

Disability Campaign.org

Planning an Accessible Cruise Vacation

For many people with disabilities, traveling is possible. It does, however, take some extra planning to ensure that your trip will be accessible. It's important you look into the various options that exist: travel by land, air, or sea. In this resource, we will cover what it takes to plan an accessible cruise, including the benefits that come with taking a vacation by sea. You may be surprised at how fun, accessible, and safe some major cruise lines are when it comes to accommodating the needs of passengers with disabilities.



Benefits of vacationing on a cruise ship

- If a cruise ship docks in a U.S. port, it is required to comply with the rules set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This ensures your rights to accessible travel and fair treatment will be upheld.
- Many cruise liners have automatic doorways and are equipped with elevators that can get you from deck to deck. Some major cruise lines even have maps that provide you with all the accessible routes throughout the ship.

- Public areas on major cruise lines are built with accessibility in mind. For example, some cruise ships include lifts in pools and lowered playing tables at casinos.
- Accessible cabins onboard cruise ships are larger than most standard rooms onboard. Though they are still smaller by most hotel standards, these cabins are often located near elevators and may include accessible features such as:
 - Wide doors
 - Lowered closet rods
 - Ramped bathroom doorway thresholds
 - Roll-in showers with grab bars
 - Shower seats
 - Raised toilet seats



- Everything is in one place. When you vacation on land, you're probably concerned about whether the restaurant is wheelchair friendly or whether you can pick up an accessible taxi to get you back to your hotel. On a cruise ship, you typically don't have to worry about these details. Just make sure that the cruise line you're traveling with knows your disability and

that your travel agent has covered all the details with you regarding your vacation.

- You'll have access to medical care. Major lines contain medical facilities on board with staff (at least one doctor and two nurses) available 24 hours a day to care for sick passengers. The services provided are usually for minor nonemergency conditions, such as a laceration from a fall or a slight respiratory infection. If, however, you were to need emergency medical treatment, you'll be referred to a facility on land or disembarked so that you can access better care.

- There are some specialty cruise ships that meet the unique needs of certain people groups or disabilities, such as Autism On the Seas and Dialysis at Sea Cruises (see the “Additional Resources” section at the end of this document for more information).

Who may not benefit from cruise ships

- **People with claustrophobia or social anxiety disorders.** Rooms on cruise ships run smaller than most hotel rooms. Cruise ships can get crowded, especially during popular times or onboard events. Once you’re out in the sea, it can take days to get back to shore; this may be overwhelming for those who have anxiety related disorders.
- **People with dizziness, inner ear problems, and motion sickness.** While on sea, or even while getting on and off the ship, you may feel dizzy, lightheaded, and sick due to the movement of the ship on water. Talk to your doctor about whether vacationing on sea is an option for you. Some people find relief with over-the-counter Dramamine and motion sickness Sea Bands, while others may require a prescription medication to better tolerate their time at sea.
- **People with severe or serious disabilities/illnesses.**
 - People with compromised immune systems, such as cancer patients or infants, due to contact with the many people onboard
 - People who require very frequent visits to their medical care provider
 - People who require more specialized care or treatment that is not readily accessible on a ship
 - People whose medical treatment devices are not portable



Considerations to make

- **Choose the right cruise line for you.** Not all cruise ships are the same. As you would with finding the right airline carrier, shop around to find what cruise ship best meets your unique needs. Sure, most cruise ships offer ramps and accessible rooms, but perhaps you're looking for something more specific, such as menus in Braille, gluten-free meals, sign language interpreters, or quiet areas for children with autism. For more information, checkout our "Additional Resources" section at the end of this document, where we've listed some major cruise lines that are known to be among the most accessible.



