



INCLUSIVE & ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL GUIDELINES

Introduction

People with disabilities should not be overlooked when creating travel experiences. Providing accessible travel is both a social imperative and a business opportunity. In fact, according to the World Health Organization, “almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life. Over one billion people – about 15% of the global population – live with some form of disability and this number is increasing.”

People with disabilities are diverse as are their disabilities. Even two people with a similar disability may have very different needs when it comes to accessibility and travel. Although wheelchairs typically appear on disability symbols, wheelchair users are only a small percentage of people with disabilities. People with disabilities include anyone with impaired or decreased physical, cognitive, intellectual and/or sensory abilities, including people with hearing loss. In fact, the UK government reports that around 6% of children are disabled, compared to 16% of working age adults and the UN reports that over 46% of people over the age of 60 have disabilities. The over 60 age group is also considered to comprise of “slow walkers” who also benefit from facilities made accessible for those with mobility needs. Accessibility features will benefit both persons with disabilities and pensioners, assisting businesses to retain customers for a longer period.

The business benefits for supporting people with disabilities are both socially and financially lucrative. An EU study found that travellers with disabilities travel with an average of 1.9 other people, indicating that by accommodating the needs of one customer with disabilities a business obtains an average of about three customers. Furthermore, an Amadeus study found that travellers with disabilities would increase their travel budget, either through more frequent or longer trips, by 34% if accessibility barriers were eliminated. Providing inclusive and accessible solutions enables Travel & Tourism businesses to reach more travellers and a higher paying market that has been historically underserved.

These high-level inclusion and accessibility guidelines were compiled on the basis of insights and frameworks developed by private sector leaders in Travel & Tourism, travel and disability experts including Accessible Travel Solutions and research from intergovernmental organisations. These differ from WTTC’s Inclusion & Diversity Guidelines which address inclusion and diversity in the Travel & Tourism workplace. This document’s focus is on the experience of travellers with disabilities.

A number of issue areas within accessible travel were considered when compiling these guidelines namely, developing a system for inclusivity and accessibility; offering accessible travel products, services and facilities; providing accurate, detailed and comprehensive accessibility information; marketing to people with disabilities actively and effectively; training staff on inclusivity and accessibility and including people with disabilities in operational decisions. These issue areas and their principles are included as key points to create a comprehensive set of guidelines for Travel & Tourism businesses.

Note that the guidelines are subject to change and may be enhanced as new research and insights become available. While not all guidelines will be feasible for every business in the Travel & Tourism sector, the information is intended to provide guidance to be integrated and adapted by each business wherever this is feasible for that business. These guidelines are scalable and can be used in Travel & Tourism businesses of any size. Businesses should consider further engagements internally to refine their approach.

Numerous organisations have undertaken work in this space, which have informed this document, notably the ISO/IEC guide for addressing accessibility in standards, the World Health Organization Disability information hub, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Ageing and Disability information hub, Expedia’s Breaking Down Barriers to Accessible Travel as well as Amadeus’ Working Towards Inclusive and Accessible Travel. While WTTC’s guidelines have their own pillars, they do integrate the content, learnings and insights from previous research.

These guidelines follow a similar structure as WTTC’s High-Level Inclusion & Diversity Guidelines and Mental Health Guidelines. The guidelines are divided into four pillars namely:

- 1. Developing an Inclusive & Accessible System**
- 2. Creating Safe Spaces**
- 3. Designing an Engaging & Relevant System**
- 4. Exemplifying Inclusion & Accessibility**



Developing an Inclusive & Accessible System

This pillar refers to systemic support of accessibility needs; effective change needs to be actioned at a systemic level. Access to accurate and detailed accessibility information is a large barrier to entry for travellers with disabilities. This information should be made available from before a traveller makes a booking and throughout the traveller journey. Travel & Tourism businesses should:

- Develop a long-term accessibility vision and short-term accessibility targets, including metrics to monitor the progress towards achieving the vision and targets.
- Dedicate sufficient resources to achieve the vision, considering the creation of a specific role for an accessibility expert and the naming of an executive sponsor within the organisation's senior leadership for accessibility.
- Collaborate, where necessary and possible, with other businesses in areas where there are gaps in accessibility knowledge, experience and services. Consider conducting meaningful research with travellers with disabilities, whenever possible, to avoid making assumptions.
- Offer travel products, services and facilities without accessibility barriers for those with physical, cognitive, intellectual or sensory needs, where possible. Adhere to international accessibility standards for the built environment and for information and communications technology (ICT), where possible.
- Cover travellers' accessibility needs throughout the traveller journey and aim to achieve consistency in accessibility features within and across the business, as much as possible. Where businesses work with other partners to offer the travel experience, businesses should collaborate to achieve reliability throughout the journey. Where products, services and facilities are not able to meet certain accessibility standards, provide travellers with accurate and reliable information about barriers and/or partial accessibility to manage expectations and allow travellers to make decisions for themselves.
- Avoid making assumptions about a traveller's disability or their needs. Build for accessibility, as much as possible, and let the travellers determine what works for them or meets their needs; providing opportunities for them to share this feedback.
- Provide clear, detailed and accurate information for travellers with disabilities and share the information in a consistent manner across the business. Compile, evaluate and validate accessibility information with the guidance of an accessibility expert wherever possible.
 - Develop online services that follow digital accessibility standards so travellers with disabilities can browse services, make a booking, modify a booking and/or contact your business seamlessly.
- Provide training to staff on disability awareness and how to support travellers with disabilities. Offer general disability awareness training to all staff and more detailed accessibility training to customer-facing staff. Enhance this training with guidance, resources and ongoing support.
 - Accessibility training should cover a wide range of topics including an overview of the types of disabilities, disability etiquette and terminology, education on appropriate and inappropriate terms, general awareness of common accessibility barriers and features, tips for assisting customers with disabilities and specific knowledge of onsite accessibility features and how to use them.
 - Training should also account for unconscious bias, including stereotypes and assumptions, and actively counter it.

