



# The Torch



Edition 46

## Recap: The John and Esther Ellerman Long Cane Rally 2025

The John and Esther Ellerman Long Cane Rally took centre stage at the Cape Town Company Gardens this year, offering participants a truly beautiful and sensory experience within South Africa's oldest garden.



*Participants posing with their gifts*

The Long Cane Rally is a powerful demonstration of freedom and independence with participants skilfully, showcasing their proficiency with the white cane. Participants transformed the historic Cape Town Company Gardens into a vibrant testament to independence. The walk was described as relaxing and peaceful, guided by the sounds of nature and the rhythmic tap of their white canes."

This annual gathering brings together all organizations for the blind in the Western Cape, united by the shared goal of promoting awareness and celebrating the independence and empowerment of the blind community.



*Hendrik Schmidt (director) handing over the gifts to participants*

The essential training provided by Orientation and Mobility Practitioners equips blind individuals with the skills to be independent at home, in the workplace, or at school. By learning to use their white canes, they banish isolation and gain the confidence to fully navigate life. Hearing participants share their O&M stories on the day, highlighted the profound impact this training has on living a full, independent life.



*Participants enjoying their meals*

After their tranquil walk-through nature, participants enjoyed a freshly grilled Spur burger. A big thank you to SPUR for a job well done.

The day was filled with enthusiasm and laughter, expertly guided by our MC, Bonita Blankenberg, whose warm personality added fun and excitement.

#### THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

We would like to thank Piet from UDS Africa and ICE for our t-shirts. Each year all participants and volunteers receive a t-shirt to wear on the day promoting a sense of togetherness and unity in the spirit of community. A big thank you from everyone who participated on the day. We loved our t shirts.

Our lucky draw was a great hit due to all the great prizes sponsored.



*A participant on the route*

Thank you to:

- Shoprite
- Pick N Pay
- Rabie Property Group
- CTSB
- SA Guide Dogs
- Specs Savers
- Roco Mamas
- Steers
- Hoop Bok Radio
- Peninsula Beverages
- Greenleaf Olive Oil

The great smiles on the faces of the winners, adults and children alike were heartwarming.

Thank you to all the team leaders, volunteers, and assistants who dedicated their time and energy to making the John and Esther Ellerman Long Cane Rally a truly wonderful and memorable success.

Finally, thank you to all the participants for joining us every year to make this event memorable.

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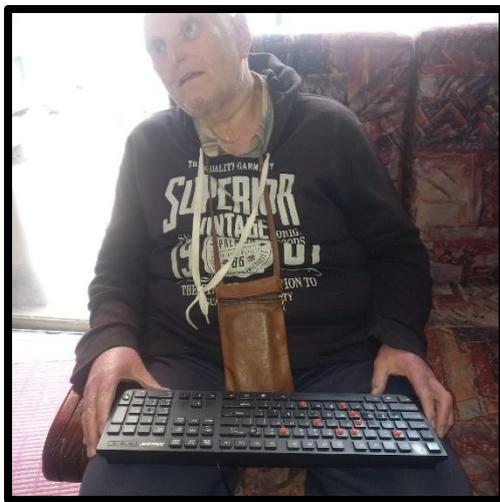
A special thank you to Noretta Minnaar from St Dunstan's. Noretta works hard all year to get as many prizes as possible so that there are more winners each year going home with a gift.

Noretta is retiring this year. We want to say thank you from everyone for growing our sponsorships and gifts to have more happy and excited faces and winners.

## A Little Bit of Tech Magic

Peet on his journey to upskill his technology. It's amazing to see the progress that happens when patience meets persistence, and a little technical elbow grease is thrown in.

Inclusion Works Africa's (IWA) focus was on making Peet's computer experience smooth, safe, and truly his own.



*Peet applying his new found skills*

They started with a full "spring cleaning" of the digital and physical workspace. The computer, scanner, and external keyboard all got a thorough cleaning, complete with lessons on PC hygiene. Peet was shown and support how to secure all his wires and plugs, creating a workspace that is optimal for safety and easy reach.

Under the hood, the PC had a serious tune-up: anti-virus scans, disk cleanups, and updates to make sure everything is running as fast as possible. Most importantly, IWA fine-tuned the settings for his essential screen readers, NVDA and Dolphin.

