



What to expect at the airport



Article By: Elizabeth Rogers

Confused by new security procedures, new fees and new policies? We've got the latest on issues that could affect your travels.

If the past few years have taught us anything, it's how quickly travel can change -- and 2010 is proving to be no different. After the December 25 bombing attempt on board a Detroit-bound flight, new security procedures seemed to appear overnight. New technology and fees weren't far behind -- and even pets and snacks are now

subjects for debate.

Confused yet? Here's a quick look at what you can expect if you're flying the "friendly skies".

Yes, you can carry on

Worried about packing light? Here's some good news: as of January 20, Transport Canada has lifted its ban on carry-on luggage for U.S.-bound flights. Passengers are now allowed to bring one piece of carry-on luggage on board -- but get out the measuring tape because size restrictions still apply. Anything larger than 23 cm x 40 cm x 55 cm (9" x 16" x 22") will have to be checked.

Of course, there are a few exceptions -- or additions, in this case.

Travellers can also bring a laptop bag, small purse or camera bag.

Medical equipment, musical instruments, pets, diaper bags, canes, walkers and other "life sustaining items" are also allowed, and you can bring on any items purchased at the duty-free shop after you've been through security. (Read the Info Sheet for more information.)

What about flights within Canada or to international destinations? Those requirements haven't changed. Depending on your airline, you can still bring a maximum of two carry-on bags per person. However, if your itinerary includes a stop or connection at a U.S. airport, then the one-bag restriction applies.

And in case you're wondering, you can once again take temporarily banned items like books, magazines and electronic devices on board.

What hasn't changed are the restrictions on liquids, gels and prohibited items.

Invasion of the body scanners

By now you've heard the controversy about these machines, but you might soon get a chance to become intimately acquainted with one. Many major airports around the world now use these full-body scanners, and they're making their Canadian debut. Currently, eight airports in major cities -- Halifax, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Regina,

Ottawa, and Toronto -- have new machines in place. Another 36 machines will show up across the country in the coming months.

What's all the fuss about? The images show the "naked truth" about what's under travellers' clothes -- including every contour, wrinkle and roll. Privacy advocates call them a violation of people's privacy, and critics question whether they're an effective way to find concealed weapons and bomb-making components.

Regardless of how you feel about them, you can avoid them if you want because the scans are strictly voluntary. It's a misconception that everyone who arrives at the airport will be scanned -- they're offered as an alternative to a "pat down" if you're selected for secondary screening.

The search is on

These days, travellers and their baggage are facing more scrutiny at the airport. Like it or not, new directives on both sides of the border means that any bag or any person that look suspicious can be subject to searches. That means more people being selected for secondary screening (like pat-downs or body scans) and closer inspection of their travel documents. Don't be surprised if you come across random searches of your luggage, purse or even your wallet.

And if you're in a U.S. airport, you'll soon see more agents swabbing luggage and passengers' hands to check for traces of explosive chemicals. In fact, you should see more security personnel wherever you travel. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, it's up to the Canadian government and governments around the world to have sufficient staff to cope with the new procedures ahead of the busy summer travel season.

The company you keep

Even travellers who don't look or act suspicious might be screened because of their passports. Thanks to a TSA directive, if your trip takes you to (or through) any nation that's known to support terrorism, you can be pulled aside for further screening before flying to the U.S. The same rule applies if one of those countries issued your passport.

Which locations are we talking about? The TSA's website doesn't offer specifics, but the Department of Homeland security has named Syria, Sudan, Iran and Cuba in past reports. Of course, the list of "countries of interest" is longer, and likely includes some countries in the Middle East and North Africa. (For more information, see the TSA's statement.)

If you think this issue might affect you, check with the embassy or consulate before you travel.

Show them the money

You didn't think the new machines and additional staff would be free, did you? Travellers, rather than taxpayers in general, will be footing the bill. According to media reports, travellers can expect to pay more for their flights starting April 1, 2010 (that is, if parliament approves the plan). How much more? Flights within Canada will cost an extra \$2.50, flights to the U.S. will cost another \$4.37 and international flights will cost an additional \$8.91 -- each way. (Read more on CTV.ca.)

Pets on planes?

Small dogs and cats can fly in the cabin... for now. Last July, Air Canada reversed its ban on pets in the cabin, and this February, WestJet announced that it's keeping its pet policies in place.

