

# A GUIDE TO WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE EUROPE: BERLIN, NEWCASTLE AND THE EUROSTAR

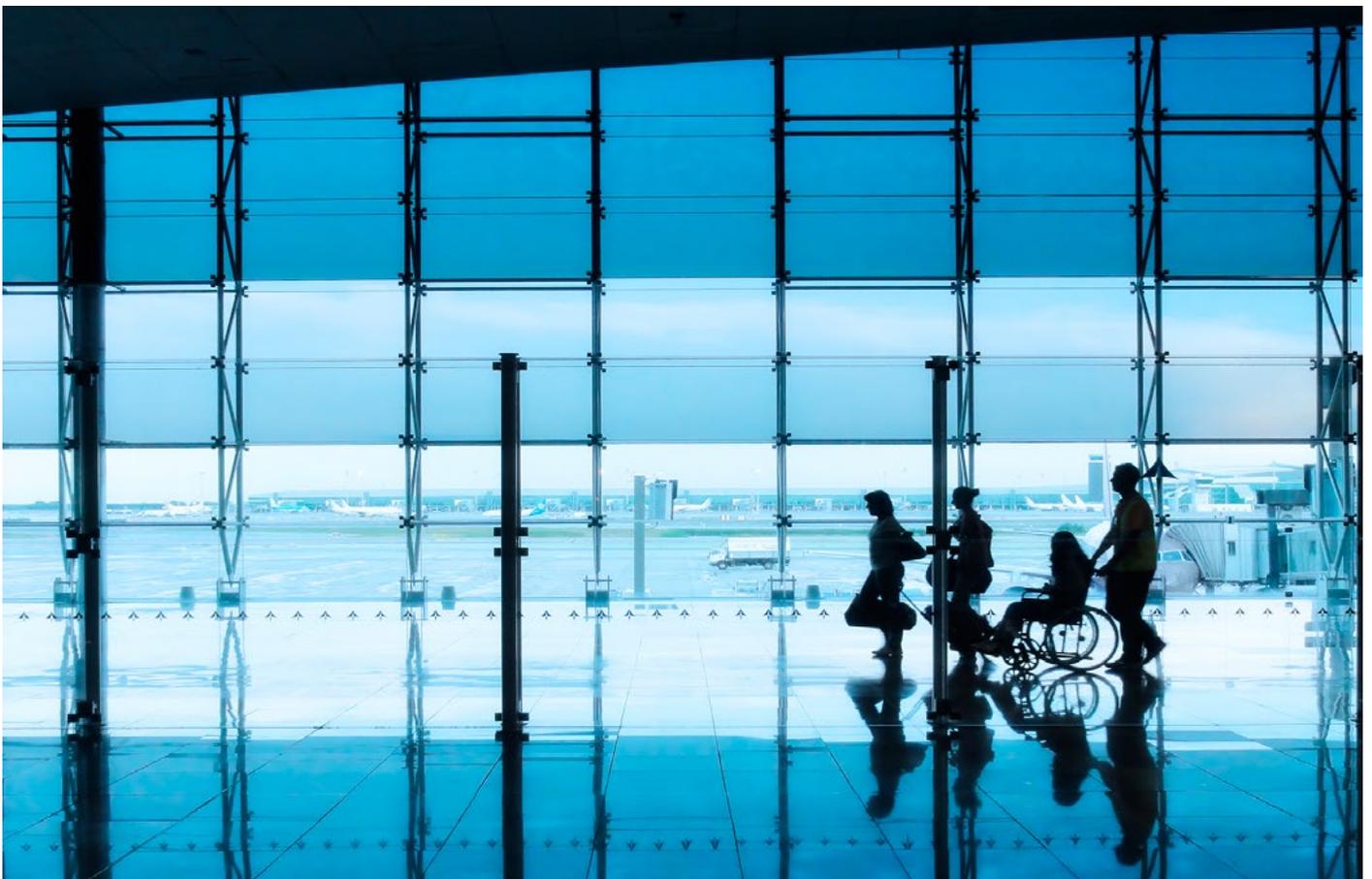


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# Introduction

At [Invacare](#), a mobility company working hard to improve the lives and promote the wellbeing of those with disabilities, we believe it's important to understand what can be achieved by thinking of access and inclusion in new and interesting ways. In order to do this, we're releasing a series of e-books to encourage our clients, customers and friends to broaden their horizons and grab all the opportunities that come their way. The first of these guides focuses on wheelchair accessible travel around Europe, looking specifically at Britain, Berlin and some pretty special accessible transport. Stay tuned for more in the future, and happy reading!

