

Making a holiday resort accessible, working with the Destination pour Tous label: Balaruc-les-Bains, France's number one spa resort.

Presentation abstract

Balaruc-les-Bains: Fact sheet:

By the Mediterranean, in the south of France, Occitanie region – Hérault department – near Sète (Bassin de Thau), between

Toulouse and Montpellier

6.950 inhabitants

> 53.000 patients/year > 1 million overnight stays

France's number one spa resort (in terms of visitor figures)

Awarded the Destination pour Tous (hearing and mental disability) label / classified Tourist Resort

Balaruc-les-Bains, France's number one spa resort, places great importance on overall accessibility for its visitors. Europe's very first Audioplage was installed on the beach at Balaruc-les-Bains, by the Thau lagoon. Since then, many other measures have been put in place with the needs of handicapped visitors in mind.

In 2011, Balaruc-les-Bains was one of six French destinations chosen to test the criteria of the new Destination pour Tous label. A project to make the resort more accessible has been rolled out progressively, led by the Tourist Office, working with public and private entities in the social and professional sectors. Consequently, the spa and holiday resort applied for the Destination pour Tous label.

During the application process, the town chose to put in place a management board consisting of local councillors and representatives from the Commission Communale d'Accessibilité; designated members (the Tourism Office director plus representatives from the Direction Générale des Services and technical services teams); a steering committee with institutional partners including Direccte (the State economic development agency), DDTM (Direction du Territoire et de la Mer), the region, the department, and the greater Sète area; and those working with people with disabilities (Comité de Liaison, Association Roule Nature...)

Precise methodology was essential to ensure the involvement of all the resort's members and partners (e.g. local outreach, public meetings, working meetings, events, rallying and training).

In applying for the Destination pour Tous label, the municipal authorities were firstly seeking to connect specifically adapted tourist services (accommodation, restaurants, shops, leisure activities, services, transport...) and the relevant services, taking into account disabled people's needs in terms of autonomy and ease of access.

They also sought to connect everyone from the local area to speed up the process, rallying all partners and inhabitants, and encouraging different services to work together on this shared project which effectively put a structure in place.

Regarding its application for the label, Balaruc-les-Bains already had several relevant assets:

A Mediterranean spa and seaside resort

France's number one spa resort

A range of accommodation

Many shops and services

A growing number of totally accessible areas

An Audioplage beach

A tourist office with the "Tourisme et Handicaps" label

The steering committee and local members were extremely active during the application period, rallying all those involved, hosting technical meetings, commissions and events, liaising, training and working closely with those businesses and structures which were most directly associated with the Tourisme & Handicaps label.

In March 2017 the Destination pour Tous (hearing and mental disability) label was awarded to Balaruc-les-Bains (excluding the spa resort) during the national symposium "Allez où vos envies vous portent, pour un tourisme accessible - Auditif et Mental" (three French cities have the label: Bordeaux, Amiens and Balaruc-les-Bains).

This collective, people-focused project gave the resort an incredible boost and its success was very much thanks to the support of committed partners including Hérault Tourisme, Association Roule nature and Cabinet Mission Tourisme. The project also received excellent support from our institutional partners, including the DGE (Direction Générale des Entreprises), the ministries of tourism, accessibility and social solidarity, Direccte, and the Hérault department council (B. Mason).

Being awarded the label also raised awareness of the resort in a highly positive way via extensive media coverage, and the application effectively provided Balaruc with many tools and technical materials. The resort continues to pursue its quest for ever-improved accessibility.

Lead speaker : Pierre LARY

Organisation : Tourism Director - Balaruc-les-Bains

City (Country) : Balaruc-les-Bains(France)

Biography : Pierre LARY Institut Universitaire Professionnalisé de Tourisme (Toulouse) "Management and organisation of tourism structures". Master engineer in tourism. Tourism director (Tourism Office/Campings) of Balaruc-les-Bains, France's number one spa resort. Responsible for the use of the "Destination pour Tous" and "Tourisme & Handicaps" labels within the resort. Speaker on accessibility at conferences and seminars. Administrator with the Comité Régional du Tourisme (Occitanie). Holder of the national award Médaille d'Argent du Tourisme. NB: this request is for a two-speaker presentation by Pierre LARY, Tourism Director, and Sylvain BONNET, Director of the Balaruc-les-Bains Spa.

2nd speaker : Sylvain BONNET

Organisation : Director of the Balaruc-les-Bains Spa

City (Country) : Balaruc-les-Bains (France)



Biography : Sylvain BONNET : Director at Thermal Baths and Spa - Balaruc les Bains. Master of Business Administration (Lisbonne). Senior engineer specialized in methanization plants and processes.