

Travel, Tips, Tricks, Tools and Techniques

July 23, 2008

In memory of Michael Osborn: He broke down barriers with grace and persistence. Michael was a driving force behind the legalization of dog guides traveling into the UK.

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## **Introduction:**

The following items pertain to travel by a blind person with a dog guide or cane. Dog guide quarantine and relief sections are at the end of the document. These items have been learned by blind frequent travelers in the spirit of getting lost in order to enjoy the empowerment of becoming “unlost.”

An important learning technique for becoming unlost is to review the correct route in your mind shortly after the experience of being lost. By mentally replaying the correct and incorrect route, the correct route is cemented in your memory for future reference.

With any of the following travel considerations, it is important to do your homework. An accessible GPS system and the Internet are two means of obtaining valuable location information prior and throughout your trip. Are there plenty of walkable restaurants near the hotel you pick? How far is the airport from the hotel? Should you take a taxi or a shuttle? These are important questions to answer before leaving home.

Make sure to check web sites for up to date information, especially with regard to quarantine regulations. If you have comments or suggestions, go to <http://www.WayFinding.org> to make email contact or to view an updated version of this document.

The airline disability hotline is 800-778-4538.

The Air Carrier Access Act requires U.S. carriers to have a Complaints Resolution Officer available to help resolve complaints on the spot by passengers with disabilities. Similar requirements may be extended to foreign carriers next year (See Part 382 draft regulations).

For problems with airport security personnel, you can reach the TSA Contact Center at 866-289-0673 or the TSA Office of Civil Rights at 877-336-4872.

### **Packing and Booking:**

#### **Things to bring and to learn before traveling:**

If you travel with a cane that does not fold, be prepared to stow it between the seats and the fuselage. Even dog guide users should bring a folding cane in case something happens to your dog or for a quick trip to the hotel pool or hot tub. A telescoping cane may get jammed with sand if you are in a beach area. If you will be walking on cobblestone streets, like the Templebar area of Dublin, a cane with a marshmallow tip is advised.

Carry an emergency medical kit for your dog. An upset stomach or a diarrhea episode will make the dog's trip as well as yours very unpleasant. Ask your vet for a small supply of appropriate emergency meds for these conditions. Consider carrying bottled water for your dog depending on the availability of water at your destination but remember this cannot be in your carry-on bag and bring a plastic collapsible bowl.

The ideal carry-on bag has wheels, fits in the overhead bin and has a detachable back-pack or small bag. You need to be able to easily manage all your bags with one hand. If you have a larger checked bag, make sure it too has wheels and that any carry-on bag can either go on top of the checked rolling bag or can be pulled behind it.

Purchase or download language lessons. People often are happier to assist you if you make an effort to say excuse me, please, and thank you in their language. It is helpful if you know simple words like restaurant, bus, train, etc.

Carry a few name/address/phone number labels in your wallet. Great for expediting the filling out of forms or just identifying a package which otherwise does not have suitable identification.

Carry a self-addressed FEDEX envelope bearing your account number in case you need to ship things home.

Carry extra batteries or an airplane power adapter.

### **Booking a flight:**

Frequently traveling the same airline can be beneficial both because you may receive free mileage awards but also because you can become familiar with common airport concourses and departure gates.

Book flights early so you have a choice of seats. An aisle seat can be most convenient for getting up during the flight although it also means your seat mates may be asking you to get up occasionally. If you are a dog user, you may wish to book a window seat, not in the bulkhead. Counter to what many airline employees think, a blind person is not required to sit in the bulkhead and there is usually less foot/dog room in the bulkhead. Airline regulations do not permit a blind person to sit in an exit row. Pay attention to which rows are best on different aircraft so you can request those rows on future flights. For example, Row 2 in a 737 First Class is nice because there is a wall right behind you where you can stow your bag and harness and easily access them during the flight or after landing. One drawback of the window seat is that you cannot easily retrieve your bag quickly from the overhead bin. Bulkhead rows are really bad on some aircraft and better on others. Try to book in a row where the middle seat is open. If the flight isn't 100% full, the gate agents will sometimes try to keep that middle seat next to a dog-user free.

On-line check in is available on most airlines now 24 hours ahead. Take advantage of this so you can skip waiting at the front counter. The on-line boarding pass may not tell you what gate you are departing from. You can call the airline or use Google or FlightStats.com to obtain up to the minute gate location and time-of-departure information. See the Google text messaging procedure below to allow this from a cell phone.