Peet is enjoying learning to use both! He even learned how to switch between NVDA and Dolphin depending on the task. He's keyboard was cleaned and newly marked with tactile markings based on his input.

Every adjustment, every lesson, and every clean surface is making a difference; Peet's training on dolphin and NVDA is about unlocking independence and connecting him to the world in a way that feels empowering.

## Beneficiary News

### Matteo Wessels



*Matteo with his 2025 Matric Partner, Tabita*

Matteo Wessels (18), oldest son of St Dunstaner Don Wessels, recently wrote his final matric exam at Parel Vallei High in Somerset West. During primary school Matteo was able to walk to school, but for high school this tall young man, standing 1.94m in his socks, cycled to the nearby high school.

Matteo's plans are to study B.Com Agricultural Economics at Stellenbosch University, starting 2026. With Matteo having reached the milestone of finishing school, the Wessels family uses this opportunity to sincerely thank St Dunstan's for their unwavering support for Matteo right through his school career and for future support at university.

## 10 Empowering Travel Tips for Blind or Visually Impaired Travelers

Traveling as a blind or visually impaired person is absolutely possible and can be incredibly rewarding. With the right preparation, tools, and mindset, you can explore new destinations independently and confidently. This guide shares 10 practical travel tips to help blind and



low-vision individuals (and those supporting them) plan trips, navigate unfamiliar places, and enjoy the journey. From technology hacks to old-fashioned planning, these tips focus on empowerment and safety. Whether you're an experienced adventurer or preparing for your first solo trip, these insights will help you travel with confidence and ease.

## 1. Plan Ahead and Research Accessibility

The most important step is thorough planning. Start early (even several months ahead) to investigate your destination's accessibility features. Look into every aspect of the trip, from transportation to accommodations, so there are fewer surprises. Key things to research include:

- **Accommodations:** Does your hotel offer Braille room numbers, accessible elevators, or staff assistance for orientation? Read reviews or contact them to ensure they can meet your needs.
- **Local Transportation:** Check if buses, trains, or subways have audio announcements or tactile paving. Many cities publish accessibility guides for public transit.
- **Streets and Navigation:** Find out if crosswalks have audible signals and if tactile maps or navigation apps are available for the area. Knowing the layout of streets and landmarks in advance will boost your confidence when you arrive.

## 2. Organize Documents and Itineraries for Easy Access

Keeping your travel information organized will reduce stress during your trip. Many blind travellers carry both hard copies and digital copies of vital documents. For example, one seasoned traveller suggests: "Print everything off including flights, transfers, hotel and insurance details. Keep this along with your passport, cards, and spare cash in a travel wallet... Always keep this on you." Having printed confirmations on hand helps if you need to show tickets or reservations quickly.

At the same time, store all important details on your phone for offline access – from itineraries to emergency contacts. Make sure files like flight info or hotel addresses are saved in an accessible format (such as large text or a notes app) in case you have no internet. It's also wise to share your itinerary or live location with a trusted friend or family member, so someone knows your plans and can assist if needed.

## 3. Use Available Travel Assistance Services (On Your Terms)

Don't hesitate to make use of the free assistance services available to travellers with disabilities. Airlines, railways, and bus stations often have staff who can help you navigate terminals and reach your destination smoothly. Remember, using these services is your choice – they're there to support you, not to restrict your independence. For instance, under the law airlines must assist blind passengers with boarding, connections, and retrieving luggage, and they can't require you to travel with a companion. Here are a few assistance options to consider:

- **Airport Special Assistance:** When booking your flight, request special assistance. Staff can meet you at the airport, guide you through check-in, security, and to your gate, and help with luggage. Many airports also offer priority security lines for people with disabilities, making the process faster.
- **TSA Cares and Equivalent Programs:** In the U.S., you can arrange help through TSA Cares for expedited security screening. Other countries and airlines have similar programs – ask ahead about what support is available for travellers who are blind or visually impaired.

- **Train and Bus Station Help:** If you're taking a train or bus, call the station or ask at the information desk for assistance. Staff can often escort you to the right platform or stop. Don't be afraid to speak up and ask conductors or fellow passengers if you need help finding your seat or knowing when to get off.