- **Consider hiring a travel agent who specializes in accessible travel.**
Let's face it, we're not experts at everything. Though you certainly can plan a cruise yourself, hiring an agent who specializes in accessible travel can ensure that your needs will be met and it can make planning your trip less stressful for you.
- **If you have trouble walking long distances,** you may want to look into using a wheelchair or scooter while on board to help you get from one end of the ship to the other. Major cruise lines provide wheelchairs during boarding and de-boarding, but if you wish to use it while on board, you will have to bring your own mobility device. Also, check to make sure that your wheelchair will fit within your cabin.
- **Get someone else's opinion.** You are not the first person considering a cruise vacation. Talk to people in your support group, at your doctor's office, or join a chat forum online of people with disabilities who travel. Look up reviews and ratings of the various cruise lines that offer accessible accommodations to learn what people liked and disliked about their vacations (Checkout our "Additional Resources" section at the end of the document for a link to a review site for accessible cruises).

- **Keep medical information at hand.** You'll want to make sure you carry with you a card that has important medical information, such as a list of medications, the name of your illness, and the contact information of your physician. Consider using a medical ID bracelet for added safety.
- **Think about buying travel insurance.** If you receive treatment while on the cruise, it's likely the cost will be charged to your cabin folio. It will then be your responsibility to file a claim with your personal insurance carrier. Though your health insurance may cover a portion of the expenses, travel insurance can help pay for the rest.
- **Consider cruising with a group.** Not everyone's up to taking a cruise on their own. It's why some organizations, such as the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation and the Amputee Coalition, put together group cruise vacations. Who knows, you might even make some new friends!
- **Choose your destination wisely.** Will you be docking at a city or town that has cobble stone streets, no elevators, or few sign-language interpreters? Will shore excursions be accessible, as well? These are all things to consider to ensure that you will be able to enjoy the full extent of your trip.
- **Don't book last minute.** Give yourself enough time to plan your cruise: at least 30 days before your sail date. You want to make sure your needs will be met and that your money is going to be put to good use. Plus, rushing into purchasing a cruise package or not communicating your disability needs can leave you stuck on a vacation that doesn't meet your expectations. Remember, what matters is that you enjoy a fun, safe, and accessible time out in the sea!



Additional Resources

Amputee Coalition Travel Adventures

- Amputee Coalition Travel Adventures specializes in cruise vacations and packaged land tours to accessible destinations for anyone with mobility limitations, including amputees and those with limb differences. Family members and friends are welcome to come along and enjoy the fun!
- Link: <http://www.amputee-coalition.org/get-away-from-it-all/#.WVqoFqQzEY>

Autism on the Seas

- Autism on the Seas specializes in cruises for adults and families living with autism, Down Syndrome, and other related disabilities.
- Link: <https://autismontheseas.com/>

Carnival Cruise Line

- Major cruise line
- Contact Info.: specialneeds@carnival.com | 1-800-438-6744 ext.70025
- Link: <https://www.carnival.com/about-carnival/special-needs.aspx>

CruiseCritic

- A website with lots of information on cruises
- Link to reviews that rate and compare the accessibility of different cruise lines: <http://www.cruisecritic.com/memberreviews/styles/cruises-for-disabled/>

Dialysis at Sea

- A cruise line for people on dialysis and their families, specializing in the treatment of hemodialysis
- Link: <http://www.dialysisatsea.com/>

Disney Cruise

- Major cruise line, particularly for families with children
- Contact Info.: (800) 951-3532.
- Link: <https://disneycruise.disney.go.com/guest-services/guests-with-disabilities/>

Multiple Sclerosis Foundation: MS Focus Cruise for a Cause

- The MS Focus Cruise for a Cause is an annual educational event featuring presentations from MS experts, interactive exercise sessions, and social gatherings, all aboard a beautiful cruise ship.
- Link: <https://msfocus.org/Events/MSF-Events/MSFocus-Cruise-For-A-Cause>

Royal Caribbean International

- Major cruise line
- Contact Info.: Special_Needs@rccl.com | 866-592-7225 | [Special Needs Form](#)
- [Download a PDF Brochure](#) of Royal Caribbean accessible cruise options.

Travel Ability

- A travel agency that specializes in accessible travel
- Contact Info.: travelability@ATT.net
- Link: <http://travelability.agentstudio.com/>

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