

The World is Now More Accessible Than Ever - Explore and Enjoy It!

The world is now more accessible than ever before. Twenty percent (62 million) of the U.S. population has some form of disability, and the number of these individuals is increasing daily. These people need to, want to, and can travel. If you're part of that twenty percent, a world of travel awaits you.

Travel professionals such as myself who are accessible travel advocates certified by Special Needs Group www.specialneedsgroup.com, the leading global provider of special needs equipment for the travel industry, have unique, specialized knowledge about how to help individuals with disabilities enjoy a wonderful, hassle-free and memorable trip.

Here are a few tips from Special Needs Group to ensure that when your next travel opportunity arises, you are ready to go.

Outline your travel needs

Take time to evaluate the logistics of your trip in relation to your ability to keep pace. What modes of transportation will you be using? Airplane, motor coach, train, ship, transit vans for ground transfers? Make a list, referring to relevant brochures, your trip organizer or travel agent to make sure you don't miss anything.

Now, make a list of your specific requirements. Be honest: what types of special needs equipment do you depend on at home? What do you use or need (or wish you had!) when shopping, sightseeing locally, dining out or going to the movies, attending concerts, the theater, street fairs or sporting events at home?

Can you hear and see clearly without special auditory equipment or visual aides? How far can you walk without a rest break? Are stairs difficult? Can you get in and out of the tub or shower at home without handgrips or other assistance?

Travel, whether solo or in a group, is no time for roughing it or trying to "tough it out." If a wheelchair, scooter or portable oxygen will make your trip easier, place that item on your list. Many people who do not use wheelchairs or walkers at home feel more comfortable using these mobility aides for tour and excursions. In fact, most of Special Needs Group's wheelchair and scooter rentals are to individuals who only use such aides when traveling.

Plan Ahead

If you already own a scooter or portable oxygen, it's important to know the policy and procedures for bringing that equipment onboard all the transport vehicles included in your itinerary, from planes to taxis to ferry boats. Does that transport have a way to stow your scooter or wheelchair? Is oxygen allowed on board? Some airlines prohibit certain types of batteries, such as wet cell batteries, or oxygen cylinders. Airlines operate under strict rules, so there may be packing procedures to

follow if they do allow the equipment. Keep in mind, most airlines need at least 48 hours' notice to make special arrangements, and be prepared to fill out forms.

Overall, cruise ships are more lenient in allowing oxygen, but some disallow certain types of oxygen. All require that the oxygen be delivered to the ship, and that you have enough for the entire voyage. Oxygen may never be brought aboard in your luggage. Requirements vary, so check your cruise line for proper instructions. Again, documentation and paperwork are required.

Whether you are headed for a cruise ship, hotel or all-inclusive resort, double check for wheelchair access at that venue, plus any venues you will be visiting on the trip. Confirm that accessible hotel rooms, resort accommodations or ship staterooms are available for your travel dates. The earlier you book, the better your chances of securing fully accessible accommodations. And early booking increases your chances of securing a ground floor hotel room or cruise stateroom near the elevator, if these issues are important.

Check on the access to public rooms, restaurants, bars, toilets, the swimming pool, hot tub, beach area and other amenities. Are there TDD phone devices? How will you get in and out of the shower or bathtub? Are there flashing lights to accommodate hearing? Braille room numbers? Knowing in advance the scope of your needs gives you time to arrange advance rentals of any necessary equipment, scheduled to arrive when you do. Everything from scooters, lifts, ramps, TDD kits and special mattresses, including special needs cribs, is available for rental.

Will road travel or car excursions be part of the trip? Many car rental companies have vehicles that are modified for drivers or passengers with mobility limitations. Check ahead to make sure a suitable vehicle will be available for your travel dates. If you will be hiring a car or van, make sure the company is aware of your special needs.

When traveling with a limitation or disability, full travel insurance for medical coverage abroad and trip cancellation insurance are even more important and strongly advised.

Ask the Right Questions

When making the final bookings, be sure you ask the right questions, even if the accommodations or cruise stateroom are categorized as "accessible."

For example, are doorways wide enough for the largest wheelchairs? Do the doors open outwards or into the room?

Are all the public areas of the hotel, resort or ship accessible? Do you need to make special arrangements in the dining room to accommodate the wheelchair or scooter?

Will the bathroom facilities truly fit your needs? Is the bathroom large enough for the wheelchair or scooter? Is there a roll-in shower? Grab-bars?

Are there facilities for companion/assistance animals?

Are there shopping and entertainment facilities close by if you are staying at a hotel or resort?

On shore excursions or tours, does the van have a lift and method for transporting wheelchairs and scooters?

Simply stated, don't take anything for granted. It's easy to arrange for almost every situation, and the world is wonderfully accessible, once you know what's needed, what's available and how to find the necessary equipment.

I look forward to helping you with all your accessible travel needs!



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T.E.E. is an independent affiliate of World Travel Service-Hunt Valley, a Virtuoso agency.

We are active members of the CCRA, CLIA, DWHSA, IATAN, and TRUE.

Anne M. Smith is a 2015 Jamaica Tourist Board Top 50 Travel Agent (in US CA UK) and the First Place Top Aruba Tourism Authority ACE Producer for Third Quarter 2016.

Anne is a Certified Accessible Travel Advocate (CATA), equipped to equip you with the right equipment.

Anne is also a Virtuoso Family Travel Advisor

