

BestCities
GLOBAL ALLIANCE




*Gaining***Edge**



Universal Accessibility in Meetings

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Preamble

“Universal Accessibility in Meetings” is a study by three project partners - BestCities Global Alliance (BestCities), GainingEdge and Rehabilitation International (RI Global). The goal of this research project is to promote awareness among meeting organizers and the supplier community on the need to remove barriers in meetings and conventions for delegates with disabilities. The study also includes some recommendations on how destinations can make the business events they host more inclusive.

Our research interviewed bureaus and convention centres, hotels and venues where conventions take place within the BestCities Global Alliance. It is our wish to showcase some of the best practices and case studies within BestCities so we can learn about initiatives taken to improve universal access around the world. BestCities is an international network of 12 leading convention bureaus around the globe who are distinguished by their commitment to advancing the cause of meetings worldwide. The convention bureau partners are from Berlin, Bogotá, Cape Town, Copenhagen, Dubai, Edinburgh, Houston, Madrid, Melbourne, Singapore, Tokyo and Vancouver.

Through this project, we aim to support RI Global’s mission and vision for widespread universal accessibility specifically in the field of international business events. Founded in 1922, RI Global is a worldwide organization comprising people with disabilities, service providers, government agencies, academics, researchers and advocates working to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities. With member organizations in more than 100 countries in all regions of the world, RI Global also provides a forum for the exchange of experience and information on research and practice.

The research and editorial team from GainingEdge used desk research, editorial contributions, local intelligence, trade surveys and interviews and also reached out to experts in the field. GainingEdge is a specialist consulting firm advising exclusively to the convention, incentive and exhibition market. A GainingEdge Scholar interned with the consultancy for six months to provide support for this project.

For the purpose of this project, we consider “disability” and “special needs” to cover the following:

- **Senses** (Vision & Hearing Impairments);
- **Mobility** (Temporary as a result of an accident, Quadriplegia, Congenital, or Age);
- **Cognitive/Developmental** (Autism, Down Syndrome, ADHD, Dyslexia, Learning, Epileptic);
- **Medical** (Autoimmune, Allergies/Diet, Cancer, Cardiovascular, Diabetes, Arthritis, Respiratory, Baby Boomers).

Understanding Universal Accessibility

The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is an international agreement that in principle guarantees people with disability an equality of experience in all areas of citizenship including the meetings industry. The Convention provides the international agreement on which national disability discrimination legislation and policy are framed.

According to UN CRPD, a “person with disability” is anyone who cannot ensure “the necessities of a normal individual and/or social life, as a result of deficiency in physical or mental capabilities.” The term disability not only refers to reduced mobility, visual impairment, hearing impairment, developmental disabilities, mental disabilities, learning disabilities or long-term health related disabilities: people with prostheses, allergies or other sensitivities, invisible disabilities and even the elderly all belong to this group. The disabilities can range from congenital (prenatal/hereditary) to acquired, through illness or accident. The term ‘accessibility’ refers to the design of products, devices, services, and environments for people who experience disabilities.

Today, universal accessibility is strongly related to the paradigm shift from the medical model to the social model of disability that is enshrined in the UN CRPD with disability being viewed as the result of inaccessible environments and not of inabilities or even sickness. The World Health Organization - WHO - estimated that in 2011, 15% of the world population or approximately one billion people live with some form of disability. Of these, some 110 to 190 million adults encounter very significant difficulties in their daily lives.

The prevalence of disability is growing due to population ageing and the global increase in non-communicable conditions including NCDs (non communicable diseases), road traffic injuries and mental health problems. A fact sheet based on the World Report on Disability by WHO and The World Bank is [available here](#).

The World Report on Disability is the first of its kind, providing global guidance on implementing the UN CRPD and giving an extensive picture of the situation of people with disabilities, their needs and unfulfilled needs, and the barriers they face to participating fully in their societies. People with disabilities, together with their friends and family, control over USD8 trillion in annual disposable income according to the 2016 Annual Report – The Global Economics of Disability. Consumers that care about the disability market are increasingly directing their loyalty, and their consumer spend, to organizations that demonstrate action inclusive of people with disabilities. Based on Article 9 of the UN CRPD, accessibility is specifically about four major categories: the built environment; infrastructure; information and communications technology (ICT); and products and services. Another concept that is core to accessibility is Universal Design, which is the process of creating products from scratch, and not adapting them only later, that can be readily used by people with the widest possible range of abilities.

The meetings industry is one that comprises myriad groups of people ranging from delegates, event spectators, participants, employees, clients, suppliers, and volunteers. Policies on disability not only allow people with disabilities to be given equal treatment and opportunities, they also present wider and more diverse opportunities for businesses.

Understanding Universal Accessibility

Every year since 1992, December 3 is International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This Day aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. Some of the major challenges of inclusivity around the globe lie across four key areas, mainly Attitudinal mindsets, Legal issues, Architectural obstacles and Technological inefficiencies.

Attitudinal

If a business only has steps access and people with wheelchairs cannot enter, this is discriminatory towards people with such disabilities as this is a denial of reasonable accommodation. This simple example illustrates the issues of discrimination. The root causes of this discrimination can be owed to humanity's perceptions of disability, leading to people with disabilities being marginalised in society. This situation can also be credited to ignorance and not knowing or considering how to cater to the needs of the people with disabilities.

Legal

In many countries, it is now against the law to discriminate against people with disabilities in the various areas of their lives. However, there is still a huge disparity between legislative intent and reality in many parts of the world especially in undeveloped/developing nations. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), UK's Equality Act and Australia's Disability Discrimination Act aim to boost rights and access however, for some countries, getting legislation for an architecturally barrier free environment through congress is easier than enforcing it.

Architectural

These are structural obstacles within natural or man-made environments that prevent or block mobility or access. Examples can include a building's stairs or doorways, width of halls and sidewalks, door knobs or handles that are too high to reach or grasp, and many others. Within a conference and convention setting, architectural obstacles can be easy to overcome, however, the issue lies in whether we ensure we are well prepared to cater to these needs. As such, it is imperative that these needs are considered during the planning and venue selection phases of an event plan.

Technology

When we speak of technology, we speak of those aids that assist persons with varying disabilities to be able to participate independently. Careful design and use of this technology can determine whether it will enhance or inhibit the user's experience. Examples of technological barriers include an inaccessible event registration website, resources or reading materials that are not available in alternative formats such as Braille or large print, or the lack of a close captioning system for those with hearing problems. Meeting suppliers have the opportunity to come up with innovative solutions that will enable universal access for all participants attending meetings and conventions.

Understanding Universal Accessibility

Our Project Partner Rehabilitation International (RI Global) is a non-profit global organization and network that empowers persons with disabilities and provides sustainable solutions toward achieving a more inclusive society for them. RI Global's primary mission is to advance the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities across the world. From the period 1981 to 2006, RI Global led the original campaign for the UN CRPD. Within RI Global, there are seven commissions of specialists and experts on issues in disability. These commissions assist in developing and expanding programming and activities in accordance with RI Global's strategic goals.

One of these commissions is the International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (RI-ICTA) which focuses on the promotion of accessibly built and virtual environments, including assistive technology. RI-ICTA is also a forum that facilitates the exchange of ideas and good practices, notably in the areas of housing, public transportation, communications, technical aids and universal design. In addition, the commission works to sensitize decision makers in the public and private sectors regarding the obstacles faced by persons with disabilities and offer possible solutions through technologies. RI-ICTA has referenced *ISO Standard 21542: Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment (2011)* for designing meeting and conference venues to be accessible and inclusive. This international standard provides building users, architects, designers, engineers, builders, building owners and managers, manufacturers, policy makers and legislators with requirements and recommendations to create a sustainable built environment which is accessible.

In a preview document, ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) pointed out that this international standard should be applied to new and existing buildings, and if these requirements are taken into consideration in the early stages of building design, the costs of providing accessibility and usability measures are minimal and raises the value of the property in terms of sustainability. Retrofitting at a later stage will incur additional costs and is more complex.

According to RI-ICTA, there are many other generic codes, standards and guidelines globally on universal design and accessibility from USA, Canada, and Australia, and Singapore. As such, there is no shortage of design reference materials to cover the hardware aspect.

RI-ICTA went on to highlight an equally important aspect in terms of software - Disability Awareness and Sensitivity Training for all staff and personnel.

Most people want to be sensitive to those with disabilities and want to treat them with dignity and equality but are at a loss on how to do this respectfully. Being aware is the first step. As more and more persons with disabilities are becoming active members of the workforce, we have to consider that they often may need to participate in offsite events, meetings and conventions, so meeting and event planners and suppliers should ensure they are accommodated. Effectively, many people will benefit from these provisions including the aging population, parents with prams, and those with reduced mobility.



Accessibility in BestCities

BERLIN



Berlin

Berlin is a role model of urban development which takes universal access for people with disabilities seriously. Since 1992, Berlin has been pursuing an accessibility planning policy. The concept of “Accessibility for All” is the basis of the “10 Disability Policy Guidelines” which the Berlin Senate passed in response to the UN CRPD with a completion target of 2020. In 2013, the European Commission honoured Berlin with the Access City Award 2013 in recognition of the city's comprehensive and strategic approach to creating an accessible city for all. The award is organized by the European Commission together with the European Disability Forum, and was presented on the occasion of the annual European Day of People with Disabilities conference in Brussels. The jury highlighted Berlin's transport system and investment in accessibility for people with disabilities in reconstruction projects. Berlin was further praised for its comprehensive approach to accessibility which is fully embedded in the city's policies and broadly supported by its decision-makers.

The *visitBerlin* “Accessible Berlin” [website](#) will give convention delegates with special needs information about how they can travel to Berlin and be out and about in the city without any obstructions. The information includes tourist attractions, barrier-free restaurants and shopping districts. If a delegate has a problem with his/her wheelchair, there is a [wheelchair breakdown service](#) ready to help with a 24/7 emergency service. Berlin's accessible hotels have been certified under the *Reisen für Alle* (“Tourism for All”) nationwide certification scheme. System Mobidat which operates an internet portal service, offers information on the accessibility of over 35,000 establishments in Berlin. The portal surveys and checks the degree of accessibility of all public facilities.

In August 2017, Berlin launched its “[Inclusion Taxis](#)” project. In this initial test phase, the project aims to gather more valuable experience for a regular accessible taxi service in the city. Apart from their logo, the “Inclusion Taxis” look the same as all other Berlin taxis. However, they can be easily converted to carry people with limited mobility or wheelchair users together with their companions – a service facilitating spontaneous door-to-door mobility. With the accessible “Inclusion Taxis”, people with disabilities can order a taxi as and when they need, and enjoy greater flexibility when travelling around the city. *visitBerlin* is one of the partners supporting this accessible project run by the Social Association of Germany.

Berlin hosted a Rehabilitation International meeting “Advancing the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities worldwide” on 4 November 2018. At this meeting, the *RI Commission on Policy and Services*, one of RI Global's seven commissions, reviewed progress made as a result of policies and services that RI Global has contributed, and discussed how to further collaborate with fellow RI Commissions, stakeholders and other experts. Earlier, from 2-6 November, the RI Global Executive Board meeting, the 2018 General Assembly and other meetings, also took place in Berlin.



Case study: accessBerlin App – Berlin for all

Travelling presents a particular challenge to nearly seven million people with disabilities in Germany and almost 50 million people across Europe. Whether for leisure or on a business trip, these travellers constantly need to be well prepared to encounter barriers which can range from steps to the lack of acoustic signals, all which prevent a smooth and seamless trip.

visitBerlin is committed to a universally accessible Berlin. This organization has developed standards that meet the needs of Berlin visitors. Tourist partners, such as the Berlin hotels, attractions and sights are inspected for accessibility. *visitBerlin* wants all visitors to enjoy their visit to the city and as such, it is essential to give visitors all the information they need to plan ahead and be as independent as possible.

The *visitBerlin* Convention Office has a free app which will advise the meeting delegate looking for pre/post sightseeing options the best five tours on accessible routes - already certified by *Reisen für Alle* - through the city of Berlin. Thanks to the [accessBerlin app](#), which was launched in 2017 and has been continuously expanded since then, visitors with limited mobility will now find it even easier to explore Berlin. The app's map shows the various recommended routes across the city with accessible attractions and sights.

A filter function allows the user to select a number of categories from hotels to restaurants, shopping, and attractions. All the venues for a selected category are visible at a glance. In addition, all Test Reports for the *Reisen für Alle* nationwide certification scheme are available as downloads.

The map also shows the location of elevators and accessible public toilets. One important feature is that the app is always up-to-date. If an elevator is out of order, this information is posted as soon as possible in the app.

Berlin's efforts over the last years have paid off: the city is considered to be particularly suitable for people with disabilities and its "accessBerlin" app is a real travel aid for all visitors with special needs who can now:

- Explore accessible Berlin;
- Get details on arriving in Berlin, services, public transport, hotels, eating out, arts and culture, shopping, and leisure activities; and
- Check out accessible routes as certified by *Reisen für Alle* ([Tourism for All](#)).

The app is supported and funded by the Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises, and free for download for Android and iOS.



BOGOTÁ



Bogotá

In Colombia, people with disabilities enjoy the special protection of their human rights within the constitutional and legal framework, which was supplemented and reinforced in 2011 by the ratification and incorporation into the domestic legal order of the UN CRPD. Thanks to the momentum provided by this international treaty, Colombia has made important progress in reforming various laws and policies, as well as issuing new regulations consistent with international standards, notably its Law 1618 of 2013. In addition, the country now has a National Disability and Social Inclusion Policy, which it adopted in 2013 through CONPES 166. (Source: Saldarriaga-Concha Foundation)

Earlier, in 2002, Colombia had ratified the OAS Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities. (Source: [Disabled World](#)) Various actions have been designed to encourage better integration of people with disabilities into society or increase their visibility.

In Bogotá, although there are no regulations that mandate access to public buildings, there are some international hotels with accessible rooms. The TransMilenio buses are the most accessible options for public transportation as some of them feature level boarding, priority seating for passengers with disabilities and wheelchair spaces. Bogotá's broad streets and wide, open squares will accommodate wheelchair users although there are not yet many sites and buildings adapted for people with disabilities. No law requires access to public buildings for persons with disabilities, thus limiting the power of the government to penalise schools or offices without access. However, national and local governments are addressing this issue with programmes aimed at improving access.

In 2017, the new Ágora Convention Center in Bogotá hosted One Young World (OYW) Summit – its first time in Latin America - with over 1,300 delegates from 190+ countries. OYW serves as a springboard for young leaders to tackle global issues such as education, human rights, environment, health and poverty alleviation. The Bogotá Summit also touched on the importance of inclusion for people with disabilities. A global business campaign on disability inclusion, called #valuable, which is a project to make the business world more disability friendly, was launched at the Bogotá Summit.

In its planning stages, the Ágora Bogotá Convention Center sought the recommendations of its *Secretaría de salud de Bogotá*, a public organization for citizen health. Recommendations on universal accessibility of the venue was one of the key areas. Staff at Ágora are trained and certified in responses to industrial security, emergencies and attending to people with disabilities. The opening of Ágora is great news for Colombia's tourism sector as meetings and conventions represent 27% of the total income of the industry and contributes to the diversification of the portfolio. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism projects that the industry will boost the capital's GDP growth as well as serve as an important window to promote Colombia's business, commerce and tourism potential.





