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# Accessible Journeys

WINTER 2023

## SILENT Adventures

*Deaf Travellers on the go!*



# EXPLORE

## ACCESSIBLE DESTINATIONS

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Greater Fort Lauderdale

Arizona

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# Note from the Guest Editor



ANGELA LYNN



ello everyone,

I'm delighted to welcome you all to the Winter edition of *Accessible Journeys*.

I come from the fabulous city of Las Vegas, a place that never fails to excite visitors and residents alike! It's a city known for its vibrant entertainment scene and I cherish the fact that it offers everything one could desire.

As great and fabulous as our city is, it's hard to believe there's still room for improvement. In Las Vegas, when it comes to inclusion and resources for people with abilities, we are lacking. I'm hopeful that over time, positive changes will come to fruition in our city.

In the intricate tapestry of life, I've woven

my passions into a vivid tableau that resonates with the beautiful melody of inclusion. As an enthusiastic writer, host and producer of *The Angela Lynn Show* a Deaf interpreter, educator and unwavering advocate for an inclusive world, my journey has harmonized the realms of travel and inclusion into a purposeful symphony. I invite each of you to join me in a world where silence is golden, and communication is profoundly powerful.

I consistently relish opportunities to share my unfiltered, authentic experiences and I feel incredibly fortunate to be a part of *Mélange Accessibility for All* and now, *Accessible Journeys* magazine. In this issue, everything is real and raw, sharing with you personal journeys of a Deaf traveller, where every word is a brushstroke on the canvas of my life.

My joy in championing inclusion knows no bounds as I crisscross the globe to underscore its significance in the context of travel. From airplane destinations to cruise getaways, train adventures and more, I've explored it all. In this issue, I've contributed articles that delve deep into the experiences of people with abilities in the world of travel. Within these pages, we'll embark on a transformative exploration of travel and inclusion, uncovering its profound impact on lives across the spectrum.

In this issue, you'll gain insights into the various facets of accessibility for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals navigating a hearing world.

Resources may sometimes be scarce, and sign language may not always be widely understood, but every traveller carries a unique story and a personal journey. Each one requires varying degrees of support to make their travels as inclusive as possible.

I warmly encourage each of you to embark on this voyage with me, where silence speaks volumes, and every word resonates deeply. Together, we will explore inclusion, navigate diverse landscapes of travel, and learn how shared experiences and understanding can bridge gaps, creating a symphony of inclusion that transcends the barriers that once stood in our way. Let us build a world that embraces every traveller with open arms and where every unit of communication, message or expression resonates with the vision of inclusivity.

If you have any questions about my travel experiences or would like to be a guest on *The Angela Lynn Show*, I invite you to contact me at [angelalynn@theangelalynnshow.com](mailto:angelalynn@theangelalynnshow.com).

Wishing you all a positive and joyful winter season. Stay warm, and don't forget to savour a cup of tea or a cup of joe while reading these fantastic articles contributed by people from around the world.

Warm regards,

Angela Lynn



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# Leading Off: Silent Adventures

The world through the eyes of Deaf travellers

## Communication is a two-way street

By Nancy Baye

**A**s senior editor, my job is to be a stickler for the standards set for our brand. But there's a conundrum when I worry about when changes that might be seen as disrespecting how contributors expresses themselves. I never want to do that, quite the opposite. Editors are often caught between loyalty to style consistency and the voice of their contributors. It's a pickle. For example, when a writer puts quotations around words to indicate they're being tongue-in-cheek, I must remove those quotation marks, which our style only uses for direct

quotes. That happened in this issue, turning "normal" into normal.

But what is normal anymore? As it pertains to people, to life, hasn't normal become an unnecessary word?

This issue was steered by Guest Editor Angela Lynn, who navigated us through the world of auditory challenges, and how they affect travel. When she used the term people with abilities, I felt that zing of empowerment—focus on ability, not disability.

I held the thoughts—what is normal, what is ability?—as I



paged through our articles. Lori Roach details how she uses the term hearing impaired to convey her situation. She found that her preferred term, hard of hearing, can lead to uncomfortable communication, so she avoids using it. Diane Lisanti unpacks why it's often preferable for her to lip-read, citing that when people speak to her loudly, their sound and lip movements distort, leading to poor communication.

We've long heard about how people with disabilities carry the onus to adapt. Why is it that they must bend to the abled world and not the other way around? If there is no normal anymore then who is supposed to twist and curl around what?

A further note on adaptation, from Mrs. Sariah Ibrahim, reminds travellers to understand and respect the local people and culture they venture into. She adds, "Tolerance, regardless of differences in religion or race, is crucial." Now we were on fire—including all spectrums of normal and ability, plus all cultures and creeds! Our writers, bloggers and vloggers continue to remind us that we have much to learn about the humans who share and move around our global village.

When contributors addressed the topic of tech, with Yash Romilus describing how Siri enables her to travel and communicate with ease as a DeafBlind adventurer, another light bulb went off—what a time we live in, with technology exploding, creating more and better ways for us all to communicate.

And there's no reason for that to be a one-way street.

When Angela celebrated smartphone technology, which enables communication between Deaf and hearing people, but also between most any languages, she posits a provocative idea—apps for hearing people who enter the Deaf world. What a chance for us all to spin the norm! While people with disabilities fight to break down barriers to the normal world (it is hard not to add quotations

here!), developing and utilizing technology, bending to communicate, carving new frontiers and pushing boundaries . . . I have to ask, what are abled people doing to explore the world of people with disabilities?

I'd embrace an app that allowed me to employ sign language when I encountered a Deaf person – after all why should they have to adapt to me? I'd love an app that offered appropriate verbiage and insights on how to assist any person with any challenge. Just a quick reference and voila, I've made the effort to accommodate someone else. How's that for normal, for ability, for respect?

*Accessible Journeys* would love to hear your thoughts on this. We're all on this journey of humaning together, let's use all advances at our disposal to lift one another up, and to explore the world without limits for anyone. ■

“What are abled people doing to explore the world of people with disabilities?”

Nancy Baye



Angela Lynn



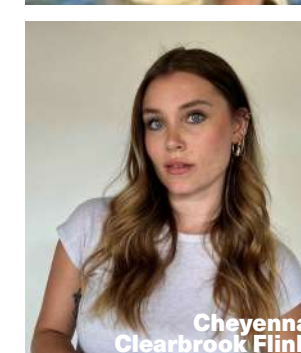
Lori Roach



Diane Lisanti



Videliz Njoki



Cheyenna Clearbrook Flink



Sariah Ibrahim



Yashaira Romilus



Bridgette Jones



Marissa and family



Kady' and family



Kayla and Maci



Angela Lynn and mom

# Empowering, inclusive travel tips for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind travellers in a hearing world

By Angela Lynn

Here are eight empowering travel tips for people with abilities who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and/or DeafBlind, especially when travelling in a hearing world or in locations with minimal accessibility.

## 1. Empower yourself

Take charge of your travel experience by learning about your rights, accessible resources and assistive technology that can enhance your journey. Self-advocacy and knowledge are powerful tools for ensuring a more inclusive and enjoyable trip.

## 2. Pre-travel research

Thoroughly research your destinations and accommodations. Look for reviews or resources specifically focused on accessibility for Deaf, Hard of Hearing or DeafBlind travellers. This helps you identify places that are more likely to meet your needs.

## 3. Plan ahead and be prepared

Thoroughly plan your trip, including accessible transportation options, accommodations and accessible attractions. Prepare a travel checklist to ensure you have all necessary medications, assistive devices and communication aids.

## 4. Utilize visual and written aids

Carry visual and written communication aids like a notepad and pen, communication cards or smartphone apps with large text and visual aids. These tools can help convey your needs and facilitate interactions in a world where sign language may not be widely understood.

## 5. Enhance your stay with personalized assistance

When booking accommodations or checking in, engage with the staff to customize your experience for maximum comfort and enjoyment. Share your preferences and request specific accommodations, such as visual alarms, captioned TV or vibrating wake-up devices, to make your stay more pleasant.

## 6. Travel with a communication partner (for those who may require additional assistance)

Consider travelling with a companion

who is proficient in sign language or familiar with your preferred communication method. They can provide valuable assistance with communication and navigation, enhancing the smoothness of your journey.

## 7. Know your rights

Familiarize yourself with disability rights and laws at your destination, both domestically and internationally. Knowing your rights can help you advocate for necessary accommodations and accessibility.

Understanding your rights, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), is pivotal in securing equal access and accommodations during your travels. It empowers you to advocate for necessary adjustments and fosters a more inclusive travel environment, benefiting both you and future travellers with diverse abilities.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is a significant international agreement that protects the rights and dignity of individuals

with disabilities, including Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind people, in various aspects of life, including travel and accessibility.

## 8. Share our experience

Share your travel experiences on platforms like blogs or social media to inspire and inform others with

similar abilities. Your insights and recommendations can be invaluable to fellow travellers seeking accessible options.

For me personally, I find that number 8 holds a special place. Sharing your experiences is like an open book on inclusivity. It's been my guiding star when I travel because I always want

to have the inside scoop on what awaits me, be it in a local, national, or international setting. While there are more travel tips out there this one stands tall as a universal key to becoming a savvy and effective traveller, just like me. ■



# Travel Tips for **Hearing People** meeting Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind people

By Angela Lynn

When travelling solo, I often blend in seamlessly like anyone else. I sometimes find it amusing that hearing people initially try to communicate with me when I'm not looking at them, only to become frustrated or confused—until they realize I can't hear. Upon this discovery, nervousness usually sets in, but there's no need to be nervous—I don't bite! (LOL). They often inquire if I can lip-read or speak, to which I respond yes, I can lip-read and use some vocal communication, though it's not perfect.

It is absolutely important to raise awareness and provide travel tips for hearing people to ensure smoother interactions with Deaf travellers. Here are some tips for hearing people to consider when they encounter Deaf people during their travels.

## **1. Be respectful**

Treat Deaf people with the same respect and courtesy as you would anyone else. Remember that their communication methods may be different but they are fully capable travellers.

## **2. Face-to-face communication**

When trying to get their attention or communicate, face them directly and make eye contact. This makes it easier for Deaf people to understand and lip-read.

## **3. Use clear gestures**

If you suspect someone is Deaf, you can use simple and clear gestures to convey your message or get their attention. Avoid shouting, as it can be ineffective and even uncomfortable.

## **4. Be patient**

If you discover that someone is Deaf, be patient and understanding.

Communication may take a bit longer, but it's worth the effort to ensure clear understanding.

## **5. Ask about communication preferences**

If appropriate, ask the person about their preferred communication method. Some may prefer sign language, speaking, lip-reading, writing, or a combination of these.

## **6. Avoid negative assumptions**

Don't assume that Deaf people can't communicate at all. Many Deaf people have effective communication methods, so ask them directly about their abilities.

## **7. Educate yourself**

Consider learning some basic sign language or familiarizing yourself with Deaf culture. This can enhance your ability to communicate and interact respectfully. Learning some basic sign language in advance is

not only a valuable skill, but it can be crucial in emergency situations. Being able to convey essential information or assistance through sign language can make a significant difference.

As a recommendation, you can find basic sign language resources on my website, [TheAngelaLynnShow.com](http://TheAngelaLynnShow.com), under the Beautiful Language tab. These resources are interactive and user-friendly, making it easy for anyone to learn and potentially use sign language when needed.

By being mindful of these tips, hearing travellers can create more inclusive and positive interactions with Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind people they encounter during their journeys. ■

We want your feedback.

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# Lori Roach

## shares strategies to overcome communication barriers during travel

An interview by Angela Lynn



Lori Roach

Lori has aphasia and is Hard of Hearing. She is the author of [My Mother, My Voice: My Life with Aphasia](#)

Aphasia, as defined by the [Mayo Clinic](#), is a disorder that affects how you communicate. It can impact your speech, as well as the way you write and understand both spoken and written language.

### Introduction

I am Lori Roach, hailing from Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Currently, I am enthusiastic about learning new things to maintain my health, as well as writing and reading, which assist in improving my speech. I am employed alongside Naturopathic Doctors, working in an administrative capacity where I handle tasks such as data entry, invoicing, product orders, managing inventory and communicating with patients. This role posed considerable challenges for me due to difficulties in understanding what others were saying. I have both aphasia

and am Hard of Hearing. I often make it known to others about my situation so that we can achieve better mutual understanding and improved communication.

### What are your favourite travel places?

These include Shannon Falls and Squamish in British Columbia, as well as various locations in Vancouver and throughout the province. I relish driving around in a peaceful state of mind. I often come across tranquil spots to unwind and reflect, especially in places that bring back memories of my mother. Among these, the countryside

holds a special place in my heart, with its vibrant trees, serene lakes and oceans. Escaping the hustle and bustle of the city to immerse myself in such scenery provides a meditative experience that I cherish.

### What is aphasia?

Some children who struggle with learning to speak share similarities with adults who have aphasia. Individuals with aphasia can hear sounds, including voices, but these sounds may not always appear meaningful to them. People with aphasia acquire language much like children do, by breaking it down into smaller components and linking

sounds with written symbols. Although I may not be personally acquainted with anyone who is both Deaf and has aphasia, it's important to note that aphasia can affect both Deaf and hearing individuals, from infants to seniors.

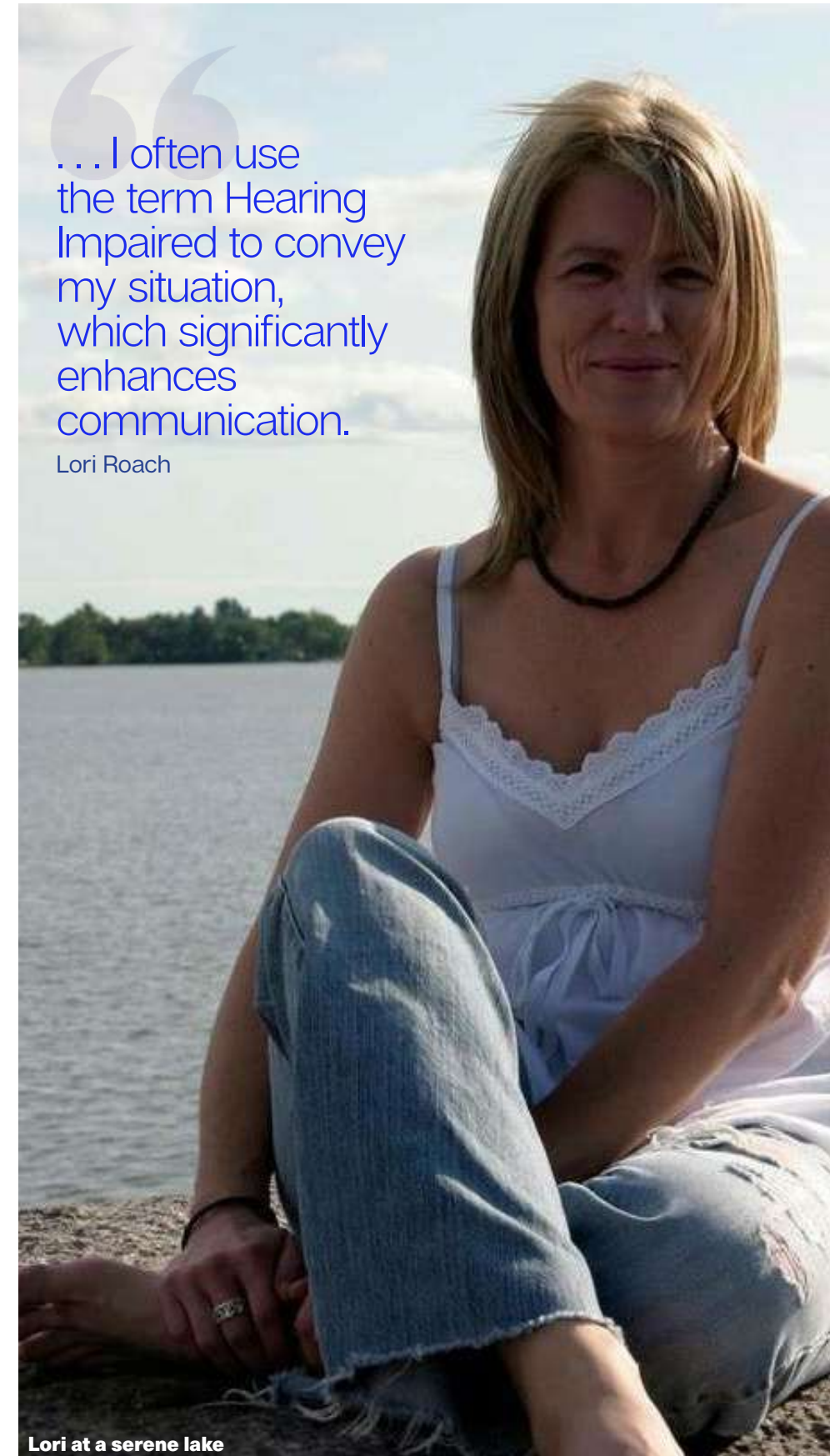
### How has your experience as a Hard of Hearing traveller with aphasia influenced the way you plan your trips?

Significantly! As an adult, I no longer have the comfort of travelling with my parents, who used to be my voice. It has been a challenge because I now have to communicate independently. I used to feel frustrated when people didn't comprehend me, and I would question whether I had misspoken or if my speech sounded unusual. Over the years, I've developed more effective communication strategies through online research. I've discovered that I don't always need to explicitly mention, hi, I have aphasia. Instead, I often use the term Hearing Impaired to convey my situation, which significantly enhances communication. It's worth mentioning that this preference for Hearing Impaired arises because saying Hard of Hearing can sometimes confuse people and make interactions uncomfortable.

Hearing Impaired tends to be more easily understood and accepted by others, leading to smoother communication. However, I want to clarify that I personally prefer to identify as Hard of Hearing rather than Hearing Impaired.

... I often use the term Hearing Impaired to convey my situation, which significantly enhances communication.

Lori Roach



Lori at a serene lake

**How do you handle situations where communication barriers due to your deafness and aphasia arise during your travels?**

In situations where communication becomes challenging due to both my hearing loss and aphasia, I employ various strategies while travelling. I adhere to my doctor's recommendation to use my voice regularly. I speak deliberately and clearly to enhance comprehension, and I occasionally resort to writing with pen and paper. When I find myself in noisy environments like pubs or restaurants, where loud music can affect my speech, I patiently wait for the noise level to diminish before I engage in conversation. In such instances, I also use my phone to type out notes when necessary.

**How do you find or choose accommodations that are understanding and supportive of your needs as a Hard of Hearing traveller with aphasia?**

Selecting accommodations that cater to the needs of a Hard of Hearing traveller with aphasia presents various challenges due to multiple factors. Firstly, many accommodations may lack awareness of the specific challenges faced by individuals with aphasia and hearing impairments, which can result in a lack of appropriate facilities or staff training to provide suitable support. Additionally, there is a potential for misunderstandings to arise with communicating needs and preferences. My struggles to express these requirements

clearly, coupled with the potential for accommodation providers to misinterpret them, can further complicate the selection process. To address these challenges, I frequently utilize my cell phone, paper and pen to communicate with the staff. In some instances, I also opt for Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) services based on the situation and the individuals involved.

**What's the location of your next trip?**

My next trip will be a vacation to Timmins, British Columbia for my family reunion next year. In the next few years, I would love to travel to the Netherlands, Ireland, Germany and other places in Europe.

**Share a bit about your journey as an author**

I authored a book titled *My Mother, My Voice: My Life with Aphasia*, and it was a truly remarkable experience. A psychologist encouraged me to share my aphasia journey through writing, and with my son's assistance, I began the endeavour. Completing the book spanned four years, marked by numerous emotional highs and lows. I am genuinely delighted to have been able to share my aphasia experiences through this book.

Here's a summary: Taking a look at a life through the eyes of Lori will show you that a hard life lived is not a life wasted. *My Mother, My Voice* stands as a window into another world. A world where the disabled, in one way or another, are not given the same opportunities that a community of equality ought to provide, and are more often not, overlooked and cast aside.

For more information, visit [mymothermyvoice.com](http://mymothermyvoice.com).

Lori is working on another book about her journey which she hopes to finish in the next year or so. Stay tuned! ■

GUEST EDITOR'S COMMENT

"I read Lori's book and found it exceptionally fascinating. It was truly inspiring to gain such an intimate insight into what aphasia means for a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual upon diagnosis.

In Winter 2024, Lori will be featured on *The Angela Lynn Show* where she will share her journey of triumphing over aphasia, a story you definitely won't want to miss.



Lori and family



Taking a look at a life through the eyes of Lori will show you that a hard life lived is not a life wasted. *My Mother, My Voice* stands as a window into another world.



**Travel is filled with memorable sights, sounds and tastes, but it is challenging!**

## Q&A with Diane Lisanti

By Angela Lynn

Diane is a resident of the bustling metropolis of New York, New York, a proud member of the Hard of Hearing community and a true Hard of Hearing Traveller.

Her journey with hearing loss began when she was diagnosed at just four years old (believed to be caused by a high fever at 14 months). She started wearing a hearing aid at the age of five, and by 1960, at eight years old, she had embraced binaural hearing aids.

Throughout her life, Diane has shown immense resilience and determination. Between the ages of five to 20, she engaged in speech therapy, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to improving her communication skills. She pursued her education in hearing schools, with the exception of her second graduate program at Gallaudet University from 1993 to 1995, where she embraced a unique educational experience. "At Gallaudet, I experienced an immersion of ASL

in an educational setting which was beautiful and the first time where information/thoughts were visual and understood," she shared. "On a personal level, it was the first time I met intelligent, Hard of Hearing people who were comfortable with their identity and sharing our stories with friends and acceptance of everyone."

For Diane, lip-reading has been an integral part of her communication toolkit. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its mask requirements, made her adapt even more to the world around her, highlighting the importance of controlling her environment, be it lighting, acoustics or the size of social gatherings. In the days before closed-captioning became widely available for television and movies, Diane's determination shone bright as she quite literally watched and pieced together the storylines. Her passion for instrumental music remained a constant source of joy, as she found the simplicity of musical tones to be a

welcoming and accessible aspect of her life.

### What are some of your favourite destinations?

Some of my most cherished destinations, ones I'd absolutely love to revisit, include Scotland, Italy, Belgium and Israel. These places have left an indelible mark on my heart. Additionally, I've had the pleasure of returning multiple times to Cape Cod, MA, and Montauk Point, N.Y., which hold a special place in my travel history. My passion for travel runs deep, though I've found it challenging when journeying alone. Over time, I've honed the art of remaining composed while explaining to others how best to communicate with me.

### Do you have an experience and place that is extra special?

Scotland, with its captivating cities and majestic mountains, holds a timeless allure, especially Edinburgh,

where I felt transported to an era that seamlessly melded the ancient with the modern. Italy, on the other hand, felt like a second home, given that it's the ancestral land of my great-grandparents. While I've had the chance to explore Italy, my heart longs to delve deeper, particularly into Naples and its surroundings, where my ancestors once thrived. The ocean has always held a special place in my heart, making any coastal destination feel uniquely soothing and rejuvenating. And then there's Bruges, Belgium, a city that enchanted me with its exceptional beer, delectable chocolates and mouthwatering cuisine.

