

## Niagara Falls, Canada



### Report made by

- **Name:** Joan & Elena
- **Social media handles:** @joan\_pahisa (Twitter, Instagram), @joanp (TabiFolk) & @elenacruz7 (Twitter)
- **Date:** September, 2022.

### General information of the attraction

- **Name of the attraction:** Niagara Falls (Niagara Parks)
- **City and country:** Niagara Falls, Canada
- **Description:** One of the most famous in the world, Niagara Falls is a set of three great waterfalls, which have a vertical drop of more than 50 meters and the highest flow rate in North America, located at the border between Canada and the United States. **This review will focus on the accessible outdoor activities available at Niagara Parks (Canadian side):** Niagara Cruises, White Water Walk and Journey Behind the Falls.

- **Cruises:** 20 minute day or 40 minute night (with fireworks) boat rides that take you right next to the falls. Cruises are operated by Niagara City Cruises by Hornblower.
- **White Water Walk:** 300 meter wooden boardwalk next to the river rapids.
- **Journey Behind the Falls** (JBF): 50 meter tunnel behind the falls with two viewing portals to the back of the fall along the tunnel and two observation decks at the end.
- **Opening hours:** Outdoor activities at Niagara Park are not open all year long. You can check their availability and opening hours here.
- **Getting there:** The most common way to reach Niagara Falls is from Toronto. The fastest way is to take a direct bus (100-120 minute ride). Megabus has accessible buses, although they have to be booked in advance by phone if you need to stay on your wheelchair while traveling. Otherwise, tickets can be purchased online, mobility devices are stored in the trunk and the driver offers assistance to climb the steps to board. Here is Megabus Canada's website with information on accessibility. There are two bus stops serviced by Megabus, one is at Niagara Falls Bus Terminal (2.5km away from the cruises) and the other one right next to the Horseshoe Fall (the biggest of the three waterfalls) at the Table Rock Welcome Center (visitor center). From Toronto's Airport to Toronto's Union Station (next to one of Megabus' stops), there's the Pearson Express train (25 minute ride), which is wheelchair accessible and doesn't require booking in advance. To go directly from the airport to Niagara Falls, you can book an accessible shuttle from Ridebooker by phone or by e-mail with at least a 48 hour notice (contact information at the footer of the site).
- **Discount:** Support persons for persons with disabilities have free access to all Niagara Parks attractions (the only exception is the Falls Fireworks Cruise from Niagara City Cruises; the day cruise is alright) and transportation (WEGO buses and incline railway). Only 1 support person per visitor with disabilities has free access. Also, persons with disabilities get a 10% discount to the White Water Walk and the Journey Behind the Falls. If you get one of the Parks Passes, which include other indoor attractions and may also include the Whirlpool Aero Car (that is not wheelchair accessible) depending on the pass, further discounts do not apply. Passes do not include cruise tickets either.
- **Buying the tickets:** For the cruises, you can buy tickets in person at Hornblower Niagara City Cruises Main Ticket Plaza (next to the Zipline) or online at their website (it complies with WCAG 2.0 guidelines and has many accessibility features available from the accessibility symbol at the bottom right of the page). For the White Water Walk and

the Journey Behind the Falls you can get tickets, as well as passes, in person at the Table Rock Welcome Center (visitors center). Passes can also be bought online.

### **Accessibility information** (you may check boxes + write small descriptions)

- **ACCESSIBLE ROUTE**

- **Moving around:** Niagara Parks area spans about 6km along the Niagara river. The best way to move around is using WEGO buses, which are fully accessible. Niagara Falls conventional city buses are also wheelchair accessible. Nevertheless, it is also possible to freely wheel around, as sidewalks are wheelchair accessible with curb cuts at all crossings, although not all of them are 0-level, some are a bit uneven and there are areas where there aren't many available crossings to cross the road. Also, availability of tactile pavement at crossings is not consistent (there are more around the visitor center and the cruise area, but less the further you move from them). Crossings with traffic lights do have buttons to trigger acoustic signals.

