

Concern over 2010

THE start of the 2010 World Cup Soccer Tournament is getting closer and the question remains if South Africa is ready to accommodate visitors with disabilities. Are you worried?

Stadiums are built, airports are revamped and everywhere guest houses are becoming bigger. One can only hope that the needs of those suffering from disability are considered during the process.

I would like to know from the Department of Tourism how the grading of accommodation in South Africa is commencing – a country-wide initiative to make guest houses more accessible for persons with disabilities.

Are personnel in the hospitality industry adequately trained to treat the disabled?

The following tips for restaurants, guest houses and hotels are important:

Do not speak to someone in a wheelchair if you are standing behind the person. Many wheelchair users find it difficult and even impossible to turn around. Sit down in front of the person before you start speaking. This will ensure eye contact.

People who are disabled do not want to attract unnecessary attention – show sensitivity towards their needs. Some disabled persons may, for example, ask you to cut their food into smaller pieces before a meal.

You should take care that glasses are placed within their reach at all times. Many people suffering hearing loss don't go to restaurants because they fear that misunderstandings might arise. Waiters should determine the method of communication preferred by their client and with the necessary knowledge about, for example, Sign Language this can be overcome.

Many of those working in the hospitality industry are not sure about the needs of the blind and those with sight problems. Menus printed in a bigger font are, for example, preferred to menus in Braille.

Always remember the golden rule: Ask the disabled person what type of help or support s/he needs. Discuss his/her needs in a relaxed manner without emphasising it in the presence of others.

For training sessions with regard to the integration of the disabled, you can call Ms Sandra Goosen, manager: placements at the Free State Association for Persons with Disabilities (APD), on 083-560-5991 or send an email to sandra@apdfreestate.co.za.

Write to me at fanie.dt@mweb.co.za or PO Box 1758, Worcester 6849.