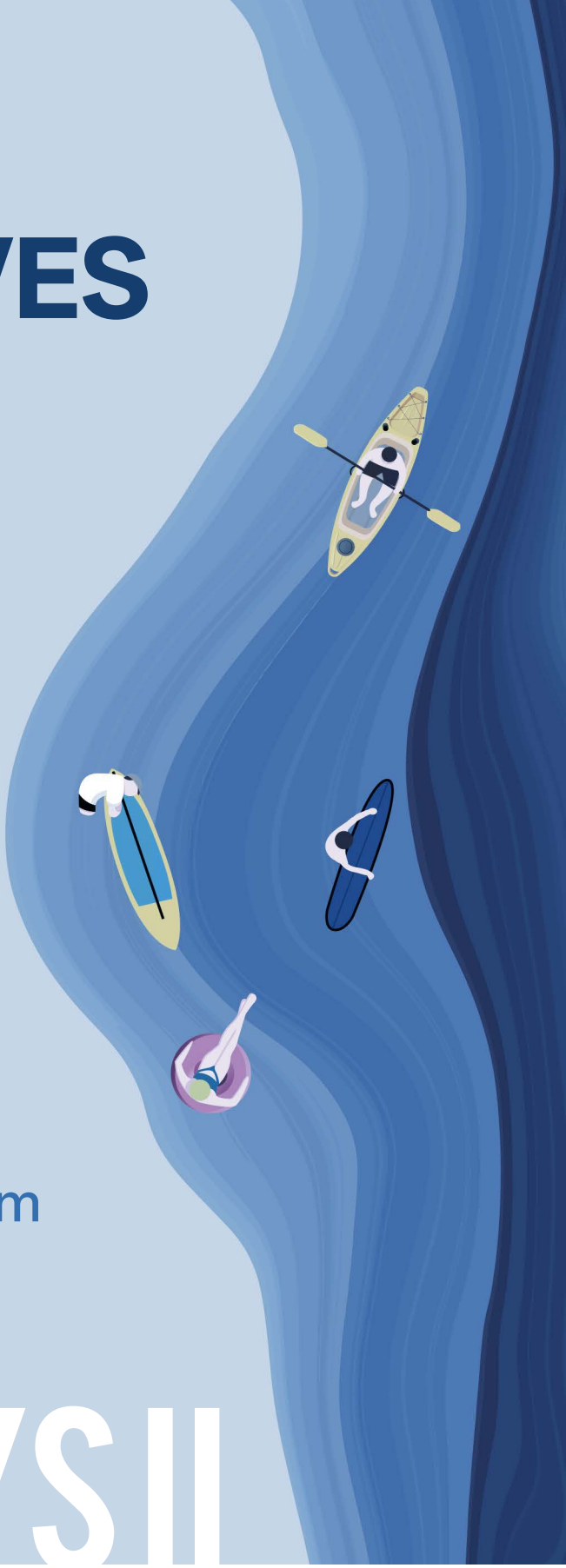
MAKING WAVES FOR ALL IN TOURISM



Guidelines for Accessible and Inclusive Water-Based Tourism

RIVERWAYS II

Interreg

Co-funded by the European Union

Estonia – Latvia

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Co-funded by the European Union

Estonia – Latvia

This project was financially supported by the Interreg Estonia-Latvia. This guidlines expresses the findings and views of the authors only. No program management body is responsible for how this information may be used.

Project name and ID: „Development of water tourism as nature and active tourism component in Latvia and Estonia – Riverways 2"

Project partners:
Kurzeme Planning Region, Riga Planning Region, Vidzeme Planning Region, University of Tartu, Tartu County Tourism Foundation, Dienvidkurzeme Municipality, Liepāja City Municipality Central Administration, Kuldīga Municipality, Jūrmala State City Municipality, Ķekava County Municipality, Ādaži County Municipality, Valmiera Municipality Government, Madona Municipality, Valka Municipality Council, Limbaži Municipality, Green Riverland Partnership NGO, Otepää Rural Municipality Government, Luunja Municipality, Antsla Municipality, Setomaa Municipality Government, Võru Rural Municipality.

Project webpage: www.riverways.eu

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Special thanks for their contribution to all previously listed project partners.

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately 71% of the Earth's surface is covered by seas and oceans, as well as by inland water bodies, including rivers, lakes, etc. Water is one of the most important attractions for tourism. Lakes, rivers, seas, and even small inland water bodies offer opportunities for relaxation, sports, and experiencing nature. In addition to visiting beaches, water tourism also includes boating and canoeing, fishing, diving, relaxing in spas, and other activities that bring people to or on the water. Water shapes destinations, creates experiences, and influences the length of the season. Water offers both relaxation and adventure opportunities, serving as a source of natural beauty and a catalyst for tourism businesses. Water bodies are both an opportunity and a responsibility. The role of the service provider is to ensure that water is accessed safely and respectfully, and used sustainably, so that natural values and visitor experiences are preserved for the future.

Water-based tourism initiatives can transform water into a sustainable economic and social resource, while tourism can leverage it as a driver of regional development, conservation of unique ecosystems, and enhancement of the quality of life for both visitors and local communities.

Water tourism can be categorized into various types, including those based on primary purpose, modes of transportation, activities, services, and tourism products. For example, tourism product represents a combination of different aspects (characteristics of the places visited, means of transport, types of accommodation, specific activities at the destination, etc.) around a specific centre of interest, such as nature tours, life on farms, visits to historical and cultural sites, visits to a particular city, the practice of specific sports, the beach, etc.). Water tourism offers a variety of different kinds of services, for example:

- **Vacation and relaxation:** beach activities, spa services, swimming, sunbathing, cruises, and pleasure trips by boat.
- **Active holiday and sports:** canoeing and kayaking, rafting, diving, snorkelling, fishing, waterskiing, surfing, SUP-boarding.
- **Adventure and experience:** whitewater rafting, visiting water-related sightseeing spots like rapids, water caves; extreme activities like swimming with sharks or other water animals, diving into caves, parasailing.
- **Culture and nature:** different nature observation (whale watching, bird watching in wetlands), cultural trips along rivers (e.g., Venetian gondolas), historical boat trips, canoeing with historical wooden canoes, SUP board hiking.
- **Transportation services:** boat trips between the mainland and islands, transport of overseas passengers and coastal waters, whether scheduled or not, renting of pleasure boats with crew for sea and coastal water transport (for example, fishing cruises).

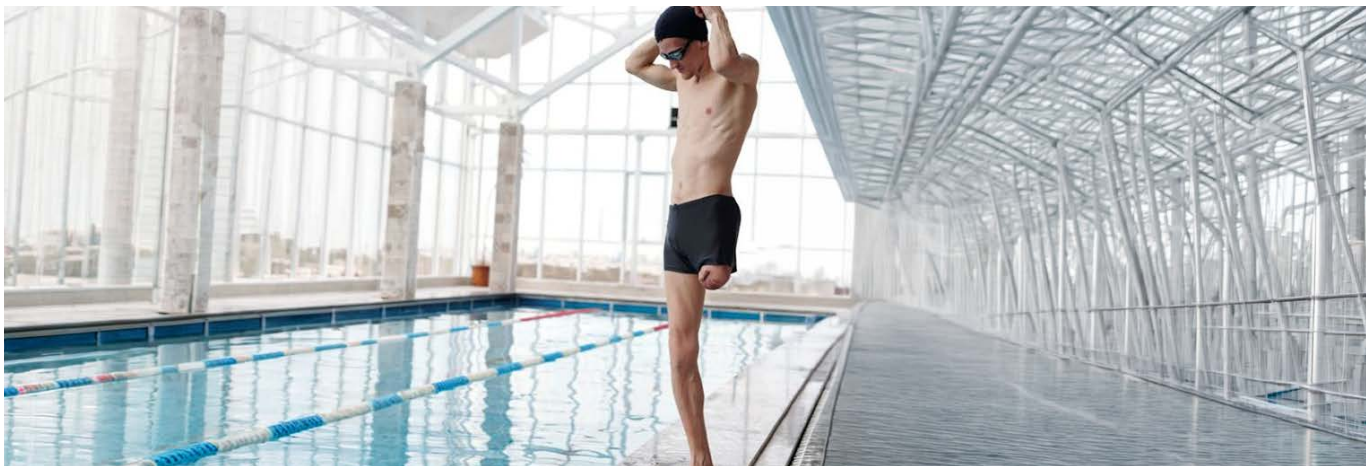


Travel should be comfortable, easy, and affordable for everyone. Unfortunately, for many people with accessibility needs, this remains distant and unattainable. For example, Załuska, Kwiatkowska-Ciotucha, and Grzeskowiak (2022) point out in their study on the experiences of people with disabilities in tourism, that for half of the study participants, travelling is inaccessible due to a lack of money, but in half of the cases, there were accessibility issues, such as poorly trained staff, insufficient information about the services offered, or lack of accessible services offered.

Estonia and Latvia have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 30(5)(e) of the Convention obliges states to ensure that recreational, leisure, tourism, and sports services are accessible to persons with disabilities on an equal basis. In practice, this means accessibility is not an "add-on" but a norm for designing services. This, in turn, requires service providers and society at large to adopt universal design. Universal design refers to the process of creating products and environments that can be used by as many people as possible, without requiring adaptation or specialized design. At the same time, it is essential to remember that accessibility development must consider all members of society, not just individuals with disabilities. Products, services, and spaces must be equally accessible to everyone. However, equal access to services is not yet fully understood, and accessibility remains a challenge for many tourism services.

People with disabilities love to travel and are eager to explore the wide range of opportunities offered by tourism operators. Their choices and experiences are influenced by accessibility needs arising from their health condition: mobility, visual, hearing, speech, and intellectual disabilities, mental disorders, and chronic illnesses. If a service provider has taken these needs into account, then it can be said that the service is accessible and can be consumed and enjoyed by all visitor groups.

Regularly offered services in spas, swimming pools, and saunas support health, well-being, and social inclusion. Although many people with accessibility needs require detailed information about the services offered and a certain degree of predictability, changes in everyday life are important and welcome. The primary issue to address is how to deliver the optimal water-tourism experience for visitors with diverse limitations and needs.



This guide provides water tourism operators with an overview of the primary accessibility needs and practical guidance on enhancing the accessibility of water tourism services. The guide addresses various disabilities, mental disorders, and age-related characteristics. Multiple disabilities (e.g., a person diagnosed with both intellectual and physical disabilities) are not addressed separately, but by combining specific recommendations, it is possible to arrive at solutions that are also suitable for visitors with multiple disabilities. These principles also make services more convenient and accessible for various other target groups, including children, the elderly, foreign visitors, and individuals with different accessibility needs.

1 Accessible customer journeys in water tourism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding the role of accessible service design in shaping inclusive and enjoyable water tourism experiences.
2. Recognizing the importance of clear, up-to-date, and predictable information in enabling participation in water tourism for visitors with disabilities.
3. Appreciating the value of planning water tourism services around the full customer journey, from initial interest to post-visit experience sharing.

Water offers people very special experiences on physical, mental, emotional, and aesthetic levels. The relationship between water and tourism can be understood from a dual perspective, where water serves as both a valuable resource and a tourist attraction. Various types of water bodies support a wide range of tourism forms. While water tourism encompasses a wide variety of environments, activities, and services, this diversity also creates significant differences in how visitors access, perceive, and use tourism experiences. The multiplicity of water-based tourism forms means that visitor experiences are shaped not only by the natural setting but also by the design of services, infrastructure, information, and interactions throughout the entire visit. For visitors with disabilities and other access needs, these factors are particularly decisive, as barriers can arise at any stage of the customer journey - from the initial idea of participation to the sharing of experiences after the visit. Therefore, understanding and designing accessible customer journeys in water tourism is essential to ensure that water-based experiences are inclusive, safe, predictable, and consistent in terms of accessibility and difficulty, and enjoyable for all visitors.

Clear advance information and planned activities are key to creating an accessible experience. Information about the services should be easily findable and updated regularly. The service description should be written in simple language and include pictures. It should clearly outline where and for how long the activity will take place, what the activity's stages entail, including the types of sound and water contact that can be expected, where breaks will be taken, and the location of the toilets. On-site, service quality is enhanced by smaller groups, a relaxed pace, free-of-charge participation for support persons, and the opportunity to conduct a short "dry run" before entering the water. Safety is ensured by stable equipment, accessible entry into the water or boat, a pre-agreed break signal, and the option to stop the activity if necessary.

The principle of accessible visitor services is simple: 1) anticipate needs, 2) adapt the environment and communication, 3) offer choices, 4) control, and gather feedback to continuously improve the service. The goal is to make water-related experiences accessible to all visitors, regardless of their abilities.

In practice, this means that, for example, a fishing trip for wheelchair users is planned with a stable boat and accessible quay facilities; audio instructions and tactile aids are added for visitors with visual impairments; and rafting is only offered to participants with intellectual disabilities on calmer

sections, in smaller groups, and after thorough preliminary training and a step-by-step overview. This design enhances the experience for everyone, including families, seniors, and visitors with temporary disabilities, and improves the overall quality of the service. At the same time, the service provider should also consider that when developing accessible services, other factors affecting access to the service, such as public roads, access points, and bus stops, should also be accessible.



The stages of the visit are listed below, and each stage is accompanied by an explanation or suggestion of what is important for people with disabilities at that stage. More specific restrictions, needs, and requirements arising from the specific nature of needs are described in the subsections on accessibility needs.

1. The thought, idea, or dream of going on a trip, hike, or spa

The idea to go on a trip may arise spontaneously, be a tradition, be prompted by repeated advertisements, or be suggested by a family member, friend, or even an activity leader. The idea may also arise from seeing a direct advertisement, a program, or someone sharing an experience of the service being accessible and available. Consequently, it is necessary to advertise accessible services so that the relevant target group is aware of and interested in using the service.

2. Exploring options and planning

People with accessible needs and their companions usually plan their trips very thoroughly and therefore need as much advance information about the service provider as possible. It is therefore strongly recommended that every tourism operator create a reliable, comprehensive (but not overloaded) website and/or social media profile. Several studies have confirmed that one of the primary issues with service accessibility is the presence of missing or outdated information. If accessible services are not available, this information should also be highlighted in your information channels: Unfortunately, our services are not accessible to people with disabilities. Sharing honest information saves both service providers and potential consumers a lot of time and energy in searching for and sharing information.

3. Booking, specifying the purchase of a service

The security, clarity, and accessibility of the booking and purchasing process affect all visitors. However, people with disabilities are often particularly sensitive to this issue because their circumstances may create additional accessibility needs. When booking a service, it is worthwhile to prepare questions related to accessibility needs in electronic forms or standard questionnaires. It is also important to share information about payment for services before arriving at the service provider (e.g., card payment options with voice settings, contactless payments, etc.) or about deferred payment options. Many people, especially seniors or those with cognitive impairments, prefer personal assistance when making a booking. To support this need, it is useful to offer a client service via phone or various online chat options.

4. Arrival

The initial experience at the destination (transport, reception, and first impression) depends on the physical environment, technology, and the staff's awareness and attitudes. The first impression lays the foundation for the subsequent experience and consists of many details, such as how noticeable the entrance was, how parking is organized, whether and what information signs and directions guided visitors to the reception and/or service-related activities, whether the company's staff smiled and expressed joy at the arrival of guests, etc. The first impression of the service and the subsequent service experience are influenced by the presence of trained staff and an accessible environment.

5. Experience

Consumption of purchased services. The way in which all service components and their interactions are designed plays a crucial role in this regard. For example, how a wheelchair user gets on board the ship, how their seat is arranged, and whether they have the opportunity to view the surrounding nature during the trip, enjoy food and drinks, and so on. Additionally, equal inclusion with other service users, effective communication, and emotional management are crucial.

6. Departure from the service

End of service and departure must be organised and carried out in a high-quality manner: an accessible visit to the souvenir shop, friendly attention, asking for feedback on the service, opportunity to conveniently return the equipment used during the service, etc. Feedback on services could include questions about accessibility, helping align services more closely with customers' actual needs. Contact with the service provider must be maintained until the guest ends it themselves and the final words of the communication have been exchanged.

7. Sharing and remembering

Sharing experiences and emotions with loved ones: photos, souvenirs, emotions. Opportunity for follow-up communication and writing reviews on Google, TripAdvisor, etc. As a service provider, share relevant information with guests through personal follow-up or through the company's public communication channels. Include information about accessibility for individuals with various disabilities.

In summary, to create an accessible service, involve people with disabilities and their loved ones in its development. Only they are the true experts who can help create the best solutions based on their accessibility needs.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Water tourism experiences are shaped not only by natural environments but also by information, infrastructure, and interactions across the entire customer journey.
- Clear, up-to-date advance information and predictable service processes are essential for accessibility, safety, and positive visitor experiences, especially for people with accessibility needs.
- Accessible services rely on anticipating needs, adapting environments and communication, offering choices, and continuously improving through feedback.
- Designing services inclusively benefits a wide range of visitors, including people with disabilities, families, seniors, and those with temporary limitations, while improving overall service quality.
- Meaningful accessibility is best achieved by involving people with accessibility needs and their close ones directly in service development, as they are the key experts on real access needs.

2 General safety principles for water tourism activities

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding the key safety risks in water tourism and the responsibilities of service providers.
2. Knowing the practical principles for planning, equipment, staff competence, participant guidance, and emergency preparedness.
3. Knowing how to integrate safety, inclusivity, and service quality into everyday water tourism operations.

Water tourism offers unique opportunities for recreation and discovery, but it also involves specific risks related to the natural environment, equipment, and human behaviour. For entrepreneurs providing water-based services, ensuring safety must always be the highest priority. Safe practices protect both customers and businesses, building trust and reputation.

1. Risk assessment and planning

Before launching any activity, conduct a thorough risk assessment to ensure a safe and secure environment. Identify potential hazards, such as currents, tides, changing weather conditions, cold water, and obstacles (e.g., rocks, boats, fishing nets). Develop clear safety protocols for both normal conditions and emergency situations. Always adjust the challenge level to match the participants' skills.

2. Equipment and infrastructure

All equipment must be regularly inspected, well-maintained, and suitable for professional use. Life jackets or buoyancy aids are mandatory in all activities on open water. Boats, kayaks, paddleboards, and safety gear must meet national safety standards. Ensure that emergency and first-aid equipment (e.g., rescue throw lines, whistles, waterproof communication devices) is readily available and in good working condition. Clear signage and safe access points (piers, docks, or shore areas) reduce accidents.

3. Competent staff and training

Well-trained staff is the backbone of safe water tourism. Guides and instructors must be certified, physically fit, and trained in water rescue and first aid, including CPR. Staff should regularly practice emergency drills and refresh their qualifications. One responsible person should always be in charge of monitoring safety during activities.

4. Information and instructions for participants

Never assume that participants have prior knowledge. Provide clear safety briefings before every activity, covering correct use of equipment, signals, behaviour in emergencies, and respect for the natural environment. Instructions should be adapted to different age groups, languages, and cultural backgrounds. Encourage participants to ask questions and check that they understand key points.

5. Inclusivity and accessibility needs

Water tourism should be accessible to as many people as possible, including participants with physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments. Safety measures must be adapted to ensure equal participation without increasing risks. Before the activity, discuss the customer's (and their caregiver's, if present) individual needs, abilities, and possible limitations. Provide or allow the use of adapted equipment (e.g., stable kayaks, support handles, adaptive seating). Use clear, tailored instructions delivered verbally, visually, or through demonstration. Staff should receive basic training in working respectfully with customers with disability needs, and group sizes may need to be reduced for better supervision. Ensure that access points, changing areas, and facilities are safe and accessible to people with disabilities. Emergency procedures should also consider the specific requirements of these participants. At the same time, staff should keep in mind that not all disabilities are visible, and therefore should avoid making assumptions based on appearance.

6. Monitoring weather conditions

Weather and water conditions must be checked before and during activities. Strong winds, waves, storms, fog, or sudden temperature drops can create hazardous situations. If conditions are unsafe, activities must be postponed or cancelled. Safety decisions should never be compromised by commercial pressure.

7. Emergency preparedness

Every operator must have a clear emergency action plan that is known to all staff. This includes procedures for accidents, lost participants, hypothermia, and communication with rescue services. Ensure that emergency contacts and local rescue units are informed about your activities when necessary. Practice evacuation and rescue scenarios regularly.

8. Promoting a safety culture

Beyond rules and equipment, safety is a mindset. Encourage staff and participants to look out for one another, to speak up if something feels unsafe, and to follow established procedures. Maintaining a culture of responsibility and care enhances both safety and customer experience.

For water tourism entrepreneurs, safety is not a one-time task but a continuous process of prevention, training, monitoring, and improvement. By embedding safety into every aspect of service design and delivery (incl. making activities inclusive for all participants), businesses can protect lives, meet legal requirements, and create enjoyable experiences that keep customers returning.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Safety is the highest priority in water tourism and must be systematically integrated into all activities to protect participants, staff, and service providers while building trust and reputation.
- Effective safety management relies on thorough risk assessment, appropriate equipment and infrastructure, competent and well-trained staff, and clear instructions for participants.
- Inclusive and accessible safety practices are essential, requiring adaptations to meet diverse physical, sensory, and cognitive needs without increasing risk.
- Continuous monitoring of weather and water conditions, combined with clear emergency preparedness plans, is critical to preventing and responding to incidents.
- A strong safety culture is based on shared responsibility, awareness, and ongoing improvement. It enhances both safety outcomes and overall service quality in water tourism.

3 Different social groups in water tourism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding the diversity and prevalence of mobility, hearing, visual, and speech impairments.
2. Understanding intellectual disability and mental disorders.
3. Understanding the diverse needs, motivations, and abilities of different age groups and generations in water tourism.
4. Identifying functional limitations and corresponding support needs of various social groups in water tourism.
5. Applying respectful and effective communication principles.
6. Designing and evaluating accessible water tourism environments and services.
7. Planning inclusive service journeys from arrival to follow-up.

