

YOUR ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL GUIDE

Created by Peers for Peers.
"Push your limits. Explore the world."



ABOUT THIS ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL GUIDE



Just because you have a physical disability, it doesn't mean your travel days are over. This travel guide is meant to help you plan your trip so that you are able to get the most out of your travel experience regardless of your level of ability.

The tips in this E-book were collected by the staff of Spinal Cord Injury BC from a panel of expert travelers with physical disabilities who have collectively explored every single continent— yes, even Antarctica — over the course of several decades.

Together we aimed to create a travel resource that would be useful to anyone who wishes to travel with a spi-

nal cord injury (SCI), a mobility impairment, or a physical disability by themselves or with their family, friends or an attendant.

We know that each individual is unique and has their own specific needs, so please use these tips as a resource to adapt to your own travels.

You can find detailed video travel tutorials and watch our expert travelers share their incredible travel stories on [YouTube.com/SpinalCordInjuryBC](https://www.youtube.com/SpinalCordInjuryBC) or find more travel tips on our website: www.sci-bc.ca/travel.

This project was created thanks to the volunteer hours donated by many SCI BC Peers and with the sponsorship of the Vancouver Airport Authority.

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SCI BC Peer Gerry Burns is an incomplete quadriplegic who doesn't let his injury cramp his travel style. He has been to Thailand, Cuba, Bali, Hawaii and Mexico.

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OUR TRAVEL PANEL EXPERTS



Roger Jones has traveled across North America as a motivational speaker. He even survived a hostage taking in Venezuela during his first trip abroad after his injury. [Click here](#) to watch him tell the whole story on YouTube.



Since his accident in 1983, Daryl Rock has been through Europe, the Carribean, the Middle East, Asia, South America and the South Pacific.



Steve Milum is an avid hand cyclist who has explored the banks of rivers along Belgium, Germany and Holland.



Linda McGowan has been to every continent and more than 80 countries since 1989. Here she is at 18,500 feet on Mount Everest.



Peter Isherwood and Kirsten Sharp star in our online Accessible Travel Series. Watch them take you through the YVR airport.

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 traveling alone or with company? This could determine how you plan your trip and your destination (dealing with luggage, transfers, transportation, etc...). If you are traveling 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 travelers with disabilities.

- If you are traveling in CANADA, visit the Government of Canada's Access to Travel Website (www.accesstotravel.gc.ca/) and the Canadian Transportation Agency's page on accessibility: (www.otc-cta.gc.ca).
- If you are traveling in EUROPE: (www.equalityhumanrights.com/advise-and-guidance/service-users-guidance/air-travel/your-rig).
- In the UNITED STATES the Air Carrier Access Act dictates what air carriers are required and not required to do for travelers with disabilities: (http://www.disabilitytravel.com/airlines/air_carrier_act.htm)
- United Spinal also has a thorough [travel brochure on accessible air travel](#).

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

4. DO YOUR RESEARCH Here are some websites to get you started:

- Created by the Rick Hansen Foundation, www.planat.com has reviews of different places around the world rated for their level of accessibility.
- Wheelmap.org is an app that helps you find and add wheelchair accessible places around the world.
- The ThornTree Forum is an online travel forum where you can exchange questions, tips and advice about different places around the world.
- Try Googling “Accessible + your destination” and see what comes up (ex. Accessible Moscow, Accessible Amsterdam, Accessible Beijing etc.)

5. ASK A PEER

Chances are that someone has already visited your destination and can help you bypass a lot of the initial groundwork. There are many ways to reach us:

- [Contact](#) your Regional SCI BC Peer Coordinator.
- Call our toll-free InfoLine: 1-800-689-2477
- Ask us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#)

6. TALK TO A TRAVEL AGENT

Travel Agents have access to rates and information that may not be publicly available. Someone with experience arranging trips for people with disabilities can help you cover all your bases and will go that extra mile to help you plan the trip that works for your needs.

7. ATTITUDE

Travel with an open mind and succumb to 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.

BOOKING THE FLIGHT

1. THE AIRLINE

- Some airlines have better policies for passengers living with a disability. Call airlines directly and check their website for detailed information.
- Ask about their baggage policy. Can you bring extra equipment like commodes, a manual chair or a sports chair or will they charge you?