### What is travel like for you as a Hard of Hearing person?

Regrettably, my travel experiences have often been less than ideal, sometimes even a pain in the neck. I consistently find myself having to explain that I rely on lip-reading, and that speaking louder actually hinders communication as it distorts both sound and lip movements. To make matters more complex, my speech quality is often described as too good, which can lead to misunderstandings. To mitigate these challenges, I've learned to anticipate my needs, like checking the Inflight magazine for information on available beverages and pre-ordering my food before the flight. However, when it comes to requesting ADA compliant hotel rooms, it's often a hit or miss situation. Many times, the room is designed for mobility disabled guests, resulting in impracticalities like the toilet being too high and my feet not reaching the floor, or the sink being too high.

Flying poses a particular set of

problems for me, mainly due to adverse effects on my hearing caused by air pressure changes. To cope, I must keep my hearing aids on and remain awake to periodically yawn or pop my ears. On two occasions, I experienced hearing loss lasting from one hour to a staggering 15 hours after a flight. To minimize such issues, I do my best to opt for non-stop flights and avoid layovers whenever possible.

Unfortunately, I encountered a tour guide who once refused to face me while providing a tour. In this situation, I had to rely on a friend to provide an oral interpretation of the information being shared.

### Do you think the travel industry provides adequate communication options for Deaf and Hard of Hearing travellers?

It's worth noting that there are very few airlines that offer captions for in-flight communications and videos. Regrettably, the same applies to public transportation in New York City, where announcements on trains, buses and subways lack captioning accessibility. In recent times, mobile phones have introduced captioning technology to facilitate interactions with hearing individuals. However, not all hearing individuals are comfortable with me using my phone to decipher conversations, and the accuracy of these captions can be inconsistent.

### What are some of the things you do to make travel less challenging for you?

Right now, I hold TSA Global Entry status, which I obtained in 2022. This has significantly reduced

the challenges associated with comprehending security personnel during travel. As always, I make a conscious effort to anticipate my needs in advance, such as reviewing the inflight magazine for information on available beverages and pre-ordering my meals before the flight to streamline my journey.

### Any upcoming travel plans?

I do plan to travel later this year to visit my sister in Los Angeles, California, visit friends and family that I have not been able to see due to the pandemic, as well as revisit Italy and Scotland. Additionally, I'm considering the possibility of exploring Iceland or another northern location where I can witness the Aurora Borealis. However, I'm uncertain about embarking on guided tours, as my hearing has deteriorated significantly over the past year—unless they offer ASL/total communication or captioning accessibility. ■

**I consistently find myself having to explain that I rely on lip-reading, and that speaking louder actually hinders communication as it distorts both sound and lip movements.**

Diane Lisanti

# Videliz Njoki

## Deaf solo traveller, passionate about raising awareness



Videliz Njoki, a Kibera, Kenya native, is multi-talented. She serves as a news anchor and host at Signs TV Media Kenya, has excelled as an actress, and passionately champions disability inclusion. Videliz also finds joy in travelling and networking.

Interviewed by Angela Lynn. Written by Pauline MacKenzie

Travelling is a passion that transcends boundaries, bringing people from different backgrounds and abilities together to explore the world's wonders. For one adventurous traveller from Kenya, the journey is not just about visiting new destinations but also about breaking barriers and inspiring others. Guest Editor Angela Lynn spoke with Videliz Njoki, delving into her travel

experiences and aspirations as a Deaf solo traveller. Videliz shared insights, tips and tools that make her journeys both memorable and accessible.

### Essential travel companions for a Deaf traveller

Being well-prepared is crucial for any traveller and for a Deaf traveller,

it's even more essential. To navigate the hearing world seamlessly, Videliz relies on a set of trusty companions.

#### Smartphone

Her smartphone, equipped with SMS and text messaging, is a versatile tool that helps her navigate unfamiliar places with GPS apps like Google Maps, stay updated with weather forecasts, and efficiently

manage her travel plans. "The ability to transcribe conversations and capture precious moments allows me to treasure the experiences I encounter," she shared, "but local signs and gestures have also become my universal language, enabling me to communicate and connect with people from various corners of the world."

#### Notebook and pen

A small notebook and pen serve as a reliable backup for jotting down notes and crucial contact information when using a phone may not be the most convenient option.

#### Power bank and universal charger

These ensure that her devices remain charged and ready no matter where her travels take her.

#### Translation app

The Live Transcribe app comes in handy when there are no captions provided in her surroundings, allowing her to communicate effectively. "With these dependable tools and my proactive approach, I embrace each journey with confidence and enthusiasm, finding my way around independently," she shared.

Videliz has valuable advice for others who may feel anxious or nervous about embarking on solo journeys as a Deaf traveller or as a person with a disability.

#### Cultivate flexibility

Embrace flexibility and an open mind, as every new place offers something new to learn. And be willing to challenge yourself. "When I embark on travels, I encounter something new each day in each new place I visit."

#### Research and prepare

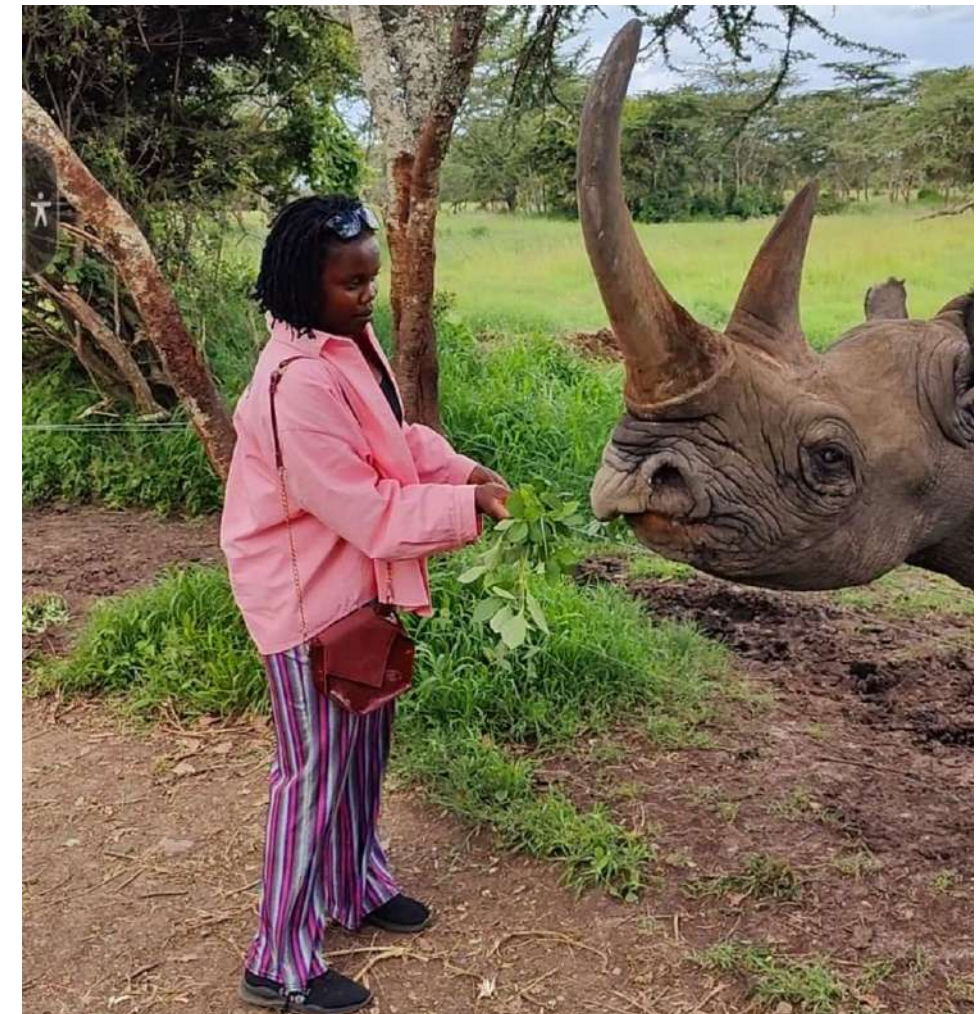
Conduct thorough research about your travel destination to ensure a smooth and enjoyable trip.

#### Raise awareness

Use your travels as an opportunity to raise awareness about your unique experiences and challenges.

#### Stay positive

Maintain a positive mindset and pursue your passions while on the go.





“Travelling is a continuous cycle of learning and unlearning. I use my travels as an opportunity to raise awareness. Most importantly, I never stop pursuing my passions. With a positive mindset, I can journey to any destination I desire. My tools empower me to confidently engage with new environments and people while cherishing the memories that enrich my travels.”

And her travels have only just begun. Tanzania has captured her heart with its stunning beaches, rich culture, captivating sights and warm hospitality. The journey to this East African gem was prompted by an exciting opportunity – participation in the Miss and Mr. Africa Deaf Cultural and Art event, hosted at the Serena Hotel in Dar es Salaam. The event not only allowed her to showcase her talents but also gave her a deeper appreciation for the country’s diverse culture. But while Tanzania has become a cherished destination, Videliz’s wanderlust knows no bounds. India, with its mesmerizing

sights and vibrant culture, is next on her list of dream destinations. The idea of immersing herself in the rich tapestry of Indian traditions and exploring its diverse landscapes fills her with excitement. And, she longs to witness the iconic Eiffel Tower in Paris, a symbol of romance and artistry that beckons travellers from around the world.

Looking ahead, there are more exciting travel plans on the horizon. “My aspirations include attending the 3rd World Deaf Tennis Championship in Greece, where I aim to showcase my skills and passion for the sport. Following that, I have my sights set on exploring the breathtaking landscapes and natural wonders of Namibia. From the mesmerizing Etosha Park to the tranquil Swakopmund beach city and the vibrant capital of Windhoek, Namibia promises a diverse and enriching travel experience. Zambia also beckons, as I dream of witnessing the majestic Victoria Falls and embarking on an unforgettable

safari along the Caprivi River. These future goals fuel my wanderlust and drive me to immerse myself in the beauty and culture of these remarkable destinations.”

Being Deaf does not hamper the spirit of this intrepid traveller. With the right tools and attitude, Videliz believes the world can be accessible to Deaf travellers. ■

“Use your travels as an opportunity to raise awareness about your unique experiences and challenges.”

Videliz Njoki





# Cheyenna Clearbrook Flink

## Confident Deaf influencer and advocate

Cheyenna is a Deaf influencer and young mom. Born Deaf to a Deaf family, she was raised in Washington State and moved to British Columbia, Canada a few years ago. She has been a social media influencer since 15 years old, first starting on that journey with a friend on YouTube. Their mission was to spread awareness of Deaf culture and have the world see their lifestyle through their eyes. She was part of the enriching [Netflix Deaf U series](#) and this led her to eagerly create videos of Deaf culture and showcase her lifestyle as a Deaf person.

### What are some common misconceptions you've encountered as a Deaf influencer, and how do you address them through your content?

Often, misconceptions about the Deaf community are varied, including questioning their ability to hear and their speaking skills. I don't speak or hear but it doesn't mean others who are Deaf cannot hear or can choose or not choose to speak. Also, I have encountered comments that are considered audism, saying they thought Deaf people can't read or need to use braille, which is not true. Deaf people can read and write, they don't need to use braille because this is for people with vision loss. Deaf people do not have vision loss they have hearing loss. I simply address these with a firm explanation.

Some stereotypes hearing people have of the Deaf community are, "Deaf people should learn how to speak, they should get a cochlear implant or a hearing aid." They

suggest how to fix us but those will not. As Deaf people, we have our language, culture, and everything. We do lots in our community. We are thriving and are simply fine!

### What are some of the destinations you've visited so far, and what made them special for you?

I have been to Guatemala, Belize, Mexico and Iceland. Guatemala is very vibrant and colourful. People there understand Deaf people and they have a natural ability to figure out how to communicate through gestures without having to speak. Just the same with Belize and Mexico.

### What are some of the challenging experiences you've had while on your journeys?

Naturally, there are several barriers in the form of communication and most often I try to gesture or point to something. Also, I rely heavily on my phone to communicate.

I also use Google Translate to communicate if it is in a different language. This is successful. Sometimes I try to read their lips to understand but this doesn't always succeed. I think we, as Deaf people, have been so used to finding ways to communicate that at any point we will naturally figure it out on the spot, and get it done.

For announcements when something is happening while I'm travelling, for instance taking a flight or bus, this is challenging. I would have to ask someone who is sitting beside me what is going on. I must be assertive and ask around to know what is happening. Also, I inform them that I am Deaf and need to be aware if something has happened before hopping on the bus or flight.

### How do you navigate communication barriers in your daily life?

As a Deaf person, I have a natural skill to be assertive and figure out on the spot how to communicate. It never really bothers me and I don't

feel awkward or scared to reach out to a hearing person. In my daily life, I rely most often on my phone to type or using a paper to write on. I will use sign language if someone knows how to sign and if not, use my phone to type my message. I love using Notepad. It is easy and has an option for hearing people to speak and it translates into words. It saves me some time.

**Do you have any specific strategies that have made your journeys around your community or when travelling abroad more accessible and enjoyable?**

One strategy is to inform someone ahead that I am Deaf and might need some assistance. I always do that for flights. I would inform the flight attendant that I am Deaf so they would be aware in advance. Or on a bus, I would just ask someone who is sitting beside me if something has happened. It just depends on what situation I am in and how much in advance I should be informed, but for activities, for sure I would let them know that I am Deaf.

**What advice would you give to Deaf aspiring travellers who dream of exploring the world? Are there any essential tips or resources you would recommend to help them start their own journey?**

I would say, always be assertive and don't stop yourself by feeling frozen, not knowing what to do when there are communication barriers. Just go ahead and ask because you came out to travel so don't let anything stop you from exploring or anyone tell you what

you should and should not do. Carry your phone with you at all times, or paper to write on. Also, be prepared for barriers but stand up for yourself when you want to participate in activities but people disagree with what you know you can do.

Always inform people that you are Deaf, and let them know there are some areas in which you might need assistance. You're Deaf and there's nothing to be ashamed of! You should just go out and do what you want to do. Just be a person and don't think "I am not sure if I can do this because I am Deaf."

**What are the most significant changes or improvements that need to be made in society to create a more inclusive and accessible world for the Deaf community?**

I think the simple answer is to be aware of the Deaf community. Try to accommodate us and listen to us. Respect Deaf people, treat us as people and not from a disability perspective. We are just people, like you. Try to figure out how to accommodate us and don't tell us, "Sorry we can't do that," or we're "not trying enough" and "try to find a solution." If you are aware, it will bring you and the Deaf community together.

**Can you share some tips for aspiring Deaf influencers who want to make a positive impact in the digital space?**

Just continue what you are doing, stay firm and stand up for yourself. The world can be brutal and not everyone else understand us Deaf

people. Focus on the goal you want to achieve and do it without hesitation regardless of other people's opinions or criticisms.



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“As a Deaf person, I have a natural skill to be assertive and figure out, on the spot, how to communicate. It never really bothers me and I don't feel awkward or scared to reach out to a hearing person.”

Cheyenna Clearbrook Flink



# Mrs. Sariah Ibrahim

## shares good and bad memories of travelling as a Deaf person



Mrs. Sariah Ibrahim is a remarkable Deaf woman who travels the world to empower and uplift Deaf communities. She's married with three grown sons and is also a proud grandmother of two. With over 30 years of dedicated involvement, she now plays a pivotal role at the Negeri Sembilan Deaf Association (NESDA) in Malaysia, located in Negeri Sembilan.

Sariah, a respected figure with a bachelor's degree in psychology, serves as a social worker, Deaf interpreter, and counselor for NESDA, and she also holds the prestigious position of president at the Malaysian Deaf Advocacy and Welfare Association (DAWN).

### Which destinations have you enjoyed the most and why?

I have travelled to various destinations as a Deaf traveller, with Japan, Singapore and Indonesia among my favourite places.

Japan is known for its advanced facilities for people with disabilities, providing a comfortable environment

for them. In contrast, Indonesia, a neighboring country to Malaysia, lags in facilities that are friendly to people with disabilities, but Deaf individuals there have learned to be more self-reliant. During my time in Japan, I marvelled at their friendly facilities and advanced technology for people with disabilities. High-tech devices like light-up alarms, doorbells, disability-friendly

emergency buttons and even sign language interpreters on TV made it easy for people with disabilities to navigate without hindrances. These were technological advancements not available in Malaysia at the time. My friend took me to visit a local Nara Deer Park in Nara, a city in Japan. We arrived in the early evening, even though it was only 4 pm. When I offered food to the

deer, how did they react? Did they snatch it eagerly? Not at all! The deer displayed remarkable politeness towards those who fed them. But how did they express this politeness? Some of the antlered deer would playfully chase after guests holding food. However, once they reached a guest, they would bow their heads as a sign of respect, asking for a treat. This gracious gesture, where the deer bowed their heads, is reminiscent of a Japanese cultural custom. It's a memory that I will cherish, as it was truly heartwarming.

During my trips to Indonesia, shopping was a must due to its affordability and vast selection. However, one must exercise caution, as the area is known for pickpockets. On one occasion, my bag was torn from behind, and my money was stolen by an unseen perpetrator who had been following me closely. It served as a reminder to remain vigilant while exploring the bustling markets.

### As a Deaf traveller, what resources do you typically use to seek accessible travel information and advice?

As a Deaf woman and a Muslim, I often face challenges due to society's misconceptions about my appearance. Preparation is key when embarking on a journey, whether for tourism or travel. Gathering information online, from traveller books, and considering factors like health and security are essential.

Responsibilities to family and work should also be addressed before leaving. While in a foreign country, it's important to maintain self-confidence, be prepared for unexpected challenges, interact



with locals, and effectively resolve conflicts. Tolerance, regardless of differences in religion or race, is crucial. Understanding and respecting the local culture and identifying accessible facilities are also vital aspects of travelling.

### Have you had any unexpected challenges as a Deaf traveller, and if so, how did you overcome them?

I travelled alone to Brisbane, Australia, to attend the WFD Conference. Unlike previous trips, no one was there to welcome me at the airport. I waited in the arrivals area for a while, feeling puzzled and wondering why no one came to pick me up. This was my first solo trip, and I had to figure things out on my own. I approached the airport counter and asked for directions to the city, where I needed to find accommodation near the event venue. They provided me with a map and instructed me to take a bus to the city, where I would have to navigate on my own. This experience taught me how to handle solo travel and discover more about myself

along the way as an international traveller.

### In your experience as a Deaf Malaysian, have you noticed any differences in communication with hearing and Deaf people in terms of language and culture?

As a Deaf Malaysian, I have encountered various forms of communication used by Deaf people, including different approaches embraced by hearing people. However, my most significant learning experiences came from interacting with Deaf people from different countries who did not use Malaysian Sign Language, which presented unique communication challenges. During our orientation on the first day, we were introduced to International Sign Language by a Deaf teacher and a Deaf sign interpreter. It was my first experience learning International Sign Language, and it opened new possibilities for smoother communication. During breaks, I observed a group of Deaf people conversing in Japanese Sign

Language and eagerly learned from their interactions. Eventually, I became proficient in both Japanese Sign Language and International Sign Language, which was a rewarding experience while travelling different places together. I also found Japanese culture to be distinct and intriguing. In Japan, it's customary to bow slightly when greeting someone, which is different from Western cultures where greetings may involve hugging or kissing on the cheek. I appreciated the Japanese way of greeting, as it minimized physical contact and felt safer, especially in the context of avoiding the spread of infections like COVID-19.



Sariah with Gallaudet University President, I. King Jordan, during the Deaf Way II event in Washington D.C.

### Where have you had some of your most memorable travel experiences?

**China:** During my stay in Beijing, I decided to explore the subway system with a friend, seeking a new adventure. We were filled with excitement as we purchased our tickets and selected a destination that was conveniently connected to our hotel via the same train line. While capturing photos at the station, our enthusiasm was abruptly interrupted by a man who approached us assertively. He aggressively attempted to snatch our camera, but we implored him not to do so. In that tense moment, we were unsure of his identity; he could have been an imposter or a plainclothes police officer due to his neat attire. Our fear escalated as bystanders remained unresponsive, and our inability to communicate with him added to the distress. Our predicament took a turn when two uniformed police officers arrived and intervened on our behalf. They instructed us to board the next train immediately and, overwhelmed by fear, we did so without verifying the destination. It turned out that we had unknowingly boarded a train heading in the opposite direction, taking us far from our hotel. Our anxiety deepened as we realized that no further public transportation was available when we disembarked at the station. To make matters worse, the exit doors were locked due to the late hour, and the station counter was unattended. We scoured each exit door in search of assistance until we finally encountered a security guard who unlocked one for us. Stepping outside, we found ourselves in unfamiliar surroundings, distant from our hotel. Adding to our distress, we discovered that we

had left our wallets behind, with only a few coins in my pocket. The clock indicated that it was already 11 pm, and there were no public transportation options in sight. Our only recourse was to consider taking a taxi, despite our limited funds and the late hour. With trepidation, we hailed a taxi and negotiated a fare with the remaining funds we possessed. Thankfully, the taxi driver was understanding, and we reached our hotel safely. It was an unforgettable experience, one that left an indelible mark on our journey.

**Washington D.C.:** I was honoured to be selected by Gallaudet University, U.S. to attend DeafWay II. The prospect of visiting America, a country known for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and its superior facilities for Deaf individuals, filled me with excitement. It was a dream come true, a desire I'd harboured for a long time, nurtured by countless American movies I'd watched. My journey began with a flight to Singapore and then a transfer in Hong Kong. I encountered multiple stringent security checks, including the scanning of my shoes, at these airports – a novel experience for me. The heightened security measures were a response to the aftermath of the 9/11 incident and reflected the increased vigilance for visitors to the U.S. Upon reaching Los Angeles Airport, a sprawling expanse, my anxiety was further heightened when I learned of a shooting incident. Our plane was forced to halt, waiting for instructions for an extended period. I couldn't fathom why we weren't moving toward the gate, and it wasn't until nearly two hours later that the plane resumed its journey. We taxied closer to the

Welcome to Beijing

TianAnMen



airport terminal, and passengers were instructed to disembark and board a shuttle bus. Initially puzzled by the decision, I later understood that the safety of passengers was the top priority, as explained by the crew. This meant a rush to catch my connecting flight, which was located quite a distance away. Upon reaching the connecting counter, I presented my boarding pass, underwent an inspection, and was asked to remove my shoes for scanning. Fortunately, I managed to board the United Airlines flight, all of this being a consequence of the earlier incident, which compelled me to hurriedly catch my connecting flight to Washington DC. During the flight, fatigue, hunger and jet lag took their toll, causing me to fall asleep. However, the flight attendants distributed a light meal to all passengers except me, as they didn't want to wake me. Upon waking up, I naturally felt hungry and wished to request food from the flight attendants, but they declined. Their reason? We were nearing our

landing in Chicago, where we had a connecting flight, and there was no time for in-flight meals. Upon arriving in Chicago, I was promptly directed to my next flight. After enduring a long journey, I found myself both exhausted and famished, with no opportunity to purchase food. My final leg took me directly to Washington DC. This 24-hour journey, which involved three flights, the shooting incident in Los Angeles, time zone adjustments, and stringent security checks, presented numerous challenges that I will never forget.

### Where's the next place you're excited to visit?

I long to reconnect with dear friends in Japan and the U.S. driven by a desire to bridge the physical distance that separates us. However, my commitment to government-mandated teaching responsibilities requires careful financial planning for these reunions. With hope for an extended vacation and a managed

budget, I am thankful for the assistance of my friend in Singapore in reconnecting with my close friend in the U.S. where I eagerly anticipate their upcoming wedding. I hold onto the hope of reuniting with my friend from Japan. ■

“While in a foreign country, it's important to maintain self-confidence and be prepared for unexpected challenges. Tolerance, regardless of differences in religion or race, is crucial.”

