

# E2 Traveling with Catarina Rivera (Who In the World is Asking the Questions?)

[00:00:00]

**Christy Bloemendaal:** On this episode of the disability, tangent, we have an amazing discussion with Catarina Rivera. Catarina is a CPACC certified DEIA consultant, a content creator on her site blindish Latina, A TEDx speaker, and a LinkedIn top voice in disability advocacy. She has been featured in NASDAQ and authority magazine, and her past clients include Harper Collins Publishers, LinkedIn, whole 30 and color stack. Catarina uses all of these platforms to improve disability awareness, inclusion, and accessibility. And Blindish Latina proudly seeks to smash disability stigmas through storytelling and advocacy. She is doing so much.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Y'all. And we have so much to cover in this episode. So get ready. Here we go.

**Christy:**

Hello everyone. My name is Christy Bloemendaal [00:01:00]

**Rocco:** And my name is Rocco Catrone

And we are the Disability Tangent podcast.

**Christy:** Each episode we talk about current issues affecting communities, while supporting

people

with

disabilities

**Rocco:** Through research, community connections, and resource sharing. We hope to invite everybody to challenge their perceptions of people with disabilities and promote a more inclusive world.

**Christy:** defined by what the people actually want and not what others think they want.

**Rocco:** Come join us on this journey.

**Rocco Catrone:** This episode is sponsored by Emily Krejci, the creator of our fabulous cover art here at the Disability Tangent. You can find her amazing work on Redbubble. Go to [redbubble.com](https://www.redbubble.com/people/emilykrejci) and search for Emily Krejci Shop. That's E M I L Y. K R E J C I, or check out the link in the show notes below,

**Christy Bloemendaal:** We are really happy to be here

today with Catarina Rivera

who has started Blindish [00:02:00] Latina. And we are really excited to be talking about travel in particular, and then hopefully we get to some other topics as well.

**Catarina Rivera:**hi. I am Catarina Rivera. I'm a public speaker, DEIA, consultant and content creator. I travel full-time, so that is really important to me to show as part of my lifestyle. As a disabled entrepreneur, but also I do some travel brand partnerships and I really have an interest in making sure that travel is more inclusive and accessible for disabled people.

**Catarina Rivera:** So it's something I am passionate about.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** so travel. is a important part of your life, and how did that transition come about or how did you get started on that path?

**Catarina Rivera:** Well, I got interested in travel when I was in high school. My family took a trip to Spain and I met some distant relatives in the mountains of northern Spain for the [00:03:00] first time. This trip expanded my worldview and I loved it. It was so cool to experience another culture, the food, the dancing, and then I continued to travel in college, going to Cuba.

I'm meeting family members there, I should say CUBA in Spanish, as well as spending time in Argentina and South Korea. By the time I graduated college, I knew I wanted travel to be a big part of my life. From then on, I began to dream of living abroad. One day, six years ago, I co-founded a sustainable travel company that is no longer running, but while it was running, which focused on supporting locals through travel experiences, highlighting equity and social justice themes, it just started with a trip idea to create a trip focused on food sovereignty in Puerto Rico.

After Hurricane Maria, we built that trip and had eight travelers join us in June, 2019. And it was amazing. Uh, we were planning [00:04:00] to expand with partnerships in Honduras and Brazil, but when the pandemic hit, we couldn't move forward. But then in 2020, I started sharing my story as a disabled Latina woman on Instagram at Blindish Latina.

I'm blind with a very reduced visual field, and I'm hard of hearing and wear hearing aids and it took off, I ended up starting a business as a public speaker and DEIA consultant focused on disability awareness and inclusion. And I also ended up fulfilling my dream of moving abroad as my partner and I moved to Barbados and began a location independent lifestyle.

And now we're continuing to travel to different places. So as a creator, I share my experiences and advocate for the need for inclusive and accessible travel. I also share the message that disabled people do travel and that we want to travel. Oh, I've done partnerships with a few different [00:05:00] brands like last year with Delta Airlines, New York City's Tourism Board, and visit Westchester.

**Rocco Catrone:** Wow. That's very cool. I'm a little jealous. I'm not a little, I'm a lot jealous, actually. I am a lot jealous of this lifestyle. I, this might inspire me to get

out of this chair and move somewhere else. That would be fantastic. Yeah. So as you've been, traveling around, are there specific types of travel that you have found more accessible to you as a person with disabilities?

**Catarina Rivera:** Since I'm traveling all the time, I appreciate when I can engage in slow travel and not change locations as frequently. I prefer to stay in the same accommodations, especially if they're comfortable rather than switching. Often when I can learn and memorize my environment and I'm in the same place, I can reduce the amount of energy that I spend on [00:06:00] navigating and managing my daily life, which then gives me more energy for travel adventures.

