

Move to make city highlights more accessible for disabled tourists

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The Nelson Mandela Bay municipality is on a mission to make the city more disabled-friendly by improving accessibility to all tourism hotspots.



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Raising awareness about the struggle of disabled people, the metro has trained tour guides to be sensitive to the needs of those with disabilities and avoid marginalising them. There are about 100,000 disabled people in the Bay.

The municipality, with the East Cape Parks and Tourism Agency, hosted a workshop at Kwantu Towers yesterday to raise awareness about the need to accommodate disabled tourists. Guides from Port Elizabeth companies attended the workshop, which looked at ways to communicate and physically prepare their businesses for disabled customers.

Avoiding incidents where disabled tourists feel helpless

For freelance tour guide Willy de Jong, 76, disability awareness will help avoid "stupid" incidents. "I have been a tour guide for more than 22 years now and I have come across stupid incidents that would have been easily avoided if we had known better," De Jong said.

He referred to a recent incident where a wheelchair-bound tourist could not get into a taxi being used as a shuttle because there was no ramp. "In the past, we were forced to use boards to create a ramp but now we can use portable ramps," De Jong said.

"This helps avoid an incident where they feel helpless."

The Association for Persons with Physical Disabilities' executive director in the Bay, Brian Buizuidenhout, said more workshops should be held as disabled people were marginalised in tourism. "It is important that we understand that everybody deserves their space and recognition.

"People with disabilities are tired of being ignored in terms of facilities that are made available."

Including disabled people in the tourism economy

Bezuidenhout said the metro needed to invite the 100,000 disabled people in the city to contribute to the economy. "They are an important part and they are not helping the economy in terms of tourism because the facilities are not in place," he said.

Lungton Tours owner and tour guide Lunga Ngabaza said even though he had never had to accommodate a disabled customer before, the workshop had helped him to prepare for it. "Why would you leave a customer behind just because they are physically challenged? That alone is a reason why more tour guides ought to be involved," Ngabaza said.

Promoting universal access

The workshop was in line with a commitment made by Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism last year to pursue awareness and training on how to ensure people with disabilities felt welcome in the city.

Economic development, tourism and agriculture political head Andrew Whitfield said it was important to constantly promote universal access and ensure that visitors with disabilities felt welcome in the Bay.

He said the campaign also included sign language training, designed to encourage tour guides to develop the skill further and facilitate the best experience possible.

Source: Herald