**Travelling, in all its glory, can be breath-taking, beautiful and pretty flipping tough, regardless of ability. If moving around is trickier for you though, problems can quickly multiply, but that doesn't mean you can't overcome them.**

We all want to see new places and do new things; some of us just need extra advice and support to make it a reality. Behold, the definitive guide to Accessible Europe! Of course, we can't mention every excellent hotel, restaurant or attraction, but we can give you a good idea of where to start your search.

The two of us writing this guide, Emily Yates and Anthony William, are both wheelchair users and currently setting up our own accessible travel business, so we definitely feel we have a lot to say on the matter. From riding camels across the Sinai Desert and getting stuck in a shark cage in South Africa, to battling the ancient beauty of Cambodia with only two hands and two wheels, and blagging free accessible stays across New Zealand, we've had our fair share of hurdles and triumphs. Sometimes it's the rubbish bits that, surprisingly, bring the most satisfaction once they are conquered, but too much of that can bring any traveller down.

But with our handy guide to **Berlin, Newcastle** and the **Eurostar**, hopefully you'll avoid the hurdles and have the holiday of a lifetime!



# History and Culture in Berlin: Europe's Most Accessible City?

Germany's capital is often described as being a 'poor yet sexy city', and as you make your way through the streets of Berlin, it's easy to see why. Although Berlin may not be the most affluent of cities, it has an air of mythic grandeur that isn't replicated anywhere else.

In the heart of the city, where history mixes amicably with culture and fashion, you'll find a vast selection of museums, galleries, monuments and places of interest. We've compiled a list of some of the best attractions, all of which can be easily accessed.

## Places to see in Berlin

### Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer (Berlin Wall Memorial)

When thinking of Berlin, many remember the Berlin Wall – an expansive stone wall that separated East and West Germany until 1989. Pieces of the wall still remain to this day, and act as a sobering reminder of the reality of the division of Germany; lasting for almost three decades. If

you pay a visit to the [Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer](#) (Berlin Wall Memorial) you can get a real sense for what it was like for all those who faced years of separation from family and friends. The wall was erected with such little warning that for many, they woke one morning to find they were no longer able to visit relatives.

**The Berlin Wall Memorial offers full access for all, so you need not have any concerns about the comfort of your visit.**

On one side of the street, a monument has been erected to commemorate where the wall once stood. Pillars now take the place of what was once a concrete curtain. On the other side of the street there is a viewing platform, so you can have a bird's-eye-view of where the wall once stood in the streets below, and there is also a museum, which gives a detailed account of the history and politics associated with the era.



Admission to the memorial is free of charge and it's located on the Bernauer Straße which also has its own Underground station, found on the U8 line; a station which is 'barrier free' and accessible to all.

[Reviews on TripAdvisor](#)

## Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

Another obvious aspect that surrounds you in Berlin is the clear openness and sombre approach to the Holocaust and all those that died at the hands of Nazi Germany during WWII. [The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe](#) is nothing short of breath-taking; but also, nothing short of harrowing. Designed by architect Peter Eisenman and engineer Buro Happold, the memorial itself spans over 19,000 square metres and features 2,711 concrete slabs, of various sizes, arranged in a perfect pattern across a sloped grid.

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**The most commonly accepted interpretation of the memorial's design, is that the confusing and often oppressive structure is supposed to resemble and replicate a proportion of the emotions which the imprisoned Jews felt during the Holocaust.**

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Underneath the memorial is a museum in which over three million names have been recorded, of Jews who lost their lives during the Second World War. **Access to the museum for the disabled can be found via an alternative entrance, with a lift.** All exhibits and experiences both in and outside can be accessed, although it is advisable to take a companion to get a true sense of the vastness of the memorial. If you feel brave enough, don't miss the large metal door at the side of the museum, taking you to what can only be described as the 'silent end of the world'. Fully accessible, but tough on the emotions. All exhibit descriptions are also in English for those who need to brush up on their German.

Admission is around €20 per person, although for disabled visitors it is usually free of charge.

