

maximum weight for any single piece of baggage is 32 kgs. Passengers travelling with vital medical equipment – which prosthetics comes under – are allowed an additional 10kgs, but the total hold baggage must not exceed 50kgs. This could mean that you may need to be prepared to open your suitcase to show the ground staff the spare/swimming limbs in your luggage, so pack carefully. Under the codes laid down by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (see below for more details), if you need to use or carry any medical equipment on the plane, you will need to check in advance with the airline. Different airlines will have their own rules for different equipment. All airlines will carry wheelchairs – in the hold, but may not take a scooter or buggy. If you need to take expensive disability equipment with you, make sure that it is adequately insured for loss or damage, mobility aids are unlikely to be covered by standard travel insurance policies, this is particularly important for wheelchairs, as compensation from the airline is currently based on weight, not value. Sometimes your household insurance may provide cover for these items but most insurers will quote separately. If you do use a wheelchair, it is always advisable to remove the seat cushion and the footplates before you hand it over to the baggage handlers.

Very often an amputee's disability is not obvious to other people, so make sure you explain your particular requirements clearly, this is particularly pertinent with regards to security or the airline screening process. If you use a wheelchair, it is obvious that you are going to set the metal detector ringing, and a same gender security handler will always screen you and your personal wheelchair. Screeners will frequently need to see and touch your prosthetic device as part of the screening process, but they do not, except in rarely heard of cases, ask you to remove it. We at the LA have heard of one instance of an amputee asked to remove his shoe, (following the shoe bomber incident, when security was at its highest) and

have heard on the grapevine about one other time when an amputee was asked to remove their prosthetic leg which came soon after reports of drugs being stored in a prosthetic, but in the absolute majority of cases you should not be asked to remove your prosthetics. If your clothing needs to be disturbed in any way for the screener to see or touch your prosthetic(s), you can request a private screening. Walkers, crutches and walking sticks and other devices that can fit through the x-ray machine must undergo x-ray screening.

For additional comfort, try to book your seats in advance, to trawl back a little extra leg room – right at the front of the plane section is best but be aware that passengers with additional needs will not be seated or in cross aisles that form part of the emergency exit routes.

Once aboard, if you can, take aspirin, to facilitate circulation and try to move your residual limbs as much as possible during the flight by tensing and releasing the muscles in the residual limb. Sitting in a pressurised cabin for a long time can make your ankles, feet and joints swell. If you take off a prosthesis during the flight to be more comfortable, you may find it very difficult to get it back on, especially in the limited space of a plane seat.

On a final note, some staff, who provide specialist services like driving buggies, handling mobility equipment such as wheelchairs, will have had extra training to make sure they have the necessary skills but please remember that this does not mean they are experts in all types of disability. Give advice and explain your personal requirements at every relevant stage of your journey as clearly as possible. All the major airlines have special assistance helplines – some of which are featured below, all of the airlines stipulate that these lines must be phoned if you require special assistance. Do your research, be prepared, be open with your information, and have a great flying time! This article first appeared in the Summer Issue of Step Forward Summer 2007.

With thanks to InMotion magazine

The government has worked with disabled people and the organisations involved in all stages of a journey by air. This guide is published by Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC): Access to air Travel: Guidance for disabled and less mobile passengers: Tel: 0207 944 8011 Web: <http://www.dptac.gov.uk>. It covers all aspects of air travel – from accessing information through to arriving at the final destination. It also covers the design of airports and planes with over 30 seats.

Association of British Travel Agents:
Tel: 0901 201 5050 Web: www.abta.com

Tourism For All: Tel: 0845 1249971
Web: www.tourismforall.org.uk

Commercial Tour Operators
specifically geared towards people with mobility difficulties:

Access at Last
www.accessatlast.com
Tel: 0845 890 2120

Access Travel
Tel: 01942 888844
www.access-travel.co.uk

Accessible Travel and Leisure
Tel: 01452 729739
www.accessibletravel.co.uk

ATS Travel Ltd
Tel: 01708 863198
www.assistedholidays.com

Venture Holidays Ltd – Activity holidays for disabled
(British run organisation working out of France)
Tel: 00 33 5 62 06 72 39
www.atventure.org.uk

Can Be Done
Tel: 0208 907 2400
www.canbedone.co.uk

Enable Holidays
Tel: 0871 222 4939
www.enableholidays.com

www.matchinghouses.com
This is a website for disabled people who wish to house-swap for their holidays.

Special Assistance Telephone Lines:

British Airways:
0870 850 9 850
EasyJet: 0871 244 2336
Ryan Air: 0871 246 000
Virgin: 0870 380 2004