

Has travelling by air become any easier for the SCI passenger?

Last year *forward* featured an article in which we considered whether European legislation had significantly improved air travel for SCI people.

Andy Wright reports that since then, there have been a number of important developments, many of which have had a significant impact.

At the end of 2014, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) was given full legal powers to ensure airlines and airports fully meet their responsibilities to disabled people travelling by air. The CAA insisted that airports in the European Union (EU) and EU registered airlines, now publish comprehensive guidelines on their policies and procedures for disabled passengers.

UK airports must now publish on their websites the following information, which should only be one click away from their homepage:

- the assistance provided at the airport and how to obtain this assistance
- getting to the airport, which should include public transport methods along with details for disabled parking
- the layout of the airport and should provide a map of the airport with the distances to airline gates
- performance standards
- airport security

- mobility equipment arrangements at the airport and include details for obtaining replacement equipment in the event of it being damaged
- how to complain, as well as a helpline number so passengers can prearrange support

Airlines must now publish the following information:

- safety restrictions including fitness to fly and the criteria for travelling without an assistant, and should include any reasons why the airline could refuse to accept a reservation from a disabled person or be unable to carry their mobility equipment
- how to obtain assistance including the required check-in time for a passenger who requires airport assistance
- seating on-board and should include what type of seating is available eg extra leg room, movable armrests etc
- how to get to and from the toilet, including whether an on-board aisle chair is available
- compensation policy for damaged mobility equipment
- how to complain as well as a helpline number

The provision of the information above has helped passengers who require assistance when flying, but has also

helped to increase the profile and awareness of the needs and requirements of disabled passengers, to airports and airlines, which can only be a good thing.

So for those of you contemplating flying abroad this year, here are some tips to help you when organising your flight.

1 When making your flight reservation, always remember to notify your airline, travel agent or tour operator if you require assistance. The airline needs to be notified no later than 48 hours in advance of travel, but if this is not possible, all reasonable efforts should be made to provide assistance.

2 To ensure you receive the appropriate assistance, familiarise yourself with each of the following four letter codes that airlines use when communicating your requirements to the airport, and request the appropriate code at the time of booking:

1. WCHR – for passengers who require a wheelchair to the aircraft, but can walk short distances, including steps
2. WCHS – for passengers who require a wheelchair to the aircraft, but cannot climb steps
3. WCHC – for passengers who require full assistance, which includes being assisted into their aircraft seat

3 Upon arrival at the airport, there are a number of help points available to you which can be found





in the car parks, railway or bus stations (if applicable) and at terminal entrances. The legislation ensures that airports provide assistance to you from any of these points if required. Otherwise, make your way directly to your airline check-in desk and once you have checked in, you should then make yourself known to the special assistance desk to confirm how you would like to be assisted to the aircraft.

4 Many of the larger airports operate with air-bridges enabling passengers to access the aircraft directly without ascending steps. But when this is not possible (for passengers who require assistance into their aircraft seat or cannot climb steps) then most airports utilise ambulifts, which are vehicles that can be driven to the aircraft and then raised up to the aircraft door.

5 If required, an aisle chair, a small and narrow chair on wheels, can be utilised to gain access to your aircraft seat. This same chair can be used to enable a passenger to gain access to the on-board toilet. However, please be aware that the cabin crew are not encouraged to lift

passengers and obviously cannot assist within the toilet. It is also important to understand that passengers with reduced mobility cannot sit in seats where you may obstruct access to emergency exits.

6 You can take up to two items of mobility equipment with you as well as your chair, which could include a shower chair and a hoist for example. If you are taking a powered wheelchair with you, the airline will ask whether it is dry or wet-cell battery operated, as well as the approximate weight. On some occasions you may also be

If you do not have a copy of your manual to hand you can visit www.bhta.net which lists most powerchairs and also provides information on how to immobilise your chair during a flight. One particular gadget that is often referred to and is able to immobilise most powerchairs is the AirSafe-plug. Further details about this product can be found at www.careco.co.uk

Arguably, one of the most stressful elements to any package holiday for a disabled passenger is the flight. As a result of European legislation and a genuine desire by most airlines and airports to want to improve the customer experience for ALL their passengers, this ordeal is becoming easier.

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For further information about flying or booking a holiday overseas, please visit www.accessibletravel.co.uk or call 01452 729 739