

Episode 5 - 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 TabiFolk, your accessible travel community. And now, without further ado, welcome aboard and get ready to take off.

This is episode 5: Trouble in Madrid. First of all, sorry that it's been a while since our last episode. Many things have been going on. Well, I've moved to a new apartment, I got run over by a car... I'm fine, I'm fine, luckily. I also went on vacation, but, at last, we are here again with this new episode. So, what's on the menu today. First of all, we are going to travel to Madrid for a city accessibility review, followed by our first special guest interview with a fellow traveler from Spain and accessibility expert. Then, we'll have a horror story with some medical issues and we'll wrap it up with some accessibility tips and our sounds of the world. Let's begin.

Welcome to Madrid.

The capital of Spain located on top of a plateau in the heart of the Iberian Peninsula is known for the friendliness of its locals, the bustling activity of its bars and terraces and for being home to classical palaces and to masterpieces of painters, such as Velasquez or Goya.

We're on board of Madrid's subway to give our score on Transportation accessibility.

We are giving it 3 out of 5 stars. It's fair. The bus system is widespread and 100 wheelchair accessible, as well as long distance trains with prior reservation. However, although it's improving, the subway network's accessibility, reportedly at 60%, is not reliable, as some of the accessible stations have either a gap or a tall step to board. Elevator maintenance and RENFE trains accessibility to outer cities could also improve.

Next, Streets accessibility.

That's me rolling on the sidewalks of Madrid with my wheelchair and, despite the sound, or maybe because of it, we are giving it 3.5 stars. Actually, pavement in the city center is mostly good, although there are uneven sidewalks not far away from major stations. Also, despite there being curb cuts everywhere, they get shadier the farther you get from the center.

Let's not forget, as we are hearing, there's beeping traffic lights in wider streets and tactile pavement on all crossings.

Restaurants and Shops, 4 out of 5 stars. It's quite good. Around 50 to 70% of them are wheelchair accessible in the city center. Furthermore, as Madrid is the city of terraces, you will

always find an accessible place to eat nearby. Accessible toilets are also common in bigger restaurants.

Hotels and Accommodations, 4.5 stars. Many accessible options in different price ranges. We specially recommend hotels from the ILUNION Hotels chain, which have really good accessibility for all type of disabilities, although some of them are a bit off from the city center.

We are on Madrid's Plaza Mayor to give our score on Tourist attraction accessibility, 3.5 stars.

Quite good. Most attractions are fully or partially wheelchair accessible, although, for instance, Sorolla's museum is not accessible at all. Nevertheless, accessibility information is usually available on all attractions websites and discounts for disabled people plus companions are common.

And last, we are getting off a bus from the airport to give our score on Getting There.

By the way, that was the accessible ramp and our score is 4 out of 5 stars. Accessibility from main transportation hubs to the city center is good, although from the airport to touristic areas it can take between 40 to 60 minutes, depending on the chosen transportation and the traffic. We recommend, depending on where's your accommodation, either the subway plus bus or the bus line 203 if you want to go close to the touristic center without transfers.

And now, as we are done with all the accessibility categories, the overall accessibility score of Madrid is 3.7 stars. Madrid's accessibility doesn't top any of the categories, but it's still above average in all of them making it a well-rounded city for accessible tourism. Inconsistent subway accessibility and poor sidewalk maintenance in some areas are its downside, but, on the other hand, the easiness of finding wheelchair accessible accommodation is a rare treat.

Not bad at all for today's city. Remember that this is just a summary, if you want the full accessibility report of Madrid, you can go to troublewithme.com and download it from there. And now, let's move on to our first special guest. Welcome!

[Host] Thanks a lot for coming today, Kike. Now, he's going to introduce himself. I've already done a little bit of a spoiler with your name, but, anyway, what's your name?

[Kike] My name is Enrique Garcia Cortes, but everybody calls me Kike.

[Host] Yeah, as I've already said. Sorry, sorry. So what do you do?

[Kike] Okay, I play video games and I love swimming, I am a technology technician in a big company to help people with disabilities to get a better condition in their lives.

