

Creating real inclusion

- ▶ A call to arms to the tourism industry in support of people with disability



Image description: Two people sitting on a chair looking out at the view.

Image credit: Mode Imagery for Getaboutable and Visit Canberra.

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Discussion Paper
Prepared By:



SPARROWLY
GROUP

Image description:
Two sparrows flying
side by side with the
words Sparrowly Group
underneath

Image credit:
Sparrowly Group



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► Disclaimer

Sparrowly Group is a strategic management consultancy who work within the health, community development and visitor economy sectors of Australia. We understand the importance of resilient, self-sustaining communities and advocate for those who need solutions for improved health and wellbeing to drive positive outcomes for all.

We do not claim to be experts in the access and inclusion sector, however hope that this discussion paper helps to raise awareness and create opportunities for accessible and inclusive tourism.

This paper is to be used as a guide only and the intent is to ensure it is kept dynamic and current. It is therefore formally updated annually with additional examples and research undertaken throughout the year. ▲



Image description:
One wheelchair user and companion along the path at Monarto Safari Park

Image credit:
South Australian Tourism Commission

► Abstract

In April 2016, I found myself with no choice but to undertake the medical care needs of my child on the bathroom floor at the Singapore Airport. This continued to be the trend as we travelled throughout Asia, Ireland and Italy. And when I returned to Australia I realised just how much work was still needing to be done in my home country.

This was not ok.

Following that trip and after two years of research, I knew that as a professional working across tourism and community development sectors that it was my responsibility to advocate and contribute to making positive change.

The accessible tourism sector is a high value sector to the Australian tourism industry and broader economy. Accessible tourism is tourism which services experiences that accommodates the needs of all people, and for the purpose of this research piece, those with disability. In Australia, 1 in 5 people have some form of disability.

According to Travability (2018), domestic and international visitation by people with disability contributes \$10.8 billion to the Australian economy, more than that of the Chinese inbound market of \$10.4 billion. Prior to the COVID pandemic, this market was predicted to reach 25% of total tourism spend by 2020 (Travability 2018). Until international visitation returns to pre-pandemic levels and new research is undertaken, these numbers remain the guideposts for industry.

2018 saw co-author Jackie Hicks and I publish the first edition of our Discussion Paper, **Creating real inclusion - A call to arms to the tourism industry in support of people with disability**. We are committed to the ongoing research and advocacy in this sector, updating the paper annually. And in response to the journey that the industry is on, to better enable accessible tourism and better support people with disability to enjoy meaningful, memorable and enjoyable holidays in Australia.

This is our fifth edition and builds upon previous editions by recognising how far the industry has come acknowledging the challenges and opportunities, while celebrating progress along with practical advice and support resources for the industry.

Like anything in life, it's about progress not perfection and as we move forward with a heightened awareness and motivation to progress, it's our collective job to educate and support industry to do better, and continually learn from people with disability as we welcome tourism back following over two years of pandemic restrictions.

In our advocacy and educational journey, we have met so many wonderful individuals and organisations working towards a common goal to improve the visitor experience for people with disability and for that I want to say thank you. We welcome the Queensland Government's dedicated focus in its announcement of 2023 as the Year of Accessible Tourism in Queensland supported by a full program of far reaching and long lasting initiatives.

Thank you for putting yourself out of your comfort zone to learn how you can do better.

Because, it's about progress not perfection - so let's keep striving and progressing as an industry to drive Australia as a first choice for accessible tourism.

Giovanna Lever

Managing Director, Sparrowly Group ▲

▶ 1.0 Defining The Sector

DISABILITY

Most commonly agreed on, a disability is any condition that restricts a person's mental, sensory or mobility functions (Australian Network on Disability). A disability may be temporary or permanent, total or partial, lifelong or acquired, visible or invisible (Australian Network on Disability). The correct reference to a person is to be 'with disability'.

In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person in many areas of public life including education, employment, accommodation, goods and service provision, premises, transport and access to laws and programs. Therefore, the requirements for the built environment must operate in parallel to the DDA, and today access and inclusion is at the forefront for many organisations.

The social model for accessibility makes a distinction between impairments (the condition, illness or loss/lack of function) and the disability (barriers and discrimination). It contrasts the medical model of disability, which sees disability as a health condition dealt with by medical professionals. In the social model, disability is the result of the interaction between people with impairments and the environment being physical, communication, attitudinal and social barriers. Within this context, the environment must change and adapt to enable people living with impairments equal opportunity to participate in society. The social model is now internationally recognised as the correct way to view and address disability. ▲



Image description: Pillar at an airport with access symbols with the words 'Assisted Travel' as a meeting place

Image credit: Flying With a Baby

ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM

Accessible tourism, tourism for all or barrier free tourism, aims to ensure tourism products and services, infrastructure, public spaces, accommodation, and transport modes are accessible for all, including people with disability (Alén, Domínguez & Losada 2012).

Accessible tourism encourages the full integration of an individual or community, into social interaction within the environment. It includes delivering welcoming customer service, creating an accessible environment and engaging with meaningful participation (Push Adventures 2021).

Sometimes referred to as inclusive tourism, which is the movement to ensure the social participation and total integration of people with disabilities, in travel, adventure and cultural contribution (cultural and language barriers) (Jezza Williams, AITCAP 2021). Being inclusive refers to the attitude or acceptance of businesses towards people with disability where their attitude and willingness to enable a welcoming experience for all visitors makes people with disability feel included in the overall experience (Dane Cross, AITCAP 2021).

Essentially, being inclusive is the gateway to becoming accessible.

