Spinal Cord Injury BC

Your Accessible Air Travel Guide

about this ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL GUIDE

This travel guide is meant to help you plan your trip so you are able to get the most out of your travel experience regardless of your level of mobility.

The tips in this ebook were collected by the staff of Spinal Cord Injury BC, from a panel of expert travellers with physical disabilities who have collectively explored every single continent on the globe. This travel guide is for anyone with a spinal cord injury (SCI), a mobility impairment, or a physical disability who wants to travel by themselves or with their family, friends, or an attendant.

Everyone has unique needs – use these tips as a resource to adapt to your own travels. You can find a digital version of this guide with clickable links, plus detailed video tour of air travel as a wheelchair user, travel stories, and more on our website: **www.sci-bc.ca/travel**.

This project was made possible through the experiences of SCI travel experts, SCI BC's InfoLine, and sponsorship of Vancouver International Airport (YVR).

Version 2.2, January 2026

Kim Bellavance

Murray Siple

Cover Photo: Manu Heras

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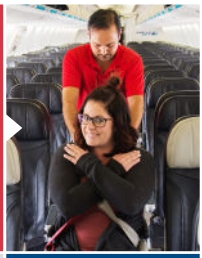
our travel panel
EXPERTS

Gabe Chesman	Codi Darnell		Kim Egger	
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With thanks to staff and participants at SCI BC Vancouver International Airport (YVR) Experience Tours.

planning YOUR TRIP

1 Identify Your Purpose

Are you travelling for work, to visit family, or are you looking for a relaxing vacation or a rustic adventure? Different locations will lead to different levels of accessibility and comfort.

2 Who is Coming?

Are you travelling alone or with company? This could determine how you plan your trip and your destination (dealing with luggage, transfers, transportation, etc.). If you are travelling with one or more people make sure your plans do not revolve only around your needs. Plan a balanced trip!

3 Know Your Rights

Different jurisdictions have different laws protecting the rights of travellers with disabilities.

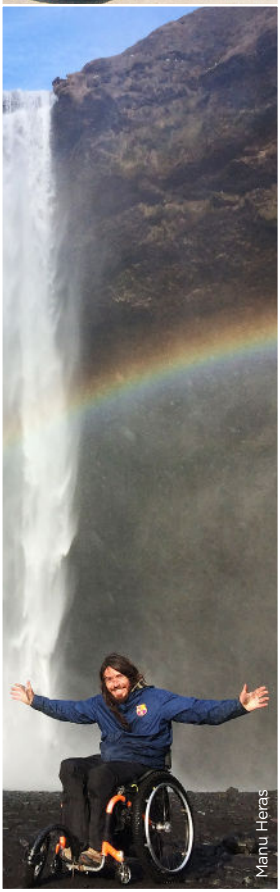
- If you are travelling in **Canada**, visit the Government of Canada's Access to Travel Website and the Canadian Transportation Agency's page on accessibility at **www.otc-cta.gc.ca**.
- Travelling in **Europe**? View the air travel rights of people with reduced mobility **www.bit.ly/reduced-mobility-travel-rights**.
- United Spinal also has a thorough travel brochure on accessible air travel at **www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/Accessible_Air_Travel.pdf**.

4 Do Your Research

Here are some websites to get you started:

- The ThornTree Forum by Lonely Planet is an online travel forum where you can exchange questions, tips, and advice about different places around the world.
- We recommend the Lonely Planet Accessible Travel Phrasebook, (**www.bit.ly/accessible-travel-phrasebook**), a free downloadable list of common words and phrases related to disability in a number of languages.

Steve Mann


Manu Heras

- **WheelchairTravel.org** offers stories, destination-specific reviews and a wheelchair-oriented global travel outlook.
- **www.sci-bc.ca/access-bc** has a database of accessibility features of BC parks, rec areas, and outdoor spaces.
- The Access Now map at **map.accessnow.com** is a crowd-sourced map of accessible public spaces worldwide! You may be able to find information regarding a destination, and contribute during your travels.

5 Ask Someone Living with SCI

Your best resource is someone who has traveled to your destination before! Connect with people with similar disabilities who've been where you're going through SCI BC's Peer Programs.

