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Accessible Journeys

SUMMER 2023

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TRAVELING WITH

DYSAUTONOMIA

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SUMMER 2023

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Note from the Guest Editor

MARINA APPERLEY

Hello! Welcome to our summer issue of Accessible Journeys. I'm Marina Apperley, and I'm truly honored to be this issue's Guest Editor. As a member of the Accessible Journeys team, I am proud to help bring this fantastic resource to the accessible travel industry and to readers like you. Each issue shares with you the personal, firsthand accounts of accessible travel from people with disabilities from all over the world. We are incredibly grateful to all the amazing accessible travel bloggers, vloggers, Instagrammers, organizations, and more, who share their stories, advice and solutions and break down the travel barriers that continue, albeit lessen, in our world.

I grew up and continue to live in Belleville, Ontario, Canada, a wonderful area with a wide and eclectic variety of places to see and activities to do - all within driving range. To say I've been lucky is an understatement, one I hope to never take for granted. I am essentially all about family with members living all over the world. Within months of being born I became a world traveler, visiting the Netherlands for family reunions and holidays, vacations in Florida, U.S., Los Cabos, Mexico, and Alberta, Canada, and camping in Old Forge, New York, and in the many locations throughout my own backyard of Ontario. While living with disabilities has slowed how often and where I travel, it certainly has not curbed my love of being outdoors, seeing new places and learning new cultures.

In addition to my work with Mélange Business Group, I am the owner and operator of Shiplap & Sundays, a small online boutique that provides goods for the home and family, as well as a virtual assistant to a wonderful firm in Australia. I am also disabled; I live with vasovagal syncope, also known as neurocardiogenic syncope (NCS), postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), and fibromyalgia, to name a few. The symptoms of these conditions, along with the lack of true support from within the travel industry, can make life feel narrow. It's not! With the support of friends and family, adventures are always possible, whether it be a weekend camping trip, a day at the beach, or ziplining from The Euromast in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

I'm excited about this issue. We'll be looking at how living with dysautonomia, such as POTS and NCS, affects travel. Find inspiration and encouragement in the shared adventures from those living with dysautonomia as they detail what has worked for them, what hasn't, where the most accessible hotels are, the tips and tricks for flying, and much more. We might not travel the same as others, it might be more challenging, but its rewards are certainly significant and well deserved.

As we continue to provide relevant, real, and inspiring stories of accessible journeys, we'd appreciate your thoughts. Let us know if you have a product, service, or personal story of traveling without barriers by emailing **marina@readmelange.com.**

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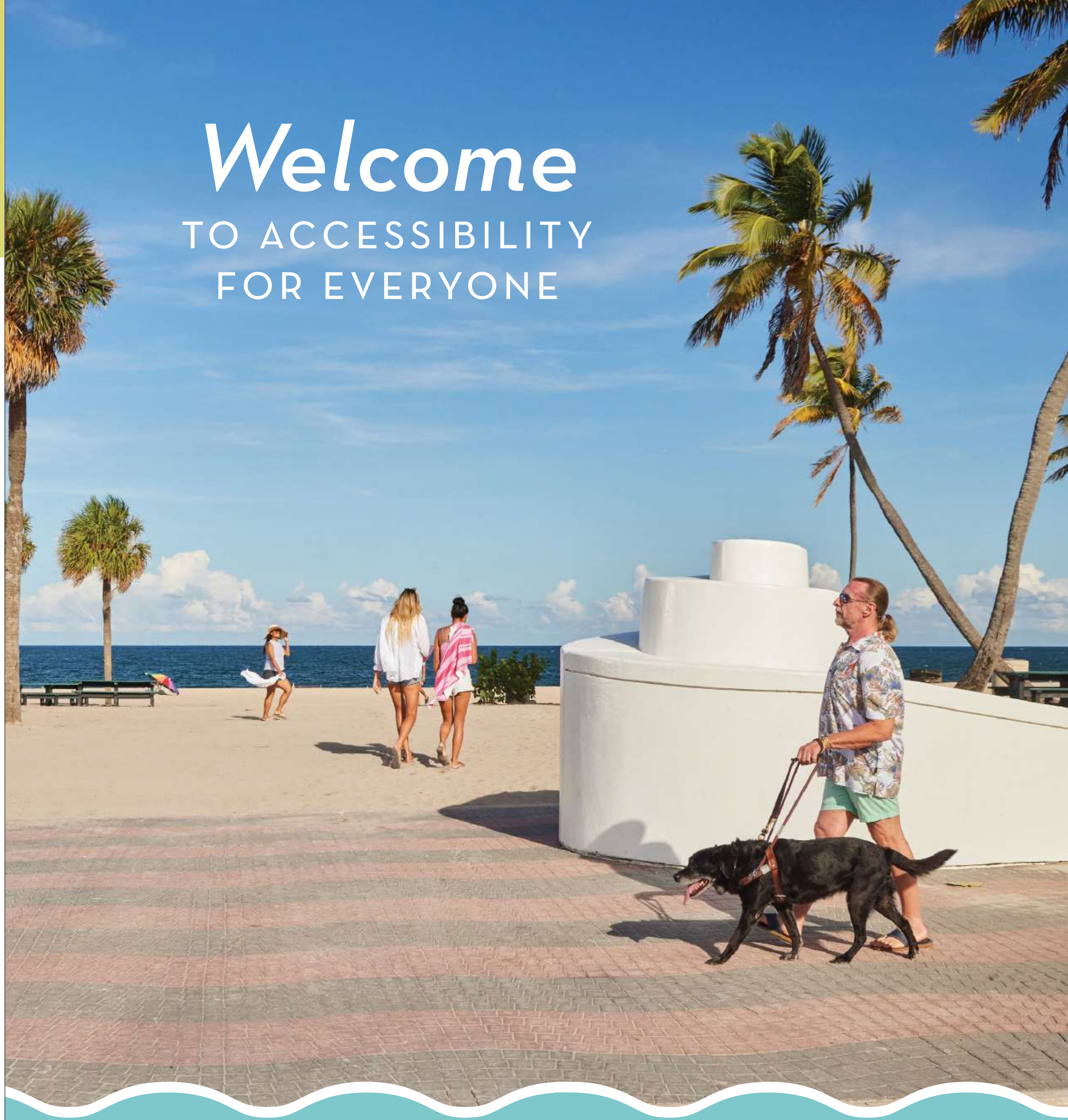

Leading Off: Traveling with Dysautonomia

How fragile we are

By Nancy Baye

It's embarrassing to admit, but up until a few months ago, I didn't know what dysautonomia was. Its name might be a tongue-twister, but it's a life-twister, a devastating disease that is under-recognized.

Essentially, dysautonomia is a group of medical conditions caused by issues with the autonomic nervous system, which controls involuntary body functions like breathing, heart rate and blood pressure, digestion and temperature regulation. Ramifications of dysautonomia include cognitive issues, extreme fatigue, sleep disruption, body pain, tachycardia, dizziness, fainting spells and more.

Accessible Journeys' Marina Apperley contributes wholeheartedly to each issue, and we are grateful to her for serving as guest editor on this edition. Marina pulls back the curtain on dysautonomia, sharing her experiences and tips, and securing content from other thought leaders in the field. Thank you, Marina, for steering us through another eye-opening journey of life and travel through this unique lens.

Journalist Summer Dashe's article informs us that her version of dysautonomia—POTS is a disease that happens to otherwise healthy people and is often triggered by a virus (COVID-19, the flu) or physical trauma (an accident, a surgery). It's a reminder of how fragile we all are.

Sadly, dysautonomia and its related conditions remain widely misunderstood, especially by the medical profession. Ilana Jacqueline reminds patients to beware medical gaslighting, to remain strong when confronted by doctors who dismiss or disregard health concerns. She reminds us to self-advocate, and actively speak up to improve the culture of healthcare, saying, "We do have rights, so knowing, using and protecting them has to be a conscious practice."

Faith Littlejohn shares her vision of people with dysautonomia as warriors because she knows it's a battle—one that begins with grieving the life the warrior knew before.

Dysautonomia's range of conditions create invisible disabilities, and as such, their tribes face unique stigmas. We are thankful to the wonderful contributors willing to speak up on what this means to them, and what the rest of us need to know. Together, we can work past judgment and shame.

Christine E. Staple Ebanks and regular columnist Jennifer Allen, lend sage advice on transportation and travel for parents with special needs children. And, as always, we share tales of inspiration, like that of Craig DeMartino who fell the equivalent of a 10-story building during a rock-climbing expedition. He went on to endure rehab, choose amputation and—no surprise—return to a career of rock climbing!

Along with our bloggers, vloggers and Instagrammers, all reporting from the front lines, we have enough resources and inspiration to fill ten magazines.

And as always, we bring it all back to our favorite topic—travel. Most of this issue's writers agree that dysautonomia makes travel more difficult and that adaptations are needed. But they also agree that travel remains key, refreshing mind and soul, making life richer. That's why Accessible Journeys is here—to ensure that everyone can travel without limits.

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Tips for traveling with dysautonomia

By Marina Apperley

Traveling can be an exhausting and stressful endeavor. For those living with a chronic illness such as dysautonomia, this is especially true. However, with the right mindset, tools and precautions in place any style of travel, whether near or far, can become an enjoyable and memorable experience.

The following are some of my top tips and tricks to ensuring a safe and happy excursion for all.

1. Give yourself plenty of time for sleep the night before traveling.

2. Stay hydrated!

3. Carry salty snacks with you.

4. Make sure to have small meals throughout the day.

5. If a walking device is needed, such as a cane or walker, use it!

6. During flights, long car rides, or activities that require walking a distance, wear compression stockings. This will help with blood pooling in your legs. It's also important to also move around during long flights. This will also help with blood pooling.

7. Sit whenever you need to. Even if this means directly on the floor. It is always safer than fainting from a standing position.

8. Take breaks during long walks.

9. Use any accessible assistance available. Example: The airport's Accessibility Services and Facilities department.

10. Know your travel plans when traveling in a group – where are you going, what flight number, what hotel, what room number, etc., just in case you get separated from your group.

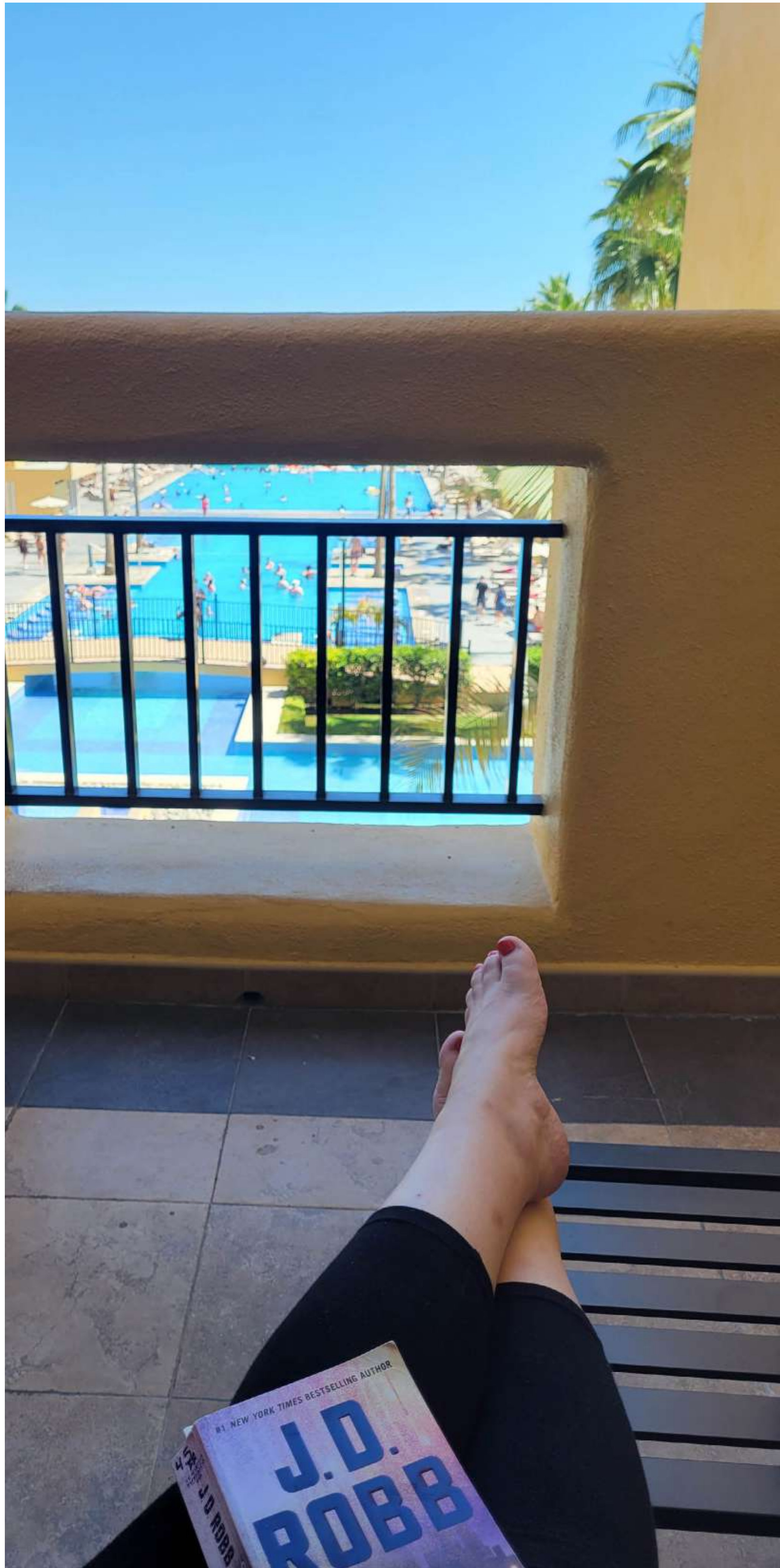
11. Prepare for any emergency. Have your mobile phone, wallet and medical ID bracelet on you. These items should hold your emergency information such as a list of medications, your emergency contact information, travel insurance information, etc.

12. Pack enough of your prescribed medications to last a few days longer than your planned trip duration in case of any delay returning home.

13. When planning your trip, consider the weather. Many with dysautonomia suffer from heat intolerance, causing a spike in symptoms. Pack any tools that can help make you more comfortable like a personal cooling fan, don't wear dark colors, but do wear a hat, etc.

14. Before embarking on a trip, talk openly with your traveling partners. It's important that everyone knows what health needs need to be met and that they're on the same page, itinerary-wise. My best advice to ensuring everyone enjoys their holiday is to not have a strict itinerary. A strict plan can work against anyone with a chronic illness; after all it's the body that makes the decisions. Instead, have a plan in place that allows everyone the option to join in on the different activities as they are able. For those with dysautonomia or other chronic illness, it allows them time for additional rest.

15. To manage time zone changes and jet lag, allow yourself extra time to rest before and after arriving at your destination. Don't plan any major activities for the day of travel or for the first full day at your destination – instead use this time to rest. Note that "rest" includes anything from sleep to sitting pool side with a book. ■



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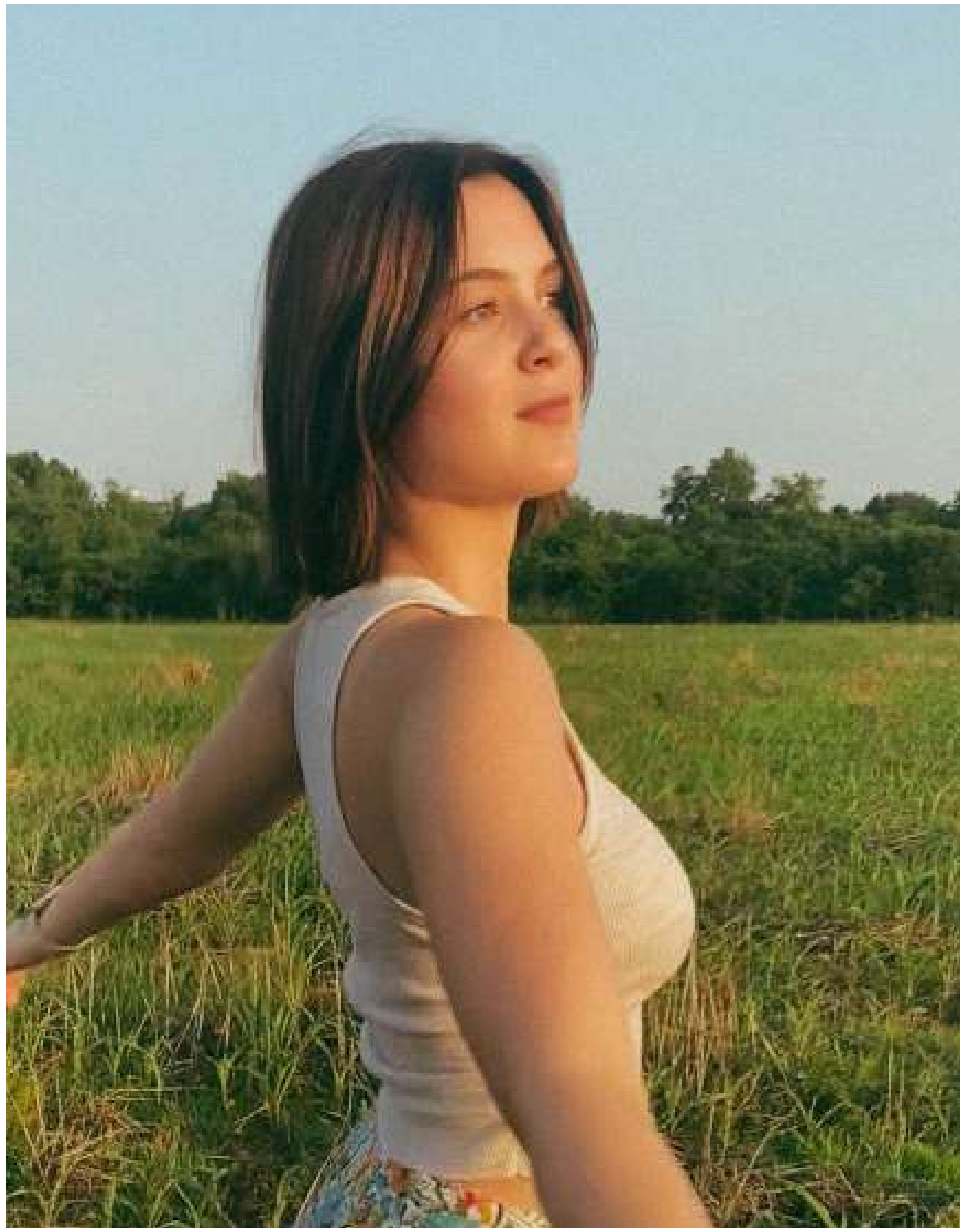
Faith Littlejohn

a lighthouse for people with dysautonomia

Faith Littlejohn has two autonomic nervous system disorders, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome and neurocardiogenic syncope. Both are forms of dysautonomia. As a senior in high school, Faith started spreading awareness about her conditions on social media and soon gained a large following. She continues to spread awareness now that she's working towards a bachelor's degree in secondary education.

Dysautonomia is a large group of medical conditions, caused from a dysfunction of the autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system controls involuntary body functions like heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, digestion, sweating and many other things. For people with dysautonomia, their bodies have a hard time regulating these automatic functions. Faith calls people with dysautonomia warriors because it's a battle. She adds, "I hope everyone with these conditions knows it is more than okay to grieve the life you had before getting sick." But having dysautonomia doesn't mean you have to stop living, it just means finding new ways to live life with its symptoms.



Having dysautonomia has affected Faith's ability to travel and now she must take steps to ensure she stays as symptom free as possible. To prepare for a big trip, she rests for a week beforehand. When packing, she ensures all her necessary medical equipment and symptom aids are packed: blood pressure and heart rate monitors, medications, electrolyte powder, migraine caps, compression socks, etc.

Small outings, like going to classes or the grocery store, might be routine but Faith knows she must remain careful. Her example is, "If I'm having a symptomatic day I have to think about my health and safety above anything else, so sometimes I can't always go out and do what I would like to." To this end, she makes sure she always has her medications, lots of water and electrolytes, and high sodium snacks. She dresses in light layers so she can easily adapt to being hot or cold. She wears compression socks to help on more symptomatic days. Faith also knows that resting up is crucial to prepare for a big day or busy week. All these preparations help with her temperature regulation, leg pain, dizziness and threat of fainting.

But travel is still high on her agenda. Faith recently went to Universal Studios with her mother, adding, "It was wonderful!" In part, that's because she had brought lots of things to help manage her symptoms. Even then, there was some leg pain and a few dizzy spells, but no fainting. She had lots of salty snacks and kept her water bottle full. She says, "We rode all the rides, walked everywhere, ate great food, and enjoyed the magical world of Harry Potter. It's the most successful trip I've had in years!"

When asked about the travel and tourism industry, Faith said that the best thing they can do for people with dysautonomia is to get educated about it. Depending on the form of dysautonomia there are lots of things that can be done. Her suggestions for venues are:

Ensuring there are lots of places to get water, especially in large venues, because having to walk long distances for water can be very challenging.

Offer lots of places to sit: benches, chairs, fountains, steps, anything that gives those who suffer from blood pooling a place to rest.

Have a few wheelchairs that can be used for free. Those with invisible illnesses may not need a wheelchair all the time, but Faith adds, "There have been times where I have needed a wheelchair out of the blue and it's extremely helpful to have access to them without cost.

Aside from her awareness-raising and great tips, Faith wants to light the way for others. One of her Instagram posts says, "I think I'm a lighthouse instead of a lifeboat. Rather than rescue people I help others find there way to shore." The sentiment sprung from the many times in her life where Faith felt like she was constantly being rescued: non-stop doctor appointments, testing, family members waiting for her to drop to the floor, teachers watching her every move, friends always on standby. As much as she appreciated all of that, it sometimes left her feeling hopeless: "The people acting as my lifeboat had no idea where to go or what to do. I was stuck in the ocean in a storm. I needed a light from a lighthouse, something to show me there was hope, there was a place to go, and that someday I would make it to shore." She wants to be the one shining a light on hope, helping people see they can make it to shore. Helping others feel independent in their health journey means, "They don't have to be in a lifeboat stuck in the storm forever."

Her advocacy work began at the age of 17 when she started spreading awareness and was struck by how many people reached out and shared what they were going through. Today, Faith continues to post on social media: advice, encouragement, education so that nobody feels as lost as she did. Her posts aim to help others feel like they can advocate for themselves with doctors, and to know where to go next. Faith advises anyone who wants to be an advocate for those with disabilities to do it, don't wait and don't be afraid. "It is an amazing thing to be a part of and it's a decision I will never regret making for myself."

As for going back in time to advise her younger self, Faith would say, "Darling, in the future your life is going to change very suddenly. It's going to be confusing, it will be scary, you won't feel the best most days, you're going to lose people close to you, and you're going to lose yourself. You will think your life is over. But, in time you will grow, find yourself again, and you will have a new life. You'll realize that when your life changed it made you resilient, it helped you have faith, it made you appreciate all the little things, it helped you find your forever people, and it changed you, forever, and for the better. Feel all the emotions, love others, love yourself, and know that you're stronger than your bad days."

