

## Episode 7 - Transcription

[Music] 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 or 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 7, Trouble in San Francisco. So, what's on the menu today. Today we've got a really international menu. Actually, it's not just international, but we are going to have tastes of three different continents. For starters we've got our accessibility review of San Francisco, followed by a new special guest interview. Then, we'll move on to Egypt for our accessibility horror story, we'll have some accessibility tip-tip-tip-tips and, finally, we'll have some sounds of the world and we'll visit a bit of Rome. Let's begin.

Welcome to San Francisco

[Music]

Misty and surprisingly cool in summer, San Francisco is a fantastic melting pot of cultures. Inclusive and friendly to all, aside from having world renowned sights, such as the Golden Gate bridge, the Alcatraz prison or the cable cars, each neighborhood has its unique personality, making it a city of a thousand atmospheres.

[Subway loudspeakers] We are at Embarcadero Station hearing announcements for next trains for the Muni Metro to give our score on Transportation accessibility. We are giving it 3 out of 5 stars. Both the city buses and the BART, the train system serving the Bay Area, nothing to do with the Simpsons, are 100% wheelchair accessible, though, for BART, elevators are frequently unusable and sometimes you have to mind the gap between the train and the platform. As for the Muni Metro, once it's above ground, aside from the T-line, which is fully accessible, only one in every three to four stations are wheelchair accessible.

Next, Streets accessibility. We are giving it 4 out of 5 stars. [Music]

This is a barber shop song in the streets of the city and, even though San Francisco is renowned for the steep streets, most of them are not in the touristic area or can be mostly avoided or navigated with city buses. Curb cuts and tactile pavement on intersections are also widespread. Said steep streets and few pedestrian only areas near downtown are it's only downside.

Yeah, baby! We are in a jazz bar in the heart of the city to give our score on Restaurants and Shops. Five stars. Accessibility laws in California are one of the most advanced in the world, ensuring that finding accessible restrooms or websites accessible by screen readers for people

with visual impairments, things that in most countries are optimistically rare, in San Francisco are quite common. Also between 70 to 80 percent of the places have accessible entrances.

Still in the bar to give our score on Hotels and Accommodations. 4 out of 5 stars. There are many wheelchair accessible hotels in the city. Some even have accessibility features for people with hearing impairments, such as visual alarms, which are not common to find. High hotel prices, in general, are the only drawback.

And now what? What a lively sound episode that we are having today! We are at Fisherman's Wharf with the famous seals, to give our score on Tourist attraction accessibility. 4 out of 5 stars. Even if the famous historic cable cars of San Francisco are not wheelchair accessible, the rest of the attractions are either nearly or fully wheelchair accessible, with only minor inaccessible areas, such as some of the upper levels inside of the Alcatraz prison or the Western walkway of the Golden Gate Bridge, which, by no means, hinder the worthiness of the visits. Also, many accessibility features, like Braille leaflets or guideposts, guides in American Sign Language or accessible restrooms, are also common in attractions.

[Music] This is San Francisco's Ferry Building clock and, even if probably you're not going to get to the city by ferry, we are here to give our score on Getting there. 4.5 out of 5 stars. There is a fast and accessible connection by BART train from San Francisco International Airport to the city center. The lack of a good long distance train option to get to the city makes it miss out on the perfect score. This is the end of the accessibility review for San Francisco and our overall accessibility score is 4.1 out of 5 stars. Despite the image in films of cars racing down crazy slopes, actually, San Francisco is currently one of the best destinations for accessible travel. Even if accessibility can still improve in all of the assessed sections, except for elevator maintenance, it is top tier in the world and does not require a lot of extra planning.

Remember that this is just a summary. If you want the full report, you can download it at [troublewithme.com](http://troublewithme.com) or you can visit Tabi Folk community. I would also like to give my thanks for checking all the review to our next special guest. Thanks a lot Joe for your help. And, without doing many spoilers, we are going to move on and give him our welcome. [Applause]

[Music] [Host] Thanks for being here Joe. We are with our special guest today, he's living in the San Francisco area and now we'll know a bit more about him. So, what do you do?

[Joe] I work in IT consulting services in the Silicon Valley.

[Host] Wow! That sounds very interesting. Afterwards you'll tell us more about it. And what about your social media description?

[Joe] My social media handle is @DwarfFamily.

[Host] So there's no description, just that, okay. Well, it's already quite descriptive!

