

Introduction

This guide sets out to give detailed information about travel, accommodation and the tourist attractions for people who have mobility problems. Mostly this will be because walking any distance or climbing stairs is difficult. Some readers will be wheelchair users. Where possible we have included information for those who are visually or hearing impaired, although our main focus (and experience) is based around the needs of those with mobility problems. The information can be useful to families with young children and/or elderly relatives, since the family group may then have mobility issues and will be interested in the easiest way of doing things. The guide deals primarily with distances, slopes, steps, and the provision of lifts, together with details of accessible toilets.

We hope that this book will encourage people to get about, either alone or with friends, and that they will feel more confident about making adventurous holidays, trips and visits. We also hope that it will encourage able-bodied people to go with disabled friends to places like Paris, because the majority of obstacles that are there can be surmounted with a minimum of effort and a bit of determination. It is surprising what you can get to see and do if you use the easiest methods of transport and know the best way to get into buildings.

We assume that people will use it in conjunction with conventional guidebooks which will provide information about opening times and prices among other things.

We hope that it will also encourage transport organisations, accommodation providers and those responsible for the sights and places of interest to provide factual descriptive information. This applies to websites and leaflets.

It is now quite easy to put floor plans and photographs on a website, and if carefully selected, these can provide invaluable information to disabled visitors. Hotels, for example, could include a bedroom/bathroom plan including the key dimensions which show door widths and how much space there is. They could also show the provision of a wheel-in shower. For the sights, the information could include floor plans, lift locations (and sizes) and approximate dimensions to help the visitor assess the practicality of a visit. Details of the provision of disabled persons toilets could also be included.

Since the last edition in 1993 there have been major developments, and some of these themes are discussed further in the guide text.

In particular, new thinking has resulted from:

- the existence of the internet and the parallel ability to communicate by e-mail which has changed many things;
- increased awareness of the rights of disabled people to be able to utilise all kinds of services on an equal basis with others; and,
- new restrictions have been introduced making it more difficult to get about because of the sometimes officious application of health and safety regulations.

In 1993 we included no listing of websites, because at that time they didn't exist. Now they are a valuable resource, although (with a few notable exceptions) websites do not include the kind of detailed and authoritative information that a disabled visitor might need.

Some people now travel with wireless-enabled laptop computers to take advantage of what information is available, for example about opening times and prices. Currently the information on websites about access is extremely limited, and what is there is often misleading. As we have said earlier, we hope that this will change.

The application of the Disability Discrimination Act in the UK is encouraging change, as similar legislation has done in the USA and in other places. France has been relatively slow in becoming more sensitised to the needs of disabled people - and we are quoting here what French people themselves say. As a result, many facilities in Paris are not as 'accessible' as they could and should be. However, that is part of the reason for researching and writing this guide if access was easy, the guide would be unnecessary.

The application of health and safety regulations has meant that people can no longer do some things that were perfectly (and reasonably) possible ten and twenty years ago. Most notably and frustratingly, disabled people are no longer allowed to go to the top of the Eiffel Tower. In the past our group has been up to the very top many many times, including in that number, dozens of wheelchair users - ever since 1969 when we first visited Paris. Other venues which were 'accessible' in the past have also become 'inaccessible', including the Paris Sewers (Les Égouts) which provided an interesting, if slightly off-beat, place to visit.

Throughout the guide, our objective is to present accurate and well researched information, and we try to avoid making value judgements. The use of the word ‘accessible’ therefore needs to be thought about and defined. We frequently say ‘accessible’ rather than accessible, because people’s needs are different. A good example of its use is in the map and write-ups about the ‘accessible’ RER stations. The definition here is that the stations are step-free from pavement to platform (if the lifts are working!), but the traveller still needs to get over the step and/or gap to get on and off the train. The use of the description ‘accessible’ does not mean that everything will necessarily be totally straightforward for everyone, but that step-free routes should be available to get over the more obvious potential access barriers. In particular you should only come across minor problems such as a kerb or single step en route.

The practicalities of visiting

Travelling to Paris has become considerably easier with numerous different options from the UK including the Eurostar trains and *le Shuttle* which go through the Channel Tunnel. From the rest of Europe it is possible to get there by train, road or air, and Paris can be reached from more distant parts of the world by plane. Whichever way you come it may be the handling of your luggage that is likely to cause the biggest logistical problem, particularly in getting from the airport or train station to a central hotel.

Overall Paris offers a somewhat limited choice of ‘accessible’ accommodation in a convenient location and at a reasonable price.

The places that we have found are listed in the *Accommodation* chapter. This does not claim to be a comprehensive listing, but should provide the reader with some well researched choices.

We have found a small number of relatively central hotels and hostels with wheel-in showers, and some more with larger bathrooms which have a conventional bath, some of which are fitted with handrails and grabrails. These are all described. The low-price chain ETAP offers adapted rooms with wheel-in showers, but their hotels are all outside the centre of the city.

Getting around to see the sights, or getting to the shops is perhaps the biggest challenge for the disabled visitor. One good thing is that the city is quite small, and the main places of interest are grouped in just three or

four areas. These are around the Eiffel Tower (inevitably); around Notre Dame and the Hôtel de Ville, and then, perhaps the Champs-Élysées. There are also key sights like the Château at Versailles, which are some distance from the city centre.

Travelling around by car or adapted transport is likely to be by far the easiest for many disabled visitors. It may be sensible (for some) to hire a car for all or part of the time, if you have not got your own transport. It is not desperately expensive particularly for three or four people sharing. The driving style, however, is best described as ‘challenging’ and you may not be keen on driving in the rather wild traffic in Paris. It’s definitely not everyone’s cup of tea. Parking near your destination can also be tricky, although there are a good number of huge underground car parks (UGCPs), some of which have a lift for getting up to street level. There are particular problems in finding parking for vehicles more than 1.9m high. There are a few Blue Badge (BB) spaces, but these are very frequently occupied.

Public transport is mixed. Some buses are wheelchair accessible, and parts of the RER which goes right across central Paris are ‘accessible’ to and from the platform. The RER is the Réseau Express Régional, providing a network of railway lines which are underground in the centre of Paris and on the surface in the suburbs. There is nearly always a largish step or gap involved in getting on to the train itself, and the lifts to get to and from the platform are not entirely reliable. A chair user with strong friends would manage getting on and off the trains on RER lines A and B. Most of the Metro, apart from Line 14, is best described as ‘inaccessible’ and there are more details in the chapter on *Getting around*.

For some journeys it may be easier to use a taxi rather than public transport, and if done selectively, this shouldn’t be too expensive. Most taxis are conventional cars, and for those who can transfer to a car seat, this can be the easiest way to make some journeys. We list some wheelchair accessible taxi/minibus services, though most of these need to be booked in advance, and are generally quite expensive.

There are an increasing number of wheelchair/adapted toilets, although they’re somewhat scattered and difficult to find. Their design lacks any good or consistent specification. Most have only one support bar and quite often that is not well placed. Commonly they are ‘pay’ toilets, so you need to carry some small coins with you to ensure

that you can get in. See our *Good loo guide*.

Check out our definition of wheelchair/adapted toilets in the section on *Units*.

During the past five or ten years considerable progress has been made in making sites in Paris more accessible. As in many places there are still hassles. Being a foreigner has certain advantages and we have generally found that people are helpful in enabling us to overcome difficulties. *Much depends on who you meet and also on your own approach and attitude.*

We had meetings with the Paris Ile-de-France tourism authorities, and discussed the application of the '*Tourisme et Handicap*' labels which are now being awarded to various accessible sites. On their own admission, the French authorities have been very slow in encouraging and providing good facilities for disabled visitors - but they are now actively pursuing the policy of awarding appropriate labels to sites which meet certain criteria. The labels are discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter under *Symbols*.

A few sites are outstanding in the ways in which they have tried to provide information and good facilities for the disabled visitor. These include the Château at Versailles, the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay and the Cité des Sciences at la Villette.

We discussed with the tourism authorities the value of getting every site, hotel and restaurant producing their own 'access' leaflet. This would include the kind of descriptive data which is the basis of this guidebook. It could be available in leaflet form, and on the appropriate website, normally fitting in to a single A4 sheet. We were told that the tourism authorities would take this suggestion seriously, and guide users might like to take any opportunities they get of encouraging this.

Words of warning

There is great confusion and lack of understanding about the needs of a *handicapé* (disabled person). The confusion is principally between the different requirements of:

- a disabled walker, for whom distances and possibly steps may be an issue;
- someone who only uses a chair for some of the time and who can walk a few steps and possibly even climb some stairs;
- someone who is paraplegic, but may have strong arms and a strong torso;
- a person who is paraplegic and has limited body strength; and,
- someone who needs total care/help in transferring from a chair to the toilet or on to a bed, and who may require (enough space for) two people to do the lifting, one from behind and the other from the front.

In particular (and this will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on *Accommodation*), hotels which advertise that they have rooms *pour les personnes à mobilité réduite* do not necessarily have accommodation which is suitable for most wheelchair users. Very few such rooms have a wheel-in shower, which many would regard as being an important requirement.

Information and service providers rarely provide the descriptions that people would need to help them make informed choices - so if something is important to you, you need to ask, very precisely and clearly.

The guide

We have tried to ensure that the places and facilities described have been visited, walked into and wheeled over by one of our survey teams. Inevitably a few mistakes will have crept in and, with time, changes will take place. Where we have not actually seen something, we say 'We were told that' - and we would suggest that such information needs checking if it's important to you.

Please note that a listing does not necessarily imply accessibility. This is an important distinction between our information and that supplied by others.

What we have done is to DESCRIBE THE BARRIERS in our write-ups and you, the reader, must make your own decision about what is possible. We include some places that are inaccessible by most people's standards, simply so that you know what the problems are and don't waste time and effort OR so that you go with sufficient help if getting to a particular place is important.

We have covered the main aspects of travel, hotels and the sights, and have even included a few eating places. Tables at many Paris restaurants and cafés can be reached without steps (at many brasseries you can eat outside on the pavement). They are often somewhat crowded inside, and very few have a wheelchair toilet. A problem with most restaurants is that the toilets are commonly in the basement down narrow and sometimes twisting steps. Hopefully the *Good loo guide* will help.

It is now possible to communicate quickly and efficiently by e-mail, and this can take some of the hassle (and cost) out of making enquiries. A problem with e-mail is that some organisations receive so many of them that they are overwhelmed, and if you do not receive a reply, that may be the reason. E-mails are more easily overlooked than a letter or fax.

If you need particular information, forms or services, and you e-mail or fax someone, don't wait too long before you follow it up saying politely, 'What are you doing about my query?' The chances are that it is sitting in someone's 'in' tray and they have gone off sick or on holiday - or they are just waiting for someone to remind them!

Note that an increasing number of major exhibitions are using a 'timed entry' system whereby people can book tickets online, and in advance. If you just turn up, you may have to wait until a slot becomes available.

