

TRAILBLAZERS

Part of the Young Campaigners' Network

ALL INCLUSIVE?



THE TRAILBLAZERS' TOURISM REPORT

Report 5 of the **Inclusion Now** series
August 2010

"I am planning my wedding at the moment and it upsets me that so many venues include a stay in the bridal suite that is up a huge flight of stairs with no lift while the only wheelchair accessible room contains only a single bed and is decorated like a hospital, etc. Aren't disabled people allowed to want a romantic or even an attractive room?"

Trailblazer, Leamington Spa

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ABOUT TRAILBLAZERS

Trailblazers is a nationwide organisation of more than 250 young disabled and non-disabled campaigners. We are part of the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign, the leading UK charity focusing on all muscle diseases. We aim to fight the social injustices experienced by young people living with muscle disease or a related condition and ensure they can gain access to the services they require.



ABOUT THE

MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY CAMPAIGN

The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign is dedicated to improving lives of more than 70,000 babies, children and adults who are affected by muscle disease.

The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign fights muscle disease by:

- funding world-class research to find effective treatments and cures;
- providing free practical and emotional support to families;
- awarding grants towards the cost of specialist equipment such as powered wheelchairs;
- campaigning to raise awareness and bring about change.



Trailblazers campaigners joining forces with MPs and Peers outside Parliament

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 aims to end the discrimination that many disabled people face. The Act was significantly extended in 2005 to cover rights to goods, facilities and services. However, many disabled people are still unable to access adequate levels of service when planning and taking holidays in the UK and abroad.

Tourism is a major domestic and international industry involving diverse businesses such as hotels, bed and breakfasts, travel agents, tourist attractions, restaurants and transport providers. These organisations are legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments, providing solutions as long as they are not impractical and beyond their resources.

In 2005 Leonard Cheshire Disability published a report titled *Wish You Were Here* that highlighted the major concerns of disabled tourists at that time. Five years on this report shows that little appears to have improved regarding accessibility in the tourism industry and, in some cases, the situation has got worse.ⁱ

This report reveals that many young disabled people are currently missing out on the opportunity to travel independently and holiday in the location and accommodation of their choice. This report also shows poor services and the complications faced by disabled people when organising a holiday can be stressful, lead to anxiety and uncertainty and turn a break into a chore.

Extra costs for transport, a shortage of accessible budget hotels and the poor disability awareness of travel agents offering discount holiday deals all result in making the average disabled person's holiday more expensive than their non-disabled peers. With an estimated 11 million disabled people in the UK and an ageing population it is important to recognise there is a business case for improving the accessibility of the UK's transport and tourism infrastructure.

While this report shows that there are some examples of tour operators, accommodation providers, tourist attractions and airlines delivering excellent staff disability awareness and access to

buildings, much more needs to be done to ensure disabled people get equal opportunities to relax, get away and enjoy their holidays.

The *Trailblazers* investigation has highlighted a number of factors that can affect young disabled people on holiday. These include:

- Booking holidays;
- Accessibility in hotels;
- Air travel;
- Accessibility at tourist attractions;
- Disability awareness in the tourism industry.

Jennifer Gallagher on holiday in London



Dave Gale on a day out

KEY FINDINGS

The *Trailblazers*' survey reveals that:

- Eight out of ten young disabled people believe holidays are more expensive as a direct result of disability.
- 85 percent of *Trailblazers* do not feel confident that they could spontaneously plan a trip away in the UK.
- More than half of young disabled people feel that the inaccessibility of aircraft has a major impact on their choice of holiday destination.
- 77 percent of young disabled people feel that the standard of disability awareness among hotel staff members is poor or variable at best.
- One third of young disabled people feel that issues around the accessibility of bathrooms are the biggest challenges when staying in a hotel.
- One in three young disabled people said that access to and around hotel buildings is their greatest concern when staying in a hotel.
- One in four disabled people feel that there is a shortage of accessible rooms at hotels in the UK.
- Half of young disabled people said the accessibility of hotels and tourist attractions in the UK was poor or very poor.
- More than half of young disabled people experience difficulties in booking hotels in the UK for reasons related to their condition.
- Six out of ten young disabled people feel that most hotels are inaccessible and don't cater to their requirements.
- 70 percent of young disabled people feel that there are not enough accessible toilets at most holiday resorts and tourist attractions in the UK.
- Almost half of young disabled people feel that the general standard of disability awareness among members of staff at tourist attractions was poor or very poor.

- One in two people felt that it was not easy to find good, reliable information on accessibility at tourist attractions in the UK.
- 90 percent of young disabled people feel that most high street and mainstream travel agents have poor disability awareness and knowledge of issues affecting disabled tourists.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We are calling on hoteliers, travel agents, airlines and owners of tourist attractions to:

- work with organisations like *Trailblazers* to come up with solutions to the problems faced by young disabled tourists;
- ensure high-quality disability awareness training is provided to staff members;
- put accessibility at the heart of the tourism industry and ensure that all members of staff are aware of the accessibility of the facilities they work with;
- install ramps, lifts and banisters to ensure accessibility throughout buildings;
- increase the number of accessible rooms wherever possible;
- ensure that accessible hotel rooms are spacious, well planned and, if en suite, have fully accessible bathrooms including walk in showers;
- keep a stock of adaptations and equipment useful to disabled people;
- increase the number of hotel rooms with automatic power assisted buttons or lighter doors.