[TripAdvisor Reviews](#)

## Berlin Zoo

[Berlin Zoo](#) is one of the **largest zoos in the world**, with over 17,000 animals spread out across 84 Acres of land. Cages are a rarity here, with many of the animals being allowed to roam free in areas that have been designed to replicate their natural habitat.

The zoo's main draws are both the Panda enclosure and the Polar Bear den, but other areas of the zoo are also a huge hit – such as the Elephant ring and the Hippos; which can be viewed in their underwater home too, thanks to a brilliant panoramic window.

Disabled visitors benefit from a concession, which reduces the admission charge to only €10, instead of the usual €14.50. Accessible toilets can also be found throughout the grounds, but more specifically at the following locations:

- ▶ **Elephant House**
- ▶ **Restaurant**
- ▶ **Waldschänke**
- ▶ **Zoo Restaurant**

**Wheelchairs can also be rented for free** at the main entrance of the zoo. If you're willing to pay €15 for a concession ticket (€20 for a standard adult) you can also gain access to the zoo's Aquarium – another superb highlight that's definitely worth a look. All-in-all, it's easy to while away a day exploring Berlin zoo, an activity which is perfect for all the family.

[See what TripAdvisor has to say](#)

## Brandenburg Gate



Built in 1791, the [Brandenburg Gate](#) stands tall and proud, as an entrance to 'Unter den Linden'. The gate is situated just a stone's throw away from the Reichstag, Germany's parliament building, and other main attractions such as the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

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The Brandenburg Gate, or Brandenburger Tor as it is pronounced in German, is nothing short of impressive. The architectural design leaves a powerful image imprinted in your mind's eye and to get a sheer sense of the size and beauty, the gate is best viewed at night.

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**Seeing as this is an outdoor attraction, wheelchair access is not an issue, and although the cobbled streets may throw up some challenges, paved pathways at either side of the gate make for easy viewing.**

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The nearest station to the Brandenburger Tor is U Französische Str, which can be accessed on the U6 line.

[Reviews on TripAdvisor](#)

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## Places to stay in Berlin

### The Pfefferbett Hostel

The [Pfefferbett Hostel](#) opened its doors in 2008 after renovation work was carried out on the site of a former Brewery. The hostel is perfectly situated on Berlin's U2 Underground line, just two stops away from Alexanderplatz and a direct train ride to Berlin Zoo. After some trial and error, it was easy to catch a connecting train to Berlin HBF and all the popular tourist hotspots around the city, although finding one's bearings on the Underground and the other various train lines available in Berlin, is quite a challenge in itself.

**This spacious hostel has more than enough room for wheelchairs and any other accessibility equipment that you may need.** A lift to all floors was a very welcome sign, as many hostels throughout Europe don't have one.

As with many other hostels, there are several types of room available, from single private rooms to shared mixed dorms for up to eight people. With prices starting from €9 per night, per person, it's difficult to grumble. Each room/dormitory has a locker inside for security, which is handy as there is a daily cleaning service and it also means guests are able to leave bulky items in the hostel while they're exploring the city.

Outside of the rooms the lounge area is very trendy; with an open fire and a well stocked bar. As part of the lengthy drinks menu, beer remains cheap at only €2.80 for a half litre of Pilsner. The background music within the bar is a mix of psychedelic bands such as Pink Floyd, infused with popular jazz.

Guests can enjoy a **buffet breakfast** from 7am-11am (7am-12:30pm on Saturdays and Sunday, perfect for a hangover!) for just €6.50. Aside from breakfast, food throughout the day appears to be quite limited; however, the Pfefferbett Hostel is situated in a district of Berlin that is full of restaurants and bars; so food is never too far away when your tummy's making noises!

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**Since 2009 the Pfefferbett Hostel has operated as a not-for-profit organisation, with 40% of the staff that work at the hostel having some form of disability.**

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The concept behind this is to offer employment to more disabled individuals. It's a brilliant initiative which appears to be working extremely well. It's fair to say that those who run the Pfefferbett Hostel are less interested in gaining recognition for their actions, and more interested in making positive changes in society, which reflects admirably on them.

Overall, the Pfefferbet Hostel rates extremely highly. The hostel boasts all the usual amenities you'd expect, including some aspects not yet mentioned, such as laundry, free parking, free WiFi and computer access, a pool table and English speaking staff. A true gem in the heart of one of Europe's sexiest cities.