Ilana Jacqueline

on chronic illness and medical gaslighting

Tell us about yourself

I'm an author, patient and patient advocacy strategist. I was diagnosed with primary immune deficiency disease at 19, after struggling with why I had so many infections that wouldn't fully go away. Though it was great to finally have a diagnosis, I still wasn't able to access treatment and wouldn't find a doctor who fully understood my rare disease until my 30's. I went a full three decades of my life living with constant and severe infections. I believe this is what finally triggered my dysautonomia—which initially started off as dizziness, fainting and tachycardia.

Dysautonomia is the dysfunction of the autonomic nervous system which can impact multiple organ systems. It comes in many forms including POTS (postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome) and gastroparesis (the partial paralysis of the digestion track). It can affect sleep and cognitive function, causing brain fog.

I developed gastroparesis and struggled to keep a healthy, nourishing diet. Thankfully, I worked with my cardiologist and got on beta blockers to treat my heart issues. Now I have weekly IV fluids which help with my gastroparesis and other dysautonomia symptoms. I am also in treatment for my primary disease, which requires a weekly sub-cutaneous infusion of immunoglobulins.

How has living with these chronic illnesses affected how you travel, to far off places or simply to your local grocery store?

Traveling is definitely a struggle. But it is possible. I have to always be prepared to deal with the things I can't control. I carry extra medications and fluids to stay hydrated. I avoid large crowds and places like waterparks and public pools to reduce my chance of infection. I don't visit people who are unwell since I'm immunocompromised. This was really a struggle during the pandemic.

When traveling by plane, I pack for all scenarios that my disease might cause. I use the airline's ADA services, like wheelchair support to reduce fatigue from walking and carrying bags. I'm allowed to take one carry-on item besides the one I paid for, to hold all my medical supplies and during COVID. I sometimes request a compassion seat, which puts an empty seat between me and the next person, to ensure space to stay germ-free.

How can the travel and tourism industry, and venues, better assist those living with chronic illnesses?

All my conditions are invisible ones, and though I feel comfortable using all the disability support services—many patients don't. They fear they'll be judged, or shamed for using these offerings. I would like to see more awareness campaigns aimed at those with invisible illnesses that would help them feel more confident in utilizing these services.

Your work as a patient advocate is inspiring. How did you become an advocate? What advice do you have for others who want to become advocates?

I often call myself an accidental advocate, which, I suppose, most advocates are. Advocates exist to break a cycle or prevent harm to others that was done to them. I started advocating in the early 2010's with a blog about my daily life with an invisible illness. I wanted friends and family to get to know this part of my life, which I had been ashamed of for a long time. I wanted them to understand that there was still me but also a disability that occupied a lot of my mental energy, strength and time. I found that a lot of other patients were looking for stories like mine, of living openly and candidly with a chronic illness and sharing how it touched everything in my world—relationships, friendships, work, school, money and considerations about my future. I later started writing books to

reach a broader audience offline but continued my efforts on social media.

My advice for others is to understand that advocacy takes many forms. As a writer and publicist, content creation seemed like a natural path to share my story and utilize my skills. Others could impact policy change and legislation, create support groups and moderate them, create art, start non-profits or for-profit companies that provide services or products that are missing for those with an illness. There is no degree, no certification, and no firm rule on how to become an advocate. Speak and share your story and you will find your next steps from there.

Congratulations on the publication of your book, Surviving and Thriving Chronic Illness. What motivated you to write it?

Surviving and Thriving is my first book and it was released in 2018. It's a great beginners guide for young adults or newly diagnosed adults on how to survive daily life with a chronic illness. It offers tips on dating, relationships, sex, school and work with an active disease that often makes you unreliable. I wanted to write this book because it was what I needed when I was transitioning into adulthood with a chronic illness. There were very few resources to help me understand how to cope with new adulthood and the responsibility of my disease.

My newest book, Medical Gaslighting: How to Recognize It, Prevent It, and Fight For Your Life, is coming out in fall 2024 with BenBella Books. This is a survival guide for women dealing with doctors who dismiss, ignore or even shame them for their health concerns. It teaches actionable skills to help you better support your case for quality of life when discussing treatments and diagnostics with your doctor.

What moments or achievements stand out for you in your work?

I always knew I'd write a book someday, but I'm surprised at what the topic ended up being! I'm so proud of my books and am always moved to hear feedback from readers who say they helped guide their journeys. Both of my publishing deals were really significant for me personally. I had been struggling to respond to every single patient that reached out so being able to offer widespread, in-depth information for patients was a relief for me.

I was recently on the Dr. Phil show as an expert in medical gaslighting in late 2022. I'd done a few television interviews, but this was my first national one on cable and I had a great time. I've worked with amazing advocates in my field on webinars and panels. The network I've built is significant for me—people who are living parallel lives to mine, dealing with the same challenges of being chronically ill while pursuing a career that can be part of the systemic changes we're fighting for in healthcare.

What message would you like to share about the importance of advocating for patient rights?

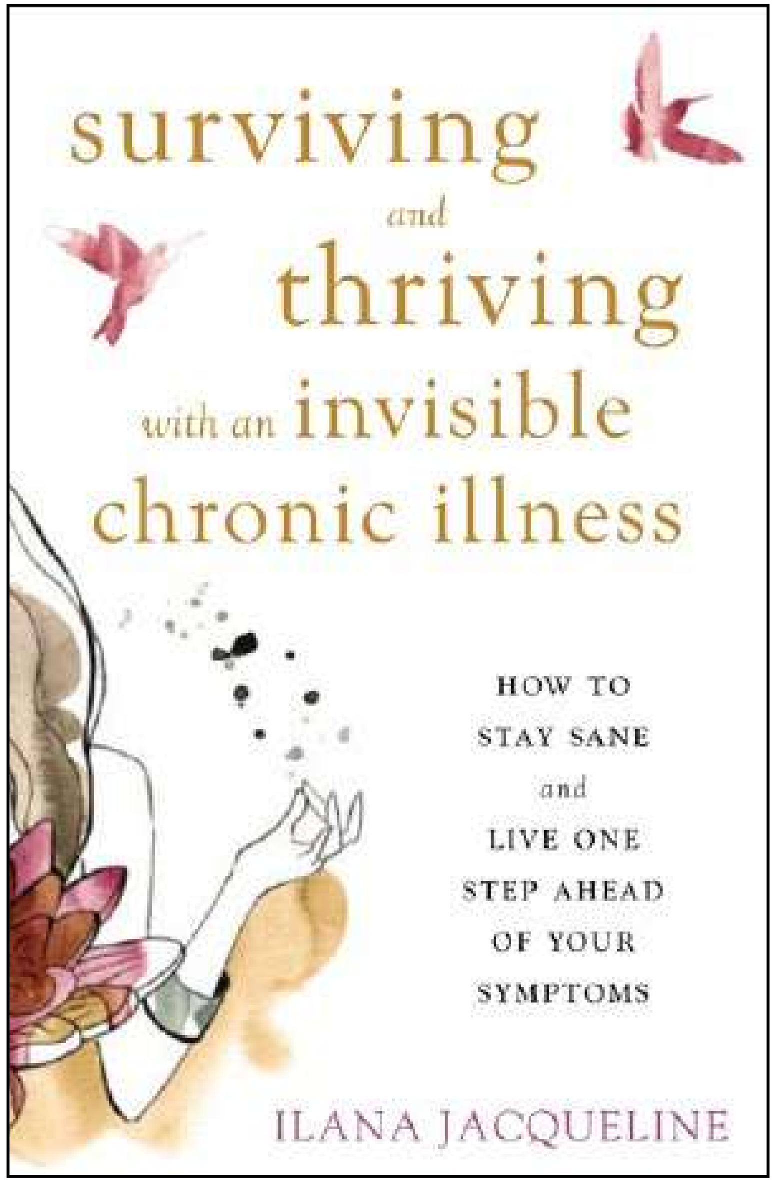
Patients can shape the culture of healthcare. If you are submissive or not engaged, that is what your providers will expect. They won't feel the need to explain their reasoning, and they will find the few patients who do ask questions and get involved in their care to be impertinent or bothersome. If you don't write reviews for your doctors and report doctors who are harming you, they will continue to harm others and get away with poor treatment. We need to hold the system accountable for anti-patient practices. We do have rights, so knowing, using and protecting them has to be a conscious practice.

I know that my story has been a guide for patients who feel hopeless or stuck. Every time we tell our stories, we help people like us get unstuck from the helplessness of chronic illness.

What can we expect to see from you in the next year?

I'm still collecting narratives for my next book from patients who have experienced medical gaslighting and racial bias in healthcare. Patients with stories to share can send them to Iwasnotheard@gmail.com. I'll be doing more speaking engagements and interviews as we ramp up for the release of the book next year.

Find Illana at IlanaJacqueline.com or @Ilana_jacqueline on Instagram and TikTok.



> “My advice for others is to understand that advocacy takes many forms.
>
> Ilana Jacqueline

Meredith Aleigha Wells

paves a path for disabled performers

Meredith Aleigha Wells (they/she) is a touring actor, singer, dancer and writer, best known for their performance as Punky Who in How the Grinch Stole Christmas the Musical, marking the first performance by a wheelchair user in a Broadway National Tour.

Tell us about yourself and what brought you to where you are today.

I am a Chicago-based actor, singer, dancer and writer. I am originally from Massachusetts where I performed in my first musical and fell in love with singing, acting and dancing. Despite a number of road blocks along the way, I've been pursuing my craft ever since. Writing came later for me, around the time I became disabled. I came to it out of necessity - as a way to create opportunities for myself and to process my experience.

There are a million small decisions that brought me to where I am today but a few that stand out include:

- When I became disabled, instead of leaning into unaffected skills in hopes of overcompensating for my limitations, I dove head-first into my dance training and re-learned how to dance in my wheelchair, completely changing the trajectory of my career. Now dancing is something I do professionally and outside the context of musical theater, which is something I never could have imagined pre-diagnosis.

- Not taking no for an answer, learning to create my own opportunities

- Quitting drinking

- Getting Scout, my service dog

What is dysautonomia, and what do you wish people knew about it?

Dysautonomia is dysfunction of the autonomic nervous system. It's an umbrella term for a group of disorders that affect the ANS - the system that controls everything that happens automatically in the body. Something I wish people realized about POTS specifically is that tachycardia is just the tip of the iceberg. There are so many other symptoms. I often get asked, "why do you use a wheelchair if you can walk?" I am reminded how far we still have to go in regards to dysautonomia awareness, especially since the most crippling parts of my disability are invisible.

How has living with dysautonomia affected how you travel?

Traveling with dysautonomia is a PROCESS. Whether I'm traveling solo or with my cast, there's so much planning required. Air travel requires notifying airlines of mobility equipment, my service dog and any assistance I may need. I have a living document on my phone that I add to each time I fly. It has an info section for each airport, including where the pet relief and sensory areas are located. I also take notes

Photo Credit: ERAVIEW portraits

Mic check on tour of the grinch tour - Blumenthal performing arts center

about the type of aircraft I'm flying and whether or not my wheelchair was able to fit inside the in-cabin storage. When possible, I try to take photos for future reference. I also have links to all of the laws regarding mobility equipment and service dogs handy for when I run into staff who are uneducated on the subject and insist wheelchairs or my service dog cannot stay in-cabin. Despite all the extra work, it's absolutely worth it to get to travel and tour!

How is touring for you as a person living with a chronic illness? What tips help you on the road?

I think it all comes down to planning. I have a lot of food sensitivities, gluten being the main one. So I always do research before we get to each new city to make a list of places with options for me. That way when a group of cast-mates wants to go out, I have places to suggest. Bonus points if I crowd-source recommendations on Instagram and cross reference those with my list of gluten-free friendly restaurants. I also always travel with my Magic Bullet mini and Vivo Life protein powder. Knowing I always have an option in a pinch gives me peace of mind. As a wheelchair user, my adaptive suitcase from Phoenix Luggage has been an absolute life hack. It hooks onto the back of my wheelchair so I can get around the airport independently.

Can you share a hit or fail wow travel experience?

Before booking my first national tour, I was a digital nomad for about a year. I had always dreamed of being on a Broadway national tour but wasn't sure how my body would handle all the travel. I set out on my nomadic year as a trial run, to prove to myself that touring and living on the road was possible for someone like me. In the way I trained to sing, act and dance, I also trained in the traveling aspect. I knew this would be important because, at that time, a wheelchair user had never been a part of a Broadway national tour before. I had no idea what I was doing but I'm so glad I did it anyway. That year allowed me to identify what the biggest hurdles would be. By the time I booked the Grinch tour, I was able to put my best foot forward because I had spent a year identifying what accommodations I would need. I could advocate for myself accordingly when the time came.

Tell us about the one-person musical you wrote, Dysfunctioning Just Fine

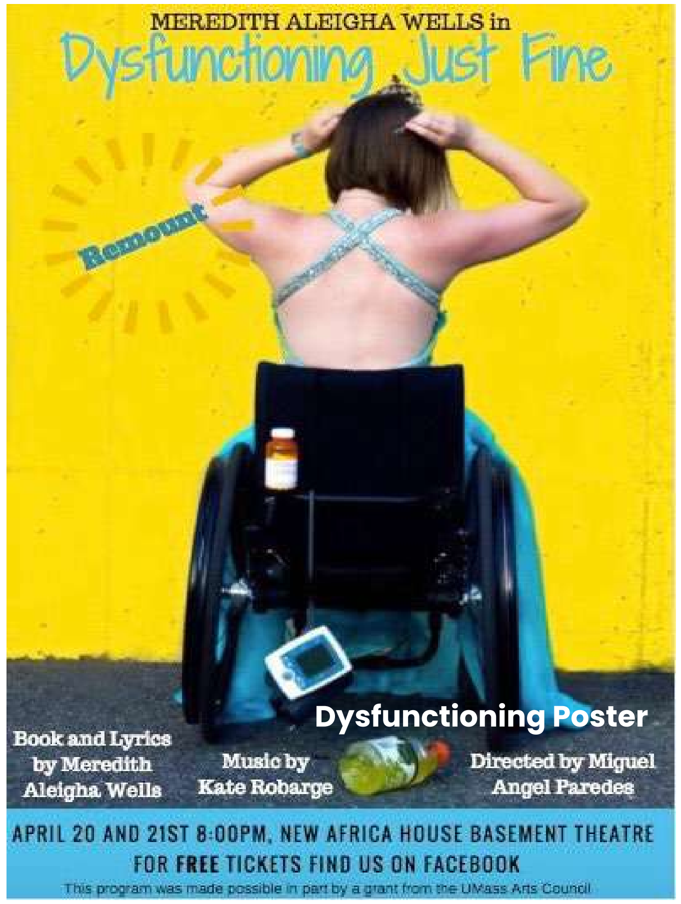
Dysfunctioning Just Fine is a queer and disabled coming of age story. Disheartened by the lack of opportunities available to me post-diagnosis, I took matters into my own hands and created an opportunity for myself. Dysfunctioning was cathartic. Channeling that script allowed me to process my diagnosis as well as accept my queerness.

The response was nothing I could have ever imagined. We sold out before we even opened, brought the show back by popular demand to another theater on campus. After graduating, we took the show on a northeastern school tour that culminated in a run at the My True Colors Festival, where I received the Purple Skies Playwright Award. It was an incredibly special and exciting year of my life.

Tell us about your advocacy for people with disabilities. What advice do you have for others hoping to become advocates?

My activism has evolved a lot over the years. I ran a student coalition to advocate for accessible arts facilities in college. I think with the rise of social media and influencer culture, especially after the civil unrest of 2020, I felt like people were turning to me as a source of disability education for their feed. I felt like I was making a difference for a while but at some point, I realized that for me, engaging in this medium of advocacy was flawed.

I believe we can champion disabled people best when we advocate in ways that are aligned with our purpose. Being an online disability educator was not my lane. My lane is creating art and in turn opportunities for other disabled artists, paving a path for more disabled artists to be a part of this industry, using art as a platform to spark radical empathy and social change. I have an opportunity to have a large platform and do a lot of good if I remain committed to my craft as the vehicle for my advocacy. My advice is to find your lane, align with your purpose, and a kinder world will follow.



Dysfunctioning Poster

What's next for you?

You can catch me at the MUNY in St. Louis August 14-20. I'll be playing Sister Mary Robert in Sister Act!

Marina Apperley

opens up on dysautonomia

Tell us about yourself and some history of your condition.

Though I was born in Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada, I am a county girl who grew up in Prince Edward County and the Belleville area (part of the Quinte region) from the age of ten. I still live in the area, in Belleville. The County, as locals call it, is a fantastic place with an eclectic array of things to see and do. Summers always include camping, beach days at Sandbanks, weekend trips to the local drive-in, etc.

I am the oldest child in a family of five, with a brother, Jon, and sister, Nikki. Anyone that knows me knows that I am all about family, I love being an aunt to my five nieces and nephews, and I'm determined to still have a semblance of independence, a part in society and to have personal joy. When I am not working, I am still busy. I love to knit, crochet – I love to make amigurumi toys – read and learn new things.

On December 15, 1999, along with my brother's pregnant girlfriend Kim and my boyfriend Ryan, I had a car accident. As the driver, I hit a patch of black ice while driving around a bend in the road. Thankfully, everyone was alright, with only minor injuries. Unfortunately, I was unconscious during the accident, most likely caused when I hit my head on the space by the window. Still, 23 years later, we are not fully sure if this was the start (cause) of my life with dysautonomia or if it was a byproduct of it having already started (did I faint before spinning out of control?). Needless to say, I no longer drive – I'm medically not allowed as I continue to faint often.

By June 2000, I was battling extreme fatigue, body pain, weakness and more. Then I began fainting. Within weeks I was fainting numerous times a week. By the fall, I was fainting nearly twelve times a day. The fatigue never let up. The pain grew – I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia a couple years later. The weakness was like moving through a pool of mud, with my limbs heavy and weak. In late fall of 2000, my hospital stays and testing began. Two and a half years later, I was officially diagnosed with what the doctor referred to as "a rare form of vasovagal syncope." This rare form is referred to as both vasovagal syncope and neurocardiogenic syncope (NCS), a form of dysautonomia. Previously, in 2018, I had been told I had postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS). I am on medication daily and, along with making lifestyle changes, it has helped lessen my pre-syncope symptoms as well as the frequency of fainting spells.

How has dysautonomia affected your traveling experiences? What unique challenges does it present?

To be honest, traveling, though I love it, is difficult. I do not travel alone. As physical activity is a trigger that causes fainting and other pre-syncope symptoms, traveling can also be scary, for both myself and for those around me. My mom, Marilyn, is also my best friend so we always travel together and this works well for us. She helps me physically be able to travel – understanding how often I need to sit, how slow I can walk, etc. She helps to make sure I'm safe when unconscious and that those around us don't panic. Unless I hurt myself when fainting, I don't need an ambulance or trip to the hospital – I would end up there way too often for my liking.

When traveling, it's important that I always allow extra time. Rushing tends to make my symptoms stronger, thus ends up being counterproductive. While I am usually fine without a walking device for short periods, longer walks such as through an airport, walking the block, or even grocery shopping, requires my walker or other device that can hold me up (a shopping cart works too).

On family trips, I often feel guilty as it's my family that needs to carry luggage, set up camp sites, etc. I usually need to sit. Instead, I help watch my nieces and nephews.

How do you manage your symptoms during long flights or car rides? What strategies help?

Thankfully, I am usually okay when sitting – though it's heavily reliant upon factors such as the weather, if I had a good night's sleep, if I am ill at all - as these can lower my blood pressure. I absolutely love flying, once we've boarded the plane. At airports, upon handing over my walker to be loaded on the plane, I get wheeled to and from each gate with help from the airport's Accessibility Services and Facilities. As a person in a wheelchair, I am one of the first to load onto the plane. I always let one of the flight attendants know about my conditions as half the time I end up fainting either during take-off or landing, or both.

When traveling, either by plane or by car, I always carry the following: my meds (a day's worth), water or something to drink (with POTS and NCS you get dehydrated easily), a salty snack (diets for POTS and NCS need higher salt intake), my purse (my identification), my mobile phone (has my health and emergency information) and my medical bracelet. As mentioned above, it's important that I allow extra time while traveling

so that I am not rushed. I also must stay as hydrated as possible.

Are there any destinations that have been especially accommodating to your condition?

Thankfully, yes. The Hilton in Niagara Falls, Canada, went out of their way to make sure I had everything I needed accessibility wise, for the duration of our stay. This included changing our room to one that was larger, for ease of using my walker, and that had an accessible shower, etc. They did not make me feel that this was a burden but instead that this was not a problem and that my enjoyment was more important.

Another location was Kissimmee, Florida. I found the area to be quite accessible and accommodating to those who needed extra help. Disney World and each of its parks were fantastic for accessibility. These locations included accessible washrooms, ramps when needed, good aisle space inside buildings, and smooth walking surfaces, to name a few. Interestingly enough, the people of the area also had no reaction to any of my differences, which was amazing. This isn't always the case. Because I began needing assistance when walking any distance when I was 21 years old, I have seen and heard people's many reactions. Some people are over accommodating, which makes me very uncomfortable. Some are rude, making sarcastic comments. Some just stare.

What specific tools or resources help you manage your condition while traveling?

My walker as I can't walk long distances without it.

The airport's Accessibility Services and Facilities department.

A personal, battery-operated fan. I take this with me when camping in the summer to help me stay cooler.

Medication dispenser – I carry one that holds all my medication for one day plus another that carries my vitamins and other over-the-counter medications such as antihistamines, anti-nausea medication, etc.

What advice would you give to others with dysautonomia who want to travel but are apprehensive?

Start small. Take a day trip around your local area. When ready, graduate to weekends away. Travel does not need to be big, grand, exciting, world-encompassing adventures. It can be a weekend get-away with friends. Or a trip to the zoo with family. It's about getting out of your comfort zone, seeing what the world offers. It's about learning something new, something more than your four corners of the world. It's about growing. It's about living.

Can you describe an instance where you had to navigate a tricky health situation while abroad?

Recently my family and some of our friends traveled to Mexico for my sister and brother-in-law's wedding. Traveling to and from required multiple bus trips, a flight and lots of walking. On the return to Canada, after a lengthy walk from one location to another, we needed to board a bus to take us to the terminal. While waiting, I ended up fainting. Thankfully, I was able to sit on one of the nearby chairs, but this spell (fainting over and over in a short period of time) lasted approximately 10 minutes, caused some panic with those on the same flight, panic with my family and the airport staff, and a lot of embarrassment for myself. Thankfully, my mom and one of the staff helped get me into a wheelchair just in time for the second, and last, bus's arrival. Everyone was staring and talking about me and what happened. It was difficult but I told myself to act normally, be kind, and reminded myself that though it was very embarrassing for me, it was something scary and/or exciting for them (it's not something that happens in most of their lives). I thanked the staff and assured them that I was fine and able to keep traveling. I just needed to stay in the wheelchair.

Nutrition and hydration are important for managing dysautonomia - how do you manage them while traveling?

Usually, this is easy. Whether traveling for a holiday or locally (grocery shopping, etc.) I always have a drink of some kind with me, a water bottle or bottle of Diet Pepsi most often. Always. It is very easy to get dehydrated when you have POTS or NCS – if anything it's more accurate to say we can't hydrate. When leaving home, I try to keep a Sweet and Salty granola bar in my purse or in my coat pocket. I always carry my day's medications and money if needed to grab something more than what's on me.

For flights in Canada and most places to Europe, I've been lucky enough to be allowed to keep my drink with me (I also have type-two diabetes). On longer flights, I usually order the cheese and cracker boxes or something similar that contains higher amounts of salt.

