



Project title: Persons with sensory disabilities as a target group for the tourism industry - exchange of good practices

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Persons with sensory disabilities as a target group for the tourism industry – Exchange of good practices

Desk research

Persons with sensory disabilities as a target group for the tourism industry - exchange of good practices

Desk research, Poland

About the research

- Date of the research - the first half of October 2019.
- The method of selecting companies – from the database of the Polish Chamber of Tourism and rankings of travel agencies (published on the Internet).
- Sample size – 100 companies from the tourism industry from all over Poland
- Research methods:
 - 1st stage - all companies participating in the survey: reviewing the content of websites, sending an e-mail with an enquiry, a telephone conversation asking for information on the availability of the offer for people with disabilities,
 - 2nd stage – companies which declared that they could offer services to people with disabilities: a phone conversation – a request for a specific order - mystery shopper, alternatively sending an e-mail asking about the possibility of organizing a specific tourist service for a group of deaf people (communication in Polish with grammatical errors typical of deaf people).

Research results, preliminary conclusions

1. According to research results, 16% of tourism companies declare that they possess an offer for customers with disabilities (see Figure 1). One company declared that it has a special offer for people with sensory disabilities.

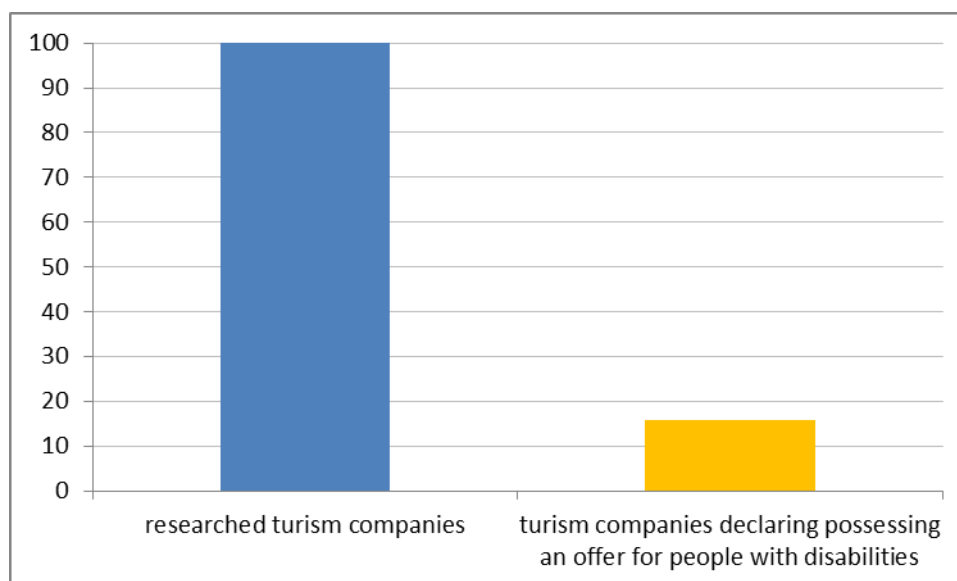


Figure 1. Companies participating in the research, declaring possessing an offer for people with disabilities. Source: Own work.

It is worth noting that in the case of companies declaring having a special offer, it is most often invisible on their website. This is mainly due to the fact that many of them are intermediaries that sell travel agencies' offers or accommodation (just like booking.com) - in our research this was the case in 7 out of 16 companies.

Availability of offers for people with disabilities is limited to checking the "For people with disabilities" box in the search criteria (somewhere between "Swimming pool" and "Animal friendly", and applies only to people with physical disabilities (i.e. wheelchair users). Agents do not seek information about facilities accessible for people with disabilities on their own initiative - if they receive such information, they share it and this is it. Most representatives of tourist agencies claimed that they did not have an appropriate offer since there were no such enquiries, but if there were, they would gladly prepare it. Others simply replied that they had no offer and ended the conversation.

