

ENGLAND'S EASIEST REGION: YORKSHIRE ♦ 1992'S HOT TIX ♦ AGENT NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

Travellife

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DISABLED TRAVEL IN THE '90s

Smart questions to
ask suppliers and great
places to send clients

Janice Perkins of
Hinsdale Travel Service in
suburban Chicago (here at
wheelchair-friendly Walt
Disney World) knows
firsthand how the new
Americans With Disabilities
Act will be a travel boon.



THE NEW WORLD OF DISABLED TRAVEL



The Americans

With Disabilities

Act promises to

make travel

more accessible.

Here's how you

can help, too.

BY DAWN M. BARCLAY

Bret and Sue want to book an eight-day Hawaiian honeymoon. They've requested oceanview rooms in Honolulu as well as on the Kona coast of the Big Island. They'd also like a rental car. You've handled trips like this dozens of times before, but this time, you're nervous: Bret uses a battery-powered wheelchair. How will you plan their vacation to ensure its success?

The cardinal rules followed by every successful travel agent—Thou Must Know Thy Stuff and Thou Must Extend Personal Service—take on new meaning when applied to arranging travel for disabled people. You can't assume, for example, that your client will be able to make his way independently from the airport parking lot to the airline check-in counter. Nor can you be certain that a cab will be willing to transport him to his hotel (the driver's liability for damage to the wheelchair or injury of its occupant might be too high).

If you haven't dealt with a disabled client yet, there's a good chance you will soon. There are now nearly 43 million disabled persons in the U.S., a number expected to grow as the population ages. And on January 26, the public-accommodations section of the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act takes effect, which will help make travel much easier for disabled people. Called the most sweeping civil rights statute since the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the disabilities act guarantees disabled individuals the same rights of service and access as those who aren't disabled.

As travel suppliers strive to make accommodations and transportation more accessible, a larger percentage of this

untapped market will be encouraged to travel. And who will get their business? Prepared agents who know the special requirements of disabled travelers. "When word gets around that not only is your agency accessible, but that you have an agent who can accommodate travelers with disabilities, access can be good business," says Carol Lee Power of the Wheelchair Journeys division of Redmond Travel in Redmond, Washington. "A person with disabilities will take more time [than a nondisabled client] but is also more likely to become a repeat customer."

It may be difficult—even daunting—to handle the disability market though, unless you are aware of the group's travel challenges. That may be why, up to now, most travel professionals who cater to this clientele have disabilities themselves or know someone with a disability. Planning travel for disabled people requires a specialized knowledge of what to ask clients and suppliers, something that many agents think not worth their trouble to learn. But agent awareness is desperately needed, notes Power. In a 1989 state-sponsored survey of 5,000 disabled people, she found that travel-agent sensitivity was a higher priority for disabled travelers than was their gaining access to airline seats, hotel rooms, and ground transportation.

Although the term "disabled" is all-encompassing (including vision and hearing impairments as well as learning and developmental problems), this article focuses on wheelchair users, for whom access to hotels and ground transportation can be most difficult. Here are four important rules of thumb.



PHILIP SALTONSTALL



When Yvonne and Lou Nau met, neither was involved in travel. Both had been married before and had six children between them. But the two California residents had even more in common: both had contracted polio in the 1940s and are wheelchair users.

After they married in 1981, Lou became involved in the Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicapped (SATH). Soon the Naus were arranging tours for disabled travelers as well as slower-paced tours for seniors. They formed Nautilus Tours 10 years ago. One of its cornerstones, Yvonne says, is to help wheelchair users travel with dignity.

In 1986, the Naus founded TIDE, the Travel Industry and Disabled Exchange, a trade membership organization that

fields travel agents' questions about disabled travel and gives them information about accessible hotels, van rentals, and tour companies.

Yvonne loves her career but says she's disappointed by the lack of accessible accommodations, and especially transportation, in the U.S. "I get calls from agents in Europe, Australia, and Africa who want to bring groups of wheelchair travelers to the U.S.," she says. "It breaks my heart to tell them that it's not always possible.

"In other countries, travelers in wheelchairs are looked upon as a potential market. Here, we seem to be regarded as a nuisance. When you have associations lobbying to delay having wheelchair lifts installed in tour buses, it's a sad statement about this country."

DYNAMIC DUO:
Nautilus Tours'
Yvonne and Lou Nau
generate accessibility
information for
wheelchair travelers.

NEVER ASSUME THAT ALL DISABILITIES ARE THE SAME

"Even two stroke victims can be capable of different levels of ability. The key is to be sensitive to individual clients' abilities," says Betty Hoffman of Evergreen Travel Service in Lynnwood, Washington. Hers is one of the largest agencies that work with disabled clients, and it also runs commissionable Wings on Wheels tours.