- Contact your local SCI BC Peer Coordinator: **sci-bc.ca/our-staff**.
- Call our toll free InfoLine (1-800-689-2477), e-mail **info@sci-bc.ca** or check out our Facebook Page (**www.facebook.com/SpinalCordInjuryBC**).
- Check out travel stories from other travellers with SCI: **www.sci-bc.ca/travel-stories**.

6 Talk to a Travel Agent

Travel Agents have access to rates and information that may not be publicly available, and those who specialize in disability will best understand your needs. This is particularly important when you are travelling in areas with different languages and cultures. What is considered "accessible" can vary around the world!

- Consult SCI BC's SCI Information Database's List of Accessible Travel Agents: **www.sci-bc.ca/resource-category/travel-agents**.
- Search online for travel consultants who specialize in accessible travel, especially if you are travelling in a country with a different language or culture.

7 Attitude

Travel with an open mind and expect the unexpected. No matter how much you plan ahead, something can still go wrong. With the right attitude, even the worst-case scenario can lead to the best memories.

Kirsten Sharp

Kim Bellavance

booking
THE FLIGHT

1 The Airline

- Call airlines directly and check their website for detailed information; major airlines tend to be better than charters and smaller airlines. Ask the airline about their baggage policy. Can you bring extra equipment like commodes, a manual chair, or a sports chair; or will they charge you for these?

2 Travelling with an Attendant?

- Discount policies for travelling with an attendant differ with each airline, and with national or international flights. You may need to provide a letter from your physician to the airline's medical office in order to qualify for a discount.

3 Consider Your Bowel Routine

- Try to book your flights on days you do not have a bowel routine. If you cannot avoid this, then try and book your flight for a time that does not coincide with your usual routine.

4 Connecting Flights

- Try to limit flight connections on your trip, as this will minimize the possibility of your equipment or luggage being damaged or lost. It is also easier on you physically, as you will be doing fewer chair transfers.
- If you are booking a long flight overseas, you might want to break up your trip into more than one day of travel. Longer layovers can be a break for your body, and also a chance to visit another destination for a short period!

5 Security Screenings

Security screenings can be arduous for some wheelchair users – each involves a physical pat down and thorough hand search and chemical swab of your wheelchair, shoes and cushion. It can take 2-3 times as long as a standard screening for everyone else, so consider researching the security checkpoints you will cross in your travels and taking advantage of any rapid-access programs they have that would make your travel smoother:

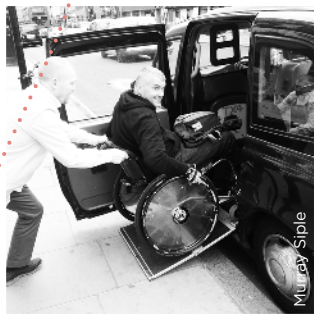
- Use CATSA's Special Needs Travellers Guide to plan ahead for a smooth security screening: **www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca/special-needs**.
- Check out TSA Cares (**www.tsa.gov/travel/passenger-support**) for travel from a US destination. Travellers with disabilities can provide a TSA Cares agent with a flight itinerary and TSA Cares will coordinate assistance available from each airport. You can request this assistance at the checkpoint, but 72 hours notice is recommended. Contact at **www.tsa.gov/contact-center/form/cares**.
- You can also get TSA's Disability Notification Card, which allows you to discreetly notify the TSA officer of your disability or medical condition, and your needs for accommodation or assistance during screening: **www.tsa.gov/travel/special-procedures**.
- Most transportation security agencies now provide an application-only expedited pre-screening service like CATSA Trusted Travellers (Nexus or Global Entry) TSA-PreCheck that makes the screening simpler and faster. This is helpful for frequent travellers, and those who cannot stand for long periods of time or who have limited energy. Visit **www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca** and **www.tsa.gov/precheck** for more information.

Register with the airline medical desk, or not?

Most major airlines have medical staff who can arrange certain medical or disability accommodations in the air, once you provide a letter from your doctor. It's not without drawbacks though!

If you register with the medical desk: you provide a letter from your doctor about your needs to the airline's medical desk. This can enable accommodations such as extra legroom, in-flight oxygen, or **a free or heavily discounted attendant ticket when you travel in Canada.** However, you must book your travel through that airline medical desk (which can limit flexibility), and may mean you are not allowed to travel **without** those accommodations until your doctor has written a letter attesting you are able to travel without them.

