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UN Tourism

# Advancing Accessible Tourism for Destinations, Companies and People – Compendium of Good Practices

International Conference on  
Accessible Tourism,  
San Marino, November 2023



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**Advancing Accessible Tourism for Destinations, Companies and People – Compendium of Good Practices  
International Conference on Accessible Tourism, San Marino, November 2023**

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The European Accessibility Resource Centre “AccessibleEU” oversaw the accessible design of the publication, under the supervision of its Director, Jesús Hernández Galán, as well as José Luis Borau and Sonia García Fraile. Ivor Ambrose, Managing Director of the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), contributed to the editing of the report.

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City Gate into Walled San Marino. © Elena Korsukova | Dreamstime.com

# Foreword

by Zurab Pololikashvili,  
Secretary-General,  
World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism)



People have different abilities which generally shrink as we age. Nevertheless, we all still wish to travel. Recent global shocks have made us realize that advocating for inclusiveness, accessibility and diversity is good for tourism and good for people; good for destinations and good for businesses. Ensuring accessibility is a real game-changer for both destinations and businesses. Shifting our mindset, unlocking the economic potential and understanding a full spectrum of people's specific requirements, should be at the top of our agendas. The UN Tourism International Conference on Accessible Tourism, held in San Marino in November 2023, provided a platform for governments, destinations, the private sector and civil society to prioritize accessibility in tourism policies and strategies. The conference strengthened international networks and highlighted San Marino as a model of inclusivity, not least as it is the only UN Tourism member state to have hosted two Conferences on Accessible Tourism.

The Action Agenda for the Future of Accessible Tourism 2030, the key outcome of the event, is our new roadmap for disability inclusion and tourism's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. The good practices set out in this report showcase how we can put theory into action. I have every confidence they will inspire more destinations to step up their efforts to make tourism accessible to all.

# Foreword

by Federico Pedini Amati,  
Minister of Tourism of San Marino



The Republic of San Marino has the honour to serve as one of global meeting points for key discussions related to accessible tourism, after hosting the UN Tourism International Conference on Accessible Tourism in November 2023. The longstanding commitment of San Marino to making our country more inclusive and accessible for all people, made it possible to organize the aforementioned landmark conference gathering 30 international speakers, which has resulted in this inspiring publication. This document provides guidelines for people to enjoy a seamless travel experience and for those of us who firmly believe that disability should never be an obstacle. The good practices that showcase the implementation of accessible tourism for all were presented in San Marino in 2023, and from here now they will be disseminated around the world to inspire further changes. I can assure you that I take great pride in this report, which is just one of many highlights of our

collaboration with UN Tourism; I intend to share it with my collaborators at the Ministry of Tourism, Tourism Department and San Marino Promotion Board. Allow me to thank our colleagues from UN Tourism and the AccessibleEU Consortium, for the co-edition of this outstanding document.



# Foreword

by Jesús Hernández Galán,  
Director,  
European Accessibility Resource Centre



Around 100 million people in the EU have some form of disability. The European Accessibility Resource Centre (AccessibleEU) was established to advance accessibility across EU-27 by building capacity on accessibility, fostering the implementation of European Union accessibility legislation, connecting stakeholders and training highly qualified professionals. In collaboration with the ONCE Foundation and leveraging its longstanding strategic partnership with UN Tourism in accessible tourism for the past 15 years, AccessibleEU proudly contributed to the UN Tourism International Conference on Accessible Tourism, held in San Marino in 2023. Through our partnership in this key international conference, AccessibleEU enriched discussions, made the event more accessible for participants with disabilities and supported the achievement of the conference's successful outcomes. Driven by the belief that tourism for all is not only possible but also profitable.

AccessibleEU is honoured to support the development of this Compendium of Good Practices, highlighting inspiring success stories, addressing key challenges and exploring new opportunities. This project underscores the commitment of AccessibleEU in raising awareness about accessible initiatives within Europe and beyond.

# Introduction

Tourism is a human right.<sup>1</sup> It represents a vehicle for both individual and collective fulfilment. However, for 1.3 billion people, 16% of the population that experiences significant disability,<sup>2</sup> and for millions of persons with specific access requirements, participating in tourism on an equal basis is challenging. Customers encounter barriers due to the way tourism infrastructure, products and services have been designed – in developed and emerging economies alike. Within the European Union (EU), 70% of persons with disabilities have the purchasing power to travel.<sup>3</sup> The overall multiplier effect on tourism spending of travellers with disabilities accompanied by their families and caregivers, is immense. It reaches as much as a 2 to 3 people per each traveller with disability, implying a major income share. Accessibility is also

a critical aspect for the ageing population: by 2050, in the EU, 1 in 6 people will be over 65; in 2019 people aged over 55 – the “baby boomers” – account for over one third of the population.<sup>4</sup> Jointly commissioned by UN Tourism, San Marino and AccessibleEU<sup>5</sup>, this Compendium of Good Practices illustrates success stories and challenges in advancing accessibility, shared by policymakers and the industry stakeholders in San Marino. This publication demonstrates why making tourism destinations and companies accessible now, is paving the way for the future, enabling everybody the right to enjoy travel and tourism.

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- 1 World Tourism Organization (1999), *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*, Article 7, UN Tourism, Madrid, available at: <https://www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism>. Article 7 of the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* refers to the universal right to tourism.
  - 2 World Health Organization (2023), ‘Disability. Key Facts’, WHO, Geneva, available at: <https://www.who.int> [02-09-2024].
  - 3 Bowtell, J. (2015), ‘Assessing the value and market attractiveness of the accessible tourism industry in Europe: a focus on major travel and leisure companies’, *Journal of Tourism Futures*, volume 1, number 33, pp. 203–222, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-03-2015-0012>.
  - 4 Eurostat (2020), ‘Ageing Europe – statistics on population developments’, Statistics explained, Eurostat, Luxembourg, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ageing\\_Europe\\_-\\_statistics\\_on\\_population\\_developments](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ageing_Europe_-_statistics_on_population_developments) [02-09-2024].
  - 5 European Commission (n.d.), ‘About AccessibleEU’, European Commission, available at: <https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/> [11-11-2024].



# 1 Policymaking and strategic leadership by public administrations and international organizations

## Key takeaways:

- Policymaking in accessible tourism requires **multi-stakeholder cooperation, awareness-raising, capacity building and formal education**, as well as widespread horizontal and vertical information-sharing.
- **Investments in accessibility** need to be prioritized by the public administrations. Businesses need to be incentivized to implement Universal Design (UD) principles. Tourism companies should take a full grasp of the **business opportunities** that accessibility entails.
- Czechia, Israel, Italy, the Republic of Korea, San Marino and Uzbekistan showed that enhancing accessibility not only attracts new visitors, but also ignites a virtuous cycle of economic growth.

**Key words:** policymaking | legislation | multi-stakeholder cooperation | awareness-raising | capacity building | investments

# 1.1 Analysis of policies championed by Czechia, Israel, Italy, the Republic of Korea, San Marino and Uzbekistan

## Czechia

**The Ministry of Regional Development launched the Strategy for Tourism Development of Czechia 2021–2030. The strategy provides specific inputs on universal accessibility, recognizing accessibility enhancement as a key priority to maximize visitors' experience at the destination level.**

Czechia has a Government Board for Persons with Disabilities<sup>6</sup> in place and several national programmes to support barrier-free access to public buildings. The Czech Tourism Agency is promoting inclusivity in cooperation with organizations of people with disabilities, to map the tourism offerings and promote locations for barrier-free travel. Furthermore, the Czech Tourist Authority is displaying detailed information on its website on accessible experiences

and itineraries. Characteristics of the main airport, public transportation and accessible cultural and historical sites are described, to allow everyone to make their travel choices. CzechTourism also played a pivotal role in supporting the creation of a working group on accessibility, as well as the training sessions for tourism professionals and service providers. Among the various offerings, the Lipno region, renowned for the Šumava National Park, promotes accessible tourism through *Lipno without Barriers*. Supported by the Ministry for Regional Development, this initiative ensures year-round access for visitors with disabilities. Summer activities include powered hand bikes (for children and adults), para-paddleboards with adjustable seats and sports for wheelchair users. Winter offerings feature monoski and biski skiing (both independently and with instructors) and cross-country skiing for visually impaired people supported by handsfree communication sets.

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6 Consult For more information Government of the Czech Republic, Advisory and Working Bodies, Government Board for Persons with Disabilities: <https://Mada.gov.cz/en/ppov/vzpo/assets-of-the-government-board-for-people-with-disabilities-3935/> [11-11-2024].

Activities comprise an accessible pool with a lift at Aquaworld, an inclusive treetop walkway and a universally accessible bobsleigh track. The accessible offerings are complemented by accommodations and restaurants, equipped with services to ensure excellent experiences for visitors with disabilities, enabling all to enjoy the region.



A working group discussing accessibility initiatives during a meeting in Prague.

© Eva Beranová

# Israel

**Around 20% of the population in Israel has some kind of disability.<sup>7</sup> In the journey to advance accessibility, the country poses its focus on innovation, investments, and travel technologies. In this context, worth-mentioning examples are Travaxy and the accessibility adaptations at the Tower of David.**

Travaxy<sup>8</sup> is a startup created in 2019 to support costumers and travellers to find the best options for their specific access requirements. Travaxy's application programming interfaces (APIs) and software as a service (SaS) solutions empower business-to-business (B2B) travel partners to arrange accessible holidays. By facilitating both online and offline travel agencies in booking holidays, flights with airline notifications and accommodation establishments customized to specific disability requirements, Travaxy identifies the most

suitable solution in a very short time. This capability enables travel agencies to cater to the largest and fastest-growing minority worldwide.

Another successful initiative carried out by the country to improve access to cultural sites, is the renovation of the Tower of David,<sup>9</sup> housed in the ancient citadel at the entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem, where the conservation of the architecture was made compatible with accessibility improvements. The renewed museum opened to the public in June 2023, after a decade of thoughtful planning and USD 50 million investment in renewal and conservation, achieving the objective of ensuring universal accessibility. By implementing creative solutions, the citadel was made physically accessible while minimizing damage to its archaeological layers and preserving its historical and cultural character.

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7 Government of Israel – Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2022), 'People with Disabilities in Israel 2021: Facts and Figures', Ministry of Justice, Jerusalem, available at: [https://www.gov.il/en/pages/pwd\\_israel\\_2021\\_statistics](https://www.gov.il/en/pages/pwd_israel_2021_statistics) [22-08-2024].

8 Consult for more information on Travaxy – travel accessible: <https://data.travaxy.com/> [31-10-2024].

9 Tower of David Jerusalem Museum: <https://www.tod.org.il/en/> [31-10-2024].

See also: Tower of David Jerusalem Museum (2024), 'Visiting the Tower of David Jerusalem Museum', Tower of David Jerusalem Museum, Jerusalem, available at: <https://www.tod.org.il/en/event/entrance-to-the-tower-of-david/> [31-10-2024].

The new permanent exhibition was designed to create an accessible and inclusive environment and to offer the broadest, richest and most engaging access for all, including people with physical, hearing or visual impairments, learning disabilities and neurodiverse conditions.

