

Episode 1 - Transcription

Hello, 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. For starters, as it's the first episode, we'll discover a little bit more about the podcast and its host. Then, we'll travel to Osaka for our first accessibility review. Afterwards we'll hear a tell of an accessibility horror story set up in the middle of the Japanese Alps. And finally we'll have some accessibility tips and we'll wrap it up with some sounds of the world. Let's begin.

Have you ever wanted to travel, but you never really ventured far away from home worried about your disability or some accessibility issues that may arise? Did you always want to make that great touristic experience more accessible to everyone? Have you ever wondered how's accessibility in other parts of the world? Hopefully this podcast will give you all some answers. Trouble with Me, it's um, it's not trouble, it's not travel, it's difficult to explain, actually, it's not travel as in a trip or as in a journey, it's trouble as in issues. Trouble with Me, why, because every time that I travel with my wheelchair, um there are problems usually, so it's a little bit of play on words, and the idea behind the podcast is to share mine and other disabled travelers experiences, so that the next time that you decide to go on a trip, you will have an easier time planning, as we all know that when you are preparing for a trip with any kind of disability involved, well, planning can take a lot, a lot of time, I'd say that about 10 times more sometimes. I don't want to discourage anyone actually, but the opposite, traveling is fantastic, so hopefully with Trouble with Me we will have some fun, you'll learn a bit about accessibility and, maybe, your next trip will have a little bit less trouble.

So now that we know a little bit more about the podcast, it's time to know more about its host. What I'm going to do is I'm going to answer the same questions that our future special guests will answer. Okay, so let's start. Name? I'm Joan, I'm Joan Pahisa. Where are you from? I'm from Barcelona. What do you do? Well, I'm an accessibility expert and consultant, I'm an aspiring writer and, as you can see, a rookie podcast host. My social media description? Okay, I'm going to read the one that I've got on Instagram: accessibility expert, writer and arts enthusiast, Glance Up documentary, Jocomunico app, podcast host and more, pics of my trips to Japan. I'll expand on all these a little bit later on. Um, so now, time for the Fast Travel Quiz questions. Okay, let's begin. Number of countries that you've visited? I had to count a little bit, 18 countries. Number of continents that you've been to? 4. Number of countries that you've lived in? Also 4. Most southern country that you've been to? Egypt, actually the south of Egypt in Abu Simbel. And the most northern one? Russia, when I was in Moscow a few years ago. Farthest country that you've been to from your birthplace? Japan. That's it, that's for the short quiz and now a little bit more about me. Okay, tell us more about what you do.

Well, I'm mainly involved in accessibility projects, mostly related to technology, but also related to accessibility in the built environment, for instance, the one in my Instagram description, Jocomunico, it's an application that helps people with speech impairments or cognitive disabilities to communicate by means of pictograms, and also I've been involved in projects to improve accessibility in public transportation in Spain, in projects related to assistive robotics and another interesting things. Good, so how does travel get into your life? Well at first I think it started because of sport, I used to do a lot of sport mainly, well, swimming and table tennis and I traveled a lot around Europe and other parts of the world with my teammates. And then, I've also traveled quite a lot for work and studies and finally for pleasure with with my friends. Finally, what are your accessibility needs? Well, I'm a little person, I'm one meter tall, I'm also a wheelchair user, before I used to walk with one crutch and then two crutches, so the good part, well at least in terms of accessibility, is that I can relate to wheelchair users, I can relate to people that have got trouble standing or walking long distances and also, thanks to my work and my friends that we've traveled a lot together, I'm also acquainted with visual, hearing, cognitive, sensory accessibility and, although the podcast in the city of the day section will focus more on physical and visual accessibility, in other sections we'll talk about accessibility as a whole. That's it about me, now the interview goes to questions on accessible travel. I don't think it makes much sense to go on because all the podcast will be on accessible travel and I will be sharing lots of experiences. The only thing that I want to add before moving on to the next section is that, well, I've not traveled in more than two years due to the pandemic, as many people, I know, especially lots with disabilities. I'm really looking forward to my next travel and I think that this podcast is kind of a way of traveling in itself for me and, hopefully, for all the listeners and for getting ready for when we hit the road again. Having said that, let's go to our first city accessibility review. Welcome to Osaka.