BOOKING A HOLIDAY

The search for a dream holiday for most people starts at a travel agency. Traditionally, holidaymakers have popped into their local high street agent and received face-to-face advice. Today, many people find searching and booking online more convenient. However, according to the *Trailblazers*' survey, many disabled people are often left with little guidance, expert advice or information when they encounter travel agents or holiday websites.

Trailblazers report that many travel agents cannot provide any information on the accessible facilities within the hotels they are advertising. We received reports of travel agents being unaware of whether hotels had accessible rooms, ramps, lifts or the gradient of the surrounding location. There also often appears to be a dearth of knowledge around the accessibility of local transport and the geography of the area.

"I have just been looking to go away for a week in the UK and am finding it extremely difficult to find somewhere that has accessible hotels and attractions. Travel agents are useless with information. Two big name travel agents could not tell me any accessible venues in the UK at all."

Jennifer Gallacher, Middlesbrough

"Travel agents always have to ring the hotels to find out what they have in place, we have missed out on good flight times by having to wait a day for an answer from the hotel. Travel agents would push for a better system or avoid these hotels if they seriously cared about us."

David Lowe, Chesterfield

Online travel agents review

A *Trailblazers* investigator went undercover to see how well some of the UK's most popular travel websites cater for disabled tourists.

[Expedia.co.uk](https://www.expedia.co.uk)

Expedia.co.uk recommends that disabled tourists file special requests for accessibility. This can be done by clicking on the 'I have a special request' link. You are then required to describe any special requests (e.g. easy wheelchair access, late check-in). Expedia states that it will pass your special request along to the booked location, but such requests are **not guaranteed** and may incur additional charges. In order to guarantee your request, Expedia advises that you contact the hotel directly.

Expedia puts the onus on a disabled person to contact a hotel themselves. It is therefore up to a disabled person to find out if an accessible room is available.

However, if you book through Expedia you cannot be sure of getting an accessible room and you would be paying for a holiday without the guarantee of a room you can use.

On top of this, by pushing disabled customers away, Expedia stops disabled tourists from accessing discounted holidays.

Late Rooms.com

Late Rooms.com does have the facility to process specific searches for accessible rooms. When booking online there is a section dedicated to specific requests regarding wheelchair access and other accessibility factors. However, special requests cannot be guaranteed.

Late Rooms also has a special request booking line number where they will carry out the research and get back to you with the information you require.

Lastminute.com

Lastminute.com has the facility to search for hotels that have accessible rooms, but it is not possible to see whether an accessible room is available.

There are no instructions on booking accessible rooms and we assume that a disabled person is expected to contact the hotel independently.

Action needed

We are calling online and high street travel agents to:

- ensure high-quality disability awareness training is provided to staff members;
- put accessibility and tourism at the heart of their service and ensure that all agents are aware of the accessibility of the hotels they work with;
- provide photos and specifications of accessible rooms in hotels;
- to have the facility to directly book accessible rooms
- develop good working relationships with reliable and accessible hotels abroad.



Carrie-Anne Fleming relaxes on holiday

"Most travel agents don't have enough knowledge and don't always understand what accessibility means. This confusion needs to be eliminated and high street and mainstream travel agents need to give good, reliable advice to disabled tourists."

Trailblazer, Newcastle

"I like websites which include a 'disabled access' tick box on the initial form. When I'm 'just looking' I want all the info on the website rather than having to phone up. But there should be a designated phone line for when I am ready to make a booking."

Trailblazer, Oxford

"Some holiday companies are worried when you mention wheelchair access and would rather say they can't accommodate you than manage the request. You are then forced to go to the specialised firms who can charge much higher amounts than for an ordinary holiday!"

Tanvi Vyas, London

ACCOMMODATION

Finding good value and comfortable accommodation is at the top of any tourist's list when it comes to planning a holiday. The growth of the Internet has led to this process becoming simpler, cheaper and much more user led. However, many disabled people continue to face obstacles that can make the idea of going on holiday something to dread, rather than look forward to. Although the number of wheelchair accessible rooms and accessible hotels continues to grow, there are still hotels and bed and breakfasts that just cannot cope with the idea of a wheelchair user or person with mobility difficulties staying in their accommodation.

Getting away without needing to plan

More than eight out of ten *Trailblazers* do not feel confident that they could take a spontaneous trip away in the UK. One problem the participants highlighted was the lack of accessible rooms in hotels. This means that they had to book early and could never guarantee that if they arrived without planning the hotel would be fully accessible and set up to cater for their needs. Many people felt that it was simply not possible to travel spontaneously because they had to research, check and then check again that the hotel would provide what they need.



Nicky Baker on holiday in Brighton

The extra expense of disability

Eighty percent of young disabled people feel that being a tourist is more expensive for them than it is for their non-disabled peers. Many participants feel the accessible accommodation was often in the more expensive hotels which they would not choose to stay in. Some people also felt that the time they had to spend searching for suitable accommodation was significantly longer than for non-disabled people and added expense to their holiday. Some *Trailblazers* have also been charged for extra rooms for personal assistants, which effectively places a tax on disabled people.

Disability awareness

Poor disability awareness among staff members is a common concern for the vast majority of young disabled people. Some *Trailblazers* feel that they are treated like a nuisance or as if they were subordinate to the member of staff. Other tourists felt that the behaviour of staff members could lack respect and dignity, which included ignoring the advice and suggestions of the disabled person and choosing to speak to their carer or PA.

