

HOW YOUR NEXT HOLIDAY CAN BRIDGE DIVIDES WITHIN COMMUNITIES

We might talk about ‘sightseeing’, but travel is about so much more than simply seeing the sights. Especially considering that in the UK around 360,000 people are registered blind and around two million people are living with some form of vision impairment.

Although perhaps less publicised, there are actually dedicated travel agencies who work to support visually-impaired travellers plan their trips.

Responsible Travel – based in Brighton – curate travel experiences with ethical responsibility at the core, for the planet and also with each individual’s needs in mind; *Traveleyes* – soon to relaunch following the pandemic – was created by Amar Latif,

watches and phones locked away at the entrance, there is absolutely no light inside. Temporarily, I am completely bereft of vision, equipped with just a cane and the supportive voice of my blind guide.

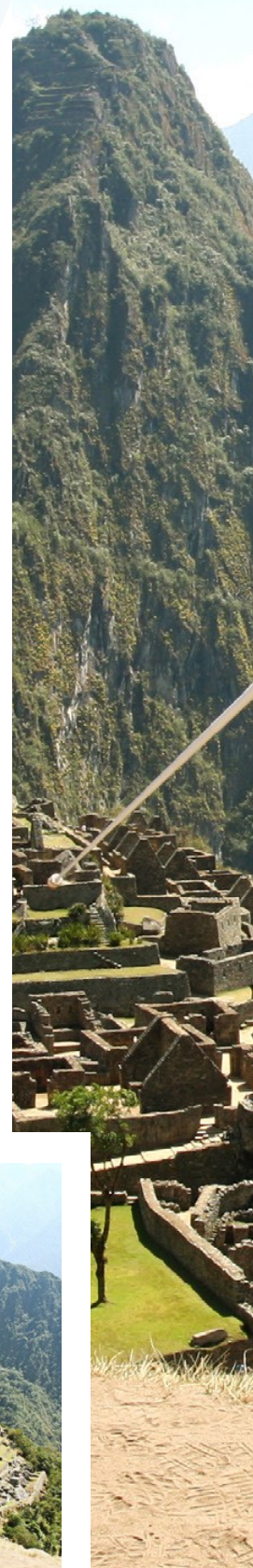
The tourism industry can play a huge role in breaking down boundaries and prejudices in society, and – as industry professional, Mandy Jung explains – it’s a key component of professional training these days too:

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the self-dubbed “blind guy who wants to show you the world”, and pairs sighted and visually-impaired travellers, opening up new perspectives for both partners and building bridges across communities.

And that got me thinking. Travel is one of the most incredible ways of opening our minds and hearts to new opportunities and ideas. Being in new, unfamiliar spaces forces us to see things differently and embrace alternative ways of approaching the world.

So, in Hamburg I visited *Dialogue in the Dark*, an immersive experience that guides visitors through common everyday situations... in total darkness. With





“I had a module called responsible tourism as part of my Tourism and Leisure Management degree,” Mandy tells me, before sharing a story from her training that sounds surprisingly like my recent trip to Hamburg.

“They blindfolded us – literally you couldn’t see a thing - and then they walked us through the town like that. They even walked us up hills and staircases – it was terrifying... but eye opening. It was very interesting to experience how people who cannot see experience a city, because otherwise you don’t think about it. The person next to me was describing all the things they could see, from guiding me up the stairs to the colours of the trees... even pointing out squirrels.”

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Taking the time to witness the world through another’s eyes (and other senses, of course) isn’t only educational for those working in the tourism industry but can be an enriching experience for anyone to try.

Dans Le Noir? is a novel chain of pitch-black restaurants where diners are served by blind and partially sighted waiters and experience the fullest sensation of taste, without the interference of sight. With restaurants in several European hotspots including Paris, London and Madrid, this convivial restaurant where the person next to you could be royalty without you ever knowing is both a humbling and very inspiring dining experience. You’ll never look at a plate of food in the same way again.

Dialogue in the Dark is a global initiative with interactive exhibitions in every continent. So, on your next visit to Melbourne, Milan or maybe Mumbai, take some time out from seeing the sights and connect with your other senses, as well as enhancing your ability to appreciate life from the perspective of someone living without sight. Of course, we can’t compare one event to a lifetime of experience. But dedicated events and tourism focused on disabled people’s experience can open up the sector to realise that being accessible is not only wanted, but sorely needed.

The world is a big, big place and in so many ways we’ve sought to shrink it and bring it together. Planes can cross continents in a couple of hours, and the internet brings images of other planets to your living room in nanoseconds. But perhaps the most challenging gap to bridge is that of different life experiences within the same community, and initiatives like these within the tourism sector may be just the tool we need. ■

✍️ AUTHOR: **Daniel Edward**, a freelance travel writer and presenter
 🌐 WEB: danieledwarduk.com