



DESTINATIONS
INTERNATIONAL
SOCIAL IMPACT

CITY
DESTINATIONS
ALLIANCE

Global Accessibility Report

A collaboration between City Destinations Alliance
and Destinations International

Photo Credit: © Visit Mechelen

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global accessibility is essential to ensure that all individuals, regardless of physical, sensory, cognitive, or unseen disabilities, have equal opportunities to experience the world through travel. Through accessible tourism, destinations can empower people with disabilities to travel independently and confidently, providing them with seamless, safe and enriching experiences.

UN Tourism defines accessibility to facilities, products and services as a core component of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. With a global disabled population of 16%, or 1.85 billion people, investing in global accessibility is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for destinations. It unlocks significant economic opportunities by attracting a broader range of travelers and provides a competitive advantage in the tourism market.

Accessibility investments further align with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals of reduced inequalities and sustainable cities and communities. Prioritizing accessibility showcases a destination's commitment to ethical tourism and human rights and reinforces the travel and tourism industry as socially responsible and forward-thinking.

The Global Accessibility Report, a collaborative research effort by City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA) and Destinations International, provides a foundational understanding of the global initiatives around accessibility. It serves as a catalyst for destinations to adopt in evolving their strategies and shape a more inclusive future for tourism. Destination organizations, convention and visitors bureaus and regional and national tourism bureaus are encouraged to reflect on their states of accessibility and consider changes to support greater belonging. Meanwhile, industry stakeholders, funding agencies, subject matter experts and advocacy groups can use these insights to uplift destinations and contribute to collective progress.

Introduction	3
Getting Started: Definition and Vision	4
Impact of Ownership and Funding	6
Initiative Themes	9
The Opportunity of Business Events	17
Conclusion	18
Special Thanks	19

INTRODUCTION

City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA) and Destinations International established a partnership to understand and advance the accessibility landscape of destinations organizations and convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) through research. Together, they developed a methodology to analyze global efforts based on gaps in existing research.

The joint research has three primary objectives:

- 1 To understand the challenges and opportunities in creating inclusive environments that benefit everyone.
- 2 To assess the current state of destination accessibility, identify gaps and highlight innovative practices that bridge these gaps, fostering more welcoming and inclusive spaces.
- 3 To inspire and motivate destination organizations to improve accessibility for residents and visitors of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

In spring 2024, a survey was fielded to capture insights. 92 destinations participated in the survey, with 65% representing destination marketing organizations. The majority, 63%, are in Europe, and 25% are in North America.

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respondents represent a destination of 500,000 to 1 million residents.

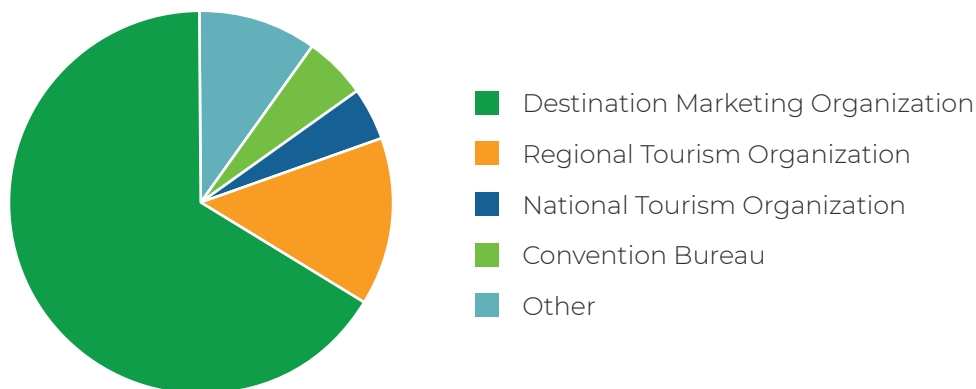
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respondents represent a destination of 100,000 to 300,000 residents.

1/6

respondents represent a destination of less than 100,000 residents.

Most respondents either have small or large budgets in Euros or US Dollars: Of those who provided a financial figure, half have an annual operating budget of less than \$1M, while the other half have a budget of more than \$10M.



Breakdown of respondents in survey.

