

## **blindekuh: bar, restaurant, culture and education in the dark**

**blindekuh (“blindekuh” or “blind cow” is the German word for the game blind man’s buff) is a place sighted people go to experience darkness. Blind and partially sighted staff, the darkness pros, help guests plunge into their world for a short time. People who come to eat or to attend cultural or educational events find out something new about themselves and their surroundings. blindekuh receives financial support from a foundation, Stiftung Blind-Liecht, and is an important employer of blind people in Switzerland. blindekuh Zurich has been open for six years, and blindekuh Basel opened in March 2005.**

### **History**

The idea for blindekuh originated in 1998 during the “Dialog im Dunkeln” (Dialogue in the dark) exhibition at the Zurich Museum of Design. The focus was to give sighted people an insight into the experience of being blind. The idea for blindekuh emerged because of the great enthusiasm shown by visitors and the opportunity to create jobs for visually impaired people. In 1998 the Blind-Liecht foundation was founded by visually impaired people, and in 1999 a restaurant, bar and platform for education and culture in the dark was created in a former Methodist chapel in Zurich Seefeld. At the same time a concept was created for the Expo.02 – the blindekuh pavilion on the Murten arteplage proved to be one of the great successes of the Swiss National Exhibition. blindekuh Basel opened in March 2005.

### **Important employer of blind people in Switzerland**

Blind and partially sighted people do not have the easiest time finding a job. But unlike other jobs, at blindekuh their handicap is a key qualification, and a basic factor in the success of the enterprise. More than thirty blind and partially sighted people work for blindekuh in Zurich and Basel.

### **Restaurant**

The chefs set great store by fresh seasonal produce, and the menu is changed every week accordingly. Prices for food and drink are in line with those at other restaurants in Zurich or Basel.

### **Bar**

The Zurich bar serves drinks and snacks, and is a great place for guests who don’t want to eat an entire meal in the dark.

## **Culture and the arts**

The arts programme features musical, theatrical and literary events. The artists, who confront the special challenge of performing in the dark, all take unconventional approaches. A fair amount is expected of the audience as well. They must be open to experiencing the arts in a different way. Because there are no visual stimuli at all in the dark, the ears become more sensitive and allow an unusual listening experience. Arts events receive financial support from different organisations and foundations.

## **Education**

blindekuh offers a selection of different course modules ranging from the sensory discovery experience to conflict management, all of which take place in the dark. Darkness enables people to become aware of hidden capabilities and habitual patterns of behaviour, as well as making speech more important. Seminar leaders are all experts in the dark.

## **Blind-Liecht foundation**

The Blind-Liecht foundation's purpose is to foster the culture of blindness and promote dialogue and mutual understanding between sighted and visually impaired people. To this end the foundation initiates and supports projects aimed at creating jobs for blind and partially sighted people. Its three largest projects so far have been blindekuh Zurich, the blindekuh pavilion at Expo.02 and blindekuh Basel. The foundation is overseen by a board of five trustees, the majority blind or partially sighted.

## **Finances**

In 2003 blindekuh made a profit for the first time, and aims to continue doing so in the future. Under the Blind-Liecht foundation's strategy, financial independence is seen as a prerequisite for the development of the business and new projects. In the last four years, annual sales have risen to CHF 1.8 million. During the start-up phase, operating deficits were covered by the Blind-Liecht foundation and various organisations for the blind and partially sighted. Although blindekuh is fully booked months in advance, its operating costs are higher than for other restaurants.

## **Internet**

The website is intended to be equally accessible to sighted, partially sighted and blind people. For this reason it does not use images as elements of the design. The site fulfils the requirements of the WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative) of the World Wide Web Consortium. Internet sites that comply with these guidelines are accessible to blind and partially sighted people in their entirety, regardless of the operating system or browser used.

## **Current situation**

blindekuh Zurich is the world's first completely dark restaurant, and has been a great success for more than five years. In 2003, blindekuh Zurich had 31,000 guests. blindekuh has become very well known, even outside Switzerland, thanks to frequent media coverage. The blindekuh concept is very difficult to copy because so much know-how and experience lies behind it. Recruiting suitable staff is also very demanding.

## **blindekuh Zurich**

blindekuh Zurich is in the heart of the Seefeld district in a former Methodist chapel that now seats 70 guests. Around 30 staff work on a part-time basis, most of them blind or partially sighted. Service staff are given special training by blindekuh professionals and external experts. The kitchen staff consists of both sighted and partially sighted people. The restaurant is open at lunchtime and in the evening. There are cultural events two or three times a month. Courses can be booked on an individual basis.

## **blindekuh Basel**

blindekuh Basel is located on an old industrial site at the heart of the Gundeldingen district, only ten minutes' walk from the railway station. The restaurant has room for 100 guests. Blindekuh Basel employs twenty people, most of them part-time. The majority are blind or partially sighted. The kitchen is run jointly by sighted and partially sighted people. blindekuh Basel is open only in the evenings. There are cultural events two or three times a month. Courses can be booked on an individual basis.

Besides the restaurant there is also an additional 330 square metres of "non-dark" space available that can be used for many different purposes. This is a place where companies and other organisations can hold events (presentations, training programmes, parties, etc.) before participants go on to eat in the restaurant in the dark.

## **Facts and figures**

Opened: blindekuh Zurich 1999, blindekuh Basel 2005

Seats: Zurich: 70, Basel: 100

Staff (mainly part-time): Zurich around 30, Basel around 20

Trustees of the Blind-Liecht foundation:

Chairman: Stefan Zappa (partially sighted)

Vice-President: Guido Jeker (partially sighted, responsible for education)

Jürg Flück (blind, responsible for culture and the arts)

Violanta von Salis (sighted, responsible for public relations)

Klaus Peretti (sighted, responsible for finance)

Honorary members of the Blind-Liecht foundation:

Andrea Blaser (blind)

Thomas Moser (blind)

Jürg Spielmann (blind)

Christine Huber (sighted)

Pierre Antolinez-Fehr (sighted)

Managers: Zurich: Adrian Schaffner; Basel: Sonja Hohgraefe

Arts officers: Zurich: Christine Lather; Basel: Fredy Heller

blindekuh Zurich

Mühlebachstrasse 148

8008 Zurich

Switzerland

Tel. 044 421 50 50

Fax 044 421 50 55

E-mail [zuerich@blindekuh.ch](mailto:zuerich@blindekuh.ch)

blindekuh Basel

Dornacherstrasse 192

4053 Basel

Switzerland

061 336 33 00

061 336 33 05

[basel@blindekuh.ch](mailto:basel@blindekuh.ch)

Website: [www.blindekuh.ch](http://www.blindekuh.ch)