

Accessible and assisted travel guide



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Introduction

At ABTA we believe that travel should be accessible to all. Whether you're travelling for leisure, business, or to see family and friends, your experience should be as smooth as possible.

This guide has been produced to support you with planning your travel arrangements. It will help you navigate the process and provides some pointers for you to consider if you, or someone you're travelling with, has reduced mobility, access requirements, a non-visible disability or neurodiversity.

Thinking about your accessibility requirements, and using this guide and our checklist to prompt conversations with your travel advisor, will make sure you have all the information you need before finalising your travel plans.

Some travel providers also have dedicated assisted travel service teams who can help you navigate the booking journey, they often have dedicated websites pages and FAQs.

The questions on the checklist aren't intended to be intrusive and the information you provide will be treated confidentially and will only be used to check that the travel services you are choosing are right for you.

Remember to consider the whole experience or journey, from door-to-door, and back again. Include transport, your accommodation and access to facilities, resort areas and taking trips or excursions while you're away from home. Think about the type of travel or holiday experience you are looking for and where. Are there specific places you want to visit and things that you want to do?

Giving the travel provider as much information as possible will help them and their suppliers to understand your specific requirements. Be realistic and consider your needs in different circumstances – think about how independent, comfortable and healthy you're likely to be in different situations and climates and in places where language may be a barrier to simple communication.

Ask your travel provider to provide written confirmation of the services you book, including any assisted travel arrangements or special provisions.



It's never too early to start planning your trip, and booking well in advance might help you secure the best options.

Passenger assistance from airports and transport providers may not always be available on demand, so it is recommended you pre-book assistance as far in advance as possible. For airports, at least 48 hours in advance, and for hotel and transport requests at least 72 hours in advance of your departure.

Booking and pre-departure

Access to information

When you provide your contact details, let your travel advisor know your preferred methods of contact or communication. For travellers with sensory or non-visible disabilities, this may include requests for alternative formats, such as large print materials, documents which are compatible with screen-readers, audio guides, British Sign Language or text-based services, or information in a more simplified or pictorial format.

Some travel service providers have maps, photos and videos available for travellers who prefer to see these ahead of time, including those who need more time to process information or may feel anxious in unfamiliar settings.

It's also very important to consider any difficulties you might have in seeing, hearing or understanding instructions and following emergency information. Thinking about these issues in advance makes it easier to plan ahead – for example, your accommodation may be able to provide visual or vibrating alarm devices for travellers with hearing impairments.



In addition to your contact details, we would recommend that you provide your travel advisor with an emergency contact, this should be someone that is not travelling with you.

Mobility considerations

You may be a wheelchair user, have mobility challenges associated with ageing, or have a temporary condition which impacts your ability to get around, for example, recovering from surgery or an accident. Whatever the reason, try and provide as much detail as possible, so your travel provider can try and match your requirements with the best services for you.

Think about how you would answer these questions:

- How far can you walk without assistance?
 - Are you comfortable walking unaided, for short, medium or long distances?
 - Are you able to walk up and down steps, or walk along a ship gangway unaided?
- How many steps can you climb or descend unaided?
- Are you able to walk up or down hills, on rugged or uneven terrain, for example cobbled streets without assistance?
- If you are a wheelchair or mobility scooter user:
 - Can you transfer from a wheelchair or mobility scooter to your seat or chair unaided?
 - Would you need an aisle chair to reach the toilet on a plane or ferry?
 - Are you able to walk short distances using alternative aids to support your walking – for example, walking stick, crutches, walking frame?

Equipment

If you're travelling with a wheelchair, scooter or other mobility aid (manual or electric), or any other medical equipment or devices, your travel provider will need to collect information about the equipment.

Airlines, cruise lines and other travel service providers may have restrictions on the size, weight and number of devices or equipment that may be carried or accommodated. There may also be safety rules regarding, for example, batteries, which must be followed.

We've included some of the questions which may be asked in our checklist, but these are not exhaustive, as there are a huge variety of devices and equipment available.

