

International Forum for Health Tourism
Romania, Targu Mures, 8-10 November 2013

**Accessible tourism and disability service information provided on
leading airline websites: A content analysis**



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- **What Accessible Tourism is, and what it is not**
- The economic perspective of Accessible Tourism
- Tourism and airline services
- Case study

TOPICS

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and what it is not

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Statement 1

Accessible Tourism is *not* a product

BUT is an opportunity

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Statement 2

Accessible Tourism is an Ethical and Human Rights concern. People with disabilities have the same right to participate fully in the community and enjoy the same quality of life as people without disabilities.

BUT is also a very interesting economic opportunity

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Statement 3

Accessible Tourism is *not* only for persons with disabilities

BUT also for older adults... and sometimes for everybody

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Statement 2

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Statement 4

Accessible Tourism is *not* only for wheelchair users

BUT also for persons with temporary or permanent vision, hearing, sensorial or mobility impairments, families with baby buggies...

Statement 1

Statement 2

Statement 3

What Accessible Tourism is, and what it is not

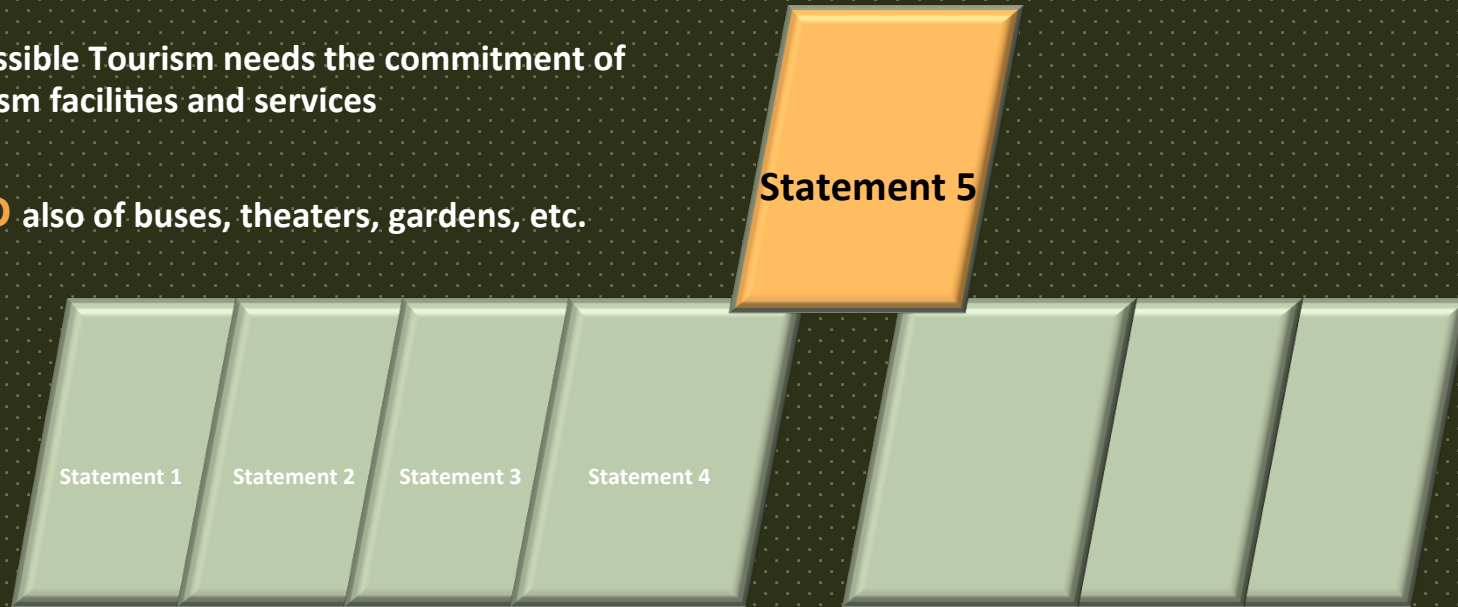
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Accessible Tourism needs the commitment of
tourism facilities and services

AND also of buses, theaters, gardens, etc.



