



**visits4u Access Guide:
Frequently Asked
Questions**

Frequently Asked Questions

A list of some of the most frequent questions on inclusive tourism, why it is important and where to start.

1. Who is the visits4u forum for?

For any business, professional or entrepreneur, organisations and their staff who are involved in the tourism sector, for example:

- Hotels and accommodation providers
- Tour operators and travel agencies
- Tourism authorities (local, regional or national)
- Tourism destination managers and tourism boards
- Art and cultural attractions
- Tourist information centres
- Companies providing accessible tourism services (transport, holidays, specialist assistance)
- Tour guides

You can find information useful recommendations on what you can do to improve accessibility of your service for any tourist potentially.

2. What is 'inclusive tourism'?

The term stems from the concept of 'universal' or 'inclusive' design. This means that when any building, service or product is created, all potential users are considered from the beginning of the process as much as possible so that everyone can access the environment regardless of age, size or disability.

Often the term 'accessible tourism' is used instead (see some definitions here: <http://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.faq#fi744>)

The concept of inclusive tourism is wide. It recognises that barriers may exist for a broad range of tourists who:

- may or may not identify as disabled people
- may or may not have specific 'access' or 'disability' needs
- may have a hidden / invisible disability

Barriers may be attitudinal, intellectual, sensory or physical. Therefore, under ‘inclusive tourism’ aim to identify these barriers, remove them or reduce any negative impact on the tourist’s or visitor’s comfort or health to give a high quality, safe and enjoyable experience.

3. Who benefits from ‘inclusive tourism’?

Everyone! Everyone may have needs when they want to travel for business or pleasure.

The symbol that is used internationally to indicate access or disability is this:



However, across countries of the European Union, “94% of tourists with access needs do not use a wheelchair and the vast majority people’s access limitations or needs are not apparent”⁽¹⁾. If you take into consideration the range of different user needs when you create a service or design a product, then you will make this service or product accessible to many more customers. It is true that many people will benefit the entrance to your building is step-free or has a ramp: wheelchair users but also example someone with a baby buggy or a very heavy luggage. It is also true that many customers may have access needs that have nothing to do with ramps, for example someone who is hard of hearing or deaf, or someone who is on the autism spectrum.

4. Why is inclusive tourism important?

Inclusive tourism is important because:

- **‘access’ means ‘business’:** inclusive tourism is key to good customer service for tourism. Anyone can be a tourist, so inclusive tourism helps businesses better understand their potential market and increase the number of satisfied customers. Remember that “a happy customer tells a friend but an unhappy customer tells the world!”
- **it is the right thing to do:** access to leisure, tourism and cultural life is recognised under the [UN Convention on the Rights for People with](#)

[Disabilities](#). Furthermore, it is estimated that over one billion people in the world with or without access needs encounter barriers when travelling independently, with friends or family.

- **it can have economic benefits to your business and the destination:** People with access needs will choose very carefully their destinations and plan their trip in advance to avoid facing barriers in every part of their trip (from getting to the airport/station, to the room hotel and where to eat at their destination). In practice, this means that better prepared businesses and destinations increase their chances of welcoming more tourists that other destinations are missing.
- **in some places or countries,** there are laws that oblige you to make ‘reasonable’ adjustments for people with access needs.

5. Where can I start?

There are three pillars of inclusive tourism (as suggested by Visit England under their ‘Access for All’ project):

- **Customer service:** this means how welcoming and friendly staff are, particularly in understanding the needs of customers with or without access needs.
- **Information:** this means that tourists can easily find accurate information about the level of accessibility
- **Facilities:** this means that buildings are accessible for everyone.

There are measures that you take to improve your service under any of these pillars. Even if there are restrictions on what you can do immediately in the building and facilities (because of budget or because the building is a heritage site), you can focus on the other two pillars.

You can...

- start with your current and regular customers. Ask for their feedback and thoughts on your accessibility. With any future customer, encourage them to tell you if they have any unmet access needs and how you can assist.

- search for representatives from local access and disability or disabled people's organisations that can help you. Encourage them to visit you and tell you what they think. Even further, initiate a small 'focus group' with these representatives and hold regular meetings at your venue, once every 3 or 4 months. The 'focus group' structure will give you an informal and safe platform to find out what works for your customers with access needs and what else you can do. The costs for a 'focus group' are very small and may cover offering teas / coffees and paying travel expenses of the members.
- include training on accessibility and disability awareness for your staff. Make accessibility part of your policies and general customer service. Even if your building (hotel, restaurant, museum etc) has a few steps to get in, many more tourists will value your staff's friendly attitude and understanding of accessibility.

In these pages you can find a number of short guides and factsheets to start with. You can share them with your staff and co-workers. Go to the 'visits4u Access Guide' for recommendations for hotels, shops and restaurants, tour operators and cultural attractions.

6. My business is in a building with a lot of steps and physical barriers for people with mobility needs and wheelchair users. What can I do?

Remember that not everyone who has access needs is a wheelchair user. You are likely to have customers who are deaf or have hearing loss, blind or partially sighted, parents with young children or pregnant women, people with a learning disability or people who have epilepsy. Someone who uses a walking stick, may be able to manage a few small steps if there is a handrail to use. Prior to planning a trip or visit to your attraction, they will need accurate and up-to-date information on your accessibility.

