



Traveling By Airplane

With more and more wheelchair travelers are taking to the skies you would think that airlines would be making improvements to keep pace with the fast changing demographics of their passengers. Sadly, this is not the case with all airlines. We can not recommend a favorite airline because in any given situation any airline can be a villain or a saint to the wheelchair traveler. Last year we had two separate groups of clients flying on the same airline at different times of the day. Each met connecting flights at the same connecting airport. The first group praised the airline for giving them the best assistance they had ever experienced. Surprisingly, every member of the second group cursed the same airline for their poor performance stating "they were the worst." The bottom line of your airlines' performance depends on the airport staff, the airline staff, and the airline crew on duty at the time you check into the airport and board your aircraft.

Reconfirm your airline flights with your airline 24-48 hours before any departure. Flight times and flight numbers are subject to change. Take painstaking steps to notify your airlines that you are traveling by wheelchair. Inform them if you are traveling with a manual wheelchair, an electric wheelchair, or a scooter. When reconfirming your flight, ask the airline for "maximum assistance" at all airport terminals. Reconfirm your request for "maximum assistance" when you arrive at the airline ticket counter.

At the airport, ask the ticket personnel to "gate check" your wheelchair and obtain a luggage claim receipt for your wheelchair. When you "gate check" your wheelchair it allows you to roll your wheelchair directly to the fuselage of the plane where you will either walk to your seat or transfer into an "aisle chair" for assistance to your seat. Before handing your wheelchair over to the airline staff, remove your leg supports and portable seat cushions and carry these into the plane....these do not travel well when attached to your wheelchair and are likely to be lost. We recommend a small, nylon sports bag large enough to hold the leg supports that is also light enough to fold into your carry on luggage when not in use. This light weight sports bag keeps your leg supports in one place and hopefully prevents them from falling out of the overhead luggage bin onto someone's head. If your wheelchair folds, collapse the wheelchair together and use a small strap or a piece of "duct tape" to hold the sides together. This process makes for a compact wheelchair that is less likely to be damaged with airport handling.

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