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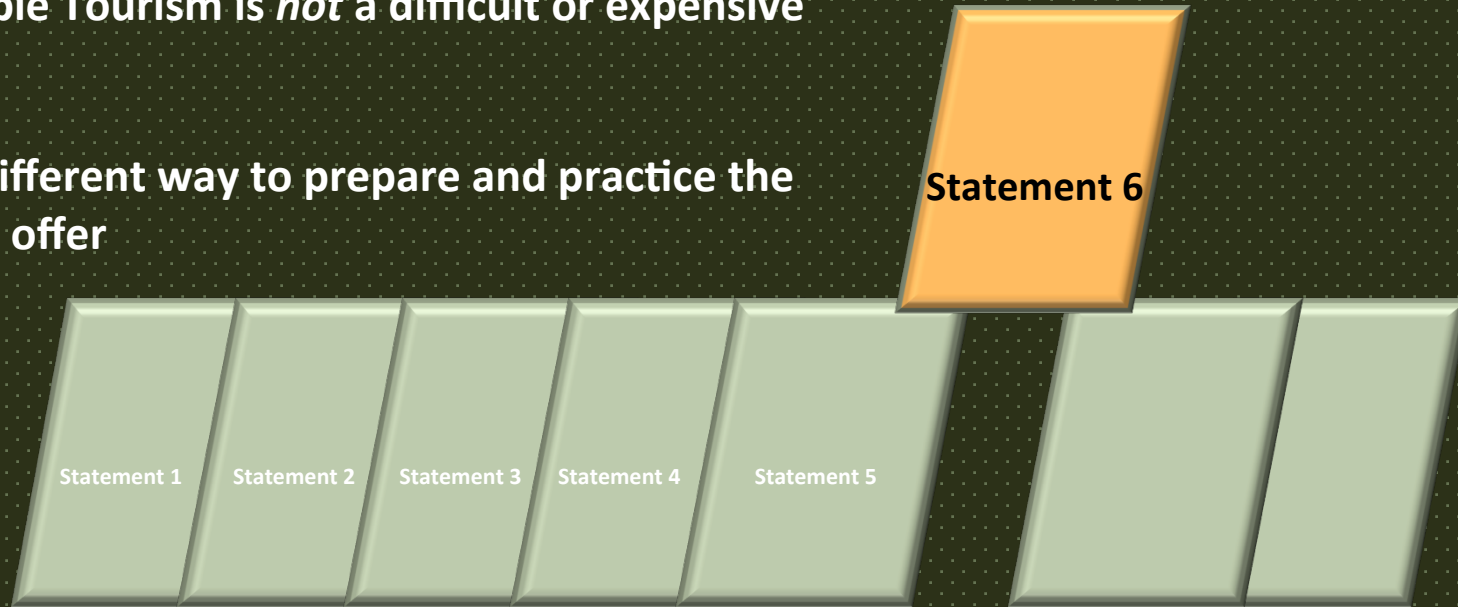
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Accessible Tourism is *not* a difficult or expensive target

BUT a different way to prepare and practice the tourism offer



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Accessible Tourism is a matter for clients and for professionals

From a boring concept, passing by a good practice challenge to a marketing winner: Should the new perception of AT be compared with the process of the «*green cause*»?

Statement 7

Statement 1

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Statement 5

Statement 6

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Accessible Tourism is:

... a process of enabling people with disabilities and seniors to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universal tourism products, services and environments

The definition is inclusive of the mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access (Darcy, 2006, p.4).

We also believe that is a **matter of intelligence** because it synthesizes a culture requirement with an economic opportunity that soon will become inevitable

Statement 8

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Persons with disabilities are all that have “long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UNCRPD, 2007)

Enabling environments must empower people with access requirements to make informed decisions about whether accessible destination experiences are appropriate for their needs. Research has shown that people with disabilities desire to travel and many do it when their information and access needs are adequately addressed

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How many persons
with disabilities?

- **650 millions**, about 10% of the World Population (Darcy, 2008)

How many disabled
tourists?

- **65 to 75 millions**, about 7/8% of the market (Darcy, 2008; WTO, 2011)

How much €?

