



The ability to support accessible tourism in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the readiness of Chiang Mai to support the market of those who are disabled in some way and need special access. This article considers the support of marketing management for this group of tourists by referring to the tourist attractions that have cited the preparation for accessing the market of this group of people. The research was qualitative and the sample group consisted of 5 sample groups as follows. A group of tourists with special access demands, product and service providers in that place or the attraction, tour guides and tour agencies, government agencies and NGOs. The results from the visitors' point of view show that all the seven studied places in Chiang Mai are still not ready to be accessed because they lack facilities such as ramps, designated parking lots, pathways and suitable toilets. Moreover, from the research results according to the visitors' experience, it cannot be concluded that all these seven places have the readiness to provide the accessibility information and would in any way be able to contribute to the visitors in providing this because none of the visitors are also not prepare themselves to collect all the needed information relating to disability provision from these places before their trips. The results show that most of the tourists do not pay attention to systematically learn about their targeted destinations. Nevertheless, all the servicers are gradually developing and venues are slowly improving their services in both the needed physical aspects and data service access in order to provide more convenience to all the tourists in Chiang Mai.

Keywords: Accessible tourism, disabled people, universal design, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Introduction

In comparison to other service businesses, the accessible tourism market is an important market with a good spending power, growing trend and a high income level and covers 1.3 billion tourists. Its value and rapidly growing trend derive from per capita spending of individual tourists, expenses and consumptions of accompanying persons and family members as well as the increasing number of elderly. In 2015, it was found that the baby boomers have the most travel needs; almost 60% of them have tourism-related expenditure; over 50% of them have the consumption; and 40% of them will be retired with certain impairments. The accessible tourism market's value will thus increase by 25% in 2020 and the survey of accessible tourism market indicates that there are approximately 650 million persons with impairment worldwide or 10% of world population. It is estimated that 37-45 million persons in Europe have certain types of impairment (Buhalis, Eichhorn, Michopoulou & Miller, 2005). The estimation by "One-Stop-Shop for Accessible Tourism in Europe" (OSSATE) reveals that Europe has 130 million persons with special accessibility needs. The strongly positive correlation between age and impairment is found implying that you will be more impaired when getting older. Importantly, 70% of disabled persons still have physical fitness and financial readiness for travelling.

However, the accessible tourism market is always neglected by the tourism industry business, while the physical restrictions of these tourists to access to tourist attractions obstructs their



enjoyment of travel experiences. According to the study titled “The Disability Divide in Internet Access and Use” (Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006), persons with impairments have no personal computer at home so they cannot have online access. However, it was found that the internet use of persons with hearing impairment and with moving difficulty is not less than that of unimpaired people. This research indicates the influence of internet-based information dissemination on persons with impairment (Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006). The tourism industry fails to provide the tourist spot accessibility information to the accessible tourism market, while the tourism design principles exclude this group of tourists due to the lack of enforcement of rules and regulations on building for tourists with impairment. The misunderstanding and lack of knowledge on actual needs of tourists with impairment and the elderly (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005) are found to exist globally. Bowtell (2015) conducted research on assessing the value and market attractiveness of the accessible tourism industry in Europe, focusing on major travel and leisure companies. The results from his research insists that this group of tourists are also high potential customers. However, they cannot access an area because they have limited accessibility so they decide not to go to anywhere at all.

As in the rest the world, Thailand has the same situation of the growing trend of an accessible tourism market. According to the population number survey, there are 687.9 million persons aged 60 years old or older and, by 2050, it will soar to 1,968 million and Asia will have the greatest number of the elderly. In 2007, Thailand had 7.02 million elderly or 11% of total population and this number will rise to 20.7 million or 28% by 2050. ‘The Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act, B. E. 2535 (1992)’ and the Promotion and Development of Quality of Life of Disabled Persons Act, B. E. 2007 (2007) are the laws on “persons with impairment” enforced by Thai government. Both laws are based on the analysis of comprehensive situations and integrated works of all sectors for developing the disabled persons’ quality of life. It focuses on the promotion of good quality of life and on the policy that enhances happy and independent living with others in the society so that they can also equally and fairly access their rights. This results in systematical development of quality of life e.g. health care, education and job promotion for persons with impairment so that they can enjoy certain levels of self-reliance. The number of elderly and persons with impairment in Thailand is similar to the rest of the world; therefore, the accessible tourism market is increasingly important. The spending power is high, especially the elderly who look for tourist experiences as other people do. The tourism development in many countries focuses on the accessible tourism market. Japan, for example, is a country renowned for the world’s highest number of facilities for elderly and for those persons with impairments.

