

# Traveling with AUTISM

Royal Caribbean at Coco Cay



"You have no idea how much it means to our family to finally find a travel professional who understands us! Thank you!"  
– Greg, parent with child on autism spectrum

## SOME BASIC TRAVEL TIPS FOR ALL PARENTS:

- Take your time and be patient
- Be aware, be creative and be prepared
- Focus on your children's strengths – lots of positive re-enforcement
- Do what you enjoy doing with your child – Avoid trying to fix, cure or change them
- Relax (easier said than done said every parent ever); Kids sense your stress

## AUTISM TRAVEL RESOURCES:

TSA: Dress rehearsals for individuals with autism for the entire experience of air travel covering everything from check in, security, boarding and deplaning.

- [www.TheArc.org/WingsForAutism](http://www.TheArc.org/WingsForAutism)
- [AutismTravel.com/](http://AutismTravel.com/)
- [Ibcces.org/](http://Ibcces.org/)
- [www.Autism-Society.org/](http://www.Autism-Society.org/)
- [www.AutismSpeaks.org/](http://www.AutismSpeaks.org/)

Reach out to a Certified Travel Professional to help plan your next family vacation. As we know, each individual on the spectrum is unique as should be their travel plans and preparation, but together, we can make a difference. One day, one advisor, one family, one resort at a time.

Please join our Facebook group to show your support as we urge resorts and other advisors to get certified so that our families, friends and neighbors can travel easier in the future.

## FIND OUR PAGE ON FACEBOOK AND PLEASE JOIN US. "AUTISM TRAVEL AWARENESS"

[facebook.com/Autism-Travel-Awareness-2489202547761018/](https://facebook.com/Autism-Travel-Awareness-2489202547761018/)

*\*The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) offers certification programs to travel professionals who help families and individuals with special needs prepare for their perfect vacation. A Certified Autism Travel Professional™ (CATP) is defined as a professional who has demonstrated that they are both knowledgeable and capable of providing support and travel related services to an individual on the autism spectrum as well as their family.*

\*\*Source: CDC

For more information: [www.LiveLifeTravel.world](http://www.LiveLifeTravel.world)



Nickelodeon Resorts, Puta Cana

WRITTEN BY ANNE GORDON, LIVE LIFE TRAVEL, AN AFFILIATE OF TRAVEL EDGE, VIRTUOSO MEMBER

Travel is usually very easy for me to write about, but this article was a tough one and not because I did not do my homework (I am now a Certified Autism Travel Specialist (CATP\*), but because of how frustrated I am at the lack of certified family vacation destinations that are available in today's world. It is something that I am committed to changing as a Virtuoso Family Travel Specialist. It is not acceptable to me and it should not be acceptable to anyone that has a child with autism.

As of today, there are only 4 family brands that I currently work with and recommend that are IBCCS\* certified.

**Beaches** – Locations in Turks and Caicos, Negril and Ocho Rios

**Nickelodeon Resort** – Punta Cana (a second location opening soon in Riviera Maya in Mexico)

**Royal Caribbean** – Family Friendly Cruise Ships; applies to children, teens and adults

**Sesame Place** – Has a sensory guide for every attraction so parents can plan in advance (I believe that this should become the universal standard);

For our online readers, scan here for the sensory guide:



One of our favorite initiatives of all is Julia. In late 2017, Beaches Resorts added Sesame Street's newest, and first ever autistic character, Julia, to the collection of walkaround characters at Beaches Resorts and staff underwent extensive training. Based on data collected since the beginning of 2018, an average of 200 children per month took part in the Meet and Greet with Julia and the 'Amazing Art with Julia' painting activity, across all three Beaches Resorts.

The introduction of Julia also brought with it an exciting new activity, 'Amazing Art with Julia,' teaching children how to express themselves through art. In this activity, children are greeted by Julia a 4-year-old girl character who has Autism. Julia, who loves to paint, highlights how people can express themselves through art. Using a range of materials, children have the opportunity to explore, experiment and create in this open-ended art activity.

We need to adapt to the world that we live in today, we need to be inclusive, not exclusive and like it or not, the diagnosis rates for autism are increasing by 600%\*\* every year. The latest numbers indicate that 1 in every 59 children are affected; 1 out of 42 of those children are boys. And don't be fooled, "Autism Friendly" is not good enough. To become a Certified Autism Center, 80% of its full-time staff must go through the IBCCS certified training program (individuals are matched up to different certifications based on their education and experience). You are then certified for a 2-year period.



Below is the reality of WHY we need change. We need to support and empower families with the ability to be able to travel. Vacations are essential to these parents and families now more than ever before.

## PARENT TRAVEL SURVEY (SOURCE: IBCCES)

Over 1,000 parents who have a child on the spectrum were asked:

- Do you currently take vacations as a family? 87% responded "NO"
- Would you be more inclined to travel if autism certified options were available? 93% responded "Yes"
- Are you satisfied with current travel options for families with autism? 89% responded "NO"

"We know that training and certification is the best way for organizations to ensure they can accommodate all families," explained Myron Pincomb, IBCCES Board Chairman. "IBCCES is proud to work with Aquatica Orlando and other leaders in the industry to increase the availability of certified options and help individuals have a safe and enriching experience when traveling or visiting a new place. With the rise in diagnosis rates of cognitive disorders, there is a huge need for these options and for organizations to make a long-lasting commitment to their guests."