3.1. People with disabilities

Visitors with disabilities have specific requirements for using services that are often related to health and deviate from the general norm. People with disabilities always have specific needs, but not all people with specific needs have disabilities. Specific needs can range from health concerns to specific mental, behavioural, or emotional needs, such as hypersensitivity, behavioural and/or emotional disorders, phobias, etc.

A disability is a loss or deviation in a person's anatomical, physiological, or psychological structure or function which, in combination with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, prevents participation in society on an equal basis with others (Social Benefits for Persons with Disabilities Act, 1999). Disabilities are categorized into six main types: mobility, visual, hearing, intellectual, speech, and combined disabilities, as well as other disabilities resulting from a medical condition.

At the end of September 2025, people with disabilities comprised 7.5% of Estonia's total population, or 102,863 individuals. Of these people, nearly 49,000 have been diagnosed with a severe disability, 45,000 with a moderate disability, and less than 10,000 with a profound disability. As of August 2025, 129,865 cases of functional impairments, of which a person may have more than one, had been diagnosed. In 2024, there were more than 221,000 people with disabilities in Latvia. In 2024, Latvia had the highest proportion of people reporting a disability, with 41.2% indicating limitations, including 11.1% reporting severe limitations and 30.1% reporting some limitations.

The following subsections provide an overview of various disabilities and the associated needs. However, we ask the reader to bear in mind that the specific needs associated with each disability may vary in some respects.

3.1.1. Mobility impairment

Overview of the target group and their specific needs

Mobility impairment is the most common type of disability, approximately half of people with disabilities experience a mobility impairment. Mobility function deviation was diagnosed in August 2025 for 63,821 people in Estonia. By 2024, 42,383 people in Latvia had been diagnosed with restricted mobility. *(Different terms are used regarding the terms used in national databases.)*

Mobility impairments include disabilities of various types, severity, and duration: paralysis, weakness, movement coordination disorders, amputations, head and spinal cord injuries, and congenital cerebral palsy. People with reduced mobility have limited mobility and may have problems not only moving but also grasping, lifting, and holding objects. Difficulties with mobility may also occur with other activities. For example, they may not be able to write, dress, eat, or do other activities that are usually performed without difficulty. A separate group consists of diseases that lead to mobility impairments, some of which are progressive: multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, etc. Mobility can be temporarily affected by a fracture or by restricted movement due to illness, trauma, or a condition.



People with reduced mobility use a variety of assistive devices, such as wheelchairs (including electric wheelchairs), walkers, canes, crutches, and grabbers, depending on their needs. Many people with reduced mobility may not use assistive devices. For example, their ability to move is restricted due to arm impairments, back problems leading to nerve damage, and health conditions causing numbness in the legs, etc.

Some people with mobility impairments may have multiple disabilities, such as deaf wheelchair users. As a rule, people with multiple disabilities do not move around without an assistant, at least outdoors. Independent wheelchair users require greater attention when designing the environment, as people with specific needs depend on caregivers' skills and strength to overcome environmental obstacles (thresholds, sidewalk curbs, steep slopes, both natural and artificial). With help, they can overcome higher obstacles. Independent wheelchair users can only move over obstacles with a certain angle of inclination and height difference. If there is also partial paralysis of the arms, the obstacles and slopes that can be overcome independently are lower, depending on the severity of the disability.

Suggestions for communications and targeted information with the target group

- When interacting with people with mobility impairments, it is important to be polite and not to overdo it with offers of help.
- Before offering help, ask if it is needed. Find out how you can help and follow the instructions you are given.
- Always talk to the person with the disability, not only their companion.
- Speak in a normal, respectful manner, unnatural sympathy is inappropriate.
- When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair, try to find something to sit on to be at eye level with them.
- Do not use slang used by people with disabilities, and be careful when making jokes. Do not use the word "invalid".
- A person with a mobility disability is just as valuable as anyone else, they go to work, to the store, and move around. There is no need to be afraid of these expressions.
- Create an environment/atmosphere where people can be as independent and "disability-free" as possible. For example, come out from behind a high table when dealing with a wheelchair user.
- Make the path of movement obstacle-free. People feel more comfortable when they are not the source of problems (e.g., their arrival does not require moving tables or chairs, searching for a disabled toilet key, or cleaning it out, as it has been used as a storage room, etc.).
- If necessary, assist with opening doors, moving around, and crossing thresholds. Use portable ramps to cross steps, but make sure they are safe and properly installed beforehand.



Recommendations and good examples of accessibility in water tourism for people with mobility impairments

Communication and before arrival

Accessible website *(compliant with WCAG 2.1, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)* and, at the same time, accurate information on the website about what services are available and how accessibility is ensured for people with reduced mobility. Contact information for accessibility related questions (email or phone) should be clearly visible on the website.

In addition to text, it is recommended to include information on roads, entrances, boat bridges, quays, boats, etc., with photos and precise measurements, so visitors can assess as accurately as possible whether the service provider's description of the services meets their needs.

When sharing information with people with mobility impairments, it is important to be as specific as possible about which types of mobility impairments the service is accessible to. For example, a boat may be adapted for a person in a wheelchair, with a suitable place for the wheelchair, but the other seats may not have backrests or other supports. In this case, the boat trip would not be suitable for a person who can move around but cannot sit for long periods without support.

Arrival and using the service

Recommendations for environmental adjustments for people with mobility impairments

- Parking spaces located as close as possible to the service, e.g., access to a boat dock.
- Entrances are wide enough and free of obstacles for wheelchair access.
- If the entrance to the service provider is closed by a fence, door, or other barrier, it must open automatically or be possible to open by a person in a wheelchair, e.g., the door opens inwards. The button is at a height that can be easily reached while sitting in a chair (suggested height: 85-110 cm).
- The recommended width of passageways is 1.2-1.3 m.
- At turning points and manoeuvring areas (e.g., near doors): at least 1.5 x 1.5 m of free space so that a wheelchair can turn.



- The surface of walkways must be flat, hard, stable, and non-slip, e.g., asphalt, concrete, high-quality stone slabs with tight joints. Wooden material covered with a mesh to prevent slipping, with no gaps wider than 5 mm between the boards, may also be used. Unsuitable covering materials for movement routes are cobblestones, loose gravel or gravel, bark mulch, or soft sand/soil.



- Hard, stable, and non-slip walkways have been specially created for walking along the shore and in the water, allowing people to go swimming as independently as possible.



- If ramps are used in addition to stairs, the average slope must not exceed 6% and handrails must be provided on both sides of the ramps.
- There must be a reasonable number of seats and rest areas in the area where the service is provided.
- Platforms or quays must be at least 1.5 m wide, non-slip, and edged with contrasting edge markings.
- Stairs, (boat) bridges, and other objects requiring attention in the service provider's area must be marked with contrasting markings and limited handrails.
- Movement between land and watercraft must be facilitated in a manner that is as stable as possible, sufficiently wide for people with reduced mobility to move around in wheelchairs, and restricted by edge markings and handrails (boat bridges, floating docks, pontoons, stairs, ramps).

- Access to watercraft must be designed for wheelchair users as well as those using walking frames or canes. Various hydraulic lifts and ramps can be used for access, provided they are stable and covered with non-slip material. Ramps leading from land to watercraft must be equipped with handrails or other safety and support solutions (e.g., a protruding boat bridge with a handrail that allows easy access to the boat).



- Adaptations on boats for people with accessibility or specific needs: low gunwales, wider bottoms (wider design), separate access hatches, a separate area for wheelchair users. Important are non-slippery surfaces on board and contrasting visual markers (especially near edges).
- A clear and uninterrupted system of information signs and signposts that helps people with mobility difficulties to easily find their way around and reach their desired destination without expending excessive energy.
- Accessible toilets and other service-related rooms (1.5 m x 1.5 m manoeuvring space, support bars, sufficiently wide entrance and walkways). More spacious toilets are also necessary for visitors with children, for example, when one of the caregivers must accompany the child to the toilet.
- Trained staff who understand the possible limitations of people with mobility difficulties when using services and are therefore able to provide skilled assistance and support in providing tailored services to visitors with specific needs.

Examples of accessibility

- *Accessible beach: https://www.beachability.org*
- *Accessible docks: https://fwmdocks.com/handicap-accessible-dock*
- Variety of tools and devices for swimming pools: *https://paramobility.com.au*

Safety equipment and associated equipment that will support and ensure the safety of people with mobility impairments

Aids for staying in the water and activities:

- Adapted life jackets – special models for wheelchair users or people with limited arm strength, for example Adaptive Life Jacket (Lj-A) *https://www.pfd-a.com/* which keeps the user on vertical position and face out of the water or the Horizontal Float Vest which is suitable for people who need support in a horizontal position, such as users who are lying down or have a recoiled lower body.

Other types of safety equipment (additional weights, belt supports, etc.):

- Ankle weights – sometimes small weights are used on the ankles to help stabilise the lower body underwater (e.g., if the legs tend to rise to the surface).
- Waist belts or safety belts – used with a belt attachment as additional support to secure the user on a boat or floating platform.
- Safety belts and straps – boats or swimming devices may have additional fastening straps or belt fastenings that hold the body in place and prevent slipping.
- Buoyancy aids/floats/flotation cushions – e.g., special cushions or rubber supports that help keep the body on the surface or support a certain body position.
- Beach/water wheelchair – wheelchairs with large pneumatic tyres that move on sand and float on water *https://www.accessrec.com/waterwheels-water-wheelchairs*
- Floating mats – wider, stable surfaces on which you can sit or lie on the water surface.
- Customised kayaks and canoes – with seats and backrests, additional supports, or stabiliser floats.
- Adaptive surfing board / SUP – wider and more stable boards with handles and supports.
- Adaptive scuba gear – customised diving equipment, e.g., systems that support hand strength.

Feedback and leaving the service

- When leaving the service, whether it be a boat trip, beach visit, or other activity, create convenient conditions for returning rented equipment and paying for the service. For example, at the beach, you can offer contactless returns of rented chairs or shades (QR/SMS/call), nearby collection points on solid ground, simple aids in sand, clear zones and instructions, and automatic deposit refunds. These steps reduce effort, save time, and ensure a dignified, independent experience.
- At the end of the visit, offer opportunities to leave written feedback on-site or online, through direct communication on-site or in writing via e-mail, by filling out a feedback questionnaire on the website, or in another environment that reflects the company's services.



Visitors with mobility impairment in water tourism

Persons and suggestions to support, preparation for the trip/service offer, interaction during the journey/service offer, finishing, and follow-up of the journey/service offer.

Person nr. 1. Wheelchair user. An adult visitor who uses a wheelchair for mobility. Independent in decision-making but requires accessible infrastructure and adapted equipment. The main support needs are: barrier-free access, stable surfaces, adapted watercraft, assistance with transfers, and clear safety procedures.

- Before service, the person needs clear information on the accessibility provided (ramps, piers, toilets, changing areas) and confirmation of the availability of adapted equipment (e.g., stable kayaks, transfer boards), and the possibility to discuss personally (via phone or email) individual needs and preferred level of assistance in advance.
- During the service, the person needs to be ensured step-free access to all activity points, personal assistance from trained staff, and support with transfers and boarding, with consent. Also, it is important to provide clear verbal explanations and demonstrations at eye level regarding the use of necessary service items.
- At the end of the activity, the person needs assistance safely with exiting the equipment and returning to shore. The exiting and returning to the shore may take longer. It is needed to provide more time to finish all activities.
- Follow-up consists of several accessible feedback options: oral feedback during the activity, on-site written feedback, or online written feedback later. It is good practice to provide information about future accessible activities and improvements.

Person nr. 2. A visitor who can walk independently but has limited or no hand function, requiring assistance with tasks involving grip, fastening, or fine motor skills. Main support needs are hands-on assistance, adaptive equipment, patience, and respectful communication.

- Before the service, the person needs to clarify which activities require hand use and what assistance will be provided. Service providers should consider which adaptive solutions (e.g., easy-fastening life jackets, support handles) would be useful and assign a staff member for close assistance if needed.
- During the service, the person needs assistance with putting on safety equipment, handling paddles, and fastening straps. Verbal guidance and physical assistance should be offered to the person only with consent. The service provider should ensure safety instructions are given clearly and that understanding is confirmed.
- At the end of the activity, the person needs support with removing equipment and personal belongings in a calm, unhurried manner. Follow-up activities could include feedback on the adequacy of assistance and equipment adaptations. It is worth considering sharing photos or summaries of the experience, provided by the service offerer, if the visitor wishes.

Person nr. 3. An older adult who walks independently but slowly, with reduced strength, balance, and hand flexibility. Main support needs are extra time, physical support, simplified instructions, and reduced physical demands.

- Before service, the person needs clear information on the various services and which are recommended as low-intensity, stable activities. On the website and via direct communication, clear information should be provided about the duration, pace, and physical effort required. Additional information about appropriate clothing and other items (shoes, glasses, towels, etc.) should be offered. Also encouraging to bring along personal assistive devices if used.
- During the service, it is good to maintain a slower pace and allow frequent breaks, or breaks as needed. As a service provider, assist with boarding, balancing, and handling equipment. While giving instructions and demonstrations, do so calmly and simply.
- At the end of the activity, ensure safe disembarkation and access to seating or rest areas. Monitor for fatigue or cold exposure. For follow-up activities, warm-up facilities and refreshments could be offered if available. Provide reassurance, appreciation, and easy ways to give feedback.
- If the site is a swimming area, marina pier, or other water tourism attraction without personal service, it is essential to ensure a level and obstacle-free circulation route, safety railings and markings along the water's edge, handrails and guardrails in areas where movement is unstable or close to water, and opportunities for rest breaks. Attention should also be paid to information boards and safety equipment that can be used independently by the visitor or by an accompanying assistant.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Mobility impairment is highly prevalent and diverse.
- People with mobility impairments have varying levels of independence, and many can participate fully in tourism activities when environments are well designed, obstacle-free, and supported by appropriate infrastructure and equipment.
- Respectful, person-centred communication is essential, including asking before offering help, addressing the person directly, avoiding assumptions, and creating an atmosphere that supports independence and dignity.
- Accessible water tourism requires thoughtful planning of the entire service journey, from clear pre-arrival information and accessible booking to adapted environments, safe equipment, trained staff, and inclusive activity design.
- Inclusive design and adaptive solutions benefit all visitors, improving safety, comfort, and service quality not only for people with mobility impairments but also for seniors, families, and visitors with temporary limitations.

3.1.2 Hearing impairment

Overview of the target group and their specific needs

Worldwide, about 750 million adults have hearing loss. According to various sources, hearing loss, including hearing impairment, is estimated to affect 5-15% of the population, up to 20%. The prevalence of congenital hearing loss is 1 in 1000 people, and in half cases it is genetic.

There are 5470 people diagnosed with hearing impairment in Estonia, of whom around 1464 are sign language speakers. 754 people with hearing impairment use sign language as their native language, and 710 as a foreign language. There are 115,644 people in Estonia diagnosed with hearing loss. In Latvia in 2024, 2,273 people had a diagnosed hearing impairment according to CSPV data, but the numbers could be higher. In Latvia, approximately 280,000 people have hearing impairments. It is estimated that around one in five people over 65 may have hearing difficulties.

For many people who are hard of hearing, hearing loss develops over a lifetime. People with hearing loss are found in all age groups, but the proportion is higher among older people than younger people.

There are many causes of hearing loss, but the most common is sensorineural, in which the nerves and cells in the inner ear are damaged. This can be caused by noise, age, viruses, smoking, or other factors. Sensoneural hearing loss cannot be cured medically, but it can be compensated for with various aids. Secondly, hearing loss can be caused by an obstruction in the middle or outer ear: earwax, fluids, tumours, etc., which prevents sound from reaching the inner ear. In this case, intervention can remove the obstruction that is causing the hearing loss. A third cause of hearing loss is a combination of the above, i.e., the person cannot hear because there is an obstruction in the middle or outer ear, and the inner ear is also damaged.

Hearing loss is divided into different degrees of severity:

- Mild hearing loss, in which a person hears sounds but loses the soft, quiet sounds.
- With moderate hearing loss, a person has difficulty hearing and understanding sounds at normal loudness.
- In severe hearing loss, a person hears very little or no normal speech and can hear and understand mainly loud sounds.
- With profound hearing loss, a person may hear only very loud sounds or nothing at all.
- In general, hearing loss occurs when high-pitched sounds are heard first, followed by lower-pitched sounds.

The primary way people with hearing loss communicate is through sign language, which is often their first language. A variety of aids are used to compensate for hearing loss, such as hearing aids, cochlear implants.

Tinnitus (ringing in the ears) is also considered a hearing problem. Tinnitus is a sound (ringing, buzzing, humming, hissing, roaring, etc.) that is heard in the ears or head. It is a sound sensation that occurs in a person's head and can be heard only by them, there is no external cause. Tinnitus is a fairly common problem, affecting approximately 10% of people. The causes of tinnitus are unclear, but it is more common in people with hearing loss or ear disease. However, it can also affect people who have never had any ear or hearing problems. There is no complete cure for tinnitus, but its effects can be alleviated.

Suggestions for communications and targeted information with hearing-impaired people

- Seeing the speaker's face, especially the mouth, is very important in a conversation. It helps if the light is on the speaker's face, lip-reading can often provide clues to words that might otherwise be unclear to someone who is hard of hearing. However, if, for example, a tour is long, not all deaf people may be able to follow the speaker's mouth at all times.
- Be in the same room as the other person when communicating. If the hearing-impaired person cannot see body language, it is harder to understand the speaker, and speech signals are much less audible.
- Minimising or avoiding background noise - noise of any kind can affect speech clarity and understanding.
- Speak one-to-one in a group - this makes it easier for people with hearing loss to understand whose text and face to focus on, and speaking one-to-one reduces background noise.
- Don't shout - the main difficulty for the hard of hearing is getting speech signals, not so much the volume. If you can't properly get the speech signal, it's harder to understand speech.
- Speak more slowly - when you speak quickly, the endings and beginnings of words often blend into one, which reduces comprehension. However, slow pronunciation should not be exaggerated as it disrupts the rhythm of speech and confuses the context.
- Keep sentences short, it is easier to follow short sentences while lip-reading.
- Clear diction and a slightly louder voice are important. It is important to use a stronger voice so that it does not get lost in the background noise.
- It is important to know in advance if there are people with hearing loss in the group - this will allow you to choose the appropriate communication methods.
- If you want to start a conversation with someone who is hearing impaired, try to get their attention beforehand, either with a light tap on the shoulder or by other means of attention seeking.
- Deaf people need a sign language interpreter or a tablet with sign language information. Deaf people need written interpretation or a loop system. Providing both options whenever possible (sign language + written materials) would be the best practice.
- Sign language is different in different countries, and sign language is the first language for deaf people. For example, Estonian sign language is the mother tongue of the deaf in Estonia, and Estonian written language is their second language.
- Hearing-impaired people can use hearing aids, but not always. Hearing aids may also not be helpful in noisy places. Therefore, when offering a service, choose places to talk where there is little or no outside noise. Alternatively, distribute the reading materials for your information or presentation, or use sign language interpretation if it has been previously agreed with the clients.
- For communication with the deaf, sign language interpretation or, if necessary, communication by paper is the best way.
- Information maps can be used during the service offer, as supporting material. These could include a photo of the site, a QR code directing visitors to the video (the video must then be subtitled), and short text to help them absorb the information more quickly.

Recommendations and good examples of accessibility in water tourism for people with hearing impairments

Communication and before arrival

The information on the company's website and social media is up to date and reliable. The website provides clear and comprehensive information about the content and organisation of services. Booking confirmation and essential instructions should be provided in writing by default (e.g., by email or SMS). Comprehensive information allows people to obtain the necessary information in advance, reducing the need for verbal communication. However, visitors must have the opportunity to request additional information in writing (by e-mail, social media, etc.), as telephone conversations are not accessible to people with hearing impairments.

The website should include clear, concise information about the requirements, rules, and other details related to the service that service users need to know. If the website contains illustrative videos, the videos must have subtitles and/or sign language interpretation (it is recommended to use subtitles, as not all people with hearing impairments know sign language).

When creating or developing a website, WCAG 2.1 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) should be followed to ensure it is easy to perceive, use, understand, and operate.

Arrival

It helps both people with hearing impairments and all other visitors if the service provider has placed information signs and references in a clear, visible, and uniform design to help visitors arrive at the service, find their way around, and leave. Information signs must stand out from their surroundings, be made of non-reflective material, and use contrasting colors (e.g., dark blue or black on a white background or vice versa), and use an easily legible font, such as Arial, Open Sans, Roboto, Calibri, Times New Roman, or other sans serif fonts. Text should be aligned to the left, and the text size on signs and information boards should be large enough to be easily seen and read in different lighting and weather conditions and by people of different heights (including wheelchair users).

As a service provider, visually mark all key services with signs and ensure that the signs that help people find and use the service are placed in a continuous sequence from the entrance.

Service offering

People who are completely deaf or have severe hearing loss rely primarily on visual information, and therefore, companies offering water tourism services must consider which parts of their services rely primarily on sound and how these can be replaced with visual information.

From a safety perspective, it is necessary to consider:

- Warning signals – in addition to boat sirens and rescue whistles, use additional warning signs like light signals, and hand signals.
- Rescue instructions – before various water activities, all necessary instructions and other safety information must be clearly visible and legible on posters, written instructions placed in the boat, e.g., next to each seat, or guests can view a video with subtitles containing rescue information using a QR code on their phone.

Please note the following regarding communication:

- Trained and knowledgeable staff who can take into account guests with hearing impairments and provide additional written information, using various communication aids such as Google Live Transcribe.
- If necessary and/or by prior arrangement, sign language interpreters, prepared written support materials, and audio or video guides with subtitles.

Taking care of guests:

- Many guests with hearing impairments are not completely deaf and use various aids and electronic devices to support their hearing. When engaging in various water-related activities, it is always necessary to investigate whether and how hearing aids need to be protected and stored. The operator can also offer options for storing devices, for example, by providing and, if necessary, offering drying boxes or plastic bags, boxes in which to place hearing aids and other assistive devices during the activity, various protective covers (e.g., Ear Gear, etc.), or safety straps to secure the hearing aid so that it does not get lost.
- Post information on the website for people with hearing impairments to remind them that assistive devices may get wet during activities and ask them to equip themselves with the necessary protective equipment.