If you prefer to travel with sighted assistance, make sure this is noted in your record during booking. If you prefer not to have assistance, make sure the booking agent doesn't assume because you have a dog that you wish assistance. You don't want someone showing up at the gate to help you unnecessarily.

One question to consider is whether it is better for your dog to fly two shorter flights with a connection or one long-haul flight. The "just get it over with approach." If you know there is a relief area in the stop-over city, a connecting flight might be a good idea. Otherwise, minimizing connections is always a smart frequent flyer strategy. See a list of known airport dog relief areas at the end of this document as well as details about quarantines.

Another question to consider is whether or not there is a net benefit to traveling with a dog on an international trip. If you are staying in a country for several days, bringing the dog may be mostly helpful. If you on the other hand are changing countries every day, especially if quarantine countries are involved, traveling with a dog may be more hassle than it is worth. The dog is supposed to improve independence not limit it.

### **Luggage:**

In today's unpredictable travel environment, it is highly advisable not to check a bag. This enables you to easily change or stand by on flights if necessary. Ship items ahead if you have too. Things needed for a disability are not to be counted in the baggage limits.

One would normally withhold dog food before an international flight. Limited water or ice chips should be okay during the flight.

If need be, carry a separate bag for dog food so it is obvious what it is. Some countries like the UK may limit or restrict bringing dog food from another country. If you travel with canned food, you may wish to have a letter from your vet verifying that this is food for a dog guide. If you do check a bag, make sure you have a one-day supply of dog food in your carry on. Pack it in a couple different containers. In case it is removed in quarantine, they might overlook one small container. Here are 3 online sites for ordering food in the UK to be shipped to your hotel.

<http://www.petplanet.co.uk>

<http://www.feedem.co.uk/>

<http://www.pet-supermarket.co.uk/>

Be aware that carry-on baggage weight and size limits are higher for US airlines than for most airlines in other countries. You may be able to fly out of the U.S. with a large carry-on bag but not allowed to return with the same bag. Low budget airlines like Ryan Air and Easy Jet have the lowest weight limits.

To find a checked bag, use a Luggage Locator clipped to the handle of your bag or ask for help. Putting bright tape on the bag is a good idea since many bags look similar. It is possible to teach your dog to help locate your bag by putting a distinctive scent on it.

## **At the airport:**

### **Getting to Gates:**

In terms of finding your gate, you can of course take the path of least resistance and ask the sky cap or gate agent for assistance. This isn't the fastest way to proceed. Take the time to learn the airport yourself so you can find the security checkpoints and the gates in the future. If you ask a friendly person for help, chat them up and you may have some company all the way to the gate. You may also want to stop at a restaurant or shop along the way and this is easier with some eyeballs. Heathrow airport has been known to have roving people in green jackets to help all shoppers.

As far as locating gates on your own, especially when connecting, you mainly need to know the arrival gate and the next departure gate. The odd gate numbers will be on one side of the concourse and the even numbered gates on the other. This will vary from airport to airport. Ask which way the gates ascend and descend and make note of this for future reference.

Note which gate your favorite restaurant is near or at which gate you should turn to reach another concourse. Chat up your seat mate and avail yourself of their companionship should they be going the same direction. Waiting for official airport assistance takes longer and singles you out. You can meet interesting people and learn the airport for future travel if you take matters into your own hands. Here again, if you listen to others as you exit the first aircraft, you often hear someone going to your gate or one nearby. Simply asking the question, “mind if I walk along with you”, can result in an escort.

When walking with a stranger, engage them in mobility babble, in other words, keep them talking. Ask about the weather, Ask where they are going or coming from. Ask about their trip. As long as they are talking, you have a voice cue to follow. If they ask how they can help you, it will put the stranger more at ease if you just say “as long as you and I are talking, my dog and I will follow you.” Often this is safer than attempting sighted guide with an untrained stranger.

Text messaging Google for flight information can be done as follows.

In the Address field, enter 466453 (Google).

In the text field, enter “flight united 123” and press Send. You can use abbreviations like UA for United or SWA for Southwest.

You will receive a text message in response with the gate, arrival and departure information.

This is a good thing to do just after you have landed and approaching your gate. Find out at which gate you are arriving and from which gate your next flight leaves.

