



Festival Accessibility for Wheelchair Users

By Steven Nguyen

Photo by Jeff Kravitz

Spring is in full swing, which means flowers are blooming, warm weather and festival galore in the New Orleans area. From the more nationally recognized New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, to much smaller church and community fairs, there's always something going on.

For someone with a physical disability, who may use a wheelchair, walker or other durable medical equipment, attending a festival may be daunting to even consider and may be a nerve-wrecking experience once you get there. However, if adequately prepared, it could

turn out to be one of your best experiences.

Many festivals try their best to accommodate all their patrons, including those with physical disabilities. Some examples of accommodations include getting moved to the front of the line, wheelchair-friendly seating area to watch the live performances, paved sidewalks so that you can get from point a to point b, accessible parking, charging areas to accommodate those power chairs that need a little juice, and accessible restrooms and port-a-potties, etc. It's

worth contacting festival organizers and doing a little research to see just what kind of accommodations they offer for you.

Here are a few tips that I learned from going to festivals myself, as someone who uses a manual chair and for many friends who use a power-chair (primarily).

1. Tag along with someone or go with a group of people you know and trust who will help you make the most of your experience.
2. Don't be afraid to ask for help! I find that many festival goers are super friendly and are willing to help you if needed.
3. If possible, use a manual chair instead of your power chair. This way, you don't have to worry about the chair running out of juice while you're

enjoying yourself. If this is not possible, make sure your chair is fully charged before heading out there.

4. Check the day's forecast before heading out for that day and plan accordingly! One of the most difficult elements to get around in, for me, is wet, muddy conditions! It's just not possible with the type of wheels that I have on my chair.

Do research before heading out! Many of the larger festivals have websites that you can visit. You can also contact festival organizers to find out this information.

Yes, wheelchair festival-going requires some patience and planning, but don't let it take away from the opportunity for you to enjoy it!



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