[TripAdvisor Reviews](#)

## Hotel Zoo Berlin

If you're in search of a central hotel with great access to some of Berlin's top attractions, and you're also willing to splash out and enjoy a little bit of the high life, then look no further than [Hotel Zoo Berlin](#). Nestled in an historic building, the Hotel Zoo Berlin can be found deep in the heart of the Kurfürstendamm shopping street.

The elegance and grandeur of Hotel Zoo Berlin is apparent from the moment you pass through the main entrance.

**Exuberant style, great attention to detail and industrial design await you.**

Prices start from around £146 per night for a Superior Room and can go up to as much as £500 per night for a stay in the King Suite. See the [Reviews on TripAdvisor](#).

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**The hotel offers accessible rooms for disabled guests and access throughout the property for no extra cost, as it should always be.**

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## Eating in Berlin

In 2006 a law was passed which dictated that all new restaurants opening in Berlin must have barrier-free access for all. **The requirements must include access to the main entrance, suitable room within the building and also; access to a disabled toilet facility.**

If you fancy a taste of some **regional cuisine**, then why not stop off at the [Julchen Hoppe](#), famous for its Berliner delicacies. You can often find a hearty three-course meal for less than €20, including one set menu of Beef Broth with vegetables, Smoked Pork Loin with lentil and red wine sauce and parsley potatoes, and finally, Berlin apple Fritters – all for only €16.50 (£13). Remarkable value for money and a real treat for anyone looking to sample traditional Berlin food.

There is one restaurant in particular that offers an amazing experience for anyone with or without a disability – [the Nocti Vagus, aka, The Dark Restaurant](#). Equipped with all your available senses apart from sight, you'll sample food from their exquisite four course menu, all the while focusing your attention on the food in a very unique way.

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**The Nocti Vagus aims to allow guests to experience what it is like to be blind, and indeed, many of the staff members are either blind themselves or have a severe visual impairment.**

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Not only is this something not many people get to try within their lifetime, the Nocti Vagus also provides themed dining, such as a Murder Dinner, an Erotic Dinner and even some spooky shows. The expert team of restaurant staff will of course guide you as you take in the sounds and smells of this unforgettable evening's entertainment.

Monday nights are a special discount evening, with your dining experience coming to just €39 per person. Wednesday nights play host to the erotic dinner, with guests paying €49 per person and Friday night is the horror dinner at a cool €59 per person. All other prices and available nights can be found on the website:

<http://www.noctivagus.com/english/prices.html>

In order to make a reservation (required) you must either call or send an email. Details are as follows:

Phone: +493074749123

Email: [kontakt@noctivagus.de](mailto:kontakt@noctivagus.de)

To make your way to the Nocti Vagus restaurant, it's advisable to take the underground to Senefelderplatz, one of the closest stations to the venue.

[TripAdvisor Reviews of Nocti Vagus](#)

# British Nights Out: The Toon! Access on Newcastle's Quayside



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**When you're coasting along Newcastle's famous Quayside area, you'd be forgiven for taking a moment to dwell on the daunting prospect of making your way back up the steep embankment into the city centre.**

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Fear not, dear intrepid explorers, as there is the amazing Q3 (Quaylink) that links the Quayside walkway with the centre of the city.

The bus also offers fantastic follow-on access to the North-East Metro service. Further details on the bus services, where the buses stop and at what times they

run, can be found on the [Go North East](#) website and by following the '[Our Services](#)' option.

Now that transport concerns are out of the way, it's well worth spending an afternoon or early evening exploring all that Newcastle and Gateshead Quayside have to offer. On the Newcastle side, which is north of the River Tyne, you have a whole host of trendy bars, restaurants and even a nightclub. On the Gateshead side of the river, you'll find yourself knee-deep in culture; with fine choices such as the Baltic Art Museum and the Sage.

For now we'll focus on the hotspots of the Newcastle side, as the alluring nature of the Sage and the Baltic are enough to draw you in their direction without the need to go into raptures about what you will find there. Thankfully – both buildings have impeccable access, although you'll have a bit of a workout making your way across the magnificent Millennium Bridge.

## Pitcher and Piano

Best described as one of the more **iconic bars in Newcastle**, Pitcher and Piano is situated at the northern end of the Millennium Bridge, overlooking the river and the world famous Tyne Bridge. For those who like a little bite to eat with their evening drinks, take full advantage of any three selections from the “Grazers” section on the menu for only £12.50, which comes in at great value as they’re £4.95 when ordered individually. We personally recommend wrapping your lips around the Lamb & Garlic Koftas or the Chorizo & Pork Sausage Rolls!

