

HAVE LOOP WILL TRAVEL

By Stephen O. Frazier



Travelers with hearing loss should look for the international hearing loop symbol, which is usually blue in the U.S. but may be maroon or green or some other color abroad.

I'm 80 years old with a hearing loss. What I've learned through my travels is that I need more than just my hearing aids.

IN NEW YORK CITY NOT LONG AGO, I EXPECTED TO have a problem when I approached the fare booth to buy a subway pass. I knew the roar of trains constantly passing through makes it difficult for someone with typical hearing to communicate, let alone someone like me with a severe hearing loss.

But when I noticed a sign for hearing loops, a blue symbol with an ear and a "T," I turned off my hearing aids' mics and turned on their telecoils. To my surprise and delight, I heard quite clearly the attendant's voice, just as a train was passing through underneath.

Telecoils, or T-coils, are tiny coils of wire in my hearing aids that receive sound from the electromagnetic signal from a hearing loop. A hearing loop, in turn, is a wire that surrounds a defined area and is connected to a sound source such as a public address system. It emits a signal that carries the sound from its electronic source to the T-coils in my hearing aids, which are already optimized for my hearing ability. It's as simple as flipping a switch to gain access to sound in any looped setting.

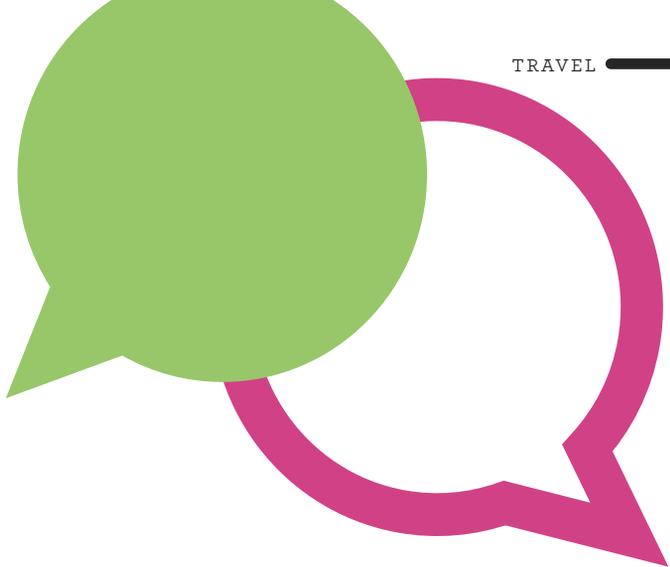
Beyond New York City, hearing loops are available around the country in auditoriums, train stations, airports, places of worship, theaters, and more. For a full and growing list, see time2loopamerica.com and aldlocator.com.

The technology also works with devices called neck loops—personal loops that replace the headsets used in assistive listening situations (such as a museum audio guide, in-flight entertainment, or a live theater production) and send sound to the telecoils of hearing aids.

Travelers with hearing loss should look for the international hearing loop symbol, which is usually blue in the U.S. but may be maroon or green or some other color abroad. If you aren't sure whether your hearing aid has T-coils, talk to your hearing healthcare provider. Keep in mind the smallest-size hearing aids sometimes do not come with telecoils.

Here are some of my other travel tips, as a lifelong travel enthusiast:

- » If you have a Pocket Talker or some other personal sound amplifier, take it along with a neck loop to hear over cabin noise in flight.
- » Download a speech-to-text app like Live Caption or InnoCaption to your cell phone to let you read what's said to you by others.
- » Download a captioned phone app such as the one from Hamilton CapTel so you will have captioned phone access during your trip, for both placing and receiving calls.
- » Pack extra hearing aid batteries and, if you have one, an extra hearing aid for the trip.
- » If your hearing aids are rechargeable, be sure to take the charger and put it in your carry-on in case your checked luggage doesn't arrive with you.
- » Take a pen and notepad with you to communicate with ticket/gate agents if needed.
- » Download the SoundPrint app for its Quiet List that identifies restaurants and bars in U.S. cities that are less noisy and more conducive to conversation. (See the following page for more information.)
- » Print your ticket and boarding pass at home, or send it to your phone.
- » Carry a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Notification Card about your hearing condition to hand to the TSA agent when you go through airport security. (Get one at tsa.gov.)
- » If available, take a seat near the information counter at the gate and alert the attendant to your hearing loss. Request that you be notified of any emergency or other announcements. Often the agent will add you to the group allowed to preboard.
- » As you board the aircraft, alert the flight attendant(s) to your hearing loss so they will know to pay attention to your communication needs, and read the safety instructions in the pocket in front of you—you may have difficulty hearing verbal directions from the flight crew.
- » Once you reach your destination, if staying in a hotel, alert the desk clerk to your hearing difficulty



so staff can be instructed to personally inform you of any emergency, e.g., fire alarms. If you feel you need it, ask for an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) deaf/hard-of-hearing kit from the hotel; they are required to have them available. These kits include such items as a door knock sensor, telephone handset amplifier, telephone ringer signaler, visual/audio smoke detector, and a special alarm clock. Not all hotels are in compliance with the ADA so check ahead on the availability of a kit.

- » And most of all, relax and enjoy your travels! —



Stephen O. Frazier is a hearing loss support specialist. The former Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) chapter coordinator for New Mexico, he is now the director of Loop New Mexico. He also serves as the co-chair of the Committee for Communication Access in New Mexico and on the national HLAA Hearing Loop Steering Committee. For more, see hearingloop.org and loopnm.com.

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