Case study: Reducing the Digital Divide

A badge on Colombian web portals will tell visitors if the website they are visiting is accessible. Web accessibility means that the website, tools and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them. The Bogotá Mayor's Office website is one such accessible website which is in compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 1.0 Level A guidelines. The following are some of the features of its accessible website:

- **Equivalent texts for non-textual content.** Alternative text in images.
- **Logical reading without stylesheet.** When the style sheets are disabled in bogota.gov.co, the content can be read logically.
- **Screen flashes.** No tags that generate flashes or intermittent messages to the user are used.
- **Clear language.** Clear content and without errors in spelling, syntax, grammar or orthotypography.
- **Frames.** Avoiding the use of frames and tables.
- **Auditory transcription.** In the production of news, articles and other content, alternative audios are generated so that they can be easily heard.
- **Combinations of colour.** Contrasting texts are used to facilitate reading from any device.

The National Institute for the Blind - INCI, the National Institute for the Deaf - INSOR and the ICT Ministry, offer free web accessibility workshops for Colombian businesses.

'[ConVerTIC](#)', is a software offered by Colombia's Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies for people with visual disabilities so that they can use a computer and surf the Internet. 'ConVerTIC' allows the free download of the screen reader software Jaws 15.0 and a screen magnifier.

The JAWS screen reader software transforms the information of operating systems and applications into sound, while the amplifier software, MAGIC, can increase the size of the letters on the screen by up to 16 times, allowing blind and low vision people to access the information.

The first is an application for people with visual disabilities that interprets codes and texts while a robotic voice 'reads' the contents aloud and at the speed desired by the user. This allows them to use most of the programmes of a computer. In addition, it also allows access to different Internet browsers, mail, call services and instant messaging such as Skype, social networks and video and audio players such as VLC Media Player or the Windows Media Player.

The second, MAGIC, is an application for people with low vision, which increases up to 16 times the size of the objects projected on the monitor.

In the first six months of its launch, the Ministry reported 100,000 downloads of the software, far exceeding its expectations. The goal of the ConVerTIC project is to provide more and better opportunities for labour and educational inclusion to blind people so that they achieve greater autonomy and are on equal terms with the rest of Colombians.



CAPE TOWN

Cape Town

The FIFA World Cup staged in South Africa in 2010 had provided the authorities with the perfect opportunity to ensure that Cape Town is disabled-friendly, not only for the World Cup, but for decades thereafter. Extensive efforts have been made to ensure visitors with disabilities can access World Cup stadiums, and also public transport, hotels and other facilities. All the facilities in stadiums, from the pitch, changing rooms, treatment rooms, spectator stands and business suites, to VIP areas and offices, are accessible. In addition, the lighting took into consideration the needs of people with sight impairments. There are also tactile signage and maps on every level, as well as tactile paving, where required. Vertical circulation and evacuation plans are mindful of the special needs of people with disabilities.

Meeting delegates who want to explore on their own will be happy to know that the city's "MyCiti Bus" has been recognised as one of the world leaders in universal access. The buses run throughout central Cape Town making daily commuting convenient on this public transport system that is universally accessible. Buses have boarding bridges, allowing wheelchair users level access from platforms or pavements. They also have tactile paving for visually impaired travellers to locate platforms, and induction loops at kiosks for the hearing impaired. Guide dogs are allowed on the *Go George* buses. All feeder services have ramps that can be pulled out to provide wheelchair access. There are spaces reserved for securing wheelchairs inside trunk and feeder buses. The city's plan to ensure disabled access was based on the findings of a World Bank-sponsored report investigating best practices in cities around the world.

Universal Access (UA) in tourism is one of the city's eight responsible tourism priorities. It is estimated that the Universal Accessibility Tourism market is about 650 million people with differing disabilities and 600 million elderly people worldwide. In fact, Cape Town has ambitions to be a premier Universal Accessibility tourism destination. Learn more about Universal Accessibility Tourism from this [attractive infographic](#).

Universal access for people with disabilities is a compulsory requirement for the grading of all types of tourism accommodation and meetings, exhibitions, and special events (MESE) venues by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa. Find out what are the Universal Accessibility requirements for South Africa's MESE venues [here](#).

The *Standard Electrical, Mechanical and Architectural Guideline for the Design of Accessible Buildings (Facilities for Disabled Persons)* published by the Department of Public Works is a [design guidebook](#) providing architects and designers with the basic information necessary for an accessible environment for people with disabilities.





Case study: Cape Town International Convention Centre

At the end of 2014, the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) achieved its first Universal Accessibility (AU) audit, with an outstanding result of 83% for Mobility Accessibility from the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa.

The CTICC has been designed to cater for the disabled to ensure that the venue is an inclusive venue for able-bodied as well as delegates and visitors with disabilities. The building incorporates international norms as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the South African National Building Regulations (NBR) Standards.

The CTICC has been the venue of choice for a diverse group of meetings and events since its inception. These meetings include the Disability Employment Summit, the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability (IASSIDI), the Disability Workshop Development Enterprise International Small Business Conference, and South African Disability Expo and Conference, among others.

Facilities at CTICC which cater for people with disabilities include:

- Designated parking bays for the disabled in P3 have direct access to elevators which are designed to accommodate wheelchair access;
- Disabled toilets on all levels of the venue including the Management Offices;
- All exterior entrances to the venue have ramp access;
- The width of all doors have been designed to accommodate wheelchair access;

- Buttons in lifts are positioned at a level to ensure they are accessible to wheelchair users;
- All lift buttons are labelled in Braille;
- Designated drop-off points at the main entrance of the venue have been allocated for people with disabilities;
- Auditorium 1 has been equipped to accommodate designated seating positions for wheelchair users. Auditorium 2 can be suitably adjusted;
- All passenger lifts within CTICC 2 are disabled friendly; and
- All rooms can be easily accessed as there are no raised doorsteps to the meeting venues.



COPENHAGEN

Copenhagen

When you visit Copenhagen, you should not miss the “world’s most accessible office building.” The *House of Disabled People’s Organizations*, widely regarded as the world’s most accessible office, is located in the Copenhagen suburb of Taastrup. 30 different disability groups in Denmark have come together to share headquarters here. Many of the staff members of the organizations have different disabilities so the whole house has been designed with equal focus on modern office spaces and equal accessibility for everyone.

Conference participants with special needs can get [information on accessibility](#) in the city by visiting Wonderful Copenhagen’s website. A Danish initiative called *God Adgang* which means “Access Denmark” is an Accessibility Label scheme and will help convention delegates who need information on accessibility in Denmark. The visitor to the website www.godadgang.dk can look up details on how accessible restaurants, conference facilities, exhibition and meeting venues or museums and indoor attractions are.

The label scheme covers seven labels aimed at different groups of disabilities, each with different requirements for accessibility. These are:-

- Wheelchair users;
- People with reduced mobility, arm and hand impairments;
- People with visual impairments;
- People with hearing impairments;
- People with asthma or allergy;
- People with mental disabilities; and
- People with reading difficulties.

Service providers who have been granted an Accessibility Label meet the minimum accessibility requirements applying to one or more of the seven categories. The accessibility label is based on a set of criteria developed by the Danish Standardization Institute in cooperation with the Danish organizations of people with disability and representatives from the companies/buildings involved. The labelling scheme, based on an expert audit made by an auditor from Access Denmark, has been practised in Denmark since 2003.

The results of this audit fulfil two objectives:

- Information for the end user where fact sheets are available with pictures and detailed information on the accessibility; and
- Feedback to the company/building on the current accessibility conditions, where the gaps are (if any) and what improvements can be implemented.

The Access Denmark label is a private and voluntary initiative. View a short [introductory film](#) about this labelling scheme, which presents a good business case on why service providers should participate in this scheme.





Case study: Scandic Hotels Group

Scandic, the largest Nordic hotel operator with a network of close to 280 hotels across six countries, views universal accessibility for its guests as a top priority. This hotel chain has sought advice from hotel guests, its own team members, and organizations of persons with disabilities for the planning and implementation of their accessibility services.

The hotel chain prides itself on its 135-point accessibility standards. Each hotel's website will list detailed information about their respective solutions which can range from a vibrating fire alarm clock, walking stick holder at the reception desk, portable hearing loops for those with impaired hearing, Braille hotel factsheets, and more. Even service dogs are well taken care of – there is a list of dog-friendly parks and play areas close to Scandic Hotels.

You can view Scandic Hotel's [135 accessibility standards](#) here and learn more about their commitment and efforts to ensure that all their guests are comfortable.

In 2013, Scandic became the first hotel chain in the world to offer an interactive online training in accessibility. This course has now received several honours, including “Best e-learning organization run for profit” in the Swedish Learning Awards.

This training course is part of the Scandic Business School where all team members at the hotels have to complete. In addition to this digital training course, the hotel chain constantly conducts training programmes at newly opened hotels or those which have just been taken over.

You are welcomed to [take Scandic's online course on accessibility](#) here.

During the training, you will be given the opportunity to explore a Scandic hotel and learn more about how Scandic works with accessibility in three areas in a hotel – the reception, the bedroom and the restaurant.

“What makes us most proud is when guests tell us that when they stay at Scandic, they're treated as hotel guests, not as people with disabilities.”

Magnus Berglund, Accessibility Director, Scandic Hotels Group



DUBAI

Dubai

In May 2017, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, announced that people with disabilities and special needs should be known as the “determined ones” and appointed a dedicated “determined ones” officer to every government department. The Government of the Emirate of Dubai, the most populous city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has also begun to implement the Dubai Universal Accessibility Strategy and Action Plan (DUASAP). 15 relevant governmental and semi-governmental local entities in Dubai have been mandated to prepare a three year (2018-2020) sectoral implementation plan to retrofit existing buildings, infrastructure and facilities to ensure a barrier-free and fully inclusive physical environment.

Since the beginning of 2017, new public spaces have had to fulfil an emirate-wide, disabled-friendly code. At the same time, many older buildings are being retrofitted to fulfil the requirements of the code. The project, titled *Accessible Environments for People with Disability based on Universal Design*, is in line with the wider “My Community – A City for Everyone” initiative to transform Dubai into a disabled-friendly city by 2020.

This means that by the time Dubai hosts the Expo 2020 Dubai, the city will be fully accessible. The earlier study phase of the project which began in 2014, looked at successful examples of accessibility-friendly planning in the US, Canada and Singapore, among other countries.

At the AccessAbilities Expo 2017 at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre, the organizers provided a separate venue map for persons with disabilities which provided specific information on the services that were especially catered to their needs, such as indoor and outdoor accessibility routes, elevators, and accessible washrooms. An additional complementary app was available for the use of the blind - as they walked through the expo, the app announced the names of nearby exhibitors and facilities. The world’s first smart eyeglasses which help the visually impaired function without assistance, as well as a device to cure stuttering within hours, and running prostheses for recreational athletes, were among the [smart assistive technologies](#) which were on show at the Expo. This three-day expo brought more than 150 exhibitors from over 40 countries together and showcased the world’s latest assistive technology and robotics. The Expo focused on facilitating the integration of the “determined ones” into society and empowering them. Attendees included individuals with disabilities, their families, educationists, experts from different sectors such as healthcare, technology and infrastructure, and decision-makers. AccessAbilities Expo was organized by Reed Exhibitions Middle East and Nadd Al Shiba PR and Event Management.

Among other meetings and events, this BestCities destination hosted the 24th International Association for Disability and Oral Health Congress this year, to be followed by its first World Para Snowboard World Cup in November.



Case study: Dubai Disability Strategy 2020

All private healthcare facilities in Dubai have been given six months to ensure they are accessible for persons with disabilities. This notice to improve disabled facilities at healthcare facilities is the latest government move to improve universal accessibility across the city ahead of Expo 2020 Dubai under the Dubai Disability Strategy 2020.

Taking place in the MENASA region for the first time, Expo 2020 Dubai will place the UAE into a global spotlight during its 6-month duration. With 25 million visits to the Expo 2020 Dubai site anticipated, the event aims to deliver an inclusive and landmark Expo. World Expos are designed to share ideas, showcase innovation, and encourage collaboration and the Expo 2020 Dubai theme 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future' is underpinned by three key elements: Opportunity, Mobility and Sustainability. The Expo will be a climatic conclusion to five years of work to promote inclusion and for Dubai to showcase itself as a city that has transformed itself into one which is fully accessible to people with disabilities. A World Expo which is accessible will add value to the Expo story and make Dubai one of the first, if not the first, of the Expo cities to put accessibility at the top of its brand. Behind the Expo scene, government bodies in Dubai are already stepping into the new era of being disabled-friendly. The new initiatives include Smart Gate Special Counters at the airports, guidelines in Braille, government staff trained in sign language to support those with hearing and speech impairment, ease of wheelchair access in buildings, parks, transport facilities, government offices and other places, and parking facilities close to the centres. Committed to bringing the Vision 2020 to reality, these departments are actively using smart technologies, providing job opportunities and also introducing facilities aimed at integrating the “determined ones” into the society.

When it comes to getting around, the Dubai Metro and Dubai Tram offer services and facilities for people with different types of disabilities. Stations and metro carriages have audio and visual announcements for guidance, notifications and display of information for people with hearing and visual impairment, floor signs that facilitate the movement of people with visual disabilities where it keeps track of movements that guide them to the gates or to their designated locations in the carriages. There are elevators and escalators with audio and light-customised systems for people with visual impairment and hearing disabilities. Meanwhile, the Dubai Customs exempts goods and materials used by people with disabilities from customs duties. These include educational, medical tools, machinery, wheelchairs that have an engine or another mechanism, along with cars made specially to be driven by people with physical disabilities, crutches, devices for the hearing, speech and visually impaired.

Even congress delegates to Dubai can play a role. Participants at the ICCA (International Congress & Convention Association) Annual Congress, taking place in Dubai in November 2018 can support visually-impaired people through the Noor Dubai Foundation. The Foundation, which focuses on the prevention of blindness and visual impairments, has assisted some 27 million lives across Africa and Asia through its free treatment and preventive programmes which include providing eye glasses, medication and eye surgeries. ICCA Congress delegates are encouraged to bring with them their old pair of spectacle frames which will then be refitted with the right lens and distributed by the Foundation through their mobile eye clinics. Delegates can also participate in the ICCA Charity Run 'N' Walk at Dubai's La Mer beach and make voluntary donations to the Foundation. In addition to this, instead of speaker gifts, ICCA will make donations to the Foundation.²⁷



EDINBURGH



Edinburgh

Edinburgh, a highly successful meetings destination, is committed to the provision of a high standard of accessible facilities for visitors and delegates to conferences. There is a range of [information and tools](#) available for conference organizers and delegates visiting Edinburgh as well as guidelines and recommendations to assist hotels and venues welcoming guests with disabilities.

Edinburgh Airport has produced a special booklet “Journey for Passengers with [Reduced Mobility Access Guide](#)” so that all visitors and users will have a comfortable experience. Also worthy of mention is the special signage used for its Accessible Toilets at the Edinburgh Airport, and the significance. A local schoolgirl Grace Warnock had spearheaded a campaign to raise awareness of hidden disabilities such as Crohns Disease, an inflammatory bowel disease that is not visible to others, and to combat the stigma around sufferers who used disabled facilities. Grace designed a door sign indicating the needs of people who are not visibly disabled. The bathroom sign includes a person in a wheelchair and a standing person with a heart symbolizing people with invisible conditions. For her initiative, Grace went on to win the [Child of Achievement Award and the Young Scots Award 2017](#).