In-depth research (mystery shopper method) provided additional information. The vast majority of companies were not interested in organizing a trip in Poland/abroad for a group of deaf people. All they could do was offer assistance in transfers and reservations. More detailed information is provided in Table 1. There are two praiseworthy exceptions:

- Tourist agency no 1 openly admitted that they had never prepared an offer for deaf people, and that this was something new to them. They suggested that they would check the availability of a sign language interpreter on site (a group of 8-10 deaf and hearing impaired people would go to Prague). The interpreter would be available only during sightseeing time, whereas on the journey and in the hotel they were not able to provide anything else than a standard tour guide service. They promised to send some feedback the following week, but unfortunately did not do so.
- Tourist agency no 2 company made a phone call few hours after sending an enquiry via their online contact form. I asked about the possibility of organizing a 2-day trip to Prague (Romantic Prague - Winter Walk) for the deaf and hearing-impaired. They called us back and stated the group was too small – they could join us to another standard group, but we would have to arrange an interpreter for us on our own (that is, pay for their trip); NOTE: if the group was bigger, around 30 people, they would be able to organize such a trip – provide a sign language interpreter and care (in their database they have a tour operator that has already done it). The company representative was very kind, vividly interested in this topic and willing to help. It is worth noting that she used the expression of "people with disabilities".

Table 1. Detailed results of in-depth research covering selected companies, carried out using the Mystery Shopper method.

No	Results of in-depth research
1	They do not organise holidays – this is only an agency (e.g. booking.com). In the search criteria one can check the “for the disabled” box, and see offers for people with physical disabilities.
2	<p>Making a phone call in order to ask about an offer: To Prague: they could only book a hotel, and we would have to arrange transport on our own. After changing the selection criteria and choosing a flight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we would have to have our own tour guide; - they could help us make a reservation or arrange a transfer; - their tour representative is available 24h, so they could solve any problems on site (but they do not know a sign language). <p>Nothing but standard services.</p>
3	<p>Nothing but standard services. We would have to have our own sign language interpreter. Information from the e-mail: <i>“Well, we might have some difficulties finding a proper guide for you. Unless you have your own sign language interpreter. When sightseeing, group members receive headsets, and the guide has their own microphone which they talk to”</i> A headset for a deaf person? What a great idea☺</p>
4	An agency, not a tour operator. They sell holiday packages of German and Austrian travel agencies in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. Searching for an offer for people with disabilities, one needs to check the “for the disabled” box. The offer is only meant for people with physical disabilities.
5	An agency selling holiday packages. They are not interested in tailoring their offers to customers’ needs.
6	A travel agency selling holiday packages (similar to booking.com).
7	A Czech travel agency offering stays in Italy (similar to booking.com but meant for Italy). They do not organise holidays, but only accommodation and insurance.
8	An agency, not a tour operator. They sell holidays organised by other travel offices. In search criteria, they have a “for the disabled” option but it only concerns facilities adapted to tourists with physical disabilities (and there are not many of them. Moreover, they do not enquire about their availability – if someone reports that, they simply post such information on their website).
9	This is an agency, not a tour operator.
10	They treated this enquiry very seriously. The representative responsible for organising group trips promised to find out whether they were able to find a sign language interpreter available in Prague. They were not able to provide any additional support on the journey (unless the group was bigger e.g. occupying the entire coach).
11	<p>An enquiry sent by e-mail which was answered the same day: <i>“Good afternoon, Unfortunately, we do not have such services in our offer.</i></p>

