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# Accessible Journeys

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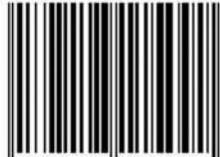
## Little People

IMMERSIVE NATURE EXPERIENCES

Chasing a dream in the jungles of Borneo



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# Table of Contents

## IN THIS ISSUE



29

### Empowering travel for Little People

ON THE COVER:  
Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk and her son Yale in Italy



68

### Chasing a dream in the jungles of Borneo

by Jan Bonville

## DEPARTMENTS

10 Travel Tales of Little People    34 Family Fun, No Limits    46 Adaptive Adventures    50 Journeys with Autism    54 Features

- 6 **Note from Guest Editor**  
Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk
- 8 **Welcome to another vantage point**
- 10 **Travel tales of Little People**  
with Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk
  - 10 Travel tips for Little People
  - 13 Jesse Nichols: "Pack your patience"
  - 14 Kai Rivas encourages self-advocacy
  - 16 Marie Trottier cares
  - 19 Jim Teneycke: "Find a travel ally"
  - 22 Maria McClellan takes control of her travel destiny
  - 23 Recommended reading
  - 29 Empowering Travel: Navigating Accessibility and Advocacy for Individuals with Dwarfism
- 34 **Family fun, no limits**  
with Jennifer Allen
  - 34 Summer vacation
  - 38 A family trip to Lancaster, Pennsylvania  
by Olivia Novak
  - 40 Enjoy the journey  
by Katie Vandergriff
  - 44 Better together: Disability Q&A
- 50 **Connor McClure - autism and adventure**
- 54 **Accessible camping adventures in Oregon**  
by Shasta Kearns Moore
- 58 **An untapped niche: Accessible vacation rentals**  
by Jerrica Mah



### Adaptive Adventures: Lisa Franks - Living a limitless van life



### Monica Gartner, founder of The Canadian Assisted Travel Society

- 60 **Thunder Bay Ontario: An adventure for everyone**  
by Erin Simmons
- 62 **Tenerife Accessible Experiences**
- 64 **Discover Kelowna, BC, Canada this summer. Accessible adventure awaits**
- 76 **Aimee's tips for travelling with a guide dog**  
by Aimee Huxley
- 80 **Lily Yu dishes out travel tips for the Deaf and hard of hearing**  
by Lily Yu and Angela Lynn

68 Immersive Nature Experiences    74 Cruising Corner    76 Beyond Sight    80 Silent Adventures    84 Bloggers, Vloggers and Instagrammers

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# Note from the Guest Editor



**SAMANTHA RAYBURN-TRUBYK**

**A**s the guest editor for the July edition of *Accessible Journeys* magazine, I am honoured to delve into the crucial topic of accessibility within the travel industry, particularly focusing on the experiences of individuals with dwarfism. My son and I were born with achondroplasia, the most common form of dwarfism. Prior to us, there is no history of dwarfism in my family. Little People of America defines dwarfism as a medical or genetic condition that typically results in an adult height of 4'10" or shorter in both men and women. There are over 400 types of dwarfism, with the most common being achondroplasia (1 in 40,000 births), spondyloepiphyseal dysplasia congenita (SEDC) (1 in 95,000 births), and diastrophic dysplasia (1 in 110,000 births). It is important to note that dwarfism is recognized as a disability.

I am passionate about advocacy for little people and all disabilities. I hold a master's degree in Disability Studies from the University of Manitoba and am on a mission to ensure that every child born with dwarfism believes they can achieve

anything they aspire to be AND that they are perfect, just the way they are.

I enjoy travelling and have explored much of the U.S. through my involvement with Little People of America (LPA), a nonprofit organization that provides support and information to people of short stature and their families. Having been a member my entire life, I recall my parents travelling with me to the annual convention every year. Now, serving as the Advocacy Director on the board for LPA. In addition, I serve as the President of Little People of Manitoba, Canada.

I am excited to share insights from well-seasoned travellers in our community. Through engaging interviews with Jesse Nichols, Marie Trottier, Maria McClellan, Jim Teneycke and Kai Rivas, we have gained profound insights into the barriers and triumphs faced by individuals with unique mobility needs when travelling. Each interviewee exemplified the theme of self-advocacy and confidence, showcasing the importance of advocating for one's needs and navigating travel with resilience and determination.

LPA's 2024 conference welcomed 2,400 attendees, the majority of whom are born with dwarfism, and the focus on accessibility and inclusivity in travel was paramount. The experiences and perspectives shared by Jesse, Marie, Maria, Jim, and Kai serve as a reminder of the barriers and unique needs faced by individuals with dwarfism when travelling. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding, we

can create a more welcoming and accommodating travel environment for all individuals, ensuring that everyone can embark on their travel adventures with dignity and independence.

No matter what, we all deserve respect while travelling and the ability to travel without frustration. Ensuring that the needs of all travellers are met is crucial. By acknowledging and addressing these needs, we can help make travel a more enjoyable and hassle-free experience for everyone. The annual conference provides an opportunity for attendees to come together, share experiences and advocate for greater accessibility in the travel industry. By acknowledging the diverse needs and perspectives of individuals with dwarfism, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and empowering travel landscape for all travellers.

I hope that you enjoy reading about some of the wonderful people who I am lucky enough to call my friends, and their various experiences.

For more information about Little People of America, visit [www.lpaonline.org](http://www.lpaonline.org).

Little People of Manitoba, visit [littlepeoplemanitoba.wordpress.com](http://littlepeoplemanitoba.wordpress.com)

Feel free to contact me via my LinkedIn Profile:  
[Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk | LinkedIn](#)

*Samantha*

## Welcome TO ACCESSIBILITY FOR EVERYONE



In Greater Fort Lauderdale, we're excited about welcoming everyone under the sun and providing access for all, from beach wheelchairs and accessible pathways to the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program at FLL airport. Learn more about local resources and plan your trip at [VisitLauderdale.com/Accessibility](http://VisitLauderdale.com/Accessibility).



# Leading Off: Empowering travel for Little People

People with disabilities are redefining the concept of luxury vacations

## Welcome to another vantage point

**P**ushing through discomfort, finding ways around barriers and establishing new norms is something that the *Accessible Journeys* community does all the time and without a lot of complaint. So, even though life can be difficult at times, it's always made easier and better by our contributors.

This issue provides the vantage point of travel for Little People. We are fortunate to have Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk as our guest editor, guiding us over this terrain. Samantha offers a whopping 18 travel pointers in her *Travel tips for Little People*. Other sage wisdom comes from Jesse Nichols, with

the prime non-negotiable item travellers must always pack. Marie Trottier shares an inside look at a group that intimidates many of us, the Transportation Security Administration, showing us their gentler side with the TSA Cares and TSA Precheck programs. Jim Teneycke exemplifies how one lone advocate's voice can grow exponentially, as his grew through his son's huge social media following. Monica Gärtner fills us in on some less glamorous challenges, such as travel toileting, to shed light on human's inherent right to dignity.

Allow mama bear Jennifer Allen to spare your family from some of the pain and upset woven into summer holidays. Get inspired by the amount and variety of

Paralympian Lisa Franks' limitless adaptive adventures. Join Connor McClure as he talks about adventure and autism. Dive into inclusive tourism in Tenerife. Sail over the lake waters of British Columbia. Explore the Chelsea, N.Y.C. neighbourhood. Wheel through the jungles of Borneo. The good news is that you can do it all here, via these very pages.

As in every issue, we salute our Instagrammers who share a precious moment in time, our bloggers and vloggers who continue to blaze trails towards inclusivity and accessibility.

We thank our treasured contributors and readers who continue to join us on this journey towards *travel without limits, in a world where all are welcome.* ■

I'm on a mission to ensure that every child born with dwarfism believes they can achieve anything they aspire to be AND that they know they are perfect, just the way they are.

Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk



Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk



Jesse Nichols



Kai Rivas



Marie Trottier



Maria McClellan



Jim Teneycke



Monica Gärtner



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# Travel tips for Little People

By Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk



Travelling holds a special allure for many, offering the promise of exploration, adventure and unforgettable experiences. Yet, for individuals born with dwarfism, embarking on a journey can unveil a distinct set of challenges, barriers and opportunities which shape the way we experience the world.

I have come up with a few tips and insights garnered from personal travels and encounters for fellow travellers navigating similar paths.

## 1. RESEARCH DESTINATIONS THOROUGHLY:

Investigate accessible restaurants, transportation options and attractions at your destination. Knowing where you should and shouldn't go ensures a comfortable and enjoyable trip.

## 2. ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF:

Use your voice to advocate for your needs when travelling with others. Don't hesitate to ask for assistance or accommodation as necessary.

## 3. PACK ESSENTIAL CLOTHES IN YOUR CARRY-ON:

Due to the difficulty of finding suitable replacements if luggage is lost,

pack essential clothing items in your carry-on bag.

## 4. BRING A FOLDABLE STOOL:

Since most hotels do not provide stools, pack a foldable stool to help with accessing high beds, sinks, or mirrors.

## 5. PLAN AHEAD FOR MEDICAL NEEDS:

Pack your medication in your carry-on bag. Ensure you have enough medication and any necessary medical supplies. Bring a doctor's note or prescription for ease at security checkpoints and in case you need a refill while travelling.

## 6. PRE-ARRANGE ACCOMMODATIONS:

Contact hotels in advance to discuss your specific needs, such as accessible rooms, or shower or step stools. Make sure your accommodations are confirmed before your arrival.

## 7. USE MOBILITY AIDS WHEN NEEDED:

If you use a mobility aid, ensure it is in good working condition before travelling. If you are going somewhere that may have uneven surfaces, or different accessibility than what you're

used to, consider using a mobility device if you don't typically use one. Consider renting mobility aids at your destination if it's more convenient.

## 8. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:

Familiarize yourself with disability rights and regulations in your destination country. Understanding your rights can help you advocate more effectively. Ensure you have the contact information for a local disability rights organization at your destination.

## 9. STAY AWARE AND TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS:

Always be aware of your surroundings and trust your gut feelings. If something doesn't feel right, don't do it, don't go into that space and don't trust that individual, just don't. I can't tell you how many times that I'm thankful that I trusted my gut reaction.

## 10. UTILIZE TSA CARES OR CATSA:

In the United States, Transportation Security Administration TSA Cares (1-866-289-9673) provides assistance for travellers with disabilities and medical conditions. Contact

them 72 hours before your flight for support during the security screening process. In Canada, contact [Canadian Air Transport Security Authority \(CATSA\)](https://www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca) for similar assistance. For more information visit [Special Needs - CATSA \(catsa-acsta.gc.ca\)](https://www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca) or call 1-888-294-2202 (toll-free) or 1-833-339-1021 (TTY)

## 11. PREPARE FOR SOCIAL INTERACTIONS:

Be prepared for the social aspects of travelling as a Little Person. Know how to handle inappropriate comments or photo-taking and don't hesitate to remove yourself from uncomfortable situations.

## 12. EMBRACE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES:

Travelling as a Little Person often leads to unique and memorable experiences. Embrace these moments, such as meeting public figures or gaining special access, and cherish the connections you make.

## 13. BE PREPARED FOR SAFETY CONCERNS:

Safety can be a real concern. Be aware of your surroundings, trust your instincts, and take precautions, such as blocking doors with furniture if necessary.

## 14. PLAN FOR ACCESSIBILITY IN SOCIAL SETTINGS:

When attending social gatherings, call ahead to ensure there are low tables or seating options that are accessible to you.

## 15. EDUCATE AND ADVOCATE:

When you encounter inaccessible situations, take the opportunity to educate and advocate for better accessibility. Your feedback can help improve conditions for future travellers.

## 16. RECOGNIZE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES:

Be aware that different countries have varying



Samantha standing on a toilet in a hotel

levels of accessibility and views on disability. Research and plan for potential challenges.

## 17. NETWORK WITH OTHER LITTLE PEOPLE:

Engage with other little people in your destination. They may have suggestions and great advice to share about how to navigate in their community. They will also provide for a great connection should you need assistance while visiting their community.

## 18. DON'T LET FEAR HOLD YOU BACK:

Preparation and self-advocacy can make travel a rewarding experience. Embrace the adventure and enjoy the journey despite any challenges you may face. ■



# Jesse Nichols

## “Pack your patience”

By Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk

I had the pleasure of interviewing my long-time friend Jesse Nichols in early May for this issue. Jesse, a seasoned traveller was born with a form of dwarfism called diastrophic dysplasia. Known for often saying “pack your patience,” by sharing his travel experience Jesse raises awareness and provides learning opportunities for people with dwarfism. Despite encountering challenges and barriers, he continues to travel but is proactive as he explores the world.

One key aspect that emerged from Jesse's interview was the importance of meticulous planning and preparedness to ensure a smooth travel experience. He shared practical tips, such as having access to a folding stepstool and keeping medications in your carry-on. Airlines advise that medications

should be packed in travellers' luggage but Jesse's medication was once stolen from his luggage while in the possession of an airline. This resulted in frustration and anguish as he not only had to file a police report while on vacation but had to quickly find a way to access his required pain medication.

Despite misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding disabilities, Jesse encourages individuals with dwarfism to approach travel with confidence, patience, understanding and a positive attitude.

His memorable travel stories include both positive and negative experiences:

Positive—Germany: their innovative designs and cultural ethos contribute to a more accessible

travel environment. He reflected on the differences in accessibility between countries and the impact cultural attitudes can have on design.

Negative—an airline's refusal to bring his wheelchair to the gate and him (almost) being arrested for demanding its return. It was not returned at the gate and he was forced to endure a painful journey through the San Francisco International Airport escorted by airport attendees who seemed to care less about his comfort level or the pain he was in.

Jesse's stories as a traveller living with dwarfism sheds light on the nuances of accessibility in travel and the importance of advocating for inclusivity in all aspects of the travel industry. ■

# Kai Rivas encourages self-advocacy

By Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk

Kai Rivas is an incredible 15-year old athlete currently enrolled in high school in Arizona, U.S. He is a dedicated power wheelchair soccer player who recently travelled to Montreal, Canada for a soccer tournament with his team.

One key theme emerging from my conversation with Kai who was born with diastrophic dysplasia, a form of dwarfism, was the importance of being proactive and informed when travelling with mobility equipment. He emphasized the



Kai and members of his soccer team



Kai and members of his soccer team



importance of knowing the specifics of your equipment, such as battery type and assembly instructions, to ensure a smooth travel experience.

Despite barriers and challenges, Kai has enjoyed smooth travel particularly when the airport staff is knowledgeable and accommodating. But he admits that it is important to be unafraid to advocate for yourself and clearly communicate your needs to ensure comfortable, efficient travel.

Kai has observed a disparity in accessibility between U.S. states and other countries. He believes there should be a substantial global effort to create a more inclusive travel environment so that everyone can enjoy travel wherever they go.

He touched on the discomfort and challenges he faces during airport security screenings, identifying the need for improved sensitivity in these situations. Upon hearing

about the TSA Cares program (see Marie Trotter's article), he believes that it will allow travellers with disabilities fewer instances of frustration.

In terms of advocacy, Kai reiterated his desire for improved systems in airport security procedures in every country so travellers with disabilities can be assured of respectful interactions with airport staff.

His advice for fellow athletes and travellers with skeletal dysplasia:

- bring cushioning for comfort during long flights
- advocate for yourself during security screenings
- be prepared with knowledge of equipment specifications
- breaks and layovers are important to reduce fatigue and discomfort during travel. ■



Many travellers experience a lack of sensitivity highlighting the need for continued disability awareness and training.

Kai Rivas



# Marie Trottier cares

By Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk

Marie Trottier was born with achondroplasia, the most common form of dwarfism. She is the International Liaison with [Little People of America \(LPA\)](#) where she volunteers much of her time. She grew up with the organization and has a deep fondness for it.

Marie currently works as the Outreach and Engagement Program Manager in the Civil Rights Office with the Federal U.S. Government. Within that role, she oversees the [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](#). Marie's dedication to collaborating with advocacy organizations highlights her mission to foster inclusivity and accessibility in travel.

In her capacity at TSA, Marie plays a crucial role in enhancing public-facing programs such as [TSA Precheck](#) and [TSA CARES](#), aimed at providing support to travellers with disabilities. Through the provision of advanced information and the availability of [Passenger Support Specialists \(PSS\)](#), [TSA CARES](#) serves as a vital resource for travellers to address security screening concerns and ensure a seamless travel experience for individuals with diverse mobility needs.

Marie emphasizes the significance of self-advocacy and education for individuals with dwarfism, encouraging everyone to understand their body autonomy and mobility requirements when embarking on travel journeys. By leveraging her advocacy efforts and collaborating with advocacy organizations, Marie strives to empower individuals with disabilities to navigate air

travel confidently and efficiently, fostering a culture of inclusivity and accessibility.

Within her role at TSA, Marie focuses on training TSA officers to better understand and accommodate travellers with disabilities, including those with dwarfism. By engaging with advocacy organizations and gathering valuable feedback, Marie works towards enhancing training programs and developing resources to improve the overall travel experience for individuals with diverse medical needs and disabilities.

Marie's advice for individuals with dwarfism centers on:

- understanding specific needs
- reaching out to [TSA CARES](#) for advanced information
- ensuring compliance with security regulations when carrying medications or medical devices

By offering practical tips, insights, and resources, Marie empowers individuals with dwarfism to approach travel with patience and preparedness, mitigating challenges and enhancing their overall travel experience.

Sharing a poignant story involving assisting a dwarf couple facing challenges at TSA, Marie underscores the importance of

- preparation
- effective communication, and
- self-advocacy

in navigating travel obstacles. Marie



shared that the couple had recently contacted her for assistance with easing the frustration that travelling with a walking stick has caused in the past. Marie was able to provide helpful tips and empower the couple to contact [TSA Cares](#) to ensure that they had a smooth journey en route to Europe.

Marie's unwavering commitment to promoting inclusivity and accessibility in air travel is encouraging for individuals with dwarfism and disabilities. Through her tireless efforts, dedication to education, and commitment to raising awareness, Marie advocates for a more inclusive and accommodating travel environment for individuals with diverse mobility needs.

If travelling in the U.S., for more information on [TSA Cares](#) visit: [TSA Cares | Transportation Security Administration](#) or call 1-866-289-9673.

In Canada, [Canadian Air Transport Security Authority \(CATSA\)](#) can assist with travel requirements. Visit [Special Needs - CATSA](#) or call 1-888-294-2202 (toll-free) or 1-833-339-1021 (TTY) ■



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## Jim Teneycke

### “Find a good travel ally”

By Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk

I have had the pleasure of knowing Jim and his family for nearly 15 years since our kids first became friends. I have always known him to be someone who is kind, knowledgeable and passionate about advocacy.

Jim Teneycke was born with spondyloepiphyseal dysplasia congenita (SEDc), a form of dwarfism. He lives on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada and is married to Tracy with whom he has a 19-year-old son. Jim shares his experiences, challenges and triumphs exploring the world as a little person.

