

# MEANINGFUL TRAVEL TIPS AND TALES

TRAVELING WITH A DISABILITY



An Initiative to Make Travel More Inclusive



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# WHY WE CREATED THIS BOOK FOR TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

## A NOTE FROM GOABROAD



**GoAbroad is dedicated to promoting accessible meaningful travel.** There is no limit on the ways travel changes lives and opens us up to the world around us. Traveling with a disability may seem tricky at first with a little extra planning, but the logistics of it shouldn't, and won't, prevent you from enjoying life on the road.

Travel is not one size fits all. We believe the dominant narrative in travel and international education needs to shift to be more inclusive, and look outside the lens of your typical go-getter, able-bodied, happy-go-lucky, nothing-ever-goes-wrong-or-is-hard traveler. So, while you might need to do a little extra research to ensure that your hostel is wheelchair accessible, or make sure the museum has video guides or sign language interpreters, none of this should stop you from embarking on your big adventure abroad. You can travel, study, intern, teach, and volunteer abroad, but most importantly, you can thrive while doing it.

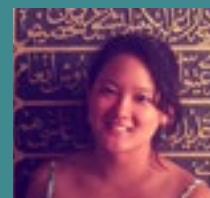
**As part of GoAbroad's push for more inclusivity in travel, our writers share their personal experiences, resources, and advice about traveling with a disability.** We want our readers to be inspired to travel while prioritizing their well-being.

Interested in joining this initiative? [Partner with us!](#)

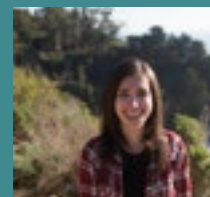
# OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**Abroad With Disabilities (AWD)** is a non-profit organization based out of Coopersville, Michigan and was founded in 2015 with the goal of promoting the belief that persons with disabilities can and should go abroad. AWD works diligently to empower persons with disabilities to pursue international study, work, volunteer, and/or internship opportunities abroad.



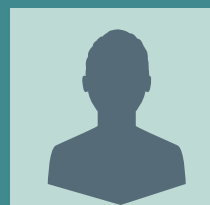
**Sheila Xu** is an aspiring deaf global citizen, polyglot, and digital nomad. After graduating from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she went to Italy to fulfill her dreams of traveling and living abroad. She has taught American Sign Language at an university in Venice, and won a Fulbright grant to research deaf entrepreneurs in Italy. Also, Sheila dreams of making travel more accessible to the global deaf community, which she plans to further pursue and combine her passion for both deaf community and travel after completing her Fulbright grant. Her new travel blog is Boarding Happiness ([www.boardinghappiness.com](http://www.boardinghappiness.com)).



**Rachel Chaikof** is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer who served in Cameroon for two years as a Community Health Educator. Her work focused on providing persons with disabilities with access to health education. She received a BA in Visual Communication with a concentration in Photography from Savannah College of Art and Design and an MA in Anthropology with a concentration in Material and Visual Culture. She is passionate about traveling, photography, human rights and disability advocacy.



After growing up in the Chicago area, **Dan Beirne** went on to graduate from Valparaiso University with a degree in Theology and Youth and Family Ministry. During his studies at Valpo, he experienced his first trip out-of-country to Namibia for a semester abroad. Both his time in Namibia as well as his two years working in El Salvador, nurtured in him a deep passion for discovering and celebrating the authentic expression of a group of people.



← This could be you! Want to share your own travel tips and tales? [Give us a shout!](#)



# A FEW TIPS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STUDYING ABROAD

by Abroad with Disabilities

Hearing someone say that you cannot meet your goal is like having an ant beat you in a wrestling match: The dignity and confidence you possess or attempt to find will wither away. But, the courage to continue moving forward and withstand the negativity will make you stronger than ants and doubters alike. [Abroad With Disabilities](#) is excited to share some tackling methods to help simplify the preparation process of studying, working, interning or volunteering abroad with a disability.

## Meet with ALL Your Advisors

First and foremost, it is crucial that you, as a student, sit down with both your study abroad and disability support services advisors together. This allows the study abroad advisor to walk you through the required paperwork and share with you what is to be expected when you go abroad, while your disability support services office advisor will be able to check for accessibility online, or scan copies of paperwork so that you are able to fill it out independently.

It is much easier to have people experienced in the fields of international education and disability studies work together so that each person can focus on their areas of expertise, while you advocate and inform both advisors of your specific needs, which may include having materials in an electronic format or having detailed lists of tasks to complete. Speak up if one advisor constantly refers you to another. You are not a pingpong ball, and you need to jump on board with preparing your trip abroad like your peers.

## Apply for Scholarships

Communication and accessibility may be quite challenging for students and advisors, but financial concerns can pose a challenge as well. If you are going with an organized program, apply for scholarships through that program, but also look for scholarships for persons with disabilities, both nationally and at home, relevant to going abroad. Moreover, be sure to speak with your institution's financial aid advisor to see if you can receive your current aid package while you are abroad. If you receive Vocational Rehabilitation funding, you may be able to continue to receive funding abroad.

Furthermore, if you receive supplementary income, we advise you to visit the Social Security Administration's website to see if you are able to receive income when you are out of the United States. It's not guaranteed that you will be able to receive your current financial aid package, Vocational Rehabilitation funding, or supplementary income when you are abroad, but be sure to do your research and communicate your needs and expectations.

Now that you understand that communication and financial aid play a large role in planning your trip abroad, there are other important steps to consider when traveling with a disability so that you can be prepared emotionally and physically to the best of your ability.