You know your equipment, so if there's any information which may impact whether or not a service is right for you (perhaps because you've faced challenges on previous trips), it's best to share that information with your travel provider, even if they haven't specifically asked for the details.



If you are a wheelchair or mobility scooter user, airlines and other service providers normally will need you to provide details about the batteries, for example, the type, watt-hour rating, whether batteries are removable, and how spare batteries will be packed. There is also a watt-hour limit, but this can vary between airlines, so it is a good idea to check with the airline that your equipment is within the allowed limit.

It's also a good idea to carry the dimensions, weight, battery details and other technical information about your equipment such as how to release brakes, safe lifting points, detachable parts, and how to isolate the battery if it is not removable, with your other travel documents, in case any questions come up during your travels.

Transport providers will ask you to provide details of your equipment at least 48 hours in advance whenever possible, but we'd always recommend doing this at the time of booking.

Luggage

Depending on where you are travelling, and your modes of transport, you will need to consider how much luggage you are planning to bring with you, so that the travel provider can build this into your booking. Remember to consider personal luggage as well as the carriage of any mobility equipment you may need.

Assistance

Assistance can take many different forms, depending on your individual needs and requirements. Whether you have physical, sensory or cognitive needs, think about this when planning your trip, as it may influence where, when or how you travel.

Think about whether you can travel on your own in an unfamiliar place, where language or communication may be a barrier. And if not, is there assistance that could be available, which could remove or minimise those barriers?

You're the expert when it comes to knowing what you need, and sharing this with your travel advisor will help them in suggesting services which could make that trip a possibility.

Bear in mind that while travel providers are working hard to make their services accessible, there are some personal services which cannot be provided by transport and airport staff, crew, hotel staff or other suppliers. If you need help eating or drinking, using toilet facilities or other personal hygiene requirements or to administer medication, you will need to travel with a companion who can assist you.

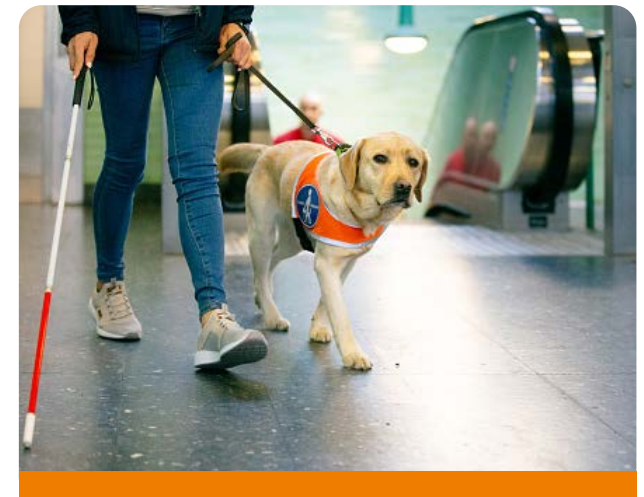
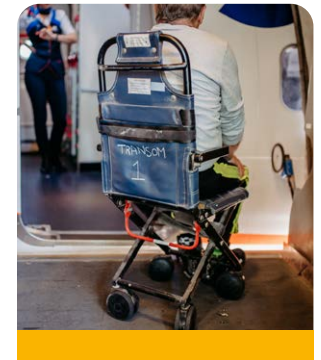
Assistance dogs

If you're planning to travel with your assistance dog, Guide Dogs UK has some helpful guidance: www.guidedogs.org.uk.

Depending on where you are travelling, and your modes of transport, there may be specific rules or procedures to follow and you'll need to provide evidence that your assistance dog is appropriately registered, accredited and/or trained.

You'll also find further information available from airlines, cruise lines and other travel service providers and the Government.

Don't forget to consider every part of your trip, not just the transport element. This should include practical issues like relief areas at airports or planning for long journeys and also because your accommodation or destination service providers will need to know about your assistance dog.





Medication

If you are travelling with prescription medication, you should check with your doctor whether your prescription contains controlled drugs such as Diazepam, Lorazepam, Codeine, Morphine or Tramadol (this list is not exhaustive), as some countries have strict regulations regarding these medications. If you need to travel with medicine that contains these, you should check the embassy rules, as well as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice for the countries they are travelling to or transiting through, to see if there are any other restrictions. You should carry a copy of your prescription or a letter from your doctor confirming that the medication you are carrying is prescribed to you.

