

Travel Muggles Welcomed

by Kleo King Esq., VP, United Spinal Association and Mary Peterson, CTC, ABLE to Travel

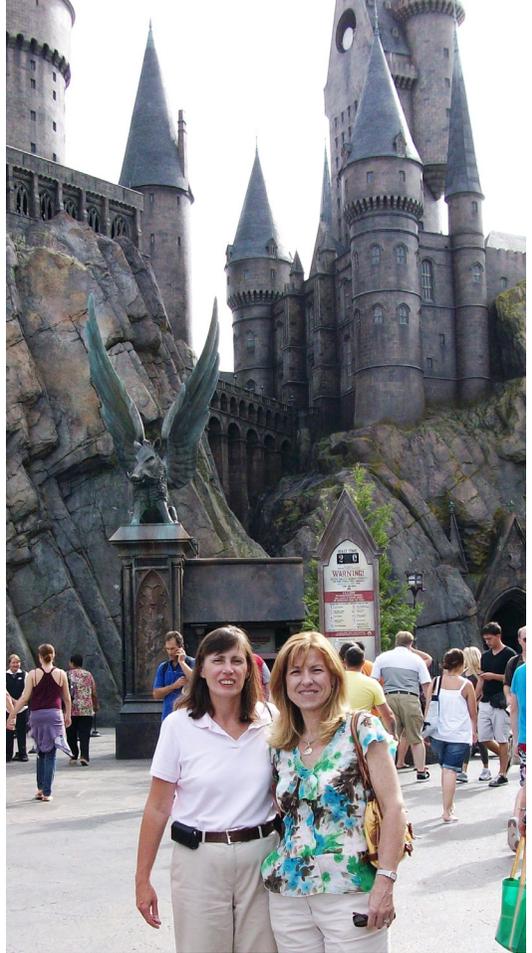
The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort was not only magical for the ABLE to "Travel Muggles" and United Spinal Association board member Michele Leahy, but it was accessible as well.

You enter the gates and to the right you see the train engine that left Platform 9 ¾ a short time earlier. As you proceed through the streets of Hogsmead, you realize that the cobblestone streets have been fashioned so they are smooth and easily traversed by guests who are walking or using a wheelchair or scooter.

The three main attractions (Dragon Challenge, Flight of the Hippogriff, and Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey) can be ridden by all who are able to transfer onto the ride's seat. Each attraction features a ride queue that is an attraction in itself. For non-riders, you can simply step out of line after touring the castle on the Forbidden Journey attraction or walking through the champions' tent before boarding one of two dragons on the Dragon Challenge. Before boarding the Flight of the Hippogriff, visitors pass Hagrid's house and learn how to greet a Hippogriff.

Of course the jewel is Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey. As you wind your way through the castle and up the staircases (which also provides adjacent elevator access), you witness the portraits come to life and speak about Muggles being allowed into the castle. This is so much like the books and movies that you feel as if you really are a part of Harry's world. In fact, the travel agent some of you have come to know and love, Mary Peterson, was moved to tears at the sight of the talking portraits.

Prior to boarding the ride, all potential riders are able to see the seat and test it out. For individuals who require additional time to board, a car is sent to a private area where boarding can be done without delaying the ride for others. A ride attendant directs one car that seats four guests to leave the track and come to the private boarding area. Michele expressed her thoughts by stating, "This is a great invention as I could take my time to board without delaying others." Once she boarded, the car rejoined the others on the track for a seamless transition. As this attraction provides presentations by Hogwarts' professors, students, and headmaster it provides assistive listening devices and a sign language interpreter once daily, Monday through Thursday.



The Flight of the Hippogriff has a car with a side door to allow for easier transition from a wheelchair or scooter to the ride seat. Once the person boards, a ride attendant moves their wheelchair to the other side of the platform so that upon exiting the ride the person exits on the same side as all the riders.

As you exit Hogsmead stop, there are accessible shops including Hooneydukes, the Three Broomsticks and Ollivander's. A guest is asked at Ollivander's to see if they are the "chosen one" by testing out wands (I have it on good sources – the *Daily Prophet* perhaps, that Michele was the "chosen one").

Your trip will not be complete unless you stop at the Hog's Head Pub to have a refreshing Butter Beer topped with cream foam that is too delicious to begin to describe.

ABLE to Travel (www.abletotravel.org), a program of United Spinal Association, provides travel services and knowledgeable travel agents who specialize in all types of accessibility issues for travelers. They can be reached at 888-211-3635.

Mary Peterson, CTC, was the guest speaker at the New York Mobility Club on February 13, 2013. Sponsored by Bussani Mobility, the group is a circle of friends and resources for people with disabilities. A FREE community service, the club meets every 2nd Wednesday of the month in Smithtown, NY at the new Bussani Mobility showroom. For more information, call 888-690-7709, email dcaiazzo@wegetyouthere.com or visit www.BussaniMobility.com

