

News Of Travel



Cruise Vacations Can Accommodate Special-Needs Travelers

(NAPSA)—With one in five Americans having a special need affecting his or her lifestyle, cruising offers a viable vacation choice. Cruise lines today emphasize accessibility in the design of their ships, and cruising has become a more comfortable way to travel for persons with disabilities.

For wheelchair users, most cruise lines are proactive and progressive, offering accessible staterooms spacious enough for maneuverability. Accessible bathrooms have roll-in showers, grab bars and built-in seats with an emergency call button or telephone close at hand. Closet hangers and light switches are mounted lower, and life jackets are stored within reach of a wheelchair user.

Many cruise ship public areas are also designed to accommodate wheelchairs. Automatic sliding doors and ramped thresholds provide access to deck areas. Restaurants, bars and lounges have maneuvering space between tables, and designated areas are provided in show lounges and movie theaters.

For persons with vision disabilities, ships may offer Braille menus. On some vessels, Braille call buttons and audible floor announcements in elevators, and raised door numbers on cabins and stairwell banister deck numbers, facilitate movement around the ship.

Cruise lines have individual policies for accommodating service animals such as guide dogs, but acceptance of these assistance animals is common.

For persons with hearing disabilities, many cruise lines pro-



A growing number of people with special needs regard cruising as a viable vacation choice.

vide a TTY, or text telephone device, that allows communication through typing messages. TTY kits may also include vibrating alarm clocks and visual alerts for doorbells.

Some cruise lines also sell shore excursions that can accommodate guests with special needs. Some tour operators provide accessibility ratings for their shore excursions, so guests can plan ahead.

All cruise lines request that guests with special needs notify them at the time of booking. This ensures the line can accommodate the individual and that an accessible stateroom is reserved. In some cases, special health services can be arranged in advance.

Some travel agents specialize in booking vacations for those with special needs, and it pays to use an agent who is familiar with the facilities and policies of different cruise ships.

When it comes to a vacation, many say they find it difficult to match the value, dining, entertainment and destinations of a cruise.