



Majestic Princess

Inset: Our writer, Beth D'Addono, and her father, Vito

Below: Onboard entertainment



CHARTING A NEW COURSE

Ocean cruises can offer vacation accessibility that's sometimes not available on land.

By Beth D'Addono



Imagine my surprise when my 95-year-old musician dad, Vito, showed me his new passport and said he wanted to take a cruise.

It had been more than a decade since Dad had last traveled and more than 20 years since he had last cruised, working a series of gigs playing saxophone with the Glenn Miller Big Band on Crystal Cruises. Since that time, he's been widowed, and his mobility has been greatly curtailed by spinal stenosis, with a curvature in his spine and painful neuropathy affecting his movement. He can't walk much, and he uses a combination of a wheelchair and rollator to move short distances. But he's as sharp as ever and knows his own mind.

Before making any plans, we needed to do some research. How do cruise lines accommodate guests who are differently abled? Dad is based in Palm Desert, California, so it made sense to research lines that cruised out of Los Angeles. Princess Cruises, a line I'd personally experienced and enjoyed, seemed a good fit for both its demographic appeal and variety of trip options. So, we started there.

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Casino Fiesta slot machines

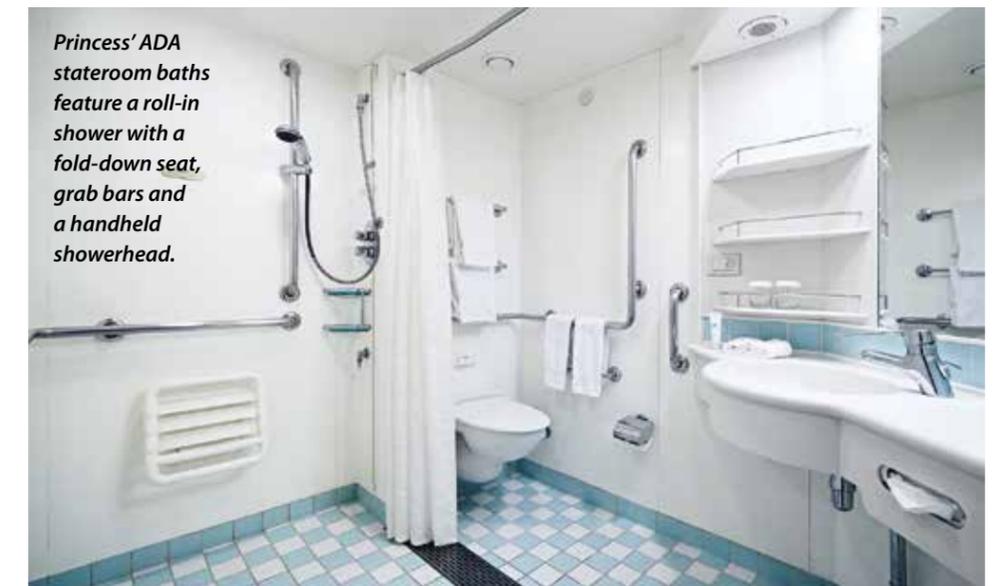
What to Expect

The good news is that all Princess staterooms now have touchless entry via a wearable device that unlocks the door as the guest approaches. No fumbling with cards or keys is necessary.

My dad would need an ADA stateroom for sure, with its wider doorways, larger bathrooms with roll-in showers and accessible balconies. The number of accessible staterooms varies by ship. On the newest ship, *Sun Princess*, 3 percent of the 2,157 staterooms are accessible, so it's important to book early and be flexible with dates.

We also learned through our research that special accommodations for guests with ability challenges begins at embarkation with a designated "Accessibility Lane," as well as wheelchair assistance upon request, which makes the process easier. Once aboard, guests with mobility challenges and their traveling partners will find handrails in common spaces, banks of elevators, and reserved seating in the casino, restaurants and theaters. For guests with visual impairments, large-print or Braille menus are available with 60 days' notice. Excursions are clearly labeled with activity level and accessibility.

Princess, like most cruise lines, has a designated Access Office to field special requests related to disabilities. The first step is to fill out the Mobility Questionnaire at the time of booking. Questions address what type of mobility devices are used, if the passenger can transfer from the device to a seat, whether a companion/caregiver will be assisting, and if an accessible room is needed on pre- or post-tour options and so on.



Princess' ADA stateroom baths feature a roll-in shower with a fold-down seat, grab bars and a handheld showerhead.

A Growing Segment of the Market

Dad isn't alone in his disabilities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than one in four adults in the US currently live with some sort of disability, a number sure to increase as Baby Boomers age. And some of those folks are lifelong travelers with no intention of giving up on their wanderlust.

Cruise lines and other hospitality companies are working to improve the travel experience for the differently abled, a good move since travelers with mobility issues spend an average of \$58.2 billion per year on travel, according to a recent report from MMGY Global, a leading marketing company specializing in the travel, tourism and hospitality industry.

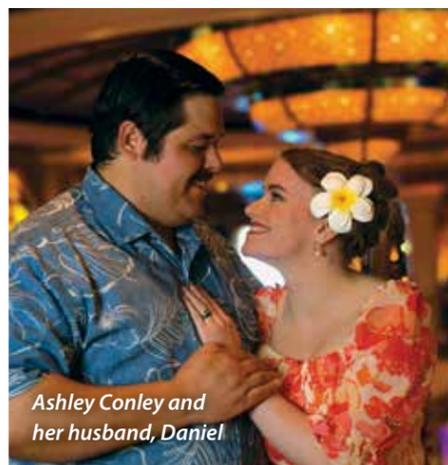
Cruising checks many of the right boxes for differently abled travelers, according to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), which represents more than 50 global cruise lines. CLIA's 2023 *State of the Cruise Industry* report noted that the number of accessible cabins is increasing in the cruise industry to meet the needs of travelers with limited mobility or those who travel with someone of limited

mobility, “the vast majority of whom...say they view a cruise holiday as the only travel option that meets their needs.” The same holds true for travelers with special sensory and cognitive needs.

And in 2024, CLIA noted that wheelchair-accessible and mobility-friendly shore excursions were also increasing.

Avid traveler Ashley Conley, who lives in the Los Angeles area, has a genetic neurological condition that is progressively chipping away at her mobility—but not at her will to travel. The former medical transcriptionist, now 37, is wheelchair bound. And she’s had plenty of roadblocks placed in her path while traveling on land, despite the promise of accessibility.

“So many times we show up, and my wheelchair can’t fit through a doorway, or the bathroom isn’t truly accessible,” she says. “Or we park in a handicapped spot, but there are no curb cuts.”



Ashley Conley and her husband, Daniel

COURTESY OF ASHLEY CONLEY

That’s why she and her husband, Daniel, love cruising, and Princess is their line of choice. The couple recently completed their third voyage out of Los Angeles, this time opting for an ADA-accessible stateroom. It made all the difference, she says.

Conley notes that cruising offers her important benefits. “I can’t be upright for long. I need to take breaks. On the cruise, I can be back in the room in five minutes—not waiting for a car to show up and fighting our way through traffic.”

Although they’ve taken excursions in the past, the couple skipped that option on their most recent cruise. “We wanted to chill, enjoy good quality food and entertainment,” she says. “We splurged on the specialty restaurants. We loved the behind-the-scenes Chef’s Table experience. I’m so happy we’ve finally found a way to actually take a vacation.”

After our research, my dad and I agree that cruising seems like the perfect option for him. For now, he’s decided to stick close to home. But when he’s ready, the path forward will definitely be by sea.



Sky Princess wheelchair-accessible stateroom

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