

The Accessible Travel Talk Show

Episode 1: Accessible Music Gigs with Emma Muldoon of Simply Emma

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Host: John Morris of [Wheelchair Travel](#)

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Announcer: You're listening to The Accessible Travel Talk Show. In each episode, we'll explore new destinations, activities and ways to travel, inspiring you to open your world. Now, please welcome our host, WheelchairTravel.org Founder John Morris.

John Morris: Welcome to the inaugural episode of The Accessible Travel Talk Show. Here, I hope to create a platform to engage disabled people and the travel industry in conversations around accessibility with the goal of creating a more inclusive and open world. I'll be talking to accessible travel leaders and industry insiders to educate, inform and inspire disabled travelers like you.

Announcer: This is The Accessible Travel Talk Show, and this is John Morris.

John Morris: Joining us today from Scotland is my friend Emma Muldoon, founder of the UK's leading disability and travel blog, Simply Emma, which you can find at [SimplyEmma.co.uk](#). Emma has limb girdle muscular dystrophy and uses a power wheelchair, but that hasn't stopped her from travelling and living life to the fullest. Welcome, Emma.

Emma Muldoon: Thank you so much. Nice to speak to you, John.

John Morris: It's such a pleasure to have you on my very first podcast episode today.

Emma Muldoon: It's an honor. So this podcast is really the fruit of being trapped indoors for months on end due to the coronavirus. Podcasting gives me a chance to be social again. How has the quarantine experience been for you, though?

Emma Muldoon: So far, Yes, it's been not too bad. We're managing. Food deliveries has been a bit of an issue for us. And just generally missing getting out and about, traveling and missing gigs. That's one of the things we're missing right now. But in general, we're getting on OK at home.

John Morris: Obviously with public gatherings being discouraged and in many cases forbidden during this crisis, a lot of the things that we normally do for fun are not possible right now.

Emma Muldoon: Yes.

John Morris: But I think one of the best sections of your web site looks at the accessibility of music concerts in the UK. And, wow, you've attended a lot of gigs.

Emma Muldoon: Yes, I have.

John Morris: How many would you say?

Emma Muldoon: Oh. That's difficult to say. I haven't actually counted. I really should, because I know you count your flights that you've been on, which I think is so cool. But how many? I've been to probably close to hundred. Thereabouts, yeah.

John Morris: Something very interesting about you and perhaps one of the worst kept secrets in Scotland. Worst kept because it's well-documented on your blog. Is that you are basically a super fan of the band Kings of Leon.

Emma Muldoon: Yes.

John Morris: Explain your love of the group, Emma.

Emma Muldoon: Oh, I don't know what it is. Me and my partner, have just been like big, big fans of them for many years. And every time they come to the UK, we just have to go and see them. It's a must. And we just love them. We love especially performing live. There's just something about them, when you see them live and on stage, it's just a great feeling.

John Morris: I've been thinking a lot lately about the question of why. Why do we travel?

Emma Muldoon: Yeah.

John Morris: And this is a sad thought, but I think it would be news to many people that those of us with disabilities travel for many purposes - and not only to see the doctor. We travel for the same reasons as our nondisabled peers, including to see our favorite bands perform.

Emma Muldoon: Yes.

John Morris: What feeling or emotion does seeing the Kings of Leon perform generate in you?

Emma Muldoon: I think it's just so exciting to especially go on a road trip. That's one of our favorite things to do when we're going see our favorite band is just like the whole experience in general. Because also we live in Scotland, but we travel to England quite a lot to see our bands. I think it's just - yeah, it's just really exciting to plan the trip and to go down there and in just the build up to it, the anticipation and then the actual show. Just sitting there waiting and, you know, the intro music's coming on and it's [music noises]. And then also that the [unknown] stage and that first song and then the whole crowd just goes crazy. And I dunno, it's just a great feeling. I don't know what is. It's hard to explain.

John Morris: I think when I go to a live music event, it makes me feel like I'm part of something.