Having encountered inconsistencies with airlines handling his mobility device, Jim understands the importance of preparation, the need for self advocacy and resilience in the realm of travel. The advocate also nurtures these skills in his son, Caden, a [YouTube influencer](#) with over 300,000 followers.

Travelling as a person with dwarfism comes with its unique set of challenges, particularly regarding the acceptance and treatment of mobility devices by airlines. Jim and

his son, Caden, who was also born with spondyloepiphyseal dysplasia congenita use a Segway as their mobility device, but Segways are not often viewed by the able bodied as a mobility device people with disabilities would use. This causes them a lot of frustration during travel.

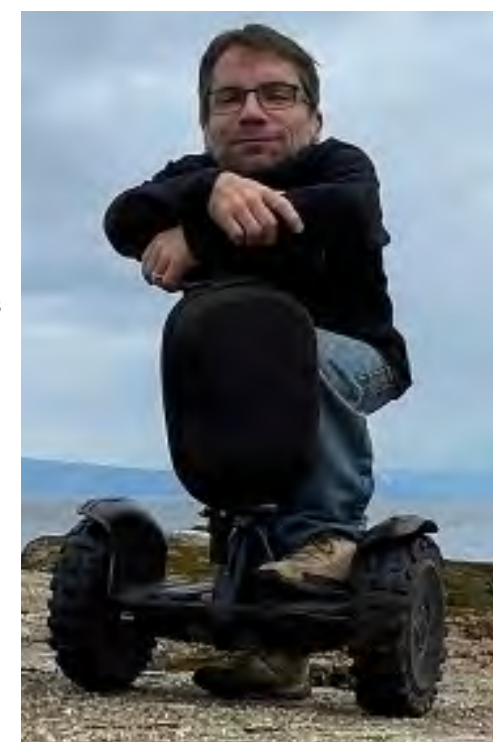
During our interview for this issue, Jim highlighted some of these frustrations which include receiving varying responses from airport staff regarding their mobility device. Some flights would proceed smoothly while others turn into nightmarish experiences due to misunderstandings and often, a refusal to allow them to board with their device despite diligently following guidelines and regulations.

Throughout our conversation, Jim emphasized the need for awareness among airlines (and hotels) and consistency in the information they share to ensure a smoother travel experience for individuals with disabilities.

The stress and uncertainty surrounding travel planning as a

person with dwarfism prompts Jim to wisely prioritize preparedness and assertiveness as he navigates seemingly inevitable travel challenges.

Jim and Caden speak fondly of Air Canada with whom they have a reliable connection. With this supportive travel partner, they proactively communicate their device specifications. The airline has demonstrated that they understand the men's needs and ensure a seamless





travel experience for them. But this reliable relationship with Air Canada, unfortunately, is not the same with other airlines within North America. Jim finds they are not as customer focused. He shared many stories about his interaction with other airlines that turned his excitement of travelling into a negative experience.

Specifically, and most recently, Caden was denied boarding with his Segway on a flight to Los Angeles. He was forced to leave his Segway at the airport with a stranger who worked there. This person agreed to hold on to the device until Caden's

friend could pick it up at a later time. Without his mobility device which provides him with independence, Caden had no choice but to purchase another Segway in Los Angeles.

Travel for Jim and his family now consists primarily of road trips to avoid the stress and frustration that comes with travelling on airlines other than Air Canada, however, he offers valuable advice for individuals with dwarfism seeking to explore the world: be courageous and determined!

He reflects on the importance

of nurturing advocacy skills in individuals with dwarfism, as exemplified by his son Caden's remarkable efforts in raising awareness and advocating for inclusivity through his social media presence.

Jim stresses how important it is for a person with dwarfism to exude confidence when navigating both online platforms and real-world challenges. ■

Follow Caden @CadenTenycke



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# Maria McClellan takes control of her travel destiny

By Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk

I have had the pleasure of working with Maria McClellan as a fellow board member of Little People of America for over a year. She holds the position of Inclusion Director.

Maria was born with Morquio Syndrome, a rare form of dwarfism. According to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, this occurs in 1 of every 200,000 births. She was born and raised in Hawaii but now lives in Pennsylvania and has a wealth

of experience travelling across the country and advocating for inclusivity.

One of the primary challenges she faces during travel is ensuring the safe transportation of her power wheelchair. With varying requirements and procedures across airlines, Maria emphasizes the importance of thorough planning and preparation to prevent damage to her mobility equipment. From

crafting a customized foam bed to carrying spare tools for repairs, Maria's meticulous attention to detail and taking proactive measures contributes towards a hassle-free travel experience.

Despite the obstacles and barriers encountered, Maria advocates for her needs by communicating confidently with airport staff. She encourages individuals with dwarfism to assert themselves

to ensure a respectful and accommodating travel environment.

In-person interactions with airport personnel is necessary, so too is the need for improved awareness and sensitivity to the needs of travellers with disabilities by airport staff. By speaking up, you raise awareness!

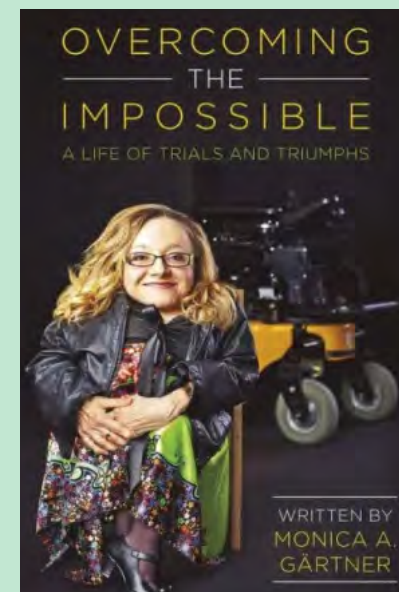
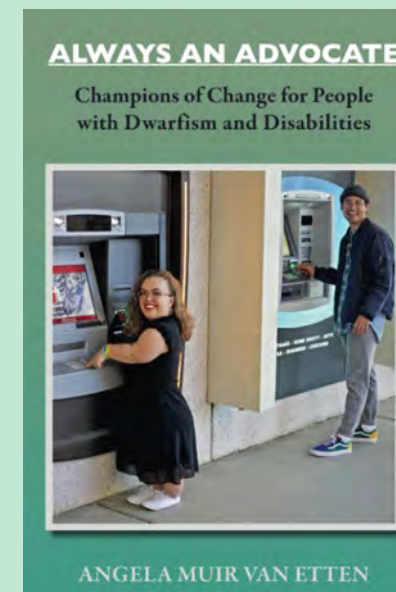
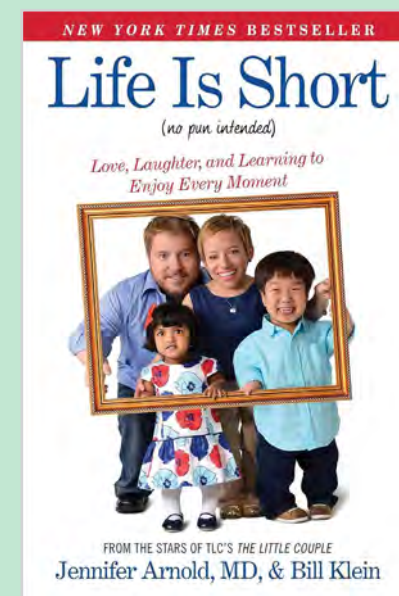
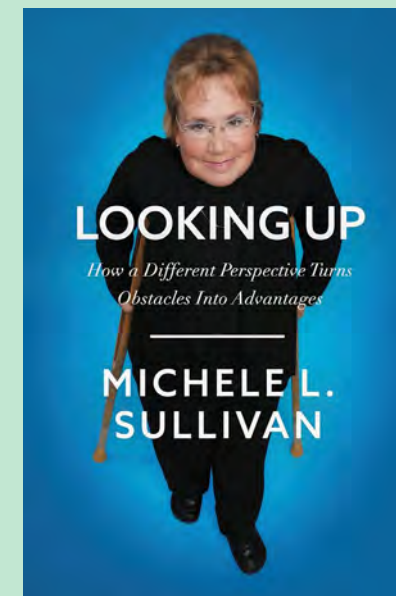
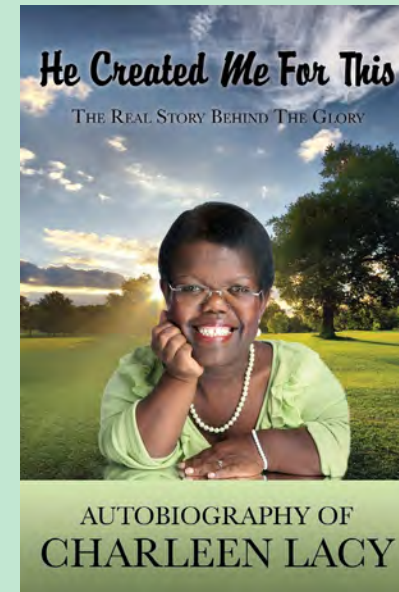
A journey from Hawaii to New York remains in her mind. She prefers direct flights, often finding it difficult for her and her service dog, Shadow, when a flight has a layover. That specific flight resulted in a legal battle against an airline that damaged her wheelchair. She ultimately won her battle but the stress and frustration was emotionally draining.



To navigate the intricacies of travelling as a Little Person, Maria advises:

- protect your mobility device
- self-advocacy
- thorough travel preparation
- be polite but assertive ■

## Recommended Reading



# Monica Gärtner

## Founder, the Canadian Assisted Travel Society



Monica was the recipient of a prestigious Courage To Come Back Award 2024

Coast Mental Health's Courage To Come Back Awards presented by Wheaton Precious Metals are now in their 26th year. It was held at the Vancouver Convention Centre on May 23rd. To date, the event has raised over \$25 million in support of Coast's community-based mental health services in the Greater Vancouver area. The evening celebrates the inspiring journeys of five award recipients across the following categories: Addiction, Mental Health, Physical Rehabilitation, Medical and Youth. Each has overcome extraordinary adversity to come back and give back to their community.

From the day she was born, Monica Gärtner has faced challenges most could not imagine. She has a very rare bone disease called Osteogenesis Imperfecta, causing her bones to break easily. As a result, she has had over 500 fractures – something as small as a cough could cause a broken rib.

As a child, she felt excluded from day-to-day activities in school and was bullied, taking an immense mental toll and leading to suicidal thoughts. She couldn't see a future for herself. But she persevered, completing her studies and becoming strong enough to manage many tasks – such as getting items out of a fridge - that might have seemed impossible.

Despite facing discrimination at every turn, Monica gained full time employment. She was underestimated and overlooked for roles and promotions by employers because of her disability and had to work extra hard to prove herself time and time again.

After two car accidents, a fall out of her chair, which resulted in multiple fractures and months and months of rehabilitation, she continues to work full time. Less than a year ago, both of her lungs collapsed. Her medical team didn't think she would survive, and she was denied certain supports because they feared breaking her bones. But Monica did survive, is back at work and continues to defy the odds.

Remarkably, Monica finds the time and energy to fulfill her life's mission: to show that people living with disabilities can live equal lives to able-bodied people. She selflessly shares her story through public speaking, writing and acting. In 2016 she published a book *Overcoming the Impossible-A Life of Trials and Triumphs* about her story. She also founded the Canadian Assisted Travel Society to support people with disabilities who want to travel. She has volunteered her time on multiple charity boards and mentors her peers.

[www.monicagartner.ca](http://www.monicagartner.ca)

## A conversation with Monica . . .

### WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO ESTABLISH THE CANADIAN ASSISTED TRAVEL SOCIETY (CATS), AND HOW HAS YOUR PERSONAL JOURNEY WITH OSTEOGENESIS IMPERFECTA (OI) INFLUENCED ITS MISSION AND GOALS?

Myself and a few friends got together to discuss our favourite topic. It was getting increasingly difficult to travel with family and friends because of aging parents and friends getting married and subsequently having families of their own. The Canadian Assisted Travel Society's mission and goals have not been influenced by me having OI, but rather I believe if a person with mobility disability needs assistance while travelling then one should get the assistance. Since I do have OI, I am very careful about who I choose to travel with me. I try and reduce the risk of injury to myself or my caregiver.

### HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THE CHALLENGES OF TRAVEL AND WHAT ARE SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS INDIVIDUALS WITH OI SHOULD KEEP IN MIND WHEN PLANNING TRIPS?

I always ensure the person I am travelling with is capable of lifting me in small places. The person has to have great balance and not hold me too tightly, so I don't break. The caregiver needs to be physically fit because I may have to lay down on the floor for toileting. There is always a chance I can fracture, so I

always bring strong painkillers with me. I purchase medical and trip interruption insurance for both my caregiver and myself. Safety always comes first, so I don't take chances when transferring.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE FROM YOUR TRAVELS THAT HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY AND SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES?

I have not been able to use the toilet on the plane for decades because the bathroom is so small. I usually go on a bedpan on the floor. I also have more pain in my back now because of the car accidents I have sustained. I wish that I could afford the business class seat so I could lay down, but it's too expensive while travelling long distance. I sometimes will lay down on the floor in front of my seat, but this is getting dangerous due to turbulence. Alternatively, I wish the airlines would allow us to bring our wheelchairs on the plane and have a tie down system so it would be more comfortable for us.

### WHAT ARE SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE ABOUT TRAVELLING WITH A DISABILITY AND HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION WORK TO DISPEL THESE MYTHS?

Most people think people with disabilities can't afford to travel and when we do many people tend to

look to your caregiver for guidance instead of asking the person with the disability. Also many people who are newly injured or have acquired a disability don't think it's possible to travel and that it takes so much effort. It does take some investigative work, but everyone does some research when they want to go on vacation.

### WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED WITHIN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY TO MAKE IT MORE INCLUSIVE AND ACCOMMODATING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES?

The travel industry needs to provide a place for us to sit within the aircraft. It would be far more comfortable with less pain and anxiety. A caregiver can sit behind us—and give us a break on the cost of the caregiver seat. In Canada, we no longer have to pay for the cost of the caregiver seat, but we do have to pay the tax for that seat. I think that's fair and that model should be expanded to not only domestic flights, but also international flights.

### HOW DOES THE CANADIAN ASSISTED TRAVEL SOCIETY COLLABORATE WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS OR STAKEHOLDERS TO ADVOCATE FOR BETTER ACCESSIBILITY AND SUPPORT IN THE TRAVEL SECTOR?

The Canadian Assisted Travel Society needs to do more collaboration with the airline industry. We have currently been

focusing on the end user and educating people with disabilities that we exist and also holding fundraising events. During these events, we educate the public on the challenges of travelling when you have a disability and also give some practical advise such as planning ahead.

**WHAT PROGRAMS OR INITIATIVES HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION IMPLEMENTED TO ENHANCE THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?**

We have a travel grant program. We invite people with disabilities to complete a form that outlines their travel plans. This plan includes the cost of taking a caregiver and reasons why the person needs a caregiver. We pay for part or all of the caregiver's travel expenses depending on the amount of money we raise.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WITH OI WHO DREAMS OF TRAVELLING BUT IS HESITANT?**

It's very important finding the right person to take with you. Recognize no one is perfect and don't expect

a perfect trip. Be open to changes in your plan because sometimes you will face the unexpected. That happened to me recently when I went to Antwerp, Belgium. I received information from the Antwerp travel as to what I can see that is wheelchair accessible, however, they failed to tell me that you have to book a taxi three weeks in advance or you will not be able to order a taxi. I had to modify what I wanted to see.

**FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, HOW DOES TRAVELLING WITH A DISABILITY CONTRIBUTE TO PERSONAL GROWTH AND WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE MOST REWARDING ASPECTS OF YOUR OWN TRAVEL EXPERIENCES?**

My travelling began when my parents took me to Germany with my sister when I was ten. I met my cousin who was developmentally and physically disabled. Travelling opened my eyes not only to various cultures, but to the realization that there are people with disabilities all over the world. We all struggle with our challenges and we all strive for acceptance. Thinking back, when I was in my late teens, my family went to Toronto, Ontario. My parents wanted to show us where they lived before we moved to BC. By that time, I had an electric wheelchair. The airline in BC let my chair and batteries on the airplane, however, on our way back, my batteries were not allowed on the plane. A steward escorted us through the Toronto airport and said, "In all my 30 years working in the airport, I have never seen anyone in a wheelchair travel."

In my head, I said get used to it because we aren't staying home anymore! Every now and again, I think about that conversation and it gives me great joy and satisfaction that people with disabilities are travelling all over the world.

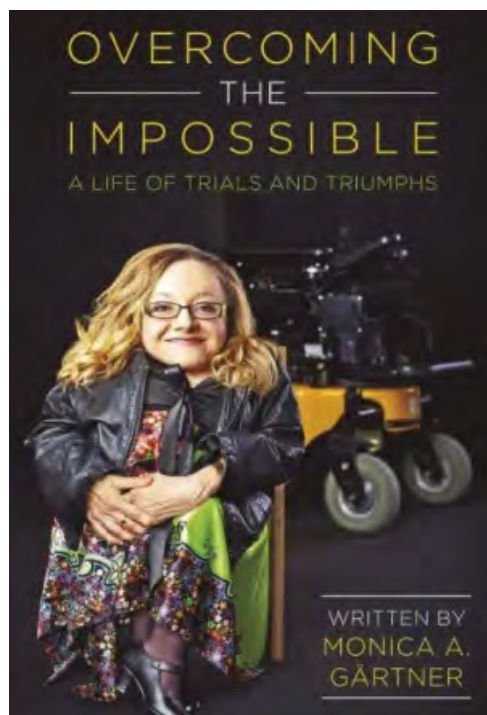
**LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL, BOTH IN CANADA AND GLOBALLY?**

It is my hope that one day people with disabilities who use an electric wheelchair will be able to sit in their wheelchair while on the aircraft in Canada and around the world. It would reduce the pain and discomfort we feel while travelling. It certainly would be great if planes had a wheelchair accessible toilet on board, but that may be more difficult to convince them to do because of the space. A curtain around the wheelchair would allow for some privacy while using a medical device to go to the washroom. In addition, I would like to see international flights give people with disabilities a 50% discount when buying a ticket for their attendant. This would include business class seats, so a person with a disability who has back pain can lie down while travelling long distance of 8 hours or more.

There needs to be more wheelchair accessible accommodations and transportation in Europe. I can't speak for the rest of the world, because I haven't travelled to every country yet. Society needs to learn that not all people with disabilities are on government assistance. We work, and we have disposable income, therefore, we are good for their local and global economies. ■

As a person with a disability, I have had my share of emergency department visits. I survived getting hit by a car twice, falling out of my wheelchair which resulted in five fractures, and last spring I got pneumonia which subsequently led to both of my lungs collapsing due to a drug overdose. However, when I'm not injured I work full-time for the Government of Canada in the area of Human Resources. In my spare time, I created the Canadian Assisted Travel Society, and wrote a book called *Overcoming the Impossible - A Life of Trials and Triumphs*. [Get the book here.](#)

"I'm not a superhero, I'm just a woman with a disability that has a great deal of perseverance and a desire to help my community live with dignity."  
- Monica Gärtner



Monica Gärtner, Medical Recipient in Coast Mental Health's Courage To Come Back Awards



Samantha with her husband, Ryan and son, Yale.



