

Travelling by Air: A Wheelchair User's Guide

Top tips that will help your experience abroad
run that bit smoother...



Plan to your heart's content!

For many people, travelling by air is exciting but also stressful, especially if you're not too sure what to take, where to go and don't have any tips of your own when it comes to holidaying, rain or shine. Behold, my checklist and travel top tips: disabled or not, you are bound to find advice here to ensure you have more fun in the sun!

Before you travel by air as a wheelchair user, you need to be aware of the category your wheelchair falls into, as this will affect the support you may need and questions you may be asked once at the airport. Usually, at check-in, you will be able to request help immediately, or ask to meet airport staff at the gate, where they will transfer you into an aisle chair and take your wheelchair away, or help you to walk onto the aircraft, should you be able to do so.



It is important you arrive at least 3 hours before departure, and you have already informed the airline of whether your chair is:

- A hand-propelled manual chair
- An electric chair/scooter with wet acid batteries
- An electric chair/scooter with dry cell or sealed gel batteries.

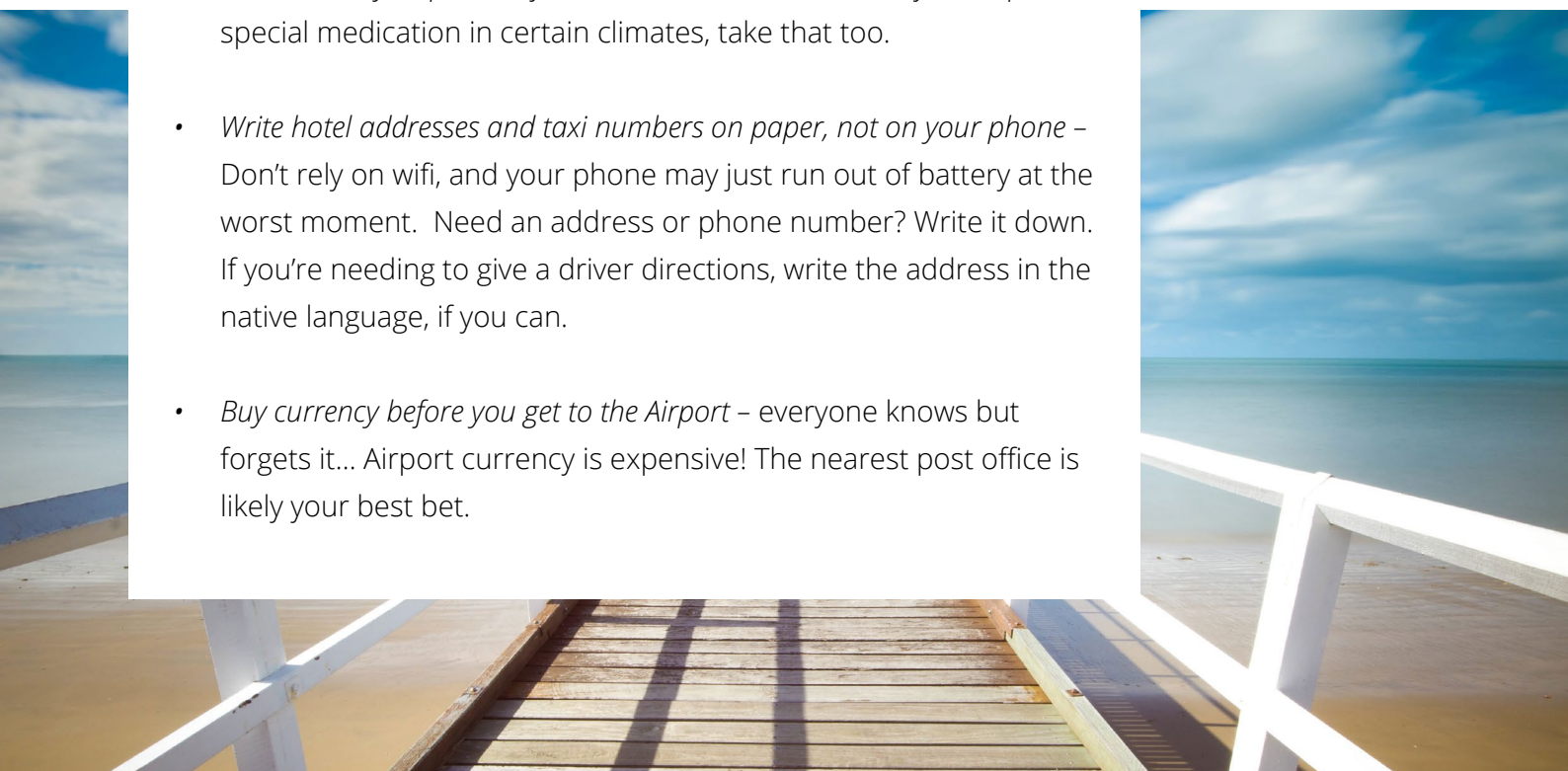
The airline will then inform you of the necessary action to take. In terms of your wheelchair, first and foremost, preparation is key...

