



# Traveling with Dementia: Planning Tips for a Successful Trip

Planning a trip is stressful under the best of circumstances, but it's particularly daunting when traveling with someone with dementia. As anyone who has a window into the life of a dementia patient knows, routine is everything in supporting cognitive function, safety, and security. So, how do you plan a trip that sets your loved one up for success and creates some valuable family memories?

Whether it's a simple getaway to visit friends or that bucket list trip you promised each other you'd take together, these experiences are still possible with the right approach — and expert advice. Jan Dougherty, a dementia care expert and founder of [Trav-ALZ.com](http://Trav-ALZ.com), provides some key insights on planning a successful getaway.

## 1. Communicate Early and Often

When traveling to visit or with family and friends, be sure to brief them ahead of time about your loved one's condition. Go over routines that work best (and why) and find out how they can help you maintain them. Be specific about what help you need — the goal is to make the trip easier, and that begins with getting the right support from those around you.

As you let family or friends know what may have changed since the last time you got together, don't forget to highlight the things your loved one *can* do. As caregivers, it's easy to get caught up in the ground lost, but remembering and communicating all that your loved one is still capable of is vital to an enjoyable trip.

## 2. Set Realistic Expectations

Take some time to assess the expectations you, your loved one, and others may have:

**Consider your loved one's perspective:** Make sure they actually want to go on this trip and have the ability to handle the demands and logistics of travel. Be honest about whether their symptoms are difficult to manage, even in their home environment.

**Evaluate your readiness as a caregiver:** Reflect on whether you feel comfortable managing travel for your loved one, can adapt to changes as needed, and are ready to accept help when offered.

**Prepare your family and friends:** Ensure they have a true understanding of your loved one's condition and don't expect things to be exactly as they were before this stage of memory loss. Address any tendency they might have to correct your loved one.

Get everyone on the same page as you plan your trip, making it clear that certain modifications will be necessary for a successful experience.

### 3. Plan with Practical Modifications

Dementia inevitably changes travel, but simple modifications in the planning process can help build a memorable experience. When booking a cruise, select a smaller ship with fewer passengers and less room to roam. For group tours, assess activity levels and choose options that don't require frequent hotel changes. When flying, look for minimal connections or build in ample time between flights.

Consider your destination's accessibility, trip length, and emergency planning as you finalize your arrangements. The key is ensuring your loved one's specific needs can be accommodated throughout your journey.

### 4. Take Advantage of Travel Accommodations

Using available travel accommodations will make an enormous difference in your travel experience with your loved one.

**When traveling by plane**, alert the airline and submit a request for assistance through [TSA Cares](#) ahead of time. You don't have to disclose specifics — it's enough to simply say that you're traveling with someone who has a hidden disability and requires assistance.

TSA and the airline can provide you with vital support and reduce travel anxieties by:

- Helping your loved one through security and screening
- Accommodating mobility limitations when moving through the airport
- Understanding your loved one's communication limitations
- Guaranteeing you're seated together on flights

**When booking a hotel**, look for accessibility features, like doors wide enough to fit a wheelchair, showers without a step, beds that aren't too high, and rooms located away from elevators or loud areas. Avoid booking suites unless you bring a door alarm — remember, you'll likely be exhausted from travel, and the sound of the door opening may not be enough to rouse you.

If your loved one is prone to wandering, consider using a tracker like an AirTag, notes to direct them (or someone trying to assist them) back to you, a sign on your door they can easily recognize, and identification such as [Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard](#), which signifies your loved one needs extra assistance.

### 5. Maintain Routines While Staying Flexible

People with dementia thrive on routines, so build in as much of your loved one's daily cadence as you can. Take note of the time of day when they are most engaged and plan activities in that window. Similarly, add a few rest times into your trip schedule to give both you and your loved one time to recuperate before or after key events.

For a road trip, plan frequent stops, limit your time in the car to about six hours per day at most, and consider bringing a companion driver to split the driving duties. Keep a routine with quiet

evenings to recharge, and consider the possibility of an RV trip, which provides a familiar, consistent space for your loved one during your travels.

Allow your loved one's needs and comfort level to direct your plans. If you need to deviate from your itinerary, that's okay. You can order room service instead of going out to eat, choose a quiet day in the hotel, or even cut your trip short if it's getting to be too much.

## **6. Enjoy Your Time Away**

It's the nature of a caregiver to constantly think three steps ahead but try to give yourself permission to simply enjoy the moments as they come while on vacation. Take photos, keep a journal, engage in the joy of discovering a new place with your loved one, and build memories that you'll enjoy reflecting on later. Consider picking up small mementos that your loved one can engage with when you return home to help you talk about your experiences together.

While difficult, traveling with a loved one with dementia isn't impossible — it just takes a little more planning and consideration. By keeping expectations in check, relying on upfront communication, making sensible accommodations, and building in comfort through routine, you and your loved one can still take the trips, create the memories, and live in the moment.

For more information and resources, be sure to visit Jan at [travel-alz.com](http://travel-alz.com).

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