

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

AUTISM-FRIENDLY FINDS

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Nicole Sammartino of Haverhill is well-versed in the challenges of traveling with a child on the autism spectrum. Sammartino is the stepmom to a 7-year-old boy with autism.

"I would say the people and noise of traveling is what really can make him nervous," says Sammartino. "He does not do well with lots of people and loud noise, so our traveling is kept to car rides at this point."

When the family attends a crowded event, her stepson is equipped with earplugs and stays close to dad, she says. "It can be tough when he is struggling, and we are with a group of people who don't understand that he needs to decompress once in a while from everything going on. He has never been on an airplane but we hope to someday bring him and his baby brother to Florida or California."

According to Alan Day, cofounder and CEO of **Autism Double-Checked**, a company that trains the hospitality industry how to best accommodate travelers with autistic family members, 87 percent of parents with autistic children say they do not take family vacations, yet 93 percent would be more inclined to travel if autism-friendly options were available.

Here are some ideas and tips for traveling — far-flung or nearby — that are autism-friendly.

Flying

Eight years ago, Massport launched the **Wings for Autism** program at Boston Logan International Airport to help autistic children practice how to navigate the airport, including checking in, getting through TSA security inspection, and boarding an aircraft. The twice-yearly program, created by Brad Martin, deputy director of Aviation Customer Service, is now modeled at 57 US airports. Massport also teams up with individual airlines and TSA to offer personal meet and assist services for those families who need extra help, says Bernice Freedman, spokeswoman for Massport. www.thearc.org/wingsforautism

Cruises

Autism on the Seas organizes cruises for families with special needs and even has trained professional volunteers to accompany families on their cruise.

"We have hundreds of families cruising with us on our staff-assisted cruises each year and it is growing year in and year out," says Mike Sobbell, president and founder of Autism on the Seas. "Our 1:1 staff service has also grown in popularity as the number of families opting for a dedicated staff caregiver has increased." Royal Caribbean International is the most popular line the company works with, he says. Families can also take the free "Seating Is Believing" ship tour (with lunch) offered at ports including Boston.

On the horizon: Cruise Buddy, for teens (and adults), will be available for those on the spectrum who are more independent. They'll connect with their Cruise Buddy prior to sailing, and get buddy assistance onboard with finances, meals, and excursions. www.seasforautism

Beaches Resorts

(**Beaches Negril, Beaches Ocho Rios, and Beaches Turks & Caicos**)

Meet Julia, the 4-year-old Sesame Street Muppet on the autism spectrum, who hangs at Beaches. Julia especially loves to paint and help kids express themselves



COURTESY OF STORY LAND

Story Land in Glen, N.H., partners with Autism Speaks to host a Sensory Friendly weekend twice a year.

through art in open-ended art activities. The staff also undergoes sensitivity training with resources from **Sesame Street and Autism: See Amazing in All Children**.

Two years ago, Beaches Resort was designated a Certified Autism Center by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). This spring, Beaches became an Advanced Certified Autism Center, and offers personalized pre-travel questionnaires, private in-room check-in with sensory toys, modified culinary choices, and quiet spaces. And, a One-on-One IBCCES Autism Certified Beaches Buddy, too. www.beaches.com

SeaWorld Orlando

Earlier this year, the theme park was designated a Certified Autism Center by IBCCES. "With 1 in 59 children diagnosed on the autism spectrum, the resources and tools that our parks now offer can provide peace of mind for families with members that have autism and other special needs," says SeaWorld Orlando president Kyle Miller.

These tools include sensitivity and awareness staff training and a comprehensive autism competency exam. There is also a designated quiet room for kids, and pre-visit planning resources including an online park specific sensory guide, says Miller. "This sensory guide makes it easier for parents to plan activities that satisfy their child's specific needs and accommodations, by providing insight on how a child with sensory processing issues may be affected by each sense for each attraction, including highlighting areas that are most soothing." seaworld.com/orlando/help/certified-autism-center/

www.storylandnh.com

Staycation

You don't have to travel to distant spots for a memory-building getaway. The Sammartino family recently enjoyed a trip to Story Land in Glen, N.H. The theme park partners with Autism Speaks to host a Sensory Friendly weekend twice a year — loud music is turned off throughout the park, as well as startling features on the rides.

www.storylandnh.com

And in Boston, The Boston Pops offered its first sensory-friendly concert at Boston's Symphony Hall in June and has plans for more. The 75-minute concert includes modifications like reduced volume and lighting, relaxed house rules (cancel or leave the concert early), noise-reduction headphones, and on-site credentialed autism therapist volunteers. www.bso.org



MICHAEL BLANCHARD

A sensory-friendly concert was held at Symphony Hall in June.

