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Invisible Class.

A guide to supporting
accessible travel.

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There's a class of travel no one chooses, yet millions are placed in. From broken lifts and inaccessible platforms to stares, assumptions, and unwanted help, the barriers people with disabilities face often begin long before the journey itself.

This guide is grounded in lived experience and shaped by voices from the disability community. It is written both for fellow travellers and for those in the travel industry who want to challenge established structures and help create a more inclusive, barrier-free experience for people with mobility requirements.

1. Respect people's independence.

Travellers with a disability aren't here to inspire you - they're just here to travel.

Example:

Many travellers with mobility requirements share how people often praised them for "doing so well" just walking through an airport. They weren't struggling — they were simply trying to catch their flight.

Why it matters:

People with disability don't need your admiration for going on holiday. They need equitable access and to be treated as travellers, not tokens.

What to do:

- Treat people with disability as equals, not exceptions.
- Don't make a fuss when someone does something "everyday."
- Respect personal space and don't rush someone who might need more time.
- Let people define and manage their own needs.

2. Small inconvenience or major barrier?

Not all barriers are obvious. Assess the situation, and offer help respectfully.

Example:

One lower limb amputee, who was travelling solo with two children, described how an out-of-order lift and a delayed flight turned a normal trip into a logistical nightmare — made worse by the fact that most people walked by without noticing.

Why it matters:

Broken lifts, last-minute platform changes, heavy luggage — these can be inconvenient for you, but deeply stressful for someone with a disability.

What to do:

- Look out for signs of physical or situational difficulty.
- Offer help if someone's clearly struggling - but do so quietly and respectfully.
- Don't block lifts or priority seating.
- Being present and aware is one of the most powerful acts of allyship.

3. Ask, don't assume.

Someone doing something differently, doesn't automatically mean they need your help.

Example:

Many wheelchair users have had strangers grab their handles without warning. It's not just annoying, it's invasive and unsafe.

Why it matters:

Jumping in without asking, no matter how well-intentioned, can feel patronising, or even threatening. It removes choice, and assumes someone's struggling simply because they're doing things differently.

What to do:

- Treat people with disability as equals, not exceptions.
- Don't make a fuss when someone does something "everyday."
- Respect personal space and don't rush someone who might need more time.
- Let people define and manage their own needs.

4. Good help starts with a good question.

Vague offers are easy to decline.
Specific ones show real thought.

Example:

If you notice the lift is out of service, instead of asking "Are you okay?", consider asking "Would you like a hand with your bag up the stairs?". This small kindness could go a long way.

Why it matters:

Generic offers like "do you need help?" can be misinterpreted or easily dismissed as a empty-offer.

What to do:

- Specific offers show thought and respect.
- When in doubt, be direct but situational.
- Offer to hold the door, call for assistance or carry luggage up the stairs.

5. Offer support, not skepticism.

Not all disabilities are visible - and no one should have to prove theirs.

Example:

Someone sat in a priority seating area may have a prosthetic that's covered by clothing.

Why it matters:

Judging who "looks disabled" enough to use a priority seat, receive wheelchair assistance or priority boarding, is offensive and undermining.

What to do:

- Avoid judging people who use priority seating or need extra time.
- Assume people know what they need.
- Don't stare and refrain from making any unsolicited comments.

6. Protect passengers' dignity as well as their safety.

Mobility isn't a threat. Don't treat it like one.

Example:

Many amputees have had a distressing experience when it comes to security checks at airports, that has left them feeling stressed and dehumanised.

Why it matters:

Whilst it may or may not be necessary to ask someone to remove a prosthetic, doing so in public, without explanation or compassion, can make those with accessibility needs feel very vulnerable.

What to do:

- Treat prosthetics, aids and wheelchairs as part of the person - not part of their luggage.
- Always ensure privacy, clear communication, and consent.
- For staff, take time to learn the correct terminologies and have good understanding of amputations as well as prosthetic and mobility devices.

7. Accessibility isn't just for "special occasions".

It's not just the holidays. It's the commute, the school run, the quick errand.

Example:

For many amputees, taking the stairs is possible, but it requires concentration and patience. Consider you're an above the knee amputee, you've just purchased your morning coffee and are now faced with a last minute platform change. The challenge of maintaining your balance on the stairs has increased and you've only got two minutes to make your train.

Why it matters:

Not every journey is glamorous. Most are essential. And if they're full of barriers, they're full of stress.

What to do:

- Offer help even on the "boring" journeys.
- Make room on buses, in stations, and at crossings.
- Don't treat access as an afterthought — treat it as a given.
- Accessibility isn't just for "special occasions."
- Every journey matters — and so does every ally.

An ideal travel culture is one where everyone has an equal experience - where accessibility isn't an afterthought, but part of the norm.

If you would like to learn more about the Invisible Class campaign or are interested in partnering with Ottobock to improve accessible travel, please email InvisibleClass@ottobock.com.

We're on a journey to make every journey possible. We hope you will join us.