However, some participants believe that if the hotel has good physical accessibility and facilities for disabled people, there was a greater chance that the staff would also have good disability awareness. There were also many accounts of excellent practice and helpfulness.

"Spontaneous would mean that I could just get in my car, drive for a couple of hours, stop in the prettiest town I could find, and go to the first b&b, hotel or cottage I see. However I don't believe I could do this and secure accessible accommodation.

Raquel Siganporia, Richmond

"To do this you have to be organised and you soon realise that the help is out there but it won't just come to you. Lots of research is needed."

Lorinda Dixon, Isle of Wight

Other major concerns include:

- poor accessibility in bathrooms and a scarcity of accessible rooms with showers;
- access into and around hotel buildings;
- not enough accessible rooms;
- electronic key cards, heavy doors and timed locks making it difficult for many disabled people to enter their rooms.

Action needed

We are calling on hoteliers and providers of all tourist accommodation to:

- install ramps and banisters throughout their buildings;
- increase the number of accessible rooms wherever possible;
- consult disabled tourists and act upon their advice;
- ensure that accessible rooms are spacious, well planned and, if en suite, have fully accessible bathrooms including walk in showers;
- keep a stock of adaptations and equipment useful to disabled people;
- provide high-quality disability awareness training to all staff;
- install automatic power assisted buttons and/or lighter doors to all rooms.

"The accessibility of hotels in Britain is wildly variable – some places seem to have no ramps, wide doors, hearing loops or handrails. Other places have fantastic facilities including mirrors and switches at different heights, all the above, and well-trained staff."

Trailblazer, Northwest

"I'd never trust someone who told me a hotel was accessible over the phone or by email. I'd want to see photographs of entrances, bedrooms, bathrooms, bars etc."

Trailblazer, London

"Everything requires a lot of planning when you are disabled. Transport, care, accommodation, equipment, insurance, carrying luggage and venues to visit. Each of these usually requires a few phone calls as a minimum."

Trailblazer, Oxford

"Most large hotels do have an accessible room although some have a bath rather than a level access shower. It always takes much longer to book an accessible hotel as you have to shop around and it usually can't be booked on the Internet as it's not always clear what you are actually getting with regards to space and bathing facilities."

Carolyn Bean, Middlesbrough

TOURIST

ATTRACTIONS

The Trailblazers' Calling Time investigation showed that many leisure services and tourist attractions have made significant steps towards making their venues accessible in recent years. Almost every Trailblazer interviewed could give examples of a pub, club, stadium, museum or cinema that had made great strides towards creating an equal service for all, and the Trailblazers celebrate these establishments and businesses.ⁱⁱ

However, almost half of the participants in this survey feel that the general standard of disability awareness among staff at tourist attractions is poor or very poor. Other issues highlighted by Trailblazers include disabled tourists being charged a full price to visit a venue but then being unable to access any of the facilities.

One positive note that should be recognised is that many tourist attractions offer free access to carers or personal assistants, which ensures that the disabled person does not have to pay twice to visit the venue.

Action needed

We are calling on tourist attractions to:

- provide better disability awareness training for staff members who work with the public;
- offer better disability awareness training for all staff members who work on the future development of the attractions. Sometimes a little awareness can be the difference between a disabled person being able to enjoy full use of a tourist attraction or not;
- develop fully accessible maps for disabled tourists;
- permit free entry for all carers or personal assistants to ensure that disabled people do not pay a tax on disability.

"Most places have a plan that they can easily put into action when they have a disabled person visiting a tourist attraction. But I have encountered tourist attractions where the standard of disability awareness among members of staff has been poor."

Trailblazer, Newcastle

"One particular visit to a well-known tourist attraction was horrendous. My daughter needed her wheelchair to access the main parts but was able to get out of her chair to access the ride. On seeing me help her out the staff said that they didn't allow disabled people onto the ride. We were eventually allowed on but only after snide remarks."

Lorna Dixon, Isle of Wight

"A lot of tourist attractions will try and be as accommodating as possible and helpful when asked for advice although some can be frustratingly clueless."

Judith Merry, Aylesbury



Zoe Hallam and friends in Europe

"In England, the staff attitude is good, however, when you go abroad due to cultural differences there may be challenges in getting people to understand. People should talk to me, not the person with me!"

Tanvi Vyas, London

"We went to the Lancashire Cricket ground recently to see a concert. The staff there were brilliant. When we were leaving we were asked if anyone objected to everyone else being let out first at the end so we didn't get into the large crowds. I was pleased that we were asked instead of being told or being held back by a barrier or otherwise."

David Lowe, East Midlands

"A lot of attractions have staff that are really helpful for people in wheelchairs, but when they see someone with a disability who can walk, they assume that they don't need the same sort of facilities and can cope without them. I find that if I ask they are more than willing to help, but can sometimes be more hesitant or unaware of what to do than hotel staff."

Mathy Selvakumaran, Worksop

"Once again disability awareness in the UK is haphazard and low on the list of priorities. Compared to America, where it is ingrained into the customer service ethos of all organisations it is very poor."

Nicky Baker, Harrow

AIR TRAVEL

Airlines and holiday companies are no longer permitted to refuse to fly people because they are disabled. European regulation 1107 for persons with restricted mobility has been in force since 2008.