Start by asking clients what they need, then try to understand why they need it. "If you understand the 'whys'—why a narrow bathroom doorway makes the bathroom unusable, why a doorway threshold of a few inches might as well be a hundred feet high—you'll instinctively know what questions to ask your suppliers," says travel consultant Rick Crowder, named the 1991-92 Disabled American of the Year by the President's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities.

Here are key questions to ask wheelchair travelers:

- ◆ Will you be traveling with a nondisabled companion? How mobile are you? Can you walk? Climb stairs? Transfer independently from a wheelchair to a car or airplane seat?
 - ◆ If you use a wheelchair, what is its width and type (manual, battery-operated)? If battery-operated, what type of batteries are used? (Gel-filled usually cause less trouble than wet-cell on airplanes; airline personnel will detach and specially pack wet-cell batteries because of the potentially destructive battery acid inside. It's important to check the airline's policy when booking.) Advise clients to take a heavy-duty transformer to recharge batteries.
 - ◆ When flying, would you prefer bulkhead seating or seating near a bathroom? Do you need help with your luggage, getting from the parking area to the terminal, entering or leaving the aircraft, or traveling between the airline seat and the bathroom? (Book nonstop or direct flights at times when airports are least crowded and advise clients to arrive early for pre-boarding. For connections, arrange between-flight assistance with the airline.)
 - ◆ If renting a car, will you require one with hand controls (and if so, right- or left-handed)? Or would you prefer a van with a mobile lift?
 - ◆ For rail travel, will you need a ramp to get onto the train? Will you need assistance up the ramp?
 - ◆ In ship cabins and hotel rooms, how many beds do you prefer and what size? Do you need trapeze-assist bars to get into bed, or do you have a wheelchair with a lift? (Lifts elevate clients from chair to bed but require an open bed frame.) Will you need grab-bars in the bathroom? Do you prefer a tub bench or a roll-in shower?
- Finally, ask for a brief description of the client's disability. Some agents ask about specific bathroom needs (do clients need frequent rest stops?) as well. Obtain a doctor's phone number in case of emergency.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Once you know your clients' needs, it's time to start matching them with appropriate suppliers. Airlines' procedures regarding disabled travelers are fairly standardized due to the Air Carrier Access Act of 1990. When dealing with hotels and restaurants, however, the International Symbol of Access may be just the first indication of whether clients

Sphere of Influence



Janice Perkins's first overseas excursion six years ago to Britain convinced her that she wanted—and perhaps needed—to enter the travel industry.

"There were mix-ups that could have easily been avoided," recalls this travel agent and grandmother of nine from Glen Ellyn, Illinois, who has used a wheelchair since contracting polio 40 years ago. "For example, the agent booked me into 'first floor' accommodations, but abroad, the first floor is our second floor. I also found myself booked in country inns that lacked elevators. The trip worked because people helped me everywhere."

Determined to prevent others from encountering the same problems, she enrolled in travel school. Even before she completed the coursework, she was offered a job by James R. Ward, CTC, owner of Hinsdale Travel Service in Hinsdale, Illinois. He helped her set up an office in her home with a phone and a fax machine that connect to the main office.

About a third of Perkins's clients are wheelchair users from around the U.S. and Canada, a following that may partially stem from her travel lectures to local rehabilitation centers, spinal-cord injury groups, and post-polio and -stroke clubs. "I feel my talks are more effective because I'm in a wheelchair myself," she says. "I can't imagine anything nicer than this type of work."

HAVING A BALL: Hinsdale Travel's Janice Perkins at Epcot Center in Orlando.



can be accommodated, says Donald England of Travelac, a Colorado marketing company that helps the hotel industry design for accessibility. "There's no consistency of product," he says. "I've seen handicapped rooms with door frames only 25 inches wide [a minimum width of 36 inches in doorways and 44 inches in corridors is needed for most chairs] and rooms that required you to go down six steps to reach the floor on which the so-called 'accessible' room was located."

What makes a facility accessible? The checklist, especially for hotels, can be long. Some basics:

◆ Do curb cuts enable wheelchair movement from the hotel's driveway to the sidewalk? Is there a ramp to the entrance or are there steps? Inside, are all public areas (including restaurants, meeting space, bathrooms) on one level or ramped? If spread out on many floors, are these facilities reachable by an accessible elevator?

◆ In ship cabins and hotel guest rooms, how much maneuvering space is there? How wide are room and bathroom doors (measuring between inner door frames)? Are there thresholds leading inside, and if so, how high are they (more than half an inch can be problematic)?

◆ Do bathrooms have grab-bars or trapeze-assist bars? How high are sinks and vanity tops (maximum underside clearance should be 28 inches)? Is the toilet seat 16 to 18 inches high to allow easy transfers from wheelchairs? Are towel racks, light switches, mirrors, and shelves a maximum of 48 inches from the floor? Are roll-in showers or tub benches available? Are shower stalls a minimum size of 3 feet by 3 feet? Are mirrors full-length so that guests can see themselves when seated?

