# HOTEL EXPERIENCES OF DISABLE GUESTS: A SHORT REVIEW

**[1]MAGGIE CHONG, [2]AHMAD AZMI M.ARIFFIN**

[1,2]Graduate School Of Business, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Email: [1]maggie.chong23@gmail.com, [2]aama@ukm.edu.my

**Abstract:** The hotel experience of guests may vary according to their personal needs. This article highlighted the service encounters and experiences of disable people during their hotel stays with special focus on the deaf guests. The review starts with understanding the characteristics profiling of disable people and follows with core issues they are facing in the context of tourism industry in general as well as hotel or accommodation sector in specific. The article finally elaborates on the hotel experiences of deaf people which is the focus of this article

**Keywords:** Hotel Marketing, Tourists Experiences, Disable Tourists

## I. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organisation defined disability as an umbrella term, covering impairment, limitation in activities and participation restriction (WHO World Disability Report 2011) whereby impairments refer to problems regarding physical functions or alteration in one's body structure, such as paralysis or blindness; activity limitations refer to challenges in the performance of day-to-day activities, such as eating and walking; participation restrictions refer to general problems in different social contexts, such as discrimination in the workplace or transport related concerns.

Based on the aforementioned definitions, impairments may not cause disability if there is no restriction in the particular environment (Poria and Reichel 2011). Puhretmair (2006) mentioned barriers to travel for people with disabilities including physical, economic, social and attitudinal barriers. Physical barriers refer to inaccessible accommodation, restaurants, places of attraction and inadequate transport. Economic barriers, however, are more crucial for people with physical disability (Darcy and Daruwalla, 1999). People with disabilities require more support, such as physical infrastructure and personal care assistance in their travel activities, thus putting increased reliance on their personal economic ability, such as income and social benefits. An example of an attitudinal barrier is a lack of concern about the needs of people with disabilities (McKercher et al., 2003).

Daniels et al. (2005) identified three other dimensions of barriers namely: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. Intrapersonal constraints relate to an individual's psychological condition and include personality factors, attitudes, and knowledge. Interpersonal constraints arise from social interaction, such as with family members, friends, co-workers, neighbours and any travel companions. Structural constraints include lack of money, time, facilities, geography and opportunity.

A study by Freeman and Selmi (2010) highlighted that these barriers include physical barriers, attitudinal barriers, financial barriers and communication barriers. Communication barriers arise when disabled people are ignored not only by members of the tourism industry but also by locals or other tourists in a foreign country. Disabled people like the deaf only communicate in sign language and are often treated as aliens as they do not speak. There are other communication barriers, such as non-accessibility of information. Most people with disability suffer from lack of travel information due to the information not being communicated successfully through advertisements, public relations and publicity (Freeman and Selmi, 2010).

## II. IMPORTANT ISSUES INFLUENCING TOURISM EXPERIENCES OF DISABLE PEOPLE

### A. Accessibility

In transportation, Poria et al. (2010) discussed pre- and post-flight experiences and on-board experiences of the blind, wheelchair passengers, and passengers on crutches. Most of the difficulties faced by passengers in wheelchairs during the boarding and disembarking process resulted from the size of the wheelchair and toilet accessibility. As for the blind, they reported almost no difficulties provided they had a companion with them and were approached appropriately. However, all disabled passengers sampled in the study shared common challenges, i.e., communication with cabin crew and airport staff. Often, these employees would respond by directing their answers to the disabled passengers' companions, even though the disabled passengers themselves forwarded the queries.

Accessibility to information could be facilitated by tourism websites and tourism information centres. Mills et al. (2008) reported that there were guidelines to review the accessibility of websites, such as colours, background design, language, content and others. The study showed unfavourable results wherein all the websites tested in the study were found to have failures, inappropriate use of colours, and violation of guidelines for accessible tourism websites.

**B. Legislation**

Darcy and Daruwalla (1999) listed pertinent legislation, including one important law, which is to make discrimination on the grounds of disability illegal through the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA).

In Turkey, the 'Law for Disabled People', enacted in 2005, provides assistance for disabled people by alleviating challenges related to health, education, rehabilitation, employment, care and social security (Ozturk et al., 2007). The law also emphasized that facilities in buildings must be made accessible for disabled people. In tourism, the Code of Practice (18/c) of Law 2634 provides ways in which disabled people can participate in tourism-related activities.

Raman (2011) highlighted regulations concerning airport operators to ensure that people with disabilities could easily access facilities and obtain relevant information in the airport. Regulations like the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 and Section 504 are in place to avoid discrimination against the participation of people with disabilities concerning the facilities. This Act requires airport operators to redesign the buildings and service delivery to enhance accessibility.

The travel agency sector received the most complaints over negative attitudes from the people with disability (McKercher et al. 2003). Travel agents were seen to lack empathy, were ignorant, and discriminatory towards people with disability. Respondents in the study who were blind or had a wheelchair companion were often rejected by travel agents for being seen as incapable of travel. Such treatment from travel agents resulted in the people with disability looking for better guides or other alternatives.