The introduction of this regulation represented a major change in assistance provision, identifying new responsibilities for the airport and making it a statutory requirement for both the airport and airline to provide assistance. It is now an offence to deny someone access to a flight on the grounds of disability or impairment, except where there are specific safety restrictions. The regulation also means that appropriate assistance must now be provided throughout the journey at no additional cost to the passenger.ⁱⁱⁱ

Travelling by plane is often an integral part of a holiday. However, two years after the regulation was implemented, our investigation reveals that many disabled people are still receiving a second rate service.

Trailblazers continue to have concerns about the way airlines treat essential equipment, like powered wheelchairs, on flights, where they are often returned damaged.

Zoe Hallam takes in the sights of Edinburgh



Trailblazers believe one solution is for airlines to allocate specific places on planes where seats can be removed and wheelchairs can be clamped into place – this will provide greater comfort for many wheelchair users and ensure their chair is not at risk of damage. The seats could be put back into place when not required, so the company does not lose revenue.

Currently most wheelchair users need staff assistance to transfer into a manual wheelchair provided by the airline. This method could be improved upon by using a hoist which would also remove health and safety concerns for airline staff

Wheelchairs and oxygen

When disabled people fly, the costs incurred can be disproportionately high and directly related to disability.

Trailblazers investigators have revealed that although most full service airlines have no additional charges for disabled people, many no frills budget airlines can add considerable sums for so called “luxury” items such as oxygen which can cost up to £100 per canister to hire and is essential to many air travellers.^{iv} *Trailblazers* argue this amounts to a charge on breathing.

“My electric wheelchair was almost left in the cargo holding area on the plane. After two hours we asked where it was. The staff had forgotten after getting my sister's chair that there was another one and were closing down for the evening. A manager had to go and get it himself.”

Judith Merry, Aylesbury

“I haven't had much trouble with airlines as I always phone up to request wheelchair assistance to and from the plane. However, I do find the aisle within the plane a bit narrow.”

Aminder Virdee, Hayes

How the airlines faired

Bmi

Passengers who require oxygen canisters are charged £100 for oxygen. Passengers may not bring their own.

No weight or size restrictions on powered wheelchairs.

Ryan Air

Passengers who require oxygen canisters are charged £100 for oxygen. Passengers may not bring their own.

Powered wheelchairs can only be accepted on the basis that the battery is a dry or gel cell and the dimension of the wheelchair when collapsed will not be greater than the combined dimensions of more than 81cms (height), 119cms (width) and 119cms (depth). No weight restrictions. 4 people with reduced mobility permitted per flight.

Virgin

No additional charge for oxygen.
No weight or size restrictions on powered wheelchairs.

Easy Jet

No additional charge for oxygen as you can bring your own on board as long as passenger notifies the specification prior to travel.

Wheelchairs and mobility aids weighing more than 60kgs (excluding battery) can be accepted for travel provided they can be collapsed into separate parts weighing less than 60kg each.

British Airways

No additional charge for oxygen since 2008.

No weight or size restrictions on powered wheelchairs.



Steve Ledbrook on a day out in Somerset

"It would be good to have an idea of your rights. They always let me take my chair to the plane door but only after a big discussion saying it is not allowed. They eventually let me do it but it would be nice to not have to fight."

Lauren West, Wales

"There should be better staff awareness of disability. One time I had to let go of my stick so it could be passed through the scanner, this meant I was then unable to walk through customs without it and felt very unbalanced."

Steve Ledbrook, Weston-super-Mare

Common concerns include:

- boarding the plane.
- travelling on the plane.
- no accessible toilets on board.
- the additional expense.
- the staff attitude and organisation.
- the way essential disability related equipment was treated when transported to the plane and on board the flight.

"An international standard should be introduced which would provide certainty. For example, all wheelchairs should be brought to the plane and not collected at the baggage carousels."

Raquel Siganporia, Richmond

"Airlines and airports need to know how to handle and load powered wheelchairs on to the plane carrier safely and without damaging them.. The best airline for disabled people is Virgin Atlantic as they have onboard wheelchairs but it would be good if every other airline did the same as it makes things a lot easier."

Trailblazer, Newcastle

"Airlines should have a 'disabled' ticket, like on trains, for people who are not obviously disabled. The airline and airport would know that you are disabled from check-in and can provide any needed support. This would be especially useful for someone like myself, who is not a wheelchair user and still needs some support, but airlines and airports don't know to provide help because they can't 'see' the disability."

Mathy Selvakumaran, Worksop

Key Recommendations

We are calling on the airlines and airports to:

- work with groups like *Trailblazers* to create effective and appropriate policies on disability;
- allow a passenger to pre-book luggage assistance;
- scrap all charges on oxygen;
- allow all wheelchairs to travel;
- improve the secure storage of wheelchairs on aeroplanes;
- provide better staff disability awareness training;
- find methods that will permit a wheelchair user to travel in their own wheelchair on a plane;
- improve the passenger assistance services by putting the passenger first;
- promote clear and concise information on a wheelchair user's rights as an airline passenger;
- give the customer the option to allow clear markings on tickets belonging to disabled passengers without visible disabilities, so staff are aware additional assistance may be required;
- ensure airlines follow the advice of the Department of Transport and approve the carriage of oxygen cylinders or concentrators.