As the sun begins to set, you’ll be in prime position for a truly wonderful night time view of the River Tyne, and it’s all accessible, too!

[TripAdvisor Reviews](#)



## The Bridge Tavern



For everyone looking to have a good night on the town and in need of a starting point, why not check out The Bridge Tavern? Not only is this place also situated close to the Quayside, there’s also an extremely useful website, providing the [answer to all your accessibility questions](#).

Ground level access to the bar and to disabled toilets makes this a great place to relax and let the good times roll. As well as a fine atmosphere and reasonably priced drinks, you can also sample some tasty cuisine, with light meals starting from just £4.95, including Haggis Toastie, Soft Quails Eggs and ‘Broon’ Sauce (brown sauce for those who are not well versed in the Geordie dialect).

[Check out Reviews of The Bridge on TripAdvisor](#)

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# Transport - Taking the Eurostar: From London to Paris in Inclusive Style

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## **Book Wheelchair Assistance on the Eurostar**



**When choosing an accessible holiday destination, it's easy to forget the importance of actually getting there.** There have been many times when excitement has overcome us and we've set out to visit a museum, gallery or other attraction without doing the necessary research in advance, only to find that arriving there will take most of the day. It's fair to say, that excitement then quickly fades!

Fancy a quick trip to France, including direct transport to Paris or Euro Disney? Then let us tell you that you can indeed get excited, and that excitement is not likely to fade, thanks to the fantastic [Eurostar service](#).

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**Firstly, it's important to make sure that you navigate the website correctly when booking tickets.**

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One-way tickets to France cost a mere £29 each for you and a companion – AND that's a business class ticket, with a complimentary light meal on each journey. Pretty impressive, right? It's possible to book online, just click the options for those needing to make reservations with a wheelchair and you will be guided through the steps. There's also a number to call if necessary, and we've rarely spoken to more helpful representatives over the phone – another huge plus!

Once you're at London St Pancras, you'll enjoy speedy check-in and a complimentary visit to the Business Lounge (again, with free nibbles and alcohol; it was tough not to get drunk on the journey!) Here, there are also excellent phone chargers, magazines to take with you on the train and snazzy elevators to take you to really quite classy accessible toilets. The brown leather seats and individual reading lamps also add a hint of elegance to the whole experience. Then, all you have to do is wait to be picked up by a staff member who will take you and your bags to the platform, whilst another helpful attendant ensures that you get onto the train, via a sturdy corner ramp. You will then likely have the option to stay in your chair or transfer onto a train seat, depending on how full the carriage is. An accessible bathroom is situated just outside of your carriage too – not too far, especially after all those drinks in the lounge! So sample some wine, read those free magazines, and enjoy a salmon lunch and chocolate mousse, and hey presto! You're in the city of love, darling.

A quick message to anyone then travelling on from Paris, maybe to Strasbourg for example (a beautiful and thoroughly accessible tram-filled city that we'd definitely recommend): your onward tickets will have to be booked through [SNCF](#), Eurostar's French partner. Similar disability discounts are available but cannot easily be booked online and a dedicated accessibility phone service must be called. If your French is not up to scratch, you may well struggle to get these discounted tickets booked – we did! Any help you could get on this front would be highly recommended!

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# To Finish

If nothing else, we hope this has encouraged anyone reading to see Europe is all of its (arguably pretty accessible) glory. Of course, there are many more cities and countries to review, and we hope to do this in future issues.

But, for now, do remember that Berlin has much to offer when it comes to culture and history, with emotional exhibits and stunningly grand buildings around every corner. Once mastered, the complicated and colourful underground map will also aid any accessible journey across the city. Watch out for any pop-up markets or protests during your visit, too!

If a chilly but cheerful night out is what you're looking for, with little hassle on the wheelie-front, the bright lights of Newcastle may just be for you. Take in the views of bridges and brash stag-and-hen parties, and you're bound to have a ball.

And, have you ever wanted a stress-free and stylish journey, with rolling hills and green scenery whizzing past

you while you sit in the comfort of your own wheelchair (in business class, of course)? Well, there's one great big word for you: Eurostar!!!



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