	<i>Best Regards”</i>
12	<p>An enquiry sent by e-mail which was answered the same day: <i>“Dear Sir/Madam, Thank you for your interest in our offer and sending an enquiry. We do have a tour operator specialising in organising trips with a guide using a sign language. Please find the link below to the current offer for summer 2020: https://deaftravelmartins.pl/oferta-2020-2 Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me. Best Regards.”</i></p>
13	An e-mail sent 23.10.2019 – unanswered.
14	A phone call with an enquiry about organising a trip to Prague for a group of deaf people. I got through to the office after several attempts (an office employee was abroad). Our request was treated individually and the offer was supposed to be tailored to the group’s needs. The company representative needed detailed information in order to prepare an offer, including its terms and conditions. She had Polish interpreters in Prague but she did not know whether they knew a sign language. If not, we would have to find a sign language interpreter on our own. Generally, the company does not have such customers (that is, deaf and hearing-impaired) but since they received such an enquiry from us, the representative noticed a gap in her offer and stated she must think about introducing such an option.
15	Despite many attempts, it was impossible to reach that company.
16	A company representative called us several hours after filling in a contact form on the company’s website. I asked about the possibility of organising a 2-day trip to Prague (Romantic Prague – Winter Walk) for a group of deaf and hearing-impaired tourists. Unfortunately, I heard the group was too small and we would have to join a standard group, bearing in mind we needed to hire a sign-language interpreter on our own (and to pay for his/her trip). NOTE: if the group was bigger (that is, around 30 people), they would be able to organise such a trip, provide a sign language translator and care (they do have a tour operator in their database that has already done something like this). The person I spoke to was very friendly, interested in my enquiry and willing to help. It is worth noting that she used the expression of “people with disabilities”.

Source: own work.

2. Out of sixteen companies which declared that they could offer services to people with disabilities, three theoretically have links to websites with such offers. A deeper analysis, however, shows that:
 - the offer for people with disabilities applies mainly to wheelchair users and architectural solutions in facilities;
 - people who suffer from sensory disabilities should inform the company about that only for the sake of communication;
 - **there is no information about an offer tailored to such a group, no information about being aware of their needs or preparing something suitable for them.**

It seems that most information concerning the specificity of people with disabilities can be found on the website of one of the agencies, in the form of FAQ. This information, however, concerns the need to inform the travel agency about types of disabilities in order to ensure proper communication.

Additionally, the only travel office, which declared that it had an offer for deaf people (Accessible) on their website, used the expression “deaf without speech”! This proves the lack of awareness of the environment of deaf people, lack of knowledge about their culture and different needs of this group of potential customers.

Moreover, one of the companies which declared directly on their website that they had an offer for people with disabilities was “X”. According to the own experience of the Polish project team, this is only a declaration that has little to do with reality (a specific example of using services of this company by a person with a broken leg shows that company representatives, who are directly in touch with customers and who should provide them with care and safety, know nothing about providing support to people with disabilities). As a result, it is difficult to suspect them of any signs of empathy or assistance.

Summary

After carrying out the research, preliminary suspicions were confirmed as to the lack of an offer dedicated to people with disabilities based on a thorough analysis of the needs of this target group. Only a small percentage of companies declared that they could tailor their offer to the needs of people with disabilities. Unfortunately, this declaration concerns only architectural adaptation enabling accessibility for people with physical disabilities. Representatives of the vast majority of travel companies do not have any knowledge about the specific needs of people with disabilities, in particular people with sensory disabilities.

It seems that in Poland, the use of tourism services by people with disabilities is, on the one hand, a taboo subject, and on the other hand – a ticking bomb which the vast majority of companies do not want to deal with. People with disabilities are still perceived as a threat rather than a chance to expand a target group.

PERSONS WITH SENSORY DISABILITIES AS A TARGET GROUP FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY – EXCHANGE OF GOOD PRACTICES

Research Greece

About the research

- Date of research: November to December 2019
- Method of selecting companies: Greek Travel Pages
- Sample size: Forty (40) travel agencies
- Research method: Reviewing the websites content. Asking for specific practices by telephone or email

Preliminary research results

According to the research through internet websites, nine (9) from a total of forty (40) travel agencies (22,5%) declare to have services (accommodation) for people with disabilities. From these travel agencies five (5) (56%) mention services only for wheelchair users and four (4) (44%) mention disability in general.