POSTCARDS FROM

TRAILBLAZERS – ACCESSIBLE HOLIDAYS

IN THE UK AND ABROAD

Jagdeep Sehmbi in New York



Jagdeep Sehmbi went to Canada last summer. Here are her thoughts on her airline experiences.

"Before we flew out we wanted to leave our car in a long stay car park near the airport. While making our booking on the telephone we asked whether they had wheelchair accessible transport to take us from the car park to the airport. We were assured that they did and so we confirmed the booking.

"However, on arrival we were faced with disappointment. The buses were not accessible, so we asked whether the driver could take us in our own car to the airport and after dropping us off take our car back and park it. We were told they were not insured for this.

"In the end, I had to get out of my wheelchair and get into the bus with the help of my mum and sister, and my chair was put into the back of the bus, using our car ramps to help. We were all upset at this situation because we had been told something that was quite obviously untrue.

"Once at the airport the staff insisted that they could not load my chair until the backrest was folded. However the backrest on my chair is fixed and this has never been an issue any other

time I have been abroad. After some discussion they decided they could accommodate my chair after all!

"In Toronto the disabled assistance was really good. There was someone waiting to help as soon as we landed. They helped us get to where we needed and I was relieved to find both my manual and powered chairs were in one piece!

"On returning the assistance at Heathrow was also very good compared to other times. But I was again disappointed when I saw my electric chair at baggage reclaim. The back was bent out of shape and the headrest was completely broken.

"I filed a complaint with the airline as this is the second time this has happened; previously my chair had been put onto the conveyor belt and after falling off it had broken apart, with the batteries, control box, and other parts lying all over the airport floor.

"Though this time wasn't as bad, it is still very upsetting when a piece of equipment that I am dependent on for independence on a day to day basis is damaged because of a lack of care or ignorance on the part of an airline company. I feel there needs to be some regulation and training for the handling and storage of wheelchairs."

Tanvi Vyas went to Tenerife in July 2010.
This is what she made of it:

"Los Christianos is an extremely accessible seaside town in Tenerife. There is easy access to the beach if you use a manual wheelchair, and a boardwalk all along the coast if you use an electric wheelchair. There are ramps everywhere, although they are sometimes very steep, and access into most shops and restaurants too - probably more accessible than London! However disabled toilets are extremely rare and you will probably have to go into well known fast-food establishments for accessible loos.

"Although very hilly, there are accessible taxis which are easy to book and even when you haven't booked, other drivers radio them to let them know you are there so you don't have to wait long. You can use an electric wheelchair and get safely in the cab, and they aren't too expensive. Around five euros to the centre of town and eight to the next town of Las Americas. People are really friendly and willing to help.

"The Hollywood Mirage hotel, where I stayed, is on a very steep hill which can be problematic. The room had two showers - one bath and one shower, but as we did not book the accessible room we had to make do with the communal disabled shower which was downstairs. This was great as it had lots of room, a wet room, an additional stool and was cleaned regularly and hardly used. The pool area was accessible via a very, very steep ramp but once there it was fine."



Tanvi Vyas in Tenerife

Helen Starbuck at the Eden Project



Helen Starbuck went to see Calvin Harris at the Eden Project. Here are her thoughts:

"I went to the Eden Project to watch one of their music sessions in July featuring Calvin Harris, Audio Bullys and Annie Mac. Accessible parking was close to the entrance with just a short walk. Once through security, which was simple, we had to go and get a band for our wrists. It is quite a walk from the top to the bottom at Eden where the domes and the stage are but everyone was very friendly and helpful. At the bottom of the long path I was directed to the accessible raised stage. Once I had reached this they had my name on a list to make sure only people that were disabled were allowed on with their guests. The raised stage for wheelchairs was massive with an amazing view and there was room to dance on it also! The accessible area also had an accessible portaloo which was a good size and a wheelchair could fit in there nicely.

"When the concert ended we waited for some of the crowd to clear and I was then chauffeured by two assistants out of the Eden area and through all of the hidden areas where no members of public are usually allowed. It did make me feel a bit like a celebrity if I'm honest! I got through the crowd with no problems and was taken back to the car park. I found them all very helpful and was quite impressed!"

Nicky Baker went to Brighton and stayed at the famous Grand Hotel for the weekend. Here are her thoughts:

"The main entrance is completely inaccessible but there is an alternative entrance with an enclosed platform lift at the front of the hotel. To operate the lift, you must keep your hand on the button continuously, which can be very difficult. Because of this, I had to have someone in the lift with me and the space to do this was very tight.

"The reception area was large and easy to navigate around but the reception desk was extremely high so a wheelchair user could not see over it or be seen. The accessible WC was situated within the ladies WC. This may make a male who needed to use the facility very uncomfortable. Or like me, having one carer with me of the opposite sex, who did not feel comfortable entering the ladies WC.

"I booked into a room for £130; however, it was not an accessible room. The accessible rooms are suites that cost £250 a night. I was upgraded at no additional cost – they informed us of this a week before we arrived. However, the hotel was not very busy the night we stayed and I wonder if the hotel would have still upgraded us if it had been busy.

"The room itself was large and spacious although the two doors to access the room were slightly narrow for wheelchairs. In the room, there were two single beds pushed together to make a double bed. We had requested a twin room, as I was sharing a room with my carer, we just separated the beds. However, it was nice that the hotel did not assume I didn't want a double bed.

