

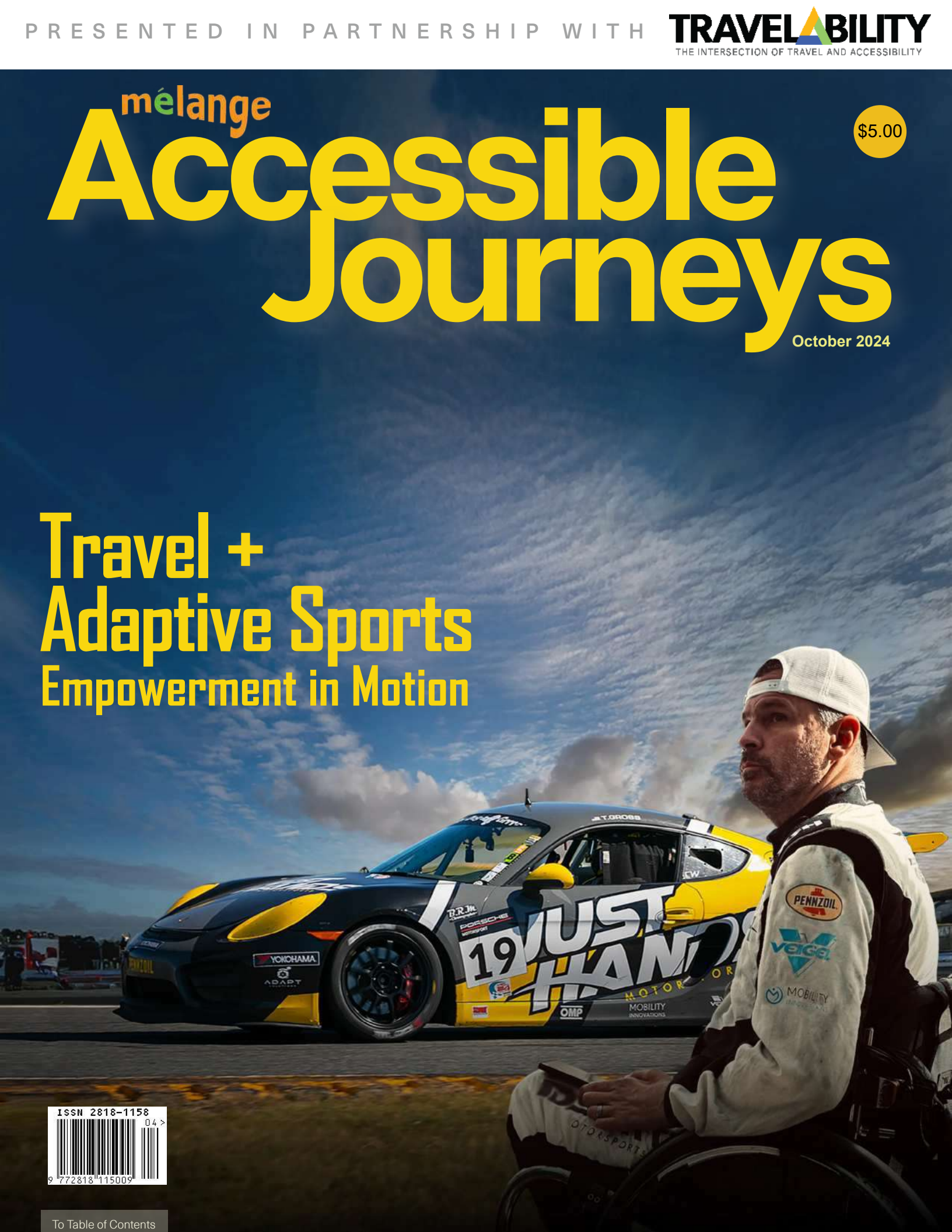
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# Accessible Journeys

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October 2024

## Travel + Adaptive Sports Empowerment in Motion



ISSN 2818-1158



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## Two State Parks

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# Note from the Guest Editor



BY TORSTEN GROSS

**W**elcome to the adaptive sports edition of *Accessible Journeys*. As someone who frequently tests the limits of their life insurance policy, it feels fitting to share my personal experiences with you. That said, I must admit I was initially hesitant to accept the role of guest editor. Why? Because I'm not entirely sure I'm prepared for the backlash that may come from sharing my views on sports and travel. While systemic changes are certainly needed, my own experiences and approach to travel often differ from the narratives I see online. I worry that responses like "How dare you?" or "How would you feel if this happened to you?" will inevitably follow.

The reality is: I've flown more times than I can count. I'm a Delta Million Miler and have achieved Diamond Tier status for several consecutive years. Despite flying multiple times a week over several years, I've never had my wheelchair damaged. Because of the number of flights, it won't surprise you that I've also earned lifetime status with Marriott. Yes, I've been assigned the occasional inaccessible room—such as those with beds too high for me to transfer into—but I've always found a way to

overcome these obstacles. So, when someone asks me what it's like to travel in a wheelchair, I tell them that my experiences, while different, are no worse than those of able-bodied travelers. We all face challenges on the road, just of different kinds.

As I began drafting this foreword, I wrote several versions, each trying to consider a range of disabilities. It quickly became clear that I cannot speak for everyone, as my perspective as a C6 quadriplegic will inevitably differ from the experiences of others reading this. This realization led me to shift my focus: How can my experience be relevant to you? And once again, I was reminded of the enormity of the challenge that accessibility poses. We all seek accessibility tailored to our individual needs, often without fully grasping the vast scope of what true accessibility entails and the multitude of factors that must be addressed.

However, I would be remiss to not remark that after 30 years in a wheelchair, I am genuinely impressed by the progress that has been made. The world has become far more accessible than it once was, and change is happening. Do I think the work is done? Absolutely not. Do I believe we must continue striving for a more inclusive society? Without a doubt. Yet even as this evolution continues, I refuse to wait passively for the world to be perfectly accessible before I engage with it. While the path forward may not always be easy, I encourage you to adopt the mindset of an explorer: to embrace new challenges, venture into unfamiliar territory, and plan as best you can, knowing that things might not go exactly as intended. This uncertainty, after all, is not unique to those with disabilities. When was the last time someone shared their greatest adventure without also telling you about an unexpected twist?

Am I beyond the emotion of frustration

or anger? Far from it. I have my moments. But I believe that even when life turns out different than what you've planned, it's always better to try and fail than to wonder what could have been.

When I travel, I rely on a few core principles:

## **PLAN METICULOUSLY**

The more you know, the fewer surprises you'll encounter.

## **TAKE CONTROL**

Don't expect others to anticipate your needs. They will try to help based on their limited experience, but only you know what truly works for you.

## **STAY CALM AND PRESENT**

Rushing only exacerbates issues.

## **DON'T TAKE SETBACKS PERSONALLY**

People generally try their best, even if their best falls short.

## **EMBRACE UNPREDICTABILITY**

Something will inevitably go wrong. Take a breath, adapt, and turn it into an opportunity for something new.

These same principles apply to adaptive sports. As individuals with disabilities, we all have unique challenges, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Yet by applying these five beliefs, I've surprised even myself with what I've accomplished: completing 12 marathons in 12 months, becoming the world's only quadriplegic rescue scuba diver, and racing cars. None of it has been easy, but all of it has been possible.

So, as you read the following pages, think creatively. Know that all perspectives are individual, but each individual has plotted their own course. Think about all the ways what you read can work for you. And maybe be excited to fail. Because I guarantee with that mindset, you won't. ■

*Torsten Gross*

**WE ARE ALL**  
**EQUAL**  
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Just Hands gives hand control drivers the opportunity to get behind the wheel of a track car and experience high performance driving. Whether learning the techniques of high-speed driving on a track, improving your technique on the autocross, or experiencing the thrill by sitting in the passenger seat on a ride-along, Just Hands Foundation is here to make it happen. Because we believe that everyone is equal no matter what appendages they use to drive.



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# Leading Off: Adaptive Sports

## Impossible is not in our vocabulary

By Jan Bonville



**A**dventure connotes exotic locales and extreme feats. Some of the people featured in this issue do all that, and more. More, because their exploits are in face of tremendous challenge due to disability. But then, our community is all about redefining the narrative on disability. This issue epitomizes pushing the limits on what is possible and refusing to be defined by society.

Some of this issue's featured individuals thrived in nature and sport prior to disabling events which—at first—rendered adventure and the outdoors out of reach. Each dealt with the curveball life threw at them with creativity and resourcefulness. Chloe Giroux, after a paralyzing bike accident, went into adaptive biking, downhill skiing and waterskiing, now competing for Team Canada. Motocross

racer Doug Henry transformed the accident that left him without use of his legs into an entrepreneurial opportunity, developing an adaptive hands-only bike, continuing to race worldwide. Tim Burr, who broke his neck skiing, created an innovative new approach to outdoor exploration designing adaptive vehicles allowing people with physical limitations to experience the awe and power of the backcountry. George Gallegos' spinal cord injury led to a conscious decision to take control and fight his limitations. Guest Editor Torsten Gross has completed 12 marathons in 12 months, is the world's only quadriplegic rescue scuba diver, performance drives his Porsche Cayman S and encourages readers to focus on the possible with joy, curiosity and a spirit of adventure.

Other stories in this issue also embrace this spirit. They include a glorious adaptive biking, sailing

and winetasting journey in Kelwona, B.C., a dreamy, remote Tahitian atoll, RentABLE ambassadors exploring US state parks to identify accessible lodging and Family Fun tips on inclusive outdoor destinations and tours.

Our community is, indeed, badass. For an outdoor lover like me, George, Torsten, Doug, Chloe and Tim's stories inspire me to embrace positivity, exploration and persistence, especially on the days—and there are many—when I feel down due to my disability. For each and every one of us who pushes ourselves to travel, try new activities and get outdoors, we are gradually redefining what it means to be disabled.

In Torsten's words: it's always better to try and fail than to wonder what could have been. ■



Torsten Gross

Most people aren't trying to ruin your day because you are disabled . . . They just don't know what you need.

Torsten Gross



Tim Burr



Chloe Giroux



Doug Henry



George Gallego



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# Travel tips

1. To the people with disabilities: When travelling, never lose your voice but don't be too loud either. To the able-bodied: listen and learn. Travel is about learning and discovery.
2. Never check your shower chair. Take it with you in your carry-on.
3. Don't be afraid to self-advocate!
4. Be mentally prepared for travel but don't fear the journey!
5. Surround yourself with the right team/companion for travel purposes.
6. Try an adaptive activity. Give it a shot. If you don't like it, you don't have to do it again.
7. Travell! It's very healthy and enlightening to finally do something that you always wanted to do.
8. Remember . . . regardless of what life throws at you, there is always a way to overcome it.
9. When planning travel, do your homework thoroughly, prepare yourself mentally for obstacles and manage them. Life is about finding solutions.

## Did you know . . .

You can bring an extra bag of medical supplies on your flight for free. Find more information here:

Canada: [Transport Canada](#)

USA: [Transportation Security Administration](#)

UK: [UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)

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# What Does it Mean to Be a Destination A11y?



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- Your destination sees the future of travel
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# Torsten Gross

## redefines adventure and equality through racing



Be prepared! When speaking with Torsten Gross a resident of Connecticut, USA, founder of [Just Hands Foundation](#), you're stepping into a conversation with someone who sees the world a bit differently — in the best possible way. Gross is a C6 quadriplegic who has found ways to transcend physical limitations through racing, scuba diving and adventure travel. He is breaking barriers, not by demanding changes in the environment, but by shifting his perspective and finding his own path.

What inspired Gross to start Just Hands Foundation? He says, "I needed to share my experience of freedom and being equal to able-bodied people with my

community—the hand-control driving community." Gross discovered a gap—the sheer joy and sense of equality he felt behind the wheel of a track car wasn't something everyone had access to. That realization became the fuel for Just Hands, which focuses on performance driving, not competitive racing, giving others the chance to experience the thrill of mastering the track.

Gross himself races all over the country, from Lime Rock in Connecticut where he trains, to iconic tracks like Circuit of the Americas and Watkins Glen. His vehicle of choice? A Porsche Cayman S. "It's the car that fits me," he says with a smile. But don't be

fooled — his sense of adventure isn't limited to driving. He is also a rescue scuba diver and a veteran of 12 marathons (which he did in 12 months).

Torsten does not waste time on self-pity or regret. With his energetic spirit and sharp sense of humor, when he isn't racing, you will find him diving with sharks in the Turks and Caicos, drift diving in West Palm Beach, mountain biking in British Columbia, exploring the waters of Curaçao, skydiving and other adaptive adventures in Belgium, Germany and elsewhere. But racing is his ultimate passion. It unites everyone who gets a thrill being behind the wheel. "Disabled or able-bodied, when in the car, we're





all equal,” he says confidently. His wife joins him on some of these escapades—whether it’s going on a hike while he hits the track, or diving alongside him in exotic locales.

Travel, for Gross, is an exploration not just of new places but of new ways to adapt and enjoy life. While he will call ahead to ensure accessible accommodations, when he arrives, if it is not as expected, he’ll simply adjust his plans, handling it all with a level of grace that’s as refreshing as it is rare. He points out that not everything is under our control, and that’s okay. “There’s not only one way of doing something,” he says. If things don’t go as planned—like finding the wrong car waiting for him at the airport—he adapts. He finds another way, whether that means taking a taxi or finding a different hotel with a roll-in shower. But what’s most striking about



Gross isn’t just his adaptability. It’s his perspective. He doesn’t view every bump in the road as a challenge specific to his disability. He sees them as part of the human experience. “Everyone has a wheelchair,” he says, using the term metaphorically. For some, it’s depression. For others, it might be grief or an emotional struggle. “We all have something that we believe holds us back.” Gross believes that while it’s easy to get angry



when things don’t go our way, it’s far more powerful to extend grace—to ourselves and others.

His stance on ableism is equally thought-provoking. He acknowledges that while ableism exists, much of what people attribute to it might simply be a lack of knowledge or experience. “Most people aren’t trying to ruin your day because you are disabled,” he explains. “They just don’t know what you need.”





And perhaps that's the crux of Gross's message — understanding, communication, and patience. He advises, "It's not about being angry when the world does not bend to your needs, but finding ways to navigate it on your terms, while still respecting the beauty and integrity of the world around you."

Gross reminds us that life — whether on four wheels or two legs — is what you make of it. And with a bit of patience and a lot of passion, it's always possible to find a way forward.

His philosophy? Focusing on what's possible, instead of dwelling on limitations. It's about shifting the mindset from "I can't" to "What can I do?"—something that transforms not just travel experiences but life itself.

"There's something beautifully radical about choosing joy and

possibility," he expressed, "even when things don't go as planned—the hotel's accessible room isn't available, or you're stuck on a plane for 45 minutes waiting for someone to come help—you get to decide whether those moments will define the whole experience. And to some degree, it's a rebellion against a world that expects us to complain, to magnify the negative."

Torsten believes in "taking ownership of our experiences, good or bad. If we allow the inevitable bumps in life to consume us, then we're just giving up that control. And the thing is, whether you're walking or rolling, life is bumpy for everyone."

He continues, "What your readers will hopefully take from my story is that happiness, travel, adventure, and success aren't reserved for the privileged few, or the able-bodied. It's about leveraging the power of mindset, creativity and adaptability.

Maybe my experiences will spark something in them—maybe not racing cars, but perhaps pursuing that art class they've been hesitant to sign up for, or finally taking that trip to a place they never thought accessible. Because, ultimately, the one thing I want readers to remember is this: If you can figure out the how, everything else is just logistics. Whether you're diving with sharks in Turks and Caicos or finding joy in a simple coffee run—the possibilities are endless. Here's to shifting perspectives, one adventure at a time!" ■

“Disabled or able-bodied, when in the car, we're all equal.”  
Torsten Gross



# Tim Burr's Return to Dirt is adaptive, audacious and unstoppable!

Tim Burr is not your ordinary adventurer. It's easy to conjure up images of a rugged, thrill-seeking skier when you think of a guy raised in the mountains of Colorado, who has always lived life at full speed, diving into sports that are not for the faint of heart. He's spent his life weaving through white-water rapids, flying down mountain slopes, and

conquering the dirt trails on bikes and skis. But the story takes a sharp turn—a life-altering one—at 19.

Breaking his neck in 2014 while backcountry skiing in Colorado didn't slow Tim down, though the world might've expected him to stop in his tracks. When you picture someone with a C5 spinal cord



injury, you might imagine limitations, boundaries. But Tim saw a different landscape. He saw potential, not for sympathy, but for adventure.

Adaptive sports swooped in like a lifeline, but not a soft, comforting one. It was a challenge, and Tim grabbed it with both hands. *High Fives Foundation*, an adaptive sports organization, introduced Tim to a whole new world: adaptive surfing, mountain biking, skiing and even fly fishing. These sports became more than a hobby—they were his heartbeat! Life had changed, but the mountains? They were still there, waiting.

Here's the thing about adaptive sports: it's not just about getting back to life pre-injury. It's about transforming, transcending the limits the world expects of you. You don't just slap a band-aid on life after a spinal cord injury. You rebuild, you reimagine. Tim found his answer in something unexpected: dirt. And not just any dirt—*Return to Dirt*, a nonprofit that feels as wild and gritty as its name suggests. This was a new kind of freedom. Imagine getting behind the wheel of a UTV, racing through untamed terrain at 10,000 feet, with hand controls designed to defy the physical challenges of a quadriplegic body.

For Tim, driving was a new form of expression, not merely for transportation, but a way to reclaim the wilderness. He describes the Return to Dirt program as having “the lowest barrier to entry” for adaptive athletes with physical limitations, a way to level the playing field and make the outdoors accessible again. What Tim does with Return to Dirt is much more than enabling adaptive athletes to

ride vehicles through the backcountry. It's about giving people back their freedom and independence. That heady rush of adrenaline when the wheels kick up dust and the mountain air fly past is not just for him. It's for anyone with mobility challenges. Whether they're the ones behind the wheel or simply along for the ride, the experience of roaring through the wilderness, far from paved roads and concrete constraints, is unparalleled. For some, this is therapy, but it's also adventure in its rawest form.

And that's the magic of Tim's approach—Return to Dirt isn't framed as an adaptive sport program, as a way to ease pain or cope. It's not about “helping the disabled.” It's about being in the wild, just like anyone else who craves a ride through rugged terrain. Tim makes it clear: this is cool, this is badass, and anyone watching these adaptive athletes tear through the mountains will be in awe, disability or not.

Tim's vision is about pushing boundaries but it is also about erasing them entirely. He doesn't just want adaptive sports to exist as a niche—he wants to make them cool. Imagine a world where people don't see limitations first but rather the sheer thrill of what's possible. When an adaptive athlete takes the wheel, he doesn't want them to be seen as someone



overcoming their disability—they're just another badass tearing up the trail. And for Tim, that shift in perspective is the ultimate goal. When reclaiming freedom, especially after you've faced life-changing challenges, travel can be both an exhilarating adventure and a calculated necessity. With

his passion for the outdoors, Tim's travels have taken him to the rugged backcountry of Colorado, Utah, Nevada and beyond on exhilarating adventures. Like every traveller, the process includes booking a flight and packing bags but his is a meticulous orchestration of accessible lodging, adaptive

His life, post-injury, though full of grit and determination, is far from a solo endeavor. The community he's built with High Fives Foundation and Return to Dirt is undeniable proof of what happens when people come together to smash preconceived notions of what's possible.



When High Fives merged with Return to Dirt in 2022, it was a declaration that adaptive sports were about thriving—not merely getting by. It was about pushing the limits of adventure and refusing to accept boundaries. High Fives Foundation, with its five pillars—snow, surf, biking, dirt and fishing—has become a giant in the adaptive sports world and Tim's Return to Dirt is a cornerstone of that. Together, they sponsor athletes, host camps and get people out in the wild who never thought it possible again.



equipment and support. The most crucial element? A hot shower. Simple, right? Yet, it's the linchpin of his comfort and well-being. Ground transport is another essential consideration, ensuring that every trip is planned to the smallest detail.

If there's anything Tim has proven, it's that your past doesn't define your future. The world didn't expect him to return to the dirt in the way that he has, but he's not just returning—he's owning it.

Tim's love for places like Montana and California helps him to enjoy freedom in places that offer adaptive accessibility. He refuses to be limited by his wheelchair, even when air travel can be an unpredictable challenge. Sure, there have been a broken wheelchair and occasional frustrations with accommodations, but Tim packs his patience and with his team of supporters—his adaptive entourage—his trips are all well worth it.

And the legacy Tim is building? It's about showing up and being









extraordinary— not about sympathy or overcoming. It's about making adaptive sports not just necessary or functional but cool. As Tim says, it's not about making nature accessible—that's impossible. But you can make yourself more capable with the right tools, the right equipment and a whole lot of drive.

Tim's vision for Return to Dirt is audacious. He's pushing the notion that adaptive athletes aren't sidelined—they're out there in the thick of it, doing things most people

can't even dream of. Whether it's driving through backcountry trails or navigating the complex world of adaptive sports, Tim Burr is not sitting back and riding the path that life gave him. He's carving his own. And it's badass. It's wild. It's dirt in your face, adrenaline in your veins and freedom roaring in your ears.

If you take one thing from Tim's story, let it be this: nothing, not even a spinal cord injury, can keep you from the thrill of adventure. You just need to find your way back to the dirt. ■

-  [Return to Dirt](#)
-  [Return to Dirt](#)
-  [@returntodirt](#)
-  [@bimturr](#)

“This is cool, this is badass, and anyone watching these adaptive athletes tear through the mountains will be in awe . . .  
Tim Burr





# Chloe Giroux

## A journey beyond expectations

Imagine being in a place where nature is your playground, where every mountain, trail and body of water beckons you to come alive. For Chloe Giroux, that was life — wild, vibrant, and unstoppable. A young Canadian from Calgary, Alberta, Chloe had always been someone who lived life on the move. Raised in the shadow of the Rockies, she had a natural affinity for the outdoors. From downhill skiing to mountain biking, she embraced the thrill of adventure with open arms. And then, in an



instant, her world shifted. In August 2022, Chloe was on a camping trip with friends when a dirt bike ride ended in a crash, leaving her paralyzed from the chest down—a spinal cord injury, the kind that flips everything upside down. But Chloe didn't let that moment define her. What defines her is what came next — the incredible determination to reshape her world, to move forward, to keep moving.

"I was always an outdoorsy person," Chloe reflects, speaking with the kind of energy that seems to bubble up from a wellspring of confidence. "I couldn't imagine giving that up. I knew right after the accident that I'd have to find a way to keep doing the things I love. It was just a matter of figuring out how."

### A MINDSET OF POSSIBILITY

Two weeks after leaving the hospital, Chloe did something remarkable. She got back into sports — adaptive sports. Many would be hesitant, taking time to process the trauma, but Chloe chose to dive in headfirst, just like she had in everything before her accident. Downhill skiing was her first choice, an unexpected one for most people, but Chloe was never "most people."

"It was tough," she admits, laughing.



"Definitely one of the hardest sports I've tried. But the way I see it, if an able-bodied person can do it, there's always a way for me to do it, too. I just need to problem-solve and adapt."

Adaptive mountain biking and water skiing quickly followed, along with other sports like kayaking and sled hockey. Now, Chloe is not just a participant, she's a fierce competitor on Team Canada's waterskiing team. In her words, "When I'm on the water, that's when I feel most like myself. It's where I'm happiest."

### A COMMUNITY OF CONNECTION

Adaptive sports not only brought Chloe back to the activities she loved but also introduced her to a community that's as supportive as it is fearless. "I've never been part of a community that's so loving and inclusive," she says. "If you express interest in doing something, there's always someone ready to help you figure it out. There's no naysaying — only 'let's make it happen.'"