Emma Muldoon: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because everybody is there for the same thing. And yeah, it's just the whole atmosphere in the room. It's amazing. Everybody singing and dancing and having a good time.

John Morris: And I think maybe to some degree it's staking a claim, you know, I'm disabled, but this band is just as much mine as it is yours.

Emma Muldoon: Yeah, yeah, live music is for everybody. It should be for everyone. And so, yeah, it should be accessible for everyone.

John Morris: I love that, Emma. I think it's a great perspective to have. And it's clear that you're taking advantage of accessibility at shows all the time. So you say that you travel a lot domestically within the UK to see shows. Where is somewhere interesting that you've gone because of the show?

Emma Muldoon: So obviously we travel quite a lot to England and the big cities in England - Manchester, Newcastle, Liverpool. But one of the places we really want to go is actually Europe. That was our plan for this year, to follow some of our favorite bands and see them in a few places in Europe. Obviously, because of the coronavirus, that's kind of put that on hold at the moment. But that is one of our goals eventually is to go. Because also we do follow our favorite bands around the UK when they come here, but it would be amazing to follow them around Europe. So hopefully that will be something we can do.

John Morris: I think it would be very interesting to compare your experiences at venues in the UK to those in the European Union.

Emma Muldoon: Yeah.

John Morris: I've seen some of my favorite bands that are touring Europe and it seems as though they always start in the UK and then head out, head out to the continent.

Emma Muldoon: Yeah.

John Morris: And there are so many different venues to see those performances. But, you know, obviously one of the exciting things about travelling to a show is that sometimes you're enjoying some of the other things in the local area, right?

Emma Muldoon: That's right. And we try and go a day before the show and then maybe the day after, just telling ourselves to explore and enjoy the city.

John Morris: That's wonderful.

Emma Muldoon: That's what we enjoy doing, because we used to always go just the day of the show. So it was always a rush to travel down and especially if we were traveling From Scotland to England. But don't really get a lot of time to see the city, so we're trying to make it our mission now to spend a little bit more time and really enjoy and just take our time.

John Morris: You know, there are many occasions where I've travelled to a city to see a show or attend an event, and I want to participate in some of the other activities that the city has to offer.

Emma Muldoon: Yeah, museums and eating nice food and just being a bit of a tourist.

John Morris: That's a major part of the tourism business. Once you get people to your destination, you want to keep them there for a little while.

Emma Muldoon: Yeah, That's true.

John Morris: So back to gigs. What does an accessible gig or music festival need in order to be accessible? What are some of the best practices that organizers should be implementing?

Emma Muldoon: Oh, there's various different factors and personally, when I'm reviewing a gig, I take in lots of different stages and like pre event I think is very important. And so obviously access online, that's where it needs to start. And so information definitely needs to go on the web site. And I think it's very frustrating to look on the web site and not find anything to do with accessible information. Also easy

booking as well. And I don't know what it's like in the States for booking accessible tickets, but here in the UK it can be quite challenging. Especially if it's not online, which a lot of the time it's not and you need to phone a number and you're in a waiting queue for a long time. I remember, for example, a few years ago I tried to get tickets for Adele and I actually called the ticket number, it must have been about a thousand times. And that actually is crazy to say that I lied, but I've actually phoned about a thousand times because I really wanted to see Adele. And we couldn't get through at all because it is such high demand. But that was just because it was the accessible line. If we were just booking standard tickets, it could have easily been done on the website. And obviously getting to a venue, that is important as well. And that's one of the things that we always look out for is, are we going to be able to park close by the venue? And for inside the venue, the main thing is, how am I going to get into the venue - is it level access? Is there a lift? And at one of our favorite venues, the lift broke, and it was broken for, I think, nine months. So we missed out on so many shows that we wanted to go to because the lift wasn't working and it took them that long to get it fixed.

John Morris: In a lot of cases, when we hear about deficiencies in accessibility, we start to question the commitment by the venue or the organizer. Nine months of an elevator being out of service just seems... Well, it certainly seems like too long.

