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Disabled travel by land, sea or sky – easier would it be for a camel to pass through a needle's eye? When travelling by wheelchair, travel can be a trial. How would we fare when travelling on a Jumbo Ambulance with fellow disabled passengers and a team of helpers?

Our story

My husband uses a wheelchair and we've had a lot of disabled travel woes [3]. I know how it feels to be stranded on the tarmac at the airport or to find the wheelchair space stuffed full of suitcases on the train; the cruise ship also failed to provide a promised disabled excursion.

This year we travelled by Jumbulance – a large coach that can transport people in their wheelchairs, and even on stretcher beds - from England to Austria. The coach boasts an entry lift, a wheelchair accessible toilet, a kitchen, a mobile hoist and even a defibrillator, oxygen supply and suction equipment.

Lemons and lemonade

"When life gives you lemons, make lemonade" goes one saying, and it became my holiday catch-phrase. Ailments amongst our travellers included multiple sclerosis, stroke, spinal cord injury, loss of limbs and small vessel disease - bitter life experiences indeed, with the large blue siren atop the coach a sombre reminder of the frailty on board. The length of the journey (20 hours) was also a bitter taste to swallow at times.

Metaphorically speaking, though, we did make lemonade! We travelled on ancient steam trains, cable cars and boats; we enjoyed meals together (schnitzel, sauerkraut and sachertorte); we immersed ourselves in the local culture, attending the annual 'Almabtrieb' (when the decorated cows come down from Summer pasture to the sound of Oompah bands, welcomed by people in traditional dress); we saw the opulence of Mad King Ludwig's palace, the picture-book city of Innsbruck and the alpine landscapes in the Zillertal valley - our tireless guide teaching us the treasures of the Tyrol.

More sweetness was added when my husband could, for the first time, sit next to me on a coach. No other coach has allowed on-board wheelchair access, enabling him to transfer to a regular seat. Small yet precious pleasures.

The recipe books suggest keeping a stash of sugar syrup in the fridge, and simply adding lemons to make lemonade. I will use the memories from this holiday as my sugar syrup: lemons (life's difficulties) will soon taste less bitter.

Craving champagne

Lemonade can be a refreshing drink, but I'd rather drink champagne. A romantic break for two, perhaps, on a remote tropical island – free from disability?

Whilst we were away, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle were themselves enjoying a luxury stay in a Toronto Hotel suite – equipped with a "press for champagne" button at every corner I imagine.

Importantly, though, Harry himself announced to the world, through the Invictus Games, the inestimable value of the human spirit – of greater worth than the finest champagne. Human courage and resilience were at the forefront of the Invictus games and the Jumbulance trip; the kindness displayed by on-board helpers and local people was also truly touching. Time à deux on a tropical island seemed less appealing.

We even stayed at 'Hotel Sonnschein', reminding me of a remark once made by French philosopher Albert Camus: "In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer". For me, Michael's* smile showed me that invincible summer. Thank you.

*Michael is a retired lawyer and has lived with multiple sclerosis for 58 years. He was a travelling companion.

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