

“Flying Solo”

Seven Solo Travel Tips



Written By:
Alana Wright
and Jim Archibald

One of my favourite things about working with the Parkinson Association of Alberta is being able to meet so many wonderful people. My first conversation with Jim was a cheeky debate about the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames. When Jim agreed to help me with this article, I knew I had to sport my Oilers gear for our meeting. Apparently, Jim also had the same idea and was happily sporting his Flames attire. After another friendly debate, we got right down to business!

As a former teacher, Jim had summers off to travel, and went on many solo adventures across the globe. Upon learning he had Parkinson's he knew things would change, but he was not going to let that stop him from travelling the world! Jim was worried about keeping up with his exercise regime, how he would handle his tremors when near others, how to ensure he felt safe, and how to handle any limitations that may have come his way. However, as he continued to travel after his diagnosis, he was able to figure out ways to manage his concerns and still do the thing he loves! Travelling is extremely rewarding, but it can be intimidating at times when you have a Parkinson's diagnosis; especially if you're "flying solo" as it were. Believe in yourself, prepare, and have a quick peek at Jim's tips for travelling solo with Parkinson's!

1 Planning builds confidence and creates safety.

A lot of building confidence comes from planning ahead, so be sure to check out our planning ahead article to be in the know! When travelling to a place where he has friends or relatives, Jim asks them to notify their family doctor of his diagnosis and the dates of his trip. Then, he sees if the doctor would be willing to see him during his trip if there was an emergency. Although the likelihood of needing to access a physician while travelling is slim, it is nice to have a safety net.

2 Book your transportation and accommodations based on symptoms.

This was one of the most brilliant ideas I thought Jim shared during our discussion. For Jim, his tremors started on the left side of his body, so when travelling, Jim books his seat on the plane so that his left side was either against a window or in an aisle seat. This provided an overall sense of comfort and control over his symptoms when being around others. Additionally, Jim is also mindful about booking his seat near a washroom for sake of ease.

Although it may not always be feasible, Jim also suggested booking business class or preferred seating if you are able, especially during longer flights. The extra room can take away a lot of worry and provide comfort.

3 Carry a form of identification that notifies others about your Parkinson’s diagnosis.

Travelling alone can be challenging, especially when you have a diagnosis that may make it difficult for you to communicate at times. When Jim became a member of the Parkinson Association of Alberta, he received a membership card. Jim carries this membership card when travelling and shows it to airport, hotel, and travel staff prior. He has found this has helped him receive extra time to get settled whether it is for an activity, transportation, or accommodations. It also increases his comfort and confidence in accessing help when his symptoms may not show as much or when someone may not be aware of Parkinson disease.

4 Ask for help or take it when it is offered, most people are more than willing to lend a hand.

Jim shared an experience he had in Stanstead, Quebec that I think a lot of you may relate to. He was in a busy area for security and needed to fill out a form. His tremors started “acting up” due to the stress, pressure, and noise of the area. A couple next in line recognized Jim needed help and assisted him in filling out that form. As far as Jim knew, it is possible that the couple recognized signs of Parkinson disease, but regardless they saw he needed help and stepped up. As a solo traveller with Parkinson’s, it can be challenging at times, but Jim advises to embrace it and make the best of it!

5 Be aware of your limitations and the limitations of the place you are travelling to! No one knows how Parkinson’s impact you daily better than you!

Jim knows that he can travel with Parkinson’s but reminds himself that he can do selective travelling. By asking yourself questions such as “how far can I walk?” or “when will I eat or rest?” and “how is my balance?” you are able to recognize what you need to be mindful



of when travelling and not take on more than you can realistically do. Adjusting your expectations as your disease progresses is important, but it is a learning curve and can take time. The best thing you can do is to prepare as much as possible, be aware of things such as uneven surfaces, whether the area can accommodate a walker, or the length of time needed for activities. Not all countries have the same level of accessibility as Canada, so it is important to be aware of this.

6 Try and find a local Parkinson’s organization and connect with them.

When travelling to Australia, Jim searched for a Parkinson’s organization to connect with during his stay. He found a local organization and was even able to join an exercise class like his regular one in Alberta while he was there! When travelling solo, it can be comforting to know you have support to reach out to if you needed.

7 (Saved the best for last!!) Take a moment to take it all in and breathe

When going through a train station on one of his many travels, Jim found himself overwhelmed with the environment as there was a lot of people, lights, and noises. He found a place where he could sit down, breathe, and just take a moment to process everything and determine his next steps. Do not be afraid to take a moment before doing something!

A special thanks to Jim for all his help with this article! To end this off, here is one of my favourite quotes from Jim!

“Don’t let Parkinson’s rule you, go for the things you enjoy!” – Jim Archibald