## 4. Rely on Your Mobility Tools and Skills

Your mobility aids – whether a white cane or a guide dog – are your best friends when traveling. These tools extend your senses and give you the confidence to explore independently. A cane, for example, not only detects obstacles and curbs, but also signals to others that you have a visual impairment, which can make them more helpful and aware. (Check out our white cane guide for in-depth tips on cane techniques and choices.) Good orientation and mobility (O&M) skills, such as using auditory cues and mental mapping of new places, go a long way when navigating an unfamiliar city.

Many experienced blind travellers say their cane is the key to their freedom on the road. As one solo traveller put it, “my lack of vision doesn't stop me from traveling – as long as I have my white cane.” With proper training and confidence in your mobility skills, you can go virtually anywhere on your own. Trust your cane (or dog), practice your techniques, and step forward knowing you have the tools to find your way.

## 5. Prepare Your Guide Dog for Travel (If Applicable)

Traveling with a guide dog requires some extra planning so that your canine companion stays safe and happy. If you use a service dog, be sure to:

- **Know the Rules and Paperwork:** Research the rules for guide dogs at your destination and with your airline. Policies vary widely around the world – some countries may require special health certificates or even quarantines for incoming animals. Contact embassies or consulates ahead of time to verify what documentation you need. Also check airline regulations (in the U.S., airlines must accommodate guide dogs with the proper Department of Transportation forms).
- **Pack Ample Food and Supplies:** Bring enough dog food and medications for the whole trip, plus a little extra. It's a good idea to pre-portion your dog's food into sealed bags or containers (this keeps it fresh and makes airport security easier). Don't forget collapsible water bowls, poop bags, and any comfort items like a favourite blanket or toy.
- **Plan for Relief and Comfort:** Identify where relief areas are located in airports or transit hubs – many have designated spots for service animals. During flights or long rides, let staff know you have a guide dog so they can seat you where your dog has space to lie down comfortably. Schedule in regular breaks during your trip so your dog can stretch, relieve itself, and stay relaxed in new environments.

## 6. Leverage Accessible Tech and Apps for Navigation

Your smartphone can be one of your greatest travel aids. Accessibility apps and features help you navigate, recognize objects, and get real-time assistance. Many free apps for blind people offer functionalities like object recognition, audio navigation cues, and connecting to

sighted helpers. Before your trip, install and try out the tools that best suit your needs. Here are a few types of tech to consider:

- **GPS and Navigation Apps:** Use navigation apps that provide walking directions with audio feedback. Google Maps and Apple Maps have strong VoiceOver support – and you can download maps offline in advance so you won't lose guidance if you lack internet. Specialized apps for blind users (like Lazarillo or BlindSquare) can also give extra audio cues about your surroundings.
- **Visual Assistance Apps:** When you need help reading signs or finding something, apps like Be My Eyes or Aira connect you with a remote sighted assistant via video. A volunteer (or a professional agent with Aira) can describe what's around you in real time – handy for navigating a busy station or reading a menu.
- **Other Useful Tools:** Use apps for specific tasks. A currency identifier will speak out a bill's value – great for unfamiliar money. Translation apps can read foreign text on signs or menus aloud. And OCR (optical character recognition) tools (such as Seeing AI) turn printed text into speech, which is useful for schedules, brochures, and other documents on the go.

## 7. Keep Your Phone Safe and Within Reach

Smartphones are vital for navigation and communication, so you'll want to keep yours both secure and easy to use on the move. When traveling, it's not always ideal to hold your phone out in front of you – it could slip from your hand or draw unwanted attention. Instead, consider ways to use your phone while it stays safely in your pocket or bag. For example, the Hable One (a pocket-size Braille keyboard) and the Hable Easy (a simple eight-button controller) let you control your smartphone without having to touch the screen. With a device like Hable, you can type messages, control apps, and navigate menus while your phone stays tucked away. This means you're less likely to drop the phone or have it taken, and you maintain privacy since others can't peek at your screen.

If a dedicated device isn't for you, you can still secure your phone by using a wrist strap or phone lanyard, and enabling voice commands or earbuds for hands-free use. The goal is to prevent accidents and keep your phone accessible whenever you need it, without exposing it unnecessarily.