Three people – two of them are wheelchair-users – using virtual reality. The Tower of David Museum created a 360 virtual reality experience showing the magnificent view for those unable to climb the last 50 stairs of the Tower. © Tower of David Jerusalem Museum



# Italy

**Italy considers accessibility as an opportunity for growth and development. The country has taken several steps in ensuring accessible, barrier-free and inclusive travel experiences. Since 2018, Italy has been promoting a cross-cutting approach across the spheres of work and employment, education, health, culture and tourism to adopt disability inclusion policies.**

The National Observatory for People with Disabilities<sup>10</sup> was established in Italy as a consulting body of the Government where all ministries and key associations are duly represented. Universal Design (UD) is also at the core of the *Piano nazionale di ripresa e resilienza* (PNRR – National Plan for Reconstruction and Resilience)<sup>11</sup>, which commits investments in accessibility. It also invites all public administrations involved in construction works, infrastructure and provision of services to adopt UD principles.

In 2021, with the adoption of the Budget Law 234/2021, the Tourist Accessibility Fund (Fondo accessibilità turistica) was created, allocating EUR 6 million each year, from 2022 to 2024. Additionally, the new Italian Directive on Accessibility for Accommodation, Spas, Bathing and Sports Facilities was launched in November 2023. It is an adapted directive issued by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry for Disability to further integrate accessibility requirements in alignment with the principles of Universal Design. Formulated in collaboration with associations representing end-users with disabilities, the regulation addresses accessibility both in urban and rural environments, leisure activities and the MICE<sup>12</sup> industry. In Italy's experience, accredited certifications, coupled with technical standardization and comprehensive training, are the most adequate tools to verify that hotels, tourist and sports facilities, comply with accessibility standards.

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10 Governo Italiano, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2024), *Osservatorio nazionale sulla condizione delle persone con disabilità*, available at: <https://www.osservatoriodisabilita.gov.it/it/> [11-11-2024].

11 Consult for more information the website of the Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy: <https://www.mimit.gov.it/it/pnrr/piano> [14-11-2024].

12 The MICE industry refers to meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. In the tourism sector, it mainly encompasses businesses events.



Certifications schemes do not only ensure compliance but also open avenues for tax benefits for the entities involved. Finally, the Italian Parliament is examining a draft law on accessible tourism presented in 2023.<sup>13</sup>

Parking for people with specific access requirements in front of a church, Noci, Puglia, Italy.  
© Damian Hadjiyvanov | Dreamstime.com



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<sup>13</sup> The draft law relates to accessible tourism and the participation of people with disabilities in cultural, tourist and recreational activities. Consult for more information about the proposal: Camera dei Deputati (2023), Disegni di Legge e Relazioni, Poposta di legge, N. 997, Parliament of the Republic of Italy, available at: <https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/pdl/pdf/leg.19.pdl.camera.997.19PDL0028610.pdf> [31-10-2024].

# Republic of Korea

According to the 2022 Population Census, 26% of the country's population – or more if caregivers are considered – are potential beneficiaries of barrier-free tourism, primarily people with disabilities and seniors. Additionally, by 2040, the

country will have more than 34% of its people aged over 65.<sup>14</sup>

Recognizing such need and urgency, the government has been prioritizing investment in accessibility inclusive environments.

A group of people, together with the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea, talking and moving forward on a boardwalk at the beach, some are on wheelchairs and others on foot.  
© Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea



<sup>14</sup> Statistics Korea (2021), 'Population Projections for Korea (2020–2070)', Statistics Korea, Daejeon, available at: [https://www.kostat.go.kr/board.es?mid=a20108080000&bid=11748&act=view&list\\_no=416209](https://www.kostat.go.kr/board.es?mid=a20108080000&bid=11748&act=view&list_no=416209) [13-11-2024].

In 2014, the Government adopted a new legislation on accessible destinations. Specifically, Article 47-3 (Support for Tour Activities of Persons with Disabilities and Seniors) of the Tourism Promotion Act mandates that the State and local governments establish facilities and policies to enhance travel opportunities for people with disabilities and seniors.<sup>15</sup> The new legislation laid a sound legal basis for the government to further promote barrier-free tourism policies. Starting from 2015, as many as 162 new initiatives were launched with the aim to improve physical accessibility and information provision within tourism destinations. The Republic of Korea further plans to designate more open tourism destinations up to 252, targeting 10% of the main travel attractions in the country. A barrier-free tourism information platform has been created by the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism and Korea Tourism Organization, posting accurate and trustworthy information in accessible formats, including audio support, text adjustment and high-contrast. The platform showcases approximately 8,600 records of data on accessible tourist attractions, restaurants, hotels and accommodation establishments, as well as 220 travel itineraries catering to end-users with specific disabilities.

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15 Consult full text of the Tourism Promotion Act at: Korea Law Translation Center (n.d.), 'Tourism Promotion Act', Article 47-3 (Support for Tour Activities of Persons with Disabilities and Seniors), Law Viewer, available at: [https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_mobile/main.do](https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/main.do) [31-10-2024].

# San Marino

**In 2013, San Marino had been nominated European Destination of Excellence (EDEN) for accessible tourism. In 2014 San Marino hosted the first UN Tourism Conference on Accessible Tourism in Europe, placing accessibility at the heart of tourism development. This little country with a long tradition of hospitality, hosted the second edition of the Conference in 2023,<sup>16</sup> expanding beyond the European borders.**

The new gathering in 2023 reaffirmed San Marino's unwavering commitment to accessibility and served to promote it as a potential accessible MICE<sup>17</sup> destination. In the last decade, the *San Marino for All*<sup>18</sup> project has advanced through the mapping of the historic centre and a user-friendly guide. By recognizing the subjective nature of disability levels, this guide includes crucial information and descriptions, enabling each visitor with a disability to check specific locations. The *Lovely Places*<sup>19</sup> stands out as another

impactful project rolled out in cooperation with nine municipalities of San Marino (Castelli), and the Italian regions of Emilia Romagna and Marche, to develop joint itineraries. The project includes the participation of 122 municipalities and 118 mayors of neighbouring municipalities. It led to the creation of 33 itineraries, for a total of 7,957 km of routes. The *Lovely Places* creates new accessible tourism experiences, promoting synergies in tourism development of San Marino and the surrounding locations, where social and environmental sustainability are the centre stage. In line with the outcomes of the UN Tourism San Marino Conference, the Working Group on Accessible Tourism was convened in May 2024 to discuss accessible tourism improvements and establish a dialogue between institutions and associations. Among the initiatives examined were investments in the transport in the historic centre; the provision of tri-rides to facilitate wheelchair access and powered 4-wheelers;

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<sup>16</sup> International Conference on Accessible Tourism website is available at: <https://www.sanmarinoaccessibletourism.com/> [31-10-2024]

<sup>17</sup> The MICE industry refers to meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. In the tourism sector, it mainly encompasses businesses events.

<sup>18</sup> Consult for more information San Marino for All: <http://sanmarinoforall.com/> [13-11-2024]

<sup>19</sup> Consult for more information The Lovely Places: <https://thelovelyplaces.com/> [13-11-2024]

training of tourism workers in to promote skills related to accessibility; setting up a tourist information desk for people with disabilities; and the feasibility study on the application of the ISO Standard 21902.<sup>20</sup>

Tactile panels in the city centre of San Marino, illustrated during a guided tour of the International Conference on Accessible Tourism held in San Marino in November 2023. © Evolency



20 Full text available at: International Organization for Standardization (2021), 'Tourism and related services – Accessible tourism for all – Requirements and recommendations', ISO21902:2021, ISO, Vernier, available at: <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/en/#iso:std:iso:21902:ed-1:v1:en> [02-09-2024].

# Uzbekistan

**Uzbekistan has been experiencing a significant increase in tourism flows.<sup>21</sup> Such a growth strengthened the country's determination to foster inclusivity, especially so after approving in 2021 a law ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

Uzbekistan has committed to the Convention's implementation by making public infrastructure more accessible, in

agreement with its Article 30 calling upon the Governments to ensure access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues by persons with disabilities. A new law<sup>22</sup> stipulates that any design, construction and reconstruction work in public infrastructure and facilities, regardless of their organizational and legal form, should be carried out considering the access requirements of end-users with disabilities. Additionally, the country's commitment

Panoramic view of Registan Square featuring its three iconic madrasahs illuminated at night, Samarkand, Uzbekistan. © Javarman | Dreamstime.com



21 World Bank (2021), 'Country Profile: Uzbekistan – Disability Inclusion', World Bank Group, Washington, D.C., available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home> [20-08-2024].

22 President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2020), Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, No. ZRU-641, 15 October 2020, LexUZ, available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/5049549> [20-08-2024].

to accessibility is shown in Article 10 of its Urban Planning, which requires the “creation of conditions for unimpeded access for persons with disabilities to social infrastructure facilities (residential, public, industrial buildings, recreation areas, culture and entertainment and other facilities).”<sup>23</sup> With 650,000 people with disabilities<sup>24</sup>, Uzbekistan has established a specific government agency for accessibility to bring together all stakeholders and overcome the lack of infrastructure. In January 2024, the presidential resolution titled “On Measures to Develop the Infrastructure of Accessible Tourism and its Stimulation in the Republic of Uzbekistan”<sup>25</sup> mandated the allocation of state budget funds to enhance accessibility. This includes installing ramps, plinths, elevators and Braille information at cultural heritage sites. Transportation infrastructure, such as railways, public transport, airports, train and bus stations, will be equipped with ramps, stair handrails

and wheelchairs. Additionally, the Tourism Support Fund would cover 50% of travel expenses within Uzbekistan for 1,000 people with disabilities until 2027, and from 2024 to 2026, hoteliers who provide at least three accessible rooms should receive state subsidies. Furthermore, within the framework of *Tourism Month for the Elderly and Travel for All*, the Tourism Committee will organize trips for seniors with disabilities.

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23 LexUZ (2021), Urban Planning Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 22 February 2021, LexUZ, available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/5307955> [02-09-2024].

24 World Bank (2021), ‘Country Profile: Uzbekistan – Disability Inclusion’, World Bank Group, Washington, D.C., available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home> [20-08-2024].

25 Consult for more information *Ўзбекистон Миллий ахборот агентлиги* (Uzbekistan National News Agency): <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/measures-for-the-development-of-barrier-free-tourism-infrastructure-in-uzbekistan-have-been-approved/> [13-11-2024]-

## 1.2 ISO 21902:2021 – The first comprehensive standard covering the entire tourism value chain

Case study presented by Igor Stefanovic

Technical Coordinator of Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility at UN Tourism

The publication of ISO 21902:2021,<sup>26</sup> as the first comprehensive international standard on accessibility covering the entire tourism value chain, features a major global highlight in the last five years. The joint project promoted by UN Tourism, Fundación ONCE and UNE (Asociación Española de Normalización), and the technical inputs of 85 experts from 35 countries, led to a multisectoral consensus and this pioneering guidance tool in 2021.

The fragmentation of existing codes, standards and guidelines, that differ between countries and regions causes confusion when booking a holiday. The ISO 21902:2021 was created to fill this gap, providing a groundbreaking common international framework to ensure equal access to and the enjoyment of tourism

by people of all ages and abilities. This guidance tool conveys a set of core requirements and recommendations applicable to all stakeholders within value chain. ISO 21902:2021 also targets the following stakeholders by suggesting more specific recommendations for the following actors and stakeholders:

1. National or regional public administrations and tourism promotion boards, destination management organizations (DMOs), municipalities, public entities in charge of infrastructure polices and following up on regulations application;
2. Professionals engaged in natural sites and cultural heritage management;

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26 Consult full text at: International Organization for Standardization (2021), 'Tourism and related services – Accessible tourism for all – Requirements and recommendations', ISO21902:2021, ISO, Vernier, available at: <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/en/#iso:std:iso:21902:ed-1:v1:en> [02-09-2024].