It's this spirit of camaraderie that has helped Chloe not only adapt but thrive. As a coach herself now with [Rocky Mountain Adaptive](#), she's able to give others the same sense

of achievement she experienced when she first got back on the mountain or the water. “Seeing someone else have their best day because you helped them? There’s nothing better.

That’s what fills me up,” she says, her voice filled with pride.

### **NAVIGATING THE WORLD, ONE ADVENTURE AT A TIME**

Chloe’s passion for adventure didn’t stop with her injury. In fact, it seems to have only expanded. She speaks of her recent travels with the same excitement that she brings to her sports. Whether it’s exploring British Columbia’s rugged landscapes or heading south to Palm Springs, Chloe is all about pushing the boundaries. Travelling post-accident, however, comes with its own set of challenges.

“I’ve had some airport nightmares,” she shares, recounting the time an aisle chair (necessary for boarding the plane) simply didn’t show up, leaving her stranded at the gate while others boarded. “Everyone was staring, and it was just...awkward. But it taught me to advocate for myself. Now, I make sure to be clear about what I need.”

One place that gets a glowing review from Chloe? The Calgary airport. “Double thumbs up,” she says with a grin. “The bathrooms are spacious, with roll-under sinks, and the security staff were really respectful during the pat-down. They made a big difference.”

Her travels also include stays in accessible accommodations. Chloe fondly recalls the [Tru by Hilton in Louisiana](#). “It was amazing,” she says. “Spacious, accessible, and the bathroom was perfect — great roll-in shower, plenty of space.” Then there’s the [Marriott Desert Springs Villas](#) where she stayed,



which was equally accommodating. “Double thumbs up for that place,” she beams.

For Chloe, these experiences emphasize the importance of being a self-advocate. “When you’re travelling as a wheelchair user, you have to be very specific about what you need. You can’t be shy. If something’s wrong, speak up. It makes all the difference.”

For Chloe, the world is still a wide-open book of destinations waiting to be explored. Top of her list? A semester abroad in Australia and a dream trip to Europe. “I’ve been told Europe’s not super accessible,” she says, “but I’m sure I can make it work. I just have to approach it like I do with everything else.”

### **PUSHING THROUGH THE UNKNOWN**

Chloe’s advice for others who may be hesitant to jump back into sports or explore new adventures is simple but powerful: “The unknown is scary, but that’s okay. Don’t let fear stop you. When I first tried waterskiing, I had no idea where it would take me. A year later, I’m on Team Canada. You just never know what’s waiting for you if you take that leap.”

It’s a message that resonates beyond the world of adaptive sports. Whether you’re facing a challenge with physical limitations or dealing with any kind of personal roadblock, Chloe’s approach—to keep pushing, keep adapting, and keep believing in possibility—is one we can all learn from.

### **THE BEAUTY OF SELF-DISCOVERY**

It’s clear that Chloe’s journey has led her to a deep understanding of herself, one that goes beyond physical ability. “I lost a bit of myself after the accident,” she says

candidly. “But getting back into sports—getting back outdoors—it reignited something in me. I feel like me again.”

There’s a beautiful irony in Chloe’s story. This world often tries to define people by what they can or cannot do, but she has defined herself by what she chooses to be — determined, adventurous, and, most of all, hopeful. Through her zest for life and her commitment

to both herself and others, Chloe Giroux is a reminder that sometimes the greatest adventures happen when we step into the unknown.

So, what’s next for Chloe? More travel, more sports, more life. “There’s so much out there to see, to do, to experience. I’m not done yet,” she says with a smile. And if her story is any indication, she’s only just begun. ■



# George Gallego

## A legacy in motion

George Gallego's story is a masterclass in transformation. From his own personal battles to his broader mission of creating systemic change, he's been a force for good, not just for himself but for countless others. Whether through his athletic achievements, his nonprofits, or entrepreneurial ventures, George has dedicated his life to breaking barriers and building bridges.

He's a para-triathlete, a social entrepreneur and an advocate for accessibility, but more than that, George Gallego is proof that when life knocks you down, you can rise stronger. His journey reminds us that the limits we face are often temporary and with enough willpower, we can not only break through them but turn them into opportunities for growth and empowerment.

If George's story teaches us anything, it's this: don't wait for the world to make space for you. Go out and make it yourself. Push forward, adapt and create solutions—not just for your own life but for others around you. Because like George, you're not here just to exist. You're here to change the world.

### THE INJURY THAT SPARKED A TRANSFORMATION

March 5, 1992. A date George Gallego remembers with clarity because it marks the day his life was forever altered. A spinal cord injury shattered his world. The outdoor adventurer, martial artist, the man who thrived on an active lifestyle, suddenly found himself confined to a body that no longer cooperated. There was nerve pain, spasms and a growing distance between the man he was and the man he had become. His doctors prescribed medication after medication until he found himself in a zombie-like haze, losing himself in a fog of painkillers.

Within a year, George's physical condition worsened—he gained weight, reaching 300 pounds and life spiraled out of control. It wasn't until he saw a picture of

himself, slouched in a wheelchair with his children clambering around him, that the fog lifted. "Enough," he thought. That single moment became a turning point, igniting a fire that would fuel his transformation.

George decided to take back control—not for appearance, not for accolades, but for survival. "I started relying on the natural painkillers our bodies produce when we exercise," he says. He rejected the endless prescriptions in favor of endorphins. The weight began to melt away, and so did the fog of helplessness. For him, exercise was about reclaiming his life.

### FROM RECOVERY TO RACING SPORTS AS A LIFELINE

Exercise became George's salvation, but he didn't stop



2008 NYC Triathlon National Championship Race-Run Portion of Triathlon



2010 National Championship Race NYC Bike portion of triathlon



2008 NYC Triathlon National Championship Race-Run Portion of Triathlon. Swimming start.



2010 National Championship Race NYC Bike portion of triathlon

there. “I realized that sports could be my way of fighting back.” He found mentors, who introduced him to wheelchair racing and hand cycling. This was an invitation to a new world where he could push his limits, redefine himself and do what seemed impossible.

George didn’t shy away from the challenge. Starting small with 5k races, he escalated to 10ks, half-marathons and full marathons in cities like New York, Boston and Miami. But there was more to conquer. His mentor suggested he try a triathlon. George balked at first.

Swimming terrified him—he hadn’t been in the water since his injury and the idea of flipping over in the water was a real fear. Yet, true to form, he didn’t back down. He jumped into the pool and learned to swim all over again. “I held my breath the entire time at first,” he recalls, laughing now at the memory.

That fear gave way to determination and soon, triathlons became his new obsession. What once seemed impossible became George’s reality. He was surviving, thriving, proving to himself and the world that limits are often self-imposed.

## TURNING PAIN INTO PURPOSE

As George’s athletic career grew, so did his passion for advocacy which started with his own needs, leading him to reach out to the New York City Chapter (NYC) of the United Spinal Association. They guided him through the challenges and he became a member, advocated fiercely alongside them and eventually became President of the Chapter.

His personal journey revealed a harsh truth: for many, living with a disability meant dealing with issues that went beyond physical limitations, including navigating a society not designed for them. George saw a disturbing trend—people with disabilities, particularly younger individuals, were often forced into nursing homes due to a lack of accessible housing and resources. The case of Jonathan, a young man paralyzed by a gunshot wound and condemned to spend his life in a nursing home, haunted George. Jonathan’s life, filled with promise, was trapped in a place meant for the elderly. George couldn’t stand by. That’s when his non-profit, Wheels of Progress, was born, co-founded with his former professor and mentor, Dr. Rosemarie Murray. Wheels of Progress offered a lifeline to individuals like Jonathan, providing transitional housing, support



2008 George visiting Jonathan with a gift while he was in nursing home. George gave him a new laptop with sip&puff technology

and, above all, the dignity of living independently.

But his efforts didn't stop there—he built The Axis Project, a wellness center that serves as both a gym and sanctuary—a place where people could rebuild not only their bodies but their sense of self. He co-founded Access Initiatives, empowering seniors and people with disabilities through nurturing personal growth, community connections and encouraging them to push beyond perceived limitations. He also co-founded Contento, a wine bar and restaurant in East Harlem, in partnership with Lorenz Skeeter, Mara Rudzinski and Yannick Benjamin, another paraplegic whom George once mentored. Since then, George and Yannick have continued to collaborate closely. “At Contento, we embrace everyone,” George explains. From its accessible design to the culture within, the restaurant is a space where people of all abilities feel at home. It's a model for how businesses should operate, combining excellence with empathy.

Through all his efforts, George's message remains clear: people with

disabilities are not to be pitied—they are to be empowered.

## TRAVEL: REDEFINING ACCESSIBILITY AROUND THE WORLD

George offers a unique perspective on life and how he approaches travel—with a blend of practicality, curiosity and determination.

“I don't like to complain,” George says. “I observe and come up with solutions” which is his travel and life philosophy. For George, each trip, each challenge—whether it's a hotel that wasn't as accessible as promised or navigating a city with limited infrastructure—is not an obstacle, but an opportunity. He transforms frustration into ingenuity, finding creative ways to make things work and also to educate and raise awareness.

His work with the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) saw him globetrotting to places most Americans could never fathom, let alone during a time of heightened political tension. He ventured to Cuba, a land frozen in time, where inaccessibility was the norm

but it left a lasting impression on him. Despite the country's aging infrastructure and lack of accessibility, George felt welcomed. “The people completely embraced me,” he recalls, “whenever they thought I was about to struggle, they came to my rescue.” It wasn't about whether the place was perfectly designed for his needs, it was the warmth and generosity of the people that made Cuba feel accessible in ways that no ramp or wide doorway could. “I was welcomed into every space,” he reflects, “even though it wasn't accessible, the people made sure I could enjoy what they had to offer.”

Each trip, Germany, Australia and countless others has reshaped his understanding of accessibility. “In Hamburg, everything was rebuilt after the war, so the city is very accessible. It's incredible,” he says. But his favorite destination? Australia. Not just for the beautiful scenery, but for a very specific, practical reason. When he landed in Sydney, a police officer told him to stop by the 1st hardware store he saw. Not knowing why, nevertheless, his curiosity made him pursue it and on arrival at the store, a cashier handed him a



NYC Marathon 2023



NYC Marathon start with Yannick Benjamin, partner, friend and collaborator



George on CanAm Trike



2013 Medals from countless races

key he was told would open every accessible bathroom in the country! Spain, where he spent nearly two months exploring accessibility for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), was another experience that reinforced his belief in the power of people over places.

Travel, to George, isn't about finding accessible perfection—it's about finding solutions in the face of inaccessibility. This has shaped him into not just a global explorer, but a global advocate.

For anyone hesitant to travel because of a disability, George has one key piece of advice: "Don't hesitate. Do your homework, prepare yourself mentally for obstacles and manage them. Life is about finding solutions." And if you ever feel like you don't have the answers, find someone who does. "Connect with people who have the knowledge," he insists. Whether it's travel or life, George knows that we're all stronger together.

George's travels are not defined by where he's been, but by how he moves through the world—gracefully, boldly, confidently. His experiences teach us that travel, like life, is not about perfection but about progress, perseverance and the power of human connection. ■



2013 Roll on Capitol Hill With NYC Chapter of United Spinal Association



## Doug Henry's journey from tragedy to triumph on two wheels

Doug Henry teaches us that you don't stop living just because life throws you a curveball—you adapt, innovate and keep racing forward.

His life is a story of grit and a love for speed that transcends the boundaries of what most people think is possible. A motocross legend, Doug spent years flying over jumps, tearing through dirt tracks and pushing himself to the limits. His life was defined by speed,

power and a relentless drive to be the best. But even when life threw him a devastating curveball in the form of a spinal cord injury, Doug's spirit remained unbroken. In fact, it seemed to only burn brighter.

Racing was in his blood. Born with a passion for motorcycles, he grew up like any other kid obsessed with two wheels. Neighborhood rides turned into track days and before long, Doug was racing professionally.



He spent 15 years competing at the highest levels of motocross, and his trophy case tells the tale: three national championships and a legacy that stretched across the globe. But in 2007, Doug's life took a sharp turn. During a supermoto race, a brutal crash left him with a spinal cord injury, paralyzed from the waist down. The man who had once dominated dirt tracks was now facing a future in a wheelchair.

For many, that moment would have been the end, but Doug Henry isn't just anyone. Where most people might have seen a tragedy, Doug saw an opportunity. An opportunity to push boundaries, not just for himself, but for others who believed their injuries meant the end of their sporting lives. Doug didn't give up, he adapted. With the help of friends and family, he engineered a custom motorcycle that allowed him to ride again—this time, without the use of his legs. It wasn't easy. The modifications were complex, and Doug had to be protected by a safety cage and rely on specialized controls. But in true Doug Henry fashion, he wasn't content just to ride—he needed to race.

The path back to competitive motocross wasn't without its challenges. Doug faced numerous crashes, re-injuries and the kind of mental battles that most people can only imagine. But each time, he got back up and into the saddle. He wasn't concerned about avoiding risk but about learning how to live fully within new limits. And in the process, Doug didn't just come back to motocross—he became a pioneer for adaptive sports, showing that extreme sports and wheelchairs weren't mutually exclusive.

Both before and after his injury, travel is a significant part of Doug's life. Racing takes him around the world, from the hills of Australia to the historic landscapes of Europe. Travelling with a disability adds

a whole new layer of complexity. For Doug, though, the challenges of navigating airports, hotels, and inaccessible streets weren't obstacles but just part of the adventure.

He laughs when asked about his biggest travel challenges, mentioning how the TSA checks have become a familiar routine. "I get the full 'TSA massage' every time," he jokes. And while finding truly accessible accommodations can be hit or miss, Doug has developed a remarkable sense of

calm about the whole process. "If the room and shower aren't accessible, I would ask them to find me another room in town. If there are none, I'll just ask for extra towels to transfer on, make it work, and move on."

Doug's approach to travel is practical, patient and adventurous. He's travelled to places like England, Spain, Italy and Australia—each with its own unique accessibility hurdles. But Doug finds a way to enjoy the experience, often by embracing the help of



those around him or simply by adapting as he goes. Whether it's wheeling down the cobbled streets of an old European city or making do with an improvised shower setup in a hotel, Doug's not one to let a small inconvenience ruin the moment.

For people living with disabilities, Doug's story is a roadmap for how to keep living boldly. He doesn't shy away from the fact that life in a wheelchair can be difficult. But he's also quick to remind others that it's not the chair that defines you—it's your willingness to keep going, no matter what.

Doug's passion for motocross has never wavered. Even now, he continues to race, pushing his limits and finding new ways to innovate. He's currently working on an "impact seat" for motorcycles, an adaptive device that could allow more people with disabilities to experience the thrill of riding safely. Doug's not just thinking about his own future—he's thinking about how to open up the sport he loves to more people, making sure that others can feel the same freedom he does when he's out on the track.

But racing isn't the only thing on Doug's horizon. He's also committed to improving accessibility at motocross events, working on plans to build better viewing platforms for wheelchair users and to provide mobility devices that can help navigate the often-rough terrain of racetracks. Doug sees a future where no one is left on the sidelines—where anyone, regardless of physical limitations, can fully enjoy the sport he loves so much.

It's about motocross for Doug but it's also about life—showing people that even when life throws you its worst, you can still find

ways to do what you love. Whether that's racing a modified motorcycle or simply being able to travel the world, Doug's story is one of relentless determination. He's not shy about the challenges he faces, and neither does he let them stop him. "You only live once," Doug says with a grin that suggests he's still planning his next big adventure. "So, give it a shot. If you don't like it, you don't have to do it again. But at least try."

Doug's bucket list is long, and his desire to experience everything life has to offer remains undiminished.

From scuba diving in Australia to wheeling along the Great Wall of China, his future is filled with new challenges, new places to explore, new ways to push himself—and everyone else around him—beyond what they think is possible.

Doug Henry's life is a reminder that no matter what happens, there's always a way forward. You just have to be willing to adapt, to push through the obstacles, and most importantly, to keep moving. ■



# Find your outdoor adventure in Oregon



Nicole O'Brien Photography



Oregon Adaptive Sports / Patrick Addabbo



Cory Lee



Plan your Oregon trip



# Travelling as a Little Person

Empowering travel  
for Little People

## Little Legs, Big Impact! Don't let fear or doubt hold you back.

Kristen DeAndrade is the embodiment of perseverance and advocacy, relentlessly pushing boundaries to break stereotypes surrounding dwarfism and disability. Born with achondroplasia, the most common form of dwarfism, Kristen channels her lived experiences into changing the narrative around disability and differences. She is the published author of *Little Legs, Big Heart: One Girl's Journey of Acceptance, Perseverance, and Growth*, a memoir that invites readers to confront the insecurities and vulnerabilities we all face.

In 2024, Kristen took a monumental step by founding [The Little Legs Big Heart Foundation](#), a nonprofit dedicated to inclusion, community, and support for individuals with skeletal dysplasia and their families. Through the Foundation's initiatives like the Little Legs

Lifeline Fund, which offers financial assistance for medical treatments, Kristen is creating a lifeline for those navigating life with skeletal dysplasia.

Currently residing in West Palm Beach, FL, Kristen is a mover, dancer, and lover of all things creative—especially in the kitchen and by the ocean. An advocate for vulnerability and inclusion, locally Kristen is deeply connected with both The Paley Orthopedic & Spine Institute and The Quantum House, supporting patients and their families. She has also made waves on the TEDx stage and across media outlets such as The Learning Channel, NY Post, Insider, Refinery29, Women's Health, Huffington Post, The Female Lead and more.

Kristen's mission is clear: to shine a light on adversity, celebrate the



Photo Credit: Monica Lokitus

power of connection, and inspire others to embrace their scars as stories worth sharing.

### **CAN YOU SHARE SOME OF YOUR MOST MEMORABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES?**

Oh boy, where to even start! There have been so many memorable travel moments. As a kid, our road trips from Massachusetts to our camp in Maine were like the highlight of my life. The second we crossed the New Hampshire-Maine border, I was practically buzzing with excitement. To this day, I still get giddy driving that route or landing at Portland airport. I did a lot of growing up in Maine—found peace in nature, realized I could



From getting lost in Costa Rica trying to find my hostel to losing my luggage in Portugal, my travels are never without a good story. Bottom line: life is never dull when I'm on the move!

Today, I'll jump at any chance to go anywhere. The thrill, the excitement, and the confidence that comes from knowing these little legs can take on anything—it's what makes my heart feel SO BIG. Every adventure, whether smooth or chaotic, just fuels that fire to keep exploring, pushing boundaries, and embracing whatever comes my way.

actually be athletic on the water and slopes and Maine became more of a home to me than Massachusetts ever was.

College, though? That was a whole different vibe. I was on the rowing team and we'd cram as many rowers as humanly possible into my tiny 5-passenger Jeep after practice. One time, I had 14 sweaty rowers in there (yes, 14!), and of course, I got pulled over. Somehow, I managed to convince the officer that they were way safer jammed into my car like sardines than trying to walk or bike back downtown. Not my proudest moment, but it worked! Another

time, my car broke down in the middle of nowhere, South Carolina, and while we waited for a tow, we used the broken fan belt as a jump rope and pretended to be deer running through the woods. The cops were not impressed, but we laughed so hard.

Then there was my first solo flight—just a tiny plane to Colorado. I started feeling nauseous and, of course, my timing was off. I reached for the bag too late, and let's just say it wasn't pretty. I'm still cringing at the thought of it, but at 12 or 13, I don't think I'd ever been that embarrassed in my life.

### **WHAT IS ONE DESTINATION YOU'VE VISITED THAT HOLDS A SPECIAL PLACE IN YOUR HEART?**

Uganda holds an even deeper meaning for me, especially living with achondroplasia. Over there, people view disabilities so differently—it's not seen with pity or awkwardness like it sometimes is here. Instead, there's a quiet acceptance, a simplicity in how they treat everyone, no matter their differences. It gave me such a unique perspective on life with achondroplasia. I was able to connect with people on a human

“Stop treating accessibility like an upsell. Travel should be accessible for all, no hidden fees attached!”

Kristen DeAndrade



level, not defined by my stature. Living with dwarfism offers me a different lens on the world, and in Uganda, that lens became even clearer. People live with so little, yet their gratitude is immense, and that's something that's stuck with me ever since.

It was my first mission trip where I truly found the meaning of gratitude. I realized how far "a little" can go, and the people there? They're incredible—especially the kids, who seem to have endless energy. There's something magical about that orange dirt, the simplicity of life, and the lack of technology and constant personal connectivity. This past December, I went back for the first time since 2014, and we FINALLY saw lions! It's truly a different world over there, one that continues to leave a mark on me.



Kristen in Uganda  
Photo Credit: Monica Lokitus

**ARE THERE ANY TRAVEL DESTINATIONS THAT YOU FIND PARTICULARLY ACCESSIBLE?**

Spain, but one thing that surprised me was travelling to Spain—while the country itself is quite accessible, the carry-on overhead bins on Iberia flights are basically made for humans who are 7 feet tall. And let's just say, the flight attendants weren't exactly rushing to help either, at least in my experience. Add in my horrific Spanish and the whole experience was a real treat. Honestly though, it was a bit of a mismatch considering how accessible Spain is overall. And that is really the only issue I have ever come across.

Travelling as someone with dwarfism, especially after undergoing limb lengthening, has really shifted my perspective. I've learned that the key is to ask for help when you need it. Where there's a will, there's a way! Every time I board a plane and can comfortably sit with both feet on the floor, I feel a wave of gratitude toward my 12-year-old self for committing to limb lengthening back in the day. It's made a world of difference in how I navigate life.

Everything from getting my own luggage overhead, renting a car, or accessing public facilities has become much easier. It's not just about physical height; it's about the confidence and independence that come with it. Traveling now feels more like an adventure than a challenge, and that's something I cherish deeply.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER LITTLE PEOPLE WHO ARE HESITANT TO TRAVEL DUE TO ACCESSIBILITY CONCERNS?**

Here's my heartfelt advice: we, as humans, are capable of so much—

“The world is out there waiting, and it's time to take up the space we deserve  
Kristen DeAndrade

especially when we work together! It's completely normal to feel hesitant, but don't let those worries hold you back.

Airlines and hotels have become increasingly accessible, and there are more resources than ever to help you navigate the journey. Yes, asking for help can be daunting—I know it was one of the hardest things for me to do for a long time. But you have to push through that discomfort. Life is too short, and the world is filled with incredible experiences waiting for you. Sure, it may take a little more time and effort to navigate some challenges, but the freedom and joy that come from travelling are absolutely worth it. So, take that leap! Reach out, ask for what you need, and embrace every moment. You'll be amazed at the connections you make and the adventures that await. Don't let anything keep you from exploring this beautiful world!

**ARE THERE ANY INSTANCES WHERE YOU HAD TO ADVOCATE FOR BETTER ACCESSIBILITY RELATED TO TRAVEL?**

One thing that really stands out for me when it comes to travel advocacy is raising awareness about designated handicapped seating on trains, in airports and beyond. Almost every time I travel, I find myself advocating for someone who is disabled or elderly, standing and waiting while able-bodied individuals take up the handicapped seating—or worse, hogging multiple spaces with their bags.



I'm not afraid to speak up about it. Being born and raised just outside of Boston, I'm loud and make my point known when needed! It's important for people to understand that these spaces and amenities are not for the general public's convenience, they're essential for those who truly need them.

One instance that really stands out in my travel advocacy happened when I saw a woman idling in a handicapped spot in her Tesla, waiting for her friend. I knocked on her window, and she looked confused until I pointed out my two friends on crutches making their way down the sidewalk after we had come around the corner. It was clear that her use of the handicapped spot was impacting them directly.

