

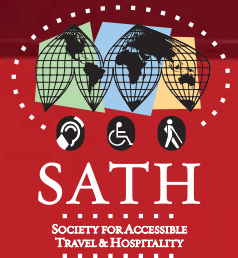
READY, SET,

GO



Anyone who is disabled can get around in style—and comfort—thanks to amenities the travel industry offers.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:





THRILL RIDE: A MONOSKI WITH OUTRIGGERS FOR STABILITY ALLOWS A MAN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS TO ENJOY THE SLOPES.

FOR

generations of Americans raised on sports, travel, and adventure, aging and injuries are proving no barrier to enjoying life as they always have. Today, men and women with disabilities are skiing, kayaking, competing in athletic events, and traveling just about anywhere on Earth they want. In the process, they are letting the travel industry know they mean business.

According to a Harris poll, people with disabilities spend more than \$13.6 billion on some 31 million trips a year. That dollar amount could easily double if travel were made easier for this group, the research found, because of strong demand.

"People with disabilities are just like anybody else—they travel and they spend money," says Jani Nayar, executive coordinator of the Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (SATH), an educational nonprofit that works to raise awareness of the needs of travelers with disabilities. "Disabled travelers don't need charity, they need service. And the travel industry needs to know that providing those services is good business."

By law, companies that service the public are required to provide safe accessibility, such as ramps or step-free entrances, and cannot charge customers more because of a disability. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, transportation companies must provide accessible seating and personnel to assist the disabled, and hotels must have in place a range of additional features: extra-wide doorways for those using wheelchairs; gadgets such as door knockers that light up lamps and vibrating clocks for the hearing-impaired; and information in Braille for the blind, for example.

Much of the real thrust behind the disability travel boom is naturally coming from the disabled and their advocates, who run awareness, consulting, and marketing organizations like SATH, in New York; Open Doors, in Chicago; and Access Anything, in Colorado.

After being paralyzed in a skiing accident in 1996, Craig Kennedy, with his wife, Andrea, co-founded Access Anything, which markets adaptive sports and adventure travel for people with disabilities. The couple works with

companies like the Steamboat Ski & Resort Corp. to help provide recreational opportunities for those with special needs. The Steamboat Ski Resort, in Steamboat Springs, Colo., rents state-of-the-art adaptive equipment, runs adaptive ski camps, and hosts special events. Access Anything helped train employees and marketed the resort to the disability crowd (Mr. Kennedy himself skis Steamboat using a monoski—a molded seat mounted on a shock absorber atop a single ski, with outriggers for stability). The result, according to Andrea Kennedy, has been a 25% increase in business for the ski area.

"Technology and awareness are driving this industry," she says. "It benefits both sides—the disabled and the companies serving them."

OFFERING A HELPING HAND

One company that has embraced the emerging market is United Airlines. In addition to accommodating customers with disabilities, United proudly flies both the U.S. Olympic Team and U.S. Paralympic Team. Like the Olympic Games,



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THE ATHLETES

WHO MAKE OTHER ATHLETES

SHAKE THEIR HEADS

IN AMAZEMENT.

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United is proud to provide year-round support to both the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Teams, assisting and funding every athlete's dream to compete at the highest level. And so we wish the very best of luck to the U.S. Paralympians at the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver.



Proud to Fly the 2010 U.S. Paralympic Team

“Disabled travelers don’t need charity, they need service. And the travel industry needs to know that providing those services is good business.”

the Paralympic Games are also held every two years, and showcase world-class athletes with physical and visual disabilities. United has partnered with the U.S. Olympic Team for more than 30 years and has been the official airline sponsor of the U.S. Paralympic Team since 2001. As part of its partnership, the airline operates the United Olympic Desk—a team of eight agents who take calls on a special line that serves U.S. Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

The partnership is in line with the airline’s overall goal of accommodating disabled travelers’ needs by providing wheelchairs, accessible seats, and trained employees at the gate and on board, according to Tim Simonds, managing director, marketing and customer experience.

“Everyone from baggage handlers to gate agents to flight attendants take an enormous amount of pride in serving the Paralympic athletes,” says Simonds. “For United, it’s an honor to get the athletes and their equipment to training events, trials, and national and international competitions on a daily basis. They know they can count on us to deliver safely and on time.”

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Other companies, meanwhile, are viewing the market with an eye on customer service but also on the bottom line. “We strive to ensure our travel services are safe and accessible as a standard part of the customer service we provide,” says Kevin Marshall, director of diversity initiatives at Amtrak. “It’s not so much that the law requires it. We want to serve all our customers the best way we can. Regardless of the type of disability, our aim is to ensure our services are accessible, customer-friendly, and quality-oriented.”

Amtrak has long provided accessible restrooms and café and dining cars, space on board trains for wheelchairs, and assistance with luggage and other needs. More recently, the railway line’s long-distance Superliners and Viewliners have been reconfigured to better accommodate disabled passengers in specially designed bedrooms with a wheelchair-accessible bed, sink, vanity, and toilet, and room service.

In 2000, the company began offering discounts both to passengers with disabilities and their traveling companions, and by 2007 revenues from that market had climbed to \$17 million. By 2009, that figure was over \$19 million. “It’s been an incremental increase every year,” notes David Nelson, diversity specialist and liaison to disability affairs, “in both the number of disabled passengers traveling with us and the amount of revenue generated.”

When planning a vacation or adventure, SATH recommends contacting travel agents or tour operators who have experience with disability travel and agreements with airlines, hotels, and cruises that can save disabled travelers money. To find such experts you can find a list at www.sath.org.

The organization also advises travelers with disabilities to make their needs known to service providers in advance. Airline agents, for example, must know to have a wheelchair ready and personnel available to assist disabled passengers. Hotels should also be made aware of special needs and asked about special features, such as roll-in showers. And travelers must plan how to get from the airport or train station to the hotel.

“Destination choices are limited only by the availability of transportation and accommodations adequate to the needs of travelers with disabilities,” says Nayar. “It’s very important—for both traveler and provider—to ask the right questions and provide the right information.”

But of even greater importance? The right attitude: You can go anywhere you wish and do anything you want! ●



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