

Episode 2 - Transcription

Welcome back, fellow travelers, this is Trouble with Me, your in... accessible travel experience podcast.

If you enjoy the show and would like to be a part of it by sharing about your cities or telling us your accessibility horror stories, you can visit us at troublewithme.com or at Tabi Folk, your accessible travel community. And now, without further ado, welcome aboard and get ready to take off.

So, what's on the menu today? Our full course will be mostly focused in North America with a little bit of Australian sauce. For starters we're going to visit New York, followed by our first tourist attraction accessibility review, where we'll be going to Niagara Falls. Then, as our main course, we'll have an accessibility horror story taking place in Canada. And we'll finish up with some accessibility news and, as always, our sounds of the world. So let's begin with the accessibility review of our city of the day: welcome to New York.

New York is the largest city in the United States. It's famous around the world for its unmistakable skyline, the rectangle of green in the heart of Manhattan known as Central Park, its Broadway shows and its yellow cabs.

[Subway speakers] ... This is an accessible station, the elevator is at the front of the platform.

[Host] We are on New York subway to give our score on Transportation accessibility and, despite what we just heard that this was an accessible station, we are only giving it 2 out of 5 stars.

[Subway speakers] Stand clear of the closing doors, please.

[Host] So, why is that? Even though the bus system is indeed wheelchair accessible, but, as it's not a fast means of transport, it does not make up for the poor subway accessibility. Train accessibility is not bad either, although, unfortunately, it does not cover most of touristic areas. Next, Streets accessibility.

[Traffic lights] Wait, wait, wait.

[Host] We are giving it a total of 3 stars.

[Traffic lights] Wait.

[Host] By the way, no one is drilling anything. These are New York traffic lights, when you cannot cross, when you push you hear: wait, wait... And, afterwards, when you can cross. So, even though streets are mostly manageable, you have to constantly keep an eye on the ground, while also keeping an eye on other pedestrians because New York is pretty crowded. Also, there's no consistency with good curb cuts and good tactile pavement. Nevertheless, it seems to be improving. Okay, Restaurants and shops, we're also giving it 3 stars. Accessibility is not good, but

it's not bad either. The sheer amount of options compensates a little bit. However, accessible restrooms are a real problem. Next, Hotels and accommodation. We are giving it 4 out of 5 stars. Despite many hotels not being wheelchair accessible, there are also many that are and in different price ranges. However, lower budget options in peak season combined with poor subway accessibility, that could otherwise get you fast to centric locations, may be an issue. We are on the Brooklyn Bridge to give our score on Tourist attraction accessibility.

Actually, we are giving it a 5 out of 5 stars.

Even though it is still not perfect, but, overall, it's one of the best in the world. All main tourist attractions are wheelchair accessible, including skyscrapers, museums and parks. Also, many museums and Broadway shows have other accessibility features for people with visual impairments or hearing disabilities. And, finally, Getting there, 3 out of 5 stars. Most people in New York will be getting there by plane and getting from the airport to Central Manhattan, or vice versa, by public transit can be tricky due to the aforementioned poor subway accessibility. Taxis and shuttles are your best option. With this we have finished the accessibility review. The overall accessibility score is 3.3 out of 5 stars. As you have seen, New York City's accessibility really takes a hit due to problems with the subway. Despite that, tourist attractions are still top of the class worldwide and accommodation should not be a problem either. Remember that this has been a summary, for the full report with all details, also details on accessible taxis in New York, you can go to troublewithme.com or visit Tabi Folk community and download it from there. Also, I would like to give my special thanks to Guillem, who lives in New York, for his help with the review and also for his really cool audios. And now, we are opening a new section and we are flying to Niagara Falls for our first tourist attraction review.

One of the most famous places 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. They are located at the border between Canada and the United States. Today's review will focus on the accessible outdoor activities available at Niagara Parks, the area on the Canadian side of the Falls. These activities are Niagara cruises, either 20 minutes during the day or 40 minutes during the night boat rides that take you right next to the falls. The night one, actually, has fireworks and a light show. It's pretty cool. Also, the White Walker way... white... no, White Walker! That's Game of Thrones. Sorry, um, it's White Water Walk. 300 meter wooden boardwalk that is next to the river rapids. And, finally, the Journey Behind the Falls, which is a 50 meter tunnel behind the falls with two windows and a couple of observation decks.

