This guide was prepared by Alzheimer’s Australia for people with dementia and their carers. The guide is based on discussions, consultations and input from people with dementia, their carers, and travel professionals. We would like to acknowledge all the people who contributed to the development of this booklet.
Why is this guide necessary?

Travelling and going on holidays plays an important role in many of our lives. Although living with dementia may make holidays more complex, it doesn’t necessarily mean these plans need to be put aside.

This guide has been developed by Alzheimer’s Australia for people with dementia, their families, carers and friends, as well as for health professionals.

It provides a summary of the key issues surrounding travelling and holidaying when living with dementia and provides the reader with a number of tips for an enjoyable holiday.

Although every effort has been made to ensure the content of this guide is relevant to all States and Territories of Australia, we advise you to check with your local authorities regarding specific details and possible variations.

How does having dementia affect the way you take holidays?

Going on holidays can be an enjoyable experience for people with dementia, and their families and carers, as it offers a break from routine and the opportunity for new experiences. Some people like to travel alone, which can become increasingly difficult as the impact of dementia becomes more challenging for the person, as well as for their family, carers and friends.

“We didn’t think making our Hawaiian holiday dream a reality was possible, but guidance from our doctor and the counsellor at Alzheimer’s Australia helped us prepare. It wasn’t always easy, but it is now one of my fondest memories.”
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PLANNING HOLIDAYS WITH DEMENTIA

Travelling with someone who has dementia can be stressful and challenging for the family, carer and the person with dementia, but can also be a very rewarding experience. Planning well ahead of time will ensure that both the person with dementia and their carer can have the best possible experience.

Planning with a trusted and recommended travel agent may be a good idea if you are a first time traveller. Consider booking a holiday package, as many of the travel arrangements can be pre-booked and this may help reduce the stress of travelling with a person with dementia. Exploring online travel forums and blogs can provide you with travel advice specific to your chosen location.

Being aware of capabilities and possible challenges can help with your decision about going on holidays, and can assist you in deciding where you want to go, and what you might do whilst you are travelling.

Things to consider before planning your holiday:

- How does the experience of living with dementia impact on the person?
- Can the person living with dementia sufficiently complete daily living activities?
- How will they respond to changes in routine and environment?
- What is the carer’s capacity to support the person without their usual support networks?
- Can the carer manage well if a crisis arises?
- Does the carer have health issues of their own?
- Is the carer prepared to adapt to the person with dementia should their needs change mid-trip?

There are a number of warning signs that may indicate that travelling and holidays are not a good idea for the person living with dementia.
They include:

• Regular disorientation, confusion or agitation even in familiar settings
• Wanting to go back home even when they are away from home on short visits
• Problems with continence
• Unsafe walking
• Feeling angry or anxious when needs are not met which can lead to physical or emotional responses
• An existing predisposition to falls or a high risk of falling
• Unstable coexisting medical conditions

If you are unsure travelling is a good idea, seek the advice of your healthcare professional.

Begin planning

Some things to consider when planning your holiday:

**Medical clearance:** Before planning a holiday, check with your doctor to see whether the type of holiday you are planning is appropriate for your personal situation.

You may need written medical clearance from a doctor when travelling with some airlines or cruise ship operators. You may also require clearance when taking out an insurance policy with some providers. Also, ask if you can take prescription medications on your trip, or purchase more medication if required – especially if language is a barrier.

**Time and duration:** Consider the length of time you’ll be away from home. Experimenting with short domestic holidays first will allow you to see whether a longer international trip is a good idea. Avoid travelling at peak travel seasons such as Christmas and be prepared to allow plenty of time for everything. Travel during the time of day that is best for the person with dementia.
**Book in advance:** Planning ahead is important, especially when you require special assistance. Booking in advance can help ensure that accessible accommodation and transport options are available. It also provides you with time to prepare for your trip.

**Medication:** Pack a first aid kit and take all medications you may need while you are away. Medication packs and dispensers are convenient ways of organising and keeping track of medication. Bringing prescriptions and additional medication can be helpful in the event that your medication gets lost, runs out, or if you decide to extend your trip. Also, take medications that help manage stomach upsets, diarrhoea, urinary tract infections or other temporary problems caused by changes in environment and food. Keeping a list of all medications as well as dosages may be helpful if the person with dementia becomes unwell. A letter from your GP or specialist detailing diagnosis and medications used is a good idea when travelling to countries with stringent drug laws.

