

Accessible Tourism Destination Certification Programme by TGB

By Mieke Broeders and Bieke Thys, Toegankelijkheidsbureau vzw. (TGB)



On 30th June 2011 *The Accessibility Office (Toegankelijkheidsbureau - TGB)* based in Hasselt, Belgium awarded the first international **Accessible Tourism Destination Certificate** to the Municipality of Lousã, Portugal.

The Certificate was handed to the Mayor of Lousã, Dr. Fernando dos Santos Carvalho, by TGB Director, Mieke Broeders at a public ceremony marking the end of a two-year accessible tourism destination development project supported by the European Social Funds through the Portuguese National Programme of Human Resource Development.



Certification Programme

The Accessible Tourism Destination Certification Programme or **ATDCP** is based on an extensive audit of the municipality's accessible tourism policies, infrastructure, transport, services and visitor information, and includes accessibility assessments of the outdoor environment, overnight accommodation, attractions, activities and offers for visitors including persons with disabilities, older persons and families with small children.

Designed and developed by accessibility and tourism experts, *TGB Belgium*, the **ATDCP** is a completely new destination management tool which provides

an accurate measure of the excellence of an accessible tourism destination, based on strictly defined criteria.

The Destination Certification Programme involves assessment meetings with destination managers coupled with on-site audits and document analysis, thus building a picture of the capacity and level of achievement of the accessible destination.

Each element of the assessment is scored against a set of indicators, thus enabling managers to track the destination's performance over time and allowing for benchmarking across any number of destinations.

The ATDC Programme also provides a tailor-made *Action Plan* for destination managers, with priorities for improvements to be made in the different facets of the accessible destination. The Action Plan aims to ensure that the destination will continue to develop and improve its offers to all visitors, giving them fulfilling, accessible experiences, whatever their interests and regardless of their age or abilities.

The TGB Accessible Tourism Destination Certificate is valid for two years, after which time it must be renewed through a re-assessment process.

While a copy of the Certificate and the scope of the analysis may be publicised for marketing purposes, the full **ATDCP Assessment Report** and **Action Plan** are confidential to the Destination Management Organisation.

TGB's collaboration over the past ten years with the Belgian regional tourist board, *Tourism Flanders*, and participation in European projects such as OSSATE¹ has enabled the accessibility experts to establish the **ATDCP** on a firm basis, incorporating many of the tried-and-tested assessment tools and procedures developed both in Belgian and European projects.

Mr. Ivor Ambrose, Managing Director of the *European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT)*² has also acted as a consultant to TGB in the development of the certification programme.

New Destinations for Pilot Certification

Having developed and launched the first **ATDCP** in Portugal, TGB is now seeking other destinations to use the assessment and programming tool.

¹ One-Stop-Shop for Accessible Tourism in Europe: www.ossate.org

² ENAT: www.accessibletourism.org

“Working with the Municipality of Lousã, we developed the ATDCP because it was evident that having a destination-level certification for accessibility is an important way to establish full credibility in the emerging accessible tourism market”, says Mieke Broeders, Director of TGB.

“Access audits for tourist establishments are important to assure visitors about the quality of accommodation but Destination Certification goes much further” she adds – “Tourists want more than a bed and a bath – they want to experience the full range of offers at the destination. Destination certification of accessibility is the important step which all DMOs should take now”.

“After the positive experience of developing and testing the accessible destination certification programme in Lousã, we would like to conduct more pilot assessments in destinations of different sizes and with various activities and tourist offers”, continues Ms. Broeders.

“This will enable us to validate and develop our methods and offer the ATDCP to all kinds of destinations that wish to certify their status as “accessible for all visitors”.

Lousã – Accessible Tourism Destination

<http://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.member&id=438>

Lousã is a town of 17,000 inhabitants located in the central region of Portugal. Its tourist attractions include the mountainous landscape with forests and traditional slate villages, an ancient castle and other heritage sites, as well as nature tourism, adventure sports, gastronomy, local crafts and products.

The decision to develop Lousã into an accessible tourism destination originated in 2007, when the first national accessible tourism conference in Portugal was hosted at the town’s Palacio de Lousã Hotel.

The Mayor and Town Council took the lead in defining a vision of Lousã as a model for accessible tourism development in Portugal. With the support of local businesses, NGOs, including the ARCIL Rehabilitation Centre and the Disability Ombudsman’s Office, a multi-faceted project was designed to address all aspects of accessibility in the town and surrounding areas.

The ARCIL Rehabilitation Centre is a highly regarded organisation in Portugal, having been developed over 30 years ago by a group of parents with disabled children. Today, with its many activities for training, employment and leisure pursuits for children, youth and adults with learning or physical disabilities, ARCIL provides a dynamic impetus to the accessible tourism destination of Lousã.

It is fair to say that the citizens and businesses in Lousã have also developed a special understanding of care and respect for people with disabilities, as a result of living and working side-by-side with ARCIL, and this has given Lousã a head start in its development of accessible tourism offers for all visitors.

There are now over 120 enterprises participating in the *Lousã Accessible Tourism Destination labelling scheme*. Members of the scheme are committed to making access improvements in their facilities and services, while training courses in disability awareness and “welcoming all” have been conducted for different groups of businesses.

Further information

To learn more about the Accessible Tourism Destination Certification Programme, please contact:

Mieke Broeders, Managing Director

Toegankelijkheidsbureau vzw.

Belgiëplein 1,

3510 Hasselt,

Belgium.

Tel.: (011) 26 50 30 Fax: (011)87 41 39

Email: Mieke.broeders <at> toegankelijkheidsbureau.be

Url: www.toegankelijkheidsbureau.be