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is an independent, non-governmental organization developing public standards on a variety of topics, to ensure safe, reliable and high-quality products and services.





Cover page of the UN Tourism Recommendations for key players in management of natural resources.  
© World Tourism Organization

- 3 . Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in transportation, accommodation, as well as travel agencies, hospitality and catering sectors; and
- 4 . Information and communication technology (ICT) professionals and architects, developers of support tools for people with disabilities and end-users.

UN Tourism, Fundación ONCE and UNE launched the *How to apply ISO Standard 21902* collection of six sets of guidelines to facilitate its application. The recommendations target public officials of governments and destinations, managers and employees of accommodation, food and beverage and MICE companies, transport sector, travel agencies and tour-operators, as well as key players in designing and managing nature and culture-based tourism experiences.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Consult the How to apply ISO Standard 21902 guidelines at: World Tourism Organization (n.d.), 'Accessible Tourism', UN Tourism, Madrid, available at: <https://www.unwto.org/accessibility> [11-11-2024].

## 1.3 AccessibleEU – Driving the implementation of accessibility policies and legislation across EU-27

Case study presented by Jesús Hernández Galán  
Director, Accessibility EU Resource Centre–AccessibleEU

The primary objective of the AccessibleEU Resource Centre is to support the implementation of EU legislation in the realm of accessibility and building capacity and skills in all EU countries. AccessibleEU is bringing together national authorities, experts and professionals, to share best practices across sectors, develop tools and standards, and inspire policy development at national and community levels.

AccessibleEU is a flagship initiative proposed by the European Commission through its *Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030*.<sup>28</sup>

The project is aimed at:

1. Strengthening the implementation of the accessibility legislation in the twenty-seven European Union countries; and
2. Producing, collecting and disseminating documents and the most relevant knowledge in the field of accessibility.

AccessibleEU is committed to connecting stakeholders, promoting cooperation and facilitating communication. In order to improve the availability of accessible products, services and infrastructure across the EU, the centre created an online library. The latter contains a public database on different legislations, standards and sets of technical specifications and recommendations on accessibility.

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28 As a result of the previous European Disability Strategy 2010–2020, in March 2021, the European Commission adopted the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021–2030. The strategy aims at improving the lives of people with disabilities at a European and global level. Consult for more information:: European Commission (2021), 'Union of equality: Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021–2030', European Commission, Luxembourg, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484&langId=en> [11-11-2024].

On its website,<sup>29</sup> 70 good practices across EU have been featured, as well as more than 100 references of publications on accessibility. AccessibleEU also published six reports on policies, built environment, transportation, ICT standards, as well as guidelines targeting a wide range of professional profiles, which need to be engaged in accessibility improvements. Furthermore, AccessibleEU has created a network of national experts in the 27 EU countries, tasked with supervising the development of a unified European platform as a one-stop shop. It is a

virtual space offering information about accessibility, professional training programmes and standardization, while guaranteeing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the process. Considering the challenge of the collection of quantitative and qualitative data and the development of a common framework, the centre is building indicators to measure accessibility across EU-27. Standardizing accessibility is necessary to promote accessibility improvements and common indicators are essential to achieve this goal.



AccessibleEU representatives taking part in an event in Brussels in July 2023.  
© Fundación ONCE

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29 European Commission (n.d.), 'About AccessibleEU', European Commission, available at: <https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/> [11-11-2024].



## 2 Accessible transport as a key pillar of a seamless tourism experience

### Key takeaways:

- Choosing transport is one of the main concerns for people with disabilities when travelling.
- A coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach, as well as the **provision of accurate, updated, clear and precise information** are key elements to enabling the advancements in accessibility, across the sector.
- Good practices from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the Istanbul Airport and car rental services in Italy shed light on accessibility solutions catering to a wide range of end-users.

**Key words:** transportation | infrastructure | innovation | information and communication technology

## 2.1 New IATA protocols to upgrade customer services for passengers with disabilities

Case study presented by Linda Ristagno

Assistant Director of External Affairs, International Air Transport Association (IATA)

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is bringing together the travel sector and governments to harmonize national legislations for an enhanced experience for all passengers. IATA engages with governments, international organizations, representatives of organizations of people with disabilities and all key players in the air transport to improve accessibility.

IATA's mission is to ensure that safe, reliable and dignified air travel is accessible to all passengers. In 2019, IATA members approved the Resolution on Passengers with Disabilities, calling upon governments to implement IATA's principles to welcome passengers with disabilities and to recognize that "persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication including information technologies and systems,



Cover of the IATA *Guidance on the Transport of Mobility Aids*, showing athletes at Paralympic Games.

© IATA

[...] both in urban and rural areas.”<sup>30</sup> IATA, the main international organization in the sphere of civil aviation, emphasizes clear communication, both before travel and at the airport, as well as the critical role of personal assistance. According to an IATA survey from 2023, assistance requests have been growing yearly at a +30% rate in bigger airports.<sup>31</sup> In February 2023, IATA issued a new *Guidance for Airlines*<sup>32</sup> stressing the need to promote better processes for booking and information exchange, including the use of special service request (SSR) and passenger

name requirement (PNR) codes. The Guidance also outlines improved information sharing procedures, such as the development of a communications toolkit to engage with people with disabilities, enhanced practices for loading, collection and return of mobility aids, and training. Given the significance of clarity in information and communication, IATA has also released new guidance material for airline websites to ensure easy access.<sup>33</sup>

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30 International Air Transport Association (2019), ‘Resolution on Passengers with disabilities’, IATA, Montreal, available at: <https://www.iata.org/contentassets/7b3762815ac44a10b83ccf5560c1b308/resolution-disabled-pax-agm-2019.pdf> [22-08-2024].

31 International Air Transport Association (2024), ‘Air Travel Accessibility for Passengers with Disabilities’, IATA, Montreal, available at: <https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/pressroom/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-accessibility/> [02-09-2024].

32 International Air Transport Association (2023), *Guidance on the Transport of Mobility Aids, first edition*, IATA, Montreal, available at: <https://www.iata.org/en/programs/passenger/accessibility/> [22-08-2024].

33 International Air Transport Association (2023), ‘One Click Away’ *Best Practices*, first edition, IATA, Montreal, available at: <https://www.iata.org/contentassets/7b3762815ac44a10b83ccf5560c1b308/one-click-away-best-practices.pdf> [22-08-2024].

## 2.2 iGA Istanbul Airport – iGA Cares: an accessible journey is possible at iGA Istanbul Airport

Case study presented by Hilal Kahraman

Experience Design and Segment Management Chief, iGA Istanbul Airport

At iGA Istanbul Airport, a strong dedication to improving accessibility and the overall guest experience has been the driving force of the iGA Cares programme that champions accessibility initiatives by promoting inclusive solutions.

The challenges posed by the recent pandemic prompted tailored measures to address the specific requirements of people with disabilities, including public announcements for social distancing and mask usage, videos featuring sign language on airport screens, a campaign granting free access to fast-track security checkpoints and iGA electrical shuttle services for passengers aged above 65. These measures contributed to a swift recovery, making Istanbul Airport the only airport exceeding 2019 passenger numbers by 23% in 2022. Focused on inclusive design within the aviation sector, the approach of iGA Cares was to experience the airport journey alongside end-users with disabilities and promote access-friendly solutions such as:

1. Loud steps – an indoor navigation application enabling users to locate themselves, explore surroundings or follow an audio-described route;
2. Accessible route – another remarkable innovation consisting in a single-line tactile paving designed to improve the independent travel experience, currently available in the domestic departure area;
3. Video call centre and digital information kiosk catering to sign language users; and
4. Specific rooms and isolated food and beverage areas to accommodate guests with noise or crowd sensitivities, or autism spectrum, reflecting engagement with people with disabilities and their input in ongoing improvements.

Two elements emerged as essential aspects of the iGA Cares strategy, namely (i) direct involvement of people

with disabilities and (ii) collaboration across teams. These factors ensured for accessibility measures to be aligned with the specific requirements of end-users, promoting an inclusive experience for passengers. The creation of a truly accessible journey extends beyond individual services. iGA partnered with INCLAVI (Inclusive Aviation),<sup>34</sup> a three-year project co-funded by the European Commission, involving academia, aviation professionals and accessibility experts, with the aim of enhancing the

travel experience for all and creating inclusive training modules for aviation professionals and students. Additionally, Istanbul Airport is engaged with the Accessibility Committee led by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure of Türkiye, with representatives of governmental agencies, private and public entities from the transportation sectors, and organizations of people with disabilities.

Man with visual impairment walking through Loud Step and Accessible routes at the Istanbul Airport.  
© C. Karasakal



34 Consult for more information INCLAVI – Inclusive Aviation: <https://www.inclavi.eu/>



## 2.3 Making car rental fleet accessible for all by BIL Benefit and AISM, Italy

Case study presented by Luca Briziarelli  
Journalist and Senator, Senato della Repubblica, XVIII Legislature

The overarching aim of *La vita indipendente non va in vacanza* (independent life doesn't go on vacation) is to guarantee the fundamental human right to personal autonomy. To achieve this goal, car rental companies are introducing adapted services for customers with disabilities at major Italian airports.

In 2021, as much as 7% of Italians embarked on at least one vacation accompanied by a person with a disability or specific access requirements.<sup>35</sup>

Despite car rental services having swiftly become a key component of travel on the mainstream market over the last decade, customers with disabilities have been left behind. The project *La vita indipendente non va in vacanza* is built on three main pillars:

1. Expanding the boundaries of what should be considered essential for a satisfactory autonomous life;
2. Proposing an effective and replicable solution within the car rental sector; and
3. Directly involving organizations of persons with disabilities (entities gathering the end-users) and companies providing customer service and the car fleet.

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<sup>35</sup> Agenzia Nazionale del Turismo – ENIT (2021), 'Indagine popolazione italiana – Vacanze estate autunno 2021', Bollettino ENIT, ENIT, Roma, available at: [https://www.enit.it/storage/202206/20220627164750\\_bollettino-settimanale-novembre-2021-w1---focus-italiani.pdf](https://www.enit.it/storage/202206/20220627164750_bollettino-settimanale-novembre-2021-w1---focus-italiani.pdf) [23-08-2024].

The key partners are the Italian Multi-Sclerosis Society (AISM), BIL Benefit, public institutions, and companies, each playing a specific role. AISM holds ownership of the project and is entrusted with fine-tuning the inclusive rental model. BIL Benefit supports research, promotion, and partnerships. On the operational front, private partners provide the vehicles and manage the service, offering their infrastructure expertise and business know-how. The pilot project has been initiated at the airports of ten major Italian cities – including Bari, Catania, Florence, Milan, Palermo, Perugia, Pisa, Rome, Trapani, Turin – and is expected to be completed by 2025.



A man, wheelchair user, opens the door of a car modified to allow driving by people with disabilities.

© Bil Benefit SRL



### 3 Universal Design and innovation for a better access to culture and nature-based tourism experiences

#### Key takeaways:

- Enabling universal **access to culture and nature through travel and tourism** should be one of the basic principles of the tourism sector.
- Enhancing accessibility within cultural and natural settings improves the quality of life of local communities and visitors, while gaining new advocates for culture and nature conservation
- Managers of cultural and natural resources can ensure universal access to cultural heritage and nature-based tourism experiences through carefully planned accessibility **improvements with qualified experts, investments and innovation.**
- The primary challenge is to balance heritage and nature conservation with the principles of Universal Design. Good practices from the Italian cities of Procida and Ravenna, the Camino de Santiago in Spain, and the Walloon Natural Parks illustrate how to combine natural and cultural preservation with accessibility.