GETTING STARTED: DEFINITION AND VISION

A clear definition and vision for accessibility are the foundation for any destination to create inclusive environments. A strong definition guides the vision, strategy and ultimately the initiatives that make tourism accessible to all.

While some destinations have yet to formalize their definitions, key themes of belonging, integration, awareness and support emerge across responses. Destinations that prioritize accessibility do so with the understanding that every individual deserves equal access to tourism experiences.

As one respondent noted:

“Everyone deserves the opportunity to explore, discover and enjoy the world around them. All tourism businesses should aim to provide barrier-free tourism experiences, ensuring accessibility to all, regardless of physical limitations, disabilities or age.”

Another emphasized the importance of designing accessible services and products to serve the widest possible audience, ensuring non-discrimination throughout the travel experience. This broad commitment to inclusivity reflects a growing recognition that universal accessibility is essential for the future of tourism.

Once accessibility is defined, creating a clear vision and actionable strategy is the critical next step for destinations aiming to become truly inclusive. A well-documented vision sets the direction for long-term progress, while a strategic plan ensures measurable steps toward achieving accessibility goals.

Man in wheelchair looks at museum exhibit. Image courtesy of Visit Brussels





59%

Study respondents have defined accessibility. Of this percentage:

48%

Include both physical and sensory disabilities.

43%

Broaden their definition to encompass physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities.

38%

Include unseen disabilities alongside physical, sensory and cognitive conditions, reflecting a more comprehensive approach.

33%

have a vision and strategy in place.

24%

Say their strategy is implemented.

17%

Are currently developing a strategy.

Photo Credit: © Visit Brussels

Destinations are taking the lead in shaping their own futures when it comes to inclusive travel. Half of the survey respondents reported crafting their own accessibility strategies, rather than turning to mandates from local or national governments. This highlights the unique needs of each destination and community, as well as the absence of consistent oversight at a national or global level.

A successful vision and strategy are also rooted in community collaboration. The study reveals that four out of ten destinations engage local disability advocacy groups, community members or City Council representatives in co-creating their strategies.

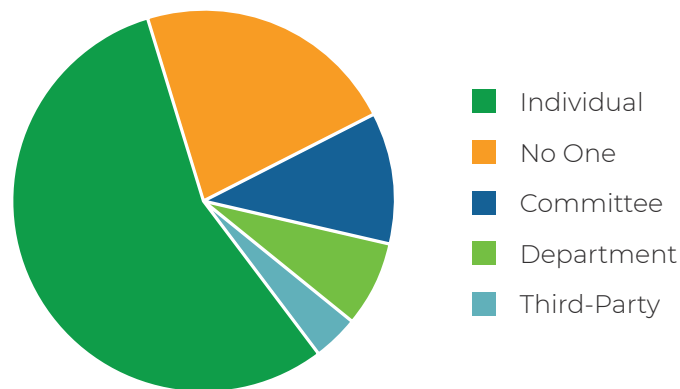


Imagine what accessibility looks like for your destination and how that aligns to your broader vision.

IMPACT OF OWNERSHIP AND FUNDING

Establishing clear ownership and securing funding are crucial for accountability, progress and successful implementation of accessibility initiatives.

Responses show that ownership has a direct impact on strategy implementation. 80% of destinations with accessibility ownership are twice as likely to have a strategy in development or in place than those without ownership.



55% of respondents have an individual responsible for accessibility.

Funding also has a direct impact on strategy:

71%

of destinations with accessibility funding have an accessibility strategy in development or implemented.

95%

of destinations with funding also have ownership in place. Of those without funding, nearly half do not have a strategy in place.



Determine the appropriate parties responsible for ownership and sources of funding that best align to your organization and destination.

Among respondents with funding, destinations draw from a diverse range of sources:

28%

Are supported by their city governments.

21%

Have allocated internal budgets.

14%

Receive funding from national budgets.

13%

Use a combination of these funding streams.

6%

Rely on grants.

Photo Credit: © Visit Mechelen

Most commonly, those with funding and a strategy in development or implemented have a single person responsible for the implementation itself.