Samantha with her son, Yale, in Italy

## Empowering Travel: Navigating accessibility and advocacy for individuals with Dwarfism

By Samantha Rayburn-Trubyk

I love to travel. Travelling as a person born with dwarfism presents unique challenges but also opportunities for making connections. In this article, I share some of my most memorable travel experiences, from navigating inaccessible rental trucks to meeting Andre Agassi and Vice President Kamala Harris.

These stories highlight the importance of preparation, self-advocacy and the need for greater accessibility in the travel industry. Whether it's ensuring accessible accommodations or dealing with safety concerns, my journey offers insights and advice for fellow Little People hesitant to travel.

### MOST MEMORABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

One of my most memorable travel experiences occurred during a work trip. My coworker rented a massive truck that lacked running boards. I was not able to get in or out of the truck comfortably and needed a curb to climb into it. After

a few unsuccessful attempts, I decided to take a taxi to our daily destinations instead.

In another instance, before the days of Uber or Lyft, I was in Edmonton for work. After a long day, I called a cab to take me back to my hotel but ended up waiting for three hours due to heavy snowfall and a busy season. When the cab finally arrived, another passenger, who had also been waiting for a long time, ended up sharing the ride. The driver and the passenger engaged in a heated political debate, making me feel unsafe. Fortunately, the passenger's stop came up, and he got out at the right time.

### SAFETY

Safety can be a real concern as a Little Person and being aware of your surroundings is critical. I recall another work trip to Calgary. I was returning to my room after an all-day session and noticed a hotel employee in the hallway. Something about the situation

made me nervous, so I went back to my room and chose to order dinner in. I was so nervous that I decided to pull the loveseat in my room in front of the door. This room was not an accessible one, so I could not use the peephole. I went to bed feeling secure and woke up to find evidence of an attempted break-in. The couch had been pushed from the door which was slightly ajar, but my makeshift lock had worked. After speaking with hotel management, I was informed that their security footage was not working that night.

### SOCIALIZING AT WORK EVENTS

Travelling for work can be uncomfortable and you often have to rely heavily on others. The challenges I face daily are highlighted even more. When discussing dinner or after-work plans, coworkers often choose lounges with high tables. I often find that I either don't attend the gathering and feel excluded or, if I do attend, I have to call the

restaurant ahead of time to ensure a low table is reserved. When travelling for work, I now ensure that rental cars are accessible and advocate for suitable arrangements when colleagues suggest outings to places with high tables.

**VISIBILITY**

As a Little Person, you are noticed more when out and about, but that isn't always negative. I recall many vacations where I've had wonderful experiences that would not have happened otherwise. One was when I travelled to see a tennis match. It was one of the last times Andre Agassi played and his opponent was Andy Roddick. After the match, I managed to sweet talk my way into meeting Mr. Agassi. In 2019, at the Little People of America conference in San Francisco, a group of us attended the San Francisco Pride Parade. There was a stoppage during the parade and we were lucky enough to have (now) Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, stop close to us.



Samantha's son Yale with VP Kamala Harris

Her security detail noticed us calling her over and allowed her to visit and take photos with our group.

Travelling as a Little Person has given me a unique perspective on

the world. I've encountered both challenges and incredible moments of connection.

**CHALLENGES**

Travelling often presents challenges related to accessibility and social interactions. In Winnipeg, where I know the community well, I navigate comfortably. However, in unfamiliar places, I face new stares, new comments and inappropriate photo-taking. I recall an incident in a mall in Atlanta with my best friend, who is also a Little Person. We were followed and laughed at and I naively tried to confront the person, which was a mistake. We quickly left the mall for the safety of our hotel.

**A LITTLE PERSON IS A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY**

Depending on where you go, I find that some places do not recognize that being a Little Person is considered a disability. When trying to utilize my access needs, I am sometimes questioned about the validity of my disability. Disney, for example, used to be accommodating, but over the years, their policies have changed. Now, the amount of work needed to "prove" my disability is extensive. They recently changed their eligibility criteria for their Disability Access Service (DAS) program, excluding many visible and non-visible disabilities.

While I find most places in the U.S. accommodating, travelling outside North America can be difficult. A family trip to Italy in 2022 was challenging due to the number of stairs and uneven surfaces, simply due to the sheer age of the destinations we visited. Despite these challenges, researching and planning can help mitigate some of the issues.

**ADVICE**

I advise thorough research

on destinations, especially regarding accessible restaurants, transportation and attractions.

Know where you should and shouldn't go and always use your voice to advocate for yourself when travelling with others.

Pack essential clothes in your carry-on since finding suitable replacements can be difficult due to the nature of not being able to buy off the rack if luggage is lost.

Pack a foldable stool, as most hotels do not have stools available. I've had many trips where I've had to take a running start just to get into bed or stand on the toilet seat to see the mirror.

Finally, be aware of your surroundings and trust your gut. If something doesn't feel right, don't do it, don't go into that space, don't trust that individual.

Don't let fear hold you back—preparation and self-advocacy can make travel a rewarding experience.

**ADVOCACY**

During a business conference (and most that I have attended), the meeting room had high tables used for networking (think wine and cheese event) that were inaccessible for me. I approached the organizers, explained my situation, unintentionally, they had created an event that excluded some. Initially, they seemed unsure, but after I explained the importance of inclusivity, they promised to update their policies for future conferences. This experience reinforced the importance of self-advocacy.

**TRIP PREPARATION**

Preparation is key to a smooth and accessible trip. I research my destination thoroughly, looking



Samantha with her husband, Ryan in Greece



Samantha with her husband, Ryan in Italy

for accessible accommodations and transportation options. Where possible, I book accessible rooms and contact hotels in advance to confirm accessibility features and request any necessary modifications.

Packing strategically, with essential items in my carry-on, helps me stay prepared for any unforeseen circumstances. Additionally, I plan my itinerary to include accessible routes and activities, ensuring a more enjoyable travel experience.

**IMPROVEMENTS IN TRAVEL**

There have been notable improvements in travel accessibility over the years. The advent of services like Uber and Lyft has significantly enhanced my ability to get around comfortably. I am a fan of ride sharing services as they give me the independence to move around the destination freely.

More hotels and public spaces are incorporating accessibility features, and there is a growing awareness and sensitivity towards the needs of travellers with disabilities. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure consistent accessibility across all aspects of travel.

**THE ROLE OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY**

The travel industry has a crucial

role in improving accessibility. This includes designing a more inclusive infrastructure, offering comprehensive accessibility information and training staff to understand and address the needs of travellers with disabilities.

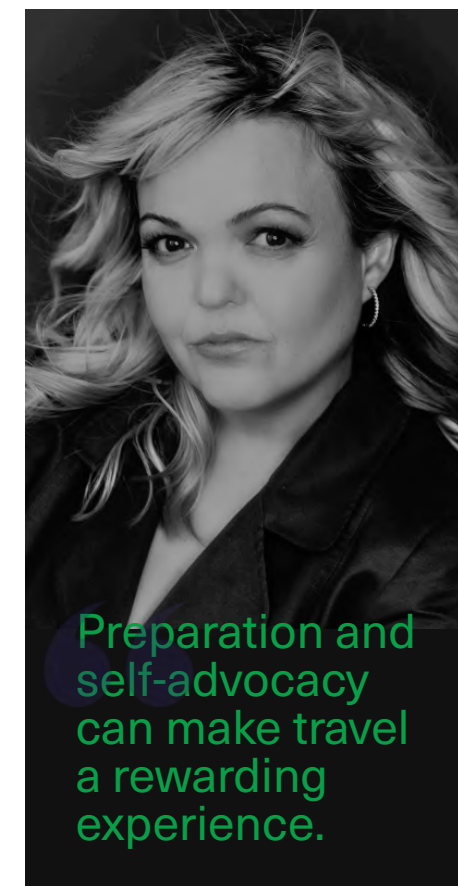
Airports can improve screening processes and allowable devices. Airlines can improve seating arrangements and boarding processes, while hotels can ensure their facilities are genuinely accessible and have resources like stools and "reachers" available. The industry should also collaborate with disability advocacy groups to develop and implement best practices for inclusivity.

**CONTRIBUTION OF FELLOW TRAVELLERS**

Travellers can contribute by being respectful and aware of the needs of those with disabilities. This includes not taking unsolicited photos, offering assistance when appropriate and advocating for accessibility in shared spaces. Educating themselves about the challenges faced by travellers with disabilities and promoting inclusive attitudes can help create a more welcoming environment for everyone. Fellow travellers can also become an ally to those with disabilities and when they witness

something egregious, assist where needed.

By sharing our experiences and advocating for better accessibility, we can inspire others to explore the world confidently. Remember, the more we travel and raise awareness, the more inclusive and accommodating the world will become. Your advocacy and experiences matter—use them to pave the way for a more accessible future for all travellers. ■



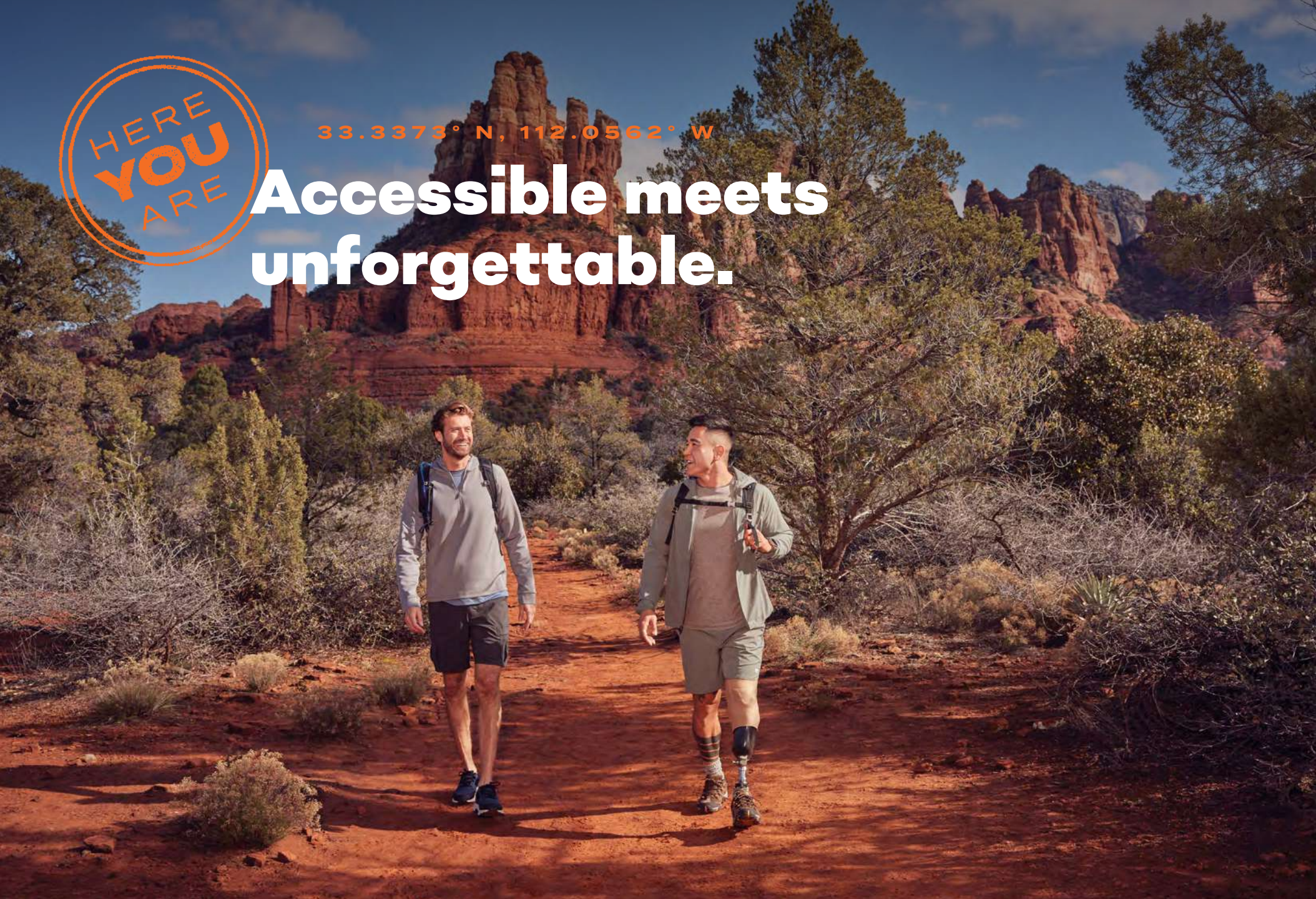
Preparation and self-advocacy can make travel a rewarding experience.





33.3373° N, 112.0562° W

# Accessible meets unforgettable.



In Arizona, adventure is everywhere and inclusive experiences abound. Make some memories against a spectacular backdrop.

**1 Kartchner Caverns**  
Immerse yourself in a literal hidden gem.

**3 Sedona Hiking**  
Experience the Red Rocks on miles of accessible trails.

**2 Verde Canyon Railroad**  
All aboard for a scenic journey filled with rugged landscapes, wildlife, and historic sites.

**4 Grand Canyon National Park**  
By train or plane, a 7th Wonder is calling.

**5 Bartlett Lake**  
Cool off with Arizona Adaptive Watersports.

**6 Desert Botanical Garden**  
A Sonoran Desert wonderland with endless smooth pathways.

**7 Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument**  
Dark skies and stars await.

**8 Bearizona Wildlife Park**  
Get up close and personal with North American wildlife.

**ARIZONA**  
THE GRAND CANYON STATE

VISITARIZONA.COM



# Family Fun No Limits

With Jennifer Allen  
Read her blog, [Wonders within Reach](#)

## Summer vacation

**M**y early vacation memories as a family with disabilities are not fond. I remember carrying my 40 lb. son, along with the beach umbrella, toys and chairs... and then adding his little sister to my arms when the sand became too hot to walk. I remember his scraped-up legs and feet from trying to navigate the sand without being able to walk. I remember getting back to our room

and carrying him upstairs in the hotel with no elevator and where there was no space in the room to store a wheelchair. I remember feeling furious with my husband for his “helpful idea” of heading back early so he could pick up pizza and have it ready when we returned. Everything hurt. I was tired and overwhelmed and just wanted to go home.

Maybe part of that was the growing pains of adjusting to a new lifestyle, but mostly we were just doing it all wrong. I had never heard of a beach wheelchair. I didn't know to search for mobimats. I didn't filter my search for accessible beaches, because I had never seen one and didn't know they existed. The ocean is a miserable experience for wheelchair users who aren't at an accessible beach.

We've come a long way since then! We can even say that most

Families with disabilities exploring the world together



of our vacations actually feel like a vacation. Here are some typical summer vacations that can be done in an accessible way to make them feel like... well, vacation!

### THE BEACH

There are nearly endless accessible beach destinations for wheelchair users. A good accessible beach should have at least a beach wheelchair, accessible paths and a handicap restroom. Of course, it's even better if there are additional amenities like accessible picnic pavilions, adaptive sports or direct accessible access from your hotel.

Here's a list of [accessible east coast beaches](#) in the U.S., categorizing what's available at each location. There are also great options along the west coast. California has an ever increasing list of [beach wheelchairs](#) available. The accessible amenities go far beyond

[beach wheelchairs](#) at [their most accessible options](#).

Galveston, Texas hosts adaptive festivals and events at their [accessible beaches](#).

Accessible beaches aren't limited to the U.S.! The Greek islands are becoming known for their unique track chair that moves in and out of the water by remote control.

Queensland has several [accessible beaches](#), and they've made [disability inclusion](#) a priority in all areas.

Even the pebble beaches of Croatia have multiple accessible options! Wherever you're headed, try a search for the destination + “accessible beach.” You may be surprised by how many options you find.

### FAMILY CAMPS

There are plenty of [camps for kids with disabilities](#), and endless options

for siblings, but finding an option that takes both is tough!

Many disability-specific camps welcome the whole family. My kids chose to return to [Camp NSF](#) this summer, rather than take a family trip to Hawaii. Search camps for your child's disability and you may find unforgettable options for everyone. Another great option is the [National Ability Center](#) in Utah. The camp offers family stays on a variety of dates and offers fun for all abilities. They have adaptive rock wall climbing, kayaking, skiing, biking, archery, and much more. All of these activities are adapted for the whole family to participate.

### NATIONAL PARKS AND NATURE STAYS

A summer at the cabin isn't what comes to mind for an accessible holiday, but there are plenty of accessible ways to soak in the outdoors!



Accessible waterfall view and trail at Great Falls National Park

I have a dream for this summer of living in nature, spending our days outdoors with the freedom to play and explore at our own pace. I'm not sure what that will look like with our family needs and disabilities, but I know we can find accessible accommodations, camping options and trails to get us on our way.

### National parks

National parks are one of the best ways to find an accessible path into the wonders of nature. Most national parks have at least one accessible camping spot and one accessible cabin, if there are overnight amenities at that park. Because national parks draw in visitors, you can also find a variety of lodging options near the parks. [Tenaya Lodge](#) is just outside of Yosemite and offers a barrier-free stay, along with accessible park experiences.

National parks will almost always have accessible trail options, as well as drive-up views.

### Accessible trails

National parks don't hold the only claim over accessible nature. Search



Enjoying an accessible beach in Surf City



Adaptive sports at the NAC

your state parks and you're likely to find other good options. Some of the parks that can't be accessible, like Staunton State Park in Colorado, have track chairs or other equipment to get you through.

Rail trails are another great option—winding through all types of terrain, usually on a paved surface. These trails are spread out around much of the globe.

**Glamping**

Glamping is the perfect middle ground for immersing yourself in nature without having to set up camp. Glamping sites are not typically wheelchair accessible, but there are accessible glamping options all around the world. Many state and national parks also offer an accessible cabin option.

While van camping is not nearly as glamorous as glamping, it can add ease and comfort to a camping experience. Accessible camper vans can also be hard to find. We do a cheap, temporary van conversion, enabling us to stay in the comfort of our minivan.

