

Challenges Faced by the Disabled People while Travelling in the Malaysian National Parks

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Abstract— Accessible tourism is expected to be the best tour packages in Malaysia, due to its wider market range which allows everyone to travel at the same time. The demand of accessible tourism is increasing day by day. Currently, the tourism market only offers its product to the non-disabled people and disabled people often marginalized in all the activities engaging the society especially in the tourism sectors. Despite of many aspects which cause unavailability of accessible facilities, prompt corrective actions need to be executed, at least to minimize the challenges faced by the minority group. Therefore, this papers aims to find out the challenges faced by the disabled people in the Malaysian National Parks. From the in-depth interview session, it is found that several factors were listed down as the challenges faced by the disabled people. Inaccessibility in the parks occurs mainly due to less communication between the service provider and the service users. Accessible tour destination is not only will be beneficial for the disabled people but it can be beneficial for everyone and at the same time, it can create an equal opportunities for everyone without considering their physical deficiency. Challenges usually weakens the strength of tourism sector to reach its customer's expectations Provision of accessible facilities in the tourism destination especially in the national parks can be a good investment for our future generation to guarantee better quality of life.

Keywords- *Accessible Tourism, Disabled, Inaccessible, National Park, Sustainable Environment, Quality of Life*

I. INTRODUCTION

Accessible tourism is one of the niche tourism which create revenue to the tourism sector. Niche tourism is a formation of specific tourism and has become visible as a competitor to damaging growths of mass tourism mentioning to environmental condition and socio-cultural interference. From an ethical and moral viewpoint, niche tourism is predicted with development compatible with environmentally sustainability and social care. A niche is defined as an ideal place entailing resources to be used by an organism in the current of its competitors. Due to the fact, that niche tourism fascinates more advanced high spending segments, it might produce very higher profits in relation to sales as mass tourism [1].

Accessible tourism is a world-wide mobility to certify the complete social involvement of all persons with impairment in

travel, citizenships, and cultural contribution and in the process to convince the same for all [2]. Accessible tourism is an atmosphere where people of all ages and abilities are felt welcome and required as clients and visitors [3]. Accessibility has been denoted as an activities that allows an individual to involve in his environment by taking choices, being maintained in what he does on a regular basis, networking and being valued. Accessibility suggests that each person deserves to be given a chance to take part of a community from the start of their life. Accessibility is defined having the similar choices and chances in recreation events that others have [4].

Often, social barriers are manifested in explicit and discriminated manner, eventually fastening their exclusion from social arena however the worst being treatment of disability as social taboo. Many scholars lament that, over the years, even though the society and institutions largely changed its attitude towards women and many other marginal social groups; the people with disabilities are continuingly ignored and subject them to material hardship and injustice. According to them, understanding disability would need one to focus on disabling environment barriers, hostile social attitudes and material relations of power. From travel and tourism angle, UNWTO (2005) defines disabled tourists as 'all persons who, owing to the environment being encountered, suffer a limitation in their relational ability and have special needs during travel, in accommodations and other tourism services, particularly individuals with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities or other medical conditions requiring special care, such as elderly persons and others in need of temporary assistance'. This definition acknowledges the complexities and intricacies of disability as it exists and provide the scope to even cover pregnant women, the diseased and senior citizens under its ambit because all of them would need some form of assistance, even if temporary. Needlessly, 'assistance' could come in any form-information gathering, booking facilities and provisions, mobility, stay, seeing places and others [5].

Due to the tourism is one of the main industries which contribute to Malaysian economic, there is a most important concern about the efficiency of facility management in tourism sector. Malaysian Prime Minister has conveyed his deepest concerns on the maintenance mentality. Currently Malaysia is spending millions on building a world class services and

facilities but these becoming outdated just after few years due to inadequate of proper maintenance. Same goes to the people with disabilities niche market, Malaysia is still in infant stage in catering tourism packages for the people with disabilities due to Malaysia is not yet ready to provide required and appropriate facilities for these minority tourists' categories. This shows that facility management in tourism industry is equally important as in other industries but at present studies regarding facility management in tourism industry is very limited and this situation has to be changed [6].