- **80 billion €**, only in **Outbound Tourism** (Darcy, 2008; WTO, 2011)

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Some reasons to believe in the economic potential of Accessible Tourism

R1

People with impairments represent a large and growing proportion of the population

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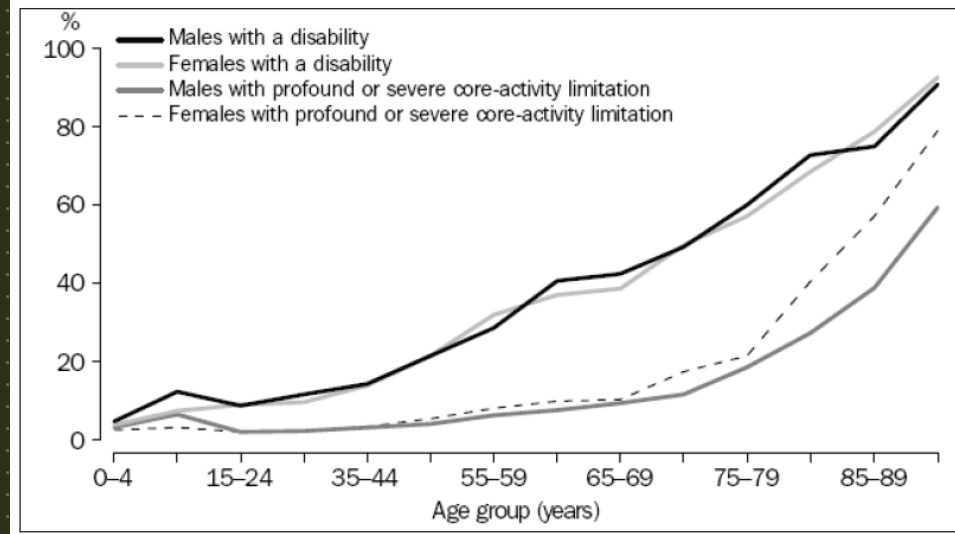
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Some reasons to believe in the economic potential of Accessible Tourism

Figure 1: Disability Rates by Age and Sex



Source: Darcy et al. 2008: p.13

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Some reasons to believe in the economic potential of Accessible Tourism

AT is a complex concept:

Any segment within the tourism market that prefers accessing tourism experiences with ease. This may include seniors who may prefer walking up a gentle ramp rather than tackling a large number of stairs. People with a disability, including those with physical and sensory disabilities, will find it easier to access tourism facilities where there is a continuous pathway and tactile surfaces and clear signage.

Source: Darcy et al. 2008: p.14

Some reasons to believe in the economic potential of Accessible Tourism

R1

People with impairments represent a large and growing proportion of the population

R2

When a group includes a person with disabilities, he/she becomes the center of the group's decision, which enlarges the real market

R3

The number of Accessible Tourism destinations is still low, which means that the competition within this specific market is less aggressive

Some reasons to believe in the economic potential of Accessible Tourism

R4

People with disabilities and/or impairments (including aged) are likely to prefer to travel during low season

R5

Guests with disabilities stay longer at the holiday destination than other tourists

R6

The concept of Accessible Tourism and its requirements are also useful to explore markets such as *health tourism*

Some reasons to believe in the economic potential of Accessible Tourism

R7

Sometimes, this kind of tourism can be supported by social funds or personal insurances, enlarging the economic dimension of the market

R8

These clients are more likely to stay and spend within the tourism unit

R9

When they feel their needs are adequately addressed, these clients tend to be more loyal to their holiday destinations and facilities

- In 2011, there were over 980 million international tourist arrivals globally (UNWTO, 2013)
- It is estimated that around 15% of the international tourists use the air transportation
- In certain markets, airline travel is more predominant. For example, in the European market, 86% of tourists use air transportation when traveling external to Europe (Cooper et al, 2008)

- **The competitive market for airlines has escalated. There are an estimated 230 major airlines worldwide registered with the International Air Transport Association (IATA, 2013)**
- **Travelers with special needs may need help in the airports and aircrafts. Sometimes this responsibility is from the airports' authorities, but in some other occasions airlines need to assume this task**

