



**visits4u Case Studies:
Sandcastle Waterpark
Blackpool, United Kingdom**

Sandcastle Waterpark

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Title: A waterpark that caters for all visitors



Description

Sandcastle Waterpark, Blackpool, is the UK's largest indoor Waterpark with over 18 slides and attractions. It opened in 1986 and celebrated its 30th anniversary in June 2016.

Their mission is to ensure our guests have a quality, fun filled, memorable experience, delivered by a polite and attentive staff, who are committed to providing Guest Service Excellence and Tourism and Inclusion for All. In addition, their teams ethos extends to making a measurable difference to our local community through the Sandcastle Waterpark Social and Corporate Responsibility program.

Becoming inclusive:

1. Description

The last 10 years have seen significant growth in the number of guests with disabilities and their families visiting the Waterpark. The demand for accessible facilities at visitor attractions continues to grow at an encouraging rate, the Accessible Tourism pound being worth £12.4 billion. The company is proud of being a fully accessible attraction and the services and facilities offered. Accessibility at Sandcastle Waterpark has evolved immensely in recent years as a result of working very closely with local disabled groups and their families in order to assess what work was needed to make a day at the waterpark as comfortable and enjoyable as possible for every one of the guests.

2. Description of steps taken, changes and progress

Sandcastle Waterpark have forged relationships with local community groups in order to gain a full understanding of the services and facilities that are required including charities such as Aiming Higher (a Blackpool based charity that works with more than 750 disabled children and their families) have been valuable in the development of accessible facilities. Working with them has been an immensely rewarding partnership that continues to grow each year.

When they started to work with a variety of local charities and community disability groups to gain their feedback of our visitor experience, their opinion was that this was the best way to gauge the levels of accessibility required within the business and then look at the Improvements that they needed to enhance to meet their requirements. This led to many changes of existing facilities as well as the introduction of a host of new ones, all designed to ensure that disabled guests would have peace of mind that a visit to Sandcastle Waterpark would be a positive, enjoyable one and remove any possible barriers.

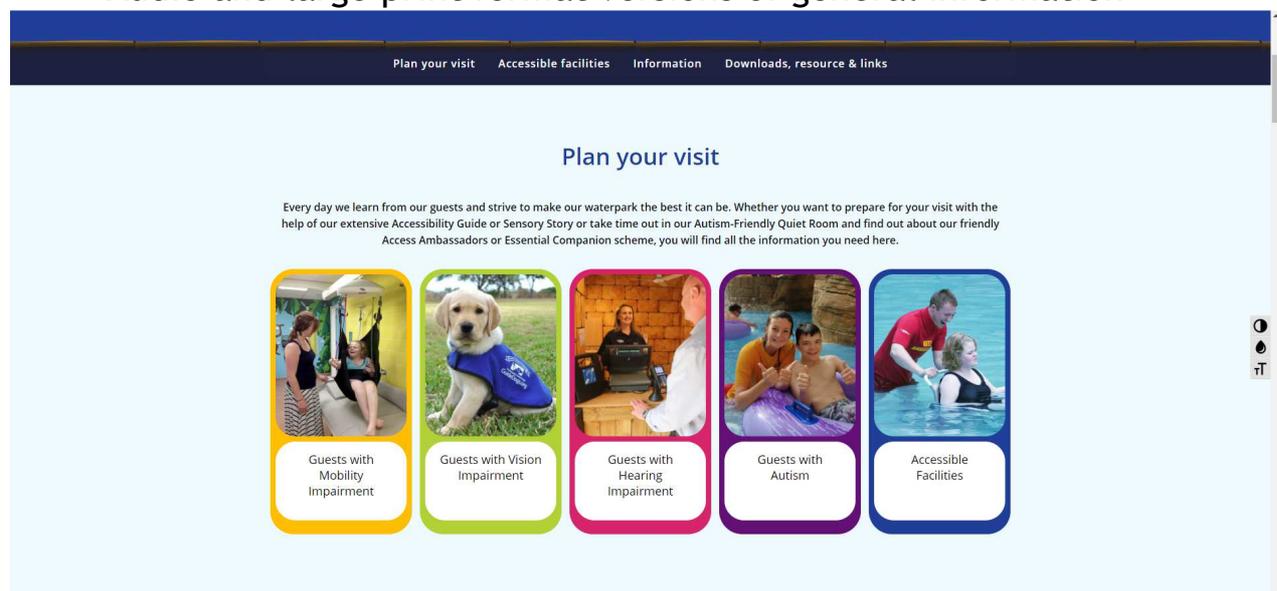
Through guest comment forms and surveys the team gained the feedback required to plan future developments and their Accessibility team welcomes guests with disabilities every day, taking time to talk to them, their carers and families as often as possible and in turn pass on their comments, criticisms and feedback. All of these are taken on board and acted upon. In particular the training and development of staff attitude and approach is key to the business.