It is advisable to carry a supply of your medication in your hand luggage and keep it with you at all times. Think about potential scenarios such as unexpected travel disruption or lost luggage and make sure you have sufficient medication to cover your trip and any delays.

If your medication needs to be stored at a particular temperature or refrigerated, bear in mind that this may not always be possible, so remember to ask what facilities are available and likely temperatures for the destination you're visiting.

There are liquid limits (currently for many countries it is 100ml) and rules on carrying oxygen cylinders and concentrators. There are also rules on sharp objects such as syringes, or other equipment that might be considered dangerous – check the specific rules for the carriage of these items and be aware you may need to travel with a doctor's letter.

Food allergens and dietary requirements

If you have a food allergy, please tell your travel provider at the time of booking.

Airlines, cruise lines, hotels and other travel service providers should be able to provide you with information concerning their food products, but they are unable to guarantee an allergy-free environment. Also bear in mind that not every country considers the same food ingredients to be potential allergens, so labelling on the packaging may not reflect all the allergens which would be listed under UK legislation.

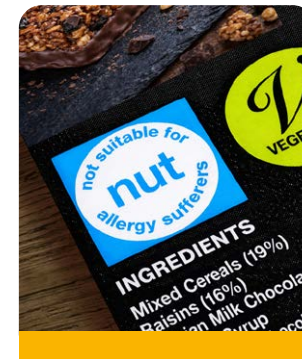
Even when you have shared details of your allergy in advance with your travel advisor, we strongly recommend you repeat these details to service staff during your trip. While accommodation and excursion providers will try to meet dietary and allergen requirements, we suggest you ask restaurant staff to provide you with the menu ingredient details, so you can make informed choices. For buffet style catering, as other travellers may be selecting and serving their own food choices, pay particular attention to the risk of cross contamination.

If you have specific dietary requirements, you can request special meals when you book your travel arrangements. If these are not booked far enough in advance of departure (four days is the minimum recommended), the travel provider may not be able to confirm these.

Non-visible disabilities

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower is a simple way to voluntarily (and discreetly) share that you have a condition that may not be immediately apparent to others, and that you might need a helping hand, understanding, or more time in shops, accommodation, transport, or in public spaces.

Many participating businesses (including some airports, supermarkets and other service providers), offer a sunflower lanyard free of charge to customers who have a non-visible disability. Sunflower lanyards are now widely recognised and acknowledged, however there are some areas of the world where it is not yet recognised. For more information on the sunflower scheme, and to identify participating businesses, please visit this website: [HDS – Global](#). Spanish Airports (Aena) have their own scheme called 'Invisible Disabilities Badge' and you can pre-register before travel, visit the [website](#) for more details.



Some travellers like to be prepared before they travel by seeing maps, videos and photographs, which help to reduce the anxiety some may feel when visiting a new destination. Many travel businesses provide this type of information on their websites for familiarisation purposes. They may also list other services available, such as quiet rooms, sensory rooms and other resources.

Travellers with non-visible sensory impairments may also find travel providers can offer helpful resources, including hearing loops, BSL interpretation, large-print documents, or formats suitable for screen reader users, or audio-described commentary.

Medical clearance

Generally, if you have a permanent and stable condition you will not require medical clearance to travel. However, there may be some circumstances where medical clearance, a doctor's letter, evidence of prescription, or other documentation is needed – your travel provider will let you know if this the case. There are a few acronyms it may be helpful to know:

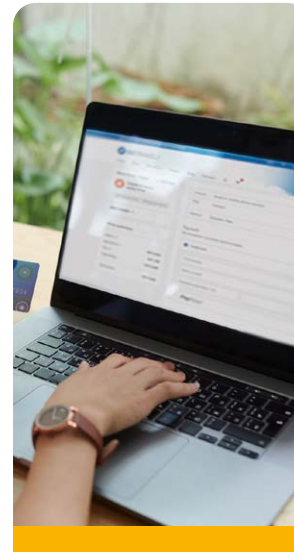
FTF – also known as 'Fit to Fly' and often used to authorise travel after an illness or injury.