If you don't register: you can still indicate you are a traveller with a disability and require assistance to board when booking your flights. There are no extra restrictions on what flights to take or whether you must bring an attendant. **However** if you need one, you will pay full fare. Some people elect to register with the medical desk on a particular airline and not with its competitor, so they have an option as to which one to fly with when they are going to need attendant care or extra accommodations.



6 Arranging Transportation

- Some travel agencies will arrange transportation/transfers between the airports and hotels. Make sure to ask if they are accessible, what accommodations they offer for accessibility (this definition can vary widely!), and if not, whether other options are available.
- Some destinations do not have accessible vehicles readily available, so it is important you plan ahead, especially if you are travelling in a power wheelchair.
- Many North American and European airports have private shuttles that are already wheelchair accessible or can provide one on request. SuperShuttle and Go Airport Shuttle are two that are well known in North America.
- Check out New Mobility's articles about travelling with disabilities for more accessible transportation advice: **www.newmobility.com/taming-fear-flying**.

DECISION POINT

Connecting Flights

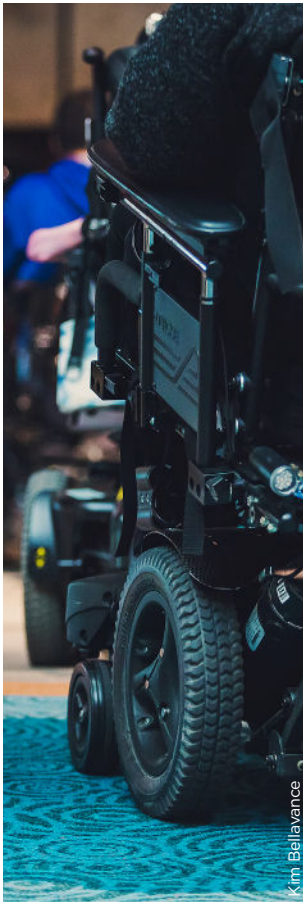
The effort, time, potential for errors, damage, and loss that connections can pose for travellers with disabilities cannot be overstated – connections should be avoided whenever possible. However, there may be times connections make your travel easier.

- **Connections for comfort:** Connections can give you a good opportunity to use the toilet on land, avoiding the need for an in-flight bathroom strategy. It can be a great opportunity to change position, relieve pressure or soreness, and grab something to eat.
- **Non-stop wherever possible:** Connections may save some money but they involve 2-3 times as many transfers, opportunities for your wheelchair to be lost or damaged, concerns about delays, etc. Some airlines have a defined "minimum connection time" that is considered adequate to allow a passenger to make it to their connecting flight at that airport, however these times aren't adequate for wheelchair users who must deplane last. Any time you have to connect, ask what the minimum connection time is and choose a connecting flight with at least twice that time in between. Where you have a choice of airports to connect in, choose one where you will not have to traverse between terminals or re-clear security and re-check your bags.
- **Check for hidden stops:** Long flights may be listed as non-stop but require a refueling stop, such as from Vancouver to Sydney, Australia. You still need to deplane only for the time the aircraft is being refueled but you won't need to find your next flight or aircraft. You may or may not need your chair to be brought up to you depending on your comfort and the difficulty of removing it from the baggage compartment at that airport (for example, power chairs).

packing and HOME

1 Expect the Best, Plan for the Worst

- **Make a photocopy or scan** all of your essential travel documents (passport, ID, credit card, insurance information, driver's license). Leave a copy with someone you trust at home in case of an emergency.
- **If you are going on an extended trip,** consider having vital equipment shipped to meet you at your destination. Never check vital equipment such as respiratory devices – airline regulations will always let you carry medical devices in your carry on allowance.
- It's always a good idea to **research local equipment repair and rental services at your destination,** particularly if you are travelling in an area where you don't speak the language.


Kim Bellavance

2 Medication

- **If you experience chronic bladder infections,** it may be a good idea to bring along a course of antibiotics. Consult with your physician about when you should take it. Pack enough medical supplies for your entire trip. If you travel to the same destination regularly, consider sending your supplies ahead of time, or even keeping supplies there for future visits.
- **Ensure all your medication is legal** in your destination country and any country you may have a layover in. All prescription medications should be kept in the bottle that indicates the prescribing physician, pharmacy, dose, and medication name.