Chiang Mai province has both national and international potential for tourism due to its beautiful landscape, art, literature, lifestyle, culture and unique Lanna tradition as well as boasting of numerous tourism styles e.g. many renowned restaurants, boutique hotels, resorts and homestays. All these attract Thai and foreign tourists and are the reason why Chiang Mai province has become a world-class tourism city. For the elderly and persons with impairment, they may need different basic facilities according to their individual impairments for promoting accessibility. Therefore, the Office of Tourism and Sports of Chiang Mai province has introduced the first tourist manual consisting of 4 routes for the elderly and disabled persons suggesting 7 tourist attractions for an accessible tourism market, namely, Phra Singh Temple, Phrathat Doi Suthep Temple, Chiang Man Temple, Chiang Mai International Exhibition and Convention Center, Chiang Mai Night Safari, Promenada and Chiangmai Zoo Aquarium. Besides, Tourism Researcherity of Thailand (Chiang Mai Office) and local agencies have jointly launched a campaign “Hearty Travel across Thailand without Limits” (เที่ยวทั่วไทยด้วยใจ ไม่จำกัด) introducing the tourist routes for the elderly and disabled persons. This is to enhance the tourist spot accessibility for all groups of people, particularly the elderly and disabled persons who may not enjoy the convenient travel or accessibility to tourist spots in the same way as unimpaired people.



However, the provision of facilities for an accessible tourism market mostly focuses on Universal Design (UD) buildings. According to conceptual framework of Puhretmair and Buhalis (2008), three important factors of accessibility are: physical accessibility, information regarding accessibility and accessible information provision on-line. The researcher wishes to study the readiness of Chiang Mai province in accommodating an accessible tourism market through viewpoints of service providers and clients. This is to promote equitable accessibility to tourist spots and increase the value of the Chiang Mai tourism market.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the readiness of Chiang Mai province in accommodating an accessible tourism market through viewpoints of service providers and clients in 3 aspects: physical accessibility, information regarding accessibility and accessible information provision on-line.
2. To provide suggestions on the readiness for an accessible tourism market.

Review of Relevant Literature

The tourism industry has different factors and several conceptual frameworks in such regard are proposed by many academicians. For example, McIntosh and Goeldner (1986) and Nicolaides (2014), have reflected their attitude towards tourism that tourists will seek experiences and satisfactions through the search and selection of tourist spots and tourist activities to fulfill their satisfactions. The tourism derives from the collaboration of government agencies and local people in managing tourist spots and facilitating tourists (Moyo & Tichaawa, 2017; Mudimba & Tichaawa, 2017).

Additionally, the behavioral characteristics of tourists visiting tourist spots may vary and be divided into three phases: pre-, inter- and post- purchase of goods or services. The motivations influence the needs and decision-making to buy. There are several motivations and factors encouraging tourists with special accessibility needs to make decision to travel. For example, the elderly's enjoyment of tourist activities may involve health care and opportunity to do activities with ease and diversity. Also, the activities may be integrated with the new generation ones allowing the elderly to meet young people from different cultures, activities and family backgrounds. Moreover, The World Trade Organization (WTO) defines the tourism resources as relating to natural geography, historical background and culture (WTO, 2005).

Goeldner and Ritchies (2006) claim that United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has divided the types of tourism into three main categories as follows:

1. Natural based tourism

It is the tourism which based on the natural resources such as marine ecotourism, which is a conservative tourism emphasizing the marine ecosystem. It also encourages the tourists to learn about the ecosystem and also 'plant' the desired behavior of conserving nature for the further sustainability. The tourists can also acquire new experiences through many activities while participating with the locals in that area.