## Know Your Rights and Available Resources

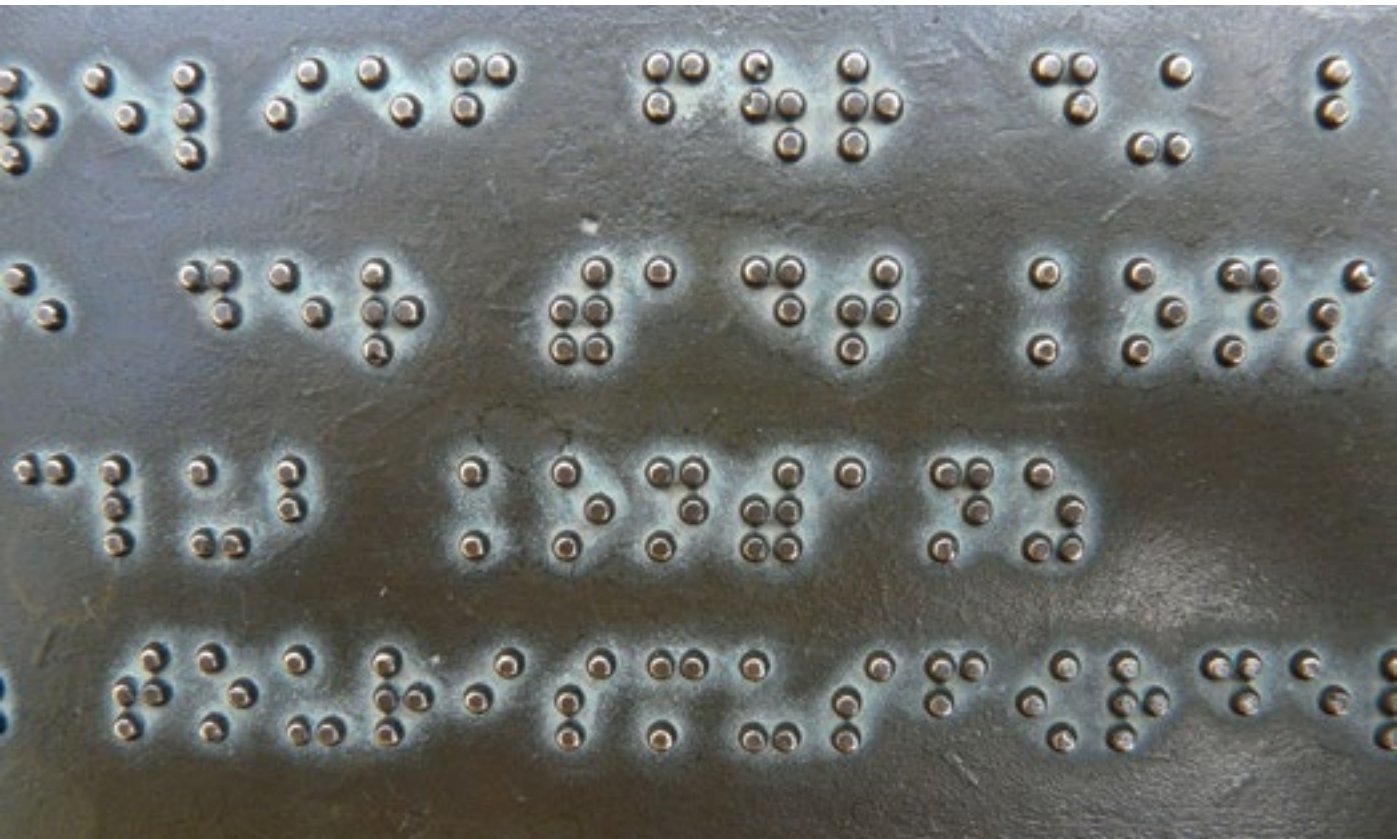
You need to think of the host country as if you are moving there for good, because the laws in terms of accommodations and access to public places differ from your home country. The ADA does not go with you abroad. Be sure to communicate your needs to your program advisors, instructors, and host family. Often times they are more than happy to assist you as long as you are able to tell them how to help you and what they need to do to accommodate you.

In addition, you should research how your host country may view disability as well as search for organizations that may work with your specific disability. For example, someone who is blind or visually impaired may want to find an organization that sells canes. Perhaps you do not need mobility devices, but you may require extra tutoring, you'll want to know what resources are available to you.

## Reach Out to Your Program Coordinator

Just like you had a lot of questions for your study abroad advisor, the process of planning to go abroad will prompt a lot of new questions that your advisor might not be able to answer. For those hyper-specific questions about your host country, host university, and study abroad program, your best bet will be reaching out to your program coordinator. They're on the ground and will be your go-to person for anything you might need while abroad.

You need to understand that many program fees and scholarships do not necessarily incorporate personal fees such as mobility orientation training, assistive technology, caretakers, daily transportation, extra tutoring, or protective equipment. But, talking about this with your program coordinator will guarantee a setup that works best for everyone! Their goal is for you to have the best experience possible abroad. Never be afraid to ask for what you need.



The key to being successful abroad is preparation. Take any and all necessary steps to make sure you're ready to study abroad and that your program is for you as well. Together you will show any of those Debbie Doubters from before exactly where they can put their opinions!

To learn more about resources and tips for traveling abroad with a disability, visit [Abroad with Disabilities](#).

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# VOLUNTEERING ABROAD AS A TRAVELER WITH A DISABILITY

by Rachel Chaikof

Volunteering abroad—particularly in a developing—country is a monumental challenge that requires grit and ability to adapt to strange places. Persons with disabilities offer unique strengths that can make them phenomenal volunteers. They have a lifetime experience of facing obstacles and being flexible. They often have to think creatively about how complete certain tasks because they may not be able to do them in the same way as persons without disabilities. Because they want to show the world that they are human beings who can contribute to the society, they will often go an extra mile to reach any and all goals.

## Hello, Fellow Travelers!

I have Usher Syndrome, a condition whereby individuals are born deaf and gradually lose vision. I have cochlear implants, which are technologies that allow people who are deaf to hear. I received a BA in Visual Communication with a concentration in Photography from Savannah College of Art and Design and an MA in Material and Visual Culture from University College London. I have travelled to more than 20 different countries. While traveling, I often lived with host families and used my camera as a tool to study cultural differences. I felt that joining the Peace Corps would provide me an opportunity to live in a different environment and learn about a different culture.

More importantly, Peace Corps also allowed me to “pay it forward” as so many people positively helped me become a successful person when growing with disability. **Here are a few tips for hopeful volunteers abroad:**

## Applying for Volunteer Programs

Applying to join the Peace Corps – or any long-term volunteer program – can be a complex and lengthy process. Sometimes it can be a good test to see if applicants can make through the entire two years service. The application process includes answering questions, writing essays, sometimes interviews, medical screenings and legal screenings.