**TIME FOR A VACATION!**

While I only covered the three big summer vacation destinations, these aren't your only options. If you're not sure where to begin, start with a destination that already has a reputation for accessibility and inclusion. Accessible Journeys features incredible options around the world. A disability travel agent can take the load off and plan your accessible trip for you. Whatever your vacation dream is, there's an accessible way to achieve it! ■



Accessible Trail at Joshua Tree National Park

“National parks will almost always have accessible trail options, as well as drive-up views.” *Jennifer Allen*



# What Does it Mean to Be a Destination A11y?



**Being an A11y means:**

- Your destination is welcoming to visitors with disabilities
- Your destination cares about being inclusive
- Your destination is working to improve your accessibility
- Your destination sees the future of travel
- Your destination is actively engaging with stakeholders to raise awareness about the needs of the disability community

Thank you to the following destinations who have committed to accelerating accessibility:



THE DESTINATION A11Y CLUB IS A PROJECT OF



# A family trip to Lancaster, Pennsylvania

By Olivia Novak

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, with its rolling hills, charming towns, and rich cultural heritage, offers a peaceful yet exciting escape for families of all abilities. Beyond the breathtaking farmland vistas, the county boasts a variety of accessible attractions that cater to a range of interests. Lancaster County is proud to be an [AbleVu Accessible Destination](#) and Discover Lancaster is committed to providing accurate and helpful accessibility information for visitors. Check out our [Accessibility Guide](#) for more trip-planning resources.

**Lights, Camera, Magic!** Experience the wonder of live entertainment at the [Magic & Wonder Dinner Theater](#). This wheelchair-accessible theater offers a captivating blend of magic, comedy, and illusion that will leave the whole family shocked and amazed. Spacious aisles and designated seating areas ensure a comfortable experience for wheelchair users. Visit their website to access a [virtual tour](#) of the theater.

**Lancaster's Only Vintage Bowling Alley and Arcade!** [Decades](#) has something for the whole family to enjoy. The classic bowling alley and arcade are perfect for kids and adults alike, and their full-service restaurant and bar can fuel the fun for hours. There is a wheelchair lift on the side of the building that facilitates entry into this historic building for wheelchair users.

**Shop Local!** Embark on a treasure hunt at [Kitchen Kettle Village](#), a charming village with over 40 unique shops and eateries. There is an uplifting and exciting energy throughout the village as families pop in and out of various locally owned shops. Paved walkways and level storefronts ensure easy access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Many shops offer spacious aisles and well-lit displays, making browsing enjoyable for everyone. Restrooms throughout the complex are also fully accessible.

**Explore the Great Outdoors!** Immerse yourself in nature on a scenic adventure along the

Northwest River Trail. This paved trail, a part of the Lancaster County River Trail system, offers stunning views of the Susquehanna River. The gentle incline of the trail makes it suitable for wheelchairs.

**Plan Your Accessible Adventure!** Let us help you plan your trip to Lancaster County! Visit our website's expansive [list of accessible businesses](#) to map out your itinerary. When you get to Lancaster, stop by the [Discover Lancaster Visitors Center](#) to speak with our knowledgeable travel consultants about things to do, places to stay, and more. The Visitors Center is fully wheelchair accessible and has braille copies of our [visitors guide](#) for guests with visual impairments. Take a [virtual tour](#) of the Visitors Center before you come to ensure the space is conducive to your family's needs.

So pack your bags, gather your family, and get ready for an unforgettable adventure in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch Country! Find more inspiration for your trip by [following us on social media!](#) ■



## Accessibility — MEETS — Adventure

LANCASTER COUNTY, PA welcomes visitors of all abilities. Visit Discover Lancaster's accessible attractions, lodging options, historical sites, sports, recreational activities and more!

PLAN YOUR ADVENTURE NOW



"Lancaster County is one of the most progressively accessible destinations we've experienced. There's plenty for everyone to enjoy, and they're continuously improving and making sure all feel welcome. It just keeps getting better!" -Jennifer Allen, *Wonders Within Reach*

“Climbing the hardest mountain brings the best views.”  
Katie Vandergriff



A Down Syndrome diagnosis opened a new world for the Vandergriff family

## Enjoy the journey

By Katie Vandergriff - [Downs and Towns](#)

*Katie is the mom of Houston Vandergriff, a world renown photographer with Down Syndrome. The following is her story, from diagnosis day to changing the world through following her son's passion.*

When our son, Houston, was born 26 years ago, each consecutive doctor came in with worse news than the last. Houston had jaundice, difficulty breathing, low muscle tone, a hole in his heart, Down syndrome. Each specialist had a long list of things Houston would struggle with or never do.

### TURNING A DIAGNOSIS UPSIDE DOWN

Despite the doctors' dire predictions, today our family

joins Houston on his journey to be a globe-trotting photographer, entrepreneur and influencer. Houston has travelled to 27 countries, 49 of the 50 United States and five Canadian provinces. His award-winning photos have been in magazines and books and have been shown in galleries in seven countries.

When Houston was born, the geneticist told us that people with Down syndrome “wear it on their face.” As an exhausted and

overwhelmed new mom, I thought that was a horrible thing to say and I cried for days. We have since discovered what the doctor meant is that, unlike many disabilities, Houston's Down syndrome is visible. That can honestly be a very good thing. Inclusive clients who wish to show how they are embracing differences can use Houston's story to showcase the fact that diversity includes disability. One of Houston's first influencer clients was Amazon.

Our progress has not happened overnight: it's a result of just hanging in there, having fun and staying connected. In 2021, we started selling his fine art photos online through his website, [www.downsandtowns.com](http://www.downsandtowns.com). In 2022, Houston sold his first digital collectible photographs (i.e. NFT). In 2023, he was named by NFT NOW to the NFT100 as one of the top creative influencers in the world. And in 2024, he was named as one of only nine Nikon Creator Official Partners in the United States.

The week that we opened the Downs & Towns online shop, we had a TikTok video that went viral. Houston's photography story was shared in Newsweek. People started contacting our family from around the world. In just two weeks we did fourteen podcasts and interviews on four continents—thanks to the miracle of modern technology. Our two most viral TikToks (more than 25 million views for the 2 videos) are about travelling and being a travel photographer. Many people find it hard to believe that a person with a disability can do anything. It is fun to prove them wrong.

Since Houston was born, our family's biggest passion has been helping break down outdated stereotypes. We have been invited as speakers to multiple conventions—including two national and three international—where we were honored to share about our family's journey. Houston's camera opens doors around the world.

Our family continues to travel. Since March 2023, we have been to 23 states, seven countries, and four continents. Our trips have included a two week influencer trip to Portugal, leading nine day photography adventure trips to Egypt and Costa Rica (led by Houston), a week of



vacation on St. Lucia, a 13 state road trip from Tennessee through New England and two weeks in Turkey.

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In 2023, Houston was awarded the International *Against All Odds Traveller* by NomadMania. Houston's story inspires many both inside and outside of the disability community. His photography and personal story have attracted a global audience.

Houston's travels with his camera open doors and build relationships around the three pillars of travel, photography, and advocacy—and the magic that happens when you combine all three.

Houston's camera is a voice for inclusion. Social media has given him a chance to shout from the rooftops. Through his photography and our family travel, Houston's story encourages people to look at



disability in a different light. We use Houston's photography for inspiration, influence, education and advocacy. Pursuing travel photography has put us in touch with many amazing advocates from all over. Travelling and meeting people from around the world in real life has been the most amazing part.

Houston was labelled the "Champion of Life" by a podcaster in India and it is exciting to know that as one small family, we can make a difference in disability awareness around the world. Houston has always had a camera in his hand, since he was a little kid. As an adult, he worked hard to make it his profession. He received his Photography Certificates from the University of Tennessee Professional Programs in 2019 and 2020. That resulted from more than 200 hours of class time, homework, field trips, mentoring, and portfolio reviews.

Through Houston's photography, we have been able to support the special needs community in a variety of ways. We have made

donations to international support organizations, used our social media platforms for advocacy and donated photo greeting cards to newborn babies with Down syndrome. We have supported an emerging artist in Nigeria by helping him purchase a camera and computer. We even raised enough money from the sales of Houston's photographs to build an accessible bathroom at a special needs school in Guatemala.

Our family has been able to use Houston's photography for inspiration, influence, education and advocacy. We love to share the positives surrounding disability on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter/X, as well as in real-life events. This year, for World Down Syndrome Day, Houston was invited to do a gallery show on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

**A MESSAGE TO MY YOUNGER SELF**

If I could go back, I would like to say a few things to those grieving parents in the delivery room and

to the doctors making their dire predictions.

I would tell them to take a deep breath, relax and get ready for a fantastic journey. Climbing the hardest mountain brings the best views. I would tell them that disability may bring bigger challenges, but it also brings bigger gifts. Having Down syndrome is Houston's superpower.

Houston helps us see the beauty in the everyday, feel the infectious joy of discovery and understand that true diversity builds a stronger community and world. Houston's travel photography captures his unique view of the world. With his camera, he can share the beauty he sees in everything and everyone—and it is truly beautiful.

Because we have Houston in our lives, we have learned not to take a single minute for granted. Every day is a gift to be celebrated. Our suitcases and camera bags are always packed for the next adventure. ■

**Houston's travel photography: Lisbon**

[www.downsandtowns.com](http://www.downsandtowns.com)



# Better Together

## Disability Parent Q & A

**Q** How do you navigate travel with all of the medical equipment needed?

**A** No matter how much gear you travel with, it can be done! Some people prefer to stick with road trips or travel with an RV to cut back on the hassle of transporting bulky gear or fitting everything on a plane. If you haven't travelled before, that's a less intimidating way to start. If you have things that won't fit into a car or RV, like a hospital style bed, many things can also be rented from local DMO providers. If this is overwhelming to you, consider booking through a disability-focused travel agent.

When you're ready to fly, it's good to know that your medical equipment flies for free! If it meets the size requirements, it can stay with you as a free carry-on. If it's a larger item, it will need to be checked. It's helpful to have a separate

suitcase dedicated to medical equipment both for organization and for showing the airline what counts as medically necessary. I strongly recommend contacting your airline ahead of time, since airlines are notorious for running out of space for wheelchairs and other essential, large items. If you have anything that isn't obviously meeting a medical need, it may be helpful to travel with a note from your doctor. Getting dish soap for an enema through Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is no small ordeal!

If you're visiting family or friends, you can preship anything you don't want to carry with you. We've also had our insurance mail supplies directly to our destination. Just make sure they understand when to switch it back! ■

### NEXT ISSUE:

**Are there destinations that cater specifically to high needs/disability?**

Do you have any expertise to share on next issue's question?

Please submit your input, or any questions of your own for future issues, to [jennifer@wonderswithinreach.com](mailto:jennifer@wonderswithinreach.com)



# Adaptive Adventures

Thrilling adventures for all abilities



[To Table of Contents](#)



## Lisa Franks: Living a limitless van life

Canadian Lisa Franks was a Paralympian, a title she wore with pride. Her journey in athletics began with a spinal cord injury at fourteen, but it quickly turned into a winning narrative. Before her injury, she was very active, a true athlete at heart. Introduced to wheelchair sports by visiting Paralympians, she was inspired and determined. She started with wheelchair rugby for fun, which then led her to wheelchair racing. Under the guidance of her coach, also a Paralympic wheelchair racer, she excelled rapidly. By 1999, she was breaking world records and in 2000, she competed in her first Paralympics in Sydney, Australia, returning home with four gold and one silver medal.

Her proudest achievement, she recalled, was in 2004, achieving the “world record sweep” by setting world records from the 100-meter

race to the marathon. At the Athens Paralympics, she secured two gold medals and set two world records. Despite her success, she constantly sought new challenges, eventually transitioning to wheelchair basketball and attending her third Paralympics in Beijing, China.

Yet, as injuries took a toll on her shoulder, she faced a different kind of challenge. Forced to undergo multiple surgeries, she grappled with chronic pain for seven years. During this dark period, Lisa reevaluated her life. She realized she needed a change, something to reignite her passion and bring joy back into her life.

That change came in the form of van life. Initially, it was a way to escape the harsh winters of Saskatchewan. In 2019, after a tough year marked by personal

losses and with a harsh winter looming, she built a bed in her SUV and headed to Southern California. The trip, intended to last four months, was cut short by the pandemic, but it sparked something within her. She felt healthier and happier being outdoors and living on the road. Lisa transformed her SUV into a home on wheels and later upgraded to a camper van. Travelling solo, she equipped her van with everything she needed to live independently. She was no stranger to challenges, but this time they were different. Navigating the logistics of accessible travel, finding suitable campsites and managing her physical needs were all part of her new adventure.

Sharing her journey on social media as [@keepinitwheel306](#), Lisa found a new community and purpose. Initially a private

[To Table of Contents](#)



person, she opened up about her experiences, providing valuable information to others with disabilities interested in van life. The feedback was overwhelming. Messages poured in from people inspired by her journey, grateful for the insights she provided.

“Social media has been a game-changer for me,” Lisa explained. “It’s connected me with so many people and allows me to share important information about accessibility.”

One of her key messages is the importance of making things accessible from the start. Whether it’s a trailhead or a campground, accessibility benefits everyone. Her journey aims to inspire others to see the possibilities and challenge their own limits.

Lisa’s approach to solo travel is meticulous yet flexible. She uses resources like Google Maps and the [iOverlander app](#) to find accessible facilities and campsites. Her itinerary follows the seasons, avoiding extreme weather and ensuring a comfortable journey. This flexibility allows her to enjoy spontaneous adventures, like the time she planned to go surfing but ended up paragliding in the desert with friends.

“Every day is a challenge, but the benefits far outweigh the difficulties,” Lisa said. “I’ve built a supportive community on the road and that makes all the difference.”

Living on the road also meant prioritizing self-care. Managing

chronic pain and maintaining a healthy lifestyle were crucial. Lisa found that being active and outdoors helped her manage pain better than being confined to an office. Her lifestyle was a balance of activity and rest, allowing her to thrive despite her physical challenges.

“My goals are to continue being happy and healthy,” Lisa shared. “I want to inspire others to live their best lives and to challenge themselves.”

Looking ahead, Lisa envisions a future where she continues to inspire through her adventures, providing valuable information and encouragement to others. She hopes to leave a legacy of exploration and accessibility, showing what’s possible for people of all abilities.

In the world of Paralympic sports, she hopes to be remembered for introducing people to the benefits of being active and supporting them in recreational activities. In the nomadic community, she aims to leave a legacy of information and inspiration, encouraging others to push their boundaries and embrace new adventures. From a champion Paralympian to a solo traveller living her best life on the road, Lisa embodies the spirit of living limitless, showing that with determination and adaptability, anything is possible.

Follow Lisa’s van life adventures on [@KeepinitWheel306](#) ■



# Journeys with Autism

Navigating the world with autism



Connor in Aran Islands

Hi, I'm Connor McClure from Texas. As a millennial baby (born in 2000), I'm a Gen-Zer with a happy childhood, complete with two older siblings, dogs, cats and loving parents. While I displayed signs early on that later pointed the way back to autism, I wasn't officially diagnosed with what was then referred to as Asperger's syndrome, now under the umbrella of autism spectrum disorder, until I was 13.

I have two associate degrees from college, love science, history, artificial intelligence and of course, travel. I tell everyone my story is currently still under construction as I'm still striving to become the best possible me.

## Connor McClure: autism and adventure

### WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START YOUR BLOG, MYAUTISMMIND.COM

Autism is often considered an invisible disability because people with it don't look any differently, they just sometimes come across as awkward or quirky. Social challenges are sometimes the biggest hurdle to having friends or relationships. I've always liked to write and in 2023, when trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, I realized I could help shape a better

understanding of what it is like to be autistic.

I felt it was underreported and under-talked about (because disabilities sometimes make people uncomfortable). I heard about blogging and thought I could share my experiences about being on the spectrum and help connect with others. Also, while there seems to be a lot written about children on the spectrum, there isn't as much information about teens and adults, and I wanted to help change that.

### HOW HAS TRAVEL IMPACTED YOUR LIFE AND YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH AUTISM?

Travel has let me see new possibilities and how different people in different parts of the world live and work, compared to America. I especially like looking at different architectural styles. I've been very fortunate my family took me on trips growing up and I think seeing new places created a sense of wanderlust I have in the world, and ties into my avid curiosity and



Connor and his sister Erin in Iceland



Conwy Castle in Wales

love of history. But mostly I think the internet has cultivated my wanderlust because it lets me see stories about history all over the world and it lets me talk to people all over the world about their experiences and worldviews.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST AUTISM-FRIENDLY DESTINATIONS YOU'VE VISITED?

Since we live in Texas, trips to nearby Mexico have been part of my growing up. Mexico is very chill and great for people with sensory sensitivities, as you can just sit by the ocean, listen to the waves and enjoy the peace. There is always music, food, drinks and lots of fresh offerings prepared right before you, which I like. My sister and I went to Iceland together in 2023 and it was an incredible country with beautiful scenery. It was a nice and quiet place, not overstimulating, but more to look at and relax. I enjoyed the hot springs experience and seeing massive waterfalls.

In May of this year, I took a huge step and booked a young adult travel trip to the United Kingdom as

a solo traveller. While the cities we visited were interesting, I mostly enjoyed my time in North Wales to the seaside town of Conwy and Snowdonia National Park, and then Galway, Ireland and the incredible cliffs and countryside on the Aran islands which dare I say is more impressive than the cliffs of Moher and far less touristy, and that makes it easier for people with autism to avoid being overstimulated.

At least for me as an autistic, I think trips involving nature and being outdoors work because there are fewer crowds, noises and overwhelming sights. While I love museums and seeing relics from the past, the British Museum in London was extremely crowded and hot and I couldn't fully enjoy the experience because of it.

### TIPS FOR AUTISTIC TRAVELLERS TO MANAGE SENSORY SENSITIVITIES WHILE TRAVELLING

Know what you are getting into first. Do your research. Is the place loud and noisy, or quiet and serene? Don't leave anything to chance so you won't encounter anything

unexpected, get overwhelmed and can prepare. I mentally knew that London would be quite crowded, but having a schedule that allowed for a balance of crowds and then quiet helped. For example, I liked being able to escape to Hyde Park in Westminster and St. James's Park near Buckingham Palace to regulate myself and stay calm and content.

### HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR A TRIP TO ENSURE IT WILL BE AS SMOOTH AND ENJOYABLE AS POSSIBLE?

Mentally prepare; think about all the things you will do on the trip and accept that you won't be able to sleep in your bed for a bit, but you will be back so there is no reason to worry. I sometimes run scenarios through my mind and then problem-solve any issues so I feel more confident. Also, try and book travel that is either non-stop or has a less likelihood of travel interruptions so you won't have to change your plans or routine. I also add the locations of where I'm visiting on my weather app to my phone and start watching weather forecasts ahead of time so

that I can pack appropriately, load Google Maps on my phone (which was great to have during my most recent trip) and know how to use Uber or public transport. I preferred Uber over subways or other mass transportation options due to crowds and was willing to spend a little more knowing I would be taken directly to my destination.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you can, I recommend regular hotels instead of hostels, because the idea of sharing sleeping space with a lot of people in a small space, especially bathrooms, can be a problem. Make sure that if you are travelling with someone and rooming with them and aren't a couple, the hotel has two separate beds with some space between them (which was an issue at one of the hotels I stayed at). Look for larger rooms as much as possible or ones with a quiet place where you can get away when rooming with someone. The Good Hotel London is a great example, as it had a nice rooftop seating area overlooking the water and it was peaceful.

