

Strategies and Resources: **Travel (part 3)**

So, you've decided you want to go on holiday/travel! Fantastic! The Leeds Autism AIM team have created this helpful guide to support you plan your holiday, with accommodations in mind that will make your holiday more enjoyable and less stressful.

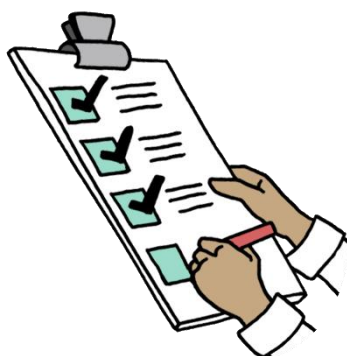
Our guide has been broken up into smaller parts to make it easier to read and find the resources you are looking for.

Part 3 will cover travel tips to help you feel prepared before you go, as well as a list of useful things to pack, and tips and tricks for having a safe and fun holiday as an Autistic person. This guide was produced by experienced Autistic travellers.

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Being prepared



Being prepared before you go will save a lot of stress.

- Check-in and seat allocation - If you booked your flight online, you will be able to check-in online before you get to the airport. Depending on the type of package you bought, you may be able to check-in weeks before you fly if you have purchased a seat.

If you haven't purchased a ticket, you can usually check in 24 hours before your flight. Some airlines will randomly allocate you a seat on the flight. This means that you and your travel partner maybe sat separately. To avoid this, you can book your seats together for a fee. Check with your airline when booking about check-in and seat allocation.

For train, ferry and coach tickets, online ordering may be the best option. In the summer of 2023, it is likely that most train stations will close their ticket offices. Some coach operators such as National Express send you a ticket by email as a PDF with a scannable QR code.

- Travel documents – do you have your passport, holiday insurance, all your flight details, travel tickets etc. Keeping these in a safe place so you can find them easily on the day you travel.
 - Passport – Check your passport is in date. You will need at least 6 months left on your passport to travel, if your passport has less than 6 months left, you will have to renew. If you need to renew it, apply at least 6 months before your holiday.
 - Travel Insurance – Always make sure that you have travel insurance that meets your requirements. You can search for insurance through comparison websites. The most important thing to insure if your health and medical, so look for the best coverage.
- **Phone Contract** – Due to the UK leaving the EU, this means using your phone abroad maybe more expensive. It is worth checking with your phone

contract on what these charges maybe (if any). You might be able to buy a package which allows you to use your phone abroad.

Your phone will most likely charge you for using calls, texts and internet while outside of the UK. Using your phone abroad has benefits like being able to use Google Maps and for googling opening times of places you may visit.

If your phone contract has a £0 spending cap, your phone may not work abroad, so it's best to contact your phone company to ask them to add more to your spending cap so you can still use your phone.

- **Emergency services** – In case of emergency it is good to have emergency contact details of police, ambulance, emergency doctors. This probably won't be needed but good to have on hand in case.
- **Your travel partner's contact details** – Write down your travel partner's phone number in case you need to call them and don't have your phone to hand. It is also handy to have the contact details of family members and any next of kin.
- **Useful apps** – If you will be using your phone, it is good to download apps which can help you along your way, such as Google Maps, Google, 'Where is Public Toilet' or a language translate app.

The 'where is public toilet' shows you on a map where is the closest public toilet. The map isn't 100% correct as the location may not be exact or the toilet may be closed, but this will be a useful app for helping you find a toilet. It's ok to ask cafes/restaurants to use their toilet. Most times, they will be ok with a non-customer using their bathroom.

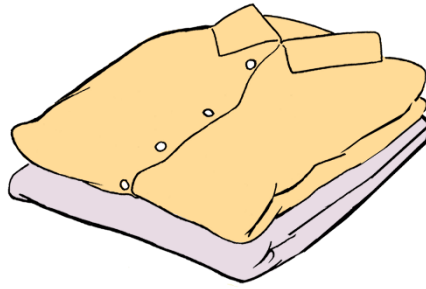
Translate apps are great as you can download the language of the place you are going and it can translate images, so a food menu or a ticket station – you can scan over the text with your camera and it will translate into English. This can be a great feature when you don't know the language.

- **Disney/Theme parks** – If your holiday includes a theme park, it is good to check out their website, download theme park maps and where the toilets are, as well as what support they may be able to put in place for you (such as giving you a time to come back for the ride, so you don't have to queue or quiet areas etc).

Look at what documentation you may need to receive the support. Make use of any 'fast pass' tickets which will help with avoiding queues. Sometimes theme parks will give you a free ticket to take a support work but it's best to check with the theme park about this.

