

Traveling For Medical Or Therapy Reasons

One of the most concerning dilemmas faced by parents of special needs children is the search for medical specialists. Whether it's for physical disabilities, developmental disabilities, or learning disabilities, our kids have challenges that sometimes cannot be treated by standard family medical practices.

To complicate matters further, depending on where you live there may not be any specialists who are qualified in your child's particular need. Furthermore, in some cases, complex issues arise that require a higher degree of specialty in your child's issue.

The unfortunate fact is for many parents of special needs children, getting the right kind of medical or therapeutic services may require traveling long distances across a state or even several states in order to get the help needed.

We faced this situation a few years back, and after doing a lot of research, we were able to find services that made traveling a lot easier and less stressful.

Car Rentals.

When making repeated day trips — traveling by vehicle to and from your destination — you might want to consider renting a car instead of putting all the miles and wear on your own vehicle. Here are some tips on car rentals:

Renting a car from an agency that is not located at an airport is usually cheaper. Car rental offices located at airports or transportation hubs charge extra return and usage fees that are typically waived at off-site car rental offices. Car rental agencies usually have a greater number of small to mid-size cars for rent than large sedans, vans or SUVs, so you'll have an easier time getting the vehicle you want if you can take a small to midsize model.

Most car rental agencies offer unlimited mileage in their packages. **However**, almost all of them have a two to four state restriction on where you can drive the car. For example, if you rent a car in Chicago, you may be restricted to travel only in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin (or fewer states). Be certain to ask the rental agent if you need to travel further than your region. The only rental agency we found that has absolutely no restrictions on inter-state travel within the 48 contiguous states is Hertz... however be sure to ask because that may change without notice.

Travel By Air.

When traveling a greater distance than you can drive in one day, you may want to consider air travel. Two great organizations exist to help you make those flights for free.

Air Care Alliance. <http://www.aircarealliance.org> helps to coordinate public benefit flying groups like Angel Flight, Operation Angel Planes, Wings of Hope, and many more. They offer free travel for medical needs on private planes in the United States, as well as international public benefit flight groups.

Because Air Care Alliance works with private plane owners with all different kinds of aircraft you might fly on anything from a corporate jet to a small four passenger plane, depending on your needs. This service can accommodate small town airports that are not often served by commercial flights. Check out Air Care Alliance's directory of groups that they work with: <http://www.aircarealliance.org/directory-groups>

Miracle Flights. <https://www.miracleflights.org/how-we-help/> Miracle Flights offers free commercial airline travel from frequent flyers who donate their mileage awards. They also work with the airlines for accommodations and accessibility for specialized medical needs. Miracle Flights has free travel available on domestic U.S. flights, as well as International flights, and can even help families accommodate service dogs on flights.

Overnight Stays.

Let's face it, hotels can be expensive and a stay in one for medical or therapy reasons is typically not covered by health insurance plans. Fortunately there are some options that are very affordable and offer great services for special needs children.

The most well known are the Ronald McDonald Houses, <http://www.rmhc.org>. Most RMH locations offer accommodations for families of children up to age 18 receiving medical or therapeutic care. The facilities are equipped with all accessible rooms, elevators, indoor play areas, libraries, video game consoles, and other fun areas for kids. Some also have outdoor accessible playgrounds. Rooms vary from two beds and a bathroom, to family rooms with living rooms and dining tables, a kitchen, and one or two bedrooms. Laundry facilities are available and a group kitchen and dining room are also included for all guests. Most RMH facilities also offer transportation services to the hospitals or clinics where you need to go, as well as transportation to local airports, train stations, or bus depots.

Ronald McDonald House facilities typically offer overnight stays for a donation of up to twenty five dollars per night, depending on location and availability, but can work with families on ability to pay with free of charge options. If the RMH you are hoping to stay with does not have a room available for the night you need, they can offer vouchers for greatly reduced rates at nearby hotels of up to seventy five percent off a regular night's stay, depending on availability. It's best to call the local RMH near your destination for detailed information and reservations.

Other options: Check with the hospital or clinic that you are traveling to for other recommendations on overnight stays. Some offer hotel style rooms for families right within their facilities. There may also be other accommodation services for family medical stays in the nearby area that they can arrange for you.

Final Thoughts:

Traveling for medical reasons can be one of the most stressful things a family will go through. Take the time to research where you are going, how to get there, and where you will stay **before** you go. Ask lots of questions about accommodations, nearby facilities, even information on local grocery and retail stores. Get directions and use internet map services or GPS apps to help you figure out where you will be and how to get around. If you travel without a vehicle, find out about public transportation options and/or taxi services in the city where you are staying.

Get to know the city you're traveling to with Wikipedia and WikiTravel, especially if you're going to have a stay of a few days or more, so that you will have options for things to do when you have some time to venture out for a break. This will happen. You'll need a break from time to time... it won't make you a bad parent to take a little time for yourself. You might also have time to take your child out for a little adventure between therapies or medical treatments. Knowing where to go for fun at those times will definitely help.

Planning ahead and lots of research will help you make the best of a difficult situation and make the experience better for your child.