**Key words:** Universal Design | cultural heritage | nature-based tourism | accessible technology

## 3.1 Accessibility for all to cultural and natural resources: applying principles of Universal Design is a must

Case study presented by Katerina Papamichail

Architect, Accessibility Expert,

Board of Directors, European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT)

The seven principles of Universal Design (UD) cover the entire value chain of accessibility and serve as guidelines for designing environments, products and services. These principles – equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, appropriate size and space for approach and use – are instrumental for improving accessibility and making cultural heritage and natural sites more inclusive.

According to the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, “Universal Design (UD) is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.”<sup>36</sup> The aim is to ensure a comprehensive experience for all, addressing various elements such as buildings, monuments,

outdoor spaces, exhibits, information and all associated services. Cultural heritage sites pose challenges when it comes to implementing UD principles: the dual challenge faced by managers is to minimize diverse access barriers, enabling cultural heritage to be enjoyed by a broad audience, while ensuring that accessibility improvements do not compromise the cultural heritage values. With an ever-increasing urban population, experiencing nature is also vital. Ensuring accessibility for all visitors demands careful interventions and management in accordance with conservation criteria. Where physical access proves to be unattainable, technology represents a strong ally in providing accessible solutions; the creation of replicas, models or digital exhibits are alternatives that provide an inclusive experience for a broader audience.

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<sup>36</sup> Definition based on: Government of Ireland – electronic Irish Statute Book (2005), Disability Act 2005, Number 14 of 2005, eISB, Dublin, available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie> [23-08-2024].

Visitors with specific access requirements need objective information about the accessibility of the sites, both before and during their visit, in form of universally designed access guides.<sup>37</sup>

The accessibility interventions at the Acropolis archaeological site represent a successful application of UD principles and technology, while respecting its heritage values: In 2021, a new custom-designed lift for access to the top, and broader pathways, made of a specific concrete laid on a membrane, were installed. The latter provides a non-slippery surface, while protecting the rock and archaeological remains.



New pathway at the Athens Acropolis made of a specific concrete to provide a smooth and non-slippery surface.  
©Katerina Papamichail

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<sup>37</sup> An access guide presents objective information about the available accessible offerings and services, enabling people with disabilities to plan their visits. A good example of an access guide is available at: Royal Albert Hall (n.d.), 'Accessibility', Royal Albert Hall, London, available at: <https://www.royalalberthall.com> [23-08-2024].

## 3.2 From the right to beauty to social reintegration: accessibility in Procida, Ravenna and Pompei, Italy

Case study presented by Dino Angelaccio,  
President of ITRIA

Protecting and preserving cultural heritage needs to be compatible with ensuring its accessibility to all people, granting everyone the right to beauty. The initiatives carried out by the Intercultural and Accessible Tourist-religious Itineraries (ITRIA) Committee move precisely in this direction.

ITRIA<sup>38</sup> manages projects financed by national and international institutions, operating within Italy and in several European countries. The work of this organization in cultural sites encompasses:

1. Implementation of accessibility improvements;
2. Set-up of inclusive signage catering to different disabilities; and

3. Promotion of tangible and intangible cultural heritage through universal accessibility.

ITRIA's activities are taking place in the context of the Jubilee for All<sup>39</sup> project, providing for inclusive itineraries of beauty, between art and faith, across Italy. The projects have been carried out at sites of religious and historical significance, including the Church of Sant' Anna dei Lombardi in and the Museal Complex of the Pilgrims in Naples; and the Codex Museum in Rossano, Calabria, UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) which houses the oldest Bible. Worth mentioning are the five UNESCO WHS featuring mosaics in Ravenna, where accessibility improvements have been carried out. Tactile replicas of the mosaics equipped

38 Itinerari Turistico-Religiosi Interculturali Accessibili (ITRIA) is a non-profit organization for the promotion of accessible intercultural tourist-religious itineraries. It was established in 2016, inspired by the declaration of the World Tourism Organization's Year of Accessible Tourism for all.

39 European Commission (n.d.), 'Jubilee for all. Accessible itineraries to enjoy treasures of art and faith – Italy', Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Accessible Resource Centre-AccessibleEU, available at: [https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/jubilee-all-accessible-itineraries-enjoy-treasures-art-and-faith-italy\\_en](https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/jubilee-all-accessible-itineraries-enjoy-treasures-art-and-faith-italy_en) [15-11-2024].

Tactile and speaking reproduction of Ravenna mosaics. ©Dino Angelaccio



with audio descriptions have been thought out to allow people with visual impairments to enjoy the artworks.

ITRIA was also engaged in improving accessibility in Procida, in the south of Italy, named Italian Capital of Culture 2022.<sup>40</sup> ITRIA created accessible and multisensory community maps of the island, engaging people with disabilities from the design phase, to overcome one of the common barriers: information provision. Distances between different locations and their accessibility characteristics were displayed, allowing people to plan their

visit according to their specific access requirements. Tulipano Art Friendly<sup>41</sup> is another social inclusion project initiated by ITRIA in the Pompeii archaeological park. Launched in 2007, it creates services and employment for people with autism spectrum and intellectual impairments, while promoting individual well-being through cultural heritage practices based on UD for Learning. Pompei in Blu is one of the activities, a trail where children with disabilities can act as tour-guides of the Menandro's House, encouraging integration and inclusion.

40 Ministero della cultura (n.d.), 'Capitali italiane della cultura', Ministero della cultura, Rome, available at: <https://capitalidellacultura.cultura.gov.it/capitali-italiane-della-cultura/> [23-08-2024].

41 More information about Tulipano Art Friendly available at: <https://www.tulipanoart.org/> [13-11-2024].

## 3.3 Making the Way of St. James (Camino de Santiago) more accessible for pilgrims, tourists and locals

Case study presented by Sonia García Fraile  
Technician of Accessibility & Innovation Directorate, ONCE Foundation

**Making the Way of St. James (Camino de Santiago)<sup>42</sup> more accessible is enabling people with disabilities to undertake the Camino as independently as possible. Initiated in 2018 by the ONCE Foundation, the project's goal is to make the trail more accessible, avoiding a damaging impact on the environment and generating business and entrepreneurship opportunities.**

The Camino de Santiago was declared the First European Itinerary of Cultural Interest by the Council of Europe in 1987,<sup>43</sup> and in 1993 World Heritage Site by UNESCO.<sup>44</sup> It is therefore crucial to ensure that the widest possible range of pilgrims, willing to experience the Camino, can enjoy it without barriers. Accessibility to public areas, built environments and

virtual spaces has been improved, turning the trail into a more inclusive, interactive and playful activity for all its visitors. The accessible website of the Camino de Santiago provides some of the following elements:

1. Practical advice to prepare the experience;
2. Recommendations on the most adequate accessible technologies to be used in different stages and points of interest along the trail;
3. Accessibility information about hostels and specific segments of the trail; and
4. Links of interest to complement the information available on the website.

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42 Consult for more information on the Way of St. James: World Tourism Organization (2021), Accessibility and Inclusive Tourism Development in Nature Areas – Compendium of Best Practices, UN Tourism, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284422777>.

43 Council of Europe (2024), 'Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes', available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-santiago-de-compostela-pilgrim-routes> [18-11-2024].

44 UNESCO (n.d.), 'Routes of Santiago de Compostela: Camino Francés and Routes of Northern Spain', World Heritage Convention, World Heritage List, available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/669> [18-11-2024].



Signage of the Camino de Santiago in the foreground. Blurred in the background a group of pilgrims is undertaking the trial; one of them is wheelchair user. © Fundación ONCE



Guiding Apps are also made available to alert users about existing obstacles, allowing individuals with visual impairments to take necessary precautions. Accessibility experts travelled to the hostels on the French Way, one of the routes to reach Santiago de Compostela, to advance accessibility by tourism businesses and provide trustworthy information. The experts audited services against accessibility criteria and the collected information was published on the website. When planning their trip, pilgrims are nowadays informed on the degree of accessibility and are able to book the best option meeting their requirements.

ONCE Foundation carried out pilot testing with people with disabilities to guarantee the usability of the applications and web content. The project is easily replicable in

similar contexts outside of Spain. Thanks to its international dimension and the intrinsic innovation it incorporates, this initiative conveys the message that cultural heritage is dynamic and susceptible to access improvements.

## 3.4 Project Natur'Accessible: extraordinary nature accessible to all, myth or reality? Wallonia, Belgium

Case study presented by Baptiste Hottekiet

Director of Parc naturel du Pays des Collines, Wallonia's Nature Parks Federation

**Natur'Accessible<sup>45</sup> makes it possible for more people to experience and learn about nature thanks to accessibility improvements undertaken in the Natura 2000 sites of the Walloon Natural Parks. The aim is to enable everybody to enjoy respect and protect nature.**

The Project Natur'Accessible was developed by the Walloon Natural to:

1. Enhance accessibility for people with physical or intellectual disabilities;
2. Untap the green tourism potential of Natura 2000 sites through the creation of eleven thematic short walks in the Natural Parks of Wallonia;
3. Showcase different possibilities for the inclusion of people with disabilities by the tourism sector; and

4. Pilot-test a replicable methodology to be used by other Natura 2000 sites.

*Natur'Accessible* implemented accessibility improvements in eleven sites, by adapting short trails. Reception facilities – such as adapted parking –, as well as educational modules have been provided to facilitate broader public access to nature exploration. These focus on discovering the forest through the five senses or manipulating images to learn about forest animals. Informational panels illustrating the parks ecosystem were installed to engage the audience with nature, while handrails facilities, stabilized bridges and paths facilitating access have been put in place. A worth-mentioning example is the didactic trail of Bois de la Fontaine,<sup>46</sup> which allows people to explore the forest through informational panels. The trail forms a 900-m loop, with the entrance to the trail located next to the accessible parking

45 Consult for more information: <https://parcsnaturelsdewallonie.be/naturaccessible/> [13-11-2024].

46 Consult for more information on the trail: Access-i, <https://access-i.be/espaces/sentier-didactiques-du-bois-de-la-fontaine-parc-naturel-des-deux-ourthes>. [13-11-2024]

A girl and a boy practicing on an education module adapted to people with disabilities. © Louis Salmon



area. The walk follows a ring equipped with simple and intuitive signage, handrails, and an adapted picnic table at the trail's entry point. The connections between the various boardwalks and the trail are smoothly integrated. The trail has been made accessible to visually impaired people, through audio description tracks downloadable from the website. The main challenge during the project roll-out was to produce tangible solutions under budgetary constraints. The staff of the natural parks worked with Access-i<sup>47</sup> and its designers. Different municipalities,

water and forestry management services, the General Tourism Commission and the Walloon Agency for the Quality of Life<sup>48</sup> were also involved in selecting the paths, the type of adaptations, monitoring progress and ensuring promotion of the trails. The positive feedback from end-users, both locals and visitors, shows the value of enabling a more inclusive experience in nature.

47 Access-i is a non-profit organization working since 2010 to provide information on the accessibility of goods and services across Belgium. It comprises 13 member associations and it is also part of ENAT.

48 The Walloon Agency for the Quality of Life was established by the Walloon Government to provide its citizens a specialized body to support them and improve their quality of life. The agency is responsible for welfare and health, disability and family policies.



