

## FIELD-TESTED TRAVEL TIPS

By Larissa and Michael Milne



In Virginia Beach, Grommet Island's handicapped-accessible park is the only one of its kind in the U.S.

### Va.'s flagship resort beach is ultra-accessible

Summertime is synonymous with family beach vacations, but playing in the sand and splashing in the water can be a challenge for those with disabilities. Not so at Virginia Beach. In the last several years, the vacation destination at the juncture of the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean has put in a concerted effort to make its flagship resort beach ultra-accessible.

"Focusing on accessible tourism might be an unusual strategy for a resort destination," said Jim Ricketts, director of the Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. "But it is one we feel is important and necessary."

It's easier for anyone to get on to the beach. There are handicap-accessible ramps from the boardwalk at every block. Those longing to feel the splash of the ocean can do so at one of the wooden walkways that extend right down to the water line from four street entrances. The city provides rentals of beach-accessible wheelchairs, which ride atop the sand and are easily maneuverable.

The most remarkable facility at Virginia Beach, however, is JT's Grommet Island Beach Park & Playground. Located at the southern end of the boardwalk, near a parking lot with accessible spaces, this free

amusement area is designed to be fun "for everyBODY."

The Grommet Island playground is America's first and only 100-percent accessible oceanfront park. Accessible play equipment, soft sculptures, and a wheelchair-friendly bouncy play surface are the highlights of the shaded play area. There are also ramps heading every which way, picnic tables, and bench seating. From here, it's only a few short yards to the water's edge, easily navigable in one of the beach-friendly wheelchairs.

During a recent visit, we witnessed kids of all ages and physical abilities cavorting on the playground, while a grandfather looked on from his beach-friendly wheelchair. EveryBODY was, indeed, having a great time. And that's what family beach vacations are all about.

For more information: [www.visitvirginia-beach.com/a-beach-for-everybody/](http://www.visitvirginia-beach.com/a-beach-for-everybody/).

Philadelphia natives Larissa and Michael Milne have been traveling the world full time since 2011. Get more travel tips on their blog, [www.ChangesInLongitude.com](http://www.ChangesInLongitude.com). Their first book, "Philadelphia Liberty Trail," takes a revolutionary approach to visiting the historic district.