For persons with disabilities, the application process can sometimes be more challenging because they may need to fill out extra paperwork for medical screening since some aspects of disabilities can be considered a medical issue. Some may also receive additional questions about how they will be able to perform certain activities as a person with a disability.

**I went through the application process twice.** I first applied in 2009 when I was a senior in college. I filled out the application online and I went through the interview process and then legal screening and medical screening. I was denied medical clearance solely because of my disabilities.

They questioned my ability to maintain my cochlear implants, my ability to learn a new language, my progression of blindness and my vestibular issues.

I reapplied in 2013 with a vow that I would fight all the way through if I were to be denied again solely because of my disability. I filled out the application again and was called for an interview. After my interview was finished and I was told that I would move onto the next step which would be medical screening, I very openly shared with the interviewer that I applied in 2009 and was denied. I asked her if she could inform the medical office that I am a fully capable and functioning person who can indeed serve. The interviewer said she was very glad that I shared with her about what happened four years earlier and that she would speak with the medical office. I then completed the forms for medical screening, which my primary care and also specialists had to fill out too, and submitted to the medical office.

I heard nothing from the medical office for six months. When I finally heard from them, they asked me additional questions. They asked me how I can maintain my hearing devices and what type of batteries I would need to use during my service. I finally received a medical clearance and then soon after, I also received a legal clearance. I was invited to serve in Cameroon in April 2014 and then began my Peace Corps service on September 9th, 2014 after another medical screening for general health and wellbeing.

**Peace Corps changed their application process in 2014**, shortly before I began my service. Peace Corps now allow applicants to choose which country to serve. It is important to note that persons with disabilities may limited choices of countries as Peace Corps share on their website what medical conditions each country cannot accommodate. There is also no longer a medical screening process prior to receiving the invitation. There is now only one round of medical screening, which occurs after receiving the invitation.

**When applying for programs as a person with a disability, it is important that you be clear about your strengths and capabilities.**

When applying for programs as a person with a disability, it is important that you be clear about your strengths and capabilities. When Peace Corps reviews the applications, they are most concerned about whether or not you can live in a challenging environment with hardships. For example, I have advanced French skills and so, in my application, I emphasized that I learned to speak French and have experiences in living with host families in France. It was very important that they knew this information because people with hearing loss are often perceived as individuals who cannot communicate. They needed to understand and know that I am fully capable of communicating and learning new languages.

## Preparing for Your Service

If you are accepted to your program/receive an invitation and medical clearance, congratulations! Now you need to get ready to depart for your country of service. The best way to prepare for the departure is to spend time reading blogs and articles written by volunteers serving in your host country. Many volunteers share their highest of the highs and lowest of the lows. They share their raw experiences. They share all the positives and negatives.

If possible, **meet with other Returned Peace Corps Volunteers in your hometown** and ask as many questions you'd like about their experience. You can find them through local Returned Peace Corps Volunteer chapters on social media.

I spent many hours reading blogs by volunteers who were serving at the time in Cameroon or had recently finished serving. Reading about their experiences prepared me well for my service. For example, I read posts about female volunteers experiencing harassment including receiving proposals from complete strangers; so when I was in Cameroon and first receiving proposals, I was neither scared nor surprised.

It is important to note that while one could spend so many hours trying to digest information to be well prepared for integrating into a culture that is so different from our own culture and living in a new environment, the experience will be different from what you may imagine. There will still be many moments that will shock volunteers. **It is best to arrive in your country of service expecting the unexpected.**

### Accommodations You'll Need and How to Obtain Them

Accommodation requirements will vary from person to person depending on your individual needs. For example, one deaf person may request sign language interpreter while another deaf person may not request it and instead, asks for preferential seating. One visually impaired person may request braille while another visually impaired person may request text to be in large print.

**These accommodations may be requested as long as it is reasonable and can be managed in your country of service.** However, I do advise that if you can provide any of the resources yourself, I would bring them to your country of service. For example, when sleeping at night, I do not wear my hearing devices and so, I need a smoke detector that wakes me up by shaking the bed. I bought my own smoke detector system and brought it with me to Cameroon. The reason I advise bringing our own resources is because they may not be available in the country of service and therefore, Peace Corps would have to order them from the U.S., and it could take several months for them to arrive to your country of service.

### Communicating with Locals Abroad About Your Disability

While disability can often be seen as a stigma in many developing countries, locals may not be concerned about your disability and instead, they may be more interested in your nationality. If your skin color and/or accent is different from the locals, they will often see you as a foreigner first, not your disability. You may have technologies or devices that you use for your disability that may not exist in your host country and so, locals may see you as more superior as other persons with disabilities even though they should regard all other persons with disabilities as equal as you and persons without disabilities.

If you do face stigma, it is important that you explain politely that persons with disabilities are human beings who function differently. Explain to the locals that every person has strengths and weaknesses. Persons without disabilities have flaws such as inability to carry a tune when singing, inability to run fast, or inability to paint a pretty picture, but that doesn't change the fact that they're still capable people.

Because I primarily worked with persons with disabilities in the Peace Corps, they were often interested in learning about my perspective on living with disabilities and the best approaches for advocating for rights of persons with disabilities.

When I shared with other locals about my disability, they were often rather amazed that there is a technology that allows people who are deaf to hear. When I gave a seminar to a large group of healthcare workers at a hospital and one of my work partners shared that I am deaf but hear with cochlear implants, they gasped and asked questions about the technology. When they took a test at the end of the seminar, under the question that asked them to write one thing they learned from the seminar, many of them wrote about "a technology that allows a deaf person to hear."



**Do not allow your disability stop you from joining the Peace Corps or working with any other volunteer organizations.** No matter how complex your disability may appear on paper, persons with disabilities are far more capable than everyone may realize. Disability does not define a person's life and does not equate to obstacles and prevention from doing good work. Persons with disabilities can find ways to tear down the walls by finding alternative ways to function in their own bodies. You, as a person with a disability, have unique skills, and both volunteers and locals can learn so much from you.

