

# The tourists accessibility and their disabilities



Impairments are the reality of life that sooner or later each person will be experiencing this in some point of a persons life particularly during the elderly stage of an individual. Serving the disabled individuals is not something that comes naturally to most people. This chapter has been divided into three parts which are the accessible tourism, museum and disabled visitors and disabled person. To give an overview of what and who are the visually impaired individuals, a section of this report will discuss about a visual impairment.

Furthermore, in this chapter, a brief overview of two museums and two galleries will be tackled in this chapter. The two museums are British Museum and National Maritime Museums while the two galleries are the National Gallery and the Tate Modern Gallery.

According to Macfarlane (1996 cited in Barnes, 1991), for over a hundred years, disability has represented a culturally embedded and socially accepted form of oppression against disabled people. Furthermore, a disability may be physical, cognitive, sensory, emotional and or developmental.

Also, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2010), the term disability is ‘ an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or actions; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.” In addition, Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1995) defines disability as ‘ a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out

normal day-to-day activities'. Moreover, according to Shaw and Coles (2003), disability is 'the loss or limitations of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others, due to physical and social barriers. On the other hand, Shaw and Coles (2003) define impairment as the functional limitation within the individual caused by mental or sensory impairment.

As mentioned above, disabled individuals faces different barriers which holds them back in participating in such activities like travelling. Nevertheless, a number of disabled persons do not consider themselves as a person with disability to a certain extent. Some of disabled people prefer to be independent in nature and associate disability with passivity and dependence qualities (Barnes, 1996).

In most cases, a person with disability likes better to travel with their friends and or family members. According to Yau, et al (2004: 958), the process of being a traveller with a disability can be complex, requiring personal initiative, the need to accurately evaluate one's own capabilities as well as the ability to collect reliable information, manage the trip, manage oneself and take stock to reflect experiences. Nevertheless, the experience of the traveller with disability is completely different from the experience of the other travellers without disability. Disabled travellers may have an uneven experience as the facilities being offered are not enough most especially for the other impairment such as for visually impaired individual. Even so, it is logical to note that the majority of the travellers, whether they are disabled or not, are expected to experience some form of barriers during their time of travel.

A qualitative work was undertaken in Hong Kong, proposed 'The Model of Tourism and Disability' to facilitate an understanding of the multifaceted interaction amid disability, tourism and the environmental context (Packer et al, 2007). A model of tourism and disability included three key components:

The process of becoming and remaining travel active

The personal and or disability context; and

The environmental and or travel context

(Packer et al, 2007)

The model of tourism and disability tells that the relationship involving the process of becoming travel active and the environmental context are autonomous with each influencing the other (Packer et al. 2007). In travelling there is always a positive and negative outcome of travel experience. A negative travel experience could be the poor quality of service or the destination being inaccessible. Furthermore, these could result on the decrease in numbers of tourist in tourism market. Nevertheless, a positive outcome of travel experience is likely to result on a repeated visits and increasing the tourism market.

## **2. 2. 1 Visual Impairment**

Visual impairment is one of the types of disability. Generally, not all the individuals with visual impairment are completely blind. In 2002, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had estimated that there were more than 161 million people globally who were visually impaired. In which 37 million are blind and 124 million of whom had low in vision (WHO, 2004). At the same

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time, World Health Organisation (WHO) noted that the ageing of the global population and the age-related nature of visual impairment was driving global changes in the epidemiology of vision loss (WHO, 2004). In which at the present time, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), there are about 314 Million people who are visually impaired worldwide and 45 million are blind. In addition, most of the visually impaired individuals are living in a developed city. Furthermore, according to Open University (2010), there are between one and half and two million people who are visually impaired in UK. Subsequently, most cases of visually impaired are also considered hidden disability (Open University, 2010).

In tourism, disability is a neglected subject within tourism enquiry and cognate fields (Aitchison, 2009 cited in Richards et al, 2010). According to Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB, 2010), visual impairment may be extremely different from person to person and that there are relatively some aspects that could support and help the blind or the partially sighted individuals to enjoy and have fun on a holiday. In addition, a lot of older visually impaired individuals may as well suffer on other disabilities, for instance, mobility and or hearing difficulties.

According to The Council for Museums Archives and Libraries (2001), ' every person with a visual impairment is different in terms of the nature of their visual limitation and their expectations and requirements'. Most of the visually impaired individuals use their other sense of smell, hearing, taste and the sense of touch in order for them to feel the surroundings that they are into. On the other hand, some of the visually impaired have a difficulty in imagining an actual object.

Furthermore, visually impaired people are considered as a potential market in tourism industry. In UK there are about 1.97 million adults who are visually impaired (The Council for Museums Archives and Libraries, 2001). Additionally, according to The Council for Museums Archives and Libraries (2001), 82 percent of visually impaired in UK have low visions, 90 percent are aged over sixty and approximately 75 percent of visually impaired can read large prints. In most cases, partially sighted and the blind people travel with their friends and families and there is a bigger chances that will return on the places where offers a good facilities and provides good services (RNIB, 2010).