Include as much information as possible on your website and leaflets about your accessibility. Be honest. Describe your facilities, include photos and what further assistance or equipment you may be able to offer.

Encourage the customers to contact you if they need more information or have questions.

Furthermore, **Visit England** have designed a dedicated website where tourism businesses in England can create their own Accessibility Guide. It is a useful example of what access information to collect about your business and how to do it. The website includes step-by-step guidance that can be useful to tourism businesses interested to create an access guide for their facilities. It can also be useful to tourism boards, tour operators and destination managers in any country interested to support businesses involved in the local tourism supply chain:

www.accessibilityguides.org

7. How much does it cost?

From nothing to as much as you can spend.

Any costs are usually a one-off investment. If you make sure you do it right from the beginning, you will save money from possible future adaptations and secure a larger number of customers, which translates into greater profits for your business.

There are simple things you can do at no cost or with very little spending:

- Update your website with information on accessibility. Make sure it is clear and straightforward to find that information from your homepage
- Search and add to your library information, resources and toolkits on accessible tourism.
- Use respectful language when talking to or referring to people with access needs. You can find a few 'customer service tips' in most visits4u guide documents

8. Will I need to carry out a full access audit of my building and external spaces?

This is recommended where possible, particularly when you plan a refurbishment of your building or when you design a new one. Usually an access audit will give you information on the accessibility and usability of an environment (building or external spaces), the facilities used and the services provided in that environment. This can be done in an existing

building or in advance by looking at the proposed design and drawings for a new site or refurbishment.

The aim of the access specialist's job is to identify potential barriers and recommend solutions that can benefit anyone who uses the building (as a customer, visitor or staff). It is best to look for a specialist who has experience and understanding of pan-disability issues. This means that they will not focus only on access for one user group, but consider what is reasonable for all users and ensure that a proposed solution for some users does not create a barrier for other users. For example, a suggestion to design a very bright hotel reception as good access for visually impaired visitors, might not be good for some with residual sight who needs good colour contrast or for someone with autism.

Remember that access audits will vary in scope and complexity. It depends on the size and type of the building, how it is used by the public and for what purpose, whether it is a new or existing building, or an extension to an existing building. Usually the access auditor will ask these questions and might also ask for photos and designs of the building, before they tell you how long it will take, how many site visits they will carry out, what kind of report and recommendations they will give and how much all this will cost.

Before you commission an access auditor you should check that they have the necessary expertise and experience in pan-disability issues. It is good practice to contact more than one access auditor - if possible - and see what they can do and how. It is important that the fees, timescale, terms of engagement and scope of works are clarified at an early stage and clearly set out between you and the auditor.

9. So, I want to carry out a full access audit of my business. Where can I find an access specialist?

This will depend on where your business is located and what you want to audit. In some countries or regions there are official registers of access auditors or consultants, and official bodies that provide access standards and regulations for inclusive design.

For example:

The National Register of the Access Consultants (NRAC) in the UK is an independent register of accredited access auditors and access consultants who meet professional standards and criteria established by a peer review system. Many of its members are based across Europe and globally, so you can search their online directory: www.nrac.org.uk/members

You can also contact the **visits4u** partners who could may be able to give you more information about access consultants or auditors in the region.

10. Where can I find more information?

You can visit the pages on the visits4u website for resources, guides and case studies. You will also find examples inclusive tourism products in the partner countries (Greece, Latvia and Spain) and view the associated information in Easy Read and Sign Languages.

You can contact the visits4u partners directly and find out more about their work on inclusive tourism:

www.visits4u.eu/contact-us

There are also a number of useful websites for further guidance, resources and contacts. The list below is not exhaustive, but it may be a good starting point in your research.

Networks and directories:

- European Network for Accessible Tourism
www.accessibletourism.org
- PANTOU - The European Accessible Tourism Directory
www.pantou.org
- European Concept for Accessibility Network
www.eca.lu

Further reading on accessible/inclusive tourism:

- Design for All in Tourist Destinations - ECA 2017, Published by EuCAN - European Concept for Accessibility Network. Available online:

<http://www.eca.lu/index.php/documents/eucan-documents/45-destinations-for-all-eca-2017/file>

- UN World Tourism Day 2016: Accessible Tourism
<http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2016-09-20/accessible-tourism-theme-world-tourism-day-2016>

- Study - Economic Impact and Travel Patterns Of Accessible Tourism In Europe - Final Report, June 2014
<http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/5566/attachments/1/tranlations>
- Tourism for All - Promoting Universal Accessibility” Good Practices in the Accessible Tourism Supply Chain
<http://ethics.unwto.org/en/content/accessible-tourism>
- Inclusive Hotels Network
<http://cae.org.uk/resources/inclusive-hotels-group/>

11. I still have questions, what can I do?

For questions about the visits4u project, go to www.visits4u.eu/contact-us

For questions about inclusive tourism in your area you can:

- Post a question under the visits4u blog:
www.visits4u.eu/blog
- Contact one of the project partners directly:
www.visits4u.eu/partners



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