Inclusive Tourism: How the Eden Project is Leading the Way

Inclusivity has always been integral to the Eden Project’s mission and values, but winning a major national tourism award has underlined just what it does on a daily basis.

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Judy Thorn
Visitor Experience Manager, Eden Project

Sometimes this does involve running alternative sessions or performances that are a little more informal, she notes, but the aim is always to provide something that is as close to the general experience as possible.

“The Eden Project is about connecting people through conversations and shared experiences, regardless of shape, size, ability or gender,” says Thorn, “so making sure that we can facilitate everybody is vital to giving people the confidence to interact with Eden – and with each other.”
Deep roots

For the Eden Project, VisitEngland’s half day spent on-site during their Awards selection process made it clear that inclusive tourism was central to the work of the educational charity.

The dramatic global garden, dubbed ‘the eighth wonder of the world’ by some, was subsequently named the country’s best visitor attraction for inclusivity at the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence 2017 (Inclusive Tourism category).

“One of the things we were recognised for was that we don’t just have a single ‘accessibility and inclusivity’ ambassador. Instead, we understand the value of having ambassadors in all different areas to provide an accessible and inclusive experience throughout,” says Thorn.

A recent internal audit, for example, has emphasised the importance of communicating accessibility and inclusivity improvements to all team members. “This doesn’t cost anything,” stresses Thorn, “but raises awareness of the services we have in-house.”

Having people within the wider team working within the community to invite people in is also very important, she adds. “As well as keeping elderly people active, bringing in walking groups can help people who might be lonely, for example.”

Better by design

As a leading authority on inclusive and sensory design, The Sensory Trust has been an important long-term partner in helping the Eden Project provide an excellent visitor experience across the board.

An external perspective can be very important in giving you a reality check – and helping identify where you may be able to refresh your approach, explains Thorn.

“The Sensory Trust is very good at picking up on small tweaks that you can make to ensure that you’re not necessarily changing your product, just opening it up to a wider audience,” she says.

“Some of these changes may be small and relatively inexpensive, such as ensuring that people are not put off from visiting by incomplete information or a lack of large print menus. But, at the end of the day, they can make all the difference,” she concludes.

Judy Thorn
Visitor Experience Manager
Eden Project