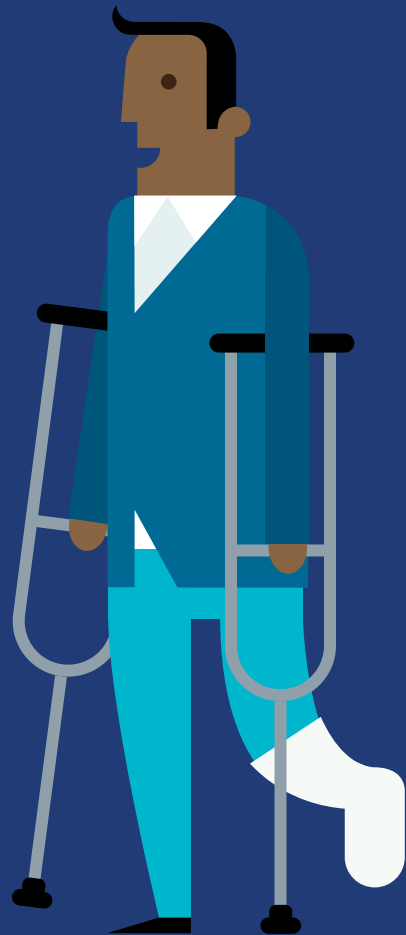


# Business travellers with a disability or medical condition

A short  
e-guide  
for travel  
managers



**Booking.com** **business**

# Who is this guide for?

In this short e-guide for travel managers, we'll take a closer look at some of the challenges commonly experienced by travellers with a disability or a medical condition.

We'll provide some helpful tips for you and your team to prevent some of those challenges without draining your resources beyond what's reasonable.

We hope these insights will encourage your travellers with special requirements to work within your organisation's travel policy, while at the same time keeping your third-party providers on their toes.

We also hope these tips will help you and your team empower employees with a disability to have the confidence to experience the many benefits that come with travelling for business.

## Duty of care and reasonable adjustments

As a travel manager you'll be well aware of your legal duty of care towards your employees outside of the workspace. At the same time, you also play an important part in making reasonable adjustments to prevent a person with a disability from being put at a **disadvantage** compared to their colleagues.

Business travellers with a disability or a medical condition generally don't want to be treated differently from anybody else. Nonetheless, it can sometimes feel like a tall order to ensure the health and wellbeing of your business travellers, while at the same time keeping costs down and staying on the right side of anti-discrimination legislation.

This is precisely why taking in the considerations of travellers with special requirements should never be an afterthought.



**Tip:** Keep your training up to date. It will ensure that you, your team and/or your travel management company (TMC) are competent in all aspects of providing a universal service to all your employees regardless of their physical requirements.

**Tip:** If demand is great but you appropriately lack in-house resources, consider seeking the support from specialist expertise in supporting travellers with specific needs. If you have a TMC you can ask them provide you with additional help or specialist expertise when required.

## Organisational policy

Most larger organisations have a travel policy in place that clearly defines responsibilities for travel costs and reimbursements for employees.

Your travel policy will also set out in which circumstances exceptions can be made in relation to bookings and reimbursements, and what the approval process looks like in that case.

As part of your policy, you may consider making pre-authorisation a requirement for business travel for people with a disability or with a medical issue.

Pre-authorisation usually looks at three elements, the medical risk within a location; what expertise and medical facilities there are within that location to deal with the medical issue; and the fitness and condition of the employee.



**Tip:** Instead of listing every possible exception to the company travel policy, operate according to an 'exceptions' rule instead. This means that if your employee is entitled to an out-of-policy booking, make a note in their traveller profile and have a clear outline of what they are entitled to.

**Tip:** Where possible, ensure that you have a pre-authorisation process in place to establish if travellers are fit to undertake the journey.

## Data management

Although the needs of some of your travellers may be long term, a business traveller with a broken ankle may of course only require additional support in the short term.

This is why you need to have access to the most up-to-date information, particularly for travellers with special requirements.

Having effective data management and travel booking systems in place is of course the bread and butter for most travel managers. Keeping the information in those systems up to date, is sometimes slightly less so.

In the future, technological innovation is likely to play an increasingly important part in connecting location-based information, personal identification and other relevant data. For travellers with special requirements this type of technology will be a life saver, especially in emergencies.