An app which allows passengers with reduced mobility and hidden disabilities to personalise the assistance they need has also been launched at Edinburgh Airport. The ‘Welcome’ app by the Edinburgh-based *Neatebox* allows people with disabilities to set up a personal profile and request assistance in advance from facilities and venues which recognise the app. Users are able to download the ‘Welcome’ app for free, with venues paying a monthly subscription to use the service.

This is an addition to Edinburgh Airport’s provisions for passengers with disabilities or reduced mobility. The airport also recently became the first in Scotland to be recognised as Autism Friendly.

In another development, the pioneering *Visually Impaired People* (VIP) service by Edinburgh City Council to make its libraries more accessible to people with sight loss has won a prestigious award in Scotland. The service encourages greater inclusion and participation among library users with sight loss, develop their confidence in using new technology, incorporate assistive technology into public computer equipment, and signpost on to other services. Many people with sight loss who have never used libraries before, are now accessing library services. As a result, new visually impaired reading groups have now been formed.

VisitScotland, the national destination marketing organization, plays an important role to ensure ensuring that Scotland is an inclusive and welcoming destination for all visitors. The organization has put together some [helpful resources](#) on Accessible Tourism so that its supplier community is always ready to cater to the needs of a full range of customers. The accessible market not only encompasses people with permanent physical disabilities, but also parents with young children, senior travellers and people with temporary injuries and their travel companions.



“Inclusivity and Accessibility is deeply embedded within our organization’s values beyond simple conference wins. This is part of who we are as a business, this is how we deal with our whole community, whether citizens of the city or an International delegate visiting Edinburgh.”

*Amanda Wrathall,
Sales & Marketing
Director,
Edinburgh
International
Conference Centre
(EICC)*

Case study: Edinburgh International Conference Centre

The Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) works with the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters to provide interpreters during conferences when required. EICC also partners with The National Autistic Society to train its staff and cater to guests with autism spectrum conditions and sensory disabilities. For someone with autism spectrum conditions (ASC), sensory or additional needs, attending an event can be a daunting experience. EICC allocates quiet areas which can be used by the delegates during the event, as well as seats outside the rooms if these guests need a break during sessions. Public address announcements can be preceded with a soft tune before making the main announcement so that guests who are sound-sensitive are alerted that an announcement is upcoming. Slides that are placed on monitor screens are extended to about 7-12 seconds for the guests to read and absorb the information.

On page 16 of “[Everyone’s Edinburgh](#)” by the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group, you can read EICC’s experience when they were given the honour to host the XI Autism-Europe International Congress in 2016. EICC was subsequently presented with an Autism Friendly Award, making it the second building in Edinburgh to achieve this. This is in recognition of the Centre’s special efforts to adapt and modify their standard operating procedures to ensure a successful congress for the participants. EICC also works closely with local dementia groups in the community as well as help spread best practices for Alzheimer Scotland which it hosts at the Centre.

[Download EICC’s Autism Friendly Visitors Guide](#)

[Download EICC’s Autism Friendly Event Organisers Guide](#)

The EICC has won Best Venue in *Euan’s Guide’s* Annual Awards for the best examples of disabled access at Edinburgh Festivals, the world’s largest arts and culture festival. Attaining best-of-class accessibility standards has been high on the agenda for the EICC for a number of years with its entire team having received disability awareness training, under guidance from *Euan’s Guide*. *Euan’s Guide* was founded in 2013 by Euan MacDonald, a power chair user who has Motor Neurone Disease, and his sister Kiki MacDonald, when they were looking for recommendations for accessible places to visit. The website features thousands of friendly and honest disabled access reviews and listings in the UK and internationally.

In addition, EICC was recognised at the European Association Awards 2017 for its work in improving the centre’s accessibility. Meeting planners can get all the information they need to cater to delegates with disabilities by visiting [EICC’s website](#). EICC is also a “Keep Safe” participating establishment.

Across Scotland, the [Keep Safe Initiative](#) works with a network of businesses such as shops, libraries and cafes who have agreed to make their premises a “Keep Safe” place for people to go if they feel frightened, distressed or are a victim of disability hate crime. Disabled and elderly people who wish to take part in the initiative will be issued with a contact card with details of the person’s name, any health concerns, any communication needs and contact details of family or friends. As of April 2018, there are 375 Keep Safe places across Scotland with 17, including the EICC, in Edinburgh.



HOUSTON

Houston

The United States has consistently been recognised as a world leader in the rights of the disabled. USA developed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which “prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications and access to state and local governments’ programs and services.” (US Department of Justice, 2005) Aside from the Department of Labor, other agencies take a part in implementing the ADA, such as the Department of Transportation for regulating accessible transit, Department of Education, and Department of Health and Human Services, among many others. USA developed a non-profit organization called Open Doors Organization (ODO) that supports the rights of persons with disabilities toward equal opportunities. One of the organization’s goals is to educate businesses on how to incorporate and consider people with special needs in their business planning and strategies. ODO, together with Harris Interactive (a market research firm), conducted a market study in order to get a better context on the travel industry and persons with disabilities. The results of the study proved that since there is a large market of people with special needs, the economic profits of hotels and other places for the meetings industry have the potential to increase if they are able to make adaptations to the needs of these people (World Tourism Organization, 2016).

TAS, or Texas Accessibility Standards, are set by the Texas Department of Licensing and Registration Elimination of Architectural Barriers Program. These standards are intended to ensure access to facilities by people who have disabilities. TAS is not the same as ADA. However, TAS has been certified as a reasonable substitute for ADA compliance, which means that it meets or exceeds the federal ADA Accessibility Guidelines.

Houston’s downtown Theatre District spans 17 blocks and has nearly 13,000 seats in a concentrated downtown area offering a unique blend of cutting-edge performing arts and well known classics. Houston theatres like Main Street Theatre, the Houston Ballet, Hobby Center and Society of Performing Arts also offer sensory-friendly acts for autistic audience members and their families. During each season, and specifically for these guests, the Hobby Center has several performances where they keep the theatre under-capacity, audience members can get up, move and talk, and trained volunteers staff the event to ensure a positive experience.

At the Houston Ballet, two autism friendly performances were available for their 2018/2019 season – *Dancing in Texas*, and *My First Ballet: The Sleeping Beauty*. In order to be “autism-friendly,” the shows were performed in a friendly, supportive environment for an audience of families and friends with children or adults who are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder or other sensitivity issues. Adjustments to the productions include reduction of any jarring sounds or strobe lights focused into the audience. If anyone feels the need to leave his/her seat during the performance, he/she can proceed to the theatre lobby area where there are designated quiet and activity areas which are staffed with autism experts. To get an idea of what an [autism-friendly theatre performance](#) is, check out this *Mary Poppins* performance from TDF (Theatre Development Fund).



Case Study: Houston Space Center

This science and space exploration learning center is the first of its kind to be designated as a Certified Autism Center by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards - IBCCES. The certification process involves rigorous training for staff, and is supplemented by inspections and improvements which enable the Houston Space Center to better welcome and accommodate guests with autism spectrum disorders and other sensory and cognitive challenges.

The Center goes beyond simply meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. This commitment is certified by its autism center designation. Customer service staff who interact with guests on a daily basis are trained on awareness and sensitivity, and best practices for instruction and interactions.

The Center offers “Sensory Friendly Evenings,” with reduced lights, sounds and crowds as well as Space Center University for the visually impaired and other events which are designed to provide quality learning experiences for guests with special needs. Individuals and school groups can use their “Stellar Explorer Guide” to prepare guests with autism for an upcoming visit and “Vocabulary Cards” for non-verbal or low-verbal guests.

Also available are sensory friendly backpacks which have sound-cancelling headphones, sunglasses, a fun space book and other sensory items.

Houston Museum of Natural Science

The Houston Museum of Natural Science (HMNS) is another attraction which makes accessibility a priority. Before coming to the museum, visitors with special needs can download and review tips, guides, planners, and other resources to make their visit more enjoyable. The *Access HMNS* app – which is presented by the Texas Children’s Hospital and SPARK - has social guides, a customisable schedule, communication icons, games, a sensory map, and tips.

The Sensory Guide provides information on which exhibits, transitions and pathways between museum halls are most appropriate depending on one’s sensory needs. This map includes information on sensory components of each exhibition as well as quiet places to stop and take a break during exploration. The Houston Museum of Natural Science has four floors of exhibit hall spaces with elevators or stairs available as pathways between floors. This guide displays colour-coded versions of each floor with numbered exhibit hall spaces. A sensory evaluation of each exhibit hall corresponds to the numbered spaces listed on the map. Evaluations are included for noise level, visual stimulation, tactile components, and any scents that a visitor may encounter. The guide is also useful for families with young children and elderly patrons.

Three times a year, HMNS offers Sensory Friendly events where exhibits and venues are modified for those with sensory sensitivities. Families who have children with autism are also invited to a special on-site registration and data collection event for the SPARK Autism Research Study (Texas Children’s Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine). SPARK, a large autism survey, wants to uncover causes and treatments for autism by creating a community of over 50,000 individuals affected by autism, and their biological family members.



MADRID

Madrid

There are several laws in place in Spain that are designed to support and protect those with disabilities. These include the 1982 Social Integration for Disabled People Act, the 2003 Non Discrimination Act and the 2007 Equal Opportunities Act. Madrid has taken great strides to adapt and improve its tourism infrastructure so that residents and visitors can enjoy accessible tourism. You can refer to the [Accessible Tourism Guide to Madrid](#) for more information.

The city has worked with accessibility expert PREDIF (Spanish Representative Platform for the Physically Disabled), as well as different tourism associations and organizations such as AEHM (Madrid Hotel Business Association) and AEHCAM (Madrid Hostel and Guest House Business Association). Prior to compiling this guide, the Madrid Visitors & Convention Bureau Tourist Office carried out a study on accessibility of Madrid's tourist resources and accommodation with at least one room reserved for people with reduced mobility. Once identified, these sites were visited by PREDIF's technical team, who performed an evaluation of each site's accessibility and highlighted its positive features, and also areas where there was room for improvement. To complete the study of all establishments, Diagnostic Accessibility Forms were used to determine the minimum standards which have to be met in order for any given establishment to be considered accessible. A list of accessible hotels in Madrid which range from guest house hostels to 5 star hotels, can be obtained [here](#). This tool has been accepted and endorsed by various specialist organizations, such as CEAPAT (the National Centre for Personal Autonomy and Specialized Assistance, under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality); PREDIF; FESORCAM (Community of Madrid Federation for the Deaf); and Via Libre which is a ONCE Foundation company.

ONCE Foundation's mission is to promote personal autonomy and the full social inclusion of persons with disabilities through education, training for employment, integration into the labour market, universal design and accessibility, and by strengthening organizations which advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities.

In partnership with the ONCE Foundation and the Spanish Association for Standardization (UNE), the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is developing a "global and transversal international standard" for accessibility in the areas of tourism planning and destination management. Following a review of existing standards, the three parties aim to establish new technical criteria, and recommendations and requirements for accessible tourism. These will assist not only disabled travellers, but also the elderly and families with young children.

The city of Madrid's metro operator, Metro de Madrid, is investing € 57 million to improve accessibility across its network. As part of this work, Metro de Madrid will also replace tactile pavements on the edges of platforms in a large part of the network and install Braille information panels. Part of the *Metro Accessibility and Inclusion Plan* includes staff training programmes on how to support travellers with disabilities and those who experience difficulties with understanding and orientation.



MADRID
CONVENTION
BUREAU



Case Study: Ilunion Hotels

Ilunion Group is a Spanish hotel chain at the centre of an unusual social project – it was founded in 2014 to promote social integration of people with disabilities.

Apart from being a leader in universal accessibility, the Group is a pioneer in labour market inclusion for disabled people. What marks out Ilunion is its employment policy, with some 40 percent of staff having some kind of disability, which promotes integration through employment and making it possible for people with disabilities to join the workforce.

The three, four and five-star hotels are situated in the main Spanish cities across 12 provinces. Between them, they have more than 3,700 beds and around 8,000sqm of space for meetings and events. Four of the hotels – Ilunion Suites Madrid, Ilunion Barcelona, Ilunion Valencia 3 and Ilunion Valencia 4 – are Special Employment Centres i.e. workplaces where at least 70 percent of the staff are people with disabilities.

All employees receive specific training on accessibility, as well as work protocols they must maintain when receiving people with disabilities. While catering to the visually impaired is Ilunion's niche - there are Braille signs in every room, special key cards, meeting rooms with Braille, shampoo and shower containers in Braille, and Braille menus in restaurants – the hotel chain also takes great care to ensure the comfort of all other guests with disabilities. This 'unnoticed accessibility' takes the form of rooms with enough turning space, bathrooms with grab bars, with accessible design and height, continuous floor shower stalls or roll-in shower, with a shower chair.

In 2015, Ilunion took the People Award when the World Travel & Tourism Council's Tourism for Tomorrow Awards recognised the chain for its commitment to accessibility. In Nov 2016, The World Committee on Tourism Ethics (WCTE) awarded Ilunion Hotels with the UNWTO Ethics Award. The Award distinguished Ilunion Hotels for its work in the area of accessible tourism for all and its contribution to change attitudes, break down social barriers and make the accommodation industry more inclusive.

Ilunion Hotels possess a Global Certificate in Universal Accessibility that has been officially certified (UNE 170001-2:2007).

“We want to show it's possible to be a profitable business while giving opportunities to people with disabilities. People only need an opportunity to show what they can do.”

*Beatriz Rubio del Campo, Corporate Accessibility Manager
Ilunion Hotels*



MELBOURNE

Melbourne

Australia's implementation of its UN CRPD obligations are set out in the [National Disability Strategy 2010–2020](#), a ten-year national policy framework. The NDS commits all Australian governments to a nationwide approach aimed at improving the lives of people with disability, their families and carers, and to providing leadership for a community-wide shift in attitudes.

Accessibility goes beyond structural changes such as ramps and wider aisles. In business circles, accessibility is also a range of things from training staff on how to accommodate the needs of all people, the font used on menus and websites, how products in shops are arranged and where the signage should be placed. The city of Melbourne's "Good Access is Good Business" programme supports city businesses in meeting the legal and community expectations that all people have fair access to goods, services and opportunities. People with disability, their families and friends consider how easy it is to access a place when choosing where to shop and socialise. Making businesses more accessible also makes it safer for customers and staff. You can view the campaign infographic with excerpts from the Monash University Report 2012 [here](#). The council also provides Customer Access Checklists to help business owners meet key access requirements.

Later this year, Melbourne will be delivering an updated business listing which will enable people to research venues and businesses with specific needs that they have.

As Melbourne continues to grow, the city's best and brightest innovators have uncovered a range of creative and smart solutions which may one day change the face of its city streets.

The city's "Open Innovation Competition" designed to help Melbourne improve its accessibility has yielded five innovative solutions:

Audio Accessibility Map — An accessible, mobile and interactive map of venues throughout the City of Melbourne featuring a hearing augmentation system.