People can often get so caught up in their own little worlds that they're completely unaware of how their actions affect others. This woman initially made excuses, but once she realized I wasn't advocating for myself, but rather for my friends who genuinely needed that spot, she finally moved. It was a powerful moment that reminded me how important it is to speak up, even when it feels uncomfortable.

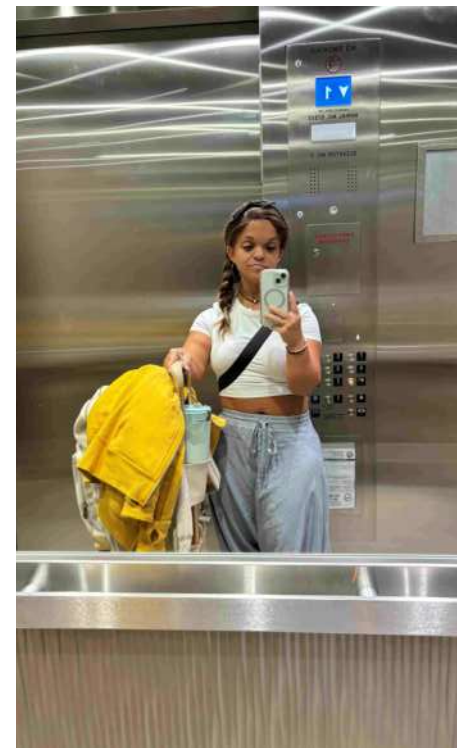
By raising awareness in these situations, we can help foster a greater understanding of accessibility issues and the impact of our choices on those around us.

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

Preparing for a trip can feel like planning a military operation—except I'm usually the one who waits until the last minute to pack and inevitably forgets something crucial. It's like my personal travel motto: "Why do today what you can put off until the night before?" Spoiler alert: it never ends well!

Then there's packing. I might throw everything into my suitcase at the last minute, but I do have a system! I try to roll my clothes (because who doesn't love a good space-saving hack?) and pack essentials in an easily accessible pouch. But let's be real, I'll probably just end up wearing the same outfit three days in a row anyway.

The key to smooth travels? Embrace the chaos! I've learned that flexibility is vital; things won't always go as planned, and that's okay. I keep a sense of humor about it all because, honestly, there's never a dull



moment over here! So, whether I'm fumbling with my luggage or having a mini meltdown over missing my favorite shirt, I just remind myself that every adventure is part of the journey.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read the rest of Kristen's story. ■

# Companions

Caregiving travel tips and tales

Lynn Osmond

## Heartfelt trips of caregiving and adventure

Vacationing with a loved one while serving as their caregiver can be a deeply emotional and bittersweet experience. Based on the nature of their disability or illness, it's probably not your average getaway filled with endless excitement or carefree moments. Instead, for some, it may be a journey interwoven with love, responsibility, joy and—let's face it—a bit of sorrow, too. Lynn Osmond, former tourism official in Chicago, embodies this reality, as her recent travels with her husband, Chris, have become a lesson in patience,

compassion and the art of making memories when life feels like it's slipping through your fingers.

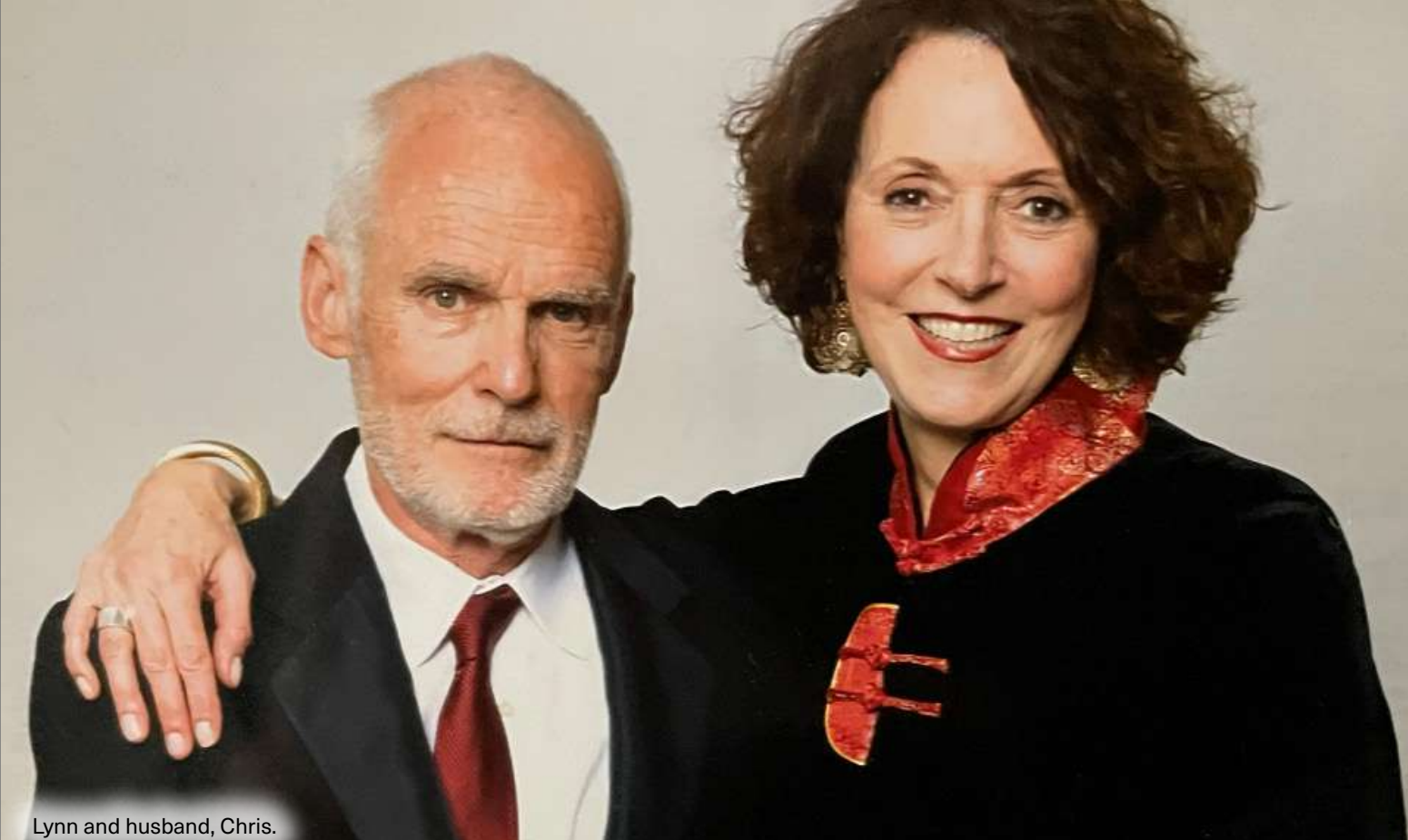
During their recent road trips in the U.S., the need for improved accessibility and staff training in the hospitality sector became painfully clear, further exacerbating their already challenging journeys. They encountered a lack of understanding from staff at hotels, visitor centers, gas stations and other public facilities. Inconsistent bed heights were a major issue, toilet heights too, with many restrooms having toilets too low for comfort. Bathtubs, often unnecessary, took up space where a more universally designed bathroom layout could have been implemented. Simple essentials like bathmats were also missing, forcing Lynn to travel with her own, as hotels often didn't provide them. The shortage of accessible rooms was another glaring problem, leaving very few options for those who truly need them. Additionally, many showers lacked safety bars, making it clear that many travellers needs are not being met. These experiences highlighted



how unprepared the industry is to accommodate the growing number of older and disabled travelers, underscoring the urgent need for universal design and better staff training.

But in spite of these challenges, Lynn and her husband continue to travel, checking off one bucket





Lynn and husband, Chris.

list item after another. She shared how her husband, who suffers from Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP), a cousin of Parkinson's, requires constant care. His impulsivity and tendency to fall mean that even during travel, Lynn cannot truly switch off. "When he's napping or when he's gone to bed early—that's when I get my quiet time," she shared. Her time, she calls it. And it's important because caregiving doesn't allow much of it. During travel, those moments are fleeting—if they appear at

all. Imagine sitting in a beautiful destination and instead of soaking in the sights or sounds, you're on high alert, your focus not on the breathtaking view but on whether your loved one is safe.

Regardless of the sacrifices, Lynn insists on travelling with her husband. And why? Because these moments, these trips, they matter. "I won't have him forever," she says. That statement holds more weight than most could ever comprehend. Every trip they take now feels like a

delicate dance between savoring the present and bracing for the inevitable future. The long walks Lynn might crave, the kayak rides she longs to take—they're all put aside because she wants to ensure that Chris experiences the world while he still can. "I want to do the stuff that I can while I'm with him," she says with a knowing acceptance.

There's a kind of raw beauty in that sacrifice, isn't there? It's this tenderness that caregivers embody,



Road trip to the Badlands  
Needles Hwy and Rocky Mtn National Park



Road trip to El Paso and Santa Fe

choosing not to focus on what they are missing out on but rather on what their loved ones still have. Lynn, like many caregivers, finds joy in creating moments, even if they're not the ones she might have envisioned.

For example, she recently spoke of a Viking River Cruise she and Chris plan to take in France. While most people might be worrying about packing or what to wear for an elegant evening out, Lynn's concerns are more nuanced. "He has a walker, a cane and a wheelchair—I'll take the wheelchair just in case because it gives us more flexibility," she mentions. And it's not just about sightseeing or joining the excursions—Lynn must constantly assess: Is the terrain too rocky? Is there accessibility for a wheelchair? Can Chris handle this? In a way, it's travel, but with an entirely different set of rules. And yet, despite all of that, they still go. They still take those steps forward into the unknown, unsure what new challenges they'll face but certain that memories are being made.

These memories, Lynn says, are what will stay with her when Chris is no longer by her side. "You're not going to remember the time sitting in the living room trying to feed him," she explains. "You'll remember being on the Needles Highway with awesome nature in front of you." It's this outlook that so beautifully sums up what it means to travel with a loved one who needs care. It's not about crossing off places on a bucket list or checking into five-star hotels. It's about being present, about holding onto what remains when so much has been taken away.

Lynn and Chris' relationship has transformed through travel, evolving

into something deeply connected yet difficult to articulate. There's a shift that happens when one partner becomes the caregiver, and the other becomes more dependent. "All of a sudden, you're not equal partners anymore," Lynn reflects. "There's an imbalance, and that can be frustrating for both of us." That frustration manifests in small ways—gentle reminders to Chris about shuffling his feet or keeping his head up. These seem like minor corrections but pile up in the everyday fabric of their lives. And while there's immense love, there's also exhaustion. Exhaustion from being the coach, the nurse, the cheerleader, all rolled into one.

Still, Lynn wouldn't trade it for anything. She knows Chris would prefer to be her equal once again, to walk without fear of falling or to explore new places without constantly checking in for reassurance. But, as she puts it, "You go out with guns blazing." The point is not to sit in the safety of your home, cocooned by routine. It's about getting out there, embracing life, even when it's messy, even when it's hard.

One of the most heartwarming elements of Lynn's story is how, despite everything, they still manage to find joy. She's learned to use an app called Polarsteps to document their travels, creating a digital memory bank of photos and notes. At the end of the year, she plans to compile these into a book, gifting it to Chris for Christmas. It's going to be a collection of their 2024 adventures, tangible proof that despite the obstacles, they still managed to make their way through the world, together.

Their travels are filled with

moments of grace and small victories. Whether it's navigating the locks of the Panama Canal or simply getting through a day without a fall, every day is a reaffirmation of their enduring love. And while Lynn admits there are moments of embarrassment for Chris—especially after falls—she never lets that deter them. "It's better to go out there and create those memories," she says.

For anyone who hesitates to travel with someone they care for, Lynn's advice is simple yet profound: "Don't overthink it. You just have to go for it." That's it. Life is short, often shorter than we realize, and waiting for the right time or the perfect circumstance means missing out on the now.

There's a unique kind of courage in stepping into the unknown, knowing full well that there will be challenges, that things might not go as planned, but also trusting that the memories you make will far outweigh the difficulties. In Lynn's world, the purpose of travel isn't about the destination—it's about who you're with when you get there. And in that regard, every trip, no matter how complicated, is worth it. ■

Regardless of the sacrifices, Lynn insists on travelling with her husband . . . because these trips, these moments matter!



## Danniel Swatosh

# Through love's lens: A companion's view on travelling with her disabled partner



Danniel and George



Danniel and George



Danniel, George and family

Danniel, George's fiancée, isn't his caretaker in the traditional sense of the word. She's not there to 'help' him in the way many might think. She's his partner, a co-conspirator in the mission of making life work smoothly. They're in it together, fully. It's about collaboration and mutual respect—at work in their organization [Access Initiatives](#), where George is the founder and Danniel the Chief Marketing Officer, and at home. Danniel describes George as funny, loyal, a superhuman who is also a pilot and he can crochet! Another endearing trait is that he checks on her family members and his, every morning.

When they travel overseas, she might handle the logistics, like booking flights or figuring out how to fit his wheelchair and luggage in the trunk of a rental car, but George brings his own superhuman strengths to the table. Together, they form a system that's perfectly calibrated to make travel not just possible, but meaningful.

Planning is a significant part of every trip. Calls are made. Back-up plans are devised and then back-ups for the back-ups. And packing?

Oh, they're pros at it. Travel light, multifunctional clothing and a meticulous method of folding and organizing—these are their trade secrets.

You might think this sounds exhausting. And maybe, for anyone else, it would be. But for Danniel and George, this is just life. And there's beauty in it. Obstacles encountered aren't just hurdles to clear—they're opportunities to refine their teamwork because it's not really about the destination, it's about how they get there together.

The funny thing is, despite the extra layers of planning and consideration that come with their travel, Danniel never feels like it's a burden. "I don't feel overwhelmed," she says. Instead, she's always activated, always alert, always prepared. There's a routine to it now, a rhythm they've built over time.

A back-up? George's leg braces might be packed in her bag, their daughter might carry his crutches and they might have snacks tucked away for everyone. But it all feels normal to them. It's their version of family travel.

And let's talk about George for a second. Yes, he's a wheelchair user. But as Danniell loves to say, George is strong. Strong enough to laugh at the world's expectations, strong enough to build things with their son, to train fellow disabled members at the gym, to shoot off emails while Danniell carries the bags, to also carry bags on his legs during travel and strong enough to be independent. He's not someone waiting to be helped. He's an active partner, pulling his weight and making things happen.

Yet, it's not all smooth sailing. There are moments when they're reminded that the world isn't always built with George in mind. Like the time at airport security when he was sitting in his wheelchair, forgotten. They had called ahead, but somehow, he still ended up waiting, stuck behind the T.S.A. line as the minutes ticked by. In that moment, Danniell's protective instincts kicked in. She was not afraid to advocate, to speak up, but she did not make a scene. It was about quietly demanding the respect they deserve, about making sure that George is seen, heard and treated as any other traveller.

What's striking about Danniell and George's travel stories is not the challenges they face but the grace with which they handle them. They're not bitter. They're not angry at the world. They simply move forward, doing what they need to do to make the world work for them. And when things go wrong, they pivot. There's always a backup plan. Always another way to solve the problem.

For them, travel is a kind of dance—a choreography of compromises, accommodations and, most of all, adaptability. They know that not

every place is going to be accessible. And that's okay. They're not out to change the world with every trip they take. But they do leave a mark on it, in quiet ways. In every restaurant they visit, in every airport they pass through, they make people pause. They make people think. And sometimes, that's enough.

And then there are the moments of pure joy—the times when all the planning pays off and they get to experience the simple thrill of being on vacation together. Those moments when they're not thinking about logistics or accessibility, but just living. Just being.

For Danniell and George, travel reminds them of who they are as individuals and as a team. They're not bound by George's disability, nor are they defined by the challenges they face. Instead, they are bound by love, trust and a mutual understanding that life—whether on the road or at home—is a journey best travelled together.

So, does travel bring them closer? Absolutely! Because, for them, travel is a reminder that, no matter where they go, they'll always find a way to make it work. Together. ■



Danniell



George



Danniell, George and kids

# Features

Captivating stories, intriguing profiles and thought-provoking articles





**INTERVIEW** with Richard Gray, Senior Vice President, Inclusion and Accessibility at Visit Lauderdale



## Meet Visit Lauderdale's newest Ambassador, Abbas Karimi

### SHARE A BIT ABOUT ABBAS WITH US

Abbas Karimi is a professional athlete, inspirational swimmer, and Visit Lauderdale's newest ambassador. Although Abbas was born without arms in Afghanistan, he grew very fond of swimming in the rivers of Kabul. He eventually progressed to swimming in pools. During the pandemic, a series of events brought Abbas to Greater Fort Lauderdale which would ultimately change his life. Abbas found friends that turned into family by joining the Swim Fort Lauderdale Masters Swim Team at the Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Center. He also became one of Visit Lauderdale's ambassadors this year and is in Paris now preparing to compete in the 2024 Paralympics in August.

### WHAT INSPIRED VISIT LAUDERDALE TO SPONSOR ABBAS?

Abbas exemplifies resilience and strength, which can serve as a beacon of hope to us all. By

choosing Abbas an ambassador and subsequently sponsoring the 2024 U.S. Paralympics Swimming Team, Visit Lauderdale shows that we are a leader and a champion of diversity, inclusion and accessibility. Visit Lauderdale chose Abbas as its newest ambassador because of his inspiring story, but also because of his love of Greater Fort Lauderdale. His energy, his daily routines, and his passion for Greater Fort Lauderdale are the reasons we chose to sponsor the U.S. Swimming Team at the Paralympics. We know he is going to inspire our visitors to live life to the fullest. Karimi is proud to be a Greater Fort Lauderdale resident, and we hope everyone under the sun gets to learn about his incredible story.

### HOW DOES THIS SPONSORSHIP ALIGN WITH VISIT LAUDERDALE'S VALUES AND MISSION?

We are dedicated to being a destination where ALL people are welcomed, regardless of gender,

gender expression, race, religion, or disability. We want people to know that we are a truly inclusive destination for people with visible and invisible disabilities. I believe travel is a human right, and by working with Abbas and sponsoring the U.S. Paralympics Swimming Team, we show the world how important accessibility and inclusion are in our destination.

### WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT AND RESOURCES ARE YOU PROVIDING TO THE ATHLETE?

On our home turf, Visit Lauderdale will shadow Abbas when he visits his favorite places throughout Greater Fort Lauderdale, highlighting those locations' accessibility. Residents and visitors can see his share his story on social media, special appearances, and publicity campaigns. In Paris while at the Paralympics, Abbas knows that his home team is behind him every time he looks at our logo and branded signs throughout the competition.

**WHAT IMPACT DO YOU HOPE THIS SPONSORSHIP WILL HAVE ON THE ATHLETE'S LIFE AND CAREER?**

A win for Abbas is a win for Greater Fort Lauderdale. The sponsorship of the U.S. Swimming Paralympics Team and having Abbas as an ambassador is a testament to what we believe in—Greater Fort Lauderdale is for everyone under the sun. We hope Abbas gets the gold medal!

**WHAT IMPACT DO YOU HOPE THIS SPONSORSHIP WILL HAVE ON VISIT LAUDERDALE AND HOW DO YOU PLAN TO MEASURE ITS SUCCESS?**

As an organization, Visit Lauderdale is committed to accessibility and inclusion. More than 15% of the world's population experiences some sort of disability whether invisible or visible, according to the World Health Organization. I hope that the sponsorship will show that Visit Lauderdale is a leader in accessible tourism and that we are a truly welcoming destination.

Accessible tourism is on the rise, so we hope to see more visitors who are ready to discover the fun and exciting places we have to offer. Our goal is to inspire travelers to experience our accessible attractions and restaurants.

**WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF THIS SPONSORSHIP SO FAR?**

I knew Abbas was incredibly talented and poised for success from the moment I heard his story. But to see the support that Abbas gets from his teammates at the Aquatic Center and surrounding community has been very rewarding. At Visit Lauderdale we are all fans and hope he wins

the gold at the Paris Paralympics. Most importantly, we are happy and proud that we have vibrant and dynamic people like Abbas that are proud to call Greater Fort Lauderdale home.

**ANY SHARE ANY MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES FROM YOUR INTERACTION WITH ABBAS?**

Abbas has been able to overcome so much adversity, so he truly inspires you to live life to the fullest and focus on the positive in every situation. To watch him accomplish his dreams encourages you to believe in your own. I can't wait to see how far he can soar!

**HOW DO YOU ENVISION THE FUTURE OF THIS PARTNERSHIP, ESPECIALLY AS HE HAS QUALIFIED FOR THE PARALYMPICS?**

He made it to the Paralympics! He qualified for the U.S. Paralympics Swimming Team, and we are so excited for him. This is a partnership that will bring awareness to the accessibility and inclusivity of our destination. It's an honor to work with him and his team. I'm always excited to share his story with anyone I meet around the Greater Fort Lauderdale area and abroad. ■

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UPDATE: *Abbas won a silver medal in the 4x4 Freestyle Swimming Relay at the Paralympics.*

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**HOTELS**

- Four Seasons Hotel & Residences
- The Atlantic Hotel & Spa
- Hotel Maren Fort Lauderdale Beach
- Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa
- Residence Inn by Marriott Fort Lauderdale Airport & Cruise Port
- Plunge Beach Resort
- AC Hotel by Marriott Fort Lauderdale Beach
- Marriott Fort Lauderdale Airport

**ACTIVITIES**

- Xtreme Action Park
- Museum of Discovery and Science
- Park & Ocean Canoes
- NSU Art Museum
- Fort Lauderdale Aquatic Center
- Broward Center for the Performing Arts
- Birch Park
- Stonewall National Museum, Archives & Library
- Historic Stranahan House Museum

**RESTAURANTS**

- Quantum Kitchen
- Riviera by Fabio Vivani
- The Easton Rooftop Pool & Lounge
- Wild Thyme Oceanside Eatery
- Seasons 52
- Union Kitchen & Bar
- Louie Bossi's Ristorante Bar Pizzeria
- Waterfront Bar & Eatery at Whiskey Creek Hideout
- The Floridian
- New River Cafe and Bakery
- The Placery

[CLICK HERE](#)



Abbas Karimi

2024 U.S. Paralympic Swimming Team

# Breaking Barriers

THE INSPIRING STORY OF  
A PARALYMPIAN MADE IN  
GREATER FORT LAUDERDALE



As a proud sponsor of the U.S. Paralympic Swimming Team, Visit Lauderdale is honored to cheer on Fort Lauderdale resident Abbas Karimi at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.



## Unwavering Spirit

### *A Swimmer's Inspiring Journey to the Paralympics*

In Greater Fort Lauderdale, we believe in the power of possibilities and the spirit of inclusivity. As a proud sponsor of the 2024 U.S. Paralympic Swimming Team, join us in cheering on one of our own, Abbas Karimi. Born without arms in Afghanistan, Karimi, a refugee, found freedom in the water. Today, he trains tirelessly in Fort Lauderdale, one of our 31 accessible communities that break down barriers to welcome everyone under the sun.



Scan this Code or  
Visit our Website  
to Learn More

[VisitLauderdale.com/abbas](https://www.VisitLauderdale.com/abbas)

# Leading outdoor travel company [pitchup.com](https://pitchup.com) strives to make camping more accessible for travellers with disabilities

By Brodie Farrow



Pencarnan Farm

This summer, global outdoor accommodation booking platform [Pitchup.com](https://pitchup.com) launched an ambitious initiative to improve accessibility in the outdoor travel sector.

Partnering with Purple Goat, a leading disability-led inclusive marketing agency, Pitchup.com conducted a comprehensive survey to identify key challenges faced by those with neurodivergence, chronic illness and physical disabilities when seeking outdoor accommodations.

With 83 percent reporting that accessibility issues play a significant factor in their decision

to avoid outdoor travel, Pitchup.com used its findings to implement changes across its website that foster inclusivity and enhance the travel experience.

