

Globetrotting Easier Than You Think

The world's a beautiful place, and **James Glasbergen's** job is to help you see it.



When you're a C4 quadriplegic bitten by the travel bug, what could be more natural than going into the travel business so you can help others share the same experiences?

James Glasbergen fell in love with traveling while studying at the University of Waterloo. By the time he earned his degree in 2002, he knew he wanted to work in the travel industry, so went straight back to college and earned a travel consulting certificate.

While planning a European vacation in 2003 through an American company, he realized that there were no Canadian travel agencies or tour companies that specialize in accessible travel. Since people with disabilities are traveling more and more, it seemed the perfect opportunity to dive into an untouched Canadian market.

The college program included a work placement at Frederick Travel in Waterloo, where James remained after graduation. His new employer immediately expressed enthusiasm about his goal of specializing in accessible travel. Through personal travels and contacts with others in the accessible travel industry, they have since established relationships with companies around the world which allow them to arrange accessible independent trips, cruises, group cruises and group tours to destinations across the globe.



"I love traveling myself, and I love helping other people plan their trips," says James, who was injured in a 1992 car accident. "The world is a beautiful place, and it's a lot more accessible than people think. I encourage everyone to get out and see it!"

James notes that his clients benefit considerably from the fact that their travel and accommodation arrangements are made by an actual wheelchair user who knows what true accessibility is all about. Being a C4 quadriplegic in a power wheelchair, he applies a more stringent definition of "wheelchair accessible" than most. He's also intimately acquainted with the right questions to ask when making reservations to ensure that his clients enjoy smooth, barrier-free vacations.

James cites a five-week, seven-country European vacation in the summer of 2003 as the highlight of his own world travels.

For one thing, the trip dispelled the often-heard myth that Europe is not very accessible because it is so old. In fact, he says, nothing could be further from the truth. He stayed in 11 cities, and had a hotel room with a roll-in shower in 10 of them (Prague being the exception). He also found virtually all of the major attractions were accessible, particularly for a wheelchair user with some determination.

Even the ancient city of Rome, which he was most worried about when it came to access, exceeded his accessibility expectations. He describes must-see venues such as the Colosseum and the Vatican, as “excellent for accessibility,” with substantial spaces where wheelchair users can wheel around and modern elevators to get between levels.

The canal city of Venice proved more challenging, due to the 400 bridges connecting the city’s 100 islands, the vast majority of which were only accessible by stairs. Even that could be overcome,



as James found out: there’s an accessible public water taxi that goes all over the city and costs only a few Euros a day. “There’s a lesson to be learned in everything,” James points out. “It can definitely be done with appropriate planning!”

Based on his experience, James is a big believer in planning ahead, citing that as the best, and sometimes the only way to avoid problems. Those problems include things like finding steps at a place that has been billed as “accessible,” getting a bathtub at a hotel that promised a roll-in shower, or a lack of accessible transportation and tours. He reminds travellers that resources such as accessible hotel rooms and rental vans are usually limited, so a successful holiday can hinge on planning months ahead to find out what’s available and make reservations. To help with that, he says there’s nothing like a knowledgeable, experienced company that specializes in accessible travel and knows what disabled travelers are looking for.

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Just a few years ago James says he spent long hours on the Internet researching destinations, but he’s since developed a worldwide network of colleagues who specialize in accessible travel. He says that can save disabled travelers the hassle of doing hours and hours of their own research to find appropriate accommodations.

“We contribute a valuable resource to disabled travelers who want to get out and see the world but don’t know where to look or how to go about planning an accessible trip,” he says. From newlyweds who thank him with saving them money on their Caribbean honeymoon cruise, to other clients who credit him with arranging good weather for a Roman holiday (he refrains from taking credit for the latter, by the way), his customers seem to agree.

For more information, call 1-800-578-8958 or visit www.fredericktravel.com, or check out James’ personal travel Web site at www.worldonwheelz.com. 