Being accessible and inclusive has a broader reach than just those with disability, but also for seniors, families with prams, and carers or support workers. It is also important to understand the breadth and depth of disabilities, with only a very small number being wheelchair users. The most common disability groups in Australia include intellectual, physical, neurological and sensory. ▲

▶ 2.0 The Current Landscape

THE VALUE OF ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

Accessible and inclusive tourism is not a niche market, nor should it have ever been seen as one. It goes beyond having wheelchair ramps or accessible toilets and any other box ticking to be compliant. With almost one in five Australians identifying as having a disability, accounting for more than four million people. And, with the ageing population growing, this number will increase over the next 20 to 40 years.

This is not dissimilar globally, with 15% (approximately 1 billion) living with some form of disability. Almost everyone will experience some form of disability in some form at some point in their life (World Health Organisation 2021).

The demand to travel and live life to the full, is global - disability or not.

There is an untapped opportunity for both those with disability and business.

There has long been a gross misconception that people with disability and seniors have significantly less disposable income. Domestic and international visitation by people with disability contributed to \$10.8 billion a year in Australia on tourism related activities (Travability 2018). This can be further broken down across day tripping (\$1.4 billion), overnight stays (\$6.6 billion) and inbound travel (\$2.8 billion) and pre-pandemic it was forecasted to account for 25% of total tourism spend in 2020 (Travability 2018).

A reader survey undertaken by Travel Without Limits in 2021 identified:

- **67% of respondents take between one and four domestic trips each year, with the most common taking one to two trips**
- **36% travel internationally at least once a year, with 54% not travelling internationally**
- **17% travel with a support worker at all times**
- **71% of respondents prefer to communicate directly with a travel provider rather than through a travel agent**
- **76% have an annual travel budget between \$1000 and \$10,000. ▲**

LEGISLATION AND GUIDELINES

In recent years, legislation and guidelines have been released improving the goalposts for industry to understand their role and commitment in making businesses accessible.

In 2021, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) published the [International Organisation for Standardisation \(ISO\)](#) to help the industry make travel accessible for all. It is the first global standard on accessible tourism. ISO 21902, Tourism and related services - Accessible tourism for all - Requirements and recommendations, provides requirements and guidelines to facilitate equal access and enjoyment of tourism by people of all ages and abilities. The document provides information on the key aspects of policy making, strategy, infrastructure, products and services. It is for all stakeholders involved in the tourism supply chain, whether from the public or private sector, at a local, regional, national and international level. The standard is set to support the tourism sector in mainstreaming Universal Design approaches, making tourism accessible for everyone, everywhere.

Also in 2021, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) launched [Inclusive and Accessible Travel Guidelines](#) focusing on the experience of people with disability to make the sector more inclusive. The four key pillars include:

- developing an inclusive and accessible system
- creating safe spaces
- designing an engaging and relevant system
- exemplifying inclusion and accessibility.

These guidelines emphasise the importance of fostering an inclusive and respectful environment with a focus on providing training to staff on disability awareness, supporting people with disability and collaborating with businesses and communities where there are gaps in accessible experiences, services and knowledge.

In 2022, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) released the [‘Tourism Access and Inclusion: Best Practice Guidelines for Tourism MSMEs in APEC’](#) which aims to help grow the market for tourism micro, small and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) and provide people with disability greater choice and control in their travel planning and purchase decisions. ▲



Image description: Woman sitting on a paddleboard with her guide dog sitting in front of her

Image credit: Cocky Guides

▶ 3.0 Challenges identified

Challenges have been identified for both people with disability and the industry:

INDUSTRY

- ▶ Industry at large does not understand the size of the opportunity
- ▶ Businesses are nervous that they will get it wrong which can inhibit improvements beyond compliance
- ▶ Lack of confidence in how to best market and communicate to the visitor with disability

VISITOR

- ▶ Lack of trust in available information in the planning and purchasing cycle. Specifically, materials hard to access or understand, and limited ways to communicate effectively
- ▶ Physical barriers in public infrastructure and access within the physical environment, such as steps, narrow or congested spaces and walkways, making it difficult to connect accessible experiences
- ▶ Attitudinal barriers as a result of discriminatory or negative attitudes. The notion of being 'othered' in situations such as at airports and the feeling of 'being a burden'

ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM

The typical customer journey is outlined below identifying the seven stages of planning and experiencing a holiday.