“Many people feel that this kind of holiday is not an option for them,” says Dan Yates, Founder and Managing Director of Pitchup.com. “We are failing the disabled community by not providing equal opportunity to reap the many benefits of outdoor vacations, from affordability in a cost-of-living crisis to the health benefits of connecting with nature.”

Pitchup.com’s survey polled more than 2,000 respondents

who experience a spectrum of challenges and, using this research, the company has created a new set of website features that empower travellers with disabilities to book accommodation tailored to their needs.

The new accessibility filters include features like well-lit paths, accessible parking, dedicated quiet space and wheelchair-accessible bathrooms, and unit-specific features for fixed accommodations, like step-free access. Park managers can upload photos to provide visual confirmation of these features and provide additional details like the size of doorways for example.

Hundreds of parks have already added the filters to their listings and Pitchup.com is working hard to encourage wider use. Among Pitchup.com's accessible campgrounds is [Oak Leaf Hills](#) in Alabama, ideal for wheelchair users, offering accessible parking and level terrain with step-free access, allowing guests to easily enjoy the natural beauty of its 116-acre forested setting. [Casa La Pieve Camper Park](#) in Albania is well-suited for travellers with hearing loss, featuring a hearing induction loop and accessible amenities like bathrooms and parking, along with the opportunity to explore nearby historic sites and natural attractions. [Flowerdew Farm](#) in England provides a welcoming environment for neurodivergent guests with spacious bathrooms, quiet areas, and level grounds, along with engaging activities and a host dedicated to creating an inclusive atmosphere.

“To search using the new filters, find the ‘Accessibility’ section and select the features you would like to be available on-site. The search will then only return parks that fit your criteria. You can use any combination that suits your needs, for example ‘Accessible parking at pitch’ and ‘Pitch close to accessible bathrooms’” says Yates.

Pitchup.com is also developing guides to the best accessible things to do in top locations, such as the new Pitchup.com guide to the [Accessible Lake District](#).

For more information about Pitchup.com's outdoor travel offerings, please visit [Pitchup.com](#) ■



Ben Nevis Holiday Park



Camping Bled



Les Rives de Paris

# Travel Talk With Joy!



wheel  the world

## Hearing the disability community one story at a time

### WHAT IS TRAVEL TALK WITH JOY (TTWJ)?

In a world where accessible travel is often underrepresented, *Travel Talk With Joy (TTWJ)* spotlights the journeys of extraordinary individuals who navigate life and travel differently. Joy Burns, a passionate traveler who has visited all 50 states and all 7 continents hosts the podcast. She travels alongside her husband, Bert Burns, a full-time wheelchair user since 1981. Currently, Joy is the Alliance and Community Coordinator for [Wheel the World](#), a travel company where travellers with disabilities can find and book accessible accommodations, activities, vacation packages, and transportation.

*TTWJ* is a platform dedicated to explore the unique stories of people with disabilities, break down barriers, and celebrate the resilience and adaptability of those who travel the world with unique challenges.

*TTWJ* is a platform dedicated to explore the unique stories of people with disabilities, break down barriers, and celebrate the resilience and adaptability of those who travel the world with unique challenges.

### WHY WE CREATED TRAVEL TALK WITH JOY

*TTWJ* connects audiences with authentic travel and life stories that inspire, educate, and challenge

perceptions. The episodes evoke a raw, genuine conversation where nothing is off limits.

The goal is to explore the universal themes of travel—adventure, discovery, and personal growth—while also addressing the unique challenges of life with a disability.

### INSPIRING GUESTS, UNIQUE STORIES

*TTWJ* has featured a range of remarkable guests, each sharing their own perspective on life and travel. These are individuals who have embraced the spirit of exploration.

## RECENT GUESTS



### Bert Burns

Bert, Joy's husband, shared his incredible journey of resilience and adventure. Bert, a quadriplegic since a car accident in his youth, has never let his disability define him. As a Paralympic gold medalist and wheelchair racer in over 80 marathons, Bert's story is one of relentless determination.



Bert Burns and Joy travelling in Iceland



Renee Bruns at a local Madagascar school



### Renee Bruns

Renee is a wheelchair traveler who has visited an astonishing 130 countries. She holds the Guinness World Record for traveling to the most countries in one year! Renee has ventured to some of the most challenging and remote destinations, including Cambodia and Botswana. She finds joy in traveling to the most unexpected and inaccessible places.



### Ryan Davis

Ryan is former Army Ranger and triple amputee who continues to defy the odds. After sustaining life-altering injuries from an explosion in combat, Ryan's journey of recovery and adaptation is nothing short of extraordinary. His story touches on emotional and physical challenges, and how he finds new ways to create lasting travel memories with his family.

From the excitement of planning a new journey to the unexpected hurdles that travelers might face, Travel Talk With Joy is about finding solutions, sharing tips, and ultimately proving that with the right approach, the world is accessible to everyone.

**Join us** as we continue to explore the world, one story at a time ■



Ryan Davis and family

# The Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation

## Champions for accessible travel and enjoyment of the great outdoors for wheelchair-users

By Dan McNeal, Director, Quality of Life Grants Program, Reeve Foundation

For those living with disabilities - specifically, those living with paralysis or using wheelchairs - travel doesn't always mean a vacation. Inaccessible terrains, outdated accessibility information on websites, untrained staff in assisting someone with disabilities, and the lack of accessible activities are just a few examples of the many obstacles that can turn a trip into a stressful experience.

However, we at the [Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation](#) are dedicated to curing spinal cord injury by advancing innovative research and improving the quality of life for individuals and families impacted by paralysis. This includes advocating to make the outdoors accessible and inclusive for all - the heart of the Reeve Foundation's '[Outdoors for Everyone](#)' initiative.

Piloted in September 2023, 'Outdoors for Everyone' aims to raise awareness and educate the community and organizations about the preventable limitations in outdoor environments so that

everyone can be part of the fun outside. As part of the initiative, the Reeve Foundation's highly trained [Information Specialists](#) - a team dedicated to helping anyone, from newly paralyzed individuals and their family members to persons who have lived with paralysis and mobility impairments long-term - are educating those in the paralysis community about accessible locations, what to look for, and how to prepare for their journeys before, during and after their trips.

To further support individuals planning a getaway or even a day trip to a local park or beach, the Foundation offers a comprehensive [Accessibility Checklist](#) and interactive [Resource Map](#). These go-to educational tools help locate accessible resources, equipment and programs throughout the U.S. to ensure a smooth and accessible experience for all! While the focus thus far has been on breaking down barriers and fostering inclusivity where all individuals can enjoy nature-based activities, including hiking, walking trails, and water

activities, we know there's so much more to do!

As someone personally committed to the campaign, I feel strongly that being outdoors and embracing everything nature offers should be enjoyable, therapeutic and a healing experience for everyone. The initiative aims to inspire relief, positivity, and excitement as people plan and embark on their outdoor adventures, while providing the vital resources to make that possible.

It is our mission to continue Christopher and Dana Reeve's legacy and advocate for those living with disabilities and in wheelchairs, and we will always look to further develop our resources and expertise to help ensure that every person can enjoy the unparalleled joy of life.

So, as you're planning your fall (and beyond) travel, visit us at the Reeve Foundation and let us help you plan a stress-free trip! ■



# Adventure and Accessibility: A perfect match in **Arkansas** **State Parks**

By Lorraine Woodward, CEO [Becoming rentABLE](#)



Once a mere dream, accessible outdoor adventures across the U.S. are becoming a reality for those of us that use mobility devices, like wheelchairs. Maybe this is due to covid or our voices finally being heard. Or maybe it could be that companies are finally seeing the value and business opportunity of reaching the disability community. No matter what the reason, I for one am thrilled!

As a lifelong advocate, person with a disability and CEO of a company, [Becoming rentABLE](#), that focuses on accessibility, I am excited for this growth. Take for example our country's state park system. I would never have attempted to visit a state park for fear of not knowing what to expect when I got there. But just this year, [Becoming rentABLE](#) was hired to evaluate and validate the [Arkansas State Parks](#) lodging units, cabins and yurts to showcase their level of accessibility. By working closely with the State Park staff we were able to certify 59 units as mobility accessible for those using wheelchairs, walkers, couches and canes. This one effort alone has increased the number of accessible short-term rentals in the entire state

of Arkansas by 843%. Not only does this help the state's economy but it gives the disability community a chance to get outside and enjoy the great outdoors!

Speaking of accessible adventures, three of [Becoming rentABLE](#)'s ambassadors were given the opportunity to experience first-hand what Arkansas State Parks have to offer. Alwyn Uys, MacKenzie and Jessie Swartz, and the Allen Family each spent time at different Arkansas State Parks to showcase accessible lodging and activities available. Each ambassador brought a different perspective and each state park brought different levels of accessibility.

Our ambassador from South Africa, Alwyn, was up for any outdoor adventure. During his stay at [Moro Bay State Park](#) he was able to go kayaking, enjoy cooking on an outdoor fire pit, stay in a beautiful accessible cabin...all helping him be independent as a wheelchair user.

Mackenzie and Jessie, our twin college ambassadors, were able to show different perspectives

of accessibility. Mackenzie is a wheelchair user while Jessie has invisible disabilities. They took a group of friends to Petit Jean State Park where they were able to experience accessible trails and Cedar Falls Overlook, their favorite overlook with a beautiful waterfall at the end.

Finally, Jennifer Allen and her three kids, went digging for diamonds at Crater of Diamonds State Park and discovered accessible tips for her son who uses a wheelchair! While the park itself consisted of dirt paths, they found the outside paths were most compact and able to get through with the wheelchair. In addition, the sifting tables were able to be reached by all of the kids, which made the search for diamonds even more fun! Afterwards, the Allen's were able to cool down at Diamond Springs Water Park. They stayed at DeGray Lake Resort Park and enjoyed all the lodge had to offer including a pontoon boat ride, accessible trails and making s'mores by a campfire!

By certifying Arkansas State Parks lodging accommodations and highlighting activities with our ambassadors, we have been able to help others find accessibility outdoors in Arkansas. Kudos to the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism for recognizing the need and importance of making their state parks accessible for all guests.

Personally, I grew up in Arkansas. I remember the state being recognized as a 'State of Opportunities' many years ago. Today, I believe that rings even more true as they empower all people to get out and enjoy the outdoors! Arkansas is just one example we are seeing with regards to accessibility and the great outdoors. We encourage others to join in...the time is now! ■



# May Mobility is redefining accessible transportation for people with disabilities

This is a story about how technology, driven by empathy, changes lives and with it, autonomy and dignity are being restored to those who need it most.

For millions of people living with disabilities, transportation is more than just a means to get from point A to point B. It's a gateway to freedom, inclusion and independence. May Mobility understands this and is redefining the very essence of movement, ensuring that no one is left behind.

When May Mobility rolled onto the scene in 2017 headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, they were rooted in the belief that transportation should be accessible to all, regardless of physical abilities. And they have more than delivered. By integrating their autonomous vehicle technology with thoughtful, community-centric approaches, May Mobility is proving that technology can be compassionate.

Simply, this is about cars that drive themselves but it is, more

importantly, about the people who ride in them—people with mobility impairments, visual challenges and a variety of other disabilities. They're the heroes of this narrative and May Mobility is the quiet hand lifting them to a higher level of independence.

What makes May Mobility's autonomous vehicles so special? It starts with the platform: the Toyota Sienna. Now, this isn't your standard minivan. The vehicles are spacious, accessible and human-centered. With the ability to safely



load and transport wheelchair users, May Mobility ensures that everyone, regardless of their mobility challenges, can access their communities. In Detroit alone, half of the Accessibili-D fleet is designed specifically for wheelchair users. That's no small feat in an industry often focused more on futuristic bells and whistles than practical needs.

But what if you're visually impaired? May Mobility has thought of that too. The company's in-vehicle experience, supported by real-time feedback via both audio and visual displays, ensures that every rider is informed and at ease throughout the journey. And here's the kicker: there's always a real person behind the scenes. In each wheelchair-accessible vehicle, you'll find an Autonomous Vehicle Operator (AVO). These trained operators don't just monitor the technology, they're there to lend a hand—whether it's assisting with boarding, providing additional guidance, or just making sure everyone feels safe and supported. It's tech with a heart!

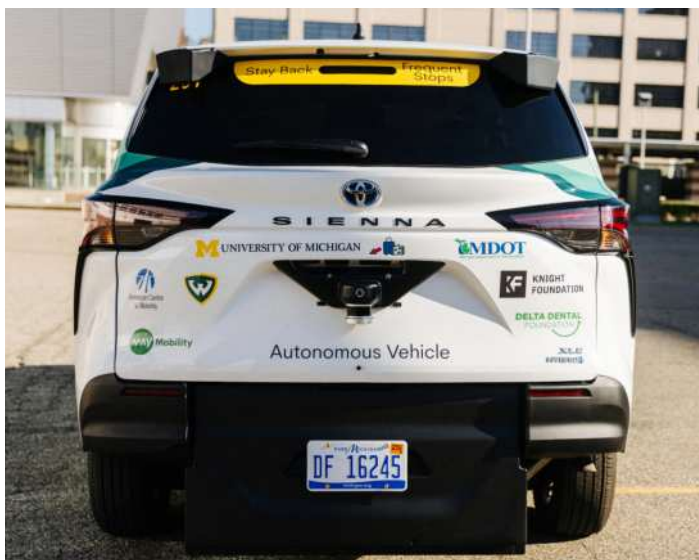
It's one thing to create an autonomous vehicle. It's another



thing entirely to create one that learns, adapts, and evolves. May Mobility's vehicles are powered by their patented Multi-Policy Decision-Making (MPDM) system, which is as sophisticated as it sounds. Here's a vehicle that can visualize and assess thousands of scenarios per second, making decisions based on what's safest for its passengers. And it doesn't stop there. The MPDM system

is constantly learning from new situations, allowing the vehicles to better handle unusual scenarios—whether it's a surprise parade blocking the road or an impromptu construction site popping up. This means that May Mobility's cars get smarter and safer with every trip, turning them into true partners in transportation.

One might assume that cutting-



edge technology like this comes with a hefty price tag, especially for users with disabilities. But May Mobility isn't just innovative in their tech, they're revolutionary in their business model. In Detroit, for instance, rides are free, fully subsidized by the city. For the people who need these services the most, this makes autonomous transportation not just a luxury but a vital part of daily life.

And while the pricing may vary from city to city, the core philosophy remains: accessibility shouldn't come at a premium. Whether through subsidies, partnerships with cities, or creative funding models, May Mobility is committed to making autonomous rides affordable for everyone.

In rural areas, where traditional public transportation is often sparse or nonexistent, May Mobility is making a groundbreaking impact by bringing autonomous micro transit solutions to places like Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

Unlike the urban environments where autonomous vehicles typically operate, these rural deployments address unique challenges like vast distances, fewer transportation options and a high reliance on personal vehicles. May Mobility's fleet provides accessible, on-demand transportation to people who might otherwise struggle to get around, especially wheelchair users, who make up nearly 8% of the ridership in some rural areas like Grand Rapids. By connecting these communities to essential services and daily destinations, May Mobility is helping to close the transportation gap and ensuring that even the most remote populations have access to the freedom and independence that reliable transit offers.

What's next for May Mobility? Well, they're not slowing down. The company recently announced expansions, adding more routes and more vehicles to meet the growing demand. The future holds even more exciting advancements in their

technology and services. But what's truly exciting is that they are not only filling transportation gaps—May Mobility is actively contributing to the creation of accessible, inclusive cities. It goes beyond the technology or the vehicles. People with disabilities can navigate their cities with the same freedom as anyone else.

For too long, they were passengers in their own lives, waiting for systems to catch up with their needs. With May Mobility, they're finally in the driver's seat—guiding us all into a future where no one is left behind. The future of transportation is here, and it's rolling forward with everyone on board. ■

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In Detroit alone, half of the Accessibili-D fleet is designed specifically for wheelchair users.

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## ABOUT MAY MOBILITY

May Mobility is an autonomous driving (AD) technology company redefining the future of autonomous mobility-as-a-service (MaaS). Leveraging its patented Multi-Policy Decision Making (MPDM) system, May Mobility built an industry-leading in-situ AI solution, which integrates real-time data every 200 milliseconds to ensure safety and efficiency, even in unpredictable situations.

This revolutionary technology pairs live, online learning with traditional offline training, enabling rapid global deployment at half the cost and one-third of the time. Operating fleets of on-demand shared ride vehicles across the U.S. and Japan, May Mobility delivers safer, more efficient transportation across diverse environments, including rural cities, dense urban areas and challenging weather conditions. Backed by strategic partnerships with industry leaders, including Toyota Motor Corporation and NTT, May Mobility is disrupting the autonomous vehicle industry with one of the most practical vehicle offerings available.

The company has completed over 400,000 autonomy-enabled rides across 15 deployments worldwide.

For more information, visit [www.maymobility.com](http://www.maymobility.com)!

[CLICK HERE](#) for current deployment sites, including:

Ann Arbor, MI

- Price: Free

Arlington, TX

- Price: \$3 (FREE to UTA staff and students!)

Detroit, MI

- Price: Free for eligible participants

Grand Rapids, MN

- Price: Free

Miami, FL

- Price: Free

Martinez, CA

- Price: Free

Sun City, AZ (Driver-Out)

- Price: Free

# A movement to travel with dignity taking shape in New York state

By Jeremy Willinger

Discovering new settings and living life outside our bubble through travel is perhaps one of the most rewarding opportunities one can have on this planet. A necessary aspect of human nature also occurs when we look to find the nearest bathroom, water

closet, baño, or lavatory. But what if you are a person with a disability, a veteran, or senior citizen who uses a wheelchair? This recurring, daily visit presents a unique challenge because there is no easy way to change an adult diaper. A new piece

of common-sense legislation could eliminate that concern and make travel more dignified for this growing cohort of New Yorkers.

The "Traveling with Dignity" Act was inspired by the lived experiences of



Diego Ortiz, self-advocate, speaks about his travel experiences as a person who uses a wheelchair

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persons supported at [CP Unlimited](#) being unable to make it to rallies at the state capital to lobby for more government support for disability services due to inaccessible travel logistics. The bill will mandate height-adjustable adult changing tables in public venues across the state with capacities above 2,500 and at public rest stops with full rollout by 2030. The result: a more accessible state for millions of our fellow neighbors like Betty Williams. Williams, a person with a disability who uses a wheelchair for transportation, said “I get changed every two hours and if I don’t get changed, I have to go home. And then I miss that part of the program.”

While this is not a new idea—if enacted, New York would be the sixth state to pass similar legislation—it is a breakthrough that, through a simple addition to existing spaces, deepens our collective commitment and expression of inclusivity and equality. The height-adjustable feature is also critical, said advocate Jacqueline Scali, co-founder of Changing Spaces Campaign’s New York State Chapter, because “it makes it incredibly easy and safe to transfer people onto the table. [Our son] will be able to use a height-adjustable table at the age of nine and when he is 49.”

The bill has attracted a bi-partisan array of supporters since its introduction. “People with differing abilities should be able to participate in the same activities, day trips and excursions that are available to everybody, and the best way to effectuate this is to provide as many adult changing areas and disability-friendly rest areas as possible,” proclaimed Senator Peter Harckham (District 40) when he announced the Act.

The 2023-2027 New York State Plan on the Aging reports that the State currently ranks fourth in the nation in the number of older adults, with that population set to increase. New York is also home to the fifth-largest veteran population in the country with more than half over the age of 65, reports the Office for the Aging. Beyond just people with disabilities, the “Traveling with Dignity” Act is a workable addition for groups that need adult changing tables now and

who will only command a greater share of residents in the future.

As Betty Williams clearly explained: “We really need this bill — for everybody.” ■

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*Jeremy Willinger is the Chief Communications Officer at [Constructive Partnerships Unlimited](#) and a freelance writer who enjoys cycling, travel, and seeing live music in his spare time.*

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NYS Senators Rob Rolison (left) and Peter Harckham (center) introduce the bill at CP Unlimited in Hudson Valley with CP Executive Director Penny Pagliaro (right)



# Catch an autonomous ride with Waymo One

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Accessible

# DESTINATION

VISIT  
*Myrtle Beach*  
SOUTH CAROLINA

# Spotlight



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Things to See + Do](#)

[Accessible  
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[5 Reasons Families with  
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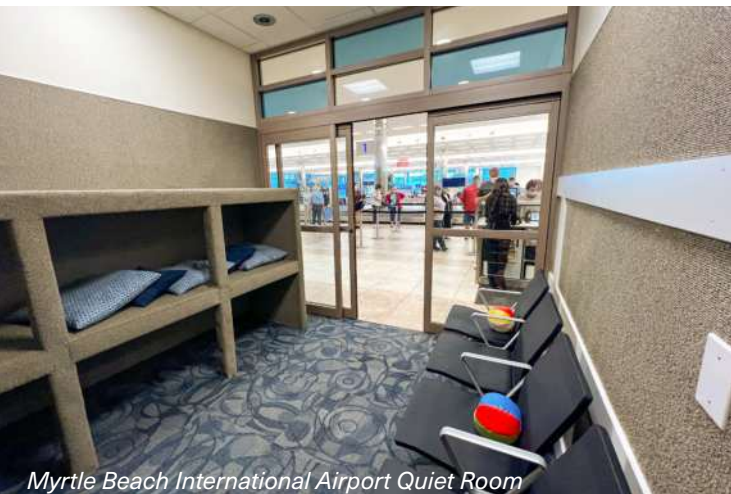
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# ABOUT MYRTLE BEACH

Situated along the Atlantic Coast in South Carolina, Myrtle Beach is 60 miles made for you. It's been a go-to beach destination for decades and has long strived to become a place where everybody belongs. "The Beach," as travelers prefer to call it, is a certified sensory-friendly destination, and they're able to provide extra service and assistance to anyone who might need extra support on their vacation. In the Myrtle Beach area, there are hundreds of attractions, more than 2,000 restaurants, live music performances every day and night, and accommodation options for every budget. These pages cover just some of the accessible places in the destination – go to [VisitMyrtleBeach.com](http://VisitMyrtleBeach.com) for even more.