◆ In guest rooms and ship cabins, are bed frames open underneath and unobstructed? Do closets have low rods? Are temperature controls and curtain-pulls reachable? Are there reachable bedside controls for television, radio, room lights, remote door unlock (ideally with intercom)? Is there enough space under tables and desks for a wheelchair? Do rooms and baths have emergency call buttons? What kind of handles are on doors? (Lever or loop-type are acceptable; automatic doors are preferable.)

◆ In hotel elevators, are controls reachable (no higher than 54 inches), and what is the elevator door's width (a minimum of 32 inches is required)?

◆ If the hotel has a swimming pool, does it have a lift for disabled guests? Does a handrail descend into the pool?

◆ If the hotel offers a free shuttle service to the airport, does it accommodate wheelchairs? If not, will the hotel pick up the cost of an accessible transfer, thereby not discriminating against wheelchair-using guests?

Don't assume that you'll get these answers by calling a hotel chain's toll-free number, warns Travelac's England. "Once I asked how many accessible rooms a chain had at a particular property and got four different answers from three different people," he says. Janice Perkins of Hinsdale Travel Service Inc. in Hinsdale, Illinois [who is featured on our cover], always calls the property directly and asks to speak to the manager. Or maintenance can usually help. "The trick is to go as high as possible up the ladder of authority to get what your client needs," she says.

Once hotel reservations are secured, examine ground transportation, especially accessible van rentals, says

award honoree Rick Crowder, who is also president of Travelin' Talk, an accessibility-information exchange based in Clarksville, Tennessee. "Ask whether the van has a wheelchair lift and tie-down systems or whether they just use a piece of plywood as a ramp, lock the wheelchair's brakes, and hope for the best." The safest vans have a four-point tie-down system that locks the wheelchair to the floor in four places. The van should also have a seat belt and a shoulder harness for the wheelchair passenger.

TREAT CLIENTS WITH DISABILITIES LIKE ANY OTHER CLIENT

When England checks into a hotel with his wife, he finds it upsetting if staffers direct all their questions to her. "They often act as if I'm deaf or unable to answer for myself. Or they'll start pushing my wheelchair without asking if I want to be pushed," he says. Other common faux pas include treating wheelchair users as if they're physically sick or

New School Of Thought



When Carol Lee Power decided to leave teaching in 1982 and return to the travel industry (she had once been a flight attendant), it was her sister-in-law, a wheelchair user, who influenced her decision to become a travel agent.

"We'd traveled extensively together and endured the disappointment and frustration over the obstacles that wheelchair travelers encounter," she says. "So I went to travel school to help people like her." When Power joined Redmond Travel in

Redmond, Washington, she formed its

Wheelchair Journeys division as an outside sales agent; it's now 10 years old.

But she didn't stop there. In 1989, Power worked with the Washington State Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment to investigate how the state could better serve disabled travelers. She ended up developing a sensitivity-training workshop curriculum with another ex-teacher, Norma Nickols. Last fall, the workshop debuted at the 1991 American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) World Congress in Taipei and became the society's first seminar on the subject.

Power has incorporated her two career paths—travel and teaching—by joining with Nickols to form Access for Travel, an educational-training company. They'd like to take their seminar "Accommodating Travelers With Disabilities" to each ASTA chapter. "It's hard to assist disabled travelers if you haven't been a disabled traveler yourself," Power says. "This seminar is one of the few ways agents can actually become sensitized to what's required."

CLASS ACT: Former teachers Carol Lee Power (standing) and Norma Nickols lead disability-awareness seminars for travel agents.



REX HYSTEDT

RESOURCES

Access for Travel

1429 10th St. West
Kirkland, Wash. 98033
206-828-4220

Provides sensitivity training on disabled travel for agents.

Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicapped (SATH)

347 Fifth Ave., Suite 610
New York, N.Y. 10016
212-447-7284

A forum for the exchange of ideas and information to encourage ease of travel for the physically impaired. Also publishes a quarterly newsletter that's free to agents.

Travel Industry and Disabled Exchange (TIDE)

c/o Nautilus Tours
5435 Donna Ave.
Tarzana, Calif. 91356
818-343-6339

A national information exchange with a quarterly newsletter.

Travelin' Talk

P.O. Box 3534
Clarksville, Tenn. 37043
615-552-6670

Provides info on accessible worldwide destinations, fed to the network by local members. A comprehensive membership directory is due this spring. Cost: about \$50. Also publishes *Travelin' Talk*, a quarterly newsletter (the suggested donation is \$20 annually).

Traveling Nurses' Network

P.O. Box 129
Vancouver, Wash. 98666
206-694-2462

Provides nurse escorts for all levels of health care.

Travel for the Disabled

Twin Peaks Press
P.O. Box 129
Vancouver, Wash. 98666
800-637-2256
Get this 1985 book by Helen Hecker, RN, for its valuable resource lists. Cost: \$19.95.

