

Accessibility Horror Story

Personal information

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Your horror story

I love fireworks. During my one year stay in Japan, they were on my bucket list, as the country is known for its spectacular fireworks festivals. For various reasons, I was nearly at the end of my stay and I hadn't had the opportunity to attend one. My last chance was the winter fireworks festival in Nagano, 500km away. Three months before, I had already booked a hotel. Unfortunately, all hotels in the city, except for two, were sold out (the festival was that popular), so I had to settle for a run-of-the-mill non-accessible hotel with three steps at the entrance. I called and, at least, I was able to secure a room on the ground floor.

The day before, I got to Nagano station and went to the tourist information center. I wanted to buy tickets for a reserved sitting area, to ensure that I'd be able to properly see the fireworks from my wheelchair. Otherwise, I'd see nothing if people stood up. They asked me if I was going alone. I was. They hesitantly told me that it would be really crowded. I said that it was ok. Finally, they told me the alleged place to buy the tickets and to be there one hour in advance.

I crossed the city, got to the hotel, painfully managed the steps and checked in. The room was freezing. I turned on a lamp. As the light warmed up, a few humongous bugs came to life and started flying around the room. After a little bit of wrestling (little bit understood as more than one hour), I caught four of them on a cup and threw them outside, along with the cup. As I was falling asleep under the covers, just in case, I felt bad for the bugs and wondered if they'd survive outside. Hopefully, they'd go back to their hibernation state.

The next day, I got to the place two hours in advance. Apparently, it was another information point. I asked them where was the ticket place actually. They made a phone call and told me to wait. I told them that I could go on my own, but they told me that it was dangerous for me to go alone and wouldn't tell me its location. I didn't want to cause any trouble, so, although I was growing restless, I waited patiently. More than a half an hour later, someone from the organization came. Again, they told me that it would be dangerous for me to be within the crowd when the festival ended and that they wouldn't

be able to help me. I said it was alright, I would wait the crowd out and leave a bit later. After more than 20 minutes of going around the being alone dilemma, they told me that ok, but that most probably tickets were already sold out, as they had opened a few minutes ago, while we were talking. They asked me if I wanted to go anyway. Of course I wanted to!

The ticket place was just a 5 minute “extremely dangerous” walk along nearly empty streets. We got there. There was a large queue and I waited at the end. A few people had gotten there just right before me. When it finally got to my turn, they hung the “sold out” sign in front of me. I was not having it.

I checked the reserved seating area and saw that there was plenty of space at the back. I explained the ticket sellers the situation, that I was delayed, due to they being extra careful (I was trying to be polite) and that I didn't need a seat as I already had my wheelchair. I only needed to be inside the reserved area, otherwise I wouldn't see anything as the rest were grass slopes and other places for people to stand up. They told me they couldn't do anything.

I, then, addressed another person from the organization. I explained again the situation. They told me it was dangerous and that it was better for me to go home. I told them I had travelled 500km just to come to the festival and, actually, 10000km more from my country. All alone, so I knew how to take care of myself. I asked how come there wasn't reserved seating for wheelchair users, as in most events. They told me that no wheelchair users came, as, when they called inquiring, they told them it was dangerous and that it was better for them not to come. Cultural translation: it meant “don't frigging come”. Like hell! I told them I wouldn't move, until I got my ticket.

Nearly an hour went by discussing in Japanese. I was at my wits end. The organizer had made a few phone calls and each time came back telling me they couldn't do anything. In the end, I lost it. I run out of patience and my Japanese ingrained “don't cause any trouble” mindset went away. I started speaking loudly in English, telling them that I had had enough of being treated like a child. That it was their fault that I was late, because all along they didn't want me to buy a ticket. That it was discrimination. That I could take care of myself. That who cared if there weren't any seats, as I had my own already. That I wouldn't budge. That... that... that... the same all over again.

Five minutes later, the organizer came back and told me “ok”, but that I would have to pay like everyone else. Of course I'd pay! Who said anything of wanting to get in free? After finally buying the ticket, we made amends and both apologized for our behavior. Nevertheless, I felt like shit for the next hour and thought that the festival was already ruined for me.

An hour later, doors to the reserved area opened and I entered. It was freezing. 0 degrees Celsius. I had already been out for 4 hours and there were still at least 4 more to go until I got back to the hotel. I wore an extremely thick coat, a pair of trousers and 6 heating

pads on me, but I was still really cold. An organizer saw me and gave me two extra heating pads that I stuck directly on my skin, despite the safety warning on its wrapping, on my chest and on my belly. I felt a bit better and the festival began. The best one in my life. The whole sky was alight with it. Two hours and a half later, it ended with a bang.

Then, I waited, until the dangerous mob of calmly marching people had mostly cleared. Another staff member came and I told them that it was alright, that I was waiting out and that I'd be going soon. I did so and, 45 minutes later, I reached the hotel. All my limbs were numb. The heating pads, supposed to last for at least 8 hours, were already dead cold, as my skin had absorbed all its heat and lost it to the weather. I stripped and went to the bath. After an hour in extremely hot water, I started feeling my body again. I imagined being one of those bugs and coming back to life with the heat from the lamp. The next day, I found one outside getting closer to a nearby plant, but that's another story...