## **2.3 Accessible tourism**

More individuals enjoy the opportunity to travel. Visiting the attractions is one of the foremost activities in tourism. On the other hand, travellers face many barriers during travelling such as getting information, accommodation and or problems in getting around at their chosen destinations. On the contrary, not most of the tourists are capable of participating in such doings that this industry could offer. Subsequently, most destinations offer a friendly environment although not to every visitors. Disabled people may be a significant market segment for the tourism industry. However, many tourism sites are not well suited to serve disabled tourist. Like, for the disabled visitors, convenience of a particular destination is essential. In almost all cases of a destination, the facilities being offered for the disabled person are limited.

Accessible tourism benefits everyone. According to Darcy (2006, p: 4 cited in Darcy and Dickson, 2009), accessible tourism is defined as “ a process of <https://assignbuster.com/the-tourists-accessibility-and-their-disabilities/>

enabling people with disabilities and seniors to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universal tourism products, services and environments.” Furthermore, Tourism New South Wales (Darcy and Dickson, 2009), noted that ‘ accessible tourism is about making it easy for all people to enjoy tourism experiences.’

Accessibility is a necessary element for every day’s existence. Neither, the privilege to travel and take pleasure in all the good destinations is for every individual. Tourism desires an access to almost the whole thing that a destination has to offer. At present, the consumer’s demands are gradually changing. Consequently, tourism is considered as one of the fastest growing industry. Nevertheless, this industry could serve as an instrument in promoting a barrier free circumstance for the individuals with disabilities. It will be an efficient means of furthering the equality for the disabled individuals that could lead to barrier free.

Each individual has the opportunity to travel and benefit from the surrounding of their chosen destinations. According to Darcy (2007, p: 74), a justly accessible tourism product will lessen or eliminate physical, attitudinal, information, financial and other barriers that make the tourism experience less accessible to people with disabilities. Furthermore, an accessible tourism should be made easier for all people, irrespectively of their age, gender and or physical status, in order to enjoy their tourism experiences. According to Tourism New South Wales (2005, cited in Darcy and Dickson, 2009), Easy Access Market is define as:

“ Any segment within the tourism market that prefers accessing tourism experiences with ease. This people with 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.”

As accessibility plays an imperative role in tourism, not everyone could have the access to their designated destinations. Even though, still this industry attracts a numbers of tourist at all times. On the other hand, accessibility generates barriers in some particular persons such as the disabled individuals. Subsequently, people with disabilities have also the rights to partake and benefit from the community as the same quality of life of the people without disabilities. Nonetheless, people with disabilities travel less due to the lack of facilities of the tourism industry. In general, the provisions that tourism industry offers to the disabled persons are commonly for the mobility impaired individuals. Furthermore, due to the increasing facilities for the disabled most especially for the individuals who have mobility impairment, tourism has widened the amenities for these types of tourist. Due to these facilities, other disabled persons travel and participate less. In contrary to that, there are some increasing numbers of disabled individuals who set off for travel mostly for physically impaired individuals only. In addition, this industry should require having an amenities and facilities that could do well to every tourist. Given the fact that most of the facilities for the disabled are for wheel chaired person, it is more convenient for them to participate in leisure activities compared to visually impaired people.

Among all the types of disabled individuals, visually impaired might not be able to be pleased about the picturesque view, on the other hand, they could

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still have a pleasant journey on some other way. All the same, these types of tourist could still feel, hear, smell and touch. Likewise, there are an increasing numbers of disabled people and most of them are engaging in travel. In addition, the increase in the demands of the mobility access for the disabled is in high demands at the present. In some point, the amenities that are being offered are for the mobility impaired visitors. Visually impaired travellers have a lesser numbers compared to the wheel chaired persons. Currently, the common facilities that tourism has to offer for the visually impaired tourist are the guide dogs, audio descriptions for some exhibits and Braille.

Increasingly the tourism industry is able to offer improved products and services. While physical accessibility is an essential component of inclusion, it has a long been recognised that successful inclusion also requires social acceptance by others (Schwartz, 1988). According to Page and Connell (2006, p: 76), contemporary literature recognises that 'access is not only about buildings; a truly accessible environment is one in which a person with disability can freely express their independence, and one in which any impediment to integration is removed'. Moreover, according to Page and Connell (2006), in United Kingdom, Visit Britain operates the National Accessible Scheme, which assists accommodation operators in making their products more accessible with standards for visual and physical impairments. Moreover, the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), in the UK places a responsibility on all public and private organisations to make services full accessible to disabled persons (Page and Connell, 2006).

