

# Disney Cruising with Special Needs - Vision Impairment: A Disney Cruise Line Planning Article

by Amy Wear, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Last December, my family got to enjoy our second Very Merry Time cruise.

After first sailing the Disney Wonder, this time around we brought along my parents to sail its sister ship, the Disney Magic. We knew that cruising with my parents would be a completely different experience, not just because we wouldn't have a new family to dine with, but because we would be juggling different interests and abilities.

My dad is blind from a progressive eye disease called Retinitis Pigmentosa. He gradually lost his eyesight in his 30s and 40s, so he's able to draw on memories to enhance the experiences he has now without eyesight. This was also our trip to mark Dad's 70th birthday. We chose to do this a few months early, when prices were much better than in the spring.

□

□ Here are some things to keep in mind when planning a Disney cruise with a differently abled family member&hellip;

□

□ Discuss how you want to spend your days before the trip. Just as there's a tendency for multi-generational families to feel they should stay together all day every day at the Disney Parks, it would be easy to adopt this mindset on a cruise as well. We decided to give everyone the choice to do something special during the cruise, negotiating who would go with whom.

We split up for our various port adventures and even left Dad and our older daughter to enjoy the ship on our Cozumel day while the rest of us did separate port adventures. Dad and Abby were perfectly content with time to relax on the comfy lounge chairs while watching (listening to) the waves go by, eat as much junk food as they could without mommy around to comment, and take in a movie in the Buena Vista Theatre.

□

□ Less is more. After negotiating something for everyone in port, I realized that I hadn't booked Dad on any of the official port adventures. I knew Dad would be content to enjoy the ship's amenities (especially the pool deck) and dining, but since he spends most of the summer walking to the local beach, he simply had to have a chance to swim in

the Caribbean.

□

□So while my husband and older daughter went snorkeling with the stingrays in Grand Cayman (again), the rest of us took a short taxi ride to Seven Mile Beach. It was Dad's first time in the Caribbean Sea and a dream come true -- which is evident from our pictures. The water was perfect for swimming and he had plenty of space to move around without worrying about running into people.

□

□Walt Disney Theatre productions are for everyone. On deck 3 of the Magic class ships, there is an alternate entrance into the theatre for people with a wide range of mobility and other issues. Stairs with a crowd of hurried people looking for good seats aren't a good mix for Dad, so we appreciated the option to meet with a cast member on deck 3 about 40 minutes before show time to enter the theatre on the bottom level and find seats before the doors open to everyone else.

□

□Those with vision impairment can also sign out a headset for descriptive narration of the show. This combined with the multisensory aspect of live theatre gave Dad an enhanced experience for each production. Dad has always enjoyed live theatre and I caught him wiping away happy tears more than once on show nights. The same headset can be used in the movie theatre, which Dad appreciated when he and Abby went to see *The BFG* together.

□

□Explain your specific needs to your servers. We wasted no time in explaining Dad's needs to our servers on the first night in Animator's Palace. Only a few simple things need to be noted for Dad to have an enjoyable dining experience; for instance, he needs to know where his drink is and for it to be kept away from the edge of the table, where it can easily be spilled (and no straw, please). He also needs to be told when food is being served to him and where it is on his plate.

□

□It's the little things that set Disney servers apart time after time. Dad asked for help with cutting his steak one night and never had to ask again. Each night our assistant server, Marcus, would come along and discreetly cut up his meat. Dad was also tickled pink on formal night when our servers sang happy birthday to him and presented him with his own celebratory cake.

□

□Note the accessible washroom locations. Since it's very difficult for Dad to navigate in an unfamiliar washroom, an accessible washroom is drastically easier for him to use. On the Magic class, these are found near the public areas on most decks, such as near the forward elevators on deck 9 (adult pool zone).

□

□ Book an accessible cabin, if needed. While most people associate accessible cabins with wheelchair and scooter users, Dad needed an accessible cabin to move safely around the bathroom and living space. The extra space in the bathroom was crucial, as the tight quarters in the split baths would most certainly result in bumps and bruises, if not another serious injury (comes with the territory when you are visually impaired or blind).

□ A cruise may be more manageable than a Disney Parks vacation. While many families may still prefer land over sea, our family found the cruise to be a more relaxing affair. Boomer grandparents of all abilities will appreciate a break from the marathon walking and touring at Disney Parks. You get your Disney "fix" while knowing the option to rest poolside or back in your cabin is just a quick elevator ride away. There's no list of attractions to check off and your daily schedule is largely determined by your own interests.

□ At the end of the cruise, we all agreed that this was one of the most enjoyable vacation experiences we've had together as an extended family. Lord willing, we'll all sail with Mickey again "real soon"!

*About The Author: Amy Wear is a work at home Mom, travel agent, writer, and registered occupational therapist. She lives in New Brunswick, Canada, and specializes in planning magical vacations for people of all abilities at [Click the Mouse](#).*

Article last updated: 02-23-2017

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/disney-cruise-special-needs.html>

Copyright by Amy Wear. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act. Resale of this guide is strictly prohibited without the copyright holder's permission. If you purchased this publication from someone other than PassPorter Travel Press, please call 877-929-3273.

View more PassPorter Articles online at <http://www.passporter.com/articles/>