MEDIF (or MEDA) – also known as a 'Medical Information Form', it's a document completed, signed and stamped by your doctor, or another appropriate medical professional.

FREMEC – also known as a 'Frequent Travellers' Medical Card', it is used by the aviation industry to identify and assist people who travel with them regularly and require clearance and assistance.

Travel insurance

Make sure you take out suitable travel insurance at the same time you book your trip, as this means that your insurance can protect you if you have to cancel your travel arrangements before your travel. It is important that you advise the insurance company of any pre-existing medical conditions at the time of purchase. In many countries the cost of medical treatment can be high, so it's essential that you take out a reputable travel insurance policy that covers the destination you're visiting, the activities you're doing and your specific needs.



If you don't declare a pre-existing condition, it's likely your insurance policy will be invalid and it will impact claims, whether or not they are related to that condition. You may have to undergo medical screening, for example, calling a medical helpline to give details of your condition or asking your doctor to complete a questionnaire or declaration. Alternatively, you may be asked to sign a declaration regarding your condition.

Read the policy conditions carefully and check for any restrictions and exemptions. Some standard policies may be inadequate for people travelling with mobility equipment such as wheelchairs, or portable medical devices. Check if these items are covered under your household policy when used abroad or make enquiries with a specialist insurer.

Don't forget about your GHIC (Global Health Insurance Card), which provides access to necessary state healthcare in the European Economic Area (EEA), and some other countries, on the same basis as a resident of that country. This may be free, or it may require a payment equivalent to that which a local resident would pay. If you don't have a GHIC card, it is easy to apply for on the NHS website [Applying for healthcare cover abroad \(GHIC and EHIC\) – NHS](#).

The journey

UK travel to your departure point – airport, cruise, ferry port or international rail terminal

National Rail and TFL offer a passenger assist service at managed stations to support people who require assisted travel services. They can provide assistance to navigate the station, board and alight the train, find your seat, and use a ramp if needed. You can book Passenger Assist in advance, up to two hours before your train departs, to ensure everything is ready for your journey. Alternatively, you can arrive at the station at least 20 minutes before your train departs and request assistance, and they will do their best to provide it.

Passenger Assist
National Rail Passenger Assist –
Transport for London

Accessible travel
Eurostar

Technology To Simplify Assisted Travel
PassengerAssistance.com

Assisted travel at the airport

Navigating your way around an airport can be tricky, so try and plan in advance and ensure that you have plenty of time before your departure, to make the experience less stressful.

Most airports offer a variety of assistance services, which are designed to make your journey as smooth as possible – this generally includes assistance from the drop off point at the terminal building, check-in support, assistance through security and boarding. This could also include assistance:

- To the top of the airbridge/bottom of aircraft steps.
- To the door of the aircraft.
- Directly to your seat.
- Disembarking the aircraft.
- Transferring between flights.

It is usually advised to book assisted travel a minimum of 48-hours in advance of departure, but we recommend doing this at the time of booking.

Airports often publish maps on their websites, which will help you see the layout in advance and find out about the distances involved. For example, from arrival point to check in, departure lounges to gates, and most importantly, where help points are situated where you can make your arrival known.

You should arrive in good time at your departure point and make yourself known to the assisted travel desk.

Security checks are made on all equipment and mobility aids. Make security staff aware of your needs.

If you are a wheelchair user, you may be able to stay in your own chair to the boarding gate. Where this is not possible, you will be transferred to the assistance providers' wheelchair and your own chair will be checked in. The same would apply to mobility scooter users.

Assisted travel passengers are usually boarded first, and you can ask to be pre-boarded.

Make sure staff at check-in, boarding gates and onboard know if you are hearing or visually impaired, so that you don't miss changes to departure display screens or any important announcements.

Assisted travel at the cruise or ferry port

If you have requested assistance, the operator of the port terminal will help you to check-in and register your luggage (including mobility equipment and any other specific equipment). The operator will also help you through any security and border controls and see you onto the ship.

