

All aboard!

Travelling by sea is a comfortable option for those who have extra needs, and other types of travel transport are also friendlier than in the past, says **Sarah Wale**.

Regardless of your condition or disability, it has never been easier to travel abroad for that holiday of a lifetime.

With greater awareness of disability in the wider community has come greater willingness on the part of travel companies to provide assistance where required, usually at no extra cost.

CRUISES

Cruise lines are at the forefront of companies offering accessible vacations.

As a seasoned cruiser who has a chronic condition (arthritis), I highly recommend this form of holiday.

You only have to unpack once and the hotel moves with you!

The usual reaction to this suggestion is that cruises are only for the wealthy.

This couldn't be further from the truth.

We have found cruising to be a cost-effective, hassle-free holiday option, as once you have paid for your cruise there are no more bills for food, tea and coffee, or accommodation.

Just think what a lamington or light lunch can cost at a café in your local town! These are included in your cruise tariff.

Some lines even include alcohol, staff gratuities, internet and laundry, and even organised tours in ports of call

(but not all do, so you should check when booking).

The internet is a great source of information about cruises and you can find amazing deals, especially if you can either book well in advance or at the last minute (though the limited number of wheelchair-friendly cabins may not be available for late bookings).

Another huge advantage of cruising is that there is no baggage weight restriction. However, if you fly out to meet the ship in a foreign port, you will have to adhere to your airline's luggage weight limit, unless you can make arrangements to raise the

allowance to accommodate any medical or mobility equipment.

FREE FOR ALL!

You can choose to stay local and take one of the many fantastic trips round New Zealand, Australia and the Islands, or travel further afield to Asia, Europe or America – when cruising, the world is truly yours to explore.

Meals are varied, and all ships offer a choice of fully serviced dining rooms or buffet options for every meal. Even at the buffet, you will find willing helpers who will

SOME COUNTRIES WILL NOT ALLOW ANIMALS (EVEN SERVICE ONES) TO LAND, SO IF YOU DEPEND ON A FOUR-LEGGED FRIEND, YOU MAY HAVE TO STAY ABOARD AT THOSE PORTS.



find you a seat and carry your food to your table for you.

Entertainment on cruise ships is legendary, though not every show will suit every taste. Still, you'd have to be very hard to please to not find something to enjoy, from Broadway-style production shows to cabaret, karaoke, chamber music and magic shows, to the latest movies or TV classics.

All entertainment is included in your cruise ticket. Some ships even provide free ice cream and popcorn while you're watching the movies!

You can also attend lectures about subjects relevant to your cruise destinations and ports of call.

The theatres aboard ship are equipped with the latest sound-enhancement technology to help the hearing impaired.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

On the subject of sensory impairment, for those with poor or no sight, important signs, cabin door numbers and elevator buttons are all in Braille as well as bold, clear writing that's easy to spot.

There are classes for all sorts of things, from crafts to computer skills. You can learn to play cards, chess or Mah Jong, or maybe you'd like to learn about napkin folding or ceramics, or cross-stitch, quilting, or crochet. Some of these classes may attract a small charge for materials, but most are free.

If you enjoy a game of bridge or Scrabble, there is usually an informal group of fellow enthusiasts who will welcome new members.

Golf is popular, too, and while I don't

Safe Travels!

- › At the cruise terminal, make yourself known to a staff member and request help through the Disabled Passenger channel. They should have a record of your request for assistance, but it is your responsibility to ask.
- › Once aboard, remind Passenger Service staff if you have booked special arrangements.
- › Your cabin steward/ess will make themselves known to you, and while they should have been told about your needs, it pays to double check.
- › Just before or soon after sailing,

- there will be a mandatory emergency drill. Specially trained staff will help you with your life jacket and to get to your muster station.
- › Your travelling companion must be able to deal with an emergency in case staff cannot reach you, so they should carefully observe emergency drill procedures.
- › The emergency drill is a great icebreaker and, by the way, in 30 odd cruises I've never experienced a real emergency, so don't be nervous about giving cruising a go!

know of a ship with an 18 or even a nine hole course, many have the latest simulators and driving ranges with computerised analysis machines to help you improve your swing!