Typically, aging is resulting from few important factors namely decreasing in mortality, late marriages and declining in fertility. Based on statistics developed by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, life expectancy at birth by sex and state in shown in Table 1.1. It is found that, life expectancy for both

male and female increased from year 2010 to year 2013 in all states in Malaysia, resulting in aging issue in Malaysia.

Population of people with disabilities in the society is increasing gradually. This phenomenon already realized by the Malaysian Welfare Department. As a corrective action, sustainable development is being practiced lately in the development process. The increment of the people with disabilities in Malaysia from the year 2008 until the year 2011 is shown clearly in Table 1.2. People with disabilities consist of 0.13% of Malaysian population. There are a total of 359, 203 people who are people with disabilities in Malaysia. Disability is divided into several categories such as visually impaired, hearing, physical, learning disability, speech, mental and others [7]. Hence, it is important to consider critically accessible tourism as essential to the restructure the range of tourism consisting products and destinations availability.

TABLE I. LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH BY SEX AND STATE, MALAYSIA, 2010-2013 [8]

State	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Malaysia	71.93	76.58	72.16	72.16	72.37	77.03	72.56	77.18
Johor	71.81	76.44	71.96	71.96	72.26	76.83	72.38	77.03
Kedah	70.10	75.78	70.19	70.19	70.24	76.30	70.25	76.38
Kelantan	68.06	74.40	68.63	68.63	68.88	75.05	68.90	75.09
Melaka	71.10	76.41	71.45	71.45	71.70	77.23	71.74	77.57
Negeri Sembilan	70.25	75.89	70.74	70.74	70.97	76.34	70.99	76.36
Pahang	70.15	75.54	70.21	70.21	70.41	75.95	70.45	75.96
Perak	70.71	76.42	70.96	70.96	71.24	76.90	71.56	77.12
Perlis	69.56	75.59	70.04	70.04	70.33	75.63	70.36	75.66
Pulau Pinang	71.94	76.98	72.17	72.17	72.27	77.49	72.30	77.51
Sabah	75.00	78.28	75.21	75.21	75.21	78.38	75.23	78.43
Sarawak	73.94	77.44	74.30	74.30	74.54	77.95	75.17	78.34
Selangor ²	73.17	77.29	73.41	73.41	73.59	77.54	73.75	77.70
Terengganu	68.42	74.08	68.67	68.67	69.01	74.56	69.25	74.71
W.P. Kuala Lumpur	73.51	77.83	73.54	73.54	73.81	78.08	74.57	79.00

¹Includes W.P. Labuan

²Includes W.P. Putrajaya

TABLE II. REGISTERED PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BY ENTHNIC [9]

Ethnic	Year			
	2008	2009	2010	2011
Malay	156,768	179,423	197,818	224,997
Chinese	48,864	55,518	61,436	70,487
Indian	23,935	27,862	31,685	36,353
Others	1,479	1,586	1,788	2,273
Total	231,046	264,389	292,727	334,110

Many tourism researchers indicates that disabled people are the most loyal customers who will make revisit quite often if the tour is satisfying and affordable. Accessible tourism is not only beneficial to the disabled people but is it also beneficial to everyone, namely elderly people, parents with baby pram, toddlers, people with permanent and temporary injuries, pregnant ladies and others because all the people in this group requires the same requirements as the disabled people. Therefore, this papers aims to find out the challenges faced by the disabled people in the Malaysian National Parks. Findings from this paper can be used to develop a policy to add the accessible facilities in the tourism destinations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally the elderly people need the same assistance as the people with disabilities, therefore accessibility become core facilities for both abled and disabled people. According to [10], tourism is the fastest growing market and approximately 750 million of these tour is made up of customers 55 years of old and above. Hence, this statistics shows the strong hint for the travel industry to fulfill the requirements of this specific group of people.

Usually disabled people do not prefer to go for solo trip, they tend to travel in a group consisting of caretakers, family and friends. Therefore, this will add the occupancy and bring in extra profit [11]. Accessibility usually linked with the accessibility chain because accessibility will only be workable with a strong links between chains consisting of information during booking, transportation, accommodation, catering, attractions in tourism destination and mouth-to-mouth experiences [12].

