# How to apply ISO Standard 21902
## *Accessible tourism for all* [1]

## Recommendations for key players in the cultural tourism ecosystem

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## Recommendations for key players in the cultural tourism ecosystem

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[2] from the beginning, investment costs can be kept to a minimum**; by committing to equality, tourism 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, as well as its implementation in companies and services.

Cultural tourism must promote **people-centred approaches**, the connections of people with heritage and places, as well as intercultural dialogue and understanding, when addressing local, national, and international heritage policies and practice[3]. **Cultural expressions and resources have a crucial role in designing tourism destinations' strategies and promoting access to culture for all people, including persons with disabilities[4] and specific access requirements. Managers and all other employees of historical or cultural sites, organizations, or companies, integrated into the cultural tourism ecosystem of a destination**, that wish to ensure that the experiences they provide are accessible, can use the international ISO guidance to assess, develop or adapt their services.

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[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] Consult the ICOMOS International Cultural Heritage Tourism Charter **https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Secretariat/2023/CSI/eng-franc_ICHTCharter.pdf** and ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites **https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/interpretation_e.pdf**
[4] 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".

## 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** all kinds of 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, heritage sites and other cultural resources

**Improve** product design and marketing, as well as interpretation and presentation at cultural sites and experiences

**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

**As a manager or an employee of a historical or cultural site, cultural institution, organization or company, integrated into the cultural tourism offer, what should be my areas of action according to ISO 21902?**

**We should act in 11 different areas:**

| AREAS [5] | ACTIONS |
|---|---|
| **I**<br><br>**ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT**<br><br>Analysing the accessibility demand; acquiring knowledge on the behaviour, specific access requirements, as well as the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of our audience; providing information on accessibility of a particular cultural element. | • Identify **common concerns** of visitors with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities, seniors, and families with young children<br>• Conduct an accessibility audit with the **help of cultural heritage and conservation experts and organizations representing persons with disabilities**<br>• **Commission** researchers and end-users with disabilities to map obstacles<br>• Decide which environments, spaces and services can and should be **prioritized**<br>• Bear in mind the **structural limitations and peculiarities** of heritage sites, monuments, museums, theatres, concert halls and cultural experiences out of built environments<br>• Assess accessibility levels of all **accompanying services**, such as toilets, entry and egress points, merchandising shops, catering facilities and security checkpoints<br>• Reflect on the **advantages** of developing accessible cultural tourism experiences, based on data and surveys of the affected stakeholder groups<br>• Understand the contribution of accessibility to **sustainability, innovation, cross-generational outreach and expansion of target groups** |

[5] 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 cultural tourism.

| AREAS | ACTIONS |
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| **II**<br><br>**AWARENESS-RAISING AND TRAINING**<br><br>Ensuring that the decision-making personnel, cultural heritage managers and professionals, and support services staff, understand the widest possible array of accessibility requirements; Acquiring skills to provide assistance and support to visitors. | • **Raise awareness** about functional diversity, Universal Design principles and potential accessibility interventions<br>• **Design training schemes** with organizations of persons with disabilities, cultural heritage managers, guides and educational institutions<br>• Carry out beginners' level and **continuous accessibility awareness** training targeting all personnel<br>• Make sure the training encompasses assistance to visitors with physical, intellectual, and sensory impairments, including **hidden disabilities**<br>• Implement capacity building for **specific professional profiles** who create, manage, interpret, promote or commercialize cultural tourism experiences and services<br>• **Brief staff** prior to (re)launching the visits following any accessibility improvement<br>• Convey **key messaging** to managers and staff, at all levels, on why a more accessible cultural experience brings along new audiences, more visitors and economic revenues<br>• Identify **best practices and standards** to improve cultural heritage sites accessibility led by peer institutions, national and international cultural heritage bodies |

