



# The Playbook

for Travelers Who Don't Take  
"Accessible" for an Answer

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The word has failed you before.  
These questions never will.

# Don't hope. Verify.

This isn't an article to read once. It's a set of plays to run every time somebody wants your booking before they've earned it—the stay, the flight, the transfer, the tour. **One chain, one ladder, one email, one law.** Read it once. Run the plays forever.

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## The one-word problem

Treat every unverified “yes” as unanswered

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## The chain

One broken link voids every perfect one after it

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The same question, asked five ways—one holds

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## Where this comes from

Trace every claim to its source

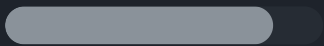
# “Accessible” is a claim, not a fact.

Ask the travel industry whether it is accessible, and it says yes. Ask the travelers, and the numbers answer differently. These are people who did everything right—they used the filters, read the descriptions, believed the word. **The word failed them.**

## AT AIRPORTS

84%

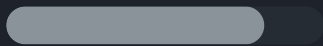
of US travelers with disabilities met obstacles—at the best-regulated link in the whole chain.



## WITH AIRLINES

81%

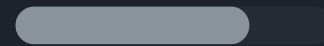
met obstacles in the air—where a mishandled wheelchair means arriving without your legs.



## AT HOTELS

74%

met obstacles at the “accessible” stay itself—the label with no inspection behind it.



## Why the word fails

- ✓ It is **self-awarded**: no fixed meaning, in most of the world no inspection, no penalty for optimism.
- ✓ The property isn't lying; it is **guessing**—and the cost of the wrong guess is transferred, in full, to you.
- ✓ A **\$50-billion-a-year** market is still being answered with a one-word adjective.

The counter-move isn't a better label. It's a better question.

## Four replies that mean “no”

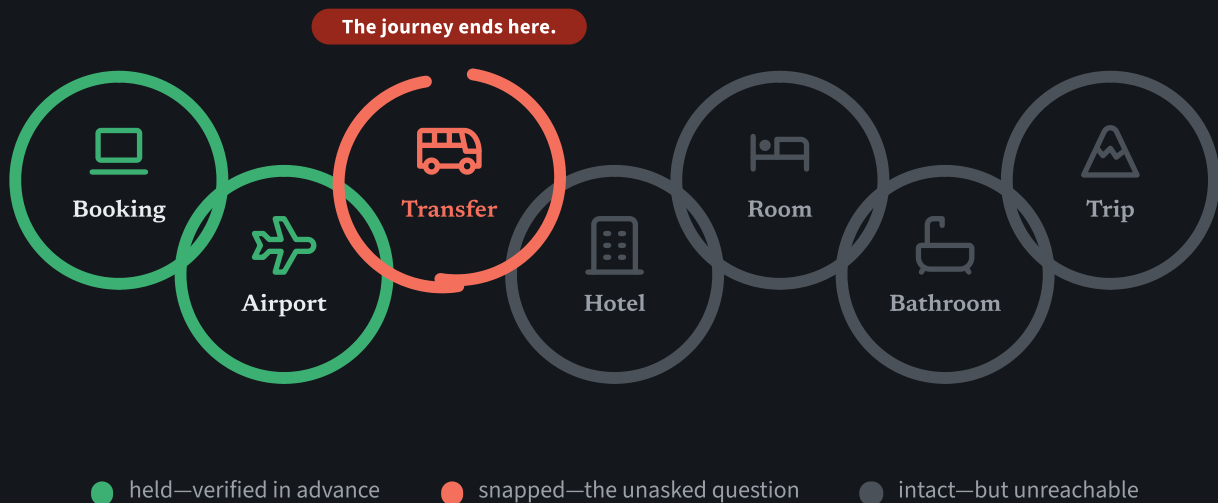
- ✗ “**We're fully accessible.**” Confidence without measurements is a label wearing a suit.
- ✗ “**Our staff will gladly help.**” Assistance is kindness, not access.
- ✗ “**Just a small step.**” A step has a height in centimeters. “Small” is not one.
- ✗ “**It should be fine.**” The sentence of someone who has never had to check. A “no”, pending evidence.

**Treat every unverified “yes” as unanswered.** Keep asking until the answer contains a number or a photograph—the two things optimism cannot fake.