Accessible tourism is a collective processes among all the stakeholders that permitting disabled people namely, mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions impairment to move independently with equal opportunities in the universally planned tourism products [13]. Almost, 200 million people experience considerable difficulties in functioning in their daily lives [14]. Hence, barriers are

perceived as a biggest restrictions encountered by the tourists to experience the tourism products.

Constraints were regarded as factors that precluded or reduce an individual's frequency, rate or satisfaction as a participant in an activity. Barriers are a physical structure which blocks or obstructs something [15]. Leisure constraints can be categorized into three main categories, namely intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints and structural constraints. Intrapersonal constraints includes lack of self-confidence, lack of encouragement or lack of information about opportunities for leisure that effect preference or lead to a lack of interest in a particular type of leisure activity. Interpersonal factors are those associated with other individuals including lack of leisure partners or lack of social interaction skills. Structural barriers are those that exist between individual preferences and participation in a leisure activity, including lack of finances, lack of transportation, limited abilities and lack of time or architectural barriers [16].

III. METHODOLOGY

Methodology used in this paper is in-depth interview session. Respondents were divided into two (2) groups namely, Malaysian respondents and Non-Malaysian respondents. Respondents were selected based on their field of interest and their experiences. Selection of respondents was carefully done from various fields to represent opinion from all the parties involved in the policy making, designing and construction process. Twelve (12) Malaysian respondents and twenty (20) Non-Malaysian respondents were selected. In-depth questions were asked to obtain a clear view about accessible tourism based on their experiences. Summary response is shown in results and discussion section.

IV. RESULTS

According to Table IV, several challenges faced by the disabled people while travelling were identified during the in-depth interview. Challenges such as financial barriers, no proper tour guide, lack of accessible information, facilities barriers, lack of personal assistant, mobility barriers, no proper government's policy, accommodation barriers, communication

TABLE III. SUMMARY OF RESPONDENTS

	Malaysian				Non-Malaysian	
Type of organizations (people)	NGO	Government	Academician	Architect	NGO	Academician
	8	2	1	1	18	2

barriers, transportation barriers and lack of accessible tourist destination were listed down by the respondents based on their experiences.

According to the respondents, if we are thinking of bringing wheelchair users for tour and leisure activities, we need to spend around RM1, 000 to hire a hydraulic bus services with a foldable ramp. Therefore, we need to spend more money on the transportation services only and then we need to hire sign language interpreter if we don't have any. It's even difficult to get entrance fees exemption on the tourism destination each time of travelling. Hence, planning for tour for disabled people without sponsorship is totally impossible. Other than that, disabled people too need extra assistance and intensive care due to their fragile nature.

TABLE IV. CHALLENGES FACED BY THE DISABLED PEOPLE WHILE TRAVELLING

Question	Respondent's Response
What are the challenges that you have faced while taking disabled people to participate in travel and leisure activities?	Financial barriers
	No proper tour guide
	Lack of accessible information
	Facilities barriers
	Lack of personal assistant
	Mobility barriers
	Attitudinal barriers
	No proper government's policy
	Accommodation barriers
	Communication barriers
	Transportation barriers
	Lack of accessible tourist destination

One of the respondents stated that, people with vision impairment can't see therefore, they need to imagine everything so they need people to describe things very well. "The plain fact is, though, that however good the intentions, touch is not sight and once you've run your hands over one piece of ancient stone, once stuccoes wall, one marble floor, well, you've touched them all". The real problem with touch is that the hand is too small thus you can only touch little bit at a

time. Audio description involves the accessibility of the visual images of theatre, television, movies and other art forms for people who are blind, have low vision or who are otherwise visually impaired. It is a narration service (provided at no additional charge to the patron) that attempts to describe what the sighted person takes for granted such as those images that a person who is blind or visually impaired formerly could only experience.

Adding to inaccessibility, respondents added that disabled people need more information regarding tourism than non-disabled person. Currently, there is limitation in gaining information or even no website provides Braille and audio description services for the visually impaired and hearing impairment to access the website by themselves. Brochures and travel magazines are not meant for the visually impaired person because no travel agent or tourism ministry take the first initiative to create travel brochures with Braille information. Prior travel information like accommodation information, accessible tourism destination, transportation services, restaurants information and other information are more essential in tour planning for people with disabilities. Once the disabled people are comfortable and satisfied with the information given then they will happily book for a tour.

