

SOCIAL PROGRAMME

BLIND LEADING THE BLIND

It's a tour of sorts. Visitors will hear as normal but will see nothing, just total darkness, as they go on a trip guided by a blind person

By *Sopaporn Kurz*
SPECIAL TO DAILY XPRESS

Frankfurt, Germany
Vision is the sense that mankind relies on the most. When someone loses their sight, we think their life is over. This prevailing opinion leads to discrimination against blind people worldwide.

Because of such prejudices, Andreas Heinecke founded "Dialogue in the Dark" in 1988. It is an exhibition in absolute darkness where sighted people get to experience what it is like to be blind. Visitors are formed into small groups of eight or nine people and are led by a blind guide through environments such as a park, a city or a bar.

Throughout a 90-minute journey, visitors will exercise all their other senses, most of which are not normally used to their best capacity. They will also learn how to communicate differently in the new environment. Most importantly, they will learn that life in the dark is not poorer - it is just different.

"Through such a platform, Heinecke hoped that disabled and able people could communicate with each other in order to reduce prejudices, stereotypes and avoidance," said Klara Kletzka, managing director of the Dialogue Museum in Frankfurt.

One of a kind

"I think nothing similar has been invented. Unlike any other museum, we are socially motivated."

According to a survey, 60 per cent of visitors to the museum later treat blind people differently. They respect blind people more and give them a helping hand when they do their grocery shopping or cross the street.

"It is a wonderful result because our aim is to raise social awareness among the public," Kletzka said.

"There are lots of handicapped people with no social life because they have no job. They are alone at home. So we

want to integrate them." Kletzka says 70 per cent of her colleagues are disabled. "Dialogue in the Dark" has hired and empowered more than 5,000 blind people.

The exhibition has featured in more than 140 cities in 22 countries throughout Europe, Asia and America. More than 5 million visitors have been through this unique experience.

This will be able to see the exhibition during National Science Week in August.



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Klara Kletzka



>> READ THIS WRITER'S JOURNEY through the darkness in next week's Daily Xpress.



XTRA

EXHIBITION VENUES

>> **Long term exhibitions:**

- Copenhagen, Denmark
- Frankfurt, Germany
- Hamburg, Germany
- Leipzig, Germany
- Holon, Israel
- Milan, Italy
- Mexico City, Mexico
- Monterrey, Mexico
- Nijmegen, Netherlands

>> **Short term exhibitions:**

- Seoul, South Korea
- Davos, Switzerland
- Brussels, Belgium
- Campinas, Brazil
- Dead Sea, Jordan
- London, England
- Tokyo, Japan
- Dalian, China

>> **Plans for 2008**

- Barcelona, Spain
- Strasbourg, Austria
- Bangkok, Thailand