Eatability — A rating system which provides guidelines for the food and beverage industry, showcasing a business's accessibility rating for four disability groups: mobility, auditory, visual and cognitive.

ClearPath — A turn-by-turn navigation system to assist the blind or vision impaired to navigate unfamiliar places including permit events, construction sites, tactile ground surfaces and locations with heavy pedestrian traffic.

Melba — A pairing of the City of Melbourne's Open Data with smart assistants such as Siri, Google Assist and Amazon's Alexa to provide up-to-date information via voice, text and screen readers.

Navigating Melbourne CBD — Creating 'Work' and 'Leisure' lanes with tactile markers to help organize pedestrians in the city and guide them through busy areas.





Case Study: Melbourne Disability Action Plan

The City of Melbourne has installed 80 tactile street signs to assist residents and visitors who are blind or have vision impairments to move around the city safely.

The city consulted Vision Australia, VicRoads and Health Science Planning Consultants on the project as part of the Disability Action Plan 2014-2017, to create a more inclusive and accessible city for everyone.

Features of the signs include:

- high contrast colours to assist people with low vision
- Braille labels indicating street names
- accessible height (plates attached to signposts at eye-level).

The new signs are located at ten major central city intersections.

Melbourne libraries are equipped with recharge points for anyone using electric scooters or wheelchairs so they don't have to worry about running out of battery power. The City Library, North Melbourne Library and East Melbourne Library are all equipped with multiple recharge points at locations within each library. Recharge points are also available at Travellers Aid sites at Flinders and Southern Cross Stations. The recharge points are free to use. The aim of this Recharge Scheme is to improve access to the city and its attractions for all visitors and residents.

(Source: City of Melbourne website)

Two beaches in Melbourne's western suburbs are the first in Australia to enable access for people with disabilities. The special facilities include beach wheelchairs (with large tyres to get through soft sand), all-terrain wheelchairs for bushwalking, and beach matting. Beach matting is a portable rollout mat which makes it easier to move over soft sand. Altona and Williamstown beaches have installed such mats on the foreshore which allows those with wheelchairs, prams, strollers and mobility aids to move easily along the sand.

Beach wheelchairs are also available for use. The armrests and wheels on Mobi-Chairs are made from materials that enable the chair to float in water. They are designed to enter water to the waist height of a support person. Integrated handles on the armrests provide added stability on land and in water. Beach wheelchairs are ideal for people who have mobility limitations, including those with permanent disability, temporary disability or those with reduced mobility due to age.

In December 2017, St Kilda and Port Melbourne also launched their floating chairs and special matting making Melbourne beaches more accessible than ever for locals and tourists with disabilities.

This case study will not be complete without mentioning the [Starfish Nippers](#), a life-saving skills programme for children with special needs or the disabled surfing programme which encourage confidence outdoors. Originally started by volunteers at Anglesea Surf Life Saving Club in Victoria, this programme is now being run at lifesaving clubs around Australia.



SINGAPORE |

Singapore

Singapore has already been working as a nation towards ensuring greater accessibility for all, especially with the ageing population. The efforts and resources go beyond the meetings industry and is led by multiple stakeholders such as the Building & Construction Authority (BCA), and Land Transport Authority (LTA), community associations such as the Disabled People's Association (DPA) Singapore, as well as private entities including building owners, attractions and places of interests.

The BCA has introduced a new Code on Accessibility for the Built Environment. This is a comprehensive set of requirements that building owners and professionals have to follow so that buildings and public spaces meet a minimum standard of accessibility. A Code on Barrier-Free Accessibility in Buildings was first implemented in 1990 and has been reviewed several times. The agency also introduced a Universal Design Guide in 2007 which offers guidelines in the design of products and environment for use by all people. New projects and existing buildings which will undergo A&A (Additions and Alterations) will have to follow the new Code. Commercial and institutional buildings that are frequently visited by the public must include barrier-free accessibility upgrades when they undergo any additions and alterations works. The building must also have at least one wheelchair-accessible toilet.

In addition, the agency has a [Built Environment Portal](#) with a Friendly Building Search, allowing visitors to search for building types that have good accessibility. The search has various categories such as Hotels & Resorts, Places of Interests, Meeting Venues and Transport Facilities.

There is a S\$40 million Accessibility Fund available up to FY2021 which will provide for accessibility features for the visually and hearing-impaired such Braille signage and hearing loops. Private building owners, especially those buildings constructed almost 30 years ago, can apply to upgrade their existing buildings. 70 percent of commercial and industrial buildings in Singapore are expected to be barrier-free by 2030. The LTA of Singapore has been investing in enhancing physical accessibility for all with a goal for 100 percent of their buses to be wheelchair accessible by 2020. Already 95 percent of Singapore's pedestrian walkways, taxi and bus shelters are barrier free.

On the community front, the Singapore University of Technology and Design has developed a signalling system known as *SwimSight* to assist deaf swimmers in competition. *SwimSight* uses two colours (orange and green) to alert deaf swimmers to race starts.

The local disabled people's association (DPA) has a webpage of [consolidated information especially for tourists](#). It has included useful information such as where to find accessible hotels, transport and sightseeing. Likewise, Singapore's national tourism website also includes handy [accessibility tips on getting around Singapore](#).





Case study: True Colours Festival

The Arts and Disability International Conference - ADIC 2018, jointly organized by the National Arts Council (NAC) and Very Special Arts (VSA) Singapore, focused on innovation and leadership to inspire and enable persons with disabilities through the arts. The first such conference in the ASEAN region, ADIC 2018 was held at Marina Bay Sands Convention Centre and the Enabling Village from 22 to 23 March 2018. The conference had a stellar line-up of international and local guest speakers and arts groups from Australia, Cambodia, Canada, Japan, Singapore and United Kingdom.

There were some 400 conference participants from overseas and Singapore, comprising social service professionals, disabled and able-bodied artists and policy makers. Keynote topics as well as case studies of artists with disabilities taking up leadership roles and being a catalyst of change for those around them, helped change perceptions to nurture a more inclusive arts environment. ADIC 2018 was held in conjunction with Singapore's first festival for artistes with disabilities – the True Colours Festival.

The True Colours Festival: *the Asia Pacific Celebration of Artistes with Disabilities*, is the first and largest gathering of artistes with disabilities to perform in an event in the Asia Pacific region. For the Singaporean deaf dance group *Redeafination*, it was an opportunity to promote awareness on inclusivity in the arts—a cause they have championed since the beginning—as well as performing with international talents with disabilities. Produced by VSA Singapore with the support of many partners, this Festival is not just a talent showcase as the organizers made the event fully inclusive by taking special measures to attract attendees with disabilities.

The True Colours Festival presented various 'firsts', such as:

- The Inaugural Arts and Disability International Conference;
- A more inclusive seating plan - Ground level seats at the indoor concert were configured to allow wheelchair users to be seated with or as close to their friends and companions as possible. Lower seating tiers were movable, allowing the Singapore Indoor Stadium to cater to varying capacity and seating requirements;
- A ticket sales campaign called *MyTreat* where individuals and companies can purchase concert tickets which went into a pool and distributed (via disability organizations) to persons with disabilities who cannot afford a ticket. Administrative charges for tickets bought under this campaign were waived;
- A festival website that was screen reader-friendly to people with visual impairment, along with adjustable font sizes and colour contrast for easier reading;
- This website also catered to the deaf and hard of hearing by providing closed captions and/or English subtitles for video content.

Some 20 artistes and troupes – both local and international – performed at the Singapore Indoor Stadium and a free-admission outdoor Festival Village. Besides interactive experiences that allow visitors to experience and learn about various kinds of disability, the Village also offered screenings of short films about disability, theatre performances, Paralympic Sports try-outs, and exhibition and sale of art.



TOKYO

Tokyo

Efforts to make Japan increasingly barrier-free have gained momentum ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Transportation hubs such as airports and train stations as well as public facilities are being fitted with wheelchair-accessible restrooms, tactile flooring and other design features to increase their accessibility. These include installing level landings to improve access to sidewalks and equipping public facilities with elevators and ramps. Tactile paving is a system of textured ground surface indicator found on footpaths, stairs and station platforms to assist pedestrians who are visually impaired. These *tenji* blocks or Braille blocks actually originated from Japan, with the first tactile blocks being used in Okayama City in 1967, and later spread around the world.

Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism is also looking into the necessary legal changes to oblige airlines that operate regular domestic and international flights in Japan to introduce wheelchair lifts, ramps and other equipment. In 2020, Tokyo will host the Olympic and Paralympic Games for a second time. When Tokyo hosted the Paralympics for the first time in 1964, this international sporting event for disabled athletes was widely credited for raising disability awareness in Japan. Tokyo was the first Paralympics to feature wheelchair racing with a 60-meter dash.

Like past host cities of the Paralympics, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) will leverage on the Games to promote a society that embraces diversity and inclusion. The Tokyo 2020 Accessibility Guidelines will emphasize the importance of city planning that is friendly to everyone from the perspective of universal design.

TMG's Paralympics Education Programme will lift awareness and promote understanding and the inclusion of people with impairments. The campaign to popularise disability sport has enlisted Japan's famed manga comics, which have a long tradition of drumming up enthusiasm for sport, with stories featuring football-loving heroes like the popular "Captain Tsubasa". The efforts also extend to local schools, where children are being encouraged to experience para sports such as wearing blindfolds as they play goalball, a sport for the visually impaired. A growing number of Japanese schools are already adopting the "colour universal design" system to ensure education materials meet the needs of people with colour vision deficiency. The Education Ministry has urged boards of education to adopt textbooks geared for people with colour vision disabilities and special chalk for blackboards.

There are also plans to train Tokyo residents in sign languages, including foreign sign language, and promote the use of communication tools such as remote sign language interpreting devices.

Japan has various websites which provide information on travel and sightseeing for visitors with disabilities. These include:

- Accessible Tokyo: <http://accessible.jp.org/tokyo/>
- Accessible Japan: <https://www.accessible-japan.com/>
- Accessible Travel Japan: <https://accessible-japan.jp/>





Case Study: WheelLog!

The Patient Association for Distal Myopathies (PADM) is a Japanese non-profit organization based in Tokyo focusing on overcoming difficulties for persons with distal myopathies and other physical disabilities. In May 2017, it launched WheelLog! This is an interactive wheelchair mobile application based on Google maps which combines accessibility information with GPS-tracked routes used by other wheelchair users. The application is based on crowd-sourced information where users upload information and photos and rate the accessibility of a location they have visited. WheelLog! is available in Japanese and English, and the rating and logging system is based on icons and pictures, allowing persons of other languages (such as tourists) to use the application.

As of late 2017, over 3,200 users have downloaded the application and have logged over 5,900 locations, mostly in Japan. The application has been used primarily in Japan, but users have posted to the app in over 15 countries, with active logging of locations including Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States. Given that system is based on Google maps, this theoretically allows the accessibility of any place on Earth to be assessed.

Read more about WheelLog! [here](#).

The Japanese government has launched a survey on wheelchair accessibility in hotels and inns across the country. 19,000 hotels and inns are being surveyed through hotel industry organizations to see how many rooms offer sufficient accessibility for people with disabilities. Currently, by law, a lodging facility with 50 or more guest rooms is required to have one room designed to accommodate wheelchair users.

Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo

For the [Keio Plaza Hotel](#) in Tokyo, which, in 1971, was considered Japan's first high rise hotel and the Shinjuku area's first skyscraper, their journey to provide barrier-free access started when they were selected as the host venue for the 16th World Congress of Rehabilitation International in 1988. In preparation for the Congress, the hotel installed 15 universal design rooms. Over time, the hotel also worked on accommodating vision and hearing impaired guests.

In March 2002, 10 newly designed universal rooms were installed, taking into consideration feedback from guests and architects specializing in barrier-free construction. The rooms are equipped with wide entrance doors, motored beds, bathroom with sliding doors, bar handles and adequate space for wheelchairs. These rooms also have unique features that can be further added to the room depending on the guest's needs. In an effort to offer higher levels of service to customers with varying medical and other special needs, further renovation of those rooms are in progress, and rescheduled to open in December 2018. The current round of renovations will expand the size of bathrooms and add new furniture that maintains the basic functionality concepts of "adjustable" and "adaptable." At the same time, special lighting systems will be created for guests with visual impairments. There are ten restaurants in the hotel without steps, thus providing easy access for wheelchairs.

In addition to these facilities, the hotel has accepted assistance dogs on its property even before the Law on Assistance Dogs for the Disabled was implemented in 2002. Training for hotel staff is done regularly, to promote the understanding and necessary services for the guests with accessibility needs.



VANCOUVER

Vancouver

Vancouver was the first Olympic host city to create a not-for-profit organization during the candidature process devoted to developing community legacies. Called *2010 Legacies Now*, the initiative positioned the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games as a catalyst for change. On top of generating excitement amongst younger generations around established and emerging winter sports — along with the participation of aboriginal groups, minorities and people with disabilities — the Games also produced a host of other benefits that still resonate within the greater Vancouver community today. An example is the event and conference industry in Vancouver which has seen significant development in the eight years following the Games.

The performances of the entire 2010 Canadian Paralympic Team captured the attention of the media and public across Canada, and inspired a generation of Canadians with a disability to get involved in sport. As a result, more Canadians with disabilities are aware of the opportunity to play sports. This legacy of greater awareness will lead to greater participation and inclusion in sport programmes. In addition, lighter, better equipment developed for the Paralympics can benefit those outside the competitive sports world as well when these new technologies trickle down into the general population of people with disabilities.

ICORD or the International Collaboration on Repair Discoveries, is an interdisciplinary research centre focused on spinal cord injury. Its Physical Activity Research Centre - PARC - was honoured with the 2017 Accessible City Award at the City of Vancouver Awards of Excellence.

PARC is a community-based research facility with the goal to advance research to understand the best strategies for providing opportunities for people with complete or partial paralysis due to spinal cord dysfunction to participate in physical activity. The first of its kind in Canada, the PARC research gym is equipped with fully-accessible, state-of-the-art exercise equipment. Members of Vancouver's spinal cord injury (SCI) community use PARC to exercise in an inclusive and supportive environment and contribute to research for better rehabilitation strategies. This unique exercise facility includes wheelchair-accessible strength-training machines, upper and lower body bikes, and GameCycle ergometers that incorporate popular video games for cardiovascular training. Smart Cards track users' progress as well as to provide raw data to researchers for analysis.

School of Kinesiology students work as exercise assistants and supervisors at the facility, helping users set up and use the equipment while providing encouragement and support throughout their exercise routine. The programme offers practical work experience and professional development opportunities to students from the School of Kinesiology while providing a valuable service to people with spinal cord injury. PARC is located on the ground floor of the Blusson Spinal Cord Centre at Vancouver General Hospital.

Spinal Cord Injury BC has published "Your Accessible Travel Guide" developed with the guidance of its travel panel experts comprising wheelchair travellers. This [eBook](#) is free to download. There is also an [Accessible Travel series](#) on YouTube



Case study: Legacy of Paralympic Winter Games 2010

Sports for athletes with an impairment first started off as rehabilitation sport, and evolved to recreational sport and then to competitive sport. The first Paralympic Summer Games was held in 1960 in Rome, Italy and the first Paralympic Winter Games in 1976 was hosted by Örnköldsvik, Sweden. The Paralympic Movement quickly gathered momentum and today, the Paralympic Games is a major event on the international sports calendar.