Sariah Ibrahim

## EDITOR'S PICK: DeafBlind, Yashaira Romilus transcends barriers and touches the world!



I'm thrilled to shine a spotlight on a remarkable individual whose journey embodies the very essence of inspiration. Ms. Yashaira "Yash" Romilus, a DeafBlind Latina traveller, has embarked on extraordinary journeys that have taken her across 31 U.S. states and to countries as diverse as Mexico, Honduras, Canada, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Haiti, Ecuador and Spain. Her adventures are a testament to her unwavering resilience and the incredible power of the human spirit.

What sets Yash apart are the inspiring stories that punctuate her travels. She navigates the world with grace, overcoming communication barriers with a determination that is nothing short of awe-inspiring. When approached by individuals who can both see and hear, she effortlessly reaches for her smartphone. With practiced ease, she opens the notes

app, designed for legibility with large text. Then, with the press of the Siri microphone button, she utters a phrase that transcends barriers: "I am DeafBlind. Please speak into my phone to communicate with me." It's a simple yet powerful act that opens the doors to understanding and connection.

Language barriers hold no sway over Yash's unwavering determination. She relies on a Google Translate app to bridge gaps in other languages, ensuring that her message of inclusion and unity resonates wherever she goes.

In her travels, Yash extends a hand – literally – to touch a million other hands, arms or shoulders. She seeks guidance and engages in the universal language of touch. A gentle tap, a reassuring squeeze, or a friendly pat on the arm become

conduits for communication, transcending the limitations of hearing and sight.

What truly sets Yash apart is her refusal to let her disability define her or limit her exploration of the world. Her journeys are a reflection of an indomitable human spirit, proving that with determination and adaptability, one can not only touch the world but also be touched by it, regardless of the challenges faced.

Yash is an inspiration, a living testament to the heights that human resolve can reach. Her story reminds us that every obstacle can be surmounted, and every journey, regardless of its challenges, can be a voyage of discovery and connection. ■

### What's it like to be Deaf

In silence, I find a world so profound,  
Where vibrations and signs are all around.  
A language of hands, expression so bold,  
Where stories are told, and emotions unfold.

In stillness, I sense the world's heartbeat,  
The rustle of leaves, the patter of feet.  
It's a symphony of visuals, colors so bright,  
Like a sunflower in morning and peace at night.

But challenges exist in this soundless sphere,  
Misunderstandings happen, the occasional fear.  
Yet strength arises from this unique view,  
Resilience and tenacity, old and new.

What's it like to be Deaf, you may ponder,  
It's a journey of life, a world of wonder.  
A world full of silence, yet rich and complete,  
Where we find our rhythm, where connections meet.

So, let's embrace differences, break down the wall,  
With unity and acceptance, we stand tall.  
The Deaf experience, is a world to explore,  
A beautiful silence forever to adore.

In the quiet of morning, like a sunflower's first light,  
Or the hush of evening's, velvet starry night.  
We find our rhythm, in a world shining bright  
With hands that speak, our stories rewrite.

By Angela Lynn

# Deaf traveller, Angela Lynn on the go!



## How has your passion for travel enriched your life and broadened your perspective as a Deaf individual?

When I took my first overseas trip to Oahu, it sparked my love for travel. I wanted more than what Phoenix, Arizona, had to offer. During that trip, I told my parents that I wanted to explore the world.

One day, I read the phrase Sea of Learning in a magazine. I didn't understand it at first, but it stayed with me. It finally made sense during a family trip to Disney World in Florida when my mom explained that it meant there was so much to learn and discover in the world, like an endless sea of knowledge.

This phrase became my inspiration as I grew up. It fueled my passion for travel as a Deaf person, helping me break down language barriers and connect with people from different cultures. Travelling has opened my eyes to new perspectives and taught me that kindness and curiosity can bridge any gap.

I'm grateful for this journey, and I look forward to sharing more of it with the world.

## How do you navigate airports and public transportation systems in foreign countries where sign language may not be widely understood?

I'm passionate about travelling, whether it's to countries with emerging economies or

those with more established ones, and whether I'm going alone or with someone. I always prepare ahead of time to have successful and enjoyable trips. I'm really thankful for smartphone technology because it helps me travel anywhere and communicate with people in their language. I have a vivid memory of when I attended the World Federation of the Deaf Congress conference in Paris, France, in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic began. I was really pleased that I knew French because it allowed me to communicate using writing and gestures, even though I wasn't confident in speaking French, which is not my first language. The same situation occurred when I travelled to Alexandria and Cairo in Egypt, as well as Doha in Qatar. I had some knowledge of Arabic when it came to reading and writing, but speaking it was a challenge. My ability to speak was limited to English, not Arabic or French. It might sound a bit unusual, but it worked for me.

When I'm at airports and using public transportation in foreign countries where sign language isn't widely understood, it can be tough. In these situations, I rely on writing, gestures and basic sign language to communicate. It's important to plan ahead, learn some basic local phrases, and be patient when asking for help from airport or transportation staff.

Sign languages are not universal and vary widely from country to country, and sometimes even within countries. By definition, there is an International Sign Language that Deaf travellers use. It is a simplified, flexible communication tool, unlike formal, structured sign languages. What's really interesting about

international sign language is how unique it is. People from different countries don't use their native sign languages; instead, we use a mix of signs and visual concepts to get our messages across clearly. It's a wonderful thing because it breaks down language barriers that spoken languages can sometimes create or require extra gestures to understand each other.

## Do you travel solo? If so, share that experience with us. Do you find solo travel as a Deaf person overly challenging?

Yes, I do travel solo, and I find it to be a rewarding experience. I also like having company for more adventure. While there can be challenges, such as communication barriers, solo travel allows me to be more independent and self-reliant. It has helped me build confidence and adaptability, and I've met incredible people along the way who have gone out of their way to assist me.

Once, I missed my flight from Kuala Lumpur to Sabah, Malaysia due to a visa issue. It took me two hours, with help from locals, to find the visa processing place. This experience taught me to always check visa requirements. This mishap happened on my way to Mount Kinabalu in Sabah, Borneo, Malaysia.

## Are there specific travel destinations that you find more accommodating for Deaf individuals, and why?

I can't speak for everyone, but I do know that some travel destinations roll out the red carpet for Deaf travellers. It really depends on what



your travel goals are and what kind of accommodations you need. Countries with vibrant Deaf communities and solid sign language support, like the United States, Canada and some parts of Europe, tend to be more welcoming and accessible. Plus, places with top-notch technology and communication systems usually make it easier for Deaf travellers to get around.

## What technology or apps do you find most helpful for facilitating communication and navigation while travelling?

In my experience with accessible travel, I've always had a world of resources at my fingertips, thanks to my phone. Technology and apps have really changed the game for Deaf travellers. I find communication apps like Google Translate, text-to-speech apps, and messaging apps like

WhatsApp to be incredibly helpful.

Sometimes, I reach out to Deaf organizations for more information or the assistance I need. I also network with fellow Deaf individuals, those who are hard of hearing, Deafblind, Children of Deaf Adults (CODA), sign language interpreters and even some hearing people who know a lot about resources for Deaf accessibility. I receive wonderful support and learn a lot from the apps they provide on Google Play or the Apple Store.

But let me be clear, I'm a strong advocate for inclusion, and these apps are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to accessibility for people with different needs. This technology is only the beginning, and I look forward to a future where I don't have to search for accessibility, it's just there, ensuring equality for all. Sometimes, I dislike having to seek out special needs services. It makes me wonder if there's a similar service for hearing people when they enter the Deaf world. It's just a thought on my part about accessibility.

**What strategies or tools do you use to bridge language barriers and communicate effectively with locals?**

To bridge language barriers in Las Vegas, a vibrant city of entertainment, I aim to advocate for inclusion. Despite its flashy exterior, Las Vegas doesn't always live up to its diversity promise. I use various methods to communicate, like the saying, music knows no barriers possible.

I recall a funny incident with my ex-fiancé when he thought I needed

constant help. While shopping, I went alone and sought assistance from the staff when I needed it. His surprise was evident, but I'm used to being independent, thanks to my mom's teachings when I was young. I don't like to be too dependent on others. I'll seek help when needed.

I am eager to advocate for inclusion, emphasizing the importance of ensuring accessible facilities for people of all abilities, thereby creating an environment that equally serves everyone. Las Vegas promotes diversity and inclusion, but I can see that there's still room for improvement. Many people from around the world come to Las Vegas, so I want to always make an effort to break down barriers by simply letting them know I'm Deaf and making it easy for them to work with me, ask questions, or follow through with whatever is needed. It's about making accessibility a reality for everyone.

**Can you share any memorable experiences of positive interactions with locals or other travellers who were accommodating and understanding of your deafness during your travels?**

I've been fortunate to have many heartwarming experiences with locals and fellow travellers who showed great care and love for my Deafness. Some individuals went the extra mile to communicate with gestures and expressions, making me feel deeply cared for and fully embraced. These interactions have strengthened my belief in the goodness of people worldwide.

**Are there any cultural or etiquette considerations you've learned while travelling that are particularly important for Deaf individuals?**

When exploring new destinations, it's crucial to keep cultural norms and etiquette related to Deaf individuals in mind. Some cultures may frown upon staring or pointing, while others might embrace curiosity and open communication. The golden rule? Approach each scenario with respect and a generous dose of patience, as attitudes toward Deafness can vary as much as the colours of a global palette.

**The Angela Lynn Show. Tell us a bit about that. Will you say your love for travel has influenced your talk show?**

My journey is driven by three key factors. First, during my time at Gallaudet University, I was inspired by David Simmons, who hails from South Africa and served as the SBG President. He encouraged me to become a TV anchor for SBG TV News, and his support transformed my self-esteem. I realized my hidden talents, thanks to his belief in me. Additionally, Robert Eller, who hails from Toronto, Canada, played a pivotal role in my journey. He encouraged me to take on an acting role of a roommate in the student production *Raving for One* at Gallaudet University. This experience opened my eyes to additional hidden talents I never knew I had and gave me hope for the path that would lead me to *The Angela Lynn Show*.

My international experience in Malaysia further broadened my horizons and inspired me to break stereotypes when related to abilities. As an educator, I received numerous awards and became an advocate for various reasons. One of my primary motivations was to show hearing parents with children with abilities that their journey need not be restricted. If you allow them to discover and grow, as I did, you'll find that striving to be normal isn't the beautiful answer. What's truly beautiful is embracing who you are as a person on your unique journey.

That's where I learned some of life's most valuable lessons. I wanted to demonstrate to the world that being Deaf or a person with abilities doesn't always limit you. I believe that God has gifted each of us with tools to learn and that we must all work together as humans. That's how I perceive it, and it's a belief that has shaped my journey.

Now, with *The Angela Lynn Show*, I share my experiences as a Deaf traveller, promote Deaf culture, and discuss accessibility and travel. My love for travel enriches the show, connecting me with people worldwide who share these interests. Being recognized as the voice of inclusion continues to help me to remove barriers for people with abilities, creating a more inclusive world for all. ■

“Travelling has opened my eyes to new perspectives and taught me that kindness and curiosity can bridge any gap.”  
Angela Lynn

To all Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind and people with abilities who may have hesitations about travelling, I want to share a message filled with inspiration and good vibes, just like a sunflower that always looks up to the sun without looking down.

The world is an abundant garden of incredible experiences waiting for you to explore. While there may be challenges along the way, the rewards of venturing into new cultures, meeting diverse people and expanding your horizons are truly priceless. So, be like that radiant sunflower, always reaching for the sun with unwavering optimism. Be prepared for your journey, stay patient in the face of challenges and wholeheartedly embrace the adventure. Remember, the Deaf community is a global one, and there are countless kind-hearted people out there who are willing to support you and help make your travel dreams come true.

Let your inner sunflower guide you, always looking up, and you'll discover a world full of beauty, connection and enriching experiences.



# News Bytes

Our roundup of notable news from around the web



## Inaccessible clubs leave two-thirds of disabled individuals excluded

U.K. government data reveal that nearly 66% of disabled individuals faced access issues at pubs, restaurants, bars and cafes. [Read more](#)



## An IATA survey reveals an 80% satisfaction rate among passengers with disabilities regarding air travel accessibility

According to a recent survey conducted by the International Air Transportation Association (IATA), 80% of travellers needing special assistance express satisfaction with airports' improved accessibility for individuals with disabilities. [Read more](#)



Aviation's accessibility problem for passengers with limited mobility is being addressed by private companies developing solutions for electric wheelchair users. [Read more](#)



## Deaf trainee officer wins £86,000 payout after unfair sacking

The tribunal found Mr. Karim experienced disability discrimination through his dismissal. [Read more](#)

## British Columbia, Canada adopts building code for safety, accessibility and climate resilience

New building code updates require power-operated doors, elevators in larger apartment buildings, designated wheelchair spaces in event facilities, inclusive signage and more. [Read more](#)



## Table tennis for the vision impaired

Swish, invented in Australia, is an adapted table tennis game for those with visual impairments. [Read more](#)

## Saskatchewan, Canada passes accessibility act to remove disability barriers

A significant milestone: the Accessible Saskatchewan Act took effect on International Day of Persons with Disabilities. [Read more.](#)



## Access card: instantly convey your accessibility needs with discretion

Nimbus Disability, a leading Derby-based organization is offering a revolutionary Access Card for disabled individuals to discreetly communicate their access needs. [Read more](#)



## New Dubai buildings must be Wosool seal certified indicating accessibility for people of determination

The seal reflects the leadership's goal to make Dubai an accessible city for people with determination, enhancing its appeal and quality of life, and reinforcing its status as one of the world's best cities for all. [Read more](#)



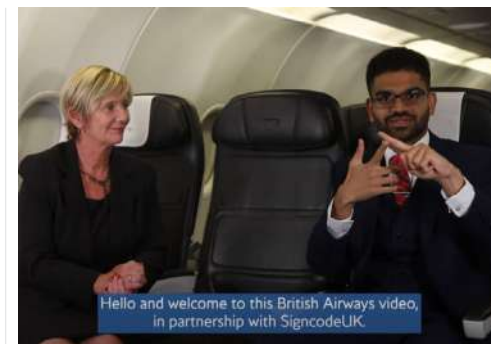
## Visit Anaheim earns Certified Autism Center™ status, boosts city accessibility

Certified by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES), the staff of [Visit Anaheim](#) are now trained to assist autistic and sensory-sensitive visitors and families in Anaheim. [Read more](#)



## iSchoolAfrica's Deaf Developers Program prepares youth for success

This groundbreaking [program](#) aims to equip unemployed Deaf youth with iOS app development skills, offering them opportunities for future success and financial independence, while promoting inclusivity in society and the workforce. [Read more](#)



## British Airways enhances accessibility for deaf travellers when flying

British Airways collaborates with Signcode U.K. to provide deaf travellers with signed video content, offering information from booking to in-flight services. [Click here to watch the video](#)

## Best electric wheelchairs of 2023

From price and weight to portability and speed, a new list is out on the best electric wheelchairs of 2023. [Read more](#)

# Family Fun No Limits

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

Families with disabilities exploring the world together



## Overcoming invisible barriers

The number one thing that's keeping you from travelling

**T**he world is full of barriers for wheelchair users and the mobility disabled. Everywhere you look there are stairs, or rocks, or fallen trees, or curbs or potholes or something that keeps you from being able to easily navigate the world around you. The more we travel, however, the more I come to realize that these aren't the barriers that keep us home. In fact, there are often simple ways around all of these obstacles. The biggest obstacle isn't a physical barrier, it isn't visible, and it isn't even standing between our children and the world... it's in front of us, as parents.

**Often, the number one thing keeping us from experiencing the world and living life to its**

**fullest is our own fear of the unknown.**

When I first found out my middle son would never walk, I envisioned us being trapped in the playroom for the rest of our lives. I'm not exaggerating. In the emotional response to diagnosis day, I had no idea how to get out of the house and back to being the explorers we once had been. Nothing about my son's body had changed since the day before, but all of my plans and dreams had. I wonder if we'd never received a diagnosis if we would've just kept figuring things out one day at a time.

I know a lot of parents in situations like mine who don't travel because it would be too hard, which makes it stressful instead of enjoyable. If you're in that group, may I ask you to stop and answer for yourself what

parts are too hard? As an example, let me tell you a few things that come to mind for me, and why the reality isn't so bad.

### The imagined barriers

We have medical routines that take a lot of time. We get a slow start in the morning, because we need an hour and a half to get ready, and we need to be in by 6:30 to start a bowel flush before bed. How can we fit that in with a full travel day?

Do you know what I learned? This changes nothing for our family. When we're at home, we get up early to get everything done in time for school. We don't participate in many evening activities, because we need to be at the house. When we travel, we just have shorter days out - matching our routine at home. It felt overwhelming, but it's really



Sand seems so overwhelming, but there are loads of [accessible beaches](#) that make it easier.

the same chaos in a better location!

The same is true for medical supplies and equipment. It feels like a lot to pack up and take on the road, but somebody packed it up to send it to us in the mail. There's no reason we can't put it back into a box.

This theory carries all the way over to mobility challenges, too! I worry that there will be too much we can't do: that it won't be worth the trip. This has

never been the case. Most places will have some things that we can't do, but the accessible has always outweighed the inaccessible.

In all of these examples, the barrier is in my mind. There's a certain amount of bravery required to get over myself and take the next step.

It's overwhelming to think about all that goes into planning a trip with a situation that's already overwhelming.

Maybe that's where the biggest mental shift needs to take place. Our vacations will never be like the relaxing solo beach getaways we snuck in when we were in college. That's not because vacations are no longer good, it's because our lives have changed! Perhaps there will always be some level of anxiety when we travel, because that's what we carry with us. Do you know what else we bring with us? Our favourite people who still have the world to explore!

## Overcoming your invisible barriers

What do you do to help you balance the chaos at home? A support group? Online resources? A network of providers and experts?

Whatever works for you at home transitions into travel!

Your support group will have expertise on places that are easier to travel with your needs, or hacks to help you do it better. Search the web for accessible travel resources and you'll be inundated with information. Refine the search to your child's specific needs and you'll be able to prepare for every situation on your trip. Your doctors can tell you which hospitals are best to use in case of an emergency while travelling.

Our return to travel began with a Google search on hiking with wheels. At the time, I didn't even know wheelchair hiking existed. That launched a journey into bigger and better things as I discovered my own disability parenting community, alongside the disability travel community.

If you can identify the fear that's holding you back, it's likely that the solution is much easier than you'd thought.

### Is it worth it?

If you're thinking this all sounds like a lot of work, you're not wrong. The key is in remembering that it's no more work than what you already



Even basic moments hit differently when you can get away from your own home. We play more, snuggle more and enjoy each other as a family more when we don't have the same pile of home responsibilities.

do every day. The difference is, the chaos is now somewhere warm and sunny.

This is family respite for us. With our kids' needs, it's hard to just get away and take a break. The change of scenery and the new experiences we share together creates a shared respite. We snuggle a little longer in the mornings, we take a moment to acknowledge the beauty of the sunset, and we savour the local flavours... via takeout, after the picky eaters have gone to bed.

These moments are a gift - worth it every single time.

The biggest obstacle isn't a physical barrier, it isn't visible, and it isn't even standing between our children and the world... it's in front of us, as parents.

Jennifer Allen



A beautiful moment at Balboa park in San Diego, after taking care of the catheter bag, flushing the bowel and bladder and caring for stomas. Adventure can co-exist with medical routine.

# Practical tips for travelling with a child with hearing loss



Amie Jo is the mother of this issue's guest editor, Angela Lynn. We asked her to share advice from her own experiences travelling with a child with hearing loss. The following are snippets of her best tips and sage advice gleaned from her own years of experience.

## 1. Advance preparation

Always prepare your child for the upcoming excursion. Inform them ahead of time about the destination and what they should expect during the trip. This not only reduces anxiety but also fosters excitement and anticipation.

## 2. Effective communication tools

Ensure you have the necessary tools and strategies in place for effective communication with your child throughout the trip.

Some key considerations include a notepad and pen for written communication—particularly useful for quick exchanges and notes.

## 3. Learn basic sign language

If you don't already know sign language, consider learning the alphabet and some basic signs. This should include emergency signs such as help, stop, yes, no, and my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Basic sign language can be a lifeline in emergencies or situations where verbal communication isn't possible.

## 4. Key travel phrases or signs

Prepare a few essential phrases or signs related to travel, like hotel, bathroom, or food, to make communication smoother in new environments.

## 5. Emergency information

Ensure your child has emergency contact names and numbers on their person or at least in their suitcase. This is crucial in case your child gets separated from you or if you become ill and cannot respond to questions.

## 6. Utilize technology

Speech-to-text apps aid communication, especially in noisy or crowded settings.

## 7. 911 Emergency training

Teach your child how to dial 911 in case of emergencies. Ensure they understand the importance of this emergency number and how to use it. Even if they are unable to speak, the 911 Operator can hear what's going on, locate where they are, and send emergency assistance.

## 8. Thinking ahead

Always think ahead, considering your child's strengths and weaknesses. Tailor your preparations to suit your child's specific needs.

I also want to emphasize the importance of providing your child with an emergency number in case they get lost or encounter any difficulties during the trip. You can even instruct them on how to approach the police and ask them to call the provided number in case the family cannot be located. It's about empowering your child with the knowledge and tools to handle unforeseen situations.

By following these tips and thinking ahead, you can make travelling with your child with hearing loss a rewarding and stress-free experience. It's all about equipping yourself with the right tools and strategies to ensure effective communication and a memorable journey for both you and your child.

## WITH THE SPOKE APP, YOU WILL NEVER MISS A WORD!

### DEAF & HARD OF HEARING TRAVELLERS: THE SPOKE APP

ACCESSIBILITY for all



MULTILINGUAL services



### DISCOVER THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL

Are you tired of missing crucial airport announcements? The Spoke App is a revolutionary app designed for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

What does it do? Spoke listens to live airport announcements, captures and delivers them as text on your smartphone, in your chosen language.

The deaf and hard of hearing community often faces significant stress and frustration while travelling, especially when they cannot see or hear important audio announcements. Spoke aims to alleviate this by ensuring that audio announcements made by airports and airlines containing vital information, are accessible to everyone. Spoke users only require a smartphone.

### BENEFITS AND BENEFICIARIES

**Deaf and hard of hearing travelers:** Spoke is key! You'll get important information delivered to you conveniently on your phone, which means less stress and frustrations, more autonomy and enjoyment of your travel experience.

**International travelers:** Spoke is the solution to all your communication issues while traveling to a foreign country as the app translates and texts announcements directly to your smartphone in your language.

**General and distracted traveller:** With Spoke, you will receive important audio messages as text even while listening to music with your headphones or talking on your smartphone.

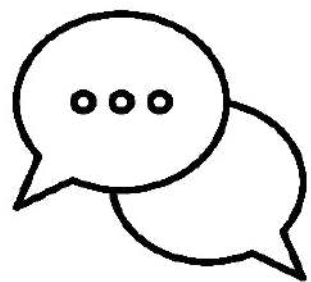
**Airports and airlines:** Spoke = improved customer experiences for travellers by providing them with enhanced communication and accessibility options.

**DID YOU KNOW?** People living with disabling hearing loss represent over **15% of the traveling public**. As per the World Health Organization, the number of people with disabling hearing loss will grow from **466M in 2018**, up to **630M by 2030** and over **900M in 2050**.

