

THE RESOURCE EXCHANGE
EARLY INTERVENTION
COLORADO



Best Special Needs Vacation Spots - by Erika Kotite

Anyone who has organized a trip for the whole family knows how much time and effort it takes. But if you're the parent of a special needs child, you can pretty much double or triple that figure. So much preparation is required that getting out of the house, reaching your destination successfully and still managing to have a good time could be considered a small miracle. Nevertheless, families do it every day -- and have the time of their lives, over and over again.

It's important to have a system, call ahead and expect the unexpected. But it also helps to choose a destination that "gets it." Thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990, public buildings have been equipped with ramps, elevators and restrooms that accommodate people in wheelchairs. But when it comes to the

serious business of having fun, vacation destinations need to go way beyond the minimum legal requirements.

Parents with children on the autism spectrum are looking for places that are full of things to see and do, while maintaining a sense of order and calm. They will often need flexibility from the chef as well. With food allergies and intolerances on the rise, families often need make special requests, such as gluten-free or peanut-free dishes.

"Preparation for Disney World begins well before departure," says Melissa Chelist of Chesterfield, Mo., whose daughter has a severe peanut allergy. "Once we've informed the airline we get on the phone with the head chef; all the Disney resorts have one. We need to find out which restaurants are safe and which to avoid."

Barbara Streett, a professional writer and mother of three in San Francisco whose oldest son is autistic, takes her family camping, to the beach and recently visited Utah, Florida and Hawaii. Through the years she's noted an increasing awareness of service providers and fellow travelers, feeling that this has helped smooth things out for her family. "You see a lot more accommodation and understanding than you did 10 years ago," she notes.

For children with wheelchairs, you will require information in advance on airline navigation and access into

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hotels, homes, restaurants and attractions. In addition, finding resorts and programs that offer adaptive sports and activities is a huge bonus.

Parents like Streett have destinations selected after years of trial and error. But for parents who are just beginning to travel with their children or those seeking new adventures, there are certain destinations that pay special attention to special needs and are worth noting.

SUMMER FUN

Shared Adventures, Santa Cruz, Calif.

[Santa Cruz](#) is a well-known summer spot because of its Beach Boardwalk and gorgeous beach location. But it is also home to Shared Adventures, a non-profit organization that puts on an impressive array of programs through the summer for special needs children and adults. In July they host an annual Day on the Beach, which offers adaptive or assisted kayaking, canoe rides, scuba diving and flotation for people of all ages. Volunteers erect plywood "paths" for wheelchair access; you can also rent beach wheelchairs. The day ends with live music and free food.

Club Getaway, Berkshires

Club Getaway in Kent, Conn., part of the [Berkshires](#), is touted as a convenient getaway for urban dwellers in the tri-state area (NY/NJ/CT). The setting is beautiful and there are lots of things to do. For Elizabeth Pflaum, a certified parent coach and mother to an autistic son, it's a haven of rest. "It's safe, relaxing and not overly stimulating," she says. Families stay in rustic cabins with fully modern amenities. Families can kayak or try out the flying trapeze over the lake. Special Parents & Kids Getaway programs occur in August.

Splore, Moab, Utah

Splore, a not-for-profit that provides outdoor activities for special needs children and adults at affordable prices. They organize river trips, rock climbing and hiking through a partnership with [Red Cliffs Lodge](#). More of a resort than a hotel, Red Cliffs Lodge offers an impressive variety of accommodations and activities. Four wheeling, river riding, horseback riding, mountain biking, scenic flights and hiking are all within 10 minutes of the lodge. There are wheelchair-accessible rooms adjacent to the lodge. Sidewalks with ramps lead to all patios and to the museum. And while meals are "traditional cowboy fare," the chefs can rustle up special menus upon request. Utah itself prides itself on offering accessible recreation. Earlier this year the Utah Office of Tourism released "Accessible Utah," a guide to the places, organizations and activities that cater to special needs travel.

WINTER SKIING

Mont Tremblant, Montreal

Although Cara Brown's middle child has global developmental delay, she nevertheless looks for vacation spots that work for her whole family. "We just kind of make it work, no matter what," Brown says. Every member of the family is an avid skier, so the Browns' annual trip to Mont Tremblant is a must. Located near [Montreal](#), Mont Tremblant offers 95 runs serviced by 14 lifts. Besides skiing, winter activities also include snowmobiling, sleigh riding, ice-skating, dog sledding and ice fishing. Private ski lessons are available and many of the instructors are experienced in working with special needs children. For wheelchair users, Mt. Tremblant offers sit skiing, a sled-like platform guided by a second skier to negotiate a ski slope or trail. No reservations are necessary. It's easy to get around, too -- rooms are all ADA accessible and are generously sized for wheelchair maneuverability. Parents of children with allergies can request special meals at any of the resort's restaurants. Every menu lists the ingredients in each dish and amendments are made cheerfully.