How does traveling and seeing new places impact your mental health and attitude towards living with dysautonomia?

It's nothing short of essential. It is easy to get depressed, to hide away from the world whether intentionally or simply because it's easier and less scary to stay home than go out and about. Having the ability to work from home has been wonderful but it has a downside. Sometimes, I find that two or three weeks have gone by, and I haven't gone anywhere. Traveling, both locally and to far off places, allows me to be out there, meeting new people, seeing new places and seeing how others live. It's something to look forward to. It's something that makes our lives richer, fuller and complete.

Summer Dashe

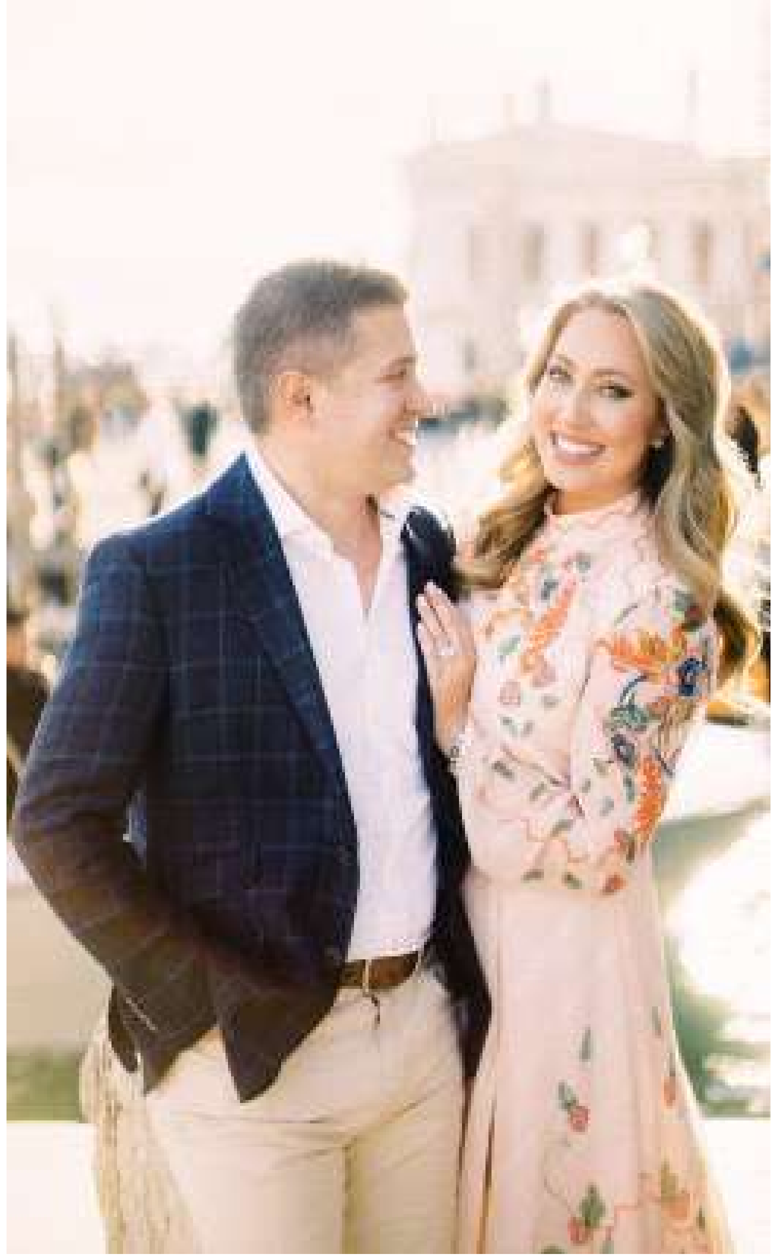
reports on ruthless chronic illnesses

Tell us about yourself and what brought you to where you are today

I'm a former news anchor now disabled by a ruthless chronic illness. I'd wanted to be a journalist since I was little. I was determined to make that happen and I did! I loved my time in news. At 26 I began experiencing strange and debilitating symptoms. For two years I went to different doctors trying to find answers to my mysterious symptoms. Test after test came back normal. Doctor after doctor told me that anxiety and the stress of my job were to blame. It made no sense. I thrived on the adrenaline of reporting. By that point, I'd worked my way up to an investigative journalist and main anchor. I lived for the job. It couldn't be the cause of these wretched symptoms.

Finally, in May of 2019 I was diagnosed with postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS) and Ehlers Danlos syndrome (EDS) at Vanderbilt University Hospital in Nashville, Tenn. POTS is an autonomic nervous system disorder. EDS is a genetic connective tissue disorder. Patients with EDS often develop POTS at some point in their life, so it all tied together. I had no idea I'd had a genetic disorder my entire life, but looking back the signs and symptoms were always there. It wasn't until the devastating POTS symptoms kicked in that everything came crumbling down.

I did everything I could to hang on to my career, but in November of 2020 I anchored my last newscast. These days I am busier than ever! With a more flexible schedule and working from home some days, I've actually been able to do more. I work full time in communications for Navarro Research and Engineering. I am a contractor to the United States Department of Energy (DOE). I get to cover stories about nuclear, environmental, and medical issues. It's so cool! I launched DOE's first newscast. I also teach journalism at the University of Tennessee. I'm a producer on a true crime documentary and travel for shoots every now and then. I also make appearances as a journalist on a true crime TV show called Fatal Attraction. I'm grateful to continue my advocacy and awareness efforts online through Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. I run those accounts with more than 130,000 wonderful followers.



What do you want the public to know about dysautonomia and those living with it?

Dysautonomia is an autonomic nervous system (ANS) disorder. Your ANS controls everything in your body you don't think about. Think auto, like automatic. Some of the responsibilities of your ANS are pupil dilation, digestion, heart rate, blood pressure and temperature regulation. Imagine if that system broke. Everything in your body malfunctions when this system isn't working properly, so the symptoms are widespread. Some patients notice very mild symptoms, while others are so disabled they can't work or attend school. According to Dysautonomia International, more than 1/3 of these patients are that severe.

Getting upright is very difficult for many patients with my form of dysautonomia. With my version, POTS, when I try to get my body upright, all systems malfunction due to the autonomic dysregulation. That means first thing in the morning when I get out of bed, my symptoms are usually worst. Sometimes I throw up. I am always very lightheaded and wobbly. I have trouble breathing and my vision goes in and out. I'll begin to experience tremors and tend to overheat and sweat profusely before then freezing later in the day. I often have memory trouble and can't retain information like normal. The neurological side of this can be quite disabling.

I wish people knew that this condition is not rare, it was just poorly researched for a very long time and many doctors didn't know about it. For this reason, there is still an intense stigma surrounding POTS. Some doctors have damaging misconceptions about it. For instance, they may be under the impression it is simply an inconvenience causing occasional lightheadedness. Others have never heard of it and wouldn't be able to diagnose it, leading to lengthy diagnostic delays for very sick patients. I wish people knew that this condition is ripping away futures from millions of people, leaving them without significant treatment options and often bedridden in the primes of their lives.

I also wish people knew this happens to otherwise healthy people. It is often triggered by a virus or physical trauma, like surgery. Healthy, active people are waking up one day with wretched

symptoms that never go away. This isn't just a POTS people problem. This is a public health problem with an economic impact. We saw POTS cases rise with COVID-19. This wasn't surprising to those of us already suffering from the condition and our doctors who knew what was coming. Anyone can develop POTS after having a virus like mono, the flu or COVID. This will continue to devastate lives and displace people from the workforce until better treatments or a cure are found.

How has living with dysautonomia affected how you travel, even locally?

This question makes me so sad. Aside from my career, of all the things chronic illness has impacted most, it is my ability to travel. When my husband and I were dating, we would go on little weekend trips constantly. We did a lot of quick driving destinations, but loved it! We'd take our two small dogs with us. These days we travel much less often. I get tired so easily. It's also difficult to make plans when I just don't know how I'll feel each day. That means traveling is tough to plan. When we do travel, we make almost no plans for the time we are in the location. For instance, we planned a two week honeymoon to Switzerland and Italy. We made almost no plans for the trip other than flights and hotel bookings. We didn't even make any restaurant reservations. We decided to play it by ear since my condition is so unpredictable. While this is frustrating, it is oddly freeing, too. No pressure when we travel! Just enjoy what we can when we feel like it! No schedule. No expectations. Just living in the moment - if it's a good one.

I don't grocery shop anymore. I use Instacart. When you're managing a chronic illness the number one tool is learning where to spend your limited energy. I am simply not going to waste my precious energy shopping for dinner ingredients. It's worth budgeting for delivery costs when it means I get to enjoy something more important.

One of the activities I miss most since becoming chronically ill is window shopping with my dog. It probably sounds so silly, but I used to love wandering along a cute strip of boutiques in some small town somewhere with my puppy, Sundae. I can't do that anymore comfortably.

How can the travel and tourism industry, or venues better assist those living with dysautonomia or other chronic illnesses?

One of the most difficult parts of travel for me is standing in lines. The waiting to get through security, on trains or on planes, makes my symptoms worse if I have to stand and my blood pools in my feet or I can't find a place to sit that doesn't hurt my back. I love San Jose International Airport in California. They have the Sunflower Program. You can ask for a lanyard that you wear to indicate you have an invisible disability. That way, if you use the designated seating areas or ask for wheelchair service, you don't feel judged. It's such a relief to simply know that their staff is trained to understand not all disabilities are visible. I wish more places adopted that training and program.

Connect with Summer on her website www.SummerDashe.com

Look out for Part Two of the interview, in our next issue. ■

Journalist Summer Dashe is a voice for patients who have long been ignored and misunderstood. Her desire to make the world better for people with disabilities drives her to share even the most personal parts of her life. Her efforts have led to viral recognition, an Emmy nomination and her unrelenting drive.

Q&A with Joanna Behm

Dysautonomia Support Network (DSN)

Tell us about the Dysautonomia Support Network. Why and how did it come to be?

Dysautonomia Support Network (DSN) was founded by an individual who is a dysautonomia patient, caregiver and medical professional. Like many of us living with dysautonomia, she was seeking information and community with others who had a shared experience. She organized an initial meeting with a small group of individuals and realized there was a tremendous need among patients and caregivers for a community of support. What began as an informal meeting in a coffee shop almost 10 years ago, grew into a thriving 50,000+ member-strong non-profit organization focused on bringing support, community and hope to people around the world who are impacted by dysautonomia.

Being diagnosed and living with dysautonomia is often a life-altering event. DSN's mission is to provide a community that empowers and supports those impacted by dysautonomia to live their best lives. The DSN community is led by a group of committed volunteers who are passionate about serving people with dysautonomia because we have been impacted by dysautonomia - as patients, family members, friends or healthcare providers.

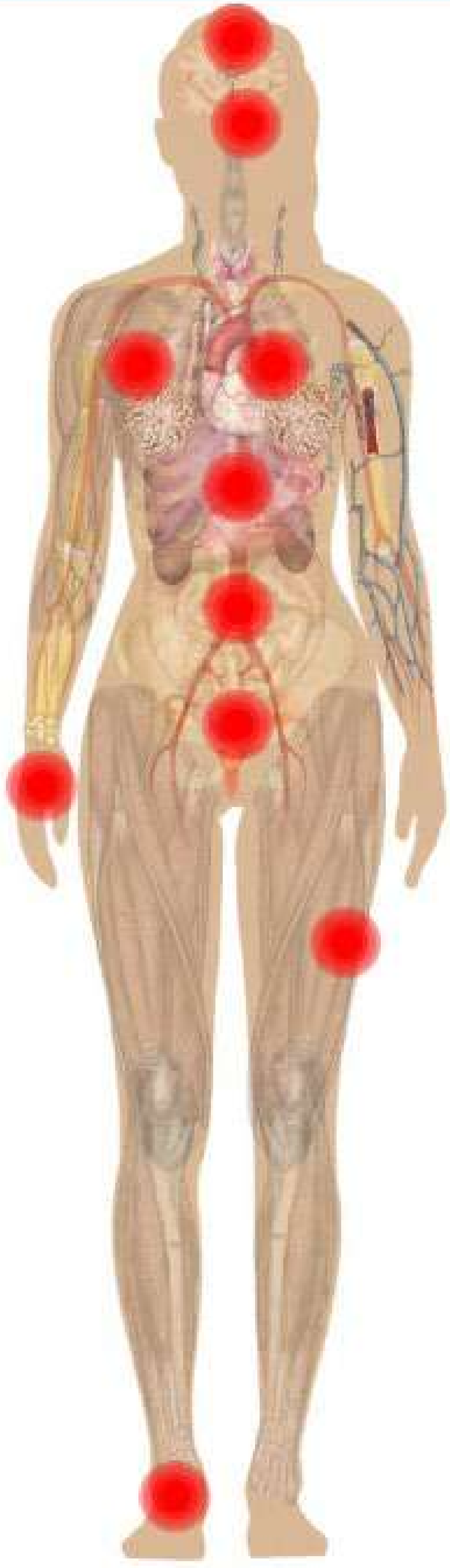
What is dysautonomia? What do you most wish the public knew about dysautonomia, its different forms and those living with it?

Dysautonomia is a group of medical conditions that affect the autonomic nervous system, which is responsible for regulating various bodily functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, and temperature control. Dysautonomia can be caused by a variety of factors, including concussions, infections, viruses, surgeries, autoimmune conditions, etc. Recently, dysautonomia has been a prevalent co-occuring condition with Long-COVID. There are several different types of dysautonomia, each with its own set of symptoms and treatment options.

It is estimated that dysautonomia impacts around 70 million people worldwide. Some dysautonomias are rare, while others are much more common. Dysautonomia can occur alone, known as a primary condition, or as a result of another disease, known as a secondary condition. It can impact men and women equally. However, some forms, like postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), appear to impact more females than males.

One of the most challenging aspects of dysautonomia is that it is often an invisible illness, meaning that those living with it may appear healthy on the outside even though they are struggling with a range of debilitating symptoms. These symptoms can include dizziness, fainting, nausea, fatigue, brain fog, headaches, gastrointestinal upset and difficulty

DYSAUTONOMIA SYMPTOMS



Head
- Dizziness
- Light-headedness
- Pre-Syncope
- Syncope
- Tinnitus (ringing in ears)
- Migraine/Headache
- Occipital Neuralgia
- Neck Pain
- Coat-hanger Pain

Sleep
- Insomnia
- Sleep-Disordered Breathing
- Sleep Paralysis
- Altered Sleep architecture

Cardiovascular
- Tachycardia
- Bradycardia
- Palpitations
- Hypertension
- Hypotension
- Large Swings in heart rate and blood pressure
- Chest Pain

Gastrointestinal
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Loss of Appetite
- Early Satiety
- Indigestion
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal Pain
- Difficulty Swallowing

Extremities
- Acral Coldness
- Raynaud Syndrome
- Hyperhidrosis
- Anhidrosis

Vision
- Sensitivity to Textures
- Sensitivity to Light
- Difficulty with Depth Perception

Mind
- Anxiety
- Attention Deficit
- Cognitive Impairment
- Brain Fog
- Mood Disturbances
- Sensitivity to Sound and Light

Respiratory
- Dyspnea
- Shortness of Breath
- Hyperventilation

Genitourinary
- Urinary Frequency
- Urinary Retention
- Urinary Incontinence
- Dysmenorrhea
- Endometriosis Pain
- Erectile Dysfunction
- Decreased Libido

Skin
- Cyanosis
- Blood Pooling
- Livedo Reticularis
- Sensitivity to Touch
- Flushing

Systemic
- Generalized Fatigue
- Early Exhaustion
- Exercise Intolerance
- Muscle Weakness
- Problems with Balance
- Sensitivity to Motion
- Tremulousness
- Temperature Dysregulation
- Paresthesias
- Heat Intolerance

Dysautonomia
Support Network

regulating body temperature.

One of the things that I most wish the public knew about dysautonomia is that it is a real and serious medical condition that can significantly impact a person's quality of life. POTS experts have found that the quality of life of those with dysautonomia is similar to those with COPD or congestive heart failure.

While there is currently no cure for dysautonomia, there are treatments available that can help manage symptoms and improve overall functioning. It is also important for people to understand that dysautonomia is not a choice or a result of poor lifestyle habits - it is a complex medical condition that requires ongoing care and support.

Additionally, I would like people to be aware of the different forms of dysautonomia and the fact that each individual's experience with the condition can vary widely. Some people may have mild symptoms that are easily managed, while others may struggle with severe symptoms that make it difficult to carry out everyday activities. By increasing awareness and understanding of dysautonomia, we can help to create a more supportive and inclusive society for those living with this condition.

How has living with dysautonomia helped you in your job at DSN? How has this helped DSN as a whole?

I was always considered a "sick kid" but never had an accurate diagnosis or treatment plan, which meant that after years of struggling and being told my symptoms were "all in my head," I continually became more ill. Finally, in adulthood, I was diagnosed with hyperadrenergic POTS, mast cell activation syndrome (MCAS), and hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (hEDS) by Dr. Hasan Abdullah as I finished occupational therapy school. I truly credit him for saving my life. I actually found DSN in OT school and relied on the community for emotional support and information as I felt hopeless, helpless, and so, so sick. DSN provided me with others who knew exactly how I felt and reassured me that my symptoms were, indeed, not all in my head. I fell in love with the community's sense of humor, can-do attitude, and all hours brain storming sessions when someone asked a question on one of the private Facebook groups. I joined DSN as a volunteer in 2014 and have been with them in multiple capacities ever since. Today, I proudly serve as the vice president of the organization. For my day job, I'm an occupational therapist specializing in chronic disease management, an assistant professor at Messiah University's Master of Occupational Therapy Program, and a researcher excited about topics of inclusivity, anti-ableism and the experiences of people with disabilities. I am passionate about helping others integrate lifestyle adaptations into their routines so they can live their best lives.

My lived experience as a person with dysautonomia and my background as an occupational therapist and educator allow for me to collaborate with our amazing Education & Awareness team to create free educational content and resources, including:

- Easy-to-understand research-based information about dysautonomia and its impact on health and lifestyle
- Lifestyle management strategies created by healthcare providers to improve quality of life
- Medical providers list organized by type of provider and location
- Monthly Dyscovery Education YouTube videos
- Social media engagement focused on new research, tips and tricks for living with dysautonomia and updates on DSN's events

Can you share any feedback from your clients about how the DSN services have helped them?

"Living a life with chronic illness filled with questions and uncertainty, knowing there is a place with reliable information, understanding kind words and a feeling that someone in the world is there all the time who feels how you feel...not just invaluable, it's been life-saving for me!!" Dawn

"Being a member of Dysautonomia Support Network's Facebook Global Community has introduced me to patients who are always incredibly generous in sharing their knowledge, experience, resources, time, and community. Their clubs are a lot of fun and their resources are great. Everyone is so kind and helpful." Jill B.

"DSN is a wonderful positive family environment." Shawn

"Being a part of this organization has made the difference between just living with this illness and wanting more despite my illness. Living with dysautonomia is overwhelming, exhausting, and lonely. With DSN, we are able to reach others and provide the support they need so they are not alone. Your tribe is here when you need support, and that is a great feeling when experiencing a major life disruption." Confidential

"Meeting others with dysautonomia and sharing our stories has helped me immensely. Being able to relate to other patients within our community makes this illness much easier to endure."- Jennifer

"Taking what I have learned during my battle with dysautonomia and using it to help support and educate other patients with similar diagnoses, has been empowering. Using my experiences as a DSN volunteer to help spread awareness and education, in the hope that future patients won't have to go through the same dysautonomia battle that I went through to get diagnosed, treated, and feel supported, has provided my life with so much added purpose."- Rachel

" DSN- Where validation and understanding occurs! P.S. It's not anxiety!"- Sandra M.

How can the public become involved and support DSN?

There are several ways to get involved and support DSN.

1. Raise Awareness about Dysautonomia- go to our website and learn about dysautonomia. Follow and like us on social media and

Front DSN webpage photo

2018- DSN Walk for DSN in Texas hosted by now DSN president Brooke O'Shea. pictured are 2 participants.

share interesting posts on your own pages to raise awareness about the condition! We are on all major social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Inspire.

2. Donations/Fundraising- We are a non-profit organization, so we rely fully on the financial generosity of our donors. To donate, go here. In the next year, we are hoping to partner with corporate sponsors as well if your company or one of your contacts is interested.

3. Volunteer, Consult, or Intern at DSN- We are always looking for new volunteers to work with us in a variety of capacities long term and consultants to work with us on a project-by-project basis. We also accept a variety of interns each year from many different disciplines. Click here to apply.

How do you envision the future of DSN, its role in continuing to improve the lives of people with dysautonomia, advancing disability rights and promoting greater accessibility and inclusivity?

DSN is continually working to ensure that all people with dysautonomia have the knowledge, resources and community support necessary to live their lives to the fullest despite dysautonomia. We are proud of our safe, encouraging place on the internet where anyone with dysautonomia and their caregivers can find a second home. We know that we are only as disabled as the environment leads us to be, and we will continue to educate the public and advocate for inclusivity.

What can we expect from DSN in the next year?

