

Wheelchair Accessibility Tips

St. Augustine gets a lot of press for its charms as one of America's most walkable cities, but what if accessibility is a problem for you? Can guests with mobility challenges still enjoy the city?

You bet they can! My grandmother is in a wheelchair, and I was surprised how many wheelchair accessible accommodations there were in town. I also was surprised how difficult it is to get some of this information online, so I thought I would share it with everyone in case you are traveling with someone who is in a wheelchair, a walker, or who just has difficulties walking distances.

Here are a couple of my tips to make your trip to St. Augustine awesome and accessible:

Parking

Parking a car can be difficult in St. Augustine, but our city really tries to roll out the welcome mat for visitors with accessibility issues. If you have a valid wheelchair hang tag on your car, or a designated license plate, you can park at *any* metered space in town (be careful not to park in the spaces reserved for residents—they are marked with RESERVED painted on the space). And no, you don't need to feed the meter. If a meter reader misses your license plate, and you do get a ticket (hey...even meter readers make mistakes), you can call the parking authority and tell them that you have a valid wheelchair pass. They will check the photo they took of your car, and if they see that they simply missed the tag, they will tear the ticket up.

Restaurant Access

Although many of our restaurants are in historic buildings, a lot of them are accessible. For my grandmother's visit, we chose restaurants that had parking lots connected to them to make getting in and out easier.

The Raintree is an upscale restaurant in an old Victorian House. It has a large parking lot, and the handicapped space is right next to their brick sidewalk. The parking lot itself is stone, which can be hard to navigate with a wheelchair (and almost impossible with a walker), so try to park as close to the sidewalk as possible. You can sit outside on the lit patio or inside the charming dining room. The dining room has several levels (it was an old house, remember), so talk to a staff member about your needs when you make reservations. The staff was *exceptionally* easy to work with when we visited. Once inside, try the beef

wellington, a local favorite. This local, however, likes an all lobster meal—starting with the lobster and red pepper bisque, and then the Veal San Marco, a veal dish with shrimp and mushrooms in a lobster infused sherry sauce. Not a shellfish fan? The pork schnitzel is really good too. 102 San Marco Avenue.
www.raintreerestaurant.com. 904.824.7211.

Preserved is one of St. Augustine's newer restaurants, and it has easy mobility ramps right into the dining room—plus extra easy points for a paved parking lot! We went there because it's a very elegant service (I always tease that my grandmother is Victorian), and the food is beautiful. Preserved focuses on local ingredients, which means the farm name is included in most of the food descriptions. If you are a meat and cheese lover, plan on sharing the charcuterie plate, along with the daily selection of cheeses. 102 Bridge Street.
www.preservedrestaurant.com 904.679.4940.

The Ice Plant. Located in St. Augustine's old ice plant, this restaurant has a stone lot, cement access ramps, and a large elevator inside. [The Ice Plant](#) is designed with a 1920's vibe, and the friendly wait staff plays along with period clothing (and even facial hair!) There is a gift shop on the first floor for the St. Augustine Distillery, and it's aisles are nice and wide, making it easy to browse. The Ice Plant menu changes frequently, but their fish sandwiches are always great, and their shrimp and grits (served in a cast iron pan) are some of my favorite in town. Plus, they have a great drink menu (remember the distillery right next door?) and they even have house-made sodas. The lemon/lime is my fave! 904.829.6553.

The Reef. Located on Vilano Beach, the Reef has a conveniently located parking lot, as well as a ramp into the restaurant. Again, the restaurant is on multiple levels—there is a step down into tables near the bar, and another step to the outside seating, so ask for the dining room to the left when you first walk in (again, I would make a reservation directly with the restaurant and make your preferences clear). We ate there and had a wonderful view of the ocean, plus the room seemed a little more formal since it was away from the bar (the more formal the better for my grandmother). I love anything that comes with their datil pepper sauce, so I often find myself just having shrimp cocktail for lunch, and their shrimp and grits are excellent. The hub and his entire family love the shrimp and lobster risotto—a rich and creamy dish that tastes like a special occasion! 4100 Coastal Highway. www.thereefstaugustine.com 904.824.8008.

Café Alcazar is a great lunch spot in the Lightner Museum. The Lightner is housed in the old Alcazar Hotel, and the café is located in the hotel's old indoor pool. As a bonus, this casual eatery typically has a musician of some kind, either a pianist or a guitarist...and nothing sounds as beautiful as a song played inside

a cement pool! Café Alcazar has a parking *space* on the east side of the building, as well as a city lot behind it. We parked in the handicapped space on the side, and entered the café through the back (you usually enter through the pool). It was super easy to get there, and a great place to have lunch. Grandmom and I had salads, but their brick oven pizzas are a great option too. 25 Granada Street. www.thealcazarcafe.com. 904.825.9948.

Delivery

We didn't eat at too many lunch spots, mostly because it was easier to spend lunch at the cottage. But that doesn't mean that we cooked! Vilano has two great restaurants where we love to get take out—the [180 Vilano Grill](#) (904.827.1009) and [Casa Benedetto's](#) (904.471.5999). At 180 (as we fondly call it), we like the blackened fish sandwich, the eggplant rollatinis, and they have some of the best pizza in town. Benedetto's is real Italian—Mike's family loves it, and everyone agrees it reminds them of their family's recipes. We get rice balls to go, along with any of the pasta dishes. Plus, we always ask for extra caponata and bread—it's an extra charge but totally worth it.