We are on board of one of the Niagara Cruises to do the review. One of the things that we want to highlight is that on the cruise you're going to get really really wet, so if you've got any kind of mobility device, or anything that cannot get wet, you should cover it thoroughly. Actually, there's a cabin on the cruise, so, if you are inside the cabin, you won't get wet. So you can be safe there. But, if you are more adventurous, be ready for the water. Aside from that, the rest of Niagara Parks is mostly wheelchair friendly, although it's true that there are some observation decks that are only accessible through stairs. On the other hand, despite the good bus system in the parks, long queues, long distances and few resting areas make it less accessible for people with mobility impairments. Keep that in mind. Also, there's barely any specific visual, hearing, cognitive or

sensory accessibility in place at the reviewed attractions. For instance, availability of tactile pavement at crossings throughout the park is not consistent, there are more around the visitor center, where there's the Journey Behind the Falls, and around the cruise area, but less the further you move from them. Furthermore, noise levels near the waterfalls are extremely high. For all this, we are giving the Falls an overall accessibility score of 3 out of 5 stars. To wrap it up, if you only have time for one of the activities, we definitely recommend the cruises. They are the most accessible and you'll get the best views of the falls. This review was made with the help of Elena and her personal assistant Carmen. You can find the full version online at troublewithme.com with way more details on how to get there, discounts, steep slopes, accessible toilets, food availability and many other things. And, if you want to be like Elena and give us a hand with the podcast by sending your review of a tourist attraction or of your city, you can find, also, all the information on our website or at Tabi Folk community. Okay, time for our Accessibility Horror Story featuring Carles and his bike-type mobility scooter. Let's go.

From Barcelona to Toronto, a transoceanic trip with one connection flight in Rome. What could go wrong when traveling with a mobility Scooter? The final destination was the campus of the University of Guelph, 100 kilometers away from Toronto, where a sports competition would be held for the following 10 days. Afterwards, I'd be going on a week tour that'd take me to the Niagara Falls, Washington and New York. My mobility device for the trip was one of those bike-type electric scooters that you attach to the front of your wheelchair. Mine was quite bulky, but the driving range was large, so a single charge would easily take me through a full day of sightseeing.

Anyway, at Barcelona airport, with all the battery details of my scooter ready for the airline, I boarded smoothly. Well, as smoothly as it gets, when you need to be there three hours in advance for the assistance, the groping at the security check when using a wheelchair and all the questioning and double-checks when boarding with a mobility device. With my fingers crossed, we landed in Rome. My connection flight was in two hours and I needed to change terminals. As everyone boarded off the plane, my wheelchair and scooter were not there yet. I waited. 30 minutes later, they were brought by the airport staff. I thoroughly checked on them and, surprisingly, they were alright. I was ready to go and did the process again to catch the next flight, although this time with the extra pressure of the tight schedule. After the 8 hour flight to Toronto, when the only thing that I wanted was to get the hell out of the airport and rest, there was a bit more waiting for my wheelchair and scooter, after landing. Again, all went as smooth as it could. After checking on my equipment, I took the accessible airport train to Central Toronto and rode about three kilometers with my scooter to the hotel. Although the battery still had plenty of juice for the next day, I plugged it anyway, just in case. In the coziness of my bed, I was relieved to think that, accessibility wise, after all the planes, I was safe for the journey. Too soon.

The following night, after a long day of wheelchair lifts to board trains, a long scooter ride to get to the university and settling in the athlete village, I realized that the battery was lower than it should have been after charging it the previous day. I plugged it and waited. The battery was not charging. I waited more. Nothing, not even a one percent up. I panicked, checked on the charger's small print and saw a dreaded 220 volts. In Canada, voltage was 110. Maybe, if it had been an electric toothbrush, it would have charged at a slower pace. For such a huge device, though, it would never work. Would it have been the opposite, a 110 volt device plugged in a 220