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad>: Check out the GOV.UK website for more information on travelling abroad.

Packing



Packing for a holiday is an art form; you need to pack enough of the right things for where you are going, but not make it too heavy. It's important to pack only what you need. If you are travelling by yourself or looking after your own luggage, you should pack light enough for you to be able to travel with your case.

Check with the airline, coach, ferry or train provider about weight limits – some airlines and coach operators have limits in place.

It can be hard to know what to pack, so we have created a packing list and some tips to help you do this.

Here's a few questions you need to ask yourself as you are packing:

Where and when are you going? The place you are going to, and the season will greatly change what you need to pack. What's the temperature like where you are going? Is it going to rain or be sunny?

How long are you going for? You will need to bring enough clothing (including enough fresh underwear) for the holiday.

Are there any restrictions? There are three different areas this breaks down into.

- When flying, there will be a weight limit. This varies between the airlines; you will need to check their limits. Some coach operators will also have weight limits on luggage.
- The size of your luggage could be restricted. Both Eurostar and Airlines have a maximum size of suitcases they will allow. Again, check this out.
- Airlines and Eurostar will allow a maximum number of suitcases you can take, this will vary on which ticket you've purchased.

You can buy special bag scales which will help you know if your luggage is overweight. If you get to the airport and your bag is overweight, your airline will charge you a fee, check with the airline about these costs.

If you are travelling on a plane, there is a maximum weight limit on your case. Before you book your baggage, you will have to select which type of bag you are taking,

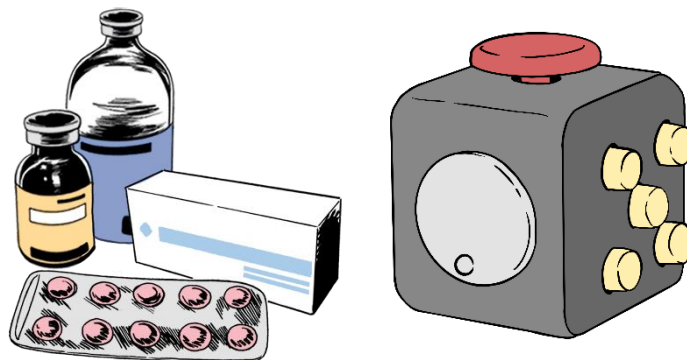
please note that for a cabin bag and hold bag you will be charged extra – check with the airline before you purchase. Some coach and train operators may have limits in place too – National Express, for example.

- Backpack/small bag – this is a small bag that can fit under the chair in front of you on the plane.
- Cabin bag – this is a smaller case which will go in the storage above your seat on the plane.
- Hold bag – this is a large suitcase which will go under the plane in the hold storage. You won't be able to access your bag until you collect it at your arrival airport.

Typically, you would have one case and one backpack, so you can put your travel documents and anything you have brought for the journey into your backpack.

It might be helpful to have strategies to avoid forgetting and losing luggage. For example, you could have a light rucksack you usually carry around.

Things to consider bringing that might help an autistic person:



- Walking stick
- Stool
- Alert card
- Comfort items
- Stim/fidget toys
- Sunglasses / reading glasses
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Earplug, noise-reducing
- Medication – headache, anti-sickness, painkillers, prescribed medication.

- Snacks/drinks
- Hat (woolly or cap)
- Sleeping eye mask
- Fun/distractions – music, notebooks, games, books, magazines, puzzles, camera, films,
- Travel communication t-shirt
- Travel water bottle
- Travel bag/bum bag/small bag
- Tissues

In our Printable Travel Help document, there is an extensive packing list. Use this to help you pack before you go

What NOT to pack

When travelling, there are items you should not pack or try to bring back into the UK. Carrying any of these items can result in you being refused travel, you might have to throw it away, or you might be interviewed by local law enforcement.

Here are the guidance pages for flying and for the Eurostar.

- For flying: [UK Civil Aviation Authority](#).
- For taking the Eurostar: [Prohibited Items](#).