Jessica Vilchez Ortiz

3 Your Carry-on

- **Pack lightly and efficiently.** If you are travelling with an able-bodied person, be thoughtful of what they will need to carry for you and for themselves.
- **Your carry-on should include enough supplies for two to three days,** in case your luggage gets lost. This includes medications, medical supplies, and extra clothing.

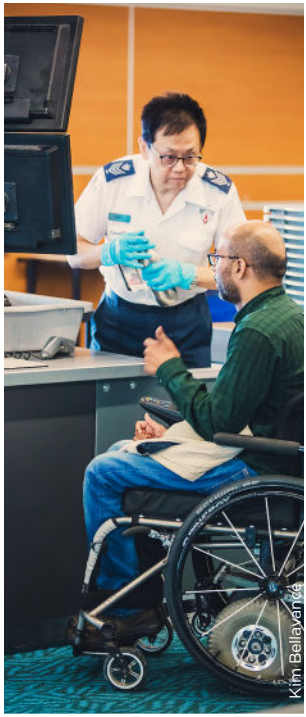
- **Pack important things in easy-to-get places** so people can help you if necessary without unpacking your whole carry-on bag. Any bag in the overhead bin won't be available to you in flight without help, so pack accordingly – keep those essentials in the personal item you stow under the seat in front of you.

4 What to Wear

- **Dress in layers** to allow you to deal with temperature fluctuations during the flight.
- **Avoid pants with seams or pockets on the back,** and avoid jeans in general – more restrictive clothing can become painful and difficult during long flights.
- **Wear clothing that you are comfortable in for long periods of time** and allows you to easily adjust for your bathroom routine. Soft, stretch pants are the best for the kind of mobility and comfort you need in a confined space, and can be adapted to accommodate for your preferred bathroom strategy. It is common to get stiff swelling in your legs while flying, and the risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) during the flight is higher for those with paralysis. Consider getting fitted for compression socks in order to prevent edema and DVT risk while flying, especially if you fly a lot or will be flying a long distance.

5 Prepare your Chair

- **Remove any parts or accessories that are fragile and easy to break before you leave.** If you need these parts at your destination, either bring them with you in your carry on or pack them carefully.
- **Label everything from controls to batteries to fragile items and accessories,** so whoever is stowing your chair after you board the plane knows how to handle your chair safely and responsibly.
- **Pack spare parts for your chair that could break or be lost during your trip** (i.e. tubes, extra cushion cover, a compact tire pump, tools, etc. – note that small tools may appear like small weapons to security – advise them in advance and don't pack expensive tools in your cabin baggage in case they are confiscated.)
- **If you use power assist devices on your manual wheelchair,** ensure you have cleared your batteries ahead of time with the airline and bring along the safety certificate you can download from the manufacturer's website.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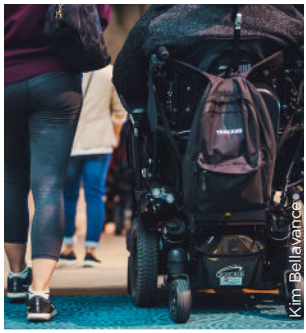

Kim Bellavance

Manu Heras

Tips for Travelling with Your Power Chair

1

GETTING READY TO TRAVEL

Discuss in advance with the airline booking agent about the measurements and approximate weight of your power chair, to verify it will fit through the cargo door. Some airlines (Air Canada and WestJet) provide details of cargo door dimensions on their websites (**www.aircanada.com/accessibility** and **www.westjet.com/wheelchairs**). Check the type of batteries on your chair with the airline when you book.

Consult your power chair manufacturer website or user guide for safety information about your battery and stowing your wheelchair for transport. If you use power assist devices, ensure you clear these batteries ahead of time with the airline, and bring along the safety certificate from the manufacturer's website.

2

24 HOURS BEFORE TRAVEL

Double check on the day of your travel there are no changes to the aircraft scheduled for all legs of your trip. If there is a change, call the airline to confirm the aircraft(s) scheduled for your flight can still accommodate your wheelchair.

Double check at the check-in desk that your reservation shows all of the support you need for your flights – assistance to the gate, attendant, etc.

Prepare an information sheet for your power wheelchair or scooter identifying how best to propel it when powered down, what parts it has, and who it belongs to. Air Canada has an excellent PDF version you can use for any airline: **www.bit.ly/powered-mobility-aid-form**. Remember to keep a copy of it in your bag!

