

Planning your Holiday or Break – Doing your Research

RV

Hello, I'm Ray Veal and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of Tourism for All

AC

Hello, I'm Ana Crome and I'm the Administration Manager for Tourism for All

RV

Ana, you have a lot of experience in researching and planning accessible holidays and breaks?

AC

Quite a lot

I use a powered wheelchair and I'm used to researching holidays and breaks that both let me do the things I like to do and are accessible to me

And while I've been with Tourism for All I've researched holidays and breaks for other people with all sorts of access needs

RV

And in these programmes you are sharing some of the things you've learned and the tips you've picked up as you have helped people with access needs to plan holidays and breaks

AC

Yes

In our first programme we talked about being confident to plan your holiday or break and what you should make sure you know before you start planning

RV

And what was the most important piece of advice you gave in our first programme to anyone with access needs who wants to take a holiday or break?

AC

The most important single piece of advice I gave is to remember that you are planning the holiday or break that you want, not just the one that you think you can have

RV

So, in our first programme we talked about being confident to plan your holiday or break and what you should make sure you know before you start planning

You shared your 7 Steps for preparing to research and plan the holiday or break that is right for you

What are we going to cover in this programme?

AC

In this programme we're going to talk about the actual process of researching and planning your holiday or break

Here are my 8 Steps for doing your research and planning the holiday or break that is right for you

Step 1 – Do a final review of your checklist

In the first programme we talked about the things to think about – what you want from your holiday or break, your budget and the access needs that have to be met – and about making a note of all this in a checklist so that you have all the important information to hand when you begin your research

RV

We suggested that you download our Holiday Planning Checklist through the Resources link on the 'Advice to Travellers' page on our website and use this to record all the things you want to consider in your holiday and break planning

AC

So, the first step is to review this checklist and make sure that you have all the information that you need about the holiday or break that you want to plan

RV

And what's Step 2?

AC

Step 2 – Look at specialist websites and organisations

RV

So this is where to start your research and planning

But Ana, why do you advise starting with specialist websites and organisations and not just going straight to a general search engine like Google?

AC

Google certainly has its place – and we will talk more about it shortly – but the thing to remember is that impairment and accessibility mean something different to every individual

The sort of generic, unstructured results that Google will return will not always tell you what you want or need to know

For example, I use a powered wheelchair, which is large and heavy, and I cannot gain access to all the places that a person using a smaller, lighter manual chair can get to. So a business that is just described as 'wheelchair accessible' or 'wheelchair friendly' may well not be accessible for me

Most people with access requirements need to know a bit more

RV

So where can you find that more detailed, specific information?

AC

A good place to start is by looking at Tourism for All's Travel Planner

The address is on the 'Advice to Travellers' page on our website

The Travel Planner lets you search for accommodation, things to do and places to eat, according to the area you want to visit and your access requirements

Then there's AccessAble

They carry out accessibility assessments of businesses across the country and give them formal ratings of different aspects of their accessibility

AccessAble's website allows you to search for accessible tourism and hospitality businesses according to the area you want to visit and your access requirements

The address is on the Resources link on the 'Advice to Travellers' page on our website

Another source of detailed accessibility information is the National Accessible Scheme (also known as NAS), which is operated by VisitEngland

Accommodation providers who are members of NAS are assessed and given formal ratings of different aspects of their accessibility

A list of NAS members is available on VisitEngland's website

RV

How about specialist charities?

AC

A number of specialist charities, which represent specific impairments or conditions, feature holiday and break information on their websites

So if your impairment or condition is represented by a specialist charity check their website

It may give you some helpful information

RV

And what about specialist travel organisers?

AC

There are a number of organisations that organise holidays and breaks for tourists and travellers with access needs

Their websites generally allow you to search for accessible accommodation according to the area you want to visit and your access requirements

RV

So specialist websites and organisations are the place to start

What's Step 3?

AC

Step 3 – Use a search engine like Google to do wider searches

If you still want further information or ideas, use a search engine like Google to search for accommodation, things to do and places to eat

Think about how you structure your searches to get the best results from a search engine like Google

You should base your searches on the things from your checklist that you identified as being the most important to you but make them as general as possible, to produce the broadest range of results

Let's use the example of someone wanting to stay in self-catering accommodation in Blackpool

If none of the aspects of the stay are flexible – it must be self-catering in Blackpool in July – then the search terms might be 'accessible self-catering Blackpool July'

If the type of accommodation is flexible – it doesn't have to be self-catering – then the search terms might be 'accessible accommodation Blackpool July'

If the destination is flexible – it doesn't have to be Blackpool, but just the seaside – then the search terms might be 'accessible self-catering seaside July'

If the date is flexible – it doesn't have to be July - then the search terms might be 'accessible self-catering Blackpool'

And so on

RV

And what should you do when you get the search results?