# UNDERSTANDING OBSTACLES: 5 WAYS TO BE THE BEST TRAVEL BUDDY

by Dan Beirne

## Understanding Obstacles

If you have ever traveled somewhere in which your first language is not spoken, then you know how limitations like that can challenge and enrich your overall experience. The first time I left the country was when I studied abroad in Namibia. While English is quite common there, we had the chance to do a tribal homestay in the northern part of the country called Ovamboland, and we stayed for nine days with the strong and lovely Ovamba people. My host father was actually the headman of our village, and you could see his authority and power in everything he did, from stirring the mahangu, to herding his cattle every morning. I was honored to call him Father for those nine days.

Then, I got food poisoning and was taken home to my host family from class that day because I was doubled over in stomach pains. My host brother, who did all of the translating for me, was still at work when I arrived home.



It was just my host father and I, and we shared no more than three words in a common language. I remember feeling so frustrated that I could not just communicate to him that I was ill and what I needed to feel better. I eventually ended up vomiting somewhere between the chicken coop and the outhouse.

He was noticeably perturbed, and not because I had made a mess by his chickens. I got the very clear sense that he was concerned for his me, his son, and that he wanted to help. I remember he grabbed items from around the house and did a sort of show, like charades, and he was quite obviously just trying to get me to laugh. When I eventually he did he put his hands on his knees and breathed a sigh of relief and let out an eruption of a belly laugh that I will never forget. He was so happy I smiled again. Shortly after this, he brought me a ginger ale and a bowl of Fruit Loops.

I begin by sharing this story because what made it most powerful was the fact that all of the feelings and concepts within it were communicated through means other than a spoken language, and in the end, that added to my experience. Had I just been able to say, "My stomach hurts 'cause I ate some bad eggs." And were he able to simply respond, "Ah, here is some ginger ale and cereal," the experience would have been far less profound and memorable.

He ached to make me feel better, I yearned to understand him, and because we were wrestling with the extreme inconvenience of not being able to speak or understand one another, we were forced to emote and perceive to a greater degree than normal, making the subsequent experience quite powerful.

This experience happened well over ten years ago, but I keep it close on my heart. In fact, **it recently came back to me again this past summer as I traveled with my mother and father-in-law, both of whom are deaf.** We traveled to Mexico and I spent a lot of time with my father in law walking around and exploring. I remember noticing how much better the locals could understand him than my wife, who, though she is hearing, does not speak any Spanish. I noticed this because I was the only one who spoke Spanish in the group, but I only seemed to need to translate for my wife; my father-in-law just dove into signing with everyone he met. He was adored by the locals in an instant because of his beaming smile and the enthusiasm with which he engaged in dialogue.

As I observed him, I remembered my time in Namibia and noticed some familiarities. I saw his interactions get squeezed through the same bottleneck of restricted communication, and produce more meaningful interactions on the other side. I even began to filter much of my experience through him, and let him lead the way as I abandoned my grasp of the language for a bit.

What I learned through both of these experiences is invaluable to me, and I happily share it with you here.

## 5 Ways to be the Best Travel Buddy

If I were to boil down these experiences, and others like them, into a list of five things to remember when traveling with someone with an ability different than yours, it would read as follows:

### 5. Remember, Disability Never Means Inability

Listen to your travel companion to find what you both are interested in, and capable of doing fully and comfortably in this new context. Even if it is as simple as sitting and taking in a scene for an hour or two. Fill your daily agenda with that, and activities similarly proportionate to his or her comfort and ability, and you will have a lovely day. As I always say to a friend who curses his aging body, "Enjoy the day as you are able."

### 4. Be Creative

Every place holds different terrain, different art, different smells, different scenery, different food, and different levels of accessibility. Each one of these variations can be harnessed to cater a trip specific to how your travel buddy can—and wants to—take in a new setting. Have fun and be creative with this process!

### 3. Understand Accessibility and Stigma in Your Host Country

Every disability offers unique access and restriction in any context, so be sure to do some research about the culture behind how your particular disability is experienced in the area you will be traveling to. This might be intuitive for a visible or physical disability (of course you would consider if the hotel is accessible), but it may not be as intuitive for "invisible" disabilities, for example hearing or vision impairment.



## 2. Recognize and Understand Your Privilege

Remember that your abilities might prevent you from experiencing the world in a unique, and possibly more powerful way. If you are going to do a faithful job seeing the world through the eyes of your loved one living with a disability, practice what it is like for them to see the world through your eyes first.

After all, people with disabilities are living in a world built by those without disability, and so they are constantly seeing the world through others' eyes. Sit down with a slice of "check yourself" pie and consider how your abilities might limit your experience of the world.

## 1. Communication, Communication, Communication

This is the most important aspect of any relationship—disability or no disability.

It is not up to you, as a travel buddy, to make assumptions about what your companion can or cannot do, or assume any major responsibility as a caretaker. Your friend/family member/whomever you happen to be traveling with will know their disability and what they need best. So, get chatting! Establish any expectations as you plan your adventure and check in on the road to ensure you both have the best possible experience abroad.

It is good for anyone to practice the discipline of seeing and experiencing the world through another person's eyes, and when you couple this with the solidarity and shared experience that it fosters with a loved one with whom you would like to experience something together, the results are priceless. This practice has deeply enriched my life, may it do the same for yours. *Buen viaje.*

# A GUIDE FOR DEAF TRAVELERS: KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS AND FINDING PUBLIC SERVICES

by Sheila Xu



Here are a few tried and true recommendations and travel hacks for deaf wanderlusts everywhere:

### Take Advantage of Your “Deaf Connections”

As I am a member of the culturally deaf community, I am fortunate to have “deaf connections.” I can reach out to my network for travel tips, finding the local deaf community in my destination countries, or just a place to stay (free is great if you’re a budget backpacker like me, but don’t forget to get to know the host too!). The culturally deaf community around the world is a lot smaller and more tight-knit than you think! However, if you are a deaf person with no ties to the culturally deaf community, I still encourage you to try to seek out deaf locals. They just may not be as easy to reach or find. One good start is joining deaf travel facebook groups or online forums.

