

Accessible Travel



Travel is about access to new and different possibilities. To those individuals with physical or medical disabilities, however, the word "access" takes on a multi-dimensional meaning. Accessible travel is a goal, an adventure, a state of mind. Increasingly, accessible travel is a concern for the tens of thousands of senior adults that are now seeking new experiences in all corners of the globe. As used here, "accessible travel" means travel that takes into consideration both the physical and cost hurdles that often face those with physical or mental impairment.

There is a growing awareness on the part of destinations and tour operators of the economic impact of failing to adequately compensate for accessible travel. As a result, more travel than ever falls into the general category of "accessible". Nevertheless, a bit of planning is always in order when deciding on a vacation, where you must consider issues such as wheelchair or scooter access or if restaurants allow service animals.

A good travel consultant is an invaluable ally when making accessible travel choices. Travel agents have professional research tools that provide inside information on the efforts that destinations have undertaken to accommodate travelers who need special access or assistance. Your travel consultant will contact tour operators that specialize in providing accessible travel. These tour operators have relationships with tourism offices, dining facilities, hotels and attractions and are the best possible resource in researching a trip. However, it is important to use a tour operator that has a reputation for solid customer service. Your travel agent's research tools will quickly determine the top tour operators to use for any destination.



In planning, be sure to give your tour operator details about special needs you have as early in the planning process as possible. Just as importantly, however, let your agent know what you are willing to take on as a challenge. For example, many articles indicate that cobblestone streets or buildings without elevators are not suitable for wheelchair users. However, such decisions are best left to the traveler. You are the best judge of what is or is not appropriate for your own physical abilities. A frank discussion with your travel consultant will make sure that you receive the greatest possible value and that your expectations are met.

Travel can be physically taxing on any traveler. Speak with your physician about the best practices for visiting your selected destination as well as the particulars of your own condition. Doctors who are familiar with travel medicine can work with you to make sure all of the appropriate immunizations and special considerations of your destination (i.e., altitude) are taken into account.



If your condition requires special equipment such as wheelchairs, scooters or oxygen, your travel consultant can assist you with determining the best way to either ship your own equipment or obtain similar equipment at your destination. Most airlines and cruise ships are acquainted with the need to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters, but vary on whether they must be checked or may enter the main cabin. Some airlines also require that batteries on motorized scooters be gel-batteries rather than wet cell, so ask your travel agent to find these requirements in advance. Knowing the airline and cruise ship policies in advance makes it much easier to cope with any requirements when necessary. Remember, too, that it may be difficult to get your wheelchair or scooter serviced in a far-off locale, so if possible, have your equipment serviced before traveling. Again, your tour operator will provide good indications of the availability of repair

and supply services at your destination.

Likewise, undertake proper planning with regard to any medications you might need. It is best to travel with an adequate supply as well as with a prescription to acquire more medicines should the need arise. Always travel with your medical supplies, especially medicines, on your person, when possible to prevent problems arising from lost baggage.

Traveling with service animals can be difficult when crossing borders. Many countries have very stringent quarantine requirements regarding the importation of animals to prevent rabies and other canine diseases. Special vaccination requirements and paperwork may be in order. Likewise, make sure that any hotels, B&Bs or other accommodations permit service animals in advance. If possible, acquire letters from your accommodations in advance acknowledging their acceptance of your animal companions. Finally, do a bit of research on local veterinarian offices in case your dog requires any attention while traveling.

If you are traveling with a tour operator specializing in accessible travel, it is highly likely that your itinerary will take into account special considerations your condition might require. However, if you are not traveling with a specialist tour company, make sure that the rigors of the daily itineraries are suitable for your needs. In some instances, you may find yourself confronted with inaccessible buildings, museums, walkways or distances. Days may be long without adequate facilities for your comfort. Again, these aspects of a trip are yours to determine and choose, but to the extent that you can properly anticipate any obstacles early in the planning process, the better equipped you will be to handle situations as they arise.

The world is a big place, make it your own.