

Here I will be writing about my personal experience of Cologne, maybe to some even more interesting because it will be from the perspective of person in wheelchair. Hopefully, it will be interesting to readers, but also useful, as it is its primary aim- to be helpful to another people who will find them self in same situation as myself, and who can learn from my experience.

I arrived in Cologne, Germany in beginning of October 2016. Weather was grey and rainy, like will be following 4 months, but with some nice surprises with very clear blue sky, and lot of winter sun, here and there. I situated in WG ("Wohngemeinschaft") or shared flat which was „half“ wheelchair accessible, with not all elements, like adjusted toilet or special seat for having shower, or kitchen with wheelchair easy access into furniture, but for me it was perfect, because I immediately noticed I can be independent there, with improvised elements that my housekeeper brought, Ikea chair for having shower, or wooden desks for lifting up the bed to be appropriately high.

In first days, we noticed that Aldi and Rewe are the best shops for doing shopping, and they are basically at every corner of the city. Aldi has very low prices, but has no big choice, usually only one or two brands for every product, and Rewe has more quality products, big variety of them, there you can find everything, also it has lot of Bio things, fruit is usually very fresh, but prices are, expectably, slightly higher.

Very soon, we also discovered how public transport functions. Comparing to Croatia, I was really delighted with trams without stairs, and fact that times of arrival are very predictable, and very frequent indeed. So, their public transport is based on trams which behave partly like metro, going underground, and partly go along streets. To cover most of points in the city, they have also buses, for these parts which tram network doesn't cover, and always in tram, for every station, you can hear which another tram or bus you can take there. That is, in my opinion very useful. All buses are, like it is expected, accessible, because they have ramp which driver is supposed to put and give you push upwards. For trams which go underground ("U-Bahn"), mostly there are elevators (but you can easily check on which stations there are no elevators on internet „Touren ohne Treppen“). It is usually reliable to use trams and information about accessible stations, but unfortunately very often happens bad surprise - that elevators are out of order. Than you have to choose, to continue on another station and come back with another side – with elevator that works, or ask people to help you with stairs. Either you can choose to go by foot/wheels. ☺

Great thing about transport is that students have semester card which includes transport in entire Cologne but also direction Cologne-Bonn, and also if you pay semester fee you get free transport in all NRW region, which is much more efficient especially if you want to visit other places, bigger cities, around, such as Dusseldorf, Dortmund, Duisburg or Aachen, which I have done.

But first week I had bad experience as I forgot my semester card, and control came, wrote my data, and gave me deadline of one week to come to Neumarkt station and show there that i have student semester card, in which case i had to pay only 6 euros. Otherwise, you pay punishment 60 euros. So, take your card always with you! :D

Another very important thing that I faced with during first weeks – what to do when your tear is broken or if you have another movement helping device? They have really everything regarding to medical devices, but anyway they were only Sanitarius haus that I have managed to find who can repair my broken wheel. It is *Stortz Köln GmbH* in Fleischmengergasse near Neumarkt.

I used swimming pool Agrippabad near Neumarkt and Poststraße, which was really good, maybe not so accessible regarding to entering in it, (they don't have special lift to enter in swimming pool) but they also have very good and professional people who are always available to give you help to move inside or outside of pool. Toilet and access are appropriate.

If you are European citizen, health insurance system in Germany is really very good. Everything is free, visits to doctor, dentists, physiotherapy, and even massage if necessary, doctor just has to give you recipe/prescription. So I used really good physiotherapy clinic NIB, and combined it with Physiosport, where I sometimes had massage.

Now, for the end, I will give some tips about places to going out, so places I can recommend and place where I used to spend free time. In my opinion, Cologne is really great, open minded, and with wide range of choices when it is about choosing place for going out. It has all around the city different places, from traditional German pubs where you can feel spirit of old brewery, their way of drinking their typical German beer (from small 2 dl glasses, which are being filled up right away when they become empty), Brauhaus Sion, Gaffel by cathedral, Peters Brauhaus, Brauhaus Sunner, all with typical proud Kölsch atmosphere, but also in some traditional German pubs you can here and there hear live music, with easy or hard rock bands like Papa Joe's Biersalon. Further, if you like Irish pub, in the center, on square just next to the cathedral, when you go little bit down towards the river, near Heumarkt, you can find many of them, like Barney Valley, the Corkonian. Also, in little charming streets near that square, in old Roman part of the town (Altstadt), there are lot of good and cozy bars, from which one of my preferred was Papa Joe, very popular jazz pub. If you prefer modern clubs with modern pop or techno music, you can find it everywhere around the city, but also there are so many alternative places – formed by left political party, which have so sympathetic way of doing things, drinks are much cheaper, you can smoke in club, enter is voluntary, if you are out of money, you don't have to give anything. On entrance you can take some food which they take in advance from bakery unused/unsold inventory, and you can give some contribution for it or you don't have to but on the other side, just think about fact how cool is to have „food” right into club where you party, after few drink you always start to starve :D Then, there is famous Zülpicher Platz/ Zülpicher Straße ,where you have all types of bars listed above and much more. For example, for me were especially interesting Soviet bar, and Soul Jazz bar there. Then, in Luxemburgerstraße, very good club for me was Luxor. Moreover, most of these places are wheelchair accessible, without stairs, except papa joe, and some of them which have only one stair to access.

Cinema where I went few times, was near Media Park, and I had positive experience about it, because access was very good with elevators, with toilets, but also entrance for me was free, so I can hardly recommend it! 😊