**Identification:** Ensuring the person with dementia is wearing a disease identification bracelet and has some form of identification on them at all times is important. Examples of identification could include a photocopy of a passport, driver’s license, or other identification card. Having the details of your accommodation with a contact number can also prove to be helpful should they get lost.

If you are travelling in a non-English speaking country, you could also have cue cards that have the word dementia printed in other languages on them.

**Travel insurance:** Travel insurance is highly recommended. It covers losses, damage, and some unexpected costs that may occur during your travels. Insurance company guidelines vary around the rights and responsibilities of customers to disclose a diagnosis of dementia. Be sure to read the policy carefully to ensure it covers exactly what you need it to. It is a good idea to check whether a diagnosis affects your travel insurance cover as a diagnosis of dementia may mean that you will be declined insurance coverage, possibly face higher premiums, or not be covered for certain risks.
WHILE ON HOLIDAYS

New environments can sometimes be confusing and difficult to adapt to for people with dementia.

To help prevent or manage issues that emerge:

**Maintain routines:** try to keep mealtimes, bedtimes, and medication schedules as close to home routine as possible. Doing so can help reduce stress and anxiety. Writing the routine down might be helpful for the person with dementia to have something to refer to.

**Communicate:** ensure the person with dementia is well informed of where you are going and what you will be doing without overloading them with complicated or excess information. Having your itinerary on hand for reference can also be helpful.

**Know the warning signs:** learn to recognise the warning signs of anxiety and agitation in the person you care for. Expect increased confusion, agitation and behavioural changes during your trip and have a plan for managing this.

**Enjoy:** holidays allow for happy memories to be formed. Keep your sense of humour when things don’t go according to plan. They will be part of your travel memories.

“Our travel agent was great. She offered us the professional advice and flexibility that we needed and provided us with easy to read maps and instructions for public transport. I wouldn’t have known where to even start looking for those.”
Travelling and holidays with dementia
TRAVELLING BY SEA

With so many ports of call around the world and a large range of activities to interest people of all ages, cruising is becoming an increasingly popular holiday option for Australians.

“My mother has dementia, but her life continues to be enriched with fulfilment. We went on a cruise last year that provided us with uninterrupted time, gave me some time to relax and just be there for my mum while our needs were taken care of. It was difficult at times, but so rewarding to have shared this time together.”

There are a number of factors to consider before planning a cruise with your loved one.

Duration: For first time cruisers, a three to four night cruise may be a good way of finding out if cruising is for you. If all goes well, longer trips can be considered.

The vessel: Cruise ships are large vessels that can often become difficult to navigate. Choosing a stateroom close to elevators or easy to find reference points may help reduce confusion. Looking into online traveller reviews about a particular cruise line can be helpful in choosing an appropriate line for your age and lifestyle.

Inform staff: Some cruise ships are designed to accommodate people with moderate disabilities but it is always best to state your needs upfront so that the staff are able to best assist you. Informing staff can also ensure you get priority boarding and extra assistance at embarking and disembarking points. Also, discretely inform your room steward of your situation as they can be very helpful.

Book in advance: Booking in advance helps ensure that the room type and location you need is available. Examine the possibility of booking a cabin in a class where there is extra concierge help available. Be prepared to limit shore excursions to short and simple ones that bring you back to the ship well before sail time.
TRAVELLING BY AIR

Whether your holiday is domestic or overseas, flying is the most popular and time efficient means of getting to your destination. Airports and aircrafts can be noisy and confusing environments for people with dementia. Some helpful tips when planning travel by air include:

**Ask for help:** Request boarding assistance when booking flights. Doing so provides easy passage through all phases of emigration. Explain that the person doesn’t understand or follow instructions well. This can help reduce stress, particularly with the crowds and technology around security and border control.

**Be prepared:** Flying for long periods of time may require the use of supportive stockings and/or a neck pillow for comfort. Many people find it difficult to sleep on long-haul flights. Well before your trip, it may be worth talking to your doctor about how medication may help.

**Packing:** Pack all essential items into your carry-on luggage that can assist you to feel comfortable. This includes items such as a full set of clothes and enough medications in case your flight is delayed or if your checked luggage is lost. Where possible, check luggage all the way through to your final destination.

A music player and noise cancelling headphones may be a good way of tuning out extra noise. Packing snacks may provide a diversion if the person with dementia is prone to agitation.

**Identification:** Encourage the person with dementia to wear an identification bracelet at all times. Recording flight and contact information on a medical alert bracelet can help the person with dementia be reunited with you if they separate. Having the following information in their wallet is helpful in case of emergency: name, address, and phone number of your holiday address, as well as any stopover information. Ensure you have copies of passports and visas in your carry-on luggage in case of emergency.