The Wheelchair User's Guide to Light Rail, Heavy Rail, and Commuter Rail in the U.S. and Canada

Access Systems
P.O. Box 1514
Baltimore, Md. 21203
301-327-6119
Learn the reasons why Robert Reuter, owner of Access Systems, an engineering consulting firm that works to improve transit access, hails Amtrak's *Metroliner* but gives the *Auto Train* to Florida a red flag. Cost: \$12 plus \$3 shipping.

The Itinerary Magazine

P.O. Box 1084
Bayonne, N.J. 07002
201-858-3400

Whole Person Tours publishes this bimonthly, the only consumer magazine about travel for the physically impaired. Subscriptions: \$10 for one year, \$20 for two years (includes two free issues).

Disability Express: Travel and Disability Resources Directory

Southwest Missouri Center for Recreation and Leisure Studies,
Southwest Missouri State University
901 S. National St.
Springfield, Mo. 65804
417-836-5411
Features some 450 entries for tour companies, medical services, and more. Cost: \$20.

RAIL IMPROVEMENT:
Access Systems' Robert Reuter helps make sure "All aboard!" means just that.



FRITZ HOFFMANN

stupid ("They see the wheelchair and assume we have no brains," says Yvonne Nau of Nautilus Tours in Tarzana, California). According to Cheryl Duke of the accessibility-consulting firm Opening Door Inc. in Woodford, Virginia, "Many people tend to be either overly solicitous, to the point of patronizing, or distant and rude. They ignore wheelchair users because they don't know how to deal with them." For the past year, Duke's organization has run seminars for travel companies and schools based on its Ten Commandments of Disability Etiquette.

Embassy Suites is one supplier that has begun teaching its staff how to accommodate disabled guests. Travel professionals can do this, too. Redmond Travel's Carol Lee Power, for example, offers agent-specific sensitivity training through her new company, Access for Travel (see her profile on page 21). The best rule: Treat *every* client with dignity and assume that every client, regardless of a disability, can competently convey to you his or her travel likes, dislikes, and requirements. "Wheelchair travelers are like everyone else," says Nau. "We're just sitting down to get where we're going."

HELP MINIMIZE COMMON FEARS

Every traveler fears the unknown. But for a wheelchair traveler, those apprehensions are multiplied because so many elements of a trip can be problematic. Power once had a client, a veteran paralyzed after his helicopter was shot down during the Vietnam War, who was to be honored in New York City during a reunion of his battalion. He was hesitant. "We helped him by laying down the groundwork," she says, "from how we would get to the airport, to getting the porter's attention to take his bags from the car, to getting from the parking lot to the terminal. True, there are always gaps, but by taking the trip apart and analyzing it for him, we diffused some of the fear. He had a wonderful time."

Concerns over bathroom visits dominate apprehensions. Will rest stops be made often on tours? Will the bathroom be accessible? And given the challenges of using airplane bathrooms, how will clients make it through a long flight? Yvonne and Lou Nau dehydrate themselves before a long flight by not drinking liquids the night before, and then they use the bathroom right before boarding the aircraft. They made it through a 24-hour trip to Bali that way. (Clients should always get a physician's okay first.) Edna Cook of Flying Wheels Travel in Owatonna, Minnesota, says clients also worry that they'll forget a necessary medical item or that their wheelchair will break or get a flat tire. "To counter the fears, we've been known to put clients in touch with managers at airlines and hotels," she says.

"Attitude is everything," adds Hinsdale Travel's Perkins. "I tell clients how good it feels to get out and get a new perspective. I relay my own experiences as a wheelchair traveler and explain how the kindness of others has helped me in my travels. But most of all, I explain that travel is an adventure. Inconveniences are just that, inconveniences—for disabled travelers as much as for anyone else." ♦

DAWN M. BARCLAY, a former travel agent and frequent contributor to *Travel Life*, requested this assignment as part of her never-ending quest to encourage her mother-in-law, who uses a wheelchair, to travel.

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL



*When a wheelchair traveler
asks you for a barrier-free vacation,
suggest one of these great options.*

BY DAWN M. BARCLAY

Florida has to be the most accessible state in the Union, and Walt Disney World, its most accessible resort," says Rick Crowder of Travelin' Talk. "They've incorporated accessibility into most of their designs over the past 10 years—which has been their period of greatest expansion." Because of Disney's dedication to accessible design, the theme park recently won the second annual Chairman's Award from the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, which recognizes private-sector efforts in increasing accessibility.

Not only is WDW well designed, but its design is well communicated. The free, extensive "Disabled Guests Guidebook" outlines rides and attractions best suited for wheelchair users and gives details on parking facilities, wheelchair rental locations, monorail access, and the locations of phones, bathrooms, and dining facilities designed for disabled patrons. Although some rides in the older sections are difficult for wheelchair users to negotiate, the majority of the park, including Epcot Center and MGM Studios Theme Park, is completely accessible. (Order the pamphlet from Guest Information, Walt Disney World

THE FAMILY VACATION

**WALT DISNEY
WORLD**

**MINNIE HAPPY
RETURNS:** Walt
Disney World
(above) meets
disabled travelers'
needs coming and
going.

Company, P.O. Box 10004, Lake Buena Vista, Fla. 32830-0004. Only one per agent.)

