



# Which accessible travel products are people with disabilities willing to pay more? A choice experiment



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- People with disabilities make trade-offs to choose an accessible travel product.
- Accommodation accessibility is considered as the most important attribute.
- Tourists with disabilities show different willingness-to-pay for each attribute.

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the rapidly increasing number of tourists with disabilities, which is known to have a strong nexus with senior travel market, tourism industry has paid little attention to the distinctive preferences of these tourists for accessible travel products. Using a sample of Koreans with mobility disabilities, this study aims to better understand how they make decisions to choose optimal accessible travel products. The results of the choice experiment indicate that respondents place the heaviest weight on the accessibility of accommodation facilities for their maximization of travel satisfaction. The results also suggest that tourists with disabilities show higher willingness-to-pay values on particular tour buses equipped with more accessibility devices. Based on study findings, this study provides several management implications that help tourism professionals develop appropriate accessible travel products for their clientele with disabilities.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), almost ten percent of the total global population is affected by several types of physical and/or cognitive disabilities. The occurrence rate of different disabilities is steadily increasing, in part because of the remarkable advances in medical sciences contributing to a growing older adult population with a greater likelihood of possessing impairments (Yau, McKercher, & Packer, 2004). A report published by the Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare (KMHW) also indicated that the total number of Korean people with impairments reached 2.5 million in 2013 (KMHW, 2015), which is a notable increase by about 160 percent compared to the statistics in 2000 (see Fig. 1). The rising number of people with disabilities provides meaningful implications for tourism industry (Kim, Stonesifer, & Han, 2012). According to Grady and Ohlin (2009), tourists with disabilities in

the United States are acknowledged as a lucrative market segment as they spend \$13.6 billion for their 31.7 million trips per year. The rapid growth of an ageing population in many developed countries reveals the enormous potential of accessible travel market (Lovelock, 2010). Furthermore, many previous studies (e.g., Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Horneman, Carter, Wei, & Ruys, 2002) have provided empirical evidence that tourists with disabilities have a strong nexus with senior tourists concerning their accessibility problems.

Despite the huge potential of accessible travel market, tourism industry has paid little attention to the distinctive travel demands of people with disabilities and their preferences for travel services and facilities, different from the tastes of tourists without disabilities (Pagán, 2012). The widespread neglect of the characteristic preference patterns of tourists with disabilities may be attributed to social reluctance to accept the unfamiliar notion of universal design, which is developed to improve the general accessibility of products and facilities, in addition to tourism service providers' unfavorable attitudes toward disability awareness training (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005). Darcy (2010) pointed out that a large

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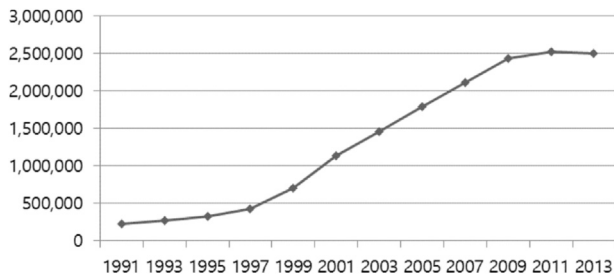


Fig. 1. Annual number of Koreans with disabilities (Source: KMHW, 2015).

proportion of hotel managers reported a low occupancy rate of some facilities built based on the standards of universal design because tourists without disabilities were unwilling to use the uncommon accommodation amenities. Different accessibility requirements established by disability-related legislation have ironically encouraged tourism businesses to engender an unexpected aversion to the niche market (Darcy, 2010). For example, since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act in 2007, a sizable number of small-scale tourism retailers in Korea have been required to implement several actions and allocate a large amount of operating budget for facilities modifications to improve the travel accessibility of customers with disabilities (Lee, Agarwal, & Kim, 2012).