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HERE

A BERRY DELICIOUS FESTIVAL

It's blueberry season! Celebrate the essence of summer with a visit to the eighth annual Blueberry Festival at Attitash Mountain Resort in Bartlett, N.H. (Aug. 3; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.). The all-day free event features blueberry pie baking and pie eating contests, cornhole challenge, blueberry-themed barbecue, tasty treats and beverages, and face painting by the Mount Washington Valley Children's Museum. Crush, a Dave Matthews tribute band, performs from 3 p.m. through closing time. The event takes place at the Attitash base area, rain or shine. In case of inclement weather, all activities and entertainment will be held inside the Main Base Lodge and Ptarmigan's Pub. Visitors can also enjoy some of Attitash's summer attractions such as waterslides, mountain coasters, and more; ticketed fees apply. Fun fact: Attitash is the indigenous Abenaki word for blueberry. 800-223-7669. www.attitash.com/event/blueberryfest

MAINE SEA TOUR AND CHIC HOTEL REHAB

Combine a new boating tour with luxurious new hotel accommodations on your trip to Mount Desert Island this summer. The Bar Harbor Whale Watch Company is launching the Acadia Explorer, a jet-powered catamaran that cruises through Frenchman Bay and along the shores of Acadia National Park. The almost three-hour excursion, Acadia By Sea, includes a nature guide and park ranger who share information about local wildlife, light-houses, and other points of interest



(www.barharborwhales.com/acadia-by-sea; adults \$42; ages 6-14 \$27; ages 5 and under \$14). Stay in style at the recently debuted rooms and suites at the Harborside Hotel, Spa and Marina. As part of comprehensive renovations, this 193-room family-friendly hotel now offers 12 Kid Suites with a semi-private bunk bed room for the little ones, complete with separate TVs, games and books, and king-size bed for parents. Hotel amenities include a full-service spa, multiple swimming pools, and a variety of dining options, from fine Italian waterfront dining to lobster rolls by the pool. August rates from \$459. 866-258-7253, www.theharborsidehotel.com

THERE

DAYCATION IN PUERTO RICO

Planning a cruise departing from San Juan? If your flight arrival and cruise departure are hours apart, consider the Daycation offering at the Courtyard by Marriott Isla Verde. Located 1/2 of a mile from the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport, this beachfront resort

offers families and couples full access to the pool and beach facilities, and plenty of water activities — jet skis, surf lessons, parasailing, and more. Includes use of chairs, umbrellas, towels, poolside food and drink, as well as dining at one of the hotel's artisanal culinary spots for authentic Puerto Rican cuisine or cocktails crafted with local rum. Daycationers are able to store their luggage onsite, and use locker room facilities for showers and changing. \$45 per guest. daycationapp.com/hotels/courtyard-by-marriott-isola-verde

GREECE GETAWAY AT HILLTOP AERIE

Imagine yourself at a tranquil hilltop hotel, gazing across the Ionian Sea. This reverie can be realized at the adults-only MarBella Nido Suite Hotel & Villas, located in the quiet southeast corner of Corfu. One of the newest additions to the Small Luxury Ho-



tels of the World portfolio, this 70-suite hotel offers plenty of ways to relax, including private infinity or in-room whirlpools, spa massages, hammam and sauna, and lolling with a book on the pebbled beach. The property boasts three restaurants, a wine cellar and a gym for aerobic activities. Rates from \$236. www.slh.com/hotels/marbellanido-suite-hotel-and-villas/

EVERYWHERE

SLEEP AID FOR TRAVELERS

Whether you're traveling across the state or across continents, an unfamiliar bed can mess with sleep rhythms and put a damper on vacation plans or business meetings. Those hesitant to use medicinal sleeping aids may want to consider the Philip Stein Sleep Bracelet, a non-invasive sleep aid that harnesses naturally occurring sleep frequencies to improve the wearers' quality of rest. To use, simply put it on your wrist 15

to 30 minutes before you're ready to go to bed. Emitting subtle delta wave frequencies, the watch encourages the body to increase its own production of delta waves, helping the user to fall asleep faster and deeper. Requires no batteries or charging. Ultra-soft strap features breathable holes for night-long comfort. In a clinical study, users reported waking up rested and refreshed. Includes 60-day sleep guarantee with full refund if not satisfied. \$395. 855-533-3939, sleepbracelet.com

GERM-FREE TRAVEL AID

Planes, trains, buses, and even hotel rooms are microbial havens. PlaneAire Surface & Air Purifying Travel Mist is an organic, antibacterial/antiviral mist designed to kill bad bacteria with a blend of six certified organic essential oils and ingredients from organic fruit. Perfect for health-conscious travelers who do not want to breathe in harmful chemicals, alcohol, or bleach. Simply shake well, and spray it on your seat, airplane blanket, pillows, tray table, seat pocket, and other germ-filled areas, such as the TV remote in your hotel room. The 2-ounce bottle means it's TSA approved. Lab tested to kill 99.99 percent of illness-causing bacteria such as staphylococcus, salmonella, pseudomonas, and MRSA. The non-staining spray emits a light herbal scent that dissipates quickly. \$14.99. planeaire.com

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