrak, 1-800-872-7245, www.amtrak.com.

Ships

Passenger ships not only provide transportation from one place to another, they offer some marvelous, relaxing cruise vacations. However, accessibility must be a major consideration when choosing a ship, since many are only partially accessible and others are totally inaccessible to passengers using wheelchairs.

Some ship lines require the traveler who has a disability to obtain a physician's letter stating if they are fit to travel.

Regulations regarding wheelchairs on board vary from one ship to another. Sometimes a ship will require you to use a wheelchair which they provide while yours is stored in the ship's hold. Motorized chairs occasionally present problems and ports of call may require a permit to operate a powered wheelchair. It is important to ask the ship line about their regulations regarding wheelchairs prior to booking a cruise.

Contact information for cruise lines, which are known to be at least partially accessible, may be found below: Carnival Cruise Lines, 1-800-227-6482, www.carnival.com; Holland America Line, 1-800-426 – 0327, www.hollandamerica.com; Norwegian Cruise Lines, 1-800-234-0292, www.ncl.com; Princess Cruises, 1-800-774-6237, www.princess.com and Royal

Caribbean Cruise Line, Booking: Special Needs Assistance, 1-866-562-7625, 1-800-722-5472, www.royalcaribbean.com, e-mail- special_needs@rccl.com.

Air

Airlines are now beginning to provide a large number of services for air travelers who have disabilities but they still vary greatly from airline to airline and even within airlines from plane to plane. Thus, it is very important for any traveler with a disability planning to take a trip by air, to closely question everyone, from the reservation agent, to the ticket taker, to the boarding personnel, to the crew on the plane as to whether the services are available (it is not uncommon to get different answers from everyone and it is frequently necessary to request a manager to settle difficulties).

Boarding Wheelchair? A number of airlines have boarding wheelchairs, which will take the traveler all the way to his/her seat on the plane from the waiting area. This chair will go down the aisle. However, some planes can accommodate a standard wheelchair in the aisle and some airlines allow a personal wheelchair to be used for the boarding process. Some airlines insist that a wheelchair user transfer to a transport wheelchair (which cannot be wheeled independently by the user) far in advance of boarding, while other airlines will let a person use their own wheelchair until just prior to boarding. Call ahead to make arrangements.

Movable Aisle Armrest? Many airlines do not have seats which allow the aisle arm to be raised, making the transfer from the wheelchair to and from the seat difficult. The in-flight staff should be able to assist you in getting in and out of the seat. Call the airlines regarding aisle seats with movable armrests on the plane on which you are reserving a seat, as well as the policy regarding staff assistance. It may help if you become familiar with how to explain to others how to assist you prior to your trip.

In-flight Wheelchair? Although rare in some larger aircraft it is possible to find an on-board wheelchair, which stays on the plane and permits a passenger to use the lavatory or any other service, which requires mobility.

Special Reservation Services? A number of airlines now have desks to serve persons with disabilities who want to fly. One should always ask if such a

desk is available. Also, a number now have telephones for deaf persons (TDD's) for making inquiries or reservations.

Passengers who have mobility impairments are usually asked to board the aircraft prior to the other passengers. Methods of boarding aircraft vary. A jetway is the easiest, as it allows a single level passage from terminal to plane. Passengers may use their own chairs in the jetway or be transferred to a more narrow chair, depending on seating assignment, aisle space, and specific airline rules. When jetways are not available, some airlines use a forklift to load the wheelchairs instead of carrying a person up the stairs. This is usually a large, three-sided box in which the wheelchair is placed on and then lifted up by a forklift until it is level with the airplane door. You are then able to roll right to your seat, but as most aisle widths are only 22 inches, you may need to temporarily transfer and be strapped into the narrower "aisle" chair, provided by the airline or airport. Some airlines use different devices for boarding, such as a stairchair that allows the passenger and chair to be carried onto the plane. Be sure to inquire about boarding methods, especially when using smaller airlines and airports. Learn how to educate crew in how to assist you in advance.

FAA regulations do not permit passengers who use wheelchairs to remain in their wheelchair. Instead they must transfer to a regular airplane seat. Wheelchairs are then usually tagged and stowed in the baggage compartment; occasionally, when space permits, wheelchairs were stowed in the cabin of the aircraft. When you have landed and are ready to deplane, usually after the other passengers, your wheelchair will be returned to you at the side of the plane or in the baggage area.

Spillable wet-cell batteries can be carried by airlines but are subject to strict guidelines. It is advisable for powered wheelchair users to check with the airline to confirm their requirements on wet- or dry-cell batteries.

Passengers' wheelchairs travel free of charge in addition to the regular baggage allowance.

Seating passengers with disabilities is limited primarily by exit placements and the convenience of seating arrangements. Once you are seated in the plane, you will usually have to stay there until you reach your destination.