ACCOMMODATIONS: For affordable accessibility, look no further than the pacesetter new *Embassy Suites Resort, Orlando* in Lake Buena Vista, right outside Walt Disney World. The 280-room all-suite property is the first example of the chain's commitment to meet and exceed the accessibility requirements outlined by the Americans With Disabilities Act and to provide disabled travelers with a "declaration of independence." Designed with Paul Duke of Opening Door Inc., a Woodford, Virginia, accessibility-consulting firm, the hotel features roll-in showers with flip-down seats and beds on unobstructed frames, which help wheelchair users lift themselves into bed. (Other special designs make Embassy Suites a good choice for hearing- and vision-impaired clients, too.) "It's nice to see a hotel that has finally done it right," says Crowder. Rates range from \$185 double; call 800-362-2779.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION: Given 48 hours' notice, most major car-rental companies can provide hand-controlled cars for disabled travelers, or agents can turn to two

commissionable specialists—both rapidly growing franchises. **Wheelchair Getaways Inc.** in Newtown, Pennsylvania, rents Dodge Ram vans that have been outfitted with power lifts, raised roofs, and state-of-the-art tie-down systems that hold wheelchairs firmly in place while the vehicle is moving. These vans require a nondisabled driver and can hold one wheelchair user and five adults or two wheelchair users and three adults. Day rates start from \$75 in Orlando; call 800-242-4990. **Wheeler's Accessible Van Rental Inc.** also rents modified minivans but is a better choice for independent travelers because vans can be driven by a wheelchair user. The firm is based in Tampa, but vehicles can be delivered to Orlando. Rates run \$89 per day; call 800-456-1371. Both companies will meet clients at the airport or train station, instruct them on vehicle usage, give them directions to their hotel, and transport them to the airport after vehicles are returned.

TOURS: Clients who prefer to leave the driving to someone else can enjoy central Florida attractions—including WDW, Sea World, Cypress Gardens, the Kennedy Space Center, and even dinner-theater performances—through **Wheelchair Wagon Tours**. The commissionable company has specialized in arranging sightseeing tours for wheelchair users since 1965 and quotes prices based on individual itineraries. Call 407-957-2044. For more information on accessibility in Orlando, contact the local **Center for Independent Living** at 407-623-1070.

EMBASSY SUITES RESORT



SUITE ROLL: Accessibility's the watchword at Embassy Suites Resort near Walt Disney World.

What if your client wants a trip that would be a challenge to arrange under any circumstance? Several companies specialize in group tours for disabled individuals and their nondisabled companions—from short hops to Canada to grand safaris in Kenya.

"With group tours, the investigation has been done in advance," explains Betty Zywicki of **Whole Person Tours Inc.** "We know there's an accessible back entrance to the Sistine Chapel in Rome, even if it isn't in the guidebooks." Also, there's the usual benefit of group tours: a support system that spares clients from figuring things out alone.

Ten-year-old Whole Person Tours, based in Bayonne, New Jersey, grew out of the frustrations of Betty's husband, Robert, in planning his own travel (he's a wheelchair user

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

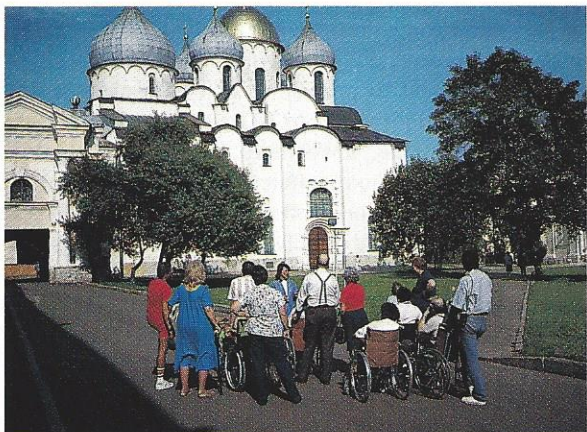
THE GROUP TOUR

with rheumatoid arthritis). The company's name stems from his philosophy that people with disabilities "are whole persons—worthy of respect, no matter what part of their body doesn't work." The agency runs six to 10 tours a year—to Florida, Hawaii, Canada, and Europe. Its disabled packages differ from nondisabled tours in that they include shorter day-trips with accessible rest stops whenever possible, and they start later in the morning.

Such tours can cost more than average tours, explains Betty Zywicki, since groups need to be smaller (to guarantee individual attention) and because hotels have fewer accessible rooms. In addition, there are fewer classes of hotels to choose from. Tours must also be inclusive, with meals, entertainment, and side trips factored in because travelers may not have easy access to them on their own.