< A foldable shipping crate to protect a power wheelchair in flight.

3

JUST BEFORE DEPARTURE

Fold in and secure the joystick/control unit and any other fragile components that extend out from your power chair's frame with clear packing tape to prevent them from catching on the cargo door or equipment. Tape the information sheet you completed to the wheelchair securely, and keep a copy with you. Bring a roll of tape to secure everything again on the return trip.

Instruct the ground crew how to turn off your power chair's circuit breaker. If you have one on your chair, it may allow you to turn the whole chair off and isolate the battery, keeping your battery safe for flight, and your chair's electronics intact.

If possible, have your attendant or companion escort your chair to the loading area and brief ground crew/baggage handlers.

make a plan to "GO"

One of the hardest issues aboard an aircraft for a disabled passenger is how to use the bathroom in-flight, especially for longer flights. Think through what your needs are, and come up with a strategy well in advance to ensure you have the seat, supplies, and support you need.

THE SITUATION

Aircraft with 30 seats or more are required to have an on-board aisle wheelchair for use in helping passengers with disabilities to the toilet. These are small, foldable aisle wheelchairs with a hard seat and low back that can be less stable. People with poor balance, skin issues, or bad spasticity may want to consider some of the alternatives below to avoid this trip to the onboard bathroom.

Flight attendants on these flights are required to provide assistance to and from the bathroom and position it close to the toilet (usually facing head-on), but will not offer assistance inside the bathroom.

Transferring to the aircraft toilet involves a 180 degree transfer from chair to toilet within a very tight space. If you transfer to the toilet, the flight attendant will pull back the aisle wheelchair, close the door for you, and wait outside for your signal to return.

STRATEGIES

Watch your water intake the day before and the day of your travel. Withholding fluids entirely may work for a short flight, but for longer flights it can lead to complications. Avoid caffeine and alcohol 48 hours before and while in-flight, as they increase the need to urinate.

Ensure you visit the bathroom in the terminal right before your flight calls for pre-boarding, and immediately after deplaning.

Consider trying prescription medications to help you stay dry in-flight if you have trouble going more than 2 hours between voiding. Absorbent pads can also help you avoid unexpected leakage due to all the movement and transferring you'll need to do.

If you normally use an indwelling or condom catheter and collection bag, **think about how you'll drain your collection bag mid-flight**. Some people bring an empty disposable water bottle with them to drain their bag. Flight attendants may be willing to empty the bottle for you in the toilet. You can also use a larger (night) collection bag to give you enough drainage for longer flights.

If you use intermittent catheters, **consider learning how to use an indwelling catheter and collection bag just for air travel.** As long as you have the bladder capacity to go several hours between emptying, you may be able to clamp off or plug the indwelling catheter you are using. Then you could drain it into a bottle or the aircraft toilet using an extension tube, reducing the need for transfers or the in-flight aisle wheelchair.

On-board aisle wheelchair >

Learn more: www.sci-bc.ca/know-how-youll-go

getting to the AIRPORT

1 Transit

To Vancouver International Airport (YVR): The Canada Line is accessible and easy to use, if you can independently manage your baggage. Connects to both Domestic and International Terminals.

2 Taxis

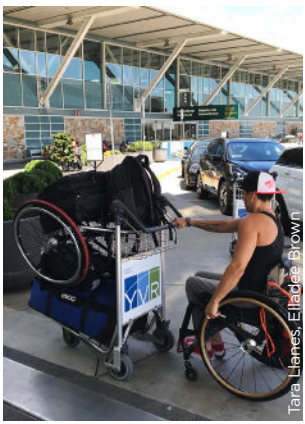
Accessible taxis can drop you off closest to your airline. Check out set fares to and from the airport: **www.yvr.ca/passengers/transportation/taxis**.

- Passenger drop off areas are directly outside domestic and international terminals.

3 Driving

- Long Term Parking allows you to leave your car for days or even weeks at a time at YVR. An accessible YVR bus with a wheelchair lift and a trained driver will take you to and from your terminal.
- YVR offers 15 minute curbside parking for vehicles displaying a valid SPARC card.
- Ask if you need assistance with your baggage. Curbside staff or check-in attendants are more than happy to assist in getting your baggage to the check-in counter.

