

Follow the needs - experiences and insides from more than 25 years of activity as a tour operator in accessible tourism

Presentation abstract

The story of videlis began with three young men doing their community service caring for senior citizens. They asked themselves what they could do to ease the loneliness and isolation the elderly people from. They decided to take the seniors on a holiday. Even though the trip was dominated by unexpected barriers and huge efforts, in the end everybody had a great time. Watching the old people flourish in the company of one another and hearing them ask for the next trip even before they were home again encouraged the three men to continue what they started. In 1990, long before accessible tourism became a widely known term, they founded videlis Seniorenreisen e.V. (Seniorenreisen means senior travel), one of the first organizations in Germany that offered group trips adapted to the needs of the oldest generation.

I was one of these young men. Today, more than 25 years later, I am here to share my huge wealth of experience in organizing assisted barrier-free holidays for senior citizens.

Nowadays videlis offers about twelve group trips a year, mainly within Germany but also flights to southern Europe and cruises. A travel group consists of up to twelve senior citizens from all over Germany. The average videlis guest is 82 years old and suffers from age-related mobility restrictions. Staying true to the original idea all videlis trips are still accompanied exclusively by volunteer helpers. They accompany the guests on excursions, push wheelchairs, fetch food from the buffet and so on. And they always have a sympathetic ear for the ones who have no one to talk to at home. As the volunteers have no such a training they can not offer medical or nursing services to the guests. If that kind of assistance is needed videlis arranges for a mobile care service at the holiday destination.

Although every handicapped traveller is unique in their needs there are some core-requirements most of them share. Let us have a look on how videlis organizes barrier-free group trips following the travel chain.

First and foremost, there is one thing that draws through the whole process of accessible travel planning and that is the need for complete and reliable information. We must exactly know what our guests need and what our partners can offer.

Due to their old age most of our clients are still using printed information to inform themselves about their desired holiday, but we are noticing online information becoming more and more important for them too. Especially when traveling with a walker or wheelchair for the first time or going on the first trip alone after having lost their partner there are many timidities and questions. If we can not answer a customer inquiry right away we take our time to find out a reliable answer. Our guests rather wait a bit for a correct answer than to find out they can not use the bathroom because the door is too narrow for their wheelchair.

As most of our guests already have a hard time leaving the house it is nearly impossible for them to handle traveling with luggage on their own. Therefore, all videlis trips start at the front door of the participants. Every guest is picked up by a videlis volunteer who takes care of their suitcase and accompanies them all the way to their hotel room. Depending on the destination we transport our guest by rental cars / minibuses or go with them by train or plane. Nowadays with the right preparation most means of transport are accessible for handicapped people. It is crucial, especially when traveling

with a larger group of disabled, to inform the involved transport companies in advance what kind of assistance is needed and how many mobility aids are to be carried.

Sadly, even today most hotels have only one or two adapted rooms. Although these rooms may be perfectly suitable for our clients, we can not choose a hotel that has not at least six or seven more rooms that are accessible without steps and equipped with walk-in-showers to accommodate our group. Today there are so many options in design that an adapted room does not have to look like one in a hospital any more. A much-needed handle for some guests can be a useful towel holder for all the others. Another huge aspect is the mindset of people - if only I have the slightest feeling our guests were not appreciated in a hotel, we will not go there, no matter how perfectly it may be built.

But even the best hotel is of no use if there are no accessible attractions nearby. videlis offers a mix of typical holiday activities like sightseeing or time on the beach and unique experiences like visiting a cheesery. Because most of our clients spend their time mainly at home they are not used to extensive activities any more. We need to give them enough time to relax and recuperate by scheduling enough breaks in our program.

Finally, we always ask our clients for their feedback. This feedback is important because organizing accessible travel never ends.

Continues little changes lead to a great holiday experience for all.

Lead speaker : Holger Kähler

Organisation : videlis Seniorenreisen e.V.

City (Country) : Augsburg(Germany)

Biography : Vita Holger Kähler 1967 born in Munich, Germany 1986 university entrance diploma in Lübeck 1986 - 1989 training as an industrial clerk 1989 - 1990 working abroad for Dräger Australia 1990 / 1991 civil service, providing senior care in Lübeck 1991 - 1996 studies of business administration at the University of Augsburg. Graduation as Diplom-Kaufmann (equivalent to a Master's degree) 1990 - establishment of videlis Seniorenreisen e.V., a non-profit-association, specialized in assisted senior travel; still acting as Managing Director 1994 - freelance production manager / producer for high-quality documentaries; (suspension of activity since 2004 due to illness) 2005 - self-employed as a lecturer in the adult education, focus on health economics

2nd speaker :

Organisation :

City (Country) : ()

Biography :