Autism Travel Card Family Members Eating Outside



Myrtle Beach International Airport Quiet Room



Savannah's Playground Autism Cafe

\*Champion Autism Network Certified (CAN)

## Accessible Hotels

### CAROLINA GRANDE RESORT\*

2505 North Ocean Boulevard,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[bluegreenvacations.com](http://bluegreenvacations.com)

### LANDMARK OCEANFRONT RESORT\*

1501 South Ocean Boulevard,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[landmarkresort.com](http://landmarkresort.com)

### CROWN REEF BEACH RESORT & WATERPARK\*

2913 South Ocean Boulevard,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[crownreef.com](http://crownreef.com)

### THE PALACE RESORT\*

1605 South Ocean Boulevard,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[palaceresort.com](http://palaceresort.com)

### THE CARAVELLE RESORT\*

6900 North Ocean Boulevard,  
Myrtle Beach SC 29572  
[thecaravelle.com](http://thecaravelle.com)

### BEACH COVE RESORT\*

4800 S Ocean Blvd,  
North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582  
[beachcove.com](http://beachcove.com)

### OCEAN CREEK RESORT\*

10600 N Kings Hwy,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29572  
[oceancreek.com](http://oceancreek.com)

### HARBOUR LIGHTS\*

2690 Harbour Lights Dr,  
Myrtle Beach, SC  
[bluegreenvacations.com](http://bluegreenvacations.com)

### SEA WATCH RESORT\*

161 Seawatch Dr,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29572  
[seawatchresort.com](http://seawatchresort.com)

### HORIZON RENTALS\*

215 77th Ave N,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29572  
[horizonmyrtlebeach.com](http://horizonmyrtlebeach.com)

"Our trip to Myrtle Beach is anticipated all year long. We have visited annually for the past 20+ years and have been able to create a sensory-friendly trip that brings our son, and our entire family, all the joys and laughter of a great vacation." - Lynda Farrington Wilson



## Popular Accessible Things to See + Do

### MYRTLE BEACH PELICANS\*

1251 21st Ave N,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[milb.com](http://milb.com)

### CAPTAIN HOOK'S ADVENTURE GOLF

2205 N Kings Hwy  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[myrtlebeachfamilygolf.com](http://myrtlebeachfamilygolf.com)

### MYRTLE BEACH SKYWHEEL\*

1110 North Ocean Blvd  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[skywheelmb.com](http://skywheelmb.com)

### SPRINGMAID PIER

3200 S Ocean Blvd,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[springmaidpier.com](http://springmaidpier.com)

### BROOKGREEN GARDENS\*

1931 Brookgreen Garden Dr,  
Murrells Inlet, SC 29576  
[brookgreen.org](http://brookgreen.org)

### WONDERWORKS\*

1313 Celebrity Circle, Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[wonderworksonline.com](http://wonderworksonline.com)

### MYRTLE WAVES\*

3000 Mr. Joe White Ave,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[myrtlewaves.com](http://myrtlewaves.com)

### FUNWAREHOUSE

2349 Dick Pond Rd Myrtle Beach, SC 29575  
[funwarehousemb.com](http://funwarehousemb.com)

### BROADWAY GRAND PRIX\*

1820 21st Ave N,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[broadwaygrandprix.com](http://broadwaygrandprix.com)

### RIPLEY'S AQUARIUM\*

1110 Celebrity Cir,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577

### THE ALABAMA THEATRE

Highway 17 South 4750 North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582  
[alabama-theatre.com](http://alabama-theatre.com)

### CHERRY GROVE PIER

3500 North Ocean Boulevard, North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582  
[cherrygrovepier.com](http://cherrygrovepier.com)

### MEDIEVAL TIMES DINNER & TOURNAMENT

2904 Fantasy Way  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29579  
[www.medievaltimes.com/myrtle-beach](http://www.medievaltimes.com/myrtle-beach)

### HOLLYWOOD WAX MUSEUM ENTERTAINMENT CENTER

1808 21st Ave. N.  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[hollywoodwaxentertainment.com](http://hollywoodwaxentertainment.com)

### GRAND 14 MOVIE THEATER AT THE MARKET COMMON

4002 Deville St,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[stonetheatres.com/grand14cinemas](http://stonetheatres.com/grand14cinemas)



Family on the Myrtle Beach Boardwalk

### OLE FASHION ICE CREAM PARLOR\*

665 US-17 BUS,  
Surfside Beach, SC 29575  
[mysurfsidesc.com](http://mysurfsidesc.com)

### GOLDEN EGG\*

810 3rd Avenue S,  
Surfside Beach,  
SC 29575  
[mysurfsidesc.com](http://mysurfsidesc.com)

### THE CAROLINA OPRY THEATER

8901 N. Kings Hwy. Myrtle Beach, SC 29572  
[thecarolinaopry.com](http://thecarolinaopry.com)

### LEGENDS IN CONCERT

2925 Hollywood Dr,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[legendsinconcert.com](http://legendsinconcert.com)

### MYRTLE BEACH STATE PARK

4401 South Kings Hwy Myrtle Beach, SC 29575  
[southcarolinaparks.com](http://southcarolinaparks.com)

## Accessible Food + Drink

### BENJAMIN'S BAKERY\*

415 US-17 BUS, Surfside Beach, SC 29575  
[benjaminsbakery.com](http://benjaminsbakery.com)

### ANGELO'S STEAK AND PASTA\*

2311 S Kings Hwy,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[angelosteakandpasta.com](http://angelosteakandpasta.com)

### CAROLINA SEAFOOD AND STEAK\*

29911 N Kings Hwy,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29572  
[carolinasteakhouse.com](http://carolinasteakhouse.com)

### LULU'S FUN FOOD MUSIC

4954 Hwy 17 S, North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582  
[lulusfunfoodmusic.com](http://lulusfunfoodmusic.com)

### SEA CAPTAIN'S HOUSE

3002 N Ocean Blvd,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[seacaptains.com](http://seacaptains.com)

### HOOK & BARREL

8014 N Kings Hwy B, Myrtle Beach, SC 29572  
[hookandbarrelrestaurant.com](http://hookandbarrelrestaurant.com)

### HAMBURGER JOES\*

712 48th Ave S, North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582  
[hamburgerjoes.com](http://hamburgerjoes.com)

### CRABBY GEORGE'S SEAFOOD BUFFET

7904 N Kings Hwy,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29572  
[crabbygeorges.com](http://crabbygeorges.com)

### JOHNNY D'S WAFFLES AND BAKERY\*

3301 N Kings Hwy,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577  
[johnnydswaffles.com](http://johnnydswaffles.com)

### NY PIZZA KITCHEN\*

Several locations  
[nypizzakitchenbargrill.com](http://nypizzakitchenbargrill.com)

### SURF DINER\*

11 S Ocean Blvd,  
Surfside Beach, SC 29575

### FAMOUS TOASTERY\*

2005 Oak Heart Rd., Suite 5,  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29579

# 5 Reasons Families With Autism Should Go To Myrtle Beach



Myrtle Beach International Airport

1

## Autism-Friendly

In 2016, the Champion Autism Network designated Surfside Beach, South Carolina – one of Myrtle Beach’s 14 communities – as the first autism-friendly beach destination. Since then, all 60 miles of The Beach have been committed to making Myrtle Beach a place where people with autism and their families can vacation in peace. The destination even has a pledge called “The Beach is for everyBODY,” which declares that the businesses that participate will “provide an inclusive space for visitors of all abilities, practice patience and problem-solving in all situations, and cultivate a space of acceptance and helpfulness.”

2

## Helpful Resources

Myrtle Beach and participating businesses in the area use the Autism Traveler Mobile App so people can find autism-ready hotels, restaurants and attractions. The staff at these locations are prepared to help anyone with autism that may need extra assistance or patience during their visit, and they might also provide special offers and discounts to registered club members. Another initiative called, Project Lifesaver, can provide a GPS tracking band for children who are prone to wandering off or who are at risk of becoming lost. The band allows them to be quickly located by search teams and returned to their families.

3

## Great Airport

Myrtle Beach International Airport has made strides to make flying easier for families. As part of the national TSA Cares program, travelers can contact TSA 72 hours before traveling so that a Passenger Support Specialist can provide them on-the-spot assistance. If your family might need some time to decompress after a flight, there is a quiet room near the baggage area open to anyone who needs it. Lastly, the Myrtle Beach Airport participates in the Sunflower Lanyard Program, which helps anyone with a hidden disability. The lanyard is a discreet way to signal to airport staff that you or a family member may require extra assistance or patience during your travels.

4

## Accessible and Sensory-Friendly

Many attractions in the area are accessible and sensory-friendly or offer special assistance to anyone who requires it. The beach, Brookgreen Gardens, Myrtle Beach State Park and Huntington Beach State Park, and many more outdoor attractions are great for anyone with sensory needs. Attractions like the SkyWheel, Ripley’s Aquarium and Broadway at The Beach offers services like expedited access and noise-canceling headphones to help enhance the experience for people with sensory needs. Savannah’s Playground is great for families with children on the spectrum as well. The free, multi-acre park was designed to accommodate children with disabilities and who have additional sensory needs.

5

## A Beach Experience for Everyone

There’s simply nothing like seeing the ocean and being able to experience a beach vacation. Myrtle Beach believes that The Beach is a place where everybody can belong—every body, every ability, everyone. They strive each day to create a more welcoming and inclusive place for families to vacation, relax, and enjoy everything there is to do in the 60 miles and 14 communities of The Beach.



Snack Stand at Broadway at The Beach



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- 2** Spoke only requires a smartphone
- 3** No integration with airports and airlines systems is needed



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THESPOKEAPP.com

SPOKE@METCOVE.com

# Tanelle's Accessible Kelowna adventure: Wonder, wine and exploration

Tanelle Bolt is the founder of the [RAD Recreation Adapted Society](#), located in BC, Canada.



Adventure isn't just for the able-bodied. It's for the bold-hearted and Tanelle Bolt's journey to Kelowna, British Columbia (BC), Canada proved just that. A ferry ride from her home on Vancouver Island transformed into an immersive adventure where nature, accessibility, sailing and wine collided in the most beautiful way. For Tanelle, every step of the trip—whether on land, lake or a bike trail—was a reminder that

exploration can be as inclusive as it is inspiring.

## THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

Tanelle's trip began with BC Ferries from Vancouver Island to the Vancouver mainland—always a scenic delight. There's something magical about being at the bow, the wind in your hair and knowing you're heading toward adventure. Even better? Tanelle brought her trusty sidekick, her dog, who



enjoyed the open-air dog deck. True, the ferry's elevators occasionally posed a challenge, but what's a little hiccup when you're surrounded by sweeping ocean views? She didn't let minor inconveniences steal the show. It was a smooth, sun-drenched sail to the mainland and the best was yet to come.

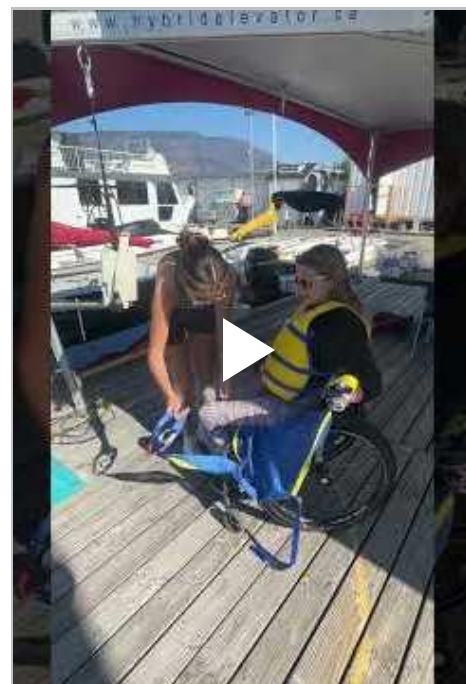
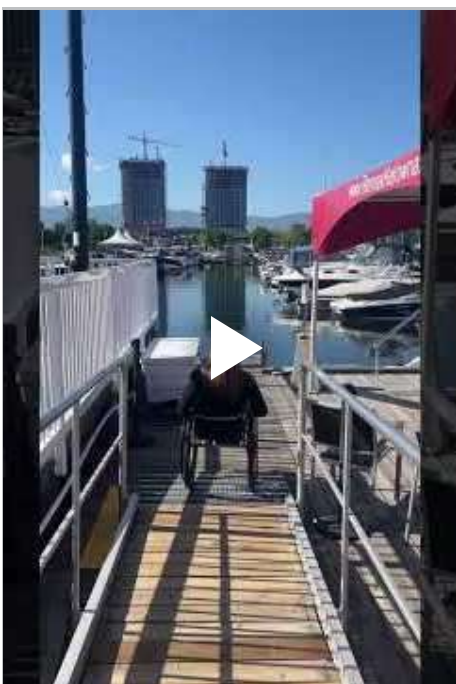
### **WINDING ROADS AND INFINITE POSSIBILITIES ON THE LONG DRIVE**

The four-hour drive from Vancouver to Kelowna? Pure bliss. Forget the humdrum of daily life, this was a road trip filled with winding highways, tall trees and a horizon painted with a hint of mountains—beautiful! Tanelle had the luxury of being the passenger—no driving herself on this trip, her partner was at the wheels, so she kicked back, snapped a few pictures of British Columbia's green splendor and simply existed. Sometimes, it's the journey that refreshes the soul before you even reach the destination.

More than enough room to breathe at the Coast Capri Hotel  
Arriving at the Coast Capri Hotel,

Tanelle found a mix of warmth and accessibility waiting for her with a spacious room, where navigating in a wheelchair wasn't tedious. No cramped corners or frustrating tight spaces here. And then, the cherry on top—a roll-in shower! It's the little things that make a difference, and this was a big win in her book. The staff at the hotel made sure that comfort was not just an afterthought but a priority.

Accessible sailing magic on Okanagan Lake with Able Sail  
If there's one thing you must do in Kelowna, it's sail on Okanagan Lake. But don't just sail—steer the boat! Tanelle's time with Able Sail, a program run by People in Motion, was nothing short of magical. Forget just being a passenger—Tanelle got behind the helm, learning to tack and jibe like a pro. The lake was calm, the sun was shining and the accessibility was flawless. No awkward transfers, no struggle to board—just smooth sailing. Able Sail has perfected the art of accessible adventure and



when Tanelle took control of the sails, her spirit soared as high as the boat's canvas!

**SIPPING THROUGH THE OKANAGAN WINE TOUR WONDERLAND**

Now, Kelowna without a wine tour? Unthinkable. Tanelle dove headfirst into the world of Okanagan wine, visiting not one, but three wineries. At Summerhill Pyramid Winery, outdoor tastings were accompanied by views so spectacular, they felt like something out of a dream. Here, accessibility didn't stop at the door—the entire outdoor experience

was tailored for ease and even the gluten-free lunch hit the mark. A glass of world-class wine, stunning views and zero barriers? Check, check, and check.

Next up, Spearhead Winery, where Tanelle found picnic tables perfectly situated for easy access, offering intimate surroundings and some of the region's finest vino. Then came The View Winery—an old, storied establishment that charmed her, even though it had its quirks. Sure, high tables posed a small challenge, but with Tanelle's optimistic spirit, nothing could dim the experience. Surrounded

by rolling hills and vineyards, she sipped her wine and marveled at the history unfolding around her. Cheers to accessible wine tastings!

**ENJOYING MYRA CANYON, NATURE'S MASTERPIECE, ON TWO WHEELS**

Biking through Myra Canyon was not just another Kelowna excursion, it was the highlight of the trip. Tanelle, ever the adventurer, rented an adaptive electric handcycle from CRIS Adaptive Adventures and set out to conquer one of the most breathtaking trails in BC. Myra Canyon is a section of the Kettle



Valley Rail Trail, featuring 13 wooden trestles and two tunnels, all of which are fully accessible.

The ride was a serene blend of nature, freedom and pure exhilaration—towering mountains, crystal-clear skies and a trail that seemed to stretch on forever.

The handcycle glided effortlessly over the gravel path, offering Tanelle a unique way to connect with nature, without obstacles holding her back. If ever there was a moment of pure joy on her trip, this was it.

### **CULINARY DELIGHTS**

No adventure is complete without indulging in local cuisine and Kelowna's culinary scene did not disappoint. A cooking class at Lakehouse Kitchens in downtown

Kelowna was an accessible treat then Tanelle wrapped up her day with a meal at one of Kelowna's premier restaurants, Skinny Duke's. Fully accessible with automatic doors and staff who were wonderfully accommodating, the experience was seamless from start to finish.

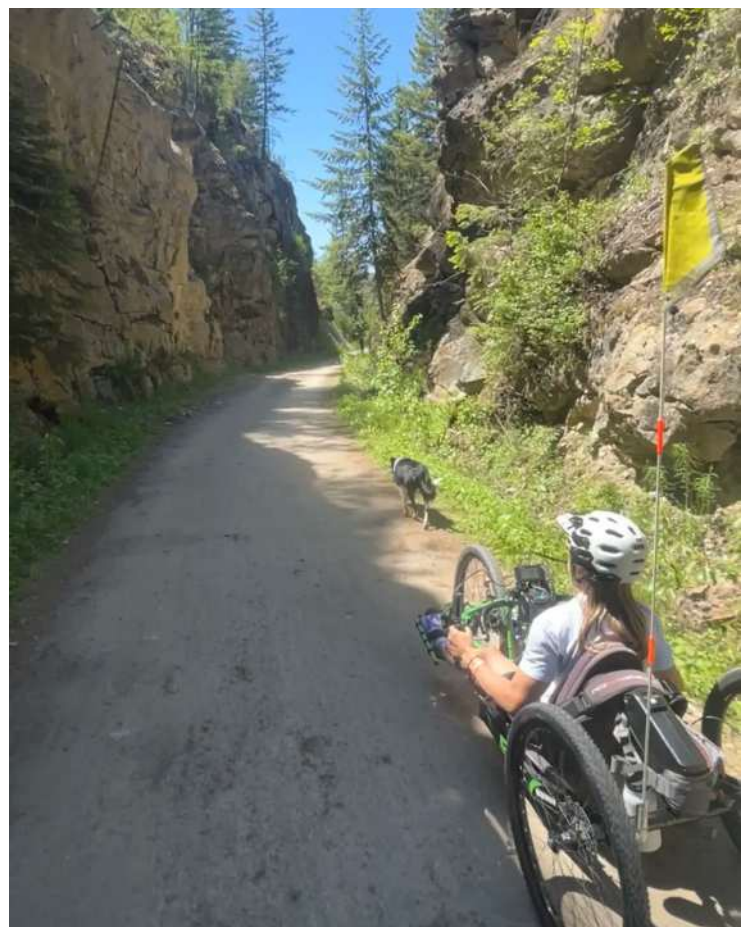
As someone who follows a gluten-free diet, Tanelle was thrilled by how easily her needs were met. Every bite of the gourmet food was a celebration of flavor and inclusivity. Even her partner, a self-professed burger aficionado, found himself in awe of the meal. Kelowna doesn't just cater to food lovers—it caters to everyone.

### **REFLECTIONS ON KELOWNA'S ACCESSIBILITY**

As Tanelle's adventure came to a

close, she reflected on the magic that Kelowna, a city with a growing commitment to accessibility, offers to travellers with mobility challenges. Yes, there were moments that could be improved, but those moments paled in comparison to the overwhelming joy, freedom and accessibility she experienced throughout her trip. Sailing, wine tasting, biking and indulging in fine dining—Kelowna offers all of these on an accessible silver platter. ■

[Click here](#) to visit Accessible Kelowna.



# Wheelchair-Accessible Cape Town group trip

**Cape Town & Garden Route** hosted by [Able2Travel](#)

To enquire, email Tarryn Tomlinson: [tarryn@liveablegroup.com](mailto:tarryn@liveablegroup.com)

Guests will start their 10 days by getting a feel for Cape Town's eclectic blend of cultures and traditions by touring the bustling inner city, the waterfront as well as the Cape Peninsula. Many attractions include its postcard-perfect beaches, mountainscapes, lush gardens, fashionable cafes, wildlife both on land and in water.

Guests then head out to the Weskus where they will come to learn about the [San People](#), the first people to roam this land, discover quaint fishing villages and meet the locals whilst they share tales and local cuisine.

They then head off to the picturesque [Cape Winelands](#) where they will get to taste some of the world's finest wines and even blend their own before moving onto the [Garden Route](#), a lush coastal stretch of land that is one of the most scenic drives in the world.

Discover where the Portuguese seafarers first landed and traded with locals in Mossel Bay, then head out to [Knysna](#), a harbour town famous for its oysters.

Cape Town is a melting pot of cultures, with African influences blending with Cape Malay, British and Dutch culture. Mix in a blend of residents and tourists from all over the world, and you have a fascinating city that never fails to enchant

## SAMPLE 10-DAY ITNIERARY

### DAY ONE

**ARRIVE** Airport Meet and Greet - Cape Town Int'l Airport. Private Shuttle to pick up guests at the airport. Accessible transportation for wheelchair users will be arranged.

**HOTEL** Our hotels are chosen based on clients' unique needs.

**LEISURE/SHOPPING** at [Victoria and Alfred Waterfront \(V&A Waterfront\)](#). Explore the Waterfront, shop for some necessary items and why not stay for dinner as you watch the yachts set sail?

**DINNER** at a South African Restaurant. Eat authentic local food at a restaurant located in the V&A Waterfront, Cape Town, that offers Traditional South African cuisine. The perfect den for meat and music lovers. Vegans and vegetarians are welcomed too.



### DAY TWO

**HOTEL DEPARTURE** for the [Cape Peninsula](#) Tour. Have your breath taken away by the beautiful vistas of the Cape Peninsula. On this tour you will encounter seals, baboons, ostriches, penguins, crocodiles and so much more.

**LUNCH** at [Two Oceans Restaurant](#)  
Visit the Cape of Good Hope, a nature reserve where the two oceans were once thought to

have met. After exploring the reserve, settle down to a scrumptious meal overlooking the ocean.

DESSERT at [Kalk Bay](#). Stop off for dessert ice-cream in Kalk Bay, a small fishing village along the ocean and walk the main street discovering the quaint boutique stores and getting a feel for the local vibe. Vibrant coffee shops and bohemian bookstores are but some of the gems you will find here.

Return to hotel. Relax after a day of sightseeing and nature. Have dinner at the hotel or on the Atlantic Seaboard.

DINNER on the [Atlantic Seaboard!](#) Have dinner on the Atlantic Seaboard and discover where locals and tourists live and play. Choose between a multitude of up-market restaurants or down-market eateries, either on the street, awash with neon lights, or by the beach front listening to the sounds of the waves.



HOTEL - Downtime. Take the afternoon off for yourself and relax by your hotel pool, sleep or have a massage. We will ensure that your hotel has multiple services to suit your needs.

DINNER AND DANCE. Feel the African vibration at our dinner and dance venue with traditional songs that will keep you moving during and after dinner!

## DAY FOUR

HOTEL DEPARTURE for [San Heritage Park](#). Take a day trip to the West Coast. Learn about the culture and history of the San People through guided tours and interactive exhibits.

LUNCH in [Langebaan](#) Enjoy a traditional fish meal on the beachfront of this famous sleeping fishing town then drive back through the West Coast nature reserve. Return to Cape Town in the evening.

DINNER - After a long day of touring, you can enjoy your dinner at the hotel.



## DAY THREE

HOTEL DEPARTURE to explore [Cape Town](#). Visit its iconic landmarks such as [Table Mountain](#) (weather permitting), [Safari](#), [The Castle of Good Hope](#) and the colourful neighbourhood of [Bo-Kaap](#), the [Cape Malay Quarter](#).

LUNCH - Enjoy a traditional Capetonian cuisine and get a taste of multiple cultures. From the sweet and sour tastes of bobotie to the spicy curries of the east, you will be spoiled for choice.

## DAY FIVE

**HOTEL DEPARTURE** - Head for [Cape Winelands](#). Visit the picturesque University town of [Stellenbosch](#) and meander through the streets popping into the local artisanal stores and art galleries.

**LUNCH** in Stellenbosch. Stop for lunch at one of the idyllic wine farms in Stellenbosch, the oldest wine farm region. Partake in a wine blending experience and make your own wine.

**DINNER** at [Franschhoek](#). Home to some of the best restaurants in South Africa and the world, Franschhoek, the old French quarter will not fail to deliver a variety of special restaurants with mouthwatering fine dining options.

## DAY SIX

**HOTEL DEPARTURE** for the [The Garden Route](#). Drive along the scenic Garden Route, stopping at towns like Mossel Bay and Knysna. Enjoy accessible activities such as bird watching, boat cruises and beach visits.

**LUNCH** at [Mossel Bay](#). Discover the quaint fishing town of Mossel Bay and enjoy a local lunch. Have a browse through the artistic shops and discover one of Cape Town's best gin distilleries.

**HOTEL (check In)** in [Knysna](#). Spend the night. Check into our fully accessible accommodation in Knysna and take some time to unwind before heading to the harbour.

**WALKABOUT** along the harbour. Explore the harbour and the town of Knysna. Purchase some gifts or have an aperitif by the pier.

**DINNER.** Delight in a scrumptious dinner of seafood at the harbour whilst watching the yachts bob up and down in the water.

## DAY SEVEN

**HOTEL DEPARTURE** Heading back to Cape Town, take in the sights and



sounds of the scenic Garden Route. Beautiful and therapeutic.