### JOIN OUR BETA PROGRAM!

**Individuals:** be the first to experience stress-free, accessible airport services for the deaf and hard of hearing. Your feedback will help us refine the future of inclusive travel. Sign up at [thespokeapp.com](https://thespokeapp.com) now and make every journey more enjoyable and effortless!"

**Organizations:** Are you interested in providing the Spoke app to your travellers? Contact us at [spoke@metcove.com](mailto:spoke@metcove.com)



# Journeys of joy

## Insights from four moms on travelling with children with hearing loss

By Jennifer Allen

Perhaps the most important part of any journey is finding your way. Just like maps are made by those who have gone before (or all knowing satellites - wouldn't that be nice in special needs parenting?), we learn both where and how to go through the experiences of pioneers in disability travel. Since travelling with a child with hearing loss is outside of my wheelhouse of expertise, I looked for those wayfinders to lead the way. I found four moms who see the value in sharing new experiences with their kids, regardless of obstacles.

### Meet the moms

**MARISSA**, mom to two-year-old Kieran, is the writer behind [Postcards to Seattle](#), where she shares Pacific Northwest travel tips and itineraries. She also shares her travels and more tips for travelling with kids on [Instagram](#). Her content doesn't focus on travel with hearing loss, but it's a part of everything she does.



Marissa and her family

**KADY** is mom to two girls and the writer behind [Tavadventures](#), inspiring all young globe-trotters to never stop searching for the next adventure. Kady's youngest, Ava, is a brain cancer warrior and travels with hearing loss and medical needs.



Kady's family exploring Yellowstone

**KAYLA** is mom to four-year-old Maci. Maci has many medical complexities, including hearing loss. Maci wears hearing aids and explores the world with her mom, who refuses to throw in the towel in the name of convenience.



Kayla and her daughter, Maci

**AMIE JO** is mom to this issue's guest editor, Angela Lynn, and the change-maker behind [Corner4Success](#), an inspirational Roku channel. She has years of parenting experience behind her and knows the ins and outs of travelling with a child with hearing loss.



Angela Lynn with her mom, Amie Jo

### What anxieties did you have to overcome to travel with your child with hearing loss?

"The only major anxiety we have had is making sure we have a power source so we can recharge her cochlear implants. We have purposefully kept to more first world countries because of this. We always need a power source that's dependable and travelling in very third world countries can be an issue." ~Kady

"For us, it was how she would handle the noise on a plane or boat. We had a family member suggest we take her hearing aids out for take off and landing in the plane. So glad we had that advice ahead of time, because it really did help.

Whenever we travel, I am always concerned about losing one of her hearing aids and then her not being able to take everything in as well and then the process of getting a replacement when we get home." ~Kayla

"Vacations were always a source of worry especially when navigating places like airports or bus terminals. Our primary concern during travels with our adventurous daughter was ensuring her safety in unfamiliar environments. We embarked on numerous journeys across the U.S., where her boundless enthusiasm often translated into quick, impulsive actions. This presented challenges, particularly because she couldn't react to auditory warnings like car horns or shouts of caution.

As a result, we were always involved with keeping Angela Lynn close by, often by holding her hand during outings to various

places. While this was essential for her safety, it sometimes limited her freedom and was physically draining for both of us. To address this, we used a child safety harness, a decision met with differing opinions. Despite frowns and negative looks from strangers, the harness proved to be an effective and joyous solution for our family. It granted Angela Lynn the freedom to explore while ensuring her safety in crowded or unfamiliar environments, offering us the much-needed peace of mind." ~Amie Jo

### How does travel look different for you than for other families?

"We have to be a lot more intentional when we speak to him while we travel, meaning turning to face him while we speak so he can hear us more clearly, and understanding that some situations may be too loud and overwhelming for him, and knowing when to take a break. There is also extra gear to remember to pack, including his hearing aid charging case and wipes for his hearing aids." ~Marissa

"We have travelled all over the world so we sort of knew which places we could go to and which places would be trickier. For example, backpacking: we can't go for more than a night or two because we run out of recharged cochlear batteries. We also stay away from extremely remote places where there is no medical care in the event we need help." ~Kady

"As a signing family, our experiences are visually similar to those of families without Deaf members. However, while Angela Lynn communicates primarily through visual and tactile means,

a child who can hear depends more on spoken words and sounds. This difference means we have to plan and experience our travels differently. We often use sign language, written messages, and other visual methods of communication. These are particularly important in noisy places where it's hard to read lips." ~Amie Jo

### What advice would you give to parents looking to travel with a child with hearing loss?

"Since we have a five year old as well, we had done normal travel with a kid before, but realized quickly that our two year old can do all the same activities. The biggest piece of advice is just being conscious of places that are loud, such as airports, and being patient if you have to repeat yourself. We have done many successful family vacations together, including Hawaii and Whistler, Canada." ~Marissa

"Go! Travel! You can make it work. There is always a way." ~Kady

"Don't overthink it. Just go and be ready to be flexible. Find the style or destination that better meets your needs. I think for any disability, when you can drive it makes things easier because you are in control of their equipment. That can lessen that anxiety some." ~Kady

### Is there a destination, or style of trip that's easier, or better meets your needs?

"We absolutely love doing road trips around the Pacific Northwest. I also find it easier because we can keep all of his supplies in the glove compartment, so they are organized and clean. I can also

wear a DM system so he can clearly hear me when I speak to him while driving.” ~*Marissa*

“Definitely places with reliable power sources and countries that are more developed.” ~*Kady*

“I think anything that avoids water is easier, because then your child doesn't have to take hearing aids out. However, our girl LOVES the water, so we would never avoid water just for convenience. There are plenty of ways to communicate with her other than verbally. The beach is hard with hearing aids. Not worth the risk in my opinion. Sand, water: that sounds like a disaster waiting to happen.” ~*Kayla*

#### Can you share a travel experience that keeps you coming back for more?

“We go to Canada on a yearly basis, particularly Vancouver and Whistler. The boys love how much there is to do outdoors there, from hiking trails to parks, and they love eating new food while there. It's also a very family-friendly country.” ~*Marissa*

“We went to see wolves in Yellowstone six years ago and we can't get enough! We go at least 20 times a year. It's an amazing activity to do with Ava, our deaf daughter, because she also has mobility issues, so watching animals from pullouts in the park works perfectly for us. She also loves animals. We learn something every time we go!” ~*Kady*

“Florida was a wonderful experience. We ran into other kids with hearing aids. We sat next to two young adult men that were using ASL to communicate. My

daughter noticed, which then opened the door to talk with them about their experience growing up.” ~*Kayla*

#### Can you share a travel experience that you learned from?

“Since my son is a toddler, he sometimes has tantrums, which includes him taking his hearing aids out. When we're in public, it's easy to just throw them in a jacket or sweatshirt pocket until he lets us put them in again, but we have also had many scares where we went to look for them later and couldn't find them. I now carry a small case for his hearing aids so if he does take them out, we know that they're contained and exactly where they are.” ~*Marissa*

“We are constantly learning. And once we think we have it all figured out our kids grow and change. I think you can learn from every trip you take. It's why we love travelling. But the biggest thing we have learned from travelling is to be adaptable.” ~*Kady*

“I don't know of a specific place I'd say is great for people with hearing loss, but just get out there. Experience life.” ~*Kayla*

#### Is there anything else that parents aspiring to travel should know?

“We always prep our kids for new vacations by showing them pictures or videos of the area, and then they're able to get really excited once we get there and it makes them feel more prepared. Our youngest does SEE (signed exact English) and spoken word, so I

always make sure to teach him new signs and words related to the area so he gets excited practicing them.” ~*Marissa*

“If your kid has cochlear implants it would be helpful to get some sort of blue tooth or device that acts as headphones for the airplane since traditional headphones don't usually work.

Bring external power sources if you're going somewhere remote. If your child is deaf, they automatically get a free National Parks disability pass! Take advantage of that and go to the parks!” ~*Kady*

“You'll be amazed by the people you meet and the joy you may bring to someone else. A mom at a hotel we stayed in thought it was so cool to meet another kid with hearing aids. I guess she's never seen another kid with them. My husband and I feel like we see other kids with hearing aids all the time, but that's because we are always up to going and trying new things.” ~*Kayla*

GO!

While all three moms agree, I think Kady best summed it up, “Go! Travel! You can make it work. There is always a way.”

As with any disability, there are challenges along the way, but it's always worth it. You know your child best. Avoid environments that you know will be overwhelming, while challenging yourself to get outside of your comfort zone and experience life fully. You've got this! ■



Keiran, age 2, travelling with hearing loss

# Better Together

## Disability Parent Q & A

**Q** What do you do about travel insurance? What do you need, and what's covered, for a child with a disability?

**A** Domestically (in the U.S.), this shouldn't be an issue. Even the most stringent of policies will cover emergencies out of state. Because policies differ, it would be wise to call your insurance, both primary and secondary, before hitting the road. Generally, any emergency that comes up will be covered. Just don't plan to get your teeth cleaned or start up with a new physical therapist while you're away.

Internationally, everything gets a little fuzzier. First, let me explain that trip insurance and travel health insurance are two separate things, even though they often have overlapping coverage. [Nerd Wallet](#) breaks this down nicely, but the main takeaway is that trip insurance is for the trip - if you should need to cancel or make changes, even if because of health; travel health insurance is for only physical needs.

Again, the best place to start is with a phone call to your insurance company (or companies). Medicaid and Medicare rarely cover anything outside of the U.S., but many private health insurance companies will still cover emergencies internationally. Unless you're planning to travel for such an extended period of time that you need physicals or routine care, you may not even need travel health insurance, since many travel health insurance policies also cover emergencies. The perk of some travel plans is that they will cover transportation to medical care, which changes everything if you're travelling somewhere remote without a nearby hospital.

If you're booking through a travel agent, they can help you research this! [Travel agents who focus on disability travel](#) have experience working with

insurance to cover a variety of needs, and can help you identify what's best for you. [Incredible Memories Travel](#) has experience booking travel health insurance with preexisting conditions waived. ■

**Next Issue:** There is a general concern over the carelessness with which wheelchairs are treated by airlines and others transporting the chair. How can we protect our wheelchair and travel by plane?

**Do you have any expertise to share on next issue's question? Please submit your input, or any questions of your own for future issues, to [jennifer@wonderswithinreach.com](mailto:jennifer@wonderswithinreach.com)**



# Adaptive Adventures

Thrilling adventures for all abilities

## Jesi Stracham

### Breaking barriers and paving the way

By Pauline Mackenzie



*"I think my favourite thing about being a paralyzed athlete is that I'm breaking barriers and paving the way in sports, showing people with disabilities that it can be done and then reaching out to the non-disabled community to say, hey, you can come help us do this."*

She's not your average athlete, nor is she content with merely inspiring others. Jesi Stracham is on a mission to motivate, empower and break down barriers in the most extraordinary way possible. Hers is a remarkable spirit that finds its greatest joy in shattering barriers and illuminating the path for those who may doubt their capabilities. In 2015, her life took an unexpected turn when an accident left her paralyzed. Instead of succumbing to despair, she embraced a life of activity and purpose.

#### Discovering the power of community

Even before her life-altering accident, Jesi understood the therapeutic value of exercise, a sanctuary for her mental well-being and a source of unyielding strength. However, it was in the world of adaptive sports that she uncovered something even more profound—community. Jesi

passionately emphasizes the power of embracing communities. Camaraderie develops, bonds that transcend physical limitations and resources are at your fingertips. "The community," she says, "offers resources and support beyond imagination, reminding us that we need each other more than we realize."

In February 2017, a fall in a hotel room prompted Jesi to share her story on YouTube. The response was overwhelming, leading her to leverage the power of the closely connected digital world and the communities that reside there, to inspire hope in others—motivating individuals to find opportunities in every obstacle even after life's most daunting challenges.

#### Adaptive sports and fitness

After her accident, Jesi had to approach fitness and sports differently, but her love for them never waned. Instead, her fervor was renewed as she passionately embraced adaptive sports. She has participated in water skiing, wheelchair motocross championships, rock climbing, road hand cycling, wheelchair curling, weightlifting, adaptive CrossFit coaching, and more. About her once favourite Tough Mudder, she says, "I can no longer participate in Tough Mudder events due to repeatedly breaking



my spinal fusion. I've undergone multiple revision surgeries, and while Tough Mudder used to be my favourite activity, I currently find powerlifting and weightlifting to be more enjoyable." Jesi takes pleasure in pushing her strength limits. "Now, I'm able to lift my suitcase into the car with ease," she says. One of the exercises she loves to focus on involves lifting a barbell from the ground to her lap. "I can perform these tasks effortlessly now, including grabbing items from the table and placing

them back. Strength training has become essential for me as it directly impacts my independence. The stronger I become, the more I can accomplish in my daily life." And the more she can help others to improve theirs, which she does through coaching.

#### Wheel With Me Adapt Fit revolution

Through the Wheel With Me Foundation, which she founded, Jesi boldly declares her mission to empower wheelchair users, promote independence and help them to be reintegrated into society. The Foundation hosts empowering events, encouraging wheelchair users to unlock their full potential including mindset calls on Zoom to showcase what's out there, remind them about what they can accomplish. "We've had a variety of presentations, from actors to advocates, tips on how to build a resume, how to get a job, how to

Whether you have a disability or not, if you are able to move your body, move your body! What you do today accumulates and that's why I'm so proactive with my health because I'm thinking about where I'm going to be, not tomorrow or a few months from now, but years from now . . .

Jesi Stracham

become a sexual being again,” she says. “We literally dive into the ins and outs of being an independent wheelchair user—independent as someone with full-functioning ability. The ultimate goal is to encourage people to get out in society, into the community, be able to live their life and not have their disability hold them back more than it has to.”

But Jesi goes further. She believes collaboration is the key to creating lasting change. “If you want to see change, you got to be the change and it’s easier to do that as a group than individually,” said Stracham, so she partnered with Nikki Walsh on the recently launched Wheel With Me Adapt Fit app, (a remake of her initial Wheel With Me Fitness app), taking a monumental step towards promoting fitness and strength among wheelchair users with fun, seated exercises.

Nikki and Jesi also run a Wheel with Me Adapt Fit Facebook group doing weekly workouts and they organize in-person events in Charlotte, North Carolina. “We have something called Fit With Friends where we partner with local personal trainers and occupational therapists for inclusive fitness at a gym in Charlotte. We host that once a month.” In-person community building continues quarterly at a brewery in Charlotte where wheelchair users just hang out, sing karaoke and have a good time. Jesi explained, “Community made me realize what I was capable of and how much I sold myself short. It made me stop making excuses because of my disability and this opened up my mind to how powerful I truly am and how powerful we are, together.”

## Travel

In the past eight years, Jesi has embarked on numerous flights and her wheelchair sustained damage on three separate occasions. She believes this figure is low, especially when compared to some of the alarming stories recently heard in news reports. While acknowledging that airlines have room for improvement in handling wheelchairs, she emphasizes the importance of not allowing the fear of wheelchair damage to deter anyone from travelling and living their life to the fullest. Hotels, however, present a distinct set of challenges. She has found that accessible hotel rooms frequently fall short in terms of true accessibility, particularly with regard to shower facilities. She recently addressed this issue in a video, highlighting the impractical placement of shower controls. She acknowledges the inevitability of encountering barriers and attributes this to the fact that the world was not originally designed with people with disabilities in mind. However, Jesi remains optimistic that by speaking out and raising awareness of what’s lacking, universal design principles can become the norm. She had the opportunity to deliver a keynote speech in Sweden earlier this year and commends them for being at the forefront of progress in this regard. Their regulations ensure that any newly built home in the country must meet accessibility standards.

## Unleashing the potential within

Jesi’s unwavering commitment to fitness and her tireless advocacy efforts are closely intertwined with

her dedication to self-empowerment and the cultivation of mindful nutrition habits. She views these pursuits as vitally important and pursues them with relentless determination. Instead of seeking external validation, Jesi has shifted her focus towards granting herself the permission to dream and accomplish her aspirations. Central to her transformative journey are the personal development books she avidly consumes, with Jesi firmly believing in the transformative power of reading just ten pages a day for profound personal growth.

Her unwavering faith in a larger mission serves as her guiding light, allowing her to stay resolute in pursuing her goals even during the most challenging days. Her driving force stems from her profound desire to positively impact the lives of others. Rather than fixating on the elusive quest for balance, Jesi encourages us to adapt to life’s constant fluctuations and navigate its challenges with grace. By embracing the natural ebb and flow of life, she firmly believes that we can maintain a positive self-image and avoid the feelings of inadequacy that often accompany the relentless pursuit of balance.

Shattering barriers and achieving goals within the world of adaptive sports, fitness, nutrition and self-empowerment—this is the path Jesi pursues while passionately nurturing a community of those who share her aspirations. ■

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# Explore the Outdoors

By Lisa Guthrie Deabill

Fresh picks for international accessible activities



Credit PAC President

## CANADA

### **Parksdale outdoor accessible community rink**

If you're in Calgary, Alberta, don't miss the opportunity to come out and embrace the joy of winter at this incredible outdoor rink! Whether you're a seasoned skater or a beginner, this rink is designed for people of all abilities to have a fantastic time. The crisp winter air, the thrill of gliding on ice, and the camaraderie of fellow Calgarians make this experience truly special. So, grab your skates, gather your friends and family, and head to the rink for some unforgettable moments of fun and community.

### **BC Adaptive Snowsports**

This organization shreds barriers, not dreams! Picture this: British Columbia, Canada's pristine slopes, majestic mountains and the exhilaration of skiing or snowboarding. Enjoying this is not just a dream for people with disabilities anymore. BC Adaptive Snowsports makes winter sports accessible to everyone, regardless of physical or cognitive differences. Teaming up with a league of incredible adaptive snowsport clubs, they bring tailored lessons and programs to suit every participant's unique abilities.

### **VanDusen Botanical Garden**

This botanical garden is accessible and has paved pathways that make it easy for wheelchair users to explore the beautiful winter landscapes and seasonal displays.

## U.S.

### **Central Park Conservatory Garden**

While Central Park can be enjoyed year-round, this oasis transforms into a peaceful winter wonderland accessible to wheelchairs and other mobility devices making it possible for everyone to enjoy the serene beauty of this tranquil oasis.

## ENGLAND

### **Adaptive snow activities and parks**

If you're looking for a more active winter experience, some locations like [Chill Factor](#) in Manchester offer adaptive skiing and snow sports programs for people with disabilities. Some parks, like Hyde Park in London, provide wheelchair-accessible paths, ensuring that individuals with mobility challenges can enjoy the beauty of nature even in winter.

## JAPAN

### **Adaptive snow activities and hot springs**

Many ski resorts in Japan have adaptive skiing and snowboarding programs for people with disabilities. These programs typically provide specialized equipment and trained instructors to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience. Check out resorts like [Hakuba](#). Japan is famous for its hot springs, known as onsen. Many onsen resorts have accessible facilities, including wheelchair ramps and accessible bathing areas. Consider destinations like [Beppu](#), and check out [Accessible Japan](#) for more information.

## SOUTH AMERICA

### **Latin America for All**

All year round, you can embark on thrilling outdoor adventures which open up a world of possibilities for individuals of all abilities. Latin America for All ensures that everyone can embrace the beauty and excitement of the great outdoors. Their carefully curated adventures not only provide a sense of adventure and connection with nature but also promote inclusivity, breaking down barriers for people with disabilities and fostering a spirit of empowerment and exploration. Discover the wonders of Ecuador, Peru and Argentina while experiencing the thrill of outdoor activities with Latin America for All.

## SOUTH AFRICA

### **Wheelchair Safari at Ximuwu Lodge.**

Wilderness meets luxury! Imagine traversing the untamed beauty of the African wilderness in an environment that ensures accessibility and comfort for individuals with disabilities. Exploring the stunning landscapes of South Africa, from rugged terrain to vibrant wildlife, while enjoying top-notch accommodations and expertly crafted itineraries designed to cater to your specific needs. You can create lasting memories of adventure, luxury and inclusivity while discovering the essence of Africa in a way that leaves no one behind.



Photo credit: Latin America for All



Photo Credit: Ximuwu Lodge

# Journeys with Autism

Navigating the world with autism.



## Paige Layle on autism, travel and more . . .

I'm a 23-year-old autistic/ADHDer who is just trying her best to survive really. I live near Toronto, Ontario and I make videos for social media. I act, teach dance and I'm an author. I also participate in plenty of hobbies and want to participate in more, but right now I like crocheting, gardening, painting, singing, and making stuff—anything and everything. I am a very passionate and caring person and I'm not too bad with my words and helping people understand things. I think my superpower in this world is my teaching ability, and I'm particularly good with teaching kids. I speak (very loudly) about what's on my mind, which often includes how difficult it is to exist and live and make money as an autistic person in this society, the autism stuff in my life that I learn more and more about as I get older, and ways society can change to make us all happier and make everything more effective.

### Advocacy

I promote and spread awareness by advocating for myself and others online, by making videos on TikTok and YouTube that are educational and entertaining and I also post on other social platforms. I talk about my life with autism, different accommodations I use, what helps me and what really hinders me, my interests, and answering questions people like to know. I also wrote a book that publishes March 26th 2024, called *But Everyone Feels This Way: How An Autism Diagnosis Saved My Life*, which will be a resource for the autistic community by helping others understand autism.

### Misconceptions about autism

I've had to address them all. Haha. Especially looking and talking like I do, people say silly things to me about autism. I don't care too much to give time or energy to people who

are just ignorant and live in the past and say stupid, mean things I've heard millions of times. I just think that they're dumb, and it's not my job to educate everyone and use my time and energy when they could be using theirs. I've already spent my energy answering a lot of these questions on my TikTok or YouTube before, usually.

I've heard people say girls can't be autistic, which must have to do with someone having a deeper problem with girls, and not understanding that they are the same level of human as boys. It's so silly.

Some other common misconceptions are:

1. that autism is caused by vaccines or diet or anything . . .
2. you can cure or outgrow autism
3. every autistic person reacts the same and has the same sensitivities
4. no autistic person can drive or hold a job or raise children

and much more. I just think they're silly, and it's important that we remember the nuances that come with each individual person. No two people are the same, no two autistic people are the same!

### Travelling

Although I haven't travelled to many places, I can attest to a few things:

1. I am always looking forward to a vacation. I am always excited for a break from reality and work and making money. I crave a break.
2. It is so hard to get back to normal once I am back home! It is upsetting and shocking and a hard sudden change of routine to be thrown back into, especially as the normal life is often more boring than when travelling or vacationing.
3. I LOVE travelling alone! I find it so easy and simple to navigate

places like airports. I love looking at new places, learning new things, meeting new people and understanding more about the world, and how large it is, and how little I know.

- I am always fascinated and happy with how many strangers I come across that are so nice and good and make me feel okay with the human race.
- I love the world, seeing it and feeling like a part of it just a little bit.



**Dealing with sensory overload while travelling**

**Sounds:** I always have my earbuds and my headphones with me while I travel to reduce outside noise and to listen to something I can control

at my own volume if I wanted to. My headphones also provide good noise dampening support on their own. I also own a lot of special earplugs, called Loop earplugs, that allow me to still hear everyone and everything clearly, just at a much lower volume.

**Tactile** I bring objects that I like to touch in my personal bag, just to touch and ground me, because I can focus on them and I like it. I pack specific clothes with specific fabrics and textures in mind, given the destination location and the temperature and the humidity, so that I am sure I will be physically comfortable in my travels and my new location.

Sometimes my ears pop horribly on an airplane and become incredibly painful, and that is hard to go through. I don't know what to do there.