Thanks to the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC), Canada was able to host its first ever Paralympic Winter Games on home soil and bring a new level of awareness and recognition to the talented Paralympic athletes, their coaches, and their support teams. As part of the Games programme, the Inaugural IPC Academy Accessibility Summit was held in Vancouver to bring engaging and thought provoking discussions on Accessibility into the spotlight. The Summit provided a platform for Accessibility to remain high on the agenda of event organizers, architecture & construction firms amongst others.

Much has been discussed about the legacy left behind from the Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver in 2010. In terms of media coverage, nearly 1,200 media representatives covered the Games. A total of 1.6 billion viewers (in 22 analysed countries) followed the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games worldwide, an increase of 12%. (source: International Paralympic Committee annual report 2010). On the human level, the Paralympics acted as an agent for change to break down social barriers of discrimination for persons with a disability. Today, Canada is one of the top Paralympic nations in the world, but the benefits of greater awareness will be seen far beyond sports.

Seeing Paralympians compete has challenged preconceptions of disability, and changed attitudes about people with disabilities. The 2010 Paralympic Winter Games inspired the next generation of Canadians with a disability to participate in sport and pursue their dreams of representing their country in international high performance competition. While excitement for Vancouver 2010 swept the country, the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC) launched its first ever advertising campaign to ensure that the CPC brand and Paralympic Movement were part of the buzz.

The campaign portrayed the athleticism of Paralympic sport to inspire current and future Canadians with a disability to participate in sport and physical activity. In particular, people with a disability found heroes and role models to inspire them. This legacy of inclusion will benefit generations of Canadians. The CPC strategically took the opportunity to leverage the 2010 Games to advance the Paralympic Movement in Canada in a number of ways including securing stable, long-term funding for the CPC. (Source: CPC annual report 2009-2010)

In addition to the commitment of CPC's sponsors, the Federal Government also extended CAD\$5 million in new funding each year for five years. This has helped CPC reach a new plateau and given the organization the resources to develop much needed new programmes to serve the disabled community. Post the Paralympic Winter Games, the CPC's goal is to work with its members, athletes, government and sponsors to keep the interest alive for the benefit of Paralympic athletes as well as all Canadians with a disability.



Universal
Accessibility in
Meetings & Events

Interview with Venus Ilagan, Secretary General, Rehabilitation International

Q: Who does Rehabilitation International regard as someone with special needs?

A: Someone who can't use the same facilities as ordinary people use. For example, if you are not able to use the stairs, you need a ramp. It is defined as “reasonable accommodation”, something needs to be provided so everyone has the facilities required to be able to do the same things. If people want to make something for all, they should follow the concept of universal design not just for disabled, but for all. Sometimes in our lives, we need a different design ie a pregnant person or with buggy or someone with a walking stick. Design for all. Access for everyone. The work place should be designed for everyone so you maximise the productivity for all working there and also giving you access to employ more people.

Q: Are there any issues or praise you might have heard of or may be aware of highlighted by people with special needs about their experience at meetings, for example new technology implemented to help people with special needs at meeting, or areas that need improvement?

A: Technology has made it easier for people to attend meetings i.e. for blind people there are talking computers CART (computer assisted real time) so the words come up on the screen and it is faster than sign language and also more understandable for all (there are different sign languages and not everyone understands if it is Russian or UK English or US English!). Media captioning while issues are being discussed helps one to know what is being discussed even if it is not the whole picture.

Q: What improvement would you like to see within the meetings industry with regards to accessibility, more specifically at the venues?

A: More accessible rest rooms. There are lots where it is not accessible i.e. there were steps to the disabled toilet and I have also come across those that are in the basement, which is totally inaccessible. The mirrors and wash hand basins are too high.

Hotel rooms can be a problem with the door not being wide enough for a wheel chair. If people with disabilities have to pay more to attend events so that they get a hotel that has the right facilities, then that is not good. It should be one standard for all. The podium is often not accessible, there should always be a ramp and a lower podium. There are more than steps that wheelchair users have trouble with.

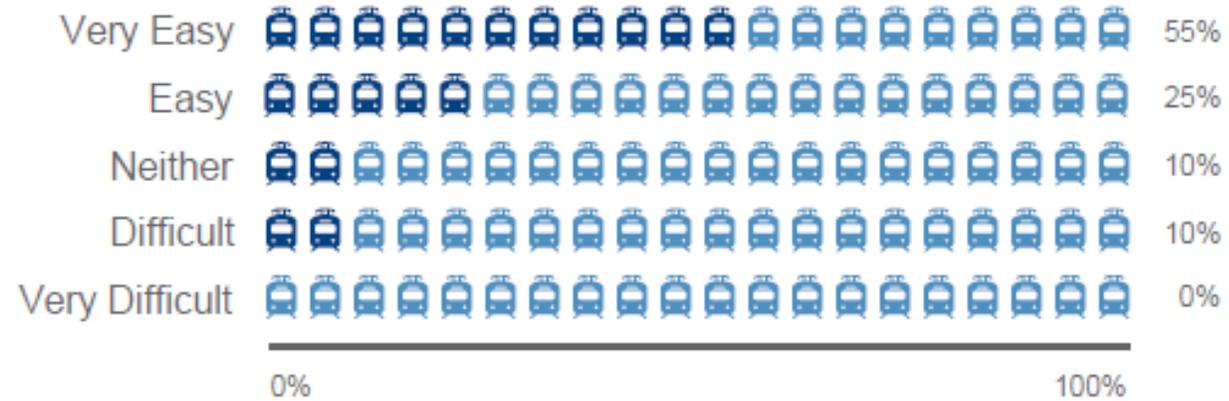
Q: Do you have any advice for destinations that want to welcome meetings and events comprising delegates with special needs?

A: Destinations should look into the concept of universal design. It would only be 1% additional cost at the start when integrated at the planning stage of building, but if they have to have a post build audit to analyse where the gaps are, the cost could be 35-40% more to retrofit. Universal design should be looked at from the beginning, not an after-thought.

ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS FOR ALL

Survey Results

How easy is it for special needs participants to get to your venue using public transportation?



As part of this research, 20 venues in BestCities destinations participated in our survey.

How easily can your venue cater to the varying special dietary needs of participants?



What facilities for assistive devices and technologies do you currently have in place at your venue to assist delegates with special needs?

Other facilities:

- All crossing and main walkway turning points outdoors have in-floor Braille barriers.
- Toilets for ostomates.
- Full tour guide script in Braille and a British Sign Language version on tablet.
- Lowered information desk.
- Noise absorbing roof coverings.
- Non-mirroring floor materials.



Wheelchair Access



Accessible Toilets



Hand Railing



Wheelchair Lifts



Electronic/ Hard Copy Maps



Front-line staff to guide delegates



Portable Ramps



Power Charging Stations



Hearing Assisted System



Large Font Signage



Ambulant Toilets



Access to Sign Language Interpreters



Venue Map and Signage in Braille



Access to Lip Speakers



Close Captioning (CC) System

Additional Information on Training:

•ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) is a vital part of CMP (Certified Meeting Professional accreditation), and all our front-line floor managers are CMP trained.

•We are working with IDT in best practices on Accessibility and inclusion.

•We have a 2-hour training session with frontline staff in Accessibility, in association with VisitScotland.

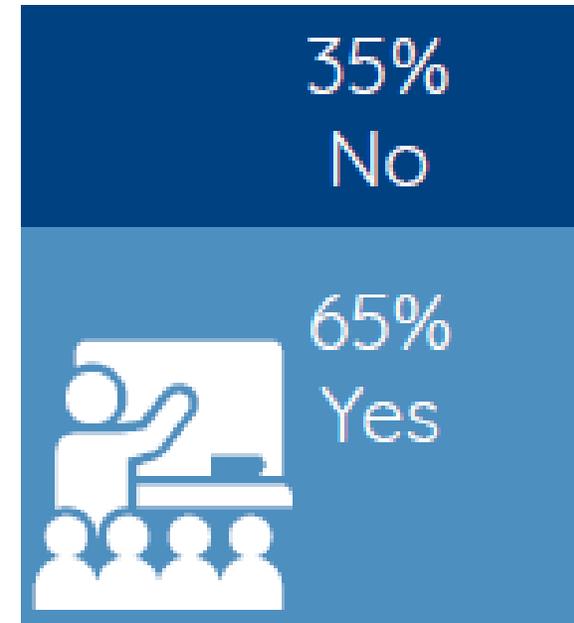
•We encourage our employees to participate in a training programme aimed at workers in the hospitality industry where the customers include the elderly and people with disabilities.

•Our FOH (front of house) staff complete an e-learning training tool via the Edinburgh Fringe Society. Additionally, we cover accessibility and inclusion as part of our FOH staff induction programme.

•Training on Accessibility and inclusion is conducted and carried out by our certified Accessibility Partner, Sedra Foundation.

•Training on Accessibility and inclusion is part of our 'get on board' procedures and employees are trained in the first 48 hours of joining Scandic.

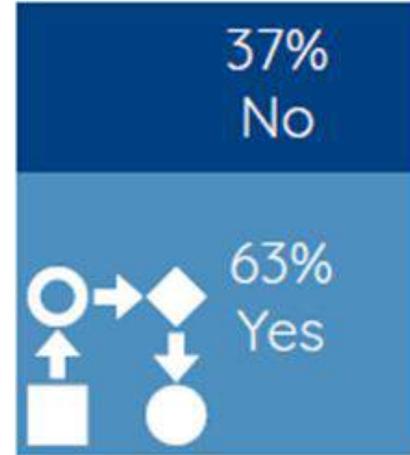
Is mandatory training on accessibility and inclusion provided for in-house events staff and front liners so they are capable of assisting people with special needs?



Additional Information on SOP:

- Our teams are trained to manage Accessibility requests.
- For every event, related hotels within the hotel meet to discuss and confirm how to attend to special needs. If training is necessary, we provide it based on the support the client needs. Information on a particular event or group is given to the whole hotel, not just the departments involved, so that there is a more thorough approach to servicing this group.
- We have instructions and procedures to improve guest experience at all stages, from booking to check-out.
- We have a working file that the team can refer to.
- We consider 135 points in our operational Manual.
- We are developing our Standard Operating Procedure manual.

Do you have a standard operating procedure (SOP) to manage accessibility requests with your clients?



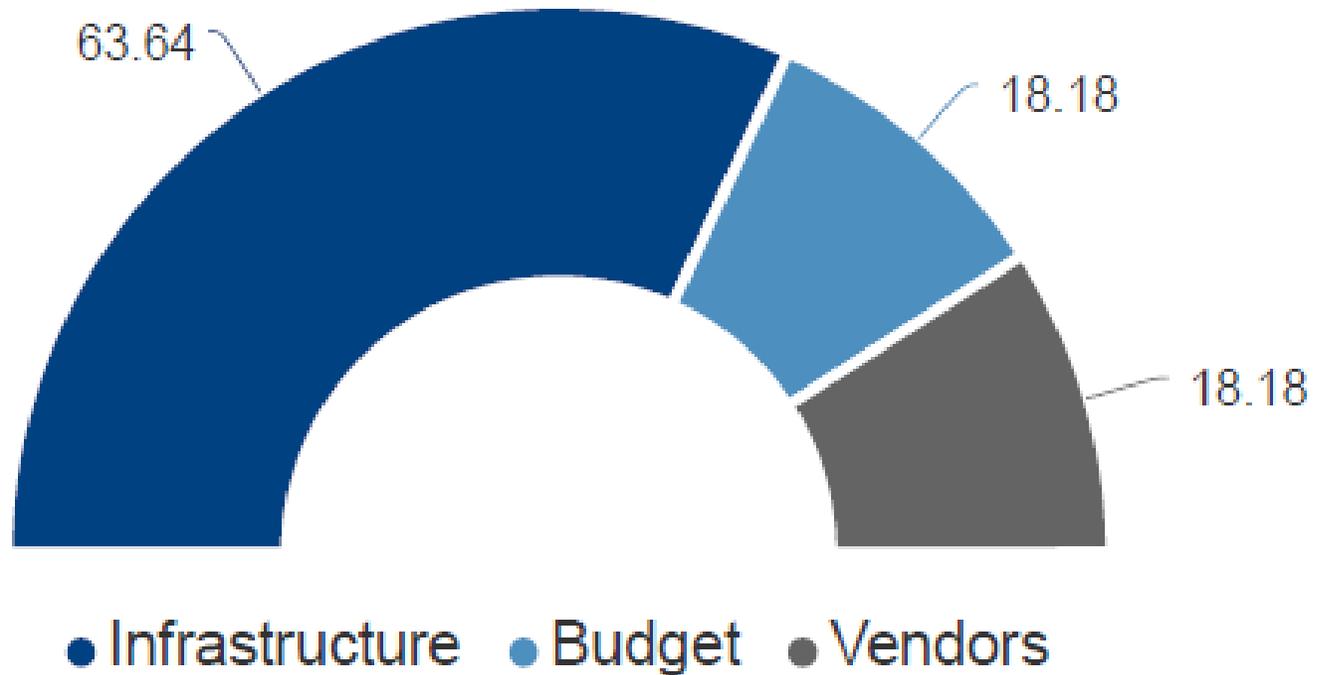
Does your venue currently have, or make references to, Accessibility Standards?



Additional Information on Standards:

- Building and Construction Authority (BCA) Code on Accessibility in the Built Environment 2013.
- Tokyo 2020 Accessibility Guideline (Guidelines for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games).
- OPERA Identification code, special service attitude.
- In conjunction with rules and regulations laid out by our Community Development Authority.
- DIN German standards combined with our own.

Are there any challenges your venue is currently facing in meeting the needs of delegates with special needs?



Additional Information on Challenges:

- Measuring the impact on our commercial KPIs.
- Mentality/Mindset.

Case study: Rehabilitation International World Congress 2016

The Rehabilitation International World Congress is a unique opportunity to build a stronger international coalition and help eradicate socioeconomic barriers, promote independence and facilitate an open dialogue between world leaders to improve the lives of people with disabilities. From 25-27 October 2016, RI Global and its UK partner, Shaw Trust, hosted some 1,200 persons in the disabled community from 65 countries in Edinburgh for its 23rd World Congress.

Considered as one of the most important disability events of 2016, the main theme of the Congress was to promote Inclusion. There were accompanying subthemes covering education, training, employment, independent living, ageing with a disability, disaster management, access, technology, leisure, culture, arts and tourism. This was supported by international themes from organizations such as the United Nations, International Disability Alliance, World Health Organization, World Bank, International Labour Organization and International Social Security Association.

The estimated economic benefit to Edinburgh was GBP2.4 million however the societal impact was worth more. A key part of securing the congress was to ensure that awareness and the profile of universal access issues were raised in Edinburgh and a legacy was created in the city for the disability movement and RI Global. The congress provided a platform to influence inclusion and accessibility and left a legacy for Edinburgh as an accessible city for all visitors. This did not come by accident - it was the result of forward thinking and collaboration of a shared goal to make a difference.

Convention Edinburgh which is the city's convention bureau, met with Venus Illagan, Secretary General of RI Global in Houston in 2013 (at a BestCities event) and worked with her and various organizations which included VisitScotland's Accessible Tourism Unit, Shaw Trust, Edinburgh International Conference Centre and Euan's Guide to ensure this globally significant conference would come to Edinburgh in 2016.