Tara Llanes, Ellidee Brown



Tara Llanes, Ellidee Brown

TRANSPORTATION TO YOUR LOCAL AIRPORT:

- Check out your local airport's website for details on public transportation and private vehicle transport options.
- Check out our guide to accessible taxis around BC for transportation options to and from airports in your area: **www.sci-bc.ca/resource/accessible-taxis-in-bc**.

checking IN

1 Arrive Early

International flights require you *check in at least two hours* before your flight. Arrive *a minimum of one hour* ahead of domestic flights. Make sure to double check with your airline the day before you leave, especially if you are travelling internationally.

Allow at least 45 minutes to get from the check-in counter to your gate as security line-ups, customs, long hallways, and carrying baggage can slow you down.

2 Self-Check In

The Self Check-in machines help you avoid lines, but they use a touch screen program. You will need your passport, your purchasing credit card, confirmation number or a frequent flyer number to access your booking.

3 Ask For Assistance

If you check in at the counter and have a lot of luggage (i.e. shower chair, sports or recreational chair, bath bench) you can ask for assistance. If you do not use a wheelchair or scooter, but you have difficulties walking, wheelchairs are available upon request. Most airlines will provide you assistance to your gate upon request, which can be very helpful if you are travelling alone with a lot of baggage, or you need more physical assistance.

4 Boarding Pass & Chair Tag

After you check in, the airline personnel will give you a boarding pass and tag your baggage. They will also attach a door delivery tag to your chair.

Double-check which airport code they put on your chair tag. If you have multiple stops, your chair's gate tag should say the next destination where you want your chair. Otherwise, your chair will only be delivered to you at your final destination.

Kim Bellavance

Kim Bellavance

5 Keep Calm and Carry On

You may encounter a newbie at check-in who doesn't know what to do. Be firm, but kind, and clearly state your needs. Remember, there's a first time for everyone.

Passengers with disabilities are allowed extra carry-on baggage on most western airlines. It can be helpful to print off these policies from your airline's website just in case. Your wheelchair, pressure relief cushion, and any other baggage vital to your health (i.e. respiratory therapy devices) should come in carry-on baggage with you. This can be a literal handful to get to the gate, so don't be afraid to ask for assistance.

DECISION POINT

Find the seat that works for you. Different seats have different advantages and disadvantages:

- The bulkhead seats offer more legroom and space to transfer, but their armrests don't lift and there are no places to stow your carry-on bags where you can reach them.
- Window seats are harder to get to, but no one will climb over you during the flight. Plus, they can be more private if you need to do some secluded personal care mid-flight. You will have to ask your seatmates to move if you need a trip to the toilet.
- Aisle mean an easier transfer, but seatmates will be climbing over you to get to the bathroom.
- Around 50% of aircraft armrests are designed to lift up for easy transfers. Don't be afraid to request one!

SECURITY

Kim Bellavance

Kim Bellavance

- **Carry-on items must be compliant with security rules.** Check **www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca/en/what-can-bring/carry-or-checked** for the rules regarding what is acceptable. Liquids and gels need to be placed in ziploc bags or clear containers you can easily remove from your carry-on to show security.
- **Wheelchair users who are not able to walk through the metal detector will be directed around the gate or through an alternate exit.** On the other side, you'll be asked to wait at a certain place for a manual/pat-down search. The security agent should explain what the search entails and ensure that you are in view of your baggage at all times.
- **Men will only be touched by male security employees, and vice versa.** Help them by identifying anything you wear on your body that they may not expect, like a leg bag or ostomy device. Also, let them know if patting you down may trigger spasticity or pain.
- **Be clear and polite about your needs.** If you have a complex condition that you must share with security, consider printing and preparing a screening card (**www.bit.ly/tsa-disability-card**) you can use to summarize your condition and needs for accommodation. This may be especially helpful if you are ambulatory and have a condition that is invisible.
- **If you are unable to remove your shoes, just let the security screener know, and they will swab them for a chemical check instead.** In Canada, people with disabilities are not required to remove their shoes for screening if they are unable to. Security practices vary, so check in advance of travel to another country.