Feedback and departure

At the end of the visit, offer opportunities to leave written feedback, either on-site or online, via e-mail, by filling out a feedback questionnaire on the website, or in another environment that reflects the company's services.

When ending the contact, keep in mind to address guests personally, use body language, and use the various communication aids mentioned above. It is important to maintain a humane, polite, and pleasant attitude toward every guest.



Visitors with hearing impairment in water tourism

Person nr. 1. An adult visitor who is fully deaf and does not rely on auditory information. Communication may be through sign language, lip reading, written text, or visual cues. Decision-making is independent. Main support needs are visual communication, clear signage, predictable procedures, and non-auditory safety information.

- Before the service is important to provide written and visual information about activities, safety rules, and schedules (website, email, messaging). While in contact with the person, clarify the preferred communication method (written notes, gestures, basic sign language, or an interpreter, if available). To provide a good service, share visual maps, photos, or short, captioned videos that explain the service.
- During the service, clear visual instructions, demonstrations, and gestures are needed. For communication, maintain eye contact and ensure good lighting for lip reading if relevant. It's crucial to replace sound-based signals (whistles, verbal calls) with visual signals (flags, hand signals, lights) and ensure staff are aware that emergency communication must be visual.

- Follow-up activities should include written confirmation that the activity has ended and what the next steps are (exiting, rest areas). Feedback options should be in written or digital form. If appropriate, share visual summaries or photos.
- If there are areas without personal client service (e.g., swimming areas, harbour areas for walking), then keep in mind that clear visual signage for rules, hazards, and emergency procedures is necessary. Provide visual warning systems near water (flags, color codes, symbols). Display emergency information clearly, including instructions that do not rely on sound, and also display easy-to-understand pictograms explaining safe behaviour.

Person nr. 2. Person with tinnitus. An adult visitor who experiences constant or intermittent ear ringing or noise sensitivity. Hearing may be otherwise functional, but background noise, wind, or loud environments can cause discomfort or reduce concentration. Main support needs are calm communication, reduced noise exposure, clear instructions, and flexibility.

- Before the service, it is important to provide clear written information about the activity, including noise levels (engines, crowds, equipment), and offer the option to ask questions in advance via email or messaging. If possible, the service provider can consider quieter, low-intensity activities in their services.
- During the service is necessary to give instructions in a calm voice, facing the person, and avoiding shouting. Background noise should be reduced where possible (turn off engines during explanations and choose quieter locations). During the communication, the understanding should be confirmed without pressure, and the person should be allowed to position themselves slightly away from noise sources.
- Follow-up activities could include a calm ending to the activity with minimal noise exposure. It is important to offer written feedback options and to ask gently whether noise levels were comfortable and if adjustments would help in the future.
- Areas without personal service could consist of clear, readable information boards that reduce reliance on audio announcements. Important are visual safety instructions and warnings. In the area, unnecessary sound-based alerts should be avoided where possible, or complemented with visual cues. Quiet resting areas near the attraction are beneficial.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Hearing impairment is widespread and diverse, affecting people of all ages and ranging from mild hearing loss to profound deafness, with different causes, degrees of severity, and communication needs, including the use of sign language, hearing aids, or other assistive technologies.
- Effective communication is central to accessibility, requiring clear visual information, good lighting, reduced background noise, respectful interaction, and the use of written, signed, or subtitled materials.
- Accessible water tourism depends on visual and non-auditory safety solutions, such as visual warning systems, clear signage, written rescue instructions, and staff awareness that emergency communication must not rely only on sound.
- Inclusive practices benefit a broad range of visitors, including fully deaf guests, people with tinnitus, older adults, and others sensitive to noise.

3.1.3 Visual impairment

Overview of the target group and their specific needs

Visual impairment affects the human visual organ as a whole and describes the loss of visual organ function, such as loss of visual acuity, visual field defects, problems with vision in both eyes, colour perception, and loss of vision in the dark. Visual impairment refers to disorders of the functioning of different parts of the visual system and related diseases, such as cataracts, retinal diseases, optic nerve diseases, and cerebral diseases.

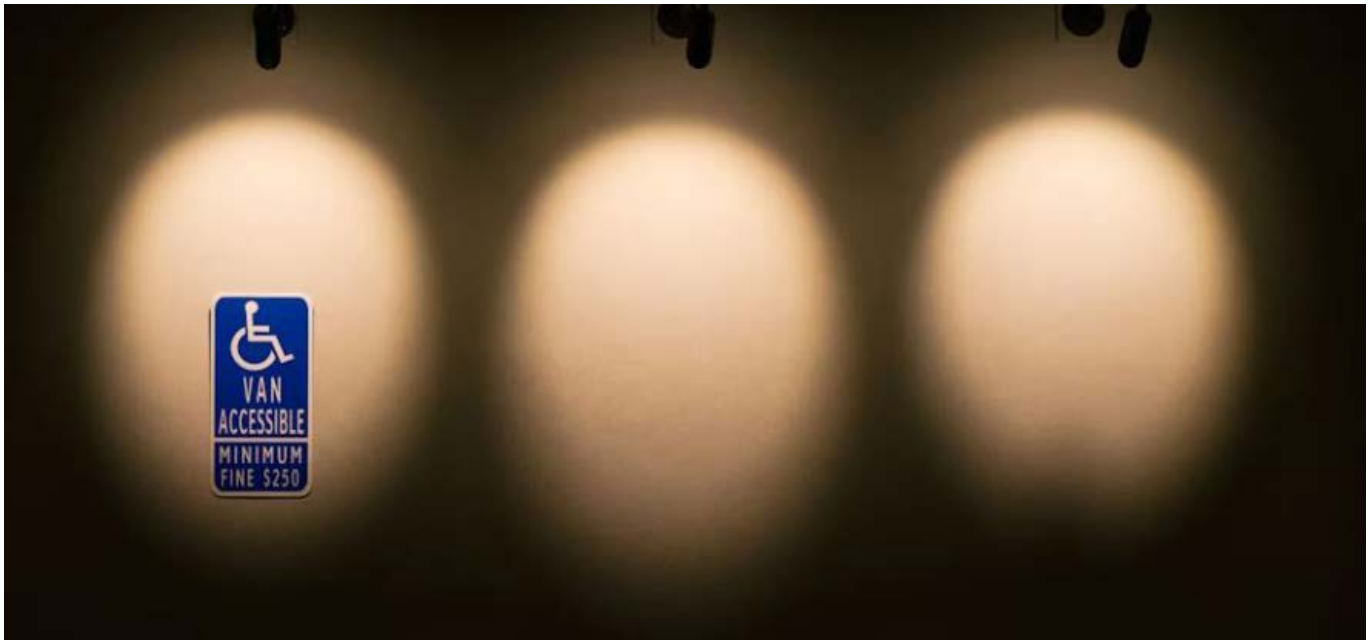
Visual loss refers to damage to various parts of the visual system and can range from impaired visual acuity to complete blindness. A person is considered to be visually impaired if his or her vision is reduced to such an extent that it prevents him or her from developing, learning, participating in work, and carrying out activities of daily living. A partially sighted person is a person whose visual acuity, corrected by glasses, is less than 0.3 in the better-sighted eye and/or whose field of vision is narrower than 30 degrees.

There are millions of visually impaired people around the world, including people who are nearsighted or farsighted. In Estonia, there are about 10,000 visually impaired people, some blind and some partially sighted. In Latvia, in 2024, 10,190 people have visual impairment, some partially sighted and some blind.

Visual impairment or disability can be congenital or acquired during life as a result of trauma or disease. People who have developed a visual impairment during their lifetime remember and know colours, shapes, sizes, and much more related to visual information. Similarly, various impairments of visual function accompany ageing.

Visual impairment can be divided into permanent conditions that do not change over time, temporary limitations, and situational visual impairments. A person with permanent visual impairment is one who has lost vision due to diabetes and will never regain it, a person with congenital total blindness, or a person with congenital colour blindness. With a permanent limitation, the person will need assistive devices and an accessible environment for the rest of their life. A temporary limitation is a condition that occurs over time and/or a situation in which the various components of a person's vision do not function as they should. For example, a person has a temporary medical condition that results in a disturbance of the blood supply to the eye, bruising, and temporary loss of vision. This is restored with treatment, after which the person no longer needs any aids.

Another example: the lighting in the room is poor, the colour-coded room signs are very small and badly placed. It is difficult for people to see and understand whether the spaces are open or closed. The situation is improved by proper lighting, clear and contrasting signage with verbal information in addition to colours. It is difficult to read/see and understand the information displayed in dim or dark conditions with inadequate lighting. Providing proper lighting is helpful, but also a torch, phone torch function, or similar in outdoor situations.



Third example: a person suffering from migraine attacks. Migraines are accompanied by temporary visual disturbances, including flickering in the front of the eye and blurred surroundings. The visual disturbances resolve during migraine attacks. Although a person with blurred vision during a migraine attack can move around and orient themselves in general, they are unable to drive a car, read text, or notice low-contrast objects.

Vision problems mean that one of a person's most important senses, the visual sense, is impaired, and this brings with it a range of challenges in everyday life. However, various challenges can be significantly mitigated or reduced through the use of assistive devices that people with visual impairments use daily and through an accessible environment that takes their needs into account.

People with visual impairments use a wide range of aids to compensate for reduced or lost vision. Different types of aids include:

- Tactile (e.g., tactile clocks, area maps, tactile marking rings, tactile coin holders, etc.).
- Audible (e.g., talking clocks, thermometers, liquid level indicators, talking mobile phones, colour indicators. Elevators in public spaces where floor information is also provided audibly, and information on city buses audibly.)
- Different mobility aids (e.g., white cane, audible obstacle barrier, pole).
- Various aids to navigate the environment and obtain information (e.g., magnifying glasses, special glasses, high-illumination magnifying glasses and supplementary lamps, text recognition devices, reading telescopes, audio recorders, dictaphones, daisy-chain recorders, software for reading and magnification, braille and relief drawing tools).

A wide variety of assistive devices have been developed for people with visual impairments, which can also be categorised by intended use, e.g., measuring aids, reading aids, clocks, calculators, etc. Further information on assistive devices can be found in Estonia, for example, from the Estonian Association of the Blind (*https://pimedateliit.ee/*), and in Latvia from The Latvian Society of the Blind (Latvijas Neredzīgo Biedrība *https://lnbiedriba.lv/lv/paliglidzekli*). They can also be purchased in various shops. For example, in Estonia, one of the shops is Silmalaegas Abikeskus (silmalaegas.laegas.ee), and in Latvia, LTD Exceed (*https://exceed.lv*).

When adapting your service to be accessible for people with visual impairments, the main thing to bear in mind is that just because a person's vision is impaired, it does not mean that their hearing is poor, their cognitive abilities are impaired, or their mobility is limited. On the contrary, the various auditory and tactile cues become extremely important to them, and their distinction from other noises, such as traffic lights, is crucial. For people with visual impairments, sounds, tactile information, and smells compensate for visual limitations.

When adapting a water-based service to be accessible to people with visual impairments, it is necessary to plan and organize all information to be shared in non-visual ways. How can a visually impaired person enjoy different water activities? Secondly, you need to consider which aids and design solutions can make your service accessible to people with visual impairments.

In most cases, people with visual impairments move around in public spaces with family members, other accompanying persons, or friends. They rarely walk alone, but do so with a guide dog or in familiar surroundings. Blind and partially sighted people need simple, clear, and systematic guidance to move around. Tactile, and/or auditory cues, adequate lighting and contrast, and well-designed acoustics help them to orient themselves. Visual information should also be of sufficient size and contrast.

Suggestions for communications and targeted information with visually impaired people

- When starting a conversation or asking a question, always address the visually impaired person by name. It is advisable to gently touch them on the shoulder to let them know you are talking to them. Then introduce yourself – say your name, role, or other important information so that the person who cannot see understands who they are dealing with.

When moving around with a visually impaired person, it helps if the guide walks about half a step or 50 cm ahead and the visually impaired person holds on to the guide's arm.



- When entering a door or moving in confined spaces, the visually impaired person moves behind the guide, holding onto the guide's arm.
- When moving around, it is important to provide ongoing information about the route: what the surface is like, whether there are steps, obstacles, etc. In addition to the general sensory input from the surroundings, a visually impaired person needs clear verbal information to understand where they are and what lies ahead.
- When navigating a new environment, it is important to describe the surroundings clearly and comprehensively. The description should be appropriate for the person's age and as specific, natural, and informative as possible.
- When pointing in a direction, use the words "left," "right," "up," "down," or the numbers on a clock face (e.g., "the church is at seven o'clock from us"). The word "there" does not give a visually impaired person any information about the location of an object.
- When leaving a visually impaired person, they must be informed.
- If a guide dog is accompanying a blind person, the dog must not be disturbed, i.e., petted, patted, or encouraged to play, so as not to distract it from its "work."
- When moving with a visually impaired person, adjust your pace to theirs so that they have enough time to orient themselves and process information.



Recommendations and good examples of accessibility in water tourism for people with visual impairments

Communication and before arrival

The service provider's website is an important source of information for people with visual impairments, allowing them to assess whether the services offered are suitable for them. When creating an accessible website, the WCAG 2.1 *(Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)* requirements must be followed. The text of a website that complies with the requirements is in a format suitable for screen readers, uses contrasting colours, uses a clear font (e.g., Arial, Open Sans, Calibri, Roboto, Times New Roman), and allows the text size to be changed without changing the website's format.

The website's content must be clear, simple, and concise, without excessive detail. All photos and videos must be accompanied by descriptions and alt text that allow screen readers to obtain information about the corresponding visual content.

Information regarding booking and purchasing services must be clearly presented on the website, and the option for verbal communication with the service provider must be provided.

Arrival

Arrival and access to services mean sharing accurate and relevant information and ensuring safety.

- A clear system of signs and information boards that are easily noticeable in the surrounding environment, designed in a consistent style and easy to read (using contrasting colours, easy-to-read fonts, sufficiently large font sizes, and not overloaded with information or overly structured).

- The entrance to the service is clearly and prominently marked, and where possible, an audible signal is installed to provide information about the entrance and movement within the area.
- The entrance and movement routes within the area are free of obstacles, and dangerous areas such as stairs, quays, and bridges are marked with information signs and contrasting colours, as well as barriers and handrails. Also, there should be tactile markers on the grounds where possible.
- Various tactile and audible signals are used on the movement paths to help guide people with visual impairments. Various surface materials (e.g., asphalt vs. grass, rubber strips, etc.) can be used to indicate the edge of the path or a change in surface. Audible signals can be used at the entrance to the port, at the end of the quay, or elsewhere where it is necessary to draw people's attention.

Providing service

When providing the service, safety must be the primary consideration:

- Boat harbours, beaches, water parks, etc. must have clear signage to facilitate orientation: handrails, barriers, and signposts, tactile markings.
- Where possible, use audio guides that provide information about service-related objects and activities. For example, at the departure point for pleasure boats, there is an audio device with a motion sensor that provides information about the location and the service schedule.
- For water activities, provide proper safety equipment: always life jackets and, if necessary, special flotation devices.
- Clear instructions and a precise description of activities before going into the water are very important for people with visual impairments. If you know that visually impaired people are coming to use the service, describe step by step where you are, what you are going to do, what is happening now, and what you are doing (e.g., "we are now stepping into the boat, one step down, hold on to the handrail").
- If a visually impaired person does not have an personal assistant, ask if you can help and offer hand guidance, i.e., assist with physical guidance - for example, place the client's hand on the handrail or paddle, help them sit in the boat, etc.
- Before different activities, agree on specific signals to be used during the activities (e.g., when canoeing, on a SUP board), i.e., what clear voice signals or touch signals to use.
- A clock system can be used to aid orientation, e.g., when travelling by boat, point out that the swan can be seen at 10 o'clock.
- Throughout the activity, visually impaired people must not be left completely in the dark. Unless silence has been agreed upon, e.g., to listen to birdsong or for a break, information about what is happening should be shared at a normal pace and frequency.

Example from Italy: In Venice, Luisella Romeo organises tours for visually impaired people, where each attraction offers an experience through different senses: touching, smelling, and tasting, and of course, the guide's commentary, which describes and explains everything, painting a wonderful picture of Venice's history for the guests. See for more: *https://www.seevenice.it/en/tours-for-blind-or-visually-impaired-travelers-in-venice/*.

Providing water tourism services to visually impaired people requires the service provider to be articulate and able to connect their speech to surrounding sounds, objects, and smells. It is also necessary to assess the service's impact and experience in advance through touch, physical activity, smell, taste, and hearing. What is the service like without seeing the surroundings, and how can it be turned into a valuable experience? It is like reading a book without physically turning the pages, you can still get the experience from the story by listening to it. This experience is not enriching to visually impaired people but to all.



Feedback and departure

When the service has ended, this information should be communicated verbally, and if necessary, information about follow-up activities should be shared orally as well: purchasing souvenirs, which should be pointed out before departure, collecting feedback, or providing information on how to do so later. Provide assistance or guidance as needed when the customer with visual impairment is moving to a vehicle or to the next destination.

Departure from the service follows the same logic as arrival: all routes should be free of obstacles, clearly marked with tactile signs and/or various barriers, if possible, then audible signs are used, and information boards are used to help navigate the area. It is helpful to place seating options along the route so personas with impairments can rest and take time for arrival and departure.

Suggestion: *Instagram: _rebeccaalexander_* or webpage: *www.rebeccaalexander.org* – deafblind content creator, material on how to cope with blindness and deafness, and how to help someone who is deafblind.



Visitors with visual impairment in water tourism

Person nr. 1. An adult visitor who is fully blind from birth and reads Braille. Orientation relies on touch, hearing, spatial memory, and verbal information. Decision-making is independent. The main support needs are predictable environments, tactile and auditory information, clear verbal guidance, and safe physical orientation.

- Before the service, it is important to provide information in accessible formats, such as screen – reader – friendly text, audio files, or Braille documents, where possible. Offering advanced contact to discuss preferred assistance methods and expectations improves the person's service experience. It is highly recommended to offer verbal descriptions of the environment, routes, surfaces, and water access in advance. Videos, blog posts, and reels are good methods to share information about the service.
- During the service, the person needs verbal step-by-step explanations for all actions (boarding, sitting, safety procedures). If the person needs it, it is expected to provide guided assistance using the elbow technique only after asking for consent. Service providers are encouraged to ensure consistent placement of equipment and furniture. Visual safety cues should be supplemented with spoken instructions and confirmation.
- Follow-up activities will include, for blind people, various guides (personal assistance, tactile routes, audio messages, etc.) to exits, rest areas, or changing rooms. Feedback options should be offered via verbal conversation, phone call, or accessible digital forms.
- Areas without personal service should include continuous, obstacle-free routes with tactile ground indicators or handrails. Tactile or Braille signage should be installed where feasible (toilets, exits, warnings), and QR codes with audio descriptions should be added to explain the site layout, rules, and safety. It is important to clearly mark water edges using tactile surface changes or low physical barriers.

Person nr. 2. An adult visitor with low vision who can perceive large objects, movement, and contrast but struggles with details, depth perception, or low light. Main support needs are high contrast, good lighting, simple layouts, and verbal reinforcement of visual information.

- Before the service, it is important to obtain high-quality photos of key areas (entrance, docks, boats) and to explain distances and surfaces. Home page and/or other information materials should be written in a large font and with a clear structure. There should also be information about lighting conditions and possible glare or reflections.
- During the service, it is recommended to combine verbal explanations with visual demonstrations, ensuring high-contrast markings on edges, steps, handrails, and boats. The person needs extra time for movement and orientation. Staff should verbally point out obstacles and level changes.
- Follow-up activities should include clearly indicated exits, seating, and equipment return points. Feedback forms should be in large print, high contrast, or verbal format.

- If you are offering water activities without direct client service, all information should be posted on large-font, high-contrast boards with non-reflective materials. Keep in mind to maintain good, even lighting and avoid glare. Designing the area, it should ensure clear visual separation between walkways, sand, water, and hazards. Provide simple site maps with strong contrast and minimal visual clutter.

Person nr. 3. An adult visitor with colour vision deficiency (e.g., red-green or blue–yellow). Visual sharpness is otherwise normal, but colour-based information may be misinterpreted. Main support needs are non-colour-dependent information and redundant visual cues.

- Before the service, suggest ensuring information does not rely solely on colour to explain rules, routes, or safety. Alongside the colours, use text labels, symbols, numbers, or patterns.
- During the service, it is worth keeping in mind that when giving instructions, refer to location, shape, or function, not colour alone. On maps and information boards, it is useful to offer patterned markings (e.g., striped edges, textured zones) instead of colour-only warnings.
- During follow-up, feedback systems (e.g., satisfaction scales) should not rely solely on colour. It is recommended to provide clear written explanations instead of colour-coded instructions.
- In areas without personal client service, colour-only signage (e.g., red/green zones without text) should be avoided. Instead, use icons, arrows, contrast, textures, and written descriptions. It is important to ensure emergency and safety information is understandable without colour perception.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Visual impairment is varied in type and severity, ranging from low vision to complete blindness and including reduced acuity, visual field loss, poor night vision, and colour vision deficiency, it may be congenital, acquired, temporary, or situational.
- Accessible environments and assistive devices significantly reduce barriers, with visitors relying on tactile, auditory, mobility, and navigation aids (e.g., Braille tools, screen readers, canes, magnifiers), and often using companions or guide dogs in unfamiliar settings.
- Service accessibility requires non-visual communication and orientation, meaning information must be provided through verbal descriptions, audio/tactile cues, consistent layouts, clear step-by-step guidance, and agreed signals during activities.
- Water tourism settings must prioritize safe, legible wayfinding and hazard management, including obstacle-free routes, strong contrast and lighting, tactile markers, handrails/barriers near water edges, and accessible websites compliant with WCAG 2.1 (including alt text and screen-reader compatibility).
- Different visual impairment profiles require tailored support, such as Braille/accessible formats and guided assistance for blind visitors, high-contrast design and extra time for low-vision visitors, and non-colour-dependent signage and instructions for colour-blind visitors - both with and without personal client service.