According to Timothy and Crispin (2006, p: 4), each year, in countries throughout the world, millions upon millions of people visit museums. Additionally, there is an increase of all kinds of museums all over the countries. In addition, the numbers of potential visitors are increasing due to the growing interest in their collections and their works. In some cases, a number of destinations such as museums have already established a friendly surrounding for their visually impaired visitors by providing an audio sound service. Moreover, in some museums, they had already provided the 'touching' for the display objects for these types of visitors. According to Urry, (2002, p: 256), 'touching the objects on the display is an alternative sense, makes the objects "tacky" and corroded so they no longer remain visually and physically the same'. Also, disabled individuals have the right to obtain the same benefits from museums as others are obtaining.

Travel by people with disabilities happens regardless of the presence of numerous discouraging barriers (Darcy, 1998; Lipp 2003, cited in Packer, et al, 2008). On the other hand, while they look for the same or similar travel experiences to other travellers, travellers with disabilities are likely to experience extremely different and uneven tourism experiences. In spite of all this, people with disabilities still retain their eagerness for travel and want to travel. A person travelling with a disability can be complex, according to Yau et al (2004) it requires a personal initiative, the need to accurately evaluate one's own capabilities, as well as the ability to collect reliable information, manage oneself and take the stock to reflect. The mentioned are considered the process of travelling with disability.

It is reasonable to note that all travellers, whether they have a disability or not, are likely to experience some form of barriers to participation while travelling. Moreover, a person without disabilities thinks the barriers as just an occurrence. On the other hand, a person with disabilities dealing with the barriers during their travel is a challenging task. It is regrettable that travellers with disability may encounter or experiencing a tourism market place that does not cater and or give their needs as it does to travellers without disabilities. Imagine that this is the reason why people with disabilities participate less in travel and tourism.

## **2. 4 Museum and disabled visitors**

Individuals with a sight problem can face a lot of barriers when visiting a museums and or galleries. Museum displays, whether picturesque arrangements of beautiful things or chronological narratives of a developmental process are involved in scopic forms of understanding (Hetherington, K. 2002). On the other hand, there are some displays that at times seen as discriminatory for some visitors. Furthermore, building an access in a museums or galleries for every individual is a part of the obligation to the community. In addition, a museum or gallery which are accessible to every person attracts more visitors.

Most of visitors are pleased about museums and galleries as a place where they can extend their experience and also to have an enjoyment on societal circumstance. Museums have expanded in multiplicity and burst in popularity over the last few decades. Millions of people every year visit a museum. Moreover, every museum attracts a variety of visitors. According to Dr. Johnson's 1755 dictionary (cited in Yale, 1998: 33) a museum was simply

' a repository of learned curiosities.' " The Museums and Galleries

Commission currently defines a museum as ' an institution which collect, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit" (cited in Yale, 1998: 33).

Furthermore, according to the International Council of Museums (2005 cited in Sandell, 2007: 2), ' a museum have unique potential for addressing and fostering cultural understanding in interdisciplinary ways.' It is known that a museum is a collection of antiques or historical materials that has been used during a significant event during earliest times. Furthermore, a museum broadens the knowledge of its visitors. In most cases, the public is the one benefitted on what the museums could provide and do. According to Ambrose and Paine (2006), it is only when the museum's public is thoroughly understood that the museum can effectively responding to the public's needs and requirements through services.

It is stated in Museums Association's definition (1998 cited in Disability Directory for Museums and Galleries, 2001) that " Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens which they hold in trust for society". Museums are for everyone this includes the disabled people.

A museum visitor comes in all ages of any gender, social status and with or without disability. A museum's market can be thought of as the overall social and economic context within which the museum operates. All museums operate within a market and all provide a supply of services that meet a market demand. According to Ambrose and Paine (2006), ' internationally,

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there is for example a growing critical awareness of the ' political' nature of museums and their historic role in maintaining the cultural values of elite or privileged groups ins society'. A museums visitor expects more on what the museums could offer.

Disabled visitors must be accommodated in the museums. On the other hand, accessibility in the museums is less for most cases of disabled groups. Furthermore, the needs of each disabled individual may vary on their types of disability and there may be an inconsistency with one another. In addition, in some cases the needs of the disabled community may alter rapidly upon their visits. According to Majewski and Bunch (1998, cited in Sandell, 2007), there are three distinct tiers of disability access that museums should address in order to meet the needs of their audiences and these are:

- a) Access to the exhibition's physical elements,
- b) Access to exhibition's content; and
- c) The access that describes the representation of disabled people and the inclusion of disability-related narratives and interpretation within exhibitions.

(Majewski and Bunch, 1998 cited in Sandell, 2007: 146-147).

Moreover, access to the museums and galleries should also take into consideration the architectural structure of the building, the parking spaces for the disabled and on how to get to the museums and galleries. Likewise, if the museum or gallery is a massive place, a map and signage's will be helpful for these types of visitors.