LUNCH. Stop for lunch in Hermanus at an iconic wine farm and enjoy the beauty of the estate.

ARRIVE CAPE TOWN - Hotel check In

DINNER at the Hotel. After a long day of driving, you can decide to have dinner at your hotel or head out on your own.



## DAY EIGHT

HOTEL DEPARTURE for a day of exploration. Whether you would like to spend time leisurely exploring the Waterfront, shop for gifts, visit the Zeiz Mocca Museum, take a boat trip to Robben Island, go on a harbour cruise or a helicopter trip, the V&A Waterfront area has lots to discover.

LUNCH at the V&A Waterfront. After working up an appetite you can indulge in a scrumptious seafood meal whilst sipping on some of the region's best wines.

DINNER Have dinner indoors at the hotel or check out one of Cape Town hotspots.

## DAY NINE

HOTEL DEPARTURE for a City Bus Tour. Experience the vibrant energy of Cape Town city with an inner-city bus tour.

LUNCH. Visit Kirstenbosch Gardens for a delicious lunch at Moyo's and explore the beautiful botanical gardens while there.

ARRIVE back in Cape Town and enjoy some downtime.

DINNER and Dance. Enjoy the final night with dinner while dancing to the sound of African drums. You can dance the night away as you say your farewells to the city.

## DAY TEN

HOTEL CHECK OUT 11 AM  
Head to Cape Town Int'l airport.

You'll be dropped off in style as we wave you goodbye! ■



# Immersive Nature Experiences

with Jan Bonville

Explore, connect, rejuvenate  
... in nature

**You can get there.  
Good luck trying to leave . . .**



# Tahitian Motus with a disability

By Jan Bonville

The isles of Tahiti are breathtaking. The first sighting of the majestic, jagged peaks framing the deep blue-green of the lagoons, pink-white sands barely fine enough to sift through your fingers, the myriad of colors of fish under the warm, clear surface of the water just simply stuns your senses.

I have had the pleasure of visiting Tahiti several times through a variety of life stages: twice as a couple and twice with children, first young and then older teenagers. A constant throughout these trips was my declining mobility. I have had multiple sclerosis, a degenerative neurological condition, for over two decades. With each trip, my mobility slowly but surely declined. My first visit required no walking aids, the second, one cane, the third and fourth, two canes and a walker.

My most recent experience was at the [Le Taha'a Resort](#), which is on a motu, or, a mini-island around an atoll. The Merriam-Webster definition of a motu is "a Polynesian reef islet with vegetation." Accurate, but boring! I would define a Tahitian motu as being the very definition of Paradise itself . . . imagine a faraway isle with fine sand clean and soft as snow, views of the majestic Bora Bora volcanic peaks, with nothing around you other than miles and miles of the endless blue of the Pacific Ocean.

Nobody, nothing to disturb you, other than your travel companions and fellow island dwellers, and your own thoughts and dreams. There is, as far as I know, no equivalent for a Tahitian motu. For those of us like me who get emotional nourishment and pure joy from secluded, immersive nature experiences, Le Taha'a's beauty, hospitality and incredible welcoming spirit makes it my version of island paradise.

However, for someone with a mobility disability, island paradises are challenging. Getting to Taha'a is no small feat. The logistics involve small planes and boats,

moving on the sand, getting in and out of the water and navigating uneven terrain. It is more difficult to get to Taha'a than to the volcanic islands of Moore'a or Bora Bora, (also beautiful and stunning, which I will save for another story.)

From the capital of Papeete, where international flights land, one takes a small plane to the island of Raiatea, then goes to a boat dock where the island resort boat meets you. For those of us who are mobility impaired, the prospect of getting from a dock onto a boat, maintaining balance in said boat, getting back out onto the hotel dock and then onto sandy



Sunset Tahaa

ground which is uneven at best, is daunting.

I alerted the hotel ahead of time that I needed help. When you ask for help in Tahiti, you will get it. From the moment we went to the dock, I was met with kindness, empathy and warmth. Once at the resort, I was helped to disembark and we were shown to our lodging, a family villa on the beach. While this was not exactly wheelchair accessible, it was flat, easy to navigate inside and spacious. The grounds of the resort had paved paths which I was able to navigate with canes and an elevator to go to the restaurant nestled in the trees with views of the gardens and ocean. The resort is hard to get to, secluded and calm, a must for a disabled nature lover like me.

Tahiti is known for acceptance and openness, particularly as an accepting destination for LGBTQ



Kids in Tahaa

travellers due to its history and culture. I have to say I did not see any other travellers with visible disabilities. Nonetheless, I did feel welcome and included. I am fortunate that my husband and sons are able bodied and can help me. I had to be resourceful at times to the point of comedy: since I cannot really move on sand, I'd slide down on my bottom from the villa to the water's edge, allow myself to be lifted like a rag doll onto and off the kayaks, and required my husband's assistance to get in and out of the tub surrounded by tropical flowers. I definitely had my share of inelegant moments. But, who cares?! I was in Tahiti!

The magic of Tahiti is that, thanks to the stunning landscapes and gentle lagoons, much of this experience does not, in fact, require a lot of mobility. The water in the lagoon is shallow, warm and calm. Being in or on the water in a kayak or boat provides an experience not too dissimilar from that of able bodied travelers. The

fish and coral, the views and the sunsets are the same whether you are mobile or not. The most precious moments, in fact, came while staying still: sitting outside the villa, watching my children play in the aquamarine waters of the lagoon with the palm fronds overhead, lowering myself into the heavenly warm, clear water and simply sitting still, observing the fish play around my toes.

Every evening, an hour before sunset, we took a magical kayak ride along the length of the motu to see the sun setting over the ocean and the mountains of Bora Bora. This involved me struggling a bit to get into the double kayak, again, with help, but . . . once I was there, sitting still in the kayak, the calm lagoon water lapping at the paddle, enjoying the skies and views, my experience was no less dimmed by not having use of my legs.

There are, of course, many things I could not do. A snorkeling area involved swimming in a current



Tahaa Villa boardwalk

that was too strong for my limited upper body strength. I could however snorkel in the lagoon, which as often is the case in Tahiti was calm and shallow and did not require a lot of strength. I no longer have the leg strength to swim very much so my snorkeling experience involved laying still, close to the surface—still magical, but I could not swim to follow sea turtles like others did. I could not have managed the kayak, or the boat, without help, but help was ready and available. I had to explain what I needed ahead of time and be ready to accept manual help, from the resort and my own family. I would not have been able to access the restaurant at all without the elevator, and the paths were narrow and not perfectly maneuverable, though not unfeasible, due to being flat. But as a person with a disability I am used to everything being more complicated and more difficult. But difficult does not mean impossible.

It is not easy to get to a place like Taha'a and once there, you need to be creative and resourceful—and importantly, ask for and accept help. You need to be okay with not being able to do every activity offered and be creative. Since we last went, my mobility has now declined to the point where I need a wheelchair to move around. I will need even more help than I did the last time.

But I will go again. I don't plan to give up the experience of the



Jan in Taha'a with canes

magical sunsets over Bora Bora, the gliding evening kayak rides and the complete sensation of silence and tranquility that comes from being at the edge of the world. It will be a challenge, but that makes it all the more worth it. ■



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

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## Jan's Tahiti's Recommendations

**Le Tah'aa by Pearl Resorts**

**The Society Islands Taha'a**

# Cruising Corner

Inclusive adventures  
across the seas

## Plenty of Sunshine Travel shares cruising insights



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

From my perspective as a travel agent, it's important to assure clients with disabilities that they can enjoy fulfilling travel experiences without feeling limited.

### **HERE ARE MY THOUGHTS:**

**Inclusive Planning:** Proper planning can ensure that every aspect of the trip is accessible and enjoyable. This includes booking

accessible accommodations, arranging for necessary equipment to be ready in the stateroom, and selecting shore excursions designed to be accessible.

### **SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:**

There are many ways to make travel easier for those with disabilities. This might involve renting mobility aids like scooters

or beach wheelchairs that will be waiting for you upon arrival, ensuring the accessibility of rooms, or pre-arranging dietary needs with the head chef onboard.

### **CUSTOMIZED EXPERIENCES:**

While some excursions might not be feasible, alternative activities can always be equally enjoyable. For example, many cruise lines offer adapted shore excursions



# Beyond Sight

Sharing the unleashed power of the other senses during travel

## The adventures of Tony Giles, the blind solo traveller



Tony Giles is a 46-year-old who lives in the Southwest of England, in a small beach town near the cities of Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth. He was born blind with a rare eye condition: Cone Dystrophy and Photophobia. He had light sensitivity until about the age of 12 or so and then it faded. Around age four or five, he became slightly deaf in both ears which had digressed slowly to this date. Tony wears a powerful digital hearing aid in each ear but his speech is unaffected and he hears reasonably well in one-to-one conversations and in small groups.

when aged 16 that really sparked my interest in travel. Everything was different and exciting. Traffic went in the opposite direction from in England, and the pavements were huge compared to those in the UK. I found Americans more direct. America had a different atmosphere compared to England and I found it exciting and desired to return, which I did.

### **WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST DIFFICULT OBSTACLES YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED WHILE EXPLORING NEW PLACES?**

The language barrier in several countries. Being partially/severely deaf makes learning foreign languages very difficult for me and not being able to read print means it is doubly hard to learn languages. I also find thick or strong accents difficult to understand. I can't lipread or sign. This means I have to try and learn a few basic words like 'hello', 'thank you', 'toilet', 'water', etc.

When I visited Russia in 1998, I realised that no staff in the train stations would speak much, if any, English, so I needed to plan my trip more carefully and book



### **WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START TRAVELLING THE WORLD DESPITE BEING TOTALLY BLIND AND PARTIALLY DEAF?**

My dad was in the merchant navy before I was born. He told me stories about travelling across Australia from coast to coast by steam train. He also described travelling along the St. Lawrence River with icebergs floating past the ship's sides. As a seven or eight-year-old, I found these adventures exciting. I became interested in the world. However, it was visiting Boston in the USA with my school

train tickets in advance. Once at the train station, I would simply show the ticket, say my destination and the station staff helped me to the correct train. Fortunately, this worked. On the long train journeys across Russia, when I became hungry, I'd go to the canteen and rub my stomach with my hand, and when thirsty, say, "coffee" or "Chai" and make a drinking motion with my hand. Most times this worked. I found the Russian people I met very helpful and kind, despite the language barrier.

Using foreign money is also a challenge. British Pounds and Euros have different size notes and I can use my fingers to identify the different denominations. Canadian notes have had Braille dots on them for a long time. British Pounds also now have Braille dot symbols on them, making it easier to identify the various notes. British and Euro coins are different shapes and sizes. However, U.S. Dollar notes are all the same size and difficult to identify. I have to continuously count my money and ask people I trust what each note is and put them in separate compartments in my wallet. I usually fold the \$1 bills. Finding someone I can trust is also not always easy. I have to listen to people in the accommodation I'm staying at, hear what they say and how they say it and decide if I feel I can trust him or her. I will often ask the reception staff in a hotel or hostel where I'm staying, to help me with the foreign currency. I also ask fellow travellers I've become friends with. But countries like Vietnam, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, where inflation is out of control and the notes are too numerous to count, I simply guess, offer a bunch of notes, and hope for the best. Fortunately, I've only been ripped-off a couple of times and only for a small amount of money. Likewise, using cash machines

outside of the UK is difficult. In the UK, I can put headphones into many cash machines and listen to the information on how to operate the machine and obtain money myself. But when abroad, I have to find someone to help me do this. Often, I ask a fellow traveller I've become friends with to help me use a cash machine. Or I might visit a bank and ask the bank staff to assist me with the machine. This is the safest option.

Eating can also be a challenge. I mean knowing what to eat and what options are available, especially in Asian or African countries where I'm less familiar with the local foods. I research the country I visit and try to learn the names of the local dishes. I can't read a menu and in many countries, the local people don't speak enough English and I don't speak enough of their language to ask people to read the menu. So, requesting the national food or dish often makes things easier.

Some restaurants in Canada, the U.K. and the U.S. do offer Braille

menus, but they are often not updated and reading a Braille menu is time-consuming.

### **HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE UNFAMILIAR ENVIRONMENTS, SUCH AS BUSTLING CITIES OR REMOTE LOCATIONS, WHERE RELYING ON SIGHT OR HEARING MIGHT BE CRUCIAL FOR SAFETY?**

I received fantastic mobility training at the specialist school for blind and visually impaired kids when a child. I learned how to use a long white cane to get about, how to crossroads safely without using audible traffic lights and go up and down stairs. I also learnt how to approach and ask people for help when on the street. I use these tactics when travelling. I usually travel alone, so I need to have some idea of where I am going, how to get to and from my accommodation, what places I wish to visit and how to get to them.

I research the country or city I plan to visit, discover what public transport is available, or if I need to take a taxi to my hotel/hostel. I also learn about a particular city's



attractions and the best way to visit them.

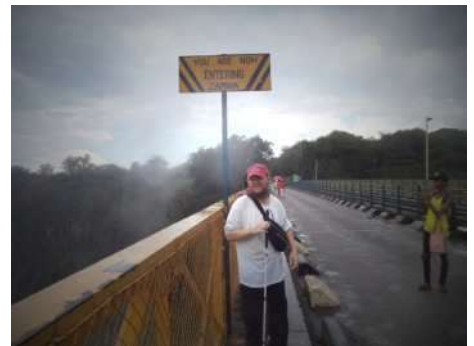
Once I've booked a flight (with help from family or friends), I book 'free' special assistance through the chosen air company. I go to the check-in desk and staff escort me through the busy airport, customs, immigration, security and onto the plane. The same occurs upon landing. Although, the assistance often takes a long time to arrive after the flight has landed!

Arriving at my accommodation, which I can book online, I ask the staff for directions to the nearest café, restaurant, bar, etc. I will say, "Please tell me how to find the nearest café/restaurant? Do I turn right after exiting the main door, or left?" I get the accommodation staff to write down the name of the café/restaurant or tourist attraction I wish to visit in the local language, ask for specific walking directions, go onto the street and continuously show the paper with the information to people on the street or in shops, cafes, bars, until I reach my destination. This is an excellent way to meet local people and get a feel of the place or area I'm travelling around. Frequently, the many people I meet when asking for directions, will often help me find the place I'm searching for. I've even made friends by this method.

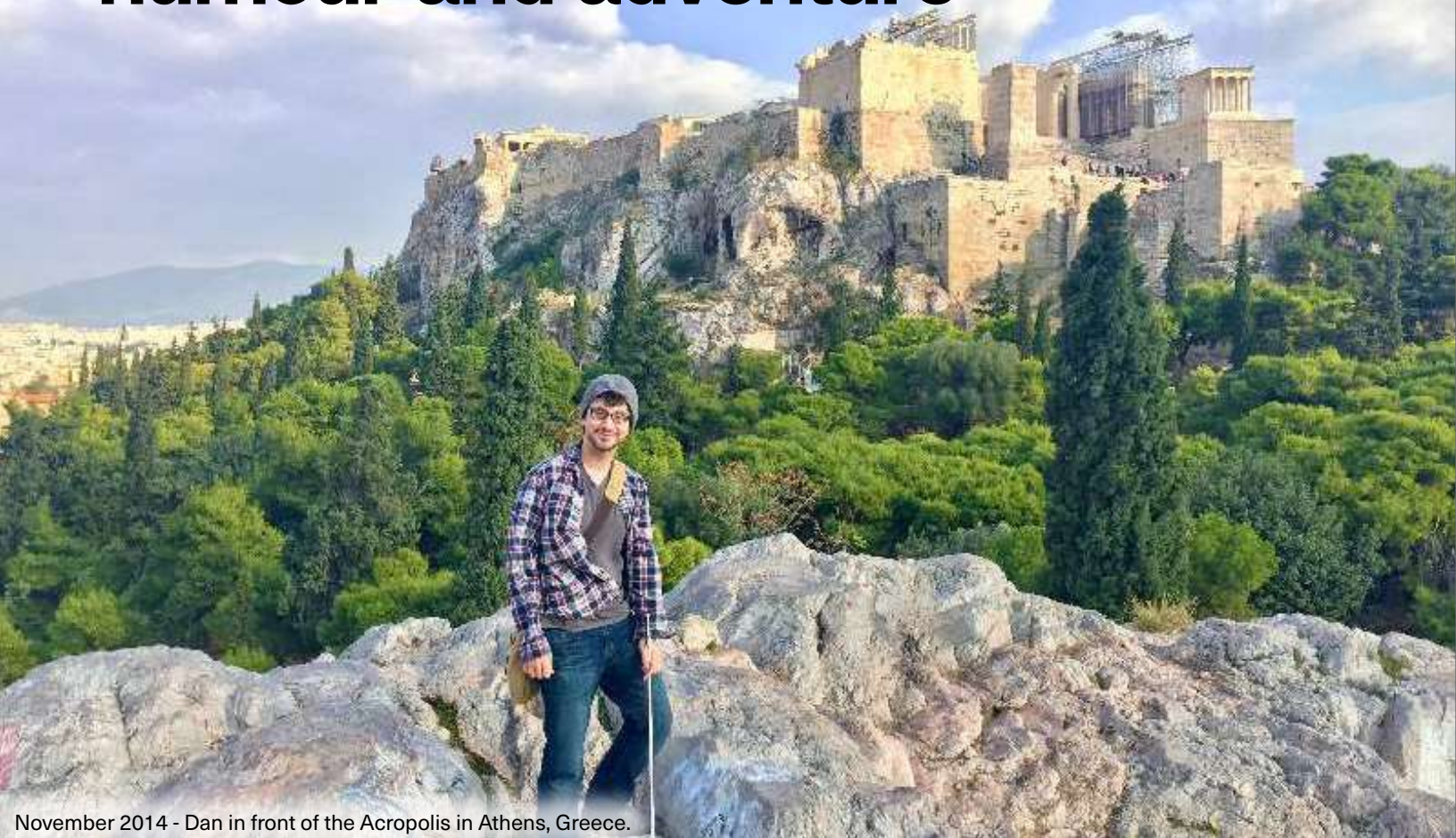
Being blind and partially deaf can make crossing roads in foreign countries more difficult at times, especially in a country like Vietnam, where five thousand bicycles are moving at once! I will walk along a pavement, sweeping with my cane for obstacles and at the same time follow the sound of the traffic. When I come to a road I need to cross, I will listen for any audio crossing sound, such as a rapid clicking or beeping, like in the U.K. If no such audio crossing exists, I will listen for the traffic in front of me and, when it sounds quiet, I will cross. Often, I listen for other people's voices or their footfall and follow them. However, if it is very windy or there's construction in the vicinity or heavy vehicles passing by, this can make crossing roads and walking around unfamiliar areas more difficult. Strong wind can affect the microphone on my hearing aids, leaving me disoriented. If this happens, I stop, stand with my cane and wait until a kind stranger comes to my aid. I always carry an address card from my accommodation, so if I become stuck or lost, I can simply ask for a taxi, show the card and return to my accommodation.

[Click here to read the rest of Tony's adventures.](#) ■





# Dan's daring dance with disability, humour and adventure



November 2014 - Dan in front of the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.

Dan recently performed at the 2024 Halifax Comedy Festival and his set will air later this year on CBC. He can be seen in AMI TV's **Breaking Character**, and most recently he wrote for (and acted in) **The Squeaky Wheel Canada**, a satire news show with a focus on disability. He currently lives in Toronto with his wife, Michelle, and their son.

Life handed Dan lemons. He took it and served up a zesty cocktail of travel adventures that's anything but ordinary—a blind backpacker with an iPhone, a trusty white cane and a spirit so unbreakable it could give the Eiffel Tower a run for its money. Welcome to the whirlwind life of Dan Barra Berger—a traveller, writer, advocate, comedian and now a new dad—an all-around legend in his own right.

Dan's journey isn't your run-of-the-mill "overcoming adversity" story. Oh no, it's more like a high-octane road trip through the highs and lows of life, interspersed with plot twists that would make even the most seasoned sitcom writer envious. He lost his vision in his late twenties due to retinal detachments caused by a connective tissue disorder called Stickler Syndrome. Dan is totally blind in his left eye and extremely

nearsighted in his right. He jokingly says, "I always forget my prescription (I'm not a numbers guy) and I usually just describe it as 'think of a bad one, and it's worse than that.'" From his vision loss to embarking on solo adventures that make Indiana Jones look like he's stuck in a museum, Dan has transformed his challenges into laughter and inspiration.

## THE GREAT LOSS AND THE GRAND ADVENTURE

It all began in 2009 when Dan's life took a sharp turn. Losing his vision was a physical transformation but it was also an emotional rollercoaster that sent him spiralling from the highs of a thriving marriage to the depths of divorce. But instead of letting despair take the wheel, Dan flipped the script. He decided that if life threw him into the dark, he'd make it his own comedy club—no tickets required.

With nothing but a massive backpack, an iPhone 4—yes, the dinosaur of smartphones—and his trusted white cane, Dan boarded a plane to London to get away from the funk of heartbreak, the new lifestyle that required so many adjustments and the emotional darkness that oftentimes engulfed him. Imagine a blind man deciding to conquer London's unfamiliar tube alone, with nothing but sheer will and a can of optimism. The result?

A solo trip that felt less like navigating a maze and more like starring in his very own adventure-comedy.

## FROM LONDON'S LANES TO EDINBURGH'S HEIGHTS

London was just the beginning! Dan thrived in the city, making friends faster than a stand-up comedian lands punchlines. He recalls meeting travellers who didn't care that he was blind. He was seen as a fellow solo traveller, not a blind traveller. Dan recalled a conversation, "I said, hey, man, why haven't you ever asked me about my cane?" His friend replied, "I figured you got all the way here yourself; I



July 2016 - Dan climbing sunbaked rocks on the Frioul Islands off the coast of Marseille, France.

see what you can do, mate, you've got it together, I don't give a damn about your cane."

That cane sometimes gave people nefarious ideas. Dan was "rescued" by his newfound Australian friends who swooped in like heroes from a low-budget action film to save him from street scammers who used a box of pizza as a decoy while attempting to pick his pockets. "I could sense there were two people behind me who were going to empty my pockets," he laughs. "But I was going around the area with these two Aussies who are both rugby players, and as the guy kept shoving the pizza on me, I just called to the Aussies. I'm like "fellas!" They turned around and came running up. They grabbed the guys from behind me and threw them against the wall and the other guy with the pizza took off."

Despite the thrilling adventures that kept his adrenaline racing, there were moments when sadness and loneliness would creep



June 2012 - Dan on top of Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh, Scotland.



July 2012 - Dan on the Cliffs of Moher



July 2016 - Dan walking along a rocky trail with the Mediterranean Sea in the background on Frioul Islands near Marseille, France.



April 2016 - Dan in Akchour, Morocco



August 2012 - Dan standing next to R2D2 at the Gamescom video game convention in Koln, Germany.



July 2016 - Dan looking through a rock formation on the Frioul islands off the coast of Marseille, France.

in. Fortunately, in Dan's usual comedic style, his new travel companions would quip, "go build a bridge and get over it, mate" or "eat a bag of cement and toughen up." Laughing, Dan recalls, "that was insane advice, but I kind of liked it, and it was so absurd that it would break me out of my funk."

But the crown jewel of Dan's travels? A moment of revelation that came atop Edinburgh's [Arthur's Seat](#). As he reached the summit, wind whipping around him like nature's own applause, Dan had an epiphany: he didn't need a guide, his ex-wife, or even a functioning phone. With his cane in one hand and sheer determination in the other, he saw himself as the conqueror of his own fears and sadness.

The climb turned out to be more than a physical two-hour challenge—it was a metaphorical ascent from dependency to self-reliance. As Dan stood there, hands gripping the worn handle of his cane, he realized that his life journey was only just beginning. Edinburgh was a turning point, a summit where he shed his gloom, scattering them in the wind and on his descent, embraced the limitless possibilities ahead as a renewed man.