"The bathroom was extremely large. A toilet, bidet, shower cubicle, bath and vanity unit/sink were provided and there was still enough space to manoeuvre a wheelchair. The shower was a small cubicle and although it was a roll-in shower, was not large enough for a person with a mobility impairment. The bath had handrails provided.

"Brighton Palace Pier is entirely accessible if the wheelchair user does not mind bumps, a more level pathway has been provided from half way down the pier. Each individual attraction or ride had a cost associated with it but none of the rides had been adapted for wheelchair users. There were several coffee shops/food outlets which all had high counters and high tables and seating. There were some benches provided but there were no spaces provided for wheelchair users without blocking routes. There is an accessible WC on the pier which doesn't require you having to travel further than a non-disabled person and it is clearly signposted from the standard WCs.

"The Royal Pavilion was completely accessible and there was no part wheelchair users could not access. There was an audio guide, however, that you had to hold to your ear, no alternative or headset were offered. The standard price is £9.50 per person but this is reduced to £7.50 for wheelchair users and the carer goes free. The staff I came into contact with were friendly and helpful.

"Overall I would not recommend Brighton as a place for a disabled tourist as there is so much that is not accessible. You also have to plan very carefully where you go, due to the limited accessibility and it is also quite hilly."

Carrie-Ann Fleming who works for Tourism for All and is a member of the Cumbria Trailblazers group visited Stirling. This is what she made of it.

"Our hotel was the Express by Holiday Inn Stirling which is about two miles from the city centre. Compared to previous stays at Express By Holiday Inn hotels, we felt this one was not quite up to the high standard usually found. The main doors into the lobby were not automatic and extremely heavy so I was very glad to have someone there to help. Access in the bedroom was great, especially the 'wet-room' style bathroom, however we found the room decor a little dated.

"We had dinner at the Sprinkerse View restaurant, which was adjacent to the hotel. They serve enormous portions at very cheap prices. No issues with access here, apart from trying to wheel back to the hotel with a very full tummy!

"The next morning we set off to Stirling Castle. We were met at the entrance and led to the Castle's complimentary wheelchair accessible minibus, which took us up to the highest point. This enabled us to take our tour around the Castle downhill rather than uphill – much easier when cobbles are involved!

"All areas are accessible, apart from the medieval kitchens and the Elphinstone Tower. We finished off our visit with lunch in the cafe, which was buffet style. I normally find this setup difficult, but they had made it as inclusive as possible.

"We then visited the Church of the Holy Rude, the second oldest building in Stirling after the castle. We were met by Brian, who is in charge of the Welcome Team. He gave us a full, very informative tour. There are ramps inside the church for wheelchair access, and an information guide available in different formats, including Braille.

"Next we popped into the VisitScotland Information Centre for Stirling. Unfortunately, we weren't very impressed. Obscuring the accessible entrance was a foot stool and several cardboard boxes. We milled around for a while looking at leaflets but no-one asked us if we required help. I understand that the Information Centre has been made aware of these issues and is tackling them.

"The following day, we travelled out to the Bannockburn Heritage Centre, which is owned by the National Trust for Scotland. Access is brilliant, with wheelchairs available for hire and information available in Braille, large print, audio and subtitled formats. The staff were dedicated to the subject, and very passionate, which was infectious.

"Before we embarked on our journey home, we had lunch at the King Robert Hotel, which was next door to the Heritage Centre. It was very quiet, at one point we were the only people in the dining room, however the food was tasty, and good value. The accessible toilet was badly designed, I found it difficult to transfer – I mentioned this to the hotel, who have taken my comments on board and, with the assistance of VisitScotland, they are trying to find a solution."



Carrie-Ann Fleming
in Stirling

ADVICE FROM

THE EXPERTS

Tourism for All

For over 30 years Tourism for All has listened very closely to hundreds of thousands of people who have contacted us for advice.

As well as our helpline which is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, our websites **www.tourismforall.org.uk** and **www.openbritain.net** may also be helpful if you are looking for information about accessible facilities - especially outside of these hours.

We always try our best to provide answers which aren't always immediately obvious. There is a Forum on our website where you can see what other users have written or you can put up a question of your own, to see if anyone has some ideas.

For those who wish to support us they can become members for an annual subscription. There are some benefits for this which are listed on our website.

For more information and advice contact Tourism for All UK on **0845 124 9971** or email **info@tourismforall.org.uk** or go to **www.tourismforall.org.uk**



