

HOW TO FIND ACCESSIBLE HOLIDAYS

THE PERFECT TRAVEL GUIDE FOR
A DISABILITY OR ADDITIONAL NEEDS.

WORDS **ANTONIA WINDSOR**

When I start planning a holiday some of the things I have to bear in mind are “will there be mud?”, “will we need to walk on sand?”, “how long are the corridors?”, “how far is the dining room from the accommodation?” If I don’t think about these things then I have to accept that my husband probably won’t be joining me and our three children for breakfast, or dinner, or any number of other activities. That’s because he has a complex spinal injury from a car >



crash in 2004 and he walks with difficulty. Were he in a chair, our requirements would be different. Every family with a member with additional needs will have different access requirements, which can make booking an accessible holiday a bit of a minefield.

Thankfully, things have improved in the travel industry and accessibility is at the front of many minds. There is still some way to go. I have yet to see a disabled room in prime position at the front of a hotel with stunning sea views in the UK; they are normally round the back by the car park and are the last to get a design upgrade. However, in countries such as Japan entire floors of swanky hotels, such as the Keio Plaza hotel in Tokyo, are dedicated to accessible rooms. In fact, one of the key taglines for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (currently taking place)



A SELECTION OF PHOTOS OF ANTONIA AND HER FAMILY.

is “Diversity and Inclusivity; know differences, show differences” and the city has made huge improvements since they were awarded the games in 2013.

I don’t think I will ever be able to afford to take the family to Japan. So it is good news that there are plenty of great options close to home.

The Youth Hostel Association (YHA) is a great affordable option for families with additional needs. Many hostels have disabled-access rooms and they are all child-friendly. Jenny Lunnon, who’s son is autistic is so passionate about the flexibility that staying in youth hostels provides that she’s become an ambassador for YHA.

“A staff member at YHA Keswick, a recently-refurbished town-centre hostel, told me someone had phoned to ask if the hostel was heated,” says Jenny. “Hostels vary a lot.

Some are in stately homes and grand old hotels and some are simple bunkhouses, one level of comfort up from camping. It depends on what you want and need. Everywhere we’ve found the mattresses comfortable and the duvets warm, and our children love the novelty of bunk beds.”

All hostels have access statements on their individual web pages so you can check facilities before you book. YHA Boggle

Hole and YHA South Downs are particularly good for families.

Another useful companion to booking an accessible holiday is the travel company Disabled Holidays. The team understands the full gamut of disabilities and special needs and has access to a wide range of suitable holidays; from beach resorts and cottage rentals to safaris and cruises. The website Disabledholidays.com provides inspiration on the types of holiday possible and is a good place to find out about specialist provision, such as the dementia-supported holidays provided by Mind For You or holiday grants available from organisations such as Make a Wish UK or the Sandcastle Trust. However, the company’s real value lies in their travel office, which is staffed by people with a wide knowledge of the market who are able to suggest things you wouldn’t necessarily think of yourself. “All of our team are highly skilled



YHA AMBASSADOR JENNY LUNNON AND HER CHILDREN (ALEX AND ISLA) WHILE STAYING AT YHA BOGGLE HOLE.

in the travel industry and also receive disability awareness training and visit equipment suppliers and properties,” explains business development manager, Gillian Moorhouse-Hoole. “We have a mixture of trained staff with backgrounds in travel, care, disability and therapeutic backgrounds. Several

staff members have personal experience of holidaying as a family where a member of their family has a disability, which is very beneficial.”

Sometimes you will be able to take a holiday to a popular resort. In the UK Butlins, Center Parcs, Bluestone and Haven Holidays all have good accessibility provision, as does Disneyland in Orlando and Paris. The major travel company TUI has a specialist phone line to call if you have access

needs (0203 451 2585). At other times you might need the enhanced provision that a company such as Revitalise provides, which organises respite holidays for families that need 24-hour on-call nursing support.

And if it’s days out you are looking for, then the Rough Guide to Accessible Britain, an entirely free resource that you can access online, is packed with more than 200 ideas for accessible days out in the UK. ■

ACCESSIBLE DAYS OUT IN THE UK



1 A magical spot for storytelling set to capture the heart of children

Everyone can enjoy the multi-sensory journey at the Discover Children’s Story Centre which includes secret caves, an enchanted forest, a giant spacecraft and plenty of hidey-holes. This blissfully uncrowded spot does everything it can to be as accessible as possible including the Saturday morning Mighty Mega club for children with SEN needs. The centre is located near Stratford High Street.

Photos: iStock; Vasilios Muselimis/Unsplash



2 Let children enjoy the animals at “No Ordinary Zoo”!

Drusillas is a play park and Zoo full of cute and cuddly creatures. Both parents and children will enjoy a walk through Lemurland and everyone will learn something with all the fun “finding-out facts” about the animals. The whole park is wheelchair accessible and completely accommodating to additional needs. The only question left to ask is “can your children hold their breath as long as a penguin?”. Drusillas is located in East Sussex.



3 Wrap up warm to visit the National Ice Centre

The National Ice Centre is home to the Nottingham Panthers and has Olympic standard facilities but is suitable for everyone! There are many live events and concerts including options for parents and toddlers and the centre is entirely inclusive with a relaxed skating session just for those who need a quieter atmosphere. Soon everyone will be gliding over the ice!