

Travel health, safety and security guidelines for persons who are visually impaired

Table of contents

| | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 1 | Introduction..... | 3 |
| 2 | Travel preparation..... | 4 |
| 3 | During travel | 5 |
| 4 | Unexpected situations and incidents | 7 |
| 4.1 | Vehicle check point..... | 7 |
| 4.2 | Assault (robbery) | 7 |
| 4.3 | Robbing wallet..... | 7 |
| 4.4 | Medical | 7 |

1 Introduction

These guidelines were developed by and for travellers who are visually impaired. Their personal experience was invaluable in producing this document. CBM work has a global approach. The focus lies in developing countries. The following paper is mainly written from the perspective of visually impaired colleagues traveling on their own to developing countries, and who have a heightened awareness for health, safety, and security.

The objective of these guidelines is to provide useful and practical advice for travellers who are visually impaired. They also aim to sensitize persons or personal assistants travelling together with visually impaired persons by pointing out specific challenges that arise from being visually impaired. However, some points mentioned can be considered general advice which applies to any traveller, irrespective of their specific risk profile.

Naturally, preparation is one of the main elements when going on a trip. Preparing for “what if” situations can result in a more confident reaction in unexpected situations. Having contingencies in place will decrease the likelihood of an incident or situation escalating even further. Finally, getting in touch with persons who have travel experience and who are willing to share their knowledge, is a good opportunity to ask for first-hand advice.

You are encouraged to share the information in this document. Furthermore, if you have additional tips and experiences you would like to see documented in these guidelines, please don't hesitate to get in touch and share.

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2 Travel preparation

1. Plan ahead! Inform yourself about your destination so you know what to expect.
2. Think about your way chains¹ and ask yourself: Where are the gaps and how will I manage them? If local colleagues are offering to make arrangements for you like the transfer from the airport to the hotel - take it.
3. Use the support that is guaranteed to you by international agreements such as services offered by the personal assistance in airports.
4. Communicate your travel needs to others: inform the travel agency, your airline, the human resource department and the office at your destination that you are visually impaired. Be very specific about what you need, what you expect, what you can organise for yourself and what you request others to organise for you.
5. Find out about cultural behaviours and special legal constitutions. Check the internet and take advice from local colleagues or friends. This is important as you cannot learn by observing others.
6. Find out how visually impaired people are seen in your destination country. Do people know what a white cane says about its user? If you are a guide dog user, find out about the vaccination policies in your host country and find out about the general perception of dogs. In some Muslim countries dogs may be perceived as impure beings. Ascertain the status of guide dogs in your destination country, their acceptance in public facilities, on public transportation etc. Pack sufficient supplies for your dog's needs.
7. Find out about celebration days in your destination country during your stay and what it means regarding mobility, business and personal behaviour.
8. Print out the addresses of all the places you plan to go to (hotel, office, conference centre) or ask local colleagues to write them down for you. It's helpful when you take a taxi or in case you want to ask people when using public transport.
9. Find out about the current political situation in the country you are traveling to. Is there a risk for demonstrations, violence etc.? Ask local colleagues or Safety & Security (S&S) experts how dangerous it is.
10. Create a list of telephone numbers to call when you have to block your credit cards, your Maestro card, your mobile phone etc. e.g. after a robbery. Save the information on your replacement mobile phone or in writing.
11. Ask the airport transfer to take you to the meeting point you are required to come to, to get personal assistance. If this is not possible

¹ A way chain describes the points you must pass on a journey in the necessary sequence. Example: From your home to the airport by taxi, from the taxi to the airline counter by foot etc.

don't worry, sooner or later you will find security staff or other passengers to help you along.

3 During travel

12. Ask questions. If you cannot find a gate at the airport or bus station, ask a customer service representative or another traveller to help you.
13. If applicable, carry your cane. Your cane can help to notify others that you are visually impaired. If you don't use your cane, people will probably not realise that you are visually impaired and therefore may not offer any assistance. However, in some countries people may not know what a cane says about its user. Have a replacement cane in your bag.
14. Keep your essentials with you at all times: carry your money, keys, tickets or passport (if overseas) in a safe pocket. If you happen to misplace your purse or wallet or someone takes it, you can still reach your destination. Carry addresses, directions and your itinerary with you in a format which you can read!
15. It is recommendable to always have at least two forms of payment on you (ideally kept in different places on your body). Also, remember to carry ID with you and to store another one with the additional payment methods at a safe place in the hotel.
16. During the security search of your baggage, request to airport security staff that you unpack and repack your bags yourself. In this way you will be able to locate essential items without too many problems.
17. Mark your luggage with something bright, so that it will stand out when you go to collect it. Making your luggage easy to identify (especially at an airport) can save quite a bit of time as there may be 50 black bags all looking similar. You may even want to consider using a device such as a remote luggage locator. This may also make it easier for people travelling with you or personal assistance at airports to help you locate your bag/s. Alternatively, ask someone to photograph your bag and then to send the photo to your mobile phone (Signal, WhatsApp or MMS) before travel. This way you can show personal assistants what your bag looks like.
18. Board early and bring carry-on luggage. Packing only carry-on luggage saves you time and trouble by eliminating a visit to the baggage claim terminal upon arrival. If you do bring a suitcase, remember its size, type and colour (and any identifying markers on it).
19. If you check in online, choose a seat near a bathroom and a cabin crew pantry if you can. In all aircraft the seats are numbered by row going up in number from the cockpit to the back of the plane. From left to right, seats are counted with a, b, c, d etc. It's helpful to have an aisle seat, especially for long distance flights. It's easier for the cabin crew to assist you there (programming the entertainment system etc.).