Jennifer Gallagher on a boating trip



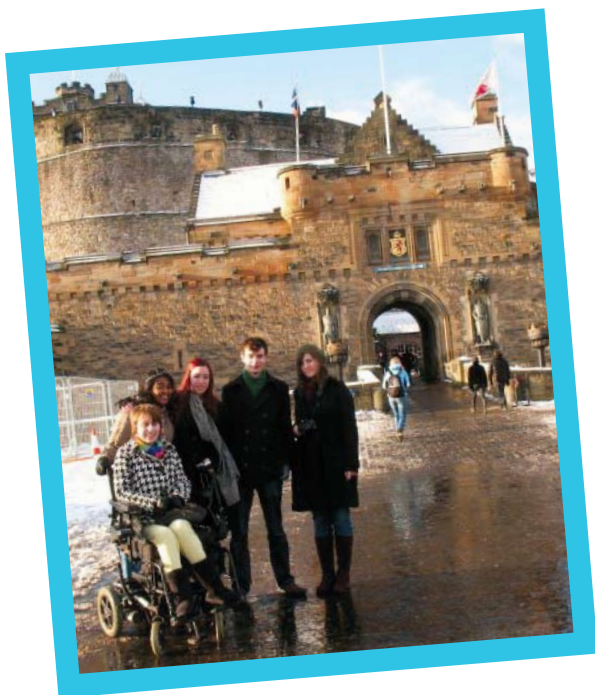
Zoe Hallam at the Jardin Anglais

Questions to ask when booking accessible rooms

In terms of booking an accessible room this might depend on what you are prepared to accept, as it probably isn't going to be perfect for everyone, and may also depend on how long you intend to stay.

The questions might include some or all of these:

1. Is there a description or an Access Statement on the website? Hopefully there will be some information eg: www.mortonshouse.co.uk/access.asp. However, not all places currently do this which can be frustrating. Send them a link to this or other hotels so that they can see what others are doing.
2. If you contact an accommodation provider explain what you are looking for. For example a wheel-in shower, shower seat or hoist. If they are booked or can't help you ask them if they know somewhere nearby that can?
3. Is the room a double, twin or zip and link bedded room? Your requirement may depend on whether or not you travel with a PA and are happy to share a room with them.
4. If you need a tracking hoist is this available in the accessible room? The Ceiling Hoist Users Club www.chuc.org.uk has a list of places it is aware of. If there isn't one is it possible to use a portable hoist?



Zoe Hallam in Edinburgh

5. Are there any pictures of the accessible room, bathroom or equipment? If not, can they send some?
6. Is there accessible public transport? How far away is this?
7. Is there designated accessible parking nearby?
8. Is parking free for Blue Badge holders? This does vary and could add significantly to the cost of staying somewhere.
9. Are there step-free routes to the entrance?
10. Is there wheelchair access to all public areas including leisure facilities such as the swimming pool or garden?

There may be many more questions if you have dietary requirements, need to store medication in a fridge or if you have other specific needs.

10 useful tips when booking a holiday

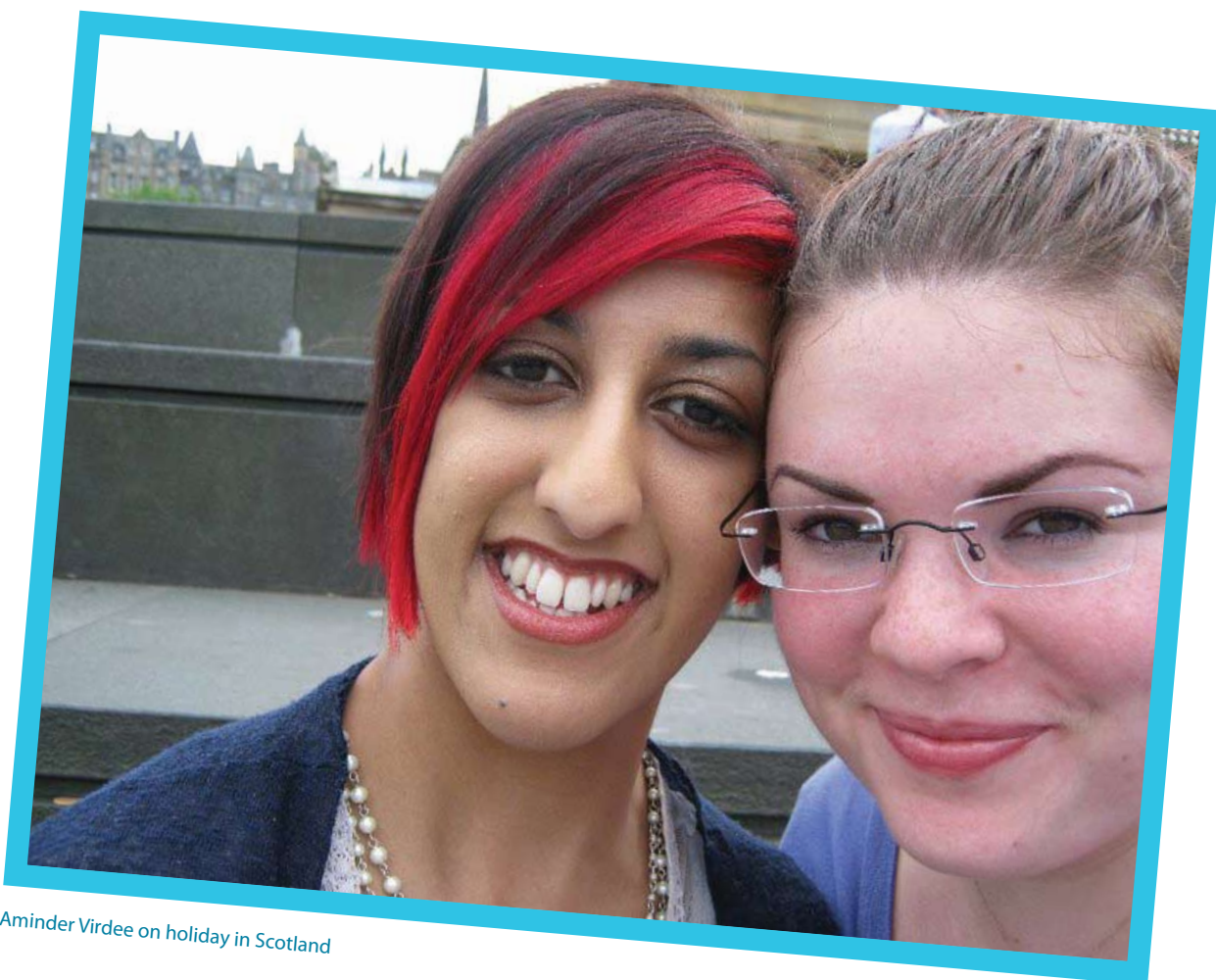
1. Does your holiday insurance cover pre-existing medical conditions? Tourism for All has a list of insurance companies that do: www.tourismforall.org.uk/Travel-Insurance.html
2. Does your holiday insurance cover wheelchair and equipment repair or replacement? Tourism for All has a list of companies that should be able to help.
3. Can the agent make accessible accommodation a 'requirement' rather than a 'request'? This is important if you need an accessible room.
4. Can the agent guarantee this room will be available?
5. Is the resort and beach accessible? This is likely to be important if you want to get out and see the world. Not many people want to stay in their room for two weeks if they can help it.
6. If oxygen is required on the flight is this free of charge? If you use oxygen, some airlines charge for this and some don't. If possible, shop around so you can get the best deal.
7. Is there assistance available at the UK and destination airport? Under EU legislation you should be provided with assistance in the UK and in Europe. Outside the EU you will need to check with your operator. Please give at least 48 hours notice.
8. If the transfer bus at the destination is not accessible is there an alternative accessible taxi service? Not all transfer vehicles will be accessible so it is definitely worth checking.
9. Who is liable for the cost of an accessible transfer taxi? Again, check to see if this would be at an additional cost over and above the holiday.
10. Don't forget to take additional medication in case of delays when travelling and at the airport. You could be away more days than planned.