Emma Muldoon: And when we questioned it, they just said, we're trying to get the part and the part is in, I think, Europe. So they were struggling to get the part and send it over. That could well be true, but it just seems like a long time to have to wait. And obviously during that time, all the shows that not just myself, but other disabled people were missing out on. Especially if it's your favorite band and they don't visit the UK that often. Oh, so that's really frustrating.

John Morris: I'm very fortunate living in the United States because one of my favorite bands is playing somewhere almost every week.

Emma Muldoon: Yeah.

John Morris: I'd like to talk for a moment about those venues that maybe are not doing things the right way. And I recall that you had a poor experience at a festival last year.

Emma Muldoon: The festival was Fusion Festival in Liverpool. And so Liverpool is about four and a half hours drive from where we live in Scotland, so it's quite a long way to go. And our favorite band was playing - Kings of Leon - so we were really, really excited to go and see this band. But we had never been to this festival before, so it was all new and we weren't sure what it was going to be like. But we booked the tickets online. Surprisingly, that went quite smoothly. But we just had a bad feeling about it because there wasn't a lot of information on the website about accessibility so that concerned us, but we went ahead anyway. We tried emailing them in the lead up to the festival just to find that out if there was going to be accessible toilets at the festival, like what type, was it just going to be a small, porta-cabin style toilets or changing place toilets? I don't know, do you have them in the USA?

John Morris: Yeah. I'd like to interrupt for a moment because the Changing Places facilities are extremely uncommon here in the United States. The only place where I've seen them installed is in 9 or 10 airports in America. I believe that some sports stadiums are or were planning to invest in them, but they haven't yet. And, you know, contrast that with the UK, where this project to improve bathroom accessibility, particularly for disabled adults, is very widespread. And so perhaps you could tell listeners a little bit about what these facilities look like.

Emma Muldoon: Yes. A Changing Place toilet is a much bigger, accessible toilet. And it's got an adult changing bench. It's got a ceiling track hoist and it's got a sink that rises up and down as well. But generally it's just a much bigger toilet, so you can have space for a person in a wheelchair and various companions and carers to help you. So it's just a lot bigger and safer.

John Morris: What about events where the venue doesn't have one of these installed? I heard about these accessible toilets being taken on the road. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Emma Muldoon: Yes, a charity called Mobiloo, they have, basically a van that's all kitted out in the back, basically like a Changing Place. So it has a hoist, a toilet and an adult size changing bench, so that travels around the UK and basically goes to events that don't have a permanent Changing Places toilet on site. So basically, it just allows

people with disabilities to enjoy events just like everybody else, who do need the extra facilities than just a standard accessible toilet.

John Morris: With the availability of these services out there, the Mobiloo, it seems like there should be no mass event in the U.K. that does not have an accessible toilet, right?

Emma Muldoon: There shouldn't be. No, no.

John Morris: So how did things go down at the Fusion Festival?

Emma Muldoon: Ah, yes, it's a very long story, but basically in the failing started from the very beginning. Just the lack of information online, their lack of communication, because like I said, I tried e-mailing them various times leading up to the event because I was concerned about the toilet situation. I thought, I can't go to a festival all day and potentially not drink or use the toilet, because if it was a small standard accessible toilet like a Portakabin, then there would be no way that I would be able to get inside with my wheelchair and my partner who has to transfer me. So that was one of my biggest concerns. So I tried contacting them and they never got back to me. I contacted them about parking as well because we're not from Liverpool, we weren't sure the location. So that's things that we want to find out. But yeah, they didn't get back to me until two weeks before the event. Again, after I'd sent them a more stern e-mail. And basically they just passed me off and said, you have to contact Ticketmaster. And so that was one of the biggest things that frustrated me. And once we got to the festival, they just let us in, but we didn't know where to park. There was no one around to help us. There were no signs either, which I thought was not very good planning because we were basically in the middle of a park that was getting dark. But no sign posts telling us where to go, so we actually had to just stop and listen to find out where the music was coming from and head in that direction. But there is like four different paths that we could go on. So my partner ran over to them to find out where's the accessible entrance, because we don't want to head all the way down there to potentially come back on ourselves. So they were like, no, no, it's down this way. That's fine. So we headed in that direction. We got to the entrance and it was just like barrier lanes and it was just some grass. And obviously in the UK, we don't really have the best weather. So the grass was really muddy at this point. So that was a bit of a what if, how is my chair going to get through all this muddy grass. So then we got inside, we asked the steward who checked our