| AREAS | ACTIONS |
|---|---|
| **III**<br><br>**REMOVAL OF BARRIERS**<br><br>Improvement of accessibility features and infrastructure as a core operational element of cultural sites, organizations and companies; Ensuring a permanent, ongoing dialogue engaging different stakeholders, institutions and competent professionals to agree on feasible. | • Undertake accessibility improvements by ensuring the respect of heritage **conservation** status, laws, regulatory tools and international standards[6]<br>• Carry out a **detailed assessment** of the most common visitors' itinerary, its **essential** cultural elements and their value, as well as the main accessibility obstacles<br>• **Apply Universal Design principles**, in new construction or renovation works, as well as in the design and procurement of tangible and intangible cultural heritage experiences and services, while respecting conservation criteria<br>• Establish **protocols to remove barriers**, according to heritage protection and status, starting with biased attitudes, lack of awareness and innovative solutions<br>• Recognize possible **limitations** to achieving better accessibility due to the need to maintain heritage values, sense of place, integrity and authenticity of cultural heritage<br>• Reflect on why certain features of a cultural heritage element **are so unique** that they cannot be physically adapted and enjoyed by all people<br>• Create **alternative** approaches with the help of digital interpretation, virtual and augmented reality, or artificial intelligence, in case barriers cannot be removed<br>• **Coordinate with administrations** making sure that the urban furniture and equipment, roads and pavements, and transport services to the site are accessible |

[6] Charters Adopted by the General Assembly of ICOMOS:  **https://www.icomos.org/en/what-we-do/involvement-in-international-conventions/standards**

| AREAS | | ACTIONS |
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| **IV**<br>**COMMONS SPACES** | Provision of spaces for common-use and routes that visitors need to transit or spend their time in, in order to be able to access and enjoy all the facilities which are meant for public use; Ensuring service excellence in common spaces for all audiences, with or without disability. | • Create **accessible routes, signage and wayfinding** in the busiest areas<br>• Improve accessibility features of the site facilities, their content and its interpretation<br>• Work with **destination authorities, transportation and infrastructure departments** to improve access to cultural sites and experiences<br>• Ensure **designated spaces** in the seating arrangement and rest areas for wheelchair users, blind people, as well as their companions and authorized assistance animals<br>• Make available **menus** indicating allergens, in accessible formats<br>• Install free, onsite Wi-Fi services, to **enable digital** access and interpretation<br>• Provide **direct accessible purchase options** of tickets or accessible experiences<br>• Elaborate and implement **maintenance, evacuation, safety and security** plans that take into account different disabilities |
| **V**<br>**HERITAGE SITES, MONUMENTS AND HISTORIC AREAS** | These elements are often the core of the cultural landscape of a destination and accessibility improves their operational features; A wide spectrum of accessibility solutions can be considered, while applying heritage conservation principles. | • Analyse both the **current and the potential experience** of viewing and visiting the site/area from the standpoint of end-users with disabilities<br>• Use the training resource of **technical visits to historic buildings** in which universal accessibility has been successfully incorporated<br>• Ensure that accessibility interventions **can be reversed**, to return the monuments or any other cultural element, to their original state<br>• Consider interventions **with new solutions**, to better serve the cultural purpose of the monument or site and their visitors<br>• Pay attention to **materials, shapes, textures, sounds and fragrances** in accessibility interventions, varying according to visitors' needs or climatic conditions<br>• Introduce slow interactive and customized tours that connect students with **intellectual disabilities**, as well as their teachers and families, with cultural heritage |