- **Condition is everything** - To avoid a potential dilemma, it is important to make sure your wheelchair is in good condition before a trip.
- **Tools are handy** - If possible, bring an emergency toolkit with you to fix any problems while you are away.

Now, for some more general holiday tips

What to remember...

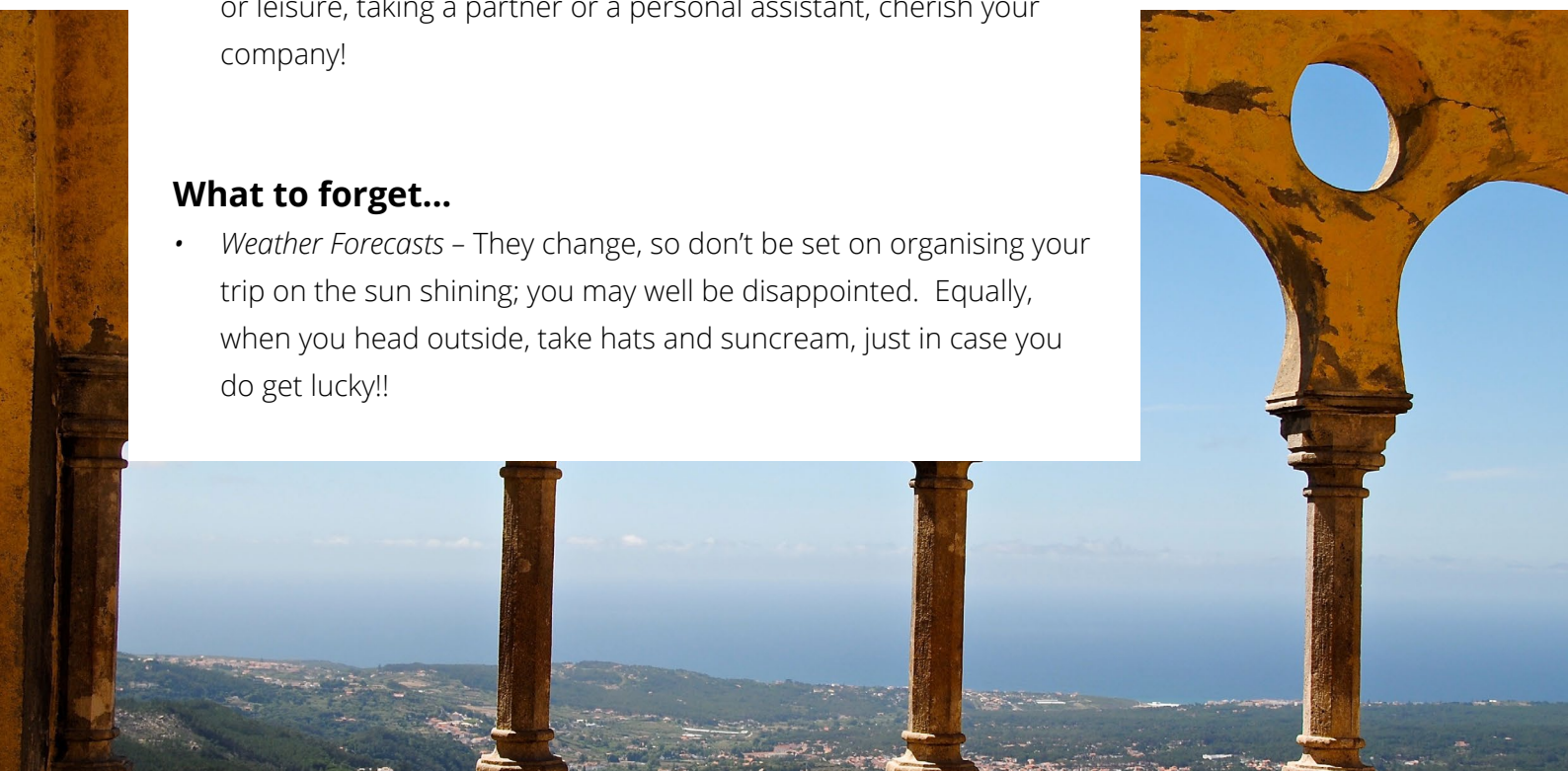
- *Pack lightly, but for all weathers* – you're never going to know exactly what the weather is going to be like, so pack for rain or shine. Just remember, you probably need 10 outfits, not 100... If you require special medication in certain climates, take that too.
- *Write hotel addresses and taxi numbers on paper, not on your phone* – Don't rely on wifi, and your phone may just run out of battery at the worst moment. Need an address or phone number? Write it down. If you're needing to give a driver directions, write the address in the native language, if you can.
- *Buy currency before you get to the Airport* – everyone knows but forgets it... Airport currency is expensive! The nearest post office is likely your best bet.