I like doing Airbnb experiences or small group tours rather than large group tours. I also like the free walking tours or doing self-guided tours, and I find those to be more supportive for me. I don't typically join planned group trips myself because I find that they make me nervous and can be too rigid in how they're planned or can be draining as well, especially if they haven't planned with accessibility in mind.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Yeah, I really like that point about the energy and the expenditure of energy because, for me, as a person that has, chronic conditions where I only have, well, we talk about spoon theory sometimes, right? Where you only have so many spoons of energy to give. If I have to spend a lot of that energy trying to navigate a new environment

I don't [00:07:00] wanna spend the limited amount that I have on that getting used to the hotel room, right? Or figuring out where I have to go. So it makes a lot of sense to just park in one place and then navigate out from that space. So that's a really great tip. Yeah.

**Rocco Catrone:** when you were talking about the groups with, sometimes, their travel plans are a little rigid. what are some, rigid things that maybe you've run into or you try to avoid?

**Catarina Rivera:** When we're on someone else's schedule, even if it's an all day tour. So usually group trips will start their days very early, and that can be

challenging in terms of just, having time. And, it's not all about disability. I'm not a morning person, so I don't enjoy

having to start early in the morning.

**Rocco Catrone:** Fair.

**Catarina Rivera:** I'm not in a good mood the morning. The things that sometimes can happen as well is, when things are already [00:08:00] preselected, so a restaurant is selected and I might not know if there's going to be options for me on the menu. I don't eat meat, so that can be challenging. It can be challenging if a restaurant is really loud, noisy and I'm trying to interact with a group of people, but I can't hear very well.

the pace of it, the listening fatigue that I can get if they are using a microphone, for example, to communicate information, or I've had tours where a driver is sitting and driving and they're also the tour guide and they're sharing information, but they have to face the front because they're driving.

**Rocco Catrone:** So I've been able to sit in the front seat with them so I can read their lips, but if I wasn't seated in that position, I would not have had access to that information. So I think at the end of the day, if it's a multi-day group trip, and I kind [00:09:00] of know that I'm probably gonna have to spend extra energy and I'm going to feel listening fatigue, then a rigid group trip that is like pre-planned, it doesn't have flexibility or free time or choice points that you can participate in is not gonna be the most enjoyable option for me. Absolutely. And I think that makes sense too. and like you said before, it's not always about disability, it's the morning just doesn't work out. And I've seen those. I travel quite a bit as well, and I do also tend to stray away from some of those sometimes just for different reasons.

'cause it's, if I want to explore, if I need a break halfway through, I feel sometimes obligated to keep up and that, I'll do it, but then I overexert myself and then I end up having a bad time. I think that's a really good consideration, especially for, folks maybe leading these groups or international experiences, building in that time or,

just talking with people ahead of time that it doesn't have to be, at 8:15 AM we're gonna do this at 8:31, we're gonna hit this.

'cause that might not be the case for people in the [00:10:00] group.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Yeah, and you wanna enjoy it, what's the point of traveling if it's not going to be enjoyable travel Hey, I saw Rome and I hated it every minute of it. It was terrible. Like the buildings were cool, but I was miserable. like that doesn't sound like a lifestyle that I would want to choose.

If you're going to do it and

Put the effort into it, then obviously you want it to be an experience that is edifying for you, not something that makes you feel worse about yourself or your life or your situation, which I think can happen when you aren't having access.

**Rocco Catrone:** so along those lines, are there any particular airlines, hotels, or the, like that you found more accommodating and accessible than others? And, how do you even go about finding something like this?

**Catarina Rivera:** I care about customer service when it comes to airlines, and the best airline for me in that area has always been Delta Airlines. [00:11:00] As a deaf person, I really appreciate that I can use iMessage to text them and get my questions answered without having to call. If you are looking for whether an airline is going to be accessible for you or really any travel related company.

I encourage you to check the options available for contacting them on the Contact us page, on their website or the customer service page. Can you chat right away with them or text with the company? The more options you have, I think it show their commitment to customer service or lack thereof.

Another option for planning travel if you're looking for an accessible experience, is to work with a provider that specializes and planning accessible travel, or to join a group trip that focuses on accessibility. So I [00:12:00] co-hosted an accessible

group trip to Portugal last year with a company called Portugal for All Senses Wheel.

The World collaborates with curb free Cory Lee on group trips for wheelchair users. Iceland Unlimited is a company based in Iceland that has accessible experiences that they can plan for you Accessible Switzerland is another one of these companies that's located in Switzerland. There are actually a lot of companies available, and they'll have the local expertise to guide you.