If you arrive at the port with medical or mobility equipment, but haven't notified the operator in advance, you may not be able to take the equipment onto the ship. This could result in you not being able to travel. To avoid this ensure you book your assistance in advance.

Onboard your flight

Generally, pilots and cabin crew will have been trained in disability and equality awareness, including hidden disabilities, and will be on hand to support you and answer any questions you may have while onboard.

Whilst the cabin crew will provide support and assistance onboard to help your flight be as comfortable as possible, they are unable to assist passengers with personal care services such as eating, drinking, taking medication or using the toilet facilities onboard. If you need

this type of assistance you will need to travel with a companion who is over the age of 16 or a carer who is able to help you.

If you need an alternative type of safety briefing or use of an aisle seat to access the onboard facilities it is important that you advise the airline before travel of your onboard assistance needs so they can arrange this.

Onboard your cruise or ferry

Many cruise lines have made modifications to their ships to make them easier to navigate. Find out what facilities your cruise company offers, which could include anything from accessible lifts, allowing access to dining and other facilities, safety briefings in large print format, or with captions or sign language interpreters.

While they will provide an attentive service, crew cannot provide one-on-one personal care assistance, and you must be able to provide such care yourself (eg performing personal tasks such as eating, dressing, toileting, bathing, and getting around the ship).



There will likely be limits on the number of wheelchair users onboard for each sailing, and the use of mobility scooters may be restricted to certain areas on a vessel. Not all cabins are designed for wheelchair users, so book well in advance to get accommodation which suits your requirements.

As ships are different shapes and sizes, they will have different safety considerations. For example, some routine items of mobility or medical equipment (such as oxygen cylinders) may not be permitted onboard or may be subject to a size limit. Large or heavy items of mobility equipment may not be permitted in all parts of the ship, particularly if the ship is small. Information on such restrictions will be available from the ship operator.





Ports of call

Facilities, services and accessibility across ports of call vary significantly and assisted travel services may not be available for some shore excursions or in certain ports of call due to limited infrastructure or transferring to shore by a tender. Additionally, other factors including weather, tidal conditions, and other safety concerns can impact the ability for an accessible tour to be safely operated.

Your cruise provider will do their best to secure accessible tours, but in some circumstances they may be limited. Discuss your cruise itinerary and assisted travel needs for shore excursions with your cruise provider or tour desk onboard who will be able to advise you of the tours and services available at your various ports of call. In certain circumstances wheelchair users may not always be able to go ashore at tender ports, depending on tides, weather, or local infrastructure. Your cruise provider will be able to provide you with more information on this.

For ferries, in certain circumstances, and where strictly necessary, carriers may require that you be accompanied by another person who is capable of providing you with assistance if required. You should let the cruise line or ferry service know if you need to travel with a carer. On a ferry, your carer might be able to travel for free. This does not apply to cruises, and all accompanying passengers would be required to pay for their cruise.

In destination

On arrival in your destination

On arrival in the destination, if you have pre-booked assisted travel arrangements, you should be provided with the same level of assistance as in the UK.

If travelling by air, when you land, it is likely that you will be asked to remain seated on the aircraft until advised by the crew. This is so that they can make sure the assisted travel team is on-site and ready to help you. They should be able to help you disembark the aircraft, as well as help you navigate through passport control, baggage collection and customs.

For transfers to your accommodation or cruise terminal, once you have left the customs area, locate your travel provider. They will be able to signpost you to the transfer that has been arranged for you.



Transport from the arrival point to your accommodation (transfer, car hire, taxi, public transport)

Generally, unless otherwise specified at the time of booking, if a transfer is included in your travel arrangements, it will be provided on a coach or minibus. If a private or adapted transfer is required, discuss this with your travel provider, and note that there may be an additional charge for this.

Adapted cars are available for hire in many countries. Inform the car hire company of your requirements and always make sure you know the licence, insurance requirements, driving laws and driving conditions of the country you're visiting.

If you're booking a taxi, book well in advance and share any information relating to your assisted travel needs which will help them to allocate the right vehicle for you.

