



Coping Strategies for Travelers with Hearing Loss  
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Thanks to Ruth Bernstein of the Hearing Loss Association of America Manhattan Chapter and Lise Hamlin of Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) I am using their input to start the group discussion on "Coping Strategies for Travelers with Hearing Loss" today at this meeting. In addition some of the info below appeared in *The Buzz*, the Center for Hearing and Communication's electronic newsletter on 6/19/2011.

Traveling rates high on the list of stressful situations for people with hearing loss. There are so many "need to hear" situations involved, that planning and enjoying a trip can seem overwhelming and frightening. Here are some ideas about traveling which to use to help lessen your pre-trip anxiety level and raise your pleasure quotient while traveling on the road.

Take responsibility for yourself. Always identify yourself as someone with a hearing loss even if your are traveling with a partner who can hear. Tell everyone who is involved in arranging your trip you are hard of hearing/deaf including the travel agent, ticket agent, airlines and hotel clerks, group coordinator or cruise ship operator. If you can, use the Internet to make reservations. If you are making reservations by phone, identify yourself as a person who has a hearing loss and tell the agent your needs so they can be entered into the computer. Follow up by stating your needs in writing. Ask for WRITTEN confirmation of all arrangements. If possible, use the universal symbol for hearing access on your correspondence. (sticker)

A hearing loss person should carry ID that shows his/her name, address and phone number(s) plus a list of names and addresses of your family and medical contacts and to indicate that you have a hearing loss. This is necessary in case of an emergency.

Put important papers, including your passport, drivers license and tickets in a carry-on bag. Pack **copies** of your ID information, itinerary, ticket(s), passport, license, credit card(s) and a list of the medications you take **separately** from the actual documents and leave copies with a responsible person on your desk and on your computer.

As part of planning for the trip, check with your audiologist, hearing aid supplier and/or assistive devices center for information about assistive technology. The FAA ruled that it is permissible to take ALDs including personal FM device with headphones and a neckloop, extra batteries for ALDs and hearing aids, a battery tester, a portable phone amplifier, a small flashlight and a night light you need to communicate in your carry-on luggage. Be prepared to explain what they are for. Take batteries out of assistive devices you are not using and put them in your checked luggage. Pack a small battery tester. Don't forget pen and paper.

Check with your air carrier about how and where to pack these items mentioned above.

When you fly, ask for an aisle seat so you are closer to the flight attendant, making it easier to hear and speech read. Sit as far away from the engines as possible. When checking in for a flight, make the agent aware of your hearing loss. Ask if you can pre-board because you may not hear your row called. Sit within sight of the gate personnel so you will be aware of when announcements are being made. As soon as you board, tell the staff you have a hearing loss and that you will need help understanding announcements. If you are traveling by yourself, ask your seat mate to repeat announcements, if necessary. Read the airplane safety publication and use a personal listening system. Note: FM systems cannot be used during take-off or landing. Notifying staff of your hearing loss wherever you go is important on all forms of transportation-ships, buses and trains and, of course, at hotels.

When traveling with a group, explain the communication strategies that work for you, share the information on "Tips for Communicating With Someone Who is Hard of Hearing or Oral Deaf", demonstrate the assistive devices you use and ask people to help you.

If you have communication problems during a trip, speak to the person in charge and explain your needs calmly and clearly.

Be flexible and try to keep your sense of humor.

After the trip, write letters of thanks or complaint.

Remember, take responsibility for yourself. Speak up and ask for help when you need it. Most important of all, enjoy your travels!

Additional things to do:

Check the web site or call the carrier you are using to find out about identification requirements and baggage restrictions. This keeps changing so it is important to recheck this information within 24 hours of your trip. For packing instructions go to the Transportation Security Administration webpage, [http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/screening\\_experience.shtm](http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/screening_experience.shtm) and <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/index.shtm>

For flight information check your airlines and <http://www.fly.faa.gov/flyfaa/usmap.jsp>.

I have also included suggestions from other chapter leaders of HLAA.

## **For plane**

A number of years ago, I made up business cards (just printed them on card stock on my computer) that said, " I am hard of hearing. I cannot understand what is said over the PA. Please tell me if there are any unusual announcements. Passenger name: John Smith , Flight [1234], Seat [17B]."

I left the flight and seat number blank to fill in each time I traveled. I gave it to the flight attendant as I boarded the plane. I tell them I know the basic announcements, just let me know if there's anything unexpected. Sometimes I also gave it to another flight attendant that was assigned to my area if I didn't see the one I gave it to earlier. I also have said this to my seatmate, when I travel solo. And, I never sit in an exit row anymore.

Check to see if the airline has a disability phone number and if so, call at least 48 hours ahead of your flight and give them your flight confirmation number.

When I get a gate agent who seems indifferent, I try another tactic: Every time I hear something announced (usually can't make out what they are saying), I get up and go to the desk, and ask if that was something I need to know about. I make myself a pain in the neck for them, and then they are less likely to forget to let me know when it's time to board.

HAAA's position on accessibility at airports is stated on this webpage, <http://hlaa-advocacy.blogspot.com/2011/01/access-to-airlines-are-we-there-yet.html>. For those who don't have access to the Internet here is a summary. Hearing Loss Association of America participated in the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) forum on the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA), "Working Together to Improve Air Travel for Passengers with Disabilities" January 11, 2011.

At the DOT's forum, it was emphasized that consumers need to send complaints in – or things won't change. DOT says they receive very few complaints from people with hearing loss. You and I may talk about it, but we aren't sending our complaints to the people who need to hear about it. We must take responsibility ourselves and file those complaints. To let DOT and the airlines know how they can do better, you need to let them know what happened. But you need to be very clear about your complaint.

Air travel complaints: **Be specific!**

Include:

**Your name**

**Your contact information, including either email address or phone**

**Airline**

**Flight Date**

**Flight Itinerary (destination cities and flight number)**

**Description of the problem**

You can contact the airline directly, or fill out the form on the DOT website:

<http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/escomplaint/es.cfm> .

**For Train**

When boarding the Amtrak train, explain to the conductor that you have a hearing loss, and might not understand the announcements. The conductor will tell you how many stops before your arrival stop. Then he will come and get you too prior to your arrival stop, to be sure you don't get left behind.

**For laws/guidelines**

See [http://travel.state.gov/pdf/TravelingWithDisabilities\\_Oct\\_2010v2.pdf](http://travel.state.gov/pdf/TravelingWithDisabilities_Oct_2010v2.pdf) and [http://alda.org/pdfs/DHHCAN\\_AirTravel\\_2009\\_guide.pdf](http://alda.org/pdfs/DHHCAN_AirTravel_2009_guide.pdf).