Sails *Anyway*

THE FREE ACCOMMODATIONS GUIDE · FOR ANY CRUISE LINE

Everything they'll do for you.

If you know to ask.

Every major cruise line offers accommodations. They've built a great deal of this out. They've just never been very good at telling you it's there.

So here's the whole list.



Inside: the form nobody mentions and its deadline · every piece of equipment you can request for free · what accessible staterooms include · the cabin question no listing answers · tender ports and what they mean for you · excursions that hold up · and what not to do.

Ai-Cruise Granny is an AI character. The cruiser behind her is not. She's the one who actually sails — Royal Caribbean, Celebrity and Princess, out of Port Canaveral, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Tampa, New Orleans and Galveston. She cruised with her stepmother when both of them needed help, filled out every form, and asked every awkward question to learn how this really works. Everything here comes from that experience, checked against what the cruise lines publish themselves.

ONE GUIDE, EVERY CRUISE LINE

Every major cruise line offers accommodations for guests with disabilities and mobility needs. What differs is the details: the name of the form, the deadline, and exactly what's available on each ship. The person behind Ai-Cruise Granny has sailed Royal Caribbean, Celebrity and Princess for the last several years, so we use those three as our examples throughout. Whichever line you're sailing, use this guide to know what to ask for, then confirm every detail directly with your cruise line.

START HERE

The part most people *never hear about.*

There is a form. It costs nothing. Most people never find out it exists.

You fill it out, you send it in, and things start appearing: a shower chair in your cabin, someone meeting you at the pier with a wheelchair, a seat held for you in the theater.

It has a deadline, and nobody reminds you. Here's how it works on the three lines we know best. Your cruise line will have its own version.

	ROYAL CARIBBEAN	CELEBRITY	PRINCESS
The form	Guest Special Needs Form	Guest Special Needs Form	Accessibility / mobility questionnaire
Due	**30 days** before sailing	**30 days** before sailing	At booking — don't wait
Sign language	**60 days**	**60 days**	Ask early
Groups of 10+	72 hours minimum	—	—

Miss the window and they'll still try. Royal's own wording is that without enough advance notice they will make *reasonable efforts*. In practice, that means hoping a spare is available.

AI-CRUISE GRANNY'S NOTE

Submit it the day you book, not the month before you sail. You already have your booking open and your details in front of you.

✓ **Check with your cruise line:** ask for its special needs or accessibility form, where to send it, and its deadline for your sailing.

PART ONE

What you can *actually ask for.*

This is Royal Caribbean's published equipment list. It's longer than most people expect, and all of it is free.

In your cabin, on request

- ☐ Raised toilet seat
- ☐ Shower stool
- ☐ Bed boards, to raise the bed
- ☐ Sharps container
- ☐ Extension cord
- ☐ Visual-tactile alert system
- ☐ Assistive listening devices
- ☐ Commode chair
- ☐ Transfer bench
- ☐ Medical refrigerator
- ☐ Distilled water
- ☐ Closed-captioned television
- ☐ TTY
- ☐ Large-print material

Delivered to the ship

Oxygen supply and dialysis supply, both arranged in advance.

Elsewhere aboard

A service animal relief area.

Other lines offer comparable lists. Celebrity's is similar, and Princess provides toilet seat raisers, shower stools, bed boards, and an all-in-one kit for hearing loss: a TDD text telephone, visual smoke alarm, door-knock sensor and pillow sensor.

AI-CRUISE GRANNY'S NOTE

Look at that list again: bed boards. Few people know they exist. If getting out of a low bed is what makes your mornings difficult, the cruise line will raise it at no charge. You only have to ask.

The same goes for shower chairs. Request one before you buy one and carry it through an airport.

✓ **Check with your cruise line:** ask which of these items it provides on your ship and how to request them. Lists vary by line and by ship.

PART TWO

Accessible staterooms, *and an honest warning.*

What you actually get

An accessible stateroom isn't just a larger room. On the three lines we use as examples, you can expect:

- **Wider doors** — Royal's run 32 to 34 inches, depending on the ship
- **A roll-in or transfer shower** with a fold-down bench and hand-held showerhead
- **Grab bars** at the toilet and in the shower
- **A lowered sink, vanity, closet rods and safe**
- **Ramped or removed thresholds**, with no lip to catch a wheel or a toe
- **Turning space** — Celebrity notes most offer a five-foot turning radius
- **A bathroom distress alarm**
- **A higher toilet** — most are 17 to 19 inches

Princess elevators are 36 to 42 inches wide, which matters if you use a scooter.