As the oldest company handling disabled travelers (since 1960), Washington's **Evergreen Travel Service** has perhaps the most exotic bent to its tours, helping disabled travelers "climb" the Great Wall of China and ride Indian elephants (via ramped access), with safety a primary concern. According to co-owner Betty Hoffman, Evergreen even plans to restart the six-week, round-the-world tours for wheelchair travelers that it ran in the late 1970s. The tours are slated for 1993.

DETAILS: Call Whole Person Tours at 201-858-3400 and Evergreen's Wings on Wheels Tours at 206-776-1184. Other specialists in wheelchair travel include **Flying Wheels Travel** of Owatonna, Minnesota (800-535-6790), **Nautilus Tours** in Tarzana, California (818-343-6339), and **Accessible Journeys** in Philadelphia (215-747-0171).



EVERGREEN TRAVEL

COMRADE-RIE: Evergreen Travel's Soviet Union trip.

Glorious cathedrals, brooding castles, and lush countryside all help to make England America's favorite European destination. But it's the reception disabled travelers usually receive there that may help them decide to visit. "Part of the country's beauty is the helpful attitude of its people," says Betty Zywicki.

"Even if something is not totally accessible, the British still try to get you inside. Sometimes, in fact, wheelchair users get to see things that other travelers don't," she says. With advance permission, for example, the queen allows those in wheelchairs to watch the changing of the guard inside the gates of Buckingham Palace, and though they can't get down the stairs to see the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London, they can (if it's prearranged and they're part of a group tour) get into the Learning Center, a specially equipped room, to try on replicas. Says Zywicki, "It's like being queen for a day."

ACCOMMODATIONS: London visitors can stay at one of Europe's pioneers in state-of-the-art accessibility, the *Copthorne Tara Hotel* in Kensington. All public areas are accessible, and elevators are wide enough for two wheelchairs. "It's a great design for unassisted wheelchair travelers," says Donald England of Travelac, himself a paraplegic from a spinal-cord injury. "More to their credit, they've increased the size of their bathrooms, where most inaccessibility occurs, in 10 rooms. They've also added bedside remote controls for TVs, radios, lights, and even for unlocking the door to allow in visitors. [The door also has an intercom, so occupants know who they're letting in.] Doorways have been widened and have electronic doors that automatically shut 20 seconds after occupants open them, giving you adequate time to wheel inside."

ROBERT HAYNES/COPHTHORNE TARA



INCLINED TO SERVE: A wheelchair traveler arrives in style at London's Copthorne Tara.

HEADING ABROAD

GREAT BRITAIN

In these rooms, the Tara has also modified bathroom fixtures, adding lever-action taps, grab-bars beside the bathtub and toilet, and emergency call buttons. Two rooms contain equipment for the most severely disabled guests, while eight have adjoining rooms, connected by intercom and special doors, to accommodate nondisabled companions.

England notes that many hotels with disability facilities won't guarantee those rooms, often requiring disabled persons either to try elsewhere or to make do with inappropriate accommodations. That's why he's so excited about the London Visitors Club, which disabled persons can join for about \$9 a year. The club gives members priority in reserving accessible rooms at the Tara at a special discount (more participating hotels may be added

later). Through March, a single runs \$81 instead of the usual \$168, and doubles cost \$112, down from the usual \$194. Book through Utell International (800-448-8355) and Omni Hotels (800-743-6664). For information on the Visitors Club, write the John Groom Association, 10 Gloucester Dr., Finsbury Park, London N4 2LP, England.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION: Within London, the tube and double-decker buses aren't always accessible. Some London boroughs now operate "mobility buses" though, and all new taxis are wheelchair accessible. For details, write to the *London Regional Transport's Unit for Disabled Passengers*, 55 Broadway, London SW1 OBD.

DETAILS: A charity called *Holiday Care Service* provides general information to assist wheelchair clients visiting London. Write the group at 2 Old Bank Chambers, Station Rd., Horley, Surrey RH6 9HW. Visitors can also obtain free local travel advice weekdays from *Tripscope*. Call 081-994-9294 (fax: 081-994-3618).

In south Florida, your wheelchair-using clients can experience the wonders of the deep. Since 1987, Barbara Koolick and Steve Schreck's Omega Blue Diving Service has arranged scuba trips for disabled clients in Key West, and last year the outfit began Fort Lauderdale dives. It's the only member of the Broward Association of Safe Dive Operations to regularly run accessible tours. "It's a neglected area and shouldn't be. Everyone should try diving at least once," says Schreck.