Suggestions for Air Travel

Make your hotel and plane reservations in advance. Arrive EARLY. Tell them you use a wheelchair and about other needs. Better still, make your reservations in person, or use a travel agency that knows your travel needs. Some programs may use travel agencies which know what might be needed by those with disabilities. Some tips:

Check the boarding procedures so you and they know what to expect, Arrive at the check-in area and assigned gate EARLY, as you will be boarded before other passengers, a large urinary collection device for draining a leg bag may be advisable for long flights on airlines not equipped with an on-board wheelchair. Some travelers also keep their liquid input to a minimum prior to flying, Organize an emergency kit containing those things you can't do without for the next 24 hours. Bring this kit on board with you as luggage does get misplaced occasionally, get a luggage identification tag for your wheelchair, as it will probably be stored with the baggage, tip Skycaps well, as they will make it easier for you and this will probably make it easier for those who follow, always be considerate of your fellow passengers and flight attendants and remember the latter is not a medical aide or nurse, be sure the airline has notified your destination that you use a wheelchair and will need assistance deplaning, be sure to give complete instructions for transfer to the flight attendants, try to have your chair stowed in a forward cabin or in the passenger cabin to shorten the wait upon arrival at the destination, if your wheelchair must be stored with luggage, all removable parts should be kept with you and if you have to switch planes, have your chair checked to the point of transfer.

Discount travel websites may also be used when booking your flight. These sites have an option that can be checked for wheelchair users. Even if this option is used, ALWAYS call the airline to verify they received the message otherwise it could be a great hassle once it is time to board the plane.

RESTAURANTS/TOURIST ACTIVITIES

Always call ahead and leave extra time. Ask about parking and accessibility both inside and outside. If you are going to a restaurant call ahead and ask them to please describe their accessibility. (Some locations do not notice a single step

or a narrow bathroom door.) Ask friends for recommendations. Give feedback if you have any difficulties.

HOTELS & MOTELS

Giant strides have been made in accessibility of public accommodations especially in the case of motels. But again, it is important to check individual establishments even though they may be listed in guides as being accessible. Identify what you will need and ask if it is available. Specific needs may include rooms that have extra wide space between furniture, roll-in showers and/or built in shower chairs if you are able to get in. How important is it to reach the clothing bars, to get in under the sink or to get in under the bed if you are bringing a lift?

Many major hotel/motel chains have accessibility standards for their establishments and indicate in their directories those that conform to them. Most major hotel/motel chains have an 800 number you can get by calling information or a local hotel.

TRAVEL AGENCIES & GUIDED TOURS

Most reputable travel agencies should be able to accommodate your needs as long as you bring to their attention everything that must be considered. Some travel agencies provide reservations and tours for persons concerned with wheelchair accessibility. Contact them for more information concerning trips and costs: (Please let us know if you have any difficulties with any of these agencies.)

Access Travel www.e-bility.com/accesstravel	Society for Accessible Travel www.sath.org	Accessible Journeys www.disabilitytravel.com 1-800-846-4537 sales@accessiblejourneys.com
Access Tours www.accesstours.org 800-929-4811	New Mobility Magazine www.newmobility.com	Dave's Travel Corner www.davestravelcorner.com
Access Able Travel Source www.access-able.com		

GUIDEBOOKS

If you are interested in a guide to a particular city try contacting the Chamber of Commerce in that city. When writing for guidebooks do not forget to ask for the most up-to-date edition available as access is improving all the time.

MORE TRAVEL RESOURCES

Magazines

New Mobility Magazine (www.newmobility.com) may list rental property or group trips in classifieds or real estate. Prior issues that had travel and recreation ideas have been archived.

Books

Easy Access to National Parks: The Sierra Club Guide for People with Disabilities by Wendy Roth and Michael Tompane, Sierra Club Books, 1992, 400 pp.

Great American Vacations for People with Disabilities, New Mobility Bookstore, P.O. Box 8987, Malibu, CA 90265-8987; 1-800-543-4116.

Around the World Resource Guide: Access for Disabled Americans, 4th edition

Air Travel Guide for Seniors and Disabled Passengers

Exotic Destinations for Wheelchair Travelers: Hotel Guide to the Orient: Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand

Fodor's Great American Vacations for Travelers with Disabilities

Wheelchairs around the World

Travel Clubs

Club Access, from the AccessAbility Travel Division of FPT Travel Management Group (travel club dedicated to accessible travel) - call 1-800-610-5640 or 617-661-9941 in MA, 1-800-228-5378 (TTY).

Additional Links and Sites Include:

Discount Sites (make sure to double check reservations over the phone):
www.kayak.com, www.expedia.com, www.orbitz.com, www.travelocity.com,
www.hotwire.com and www.hotels.com.

You may also want to go to
www.armchair.com/tour.html, www.makoa.org/travel.htm, www.blvd.com or
www.ucantours.com. Disney also has a website at
www.disney.go.com/vacations/websites/disabilities/index.htm.