There is plenty to see and do

It is undoubtedly best to plan what you want to see and perhaps even to stay near the places of greatest interest to you. There are enough sights with relatively easy access to fill any holiday itinerary. If you visit even a handful of the places with reasonable access mentioned in this guide, you will be in Paris for quite some time and will have seen quite enough to make your trip memorable and worthwhile.

In terms of accessibility, all the views expressed are those of the survey/research teams and they relate to the place at the time of the visit. Most of what we include are simple facts about steps, distances and doors, and these are not likely to change. Readers must appreciate that some aspects of 'accessibility' will vary according to the time of day, the time of year and which officials are on duty. Some people will be prepared to break or bend rules, while others will be more rigid. If particular features of access are especially important to you it may be possible to check before

setting off. We have included telephone numbers wherever possible, but these will probably not be of much use unless your French is adequate. We have also included websites for getting accurate contact details and opening times.

Why travel and why Paris ?

The cliché says that travel broadens the mind, and we've found that to be profoundly true.

These PHSP access guides started back in the 1970s, when some of us wanted to travel and experience different cultures and new situations. En route we've learned a lot. The group consists of disabled and able-bodied young people. Over the years we have been to various parts of France, to Jersey, Norway, and Israel/Palestine. We've been to Paris many many times now, and it was after visits early in the 1970s that several disabled members of the group said "It's been bloody difficult, but we've managed it, so why don't we write a guide-book for other people ?"

Pauline Hephaistos Survey Projects is the name of our group but as it's a bit of a mouthful, we have more recently used the name Access Project to describe ourselves. There's an account of the origin of the name in the *prelims* pages at the front of the book, and we have a website www.accessproject-phsp.org.

We have had an enormous amount of fun and have learned a lot. We meet all kinds of problems and it is a challenge sorting them out, although perhaps it doesn't always seem to be fun at the time. We have met many people who have been helpful, friendly and interesting, as well as some who were disinterested, and a few who have been downright awkward and unhelpful. Overall we have a lot of things to look back on and to talk about.

You will have your own reasons for wanting to travel. We hope that you'll find it as interesting and rewarding as we have! If you haven't travelled much and feel a bit hesitant about it, we recommend that you look at *Nothing ventured* edited by Alison Walsh (a Rough Guide special, published by Harrap Columbus, London). This includes stories of disabled people going to all kinds of exotic places, as well as to destinations in Britain and in northern Europe. If you haven't got

the travel bug already, some of the tales will probably give it to you. Secondhand copies are available from Amazon, the on-line bookseller. If you want a wider perspective then there's the *Global Access News Travel E-zine* available from www.globalaccessnews.com.

Paris is a historic city with monuments that include Nôtre Dame, the Louvre, the Sacré Cœur and the Eiffel Tower. There are many many others. French history over the past three hundred years has been pretty dramatic with the rule of the aristocrats, the Revolution, the successes of Napoleon, the threat of invasion during the first world war and the reality of occupation in the second.

Paris is unquestionably a lovely city; many would argue it is the most beautiful in the world. It is far closer than you might think and travelling from the UK has got much easier, now that the Channel Tunnel is open. For a capital city, Paris is relatively small, and has a layout which has been controlled and developed for centuries. This gives it a certain grace and cohesion. The authorities have been careful to restrict the construction of high buildings and you will find the skyscrapers are nearly all outside the main ring road, the boulevard Périphérique.

For a capital city there is a some reasonably inexpensive accommodation, and there are a growing number of places which are wheelchair accessible. Paris has a first class public transport system, although only limited parts of it are accessible to wheelchair users and to other disabled people.

Wouldn't sitting outside a café in a Paris square on a wonderfully sunny day, watching the world go by, be a welcome change? You can make your own pace and see a lot or a little. You may enjoy going to French restaurants and cafés or the clubs and bars, much more than the culturally correct churches and art galleries, or you may have gone for the shopping. Either, both or all, will give you new experiences.

If you have a problem in getting around, then one reason for going to Paris is that it is one of the few places with a well researched and up-to-date access guide.

How the guide is arranged

The sights are grouped in various key areas as follows, and there is a map showing the areas near the start of the Chapter on *Sights* together with a more detailed listing:

- A Ile de la Cité**
- B Louvre and Tuileries gardens**
- C Champs-Élysées (8th)**
- D Grandes boulevards/Opéra (9/10th)**
- E Les Halles/rue de Rivoli/place Vendôme/Bibliothèque Nationale (1st/2nd)**
- F Marais/Beaubourg/Bastille (3rd/4th)**
- G Left Bank (5/6th)**
- H Eiffel Tower (7th)**
- I Palais de Chaillot (16/17th)**
- J Montparnasse (14/15th)**
- K Montmartre (18/19th)**
- L The eastern arrondissements (11/12/20th)**
- M Bibliothèque François Mitterrand (13th)**
- N Bois de Boulogne.**

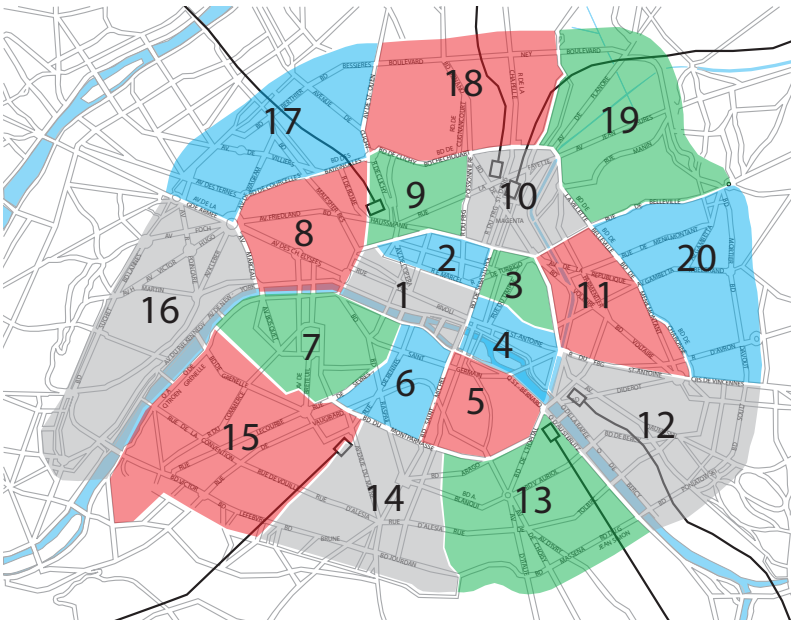
Inside these groupings, sites are then listed geographically as described at the start of each section. We have tried to include the main variations on place names, including both French and British versions where appropriate. In this respect we have initially listed most sights by their French names, since this is what you may see signed or listed in Paris. In the text we have frequently reverted to using the more familiar British version for convenience. Wherever possible we have referred to parking and to public transport access, although the main discussion about transport is in the chapter on *Getting around*.

We have tried to identify particularly accessible sights and also some small areas where there is plenty to see without too much walking or wheeling and there is a separate chapter entitled *Recommended itineraries*.

There is an extensive Index

There are two chapters on travelling: one covering the various ways of getting to Paris and the other with advice and information on how to get around once you are there. *General information* is given early on in the guide and the various sections are listed on the *Contents* page.

Note that the arrondissement is the local government area and numbers go from 1 to 20. In the Paris address there is a post code which starts with 750, and then gives the number of the arrondissement. Hence 75018 is in the 18th and 75005 in the 5th arrondissement, although there seem to be a few addresses where the post code does not follow this convention. In quoting addresses we have normally included the 750 post code, and you can thus work out where things are more easily. Arrondissements 1, 2, 3 and 4 are right in the centre, and then the areas wrap themselves around the centre in what one can only describe as a snail-like arrangement. Have a look at the diagram - and you'll see what we mean !



The arrangement of the Arrondissements in Paris

Units and definitions

We have given measurements in centimetres (cm), metres (m) and kilometres (km). Although these are the units increasingly being used internationally, many British people, and those from the USA, still think in Imperial measures.

To convert metric measurements to the Imperial units, use the following guidelines:

Length and distance

10 centimetres is about 4 inches (2.5 centimetres=1 inch)

1 metre is about a yard

1 kilometre is about two-thirds of a mile (0.62 miles more precisely), thus 3km is a about 2 miles

Weight and volume

Metric weights and measures are used in France (and increasingly in the UK) and very roughly, a litre is just under two pints, so when you're buying petrol (gasoline) 4.5 litres is about equivalent to a gallon.

Solids are sold by the gram or kilogram. There are 1000 grams in a "kilo" and 1 kilo is just over 2 pounds weight.

Area

For areas, 1 hectare (ha) is about 2.5 acres.

Temperature

In the text we have used degrees Centigrade, although readers from the USA will be more familiar with Fahrenheit.

To convert:

$0^{\circ}\text{C} = 32^{\circ}\text{F}$, $10^{\circ}\text{C} = 50^{\circ}\text{F}$, $20^{\circ}\text{C} = 68^{\circ}\text{F}$,

$30^{\circ}\text{C} = 86^{\circ}\text{F}$, $40^{\circ}\text{C} = 104^{\circ}\text{F}$

The diagram opposite page 1 gives the approximate dimensions of a standard wheelchair. Chairs vary considerably in size so it's worth checking the exact dimensions of yours to relate to the measurements given in the guide. With powered chairs, it's also worth checking its weight as well as adding your own weight, as some platform stair lifts have weight and size restrictions.

Similarly, scooters (the little electric powered buggies for those who find walking long distances difficult) commonly measure around 65cm wide and 135cm long, although again, sizes vary, and as with powered chairs, you need to check the weight and dimensions of the one you have. **We've given door widths and other measurements in centimetres (cm).**

Steps

These are listed by number, with + indicating steps up and – indicating down. Occasionally we list them as \pm , in that it depends on which direction you are coming from, and you may well need to go both up and down to get to where you want to go.

Conventionally, the word *steps* is only used once in a write-up (or paragraph), and after that the + or – sign implies that there are steps and indicates how many there are.

Movable chairs and tables

In cafés, restaurants and pubs we have not said each time that the chairs and tables are movable. It is assumed that they are movable, and therefore more convenient for chair users and for others. **Where they are not movable, or if the seats and tables are high up or might cause a problem, we have said so.**

Toilets

Our definition of a **wheelchair toilet** is one where the toilet is unisex; the door opens outward; the door width (D) is greater than 70 cm and the side transfer (ST) space is greater than 70 cm. If the toilet does not quite meet these criteria, but is adapted for a chair user, then we call it an **adapted toilet**, and we give the appropriate measurements and information.

Where the cubicle is INSIDE the womens or mens toilet area, we describe them as being **wheelchair** or **adapted cubicles**. In England, the standard height for a toilet seat is about 45cm. We found in Paris that the seat height varies quite a lot, so we have included the height measurement as SH (seat height).