In the next year, DSN will be publishing our comprehensive patient handbook, which will include everything from what dysautonomia is, how to get diagnosed, what medications may work, and what lifestyle modifications to try. We will also start hosting educational seminars and continuing education for healthcare professionals to increase the quality of care. Lastly, we plan to expand our YouTube series, Dyscovery Education, which brings the experience and knowledge of health providers and experts to you in easy-to-understand language. ■

2019- DSN Education & Awareness Coordinator Leslie Wuenstel and her service dog advocating on Capital Hill

I can ignore and hide my symptoms on a good day, but no, I do not feel well on a good day even when you cannot see my illness.
- ME Words

News Bytes

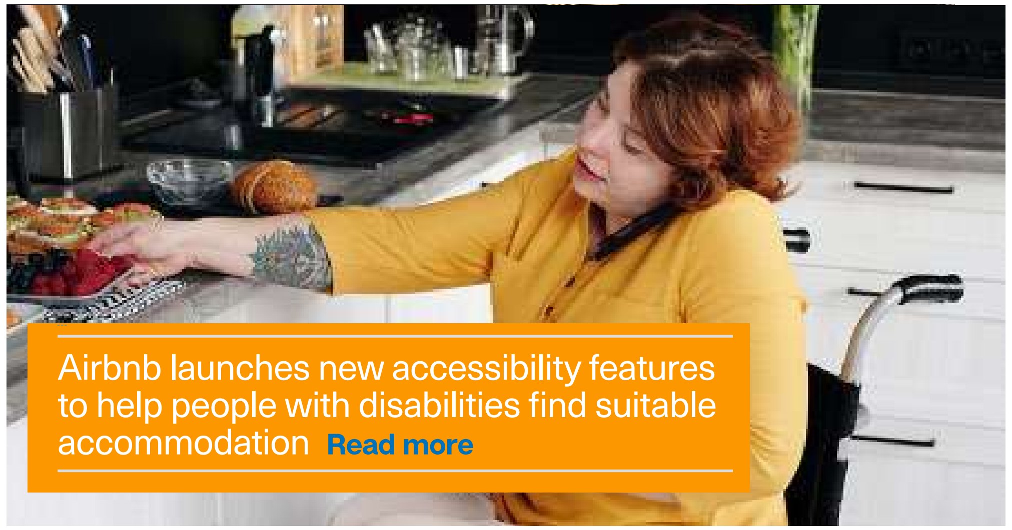
Our roundup of notable news from around the web

A band of travelers on a mission to redefine accessibility

A group of friends is traveling the world to prove that disabilities shouldn't limit anyone from seeking adventures. **Read more**

YVR introduces Beyond Accessibility

Over the next three years, travelers, employees and guests at Vancouver International Airport can expect to see enhanced facilities, technology and support programs to make the airport more accessible and inclusive for people of all abilities. **Read more**



Airbnb launches new accessibility features to help people with disabilities find suitable accommodation

Read more

Greece Is making hundreds of beaches more accessible

Greece is making hundreds of beaches a little friendlier for visitors with disabilities with the addition of wheelchair friendly ramps, updated restrooms, accessible walkways and more. **Read more**

Advice for travelers with a disability

Whether it's finding the best travel insurance or taking service animals on trips, there are a number of things travelers with disabilities can do to make their trip enjoyable and hassle free. **Read more**

Apple introduces enhanced accessibility features for iPad and iPhone devices

Apple is releasing new accessibility features for many of its products which will allow users with disabilities to communicate and use the devices with greater ease. **Read more**

10 people on what accessible travel means to them

Athletes, actors and activists explain why accessible travel is so important and the changes they would like to see in the near future. **Read more**

Bill aims to improve air travel for passengers with disabilities

U.S. lawmakers are taking steps to improve air travel for passengers with disabilities. They want to hold airlines more accountable for damage to mobility devices and allow passengers to board a plane in their wheelchair. **Read more**

Drivers with disabilities are tackling performance driving

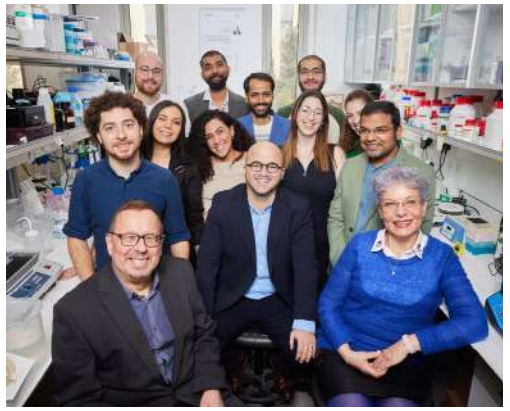
Physical impairments aren't stopping people from experiencing the thrill of motorsports thanks to race car modifications.
Read more

The best assistive tech gadgets to create an equitable workforce

From a hands-free computer mouse to a camera that reads full pages of text, those are just a few of the assistive technology devices available for people living with disabilities. **Read more**

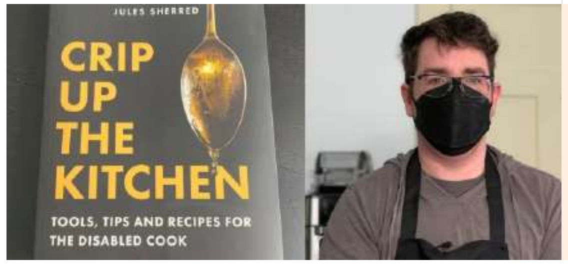
Wings for Autism helping families feel comfortable at the airport

A dress rehearsal for flight is helping children with autism feel more comfortable on a plane before takeoff. **Read more**



New study gives hope to finding autism cure

Researchers say a chemical in the brain may hold the key to potential treatments for autism and other neurological disorders. **Read more**



Author with a disability writes new cookbook for people like himself

A cookbook written specifically for people with disabilities is taking the frustration and pain out of cooking. **Read more**

News Bytes

Our roundup of notable news from around the web

The 'double discrimination' of being a mother with a disability

Raising a child was not easy for a mother with autism. But she says she succeeded thanks to a strong support system. **Read more**

Celebrities with autism: From Sia to Elon Musk, these are the famous faces on the autistic spectrum

Of the 75 million people worldwide with an autism spectrum disorder, many of them are celebrities who are now speaking out about the condition. **Read more**

Delta is developing a new first-of-its-kind airline seat that allows wheelchair users to stay in their chairs. Take a look.

Delta Airlines is working on a seat that will allow passengers to stay in their wheelchair during flight. **Read more**

Boston Marathon's Rick Hoyt dies at 61, Hoyt Foundation announces

A Boston Marathon athlete who competed for decades in a wheelchair pushed by his father has died. **Read more**

Myrtle Beach partners with nonprofit to bring back free beach wheelchair service

After being put on hold by the pandemic, a popular vacation destination is working on bringing back free beach wheelchairs for visitors with disabilities. **Read more**

To Table of Contents

Seattle-Tacoma Airport
A LEADER IN ACCESSIBILITY

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport in Washington is working to become the most accessible airport in the nation. And it's well on its way. SEA has implemented several programs over the years to improve the travel experience for all people.

SENSORY ROOM

A squeeze chair, acoustic panels, dimmable lighting and a starry night ceiling are just some of the features of SEA's sensory room. The airport opened the sensory room in 2021 for travelers in need of a quiet, calming space to decompress. It is located on the train level of the A Station.

THERAPY DOGS

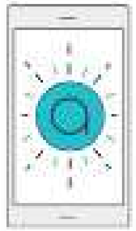
Traveling can be stressful for everyone. But don't fear. SEA Pups are near to ease travel jitters. The team of certified therapy dogs and their volunteer handlers can be found at the airport for people in need of a furry face. SEA Pups like Gracie, Samee and Duke love to lend a paw to calm travelers and are more than willing to accept a pat on the head or snuggle in return.

SUNFLOWER LANYARDS

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport provides a discreet way for travelers with invisible disabilities such as hearing loss, PTSD, dementia and autism to indicate they may need extra help, patience, or flexibility. Passengers can get a free sunflower lanyard at the pre-security information desk or post-security information desk. In 2019, SEA became the first airport in the United States to introduce the Invisible Disabilities Sunflower lanyard program.

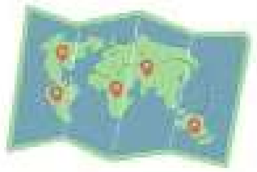
TRAVELING WITH SERVICE DOGS

Pets and service animals are welcome at SEA. The airport has gone out of its way to provide pet relief areas inside and outside of the terminal. All animals must be leashed or in a travel carrier inside the terminal except for service pets that are helping their human companions with disabilities. Contact your airline with questions about service animal policies on flights.



VISION ASSISTANCE

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is helping people with vision impairments to safely navigate the airport. Travelers who are blind or have low vision can connect to the Aira Airport Network for free. An app connects people to live agents who can see their environment in real-time and guide them through the airport.



INTERACTIVE MAP ACCESSIBLE ROUTES

Navigating SEA has gotten easier thanks to the FlySEA app available for free on iOS and Android devices. Interactive maps are available on the app. Users type in where they want to go, and the app will give directions and the distance to the desired location.

To ensure a smooth travel experience from arrival to take-off, SEA suggests that people in need of special assistance contact their airline before their departure date.

Family Fun No Limits

With Jennifer Allen
Read her blog, Wonders within Reach

Families with disabilities exploring the world together

Your first trip as a family with disabilities

5 accessible destinations that simplify travel

Ain't nobody got time for that” seems to be the general vibe from parents of kids with disabilities when you ask about travel plans. There's a lot that goes into planning a trip when you have multiple needs to consider.

The following are accessible U.S. destinations that are designed with everyone in mind. While any vacation still takes some planning, these destinations take the load off because you know that your family will be in a safe, accessible environment designed to meet their needs.

Disney World

Disney World was our first family vacation as a family with disabilities. Planning any trip on our own felt overwhelming, and Disney's accessibility programs made it a less daunting place to start.

All shows and restaurants, most attractions and many rides are fully wheelchair accessible, with no need to transfer. Most remaining rides are accessible if you're able to transfer. All resorts have accessible rooms and there are multiple accessible modes of transportation to the parks.

The staff are thoroughly trained to be prepared to meet a variety of needs, and if they can't help, they will quickly find what you need. There are companion restrooms throughout the parks and the first aid locations all have cots that can double as adult-sized changing tables. They also have several resources for people with cognitive disabilities.

Disney World was a great place for us to start. All I needed to figure out was how to get there and where to eat!

Morgan's Wonderland

This theme park in San Antonio, Texas, was purposefully designed as an all-abilities space. Morgan's Wonderland is the world's first ultra-accessible theme park, where every single ride, playground, attraction and amenity is fully accessible.

There are only a handful of rides in the park (race cars, a train, a Ferris wheel and a carousel), but plenty of fun for all day. They have several all-abilities playgrounds, a sensory area and the equivalent of a small children's museum with a grocery store, weather station, digital art room and arcade. They also have games and free fishing. When it's warm enough, they run an impressive water park - which is also fully accessible! Admission for any guest with a disability is free.

John Dillon Park

Let's jump away from the lights and noise of accessible theme parks into the silence of the Adirondacks frontier.

John Dillon Park is an accessible campground deep in the forest. They have fully accessible lean-tos (essentially a three-walled cabin, for other camping novices), accessible bathrooms, only accessible paths and trails, and... well, fully accessible everything from adventures like fishing and boating to essentials like sleeping and eating.

This is another place where the trained staff make your trip easier. If there's anything that you can't do on your own in a wheelchair, ask for help. The staff are amazing and they'll help as much as they can. They can even get your gear from the parking lot to your campsite. Overnight camping is completely free, but you can also just use a day pass for hiking, fishing, boating, picnicking or whatever style of outdoor retreat you need.

Mesa, Arizona

Mesa, Arizona is a destination that prioritizes accessibility and inclusion. As the nation's first Autism Certified city, they believe that all visitors should be able to explore with confidence, knowing that they are welcomed. This extends beyond the autism community to include people of all abilities.

While you'll still have to do some planning in choosing your accommodations and activities, Visit Mesa makes it easy with a website that is designed for planning disability travel. You can easily find lodging and attractions that are a good fit for your needs. You can explore pre-made itineraries based on your needs, or pick out your

Jennifer Allen and her family at Disney

favorites from the accessible directory. Accessibility information is easily available for outdoor adventures, arts experiences, indoor attractions and everything else that Mesa has to offer. They're also leaders in the Sunflower Lanyard Program, assisting people traveling with invisible disabilities.

Mesa Lost Dutchman State Park Superstition Mountain VisitMesa

Greenbrier Valley, West Virginia

Greenbrier Valley is home to the world's most accessible hotel - The Schoolhouse Hotel. The boutique hotel, transformed from an old school, is thoughtfully designed to make every room and shared space exceptionally easy to navigate. The hotel makes a great launch pad for exploring the rest of accessible Greenbrier Valley. From expansive accessible trails to a trending small town food scene with mostly zero-entry eateries, the area has a bit of something for everyone.

The Greenbrier is an upscale resort that has several accessible activities open to the public, including day passes to the spa. Seasonal festivals add to the allure of the area, but there is something to do at any time of year; the small towns and the great outdoors are surprisingly easy to navigate.

John Dillon Park

Santa Monica, California

Without intention in design, beach trips are impossible for people with mobility challenges. Santa Monica has all of the essentials for an accessible beach trip - beach wheelchairs available from multiple locations, a mobi mat for ocean views and spacious accessible restrooms.

What makes Santa Monica our favorite accessible beach destination is how far above and beyond they go. There are multiple accessible parking options, with some spaces within easy rolling distance of the mobi mat. Multiple beach wheelchair pickup locations offer different styles of chairs, including electric beach chairs, giving everyone the freedom to explore different areas of the beach with each visit. The pier has plenty of accessible food options, tourist shops and local artisans. Accessible dining options abound, both on the boardwalk and off. Accessible views extend far beyond the boardwalk along the wide, paved oceanfront walk. The beach has three all-abilities playgrounds.

The Annenberg Community Beach House is a community destination that's free to the public. They have a splash pad, playground, gallery, Marion Davies Guest House, beach courts & fields, community & cultural events, historic pool, free Wi-Fi and more. This is one of the pickup spots for beach wheelchairs. ■

Five considerations when planning a trip with your special needs child

By Christine E. Staple Ebanks

As a mother of four children, including my son Nathan, who has cerebral palsy, I have experienced firsthand how daunting it can be to travel with a child with special needs. Nathan is my youngest child, and when he was born my husband and I already had our hands full with three kids under eight. Initially, traveling with him was no different than traveling with any other baby. As he grew older, and the specialness of his needs became more apparent, we found it increasingly difficult to travel with him. Consequently, we stopped family travels for a while.

We eventually resumed traveling when Nathan turned two, as we needed to seek medical treatment overseas. However, navigating airports and ground transportation proved to be quite challenging. To make matters worse, unexpected healthcare issues arose, overwhelming me. Among our many journeys, one trip stands out vividly in my memory—it was the time we traveled from Jamaica to Florida for Nathan to visit family and for medical treatment. I had not anticipated that he would catch a cold and so was not prepared. We could not find over-the-counter medications comparable to what he used at home, so we had to take him to the Emergency Room where we ended up spending the day.

After encountering several travel emergencies, I eventually learned that when traveling with a child or family member with special needs, preparation is the key to a successful and enjoyable trip for everyone involved. With this in mind, I have compiled my top five recommendations to increase ease and reduce stress on your family travel experiences.

1. Pack all the necessary medications, medical supplies, and information. Keep enough cold, fever, and constipation medications and supplies on hand in case they may be needed. Pack these items in clear zip lock bags in your carry-on so you always have them.

During a separate trip, we packed cold medications for Nathan but faced another challenge - dealing with constipation issues. This is a recurring symptom of his cerebral palsy. Normally, we effectively manage this problem at home through methods such as him rolling on the floor, giving him a warm bath, or administering an enema. However, these options were unavailable on our trip to Orlando. So, once again, we ended up spending the day with him in the ER. This unforeseen situation made us realize the importance of always being equipped with the necessary medications. Consequently, we have since made it a point never to leave home without these essential items.

2. If your child uses a specialized wheelchair, ensure the chair has a boldly displayed "Do Not Disassemble" label. In addition, it would be best to mention to the check-in counter and the attendant at the aircraft door that the chair should never collapse.

During our week-long trip to Bakersfield, California, we faced an unexpected challenge involving Nathan's specialized wheelchair, which provides crucial neck and trunk support. The airline ground crew disassembled the chair before placing it in the cargo hold to facilitate its transport. However, upon reaching our destination at LAX, we encountered difficulty reassembling the wheelchair. This unexpected setback forced us to wait more than eight hours until the airline could arrange for a technician to come and put the chair back together.

Following this incident, we have learned to be more cautious and prepared when traveling with a wheelchair. One important measure we have taken is to ensure we always carry a sticker indicating the specific requirements and instructions for handling the wheelchair. This small but crucial step helps minimize the risk of encountering similar issues in the future, making our journeys smoother and more manageable since then.

3. Adjusting your plans and activities in consideration of your child's needs and interests is vital. Ensuring ample time between connections, preferably ninety minutes to two hours, is also crucial to allow for sufficient rest and recharge throughout the day. After all, the last thing you want on a trip is a meltdown due to exhaustion and frustration.

We have faced the frustration of missing connecting flights on a few occasions due to insufficient time between connections. These missed connections not only disrupted our travel plans but also had a ripple effect on our entire itinerary. As a consequence, we found ourselves in the unfortunate situation of missing important appointments or engagements that were scheduled at our destination.

4. Ensure you communicate your child's unique accommodation needs with airlines, hotels, and other travel providers. Again, communicating in advance ensures your child's needs are met, and that your trip goes smoothly.

Due to a lengthy flight delay that was poorly managed by the airline ground crew, there was a time we ran out of appropriate food for Nathan during a budget-conscious trip . Consequently, we found ourselves not having enough food for him on the return portion of our journey. When we got onto the flight, there was nothing available that he could eat. Since then, we ensure that we fill out his special needs when booking flights.

We also make a point to pack extra nutrition shakes that he loves. This way, we can proactively address any unexpected events or delays, ensuring that Nathan has the necessary sustenance throughout our journey.

5. Flying at night can make your child's long plane trip easier. A child used to sleeping at night may be able to sleep for a considerable portion of the flight.

Nighttime flights have proven to be a true blessing for us. This makes air travel more serene and tranquil as Nathan sleeps through most of the flight. But, if a nighttime flight is not feasible, it is worth considering additional measures to help your child relax. Bringing along familiar comforts such a beloved pillow or blanket, comes to mind. These can provide security and familiarity. Noise-canceling headphones can help block out disruptive sounds, or a tablet loaded with their favorite movies or TV are also great options for making the trip more engaging and enjoyable.

As you plan your next trip, don't let the challenges of traveling with a child with special needs discourage you. With the proper preparation and planning, you can create a fun, memorable, and stress-free vacation for everyone. So go ahead and enjoy the journey! ■

> **If your child uses a specialized wheelchair, ensure the chair has a boldly displayed "Do Not Disassemble" label.**
>
> – Christine Staple Ebanks

Christine Staple Ebanks is an accomplished author, dynamic public speaker, and unwavering advocate for special needs parenting. With four children, one of whom has cerebral palsy, and her extensive background in human services, Christine's writing and advocacy amplify the voices and empower the stories of children with special needs and their families. Through her organizations, the Nathan Ebanks Foundation in Jamaica and Raising Special Needs Inc. in the USA, Christine's work serves as a catalyst, driving change across Jamaica, the Caribbean, and the U.S. for the effective inclusion of these exceptional children in society.

Better Together

Disability Parent Q&A

with Jennifer Allen

Q **Transportation while traveling. How do you get around with a wheelchair? Do you rent a large or accessible van? What about public transportation?**

Not all wheelchairs travel the same! Here's what some of our readers had to say (my own notes in *italics*):

A Scenic Route Family: We get a suburban, but Uber Black SUV saved us in D.C.! *(Large rental vehicles are always an option. Our chair doesn't come apart, so we need a big vehicle. I'll search with the filters open for both vans and SUVs because I often find a deal on one or the other. Most cities also have wheelchair accessible Uber, Lyft, or taxi services. Depending on your chair set-up, you may also be able to use an Uber XL or similar size upgrade.)*

Danamarieplus3: Some cities have great public transport for wheelchair users. (Public transportation can be a great option for city travel - especially in the U.S. While D.C. is the only city I've visited with a fully accessible metro system, most cities have an accessible bus system. In general, we avoid the underground because it's too unpredictable.)

Bethany Hildebrandt: We drive our wheelchair accessible van. (Road trips are our favorite! There are so many destinations that are worth the drive, and you have the added convenience of your own vehicle. You can also rent wheelchair accessible vans, but it will likely be the most expensive part of your trip.)

Wonders Within Reach: The most common response I received from polling my audience was to take the chair apart and put it in the trunk. We're not able to do that, but we've had good experiences using public buses and renting larger vehicles. Uber, Lyft, and accessible taxis can also be a good option, but we typically wait much longer than we would if we were using a regular-size car service.

↓

Next Issue: Public restrooms are hard to find. How do you meet the need for frequent accessible restrooms while traveling? What about outdoor adventure - how do you meet bathroom needs where there is no bathroom? What do you do for someone who can't fit on a changing table, but needs to be changed lying down?

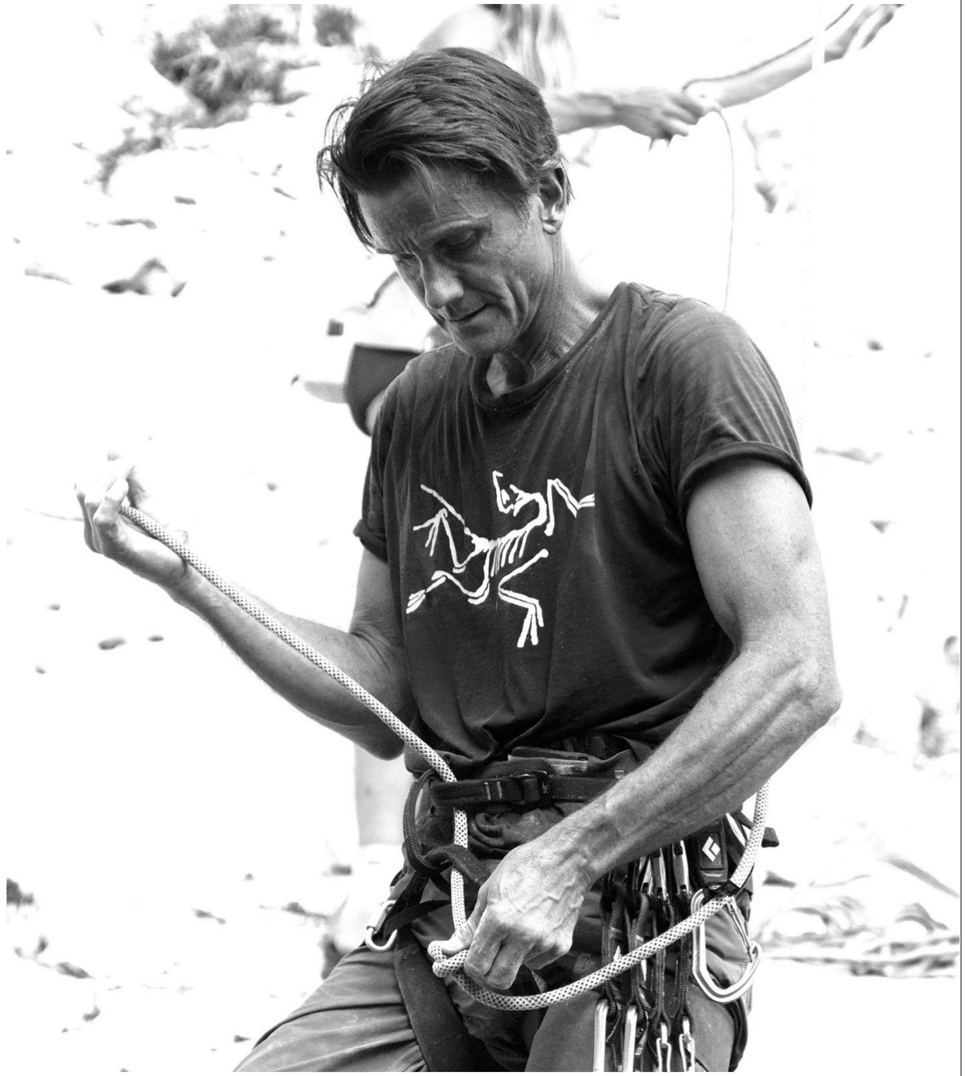
Do you have any expertise to share on next issue's question? Please submit your input, or any questions of your own for future issues, to jennifer@wonderswithinreach.com ■

Adaptive Adventures

Thrilling adventures for all abilities

Craig DeMartino climbs to new heights

In 2002, Craig's life changed forever when he accidentally dropped 100 feet on a climb. He is now a motivational speaker and continues to be a climber. Find him at www.craigdemartino.com or on Instagram @craigdem



Your journey as a climber took an unexpected turn with a life-altering fall. How did you find the strength to adapt and continue climbing?

The accident in 2002 changed everything in my life, from the simple to the complex, every facet of my life was changed forever. As I went through the recovery process, I understood that my life was never going to be the same. The accident took so much from me and after the amputation of my right leg, I had a moment when I had to decide how my life was going to look.

I knew I didn't want to just exist. I wanted to have a life of adventure, and even though I was injured climbing, I wanted to go back to the climbing lifestyle I loved. Together with my wife Cyndy, we began to move towards that goal. Not only did we not know what I could do, but we wanted to explore how I could be a climber again plus a dad, husband, and person with a good quality of life.

