



With a little help from my friends

Everyone needs to get away for a while. **Ruth Stokes** has ideas for those travelling with specialist needs

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Travelling to new places is a joy and a challenge. Negotiating unknown streets, adapting to local customs and grappling with a different language can leave even the most enthusiastic tourists flummoxed, but for anyone with a specialist need the effort can seem overwhelming. With towns and cities making efforts to improve accessibility – encouraged by EU legislation, a host of specialised tours and a new travel service from The Co-operative Travel designed to cope with specific health problems – getting away from it all has never been easier. And taking a holiday is important. As the author Mark Twain wrote, *Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do.* So the only question is 'where'?

The charming town of Polis in Cyprus is perfect for a hassle-free escape. It has quiet beaches backed by lush meadows dotted with citrus trees. The town is compact and easy to explore – if you happen to be staying at the accessible-specialised C&A Apartments, it's a 20-minute amble to the beach. Spend time lounging at street cafés or simply enjoying the sunshine by the sea.

Tenerife has been catering for years for people who get

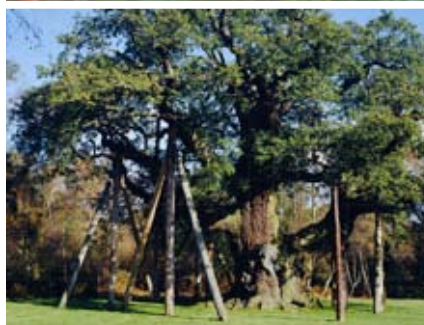
around in a wheelchair. On the south-west coast, the wide seaside boulevards and white sand beaches of Playa de las Americas and its slightly quieter neighbour Los Cristianos offer sun and sea all year round, just four hours' flying time from the UK. These resorts have wheelchair-accessible restaurants, bars and shops. Further west is Costa Adeje, where a number of recently built, luxurious four- and five-star hotels have been designed with disabled clients in mind.

City and cultural breaks

For a European city break, head to Prague. The city has made an effort to improve its accessibility, from specially designed paths in the botanical gardens to lift access in the city's tallest building, the Zizkov TV Tower. After admiring the view, soak up the exhibitions at Prague Castle. The city has many unique exhibitions, and, catering to the visually impaired, some can be appreciated by touch.

Over the border in Poland is the romantic city of Krakow. It has quaint historic charm by day, but a lively bar scene when the sun sets. The main square in the city's Stare Miasto (old town) is pleasant, and much of the city's old centre is pedestrianised. The Wawel Royal Castle, which displays

Clockwise from left: Prague castle; an adapted cabin on a Norwegian Cruise Lines ship; wheelchair-friendly accommodation; Krakow's nightlife



the national art collection, has been adjusted to accommodate all – and is well worth visiting. The market in the main square is the place to find Polish amber.

Visually-impaired travellers can sign up for a Krakow holiday tour with Traveleyes International, a company which brings together partially sighted/blind and sighted travellers. The sighted half of the group, paint verbal pictures for the rest of the group. Traveleyes has a range of destinations, from Egypt to Las Vegas and their tours can be booked through our Specialist Advisors.

A quieter slice of culture can be found in the elegant, French fishing town of La Rochelle – accessible by plane, boat and train. La Rochelle's past architecture is beautifully preserved. Visit one of its three harbours, its arched walkways and numerous green spaces.

Smooth sailing

Cruise ships now cater well for everyone, with lifts to all floors, flat public areas and ramps to get ashore. Cruise lines, including Fred. Olsen and P&O Cruises, have cabins adapted for those in wheelchairs. Norwegian Cruise Lines also offer Braille and audio deck announcements for visually-impaired travellers, and vibrating pillow alarms and light indicator systems for those hard of hearing.

A popular cruise route from the UK is the voyage to Scandinavia. Busy ports such as Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen are complemented by the peace of the Norwegian Fjords. Stockholm is good for wheelchair users as most underground stations have lifts and there's good access to museums, restaurants and tourist attractions.

A Mediterranean cruise promises warmer weather, however and the chance to explore the bustling cities, such as Barcelona. Or you could discover Tripoli, Libya's capital and a mosaic of historic influences. Make sure you enjoy a meal on the roof terrace at the Al-Dar before heading back to the comfort of your ship.

Clockwise from left: Thoresby Hall; Stockholm, convenient port of call; getting around in Barcelona; Sherwood Forest's Major Oak

A great British holiday

At home, Britain is catering for those with special needs. *The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* (Penguin, £6.99) has a variety of things to see and do. One attraction is Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve, Nottinghamshire. Stay at the Thoresby Hotel and Spa and it is right on your doorstep. Accessible routes are clearly marked and will take you past the Major Oak, which Robin Hood and his men are said to have used as a hiding place.

Alternatively, escape to Haven's Haggerston Castle in Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland. With seven lakes, acres of woodland and Italianate gardens, this is British countryside at its best. The five-star, landscaped park offers a range of activities, from archery to boating. Adapted caravans are available. Visit the town to see the only Elizabethan walls still standing in Britain today, enjoy an art exhibition or the sea air. Then pop into a cosy pub – the easy, friendly atmosphere makes it easy to relax.

Inspired? Then go along to your local branch of The Co-operative Travel. All of our Specialist Advisors have received extensive training so offer expert knowledge and advice. The Co-operative Travel works in partnership with tour operators who are leaders in providing specialist travel solutions. Browse the Specialist Travel guide in store to see the huge range of holidays and services available. ■

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