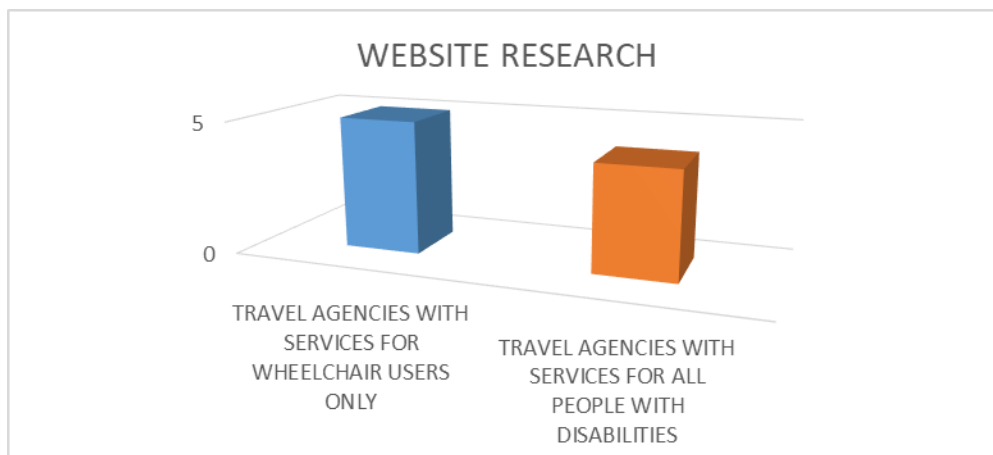
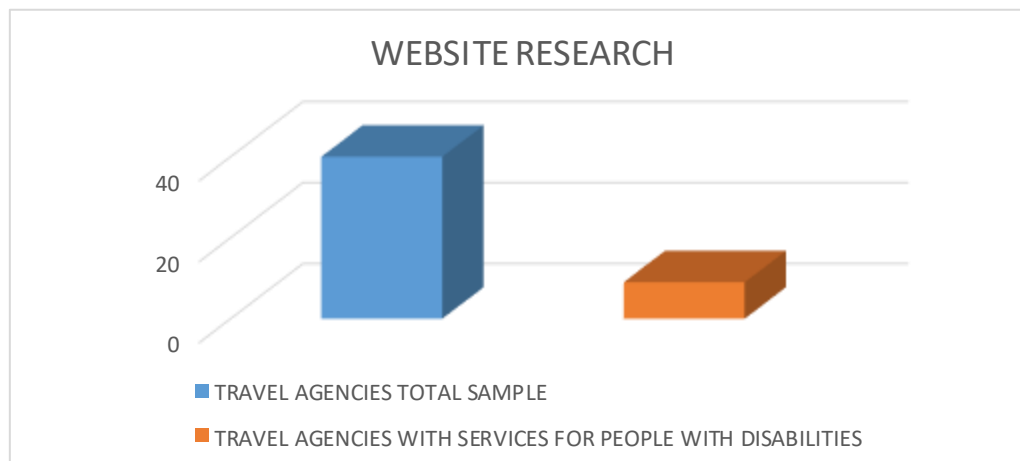


Table 1. Detailed results for travel agencies mentioning on their website accessible tourism services

TRAVEL AGENCIES	RESULTS OF RESEARCH
1.	They have experience for wheel chair users only. Positive to check it and try to accommodate people with sensory disabilities.
2.	They no longer have services for people with disabilities.
3.	They specialize in people with motor disabilities. Positive to check the possibility to serve people with sensory disabilities.
4.	They had an assistant who was responsible but he no longer works with them. They don't have services.
5.	They have services for all people with disabilities. They have contact and cooperation with National Confederation of People with Disabilities and Hellenic Federation for the Deaf. On their site they also have a link to disability guide by NCP.
6.	Specializing in tours for the disabled with a fleet of accessible vehicles.
7.	Their site mentions Paralympics and great experience. They haven't accommodate people with sensory disabilities but they could check the possibility.
8.	They don't have services for people with disabilities. They only have packages for specific periods of the year. They didn't explain if they can provide services for people with sensory disabilities.
9.	Only wheel chair users.

Out of nine (9) companies which declare on their websites they could offer services to people with disabilities, only one (1) can accommodate people with sensory disabilities and has experience. Two (2) travel agencies no longer offer services and six (6) of them apply mainly to wheel chair users.

The only company which have offers for people with disabilities is travel agency no 5. They cooperate with National Confederation of people with disabilities and they knew how to accommodate all type of disabilities. They immediately mentioned Hellenic Federation of the Deaf and the presence of sign language interpreter.