I was really lucky for a great support network who loved me and helped me to move past the accident. My wife and I figured out how I could be active again even with a fused lumbar 1-4, a fused neck at C5/6 and a prosthetic leg. Gear manufacturers came to help, I was given opportunities to explore different ways an amputee foot could be used for climbing.

As an amputee, you have defied the odds and pushed your limits in the climbing world. What has been the driving force behind your determination and resilience?

Climbing is pretty much the only thing I've done my whole life. Going back to it just made sense to me but there were no tools to help me as an amputee climber. I was fortunate to work with a prosthetic maker, Quorum Prosthetics in Colorado, to make a socket that could take the abuse of climbing. I also worked with climbing shoe company Evolv, to design a foot that would allow me to climb a wide array of terrain. I was able to focus on climbing movement again and quickly realized that the movement of climbing made me feel better, even after the accident that had taken so much from me. That simple realization is what allowed me to climb bigger and bigger things and be able to set records and win competitions over the years. The driver in all this was my desire to return to some form of the life I had before, one of being outside, climbing and exploring. I just needed to figure out how my new body would fit into that.

You've turned adversity into motivation - how does your experience as a disabled climber influence your work as a motivational speaker and author? What message do you have for others facing challenges?

When I speak to groups or teach clinics on climbing, I always say, "Whatever you are going through now, be it good or bad, it's a fluid situation." Even now, 20 years after I was hurt, I'm still seeing that my life changes all the time. Some days are good, while others I have a lot of chronic pain from my injuries. That's just a fact of life after such heavy trauma. But I know that tomorrow will be different; it may be worse, but usually it's better and I can do the things I want to do. People need to remember that the life they are living day to day will change all the time. It's like water, moving and flowing, changing all the time. We, as trauma survivors, need to embrace that.

I think most people have doubts about what they can do after an accident, trauma or when growing up with congenital problems. The best thing to do is be curious about what you can do in life. Nothing will be the same, but a lot of things will be better if you're willing to explore and see what fits you. I work with a non-profit based in Denver called Adaptive Adventures, who use eight different sports like climbing, skiing, paddling and biking to get people with physical disabilities active again. Maybe your thing won't be climbing, but we can help you find a new passion and be part of a community that supports you and enables you to be an athlete.

Climbing is demanding, often seen as a sport that requires a complete set of limbs. You've redefined what is possible. What advice do you have for people doubting their abilities due to physical limitations?

Everyone who goes through these types of events has doubt and fear, myself included. When I first saw myself in a mirror after my amputation it was shocking. I didn't think I'd be able to do anything and that scared me to my core. The thing to remember is this is a long process, and you have to settle into it. Take your time and let the process happen around you, shape you, and that will allow you to control those doubts and fears.

Your determination and courage have inspired people around the world. Can you share a time when you witnessed the impact of your message on someone facing hardships?

At one of my clinics in Colorado, where I'm based, a man in a wheelchair came to watch how adaptive climbing worked. I invited him to climb but he felt he couldn't since he was in a chair. I explained how he could, and with a bit of fear he decided to try. He climbed one route that night and what that 40 feet of climbing did was shift his perspective. He went from a person who thought he couldn't, to an athlete who knew he could. He just needed some adaptation and help. He returned to skiing, camping and a life of adventure, thanks to his willingness to trust me and try. He still climbs with me when I'm in town teaching and credits climbing for bringing him back to being whole. That never gets old!

Your book, After the Fall, delves into your struggles and triumphs. What message did you want to convey and how did you hope it would resonate with others struggling with their own setbacks?

Setbacks come with the new normal we find ourselves in after heavy trauma. I think you have to remember it's fluid and changing even as you are dealing with a setback. I've had years of injuries, bad luck and chronic pain but I try to remember they are not the rest of my life. They are simply put, a fraction of my time here on earth.

What advice would you offer to people searching for a sense of purpose and strength in difficult times?

Even in your difficult times remember there is always someone who is worse off. One of the best things to happen to me through the clinics I teach is to see that injuries come in many packages. Don't get too focused on the downs or the highs, try to find that middle ground where you can exist in a life of quality and fulfillment. Don't try to solve all the problems at once, it's a process and really, you can only do one thing at a time. Let the process happen even if you don't see the end; it's happening, and you have to have faith it's working.

I saw a quote online, "Life is 10% circumstances and 90% my reaction." To me, it embodies the idea that things are always changing and it's up to me to not be too caught up in the circumstances. If I can react positively, even the worst things can be made better.

What are some of your most memorable accomplishments?

I've been fortunate to achieve some fun things:

1. First amputee to climb Yosemites El Capitan in under 24 hours
2. First all disabled ascent of El Capitan
3. Speed record holder on the nose of El Capitan, 13 hours
4. Two-time National Champion
5. Two-time bronze medal winner in Adaptive Worlds

See Craig in action here:

Craig's Reaction

KAI LIN: OUT ON A LIMB | The Problem Solvers Ep. 1

Arc'teryx - Gimp Monkeys

> Whatever you are going through now, be it good or bad, it's a fluid situation.
>
> Craig DeMartino

My paddle boarding experience

by Ashton Dunford

I think that paddle boarding is very cool and that more blind people should do it. It's very easy to learn and once you get the hang of it, it is really fun. It is one of the most fun things to do in the summer. I like it because it is a fun way to see nature and relax. Nature feels like wide open spaces when I'm on the water. I enjoy just being there in the water and feeling the breeze.

Being blind has sometimes given me anxiety when trying new things because I don't know if I am going to fall off the board or if the water is really deep. I like to deep-breathe and pretend like I'm not scared, and I tell myself it's okay when I feel anxious. When I get to the board I climb on it and sit down. I like to hold onto the board handles to feel safe. But I'm always glad when my dad and I get out there on the water on my paddle board.

I like paddle boarding because I like to imagine I'm in different parts of the world when I'm on the water - pretending I'm there right now. I imagine Peru, Costa Rica, Honduras, Argentina and so many other places. Peru is one of my favorite places because my mom grew up there and I feel a connection to it.

Eleven-year-old Ashton Dunford lives in Utah. He loves skateboarding, skiing and cycling. His message is simple: blind children are just capable as sighted children. Find Ashton and his mom Hilda on Instagram @ourblindside and read more about him here and here.

The picture was taken at The Spanish Oaks reservoir in Utah very close to my house. The name of the snow-capped mountain in the background is Mt. Nebo and it was actually 80 degrees that day. That's considered warm weather here in Utah so it was a perfect day for paddle boarding.

Codi and friends go camping

By Codi Mendenhall

Teenager, Codi, has cerebral palsy and epilepsy.
She and her mom, Jenn, advocate for persons with disabilities.

> I went on a camping trip! Me, my friends Carol-Lynn and Bella, and their moms Jody and Becky all went. The camping trip was at Ridgway State Park (RSP) in Ridgway, CO. We stayed in a yurt that had electricity.
>
> We had so much fun! We laughed so much! We made smores and ice cream.
>
> We got to drive on an Action Trackchair. It was fun! It could pretty much go in any direction and on any surface like stairs. Carol-Lynn drove it up the stairs.
>
> I used a megaphone to wake my friends when it was time to go on a scavenger hunt. The megaphone had a siren that went off and scared all of us. We all laughed very hard.

This is my friend Carol-Lynn

This is Becky, she is Bella's mom

This is Jody, she Carol-Lynn's mom

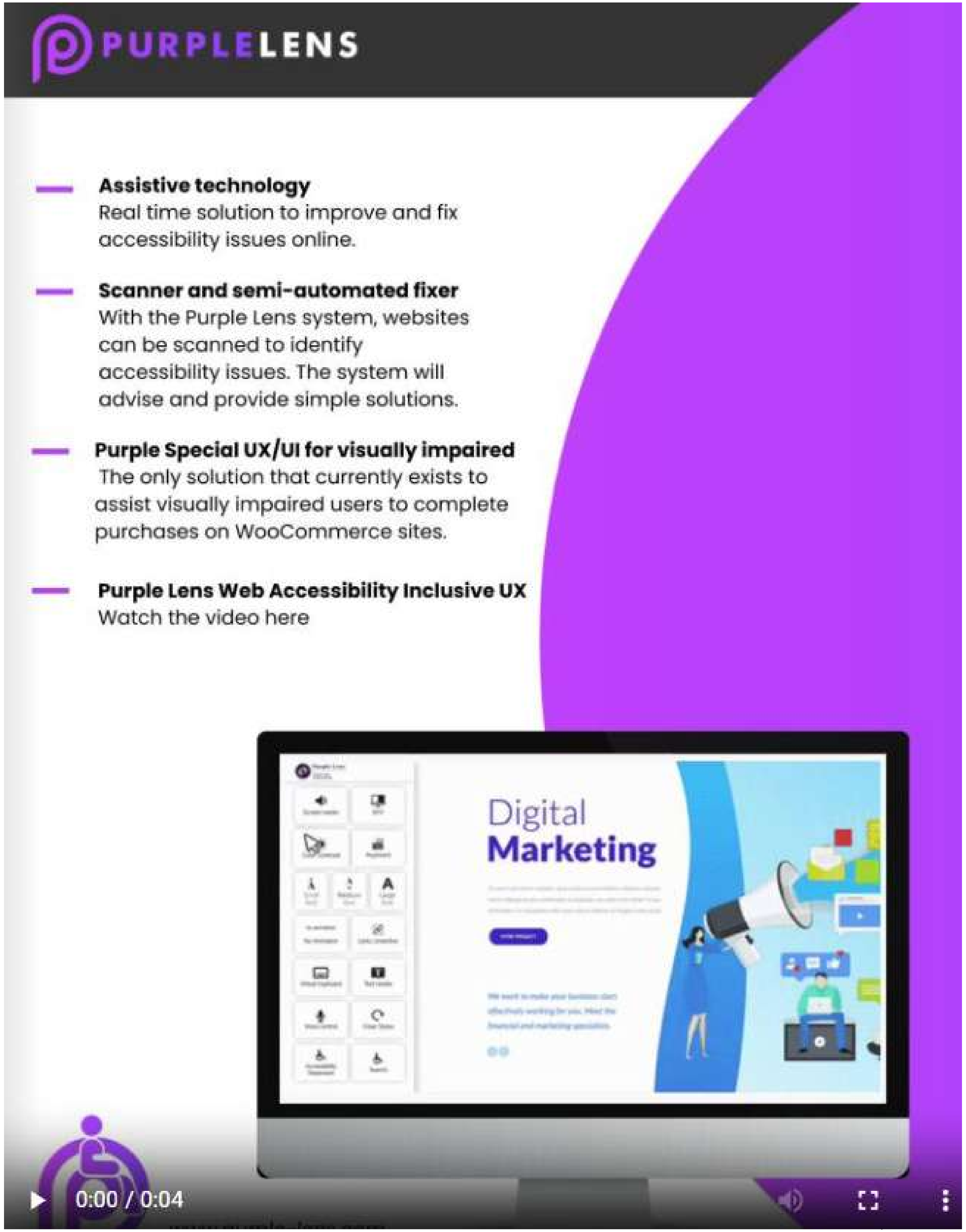
I made all these faces because Becky gave me a piece of white chocolate with lemon on it

This is my other friend Bella

This is the Action Track Chair

This is my mom in my chair

Find Codi at https://www.codislifeadvocacy.com



PURPLELENS

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  The only solution that currently exists to assist visually impaired users to complete purchases on WooCommerce sites.
- **Purple Lens Web Accessibility Inclusive UX**
  Watch the video here

Three amazing girls,

three wheelchairs, three feeding tubes, three communications devices and an incredible spirit of adventure!

By Jen Mendenhall

We went camping at Ridgway State Park (RSP) in Ridgway, CO. We chose to go there because of its accessibility options. Ridgway is located about 1 1/2 hours from where we live in Grand Junction, CO. We had two sites, one was an accessible yurt and the other was a tent campsite. A yurt is a traditional portable dwelling used by many cultures in the world but primarily in Mongolia. A yurt is a round wooden structure with a canvas outer lining. It has a domed ceiling with a skylight.

RSP has been working with the Telluride Adaptive Sports Program to improve its accessibility. Three state parks in Colorado, including RSP, purchased Action Trackchairs, wheelchairs for people with disabilities to use on hardened and off-road trails. The Park also has big wheeled wheelchairs for the beach and water access. It was a bit too cold and the lake levels were too low for us to try those out.


Van loaded


Group San Juans

We went as a group of three families (moms and daughters) to take our girls camping. We had originally wanted to road trip to San Diego but thought we would start with an adventure closer to home for our first trip. My partner and the girl's Special Education teacher braved the all girls trip with us too!

All three girls have significant support needs and Codi's friends Bella and Carol-Lynn hadn't been camping before. So we had three girls (16, 10, 9 years old), technically considered non-verbal who use communications devices, three wheelchairs, three gastrostomy tubes (g tubes) and many supplies for a two night excursion into the woods! It was an incredible experience!

The first night Codi and I slept in our tent. The second night all of us slept in the yurt because the girls wanted to have a sleepover. There were lots of giggles, reading of stories and feeling free from all of their medical worries!

The campsites and campground were very comfortable and easy to get around. We did a scavenger hunt around the campground. There were shower houses and very accessible bathrooms close to our campsites. We cooked our meals on a propane stove. The yurt did have electricity/refrigerator which was good for all of the meds and feeding tube supplies. We spent all of our time outside except for sleeping! The fresh air was wonderful for all of us!

All of the girls experienced the Action Trackchair! It did have a companion control so if they needed help driving it someone else could help out. A park ranger came with us to teach us about the chair and the trails. The dirt trails were awesome for the Trackchair but the rest of us had a workout pushing the manual chairs!

Ridgway is at the base of the beautiful San Juan Mountains, which many songs have been written about, and many movies have been filmed in the area. We went to Ouray Hot Springs for one afternoon to get ice cream. Ouray has a one million gallon hot springs pool which we didn't go to that day, but Codi has soaked in it. It was wonderful to see the shocked and pleased reactions we received from people as we rolled around a very hilly and not very accessible small mountain town. We will be back! The next week all the girls went on a field trip with their school to the Glenwood Adventure Park and rode a roller coaster! We love having adventures and giving our girls the best lives possible.

Codi in Glenwood

Adaptive activities promote emotional well-being

By Lisa Guthrie- Deabill

Raul Mellado/Envato Elements

Walking, biking, swimming and yoga—all forms of physical activity are shown to have great health benefits, both physical and mental. People with disabilities shouldn't feel left out. Studies show that adaptive sports and activities offer the same outcomes.

According to the United Kingdom's Department of Health and Social Care, participating in physical activity improves the overall mental health of children with disabilities. Researchers found that kids who participate in physical activities gain confidence, improve social skills, have increased concentration and better sleep. They also say children are more likely to participate in physical activities that are inclusive and fun.

Adults with disabilities or physical limitations benefit from physical activity too. Adaptive sports which are modified to support a person's abilities can help them stay active.

"Eventually, almost everyone will experience some kind of disability that impedes regular exercise, whether it's mild arthritis, requiring a knee or hip replacement, limited vision, or a more significant physical disability," says Dr. Cheri Blauwet, an associate professor in physical medicine and rehabilitation at Harvard Medical School and a former wheelchair racer.

Envato Elements

To get involved, Dr. Blauwet says to focus on your strengths and what you can do. For instance, if you have limited lower body movement, try upper body activities like kayaking.

Participating in the adaptive sports community is a great way to socialize, get motivated and overcome adversity. That is one of the reasons why Dr. Oluwaferanmi Okanlami, assistant professor of family medicine and physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Michigan, created the school's adaptive sports and fitness program after suffering a paralyzing injury.

One student explains how she has benefited from the program. Cathryn Gray, who participates in adaptive track and field, said, "Participating in adaptive sports has significantly improved my mental health, as well as my physical well-being. I became a happier and more optimistic person after joining adaptive sports. Adaptive sports have given me a sense of community I didn't have previously and have given me the opportunity to be part of a team – with all the benefits that belonging to a team provides – that many able-bodied athletes take for granted."

You don't have to leave home to be active. You can reap the benefits of exercise while sitting down! Chair exercises and chair yoga can be done incorporating various upper, lower and core body movements. The body releases chemicals called endorphins when we exercise. Endorphins improve mood, reduce stress and help sleep.

So, whatever your ability, there is an adaptive sport or exercise you can do to boost your overall sense of well-being.

Traveling with Autism

Navigating the world with autism

Shalese Heard,

the Autistic Travel Goddess

As a person with autism, how has traveling impacted your life?

Traveling has given me more confidence, expanded my social skills and brought out the best in me when meeting new people. It has indeed been a positive and enriching experience.

What types of travel experiences do you enjoy?

I enjoy outdoor excursions that allow me to engage in sensory seeking: hiking, bungee jumping, water activities, skydiving, parasailing. I love adventure-based travel experiences. These activities allow me the solitude I enjoy, aren't filled with crowds and noise and are engaging with nature. That keeps me closer to my special interest: anything to do with the earth, geology or geography.

What strategies, tools or apps do you find helpful while traveling?

I download airline apps. They send helpful reminders of the boarding time, our boarding passes, what to pack etc. Airport apps are also helpful in letting me know what to expect with security and airport traffic. I am a huge fan of hotel apps too because they allow me to check in and get my keys without having to deal with long lines. When traveling to other countries, I find comfort in having a map handy, as well as a list of all of my planned excursions.

How can travel and exposure to new cultures contribute to the personal growth and development of people with autism?

Travel teaches you social skills, confidence and self-advocacy skills. Most importantly, travel teaches you to have grace and patience with yourself. We as autistic people are very hard on ourselves when we don't meet a deadline, when plans go awry, or when we don't measure up to society's timeline. Travel teaches us to let go of the pressure we put on ourselves because travel is full of changes and uncertainty.

What are the most important factors for creating an inclusive and supportive travel environment for individuals with autism?

Flexibility with hotel and flight changes. Sometimes I come close to missing flights and hotel reservations due to executive function struggles. When the lines, noise and stimuli get overwhelming I might need to reschedule. Airports need to offer quiet hours, sensory times or even separate sensory lines for their autistic travelers. Variety is another factor that is helpful for autistic travelers. For instance, restaurants should offer more variety in the way food is cooked so as to accommodate for sensory eating.

How could the travel industry make travel more accessible and accommodating for people with autism?

I would like to see more travel professionals trained in autism: flight attendants, hotel management, cruise staff, even restaurant staff. I would also like to see more flexible options offered at hotels and airlines in case someone with Autism has to change or cancel a flight due to either sensory overwhelm or executive function. More establishments (museums, restaurants, amusement parks etc.) should offer sensory hours as well.

Do you have any personal stories or anecdotes that highlight the unique joys or rewards of traveling as a person with autism?

In my final semester of grad school, I decided to take a chance and fly out to L.A. to audition for my dream job, a travel show host for the Travel Channel. It seemed illogical by all counts: I was still in school, there was no guarantee I'd make it, I didn't know anyone in L.A., it was far from home etc. I booked my flight and hotel. As soon as I landed, I was already in love with California: the mountains, the beaches. The warm weather was a welcomed change from my snowy hometown. I went to the audition, gave it my all and met some amazing friends along the way. I ended up having dinner with them after the audition. Nope, I didn't get the job. I honestly didn't have high hopes of getting it. The most rewarding thing for me was that I not only checked it off my bucket list, but I took a risk for something I had my heart set on. Risk-taking is particularly hard for us as autistic people. I'm a very literal person, so it's usually very hard for me to take risks with no guarantee of a reward. This trip showed me what I was made of. For the first time in my life, I wasn't disappointed by a loss. I saw more wins that losses. I learned that I'm more social than I thought. I also learned how brave and independent I was to take a trip like that solo. It was more about the experience than about winning the audition. I was finally able to see and appreciate the big picture rather than fixating on a detail that didn't go right.

An anecdote: I traveled to Iceland one winter. I was on a mission to see the Black Sand Beach. The weather was treacherous, icy and unpredictable. I nearly had a car accident on the way. My car spun around, alongside of a mountain road with NO guardrails. Right next to the ocean. I was fortunate that I didn't hit the other cars near me. I eventually regained control of the car. I decided to continue the trip the next day and give myself the night off. What was shocking to me was that that didn't faze me whatsoever. I have always had a muted sense of fear, where I don't feel fear the same way or for the same reasons most people do. This was a moment where I realized the autism trait of having a muted sense of fear is BENEFICIAL to me. This trait helps make my travel experiences richer because I'm not afraid to have new experiences. I'm also not easily deterred by scary experiences. What society tells me is wrong or broken about me proves to be a STRENGTH when I travel.

What other insights can you offer on travel and autism?

Given that 85% (and counting) of the autistic adult population is either unemployed or underemployed, travel opens up opportunities for us to create financial freedom for ourselves. First off, there are other cultures out there that are more suitable to autistic people. Some cultures view autistic traits as genius like rather than off-putting. Because of this, we may find it easier to find educational and career opportunities in other countries or states/provinces. Also, many autistic people from the Western world are able to stretch their currency further in some countries. That gives us more freedom to spend on enriching experiences, our special interests and takes the financial pressure off of us. Travel is good for helping autistic people find financial independence so they don't have to rely on toxic systems and relationships for support.

Secondly, traveling as a black autistic woman adds another layer to my experiences. I either find that I have to be hyper aware of the possibility of racial microaggression I may experience as a black woman, which is often hard for me to pick up on as an autistic person. There's the double-edged sword of reading social cues AND the stress of not knowing when I've missed them as it relates to race. On the other hand, I've found myself welcomed and treated especially well compared to my white peers when I travel. It can go to both extremes as a black autistic traveler. ■

> **. . . the autism trait of having a muted sense of fear is BENEFICIAL to me. This trait helps make my travel richer because I'm not afraid to have new experiences**

Find Shalese @autistictravelgoddess

THE POWER OF accessible travel

By Samantha Ellsworth, Wilderness Inquiry

> **Being her trip assistant made New Zealand all the more meaningful for me, and it was largely because I was her eyes. I found myself really looking at things and experiencing the natural world in a new way so I could describe it to Laura.** Erica Rivers

Erika Rivers and Laura Oftedahl met just once by phone before traveling 8,000 miles and exploring New Zealand together. Their first conversation ranged from food preferences, to favorite hikes, to Laura's time in the Paralympics. Little did they know the impact that this trip would have on both of them.

Erika Rivers is the Executive Director of Wilderness Inquiry, an outdoor nonprofit based in St. Paul, Minnesota, offering inclusive trips from the Boundary Waters to Yellowstone to Chile. The organization was founded 45 years ago on the fundamental belief that everyone belongs in the outdoors. Over the years, people of all ages, abilities, identities, and backgrounds have connected with each other on Wilderness Inquiry adventures as they explore the beauty of nature together.

Erika played the role of trip assistant in New Zealand. Trip assistants help participants experience the activities and community life that come with Wilderness Inquiry adventures. Laura had been on two trips with Wilderness Inquiry – to the Apostle Islands and Florida Everglades – before going to New Zealand with Erika. Since Laura lives with limited vision, Erika assisted by orienting her to her

Photo Credits: Pat Rivers

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surroundings, navigating the terrain and narrating the scenery.

The group of nine travelers spent 10 days touring the south island of New Zealand with local tour guides. Over the course of their trip, they formed a sense of community with one another. Laura said, “This is my third trip with Wilderness Inquiry, and it always amazes me how compatible the group of people ends up being. Every trip that I’ve been on, I remember the people were cool, and that made the trip even better.”