**HELPFUL TRAVEL TOOLS**

There are many essentials I would recommend for anyone with autism to include on a trip. I would have a backup charger and consider a portable charger as well when on the go when you plan to take lots of photos and videos, as you'll also need your phone for maps or other information. I nearly ran out of battery a couple of times and it became very stressful since I was in a strange city. I packed several travel-size hand sanitizer bottles to help me feel more confident of

cleanliness at certain times. I would choose clothes with zipper pockets, especially pants, because it made me more confident that I could not have my wallet stolen or lost. I also recommend choosing layers of clothing and packing accordingly. Bring snacks on a long flight and in your suitcase so you'll have something you like when you are unsure of local food. Bring a book to help you relax. Take earbuds or headphones, not only for the flight but for times you may just want to chill by listening to music or bring down any sensory overload. And consider bringing a weighted blanket for the trip. It's great for a long flight and can bring a sense of calmness and familiarity when sleeping in a strange bed. Make sure you have the right type of adapters for the countries you are visiting. And, finally, having air tags that alert you that your luggage is on your plane or mode of transportation with you can be reassuring, as it's one less thing to worry about.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AIRLINES AND TRAVEL COMPANIES TO IMPROVE THEIR SERVICES FOR AUTISTIC TRAVELLERS?**

Make sure to have a nice quiet room or area so individuals with sensitivities and anxiety can decompress after a long day.

Have notifications of schedule changes that come directly and timely to travellers because change is stressful. If requested, allow individuals to board either first or last to help with sensory difficulties, and the anxiety that can come with trying to find seats in tight and crowded environments. Also, to

be respectful and understanding if an autistic traveller seems to be anxious or even stims. Employees need to be educated about what stimming is and what it isn't and how it can help us to regulate ourselves and find balance.

Autistics sometimes have problems with asking for help and I learned a lesson this year the hard way to go to the reservations counter and ask for something (in my case it was catching an earlier flight rather than waiting hours and hours on my original flight that was delayed). Next time, I won't hesitate.

Travel companies need to make sure they have carefully planned out their itineraries and make it available to travellers, along with having local guides who are available at any time and who provide their contact information in case they are needed. Nothing could be worse than having something happen and not knowing who to contact or how to reach someone immediately on a trip.

**HOW DO YOU HANDLE UNEXPECTED CHANGES OR DISRUPTIONS IN YOUR TRAVEL PLANS?**

No lie. This is stressful. I practice stoicism and mentally think about the scenarios and how it will be ok.

Know de-stress measures and how to handle anxiety. Understand your triggers and how to de-escalate them. Most importantly, have a safe person to check in with and have all emergency contacts on the phone with an extra copy printed out. Travel doesn't always go according to plan. Having unanticipated changes to an itinerary can be upsetting but



Connor's legs over the cliff in the Aran Islands, Ireland



Connor trying octopus

typically having someone who can walk a person through the change helps. I was lucky that my flights have typically been on time. However, I struggled with finding a gate in Ireland initially and was stressed until I was able to view updated information on a board at the airport.

**WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE WITH OTHER AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS WHO MIGHT BE HESITANT ABOUT TRAVELLING?**

You only have one life so don't waste it on fear if travel is something you truly want to do. Start small, try a trip with a short turnaround time and a single destination and see what you think. Consider travelling with

a travel group (I chose EF Ultimate Break), which handles the details and is available as a resource. Using one has allowed me to experience travel without setting up all the details myself. The company is also responsible for ensuring all the accommodations and activities are scheduled properly. I don't believe having a disability like autism or any other condition should stop you from doing what you want to do. Just prepare well and you can handle anything. Go ahead and leap outside of your comfort zone.

People with autism have extra challenges that make it harder to live life to the fullest, but with extra help and guidance, they can overcome difficulties and live the life they want

and deserve and nothing can stop them. I'm still figuring out what I want to accomplish in life, but travel is a positive experience and has changed my outlook.

My travels have allowed me to dangle my legs off the cliff in the Aran Islands of Ireland, scuba dive in the warm ocean in Mexico and tour volcano tubes in Iceland. I've tried strange foods like bangers and mash, haggis and octopus and trust me, as a former very picky eater, experiencing the local favorites took me outside of my comfort zone for sure! I'm now working and saving money for my next big travel adventure in 2025: Japan! ■

Connor's website focusing on adults with autism [myautismmind.com](http://myautismmind.com)

Subscribe to his free newsletter, which is published twice a month

He welcomes emails. If you have any questions about travelling with a disability, autism or adulthood at [connor@myautismmind.com](mailto:connor@myautismmind.com)



# Features

Captivating stories, intriguing profiles and thought-provoking articles



A log cabin with a wheelchair accessible ramp at LaPine State Park  
Courtesy of Travel Southern Oregon Coast



A smiling man in a kayak coming onto the accessible ramp at William M Tugman State Park

## Accessible camping adventures in Oregon

By Shasta Kearns Moore [Read the full story here](#)

From accessible kayaking to old-growth forest trails, the range of opportunities has never been greater for campers needing accommodations in Oregon. Thanks to an initiative to [update and upgrade Oregon State Park facilities](#) to make parks accessible for people who need assistance and mobility equipment, it's even easier to make treasured camping memories. Here are some ways that even more campers can get back to nature and camp in Oregon. Just be sure to book early — summer spots fill up quickly.

### TAKE IN A DEEP-BLUE CRATER OR PONDEROSA PINES

Feel on top of the world from almost 2,000 feet up on the rim of a former mountain. [Crater Lake National Park](#) in Southern Oregon has a wide range of [accessibility options](#), including campsites at [Mazama](#)

[Campground](#), which can be reserved up to 365 days in advance. The campground is typically only open June through late September. The [Godfrey Glenn Trail](#), a 1-mile, hard-packed dirt loop through old growth, [The Lodge](#) and the [Visitor Center](#) at Rim Village are all wheelchair accessible. The park provides

captioning and audio descriptions at the Visitor Center's exhibits.

Ponder Oregon's beauty amongst the ponderosa pines at [LaPine State Park](#) in Central Oregon, just a short drive from Bend and Sunriver. All five of the deluxe cabins and one of the rustic cabins are wheelchair

accessible. The park features an accessible boat ramp, so bring your boat or kayaks and some binoculars to spot eagles at this birding hot spot. Note that the 500-year-old "Big Tree" path is steep and not wheelchair accessible. Be aware that it gets cold at night year-round, so bring layers.

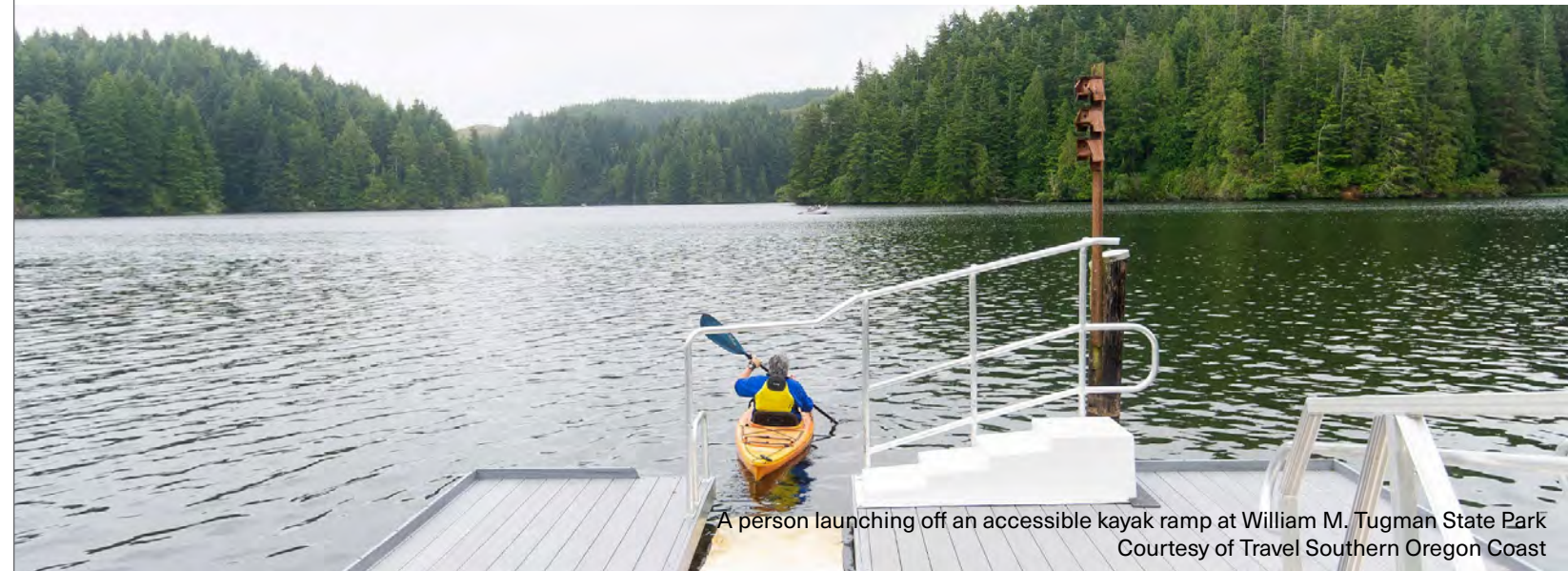
### TAKE IN A WATERFALL OR FISH ON A TRANQUIL LAKE

Accessibility accommodations sometimes seem synonymous with wheelchair users, but there are many types of needs and abilities.

[Silver Falls State Park](#) near Salem is a draw for all those who love the sensory experiences of feeling water spray and hearing the rushing falls. Two campsites and four cabins have universal access features, as do the campground restrooms and showers. Wheelchair users can roll along a brick paver path from the parking lot to a viewpoint of the 177-foot-high South Falls. Pro tip: A paved path also leads from there to the top of the falls but is steep in one part that may not be wheelchair accessible. In summer of 2023, there will also be a 0.6-mile, hard-

packed gravel trail that leads to a view of the North Falls from the parking area.

Go fishing off the fully accessible dock for bass, crappie, trout and salmon in the stocked lake. [William M. Tugman State Park](#) on Eel Lake north of Coos Bay features new beach access and [accessible kayaking](#). Year-round camping is available, with hot showers, 11 yurts and two RV campsites. A 40-minute drive south is [Shore Acres State Park](#), with [interpretive signage](#) and view of the Simpson Reef overlook.



A person launching off an accessible kayak ramp at William M. Tugman State Park  
Courtesy of Travel Southern Oregon Coast



A railroad stop on the Sumpter Valley Railroad. People are coming off a passenger, open-air train. Courtesy of Sumpter Valley Railroad

**RIDE THE RAILS OR GLIDE WHERE TRAINS ONCE TRAVELLED**

The Snake River carves deep through Oregon alpine peaks to create spectacular landscapes. At one of the state's largest U.S. Forest Service campgrounds, Union Creek Campground in Eastern Oregon's Wallowa Whitman National Forest is located on the north shore

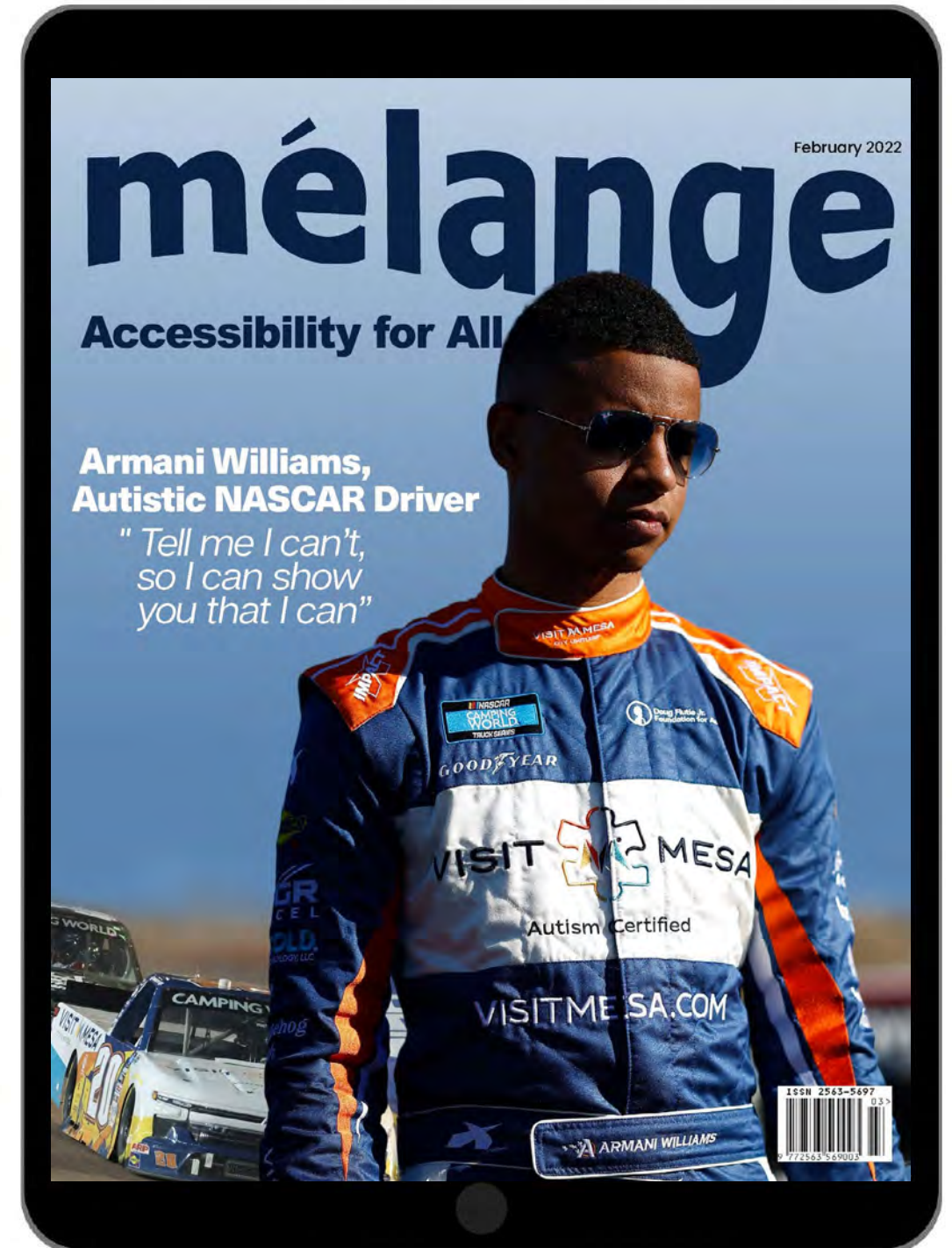
of Phillips Reservoir. The campground features fishing, water sports and birding. Parked spurs are paved and some facilities are accessible, including four campsites with electric hookups. Take a day trip to the historic gold-mining town of Sumpter and take a ride on the historic Sumpter Valley Railroad steam locomotive. One of the rail cars has a wheelchair lift.

Take in the sights on the Banks-Vernonia State Trail, an 8-foot paved path that runs 21 miles through Douglas fir stands and wildflower fields. Then bunk up at L.L. Stub Stewart State Park, an updated campground with 13 accessible cabins, five accessible campsites and two meeting halls. Double-check the trail map online or at the Welcome Center for elevation and route information. ■



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FEBRUARY • MAY • AUGUST • NOVEMBER



**SUBSCRIBE**

# An untapped niche: Accessible vacation rentals

By Jerrica Mah

Did you know if you filter an Airbnb search for all accessibility features, you can count the house results in the entire United States on one hand? Or if you filter only by step-free and wide entrances, you're still left with less than 100 entire homes to rent? *In the entire United States!*

When we set out to build an accessible short-term vacation rental, we didn't know this. We didn't know how great the need was for accessible options. We only knew that we wanted to honor someone very dear to us.

After years of planning and construction, we opened Varonica's



Back Patio at Sunset

View near Yosemite National Park and Bass Lake in March of this year. It's a four-bedroom house designed to be ADA-friendly, with wide doors, no steps, an ADA bathroom with a roll-in shower, a hydraulic patient lift, easily reachable dishes and more. We designed all of this with Varonica in mind.

Varonica Priest was the daughter of the property owner, Stephanie Norgard and my best friend. Varonica was born with mobility and strength disabilities and often relied on a wheelchair and walker, especially when she travelled.

Being best friends since middle school, I learned through our daily lives and travels how difficult it can be for people with disabilities to get around. The smallest of details, like a step or heavy door, can stop you in your tracks. I also learned how ignorant the travel industry is of what is truly accessible.

So, when Stephanie and I decided to restore her family property that had been destroyed by a wildfire, we knew we wanted to cater to the needs of individuals like Varonica and their families and friends. We wanted to create a safe, comfortable, and easily-used environment for people with disabilities.

As we set out to turn our vision into reality, we realized that even with our personal experience, we were still quite ignorant of the range of needs in the disabled community. Our home is primarily designed for mobility challenges, but we are still striving to make it more accessible to a variety of disabilities. It's a process that will continue as long as our doors are open.

However, more than realizing our own ignorance and room for improvement, we realized the need to spread the word to the short-term rental community. There is a huge demand—a dire demand—for



ADA-friendly kitchen



Enjoying Sunset by the Fire

accessible vacation rentals that can not only benefit financial investments but also the lives of countless families who want to experience more of the world despite disabilities.

With Varonica's View, we had a big advantage because we were designing and building from scratch. We could widen the doors and remove steps with an eraser. Short-term rental owners with existing rentals have to do it with a sledgehammer, but it's a sledgehammer well worth swinging.

The feedback we have received from the disabled community could be summarized in one word: gratitude. We have received more sincere thanks than we ever expected, further opening our eyes to how much the accessible world needs to expand.

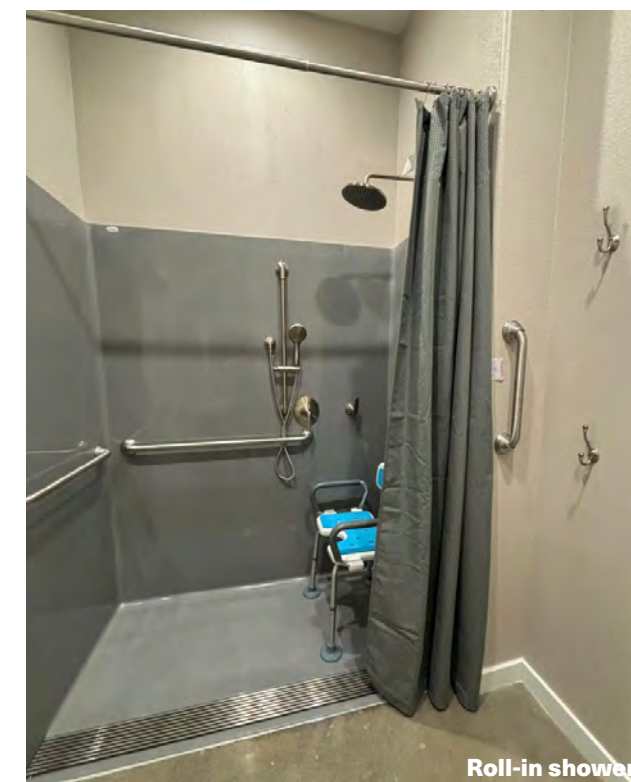
We want to help expand that world. We are currently building an accessible guest house at Varonica's View and hope to add more locations in the future, but we know we can only build so much. The greater impact is to get the word out. To tell the ever-growing vacation rental industry that they are missing out on an amazing niche that makes a real difference in people's lives.