Encouraging is the fact that almost all of the other travel agencies were positive to search and try to accommodate people with sensory disabilities. However, there is a question mark over the quality of their services since they have lack of knowledge.

Furthermore, positive to investigate the possibility of accommodating people with sensory disabilities were some travel agencies that didn't have specific services for them mentioned to their websites.

Table 2. Detailed results for travel agencies without services for people with disabilities mentioned on their websites

TRAVEL AGENCIES	RESULTS OF RESEARCH
1.	No services for people with disabilities
2.	No services for people with disabilities
3.	No services for people with disabilities
4.	No services for people with disabilities
5.	No services for people with disabilities
6.	No services for people with disabilities but positive to check in order to provide accessibility
7.	No services for people with disabilities
8.	No answer (email – telephone)
9.	No services for people with disabilities
10.	No answer (email – telephone)
11.	No answer (email – telephone)
12.	No services for people with disabilities
13.	No services for people with disabilities
14.	No services for people with disabilities

15.	No services for people with disabilities
16.	No answer (telephone – email)
17.	No services for people with sensory disabilities. They can accommodate wheel chair users only.
18.	No services but positive to check. They asked if people with sensory disabilities can find a guide by themselves.
19.	No services for people with disabilities
20.	No answer (email – telephone)
21.	They have experience from groups of people with vision loss. They can provide tickets etc but not a guide
22.	The employee didn't have information about services for people with sensory disabilities. They will check and call back.
23.	They don't have specific packages for people with disabilities. If a request arise they will try to accommodate.
24.	I left a message in order to call me back. Their email is not valid.
25.	No services for people with disabilities
26.	They don't have packages for people with disabilities. They asked if a guide could accompany the group in order to have accessibility.
27.	They have services for people with motor disabilities only.
28.	They don't have services for people with disabilities but they liked the idea!
29.	No answer (telephone)
30.	They don't have services for people with disabilities
31.	No answer (telephone)

Summary

In conclusion of this research, it is obvious that there is lack of services for people with disabilities and especially with sensory disabilities. Only one (1) travel agency has experience and knowledge of both Deaf and Blind clients, and another one (1) has experience of accommodating people with vision loss.

Unfortunately, the majority of agencies declaring offers for people with disabilities refer only to people with physical disabilities.

What is interesting is how some travel agencies deal with sensory disabilities. The ones that are positive about providing services for people with disabilities can be divided into two categories. The one is travel agencies willing to search and present an accessible solution for them. In particular, they said that they will try to provide a complete package of services, meaning tickets, carriage, accessibility in tours, hotels etc. The other category is travel agencies which are willing to provide only tickets and carriage, as a matter of fact they are asking from people with sensory disabilities to find themselves a solution for accessibility.

Accessibility seems to be considered as a responsibility of people with sensory disabilities. This probably happens because physical disabilities need reasonable accommodation (adjustments) in order to achieve equal access. On the other hand, sensory disabilities require services to be accessible, which is more complicated to cope.

Persons with sensory disabilities as a target group for the tourism industry – Exchange of good practices

Desk research, Portugal

In statistical terms, nobody knows how many deaf people there are in Portugal, but the official number is around 26 thousand. However, there are 115,000 people in our country who do not speak Portuguese sign language but have a hearing impairment.

To better understand the offers for this type of population regarding tourism, a small survey was conducted, with some of the main tourism agencies operating in the Greater Porto Region (National Tourism Registration Platform), by conducting a survey on the supply available for people with sensory (visual and hearing) disabilities. We only got a response from one of them, indicating that they had no “offers specific to this condition.”

Hands to Discover Project

The “Hands to Discover” project has developed an online platform that allows the deaf community to get to know Porto in a more complete and enriching way, making known what Greater Porto has to offer: such as hotels, restaurants, museums, nightlife spaces, hiking, among other possibilities. Parallel to this publicity of the spaces is the objective of sensitizing partners to issues that concern the deaf community and the difficulties that it encounters daily.