**C. Employment**

Not all studies placed disabled people as tourists or guests in the tourism industry. There were some that positioned disabled people as employees in the hotel industry and studies usually reviewed employers' perspectives concerning such recruitment (Houtenville and Kalargyrou, 2012).

Groschl (2005) explained that it was not common for Canadian hotels to hire people with disabilities. Some of the hotel management defended that many hotels are concerned with company image and fear that hiring disabled employees might jeopardise the aesthetics of the hotel. The challenges to hiring disabled employees in the hotel industry would include modification of the accommodation to suit their needs, unfamiliarity to being sensitive to disabled employees and perceptions from the society, such as hotel guests and other hotel employees. Groschl (2005) further mentioned that one of the challenges to hiring disabled employees could be the physical attractiveness of hotel employees.

Ethical values in the hotel industry towards disabled employees were discussed by Ross (2004). The study concluded that employers in the hotel industry that are more likely to emphasize career protection over ethical influences embraced a neutral or noncommittal stance regarding the measure of mistrust.

## III. HOTEL EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

The most important information for people with disabilities to consider prior to selecting accommodation was the appropriateness of the bedroom and detailed criteria of the bathroom (Darcy, 2010). Guests with ambulation disabilities were more particular about detailed information and photos of the position of handrails. These handrails were not only to support their mobility but also an element to ensure their safety from slips and falls.

Darcy and Daruwalla (1999) mentioned that wheelchair guests faced difficulties in rooms even if there were only two steps to gain entry into the rooms. Other challenges mentioned were the hob and sliding screen in the shower. Even if these wheelchair guests were not satisfied with their hotel choice, they had to stay put because limited rooms were available. Darcy and Pegg (2011) raised the issue concerning people with disability with regards to their individual safety. In a North American survey of attitudes concerning evacuation during disasters, it was found that hotel managers questioned whether they had the obligation to provide assistance to people with disability (Drabek 2000).

Poria and Reichel (2011) in their exploratory research on hotel experiences of people with disabilities examined four sections: the hotel room, the hotel public areas, hotel restaurants, and staff. The difficulties experienced by people with disabilities were categorised into two: linked to environment (human and physical) and linked to emotions (angry, fed up, shame or all). Their research focused on the blind, wheelchair bound and guests on crutches. Their findings reported that people with disabilities experience challenges in their interactions with their surroundings. Most challenges are specific to each disability although some challenges might be common for people with disabilities. For example, guests on crutches felt insecure on uncarpeted floors due to the fear of falling while wheelchair users faced difficulties in mobility on carpeted floors.

Sacks (2000) talked about the term "deaf" in his literature. A number of words or terms were used to associate deafness in the community, namely "hard of hearing", "profoundly deaf" and "severely deaf". Deaf people either lost their hearing ability after acquiring sounds or audio or experienced silence surrounding them since birth.

The main barrier of being a deaf person is language deprivation (Yahaya-Isa, 2004). Sign language, which is considered the "most appropriate" first language for deaf persons, is hardly accessible due to the failure of many countries to officially recognize it as a language or national language (Ball 2011).

In addition to sign language, deaf persons depend on other methods for communication. Many deaf persons rely heavily on note writing, especially with hearing people who do not use signs (National Association of the Deaf, 2000). Less than 30% of deaf persons can accurately lip-read (Deaf Expressions, 2011 as cited by Fileccia, 2011).

In emergency situations, there are different ways to attract the attention of the deaf person. Visual alarm systems are necessary to alert them about emergencies involving smoke and fire, or other necessary evacuations (National Association of the Deaf, 2000). Fatalities can be avoided if visual information is used during announcements to warn patrons regarding impending danger, for example, fires caused massive destruction in major sections of California in 1970 (National Association of the Deaf, 2000).A publication from the Majudiri Y Foundation for the Deaf (2006) highlighted examples of barrier free environments for deaf people. These include examples like modified flash light doorbells as an alert device to know if someone was “knocking” on the door, text announcements at public transportation hubs to help the deaf travellers know what is happening and fewer decorations on dining tables to ease the flow of communication among themselves.

A recent article in the press by Kim et al. (2012) highlighted obstacles that deaf guests experienced in hotels when having to deal with staff, rooms, and public areas. Communication was recognised as a major influence on their hotel experience and participants of the research paper suggested sign language and exchanging notes as methods for hotel operators to interact better with deaf guests.

## CONCLUSION

In order for a hotel to be considered not only as a “global hotel” but also as a truly “customer-oriented” hotel, the hotel design in both its hardware (physical and human assets) as well software (procedures and services) must be developed by taking into consideration the needs and preferences of the disable guests. Hotel managers must understand all the issues and barriers they faced. This article provides a special review focusing on the deaf guests.

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