## 4 Inclusion in sports, leisure and events leading to personal fulfilment and entrepreneurship

### Key takeaways:

- A wide range of approaches are employed to advance the inclusion of people with disabilities in sports, recreation and leisure activities, and events in the context of tourism.
- These activities are crucial in the tourism value chain and pose different accessibility challenges that need to be bridged through **social integration, innovation and entrepreneurship**.
- As illustrated in the cases of Cape Town Tourism, Paris Tourism Office, Turismo de Portugal, Mirabilandia and the Municipality of Rimini, opting for best practices and international guidelines, through a coordinated and cooperative approach, is key to enhance inclusivity.

**Key words:** sports | leisure | events | mice industry | social integration | innovation | entrepreneurship

## 4.1 Putting accessibility at the centre stage of Cape Town Tourism strategies, South Africa

Case study presented by by Briony Brooks  
Head of Global Communications at Cape Town Tourism

**Accessibility stands as a primary focus for Cape Town Tourism, dedicated to ensuring that cultural and artistic experiences are accessible and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of their abilities.**

Cape Town Tourism (CTT),<sup>49</sup> the official destination marketing organization for the City of Cape Town, launched a first-of-its-kind universal access to tourism movement called Limitless Cape Town,<sup>50</sup> ensuring equal opportunities and access to Cape Town's rich tourism landscape. This movement generates an inclusive environment, promotes accessibility initiatives and strives to make Cape Town free from barriers and any form of discrimination.

Driven by the vision of inclusivity, Cape Town Tourism supported Winston Fani, a 35-year-old South African. CCT sponsored Winston's tuition to obtain his tourism

qualification and become South Africa's first qualified visually impaired tour guide. Winston Fani offers guests a unique interactive street art tour in Salt River, showcasing its impressive murals, as well as the artists and narratives behind them. CCT installed braille touchpoints on street art murals in Salt River and Cape Town's iconic yellow frames at tourist attractions. These points make it possible for the visually impaired visitors to explore the city. QR codes leading to audio content, have been incorporated to describe the views and art murals by voice features. The Tourism Office is also developing social media content featuring audio options, designing maps outlining accessible routes and launching audio maps. This destination management organization (DMO) has undertaken measures to promote accessibility training to the companies and industry professionals. CCT has also equipped its website with

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49 Cape Town Tourism website available at: <https://www.capetown.travel/>.

50 Cape Town Tourism (n.d.), 'What is Accessibility', CTT, Cape Town, available at: <https://www.capetown.travel/limitless-cape-town/> [30-08-2024].

valuable information enabling visitors to plan holidays based on their personal access requirements, allowing listening capability to those using their website. The website displays a selection of restaurants and barrier-free dining destinations, wheelchair friendly activities and attractions, as well as detailed information about accessibility at the airport. CCT has also hosted a number of inclusive activities including “Dinner in the Dark” events, partnering with the Cape Town Society for the Blind.



Group of people with visual impairments enjoying a guided tour thanks to braille touchpoints describing the attractions. © Briony Brookes

## 4.2 Olympics and Paralympics 2024: preparing Paris for a major global sport event, *Paris je t'aime*, France

Case study presented by Thomas Deschamps  
Director, Observatory on Sustainable and Accessible Tourism,  
Paris je t'aime-Paris Tourist Office

The Olympic and Paralympic Games<sup>51</sup> are a unique opportunity for Paris to raise awareness among its stakeholders on accessible tourism and provide new access solutions to both locals and visitors. Paris je t'aime Tourism Office has a once-in-a-lifetime chance to position Paris as a city welcoming all.

Paris has made significant progress in sustainability. However, it still has to prioritize universal accessibility. The *Paris je t'aime* journey started from the major accessibility audit concluding that people with disabilities:

1. Were not visible enough in its communication; and
2. Were lacking information to organize a comfortable stay, without barriers.

The tourism office collected detailed data so visitors with disabilities could independently assess which facilities in Paris meet their specific access requirements, making them eager also to attend the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The tourism authority has developed a tool to meticulously gather information by appointing auditors. 600 entry points situated in all premises of the establishment were checked during each visit.<sup>52</sup> This initiative not only facilitates the collection of data but also allows experts visiting the establishments to raise awareness among tourism professionals regarding adaptations.

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51 Note that at the time of the International Conference on Accessible Tourism, San Marino, November 2023, the Games were not held yet.

52 Some of the elements under consideration were the signage for transparent entrance and communication doors, as well as a detailed description of the shower in the bathroom.



*Paris je t'aime* large standing letters in front of Paris skyline, France.

© Geert Van Keymolen | Dreamstime.com

The data collection, which was publicly disseminated on the open data website of Paris and made accessible to social stakeholders,<sup>53</sup> has encouraged public authorities to address the root of the issue. To support people in organizing their stays in Paris, the tourism office offers accurate information on its website on accessibility in transports, accommodation and leisure activities.<sup>54</sup> Such an approach instills trust and is key in the planning phase when making travel choices. The Paris je t'aime Tourist Office also developed an application called *MyParisJetaime*,<sup>55</sup> providing a list of specific sites adapted to people with disabilities (accommodation, restaurants and cultural venues) and detectable through the users' actual location or specific address. The challenge was to persuade influential businesses

of the accessibility advantages, as they are the ones capable of driving the initiative forward – on the long run. The strategy followed by *Paris je t'aime* to overcome initial reluctance was to align the accessibility principles with those of hospitality. In tourism destinations such as Paris, that perform so well in terms of visitor numbers and revenues, attracting new customers is sometimes mistakenly perceived as an “easy task”. There is a risk of linking accessibility to normative constraints rather than to hospitality and making everyone feel welcome. With the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the concern of not being able to welcome anyone to Paris was key in stimulating a change of mindset and boosting accessibility improvements.

53 The data are published on the open data website of the city of Paris: Paris Data (n.d.), 'Accessibilité des Hébergements en Ile de France – Paris je t'aime', Paris Data, Paris, available at: <https://opendata.paris.fr/explore/dataset/accessibilite-des-hebergements-en-ile-de-france-paris-je-t-aime/information/> [30-08-2024].

54 Paris je t'aime – Tourist Office (n.d.), 'Accessibility', Paris je t'aime, Paris, available at: <https://parisjetaime.com/eng/article/accessibility-a646> [30-08-2024].

55 Access to the *MyParisJetaime* application through: <https://my.parisjetaime.com/> [14-01-2025].



## 4.3 Accessible MICE, leisure, festivals and events: Turismo de Portugal creating hands-on tools for businesses

Case study presented by Helena Ribeiro

Project Manager for Accessible Tourism, Turismo de Portugal

For Turismo de Portugal, improving accessibility throughout the value chain is crucial for qualifying the tourist offer and differentiating Portugal from competing destinations. It ensures the universality of tourism and the right to enjoy travelling, while also representing an excellent business opportunity.

With its Tourism Strategy 2027, Turismo de Portugal has set environmental, economic and social sustainability goals. The *All for All* Programme<sup>56</sup> integrates a diverse set of initiatives with the aim to stimulate, inform, train and support those enterprises and entities that constitute the tourism value chain in developing accessible offerings.

The main capacity-building and awareness-raising actions promoted by Turismo de Portugal include:

1. An Accessible Tourism Module, available at the Hospitality and Tourism Schools of Turismo de Portugal. The latter are key institutions in training the future workforce and managers of the national tourism sector;
2. The online executive training at the Digital Academy of Tourism in Portugal, completed by 60 professionals in 2021; and
3. Webinars on accessible tourism, as well as the new practical accessibility guides which reported over 1,300 participants between 2020 and 2022.

The Portuguese tourism authority has also provided the new *Technical Guides – Accommodation, Events, Tourist Entertainment, Beaches*<sup>57</sup> offering updated technical information and

56 Turismo de Portugal (n.d.), 'Programa All for All – Portuguese Tourism', Turismo de Portugal, Lisbon, available at: <https://business.turismodeportugal.pt/pt/Paginas/homepage.aspx> [12-11-2024].

57 Turismo de Portugal (2022), *Guias práticos sobre acessibilidade*, Turismo de Portugal, Lisbon, available at: <https://business.turismodeportugal.pt/pt/Paginas/homepage.aspx> [12-11-2024].

A wheelchair user visiting the Castelo dos Mouros in Portugal.

© Parques de Sintra – Monte de Lua, SA



recommendations on access-friendly services. Given Turismo de Portugal's investments, 107 projects promoted by the Accessible Tourism Support Line are in the final stage of implementation or have been completed. Furthermore, the Accessible Beach Programme<sup>58</sup> and the Most Accessible Beach Award<sup>59</sup> have reached a record in 2023 with 242 accessible beaches, corresponding to 37% of the total bathing areas classified in 2023. Turismo de Portugal launched the Accessible Festivals Programme, in partnership with the National Institute

for Rehabilitation, and published a guide on accessibility practices at events. These initiatives increase and diversify the accessible cultural offer, capturing tourist flows, and strengthening local and regional economies. Despite evidence of a growing market for accessible tourism, the sector still faces challenges. Adopting and promoting best practices in accessible and inclusive tourism and increasing employability of people with disabilities, are essential aspects in such a transformative process.

58 Turismo de Portugal (n.d.), 'Praia Acessível, Praia para Todos!', Turismo de Portugal, Lisbon, available at: <https://business.turismodeportugal.pt/pt/Paginas/homepage.aspx> [12-11-2024].

59 Turismo de Portugal (n.d.), 'Prémio Praia +Acessível', Turismo de Portugal, Lisbon, available at: <https://business.turismodeportugal.pt/pt/Paginas/homepage.aspx> [12-11-2024].

## 4.4 SEATRAC: technologies making seaside destinations and water resources accessible to all, Greece

Case study presented by Ignatios Fotiou  
President, TOBEA

**SEATRAC<sup>60</sup> is central figure in the accessible tourism landscape, thanks to innovation and technology. It advances equality, inclusion and personal autonomy in over 225 accessible destinations worldwide. This ground-breaking technology started its journey in Greece and is expanding now internationally, enabling all people to enjoy a barrier-free bathing experience.**

The SEATRAC journey started in 2009, when its founder, Ignatios Fotiou, engaged in a conversation with a friend who happened to be wheelchair user, expressing the impossibility to get into the water autonomously. The same situation also affects other people with reduced mobility, such as those with multiple sclerosis, post-stroke patients, elderly people or pregnant women. In 2012, TOBEA<sup>61</sup> launched SEATRAC – a device

aimed at providing autonomous sea access for people with reduced mobility. To ensure a comprehensive experience to all the company developed an online platform offering essential information about beaches equipped with SEATRAC. Thus, TOBEA is supporting people with disabilities through their social media channels by providing the most complete information. In doing so, they act both as travel guides and as the intermeddle between government, local authorities and people with disabilities. The first challenge for SEATRAC was to provide a tool that could benefit people with different types of disability. To increase its functionality the SEATRAC team engaged in annual meetings, focus groups and personal interviews with the community of SEATRAC, drawing valuable insights from their experiences. The dialogue led to continuous improvements in their devices,

60 Consult for more information SEATRAC: <https://seatrak.gr/en/> [13-11-2024]

61 TOBEA stands for Thinking Out of the Box Engineering Applications, and it is the name of the company founded by Ignatios Fotiou and George Sotiriadis. TOBEA Ltd was created in 2012, as a spin-off of the University of Patras, to promote SEATRAC and develop additional products. Consult for more information: <https://www.tobea.gr/en>.

including new features and capabilities, providing unique experiences to users. Another challenge was to find a solution suitable to different types of beaches. The first SEATRAC was a stationary device which operates perfectly in the Mediterranean area, with minor tides. Subsequently, the company created SEATRAC Mover, a new model adaptable to tidal movements. The company is planning to also launch a product for the coastline with short cliff edges and

shallow beaches. TOBEA has achieved recognition for its innovation starting in 2013, when the company received the first prize at the Greece Innovates! competition,<sup>62</sup> sponsored by SEV Hellenic Federation of Enterprises and Eurobank EFG. In 2015, TOBEA was honoured with the title of national champion for innovation at the European Business Awards (EBA). The company's work was additionally acknowledged in 2022 with the Startup of the Year award by ACCI.