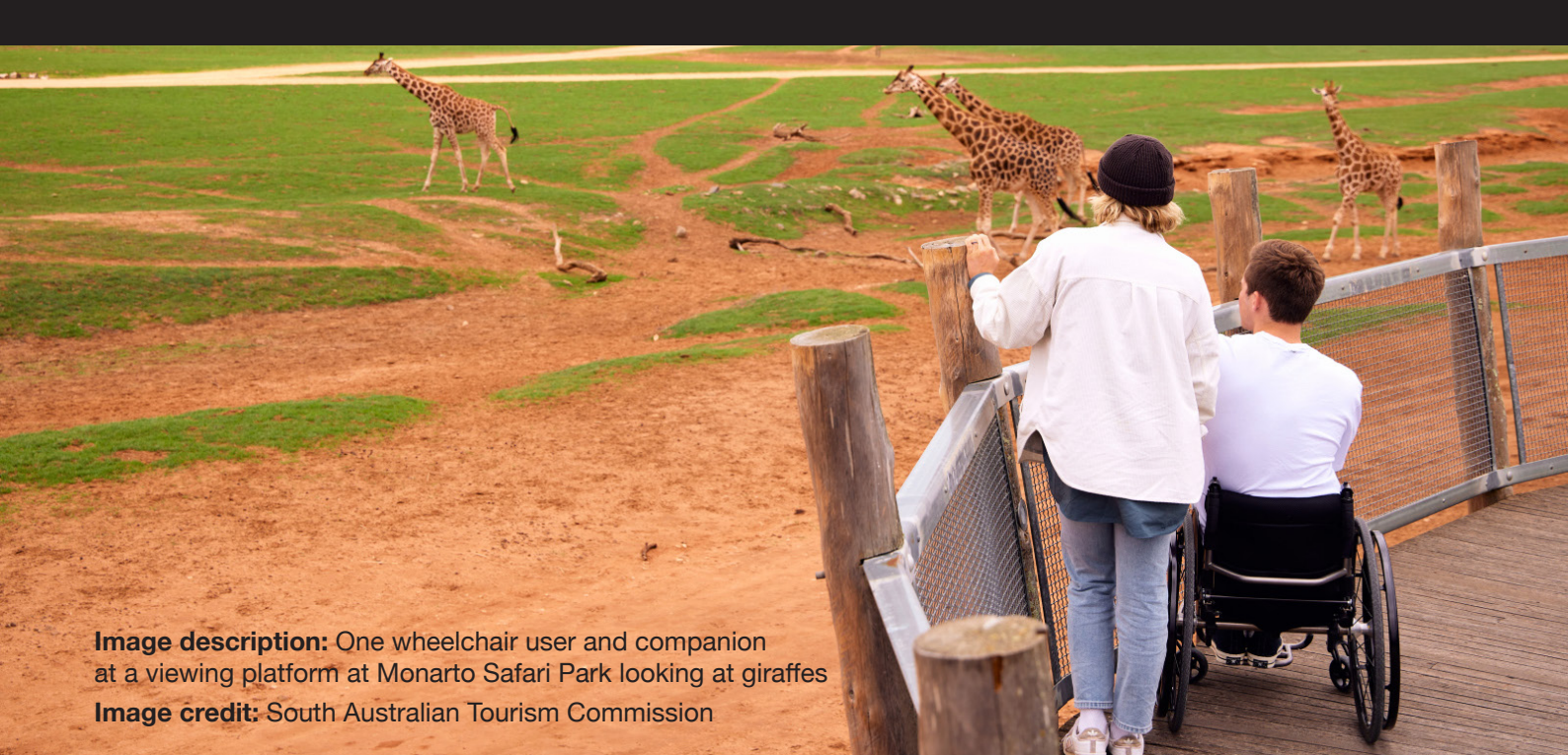


Image description: One wheelchair user and companion at a viewing platform at Monarto Safari Park looking at giraffes
Image credit: South Australian Tourism Commission

Common challenges for people with disability start as early as at the planning stage (dreaming, consideration and intention) in that there is a lack of clarity and accuracy as to what accessible and inclusive options are available. Inconsistency in the approach towards information sharing, presentation, promotion, marketing and distribution of accessible and inclusive experiences indicates for many it is no more than a tick the box compliancy or afterthought.

People with disabilities primarily conduct their own research, planning and booking holidays online to understand what is available and breadth of experiences on offer. Often, they or their support worker may contact businesses for further accessible information in the consideration and intention phase of their customer journey. This is primarily due to the fact that historically the information provided by destinations and businesses has not been reliable.

In Australia, there is no official nationally recognised certification or accreditation to acknowledge a business as accessible and this lack of national standards for verification remains a challenge. Not only for businesses who are doing excellent work in catering for this sector, but also for people with disability who have no guarantee of the standard of offering.

Like anyone booking a holiday, people with disability rely on previous travel experiences and word of mouth recommendations for places to visit. They also rely on expert opinions from peak bodies relating to specific disabilities, NDIS coordinators and specialist travel agencies.

There is a high level of loyalty for people with disability. This is linked to the idea of place attachment and place identity, where someone develops a deep connection and attachment to a place and creates an emotional bond. They will repeat their travels to certain places based upon their own experiences, recommend great places to go, while also highlighting poor experiences, which is extremely damaging for tourism and hospitality suppliers. The network of blogs, forums, communities and groups is enormous and far-reaching. This is a major opportunity for businesses to find these groups, connect with them, learn from them and adapt their business. ▲

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND DESIGN

Failure to deliver and provide accessible tourism experiences and services fails not only the customer, especially with the focus in business being 'customer centric'. But also for the business in significant revenue loss by failing to understand and capitalise on the accessible tourism opportunity. People with disability don't want to be treated any differently than any other customer without a disability. That is they want the same as every customer, exceptional customer service and experiences.

It is important when designing tourism and hospitality facilities and broader destination amenities and spaces that universal design principles are at the forefront. It's more than accessible toilets and hotel rooms, but a consideration of the entire customer journey from pre to post experience. This includes areas such as doors, lift or ramp access to the swimming pool, table heights in restaurants and bed heights. Ultimately it includes staff education and customer service training. ▲

EVENTS AND VENUES

There are two main challenges at events, the first being with the ticketing and purchasing journey. Often there is limited flexibility around seating for people with disability and in particular, wheelchair users. This limits their ability to attend these events with their family and friends, as they are often seated in a separate area if they can even secure tickets.

Secondly, venues themselves are not all suitable as historically they have not been constructed to compliant standards. Often people with disability want to attend events and concerts but simply cannot attend if the facilities are not accessible. ▲

► 4.0 Opportunities and Best Practice

From an accessible tourism perspective, while Australia has a long road to go, our research over the last five years has uncovered a positive change towards improving access and an increased desire to make change. It is increasingly a priority component of future infrastructure planning and design in public spaces and amenities and destinations are leading the way to improve access, setting the benchmark for businesses to look beyond compliance.

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission (AUSTRADE) proposed strategy for the visitor economy THRIVE 2030 (The Re-Imagined Visitor Economy) identified diversification as one of the key priorities for the recovery of the visitor economy. Within this is the focus on enhancing visitor infrastructure and the diversification of experiences to make it more accessible. A greater focus on accessibility will enable tourism operators to attract this emerging and valuable market, as well as better meet the needs of changing demographics of travellers. ▲



Image description: One child getting shoes put on by another man kneeling down. There is another child in the background

Image credit: Mode Imagery for Getoutable and Visit Canberra

DESTINATIONS

Accessible tourism in Australia is getting more traction than ever before, with each state and territory mandated under the Disability Services Act to develop a Disability Inclusion Plan. Key to this is to ensure that these plans are consistently implemented to ensure people with disability have continued access to improved services and experiences to enable the quality of life they deserve. Supporting this has been the recruitment of disability experts with lived experience into council and destination teams across many parts of Australia.