Source: Open Doors Organization, 2024 Market Study on Adult Travelers with Disabilities (with The Harris Poll): 84% encountered obstacles at airports, 81% with airlines, 74% at hotels; nearly \$50 billion in annual travel spending—over \$100 billion including companions.

# A trip is only as accessible as its weakest link.

A journey is a chain of dependent links—booking, airport, transfer, hotel, room, bathroom, and the thing you actually came for. **Accessibility is not additive; it is multiplicative.** The failure of any one link voids every link after it: a flawless roll-in shower is worthless to the traveler whose transfer had steps. Four links held. The trip still failed.



Count what the break costs: not the transfer alone, but every verified link after it. This is why the playbook audits **journeys, not highlights**—and why the traveler who verifies the boring links (the transfer, the bathroom) outperforms the one who researched the famous sight. The famous sight almost never breaks the trip. The ride to it does.

**“Is it accessible?” has no honest yes.** Accessible from where—through what—to what? Write your own trip as a chain of links, verify each one as if it were the only one, and let the weakest link decide who gets your money.

The whole-journey principle traces to UN Tourism’s *Manual on Accessible Tourism for All* and ISO 21902:2021. The interactive chain—break any link, watch the journey end—lives at [inclusivetourism.com](https://inclusivetourism.com).

# The lower you ask, the safer the answer.

Verification sounds like labor; mostly it is a change of altitude. Here is the same hotel asked the same thing five different ways. At the top sits the question anybody would ask—and the answer that means nothing. At the bottom sits a question that cannot be answered without someone walking to the room with a tape measure.



**Replace the adjective with a noun, the noun with a number, and the number with evidence.** The ladder is not only for wheels—for sensory and cognitive access the rungs are identical, only the nouns change: “Which is your quietest visiting hour?” · “Can the audio guide be borrowed as a written transcript?” One rung exists only on paper: **get it in writing**. A verbal “no problem” evaporates at check-in; an email that says “roll-in shower, 82 cm doorway, confirmed for booking #4711” is a claim you can hold someone to.

Method distilled from access-verification practice documented by travelers and auditors; provider answers are illustrative composites. The interactive ladder—put weight on each rung—lives at [inclusivetourism.com](http://inclusivetourism.com).

# Ask for centimeters, not adjectives.

None of the questions below can be answered from a front desk. That is the point: each one forces a walk, a look, a tape measure. Your own numbers come first—they are the standard every answer gets compared against.

**Before you ask anything, measure yourself.** My chair is \_\_\_\_\_ cm wide · turning circle \_\_\_\_\_ cm · transfer height \_\_\_\_\_ cm · me + chair \_\_\_\_\_ kg · battery type \_\_\_\_\_—measured, written down, and saved on your phone. Your chair has the final vote on every answer below.

## The room

- **Doors:** the clear width, in centimeters, of the entrance, the room door, and the bathroom door. (The US ADA floor is 81.5 cm—a useful benchmark on any continent.)
- **Shower:** roll-in or step-in? How high is the threshold, in centimeters?
- **Grab bars:** where exactly—and is there a fold-down seat?
- **Bed:** mattress height, clear space on the transfer side, and can the frame be raised or moved?
- **The route:** step-free from the street to *that* room—parking, entrance, and the lift's door width and depth.
- **The photo:** a tape measure across the bathroom doorway. The bottom rung—ask it whenever the stakes are high.

## Beyond the room

- **The beach:** is there a mat to the waterline—and a beach wheelchair to borrow?
- **The boat:** how wide is the gangway, and is there a step at the end of it?
- **The trail:** the six numbers—surface, maximum grade and its length, cross slope, narrowest width, tallest obstacle, rest spacing. No numbers? It hasn't been measured.
- **The senses:** the quietest visiting hour, a visual story to review before arriving, the audio guide as a written transcript.
- **The alarm:** how would a Deaf guest be woken by the fire alarm—and can you show me?
- **The margin:** how long, how far, how many rest points? Energy is a measurement too.

Benchmarks: 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design §404.2.3 (32 in / 81.5 cm clear door width); US Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (the six trail measurements). The best questions need no standard at all—only a number in the reply.

