

How to Find Hearing Loss-Friendly Service Providers

By Shari Eberts

My family and I recently traveled overseas to mark an important family milestone. It was an amazing trip with many historical sites to see, a beautiful countryside to experience, and a special family event to observe. It was a once in a lifetime trip, so we decided to splurge on a private guide. But it was critical that we find the right one. I didn't want to miss one word because of my hearing loss.

I decided not to leave anything to chance. I invested a significant amount of time upfront, detailing my communication needs to the tour company as well as to the tour guide they recommended. This involved several phone calls, numerous follow-up email reminders, and a video chat with our prospective tour guide, but it was worth the effort. I found the right tour guide for my needs, making the trip more enjoyable for my entire family.

This experience reminded me how important finding the right service provider is for people with hearing loss—someone with the proper attitude, but also with the right manner of speaking for your particular level of hearing loss. My hearing loss is most severe in the mid-range frequencies, so female voices are often easier for me to hear. Your hearing loss may require a different voice profile.

Below I share the steps I took in finding the right tour guide for my family's trip, but these steps could be followed when seeking any service provider, including a lawyer, financial advisor, doctor, yoga teacher, even an audiologist.

1. Be as specific as possible about your needs upfront.

In my initial inquiries I mentioned my hearing loss and asked what accommodations could be made. It was very telling to see how each of the tour companies reacted to this request. I was also very specific about the type of guide I wanted—someone with a naturally loud speaking voice (people never remember to adjust their volume after the first few minutes), a minimal accent, and no facial hair.

2. Take a test drive. I had a video conversation with our assigned guide through Skype before things were finalized. I wanted to experience how well I could hear him and to see how easy he would be to lipread. I also wanted to assess his attitude about my hearing loss. Would he try to be helpful or find it annoying? I was very impressed. In our call, he listed a number of suggestions that he thought would help me hear

well during the trip, including my sitting in the passenger seat of the van.

3. Start off on the right foot with a reminder. On our first morning of touring, I reminded the guide about my hearing loss and was happy to see that he had already cleared out the spot in the passenger seat for me to sit.

4. Provide real-time feedback, both positive and negative. I was so happy on the first day with how well I was hearing that I made a point to mention this to the guide. I complimented him on how clearly he was speaking and he was pleased, which motivated him to continue with his efforts.

5. Continue to self-advocate along the way. Whenever we visited a site with a film, I asked if it was available captioned, and if I missed something, I asked for a quick summary from my guide. This saved my family the task, which decreased the burden on them. Plus they all probably benefited from hearing the information again.

6. Confirm important details by email or text. Even though I was hearing well, I didn't want to risk mishearing important details so I asked the guide to confirm all reservations and other appointment times with me via email or text.

While finding the right tour guide for our trip required an upfront investment of time, it allowed me to weed out service providers that were not sensitive to my needs and provided a strong backdrop for the success of the trip. It worked so well that I plan to use this same process anytime I need to hire a service provider. **HLM**

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