2. Cultural based tourism

There are two types for cultural based tourism as follows:

Archeological and Historical Tourism resources

This type of tourism exhibits the background on historical and human inventions. These are also known as tangible cultural heritage resources. The example for this type of tourism is the



historical tourism, and the tourists can walk around some important religious places or vital places as stated in history.

Cultural Festival and Event Tourism resources

This kind of tourism emphasizes intangible cultural heritage resources such as beliefs, languages, local wisdoms, artworks and rituals. The examples for this kind of tourism are cultural and traditional tourism, rural or village tourism, ethnic tourism and Edu-Mediation tourism.

Special based tourism

Apart from the above type of tourism, there are also the tourism types that are very specific depending on the tourists interest such as the atomic tourism, disaster tourism, voluntourism and pop-culture tourism.

Regarding the management of an accessible tourism market, the tourism industry sector should consider factors enabling tourism to satisfy three special accessibility needs (Puhretmair & Buhalis, 2008).

1. Physical environment of tourist spots and physical accessibility.
2. Information regarding accessibility.
3. Accessible information provision on-line.

Firstly, the provision of facilities to promote the physical accessibility is the most important factor for goods and service accessibility of tourists. The availability of reliable information on the accessibility may promote their full enjoyment. Tourism facilities e.g. hotels, restaurants, museums, historical sites, event venues and other means to satisfy the needs should be based on the accurate information and the assessment of accessible routes by standard devices. All these will support potential tourists to plan and make decisions. The lack of reliable information is thus the important or main hindrance of persons with impairment and tourists with accessibility to travel.

Secondly, the accessibility information is a basic element for an accessible tourism market, while the accessible buildings are also important for tourism. However, the provision of information on the accessibility and facility is equally crucial so that the market can realize such data and make an informed decision to travel. Despite the availability of accessibility information, the tourists with impairment may not decide to travel if they receive no reliable and sufficient information to meet their expectations and unique needs. The tourist destination information should thus include tourism details and elements that tourists can enjoy the accessibility because these data are a key for making travel-related decisions.

Lastly, the accessibility information should be provided online by considering different types of impairments (perceptual, sensory, mobility and cognitive impairments). Therefore, the technologies, computerized devices and programs e.g. screen reader, voice recognition, typing and printing aids and Braille display could be used in assisting and enabling persons with impairment to access to information through computer network and to use the internet more efficiently. Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), for example, enhances website flexibility, while website design principle and guideline for the accessibility of persons with special needs should be considered too. This fundamental aspect is agreed to by Darcy et al. (2010), describing that any tourist attractions should have readiness for both the physical facilities and also the online business management, in order to respond to this special group of tourists.



In this study, persons with special needs are divided into two groups: disabled persons and the elderly. First, disabled persons are those who have physical and mental impairments leading to the restriction and loss of opportunity to do daily activities or tasks according to the responsibility, age, society and culture as other people do. The 4th and 5th National Plan for the Development of the Quality of Life of Disabled Persons focuses on creating the integrated society for disabled persons and everyone else. The disabled persons can enjoy the accessibility and rights in an equal, fair and indiscriminate manner along with the creation of environment as well as technology and information development. The organizations in all sectors and private business enterprises should enhance the accessibility of disabled persons and use of environment, technology and information to empower them; to enhance the service accessibility and to immunize them from the impacts of climate change and natural disasters. Moreover, the development partners like the organizations and networks of disabled persons should be strengthened to steer all dimensions of works related to the disabled persons efficiently and systematically. Nicolaides (2014) says we should help tourists find authenticity and a sense of being and this applies to the disabled especially. This is to promote the creative attitude towards disability and disabled persons with the awareness of human dignity, potentials, independent lifestyle, right and duty of disabled persons.