Bear in mind that your business traveller may well feel better informed about the challenges of travelling with a disability in a specific location than you. Combined with a lack of willingness to disclose certain medical conditions, it can be tempting for them to travel rogue.

While rogue travellers are common in most organisations, for travellers with a disability or a medical condition, organising trips outside of the organisation's booking system without prior approval can be outright dangerous.

**Tip:** Have a procedure in place which ensures the information you hold about your travellers remains relevant and is regularly updated.

**Tip:** Add additional incentives into your company policy to ensure that travellers with a disability do not book outside the TMC or your online booking system, unless in exceptional circumstances and with prior approval.

**Tip:** Take any privacy concerns among your travellers seriously. Work with other departments to develop a clear internal protocol about who has access to sensitive health information. Make sure these protocols are communicated with your business travellers.



## Disclosure and insurance

Even in those countries with strict anti-discrimination legislation in place, some business travellers may wish not to disclose a particular medical condition or disability for fear of stigma.

Although this is entirely understandable on a human level, from a duty of care perspective it is important you encourage all your business travellers to disclose any medical conditions. Without that information it becomes much harder for you to prepare for any risks that may come up from sending that employee to a location.

Disclosure is also important for travel insurance purposes. The degree of the medical condition or disability will have an impact on the cost of the insurance. Certain insurers will cover certain medical issues but may refuse to provide insurance for others, for example during the advanced stages of certain types of cancers.



**Tip:** Be empathic and sensitive in all your communications. Play your role in creating a culture where employees feel confident that disclosing a pre-existing medical condition will be treated with the utmost discretion. Ensure this is also reflected in your company travel policy.

**Tip:** Depending on your location, some insurance companies provide specialist cover for medical conditions that are not covered by other insurers. The trade body for insurance companies can provide you with more information about which specialist provider covers which condition.

## Travelling with medication

Prescription medication can come under intense scrutiny from foreign officials while travelling. Medication which may be legal and readily available in your country may be considered illegal, require a prescription, or simply arouse suspicion among local officials or customs in other countries.. It's always best to remind your travellers to contact the embassy or high commission of the country they're visiting and check the status of their medication.

It never hurts to remind your employee to take enough medication with them to see them through their business or bleisure trip; and also include some extra for possible delays.

Remind them to keep medication in their hand luggage and stored in their original labelled containers. That way they can get to it easily and there's less of a risk of it getting lost in transit.

**Tip:** If a traveller has a pre-existing medical condition, remind them to take a list of requirements translated into the relevant language. Supplies and equipment may be difficult to obtain when travelling.

**Tip:** Check with the airline what documentation the traveller needs to take with them to prove the need to carry medication or medical devices.



**Tip:** Especially in countries with strict drug controls, your traveller may need to bring a letter from their doctor stating the need for the medication for customs purposes. A letter is also a good idea in case they lose their medication or need to get more.

**Tip:** If your employee has diabetes or dietary restrictions their travel itinerary needs to take into account the length of the journey and any changes in time zones in relation to their meal times.

## Booking

One of the biggest headaches for travel managers is the general lack of information about accessibility and specialist providers at the destination.

Information may be very hard to find via mainstream channels, it might be too technical, or it might simply be out of date.

This is a challenge often experienced by travellers with a disability themselves. It's compounded by the fact that many online booking websites continue to have accessibility issues for those with a visual impairment. It goes without saying that your own booking system (OBS) should therefore be universally accessible too.

The lack of universal standards across most operators, airlines, rail companies and train stations means that your team will need to do a lot of the research and pick up the phone or email to request information.

Encourage them to always ask very specific questions. Rather than asking whether a room has disabled access, ask what the height of the toilet roll holder or the bed is. What is the width of the doors? Does the room have dimmed lighting? What is their policy on bringing in guide dogs?

**Tip:** Be specific as possible when questioning providers. Ask open questions that provide you with actual data, rather than just reassurance.

**Tip:** Build a database of vendors and suppliers who are suited to your travellers' needs. Add your research data to your data management system.

**Tip:** Remind your travellers to give you as much notice as possible, so you can find the widest range of options available.

**Tip:** Explore specialist disability travel forums for advice, tips and reviews. Always focus on the negative reviews first.

**Tip:** Have your own booking system assessed by a disability organisation to make sure that it is accessible to employees with a variety of disability profiles.