Osaka is the second largest metropolitan area in Japan with more than 20 million people. It's also a bustling city that blends old and new in a chaotically charming way. It is also known for its tasty and affordable cuisine and for its steampunk vibes around the Dotonbori canal and Shinsekai district. Actually, it's where the original Blade Runner movie was filmed.

[Japanese audio]

We are on board of Osaka's subway to give the score on Transportation accessibility. We think it's a 5 out of 5. Why? Because most of the time you don't need to plan in advance for accessibility, you can go nearly anywhere, sometimes you may need some help from station staff, but you don't need to notice it in advance.

Next, Restaurants and shops. We only give it a 3 out of 5 stars. It's not really good, there are many places with steps at the entrances or they are really tight in the inside and it's hard to maneuver with a wheelchair, but the sheer amount of options compensates a little bit, so, don't worry, you'll be able to enjoy sushi or your favorite Japanese food. Hotels and accommodation, it's a little bit worse, we're only giving it a 2 out of 5. There are not many options, but still there are some. If you need a fully accessible room, look for international hotel chains.

Let's get back on the bright side. We are hearing Osaka's traffic lights. For Streets accessibility, we are giving it a 5 out of 5 stars. I mean curb cuts everywhere, there's a lot of tactile pavement and not just on crossings, but along all main streets, accessible traffic lights, flat terrain mostly, smooth surfaces, maintained pavement and more. Tourist attraction general accessibility, quite good, we are giving it a 4 out of 5 stars. Touristic districts, skyscrapers, Osaka castle and other attractions are all wheelchair accessible, except for the inside in some traditional buildings and gravel that you may find in some temples, the rest you are good to go. And last, but not least, Getting there, we're also giving it 5 stars. No need to plan in advance for accessible transportation as all arrivals, airports, Shinkansen station, have accessible and high frequency options to get to the city center. With this, we have reached the end of the report. As you have seen, Osaka is a really accessible destination, except for accommodation, which requires a little bit of planning ahead, but the rest is mostly accessible, for that, our overall score is 4 out of 5 stars. This was just a summary. If you want to have access to the full accessibility review of the city, you can visit our website troublewithme.com or you can go to Tabi Folk community and download it from there. And now, we are going to the next section, but we are staying in Japan for our Accessibility Horror Story.

[Music]

We are in the middle of the Japanese Alps, in the town of Tsumago, a village frozen in time, nearly kept as in between the 17th and the 19th centuries. This was a weekend trip to visit some post-towns along the route that connected to Tokyo and Kyoto at the time. After a night spent in Nakatsugawa, a small city at the door of the Alps I took an accessible bus to Magome, my first stop. Before going, I had checked for potential accessibility issues and I was ready for some challenges, the first one the main street of Magome, a really steep slope, paved with uneven stone, although with a one meter wide tile path at the center. My power assist device handled the slope along the path on its way up, but I thought that I'd better find another way down, as the slope might be too steep for my hands to break. My power assist only pushes forward, so I have to handle steering, braking and going downhill. Anyway, after a nice climb, I reached the top. There, my power assist behaved odd for a few moments. I restarted it and it got fixed. I gave it no more thought and continued. Then, I took another bus. This one was not accessible. Luckily, the bus driver gave me a hand with the wheelchair and I managed to climb the stairs on my own and sat on a regular seat, while holding the chair in place as we hit the windy road. We got to Tsumago and there I spent a day to remember. Instead of staying on the main streets, I wandered around enjoying the warmth of the sun, the sound of the trees and the freshness of the air. Again, I noticed that the assistive device was behaving odd and I thought that it may have been due to the lifting on and off the bus, not the first time that it had happened. I stopped on a back street next to the river and fixed the joint that attaches the device to the wheelchair. I don't usually enjoy doing handiwork, but the place, the atmosphere, were just mesmerizing and I could have stayed there till the sun went down. Nevertheless, the way back would take some time and there was a bus to catch. I went back to the main streets and had lunch at the noodle restaurant. Good stuff. After lunch, though, my wheelchair stopped working, at all. I restarted it once, twice, thrice, many times. I started breathing and looking at my surroundings, realizing that I was far from home. I started pushing towards the bus stop, despite my arms not being ready for it. In my case the power assist is not just an assist, but it's actually THE power. Now it was just dead weight. About