The destination ecosystem is built on connection, knowledge and collaboration. Community has the power to create synergies that support ownership, funding and progress.



Visually-impaired woman walks in nature with dog. Image courtesy of Visit Colorado Springs.

INITIATIVE THEMES

Recognizing that ownership and funding have a direct impact on accessibility strategy, we can observe the practices of those destinations with funding and ownership who have strategies either in development or fully implemented. Through this lens, we can then identify how destinations prioritize accessibility initiatives to better understand prioritization. Ultimately, destinations prioritize accessibility initiatives in four categories. They are listed in terms of adoption:

- 1 Marketing and Communications:** How destinations communicate their accessibility offerings to travelers through clarity, accuracy and inclusivity; How destinations use marketing strategies to promote accessible travel experiences.
- 2 Community and Expert Engagement:** How destinations collaborate with disability advocacy groups, residents and specialized organizations to ensure that accessibility initiatives are well-informed and inclusive.
- 3 Training and Resources:** How destinations approach training internally and among members; How destinations equip members through certifications, assessments, or toolkits.
- 4 Adherence to Standards:** How destinations align to accessibility standards for physical infrastructure and in digital spaces; Whether destinations go beyond minimum legal requirements, whether they conduct assessments of the destination, and whether and seek third-party accreditation.

The following sections address these themes in more detail and explore how destinations approach each theme accordingly.

Marketing and Communications

Among destinations with a strategy in development or in place, marketing and communications initiatives are most prioritized.

89%

of these destinations have website enhancements implemented.

75%

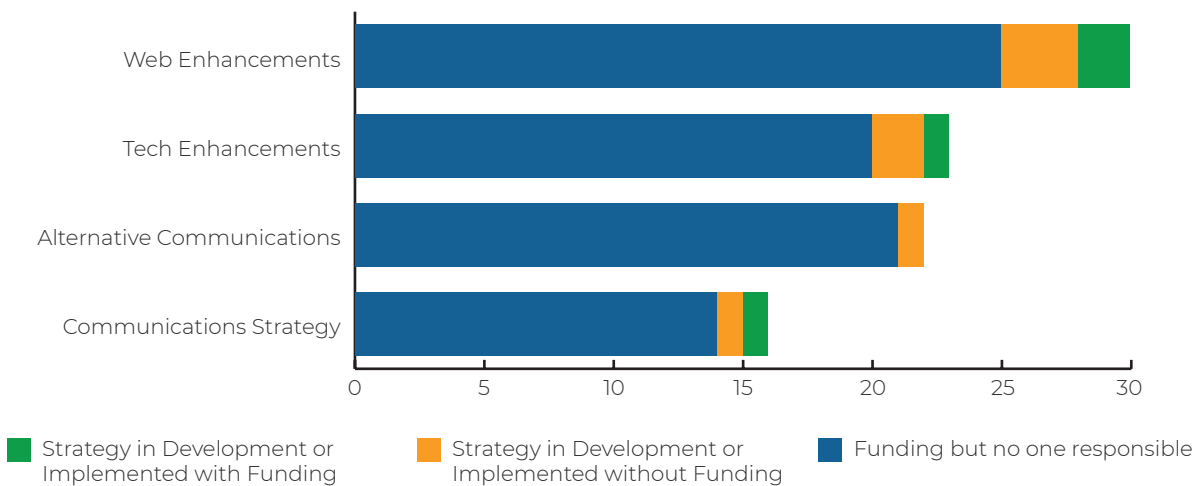
of these destinations incorporate Braille, large print, audio, or color-blind sensitive visuals in their marketing and communications.

71%

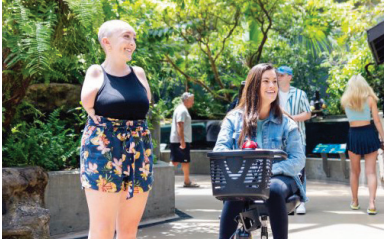
of these destinations have technology enhancements implemented.

50%

have a communication strategy in place.



No matter the state of funding, web enhancements are the most-prioritized initiative within marketing and communications.