2. BRINGING AN ATTENDANT?

- Discount policies for traveling with an attendant differ with each airline and with national or international flights. You may need a letter from a physician confirming your level of disability to qualify for any available discount.
- Careful: once you ask for an attendant discount you may never be able to travel independently again. Likewise, if you travel independently once, it may be more difficult to claim a discount for an attendant in the future.

3. CONSIDER YOUR BOWEL ROUTINE

- Try to book your flights on days that 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 (later in the day). Bowel accidents are quite often the greatest fear for those traveling with a disability so proper planning goes a long way towards peace of mind and behind!

BOOKING THE FLIGHT

4. CONNECTING FLIGHTS

- Try to limit flight connections on your trip as this will minimize the possibility of your equipment or luggage being broken 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 up 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. ARRANGING TRANSPORTATION

- Some travel agencies will arrange transportation/transfers between airports and hotels. Make sure to ask if they are accessible, and if not, if other options are available.
- Some destinations do not have accessible vehicles readily available so it is important that you plan ahead, especially if you are traveling in a power chair.
- In the United States, [Super Shuttle](#) is an airport shuttle service providing accessible transportation to and from more than 30 airports and over 50 cities.
- [GO Airport Shuttle](#) is a global network of locally owned airport shuttle service providers operating in 50 countries around the world. However, accessible vehicles can only be booked over the phone.
- [Read New Mobility Magazine](#) for more accessible transportation advice.

PACKING & HOME PREP

1. EXPECT THE BEST, PLAN FOR THE WORST

- Make a photocopy or scan all of your essential travel documents (passport, I.D., Credit Card, Insurance Information, Driver's License). Leave a copy with someone you trust at home in case of an emergency.
- Leave a backup chair with someone you trust and include instructions on how to ship it to you in case something happens to your chair during your trip.

2. MEDICATION

- If you suffer from chronic bladder infections, it may be a good idea to bring along a cycle of antibiotics. Consult with your physician beforehand.
- 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 a cache of supplies there for future visits.

3. YOUR CARRY-ON

- Pack lightly and efficiently. If you are traveling 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 that people can help you if necessary without unpacking your whole carry-on bag.

PACKING & HOME PREP

3. WHAT TO WEAR

- Cabin temperatures can get quite cool due to air-conditioning so layers are recommended. Wear pants without seams or pockets on the butt to avoid pressure sores on long flights.
- Wear clothing that you are most comfortable in and that allow you to easily adjust when you are emptying your bladder. Ease of access becomes a blessing for yourself or whoever is assisting you in a confined and public space.
- Pack an empty water bottle. If you're a man, this could help you empty your bladder discreetly on the plane.



4. 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 in your bags.
- Label everything from controls to batteries to fragile items and accessories so that 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.).

GETTING TO YVR

1. TRANSIT

- The Canada Line is accessible and easy to use. It will connect you to either the International or Domestic Terminal.

2. TAXIS

- Accessible taxis can drop you off closest to your airline. The average fare from downtown Vancouver to YVR is approximately \$32.
- Passenger drop-off areas are directly outside domestic and international terminals.

3. DRIVING

- Valet Parking isn't free, but it may be an easier option for some people.
- 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.
- 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.
- No matter which mode of transportation you choose to get you to the airport, remember to give yourself plenty of time. International flights require that you *check in at least two hours* before your flight. Check transit schedules, reserve taxis ahead of time, and confirm rides with friends or family.

CHECKING IN

1. ARRIVE EARLY

- International flights require that you check in *at least two hours* before your flight. Arrive *a minimum of one hour* ahead of domestic flights.

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 or a frequent flyer number to access your booking.

3. ASK FOR ASSISTANCE

- If you check-in at the desk and have a lot of luggage (i.e. shower chair, sports or recreational chair, bath bench), then ask for assistance. Have all your passport and flight information ready and at hand.
- If you do not use a wheelchair or scooter, but you have difficulties walking, there are wheelchairs available upon request.

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 (*pictured right*).



- Double check which airport code the airline representative 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.

CHECKING IN



To watch our YouTube tutorial video on Checking In, [click here](#).

