

Traveling Well with MS



Lakebay Marina in Lakebay, WA

My husband Darren and I are back in the U.S. in western Washington state after spending a year traveling around Europe. Traveling with MS isn't always easy. However, it is totally worth it and I'm glad I had the opportunity for extended travel. After spending a year on the road, here's my advice about how to travel well with MS.

- Pack light. Really light. You'll be glad you did. If you have issues with your legs and don't do well with carrying a pack, get a small bag with wheels – a suitcase or backpack. As you're preparing what you want to take with you, put all your stuff in one place. Pack your bag. Now, cut that amount of stuff in half, and add more money to your trip fund. You often need less stuff and more money! If you find that you really need

something that you didn't bring, you can purchase it on the road. You'll then have a fun memory of shopping in a foreign country. You'll also always think of that place when you see your purchase back home.

- If you use assistive devices take them with you, especially if you need them for walking. Examples are canes, crutches, AFO's, braces, etc. If these things will help you walk more and see more, take them along and use them all the time. You'll be glad you did.
- Rest. Get lots of rest. Get more rest than you think you need, and more rest than the others you're traveling with. Also, have things to do during this rest time. In addition to taking a nap, this is the perfect time to Skype with a friend, catch up on emails, listen to a podcast, meditate, read a book, or write a postcard.
- On a longer trip, staying in touch with friends and family can help you be less homesick. Email, instant messaging and Skype were all important ways that I stayed in touch with what was going on back home.
- Go slowly and don't try to see it all. You can't see it all anyway, even if you didn't have MS. Slow down and prioritize your list of things to see. Leave some things on your list for the next time you're there.
- Adjust your expectations. You may see less, but in going slowly you may just have richer, more interesting experiences with people you meet on the trip. You don't have to lower your expectations but you may need to adjust them.
- Be open to new things. You'll be glad you did. Push a bit beyond your comfort zone. You may just surprise yourself!
- Be curious. Ask questions, talk to people, look around, research where you're going.
- Make the trip your own. Like to spend all day in museums? Then do that. Love nature instead? Then get outdoors. People will have suggestions before you go, but if they aren't right for you, don't feel forced to

do things. Make the trip yours! You'll enjoy it more than if you just follow the normal tourist path. Explore the local culture in your own way. There isn't one right way to travel. It is different for everyone.

- Be gentle with yourself. There will be times you need to stay back and rest when your traveling companions may go out. There may be things you won't be able to do and see. It is OK. Be gentle, and remember to be grateful for what you are doing!
- Write about your experiences, even if you just jot down a few notes about what you did each day. You'll be glad you did this later, as some of the fun and amazing little details of a trip are often lost with the passing of time.
- Ask for what you need. People want to help. Whether it is a stranger on the street, or your travel companion, ask when you need help. It may just make the trip easier.
- Know that you are different from other travelers. And yet at the same time, know that you are the same. There is comfort in both of these thoughts!
- Finally, to quote author Thalia Zepatos in my one of my favorite travel books (*A Journey of One's Own*), "Just go. You'll be fine!"