**Importance of maintaining a routine and dealing with unpredictability while travelling**

In general, it's just important that we have one routine and I know what it is, so I know how much time I have available and when all certain things should be done. It's important to make a routine while travelling to manage time. However, when travelling, I am usually much more lenient with disruptions to that routine - specifically, when on vacation. I don't like to book any special excursion or appointments until I am there and I know how I want to manage my time. On the way there, I am not in control of everything and I expect delays and things to throw my routine off. There are still some events that could be a lot for me

to handle emotionally, but most of those troubling moments are due to someone else I'm with, not me. For instance, being late to something because someone I was with made us late, after I warned them about it multiple times and they didn't listen to me. That kind of stuff makes me so frustrated. Therefore, I like to travel alone. I don't like my actions, or my time, to be limited by anybody. I can follow a routine just fine, and I like to, because the routines I make are very efficient. If I follow my routine, I won't miss anything. I won't fall behind or go, "oh! I wanted to see x!" I would've already planned it. Routines usually mean I make the most out of the trip.

It is hard to get back home, though, and have to throw out everything you were just doing, and almost pretend like it didn't happen, when I worked so hard at it and had so many big emotions and moments. I have to grieve a trip, almost, when I get back. I'm usually out for a few days, not talking to anyone or working, just recharging and focusing on myself.

**Self-care strategies to manage stress and anxiety while on vacation**

I like to travel alone. I try to utilize the disability services the various airports and hotels offer that are helpful to me such as being able to board the plane first, so no one is waiting behind me or nudging me or in my way. I wear a sunflower lanyard around my neck while I am on the move. The sunflower lanyard is a symbol recognized by many to indicate the wearer has an invisible disability, and a lot of staff are trained to recognize this. When I wear the lanyard, people are a lot nicer if you ask them

questions, or take a little bit longer to respond, or cry.

I try to over-pack because I always end up missing something slightly important and freaking out. I like to limit that as much as possible and pack more than I need.

Take deep breaths! Remember what you can control and what you do not have control over!

I bring special interests of mine in my personal bag right on my person for me to focus on and get dopamine from. This includes things like books, yarn to crochet, notebooks to write in, little knick-knacks that I think are cute and make me smile.

When I was in school, I would absolutely dread having to go on a vacation my parents booked that made me miss school. It was very difficult to enjoy a vacation when I was worried about missing school so much. I would do nothing but stay inside, studying. I'm so glad I'm older now.

**Places that are supportive of individuals with autism**

I haven't visited but I have heard so much about Alberta and the different

**“I speak very loudly about what's on my mind, which often includes how difficult it is to exist and live and make money as an autistic person in this society.”**

Paige Layle

supports they have for autistic people and their families that Ontario (where I live) isn't even close to.

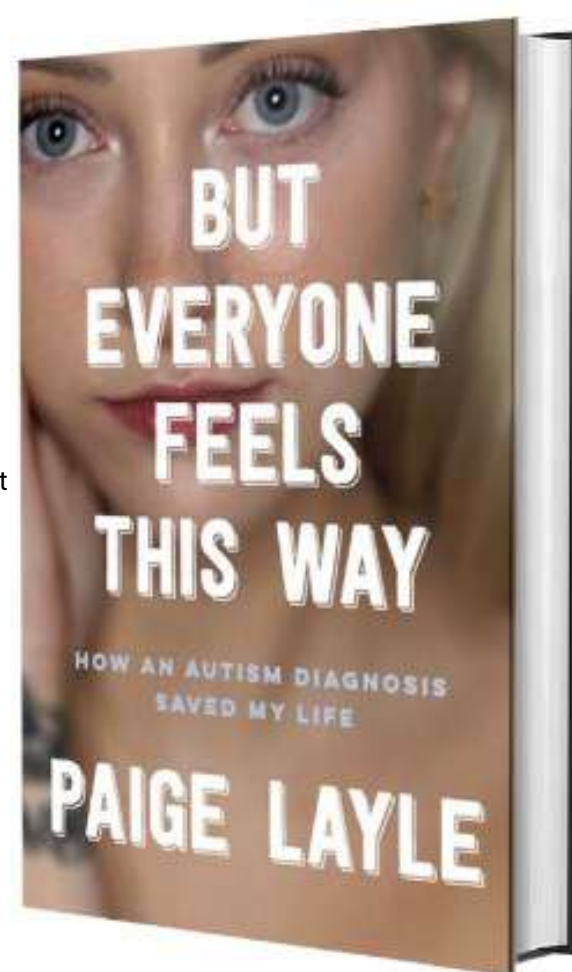
There is an [autism town in Newfoundland \(Channel-Port aux Basques\)](#), which I would love to visit someday.

The best I've seen was the [Canadian Tire Centre in Ottawa](#) where the Ottawa Senators play. They have sensory bags you can ask for and those signs are very visible.

[My book \*But Everyone Feels This Way: How An Autism Diagnosis Saved My Life\*](#)

Aw yay! I've always wanted to write a book, and once I gained a bit of a following on social media and saw how many questions people had that I could answer, I thought, I need to compile this all in one place and have that be a source of information.

A book! I chose to write about my life, as that is what I know best and where all of my autism experience comes from, and because I knew from social media that my experience was so similar to other people. I needed representation of someone like me, because I knew I wasn't alone



anymore, and there were kids out there struggling like I had. I wanted to share a story that shows how nature and nurture work together to create the autistic individual, and how my growing up impacted my life and my challenges with autism. I hope we can continue the conversation to learn how to best parent and educate autistic children.

**Challenges faced as an autistic social media influencer**

It is difficult being a public figure who people want to talk to, while also disliking being perceived by others in public and being really uncomfortable with small talk with strangers! I feel bad sometimes when I'm so awkward when I meet a fan in real life. It is just a very strange encounter from the receiving end, emotionally, when strangers come up to you very emotional about you, and you almost feel bad that you don't know them and feel the same way about them.

It's also difficult being an autistic influencer because I don't really like social media or how it operates or what it asks for. I started creating videos online when I was 19, and now I don't care to make other people happy or have other people like me or agree with me. I don't care as much as I once did about changing people's minds. It really has been an emotionally draining and exhausting ride that is worth it, but it's so hard.

**Supports needed for the autistic community to create a more inclusive world**

I could go on forever about this! I think the biggest barrier is education and just getting people to know what is going on with autistic people and what we are feeling and dealing with all of the time. We need education to get to understanding, and so much can be changed with more or MOST people understanding autism. For instance going non-verbal, not giving proper eye contact, stimming/ flapping my hands, repeating words over and over, getting upset at a change in schedule that impedes on the arrangements I made... and any other generally odd behaviour that is outside of the societal norms but is harmless and just weird. I want people to say okay, that is fine and not something I think is strange or crazy, I have no negative feelings towards this and I do not feel the need to comment on this or make a face or think any further about it at all.

Also, we need more competent social workers. We need more

caretakers available for autistic kids. And we need more doctors worrying about autistic kids and their well-being. We need more people looking out for autistic kids and their families, and we need more support for autistic people readily available. I think getting people to understand is what will get them to care, and will get more people to come and work with the autistic community.

**Travel advice**

Travelling can be really fun and exciting and also hard and overwhelming and fast and a

lot! My advice to autistic people when travelling is: go fast when you want to go fast, go slow when you want to go slow. I can and will travel by myself.

Travel can be really liberating and important to autistic people. ■



“I love the world, seeing it and feeling like a part of it just a little bit.”  
Paige Layle



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Photo courtesy Thomas Henley

# Thomas Henley

## wants to change the aesthetic of autism

By Pauline Mackenzie

Thomas Henley is an autistic 26-year-old with a deeply captivating and intricate life journey. He calls the picturesque North Yorkshire, England home and from this location, his experiences come to life. He is part of a close-knit family and the bonds they share offer him unwavering emotional support and provide many cherished moments. We got a poignant glimpse into the challenges he faces and the coping mechanisms that keep him moving forward.

For Thomas, meticulous preparation before a significant event or journey is important. The gravity of the occasion determines the depth of his mental groundwork. When navigating social gatherings, he often requires a day both before and after—the first to prepare and the other, post-event, to decompress. During these intervals, he immerses himself in mindless activities to alleviate stress. Transitioning from solitude to social engagement is a delicate process, necessitating time to ease into the rhythm of socializing. Once in this social mode, however, he becomes an extrovert, relishing the connections he forges. Outside these social situations, he

prefers a more passive role, content with listening and observing.

Spontaneity can induce anxiety in Thomas, but occasionally, he pushes himself beyond his comfort zone. Even these seemingly impromptu decisions are meticulously considered, forming a plan to not have a plan. Without adequate preparation, Thomas finds it considerably more challenging to navigate the complexities of life, and it can lead to disarray and turmoil.

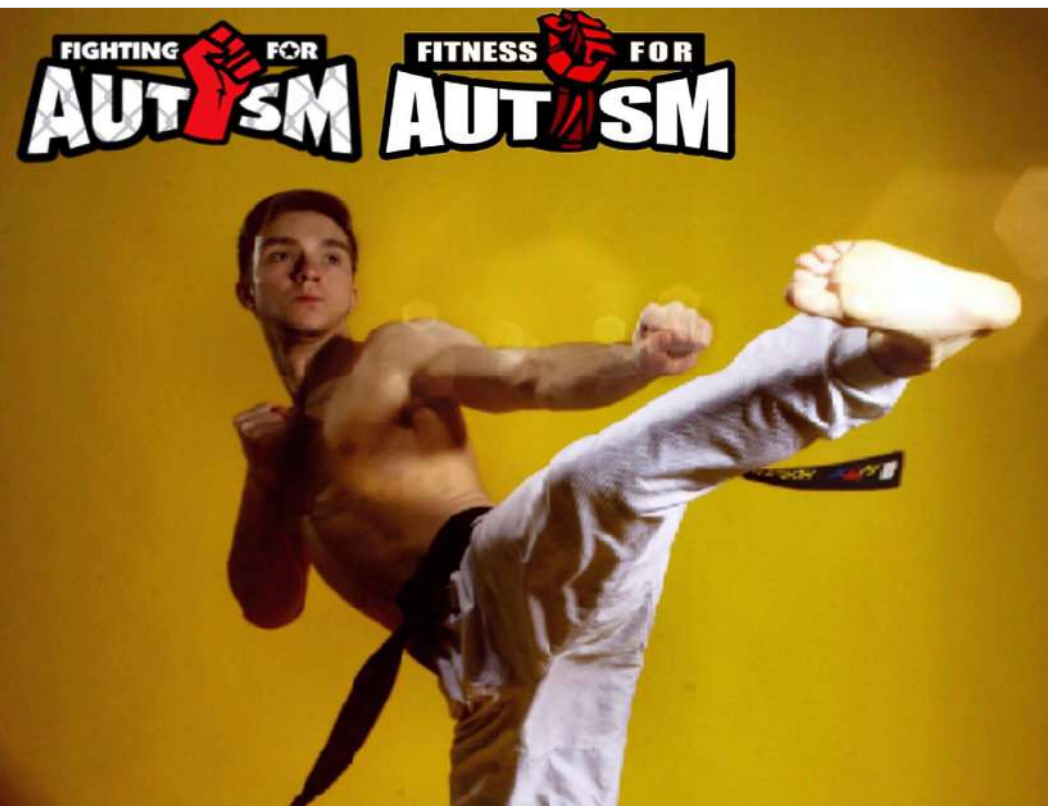
When discussing international travel, Thomas underscores his difficulties with transitions, not just during journeys but also in his daily life. He describes himself as moving at a more deliberate pace, requiring extra time for tasks and yes, the transition. Thomas acknowledges his need for organization and planning, particularly when it comes to significant events or travel.

Regardless of the bouts of anxiety, Thomas loves to travel and has done so extensively. “I’ve travelled all over the place. I’ve been backpacking around Southeast Asia with a friend. I’ve been to Cambodia, the Philippines, Japan, Singapore,

Malaysia and spent a year in Thailand as part of my University of Manchester’s Biomedical Science university degree,” he enthused. He’s had many adventures in Asia, some nail-biting, some discomfiting and others immensely traumatizing like a bike accident, which still produces a shudder when it comes to mind. He’s had many inspiring experiences too, such as interacting with monks and locals, learning from them, hearing about their trials and gaining insights into their unique, resilient life experiences. He thrives when there is no time pressure, enabling him to fully savour the experience. Back at home, one of the places he speaks of fondly is [Center Parcs](#), where he relishes spending pressure-free time with his family.

Travel is great, but the issue of sensory overload, especially at airports, is always concerning. To drown this out, Thomas finds solace in music. While he doesn’t mind spontaneous conversations with strangers, he concedes that breaking out of his hyper-focused state when deeply engrossed in a task can be a formidable challenge.

The thread of autism weaves



through the tapestry of Thomas' life, guiding him along an extraordinary and multifaceted career path. As an autism consultant, public speaker, podcaster, workplace trainer and model, he wears many hats, each of them resonating with his unwavering passion for raising awareness about autism and advocating for disability rights.

Looking back on his childhood, Thomas acknowledges that his parents noticed the signs of

autism early on yet hesitated to put a label on him too soon. It wasn't until he turned 10 that he underwent an assessment, providing his autism diagnosis. Throughout his formative years, he grappled with a sense of detachment from his peers, finding it easier to connect with adults while struggling to navigate the intricate web of social dynamics.

Thomas' childhood was a beautiful cornucopia of warmth

at home but his trusting and straightforward personality often made him vulnerable to those who took advantage of his genuine nature, especially at school. Describing this feeling of disconnect, Thomas poetically likens it to feeling like an alien at times. His social awareness lagged behind his peers, leaving him on the fringes of social norms and interactions. While he cherished a few close friendships, he never truly integrated into larger social circles.

As he transitioned into secondary school, Thomas' struggles with social interaction and sensory overload intensified, leading to crippling anxiety and frequent school absences. Remarkably, his academic prowess remained undiminished, earning him top grades in various subjects. But as his anxiety deepened, Thomas encountered bullying and social challenges that ultimately culminated in bouts of depression and self-harm during his teenage years. Despite these hardships, he excelled in Taekwondo and sought solace in Japanese anime, which served as a lifeline in coping with his tribulations.

Thomas' dedication to Taekwondo bore fruit, as he ascended to become not only a British champion, but he proudly won a gold medal and Best Male Fighter trophy at the Commonwealth Championships. However, his dream of becoming a professional athlete was cut short by the lack of understanding and support for autism within the sport's governing body.

This autism journey has moved

him into the world of ardent advocacy for autism awareness and support. He embarked on a podcasting venture, [Thoughty Auti](#), inviting influential figures like [Temple Grandin](#) and [Professor Baron Cohen](#) to engage in conversations that dissect autism from various angles.

Thomas' fascination with people persists, propelling him to seek a profound understanding of both himself and those who don't fall on the autism spectrum. He views himself as a reverse autism researcher, finding neurotypical individuals just as captivating as they might find those with autism. His insatiable appetite for comprehending autism from diverse perspectives led him to work as a special needs teaching assistant and for a charity devoted to social inclusion. But through all of this, there is the ongoing battle he wages against his own mental health. His life is marked by fluctuating levels of anxiety and depression, occasionally giving way to severe meltdowns and periods of low functionality.

Even amid the external support he receives from family and friends, the internal struggle persists. But Thomas does not shy away from pushing his boundaries, as evidenced by his backpacking adventures through Southeast Asia, forcing him to adapt to new environments. "Everything I've done in my life has mostly been to prove that autistic people can do certain things," he says. "People say autism affects your

communication, right? So, I decided I'm going to be good at public speaking. Autistic people aren't very good with emotions or relationships—so, I'm going to be exceptional at both of those. They think an autistic person won't be good at Taekwondo, be great at sports, be jacked or a model, but I'm all of those."

Thomas is sustained by his unwavering dedication to helping others and finding meaning in his work. These offer him a guiding light on the darkest days. As someone who candidly shares his experiences with autism, Thomas imparts invaluable advice to individuals on the spectrum and their loved ones. He encourages self-reflection to identify both challenges and strengths. He recommends sidestepping the negative aspects of life whenever possible and implementing support systems when needed. Thomas underscores the significance of infusing one's life with activities and pursuits that nurture confidence and happiness. He highlights the necessity for greater representation across various fields and emphasizes the importance of understanding autism from a neurodiversity perspective.

Thomas aspires to reshape the perception of autism, rendering it more relatable and acceptable in society's eyes. ■



I want to change the aesthetic of autism somewhat . . . to look like anyone that you come across.  
Thomas Henley



Autism is starting to become less stigmatized but there definitely needs to be more representation in the media.  
Thomas Henley

# Feature Stories

Captivating stories, intriguing profiles and thought-provoking articles



## Four disability influencers who will inspire you to travel

By Wheel the World



Kirk Williams



Kevin Ortiz



Kerry Peterson



Kelcie Miller-Anderson

Sharing your stories online is a powerful way to inspire others, to educate and showcase your abilities. Many individuals with disabilities may feel limited in the experiences they can have and places they can go. For this reason, in this article we are going to share four disability influencers who go against this narrative and are living life to the fullest.

We have interviewed them, asking about their life experiences and advice for those who want to travel as well. Their stories are not just about the travels and adventures, but also of resilience, passion, and overcoming the obstacles in front of them. The four of them recently travelled to Costa Rica with us at Wheel the World and our local partners, [Essential Costa Rica](#).

They highlight their experiences and for some of them—their firsts. Costa Rica is one of the best destinations for wheelchair users, especially for those travelling for the first time or who are nervous to do so. It is an accessible destination with one of the most welcoming cultures you can experience.



Kirk Williams in Costa Rica

Following a bike accident in 2009 resulting in injury, Kirk has been living in a wheelchair. Up until that point, he had been an avid traveller, explorer and adventurer. To this day, 14 years later, Kirk continues this lifestyle despite being in a wheelchair. However, it was a work in progress to get to the point of regaining his independence.

“Travelling has always been one of the most fulfilling things for me. To see and interact with other cultures and their way of life was dear to my heart before I was in a chair,” Kirk told us. “I never thought I’d be able to travel again when I first broke my neck. It has taken me many years to fully regain my independence. Getting in and out of bed on my own was

the real victory of the day. But I was able to progressively push that boundary. Then being able to go Burning Man, scuba diving, and go on a safari in Kenya was a powerful message for myself and others to know that I can still do these things.”

Independence has been his biggest goal since leaving the hospital in 2009. Since then, Kirk has built a custom wheelchair accessible van for himself and has done multi-month roadtrips all around the U.S. He’s also been to 13 different countries. Being in a wheelchair hasn’t stopped him from doing the things he loves the most.

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

[@impact.overland](https://www.instagram.com/impact.overland)



Kevin Ortiz exploring Costa Rica in his wheelchair

Kevin is a YouTuber, wheelchair advocate, and Air Force veteran who has been living in a wheelchair for the past 11 years. He’s amassed a significant following on both YouTube and Instagram, combining for over 200k followers.

For the past 10 years, Kevin has been travelling the world and creating content. His primary reason for sharing his life online is to inspire other wheelchair users to get out there and live. It wasn’t always like that, though. For the first few years of being a wheelchair user, Kevin rarely got out of bed. Now, he’s sharing his life that inspires thousands of people around the world.

the world that need to see the message I have. If I can do it, you can do it too.”

It’s not just about travelling. Kevin shares tips and insights on how wheelchair users can live a comfortable life.

[YouTube](https://www.youtube.com)

[Instagram](https://www.instagram.com)

“There’s a lot of people around

Kerry Peterson



Kerry Peterson on her trip to Costa Rica

Kerry is a wellness coach, disability advocate and avid traveller. After an accident about a year and a half ago that caused a spinal cord injury, she has been a wheelchair user. Regardless, she has maintained her adventurous spirit and strives to travel, have new experiences and push the boundaries.

When asked what she loves about travel despite the difficulties that often arise as a wheelchair user, she says, "Whether you have a disability or not, adventure is something we should all strive for. To be courageous, brave and try new things is what travel means to me, breaking through barriers and going for it no matter what abilities or disabilities I have."

The first handful of years can often be the most difficult as you adjust to living as a wheelchair user. As someone who is relatively new to this, Kerry provides advice for those who may be afraid to travel: to remember that typically people in other cities and countries want to help you and want you to have a good experience.

"People in other countries don't want you to come to their home and leave with a bad taste in your mouth," Kerry states, "people want to show up for you. Don't be scared to ask for help or to speak up for yourself. Have the courage to speak up and take that first step."

 [Instagram](#)



Wheelchair users crossing accessible trails in Costa Rica

Kelcie Miller-Anderson



Kelcie Miller-Anderson on a boat tour in Costa Rica - capturing the moment on her camera

Kelcie is a social entrepreneur, content creator and traveller. She has been a wheelchair user for four years and started creating content to help others in the community. "I love the sense of community in the disability space. What I needed when I first got a wheelchair is now something I can give to others in the same situation."

Growing up in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, Kelcie has always had a love for the outdoors and experiencing new places. Being immersed in a totally new environment is what draws her to travel and exploring.

"Being surrounded by new and different people, seeing what the locals are doing and experiencing a new culture, these are things that

haven't changed since being in a wheelchair."

She advises, "Life doesn't have to stop. You can still continue exploring the world. There are so many accessible places around the world waiting for us to travel to."

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

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## Want to travel? Costa Rica is an accessible paradise

### A perspective from those with disabilities

Wheel the World recently did a trip to highlight the accessibility of Costa Rica. If you are hesitant to travel, Costa Rica is a perfect place to start. Local partners of Wheel the World, Costa Rican Tourism Institute have implemented accessibility measures to ensure all travellers can experience the best of their country.

**Costa Rica's accessibility**  
Our disability influencers weigh in on Costa Rica before and after their disability

Kerry Peterson travelled to Costa Rica pre-injury and travelled back post-injury. Her perspective sheds light on the accessibility of the country because she has

experienced it in both ways. The part that might surprise you is that she was able to do almost everything she did the first time around, despite being in a wheelchair now.

"I was in Costa Rica six years ago when I was able to walk. Now here for the second time, we were able to do almost the same activities and I've been able to do absolutely everything—before when I was able to walk, and now in a wheelchair. That is unmatched to me." - *Kerry Peterson*

One of the other things she noticed is that most of the tourism buses have accessibility ramps or lifts for wheelchairs and most of the national

parks have paved pathways for those with mobility issues.

Kelcie, similarly, had also travelled to Costa Rica before becoming a wheelchair user. Of course, during that time, she wasn't on the lookout for accessible ramps, beach wheel-chairs or trails that would be accessible for those with a disability. Now years later, Kelcie travelled back to Costa Rica for the first time as a wheelchair user. She noticed most of the businesses have ramps installed for disability access, the beaches have platforms for wheelchair users, and overall the country is more accessible than she's used to back in her home country, Canada.



**Adaptive surfing: first time in the ocean in over 15 years**

When Kevin Ortiz travelled to Costa Rica, he was able to get into the ocean for the first time in over 15 years. Not only that, he was able to try an activity that he never thought he would've been able to.

"I was apprehensive about trying adaptive surfing. I never thought I would ever be able to do it, but Adaptive Costa Rica was there to help me get on the board and assist me with anything I needed. It felt amazing being out there."

When Kirk Williams went surfing for the second time in his life, this time as a quadriplegic, he noticed that the instructors were just as excited to be there helping him as he was to go surfing. Water is a major concern for those with disabilities, but the instructors of the adaptive surfing group made them feel right at home. "They were as excited to be there as we were to get into the water. They were ready to catch us and we knew we were in safe hands," Kirk said.