Chain hotels are typically more accessible because they have global standards in place, but I typically stay in Airbnbs when I'm working because I'm working remotely and I'm traveling at the same time. So I like to have a space with a kitchen and just more space to live. But when I do stay in a hotel.

I actually try to prioritize locally owned [00:13:00] hotels because I do support sustainable travel and I want my money to benefit the local economy. So I think when you're making these choices, you have to see what's the most important thing for you for your values, and if it is a little bit inaccessible, like what you can tolerate.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Excellent.

Ya, I really like that.

I hadn't really given huge amount of thought to that. As far as travel goes, I give it a lot of thought in my daily living, like plastic usage, how do I wanna take care of the planet, but I also need convenience because of some of my disabling conditions.

So it makes a lot of sense too, to figure out, where your boundary lies as far as sustainability versus accessibility. What are your values? What can you live with, what can you not? And that's going to be different for each person based on what, their needs are, what accommodations they require.

So I like the idea of looking, how do you contact them? Can you [00:14:00] get in touch? how aware and available are they to you? 'cause, if you can get that access immediately. From, I open the webpage or I, get in touch immediately and someone is there to help me. That's probably gonna be continued throughout my experience.

that's an excellent point. One thing that disabled people often experience is what we call hidden costs. And that's the increased expense that you might pay as a disabled person for the same services or goods.

Are there things that you

have

encountered and things that you see people with disabilities having to shoulder in order to travel that our listeners might not have considered? And how can you prepare or react to that?

**Catarina Rivera:** As we know, these hidden costs are not monetary costs necessarily. They can [00:15:00] be mental, physical, or emotional. So disabled people typically have to spend extra time trying to figure out if an experience or a place is accessible for them, and that can be tiring to do. There's also extra money that we do have to spend, so I have to spend extra money on exams and supplies from my disabilities.

Like hearing aid tubes. The hearing aids themselves which cost thousands of dollars new white canes and balls for the end of it. Hearing aid batteries , the medical appointments. I also myself, deal with increased stress in many situations when I don't understand what's going on around me, that can be very stressful, especially

for example, if I'm on a flight and they're making announcements, I never can understand what that speech is. there's also, when I'm in unfamiliar environments out at [00:16:00] night, that is stressful for me, especially when I'm in a location that has broken sidewalks and lack of infrastructure. So there's, I can feel



sometimes alone and isolated as well, just by existing as a person who uses a white cane, because when I travel, there are some places where people seem to be less familiar with independent blind people, so I get stared at, and, sometimes people have reactions to me and wondering if I need help.

but I've got it all handled. So the, these are some of the hidden costs that I have experienced. but I know that each person with their own disability is gonna have their own story with that.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Yeah. do you have specific stories or ways that you react to some of that stigma behavior that, you could share? What are some thoughts [00:17:00] about how you cope with that when you are being stared at or people react inappropriately or, do people grab your arm? Like how do you respond sometimes in that situation?

I think especially for people who, haven't traveled a lot before or been in different environments, like they might be nervous about, how do they react if people are behaving in those manners? What would be your advice?

**Catarina Rivera:** If someone is staring at me, I. I don't care. They can learn from my existence. but if they grab me or interact with me in a way that disrupts my motion, then I have to deal with them. So I've had a situations, just so many situations where people think I need help and literally I'm showing no signs of needing help.

I have a story where I was in an airport [00:18:00] waiting outside the bathroom for my partner to come back, and I had the two suitcases with me and I was on my phone and a woman came up to me and said, do you need help? Are you going, you need help going somewhere in the airport. And like I was not moving at all.

So you know, I just told her, no, I'm good. I'm waiting for my partner. And that's a lot of what happens is basically telling people I'm good and trying to get out of that interaction as quickly as possible, especially if I am going somewhere like I don't have time. So I think what's really important, more than what do you say or do is like, how do you handle it internally as a disabled person?

Do you take on an emotion from those exchanges? For me, I find them annoying, but I also move on and don't give them more space than they need to have in my brain, I know that people are uneducated. I know that each interaction like this shows that my work is [00:19:00] necessary. I. And so I understand that it's probably gonna happen and I find my ways to deal with it.

So sometimes I share these stories of microaggressions online, and so I use them as educational stories. That's part of my work.

**Rocco Catrone:** Excellent. Yeah, and it, I feel like that's something Christy and I have talked a lot about as well, where, although well intentioned and I think people, imagine that oh, I'm trying to assist this individual, but that kind of, promotes more of that. I don't know, that viewpoint that oh, well this person definitely needs help at, well, if they're not asking for help and they're not in distress. let people be.

are there different regions or cities that you have found more particularly accessible that you might recommend for people to venture, or maybe as a starting point for travels?