- Websites are sponsored by airline companies interested in selling products/ services, so the information contained should be adequate for the target public, including disabled passengers
- The amount of effort spent searing for needed information during the decision-making process is a key factor and can influence decisions about purchasing travel-related products and services (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). A website is a practical and cheap source of providing useful and necessary content to the masses

Methodology

- The primary purpose of this study was to assess the content provided on official websites of major airline carriers as related to information, services, and resources to accommodate aging and disabled travelers
- Airlines were selected for meeting one of the following criteria*:
 - (1) ranked as one of the 10 best airlines
 - (2) ranked as one of the leading 10 airlines in terms of safety ratings
 - (3) ranked as one of the leading 10 airlines in terms of lowest cost

* 3 airlines met two of the above categories, so the final sample is #27
- A total of 30 topics were identified and included in the rubric

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Table 1. Disability Service Availability and Dietary Restrictions

	Total TM (n = 27)	Best (n = 10)	Low Cost [†] (n = 10)	Safe (n = 10)
Onboard Staff Assistance				
No	14.8%	20.0%	10.0%	10.0%
Yes	62.9%	50.0%	60.0%	90.0%
No information available	22.2%	30.0%	30.0%	0.0%
Safety Training Requirements for Staff				
No information available	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Available Services: Hearing				
No	7.4%	10.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Yes	77.8%	50.0%	60.0%	90.0%
No information available	14.4%	40.0%	30.0%	10.0%
Available Services: Vision				
No	3.7%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Yes	70.5%	50.0%	70.0%	100.0%
No information available	25.9%	40.0%	30.0%	0.0%
Available Services: Mobility				
No	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Yes	89.9%	90.0%	80.0%	100.0%
No information available	11.1%	10.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Available Services: Cognitive				
No	11.1%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Yes	40.7%	30.0%	40.0%	60.0%
No information available	48.1%	50.0%	50.0%	40.0%

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Analysis

- **Aging and disabled travelers represents an interesting segment in the tourism industry**
- **However, the current market offers inadequate products and services to meet the needs/demands of this special population**

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- The information provided within these website sections differed dramatically; in fact, we must consider that, at least in some cases, although the information was not contained within the website, this does not guarantee that the airline did not provide the service
- If
 - ✓ services are not provided or
 - ✓ there are associated costs or
 - ✓ it is evident an absence of detailed information on websites

it increase the likelihood of frustration, stress, or dissatisfaction

Analysis

- Generally, findings indicate that most of the assessed airlines provide mobility (89.9%) and vision (70.5%) services for disabled passengers; fewer airlines provided services related to hearing (62.9%) or cognitive (40.7%) impairments
- Generally, **leading safety airline websites** provided more content about available AT services, and also reported more information on their websites about medication restrictions and more allowances related to service animals

Recommendations:

- The industry should consider modeling AT-related trainings and protocols from the practices of leading safety airlines
- Despite being capitalistic in a competitive market, we recommend **AT-related services to be uniformly provided** across airline categories and AT-related topics and information to be accurately and uniformly reported on airline websites; while some airlines will elect not to offer these AT services, at least **explicitly stating they do not offer such services** enables the customer an opportunity to make an informed decision about pursuing travel plans with said provider

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Recommendations:

- **We recommend the airlines to consider the costs, benefits and resources needed to offer AT- services** (i.e., in airports and onboard). Given the large and growing number of aging and disabled travelers, who are often accompanied by other individuals when they travel, the financial return on investment of catering to this subsection of travelers is vastly promising
- **For example, safety cards in braille are an inexpensive and important resource** for the travelers with vision impairments. Information in braille fosters autonomy to these travelers

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Recommendations:

- We also recommend the creation and delivery of uniform AT and sensitivity training to enhance the workforce's capacity to accommodate aging and disabled travelers in the event of an emergency situation; in addition to protecting airlines against potential legal liability in the instance of adverse incidents, such training also has implications to foster the daily customer satisfaction, comfort, and loyalty

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Thank you!