**Allow plenty of time:** Allow enough time before flights to complete all the pre-boarding steps without rushing. However, allowing too much time may increase the risk of the person with dementia becoming anxious or disoriented.
TRAVELLING BY CAR

Things to consider when travelling by car:

**Comfort:** check that the person is comfortable in the seat. Make sure the seatbelt is not too tight or restrictive.

**Safety:** Where possible, engage the safety lock to prevent accidental opening of the car door. Be aware of their safety when getting out of the car, especially when parking near traffic.

Do not get in the car if you are worried that the current stress and anxiety levels of the person living with dementia may impact on your ability to drive safely and effectively.
TRAVELLING BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Plan ahead: Checking train and bus timetables prior to your journey can assist to reduce confusion when catching public transport. Purchasing tickets in advance (wherever possible) can also help navigate busy train stations and confusing bus routes. If travelling by bus, let the driver know where you need to go, and this will ensure that you don’t miss your stop.

Be prepared: Having your trip details and personal information with you can be helpful if you happen to get lost or are unsure where to go. You should have details such as your home address, destination, and emergency contacts with you at all times. If setting off on a longer journey, ensure you have plenty of things to keep busy with such as games, photo albums and puzzles, as well as snacks and drinks. Choosing seats close to the bus driver or near the doors in a train carriage can help make disembarking an easier process.

Ask for help: If you are lost, or unsure about where to go, don’t be afraid to ask. Bus drivers and staff at train stations can assist you. Transport staff can be easily identified by their uniforms or the high visibility vests usually worn.

Have a companion: Using public transport alone can be stressful. Travelling with someone can make it easier. A companion can help to ensure that the bus stops at the right point or that you disembark at the right train station. Having someone to talk to, or play games with can also help pass the time and keep the person with dementia occupied.
New surroundings and living spaces can be confusing for people with dementia.

Here are a few tips to make your stay in accommodation more pleasant:

**Location:** Book accommodation that is easy to find and is convenient to get to via public transport.

**Notify hotel staff:** Notifying staff that you or the person you are traveling with has dementia is important. Stating your needs upfront allows staff to better assist you.

**Hotel rooms:** Most hotels offer accessible rooms which may be more comfortable for someone with dementia. Keep exit doors locked at night to avoid confusion and wandering.

**Bathrooms:** If necessary, keep the bathroom door propped open so that the toilet is clearly visible, cover mirrors and keep the light on at night.
Allow yourself time to settle in: Allow a few days to settle back into the routine of things. Avoid scheduling too many events in the days following your return.

Visit your doctor: Scheduling a visit to your doctor provides an opportunity to debrief about the trip and to be issued any prescriptions that may need to be filled.

Stay hydrated: Aircraft cabins can be extremely dry, making it easy for dehydration to occur unknowingly. Drinking plenty of water on the plane and upon your return may help with this.
USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

Smart Traveller
smartraveller.gov.au
Phone: 1300 555 135 (from within Australia)
       +61 2 6261 3305 (from overseas)

Cruise Critic
Website providing information and reviews about cruising all over the world. It provides a forum for people to discuss issues and find advice.

    cruisecritic.com.au

TripAdvisor
Website providing customer reviews and travel related information.

    tripadvisor.com.au

Carers Australia
Provides information and resources for carers. The Carer Supports and Services line operates Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm and can put carers in touch with a range of services and supports.

    Free call: 1800 242 636

Reduced Mobility Rights
Website which advocates for delivering customer service excellence to passengers with special needs who travel by air. They have a dedicated page for ‘Air Travel Tips – Flying with Dementia’.

    reducedmobility.eu
National Dementia Helpline

The Helpline Advisors can assist you with information, support and advice about all forms of dementia and related issues – no question is too small. The Helpline is available 9am to 5pm across Australia, Monday to Friday excluding national public holidays.

Phone: **1800 100 500**

You can also contact the Helpline by email:
ACT: helpline.act@alzheimers.org.au
NSW: helpline.nsw@alzheimers.org.au
NT: helpline.nt@alzheimers.org.au
QLD: helpline.qld@alzheimers.org.au
SA: helpline.sa@alzheimers.org.au
TAS: helpline.tas@alzheimers.org.au
VIC: helpline.vic@alzheimers.org.au
WA: helpline.wa@alzheimers.org.au
Other: helpline.nat@alzheimers.org.au