So I know you mentioned a few of those organizations, but, do you have any other insights on that?

**Catarina Rivera:** Everyone's accessibility needs are different according to their. Individual disabilities and their situations. I would say that my [00:20:00] blindness is my primary consideration when traveling because I don't drive and I want to feel independent when I'm traveling. So for me, cities with sidewalks and public transportation are the most accessible.

This means places that have more infrastructure are better for me, and so this doesn't mean that I'm not gonna go to places where there's no crosswalks or lights to cross, which yes, I see. I see videos of some of these places and I get nervous, but I would plan ahead and I would probably spend less time there and rely on my partner a lot.

You have to kind of plan for inaccessibility in that way, but I've gone so many places that I've had, I. Great infrastructure like Hong Kong, I've been able to get around a hundred percent easily. Many cities in Europe. however, those cities sometimes can have historic areas which can have uneven sidewalks, cobblestones, or more [00:21:00] steps.

So it really depends on what you're looking for. And Lisbon, for example, there are a lot of hills, but there is a neighborhood near the water that is flat and has curb cuts and street crossings with lights. So sometimes it's about even choosing the right neighborhoods to stay in 'cause there is variation within a place.

So for even in areas that aren't accessible to navigate around in or walk in, if you really wanna go there, you can still try to perhaps find accessible housing and work out a transport solution. So it's just really dependent on how badly you wanna go somewhere and you know what you're willing to deal with.

But me, with full-time travel, I tried to balance it out. So for example, last year I spent some time in Greece, six weeks, and I was on various islands where there wasn't any proper sidewalk, just [00:22:00] walking on the side of the road. So after spending time on those islands, we spent two weeks in Thessaloniki, which is a proper city.

And we had a great apartment and I was able to walk around a lot. So just finding a balance between my schedule throughout the year is something that works for me personally.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Really good advice.

**Rocco Catrone:** I think that

**Rocco:** goes

**Rocco Catrone:** into the hidden costs piece we were talking about before. the amount of prep that has to go into that too, and just imagining what that is. I imagine there's

people when you're traveling abroad, everybody goes through those components, but even as, what do the sidewalks look like or, what other kinds of transportation considerations are there?

that's just additional things to think about and I think that's really cool.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** I

love too.

**Rocco Catrone:** is there,

**Christy Bloemendaal:** sorry.

**Rocco Catrone:** oh, Christie,

**Christy Bloemendaal:** I love too that you mentioned you see videos because that's not something that I had considered. Right. Looking up, seeing videos of the place where you're gonna go or look on Google Maps, on the street view and see, what [00:23:00] is it that you're going to encounter when you get there.

We live in an age where it's possible to do some of those things, which is a beautiful thing. You can, look ahead and know a little bit about what you're going to encounter and decide whether or not you can cope based on that information where, you know, 50 years ago you wouldn't have had that information before you left.

You wouldn't really have known, other than someone else's anecdotes, you wouldn't have known what you were going to encounter when you got there. yeah, I think that's a really good point too, to utilize those resources and look ahead. So yes. Rocco, what were you gonna say?

**Rocco Catrone:** that was exactly it. That was exactly the

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Rocco and I do this thing a lot where we're thinking the exact same thing. I don't know how or why, or we, yeah anyway,,

Now that I've covered Rocco's [00:24:00] question for Catarina, I don't know, I dunno how that happened. Do you have another question, Rocco? Any, any other questions?

**Rocco Catrone:** one of the questions, you said that you're traveling full-time. tell us some of the things that have, worked for you or maybe some of the resources that you've, been able to utilize that have helped you the most during all of these travel sessions.

**Catarina Rivera:** resources that I use for travel. First of all, I always need my essentials, my white cane and my hearing aids and my hearing aid batteries. Those are my basic essentials. I also need sunglasses that have a special tint for my retinitis pigmentosa.

I had some very old sunglasses that I wanted to replace, and I ended up getting an eye exam in Slovenia and replacing them there.

**Catarina Rivera:** then I got another pair of prescription sunglasses from Dublin, Ireland and had to figure out how to get them shipped to my parents in the US. I always adapt on the [00:25:00] go and try to anticipate my needs whenever possible when traveling.

I've had to deal with the ball of my cane being broken before and not having a replacement available. But anytime I go to the US I stock up on things and I create a plan to get ahead of what I might need. So this approach works in general.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Yeah. So do you,

sorry.