Sandcastle Waterpark also works with regional and national advisors to ensure it remains at the forefront of Accessibility development within the Visitor Attraction Industry, not just locally, regionally or at a national level, since they regularly welcome colleagues from the Waterpark Industry around the world, who come to view the levels of accessibility they offer. Similarly, members of the management team are often invited to international Industry events such as the annual EAS (European Attractions Show) and IAAPA (International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions) to share their knowledge and experience of accessibility.

A wide and varied range of accessible facilities are waiting to be used as frequently as possible by the guests that require them. These facilities include:

Pre-visit:

- New Access for All webpage launched for Autumn 2017 developed with a dedicated Accessible Section which features large print menus, visual tours, audio tours, FAQ and much more
- New Sandcastle Story and Top Tips for Guests with Autism - planning tools that have been developed based on guest feedback and which were introduced in Autumn 2017
- Pre visit familiarisation tours to assist with planning and preparation
- Dedicated Pool Safety Hotline to discuss individual requirements prior to arrival.
- Access Statement, Frequently Asked Questions and Safety Guidelines for Guests with Disabilities/Alternative format information including Audio and large print format versions of general information



- Special FAQs for Guests with disabilities and Information for Guests with Disabilities.
- The Waterpark were the first Tourist Attraction in the UK to launch on the **Assist-Mi** app which is designed to empower guests to greater independence when accessing everyday goods and services.

On arrival:

- Specially displayed pool safety maps.
- Dedicated Guest Service and Inclusion Manager
- Facility to accommodate Assistance Dogs.
- Contrasting colours on all stairs and accessible toilets
- Wide, obstacle free passageways
- Lift with access to all areas.
- The entrance areas, reception, catering, amenities and shops are all on ground level.
- Lowered desks at reception, shops and internet booking desk
- Full accessible toilets throughout the building.
- Induction loops at every till point.
- Details on food allergies and intolerances on menus.
- Seating available throughout the building with designated areas for guests with disabilities
- Special relationships forged with specialist groups to test accessibility and give something back to the community.

Inside the waterpark:



- Dedicated Water Ambassadors specially trained to assist guest in our pools.
- RLSS training for rescue of guests with disabilities.
- Full treatment room for treatment of medical conditions.
- Dedicated First Aid Room with over 10 qualified First Aiders
- 4 poolside wet-rooms with lockers for easy pool access

- Pool accessible wheelchairs allowing full access to 90% of the Waterpark.
- Accessible doors from reception into the Waterpark.
- New for 2017 - Quiet/Sensory Room
- Silent starts each day - no announcements or music during the first hour of operation.
- Award winning Changing Place wet room (below) and 3 additional poolside wet rooms.



Each enquiry received from guests relating to accessibility is handled individually and the requirements of each guest are looked after by the accessibility team. In most cases this also means that one of their Accessibility managers is on hand when guests arrive to take them on a short tour of the facilities that they will be using, and where required, introducing them to any other members of the team that they may need assistance from during their visit. For example, the Waterpark supervisory team will oversee the storage of medical supplies and also co-ordinate the provision of one of the Water Ambassadors if assistance in the water is required.

3. Main stakeholders / actors

The company worked closely with local community groups to understand what their customers with access needs might need. Following the changes

of their facilities and services, they continued to have a relationship with the local community and disability organisations, and they actively engage them in the development of their business.

As part of their ongoing practice, they also ask feedback from visitors and encourage staff to share any comments and suggestions for improvements with the team.

Furthermore, during the development phase they consulted regional and national access advisors in how to implement accessibility.

Results and Impact

Sandcastle Waterpark has seen 326% growth in visits from disabled guests during the last three years as a result of the upgrading and investment in accessible facilities, training for their staff and commitment to providing the very best in accessible tourism.

The positive feedback from guests points to the very welcoming attitude from staff as well as the facilities available.



Lessons learnt

Involvement of local community groups and active feedback from visitors ensures that the Sandcastle Waterpark is always responding to its customers' demand.

Improving accessibility has been considered as part of the overall business development of the company and its staff, instead of assigning it to a separate 'access team' within the company. Therefore the changes that were implemented were immediately applied across the board: from senior and front-of-house staff to specially trained 'Water Ambassadors'.

The availability of detailed pre-arrival information was extended on the company's web page in 2017 to allow guests to seek the Information they require, as quickly as possible. In addition The Sandcastle Story and Top Tips for guests with Autism have been designed specifically to assist in visit planning. The works to upgrade facilities and the website are complemented through a strong management system, with the Accessibility team always being available to answer queries by guests and meet them in person on the day of their visit.

Quiet/Sensory room - Opened Autumn 2017:



Further information

Sandcastle Waterpark website: www.sandcastle-waterpark.co.uk



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