# One email. Every answer in writing.

Two minutes to send, and it converts every answer into a commitment. Copy it, swap in your own numbers, and send it before any money moves—the reply, or the absence of one, is the most honest review a property will ever give you.

**SUBJECT: ACCESS CONFIRMATION FOR BOOKING  
[NUMBER]**

*Hello—I use a wheelchair 66 cm wide and will be staying with you on [dates], booking [number]. Before my arrival, could you please confirm **in writing**:*

- (1) the clear width, **in centimeters**, of the room and bathroom doors of **the room I will occupy**;*
- (2) that the shower is roll-in, and the height of any threshold—a **photo with a tape measure** across the doorway would be perfect;*
- (3) the step-free route from the entrance to that room, including the lift's door width;*
- (4) the height of the bed.*

*Thank you!*

## What each line does

- 1** “...the room I will occupy” pins every answer to your booking—not to the showpiece room the website photos were taken in.
- 2** “...in centimeters” can be checked against your own numbers; an adjective cannot. This is the line that forces the walk to the room.
- 3** “...a photo with a tape measure” is the bottom rung of the ladder. Nobody can answer it from the front desk.
- 4** “...confirm in writing” turns hospitality into a commitment you can enforce, escalate—and, if it comes to that, be refunded against.

Not a wheelchair user? Keep the skeleton, swap the nouns—quietest hour, visual story, written transcript, the fire-alarm question. The shape of the letter never changes.

**If the reply comes back with numbers and a photo, you have a hotel.** If it comes back vague, you have learned something more important than any measurement—while there is still time to book elsewhere.

This template is yours—copy it, adapt it, translate it; no attribution needed. The full planning method behind it lives at [inclusivetourism.com](https://inclusivetourism.com).

# Assistance is a right, not a favor.

You are not asking for kindness—you are invoking law. In 2024, US airlines mishandled **one checked wheelchair in every eighty**. The counterweight is a set of rights that work beautifully—but only when invoked ahead of time, in writing. Set the notice clock:

BY AIR · EU

## 48 h

Free assistance at every EU airport, aircraft door to arrivals curb—Regulation (EC) 1107/2006. Notify the airline 48 hours ahead.



BY RAIL · EU

## 24 h

Assistance across EU rail—Regulation (EU) 2021/782 cut the pre-notification to 24 hours. Reserve the wheelchair space early.



BY SEA · EU

## 48 h

Free assistance in ports and on board—Regulation (EU) 1177/2010. 48 hours' notice; declare the accessible cabin at booking.



## The gate ritual, when you fly

- Book assistance through the **accessibility desk**, not the general line—then reconfirm in writing 48 hours out.
- **Photograph the chair at the gate**, all sides, timestamped—its condition before anyone else touches it.
- Gate-check the chair; keep **medication, chargers, cushion**—everything your body depends on—in the cabin.
- Power chair? Carry the **battery data sheet**. Gate crews improvise when they can't identify a battery; paper beats improvisation.
- Service animal? File the **DOT attestation forms** when you book, not at the gate.

## If the chair comes off broken

- Report it **before you leave the airport**, and insist on a written damage record. Reported at the gate, it is a claim; reported from the hotel, a debate.
- Photograph everything **next to your gate photos**—before and after, timestamped. Ask for a loaner on the spot.
- **US**: the airline must repair or replace the device at its own cost—a rule in force since January 2025 (enforcement of some provisions paused since late 2025).
- **EU**: file with the airline and airport under Regulation 1107/2006; escalate to the national enforcement body if the answer disappoints.

Sources: Regulation (EC) 1107/2006; Regulation (EU) 2021/782; Regulation (EU) 1177/2010; US DOT Air Travel Consumer Report (1.26% of checked wheelchairs and scooters mishandled in 2024); US DOT wheelchair rule (Dec 2024); US DOT service-animal rule (2020).