About 20 percent of Omega Blue's clientele use wheelchairs, and its boat is designed for easy access. Groups, which consist of both disabled and nondisabled divers, are kept small (six people) to guarantee maximum attention. If divers aren't certified, they'll receive instruction. "The beauty of diving is that many disabilities don't matter underwater," says Schreck. "If someone has strong arms, it's less important to have use of his legs." Even if divers lack use of both arms and legs, Schreck adds, diving is still a possibility. A master diver accompanies such clients by

UNDERWATER ADVENTURE

OMEGA BLUE DIVING

"towing and pulling them along," explains Schreck. "Motion isn't necessarily important. You can have a spectacular dive by just sitting on the bottom of the ocean."

DETAILS AND ACCOMMODATIONS: Four-hour dive trips cost about \$45 per day (\$100 for noncertified divers), including the cost of the boat, tanks, weights, and soft drinks. Accompanied dives cost an additional \$35 each. The company can provide transportation in its own van (no ramps or lifts; wheelchairs must be lifted physically) and will book the accessible *Fort Lauderdale Days Inn-U.S. 1* on clients' behalf for the special rate of about \$29 to \$49 per room. For additional transportation options, both *Wheeler's Accessible Van Rentals* (800-456-1371) and *Wheelchair Getaways* (800-637-7577) service the area.

Contact Omega Blue Diving Service at P.O. Box 39875, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. 33339-9875; 305-783-3111. For additional information on accessibility in south Florida, contact the *Center for Survival and Independent Living* at 305-547-5444.

Disabled clients can feel just as at home on the range as anyone at the Blue Spruce Lodge and Guest Ranch in Trout Creek, Montana. One of the only barrier-free resorts in the country, the lodge was custom-built in 1986 by area native Russ Milleson, who became a wheelchair user himself after an industrial accident 18 years ago. He and his wife, Karen, run the ranch, which is set on 470 acres high on a razorback ridge overlooking the Noxon Reservoir. "It's a family-style mountain resort made as accessible as it can be without looking like a hospital," says Milleson. "We've redesigned every possible outdoor activity with the wheelchair user in mind."

The homey log lodge contains rustic accommodations for 18 people, in 6,000 square feet of open space. All guests have equal access by ramp or by lift to the facilities, which include a bar, common room, library, pool table, sauna, hot tub, and a barn with stables. Though bedrooms are small, guests spend most of their time outside—fishing, white-water rafting, boating, camping, and visiting such nearby attractions as the National Bison Range. From September to November, hunting trips get added to the list, as do skiing (on special monoskis), ice fishing, and tobogganing. Disabled guests can even drive the resort's all-terrain vehicles, which have been outfitted with hand controls.

DETAILS: All-inclusive prices for seven-day packages, beginning on Wednesdays and Saturdays, range from \$500 to

BACK TO NATURE

BLUE SPRUCE LODGE



\$750 per week per person. Travelers can fly into either Missoula, Montana, or Spokane, Washington (each about 140 miles away), and then rent cars with hand controls from the major car-rental companies. Or Milleson can provide transfers from either airport (or the nearby Sandpoint, Idaho, Amtrak station). Contact him at 451 Marten Creek Rd., Trout Creek, Mont. 59874; 406-827-4762.

TOURS: Other wilderness vacations for wheelchair users are offered by *Access Tours Inc.*, based in Jackson, Wyoming, which is the first to launch regular tours (late May through mid-September) of Yellowstone National Park for people with mobility problems (307-733-6664), and by *Bill Dvorak Kayak and Rafting Trips*, which arranges Colorado-based river adventures (719-539-6851).



J. CRAIG SWEAT/GAMMA-LIAISON (2)

SPRUCED UP: Russ Milleson and his wife, Karen, have hewn a barrier-free haven out of the rugged mountains of northwest Montana. Top: the main lodge.

When romance or relaxation are your clients' travel motivators, sell Hawaii. "It's a top choice for persons in wheelchairs, especially those on the West Coast," says Yvonne Nau of Nautilus Tours. She and her husband, Lou, should know: they've been sent there for the past four years by FIT operator Classic Hawaii to inspect hotels and tourist attractions. "You can wheel from one end of Waikiki to the other, with curb cuts all the way," says Nau. "Everything you encounter is ramped and accessible." Honolulu has the largest number of accessible hotels in one area, she adds.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Nau recommends the *Halekulani* as Waikiki's most accessible hotel, citing its ramped public areas and 13 specially equipped guest rooms (four with roll-in showers). "Unlike many hotels, the Halekulani gives you the option of a roll-in shower or a tub with grab-bars," she says. "True, roll-in showers are a welcome rarity, but many hotels forget that some wheelchair users like tubs." Though it's pricey, Halekulani guests get their money's worth, from in-room private check-in to the terrific (and accessible) surf-side restaurant *Orchids*. Rates start at \$220; call 800-367-2343 or 808-923-2311. Nau and other agents interviewed also recommend the *Sheraton Waikiki*, the *Hilton Hawaiian Village*, and the *Prince Kuhio Hotel*.