Gyms and health and beauty spas are available (at a cost) on most ships, and many also have complementary age-appropriate Kids Clubs, well staffed with qualified child carers; this makes cruising the ideal family holiday, as we discovered when travelling with ours.

The grandsons (aged 3 and 8) had a ball, as did their parents, knowing they were safely looked after.

We took pleasure in their delight when we all met up for meals, having each pursued our own interests, especially during the days at sea.

Alternatively, you can do absolutely

nothing while cruising. Sit back and relax on deck in one of the beautifully appointed lounges or bars, or even in your cabin, where 24 hour room service means you don't have to venture out for meals if you're having a 'Greta Garbo Day' and want to be alone, or just don't feel up to par.

SUPPORT FOR EXTRA NEEDS

Most cruise lines have fact sheets outlining their services for those with health or disability needs.

The information describes what can and cannot be provided, and tells you what you should know before committing yourself to a particular ship or cruise. >

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- ✓ Range of 13km each battery (approx).



Broadly speaking, most lines ask that you be accompanied by a travelling companion who is familiar with your needs and can help you if needed.

Whilst there is always a doctor and nurse aboard, with a well equipped medical facility for dealing with emergencies, they cannot undertake routine caring duties nor dispense day to day medication, so make sure you stock up with what you need before you travel.

You can bring mobility aids on board, but check the dimensions of your wheelchair or scooter when booking to ensure these will fit into your chosen cabin, as they can't be parked in the corridors.

If your disability means you use a service animal, this may be accommodated, but check with the cruise line and be aware that you will need to provide all food, as ships do not generally cater for animals.

You should also be aware that, for quarantine reasons, some countries will not allow entry for animals (even service ones), so if you depend on your four-legged friend to get about, you may have to stay aboard at those ports.

On the subject of going ashore, you need to be aware that some cruise ships have to anchor out at sea in smaller ports, with passengers ferried to land in the ship's 'tender boats'.

Whilst the crew will do everything possible to provide support for shore visits (there are specially trained, friendly and respectful helpers to assist you onto and off the tenders), weather or local wharf conditions occasionally mean that transfers are unsafe for wheelchairs.

On such occasions, it may be necessary for you to skip that particular port. While this can be disappointing, you would find

contacts for cruises!

> Azamara Club Cruises

Contact your travel agent or visit www.azamaraclubcruises.com

> Carnival Cruise Lines

Contact your travel agent or visit www.carnival.com

> Celebrity Cruise Lines

Contact your travel agent or visit www.celebritycruises.com

> Cunard, phone 0800 543 432 or visit

www.cunardline.com.au

> Holland America

Contact your travel agent or visit www.hollandamerica.com

> NCL Cruise Lines Contact your travel

agent or visit www.ncl.com

> Princess

Phone 0800 780 717 or visit www.princess.com

> P&O (Europe)

Contact your travel agent or visit www.pocruises.com

> P&O (Australia)

Phone 0800 780 716 or visit www.pocruises.com.au

> Royal Caribbean

Contact your travel agent or visit www.royalcaribbean.com.au

> Star Cruises Contact your travel

agent or visit www.starcruises.com

NZ Cruise Specialists

> Cruiseabout (part of Flight Centre)

www.cruiseabout.co.nz or phone (09) 379 0408 or 0800 221 100

> i-cruise Phone 0800 427 847 or

visit www.icruise.co.nz

> Let's Cruise Phone (09) 476 9514

or 0800 400 450 for outside Auckland, or visit www.letsruise.co.nz

> Cruise Republic (aka Cruise Sale

Finder) Phone 0800 122 129 or visit www.cruisesalefinder.co.nz

For unbiased reviews of cruises worldwide, or to help you choose a cruise, visit the Cruise Critic site, www.cruisecritic.com



that many of your fellow passengers (even those without disabilities) have chosen to stay behind, as there will be a full programme of activities on board.