There is only few places which is fully accessible by the wheelchair users in Malaysia currently, wheelchair users were targeted because they are only person who faced many mobility barriers than other type of disabled people. After so much of struggle, now transportation services, health-care facilities, accommodation facilities, education facilities, commercial buildings, government offices and other places are built near to zero access barriers. Therefore, accessibility will be a common and highly required matter in tourism industry too after many researches and disability advocating action are done very often. Things will not change in overnight is very unrealistic, therefore disabled people must keep on motivating themselves to live a normal life like others without thinking of their physical conditions and built environment which is not people with disabilities friendly. Actually, challenges in tourism activities will make the trip to be more interesting and exciting that than a trip which comes easily without any hassles.

Disabled people can't go anywhere alone, they will always need personal assistant. Light Rail Transit (LRT) is the only accessible transportation mode, booking via online doesn't provide exact information. At times accommodation especially hotel is not accessible for wheelchair users. Without manpower it's difficult to handle people with disabilities because they are same like small children, personal assistants need to be

extremely patience and willing to give extra care in handling them therefore the more manpower is available, the better it is or else disabled people will be perceived as a burden. Sometimes, it is difficult for the personal assistant to get exemption for entrance fees in each tourism destination, therefore usually personal assistant hesitate to accompany disabled people everywhere. Disabled people often feel uncomfortable without their personal assistant to move around.

Generally, enhancing disabled people's mobility is a very huge responsibility than just constructing physical environments and upgrading transportation system, it is also involves access for wheelchairs and walking aids and then offering transportation system in an affordable price. Other than that, it also need supply of sufficient information to the customers and practical management practices and policies need to be taken place to promote the inclusion of the disabled people in all aspects of society. Approach on disability differ, same goes to the sources that can be distributed. Nevertheless awareness towards the recognition of the disabled people's needs, access and mobility needs are relatively growing around the world. Government and non-governments organizations started to give attention on this matter but then it is not enough. Mobility is the first and primary need of a human to be alive in this world, hence it is a major issue to discuss internationally.

Generally, barriers faced by the disabled people and this is the difficult matter to overcome. When travel websites consists of inaccessibility information or attitudinal barriers, tourists with physical deficiency will not be able to access those sites less and hence disabled people have less opportunities in the tourism environment than the people non-people with disabilities. Accessibility and attitudinal barriers are the fundamental topics in investigating barriers experienced by tourists with disabilities.

The main problem is there is no proper guidelines on tourism facilities and accommodation facilities. There is no strong allegation is if one did not follow the guidelines if any. In addition to this, there is lack of Universal Design features and could not be invoked for accessible tourism. Ministry of Tourism Malaysia need to keep on updating and perform amendments on the clauses in the existing law if it is necessary. Malaysia has "eco-friendly" construction in progress but "disabled-friendly city" is still in infant stage and this need to be developed.

Disabled people faced many problems such as the access symbols is insufficient and has no proper information about accessible accommodation. To begin with, there is lack of accessible accommodation. This is because the accommodations which comes with standard accessibility are almost non-existent, therefore their features cannot seen on a signpost and secondly because each and every individual user has special needs depending on their disability and personal conditions. When we are talking about accessibility, it means we need also talk about necessity. Generally, accessibility includes a wide community of non-people with disabilities, they also benefits from accessibility if they have specific necessity. For that reason, there must be a visible improvement from the service provider and once the upgrading process is

completed all the users either disabled users or non-disabled users need to be acknowledge.

There is also barrier in sign language interpretation and many of the tour agents cannot speak English fluently. Many of the tour agents cannot speak sign language to the hearing and speech impaired person. Travel agencies are not interested in sending their staffs to enrol language interpretation class or courses because these travel agencies thinking that tourism for disabled people is not profitable compared to tourism for non-disabled. In addition to this, travel agencies also need to make sure that their staffs has a good command of English because English is becoming an international language and the only language which is connecting everyone.

