

Traveling Abroad By Rachel Goldstein

I was fortunate enough to be able to spend the holidays and bring in the New Year traveling to Paris, Madrid and Barcelona. In Paris, we went to the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame Cathedral, Saint Chapelle, Arc De Triomphe, and the Louvre and took a day trip to Versailles. In Madrid, we did a hop on, hop off tour bus to see as much of the capital and largest city of Spain as possible. We went to the Prado Museum and the Royal Palace, and we saw a Flamenco show. In Barcelona, we went to see many of Antoni Gaudi's masterpieces, like Casa Mila and Casa Batllo, Sagrada Familia and Parc Guell. We also made a trip outside Barcelona to Montserrat, a multi-peaked mountain in Catalonia, Spain. It was an unforgettable trip full of a lot of new experiences!

I am always thinking about disability-related issues and notice them throughout everyday life, and that didn't stop just because I was on vacation. The hotel we stayed at in Paris had steps leading to the only elevator, which was outdated and so small that it was a tight squeeze for two people to fit inside. We researched and brought converters and adapters so we had the right voltage to power our electronics and a blow-dryer and still managed to burn out a converter as soon as we plugged something in. Using public transportation to get around is a must – I noticed the elevators out of service, leaving stairs as the only option in several metro stations, and the large opening between the train and the station platform that requires you to take a big step to get on or off the train.

Planning a trip abroad and traveling to a new place is stressful on its own. I spent countless hours researching and planning as many of the details as possible, from hotels to restaurants to site-seeing and activities. For a person with a disability, traveling abroad can involve additional considerations, like having a backup plan for charging an electric wheelchair when you burn out your voltage converter and for your accommodations when it requires you to use the stairs to get to the elevator. Despite this, don't let the extra planning that may be required discourage you! It's hard to imagine a trip abroad going completely as planned, regardless of the circumstances. (I know our trip didn't!) There are many resources that can be used by travelers with disabilities to ensure an amazing trip abroad!