Wheel the World partners with the

best local tourism organizations with the goal to provide the best experiences for those with disabilities. The instructors are not only knowledgeable about surfing, but also assisting travellers with disabilities. This is why Costa Rica has been an ideal spot for travellers.

**Experiencing the Pura Vida lifestyle**

The unofficial slogan of Costa Rica is Pura Vida, meaning pure life. It perfectly embodies the local culture and its perspective on life: being grateful for the present moment and prioritizing the things that truly matter. The result is a stress-free and laid-back lifestyle that invites travellers to embrace the good life in its purest form.

We asked the four influencers about their favorite thing about travelling to Costa Rica and their answers all had one common theme—the people and the culture.

"The people are so friendly, so happy and so helpful. It makes your entire experience so much better," said Kerry Peterson.

"Sometimes individuals can feel like a burden when they are travelling with an able-bodied group," Kelcie Miller-Anderson pointed out. "You can feel like the odd one out, but Costa Rica is known for warm hospitality and a welcoming culture, and with the ever increasing awareness in this country, you will feel welcome by the friendly locals."

Costa Rica is proud of its accessibility but efforts are being made to become even more accessible for those with disabilities. The country has around 15 beaches with accessibility features, such as mats, beach chairs and more, and there are local initiatives to make more beaches available for wheelchair users.

Costa Rica is certainly a destination to have on your radar. ■





# Unlocking Cape Town's beauty

## A dive into Accessible Tourism

By Tarryn Tomlinson, Able2Travel

Cape Town, a city renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural tapestry, and vibrant history, is increasingly becoming a beacon of accessible tourism. With a commitment to inclusivity, the city is striving to ensure that all visitors, regardless of their physical abilities, can partake in and enjoy the wonders it has to offer. This article explores the strides that Cape Town tourism and some businesses have taken to make tourism accessible to everyone.

### Making infrastructure inclusive

One of the cornerstones of accessible tourism in Cape Town is the ongoing effort to make public infrastructure more inclusive. The city has invested in ensuring that the main tourist attractions are universally accessible. You will find wheelchair-friendly parking, paths, accessible bathrooms and

signage at major tourist attractions such as Table Mountain, the V&A Waterfront, and the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden. These modifications not only enable individuals with mobility challenges to navigate these sites but also enhance the overall experience for all visitors.

### Accessible accommodations

Though finding a variety of accessible accommodation in terms of price point and location can be a challenge, the city boasts a number of accessible hotels in the three, four and five star categories. Guest houses and vacation rentals equipped with accessible features such as ramps, elevators with wider doorways and roll-in showers can prove to be harder to find. This is especially true, when you are looking to adventure further away from the city center.

It's always best practice to ask the

property agent to send pictures of the accessible property features, as many people working at establishments are not educated enough about access to know whether a property is truly accessible.

### Inclusive experiences

The tourism industry recognizes that accessible tourism is not just about physical infrastructure but also about providing inclusive experiences. One of the exhilarating and inclusive experiences available for travellers with mobility challenges is adaptive paragliding.

Paragliding can be difficult for someone who does not walk, but adaptive paragliding allows the person to do a tandem jump from Signal Hill, comfortably seated in a specially designed wheelchair. This year, 2023 Cape Town Tourism launched the first tour that makes street art accessible to blind and

visually impaired people. The I'm Possible tour is also led by Africa's first blind tour guide, Winston Fani.

My company Able2Travel Accessible Travel Concierge also offers access to accessible tours that cater to individuals with different abilities. These tours may include sign language interpreters, audio guides, and tactile exhibits to ensure that everyone can engage fully with the cultural and historical richness of the city.

### Accessible transportation

Efficient transportation is crucial for any tourist destination, and Cape Town is no exception. Unfortunately there is a lack of accessible transportation, despite the city taking significant steps to make its public transportation system more accessible, with MyCiti buses and the official Red City Sightseeing buses equipped with ramps and designated spaces for wheelchair users.

Additionally, accessible private taxi services are available, providing a convenient and comfortable mode of transportation for individuals with mobility challenges.

Uber services run well in the city and Uber has a function called Uber assist. When choosing Uber assist you will be sent a driver who has been trained to assist persons with disabilities.

### Inclusive events and festivals

Cape Town's vibrant events and festivals have also embraced the principles of accessible tourism. Major events, such as the Cape Town International Jazz Festival and the Cape Town Carnival, now incorporate accessibility features, including designated viewing areas, sign language interpreters, and accessible restroom facilities. These measures ensure that individuals with disabilities can participate in and enjoy the city's lively cultural scene.



### Community engagement and awareness

Creating a truly accessible destination requires more than physical modifications; it demands a shift in mindset and cultural awareness. Cape Town Tourism has been actively engaging with local communities to raise awareness about the needs of individuals with disabilities and promote a culture of inclusivity. The Limitless sensitization campaign aims to foster understanding and empathy among residents and businesses alike.

### Conclusion

Cape Town's journey towards accessible tourism is a testament to the city's commitment to inclusivity and equal opportunities for all. By continually enhancing infrastructure, accommodations, transportation and cultural events, Cape Town is not only making its attractions physically accessible but also fostering a welcoming environment for everyone. As the city evolves, it sets a positive example for other destinations around the world, proving that the beauty of travel should be accessible to all, regardless of physical abilities. ■



# Accessibility meets luxury at Ximuwu Lodge, South Africa

By Alicia Williams



As the African journeys of Netherlands couple, Patrick and Elly Suverein continued, their desire to make this vast and untamed land their permanent home grew stronger with every passing day. The pull of Africa's majestic landscapes, vibrant cultures and enchanting wildlife became an irresistible force. And so, in 2017, with hearts brimming with anticipation and adventure, they made the monumental decision to bid farewell to their European life and embark on a new odyssey with their Ximuwu Lodge located in South Africa.

As time went by, they realized their haven needed visiting friends and family. The dream of a separate,

intimate guest house was therefore conceived with solitude and privacy in mind—a sanctuary where groups can enjoy the grandeur of the South African landscape, live close to nature while savouring the sights and sounds of wildlife within the 6,500 hectares of their private nature reserve.

Their concept evolved organically, from a simple guest house to an ambitious yet intimate establishment. But destiny had one twist to offer. A failed back surgery temporarily bound Elly's husband to a wheelchair, a period that resulted in profound revelation and subsequent reflection. In the midst of this challenging journey,

they witnessed firsthand the hurdles faced by travellers with disabilities and the glaring absence of luxurious, wheelchair-friendly safari options. Their sojourns across Europe and South Africa revealed an unfortunate truth—many misconceptions and patronizing attitudes towards individuals with disabilities are pervasive, transcending borders. In airports and various corners of the world, they observed people speaking down to those in wheelchairs, presuming additional impairments. It was a disheartening revelation.

"When you're in a wheelchair," Elly said, "people think you also can't talk so, for example, we were at the



airport checking in for our flight and my husband was beside me in a wheelchair and the attendant asked me whether my husband was able to walk. I told him my husband could speak for himself, he was only in a wheelchair. Then they started to speak loudly to him as if he was deaf. People often treat someone in a wheelchair like they can't do anything at all. So, they touch you, all the time and try to help you" she said. "They talk to you like you are a child."

Having experienced this firsthand with her husband and knowing that "this feeling is not very nice at all," all of Ximuwu Lodge's staff are trained on how to treat guests with disabilities. "We always emphasize that this is another person just like you and me."

It was during these personal experiences that the new Ximuwu Lodge vision took shape, one that transcended the ordinary and blossomed into the extraordinary. The luminous idea was born—to create an oasis of exclusivity, a high-end haven where accessibility and opulence would coalesce in perfect harmony. After Patrick regained

his mobility, albeit with a few lingering challenges, their mission became deeply personal. They were determined to create an environment that upholds the dignity and independence of wheelchair users, where every guest is treated with the same respect and consideration.

Their sanctuary, Ximuwu Lodge, was therefore conceived with accessibility at its heart but without compromising on its aesthetic allure. Here, form and function merge seamlessly. They integrated ingenious features, from game vehicles with slide-out seats to accessible bush dinners under the star-studded African sky. Their spa, too, is designed with accessibility as its guiding principle, inviting every guest to experience its soothing embrace, equally.

Electric and manual wheelchairs stand ready to facilitate exploration, ensuring no guest is confined by their mobility. Their commitment extends to comprehensive transparency on their website [www.wheelchairsafari.com](http://www.wheelchairsafari.com) which shows how wilderness meets luxury and highlights the meticulous

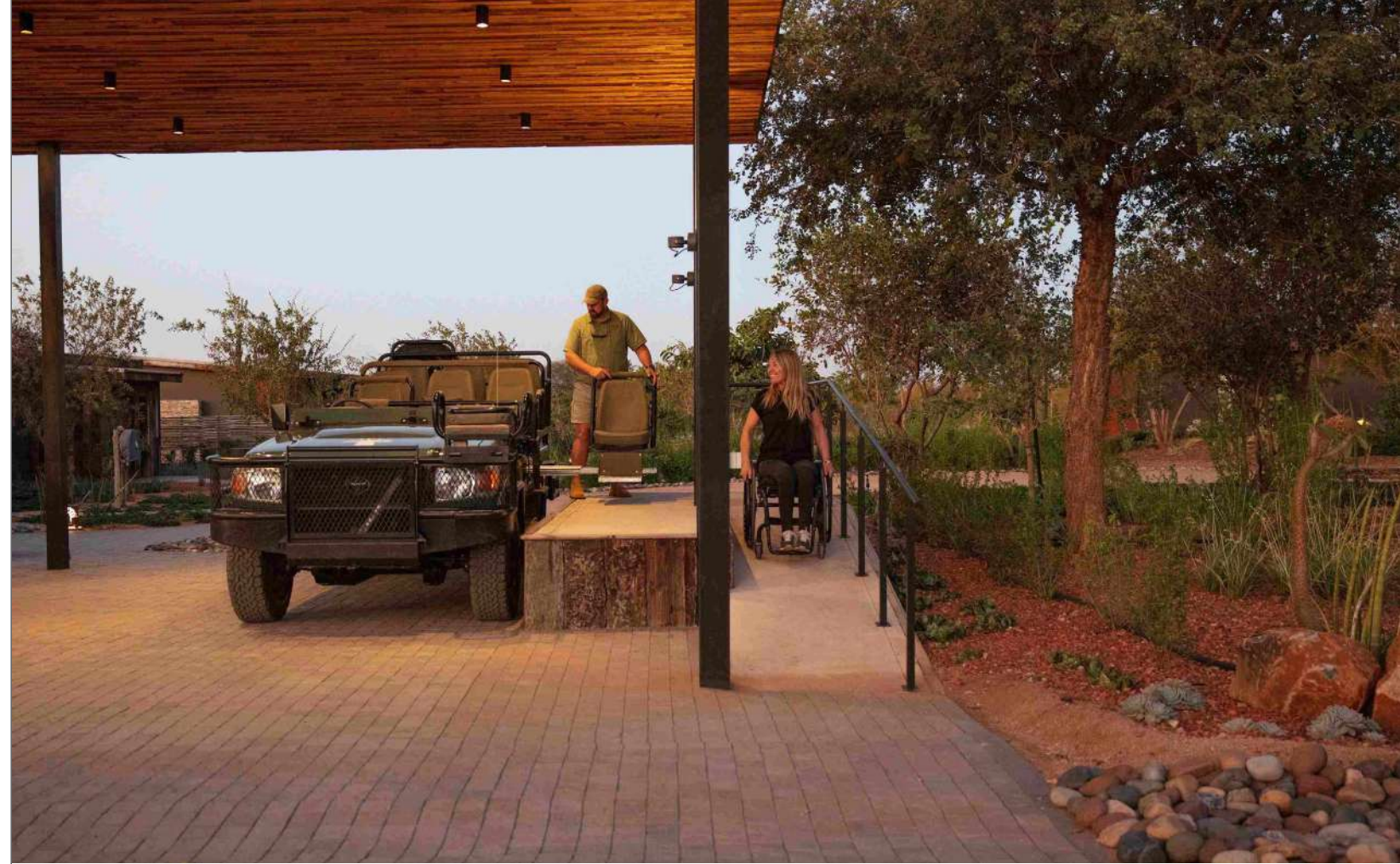
consideration they placed on accessibility.

Their vision is singular—to provide an inclusive safari experience where mobility poses no barriers. Ximuwu has the capacity to host up to ten guests at a time, with specific provisions catering to the needs of two wheelchair users. Though they contemplate expansion to accommodate larger groups, their focus remains on preserving an intimate, exclusive ambiance.

A stay here is one that won't soon be forgotten. Nights at the Lodge are a symphony of serenity, where the sounds of the wild become a soothing lullaby. Here, guests form a profound connection with nature, cocooned in a tranquil, secluded setting that stirs the soul. But Ximuwu Lodge is more than a destination; it indicates the owners' unwavering commitment to caring about people and the environment. A vegetable garden flourishes on their grounds, while a water purification system draws from a well, reducing reliance on plastic. They are also diligent in sourcing meat and fish.

Situated near Johannesburg, Ximuwu Lodge is a mere 45-minute flight or a six-hour drive from the city, a convenient gateway for international visitors. Recognizing the dearth of suitable transport options, they have added an accessible van to their services, ensuring a seamless journey for all. And for guests who want to do and see more, their connections in Cape Town allow them to recommend high-quality, accessible accommodations for those eager to explore beyond the safari Ximuwu offers.

Ximuwu clearly shows that accessible accommodations can be stylish and luxurious. Admittedly, this requires investments in facilities like pool lifts and many other thoughtful adaptations, but collaborating with experts and individuals who have firsthand experience of disabilities will ensure that the end result is something people of every ability can enjoy. Elly acknowledges that awareness is the catalyst for change and initiatives like *Accessible Journeys* play a pivotal role in educating and enlightening potential travellers



about accessible options. She believes the advent of accessible travel guides is a monumental step forward, providing invaluable insights for travellers with disabilities.

The Lodge offers many things of which the owners can be proud, but the crowning jewel of its allure is the absolute independence it offers to wheelchair users. Here, they can navigate the game vehicle, their rooms, and all lodge facilities self-sufficiently. This independence, coupled with the exclusivity and privacy that envelops the lodge, creates a singular and inclusive haven for guests with disabilities,

their families and friends. It is akin to having a cherished home in Africa, a sanctuary where luxury and independence flourish in the embrace of a breathtaking natural canvas.

In the heart of Africa, the owners of Ximuwu Lodge have found their calling. They have fashioned a haven where barriers are shattered. Their journey shows the extraordinary transformations that can arise from awareness. It is a story of compassion, and a steadfast belief in a more inclusive world. Ximuwu is not merely a lodge; it is a legacy of accessibility, luxury and the undying spirit of the wild. ■





# Thunder Bay, Ontario: A winter for everyone!

By Erin Simmons

Nestled in the heart of Northwestern Ontario, on the edge of the world's largest freshwater lake, Lake Superior, Thunder Bay is known as one of Canada's premier outdoor cities. Thunder Bay, however, embraces itself as a community that is committed to making sure everyone feels welcome no matter what challenges they may face, ensuring that even individuals with

mobility challenges can navigate its scenic landscapes with ease.

Located upon the traditional lands of the Anishnawbae Peoples of Fort William First Nation, Signatories to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1950, the community has always had an intimate connection to the natural environment around it. During the winter, as fresh snow blankets the

ground, the city transforms into a wonderland of adventures for both residents and visitors. Whether you want to stay indoors or venture outdoors your trip to Thunder Bay can be filled days of fun activities.

## Outdoor adventures

Winter in Thunder Bay doesn't mean hibernating indoors. Thunder Bay has some great outdoor adventures. Its commitment to inclusivity is evident in its natural spaces with accessible boardwalks, and flat surfaces that are maintained during the winter months. Located along the shoreline, Thunder Bay's Marina Park offers those with mobility issues the opportunity to bask in the breathtaking views of Lake Superior and the iconic Sleeping Giant. The thoughtful design of the park ensures that families and friends can stroll together, creating lasting memories against the amazing backdrop.



Winter at Sleeping Giant

Kamview Nordic Centre offers both snowshoe and cross-country ski trails. For those that need a little assistance, the centre also offers sit-skis rentals that will allow you to enjoy the great outdoors with ease.

## Indoor fun

For those that would prefer the indoors, Thunder Bay has adventures waiting for them as well. For those sport lovers, Thunder Bay offers both wheelchair curling at the Fort William Curling Club, or sledge hockey at Fort William Gardens every Wednesday.

During the winter months you can also explore the city's cultural gems such as the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. The gallery is the largest public art gallery between Sault Ste Marie and Winnipeg and is home to over 1600 pieces of art in its permanent collection. The gallery's dedication to making culture accessible allows art enthusiasts the ability to discover the beauty of art with exhibits that will leave them captivated.



Thunder Bay Art Gallery



Wheelchair Curlers line up shot



Sledge Hockey



Conservatory

For those seeking the tranquility of nature but want to stay indoors, the Centennial Botanical Conservatory is a haven of serenity. Accessible pathways wind through lush greenery, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the beauty of the natural world.

## Getting around Thunder Bay

Navigating around Thunder Bay in the winter is made easier by the city's commitment to accessible transportation. Buses equipped with ramps and designated spaces for mobility devices ensure that everyone can venture out to explore the winter in Thunder Bay, which gives people who need assistance a sense of independence.

Winter in Thunder Bay isn't just a

season, it's an adventure waiting to be found. The city's dedication to accessibility allows everyone to enjoy the winter season while showing how a community can turn winter into a time of joy, a season to make memories in an inclusive and welcoming city.

Check out the City of Thunder Bay's website, to learn more about accessible services available. For information on additional things to do, how to get around or book a stay, visit Tourism Thunder Bay website at [www.visitthunderbay.com](http://www.visitthunderbay.com)

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# Latin America for All: making the impossible possible

By Cristina Vallejo

“Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

-Francis of Assisi

I believe this phrase fits perfectly for a person like me, who has to learn to live with a disability. Almost five years ago, I had a horse accident that left me with a paraplegia from my waist down, which means I cannot feel or move any part of my body below my ribs. In a matter of seconds, my life had an irreversible turnabout, which would not only bring difficulties, but several life lessons and blessings as well. I feel blessed by the fact that I am still alive, with full use of my mind, and am able to share my life with my children, who at the time of the accident were aged one and three. I have felt the love and support of family and friends more intensely than ever. And I have proven myself to be stronger than I ever imagined possible. Perhaps my new life has brought more blessings than difficulties. But, until recently, there was something that really upset me, and I simply decided

not to give it much thought: how challenging it would be for me to travel.

## ME AND TRAVELLING

I love to travel. I loved to work in the travel field. I traveled for work, and worked so I could travel. Besides being passionate about travelling, I’ve always been passionate about promoting my country as a unique destination. I wrote travel articles for over 15 years for our family business.

As a journalist, I travelled countless times throughout my wonderful country. I was invited on several press trips. I also worked for a public relations office, where I got to organize and accompany national and international journalists on press trips throughout Ecuador. I loved to share all the wonders I discovered in my own country both with our magazine readers as well as with journalists, family and friends.

## BUT NOW THAT I’M IN A WHEELCHAIR, GALAPAGOS ... ACCESSIBLE? NO WAY!

Now more and more travellers are able to enjoy



Galapagos, this “living laboratory of evolution”. But... accessible for all? Until recently, I was almost sure not.

I quit working for the magazine after my accident.

With my new life in a wheelchair... adventure travel? The Galapagos? No way! I comforted myself by thinking “I’m glad I got to do so much of it when I could.” However, it really upset me to think I would not

be able to continue enjoying these adventures. And even more so to think I would not be able to share my passion for the outdoors with my kids.

Thanks to Latin America for All . . . I did it again!! In a different way of course, but it happened! Rolling through those trails I had once left my footsteps on felt like magic. Moreover, I was able to once again enjoy one of my favourite activities: snorkelling. Next time I’ll make sure to go scuba diving! We also did kayaking, sightseeing, swimming and more... A dream come true! I felt immensely thankful to life. And of course, to Latin America for All.

## MY GALAPAGOS EXPERIENCE IN A WHEELCHAIR

I travelled to San Cristóbal Island, and stayed in the town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. The highlight of this town is the main street with a boardwalk next to the sea, and from which, at a point, you can spot several sea lions (and unfortunately smell them as well).

The tour operation at Galapagos is outstanding! Their most remarkable asset is their staff! Guides and the support people in charge of logistics were extremely helpful. They would go beyond their responsibilities in order to make our trip pleasant. You could definitely tell they enjoy their job, and their passion for their home island is contagious!

The tours also include top notch equipment, special wheelchairs for the trails, beach wheelchairs, flotation devices to make snorkelling comfortable, wetsuits, and snorkelling gear. Also worth mentioning is their flexibility to adapt to the needs of their passengers. The staff was respectful of the times we needed

for certain activities. They invited us to participate in several activities, however, they never made us feel pressured, but rather confident in the fact that we were in excellent hands.

## THE FOOD

I really enjoyed the food! Whenever I am at sea level, I like to eat fresh fish and seafood. And I found it delicious in San Cristóbal!

I believe the restaurants were carefully selected. Although some of them did not seem very good by just looking at the place, the food was quite tasty. The ones I liked the best were El Descanso Marinero, where I had delicious clamshells, and which had a folkloric marine decoration. Maui Resto Bar had a laid-back tropical ambiance with trees inside. Here I dined a superb prawns and we shared nice cocktails. Finally, the restaurant where we had lunch on the day of our visit to the highlands, Ottoy was located in a farm with a lush tropical vegetation and overlooking the highlands all the way to the sea. Here I had a fish dish served with rice, salad and a delicious natural fruit juice.

## DAY BY DAY

**Day 1:** Arrival at hotel + Lunch + Briefing + Snorkel at Lobería Beach

Although the main purpose of this visit is to try the snorkelling equipment and find what suits your needs best, it is a great introduction to the Galapagos. This beach of white sand and clear sea, close to town, is inhabited by sea lions, the endemic marine iguanas, and a variety of marine birds. In the water, one can encounter some of the most common species of the Galapagos Marine Reserve, including sea turtles, rays, a variety of fish and,



with some luck, spot white-fin sharks.

**Day 2:** Kayak + Interpretation Center + Tijeretas View Point

Kayaking around the bay was quite relaxing. We caught sight of several animals, both at the rocks on the shores, as well as on the boats that were anchored in the bay. We saw sea lions, marine iguanas, crabs, blue-footed boobies and other marine birds.



town. Locals call it Leon Dormido (Sleeping Lion). Several marine birds live on Kicker Rock, including blue-footed boobies, gulls and frigate birds, but to appreciate the best of this visit, do not miss the snorkelling! Swimming at the edge and through the canal that divides this formation in two, the walls are covered with colourful algae and starfish. We spotted sea turtles, eagle rays, white-tip sharks and even hammerhead sharks! It sounds scary, but in fact, these animals seemed to not even notice our presence.

Moreover, we were so lucky on the day of our visit, that during our navigation, we were followed by several dolphins that swam and jumped around our boat for at least 10 minutes.

Later we had lunch at the boat, we went to the nearby beach of Manglesito to rest for a bit and enjoy the beautiful scenery. It is a beach of white sand and mangroves, thus the name Manglesito. You can also snorkel around if you'd like, or just rest on the beach after all the excitement of Kicker Rock.

**Day 5:** Return to Quito ■

After lunch, we took a quick tour of the San Cristobal Interpretation Center to learn about Galapagos natural and cultural history, and the challenges for the future of the conservation of the archipelago. Later we continued on a trail that guided us to Tijeretas View Point to admire the island from above.