Other respondents also highlighted that PWD's encountered transportation barrier in daily life often. If one of the link in the transportation accessibility chain broken, then the whole trip will be ruined. People with disabilities usually do not prefer to drive their own vehicle due to difficulty in getting car parking. In addition, non-disabled takes reserved parking spaces when there is limitation of parking spaces. According to visually impaired person, the signs are written either too small or too high or too far away from disabled people's vision or with a colour that do not allow optimal contrast. In addition, they also have difficulty to purchase bus ticket from the counter, when the disabled people's request for the ticket from the staff, the staff ask the disabled people to go to the machine to get the ticket but then the person can't see. There are also limited visual signs for the use of hearing impaired person. There are insufficient bus which allows the wheelchair users to enter in and once they entered, there is no special space for them to place their wheelchair.

Many activities and places of leisure is not disabled-friendly. In addition, lack of services in tourism destination. The complication of destination accessibility is a crucial concern in the sustainable tourism development in the developing areas due to the increment in the number of tourism business growth currently. To begin with the quality of the service information is relatively based on the experiences supported by the adequate information. Upgrading quality of information in the initial booking stage will multiply the revenue by influencing the purchase behaviour of consumers, indirectly it will also increase the post travel experience. Secondly, disabled people and elderly tourists get derived from using the tourism product like other tourists. Thirdly, there are indeed risk in tourism destinations, which cannot be used by human beings due to complexity of the geographical location.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the Table IV, several challenges were listed down. All the challenges need to be eliminated as soon as possible to open the market to wider range of people. Inaccessibility issues usually occurs due to less of communication between the disabled tourists and the stakeholders. Less communication makes stakeholders and service providers fails to understand disabled tourist's requirements in the tourism destination. Many accessible tours need to be organized in the national parks in Malaysia to experience ourselves about the challenges

faced by the disabled people and people who need extra assistance to suggest better accessible facilities for the usage of all kind of people. One need to visit the entire parks to list down the pros and cons of the place to the management. Disabled and tourists who need extra assistances need to be accompanied by several staffs if needed, it is highly recommended because by doing this they can see themselves the barriers encountered by the disabled tourists while visiting the park. Suggestion forms need to be distributed after the accessible tours to evaluate experience of the tourists while visiting the national parks. Management review meeting need to be conducted regularly by inviting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) regarding disabilities to discuss any accessibility issues in the park. Advertisement, roadshows, campaigns need to be organized to educate the local people about the accessibility in parks and promote the national parks. Disabled people will start fight for their rights in the tourism sector only if they were exposed to the right parties to speak out their problems.

Generally, complete information is a very crucial key point in marketing strategy. Therefore, ICT plays an important role to attract the potential tourists to visit their dream destination. Information can create an interesting idea about the destination and the potential tourists will be more eager to visit that place. Another important factor in tourism strategy marketing is the tour guide. Tour guides must be able to understand the needs and requirements of the tourists by looking at them. Sometimes, when many questions were asked to the disabled tourists, they might get hurt or offended. Tour guide must be able to make the disabled tourists to feel the pleasure same like the non-disabled tourists. For example, the visually impaired tourists need a tour guide who can describe to them every little things about the place such as the color, activities, textured, designs and others so that they do not feel neglected. Audio description which involves a narration service that attempts to describe what the sighted person takes for granted need to be provided at no extra charges to make the visually impaired tourists to feel appreciated. Usually, those little images can only be experienced through the whispering asides from a sighted companion.

All the stakeholders are required to work together to find out the solutions and allow all types of people to visit the national park without any discrimination. Generally, all the new concepts requires co-operation and support from various parties so that the implementation process goes on well. Since the concept of accessibility in tourism sector in Malaysia is still in infant stage, therefore continuous seminars, conferences, exhibitions and others need to be carried out to educate the society about this concept. Disabled people, elderly people, parents with baby pram, pregnant ladies, people with

permanent and temporary injuries and others who need extra assistances need to be treated equally and they must be given opportunities to follow the main door not the backdoor. Disabled people cannot be separated and perceived as a different entity in the society because this will make inequality to prolong. Removal of barriers in the public recreation park will ensure the minority recognition which will leads to higher quality of life to all.

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