☐ **Special entrance:** No. The Niagara Cruises entrance is at their Ticket Plaza (see above). It's 1.2km away from the visitor center and has a WEGO Green line stop nearby. The White Water Walk entrance is near Niagara Falls Bus Terminal (WEGO Green line also reaches it) and 4km away from the visitor center. There's also a WEGO Green Line bus stop next to the entrance. The Journey to the Falls entrance is at the visitors center building, also served by the WEGO Green line. Besides, it is noteworthy to mention that the incline railway that goes from the Fallsview Tourist Area (where the hotels are) down to the visitors center is wheelchair accessible (credits to Tori Hunter for the info).

☒ **Inaccessible areas:** At the White Water Walk there are two small lower viewing decks that can only be accessed by stairs. The rest of the trail is wheelchair accessible. Likewise, at the Journey Behind the Falls the lower viewing deck at the end of the tunnel (which has a better viewing angle compared to the top deck) can only be accessed through stairs.

☒ **Specific restrictions:** For safety reasons (wet floor and mist coming from the falls), visitors with disabilities can only enter the Journey BF with a support person.

- **PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY**

☒ **Ramps:** Leading to the elevators of Niagara Cruises there is a well paved mild ramp. Also, from the elevators exit to the boats boarding ramps, there is a zig-

zagging ramp with handrails that is also the entry queue. Finally, there are the aforementioned ramps to board the boats. There are also some mild slopes along the White Water Walk trail. The Journey Behind the Falls route is flat.

☒ **Elevators:** All three attractions have wide-door elevators. There are 4 elevators that go from the Niagara Cruises Ticket Plaza to the boat boarding area. Long cues tend to form at the Journey Behind the Falls elevators.

☒ **Steep slopes:** After getting off the boats, to get back to the elevators (there is also a souvenir shop and a restaurant), there is a steep long wide slope that may be difficult for manual wheelchair users or hard to push for some support persons (partially seen on the 5th photo). The rest of the attractions don't have steep slopes.

- **Types of flooring:** Most of the flooring at Niagara Parks is concrete, although there are some compact ground paths bordering the river between the cruises area and the visitor center. There are also some new cobblestone-style paved paths around Niagara Cruise Ticket Plaza, but they are even and well maintained. The inside of tunnels at Journey Behind the Falls and at the White Water Walk is also concrete. The Journey BF one is usually really wet, as well as the concrete stairs to go down to the lower deck. The White Water Walk is a wooden boardwalk (see photo). Planks are well maintained and there is a small separation between them (canes should be ok). Stairs to go to the lower decks are either wooden or concrete.

☒ **Steps and/or stairs:** There are stairs to go to the lower viewing decks at White Water Walk and at Journey Behind the Falls.

☐ **Narrow doorways/paths or tight turns:** None.

☐ **Elements blocking the view:** There are handrails or fences between 100 to 120cm everywhere, but most of them are not concrete and you can see between the bars. Only at the higher level along the river, there are low concrete walls that may hinder visibility for some little people or wheelchair users, but there are many observation viewpoints along the same route where the view is unobstructed (see 4th photo).

☒ **Accessible toilet:** There are 2 unisex wheelchair accessible restrooms located on the lower deck of both Niagara Cruises. There are also 2 accessible restrooms near the boat boarding area at the administrative building (with the shop, the restaurant and the elevators). Finally, there are also accessible restrooms at the Table Rock Welcome Center (visitors center).

☒ **Rental wheelchairs:** There are 8 free rental wheelchairs available at the visitor center on a first come first serve basis. There are also 2 free rental wheelchairs at the Niagara Cruises area. A deposit is needed to borrow the wheelchairs.

- **Distance:** If you visit the whole park on foot, be ready to walk between 5 to 15km. If you move around by bus, the total estimate distance for the round trip at each attraction would be the following: Niagara Cruises about 250 meters; White Water Walk around 800 meters (the tunnel is 73 meters and the boardwalk 305 meters); Journey Behind the Falls around 250 meters (the tunnel is 56 meters). Also, keep in mind that there may be long waiting times in queues (see below).

