

Abilities tourism: an exploratory discussion of the travel needs and motivations of the mobility-disabled1.

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Research note

Abilities tourism: an exploratory discussion of the travel needs and motivations of the mobility-disabled ¹

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Abstract

With the 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the earlier Air Carrier Access Act, US marketers began to pay some attention to one of the most important but overlooked of all market segments. This article discusses the importance to the travel and tourism industry of the US disabled market, concentrating on the mobility-challenged travelers, which number 36 million (Murphy & Baig, 1997). Post-ADA literature regarding marketing to the disabled is reviewed and results are reported of a focus group with one support group attended by wheelchair-bound members and survey respondents attending an Abilities Expo. Data are also collected from general tourists, eleven percent of whom indicated that they have a physical disability. Survey respondents reveal that word-of-mouth, the Internet and travel guides serve as the most important

sources of information when planning travel. The main special interests they pursue while vacationing involve nature activities, often participating in sports. A temporary disability or "slowing down" does not stop their enjoyment of travel, especially nature travel. Tourism operators, especially those involved with heritage and nature activities, should consider appealing to the mobility challenged, as they do not shy away from travel. They are, however, careful in planning their travel and are impressed by "personal inspection" of hospitality facilities and accommodation.



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Keywords

Disabled tourists; Mobility-disabled; Marketing to the disabled

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- The word "eabilities" refers to www.ebility.com, which emphasizes "your abilities online". The "e" (electronic) portion is later shown to be relevant to this paper with the discussion of the importance on on-line surveys in the collection of marketing research data from the mobility challenged and because of the importance of the Internet as a source of information when planning travel.

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