| AREAS | ACTIONS |
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| **VI**<br>**MUSEUMS AND EXHIBIT SPACES**<br><br>Museums, galleries and exhibit venues attract major visitor flows of both locals and tourists; There is a wide range of solutions to making their buildings, services and content more accessible in order to create engaging experiences. | • Distinguish the feasibility of accessibility improvements in modern facilities from those in **historic buildings and sites,** since their functionality and conservation criteria vary<br>• Establish and adequately communicate a protocol on previous booking, or, first-come first-served basis, to borrow **wheelchairs and mobility scooters**<br>• In case of extensive buildings, try to ensure **accessible toilets** on every floor and install **seats and benches** throughout the exhibit spaces<br>• Generate discussion-based experiences for the **elderly** and people with memory loss<br>• Provide hand-held **magnifying lenses** that can be borrowed from the front desk<br>• Consider **introducing, displaying and interpreting** different disabilities in the content of the exhibits, showcasing human diversity |
| **VII**<br>**CULTURAL EVENTS AND STAGING ENVIRONMENTS**<br><br>Concerts, theatre, opera, dance performances, cinema and a wide range of cultural events can also be made accessible; The challenge is how to enhance accessibility of the physical environments (tangible aspects) and the specific programme content (intangible aspects). | • Extend services of the **traditional accessible ticket line** to alternative channels for customers with difficulties using the phone<br>• Achieve **"ticketing equality"** so customers with any disability can purchase tickets online in an autonomous and expedient manner and indicate their requirements<br>• Consider staging performances adjusted to audiences with a wider **autism spectrum and intellectual disabilities**<br>• Work with the civil society organizations and cultural sector to reflect disabilities and human diversity in the **cultural content development** |
| **VIII**<br>**DESIGNING CULTURAL TOURISM EXPERIENCES**<br><br>Provision of high quality, authentic, engaging and inclusive cultural tourism experiences for all, while observing the Universal Design principles; Partnering with cultural tourism specialists, guides and agencies to familiarize them with new accessible experiences. | • Cater to different access requirements and **harness peoples' capacities** to enjoy cultural heritage instead of focusing on people's disabilities<br>• Create accessible cultural heritage experiences in collaboration with **end-users, site managers, cultural curators, guides and destination management organizations**<br>• Engage end-users with disabilities in a **mutual learning exercise** with guides, to create more accessible experiences for tour groups and individuals<br>• Accommodate **companions or family members of your audience with disabilities**<br>• Engage consultants with disabilities to **test and feedback** on accessibility of different environments, facilities, communication, interpretation and support services<br>• Encourage **innovation in design, presentation and interpretation** of cultural heritage sites to reflect up-to-date accessibility trends and solutions |

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| **IX**<br>**INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND INTERPRETATION** | Development of channels and media platforms providing information about the accessibility features, target audiences and the content; Designing an innovative interpretative content in collaboration with end-users, other cultural institutions and professionals. | • Ensure **updated, reliable and accurate** visitor information on all platforms<br>• Offer information on **accessible** services in accessible formats, using **plain language**<br>• **Communicate** key visitor services information to front-desk employees<br>• Work with guides and technical experts to incorporate accessibility criteria into presentation, **interpretation** and digital media<br>• Make available a clear and detailed **accessibility statement online**<br>• Ensure **signposting** in different languages and standardized communication **iconography**, in accessible physical and digital formats[7]<br>• **Analyse** how Braille signage, electronic versions of the programmes, large-text print, sign language, induction loops, audio descriptions, screens and subtitles, can be incorporated<br>• Keep **adequate maintenance and visitors' feedback** on information provision, communication and interpretation channels and platforms |
| **X**<br>**INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES** | Creation of a corporate or institutional vision and public commitment to enable access to culture for all people; Formalizing political support for a systemic action to improve accessibility; Developing a set of actions based on agreed objectives. | • Design a **policy** on disability inclusion impacting both the organization and suppliers<br>• Elaborate an **implementation plan** for specific actions and forecast **costs and benefits**<br>• **Allocate budget** and appoint staff to implement accessibility improvements<br>• Apply for economic and **tax incentives** from public administrations<br>• **Consider discounts** for visitors with disabilities/their caregivers in accordance with laws or institutional policies<br>• **Review complaints** of visitors with disabilities and implement **evaluation** indicators<br>• **Incentivize** off-season and mid-season affordable programmes or visits for tourists with disabilities and position the institution accordingly<br>• **Measure** the rise in number and positive responses of visitors after improving accessibility at cultural heritage sites, institutions or companies |

[7] Signage and the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design: https://www.etikk.hu/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ADA_informacios_tablak.pdf

| | AREAS | ACTIONS |
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| **XI**<br>**LABOUR INCLUSION** | Establishment of decent working conditions, economic independence, and self-realisation through employment in the cultural tourism ecosystem; Labour inclusion seen as a right and a profitable advantage, instead of a charitable action and legal obligation. | • **Assess** staff sourcing, hiring, training and development policies for inclusion of people with all types of disabilities and specific access requirements<br>• **Hire personnel**, external service providers and suppliers with disabilities<br>• Develop an **intern programme** with career development prospects<br>• **Adapt personnel's workstations**, back office and public-restricted areas for **lasting** labour inclusion of persons with disabilities<br>• Analyse and foster the **benefits of disability inclusion** for your entity and your employees |

# In collaboration with  ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee and European Network for Accessible Tourism



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