Creating Safe Spaces

An inclusive and accessible travel ecosystem needs to be supported by an enabling environment which is safe, welcoming and provides the opportunity for travellers with disabilities to enjoy their travel experience like any other traveller served by the business. It is important that accessible solutions are integrated as part of the travel experience to avoid ostracization and discrimination of travellers with disabilities. Creating safe spaces relates to ensuring the environment is free of discrimination on site, online or elsewhere. A safe space is not just about bodily safety; it is also about the emotional and inferred safety of the individual, ensuring the individual feels welcomed and included. The system needs to build in this kind of safety otherwise inclusion may not result in an improved experience for travellers. Travel & Tourism businesses should:

- Foster a respectful environment at all locations and for all activities. Remind staff that their attitude towards people with disabilities plays an integral role in making that customer feel welcome and included.
- Provide clear signage throughout the traveller journey about accessibility for varying physical, cognitive, intellectual and sensory abilities. Include text, braille, photos and audio, where possible.
- Develop accessibility features that are clear, overt and which travellers with disabilities do not require special assistance from staff to use. Where staff need to operate features, aim to have a staff member available to assist, where possible and necessary.
- Make accessibility decisions using feedback and information obtained from travellers with those disabilities. Test accessibility features with travellers with disabilities so that these meet their needs, as much as possible. Empower these individuals to share honest feedback and experiences.
- Have like-minded accessibility values and standards with partner businesses, where possible. To have a seamless and consistent experience for the traveller, work with partners to train all staff appropriately and equally.



Designing an Engaging & Relevant System

For the accessible travel journey to remain relevant, the organisation needs to adapt as accessibility needs evolve and more accessible products become available. Travel & Tourism businesses should:

- Regularly and proactively engage travellers with disabilities in the creation of accessible products and services so that these meet their needs appropriately. Regularly obtain feedback on the experiences of travellers with disabilities and incorporate the feedback, as appropriate and possible.
- Include accessibility features from the booking process, enabling travellers with disabilities to engage with the business before booking their travel service or product. Where possible, have fully trained staff available to provide clarity and/or detail in a way that traveller prefers according to their physical, cognitive, intellectual and/or sensory needs.
- Create an environment that can quickly respond to and address accessibility concerns. Provide accessible communication channels so travellers with disabilities, regardless of physical, cognitive, intellectual and/or sensory need, can communicate easily with staff. Staff should be trained to resolve quickly and efficiently any potential issues at any point in the traveller journey.
- Consider flexibility, if possible, in itineraries for those travellers with disabilities, so that their experience is not hindered or diminished because inclusive and accessible travel features are not available. Where itineraries cannot be changed, (such as in the case of large group tours), notify customers prior to booking and suggest other options if available and possible.

Exemplifying Inclusion & Accessibility

An organisation's internal and external commitment to inclusive and accessible travel needs to be aligned. In effect, how organisations offer inclusive and accessible travel is as important as their continued dedication to enhancing the accessible travel experience across the Travel & Tourism value chain. Travel & Tourism businesses should:

- Create systems to regularly engage with key accessibility stakeholders and incorporate their feedback, where appropriate. These stakeholders should include people with varied disabilities as well as travellers, staff and local community members.
- Engage with accessibility specialists and fellow Travel & Tourism businesses to share knowledge, where possible, and work in harmony to achieve a better experience for travellers across the value chain.
- Champion accessibility within the Travel & Tourism sector broadly and within their own industry, where possible and appropriate, so that these travellers can safely enjoy travel.
- Have customer-facing processes that are inclusive and accessible for people of all needs. For instance, allow for multiple payment methods to cater to different types of customers and make customers aware that digital and in-person options are available.
- Develop inclusive marketing, media and communication standards to dignify representations of all people and authentically represent them. Actively market to travellers with physical, cognitive, intellectual and sensory disabilities to alert them to accessible products and services.
- Empower staff to address customer concerns as they occur or to engage other staff members if and where necessary. Provide a quick response to any accessibility matters, where possible.
- Engage regularly, where possible, with industry bodies and local governments to share visitor feedback on accessibility, thus enabling the destination to enhance customer experiences in the future.
- Partner with organisations that have like-minded approaches to accessible travel where possible.

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The World Travel & Tourism Council is the global authority on the economic and social contribution of Travel & Tourism.

WTTC promotes sustainable growth for the Travel & Tourism sector, working with governments and international institutions to create jobs, to drive exports and to generate prosperity. Council Members are the Chairs, Presidents and Chief Executives of the world's leading private sector Travel & Tourism businesses.

Together with Oxford Economics, WTTC produces annual research that shows Travel & Tourism to be one of the world's largest sectors, supporting 330 million jobs and generating 10.3% of global GDP in 2019. Comprehensive reports quantify, compare and forecast the economic impact of Travel & Tourism on 185 economies around the world. In addition to individual country fact sheets, and fuller country reports, WTTC produces a world report highlighting global trends and 25 further reports that focus on regions, sub-regions and economic and geographic groups.

To download reports or data, please visit www.wttc.org





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