

Accessibility Horror Story

Personal information (so that we can present yourself to the audience)

- **Name:** Carles
- **City and country:** Terrassa, Spain
- **Social media handles** (optional): @CarlesMillera (Twitter)
- **Your accessibility needs or how are you related to accessibility:** Two-crutch hopper, wheelchair or scooter for longer distances or when traveling.

Your horror story

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, as smoothly as it gets when you need to be there 3 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 2 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 3 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, getting to know the campus 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 1% up. I panicked, checked on the charger small print and saw a dreaded 220V. In Canada, voltage was 110V. Maybe if it had been an electric tooth brush, it would have charged at a slower pace. For such a huge device, though, it would never work. Would it had been the opposite, a 110V device plugged in a 220V socket, for instance, for someone going from Canada to Europe, the circuits of the charger, plus maybe the device's, would have been fried, burnt 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 the scooter 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 110 to 220V transformer at a hefty price. It was a more than 3kg 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...