3.1.4. Speech impairment

Overview of the target group and their specific needs

A speech impairment is a communication disorder that impairs a person's ability to communicate effectively. Up to one in ten people may experience a speech impediment or difficulty with speech. Speech problems are broadly divided into two types: those in which a person cannot make him/herself heard in speech and/or seen in writing, and others in which a person has difficulty understanding what is said and/or written. Sometimes a person may have problems with both understanding and expressing herself.

People with speech impairments have difficulties communicating, receiving, processing, and understanding information through verbal and nonverbal means, including symbols. In the most severe cases, there may also be a speech impairment (aphasia), in which normal speech is impaired, making it impossible to understand speech or text or to express oneself orally or in writing. However, it should be borne in mind that this is not an intellectual impairment.

Speech impairment can be a person's main special need or a co-existing disability. People who have problems with speaking include people who have difficulty swallowing, damaged vocal cords due to, for example, paralysis, aphasia (speech and language comprehension disorders), dysarthria (a speech disorder caused by muscle weakness, paralysis or lack of coordination), apraxia (a neurological disorder that prevents people from making any movement, including speech, against their will), mutism, in which a person is unable to speak in certain situations or places, and others. Speech comprehension, even when physical hearing is fine, is hindered by aphasia, autism spectrum disorder, stress, or depression, among other conditions. People from other linguistic backgrounds with limited language skills also experience similar barriers to people with speech impairments.

If a person has a speech impediment, it is important to support their speech comprehension, self-expression, and communication. Many accessibility solutions (symbols, visuals, clear text) make services more accessible to people with speech impairment as well as to everyone.



Recommendations for communicating with people with speech impairments to understand you better

- To help someone understand you better, get her attention first.
- Keep your voice at a comfortable level. You don't need to talk louder unless they ask you to do so.
- When speaking, it is important to have clear diction and a moderate or slower (you may ask a person) speaking pace, to convey information in clear, short sentences, to avoid pauses between exchanges, to avoid background noise, and to avoid several people speaking at the same time.
- Keep the words you use simple but adult. Don't "talk down" to the person.
- Repeat important words and sentences.
- The information must be provided on a per-unit basis. For example, first the welcoming, then the introduction, and then the activities carried out there one by one.
- People with a speech disability are supported in understanding the speech of others by eye contact with the speaker, facial expressions, and the use of body language.

- Drawings, pictures, and other visual material support the understanding of spoken text.
- An open and respectful attitude is important when interacting with a person with a speech impairment.
- When conveying information, in addition to narration, it is useful to show specific objects, point to the object being described, and add language to convey imagery.
- You can also use paper and a writing utensil to write a name, number, etc., on paper if necessary.



Recommendations for communicating with people with speech impairments to express themselves better

- You need to take the time to communicate so that the person dares to express themselves calmly. Pronouncing words and guessing what a person with a speech impediment is saying are barriers to self-expression.
- Watch their body language and gestures. These visual cues may provide additional information and context.
- Let the person know when you have trouble understanding. Don't pretend to understand.
- If you don't understand their whole message, then repeat the part that you understood. This way, they won't have to start all over again.
- Ask them to draw, write, point, or gesture if they're having trouble communicating - or if you're having trouble understanding.
- Use "yes" and "no" questions to offer simple options and to make sure that you understand their message. Say a person's messages back to them, as needed, so they can tell that you understood them correctly.
- Give choices instead of asking an open-ended question. For example, "Do you want to sit and relax?" instead of "What should we do next?".
- Let them make mistakes. They may not be able to say everything perfectly all the time. The important thing is that they get their message across.
- If people with speech impairments go to the beach, for example, on their own and there are a lot of people there, they should have the name and contact details of their contact person just in case.



Recommendations and good examples of accessibility in water tourism for people with speech impairments

- People with speech impairments often find self-expression most difficult, and they can struggle to receive and process information quickly. Therefore, use clear, simple words and expressions in both verbal and written communication (e.g., information signs, references, websites, e-mails). The information on the website must be simple, clear, easy to understand, and without unnecessary details. Try to avoid long texts.

- For people with speech impairments, it is necessary to share information about services on the website as thoroughly as possible without going into too much detail. It is important to use simple language and provide illustrative additional materials about the service.
- When arriving at and using the service, it is important to share information through signs and information boards that have a uniform design, are easily noticeable, easy to read, and, in addition to text, include visual materials that help to understand the text and/or allow you to understand where to go, what to do, and how to do it without reading the text.
- As with other specific needs, trained and knowledgeable staff are required who are open and friendly and know how to support people with disabilities. When communicating with people with speech impairments and providing services such as canoe or boat trips, it is important not to rush but to set a pace that allows the person to acquire information calmly, use the service, and communicate with the customer service representative. Verbal self-expression and information acquisition are difficult for people with speech impairments, so time must be set aside for this.
- During activities to create a more comfortable setting or for assistance, it is suggested to use various creative tools or techniques, such as emotion cards and stress balls. When leaving the service, consider creative ways to provide feedback that do not require filling out a written feedback form or answering questions. Emotion signs, feedback boards, or stickers that can be added to a guest book are well-suited for collecting feedback.



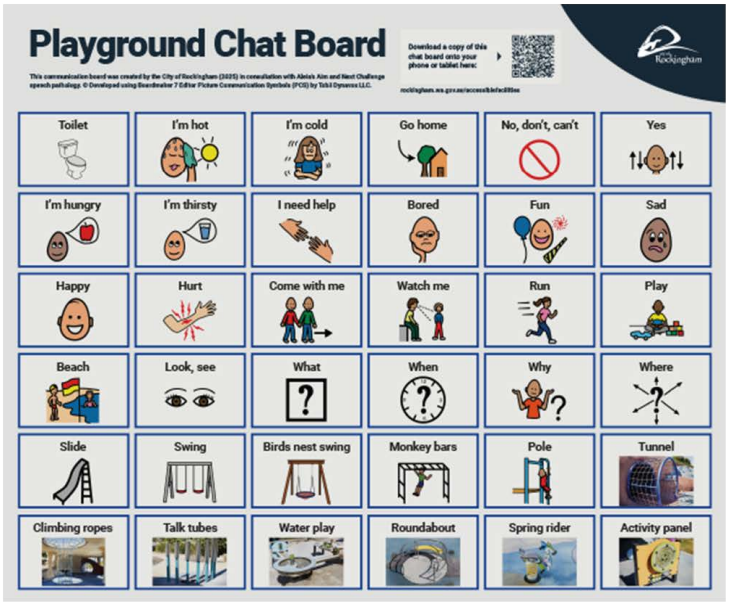
Visitors with speech impairment in water tourism

Person nr. 1. An adult visitor who has lost the ability to speak due to a traumatic throat injury. Hearing, vision, cognition, and literacy are intact. Communication is possible through writing, gestures, mobile devices, or assistive communication tools. Main support needs are related to alternative communication methods, patience, time, and non-verbal safety communication.

- Before the service, it is important to provide all essential information in written or digital form (email, SMS, website) and offer advanced contact via text-based channels to discuss needs and preferred communication methods. Staff should be aware that verbal responses may not be possible.
- During the service, written notes, tablets, phones, pictograms, or gesture-based communication could be used. If you need to ask questions, use yes/no and closed questions where appropriate. Safety instructions should be available in written and visual form, not only verbally. Before activities, non-verbal emergency signals (hand signals, visual cards) should be agreed in advance.
- During follow-up, it is recommended to provide written confirmation of the end of the activity and the next steps (equipment return and payment). Feedback options should be in written or digital format, and the time for written communication should be without rushing.
- Water tourism-related areas without personal client services need clear, simple, and visible written signage for rules, routes, and safety. Written material should be complemented with pictograms and symbols rather than relying solely on spoken instructions. Emergency procedures should be clearly displayed visually, not rely solely on calling for help. It is recommended to provide QR codes linking to written or video instructions.

Person nr. 2. An adult visitor with normal intellectual capacity but difficulties in reading comprehension, processing information, and expressing themselves verbally. Speech may be unclear, slow, or fragmented. Main support needs are plain language, clear structure, repetition, confirmation of understanding, and supportive communication.

- Before the service, it is important to share information on the webpage or in other resources in plain language, using short sentences and a clear structure. Avoid complex terminology, use examples and visuals where possible. Same time, offer the option to ask questions via messaging or in person.
- During the service, it is necessary to give instructions step by step, one point at a time. Use demonstrations, pictures, or physical examples alongside verbal explanations. During every step of activity, confirm understanding by asking the person to show or repeat actions, rather than repeating complex explanations. Allow extra time for responses and avoid finishing the person's sentences.
- While finishing the activities, explain clearly what happens next in simple language. Offer feedback options with symbols, smiley scales, or assisted verbal feedback if appropriate. Be patient and supportive during payment or equipment return.
- If you offer water-related activities without personal client service, use information boards and signs with easy-to-read, simple wording, icons, and minimal text. Avoid long instructions or dense information boards. Provide people with visual step-by-step guides (illustrations and numbered steps). Use QR codes linking to short videos or pictorial instructions rather than long written text.
- Example of chat boards from Rockingham. Chat boards are simple communication tools that use symbols, pictures, and words to help people who are non-speaking or have limited speech share their thoughts and needs.





SUMMARY POINTS

- Speech impairment affects communication, not intelligence, and may involve difficulties in understanding, expressing, or processing spoken and written information due to various neurological, physical, or situational causes.
- Accessible communication relies on clarity, patience, and alternative methods, including plain language, short and structured messages, visual supports, gestures, writing tools, and assistive or digital communication aids.
- Service design must support both understanding and self-expression, allowing extra time, step-by-step information, confirmation of understanding, and respectful interaction without rushing or guessing a person's message.
- Water tourism services should integrate visual and non-verbal communication throughout the customer journey, from clear websites and signage to written safety instructions, agreed non-verbal emergency signals, and accessible feedback options.
- Inclusive communication practices improve experiences for everyone, benefiting not only visitors with speech impairments but also people with language barriers, cognitive challenges, stress, or temporary communication difficulties.

3.1.5. Intellectual disability

Overview of the target group and their specific needs

Intellectual disability is a condition that affects around 1-3% of the population. It is neither a mental disorder nor a disease, but a condition that is congenital or develops in early childhood and stays with a person for life. Intellectual disability is characterised by a person's limited intellectual functioning, i.e., the person's overall mental capacity and adaptive behavioural capacity, as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. Conceptual adaptation refers to an individual's ability to use language, reading, writing, mathematics, reasoning, knowledge, and memory. Social adaptation refers to lower empathy, social judgment, interpersonal skills, and the ability to form and maintain friendships in people with intellectual disabilities. Practical adaptation, however, relates to personal care, work responsibilities, money management, leisure, school, and work.

People with an intellectual disability find it more difficult to learn, adapt to new situations, understand social and societal rules, such as norms of behaviour, or think in abstract terms. They may have great difficulty finding their way around unfamiliar places, understanding the value of money, and asking strangers for help.

People with intellectual disabilities may have:

- Limited capacity to learn.
- Difficulties with speech, movement, and social skills.
- Difficult to understand complex relationships and consequences.
- The need for clear and simple instructions.

Some people with an intellectual disability need more support in their daily lives, while others are able to cope independently in familiar situations.

Intellectual disability is divided into different levels of severity according to the person's ability:

- **Mild disability** - the average mental age of a person is 9-12 years. The disability can interfere with learning or performing complex tasks. However, problems can often be managed, especially with special intervention and early help.
- **Moderate disability** - the average mental age of a person is 6-9 years. People with a moderate intellectual disability can communicate using simple language. Many can learn to live independently to some extent but need varying levels of assistance to do so.
- **Severe disability** - the average mental age of a person is 3-6 years. People with a severe intellectual disability use few words, phrases, and/or gestures to communicate. They need daily care and support with activities and daily living.
- **Profound disability** - the average mental age of a person is 3 years or less. These people usually communicate non-verbally, understanding some gestures and emotional cues. They need round-the-clock medical care and support in all aspects of their lives.

Nowadays, people with intellectual disabilities are increasingly going out and discovering new places.

People with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities, who are the most numerous in terms of numbers, are more likely to visit different tourism attractions. They are also more enthusiastic to participate in activities and outings. When offering service, it is important that people with intellectual disabilities feel safe, comfortable, and included. The greatest support for people with an intellectual disability is another person who helps them to understand and experience the environment and the services provided.



The thinking of a person with an intellectual disability is often concrete and immediate. He or she understands the world directly - for example, if you say 'blue-blooded', he or she might ask how blood can be blue if it is red. The behaviour of an intellectually disabled person may be similar to that of a child, but an adult has many years of life experience and needs to be treated accordingly - not as a child, but as an adult with specific needs.

Suggestions for communications and targeted information with intellectually disabled people

- Make sure you have the person's attention before you start talking. Try using their name or making eye contact.
- Use short sentences with a simple message. Take more time to communicate as usual.
- Remember that your body language is important because people with an intellectual disability often rely on visual cues.
- At the beginning of the communication, be very clear about what will be done, where, and for how long.
- Repeat important information throughout the meeting.
- Be ready to speak about other topics, not related to your service, as well. People with intellectual disabilities are eager to talk about many things.

- Speak to the person directly, feel free to use the 'you' form.
- Make sure it is acceptable before touching.
- Use simple, understandable words that people know well.
- Use examples from people's everyday lives to explain things.
- Do not use metaphors or abstract expressions.
- Don't use foreign words unless they are as well-known as, for example, "okay".
- Avoid using abbreviations.
- Percentages and big numbers are hard to understand. Instead, use the words "a little" and "a lot" to make your point.
- When making agreements and presenting the rules, make sure they are understood, if possible, at times.
- Please note that not answering or responding slowly does not mean you are being rude.
- Please note that any activity, such as boating, fishing, etc., is likely to take more time. Plan little breaks into the activity.
- Avoid making sudden and spontaneous changes to plans - an intellectually disabled person is more comfortable in routine situations if they know what will happen next.
- A long, fast-paced tour or other activity can be tiring.
- Give people time to adapt and absorb the information.
- Don't leave the person with an intellectual disability alone - always make sure they know where they are, who they are with, what time, and where to go.



Recommendations for better accessibility

- Use different senses - for example, let them touch objects, enjoy and listen to sounds, or smell fragrances.
- Use simple language in your communication.
- Supplement the story with pictograms, pictures, drawings, or other visual aids.

People with an intellectual disability are open to new experiences, although they need routine and familiar surroundings daily. The most important thing for people with an intellectual disability is to receive simple, clear, and unambiguous support, both through direct communication and through a clearly and understandably designed environment. Many people with an intellectual disability are independent in familiar surroundings and situations but need additional support and a sense of security to cope in new spaces and situations.

Recommendations and good examples of accessibility in water tourism for people with intellectual disability

In most cases, people with intellectual disabilities use water tourism services with an accompanying person, who may be a family member, an activity instructor, a friend, or a teacher. Given the needs of people with intellectual disabilities and their companions, it is important to share information about the service, including visual materials, before use. Therefore, provide clear and easily understandable information on your website about the content of the services (what will be done, what or who will be seen, what sounds can be heard, etc.) and practical arrangements (e.g., how long the boat trip lasts, what to wear, when breaks are taken, where to use the toilet, etc.). This information is useful to many visitor groups, including groups with children. Since people with intellectual disabilities travel with an escort, additional information about the support person must be provided, e.g., whether the support person can use the service at a reduced rate/free of charge, whether the support person can accompany the customer, e.g., in a canoe, etc.

Most people with mild or moderate intellectual disabilities can read. However, their ability to comprehend long and complex texts is limited. Therefore, design your website in such a way that the text is moderate and the main information is also available in simple language, in an easy-to-read version. This version could be split into a downloadable PDF. More detailed information on easy-to-read language requirements can be found here: *https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read-standards-guidelines/*

When booking a service, if the form is fillable, additional questions about specific needs must be included. In the case of intellectual disabilities, for example, needs a calm pace, little noise, a support person, simple instructions, dry practice before going into the water, shorter duration, breaks, the opportunity to be alone, etc.

The recommendation for people with intellectual disabilities is to avoid excessive sensory overload, i.e., choose a service offered in a smaller group, at a quieter time, or when fewer people are in the area or using the service.



When arriving at and staying at the service, the methods of communicating with people with intellectual disabilities must be followed. In addition, people with intellectual disabilities are supported by a clear, easily visible system of signs and information boards that must guide them continuously from one place to another on the service provider's premises. Signs and information boards must have easily understandable text, where one sentence conveys one idea, the text is not ambiguous, metaphors, foreign words, and excessive use of abbreviations are avoided, and it is easy to read (contrasting colors, written in lowercase letters, aligned to the left, clearly structured, important information is in bold or in a separate box).

When communicating with people with intellectual disabilities, ask the escort(s) what you should focus on and what you should consider. In general, it is worth following these principles:

- One instruction at a time.
- In addition to verbal instructions, demonstrate the action.
- Use gestures and body language, pictograms, sample sentences, and sample actions.
- Don't rush, give the customer time to process the information.
- Use simple language.
- Repeat important information and actions.
- When providing a service, it is a good idea to show the entire process visually, either with pictograms or photos.
- Smile and be open.

In many cases, people with intellectual disabilities also have other health problems, which means they need various types of support when using services. Equipment that helps people with intellectual disabilities cope better:

- Stable vehicles, e.g., watercraft with a wider base or other stabilizers.
- Tandem vehicles, i.e., a companion of a person with intellectual disabilities, can be with them and support their sense of security.
- Mobility aids: low quays or ramps, handrails, non-slip flooring materials, boat flooring materials, contrasting markings on stairs, quays, and boat bridges.
- Boats and other watercraft are equipped with seats with backrests, armrests, and, if necessary, additional supports to help people sit, stand up, and sit stably in the watercraft.
- Life jackets of various sizes with easy fastenings. It is essential to practice and test in advance how to move and sit while wearing a life jacket.
- Many people with intellectual disabilities cannot tolerate loud noises, so the service provider should be able to offer earplugs or quieter alternatives.
- Many people with intellectual disabilities, as well as those with mental disorders, are very sensitive to different sensations, so it is worth offering earplugs, blankets, soft vests without seams, raincoats, sunglasses, etc., to calm their senses. If the business does not wish to, or is unable to, stock all of these items, it should provide on its website, in the service description, information about the various aids customers can consider bringing with them before using the service.

When leaving the service, people with intellectual disabilities are happy to provide feedback. They share their experiences, are willing to complete simple feedback forms, and use various creative feedback methods, such as emotion cards and colour codes.



Visitors with intellectual disability in water tourism

Person nr. 1. An adult woman with a moderate intellectual disability who lives in a community service setting. She can participate in leisure activities and make choices with support. Understanding complex information, unfamiliar situations, and abstract safety rules may be challenging. A support person accompanies her in public spaces and assists with communication, decision-making, and safety. Her main support needs are a clear structure, simple communication, predictability, reassurance, supervision near water, and cooperation with the accompanying support person.

- Before the service, it is important to provide clear, simple, and concrete information about the activity (what will happen, how long it will last, and what is expected). The information should be in plain language, with short sentences, and supported with visual aids (photos, pictograms). As a service provider, think through how to share information in advance with the support person to prepare the visitor and reduce anxiety. Before the activity is important to clarify roles: what the service provider supports and what the support person assists with.
- During the service, instructions need to be given step by step, one task at a time, and verbal explanations are combined with demonstrations and visual cues. During the whole process, maintain a calm, friendly, and predictable pace. Always explain safety rules clearly and repeat them when needed, especially near water. Address the visitor directly, while also coordinating with the support person. At the same time, don't forget to monitor emotional state (stress, excitement, fear) and allow breaks when needed.
- Finish the activity by clearly explaining that it is ending and what happens next (changing, resting, or departing). Allow extra time for transitions. After finishing all water-related activities, offer simple feedback options, such as verbal reflection with guiding questions or pictorial feedback. Also, there should be a provision of follow-up information in an easy-to-understand format for both the visitor and support person.
- If a person and her support person are on a public beach or in another self-guided area, ensure indirect support is provided. For example, ensure the area has clear, easy-to-understand signage using symbols, pictograms, and minimal text. Safe and unsafe zones are clearly marked (e.g., swimming areas, deep water, restricted zones). Simple visual rules (e.g., "Swim only here," "Stay with your support person") are provided, and complex instructions or abstract warning messages are avoided.
- Regarding safety and supervision, the support person remains responsible for close supervision near water. Other environmental risks should be reduced through design: clear boundaries near the water, a visible lifeguard presence (if available), and seating and shaded rest areas to prevent fatigue or overstimulation. Environmental design should support visitors' participation without drawing attention or requiring special arrangements. It means that various facilities (toilets, changing areas) are easy to find and use.

- Moderate intellectual disability does not mean inability to enjoy or benefit from water tourism. Predictability, repetition, and simple communication reduce anxiety and increase safety. Cooperation between service staff and the accompanying support person is essential.

Person nr. 2. A 16-year-old boy who has a severe intellectual disability because of an acquired brain injury. Cognitive functioning, understanding of danger, impulse control, memory, and communication are significantly affected. He requires constant supervision in public spaces, especially near water. Communication may be limited to single words, gestures, facial expressions, or behaviour. One or more caregivers always accompany him. Main support needs are high-level supervision, clear structure, repetition, a calm environment, simplified communication, and strong environmental safety measures.