We are so thankful for all of those who embrace and share their accessible journeys. For inspiring us to do more and to do better. We hope our story and yours can lead to a chain reaction through the short-term vacation industry, making the world more accessible for all.

To learn more about Varonica's View, visit: [VaronicasView.lodgify.com](http://VaronicasView.lodgify.com).



Invacare Manual Hydraulic Lift



Roll-in shower



Living area of Varonica's View



Varonica and Jerrica at Bass Lake

# Thunder Bay, Ontario: An adventure for everyone!

By Erin Simmons



Marina Park

Nestled in the heart of North-western Ontario, on the edge of the world's largest freshwater lake, Lake Superior, Thunder Bay is known as one of Canada's premier outdoor cities. It is a community committed to making sure everyone feels welcome, no matter what challenges they may face, ensuring that individuals with mobility challenges can navigate its scenic landscapes with ease.

Located upon the Traditional lands of the Anishnawbae Peoples of Fort William First Nation, Signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850, the community has always

had an intimate connectivity to the natural environment around it. During the summer, the sights and sounds come alive with activities filling your days with both indoor and outdoor adventures filling your trip to Thunder Bay.

## OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Summer in Thunder Bay means enjoying outdoor adventures. Its commitment to inclusivity is evident in its natural spaces, with accessible boardwalks and flat surfaces found throughout the city. Located along the shoreline, Thunder Bay's Marina

Park, offers those with mobility issues the opportunity to bask in the breathtaking views of Lake Superior and the iconic Sleeping Giant. The thoughtful design of the park ensures that families and friends can stroll together, creating lasting memories against the amazing backdrop.

For those who may want to get out and enjoy the great outdoors, many of the parks around Thunder Bay offer accessibility with ramps, and boardwalks to viewing pods, where you can enjoy great views, including Ouimet Canyon Provincial Park and Anemki Wajiji

(Mount McKay). You can also take a leisure stroll at the Thunder Bay International Friendship Gardens, where you can sit and feed the ducks by the pond and explore more than a dozen monuments representing many of our local ethnicities dedicated to the citizens of Thunder Bay during Canada's Centennial Year.

## HISTORY COMES ALIVE IN THUNDER BAY

Transport back to the 1800's to the life of the voyageurs and businessmen of the NorthWest Company at Fort William Historical Park. A shuttle service is offered down to the park and those using mobility devices can enjoy the flat surfaces to see many of their buildings that encompasses the fort.

## INDOOR FUN

For those that would prefer the indoors, you can explore Thunder Bay's cultural gems such as the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. The gallery is the largest public art gallery between Sault Ste Marie and Winnipeg and is home to over 1600 pieces of art in its permanent collection. The gallery's dedication to making culture accessible allows art enthusiasts the opportunity to discover the beauty of art through exhibits that will leave you captivated.

## GETTING AROUND THUNDER BAY

Navigating Thunder Bay is made easy, by the city's



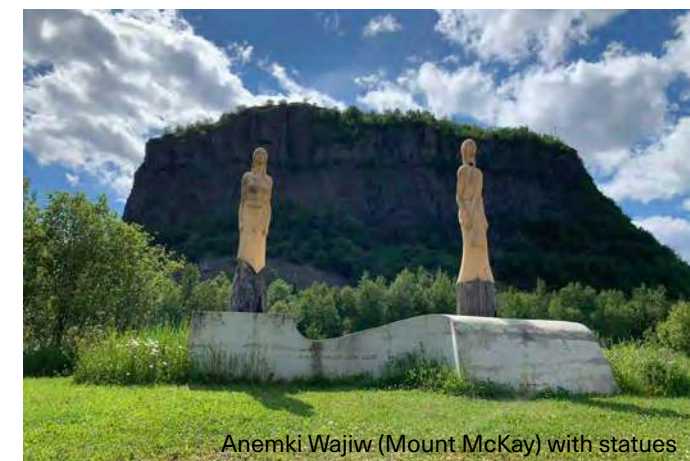
Fort William Historical Park

commitment to accessible transportation. Buses equipped with ramps and designated spaces for mobility devices ensure that everyone can venture out to explore Thunder Bay, providing a sense of independence to those who need assistance.

Thunder Bay has an adventure waiting to be found, and the city's dedication to accessibility allows everyone to enjoy it year-round, demonstrating how a community can create memories in an inclusive and welcoming environment.

Check out the City of Thunder Bay's website to learn more about accessible services available.

For additional activities, transportation information, or to book your stay, check out the Tourism Thunder Bay website at: [www.visitthunderbay.com](http://www.visitthunderbay.com)



Anemki Wajiw (Mount McKay) with statues



Thunder Bay International Friendship Gardens



Thunder Bay Art Gallery

# Tenerife Accessible Experiences (BAT4ALL): A new era of inclusive tourism



BAT4ALL has dedicated the past two years to fostering accessibility and inclusivity in the vibrant south of Tenerife. Their efforts have culminated in the founding of Tenerife Accessible Experiences, a pioneering travel agency that promises to revolutionize the tourism landscape for individuals with disabilities.

## A GROUNDBREAKING ACCESSIBLE BOAT

The crown jewel of their agency is an innovative excursion boat, the only one of its kind worldwide. This vessel boasts accessible architecture designed to accommodate all types of wheelchairs—manual, electric, and scooters alike. With the help of a state-of-the-art hydraulic platform that can be lowered two meters below sea level, people with reduced mobility can now immerse themselves in the ocean's wonders. Whether it's swimming, fishing, snorkeling, diving, or simply enjoying the therapeutic effects of the sea, their boat offers an unparalleled experience.

## ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY GAP

Over the years, they have had the pleasure of welcoming hundreds

of people with disabilities and their families aboard their boat. Through these interactions, they have identified a significant gap in the availability of accessible services within the tourism value chain. Despite the increasing number of people with disabilities—driven by demographic changes and medical advancements—there remains a substantial unmet demand for accessible travel options.

Many individuals with disabilities in the European Union possess both the financial means and physical capability to travel. Recognizing this, Tenerife Accessible Experiences is committed to building synergies with other tourism service providers in southern Tenerife to expand accessible offerings. Tenerife, known for its wheelchair-friendly environment and year-round spring-like climate, stands as one of Europe's most accessible destinations.

## A SYNERGISTIC APPROACH

The new venture, Tenerife Accessible Experiences, has been created in collaboration with ACÁ ESTÁ - Asociación Canaria de Excursiones Sociales y Turísticas Accesibles, a non-profit organization. This partnership

reflects their shared mission to provide activities for people with disabilities and to create synergies among local administrations, residents and tourism stakeholders.

Their objective is clear: to make all accessible excursions, services, routes and facilities readily available to people with disabilities.

Among the array of experiences they offer are helicopter and paratrike flights, jet ski excursions and their unique boat trips that include opportunities for fishing and diving.

At Tenerife Accessible Experiences, they believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to explore and enjoy the beauty of Tenerife. They are on a quest to create a more inclusive and accessible world, one unforgettable experience at a time. ■



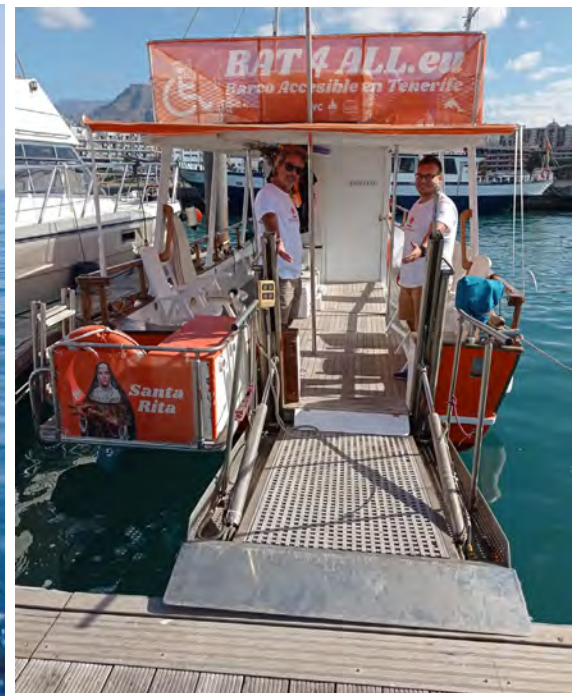
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@barcoaccesibletenerife



@bat4all\_barcoaccesibletenerife





# Discover Kelowna this summer: Accessible adventures await!

Nestled in the heart of British Columbia, Canada's stunning Okanagan Valley, Kelowna invites people of all abilities to explore its natural beauty and vibrant culture.

From May to September, this inclusive city offers a variety of adaptive activities designed to ensure everyone can enjoy a memorable summer adventure.

One of the highlights is [AbleSail](#), an inspiring program run by [People in Motion](#). Whether you're an experienced sailor or a curious beginner, AbleSail provides the perfect opportunity to experience the thrill of gliding across Okanagan Lake. With specially adapted boats and expert guidance, participants can safely navigate the sparkling waters, feeling the freedom and exhilaration that sailing brings.

For those who prefer land-based adventures, [Biking Myra Canyon](#) is a must. This historic trail, with its breathtaking views and iconic trestle bridges, is now more accessible than ever. Thanks to [Adaptive Adventures](#), in partnership with [Kelowna Bike Rentals](#), visitors can rent handbikes and other accessible bikes. Duet bikes and tricycle rentals are also available at [Myra Canyon Bike Rentals](#). These

specially designed bikes allow everyone to traverse the scenic paths of Myra Canyon, enjoying the fresh air and panoramic vistas at their own pace.

Kelowna's commitment to accessibility doesn't stop there. The city boasts numerous wheelchair-friendly trails, parks and attractions, ensuring a seamless experience for all visitors.

So, why not make this summer unforgettable? Whether you're sailing on [Okanagan Lake](#) or cycling through Myra Canyon, Kelowna promises an inclusive adventure filled with joy, freedom, and discovery. Embrace the spirit of adventure and visit Kelowna, where accessible fun and natural beauty go hand in hand.

Plan your trip today and see why Kelowna is the perfect destination for all abilities. ■



Courtesy of [ablesailokanagan.com](#)

In our October issue, you'll get to visit Kelowna with [Tanelle Bolt](#).

Ablesail

Biking the iconic trestles

Accessible wine touring

Cooking class

[WWW.TOURISMKELOWNA.COM](http://WWW.TOURISMKELOWNA.COM)

Guided bike tour with CRIS Adaptive  
at Myra Canyon Trestles 15

Photo Courtesy of  
[tourismkelowna.com](http://tourismkelowna.com) - Ken Hagen



# Wheeling through the Chelsea neighborhood of New York City

By Marcia Frost

I moved to the Midwest 16 years ago. I grew up on Long Island and went to New York City on occasion. Most of the time it was the Time Square area, to see a play, have dinner and enjoy the bright lights.

When I decided to visit friends and family on The Island a few months ago, I decided to first do a few days in The City. It was to be my first trip travelling alone in my wheelchair and I was a little nervous. I wanted a simple itinerary in an area that wasn't too crowded. Chelsea seemed ideal.

I had spent little time around the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, and it seemed like there was a wide selection of accessible things to explore, and great food to eat.

My new power chair was delayed, and I ended up travelling in my scooter. I was a bit relieved because I could put luggage at my feet and hang a bag on the handle. I had asked a few of my wheelchair travel friends about the safety of having a backpack behind you and never got any answers. It will remain a question for the next trip alone.

There were some flight delays, but I was impressed with the updates at LaGuardia Airport. There used to be narrow walkways and only one tiny elevator that you could use to baggage claim if you were in a wheelchair. It is now wide open and the elevators are much bigger.

My cousin Marissa came to the airport to get me. She was extremely helpful with my luggage, helping the scooter up the ramp in the van, and getting me settled in the hotel.

It didn't take us long to get to Chelsea. The area runs along the Hudson River and has been refurbished over the last decade. It's a favourite of artists and foodies, with lots of parks and waterfront.

I decided to stay at the Hyatt Place New York Chelsea. It was in a good location and I



had an accessible room with a low bed and a spacious bathroom. The view of Manhattan from the room was spectacular and included the Empire State Building. The hotel offers a free breakfast bar and has a rooftop restaurant with a terrace.

I changed my clothes and waited for Marissa before ordering my first accessible ride of the trip. New York City has the best transportation for wheelchair users I have seen so far. It is always available and reasonably priced. New York City Wheelchair provides a taxi van with a ramp or lift within 10 minutes. They are available in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island and the Bronx. They also pick up and drop off in areas within 30 miles.

The taxi service is great, but I also

found that Lyft and Uber had accessible vans available for the same price as a regular car. I was able to do that on an app on my phone. My rides averaged about \$15 each, which is what you would expect to pay for a cab in New York.

Our ride took us to Hav & Mar, owned by Chef Marcus Samuelsson. I had met him a few times when I used to cover food and wine festivals. I always enjoyed speaking with him and tasting his flavorful food. Hav & Mar, who had Executive Chef Fariyal Abdulla in the kitchen, did not disappoint.

The restaurant is known for its seafood, but they were happy to accommodate my severe allergy to shellfish, as well as my cousin's gluten intolerance. I feasted on corn bread with hummus and tomato jam and vegetable curry, while Marissa indulged in grilled fish, oysters and scallops. We finished with crême brulee for her and a huge slice of chocolate layer cake for me. I could only eat half of it, but it was too good to leave so I took the leftovers to my hotel room.

The next day we headed to Chelsea Market to meet with a Like a Local food tour which would take us through the market, the Highlands and Yards. We really did eat our way through the tour, which was filled with history tidbits from our guide, Chris.

The market has ethnic food from around the globe, a handful of which are lauded as some of the best eateries in New York. The place is very accessible. There were just a few restaurants that had stairs to get in and Chris knew exactly where to take me, so I

didn't feel left out of any of the experiences.

We tasted mini donuts from Doughnuttery; brownies from Fat Witch; Pasties (hand pies) from Joey Bats; Takumi Tacos, with an Asian slaw that gave them a unique flavor and Zach & Zoey Honey.

Then we went across the street to Market 57 at Hudson River Park. There we saw the open kitchen Platform Culinary Experience by the James Beard Foundation and enjoyed Good Batch cookies.

It was a cloudy day with a little rain, but we could still see Little Island, Chelsea Pier and Hudson Yards from there.

Chris led us back on the street and we went to the Highland, another place to take in the New York City Skyline. Marissa and I didn't have long to stay because we had one more spot in Chelsea to visit. As a child I had many field trips to New York City museums, and I went back as an adult to some, but I had never been to the Whitney Museum of American Art. It is often forgotten by visitors to Manhattan because of its location, next to the Meat Packing District and across from the pier, unlike other midtown attractions.

The Whitney is extremely wheelchair friendly. I especially loved the large lobby with plenty of room to enter and exit. I could move around easily, even into the café. The elevators were also spacious and we explored each floor, checking out the American artists. The museum has the biggest collection in the world of New Yorker Edward Hopper's paintings.

I was impressed with all the programs available for those with special needs, as well as workshops for families, free admission nights, and live music on the terrace in the summer. Special exhibitions are there often and a unique one is coming in the fall with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

It was an exciting trip to Chelsea, and I felt more confident about wheelchair travel alone after going. New York is definitely working hard to make wheelchair users feel more comfortable about traveling there. I was even able to get an accessible ride out to Long Island, where I spent a few days with friends and family before heading home. ■



Marcia Frost covers travel and health for online, print and television. She is learning her limitations as she battles multiple progressive illnesses, including dermatomyositis, Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and UCTD.

Follow her: [@Spiritstraveller](https://twitter.com/Spiritstraveller) on Twitter, Facebook, Threads, Instagram and YouTube.

<https://linktr.ee/MarciaFrost>



# Immersive Nature Experiences

with Jan Bonville

Explore, connect, rejuvenate  
... in nature



## Chasing a dream in the jungles of Borneo

By Jan Bonville

I dream of nature and wilderness travel: rainforests, ocean, savannah, falling asleep to jungle sounds at night and birdsong early in the morning. I have progressive multiple sclerosis with significant decline in physical ability. But while my abilities have changed my travel dreams have not.

I stubbornly hold on to my dreams of visiting the world's wild unspoiled destinations. Borneo was always a particularly inspiring dream.

I experience intense joy in discovering new places and creating memories with my family, further heightened by having a chronic health condition and disability. I have safari'ed in East Africa, explored lagoons in French Polynesia, adaptive biked in Hawai'i and visited rainforests in Costa Rica and rice terraces in Bali. Borneo with its hidden valleys and elusive wildlife in deep, dense jungle was the most epic yet.

I began researching almost a year before our trip as I always do. Those of us with disabilities know much of the information out there is less than helpful. Some information was highly off-putting implying that infrastructure was so poor as to be impossible for people with disabilities. They weren't entirely wrong: Borneo is an off the beaten path destination for nature and wilderness travellers and does not have the infrastructure that many North American tourists are used to.

Maybe so. That wasn't going to stop me from chasing my dream.

Borneo was every bit as epic and magical as I imagined. I won't deny it was hard. Our journey involved six flights, five cities, multiple long jeep drives, remote boat rides and seven different accommodations. Every step involved risk. Each plane ride posed potential uncertainty about my wheelchair. Long drives implied need for suitable toilet facilities.



Each new lodge represented an unknown for accessibility. But with high risk comes high reward. Borneo is deeply mystical and awe inspiring. Imagine dense dipterocarp trees in an endless canopy of green and mists, brightly colored hornbills cawing as they fly over meandering rivers, macaques and orangutans swinging in the trees above quiet, endless rivers with pygmy elephants on the banks and, large crocodiles sunning themselves before disappearing underwater.

Travel like this is not for everyone. It involves risk, discomfort and uncertainty. You never know what will happen to your wheelchair in the plane. You need to be okay with figuring things out as you go along. The best laid plans do not mean you will get the infrastructure you are used to at home. That is the stress of nature travel to a remote destination with a disability. But the reward is the awe of experiencing an unreal wild and beautiful destination and unbeatable memories.

