

HOW ACCESSIBLE ARE YOU TO **THE DISABLED?**

GEARING UP FOR
2010



ELNA FLIERL

email your questions to info@elfasco.co.za, or visit www.elfasco.co.za for more information

ACCORDING TO THE WORLD HEALTH Organisation, 10% of the world's population live with disabilities. Many of these disabled people travel with their families and friends, so if your establishment can't cater for them, imagine how many potential customers you are losing out on.

In short, it's all about how accessible your premises, vehicle, restaurant etc. are to them. So it's really important for hospitality establishments to provide the right facilities for the disabled (and this will soon be one of the basic criteria for grading by the Tourism Grading Council of SA).

"It's a fact that we do not have enough 'disabled beds' in SA for 2010," says Karen Coetsee, a disabilities consultant and contributor to www.disabledtravel.co.za. "Most rooms for the disabled here do not comply with the basic standards and only 22% of those advertised as 'accessible' are really disabled-friendly. The Cape Town tourism website lists about 183 places for the disabled but some have admitted to having stairways and others bathrooms that are too small. Facilities for people with visual and hearing problems are even scarcer than for those with impaired mobility."

Accessibility refers to how easy it is for a person to approach or use a facility independently without the

- Is a suitable means of calling for help available?
- Are your thresholds, doorways and passages wide enough for wheelchairs?
- Are your cupboards, switches etc. within reach of a person in a wheelchair?
- Are customers with hearing impairments informed of anything that might affect their privacy or safety, such as housekeeping, room service and fire drills?
- If a person with visual impairment is occupying a room alone, do staff offer to orientate them with regard to the furniture and facilities in the room?

The disabled should be treated like any other person, i.e. with consideration and without condescension.

- Offer to assist them but wait until the offer has been accepted before doing so.
- Speak directly to them and not through a companion.
- Never ask what their impairment is. If they want you to know what it is they will tell you.
- Remember that people with similar impairments often cope differently, so don't expect uniformity.
- Never lean on someone's wheelchair as it's an intrusion of their space.
- When offering assistance to a blind person, allow them to take your arm; you should guide rather than lead or propel them. To help them sit down, place their hand on the back of the chair and tell them what you've done. When talking to them, always introduce yourself and the people with you, and always say when you are leaving.
- When dealing with a deaf person establish if they can lip read. Look directly at them and speak slowly and clearly. Face the light and keep your mouth free. If there are difficulties, use written notes. If there's a need to evacuate the building, make sure deaf people understand what is happening.

As South Africans we stand together in unity, so can our hospitality industry afford not to make provision for the disabled?

The world is full of challenged travellers and the key to attracting them is accessibility.

need for special arrangements. So what's required is to provide accessible public toilets, accommodation, services, equipment, transport, parking and tourist attractions, not to mention information for the disabled and staff with the right attitude.

How accessible is your establishment? To help you assess it objectively, here are some guidelines:

- Are your rooms for the disabled as close to the front desk as possible, which is where they should be?

LET'S FLY THE FLAG HIGH

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THE LONG AWAITED KICK OFF FOR 2010 IS barely months away. At this stage we should have gone through the preparations and have everything in place to welcome the Soccer World Cup and all that it brings. The world will have its eyes fixed on our country. We will be visited by thousands of soccer enthusiasts who in turn will be depending on us as hosts to make their stay and experience as enjoyable and memorable as possible.

So now is the time to make sure you have dotted all your i's and crossed all your t's. In the past months we have been systematically preparing for the World Cup and so should have bookings in place and deposits paid. With only a few months left, we now have to make sure we deliver on what we've promised.

Our employees and staff play vital roles in ensuring the smooth running of our operations. It is at this time that we need to take stock of what our human resources requirements will be during the World Cup period and then to plan accordingly.

So often we just expect our staff to work long hours and do overtime. Rather meet with your staff in advance and discuss these issues with them. Determine their need and days off requirements and formulate a policy regarding these matters. If you

With the 2010 World Cup almost upon us, now's the time to ensure you've left nothing to chance.

are fully booked for the World Cup period, then you might need to bring in temporary extra staff to help out. Remember, there will be a huge demand in bigger centres for skilled temporary labour so don't wait until the last moment to make these arrangements.

Ensure that your staff know what will be expected of them and arrange to provide them with skills development timeously if they don't already have

the necessary skills. Brush up on all the skills required in your business. Make sure you capture all relevant information about your guests so that when they arrive, your staff will already know who they are dealing with. This is where the information in your database will assist. When making their bookings, each guest would have given you useful information, such as what games they'll be watching and what special requirements they might have. You'll now be able to prepare your staff accordingly.

Make sure your staff, especially your reception staff, are familiar with what's happening in your area. Get the World Cup fixture list so you can inform your guests on what is happening, such as which teams are playing who and where and when. Remember, your guests will depend on you for up-to-date information.

It's always more professional if staff wear uniforms and name tags for easy identification. It also boosts their morale and gives them a feeling of being part of an important team. Make sure the name tags are readable.

Place orders for supplies well in advance so you aren't caught with too little stock. Imagine running out of guest amenities or even food! Plan your menus well in advance to ensure your order lists are relevant to what you will be serving.

Remember too that your suppliers might not be able to come up with what you want in time over the World Cup period due to the pressure and demand.

The emphasis for all of us stakeholders during the World Cup will be on our service delivery. Now more than ever we will have to provide top level service to the world. So make sure your staff understand what top level service is and what it requires of them. And when it's all over, don't forget to reward them for jobs well done.

I wish you the best over this exciting period and thank you for your contribution towards making South Africa the dream destination it is.

Fly the SA flag high!