WORTH CHECKING FIRST

Accessible suites on Royal Caribbean have roll-in showers rather than bathtubs, except on Quantum of the Seas. If you were counting on a tub, confirm before you book.

The honest warning

Royal states plainly that if you're booked in an accessible stateroom and don't have a disability requiring its features, **you may be moved at any time** to a standard room to make space for someone who does. They investigate suspected fraudulent bookings.

AI-CRUISE GRANNY'S NOTE

Book an accessible stateroom if you need its features, not because it's larger. There aren't many — Princess has just over 350 across its entire fleet, up to 31 per ship — and each one booked by someone who doesn't need it is one a wheelchair user can't get.

If you don't need a fully accessible room

You don't have to book one to get help. **Every item in Part One can be added to a standard cabin**: raised toilet seat, shower stool, commode chair, bed blocks. That matters when the accessible rooms are sold out, or in a location you don't want.

✓ **Check with your cruise line:** ask exactly what the accessible stateroom on your ship includes, such as door width, shower type and bed height, before you book it.

PART THREE

The cabin question *no listing answers.*

No cruise line will point this out, because it isn't about equipment.

Distance to the nearest elevator is the single most important thing about your cabin.

A large ship is longer than three football fields. A cabin far forward or far aft can sit 200 feet from the nearest lift. You'll make that walk four or five times a day for a week — plus stairs when the elevators back up at dinner.

Before you accept a cabin

- Pull up the deck plan for your ship
- Find the elevator banks, usually forward, midship and aft
- Find your cabin
- **Count the distance**

Then check two more things

What's above you. Under the pool deck means deck chairs scraping at six in the morning. The same goes for the buffet.

What's below you. Above the theater or a nightclub means bass at ten at night.

Neither shows up in the listing, and either can cost you a week of sleep.

> **TIMING**
>
> You can usually change your cabin right up until final payment. After that it becomes much harder, so check early. The day you book is not too soon.

✓ **Check with your cruise line:** ask your cruise line, or your travel advisor, to confirm where your cabin sits relative to the nearest elevator.

PART FOUR

Wheelchairs and scooters: *the rule that surprises everyone.*

None of our three example lines provides a wheelchair or scooter for use during your cruise, and many other lines work the same way.

Royal provides complimentary wheelchair assistance for *embarkation and disembarkation only* — getting on and getting off, not the week in between. Princess doesn't provide mobility devices either.

Your two options

Bring your own. Allowed on all three lines. Royal notes that assistive devices should fit through a standard stateroom doorway of at least 23 inches. If yours is wider than 32 inches, contact their Access Department before you sail.

Rent one, delivered to your cabin. The cruise lines point to two vendors, Scootaround and Special Needs at Sea. They deliver to your stateroom before you board, so you never carry it through the terminal.

The rules once you're aboard

- Scooters must be **stored and charged in your stateroom**; corridors and elevator lobbies stay clear for emergency evacuation
- When parked elsewhere on the ship, keep it out of the way

- **Crew members are not permitted to lift assistive devices**, so plan around that
- Segways aren't allowed

AI-CRUISE GRANNY'S NOTE

If you're unsure whether to rent a scooter for the week, it's usually worth it. Not because you can't walk, but because a full day on your feet can take the rest of the evening with it. Many people who manage well at home rent one for a seven-day sailing.

✓ **Check with your cruise line:** ask about its size limits and battery rules for mobility devices before you rent or pack one.

PART FIVE

Embarkation day, *the hardest day of the week.*

Packing, terminal lines, standing, luggage, and a long walk at the end of it. More people are hurt on the first day than on any other day of the trip.

The accessibility lane

Princess runs a dedicated Accessibility Lane at check-in; ask a representative for directions when you arrive. **Anyone traveling with you can use it too.** Royal Caribbean and Celebrity offer priority embarkation for guests who need assistance.

Pier assistance

Royal asks that you request pier assistance **30 days before sailing** so they can prioritize you. Wheelchair assistance runs from terminal check-in to the ship. In their words, during peak times there may be a wait.

They state two limits plainly. **Staff are not permitted to lift guests or equipment.** And guests using assistive devices may not be able to board or leave the ship, depending on gangway steepness, tendering, weather, tide and sea conditions, and shore-side facilities.