socket, for instance, for someone going from Canada to Europe, the circuits of the charger, plus maybe the devices', would have been fried, burned and smelly as a charred toast, to say the least. In the end, I was lucky, ain't it? I spent the next week shuffling from the competition to electronic shops in the area. As I had literally no way of moving the scooter, as its battery was already dead, if I couldn't find a transformer by the end of my stay, I could either abandon it for good, and ruin the rest of my trip, or send it back home overseas at an astronomical cost, and ruin the rest of my trip anyway. The competition was already a ruin, so the least I could do was to try to save the trip. Finally, with the help of a university guy, we managed to locate a 100 to 220 volt transformer at a hefty price. It was a more than three kilogram cube nearly as big as a melon, that looked more like an amp for a heavy metal band, rather than equipment for my mobility device. It would be difficult to explain to security at the airport why was I carrying that "thing". Anyway, the "thing" became my companion for the rest of the trip, saving it, in fact, but taking precious space on my luggage and a few tense moments on the plane back home. But that's another story...

Well we've reached the end of the story and it leads us directly to our tip of the day. This time it's quite simple. Basically, you really need to check your device's voltage before going on a trip, especially if it's to another continent or, well, to another country, just in case, I would check it. First of all, you need to know what's the voltage of the electricity in the country that you are visiting. This is really easy to find with Google and, then, when you look at the charger of any of your devices, you have to check the range of the voltage. If it's between 100 and 240 volts, it should be okay for anywhere in the world. Otherwise, it may only work in some regions. For instance, things like cellphones, laptops, computers... usually work everywhere, you just need to check the charger. But other stuff like toothbrushes or razors and other smaller appliances, sometimes only work in a certain region. So, check your equipment, check your mobility devices, your health devices, before a trip and make sure that you're not on our next accessibility horror story.

As an extra accessibility tip for today, also coming directly from the story. In order to board a plane, it is interesting, if you are going with a mobility device, to carry the battery information from your manufacturer, as there is a 300 watt/hour limit for mobility scooter batteries that can be carried on a plane. Um, sometimes you can get it online from your manufacturer's website or sometimes you need to send them an email, so that they send a kind of certificate of the battery info stating battery capacity and all that stuff. With that, if you've got it, it will be way easier to board a plane. You hand the information when boarding or when they ask for it and things may be a bit smoother. Okay, that's it for our accessibility tips and, before closing the program, we are going to move on to a new section. We'll hear some positive accessibility news to see that, even though there are many things that still have to improve, little by little, they are moving forward.

Hello everyone, this is your forgetful news reporter from the sofa. This is today's accessibility news flash. Accessibility program at Minnesota International Airport. There's an accessibility program at Minnesota Saint Paul International Airport (MSP), both to train staff give better assistance to passengers that request it and, also, to help passengers with disabilities get acquainted with the process of boarding and getting off a plane before travel. MSP is a leading airport regarding accessibility and this program specially helps service dogs and their handlers

and younger passengers with autism. The airport even has a full-fledged airplane cabin in place specifically used for the training. More information on YouTube's link that you can find at troublewithme.com. Also, increase use of Braille in Australia. The Australian Braille Authority has reported an increased availability of Braille for accessibility throughout Australia, including in restaurant menus, street signs, Braille and tactile maps, products with Braille and tactile labels, more airline information booklets available in Braille, parks, playgrounds and more. There's a link to the full news at tabifolk.com. I've been hearing that people don't know how to write Tabi Folk. Well, you have to spell it the following way: Tango, Bravo... oh, sorry, sorry. Tango, Alpha, Bravo, Indigo, Flying, Octopus, Lovely, Kiwi. I hope that was clear enough. That's it for today's news flash. Copy and out.

Thanks a lot forgetful reporter for clearing the doubts on how to spell Tabi Folk. As a preview for our next episode, just say that we are going to visit Barcelona and sightsee one of its most iconic buildings, Sagrada Familia. And now, let's finish it with some sounds of the world.

[Train tracks]

As we recently heard news from Australia, our first sound of the world comes from Melbourne. We are on board of one of its tramways. Some of them are accessible and some of them are not, we hear. And, our second one is a notice from New York subways. [Subway speakers] Hello everyone, the New York City Police Department would like to remind you to keep... [Host] With this, we say goodbye, have a good day and see you next time, fellow travelers. [Subway speakers] ...police officer or an MTA employee. Thanks for riding with us.