Colorado Ski Resorts

Skiers in [Colorado](#) have a lot of choices when it comes to adaptive ski programs. The [Breckenridge Ski Resorts](#) offer lessons for alpine skiing, snowboarding and cross-country skiing at Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Heavenly, Keystone and [Vail](#). Families need to call ahead for schedules and availability. The Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center provides lessons in all types of adaptive skiing at Copper Mountain Resort; the fee includes one-on-one instruction, specialized equipment and lift ticket.

Park City Resort, Utah

Meanwhile back in Utah, great skiing awaits at a number of resorts and lodges. [Park City Resort](#) is one of the biggest ski destinations in Utah; and according to Barb Likos, a professional writer and mother to a wheelchair-using son, it is also the best for catering to physical disabilities. "The resort works in tandem with the National Ability Center to make adaptive skiing part of a whole family experience," she explains. Last winter, when the resort's newest tube lift could no longer accommodate her son's wheelchair, the staff insisted on towing him up via snowmobile each time. Later, Likos found out they revamped the lift with a rubber and wood platform so that disabled tubers could sit on their tubes on the way up the lift.

AMUSEMENT PARKS

Dollywood, Gatlinburg, TN

Tara Kline-Kennedy of Shoemakersville, Pa., took her two boys to [Dollywood](#) recently and they loved it -- especially her youngest, who is autistic. "He loved the calmness of it even though it was a theme park," she recalls. "In addition to the great shows and exhibits there were tons of rides he could enjoy, even at his small size." Dollywood is located within Tennessee's [Smoky Mountains](#) and has a rural feel, with lots of trees and natural creeks running through it. Guest Services provides families with information on each ride and whether or not it's appropriate for kids with special needs. Recently the park adapted two of its attractions -- River Battle, a water ride with boats and Adventure Mountain, the largest ropes course in the country -- to accept wheelchairs. They also modified the Barnstormer, a swing ride, with seats that non-ambulatory children could access.

Morgan's Wonderland, San Antonio, Texas

One of childhood's most cherished sensations is that of flying through the air on a swing. This was something many disabled children never experienced -- until Morgan's Wonderland came along. Billed as the world's first Ultra Accessible Family Fun Park, this playland in [San Antonio](#) offers 30 traditional, adaptive and wheelchair swings along with many other rides and activities. A lake is stocked with fish for catch-and-release fun. Artists perform at an amphitheater with flat levels for wheelchairs. Visitors with special needs get free admission.

RESORT TRAVEL

The nice thing about resort travel is that ideally, everything from lodging to dining to activities is in one easy-to-reach place. But just because a resort is advertised as having "something for everyone," doesn't mean it will have even the basics for special needs families.

Lucy Cusick, whose son has cerebral palsy and is in a wheelchair, looks for resorts that offer accessible taxi service for their offsite activities. But she has an entire "wish list" for a truly special needs-friendly resort. "I would look for poolside tables with plenty of shade; restaurants with tables that aren't too close together; paved walkways to the beach; family, or unisex, restrooms in the public spaces; and of course the ultimate: a pool chairlift," she says.

Smuggler's Notch, VT

[Smuggler's Notch](#) is an overall winner for family fun, providing a heady combination of pools (eight in total, plus four waterslides), camps (including special interest camps like tennis), and mountainside condos with full kitchens and one to three bedrooms. But what truly makes it shine is its SNAP program (Smuggler's Notch Adaptive Program) offers nine adaptive activities including swimming, hikes and horseback riding. The resort also has an inclusion program to help integrate children with special needs into group activities. Be sure to call ahead for reservations.

Great Wolf Lodge, Nationwide

With 11 locations across North America and a 12th soon to open in California, [Great Wolf Lodge](#) is like an exotic destination within (or at least close to) your own backyard. Famous for its giant indoor water parks and rustic-themed rooms with kid caves, this family-friendly resort is a favorite destination for 4 million visitors every year. Best news of all for special-needs families is that besides being fully ADA compliant in their accommodations, Great Wolf Lodge also offers "zero entry" pools at most of their locations and in the water parks. The company is also planning to install chairlifts in the pools without zero entry within the next few years, notes senior communications manager Bethany Perkins. "Nearly any kind of special accommodation will be made for visitors if we just have some advance notice," she says. "I know for a fact that the chefs welcome special menu requests, because it allows them to get creative."

Disney Resorts

Of course, it's hard to beat the [Disney resorts](#) in pretty much any category, and catering to special needs children is one of them. Although the parks, which include Disneyland, Walt Disney World, Epcot Center and California Adventure are full of crowds, bustle and activity, they all manage to personalize service for families with special needs. When Melissa Chelist first brought her daughter to Goofy's Diner at Disney World, she made a reservation months in advance, notified the chef of Leah's peanut allergy, and then called again on the eve of their dinner.

"The chef came out and told Leah she could have anything she wanted to eat," Chelist says. "Leah looked at him with her big blue eyes and rattled off her menu of choice. The chef then informed us that they had purchased all new pots, pans and utensils just for our meal. We were so overwhelmed with this generosity we've told the story many times."

The Disney hotels near the theme parks have a special reservation form that allows visitors to request anything from roll-in showers to double-rinsed linens. The theme parks offer guides that show mobility requirements for each ride. And don't forget to ask about designated viewing spots along parade routes and shows!