[Joe] Yeah.

[Host] I know you, so I know you you've got quite a huge family. So it's a good description. Let's move on to the Fast Travel quiz. Are you ready?

[Joe] I'm ready.

[Host] So, number of countries that you've visited?

[Joe] 16.

[Host] 16, not bad, not bad. Number of continents that you've been to?

[Joe] 4.

[Host] The same as I actually. Number of countries that you've lived in?

[Joe] That I've lived in... 1, 2, 3.

[Host] Most southern country that you've been to?

[Joe] South Africa.

[Host] And the most northern one?

[Joe] Well, I would say Alaska because Alaska is kind of separate from continental United States.

[Host] And what's the farthest country that you've been to from your birthplace?

[Joe] South Africa.

[Host] South Africa. Okay, so, now that we know that you are a huge traveler, we'll know more about you and about your trips. First of all, you said that you worked in IT in Silicon Valley, so, tell us more about what you do.

[Joe] Well in my role as a IT Consulting specialist, I help companies that need extra services for their information technology department, either by augmenting what their team does in, you know, some specific areas like cyber security or industrial automation or incident response planning, things like that, or we work with smaller companies that need some... a company like ours to be more responsible for all of the IT support on a day-to-day basis.

[Host] So, how does travel/trouble get into your life?

[Joe] So, when I go to visit customers at their location, every once in a while, I will run into situations where I'm visiting a factory that just has a lot of obstacles. You might be required to wear a hoodie and a lab coat kind of thing. You know, the lab coat, for example, it's not made for people with dwarfism. So, if I anticipate needing to do that, I always tell the person before coming. Same thing with accessibility. If, for example, you know, they're taking me on a tour of the plant and they expect me to climb a ladder, depending of course on the height of the ladder and all that, I might say, well that's not something I can do safely.

[Host] Yeah, that's right. Well, you already started on it... so, your accessibility needs, you are saying that you're a dwarf, maybe you've got some mobility issues, also some reaching problems... what else? What are your, like, accessibility needs?

[Joe] I think, for me, mostly, it's just preparing or planning for my visit. So, if, for example, I go to a high security facility, sometimes they have, you know, a very high shelf with a very high window and you can't, you know, show them your driver's license, they can't take your fingerprint easily... just, you know, things like that. And so...

[Host] Counters, high counters, are like horrible always.

[Joe] Exactly. Yeah. And so, sometimes, you know, again, I'll try and predict these things in advance so, then, I'll tell the person before coming, "Hey, I'm only, you know, a little over a meter tall and, so, I need to have you think about what kinds of things you're going to put me in front of that we might want to plan ahead". And I tend to push more for questions, right, I say, "Tell me, walk me through, give me an example of where are you taking me".

[Host] Yeah, the process, yeah.

[Joe] And, then, I, as they tell me where they're going to take me, then I discover situations where I need to ask them, "Okay, instead of going that way, is there a different way to go? Or instead of you trying to help me, let's try, let's assume you cannot help me..."

[Host] Yeah, let's try to find another way.

[Joe] Yeah, because I don't want you, I don't want you to try and carry me, I don't want to have to depend on you, right? I want to be able, to be able to do this like anybody else would.

[Host] Planning in advance, it's key to solving many things... and the question that you ask them saying, "I want you to think about what may be the potential issues", that's also very good because, well, they have to start like putting themselves in your shoes. Probably, they are not going to be as good as you because...

[Joe] Sure.

[Host] ...they don't have the experience, but I always think it's nice to make people put themselves in your skin. So, what about international travels?

[Joe] Yeah, international travel is all for tourism, you know, family travel... I would say carrying luggage or moving the luggage. So, again in most cases I've been able to do it myself, and our family has been able to do it, but, every once in a while, you know, especially if we're visiting a country with older infrastructure and architecture, you have to climb more stairs or the streets are not straight and, so, it just makes it harder, you know. We're very good about asking people for help, and most people will help us, but those are the kinds of things that we usually run into.

[Host] So, give us a trip recommendation, a trip that maybe you did and why did you like it.

