

# TOURISM ROUTE IN THE FREE STATE

I recently spoke to Elzarie Devenish, Director of the Association for Persons with Disabilities in the Free State, about the tourism route [in the Free State] for persons with disabilities.

According to Devenish, the purpose of the accessible route is two fold. Firstly it brings persons with disabilities closer to tourism and secondly, tourism to persons with disabilities.

Devenish says: “Persons with disabilities must be part of the wonderful tourist attractions in the Free State”. To make this possible there must be accessible accommodation, restaurants, transport, sights worth seeing and information regarding these aspects. With this project, the needs of persons with disabilities are met directly.

For eg in Bloemfontein, there is a guest house that has been built and made accessible for persons with disabilities and next door is a coffee shop that is also accessible. In the coffee shop is a tourist route centre specifically for persons with disabilities as well as a showcase of articles made by persons with disabilities for sale.

An accessible guest house, coffee shop, tourist information centre and promotion of articles made by persons with disabilities are for sure unique in South Africa.

All these facilities are on the premises of the Association for Persons with Disabilities, 47 Park Rd Bloemfontein. It is promoted as 47@ Park Road.

Accessibility for the rest of the Free State is receiving attention, according to Devenish. They are following a holistic approach with this route.

They refer to a route because there are so many places in the Free State involved in this project. To introduce further accommodation to persons with disabilities, accessibility evaluations were done in all the districts in the Free State. Guest houses, nature reserves, even a casino were visited by experts.

“These places are being supported to persevere and in doing so improve their accessibility”, says Devenish.

It is this indispensable information that is available, that is evident to the general public in the tourism centre [in the coffee shop]. It is good news for the hospitality industry that their efforts are acknowledged in a tangible way.

This project also has the aim to bring tourism to the persons with disabilities. This route encompasses the whole Free State – a wide variety of tourist attractions are involved. The brown road markings are used for this purpose. This project is not exclusive to persons with disabilities.

As part of the route, 24 walls of remembrance are being built in different towns in the Free State. Appropriate information covering the work of persons with disabilities in the surrounding areas will be depicted on the walls. There are 5 projects where persons with disabilities produce and tourists may visit. Hand made articles may be bought at these work shops.

Accessible transport remains a challenge. The Association for Persons with Disabilities in the Free State already has a transport section but has minimal transport available. As part of this project this institution has 2 vehicles to transport persons with disabilities. One vehicle is equipped with hand controls so that persons with disabilities may hire it when available.

Through the funding of the Dept of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, APD is empowered to integrate persons with disabilities in the community. Another important outcome of this project is the poverty relief through job creation and training opportunities that arose from this. Approximately 300 people form part of this unique project.

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