### **Security screening:**

If the security lines are long, go in the staff line where the airport personnel would be taking you if you were with them. The person you just met will be thrilled to go to the head of the line too.

Use **quart sized plastic zip bags to consolidate small items for going through airport security and ease of retrieval on the other side, e.g. wallets, keys, sunglasses, wires for technology, and earphones etc.**

Take unusual Braille looking devices out of your carry on along with a laptop. This can be stricter in some countries. Put your things in a bin so you can easily retrieve them on the other side of the scanner. Put your cane through the scanner unless it is completely fiberglass and plastic as many are. You can always try walking through with it and if it sets off the alarm, go out and try it again without the cane.

The common procedure for a dog guide going through the security scanner is to have the dog sit or lay down. It is not necessary or required to remove the harness. Walk through on your own. Once you are clear, call the dog. Technically, you should not touch the dog’s leash until they have checked the dog by hand. The harness will obviously set off the alarm. It is best to advise the screener what you are going to do before you walk through the scanner. Make sure that person tells someone else who may be called that it was only the dog that alarmed and not you. Occasionally they may insist that you be patted down as well as the dog. Inform them of the correct procedure but it isn’t worth a fuss to refuse. If you are by yourself, ask one of the screeners for directions to your gate.

**Preparing for departure:**

Show up early to the flight, be friendly at the gate counter and sit in a visible location so the gate agent is reminded you and your dog are there. You might get lucky and score a free first class upgrade. At the very least, ask if the flight is full and if not, ask if the seat next to you can be left open.

Take advantage of pre-boarding or frequent flyer status to board early. This is the time when most of the overhead bins are open and you have much more chance of placing your carry-on luggage above your seat. It also gives you more time to get your dog settled without interfering with others boarding.

It is common courtesy to ask your seat mate if he or she minds sitting next to a dog. If there is a problem, the flight attendant can move one of you.

**Final airport:**

When you reach your destination, particularly if it isn't a major hub airport, most people leaving the aircraft will be headed for baggage claim. You can follow the flow once several people have left the flight. In most major airports, baggage claim is one or more levels below the gate concourse so you will be looking for escalators once you are outside security. Listen for the scanner alarm to know when you are in the vicinity of security and the escalators will be soon afterwards. Some airports have a shuttle or train to baggage claim.

With so much roll-aboard luggage in use these days, it's very easy to locate escalators by listening for the distinctive sound of the luggage wheels rolling on or off the escalator.

**After the Airport:****Bus, Taxi and train:**

Ask a taxi dispatcher for the approximate fare to the destination to guard against overcharging.

You could also estimate the fare using your GPS. If you have a dog guide, you might obscure your dog in the crowd, then get in the middle of the group, and walk on before the bus driver can complain. Hiding your dog guide sometimes helps with getting taxis too.

If there is a hotel nearby, ask the doorman to get you a taxi. Taxis often are lined up at hotels, and usually won't refuse a ride.

Major train stations can be a major wayfinding challenge. Request assistance ahead of time or at the train station if you aren't familiar with the station or if you have minimal time to find your own way. It can be tricky to hear or understand announcements, particularly if they are not in your native language.

It can also be difficult to hear the stop announcements. A GPS can be extremely helpful in knowing what stop you are near and how far you are from your destination. If you don't have a GPS or if you are traveling underground, obtain a stop list for your route from the Internet or customer service agent.

### **Hotels:**

When entering the hotel lobby, listen for word cues. For example, in a hotel listen for "Do you have a reservation?" or "Welcome to the xxx Hotel" to indicate the probable location of the front desk.

If you don't like having a giant bathroom, let the check in person know a "handicapped" room is not desired. They also like to put a blind person in a room near an elevator which can be a noisy location.

If the hotel uses key cards, ask that the check-in person place a piece of scotch tape on the upper right corner, and show you which way the card will fit into the reader on your door. If you forget, the first time you use your card, try all four possibilities. When you get it correct, just bend the upper left corner over a bit. Now the card has a tactile mark for the rest of your stay.

The elevators are usually behind or near the check-in counter. Listen for the ding of opening doors. Remember two dings for a down elevator and one ding for up.

Ask the check-in person what floor the restaurant is on. Restaurants are usually on the first floor, but not always. Once you find the correct floor, the restaurant (and bar) often is easy to find at mealtimes from the noise.