☐ **Places to sit&rest:** At Niagara City Cruise boats, there are places to sit inside, behind a glass (if you don't want to get wet), and outside, as well as areas to stand outside, either on the lower deck or the upper deck. The queue to board the cruises can be long and, although there are handrails, there is no place to sit. Before the queue, there is a restaurant area where you may rest. At Journey Behind the Wall, there are no places to sit inside the tunnel nor at the observation decks. There aren't any seats either at the waiting queues, which can also be long. At the White Water Walk there are benches at the beginning and at the end of the 300 meter trail.

- **VISUAL ACCESSIBILITY**

☒ **Tactile paving:** As mentioned, availability of tactile pavement at crossings throughout the Park is not consistent (there are more around the visitor center and the cruise area, but less the further you move from them).

☐ **Guiding system:** None, although traffic lights in the area have buttons to trigger acoustic signals.

☐ **Audioguide:** None, although elevator operators, while descending, make a general description of the route at White Water Walk and Journey BF. Cruise loudspeakers also do a tour introduction in English. Buses announce next stops along the way.

☐ **Braille:** None.

- **Contrast and size of signage:** Contrast is ok, but base lettering is small (see photo).
- **Contrast of architectural elements:** Contrast between steps at some of the stairs, especially when wet at Journey BF, may be a bit low.

☐ **Touchable 3D models:** None.



- **HEARING ACCESSIBILITY**

☐ **Sign language:** The “Communication” section on Niagara Parks accessibility info webpage says that staff is trained to communicate with persons with disabilities, but sign language is not mentioned.

☐ **Hearing loop:** None.

☐ **Captions:** None, although buses do have visual signs identifying next stops.

- **COGNITIVE ACCESSIBILITY:**

☐ **Easy-to-read:** None.

☐ **Pictograms:** Aside from the basic signs marking elevators, exits, restrooms, restaurants, etc., information throughout the park is not available with specific pictograms for cognitive accessibility.

- **SENSORY AND ORGANIC ACCESSIBILITY**

☒ **High noise level or loud sounds:** Extremely high noise level near the waterfalls.

☐ **Potential issues with lighting:** Tunnels are well lit, but not too brightly.

☐ **Bright colors:** None observed.

☐ **Strong smells:** None.

☒ **Need of interaction with other people:** If you buy tickets in person at the visitor center. Also with elevator operators. Elevators can get crowded and there are usually queues to get to them. There are also queues to board the boat and boat decks get packed with people. The tunnel at Journey BF can also get really crowded.

☐ **Silent or sensory room:** None, although as the park is so vast, there are areas, specially a bit away from the main attractions, that are calm.

☒ **Food availability:** There's a wheelchair accessible restaurant at the boarding area of the Niagara Cruises and another one at the visitors center building.

- **EXTRA FEATURES OR BARRIERS:**

- **Other:** Nearly at all attractions you will get wet or extremely wet, specially at the cruises (see 3rd photo; only if you stay inside you can keep dry) and at the Journey BF, even if you're wearing the ponchos that you get with your tickets. It is extremely

advisable to carefully cover any parts of your mobility devices that should not get wet (e.g. controls, battery areas, etc.) and to take extra coverings or raincoats with you.

- **URL to information:** [Niagara City Cruises accessibility information](#) / [Niagara Parks attractions accessibility information](#) / [Niagara Parks accessibility feedback and inquiries contact](#).

**Overall score** ★★☆☆☆

- **Score: 3 stars.**
- **Summary:** Although there are some observation decks only accessible through stairs, Niagara Parks is mostly wheelchair accessible and can be enjoyed. However, despite the good bus system, long queues, long distances and few resting areas at some of the attractions make it less accessible for people with mobility impairments. Also, there's barely any specific visual, hearing, cognitive or sensory accessibility in place at the reviewed attractions.

## Photos