A REAL REASON TO DECLARE A NEED

Princess notes that if you indicate you need wheelchair assistance for embarkation or disembarkation, crew are automatically assigned to help you in an emergency, and guests requiring additional assistance appear on the Captain's All Souls Manifest. This isn't only about convenience. Declare it even if you think you can manage.

Getting off

You'll be asked to wait in a designated area and add your name to a roll call. Priority debarkation goes to guests who need wheelchair assistance, along with tight flight connections and suite guests. Instructions arrive in your cabin the evening before; read them that night, not in the morning.

✓ **Check with your cruise line:** ask how to request pier and wheelchair assistance at your departure port, and by when.

PART SIX

Once you're *aboard.*

Who to talk to

On Princess, the **Guest Services Director** is your point of contact for anything accessibility-related, at the desk or through CrewCall Chat. On Royal Caribbean and Celebrity, Guest Services is the equivalent.

AI-CRUISE GRANNY'S NOTE

Do this on your first day, not your third. The first two hours aboard are when arrangements are easiest to make. By midweek, everything is set and changes are harder.

Seating

Accessible seating exists in theaters, dining rooms, lounges and show venues on all three of our example lines, and assistive listening systems are available in Celebrity's theaters. **It goes to whoever arrives first.** Arriving twenty minutes early isn't fussiness; it's strategy.

Pools

Royal has hoists for one pool and one whirlpool across the fleet and on selected Celebrity ships. Ask at Guest Services; it isn't self-service.

✓ **Check with your cruise line:** on your first day aboard, confirm with Guest Services that every request you made is actually in place.

PART SEVEN

Port days, and the question *that changes everything.*

Are you docking, or tendering?

Docking means the ship ties up at a pier and you walk off. **Tendering** means the ship anchors offshore and a small boat carries you in. That boat moves, the ship moves, and you step across while both are moving.

Tenders and gangways may not accommodate wheelchairs or scooters, you may have to use stairs to board one, and some guests with limited mobility may not be able to go ashore at all. If the seas are rough enough, tendering is cancelled outright — you paid for that port, and you'll see it only from the ship.

What to know about specific ports

- **Grand Cayman is always a tender port.** It has no cruise pier and isn't getting one; voters rejected a berthing facility by roughly two to one.
- **Some ports go either way.** Ocho Rios, Grand Turk, Cozumel and Puerto Plata may dock or anchor depending on the ship, the day, and how crowded the pier is. The same itinerary can give a different answer on a different visit.

The regions that are easier

Royal Caribbean itself recommends Alaska, Hawaii, Canada and New England, and the **Eastern Caribbean** for travelers with limited mobility — the Eastern Caribbean because more of its ports are docked, which limits tendering.

CocoCay, and a rule that changed

If you're sailing Royal Caribbean, Perfect Day at CocoCay has two separate tram systems, and most people confuse them.

The pier tram changed on October 1, 2024. General pier tram service was discontinued for all passengers. Pickup at the pier end, near the forward gangways, is now **reserved exclusively for guests with wheelchairs, scooters or other mobility needs.** Everyone else walks the pier.

The **island tram** is separate and still runs for everyone, every 10 to 15 minutes, with seven stops. Several stops are wheelchair accessible, and drivers will often stop if you wave them down.

Complimentary beach wheelchairs are available first-come, first-served; ask any crew member to locate one. Coco Beach Club has beach wheelchairs, a pool lift, a lowered bar counter, ramps to dining, and an accessible restroom and shower. Oasis Lagoon has a lift, and the Wave Pool at Thrill Waterpark is wheelchair accessible. The waterslide towers and the zip line tower have stairs.

Walk times from Arrivals Plaza: Thrill Waterpark about 3 minutes, Harbor Beach 5, Chill Island 5 to 10, Oasis Lagoon 8, South Beach 10. Coco Beach Club is nearly a mile away, so take the tram.

THE HONEST PART

There are no beach mats on CocoCay. Beach wheelchairs are hard to push through sand, even with a light passenger, and there's no designated place to leave your own chair while you use a beach one. By cruise standards it's a genuinely accessible island, and it still has real gaps.

✓ **Check with your cruise line:** ask whether each port on your itinerary is a dock or tender stop, then ask again closer to sailing. It can change.

PART EIGHT

Shore *excursions.*

The trade-off nobody explains

Book through the cruise line: it costs more, but if the tour runs late, the ship waits.
Book independently: it costs less, but if you're late, the ship leaves.

