

# Away from home

In the second of a series of articles charting the experiences of a Wanstead-based travel writer, **Carole Edrich** recalls a particularly unaccessible train press trip from Brussels to Vienna

**F**rom the first time I read an Agatha Christie novel, sleeper trains have epitomised romance. Great scenery, fine dining, an ever-changing view and interesting strangers in manageable doses are part of that, as is the train itself. I thought an accessible ÖBB NightJet sleeper cabin from Brussels to Vienna would make a great story, be environmentally friendly and get me where I needed to go.

*On a train, this little lady, journalistic trammels three. With the treatment a bit afraid is, wondering what the worst would be!*

There's still magic in it. Entranced by the vistas of places we passed, I ignored my work on the window-side table. But, had I known I would spend the night worried about whether I'd be turfed from my accessible-cabin bed and dumped on a random seat elsewhere, I'd have worried more about that and less about setting up to timelapse the trip.

I write on travel accessibility partly because the way my friends' disabilities are ignored pisses me off, partly because I need to write what I see, partly because I'm disabled myself and mostly because, after becoming an Unlimited Trustee (the world's largest funder of disabled arts) I don't feel I have a choice. So, before you read further, imagine you are a wheelchair user, travelling with a friend with hidden disabilities. List the worst, most predictable and clichéd train-travel problems you'd have, for fun.

If you've drawn from experience, you might have more than the 30 accessibility failures that beset that trip. Sticky plugs, switches that didn't work, a door so heavy it was hard to budge, guards who promised to recharge my laptop and phone and didn't, who refused my disabled status, asked for a nonexistent certificate of disability, lights that turned themselves on in the small hours, an announcement of delay so early that it woke



me, and a breakfast that was so much later than agreed that – in mucking up my blood sugar levels – it made everything worse.

I'd prefer to forget what happened, but the tediously sentient part of me won't let go. And boy I let go for that feature! I went on and on and on.

I reached the hotel so late there was no time to research my arts piece or my other idea. Should I take a leaf from the Post Office scandal and blame others for a failure to deliver? Take moral responsibility like the MP in the Chichel Down Affair? Offer the editor something else entirely? The first is unthinkable, the rest would make me seem unreliable. Luckily, my brief only mentioned Austria, so I used my Salzburg notes instead. I filed the article, the editor left and the commission wasn't honoured. So it goes.

Despite the challenges I enjoyed my brief trip to Vienna. There was great coffee, wiener schnitzel and apple strudel to die for and I'm grateful to ÖBB NightJet for providing the comedy gold for my next standup solo.

*I've got 'em on the list, a lovely little list, of all the things they missed, and oh they really missed.*

I'll get my coat.

To contact Carole, read more of her work or hear a podcast, visit [caroleinnit.com](http://caroleinnit.com)