SUMMARY

For young disabled people to be able to relax and enjoy their free time, we believe that hoteliers, airlines, travel agents and all other businesses involved in the tourism industry need to place accessibility at the heart of their goods and services provision. Although some alterations and adjustments can be expensive, there are many ways that small and simple adjustments can be made that will help to improve the opportunities available to disabled tourists and ensure a fairer deal for disabled holidaymakers.

This report has highlighted examples of good disability awareness throughout the sector. However, *Trailblazers* campaigners have also revealed many of the issues that can make travel and tourism more expensive and more complicated for a disabled would-be holidaymaker.

Trailblazers believes that by making adjustments and putting an emphasis on accessibility for disabled tourists, the tourism industry will open itself up to many new potential customers which over time will lead to increased revenue.



Aminder Virdee on holiday in Scotland

- i. <http://www.lcdisability.org/?lid=3873>
- ii. http://www.mdctrailblazers.org/assets/0000/2993/Trailblazers_calling_time_final_copy.pdf
- iii. <http://www.caa.co.uk/docs/14/InFocus-PRM%20Review-web2.pdf>
- iv. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090630/halltext/90630h0009.htm>

USEFUL LINKS

ABTA

www.abta.com/consumer-services/accessible_travel

Information and tips on travel and accessibility.

Direct Enquiries

www.directenquiries.com

Provides nationwide resources for disabled people.

DisabledGo

www.disabledgo.com

Lists accessible entertainment and retail facilities around the UK.

DirectGov

www.direct.gov.uk

Provides information on government services.

Disability Law Service

www.dls.org.uk

Provides information and advice for disabled people.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com

The home of campaigning for equality in the UK.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission – tourism

www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/information-for-service-users/air-travel

The EHRC guide to the rights of disabled air travellers.

Find your Assembly Member

www.assemblywales.org/memhome/member-search.htm

If you live in Wales, search here for your Welsh Assembly Member.

Find your MLA

www.niassembly.gov.uk/members/constmap_res.htm

If you live in Northern Ireland, search here for your Northern Ireland Assembly Member.

Find your MP

www.findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons

Self explanatory!

Find your MSP

www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/membersPages/MSPAddressPostcodeFinder.htm

If you live in Scotland, search here for your Scottish Parliament Member.

RADAR

www.radar.org.uk

RADAR is the UK's largest disability campaigning organisation, with a membership of over 900 disability organisations and individual campaigners.

The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain

www.accessibleguide.co.uk

The place to order a guide to accessible holidays in the UK.

Tourism For All

www.tourismforall.org.uk

Advise on accessible tourism.

Visit England

www.visitengland.org/accessibility

Visit provides tips and advice for people with access needs

Visit London

www.visitlondon.com/attractions/culture/london-attraction-accessibility

A guide to the accessibility of London's cultural attractions.

GET INVOLVED

Take action, campaign, learn skills, make friends. Interested in becoming a Trailblazer? We always welcome people to join our thriving campaigning community.

Contact Bobby Ancil on **020 7803 4807**, email at **b.ancil@muscular-dystrophy.org** or visit **www.muscular-dystrophy.org/trailblazers**

To find out more about the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign call **0800 652 6352** (freephone), email **info@muscular-dystrophy.org** or visit **www.muscular-dystrophy.org**

**This report has been researched, compiled
and written by *Trailblazers* ambassadors**

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