

TIPS AND ADVICE FOR YOUR JOURNEY



During my years as Scandic's accessibility ambassador, my rehabilitation dog Ada and I have travelled a great deal, passing through many airports and visiting many cities all over the world. Below I offer some tips and advice based on my experiences and reflections. I don't use a wheelchair myself, but sometimes have difficulty walking long distances and my joints tend to stiffen up when I sit still on a plane. Before I travel I therefore try to find out in advance how far there is to walk in the airport, whether there are moving walkways, whether I need to book assistance, whether there's a golf cart, and what the accessibility is like at the destination. I mention some of the places Ada and I have visited in recent years, not just the places where Scandic has hotels.

Magnus Berglund

Scandic Accessibility Ambassador

Scandic

Berlin-Tegel Airport

Here the walking distances are short: about 20 metres to pick up your luggage, then 20 more metres to the taxi rank. Of course, the walking distance varies depending on which gate you enter from, but I have never found it to be more than 100 meters. You get from the airport to Berlin by bus or taxi, but if you need a special vehicle for an electric wheelchair, you have to book it in advance, as in most airports in Europe. The bus stops are located just outside the airport. A new airport will be opened in future which will have a direct train connection to Berlin with wheelchair access. If you need a hotel, Scandic has a large hotel in Berlin. 60 of the hotel's 560 rooms have disabled access.

Frankfurt and München Airport

The airports in Frankfurt and Munich are both very large. There are moving walkways, but usually there are still long distances to walk. When I fly to these airports I always book assistance, and then I'm picked up in a golf cart. If you're taking a connecting flight across the Atlantic, you have to change terminals, which takes 10–15 minutes with the golf cart.

Hamburg Airport

In Hamburg Airport, there's usually not very far to walk to the plane after you've gone through security, which is near the check-in desk. However, when you land at the airport, there's a fair way to go, through a tunnel. So if you have difficulty walking more than 300 metres, my tip is to book assistance, which is what I usually do.

Barcelona and Madrid Airport

Barcelona and Madrid airports are both large and modern. It can be far to walk, but if you're not near the gate there are moving walkways. If you have a guide or service dog and have trouble walking more than 300 metres, it is best to book assistance, since the dogs can't walk on the moving walkways. If you haven't booked assistance and have trouble walking, use crutches or have a service dog, you will not be allowed to go through the special disabled

security check. Instead, you will have to take your crutches, etc. through normal security, which can take a long time. If you find it hard to walk far or stand for a long time, it is therefore advisable to book assistance. This applies to all the airports I've been to in Spain: Barcelona, Madrid, Malaga and Valencia. In my opinion, Spanish airports are generally advanced when it comes accessibility for the disabled.

Accommodation in Spain

I know that many find it hard to find hotels with a high level of accessibility and rooms for the disabled. A hotel chain in Spain that I know works a lot with these issues and has good rooms for the disabled is Confortel Hotels. The chain has 18 hotels in various locations in Spain, including Madrid, Malaga and Barcelona. I have stayed at two of their hotels myself and was very satisfied.

Turin, Italy Airport

Here I book assistance. One good thing here is that the check-in counter is located right where you come in from the taxi. There is a lounge 30 meters from the check-in counter where you wait for assistance. The assistants use a wheelchair to transport you. I haven't seen any golf carts at this airport.

Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport has moving walkways, but if you are unlucky, you may still be forced to walk extremely far, both when you depart from and arrive at the airport. If you have a service dog and have trouble walking more than 500 metres, it is best to book assistance.

Arlanda Airport

Arlanda Airport, Sweden, Domestic, terminal 4: If you're unlucky and end up farthest away, you'll have around 300 metres to walk. In the International terminal it varies a lot, but if you're travelling to a country that requires that you go through passport control, it is perhaps a 400–500-meter walk from check-in. There are no golf carts in Swedish airports, so if you need assistance, you will be transported

in a wheelchair. The airports in the rest of the Nordic countries, apart from those in the capitals, are small and usually there's not less than 100 metres to walk until you are outside the airport.

Göteborg and Malmö Airport

Landvetter Airport in Gothenburg and Malmö Airport in Sweden are relatively small. In my experience, there is not more than a few hundred metres to walk.