Lifts

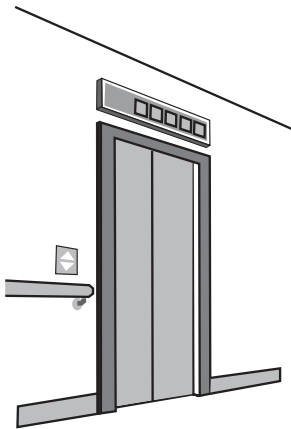
A **lift** is in a lift shaft, with doors, and a conventional cabin which can be large or small. It goes up and down between the floors of a building.

An **open lift** is a small rectangular vertical lift, usually to take one chair user at a time and bypasses just a few steps - often added in a building as an afterthought.

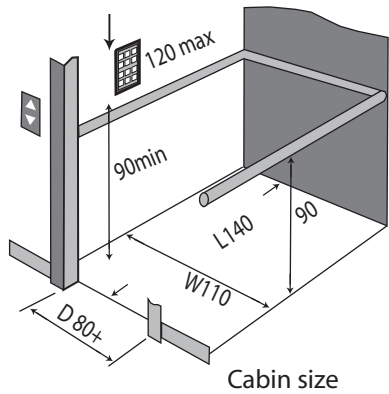
A **platform stairlift** goes up stairs (it is attached to the wall) and has a platform which can take a wheelchair, and occupant.

A **‘seated’ stairlift** goes up the stairs (the track is usually attached to the wall) and has a seat into which the passenger has to transfer. This is very useful for many disabled walkers, but for a wheelchair user, their chair has to be carried up or down the stairs by someone else.

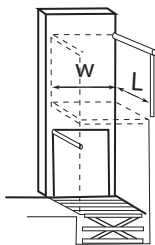
For lift measurements, we quote: door width (Dcm), cabin width (Wcm) and cabin length (Lcm). On this basis, you can decide whether the lift is large enough for you to use.



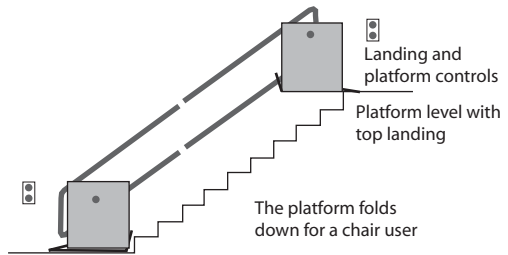
Shaft lift



Cabin size



Open (vertical) lift



Platform stair lift

Different kinds of lifts

We have used abbreviations when giving both lift, doorway and toilet measurements.

We have abbreviated ground floor to GF and an underground car park to UGCP etc. There is a full list of abbreviations.

French roads are designated as A for autoroute and RN for route nationale or main roads. Smaller roads simply have the prefix N. These are abbreviations that may appear in the text from time to time.

Note that we have used some additional mathematical symbols, and in particular > meaning more than; < meaning less than, and ~ meaning approximately.

Disability terms

Throughout the book we have used positive language about disability, and tried to take a positive attitude to obstacles. The barriers are there to be overcome, not simply accepted, and for a long time we have been part of the movement involved in breaking down barriers. Members of our group have a variety of disabilities and as a result, are handicapped by the world around them.

We talk about disabled people and not ‘the disabled’. When people refer to a ‘disabled toilet’ they imply that the cistern doesn’t work, and not that it is big enough for a chair user. We would encourage the use of the descriptor ‘accessible toilet’ in the future, although replacing the well accepted ‘disabled toilet’ will take some time.

We have used the terms **wheelchair toilet** or **adapted toilet** or **wheelchair cubicle** or **adapted cubicle**, with some specific criteria attached to the description. Amazingly (we think) we still find places where parking, entrances and other facilities are still described as being for ‘invalids’. Emphatically, we do not regard ourselves as being invalid.

The use of language changes, and there is, of course, a danger in worrying too much about precise political correctness. Nonetheless a sensible use of language can help to change attitudes, and to increase understanding, especially if it causes people to ask, ‘Why did you say it that way?’.

Symbols

Some years ago the use of a symbol to denote facilities for disabled people was agreed internationally and everyone is now familiar with the 'wheelchair' sign. In theory the sign is used in accordance with certain criteria, such as flat or ramped access, doors wider than a known amount and so on. Unfortunately, in practice the symbol has been misused so widely that it has become virtually meaningless, particularly when used in general guide books, in listings and on websites. The problem is that assessment of accessibility is made by so many different people with different perceptions of disability.

The application of the *Tourisme et Handicap* labels in France (see below) seems to be intended primarily to have an influence on those who provide facilities for visitors. It is the system promoted and encouraged by the tourism authorities. The application process of applying for a label can certainly encourage sites and places to raise their standards.

However, the labels have severe limitations in terms of the provision of the necessary information to visitors. This is because the use of a single symbol is totally inadequate to describe the accessibility of any facility. No account is taken (for example) about whether a place is large or small - or whether the area is hilly or flat. It does not even seem to be a criteria that a site with a label for the mobility impaired should have a disabled person's toilet. It can also mean that there are some really good facilities where the label is not awarded, because something required in the specification - which may of may not be very important - is missing.



On our website www.accessproject-phsp.org we have put a set of descriptive symbols which can be downloaded and used in guidebooks or on leaflets. There are also translations of their meaning into several major European languages.

In the previous edition of this book we included them in the text. This time we didn't have the time or resource to do this, even though we think that they can be really helpful, and internationalise the presentation of information.

General information

We have included further down a section on equipment repair and hire, some medical advice, and a major section on insurance. We will start, however, with a suggestion for those who have difficulty walking long distances, but don't normally use a wheelchair. We recommend at least considering getting a chair which should help you to be more mobile and flexible and to do things that would otherwise be a strain.

As a result, we looked into the possibility of hiring a chair in Paris, and this is discussed under *Equipment repair and hire*.

For most people needing to use a chair very occasionally, you can find one at some venues, like the Louvre, the Orsay, and other big venues. If you need it to get around the shops, and to enjoy just wandering around, then taking a chair with you is almost certainly a better option than trying to hire one in Paris, unless your journey to get there is particularly complicated or difficult. See also the write-up on the Sainte Chapelle where we highlight at least one other reason for having your own chair available.

We discovered that (in the UK) you can actually buy a chair for only a little over £100, using the internet, getting direct delivery from a manufacturer.

Two sites from which this is possible (there are others) are:

- **Mobility Zone Ltd** www.mobilitymegastore.co.uk; and,
- the **Bin-to Co** www.bin-to.co.uk.

The two that we bought recently not only had a fold-down back and detachable footplates, but the chair wheels were easily removable, and the chair was of good quality..

Note an American company **Spinlife** www.spinlife.com who offer a similar facility in the USA, and whose website includes some useful tips and information about '*Selecting a wheelchair*'. For the occasional user, a lot of the finer points don't matter all that much, but the choice between having large wheels and small wheels is important. With small wheels you always have to be pushed - with large ones you have more control, and can push yourself over short distances. Also important is the weight of the chair and how easily it will fold up, for example to go in the boot of a car or taxi.

Much of the information in this chapter has been gathered from the internet. It has not been possible for us to use all the services described, and as a result, we are quoting from the information provided in the publicity material provided by a wide variety of companies.

Car hire

If you want to hire a wheelchair accessible vehicle in the UK, and use it to go for a visit to Paris, we found two companies that you can try:

Adapted Car Hire (ACH)

13 High Street, Wanstead, London E11 2AA

Tel: 0845-6862007 *website:* www.adaptedcarhire.co.uk

ACH offer hand controlled cars, and wheelchair accessible vehicles with ramped access. They offer a very flexible service, and can provide a collection and delivery service to your home (obviously at a cost). Note that there is an excess of £500 on the insurance cover if the vehicle is damaged.

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles

Unit H4, Morton Park, Darlington DL1 4PH

Tel: 01325-389900 *website:* www.wheelchairaccessiblevehicles.co.uk

Another good contact point is **Wheelchair Travel**, in Guildford, whose details are in the section on *Coach and minibus hire*. We have used them regularly over the years, and have found them to be extremely helpful and reliable.

In addition, **Thrifty** have two or three adapted Renault Kangoo vehicles which are designed for a wheelchair user and up to three other people. If you are not familiar with this kind of vehicle, there is a large door at the back, and a fold-down ramp to facilitate chair access. Even if you cannot justify (or afford) owning such a vehicle, to hire one for a holiday in Paris or elsewhere, could simplify both getting there and getting around. It would also help with luggage handling - though you might find it more comfortable with only a driver and only one additional passenger if you are taking a lot of luggage.

The **Thrifty** contact details are: Tel: 0118 951-1123

e-mail: thrifty.reading@thrifty.co.uk

For some visitors there is great advantage in being able to fly to Paris and pick up a standard (unadapted) rental car at the airport. The independence implied is of great value. For a group of three or four people car hire can be a reasonably priced option, but remember all the extras that may not be mentioned on the basic tariff, such as passenger insurance, collision damage waiver and VAT. The big companies such as Hertz, Avis, Budget, Europcar etc, all offer this service. They tend to charge what one might call 'business' prices. They have the advantage of airport or Gare du Nord check-in desks and can be booked quite easily by a British travel agent. It's definitely worth shopping around and getting a quote from several of them, and possibly from smaller local companies as well, as the rates vary a lot.

While you can use the internet to get competitive quotes for car hire, it is generally only possible to book a standard vehicle this way. You may well be restricted to the age range 25-65/70 for on-line bookings. Any kind of special booking for a particular vehicle generally needs to be done by phone. As with other queries, you need to note and log the time of any call, finding out who you are speaking to. You need to take a reference number for a booking as well as getting confirmation of the details in writing.

Two sites which represent car hire agencies in the UK and USA are:

www.carrentals.co.uk Tel: 0845 225-0845 (in the UK), and

www.autoeurope.com Tel: 1-888-223-5555 (toll free in the USA).

The Auto Europe site includes a neat summary of both the history and culture of Paris, and some helpful information about the local climate.

www.easyCar.com only undertakes on-line bookings, which reduces costs, but makes it more difficult if you have questions or special needs. They can offer good value rental.

Another American site with links for car rental in Paris is **www.bnm.com**. If you use Google, you'll get an even wider choice.

The **www.Fodor.com** site has some useful tips about reducing the cost of car rental. The minimum age for hiring a car is usually 21, but with some companies it is 25. Some also have an upper age limit. You're recommended to take out full CDW (collision damage waiver) insurance, even though it may cost £7-8 per day. This means that if you are unlucky enough to damage the car, most of the cost is paid by the insurance

whether it was your fault or not. You have no open-ended financial commitment relating to the car, and the advice is based on our own recent experience!

To hire an adapted vehicle in Paris, you can try a company which seems to be related to Ulysse Taxis (see *Getting around*, under *Taxis*). They have Kangoo vehicles which can take one chair user plus up to four other people, and also minibuses which can take two, three or even four wheelchairs/users.

The firm is called **Libertans**, *website*: www.libertans.com
e-mail: contact@libertans.com *Tel*: 0820-825-216.

