SESSION 8 – ACCESSIBLE TOURISM BUSINESS

Moderator: Helena Ribeiro

Speakers: Ivor Ambrose, Bee Abdulla Dalilah, Mònica Santa Eulàlia, John Morris

The session "Accessible Tourism Business" explored how destinations, organisations, and entrepreneurs across Europe and beyond are reshaping the tourism landscape by embedding accessibility into their business strategies. Moderated by **Helena Ribeiro, Turismo de Portugal**, the discussion showcased three complementary perspectives—from data-driven research to public policy and private-sector innovation.

Ivor Ambrose, Managing Director of the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), presented the Portrait of European Travellers with Mobility and Access Needs, a major survey conducted across five countries in collaboration with MMGY Global. The study revealed that 46% of European travellers with access needs take at least one leisure trip per year, with the UK leading in travel frequency. It also highlighted that most travellers journey with companions or in groups, generating a significant multiplier effect on destinations. Key accessibility priorities identified include adapted bathrooms, assistive equipment, and reliable booking of accessible rooms—while transport remains the most challenging aspect of travel, with 84% of respondents reporting barriers such as boarding difficulties, lack of trained staff, and limited accessible taxis. Ambrose emphasised the urgency of updating information systems and integrating accessibility into mainstream tourism intelligence.

Mònica Santa Eulàlia, from the Catalonia Tourist Board, described how her region transformed accessibility from a legislative obligation into a coordinated territorial policy. Rooted in Catalonia's accessibility laws—first introduced ahead of the 1992 Paralympic Games and updated through the 2024 Accessibility Code—the region's "Tourism for All Network" unites stakeholders across governance, training, and self-assessment. Flagship projects include the PROA self-evaluation tool, an online course on accessible tourism, and cross-sector working groups involving municipalities and provincial councils. Santa Eulàlia highlighted examples such as accessible beach networks, cultural sites, and the "Gothic Easy Tour" in Barcelona, reinforcing that accessibility must be part of a destination's DNA.

Unfortunately, **Bee Abdulla Delilah** couldn't join the session, so the floor was given to the last speaker.

Finally, **John Morris, founder of WheelchairTravel.org and representative of TravelAbility (USA),** illustrated how industry leadership and innovation can emerge from collaboration. He presented the TravelAbility Summit and its ecosystem, including the Accessibility Playbook for DMOs, the Destination Ally Club, and university partnerships introducing accessibility into hospitality curricula. Morris emphasised that accessibility information must be prominently displayed and user-friendly, not hidden within websites.

The session concluded with a shared message: accessibility is no longer a niche but a business imperative—an engine for competitiveness, inclusivity, and global cooperation in tourism.

Watch Session 8 on YouTube. (run time 1:34:46)