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Discovering Bavaria and Makin' Tracks: Part 2

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Makin' Tracks is an independent, family-run business offering overseas tours to wheelchair users. Here they tell Disability Horizons about excursions around **Bavaria**.

If you read our first article about our trip to Bavaria, then you might be wondering where we chose to take the group on excursions around the country...

The Danube

The celebrated **Danube** is an attraction in its own right. We decided to take in the scenery via a short cruise through its gorge, from **Kelheim** to **Kloster Weltenburg**, a **Benedictine** abbey that reckons to have the world's oldest monastic brewery, producing beer since 1050.

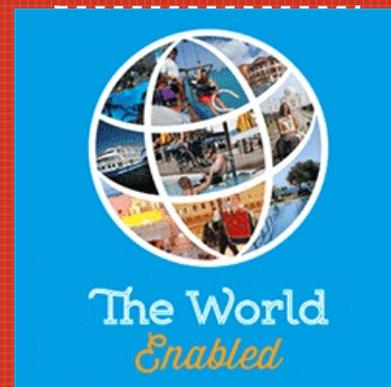
The boat is accessible (though not to the top deck) thanks to the energetic crew. The abbey is also reasonably so; the toilet is OK, and they have a makeshift ramp hidden away for the extravagant Baroque church (ask in the shop). Kelheim is pleasant for a wander and you can park on the riverbank by the boats for free with a blue badge, or 300m downstream for free without. I advise that you ask at the Tourist Info for access to the Kelheim toilet.

Downstream is the thoroughly remarkable town of **Regensburg**. From its time as the northern outpost of the Roman Empire, there remains a gate and tower. The architecture is often likened to Italian, but I felt an even greater likeness to **Prague**, particularly in the approach over the bridge from the north; just as attractive, but far less frenetic!

The tour bus drop zone on Am Protzenweiher has an accessible toilet, and sets you up for the best approach, over the Steinerne Brücke (stone bridge) to the **Regensburg Cathedral**. This can be entered by following its exterior in an anticlockwise direction, confidently continuing into what appears to be a private yard. There are accessible toilets in the Cathedral, and also at the end of Untere Bachgasse, near the Tourist Office.

Upstream is **Neuburg-an-der-Donau**. The upper town is a stunning mass of Renaissance and Baroque. The most satisfying vehicular approach is through the **Oberes Tor**, a striking

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16th Century town gate. Continue to the end of the main street, where you have to turn right and go uphill past the castle. At the top of this short hill is the Tourist Info, by which you can park outside. They can give access to an accessible toilet which requires them to open a forbidding looking door to the right of their office. Don't be misled by references to the adjacent toilets up steps.

The Residenzschloss (the castle) is well worth the crossing of a few cobbles to get inside and across its courtyard. From there its grotto, museum, and astonishing gallery can easily fill several hours. All are particularly accessible with a myriad of special lifts, and staff who insist on taking you on the entire circuit. We only went up for a quick look but were kidnapped by a relay of staff members who led us up to what appeared to be an entire private wing of the Louvre. And yes, there's a barrier-free toilet.

We also had a warm reception at the **Schleissheim Palace**, on the northern outskirts of Munich. There are quite simply so many notable buildings in the region that it's easy to find you are almost alone and often treated like a VIP. The best of the palace is upstairs so I would recommend focusing your visit up there. There is gravel outside, but you can minimise your push by using the staff car park.

From Wolnzach it's a mere hour and a half drive to **Oberammergau**, home of the world famous **Passion Play**, performed by its townsfolk every 10 years in gratitude for being spared from the plague in 1633. While there may be another 8 years to go until the next one, the village is well worth visiting at quieter periods. We had it almost to ourselves in September, but I gather it gets pretty hectic in summer. Apart from the play, the village is famed for its **Lüftmalerei** paintings on its houses, and has a fine Baroque church. There are accessible toilets in the building to the right of the Tourist Office (which itself frustratingly has 2 steps), and in the **'Wirtshaus O'gau restaurant**.

By now we're in the foothills of the Alps, and it's a short and incredibly scenic drive west to Schwangau, home of mad **King Ludwig's Neuschwanstein castle**. I found the access arrangements here particularly frustrating. If you can transfer to and from a horse drawn carriage, then you can make it up to the castle, and they allow just one wheelchair user on each hourly tour. I've also been informed that the lift in the castle is small, but can't confirm or dispute this. Personally I feel that the management could be more accommodating, but the pressure of visitor numbers is so great that they presumably feel it's unnecessary to try harder. However, in spite of all this, I still feel that it's worth a visit to the area, if only to see the castle from the outside – its architecture and setting are incredible. King Ludwig's tragic tale just adds to the romance.

My alternative solution was to do photo shoots from our bus, driving through **Schwangau village**, then take a boat around the **Forggensee** from which we could enjoy clear views back up to the castle at leisure.

So, there's a look at our time in Bavaria, from which I hope you can gain an insight into how Makin' Tracks operates, draw some useful advice if you're intending to do it yourself, or perhaps just be inspired to travel anywhere more often.

Should you wish to travel with Makin' Tracks to Bavaria... in fact you're too late! We go to different destinations every year. In 2012 we'll be in Tuscany, Hungary, and Spain.

Finally, some extra notes relevant to most of Central Europe & Scandinavia:

1 – Concessions on entrance costs are generally stated to be dependent upon presentation of a disabled person's **aussweiss**, an ID card that confirms your eligibility. Since we have no such scheme (that I'm aware of) in the UK, we have no way of complying. Hence we have to rely on the good nature and common sense of staff to recognise that concessions should apply. More often than not, I have found them to accept our case.

2 – To enter toilets you usually need to have a **Euro-Schlüssel**, an equivalent but different and much more universal key than the UK's **Radar scheme**.

3 – If you are considering travelling to Bavaria independently and only require one accessible room, then you will have many more hotel options. But I would recommend direct contact with the hotels themselves by email to be absolutely sure of bathroom details, specifying level access showers and separate beds. Tourism offices and hotels themselves seem to have considerable naivety on the subject.



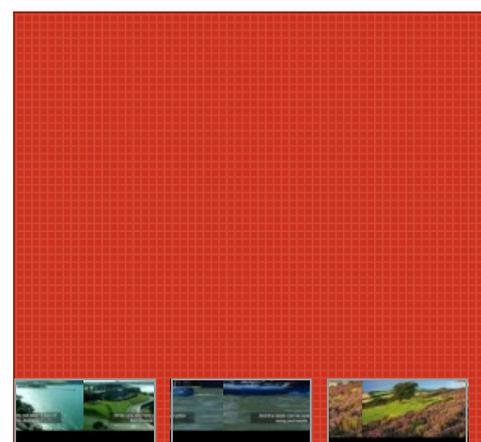
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By Dave Jepson of Makin' Tracks

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