When asking for directions, ask the person to close their eyes. Often they'll try to imagine the route, rather than seeing it, and will give better directions.

Ask the desk clerk if there is Braille or raised lettering for the room numbers. You can always take guidance to your room but if you want an adventure, most hotels these days have some sort of raised numbering. Worst case, call the hotel phone number and ring the room you are looking for. Let it keep ringing until you hear the room. The same locator device you use for luggage can double for a door finder. Place it on the inside of the door knob.

Remember to ask where the fire stairs are in case of emergency.

If you do accept assistance, find out how to operate the temperature controls and ask about the TV remote.

If you are a coffee drinker, find out which bag is decaf and which is regular.

Be sure to put the “do not disturb” sign on your hotel room door if you leave your dog unattended. This reduces the possibility of a surprise for the housekeeping staff and may prevent your dog from accidentally getting loose.

If you are exploring the area around your hotel and do not have a GPS, ask the hotel staff to describe the front of the building to you before you leave. Then, if you need to ask for assistance in finding your way back to the hotel, you can describe what it looks like.

### **Finding restaurants and your way around town:**

No point eating in the hotel restaurant if you are going to truly have an international experience. Use your GPS to research restaurants and to plan a walking route. Call ahead to get a sense of the restaurant. There are two theories about bringing a dog into a restaurant where there aren't access laws. Sometimes it is best to call several restaurants and find one that permits you to bring the dog. Other times, you may have more success dealing with the proprietor in person. Most people not familiar with dog guides will automatically refuse on the phone. When they see you in person, they understand even if you don't speak the local language. In any event, know what the rules are so you know how to respond if you are refused.

There are many countries which don't allow dogs of any status into restaurants. It is still possible to sweet talk your way into these establishments. It may take significant patience and persistence. Make sure you are talking to the manager or owner. Once the proprietor sees that the dog is well behaved for a period of time and that other patrons are not complaining, they may allow you into the restaurant. It is important to give the proprietor a means of saving face. Maybe you agree to sit in another room or at an outside table. Work with the particular culture and situation to find a solution.

## **Dog Guide Specifics**

### **Regulations and procedures for international travel with a dog guide:**

Carefully check the regulations of the air carrier you plan to fly. In-cabin rules for dog guides may vary with different airlines. If flying on a code-share flight, call the airline providing service to ensure they were notified that you are bringing a dog guide. Some countries require advance notification that a dog is being transported, and the airline may refuse boarding if not notified in advance.

There can be misinformation on foreign travel requirements for dog guides. Search online for a country's quarantine site. Often this site has the most up-to-date information. Alternatively, try calling the foreign embassy

and your state's USDA APHIS veterinarian for information. Don't trust sites for foreign travel with pets because there may be special rules for dog guides not noted on these sites.

It can be helpful to make a contact at a guide dog school in foreign countries to learn about access laws. These contacts also may offer to talk with proprietors if you run into access problems, and may be able to give you a card or paper with the access laws in the foreign language that you can show anyone who refuses access. In some quarantine situations, the dog may be taken away from you for a short period of time. Make sure that folding cane is handy.

Look into Rabies Vaccination records being up-to-date and RNATT being matched up as this will be required for "Rabies-free" countries or territories. Take particular notice of the 6 month waiting period from the time of the Titer shot until your dog is cleared to travel.

For Hawaii go to [http://www.hawaiiag.org/hdoa/ai\\_aqs\\_guidedog.htm](http://www.hawaiiag.org/hdoa/ai_aqs_guidedog.htm)

The regulations are similar to the UK with some small differences.

For Australia email [animalimp@aqis.gov.au](mailto:animalimp@aqis.gov.au)

Note for Australia it is almost more trouble to leave than to come in. You must visit a vet the day of departure and then go to the animal inspection center and then to your flight. Plan on the better part of a day to accomplish this.

Contact the New Zealand office [mulqueenk@maf.govt.nz](mailto:mulqueenk@maf.govt.nz)

When visiting the U.K. or E.U., apply for a "pet passport" as this will help in future travels into and among those countries.

Getting to know the quarantine department and personnel in charge of dog guide requirements will be extremely helpful if you need to travel regularly to those countries.