5. SELECT YOUR SEAT

- Different seats have different advantages and disadvantages:
 - o The bulk head provides more leg room but you may not be able to reach your TV screen. Sometimes the arm rest doesn't lift.
 - o Window seats are harder to get to but no one will climb over you during the flight.
 - o Aisle seats are easier to get to but people will be climbing over you to get to the bathroom.
 - o Whatever you choose, ask if the arm handles to your seat can lift. This will help you transfer in and out of your seat.

6. KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON

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

SECURITY

- Carry-on items must be compliant with security rules. [Check online for the rules and regulations](#) regarding what is acceptable.
- Medication or liquids need to be placed in ziplock bags or clear containers that you can easily remove from your carry-on to show a security agent.
- Your chair will most likely set off alarms as you go through the gate—don't worry.
- If your chair will not fit through the gate, a guard may direct you around the gate through a bypass.
- Security personnel will pat you down. Men will only be touched by male security employees and vice versa. Help them by identifying any leg bags, tubes, straps, etc... that are attached to your body. Also let them know if patting you down may trigger spasticity or pain. Remember they have done this before, but everyone is different.
- Wear shoes that you can easily remove yourself or with assistance.



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 down the ramp to the plane entrance. The ramp is usually quite steep.
- To board the plane, you will have to transfer to the Washington Chair, which is also called an aisle chair. This is a narrow, dolly-style chair that is not very comfortable. You will not be in it for long. It is only necessary to get you to and from your seat safely. If you can walk for short distances, you can ask for assistance getting from your wheelchair and to your seat.
- The transfer will take place in the ramp area just outside the plane entrance and away from the public eye. Two people from either the airline or the airport personnel will lift you from your chair to the Washington Chair.
- Knowing how to direct your lift or transfer is very important. This skill will help you many times throughout your travels so learn it!
- Remember to take your wheelchair cushion on the plane—either to sit on or to safely store. You might want to sit on it during your flight, but mostly this is to ensure that it won't be lost in the cargo.
- Baggage personnel will tag your chair and store it in the 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. Show them the chair labels you carefully crafted when you were planning your trip!
- Staff will roll you in the Washington chair to your seat and will then assist you (if needed) in transferring to your seat.
- To watch someone transfer onto an aisle chair with assistance, [click here](#). To watch someone self-transfer onto an aisle chair, [click here](#).

DURING THE FLIGHT

- Once you are seated, make any necessary adjustments as quickly as possible after you have taken your seat (ex. check your urinary equipment, pull out your pants from the wedgie you most likely have, get balanced etc.) It is more difficult and less private to do while the other passengers are boarding.
- As long as you are kind and respectful, flight attendants are usually happy to help so do not hesitate to ask for assistance.
- If you are using a Roho seat cushion (airtight cushion), release air after you take off or it will become hard from the air pressure changes.
- Edema and swelling of your lower extremities is common on long flights and can be dangerous. Consider asking someone to help you take off your shoes or move your limbs to help relieve pressure throughout the flight.
- People manage their bladder in different ways when they're flying. Some people limit their fluid intake during the flight to ensure they don't have bladder management problems. That said, all airlines are required by law to have an aisle chair on board to bring you to the bathroom.



WHEN YOU LAND

1. DEPLANING

- When the aircraft is descending, ask a flight attendant to call the arrival airport to make sure that your chair will be ready for you when you land.
- 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!

2. BAGGAGE

- Ask for assistance in getting your bags off the carousel. Other passengers will more than likely be happy to assist.
- Look for porters, airport staff or customer service personnel to help get your bags to the curb.

3. TRANSPORTATION

- Some travel agencies will arrange transportation between airports and hotels. Ask if they are accessible, and if not, if other options are available.
- In the United States, [Super Shuttle](#) is an airport shuttle service providing accessible transportation to and from more than 30 airports and over 50 cities.
- [GO Airport Shuttle](#) is a global network of locally owned airport shuttle service providers operating in 50 countries around the world. However, accessible vehicles can only be booked over the phone.
- [Read this New Mobility Magazine](#) story for more accessible transportation and travel advice.

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[Vancouver Airport Authority](#) and
with the help of [WestJet airlines](#).



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www.sci-bc.ca

Share your travel stories with us:
www.sci-bc.ca/travel

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