This priority focus as part of business as usual has seen significant improvement in infrastructure across the country.

Designing public spaces with the residents' needs front of mind provides a strong foundation for destination development. This notion of place making and design extends to enabling infrastructure for people with disability. When done well, this provides confidence in visiting and further exploring the destination. This has been a significant focus for the NSW Government's Regional Growth Fund Program which has had a focus on improved accessibility woven throughout a majority of the 2,700 projects funded to date.

Equally the way in which we promote destinations to people with disability as well as the way we communicate when visiting is integral. Visit Canberra and South Australia Tourism Commission have made significant strides forward with improved inclusion of people with disability in their brand marketing as well as their content libraries for industry to access.

Queensland also does this well, with a number of accessible travel guides for major cities and most regional tourism organisations having accessible trip planning pages. The City of Sydney has seen accessible improvements in the last several years with significant work in the main CBD and main visitor hubs. They have developed an [accessibility map](#), highlighting accessible public transport options, steps and uneven footing in the city and locating suitable alternatives. Destination NSW have compiled a guide on [Accessible Sydney](#) with things to do and how to get around. ▲



Image description: Wheelchair user and staff member at the Australian Parliament House

Image credit: Tourism Australia

AN INCLUSIVE CAPITAL

Australia's capital city offers a myriad of attractions with their slogan 'more than inclusive, more than accessible'. Canberra is well known for its many cultural institutions and most attractions are family-friendly and suitable for people with different kinds of accessibility needs. Public transport (buses and trams) including the Canberra Airport and hop-on hop-off tourism circuit, are wheelchair accessible and have both visual and auditory stop information and support information.

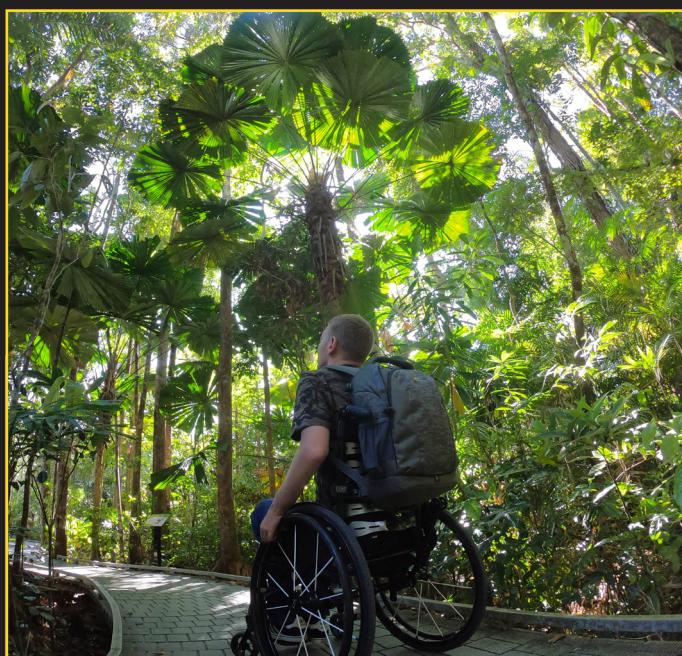


Image description: Wheelchair user at the Daintree Rainforest

Image credit: Tourism and Events Queensland

INCLUSIVE NATURE TOURISM

The Tropical North Queensland region, which includes Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef, offers an experience for every kind of traveller and every kind of accessibility level. In partnership with Spinal Life Australia and Out There Travel Care, Tourism Tropical North Queensland developed an [accessible travel hub](#) to provide inspiration for people planning a holiday and showcase accessible and inclusive experiences.

EXPERIENCES AND ATTRACTIONS

More recently there has been an increase in products and experiences that lead the way as best practice for the way they have seamlessly integrated accessibility into their business. One business leading the way is Global Ballooning Australia with the introduction of Australia's first easy access basket hot air balloon which includes a door in the basket, to international franchise iFLY providing safe accessible experiences for visitors with staff trained and prepared to support and guide wheelchair users throughout the indoor skydiving experience. There are businesses working to support specific disabilities, including Travengers who provide supported youth travel for people with hidden disabilities including young young autistic people. They enable building social networks and friendships, travel and build skills and confidence to move forward through trips, social events and virtual tours across Australia.

Australia's airports are now ensuring that people with hidden disabilities are catered for under Integrated Hidden Disabilities programs. At most airports, a lanyard system discreetly notifies staff in terminals of the travellers' needs, social stories have been created depicting a typical journey, as well a sensory map which provides step-by-step guides on navigating their way through the airport through busy areas and potential trigger points. ▲



Image description: Three men looking at the view along the Great Ocean Walk, with one using a trail rider

Image credit: Parks Victoria

IMPROVING ACCESS TO NATIONAL LANDSCAPES

Across Australia, and more notably [New South Wales](#) and [Victoria](#), state National Park bodies have introduced a number of accessible friendly offerings and initiatives to improve access for visitors including improving walking tracks, canoe launch pads and all-terrain wheelchairs (Trailrider). In South Australia, the Tantanoola Caves in the Limestone Coast continues to lead the way by being one of Australia's few wheelchair accessible caves.