- Before the service, the caregiver(s) need all the information related to service provision. Clearly and as detail as possible, the activity structure, safety risks, supervision responsibilities, and sensory factors (noise, crowds, water temperature) should be explained. It is necessary to assess whether the activity is appropriate and safe, given the young person's abilities and behaviour. If the activity is suitable, agree in advance on roles and responsibilities between staff and caregiver(s).
- During the service, the person must never be left unattended. The caregiver remains the primary supervisor, and staff provide support and adapt the environment. All instructions given during the activity should be very short, concrete, repeated as needed, supported by demonstration and physical guidance (with caregiver consent). Keep in mind to avoid overstimulation (loud sounds, crowds, long waiting times). Use clear safety routines and predictable sequences (e.g., "life jacket on → sit → wait"). Don't forget to monitor behaviour closely for signs of distress, fatigue, or agitation.
- Finishing the activity signals its end clearly and calmly, supporting smooth transitions (changing clothes, moving to rest areas). Feedback should be collected from the caregiver, but don't forget to pay some attention to the person with intellectual disability too. Discuss and share observations with caregiver and staff that may help improve future visits (what worked well, what was challenging).
- If a person and her support person are on a public beach or in another self-guided area (e.g., public beach, walking area on a harbour), make sure the environment compensates for the person's inability to recognise danger: clear physical boundaries near water, visible barriers or fencing where possible, and lifeguard presence is highly recommended. Signage alone is not sufficient for safety in this case. Continuous one-to-one supervision by a caregiver is essential. The caregiver must always remain within arm's reach of the person when the person is near the water. It is important that the person wear appropriate safety equipment (e.g., a life jacket) even when not swimming if there is a risk of unintentionally entering water.
- Generally, it is worth keeping in mind that organised or independent activities should be short, simple, and low intensity. There should be access to quiet areas for breaks if overstimulation occurs, and ensure toilets, changing areas, and exits are easy to access with assistance.
- All services must be adapted not only to enable participation, but to prevent dangerous situations before they arise. Severe intellectual disability significantly limits understanding of risk, environmental safety and supervision are critical. The caregiver is the central decision-maker and safety partner.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Intellectual disability affects learning, understanding, and adaptation rather than being an illness, with varying levels of severity that influence conceptual, social, and practical skills and determine the level of support required.
- Clear, simple, and concrete communication is essential, using short sentences, visual aids, demonstrations, repetition, and predictable structures while avoiding abstract language, metaphors, and sudden changes.
- Predictability, routine, and emotional safety are key to successful participation, as unfamiliar environments and sensory overload can cause stress: calm pacing, breaks, and advance preparation reduce anxiety.
- Accessible water tourism relies on cooperation with support persons, who play a central role in supervision, communication, and safety, especially for people with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities.
- Environmental design and equipment must proactively reduce risks, using stable watercraft, physical barriers, clear signage with symbols, supportive seating, appropriate life jackets, and sensory-friendly options to ensure safe and inclusive experiences.

3.1.6. Mental disorders

Overview of the target group and their specific needs

There are many ways of defining a mental disorder, but one way of explaining it is through the medical concept: "Mental, behavioural, and neurodevelopmental disorders are syndromes characterized by clinically significant abnormalities in a person's cognition, emotional regulation, or behaviour that reflect dysfunction in a psychological, biological, or developmental process, which in turn affect mental and behavioural functioning. These disturbances are usually associated with difficulties or impairments in personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning." (ICD-11, WHO) In other words, a mental disorder is a health condition that can profoundly influence a person's emotions, thinking, behaviour, and relationships with others. Thus, a person with a mental disorder is someone who has a different mental state from the average, whose mental, emotional, or cognitive state causes them significant difficulties in coping with everyday life, communicating, or participating in society.

Mental disorders are often viewed as medical conditions in which the brain and/or its functions may be affected. Mental disorders include a wide range of disorders, such as anxiety disorders (e.g., phobias), dementia, addictive disorders, personality disorders, mood disorders (e.g., depression), schizophrenia, anorexia, autism spectrum disorder, etc.

People with a mental disorder may, depending on the diagnosis, have a disorder:

- Perception - a person may have hyperacusis, hypersensitivity, etc., which makes it difficult for them to cope with their surroundings.
- Thinking - a person's thinking does not accurately reflect reality, where, among other things, it may be difficult to relate thoughts to words, there may be obsessions, etc.
- Wilfulness - a person's will is disordered in purpose or activity, for example, he or she is unable to do something because his or her will is disordered and there is no impulse to act.
- Emotional - a person's feelings do not match the situation around them, and they are unable to control or regulate their feelings.
- Instincts - human behaviour is not in line with normal instinctive actions, such as eating out of control or, conversely, starving when the body is weak.
- Intellect - a person's memory, cognitive abilities are impaired.
- Consciousness - a person's consciousness is disturbed, it can be blurred, camel states are in constant flux from alertness to drowsiness and sluggishness.

In the case of a mental disorder, a person's difficulties are related to the following areas:

- Interacting with people.
- It is difficult or impossible for them to consider others and care about anyone.
- Working and social relationships are very difficult or even impossible.
- Various difficulties that arise in life are insurmountable, and performing tasks is difficult.
- Anxiety and loss cannot be coped with.
- Changes cause panic, and coping with them is extremely difficult.
- It is difficult to understand who i am, a person's self-identity may be disturbed.
- It is difficult to distinguish between reality and what is going on in a person's head.

while intellectual disability is a permanent condition, mental disorder is a medical condition that can change over time and can be prevented and treated. People with mental health problems need the most support in situations where there is an exacerbation of the illness, or crisis, and rapid intervention is essential. This is followed by recovery and aftercare, leading to stability.

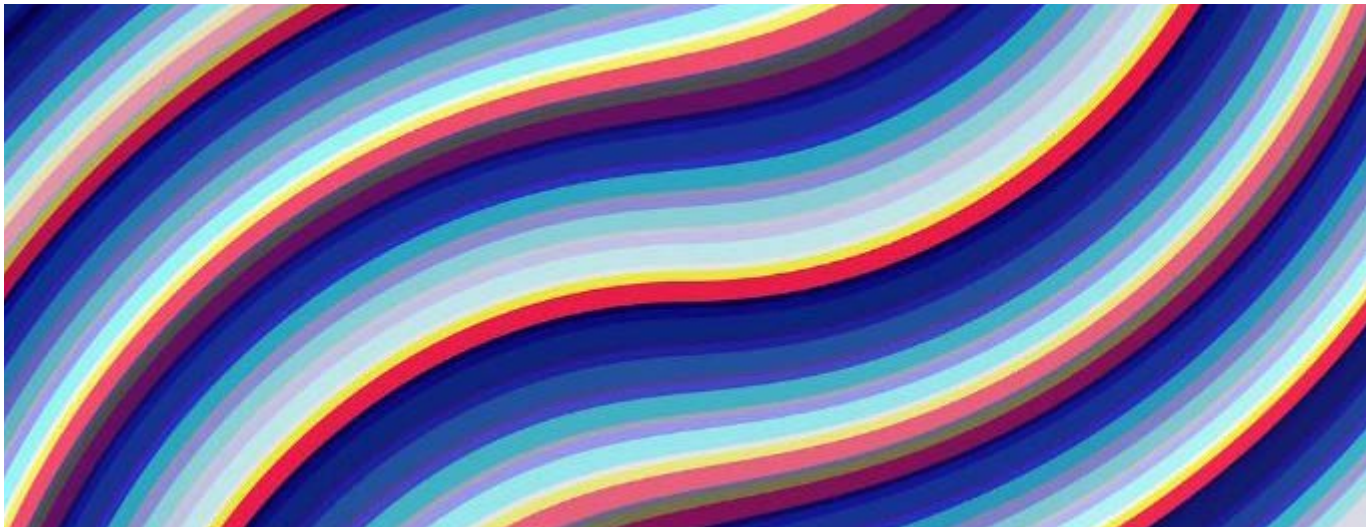
People with mental disorders use water tourism services mostly during their recovery and aftercare period, or when they have fully recovered.



Suggestions for communications and targeted information with people with mental disorders

- Be respectful to the person. When someone feels respected and heard, they are more likely to return respect and consider what you have to say.
- Patience and friendly support in communication (medications, problems with attention and concentration, etc., may affect speech tempo, self-expression, courage to ask for information).
- Some people with paranoia may be frightened, so be aware that they may need more body space than you.
- Instead of directing the conversation at them with 'you' statements, use 'I' statements instead. People with mental disorders are very sensitive and may misinterpret messages. "You" statements are often experienced as accusatory or blaming, even when no blame is intended (for example, "You are not listening"). "You" statements may be misinterpreted as criticism, control, punishment, or hostility. Therefore, using "I" statements helps to keep the conversation calm and grounded, lower emotional arousal, and slow escalation. For example, "I like to talk to you about safety rules…", "I can't allow this to happen because I need…".
- Ease into the conversation gradually. It may be that the person is not in a position to talk. Don't force a person to communicate.
- Be sure to speak in a relaxed and calm manner.
- Talk to them in a space that is comfortable, where you won't likely be interrupted and where there are likely minimal surroundings and other types of distractions.
- Do not lie to them, be open and honest about your services and what you can offer.
- Be aware of a person becoming upset or confused by your conversation with them.
- Listen to the person and try to understand what they are communicating. Reflect the information.
- Communicate straightforwardly and stick to one topic at a time.
- Use clear and simple language.
- Be a good listener, be responsive, and make eye contact with a caring approach.
- Allow them to talk and open, but don't press.
- Reduce any defensiveness by sharing your feelings and looking for common ground.

- If needed, set limits with the person as you would others. For example, "I only have five minutes to talk to you" or "I will not be able to talk to you when there is too much noise" (indicating the person is screaming).
- Be polite and show appreciation.
- During the communication, repeat important information and ask questions to confirm understanding.
- Use illustrative materials like pictograms, pictures, while explaining water safety or following activities.
- It is important to support a person's sense of reality. If a person sees or hears things or voices that others don't, you can say calmly that it is you who sees or hears, and we don't. Bring his/her attention to the present situation and activities. This should not be a blaming but a neutral statement.
- Try to avoid too much sensory overload:
    - Voices and noise, for example, different voices at the same time in the same space.
    - Overcrowded places, enable a quiet room or space to relax.
    - Too dark or bright surroundings.
    - Flashing lights, aggressive patterns on floors and walls.



- If a person behaves unexpectedly, then stay calm, use a slow and clear manner of talking, lower your voice slightly, do not make sudden moves, keep your hands visible, and explain carefully what you will do next and confirm it with the person. Avoid confrontation.

Things to avoid doing:

- Criticising, blaming, or raising your voice at them.
- Talking too much, too rapidly, too loudly. Silence and pauses are recommended.
- Showing any form of hostility towards the person.
- Excessive whispering, joking, and laughing, as these behaviours could be viewed as dangerous to someone with paranoia.

- Assuming things about them or their situation.
- Being sarcastic or making jokes about their condition.
- Patronising them or saying anything condescending.
- Bringing your own or your group's increased attention to a person with mental illness.



Recommendations and good examples of accessibility in water tourism for people with mental disorders

Communication before arrival

People with mental disorders often use water tourism services accompanied by a family member or activity instructor, but also with friends or alone if they have recovered sufficiently. Given the specific nature of mental disorders, it is important to share information about the services, including visual materials, before using them. Therefore, clear and easily understandable information about the services offered on the website must be provided regarding the content of the services (what is done, what or who is viewed, what sounds can be heard, etc.) and practical arrangements (e.g., how long the boat trip lasts, what to wear, when breaks are taken, where to use the toilet, what the more difficult stages of the service may be, etc.). Since people with mental disorders often travel with an support person, especially if they are involved in special care services, have a guardian, additional information about the companion and/or support person must be provided, e.g. whether the support person can use the service at a reduced rate/free of charge, whether the support person can accompany the client, e.g. in a canoe, etc.

A mental disorder does not automatically mean that a person's intellect is somehow inferior, nor does it impose special requirements for the use of simple language. However, a person's motivation and perception may be impaired, making it difficult to read and understand long, complex texts. Therefore, design your website so that the text is moderate and easy to understand. When designing your website, try to use a clear structure and comfortable colour schemes, and avoid flashing and rapidly changing visual elements. If you still want to use them, it should be possible to turn them off separately on the website.

When booking a service, if the form is fillable, additional questions about specific needs must be included. In the case of mental disorders, for example, needs a calm pace, little noise, a support person, simple instructions, dry practice before entering the water, shorter duration, breaks, the opportunity to be alone, etc. The recommendation for people with mental disorders is to avoid excessive sensory overload, i.e., choose a service offered in a smaller group, at a quieter time when there are fewer people in the area or using the service, avoid excessive noise, etc.

Arrival and providing the service

When arriving at and staying at the service, the methods for communicating with people with mental disorders must be followed. In addition, people with mental disorders are supported by a clear and easily visible system of signs and information boards, which must guide them from one place to another at the service provider's premises in a continuous sequence. Signs and information boards must have easily understandable text, with one sentence conveying one idea, the text is not ambiguous, metaphors, foreign words, and excessive use of abbreviations are avoided, and it is easy to read (contrasting colors, written in lowercase letters, aligned to the left, clearly structured, important information is in

bold or in a separate box). It is important to create an environment where people feel safe and can cope independently. For example, the environment has normal, stable lighting, not too loud or sudden noises, and seating and relaxation areas that can be separate from other people. Also, the environment has a logical layout, with additional signs and information boards that help orient on the premises and find services and activity areas.

When communicating with people with mental disorders, ask the accompanying person(s) what you need to pay attention to and consider when communicating. In general, it is worth following these principles:

- Calm, friendly, and clear communication.
- One instruction at a time.
- In addition to verbal instructions, demonstrate the action.
- Use gestures and body language, sample sentences, and actions.
- Don't rush, give the customer time to process the information.
- Use easy-to-understand language.
- Repeat important information and actions.
- When providing a service, it is a good idea to show the entire process visually, either with pictograms or photos.
- Avoid rushing, nervousness, overplanning, and excessive noise.

In many cases, people with mental disorders also have other health problems, which means they need various types of support when using services. The equipment and tools used must provide a sense of security and confidence that they will be able to cope in the new situation.

- Stable vehicles, e.g., watercraft with a wider base or other stabilizers.
- Tandem vehicles, i.e., a companion of a person with mental disorders, can be with them and support their sense of security.
- Mobility aids: low quays or ramps, handrails, non-slip flooring materials, boat flooring materials, contrasting markings on stairs, quays, and boat bridges.
- Boats and other watercraft are equipped with seats with adjustable backrests, armrests, and, if necessary, additional supports to help people sit, stand up, and sit stably in the watercraft.
- Life jackets of various sizes with easy fastenings. Be sure to test how to move and sit with a life jacket in advance.
- Many people with mental disorders cannot tolerate loud noises, so the service provider should be able to offer earplugs or quieter alternatives.
- Many people with mental disorders are very sensitive to different sensations, so it is worth offering earplugs, blankets, soft vests without seams, raincoats, sunglasses, etc., to calm their senses. If the business does not wish to, or is unable to, stock all of these items, it should provide on its website, in the service description, information about the various aids customers can consider bringing with them before using the service.

Feedback and departure

Upon leaving the service, people with mental health conditions should also be offered the opportunity to provide feedback. They may choose not to do so, and this should be respected. At the same time, a range of feedback options should be available – paper forms and online/electronic formats that the person can complete later at their own pace. It is important to give the option to leave feedback anonymously, as people with mental disorders sometimes may feel paranoid that others will know their thoughts or opinions. It is also advisable to use creative feedback methods such as emotion cards, colour codes, and similar tools.



Visitors with mental disorders in water tourism

Person nr. 1. An adult visitor diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Mood, energy level, concentration, and risk perception may fluctuate between depressive and hypomanic/manic phases. During stable periods, the person may function independently, during episodes, they may require increased structure, calm environments, and support. Decision-making capacity can vary across phases. Main support needs are related to predictability, emotional safety, calm communication, flexibility, and clear boundaries–especially near water and during stimulating activities.

- Before the service, the person needs clear, structured information about the activity, schedule, duration, and physical demands. Service providers should offer advanced communication tools to clarify expectations and allow visitors to ask questions privately. It is necessary to avoid overstimulating marketing language or pressure to participate in high-intensity activities.
- During the service and activities, use calm, respectful, and non-confrontational communication, and maintain predictable routines and clear instructions. Be attentive to signs of overstimulation, impulsivity, fatigue, or withdrawal. Allow breaks and provide quiet spaces if needed. Set safety boundaries clearly using neutral "I" statements (e.g., "I need us to stay within this area for safety").
- Finishing the activity signals its end clearly and calmly, avoiding rushed transitions. For follow-up, offer private, non-pressuring feedback options (e.g., anonymous questionnaires) and provide clear information about next steps (departure, facilities, rest areas).
- For public beaches and other self-guided areas near water, ensure clear signage and rules, especially around swimming zones and restricted areas. Where possible, reduce environmental triggers (excessive noise, confusing layouts). It is highly recommended to provide access to quiet resting areas. Keep in mind that safety design should not rely solely on self-regulation – clear physical boundaries near water are important. Also, try to avoid environments that encourage risk-taking without supervision (e.g., unclear depth changes).

Person nr. 2. An adult visitor experiencing depression. Symptoms may include low energy, reduced motivation, slowed thinking, anxiety, reduced concentration, and low self-confidence. Social interaction and decision-making may feel overwhelming. The person's main support needs are related to low-pressure communication, reassurance, clarity, encouragement without force, and reduced cognitive and emotional load.

- Before the service, it is recommended to provide simple, reassuring information about the activity and what to expect. Offer written confirmation of bookings and instructions to reduce uncertainty. It would be suggested to avoid time pressure and complex choices.

- During the service and activities, communicate in a warm, calm, and respectful manner. Give instructions step by step and repeat gently if needed. Allow extra time for responses and actions. Do not interpret withdrawal or quietness as a lack of interest or rudeness. Encourage participation, but respect the person's need to pause or stop.
- At the end of the activity, clearly explain when the activity ends and what happens next. It is important to offer positive, non-evaluative feedback (e.g., "Thank you for joining today"). For feedback, provide easy, optional channels (written or digital). At the same time, avoid pressuring the visitor to socialise or reflect immediately.
- For public beaches and other self-guided areas near water, provide clear orientation information (routes, facilities, exits) and ensure seating, shaded areas, and rest points are easily accessible. It would be useful to avoid overly complex signage or crowded information boards. Maintain a calm, welcoming atmosphere with visible safety presence (e.g., lifeguards). This means that you don't overcrowd attractions and activity areas in a small area. Design the premise with space and a quiet place to relax.
- Keep in mind that mental health conditions (disorders) are often invisible and fluctuating. Clear structure and calm communication reduce distress and increase safety. Support should be offered, not imposed, and dignity must always be preserved. Inclusive environments benefit not only visitors with mental health conditions but all users.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Mental disorders are health conditions (ICD-11) that can significantly affect cognition, emotional regulation, behaviour, and daily functioning, covering a wide range of diagnoses and impacting perception, thinking, will, emotions, instincts, and consciousness.
- Unlike intellectual disability, mental disorders can fluctuate over time and may be treatable, meaning support needs are highest during crises or symptom exacerbations, while many people use water tourism services mainly during recovery, aftercare, or stable periods.
- Communication must be calm, respectful, and non-escalating, using simple language, one topic at a time, confirmation of understanding, and "I" statements to avoid perceived blame or threat - especially important for people who may be sensitive, anxious, or paranoid.
- Sensory overload and environmental triggers should be proactively reduced through predictable routines, quiet spaces, stable lighting, minimal distractions, avoidance of flashing/aggressive visuals, and clear signage that supports independent orientation without drawing attention to the person.
- Accessible service requires clear pre-arrival information, flexible booking options, trained staff, and safety-oriented equipment, including stable/tandem watercraft, supportive seating, easy-fastening life jackets, mobility supports, and optional calming aids (earplugs, blankets, sunglasses), plus low-pressure and anonymous feedback options.

3.2. Different social groups: VIP clients, gender-based groups

Different social groups are defined by status, power, and material opportunities, which in turn are influenced by various demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and the amount of material or other resources. For example, one can talk about VIP guests, middle-class representatives, and backpackers (generally young people and students), as well as guests with specific accessibility requirements or distinctive needs. Many characteristics are usually combined, for example, a middle-class family with 3 children or a group of female entrepreneurs who are listed in the TOP 10 most successful business owners in a country.

Distinctive needs are like the term "special needs," but differ in several ways. While special needs are often associated with a person's permanent condition or long-term health issues that affect their daily life, distinctive needs are more temporary and context-specific. These needs can affect a person's ability to cope in the short term, for example, in certain situations or during a particular period, and are not often related to the person's health condition. Different social groups are defined by status, power, and material opportunities, which in turn are influenced by various demographic characteristics.

VIP guests, often referred to as VIP clients, may include high-ranking officials, extremely wealthy individuals, and people with very high prestige and recognition. Although power, wealth, and reputation are often interconnected, they do not always go hand in hand. VIP guests are primarily characterised by their desire to receive high-level, personalised, and private service. The schedules and needs of VIP guests are often unique, and they are willing to pay a premium to have their desires fulfilled.

When providing service to VIP guests, the following aspects should be considered:

- High-quality equipment. Offering water-tourism services often requires specialized equipment. The equipment must be high-quality, well-maintained, comfortable, and designed to ensure the best experience, while also prioritizing safety. There should be a backup plan for bad weather, technical failures, and other contingencies.
- Safety. Detailed plan of safety plans, safety equipment, and saving actions if needed.
- Uniquely tailored service package. The service should be customised to meet the guest's unique desires and needs. In addition to basic services, this includes luxury products, gifts, and other supplementary services that enhance the exclusivity of the experience and provide the guest with a special experience. As a service provider, it is important to consider how the service can be adapted and personalised. For example, adding a boat trip dinner or additional stops for swimming, or a personal music performance on board.
- High level of service. VIP clients require a high level of service, including discretion and careful attention to detail, to ensure there are no delays or interruptions during service provision. This also includes the availability of services at the guest's preferred time, booking timing, waiting list, and other details.
- Exclusive Access. VIP guests expect exclusive access to attractions, locations, or people they would not normally encounter on a regular tour, or places that are not open to the wider public. The service should provide a more private and comfortable experience, at the same time, exclusive access must not conflict with public access or general accessibility rights.
- Privacy and Security. Privacy and security are especially important for VIP guests, given the heightened security requirements associated with their position. This must be considered and

planned. As a service offerer, this may mean that the guest will be accompanied by a security team, which will oversee the service, provide equipment, prepare before and during the service, check the necessary equipment, or require the procurement of additional security gear. Privacy and security may also mean having a single point of contact for the client throughout the service.