If you are flying, there is a list of items that you should not pack:

- Chemicals and toxic substances
- Any item which could be used to cause harm or be used as a weapon (large scissors, firearms, replicas, ammunition, workman tools or sporting items)
- Fireworks, flares and other pyrotechnics including party poppers.
- Food and drink items that could leak e.g. bottles of alcohol, jams, sauce jars

You may take small amounts of liquids into your hand luggage:

- Containers must hold no more than 100ml
- Containers should be in a single, transparent, resealable plastic bag, which holds no more than a litre and measures around 20cm by 20cm
- Contents must fit comfortably inside the bag so it can be sealed

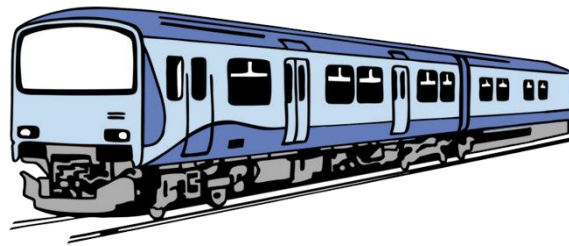
- You can take liquid containers larger than 100ml through security if they are for essential medical purposes, for special dietary requirements, or contain baby food or baby milk.
- You can only carry one lighter on board. You should put it inside a resealable plastic bag (like the ones used for liquids), which you must keep on you throughout the flight.

Pushchairs, walking aids and wheelchairs are usually allowed in the cabin of planes and on trains. However, on planes, they will need to be security screened first.

For battery-powered wheelchairs or mobility aids, check with your airline first.

Please check with your airline, ferry, coach or train provider if you are unsure.

Travelling



Travelling can be stressful, but we hope these tips will help your journey feel more comfortable:

Getting comfortable


Travelling can involve lots of sitting around waiting, sitting in close spaces to other people and it can be hard to regulate your body temperature. Some planes are hot, some are cold. Dressing comfortably for the journey with layers which you can take off or put back on.

Getting to the airport/station and back

It is worth thinking about how you will travel to and from the airport/station and factoring in this time and cost. Will you be getting a lift, taxi or bus? How much will this cost and how long will it take to get there? If you are getting a lift, is the person tracking your train/flight so they can get you on time?

Airport/station support

Each airport, train station and bus station are different. There will be a help desk at each place which you can go to, to ask for help and advice. They should also have a disability desk where you can ask for support such as someone who can wheel your



chair around the airport/station or even disability/special needs queues to get you through quicker and with ease.

Also, each airport/station most likely will have a quiet space to sit in while you wait. It is best to check online beforehand how they can accommodate you.

Manchester Airport is excellent for disabled travellers. You should queue in their disability assistance queue and they will give you a sunflower lanyard.

With your lanyard, you will be able to use the disabled queues around the airport such as bag drop, security, and plane/train boarding. These queues are a lot shorter than the normal queues; this should help with travel stress.

Travel times

Each different country has its own way of working. For example, getting a train in the UK will give you the exact time the train will arrive and depart so you know when to be at the station.

Some apps, including Google Maps and Moovit, display live travel times for planes, trains and buses in different countries.

In Spain, trains run a little differently as they do not have 'set' time that they will arrive or depart. For countries where you are unsure, it's always best to check their travel websites but also to arrive early and in good time in case your train comes early.

Coach travel

If holidaying in the UK, coach tour holidays can often be cheap. If booking a coach ticket, you are guaranteed a seat, plus coaches are often less crowded than trains. Increasingly, some operators have wheelchair access and cover longer routes than some train services.

Train travel

Trains can sometimes be overcrowded. If you plan your train journey in advance, some ticket sellers can tell you when the quietest times are to travel. If you experience claustrophobia or have mobility issues, it is possible to prebook priority seating on trains – typically, the seats nearest to the doors that have extra legroom.

Some operators have quiet coaches, where passengers are discouraged from making noise. It is worth checking whether or not they are available before booking. Train services often stop at different platforms throughout the day.

Once finding out which platform the train you are getting is stopping at, it is worth looking at the departure board in case it changes to a different platform – this happens in the UK.

On holiday



So you are all booked, ready to jet off on your holiday!

Communication

Communicate in advance with your travel partner on things that it is important. Are they going to be able to support you on your holiday. Talk to them about potential scenarios that could come up and how you will both manage them.

For when something doesn't go to plan, it's good to have a backup plan. What would relax you if the plan was to change, maybe going for a walk or playing a card game. If the weather isn't great, what will you do instead? Having a few backup ideas means you will have something to do, even when the first plan didn't turn out.

Feeling safe with your travel partner and being comfortable with each other will make your holiday more easy-going.

Don't feel guilty if you can't always do what you set out to do. If you and your travel partner are comfortable with each other, it should be ok to speak up for yourself and make your holiday a more enjoyable experience. It's ok to have off days and quiet days, not every day has to be activity-packed!

