

How to apply ISO Standard 21902 *Accessible tourism for all'*

**Recommendations for key
players in management
of natural resources**



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UNWTO
World Tourism Organization

UNE Normalización
Española





Recommendations for key players in management of natural resources

Tourism plays a key role in economic development and delivers a series of benefits. However, tourism must be sustainable and inclusive of all people. **By including accessibility and Universal Design principles from the beginning, investment costs can be kept to a minimum;** by committing to equality, tourism² companies become **more sustainable, attract new visitors, and can employ people with functional diversity, generating business opportunities and greater product differentiation.**

Inclusive policies make it possible to create a supply of accessible tourism offerings. Moreover, entrepreneurs who apply a 'design for all' approach offer quality services that position them better in the market. The absence of globally agreed regulatory and guidance tools still makes it impossible to benchmark destinations in terms of their level of accessibility. ISO Standard 21902 establishes a comprehensive set of guidelines for key players in the tourism value chain to support their efforts in making their infrastructure, products and services accessible.

The "How to apply ISO Standard 21902" series of guidelines highlights the key aspects of this tool for administrations, accommodation and hospitality establishments, transport facilities and tourism resources and its implementation in companies and services.

Nature-based tourism must promote **conservation** and a profound physical and sensory connection of people with nature and environmental values. **Natural resources have an essential role in designing tourism destinations policies and strategies and promoting access to natural resources for all, including persons with disabilities³, specific access requirements and seniors⁴.** All visitors should be able to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of the outdoor experiences⁵. Nature areas' **decision-makers and all other employees, organizations and companies entrusted with their management and promotion as tourism attractions**, can use the international ISO guidance to assess, develop or diversify the services and experiences they provide, making them more accessible for all.

¹ ISO 21902:2021 Tourism and related services — Accessible tourism for all — Requirements and recommendations (English original), <https://www.iso.org/standard/72126.html>

² The 7 Principles of Universal Design <https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/the-7-principles/>

³ According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities persons with disabilities include those who have "... physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others "... <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

⁴ According to the UNWTO Recommendations on Accessible Tourism "entities responsible for recreational and leisure activities shall take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others". <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284415984>

⁵ The IUCN/ WCPA (2021) Call-to-Action-Nature-is-Good-Medicine, states that "health promotion through contact with nature should focus on equitable and inclusive access, be fit for purpose for target groups, adaptable, environmentally and culturally sustainable, and scalable" <https://natureforall.global/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Call-to-Action-Nature-is-Good-Medicine-English.pdf>

Why should we care about accessibility? Universal accessibility in tourism is about:

1. Equality, diversity, and inclusion, regardless of our abilities
2. Understanding the integrity of the accessible tourism value chain
3. Ensuring infrastructure, products and services for all people
4. Environments enjoyed by both tourists and local people
5. Improvements in people's comfort, safety and life quality
6. Change of mindset by fostering the sector's interest in accessibility
7. New experiences, revenue streams, innovation and improved business results
8. Consumer loyalty and worker satisfaction
9. Coordination between administrations, private sector and local communities
10. Working together with organizations of persons with disabilities
11. Training and continuing education of professionals in the tourism sector

Why is ISO Standard 21902 relevant to me? It provides me with tools to:

- Avoid** access barriers for tourists and locals
- Ensure** the integrity of the tourism value chain
- Raise** awareness among the general public
- Train** tourism officials and professionals
- Analyse** the offerings of competitors and understand the market
- Gain** knowledge on the benefits and business opportunities that accessible tourism entails
- Optimize** customer service at tourist information centres, natural sites and their interpretation centres
- Improve** product design, marketing, promotion, as well as the presentation of nature areas and their environmental values
- Deliver** quality accessible experiences
- Design** economic and fiscal incentives for companies to implement accessibility
- Save** on costs for improvements in coordination by including accessibility in the planning stage



ISO Standard 21902: Accessible tourism for all

As a professional, organization or company working in a nature area, what are my areas of action according to ISO 21902?:

We should act in 11 different areas⁶:

I ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT	AREAS	ACTIONS
	<p>Analysing the needs of end-users, in order to achieve better accessibility in nature areas and undertake specific actions; providing information on the current accessibility levels; understanding the positive impact of a direct and dignified access to nature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Analyse the common concerns of end-users with disabilities when visiting natural areas● Initiate an informal team exercise to brainstorm why there are still barriers in place● Work side-by-side with organizations of persons with disabilities to understand obstacles for different groups and the solutions to overcome them● Conduct joint audits and accessibility mapping with experts in environmental conservation and accessibility● Identify barriers in all stages of a visitor experience to a specific area● Decide which environments, services and activities should be prioritized, while respecting the environmental protection criteria