Erika and Laura figured out the best way to navigate the New Zealand terrain together. Laura used walking sticks to help feel the ground in front of her, and Erika often hiked just in front of Laura to help describe the upcoming ground. What surprised Erika was how much this communication and detailed narration enhanced her own experience.

“Being her trip assistant made New Zealand all the more meaningful for me, and it was largely because I was her eyes. I found myself really looking at things and experiencing the natural world in a new way so I could describe it to Laura,” Erika said. “New Zealand is like eye candy everywhere you look, and trying to convey that to somebody who can’t see what you’re seeing really challenges you to take it all in at a whole different level.”

Photo Credits: Pat Rivers

Photo Credits: Pat Rivers

Through this experience, they became good friends. “Having Erika, I really don’t feel like I missed anything. And if I were to go on just a regular kind of trip with an organization that doesn’t know much about disabilities, I would probably feel like I’m sitting on the sidelines sometimes,” Laura said.

Wilderness Inquiry’s trips stand out from others because of their focus on community-building and inclusion. Looking for your next adventure? Wilderness Inquiry can help you travel with a purpose.

Explore more at:

www.wildernessinquiry.org/tripfinder.

Photo Credits: Pat Rivers

Photo Credits: Pat Rivers

Portugal: pretty amazing, fairly accessible

By Fred Maahs, Jr.

Fred in Gardens of Royal Palace of Queluz

I first met Jose Antonio Bourdain, yes, from that Bourdain family, in November of 2019. We were both invited to speak at the first Dubai Accessible Tourism International Summit. I listened to his presentation about his company, Tourism for All, and the amazing services it provides for people with disabilities. I was intrigued. He also listened to each of my presentations. After we introduced ourselves to each other, we planned a lunch together later in the week.

During our lunch, I told Jose I had never been to Portugal and he told me to be patient and that he would see me there one day. Well, after a lengthy interruption due to the Covid-19 outbreak, we kept in touch and reconnected in late 2022. He told me that he was planning a Familiarization Trip (FAM Trip) for travel authors and bloggers and asked me to join the trip.

Gratefully, in early March of this year, I finally made it to Portugal, thanks to Jose and Tourism for All! The trip started off with a canceled British Airways flight out of Philadelphia so I missed the first day's events, but I joined the group seamlessly the next afternoon thanks to careful planning and coordination by the Tourism for All team, including driver, Ricardo, and trip coordinator, Carolina. After a friendly and timely greeting at the airport in a fully accessible van, we were on our way to meet the rest of the group at the National Tile Museum.

As we left the airport grounds and made our way first on the highway and then through neighborhood streets, I was quickly captivated by Portugal's simplicity, beauty, and mostly it's history, and my trip had only just begun. We arrived at the Madre de Deus Convent, founded in 1509, where the National Tile Museum was the not-so-best-kept secret within its walls. The Tile Museum has numerous displays that are dedicated to the traditional tilework of Portugal and the former Portuguese Empire. At the end of our museum tour, our group was treated to our own workshop where we painted our own tiles which were fired in the historic kilns. We received our carefully and beautifully painted tiles on the last night of our trip.

We left the museum at dusk to go to our hotel, the Villa Gale, to have dinner along with a great conversation with our host, Tourism for All and the director of our hotel.

Guest room at Villa Gale Opera Hotel

Ramp going to the gardens at the Royal Palace of Queluz

Definitely a long day, I could not wait to get a good night's rest. The room in our modern hotel was accessible with proper bed height, great floor space for wheelchair navigation, and an accessible bathroom with roll-in shower with grab bars on one wall. There was no flip down shower bench but there was enough room to get my knees under the sink. I just wish the mirror on the wall behind the sink was positioned a little lower to use it.

After a hearty and delicious buffet breakfast in the hotel the next morning, we checked out of the hotel and boarded our accessible tour bus for the Royal Palace of Queluz. The entrance and parking lot was a bit bumpy with cobblestones but could be navigated in a wheelchair with a little assistance and patience. Once inside, the marble and tile floors and wide doorways made it very easy to navigate and explore. This is an historic building with no heat and with open windows and doorways, so it was quite chilly inside and you should dress accordingly. The magnificent rooms and ornate furniture, preserved in much of its original form, were beautiful. Our guide from the Palace led us on a journey into the past as she described the purpose of each room and who had used them centuries ago. Ramps took us to the outdoor gardens, fountains and statuary. The pathways outside were constructed of a very small and dense stone providing nearly a solid surface to traverse, but people who use canes or walkers should be careful. Throughout the Palace I did not see anything that was tactile or Braille for people who are blind or low vision, and nothing was available for people who are deaf.

After our visit to the Palace, we

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Display at the National Tile Museum

again boarded our accessible tour bus for a drive through Estoril's promenade to the quaint and lovely resort town of Cascais. This area of Portugal's coastline included modern and historic homes and is a well-known fishing town with calm beaches in one area and a more robust beach area with jagged rocks and waves. There were plenty of shops, restaurants and a museum for visitors, most of which were accessible. We enjoyed walking along the sidewalks next to the beach and up a hill past the museum and a small zoo. Then we again boarded our bus to leave for the westernmost point of the Sintra Mountain Range of mainland Portugal and continental Europe, Cabo da Roca (Cape Roca).

Our drive along the serene beaches to our next stop was scenic and, in some ways, peaceful. The empty beaches and crashing waves were alluring and dotted by oceanside restaurants and places where you could stop and enjoy the view. We had reservations at the Furnas de Guincho restaurant and you could not ask for a more perfect place to have a meal. Resting on the small stone cliffs literally at the ocean's edge, our group enjoyed a succulent meal of steamed shrimp appetizer, a traditional shrimp and clam soup, followed by a bowl of fresh fruit topped with a raspberry gelato. I could have easily spent the rest of the day here on the outdoor deck and wrap-around bar area overlooking the ocean, but we had to leave for Cabo da Roca.


Bathroom in guest room at Villa Gale Opera Hotel

It felt as if the roads became narrower as we drove to Cabo da Roca, with little or no guard rails to prevent any vehicle from plunging off the edge into steep ravines below – all of which added a little excitement to the drive, even though we had no worries thanks to the expert driving by Susana. We arrived at Cabo da Roca just about an hour and a half before sunset and it seemed like the timing was perfect. We made our way off the bus and down a small accessible pathway to the monument which officially marked Cabo da Roca. It was remarkable to be at that point at the right time and watch the sunset as we gazed across the ocean.

Thank you, Jose, Carolina, Susana, Susana, Ricardo, and our amazing tour guide, Pedro!

Stay tuned for part two of Fred's visit to Portugal, in our fall issue. 🟧


Ricardo and Carolina of Tourism for All

Cabo da Roca Monument


The harbor in Cascais Portugal

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Disability rights advocate Kelly Narowski

on air travel for those in wheelchairs

Kelly Narowski is a disability rights advocate. In our last issue, Kelly shared her adaptive sports experiences. Here she shares tips and insights on air traveling for wheelchair users.

Tell us how you handle traveling with your wheelchair, especially when it comes to air travel.

I could write a book about this topic! Traveling as a wheelchair user is much more challenging than traveling as a walker. For comparison purposes, I had 25 years of walking. While traveling is stressful for anyone, especially post-COVID, we have a lot more to plan and worry about. Besides flight delays, cancellations and lost luggage, we have to worry about planning for not being able to go to the bathroom on the plane: the #1 biggest hurdle for traveling chair-users.

We have to worry about the air carrier damaging our mobility devices. Under the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA), we have a right to stow our mobility device in the cabin's closet if the aircraft has over 100 seats. I often do that because it provides me peace of mind. I've had wheelchair-using friends have their chairs damaged, destroyed or left at the departure airport. Unfortunately, people with power chairs or large manual chairs are always stuck getting their chairs put into the belly of the plane.

Inside the Magic / Flickr

Kelly in London

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Airlines sometimes leave people with mobility-related disabilities on the plane too long. Then the person might miss their connecting flight. I have been left over 30 minutes three times in the past couple years and other than that, a couple times in the past 24 years. I filed DOT complaints and the law mandates the airline has to get back to you. But, I've found they don't really do anything except offer a very small voucher.

Interacting with camels in Marrakech

What about accommodations and ground transportation?

Wheelchair users have to worry about the hotel room not being truly accessible when they check in. Many chair users have to worry about beds being too high, especially since the ADA regulations don't mandate a particular bed height or range. I'm staying in a hotel right now that doesn't have a grab bar on the wall next to the toilet like they're supposed to! I'm traveling solo, so that's dangerous. It's a big chain that's normally great, so I was surprised.

When it comes to car rentals, we have to worry about hand controls being done correctly. It used to be that I had a problem with maybe one out of thirty rentals. Nowadays, it seems to be about half the time. No matter how far in advance you book, no matter if you verify a day or two beforehand too, car rental agencies will sometimes put hand controls in a high vehicle that's impossible to get into independently OR not put them in at all! This is a huge fiasco when traveling alone, especially if you have to drive a long way. It's actually my biggest fear when traveling solo.

Jedidiah Smith State park California

How do you navigate unfamiliar places and find accessible routes when you're on the go?

In the U.S., this isn't difficult. Outside the U.S., it just takes planning and research - lots of internet time.

What advice do you have for other wheelchair users who are interested in traveling but might feel intimidated or uncertain about the process?

It's very doable! There will be problems occasionally, but it's manageable with lots of planning and so worth it! If you're intimidated, consider using an accessible travel

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State park in
Northern Delaware

agency. Reach out to well-traveled wheelchair users for advice For instance, I help out by letting people know which places are accessible, which places aren't, and give hotel recommendations, especially internationally.

Anything else you'll like to add?

Know your rights. Become very familiar with the Air Carrier Access Act of '86. For instance, in the U.S., you have a LEGAL right to pre-board. It's not just best practice, like in Europe. Also, be very familiar with Title III of the ADA. An individual with a mobility-related disability should know about it anyway, but it also pertains to travel (e.g., car rental agencies, ground transportation, hotels, restaurants, stadiums, stores, theaters and other public accommodations).

One thing people tend not to know is that if a hotel offers a complimentary shuttle for guests (usually it's to and from the airport), they have to offer free accessible transportation to guests who need it. I usually just have them pay for a cab, but they also have to provide a van with a lift or ramp for those who need it.

Stay informed by reading up on the Air Carrier Access Act, or learning more about Title III of the ADA. Find more about Kelly on her website. ■


Ziplining in Costa Rica

The Edmonds:
finding the answers as they go

When Ken and Cheryl Edmonds couldn't find answers to their simple questions, they started creating content about accessible travel. That content informs people with challenges, their friends and families, so they can travel better and avoid pitfalls. Find more on their social channels and blog, Traveling with a Chair.

Cheryl

I have a connective tissue disorder and as a result, most of my back is fused. Along with that I have had multiple joint replacements. As a result, traveling can be a challenge. I cannot be scanned at the airport without setting off the alarms. My wheelchair and I always must be manually inspected, but I am used to that.

While I love to travel, being on camera is not my favorite thing. But Ken affectionately calls me his prop and knows how to bring a smile to my face. I will say this, we go to amazing places and have fun even though I have unique challenges.

Ken

This is a rare picture of me, I am usually behind the camera taking pictures of my beautiful wife. Why else am I smiling? The sculpture next to me is chocolate and I am looking for a fork.

We travel a lot, and people think it must be like being on vacation. But we work to capture pictures and videos that answer frequent questions about traveling with challenges. Our other enjoyable task is to review meals and restaurant accessibility. When there are more than three choices per day, we may split and conquer. But sometimes we may have to do double duty.

Finding answers

In the past few years, we have taken 20 cruises, visited five all-inclusive resorts, and stayed in numerous hotels. We travel an average of once a month. When we travel, in addition to documenting what we see and experience, we share suggestions with resorts, tour companies, hotels and cruise lines about improving accessibility.

During our travels, we post shorts and reels, and later we create videos of the places we visited. We focus on demonstrating how a scooter or wheelchair works in each destination and excursion. Videoing excursions is quite an enjoyable way to help show accessibility of destinations. But sometimes the excursions prove inaccessible, and we document this as well. This is proving to help others determine whether those destinations or excursions are accessible for their abilities.

Another way we help is by interviewing other frequent travelers with disabilities to see what they had to overcome and what they recommend. We find their stories enlightening and inspiring.

Another method is helping destination marketing organizations to display accessibility in their location. We work with properties and chambers of commerce to both highlight and evaluate their accessibility.

We have had the privilege of interviewing most of the ADA compliance managers for the various cruise lines to make sure our audience can get the most accurate information possible. We have had the privilege of sailing on Carnival, Holland America, Princess, Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, MSC, Virgin Voyages and Norwegian Cruise Line. We eagerly await a wonderful cruise from Quebec to New York this fall on Cunard. And this year we will be cruising MSC, Celebrity, and NCL to document accessibility of new ships in the market.

This spring we spent three beautiful days in Astoria, Oregon working with Wheel the World to film accessibility for Astoria / Warrenton Chamber of Commerce. Later this year, we have land trips to the Dominican Republic and Cabo San Lucas to document accessibility there.

Plans for next year include a cruise to Hawaii from San Diego on the Holland America Line. This is the best way for Cheryl to travel there, as we do all we can to avoid long flights. A bucket lost for Cheryl would be the HAL cruise to Tahiti.

Whether we fill our bucket lists or not, one thing you can be sure of is that we will be documenting accessibility somewhere, somehow. And finding ways to enjoy traveling despite challenges. We look forward to meeting you on our adventures soon. ~ Ken and Cheryl

Highlights from Alaska, 2022

Accessible Journeys found these highlights from the Edmonds' 2022 trip to Alaska.

Blog: Cheryl blogged about working up her nerve to be released on a very steep Alaskan zipline adventure. She recalled the words of a wise surgeon as she was about to undergo a major operation: "it's okay to be afraid, and in fact it's probably good." Read this beautiful account of Cheryl and Ken's zipling at Icy Strait Point, Alaska.

Vlog: Ken got out his video camera to chronicle their Sept. 2022 cruise on the Aleutian Ballad Bering Sea Crab Fishermen's Tour. Running out of Ketchikan, this Bering Sea excursion was voted best tour many years running, and the boat was featured on the television show, Deadliest Catch. Although the fishing boat is rugged, and has fought many storms at sea, it is now very accessible as Ken documents.

Vlog: All aboard the White Pass and Yukon Route train! This video, from Sept 2022, follows Ken and Cheryl disembarking the Radiance of the Seas in Skagway, Alaska to board the White Pass and Yukon Route train. Cheryl used her manual wheelchair on this trip, with staff assisting her from the ship and onto the train for more scenic adventures.

Exploring Boundless Horizons:

wheelchair-friendly U.S. vacation destinations

By Shatia Mason


Haleakala National Park

When planning a vacation, one of the first questions you may ponder is if the destination is wheelchair friendly. However, with the growing need for inclusivity and awareness in travel, wheelchair vacations are becoming increasingly popular. From lush landscapes to scenic adventures, consider these top wheelchair friendly destinations in the U.S. for your next vacation.

MAUI, HAWAII

Adaptive surfing, scenic drives and whale watching are just a few of many adaptive activities you can enjoy in Maui. The island offers many wheelchair accessible attractions and activities for travelers to enjoy.

Haleakala National Park: Breathtaking landscapes, scenic sunsets and unique flora and fauna, the 30,000-acre Haleakala National Park is a must stop when visiting this beautiful island.

Sunset Dinner Cruise: This tour consists of a boat trip combining food, music and the best sunset views Maui has to offer!

Adaptive Kayaking: Paddle out to enjoy the incredible and inspiring views of the Makena coastline and the rising green hills of Haleakala. You may even see a turtle or two! Each tour includes two guides for safety and comfort.

If you'd like to enjoy a relaxing beach day, consider visiting Kaanapali Beach, Kamaole Beach and Wailea. Beach wheelchair rentals are also available.

SAN DIEGO CALIFORNIA

Well known for picturesque beaches, vibrant neighborhoods and world renown attractions, San Diego is an amazing choice for a wheelchair friendly vacation. Add these accessible activities to your list of things to do.

USS Midway Museum: Named after the famous World War II naval and aerial battle, The Midway is a retired aircraft carrier and museum in San Diego. With restored aircrafts and 10 acres of exhibits, not only helicopters and airplanes can be found, but also real objects and testimonies about crew members are exhibited.

La Jolla Shores Beach: A perfect beach for surfing, scuba-diving and paddle boarding, La Jolla Shores is a 1-mile-long sandy beach in San Diego. A permanent lifeguard station is on-site and shops and restaurants are nearby. There is a park with seating areas and a playground for children to play in, with beach views and palm trees.

San Diego Zoo: Considered one of the top zoos in the world, the San Diego Zoo offers many unique experiences, tours and attractions.

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Regarded as one of the most wheelchair-accessible cities in the U.S., San Francisco offers a variety of attractions and outdoor activities. Below are some of the most accessible activities in the area.

Guided Handbike Tour: Hit the trails, the streets and idyllic San Francisco walkways as you make the most of the adaptive biking equipment available and cycle to see one of San Francisco's most prominent monuments – the Golden Gate Bridge.

USS Midway Tour


Guided Handbike Tour

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Muir Woods and Sausalito Tour

Fisherman's Wharf: Explore the waterfront of the San Francisco Bay, a lively area with beautiful views, fun street performers, the famous Ghirardelli Square and delicious seafood.

Muir Woods and Sausalito tour: This accessible tour will take you out of San Francisco to explore California's scenic landscapes.

The Golden Gate Bridge: See San Francisco's skyline from its most famous landmark. Running, walking, strolling and wheeling are possible and accessible. A cafe and a step-free visitor center can be found on-site, as well as accessible restrooms.

MESA, ARIZONA

Named America's First Ever Autism Certified City, Mesa Arizona invites accessible travelers to explore the city limitlessly. As the home of two Spring training teams—The Chicago Cubs and Oakland A's, the city has a wide variety of accessible attractions.

The Dolly Steamboat is a scenic boat ride that takes guests on a tour of the beautiful Canyon Lake. The boat is wheelchair accessible, and the crew is accommodating and friendly. Guests can enjoy stunning views of the lake and the surrounding mountains.

Canyon Lake Scenic Beach is a beautiful spot to enjoy the great outdoors. The beach is wheelchair accessible, with accessible parking spots and restrooms. Guests can enjoy swimming, picnicking and fishing.

MESA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

This museum showcases the history of Arizona. The museum is wheelchair accessible, and the exhibits are informative and engaging. Guests can learn about the state's rich history and culture.

The Autism GeoTour in Mesa, Arizona is a fun and educational outdoor activity that allows families with children on the autism spectrum to explore the city's parks and cultural attractions. While the tour is primarily designed for children with autism, it is open to anyone who is interested in learning more about Mesa's history and culture.

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

With it's rich Creole and Cajun culture, you can easily immerse yourself in the city's rich history and vibrant streets. Indulge in delightful cuisine and the sounds of the city's iconic jazz scene with these activities.

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French Quarter Food Tour: Led by a local guide, this tour showcases the highlights of New Orleans cuisine where you'll taste some of the most delicious food available in the famous French Quarter.

Treme Cultural and Food Tour: This accessible private tour features the highlights of New Orleans' Treme neighborhood, one of the oldest African American neighborhoods in the country. See Creole architecture, try classic Creole cuisine and immerse yourself in New Orleans culture.

National WWII Museum: This accessible, immersive museum offers a captivating journey through the war's history, with interactive exhibits, personal stories and artifacts that bring the era to life. ■

Inspired by these destinations? Plan and customize your next accessible vacation with guaranteed accessibility by visiting wheeltheworld.com

French Quarter Food Tour

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Unleash the Accessible Wanderlust

with Jamie Santillo of *Adventures by Jamie*

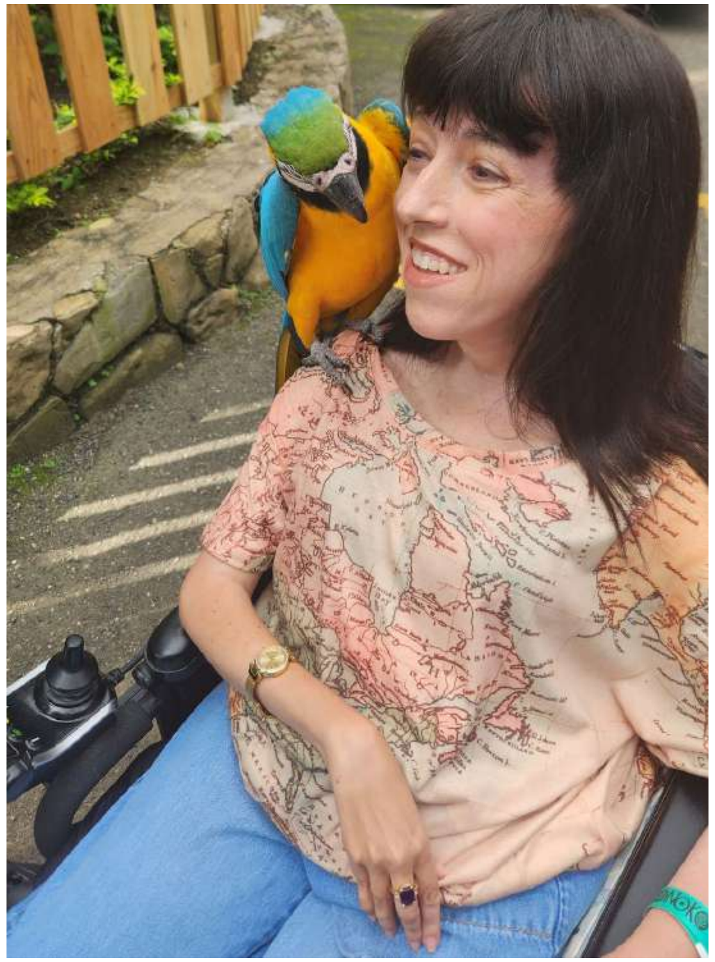
By Alice Williams

Close your eyes and imagine a world where limitations are merely stepping stones to extraordinary experiences. Picture a journey that transcends boundaries, defies expectations and celebrates the triumph of the human spirit. This is the realm of accessible travel, a realm where Jamie, the unstoppable force behind Adventures by Jamie, reigns supreme.

Born with a spirit as indomitable as the roaring waves, Jamie has transformed her own disability into a catalyst for change. With parents who instilled in her the belief that she can achieve anything she set her mind to do, a travel agency became her platform for advocacy. With every breath, she breathes life into her agency, a beacon of hope for those yearning to explore the wonders of the world, regardless of their abilities. Jamie's unwavering determination has fueled her ascent, propelling Adventures by Jamie to the pinnacle of the travel industry, where it stands proudly as the paragon of inclusivity with 72 agents strong, earning her recognition of being the Best Travel Agency in Tampa Bay in 2022.

Through her agency, Jamie orchestrates symphonies of unforgettable experiences, composing a melody that resonates with the hearts of all who dare to dream of travel. She understands the importance of personalized journeys, meticulously crafting each adventure to suit the individual needs of her fellow travelers. Like a master weaver, she intertwines the threads of accessibility and wonder, creating a tapestry of boundless possibilities.

Her clients enjoy wonderful experiences and so does she – diving headfirst into the depths of adventure. With her trusted wheelchair as her chariot, as she explores new places and cultures, Jamie oftentimes fearlessly embraces the adrenaline of adaptive activities. From the exhilarating rush of zip-lining to the breathtaking serenity of hot air ballooning, she reminds us that our limitations are merely figments of our imagination. Her infectious spirit transforms the mundane into the extraordinary, inspiring us to shatter our own glass ceilings.