[Joe] Well, the trip to South Africa was amazing. We went to South Africa as a couple, my wife and I, four or five years ago, I think it was. We went to Cape Town, and we went to Johannesburg, and we went on safari in kwazulu-natal, and it was more of a tour guided trip, so it was a little bit easier because we were able to have, you know, a driver with a van and everything driving everywhere. But, still, we're very adventurous, so, you know, we did things off script, so we frequently, you know, found ourselves in either a small little part of town that wasn't very accessible and we just forced ourselves to walk around in the neighborhood or, if we went out to the country, where there's just, you know, dirt roads, and we were able to visit a small village, and we went into a school, and my wife who is a teacher, you know, got a chance to talk to the students... again to, you know, give them a chance to realize that if somebody they meet in the future ends up having some kind of disability or dwarfism, then, they can be a little more helpful, a little more prepared, a little more open-minded to helping that person.

[Host] That's a nice trip recommendation. So, one of our favorite sections in the podcast is our accessibility horror story. Can you share any of your horror stories with us?

[Joe] Luckily, I don't have too many and, luckily, you know, I don't have anything that I would really consider a horror story compared to other horror stories I've heard about. But once, when we went to, when my mom and I went to Bolivia, I was pretty young, we were just having to carry luggage up a lot of steps and walking long distances with heavy luggage. And it was because the place we were going to stay just didn't really have a street next to it and, so, we ended up just having to carry everything up a lot of stairs and it was very very frustrating.

[Host] Thank you, thank you. Now, give an accessibility tip for engineers, designers...

[Joe] I would say just asking the engineer, the designer, the architect to think about the personal experience of interacting with another human being from behind a very high wall, because most high counters feel that way to people with dwarfism or that are sitting in mobility devices and, most architects and designers, never think about it that way. So, they will make a low counter, but they won't always make it the right way, they'll either make it too deep so that you cannot reach things, or they won't make it low enough, or they will make it low enough, but they will put other obstructions in the way, so you cannot really comfortably use that counter space. In general, I just say, "Think of the high counter like a wall", and then, the person will realize how much of a barrier that really is.

[Host] Actually, I've been talking in counters and people thought they were hearing voices... so, yeah, yeah, yeah. Finally, finally, is there a place that we can follow you or do you want to be followed?

[Joe] I would say, again, my Instagram or my Twitter, pretty much are all the same handle, @DwarfFamily.

[Host] Okay, so, thank you so much for being here. It was a pleasure and keep traveling and keep doing a good job.

[Joe] Sounds good. Thank you, Joan.

That's it for the interview. Again, thanks a lot, Joe, for your stories and your accessibility insights. And now, as promised, we are moving on to a new continent for our accessibility horror story set in a market in El Cairo.

The previous day had been a once in a lifetime experience. A visit to the Great Giza Pyramids. Despite there being quite a lot of tourists, although apparently not as many as usual, as it was January and, thus, low season in Egypt, and vendors trying to sell you anything with the "it's a gift, it's a gift" tactic (at the time, I was not used to it as I had not traveled much yet), the whole experience, specially entering the Khafre Pyramid, also known as Kefren, it's name in Greek, and going down the roughly 1.2 meter tall slanted corridor, which to me felt like home, was fantastic and had been a great start to open my appetite for what was to come.

Anyway, that day, we had already enjoyed a tour to the Egyptian Museum, early in the morning, and a visit to the magnificent Alabaster Mosque inside Cairo's citadel. Before lunch, we had an hour scheduled to stroll around Khan El Khalili, the most famous market in the country.

Now I still wonder how I could do all that visiting and walking on a single day... Truth is, being a single or double crutch user at the time, I already had to pace myself quite a bit, so a museum and a monument in the same morning felt like a reach. Add the market to it, plus extended sightseeing the previous day, and you have the ingredients for a potential horror story.

Well, we all know that when we travel we tend to push ourselves a bit more, so, despite my joints sending red alerts, I didn't want to miss on the atmosphere of exotic scents and spices that in my mind would be the market, so off we went. We were dropped by our taxi at the entrance planned on our travel tour. As soon as we stepped onto the first narrow street of vendors, reality hit hard. I hate markets, open stalls and the likes.

First of all, being one meter tall, you don't get to have a clear view of much of the wares. Well, clear or a view at all, depending on the distribution of the counters, tables, shelves... at Khan El Khalili, many were on the floor, so at least I could see nearly half of the stuff. Not that bad, right?

Second, there's usually a lot of people, so add the extra of legs, butts, bags and purses blocking your view or, worse, hitting you anytime as in a crowd the open space above a little person or a wheelchair user's head is like an oasis of air that people tend to gravitate to while trying to weave their way through. As I said, it was January and the hordes of tourists were still on hold, so maybe that was a good thing?

