



OpenAccess Tours – The full museum and cultural venue experience for Deaf, hard of hearing and vision impaired visitors

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It is little known that for many Deaf, hard of hearing and vision impaired people, cultural venues such as museums are not a popular leisure choice to visit due to access barriers.

In the museum context, Deaf and hard of hearing people miss out on the way audio commentaries (via audio devices or guided tours) bring exhibits to life and rely instead on written descriptions in their second language (English) or booking a sign language interpreted tour. For people with a vision loss, they are reliant on friends or family to provide a description of visual objects of interest which is not an optimal experience.

Conexu Foundation, a national not-for-profit organisation in Australia, developed the OpenAccess Tours application to open up access to the full museum experience. Using iOS and Android smart phone technology, it provides museums, galleries and other cultural attractions with Sign language and / or captioned translations of audio tours as well as audio description.

Following our May 2011 launch at the National Sports Museum in Melbourne, many other major venues across Australia have taken up the collaboration opportunity with Conexu to improve accessibility to their permanent or temporary exhibitions. Most recently, we assisted an Australian exhibition showcased in New York, USA which included access to American Sign Language.

Deaf, hard of hearing and vision impaired visitors can now roam freely about the accessible museums and cultural venues and enjoy the experience just like everyone else.

OpenAccess Tours is free, accessible and low maintenance for the cultural venue. Conexu remotely updates the application and content, which can be downloaded free to the user's own iOS or Android phone. OpenAccess Tours can easily be adapted for guided tours, other styles of audio delivery and other spoken and sign languages.

New Zealand has a proud cultural heritage and strong focus on showcasing this through museums and other cultural attractions.

This presentation will include a practical demonstration of OpenAccess Tours and information on how it can be implemented in museums and other cultural attractions in New Zealand enabling Deaf, hard of hearing and vision impaired people a better visitor experience.