Kim Bellavance

the GATE

- **Go to the gate early** and let the ground crew know you have arrived, as you will pre-board ahead of other passengers.
- **Confirm your seats.** Ask again if you have the best seat available, whether you prefer the bulkhead, an aisle seat, or a window seat.
- **Check to see if the Washington Chair/aisle chair is at the gate,** and let the flight attendant know what kind of assistance you'll need to transfer.
- **Use the washroom facilities before you board,** as the washroom on most aircraft will be cramped and difficult to get to. Accessible washrooms should be close to your gate.
- **Stay close by the gate** so you can hear the pre-board announcement.

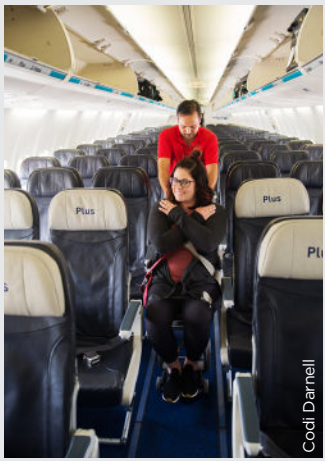
Caroline Fuentes

Self-transfer or full assistance?

When booking, you will be asked if you can self-transfer or need assistance. These options relate to the transfer from your chair to the aisle chair and the aisle chair to your seat.

SELF TRANSFER: If you can move your body weight on your own, with a sliding board, or help from a companion, you will be met just outside the aircraft on the ramp with airport staff and the aisle chair/ Washington chair. Airline staff will help make the transfer to and from the Washington chair as easy as possible, but will expect that you can shift your body weight from one seat to the other. Staff will help secure your legs and arms, and fasten safety belts across you to keep you stable.

Transfer to aisle chair

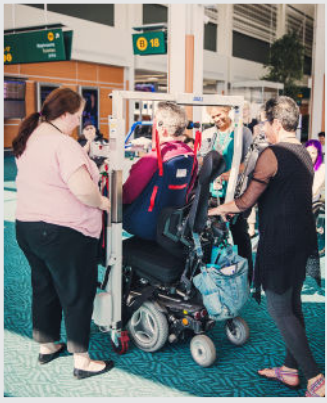


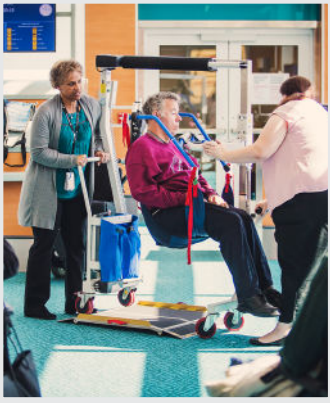
Aisle chair boarding

ASSISTANCE TO TRANSFER: If you need assistance to transfer from one seat to another, many airlines now use a patient hoist modified for the narrow aircraft aisle, designed to prevent workplace injuries. A specially-trained team will meet you at the gate and use a powered portable patient lift designed for the narrow aircraft aisle to get you from your wheelchair to your seat on board. Airline staff will assist you to don the sling under your body (1), and then carefully lift you out of your chair (2), steer the lift down the aircraft aisle, to your seat (3). The most commonly used model is the Eagle Lift model, which uses a modified sling similar to what is used on hoyer lifts. Know your sling size and make sure airport staff use the right one for you.

Eagle Lift Process:

1) Transfer to sling.

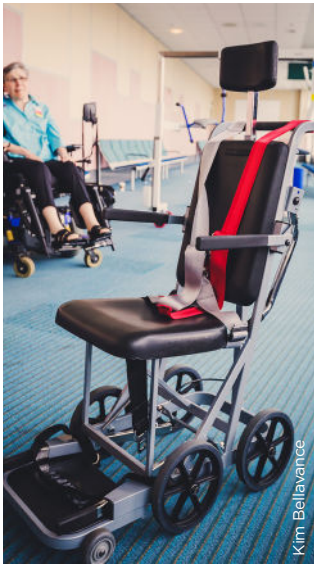

2) Powered lift elevates sling and user.


3) Lift fits over aircraft seat and lowers passenger into their seat.