Third, I'm a curious person and I like to look around at things, but I don't like when looking at something feels like a commitment to buy. When looking or just even stopping in front of a store, the vendor comes and starts offering things to you, I get flustered. I would like to look out of curiosity, not out of an interest to buy. Having quite a unique body, most of clothing won't fit me. Having uncommon tastes, a vendor guessing what I actually need is like hitting the jackpot. Having my hands full with the crutches (now the wheels), even if I liked something, I may not be able to carry it, so I'm like the worst customer. Also, if someone takes their time to explain things, I feel bad if I don't buy, so it all leads to an unsettling contradiction of emotions. I need my pace

and my space, as there are so many things to ponder. The fact that I get tired fast from standing and that I was already in pain from all the previous sightseeing, could only multiply the sensation.

So, just as we stepped onto the labyrinthine market streets, there not being many tourists turned against us. All the vendors' eyes focused on our backs. Being there with my mother, didn't help either. She's not a great spender, but she does like to stop, look and browse and, just like me, has trouble with insistent sellers.

I don't know why the hell was I fooling myself idealizing how the market would be and thinking that it would overcompensate all the wear and tear. There was not a single spice or exotic scent in sight, uneven cobblestone paved the way (great to trip or slip with a crutch) and there were steps every other turn. That was not the place to be, at least, not at the time.

Unfortunately, with the initial inertia, we had walked a couple of winding streets. With each step, my joints growled and my restlessness grew. Vendors kept calling to us in different languages trying to guess where we were from. My mother kept stopping every other meter and I dreaded being trapped there for a whole hour and jeopardizing the rest of my trip for those extra minutes of physical burden that were leading me nowhere. We had to flee.

I started urging her. "Don't stop, don't stop". "Let's go, don't look". There were thousands of wares around, but I could only focus on the floor. Placing the crutches safely on the ground, tilting forward and landing both my feet together while leaning again to place the crutches once more on a repeated motion. The illumination in the alleyway was dim, sunlight blocked by the ancient stones of the surrounding buildings. Eyes kept following. Voices calling. Enticing sounds for the keen ears, but instead spurs for my aching body. "Don't look, don't look... Let's go!". I kept repeating. Luckily, my mother knows me well, so no explanation was needed. After hastily retracing our way back as fast as we could, we finally got to the light on a nearby plaza.

The bizarre couple of tourists had stayed a grand total of 10 minutes in the market, though it had felt like an eternity. The rest of the scheduled hour, we spent it resting on a bench waiting for our transport to pick us up. Later on, I learned that the market is distributed in sections each specialized on a different product and that many locals indeed go shopping there, so the longed spices were surely somewhere else. Not that I would go back to check, anyway. Fortunately, the next day we began a fantastic journey along the Nile, but that's another story...

[Music]

Well, we got to the end of the story and, with this, we have reached our tip of the day.

Today's tip is related to travel tours. First, Joe, in the interview, told us that he went to South Africa on a tour and now we've seen another tour in Egypt and we saw that maybe the tour operator didn't know much or didn't understand a lot about the accessibility needs and, also, about the preferences and, well, what I liked or didn't like... So, when you go on a tour, it's very important that the tour operator knows and understands your needs, your accessibility needs and, also, other kinds of needs and preferences, so that they can adapt the trip accordingly. You don't want to get stuck somewhere that you are not enjoying when you pay a lot of money to go



on a tour, so make sure to talk to them and make sure that they are accommodating enough, so that you will be able to enjoy your trip.

Also, this is a call to travel agencies to be more accommodating to disabled travelers. It's not that complicated, I assure you, and, also, if you are an agency and you've got any doubts, you can also enter Tabi Folk community and our fellow travelers will surely reply and try to help you as much as they can. Okay, so Tabi Folk is for anyone, for travelers and also for agencies.

With this, we've gotten to the end of the episode and, as promised, we are going to hit our third continent and we are going to visit Rome for our sounds of the world.

[Music] We'd like to give a huge shout out to Roser, our fellow traveler, that sent us these sounds from her last trip in Rome.

Actually, we are not in Rome, we are in Vatican City. These are the bells from Saint Peter's square at noon.

[Music] And then, we've got our second sound. This is an organ playing a baroque melody in one of the multiple churches that we can find in Rome.

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

[Music]