Emily Rowley and Chelsea Bear at the Tampa Aquarium. Image courtesy of Visit Tampa Bay

What is Visit Tampa Bay doing?

Visit Tampa Bay's successful accessibility marketing campaign received significant social media viewership. Partnering with accessible travel ambassadors, bloggers and influencers was crucial in spreading their message effectively. These collaborations helped to amplify reach, tap into specific communities that value and trust influencer voices, and ensure that the message is conveyed with genuine enthusiasm and expertise.

Among destinations without funding or without a strategy in development, marketing and communications are prioritized most. Of all survey participants, 48% have website enhancements implemented. This indicates that destinations recognize the importance information plays for travelers in research and planning.

Respondents were also asked to comment on successful communication strategies. Many target the visitor experience, such as: collaborating with influencers, creating resources for accessibility-friendly tour routes, offering communication in adaptive formats and creating sensory and disability-friendly visitor center experiences.

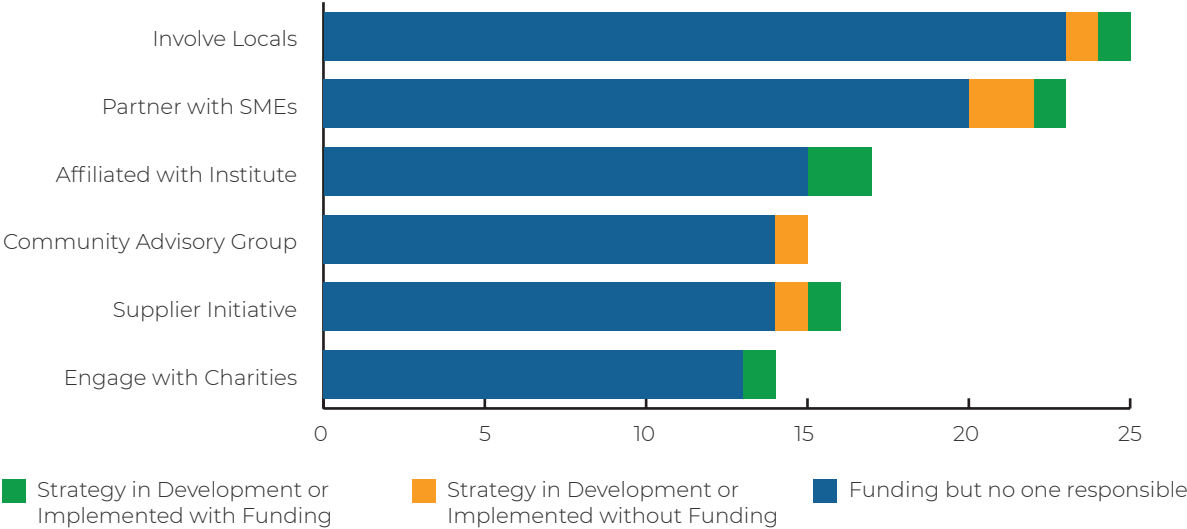
Others extend more broadly to involve the community: conducting research, providing community-wide training campaigns, developing an accessible information database and prioritizing inclusive recruitment for employees with disabilities.

Candis Welch, Ms. Wheelchair California 2023, visits Charlottesville. Image courtesy of the Charlottesville Albemarle Convention & Visitors Bureau



Community and Expert Engagement

Among destinations with a strategy in development or in place, community and expert engagement initiatives are prioritized second.



No matter the state of funding, involving locals and partnering with subject matter experts are the community initiatives prioritized most.



Woman in wheelchair looks onto Parthenon. Image courtesy of This is Athens

What is This is Athens doing?

This is Athens relies on the municipal district committees in Athens to incorporate the perspectives of the local disability community into their planning and decision-making processes. These committees, formed by members elected by residents of each district, represent diverse communities and provide valuable feedback that help the destination shape its strategies and initiatives. This collaborative approach ensures that the voices and insights of the local disability community are considered in the destination's work towards creating a more accessible and inclusive Athens.