Knowing which countries are "rabies-free" is helpful. Travelling to Uncontrolled rabies countries means that the dog guide will not be allowed into countries that have the rabies-free status within six months of any trip to uncontrolled countries. Travelling to uncontrolled countries is a lot easier in terms of "paper and medical" requirements. Make it a rule to have the rabies vaccination if travelling to uncontrolled rabies countries!

When transiting in another country, you must also know their quarantine requirements - E.g. you must pre-apply for a "transit permit" even just passing through. You will also have to pay for this transit-permit. This must be organized at least two weeks ahead as you have to mail the paper forms back to Hong Kong or other countries

with payment in order for the permit to be issued, and they will mail you the paper permit which the airlines must see prior to boarding. Without such papers, you will not be allowed to board at your departure airport!

Such an application is also required for transiting through Singapore, and this can be applied for online and paid via credit card. It takes two working days. The turn-around time is actually three days from time of application to issue (so even public holidays may lengthen the time required. Saturdays and Sundays must be accounted for). You can then download and print the permit from your computer. This permit costs around 35USD.

The Paralympics Organizing Committee is looking forward to welcoming blind persons with dog guides and will accommodate dog guide teams.

China is unfortunately a country with uncontrolled rabies. Entering into China is very easy as long as the handler brings the rabies vaccination certificate and shows it at the China Quarantine after clearing China Immigration and Customs Prior to baggage claim. The process is very quick if there is no crowd, just around 15 to 20 minutes for the forms to be completed, and a small admin fee. The handler must have at least 20USD worth of China cash for this document application fee.

Leaving China back to the country of origin is straight forward if the necessary papers for the country of origin are done prior to travel. Returning to the U.S. or Canada is very easy as they do not check for your papers for the country you are returning to. However, the original import document issued at point of arrival into Beijing must be handy for inspection if asked.

If you wish to travel to Hong Kong from China, the usual papers must be obtained for Hong Kong Quarantine. They are not as strict on entry to Hong Kong from China but the application must still be made prior to arrival. It costs less for permit fees from China to Hong Kong than from any overseas country.

If anyone wishes to visit Taiwan while on this trip, it is better to visit Taiwan first since Taiwan is a rabies free "territory".

Some airlines require the dog to stay on an absorbent mat during the flight. This is true for Qantas and Singapore Airlines.

Qantas requires the seat next to a person with a dog guide to be free or they will not allow you on a fully booked flight. Therefore, it is important to let them know you have a dog guide. This is also true for domestic carriers in Australia.

Some airlines require your dog to be muzzled during flight. At least muzzle your dog for boarding if this is a requirement. Qantas and Singapore Airlines do not.

**Airport dog relief:**

Most airports do not have a designated relief area. It may be necessary to go outside the airport building to find a relief area. It is worth asking a gate agent or supervisor to relieve your dog if you and your dog are comfortable doing that. Do not expect this solution however.

It can be difficult to find dirt or grass near an airport. It would be wise to make sure your dog will relieve on cement where long flights and connections are involved.

The most difficult time may be right after arriving from an overseas flight and you still have to spend 30 minutes clearing customs. Ask if there is a place to relieve right after you get off the plane. Otherwise, take the most expeditious means of clearing customs so you can get outside.

A listing of some airport pet relief areas can be found at the following URL

<http://www.petfriendlytravel.com/?page=airports>

At the San Francisco airport, there is a designated dog relief area at the United Domestic terminal 3 and another at the International terminal. Outside baggage claim, you can find some dirt in the "Courtyard areas."

At the Denver Airport, United has an official pet relief area at the fire station. An SD (service director) can take you to the fire station by van without leaving security. There's also an official pet relief area on the baggage claim level, but you need to take the train to the main terminal and go out of the security area, which will take a while.

At the JFK airport T7, there is a section with plants between the terminal and the airport train.

At the Frankfurt Airport, there is a Sheraton hotel connected to the terminal. There is a small strip of plants beneath the Sheraton beyond their parking lot.

There is an (open-air garden) in the "smoker's lounge" in all three terminals in Singapore, and dog guides are allowed to relieve there during transits, upon arrival, or prior to boarding. This means the dog gets to relieve half an hour prior to lift-off.

In Tokyo (Narita), Terminal 1, if your airline asks ahead of your arrival for transit, you can relieve the dog at the "remote bus-gate" at gate 28 which is on the ground floor after clearing security.