## Travelling by air

Airlines in Europe, the US and many other parts of the world are not allowed to discriminate against passengers with a disability. They can only make an exception if there are 'justified safety reasons', in which case they need to re-route or reimburse the traveller. Be aware however that the way in which carriers interpret those safety reasons can vary.

Despite this non-discrimination rule, the experience of those who have a disability when travelling by air can often be challenging.

Some of the biggest barriers in airports include inadequate provision of assistance services, inadequate signage in terminals, and difficulty moving between terminals.

Within the EU and the US guide dogs are carried free of charge and the same applies to any necessary equipment such as wheelchairs or crutches, which do not count toward the luggage allowance. Although certain medical devices and crutches are allowed on board, passengers are generally not allowed to use their own wheelchairs beyond the boarding point.

Be aware that once on board, it can be physically impossible for people with a disability to move around without the support of others, or even use the toilets.



**Tip:** Provide airlines with at least 48 hours' notice if you have someone travelling who requires special assistance. Be as specific as possible with the airline as to what the traveller's needs are.

**Tip:** Encourage your traveller to build in plenty of time when arriving at the airport. Security checks may take longer, and there may be delays in waiting for appropriate assistance.

**Tip:** Be realistic if a flight involves a transfer. People who require special assistance are generally boarded first, but often disembark last. Be mindful of this when booking flights with a tight transfer window.



**Tip:** Where possible, always choose the largest airplane when booking flights, there will be more options in terms of seating and better toilet accessibility.

**Tip:** Always inform the airline when your traveller has a wheelchair with a battery. Most airlines will only transport an electric wheelchair or mobility scooter if it is equipped with gel cell or dry batteries.

## Travelling by rail

Some of the most serious challenges for those travelling by rail include a lack of signage at stations, illegible or inaudible announcements, and poor coordination between the station of origin and the passenger's destination.

Other common barriers include a lack of systems in train stations and/or trains to contact staff. As well as a common lack of understanding with regards to the wide range of disability requirements, often the focus is only on being 'wheelchair accessible'.

Train stations in cities or bigger towns tend to be more disabled friendly than those in smaller towns.



**Tip:** For train travel you need to inform staff at least 24 hours before of any special requirements.



**Tip:** Wheelchair accessible spots may only be available in first class. Most train companies will only charge a second class ticket for your traveller plus one extra person.

**Tip:** When booking tickets check whether employees require assistance not just with getting on and off the train, but also with their bags.

## Checking into accommodation

No matter how well the trip has been prepared, there's often a mismatch between the level of accessibility advertised and the reality on the ground.

Your business traveller may well be able to solve the situation there and then, but it serves to be proactive in your approach.

Remember that empathy is key and that after a long trip your employee may feel stressed and upset. Always be prepared to step in immediately.



**Tip:** Remind your traveller to inform you of any mismatches immediately and provide additional support as required to secure a more appropriate room or location.

**Tip:** Provide a contact number or a hotline in your office which business travellers with special requirements can call in case of an emergency.

**Tip:** Keep a note on your data system of any mismatches for future reference. Consider changing providers if necessary.

## Post-trip reporting

Regular communication between you, your team and the traveller from the early planning stages of a trip will prevent many of the challenges we outlined earlier.

Keeping your technology, systems and data relevant and up to date will make your life and the lives of your travellers significantly easier. The tighter your data management, the more likely you'll anticipate any hurdles in your business traveller's journey.

Even if things go to plan, build in time for feedback from your business travellers on how their journey went. Were there any pain points that could have been avoided? What went well? What lessons can be learnt for the future?

Build in flexibility and keep an open mind as to where your organisation's travel policy can be improved based on the regular feedback from your travellers with special requirements.

**Tip:** Be consistent in your approach around the storage of travel details in your travel profiles. Mark itineraries and take careful note of trusted suppliers and providers in each location.



**Tip:** Make sure you also communicate any feedback and reviews to your TMC.

**Tip:** Attitudes toward disability can vary greatly around the world. Be empathic with your employee and be on their side. Discrimination, no matter where it took place, should always be reported and addressed.



**Tip:** As a travel manager you have a unique opportunity to highlight the value individuals with a disability bring to the organisation. Use some of the successful travel experiences in a way that builds the confidence of others with a disability so that they too can travel as part of the job.

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