RI Global's vision is to ensure that when it holds its world congresses, it should leave a legacy behind – one that will equalize opportunities for communities not only to appreciate but to continue building their shared environment for all. As a legacy from the RI World Congress, a working group called *Everyone's Edinburgh* was created, focusing on accessible and inclusive tourism. As one of its activities, a destination-wide accessible tourism audit was initiated following RI World Congress 2016. The audit identified areas of best practice as well as the challenges and barriers faced by visitors with disabilities and served as the basis for prioritizing key areas of action.

Everyone's Edinburgh aims to identify opportunities to increase Edinburgh's share of the accessible tourism market and to develop a coordinated action plan which will enable the city maximize market opportunity. Said Ms Illagan: "Building accessible cities that are inclusive of all is both a human rights imperative and an exceptional business opportunity that is often taken for granted. It's time we appreciate the fact that access in the context of tourism is not just a compliance issue, it is a market issue, and an economic development issue. Access does not just benefit people with disabilities, it benefits us all."

Case study: Rehabilitation International World Congress 2016

In order to fully engage local businesses - hotels, venues, restaurants, transportation - two workshops were held. These workshops were aimed at informing tourism businesses the value of the accessible market and encouraging them to create their own Access Statements, which will state what facilities they have, and ensuring such details are visible on their website. Participants of RI Global's events like to research thoroughly where they can stay and how they can get around before they register. Therefore, it was important that this information was readily available.

Ahead of the World Congress, the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) undertook a full accessibility audit which led to a series of enhancements being implemented at the venue, along with the commencement of company-wide disability training to improve the standards of overall accessibility.

Scotland's Digital Orchestra performed at the RI World Congress where they represented Scotland as an example of excellence in inclusive music. This orchestra is a unique ensemble where the instruments are tailored to the musicians ensuring that Everyone Can Play Music.

Musicians in the orchestra have a variety of disabilities ranging from cerebral palsy to learning difficulties and autism. However, they use a range of music technologies such as movement sensors and apps to play, compose and perform their own original music.

For more about RI World Congress 2016, you can read the report by the Chair of the Programme Board [here](#).

We thank Elaine Miller, International Association Sales Manager from Convention Edinburgh for contributing this case study. Elaine took part in a Destination Leadership Programme run by a local university, and as a result of bidding and winning the RI congress, she spearheaded a report on improving accessibility in Edinburgh. The report was picked up by the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group and VisitScotland which decided to implement some of the work suggested in the report. Elaine went on to chair the working group *Everyone's Edinburgh*. Further details on the group's objectives can be see [here](#). The work resulting from *Everyone's Edinburgh* is now being continued by VisitScotland's Accessible Tourism group.



Create a more inclusive world

RI WORLD CONGRESS 2016 | EDINBURGH

Case study: International Day of Sign Languages

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 23 September as International Day of Sign Languages. The first International Day of Sign Languages was celebrated on 23 September 2018 as part of the International Week of the Deaf. The International Day of Sign Languages will raise awareness of signed languages and enhance the quality of life for Deaf communities. The International Week of the Deaf was first celebrated in September 1958 and has since evolved into a global movement of deaf unity and concerted advocacy to raise awareness of the issues deaf people face in their everyday lives.

The President of the World Federation of the Deaf (WDF) said that this Day will emphasise the principle of “nothing about us without us” in terms of working with Deaf Communities. WDF is an international non-governmental organization representing and promoting approximately 70 million deaf people's human rights worldwide. The WFD works with the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) to offer the International Sign Interpreter Accreditation which was established to address the increasing participation of deaf individuals in the international arena. The XVIII World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in Paris, France with a five day programme will be held from 23 - 27 July, 2019.

The Congress theme, "Sign Language Rights for All" is a threefold call:

- Sign Language Rights for All as a principle needs to not only be recognised in international treaties and plans of action but also translated into action. Currently this means within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), which has been ratified by more than 170 countries; and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which has, as its cornerstone, 'leave no one behind'.
- Sign Language Rights for All complements the UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages (2019) with the opportunity to demonstrate that all sign languages should be accorded the same status as spoken languages.
- Sign Language Rights for All benefits the global community in its entirety - everyone is welcome!

With up to 3,000 delegates anticipated to attend the World Congress in Paris, this event is expected to be the largest gathering of deaf and hard of hearing people ever held in France and Europe.

Case study: International Day of Sign Languages

Malaysia signed the United Nations Convention on the Right of People with Disabilities and passed the People with Disability Act 2008 (Act 685) to give people with disabilities the opportunity to live as normal citizens. As communication is an essential part of everyday life, it is particularly important for deaf people to communicate as normally as possible. Sign language naturally develops within deaf communities and as such, different races and even regions can have their own distinct sign language.

In Malaysia, there are different signs because of the different races that make up the country. For example, for the word 'marry', it is the sign for 'tea ceremony' for the Chinese while for the Indians, it is 'long hair'. Colloquial signing is therefore dynamic and reflects a way of life for the deaf community in Malaysia.

The country's National Union of the Teaching Profession has pledged to champion the right of deaf children to learn in their mother tongue as early education of deaf children must emphasise the use of a language that is considered to be their first language. Learning localised signs benefits all of society, not just the deaf as everyone gets old and may not be able to hear or speak as well as they used to.

Starbucks' first signing store globally, opened in Kuala Lumpur the capital of Malaysia, in 2016.

This is the world's first-ever Starbucks Signing Store that hires deaf Partners (a reference to Starbucks' baristas). The store boasts another first for the brand: one of the baristas is the world's first deaf shift manager. Before this, hearing-impaired baristas have been employed at various outlets but never in frontline roles. The store currently houses a total of 10 deaf baristas along with three hearing ones who have been trained to learn and practice sign language. The Malaysian NGO The Society of Interpreters for the Deaf (SID) provided Starbucks with two sign language interpreters to translate during hiring, training and coaching for the deaf Partners and also taught sign language to all hearing Partners at the store.

For the past two years, the Signing Store has created awareness on the importance of inclusivity and diversity in the workplace. In addition to deaf tour groups who come to experience the store, sign language classes are held twice a month and serve as a platform for Partners to mingle with the public as well. For the Partners' benefit, empowerment workshops take place every quarter, with key deaf speakers sharing their experiences to motivate them.

Case study: World Parkinson Congress 2013

Tourisme Montréal and the Palais des congrès de Montréal worked with the 2013 World Parkinson Congress to bring together over 3,500 researchers, members of the medical community and people whose daily lives are affected by the disease – patients, caregivers and advocates. Montreal worked with Parkinson Québec, Parkinson Society Canada and the World Parkinson Coalition to get Montréal Parkinson's-Ready by offering training sessions to everyone from hotel and airport staff to taxi drivers and restaurant employees on how to interact and care for people living with Parkinson's.

The event planners went to extra lengths to make the congress accessible and welcoming to the whole spectrum of attendees:

- Long days of conferences can be taxing on people with Parkinson's and therefore designated spaces or Renewal Rooms offering yoga, meditation, clay work and other creative therapeutic activities were set up and run by volunteers. These activities are open to everyone, particularly for patients and their care partners.
- The convention centre served meals in bite-sized pieces and beverages in sturdy cups with straws so their attendees living with Parkinson's would feel more at home.

A modern facility with a willing and hands-on staff, the Palais des congrès de Montréal enjoys an invaluable track record when it comes to hosting events requiring special attention. When it hosted the 14th Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf, the centre's employees learned the American Sign Language.

Other conferences which have used the venue's adaptive environment include the IMC International Mobility Conference, and the 9th International Conference on Low Vision.

The Palais des congrès' facilities have been Total Access-rated by Kéroul, an organization dedicated to promoting tourism and culture for people with restricted physical ability. The staff is trained to provide a level of service that is personalised, including at the box office during consumer shows.

In addition, the Palais is equipped with FM assistive listening devices for the hearing impaired and a TTY (Text Teletype) service. As part of its continuous improvement process, the Palais always ensures it is in step with the latest Canadian and U.S. accessibility standards (Americans with Disabilities Act - ADA), and also with the Québec Building Code and the Québec *Act to Secure Handicapped Persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration.*



Case study: 11th Autism-Europe International Congress 2016

Run by the Autism-Europe Council, this congress showcases and shares the most recent developments in the field, covering genetics, diagnosis, intervention, treatments, education, support, employment, rights and policies. The XI Autism-Europe International Congress 2016 was hosted by The Scottish National Autistic Society and took place at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) with 1,650 participants, far more than initially anticipated. Earlier, in April 2016, the Society launched [Too Much Information](#), its biggest ever campaign to increase public understanding of autism.

Although research is one of the core pillars of the 2016 conference programme, there was also interest in non research-based practical knowledge as the 1600 delegates also comprised practitioners, members of autism interest organizations, and other stakeholders who represented a broad audience, including autistic people and their families. The conference was aimed at bringing together practical and scientific knowledge about autism and its most recent developments. The theme of the 2016 congress was 'Happy, Healthy and Empowered' and gave Scotland the opportunity to showcase the developments across the nation while recognising that there is much to be done locally and internationally.

The EICC was subsequently honoured with an Autism Friendly Award in recognition of the changes the venue made to increase its accessibility for the conference participants. Staff across the EICC received autism training and 'autism champions' were identified to offer extra assistance. The venue's facilities were fully audited to ensure that it is providing an environment which is as accessible as possible and autistic visitors feel safe, happy and understood.

The EICC became the second building in Edinburgh to achieve the Award, which was first granted to the Scottish Parliament in May 2015. Read more about this case study [here](#).

Event organizers can take away some tips from the Edinburgh International Conference Centre if they have participants with autism in their group. This guide can serve as a useful checklist when discussing your needs with your venue. [Download EICC's Autism Friendly Event Organisers Guide](#).



Case study: World Congress of the World Federation of Hemophilia 2018

More than 4,000 delegates from 134 countries attended the bi-annual World Federation of Hemophilia Congress, which took place at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel and the Scottish Event Campus (SEC) in Glasgow from 20-24 May 2018. Participants were from a wide range of professional backgrounds including haematologists, paediatricians, orthopaedic surgeons, physiatrists, physiotherapists, dentists, nurses, social workers, psychologists, geneticists, laboratory technicians, researchers, scientists, policy makers, and advocates, as well as members living with haemophilia who made up roughly 10% of delegates.

Ahead of the congress, the Glasgow Convention Bureau partnered with Glasgow Welcomes and VisitScotland to offer free awareness sessions which were delivered by experts from the haemophilia community. The educational sessions were designed to help customer facing staff better understand the requirements of delegates who will soon be arriving in Glasgow and using services such as hotels, restaurants and taxis as well as visiting museums, art galleries and other attractions in their free time.

Information provided included making hospitality and taxi staff aware of the fact that those with haemophilia cannot carry their own bags, so help with luggage and trolleys would be appreciated. Advice also included the fact that after travelling, people with haemophilia are more susceptible to internal bleeds and will need a quiet and private place to mix and inject their medicine.

Training also highlighted that those with haemophilia may require taxis for short distances – because the condition can affect mobility – to ensure drivers were aware. A treatment room will also be set up at the SEC to ensure delegates can safely take their medication if required.

Training sessions were filmed to ensure that a legacy is being left which can then be used by the next destination to host the WHF. The training sessions for Glasgow's tourism and hospitality businesses will leave a lasting legacy on the city benefitting both Glaswegians and future visitors

Similar awareness training sessions will be in place for the World Down Syndrome Congress and the International Symposium on ALS/MND hosted by the city in July 2018 and December 2018 respectively.



Case study: Paralympic Winter Games 2018

The PyeongChang Olympic Winter Games is the most recent global event to offer a springboard for attracting international conferences and events to South Korea. Games organizers focused on strengthening the local economy, celebrating diversity, pushing innovation forward, and advancing education through sport, both during the Games and beyond.

Artist Yi Je-seok who created the 2018 Paralympic Mural in PyeongChang, was inspired by Pope Francis' message to "build bridges, not walls" and wanted to show support for the principles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). This year's Truce Mural, titled "Building Bridges" is a 3 metres high and 6.5 metres wide concrete wall bending over partly to form a bridge. Reflecting commitment to a new world without barriers and limits to human abilities through sports, the walls will each be on display at the PyeongChang Olympic Plaza and at the Gangneung Olympic Park after the Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

In preparation for PyeongChang 2018, road and rail networks were upgraded. Two expressways and a high-speed railway were opened to allow visitors to move around the Gangwon-do province, where the Games were concentrated. They also allowed for better connection between the capital Seoul to the host city. Accessibility in venue cities - Gangneung hosted the Para ice hockey and wheelchair curling competitions, and PyeongChang saw biathlon and cross-country events - was important during the Games. Projects were implemented to improve accessibility particularly in restaurants and accommodation throughout venue cities. Old facilities were modified and amenities put in place to enhance accessibility for people with impairment.

As part of the *Actualising the Dream* project, organizers developed 13 programmes under four different streams to raise public awareness of the Games, increase participation in Para sport, grow the profile of the Paralympic Movement and leave a lasting legacy. These sports included Para alpine skiing, Para snowboard, Para biathlon, Para cross-country skiing, Para ice hockey and wheelchair curling. Workshops such as coaching courses in cross-country skiing and biathlon, and the first women's Para ice hockey training camp were organized.

The Games saw the Korean Paralympic Committee (KPC) and the Agitos Foundation sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining a framework for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of joint programmes to develop Para sport in the region. The main goal of the agreement is to organize international workshops for technical officials, coaches and athletes at the facilities of the KPC Icheon Training Centre, a multi-training sports complex established for South Korean national Para athletes. (Source: paralympic.org)

According to the director general of the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Games Bureau, the Organising Committee has specific aims regarding legacy. As well as growing the number of accessible facilities across the region for athletes and fans, it also wants to increase the general public's awareness of Paralympic sport and leave a human legacy.

This is consistent with the Paralympic Games 2010 in Vancouver where data from opinion polls conducted before and after the Paralympic Games 2010 showed that public awareness of people with disabilities increased as a result of the Games.

Case study: World Parkinson's Day 2017

April 11th is World Parkinson's Disease Day, observed in recognition of the birthday of Dr. James Parkinson, the English physician who first described the symptoms of this disease. Parkinson's disease affects the control of body movements and is a progressive and degenerative neurological condition. It is estimated that approximately 10 million people around the world will be living with this incurable condition. (source: uniteforparkinsons.org) World Parkinson's Day is dedicated to raising awareness of the condition, change attitudes and raise funds for research in better treatments. Here are some worldwide events which were held in April to celebrate World Parkinson's Day 2017 and Awareness Month:

- The Africa Parkinson's Disease Foundation celebrated with a cake in Nairobi;
- A #UniteforParkinsons coffee cup was created in Australia;
- Five of Denmark's top researchers and neurologists presented their latest research in Parkinson's disease at the Parkinsonforeningen's conference in Aarhus, Denmark;
- Paintings by Mr Dwijen Gupta, a person with Parkinson's, was on show at an exhibition held by Parkinson's Disease Patients Welfare Society Kolkata, India;
- The Parkinson's Association of Ireland celebrated with a Unity Walk;
- Parkinson's Support Nepal held a 5km *Run for Parkinson's* event, which took place in the Nepalese capital, Kathmandu;

- Parkinson Patients Support organization Ethiopia hosted a Unity Walk in the nation's capital, Addis Ababa, which is aimed at ending the stigma surrounding Parkinson's in the East African country;
- In Thessaloniki, Greece, a 20-minute play entitled 'Without Her' is about a human heart mourning the disappearance of his favourite hormone, dopamine. Dopamine is a substance that allows nerve impulses to travel smoothly from one cell to the other. When this gets reduced, the messages from the brain to the nerve cells aren't properly transmitted, hence causing tremors, rigidity, and slowness of movement among patients. The piece used light hearted conversations to educate the audience, and guide them through the Parkinson's diagnoses experience.