Please note there are very few guides or centralized information for deaf travelers, so I believe this is one of the first of its kind in the cyberspace. However, at this time, for many deaf people, using our “deaf connections” is incredibly helpful to traveling or living in our host countries. They can directly tell you what your are rights and any available public services in the country.

### Deaf Resident Vs. Deaf Non-Resident— Know the Difference

The laws defining “residents” vs. “non-residents” vary from country to country. In Italy, spending at least 183 days in the country per year defines you a resident (assuming you already have a residence permit to stay in Italy longer than the standard 90-day rule). If you’re abroad for more than three months for volunteering/studying/ interning and have a visa, it pays off to look into whether you’re considered a “resident” or not.

In some cases, the rules regarding residency can be complicated! For example, I am considered to have a “domicile” or “a home” in Italy, but my “tax home” is the U.S.!

Your residence status in the country could entitle you to benefits reserved only for residents or citizens, and you just might find out you’re eligible for these public benefits (even you’re not a permanent resident of that country)!

### Will You Still be Able to Receive Disability Payments?

Many developed countries in the world have some form of social welfare or benefits to help their population with disabilities. The U.S., Italy, and most of the European Union are included. In the U.S., only permanent residents and citizens can access Social Security disability payments. There are two kinds: Social Security Supplemental Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). SSI is for people who have no work and no work history while SSDI is for those who have paid taxes into the system and worked long enough. Check if you’re eligible for either. If you go abroad for a year or less to participate in an international program or something of a more temporary nature, you’re entitled to receive either SSI and SSDI payments while abroad. This is important because if you’re out of the country for more than 30 days for “non-excusable reasons,” your SSI will be cut off. On the other hand, SSDI is payable to you no matter where you live and how long you’re out of the country (but of course, double-check on the work requirements!).

In Italy, I found out deaf foreigners living in the country for at least a year can access the Italian disability payment scheme, equal to other Italian citizens. It’s a matter of jumping through the hoops and going through the bureaucracy to receive the benefits.

We deaf people know we receive less income on average than the hearing population, and many of us get passed over for an “abled-bodied” candidate in our job search, so any forms of financial assistance is helpful when we travel and live abroad for a period of time. It pays off to check your residency status in the country and if you can access your home country and the new country’s benefits scheme. It could make or break your experience abroad!

### What’s the Health Insurance Sitch?

I have to say healthcare is generally cheaper anywhere else in the world other than the U.S., but it is always a good idea to purchase travel insurance or enroll into the local health system to cover unforeseen medical needs. If you’re just traveling to a country for an international program or a short period of time, purchase a travel health insurance that covers medical emergencies. As the saying goes, “it’s better to have a travel insurance and not need it than to not to have it and need it.” So you have no good excuse to not to purchase travel health insurance.

However, if you are living in European Union or in a country with affordable health system for at least three months or more (even for study abroad/volunteer/internship, etc), I highly suggest enrolling into the local public health system. They not only cover your emergencies, but also your preventative and other comprehensive medical needs. For example, in Italy, I decided to enroll into the Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (SSN), or Italian national health system, so I could access medicines at affordable prices, obtain exemptions from co-pays for most doctor visits, and most importantly, receive a new, updated Cochlear Implant to replace my obsolete processor for free. I was shocked at how affordable everything was. I only need to pay a nominal sum to enroll into the system (€149 approx. per calendar year), and I am pretty much covered for almost everything else.

Since deaf people are considered to have a disability under most laws in the world, public health services are much cheaper than what we would pay for in the US (I was paying \$1,500 per year for an insurance with co-pays and deductibles). Now that’s a peace of mind that money could buy, in this case!

### Technology: Know it, Love it

We are fortunate smartphones, apps, and other technology goodies abound in our current time— thanks, 21st century! Technology is helping more deaf travelers and travelers with disabilities to travel in comfort, with independence, and hopefully, in style as well.

As a deaf traveler, obviously there are language barriers when communicating with local hearing people who don’t sign or speak English. In that case, I just whip out my handy smartphone and open up the “Google Translator” app to translate written English into their language. This was particularly useful when I was traveling alone in a small town in France where not one person spoke English, and I was struggling to find my host’s apartment.

Or the time when I used the U.S.’s public relay services for the deaf to continue to make necessary calls to the states for taking care of financial, and other, services. It turns out Italy also offers this public service for making calls to Italian businesses (caveat: Must be able to read and write in Italian—which makes my first point all the more relevant!). Both only need an internet connection and a computer.

Also, take advantage of the thousands of apps available in both iOS and Android market. There’s an app to notify you if your plane is late in case you can’t hear the announcement for gate changes, to call for an accessible taxi for wheelchair users, and so on. Search the marketplace to see what kind of apps could be used to enhance your travel experience.

It can't hurt to check both your home country and the local country to see what kind of technological services they offer!

### Research Accommodations and Services for the Deaf

No two country is the same regarding the rights for people with disabilities, including the deaf people. Some rights could be reserved only for residents and citizens of that country, or the rights could be applied to everyone, regardless of their status.

In the U.S., we are fortunate we have laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, to protect our rights and requests for reasonable accommodations in our daily lives. Unfortunately, in Italy and most of other countries in the world, the rights of people with disabilities are not as strongly implemented as it is in the U.S. If I were need to access some of the public services here, such as courts, hospitals, and so on, there wouldn't be an actual sign language interpreter on-call to come. Most of us would have to pay for an interpreter instead of the government paying for it. Bring a local friend or request someone who can communicate in your native language if a medical emergency happens. Don't go into this alone.

I acknowledge most of us don't go into looking and reading about our rights at our destination countries, but if you are living there for at least one month or longer, try to find out the limits of what you can and can't do in the country. Talking to a deaf local will help a lot in this case. Or if you want to do what I have been doing, ask public officials if they have provisions or accommodations for the deaf. Sometimes the answer may surprise you!

