

## WeTravel2 and the Flemish Youth Hostels creating All-in Hostels

### Presentation abstract

WeTravel2 - Travel without Limits.

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Kristof Steegmans, WeTravel2, Heist-op-den-Berg, Belgium (presenter)

Tine Depré, Flemish Youth Hostels, Antwerpen, Belgium (co-presenter)

The Vlaamse Jeugdherbergen vzw (Flemish Youth Hostels), VJH for short, is the umbrella organisation for 23 youth hostels in Flanders. The non-profit organization was founded in 1931 and is also co-founder of Hostelling International, the largest network of hostels in the world. The past years the association has been working hard on modernizing and extending the network, together with the support of Toerisme Vlaanderen. In all these projects, a lot of effort was put into creating sustainable and accessible hostels. Today, this resulted in 12 hostels that are fully accessible for wheelchair users and people with disabilities in general. Each of these 12 hostels carry an A or A+ label from Toerisme Vlaanderen, which indicates the level of accessibility. A thirteenth hostel is in the final approval stages. The reason why this is so important can be found in their mission. All over the world, hostels have one mission in mind: providing everyone with the opportunity to travel and discover the world. They strongly believe that travel is a right for everyone, regardless of age, origin, income or any disability whatsoever. They dream of hostels where everyone not only is welcome but also feels welcome.

So now that they have these adapted accommodations, VJH wants to get the word out and introduce accessibility. Not only physical accessibility, but also creating the right mind-set amongst their staff members. That is where WeTravel2 comes in. WeTravel2 is a Belgian tour operator, specialized in travel for people with physical disabilities and a consultant for accessibility in the tourism sector. As a partner of the Flanders Youth Hostels in accessibility, WeTravel2 will educate, train and sensitize their staff, with a specialized course: 'How to deal with people with a physical disability in the tourist industry'. Moreover, WeTravel2 will promote the accessible youth hostels with their foreign partners in accessible travel, in order to attract more foreign visitors with disabilities. Therefore the entire chain of accessibility has to be covered, in order to offer valuable travel experiences for people with restricted physical possibilities. This chain consists of 7 components : up-to-date information, comfortable flights, adapted transport, medical equipment rental, medical assistance, accessible hotels and excursions, restaurants and attractions. WeTravel2 will advise the Flanders Youth Hostels to fill in these links for every accessible hostel.

**Lead speaker :** Kristof Steegmans

**Organisation :** WeTravel2

**City (Country) :** Heist op den Berg(Belgium)

**Biography :** Kristof Steegmans (° 1974 Lier, Belgium) is an entrepreneur running his own businesses in tourism, ICT consultancy and women's fashion. He is a leading member of JCI Junior Chamber International in his hometown Heist-op-den-Berg and of a local Lions Club. Kristof has a special interest in travel, culture and speech arts. Physically disabled for life due



to a diving accident, he takes a genuine personal interest in safe, enjoyable and high standard accessible travel.

**2nd speaker :** Tine Depré

**Organisation :** Vlaamse Jeugdherbergen

**City (Country) :** Antwerpen (Belgium)

**Biography :** Tine Depré, Marketing and Communication, Vlaamse Jeugdherbergen