## 8. Plan for Unexpected Situations (Safety Nets)

Even the best-laid plans can hit a snag, so prepare some backups to handle surprises. A little foresight will help you stay safe and continue your journey with minimal disruption if something goes wrong:

- **Carry Spares for Mobility Aids:** If you use a white cane, pack a spare cane in case your primary one breaks or gets lost (it happens!). Telescopic canes fold up small and are easy to tuck in your luggage as a backup. Similarly, if you have a guide dog, bring extra harness parts or an extra leash in case of wear and tear.
- **Bring a Backup Battery:** Your phone will likely be your lifeline for navigation and communication, so don't let it die at a critical moment. Carry a portable charger or spare battery pack. It can be a real lifesaver – especially if you rely on your phone for things like ride-sharing apps or GPS. Make sure to keep your power bank charged and in your day bag.

- **Keep Emergency Info Handy:** Write down or save important information in an easy-to-reach place. This could include emergency contacts, your hotel address, and a brief note about your visual impairment (in case someone else needs to read it in an emergency). Having a laminated card in your wallet with this info, or a note on your phone's lock screen, can be invaluable if you're in an unfamiliar place and need help.

## 9. Embrace New Experiences and Adventures

Travel is all about experiencing new things – and that's as true for blind travellers as anyone else. Don't shy away from adventures just because they seem visually oriented at first. With some adaptation or guidance, you can participate in almost any activity, from tandem skydiving to exploring a museum with tactile exhibits. There are organizations and tour companies that specialize in accessible adventure travel, but you can also organize your own thrills by letting activity providers know your needs.

For example, adaptive sports programs around the world make activities like skiing, surfing, and even scuba diving accessible. One blind traveller who tried scuba diving in Mozambique described the underwater experience as a feast for the senses – she loved the “crackling” sound of the coral reef surrounding her. Her big lesson was to trust her guide and focus on the non-visual sensations, which made the dive incredibly rewarding. The takeaway: don't automatically rule out any experience. You may discover that a supposedly visual attraction offers wonderful tastes, sounds, and textures that create lasting memories.

## 10. Stay Confident, Ask for Help When Needed, and Enjoy the Journey

Finally, remember that a positive mindset is one of your most powerful travel tools. Confidence comes with practice – maybe start with a short trip to build your comfort, then tackle bigger adventures. Travel at your own pace and don't compare yourself to sighted travelers; you might do some things differently, and that's perfectly okay.

Crucially, never be afraid to advocate for yourself and ask for help when you need it. Accepting assistance doesn't diminish your independence. As one blind traveller explained, “the truth is that someone won't be with me at all times, nor do I need someone to be. If I need help I will ask for it.” Whether it's asking a flight attendant to orient you to your seat or asking a local for directions, speaking up ensures you get the support to fully enjoy your trip.

Above all, savor the journey. Traveling is about embracing the unknown and connecting with the world around you. You'll likely discover incredible hospitality and make new friends along the way. With the right preparation and attitude, there's no reason you can't explore the world to your heart's content. So pack your bags, trust your abilities, and have fun – you've got this!

## FAQ

### Can a blind or visually impaired person travel alone safely?

Yes. With good preparation and the right tools, blind and low-vision individuals can absolutely travel alone safely. Laws protect your right to travel independently, and many blind travelers explore the world solo every day using canes, guide dogs, technology, and confident planning.

### What assistive technology helps blind travellers the most?

Smartphones are extremely helpful because of GPS navigation apps, camera-based apps, and voice assistants. Many people also use a Bluetooth Braille keyboard or controller (like Hable One) to use their phone without looking at the screen. Additionally, tools like talking GPS devices or digital audio tour guides can be useful in some situations.

### How do I get assistance at airports or train stations when I'm blind?

Airports and transit stations have special assistance services for people with disabilities. You can request help when booking or at the customer service desk. Staff can guide you through security, take you to your gate or platform, and help with things like finding seats or baggage claim. Don't hesitate to ask – they are there to assist.

### Are there travel groups or tours for blind travellers?

Yes, there are specialized tour companies that organize trips for blind and visually impaired travellers (often pairing travellers with sighted guides). Examples include Traveleyes and others. But you don't have to use a special tour group – many blind travellers join regular tours or travel independently. It depends on your comfort level.

### What are some quick tips for a blind person traveling to a new place?

A few quick tips: Research the area's accessibility (transport, accommodations) in advance; carry a notecard with your destination address (in case you need to show someone); download offline maps on your phone; and take things at your own pace. Building in extra time into your schedule can reduce stress, and always have a backup plan (like a spare cane or portable charger) just in case.

Planning and confidence are key for blind and visually impaired travellers.

Sourced: [IAmHable](#)

*THE END*