

Special Needs Oxygen Story

This is a story presented by one of my agents who recently had an issue to help one of her clients. Important to take note because it is doable, of course, but using a travel consultant will eliminate some stress – but also to understand what issues are out there to satisfy the various airlines.

Hi Gwen (from Jeanne Felix Senior Consultant for Cordially Yours Travel)

My Client was booked on a Collette Vacation to New Zealand and Australia. The air was booked through the tour company. As we had to fill out different forms regarding any special needs (handicapped information).

The problem with the tour company doing the ticketing of the flights..... they don't actually issue the airline tickets until 30 days prior to departure. The reason that Collette said this is that their insurance policies will not allow them to cover tickets issued over 30 days before departure of the client's tour.

With this said it is a real hassle to try to get all the necessary approvals necessary when you have 5 different airlines involved.

My client had a portable Oxygen unit that was approved to air travel by the FAA. That doesn't make it authorized by the different airlines. Some of the airlines just wanted you to download their forms and send it back to them with the name of the unit (some want the model number). The client must have their Doctor sign all the different forms from the airline and fax them or email to the different airlines directly

United airlines was the easiest to work with and Air Zealand the hardest. Air New Zealand has an Aviation Doctor that to be involved to and I had to actually work with the Doctor and meet the client at her Dr.'s office to make sure that they had the right test taken to satisfy the required tests.

You cannot just show up for a flight without having the prior approval for the Oxygen Concentrator. You will be denied boarding.

I have never ever worked so hard on getting a client clearance in all of my 36 years as an agent. If I hadn't been involved I do believe that the clients might have just given up and cancelled their trip with their cancel for any reason insurance. I don't know how airlines can deny a unit that is approved by FAA for domestic and international flights.

Always be sure to check and double check that the clients received the emails that your clients have been approved with. They must travel with the approvals on all flights with the correct letters. I don't want to have to have a hassle for every senior client's that is on oxygen.

The biggest thing that you have to know is the you is the lung capacity, the output and other things that the client deals with when travelling. The client has to have 1 1/2 times the battery life for the entire trip. Going to New Zealand required the client to go out and purchase an additional battery. These batteries run about 500.00

Delta Airlines deals with Oxygen Approval through a company called OXYGEN TO GO. They do not get the approvals for the other airlines. I even found out that they said they get all the approval, but with there is a co share airline.. you have to get the international record locator and deal with each individual airline's separately. It took almost 3 weeks to receive all the approvals and that was cutting it close for my client and myself.

Story ended up with a positive and hassle free trip. Everything went as planned so in the end..... I was happy that I worked so hard on behalf of the client to make sure this trip was hassle free. When you have medical issues.... the last thing that you want to have happen is to have a client be denied boarding because they don't have the prior to departure approval.

Special Needs

Links for special needs group Special Needs at Sea specialneedsatsea.com/

Also on my website gocytravel.com The link has a lot of info about **does and don'ts** for the travel as well.

FYI The traveler and their companions need to think about a lot things prior to renting or requesting to rent equipment etc. for a trip they are planning.

- 1) Think about the modes of transportation: ie. air, transfers, getting around at the destination whether it is a resort or a cruise, maybe ferry boats, tour buses and the like.
- 2) Make a list of specific requirements you have, **type of equipment** you depend on at home or shopping etc.
- 3) What about auditory and visual aids: Do you need additional hearing devices or braille ordered for menus etc.). Also help with taxis, [some riverboats for ex. no elevator]
- 4) Your size ie. **weight and height** has to be considered when ordering equipment for scooters, electric chairs.
- 5) What about the policy and procedure for equipment and transport at the destination be it a resort or a cruise ship or both? Storage of the equipment? Is oxygen allowed? Are the Batteries for the particular equipment allowed.
- 6) Check with the airlines ESPECIALLY THOSE THAT HAVE CODE-SHARE ARRANGEMENTS. Each leg of the trip could be on a different airline and this can cause problems if not pre-planned. Forms to be filled out, Drs. involvement.

EXAMPLE of Jeanne's client STORY

- 7) Equipment at location that might make your trip more fun and experiential i.e. Joy Chair for the beach or a swing-lift for a hot tub or pool. Is there availability?

Special Needs at Sea does have concierge service to assist in issues like - One-way trips with equipment? arranging for delivery at a resort etc. Working with a travel consultant will help tremendously in checking and making reservations at locations or ships that are well suited for a travelers specific needs.

Next, you need to be aware of the needs at location - Resort or Cruise

- 1). Are there accessible rooms or cabins. ADA is an American 'thing' but many of the cruise ships have accommodations for handicapped. Still, you do need to check to see that the door accesses are wide enough for your heavy- duty scooter for example, or the shower is a roll in shower, etc. Maybe, for the sight impaired, braille room numbers and menus printed in braille might be available.
- 2) Special needs could also include planning for a refrigerator in a room or cabin for insulin, baby formula etc. Many have them but sometimes it is necessary to inquire and plan for them. Also, the importance of assistance to get into and out of the tub or toilet, some entities will require that a traveling companion travel with the passenger.

Oxygen and mobility are the most frequent requests though hearing impaired and visual impairments can be accommodated also. Something to be aware of - **NEVER put oxygen or batteries in your luggage!**

Suggestions:

PLAN AHEAD at least 48 hours to order the equipment, but much more time to arrange your air travel and stay whether it be resort or cruise. Knowing what is or isn't available will certainly help in making choices for your vacation.

Since my company has been helping those with special needs you become very aware, when we are on ships or at resorts, hotels or even destination, what is or isn't available for our future clients. Many destinations do offer rental opportunities at location for deliver - i.e. Cancun area...and areas that Special Needs might not be able to service.

Bottom line - Don't think you have to leave grandma or grandpa home, or a visually or hearing impaired family member or friend at home. The travel industry, resorts and riverboats and ocean liners are more and more making accommodations to help those unfortunately encumbered with a disability, and also seniors who desire to travel...there are entities working to help make it happen.

Additional Resources:

Rick Steves <https://www.ricksteves.com/travel-tips/trip-planning/travelers-with-disabilitie>

Disability resources: www.disabilitytravel.com/