ticket, where is the viewing platform? She pulled a map out and said, it's at the other end of the park. And we're like, oh no, how are we going to get all the way through the crowd. And by this point, the ground was covered in litter - empty bottles, cups, food, rain ponchos as well, because it's been raining and people are just throwing them out. So the whole grass was just covered. And I couldn't get through, obviously, with my wheelchair. All the cups were getting stuck under my chair, which is like really, really difficult. So the shirt that helps us through the crowd had to clear a path for us. And then we got to the viewing platform and then we thought, yes, finally, but my heart sank when we seen the amount of people surrounding the platform, so we couldn't properly get onto it. And then on the platform itself, I don't think I've ever seen a platform this busy at any festival or event that I've been to. It was very small, but there was way too many people on it. Basically, long story short, we couldn't see the band and we couldn't go on the platform properly. We tried complaining, no one wanted to speak to us, no one wanted to deal with that. And everybody else on the platform was also complaining because they couldn't see.

John Morris: Obviously, I think in hearing about your experience at that festival, the organizers failed to adhere to many of the best practices you described earlier. Number one, making information available to concert goers or travelers. That's a lesson for the entire travel industry, not just music concerts - when information is lacking, I wonder how many people don't go at all because they can't be sure their needs will be met.

Emma Muldoon: Actually, when I wrote about my experience at Fusion Festival, I had somebody contact me and they said that they didn't go to the festival because they tried contacting them various times about access and, obviously, the festival didn't get back to them so they decided not to bother going.

John Morris: Right. Right. If you're planning to go to a concert - and this goes for everyone, not just disabled people - but you want answers to a few questions. And I assume the first question is, how do I get a ticket? How much does it cost and all that jazz. How am I going to get there? And then, once I've arrived, what sort of facilities are available? What what will my experience be like? What are my seats going to look like or where am I going to stand or sit to watch this event? That's the information that concert goers are looking for, disabled or not. But especially if you do have a disability and use a wheelchair, that information is non-negotiable. You you need that.

Emma Muldoon: Yes, absolutely.

John Morris: At the Fusion Festival, you shared that it was difficult seeing the band. The seating was not appropriately placed. The platform to elevate you above the heads of the other people, of the other fans, maybe was not tall enough. What are some examples of venues that have not had those difficulties and instead have done a really good job with accessibility?

Emma Muldoon: Well, to compare it to a festival that I actually went to, I think, a week or two before Fusion Festival - it was the a festival in Glasgow. So our home city, as you would call it. They put on a festival called Glasgow Summer Sessions. We've been to it before and every year they improve their facilities for disabled people, which I think is amazing. So we had went two weeks before Fusion and the experience was basically night and day, their platform was probably, I'd say, three times as big as the one at Fusion Festival. There was so much space and actually it was more than big enough, and there was space in between each of us as well. Also at Glasgow Summer Sessions, they have a food and drink service, which I think is really, really good. And so, again, it saves you having to leave the platform and having to work your way through the crowd, you can actually just give them your order - whatever you want to drink and eat. And I think it is helpful as well, even if you've got somebody with you, it saves them having to leave. And because it could potentially be away for like half an hour depending on how long the queues are.

John Morris: With the appropriate planning, I think it's very easy to get things right. Making sure that once you've taken the bookings, you figure out how large of a platform you're going to need and how many people using a wheelchair are going to be there. And, you know, then providing the washrooms that accessible - that are accessible to people of all abilities. And, you know, I think this food delivery ideas is really great as well. I know that I would love to have had that at some of the concerts or sporting events that I've attended.

