

Tried and True Travel Tips

By Stephen O. Frazier

Over the years I copied, pasted and saved travel tips that I would come across on the Internet or through my reading that were intended to help the hard of hearing. Some are just good common sense but others were information that was new to me and may very well be new to others so, in addition to educating their smart phone, readers may want to review the old or possibly, to them, new ideas in these travel tips.

If you are hard of hearing, obviously the first thing you need to do is acknowledge that fact and adjust your behavior to compensate for your inability to sometimes hear well enough. Few people will recognize that you're hard of hearing unless you alert them and let them know what accommodations you may require to communicate with them. After that, consider these tried and true strategies that will make travel and the subsequent exploration of strange and exciting new places and experiences more meaningful.

In preparation

- If you have and are experienced with a computer, book hotel and other travel reservations and your ticket online. You won't have to struggle to hear and understand a fast talking, accented agent and you'll receive email confirmations that give you a written record or just what arrangement you've made.
- If you have a smart phone, download a speech to text app described earlier to help communicating with ticket agents and others during travel when hearing them is difficult.
- If you have telecoil equipped hearing aids, take a neckloop along (buy one if you don't already have one) and download the Sound Amplifier app at Google Play or a similar Apple app. It will turn your smart phone into a pocket talker for added flexibility in talking with others.
- Sign up to have flight delays or gate changes sent to you as text messages instead of phone calls or emails.
- Download a captioned phone app such as the one from HamiltonCapTel.co so you will have captioned phone access during your trip for both placing and receiving calls.
- Batteries may be hard to find after you arrive at your destination and your many devices need power to work so be sure to pack fresh batteries for each of them. Check also that all your chargers are working well and bring an extra if available.
- Should you have one, pack an extra set of hearing aids 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. There are small, almost credit card sized portable chargers available for those rechargeable hearing aids with removable batteries from www.Poweronebatteries.com.
- Take a pen and notepad with you to communicate with ticket/gate agents if needed.
- Download the SoundPrint app (<https://www.soundprint.co/>) for its Quiet List that identifies restaurants and bars in cities that are less noisy and more conducive to conversation.
- Print your ticket and boarding pass at home, or send it to your smart phone.
- Apply for a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Notification Card about your hearing condition - get one at www.tsa.gov.
- If you're traveling by train or bus, instead of or in addition to air, most transportation

companies offer their own apps that will give you access to timetables and provide alerts for gate changes or delays. Familiarize yourself with these and any other apps in advance so you don't have to learn their operation under pressure..

At the airport

- Show your TSA Notification Card to the agent at the security check-in to facilitate communication. It might even get you moved over to an express type line.
- If available, take a seat near the agent's 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.
- Have your smart phone handy to use as a pocket-talker via a neckloop or Bluetooth® and the appropriate smart phone app.
- 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 instructions from the flight crew.
- In the event you're on a long flight where music or other entertainment is offered, keep your neckloop accessible – it will plug into the sound on most aircraft and provide you with better quality sound than the ear buds handed out by the airline. If you want to be safe, get a two pronged adapter for your neckloop – some airlines still use them instead of the typical single pronged jack.

At your hotel

- Once you reach your destination, if staying in a hotel, alert the desk clerk to your hearing difficulty as you check in.
- Have the documents and identification you will need ready to show at the desk either in printed form or on your smartphone to help speed up checkin. Keep voice communication limited to avoid some things being repeated or having any misunderstanding.
- If you didn't include it when you made your reservations, when checking in, request an ADA Hard of Hearing Kit if needed. It will include such items as an alarm clock with signaler, a bed shaker and built-in flashing strobe light to alert you if the alarm clock goes off, the phone rings, someone knocks on the hotel door, or if a smoke/carbon monoxide alarm goes off in the room. It could also have a Telephone In-Line Handset Amplifier that plugs into the hotel room's existing room telephone line to amplify all callers, making it easier for guests who have trouble hearing on the phone to hear their conversations.

Out and about

- Again, advocate for yourself. Let your tour guides and fellow travelers know about your hearing loss and provide specific suggestions on how they can help you hear your best.
- Tell the guides that you will try to stay close to them so you can hear them better and see their face for speechreading.
- If requested, many tours offer assisted listening devices so you can hear the docent or tour guide even when you're not right close by so make such a request. If the device offered comes with earphones, check to see if you can connect your neckloop into it instead. That way you'll hear ambient sound that would otherwise be masked by the earphones and you'll escape the

danger of damage or loss with your hearing aids. Many theaters, concert halls and places of worship also have such systems so, if not offered, ask about their availability.

- Again, keep your smart phone or other assistive listening device handy to hear others using a neckloop or Bluetooth ® in the event such devices are not offered on loan. If you have a remote mic for your hearing aids, ask the docent to wear it around his or her neck to help you hear his or her comments.

- People are inclined to forget that they've been alerted to your hearing loss. You can silently remind them of it by simply placing your hand behind your ear you'll hear them better and they'll remember your disability.