Image description: Group of five adults standing at the top of Mount Kosciuszko summit

Image credit: Cocky Guides

EXTENDING THE SENSORS BEYOND SIGHT

Sensory disabilities are one of the most common with 1 in 6 Australians affected by hearing loss and almost 400,000 people who are blind or have low vision. Operating across Australia, [Cocky Guides](#) provide tactile and multi-sensory tours for the blind and low-vision community. Every tour and adventure is designed for travellers who are independent, or use either a cane, guide dog or a companion as a guide. Launched in 2022, [Vacayit](#) is an app built specifically for visitors who are blind or have low vision, to assist them in the research and planning of their trip, as well as while experiencing. The app features audio-rich stories, soundscapes and conversations of destinations, attractions and experiences.

EVENTS AND VENUES

For leisure events to be truly accessible and inclusive, there are a number of key factors and stakeholders involved to implement true change and ensure success. It is essential that all elements of the customer journey are aligned with the event destination and venue in terms of supply (infrastructure, access and transport).

Event planners have a major role to play in terms of having accessibility in mind in the planning, delivery and after the event. Providing access is the responsibility of the event organiser, and including people with disability in the planning of design, development and delivery is encouraged. To truly be inclusive, budget and resourcing needs to be allocated to provide accessible options and translation services. The marketing and promotion of the event should be inclusive and clear on what access services are being provided and provide opportunities for attendees to provide information on needs. Another way for events to be inclusive is to ensure disability representation in planning committees and as delivery partners.

Ticketing continues to be improved upon with both Ticketek and Ticketmaster identifying ways to streamline this process and improve the booking system for people with disability and companions, and advocating for developments. It is a collaborative effort with ticketing and venues to work together to ensure the sites are accessible and have suitable and adequate seating options available.

In Australia, most sporting and performance venues are not suitable as they have not been constructed to compliant standards or in some instances where upgrades have been made, limitations such as heritage status has meant that some upgraded venues still fall short. When remodelling and renovating aged arenas and stadiums, it is important that architects and builders consult with the disabled community before construction to identify the priorities and necessities for enhanced amenity seating and wheelchair positions, as well as other accessible requirements. The redevelopment of the [Allianz Stadium](#) in Sydney was designed to meet the accessibility needs of members, guests and patrons of the venue including accessible gates, Hearing Loop facilities available at box offices and some food and beverage outlets, accessible bays for seating throughout the stadium and accessible bathrooms (including one Changing Places Bathroom). ▲



Image description: Event attendees out the front of the Optus Stadium, two people are facing away from the camera and two people are walking towards the camera

Image credit: Optus Stadium

ENHANCING THE EVENT EXPERIENCE

The [Optus Stadium](#) in Perth is another example of a stadium serving the accessible tourism market with more than 60 universal accessible toilets, three changing places toilets (the first stadium in Australia to have more than one), universal access seating throughout the Stadium, 450 wheelchair positions located throughout the arena and across levels, 327 enhanced amenity seating, lifts, and permanent ACROD parking bays. The overall experience at the Stadium has been designed with accessibility in mind with stadium tours fully accessible and rooftop experiences available for people with disability to participate in.



Image description: Three people along the South Bank precinct with Brisbane city in the background

Image credit: Tourism and Events Queensland

CREATING A LEGACY

To ensure success for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the foundations and model has been set for how Brisbane can deliver an accessible event for all, spectators and athletes, based on the success and legacy of both the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games 2018 and Invictus Games 2018 in Sydney. As well as this is learning from past Olympic events where social legacy outcomes came of age and new standards for accessibility and equality were set for all sports and athletes. With 10 years till the Brisbane 2032 Games, it provides a great opportunity to showcase sport for people with disability and help set new standards for inclusion, accessibility and equality.

ORGANISATIONS AND INITIATIVES

There are a number of organisations and initiatives who service the accessible industry through education, training, guidance, reviews, and grants. A number of design specialists and architects exist who focus on working with tourism and hospitality organisations to ensure accessibility is considered throughout by incorporating universal design through the space. These organisations and initiatives aim to remove the stigma within society and the environment, addressing the social model of disability.

[GetAboutAble](#) is a social enterprise focused on improving travel and leisure options for people with disabilities and offers a unique platform to promote inclusive businesses around the globe. GetAboutAble are the producers of the Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Conference in the Asia-Pacific ([AITCAP](#)) which showcases and highlights the value of the accessible and inclusive market, opportunities for growth and connections with industry. In a collaboration with YouLi, an [accessible travel marketplace](#) was launched to make it easier for people with disabilities to find and book accessible travel experiences. Similarly, [WheelEasy](#) provides geo-location maps and wheelchair-accessible information for destinations and attractions.

Training programs for staff and workplaces are available for better education and awareness of the accessible tourism sector and the needs of people with disability for staff to better deliver exceptional customer experiences. Some examples include the [William Angliss Institute Disability Awareness Training](#), the [SBS Inclusion Program](#), programs through [Get Skilled Access](#), as well as specific accessible tourism training modules which were developed by the [Australian Tourism Industry Council](#) in collaboration with Travability and implemented across various states. ▲



Image description: A Changing Places bathroom at Collins Place

Image credit: Changing Places

CHANGING PLACES IMPLEMENTATION

Changing Places is an initiative advocating for major public spaces across Australia by installing full sized adult changing tables and hoists into public toilets. Accessible adult change facilities were included in the 2019 National Construction Code - Building Codes of Australia (BCA), Volume 1. In addition to what is legislated in the BCA, the [Changing Places](#) campaign calls for changing places toilets to be installed in all major public spaces including city centres, shopping centres, hospitals, highway services stations, libraries and leisure complexes, major railway stations, airports and arts venues. Shepparton in Victoria was announced a Changing Places region in October, 2022 as part of their broader focus on access and inclusion.



Image description: Wheelchair user and companion turned away from the camera near a cliff looking out over a canyon view in the Blue Mountains

Image credit: Travel Without Limits

SPREADING THE MESSAGE

Australia's first disability travel specific magazine was launched in 2019, [Travel Without Limits](#) was developed to share accessible information for the varied needs and challenges faced by people with disability while travelling and focuses on international experiences.

