

# The New York Times

TRAVEL TIPS

## Six Simple Tips for Smooth Travel With a Disability

Traveling with a visible or invisible disability doesn't have to be difficult. A few simple tips can go a long way.



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**By Shivani Vora**

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Times have changed for travelers who use wheelchairs, are visually or hearing-impaired or have another disability, says Jayne Bliss, a travel adviser with [Tzell](#), who has more than 30 years of experience in planning trips for those with special needs.

“No place is off limits, and hotels, museums and cultural institutions offer more accessibility than ever before,” Ms. Bliss said. Here are some of her tips to travel smoothly with a disability:

## Ask Your Airline for Help

Asking your airline for assistance, either at the time of booking or a few days before your trip, will make your time at the airport much easier. Many airlines will designate an employee to meet you curbside when you arrive or at check-in with a wheelchair (if you need one) and guide you through security. You can also request assistance when you land at your destination.

There is usually no charge for this service, but policies vary by airline and may depend on available staff and your disability, so be sure to clarify with your carrier before you fly. Also, many carriers allow guide dogs on board free of charge for passengers who are visually-impaired (as long as you make a reservation for your guide dog at least 48 hours in advance of your flight).

## Plan With Your Hotel in Advance

Most hotels in all price ranges welcome travelers with disabilities, according to Ms. Bliss. However, it's key to give them a heads up about what your needs are if there's anything specific. If you're in a wheelchair, for example, get measurements for the front, guest and bathroom doors in advance of your stay. Most hotel concierges will be happy to provide you this information, any many list it online. Ms. Bliss said that some her clients' wheelchairs are too large for many properties, even if they claim to have accessible rooms and facilities. Also, if you're visually impaired and find buffet breakfasts or continental breakfast bars challenging, ask your hotel's concierge to fill your in-room fridge with breakfast items, or deliver them to your room instead.

## Work With a Travel Agent

An agent who specializes in working with disabled travelers can arrange every aspect of your trip including booking your airline tickets, tours and restaurants. They can make sure to get the measurements you need, verify the hotels, resorts, or restaurants you're interested in are accessible, and provide other services to make sure you have a smooth trip and a comfortable stay.

Some of these agents, including Ms. Bliss, don't charge trip planning fees, and instead make money by booking you with hotels and resorts that are hungry for your business (and ideally, accessible). To find other specialists, consider agencies that have experts on-staff that specialize in accessible travel, like [the ones at Travel Leaders](#), [New Directions Travel](#) or [Disabled Travelers](#), among others.

## Book the Right Guides

Ms. Bliss said that there are guides all over the world who have experience in working with travelers with disabilities. “These guides can make your time in the destination hassle-free because they know the sights you can and can’t access, the restaurants where you’ll have an enjoyable experience and more,” she said.

Some guides can even arrange for wheelchairs, scooters and canes or know sign language to communicate with those who are hearing-impaired. Others simply remember to take visible and invisible disabilities into account when planning activities or organizing groups, so you’re not stuck joining a tour group where you can’t participate in half of the activities. You can find guides through some of the previously mentioned agencies, a web search, your travel agent, your hotel’s concierge or on [TripAdvisor](#).

## Consider a Tour

Several travel operators offer both private and group trips for those with disabilities. “These preset itineraries take into account exactly what your needs are so you don’t have to arrange anything yourself,” Ms. Bliss said.

One example is [Flying Wheels Travel](#), which has several itineraries a year to destinations such as Peru, Japan and Portugal. The company also sells cruises. Other options include [Search Beyond Adventures](#) and [Easy Access Travel](#). Also, several companies can arrange African wildlife excursions for travelers with disabilities, including [Extraordinary Journeys](#), [Endeavour Safaris](#) and [AccesstoAfrica Safaris](#).

## Visit Accommodating Museums

Many museums around the globe take care to accommodate visitors with disabilities in a number of different ways. The Guggenheim, in New York, for example, has [monthly tours](#) for the visually impaired. These tours are free, but must be reserved in advance. Find out what services a museum offers by calling its visitor information line, or visiting its website before you plan your visit.

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