Making Porto a more inclusive city is the main objective of the “Hands to Discover” platform, pioneering work that allows real accessibility and autonomy in places of tourist interest for deaf citizens who plan their leisure time.

There you can find information about places, scheduling visits, choosing points of interest (for deaf citizens like anyone who wants to travel to Portugal). Users also have the option of accompanying an accredited Sign Language interpreter.

The platform is essentially informative and was promoted in Europe and the United States. It is an innovative idea, national and European. The project started in Porto, but intends to spread to other cities.

One of the mentors of “Hands to Discover” is Ana Bela Baltazar, graduated in Clinical Psychology, but with over twenty years of experience as a sign language interpreter - she is an official interpreter of RTP (*Rádio e Televisão de Portugal*) and author of the Portuguese Sign Language Dictionary.

According to the information obtained from this person in charge, the platform has recorded contact from both agencies and individuals, but cannot estimate an accurate number of people covered.

From the visits already made, it can be said that the public is mainly interested in cultural and gastronomic tourism, and that the problems lie in access to information and consequent lack of autonomy.

The responsible for the creation of “Hands to Discover” also mentions that the platform is seen by European entities as an innovation, unlike entities from North America, which are already familiar with the concept.

Information on accessibility for people with sensory disabilities travelling to Cyprus

Through relevant research and by contacting various stakeholders, it has been identified that there is none to very limited information on persons with sensory disabilities travelling to Cyprus. Accessibility information is focused on visitors with reduced mobility or wheelchair users.

A. Official info by the Deputy Ministry of Tourism

This is very general and mostly focused on wheelchair users.

Website: <https://www.visitcyprus.com/index.php/en/practical-information/accessible>

Flyer:

https://www.visitcyprus.com/files/PracticalInfo/Info_for_Disabled_feb10_lrg.pdf (only info for persons with sensory disabilities are the contacts to the Blind and Deaf Schools in Cyprus).

B. Airport

Larnaka International Airport only has the following facilities for the blind or visually impaired:

1. Blind path
2. Room Mate, at the busiest PRM toilet at the terminal. The Room Mate is an Electronic wall-mounted device, which gives bespoke audio description in a disabled access toilet, to guide the persons with visual impairments in the room. It has been custom made for the specific toilet and offers guidance in English & Greek language.

Nothing for the deaf.

https://www.hermesairports.com/media/cms/EN-PRM_FACILITIES_SERVICES_LCAPFO_APR%2018.pdf

C. Hotels

Very minimum requirements for persons with sensory disabilities i.e. audible emergency alarms and visible emergency alarms. The majority of requirements is for wheelchair users. An example of the official criteria can be found here (check-list of Aldiana Hotel in Larnaka region):

https://www.visitcyprus.com/files/accessibility_facilities/ALDIANA.pdf

A list of hotels for persons with special access needs is available at the website of the Deputy Ministry of Tourism who are in charge hotel inspections:

[https://www.visitcyprus.com/files/accessibility_facilities/Hotel_Establishments_offering_facilities_for_the_disabled\(1\).pdf](https://www.visitcyprus.com/files/accessibility_facilities/Hotel_Establishments_offering_facilities_for_the_disabled(1).pdf) . Furthermore, a more detailed list with specific requirements by each hotel can be found here:

<https://www.visitcyprus.com/index.php/en/news/164-hotels-and-other-tourist-establishments-disabled>

D. Tourist Attractions

No facilities and no information at all for persons with sensory disabilities whatsoever. Only info is for wheelchair accessibility.

E. Specialist Travel Agencies

Accessible Cyprus (locally based)

<https://www.facebook.com/accessiblecyprustravel/>

Holidays to Cyprus for the blind/visually impaired (UK-based represented by the local agency above): <https://seable.co.uk/visit-cyprus-as-a-blind-tourist/>

Note: Also includes some interesting activities for the blind (wine-tasting, pottery making, boat tour with audio description).

Holidays to Cyprus for the deaf (UK based) - Limitless Travel:

<https://www.limitlesstravel.org/disabled-holidays/deaf-people/>

Note: Also includes some interesting tips

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