⁶ The brief descriptions of the areas do not include official definitions approved by the UNWTO, but rather general concepts in the context of universal accessibility and nature-based tourism

<p>II</p> <p>AWARENESS-RAISING AND TRAINING</p>	<p>AREAS</p>	<p>ACTIONS</p>
<p>III</p> <p>REMOVAL OF BARRIERS</p>	<p>Ensuring that managers and professionals, whose work is related to nature areas, understand a wide range of access requirements; this covers theoretical and practical aspects, analysis of best practices, on-site demos, and peer-to-peer exchange programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Undertake awareness-raising campaigns on the enjoyment of nature on an equal basis ● Demonstrate why more accessible nature also leads to business improvements in the value chain and an enhanced quality within the destination ● Design general training programmes on identifying access barriers and improving accessibility in nature areas ● Develop tailor-made capacity-building for specific professional profiles (managers, park rangers, professional guides, information providers, ticket sellers, beach lifeguards, etc.) and academic institutions ● Upskill personnel to provide quality personal assistance, safely manipulate mobility devices and keep maintenance of accessible features ● Regularly communicate key information on accessibility to staff who are the first point of contact for the visitors
<p>III</p> <p>REMOVAL OF BARRIERS</p>	<p>Undertaking specific interventions aimed at improving accessibility; checking their compatibility against environmental protection criteria in place; maintaining a permanent dialogue between public institutions, private entities, organizations of persons with disabilities and competent professionals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Apply Universal Design principles, when feasible, if there are new construction works, new designs or improvements within the supply chain ● Establish protocols and technical guidance to remove barriers, starting with biased attitudes towards disabilities and communication barriers ● Elaborate an action plan with prioritized actions indicating objectives, content, duration, allocated budget and persons in charge ● Outline best practices on the objective ways to communicate why certain points of a particular nature area might be impossible to adapt ● Suggest alternatives with the help of innovation and new technologies, to bring these natural resources to the greatest possible diversity of end-users

	AREAS	ACTIONS
<p>IV INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND INTERPRETATION</p>	<p>Covering key decisions about media channels that provide information about accessible attractions, transmitting core messages or tips to visitors; making it possible for each visitor to decide what suits them best when choosing a destination located in natural areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitate information about accessible services and environments in accessible formats, using plain and clear language ● Deliver up-to-date, reliable and accurate information, while ensuring signposting in different languages, Braille and pictograms ● Place information panels and displays, about natural resources and leisure activities, their characteristics and accessibility levels ● Bridge cultural or linguistic differences by using hands-on demos, animation, gestures, body language, or drawings ● Incorporate accessibility criteria and involve professional guides in planning signage and designing communication and interpretation content ● Innovate content with a focus on text size, textures, contrasts, across different physical or multimedia channels, virtual reality, apps, and tactile or interactive virtual and on-site elements
<p>V BEACHES</p>	<p>Sun-and-beach tourism is still one of the main attractions when planning vacations; beaches located either by marine or freshwater resources, should be enjoyable by all people, regardless of their physical or sensory abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enable individuals with disabilities to access water safely and comfortably ● Design accessible routes from the beach boardwalk or entry point, by installing walkways, ramps, rest areas, benches, as well as visual and tactile signage ● Use non-slippery materials which are resistant to extreme weather conditions ● Connect the accessible route with the lifeguard station and assistance point, with mobility equipment loan services to be used either on land or in the water ● Incorporate duly signposted shaded areas that are practicable for wheelchair users, providing an inclusive and healthy bathing experience. ● Harness technology for transition to the water to bridge natural obstacles, such as sand and rocks ● Where local conditions permit, provide at least one beach with: water access point, a shower, a toilet, a changing room, and a drinking water source, accessible for all visitors ● Install acoustic warning and alert systems, in addition to water safety flags

AREAS

ACTIONS

VI PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS

Many protected areas and nature reserves, both public and private properties, represent conservation challenges or complex topographies that make accessibility intricate; there is a wide range of solutions that are compatible with the conservation of the environmental elements of protected zones.

- Ensure accessibility of **interpretation and education centres**, wildlife observatories, viewpoints or camping services
- Create accessible **routes and paths** that are clearly signposted and accompanied by adequate evacuation plans
- Set up **accessible rest points**, picnic areas, and covered shelter spaces that do not interfere with the contemplation of the scenery
- Attend to **users with sensory disabilities**, by installing audio guide and wayfinding systems, rails and tactile markers
- **Design “quiet trails”** for visitors with intellectual disabilities or psychosocial impairments
- Provide **mobility equipment loan** services to experience the area in different seasons
- Consider providing authorized vehicles to move through rugged landscape or water
- Single out and adapt accessibility best practices of your peers with **solutions** that work

VII ACCESSIBLE ROUTES

Routes make it possible for a visitor to navigate throughout a natural area, use all our senses, and appreciate everything it offers, besides the popular spots (viewpoints, observatories, etc.); routes can be circular, linear or connect specific points; each type represents a series of opportunities and challenges.