50 meters flat and the rest downhill, I got to the bus, got a hand from the driver and climbed the stairs again, although way slower this time, as my joints were feeling really achy. As the bus rode off, my head started racing, rather than worried about the current situation, which was already pretty complicated, I worried about the future, meaning, how would I be able to keep living in Japan without being able to move around? How would I go to the grocery store or, even more, how would I go to my language school, as I could not miss more than 10 days without losing my Visa and the ability to keep living in the country along with it? We got to Magome. I couldn't face the steep street to go back to the other bus, so I took the road surrounding the village, still downhill, actually, the only way that I could manage without my power assist, but milder. On the way down, I was really hailing for every single curb cut that allowed me to cross smaller streets and keep on the sidewalk. After a 20 minute descent and a never-ending 50 meter flat terrain, I reached the bus stop. After getting to Nakatsugawa, there was still the 200 meters to the hotel, it took me 30 minutes, the 100 meters slightly uphill way to the convenience store to get dinner, 30 minutes more, and then the way back, though that was just 5 minutes, downhill, remember. Finally, I took some painkillers and I slept. The next day I had to visit more post towns, but I called it quits. I did the return trip to Osaka, another odyssey, 30 more minutes painfully wheeling to the Nakatsugawa station, a transfer in Nagoya and another one to the subway in Osaka, more than one kilometer in total, though friendly station staff members pushed me all the way and literally saved my ass and my arms, and the final flat stretch to my apartment. So, how did it all end? During my stay in Japan I had made some friends at a local association for people with disabilities. I called them and after explaining them my problem, one gracefully lent me his older power wheelchair. He was also one meter tall, so the fit was nearly perfect, otherwise, it would have been another nightmare. In a week time, I managed to get a spare part from my power assist company, the issue was not with the device, but with the connection to it. In the meantime, I learned some cool tricks with the power wheelchair that I later applied to my power assist driving skills, but, anyway, that's another story...

[Music]

So, we've reached the end of the story and, with that, we've gotten to the Tip of the day, but before, if you enjoyed the story and would like yours to be part of our podcast, please visit us at troublewithme.com and share your Accessibility Horror Story with us. Now, as promised, here is the tip of the day. You saw in the story that what really saved me was that I had a contact from an association of people with disabilities in the city, in Osaka, so our tip for today is that when you have to go on a trip to another country, or even to another city, it's important to have the contact from a local association of people with disabilities or maybe of some locals that may know where to get spare parts or where to rent a device. And, you're going to say, okay, so where do we find these associations or these people? In some countries it's easier, but, in some others, information is scarce and it may be difficult, so a good way is to go to Tabi Folk, the accessible travel community, enter its forums and ask there before a trip and you will get to meet people from other countries or they will be able to point you out to one of their associations. With this, we have "newly" reached, nearly, nearly, I don't know how to talk anymore. We have nearly reached the end of the program, we're really looking forward to hear from you, we want to know how's the accessibility in your cities, we want to hear about your accessibility horror stories and more. And, where can you do so? At troublewithme.com or at Tabi Folk, trouble as in issues, problems, not as

in travel, okay, not as in a trip or a journey. And what journeys will we have in store in our next episode, we are going to go to New York and we'll have 2 new sections, um, today's attraction, where we'll go to the Niagara Falls, and we'll hear some accessibility news, where we'll learn some pretty cool stuff from Minnesota and also from Australia and, of course, we'll have another Accessibility Horror Story and some more tips to make our journeys easier. And now, to wrap it up and finish this first episode, we are going to hear some sounds of the world.

By the way, I forgot to mention that you can also take part in this section and send us small recordings of any part in the world.

So, what's the first sound for today? Actually this is Osaka, it's the Tenjin Matsuri, which is one of the three most important festivals in Japan. This is one of its parades. And, the second one, also comes from Osaka, it's the elevator ride of Abeno Harukas, the tallest building in the city and one of the tallest in Japan.

With this soothing sound, we are going to say goodbye, have a good day and see you next time, fellow travelers.