

Travel Tips for People with Hearing Loss

Travel often presents a challenge for people with hearing loss. Our hope is that this article will help reduce stress and anxiety about travel. It is important to make a travel plan in advance. What are you likely to encounter? Who should you contact in advance? What should you take with you? Do you have a *Disability Notification Card, EMERGENCY MEDICAL IDENTIFICATION*? How will you communicate if you have problems? Deaf people may want to check out Gallaudet University's Travel Training Manual <http://bit.ly/evUuFI> .

{HOH--Hard of Hearing, HA—Hearing Aids, CI—Cochlear Implants, ADA—American Disabilities Act, ALDs—Assistive Listening Device, TTY—teletypewriter}

Travel by Plane:

It is helpful to contact the TSA about three days in advance regarding your travel issues. Travelers may call TSA Cares toll free at 1-855-787-2227 prior to traveling with questions about screening policies, procedures and what to expect at the security checkpoint. Travelers may also request a [Passenger Support Specialist](#) ahead of time by calling the TSA Cares hotline at 1-855-787-2227. Travelers who are deaf or hard of hearing can use a relay service to contact TSA Cares or can e-mail TSA-ContactCenter@tsa.dhs.gov. Download the [Disability Notification Card for Air Travel](#) (pdf, 69kb). <http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information/travelers-disabilities-and-medical-conditions>

As you check in at the ticket counter let the agent know that you have hearing issues so that they can put it in your traveler profile. When checking baggage, understand that this x-ray machine is stronger than the carry on check and may affect processors. There is some debate that X-rays can affect microphones on hearing aids. So, carry your spare processor and aids with you for general safety.

Because the conveyor and plastic bins may create static electricity make sure devices are in a case or bag, switched off and battery removed. The TSA suggests that you wear your hearing aids (HA) and/or your Cochlear Implant (CI) processor through the inspection. Notify the inspector that you have a hearing loss (HOH) by showing your Disability Notification Card or by simply pointing to your aid/processor and turning your

head so that it can be seen. Understand that body worn processors and devices have more metal and may set off an alarm. (Tina Childress)

You may hear a distorted sound when walking through the scanner—turn down the volume, carry your ID card. You may ask for a “Pat Down” or a visual inspection of exterior components that remain on your body. (Tina Childress)

Realize that you are your own best advocate. Alert gate personnel that you have a hearing loss issue and may not understand announcements. This will reduce the probability of problems if there is a sudden gate change or delay. If possible, sit where you can see the gate personnel and they can see you. Sign up for alerts to go to your cell phone/smart phone. When you don’t understand announcements ask. Memory is the process by which we forget and gate agents will forget unless you give them a reminder either verbally or visually. (After announcement, getting eye contact, pointing to your ears and shaking your head can often be an effective reminder.) Remember you are responsible for you.

Your HAs and CIs will not affect the planes navigational instruments. You can keep them on throughout the flight. Assistive devices can assist you with listening to music or watching the movie. (Tina Childress)

Alert the flight attendant that you have a hearing loss and will not understand the announcements. Ask for clarifications if needed. Letting your seat partner know that you have a hearing loss can be helpful in emergencies and prevent embarrassments when s/he is talking to you and you don’t respond. Make sure that you left nothing behind when deplaning.

Travel by Train:

Note that traveling by train is similar to traveling by air and many of the above notations may be helpful. Am Track has offered discounts to people with disabilities. Check it out when buying tickets.

Let the Gate Attendant know you have a hearing loss in case there are delays, changes or cancellations. Be visually aware of your surroundings for safety issues. Trains are very noisy and assistive devices can help. Check them out. If it is safe, alerting a fellow passenger may be helpful.

Travel by Car:

Road noise almost always inhibits communication for HOH people. Assistive listening devices with directional microphones, lapel microphones, FM systems, and Loop Systems can assist the communication process. It is important to know all of the features of your aids/processor. A simple communicator like a Pocket Talker with extension cords can go a long way in making travel by car more comfortable.

