

T.C.G.S.A. AND TOURISM

Tourism if effective and implemented in the best possible manner, offers the possibility of combating unemployment, of attracting foreign investment, and hence of alleviating poverty and creating social upliftment. It is imperative that every strategy be adopted in order to attract and maintain tourism numbers. U.N.W.T.O. sees tourism as a travel experience: activities that take place outside of the usual place of residence, supply of products and services to guests and satisfaction of their demand. Tourism is a crosscutting activity, and is both the result and vehicle of globalization.

Tourism needs and seeks standards in search of sustainability; in respect, U.N.W.T.O. distinguishes three dimensions that must be incorporated into tourism (U.N.W.T.O.: 2005):

- (1) Technical Specifications
- (2) Ethical Dimension
- (3) Quality Result

U.N.W.T.O. has highlighted accessible tourism as a vehicle to achieve these ends. The main local tool that attempts to ensure these aims in South African is the T.G.C.S.A.

The T.C.G.S.A. was established in September of 2000 by D.E.A.T., and was mandated to provide a structural framework from which to establish an effective means of grading across the tourism industry in South Africa. The principles inherent in these grading schemes are market-driven and voluntary; as such it aims as a means of stimulating improvement by offering a benchmark for assessment. The incorporation of Universal Access Guidelines into T.C.G.S.A.'s framework is an indication of their intent to embrace the principles inherent in the

Constitution and in the Bill of Rights, as well as ensuring South Africa's place as a leading quality-driven tourism destination.

The framework for determining and implementing a programme of accessibility should take the format of 'best practices.' In this sense, it should form a series of indications and discussions aimed at determining what the best option is, from a series of weighted options. A best practice in tourism should be defined as one that is replicable, transferable or adaptable; it should be a practice for which there is a body of supporting evidence, lending weight to its application. Such practices should, however, be of such a nature that, when implemented, they have a tangible effect on improving people's tourism experiences. Identifying best practices is a useful means to one, improve public policies based on what works; two, raise awareness of decision makers, and three share and transfer knowledge, expertise and experience through networking and peer-to-peer learning.

The tourism sector in South Africa is increasingly faced with growing demands from travelers who want better access in hotels, at holiday destinations and tourist attractions. Level access to buildings, large-print menu's and accessible toilets are just some of the things needed. If stakeholders in the tourism industry want to facilitate these needs, they are going to have to provide accessible premises and venues.

The Tourism Grading Council's commitment to addressing the needs of people with disabilities into all accommodation facilities will ensure that South Africa is one of the forerunners in addressing environmental accessibility and disability equity. The improved accessibility of accommodation facilities will provide for a significant component of society that has been previously excluded.