[Host] Your social media description.

[Kike] In this moment, I put computer scientist, speaker and TV presenter in charge of the Ga11y project.

[Host] The Ga11y project... that sounds really mysterious. You are going to tell us more about it. Okay, so now let's go to the Fast Travel quiz.

[Kike] Okay, I am ready, I am ready.

[Host] You're ready. Okay, that's cool, so, number of countries that you've visited?

[Kike] 2.

[Host] Number of continents that you've been to?

[Kike] 1.

[Host] Number of countries that you've lived in.

[Kike] 1.

[Host] One is already good. You can say it with a... like, one! Most southern country that you've been to?

[Kike] Spain.

[Host] And the most northern one?

[Kike] Belgium.

[Host] Furthest country that you've been to from your birthplace?

[Kike] Belgium too.

[Host] Our audience will think, okay, this is a travel podcast. Why did he bring someone that's only been to two countries? Well, actually, Kike travels a lot a lot within Spain for work and he's got a lot of experience with accessible travel. That's why he's here with us. Now, now we're going to know a bit more about you. So, more about you. Tell us more about what you do.

[Kike] Related to Ga11y project that I said before, Ga11y is a pet for accessible video games that we created last year. And it's a project to get different things for people with disability in this industry. Education and employment, maybe accessibility with big companies, awareness in different events and e-sports with different competitions.

[Host] I think it's really cool that you are working to improve accessibility in video games because I think video games are a great door for inclusiveness and lots of young people are into video games, so, if you can raise awareness through video games, you can raise awareness on visibility and accessibility to the younger generations.

[Kike] I love to work with young people because they are open-minded and they want to improve everything in the society. So, I love that.

[Host] I've really seen your work and it's really amazing, so congratulations and keep up the good work. Now, so I said that you travel a lot for work so, how does travel get into your life?

[Kike] Five years ago, I got an invitation for a special trip to Malaga in Spain for a special congress related with technology and tourism and my actual manager said me that I have to travel, in this case, with a new personal assistant and not my family.

[Host] That's very nice because usually, before, your personal assistant were always your family or friends?

[Kike] Yeah, that's it.

[Host] So that was quite challenging to get someone new, right?

[Kike] Yeah, it was a new adventure, but I enjoyed it a lot and that adventure opened me a new world and new experiences for me.

[Host] We've just talked about personal assistance, so, what are your accessibility needs?

[Kike] In my case and related with my disability, I don't have any arms, so together with my shoulders I have attached my hands in this case, to a quick understanding. So, by this condition, I need different things to have a shower or use the bathroom or to wear different clothes... so, I need this personal assistant and I need help to transport my luggage or different needs related with transport.

[Host] Do you also have mobility needs like walking or standing for a long time?

[Kike] Yeah, sometimes I feel more autonomous, but other times I use a wheelchair for long distance and I need help to move this wheelchair because, in my case, it's a manual wheelchair and I need help to move it.

[Host] That's very nice, actually, if you follow Kike on his Instagram, he shows many stories of him working out, so he's getting really into shape, so he can be a bit more autonomous. It's really cool, he shows a lot about his life.

[Kike] I'm trying.

[Host] So, we've just introduced a little bit about accessible travel. Now we're going to talk more about travel. Give us a trip recommendation and why did you love it?

[Kike] As I told you before, my first professional trip was Malaga and, to be honest, I love that city because I discovered that city got a special award related with accessibility a few years ago because Malaga is a good city about accessibility; and the different grounds and the buildings and the parks and other environments are really accessible for people with disability and I have a special feeling with that city because I think it was my first trip, but I love the people and the time, the food and the accessibility too.

[Host] I've also been to Malaga and the weather is really good and accessibility is also very very good, so that's a very good recommendation.

[Kike] And I think, Joan, that we have the same favorite hotel.

[Host] I think so, I think so, it's a very good hotel next to the sea, very very good. So, now, as you know, we've got a really special section in our podcast. Please, tell us one of your accessibility horror stories.

[Kike] To be honest I feel uncomfortable in a lot of situations, but...

[Host] Okay...