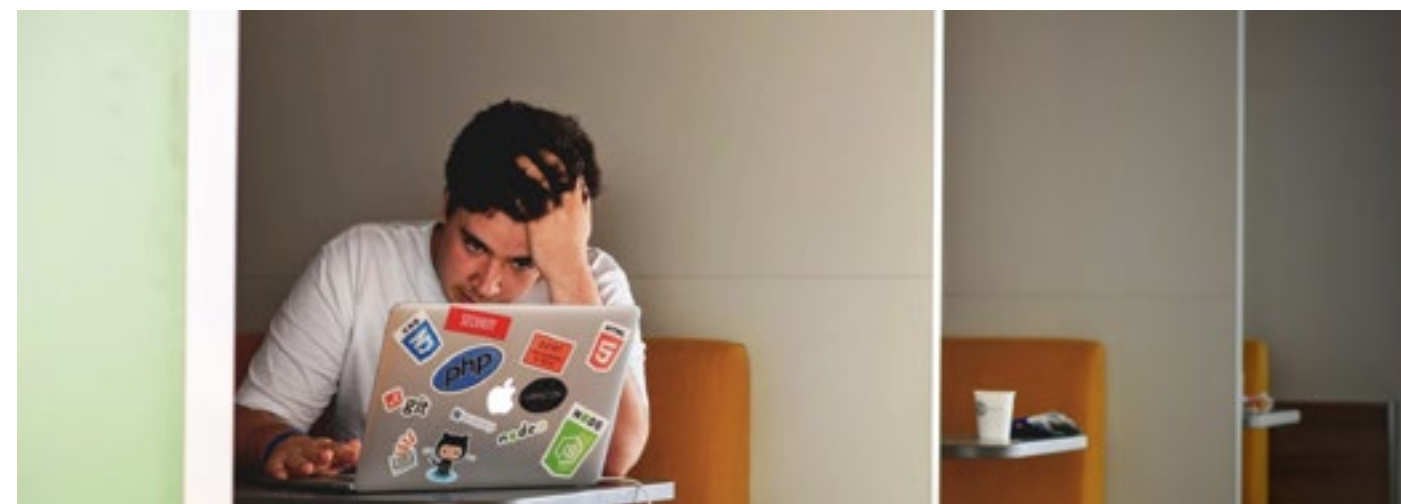
### Deaf Travel Hacking

Finally, this is my favorite part of traveling: Travel Hacking. What is "travel hacking?"

Usually it means the art of collecting reward or frequent flier points from credit cards and other means to travel for free, such as redeeming points for award tickets or hotel stays. However, I want to broaden the definition here. I want to use the term for deaf travelers and travelers with disabilities who use hacks or unconventional methods to get what they want or need.

For example, in most of Italy and elsewhere in the European Union, guests with disabilities can enter public museums for free or with heavily reduced rates. This information is not advertised well or shown on the price list. All you have to do is to ask if there are concessions for people with disabilities, and if they ask, produce your documentation of your disability (a card with your name, face, and a blue handicapped logo helps a lot—from any country will do). So this potentially translates into hundreds of dollars of savings! That €20 day ticket to the Louvre becomes €0! And you could return on the next day without needing to pay another €20! But the tradeoff is that they offer free or reduced admissions because they don't usually have accommodations for the deaf in place. Once in a blue moon, there are sign language interpreted tours in public museums, but they might not be in the language you know. So make what of it you will. All it takes is some creative thinking, willingness to try, and excellent sleuthing skills to find these hacks.

With a fair amount of research, planning, and creativity, you'll be on your way to a killer international experience in no time!



# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EARNING A DEGREE ABROAD AS A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY

by Rachel Chaikof

Getting a degree abroad not only helps further your education in the subject you choose to study, but a lifetime of experiences that you would not receive in your home country. Persons with disabilities, who have a unique view of the world because their body works differently, will be able to gain insights on how schools run differently abroad and how persons with disabilities live in other countries.

I have Usher Syndrome, a condition whereby individuals are born deaf and gradually lose vision.

I have cochlear implants, which are technologies that allow people who are deaf to hear. I was born and raised in the United States and attended Savannah College of Art and Design for undergraduate studies where I received a Bachelor of Arts in visual communications with a concentration in photography. I then went to graduate school at University College London in London, United Kingdom where I received a Masters of Arts in Material and Visual Culture. Here are a few of my tips for applying to and attending school abroad.

## The Application Process

Applying to universities abroad does not vary too greatly from country to country. They typically have a standard form and require at least one written essay, which would typically be a statement of purpose, in addition to your transcripts and letters of recommendation. Some schools may require certain test scores while some others may not. As an American applying to graduate schools in the United Kingdom, I was required to fill out an application form, submit my undergraduate transcript, letter of recommendations, and write a statement of purpose.

When writing your statement of purpose, it is often a good idea to include little information about your disability. When sharing your disability, you want to focus on how your disability has made you a better student and shaped your life positively. When schools review applications and decide whom to accept, they look for students with unique stories, as the schools want to see diversity on campuses. They also often like hearing stories about people who overcame obstacles because it means that they can handle challenges they may face during their studies.

When I wrote my statement of purposes for grad schools in the United Kingdom, I shared briefly about how my disabilities led me to pursue studies in anthropology. When I was growing up, I was very passionate about art because when I was working on learning to hear and speak, art was often used as a way for me to communicate with others. I then went to an art school for undergraduate studies. When I was studying photography, I often used my camera as a tool to study cultural differences and how human beings interacted with their own environment. Those experiences inspired me to pursue my studies in anthropology.

## Obtaining Necessary Accommodations

Once you've been accepted and you've made a decision on which school to attend, there is some extra prep before making the big move abroad! The first and foremost task you should do is check to see if the school has a disability office.

You should know and understand that many countries do not have disability laws like the U.S. where they have the Americans with Disabilities Act. The United Kingdom has the Disability Discrimination Act and Canada has the Canadian Human Rights Act and Equality Rights Section of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In countries that do not have any kind of disability laws, or do have the laws, but are not enforced, you may find that there may be no disability department at the school and so you may have to find and fund the resources yourself if you need any kind of accommodations. If the school has a disability office, contact them and ask them what kind of accommodations are available to you.