- **Design accessible itineraries, routes and paths catering to different disabilities**, while respecting the environmental and topographical features
- Use **sturdy materials** that do not detach, deform, flood or pose a slipping danger
- Facilitate **unobstructed and adequately signposted** circular routes that can be completed back to the intended starting point
- Provide **information panels** on the length, type of material, width, slope, possible hazards and rest areas
- Ensure **permanent maintenance** of paths and clearing of vegetation compatible with conservation and **walkability** conditions
- Incorporate **sensory features** by triggering touch-taste-smell and hearing sensations and perceptions along the routes
- Aim for each route to be **usable independently by any person**, without segregation

AREAS

ACTIONS

VIII

PARKS AND GARDENS

These are highly frequented spaces that allow for leisure and recreation of the locals and visitors alike; although they primarily offer benefits for the community through the enjoyment of nature, they do have urban infrastructure in place to be used by people with or without disabilities.

- Design at least one **fully accessible itinerary** from the entrance of the site to complete the planned route, without stairs or other obstacles
- Provide information in **accessible formats** on the location of accessways, facilities, activities and services, as well as their level of accessibility
- Install benches, recreation and rest areas and drinking water fountains suitable for any user, within a short distance between these facilities
- Foresee the use of diverse types of wheelchairs or guide dogs, in the event of access restrictions with electric vehicles or pets; consider loan of wheelchairs and strollers
- Respect criteria for environmental and heritage maintenance and conservation when carrying out accessibility improvements
- Ensure an adequate accessibility maintenance system in different seasons of the year
- Create **inclusive playgrounds** so that children with disabilities experience and develop skills in natural environments, while socializing with other children

IX

DESIGNING QUALITY EXPERIENCES

Developing a set of tourism nature-based products, services and experiences that can be integrated into the general portfolio of tourism offerings of the destination; Creating an extensive offer that caters to a wide range of human (dis)abilities.

- Design **quality** accessible experiences, together with direct users, of different age groups and disability profiles, and destination management organizations
- Team up with public tourism administrations and the departments in charge of infrastructure and transport to **improve access** and connectivity to the natural areas
- **Provide direct** booking and purchase options, in accessible formats
- **Communicate** in your accessibility statement why 'first-come first-served' basis is used in case of a lack of direct booking possibilities
- Work with environmental management specialists, professional guides and travel agencies to familiarize them with the latest **accessible experiences**
- Collaborate with **adventure tourism** companies to provide information on risks, instructions and safety measures to their clients
- Install accessible toilets as a key link of any tourism experience in nature
- **Address intra- and interpersonal barriers**, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment throughout the experience
- Gather regular feedback from end-users with disabilities and carry out satisfaction surveys

AREAS

ACTIONS

X INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Elaborating institutional policies and strategies with the help of organizations of persons with disabilities, to demonstrate public commitment to quality services, designed for all people; formalizing support at the political and managerial level for systematic actions.

- **Design a disability inclusion policy** and make it publicly available impacting the organizations and its suppliers
- Provide reasoning for the **internal buy-in** of such policies, based on social responsibility, as well as individual, collective and economic benefits
- Forecast **profit and expenditure** based on different time-scale scenarios
- Request **economic and tax incentives** from public administrations
- Engage end-users and experts with disabilities as consultants to **test and give feedback** on accessibility improvements
- Appoint accessibility **ambassadors** to advocate for nature areas open to all
- Systematically **collect data** on supply and demand, and visitor number with disabilities
- **Review and address** complaints, implement corrective actions and **follow-up** indicators

XI LABOUR INCLUSION

Introducing a key process that enables achieving decent work conditions, economic independence and self-realization through employment; understanding inclusion as a right and a profitable advantage, rather than a charity or a legal obligation.

- Assess staff **recruitment** policies and mandatory regulations on inclusivity ratios, as well as the extent to which they actually lead to equal **job opportunities**
- Advance **training** at all levels beyond customer service, so that labour inclusion is well understood and more effective
- Carry out internship programmes with **career development prospects**
- **Analyse the benefits** of more inclusive hiring for the entity and the host communities

**In collaboration with IUCN WCPA Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group
and European Network for Accessible Tourism**



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Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group

