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## **The opportunities of accessible tourism for disabled people**

## **Abstract**

This article describes the issues of the attitude and attention that need to be paid to a people with impairments in offering them some tourism services. Many organizations treat handicapped people with unfair discrimination, and the profits from this kind of tourism market are often underestimated.

However, the analysis of niche market and the statistics demonstrate the true picture of possible profitable potential of handicapped tourists: the more the tourism destinations for disabled people are adapted, the higher the quality of this tourism destination will be.

***Keywords:** accessible tourism, disabled people, developed countries, limited mobility, opportunities*

### **1. Introduction**

The growing population of elderly and disabled people around the world needs special support and services. According to United Nations (UN) statistics, 10% of the world's population is disabled [1]. Currently, more than 50 million people have a disability in Europe and more than 600 million worldwide. More than 500 million people have physical, mental, sensory or mental deviation. World experience shows that tourists with limited mobility occupy an important segment of the tourist market. In Europe, approximately 70% of the total numbers of people with disabilities are unable to travel, both physically and financially. And 7-8% of foreign tourists in the world tourism market have a disability. In Europe alone, the estimated revenues in this sector exceed 80 billion euros. Disabled people want to travel just like any other healthy person. However, tourism products and services are generally poorly prepared to meet the needs of this group of people. Recently, the problem of tourism accessibility

has often been discussed at International conferences for specialists in health tourism [2].

In Europe, much has been done to fully integrate people with disabilities into social life. For example, in Germany, the best conditions for the reception of disabled people have been created, and special routes have been organized for blind, hard-of-hearing tourists, wheelchair users, and Down children. Only wheelchair users are accepted here by 50 groups per year[3]. The construction of new facilities in the resorts of Lithuania, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and other countries certainly meets the requirements of accessibility; the existing facilities are adapted for tourists with disabilities of movement, hearing, and vision [4]. In some hotels, not only restore health in cases of disorders of the musculoskeletal system, but also offer diets for tourists with allergies to various types of products. The latter problem is very relevant in Europe where, for example, about 10 million people suffer from allergies only to flour products [5]. In Catalonia, people with disabilities include not only wheelchair users, the blind and the deaf, but also include the elderly, people with mental health problems, and pregnant women. In Spain, 75% of bus fleets and high-speed trains are adapted for the disabled [6].

The tourism industry and the infrastructure of accessible tourism for disabled in the post-Soviet Union countries have not been properly developed yet. It is known only in Russia, the only specialized travel agency «Liberty », which is engaged in organizing tours and receiving a disabled people from other countries [7]. From the countries of Central Asia, Uzbekistan has the resources to develop many types of tourism. The rich cultural and historical heritage, ancient traditions of crafts and art could attract fans of cultural and educational, archaeological and ethnographic tourism to the country. Currently, the measures taken to support and protect the private sector in Uzbekistan have contributed to an increase in the number of tourist organizations from 398 to 950 by the end of 2018, and hotel facilities from 661 to 900 units. However, the development

opportunities and ways to improve accessible tourism in Uzbekistan remain one of the most pressing problems [8].

The purpose of this article is to describe the key concepts and opportunities for creating accessible tourism for people with disabilities.

Tourism for people with disabilities is a relatively new and dynamically developing area of tourism. The social significance of tourism for special categories of the population is due, in particular, to the fact that the relative and absolute number of people with various types of disabilities is constantly growing (Figure 1).

