

How SEATRAC Can Help Make Beaches More Accessible *After Success in Europe, SEATRAC Is Now in North America*



Shown here is the SEATRAC device. Photo Credit: SeatracaUSA

By Grant Broadhurst

For Brian Bergman, Contract Administrator and owner of SeatracaUSA, his passion for helping wheelchair-bound people experience the beach independently with SEATRAC springs from personal experience.

“My sister-in-law had MS multiple sclerosis, and this goes back almost 40 years ago, and her disease developed from just minor imbalance to using a cane, a walker, wheelchair and then finally succumbing to her disease and hospice. But one of the things that she loved to do was swim,” Bergman told *USAEXtra* during the TravelAbility Summit in Orlando last month. “And once her MS developed to a certain point, the only way that she could get to a beach is by literally being lifted up by my brother-in-law, myself, and another member of the family. So it took away all of her independence and freedom.”

Decades later, while watching Euronews, Bergman saw a segment on an intriguing device used in Europe: SEATRAC, a solar-powered remote-controlled chair on a track that can safely carry a wheelchair-bound person into the water and back again. It's a much different experience than being carried into the water over sand—and it's free for the users.

"It gives people the freedom and flexibility to do things on their own that before this, they had to have their friends and family do this with them, which was a Herculean task in many cases, and basically they had no freedom or independence," Bergman said.

For the wheelchair user, it's pretty simple to use. SEATRAC has mats that enable a person in wheelchair to wheel themselves over to the SEATRAC device in order to transfer themselves onto the chair.

"And with a remote control that's waterproof, it takes them from the sand right into the water, and then they can get off and swim on their own or just sit at the end of the device and basically just get the lower part of their body wet," Bergman said. "And then [they can] go back to the beginning, get off, transfer to their wheelchair, and

then with the help of these various mats that we have, they can take their wheelchair and go under an umbrella and enjoy the rest of the day at the beach."

The device is patented in Greece, the EU, and the USA, and Bergman's company is the exclusive dealer for the whole western hemisphere. Over the past 10 years, SEATRAC has proven popular in Europe, especially in Greece where the device was invented. Bergman said there are more than 160 of these devices are in use in Europe from Italy to Latvia with more on the way. According to Bergman, last year 36,000 trips were made on SEATRAC devices—all of them safely.

Indeed, Bergman said there has never had an injury with the SEATRAC, and that's good not only for users but for proving the safety of the device to get insurance in order to bring it to the United States. That hurdle has been cleared, and now the product is available in the United States.

In fact, there are two versions of it for the United States: The SEATRAC and the SEATRAC Mover. The SEATRAC Mover was needed for the U.S. market because while tidal changes in the Mediterranean are measured in inches, tidal changes in the United States are often measured in feet.



“The Mover, as the name [connotes], basically has tracks like a tank. So therefore the entire object along with the sections of track can literally go in or out of the water to change for high tide and low tide,” Bergman said. “And as a result, it can be used anywhere along the Atlantic or Pacific Coast or the Gulf.”

Once the devices are installed in the United States or elsewhere in the western hemisphere, they will be listed on SEATRAC’s website. Users will be able to get directions

Shown here is the SEATRAC Mover device. Photo Credit: SeatracUSA

to exactly where the SEATRAC device is located. SEATRACs with cameras can even show what the day’s conditions look like.

“So even if you're at home, and you're not sure if you want to go to a particular beach, it will show you the conditions of the beach. If there are strong waves, windy, etcetera, then it might not be a good day to go. And on the other hand, if it does look like a good day, get in the car and go to the beach and have a fun day,” Bergman said.

Bergman said the devices make business sense as well since people with disabilities—and their families—are more likely to go to places that make it easier on them.

“For locations—whether it's a municipality, whether it's a resort, whether it's a cruise line that has their own private islands in the Bahamas, or any other location like that—to invest [in a SEATRAC device] is their own self-interest primarily. And then the hotels or resorts will benefit. Restaurants will benefit and stores will benefit. It's a win-win situation,” Bergman said.

The Mover device, and the classic stationary device are provided by Seatracusa. Extra features are also available such as the mats that allow wheelchairs to get to and from the SEATRAC. SEATRAC rigs can even include a shower at the end and/or a changing room.

“The one thing that really makes the most difference to me is [that it] basically gives somebody back independence and freedom to do something on their own,” Bergman said. “Not having to go to somebody and say, ‘Hey, by the way, can you do me a favor, I'd like to go to the beach today.’ And it just puts you in a terrible position. Even though the person does want to help you, you lose that sense of freedom and independence. And this brings that all back to you.”

For more information visit: www.seatracusa.com