For the elderly, the problems of persons at the end-of-life age may differ from persons in other generations, particularly social and public health aspects. Currently, an increasing number of elderly is found in Thailand and worldwide resulting in the governments' awareness of the importance of this matter. There is a continual effort and campaign to create public awareness, understanding and readiness to take care of the elderly in the same level of care provided for persons of other ages.

The word 'elderly' or 'aged' person refers to the one who is in the old age based on the chronological age. According to Thai Dictionary of Royal Institute B.E. 2542 (1999), the elderly person is a person who is aged or at an older age, while the 'oldness' is the quality of being old due to the age and fragility. Moreover, the definition of the "elderly" under Thailand's Act on the Elderly, B.E. 2546 (2003) is that the persons who have attained the age above complete sixty years and are of Thai nationality. Meanwhile, for the United Nations, there are three levels of "aging society": ageing (aging) society, aged society and super-aged society (The Thai Disabled Development Foundation, 2015).

The management of an accessible tourism market mostly considers the Universal Design (UD). According to the Center for Universal Design of Carolina State University, the UD principle refers to the design of environmental conditions and products based on convenience, equitability, rationality and safety for everyone's usage. It means that good and efficient design for disabled persons will be fine for other people too. In particular, seven UD principles are the equitable use, flexibility in use, simplicity and intuitiveness, perceptible Information, tolerance for error, low physical effect as well as size and space for approach and use.

Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010) define consumer behavior as the way persons or organizations employ to choose or purchase any products, their thoughts and their satisfaction on the products including how can they fulfill their desires. There are many factors affecting the consumer decision such as external factors, internal factors and their experience. The behavior includes the period before purchasing, while purchasing and also after purchasing. The most influential factors for purchasing are motivations. This theory can also be applied to the tourists behavior including accessible tourists, which also need the specific data in order to decide to travel to any places.

Mudimba and Tichaawa (2017) say there should be support for all in tourism ventures. This research agrees with the study of Chooglin Ounvijit et al. (2014) titled "Guidelines for Recreation and Tourism Development for the People with Disabilities in Chiang Rai Province". It is said that



tourism behaviors of disabled persons depend on the readiness of their family to support them. Tourist spots should be located in Chiang Rai province for convenient accessibility and must have necessary facilities for disabled persons, while, recreational activities should cause no danger and be worrisome or require physical effort and above all relieve emotional stress. The guidelines for recreation and tourism development for disabled persons should begin from the development of a local network of disabled persons, presentation of plans and projects to Local Administrative Organizations and the creation of public awareness of disabled persons' needs. All these may be done by a group of disabled persons themselves or by the organizations that support them in various means. The quality of life of adults with spina bifida has been compared with the one of normal people in the study of Bowles (1996) in order to propose a law for improving disabled persons' quality of life in New South Wales, Australia. It was revealed that disabled persons have a poorer quality of life when compared to normal people and are discriminated towards by society and family alike. They must maintain family relationship; receive opportunity and be employed according to Vila et als'., (2015) study about the competitiveness for the accessible tourism market in Spain and Australia. Vila et al. (2015), formulated and compared the competitiveness factors between these two countries, employing data sets based on historical aspects and suitability of the destination for disability tourism. The results show that the competitiveness factors are different between these two countries. In the case of Spain, the vital factors are the climate, location and tourist structure, while quality of services, infrastructure and brand are the most important factors for Australia.

Research Methodology

Many tourist attractions or tourist spots that are ready to accommodate an accessible tourism market are referred to in the above mentioned study. However, the researcher's team has chosen the area based on the first TAT tourist manual for disabled persons and elderly. This manual incorporates Chiang Mai province into one of four suggested travel routes for accessible tourism market in seven places: Wat Phra Singh, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, Wat Chiang Man, Chiang Mai International Convention and Exhibition Center, Chiang Mai Night Safari, Promenada and Chiang Mai Zoo Aquarium.