Our trip had its hiccups. The flight from Singapore to Kota Kinabalu (Sabah, Borneo) insisted on checking my wheelchair and did not provide it at the gate. As with

every flight I take I was firm about the need to protect it. As always, I boarded with nagging anxiety: the wheelchair is my legs, after all. I was met at the gate by an airport official with a wheelchair who whisked me through Malaysian Immigration at lightning speed (faster than I've ever been anywhere!) and got me to baggage claim where my wheelchair sat waiting. Getting to our National Geographic riverside lodge on the banks of the Kinabatangan River involved a three-hour boat ride with no restroom facilities en route. I had to speak up sufficiently early to request our driver find me a restroom—specifying the need for Western style toilets (as the prevailing squat toilets are too difficult with my weakened core and legs. I cannot afford to be embarrassed to speak up about my needs. These issues and more plant anxiety and fear in disabled travellers and cannot be glossed over.

Hotels, drivers, and guides were more than willing to help. This included manually lifting me and my wheelchair up steep boat ramps, finding workarounds to help me step up to high jeeps/vans and doing roundabout drives where necessary to find Western toilets.

I found accessible infrastructure in the most remote of places. I have wonderful memories of adorable sun bears tussling in a dense forest at the Sun Bear Conservation Center in Sepilok which has a solid canopy walkway whereby a wheelchair can be rolled. The lodges in the remote Kinabatangan River and Danum Valley while not perfectly up to ADA made sincere efforts to adapt and assist me. Beds were sufficiently low for transfer from my wheelchair and there were either makeshift rails by the toilets or items I could grab. I was not as comfortable as in my fully accessible bedroom at home but, after all, I was not on the other side of the world to feel at home.

As far as I could tell I was the only person in sight in a wheelchair.



Danum Vallery boardwalk

This prompted curiosity and interest. Locals and tourists approached me to ask how I was managing. My trekking wheelchair elicited requests for photographs and questions. I hope that my unusual presence prompted some

soul searching and new ideas. A memorable moment was one of our guides sharing his experience having a child with autism and the social struggle given attitudes towards disability. Another mentioned a relative who after a



Canopy walkway

**«Just because it is harder is not a reason to not do something. If travellers like me do not travel, the industry—and society—will never change.»**

Jan Bonville

car accident requires a wheelchair and spends their time at home given the challenges going out. He felt inspired to encourage them to get out and about with his help, having seen the distance we had travelled and that it is indeed possible given help and adaptations. Borneo has the key ingredients for inclusive travel: warmth, hospitality, interest and willingness to help. On my side, I needed to be clear about my needs. I had to speak up and be willing to ask for and accept help.

Just because it is harder is not a reason to not do something. If travellers like me do not travel, the industry—and society—will never change. The more of us who are out there exploring and showing up with our disabilities, the easier it will get for all of us over time. And the reward of exploring a remote new locale and building memories with your family or friends is priceless.

No one should have to give up their dreams—especially not those of us who deal with the added challenge of disability. We must perhaps work harder to attain those dreams but that makes the experience all the more powerful and rewarding. It was challenging to travel to Borneo but I would do it again wholeheartedly. I'll never forget the mists in the Danum Valley at sunrise, the call of the rhinoceros hornbills every



Kinabatangan River



River Dock

sunrise and sundown, seeing the proboscis monkeys, macaques and orangutans' acrobatics in the jungle, observing a herd of pygmy elephants disappear into the forest and the mist in the rainforest at dawn. These are some of my dearest memories and they create a happiness which MS and disability lurking in the background can never take away. ■



Jan has lived with a chronic health condition resulting in mobility disability for over two decades, facing adversity with persistence and resourcefulness. She is a true Third Culture Kid, born in Switzerland, growing up in East Africa and has lived in New York City and now the San Francisco Bay Area. Jan is a passionate advocate for disabilities inclusion and awareness. She adores travelling to far-flung, off-the-beaten path nature destinations and is determined not to let anything stop her. She is thrilled to be able to share her travels as host of *Accessible Journeys'* Immersive Nature Experiences column and to help others do the same and build lifelong memories.

**JAN'S BORNEO RECOMMENDATIONS**

Sukau Rainforest Lodge, Kinabatangan River

Borneo Rainforest Lodge

Borneo Nature Tours

# Cameron Ridge Bungalows: A remote paradise

Nestled along the historic [Gold Rush Trail](#) in British Columbia, Canada, between [Likely](#) and [Wells/Barkerville](#), [Cameron Ridge Bungalows](#) offers a serene escape for travellers of all abilities. While wheelchair accessibility is still in progress with an ADA compliant *Black Bear Cabin* under construction, the site is an idyllic haven for guests with disabilities especially those seeking a respite from sensory overload. Although not fully accessible as yet, wheelchair users, with assistance, can still enjoy a vacation at Cameron Ridge.

## ACCESSIBLE FISHING AND ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES

Fishing enthusiasts will find Cameron Ridge a dream come true. A 16x8 pontoon boat and 26' Grumman are wheelchair accessible, equipped with ramps to ensure easy boarding. These boats provide ample space and stability



for a pleasant fishing experience on [Quesnel Lake](#). Currently, fishing and lake tours are the primary adventure activities offered for guests with mobility issues.

## BOOKING AND ARRIVAL

Booking a stay at Cameron Ridge Bungalows is simple. Guests can reserve their spots [via email](#) or [phone](#). Given its remote location, visitors typically arrive by vehicle,

though an airport pickup from [Williams Lake](#) can be arranged. Cameron Ridge is prominently listed with [Destination BC](#), [Likely Tourism](#), and the [Cariboo Chilcotin Tourism Association](#), offering ample resources to aid in planning your stay.

Cameron Ridge Bungalows strives to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, ensuring all guests can enjoy the natural beauty and tranquility it offers. ■



# Cruising Corner

Inclusive adventures across the seas

## Plenty of Sunshine Travel shares cruising insights



By owner, Kathleen Penner CTA | Certified Travel Associate | Plenty of Sunshine Travel | Cruise Specialist | Travel Advisor

Cruising is an excellent vacation option for individuals with limited mobility for several reasons:

**ATTENTIVE STAFF** Cruise ships have staff available around the clock to assist passengers. This ensures that help is always nearby when needed.

**ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES** Modern cruise ships are equipped

with many accessibility features. These include lifts that provide access to all areas of the ship, accessible rooms with wider door frames, roll-in showers, emergency pull cords and telephones in the restrooms.

**PRE-ARRANGED EQUIPMENT** Before boarding, I can arrange to have various mobility aids and equipment ready in your stateroom.

This includes items like beach wheelchairs, bed lifts, scooters and more, ensuring you have everything you need when you arrive.

**PERSONALIZED SERVICE** The cruise staff goes above and beyond to accommodate special needs. For instance, if you have dietary restrictions, the head chef will meet with you at the beginning of the cruise to discuss your needs

and adapt the menu accordingly or prepare custom meals. This would be for all your meals for your time onboard. The Chef will ensure everything is exactly how you need it to be.

**ADAPTED SHORE EXCURSIONS** Cruises often offer adapted shore excursions to cater to different levels of mobility. For example, on a recent river cruise along the Danube River with AmaWaterways, there were separate groups for active, regular and gentle tours. The gentle tours provided the same experiences as the other groups but with accommodations like transport to city centers to minimize walking.

**FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS** When planning future cruises, it's helpful to choose newer ships with the latest accessibility features. For example, ensuring the ship has elevators that reach all decks, including the sky deck, can enhance the experience.

By providing these comprehensive services and accommodations, cruises ensure that travellers with disabilities can enjoy a seamless and enjoyable vacation.

As someone with limited mobility, several features and services on cruises have stood out to me, making my travel experience highly enjoyable:

**EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE** The level of service on cruises is outstanding, especially on smaller ships. On these ships, all the silverware is already set on the tables and the waitstaff is available to assist with drinks and other needs. This setup allows me to carry my plate from the buffet and enjoy my meal easily. If I prefer not to use the buffet, an à la carte menu is always available.

**ACCESSIBILITY THROUGHOUT THE SHIP** Smaller ships often have

a design that allows full accessibility from bow to stern. Thanks to thoughtful design considerations, I was able to access all areas of the ship without any issues.

**ACCESSIBLE ROOM FEATURES** The staterooms are well-equipped for guests with limited mobility. Features like automatic nightlights that illuminate the path to the restroom at night are small details that make a big difference. These thoughtful touches ensure safety and convenience.

**ELEVATOR ACCESSIBILITY** Elevators on the ship are equipped with braille buttons and voice announcements for each floor, making them accessible for visually impaired passengers. This feature ensures that even those with sight limitations can navigate the ship independently without constant assistance.

Overall, the combination of excellent service, accessible design, thoughtful room and elevator features have made my cruising experiences very enjoyable and stress-free. ■

Cruising is an excellent vacation option for individuals with limited mobility.  
Kathleen Penner CTA

The Hamilton Spectator Readers' Choice Awards honoured Plenty of Sunshine Travel as the top travel agent for three consecutive years. Their agency was voted the best Travel Agency for two years and ranked third in another year.

Customer service is incredibly important to Kathleen. She strives to put her clients first and ensure that they have the best cruise vacation possible.

"I am honoured by these awards because they were voted on by you, my clients. Thank you for voting for me the number one top travel agent in my city of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada three times!"

While Kathleen is based in Hamilton, Ontario, her clients are located throughout North America. She can book and arrange everyone within North American's cruise Vacation.

Check out Kathleen on her:

**WEEKLY PODCAST**  
[CruisingtheWavesPodcast.com](https://www.cruisingthewavespodcast.com)

**WEEKLY YOUTUBE SERIES**  
[Plenty of Sunshine Travel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)  
Over 150 episodes taped and counting!

**WEBSITE**  
[PlentyofSunshineTravel.com](https://www.plentyofsunshinetravel.com)

Look out for more cruising insights from Plenty of Sunshine Travel in the next issue of *Accessible Journeys*.

# Beyond Sight

Sharing the unleashed power of the other senses during travel

I am Aimee Huxley, a keen disability advocate and content creator, living with visual impairment and PTSD. In December 2023, I decided to unmask on social media after living 3 years of my life downplaying and trying to hide my disabilities. My goal in doing so, was to empower and support others to live authentically as themselves, whilst educating and raising awareness in this space.

In 2020, aged just 29, my life took an unexpected turn which would lead to an entire identity shift. A series of events led doctors to discover that I had a rare genetic eye condition. I was losing vision at a progressively rapid speed which has fortunately stabilized—thanks to the incredible health professionals in Sydney, Australia. I now navigate my world with an Assistance Dog, trained by Assist Dogs Australia and certified through Assistance Dogs International (ADI). Between then and now, I have learnt so much about myself and others. My journey has been incredibly challenging as I have adapted to doing things a different way in every aspect of life. Through the support of the Visually Impaired, Low Vision, Blind and Disabled communities on

Instagram, I continue to work on processing and building confidence in my new identity.

Six months after being placed with my Assistance Dog, we embarked on a bucket list adventure to Melbourne, Australia where we sat in the accessible area of the Rod Laver Arena to witness Novak Djokovic win the Australian Open title. Although the players were blurs and the tram lines double, the atmosphere and experience were incredible. This is the moment I realised that life could still be enjoyed with visual impairment. Since then, we have flown on 10 domestic flights together and two long haul flights to my motherland, England.

The moral of this short snippet from my story is that there is always a way to find adventure, fun and joy. No matter what life events occur or what identity you take on as a result. I wholeheartedly hear and understand everyone on this journey. If you'd like to join me in helping to raise awareness, breaking through stereotypes and finding the joys in life, please give me a follow and we'll tackle the world together: [@aimee.huxley](https://www.instagram.com/aimee.huxley)



Aimee Huxley

## Aimee's tips for travelling with a guide dog

By Aimee Huxley

### HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE AIRPORTS WITH YOUR GUIDE DOG AND WHAT STRATEGIES DO YOU USE TO ENSURE YOU CAN FIND YOUR WAY AROUND EFFICIENTLY?

Navigating the airport with your Assistance Dog can be challenging. In advance of travel, notify the airline that you need Special Assistance and have someone greet you at the taxi drop off point. Or have a family member or friend escort you to the check in desk where you can meet a member of the Special Assistance team, who can help you from there. The Special Assistance team will be guided by you, as to what you need. They will take you through security and to the gate, where required, dependent on the individual's level of useable vision and requirements.

Speak to the airline in advance about the dog toileting facilities available at the terminal of departure and arrival, note where they are located in your phone. Not all terminals have dog toileting facilities so it is important to know this information in advance so that you can prepare your Assistance

Dog for travel accordingly. The airline will always allocate you two seats, usually a window seat for your dog, to keep distance between them and the passenger next to you. By law, you should not need to pay for the extra seat.

### WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCES INTERACTING WITH AIRLINE STAFF AND DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS FOR EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING YOUR NEEDS TO THEM?

My experiences with airline staff have been mostly positive so it's important to focus on those. Travelling for a person living with a disability can be highly stressful and it takes us time to prepare for adventures. It is important that we receive a high standard of customer service and kindness on our journey. The majority of airport staff that I have encountered have been fully educated on what to do and not to do around an Assistance Dog team and I have never had a situation where anyone has tried to pat or distract her. At the check in desk, I clearly communicate what I need—someone to help me

through security and through to the gate. I also sometimes request that someone greet us at the plane door on landing and help us at baggage reclaim.

### WHAT STEPS DO YOU TAKE TO ENSURE YOUR GUIDE DOG'S COMFORT AND WELL-BEING DURING FLIGHTS, BOTH SHORT AND LONG?

There are a number of preparations that you must consider before flying with your Assistance Dog. I would always recommend perfecting public transport together as a team before tackling a flight. Joey, my Assistance Dog and I, did eight domestic flights prior to the long haul flight to the U.K. For the first two domestic flights, understandably, I was very anxious about how it would be and how well Joey would cope.

#### For short haul, I would do the following before the flight:

1. Go on a medium walk in the morning. Some people advise a long walk so that your dog is tired for the flight. I don't recommend this. The reason being, because

your Assistance Dog will use a lot of energy going to the airport and on a flight. It's a new environment to navigate, there's lots of new sounds, smells and many people around. Therefore, they need energy to be able to assist you in the best way possible. A medium walk (30 mins) is what I would recommend pre flight.

**2.** Ensure that your dog toilets before you leave the house. Number 1 and 2.

**3.** Reduce their fluid slightly the morning of the flight. If you're unsure on what is a safe amount of fluid reduction for your dog, please check with your vet.

**4.** Pack comfort items: fold up travel bed, favourite toy and treats.

**5.** You will need to bring a lead that can fasten around the base of the seat in flight, to secure your dog. A bit like a seatbelt. The cabin crew will usually offer to do this for you. If they don't and you need help, just ask.

**6.** You will need to bring a puppy pad or two for your dog to sit on during the flight, in case of any accidents. The airline should also have these, so if you forget them don't panic. However you should always try to bring these to avoid any issues with the airline.

**7.** Bottle of water and a portable bowl.

#### Pre take off

**1.** Cabin crew should ask you if you're ok, ensure that you and your dog are comfortable and secure in your seats. They will go through the evacuation procedures with you. They should also explain to

you what will happen on landing. Usually you and your Assistance Dog will disembark last so that you don't get lost in the crowd and ensure you have plenty of space to operate safely.

**2.** Settle your dog, put out their fold up bed and a puppy pad for them to lie on and request a blanket for them. Put the blanket over them to prevent them from getting cold during the flight.

**3.** On your first flight with your dog, the sound of the engine starting will be new and possibly scary for them. They need to learn that those are safe sounds. So reassure your dog with gentle strokes and pay attention to their body language to ensure they are ok.

**4.** As the plane starts to taxi, give them a small high reward treat. I usually defrost some shredded chicken on the morning of the flight and give little pieces throughout the journey. Small kibble would also work. Be aware of how many treats you have given your dog and take it out of their food allowance for the day.

#### Take off, in flight and landing

**1.** On take off, give your dog approx 5 pieces of kibble or small pieces of chicken at regular intervals, until you're levelled out in the sky and stroke their head to let them know they are safe and doing a good job.

**2.** During the flight, pay attention to your dog's body language. Are they lying down, are they sitting up, do they seem relaxed, do they seem anxious?

**3.** Avoid giving the dog a full bowl of water because they might have

a toileting accident. Instead, if they are thirsty, pour them a small amount to tide them over.

**4.** On occasion, my dog Joey will stand up and stare at me. To me, this means she is either cold, a little anxious or needs reassurance. I place the blanket around her like a burrito and give her regular head strokes to make sure she is happy and she usually lies back down and goes to sleep.

**5.** On landing, same as take off. Feed about 5 pieces of kibble as you near the destination airport. As the plane hits the ground, make sure that your dog is close to you and stroke their head, whilst feeding little bits of treat.

**6.** If your dog is showing signs that they need to go to the toilet, you can ask a member of staff to take you straight to the dog toileting facility on arrival. The Special Assistance team will usually greet you and your Assistance Dog at the door of the plane on landing, however it is always best to confirm this arrangement with the airline beforehand, if you need it.

#### HOW DID YOUR INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT TO ENGLAND DIFFER FROM YOUR DOMESTIC FLIGHTS, AND WHAT ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS DID YOU HAVE TO KEEP IN MIND?

Long haul flights take a lot more preparation. It's essential that you do your research and discuss everything in detail with your vet. Paperwork, vaccinations, worming/tick/flea/parasite treatments and isolation/quarantine, could all be required and can come with high price tags. The requirements are

dependent on the country of export and import. Always contact your country's biosecurity or live animal export/import team to find out. You will also need to carefully consider the airline that you fly with. Ensure you fly with an airline that you trust who is familiar with Assistance Dogs on their route. You will need to seek approval in writing from the airline and bring this document with you for your flight. If you're transiting through a country, you may also require a transshipment licence which also comes at a cost. Your dog will need to pass a health examination before they fly to ensure that they are fit to do so.

If you're flying long haul, I would recommend bringing a dog nappy and practicing putting it on your dog before you leave. Ensure that you use treats as rewards for them wearing the nappy.

#### EXTRA CONSIDERATIONS FOR LONG HAUL FLIGHTS

- Additional layers (I bought a faux fur snood for my Assistance Dog, which acted a bit like a neck pillow for her).
- Washable dog nappy x 2
- Puppy pads x 2
- Fold up dog bed
- Water bowl and water bottle. Give them little sips of water throughout the flight but don't give them a big bowl of water.
- Treats
- Food for their usual meals.
- Their favourite toy
- Hard copies of all of your paperwork
- Long lead to secure them to the seat

- Blanket (the airline can supply)
- Take your dog for little laps around the plane every couple of hours so that they can stretch their legs and maintain good circulation.
- Baby wipes

#### OTHER...

I found the paperwork and preparation aspect to be quite lengthy and stressful. Documents are quite wordy and hard to understand, even for our vet. This process definitely needs to be improved, especially for individuals with visual impairment.

Meeting the export and import requirements for live animals can be expensive, as well as purchasing other comfort items for your dog during the flight. It's important to gather all of the costs before you commit to the journey. It's also worth seeing if any local non-for profits will support you by providing some of the items such as: long leash, foldable water bowl, dog nappies and puppy pads.