The availability of accommodations can vary from country to country as it depends on what kind of resources is available. For example, the disability department at the grad school where I attended told me when I contacted them that they would not be able to provide a real time captioning reporter, a person who types everything a lecturer says, because there was no availability in the U.K., but they would be able to provide me a professional note taker.

If there is no disability department at the school where you're attending, contact the head of the department of the subject you're studying. When contacting the head of the department, introduce yourself and share your story. Inform them what kind of accommodations you would like to have and ask them what the school can provide. If the school mentions any accommodations they cannot provide, look for alternative solutions like I did when I was told that a real time captioning reporter could not be provided.

If you need accommodations for the dorms and there is no disability department at the school, contact the residence hall director. Just like when contacting the head of the department, introduce yourself, share your story, and inform what kind of accommodations you need. It's important to note that your choice of dorms may be limited because not all dorms may have the accommodations you need. For example, those in a wheelchair may not be able to live in dorms that have no accessible ramps or elevators or if there is more than one floor.

University College London has a disability department and so, I contacted the head of disability department a few months prior to starting school to discuss my needs for both in the classroom and dorm. When I was in grad school, I used an FM system and a professional note taker. An FM system is a microphone system where the lecturer would wear a microphone and I would wear transmitter, which would be connected to my hearing devices. When the lecturer speaks, the speech would be transmitted directly into my hearing device and as a result, I would hear better and be assured that I heard every word.

The professional note taker attended all of my classes and took notes for me. As a person with hearing loss, it is hard for me to take notes because when I am writing, I have difficulties in being able to listen carefully to what the lecturer says.

On my first day of grad school, I met with one of the professors who was also my advisor. I introduced myself to him and explained that I have hearing loss and how it can impact my learning in the classroom. I then explained that I would like for professors to use a microphone so that I can be assured that I would hear the instructors well. I also told him that there would be a professional note taker in all my classes. My professor then offered to email all professors to inform them about my disability and the importance of using a microphone.

Right before the first day of each course I took, I also contacted the professors of each course to inform them of my disability and asked to meet with them for a few minutes to go over my accommodations and give them the opportunity to ask me any questions.

Here is an example of an e-mail I have sent to professors:

Dear Dr. [                    ]

*I'm looking forward to being in your [insert course title] course this semester on Mondays and Wednesdays at 8AM – 10:30 AM. I was born profoundly deaf, but I hear with an extraordinary technology, cochlear implants, and I hear like an almost normal hearing person. Because my hearing is still not perfect, I will have a few accommodations, which include an assistive listening device. I will have a device attached to my hearing device and you will need to wear a microphone so that I can hear you well. I would like to meet you at least 15 minutes before class starts this Monday so that I can give you my accommodation memo and show you how to use the assistive listening device. Please let me know if this will work; otherwise we can certainly arrange a different time.*

*Thank you in advance,  
Rachel Chaikof*

## Educating Others About Your Disability

Always be open about sharing your disability with other students, professors, and locals in your community. Sharing information about your disability will help them better understand how they should interact with you. When they ask you about your disability, they have no intention of being rude or ignorant. They are simply curious and want to be educated. You also never know that your conversations with other people about your disability may inspire some of them to pursue interests in working with other people with disabilities!



When I met students, I often informed them of my hearing loss right away. Sometimes I ask people to repeat what they said and so I have to inform them of my hearing loss. For example, I will say, "I'm sorry, I didn't hear what you said. I have hearing loss. Can you please repeat that?" Students then become interested in learning more about my hearing loss and I will explain to them that I was born deaf, and I first received a cochlear implant when I was two years old. I'll give a little debrief on how the cochlear implant works. I enjoy sharing information about cochlear implants because so many people have never heard of the technology and it's an opportunity to create awareness.

You may find yourself facing some adjustments when first arriving a new country because the accommodations may be different from what you have at home, but you will find yourself to be very adaptable and flexible because you have been situations where you have to do certain tasks differently.

No matter how many accommodations you, as a person with disabilities, may need, your disability should never stop you from pursuing your studies abroad. You should never underestimate your own abilities. When living abroad, you will realize that you can push yourself much further than you imagine.



# 5 SIGNS YOU'VE MADE IT ABROAD TRAVELING WITH A DISABILITY

by Sheila Xu

**Y**ou were a little nervous to embark on studying, interning, volunteering, or teaching abroad— and who wouldn't be? All travelers know the rumble of nervous butterflies before a big adventure. You weren't sure how you'd adjust to life abroad and if find the right accommodations. Your first few weeks were a little hit or miss, but now you're all dialed in to your host country and local community.

Here's how you know you've officially made it abroad as a traveler with a disability:

## 1. You Can Communicate in the Local Language

Whether you've been in-country for months or only a day, the ability to communicate with the local people is critical to your travel experience— regardless of the methods utilized.

You could be lucky enough that they speak English, the growing *lingua franca* of the world, or in your native language, but don't bet on it.

As a Deaf American woman living in Italy for almost two years off fellowships and grants, communicating with both hearing and deaf Italians was critical to surviving in the country day-to-day. Most of the hearing people I've met in Italy can range from speaking a few words of English to near fluency with a heavy Italian accent. So, I decided the best way to learn Italian is to do a combination of self-study, tutoring with a native Italian in one-on-one, quiet settings, and forcing myself to speak and write Italian if needed. After all, how are you going to get your espresso the way you like it?

## 2. You Have an Arsenal of Technological Tools Under Your Belt

Welcome to the 21st century, where it feels weird not to have your smartphone in hand and you basically only ever telephone your mom. Whether you're a tech-head or a luddite, technology is helping more travelers with disabilities to travel in comfort with independence and style.

As a deaf traveler, obviously, there are language barriers when communicating with local hearing people who don't sign or speak English. Since not everyone has the time or desire to learn your host-country's sign language or written language—especially for just a short weekend trip—you know to use “Google Translator” to your advantage.

You've taken advantage of the thousands of apps available in the palm of your hand. There's the app to notify you if your plane is late in case you can't hear the announcement for gate changes, to call for an accessible taxi for wheelchair users, and so on. You know exactly what apps you need, for what, and when. You're a totally tech-ed out, well-oiled traveling machine!