AC

Well the first thing to remember is that businesses can pay to appear high up in the results that are returned for searches

That means that the first few results to appear for any search may be for paying businesses and may not be the closest match to your search terms

So look carefully at the results

For search results which appear to match your search terms, always click through to the business's website, to see if the business looks interesting and attractive

If it doesn't then move on

If it does then look to see if the business has an Accessibility Guide

Hopefully this should be somewhere on the homepage - businesses often put a link to their Accessibility Guide in the footer section – but there is no standard place for the Accessibility Guide to be located so you may need to search for it

The business's Accessibility Guide – if it has one – will give you a lot of information about the accessibility of the business and can help you quickly to get an idea of whether the business will meet your access needs

RV

So a search engine like Google can help you find accommodation, things to do and places to eat

What's Step 4?

AC

Step 4 – Look at non-specialist directory websites

RV

Do commercial search and booking sites show accessibility information?

AC

Yes, some of them do

Airbnb has improved recently and now has an accessibility feature so you can choose what type of access you need

Booking.com has also improved in the last few years and it is now easier to search for accessible accommodation

I also noticed recently a picture of the accessible room in one of the properties - this is a new feature and hopefully we will see more pictures of accessible facilities

RV

Now, Destination Management Organisations (also known as DMOs) are local or regional organisations, often run by the council, which promote specific areas and places (or 'destinations' as they are called) to tourists

What about them as a source of information?

AC

Well, some DMOs do feature accessibility information on their consumer websites, so it is worth looking at the DMO website for the destination you are thinking of visiting

These consumer websites are often named 'Visit' plus the destination name, so that is worth trying

Or do a Google search for 'Destination Management Organisation' plus the destination name

RV

So you've searched for where you want to go, where you want to stay, what you want to do and where you might want to eat

What's Step 5?

AC

Step 5 – Research your travel

For people travelling in the UK the most common forms of transport, apart from car, are likely to be taxi and train

RV

How do you go about organising taxis?

AC

Just do a Google search using the search term 'accessible taxi' and the destination

Some vehicles may take foldable chairs or scooters but not take a powered chair like mine where the user stays in the chair and doesn't transfer

I have been caught out like this and I really recommend that you contact the taxi firm to check directly that they have vehicles that will be accessible for you

RV

And what about trains?

AC

You can find train schedules for the whole country on the trainline.com website

This site does not include much information on accessibility, so if you have access needs I recommend using 'Passenger Assist'

As a wheelchair user myself I always use this service and it is really helpful

The telephone number for this service is available on the trainline.com website

Remember it is really important to let the train company know if you have access needs, so that they can help you

For example, if a wheelchair user's train journey requires a change of train at a station that isn't always manned, the train company will make sure a staff member is on hand to fit the ramp to help the passenger get off the first train and to get on the next one

RV

And is 'Passenger Assist' just for wheelchair users?

AC

No, it is for anyone who has access needs, like people with prams or who are carrying heavy bags

A staff member will stay with the person and make sure they are settled.

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So you've researched your travel

What's Step 6?

AC

Step 6 – Contact individual businesses to confirm their suitability

From the research you've done you have built a shortlist of accommodation, things to do and places to eat that might be suitable for your holiday or break

Now you need to contact the individual businesses directly, to check what specific accessibility they have and whether it will be right for you

We've talked about Accessibility Guides, and these can help to give an idea of whether a business is suitable for you

But websites will still often simply say things like 'accessible features' or 'wheelchair accessible', and not specify what the accessible features are

It really is important to contact the business and check, to avoid disappointment

Contact can be made either by telephone or email

RV

So you've contacted the individual businesses on your shortlist

What's Step 7?

AC

Step 7 – Research your travel insurance

What type and level of travel insurance do you require, to ensure that you are covered for any issues or problems that may arise during your holiday or break? Do you have a pre-existing condition that needs to be taken into account?

There are a number of specialist insurance providers, who can cater for your needs, including any pre-existing conditions.

Look in our directory under 'Products and services for individuals' to find some organisations who may be able to help

RV

So you've researched your travel insurance

What's the final Step 8?

AC

Step 8 – Write everything down in a Travel Plan

I recommend that you create a Travel Plan that includes your general itinerary and details of your accommodation and travel and any specific attractions, events or places to eat that you plan to visit

It should act as a checklist for booking all the different elements of your holiday and then be the reference document that you take with you, with all the details of your bookings and itinerary

RV

And to help you to note down the details of your holiday, you can download our Travel Plan template through the Resources link on the 'Advice to Travellers' page on our website

AC

Yes

It will act as a checklist for booking the different elements of your holiday and let you record all the details of the holiday you are planning

And it includes space to note down all your booking references, dates and prices

RV

So those are Ana's 8 Steps for doing your research and planning the holiday or break that is right for you.

AC

Yes, these are the steps that I follow when I am researching and planning an accessible holiday or break, whether that's for me, with my access needs, or for someone else

They work for me and I hope they will work for you

RV

Don't forget that you can download our Travel Plan template through the Resources link on the 'Advice to Travellers' page on our website, to help you record all the details of your holiday and to be the reference document that you take with you

AC

Thank you for listening

RV

Thank you for listening