



Central Canal with its walkway and tourist boats is a major attraction in Indianapolis.

# THE ALL-IN-THE-FAMILY VACATION

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**An accessible family trip takes patience and planning. Here's how our writer's family has made it work.**

**BY CASSANDRA BROOKLYN**

As the boat slowly cruised along one of the downtown canals of Indianapolis, the professional singer captaining the boat dazzled us with her soprano voice as she sang in Italian and English. My entire family was enthralled, but when I looked toward my mother, I started to tear up. A former singer and pianist, she has since lost her ability to sing and play due to Parkinson's disease, yet here she was, a smile on her face as she sang along in her head. This, I thought, is why we go through the effort

of planning an accessible family trip so that my mother can join the younger generations on our annual vacation.

Our trip last summer was our second multigenerational family vacation to Indianapolis. My mother, along with my sister, her husband and their two school-age children, joined me.

My mother had begun developing the first signs of Parkinson's disease 10 years ago, but it wasn't until a series of falls two years ago that her mobility became severely impaired. My sister and I suddenly became full-time caregivers. We had always enjoyed our get-together vacation each summer, but now we worried that our mother would no longer be able to join us. Overnight care for the course of our annual getaway was unaffordable; besides, we liked the idea of our mother being able to create special

memories with her grandkids (and they with her), so I began researching accessible travel options.

## The Destination and the Doings

As they are for many families, airline tickets for six is a stretch for us—and the airplane bathrooms a challenge for someone with limited mobility—so we decided a road trip would be our best option. The accessible bathrooms at rest areas and truck stops are a definite plus.

Indianapolis seemed the perfect destination for our first (then second) trip because it was an easy four-hour drive for us from Wisconsin, and the city's Accessibility Guide confirmed that there were family-friendly

attractions and activities. Because every museum provided free wheelchairs, we left our mom's wheelchair at home, which freed up precious packing space in our trunk.

On our first trip to Indianapolis, we all visited the Indianapolis Museum of Art for the traveling *Van Gogh Exhibit: The Immersive Experience*. The multisensory nature of the exhibit meant that the entire family could enjoy it. We left feeling as if we had all had stepped into and were moving through famous van Gogh paintings.

On our second summer vacation to Indianapolis, exactly one year after the first, we visited the Indiana State Museum



Our writer and her family enjoyed the art show *Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience*



The Children's Museum of Indianapolis has accessible exhibits for kids and offers wheelchairs for adults.

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for a temporary exhibit about the first Black American cyclist to win a world championship: Indy native Major Taylor. While the adults were captivated by a curator-led tour, the kids got to build and ride different kinds of bicycles in the children's area.

At the Eiteljorg Museum, we made our way through one of the most impressive collections of Indigenous art in the country. Even my 13-year-old nephew, who tends to be bored at art museums, was fascinated by the paintings. My 5-year-old niece most appreciated the museum's extensive children's kitchen set and play area and even started to cry when we had to leave.

On both trips to Indianapolis, we visited the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, the largest in the country, where Grandma got to watch her grandkids have the time of their lives. The thoughtfully designed museum has four floors of activities that accommodate children with various disabilities, and it even provides adult wheelchairs so that grandparents can join the fun.

Extensive interactive indoor exhibits allow families to learn about dinosaurs, space exploration and children who have made a difference in their communities. Outdoor sports areas include basketball courts,



*Bottleworks Hotel has a funky design and accessible rooms.*

COURTESY OF VISIT INDI

mini-golf courses and race tracks that allow children in electric wheelchairs to race alongside children in miniature sports cars. I also saw a father seated inside a small motorized racecar, holding his son's wheelchair as they raced together around an Indy 500-themed track.

process continues. This summer, we head to the Grand Canyon, where the entire family can enjoy the view from a paved walkway that runs along the rim, accommodating wheelchairs, walkers and strollers. I've already found an accessible room within the national park, plus a handful of accessible

and family-friendly activities such as the Flagstaff Extreme adventure course and the Lowell Observatory, in nearby Flagstaff.

Even if some things might not go as planned, I know that we'll always cherish the precious time spent together.

## Gaining the Know-How

On our first trip to Indianapolis, we stayed at a lovely bed-and-breakfast with a porch and rocking chairs so that my mom could sit outside to read if the rest of us were doing something that would have been impossible for her to join in on (like the fabulous guided bike tour we did). On our second trip, we stayed at the Bottleworks Hotel (built in an old Coca-Cola factory), where adjacent rooms made it easier for my sister and her husband to check on Grandma.

After several family road trips to Indianapolis and around our home state of Wisconsin, we've learned quite a bit, but the learning

## ACCESSIBLE-TRAVEL TIPS

### Choosing accessible activities

Before your trip, determine your family's needs and contact activities and attractions for accessibility options. Consider the following questions:

- Does the site provide wheelchairs?
- Are outdoor walkways wheelchair-and/or walker-accessible?
- Are there elevators?
- Are there accessible bathrooms?
- Are hearing aids available?

### What to bring

No perfect packing list will work for every scenario, so consider bringing everyday items that might not be available on the road. Here are some suggestions:

- Adaptive utensils
- A magnifying glass
- Clothing protectors/bibs
- Incontinence pads to protect hotel beds
- A call buzzer
- Travel-toilet support bars
- A collapsible wheelchair and/or walker