Oslo Airport

In Oslo it's extremely variable, depending on the gate the plane arrives at, but when you land there are moving walkways. However, there are no moving walkways in the terminal when you have to get to the plane, so my suggestion is to book assistance if you have trouble wading up to 500 metres. The easiest way to leave Oslo Airport is to take the express train, which gets you to downtown Oslo in 20 minutes. The train has wheelchair seats. There aren't very many on each train, but there's a new train every 15 minutes. There's a lift down to the platform from the terminal.

Copenhagen Airport

Copenhagen Airport is extremely long and is divided into several connected terminals. Here the feeling is that there is always far to walk, so my advice is to book assistance if you have trouble walking farther than 500 metres, since you don't know which gate you'll arrive at. And if you're taking another flight, it may be more than a kilometre away.

Leaving the airport: There are trains with wheelchair seats from the airport to both Malmö and Copenhagen.

London Airport

In London they have worked hard to make things more accessible to disabled people. The conditions at Heathrow vary a lot depending on which gate you arrive at, but you usually have to walk a few hundred metres before you reach a moving walkway. There are quite a few moving walkways, but not everywhere. At passport control, where

there are sometimes long queues, there is a special queue for travellers with disabilities. You can leave Heathrow on one of the express trains which will take you directly to Paddington Station in 16 minutes. There's a way to go to get to the train, but there are moving walkways along most of the route. There are wheelchair seats on the trains. The taxis have a ramp in the back so you can roll on in your wheelchair. Many of the curbs also have ramps. I have seen several small basement shops with wheelchair lifts. Many improvements have been made ahead of both the Olympic Games and the Paralympics in London.

Peking Airport

I well remember the first time I was there. I probably had a lot of prejudices and didn't think it would be adapted to disabled people at all. But Peking Airport is definitely the most disabled-friendly airport I've ever seen! It's extremely large, so it's best to book assistance if you have a hard time walking. I did, and they came with a wheelchair. However, there was a fair distance to the train that takes you to the arrivals hall: it's an extremely big airport. But when I flew out of Peking, arriving at the airport by taxi, there were only 50–100 metres to the check-in counter. By the taxi there is a button you can press for assistance, and if you just want help with your luggage, it costs SEK 10. There are also several check-in counters exclusively for disabled people, with lower counters for wheelchair users. I didn't book assistance, because when you've gone through security, there are golf carts that can drive you to your gate for SEK 10. These are available to anyone. If you've booked assistance it's free, but you will be taken by wheelchair.

If you're travelling domestically within China, it's always a good idea to book assistance. There can be very long distances to walk when you arrive in the domestic part of Peking Airport, 500 metres or more if you are unlucky.

There are trains from the airport to the city, but I take a taxi. It costs SEK 200–300 depending on where you're going. I have not taken any trains in Peking, but others who have tell me they have good disabled access. However, I have sometimes seen that there are steps before you get to the elevator and the ramps can be steep, so you need to have a strong person with you. A normal taxi is extremely cheap in Peking: meters start at about SEK 10, then run at SEK 2 per kilometre. It's just to and from the airport that it costs more due to customs and duties. I have not seen

any wheelchair-adapted cars, so you need to pre-book these through your travel agent.

The major shopping centres and markets are adapted with lifts and disabled toilets. In addition, the pavements are very wide, so it is easy to get around in a wheelchair. All new buildings in China are pretty advanced when it comes to accessibility. If you go to China, you'll probably want to visit the Wall. If you have trouble walking, there is one place where there is a lift up to the Wall.

Accommodation in China: There are several disabled-friendly hotels with rooms for disabled guests. A hotel which I know many wheelchair users have stayed in is the Swiss Hotel in Beijing. From there, most places in Beijing can be reached by taxi in just 10–15 minutes. When I was there, they even had an electric wheelchair that guests could borrow!

Hong Kong Airport

Hong Kong Airport, like Peking Airport, is well adapted to disabled passengers. It is a very large airport with some long walking distances, but the assistance service is very good.

The city of Hong Kong itself has some steep hills, but in many places there are long escalators that you can step on and off in different spots. For most of the day they only go up, so you have to take a taxi down. There are several hotels with disabled access. I stayed on the island opposite, which has less steep hills, making it easier to walk around. There are also many shops there. If you go to Hong Kong, I recommend that you take the boat to Macau, which is Asia's Las Vegas, with lots of hotels, casinos and shows. There are spaces for wheelchairs on the boat and at the harbour there are wheelchair-accessible buses that go directly to various hotels and casinos.

These have been some personal experiences from my journeys with Ada that I hope will be helpful to others who are travelling around the world.

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