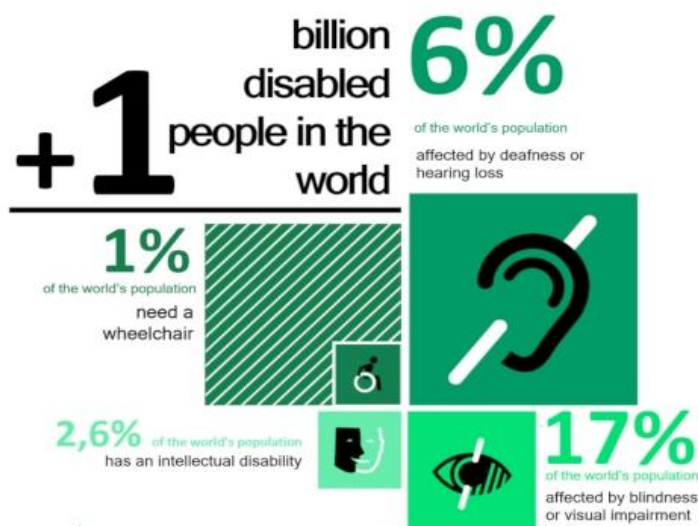


Figure 1. Disability statistics. Source: Lise Wagner. Disabled People in the World in 2021: Facts and Figures. 28 May, 2021. URL: [www.inclusivecitymaker.com/disabled-people-in-the-world-in-2021-facts-and-figures/](http://www.inclusivecitymaker.com/disabled-people-in-the-world-in-2021-facts-and-figures/)

More people are taking advantage of the opportunity to travel, which means the tourism industry gets more visitors, longer stays, longer seasons, and regular income. Society as a whole benefit from new employment opportunities, increased tax revenue for the government, and an accessible environment for both residents and visitors. Accessible tourism (non-barrier tourism) is an activity that provides a tourist product, information, individual tourist services, taking into account the needs for access and organization of these services for

people with limited mobility. Along with the term "barrier-free tourism", the definition of "Tourism accessible to All", adopted by the General Assembly in 2005 in Dakar (Senegal), is used, which is characterized as a service in the field of tourism for all categories of consumers, regardless of age, physical abilities of a particular person or the presence of a disability. Therefore, the main participants of accessible tourism are government agencies, tour operators and tour agents, representatives of tourism-related industries [9].

## **2. Literature review**

With the growing role of humanitarian and social values, the rights of persons with disabilities have begun to attract more and more attention of international political and public organizations during the second half of the XX century. The beginning of organizational activities in the field of the development of barrier-free tourism and the realization of the rights of people with disabilities on an international scale dates back to 1958, when the first meeting of WHO experts on medical rehabilitation was held. In 1960, the International Society for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities was organized, which is a member of WHO and works in close contact with the United Nations, as well as with UNICEF, UNESCO and the International Working Bureau. From that moment on, the issue of the availability of social infrastructure facilities, transport became an integral part of the integration of disabled people into public life [10].

Barrier-free tourism is a fairly new area of tourism. Key term in the definition of barrier-free tourism is the term "barrier", understood as an obstacle, a hindrance that a person encounters in the course of his life and activities. In the recommendations adopted at the 20th session of the UNWTO General Assembly dated June 11, 2013, the following definition was given: "Tourism accessible to all is a form of tourism that provides for a process of cooperation between the participants in the tourism process, allowing people with access needs, including those related to mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive functions, to function

independently, fairly and with dignity by providing them with the principles of universal design of tourism products, services and environments ”[11]. Tourism was initially not an object of scientific research and in the public consciousness was perceived as the movement and temporary stay of people outside their permanent place of residence. The need for a clearer definition of tourism arose in the middle of the 20th century, when tourist flows increased significantly, as did their impact on the economies of countries.

A significant result of the rethinking of the social role of 10% of the world population was the consolidation of their rights in a number of important international documents[12]:

- 1) UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 1975;
- 2)The United Nations is one of the first international organizations to bring the topic of disability to the world level, calling the problem a “silent tragedy”;
- 3) On September 27, 1980, at the World Tourism Organization (WTO) Congress in Manila, the term “accessible tourism” was first used;
- 4) 1981 declared by the UN as the International Year of Disabled Persons;
- 5) in 1990, at the General Assembly in Buenos Aires, recommendations for making tourism services accessible were reflected in the document Towards Accessible Tourism in the 1990s;
- 6) in 1994, WTO member countries created a committee of a group of experts to coordinate activities related to the development of "tourism for all" at the national level;
- 7)2003 was declared by the European Commission as the European Year of disabled persons;
- 8) in 2006, the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) was established;
- 9) in 2006, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted (entered into force on May 3, 2008, Russia signed the Convention on September 24, 2008 and ratified on September 25, 2012);

10) the European Commission's European Urban Accessibility Award was launched in 2010;

11) in 2013, the UN General Assembly approved the recommendations on “Accessible Tourism for All”.

