

# INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

International travel is absolutely possible, and advancements in technology and tourism have opened many opportunities for travel to countries for people with disabilities. Traveling abroad brings its own challenges, including language barriers, visiting historic sites, and developing countries.

While the ADA exists in the USA, accessibility laws do change and travelers should become familiar with accessibility laws of the destination country. Remember, accessibility may be defined differently in other countries. What may be covered in the U.S. may not be covered in other destinations.

If traveling outside of the US for the first time, we recommend starting things slow and building up experiences!

- Consider going to an English speaking country first before venturing to countries where the language can pose a barrier to communicating needs.
- Limit the number of countries to be visited, as coordinating multiple hotels, and multiple ways of transportation can be complex in a foreign country.
- Remember that many hotels are in older or historic areas and may not be able to accommodate a wheelchair. We recommend choosing hotel chains that have known accessible features. We also recommend staying in larger cities where accessibility may be more available compared to more remote areas.
- Consider taking an accessible tour or booking a tour with an agent who specializes in accessible travel. This can help ease the stress of travel as these agents / companies will already consider the barriers to travel and provide solutions.
- Be aware that some developing countries may not have accessible public transportation available and will solely rely on private transportation services for wheelchair travelers. This may increase the budget of the trip, so make sure to account for the extra cost.
- Prepare for medical emergencies abroad! Keep medical information, medication list, allergies, and primary physician's contact information on hand at all times. Pack an extra week's worth of supplies and ensure that vendors can send supplies to the destination in case of a prolonged stay.
- We also recommend enrolling in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) <https://step.state.gov/step/>, which is a free service allowing US citizens and nationals to receive security messages while traveling or living abroad for the US Embassy or consulate to help in an emergency.

As more PwDs seek travel across the globe, identifying the most accessible travel destinations is becoming more important than ever. While surveys do exist, there is a lack of standardization or more rigorous data out there to judge all cities uniformly. The European Commission, for example, has been awarding the Access City Award since 2011 to the most accessible city in Europe based on:

- Accessibility to the built environment and public spaces
- Accessibility to transportation and related infrastructures
- Accessibility to information and communication, including information and communication technologies
- Accessibility to public facilities and services
- Plans for equal access for and improvement of quality of life for PwDs
- Sustainability of accessibility measures
- Involvement of PwDs and relevant partners in policies and accessibility measures

The following cities from 2011 to 2020 have been recipients of the award:

- Avila, Spain
- Salzburg, Austria
- Berlin, Germany
- Gothenburg, Sweden
- Boras, Sweden
- Milan, Italy
- Chester, UK
- Lyon, France
- Breda, Netherlands
- Warsaw, Poland

Other surveys done by 101 Mobility, New Mobility, Access2Mobility, Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, Sunrise Medical, and Booking.com identified accessible destinations but all had different criteria to determine a city's "accessibility" including the number of physicians, climate, and accessibility of public transportation and buildings. The following have been consistently listed as some of the most accessible cities in the world outside of the United States and have been endorsed by the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) for European countries:

- Bridgetown, Barbados
- Berlin / Frankfurt, Germany
- Rome / Milan, Italy
- Vienna, Austria
- Barcelona, Spain
- London, United Kingdom
- Oslo, Norway
- The Republic of Singapore
- Jerusalem, Israel
- Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- Sydney / Melbourne, Australia

All the above cities have accessible tourism websites that provide a wealth of information to help plan an international adventure.



Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, Miami, Florida, USA.