

Accessibility

an important part of sustainable tourism



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To make tourism accessible for everyone is an important part of good quality and sustainability in European tourism. Facing a demographic change with a growing population of older people, Europe must make greater efforts to improve accessibility, so as to be competitive as a global tourism destination for all. This, at the very least, is an important step towards a non-discriminating and sustainable European society.

A large part of the 50 million Europeans with some kind of disability never goes on holidays, although they want to and they can afford it. But good accessibility is important also for a wider public with accessibility requirements. This market is estimated at 130 million people in Europe alone. Lack of accessible facilities and transport, and reliable information on accessibility, are the most important reasons that prevent disabled persons from travelling. Accessibility information and services is a complex issue that raises demands for new skills and knowledge.

Tourism for all in Sweden has been working for accessible tourism since 1998. With a target-oriented work in the tourism market

and in transnational partnerships, the organisation has developed methods and tools for web-information on accessibility, training of staff in the tourism industry; advising companies and public actors to improve accessibility and market it towards target groups, which has been considered to be the fastest growing tourism market in Europe. Together with the Region of Skåne important steps have been taken for a development towards a destination accessible for all.

For the European development of accessible tourism, the European Union has been an important financier through different programmes. In an eContent project, the partnership behind OSSATE (One-stop-shop for accessible tourism in Europe, www.ossate.org) has launched the webpage www.europeforall.com as a Pan-European Information service for people with accessibility requirements, and tourism venues around Europe that wish to reach this market.

Some of the partners behind OSSATE have also formed the network ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism, www.accessibletourism.org). The aim is to make

European tourism destinations, products and services accessible to all, by bringing together actors to share experiences, learn from each other and collaborate.

Every actor has to be aware of the fact that demographic changes and disabled persons more independently living also raises demands for improved accessibility, qualifications among staff, reliable information and marketing. To be successful in this work, new strategic partnerships have to be settled, involving public and private actors as well as NGO's. Accessible tourism has to be recognized as a benefit for everyone – for the individuals that gets the opportunity to travel; for the tourism industry getting more visitors, extending the tourist season and generating new incomes, for society with new job opportunities, raised tax incomes and an accessible environment both for inhabitants and visitors. Accessibility for all is therefore an important dimension of sustainable tourism.

For further information:

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