As a special bonus, the health and beauty spas often have attractive pamper packages, hairdressing, and other feel-good treatments for both men and women on port days.

Tempted?

We've provided contact details for many cruise lines, including specialist booking agencies operating in New Zealand and

Australia. All are knowledgeable and helpful and, if you are researching a number of options, they might be your most efficient 'one stop shop' for all the information you'll need to make your decision.

Some of the lines don't give a phone number for New Zealand, but any good travel agent will be able to assist. And when considering any cruise, it's always a good idea to request the company's Accessibility and Mobility Fact Sheet.

Bon voyage!



Holidays in Australia

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Wheelchair Accessible Car Hire
www.flashcabrentals.com.au

PLANES

Travelling by air is no longer the 'jetsetting' glamorous adventure it used to be but, on the other hand, most airlines are now more focused on providing good service to all of their passengers, including those who have mobility needs.

Having said that, it does pay to check your airline's policy with regard to mobility aids and what assistance may be available both at the airport and during your flight.

Not surprisingly, some of the budget airlines are less flexible than the major, national carriers, and you might find that the lower fares they offer aren't as appealing as the care and comfort you might receive from a full service carrier.

If you can manage it, Premium Economy or Business Class will gain you extra space, comfort and baggage allowance.

It is up to you to make sure that any needs or concerns are addressed in writing, and acknowledged in writing, when you book flights.

You don't want any embarrassing hiccups to spoil the start of your holiday when you check in!

The same caveat applies if you need oxygen or other medical equipment,

injections, nebulisers, or medications while flying. These can usually be accommodated, but airlines do need to be aware of them in advance, and given time to make special arrangements to carry hazardous material.

As always, a little advance planning will save hassles later. An experienced travel agent, or airline websites, can help you understand how to ensure that your extra needs or special requests are catered for well before you depart.

Do ask for assistance to be available at both your departure airport and destination; it will make all the difference to your comfort and stress levels, and you'll usually get taken through ahead of the long lines!

COACHES

If you can't fly, or don't want to, and life on the ocean waves is not for you, coach companies offer excellent travel options.

Tours are very popular, allowing you to travel in a comfortable coach while moving from place to place.

This type of holiday allows you to cover a lot of ground, but is perhaps not ideal for those who tire easily, need an accessible

toilet, or require significant support while travelling.

Other drawbacks of coach tours are the packing and unpacking every day or two, and the regular need to stow wheelchairs or other unwieldy equipment.

Some tour companies specialise in accessible holidays. Your travel agent can inquire about options at your destination, or a Google search will yield services that cater for your needs.

If you don't fancy a touring holiday, how about taking a train or coach to a New Zealand destination so you can enjoy a stay-put holiday, or 'staycation' as the travel industry calls them?

SPECIAL INTEREST HOLIDAYS

There are many clubs and societies which organise holidays for those with special interests, such as bird watching, needle craft, art history, music, history, and so on.

It is worth contacting these if you want to travel with companions who share your interests, especially if you are not able to join or get to a local club on a regular basis. >

tips + advice!

Up, up and away!

- + If you need considerable support when flying, at least one travelling companion must be able to help you both at the airport and during your flight(s).
- + Ensure you have everything you need for the journey in a bag that's easy to access while travelling (it should include spares of medications and other supplies you require in case of delays or lost luggage).
- + Make flight crew aware of your requirements; they should have been told about these during their flight briefing, but take responsibility for your own peace of mind and to prevent hassles.

- + Do not bring any restricted items on board without advance clearance; you will almost certainly be off-loaded.
- + Be sure to arrange suitable transfers from the airport to your ship, hotel or coach tour operator at your destination. Many will have courtesy transport available, either free or for a small charge, but they will need to know if you require special assistance.

Hit the track, Jack!

- + Allow plenty of time to check in for your road or rail tour and make yourself known to the operator, especially if your disability is not obvious.

- + Coach tours mean spending time in a confined space with others; let them know about your difficulties so they can help or make allowances for you, especially if your disability (like my arthritis) isn't visible.