However, if you're planning on travelling with your pet -- or if you have breathing problems, pet allergies or asthma -- you may want to keep your eyes peeled for the latest developments. Both the Lung Association and Canadian doctors continue their calls to ban pets on planes, and three allergy sufferers have even taken their cases to court. As a result, the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) recently ruled that passengers with allergies should get the same consideration and opportunity for accommodations as passengers with disabilities. The CTA is currently reviewing airlines' policies regarding pets, and trying to decide how to meet the needs of passengers with allergies.

The health concern may even cross borders. While pet bans don't exist in many countries, international airlines are beginning to take note -- especially in the wake of recent criticism of Air Canada in the February issue of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. (Read more about the editorial [here](#).)

Should pet owners worry? New pet-friendly airlines and services may step up to fill the gap.

Nut-free zones

In other allergy news, Air Canada was recently ordered to create nut-free buffer zones to accommodate travellers with peanut allergies. The company recently submitted a proposal to the CTA regarding how much space it will allow for these zones -- which could be as little as a few seats to as much as a few rows. (While peanuts haven't been served on flights in years, passengers can still buy snacks with almonds and cashews -- enough to trigger potentially dangerous reactions.)

Will the changes be enough? That's for the CTA to decide. Like passengers with disabilities, passengers with allergies will have to give airlines at least 48 hours' notice of their requirements. (Read the full story [here](#).)

Tips to smooth the way

If you're travelling soon, here are some ways to help keep your cool:

- **Keep an eye on the news.** Security procedures can change drastically and with little notice. Media outlets usually pick up on the stories, but visit your airline and airport's websites for the latest official advice.
- **Pack right.** Read up on restrictions before you pack and follow them to the letter, especially if you're flying to (or through) a U.S. airport.
- **Arrive early.** Give yourself plenty of time to deal with security procedures, bad weather and other extra hassles. Currently, experts recommend arriving at least three hours before an international flight.
- **Keep your luggage by your side.** This warning isn't just about theft, and it applies to other modes of transportation as well. Officials will treat unattended baggage as a potential security threat.
- **Be patient.** Keeping a level head (not to mention your temper) will go a long way to making the whole process a little easier on everyone. Expect to wait in lines, and have something to keep everyone occupied (like a

book or magazine) if there's a delay.

We wish we could promise things are going to get easier, but we're likely to see more changes and more news in the months ahead. For now, the best thing you can do is be informed.

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10 tips for travellers with disabilities



Article By: Elizabeth Rogers

Facing some additional challenges on your trip? Try these travel planning tips to help smooth the way.

Taking a trip can be frustrating even at the best of times, but many people face challenges beyond the usual hassles. Millions of travellers around the world who have a disability or special need can face obstacles that others take for granted -- like using self-serve kiosks, standing in long lines, finding facilities and boarding

transportation.

How can you deal with it? Travel providers are getting better at accommodating those with special needs, but the system is far from perfect. It's up to the traveller to plan ahead to make sure their needs are met. If you or your travelling companion has special needs, here are some tips from the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) to help you plan:

Determine your needs

It may sound obvious, but the best place to start is making a list of accommodations you might need throughout the travel process. For example:

- Do you need special seating, like additional leg room or a tie-down for a wheelchair?
- Is a shuttle or transportation required at the station?
- Do you require someone to lift and carry luggage?
- **What medication and equipment do you need -- and is medical clearance to travel?)**
- Is an attendant required to help with meals, administer medication or help you board?

Need a little help? Try this Reservation Checklist.

Talk to your travel provider

Once you've got a good idea of what you'll require, get the information you will need to help you make decisions before you book. Travel providers are required by government regulations to have some services and accommodations in place, and many companies have their own standards in addition.

The services that companies offer will depend on the mode of transportation (i.e. bus, plane, ship or train) and what equipment the company has available. Even in developed countries like Canada, not all train cars, buses or airplanes have the same accessibility features on

board, and services might not extend to all locations (like local airports or train stations in remote areas). There might not be staff on hand 24 hours a day to help out. **It might take a little shopping around to find a good.** Where can you find this information? Travel company websites have a "travellers with special needs" section, or you can speak with a customer service representative directly. (Or start with the CTA's list of accessible transportation services.)