Photos: Kim Bellavance

BOARDING

- **You will usually be the first to board** (unless you are late for your flight). A staff member will either guide or push you to the plane entrance. The ramp is usually quite steep, don't be afraid to ask for help.
- **To board the plane, you may use the Washington chair,** which is also called an aisle chair. This is a narrow, dolly-style chair meant only for transport to your seat on board the plane. If pressure ulcers are a problem for you, you can use your wheelchair cushion on the aisle chair.
- **If you can walk for short distances, you can still ask for assistance** getting from your wheelchair and to your seat. Airline staff will help with your bags and give you a chance to board before other passengers, with lots of room and no rushing.
- **Knowing how to direct your lift or transfer is very important.** Try rehearsing at home with a friend playing the role of the boarding crew – identify what you need and how to help you with clear directions. If you don't need help, it's okay to say so.
- **Remember to take your wheelchair cushion on the plane** – either to sit on or safely store. You might want to sit on it during your flight, but mostly this is to ensure it won't be lost in the cargo. Air-filled cushions should be deflated slightly, as lower pressure at altitude can cause the cushion to over-inflate. Remove all items that might fall off your chair in transport, such as side guards or armrests, and bring them aboard with you.
- **Baggage personnel will tag your chair and store it in cargo for the flight.** If they are there during your transfer, take the opportunity to personally give them any specific directions regarding the safety and storage of your chair, including unlocking your brakes. Show them the chair labels you carefully crafted when you were planning your trip!
- **Staff will push or pull you in the Washington chair to your seat, and support you in a safe transfer.** If you require the inflight aisle wheelchair to get to the bathroom mid-flight, this is a great time to ask them to check it is onboard for your use.



Washington/Aisle wheelchair

during the FLIGHT

1

Once you are seated, make any necessary adjustments after you have taken your seat: check your urinary equipment, smooth your clothing underneath you, and get balanced. Take a moment to move anything you want independent access to during the flight into a smaller bag under the seat.

2

Edema and swelling of your lower extremities is common on long flights, and can lead to complications. Consider asking someone to help you take off your shoes or move your limbs and help relieve pressure throughout the flight if you aren't able to do it independently.

3

Don't be afraid to ask for assistance in flight by pressing the button above your seat. Some cabin crew may need a reminder you have a disability in flight while you are out of your wheelchair, but are most often willing to help for things like reaching baggage, getting the aisle wheelchair, or adjusting cabin temperature.

when you LAND

1 Deplaning

- **When the aircraft is descending,** you can ask a flight attendant to call the arrival airport to make sure your chair will be ready for you when you land, but since you will deplane last, it will most likely be ready at the door by the time other passengers are gone.
- **While everyone deplanes,** make sure you have all your things with you and are ready to go.
- **Assistants will help you into the Washington Chair** and bring you to your wheelchair. Don't forget your cushion or any of your other belongings! It can be helpful to count what you brought on board, and repeat it once you deplane to let you know if you forgot anything.
- **If your own wheelchair does not appear to greet you** at the aircraft as expected at your destination, do not deplane until it appears. By leaving the aircraft without your wheelchair, it becomes a baggage handling problem, with the associated delays and inconveniences. While you are still on the aircraft, your missing wheelchair is an immediate concern to the airline and will be attended to, to minimize delays.
- **A lost wheelchair is an urgent, but thankfully rare,** problem! If you must deplane without your own wheelchair, immediately talk to airline staff and file a claim before you leave the gate area where you deplaned. Airlines will loan or rent you a wheelchair in the meantime, and most of the time your wheelchair will be sent to you with 24 hours once it has been located.

Chris Marks

2 Baggage

- **Ask for assistance in getting your bags off the carousel.** Other passengers will more than likely be happy to assist, and airlines have baggage attendants nearby the carousel who can help.
- **Look for porters, airport staff, or customer service personnel to help get your bags to the curb.** Be aware that in many countries, airport porters will expect tips in cash if you use their assistance.

let the accessible ADVENTURES BEGIN

Ready to hit the tarmac? Still feeling unsure? Check out the Accessible Travel Video Series at sci-bc.ca/travel-videos for essential tips and tricks.

- 7 Tips for Power Chair Travel
- Getting to the Airport
- Checking In
- Getting Through Security
- The Gate
- Transferring With Assistance
- Self Transfers
- On the Plane
- Baggage Pickup
- My First Trip as a Quadriplegic

We'd love to hear from you! Have a great adventure story of your own, or some indispensable advice for new travellers with SCI and disabilities?

Share your travel stories with us:
thespin@sci-bc.ca

Find the digital version of this guide at www.sci-bc.ca/travel

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