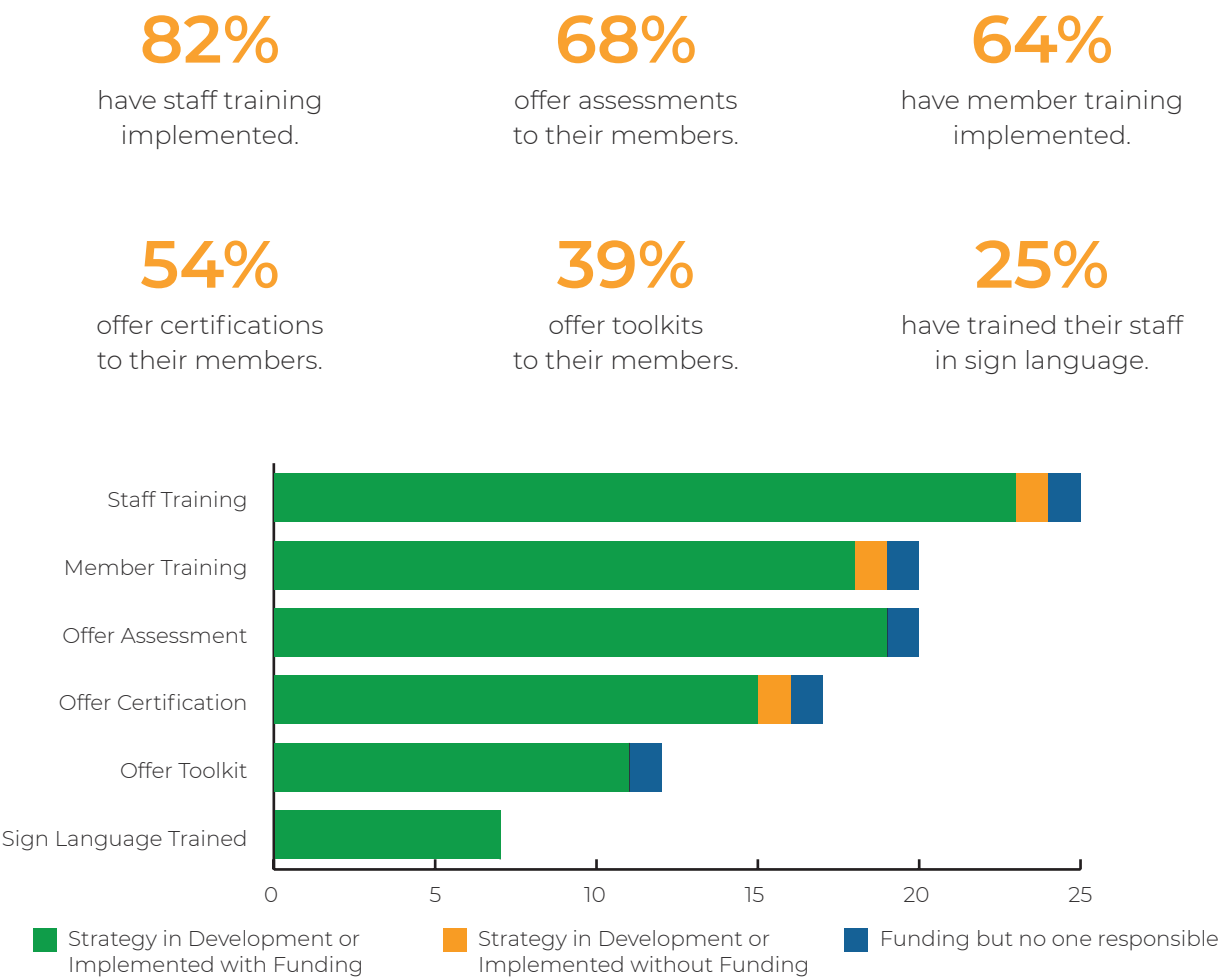
Among all respondents, including those without funding or without a strategy yet in development, 38% engage with locals in a variety of ways. Local advocacy groups inform and collaborate on strategy development, provide advice and support initiatives. Residents offer input through focus groups and engage in events. City Council members may play specific roles in helping to champion and collaborate on strategy implementation.

Girl in wheelchair poses in front of colorful mural. Image courtesy of Visit Mesa



Training and Resources

Among destinations with a strategy in development or in place, training and resources initiatives are prioritized third overall.