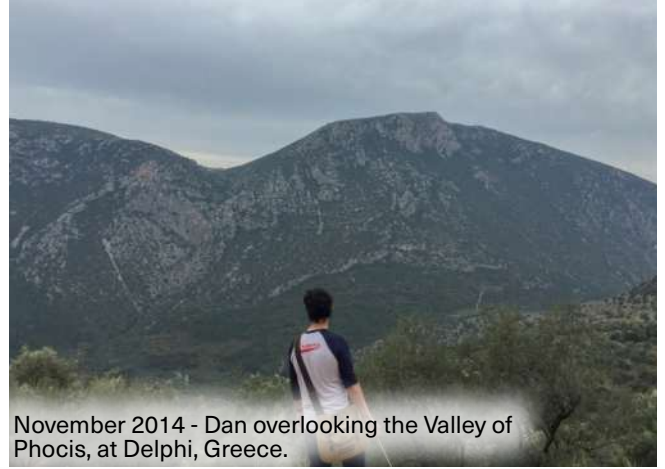
Moving on from Edinburgh, Scotland to Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, to Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and France, he travelled with a spring in his step. "Then in France I started to burn out. That was about the five-and-a-half-month mark" Dan said. He then paused his sojourn, worked in a hostel for a few months, then headed home to Toronto, Canada. But four years later, he was again backpacking, this time with

his friend Tyler Fitzpatrick who he initially met on his previous journeys in Europe—a vibrant musician and creative with a Caribbean flair. They reconnected in Toronto and with video recorder in hand, headed out, their wanderlust extending beyond Europe's historic cities, venturing into the heart of Morocco amidst bustling souks where spices danced in the air and artisans crafted wonders from everyday materials. Dan and Tyler also adventurously navigated the chaotic beauty of Portugal and Spain then called it a day.

Throughout his travels, Dan relied on a thoughtfully curated suite of technology. Central to his toolkit was his reliable iPhone. Complementing his smartphone was his white cane that has proven indispensable in maneuvering through crowded streets and navigating public transportation systems. To further aid his mobility, Dan relied heavily on Google Maps, which provided detailed directions and real-time updates, enabling him to traverse bustling cities and serene trails with confidence. Using saved Offline Maps helped significantly, especially when he didn't have a local SIM card. Although he has experimented with auditory guide applications developed by companies like Microsoft, he found them less effective. Other resources he used were: Reddit for local discussions and suggestions, [BlaBlaCar](#) for rideshare/carpooling (he met many incredible people through this service) and Tyler introduced him to [Hitchwiki](#), a sort of Wikipedia for hitchhikers. Keeping things simple, Dan followed a minimalist packing strategy, sticking to a carry-on only. This way, all his gear stays easily



July 2016 - Dan looking out a rock formation over the Mediterranean Sea.



November 2014 - Dan overlooking the Valley of Phocis, at Delphi, Greece.

accessible, eliminating the hassle of checked luggage and making his travel logistics a breeze.

### **HUMOR AS AN ADVOCACY TOOL**

Infused with his signature humour, Dan's simple advice about solo travel to blind and low vision people: "If I can do it, you can too. And at worst, it's gonna be a story."

Infused with his signature humour, Dan's simple advice about solo travel to blind and low vision people: "If I can do it, you can too. And at worst, it's gonna be a story."

"I try to teach with my comedy. I never make fun of my disability. I make fun of the situations that happen because of it and try to make it relatable," Dan expressed. This has been a successful strategy to raise disability awareness. Whether he's cracking jokes about his shaving mishaps or poking fun at the absurdities of navigating hostels with a disability, his comedic flair turns every situation into a scene from a laugh-out-loud sitcom. Imagine telling a room full of strangers, "Yeah, my name is Dan and I'm legally blind, that's right, I have a disability. There are a lot of comedians with disabilities who are actually a lot funnier than I am, but luckily for me, they can't get in here so I'm the one you get." Classic Dan—turning vulnerability into the perfect setup for a punchline.

But Dan's work extends beyond travel and laughter. It's really about advocacy. His YouTube channel, [3 Points of Contact](#), brings accessible travel to the forefront of your mind. Years ago, partnering with his

talented friend Tyler Fitzpatrick, Dan used humor and heartfelt storytelling to shed light on the challenges and triumphs of travelling with a disability. From dumpster diving (yes, you read that right) to hitchhiking, Dan's adventures were as unconventional as they were thought-provoking.

Today, he pushes for more accessible comedy venues in Toronto, one of the continent's largest cities yet so few of these exist. "There are only five venues that are fully accessible," he laments, but Dan continues to use his platform to prove that comedy can be both entertaining and a powerful tool for change, while also highlighting the absurdities of ableism.

Society often underestimates the power of humor in the face of adversity. What makes Dan's story truly unforgettable isn't just his ability to traverse the globe despite his disability, but that life's personal hurdles can be met with the courage to keep moving forward, a smile and a joke. Sometimes, the best way to navigate them is with a hearty laugh and an adventurous spirit. Whether he's scaling hills, sharing jokes on stage, or advocating for accessibility, Dan's globe-trotting giggles prove that any journey is possible.

Being a new dad has tempered his travels but not his adventurous spirit. He will soon be taking off again but



March 2016 - Dan facing out over the Atlantic Ocean at sunset, standing on rocks going to the water.

this time with his wife, also a travel enthusiast, and the new addition to their family. The three will be visiting destinations that have taken up residence on their yet-to-be-explored bucket list.

So, here's to Dan—a man who turned his darkest moments into the brightest comedy scenes and proved that with a little humor and a lot of heart, anything is possible. And honestly, we can't wait to see what hilarious adventure he embarks on next. ■



# A negative travel experience

By Kristy Durso  
Incredible Memories Travel



*Accessible Journeys* previously featured [Dahlia Tours in Africa](#) which advertised that they had the understanding and ability to accommodate travellers with disabilities. I used them for a client's high-end trip to Africa.

Dahlia Tours, which also operates under the name Exalt Africa, took my clients' money, and did not pay the vendors. I had to cover the cost of the hotels. Brian, the owner of the company, also changed the vehicle with a ramp. Instead, upon learning that my client could use a walker, he changed the ramp to a step stool. This was not functional for my client at all. The client had to be lifted into the vehicles without the ramp.

Even if the owner's story about being robbed is to be believed, he demonstrated a complete lack of knowledge on accessibility once the trip started. Even though in all the confirmations and discussions prior, he confirmed and guaranteed the accessibility to our specifications, including accessible vehicles and hotel rooms, he was not true to his word.

Without our knowledge or consent, he changed properties for two of the hotels. Both hotels were not accessible for a wheelchair user. In contrast, the two hotels we originally booked were fabulous. I was able to move my clients back to the original reservations, and the hotel took amazing care of them.

I highly recommend the following properties:

[\*\*Governor's Camp\*\*](#)

[\*\*Melia Serengeti\*\*](#)

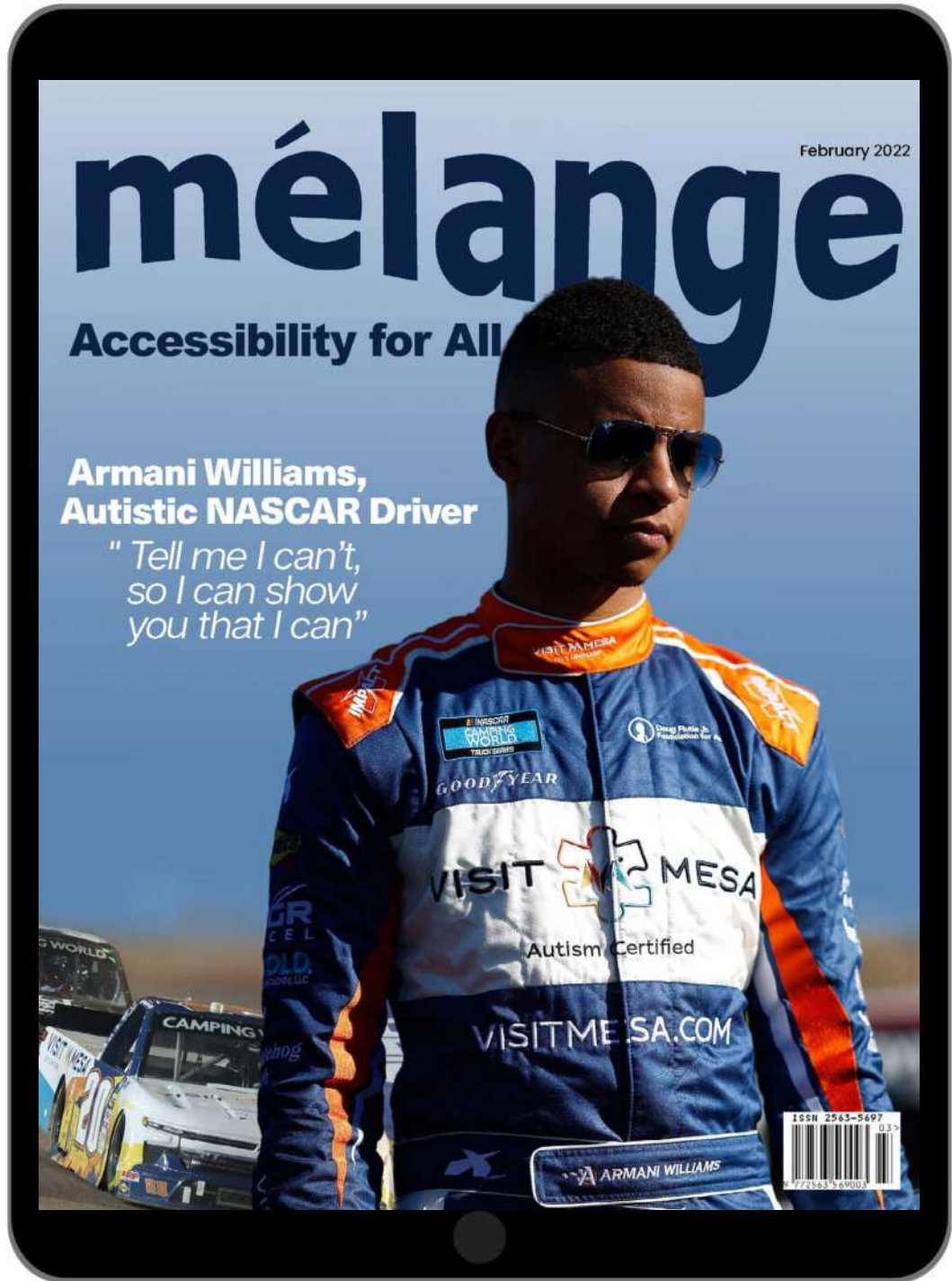
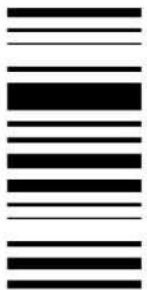
[\*\*Melia Ngorongoro\*\*](#)

I also highly recommend that anyone considering booking a trip with Dahlia Tours, immediately reconsider and use [www.go2africa.com](http://www.go2africa.com) instead.



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**SUBSCRIBE**

# Blogger Spotlight



## Mandy Horvath

My name is Mandy Horvath, I am 31 year old BAK (bi-lateral above knee) amputee that climbs mountains and monuments for charity and conservation. I am the first female in the world to summit one of the “Great 8’s,” Mt. Kilimanjaro, without the aid of prosthetic equipment. I am also the first female BAK amputee to ascend the [Manitou Incline](#), [Pikes Peak \(twice\)](#), [The Statue of Liberty stairwell](#), the world’s tallest natural pyramid- [Cerro Tusa](#), [Handies MT.](#), and most recently, the [New Church Clock Tower](#) in Delft, Netherlands.

In 2022 I was awarded the Amelia Earhart Pioneering Achievement Award for my feats in mountaineering. Professionally, I am a public speaker, writer and actress. Personally, I am a lover of the great outdoors, my family, friends and two (adorable) dogs.

I became an amputee in 2014 in a locomotive incident. In the time since, I have dedicated my life to advocacy work and raising funds and awareness for charities and causes that are important to me. Along the way, I have raised thousands of dollars for those in need and inspired millions to continue reaching for their dreams.

This Spring, I will graduate from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs with a Bachelors in English and minor in Anthropology.

On my first climb of Pikes Peak, Daniel Pond joked to me that if I could do this little mountain, I could conquer Kilimanjaro, too. It inspired me to obtain my passport and do just that. Travelling to Tanzania Africa for the biggest climb of my life was actually also the first time I had been out of my home country, America. That experience taught me so much and showed me that I could go anywhere I really wanted. A month after my return to



America, I was on another plane heading to Colombia South America, this time to ascend Cerro Tusa, the world's tallest natural pyramid.

I don't actually participate in adaptive sports, but I consider myself to be an adaptive athlete that is pioneering mountaineering for people like me.

### BEST TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

My best travel experience was earlier this spring as I travelled to the Netherlands to speak at the American School of the Hague. I went alone and also travelled through Cancun-Mexico, Germany and Ireland.

I have had some unpleasant experiences travelling, but nothing that would qualify as the worst. I love to travel because I learn so much about myself in the process. I've missed flights, been delayed, had damaged equipment, been left stranded, and also been asked to crawl off an airplane. I suppose arriving in Tanzania Africa without my bags was pretty devastating at the time, but they got them there in time for me to climb.

### MUST RETURN-TO PLACES

These include Belize, the Serengeti in Tanzania Africa, Ireland, Hawaii (USA) and Venecia, Antioquia, Colombia, South America. I'm a sucker for travelling to places where there's less people, and more mother-nature.

### TRAVEL ADVICE

Get comfortable with asking for help. People all around the globe want to help and

sometimes need direction on how they can be of assistance. I would also advise that people be patient with service representatives, flight crews and fellow passengers. Kindness is a universal language we can all understand.

My advice to people travelling with durable medical equipment would be to not leave home without the proper tools to keep up with maintenance on your equipment. For me, that means I always have an Allen wrench set handy for my wheelchair or prosthetics.

### FUN FACT ABOUT ME

Despite not leaving America until I was in my late 20s, I have travelled to all but 8 of the 50 American states!

Follow me on social media to keep up with my adventures!



To make an inquiry regarding public speaking or acting opportunities, aid in advocacy work, or apply to climb with me, visit [MandyHorvath.com](http://MandyHorvath.com) ■

“Be patient with service representatives, flight crews and fellow passengers.”



# Vlogger Spotlight

## Chelsea Bear



I'm Chelsea Bear, a content creator based in Tampa, Florida. I was born with cerebral palsy, which impacts the way I walk and I use a mobility scooter part-time. I earned a bachelor's degree in communication from Florida Gulf Coast University in 2015, and worked in public relations for more than seven years before shifting careers to social media. Growing up, I always felt that conversations around disability didn't need to be uncomfortable and that's why I began sharing my story online. While my platform unexpectedly began to gain traction in the early days of the pandemic with content related to my disability, how I adapt, breaking down societal stigmas, dating, cooking, fitness, lifestyle and more, my content has continued to prioritize those topics while also evolving over the past couple years to focus on accessible travel. A lot of things used to intimidate me because I didn't know what was possible navigating the world with a physical disability. Social media has given me a platform to become the representation that I, and so many others, needed. Today I leverage my background in communications and passion for opening up dialogue to document my experiences of navigating the world with a disability.

### YOUR BEST TRAVEL EXPERIENCE?

Traveling with a disability requires a lot of planning and research ahead of time, and sometimes accessibility still can't be guaranteed until you're physically there. That said, some of my best travel experiences have been when I go on a trip put together by a company that specializes in accessible travel because it significantly reduces the amount of time and energy I need to put into a trip in advance, and they have the local knowledge and connections to guarantee accessibility.

Some of my favorite experiences have been with [Wheel The World](#) to Costa Rica and most recently to Switzerland with [Claire & George](#).

Domestically, Washington D.C. is one of my favorite cities to visit because there are so many accessible things to do and I've always had positive experiences with public transportation and my mobility scooter. Sometimes the hardest part about traveling with a mobility aid is finding accessible transportation. That said, road trips have to be one of my favorite ways to travel. [Subaru's mobility assist program](#), which provides reimbursement and helps qualifying owners get necessary vehicle modification due to medically recognized physical disabilities, enabled me to get an external scooter lift installed to my Subaru Forester Wilderness, and having my own adapted transportation with me has made exploring the places I'm

visiting so much more accessible and stress-free. Subaru itself is all about adventure, and with an adapted vehicle that is designed for safe travel I feel more empowered than ever to go new places and try new things. Some of my favorite road trip destinations are to [Fort Lauderdale](#), [Orlando](#), [Savannah](#) and [Charleston](#).

### YOUR WORST TRAVEL EXPERIENCE?

Unfortunately, I've had a lot of negative experiences with car services while traveling to new cities or even where I live. My mobility scooter can come apart, fold into four small pieces, and fit in the trunk of a car if needed, but I still always order an XL vehicle when using my mobility scooter to

ensure there's enough space. I've experienced discrimination more times than I can count from drivers that cancel the ride once they see my mobility scooter, even though they transport people with large luggage or strollers all the time. It's always disheartening when that happens but I try not to let it impact my overall experience. While sometimes calling a car service or local taxi is the only option, I try to schedule accessible transportation in advance to avoid experiencing discrimination. It's usually a more costly approach, but it helps me feel safer and more comfortable, especially if I'm by myself. This is a huge reason as to why I prefer road trips with my Subaru now when possible, as it decreases the need for me to deal with situations like this because I have my own reliable adapted transportation.

### **YOUR MUST-RETURN-TO PLACES?**

There's so many! Most recently I had the best experience traveling around the country of Switzerland. Not only was accessibility on my mobility scooter wonderful, but the landscapes, people and the cities themselves were so diverse and incredible. It reignited my passion for travel and I'd love to go back one day. Additionally, I'd love to go back to Edinburgh, Scotland; Scottsdale,

Arizona; New York City; San Diego, California and Chicago as well as spend more time exploring national parks around the United States including road trips through the beautiful Pacific Northwest or The Great Smoky Mountains.

### **TRAVEL AND/OR EQUIPMENT ADVICE TO ENSURE SAFE, COMFORTABLE TRAVEL?**

I always make sure to pack a bag that is easy for me to get to, whether it's a carry-on bag for plane travel or a smaller bag to be up front for a road trip, with any travel essentials related to my disability. This bag usually includes my mobility scooter charger and any outlet adapters, my Theragun mini to help with muscle tightness, medications and vitamin supplements. It's important to keep the things you cannot go without in your possession and easily accessible while traveling. I've also begun traveling with an orthopedic pillow when possible to help reduce neck pain in different places. Beyond material things, I'm a firm believer that a successful trip is all about mindset. Things won't always go as planned, especially traveling with a disability, so it's important to be able to adapt in some situations and not let it ruin the entire experience. And always remember you should never be afraid to advocate for yourself and your needs.

### **WHAT FUTURE CHANGES DO YOU HOPE TO SEE IN THE WORLD OF ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL?**

Improving transportation for disabled travellers is definitely the number one priority. Of course I'd love for all restaurants, shops, activities, etc., to be fully accessible, but if you can't physically get somewhere, none of those other things matter. Plane travel for wheelchair users is incredibly challenging, and it is my hope that in my lifetime there are more streamlined processes for people to safely travel with their mobility devices. Beyond flying, leaders across the tourism industry need to keep the topic of accessibility at the forefront of every conversation. Whether it's advocating for public transportation to commit to accessibility or including disabled travellers in marketing materials, disability representation and inclusion needs to be continuously prioritized for there to be change. The more we're part of the conversation, the more the world will adapt to include us. It is my hope that all disabled travellers will one day feel empowered to travel without fear, and that accessible resources become status quo across the industry. ■



# Blogs

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

Amplifying the voices of bloggers with disabilities as they share their unique travel perspectives



**Blogger:** Tom Babinszki

**Home country:** U.S.

**Blog:** [Even Grounds](#)

**What and where:** Accessible exhibit at the Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin

Tom Babinszki, a blind blogger, celebrates the brilliance of Ellis Lane's Digital Reimaginings exhibit, where accessibility meets art. By involving visually impaired voices, Ellis crafted an experience that transcends disability, inviting everyone to touch, feel, and truly connect with art. This is inclusion done right, inspiring all. Read about his experience at the [Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin](#)



RJ, a traveler with Asperger's Syndrome, finally broke free from pandemic-imposed limitations, embarking on a solo 2023 adventure across the U.S., savoring space exploration treasures. From New York to Orlando, RJ's meticulously planned trip reignited his passion for independence and discovery, proving that even damp luggage can't dampen the spirit of a determined explorer. [Read more . . .](#)

**Blogger:** RJ

**Home country:** U.K.

**Blog:** [RJ's Blog](#)

**What and where:** My 2023 USA Holiday (The Space Stuff)

**Blogger:** Carrie McLaren

**Home country:** U.S.

**Blog:** [Carrie on Travel](#)

**What and where:** Family Fun Awaits in Ponce Inlet, Florida – Things to See, Do and Eat!

Carrie McLaren, a mom and storyteller raising a daughter with Down syndrome, shares her infectious passion for family travel. In Ponce Inlet, Florida, she uncovers hidden gems—from the towering lighthouse to dolphin-filled waters. With a blend of awe and humor, Carrie invites families to create their own magical moments in this [charming, sun-soaked escape](#).





**Blogger:** Cathy Chester

**Home country:** U.S.

**Blog:** [An Empowered Spirit](#)

**What and where:** My travels with multiple sclerosis

Blogger, Cathy, living with Multiple Sclerosis, has mastered the art of travel despite her unpredictable illness. MS may bring fatigue, numbness, and more, but with meticulous planning and a positive mindset, she's journeyed across the globe. Her message? Don't let MS ground your dreams—plan, prepare, and embrace the adventure, because your disease doesn't define your destination. [Read her insights and be empowered!](#)



Sanna Kalmari, a travel professional with SMA, chronicles her whirlwind two-day adventure in Bangkok. Despite the challenges of navigating the city in an electric wheelchair, Sanna explores vibrant markets, towering views, and historic temples. Her journey proved that even in a city not designed for accessibility, unforgettable experiences can still bloom. [Read her experience during her two days in Bangkok.](#)

**Blogger:** Sanna Kalmari

**Home country:** Finland

**Blog:** [Palmuasema](#)

**What and where:** Two days in Bangkok, Thailand



**Blogger:** Sarah and Justin

**Home country:** U.S.

**Blog:** [Travel, Breathe, Repeat](#)

**What and where:** A topsy-turvy time in Hong Kong

Justin and Sarah, the adventurous duo behind Travel Breathe Repeat, embrace Hong Kong's allure despite Sarah's rare lung disease. From the dizzying heights of Victoria Peak to the soothing strolls through serene parks, they navigate the city with grit and humor. Their journey is a vibrant reminder that even with a chronic illness, life's adventures are within reach. [Read about their topsy-turvy time in Hong Kong.](#)

# Vlogs

Spotlighting inspiring vloggers with disabilities, this section showcases their unique perspectives, empowering voices, and creative journeys.

The impactful voices of vloggers with disabilities



**Vlogger:** Hayley Honeyman

**Home country:** Canada

**Vlog:** [Hayley Honeyman](#)

**Experience:** [How to beat Travel Anxiety!](#)



Haley, a traveller with a history of autism and ADHD, battles her fears head-on, turning a typically panicked journey into a victory. Armed with noise-canceling gear, snacks, and sheer determination, she declares triumph: “Haley 1, anxiety 0!”—proving that even the most anxious souls can soar. Watch the vlog [here](#).