# The whole playbook. One page.

Every play, distilled to a working checklist. **Check off each step as the journey unfolds.**

## Before you book

- Measure your own equipment first—chair width, turning circle, transfer height
- Shortlist with the filters; verify with the ladder
- Ask for centimeters—never accept an adjective
- Ask for the tape-measure photo when stakes are high
- Get every answer in writing, tied to your booking number
- Book assistance when you book the ticket—via the accessibility desk
- Pre-book the accessible taxi or transfer, in writing
- Read the insurance equipment clause—a power chair is not “baggage”
- Build margin: extra time at every airport, a rest day, a plan B

## Pack for repair and proof

- Double the medical consumables, split between bags
- Doctor’s letter with generic medication names
- The 300-gram repair kit: patches, Allen keys, zip ties, tape—plus the battery data sheet and a plug adapter
- Printed confirmations—the paper trail travels with you

## When something breaks

- Wrong room: don’t unpack—manager, written confirmation, equal or better room or a refund
- Broken chair: report before leaving the airport; written record; loaner now
- “Accessible” attraction that isn’t: ask for the route—often it exists, unsignposted; then document
- Review with measurements—“the roll-in shower has an 8 cm lip” saves the next traveler

## The ladder

- 1 The label.**  
“Is it accessible?”—carries no information.
- 2 The category.**  
A promise about intent, nothing more.
- 3 The feature.**  
Named, but nobody checked it.
- 4 The measurement.**  
Holds—if somebody measured.
- 5 The evidence.**  
A photo with a tape measure. Book on this.

## The chain

**Seven links: booking, airport, transfer, hotel, room, bathroom, the experience.**

A trip is only as accessible as its weakest link—verify every one, and let the weakest decide where your money goes.

**If the answer has no number and no photo, it is not an answer. Ask again—or book elsewhere.**

# Don't take our word. Take theirs.

A playbook about demanding evidence had better supply its own. No claim here rests on our authority—every figure and rule traces to a primary source.

- › **2024 Market Study on Adult Travelers with Disabilities** — Open Doors Organization
- › **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** — United Nations (2006)
- › **General Comment No. 2 on Accessibility** — UN CRPD Committee (2014)
- › **Manual on Accessible Tourism for All** — UN Tourism (UNWTO)
- › **ISO 21902:2021, Accessible Tourism for All** — ISO
- › **2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, §404.2.3** — US Department of Justice
- › **Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines** — US Forest Service (2013)
- › **Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006: assistance for air passengers** — European Union
- › **Regulation (EU) 2021/782: rail passengers' rights** — European Union
- › **Regulation (EU) No 1177/2010: sea passengers' rights** — European Union
- › **Ensuring Safe Accommodations for Air Travelers Using Wheelchairs** — US Department of Transportation (2024)
- › **Traveling by Air with Service Animals** — US Department of Transportation (2020)
- › **Economic Impact and Travel Patterns of Accessible Tourism in Europe** — European Commission (2014)
- › **Disability fact sheet** — World Health Organization (2023)

This playbook is the practical arm of a larger resource—[inclusivetourism.com](https://inclusivetourism.com) holds the interactive chain and ladder, the full method, and every citation with its link. Two companion sites carry the responsible and the ethical lenses: [responsibletravel.com](https://responsibletravel.com) and [ethicaltourism.com](https://ethicaltourism.com).



# Once a month, a letter from Crete

*“Almost everyone will need an accessible world eventually. The only open question is whether travel builds it before its own guests arrive at the door.”*

The playbook ends here. The verification doesn't.

Once a month, I write a letter from my tiny mountain village on Crete—the field notes, the raw research, the access infrastructure I tested that month, and the questions I haven't answered yet. Everything that doesn't fit in a playbook. Written for travelers who don't take “accessible” for an answer. No noise. Free.

[inclusivetourism.com/letter](https://inclusivetourism.com/letter) →

Share freely.

Steven spent a decade making documentaries in the places tourism forgets—fieldwork that is now held in the archives of the UN's International Labour Organization. Then he went to live in one: a mountain village on Crete, where he field-tests the island's access infrastructure stop by stop. He is completing an MSc in Responsible Tourism Management, holds GSTC certification and ICRT credentials earned under Professor Harold Goodwin, and trained in accessibility in tourism under the Region of Crete's “Crete for All” program. He is not a wheelchair user, and this playbook does not pretend otherwise: its methods are distilled from the documented practice of disabled travelers, it treats verification—not confidence—as its product, and it is an approach he is actively building into practice with [CRETAN](#)®.