

Fall Color Tours

Gloria Van Haitsma, RN, BS, Caregiver Coordinator
Evergreen Commons

Fall is a beautiful time to travel and see the trees with their changing colors. Everyone can appreciate this exquisite display of nature whether it is for an afternoon ride, a weekend trip, or a trip for a week out East. It can also be a time for relaxing with friends and family.

If you are a caregiver, taking a trip like this, even for an afternoon ride, can feel like an insurmountable task. The most important thing you must do to make it an enjoyable experience for everyone is to plan ahead.

If you are traveling by air or train, be sure to get to the airport or train station early to reduce the stress of having to make last minute changes or arrangements. Before the trip, let the train or airline personnel know that you might need help. Explain your circumstances to them so that they will be able to help with luggage, tickets, your loved one, etc. Also, always ask for a wheelchair. If your loved one does not need it to ride in, it can be of great use for carrying extra luggage.

If you are traveling with someone who has dementia, it would be a good idea to have them registered with a Safe Return Program because they will be more likely to wander in an unfamiliar environment.

Before you leave, gather important documents to take along: insurance cards, passports, your physician's and other emergency phone numbers, refills on medications and a copy of medical records in case your loved one needs to see a physician while you are on vacation. Putting these documents and all medications in carry on luggage so they will not get lost is a good idea. Remember to bring cash or a credit card along in case you must change your plans suddenly and have to return home.

While traveling, it is important to follow the same routine that you follow at home. Try to get up the same time and go to bed at the same time every day. Try to have rest periods at the same time also, even if it means giving up seeing some of the sights others are going to. This will help lessen any confusion your loved one may feel in unfamiliar surroundings.

If you are traveling by car or know you will be waiting somewhere for any length of time, bring along picture books, CD's of favorite music, tapes of their grandchildren talking, or snacks to help occupy their time. Include regular stops for food drink, and bathroom needs. Limit drinks with caffeine such as coffee, tea and colas since caffeine is a diuretic. On the other hand, be sure your loved one has enough to drink so they do not become dehydrated.

Stop for bathroom use every 2-3 hours. It is preferable to use a one room restroom such as at a gas station if possible. Large restrooms with several stalls pose the problem of

gender and privacy. If you do need to use a restroom with multiple stalls, explain the situation and ask someone to wait at the door while you assist your loved one.

Be sure to always carry an extra set of clean clothing with you in case of accidents. While traveling, adult disposable briefs or other protective under garments may be options that provide added security. Also, you may want to cover the car seat with a large piece of plastic in case of an accident.

When in a hotel room, be sure your loved one can find the bathroom. You may need to use a sign with a picture of a toilet on it. Also, bring several night-lights to light the way and a supply of blue pads to protect the bed.

Allow others to feel good about themselves by allowing them to help you. It may mean letting them open a door for you, pushing a chair up a ramp, or letting you get in front of the line. Do it with a grateful smile. You deserve the help that is offered.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.caregiverresource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.