The play has been translated into English, Polish and Turkish.



Case study: International Congress of Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders 2017

When Vancouver hosted the 21st International Congress of Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders in 2017, over 4,200 physicians and medical professionals from more than 90 countries converged to learn the latest research findings and state-of-the-art treatment options in Movement Disorders, including Parkinson's disease. Over 1,500 scientific abstracts were submitted by clinicians from around the world.

The International Parkinson and Movement Disorder Society (MDS), an international society of over 5,000 clinicians, scientists, and other healthcare professionals, is dedicated to improving patient care through education and research.

In addition to the latest research findings and expert speakers, a new feature of the meeting is the MDS Demo Lab, where the MDS invites attendees to participate in hands-on demonstrations of the MDS e-learning tools and MDSGene Database. The congress also featured several resources for early-career scientists and first-time attendees. Congress attendees were primarily physicians, clinicians, researchers and nurses who focused on this sub-specialty of neurology.

One of the most popular events on the programme was the MDS (Movement Disorder Society) Video Challenge, where younger doctors from around the world can submit case studies from among their own patients, which are then discussed by a panel of the field's more senior and prominent practitioners. The goal of this session is for attendees to learn from a series of unusual and interesting patients, and to see how senior experts approach a challenging case.

Having this meeting in Vancouver has influenced the focus of the conference. The 2017 theme was “Pathophysiology”—the mechanics of why people develop Parkinson’s disease and other movement disorders. None of these diseases and disorders have a cure, so the attendees were focused on increasing the quality of life for patients, talking about the most recent developments in treatment, and sharing research and case studies. This focus reflected the research that was being conducted in Vancouver and Canada, providing an enhanced opportunity for local researchers to share their work with their international peers.





Conclusion

Project Takeaways

- **Establish the business case for accessible tourism and universally accessible meetings for all.** The accessible market which is largely underserved, offers destinations and businesses new opportunities. Universal accessibility in the meetings industry means contribution to business growth, knowledge sharing, an improved experience and increasing competitiveness in the destination.
- In the United Kingdom, the ‘purple pound’ is a term used to describe the spending power of people with disabilities and their families. Its influence is growing to proportions that businesses can no longer ignore, with many tapping into this lucrative market and reaping the benefits. The inclusive tourism market is made up of families, friends and carers of disabled or older people, plus families with young children. The Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) produced this [booklet](#) because increasing industry awareness and understanding of the accessibility requirements of visitors is the first step to making Edinburgh accessible for everyone.
- VisitBritain has put up this section on its website which is full of tips and resources to help British businesses prepare themselves to cater to an all-inclusive clientele comprising those who are powering the “purple pound”. From essential information to guides and sensitivity training tools, visit the website to take advantage of this [knowledge sharing](#).
- **Develop a “Universal Access Friendly” certification for venues.** Building owners, event organizers or congress centre management can check themselves if their venue comply to accessibility standards. They will need to have a 3D model of the building in question. An accessibility analysis can be easily done with the [accessibility evaluator tool](#), such as this one from Xinaps. All that is required is a basic 3D model, and basic knowledge of the rules and regulations of accessibility standards in the region or country the building is. You can then use the accessibility evaluator tool to check compliance.
- In the longer term, and for consistency in adoption, venues should look into complying with basic recommended standards. **Define the minimum requirement standards of universal accessibility with help from experts in this field.** According to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), standards need to address universal accessibility for various reasons:-
 - Increasingly more people worldwide in higher age groups;
 - Disability applies to wide segments of the population including those who did not have a disability in their earlier stages of life;
 - Public policies and regulations stipulate universal accessibility as a prerequisite in public tenders;
 - Ensuring full compliance with universal access standards in new public buildings adds, generally, only 1 percent to the cost, which is significantly cheaper than retrofitting existing buildings later.

Project Takeaways

- **Provide reference documents or links to guidelines on how to accommodate participants with disabilities for event organizers.** Rehabilitation International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (RI-ICTA) has prepared some guidelines for Meeting Planners and Organizers which will help ensure their meetings and events will be accessible to all participants. Please see page 84 of this Report.
- You will also find [this booklet](#) produced by VisitScotland useful as it provides advice for event organizers on how to organize inclusive events.
- **Develop an industry-wide programme of certification.** To start with, the certification programme can be a credential recognised at local or national level. This can be an assessment, an examination or accreditation that is administered and recognised by a third party with expertise in issues related to universal accessibility.

Certification can be done through three levels:

- Level 1: **Participate and support project** by signing a commitment to enhancing universal accessibility and conducting a self-assessment and submitting the report;
- Level 2: **Work to improve universal accessibility** by complying with at least 50% of accessibility standards;
- Level 3: **Fully meet universal accessibility** guidelines by complying with 100% of accessibility standards and submitting to a third-party assessment.

- **Identify and understand what enablers are required to promote and encourage universally accessible meetings** in our industry. Accessible meetings and events are not only competitive opportunities, but also our social responsibility.
- **Develop industry-based disability awareness training.** Disability Awareness means educating people regarding the different disabilities. Disability awareness training is an important part of establishing inclusion for people with disability. Often our fears and discomfort about interacting with people with disability is based on lack of knowledge, uncertainties, and stereotypes that can influence our attitudes.
- **Develop an universal access audit checklist and minimum recommended standards for meeting organizers and destination suppliers** (bureaus, venues and hotels). The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has an [Accessible Business Checklist](#) which can be downloaded for free. The simple self-assessment checklist is designed to help businesses quickly review how accessible their business premises or services are and also potentially identify practical ways of improving access for existing or new customers.
- **Seek guidance from people with disabilities in an advisory capacity to identify areas of improvement in meetings and events.** It is important to use a cross sectional group of disabilities. The volunteers and agencies can also provide training to all stakeholders of the conference.
- **All Request For Proposals (RFPs) should include questions and guarantees for universal access.**

What Bureaus Can Do

- **Provide information on accessibility in your city.** Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and convention bureaus are usually the first point of reference for such information:
 - Berlin: <https://www.visitberlin.de/en/accessible-berlin>
 - Copenhagen: <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/traveltrade/copenhagen/accessible-copenhagen>
 - Edinburgh: <http://edinburgh.org/discover/edinburgh-city-guides/accessible/>
 - Madrid: <https://www.esmadrid.com/en/accessible-madrid>
 - Melbourne: <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/health-support-services/disability-services/pages/getting-around-melbourne.aspx>
 - Singapore: <http://www.visitsingapore.com/travel-guide-tips/getting-around/accessibility/>
 - Tokyo: <https://www.gotokyo.org/en/plan/accessibility/>
<http://accessible.jp.org/tokyo/>
 - Vancouver: <https://www.tourismvancouver.com/plan-your-trip/accessible-vancouver/>
- **Check if your website is accessible.** Web accessibility means that websites, tools and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them. Accessible sites present information through multiple sensory channels, such as sound and sight, and a multi-interactivity (beyond the typical point-and-click interface) approach. Users with disabilities therefore have access to the same information as non-disabled users. W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) has posted a 4-minute [introductory video](#) on web accessibility and W3C standards. For more information on web accessibility, please visit w3.org/WAI.
- For further reference, the Wilfried Laurier University, in partnership with the Government of Ontario, has produced a handbook on [“Enabling Access Through Web Renewal.”](#)
- **Include an “Accessibility Statement”** on your website which will reflect your internal organizational policies, your accessibility goals and your past successes when it comes to serving and working with people who have disabilities. An accessibility statement should list the laws and standards – and the levels of these standards – that your organization is committed to. You can refer to the World Wide Web Consortium’s [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#).

What Bureaus Can Do

- **Develop and share Best Practices** through a good practice document for industry organizations who have a stake in the global meetings industry. The compilation of such best practice case studies will spread practical advice on how to make meetings and events more accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Establish a strong and tangible business case** for universally accessible meetings and events to the individual businesses in your destination. The retiring Baby Boomer generation means more age-related disabilities and a new level of opportunities.
 - Melbourne City provides a series of Customer Access Checklists which are available for download on [this page](#).
- Work with accessible organizations/associations/lobby groups to **better understand and better provide universally accessible mainstream services and fulfilling experiences**. Seek champions from within these groups.
- **Develop an industry-based disability awareness training programme for different disabilities**. View this short 3'40" light hearted Awareness [video](#) which answers some of the biggest questions that many without disabilities may have but could be afraid to ask. Encourage the supplier community to make disability awareness and sensitivity training mandatory in their organizations.
- **Create a separate map for persons with disabilities, along with facilities that are helpful to them**. Access guides offer accurate information about venues and services offered for people with disabilities. The guide should be easy to read and available in alternate formats with attention paid to the type faces, sizes and colours.
- **Work with your local associations or groups to understand better the specific needs of special delegates** coming to your destination. In the earlier case study on the World Federation of Hemophilia Congress 2018, (see page 69) the convention bureau offered free awareness sessions which were delivered by experts from the haemophilia community. The educational sessions were designed to help customer facing staff better understand the requirements of the special needs delegates.

What Suppliers Can Do

- **Check if your website is accessible.** To understand web accessibility and how to cater for web users with different types of disabilities and impairments, you can refer to [Shaw Trust Accessibility Services](#) for guidance. Shaw Trust also provides a Web Accreditation service where a website has been tested by people with a wide range of disabilities and found to be accessible. This is in addition to a stringent technical assessment by web auditors. The certificate is valid for 12 months from the date of issue and the site must be tested again as websites are constantly changing.
 - In this article, the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG) considers the [top ten things](#) you can do to ensure that your website is accessible to all of your current and potential customers.
 - The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is an international community that develops open standards to ensure the long-term growth of the Web. On this page, you can get some guidelines which explain how to make web content accessible to people with disabilities. The [guidelines](#) are intended for all web content developers (page authors and site designers).
- **Incorporate accessibility information on your website and include an Accessibility Statement.** Organizations publish an accessibility statement on their websites to describe their policy, goals, and accomplishments related to web accessibility. The statement also includes instructions on how to use specific accessibility technology that is available on the website and how to contact the organization if a user with disability needs assistance.
- **Have an Accessibility Statement** because it shows that your organization is committed to making the website available to everyone; it identifies which web accessibility standards are used; and informs which areas on the website are not yet universally accessible and what alternatives to gain access.
- **A Universal Accessibility Guide will help people understand what provisions you have made for those with special requirements.** This guide provides visitors with important accessibility information about a venue, or service and includes wheelchair users, people with hearing loss, visual or mental impairment, older people, families with young children and others who have special needs. Having such a guide is usually a minimum requirement in destinations where there is a quality assessment programme.
- **The ISO standard for accessibility and usability of the built environment is ISO 21542:2011.** However, in addition to referencing this international standard for new and existing venues, the role of the facility manager also needs close attention. Facility managers must maintain the universal accessibility and usability of a venue throughout its lifespan. This also includes raising disability awareness and providing training to the relevant staff.
- **Make disability awareness and sensitivity training mandatory in your organization.** This training will help your team members gain insights into critical issues for people with different disabilities and learn appropriate language and terminology and communication strategies. It will provide general awareness of disability and focus on attitudinal and practical issues.

What Meeting Planners Can Do

Dr Terry Howard from Alpha Iota Delta Decision Sciences Institute kindly shared his thoughts and recommendations:

“Event organizers and providers of services in the travel and tourism industry need to embrace the concept of "universal access." Event organizers need to ensure that their programs and materials are accessible to people with disabilities. Service providers (such as conference facilities, transportation companies, hotels, restaurants, special venues. etc.) need to provide accessible solutions for people with disabilities. The disability market segment is large and has more discretionary income than other coveted market segments, representing an opportunity for event organizers and providers of services.”

Dr Terry Howard, Executive Director, Alpha Iota Delta Decision Sciences Institute

- We advocate the use of the term "universal access" to address all stakeholders for an event.
- We advocate that all RFPs (Request For Proposals) include questions and guarantees for universal access.
- We ensure that disability owned businesses and disability service providers are given a specific opportunity to bid on contracts.

- We advocate that event organizers and service providers use local people with disabilities in an advisory capacity to identify areas of need for improvement.
- Also, we do a trial run on a conference using these people to identify what we missed. It is important to use a cross-sectional group of disabilities. These volunteers and the agencies with which they are often connected also can provide training to all stakeholders in an event.
- In addition to access to facilities, we advocate that all public forum meetings automatically provide "signing" for people with hearing impairments and access to both large print and Braille documents. With today's technology, event organizers can provide application software that allows people with hearing and sight disabilities to use their mobile device.
- We participate in "Project Search" (<https://www.projectsearch.us/>). We advocate that event providers and service providers incorporate individual with disabilities into their workforce. In the program, we asked employers to provide jobs (rotating in three jobs over a year) and commit to helping with ongoing employment.

What Meeting Planners Can Do

- **Determine the accessibility needs of delegates attending your meetings.** Provide reference documents or links to guidelines on how to accommodate participants with disabilities for event organizers.
- **Develop an Event Management Guide that incorporates universal accessibility guidelines.** Include a recognition programme so that best practice events are identified, rewarded, and emulated.
- **Promote and encourage an access audit** so that the destination will carry out a detailed appraisal of the universal accessibility of their environment, facilities and services delivered.
- **Encourage destinations to embark on disability awareness training.** Disability awareness is an important part of establishing inclusion for people with disabilities. The training will enable individuals and organizations to be confident when supporting participants who have disabilities.
- **Address issues of accessibility within your bid specifications and bid evaluations.**
 - This project reviewed over 150 Request for Proposals (RFPs) from international associations and while there were not many which requires accessibility for all delegates as a prerequisite, we did come across a few with such requirements. They include:
 - ❖ International Psycho-Oncology Society (IPOS)
 - ❖ BILT/RTC Events Management
 - ❖ INAS Conference and General Assembly/International Sports Federation for People with an Intellectual Disability (INAS)
 - ❖ WCPT Congress/World Confederation for Physical Therapy
 - ❖ World Volunteer Conference & World Youth Volunteer Conference/International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)
 - ❖ AWP Regional Congress/ World Confederation for Physical Therapy Asia Western Pacific Region
 - ❖ International Astronautical Congress
 - ❖ Ecocity World Summit
 - ❖ International Conference on Public Policy
 - ❖ Language Resources and Evaluation Conference
 - ❖ ISPD International Conference on Prenatal Diagnosis and Therapy/International Society for Prenatal Diagnosis (ISPD)
 - ❖ World Blind Vision/International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (WBU/ICEVI) Joint General Assembly
 - ❖ The Union World Conference on Lung Health
 - ❖ International Musicological Society
 - ❖ TRANSED International Conference on Sharing Mobility Solutions around the World (formerly known as International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled People).