This study aimed to obtain information from relevant parties in light of readiness of tourist attractions or tourist spots in Chiang Mai province focusing on the promotion of integrated development of tourism management to satisfy the needs of accessible tourism market including tourism facilities and accurate information that meet their needs. Both users and service providers offered the information transmitted and presented. In this regard, the researcher team has divided a sample of 73 respondents in this study into 5 groups:

- 1) Group of tourists with special accessibility needs.
- 2) Goods and service providers at that particular venue or tourist spots.
- 3) Tour guides and tour agencies .
- 4) Government officers and NGOs directly responsible for tourism promotion.
- 5) Normal persons who purchase the same goods and services as persons with an impairment.

The questions used were in a semi-structured questionnaire with the preparation of questions in advance to obtain the comprehensive information on all issues through interviews, which were carried out according to data collection guidelines and research ethics. The researchers used the NVivo12 Pro program in analyzing and presenting data based on the thematic approach so the statements were summarized in pursuance of the theme, while the presented data revealed the direct quotations of interviewees to reach the particular conclusions. This conclusions were then processed in conjunction with direct observations of tourists to obtain accurate conclusions based on the research objectives. The concept idea of this research can be concluded as shown in figure 1

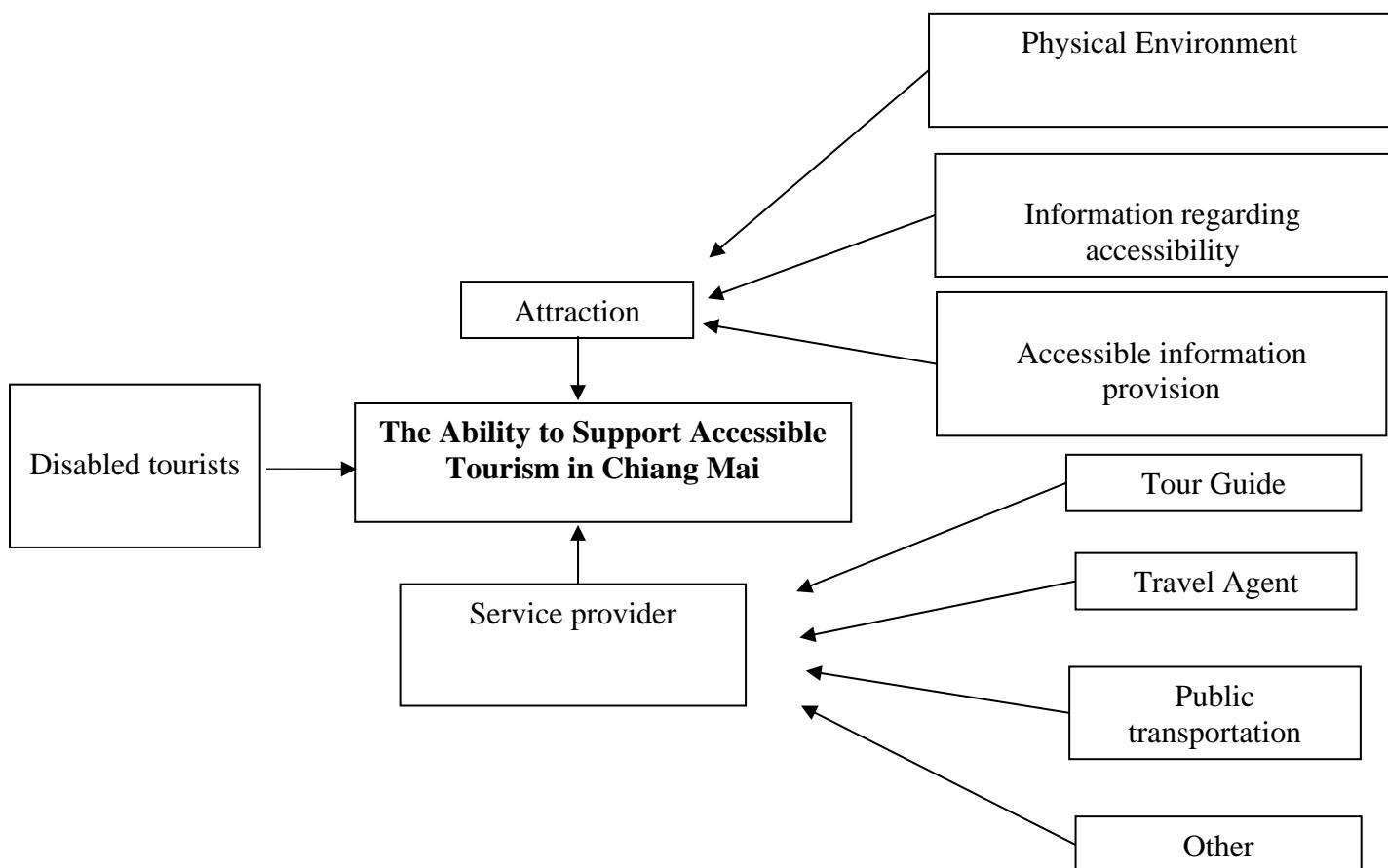


Figure 1. Concept idea of this research.

Research Findings

According to the interviews of 28 tourists with special accessibility needs (27 tourists with mobility disability and 1 elderly with mobility disability), it was found that most of them (65%) are female aged 19-78 years old or average age of 34.75 years. Respecting current status, 18 of them (64.28%) are employed while the other 8 (28.58%) are studying; another one is studying at postgraduate level and works at the same time; and the last one was a retired government official.

In the overall picture of tourists with special accessibility needs in this study, 14 of them held a bachelor's degree; the other 8 finished Grade 6 or equivalent (vocational certificate and vocational training course for disabled persons); 4 of them held high vocational certificates; one graduate Grade 3 (Prathom 3) level and the last one had not studied at all. With regard to the target group's work, 8 respondents were studying and do not work. Interestingly, 3 of them had 2 jobs. Most of the sample (14 or 70%) were employed within the system (at least 1 job). Besides, 5 served under