Attention to the rights of people with disabilities became the basis for the development of barrier-free tourism, although international law addressed the issue of disability relatively late and passed a difficult path before the full rights and equality of opportunities were recognized for people with disabilities, including for barrier-free, unimpeded tourism.

A special place in the system of international legal acts regulating the rights of persons with disabilities is held by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by resolution 61/106 of the General Assembly of 13.12.2006. Unlike most of the documents previously adopted in this area, the Convention is not advisory in nature, but mandatory. This means that States parties to the Convention undertake obligations of a legal nature, the observance of which is monitored through the international mechanisms established by the Convention - the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Conference of States Parties. The literature extensively describes the economic aspects of accessible tourism, the expected benefits and losses of investing in and promoting accessible tourism in the future, various models of disability understanding and approaches to this topic, as well as practical technical aspects in implementing accessible tourism in various types of tourist destinations. However, to date, there are not many studies that show the planning of accessible tourism from the point of view of disabled travelers. Some studies have conducted surveys of travelers with disabilities using the analysis of travel reviews of travelers with disabilities [13]. A number of interviews with experts on accessible tourism were conducted to identify the most important priorities and current processes related to accessible tourism. There is an opinion that accessible tourism is a "low income". Because of the stereotype that people with disabilities have significantly less disposable income and are more likely to be



dependent only from a pension. This argument has been used in the past as a deterrent to investment in accessible tourism, and as long as there are too few case studies that can be cited as examples of successful tourism businesses offering an accessible tourism experience [14].

However, according to the latest statistics, the market for accessible tourism is constantly growing, making it clear that to ignore its potential is actually to ignore fruitful business opportunities. Accessible tourism can be a competitive advantage, as is the case with the Divi Hotels resort on Bonaire Island in the Caribbean, which has become famous for being fully accessible”, their presentation brochures including images with a ramp for access for those who travel in a wheelchair [15].

Accessible tourism is already a profitable business in many parts of the world: in 2012, accessible tourism provided 3% of GDP (786 billion euros) in Europe; in Australia in 2003-2004, accessible tourism contributed about 15% of profits (approximately \$10 million) to total tourism; in Germany in 2002-2003, the accessible tourism industry amounted to 2.5 billion euros; in the United States, annual disability travel brings in \$17.5 billion [16].

Research in the field of accessible tourism can focus on the importance of meeting the needs of the market, the focus shifting from demand to supply, which will help facilitate the necessary transformation of the tourism sector towards accessibility for all. One of the first attempts to study the patterns of domestic and international tourism was described in the article “Access Anxiety” (Darcy 1998). It provided detailed information on the nature of travel and experiences of people with disabilities living in New South Wales. [19] In the article “Traveling with Disabilities: More than an Access Problem” (Yau et al., 2004), it was found that people with disabilities experience different stages in the travel process [20].

Darcy's research paper (2004) examines the rights of persons with disabilities and their travel experiences in Australia. The paper presents a detailed assessment of the scientific findings, explaining that tourism authorities

and the industry limit the travel experience of people with disabilities and create so-called “disability trips”. It summarizes the existing research on this topic, examines the state of the field concerning demand, supply, and regulation of industry practices [21]. Joint Research Center for Sustainable Tourism” Accessible Tourism: Challenges and Opportunities” provides a good introduction to accessible tourism research, structuring priorities, and recognizing past results [23].

Darcy and Dickson (2009) predicted that 30% of the Australian population will have access requirements at any given time, and most people will have limited mobility at some point in their lives [24]. While these findings are based on country-specific findings, they are highly relevant for other similar societies. A recent and comprehensive analysis of the easy access market was provided by the UK Tourism Review on Accessibility Analysis (Visit England 2010). The report makes a useful distinction between those who travel with “any disability” or with “any mobility impairment.” Although the scope of its application is limited to the UK, the results can be considered significant for other similar tourist markets [25]. The results of the study aimed at studying the current problems of accessible tourism using an online survey of respondents from 21 countries of the world showed that Asian citizens who have the desire to travel face greater financial restrictions and greater physical barriers, compared to people in richer countries [26]. In the questionnaires, the majority were women (59%) than men, which is very close to the comparable Darcy questionnaire (Darcy 2009). Perhaps men are more reluctant to admit that they need help. The results of the sample analysis showed a high level of employment among people with disabilities: only 30% of them were unemployed. In developed countries, several respondents noted that the reason for the restriction of their mobility was not caused by disability or age restriction of movement, but by overweight [27]. Most respondents choose hotels from 3 to 5 stars, as they offer adapted rooms (Fig. 2).