Wyndham Hotels

The Wyndham chain of hotels strives to be sensitive to guests with special needs. The [Wyndham Westshore](#), for example, was designated [Tampa's](#) first "Autism-Friendly" hotel. The staff has been trained by the Center for Autism & Related Disabilities at the University of South Florida. Since autistic children often respond better to places they familiar with, a kit is available that offers stories about the hotel and various "comfort items." Another great property is the [Wyndham Garden Hotel in Austin](#), Texas, offering five standard rooms with an extra double bed -- at a discount -- to families with an autistic child. The rooms are equipped with safety features such as shortened blind cords, corner guard cushions and outlet covers. The restaurant offers a "Thoughtful" menu that contains items free of casein, gluten and soy. Staff has been trained in autism awareness.

Carlson Hotels

Better known as Country Inns & Suites, the kids will love their complimentary "Short Stature Kit" at Carlson Hotels. The kit made with little people in mind, consists of a stool, closet rod adaptor, "poke 'n pull" stick and a grabber tool, making it ideal for wheelchair users as well. "I wish that kit was in every hotel," says Kelly Rouba of Hamilton, N.J., and the author of "Juvenile Arthritis: The Ultimate Teen Guide". "Another great thing to request (for wheelchair users) is a roll-in shower."

As time goes on there will be less reason for families with special-needs children to forego fun vacations. "Some families may isolate themselves, sacrificing family gatherings, holidays and vacations because they don't know how to set the stage for a stress-free time," says Dr. Caroline Eggerding, vice president of medical services for Bancroft, a New Jersey-based company that provides programs for children and adults with disabilities. "It's not a simple task, but it can be accomplished if you accept, adapt and stay flexible."

For more on Special Needs Travel, see our [Traveling with Special Needs Children article](#) and visit our [Special Needs Travel Forum](#) to find other parents traveling with special needs children and get advice and tips.

25 Summer Camps For Individuals With Special Needs - <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/02/13/25-summer-camps-for-individuals-with-special-needs/>

Summer Camps for all Children in the Pikes Peak Region - <http://tpecc.blogspot.com/2013/06/summer-camp-guide-2013.html>

The Resource Exchange - Early Intervention

Free developmental evaluations for children birth to three. If you or someone you know has concerns, or if you have questions about developmental milestones and wondering if your child's development is where it should be give us a call. For Teller County - Joann Jones 719-687-5047, Park County - Amelie Moutoux 303.816.0011, or El referral 719-577-9190



Woodland Park • Pine • Bailey • Morrison

June 8th - Rhubarb Festival - Pine The festival starts at 7:30 a.m. with an all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast. Folks can fill their plates with sausage, eggs, fruit and pancakes covered with (of course) rhubarb syrup. The breakfast costs \$8 for adults and \$4 for children and ends at 11:30 a.m. The festival features an array of carnival games, vendors and live music, Arts and crafts will be for sale, along with a "Rhubarb Cookbook" featuring recipes from past festivals. Entries for the rhubarb bake-off must be submitted by 11 a.m. All entries must contain rhubarb and a copy of the recipe. The winners, who are named the festival's king and queen, will be crowned around 12:30, when the parade starts. Around 1 p.m., the festival will conclude with the River Duck Race, in which numbered plastic ducks are let loose in the South Platte River. The ducks cost \$3 each or three for \$10," Ahr said. "The race brings in about \$800 for the (North Fork Fire) Department on average."

June 8th - Outdoor Family Fun Day - Woodland Park Come and join DRC for a day of fun and food! Wolves, Gold Panning, Chalk Painting, Shale Splitting, Face Painting, Balloons & Kindermusik. Our local Fire Dept. will be here with their fire truck as well as our local Police with a roll-over simulator. Check our website for further details. Saturday 11am - 3pm.

June 8th – Discovery Day at Dinosaur Ridge - Morrison – On Saturday, June 8, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., if you like puzzles, treasure maps or secret hiding places, join the Friends of Dinosaur Ridge and Geocaching Colorado for a free day of adventure at Dinosaur Ridge. There will be lessons in Geocaching for both kids and adults. Bring a GPS device or use a loaner provided by the United States Geological Survey booth (deposit required). Rockhounding activities such as gold panning, metal detecting, fossil sifting, geode cracking, and dinosaur track painting will be at the Visitor Center. Door prizes, a scavenger hunt and Mr. Bones will add to the fun. Guides will explain the geology and fossils and assist in GPS puzzles. Contact: tom_moklestad@dinoridge.org, 303-697-3466 extension 103. Website: www.dinoridge.org.

June 15th - Kids parade at Bailey Day - Bailey

- C'mon, little cowpokes, let's give Bailey Day a rip-roaring start with a rambunctious parade. Calling all cowboys, cowgirls, dance hall girls, Indians, ranchers, miners and anyone else to be in the parade on June 15, meeting in front of the Bailey Country Store at 9:45 a.m. Decorate your bike, wagon, yourselves in Western garb. Please, no pets or motorized vehicles. For more information, call Linda 303-838-2644.



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