ACCOMMODATION

There is a gap throughout Australia in providing integrated accessible experiences and facilities in accommodation offerings. While some hotels may have large and modern designed accessible rooms and bathrooms, in most cases the rest of the hotel is not accessible. This has been noted in terms of lighting, lifts, pool and spa access, flooring, and other amenities.

While there is a long way to go for accommodation providers in ensuring universal design is employed across their properties to properly service this sector, one source of information is the database of listings curated by [Accessible Accommodation](#). It is a database of holiday, respite, short-term, and medium-term stays for anyone with a disability, including elderly and NDIS participants all over Australia. Offerings are audited and assessed and when suitable, acknowledged with a qualified certification.

Launching in 2023, [Inclusion Training for Accommodation Providers](#) is a collaboration between Spinal Cord Injuries Australia and Accessible Accommodation which offers two courses for accommodation managers and owners, and the other for day-to-day staff members. The Training offers practical steps, simple adaptations, stories, and scenarios from people with disabilities who love to travel. ▲



Image description: Two people smiling and having a cup of coffee on a balcony

Image credit: Quest Apartment Hotels

► 5.0 What Is Your Role?

The accessible and inclusive tourism sector continues to grow, however still requires thought, attention and care. It is important to think of accessible tourism customers beyond their **mobility** and focus on their **ability**.

In being a disability ally, there is a need for a change in attitude from looking beyond the tick boxing exercise of being 'compliant' to one that is truly 'customer centric and commercially minded' and forms part of business as usual activities and operations. This will enable Australia to lead the way in providing world-class services and experiences that are commercially strong for this very important sector.

We need to as an industry, change our mindset to this important sector and recognise that the problem is that society puts up barriers for people with disability not the people with disability that are the barrier. While it is hard to service each disability specifically, making minor changes which would suit a wide range of disabilities is encouraged and is a positive and significant step forward.

The National Accessible Tourism Working Group represented by State and Territory Governments and chaired by AUSTRALIA funded the 2022 National Accessible Tourism Pilot Mentoring Program. This Program, developed and delivered by Push Adventures, guided operators through its WELCOME framework enabling them to improve their accessibility and inclusion. ▲

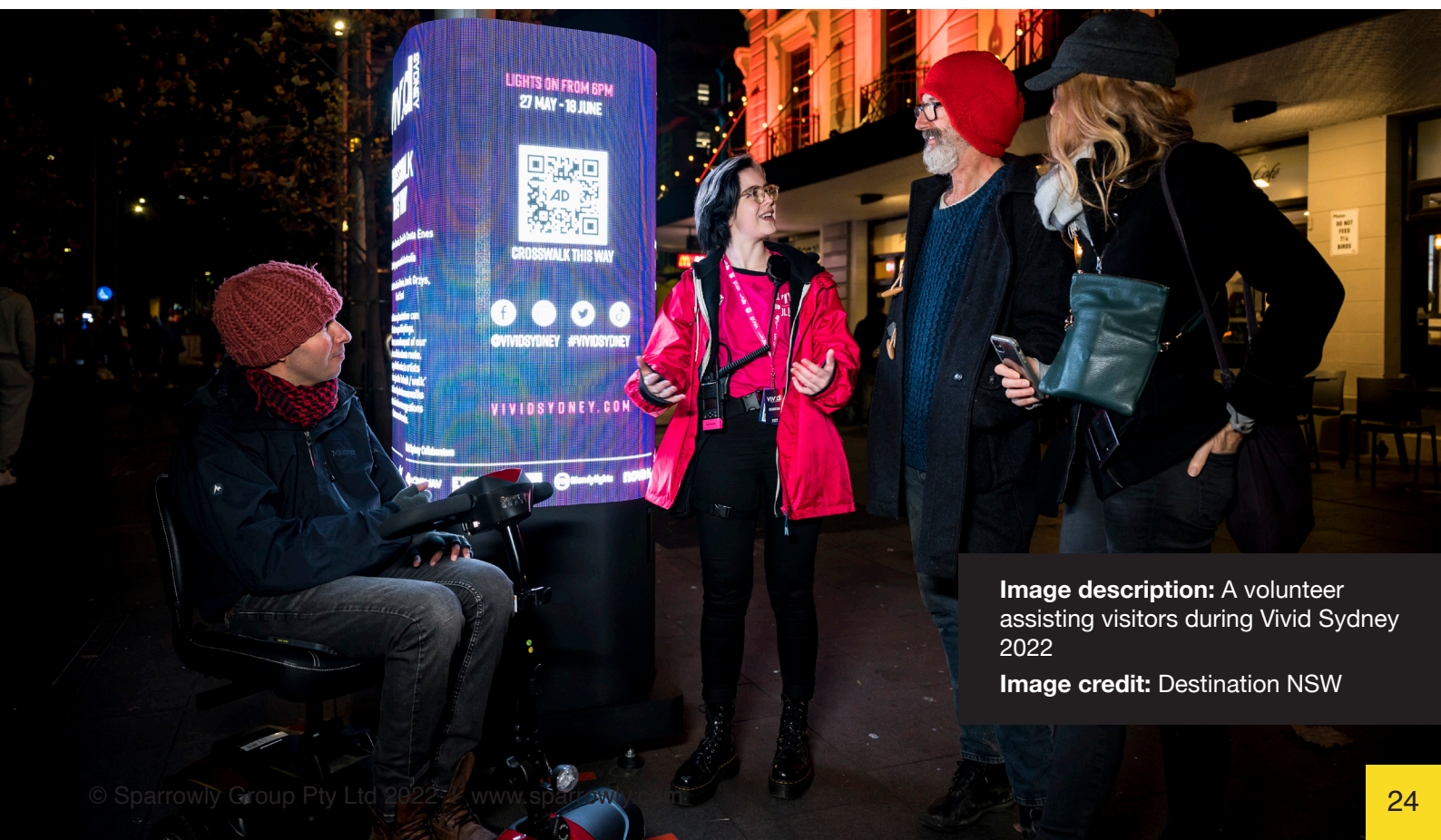
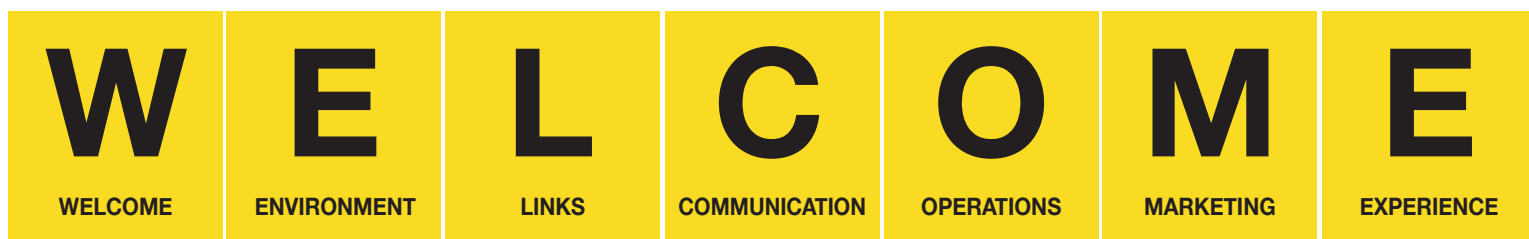