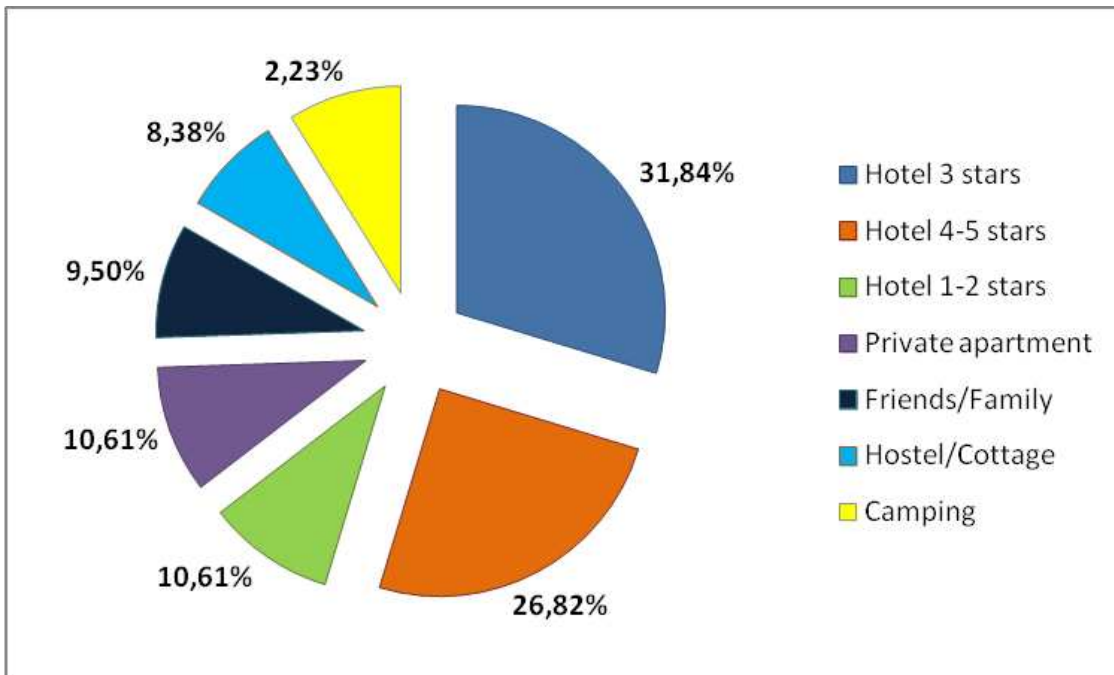


Figure 2. Preferred types of accommodation for disabled people.

Source: Carlos Buj. International centre for responsible tourism leads metropolitan university, September 2010. Darcy, S., Cameron & Pegg, 2010. Accessible tourism and sustainability: a discussion and case study. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 18(4), 515–537.

The respondents comment suggest that the preference for more expensive hotels is more likely due to the lack of availability of cheaper hotels than to purchasing power. The main reason for tourist trips was vacation time. In 24% of cases, business was the reason for travel, which again is consistent with the statement about the relatively good socio-economic situation of the sample [28]. One of the biggest obstacles to travel is the lack of specialized staff in the field of accessible tourism and the ignorance of professionals. In addition, the most popular services at the destination are: airport transfers, accessible hotel reservations and accessible tours, and other services, especially wheelchairs of various types [29].

## Conclusion

In this way, the future development of accessible tourism can help achieve the desired goal. The international competitiveness of accessible tourism is

enhanced by improvements in human rights. Designing information systems and assistive technologies will be able to stimulate the development of "smart cities" to ensure equality of available places for a group of people with disabilities. Although people with disabilities in developed countries can participate in tourism activities, however, in less developed countries, lack of infrastructure and political instability create social barriers and poor economic development for people with disabilities. It is necessary to create direct political interaction between developed and less developed countries, to prevent a one-sided development project. Supporting continuous monitoring and policy analysis in the field of accessible tourism will enable the countries of the world to meet the needs in accordance with their standards in the future.

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