At the same time consider who sits where. Internal lights can help speech reading. Most of all, remember to pull over while texting or talking on the phone--safety first. (Tina Childress)

Ocean Cruise:

Many cruise lines are now offering facilities/equipment for HOH people. ASK. You will need to ask for alerting devices: loud noise or door knock flasher, bed shaking alarms, amplified phone or communication system to contact service desk. Again, read the above for suggestions. Tell the service people of your issues. In case of an emergency, they can check on you. Discuss how you will communicate with staff. How will you understand PA announcements?

What to Pack:

- Assistive Listening Devices
- HA/CI and extra batteries
- Chargers—120 and 12 volt
- Neckloops and Streamers
- Dryer and ear mold blower
- Cleaning tool for wax
- Zip-lock bags
- Padded Pouch
- Audiogram and/or HA/CI settings if you will be gone for a time. This would allow for emergency resets by another Audiologist.
- Phone numbers to customer care and your audiologist.
- Paper and pen for back up communication
- Confirm overseas power supply

Lodging and the ADA:

ADA Business BRIEF:

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/hotelcombr.htm>

Review the above ADA Business Brief. It is good to know what you may expect from lodging. Note: When you make your reservations, ask for accommodations for your hearing issues. The Hotel etc. are only required to provide facilities in a certain number of rooms.

These communication features are required in hotel facilities built or altered after the effective date of the ADA. They are also required in hotel facilities built before the effective date of the ADA to meet the ongoing obligation to remove physical and communication barriers to the extent possible without much difficulty or expense. Hotels and motels may also use portable visual alarms and communication devices to satisfy these requirements (ADA Standards 9.3.2).

Lodging Facilities that predate the above should be able to provide an ADA Hotel Kit. In reality few do or know where it is. This is a “Use it or Lose” it situation. Since no one asks for it the hotel staff doesn’t know what it is or where it is. You may need to describe it to them. Tina Childress, an educational audiologist from Illinois who is deaf, turns every trip into a teachable moment. “That desk clerk that doesn't know what an ADA Hotel Kit is?” “Well, after talking to me, they'll probably never forget!”

The Kit can contain a visual fire alarm, TTY, Vibrating Alarm Clock, Strobe Light Door Knocker etc.

Let the staff know that you are HOH/deaf. Understand that many of us are basically deaf without our aids even if we call ourselves HOH. If traveling with someone, give them one of your keys. Your CI headpiece magnet, cell phone and cell phone case can demagnetize the strip on the hotel key. (Tina Childress)

Consider bringing your own alarm—clock, watch, cell phone, bed shaker.

Closed captioning can be difficult to obtain on older TVs and may require the original remote (not the room universal remote) to access the proper menu.

What to do in case of emergency:

Free printable medical ID cards are available at <http://www.medids.com/free-id.php#.VYcP5GfbKM8>

Everyone needs a patient medication wallet card, list of your current medicine you are taking, along with notification of any chronic medical condition/s, like Alzheimer's, Diabetes, Autism, Asthma, Epilepsy, any allergies, etc., and I.C.O.E. (In Case of Emergency), School health information information card, athlete medical information cards, Contacts to keep with you in your wallet/purse, *next to your drivers license*, at all times! Printable medical information record form for patients and caregivers, a medical history log to show your doctor.

Or create your own card and keep it near your driver's license.

Include: “Deaf”, “deaf” or “Hard of Hearing”

“Use Hearing Aids”

“Have Cochlear Implant”—NO MRI

No Monopolar Cautery

Name and phone number to CI Surgeon/Clinic

Add a listing for ICE (in case of emergency) on your cell phone, pager, or PDA

Miscellaneous:

If you're planning an outing that involves a guided tour, presentation, workshop, concert, etc., call ahead to arrange for ALDs, real-time captioning or interpreters. Know and understand the law regarding communication access in the area you're traveling. (Karen Putz, Living with Hearing Loss)

Make sure you've got a quick and easy way to “talk” to others in hectic or loud situations. A pen and pad of paper might seem like a no-brainer, but it can save the day. For the tech-savvy traveler, a notepad app on your smartphone will do the trick.

(Eva Dasher, [AARP](#), May 1, 2015)

Much of the above material was borrowed from a Power Point Presentation by Tina Childress (HLAA-2011 Washington, DC) an educational audiologist from Illinois