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For more information go to www.dimetapp.co.nz



While these holidays may not cater specifically for your needs, they are likely to comprise smaller groups of like-minded individuals who would want to do their best to accommodate someone who needs a bit of extra help.

SPECIAL SUPPORT GROUPS

In addition, some disability support organisations may offer tailor-made holidays which cater specifically for your particular disability. These groups may be here in New Zealand or in the country you would like to visit and it is worth doing a bit of research to seek them out. Often, if the group doesn't offer such trips, they will be able to direct you to companies that do.

If you are a member of a support group,

it's worth asking whether they offer or recommend accessible holiday homes, or have linkages to those available in other countries.

SENIOR TRAVELLERS

In the nature of things, many of us with disabilities are in the senior age range. It may be that the gentler pace of vacations designed for the more mature adventurer will be all the extra help you need, so why not look at some of the options available exclusively for senior citizens? Ask friends to recommend destinations and services they have enjoyed, or talk to your travel agent. With some basic searching, you can also find many websites to help you make the right choice for your interests and abilities.

Extra holiday help and information

For the blind or vision impaired

› www.traveleyes-international.com
(09) 889 2393

For those with hearing impairments

› www.deafservicecenter.org/deaf-travel-tips-for-travel-for-deaf-people.htm

Getaways for wheelchair users

› Phone (09) 486 0636 or visit www.restnztours.co.nz/tours/accessible-zealand
› Accessible travel planning help
Visit www.travelplanner.co.nz

NZ Government travel advice

Visit (04) 439 8000 or visit www.safetravel.govt.nz/beforeugo/disabilities.shtml

Senior Travel

› www.grownups.co.nz
› www.tourism.net.nz/tours/age-group-tours
› travel.msn.co.nz/8292478/seniors-abroad
› www.fullers.co.nz/tickets-fares/seniortravel.php or phone (09) 367 9111

NZ Interisland Ferries

Check before you book!
www.interislander.co.nz/Our-Ships-And-Services/People-With-Disabilities.aspx
www.bluebridge.co.nz 0800 844 844
www.bluebridge.co.nz/ferry-facilities/special-assistance

NZ Bus + Coach Travel

This site will take you to a nationwide company which makes a point of welcoming travellers with disabilities. Most, especially budget bus and coach lines, are unable to accommodate special needs.
www.greatsights.co.nz
0800 744 487
www.greatsights.co.nz/visitor-information/about-greatsights/access

NZ Train Travel

Wheelchairs can be accommodated on board but not motor scooters or other bulky equipment. The staff are unable to assist with support needs, so if these are significant, you will need a companion to help you. Kiwirail/Tranzscenic www.kiwirail.co.nz or phone 0800 801 070

When planning your trip

- › Be very clear about your circumstances when speaking with cruise lines, airlines, tour operators or travel agents.
- › Be honest about your requirements to both the cruise line and airline if you are flying to meet your ship in another port.
- › Ask what special facilities are available to cater for your needs e.g. wheelchair-accessible cabins aboard ship, special aisle chairs for boarding the plane, accessible rooms in hotels/motels etc.
- › If applicable, check that your special apparatus, needles etc, can be accommodated on the ship, plane, coach or train.
- › Make sure any hazardous materials such as oxygen or certain medications can be carried with you, though you may need a special permit for this.
- › When flying, ask the airline if it is possible to increase your carry-on allowance if you need heavy or bulky equipment, special foods or sanitary supplies etc.
- › If you use a service animal, check if they can be accommodated and what facilities are provided for them, if any.
- › If you require special liquid meals, medicines or lotions etc, check if you can have a dispensation from the rule which prohibits liquids of more than 100ml in the aircraft cabin. If not, ask what arrangements can be made for these to be placed in the custody of the crew until needed.
- › Start planning early - it can take some time to organise special permits and facilities.
- › Make sure your passport is up to date.
- › Find out about any vaccinations you might need for your chosen destinations.
- › Get a letter from your doctor outlining your condition and requirements and certifying you are fit to travel.
- › Make sure you have travel insurance - getting sick overseas can be a costly business! **FC**

