Top convention Tips from Denice Brown written by Carol King-Ries

Updated for Orlando May 31, 2024

Denice Brown wears many hats in the NFB including president of the Greater Philadelphia NFB chapter, member of the national Scholarship committee, NOBBL Board member, and proud attendee of over 20 conventions. She shares her top tips for attending the convention informed, empowered, and prepared.

 Read the National Federation of the Blind Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is a required read for registering for the National Convention. Please read it and live it!

 Get a mentor if you are a first-time attendee.

This should be a person who has attended previous conventions, whose phone number you have in your contacts and can reach out to for on the ground advice and recommendations.

 Make your own personal daily agenda.

There will be so many good sessions at the convention, you will have to choose where you want to focus your attention. A personalized agenda will keep you organized and on the right track. If the Crowd Compass app is available, use it.

 Set up your ability to use paratransit in Orlando early.

Once you have qualified for paratransit services locally, you can use it all over the country. However, it must be set up in advance. Work with your local paratransit organization to get you set up in Orlando. Do it early, if you snooze, you can lose…

 Pack well

When packing, do not just focus on looking great, pack to be great. Even though we are going to hot and humid Orlando, pack a hoodie, sweater, or shawl to stay warm in those typically very cool convention rooms. Bring an extra folding white cane. You never know when your current cane will break. Better safe than sorry. Pack extra portable chargers for your devices for the same reason. Please pack comfortable shoes. You will be on the move, and that is best to do in style and comfort.

 Place all electronics, jewelry, medications, and other valuables in a carry-on bag.

Sometimes checked luggage gets lost or items are stolen from them. Therefore, it is important to keep your valuable items with you. Denice recommends that you check your carry-on bags after they go through security to make sure that everything, they entered the scanner with is still inside!

 Pay for your hotel room with a credit card and not a debit card if possible.

When you pay for your hotel room, they always put a hold on some funds to make sure that there are no additional charges after you check out. If you use a debit card, this will be a hold on your personal funds. Hotels vary in the amount of time it takes to release that hold. This is not a problem when you use a credit card.

 Download and practice using some helpful apps for navigating Orlando.

Denice recommends that you download Aira to help with navigating the Convention spaces. Good Maps, a navigation ap, was available in the Houston convention, and she thinks it may be available to use at the Orlando convention. It has both an indoor and outdoor navigation ap which you can download for free. Also download Be My Eyes for help with items you need described. I am an enthusiastic fan of Be My Eyes AI. It not only tells you what is in the picture you take, but it explains orientation which is extremely helpful when you are trying to figure out buttons on things like remotes, or the orientation of the soap and shampoo dispensers in the hotel bath. Of course, ride apps like Uber and Lift can be helpful in Orlando so download them as well. The more tools in your Apps toolbox, the more needs you can meet.

 When you first get to the hotel, find your way to all the key venues.

Familiarize yourself with key meeting rooms and the like. I believe in safety, so I recommend that the first place you familiarize yourself with is getting to the emergency exit/stairs on your floor. Once you have familiarized yourself with the hotel room, get in the habit of leaving your white cane in the same place every time, like at the door when you enter the room. This way, if you must make a quick exit, there will be no question about where your cane will be. Safety always comes first!

Bring and use your headset/air pods/headphones.

Since we love our voice-over and text-to-speech technology, most people will be using it. Therefore, to cut down on the cacophony of voices, always use your headset/air pods/headphones. This will make sessions easier to hear and enjoy!

Travel in the company of others

Because we are in an unfamiliar city, we should travel in groups. This has been a tried-and-true method of staying safe, so partner up! Don’t be scared, explore and be wise…

 Make it easy to keep up with your room key.

Denice recommends that you get a phone wallet. This is a small , adhesive card holder that sticks to your phone. You can keep your key card, a credit card, and a little cash in this small container on your phone. I plan to use a lanyard which is a neck strap that has a small container attached which is big enough to hold my phone and my key card.

 Reward good service

I believe in rewarding good service. So, I will share a tip that was given to me… keep a roll of small bills to do this without having to pull out your wallet. Generosity and safety in one tip!

Be sure to keep your patience nearby and wear your joy!

Whenever you travel, things happen that are unexpected and can be challenging. Being patient with travel delays, impatient people, and things not going exactly how you thought they would go will make the trip better for you and those around you. And wearing your joy is always appropriate in this grand gathering. So, come with your love, hope, and determination; and add your patience, and joy as we build the National Federation of the Blind!