- Flexibility. Flexibility is a key characteristic of personalised and exclusive service, particularly when dealing with VIP guests. If a guest needs to make last-minute changes to their visit due to their obligations, how can the tourism organisation adjust the service?

In summary, working with VIP guests involves thorough preparation to offer a service that meets the guest's expectations and needs. It is important to consider how much flexibility and personalisation the water tourism service provider can offer during the activities and what resources are required to do so.

Tourism is affected by gender. Different genders have different motivations, expectations, and behaviours when travelling and using services. There is a clear distinction between men and women in their leisure interests, including motivations such as cultural heritage and sport. Yet, we cannot forget that the world is diverse and there are not only two genders: men and women. We can also talk about trans people whose biological body and sensed gender are not the same, and we can talk about different sexualities. Those differences will, to some extent, affect the services offered and enjoyed.

Things to consider when serving clients of different genders:

- Women often need more time and privacy for restroom use and for managing hygiene. As a guide, it's important to consider how to ensure their comfort during long hiking days, especially during menstruation. Are the toilet facilities spacious enough for women or guests with small children to care for themselves or their children comfortably?
- Appearance can be important to guests, and this may come with distinct needs. For example, guests may have long nails, false eyelashes, or makeup that could be at risk in outdoor or unusual conditions. It's helpful to provide information or supplies that help guests maintain their appearance or prepare for the excursion. On rainy days, guides could offer guests a chance to check and adjust their appearance, like wiping smudged makeup.
- Tolerance and readiness to acknowledge gender-specific needs are essential. Particular attention should be given to guests of alternative gender identities. If guests include members of the LGBTQ community, it's vital for both the guide and the group to demonstrate acceptance. Here are some useful questions to think of: Are there gender-neutral restrooms available, and are they clearly marked and accessible? Are all guests provided with appropriate services and a comfortable environment?

SUMMARY POINTS

- Different social groups are shaped by status, power, resources, and demographic characteristics, and individuals often belong to multiple overlapping groups (e.g., VIPs, families, gender-based groups, or clients with distinctive, situation-specific needs).
- Distinctive needs are temporary and context-dependent rather than permanent, meaning service providers must be able to recognise short-term coping challenges and adapt services flexibly without assuming long-term health-related limitations.
- VIP clients expect highly personalised, discreet, and premium services.
- Gender-sensitive service design improves comfort, dignity, and inclusivity by attending to privacy, hygiene needs, appearance-related concerns, and the respectful accommodation of diverse gender identities, including clearly marked and accessible gender-neutral facilities.

3.3. Different ages in water tourism

Tourism is no longer related to specific age groups or demographic structure. Understanding life quality, emotions, and experiences is equally important to all, and these understandings are supported by different conventions, strategies, and concepts, e.g., the concept of active aging or the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means that, when offering different services, including water tourism, the needs and expectations of different age groups should be considered.

Things to consider when serving children:

- Information signs and other information materials should be placed at a height suitable for children.
- Child-friendly symbols and visuals (animals, colors) can also make spaces, information boards, and signs more engaging and understandable.

Children need appropriately sized (but varied) tables, chairs, attractions, water activity vehicles, safety equipment, etc.



- Child-friendly alternatives should be offered for various elements of the service, such as meals, activities during the activity, relaxation options, etc.
- Choose a communication style, language, and activity content that is appropriate for children. At the same time, keep in mind that children's thinking and actions differ across ages; e.g., 3-year-olds and 7-year-olds are children, but their behaviour is already very different.
- Communication should be open, patient, and friendly, as children might be shy, unsure, or unaware of how to act in different situations. It is important to encourage them and provide clear explanations and information.
- Children should be respected equally to other guests and have the right to express their opinions and make choices.
- The service should engage multiple senses. Since children's attention span and self-regulation are still developing, the service should apply suitable methods: multisensory engagement, varied activities, clarity and concreteness, and flexibility.

Things to consider when serving elderly clients:

- Be mindful of potential health issues (e.g., chronic diseases) that may limit the pace, duration, or terrain suitability (e.g., uneven surfaces, stairs, slopes). Seniors often require slower-paced activities and frequent breaks (if applicable).
- Older people require more light for proper vision, so movement in dim or dark environments can be challenging. It is important to ensure proper and even lighting.
- Try to avoid glossy surfaces, including on information boards.
- Reading very small, complex fonts or low-contrast text can be difficult. Therefore, printed information should be in a larger font, with a simple, clear typeface, and high contrast. A magnifying glass might also be helpful.
- Many older people experience hearing loss, making it difficult to hear speech that is too quiet, poorly articulated, or surrounded by noise. As a service provider, pay attention to your speech pace, clarity, and volume, and choose locations without background noise if possible. Also, ensure your face and body are clearly visible to support lip-reading and facial cues.
- Communication and the opportunity to share their experiences are important to older guests, so the guide should make time for conversation and active listening.
- Offering boat trips or other active water sport activities, be aware that many elderly people may have mobility impairments, which don't allow them to move too fast or be very flexible. They may require the same support as described in the Mobility Impairments chapter above.

While offering services to the elderly, it is worth noting that travelling and the use of water-related tourism products are driven by different motivations, such as spending time with family, maintaining an active lifestyle, and supporting the idea of "never too old".



At the same time, older clients recognise that they no longer have the skills and stamina they once had. They rely on tour operators to take them on rivers and for other activities within their reduced capabilities, and to provide comfort, logistical convenience, reliable and forgiving equipment, and ample safety support.

Working with different age groups is always influenced by the characteristics of each generation. The generation is a group of people who share similar birth times and experiences of important events at developmental stages. Those generations are active and physically fit enough to enjoy tourist trips and various tourism services.

Those generations are:

- **Baby Boomers (BB)**–born in 1945–1964, the so-called generation of the baby boom and economic boom.
- **Generation X**–born in 1965–1980, growing up during the economic crisis of the 1970s.
- **Generation Y (Millennials)**–born in 1981–1994, brought up in the era of globalization and universal access to the Internet.
- **Generation Z**–born 1995-2012, which uses modern information and communication technology for everything.
- **Generation Alpha** – born 2013-2025, whose digital competences are often intuitive, not learnt as they are born in the era of cloud services, smart devices, and new technologies.

Each generation has its own life experiences, behaviors, thinking styles, and expectations of the social environment, including services.

The Baby Boomer generation is increasingly active in recreation and travel, supported by financial stability, higher mobility, and more free time. As this healthier, wealthier generation ages, travel is mainly motivated by enjoyment, relaxation, stress reduction, novelty, attractive environments, and a desire to maintain good health.

Generation X includes individuals born between 1965 and 1980, currently aged approximately 37–49, who grew up and entered adulthood during the period of economic transition in the former Soviet Union. Widespread inflation, rising unemployment, and unstable labour markets often required them to work under temporary contracts or accept positions below their qualifications. Beginning their careers in such uncertain conditions fostered entrepreneurial skills, while also reinforcing insecurity and concerns about job stability. Today, as established adults, many members of this generation hold positions as business owners, managers, or educators for Generations Y and Z. Family plays a central role in their lives, which is reflected in their preference for family-oriented travel to destinations such as the seaside, mountains, or lakes. When travelling abroad, they tend to favour calm recreational destinations or culturally significant sites. Although raised in an analogue era, Generation X has successfully adapted to digital technologies and actively uses the internet to plan and book travel.

The key force shaping **Generation Y** (Millennials) has been globalization, which has reduced national boundaries, internationalized businesses, blended cultures, and expanded access to goods and services worldwide. Dual-income households became common, providing favourable conditions for children's personal development. This generation places strong importance on ethics, multiculturalism, social awareness, and the possibilities created by information and communication technologies. Millennials are highly mobile and enthusiastic travellers, with social networks that extend beyond local communities to include friends across the globe. Their core values include independence, ambition, creativity, innovation, and continuous development.

Compared with earlier generations, Generation Y travels more frequently, explores a wider range of destinations, spends more during trips, and actively seeks meaningful experiences and information. They rely heavily on the Internet and social media to plan journeys and to share experiences during and after travel. Comfort is highly valued, but they also look for adventure and distinctive experiences rather than passive relaxation. Increasingly, Generation Y tourists avoid mass tourism, preferring to identify as travellers rather than tourists, a tendency linked to both independent trip planning and environmental concerns. In comparison with Baby Boomers and Generation X, they are significantly more active in organizing travel and booking accommodation online, for example, through platforms such as Booking.com or TripAdvisor.

Generation Z shares several characteristics with Generation Y, although many of these traits are more strongly expressed, while in other aspects the two generations differ considerably. Generation Z is highly open to the world and to new experiences, including not only technological innovations but also the exploration of unfamiliar destinations. It is a strongly multitasking generation for whom social media represents the primary channel of communication. A notable characteristic is a frequent preference for virtual connections over face-to-face interpersonal relationships. Members of Generation Z are curious and open to diverse forms of tourism; however, their travel activity is often constrained by limited financial resources, as many are not yet fully integrated into the labour market and remain financially dependent on their parents. Research indicates that 84% of Generation Z consider social media an important tool for travel planning. They use social platforms to search for information and promotions and to gain travel inspiration through photos and videos shared by friends or influencers. Social media as an information source is important for them.

Generation Alpha is still in childhood and is influenced by their parents, who are mostly Generation Y (Millennials). Their parents are eager to use social media to share photos and videos of themselves and their family. This means that Generation Alpha is online from birth. This generation is growing up with advanced digital opportunities, including ubiquitous streaming services. Mostly, we can describe them as tech-savvy and anxious. Both are related to the impact of the global environment in their formative years: widespread digital development and new opportunities, and, at the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic and crises emerged worldwide.

Each generation needs a good client service that supports their age, health, and life experience. It starts with online information, activity, and safety management and communication styles that suit them best.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Water tourism must be age-responsive, recognising that quality of life, emotions, and experiences matter at all ages and that services should be adapted to children, adults, and seniors in line with international principles such as children's rights and active ageing.
- Children require age-appropriate design and communication, including child-height information, friendly visuals, suitable equipment, multisensory engagement, and respectful, encouraging interaction that reflects developmental differences between age groups.
- Older visitors benefit from slower-paced, well-supported services, with good lighting, clear and readable information, low-noise environments, opportunities for rest and conversation, and mobility support comparable to that provided for people with mobility impairments.
- Generational characteristics shape travel behaviour and expectations, as Baby Boomers value comfort and wellbeing, Generation X prioritises family-oriented and calm travel, Millennials seek meaningful, ethical, and digitally supported experiences, and Generation Z relies heavily on social media and visual inspiration.
- High-quality client service across generations requires tailored communication and design, starting from accessible online information through to safe activities, appropriate equipment, and service styles that match visitors' age, health, digital habits, and life experience.

4 A valuable customer experiences all year round

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding the layered nature of boat-based tourism products and how added elements contribute to upgrading the overall boat rental experience beyond the core service.
2. Realizing the importance of experience design and customer targeting in product development.

4.1. Product development for upgrading the boat rental experience

Water tourism is often associated with being on a vessel (boat) on the water, exploring the surroundings from that perspective, or engaging in other vocational or recreational activities. Boats and water (rivers, lakes, seas, etc.) are a core part of tourism products, offering numerous opportunities to provide services. Traditionally, service providers would charge tourists who wanted to take a water ride. The captain or someone from the vessel team will assist guests on board and provide a seat. Those are the basics of a boat ride product. Stephen Smith (1994) has developed a model (see Figure 1) to illustrate all the layers of the tourism product, adding, for example, a hospitality layer. In the case of boat rental, hospitality can be provided by offering warm blankets to visitors when the weather is chilly or a glass of cold water when it's hot. Sometimes food is also served as a part of a tourism product. Providing different activities on a boat will give a person a choice if (s)he wants to participate or not. On some boat trips, it is possible to rent or use earphones to listen to the history of the shore; sometimes, a guided tour is offered, or the option to swim from the boat. The last option can also be considered involvement, which depends heavily on the customer's openness. Involvement can involve pulling something out of the water (for example, a fish or garbage). The further we move from the core, the harder it is for the service provider to control how a tourism product is experienced.

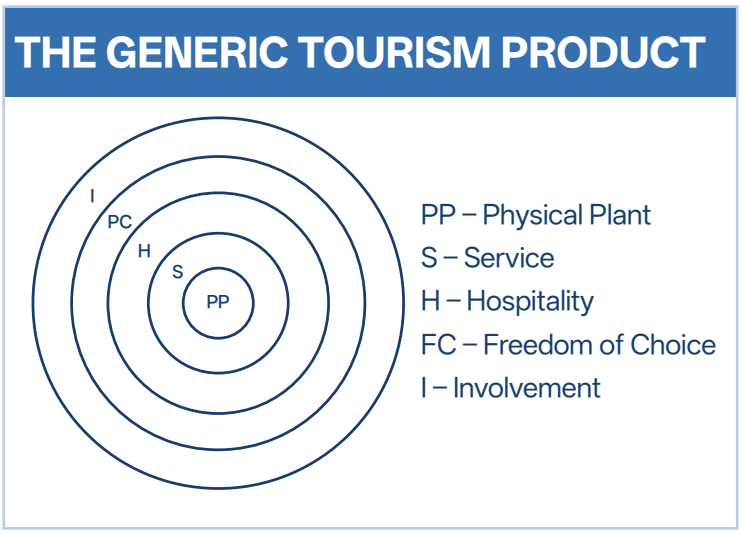
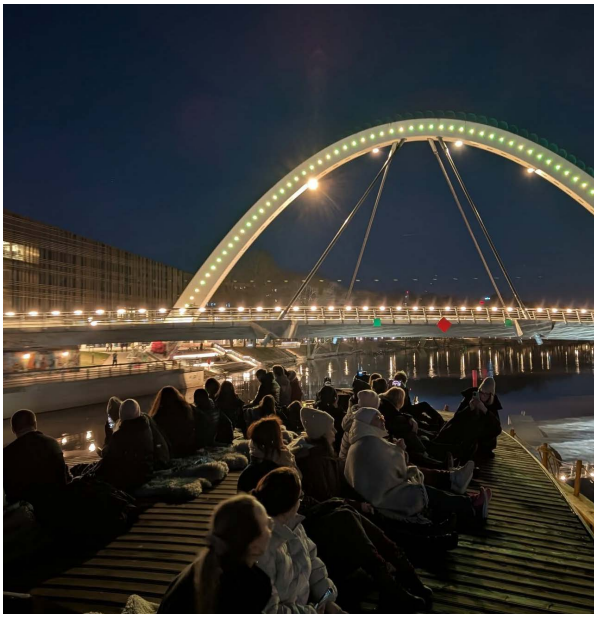


Figure 1: The generic tourism product by Smith 1994



Experience is created through all the senses and across 4 dimensions (see figure 2). For tourists, passive participation on a river can include taking a barge ride, looking around, and maybe taking photos of the surroundings. When the captain explains how the barge was built and what it was used for over the centuries, it becomes an educational experience. Maybe there is also the opportunity to participate in a workshop to build a little boat using natural materials. In that case, the participation becomes active. The natural environment can be immersive if the trip takes place at night, since it is not common for people living in the city to see stars, hear birds singing, or feel bats flying overhead.



Figure 2: The four realms of an Experience from Pine & Gilmore 1998

The tourism product should be tailored to its target audience. A certain group of people, for example, is interested in taking photos for social media, so they are constantly searching for Instagrammable places. If a service provider wishes to attract those people, it needs to plan where photo opportunities will be during the trip. Others care about nature, and maybe the third group wishes to experience different tastes. Knowing your customers helps create a tourism product that visitors are willing to pay for and recommend.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Boat rental services are layered tourism products, where value is created not only through the core boat ride but also through added elements such as hospitality, activities, guidance, and opportunities for involvement, which together upgrade the overall experience.
- Memorable boat-based experiences are multisensory and vary in participation level, ranging from passive enjoyment and learning to active and immersive engagement, though greater involvement also reduces the service provider's control over how the experience is perceived.
- Effective product development depends on clear customer targeting and experience design, as understanding visitors' motivations (e.g., social media use, nature appreciation, or culinary interest) enables service providers to tailor boat rental experiences that customers value, pay for, and recommend.

4.2. Nature and environmentally friendly operations in water tourism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding the environmental impacts of water tourism on aquatic ecosystems.
2. Recognizing the role of water tourism service providers in preventing environmental harm.
3. Recognizing key principles and practical measures for sustainable water tourism.
4. Appreciating the importance of integrating environmental awareness.

Sustainable tourism has become an increasingly important issue, with visitors' decisions increasingly influenced by how environmentally friendly service providers can operate. Water tourism is directly linked to the natural environment and therefore has a significant impact on aquatic life (e.g., fish, birds, aquatic plants) and water landscapes (coasts, islands, river basins, etc.). Water tourism activities can be neutral if the services offered are organised sensitively and based on all activities that affect the natural environment. Unfortunately, water tourism has been accompanied by many problems at both the local and global levels, including pollution, overconsumption and overuse of resources, and the loss of water-related biodiversity.

Pollution has a long-lasting effect on the water environment. Marine tourism (boating, snorkelling, diving) releases oils, fuel, and chemicals that degrade water quality and harm ecosystems, while infrastructure growth (hotels, roads, ports) destroys habitats and raises sedimentation. Tourist mismanagement of plastics and other non-biodegradable waste often overwhelms seasonal systems, causing lasting ecological damage and underscoring the need for strong awareness and responsible practices.

Overloading of the aquatic environment is often associated with intensive boat or other watercraft traffic in natural areas important for bird nesting, fish and animal habitats, and vegetation. Several studies have shown that motorboat traffic has a particularly strong impact on aquatic fauna and birdlife, as the noise and high speed of motorboats significantly affect the nesting, reproduction, feeding, and other activities of fish, birds, and aquatic animals in the natural environment, which in turn affects the survival of the species.

Estonia's coastal and offshore waters are home to diverse wildlife, including the Caspian Tern, the cliff-dwelling Razorbill, the rare Steller's Eider, the Harbour Porpoise – the world's smallest whale – and the Ringed Seal. Several of these species have declined due to human activity and resulting environmental change, requiring stronger protection and careful visitor behaviour. To safeguard key habitats, protected areas, and special conservation zones have been designated. In areas critical for threatened species, human access is often seasonally or spatially restricted. There is a list identifying Estonian maritime regions and navigable inland waters subject to movement restrictions and describing the specific rules for each area. In certain locations, access during restricted periods may be permitted upon application, provided a valid justification is submitted. The list is available at the following address: *https://www.eelis.ee/avalik/el_fil/piirangud_laevatatavatel_veekogudel.htm* (only in Estonian). In Latvia, navigation rules and safety requirements are defined in various national regulations.

The development of environmentally friendly and sustainable water tourism not only preserves the diversity of aquatic environments but is also linked to several socio-economic factors: service provider reputation, cost savings, and long-term resilience. By offering water tourism services that align with environmental friendliness and sustainability, each service provider helps reduce the footprint of water activities, protect biodiversity, and raise visitors' awareness of environmentally friendly behaviour. The following are the main requirements that water tourism service providers can follow to reduce the potential negative impact on the aquatic environment:

- **No pollution:** zero waste approach in water and coastal areas, where various measures are used to reduce or prevent pollution, e.g., organising waste collection and sorting on beaches, in ports, on boats and other watercraft; sharing information about waste through information signs and verbal communication, pollution management during hikes and water tours.
- **No harm:** water tourism services are offered in areas, periods (season, time of day, etc.), and in ways (e.g., using floating buoys instead of anchors, travelling at low speeds or without engines) that have little or no impact on the surrounding environment.
- **Fewer different resources are used:** water, energy, chemicals, and disposable materials. For example, reusable dishes are used for catering, and plastic straws are avoided.
- **Continues improvement of nature-friendly practices:** applying eco certificates like Blue Flag or Green Key.

There are no specific rules or regulations for water tourism providers, but they are subject to various laws and regulations. For example, the Maritime Safety Act, the Nature Conservation Act, the Health Board's guidelines for monitoring bathing water quality on public beaches, regulations issued by the Transport Agency regarding pollution, and various rules related to local governments and protected areas.

Important tools for entrepreneurs include:

- Develops its own standard procedures for organising service provision, based on legislation and eco-label or eco-standard guidelines (e.g., Blue Flag, which sets out criteria for beaches, ports, and boats used for tourism), and establishes SOPs (standard operating procedures) for the environment, safety, and emergencies.
- Trains the team to be environmentally conscious, including thorough knowledge of the nature and limitations of their work area, and provides skills for providing environmentally friendly services.
- Always provides warnings/briefings to customers when providing services.
- Ensures low impact of equipment, facilities, and logistics solutions, including the use of environmentally friendly cleaning products, functional equipment, etc.
- Continuously measures and assesses the impact of its activities: e.g., waste generation and management, fuel consumption, changes in the environment.
- Complies with and applies for eco-labels/standards (e.g., Blue Flag/Marina, Green Key, etc.).

SUMMARY POINTS

- Water tourism can have a direct, potentially significant impact on aquatic ecosystems, affecting water quality, habitats, wildlife, and biodiversity through pollution, heavy traffic, and infrastructure development if not managed responsibly.
- Service providers play a key role in preventing environmental harm, as their choices regarding routes, timing, equipment, speed, and visitor behaviour directly influence the pressure placed on sensitive aquatic environments.
- Protected areas and regulated water bodies require strict compliance with access restrictions, as seasonal and spatial limitations are essential for safeguarding vulnerable species and habitats, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions.
- Environmentally friendly water tourism brings long-term benefits, including biodiversity protection, a stronger reputation, cost savings, regulatory compliance, and increased resilience of tourism businesses.
- Sustainable water tourism relies on clear principles and practical measures, such as zero pollution, low-impact operations, reduced resource use, continuous improvement through eco-labels, staff training, customer awareness, and systematic monitoring of environmental impacts.