Hire cars with hand controls can be made available in Paris from:

- **Hertz** *Tel*: 08708 448844 (for worldwide reservations from the UK). *website*: www.hertz.co.uk. Given 24/48 hours notice they should be able to arrange for a car with hand controls to be available at CDG airport. This would be something like a Ford Focus;
- **Europcar** *Tel*: 0870 6075000 (the UK office who can probably make your reservation in Paris). +33 825 358358 (for the French office), but they require at least 72 hours notice. Europcar have several vehicles available including VW Golf and Bora cars.
website: www.europcar.com.

We have heard of people having difficulty in doing this (like they have turned up having thought they had a booking, only to be told “There is no adapted vehicle available”) - so make sure that you have the booking confirmation in writing, and details of who you spoke to when making phone calls - and check it by phone just a short time before you travel. Another approach is to fit your hire car with Lynx portable hand controls. Information about the system is available from:

Lynx Hand Controls

80 Church Lane, Aughton, Nr Ormskirk, Lancs L39 6SB
Tel: 01695 422-622 *Fax*: 01695 422-152 *website*: www.lynxcontrols.com
e-mail: info@lynxcontrols.com.

Lynx say that they can make arrangements for you for hiring a car both in the UK and abroad - but we have no direct experience of using them in Paris.

They offer some good advice on their website.

- first up is NOT to reserve through local travel agents, nor even, necessarily, the reservation offices of the big companies. ‘Not available’ means either ‘don’t know’, or ‘don’t want to deal with it and take the risk’;
- second, **one of the best ways of communicating with rental companies is by fax** - or possibly by e-mail where this is available. This can help overcome a language barrier where one exists, and it is easier to avoid misunderstandings.

Users have reported good experiences with Lynx controls, but say that “the driver must have good balance on the car seat, because the system ‘floats’. With some cars, strong fingers are also needed”. If you’re going to depend on this installation in a car in Paris, it might be wise to try it out first on a car at home and you need to have something in writing from the hire company saying that it’s OK to fit it.

Car hire is an interesting example of where the website information is inadequate, as it doesn’t generally provide any details of manually controlled cars which may be available, or give other information which people with special needs would find helpful.

Climate

This is not dissimilar to that in the south of England. Average autumn, winter and spring temperatures in Paris are much the same as those in London, although it may be a little colder in the winter. Temperatures rise in July and August making it fairly hot and sticky, which is an excuse many Parisians use for getting out of town. When packing, allow for variability, particularly in the winter and spring.

In general the weather poses relatively few problems. In the winter it can be both cold and damp. Average temperatures can be misleading, since Paris is more influenced by continental extremes than London. It can easily be -5 or even -10°C for short periods and much colder than some people are used to in Britain.

Either the spring or autumn are likely to be the best times for a visit if you are concerned about the weather.

Coach and minibus hire

Over fifty coach companies throughout the UK have adapted step-free coaches available for hire. The coaches are accessed by lift or ramp and some have on-board toilets at the same level as the seating, *not* down steep narrow steps. In 2005, the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK updated their “Accessible Coach Directory”. It is available on the CPT website at: www.cpt.org.uk. We hope that the information will be updated and extended by others in the future, even though Tripscope who carried out the survey is no longer around. Some of the companies included in the directory say that their vehicles are not available for travel abroad, but many will be open to negotiation, depending on the availability of both vehicles and drivers.

Coach Direct, The Coach House, 22 South Street, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BQ *Tel:* 08705-502069 *Fax:* 08700-702069
website: www.coachdirect.co.uk

We made enquiries through this company which advertises itself as a one-stop-shop for coach and travel information. They came back with a quotation for an accessible coach which would take several chair users, and which had an adapted toilet on board. **Certainly worth a try if you’re looking to hire a coach.**

Companies that can hire wheelchair accessible vehicles for foreign travel include

John Flanagan, 2 Reddish Hall Cottages, Broad Lane, Grappenhall, Warrington WA4 2HA *Tel:* 01925-266115 *Fax:* 01925-261100
website: www.flanagancoaches.co.uk

Wheelchair Travel, 1 Johnston Green, Guildford, Surrey GU2 6XS
Tel: 01483-233640 *Fax:* 01483-237772
website: www.wheelchair-travel.co.uk
e-mail: trevor@wheelchair-travel.co.uk

Probably the oldest source of converted vehicles for hire. Trevor Pollitt who has established and built-up this service over a number of years is well known to us. Wheelchair Travel has a number of adapted minibuses with either tail lifts or ramped access available for hire with or without a driver. In addition they have cars with hand controls, and ‘Chairman’

cars which take a single wheelchair user.

We used a Wheelchair Travel minibus during our Paris survey, and the service we received was excellent. If you have to go to pick it up, make sure that you have a very good map, as the garage/depot (which is not at Johnston Green) is quite difficult to find !

There are an increasing number of organisations, both commercial and voluntary, which have adapted coaches available for hire to groups. Some local Community Transport (CT) organisations can provide wheelchair-accessible minibuses and small coaches. However, our experience in Ealing with the CT is that they no longer allow people to take their vehicles abroad. They take the view that the regulations and the insurance are now too difficult to deal with.

Currency

Virtually all forms of currency exchange cost money. It also costs money to convert your unspent cash back at the end of your visit, so it can be wise to use most of it up just before leaving, using it, for example, to pay part of the hotel bill. However, if you're going to Paris on a holiday, it's best simply to accept that there will be costs - and it's certainly not worth spending much of your (valuable and expensive) time in trying to find the best 'rate'. **Our advice is "Go and enjoy yourself, and don't worry about the last few pennies!"**.

It is sensible to carry money in the form of a mixture of cash and credit/debit cards, and possibly some as travellers cheques for an emergency, although these are getting increasingly difficult to cash. Probably the best way of getting Euros is to buy them before you travel.

We suggest carrying as much cash as you are comfortable with, as it is the most versatile and dependable way of paying for things and for changing money. Make sure that you know roughly what the rate against the euro is, and then you're much less likely to be 'fleeced'.

For making larger payments, our preference is to use a credit or debit card wherever possible, provided you are paying off the balance each month, although don't use a credit card for getting cash unless you absolutely have to. Debit cards are generally significantly cheaper to use. Using a credit card to get cash out of an ATM is particularly expensive as there

is a transaction charge, and you start paying interest immediately. As a rule of thumb, this route costs you about 5% of the cash you get, though if you're getting out £100, the £5 involved is a very small proportion of your total expenses.

It is sensible, if you can, to carry at least two or three cards, so when one doesn't work for some reason, you have another to back it up. You'll need to know your PIN numbers - and there are some discrimination issues here, as not all disabled people are able to use chip and pin easily.

Commonsense security

One thing to watch out for is the safety of your purse, wallet, valuable documents and items like cameras and laptops. The risks are minimal if you take sensible precautions and are alert when you are being distracted. Disabled people, like everyone else, are vulnerable to the attentions of pickpockets and thieves. **Don't keep everything together (cards, cash, cheques etc). In particular, keep a 'spare' credit card and some spare cash, together with a photocopy of your passport and details of your return travel arrangements, in a place which is quite separate from your main purse or wallet .**

Make sure you have a record of your card details and cheque numbers. Find out what your insurance policy covers, and have a note of the number to ring to cancel your credit cards in the event of something going badly wrong. If you want to claim on your insurance for anything lost or stolen, you will almost certainly have to produce a note proving that you reported it to the local police. While that's a hassle, it IS essential.

The most risky way of carrying your valuables is in a separate bag. It's easy to put it down somewhere and become distracted, and it's also relatively easy for a thief to grab it and run, possibly by cutting the strap over your shoulder. A pouch or "bum bag" which is attached to your body, or possibly to your wheelchair, provides a safer spot for your valuables.

Documents required

British nationals need to carry a valid passport, and it is becoming an increasingly common requirement for foreign travel that your passport should be valid for at least another six months. Passports are issued by:

The UK Passport Agency

Tel: 0870 521-0410 for the advice line which is available 24/7

website: www.ukpa.gov.uk

Visitors from other European Union countries need either a passport or an identity card. No visa is required for American or Canadian visitors, and a passport is sufficient.

If you are coming by car, or intending to hire one, then remember that all the drivers must carry their driving licence. If you are bringing a car you also need to have with you the logbook, and an insurance certificate proving that you have third party insurance.

In addition to having a travel/health insurance policy, of which you should carry details in more than one place, British nationals should carry a **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)**. This entitles you to either free or reduced cost emergency medical treatment in France, and, of course, other part of the EU. The EHIC can be obtained using:

- a form available at a Post Office;
- via *Tel:* 0845 606 2030; or
- on-line from *website:* www.ehic.org.uk.

Electrical supply

This is standardised as 220 volts AC 50 cycles and so will cause no problems for visitors from Britain, except that **you will need an international plug adapter**. Remember that if you use an electric wheelchair, the airlines sometimes won't carry the batteries and you may need to organise some batteries and a charger to be available on your arrival. Get advice well in advance if you can.

American visitors may need to convert their electrical equipment for use on the 50 cycle system compared with the 60 cycles of the US supply. Get proper advice before travelling as you may need to bring a transformer.

Emergencies

If you run into an urgent problem, or have an accident of some kind, the first thing to do is to seek local help and advice - for example at the hotel you are staying at or at the information desk in the venue you're visiting.

British travellers are entitled to the same health service benefits in France as the French, provided they are armed with the EHIC, see under Documents required.

Unlike the British National Health Service, French citizens pay for part of their medical costs. Consequently **the benefits of the Reciprocal Health Agreement are no substitute for proper health insurance cover** discussed and outlined in the paragraphs on Insurance.

If you are a UK citizen you can reclaim some 70% of any doctors fees incurred during a stay in France. If you are treated as an in-patient in an 'approved' hospital, and show your EHIC then the local health administration office will (should!) pay 75% or more of the cost direct to the hospital. You pay the balance, together with a fixed daily charge. The procedures are bureaucratic, and you have to get and keep records and receipts for virtually everything, including prescription medicines. The full details are given on the appropriate page in *website*: www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellersGettingTreatmentAroundTheWorld/

We give here some of the emergency telephone numbers which you might have to call, although you may well, of course, run into a language barrier - which is why it may be better to involve locals if you can.

The numbers for :

- the 24 hour ambulance service (called "SAMU") is 15;
- for the Police it is 17, and for the Fire Service it is 18.

Note that the European emergency phone number is 112.

Other useful telephone numbers in Paris are:

- **SOS Médecins** for a 24 hour doctor *Tel:* 01 47 07 77 77;
- **SOS Dentaire** provides for dental emergencies
Tel: 01 43 37 51 00, but take care over any charges involved in using any of these services as they may not be recoverable under your insurance policy;
- **SOS Handicap** (medical help for disabled people)
Tel: 01 47 10 70 20. This is the number of the Hôpital Raymond Poincaré, Garches, 92380 just past St Cloud. It is a major centre for both treatment and rehabilitation and consequently might be able to help with advice or with broken equipment. We used them in 2006 when someone's specialist equipment

- for evacuating the fluid from the base of a tracheotomy was damaged, and they were extremely helpful and replaced it; and, there's an English language crisis line on *Tel: 01 47 23 80 80*.