Image description: A volunteer assisting visitors during Vivid Sydney 2022

Image credit: Destination NSW



WELCOME

All visitors want to feel welcomed and included, starting from the moment they engage with a business online or in-person. To offer the best experience, it looks beyond just people with disabilities and can include accommodating for those travelling with children in prams, seniors, support workers, people with food intolerances, language difficulties and those temporarily affected by a disability.

Experiences need to be delivered with accessibility in mind, in the planning, delivery and post experience, thinking back to the importance of the customer journey. ▲

ENVIRONMENT

To ensure a positive experience, people with disability undertake a high amount of research and fact checking that a site will be accessible. This includes ensuring that any communication is clear and easy to understand of what people should expect to experience.

An ideal model of accessible tourism would see universal design principles applied for all experiences, products and services appropriately meeting and adapting to the needs of all travellers regardless of their abilities (White & Childs). For major building works, consulting and engaging with accessible design providers, architects and designers is advised. Some physical improvements include ramps and minimal floor surface gradients, having non-slip floor surfaces, lighting choices, incorporating seating, and moveable furniture. Additional facilitating infrastructure including lifts, toilets and transport are considered major priorities for improvement for people with disability. ▲

LINKS

All tourism businesses represent one link in the tourism supply chain as part of the overall tourism ecosystem. As such, considering how the government and other local businesses support visitors' experience is critical within the context of the broader environment and destination they visit. Linking in with local government and tourism organisations (local, regional and state), and national organisations ensures business owners are across disability specific news, announcements and grants. This includes having an accurate Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) profile which outlines what accessible features are in a business. The ATDW is Australia's digital platform for tourism information and products amplified through the state and national tourism organisations. Tourism operators with profiles are able to include details that their business provides and all accessible features.

As well as this is a willingness to learn and engage within people with disability and ask any questions. Speak to people with disability, customers and guests, the disability community, local Council, colleagues, and start learning. Ignorance is not an excuse. To not pay attention to this important sector and make efforts towards accommodating the needs of people with disability, a business is not only doing a great disservice to themselves, but are missing out on a loyal customer base who want to spend money and travel. ▲

COMMUNICATION

Like any market sector, clear communication that is easily understood and located including signage is critical. It is important to understand that organising a holiday can become a stressful and anxious activity (and it shouldn't be), so it's important to ensure that as part of training and developing communications that this extends through to telephone and email manner - pre, during and post visit as well as a continual focus on guest feedback for improvement. ▲



Image description: A volunteer assisting a visitor wheelchair user at Busselton Jetty

Image credit: Tourism Australia

OPERATIONS

Staff training with a clear goal of improving the quality and standard of the offering is key to any successful business. Exceptional customer service lies in the consistency of delivery to all customers. Internally, consistency must be led by regular training so that staff members can understand and implement policies and procedures. Customer service training should include providing a safe environment for staff to feel comfortable asking questions on disability and responding to varying needs.

The experience for a visitor is based upon the interaction and relationship they develop with the staff, therefore their attitude and knowledge can heavily affect the traveller's visit and holiday. Staff that are trained generally and more specifically for people with disability will have a significant impact on their experience and build advocacy and repeat business for all customers regardless of ability. ▲

MARKETING

The importance of communicating information via different methods and platforms is one of the easiest steps a business can take to reference specific measures and implementations taken that addresses needs and any barriers. The use of inclusive imagery and language builds trust and confidence to enable more visitors to have a full and enriched experience. Make sure that information is in clear language and easy to understand and read, provide images (with image descriptions) and videos (with closed captions) and floor plans as proof points, provide clear directions to the business and correct business information (opening hours, contact details, address).

Most importantly, words matter and language can be a very difficult element when consulting or speaking with people with disability. In most cases, it is individual preferences for the use of language. Defining someone with disability should be their own choice. The most important thing is to understand that their disability is not what defines them.