A wheelchair user is enjoying the beach with SEATRAC, designed to ensure independent sea access for everyone. © Asimakis Stasinopoulos



62 TOBEA (n.d.), 'Our Distinctions', TOBEA, Athens, available at: <https://www.tobea.gr/en> [12-11-2024].

## 4.5 There is no fun without inclusivity: Mirabilandia Amusement Park, Italy

Case Study presented by Riccardo Capo  
Managing Director, Mirabilandia

In the amusement industry, ensuring equal access for everyone to its facilities is of paramount importance. In close cooperation with certifying companies and manufacturers, the biggest Italian amusement park Mirabilandia is improving accessibility in theme parks.

Mirabilandia's approach is forward-thinking, striving to expand its services and promote inclusivity. The park's goal is not only to provide an amusement experience, but also to enable people to embark on new adventures. The park is developing its services and improving accessibility by adhering to the SDGs and the principles adopted by Parques Reunidos<sup>63</sup>. Mirabilandia has created its own *Accessibility Guidelines*<sup>64</sup> to allow

guests with disabilities to plan their visit. These guidelines provide all necessary information regarding park accessibility covering the essential requirements for accessing, using or exiting its attractions, ensuring a comfortable experience. Additionally, at the entrance of Mirabilandia and Mirabeach parks, barriers have been removed and up-to-date information is provided. In 2023 the company started MiraLIS, a project thought to improve accessibility within the amusement parks, addressed to people that use Italian Sign Language (LIS). It includes:

1. A map featuring accessibility characteristics to ensure that visitors have accurate and trustworthy information at their fingertips; and

63 Parques Reunidos is one of the main operators in the leisure sector with a portfolio of more than 50 leisure centres across Europe, North America and Australia. Within its pillars, accessibility has a primary role. Parques Reunidos facilitates access to leisure for people with disabilities, providing accurate information and accommodation services for people with specific requirements. The Spanish parks of Parques Reunidos are also promoting access to the labour market for people with disabilities, with more than 25 people with some kind of disability as part of its staff.

64 Guidelines available at: Parques Reunidos (n.d.), *Mirabilandia Parks – Accessibility Guidelines*, Parques Reunidos, Madrid (ES), available at: [mirabilandia.it](https://www.mirabilandia.it) and <https://www.mirabilandia.it/content/dam/mir/files/mirabilandia-guida-accessibilita-web-mirabilandia-EN.pdf> [30-08-2024].



- 2 . QR codes for accessible attractions which – when scanned – show videos in LIS giving recommendations for a safe and enjoyable experiences.

Mirabilandia is one of the first parks in Italy to offer this service dedicated to all guests with hearing disabilities and that generates integration between people.

Una Giostra per tutti (“A Ride for All”) is another initiative carried out by the park through the support of certifying bodies. The project involves amusement ride manufacturers to raise awareness on accessibility and design attractions suitable for people with different kinds of disabilities. According to Mirabilandia’s CEO, inclusive offerings and barrier-free attractions resulted in 10,000 visitors with

disability annually – a trend expected to grow, considering the wide range of performances catering to people with specific access requirements. The figure reflects the importance of investing in accessibility improvements, thus allowing all customers to have fun.

## 4.6 The new waterfront of Rimini: creating a new space for all in a major seaside destination, Italy

Case study presented by Alberto Dellavalle  
Director, Infrastructure and Environmental Quality, Municipality of Rimini

Rimini<sup>65</sup> has been acquiring a new urban landscape, tucked in between the sea and the city, by replacing former parking lots and roads with green areas, bicycle and pedestrian paths, open-air gyms, and other sports and leisure features. The city is creating an inclusive environment catering to residents and tourists alike, of all ages, genders and abilities.

Rimini has witnessed urban transformation over the past decade. The Sea Park<sup>66</sup> project (*Parco del Mare*) stands out as a significant urban revitalization effort covering a 16-km stretch of coastline. It envisions a space promoting culture, wellness, sports and social interaction, by:

1. Enhancing accessibility and urban comfort;
2. Fostering citizens' and business participation;
3. Promoting service optimization;
4. Advancing innovation.

The newly created or refurbished spaces entail accessible relaxation areas, parks, fitness zones, *Spiaggia Libera Tutti*<sup>67</sup> public beaches and the *Foresta del Mare*<sup>68</sup> accessible playground, representing Rimini's urban renewal. The *Foresta del Mare* recreational area, inaugurated in

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65 Consult Visit Rimini webpage at: <https://www.visitrimini.com/en/>

66 Consult for more information Visit Rimini at: <https://www.visitrimini.com/en/the-new-waterfront-reflects-the-holistic-concept-of-wellness/> [13-11-2024].

67 Consult for more information Comune di Rimini: <https://www.comune.rimini.it/novita/una-spiaggia-libera-senza-barriere-0> [13-11-2024].

68 Consult for more information Comune di Rimini: <https://www.comune.rimini.it/novita/inaugurata-la-foresta-del-mare-nuova-area-giochi-inclusiva-nel-tratto-1-parco-del-mare> [13-11-2024].

2023, invites children to open themselves to the world, stimulating social interaction and personal development. On the other hand, the *SpiaggiaLiberaTutti* project, expected to be finalized by 2025, is making the sea and beaches accessible to everyone without discrimination. Parks and beaches are community assets designed for universal use. The removal of architectural barriers is therefore

crucial. Nevertheless, the challenge lies in interpreting norms and standards, addressing diverse abilities, and creating inclusive spaces. Beyond meeting minimum standards, designers must adopt and innovate in ad-hoc solutions to specific problems, reducing both physical and social barriers. The Sea Park project is an example of a people-centred approach, benefitting the entire community.

A view of the Sea Park playground in Rimini. © Municipality of Rimini







## 5 Tourism businesses tapping into the economic potential of universal accessibility

### Key takeaways:

- The private sector and destinations underscore the significance of accessibility as a **driver for quality**, once they understand its **business case**, as well as its **economic and social benefits**.
- Market expansion, and product differentiation are driven by changes in design and marketing strategies of accessible tourism.
- There is a series of effective approaches for **advancing innovation, leveraging technology applications and transforming the mindset** within the industry to champion accessibility.
- The good practices from the United Kingdom, Greece, Italy and Spain demonstrate how investing in accessibility can lead to business growth and social equality.

**Key words:** market expansion | product differentiation | technology | labour inclusion | innovation

## Special feature: Embracing the business case of accessibility and inclusive employment within the accommodation sector

Accommodation establishments represent the core element of any tourism experience. They need to ensure quality services and comfort for all people, with or without disabilities. Many accessibility interventions within that sector follow common standards for built environments while others are very specific to hospitality services. Accessibility and inclusion within the accommodation sector, are also related to achieving decent working

conditions and economic independence through employment of persons with disabilities.

The San Marino Conference 2023 served as a platform for two companies to present their innovative approaches to accessibility:

1. Hilton – a major mainstream hotel chain representing a global brand; and
2. ILUNION Hotels – a Spanish chain which started as an accessibility and labour inclusion champion and is becoming an important hotel brand.

A waiter with Down syndrome serves breakfast with the help of his colleague.  
© Pojoslaw | Dreamstime.com



Accessibility is a priority on Hilton's guest-facing applications. The company's Digital Accessibility Team ensures that technology is built to address the varied access requirements of all guests. Screen reader support, reduced motion preferences<sup>69</sup> and colour contrast considerations are just a few focus areas.

<sup>69</sup> The prefers reduced motion is a setting used to minimize the non-essential motions, animations that could cause discomfort for people with vestibular motion disorders.

The company has developed awareness-raising points with sign language artwork for team members with hearing impairments to enable them to effectively communicate. Hilton actively seeks input from end-users with disabilities to improve its customer service and the understanding of human diversity on the employees' side. In recognition of their steady commitment, Hilton hotels, after scoring 100% on the Disability Equality Index,<sup>70</sup> were awarded with the title of Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion in the United States of America by Disability:IN<sup>71</sup> and the American Association of People with Disabilities.

ILUNION Hotels is part of the Spanish ONCE Social Group,<sup>72</sup> established in 1988 to promote labour inclusion of people with disabilities, as well as to advance accessible and inclusive tourism. Sustainability has become the cornerstone of the company's 2022–2025 strategic

plan geared towards building a pleasant and access-friendly environment where everyone feels fully included. People with disabilities make up more than 40% of ILUNION Hoteles' workforce, reaching as much as 700 employees with disabilities and workers belonging to potentially vulnerable demographics. The hotel chain has also created 12 Special Employment Centres since 2014, with more than 70% of their employees with disabilities. Their aim is to create jobs for people with different types of disability, while increasing inclusion within companies and the entire society. ILUNION Hotels has obtained the prestigious 500+ Seal of Excellence of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)<sup>73</sup> and also the Universal Accessibility Certification<sup>74</sup> (based on UNE 170001-2:2007) for all its establishments.

70 The Disability Equality Index is measured through a wide range of criteria, including culture and leadership, enterprise-wide access, employment practices, community engagement and supplier diversity. Each company participating in the index receives a score ranging from 0 to 100, with those scoring 80 or higher being recognized as a "Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion". It was promoted by Disability:IN, in a joint initiative with the American Association of People with Disability, and it is now widely used for the annual benchmarking of corporate disability inclusion policies and programmes. More information about the index is available at: <https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/disability-equality-index/>.

71 Disability:IN is the leading non-profit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide with a network of over 500 corporations. It is engaged in expanding opportunities for people with disabilities in enterprises. Consult for more information: <https://disabilityin.org/>.

72 Consult for more information the Spanish ONCE Social Group at: <https://www.once.es/>

73 The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) is an index that acknowledges organizations worldwide with best performance in quality management. Main components include orientation towards results and costumers, leadership, social responsibility, development and involvement of people, partnerships and innovation. Consult for more information: <https://efqm.org/> [30-08-2024].

74 Una Norma Española (2007), *UNE 170001-2:2007 – Universal accessibility. Part 2: Accessibility management system*, updated in 2023, available UNE, Madrid, at: <https://www.une.org/encuentra-tu-norma/busca-tu-norma/norma?c=N0040253> [30-08-2024].

## 5.1 Forging alliances between destinations and businesses to create experiences for all, VisitEngland, United Kingdom

Case study presented by Ross Calladine  
Accessibility and Inclusion Lead,  
United Kingdom's Government-appointed Disability and Access Ambassador, Tourism

VisitEngland, as the official tourism board for England, United Kingdom, is working to ensure accessible tourism across the country by engaging in research and providing inputs, advice and resources for tourism businesses willing to make their offerings more access-friendly and inclusive.