What would almost certainly happen in the event of a serious accident or illness is that someone around would arrange for an ambulance to take you to the nearest hospital. If you have an accident at your hotel or hostel then the management will organise things for you.

In the event of a serious accident or medical condition, the procedure is to dial 15 for your nearest public emergency service SAMU (Service d'Aide Médicale d'Urgence). You will be billed for using this service, but part of the costs will be covered by your EHIC and the rest by your insurance policy. We have referred above to the need to keep records of expenditures and to keep receipts for money paid. *It cannot be emphasised too strongly that things will be much easier if you have adequate insurance.*

Note that before you undergo any extensive or expensive medical treatment, you need to check with your insurance company as to whether they will pay for the treatment at the hospital you have been taken to. They will have a 24-hour phone number - which you can usually ring without charge.

You may want to be taken or transferred to either the British or the American hospital, but as these are private hospitals, your insurance policy may not pay for treatment there. They are normally open 24 hours a day, but you should be aware that due to their relatively small size, sometimes all the beds are occupied.:

- The **British Hertford hospital**, Centre Hospitalier Franco-Britannique, 3 rue Barbès, 92300 Levallois-Perret, *Tel: 01 46 39 22 22* has some 90 beds and good facilities for dealing with most kinds of illness or injury. Although by law the doctors are French, all the nurses and some of the other staff are British and you won't have any major language problems. British residents and visitors have priority access to the hospital;
- The **American hospital**, 63 blvd Victor Hugo, Neuilly, *Tel: 01 47 47 53 00* is a little larger but offers similar facilities and can cope with dental as well as medical problems.

One of the larger hospitals in Paris with an Accident and Emergency Department is:

Hôpital Cochin

27 rue du Faubourg St Jacques, 75014

Tel: 01 58 41 27 21

Chemists

There's a 24-hour pharmacy at:

Dhéry Pharmacy, inside Galerie des Champs

84 ave des Champs-Élysées, 75008 (Métro George-V)

Tel: 01 42 25 49 95

With step free access.

and some late-night pharmacies at:

British Pharmacy

62 ave des Champs-Élysées, 75008

On the corner with rue la Boétie

Tel: 01 43 59 22 52 (a British chemist open until midnight)

With step free access.

British and American Pharmacy

1 rue Auber, 75009

by place de l'Opéra (open 08.30-20.00)

Tel: 01 42 65 88 29

+1 step at the entrance.

Pharmacy

2 rue Duphot, 75001

on the corner of rue Saint Honoré (open 09.15-19.30, Mon-Sat)

Small step/lip [7cm] at the entrance.

Equipment repair and hire

For wheelchair users, **it is always a good idea to carry a repair kit, including some simple tools. Taking a few vital spares can also be an advantage**, especially if your chair isn't standard. Carrying one of the instant tyre-repair kits available from shops like Halfords may well be a sensible precaution.

One potentially useful place that we came across right in the centre is a bicycle sales and repair shop who provided 'free air' on the pavement for pumping up tyres. They might well be able to help with running repairs to a wheelchair. The shop is:

Au Reparatteur de Bicyclettes

44 blvd de Sebastopol, 75003 Tel: 01 48 04 51 19

Located opposite the end of the rue de la Grande Truanderie, near the Pompidou Centre.

We have listed below shops and showrooms where you may be able to get repairs to equipment such as wheelchairs and/or where you may be able to hire things, although some are a little way outside the centre

Hiring equipment needs to be carefully negotiated, as you may need to be absolutely certain that what you need is available, and (if necessary) will be delivered to your hotel or wherever you are staying. Where we have made comments, they are based on information given when we visited various shops and showrooms.

In connection with equipment hire, you may have to pay a substantial deposit, particularly for hiring items like a powered wheelchair or a scooter - and it may be necessary to make the deposit in cash, possibly as much as €1000-2000, depending on the value of the equipment being hired.

With the two big companies, AMMA and Bastide, you can write in before your visit and get a catalogue if that would be helpful.

The French word for sale/purchase is *vente*, and for hire/rent is *location*. Note that very few of the people we spoke to at the showrooms had anything more than very basic English.

AMMA (Matériel Médical - Vente et Location)

170 rue Henri Barbusse, 95100 Argenteuil,

Tel: 01 39 61 11 35 Fax: 01 39 61 98 78

105, blvd Ney 75018 Tel: 01 42 54 02 02 Fax: 01 42 54 12 35

website: www.amma.fr or www.medicalassistance.fr

e-mail: valerie@amma.fr

AMMA are agents for Invacare www.invacare.fr who provide a wide

range of products, some of which are available for hire as well as for purchase. The various products include those needed by disabled people to enable them to live independently at home, and thus might be needed on a temporary basis by visitors. They are unable to hire equipment that might be used in bathrooms or toilets for reasons of hygiene. The main AMMA showroom/shop is in Argenteuil, which is some 15 km northwest of the pl de la Concorde, and almost due north of la Défense. It has ramped access, 3 BB parking spaces outside, and a **wheelchair toilet**.

The showroom in blvd Ney is closed during August.

This was the only company we spoke to who might be able to hire out a scooter - though the cost of doing this, and the deposit, would be quite high.

Bastide (Le Confort Médical - Vente et Location)

35 blvd Exelmans, 75016 *Tel:* 01 53 92 52 52 *Fax:* 01 53 92 52 59

39 rue Hermel, 75018 *Tel:* 01 53 09 22 50 *Fax:* 01 42 64 67 69

website: www.bastideleconfortmedical.com *Tel:* 0800 506 509 (free within France)

Bastide is a nationwide company with an extensive catalogue of equipment for supporting disabled people and enabling them to live independently. Some of it is available for hire. We visited their rue Hermel showroom, which is extensive, although it includes a split level section with +4 steps.

Bastide put the hire rates for various items of equipment which are listed on the first few pages of their main catalogue. Items for hire include wheelchairs, respiratory aids, hoists and inflatable beds - but not scooters.

Cap Vital Santé CVS

website: www.cap-vital-sante.com

e-mail: go2@go2sante.com (for both the showrooms listed below)

CVS is the umbrella for a number of large distributors of equipment related to independent living. It has Paris showrooms at:

Créa Santé, 160 rue St Maur, 75011

Tel: 01 53 36 88 88 *Fax:* 01 53 36 88 93

CRF Matériel Médical, 153 blvd Voltaire 75011

Tel: 01 43 73 98 98 *Fax:* 01 43 73 17 37

Aide et Confort du Malade

94 rue Amiral Mouchez, 75014

Tel: 01 45 89 16 16 *Fax:* 01 45 89 48 59

e-mail: aide-et-confort-du-malade@wanadoo.fr

Matériel Médical can provide wheelchairs and/or equipment for either sale or hire. Their focus seems to be the provision of equipment which promotes independent living, together with that for hospitals and surgeries. They have a stock of both manual and electric wheelchairs. To hire equipment you need to provide a deposit and we were told that this was around €550 for a manual one, and €2300 for an electric chair. Hiring a manual chair will around €60/week, and an electric one €350/week. This information was gathered during 2005.

Also note two other companies - whom we didn't manage to visit:

Orthofrance

9 rue de Paradis, 75010

Tel: 01 48 00 06 36 *Fax:* 01 48 00 06 42

website: www.orthofrance.fr *e-mail:* info@orthofrance.fr

Tout le Confort du Malade

198 rue Lecourbe 75015 near the junction with rue de l'Abbé Groult.

Tel: 01 56 56 83 33 *Fax:* 01 56 56 83 34

website: www.toutleconfortmalade.fr *e-mail:* m.gillard@free.fr

If the shops can't help then you could try the APF or MeV for advice.

Other potentially good contacts for running repairs would be specialist schools or institutions where there are disabled residents and someone on the administrative staff who is used to dealing with damage to equipment. An example of such a school is the École Nationale pour Handicapés Moteurs, 106 blvd Raymond Poincaré, 92380 Garches, just outside Paris *Tel:* 01 47 95 65 00. There is the adjacent Hôpital Raymond Poincaré already mentioned under SOS Handicap.

A further suggestion for some repairs is to try a small garage or motor-bike shop.

Alternatively you might ring the British Hertford Hospital for possible assistance, advice and/or the temporary loan of equipment.

France has, of course, branches of the **Red Cross (Croix Rouge)** and their Paris delegation is at 12 rue Chardin 75016 *Tel:* 01 44 14 68 88 *Fax:* 01 44 14 68 86. The Croix Rouge *website* is www.croix-rouge.fr.

French organisations for disabled people

Rather like the situation in Britain there are numerous organisations set up to meet the needs of disabled people and to work for changes in attitude. Organisations cover different disabilities and encompass umbrella set-ups as well as those with particular objectives such as providing holidays, improving access, talking to government departments, coordinating information, action and research.

In trying to find out what people are doing, we found that these seems to be a significant language barrier. As a very broad generality, France has only quite recently become sensitised to the needs of disabled people, so the process of promoting inclusive design hasn't gone very far as yet. In addition, we found that a number of organisations were understandably more concerned about the needs of local disabled people, and not very much (in practical terms) in the needs and interests of visitors.

In the Rough Guide the author refers to a website *www.coliac.cnt.fr* as the site for the *Comité de liaison pour l'accessibilité*. This promotes the rights of disabled people in France, and has a useful list of contacts for *Handicap Moteur* ie chair users and those who cannot walk far.

One major organisation with whom we had good relations back in the early 1990s the **Comité National Français de Liaison pour la Réadaptation des Handicapés (CNFLRH)** was closed down some years ago due to a lack of funding.

The main groups we came across this time are:

- the **Association des Paralysés de France (APF)**, 17 blvd Auguste Blanqui, 75013 *Tel:* 01 40 78 69 00 *Fax:* 01 45 89 40 57 *website:* www.apf.asso.fr;
- and their Paris Delegation, **APF Ile-de-France**, 13 place Rungis, 75013 *Tel:* 01 53 80 92 97 *Fax:* 01 53 80 92 98;
- **Mobile en Ville (MeV)**, 1 rue de l'Internationale, BP 59, 91002 Evry *Tel:* 06 82 91 72 16 *website:* www.mobile-en-ville.asso.fr *e-mail:* mev@mobile-en-ville.asso.fr

MeV are an interesting alliance between ALL wheel users, so they include roller-skaters, and child buggy users as well as wheelchair users. They have made an impressive map of Paris where all the kerb heights at the ends of pavements have been measured, and pavements are colour-coded for 'accessibility'. MeV were helpful to us during our survey.

Fédération Handisport

Tel: 01 40 31 45 00 *website:* www.handisport.org

The French disabled sports federation is the central body for those with an interest in sport. It is developing the market for non-competitive sports such as hiking, by launching partnerships with other, more traditional sporting federations in addition to the more familiar competitive sports activities. In Paris they make extensive use of the facilities attached to the Résidence Internationale de Paris.

