



## **Oregon Accessibility Verified Talking Points**

### **About Wheel the World/Travel Oregon announcement:**

- The Oregon Tourism Commission, dba\_Travel Oregon, has worked with Wheel the World to earn the state of Oregon a landmark designation: the first state to become Accessibility Verified.
- The designation elevates transparency and promotes inclusivity in travel experiences for people with visible and non-visible disabilities.
- Through this coordinated statewide effort and previous locally driven efforts, Wheel the World has assessed more than 750 hotels, restaurants and tourism businesses in 43 communities across the state—and that number will continue to grow as more communities are currently undergoing assessments.
- Oregon is now set apart as a destination that provides evidence-based and measurement-backed accessibility information for Welcome Centers and tourism businesses across the entire state, from hotels and outdoor adventure experiences to cultural attractions and culinary experiences.

### **What does achieving Accessibility Verified status mean?**

- Oregon is now the first state to offer visitors with disabilities and/or mobility challenges the opportunity to plan travel itineraries through an online resource that keeps their needs top of mind.
- Through Wheel the World's Accessibility Verified program, accessibility features of local hotels, experiences and attractions have been made available online through [TravelOregon.com](https://TravelOregon.com) and [WheeltheWorld.com](https://WheeltheWorld.com).
- This initiative provides access to detailed, reliable information on accessibility which is a crucial factor in trip planning for travelers with disabilities.

### **What does an assessment entail?**

- When coming to a business, Wheel the World assesses mobility, visual, hearing and cognitive accessibility to meet a wide range of accessibility needs. These assessments

are available on Wheel the World's website to offer visitors with disabilities the ability to plan trips knowing their needs will be met at each destination along the way.

- Unlike other programs based on self-reporting or ADA compliance, Wheel the World's Accessibility Verified program uses a structured, on-site evaluation process backed by physical measurements across multiple dimensions of accessibility.

#### **Is this effort part of a broader strategy to make Oregon more inclusive?**

- The partnership with Wheel the World is part of Travel Oregon's broader strategy to ensure Oregon is a welcoming destination for all, for both visitors and residents with visible or non-visible disabilities.
- With accessibility data now visible and bookable online, travelers can explore detailed listings, use Wheel the World's AI-powered accessibility profile and receive tailored recommendations based on their specific needs.

#### **Why is this important?**

- Accessible tourism not only breaks down barriers for people with disabilities, but also creates shared benefits among many different types of travelers, such as aging adults, people traveling with temporary disabilities, and people traveling with children.
- When universal design features are applied, they benefit society as a whole by improving usability for everyone.

#### **+ A Smart Investment**

- Plus, accessibility is a smart investment for the tourism industry to make. Globally, 1.3 billion people—16% of the global population—live with a significant disability. That's a massive and often overlooked market.
- According to a 2024 Open Doors Organization & Harris Poll, 25.6 million travelers with disabilities took 76.9 million trips and spent \$50 billion in the U.S. alone. Those numbers could easily be double or triple that if those visitors felt confident and comfortable knowing what to expect and that they'd be welcomed and comfortable.
- As Baby Boomers—who control 70% of discretionary income—age into accessibility needs, accessible tourism offerings will only continue to reach more people.
- And, these travelers don't exist in isolation: when you welcome one accessible traveler, you often attract their entire group of family, friends, caregivers, multiplying your impact.

#### **+ Accessibility is good for everyone (residents, too!)**

- You can think of investing in accessibility today as a down payment for addressing the needs of aging populations (*that's all of us*).
- These investments are creating a lasting infrastructure that benefits not just tourists but residents too.
- Ultimately, these features will be used 10 times more by the community, reinforcing accessibility as a win-win—both a necessity and a smart business investment.

#### **How long has the state been working on this accessibility effort?**

- The Oregon Coast, Portland and Central Oregon tourism regions began working with Wheel the World in 2022, and then Travel Oregon contracted with them in 2024 to support the remaining regions in achieving the Accessibility Verified status.
- Travel Oregon also supports projects and programs that further inclusion and accessibility across the state through a series of grants and other investments.
- Ensuring Oregon is a welcoming destination for all is woven into everything we do at Travel Oregon.

#### **Why is Travel Oregon working with Kaylee Bays?**

- To help bring the story to life, Travel Oregon and Wheel the World partnered with accessibility advocate Kaylee Bays, who has Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), a degenerative condition she was diagnosed with at age 21, and was the first wheelchair user to compete on So You Think You Can Dance.
- Kaylee shares her journey with her 140,000 followers on Instagram (@slayleebays), helping inspire a wide audience with her experiences.
- Kaylee can speak to Oregon's accessible offerings, as she explored them firsthand this past summer, experiencing the dramatic landscapes of Smith Rock and kayaking surrounded by stunning mountains on Hosmer Lake in Central Oregon.