



Travel Time: Flash Forward

by Adam Lloyd

For the past two decades groups like the Society for the Advancement of Travelers with Handicaps (SATH), the National Organization on Disability (NOD) and literally dozens of other advocacy groups have led the way in fighting for the integration of disabled individuals into all aspects of mainstream society. Their tireless efforts culminated in 1990 with the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, their labors did not end there.

Throughout the nineties, these same organizations have had to work closely with the government and the public to educate, implement and enforce the equal access mandated by the ADA. In that time we've seen great, though far from complete, strides in opening up employment, housing and, yes, even recreational opportunities that are now enjoyed by disabled Americans.

Now, as we take our first steps into the twenty-first century, it seems that we are turning a necessary corner with regard to disability rights, one which will lead to the final leveling of the accessibility playing field. This turn is from activism and legal authority to consumerism and financial authority.

There is evidence, particularly in the travel and tourism industry, that



accommodating people with disabilities is, more and more, a smart business decision as much as it is a consideration of ADA law.

I recently had the opportunity to talk with Ken Wynn, an executive with Las Vegas Mirage Resorts casino group. According to Wynn, many of Mirage Resorts handicapped facilities go well beyond what is dictated by law, and he is proud to profess that such accommodations are "not made out of the goodness of our hearts," but because they "make good business sense."

This trend toward accessibility for the sake of finance is most evident in places where the economy relies primarily on tourist dollars. Disney World, Las Vegas and several cruise lines have taken the lead in providing such accommodations as in-room electric transfer lifts, TDD equipped phones, braille menus, wheelchair pool lifts, audio guides, chair and scooter rentals, companion restrooms, and "no wait" disability policies at rides and restaurants.

This is the future of disabled travel; that handicapped individuals are viewed as consumers, like everyone else. A recent Wall Street Journal article estimated the disposable income of disabled adults in the United States at more than \$175 billion, hardly a consumer demographic to ignore. Changes initiated by the ADA opened the door to disabled travelers, and as these 50 million, previously overlooked Americans begin to venture out and flex their financial muscle, the travel industry will respond out of need - their need.

Certainly, there is still an important role for advocacy groups like SATH and NOD, but the real future of disabled equality, in the travel industry and beyond, is the integration of our financial power into the national economy; moving from people who need to be accommodated to people who need to be courted. There may be a long way yet to travel in this quest, but the road ahead most definitely leads around this bend.

Adam Lloyd is a veteran travel writer and is the editor of GimpontheGo.com, an on-line disability travel site. He has been quadriplegic since 1983.

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