Staying calm

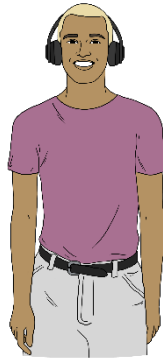
Going away can be overwhelming in a place you aren't familiar with.

Plan for time on your holiday in less populated areas, maybe look for walking routes or places to go which will be quieter.

Take accommodation with yourself, take it easy. There is no set way to enjoy your holiday, do things your own way and give yourself time to adjust.

Sometimes, breathing exercises can help to calm you down in a stressful situation, as well as creating your own travel affirmations which you can repeat to yourself such as "our holiday, our way", "I am in control and have all the resources I need to travel safely, freely and joyfully".

Sensory



Take into consideration your sensory environment while you are away. Bring things that will help you regulate yourself such as fidget toys, headphones, sunglasses etc.

Communicate with your travel partner about what types of sensory spaces will be too overwhelming, such as restaurants that are loud, smelly or bright. Make sure they know what places you will be avoiding.

If you are unable to say that something is overwhelming, maybe making a code with your travel partner so they know you need help or want to go somewhere else. Take the opportunity to sit in the shade when possible if the light is too much.

Routine and getting familiar

When you go on holiday, you won't always have the same routine as at home. Your travel partner may have a different routine to you. It's good to talk together about what routine you will create together while you are on holiday. Are you someone who needs longer in the morning?

Think about what time you'd like to be leaving your accommodation each morning. Whether you will have relaxed morning and go out when you're ready or will you be an early riser and want to get out, talk to your partner about how you will work together to get a good routine for your holiday.

You might be in a place that you aren't familiar with, but a way to work around this is by doing a bit of research about the place you are going. Look at Google Street Maps to be more familiar. Spend the first few days of your holiday adjusting getting familiar with the area.

Pocket maps can also help you to work out where the places you want to visit are. Some tourist information offices provide these maps for free. In the UK, they sometimes sell cheap walking maps called Yellow Maps, which are waterproof and difficult to tear.

Tourist information offices will also have information on local events and places of interest you might not know about before travelling.

Eating/food



If you have restricted eating, it can be difficult to find somewhere to eat or even choosing what to eat, we know this can be overwhelming.

A helpful tip is to create a plan with your travel partner which will make eating easier.

It's ok to eat at different places to your travel partner, so if you can't find something you can eat at one place, somewhere else will be able to accommodate. Speak with your company on how they feel. Have a drink while they eat, and they can do the same for you.

Make a veto/big no list for restaurants that don't have good sensory environments such as lighting, smells and overcrowding.

Sometimes, restaurants and big meals can be overwhelming. It is ok to eat small and often and getting snacks throughout the day or cooking for yourself. Bringing a bottle of water around with you so you can be refreshed on the go without needing to stop at a restaurant is okay too.

- How are you with food?
- How are you with flavours?
- Do you prefer to eat the same things?

In many countries, you will find western food such as pizza and salad.

The locals have their own cuisine; by definition, this is different. If you feel you can cope with different food, by all means try it. This can add a whole new set of experiences to your holiday.

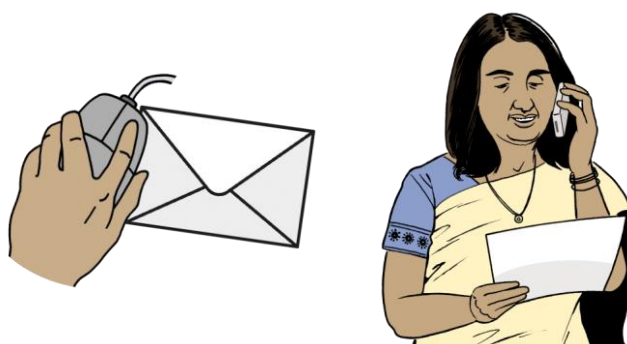
Taking time out

No matter where you go, your surroundings can become unexpectedly overwhelming. Be aware of potential quiet places to take refuge. Art galleries and museums can sometimes be quiet, but might charge an entry fee. Parks, libraries and places of worship are more likely to be quieter and free.

Contact Us

This is part three of our Travel Guide. Please refer to our website guides for other parts of the travel series.

This guide was co-produced by **Leeds Autism AIM** and Jonathan Byfield a volunteer at AIM, as part of The Advonet Group. We are a free service co-led by and run for autistic adults (aged 18+) in the Leeds area.



- Email us at leedsautismaim@advonet.org.uk
- Call The Advonet Group's office on **0113 244 0606** and ask for someone from our team
- Follow us on Facebook at [@leedsautismaim](https://www.facebook.com/leedsautismaim)
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