**Rocco Catrone:** Oh, go for it. No, you're good.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** So I was gonna say, do you recommend that people travel with extras then? do you 'cause it, it sounds like it was very hard probably to manage some of those things as they happened. Do you think that extras is a thing that is helpful, or does it just add to oh, now my suitcase is really heavy?

Do you prefer to deal with those things as they come up? Or do you Try to plan for accidents to happen?

**Catarina Rivera:** It's, I think, very important to be prepared, and so I try to [00:26:00] have extra. As much as possible because, for example, hearing aid batteries are really small. They don't weigh a lot. So it's not a problem for me to pack for three months to have hearing aid batteries and for example, there's some things that require a prescription.

Like I was running out of contact lenses and I do wear them sometimes, so I. Make sure to get that done in, in the US because coordinating medical care abroad can be a little bit challenging, especially when something needs to be produced. If it's an exam, like going to the dentist and getting a cleaning, that's not been hard for me.

that has been easy. But if it's something like, okay, I have to get, something produced like my sunglasses and that's gonna take a little time and I might be already on the move, that's harder to coordinate. So if an item is small that and I can just, account for it in my weight, I would rather have my extras with me.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** [00:27:00] Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

**Rocco Catrone:** I know we've talked a little bit about, different types of resources and things that you have found that have been really helpful for you and we've shared some of this, but, what other advice do you have to people listening regarding just travel tips, tricks and hacks and, what works for, you and others that, I know you've talked about like the planning ahead, packing, extra battery, stacking extra materials, what other kinds of, tips, tricks and hacks, maybe we haven't covered yet that you'd like to share.

**Catarina Rivera:** Well, one thing that I think about always as a location independent person is that I want to meet people and I want to socialize, and I think it's fun to do that even if you are traveling in a short-term way. So in terms of if you're traveling alone. I think it's actually very easy to meet people. You can join Airbnb experience, you can join the free walking tours, if that's accessible for you.

It's a nice way to socialize with people. You can also join these if you have a [00:28:00] travel companion as well. I have also shared sometimes ahead of time with my network on social media that I'm traveling somewhere and then I have found out about recommendations of events or people to meet. So for example, I went to Montreal many years ago alone, and I found out about an outdoor salsa dancing event beforehand, which is something that I love to do, and I had so much fun.

So I think if you have a passion or hobby. Finding a ways to socialize around that can also be really fun to do when you travel. so if you like a sport like skateboarding or in particular a hobby like painting, go for it while you travel. I think it's really fun. Also, in terms of planning ahead for me, I like to try to always create a Google map of my destination ahead of time, and I add things.

to it Like restaurants, [00:29:00] attractions, I put my accommodations on there. The map helps me feel situated more quickly and helps support me in moments where I'm overwhelmed. So it is easier, for example, for me to pick a restaurant for dinner that I've previously researched and just have on the map, rather than to pick one on the spot.

So I like to look and research and maybe find multiple restaurants, add them to the map, and then I can pick and choose in the moment. So the last thing I'll just say, like always conserve your energy. Don't try to follow the guidebook and think you have to do everything or do the top 10 things in a destination.

Do what you wanna do. This is your trip, this is your life. No one is gonna check if you saw that museum. Or do that one thing that everyone says you have to do, go up in the tower. Like you don't have to do anything that you don't wanna do. So just make it an experience about [00:30:00] you.

**Rocco Catrone:** I really enjoy, especially that last tidbit. 'cause I think, whenever I do travel it's oh, well why didn't you see this big thing that everybody sees? And I, I do a fair amount of travel back and forth to Italy and, over. 10 years of doing that. I've only seen the Colosseum once.

And people make that assumption of well, why don't you do it every time you go? And it's 'cause I don't know. I saw it. It was there, it was fine. I really like the neighborhoods better. And you can see different markets and to your point about interacting with people like that's the fun part about traveling.

It's not the, well, I took my picture in front of these 10 things, so I must have had fun. It's, the stories and like really getting into the place that you're at, that, I think that's the point of travel. I'm not trying to bring my own little neighborhood everywhere and live the same exact life each time.

It's like that interaction. So I think that's really cool.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** in your September of 22 NASDAQ article, you did talk about that educating non-disabled people, that disabled people do travel and that we [00:31:00] need more access was one of your goals.

Can you give us an update and do you feel that disability representation is improving and where can we continue to improve?

**Catarina Rivera:** I think the conversation about disability and travel is happening more often than before, but still not often enough on a global scale. We need every hotel, accommodation, tour operator, airline destination, et cetera, to really prioritize accessibility in their infrastructure, their digital communications operations, their customer experience.

