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INTRODUCTION: TRAVEL AND THE SCI POPULATION

For people with Spinal Cord Injuries (SCI), travel was reported as the most disrupted social activity since their injury with only 4% of people living with SCI choosing it as part of their leisure activities (Carpenter et al 2007). People with disabilities (PwDs), however, have the same need and desire to travel as their non-disabled counterparts. They cite relaxation, escape and excitement, as well as enhancement of personal relationships as primary reasons for travel (Shi, Cole, Chancellor 2012). Furthermore, travel is one way to help PwDs re-integrate back into the community, promote independence, and improve overall quality of life (Yau et al 2004).

It is important, however, to understand the barriers to travel that prevent this population from participating in this activity. These can include a lack of accessibility of the built environment, lack of or inadequate travel services, lack of spontaneity to travel requiring extensive planning and resources, as well as a systemic ignorance of the tourism industry towards travel needs of PwDs (Bi, Card and Cole 2007, Poria et al 2010, Shaw and Coles 2004, McKercher 2003). What is most concerning is that the simple act of getting out of the house once a week poses a challenge for this population of people. The National Spinal Cord Injury Statistics Center reports that 38% of people with SCI had not spent a night away from home in the past year, of which 25% did not get out of their house even once a week.

Thus, the process of becoming travel active does not only encompass the traditional concept of traveling to domestic or international destinations. Travel is the foundation of a successful transition and reintegration back to the community. The rhythm of daily life cannot function without it. For example, running errands to the bank or post office, going to the mall, and returning to school or work are all local forms of travel. While it can be a challenging endeavor, with appropriate research, planning and patience, it is feasible for PwDs to travel to the destination of their choosing – whether it is Paris, Hong Kong, or Rio de Janeiro or their local grocery store, movie theater, or even doctor’s appointment.

This manual is created for novice SCI travelers as a starting point to explore the world. While it is intended to be a thorough resource, it is not meant to be an exhaustive one. This manual specifically highlights pre-travel preparations, emergency considerations, and the process of booking travel with a special focus on addressing durable medical equipment (DME) needs. It is organized with questions, resources, and travel tips that can be implemented for travel in local communities and around the world. The main goal is to help anticipate and navigate the challenges and barriers to accessible travel to encourage and inspire SCI individuals to become travel active.

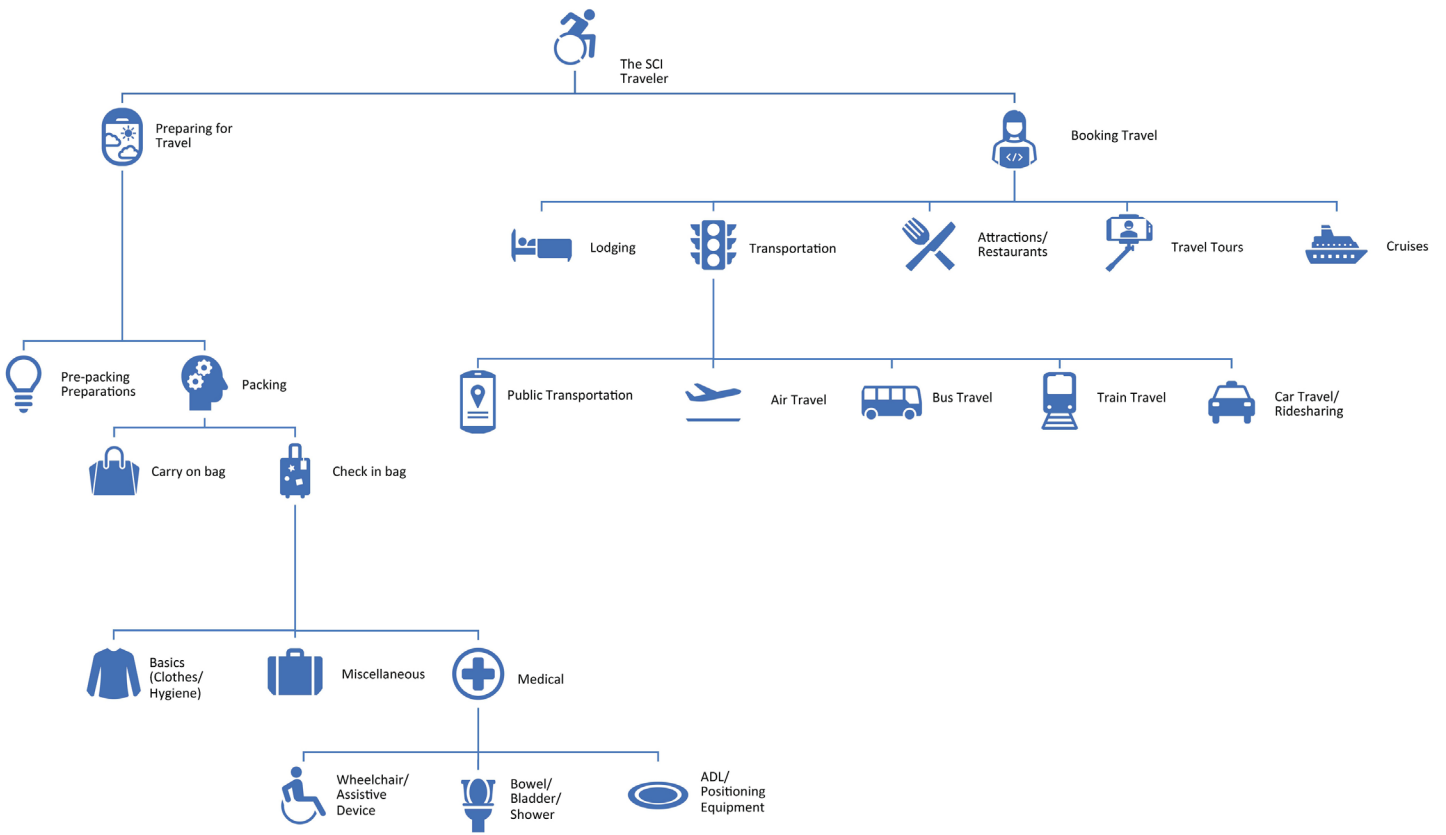


Figure 1: The SCI traveler manual - scope of information.