PLEASE NOTE: There are lots of other handicapped accessible restaurants in town. I have only included the ones where I physically navigated the wheelchair through the space. This is definitely not a comprehensive list! If there is a restaurant you're interested in, feel free to contact us—I'm happy to go check out anything specific for our guests...whether that means checking the parking, measuring openings, or whatever.

Getting Around

If you are mobile, but just can't walk for long distances, there are lots of great ways to get around town. There are pedicabs, and golf carts, and of course cabs and Uber. We also have two trolley companies—the Green Trolley and the Red Train. Both of them run a loop through town, stopping at many area attractions. If you're a first time visitor to St. Augustine, I often suggest riding the entire loop to get a feel for the town's layout, then using the trolley as transportation between stops (you can get on and off as often as you like). The Green Trolley has several trolleys with wheelchair lifts. One thing to remember: both trolleys stop at 5:00pm, so while it's a great way to get around, you'll need another plan for evening travel. Once the sun goes down, I recommend the pedicabs—the drivers are all friendly and funny, and it's a fun way to zip around our narrow streets!

One of our favorite guests is paralyzed from the neck down; he and his wife have come about five times now and she always comments on how all of the sidewalks have cut ins for the wheelchair. She also shared with me that even the brick streets aren't too bad for pushing the chair because the bricks are very

close together. And going up and down the streets is such a great way to see St. Augustine!

Hitting the Beach

With over 40 miles of beaches in St. John's County, there are lots of great places to enjoy the Vitamin Sea. Of course, walking in the sand can be challenging! Our county has three wheelchairs specially designed to roll on the sand...they are fat, plastic wheels. Rentals are free and they will even drop the chair off to you on the beach. Just call the St. Johns County Beach Services Department at (904) 209-0752 to request one of the three available chairs for your visit. They are given out on first come, first serve basis. You can choose delivery (applies to any beach in St. Johns County) or pick one up at 901 Pope Road, St. Augustine, FL 32080.

If you can get to the beach yourself, but don't have the muscle needed to plant an umbrella, you can rent them from **Barney's Beach Service** on St. Augustine Beach. Just head over to St. Augustine Beach, then give them a call with your location. They'll set up beach chairs, umbrellas, and even deliver bikes and surfboards. And they usually can set you up within the hour.

www.barneysbeachservice.com. 904.461.1422.

Bayfront Marin House Accessibility

The top floor is up a large flight of stairs so it is not accessible, but the views and rooms on the first floor are just as lovely. Our most accessible room is the Napoleon Suite. It has a King sized bed, wider doorways, and a roll in shower. The mirror tilts, and you can roll under the sink. We're also happy to make any adjustments that would make you more comfortable during your stay—whether that's removing the box springs so that the bed is very low, or outfitting the shower with a medical bench. The Napoleon is located right next to our parking pad, and we're happy to let you use that during your stay with advance notice. Please note that the pad is only available for one vehicle (we need a place to park to unload our daily grocery and produce haul!), so we can't accommodate more than one guest room at a time.



The Napoleon Room

If you don't use a wheelchair, but have some difficulty walking, I suggest the Francisco Marin with its black and white walk in shower (which has a tile bench and a handheld shower head), and the King George room with its private porch and glider. Also, the Robinson Lewis has very easy access to the dining room, so it's just a few steps to get a refill during happy hour! Speaking of the dining room, we have a ramp from the courtyard that comes right up to the front door and the dining room, so if steps are a problem, you don't need to worry.

Although they are absolutely beautiful rooms, I don't recommend the Coquina Suite or the Burgess Cottage room if you have accessibility issues. The Coquina Suite is a long narrow room, so it is the longest walk from the bathroom to the bedroom, and the Burgess has a small step between the sitting area and the bed area.

No matter what room you stay in, you can always ask us to remove furniture or rugs if that makes you feel more secure.

PLEASE NOTE: Our hotel was built in 1790, 1860, and 1880, and as a historic structure it is not required to have ADA compliant rooms. We have added features to our rooms as a service to our guests with mobility issues in order to be a wheelchair friendly hotel. If you have any questions about traveling or staying with us, please call us for more information. We'll do whatever we can to help make your stay more comfortable!

Rent Medical Equipment

If you require specific medical equipment, and don't want to travel with it (or if you're not able to travel with it), we recommend Ward Medical Services. They offer wheelchairs, walkers, lifts, benches, and other home medical supplies. www.wardmedicalservices.com. 904.794.9600.

Other Rentals

Both my grandmother and my husband's grandmother need power recliners to sleep. We found that we could rent accessible accommodations from the local [Rent-A-Center](#). Unfortunately, we had to rent them for a full month no matter how long we actually needed them, but spending a couple hundred dollars was totally worth it as it allowed them both to enjoy their stay and get a good night's sleep! 904.797.6866.

If you have mobility issues, and you're planning a trip to our inn, please call us at 904.824.4301 or email us at info@bayfrontmarinhouse.com. We're happy to answer any specific questions, or help you plan your trip.