But we're not there yet. The industry is still understanding that disabled customers are out here and that this isn't a side project. I recently gave a talk at the Women in Travel Summit on the main stage, and it was really exciting to see the impact [00:32:00] of that conversation where I was talking to travel industry brands, to travel creators and trying to reach their hearts and move them to understand that.



Accessibility is so important that we need to include disabled people and giving people action items that they can do. So I am encouraged now by the amount of travel creators that I see sharing about disability, their personal stories and the amplification that I can see in the media of discussions about accessible air travel such as Device on Flights campaign.

And I'm also encouraged by the US Department of Transportation. Because they are prioritizing the impact that they can have on the air travel industry. they are talking about accessibility. They are inviting disabled people to convenings to participate. And I personally, my lifetime, have not [00:33:00] seen such engagement, with DOT.

So I'm very encouraged by that. But, we still have a long way to go even though conversations are happening frequently. We do not have the commitment from everyone and the action from everyone.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Rocco Catrone:** Yeah. And when you're saying, the commitment and action from everyone, are you talking about like different companies, employees at, different organizations? You know what do you mean with that?

**Catarina Rivera:** Well, when we talk about travel, we're really talking about so many different entities, and you're also talking about even local government because the complaints that I have about the sidewalks and a city is not going to be the purview of a travel related entity it's gonna be the purview of the city itself.

So it's really about, just in general, in our societies, around the world, is accessibility prioritized and do we invest in it? So that could be a company, that could be local [00:34:00] infrastructure, it could be individual people. Sometimes it's not a nebulous organization. Sometimes it is a small hotel with an owner who really doesn't understand, for example, what they can do to be accessible or.

Why it matters or who they're leaving out. I think there's just, lack of integration of disabled people in society in many places.

so I use my voice as often as I can, and that's one of the reasons that I'm just really unapologetic about showing up where I'm gonna show up and people can observe and learn and see that, Hey, I'm disabled and I'm here to participate in your experience.

I'm here to be in your hotel. and I advocate for what my needs are to try to educate. But, there is sometimes a lack of understanding of inclusion versus compliance. And that happens often in the industry. They wanna know what rules do I need to follow? Okay, I'm following these rules and they think, they're done.[00:35:00]

But, that's,

there's further to go.

**Rocco Catrone:** exactly right. Because that, it seems like the, well, we did the checklist, right? We went through these other rules. But, just as you said, that's a really good point about how everything's then intersecting, it's not the travel agencies, the purview that those pieces are not done.

maybe there's not a curb cut or there's other considerations, around, mobility in the areas that they're going into. But,

it's. There's gotta be that consideration Not just checking off the compliance aspect of it, but making sure that it's an accessible experience and moving around, or maybe even reaching out to the local agencies or governments, from that, standpoint to maybe make a change.

so I, I think that's really good to, show up in those places and, you're not fearing that component. And that kind of into this next question for me. how do you respond,

to people who might have a lot of fear around stepping out the door and not being able to do that.

'cause I can imagine that there's a lot of, considerations going into that and, with so many risks and concerns about mobility and [00:36:00] access, what gives you confidence and bravery to kind of step out and have some of those new travel adventures?

**Catarina Rivera:** For every disabled person listening, I want you to know that this idea of confidence and bravery, these are like muscles. The more that you engage them, the easier it will become. It was the same way for me with self-advocacy. It was much harder in the beginning for me to speak up for my access needs and make requests, but now it's.

Easy 'cause I do it all the time. I don't have as much emotion around it. I have a lot more practice. I feel more confident in what I'm saying, how to communicate and what has worked well in the past. So if you are intimidated by beginning, know that beginning is really important 'cause then you get yourself started and you're gonna be on a journey where you'll will look back in the future and see [00:37:00] that things are not as hard anymore.

I would encourage you to be brave for things that you're passionate about and that you truly don't wanna miss out on. Spend your energy on the things that matter. Look for ways to save yourself stress. Is taking a cab or ride share, going to help you feel calm so that you can focus on navigating the space when you arrive and save your energy for that.

For example, try to contact an organizer of an event ahead of time to communicate your needs and try to arrive early as well so that you can connect with them and get your needs addressed. It's always great to greet people upon arrival and show that you're you a real person. You know when you're submitted a contact form or something or sent an email.

be persistent as well. I have a story. I wanted to see a comedian that I was following on Instagram. her name is Atsuko Okatsuka. [00:38:00] She has an HBO special now called the Intruder, but I saw her before her special came out in New York City. I basically happened to be traveling to New York City this same time that she was having a show, and I thought, I can't miss out on this.

