



# The wide open road

## *Travelling with special needs*

By Poonam Khanna

*Whether it's a road trip across the province to hold your newborn granddaughter for the very first time, a vacation cruise to the islands or even a bus-tour across Europe, it is possible, even if you have a medical condition or special needs.*

Vacations can be magical. Whether you travel by plane, train, bus or in your own vehicle, there are plenty of safe and accessible Canadian and international destinations ready to roll out the welcome mat. There is, however, a secret to the magic of conjuring up a charmed vacation. The key to any successful holiday is identifying your needs and expectations, doing your research, understanding risks and planning ahead.

Be prepared to openly communicate before you go and be firm but flexible. Make a check list for discussion. Set realistic daily itineraries that allow for "time out to rest" if necessary. Review your personal health and stamina. Ask about the weather if you think it will affect your disability. Don't assume accessibility.

### *Getting the best advice*

If you'd like help planning your trip, many travel agents, tour operators and local service providers are appropriately informed and easy to talk to. From the needs of a person with limited mobility, hearing loss or diabetes, to helping someone with a respiratory condition arrange supplemental oxygen, they've probably

encountered a situation like yours before. Especially in larger cities, where there are tour guides and personal attendants available for those who need additional assistance, hotels equipped with access-friendly rooms and other special support services available. In smaller or more remote places, be prepared to encounter more difficulties.

### *Taking off*

If you're travelling by air, be sure to advise the airline of your disability or any assistance you require ahead of time. Even if you don't normally use a wheelchair, save precious energy by arranging for one to take you through security and to and from the boarding gates. Book special meals in advance. Request a bulkhead seat because it is the easiest to get in and out of and ask about washroom accessibility on the plane. Get your ticket and boarding pass ahead of time. Pack as little as possible in suitcases that have wheels and make sure your carry on luggage is light and easy to carry. Try to arrive early at the airport to avoid unnecessary stress of rushing.

## 10 Helpful Sites

[www.access-able.com](http://www.access-able.com)

[www.aircanada.com](http://www.aircanada.com)

[www.cta-otc.gc.ca](http://www.cta-otc.gc.ca)

[www.disabilitytravel.com](http://www.disabilitytravel.com)

[www.disabledtravelers.com](http://www.disabledtravelers.com)

[www.independentliving.org](http://www.independentliving.org)

[www.keroul.qc.ca](http://www.keroul.qc.ca)

[www.mossresourcenet.org](http://www.mossresourcenet.org)

[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

[www.viarail.ca](http://www.viarail.ca)

“If you look like your passport photo, you’re too ill to travel.”

Anonymous

### All Aboard

Public transit systems such as VIA Rail, Go Trains and buses can also accommodate travelers with reduced mobility. Again, it’s important to let the ticket agent know about your needs when booking the ticket. The trains have cars that are accessible to passengers in wheelchairs and come with wheelchair tie-downs, narrower wheelchairs that can navigate aisles and tools to reduce the width of some manual wheelchairs. Diagrams of the car layouts are often available so don’t hesitate to ask to get your bearings before hand. With companies like Greyhound Canada, passengers with appropriate medical documentation can travel with an escort, free-of-charge.

### On the road again

If you prefer to drive and need to accomo-

date a walker, wheelchair or scooter, or simply need something roomier for the long journey ahead, look into renting a wheelchair accessible vehicle. Better yet, next time you are in the market, consider purchasing a vehicle that can be converted by a qualified professional. For example, minivans are ideal for modification in many ways. Equipment can be purchased to lift manual or powered mobility devices into the side and rear openings, or you can buy a transfer seat or platform for the driver’s, passenger’s or side doors. Lowered floor conversions, to increase side or rear door-height openings and interior head room can also be arranged. Rooftop carriers can store some manual folding wheel chairs and will deploy the mobility device so that it is beside the driver or passenger. Driving controls can also be readily installed in most cars, trucks and SUVs. (See [www.solutionsmagazine.ca](http://www.solutionsmagazine.ca), under learn more about accessible vehicles, for further details.)

### A room of one’s own

When it comes to hotels, always book ahead. Most hotels can offer wheelchair accessible rooms with well-equipped and safe bathrooms. Ask for a raised toilet seat or commode. For safety reasons request a lower level room. Ensure that the room has enough space to accommodate mobility devices, such as a wheelchair, walker or scooter. Lastly, ask about the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis or shuttles to get around town.

Whatever your choice, a great holiday, family visits or a weekend getaway, travelling with special needs is possible. Just plan ahead, ask lots of questions and be prepared to speak up to make sure your needs are met. ●



*Enjoy the unforgettable scenery of the Rocky Mountains from the comfort of a wheelchair accessible train. Plan a two-day adventure, or a week-long tour.*

### Need help planning your vacation?

There are travel guides available which cater to the needs of globetrotters with reduced mobility. One such guide, AccessiB, which is published by K eroul, a Tourisme Qu bec consultant, covers the various regions of Qu bec, including Montr al, Mont r gie, the Eastern Townships, Chaudi re-Appalaches, and Qu bec City. The guide highlights tourist attractions and establishments that can accommodate people with reduced mobility. It also offers thematic getaways.



# 7 tips for travellers

Check out these helpful hints next time you're getting ready to go on holiday.

- 1 Always carry your travel insurance policy with you, and read it carefully before you leave.
- 2 Call the embassy of the country you are planning to visit to find out if there are any medication restrictions.
- 3 Pack medication in your carry-on and in its original containers for security reasons and bring proof that you need it.
- 4 If you require glasses, corrective lenses or dentures, pack an extra pair.
- 5 Bring a list of your recent medical history, including medications, allergies and medical conditions. Keep a copy in your wallet and give one to your emergency contact at home.
- 6 Bring sufficient quantities of the medicines you need, even over-the-counter items. It could be difficult to find the drug in your destination country.
- 7 To avoid circulatory problems on a plane or coach, walk up the aisle every hour. Periodically, stretch your legs, arms, shoulders and neck.

Adapted from [www.denuretours.com](http://www.denuretours.com)