4.3. Overcoming low and high season challenges

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding the multidimensional nature, causes, and impacts of seasonality in water-based tourism.
2. Appreciating the strategic importance of adaptive, inclusive, and collaborative approaches in managing high and low season challenges to ensure year-round resilience and sustainable destination development.

Whether we like it or not, most tourism destinations are seasonal, because tourism generally relies on good weather – hardly anyone is looking for the worst possible weather for vacation. This chapter discusses the meaning, causes, effects, and options for managing seasonality.

The nature and meaning of seasonality in tourism

Seasonality is a situation, which something happens or is needed at regular intervals during a particular season (OED, 2016). From a tourism perspective, seasonality is a temporal imbalance that manifests in visitor numbers, spending, transportation availability, employment, and attraction attendance. While some variation is natural, strong seasonality can challenge the economic sustainability and operational stability of destinations.

Water-based tourism is particularly sensitive to seasonal patterns. Weather conditions, water temperature, water levels, and daylight hours directly affect visitor activities, accessibility, and safety. Seasonal changes can disproportionately affect visitors with access needs, as they can intensify existing limitations and make participation more difficult or less safe. For example, icy surfaces increase the challenges of mobility for people with mobility impairments. Or cold weather can make reading Braille for blind people hard, as it reduces the sensitivity of the fingertips. In addition, tourist behaviour, such as holiday schedules, school breaks, and cultural traditions, further amplifies seasonal peaks and lows.

Seasonality manifests in several dimensions:

- Demand seasonality, reflecting visitor numbers and expenditure over time.
- Supply seasonality, linked to workforce availability, opening hours, and service provision.
- Spatial seasonality, where certain sites become overcrowded while others remain underused.
- Social seasonality, influencing local communities' rhythms of life and interaction with visitors.

Globally, seasonality remains one of tourism's most persistent challenges. Even with climate adaptation, digitalization, and product diversification, managing the temporal concentration of demand remains a strategic priority for destinations aiming for year-round resilience and balanced regional development.

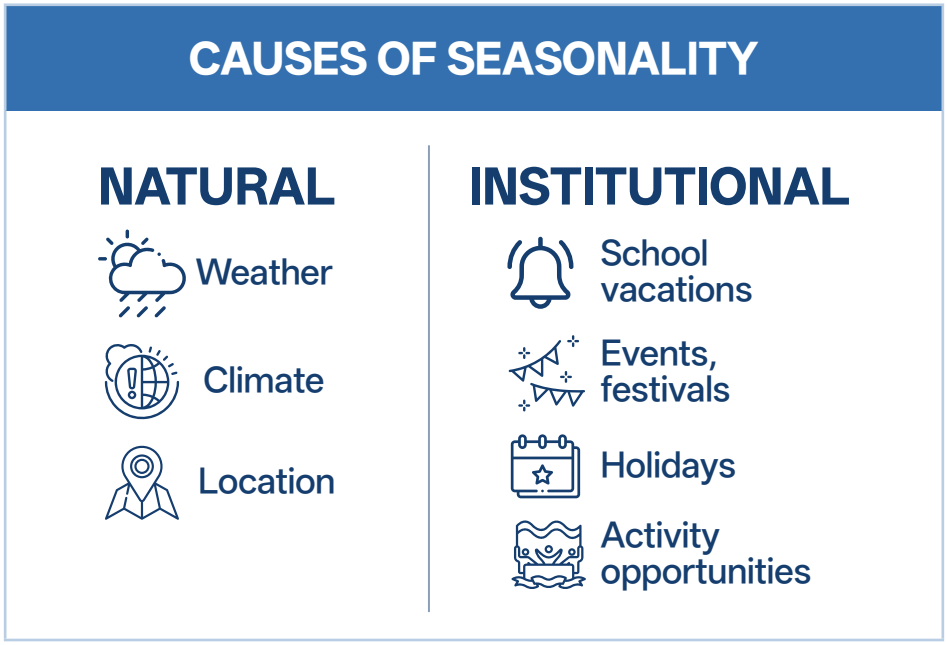
Which natural or behavioural factors
(e.g., weather, water conditions, holidays, traditions)
most strongly determine your high and low seasons?

In which dimension is seasonality
most evident at your touristic site?

The causes and influencing factors of seasonality

Seasonality in water tourism arises mainly from a combination of natural and institutional factors. Understanding those causes is essential for designing adaptive and resilient tourism strategies.

Natural and climatic factors, like water temperature, ice-free periods, storm frequency, rainfall patterns, and geographical location, determine when water-based activities are possible and attractive. These conditions often define the natural limits of the tourism season. Institutional factors include school vacations, events and festivals, and traditional holidays like Christmas, Easter, New Year's Eve, etc., which concentrate travel into specific periods.



Besides those, seasonal transport connections, limited accommodation capacity, and reduced service availability outside the main season can reinforce demand concentration. Additionally, visitor behaviour patterns, cultural habits, and traditions influence when and how people engage in water-related recreation.

How predictable or variable are the natural and climatic factors that most strongly define the limits of your tourism season?

How do visitor behaviour patterns, such as school holidays, cultural traditions, or leisure habits, shape demand peaks in your destination?

Impacts of seasonality on water tourism businesses and destinations

Seasonality has wide-ranging effects on the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of water tourism, impacting both short-term performance and long-term destination sustainability. From an economic perspective, the greatest challenge for tourism enterprises is finding and retaining full-time workers, as staffing needs can fluctuate sharply between high and low seasons. The economic drawbacks of seasonality are most evident during the low season, when revenues are low, but maintenance and operational costs remain high. For accommodation providers, the main issue is meeting high demand during summer peaks while facing underutilization and low occupancy rates in winter. However, seasonality may also bring economic benefits. Seasonal employment can provide additional income for certain groups, such as students, housewives, or farmers, who value flexible work arrangements. Many seasonal workers also prefer short-term employment because wages are higher during peak periods. Moreover, the low season allows destinations to invest in renovation, maintenance, and the development of new attractions, ensuring readiness for the next high season and improving the overall quality of tourism infrastructure.

Seasonality also affects locals socially and culturally. During peak periods, a sharp increase in tourist numbers can put pressure on public services and utilities, potentially leaving them unable to meet the needs of both locals and visitors. In larger settlements, traffic jams, overcrowded shops, long queues, and price increases for goods and services are common during peak periods, thereby reducing residents' quality of life. Large crowds can also contribute to increased crime and a sense of insecurity for locals. In contrast, the low season allows residents to return to their normal routines, participate in community and cultural events, and enjoy public services without major disruptions.

IMPACTS OF SEASONALITY

	ECONOMICAL	SOCIO-CULTURAL	ECOLOGICAL
−	• Seasonal employment • Year-round expenses • Unevenly distributing profit	• Not enough public services, queues • Insufficient infrastructure • Traffic jams and accidents • Raised prices • Increased crime rates	• Trash • Air and water pollution • Use of natural resources • Ecological tolerance limit
+	• Seasonal employment • Renovation • Development • Opportunities for additional income	• Quiet living environment in low season • Events and attractions are accessible to locals • Good infrastructure and public services	• Recovery cycles of nature

Environmental impacts are another critical aspect of seasonality. During the high season, intense visitor activity increases waste generation, poses pollution risks, and puts pressure on local ecosystems. Overcrowding can lead to air pollution, the overexploitation of resources, and the degradation of natural areas, and can put ecological resilience under stress. At the same time, overcrowding reduces accessibility to the services for people with accessibility needs. Yet, the off-season offers a valuable recovery period for nature. It is the only time when ecosystems can recover without the heavy burden of tourism, restoring balance before the next annual life cycle begins.

Have you noticed the visible social and environmental consequences of the high season in your area?

Think about how seasonal fluctuations in visitor numbers affect your business or destination economically - in terms of revenue, staffing, and long-term financial stability?

In what ways could tourism entrepreneurs or your destination benefit from the low season – for example, to support local communities, restore nature, or prepare new tourism products for the next peak season?

The strategies for managing seasonality (in water-based activities)

There is no straightforward or universal solution. However, two broader approaches have been identified to reduce seasonality: extending the main season or establishing additional seasons. Extending the existing high season is more common, especially in remote areas. In that case, similar resources are used as in the main season, with minor modifications (price, package contents, etc). Creating new tourism seasons during the low season is the second approach; however, those are more likely to remain as short breaks or second holidays rather than become main holiday periods.

Demand diversification

Market diversification seeks to attract new types of tourists using the existing resources and facilities. New visitor segments and the creation of off-season activities can smooth demand peaks. Examples include targeting senior travellers, business groups, or locals.

Product diversification

Product diversification involves developing or expanding products and services for existing markets. For example, integrating indoor and outdoor activities, or developing experiences suited to cooler seasons, may help reduce dependence on weather conditions.

Pricing and marketing policies

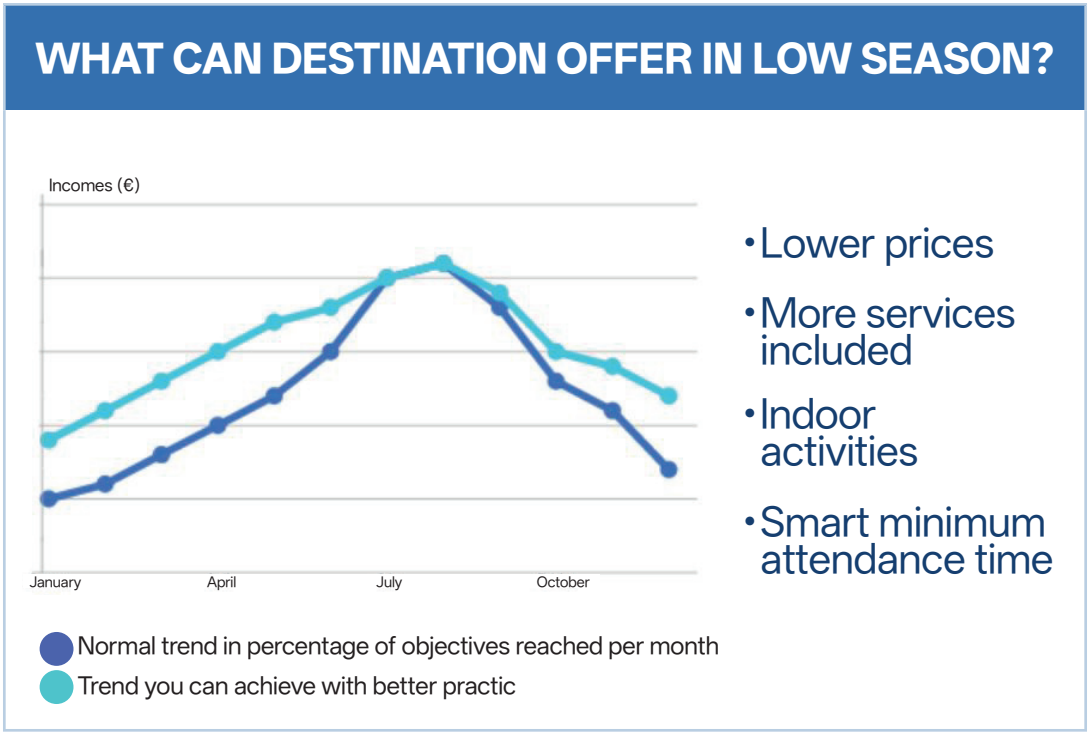
Pricing strategies have been widely used in the tourism industry to address seasonality. This involves promoting seasonal pricing incentives, such as discounting or special offers, during low seasons to increase demand. Dynamic pricing encourages visitation during low-demand periods, while off-season promotions and themed campaigns (e.g., “winter by the lake” or “quiet coastal escapes”) help shift travel behaviour. Data-driven marketing can identify and reach audiences more responsive to off-season opportunities.

Cooperation and clustering

Regional collaboration among tourism providers, municipalities, and event organizers strengthens the collective capacity to balance seasonality. Joint tourism products or packages, coordinated event calendars, and shared marketing increase the attractiveness beyond individual businesses.

Workforce management

Investing in seasonal staff training, offering multi-skill development, and creating flexible employment models help retain competent workers. Combining roles across sectors or regions can ensure year-round employment and maintain service quality throughout seasonal cycles.



Conclusively, to extend the season and increase attractiveness during the low season, businesses may offer lower prices, include additional services in the package, combine outdoor and indoor activities, or set a minimum attendance time. Effective management of seasonality requires coordinated actions that balance visitor demand, business operations, and community well-being throughout the year. Inclusive planning processes that involve consulting different user groups can result in more balanced and sustainable strategies.

A combination of product, market, and organizational strategies can help extend the active season and stabilize tourism development.

What new market segments would be strategically important for your company?
Who are the partners in your area you can work with to mitigate seasonality?

Seasonality from the community perspective

From a community viewpoint, managing seasonality is closely linked to sustaining local quality of life and protecting shared environments. Balancing visitor flows, involving residents in decision-making, and promoting responsible behaviour are key to long-term social and environmental resilience.

Communities benefit when visitor numbers are spread more evenly across time and space. The ways to achieve this include developing alternative routes, promoting lesser-known sites, and organizing small-scale off-season events. Such measures reduce pressure on popular areas during peak periods while keeping economic benefits within the region.

Active resident involvement in planning and managing tourism helps align local needs with visitor expectations. Community-based initiatives, such as local guiding, hosting, or event organization, strengthen ownership and support for tourism, reducing tensions caused by overcrowding or short -term tourism growth.

The well-being of locals is also closely linked to visitors' behaviour. Therefore, educating visitors about local norms, environmental protection, and respectful interaction with residents encourages more considerate behaviour. Clear communication through signage, storytelling, or digital platforms helps visitors understand how to enjoy water-based destinations responsibly and contribute positively to the community experience.

Conclusion and suggestions for the water-based tourism developers

Seasonality is an inherent feature of water tourism, but when understood and managed strategically, it can become a driver of innovation rather than a limitation. The key lesson is that balancing environmental, social, and economic interests requires year-round thinking, flexible planning, and strong stakeholder collaboration. Here are some practical steps to reduce seasonality and benefit from it:

- **Turn seasonality into a driver of innovation**

Seasonality should not be viewed solely as a limitation but as a rhythm that encourages creativity and adaptation. Quieter periods can be used to experiment with new services, improve digital visibility, and test wellness or educational products. Also, for staff training, product testing, or facility maintenance. If possible, for launching pilot experiences (e.g., winter kayaking, sauna rituals, or community workshops) to identify new year-round revenue sources could.

- **Strengthen cooperation and shared marketing**

Small operators benefit most when they work collectively. Regional collaboration helps pool resources, create complementary offers, and develop joint off-season campaigns that attract visitors beyond the peak months. Develop shared off-season experience packages which combine water, culture, and wellness activities.

- **Embrace digitalization and data-driven decisions**

Digital tools allow small businesses to anticipate visitor flows, understand demand cycles, and communicate effectively. Even simple solutions can improve planning and reduce the impact of peak demand. By monitoring traffic on your website and booking trends, you can identify early-or late-season interest. Additionally, digital communications can be used to promote off-season benefits such as quiet, spaciousness, and local authenticity.

- **Diversifying products and customer segments**

Expanding water activities that are independent of weather, or combining outdoor and indoor activities, active and wellness, or local and visitor-oriented offerings, can help stabilize seasonality and ensure more consistent demand throughout the year. For example, combining water-based entertainment with wellness, gastronomy, or cultural activities, or targeting niche markets.

And finally, build community trust and environmental stewardship. Locally rooted, responsible business practices create long-term value and help communities embrace tourism as a positive force. This strengthens the social license to operate at the place and supports the development of regenerative tourism – the form on tourism that views tourism as a living system, not just an industry, fostering harmony in nature, culture, and economy; helps the communities and places to flourish and seeks the practices that leave destinations in a better state than they were found. Accessibility and social inclusion are also part of regenerative tourism, which means equitable access for all.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Seasonality is a multidimensional and persistent challenge in water-based tourism, shaped by natural (weather, water conditions, daylight) and institutional factors (holidays, traditions, school breaks), and manifested in demand, supply, spatial, and social dimensions.
- Seasonality has significant economic, social, environmental, and accessibility impacts, creating revenue instability, workforce fluctuations, pressure on local communities and ecosystems during peak seasons, while also offering opportunities for renewal, innovation, and ecosystem recovery during low seasons.
- Effective seasonality management requires integrated and inclusive strategies, including product and market diversification, pricing and marketing adjustments, regional cooperation, workforce flexibility, digitalization, and community engagement to promote year-round resilience and balanced destination development.

4.4. Acting during conflict situations and responding to client expectations in water tourism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognizing the common causes, early warning signs, and dynamics of conflicts in water tourism settings, including expectation gaps, environmental stressors, safety risks, and communication breakdowns.
2. Appreciating the importance of emotionally intelligent communication, structured de-escalation techniques, and staff well-being practices in maintaining safety, service quality, and long-term trust in water tourism operations.

Conflict is an inherent part of different organisations, particularly within the tourism sector, where human-centred interactions are essential. Water tourism involves many different types of interactions that may lead to conflicts: emotions among tourists, expectations vs. the service provided, interactions with service providers, environmental factors (e.g., weather, safety, group dynamics), etc. Conflicts during water tourism are always somewhat different. For example, during boat trips or cruises, a group of people is confined to a limited space, and they cannot leave at will; they must follow certain rules, and the environment can be dangerous, etc. Special conditions may create a more favourable environment for conflicts to arise.

Conflict might happen every time, and in various situations. Therefore, the service provider needs to apply and implement different conflict management styles. It is important to handle every conflict carefully, not to ignore or avoid it, and to find the best solution at this moment.

To avoid conflicts, it is important to pay attention to the following aspects:

- Client expectations. Typical expectations of water tourism clients (safety, relaxation, authenticity, personal attention). Factors shaping expectations: culture, previous experiences, social media, and price level. The gap between expected and perceived service quality. Methods to identify and manage expectations: Pre-trip communication (should also explicitly address accessibility features and limitations), transparent information (weather, safety, itinerary), and managing uncertainty and risks through clear messaging.
- Good relations with clients: Empathy and active listening as core skills for guides and operators. Creating trust and comfort before the activity begins. Tone, body language, and professionalism in verbal/non-verbal communication. Using "emotionally intelligent" communication in multicultural and intergenerational groups, and in groups with mixed abilities or diverse communication needs.
- Setting ground rules for safety and respect on board or in group activities. It is good to repeat those rules or keep rule visuals on site (on board).
- Common causes of conflict in water tourism. Miscommunication (language, unclear safety briefings, unmet promises). Environmental factors (bad weather, equipment malfunction, delays). Different expectations among group members (adventure vs. relaxation). Safety incidents or perceived unfair treatment. Staff stress or burnout is affecting the service mood.

It is not always possible to avoid conflicts. If conflict is there, then it could be followed in three steps:

- Recognise conflict early. Be mindful of signs of frustration or anxiety in clients. Differentiating between emotional and factual problems. Using de-escalation techniques before tension grows. De-escalation is the deliberate process of reducing the intensity of conflict or aggression. It involves using verbal and non-verbal strategies that promote safety, respect, and cooperation. It's a dynamic skill set, underpinned by calm communication, emotional self-regulation, and structured interventions (empathy, awareness, and various communication skills such as active listening, reflection, space and body language, respect, etc.).
- Be aware of how to act during conflict. Stay calm and professional under pressure. Apply different methods to solve the conflict, such as the L.E.A.R.N. method, which follows these steps: listen to what the conflict parties say and how they behave, empathise, apologise (if appropriate), resolve, notify, and plan next steps. Follow the safety-first rule: separating emotions from risk management.
- After the conflict is important to restore the relationship and trust. This process involves team and/or group reflection (What could have been done differently?) and recording and learning from incidents (internal quality improvement).



Communication suggestions to prevent conflicts

- Clear and understandable information before the service (homepage, and via other communication channels) and during the service about the service process and factors which may impact the service provision.
- Do your best to offer the services that fulfil customer expectations.
- Respect and awareness about different types of people and their personalities, about human behaviour generally and tourist behaviour, and its expectations.
- Be open, friendly, and polite.

In the end, do not forget to support staff well-being. Conflict situations affect not only clients but also guides and crew, and therefore, it is important to reflect on various situations and solution practices. Supportive teamwork and debriefing help to prevent burnout syndrome and keep staff happier. Good practice is to offer training in emotional resilience and stress management. Crucial is the role of leadership: creating a psychologically safe working culture.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Conflicts in water tourism are inevitable due to close human interaction, environmental uncertainty, safety risks, and diverse client expectations.
- Effective conflict management requires structured de-escalation skills, emotional intelligence, professional communication, and post-incident reflection, while also prioritizing staff well-being and psychologically safe leadership to sustain service quality and trust.

CONCLUSION

This guide provides practice-oriented framework for designing, delivering, and managing accessible, inclusive, and safe water-based tourism services. It integrates accessibility, safety, customer experience design, seasonality management, environmental responsibility, and conflict management into a coherent operational approach tailored to water tourism contexts.

First, the reader gained a clear understanding that accessibility in water tourism is not an optional add-on but a structural responsibility grounded in human rights principles and universal design. Accessibility must be embedded throughout the entire customer journey, from the first idea of a visit, through information search and booking, to arrival, participation, departure, and post-visit sharing. Barriers can occur at any stage, and inclusive design requires anticipation of needs, clear communication, environmental adaptation, and continuous feedback.

Second, the guide provided structured knowledge about different social groups in water tourism, particularly people with mobility, hearing, visual, and speech impairments, as well as intellectual disabilities and mental health conditions. It explained functional limitations, communication principles, environmental adaptations, safety considerations, and service design strategies for each group. Third, the reader learned that safety in water tourism is a continuous, systematic process. Safety culture is framed not only as regulatory compliance but as a mindset that builds trust and long-term reputation. Fourth, the guide explored seasonality as a structural challenge in water tourism. Seasonality is reframed as a driver of innovation rather than merely a limitation. Fifth, the material addressed conflict management and client expectations in emotionally dynamic and spatially constrained water environments. Conflict handling is positioned as a competence that protects both service quality and human relationships.