**Day 3:** Giant tortoise breeding center + Highlands

After breakfast, we visited Cristobal's Giant Tortoise breeding center, to admire the giants after whom the islands are named. The National Park has done a good job bringing up these tortoises and saving them from extinction, after they were almost completely vanished due to their use as a delicacy for buccaneer and pirates of the 17th and 18th centuries. The Galapagos Tortoises also lost (and keep losing at a smaller rate) their eggs and hatchlings to introduced species such as pigs and dogs, and lost food due to competition with goats and cows. Today, the Giant

Tortoise population is increasing, and several individuals have been released in their natural habitat. However, some subspecies are already extinct.

Then we continued our trip to the highlands, where we had lunch at a beautiful restaurant in lush gardens.

**Day 4:** Snorkeling at Kicker Rock + visit to Manglesito Beach

For me, this was the highlight of the whole visit to San Cristobal. Kicker Rock is a stunning tuff cone rising over 140 metres out of the ocean, a 45-minute boat ride from the



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# Celebrating icons who blaze the trail in a quest to create a barrier-free world



**Rick Hansen**

Founder, [The Rick Hansen Foundation](#)

Rick Hansen is a Canadian Paralympian and advocate renowned for his relentless efforts to create a barrier-free world. Best known for his Man in Motion world tour in the 1980s, during which he wheeled over 40,000 kilometers across 34 countries to raise awareness about spinal cord injury and accessibility issues, Hansen has been a driving force in promoting inclusivity and accessibility. Through his Rick Hansen Foundation, he continues to work tirelessly to remove physical and social barriers for people with disabilities, advocating for universal accessibility in infrastructure, transportation, and education. His commitment to making the world more inclusive and accommodating to all individuals has inspired countless others to join the movement towards a more accessible and equitable society.

*Photo Credit: The Rick Hansen Foundation*



**Tarryn Tomlinson**

Founder, [Able2Travel](#)

South African Tarryn Tomlinson, a passionate social justice advocate, has devoted over 12 years to empowering marginalized communities, particularly youth and persons with disabilities. Beyond her advocacy, she is a writer, TV presenter, entrepreneur, public speaker and an expert in accessible travel. Tarryn's commitment to social upliftment and responsible tourism has earned her multiple awards for responsible tourism such as the WTM-Africa Responsible Tourism Awards for Diversity and Inclusion. As the newly elected board member of Cape Town Tourism, she will continue to shape positive change and inclusivity in her city and country, leaving an indelible mark on the landscape of social justice.

*Photo Credit: Tarryn Tomlinson*



**Fred Maahs, Jr.**

Founder and CEO, [Maahs Travels](#)

Fred Maahs Jr. is an American who has dedicated his life to the noble pursuit of creating a barrier-free world. With unwavering determination, he tirelessly advocates for accessibility and inclusion, working to break down physical and societal barriers that hinder the lives of individuals with disabilities. Through his advocacy, leadership and involvement in various organizations and initiatives, Fred inspires countless individuals and communities to embrace the principles of universal design, equal opportunity and diversity. He believes that everyone, regardless of their abilities, deserves the chance to thrive in a world that is truly inclusive and accommodating. He is also the co-founder of [Journeyable](#).

*Photo Credit: Fred Maahs, Jr.*



**Alvaro Silberstein**

Co-founder of [Wheel the World](#).

Alvaro is a remarkable individual who co-founded Wheel the World, an innovative and inclusive travel company, breaking down barriers to accessible travel. Through Wheel the World, he is empowering people with disabilities to explore the world's most beautiful destinations, making travel a reality for all and opening doors to new adventures for countless individuals who once thought it was out of reach.

*Photo Credit: Wheel the World*

**Jennifer Allen**



Owner of blog, [Wonders within Reach](#).

Jennifer is the parent of a child with a disability. Through her blog, she passionately shares her family's journey of travelling together while navigating the challenges and joys of life with a disability. Jennifer's heartfelt and informative posts not only provide valuable insights and tips for other disability families but also showcase the incredible adventures and experiences they've had. Her blog shares that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can explore and discover the wonders of the world.

*Photo Credit: Jennifer Allen*



**Maayan Ziv**

Founder and CEO of [Access Now](#)

Through Access Now, Maayan has harnessed technology and community engagement to empower people with disabilities to navigate the world with greater ease. Her unwavering commitment to breaking down barriers and fostering an inclusive society has earned her global recognition and admiration. Maayan's innovative leadership and advocacy have not only transformed lives but also inspired a new wave of awareness and action in the pursuit of a more accessible and equitable world.

*Photo Credit: Max Kopanygin*

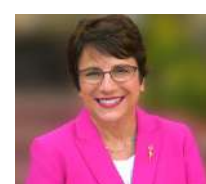


**Kristy Durso**

Owner, [Incredible Memories Travel](#)

Kristy understands the unique challenges that people with disabilities face when exploring the world so through her Incredible Memories Travel, she crafts for them unforgettable travel experiences. Her passion for inclusivity and accessibility shines through in every aspect of her work, from designing accessible itineraries to advocating for better accommodations in the travel industry. Kristy is currently TravelAbility's Ambassador of Accessible Travel.

*Photo Credit: Kristy Durso*



**Rosemarie Rosetti**

Founder and CEO of [Rosemarie Speaks](#)

With a passion for educating, Dr. Rosetti teaches about disability inclusion within the built environment, meetings, events and destination marketing organizations. She is committed to promoting inclusivity in her quest to help create a more equitable and accommodating world. Her expertise and dedication make her an invaluable resource in breaking down barriers and ensuring that every individual, regardless of their abilities, can fully participate and enjoy all aspects of life.

*Photo Credit: Dr. Rosemarie Rosetti*

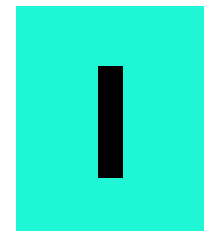
# Cruising Corner

Inclusive adventures  
across the seas

## Exploring Alaska with Princess Cruises

I never expected to be disabled for my bucket list trip

By Marcia Frost



've been on many cruises and consider myself somewhat of an expert. Now, it's a different experience

because I cannot travel without an assistive device.

I grew up with disabled parents who were travelling in scooters or wheelchairs most of their lives. It never kept them from experiencing the world. It made it easier for me, as my health declined over the last eight years, to accept I would be doing the same.

I can still walk around the house some, but multiple progressive diseases, including Undifferentiated connective tissue disease (UCTD), interstitial lung disease, and dermatomyositis, have left me mostly using a scooter as I await a custom wheelchair.

As a travel writer, I had been around the world and throughout the United States. Travel had been in my blood. I realized that it was not as easy as it used to be and



Marcia at Fairmont Empress  
Victoria Canada

had to cut down to local and just a few bigger trips a year. There was still one thing that I really wanted to do: complete the 50 U.S. states. That meant a trip to Alaska. While this bucket list item originally involved travelling around the state

and staying in multiple cities, I realized that was now easier said than done. I decided to follow my parents' and do it by cruise.

It didn't take long to decide on Princess Cruises. I had heard

that they had many wheelchair accessible cabins as well as excursions that were available for disabled passengers. I would have my good friend Brittany with me to help out with the photography and the luggage.

Princess has more than a dozen different Alaska itineraries on seven ships. I decided on the Royal Princess (one of the New Love Boat ships) on an Inside Passage voyage. It would go roundtrip from Seattle, Washington.

The main reason I chose this one was its full day in Glacier Bay National Park. Unlike any other National Park, unless you are very adventurous and able to do advanced hiking, most do not actually go into Glacier Bay.

The Royal Princess spends an entire day going along Glacier Bay, with rangers on board to explain everything. That day in the middle of the voyage was ideal. I was able to see this wonder of the world at the start of the day, watching the whales, seals and glaciers from my very accessible balcony cabin.

I ordered room service and took my time dressing. There was no worry about missing something while getting off with my scooter at a port. We stayed in the room a lot but took a break to see the view and get some pizza from Alfredo's.

In Juneau, I took a whale watching cruise. The staff helped me on and off the ship since my scooter couldn't go onboard. I was on a bench in the front where I could still see plenty of whales from that side



of the boat, as well as magnificent views of Mendenhall Glacier.

After that, we took the Goldbelt Tram to the top of the mountain for the spectacular scenery. The tram is very big and I rode my scooter right onto it, through the shop, and museum, and into the restaurant.

Skagway was a bit difficult because there was a mudslide at the port, and they needed to tender to there. That means taking a small boat (this is for all cruise lines, but hopefully won't last long). I was lucky my

scooter is light, and they could carry it on. For those with heavy wheelchairs, you needed to be able to transfer to a manual one.

With the extra boat, I missed the first part of my bus tour. I was able to scoot downtown. The roads were a bit bumpy, but I managed to do some shopping while waiting for the tour group to meet me for the Days of 98 show. I then took the bus back to the tender.

Ketchikan has an interesting history



Ketchikan houses on stilts, Alaska

and I learned about it with a walking tour. I was the only one using an assistive device and did feel I held up the group at times when there wasn't an easy curb cut. No one seemed to complain, and the city is not very big, so I think it was worth it.

Our final stopover was in Victoria, B.C., Canada. I had been there three times previously when I was still walking. I was pleasantly surprised the city buses had lifts and spaces for wheelchairs and scooters. The driver made me feel very comfortable.

We took the bus from the cruise port to the Fairmont Empress. I had hoped to have afternoon tea, but we didn't get into there until night. We sampled their new Sunset Sips, which offers cocktails in tea kettles and small bites on a tiered teatime tray. As old as this hotel is, they have made it easy to get around, with ramps.

I'm sure it won't surprise anyone who deals with disabilities to know, but the buffet on the Royal Princess was difficult to navigate. We also

found the food to be better in the other offerings. One of the three main dining rooms, Concerto, was used for people who needed extra help and they were always accommodating the scooter. We also had excellent meals in two specialty restaurants, Sabatini's and the Crowne Grill.

Pizza, ice cream, tacos and burgers were available in various places (and room service) all the time. A favourite place we went to everyday was the International Café. They had complimentary pastries, small sandwiches, quiches and more, available 24 hours a day. You could also purchase specialty coffees, which were free with our [Princess Plus Package](#).

I received a Chocolate Indulgence treatment at The Lotus Spa and went to the thermal pools in The Enclave onboard. It was all accessible and the staff were always there to help.

The only time I had any real problems on the ship was something common at most locations around the world: opening

doors. A few were automatic, but most required opening by hand or pushing a button that was not always easy to reach.

Planning is key for a disabled cruise. Excursions can fill up, so you want to make sure you are on the wheelchair ones when you first book. You also don't want to be pressed for time. We stayed in Seattle at two accessible hotels, the Homewood Suites Downtown before the trip and the Hilton Motif Seattle after. It allowed us to not feel rushed getting to the cruise ship and the airport, and even able to do sightseeing.

My Princess Cruise was a wonderful time, but it was also filled with mentally and physically challenging moments. That doesn't mean I'm not going to take my scooter on board a ship again. ■

“It didn't take long to decide on Princess Cruises. I had heard that they had many wheelchair accessible cabins as well as excursions that were available for disabled passengers.”

Marcia Frost



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

Follow her: [@Spiritstraveller](#) on Twitter, Facebook, Threads, Instagram and YouTube.

<https://linktr.ee/MarciaFrost>

# Bridgette Jones on the high seas

By Angela Lynn

I am Bridgette Jones, excited to share my story as a proud Deaf traveller. While I had never been particularly drawn to cruises, my perspective took a complete turn about a decade ago when a friend invited me to accompany his wife on a cruise adventure. I thought, "What a fantastic opportunity for adventure!" Little did I know that this experience aboard a Carnival cruise to Baja California would completely change my outlook on cruising. The cruise lasted a week, and it was so enjoyable that it inspired me to embark on a two-week journey with Virgin Voyages to the Dominican Republic.

As a first-time Carnival cruiser, I had no preconceived notions. I joined my Deaf friend, generously sponsored by her husband, who covered all our expenses. This allowed me to dive into the cruise experience without any preconceived notions. Initially, the cruise felt like a voyage on Noah's Ark, with small circular windows offering glimpses of the outside world. I even had a reflective moment, akin to a sacred passage from the Bible as I gazed outside and sought blessings for our journey. However, as I settled into the cruise, I



discovered that the ship offered numerous accommodations and amenities that greatly enhanced my experience. This adventure served as a valuable learning experience for me, and when I later set sail on a Virgin Voyages cruise, I felt much more prepared and had a significantly more enjoyable time compared to my initially awkward Carnival cruise.

## You've done a Carnival Cruise and Virgin Voyages. Which was your favourite?

Since Carnival was my first cruise experience, I didn't know what I really needed for my first trip. However, Virgin Voyages cruise isn't just any cruise – it's my absolute favourite! I was on Virgin Voyages Scarlet Lady from Miami to Santo Domingo, and I loved it! I was by then more aware of what I

wanted and needed for my cruise to be a positive one. Most of all, I enjoyed the cruise by watching how beautiful the water appeared to be. As a traveller, I don't have any specific favourite destinations; I love every place I've had the privilege to visit so far. However, my Virgin Voyages adventure was an absolute blast!

## As a Deaf traveller, what were some of your specific needs and how did the cruise line (be it Virgin or Carnival) accommodate them?

My specific needs related to communication accessibility and both Virgin Voyages and Carnival cruise lines made efforts to accommodate them.

Virgin Voyages, on the Scarlet Lady cruise, provided ASL

interpreter services, which was a valuable resource. They also utilized smartphones and in-cabin technology for messaging with shipboard sailor service crews and booking reservations hassle-free without vocal communication. Furthermore, they offered captioned movies and TV shows, enhancing the entertainment options for Deaf travellers.

One of the standout features for me was the portable kit they provided, which included door knock flashing, alarm systems, and other devices designed for Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals, enhancing safety and convenience. Additionally, Virgin Voyages ensured that important announcements and warnings were captioned in the main areas and lobby, making sure Deaf travellers were well-informed. What I found particularly helpful was their comprehensive newsletter or brochure, which contained detailed information about various locations, activities and schedules. This made it easy for me to plan my activities and explore different options. I never felt left out or alone during my cruise experience with Virgin Voyages, as they provided all the necessary information daily. The in-cabin Sailor Services crew was a valuable point of contact for answering any additional questions or requests.

It's worth mentioning that I travelled with two friends who are seasoned cruise travellers, and they also found the accommodations and accessibility features provided by Virgin Voyages to be highly effective and satisfactory.

## What are some fun activities



## you engaged in as a Deaf traveller?

Throughout the voyage, there was a treasure trove of activities and exciting excursions to take part in, making it an all-around delightful experience. Onboard the ships, when it came to entertaining options like karaoke, nightclubs and bars, I didn't require interpreter services as these activities were visually engaging and easy to enjoy. However, for activities like entertainment shows, dancing and comedy performances, I did rely on interpreters to fully immerse myself in the fun.

When it came to dining services, I was often accompanied by my close friends. Although the interpreters didn't always join us at the table, it didn't dampen our spirits. We went ahead and had a great time on our own. However, there were specific activities for which I requested interpreter services, and I was grateful that one of my hearing friends offered to step in as

an interpreter if the professionals couldn't make it. This ensured that I wouldn't miss out on any part of the experience, and I had a fantastic time alongside my Deaf friend as well.

## From your perspective, what advantages do cruises offer as compared to other travel experiences?

From my perspective, cruises offer several advantages in terms of community, accessibility and unique experiences. Firstly, both cruises did provide ASL interpreting services, which was a positive step towards inclusivity. However, it's important for Deaf individuals to proactively request this service in advance to ensure a smooth experience. The sense of community on board was welcoming and inclusive, and I had the opportunity to connect with fellow travellers. The accessibility features, such as visual alerts and notifications in public areas, ensured that important information

was accessible to me. Furthermore, the unique experiences offered by cruises, including exploring different destinations and enjoying onboard entertainment, were truly memorable. Overall, cruises provide a wonderful platform for Deaf individuals to connect with others, access necessary services, and create lasting memories while exploring the world.

**How have cruise lines addressed any challenges you faced onboard? Are there areas where improvements could still be made?**

In my travelling experience, many cruise lines now offer visual alerts and notifications in public areas, ensuring that Deaf passengers are aware of important announcements and safety information. These visual aids are a positive step towards inclusivity. However, continuous improvements are needed to provide comprehensive information about accessibility features and to expand interpreter services to accommodate international travellers, enhancing the overall cruise experience for people like me. For example, in a recent challenging experience, the interpreter wasn't able to provide me with full services because they had their own time limit, wanting to vacation for themselves instead of joining me for activities, dining with the group for conversation, etc. Even when I had an interpreter, I had a limited time frame for access, and it was up to the interpreters where they wanted to accompany me. There was even an incident where an interpreter claimed not to feel well, but my friends and I saw her partying and having a good time. It made me realize that I prefer to

have my own interpreter rather than rely on Virgin Voyages' service. Unfortunately, when my friends and I complained to Virgin Voyages' services, they didn't seem to take it seriously. They have a specific policy regarding when and where we can use interpreters, which wasn't flexible enough to meet my needs. Even though Virgin Voyages seemed to have better destinations that I wanted to visit, this experience made me reconsider using their interpreter service.

**What are your future cruise plans? Any upcoming destinations you're excited to explore?**

At this moment, I can only dream of being on Noah's Ark for an interesting journey, right? Of course, I'm just kidding. This year, I'll be travelling to Jamaica to celebrate my friend's 50th birthday, and I'll be flying with my friend. As for the next cruise in the Spring of 2024, I'll be heading to Bali with my friends on the Virgin Voyages Resilient Lady cruise, which offers full accessibility services and I've decided that I will have my own interpreter to avoid any potential conflicts and to enjoy a sense of freedom. I'm looking forward to a unique experience where I can rely on my own resources. While Virgin Voyages does provide smartphone technology and in-cabin communication systems, captioned movies and TV shows which are great, having my personal interpreter will help me to enjoy my vacation rather than relying on their services.

I can't speak for other Deaf people who may use Virgin Voyages' special needs services, but I just want

to unwind and enjoy my vacation with peace of mind. But overall, my previous experiences with both Virgin Voyages and Carnival were incredibly pleasant and filled with awe-inspiring fun.

**Recommendation for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind people seeking comprehensive communication accessibility services**

Explore this website: [www.deaf.vacations](http://www.deaf.vacations). They provide information about various cruise destinations and their schedules. These cruises provide interpreter services that offer a complete agenda, eliminating the need to coordinate with interpreters separately.



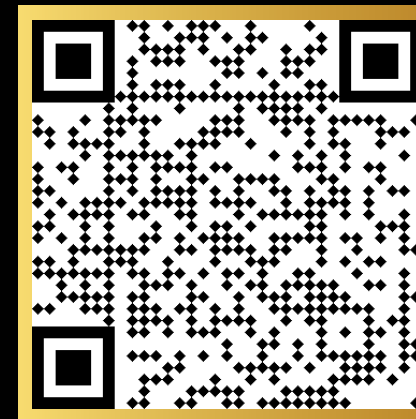
We want your feedback. **Click here** to go to our magazine survey. Five participants will win a \$100 Amazon gift card.



**Be The Change You Want To See!**

*Angela Lynn*

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# Specialized Travel Agents

Booking your next trip just got easier.

## Disability travel agents who plan worry-free trips around the world

By Wheel the World

For individuals with disabilities, a trip can be difficult to plan. There are many reasons for that. The world isn't always built with accessibility in mind and consequently, it can feel out of reach for those who require assistance or special conditions. This is where a [travel agency dedicated to people with disabilities](#) comes into the picture.

### Pitfalls of booking with a standard travel agency

When you book through a standard agency or platform, the accessibility information is not prioritized. You may see a wheelchair-friendly sign slapped on the website or statements that the rooms are ADA compliant. However, we all know that doesn't always translate to true accessibility. At times, it is more of an afterthought than a priority. The downsides of booking a trip through one of these standard travel agencies are:

1. Lack of accessibility information
2. Information is inaccurate and unreliable
3. You need to call, ask specific questions, double-check the accessibility information, and you may still arrive to find that the booking is not as advertised

4. Accessibility is not a one-size-fits-all solution. People with disabilities have unique and different needs when it comes to finding a hotel, activity, transportation and other travel factors

Wheel the World understands this to the fullest extent, this is why our mission is to make the world accessible and travel without limits.



Wheelchair user, Kirk Williams, in Costa Rica

### How does Wheel the World provide worry-free travel for those with disabilities?

We are dedicated to solving the issues that disabled travellers face—issues similar to those outlined above. Here are some reasons why you can travel with confidence when you take a trip with our accessible travel agency.

We provide detailed measurements and data for a comprehensive accessibility overview

With every offering on Wheel the World's website, detailed information was obtained through measurements and data. In fact, there are **over 200 data points** obtained with information that is relevant for travellers with disabilities.

When you book a hotel, multi-day vacation package or activity, you will know that the accessibility information is accurate and reliable. For example, you will find various pieces of data about specific hotels and rooms, allowing travellers to book the one that best suit their needs. Some of the relevant information you will find for hotels are:

- Shower type (roll-in shower, bathtub) with accessible features such as a shower seat, grab bars and height of the shower head
- Door width to entrance and bathroom
- Toilet grab bars



Measuring bed height to ensure reliable accessibility information

- Bed height
- Pool with a lift
- Step free entrances
- Turning space
- Accessibility of hotel dining areas

and so much more—too many to list in one article. You can even find out whether the telephone can be reached from the bed, whether there is free space under the bed, and the visual/auditory disability guidance available. A one-size-fits-all solution does not exist but Wheel the World provides a solution.

Expert disability travel agents provide personalized support

Have you ever called a hotel multiple times to confirm that the accessibility features shown on their website are present? Or call to ensure the room you requested will indeed be available

during your stay? If you require certain accessible amenities when travelling, chances are at some point, you have arrived at a hotel to find your room is not accessible, despite all the calls.

The expert travel agents at Wheel the World have a wealth of experience in providing trusted service for travellers with disabilities. **They make all the calls for you, confirm the bookings you requested, and set everything up for a worry-free trip.** Their expertise in this field also allows them to create personalized trips that is suitable for you.

The support continues during your trip

If any issues arise or you have questions that need answering during a trip, our travel experts will be available for support. It is the most convenient and stress-free way to book accessible travel.



Accessible hotel room with low bed height

The mission to make the world accessible cannot be fully accomplished alone. It requires a community of like-minded people that are also dedicated to the vision. This is why Wheel the World partners with various local partners around the globe to assist in disability assistance training, awareness, and knowledge of accessible tourism.

For example, one of our strong partnerships is with [Essential Costa Rica](#), an organization with whom we have done impactful work. Their commitment to accessible travel has led to Costa Rica becoming one of the best vacation spots for those with disabilities. It is a delight to book trips for our travellers there, knowing our trusted partner aims to provide a top-notch, accessible experience for all visitors. We've heard numerous stories of individuals and groups alike having one of the best accessible trips while in Costa Rica.

**TESTIMONIAL**

"From the beginning of booking with Wheel the World, to the end, and travelling our most memorable guided trip ever, the process was easy with Lorena and Majo at

the helm of getting everything coordinated, but more than that, the service provided was above and beyond anything we could have imagined.

Our guide Eddie and driver Andres were so knowledgeable, accommodating, caring and professional, it was amazing. This trip was for my mom to be able to see the nesting turtles in Tortuguero National Park and the Arenal Volcano. At 92, walking short distances is an option but getting to beaches to see the turtles at night or long hikes through the hanging bridges trail etc., assistance is needed. From aquatic chairs, to wheel chairs and scooters, accessible vans and the helping hands in and out of boats along the way, Costa Rica, we love you."

