

Dimensions of hotel experience of people with disabilities: an exploratory study

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Purpose – This exploratory study aims to focus on the challenges arising from the interactions between wheelchair users, individuals using crutches and blind people with the hotel environment as well as on the efforts to overcome these challenges.

Design/methodology/approach – The sample was gathered through a snowballing technique. The study utilizes in-depth semi-structured interviews of 45 participants: 20 used wheelchairs; ten were dependent on crutches; and 15 were blind. The data were subject to thematic content analysis.

Findings – Interpreted by the social model of disability, the results suggest that the challenges participants confront derive from the physical design of the environment as well as staff behaviors. Differences were found between the hotel experiences of people with various types of disabilities.

Research limitation/implications – The sample was limited to Israeli participants.

Practical implications – The paper offers recommendations for hotel management with regard to specific physical as well as interpersonal means to alleviate apparent difficulties faced by people with disabilities in their hotel experiences.

Originality/value – This study broadcasts the genuine voice of people with disabilities. The findings are of special relevance to hospitality researchers, educators, executives, and hotel staff.

Introduction

Marketing literature centered on the needs and experiences of people with disabilities has grown rapidly in recent years (Grady and Ohlin, 2009; Ozturk et al., 2008). The size of the disabled market, estimated at between 10 and 19 percent of the general population, is suggested to be one main motive for such studies (Bull et al., 2003; Huh and Singh, 2007; Kaufman-Scarborough, 1998). Also, efforts to better understand people with disabilities may be based on recent legislative endeavors rooted in US law and subsequently enacted in Europe and elsewhere. The American Disabilities Act (Part III passed in 1990) and the Disability Discrimination Act (Part 3 passed in 1995) symbolize a new stage with regard to the civil rights of people with disabilities. These laws were further modified (for example, the ADA Amendments Act of 2008) and serve as models for protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities. Other countries such as, Bermuda (Forbes, 2009), Scotland and Northern Ireland relied on the DDA and the ADA (SAiF, 2009) to establish their own codes of practice. Other countries such as Israel and Canada established country specific codes of practice and regulations based on civil rights and equal opportunity laws relating to access to accommodation (Rosen, 2007). The impact of the ADA and the DDA is also

evident in hotel chains and associations (e.g. Hotel Association of India, 2009), many of which established specific practice codes. Such codes relate primarily to hotel rooms and public areas (British Standards, 2008), almost exclusively focusing on the physical aspects of the environment and the mobility considerations of people with disabilities. Research interest in people with disabilities is also evident in tourism and hospitality related studies (Großschl, 2007; Lane, 2007; McKercher et al., 2003). Surprisingly, only few empirical studies have focused exclusively on the actual hotel experience of people with disabilities. Moreover, Grady and Ohlin (2009) highlighted the importance of speaking directly with people with disabilities in order to understand their needs in the context of tourism and hospitality (Chen, 2004; Ozturk et al., 2008). Such studies providing people with disabilities with an opportunity to express their needs are rare. This exploratory research aims to enrich the hospitality literature by identifying the difficulties that people with disabilities confront during their hotel experience. This research is part of a series of studies focusing on the tourism experiences of Israelis with diverse disabilities (Poria et al., 2009, 2010) proposing concrete management implications based on the personal experience of consumers with disabilities.