

Improving the visitor experience for blind & visually impaired guests

In October 2023, Ecsite hosted Anna Riethus, Research Manager, from Neanderthal Museum through the Erasmus+ job shadowing scheme. During her stay, the Ecsite team had an exchange of ideas and we discovered that Anna was writing her PhD on the accessibility of museums and science centres for blind and visually impaired visitors.

About the research

During her PhD on the topic, Anna lead a project entitled 'NMsee' (2019-2022), a cooperation between the Federation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (BSVN e.V.) and the Neanderthal Museum Foundation which focused on the needs of blind and visually impaired museum visitors.

What did they find?

In their initial evaluation, NMsee discovered that blind and visually impaired visitors were mostly restricted to passive activities in the museum. For example, being guided by or listening to their companion, having very limited opportunities for independent action. So, what can be done to change that?

Neanderthal Museum's 10 Top Tips

1. Collaborate with the community

Neanderthal collaborated with BSVN e.V. to conduct this research, having both blind and visually impaired testers and advisors along the way. This constant conversation is absolutely essential for inclusive measures.

2. Functional flooring

A tactile floor guidance system allows visitors to move around the exhibitions independently, following the path as set out by staff.

3. Tactile exhibitions

Most visitors love versatile immersive and interactive experiences and this type of exhibition perfectly fits with the Neanderthal Museum. For example, one exhibit gives you access to

Stone age hunting weapons, whereas another lets you touch a reconstructed Neanderthal face. This can also work well in many other science centres and museums!

4. Use technology!

Neanderthal Museum set up the smartphone-based audio game “Neanderthal: Memories” which had great reviews from the testers and allowed for some creativity. Guided by stone age huntress “Nami”, the game lets players move through a purely auditive world solely through sounds and spoken dialogue.

5. Include those who can't come in person

Based on the successful initiative '[Bei Anruf Kultur](#)', Neanderthal Museum allows people to book a phone call-based tour of the museum for guests who cannot travel to the museum.

6. More accessible descriptions

Audio descriptions are great, but not the only option! Neanderthal Museum is currently preparing text readers written in '[Leichter Sprache](#)' but having descriptions in braille and tactile writing is a great and necessary basis for visually impaired guests.

7. Don't forget, accessibility helps all

All of the above tips and tricks are not solely for the benefit of blind and visually impaired visitors. In fact, they can foster a unique, creative and immersive experience for all visitors!

8. Work as a team

Don't forget to include and inform all parts of your team, and keep them engaged with the topic. Thanks to the focus and research done at Neanderthal Museum, all departments have now been sensitised to inclusion and diversity. This is very important so that we can continue to promote inclusion in the long term.

9. Keep on evolving!

Keep on researching, talking and dreaming about inclusive opportunities. At the moment, the Neanderthal team is searching for new ways to make its outside areas within [The Valley](#) more accessible for blind and visually impaired guests. There is always more to learn and explore!

10. Share your accessibility and inclusivity tips!

We hope you will share pictures and learnings from your experiences with us either by email to nhamilton@ecsite.eu or on socials.



Above & Below: A visitor reading braille at Neanderthal Museum

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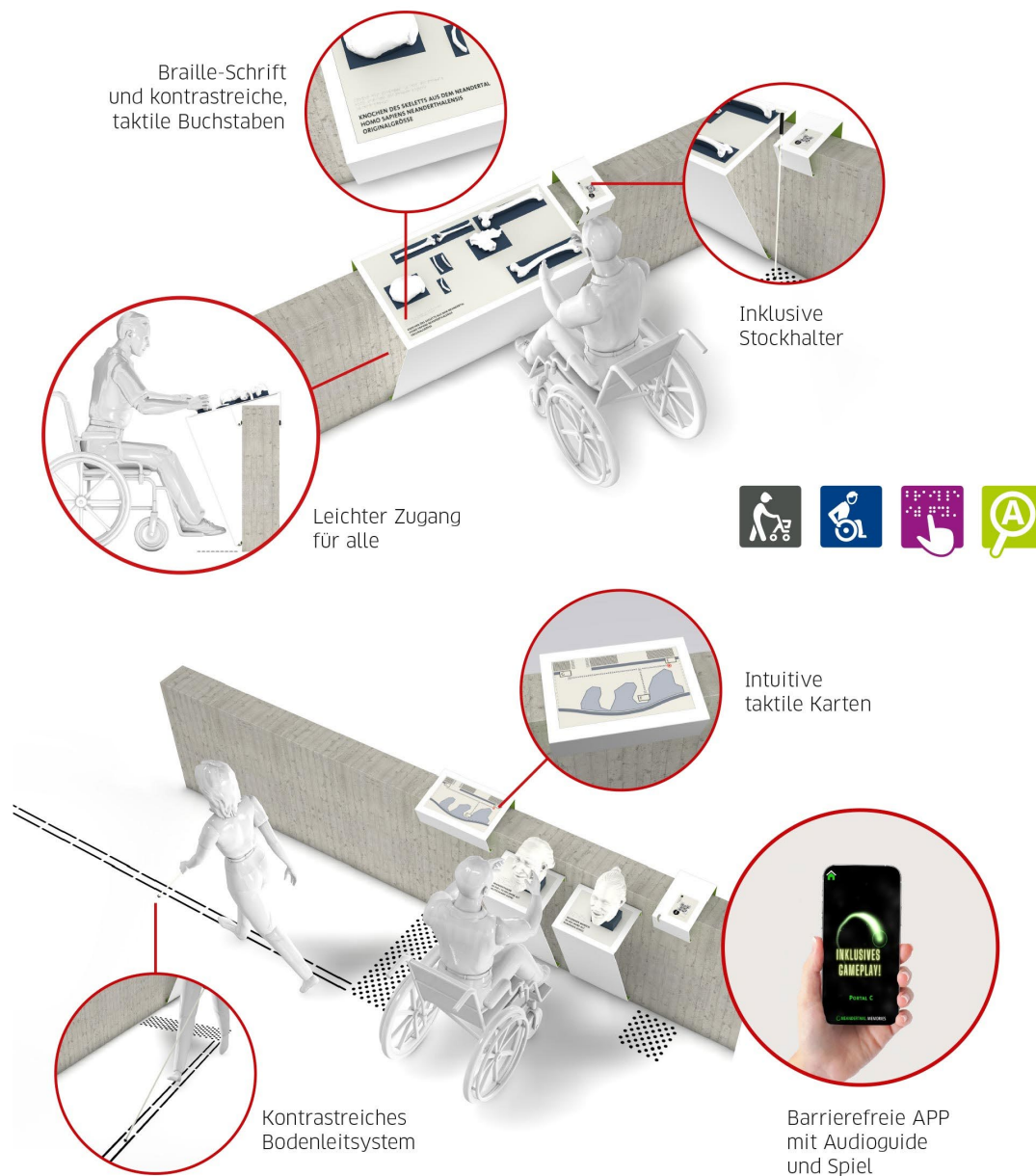


Above : A guide dog at Neanderthal Museum

Below : Accessible App with audio guide and game

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Above : Initiatives at Neanderthal Museum to improve the visitor experience for blind and visually impaired visitors.

Translations:

- Braille-Schrift und kontrastreiche taktile Buchstaben / **Braille and high-contrast letters**
- Inklusive Stockhalter / **Cane holder included**
- Leichter Zugang für alle / **Easy access for all**
- Intuitive taktile Karten / **Intuitive tactile maps / cards**
- Kontrastreiches Bodenleitsystem / **High-contrast floor guidance system**
- Barrierefreie APP mit Audioguide und Spiel / **Accessible App with audio guide and game**

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