- *Adaptor plugs!!* – Whether your prized possession is your laptop or your hair straighteners, make sure you can charge them (and that your adaptor fits the country you're going to!)
- *Reading material is a must* – Unexpected delays can be made SO much more enjoyable!
- *Check out Euan's Guide for attractions* – It's great for finding out about accessibility too. Many cities now also have their own online sites dedicated to accessibility.
- *Ask for advice on online forums* – If someone else has been, they're going to know best!
- *Cream up and don't get caught out* - Sunburn is neither comfortable, nor attractive. If you struggle to regulate your own temperature, remember to also wear a hat!
- *With WhatsApp, there's no need for large phone bills* – Be savvy with the apps you use; some allow you to contact home for free with a good connection.
- *It's the company that counts!* – Whether you're travelling for business or leisure, taking a partner or a personal assistant, cherish your company!

What to forget...

- *Weather Forecasts* – They change, so don't be set on organising your trip on the sun shining; you may well be disappointed. Equally, when you head outside, take hats and suncream, just in case you do get lucky!!



- *Airport Currency (food, and toiletries)* – If you can buy it elsewhere, try not to spend all your money on holiday essentials and luxurious treats in tempting airport stores.
- *Paying extra for luggage* – Book your luggage in advance, and don't take hand luggage that's simply too large; from experience, £60 is a kick in the teeth at the start of a trip away all because you wanted to fit those extra five dresses in...
- *Expensive hotels (unless that is what you're looking for!)* – With sites like AirBnB and some fabulous hostels around, accommodation doesn't have to be expensive (and it can still be accessible!)
- *Skimpy clothes (depending on the culture)* – Be conscientious and make the effort to find out about rules and regulations in the places you are visiting. The locals will thank you for it, and you'll be considered a thoughtful tourist, yay!

Bonus tips

- *Consulates are there to help you* – Whether it's a problem with access, equipment or medication and visas, your consulate within the country you are visiting can help. Look it up before you travel
- *Plan ahead* - If you require assistance at the airport, make sure you let the airline know ahead of time, so they can help you in the best way possible
- *If you have mobility equipment...* - Simply ask the person that checks you in at the airport to tag it as 'fragile'; it should make a big difference to how it is handled!
- *If something does go wrong...* - Keep cool, calm and collected, however tough it may seem, and file a claim with the transport provider.

- *Learn a little of the language* – It is always good to be able to direct a driver, handle money, use manners and ask for help, and will be much appreciated, too!
- *Insurance IS worth it* – Although it may not seem like it at the time, paying £20 for insurance is much better than a £2000 hospital bill! If you have a medical condition, a good travel agent should help to fight your corner for good insurance.
- *Remember time zones* – This is really important especially if you have medicine to take, remember that the cycle may be different in different zones, and jet lag may affect your routine. Also, store them in an air tight container and label them with your initials and needs!
- *HAVE FUN!* – As they always say: Travel is the only thing you can buy that makes you richer. Enjoy!

On arrival

Make sure you've booked your transport, accommodation and certain activities ahead of time, and staff know what to expect and how best to help you. If children or elderly relatives have disabilities, there may be special rates available, or adaptations that can be made. Depending on where you are travelling to, public transport may be both cheap and accessible, or an adapted taxi might be the best bet. Either way, airport customer services and tourist information desks can often provide relevant phone numbers and other contact details.

If you need support once at your destination, make sure you have asked about special rates and rooms for personal assistants. It might also be a good idea to search for an assistant or tour guide who can speak the language, especially if you need an extra pair of hands!

