

"All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveller is unaware.

- Martin Buber

Vacations are the highlights of the year – time off from one's day to day grind, and something many of us hard workers plan and look forward to. As a person with a disability, vacationing takes more planning and preparation than what is typical. While popping online and finding the best package on Expedia is a common approach for most people, when you have a wheelchair or other medical device, these quick vaca hubs can be more of a disaster than a savings. I've had my own personal situations of vacas gone right and those few gone wrong. One of the most interesting vacations was this past May on MSC Cruise lines. While a bit challenging to setup, it turned out to be one of the more smooth sailing trips ever.

Prepping for the High Seas

One of my major concerns with going on a cruise ship was traveling with my service dog, Remy. While the law requires cruise ships to provide equal access, the reality of having a service dog onboard was uncertain. Where would we take him to relieve himself? Would customs give us trouble regarding taking his food on board? How do we get him in and out of each island without security issues? How would people in other countries react? My first step was to contact the cruise line to get more intel on how things would be handled. While I'd like to say it was all smooth sailing – the reality was much different. Only after over 20 emails spanning more than two months did I receive confirmation that everything was in order.

Pro Tips for traveling on a cruise ship with your service dog:

1. Communicate your needs with the company – and get in touch with the department managing special needs
2. Prepare to have relieve your service animal in a not so comfortable area – we were given a semi indoor space behind a bar, and a tiny box filled w/kitty litter for my dog to relieve himself. A MAJOR change from the grass he's accustomed to
3. Get your veterinarian on board with your travel plans – ours was amazing at helping prep paperwork needed to enter each island
4. START EARLY – especially if you're traveling to the Caribbean, be ready for delays in paperwork. Get what you can done as early as possible and make copies of everything!



Author: Lorinda Gonzalez resides in South Florida with her family and service dog, Remy. She was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy at the age of three, and has used a motorized wheelchair for mobility since the age of nine. As an avid writer and reader, she has worked as a grant writer and editor since 2009. With the help of her family, it has grown to become a successful endeavor. Lorinda holds a Bachelor in the Arts Degree in English Writing and Rhetoric, and is currently completing a Masters of Arts Degree in Communications. She is a co-found of NMD United, 501 ©3 and on the board of multiple non-profit organizations. In her free time, Lorinda enjoys spending time with family and friends, painting, listening to music, and traveling to historical locations.