No matter the state of funding, staff training is prioritized most.

Among respondents who provided further insight into staff training on disability awareness, 33% are reviewing how to improve disability awareness training and the same number are engaging experts to provide this training. This drops for member trainings, to 26% and 23% respectively. Overall, 13 respondents indicate having staff members trained in sign language – representing 14% of the total survey population. One out of three respondents have conducted an accessibility assessment of members and partners within the destination.



Man and woman sit by Borders Book Festival sign. Image courtesy of VisitScotland / Ian Rutherford

What is VisitScotland doing?

Since 2013, VisitScotland (VS) has been raising awareness of the untapped potential of the inclusive tourism market by highlighting the barriers some groups in society are facing in accessing travel and tourism products and experiences.

The VisitScotland Inclusive Tourism Engagement Programme has used a mixture of webinars, industry events and advice tools and one-to-one support to assist hospitality businesses in addressing the key barriers of customer service, information provision and inclusive design. During the last ten years, VS has developed online training resources, developed an inclusive tourism award

recognising and celebrating best practices, introduced guides on how to make events inclusive and accessible, shared autism and dementia tourism guidance and introduced a range of easy to adopt tips to help the tourism industry capitalise on this highly-loyal market.

Working in partnership with key specialists and high-profile organisations such as Purple, AccessAble and Euan's Guide raises awareness on what businesses can do to be more inclusive and welcome to all.

Blind woman walks with aid. Image courtesy of Visit Brussels



Adherence to Standards

Among destinations with a strategy in development or in place, adherence to standards are prioritized last.

64%

indicate meeting standards for accessibility.

61%

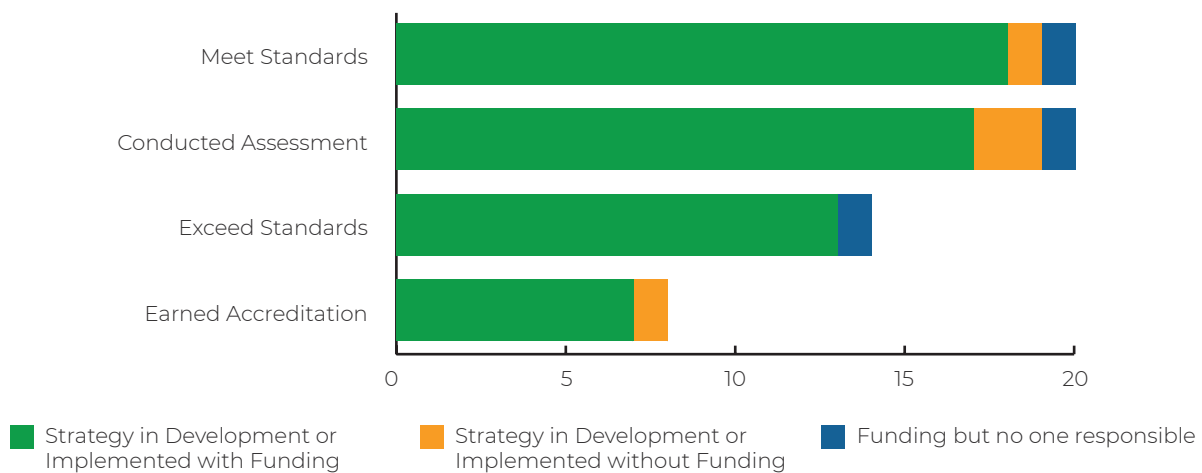
have conducted an accessibility assessment of their destination.

46%

indicate confidently exceeding standards.

25%

have earned an accreditation.



Standards are commonly met among destinations with funding, while those without funding are more likely to conduct assessments.

Overall, when asked about legal requirements, 29% of entire study respondents indicated they either do not have accessibility standards to meet or are unsure of requirements. This underscores the inconsistency in accessibility regulations across destinations, leaving gaps in the visitor experience. For those aiming to go above and beyond the legal minimum, only 20% reported adhering to a set of accessibility standards that exceed the legal requirements. 16% of participating organizations have earned third-party accreditation, demonstrating a higher level of accountability and commitment to accessibility.