## 3. You are Your Own Best Trip Planner

Excellent sleuthing and fact-finding skills. Creative solution finding. Overcoming obstacles. What do they all have in common?

These are all the skills needed to become your own best trip planner. This is all especially very true for travelers with disabilities who need to arrange accommodations at each new destination— even at your fave tourist attractions. In my experience at the Colosseum in Rome, audio tours were available for hearing people. Obviously I can't use the audio guides, but by looking on the official website, I saw they offer both ASL/English and LIS/Italian video guides adapted for the deaf. Pro travelers know exactly where to look for this info to ensure they have the fullest experience!

Many tours usually are not adapted to travelers with disabilities, so the onus is on us to contact them and see what we “can work out” to join the tour. Maybe they can't provide interpreter, but they have transcripts or can write down what was going on. Or negotiate for lower rates if they can't provide everything. I know it can be tiring and time-consuming to plan out your own trip, especially if you are not “able-bodied.” However, I believe when we meet the “other” people, they get to see and know us. We are showing them we want to have the right to travel and enjoy trip just like anyone else, and that accommodating us shouldn't be too challenging or expensive for them. Maybe in the future, someone will think on that and put in actual accommodations for us without needing us to explain how to accommodate us.

## 4. You Know Your Rights

No two country is the same regarding the rights for people with disabilities, but you know that now. You know which rights are only reserved for residents in your host country and the way those policies and laws can be applied to you, as well. Not only do you know your rights, but you advocate for yourself! You know who to contact to make sure your needs are met, but—more importantly—you also know who to contact when your needs aren't being met.

## 5. You're a Travel Hacking Pro

You've mastered, not only the art of collecting reward or frequent flier points from credit cards and other means to travel for free, like redeeming points for award tickets or hotel stays, but also the art of finding unconventional methods to get what you want or need as a traveler with a disability.

You know exactly which museums offer discounts and have the right accommodations for your disability— and, if you don't know yet then you know exactly who to ask and how much to smile politely and/or bat your eyelashes.

# TOP STUDY ABROAD SCHOLARSHIPS AND RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

by The GoAbroad Writing Team

The decision to study abroad is daunting enough, now factor in being an underrepresented student and a student with a disability that might incur additional costs for accommodation. Yeah. Daunting might not be a strong enough word. Now factor in the cost of study abroad? No amount of cream will be able to save your cuticles.

Most students will cite finances as the biggest thing holding them back from taking the plunge and signing up for their dream study abroad program. Not only do students have program fees to deal with, possibly in addition to tuition at their home institution, but exchange rates on top of differences in cost of living; it's just a lot to undertake. And while there is a lot of funding to promote study abroad programs, there aren't so many geared toward students and travelers with disability.

Here are a few top scholarship geared toward students with disabilities. The programs listed below all have the common goal of promoting accessibility (financial and otherwise) and diversity in study abroad. So, now you just have to track due dates and apply!

## 1. CIEE Global Access Initiative Grants

This is another program-specific award. The GAIN Grant helps students who demonstrate financial need cover their airfare costs to and from their CIEE program. The award is anywhere from \$750 to \$2,000, depending on program location.

## 2. National Federation of the Blind Scholarship Program

The National Federation of the Blind honors blind scholars with one of 30 awards ranging from \$3,000 to \$12,000 annually. That's a big chunk of change that can help with your study abroad goals! Scholarships are awarded (as they usually are) based on academic excellence, community service, and leadership.

### 3. American Association on Health and Disability Frederick J. Krause Scholarship

The American Association on Health and Disability aims to contribute to national, state, and local efforts to promote health and wellness in people with disabilities. This award is in honor of Frederick J. Krause for his work in disability advocacy.

This scholarship is awarded annually to a student (undergraduate or graduate) pursuing a degree related to health and disability— public health, health promotion, disability studies, audiology, disability policy, or any major that will impact quality of life of persons with disabilities. To be eligible you must have a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and enrolled full time as an undergraduate student going on their second year of study. The number of scholarships awarded annually and the amount awarded depends on the discretion of the scholarship committee.

### 4. Mobility Disability Scholarship

The Karman Healthcare Scholarship Fund offers two \$500 scholarships per year specifically for students who have a mobility disability, excel academically, and who are interested in disability advocacy. This scholarship is awarded annually, so always double check the due date to make sure you haven't missed the window! You'll also need to write a killer essay and update your headshot.

These are just a fair few of the many scholarships available for students with disabilities to help fund their program abroad. Dig deep into the dusty corners of the internet and you're sure to find plenty to fill your scholarship applications tracking spreadsheet. (#NerdAlert)

### BONUS: Try Fundraising

Sometimes scholarships don't cover everything. That's where fundraising comes in. Sure, you can have a bake sale, but these days crowdfunding online is the way to go. That way one bad Yelp review won't foil your plans to go abroad! Create a campaign on FundMyTravel, a platform specifically for meaningful travelers, and start hitting the social media pavement! Now instead of socks for Christmas or a giftcard for your birthday, family and friends can help fund your study abroad program.

With one round of scholarship research out of the way, all that's left is for you to apply and start stamping that passport! You want to make sure you're making them an offer they can't refuse, so follow these guidelines to put your best foot forward and send in a seriously kick-a\$\$ application and cinch that scholarship.

With any of these scholarships in your back pocket, your dream of studying abroad will become a reality. You'll have every opportunity to go out and explore this big beautiful world and pursue your education and passion abroad.

# BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE...

Here are a few additional resources to check out:

[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)

[Mobility International](#)

[Tips for Travelers with Disabilities from Rick Steves](#)

[Disaster Safety for People with Disabilities](#)

[Wheelchairtravel.org](#)

[The Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality](#)

[Financial Aid for College Students with Disabilities](#)

[Grad School Scholarships for Students with Disabilities](#)

*Thanks to the [Center for School, College & Career Resources](#) for their help with this piece and sharing resources with our GoAbroad community.*



## KEEP EXPLORING

More tips from seasoned travel pros:

[Top 5 Tips for Students with Physical Disabilities Studying Abroad](#)

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