20. Use the boarding request for people who need cabin crews help to be one of the first passengers on the plane. Save your hand luggage in the compartment above the seats.
21. Ask the crew the way to the closest emergency exit, and where the call button is located.
22. Ask how you can recline your seat. In many aircraft you can also vary the position and height of the head rest.
23. Ask the crew the direction to the bathroom and the location of the buttons that are located there.
24. Ask how to put on the life vest and the seat belts. Inquire and let yourself be introduced to what the “brace position” is in case of an emergency landing, if you don’t already know how to assume it.
25. Accommodation: make yourself familiar with your surroundings. Learn where the evacuation routes are and how to get to emergency exits from your hotel room. Learn where the point of assembly is in case of an emergency evacuation. If you are travelling with a companion, agree on a “buddy system” and, if possible, book adjacent rooms.
26. Further useful things to ask for in hotels: breakfast room and serving times. Control panel in the elevator (if not tactile (braille) ask someone to help you using it). Assembly room in case of conferences. Telephone numbers for reception and room service. Control panel of the air conditioning. Towels in the room. How to start the TV. Way to the hotel restaurant.
27. In case you have to lock and unlock the hotel room door with a chip card by entering or swiping it in a specific way: Ask someone how to enter or swipe the chip card and mark or scratch the card. For example, scratch the card with a key over the right upper corner. You will feel the mark with your fingertip, and you will know which way to enter or swipe your card in order to open the door. The card functionality will not be damaged by the mark.
28. Transport: plan local movements ahead (e.g. from your hotel to the office). Use either company vehicles, or request support when booking a taxi or shuttle service. Avoid calling a taxi from the roadside. When traveling by train or long-distance buses, find out in advance whether it is necessary to reserve seating. Check with the respective transport company if any assistance is available at departure and destination stations and how and when to book it.
29. Communications: always have a charged mobile phone with you, with the roaming function activated. When you arrive at the airport of your destination, check if you have coverage. Some offices may provide you with a local SIM card or mobile phone. You may prefer to insert the local SIM card in your own phone, if this is technically possible, since you already know how to operate your device. Save the most relevant contact persons on your phone, and have a hardcopy of your main contacts handy, in case you lose your phone. If necessary, buy a package that includes air time and data (roaming) for your mobile phone. Save the

numbers of your most important contact persons in the speed dial of your phone. It is recommended to have a second mobile phone in your language.

30. Obtain Addresses and phone numbers of your embassy and/or consulates.

4 Unexpected situations and incidents

4.1 Vehicle check point

Inquire if vehicle checkpoints are common at your destination. If this is the case, ask your fellow passengers to inform you when approaching a checkpoint, and what the standard procedure is when dealing with security staff at the checkpoint. In general, you should remain calm and let the driver or country office staff manage the situation.

4.2 Assault (robbery)

If you find yourself in a threatening situation where someone is demanding your wallet, your phone or your backpack, stay calm. Don't panic. Don't raise your hands over your head (unless told to do so). Keep your hands and arms in front of you, at the level above your belt. This will give you some distance and protect your torso. Hand over what is demanded of you. Do this while trying to keep a safe distance to the assailant. Explain what you are doing, while you are doing it (*"I am putting my hand in my right pocket to hand over the phone to you"*). Drop your wallet, phone or bag away from you, to keep a distance. Once safe to do so, leave the scene of the robbery and seek assistance.

4.3 Robbing wallet

Carry a "robbing wallet" with a small amount of cash with you. You can hand the robber this wallet, without losing your actual wallet with your credit and ID cards. Consider a second, "robbing phone", which you likewise can hand over in case of an assault. Avoid demonstrating wealth, such as wearing expensive clothing, jewelery and accessories.

4.4 Medical

Inquire with your country office which medical facility would be the right one for you, in case you require medical treatment. Ensure you have the details of your medical insurance with you. Always carry a personal first aid kit with you during travels. If you use medication on a regular basis, bring enough supplies.

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