

# DISABILITY CAN'T STOP THE CRUISE LOVERS



Disabled people often have trouble finding the right holiday fulfilling all their needs and wants. Especially people with limited mobility experience difficulties when wanting to travel the world. But recently, cruising has become a preferred way of travelling. Many ships have become very user-friendly yet, but there are still problems to be solved. Unfortunately most cruise lines have no legal obligations to meet all the needs of disabled customers.

It is for sure that some cruise lines do not have the opportunities to rebuild all of their ships. Especially older and smaller ships can not be reconstructed easily. They often have narrow corridors which make it impossible for wheelchair users to move freely around the ship. But also larger and newer ships face problems concerning passengers with limited mobility. In some ports the gangways are too steep to pass them without help. Tendering is another problem. Most of the tender boats are not equipped properly to transport people with limited mobility and wheelchairs safely.

People are requesting the cruise lines to make their ships more accessible for everyone and the governments might pass a legislation concerning this issue in the next few years. Some cruise lines, carrying 2000+ passengers on one ship, already started restructuring their vessels to make them more accessible for disabled people. New ships are designed different right from the start. They have larger cabins and all public areas are accessible by wheelchairs.

The advantage of cruise ships for disabled people is that they can cut off flights if they are departing from your home country. You simply embark on the cruise ship and it takes you to all the beautiful places in the world, so you can visit many different places easily and don't have to use a plane. Today there are braille-coded elevator buttons, restaurant menus and room numbers. Some staterooms are really spacious with wide entrance and bathroom doors for easy passing. They are equipped with lowered closet rods, several phones and emergency call buttons. Bathrooms have multiple grab bars and roll-in showers. Some ships even offer special seating in show rooms and lifts for the pool to guarantee disabled passengers full enjoyment. Restaurants may offer special low calorie menus or sugar free deserts. But the most important feature may be that cruise ships have excellent medical staff onboard which is available 24 hours a day if needed.

The last thing that is sometimes difficult to manage, are the shore excursions. They still present challenges for wheelchairs. Especially small, mountained islands are difficult to access. It is still possible that some shore excursions might not be accessible due to a lack of sufficient transport. Nevertheless people start recognizing these problems and work on further improvements. Some cruise lines encourage disabled passengers to be accompanied by an able-bodied person. But this does not mean that the staff would refuse to help people with disabilities enjoying their journey.

Staff members usually try to help where they can to make the trip as pleasant as possible for everyone, no matter if the passenger is disabled or not.

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