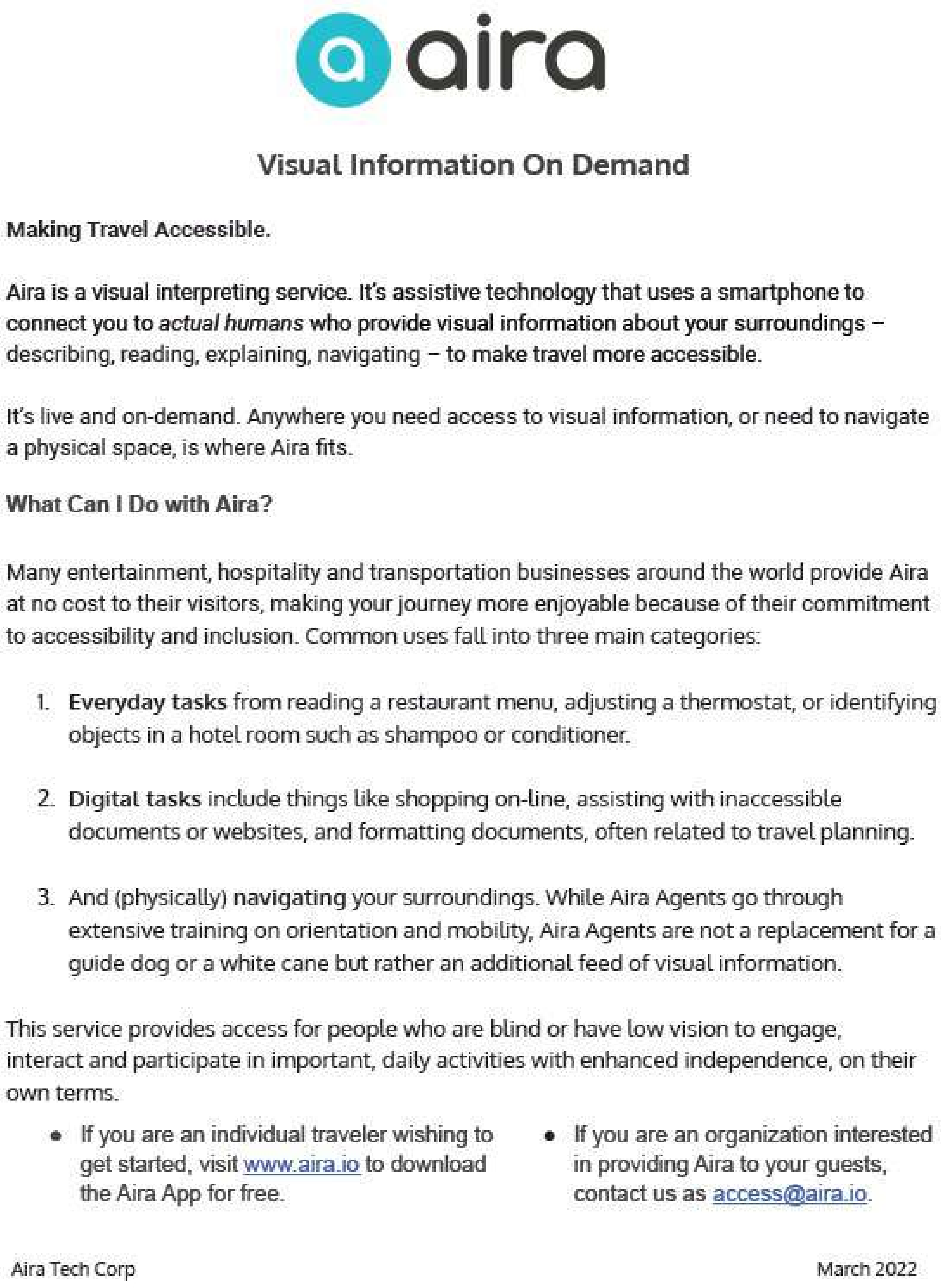


However, Jamie's path is not without its hurdles. The road to accessible accommodations remains treacherous, strewn with obstacles that impede the enjoyment of travelers with disabiities and specific needs. Yet, like a lighthouse guiding weary sailors, Jamie stands tall, illuminating the way forward. She conducts meticulous audits to ensure travelers' needs will be met, and with her team of travel agents, champions the cause of accessibility with unwavering voices. Her partnership with tourism boards and travel companies heralds a new era of understanding, where the needs of all travelers are met with open arms. She commends the companies that are taking steps towards inclusivity and partnering with advocates like herself.

In the realm of air travel, however, a tempestuous storm continues to rage. Accessibility and the treatment of wheelchairs remain unresolved issues that demand urgent attention. Jamie calls upon airlines and the travel industry at large to rise above their limitations. The time for inclusivity is now!

Jamie applauds the pioneers, the vanguards of change who, like her, walk on this epic journey to create a barrier-free world. Companies like Wheel The World and Break Relief Sitters are some of the stars that shine brightly in her constellation of allies. They, and others, pave the way for a future where limitations are mere whispers in the wind, where access knows no bounds.

Jamie's ultimate goal is to dismantle barriers and create a world where disabled travelers are no longer bound by the chains of misconception. In her vision, all wanderers traverse the globe with their heads held high. Together, they journey into a future where accessible travel becomes the glorious norm. ■



aira

Visual Information On Demand

Making Travel Accessible.

Aira is a visual interpreting service. It's assistive technology that uses a smartphone to connect you to *actual humans* who provide visual information about your surroundings – describing, reading, explaining, navigating – to make travel more accessible.

It's live and on-demand. Anywhere you need access to visual information, or need to navigate a physical space, is where Aira fits.

What Can I Do with Aira?

Many entertainment, hospitality and transportation businesses around the world provide Aira at no cost to their visitors, making your journey more enjoyable because of their commitment to accessibility and inclusion. Common uses fall into three main categories:

1. **Everyday tasks** from reading a restaurant menu, adjusting a thermostat, or identifying objects in a hotel room such as shampoo or conditioner.
2. **Digital tasks** include things like shopping on-line, assisting with inaccessible documents or websites, and formatting documents, often related to travel planning.
3. And (physically) **navigating** your surroundings. While Aira Agents go through extensive training on orientation and mobility, Aira Agents are not a replacement for a guide dog or a white cane but rather an additional feed of visual information.

This service provides access for people who are blind or have low vision to engage, interact and participate in important, daily activities with enhanced independence, on their own terms.

- If you are an individual traveler wishing to get started, visit www.aira.io to download the Aira App for free.
- If you are an organization interested in providing Aira to your guests, contact us as access@aira.io.

Aira Tech Corp

March 2022

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aira Access Locations

Dining

- All Starbucks locations in the US

Entertainment and Hospitality

- Dickies Arena, Ft. Worth, Texas
- Grand Rapids Public Museum, Michigan
- Irish Architecture Foundation, Dublin, Ireland
- Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Massachusetts
- Museum of Science Boston, Massachusetts
- Natural History Museum of Utah
- Nova Scotia Museum, Canada
- NRG Stadium, Houston, Texas
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
- Rhode Island Historical Society
- Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, Illinois
- Smithsonian Institution Museums
- Space Center, Houston, Texas
- The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio

Destinations

- City of Houston, Texas
- City of Mesa, Arizona
- City of Miami Beach, Florida
- City of Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Sedgwick County, Kansas

Building

- San Francisco Public Library, California

Parks and Rec

- Broward County, Florida Parks & Recreation

Transit

- Houston Metro, Texas
- Metro Transit, Minneapolis St. Paul, Minnesota
- Milwaukee County Transit System, Wisconsin
- State of Connecticut

Aviation and Transit

- Austin-Bergstrom International Airport
- Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL)
- Baltimore Washington International Airport
- El Paso International Airport
- Columbus Regional Airport Authority
- Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport
- Dallas Love Field
- Dane County Regional Airport, Madison, Wisconsin
- Denver International Airport
- Edmonton Regional Airports Authority, Canada
- Gatwick Airport, United Kingdom
- General Mitchell International (Milwaukee Airport)
- Greater Rochester International Airport
- Green Bay Austin Straubel International Airport
- Houston Airport System
- Indianapolis International Airport
- New York JFK International Air Terminal LLC
- Boston Logan International Airport
- Los Angeles International Airport
- Manchester-Boston Regional Airport
- McCarran International Airport
- Memphis International Airport
- Miami International Airport
- Minneapolis-St Paul International Airport
- Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
- Omaha Airport Authority
- Orlando International Airport
- Philadelphia International Airport
- Southwest Florida International Airport
- Salt Lake City Department of Airports
- San Antonio International Airport, Inc.
- San Diego County Regional Airport Authority
- Seattle-Tacoma International Airport
- Sonoma County Airport
- Spokane International Airport
- St. Louis Lambert International Airport
- St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport
- Sydney Airport, Australia
- Syracuse Regional Airport Authority
- The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey - LaGuardia, Newark and JFK
- Toronto Pearson International Airport, Canada
- Tucson Airport Authority
- Vancouver International Airport, Canada
- Wichita Dwight D. Eisenhower National Airport
- Winnipeg Airports Authority, Canada

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Blogger Spotlight

The impactful voices of bloggers with disabilities

Roll on Adventures

Asmae

Hi there, my name is Asmae! I'm a 24-year-old travel blogger from the Netherlands, and my passion lies in exploring the world while advocating for wheelchair accessibility. I live with LGMD2D, a form of muscular dystrophy, which has given me a unique perspective on the challenges that wheelchair users face when traveling. Through my blog, Roll on Adventures, I share my travel experiences and provide practical information about wheelchair accessibility at different destinations. My hope is to inspire and encourage to embrace travel and enjoy new experiences. Alongside my blogging, I work full-time as an ICT trainer. I find it incredibly rewarding to help others build their digital skills. In all areas of my life, I am dedicated to raising awareness about accessibility. I believe that everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, should have the opportunity to explore the world and create unforgettable memories.

Best and worst travel experience

My best wheelchair-accessible travel experience was in Barcelona, Spain. The city has an excellent public transportation system, including buses and metro stations with accessible entrances and elevators. Many of the major tourist attractions, such as Park Guell and La Sagrada Familia, have accessible entrances and ramps.The city's flat terrain also makes it easy to navigate in a wheelchair, and the people were friendly and accommodating. The highlight of the trip was visiting the Gothic Quarter, where I was able to explore the narrow streets and admire the historic architecture. Overall, Barcelona is an excellent destination for wheelchair users.

My worst wheelchair-accessible travel experience was in Sicily, Italy. While the country has a rich history and beautiful scenery, the accessibility features were lacking. Many of the historic sites and attractions were not accessible, and the streets were narrow and crowded, making it challenging to navigate in a wheelchair.Additionally, many restaurants and shops were not accessible, making it difficult to fully enjoy the local culture.

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Must-return-to places

One of my must-return-to places is Scandinavia. The region has some of the most beautiful landscapes I have ever seen, with fjords, forests and mountains. The accessibility features are also excellent, with many cities designed with wheelchair users in mind. The people are friendly and welcoming, and the culture is fascinating. I would love to explore more of the region, including Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

Travel/equipment advice

My travel advice for wheelchair users would be to do thorough research before going on a trip. This includes researching the destination, the accessibility features and any potential barriers. It's also essential to pack appropriately and bring any necessary equipment, such as a portable ramp or an Allen key. Additionally, it's crucial to be respectful of the local culture and customs, and to interact with locals whenever possible to get a better understanding of the place you're visiting.

Advice to my younger self

My advice to my younger self would be to embrace the challenges of (wheelchair) travel and not let them hold me back from exploring the world. It's essential to remember that accessibility features vary from place to place, but with proper research and preparation, it's possible to have a fulfilling travel experience. Additionally, I would advise my younger self to be open-minded and to embrace new adventures, even if they seem intimidating at first. Finally, I would remind myself to take lots of photos and to cherish the memories of each trip.

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Vagrants of the World Travel

Kate O'Malley and Mark Williams

A sense of adventure brought Kate and Mark together. They met while working for the Australian Antarctic Division. Mark was the station leader at Mawson Station for more than a year, and Kate was part of the voyage management team delivering crew and supplies south. In 2014, they sold everything and took off on a one way trip with a bag each and no set itinerary.

House-sitting was their primary mode of travel in the first few years of full time travel, enabling them to travel on a budget while being able to fully explore destinations they would never have dreamed of going to. From islands in Puerto Rico, to a yacht in the Greek islands (with a disabled cat), to a mid-winter house-sit in the mountains of Bulgaria, house- sitting opened up a different view of travel.


Kate and Mark Obidos Portugal Chocolate

From these experiences, Kate and Mark realized they had a wealth of experiences to share. They created Vagrants of the World Travel (a tongue-in-cheek reference to their nomadic lifestyle) to share practical and helpful travel tips on popular destinations and to inspire people to explore beyond the typical tourist hot spots. After five years of full time travel, visiting more than 70 countries, Kate and Mark settled in Portugal but are still traveling and helping others plan incredible journeys.


Giraffes-in-Kruger

Best travel experience

We kicked off a 3-month road trip of Africa with a self-drive safari in Kruger National Park. We were utterly unprepared for how overwhelmed we would be. On day one, we felt like we were in a Jurassic Park style film (before things turned bad). It was like someone yelled, "Action" and giraffes sauntered across the road, herds of zebra and rhino grazed in the fields beside the road. We could not believe people as inexperienced as us were allowed to drive through this incredible wilderness with so many wild animals roaming free.

Worst travel experience

Ironically, it was Kruger. On day two, we found ourselves in the middle of an elephant stampede on a narrow dirt road. Suddenly, out of the bush, around 20 angry elephants were bearing down on us in a cloud of dust. We had no idea what to do and had nowhere to go – the only thing to do was stop the car and hope. Surrounded by high-speed elephants, some of the herd came very close, trumpeting and nudging the car. In our rear vision, we saw safari trucks reversing at a million miles an hour. We have never been so frightened. We sat rigid in our seats, scared even to breathe. The herd eventually moved on, and the safari guides returned to see if we were okay. They were sure the elephants would flip or trample our car. It's never nice to hear someone say, "We're surprised you made it."


Mark-and-Kate-in-Morocco

Must-return-to places

So many places are special for us, for one reason or another. We spent three weeks in Israel a few years ago and often talk about returning. From an astonishing diversity in culture and fascinating history – reflected in the incredible cuisine, to gorgeous beaches and natural attractions, Israel offers visitors so much. During our three weeks there, we saw a lot of the country, but still, we felt like we had only scratched the surface.

Italy is another country we always return to. The beauty of Italy is that it's an every-season destination. Visit Italy in summer for fabulous beaches and lakeside vacations. Winter for budget skiing, exploring the cities and Christmas festivities. The weather is perfect for travel and a great time for festivals in spring and fall. Of course, food plays a big role in any visit to Italy, and fall is one of the best seasons for food festivals in Italy – from truffles to chestnuts and the wine harvest. Italy is a dream destination for foodies.

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Kate and Mark Pamukkale Turkey

Travel equipment/advice

Surprisingly, after traveling full time for so many years, I am a relatively new convert to packing cubes – especially the expandable ones. I never liked them when all our worldly possessions had to fit in one bag, but now we travel a little differently. Apart from keeping your underwear in one place, packing cubes are great for keeping dressier items from creasing. I can fold a stack of ironed shirts, skirts, pants or whatever into a packing cube and compress them with the expansion zip, and they stay wrinkle-free no matter how much your bag gets tossed around. You'd be surprised how many outfits can fit in one cube.

A power board from your country can be invaluable, especially one with USB ports. Always carry a change of clothes (or a few), basic toiletries, and medications in your carry-on if you check your luggage. If the 2022 luggage debacle taught us nothing else, it was to prepare for the worst.

Keep a secure digital copy of your passport and other important documents for emergencies and online check in's (which are becoming more common post COVID). Finally, never second guess buying travel insurance.

Advice to our younger selves

I don't think it matters where, how or how often you travel, take time to appreciate every experience, no matter how small. Today, there is too much emphasis, especially on younger people, to have perfectly curated travel experiences. Every journey should be more than a tick on a list.

In reality, we don't all have endless time and budgets to have the perfect Insta-worthy travel life, and that's just fine. Half the joy of travel is planning the trip, saving for those little bits extra, the excitement of the unknown and looking forward to the time away from work or study. These may be small parts of the entire travel experience, but they should remind us to savor the moments and be more in the moment while we travel. Travel is a joy and privilege that should be savored.

Never scrimp on travel insurance, and research potential pitfalls of your destination regarding scams or potentially dangerous situations. ■

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Rolling Around the World

Slaven Skrobot

Slaven Škrobot is an adventurer, travel writer, travel blogger and humanitarian. Despite his quadriplegia, he decided to live life to the fullest and travel the world. Salven writes about his travels and the problems he faces on the blog, slavenskrobot.com to educate people about his injury and life with a disability. He aims to encourage, motivate and inspire people to dare to live their dreams. He travels to exotic destinations outside the routes provided for people with disabilities in the simplest possible way, breaking down all barriers and stereotypes.

Best and worst travel experience

Traveling in the way I do brings the best out of both worlds, so there are many. My best travel experiences are definitely when I completed my first project and hand-cycled to Turkey, jungle trekking in Sumatra where I had an opportunity to hang out with orangutans, visiting the biggest sand island in the world - Fraser Island, climbing to the top of the ancient city of Petra in Jordan, seeing a leopard eye to eye in Sri Lanka, and climbing the active volcano Bromo on Java, Indonesia.

I'd say my worst one would be when I almost had a stroke in Greece while I hand-cycled from Croatia to Turkey. Some others were when wehad a guy pull a knife on us in La Jadida in Morocco, when we took a wrong turn in an Egyptian desert and had guns pointed at us, and when I got a screw stuck in my leg while driving on a quad in the Sahara.

Must-return-to-places

I am the kind of person whose blood flows better when there's some kind of action and adventure. I pick my destinations according to that and where is a lot to do and see. I am not a fan of ranking countries and my plan is not to see every country in the world. I liked every country I visited so far and one day I'd like to revisit each of them.

Travel/equipment advice

I always spread my catheters four ways: my backpack, suitcase, shower chair and travel's buddy suitcase, just in case something gets lost. The thing I always carry with me is duct tape, spare inner tubes for my tires, a kit for fixing holes in my tires, a small pump, and tools for my wheelchair. I carry a lot of medical stuff: pills, bandages, antibiotics, and creams, just in case.

When it comes to travel, be open-minded and communicative. People want to help but they don't know how, so mistakes are made. Make sure you calm down the situation and try to explain to everybody what to do exactly, which is very important if someone is about to carry you. Don't be scared of new experiences, bad things can happen everywhere. To avoid as many potential problems as possible, do your research, be stubborn as hell, and be ready for a lot of "no's". If you have a goal and you really want it, keep going, no matter what. Soon you'll see what you can achieve just by being persistent.

Advice to my younger self

There are not many pieces of advice I'd give to my younger self because I am happy with most of the decisions I've made throughout my life. All those decisions made me the person I am today and where I am now and when I look back, I've had a very good life. If I had to give myself any advice then I'd tell myself to trust people less, to take more risks, to always trust my intuition, to believe more in myself and to take better care of my body. ■

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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.

Read the travel perspectives of our thoughtfully curated selection of influential bloggers with disabilities from around the world

Blogger: Josh Wintersgill

Home country: United Kingdom

Blog: Able Move

What and where: Josh and ground crew's handling of wheelchairs.

Frustrated by the lack of accessibility in airports, Josh (who was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy – type 3 shortly after birth) founded Able Move in 2018. Among other things, he blogs about the aviation industry and their interactions with people with disabilities. He experienced stark contradictions at the airports of Tenerife and Bristol - part of a bigger problem across the aviation industry and blogged about it in Contradictions in Ground Crew Handling of Wheelchairs.

Blogger: Rachita Saxena

Home country: India

Blog: Meander Wanders

What and where: Rachita in Northern Vietnam

Rachita has myopia and once worked as a business analyst for three years. She loves to travel and seek new adventures. She never allowed her myopia to stop her from seeing the world, meeting new people, interacting with locals, and experiencing different traditions and food. Read about her recent trip to northern Vietnam in The Ultimate Northern Vietnam. Itinerary to Explore in 2023.

Blogger: Diana Miaus

Home country: Spain

Blog: Diana Miaus

What and where: Diana's selection of luxury hotels in Ibiza

A traveler, photographer, and travel writer, Diana has had deep vein thrombosis (DVT) since she was a college student. This requires the administration of heparin injections, wearing compression stockings, and having to always choose the aisle seat when traveling. But, in spite of it all, she continues to be an avid traveler, sharing her adventures on her blog, which is a handy collection of useful tips and inspiration to help people organize their next adventure. Discover her selection of The best areas & hotels in Ibiza.

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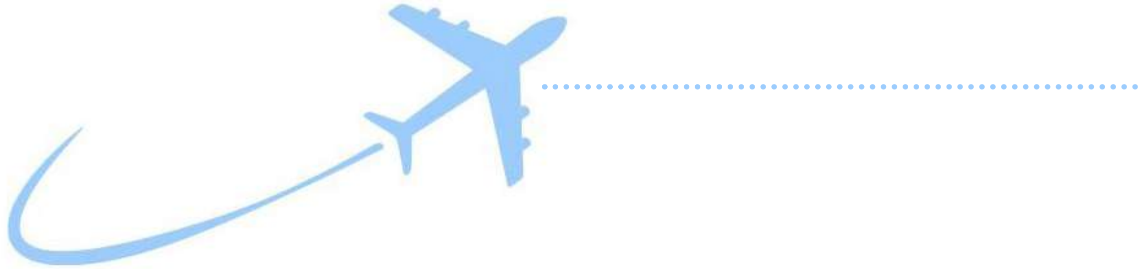

Blogger: Euan MacDonald

Home country: United Kingdom

Blog: Euan's Guide

What and where: Review of a five-star luxury resort in the U. K.

Ten years after being diagnosed with motor neuron disease (MND), Euan founded a digital charity and disabled access review website with his sister Kiki. It contains reviews on the accessibility of venues for disabled people, their families, friends and carers. Read Euan's account of his visit to Coworth Park.

Blogger: Tori Hunter

Home country: Canada

Blog: Tori Hunter

What and where: Tori's visit to British Columbia

Born with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a rare neuromuscular disease, Tori Hunter saw travel as something she needed to do after visiting London and Paris with a friend in April 2018. With the help of her family and friends, she has had the opportunity to travel. Read about her latest adventure to the fully wheelchair-accessible suspension bridge in Squamish, British Columbia.

Blogger: Laura Olds, Joshua Lewis and Mary-Kate Lewis

Home country: United States

Blog: A Piece of Travel

What and where: A visit to San Diego

A blog run by sisters Mary-Kate and Laura with Mary-Kate's husband Joshua (a T-4 paraplegic), highlights wheelchair accessible travel. It showcases destinations, as they've expressed it, in an "honest but positive light," while being mindful of different travel styles and interests. Read about 18 Wheelchair Accessible Things to do in San Diego.

