

Accessible Tourism: advice and remarks for tour operator

Accessible Tourism is nowadays a significant part of the market which needs the right attention so that the travel experience can be a right for all and not only a possibility for few.

On the other hand the "touristic behaviour" of people with disability is similar to that of the other customers': you travel for fun, work, leisure, culture, passion and the holiday is influenced by other than the interests and economic possibilities but also by needs determined by the kind of disability.

According to two International research, in America there are 54 million of disable people of which **39 million** can do or already do activities linked to tourism (Keroul, 2003) while Europe has 50 million of disable people of which at least **36 million** represent **potential tourists**, among these already in 2003, 5-6 millions actually travelled regularly (Touche Ross, 1993).

A significant segment of the market that usually travels in low season and which is "highly faithful" but which actually still find some significant difficulties in finding touristic products and travel agencies diligent and able to satisfy their needs.

As already said, an accessible touristic product should respect the same criteria and principles of a "common" travel suggestion (economic supportability, offer variety, ability to adapt the suggestion to the demand, etc) but it must guarantee that it has paid the right attention to the customers' needs and that any **element of the chain** (transport, meals, accommodation, excursions, etc.) is **"enjoyable" and "usable" autonomously by the customer**, whatever its needs are (movement impairment, movement on a wheelchair, sensorial disability, intolerances/ allergies, chronic pathologies, etc.).

In order to answer the tourist needs and to guarantee the possibility of a satisfying touristic experience under all points of view, in comfortable and safe conditions, it is useful to take into consideration some remarks and advice.

1. The tourist with special needs has to have **clear, detailed, reliable and updated information**. Actually, it is often the lack of information that is a first "barrier" in the tourist experience, which in fact discourages the disable person to travel. You need to take into consideration that for the tourist with disability the reliability of information (correspondence between expectations and met reality) is an indispensable element, that's why the indications must guarantee certain and efficient data, to allow any tourist to autonomously evaluate the level of correspondence of the suggestion to their individual needs. For the tourist with disability a vague information can create a situation of embarrassment, uneasiness, weariness or even danger, compromising the pleasure, enjoyment and satisfaction which can be derived from a touristic experience and the memory thereof. The

reliability of information deals both with the used criteria and the method of collection.

2. The tourist with special demands, needs, as everyone, of a **“full” touristic offer** based on the **principles of the accessibility chain** able to take, in terms of accessibility, all the classical elements of a holiday (transport, sport activities and excursions, events and shows, reception facilities and relief, shopping, relax, attractions, etc) into consideration. In this sense an accessible touristic offer should consider all the classical elements of travel (moving, eating, sleeping, visiting, enjoyment, etc) by analyzing and suggesting them in terms of accessibility: **an accessible hotel, in itself, is not a good reason to travel for anyone.** The touristic experience, in order to be really satisfying, in fact, must refer to the whole touristic system of the territory that is visited and must be supported by a hosting system which is able to “welcome everyone” without limits nor discrimination.
3. To work in “accessible tourism” means to **suggest a safe and autonomous usable offer** for the largest part of the customers, and this means necessarily “be usable” and include accessibility as a transversal element of the policies of tour operators or agencies. Availability, in case of a tour operator, means not only to offer an accessible touristic product but also to have a **location without architectural barriers** and to use **communication instruments usable by the largest number of customers** (paper materials with big fonts, accessible website, staff educated to relate and communicate with tourists with special needs, etc). In this sense a tour operator should take into consideration the customer with special needs, not as being different to whom they offer a “unique special and/or dedicated product” but as a customer with its own aspirations, passions, interests and economic availability who, in order to fully enjoy a touristic experience, needs some more information and attention.
4. Remember that **“a standard disability” does not exist.** Disabilities can be motor, sensorial, cognitive or regarding metabolism. Each disability has its different characteristics and needs, that is why it is necessary to know at least the main aspects, the consequent implications and the best way of relation and the approach. To know the different disabilities and above all to listen and deal with the customer about specific needs is a crucial element to create efficient touristic suggestions, modulated and planned according to the demands and specifics of the case.
5. Take into consideration that tourists with disabilities can ask for longer visiting times and can get easily tired. For this, above all in groups, it can be useful to formulate **“lighter” travel suggestions** with the

possibility of free time so that the visitor can manage it autonomously, for example in the case to rest at the hotel.

6. By the creation of an accessible travel suggestion it is necessary to **guarantee the reliability of information through an "in loco" visit of the area** and the resources (museums, restaurants, religious attractions, etc) included in the suggestion. The direct verification in fact shows, in depth, the details related to the accessibility of the resources by giving the customer all the technical details that contribute in reassuring them about the situation of usability that they will face. In case you do not have the technical competence in evaluating accessibility you can trust and cooperate with the local disabled associations who can guarantee the usability of the resources. The "in loco" verification, allows the tour operator therefore to know directly the quality of the welcome offered by the properties, and to easily find specific contacts that can results as being useful for the solution of specific problems (for example, equipped car rental, dialysis centres and ortho-sanitararies societies).
7. Remember that a touristic offer, usable for a tourist with disability, if structured according to the principles of the accessibility chain, and therefore rich, complete and satisfying under all points of view, is on the whole, a **more comfortable and efficient touristic product for all**.