What Meeting Planners Can Do

The following are clauses from RFPs which emphasised accessibility requirements:

- “Meeting rooms should include accessible space for up to 15 people per committee whilst the Conference and General Assembly venue should include accessible space for approximately 100 people.”
“Accessible accommodation should be offered close to the Conference/General Assembly venue. “
- “The venue must be accessible for those with disabilities, for example wheelchair access, induction hearing loop system. “ “at least some hotels should provide for accessibility rooms” “All facilities are expected to support accessible, healthy and sustainable communities.”
- “The Conference city must have a reasonable level of access for people with disabilities both to public transport and the pedestrian environment. The proposal should show how delegates, particularly those with disabilities, will be able to travel from these points of arrival to the Conference location.” “... there is adequate accessible transport to move delegates to and from such events. There are advantages in having living accommodation on the same.” “Fully accessible sites for both program and living arrangements are an absolute requirement. "Fully accessible" means reasonable and equal accommodation for the entire range of disabilities (physical, motor, sensory and cognitive). The Site and Accommodation Plan should specify the accessibility provision for the Conference site and type, cost and standards of accommodation that will be available, as well as their location.”
- “Are there any factors which would restrict participants from attending the conference in your country (transportation difficulties, visa restrictions, lack of facilities for people with disabilities, etc)?”
- “the congress venue must be fully accessible for persons with disabilities.”
- “The following aspects should be taken into consideration when preparing a bid – medical services; special arrangements for disabled participants.”
- “Our delegates have been extremely diverse and have included: access advocates for youth, the aged and physically impaired.”
- “The complete bid document must have the following: ...information on access to all conference venues for people with disabilities.”
- “Access to rooms and spaces should be accessible to all participants, including disabled participants.”
- “we look for conference facilities that are accessible to delegates with a disability.”
- “Special Needs: Hotel/venue must be accessible to attendees with restricted mobility (wheelchairs, walkers, etc)”
- “Ensuring that accommodations and Assembly venues are accessible to blind, low vision and other disabled participants and that appropriate training has been provided to volunteers, accommodation and venue staff; also that accommodations and venues as well as access laws are welcoming to those who travel with guide dogs.”

What Meeting Planners Can Do

- “The statement proposing to host....should include the following information: a detailed description of the conference venueaccessibility for those with special needs.”
- “A detailed description of the proposed site. Necessary information includes: confirmation of wheelchair accessibility.”
- “Catering arrangements at the Conference should take account of the dietary requirements of delegates.” “Sign language, speech to text facilities and induction loops for delegates with hearing impairment should be available for those who ask for them.” “Fully accessible transport must be provided for all delegates.”
- “Venue: Congress venue must have accessibility for people with restricted mobility (wheelchair).”
- “Evaluation Criteria: Accessibility for people with restricted mobility (wheelchair) at the Congress venue and hotels and on public transportation.”

“Every public space should be accessible. In the past, buildings did not have the modern thinking and approach to people with impairment but today, we, in the building industry, are more alert and we have evolved our thinking. These days, we have enough technology and vision to include everyone and meeting space should be better thought through. If you want every expert at your conference, you have to include them all, and that includes people with disabilities.”

*Silvia Taurer, Region Manager Europe,
RTC Events Management (RTCem)*

“For most, the % of attendees requiring is still small enough that it is not viewed as that significant to make it to a determining factor. Obviously, this is different if the group has a significant portion of special needs attendees or is about PWD (Person with Disabilities). In my own experience, even ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) in the US is not enough to effectively provide for attendees. Do a site visit with someone in a wheelchair and it immediately becomes clear how much work there is to be done.”

*Gregg Talley, FASAE, CAE
President & CEO, Talley Management Group Inc*

What Meeting Planners Can Do

ACCESSIBILITY PROVISIONS (extracts from one RFP)

a. Transport for delegates and attendees of the Conference, travelling from abroad or to and from the Conference site, should be fully accessible. Terminal accessibility should also be taken into consideration. Access to transport terminals should provide a straightforward and hazard free route of travel. Accessible transport must be provided for all those attending the Conference.

b. Provisions ensuring venue and accommodation accessibility must be in place. The Conference venue and living arrangements should be made fully accessible to people with mobility impairments. An accessibility audit to recognised international standards and criteria by professionals and people with disabilities is recommended and the audit report should be included in the full proposal.

c. Provisions to ensure that communication is made fully accessible must be made available. Providing living accommodation that facilitates communication for delegates and attendees with cognitive or sensory disabilities (e.g., through the use of alerting or signalling devices) is mandatory.

d. The use of media must not exclude those with cognitive or sensory disabilities. The Conference website should be designed according to W3C Web Accessibility Initiatives (<http://www.w3.org/WAI>). Substitutes for conventional printed material, such as Braille or audio alternatives must be on hand. The use of audio/visual equipment during Conference proceedings should enhance the experience of delegates with cognitive or sensory impairments. Captioning and other audio/visual aids (such as speech to text) should be made available.

e. Provisions must be made to accommodate service/assistance animals such as guide dogs, during travel and at the venue. The policy of the hosting nation towards service/assistance animals must be specified.

f. As part of the larger issue of accessibility by all participants, the proposal should address any security issues which may be unique to the Conference venue.

Footnote:

- We undertook a poll of association organizers poll (mainly Europe and US-based) during IMEX 2018 in Frankfurt and at ICCA's Association Management Programme 2018 in Ljubljana. We asked: "Does your association include in your Request for Proposal for your Congress(s) a requirement for barrier free accessibility for participants with special needs? We also asked BestCities bureaus, professional congress organizers and other supplier bodies if they come across accessibility clauses in RFPs. The answer was 'not often' by a wide margin.
- Some association planners clarified that although universal accessibility clauses are not part of their RFP, this will be discussed directly with the shortlisted destination/s subsequently to ensure full inclusion. In certain cases, the planners will work with the local host committee to make sure that training, especially for frontliners, will be provided.

What Meeting Planners Can Do

The following tips were contributed by Ar. Joseph Kwan MH, Rehabilitation International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (RI-ICTA).

When organising an event, whether it's a board meeting or an international conference, there are important considerations to make to ensure that the event can be enjoyed by everyone. These considerations concern both the hardware in terms of the physical environment of the meeting venues and the software, in terms of the non built-in facilities and services. The information that follows is an overview of considerations that should be made to accommodate people with disability. It is by no means exhaustive, but is a good start when planning an event.

SELECTING A VENUE

- Ensure entrances, lifts, ramps and corridor widths comply with local Accessibility Standards and design requirements.
- Ensure automatic doors at entrances are available and functioning.
- Ensure accessible public toilets are available. Check that these unisex toilets are functioning, clear of clutter, and can be easily accessed by wheelchair users as well as persons with visual impairment.
- Select a venue that can be easily reachable by accessible public transportation.
- Check local laws regarding the entry of service animals to venues and public areas, restaurants, coffee shops, etc with animal relief areas nearby.

- Check that the acoustics of the venue are adequate, and that noise from external sources such as traffic, crowds, other events etc do not interfere with the hearing and visually impaired.
- Check the venues and rooms are installed with induction loops or hearing assistive listening systems; temporary hearing loops can be installed in seating areas designated for the hearing impaired participants.
- Check the lighting levels along the access routes are uniform and of adequate level to assist in wayfinding.

WAYFINDING

- Ensure the event venue is accessible with level or ramped access. Lifts and elevators can accommodate wheelchair users, and installed with tactile, raised letters/information and braille signage; and provided with audible announcements.
- Wayfinding materials should be simple and easy to read and understand.
- Check the venue is installed with electronic guidance systems and/or tactile guide paths for the visually impaired such as Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSIs).
- Directory maps to be multi informational, in both visual, tactile and audible formats.
- Main circulation lifts and staircases to be easy to find and be installed with accessibility features, such as luminous contrast stair nosing.

What Meeting Planners Can Do

AUDITORIUM AND MEETING ROOM ARRANGEMENT

- Select auditoriums that are level or step-free that can accommodate a group of wheelchair users.
- Provide sufficient space at access routes, aisles and between tables for wheelchair access.
- Provide a wheelchair ramp to the stage, if required, and ensure it complies with local Standards and Regulations. Refer to ISO Standard 21542 (2011) if local standards are not available. Temporary Lifting Platforms are an alternative option.
- Ensure table height is suitable to wheelchair users and people of short stature.
- For standing events, provide some chairs for people who may experience fatigue.
- The venue should be clear of obstacles, and potential hazards such as cables should be removed or taped down to eliminate tripping.
- Provide guests with access to a separate, quiet area to allow them to take a break if needed.
- The venue should be evenly lit throughout and glare free.

AUDIO VISUAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Avoid strobe lighting or flashing lights.
- Provide adjustable height microphones, or lapel microphones, if required.
- Provide space for simultaneous interpreters or sign language interpreters (if required). Ensure interpreters are positioned in a well-lit area and clearly visible to the audience.
- Provide live captioning. This involves having an adequate internet connection available for attendees to connect to through their personal devices, as well as a phone line to connect the captioners.

INVITATIONS

- Ask attendees to advise of any accessibility requirements when registering so that these adjustments are managed as a part of the event. Outline the accessibility features of the venue selected.
- Ensure electronic invitations are accessible. If physical invitations are provided, ensure attendees can easily access the accessible e-versions.
- Ensure that participants can register for the event by various means, including by telephone, by email or online.
- Provide information on venue accessibility, including accessible car parking, general pedestrian access points, nearby accessible public transport and vehicular drop-off points.

What Meeting Planners Can Do

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Written materials should be available in alternative formats, before and after the event (eg Braille, large print, audio, electronic).
- Signage, presentations and written materials should have accessible contrast levels.
- The MC or event organizer should provide a verbal explanation of the layout of the venue at the start of the event. This should include the layout of the room and directions to toilets, meal areas, breakout rooms and fire exits.

PRESENTATIONS

- All videos must be captioned.
- Videos should be audio described where appropriate. If they cannot be audio described, the presenter should supply any visual information that a person with visual impairment may translate through appropriate medium.
- Presenters should describe any visual information in their presentations.

CATERING

- Provide a variety of food options and include items that are easy to eat. This includes foods that are not too messy, and foods that do not require utensils or intricacy.
- Ensure catering staff are briefed and available to assist attendees with serving items where required.
- Ensure special meals (for example vegetarian, gluten free etc) are clearly labelled and easily accessible.

Reference: **Event Accessibility Checklist** by Australian Network on Disability

Case Study References by City

A key focus of this Project is discovering new and innovative ways of engaging with the world's diverse community and improving access for all. There are many initiatives the meetings industry can adopt or adapt. Our destination profiles and case studies speak of varied and inspiring efforts. These can be summarised as below:

- AccessAbilities Expo
Dubai
- Accessibility policy/ guidelines
All BestCities destinations
- Accessibility Fund
Singapore
- Accessibility information/ratings/certification
Berlin/ *Reisen für Alle* (Tourism for All)
Cape Town
Copenhagen/ *God Adgang* "Access Denmark"
Houston
Madrid/ Global Certificate in Universal Accessibility
- Accessible City Award
Berlin, Vancouver
- Accessibility standards
Copenhagen/Scandic Hotels Group
- Accessible hotels list/accessible tourism guide
All BestCities destinations
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
Houston
- Arts and Disability International Conference - ADIC
Singapore
- Autism Friendly
Edinburgh, Houston
- Awareness and sensitivity training
Copenhagen, Dubai, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Houston,
Montreal, Tokyo, Vancouver
- Beach wheelchair
Melbourne
- Code on Accessibility for the Built Environment.
Singapore
- Colour universal design system
Tokyo
- Danish Standardization Institute
Copenhagen
- Dubai Disability Strategy 2020
Dubai
- *Eatability* F&B rating system for disability groups
Melbourne
- Edinburgh Tourism Action Group
Edinburgh
- Friendly Building search
Singapore
- "Good Access is Good Business"
Melbourne
- ICORD (International Collaboration on Repair Discoveries)
Vancouver
- Keep Safe Initiative
Edinburgh
- Labour market inclusion
Madrid/Ilunion, Kuala Lumpur/Starbucks
- Law on Assistance Dogs for the Disabled
Tokyo
- *Navigating Melbourne CBD*
Melbourne

Case Study References by City

- Noor Dubai Foundation
Dubai
- Paralympics/ Paralympics Education Programme
PyeongChang, Tokyo, Vancouver
- Physical Activity Research Centre (PARC)
Vancouver
- Screen reader software and screen magnifier
Bogotá/ ConVerTIC
- Sensory-friendly acts, backpacks, guides
Houston
- Signing store
Kuala Lumpur
- South African National Building Regulations Standards
Cape Town
- Spanish Association for Standardization
Madrid
- Sports programmes
Tokyo, Vancouver
- Standard Electrical, Mechanical and Architectural Guideline for the Design of Accessible Buildings
Cape Town
- Technology
 - Welcome app/Edinburgh
 - Digital orchestra/Edinburgh
 - access HMNS app/Houston
 - accessBerlin app/Berlin
 - Audio Accessibility Map/Melbourne
 - ClearPath* turn-by-turn navigation system/Melbourne
 - Melba* open data with smart assistants/Melbourne
 - remote sign language interpreting device/Tokyo
 - WheeLog! interactive wheelchair app/Tokyo
- The “determined ones”
Dubai
- Tokyo 2020 Accessibility Guidelines
Tokyo
- Tourism for Tomorrow Award
Madrid
- Tourism Grading Council of South Africa
Cape Town
- True Colours Festival
Singapore
- UNWTO Ethics Award
Madrid
- Universal Accessibility
Cape Town, Madrid
- Universal Accessibility (AU) audit
Cape Town
- Universal Design
Dubai, Singapore, Tokyo
- WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)
Bogotá
- Websites – accessible information for travellers
Berlin, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, Madrid, Melbourne, Singapore, Tokyo, Vancouver
- Websites – accessibility structured/accessibility certified
Bogotá, Houston, Singapore
- Wheelchair breakdown service
Berlin
- #valuable project
Bogotá

Acknowledgement

BestCities Global Alliance, GainingEdge and Rehabilitation International are grateful to all organizations and individuals who have participated in this Project to promote universal accessibility in meetings and conventions. We are proud to present this Project to you and we are hopeful that disability action plans will soon be on boardroom agendas and be well accepted across our industry and around the world.

“It is our intention that BestCities bureaus, as partners of the world’s leading convention bureau alliance, will trail blaze the way for other destinations around the world to make significant improvements for universal access in the meetings industry. This will be achieved through knowledge sharing and best practices from BestCities destinations which can then be emulated or adapted to support convention delegates with special needs.”

Jeannie Lim, Chair, BestCities Global Alliance

“Destinations should look into the concept of universal design. Universal design should be looked at from the beginning, not an after-thought. Understanding the broader issues of meeting delegates accessibility is paramount to developing positive delegate experiences and building capacity in the meetings industry to cater for the different levels of disability and promote inclusion.”

Venus Ilagan, Secretary General, Rehabilitation International

“At GainingEdge, we recognise that building an understanding of the broader issues of delegate accessibility will encourage the industry to cater better for people who have a range of needs. Bringing these into the meetings arena can help develop management practices that create a more inclusive environment.”

Gary Grimmer, CEO, GainingEdge



www.bestcities.net



www.gainingedge.com



www.riglobal.org