[Kike] But I felt really disappointed when I got an accessible room, categorized with this noun, an accessible room. And, when you enter in the bathroom, you discover that you have a slippery ground. When my personal assistant helped me in the shower, we have problems because I feel frightened for my personal assistant and for me.

[Host] And for you!

[Kike] Yeah, it's an accessible room and I think that the ground needs other characteristics...

[Host] Yeah, another kind of pavement because people with disabilities, a lot of them, don't have great balance. And, in the end, did you fall?

[Kike] Not at the moment. In my trips, I don't fall over to the ground, but I feel frightened in this kind of bathroom with a slippery ground.

[Host] Well, I've got lots of accessibility horror stories with grounds. I think they are one of our biggest enemies.

[Kike] Yeah.

[Host] So, finally, give us an accessibility tip for our fellow travelers.

[Kike] I think that everybody with disability want to schedule with a lot of time the different trips because I think it's really important for us to control different things to get a comfortable situation. For example, I need a small chair inside the shower or in the bath and I call to the hotel to ask if the hotel has this kind of chair. This is an example that I do...

[Host] That you usually do in advance when you have to go on on a trip. And, a final tip not for our fellow travelers, but for designers or engineers?

[Kike] Yeah, sometimes it's difficult to understand and to apply the different requirements about accessibility in the different environments. So, for the engineers and the designers, I think that it's a good advice to talk with an accessibility expert or to go to a company related with people with

disability to understand these standards and can apply the different improvements in their environment or other things.

[Host] Yeah, I think that's very important, they should not imagine what accessibility it's like, they have to go to accessibility experts...

[Kike] And apply accessibility since the beginning, please.

[Host] Otherwise, it's very expensive. It's way more expensive to change something than to do it right from the beginning. That's a very very good advice. Thanks a lot, Kike. Hopefully you had fun and keep traveling and keep doing a good job.

[Kike] Thank you so much for this invitation. It was a pleasure. Thank you.

[Host] That's it for the interview. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as we did. By the way, we forgot to mention that you can follow Kike on Instagram, Twitter or TikTok at kike, both with K, under slash, m of Madrid, e of England and p of Pie or Paris (@kike_mep), better Paris... And not in Paris, but at Kansai's International Airport, our accessibility Horror Story, today not for the faint-hearted.

The first month in Japan, I had been feeling quite lonely. The cold, grey days of January didn't help it much either. However, after the first few weeks, someone was finally coming to visit me. I was really looking forward to it, as we'd be sightseeing Kyoto together and I'd start moving around the country instead of focusing so much in my studies. Unforeseen circumstances, though, turned it into a bittersweet reunion.

I went to pick him up at the airport early in the morning. I wheeled to the train station, I asked for a slope to board it and got to Kansai's International Airport. His plane had just landed, so I had plenty time to go to the toilet. In Japan, there are nice and clean accessible restrooms at most transportation facilities, shopping malls, public buildings and the likes.

Anyway, I pushed the button to open the automatic door and entered the spaceship-like compartment, white and indeed clean, with different types of sinks and gadgets for people with different kinds of needs. I rode off the wheelchair and got ready to climb the toilet. That's right, climb. When you're one meter tall, you have to climb to most places. I put my knuckles on the inner lid (I mentioned the cleanliness of the place, right? Otherwise, going to the toilet is a no go...), put my weight on them and, just as I was lifting myself from the ground, my right index finger slipped and kept sliding, while the rest of the hand stayed in place. I stopped the motion, rose my hand and tried to open it. My finger, instead of forward, was pointing to the left and downwards. Dislocation.

A few years earlier, I had the same problem and I was able to put it myself into place, so I stayed calm and started the maneuver. For the next five minutes, I kept pulling and pulling on it. With each unsuccessful attempt, as the pain rose and the joint cooled, I started checking the clock. I applied hot water to loosen it and pulled again. After ten more minutes, no luck. The skin felt tight and the joint was swollen and stuck. I gave up and managed to go back to the arrivals area with

my bum finger, as my visit was coming out the gates. As he approached to hug, I showed him my hand. It was even more of an emotional hug.

