

# Accessibility Horror Story

## Personal information

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- **Your accessibility needs or how are you related to accessibility:** Little person and double crutch user (year 2010).

## Your horror story

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 different products 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...