Information services and organisations

If you make your bookings through your local travel agent remember that they will have a lot of trouble getting accurate and reliable information about any access problems you may encounter either en route or at your hotel. It is precisely because of this that these Access Guides are necessary. If certain things are important to you (eg avoiding steps, using a wheelchair, having a large bathroom) then make sure you check with the airline, port or hotel owner yourself to ensure that the facilities are what you need.

The main sources of information about France are the French Government Tourist Office (FGTO), your local travel agent and the standard guidebooks. In addition, in the UK, *Tourism for all* offer advice to disabled travellers.

The French Government Tourist Office (FGTO)

178 Piccadilly, London W1J 9AL

Tel: 09068 244 123 (60p per minute at all times) *Fax:* 020 7493- 6594

website: www.franceguide.com/uk *e-mail:* info.uk@franceguide.com

The amount of information about access is very limited as it is only

relatively recently that the tourism authorities have been sensitised to the need for the provision of such information. The labelling of facilities is at an early stage - which means that most places, even accessible ones, do not yet have a label. Also, as discussed elsewhere, the labelling system used (Tourisme et Handicap) does not include proper descriptions of any barriers. The website does, however, include a great deal of useful general information for the intending visitor.

In central Paris there were tourist information kiosks (in 2006) as follows:

Carousel du Louvre, place de la Pyramide Inversée, 99 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Under the pyramid at the Louvre.

Opéra - Grands Magazins, 11 rue Scribe, 75009

Tour Eiffel between the East and North pillars.

Pyramides, 25 rue des Pyramides, 75001 very near the metro station.

Montmartre, 21 place du Tertre, 75018

Anvers, facing 72 blvd Rochechourt, 75018

Gare du Nord, 18 rue de Dunkerque, 75010 under the glass station roof, it is part of the Ile-de-France Accueil kiosk.

Gare de Lyon, 20 blvd Diderot, 75012

Clémenceau, ave des Champs-Élysées, on the corner with ave Marigny. Only open in the summer.

Paris Expo/Porte de Versailles, 1 pl de la Porte de Versailles, 75015. Open during trade fairs.

These kiosks are good at providing standard tourist information like which times things are open, but their specialist knowledge for disabled visitors is limited, and generally they will only be able refer to the *Tourisme et Handicap* labels.

The official website of the Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau is now www.parisinfo.com.

There is also the **tourist office for the Ile-de-Paris** covering the areas around, and, generally, outside the blvd Périphérique. See www.pidf.com The **Office de Tourisme de Paris**, no longer has its main office at 127 Champs Elysées.

Access information on the web

Most information about accessibility which is provided on websites is limited and imprecise. Hotels may go so far as to say that they have ‘adapted rooms for those with reduced mobility’ but give no real

information about what provisions they have. Many other sites will simply say ‘accessible’ to wheelchair users, without defining what they mean. What this probably implies is that there is step free access to a part of the site. When the place is described as being ‘inaccessible’, little or no attempt is made to describe the barriers, so that a visitor cannot make an informed choice about whether a visit is practicable.

This situation is likely to vary with time, as more and more information is posted on to websites - and what we would like to do here is to highlight some examples.

The **Monum** website www.monum.fr for example is the site for the Centre des Monuments Nationaux. On the Home page is a link to information titled AccPs visiteurs handicapés. This leads to the four ‘Tourisme et Handicap’ symbols, and if you follow the link with the wheelchair symbol for Visiteurs B mobilité réduite you reach a list of seven sites (in 2006). Three of the sites are in Paris, and the remarkable thing about the information here (in French) is that it includes a detailed **description** of the access, much as you find it in the PHSP guide.

The description allows the visitor to make the informed choice that we regard as being essential.

Monum publish a guide entitled *Activitiés pour les publics handicapés dans les monuments nationeaux d’Ile-de-France*. This can be downloaded from their website, and includes more sites than the three mentioned above. The information has obviously been put together quite carefully, but does NOT always include a description of the barriers when declaring a site to be inaccessible.

It apparently describes Nôtre Dame as being ‘inaccessible to handicap moteur’. This is due to the fact that it is ONLY describing the Tower, which comes under one jurisdiction while the church itself comes under another! As the information (about the tower/tour) was in French we misinterpreted it, but reckon that it was a mistake that others might make as well.

In the write-up about the Sainte-Chapelle, it says that if you contact the ‘Service de la visite’ there is lift access using a lift in the Palais de Justice. What it does not say is that this is difficult to arrange (particularly if you just turn up on the day), and that the lift is quite often out of action. It’s difficult we know, to get the right balance in presenting this kind of information - but the Monum data has NOT (we suspect) been gathered



by disabled surveyors/visitors, but has been provided by those responsible for the buildings themselves.

The English version of these listings can, however, be misleading, as the translations are incomplete, and 'good access' is implied by the use of the wheelchair symbol when all that is intended is that it should be the heading for some subsequent descriptive text which has not yet been translated. It does NOT mean that this site is accessible.

The **Handihomes** site www.handihomes.com sets high standards in its description of accommodation with photos and precise data. **ALL hotels and apartments could usefully follow their example when describing their 'accessible' rooms.** Quite extraordinarily (in our view) the Handihomes accommodation has not been awarded the 'Tourisme et Handicap' label, because of extremely minor ways in which it does not meet all of the required standards.

www.jaccede.com

A site which is innovative in its use of descriptive symbols relating to 'access' is www.jaccede.com **Le portail des personnes à mobilité réduite.** We have used some of the data we found there in researching our *Good loo guide*. Like similar sites in the UK it tries to cover too much ground - in this case, the whole of France. It therefore finishes up being simply a directory in which it is not entirely clear who has supplied or validated the information and does not have an editor with local knowledge. Some of the entries are descriptive - others aren't. The mix under 'accessible toilets' which is where we searched, turned out to be a very broad mixture, including, apparently, quite a number of places without accessible toilets.

From the site Home page, you currently have to go via *Visiter l'ancien site*, and then you can search a number of different pages.

The contact details for the organisation responsible are:

Association Créactif, 10 passage Turquetil, 75011

Tel: 08 70 76 75 36 e-mail: info@jaccede.com

UK information centres include:

Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)

380 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU

Tel: 020 7289-6111 Textphone: 020 7432-8009 Fax: 020 7266-2922

website: www.dlf.org.uk e-mail: info@dlf.org.uk

The DLF works to help disabled people in aspects of ordinary life which present difficulty. It has a large showroom and has a comprehensive information service on specialised equipment of all kinds. Advice is given on visual impairment, incontinence, music, sport, clothing and skin care. A publication list is available on application. An appointment is necessary as you usually get shown round by an expert *Tel:* 0845 130 9177. Their showroom is completely accessible and has a **wheelchair toilet**. Parking possible if you book. The display includes a special kitchen for visually impaired people. Their website is useful, and they have an excellent list of factsheets.

Tourism for all

c/o Vitalise, Shap Road Industrial Estate, Shap Road, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 6HZ

Tel: 0845 124 9971 *Fax:* 01539735567

website: www.tourismforall.org.uk *e-mail:* info@tourismforall.org.uk

Tourism for all is the UK's central source of travel and holiday information for disabled or disadvantaged people, and used to be called Holiday Care.

Insurance

People rarely go abroad without some sort of insurance, largely because of a greater awareness of the costs involved if something unexpected happens. While you hear quite a lot about legionnaire's disease, insolvent airline companies, the work of pickpockets and general rip-off merchants, and these days, the threat of terrorism, the risk to the individual traveller is very small indeed. **What IS important is to have good insurance cover for something that just might happen, and which would cost a lot of money if something went badly wrong.** This would include, for example, the result of injury in a traffic accident, where you need immediate treatment and possible repatriation by air ambulance to your home country.

It has become a complicated subject. At one time, you could probably get insurance provided you had a doctor's letter saying that you were 'fit to travel'. Now, there are many different agencies/companies offering to assess the degree of risk for the insurance companies and they will all come out with slightly (or possible very) different answers, so,

regrettably, you have to shop around. Hopefully you will find some good leads here, but bear in mind that this is a snapshot of the situation in 2006 (when we did our research). Over the years, things may move on, though changes aren't always for the better!

Insurance is offered as part and parcel of most travel arrangements made by agents. It is also readily available on the internet, but **for the disabled traveller there are special requirements** and if you don't do it properly, you can finish up without cover when you thought you had it. In the *Which* report mentioned below, the advice was quite strongly NOT to rely on policies available through travel agents, as they are unlikely to have the necessary specialist knowledge.

Much depends on whether your condition is basically stable. Many policies will have a clause excluding claims with a pre-existing medical condition or disability unless you have made a detailed declaration about your condition. *It is necessary to look at the small print on any policy and to make the insurer aware of your medical history.* Some policies have an age loading, and can double in price for people aged over 65 (or even 60 in some cases).

There is advice in the UK on the **www.direct.gov.uk** site under Disabled People, Travel & Holidays, Planning a trip, Travel Insurance. This highlights your rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). It also emphasises the need to describe your medical condition to your insurer. There is also advice on **www.youreable.com** under life, money, when you travel abroad, travel insurance

When this guide was first published in 1974, the insurance world, with one or two notable exceptions, proved to be very uncooperative in providing cover for disabled travellers as they were generally considered to be a bad risk! It was not realised that very few people would want to travel abroad if they were likely to be ill. Thankfully since then much has changed and there are some policies which provide good cover for the disabled traveller.

What you generally have to do is to answer a medical questionnaire.

If your condition is stable, and you rarely need to visit your doctor, then you can say so, and issuing your policy should be straightforward. Where you can run into questioning and discussion, is, particularly if you are being treated as an outpatient OR if some test results are pending. Since, in the UK, you may be waiting for a hospital appointment for several

months (for a non-urgent condition), this can cause a problem when getting insurance. One of the authors is taking warfarin on a long-term basis and is checked in hospital about once a month. He was asked by his doctor to have a blood test related to another possible condition. When getting a quote for travel insurance he was told that there was no problem with the warfarin but that anything to do with the outcome of the blood test would carry an ‘excess’ of £500.

The standard format for asking medical questions goes something like this:

- please describe/declare your medical condition/s (with dates relating to their onset where appropriate);
- do you have any other medical conditions?
- have any of your medications for this/these condition/s changed during the past 12 months?
- have you had any (other) surgery during the past 5 years?
- have you had any other in-patient treatment in the past 5 years?
- have you seen a specialist in the past 2 years (if so, how frequently)?
- can you walk 100 metres and climb two average flights of stairs without difficulty? (and if you’re a paraplegic chair user, your answer to that will be “NO !!! but I’d like to”);
- has your/any doctor advised against travel?
- are you awaiting any investigations or treatment?
- are you awaiting any test results?

Different companies will use slightly different questions, but the objective is much the same and it is important that you provide the information asked for. Where you will bump into a difficulty with most policies is if you are travelling in order to get medical treatment.