Finally, the guide integrates environmental sustainability and regenerative tourism principles, emphasizing that water is both an attraction and a responsibility. Balanced visitor flows, community involvement, ecosystem recovery periods, and responsible visitor behaviour are essential for long-term resilience.

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- *Laevasõit ajaloolisel lodjal "Jõmmu" https://puhkaeestis.ee/et/laevasoit-ajaloolisel-lodjal-jommu*
- *Surf lessons https://mojosurf.es/en/surf-lessons-what-to-consider/*
- *Ocean sunset https://www.shutterstock.com/fi/search/ocean-sunset?dd_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F*
- *Spa holidays.https://visitparnu.com/en/spa-holidays/*

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APPENDIX 1

Self-assessment tool for accessibility regarding special needs

What is a self-assessment tool?

This instrument is structured as a questionnaire that serves both as a self-evaluation tool and a practical guide. It is designed to support you and your tourism service(s) or attraction(s) in identifying and addressing potential barriers that may limit accessibility for people with different types of impairments within your organisation.

This tool is intended solely for internal use within the tourism organisation. It does not obligate the user to enhance every dimension of accessibility, nor does it ensure full universal accessibility. Instead, it offers structured guidance to support ongoing efforts toward improving accessibility.

How do I use the tool?

The self-assessment tool follows a structured, step-by-step process that reviews accessibility across different dimensions within and around your organisation. It addresses tangible structural components (such as physical access and media use) as well as non-physical elements (including service delivery, staff training, and service design). Presented as a questionnaire, the tool enables you to assess your current accessibility level. The process can proceed through the following steps:

Step 1: Review each statement carefully, assess its relevance to your organisation, and assign an appropriate rating.

Step 2: Once all sections have been evaluated, review your scores. Areas with lower ratings or where **no action has yet been taken should be identified as priority development areas.**

Step 3: Examine these priority areas in more detail and assess the feasibility of implementing improvements. Take into account practical considerations such as infrastructural constraints, financial resources, and staff capacity, and determine which actions are both essential and realistically achievable.

Step 4: After deciding which aspects to address, refer to the accessibility handbook for concrete recommendations on how to enhance these areas.

Step 5: Implement the selected improvements, then conduct a new assessment using this tool to monitor progress.

GETTING STARTED

During a tourism experience, a visitor or prospective visitor typically moves through several stages (see chapter 1, the stages of the visit). The first stages generally involve considering a trip or using a service, exploring options, and planning the trip. This includes searching for information before the visit, known as the information acquisition stage. The second stage may include contacting the organisation in advance, known as pre-visit communication. The third stage includes booking and specifying the service purchase. These last stages highlight the importance of adequately trained staff who can communicate effectively and appropriately to meet different needs. The fourth stage includes service experience, encompassing arrival and departure. The stage involves evaluating the overall visitor experience and accessibility management, encompassing both service delivery and physical or structural conditions. Finally, the post-experience stage involves several activities: giving feedback on the site or later online, sharing memories of the service on social media or in other ways, and planning a new visit.

Each of those stages has its own accessibility criteria, which enable an inclusive visitor experience for people with special needs.

Accessible information	Not at all applied or present	Partly applied/ present	Completely applied/ present
The organisation's website/social media channels provide information about the organisation and its features. It is presented clearly and unambiguously in both the text and the visuals. The photos and other visuals provide information and help improve understanding of service accessibility. For example, photos of docks, boats, rooms, and other areas of the service area also include information on the size of the rest area, the width of the pathways, etc.			
The website has a simple and logical structure. For people with special needs, advanced information is most effectively and easily provided through the organisation's website. When designing the website, ensure a consistent layout (same colors, text, and photo placement across pages for intuitive navigation); accessibility (readable on different devices, compatible with screen readers, and suitable for users needing high contrast); and a logical structure that guides visitors step by step through topics (avoid overly complex organization, excessive text, and unnecessary visual elements). Texts should be clear, concise, and provide essential information about the organisation and services. Fonts must be simple, sufficiently large, and high-contrast against the background.			
The website briefly describes how visitors with mobility/ hearing/visual/speech/cognitive/mental difficulties can access and navigate the service area and, while using the service, indicates areas where, for example, ramps are missing, where there are only stairs, or where there are quiet corners to relax. This information includes accessibility features to toilets and other supportive services.			
The website provides information about service provision across different seasons, days, and times of day, including staff availability, potential overcrowding, and the likelihood of loud noise. People with special needs may need more attention from staff or a quieter time to enjoy the service.			

The website provides information about all services (what kind of activities are included in the service, clearly outlines where and for how long the activity will take place, what the activity's stages entail, including the types of sound and water contact that can be expected, where breaks will be taken, and the location of the toilets). People with special needs, as well as the elderly and families with children, need to understand the content of the provided service before they can evaluate its suitability to their wishes and abilities.			
The website has easily accessible information about the organisation's visiting hours and contact details. People need to know who to contact in specific cases and what exactly they can ask the contact person for when they need specific information.			
The website provides clear information about the company's security measures. The information includes an overview of the tools and activities that help ensure visitor safety. This information is illustrated with photos and other visuals, along with details on suitable safety measures for different visitor groups (children, elderly, etc.).			
The website contains information about the organization's sustainable activities, including waste management and environmentally friendly practices. The information includes instructions and explanations of what is expected of guests when using the service.			
Provide information in a clear, concise way that outlines what the visitor can expect during the visit (from before arrival to departure). Before visiting, people with special needs and their family or caretakers mostly want to know exactly what will happen during their visit. They need to know how to reach the organisation, what the parking and entrance are like, the experiences they might have, and how the experience will be rounded off. This can be explained in detail through pictograms, videos, images, etc.			
Updated, accurate information is shared regularly. If anything changes at the organisation, it should be communicated on the website as soon as possible, because the expectations of potential visitors might not be met when they arrive and may differ from what they anticipated.			

Pre-visit communication, booking, and specification of the service provision

When prospective visitors decide to visit your organisation, clear and proactive communication becomes essential. Effective coordination should take place between the organisation and the visitor, and, where relevant, their family members, caregivers, support persons, or assistants, to understand any specific access requirements and clarify how the organisation can best facilitate the visit. It is advisable for the organisation to develop a structured questionnaire for potential visitors to complete and return (fulfill online), or, alternatively, a set of guiding questions for staff to use during a phone conversation or over written conversation on WhatsApp/Messenger, or other chatbots. Based on the gathered information, the organisation can identify appropriate measures to ensure a positive, accessible experience. This process can also help determine suitable visiting times, necessary arrangements, and provide key contact details for responsible staff members to support smooth communication before and during the visit.

When attempting to become more accessible, staff members must receive training to better communicate and support people with special needs. The knowledge includes, first, information about the special need and its impact on people's abilities, and then information on how to communicate and support people with special needs, for instance, by understanding body language and nonverbal cues, asking whether assistance is needed, etc. Proper communication should be used before, during, and after a visit/stay.

Accessible information	Not at all applied or present	Partly applied/ present	Completely applied/pres-ent
Your organisation's staff is trained to communicate and work with people with special needs. Staff can adjust their communication to clients' specific needs (pace, simplicity, articulation, and visual materials to support verbal communication). Communication is in simple and understandable language, avoiding technical or bureaucratic wording			
A responsible contact person is clearly designated, whom visitors can contact before and during their visit. It is a good habit to keep the same contact person from the first contact till the end of service. This gives clients a sense of security and the knowledge that there is a responsible person who understands their expectations for the service.			
The organisation has various methods for contacting and making reservations, e.g., phone, email, different chatbots, and online booking. Written communication is clear, simple, and well-structured (short sections, clear step-by-step guidelines, and proper punctuation).			
The online booking system can be used with a screen reader and keyboard.			

The organisation has a set of questions (during the reservation process) to identify clients' possible special needs regarding the service provision. It is important to clarify that a visitor can change or cancel a reservation without penalty if their status or situation changes, which participation and payment adapt to support the person; questions are focused on supporting needs, not to diagnose; there is clear information/explanation on how information is used and why it is asked. The organisation has clear rules on how to process and to whom they can share information about their clients and special needs.			
The organisation has identified which services are adjustable for people with special needs. This information includes: does the company offer the opportunity to visit the service during less busy times; has the need for breaks, a slower pace, or early departure been taken into account; can visitors obtain information in advance about the duration of the service, waiting times, and physical exertion. The organisation realistically describes which parts of the service can be customized and which cannot. There are identified adjustments that are possible at the last minute. The organisation has considered alternative solutions if the originally planned service is not suitable (e.g., a shorter duration, a quieter environment, a separate time).			
The organisation has clear procedures for sharing information and preparatory activities before the service provision. For example, sending reminders about the booking, information about necessary clothing, or the arrival time.			

Service experience (service delivery, physical and structural conditions)

The following statements, grouped by special needs, can assist your organisation in determining which current services, experiences, and accessibility are managed and will guide you in improving management practices.

Accessible information	Not at all applied or present	Partly applied/present	Completely applied/present
MOBILITY IMPAIRMENT			
The entire service journey (arrival-parking-access routes-dock/beach - watercraft – return – leaving the service) is step-free and logically connected, without requiring ad-hoc rearrangement of furniture, equipment, or space. Step-free routes should be continuous and free of obstacles. Turning and manoeuvring areas should allow a wheelchair to turn in a circle approximately 1.5 × 1.5 m.			
Accessible parking spaces located as close as possible to the main service area (dock, beach access, boarding point). Accessible parking should be on firm, level ground, clearly marked, and connected to the service by a barrier-free route.			
Access routes, boardwalks, piers, and platforms are stable, non-slip, and suitable for wheelchairs and other mobility aids. Surfaces should be hard, stable, and non-slip (e.g., concrete, asphalt, tightly joined decking). Gaps in decking should not exceed 5 mm.			
Ramps, gangways, or sloped access points meet all safe gradient and safety requirements. The average ramp slope should not exceed 6%, and ramps should be equipped with handrails on both sides and non-slip surfaces.			
Passageways, docks, and boarding areas are wide enough for wheelchair users to move and manoeuvre independently. Recommended clear width is 1.2–1.3 m, with wider areas (≥1.5 m) at turning points, doors, and boarding locations.			
Access between land and watercraft is designed to be as stable and secure as possible for people with reduced mobility. Transfers should use stable ramps, pontoons, lifts, or gangways with edge protection, handrails, and contrasting markings where height differences exist.			
Watercraft is adapted to accommodate visitors with different mobility needs (e.g., wheelchair users, limited balance, or hand function). Good practice includes low gunwales, wider, more stable hulls, non-slip deck surfaces, back-supported seating, and dedicated wheelchair spaces, where feasible.			
Safety and activity aids are available to support visitors with mobility impairments during water-based activities. This may include adapted life jackets, flotation supports, transfer aids, stabilisers, or beach/water wheelchairs, selected based on the activity and user needs.			
The end of the service (disembarking, equipment return, payment, feedback) is designed to be simple, unhurried, and dignified for visitors with reduced mobility. Allow extra time, provide seating and rest areas, and offer accessible return and feedback options (on-site, contactless, or online).			

HEARING IMPAIRMENT			
Essential pre-arrival information (booking confirmation, schedules, safety rules, and arrival instructions) is provided in written form. Key information should be available via email, SMS, or messaging platforms, reducing reliance on telephone communication, which is not accessible for many people with hearing impairments.			
All videos or audiovisual materials used for marketing, instructions, or safety are equipped with subtitles (and sign language interpretation, where relevant). Subtitles should be accurate, synchronised, and easy to read; subtitles are essential as not all people with hearing impairments use sign language.			
Clear, consistent, and well-designed visual signage guides visitors from arrival to departure. Signs should use high contrast colours, non-reflective materials, sans-serif fonts (e.g. Arial, Roboto), left-aligned text, and be readable in different lighting and weather conditions			
Service procedures and safety instructions are designed so that they do not rely solely on spoken communication or sound signals. Information should be supported with written instructions, pictograms, diagrams, or captioned videos, especially for safety-critical content.			
Visual alternatives used for sound-based warnings and alerts (e.g., whistles, sirens, verbal calls). Good practice includes visual signals such as flags, lights, colour codes, hand signals, or clearly visible warning signs, especially near water and boarding areas.			
Staff are trained to communicate effectively with people with hearing impairments during the service: they face the visitor, ensure good lighting for lip-reading, speak clearly without shouting, use short sentences, and confirm understanding through visual or written means.			
Background noise is actively managed during instructions and customer interaction. Whenever possible, explanations should be given in quiet locations, with engines turned off and unnecessary noise reduced, benefiting both people with hearing loss and those with tinnitus.			
Solutions in place are to support visitors who use hearing aids, cochlear implants, or other hearing devices during water activities. Organisations should provide clear advance information and, where possible, offer options such as dry storage boxes, protective covers, safety straps, or waterproof containers.			
VISUAL IMPAIRMENT			
Entrances, exits, and key service points are easy to locate and clearly marked. Use high-contrast signage, consistent design, large readable fonts, and, where possible, audible cues or tactile indicators to support orientation.			
Movement routes within the service area are obstacle-free and easy to follow for people with reduced or no vision. Routes should be free of unexpected obstacles, with handrails, barriers, tactile ground indicators, or surface changes to signal edges, turns, or hazards.			
Dangerous areas near water (quays, docks, stairs, ramps, water edges) are clearly identifiable without relying on vision alone. Combine tactile surface changes, physical barriers, handrails, strong contrast, and verbal warnings to mark risk areas.			

Staff provide clear verbal guidance and step-by-step explanations during the service. Instructions should describe actions, surfaces, and surroundings explicitly (e.g. "one step down," "handrail on your right"), at a calm pace, and with confirmation of understanding.			
Guided assistance is offered respectfully and only with the visitor's consent. Good practice includes the elbow-guiding technique, adjusting pace to the visitor, continuous verbal orientation, and informing the person before starting or ending assistance.			
Orientation and information during activities do not rely solely on visual cues. Use verbal descriptions, agreed signals, clock-face directions, audio guides, or tactile references, especially during boarding, movement on boats, and water activities.			
Lighting, contrast, and glare are actively managed in service areas. Ensure even lighting, avoid glare and reflective surfaces, and apply high-contrast markings on edges, steps, handrails, and boats to support people with low vision.			
SPEECH IMPAIRMENT			
Essential service information is presented in clear, simple, and concise language. Apply plain language principles like short sentences, one idea at a time, concrete words, and a clear sequence (e.g., during welcoming, instructions, activities).			
On-site signage and information boards are easy to read and supported by visuals. Use icons, pictograms, images, and step-by-step layouts alongside short text; avoid dense paragraphs or complex wording.			
Staff communicates at a calm pace using clear diction and short sentences. Reduce background noise, avoid overlapping speech, speak one-to-one when possible, and repeat key points if needed.			
Adequate time is built into the service for understanding and self-expression. Do not rush interactions, allow pauses and responses at the visitor's pace, especially during safety briefings and equipment use.			
Alternative communication tools are readily available on-site. Provide paper and pens, tablets or phones, yes/no cards, pictogram boards, or simple choice cards to support expression and understanding.			
Safety instructions are provided in written and visual formats in addition to verbal explanations. Use short written instructions, waterproof cards, pictorial guides, or QR codes to a video for safety-critical information.			
Non-verbal or simplified signals are agreed upon before activities begin. Establish clear hand signals, visual cards, or simple gestures for stop/help/emergency situations, especially during water activities.			
The service environment supports calm and focused communication. Choose quieter locations for explanations and briefings, and separate instruction time from busy or noisy activity periods.			

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY			
Essential service information is presented in clear, simple, and concrete language. Abstract expressions, metaphors, abbreviations, and large numbers are avoided; information focuses on what will happen, where it will happen, and how long it will last.			
Movement routes and service areas are clearly structured and easy to navigate. Wayfinding is continuous and predictable, using symbols, pictograms, and minimal text to guide visitors step by step from arrival to departure.			
Instructions during the service are given one step at a time, using simple, concrete language. Verbal explanations are combined with demonstrations, gestures, and visual cues, and key information is repeated when necessary.			
The service pace is calm and predictable, allowing sufficient time for understanding and transitions. Activities include planned breaks, gradual changes, and time for visitors to adapt to new situations.			
Cooperation with accompanying support persons is integrated into service delivery. Roles and responsibilities are clarified, the visitor is addressed directly, and coordination with the support person supports communication and safety.			
Physical conditions and equipment support safety, stability, and emotional comfort. This includes stable watercraft, supportive seating, non-slip surfaces, handrails, appropriate life jackets, and options to reduce sensory overload.			
MENTAL DISORDER			
Wayfinding within the premises is continuous and predictable, supported by clear signage and information boards. Signs use simple, non-ambiguous wording (one sentence = one idea), avoid metaphors and abbreviations, and are easy to read through clear structure and contrasting colours.			
The service environment supports emotional safety through stable lighting, manageable noise, and access to quiet/rest areas. Overcrowding is avoided where possible, and seating or separate spaces are available to reduce distress and support self-regulation.			
Staff communication during service delivery is calm, respectful, and non-escalating. Communication stays on one topic at a time, uses simple language, repeats key information, confirms understanding, and avoids accusatory "you" statements that may be misinterpreted.			
Procedures exist for responding to unexpected behaviour in a calm and safe manner. Staff remain neutral, speak slowly, keep movements predictable, maintain visible hands, explain what will happen next, and avoid confrontation while setting clear boundaries when needed.			
Safety-critical instructions are delivered in multiple formats and do not rely only on verbal explanation. Pictograms, photos, written summaries, or step-by-step visual guidance are used for water safety and activity sequences, reducing cognitive load and supporting attention and concentration.			
Equipment and physical conditions are designed to increase stability, confidence, and perceived security. Stable or tandem watercraft, supportive seating (backrests/armrests), non-slip surfaces, handrails, and easy-fastening life jackets are available and tested to support calm participation.			

Post-experience activities

Every service has a starting point and an end. Each stage of the service process needs to be evaluated for its accessibility and its purpose of creating positive emotions. The following statements help you evaluate how you have managed the service ending and follow-up activities.

Accessible information	Not at all applied or present	Partly applied/ present	Completely applied/ present
The end of the service is clearly and calmly communicated to all visitors. The conclusion of the activity and next steps (returning equipment, resting, departure) are explained without rushing.			
Sufficient time is allowed for disembarking, equipment return, and transitions. No visitor is pressured to hurry due to mobility limitations, communication needs, fatigue, or emotional overload.			
Physical departure routes are safe, accessible, and easy to follow. Exit paths are obstacle-free, clearly marked, well-lit, and supported by tactile, visual, or physical guidance where needed.			
Non-verbal feedback and departure processes are available at the end of the service. Feedback should be possible in writing or digitally (on-site forms, QR codes, email), and staff should use visual cues and respectful body language when concluding the interaction.			
Support is available during departure without being intrusive or stigmatising. Assistance is offered respectfully and based on consent, allowing visitors to remain as independent as possible.			
Feedback opportunities are accessible through multiple formats. Options include written, digital, visual, symbolic (e.g. smileys, colour scales), verbal, or assisted feedback methods. Offer, for example, symbol-based feedback (smileys, stickers), short digital forms.			
Feedback can be given privately, anonymously, and at a later time if preferred. Visitors are not pressured to respond immediately or publicly, supporting dignity and psychological safety.			
Communication during post-experience interaction is calm, respectful, and inclusive. Staff use simple language, clear structure, supportive body language, and avoid evaluative or judgmental responses.			
Post-experience information is provided in accessible formats. Follow-up information (next activities, contacts, future visits, safety reminders) is available in plain text, visuals, audio, or easy-to-read formats.			
Emotional and sensory recovery is supported after the activity. Seating, quiet areas, warmth, shade, or calming aids are available to help visitors regulate before leaving.			
Post-experience practices support learning and service improvement. Feedback from visitors and support persons is reviewed and used to improve accessibility, safety, and service quality.			

APPENDIX 2

Water tourism safety checklist for entrepreneurs

Risk assessment and planning

- Have I identified risks (currents, tides, weather, obstacles)?
- Are safety protocols prepared for normal and emergency situations?
- Is the activity suited to participants' skills and fitness levels?

Equipment and infrastructure

- Is all equipment regularly inspected and maintained?
- Are life jackets/buoyancy aids provided and mandatory?
- Is emergency and first-aid equipment available and functional?
- Are access points, docks, and signage safe and clear?

Staff and training

- Are all guides/instructors certified and physically fit?
- Have staff received training in rescue, first aid, and CPR?
- Do staff regularly practice emergency drills?
- Is one responsible person assigned to monitor safety?

Information for participants

- Is a clear safety briefing given before every activity?
- Are instructions adapted to age, language, and experience?
- Are participants encouraged to ask questions and confirm understanding?

Inclusivity and special needs

- Have I discussed individual needs with customers (and caregivers if needed)?
- Is adapted equipment available (stable kayaks, support handles, adaptive seating)?
- Are instructions provided in multiple formats (spoken, visual, demonstrated)?
- Have staff been trained in working respectfully with customers with special needs?
- Are facilities (ramps, handrails, non-slip surfaces) safe and accessible?
- Do emergency plans account for participants with special requirements?

Monitoring weather conditions

- Have I checked weather and water conditions before the activity?
- Are conditions monitored continuously during the activity?
- Is there a clear protocol to postpone or cancel if conditions turn unsafe?

Emergency preparedness

- Is there a written emergency action plan accessible to all staff?
- Are procedures in place for accidents, hypothermia, or lost participants?
- Are communication devices waterproof and functional?
- Are local rescue services informed when necessary?
- Have evacuation and rescue scenarios been practiced?

Safety culture

- Do staff encourage participants to speak up about concerns?
- Is a supportive, responsible atmosphere promoted at all times?
- Are safety practices regularly reviewed and improved?

Pärnu 2026