Emma Muldoon: But definitely toilets is a big, big thing that festivals, they need to provide better. The one in Glasgow, for example, they are very good. They provide an accessible Changing Places toilet and they also have a really large accessible toilets.

And they also have, I think if I remember, maybe five other standard accessible toilets. So they really have quite a lot of facilities for disabled people. They have wheelchair matting down as well on the grass. So if it is raining, which a lot of the time it does in Scotland, the grass - you don't have to drive over the grass - there's matting there for you, so it just makes it so much easier.

John Morris: You've written a lot about your experiences at all sorts of shows and many of them have been great and others not so great. Do you think that, you know, perhaps some of the ones that you criticized, like the Fusion Festival, are going to use your input to improve the situation next year or sometime in the future?

Emma Muldoon: I hope so. But what is frustrating about Fusion Festival, for instance, as in they didn't respond at all to us after the festival, we complained, we sent various emails and Facebook messages. And they never once got back to us to acknowledge, we're very sorry this happened to you and you had a bad experience, we'll take all this on board and improve. We never got anything back from them. But there has been venues I have went to and not had a very good experience, but once I've spoken to the management, for example, they've been really responsive and they've taken all the points on board and have improved on, which is amazing and it makes such a big difference for us when we go back again in that venue, but also for some other disabled people that go afterwards as well, makes such a difference.

John Morris: Absolutely. I think one of the things we need to see in the world is an acceptance of feedback. Your web site essentially provided the Fusion Festival with a free analysis of what's going on there. And hopefully they will use your recommendations to better serve disabled concert goers next year. One thing that I know we both agree on is the importance of information, because if I don't know whether a destination or event is accessible or not, it is immediately de-prioritized on my list. I want to go somewhere where I'm going to have as few challenges or difficulties as possible. You know, somewhere where the accessibility is guaranteed and, you know, the situation is known to me. And I believe that's the main reason why so many people visit our web sites - to find those answers. Now, speaking of web sites, where can people find you online, Emma?

Yes. And so my blog is called Simply Emma. And that's SimplyEmma.co.uk. I'm on Instagram at [SimplyEmmaBlog](https://www.instagram.com/SimplyEmmaBlog). It's the same on Facebook, [Simply Emma Blog](https://www.facebook.com/SimplyEmmaBlog). And then on Twitter at [SimplyEmma2](https://twitter.com/SimplyEmma2), a little bit different. But yeah, that's the main places that you'll find me.

I have a different Twitter as well because I would have to be wheelchair travel without the L due to their character limit for usernames.

I've not actually checked who else has Simply Emma on Twitter, I must do that. I could only get 2.

John Morris: Well you know Emma, it has been a real pleasure talking with you today. And I do hope that listeners will visit your web site, particularly if they are interested in visiting the UK or some of the other destinations in Europe. I know that I learned something about Paris on your web site that I hadn't seen anywhere else - about the Little Blue Train that is accessible.

Emma Muldoon: And yes, it was fun. That was a fun little train, and they do different routes as well, which is quite cool.

John Morris: Well, we've run out of time today, but I wish you all the best and hope you'll be able to see some of your favorite bands live again soon.

Emma Muldoon: I was actually meant to see Kings of Leon in July and it's been cancelled.

John Morris: Oh, no. But one of the things I'd been trying to share with my readers is that this is a great time to be planning for the future because this quarantine will only be temporary.

Emma Muldoon: Yeah, I agree.

John Morris: But, Emma, it was a pleasure talking with you, and I hope we'll see you again soon.

Emma Muldoon: Thanks a lot, John.

Announcer: Thanks for listening to The Accessible Travel Talk Show. To join the conversation and access the show notes, visit TravelTalkShow.org. And don't forget to keep up with John at WheelchairTravel.org, your source for accessible travel inspiration. See you next time!