Some people will find that they cannot get adequate cover - or any cover at all - especially if they have been diagnosed with an unstable and/or terminal condition. They may still decide to travel, and to take the risk - taking out a policy which will cover them against many risks, but not necessarily against the consequences of a deterioration in their health associated with their existing condition. For UK residents and for others coming from European Union countries carrying an EHIC card (mentioned earlier) is essential.

A basic problem with insurance is that you don't know how good your policy is until you need to make a claim. Remember that for loss and theft claims, you nearly always need to report the theft to the local police (within 24 hours) and to get a piece of paper to prove it. Similarly with health/medical claims, they need to be thoroughly documented - and you need to consult the insurer's 24-hour telephone Helpline to ensure that you are proceeding within their guidelines. This is a little difficult if you (for example) happen to be unconscious after an accident - but the earliest possible contact with your insurers Helpline is ESSENTIAL. They may specify which kind of hospital you can be treated in and certainly which method of transport you can use for repatriation. You need to keep copies of all receipts for money spent, and a detailed note of what happens and when it happens.

We asked around in 2006, and the following information is based on these enquiries. What we did is to ask the disabled members of the group what their experience was. We also used the Travel questions pages on the Youreable website www.youreable.com where disabled people share information about their experiences.

A company that was recommended by several people, including someone who had had a kidney transplant, was:

Preferential Direct

PO Box 5317, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS1 1WY

Tel: 0870 428 4399 *website:* www.preferential.co.uk

Another company was recommended by two members of our group, both of whom are disabled. The procedure for getting insurance was relatively straightforward, and the company were quick to pay up when one of them needed to make a claim. The company is:

Direct Travel Insurance

Tel: 0845-605-2700 *Fax:* 0845-605-2710

website: www.direct-travel.co.uk which includes clear information and the statement that "although our standard policies do not cover pre-existing medical conditions, we are able to cover the vast majority of people with a pre-existing condition without any additional premium loading".

Other companies include:

Chartwell Insurance (Disabled Drivers' Insurance Bureau) Chartwell House, 292 Hale Lane, Edgware HA8 8NP.

Tel: 0800 652-4652 (freephone) *website:* www.chartwellinsurance.co.uk

Chartwell say that those with possible health problems can ring the 'Health Check' line, and get immediate clarification.

Direct Line

Tel: 0845 246 8704 *website:* www.uk.directline.com

a number of people speak highly of their policies.

J & M Insurance Services, 14 Guldford Street, London WC1N 1DX

Tel: 020 7446-7626 *website:* www.jmi.co.uk *e-mail:* sales@jmi.co.uk

Club Direct

Tel: 0870 8902 842 *website:* www.clubdirect.com

Access Travel Insurance ATI

Tel: 01942 888844 *website:* www.access-travel.co.uk

e-mail: info@access-travel.co.uk

ATI is associated with a tour company specialising in organising foreign holidays for disabled people. They have a good explanation of the basis of travel insurance on their Insurance page.

24Dr Travel Insurance, Great Strudgates Farm, Balcombe, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 6RB offers policies up to age 74.

Tel: 0870 740 9260 *website:* www.24drtravel.com

Their website has a good section relating to pre-existing medical conditions. It also has an excellent on-line 'fit to travel' self assessment form - which told me that in spite of various problems and needing regular medication, I was OK to travel. Very reassuring !

All Clear offers tailored medical travel insurance with no age limit.

Tel: 0870 777 9339 *website:* www.alcleartravel.co.uk

En Route Insurance offers travel insurance, and says on their website "most pre-existing medical conditions - no problem".

Tel: 0800 783 7245 *website:* www.enrouteinsurance.co.uk

There is also **Diabetes Insurance UK** will be of particular interest to some, and the advice on their website is very good and straightforward.

Tel: 0800 731-7431 (freephone) *website:* www.diabetes.org.uk

e-mail: diabetes@healthlambert.com.

Free Spirit Travel Insurance can cover most pre-existing medical conditions. *Tel:* 0845 260 1572 *Fax:* 023 9241 9049

website: www.charityfreespirit.co.uk

The Which review 2006

There's an excellent overall review and assessment of travel insurance in the July 2006 issue of Which, published for members by the Consumer Association. In their investigation they specifically looked for whether a policy was 'Good for those with pre-existing medical conditions'. Only a very small number of companies emerged with a tick in that box.

For a single trip policy for Europe, the only ones with a tick were for those aged 70+, from:

- the Travel Insurance Agency (Superior);
- Simple; and,
- Bradford and Bingley.

For annual policies for Europe, the ones with a tick were again mainly for those aged 70+, from:

- CIS Home Options;
- the AA;
- Halfords;

and for families, Simple.

The insurance company Simple crops up in several categories, and seems to be well worth a close look. Their details are:

Simple

Tel: 0844 412-3113 *website:* www.simpletravelinsurance.co.uk.

On their website they say that there are potential exclusions relating to pre-existing medical conditions and they use the Travellers Protection Services screening service to find out if cover can be provided.

One up-to-date source of advice in the UK about travel insurance would be Tourism for all www.tourismforall.co.uk

Remember that when getting adequate cover, you almost certainly need to talk to someone to sort out their procedure over checking your health, as the companies all seem to use agencies for medical screening - and different ones may come up with somewhat different answers. ALSO you need to check that the company provides 24-hour cover on an emergency line to be able to advise you as to what to do in the (unlikely) event of there being an emergency.

Wherever you live, you will have to find appropriate contacts and information in your own country, although the principles involved are likely to be much the same.

In Canada there is the **CIBC Emergency Travel Medical Insurance** Tel: 1-800 281-9109. There is a comprehensive description of the policy and its conditions on www.cibc.com on the appropriate page.

For travellers from the USA the following contacts may be useful:

- Mobility International USA www.miusa.org;
- Moss Rehab Resource Net www.mossresourcenet.org;
- The Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality www.sath.org.

Maps and guides available

Guidebooks

There's a wide range of good conventional guidebooks to Paris, and your choice may depend on the 'style' you like. **Our book is written on the assumption that it will be used in conjunction with one or more conventional guides**, as our main purpose is to discuss accessibility, and not history or architecture. We do not, generally, attempt to tell people when the various facilities are open, nor what it costs to get in, as this information is readily available elsewhere - in conventional guidebooks, from the Tourist Office, and directly from websites.

Different books have particular strengths and advantages, and personal preference will play its part in your choice. For an independent review, have a look at Yahoo News Reviewing the Paris guidebooks.

The new **AA Key Guide** has one of the best information pages for disabled visitors, and actually mentions Access Project, giving correct contact details! In addition it has good area guides, and suggested walks, and includes information on opening times and prices which we do not attempt to cover.

The **Eyewitness Travel Guide** includes very limited information for disabled visitors. It does, however, include five guided walks. It has a good section on getting around Paris, and incorporates a map of the central areas. It is very well illustrated and has good area guides.

The **Fodor** and **Frommer's** guides cater well for visitors from America.

The **Green Guide**, published by Michelin, has some ‘wheelchair’ symbols scattered around in the chapter on Admission times and charges, with little indication of exactly what they mean. It includes an excellent write-up on the Louvre, with detailed plans of every floor. The maps and plans are generally very useful.

The **Lonely Planet Guide** is good value.

The **Rough Guide** is, as always, very practical, and splits the city up into a number of areas, which is helpful for those with limited mobility. There are good insights into many aspects of the history of Paris, and lively sections on eating, drinking and nightlife.

The **Time Out** guide is updated annually, with opening times and prices. It also tries to include information about wheelchair access, although, suggests that this should be checked. When people understand the various issues relating to access better, it may be possible to incorporate this with confidence into the conventional books, but our experience with the Time Out guide both to Paris and to Paris restaurants was that it was so inaccurate and inadequate that it was worse than useless.

Maps

There are a number of excellent maps available including several which are ring-bound and easier to handle. You need to consider having both a fold-out map covering the whole city, and a smaller book-like one which has its maps on an arrondissement by arrondissement basis.

The book is fine for detail, but if you’re not familiar with the city you’ll find that everything you want to find out about is on the edge of a page. You can buy either or both for about £5 to £10 (or 8-16US\$), so it’s not expensive. If you’re going to use the map a lot, and carry it around, the ones that are laminated have advantages as they last a lot longer, but are considerably more expensive.

The smaller versions, generally with maps on an arrondissement by arrondissement basis include:

- the **Michelin Paris atlas no 57** by arrondissement;
- **Michelin Paris atlas no 56** (nord & sud) in conventional pocket atlas format;
- the **Blay-Foldex Paris** atlas by arrondissement, available both in paper in a laminated format;
- the **Michelin Paris** tourism map;
- **L’Indispensable Paris d’un plan B l’autre** who produce a pocket-size ring-bound version which is clear and easy to carry;

- the **Falk Paris** city map using their patented fold-out system which allows folding in either direction.

There are also some much larger street plans which include the suburban areas outside the boulevard Périphérique which you might need if you are staying for longer, and intend to move around more widely. The big ones are also quite heavy !

These are considerably more expensive and include:

- the **Blay-Foldex Paris & Banlieue** atlas;
- the **Blay-Foldex Grand Banlieue** atlas in A4 size in both paper and laminated versions. The big laminated version costs as much as £30, but we found it extremely useful when visiting and travelling around.

Ideally you will be able to choose your own map in a local bookshop, but if that's difficult then you can order from Stanford's in the UK www.stanfords.co.uk who have the biggest map/guide shop in London or from www.omnimap.com in the USA. If you do a web search you'll be bound to come up with other possibilities.

If you're driving, you'll definitely need the excellent guide *Parkings de Paris* - and there are details about it and how to get it in the chapter on *Getting around*.

Medical advice

There should be no special problems when travelling anywhere in Western Europe. No jabs or inoculations are either required or advised for nearby continental countries. If you have any doubts check with your doctor as to whether there are any particular precautions you should take.

It is worth noting again that many health insurance policies have a clause which says you are covered '*providing you are not travelling against the advice of a doctor*'. This does mean that your doctor has to agree that travelling is a reasonable and sensible thing to do, and in some circumstances, it might be a good idea to get that in writing.

If you are taking important drugs or medicines, make sure that you know both the pharmacological name and dosage. It can be a good idea to split your supply, carrying some in your pocket or handbag and some in your luggage. This minimises the possibility of loss. It is

also no bad thing to take a doctor's note and a prescription with you with amounts and dosage clearly stated.

A **first-aid kit** is invaluable for dealing with travel sickness, stomach upsets, sore throat, cuts and bruises, headaches and stings. It is much better to take brands of drugs and medicines that you are used to, rather than having to experiment with the local ones.

Other sources of advice, apart from your GP or specialist are

Asthma UK

Summit House, 70 Wilson Street, London EC2A 2DB

Helpline: 08457-010203 *Tel:* 020 7786-4900 *Fax:* 020 7256-6075

website: www.asthma.org.uk *e-mail:* info@asthma.org.uk

provides a wealth of information about monitoring and controlling asthma, including advice about what to do when taking a holiday and/or travelling.

