

Travel Tips for the Hearing Impaired

Insight for hearing-impaired travelers

- What are common problems?
- What arrangements can be made?
- How should hearing aids be handled when traveling?
- and more...

Travel is an important aspect of our lives. Whether for business or vacation, traveling can be as stressful as it is enjoyable. And for more than 20 million people in the U.S. with hearing loss, travel can be especially difficult.

What are common problems?

- Inability to hear or understand airline boarding and in-flight announcements;
- Difficulty making reservations;
- Inability to hear hotel room telephones, someone knocking on the door, or warning signals such as smoke alarms;
- Difficulty using public telephones, hotel phones, cell phones etc.;
- Inability to hear or understand scheduled events such as planned activities, tours, museum lectures, and live performances;
- Lack of oral and/or sign language interpreters;
- Lack of accommodations for hearing dogs.

What arrangements can be made?

- Try to make all travel arrangements in advance. Once transportation arrangements have been made, request written confirmation to ensure that information is correct. Always inform the ticket representative that you are hearing-impaired.
- If possible, meet with a travel agent to allow the opportunity for lip reading, or if necessary, written exchange to help confirm travel plans. Agents can contact airlines, hotels, and attractions to make necessary reservations.
- Travel information and reservation services are also available on the internet. Be sure to print copies of important information such as confirmation numbers, reservations, maps, etc.
- It is important to arrive early at the airport, bus terminal, or train station. Tell the agent at the boarding gate that you are hearing-impaired and need to be notified in person when it's time to board.
- Confirm the flight number and destination before boarding.
- Inform the flight attendant that you are hearing-impaired and request that any in-flight announcements be communicated to you in person.

In order to assist individuals who require the use of a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), many major airlines and transportation companies have TDD service. Current technology with hand-held personal communication devices provides the ability to send and receive text messages without the need to access public resources.

Is telephone assistance available?

All public telephones should now have a “blue grommet” attachment to the handset indicating it is compatible with the “T” switch in hearing aids. Some public phones have an amplifying headset. Or you may purchase a pocket amplifier from your audiologist or hearing aid dispenser. Cellular phones have solved many of these problems. All manufacturers have models that are also compatible with your hearing aid. You can search the internet by typing in “HAC (hearing aid compatible) phones” to get more information.

What other devices are helpful?

There are many visual alert systems and listening devices than can be useful while traveling.

- Telephone amplifiers and induction couplers can be attached to public or hotel phones and can help increase the volume of the telephone. Induction couplers also make the telephone compatible with your hearing aid telecoil. Telephone manufacturers produce handsets such as the G6 and G66 which plug easily into any modular telephone. Using your own compatible cellular phone, however, not only eliminates these problems, but the calls are also less expensive.
- There are small portable visual alert systems available that flash light when the telephone rings or fire alarm sounds. These can be transported and easily installed in hotel rooms. In the U.S. they should be provided if you ask.
- FM listening systems can provide direct amplification in large areas using radio frequency. They can help the hearing-impaired traveler listen to lectures, tours, etc., by simply having the speaker use a transmitter microphone, broadcasting the presentation over the air waves to the receiver.
- Another technology is portable infrared systems which can be used with hotel televisions and radios. These transmit sound via invisible infrared light to a listener’s receiver.
- Portable wake-up alarms can be used to flash a light or vibrate a bed or pillow. Cellular phones can also work as a vibrating alarm.
- There are portable TV band radios that can be tuned to compatible TV channels and listened to through an earphone. You can set the volume to suit yourself and watch TV without disturbing others.

How should hearing aids be handled when traveling?

If you wear a hearing aid, be sure to pack extra batteries and tubing. These may be difficult to obtain in some places. It would be wise to take a dehumidifier for drying your hearing aids each night to prevent moisture problems, especially if your destination has a warm, humid climate.

There are many things that hearing-impaired people can do to help make their travels safe, comfortable, and enjoyable. Travel does not have to be avoided because of hearing loss. So plan ahead, inform your fellow travelers, transportation hosts, and hotel clerks that you are hearing-impaired, obtain any necessary devices—and enjoy yourself!

Lodging

- Carry printed copies of lodging reservations, dates, and prices.
- Inform the receptionist at the front desk that you are hearing-impaired. This is very important in case of emergency.
- Certain major hotel chains now provide visual alerting devices to help the hearing impaired traveler recognize the ring of the telephone, a knock on the door, or a fire/emergency alarm. It may be advisable, however, to contact the motel in advance to make the necessary arrangements. Services to help in such situations are available. Request a room that is equipped for an individual with hearing loss. When you

make a reservation and register at the hotel, confirm that such equipment is available. These communication features are frequently provided free of charge to hotel guests.

- Inquire what resources are available for using the internet and e-mail. Does the hotel provide wireless or wired access to the internet? Do you need to bring your own laptop? Is there a business office you can use for these purposes?