In 2021, the proportion of people with disability in England was 17.8% (10.4 million);<sup>75</sup> and in 2022 adults with disability made 25% fewer trips than adults with no disability.<sup>76</sup> Accessible tourism enables companies to tap into this expanding market, and to engage with diverse customer groups and local

communities. VisitEngland is encouraging businesses to improve accessibility through a new business toolkit and reach the GBP 14.6 billion accessible tourism market.<sup>77</sup> The *Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Toolkit for Businesses*,<sup>78</sup> launched in 2024, is serving as a valuable resource for the tourism industry and addressing legal, commercial and ethical aspects of accessibility. It has been designed to provide practical guidance to advance inclusivity. Specific tips for self-catering venues, hotels, visitor attractions, food and beverage businesses, and event organizers provide significant insights on how to:

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75 Office for National Statistics (2023), 'Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021', ONS, Newport, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk> [02-09-2024].

76 Government of the United Kingdom – Department for Transport (2024), 'Disability, accessibility and blue badge statistics, England, 2022 to 2023', GovUK, London, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/> [02-09-2024].

77 According to VisitEngland, the total expenditure on tourism travels in England by those with an impairment or those travelling within a group where a member has an impairment is estimated to be GBP 14.6 billion annually. For more information, see: VisitBritain and VisitEngland (2024), 'Discover the Value of the Purple Pound', VisitBritain, Birmingham, available at: <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice> [30-08-2024].

78 VisitBritain and VisitEngland (n.d.), *VisitEngland Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Toolkit for Businesses*, VisitBritain, Birmingham, available at: <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice> [30-08-2024].

1. Remove barriers for specific customer groups;
2. Offer inclusive welcome facilities; and
3. Engage in marketing operations and foster inclusivity in the workplace internal culture.

Action checklists tailored to specific business categories prompt quick-win actions for tangible improvements in accessibility, in a short timeframe. The toolkit not only suggests specific measures, but also gives guidance on longer-term aspirational goals, relating to physical and digital design,

and business operations. Furthermore, in 2022 VisitEngland commissioned a full and independent review of the National Accessible Scheme (NAS)<sup>79</sup> for accommodation and is also supporting a new portfolio of local tourist boards called Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs)<sup>80</sup> to advance accessibility. A new support programme is planned to help destination managers in developing inclusive destination offerings. Measuring success, ensuring accountability, communicating and celebrating accessibility through support bodies, influencers, content creators and awards are also part of VisitEngland’s strategy.

A wheelchair user wearing a green jacket and smiling by waterfront in England.

© VisitBritain/AccessOutdoorGuide



79 Consult for more information VisitEngland’s National Accessible Scheme: <https://www.visitengland.com/https%3A/www.visitengland.com/plan-your-visit/access-all/national-accessible-scheme> [13-11-2024].

80 Consult for more information VisitEngland’s Local Visitor Economy Partnership: <https://visitpeakdistrict.com/industry/about-our-industry/local-visitor-economy-partnership-lvep> [13-11-2024].

## 5.2 Catering to specific access requirements in island destinations: the example of Skiathos, Greece

Case study presented by Thodoris Tzoumas  
Mayor of Skiathos, Greece

**The municipality of Skiathos demonstrates a strong commitment to advancing both infrastructure development and promoting community awareness in the realm of universal accessibility. This multifaceted approach aspires to guarantee that all individuals, whether residents or visitors, enjoy equal opportunities and access to services.**

Skiathos hosted the World Trails Conference in 2022, a worldwide event that gathered trail professionals and enthusiasts, as well as leaders from government agencies, non-profit organizations, civil society, businesses and academia to share best practices and enhance accessible trail offerings. During the event, Tracy Schmitt, known as Unstoppable Tracy, a highly acclaimed communicator and decorated athlete

with a physical disability, shared her inspirational journey with the audience. In addition to the conference, the Municipality of Skiathos, with the support of Paths of Greece,<sup>81</sup> made one of its trails in the nature reserve of Koukounaries accessible. This initiative marks a landmark achievement, being one of the first paths in Greece allowing people with major physical disabilities to undertake a hiking experience. Accessibility improvement efforts in Skiathos also include:

1. Participation in the ExtraMilers platform,<sup>82</sup> a database promoting accessible tourism and providing comprehensive information based on international accessibility standards; and

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81 Paths of Greece is a social cooperative enterprise, founded in 2010 and working to make Greece one of the main hiking destinations in the world. Consult for more information: <https://www.pathsofgreece.gr/en/> [13-11-2024].

82 ExtraMilers is a platform promoting accessible tourism information. It launched the first accessibility database for the Greek islands. Consult for more information ExtraMilers website: <https://www.extramilers.eu/en/> [13-11-2024].

2. A programme to make beaches, restaurants, parking areas and public transportation facilities more accessible.

Spiral changing rooms were installed in the beaches, showing a QR code that gives access to historical information and details about the island. This facility has been recognized with a tourism award for innovation and gained a patent from the Hellenic Industrial Property

Organisation (OBI)<sup>83</sup>. A SEATRAC<sup>84</sup> tool was also installed in four beaches to allow everybody to enter the sea autonomously. Furthermore, accessible chemical toilets were placed in the city centre. In the experience of Skiathos, all key players need to make a major effort to address prejudice related to disability still found in small town contexts and across rural areas. Awareness-raising by sharing information and knowledge is critical to overcome cultural barriers.



A beach in Skiathos equipped with SEATRAC, ensuring access to the sea for everyone.  
© Thodoris Tzoumas

83 Consult for more information OBI's website: <https://www.obigr/en/> [13-11-2024].

84 Consult for more information on SEATRAC: <https://seatraccr/en/> [13-11-2024].

## 5.3 Alpitour's Barrier Free project: how can holidays be more accessible?, Italy

Case study presented by Tommaso Bertini  
Chief Corporate & Tour Operating Marketing Officer at Alpitour World, Italy

Alpitour<sup>85</sup> wishes to provide the best possible travel service to every client, acknowledging that there is no one-size-fits-all product in the industry. With vacations viewed as a necessary primary good and a key expression of everyone's lifestyle, Alpitour ensures a tailored approach based on the clients' specific access requirements, age and financial means to travel.

Alpitour has been at the forefront of accessible tourism since 2008, when it started assessing the needs of customers with motor disabilities. In 2010, Alpitour introduced the Barrier Free project,<sup>86</sup> not only driven by the idea to expand the customer target groups, but also to improve the vacation experience for all. In this process, Alpitour firstly addressed cognitive and cultural bias stemming from their own interpretation of disability.

Then the company explored new demographics of potential clients and their perspectives with regards to the travel industry. Alpitour took on the challenge of arranging packages for clients with motor disabilities, leveraging on the field work of expert staff in key inbound destinations. Moreover, the tour operator embarked in new processes to optimize service quality, by providing precise information on accessibility features, collected and managed by a trained team. By using this approach, Alpitour reduced costs and time associated with addressing potential complaints. In Alpitour's experience, key success factors include:

1. Maximum transparency, allowing customers to make informed choices;
2. Personnel dedicated to streamlined problem-solving; and

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85 Consult for more information on Alpitour: <https://www.alpitour.it/>.

86 Consult for more information on Alpitour World Senza Barriere: <https://www.alpitourworld.com/en/news/senza-barriere> [13-11-2024].



3. Collaboration with organizations like Handy Superabile,<sup>87</sup> bringing together key skillsets.

The main partners are accommodation facilities which have a major impact on revenue generation: Alpitour has expanded its accessible offerings up to more than 50 hotel establishments in 13 destinations. All these efforts are shaping up the company's reputation and brand image, while impacting customer

decisions. One of the main challenges is updating the substantial amount of data offered to the customer. The company relies on assistants at the destinations who carefully monitor changes to what had been originally communicated to clients. Nowadays, thousands of people with specific access requirements travel with Alpitour, increasing the tour operator's revenue and inspiring further investment in the Barrier Free project.



<sup>87</sup> Handy Superabile is an Italian non-profit organization, engaged in promoting barrier-free experiences. Founded in 2006, it collaborates with public institutions and tourist operators to improve the tourist offer for people with disabilities. Consult for more information: <https://www.handysuperabile.org/>.

## 5.4 Accessibility as a fundamental base of shopping tourism, San Marino Outlet Experience and Borletti Group

Case Study presented by Maurizio Borletti  
Co-Founder of Borletti Group

From a simple leisure activity, shopping has become an element of strong attraction for any tourism destination. Accessibility is of primary importance to ensure all customers have the opportunity to fully enjoy the shopping experience, far beyond removing the architectural barriers.

The San Marino Outlet Experience,<sup>88</sup> launched by the Borletti Group and its partners, is a 17,000 m<sup>2</sup> outlet that hosts international luxury brands in the clothing, accessories and home furnishings sectors. Located along the main road connecting Rimini with San Marino, the outlet is a shopping tourism place to be. The San Marino outlet, which complies with the most advanced international eco-sustainable construction standards, is equipped with 66 designated covered parking spaces for customers with disabilities, offering direct access to the commercial area.

Additionally, spacious stores are designed to ensure comfortable entry points and shopping experience to everyone. Complementary services include:

1. A free-of-charge wheelchair lending service;
2. Fully accessible restrooms with an avantgarde design, as well as for bars and restaurants; and
3. An inclusive children's playground.

These features make San Marino Outlet Experience a welcoming shopping-stop meeting the highest standards of accessibility. In order to bridge some of the ongoing challenges related to disability awareness, the company has also undertaken staff training in customer service to respond to the specific access requirements of visitors with reduced mobility.

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88 Consult for more information on San Marino Outlet Experience: <https://www.sanmarinooutlet.com/>  
[30/10/2024]

As San Marino and the Italian region of Romagna are known for their hospitality, *being hospitable* also implies *being inclusive*. It is crucial for the outlet staff and its stores' employees to have skills to attend to clients with disabilities, to provide information and support customers with specific access requirements in the most adequate way. It is also critical to effectively communicate and promote accessible offerings, conveying the message that the San Marino Outlet Experience is free from architectural barriers and other kind of obstacles.