The majority of previous studies concerning travel behaviors of people with disabilities (e.g., Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005; Lee et al., 2012; Lyu, Oh, & Lee, 2013; Mc Kercher, Packer, Yau, & Lam, 2003; Smith, 1987) have focused on the identification of various travel constraints and barriers as well as the exploration of personal and social attitudes toward impairments. Using several factor analytic techniques, a handful of earlier studies (e.g., Darcy & Pegg, 2011; Kim et al., 2012; Öztürk, Yayli, & Yeşiltaş, 2008) have provided plausible explanations about how tourists with disabilities perceive a variety of attributes that make up accommodation services and hospitality facilities. Nevertheless, as Burnett and Baker (2001) mentioned, there has been limited research effort to better understand how tourists with disabilities make decisions for purchasing particular accessible travel products involving different types of accessibility attributes. In order to successfully implement the provision of accessible travel services, it is important for tourism professionals to accurately recognize what attributes of accessible travel products are preferred by their customers with disabilities. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how Korean tourists with mobility disabilities make decisions to choose optimal accessible travel products by jointly considering a range of product attributes. The choice experiment (CE), one of the most advanced stated preference microeconomic valuation techniques, is advantageous for a deeper insight into individuals' multifaceted preference structures for a hypothetical product (Louviere, Hensher, & Swait, 2000). In this regard, we will make use of a CE approach to better understand how much tourists with disabilities are willing to pay for accessible travel products.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Accessible travel products

Darcy, Cameron, and Pegg (2011) noted that accessible tourism enables people with disabilities to independently participate in travel activities using a variety of barrier-free travel products, services, and amenities. Many previous studies (e.g., Israeli, 2002; Shaw & Coles, 2004; Smith, 1987) addressed a principal condition

of accessible tourism emphasizing that tourism workers should not inadequately serve customers with accessibility requirements due to the presence of physical and/or cognitive impairments. This notion is also inclusive of all people regardless of their socio-demographic and economic status (Buhalis, Michopoulou, Eichhorn, & Miller, 2005; Darcy, Cameron, & Pegg, 2010). In this sense, 'tourism for all' is often considered as the primary goal of accessible tourism (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

Accessible tourism involves the paradigm of universal design, which allows people with or without impairments to easily use various products and environments (The Center for Universal Design, 2016). The core element of this design concept encompasses the intended simplification of different types of products, communications, and built environments to enhance the usability with little or no extra effort (Darcy et al., 2011). The Center for Universal Design proposed seven different principles including equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and adequate size and space for each approach and use. These requirements of universal design provide effective guidance for a better integration of user needs (Story, 1998). Therefore, in many developed countries, the notion of universal design largely serves as the foundation of building codes for public and private facilities as well as key accessibility standards for tourism and hospitality industry (Preiser & Smith, 2011).

Due to the huge market potential of accessible travel, previous studies (e.g., Chang & Chen, 2012; Darcy, 2010; Kim et al., 2012) have paid much attention to identifying the inherent needs for accessible travel among tourists with disabilities and examining their criteria for choosing accessible travel facilities and services adapting the core principles of universal design. Darcy (2010) addressed several substantial bases for selecting accessible hotel rooms that are constructed to meet the distinctive travel needs of customers with diverse disabilities. While developing the Hotel Accessibility Scale for measuring respondents' perceived importance of each room choice criterion, he found they had particular patterns of preferences for accessible accommodation facilities, which are heavily dependent upon their types of disability as well as levels of independence and closely associated with distinctive socio-demographic features.

Using a study sample of airline passengers with disabilities, Chang and Chen (2012) revealed that the most frequent complaints about airport facilities and services encompass the long distance between parking spaces and terminals in addition to the absence of barrier-free lifts and ramps. Chang and Chen also revealed that tourists with disabilities showed their strong preferences for accessible on-board restrooms and airport wheelchair services devised based on the standards of universal design. With an in-depth interview technique, Kim et al. (2012) suggested a series of practicable management options that help increase levels of accessibility of hotel facilities and amenities for guests with mobility disabilities. Furthermore, Grady and Ohlin (2009) recommended several useful policies including the vigorous applications of communication channels connecting hotel guests having mobility impairments with hospitality service providers. Mc Kercher et al. (2003) is worth noting due to their unexpected finding that many retail travel agencies often acted as barriers to, rather than facilitators for, satisfactory travel experiences of tourists with disabilities.

While there is a wealth of research focusing on diverse accessibility concerns regarding accommodations and transportation, little attention has been paid to examining how people with disabilities make decisions for choosing their favorite accessible travel products. Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2006) noted that travel products are bundles of activities, services, and benefits that

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