



Pioneering Tour for the Visually Impaired in Larnaka

A pioneering initiative took place today in Larnaka with a guided tour specifically-designed for the visually impaired. The tour was jointly organised by the Larnaka Tourism Board (LTB), Youth Board of Cyprus (ONEK) and Larnaka Municipality, in cooperation with the Agios Varnavas School for the Blind. The aim of the initiative was to function as a pilot programme for sightseeing tours for tourists with visual disabilities, while also using feedback from the participants as a sounding board for making Larnaka more accessible for persons with visual disabilities in general.

The pilot tour took place with 13 participants with varying levels of visual disability - six of whom were blind; seven with visual impairment, and six accompanying escorts.

The tour began with a visit to the Pierides Museum - Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, where participants had the opportunity to touch and feel their way around authentic exhibits from different eras, with Director of the Museum – Mr Peter Ashdjian – explaining the history of the artefacts. Participants were also given the opportunity to smell the fragrances of antiquity via true-to-life reproductions of scents from different eras, made by the Lazarou Cultural Centre, and based on studies by archaeologists.

The group then toured points of interest in the city, following a route along the Foinikoudes (Palm Tree) Promenade, from Europe Square to the Medieval Castle, accompanied by a guide. Along the way, the statues of the philosopher Zeno of Kition, General Kimon the Athenian and the Winged Lion of Venice recounted their stories and how they are connected to the city of Larnaka through the innovative Larnaka Storytelling Statues application, which is considered a best practise example of attractions for persons with visual disabilities.

Another pioneering action included in the tour was the printing of a copy of the head of the statue of Zeno of Kition. The tactile piece was created especially for the tour utilising the 3D printers of Youth Makerspace Larnaka (part of ONEK), and given to the participants to feel during the guide's information regarding the history of the Stoic philosopher.

The walking tour was then followed by an experiential visit to the Kyriazis Medical Museum, which is perhaps the only museum where visitors are encouraged to touch and feel all the exhibits, as well as use some of them under the guidance of Dr Marios Kyriazis, - owner of the museum. The boldest participants had no qualms in smelling old medicines or even tasting the Larnaka Salt Lake oil - which is a rare healing elixir.

Note: The tour was dedicated to the memory of Maria Kyriacou who served as Secretary General of the European Blind Union, Vice President of the Board of the Pancyprian Organization of the Blind, and Chairman of the National Cypriot Committee for Blind Women and Special Education. The pioneering tour was initiated by her within the framework of a European Programme meeting held by the LTB in July 2021. She sadly passed away a few months later and did not manage to see the completion of her visionary actions. Her colleagues, friends and associates continue Maria's work, sharing her goal to enable visually impaired persons to fully enjoy their lives and equal opportunities with their fellow citizens.

14 May 2022