

COVER STORY



ANNA SCHEMANSKI/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

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The highlight of my weekend was the journey to the wedding on the island of Torcello. Taxis had been laid on to transport the wedding party from the Lido and to my delight, my ride was a sleek, highly polished wooden launch equipped with a platform lift. *Result!*

Although Venice is slowly beginning to cater for those tourists that need an open-minded approach to disabled access, it still has much to learn. I understand that Venice is hundreds of years old and that visiting a city built on water will pose serious challenges for someone in a wheelchair. However, in this day of global tourism, EU regulations and ever more sophisticated engineering solutions for the problem of accessibility for the disabled, I would have hoped for more from one of the world's most visited cities.

TRAVEL TIPS

There is a legal obligation in Britain for hotels and restaurants to provide full access to those in wheelchairs, although there can be limitations on availability. When going abroad however, laws can differ somewhat.

- ❖ Foreign **airports** may provide free wheelchairs, but these may need to be booked in advance. When flying, ensure you have room near to accessible lavatories. Always ask questions tailored to your needs.
- ❖ Bear in mind the **weather**. Sun-baked settings can soon turn into mud in the rainy season and never go onto a beach unless you are confident. Warmer temperatures will sap energy, especially of someone pushing a wheelchair. Make sure you have spare tyres which might be hard to purchase.
- ❖ If you have any pre-existing **medical conditions** bring a list of requirements; translated into the relevant language.
- ❖ **Public transport** can be a big headache. Foreign taxis may not have the same facilities to transport wheelchairs as London cabs.
- ❖ Choose **restaurants** wisely. Depending on cultural habits of the country, seek advice about dining out. A wheelchair can't always squeeze between the rows of tables in the restaurant. Ask local tour guides on the facilities in that area. Ensure the exhibits in **museums** are at eye level and ask whether theatres have spaces.
- ❖ Realise your **limitations**: There were no easy access passageways or wheelchair ramps for the ancient Egyptians; a lift wouldn't look good in the Taj Mahal. Listed buildings need to retain their original architecture.

Useful websites

- ❖ **The DirectGov website** (www.direct.gov.uk/en/disabledpeople) has excellent information for disabled travellers going abroad.
- ❖ **Medici Travel** (0845 8800168; www.medicitravel.com) offers insurance cover for people with pre-existing medical conditions including those with disabilities.
- ❖ **Home and Medical** (05602 092641, www.homeandmedical.co.uk) sell travel wheelchairs, complete with travel bag, allowing it to be stored in the hold of any aircraft, weighing only 8.6kg.
- ❖ **Apparelized** (www.apparelized.com/disabled_holidays) has a good section on UK breaks for disabled travellers.
- ❖ **Disabled Access Holidays** (0845 257 0113; www.disabledaccessholidays.com) offer a numerous destinations for those who want to venture further afield.

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