What is Visit Myrtle Beach Doing?

Visit Myrtle Beach, a leading sensory-friendly destination in the United States, offers sensory-friendly accreditation through the Champion Autism Network.

What is Turismo Torino e Provincia doing?

Turismo Torino e Provincia leverages Turismabile, a project funded by Italy's Piedmont Region. Turismabile offers an accessibility survey for various tourist services offered (accommodation, restaurants, guided tours, museums and more).

Visually-impaired woman receives aid in museum. Image courtesy of Visit Brussels



THE OPPORTUNITY OF BUSINESS EVENTS

In addition to leisure travel, business events are a significant area of opportunity for destinations in considering accessible infrastructure, communications, services and partnerships.

Overall, 35% of survey respondents have resources in place to make the meeting and event experience more accessible. Efforts span of marketing and communication, community and expert engagement, and training and resources:

- Destinations offer certifications and toolkits, including event guides and recommended checklists for assessing accessibility.
- Destinations engage with experts and community members, and identify attendee needs to best source vendors or suppliers.
- Destinations offer signage and guides to best support the attendee experience.

Allegra Roccato, Head of Events at World Physiotherapy, shares her expertise on making events accessible:

“It’s not only about architectural barriers. Consider the delegate experience and accessibility of the venue by public transport, budget accommodation and food outlets within walking distance.

We research, respect and adapt to the local habits and culture. We provide open access sessions streamed live, and make congress information accessible digitally through captions and AI translation of all sessions and first timers meet-ups.

Through a new RFP process, we seek to create synergies with destinations, as they are our partners, by implementing legacy programmes and evaluating our impact on the destination.”



What is Visit Brussels doing?

Visit Brussels offers a guide to event accessibility and promotes the Access-i certification for tourist facilities and events.

Woman with visual impairment receives assistance at museum. Image courtesy of Visit Brussels

CONCLUSION

The prioritization of marketing and communications efforts means that destinations recognize how important information and imagery can be in the travel planning process. Expedia Group's 2024 "Journeys for All" study found that 59% of travelers with disabilities are more likely to plan a trip when they see themselves reflected in ads and promotions. These travelers spend 13 hours researching and planning for a trip, with extended time taken to ensure a destination is welcoming, safe and accessible.

Yet, accessibility strategies must start with a destination's "why" — and this reason, or purpose, requires both internal reflection and external engagement. Therefore, destinations should equally prioritize discussions and trainings with staff and develop relationships with community groups, residents with disabilities and experts to create empathy and understanding.

As we reflect on the findings of this report, accessibility is not just a goal — it's a powerful catalyst for change. Destinations that embrace inclusivity in all forms are poised to lead the future of travel and tourism. By ensuring that people of all abilities can travel freely and confidently, we create environments that welcome everyone, enrich communities and unlock new economic potential.

Now is the time for entire destination ecosystems to take bold steps toward greater accessibility. Whether you are just starting or looking to refine your strategy, remember that meaningful change is achieved through collaboration, intentionality and a commitment to continuous improvement. Each decision you make contributes to a world where travel is a right, not a privilege.

Actionable Steps for Moving Forward:

- **Start today:** Reflect on your destination's unique needs and the opportunities for accessibility that lie within your reach.
- **Engage your community:** Invite disability advocates, residents and experts into the conversation to ensure diverse voices shape your strategy.
- **Lead by example:** Define accessibility in a way that encompasses all disabilities, creating a clear and inclusive vision for your destination.
- **Leverage your resources:** Identify funding, assign clear ownership and tap into partnerships to make accessibility a cornerstone of your organization.
- **Drive innovation:** Go beyond compliance—embrace creativity in marketing, communications and visitor experiences to make accessibility visible and integral to your brand.
- **Create lasting impact:** Use every opportunity, including business events, to integrate accessibility as a core value, ensuring it becomes a natural part of your destination's DNA.

The future of tourism lies with destinations that prioritize accessibility and inclusion. By leading with these values, destinations can set a standard of innovation and openness. Accessibility for all allows travelers to feel welcome and leads to community trust and vitality.