A word of warning: Every country has its own regulations, and company standards aren't necessarily service guarantees, according to the CTA. Companies may differ in their definition of "special needs", which may include pregnant women, families with young children, seniors and people who are obese.

Consider all the steps

If you're crossing borders or switching providers, don't forget to consider what happens before you leave and when you arrive. For instance, an airline may have to coordinate with the airport at your destination to ensure that services and staff are available -- like a wheelchair lift, accessible airport security screening procedures or transportation for you or your luggage. You should be able to find assistance at every step of your journey from checking in to customs and immigration.

When in doubt, look at the website for your arrival and departure points -- like any airports, train stations, ferry terminals, etc. -- or cover the details with your travel agent or company. Look for maps online that show you the layout of the terminal, where washrooms and elevators are located and where information desks can be found.

Check out the local scene

All travellers should get to know their destinations before booking, and this advice is especially important for people with special needs.

Unfortunately, some countries don't have the infrastructure or facilities to integrate their own population, let alone independent travellers with disabilities. Local transportation options might be limited, or the physical features of a historic or natural site might prohibit mobility aids.

But don't fall into the trap of making assumptions. In the past couple of decades, many companies and attractions have found new ways to include travellers of all abilities. For instance, many institutions like the Louvre offer priority admission (i.e. no waiting in line) and make manual wheelchairs available for guests. Many ski resorts and national parks offer special vehicles so that everyone can enjoy the slopes and sites.

Museum and attraction websites should outline their accessibility information on their websites and in guides -- like which entrances to use, where accessible washrooms and elevators are located and discounts for attendants. Travel guidebooks and government travel advice can also fill you in on the culture, expectations and resources at your destination.

Plan ahead

Most companies require advance notice in order to make accommodations like scheduling extra staff or working with partner carriers and airports to meet requests. Find out how far in advance you need to make (and confirm) arrangements and note it in your itinerary. Most companies request at least 48 hours notice, but it may take a little

extra time to get plans organized. Allow extra time if you need medical approval from a health care professional.

In some cases, accommodations like extra seating or removable armrests are only available on certain flights or trains, so you may need to allow for some extra room in your itinerary if you have to attend a special event like a meeting or a wedding.

Consider your companion

If you're travelling with a service animal, you will be able to bring them onboard. Carriers are required to make accommodations -- like an extra seat or extra floor space. However, it's up to the traveller to meet the providers' requirements, like making sure your dog wears a harness at all times.

In addition, proper paperwork may be required when you enter a new country -- such as a letter from a veterinarian or proof of vaccinations. Some destinations may require a special permit, or may quarantine animals.

Get it in writing

When you're making arrangements, get the details in writing from the company and carry that information with you when you travel. You'll have proof of your requests, and you can show it directly to staff to avoid any confusion or misunderstandings.

In addition to requesting written documentation, take your own notes.

Write down the names of any staff and companies with whom you spoke, when you spoke with them and what arrangements were promised. Make sure you know about any steps you're responsible for -- like getting medical approval and providing any documents or identification.

Allow extra time

Rushing or leaving things to the last minute can spell trouble for any traveller, but extra assistance may take some extra time. In general, transportation carriers recommend arriving early and immediately identifying yourself to staff. Don't assume they'll automatically know who you are and what you need -- let the personnel know what assistance you have requested and have your confirmation handy.

Know where to turn for help

Even the best made plans can go awry. If you face any issues in your travel, your first step should be addressing them with the transportation or travel provider. If that doesn't work, the Canadian Transportation Agency can join the dialogue to help resolve disputes or investigate, if needed.

Add their contact information to your list of essential phone numbers to carry with you when you travel. (For contact information, [click here](#).)

Get involved

Our transportation system is far from perfect, but advocates are working to remove barriers. The Council of Canadians with Disabilities' Transportation Committee monitors transportation services and contributes to legislative reform. The organization works to make sure that accessibility is a priority for administrators and to promote barrier-free travel.

For more information about the organization and current issues, visit the [CCD website](#) .

ON THE WEB

Need more advice? Try these sources:

Take Charge of Your Travel: A Guide for Persons with Disabilities -- it can be viewed online or downloaded in PDF or DAISY (digital talking book) format from the Canadian Transportation Agency .

Access to Travel -- information on accessible transportation carriers from the Government of Canada.

Special Needs Travelers -- travel health advice from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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HAPPY Traveling