Diabetes UK

Macleod House, 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA

Tel: 020 7424-1000 *Fax:* 020 7424-1001

website: www.diabetes.org.uk *e-mail:* info@diabetes.org.uk

provide useful information for travellers, including advice about taking needles through customs and other practical advice - under the heading 'Travelling Abroad'.

Incontact

United House, North Road, London N7 9DP

Tel: 0870 770 3246 *Fax:* 0870 770 3249

website: www.incontact.org *e-mail:* info@incontact.org

can offer practical advice about travelling for those with incontinence problems. There is extensive information on their website, including a very comprehensive collection of links on all kinds of health and disability related subjects.

While we were writing the book, we heard that the **British Colostomy Association** which has been around since 1963, had been forced to close due to lack of funding. Some of its services, and in particular the

provision of help and advice have been taken over by a newly formed **Colostomy Association** with services supplied by volunteers.

Its contact details are:

PO Box 8017, Reading RG6 9DE

Helpline: 0800 587-6744 *website:* www.colostomyassociation.org.uk

e-mail: cass@colostomyassociation.org.uk

A commercial company which supplies equipment is:

Coloplast, Peterborough Business Park, Peterborough PE2 6FX,

Tel: 01733-39200 *website:* www.coloplast.co.uk

who also offer advice for those who have a colostomy, ileostomy or urostomy.

A general website providing medical advice of all kinds is www.netdoctor.co.uk and this includes advice about travelling.

Medicalert/SOS Talisman

These two similar services which are of special importance to those who have epilepsy, haemophilia, diabetes or allergies, and to those who need regular dosage of a particular drug.

Medicalert provides a central point where updated information about your medical is available 24 hours a day, but which makes an annual charge for membership.

SOS Talisman provides something for you to wear, which contains your vital medical information on a strip which you update yourself. This involves only a one-off payment.

The Medic Alert Foundation

12 Bridge Wharf, 156 Caledonian Road, London N1 9UU

Tel: 020 7833-3034 *Fax:* 020 7278-0647

website: www.medicalert.org.uk *e-mail:* info@medicalert.org.uk

Medicalert provides a useful service for those with medical problems that could be compounded by treatment after an accident. Membership currently costs about £20/year, but as the foundation is a registered charity it can provide free membership to individuals who have a limited income. Members wear a metal emblem engraved with the telephone number of the Emergency Service and a note of the immediate medical problems of the wearer. Additional medical information is filed at the Emergency Headquarters, where the telephone is staffed 24 hours a day.

SOS Talisman Co

PO Box 985, Newton Mearns, Glasgow G77 6UY UK

Tel: 0141 639 7090 Fax: 0141 577 7290

website: www.sostalisman.com e-mail: consultant@sostalisman.com

Talisman operate a service which works on the basis of including information in a small locket which is worn permanently. A bracelet, pendant or watch-type capsule, is provided which contains your vital medical information on a strip that you can update yourself.

Museums and monuments pass

If you are likely to visit several of the main and more expensive museums, houses and collections, you can buy a two-, four- or six-day pass. In 2006 it was around €40 for two days, €55 for four, and just over €70 for six days. The pass has advantages, more perhaps for disabled walkers, since chair users and their companions may find concessionary discounts and even free entry, at quite a number of places.

Principally it will help you to avoid the inevitable queues at some big venues. However, be careful; many of the places included in the pass will have access problems, so make sure that you will be visiting enough 'accessible' places to make it worth while. *One advantage of having a pass is that it gives you access to quite a number of wheelchair toilets around Paris* and, even though it is quite time consuming to have to go through some museum or monument just to go to the toilet, it could be useful, given the general shortage.

The passes can be bought at museums, tourist offices and métro stations, and from the internet from: www.museums-of-paris.com/museum-pass.php where there is a list of the museums which are included.

Pedestrians

Apart from keeping a sharp look-out the only things we feel we should mention are that **zebra crossings don't give you priority as they do in Britain** and that at light controlled crossings you are expected to obey the lights. Also watch out for French drivers filtering, ie turning at right angles to the lights, which they may do even though the lights are red for going straight ahead. In principle, pedestrians have priority in this

situation, but our advice (to a visitor) would be “Don’t push your luck!”, though you can watch what the locals do, and follow their lead.

Postal services

Post offices are normally open on weekdays and on Saturday mornings. There’s a small but useful office, where most of the staff speak English, in the Carrousel du Louvre, the underground shopping complex attached to the Louvre Museum.

The **main post office** is at 52 rue du Louvre, 75001, by the junction with rue Etienne Marcel. *Tel:* 01 40 28 20 00. It has ramped access to the main entrance and most facilities are on the ground floor. Counter 5 is specially low to suit those who use chairs, and Counter 6 is used for *poste restante* collections. Remember that you will need identification to collect your mail, so take your passport with you. If it is addressed to two people you should both go to claim it.

This office is open 24/7 (24 hours a day and seven days a week), and apparently is the only post office in Europe to be open 24/7 and 365 days a year.

Another post office which is open for quite long hours is at 71 ave des Champs-Élysées, between rue Lincoln and Pierre Charron. There’s a small lip [3cm] at the entrance, and all the counters are quite low. Open Mon-Fri 09.00-19.30; Sat 10.00-19.30.

Price concessions

Several places will offer price reductions and sometimes free entry, for wheelchair users and/or a pusher. This applies mainly to entrance fees of one kind or another. Reductions are not often available for other disabled people except, sometimes, people who are blind or partially sighted.

In France, there is a system where disabled people normally carry an Orange Card which ‘certifies’ their degree of disability. This makes it easier for people to claim (and validate their claim) to various concessions. For the visitor from the UK, the USA or from a number of other countries, there is no similar system. The fact that you have used

a wheelchair since childhood and have never been able to walk doesn't necessarily 'count'. Many UK visitors can produce their Blue Badge (for parking concessions) as evidence of disability - and you may need to carry a copy of this if the real thing is on your dashboard! The problem with all this is that it makes the whole business highly capricious for the visitor, and it depends as much on who is in the ticket office or on the door as it does on official policy. All we would recommend is that if you can, you take with you some kind of 'proof of disability' - possibly a letter about Attendance Allowance, if applicable, or some other state provision - as this may ease your path, and slightly reduce the cost of getting around.

Because of the uncertainties, **we have made virtually no reference to concessions** because the information might be misleading on the day.

The fare concession to disabled drivers offered by most of the ferry operators for cross-channel journeys to and from the UK is worth mentioning. The concession involves the vehicle travelling free of charge or at a discount. Each operator has different conditions attached to this concession, possibly depending on whether the disabled person is driving or is a passenger etc.

Most of the companies give the reduction to Disabled Drivers Association and Disabled Drivers Motor Club members, details below:

Disabled Drivers Association

Ashwellthorpe, Norwich NR16 1EX

Tel: (0870) 7703333 *Fax:* 01508-488173

website: www.dda.org.uk *e-mail:* hq@dda.org.uk;

Disabled Drivers Motor Club

Cottingham Way, Thrapston, Northamptonshire NN14 4PL,

Tel: (01832) 734724 *Fax:* (01832) 733816

website: www.ddmc.org.uk

The operators rely on the clubs validating the application. Details are available from each operator but the procedure can be somewhat long-winded and bureaucratic so make sure you apply well in advance, especially during peak periods when a month's notice is requested.

Telephones

The mobile phone has revolutionised phone use when travelling.

Take care over the cost of calls, since, depending on your tariff or rental agreement, they may cost a considerable amount in a foreign country. You may well have to pay to receive calls. With a UK pay-as-you-go contract, it can cost 50p/minute to receive a call from the UK, which is a strong incentive to keep conversations short! Texting is generally much cheaper.

Your mobile phone will automatically link-in to a new network in Paris, but to make calls back to the UK you may have to add 0044 (often shown as +44) to the number you are calling, and this replaces the initial 0 in the local number.

For using conventional phones, there are some low level telephones suitable for chair users, including some street call boxes and with no door. Background noise can then be a problem. There are telephones in post offices, hotels, railway stations and in cafés. Many, if not most, use a pre-paid phone card which you can get from post offices, many tabacs (kiosks selling cigarettes), and newsagents. As in the UK, the provision of landline phones will probably decline over the years as people rely more and more on mobiles.

To ring France from abroad dial 0033, then area code leaving out the 0. For Paris, this means simply dialling 1, followed by eight digits (after the 0033). France is divided into five areas with the codes 01 (Paris); 02 (northwest); 03 (northeast); 04 (southeast) and 05 (southwest).

To ring the UK from France dial 00, wait for a continuous tone, then dial 44 followed by the STD code and number but leaving off the first 0. For example, for central London the 00 and 44 replace the 0 in the 020 code before the number, ie 004420 followed by the eight digit London number.

Tour companies

During our researches we came across an interesting company called Accessible Europe who offer tours, visits and even cruises to a wide range

of European destinations, including a city break in Paris. Their objective is to provide tourism for all. Accessible Europe is a pool of European travel agents who have expertise in providing services for a range of people with special needs including chair users and slow walkers. We also found *Access Tourisme Service* and *Paris on Wheels*, details of which are given below. Over the years, new companies will come along providing 'accessible' tours, so it may be worth doing a new internet search when you are looking for a suitable provider.

The lead travel agency for Accessible Europe is:

Promotour Viaggi

Piazza Pitagora 9, 10137 Turin, Italy

Tel: +39 (0)113018888

website: www.accessibleurope.com *e-mail:* info@accessibleurope.com.

When we e-mailed, we got a speedy and helpful reply, although we should say that we have not ourselves been on one of their tours. They sound as though they are well organised and thoroughly positive.

In Paris they were offering 3-4 day visits for 4 people including accessible transfers for around €500-600/person, although the exact cost would depend on what you want to do, and where you want to go. There was a supplement of €65 each for the accessible transfer to Disneyland. Other packages would be possible, subject to negotiation. They also offer the hire of an accessible van which has a lift and space for up to two wheelchairs and could be picked-up and dropped-off at any of the Paris airports. The cost is around €1250/week, though rates will obviously vary, and the prices quoted here were those in 2005.

There is also the:

Access Tourisme Service

8 rue Saint-Loup, 45130 Charsonville, France

Tel: +33 (0)2 38 74 28 40 *Fax:* +33 (0)2 38 74 28 50

website: www.access-tourisme.com *e-mail:* access.tourisme.service@wanadoo.fr.

ATS offer 'accessible' and inclusive holidays to a number of places in France, including Paris. On their website they appear to be able to offer the hire of medical equipment, vehicle rental and even of a travelling companion/escort if needed.

and

Paris on Wheels

US Office, 238 Ocean Avenue, Middletown, New Jersey 07748, USA

Tel: USA (732) 787-4763 *website:* www.parisonwheels.com

e-mail: powparis@yahoo.com or parisonwheels@hotmail.com

This company offers travel consultation, guided vacations with a personal attendant, accessible transport and pushing/walking tours of Paris - at certain times of the year. It was founded by Derek Guzman who worked for many years as an aide to chair users in Seattle in the northwest USA.