

Discover the World

Tips and resources for traveling when you're visually impaired

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The World Awaits You!

Travel stimulates all the senses and can provide some of life's most enjoyable and memorable experiences. In many ways, the world has also become a smaller and easier place to get around. Here are a few tips to help make your travels smooth and safe:

- **Plan ahead.** Read about your destination before your trip so you know what to expect and what places you'll want to visit. Make reservations whenever possible – including hotels, transportation, entertainment, even restaurants. Many have special accommodations for those with low vision, and with advance notice, they can be prepared to help make your visit smooth.
- **Call your airline ahead of time.** Request that airport personnel meet you and assist you with getting to your plane, boarding, making connections and getting around the airport easily. These services must be provided to you by law. They also expedite clearing security.
- **Use a travel agent who specializes in working with disabled clients.** A growing number of tours and cruises are specially geared toward disabled travelers.
- **Make use of technology.** The Internet is a gateway to identifying and accessing a multitude of services available for low vision travelers. Multimedia, interactive software is also available that can help you plan routes around a city. Global positioning systems (GPS) are available as small devices you can hand-carry; many are embedded in cell phones. These are excellent ways to identify exactly where you are at any point in time, and can help you get where you want to go.
- **Contact accessible transportation services in your destination city.** Most major cities have at least one company that runs a shuttle between the airport and hotels, and the majority can provide accessible service or alternate accessible service. If you are eligible to use paratransit (part of the public transportation system) in your hometown, by law you may also use it in cities you visit. You can establish eligibility by filling out an application that you can obtain from your local paratransit provider.

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- **Check to see if there is a Center for Independent Living in the city you are visiting.** These centers were established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. They operate as community-based, consumer-controlled nonprofit agencies and are the hub of information and services for low vision visitors as well as residents.
- **Always carry written directions with you.** Even if you can't read them you can ask for help by showing them to someone else if you get lost. It's also helpful to have a copy of the exact address where you are going. A driver may not know where a specific hotel is, especially if there are several with the same name.
- **Keep necessities with you at all times.** Carry your money, keys, tickets and bus pass in a pocket. If you happen to misplace your purse or wallet, you can still reach your destination. Keep some extra money handy for tips. Memorize identification numbers for credit/debit cards, passports or bank accounts, or create a retrieval system to obtain them if you should lose your wallet.
- **Know the bus schedule.** Inform the bus driver where you want to get off so he or she knows to call it out. Sit near the front of the bus.
- **Notify others about your needs.** Inform your travel agency or companies such as airlines you are using that you are visually impaired. Tell your companion or those around you about your visual limitations.
- **Ask questions.** If you cannot see a monitor or find a gate at the airport or bus station, ask a customer service representative or another traveler to help you find your way.
- **Carry your cane.** Whether you choose to use it or not for mobility purposes, your cane helps to notify others that you are visually impaired.
- **Ask about amusement park or other tourist discounts.** Some amusement parks give discounts either to visually impaired visitors or to their sighted guides.
- **Pre-board and bring carry-on luggage.** Avoid the hassle of crowds and obstacles in aisles by pre-boarding trains and planes. Packing only carry-on luggage saves you time and trouble by eliminating a visit to the baggage claim terminal.
- **If you do bring a suitcase, remember its type and color.** It may be helpful to affix a colorful ribbon or sticker to help you or anyone assisting you with easy identification.



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- **Enhance your sensory experience by going on tours and visiting gift shops.** Some tour groups allow travelers who are visually impaired to experience an exhibit by touching objects that are otherwise off-limits. Gift shops often sell small-scale replicas of monuments that you can touch. A growing number of tour companies offer tours especially designed for low vision tourists.
- **Know your rights.** The Department of Transportation has established a number of rules that require airlines, buses, trains and public transportation providers to ensure easy access for all travelers. Amtrak offers a special guide, "Access Amtrak: A guide to Amtrak services for travelers with disabilities," and a special phone number, 877-268-7252. Greyhound's Customers with Disabilities Travel Assistance Line is 800-752-4841.
- **If you have a guide dog,** check with your travel agent or transportation carrier to see if there are any restrictions or quarantine requirements in the state or country you are visiting and whether these apply to your dog.
- **Get oriented in your hotel.** When you arrive, ask the staff at the registration desk for any assistance you might need to get around the facilities. In your room, ask to be shown how the door locks operate, the location of the TV remote, in-room amenities, how to adjust the heat or air conditioning, how to contact the front desk, and anything else important to you. Also, find out if newspapers are routinely placed outside door rooms, as these can pose a hazard.

There's a fascinating world out there. Let us help you take the first step. We offer hundreds of free resources, classes and services. For more information, call us or visit us online.

Stay up to date on ways to help visually impaired people live fulfilling lives. Join our free online community at solutionsinsight.org.



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