In recent years, the rise of social media platform TikTok has been a place of education and forming a community of awareness with a number of people with disability and disability activists making a difference through destigmatising common misperceptions, showing barriers from ableism embedded into society and sharing their authentic day-to-day lives. ▲



Image description: Group of four dining at Valley Hops Brewing with Brisbane city in the background

Image credit: Tourism and Events Queensland

EXPERIENCE

Improving the overall experience for people with disability will ensure and promote universality and inclusion for all. Overall it will enhance visitor experiences, memorability and, ultimately, advocacy. Most importantly, it will enable greater social inclusion, support positive mental health and ensure every visitor has an amazing and memorable holiday.

In failing to meet visitors' needs, a business is failing in their role in this industry.

Limitations in the physical environment can be challenging to overcome. But consistently improving the visitor experience is within the control of business owners and all individuals. For example, taking into consideration people with hidden disabilities, especially autistic people and other sensory disabilities. Or ensuring that WiFi is functioning properly, as autistic children often use and play on mobile devices for managing changing environments and sensory overload. ▲

▶ 6.0 Support Resources

SPARROWLY GROUP VIDEO RESOURCES

- ▲ Accessible and Inclusive Destination Marketing - [watch video here](#)
- ▲ Making Your Business Accessible - [watch video here](#)
- ▲ Making Your Business Accessible Q&A Industry Panel - [watch video here](#)



MAKING YOUR BUSINESS ACCESSIBLE

This checklist has been designed to help you review the accessibility of your business and identify changes you can make to improve access for existing and new customers with disability and mobility needs.

This self-assessment checklist should act as a guide. We recommend using this checklist in conjunction with gaining feedback from your customers to enable continual small, but impactful improvements.

HOW ACCESSIBLE IS YOUR BUSINESS?

BUILDING SURROUNDINGS

- Are there accessible routes and crossing points which are well lit to access your business?
- Are there any permanent infrastructure elements that constrict access to your business?
- Are there any non-permanent infrastructure elements or signage which are currently blocking the footway that could be moved?
- Are there designated accessible parking spaces which are clearly marked for customers close by to your business?
- If there are no designated accessible parking spots close by to your business, is there a safe drop-off point with dropped kerbs close to your entrance?
- Are there clear, easy to read signage to identify your business from the street? (minimum size font height when viewing from a distance of 50metres is 150mm - for more information [see here](#)).
- Are the footways reasonably level, of adequate width and in good condition outside of your business?

BUILDING ACCESS

- If you have steps do they have:
 - A good surface i.e. non slip and in good condition.
 - Contrasting step edges.
 - Adequate lighting.
 - Good height difference between each step.
 - Handrails on both sides which are easily gripped.
- If you have steps, do you also have step-free access? For example, a portable ramp which sits over the ramp which you can put out and bring in. To note, this must not be left in place at all times.

- If you have a ramp is it:
 - Not too steep.
 - Safe to use with a non-slip surface.
- Do you have wide self-opening or easy to open doors?

BUILDING INTERIOR

- Is there clear space between furniture and stands for a person to manoeuvre around (aisles 1.2m wide as per Australian Standard - AS1428)?
- Is the flooring slip-resistant or low pile carpet?
- If you have more than one level, is there ramp or lift access to each level?
- Are the wall colours neutral (where possible) with colour contrasting door frames, window trims and skirting boards?
- Is the lighting consistent throughout with effective glare-free lighting?
- Are the door handles at an accessible height (between 900 mm and 1100 mm above the floor level)?
- Are there adequate seating and rest areas?
- Are there low height and clutter free service counters and display areas (750 - 800mm high)?
- Are display areas with brochures, products, printed information at a low height?

BUILDING AMENITIES AND PROCEDURES

- Are there accessible bathroom facilities in your building?
- Are there accessible baby change areas in your building?
- If you don't have bathroom facilities in your premise for customers, do you know where the nearest accessible bathroom is?
- Are there responsive evacuation procedures in place to identify accessible emergency exits and an operating visible and audible fire alarm?

HOW ACCESSIBLE IS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

STAFFING

- Does your staff receive customer service training, including disability awareness training?
- Is there a member of staff who can act as an Access and Inclusion Champion?
- Are staff available to assist in servicing and attending to customers needs to read or write information, interpret gestures, expressions and messages, and speak clearly and directly?

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

- Are there ways in which customers can provide feedback on a feedback form?
- Do you have alternative ways to obtain feedback via email, online, phone or in person?

HOW ACCESSIBLE IS YOUR COMMUNICATION?

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Does your website conform with the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ?
- Is the information on your website clear and easy to understand? e.g. clear language and easy to read text (text size to be at least 14 point and use plain fonts), images with description text, and good colour contrast between text and its background.
- Do you provide all useful and accurate information about your business and facilities on your website (including designated accessible parking, notice of steps, stairs, ramp and lift access, accessible bathroom facilities, and additional assistance available for customers)?
- Are there simple directions to your business on your website?
- Are there alternative ways you can communicate to your customers visibly or audibly?
- Does your social media accounts have clear business information provided (address, phone number, opening hours)?
- Does your main phone number have a taped phone message with clear information about services and facilities?

Now that you have completed the Self-assessment Checklist, you will have identified a number of areas where you are providing good access and areas that require access improvement.

Take these areas that require improvement and group them into the following areas:

- Action you can take now for little or no cost.
- Action you can take in the medium term that doesn't require renovation to your building.
- Action you will need to take during a refurbishment or redevelopment for significant improvements.
To note that, under the Building Code of Australia, you are required to provide access for people with disabilities in any renovation or redevelopment project.

▶ 7.0 Key Contacts And Organisations

- [Accessible Accommodation](#)
- [GetAboutAble](#)
- [Have Wheelchair Will Travel](#)
- [Inclusive Access Solutions](#)
- [Inclusive Tourism](#)
- [My Travel Research](#)
- [Push Adventures](#)
- [Spinal Life Australia](#)
- [The Access Agency](#)
- [Travability](#)
- [Travel Without Limits](#)
- [Wheel Easy](#) ▲

▶ 8.0 References

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