I contacted the venue to try to get front row seats so that I could read lips. It's very hard for me to understand comedy shows and I typically don't go to them anymore because I don't understand what people are saying. I did not hear back from the venue, so I reached out directly to the comedian that I was seeing and she facilitated the access, she contacted the venue.

When I got there, the seats were labeled with my name on them in the front.

And I'm so grateful that I did that and I was persistent. It did feel courageous for me to show up to comedy show after not seeing one in years, but not this show. I didn't wanna miss it and I had so much fun. it was just unforgettable.

So I [00:39:00] think just knowing what are those can't miss out experiences for you then don't miss out. also. To be honest, sometimes we have to be okay with things not going well in terms of access

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Hmm.

**Catarina Rivera:** and just being okay with that. sometimes things are gonna be more challenging, sometimes things are not gonna go as well, but I tried and that's what matters.

So how do I do this? I keep trying, I balance my energy. I find ways to recharge. I am not out there having new experiences and tours every single day. but I know that I do want to push myself so that I am happy with the adventures that I'm having. I just feel like I'm.

Leaning into what brings me joy and what keeps my life exciting. So I push myself, but not so far that I'm unhappy. I know that I want to live this exciting life and even visit certain places. [00:40:00] So for example, if it's inaccessible to walk around, I'm still gonna go there, but I'll adapt. In Mexico City, I only walked around by myself during the day and not even right away.

Upon arrival, I took some time to get comfortable. I went places with my partner in the beginning, and then I started planning some outings for me to do on my own,

and I spaced them out. During my stay, I usually do solo outings to appointments like for facials or haircuts, and those are actually self-care moments that then recharge me.

So it all works out.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Yeah, I really love that. Thank you for that. Catarina. I feel like,

**Christy Bloemendaal:** I'm one of those people that, wishes I was out there more and then gets upset with myself because I'm not out there and I feel like it's constantly this battle. But I love how you say just start, right. Starting is hard, but once I start, then I've started and then [00:41:00] that keeps moving into more and more experience and it just gets easier. I love that and I feel like I am going to take that advice and be better with myself about pressing myself towards the joyous events and making sure that I do what I love to do regardless of my needs and access. Yeah. Thank you so much for that.

**Rocco Catrone:** so in that vein of, getting out there, and I know how you said, you're doing a lot of this traveling and you're at different places for weeks and that, you do so much of this travel, what else are you working on right now that you wanna share with us, around this?

**Catarina Rivera:** I am an entrepreneur and my business as a public speaker and DEIA consultant is what I do on a daily basis, even when I'm traveling. So other things that I am working on. I'm working on a book proposal that will be a guide to disability [00:42:00] inclusion in the workplace, and I'm looking for a book deal with a traditional publisher for that title, which I'm very excited to put out into the world.

I am currently continuing to offer my services to organizations. That includes virtual trainings, fireside chats, keynotes

on disability awareness, inclusion, and accessibility. I've currently taken on numerous consulting projects, which is exciting. I love to get involved in consulting as well because then you can be involved in the lifecycle of a project and see more of your impact.

Even though I know that trainings have a wonderful way of starting the conversation and they move people, especially through the storytelling that I offer. It's great to be involved in different types of projects with different timelines. I'm also designing my first product, which will be a stylish accessory for blind [00:43:00] people.

I hope to launch it later this year. We're currently getting the sample produced in a factory, so I can't wait to see it. and then I always wanna just promote that being a content creator, like you're always thinking of an idea, you're always filming. I was filming a video today because I've come to a coworking space here to record with you when I'm currently in Colombia, and it's our first time using a coworking space here.

So I thought it would be fun to do a video of, okay, what's my day looking like as an entrepreneur living in Colombia right now? So these are some of the things that I have going on in my life.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** So much stuff you have going on in your life. that is a

**Rocco Catrone:** Mm-Hmm.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** ton of stuff. Also, I'm very excited to see your fashionable product because you are always so fashionable. [00:44:00] I think that all the time when I see your stuff on Instagram or when your, newsletter comes through. so that is fantastic.

Excited about that I hope that. All of those things are extremely successful. And then I am wondering, and this is a question that we'd like to ask all of our guests, is what supports might you need from the disability tangent community to help in

reaching your goals? And what ways can we encourage our listeners to support what you're doing?

**Catarina Rivera:** if you wanna support me specifically, I encourage everyone to check out my TEDx talk. It's called Creating Inclusive Workplaces for All. It has over 34,000 views right now, which I'm incredibly proud and grateful for. It's less than 12 minutes long, so it's really short and that is an amazing way to support me to watch it and share it with others.

