

# Guest Blog: Hard Work Makes Memories

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Picture this. You've just seen one of your favorite artists in concert. You've been entertained, uplifted, and energized. The hotel is within walking distance, but it is raining and dark, in an unfamiliar, older part of town. There are some narrow sidewalks with overgrown tree roots and cracks and bumps in them. I still have a crystal-clear mental image of myself and my caregiver navigating these awful sidewalks with our rain gear and flashlight. With careful teamwork, we made it back to the hotel.

Summer is a time when a lot of people take trips. All trips require planning, preparation, and packing. If you have a disability, the planning, preparation, and packing processes are usually magnified because there are more factors in play. There are ways to help it go smoother, though, and I'll share some of those in this post.

The first tip for a successful trip is to be patient and persistent in your preparation. This usually means doing as much online research as possible and then making phone calls to ask questions. As you go on trips, you'll learn which questions are the highest priority for you. For me, one of those is, "How tall is the bed in the accessible room?" We discovered this on one trip when we made the phone calls, asked for an accessible room (in other words, we prepared as much we thought we needed to), but when we got into the accessible room, we discovered that the bed was up to my caregiver's waist, and I'm shorter than she is. Now we always ask about the height of the hotel

bed. If you need to fly to your destination, make sure to check airline websites for various regulations (for example, service animals, walkers, and wheelchair storage). It's good practice to provide careful instructions on where to lift an electric wheelchair and how to carry it without damaging it. A friend of mine bubble-wraps her son's power wheelchair when flying.

Once you arrive at your destination, it's important to be flexible. Despite all the diligent preparation you do, unexpected things can still happen. If you decide to be flexible and keep a positive attitude, the unexpected is less likely to spoil your trip. One time, we had picked an evening to go swimming at the hotel pool. We called ahead to ask if the hotel pool had a lift and were assured that it did. We got our swimsuits on and went to the pool only to discover that the battery for the pool lift wasn't charged, so the lift wasn't available for use. We were disappointed for sure. Rather than sit in the hotel room fuming, however, we happily decided to go out to dinner. We had a lovely evening together, eating outside in pleasant weather. It was different than planned, but it was still enjoyable. Instead of wasting time and energy on being upset, you can learn from each experience how to make future trips better.

Something else to keep in mind when thinking about trips is what would fit best with your interests and circumstances. The point of a vacation (ideally) is to enjoy it. If you can't stand sand, don't go to the beach. In my case, if the wheelchair seating is in the nosebleed section and, with my optic nerve damage, I wouldn't be able to see what's happening on the floor, I choose not to go. If a long trip is too difficult for your health needs, plan activities that are short but meaningful. Honestly, my favorite vacations are definitely staycations. I love simply having the day at home doing things I enjoy, like reading. Have clear goals in mind about the purpose for each trip. If all you really need is a "break from the norm," you may be able to accomplish that without the complications of planning a big vacation. Having goals in mind for each trip can also keep you focused when things get hectic. The last big road trip I went on was very challenging for me, but I tried to think about the wonderful opportunity to see family members, and knowing how much they wanted me to come helped a lot as well.

Planning and going on trips is hard work, especially with the extra burden of a disability and all that comes with it. Looking back, I can say that every trip I've been on has created memories. So, decide what types of memories you want to create and work for them. The memories that are created might not be what you expected. They might be better. They might be worse. But either way they will

become part of your story. As you plan, prepare, and pack, imagine the memories that might come from your efforts. Then, make it a great trip, or not. The choice is yours.