Museum's facilities and services for people with mobility impairment are highly developed compared to with people with sensory difficulties such as the visually impaired visitors. Now a day, sensory approaches are common in some museums. A museum plays a major role in communal change.

According to the Walters (2001), ' disability is viewed as being part of diversity, something that is not always the case'. Furthermore, disabled people are considered a potential visitor in museums. According to Walter (2009), in order to include disabled visitors, museums should adopt and understand the social model of disability. Social model of disability does not deny impairments or any medical needs that arises from impairments (Walter, 2009). Through this social model of disability, museums will not take the disabled visitors as a problem, to a certain extent they will create a way to welcome and accommodate them in their museums.

Access in the museums for disabled visitors should be considered in the broadest sense. Access is not just about providing lifts, toilets, spacious corridor and or parking spaces for the disabled. Access should also include the information and better access to the exhibits inside the museums.

Furthermore, improvement of access should include sensory, physical, intellectual, cultural as well as the financial access in the museums. In addition, a disabled person prefers to be independent but most of the time needs help in some certain things most especially for visually impaired as they have low in visions and in some cases they are partially blind.

According to the Disability Directory for Museums and Galleries (2001), ' nearly two million people have some form of visual impairment, but most blind people or 82 percent have some residual vision that they use to have

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good effect and many people who could register as blind do not do so'. Also, visually impaired people make and appreciate art, according to Walter (2001). In addition, if a visually impaired visitor visits museums, in most cases they need a multi-sensory exploration of an object, signage printed in large image or fonts and audio format description for objects in order to enhance their visit experience. In some museums and galleries, it is allowed to have guide dog for the visitors who have vision impairment.

Walter (2001) emphasise the needs of the people with visual impairments. According to Walter (2001), visually impaired individual needs accessible information in a range of alternatives formats, a tactile signs or diagrams and an audio-information. Moreover, the museum's staffs needs to have training in handling a visitor with visual impairment. A museum with a well trained staff could understand more the needs of the visually impaired visitors. A visually impaired visitor is not completely blind. In most cases they could see but only blurred vision and some could only recognise large font of prints.

### **2. 4. 1 Museums and Galleries**

In order to establish a basic abstract structure to be use in this research project, the review will now be set out to be aware of the background of two museums and two galleries which are the British Museum, National Maritime Museum, The National Gallery and the Tate Modern as the research area for this study.

### **a) The British Museum**

British Museum is one of the oldest and largest leading museums all over the world. It has a collection of more than seven million objects which originated from all continents. In addition, British Museum is a representation of almost all the culture of the world. Moreover, British Museum is known as the history of the world in a hundred objects (British Museum, 2010).

The British Museum is a free entrance that attracts more or less a five thousands visitors that visits the museum during its open hours. Its visitors are ranging from children to adults, all types of gender and disabilities. Moreover, visiting this museum needs a day in order to view all the exhibits in it.

### **b) National Maritime Museum**

Greenwich area is known for its unique forms of architectural design. In addition, Greenwich area has been recognized as an attraction for shopping and education which is the University of Greenwich. Furthermore, tourism in this Greenwich is developing more as the upcoming Olympics will be held in this location.

Likewise, National Maritime Museum is one of the prides of this area. As a tourist destination, National Maritime Museum is composed of three main sites which are the Maritime Galleries, the Royal Observatory and the Queen's House. Basically, the museum focuses on its four themes which are the sea, ships, time and the stars and the relationship with the people (National Maritime Museum, 2010).



National Maritime Museum welcomes visitors in all ranges of ages and regardless of the gender with or without disability. Furthermore, it provides educational learning for the children. In addition, the visitors of this museum are usually students from different schools and or universities. Furthermore, disabled people are visiting the museum but most are mobility impaired visitors.

### **c) National Gallery**

National Gallery is situated in the heart of London. Thousands of people visits National Gallery daily. It is well known for its art from the famous and renowned artist.

The gallery welcomes each and every individual regardless of gender, age and disabilities.

### **d) Tate Modern Gallery**

Tate Modern is a gallery of international modern art. Its collection is a British art collection from the last 1500 years till the present time (Tate Modern, 2010).

## **2. 5 Summary**

This chapter bring about by discussing about the disability and the forms of disability. Moreover, it was clearly discussed in this chapter the importance of accessible tourism and which had established as the basic foundation for this study. At the latter part of this chapter, it has been discussed about the facilities being offered by the museums for the visually impaired visitors.

To sum it up, the literature review's the conditions of the accessibility of the museums for the visually impaired visitors. Consequently, it is important to recognise the particular needs of different people (age group, genders, impairment group and or disabled individuals).

The following chapter will reveal the methodology of the research study along with the other relevant methodological issues.