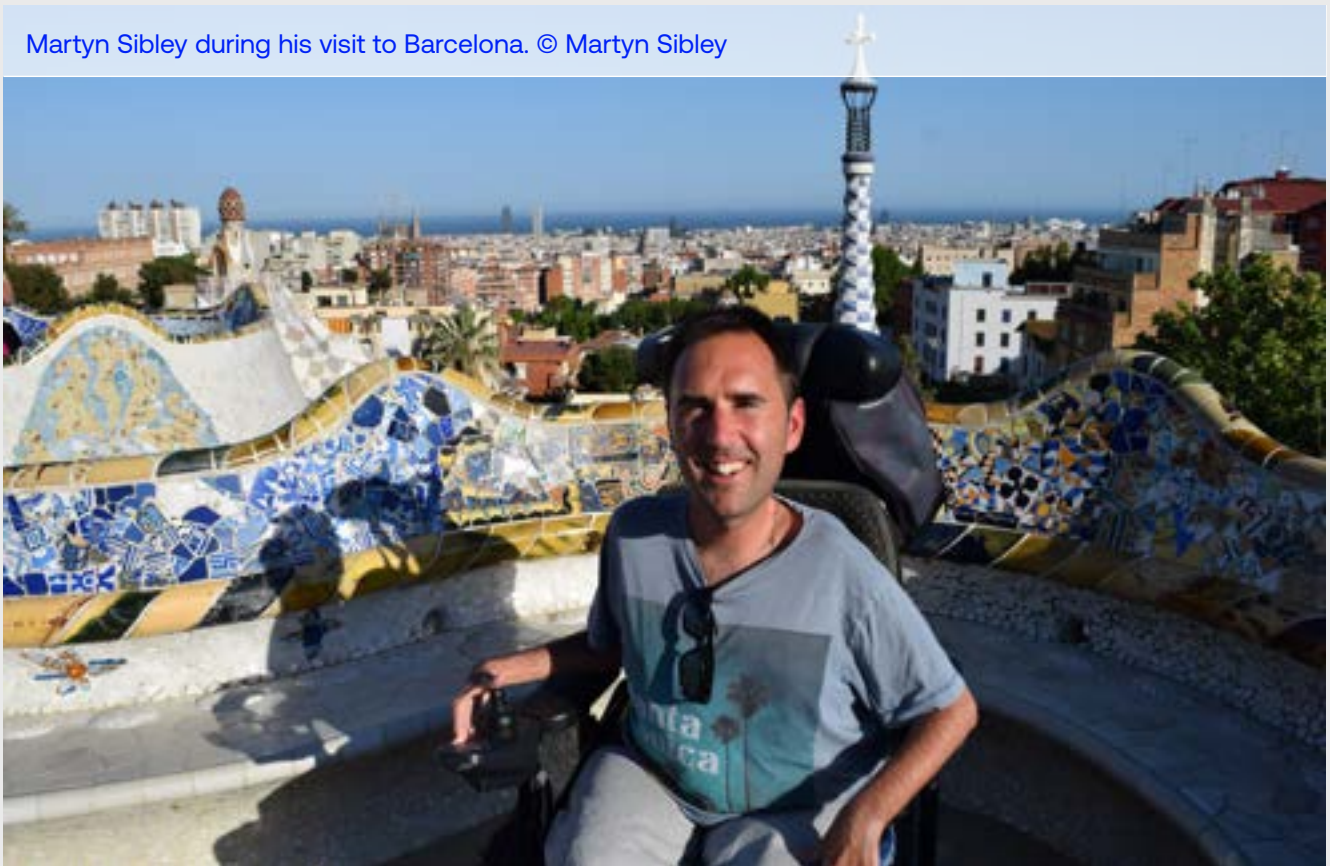


A wheelchair user together with his family doing shopping at the San Marino Outlet Experience.  
© The Market Prop.Co Srl

# Personal account of travelling with a disability and promoting inclusive marketing

Personal account by Martyn Sibley  
Co-Founder/CEO, Purple Goat Agency & Disability Horizons,  
World Changing Influencer

Martyn Sibley during his visit to Barcelona. © Martyn Sibley



Inclusive marketing and social content creation play pivotal roles in promoting accessible tourism, ensuring that all individuals can experience the joys of travel. Purple Goat<sup>89</sup> is dedicated to

showcasing the possibilities of inclusive travel through impactful storytelling and authentic representation. One such story is captured in this photograph of me enjoying a sunny day in Barcelona.

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89 Consult for more information on Purple Goat: <https://www.purplegoatagency.com/> [30-10-2024].

This moment highlights that with the right support and accessibility measures, everything is possible. This image is not just a personal memory but a powerful statement that travel can and should be inclusive for everyone. Accessible tourism is about more than just physical accommodations; it encompasses the entire experience, from planning and booking to the actual journey and activities. By using inclusive marketing strategies, we can highlight destinations that prioritize accessibility, inspiring others to explore the world barriers. Social content creation allows us to share these experiences widely, breaking down stereotypes and encouraging the travel industry to adopt more inclusive practices. When travellers see real stories of people with disabilities enjoying diverse

destinations, it challenges preconceived notions and demonstrates the feasibility of accessible travel. At Purple Goat, we collaborate with content creators with disabilities who share their authentic travel experiences, providing valuable insights. This approach not only promotes inclusivity but also enhances the visibility of accessible tourism options, encouraging destinations to improve their accessibility standards. Inclusive marketing and social content creation are essential tools in advocating for a world where travel is accessible to all. By sharing stories like mine and working with content creators with disabilities, we can drive meaningful change and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to explore and enjoy the beauty of our world.



# Annexes

# San Marino Action Agenda to advance Accessible Tourism 2030

**The Government of the Republic of San Marino, the Ministry of Tourism of Italy and other Member States of the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism),** representatives of destinations, the private sector, educational institutions, intergovernmental bodies, accessibility experts and leading civil society organizations representing persons with disability, met on the occasion of the **UN Tourism International Conference on Accessible Tourism: Advancing accessibility for destinations, companies and people** on 16 and 17 November 2023. The signatories agree to undertake the following commitments under the **San Marino Action Agenda on Accessible Tourism 2030**, as a catalyst for change towards disability inclusion and tourism for all, reflecting the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## I. All stakeholders

- **Raise** awareness of the social and economic advantages of accessible tourism. It creates equal opportunities for all and is a business opportunity for destinations.
- **Apply** Universal Design and international standards. People cross borders to travel and need to understand the characteristics of services being booked, worldwide.
- **Prioritize** accessibility interventions, even in the case of scarce resources. Train your personnel, starting from the managers and decision-makers.
- **Incentivize** entrepreneurship and a business ecosystem that offers accessible services are more resilient and there is no sustainability without accessibility.
- **Advance** labour inclusion of persons with disability. Destination authorities and companies that embrace accessibility are also well placed to diversify their workforce.

## II. Public sector

- **Embrace** accessibility as an opportunity instead of a challenge.
- **Research** visitors' behaviour, expenditure patterns and feedback on access improvements. Qualitative and quantitative data reveal what people need and what needs to be done.
- **Adopt** laws, policies and standards which enhance people's comfort, safety and life quality. Accessible tourism is good for everyone, both for visitors and locals.
- **Implement** strategies that ensure new revenue streams and customers' loyalty. Increased accessibility brings along competitive advantages for countries and destinations.
- **Ensure** accessibility criteria among tourism businesses bidding for public tenders or funding.
- **Promote** good practices through tourism stakeholder networks and the monitoring of progress based on key performance indicators. Communicate specific achievements to UN Tourism to spread the word.

## III. Private sector

- **Upgrade** accessible products and align key players on marketing, commercial strategies and platforms. There are many accessible offerings that fail to reach the target customers.
- **Diversify** accessibility offerings and **enable** everyone to enjoy the beauty of travel. By innovating in accommodation, leisure and MICE services, you will reach new markets and attain a higher degree of service quality.
- **Innovate** in transportation, information communication technologies and the digital agenda. They are key in enabling potential clients to book and enjoy accessible experiences.
- **Invest** in accessibility advancements, step by step. Monitor how your business results, your brand reputation and your customers' feedback to improve.



## IV. Organizers and strategic partners

### Government of San Marino

- **Position** San Marino as one of the hubs to host accessible events as from 2023 and raise awareness of accessibility solutions. By networking with other destinations and investing in accessibility, this commitment can be upheld by both public and private stakeholders.
- **Keep** upgrading accessibility to cultural heritage, while enhancing better access within the entire tourism value chain. Isolated actions do not improve overall tourism experience.
- **Co-create** with adjacent Italian regions new accessible tourism experiences through thematic itineraries. Accessible routes bring prosperity to rural and urban areas and their host communities.

### UN Tourism

- **Promote** the San Marino Action Agenda as a roadmap on Accessible Tourism.
- **Issue** in 2024 a Compendium of Best Practices in Accessible Tourism showcased at the Conference, in collaboration with San Marino, AccessibleEU and ENAT.
- **Work** closely with national tourism administrations and undertake a survey on their legislation and policies. They require assistance in elaborating and, implementing policies, strategies and measurement methodologies, to mainstream accessibility.
- **Publish** research, guidelines and success stories. Focus on accessibility in culture and nature-based tourism, digital solutions, and initiatives taken by tourism administrations and companies.
- **Resume** in 2024/2025 the international recognition “Accessible Tourism Destination” (ATD). Shed light on outstanding projects implemented by mature and emerging destinations in urban or rural settings.
- **Sensitize** the sector on the benefits of diverse workplaces, inclusive of persons with disabilities.

## European Accessibility Resource Centre – AccessibleEU and European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT)

- **Compile** and promote research and good practices targeting tourism professionals. Our sector requires specific tools for a correct implementation of access improvements.
- **Ensure accessibility** of new digital tools from the design phase. New immersive experiences bring about a major promise to enjoy tourism, leisure, culture and nature, but they must be accessible.
- **Insist** on Universal Design not only among tourism service providers. Talking to manufacturing industries in the tourism supply chain is key to having an access-friendly travel experience.
- **Collaborate** with educational institutions to introduce accessibility. It needs to be a cross-cutting element within the training cycle of any professional working within the tourism value chain.

## Recommended reading

UN Tourism offers a comprehensive array of publications and materials focussed on accessibility and accessible tourism. Below is a list of main resources, highlighting good practices, recommendations and guidelines to promote accessible tourism. For more information and suggestions, please contact: [info@unwto.org](mailto:info@unwto.org).

World Tourism Organization (2021), *Accessibility and Inclusive Tourism Development in Nature Areas – Compendium of Best Practices*, UN Tourism, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284422777>

World Tourism Organization (2016), *World Tourism Day 2016 “Tourism for All – promoting universal accessibility” Good Practices in the Accessible Tourism Supply Chain*, UN Tourism, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284418138>

World Tourism Organization (2016), *Highlights of the 1st UNWTO Conference on Accessible Tourism in Europe (San Marino, 19–20 November 2014)*, UN Tourism, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284417902>

World Tourism Organization (2016), *Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Best Practices – Module I: Accessible Tourism – Definition and Context*, UN Tourism, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284418077>

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>AISM</b>	Associazione Italiana Sclerosi Multipla
<b>ATD</b>	Accessible Tourism Destination
<b>API</b>	application programming interface
<b>B2B</b>	business-to-business
<b>CRPD</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CTT</b>	Cape Town Tourism
<b>DMO</b>	destination management organization
<b>EBA</b>	European Business Awards
<b>ECSR</b>	Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility Department of UN Tourism
<b>EDEN</b>	European Destination of Excellence
<b>EFQM</b>	European Foundation for Quality Management
<b>ENAT</b>	European Network for Accessible Tourism
<b>ENIT</b>	Ente Nazionale Italiano per il Turismo
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IATA</b>	International Air Transport Association
<b>ICT</b>	information and communication technology
<b>ISO</b>	International Organization for Standardization
<b>ITRIA</b>	Itinerari Turistico-Religiosi Interculturali Accessibili (Intercultural and accessible tourist-religious itineraries)
<b>LIS</b>	Lingua Italiana dei Segni
<b>MICE</b>	meetings incentives conferences and exhibitions
<b>NAS</b>	National Accessible Scheme
<b>NOD</b>	National Organization on Disability
<b>OBI</b>	Οργανισμός Βιομηχανικής Ιδιοκτησίας (Hellenic Industrial Property Organisation)
<b>PNR</b>	passenger name requirement
<b>PNRR</b>	Piano nazionale di ripresa e resilienza (National Plan for Reconstruction and Resilience)
<b>SaaS</b>	software as a service
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SME</b>	small and medium-sized enterprise

<b>SSR</b>	special service request
<b>UD</b>	Universal Design
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNE</b>	Una Norma Española – Asociación Española de Normalización
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization
<b>UN Tourism</b>	World Tourism Organization
<b>UNWTO</b>	former abbreviation of the World Tourism Organization
<b>WCAG</b>	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

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**UN Tourism**

The World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), a United Nations specialized agency, is the leading international organization with the decisive and central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. It serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism know how. Its membership includes 160 countries, 6 territories, 2 permanent observers and over 500 Affiliate Members.



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