Despite the long flight, he suggested going to a hospital, but I didn't know of any, so I decided to go to school. They'd be able to help me there and I didn't want to spoil my attendance rate, essential for keeping my student visa. I couldn't even write, but I stayed in class for four hours.

After class, they sent me to the nearest clinic. When my turn arrived, I tried to explain the situation to the doctor. Previous experiences with emergency medical care in my country, didn't make me hopeful. Most doctors usually freaked out when they saw my bones. This time around, despite my efforts in my poor Japanese, the doctor insisted that I had dislodged my finger while putting it between the wheels of my wheelchair. "Climbing" a toilet didn't seem like a plausible explanation. Whatever the cause, in the end, they took me to the X-ray room. The place was dark, crowded with piles of cardboard boxes and barely any space to move around. It seemed like it hadn't been used in ages. The X-ray machine was more than a meter high and, apparently, it couldn't go any lower. The doctor looked at me nervously. I suggested taking it with my hand up. Not ideal, but better than nothing. He took a couple of X-rays in this odd position, glanced at them and, in the same room, without any table to rest my hand on or local anesthesia to numb the pain, he started pulling on my finger. Once, twice, thrice, harder and harder. After a few minutes, a couple of shy tears sprang to my eyes, but I didn't complain. He kept going. His hair was unkempt, his forehead sweaty and his face was red. After 15 more minutes, that felt like an eternity, finally, he gave up. He suggested that I go to a specialized hand clinic the next morning, gave me the address and apologized profusely. I went back to my apartment and spent a miserable night.

The next morning, I was already developing a technique to use my wheelchair limiting the use of my right hand. In such a way, I went to the Namba Hand Center and, as I got in, things looked better from the get go. The entrance already had an air of professionalism to it. There, they took two proper X-rays and transferred me to an operating room. They injected some anesthesia and, soon after, the doctor came. She started similar pulling maneuvers moving my finger as if it were rubber, but, despite that, I didn't feel any pain. However, after a few minutes of trying, results were still the same. My hopes sank. The doctor, concerned, told me that I'd have to undergo surgery. Surgery, in a foreign country, with barely speaking the language, without being able to move for days. No hand, no wheelchair. That would mean the end of my stay in Japan, as well as lots of other potential issues. Pleading, I asked her to try once more.

She did. Once, twice, thrice... and crack. It was the most relieving crack I've ever felt in my life. The finger was back into place.

The next day, we were visiting Kyoto and staying at a traditional hotel. I was not missing it. With a splint binding my index to the middle finger and a wheelchair driving technique that kept developing despite the pain and rain, we had some new adventures on the former imperial capital. But that's another story...

We have reached the end of the story and it's turn for our tip of the day, which is that you should always carry health information with you. Especially if you've got any kind of disability or any specific health issue, carrying with you x-rays, doctor reports, or whatever, is very very important just in case there's an emergency like the one that we had in the story. Well, the information that you carry preferably in the country's language or else, at least, in English.

As an extra bonus tip, it is always nice to have a means to communicate with health professionals in their language, be it with a friend or an acquaintance that you've got in the country. Anyone will be better in these situations than a translation app. So, if you don't know anyone in the country, well, you may go to TabiFolk community and ask in their forums and I'm sure that someone will be willing to help.

So, at last, we've reached the end of the episode. Hopefully it was not too long, if it was, I'm really sorry. The next episode will be shorter and it will be a special on Kyoto, Japan's former imperial capital. And now, as you all know, we cannot say goodbye without our sounds of the world.

Like a bridge linking our previous and our next episode, this recording was taken in Paris.

I'm sure that die hard fans of the series already know that this is the opening theme of the anime Neon Genesis Evangelion.

The recording is a of a youth orchestra playing outdoor next to the river Seine.

These bunch of bubbles are me diving in a heated outdoor swimming pool at 32 degrees. We are back in Spain, in the Canary Islands at the hotel "Mar y Sol", in Tenerife, which is incredibly accessible.

With this soothing sound, we say goodbye, have a nice day and see you next time fellow travelers.