8 Helpful Tips for Traveling With Anxiety

by ANNA JACKSON

Coping With Travel Anxiety

In April 2016, I found myself setting off to visit my family in Brisbane, Australia from Cornwall, England.

My father has lived and worked abroad since I was four years old and I'd gotten used to traveling long distances, sometimes with him and other times by myself. Traveling had just become a straightforward thing for me to do; I was confident that I knew what I was doing and never really gave my ability to navigate a second thought.

In 2015 I was diagnosed with four different autoimmune diseases as well as severe anxiety and depression.

When the trip to Australia in April came around, my thoughts about traveling were drastically different.

My body had changed due to medications; I suffered from confusion, 'brain fog,' and was starting to have issues with my short-term memory.

I wasn't traveling alone, but I was and had always been the one to navigate my party through a long-haul journey. I enjoyed it; I'd always been good at knowing and remembering my surroundings. I'm also one of those people that likes to be early rather than late.

But his time around, I had serious doubts about my abilities and my anxiety was off the charts. I was worried about declaring my medications through customs, constantly checking that I had the right documents from my doctors.

Fatigue was a big issue for me at the time; it would come out of nowhere. This journey was well over 24 hours. Another big concern for me was whether I'd become overwhelmed and get so stressed out that I'd trigger a panic attack.

I personally get very frustrated with the fear of the unknown, so I try to make a plan for any kind of outcome. These are my eight suggestions to help you through if you're traveling with an anxiety disorder.

Speak With Your Doctor

In my opinion, it's always a good idea to speak to your doctor about any concerns you may have before traveling.

If you have any medications that you'll be taking with you, your doctor can provide you with a note, which lets customs know what the medications are and what conditions they treat.

In my experience, a prescription and simply presenting my medication with the patient label was proof enough, although it's always better to be fully prepared.

Organization Is Key

One of my main concerns was that I would forget something important, such as passports, tickets, documents, etc. I got myself a documents folder and put all the important things that I would need inside.

I also made sure to keep the folder in my backpack/hand luggage so that it was safe and so that I had it close enough that I could re-check that everything was there.

Keep Calm With Music

My anxiety tends to get my heart rate jumping when I'm waiting to board and during take-off and landing. I compiled a playlist before I left and made sure that every song had a positive, soothing vibe and that the tempo was slow. Listening to this type of music can help calm down heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing.

Zone Out With a Book

Personally, I can't stand to use the inflight entertainment. I find I spend more time flicking through all the channels than actually settling on something and then I end up irritable and impatient.

Instead, I loaded my phone with a bunch of good books and it worked well. I was so immersed in the stories that the time flew by and my attention wasn't on everything that could possibly go wrong.
Books, magazines, and games are just a few things you can pre-load onto your phone to help keep your mind busy on your travels.

Remember to Breathe

Yes, I know that may seem obvious, but keeping our breathing regulated helps keep us from hyperventilating, which can easily lead us into a panic attack.

Whilst searching for some breathing techniques, I came across some really helpful breathing exercises from CalmClinic. They also provide techniques for different severities of anxiety.

Write It All Down

Believe it or not, writing down how you are feeling can be incredibly therapeutic.

Buy a notebook to take with you or you can even use the Memo/Notes app in your phone. My phone has a countless stream of notes that I have typed not only during my travels, but also for everyday things. I've found it to be a great way of sorting through my thoughts.

Listen to Yourself

Know your limits. It's okay to step aside if you are not entirely comfortable with any activities or plans that have been arranged.

It's great to experience new things but don't force yourself into situations you're uncomfortable with. Just because everyone else is okay with it, doesn't mean you have to be.

Take Time for Yourself

If you're feeling overwhelmed at anytime, step away from the situation. Take a few moments to calm yourself and regroup.

Whether your travels are long haul flights, a cross-country road trip, or an hour-long train journey, just remember

to research beforehand and try and plan ahead as best you can.