You can also [00:45:00] connect with me on Instagram at Blindish Latina or on LinkedIn with my name Catarina Rivera. And I love that you mentioned my newsletter. I send out a weekly newsletter, so I always love to have new faces on there or just really written to be a message. It doesn't have a lot of different sections.

It's very simple. So it's a weekly message from me. So that's how you can support me directly. Other things that you can do to support my mission of creating a more inclusive world are if you're disabled yourself, consider sharing your story if you have the capacity to do so and become part of the representation that we all need.

It took me over 15 years since my blindness diagnosis to come to a place of disability pride and to become a public advocate. So please know that wherever you are in your journey is okay. You are not alone. And if you're non-disabled, then please commit to [00:46:00] accessibility. Learn about accessibility, learn about disability, learn from disabled voices, and be a part of creating a more inclusive world with me.

**Rocco Catrone:** Perfect. And we love the information you're putting out. The website is fantastic. I just saw the, the free ebook as well that you already have on there. And we're really excited to see the work that, hopefully you'll be publishing soon with that new book as well. So I'm really excited for that.

I'll definitely be including these in my classes if you're okay with that as well. and, is there anything else that we haven't talked about today that's really important to you and you really, wish to share with everybody?

**Catarina Rivera:** I've already shared everything I think that I want to share. I wanna thank you for inviting me to be part of this. I think the last thing that I'll share is my advice for disabled people is always to connect beyond your diagnosis, connect to the broader disability identity. I think that's been very powerful for me, connecting beyond Usher syndrome to this idea [00:47:00] that I am in a community of disabled people.

Who have all different experiences, all different types of expertise, and I am benefiting so much from being in a cross disability environment online. And then I've had moments in person that I've also been able to experience that. Like on the trip to Portugal that I co-hosted last year, all eight people that joined really had a wide variety of disabilities.

And we validated each other, we encouraged each other, we held space and were patient with each other, and we all helped each other in different ways, and I just loved being part of that kind of space. So I highly recommend connecting to disability identity across disability communities for everyone.

**Rocco Catrone:** Excellent.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Beautiful. Yeah. We support that 100%. that is absolutely what we are about

here as well. Just to. Wanting to create space for [00:48:00] everybody to do that, to, to come together and To learn from one another and to share our stories. So we thank you so much for being here and sharing some of your stories and beautiful expertise with us. And it was just

a

wonderful pleasure to have you today. So thank you so much for being here with us.

**Rocco:** Yeah, I



**Rocco Catrone:** absolutely thank you. This was excellent. And all the resources you've shared, we'll be sharing that with everybody as well, and we'll keep pushing it out. We appreciate your time. Thank you.

**Catarina Rivera:** Thank you. Thank you so much for having me, and I am, I'm remembering a few resources for, disability that I can just share very quickly. There's an app called Be My Eyes for Blind People that can be useful when you're navigating. And also Area, I believe is called, is a navigation service where someone could see live where you are in your [00:49:00] environment.

I believe that is available for free and. Not all airports in the US but many, there's an initiative to provide this service for free in the airports, which is really helpful for blind people. 'cause oftentimes, if you mark that you're deaf or blind and need assistance at the airport, they try to give you a wheelchair and it's not appropriate for that accessibility need.

things hopefully are evolving more and more. Like I've seen that Seattle airport has a sensory, I don't know if it's called a sensory room, but it's a room where if you are neurodivergent, you can go there, you can benefit, anyone can benefit. That feels that this space could be helpful for them.

and then

many airports have partnerships with the Sunflower lanyard, and if you want to wear it, you don't have to disclose your specific disability, you can just wear it.

And it's supposed to indicate to the people that you're interacting with that you will have some type of accessibility need or a need [00:50:00] for greater patience or, better treatment. hopefully. some people find that it has benefited their travel experience, that is something else to check out.

**Rocco Catrone:** That is perfect and thank you so much.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Yes. Thank you so much.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** Next time on the disability tangent, we are giving you the first taste of tangent for two. Which is just me and Rocco talking about something for a long time and getting off topic a lot, but hopefully in a way that you find entertaining. Otherwise, we may need to rethink our life choices. The first topic? Disability and the woke agenda. It is contentious and chaotic and clumsy at times. But we think you are going to want to hear it.

So tune in for this tangent topic coming soon.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** An important part of our podcast work is to bring awareness and connection to various disability [00:51:00] advocates around the world.

**Rocco Catrone:** If you're interested in sharing your story and want to connect with a network of other like minded organizations, please consider joining our coalition.

**Christy Bloemendaal:** We are calling the coalition GAIN, the Global Accessibility and Inclusion Network.

Click the sign up link below to learn more.

**Rocco Catrone:** Sweet.