The Blue Badge Scheme operates in a number of countries – check here for Europe, or check the FCDO Travel Advice for the country you are visiting for further information.

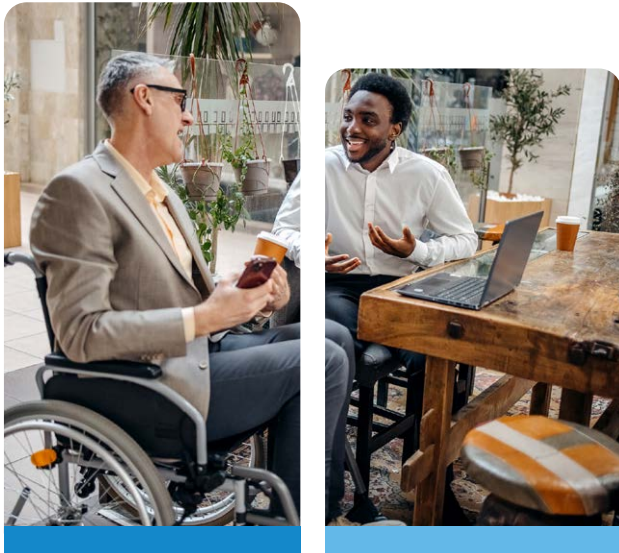
Many destinations have excellent public transport options, sometimes available directly from the arrival airport. If you would like to use public transport, speak to your travel advisor, who may be able to advise on websites or other resources with information for assisted travel on those services.



Accommodation (hotel or other)

In-depth research and using an expert travel advisor are crucial when selecting accommodation to meet your needs. Think about access around the property, the accessibility of your room, public areas, restaurants, bars, swimming pools, lifts and other facilities. In addition, if you want to explore the area around the accommodation, consider your location and its access to local towns, shopping and entertainment, availability of public transport and accessibility of excursions.

Most hotels have a limited number of fully accessible rooms for wheelchair users so consider your own needs carefully before



booking, as these rooms are essential for customers with high accessibility requirements. Some room types such as wheelchair accessible rooms or ground floor rooms are often available on request and may not be guaranteed at the time of booking. If you require specific room features for your stay, it is important to check with your travel advisor so that you understand the status of your request well in advance of travel. This will help you to make sure your needs are met and enable you to make changes if necessary.

Some travel and accommodation providers have virtual tours of accommodation on their websites. This is helpful, as it will usually show more details of the premises, including access to public areas and facilities.

For wheelchair and mobility scooter access, check that all main areas of the accommodation or resort are step-free, and that lifts serve all the floors you'll need to reach. Also check that any lifts are big enough to transport your wheelchair or other accessible equipment.

If you need additional equipment, such as back rests, bathing equipment, or special mattresses, this can sometimes be hired locally.

If you are travelling with medication, don't forget to check if there is a fridge available if this is needed to store your medication.

On arrival at your accommodation, if you have pre-booked specific services, we recommend you ask reception staff for confirmation that these arrangements are in place.

Also ask about additional support in emergencies, as they should have plans in place for safe evacuation if needed. Ask the accommodation staff to provide you with details of the plans and familiarise yourself with the arrangements.

Familiarise yourself with your accommodation and the accessibility of facilities and services, if you have any concerns or questions, speak to reception and your travel provider.

If you have a food allergy or dietary requirement, remind the staff at check-in of your needs. We also recommend that, at mealtimes, you remind waiting staff of your needs. Ask staff to provide you with details of the ingredients of the meals being served, so you can make informed choices. Pay particular attention to buffet style meals as cross contamination can occur if other diners use the same utensils for different dishes.

Access to local facilities and attractions

Many countries are making great headway in updating their facilities and services to make travel more accessible for all, but it is work in progress. Depending on the country, island, area or resort, the situation may differ and so it is important to discuss your requirements with your travel advisor, who will be able to provide insights and advice for your chosen destination.

Some destinations and local authorities have developed useful travel apps which can be a big help during your trip. The apps may include information on attractions, activities and events, walking routes with audio descriptions, the location of accessible washrooms and parking, access details of beaches, historical sites, transport and location of tourist information offices.