Allow extra time prior to departure and on arrival to go through the paperwork with the airline staff and customs/biosecurity team. They will need to go through all the forms, vaccinations and proof of treatments, prior to you boarding the flight or exiting the airport at your country of destination. This can take up to 1 hour.

Understand that following a long haul flight, your dog's toileting might be off for a day or two. Allow them a chance to run around and play/rest the day or two after the flight. ■



“On your first flight with your dog, the sound of the engine starting, will be new and possibly scary for them. They need to learn that those are safe sounds. Reassure your dog with gentle strokes.

Aimee Huxley



# Silent Adventures

The world through the eyes of Deaf travellers



VFW Park, Georgetown, Texas

In an interview with [Angela Lynn](#),

## Lily Yu dishes out travel tips for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

[Click here to read the full interview:](#)

*Lily Yu: Exploring the World in 360 Degrees—my journey as a Deaf travel Content Creator & Blogger*

I'm Lily Yu, a Deaf Travel Content Creator and Blogger from Riverside, California, USA. I am an Asian American, my parents are Deaf immigrants from China—my mother is from Hong Kong, and my father is from Beijing. I also have an older brother who is Deaf like me.

[deafjourneymedia.com](http://deafjourneymedia.com)



Zoo to You, Paso Robles, California

### DURING YOUR TRAVELS, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PLACES YOU'VE FOUND PARTICULARLY ACCOMMODATING FOR DEAF TRAVELLERS?

From my experiences, several places have stood out for their exceptional accommodations for Deaf and Hard of Hearing travellers. These places have taken significant steps to ensure we have access to the same enriching experiences as everyone else making their visits smooth, inclusive and memorable.

**1. Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco:** This museum offers an app that provides sign language interpretation for all the

exhibits. This app ensures that Deaf visitors can access all the necessary information without feeling left out, making the visit satisfying and complaint-free.

**2. Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, Ireland:** Here, they use iPads with sign language and international sign language options to explain the beers and the menu. This innovative approach significantly enhances the experience for those who struggle with verbal or gestural communication, making it enjoyable and inclusive.

**3. The Grove Hotel in Boise, Idaho:** This hotel goes above

and beyond to ensure accessibility for Deaf guests. They provide flash doorbells that alert guests with visual notifications when someone rings the doorbell. Their thoughtful features ensure no accessible items are missing, making the stay pleasant and worry-free.

**4. Cruise Lines:** Cruise lines are exceptionally accommodating for Deaf travellers, as they are legally required to provide American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters upon request. You can fully immerse yourself in the exciting excursions, captivating shows, and all the wonders your cruise has to offer. To ensure a seamless and accessible travel experience, simply request an ASL interpreter at least a few months in advance, allowing the cruise line ample time to make the necessary arrangements. With clear communication guaranteed, you can embrace the freedom to explore, relax, and create lasting memories on your dream cruise.

**Virgin Voyages:** They offer outstanding ADA accessibility, with full-time interpreter services available around the clock for excursions, restaurants and events. They even provided ADA devices in my suite. It's crucial to inform the cruise line ahead of time to ensure all necessary accommodations are in place.

**MSC Cruises:** On a cruise to Dubai, I was pleasantly surprised to find that they had already arranged for ADA accessibility and interpreter services, even though I hadn't specifically requested them. I had only mentioned that I was a Deaf traveller. This proactive approach was impressive and made my experience phenomenal.



Scout Cave, St. George, Utah

### WHAT TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY DO YOU RELY ON DURING TRAVEL?

I cannot live without my smartphone because it gives me more control over my accessibility and inclusion needs, allowing me to lead an independent life rather than depending on others. As an avid iPhone user, one of my favorite apps is "BIG" from the Apple Store. Travelling without the "BIG" app is unthinkable! It has revolutionized my communication with hearing people by allowing me to read and communicate through text-to-speech and magnified text, effectively eliminating language barriers.

When venturing abroad, my essential travel toolkit includes several apps from the Apple Store:

**1. Google Translate:** This app ensures seamless communication by translating foreign languages into English, breaking down language barriers effortlessly.

**2. Xe Currency:** For managing finances with confidence, Xe Currency helps me understand exactly how much I'm spending, avoiding any financial confusion.

**3. Google Maps:** A must-have for navigating bustling streets, Google Maps allows me to find my way effortlessly, no matter where I am.

**4. AllTrails:** As a hiker, AllTrails is essential for finding and navigating the perfect trails with ease, ensuring a smooth and enjoyable outdoor adventure.

These apps empower me to explore new destinations with confidence and independence, making my travel experiences more enjoyable and stress-free.

### ARE THERE ANY TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS YOU FIND IMPRESSIVE?

One innovation that stands out is live captions, a game-changing feature, providing real-time transcriptions



4-day Inca Trail Trekking, Peru



Fort Lauderdale Beach, Florida

of spoken content, which is incredibly beneficial for Deaf and Hard of Hearing travellers. However, there's still significant room for growth and improvement. One of the main challenges is the inconsistency of Wi-Fi connectivity, which can hinder the effectiveness of live captions, especially when I'm on an airplane or using airplane mode due to Wi-Fi requirements for my accessibility apps.

Despite its potential, current technology can be frustratingly inconsistent, rendering it unreliable and limiting its accessibility. As an iPhone user, I call on Apple to take the lead in enhancing live captions. It's time to refine this feature, ensuring seamless and accurate transcriptions for all users. With better Wi-Fi integration and more robust technology, live captions can truly revolutionize accessibility.

As a Deaf content creator and blogger, I see the immense potential these innovations hold to bridge communication gaps and make travel more inclusive for everyone.

### MOST MEMORABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE


Italy feels like utopia to me, especially considering my interactions with hearing Italians who excel at gestural communication. This unique aspect has fueled my immense passion for Italy—the country, its culture, and its people. Italy holds a special place in my travel memories, where communication flowed effortlessly without spoken words. Gestures and a positive attitude made me feel incredibly supported and welcomed. The beauty of Italy is simply stunning and its cuisine is to die for! I indulged in delicious pizza and pasta every day, savoring the flavors and aromas of this culinary paradise.

Whenever I think of positive travel experiences or dream of a perfect vacation, Italy always comes to mind. It's a place where I felt truly connected and embraced, making it my go-to destination for future adventures. ■



Seven Magic Mountains, Nevada

Visit Lily's website and follow her on social media. There are lots of exciting journeys ahead!

-  [www.deafjourneymedia.com](http://www.deafjourneymedia.com)
-  [@Deafjourney](https://www.instagram.com/Deafjourney)
-  [@deafjourney2018](https://www.facebook.com/deafjourney2018)
-  [@deafjourney](https://www.tiktok.com/@deafjourney)
-  [@DeafJourney](https://www.youtube.com/DeafJourney)

Read the full interview:  
*Lily Yu: Exploring the World in 360 Degrees—my journey as a Deaf travel Content Creator & Blogger*



4-day Inca Trail Trekking, Peru



## THE SPOKE APP CATCH EVERY WORD

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# Blogs & Vlogs

These bloggers and vloggers put the accessible into Accessible Journeys. They have blazed trails for people of all abilities and fill in critical gaps of the accessibility puzzle.



Living With Dan started out as a running blog for beginners. In 2019 Dan ran the London Marathon in a mere 3 hours 40 minutes. For comparison's sake, the 2023 average mass-participation time was 4 hours 30 minutes. But since then, Dan has focused on using the blog as a resource to help people living with autism spectrum disorder—something he knows all too well, having been diagnosed with Aspergers syndrome as a teenager. He sees his Aspie symptoms in a positive light, recognizing the strengths they give him even if he struggles socially. Check out Dan's post about stepping into the fear bubble as he prepared for another marathon in, [I'm Running The New York Marathon!](#)

**Blogger:** Daniel Jones

**Home country:** U.K.

**Blog:** [Living with Dan](#)

**What and where:** Running the New York marathon



My Several Worlds blog weaves through the many worlds that Carrie inhabits as a global citizen, world traveller and blogger, patient advocate and someone who lives with multiple chronic diseases. Having spent decades travelling with chronic illnesses—including two forms of spondyloarthritis, psoriatic arthritis, fibromyalgia, IBS and others—Carrie has a lot of helpful tips for her readers. She unpacks the angst and anxiety of intercontinental travelling as a disabled person: choosing the right airline, hazards, airline incompetence, pre-trip anxiety, and how to ask for help in [Traveling As A Disabled Person – The Angst and Anxiety](#)

**Blogger:** Carrie Kellenberger

**Home country:** Canada to Taiwan

**Blog:** [My Several Worlds](#)

**What and where:** Angst and anxiety, intercontinental travelling



Rose Ernst was diagnosed with autism in her 40s. After reaching full burnout in 2019, she left her Seattle home and began full-time travel on a budget. Her nomadic life informed her greatly about her autism and now she helps other autistic travellers to manage nomadic life with sensory issues. This post follows her trip to the city of dreaming spires, Oxford. Read along as she rates the destination, its hotels and local sights on her sensometer scale, in [4 Best Central Oxford Hotels For Autistic Travellers](#)

**Blogger:** Rose Ernst

**Home country:** U.S.

**Blog:** [The Autistic Traveler](#)

**What and where:** Best hotels for autistic travellers, Oxford



Sheryl admits that her body is a mess. That's due to a mini stroke at age 14, multiple blood clots in her lungs and legs, a faulty heart rhythm, seizures and lupus. But she takes it all on, even the tough emotions, one day at a time, and invites readers to do the same. What rises to the top in these posts is Sheryl's passion for travel, the stimulation and possibilities that new people and places offer. But more than that—travel is a reminder of the beauty of life, which is easy to forget in a pain-filled existence. Visit her post, [Travelling with Chronic Illness & Disability – Why I Do It Anyway](#)

**Blogger:** Sheryl Chan

**Home country:** Singapore

**Blog:** [A Chronic Voice](#)

**What and where:** Why travel, everywhere



Hello Little Lady focuses on everyday life with dwarfism, whether that be someone with one of 200 forms of dwarfism, the parent of a child with dwarfism or anyone else. The welcoming nature of the platform serves as a safe place to celebrate and gives voice to the dwarf community. There are blog posts but don't miss out on Steph's artwork and podcasts too. This post shares some of her photos exploring challenges and assumptions, which debuted in a 2018 exhibition, [You're Just Little – Public Transport](#)

**Blogger:** Steph Robson

**Home country:** U.K.

**Blog:** [Hello Little Lady](#)

**What and where:** Riding the metro, Newcastle, U.K.



Heather Avis founded The Lucky Few, which calls everyone towards a kinder, inclusive world. She's also a proud mother, a New York Times best-selling author, podcaster and a Down syndrome advocate. This post deals with her attempt to sign up her kids for summer camp. What should have been a simple dull task turned into an act of advocacy at the discovery that the 30-year-old camp had never had attendees with Down syndrome. To shift narratives and promote differences in such cases, Heather had to step up. Read about it in [The Advocacy of Showing Up](#)

**Blogger:** Heather Avis

**Home country:** U.S.

**Blog:** [Heather Avis](#)

**What and where:** Summer camp for kids, U.S.



**Vlogger:** Chelsie Jones  
**Home country:** U.K.  
**Vlog:** [Beauty is my Duty](#)  
**Experience:** [Accessible caravan beach holiday, Weymouth, U.K.](#)



Wheelchair user Chelsie chronicles a family trip to Weymouth, where they stayed in a spacious accessible caravan at Weymouth Bay Haven. Exploring the area led to her discovery of Weymouth Beach’s many accessible aspects, notably its free beach wheelchairs, the sea pedalos, accessible toilets and changing facilities. Arcades and shops rounded out their stay, to which the family gave a big thumbs up. Watch the vlog [here](#).

Dallas and family share some of their holiday at the Sensira Resort and Spa in Riviera Maya, finding the resort to be accessible, accommodating and beautiful. But it’s the sheer exuberance of Dallas, a girl with cerebral palsy and a thirst for life, that will leave you as energized as the mechanical bull they rode there. Watch it [here](#).



**Vlogger:** Dallas  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Vlog:** [Discover with Dallas](#)  
**Experience:** [Accessible Mexican vacation, Cancun](#)



**Vlogger:** Cory Young  
**Home country:** Australia  
**Vlog:** [Roll with the punches](#)  
**Experience:** [Cerro Verde National Park, El Salvador](#)



Cory uses his vlog to share his life experience, mindset, disability and humour. His vision is a global community full of service, hope and emotional health. Rolling atop an active volcano comes with its share of bumps, and Cory shares the ups, the downs and the steamy parts in this [vlog](#).



**Vlogger:** Randy Skroback  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Vlog:** [Skro’s Nest](#)  
**Experience:** [Cruise ship embarkation process, Miami](#)



Although many vloggers chronicle their cruises, very few focus on the embarkation process, which can be confusing and difficult to navigate. But for people with disabilities, there are always those extra needs, and that can make this stage of the trip overwhelming. Randy’s vlog offers an invaluable behind-the-scenes look at embarkation, sharing details we didn’t even know we didn’t know. Watch the [Guide to Embarkation Miami, FL](#).



**Vlogger:** Zach and Pat Valentine  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Vlog:** [Valentine Brothers](#)  
**Experience:** [Surprise international flight](#)



If you haven’t met the Valentine brothers, prepare to fall in love. Patrick surprised his brother, who has autism and a passion for travel, with his first international flight. It was a risky move, and one worth filming. Follow their journey, through its challenges, stresses, highs and lows—and that’s just the flight portion. . . [Join the flight here](#).

Affectionately dubbed Britain’s Smallest Woman, Georgia is also known as Makeup Junkie G because she vlogs about makeup. But it was her trip to Scotland that captured our attention, with a stay in a caravan that had been thoughtfully built for accessibility. The trip included daily visits to the sea, outings to St. Abbs and Edinburgh’s Old Town. One of her top highlights was something most people take for granted—being able to use the oven independently, which really got her cooking. Watch the [full vlog](#) here.



**Vlogger:** Georgia Rankin  
**Home country:** U.K.  
**Vlog:** [Georgia Rankin](#)  
**Experience:** [Visiting Edinburgh’s Old Town, Scotland](#)



**Vlogger:** The Garcias  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Vlog:** [Thee Garcia Family](#)  
**Experience:** [The San Diego Zoo Safari Park](#)




The vlog, Thee Garcia Family, is a place “where love has no color, size or shape.” The unique family spreads awareness about dwarfism, doing so in their big bold signature style. Dad and the two kids all have achondroplasia, and revel in their differences. Join them as they venture to The San Diego Zoo [Safari Park](#).

# Instagrammers

These Instagrammers capture a moment in time of an accessible journey. Like our bloggers and vloggers, they are pushing the boundaries of travel without limits.

Disability on the 'gram:  
captivating  
Instagrammers  
you need to follow

**Instagrammer:** Laura "Laurita" Tellado  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Instagram account:** [@lauritatellado](#)  
Piazza San Marco, celebrating the moment >>>




Laura was thrilled when the U.S. Dept. of Transportation announced a new proposed rule to expand the rights of travellers with disabilities. Mandates to train airline employees, penalties for mishandling or damaging mobility equipment, and dignified assistance are long overdue. Laura celebrated from Venice, with a photo of her in [St. Mark's Plaza, Venice](#).



Being legally blind (retinitis pigmentosa) can make it tough to get around some places, and Bali is one of them. This [reel](#) offers an up-close view of the sad state of Bali sidewalks and offers tips on how to navigate them for people with visual impairments.

**Instagrammer:** Regina Sorensen  
**Home country:** Australia  
**Instagram account:** [@reggiebirdbb](#)  
<<< Navigating rough terrain, Bali

**Instagrammer:** Nicci Kent  
**Home country:** U.K.  
**Instagram account:** [@angua1973](#)  
Navigating city streets, Berlin >>>



When Nicci visited [Berlin](#), she found the city to be great, with easy to navigate public transit—but beware those kerbs! Here she shares one of her own stunning black and white photos of that urban landscape.



**Instagrammer:** Morgan  
**Home country:** Australia  
**Instagram account:** [@rollinadventures\\_in\\_bali](#)  
Visiting the bird park, Bali >>>


Aussie Morgan is exploring Bali, despite cerebral palsy and autism. She shares that nature lovers and birdwatchers will love a trip to the Bali Bird Park. This [reel](#) was kindly captured by the staff, offering a tour around the facilities and showcasing their wheelchair accessibility.



Travellers, whether they have ADHD or not, all need a place to rest and adjust to the staggering altitude of Cusco, Peru. Joanne shares this [reel](#), along with high praise for the Antigua Casona San Las, AKA, the most relaxing place to stay in Cusco.

**Instagrammer:** Joanne  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Instagram account:** [@theadhdwanderer](#)  
<<< Adjusting to altitude in style, Cusco, Peru

**Instagrammer:** Christophe Zajac-Denek  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Instagram account:** [@christophezd](#)  
Surfing, big waves >>>



This disabled actor, producer, drummer and surfer loves the adage, "life is short, have fun." Here he shares [footage](#) of him riding some waves, grateful for a chance to improve his surfing.



Author, motivational speaker and founder of Little Legs Big Heart Foundation, Kristen celebrates a moment when she witnesses burdens being transformed into purpose. Here she shares a [photo](#) of her old hip brace and the Ugandan man it now helps.

**Instagrammer:** Kristen DeAndrade  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Instagram account:** [@littlelegsbigheart](#)  
<<< Donating her old hip brace, Uganda

# Tech-Enabled

Innovative technologies to support and enhance the lives of people with disabilities

## Purple Lens



A web accessibility toolkit that combines automated and human remediation

## Spoke



An app that ensures that deaf travellers never miss out on important public announcements at airports or public locations

## Vacayit



Helps the blind vicariously experience in-destination tours through professional audio description

## Dateability



The only dating app designed to help the disabled and chronically ill community find love

## Lisnen



An app that allows the deaf and hard of hearing to hear sounds like alarms, telephones and door knocks

## EnChroma



Glasses that enable people with colour blindness to see vibrant colors

## Be My Eyes



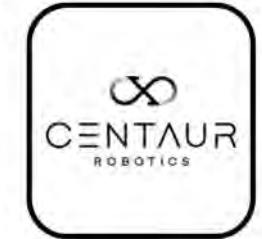
An app that provides blind users with audio descriptions of what they are seeing using AI via ChatGPT4 or live volunteers

## TranslateLive



Provides closed captioning, live captioning, translation, audio description, accessibility compliance

## Centaur Robotics



Power wheelchair that fits into the space of a dining room chair and elevates the user up to eye level.

## Three Play Media



Audio description, live captioning, automated transcription

## Picture Live



A photobook that uses QR codes to activate audio descriptions or ASL interpreters for each page

# Take our Survey



We invite you to take part in our survey and share your valuable insights to help us improve.

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[To Table of Contents](#)

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Designer Spotlight

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[WWW.TRAVELABILITY.NET/ACCESSIBLE-DESTINATIONS/](http://WWW.TRAVELABILITY.NET/ACCESSIBLE-DESTINATIONS/)