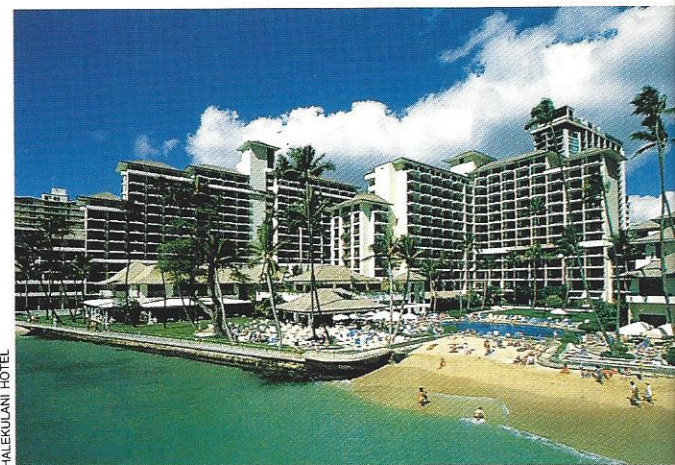
For a change from the urban atmosphere of Waikiki, the outer islands are all possibilities for wheelchair users, says Carol Lee Power of Wheelchair Journeys. She cites the Big Island's Kona coast, naming the large *King Kamehameha Hotel* in Kailua Kona as particularly accessible. Rates start at \$115 single; call 808-329-2911 or 800-367-6060. She also gives accolades to the *Kailua/Kona Center for Independent Living* (808-329-6611), which can help provide attendant referral services.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION: Wheelchair users can register with Honolulu Department of Transportation Services (808-523-4141) and become eligible for its paratransit sys-

THE BEACH VACATION HAWAII

tem, *Handi-Van*, which will transport them anywhere in the city for a small charge if given 24 hours' notice. *Handi-Cabs of the Pacific* (808-524-3866), a private taxi company with vehicles to accommodate wheelchairs, is a more expensive option. Specialized transportation on the Big Island (and on Maui and Kauai) is listed in the first part of the two-volume Hawaiian Visitors Bureau's *Aloha Guide to Accessibility for Persons With Mobility Impairments*. (Volume two describes hotels, restaurants, shopping, and attractions. Write the bureau at Waikiki Business Plaza, 2270 Kalakaua Ave., Honolulu, Hawaii 96815.) In addition, *Wheeler's Accessible Van Rental* opened a Maui franchise last August (800-456-1371).

FITs: To arrange moderate-to-upscale FITs for Hawaii-bound wheelchair travelers, consider *Classic Hawaii*. The company has devoted more than 300 hours to on-site research. It has listed 23 of its 90 properties as top rated for disabled travelers and can tailor commissionable trips to clients' tastes. Call 800-221-3949.



HALEKULANI HOTEL

HAIL HALEKULANI: Honolulu's most accessible hotel.

As more and more lines increase accessibility, cruises are rapidly becoming a favorite of wheelchair travelers, primarily because once they're aboard, mobility hassles are reduced to a minimum. "We book our wheelchair clients on cruises for many of the same reasons that we would book persons without disabilities," says Betty Hoffman of Evergreen Travel Service. "Vacationers have everything in one place—entertainment, dining, and transportation. Aside from economy, for those in wheelchairs this all-in-one philosophy has an added advantage—accessibility."

Many disabled-travel specialists have words of praise for Princess Cruises. "Their last four new ships [*Sky Princess*, *Star Princess*, *Crown Princess*, and *Regal Princess*] contained a total of 36 large accessible cabins between them," explains Nautilus Tours' Yvonne Nau. "All were built without lips [thresholds] between the sleeping areas and the bathrooms and with grab-bars in the shower. On the *Sky* and *Star*, the public areas are accessible, with ramps leading out to the decks."

Between the four ships just mentioned, Princess can

THE CRUISE VACATION PRINCESS CRUISES

transport wheelchair travelers to the eastern and western Caribbean, Mexico, and Alaska. Not every port may be accessible, however. Hoffman warns that agents should check with the cruise reservations desk to find out which ports may be off limits to physically impaired passengers. Ports where the ship anchors offshore (due to scheduling or ship size) require passengers to descend steep stairways to get into a tender and then continue ashore; both the steepness of the steps and the rocking of the tender (especially a problem in bad weather) make the trip hazardous for wheelchair users.

MORE GOOD SHIPS: Agents also cite particular ships of *Royal Cruise Line*, *Holland America Line*, and *Cunard* (especially the *Sagafford* and *Vistafford*, with 12 and 44 accessible cabins, respectively). An additional resource: *Cruise Lines International Association* (CLIA) publishes the excellent (and free) "Cruise Guide for the Wheelchair Traveler," which lists in chart form the accessibility of elevators, cabins, public areas, and decks for most cruise ships. Contact CLIA at 500 Fifth Ave., Suite 1407, New York, N.Y. 10110; 212-921-0066. ♦