

AUTISM ON THE HIGH SEAS

Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines (always a first choice for accessibility needs) is the first cruise line to be certified as “Autism Friendly” by Autism on the Seas. This certification recognizes RCCL’s efforts to make sure their products and services are accessible by guests with Autism. At the current time, one in 68 children have been diagnosed somewhere on the autism spectrum and there is a 10 – 17% annual growth in diagnosis.

Royal Caribbean has added new Autism Friendly features including Autism Friendly Films, Toy Lending and Activities and has developed a Cruising Social Story. At this time, RCCL has achieved Bronze Certification Level which means they have autism friendly products and services in place. They plan to complete Silver Certification by the end of 2014 which means they will begin Autism Awareness Training for the Adventure Ocean staff onboard.

Existing Autism Friendly Features include priority check-in, boarding and debarkation. Gluten free and other special dietary offerings are also available as many persons with Autism have food allergies. Additionally, flexible age groupings in the Adventure Ocean Program and toilet training policy exemptions are allowed. Pagers are given to parents with autistic children in the Adventure Ocean programs so they can be easily reached. Autism Friendly Films are presented in a low-lit environment with low volume. Guests are encouraged to freely talk and walk around during the film. These films are offered on all sailings with Autism Groups and where there are at least five guests with autism on board. Dates and times of these films are highlighted in the Daily Cruise Compass. Toys and games that are conducive and appropriate for guests with autism are available in the Adventure Ocean Program on all ships and can be lent out.

Royal Caribbean offer activities for children of all ages. Families are encouraged to consult with the Adventure Ocean staff regarding any needs their children may have. This helps to identify which activities are most appropriate and any modifications which may need to be made.

A Cruising Social Story is a written or visual guide describing social interactions, situations, behaviors, skills or concepts. Social Stories help individuals with autism cope with the social situations they may encounter onboard a large cruise ship. RCCL now offers a Social Story about cruising to help families with autism prepare for their cruise. The Social Story can be found at www.royalcaribbean.com/autismfriendly

Royal Caribbean provides a true family vacation experience; an option families with autism may not of previously considered because of the needs of their family member. Families with autism sailing on Autism Friendly Certified ships can be confident that they have the products and services that will help accommodate their family members with autism.

