Accessible Tourism: An Economic Driver

Key Points

Demographics and Spending

The demographics of ageing are well known. It is also well established that there is a strong correlation between age and disability, with some two thirds of people with disabilities being over 65.

For the tourism industry as for other market sectors these statistics should be signalling the urgent need to ensure that all aspects of tourism, including transportation, accommodation and all other facilities are appropriate for the needs of this changing population.

There is very clear data on the potential income to be generated in the tourism sector for those who understand and accommodate access requirements. The following statistics give a snapshot of the situation across the developed world:

- Disabled American adults spend an average of $13.6 bn a year on travel
- 88% of disabled Australians take a holiday every year
- 48% of disabled Germans would travel more frequently if more accessible facilities and services were available.
“Grey haired Globe trotters”

The current generation of older people too are much more likely, in many countries, to have the time and money to travel. Low cost air travel has greatly increased the frequency of travel among retired people.

For less developed countries, in particular, the economic driver of accessible tourism may be the most effective way to stimulate access improvements for their own populations.

As Travel Weekly Asia reported:

“The typical tourist in Asia used to be a young backpacker in need of a shower, but these days there are just as many older and retired people roaming the continent seeking its secrets”.

Tapping into new markets

There is clear evidence that these messages are being understood by a growing number of countries and that investment is being unlocked to rise to the challenge. Accessibility legislation in countries such as the USA which extends its requirements beyond its own borders means that those service industries wanting to capture the considerable market for tourism among older Americans need to look at their own standards and facilities.

A report from the Barbados Council for Disabled people to the Caribbean Tourism Organisation noted that:

"Collectively 75% of Canadians, Americans and Europeans with disabilities who are physically and financially able to travel do so with their care givers, family and friends. The current economic climate dictates that we target this emerging market."