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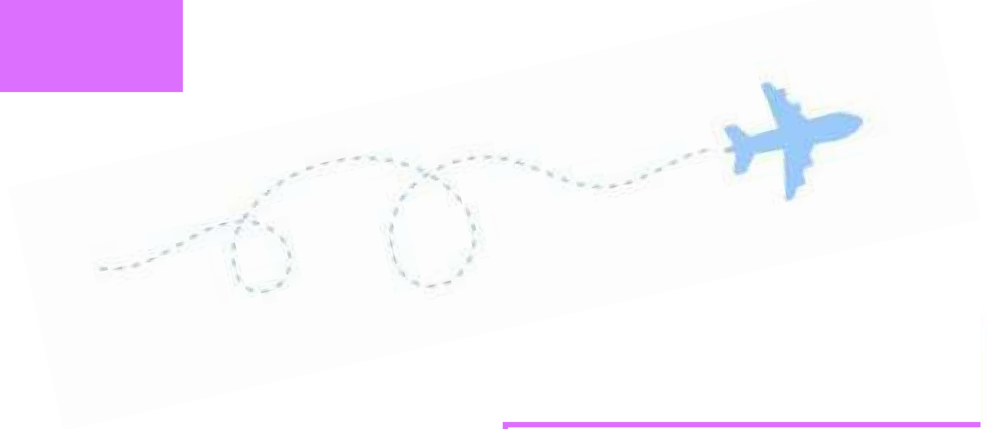


Blogger: Kasey & Andrea Stelter

Home country: United States

Blog: Adapted Adventures

What and where: Tips for wheelchair users' first-time air travel experience

This is a handy how-to guide for wheelchair users, which includes accessible travel pointers, equipment reviews, and lifestyle and fitness tips. Kasey, who has spina bifida, created Adapted Adventures with his wife Andrea Stelter to "encourage wheelchair users to live a happier, healthier and more independent life." They recently shared wheelchair air travel tips to make travel easier and more exciting.

Born with a mobility disability and armed with his electric wheelchair, Kamil Goungor considers his biggest goal to be that of visiting every country! Once, he had pensively watched the travels of others as they sojourned outside Europe. Read how he got to live his dream to tour Asia in Kamakura, which was once the capital of Japan.

Blogger: Kamil Goungor

Home country: Greece

Blog: The Trawheeler

What and where: Living a dream in Kamakura, Japan

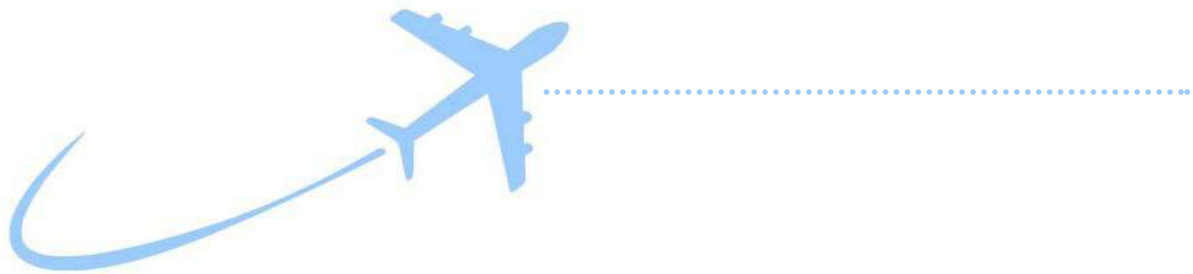
Blogger: Jenny Schmitz

Home country: Canada

Blog: Wheelchair Wandering

What and where: Riding a gondola to a wedding at the Kicking Horse Resort in Golden, B.C.

Diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, Jenny has to use a wheelchair but she realized what other people in wheelchairs have learned: you can still do many of the things you once did as an able-bodied person – just differently. She started skiing, hiking, camping, kayaking and cycling! Read about her experience at the Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, with some assistance from her ski-loving friends, in Participation: Kicking Horse wedding.



Blogger: Robert De Pasquale

Home country: Australia

Blog: Wheelie Good Cruises

What and where: His thoughts about small ships being preferred for cruises lately

Living with spina bifida and hydrocephalus, Robert de Pasquale has proven that disability does not deter him from going on cruises, which he's done for more than 25 years, all by himself! He founded the Wheelie Good Cruises where he reviews which cruises are hassle-free for people with disabilities. Read his thoughts about small cruise ships being eco-friendly and pandemic-proof in Are Small Ships the Future of Cruising?

Heidi sustained a broken neck as a result of a freak tree accident in 2009. Her personal life was affected in many different ways, but she still embraces travel. Travel is a way to remind herself (and others, through her blog) to always find the upside of life. Read about her scenic road trip to the Columbia River Gorge, Mount Hood, and the Fruit Loop around Hood River in Thirteen Years - Look up anniversary from Oregon.

Blogger: Heidi Siefkas

Home country: United States

Blog: Ms Traveling Pants

What and where: A trip to the Columbia River Gorge area of Oregon

Blogger: Ashlea Wheeler

Home country: Australia

Blog: A Globe Well Travelled

What and where: Accessible activities in Hilo, Hawaii

With a hearing impairment and a passion for photography, sustainability and travel, Ashlea has traveled throughout North America, South America, Europe, Oceania and Asia. She compiled her travel stories into a fascinating blog, A Globe Well Travelled. She recently visited Hilo, Hawaii and shared Things to do in Hilo, Hawaii.

Vlogger: Joel Barish

Home country: United States

Vlog: Joel West Barish

Experience: Touring the temples of Siem Reap

World traveler Joel Barish doesn't believe that being deaf is a barrier. He loves exploring the varied customs and traditions of different cultures around the world. He documents his travel experiences with beautiful videography, choosing to allow deafness to be a doorway to exploration rather than a barrier to living his best life. Join Joel in Siem Reap as he explores Agkor Wat, Shinta Mani, and sinks into a private lotus bath in, Cambodia: Shinta Mani Angkor.

Get busy living, or get busy dying ~ Brian started the vlog, Paralyzed Living, in 2008, dedicating it to people living with or curious about life after a spinal cord injury. With helpful tips like how to make chair transfers, how to get back to driving and more, Brian also invites others to share tips or suggest topics. His playlist on travel after a spinal cord injury, offers a great video about Renting a car for wheelchair users.

Vlogger: Brian Kinney

Home country: United States

Vlog: Paralyzed Living

Experience: Renting a car when traveling

Vlogger: Kelcie Miller-Anderson

Home country: Canada

Vlog: The Chronic Explorer

Experience: Wheelchair bike tour of Amsterdam

The Chronic Explorer, Kelcie Miller-Anderson, wanders the world on wheels. Her diagnosis of multiple rare and chronic illnesses didn't end her case of chronic wanderlust. She now explores the world from a wheeled point of view, sharing her experiences along the way. Happily reporting that she only crashed once on the outing, she takes us along Riding a wheelchair bike through Amsterdam.

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Vahen is an author, speaker and founder of GoingFarther.org. In 2017, she was crowned the first Miss Wheelchair Canada. Described as courageous and contagious, Vahen shares experiences about her self-esteem and her abilities. Her motto is, choose courage to overcome your own emotional and physical challenges. A week after her engagement, Vahen ended up in a wheelchair. She and her now-husband unpack those early struggles in this video, reminding us all, Don't Sweat the Small Stuff.

Vlogger: Vahen King

Home country: Canada

Vlog: Vahen King

Experience: Early wheelchair struggles, everywhere

Vlogger: Gajendra Negi

Home country: India

Vlog: Gajendra Negi

Experience: Accessible bus in Delhi

Gajendra Negi's life changed when he fell from a tree and became a quadriplegic. Although life in India isn't easy for people with disabilities, Gajendra chose to let his accident move him forward as a warrior. He is now committed to making life easier for others with spinal cord injuries. It was a good day when the local Delhi DTC bus completed accessibility adaptations, allowing access for wheelchair users and people with disabilities. He shows us the modified bus with an electronic lift in New technology for people with disabilities in India.

Michael Drohan has lived with MS for 18 years and is living proof that life can still be full in spite of our challenges. He discusses issues of living with MS, sharing tips, product reviews and other helpful insights. Admitting that air travel with a disability is daunting, he offers tips and resources to make it better in Air Travel with a Disability: A How To Guide.

Vlogger: Michael Drohan

Home country: United States

Vlog: Michael Drohan

Experience: Air travel tips and resources

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Instagrammers

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

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.

Instagrammer: Debbie & Michael Campbell

Home country: U.S.

Instagram account: @seniornomads

The experience: Statue hunting, Tajikistan

Senior nomads Debbie and Michael Campbell originate from Seattle, Washington, but have been exploring the world, staying in Airbnbs for eight years. So far, they’ve been to 285 cities in 85 countries, and stayed at 270 Airbnbs. This telling photo was taken in Tajikistan, which the Campbells found to have, “a very Soviet vibe.“

After Madeline’s inspiring drive across the country to take a film role in Los Angeles, she was missing her mom. We caught up with them reuniting in Alaska, against some jaw-dropping scenery.

Instagrammer: Madeline Elizabeth Delp

Home country: U.S.

Instagram account: @madelinedelp

Location & experience: Reuniting with Mom in Alaska

Instagrammer: Rahul Ramugade

Home country: India

Instagram account: @rahulon_wheels

Location & experience: On the pitch in Mumbai

Rahul is the Captain of his Mumbai Wheelchair Cricket Team, a national para swimmer and general adventure sports lover. We joined him on the pitch as he prepared for his team to compete in the T10 Wheelchair Cricket National Tournament 2023.

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Instagrammer: El Houssaine Ichen

Home country: Morocco

Instagram account: @disabled_tourist_guide

The experience: Touring the streets of Morocco

El Houssaine Ichen is a disabled tour guide in Morocco, leading disabled and able-bodied tourists. He is building a successful disabled-led tourism business, helping tourists see places they wouldn’t normally have access to. Polio contracted at age three left him paralzed, but that doesn’t slow him down - many people find it tough to keep up with him, even when hiking mountains. Here he captured the magic of a Moroccan bazaar.

This award-winning U.K. disability advocate holds the honor of being one of the first female wheelchair users to become a television personality. She has presented the Paralympics and reported on documentaries. She hosts her own prime-time travel series and is a regular panelist on a talk show. When she opened up, her suitcase that is, we wanted to share her post - A paraplegic’s travel essentials.

Instagrammer: Sophie Morgan

Home country: U.K.

Instagram account: @sopohlmorg

What & where: Paraplegic’s travel essentials, everywhere

Instagrammer: Cori Oehen

Home country: Switzerland

Instagram account: @coriii.aroundtheworld

The experience: Surfing the big waves

“The ocean makes me feel really small and puts my whole life in perspective.” Swiss surfer Cori Oehen is passionate about surfing, competing in the adaptive surfing World Championships. Cori lives with a degenerative nerve disease, but makes riding its waves look easy, as seen in this IG surfing photo and reel.

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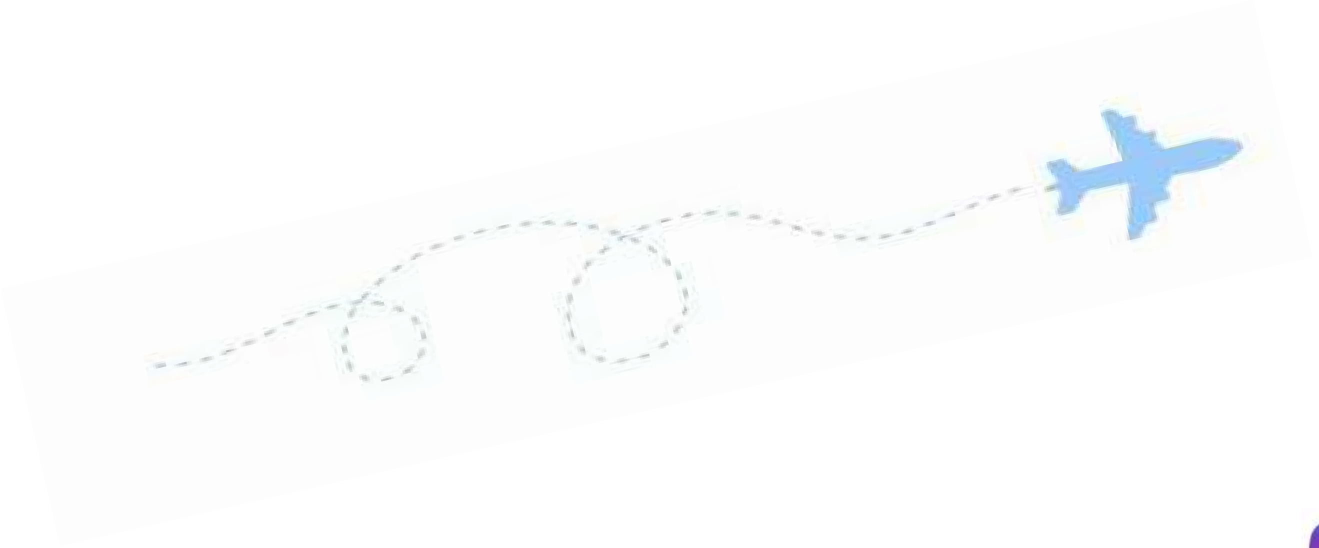

Instagrammer: Carly Findlay OAM

Home country: Australia

Instagram account: @carlyfindlay

Location of the experience: Skating and wheeling, Melbourne

Writer, speaker and appearance activist Carly published her memoir, Say Hello, in 2019. She has appeared on CNN, ABC and has been named one of Australia's most influential women. But she doesn't forget to enjoy life. We found her in her hometown Melbourne, skating with Māori dancer Rodney Bell who choreographed a short dance. The song lyrics reminding us, "Don't let the past steal from today. Find the reel here.

Australian Madeline Stuart advocates for inclusiveness and diversity in modeling. The 21 year old is the first professional model with Down syndrome. With modeling engagements around the world, lots of press, plus product endorsements and sponsorships, Madeline is paving her way to success while paving a new path for other girls. But she took off the makeup and gown for a chance to go paragliding in Bali.

Instagrammer: Madeline Stuart

Home country: Australia

Instagram account: @madelinesmodelling_

Location & experience: Paragliding in Bali

Instagrammer: Lizzie Velásquez

Home country: U.S.

Instagram account: @littlelizziev

Location of the experience: A portrait in front of a portrait, Mexico City

Lizzie Velásquez is an American motivational speaker, activist, writer and vlogger who was born with a very rare congenital disease, Marfanoid–progeroid–lipodystrophy syndrome. This led to a set of unique conditions, and a lot of bullying. But Lizzie turned all that around, being the strong woman she is and now speaks up to advocate kindness. Here Lizzie finds beauty beside itself.

American blogger, athlete and advocate, Rachelle became paralyzed after a friend playfully pushed her into a pool during her bachelorette party, causing her to shatter her vertebrae. Now married and mom to a daughter, Rachelle blogs and has published a book, The Promise, about loyalty in friendship. Still a lover of swimming, Rachel spent years needing her husband to lift her into the local pool. She shared her happiness at having a pool lift installed.

Instagrammer: Rachelle Friedman Chapman

Home country: U.S.

Instagram account: @rachelles_wheels

Location of the experience: Installing a pool lift in North Carolina

Explore the Outdoors

Fresh picks for international accessible activities

By Lucky Mae Fornoles

New Zealand/Envato Elements

AUSTRALASIA

Sailing in New Zealand
The Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron offers sailing programs for people with disabilities. Specially adapted boats and equipment are used to ensure everyone can participate. And since it's been the home of many America's Cup races, what better place to learn?

Adaptive surfing in Australia
Organizations like Disabled Surfers Association in Australia offer surfing experiences for people with disabilities, with trained volunteers and specialized equipment.

EUROPE

Beach accessibility in Barcelona, Spain and U.K.
Barcelona's beaches are some of the most accessible in the world. They provide amphibious chairs and wooden pathways to make it easier for wheelchair users to enjoy the beach. Assistance for swimming in the sea is also available during the summer months.

Check out Nova Icària Beach, which is peaceful and popular. It is near Port Olímpic, which offers lots of restaurants and bars, plus a great range of facilities for sports and water activities.

The Eden Project in Cornwall, U.K.
This indoor rainforest is entirely wheelchair accessible, including the paths leading through the Biomes. It even offers a land train serviced by a ramped shuttle to help everyone access the top of the site. Covering about 30 acres, the indoor Biomes and outdoor gardens offer so much to see, and the accessible facilities make it all easy.

Hand cycling in the Netherlands
The Netherlands is famous for its cycling infrastructure. Several organizations offer hand-cycle rentals. The region's flat terrain and well-maintained cycle paths make it a great place for wheelchair users to explore. Find more here.

Therapeutic horse riding in Ireland
Many organizations in Ireland offer therapeutic riding sessions, making horse riding accessible for people with a variety of needs. Festina Lente empowers people to achieve their personal best in the world of horses, horticulture and community. The charity emphasizes social inclusion and personal development.

AFRICA

Safari in South Africa
Many safari parks have made efforts to be more accessible to all visitors, offering vehicles that can accommodate wheelchair users and lodging that is wheelchair accessible. Spectacular and exciting, Kruger National Park is legendary. Their website recommends various safari tour options to consider.

SOUTH AMERICA

Machu Picchu, Peru
While Machu Picchu's rough stone terrain is challenging, companies like Wheel the World offer guided tours of the site using a special wheelchair, making this wonder of the world accessible to everyone. Check out their four Machu Picchu tour options. ■

Surfer on the beach checking out the surf/Envato Elements

Photo credit to www.edenproject.com

Photo from www.wikipedia.com

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Accessible Product Showcase

Products that empower lifestyles and break barriers

By Lucky Mae Fornoles

8 Pack Tactile Paving Tiles

Designed for the visually impaired, these tactile paving tiles have raised and truncated domes that feet will feel. They are high density, non-porous and can be installed quickly and easily using adhesive and anchors. With indoor or outdoor versions available, these tiles can even be used on footpaths, stairs and train station platforms.

Ispuoocti Smart Walking Cane

This cane is called smart for a reason: it serves three purposes. The base can be changed to single foot, 360°rotating or quad cane, depending on the capacity of the user and the environment they are in. It also has an alarm system, a built-in USB intelligent direct charging function, a 10-speed telescopic adjustment, 12 layers of encrypted spiral ring lock, and TPR anti-slip foot pads. Just a reminder: after adjusting the height of the cane, turn the lock hoop counterclockwise to make the cane more stable.

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Speechnotes

Speechnotes is unlike other voice-typing apps; it does not stop listening when the user takes a break to breathe or think. It has a built-in keyboard, making it easy to dictate words and tap punctuation or symbols. Bloggers, writers, drivers, joggers or people with disabilities who want to convey short or long texts will get fast and easy typing with this app.

WeWALK Smart Cane

The mobility of visually impaired people is enhanced through this revolutionary smart cane and smartphone app. How? WeWALK attaches to the traditional white cane, turning it into a smart cane with innovative technology. It detects obstacles above chest level with an ultrasonic sensor which vibrates in warning. When paired with a cell phone, via Bluetooth, WeWALK lets the user navigate apps on its touchpad, without having to hold their phone. The device is integrated with Alexa, Google Maps and more.

LINAK Baselift

Since families – with able-bodied members or not – now spend more time in the kitchen, an adjustable worktop is necessary. The LINAK Baselift™ actuator system can do just that. It has a unique, smooth and ergonomic height adjustment solution for kitchens. The system is easy to integrate. Its compact design uses only a few cables and has only controls visible so it won't interfere with kitchen design or take up much space.

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Accessible Product Showcase

Products that empower lifestyles and break barriers

Hand Talk Translator

There are over 466 million deaf and hard of hearing people in the world. The Hand Talk app is a pocket translator that brings people of all hearing abilities together. Led by a lovable 3-D interpreter, the Google Play app can automatically translate text and audio to American Sign Language or Brazilian Sign Language. It can also help anyone learn a new language in a practical and fun way.

Speechify

Speechify is great for sighted or visually impaired persons. Save time reading anything with this text-to-speech reader. It is the best app for Chrome, iOS, Android, and Mac – what with the high-quality AI voices that can read up to nine times faster than the average reading speed. These voices also sound fluid and human-like.

Ray-Ban unisex adult Stories

Ray-Ban Stories smart sunglasses were made in collaboration with Facebook. They have speakers and a camera, serving as a substitute for headphones or a phone camera. The dual 5 MP camera takes photos and video clips with the tap of a button or using a voice command - perfect for people with mobility impairments. With plastic frame and plastic polarized lens, the unisex adult glasses deliver true-to-color environment while blocking 95% of reflected light. Even people with mobility impairments can take photos and videos hands-free. Discrete open-ear speakers with 3 built-in microphones, a hyper-responsive touchpad, and content sharing companion, Facebook included.

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Pride Mobility

A high range travel mobility scooter, the Travel Pro Premium 3-Wheel Mobility Scooter by Pride offers a top speed of 4mph with a 6.3 mile drive range, flat free tires, forward/reverse controls, and a weight capacity of 275 lbs. The faux-leather seat and armrests are fully-padded for comfort. Now anyone with a mobility impairment has the freedom to travel.

Wayband Haptic Smartband

Hands-free. Ears-free. Eyes-free. The Wayband Haptic Smartband is really built with the accessibility community in mind. Haptic vibrations transmit information through touch, offering turn-by-turn navigation. Create custom routes for skateboarding, hiking, or snowboarding and the Wayband will keep you on track. The device can even be used to share navigation with the other users.

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The Google Maps of accessible businesses: AbleVu is opening up local businesses to people of all abilities

For someone with different accessibility needs, going out to dinner or grabbing drinks is anything but a simple process. While there are many businesses across the country that have accessible facilities in place, not all of them are designed to make their experience comfortable.

This is also true for people with neuro-diversities, such as autism or social anxiety. In these cases and more, a patron may want to know specific accessibility features of a business before visiting, all to avoid a wasted trip. Meegan Winters, the woman behind a new app called AbleVu, has embarked on a mission to make the world of local businesses more accessible to people of all abilities. Meegan said, "I've been in the accessibility industry for years, and the one thing that I've seen it's missing is a way for people of all abilities to enjoy local businesses as much as the next person. Whether it's wondering how high the tables are in a restaurant or whether there's an accessible stall in the bathroom. For a person with a physical or invisible disability, having decision-critical information about a business before you visit increases the chances that you'll go instead of staying at home."

AbleVu is a free map-based app that lets you search through a database of businesses across the United States who have completed their AbleVu profile and added their accessibility features. It also allows users to submit accessibility-related questions to the business, in case they are not answered through the profile alone. AbleVu supports virtual walkthroughs, photo walkthroughs, text information, as well as a section to show off accessibility features and/or programs.

Meegan and the AbleVu team are on a mission to help more people enjoy local businesses, no matter what their accessibility challenges may be. AbleVu has also begun certifying *AbleVu Accessible Cities,* which are cities throughout the country which have a high concentration of businesses with a high level of accessibility features.

AbleVu's website has just launched and is available for free to browse local businesses at www.ablevu.com


Meegan Winters

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Booking specialists

Accessible booking your next trip

Exceptional Vacations LLC
exceptionaltrips.com

Planet Abled
planetabled.com

Enable Holidays
enableholidays.com

Travel forAll
travel-for-all.com

Easy Access Travel
easyaccesstravel.com

Seeable Holidays
seable.co.uk

Tapooz Travel
tapooztravel.com

Wheel the World
wheeltheworld.com

Incredible Memories Travel
incrediblememoriestravel.com


mélange

February 2022

Accessibility for All

Armani Williams, Autistic NASCAR Driver

" Tell me I can't, so I can show you that I can"

Click here to read Mélange Accessibility for All

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where available

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