

Columnist  
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# Adventures in the Sun



**When I first put finger to keypad** to write an article about holidays, I found myself creating a list of horror stories around my travel experiences. I am sure that anyone reading this who is disabled or has travelled with someone who is, also has some nightmare stories. Whether it's airports and flying or hotels and resorts I could easily write a year's worth of columns filled with disasters, but I wanted to keep with the positive ethos of PosAbility Magazine, so here is the story of an event that changed the way I holiday for ever... for the better.



Very early on in our relationship I took my wife on a package holiday to the Costa Brava. This was a route I tended to stick to as I thought it was the best way to guarantee some attempt to meet my access needs. After spending a few days sitting by the pool, with me sunning myself while my wife hid from the sun (she does have very pale skin), she pleaded with me to go on an "adventure". So the next day we arose early and jumped onto a train, which had been picked as our means of transport as the local station was so wheelchair friendly that it seemed churlish not to avail ourselves of its use. Now, I have always found public transport alien to me, probably as I have been unable to use it for most of my life, and so as we "clickity-clacked" along, I felt a growing sense of panic. I mean not only was I on public transport but I could not understand the announcements! As my panic reached fever pitch, we got off the train and found that the gods of travel had smiled on us. We were in the heart of Barcelona City.

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The station was accessible, but the lift had broken. This was no trouble, as we were helped out of the station by a superb station guard via the in ramp to the car park. We came out into the Placa De Catalunya and both fell in love with the

city immediately. We spent the day excitedly roaming around a charming place that really leads the way in accessibility, and promised we would return. And from then on we have, every couple of years.

The first time we went back we tried one of the new accessible travel companies, and while the experience was much better than previous holidays, it cost a fortune. But the pull of Barcelona was too strong, and so next time my wife tried booking the whole thing via the web. Yet again, her idea proved to be the way to go. By talking to the hotels direct, using translation software to ensure that we were understood, the horror stories ended. The wonderful thing about Barcelona is that every time we have returned, the already accessible city has got even more accessible. I always hold it up as an example of what can be done to a historic city if there is a desire to. If you haven't been there, go!

But more than the fantastic find of Barcelona, I discovered that obsessive planning does not always lead to a great holiday. Sure, I still pack a tool kit, puncture repair kit and bike pump (all of which can cause some real fun at airports) and try to make sure anywhere we are staying knows I'm on wheels before we set out, but I no longer spend months panicking about every detail. This crazy adventure has led to me discovering the joy of travel, after so long viewing it as a cause of panic and disasters. So go on, try an adventure. Who knows where it will lead. ■