The middle option most people miss

Viator tags certain tours with a **Worry-Free Shore Excursion guarantee**. Only excursions that list it in their Inclusions qualify, and there's a filter to browse just those.

If you miss the ship through no fault of your own, they transport you to the next port of call, up to $1,000. **They also refund you in full if your ship can't reach port in time, or if the tour is cancelled because the ship couldn't get in.**

AI-CRUISE GRANNY'S NOTE

Read that last line again, then look at your tender ports. The problem most likely to spoil a day at a port like Grand Cayman is exactly what this guarantee refunds. The filter is off by default, so most people never find it.

Book early

Accessible excursions are limited and fill first. Plan on booking 60 to 90 days before sailing, and sooner for the most popular ones.

Never trust "moderate walking"

Tour descriptions are written for a general audience. Cruise line materials themselves warn of extended walking over uneven surfaces and steep terrain, extended standing, and steps.

Call the operator and ask specifically:

- How many steps are there to board the vehicle or boat?
- Is there seating at each stop, or is it standing?
- What's the ground surface — cobblestone, sand, gravel?
- How long is it between places to sit down?
- Is there shade, and where are the restrooms?

> ✓ **Check with your cruise line:** for excursions sold through the ship, ask the shore excursion desk these same questions before you book.

PART NINE

What *not* to do.

Don't wait to submit the form. Do it the day you book.

Don't understate your needs. The lines say that while they don't require details about the extent of your disability, the more information they have, the better they can meet your needs. This is not the moment to be modest.

Don't book an accessible cabin you don't need. You may be moved anyway, and someone who needs it can't get it.

Don't assume "accessible" means the same thing everywhere. It varies by line and by ship, and what's true on one of our example lines may not be true on yours. Verify it for your sailing.

Don't leave equipment rental to the last minute. Inventory is limited.

Don't plan a day with no sitting in it. The mistake isn't doing too much on Monday. It's doing too much on Monday and losing Tuesday and Wednesday to it.

Don't book a tender port without knowing it's a tender port.

Don't rely on this guide alone. Use it to know what to ask, then get the answer from your cruise line.

Don't skip travel insurance. A health-related trip interruption is one of the most common ways a cruise goes wrong for travelers with mobility needs.

PART TEN

Your *timeline.*

Anytime	Call your cruise line's accessibility or special needs department with any question. That's what it's there for.
At booking	Submit the special needs form. Check your cabin's distance to the elevator.
6–12 months	Reserve rental equipment if you need it.
90 days	Book accessible excursions. They fill first.
75 days	Confirm the form was received. Call if you're unsure.
60 days	Deadline for sign language interpreting requests.
60–90 days	Final payment on most bookings. Cabin changes become difficult after this.
30 days	Final deadline for the special needs form.
7 days	Confirm equipment delivery. Plan your first two hours aboard.
Day one	Visit Guest Services: seating, dining, anything outstanding.

WORTH SAVING — AND ADD YOUR OWN CRUISE LINE'S ACCESSIBILITY CONTACT FROM ITS WEBSITE

Celebrity Access Department	**866-592-7225**
Celebrity, by email	**special_needs@celebrity.com**
Scootaround — equipment rental	**888-441-7575**
Special Needs at Sea — equipment rental	**800-513-4515**

One *last thing.*

Everything in this guide exists because someone, at some point, had to ask for it.

The cruise lines have built a great deal of this out. They've just never been very good at telling you it's there. So people stay home, or they go and quietly struggle through it, and neither was ever necessary.

Every cruise line does this a little differently. Use this guide to know what to ask for, then ask your cruise line directly.

Ask for what you need. All of it. Every time.

Nobody stays home.

— Ai-Cruise Granny

Port-by-port notes and a reminder before every deadline:
sailsanyway.com

About Ai-Cruise Granny. Ai-Cruise Granny is an AI character. All firsthand cruise experience described in this guide belongs to the real person behind her, who does the sailing.

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Examples, not a complete list. Royal Caribbean, Celebrity and Princess are used as examples because they are the lines the person behind Ai-Cruise Granny has sailed in recent years. Other cruise lines offer their own accommodations, forms and deadlines.

Verify before you sail. Accessibility policies, deadlines, equipment and services change without notice and vary by ship, itinerary and sailing date. This guide reflects publicly available information current as of publication. Always confirm directly with your cruise line and tour operators before you book and before you sail.

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