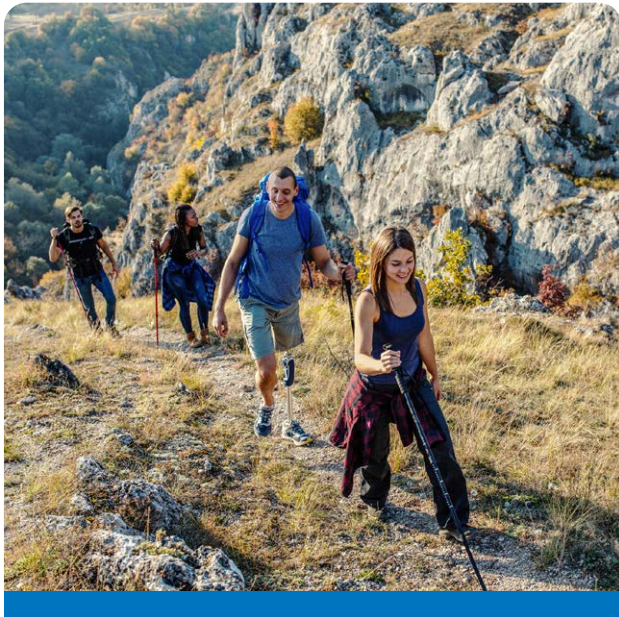
Local people are also a great source of information, speak to the staff at your accommodation as they may be able to provide useful tips and advice about getting round the local area.



Excursions and activities

Many travel providers work with local destination management companies who offer a range of excursions and activities at your destination, which can be booked locally. Make sure that you provide them with details of your assisted travel requirements to ensure that they will be able to support your needs for the trips chosen.

Your travel advisor should be able to provide you insights and advice on the various excursions and activities available for your chosen destination.



Attending meetings, conferences and events

If you are attending a business engagement such as a meeting, conference or event, as well as considerations specific to the venue, you should also discuss any special requirements with the organiser. These may include, for example (but not exhaustive), dietary requests, allergens, the need for a private room during the day, handouts in advance and/or in alternative formats such as large print, hearing loops, sign language interpreter, wheelchair or scooter access, or high backed chair. Ask for details of the evacuation plans that you should follow in the event of an emergency.

Exchanging information on your needs, and the services available, will allow you to judge whether you can fully participate in the event.



If things go wrong while you're away

Many millions of trips overseas are taken by UK travellers every year, most of which pass without incident. However, if you get into difficulty, such as falling unwell, being a victim of crime or facing an emergency situation, you should contact your travel provider and advise them of the situation. They may be able to signpost you to local services or provide advice or assistance in contacting your insurers.

Check what the emergency services number is for the country you are visiting and save the details to your mobile phone.

In the event you are a victim of crime, you are advised to report the matter to the police, the emergency number may be different.

If you require medical assistance, you should notify the assistance company associated with your travel insurance. Depending on the circumstances, they may be able to signpost you to the most appropriate medical centre, liaise with the medical facility as required and provide you with advice regarding procedures.

In certain circumstances, the FCDO may be able to provide assistance. In many countries, there will be a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate representation. Their guidance note provides further details: [Consular assistance: how the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office provides support - GOV.UK](#)

Useful links and further information

- [ABTA accessibility and assisted travel guide | Customer checklist](#)
- [DfT – Air passenger rights](#)
- [Scope](#)
- [Allergy UK](#)
- [Alzheimer’s Society](#)
- [Breakthrough T1D](#)
- [UK Civil Aviation Authority \(CAA\)](#)
- [Colostomy UK](#)
- [DfT – Rights of disabled passengers on transport](#)
- [DfT – Inclusive mobility: making transport accessible for passengers and pedestrians](#)
- [Living made easy](#)
- [RNIB](#)
- [RNI:D](#)
- [GOV.UK – Taking your pet abroad](#)
- [Tourism for All](#)
- [ENAT](#)
- [DfT – Who can get a Blue Badge](#)



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