Join Adventure Wheels’ hosts, Stephen and Karla, as they explore the uber-accessible Hotel Brooklyn in Manchester. With 18 adapted rooms, electric blinds, and spacious wetrooms, this hotel proves accessibility can be stylish and a winning game-changer! Watch their wheelchair accessible room tour [here](#).



**Vlogger:** Karla & Stephen

**Home country:** U.K.

**Vlog:** [Adventure Wheels](#)

**Experience:** [Wheelchair Accessible Hotel Room Tour! - Hotel Brooklyn Manchester 2023](#)



**Vlogger:** Inga Lizdenyte

**Home country:** U.S

**Vlog:** [Inga Lizdenyte\\_Becoming Unstoppable](#)

**Experience:** [Wheelchair accessible room at the AZURE HOTEL, South Lake Tahoe, California](#)



Inga Lizdenyte, a passionate advocate and wheelchair user, discovered the hidden gem that is Azure Hotel in South Lake Tahoe. Despite a booking hiccup, she experienced an unforgettable, ultra-accessible stay, praising the hotel’s top-tier inclusivity and breathtaking lake views. For accessible travel, “This place is pure magic!” Watch it [here](#).

Alex and Emma take you on a heartwarming camper van adventure, blending family bliss with a cozy dash of wanderlust. With accessible features and clever design, this van becomes a rolling sanctuary, where challenges melt away and joy flourishes, overcoming depression along the way. With infectious joy, he and his family dive into this frosty adventure, proving that even the chilliest storms can't freeze the warmth of wanderlust. Watch [Winter Van Life Begins](#) [here](#).



**Vlogger:** Alex & Emma

**Home country:** U.K.

**Vlog:** [Travel Beans](#)

**Experience:** [Winter Van Life Begins \(Arctic Blast!\)](#)



**Vlogger:** Chris

**Home country:** U.S.

**Vlog:** [Chris vs CP](#)

**Experience:** [Top 3 airline tips for travellers with cerebral palsy](#)



Meet Chris, who turns airport chaos into smooth sailing. With his wheelchair wisdom and pre-check prowess, Chris' tips—like opting for a trusty backpack and never hesitating to ask for help—turn every flight into a first-class experience, no matter where you sit! [Join him on this flight here](#).



Nikki Lilly, a vibrant vlogger navigating life with a rare medical condition, dives into her first LA adventure with flair. From chic outfits and dreamy Airbnb stays to uncovering the magic of the real-life “Up” house, Nikki's infectious energy transforms every iconic LA moment into an unforgettable, must-see journey! Watch her LA adventure [here](#).

**Vlogger:** Nikki Lilly

**Home country:** U.K.

**Vlog:** [Nikki Lilly](#)

**Experience:** [Los Angeles adventure. First time in California.](#)



**Vlogger:** Danielle

**Home country:** U.S.

**Vlog:** [Daniellability](#)

**Experience:** [Swimming with the dolphins](#)



Danielle, a vlogger with spina bifida, shares her unforgettable adventure swimming with dolphins at Island Dolphin Care, a facility tailored for people with disabilities.

This dream-come-true moment, organized by her family, highlights Danielle's lifelong love for dolphins and the incredible accessibility of the nonprofit organization that made it possible. Watch the video [here](#).

# Instagrammers

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

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



**Instagrammer:** Adria

**Instagram account:** [@livingproof.nutrition](#)

Holiday in Florida >>>

Adria rocked nearly two weeks in Florida, conquering Disney with 20,000+ steps daily, all while managing her autoimmune disease. Her secret? [A killer plan!](#) From hydration hacks to joy, connection, mindful eating, and daily meditation, she thrived. Adria proves that with a little prep, chronic illness doesn't stand a chance against adventure.



In Florence's hidden corners, Anthony's hands danced over unseen masterpieces, feeling the soul of art through touch. Sight is not missed in this tactile museum which turns sculptures into whispers, inviting all to experience beauty beyond sight. You too should visit this gem in Italy, where art's secrets would unfold beneath fingertips, embracing everyone. [Anthony's excitement during his visit is palpable!](#)

**Instagrammer:** Anthony S. Ferraro

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

<<< Visit to a tactile museum in Florence, Italy

**Instagrammer:** Lyndsey

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

Road trip to Yellowstone National Park >>>



Lyndsey's road trip to Yellowstone was a celebration of her mom's retirement, a journey through wild beauty. Bison roamed, geysers erupted and waterfalls whispered secrets. Their cozy Airbnb, with its friendly ranch dog and wandering deer, felt like magic. Despite challenges, [Lyndsey embraced every moment](#), finding joy and serenity.



**Instagrammer:** Katy Walker

**Instagram account:** [@katerz23](#)

Visiting the bird park, Bali >>>

Katy's heart soared as she dipped into the Mediterranean Sea for the first time in over a decade, thanks to a [Seatrac](#) that guided her into the waves. Nervous but exhilarated, she embraced the moment, grateful for the support and the chance to [rediscover the joy of swimming](#).



Kavya embarked on her first solo adventure with her sister, [navigating the bustling Delhi Metro](#) with equal parts excitement and nerves. Despite her grandfather's concerns, she proved that people with disabilities can travel independently. The accessible stations, helpful staff, and her own determination turned this journey to Connaught Place into a triumphant celebration of freedom and exploration.

**Instagrammer:** Kavya Mukhija

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

<<< Travelling for the first time on the Delhi Metro!



**Instagrammer:** Cat

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

Be kind, don't judge! >>>

Cat gently reminds us to [show kindness and withhold judgment](#) when we see someone using a disabled toilet or parking spot. Not all disabilities are visible at first sight. This reel is a quiet reminder that what we don't see matters just as much as what we do see. Don't judge, be kind!



Flying from Gatwick soon? Charlie's got a treat for you! His trips through Gatwick are usually a breeze, thanks to some insider know-how. This time, he's pulling back the curtain for a behind-the-scenes peek. Share this reel with a fellow traveler and dive into the journey! [here](#)

**Instagrammer:** Charlie Randell

**Instagram account:** [n\\_q\\_p\\_c](#)

<<< Travelling

# Family Fun No Limits

With Jennifer Allen

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

Families with disabilities  
exploring the world together

## Let's take this circus on the road!



An accessible trail and a pair of binoculars is a healthy perspective shift for the whole family.

You did it!

You made it through the summer of thrown-off routines and overload meltdowns. You cared for all of the needs, macgyvered medical equipment to handle the needs of summer play, and you made it to another school year!

School is just another beautiful reminder that you can do hard things. Whether you homeschool and manage all of the medical routines and educational needs throughout each day, or you're figuring out new classrooms, IEP updates, and endless advocating - you are an absolute hero. I see you.

### **YOU DO HARD THINGS - HOW ABOUT FUN-HARD?**

So many parents tell me that they could never take a family vacation because it feels like one more hard thing. I would never encourage families like mine to take on hard. We're stretched thin, "like butter scraped over too much bread." But what if getting away is exactly what you need to fill your cup? I don't push for moms who prefer to

be at home to take on the world, but for those who feel most alive when they're outdoors or experiencing new things it's important not to let that piece of you die.

I'm tired of sad-hard: I want fun-hard! Travel is shown to have endless benefits for all ages - so consider it another therapy investment. You're doing hard things every day, might as well do them somewhere stunning.

### FINDING FUN IN THE CHAOS

The school year seems harder for making a moment, but the drain of school and therapies makes it that much more important to be able to take a breather.

Take a look at the school calendar and see where you have a long weekend that could be a nice time for squeezing in an [accessible beach](#). Make the most of fall foliage with an [accessible road trip](#).

Consider where you're meeting your other needs and if there's a way to tie in some fun. We try to make a trip out of intensive PT, and Spina bifida clinic is always a mini vacation. An orthotics casting could double as a family hike on an accessible trail.

We're taking a weekend to unwind with a fully accessible camping experience at [John Dillon Park](#). If you need something simple and inclusive like this to start, check out this month's Q&A column, featuring destinations that cater to people with disabilities.

### DO IT FOR THE KIDS

I always feel a little selfish when I start planning a family trip. It is great for the kids, but I know a main driver is that it's meeting my needs.

Aside from all of the benefits of being outdoors and discovering new places for your kids' growth and development (I'm sure you know plenty about sacrificing for your kids' needs, anyway), this is about how it's good for you and for your family as a whole.

I'm willing to bet you're not great at self care. Most disability or medical needs moms aren't. What if I told you that's hurting your whole family? You've heard the famous euphemism that you can't pour from an empty cup? Think about that. If your cup is empty, you have nothing to give. Your family has needs, and you can best meet those needs by first meeting your own. This is the very opposite of selfish. You are putting your family first by making sure that your cup is filled.

You don't need to justify time off from work or money spent on frivolities - these are for the health of your family in the same way that taking time off for your child's surgery was. If it's not in you to do this for you, do it for them.

### JUST BREATHE - YOU'VE EARNED IT

Life with kids with disabilities and complex medical needs always feels like a bit of a circus, might as well take this circus on the road!

A beach day won't be what you remembered it to be, but you'll still feel the sun on your face and the waves on your toes.

The mountain trails will be shorter and you'll be twice as tired when you get home, but the fresh air and views will breathe life into your soul. These are new adventures as a family, memories made, and

moments of refresh that are nearly impossible to come by. What's one more hard thing if it makes everything else a little easier? ■



Beach days are hard - but always worth it for everyone



Beautiful places feel good - for everyone!

# Accessible destination round-up

By Jennifer Allen

As a travel writer for families with disabilities, I'm often asked to bring my family to different destinations to highlight accessible options and give feedback on any improvement needed. Along the way, we discover a lot of hidden gems with exceptional attention to disability inclusion.

Here are our favourites from this summer.



Fairfax County, Virginia



Grand Rapids, Michigan

## GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

Grand Rapids is more than just a city destination, and we found something for everyone in our family.

- Track chairs for easy beach access at [Grand Haven, Holland and Muskegon beaches](#)
- All abilities playground at [Courtland Township Park](#)
- [Amway Grand Plaza](#) offers one of the most accessible hotel experiences we've had, including automatic room doors.
- Paved trails through the forest for nature play and bird watching at [Blandford Nature Center](#)
- Inclusive play at [Grand Rapids Children's Museum](#)

## FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Fairfax County is just outside of the Washington, D.C. area, but offers a whole new world to explore.

- [National Museum of the U.S. Army](#) brings inclusion to a new level with hand held controls for out of reach screens, automatic bathroom doors, and thoughtful innovation throughout.
- Roll up access to stunning waterfalls at [Great Falls National Park](#)
- [NOVA Wild](#) is an incredible opportunity to experience wildlife up close through a drive through safari
- Space shuttles and interactive fun at [Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center](#), the sister-site of Washington, D.C.'s National Air and Space Museum

- Diverse accessible room options at the [Hilton Mclean Tyson's Corner](#)

## WARREN COUNTY, OHIO

Warren County is a small town that packs a big punch when it comes to fun.

- [King's Island](#) is consistently ranked as one of the best amusement parks in the world - the accessibility program and water chairs also make it one of the most accessible
- Ohio's [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) is built on mystery and wonder
- The coolest bathroom in the country at [Two Cities](#) (also really great pizza)
- Limitless play at [Great Wolf](#)



Warren County, Ohio

Lodge, thanks to water chairs, zero entry pools, and chair lifts

- 33 miles of [accessible trails](#)

## RAYSTOWN LAKE REGION, PENNSYLVANIA

Outdoorsy destinations are rarely welcoming to people with mobility disabilities, but [Raystown](#) has some secrets up its sleeve.

- Accessible cave tour at [Lincoln Caverns](#)
- Ride in style on [East Broad Top Railroad's](#) fully accessible historic train car
- Accessible views at [Ridenour overlook](#)
- Lakeside trails at [Seven Points Recreation Area](#)
- Classic frozen custard at [The Meadows](#) ■



Raystown Lake Region, Pennsylvania



# Prioritize and pace: Secrets to successful family travel

**Travelling with a disability means packing a new mindset**

By Jodie St. Clair



The way travel gets discussed is exhausting. Fast-paced trips get showcased with itineraries so overstuffed, you'd swear that in order to do everything you'll have to get up before you go to bed.

When you add in a disability, those fear-of-missing-out itineraries

become all the more demoralizing. I've been an above-knee amputee and prosthetic user for nearly thirty years. I'm also a mother of two. Along with my husband, we've been traveling the world full time with our kids for over two years. Instead of getting burned

out, we stay fired up about travel, in part because of the things we've learned both from being parents and from making sure our travels work for me and my disability.

## **SLOW DOWN**

People speed through trips because vacation time is short, and they don't want to miss out. However, this is why people come home saying "I need a vacation from my vacation."

A person with a disability expends more energy and tires more easily. A slower pace has made our travel days enjoyable instead of exhausting.

## **SKIP TRYING TO DO EVERYTHING, SET PRIORITIES, AND LET THE REST SLIDE**

Our travels and vacations improved when we stopped trying to “do everything” in a destination.

Now, we set three must-do top priorities, based on what matters to us as a family. We'll set secondary goals too, but they are “might do” not “must do” things. If something doesn't appeal to us, even if it's what a destination is known for, we skip it.

## **BUILD IN DOWNTIME**

As parents, we don't want our kids to miss anything (nor do we want to forget something important, whether that's an activity or the toothbrush charger).

However, downtime is critical, especially for kids and for people who have disabilities. We check in on our energy levels, and we balance a big activity day with downtime later or the following day. Not only can we reflect on our experiences, we recharge and can resume our activities with excitement.

## **USE ITINERARIES AS INSPIRATION, NOT CHECKLISTS**

Itineraries help us cluster activities and set priorities. However, most suggested itineraries are aspirational, best-case scenarios. They don't account for a big bout of phantom limb in an amputee, or a need to take an unscheduled snack or beverage break so you can rest.

Our destination research pulls up loads of ideas and itineraries. We only use them for inspiration, not as checklists.

## **YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIDE YOUR DISABILITY**

Disabilities can be invisible or apparent, but some can be concealed. If I wear pants, for example, my prosthetic leg is less noticeable than when I wear a dress or a skirt. In our experience, my disability being visible and apparent has led to conversations with locals, not to mention kindnesses and consideration from strangers.

## **ACCESSIBLE RECREATIONAL SPACES MAKE IT EASIER TO ENJOY PLAYGROUNDS, TRAILS, AND MORE**

When a travel or recreation space is designed for accessibility, it can be easier to access for adults with disabilities too. When we hike in the USA, we often seek out ADA trails, as they've been designed with Americans with Disabilities Act standards in mind.

At accessible playgrounds I can be far more present and engaged with my kids, since the space is usually easier for me to navigate.

## **ASK FOR (AND ACCEPT) HELP**

On public transportation in many countries, if my prosthesis is visible, people usually ask if I want to sit down.

Adults traveling with kids and/or a visible disability often learn that help is out there. When we arrive in a new country, for example, we find an immigration official and make them aware that we are traveling with kids, and that I have a disability. Often we get transferred to a (usually shorter) line for families and for people with special needs.

People often want to be kind and helpful. I've learned not only to

be okay with accepting help from others, but to be willing to ask.

## **OUR SLOW TRAVELS ARE EASIER, JOYFUL, AND MORE FUN**

Our slow travel mindset and focus on our vacation priorities has made all the difference for our family of four, and for me as a traveler who has a disability. No matter your ability or disability, travel has challenges. When you shift your travels to the right gear for you, not only can you leave FOMO at home, your trip can bring you better experiences and lasting memories. ■

### **About Jodie, Anthony, Connor, and Aster St. Clair**



We are the [Learners and Makers](#), and we empower families and the mobility disability community to travel confidently, their way. Our kids are 12 and 9. Jodie is an above-knee amputee. We love showing our kids as much of the world as we can. We've traveled the world full time since 2022.

# The Cook family's accessible travel adventures

Kristy Cook, a mom of four, navigates life with her adventurous family including Robbie, her 9-year-old son, who lives with Lennox-Gastaut syndrome (LGS). LGS is a rare form of epilepsy that causes developmental delays and challenging, daily seizures. But none of this stops Kristy and her family from living their best, most adventurous life. From breathtaking mountain vistas to immersive outdoor activities, the Cook family proves that travel isn't just for the abled—it's for everyone.

Now, when you think of family travel, what comes to mind? Fun? Chaos? Maybe a little of both, right? But Kristy, alongside her husband TJ, is redefining what it means to travel with a family, especially one that includes a child with disabilities. Fun, chaos . . . but at the heart of their travel philosophy? Inclusion. Making sure every family member, no matter their ability, has something to look forward to while on that trip. Kristy's secret to successful trips is preparation and balance. You see, with the range of abilities and ages in their family, it's all about finding places that offer options so for Kristy, planning is key. She starts with extensive research, making sure each destination has something for Robbie—like accessible hiking or adaptive equipment—while keeping her 11-year-old daughter's interest

and even her one-year-old in mind. Of course, with all the travel highs, there are bound to be challenges. And Kristy doesn't shy away from the tougher moments. There have been times when they've had to adapt quickly, like when Robbie fell sick on a trip to Michigan, turning their family vacation into a nerve-wracking dash back to Colorado for the comfort of their home hospital. But even in moments of crisis, the family remains steadfast, prepared and united. Kristy admits that packing for Robbie sometimes feels like carrying a rolling pharmacy, but she wouldn't have it any other way. Her preparation ensures that when they're out in the world, they're ready for anything.

Now, what's remarkable about the Cook family isn't just the meticulous planning or the destinations they visit. It's the way they live fully, proving that disability doesn't have to mean limitation. Robbie, who communicates primarily through body language and recently started using an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device, is living proof of this. His joy, as Kristy describes it, is infectious. He lights up at the sight of water and loves being outside, whether it's floating in a beach wheelchair or experiencing the wind in his face during an off-road adventure. He's a curious, adventurous spirit and the



Cook family's travels give him—and them—experiences they never thought possible.

But what if you're hesitant about traveling with a loved one who has a disability? Kristy's advice: Start small. Try a local trip, see how your child or loved one responds, and build from there. Fear of the unknown can be overwhelming, but as Kristy wisely notes, "On the other side of fear is usually something beautiful." Her family didn't jump into two-week-long trips overnight. They began with small, local adventures to test out Robbie's comfort levels and slowly expanded their travels.

Every trip they take gives them a new experience, shaping who they are as individuals and as a family. And they're creating memories that will last a lifetime. For the Cook family, the journey is always evolving. The only question is: Where to next?

[Click here](#) to dive into more of the Cook family's accessible travel adventures, where they've explored, what they've discovered, and how you too can experience these unforgettable places. ■



# Better Together

## Disability Parent Q & A

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

**A** There are so many! Here are some of our favorites, and some shared by our community.

Morgan's Wonderland, Austin, Texas - This theme park was designed for people with disabilities. It's 100% accessible and built for inclusion.

John Dillon Park, Adirondacks, New York - A fully accessible wilderness and camping area with lean-tos, boating, and trails.

Mesa, Arizona - Mesa was the nation's first Autism Certified city and they have a reputation for accessibility and inclusion in all areas.

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina - Moving beyond accessible beaches, Myrtle Beach strives for true inclusion in attractions, dining, and experiences.

Clearwater, Florida - Clearwater Marine Aquarium became famous through the disabled dolphin, Winter. Their sister resort, Winter the Dolphin's Beach Club shares the passion for both inclusion and the environment. This spirit seems to carry through the accessible beach town.

Jockey Ridge State Park, North Carolina - Jockey's Ridge may change North Carolina's reputation for inaccessible beaches. Hang gliding comes highly recommended!

LEGOLAND - This will depend on the disability, but all LEGOLAND parks and Discovery Centers are certified Autism centers. All parks also have programs to aid disabled riders.

San Diego Zoo and Safari Park, California - A thorough

accessibility guide, helpful staff, and attention to inclusion make these an easy visit.

Yellowstone National Park - The most wheelchair-friendly National Park we've visited. Pick up a detailed accessibility guide when you enter the park and enjoy accessible trails, views, programs, dining, and shopping throughout the park. ■

### NEXT ISSUE:

**What type of preparation do you do before a trip, in addition to the usual vacation planning?**

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)



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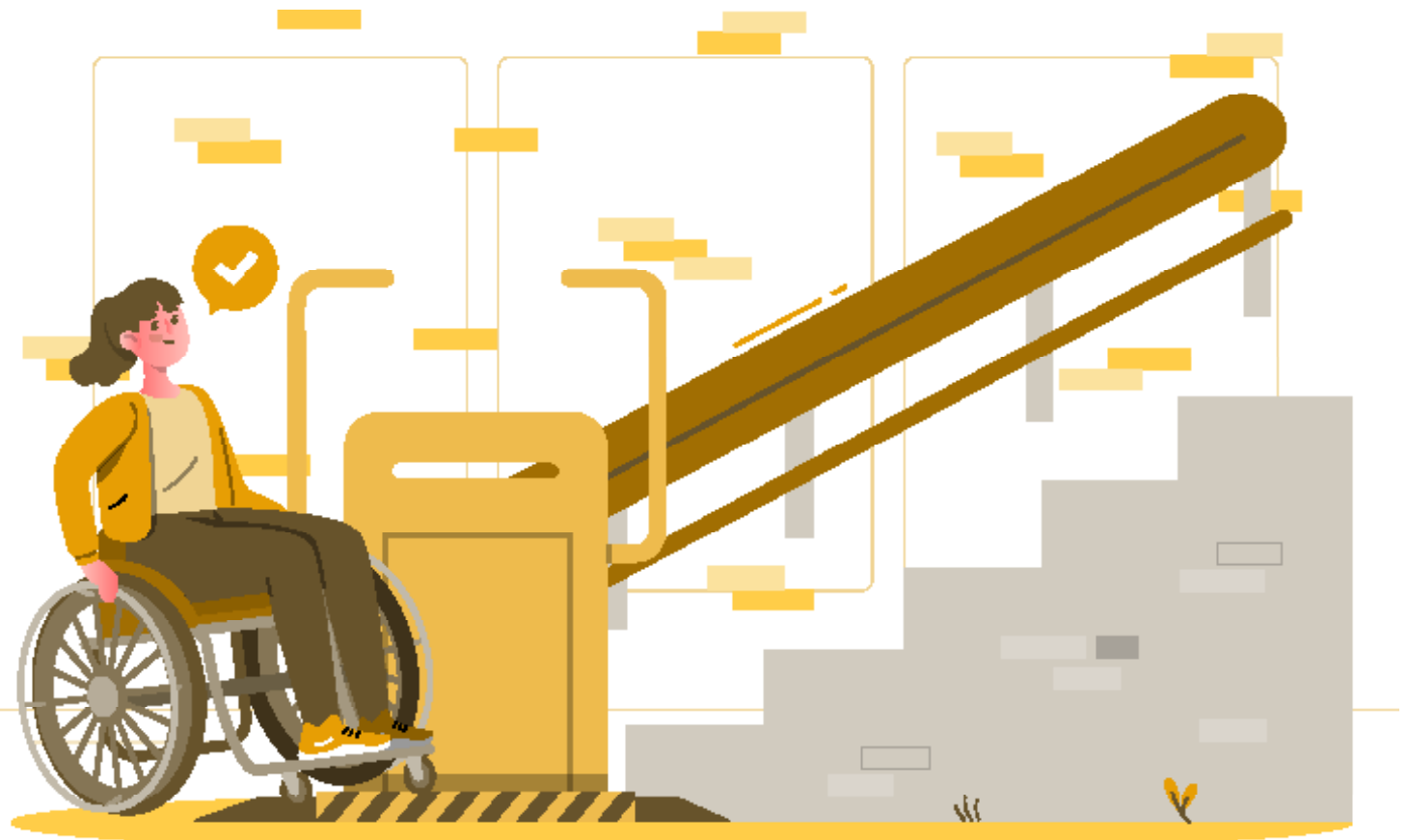
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