- *Wheel the World Traveller* ■



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# Vlogger Spotlight

The impactful voices of vloggers with disabilities

## Vineet Valentine Victor

 @wheelchairtravelswithvineet



### Your best travel experience

While no place in the world is entirely wheelchair-accessible, I must say that my best travel experience so far was in Switzerland. Although I couldn't ride the Ice Flyer or go up to the Glacier Park on Mount Titlis, the fact that I could reach a height of 10,000 feet above sea level, all while in a wheelchair, was truly unbelievable for me! We weren't adequately prepared for the trip in terms of accessibility, so we couldn't take advantage of the Euro-key system for lifts and elevators at some tourist locations like the Rhine Falls and the Chapel Bridge. However, we heard that it works well. Speaking of Rhine Falls, it was heartening to learn that there was an accessible boat for the ferry ride. We also found out that there are accessible cruises on many lakes in Switzerland. And how can I not mention the trams there? They were incredibly

easy to roll in and out of, and if I remember correctly, people in wheelchairs didn't have to pay for the ride in 2017! Well done, Switzerland!

### Your worst travel experience

If you visit my YouTube channel, you'll see that countries like Germany also have inaccessible places. However, I had disappointing experiences when I visited the state of Rajasthan last year. It wasn't just due to inaccessibility, but also because my dad and I were separated from the rest of the family as they continued with the normal tours with the guide. I missed out on hearing stories about the beautiful palaces, their kings, and their lives, which the others got to hear. This saddened them as well. Some places had ramps, but some were too steep for my

comfort, and some didn't go all the way up. I wish the people in charge understood that there is a ramp standard that needs to be followed, and they should be tested by wheelchair users before finalizing them. So, I won't label this experience as the worst; I'll call it the saddest among all the places I've been to.

### Your must-return-to places

The heading certainly brought a smile to my face! In my YouTube videos, you'll notice that in almost every place we've visited, my mom and I have a tagline – "We have to go back for the . . ." Haha! I would love to revisit most of the places I've already been to because I might have missed a spot, an activity, or simply because I want to check if the accessibility has improved, if at all! I'm aware that some places

in our country have significantly improved in terms of accessibility since my childhood visits. I am so happy and thankful to our central as well as state governments because now, another young kid in a wheelchair won't face the difficulties that my parents and I did. If you want me to name a few places, it would be great to go back to Goa and see if there is any accessible beach yet among the many beaches there. I'd also like to return to Disneyland Paris and enjoy an accessible ride, or maybe revisit Mount Titlis and check if the Ice Flyer and the Glacier Park are accessible now. My list goes on!

### Travel and/or equipment advice

My family and I have learned a lot about accessible travel since I was about two years old. As I've grown, my needs have




changed, but one thing we never fail to do is raise our voice. We've come to understand that it's challenging for the able-bodied society to comprehend our needs and the problems we face unless we express them. Fortunately, there are people who are very willing to listen and make changes for us, so always speak up.

Next comes the wheelchair. I have a travel wheelchair that is lightweight, foldable, and easy to store. Usually, my dad pushes me, but in our recent trips, he got exhausted, so now my caregiver accompanies me. If you have to go somewhere where your caregiver cannot accompany you, the next best option would be a foldable power wheelchair. Always carry protein or food supplements that can be mixed in water and consumed whenever needed. There are places where I don't get to eat due to my dietary requirements being a bit different, and I learned this the hard way.

If you need a cushion, backrest, or even your customized seat for a long trip, make sure to carry them. Don't forget your medical supplies at any cost and carry your prescriptions too. Some places require you to show your disability ID, for example, you need it for the DAS pass in Disneyland, without which you won't be allowed on a ride (we learned this the hard way) and also for the Euro-key (I think).

Always check the website of a tourist attraction for disability-related notes beforehand. Sometimes the accessible routes for one place are different from others. My favourite tip is this last one. So the next time I'm travelling to a snow-capped mountain, I'm carrying a few metres of the beach wheelchair mat just to see if it works as well as it does on sand. If it does, voila! You have a new wheelchair hack for wheelchair travellers!! There's this portable, lightweight, manual lift available in a few countries now that enables easy transfer of a person in a wheelchair to airplane seats, beds, etc. My parents have purchased one for me, and I should be receiving it in December.

 [@wheelchairtravelswithvineet](#)

 [@VineetValentineVictorOfficial](#)



Hello, I'm Vineet Valentine Victor from the beautiful land of India, and I'm a 24-year-old wheelchair musician. I was born with spina bifida, and my love for travel blossomed thanks to my parents. They believed I should start exploring the world with them before I outgrew their arms and before they became too old to travel. So, believe it or not, my first journey was when I was just one day old! Well, that was a visit to the hospital for my back surgery – just kidding :) Here we are now – I've grown out of their arms, and they are getting older, yet our love for travel persists.

Accessible travel remains a challenge in most parts of the world even in 2023. But I can say we're making progress. Things are improving, and attitudes are changing. It all starts with us—when the disabled community steps forward and shows the world that we exist, there are people who are willing to listen and make our lives easier. Even in our country, positive changes are happening, especially with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. Many improvements are being made to the accessibility of public places, not just for wheelchair users. Of course, there's still a long way to go. My mom and I run a wheelchair travel channel on YouTube where we share our past trips, focusing on the accessibility of places. We also review new places and share them with the disabled community. We draw inspiration from Cory from Curb Free with Cory Lee, a renowned wheelchair traveller from the U.S. We hope to inspire our Indian counterparts to venture out and travel if they wish. I want to show them that they too can do it! Travel is something that liberates your mind from the mundane aspects of life, even if only for a brief period. It rejuvenates the spirit, creating beautiful lifelong memories with your loved ones.

P.S. Fun fact: Did you know we made a beach wheelchair at home because the ones available online were too costly? ■

## Bucket List Accessible Destinations

### Canada

[Alberta](#)

[British Columbia](#)

[Ontario](#)

[Prince Edward Island](#)

[Newfoundland & Labrador](#)

### U.S.A.

[Connecticut](#)

[Minnesota](#)

[Maine](#)

[Arizona](#)

[Massachusetts](#)

[Colorado](#)

[New York](#)

[Utah](#)

[Pennsylvania](#)

[New Mexico](#)

[North Carolina](#)

[California](#)

[Florida](#)

[Hawaii](#)

[Indiana](#)

[Oregon](#)

[Michigan](#)



*Being able to travel with my family is a right, not a privilege*



*Enjoying the wheelchair-accessible outdoors!*

Visit [www.travelability.net](http://www.travelability.net) for more accessible destinations

# Blogger Spotlight

The impactful voices of bloggers with disabilities

## Shanna Groves

Lipreading Mom



The intersectionality of disability and advocacy is something Shanna Groves has known for more than 20 years. She lives with bilateral progressive hearing loss that was diagnosed in 2001 after the birth of her first child, who has a disability. She has published two books about deafness, [Lip Reader \(2009\)](#) and [Confessions of a Lip Reading Mom \(2013\)](#), and led advocacy presentations throughout the United States. Shanna decided to pursue a love of teaching and obtained a Master's in special education. She previously taught young children with a variety of disabilities and created Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students. She currently serves on the board of the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

### Your best travel experience

Hitting the open road is one of my favourite warm weather activities. My family and I have travelled Route 66 twice and frequented highways in the U.S. West, South and East. We've visited places like Oklahoma and Texas more times than I can count to see family and friends.

### Your worst travel experience

Before starting a family, I used to travel by plane to various destinations for work. My least favourite travel experience was when I was four months pregnant and I had a very short layover when flying home from a work event. The first plane was late taking off, which

impacted me catching the second flight in a different terminal. I had to run across the airport while dealing with morning sickness and almost missed the flight!

Also, airport announcements are usually not captioned, and I cannot understand them clearly enough, so I have almost missed boarding some flights or gone to the wrong terminal

to board because the terminal change PA announcement was not accessible to me.

### Driving trips with family

Despite the joys of summer travel, driving and I don't always get along. I blame this stress on my need to lip-read while driving the family places. It's difficult to have any conversations in rush-hour traffic or even long stretches of desolate interstates. And night driving? It just doesn't work well with my reliance upon lip-reading.

From the scrape on the passenger door of my minivan to the cracked bumper, I have participated in enough fender-benders to keep my insurance agent in business. Would it be okay to blame the inattentive driving on my three kids? Not every mom has to lip-read her children in the rearview mirror to understand what they are saying. But I do because I'm hard of hearing. When it comes to sitting behind the wheel, my eyes are my ears.

During some minivan excursions, my eyes focus on the cars ahead of me instead of the kids sitting behind me. Like magnets, bumper stickers catch my attention:

HOW AM I DRIVING? CALL 1-800-BAD-BOSS TO REPORT ME.

STAY 300 FEET BACK (NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR FLYING ROCKS).

IMAGINE ALL THE PEOPLE LIVING IN PEACE.

The last bumper message is something I should have been doing all along, instead of memorizing all the car stickers or talking to my kids through a mirror. Maybe if I took a deep breath and remained calm more often, I wouldn't have backed



Shanna and family - Colorado Rocky Mountains Trip 2019

the car up and side-swiped the passenger door against a mailbox. Or I would have stopped instead of rear-ending a dumpster. Maybe my van would still be in its pristine, straight-off-the-car-lot quality, instead of reeling with wounds. Life is impacted by my driving style. When the days are more at peace, it is because I keep my eyes on the path before me. When my eyes sway off the path, I am left feeling anxious. If my driving skills are a metaphor for my life, then I am in big trouble!

### Handy travel companions

I make sure to carry my iPhone, which has apps for accessibility, such as live captioning. I use the captioning when people are talking to me and I can't understand them. I also have used a frequency-modulated system (FM system) that works like a microphone that the speaker wears and I hear their voice directly into my hearing aids. Also, I make sure to carry back-up hearing aid batteries because they need to be replaced every four to five days. I also carry a secure, dehumidifier

case for my hearing aids and place them inside at the end of each day to remove moisture from them.

### Advice to your younger self

The next time I am tempted to take my eyes off the road, I need to remember that simple, yet powerful, statement once spotted on the back of another beat-up car. When I strive to live in peace with those around me, my attention focuses on the joy of being on the open road before me and less on the distractions behind me.

Here is a new bumper sticker I'd love to create:

IGNORE THE DENTS. I'M A WORK IN PROGRESS. ■

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

We want your feedback.

**Click here**

to go to our magazine survey. Five participants will win a \$100 Amazon gift card.

# 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.



Carly blogs about her sudden sensorineural, single-sided hearing loss and how it affected her life. Originally from a seaside village in Yorkshire, she's spent time living in China, Thailand and now Spain, where she teaches primary school. Living with Ménière's disease and vestibular migraines, the travel-lover is determined not to let her vestibular conditions stop her. She blogs about how busy environments and artificial lighting trigger her symptoms, leaving her dizzy, disoriented, nauseated and off balance. Sometimes that's tough, especially that time she was trying to get through airport security, in [Airport Spins](#).

**Blogger:** Carly  
**Home country:** U.K. to Spain.  
**Blog:** [My Hearing Loss Story](#)

**What and where:** Symptoms at airport security



Travelling with a Down syndrome son has been tough for the Benfields, partly because the 8 year old thrives on routine and familiarity. So how did he manage on their three-night Disney Cruise? This blog post breaks it down—detailing how a child with Down syndrome is likely to fare on the slides, pools, Splash Zone, Kids Club, while dining or at shows. No surprise that Jillian highlights the calm and kindness with which the staff handles kids of all needs. Read the [Disney Cruise post here](#).

**Blogger:** Jillian Benfield  
**Home country:** Wales to Tanzania  
**Blog:** [Jillian Benfield](#)  
**What and where:** Disney cruise with Down syndrome child



Jacqui Flynn lives in Lancashire, U.K. She spent years suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) along with other challenges. When she turned 40, she started a blog to support fellow ME/CFS sufferers and raise awareness about life with chronic illness. Trained in Sports and Exercise Psychology, she likes to share the therapies she's used to benefit others and keep looking forward. This post featured a camping expedition to picturesque Chapel House Farm, where she felt nature heal body and soul, even if the limited-time showers were a challenge. Read the post [here](#).

**Blogger:** Jacqui Flynn  
**Home country:** U.K.  
**Blog:** [40 and Fighting](#)  
**What and where:** Camping at Chapel House Farm, U.K.



Chris's travels have taken him through 33 states and 19 countries so far. His myotonia congenita, a rare type of muscular dystrophy, has progressed to his need to use a wheelchair, requiring alterations to his travels. He shares his experience and research on disabled travel, specifically for seniors, on The Disabled Traveller. He travelled to the Colorado National Monument—known for its sheer-walled, red rock canyons, vast plateau and towering monoliths. Chris focused on the spectacular Rim Rock Drive here, offering tips on how to navigate the drive—hint: travel east to west—and summarizing its overlooks and their accessibility. Read The Disabled Traveller's Guide to [Colorado National Monument](#).

**Blogger:** Chris  
**Home country:** U.S.

**Blog:** [The Disabled Traveller](#)

**What and where:** Driving the Rim Rock Scenic drive at Colorado National Monument, Colorado, U.S.



Helen is a disability travel blogger, based in and highlighting Scotland, notably all its wheelchair-friendly places and activities. Her rare neurological disease, neuromyelitis optica, affects her brain stem, spinal cord and optic nerves. She explores her home country with her trusty manual wheelchair, adventuring to remote cozy cottages, island retreats and city fun. Join her for a magical adapted canoeing and bushcraft weekend on the enchanting Loch Lomond, to the mystical Inchcailloch Island in A Canoeing and Bushcraft Weekend with Anyone Can in [Scotland](#).

**Blogger:** Helen Lear-Grant  
**Home country:** U.K.  
**Blog:** [Wheely Braw](#)  
**What and where:** Magical canoe trip in Scotland



At two weeks old, while in the neonatal intensive care unit, Rosie acquired a spinal cord injury and became a T6 complete paraplegic. Now she tries not to let her wheelchair slow her down, especially when it comes to her love of travel. Originally from Nashville, Tennessee, she currently lives in Dublin, Ireland while working on a Master's degree in Disability Studies. But it was the Chicago Lake and River Architecture Tour that we found especially helpful, with Rosie's tips sure to help others have smooth sailing. Read Chicago: [Architecture Tour and More!](#)

**Blogger:** Rosie  
**Home country:** U.S. to U.K.  
**Blog:** [Rosie Roaming](#)  
**What and where:** Lake and River Architecture Tour, Chicago, U.S.



**Vlogger:** Dee Lugton  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Vlog:** [Box Van Dee](#)  
**Experience:** Nomadic life with fibromyalgia



This senior citizen claims to have always been a nomad at heart, but at age 64 she broke free of a lifetime of trauma and abuse and became a true nomad. She's also disabled, solo and has spent years inspiring her audience through more than 400 videos on a wide range of topics. Check out her playlist, Disabilities in Nomad Life from the Box Van, with insights on all kinds of challenges, such as this one on [How to Cope with Fibromyalgia](#).



**Vlogger:** Sakina Kee  
**Home country:** Pakistan  
**Vlog:** [SakinaKee Deaf VLOGS](#)  
**Experience:** Visiting Kashmir



Social activist and deaf vlogger, Sakina shares inspiring stories to improve inclusivity and educate the public about life for differently-abled persons. Join her as she visits verdant rural Kashmir- transcript included- in her [Kashmir vlogs](#).



**Vlogger:** Lauren "Lolo" Spencer  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Vlog:** [Sitting Pretty Lolo](#)  
**Experience:** Travel tips for international travel - Dominican Republic



Actress and advocate Lolo shares her life as a physically disabled person, keeping it real on issues like dating, societal challenges, her diagnosis journey, and of course, fashion. Quick to remind her audience that we all have the choice to live our lives the way we want, Lolo chooses to do so with flair, her own brand of cute, and fearless sharing of her challenges. When it comes to international travel, she has tried and true [Top Travel Tips with Disability](#).

Athlete Ben was training for a shot at the Olympics when a diving accident led to a broken neck, at age 19. But he wasn't new to hardship, or shy about challenges. He knew that he had a choice about how to react to any of life's moments. With a conviction that everyone has the right to fitness, Ben chose to create workouts, nutrition and motivation to help anyone, in any situation, get the fitness and the life they deserve. Travelling requires we stay fit, so if you're up for a new fitness regime, or simply open to learning more, consider his [30 Day Wheelchair Fitness Challenge](#).



**Vlogger:** Ben Clark  
**Home country:** U.K.  
**Vlog:** [Adapt To Perform](#)  
**Experience:** 30 Day Wheelchair Fitness Challenge



**Vlogger:** Chris Olivier  
**Home country:** South Africa  
**Vlog:** [The Amped Life with Chris](#)  
**Experience:** Tips to improve amputees' gaits and avoid obstacles



Chris is a South African above knee amputee and therapist who creates content to improve life for other amputees. Long believing that his gait was fine, he took these tips from his prosthetist and was wowed by the results. Watch him share three simple tips that helped him improve his gait, more easily navigate obstacles and walk with increased stability, safety and confidence here: [How to walk with a kickass gait](#).



**Vlogger:** Brett Heising  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Vlog:** [Brett Approved](#)  
**Experience:** Vancouver's historic Fairmont hotel



Motivational speaker, disability advocate and travel expert Brett is committed to highlighting the accessibility features of restaurants, hotels and entertainment venues, so that everyone with physical challenges can travel with confidence. His stay at the grand downtown Fairmont, Vancouver's oldest hotel, showcases its many accessible features, pretty impressive considering it was built in the 1930s. See the full video at [Brettapproved visits Vancouver](#).



**Vlogger:** Chelsea Bear  
**Home country:** U.S.  
**Vlog:** [Chelsea Bear - Living With Cerebral Palsy](#)  
**Experience:** Cruise to Alaska with Scootz



Influencer Chelsea Bear recently partnered with Princess Cruises to venture Seattle to Alaska with her Scootz mobility scooter. Her footage shows the many accessibility features the cruise ship has. Chelsea reports from on ship, from the tender boats to port, and from her excursions. Overall, she gives the trip a thumbs up. If Alaska is on your bucket list, watch how Chelsea took a Princess [Cruise to Alaska with Scootz!](#)

# Instagrammers

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

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



Omar is a U.S. Navy retiree and adaptive athlete with congenital club foot. His time with the Navy also left him with injuries on the left side of his body. Nevertheless, he has competed in adaptive crossfit, para-bobsledding and para-rowing. He continues to train and raise awareness about club foot and other disabilities, showing that adaptive athletes do have a platform. See him take part in a competition in [Miami, Florida](#).



Jodi didn't let her multiple sclerosis diagnosis in 2008 stop her from having a career, a fast-paced lifestyle and a family. After two children, many flare-ups and adjustments, she now requires the use of a wheelchair but continues to live a full life. in a new way. She believes in focusing on what can be done instead of what can't, like choosing to float happily on the sun deck of a catamaran on a holiday in [Cancun, Mexico](#).

**Instagrammer:** Jodi Johnson

**Home country:** U.S.

**Instagram account:** [@msjodijohnson](#)

Floating on a catamaran in Cancun, Mexico >>>



Tasha had a rare relapse-remitting disease that left her 90% blind and paralyzed overnight in 2008. She was totally paralyzed from the neck down three years later for seven months. Fueled by sheer determination and optimism, she was able to overcome her health challenges and become an elite wheelchair athlete, author and speaker. She has also started an empowering organization, [InvincAble](#). See her competing against herself in a marathon in [Queensland, Australia](#).

**Instagrammer:** Natasha Price

**Home country:** Australia

**Instagram account:** [@the\\_invincible\\_woman](#)

<<< Marathoning in Queensland, Australia



Born with Becker's muscular dystrophy (BMD), Pratik emigrated to Canada with his family, after finishing university studies. He had found it difficult to move about independently in his wheelchair in his Himalayan homeland. Pratik has since flourished in London, Ontario, where he works as a software engineer and gained the confidence to travel widely. He shares his accessible travel experiences, like these recommendations from a trip to [Chicago](#).

**Instagrammer:** Pratik Awasthi

**Home country:** Canada

**Instagram account:** [@wheellogger](#)

<<< Accessible things to do in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.



Adventurer Nerissa has always loved to rock climb, hike and travel. So, the onset of a disability in 2013 for still unknown reasons threw her off her grasp of life. Thanks to a non-profit and a friend, she got past her depression and returned to the outdoorsy lifestyle that she loves. She uses her experiences to inspire others, like one of the first times in months that she skied in [Utah, U.S.](#)

**Instagrammer:** Nerissa Cannon

**Home country:** U.S.

**Instagram account:** [@nerissas\\_cannon](#)

Adaptive skiing in Utah, U.S >>>



Jessica was born with CHILD syndrome, a very rare genetic disorder that left her with a shortened arm and an amputated left leg. This bubbly writer and speaker lives in London and shares her experience on her [online platforms](#) to educate and spread awareness, as well as inspire self-love and disability pride worldwide. Catch her sharing a fun moment at the [Tower Bridge, London](#).

**Instagrammer:** Jessica Ping-Wild

**Home country:** U.K.

**Instagram account:** [@therollingexplorer](#)

Exploring Tower Bridge, London >>>



Triple amputee Mark Ormrod lost his legs and right arm while serving as a Royal Marine in Afghanistan. He was able to walk on prosthetic limbs even after he was told he'd never walk again and went on to be a medal-winning adaptive athlete. An award-winning author, coach and motivational speaker, he raises awareness for wounded veterans. Take a look at his World Record swim attempt and fundraising event at [Plymouth, England](#).

**Instagrammer:** Mark Ormrod

**Home country:** U.K.

**Instagram account:** [@markormrod](#)

<<< World record-setting swim in Plymouth, England, U.K.

# Tech-Enabled

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

## Purple Lens



A web accessibility toolkit that combines automated and human remediation

## Spoke



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

## Dateability



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

## Vacayit



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

## Lisnen



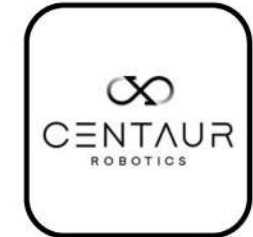
An app that allows the deaf and hard of hearing to hear sounds like alarms, telephones and door knocks

## EnChroma



Glasses that enable people with colour blindness to see vibrant colors

## Centaur Robotics



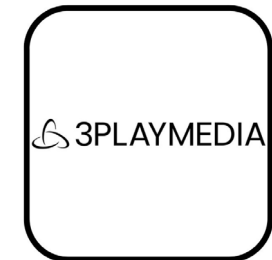
Power wheelchair that fits into the space of a dining room chair and elevates the user up to eye level.

## Be My Eyes



An app that provides blind users with audio descriptions of what they are seeing using AI via ChatGTP4 or live volunteers

## Three Play Media



Audio description, live captioning, automated transcription

## TranslateLive



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

## Picture Live



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

# We want your feedback

Join us on our journey to serve you better!

Take our survey and help us enhance our coverage of destinations, travel tips, product reviews and more, all designed to cater to the unique needs and interests of the disability community.

Your feedback is the compass guiding the future of our magazine, ensuring it remains your go-to resource for accessible and enjoyable travel experiences.

**Plus, there's \$100 Amazon gift cards up for grabs for five lucky participants!**

**Winners will be announced in our Spring 2024 issue.**



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# TRAVELABILITY

THE INTERSECTION OF TRAVEL AND ACCESSIBILITY

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