the labor law department of the government, non-profit organizations and private organizations respectively. Regarding 8 goods and service providers in 7 tourist spots chosen for the interviews, the researcher recruited each of them from 7 tourist spots, except Chiang Mai Night Safari where 2 of them were selected. Almost every goods and service provider was male (7 of 8) aged between 33-66 years old with the average age of 47.5 years.

The majority of them (6 or 75%) were the service provider and only 2 were goods providers. The former were sub-contract company employees and, coincidentally, almost all of them (4 out

of 6) were security guards, while the latter was the business owner. Their work experience in the tourist spots was between 2 months-17 years or average work experience of approximately 6.77 years.

The tourists' attraction and type of tourism

There are 12 type of tourism in Thailand. The first 6 types of tourism are eco-tourism, arts and sciences educational attraction, historical attraction, natural attraction, recreational attraction and cultural attraction respectively. The rest are natural tourism with specific attraction type and resource in the area, which are hot spring attraction, beach attraction, waterfall attraction, cave attraction, isle attraction and national park attraction. According to the survey results of 28 disabled tourists, it was found that most of them prefer natural tourism, especially the beach attractions. There are also some tourists who prefer the cultural attractions and some are interested in all type of attractions. Furthermore, there is no relationship between the type of the interested attraction and the tourist's experience. Some wheelchair tourists would like to visit the natural attractions, but they cannot travel to them because of the limitations of their physical bodies. There is also no relevance between their body movement and the amount of their travel experience. A group of tourists who can move just only half of their body and need to use wheelchair may have more travel experience than the other group who use walking sticks.

Accessibility of 7 studied attraction in Chiang Mai

As described before that there are seven recommended attraction in Chiang Mai that have been chosen in this study. According to the survey results, eleven tourists have visited only one of all the 7 attraction, seven persons have traveled to 2 of 7 attractions and four tourists have been to 3 to 5 attractions. The most popular attraction is Phra Singh temple (13 persons) followed by Chiang Mai Night Safari and Doi Suthep temple (12 persons) and then Chiang Mai International Exhibition and Convention center (10 persons). The survey results can be divided into supporting factors and obstructing factors of these attractions as shown in figure 2.

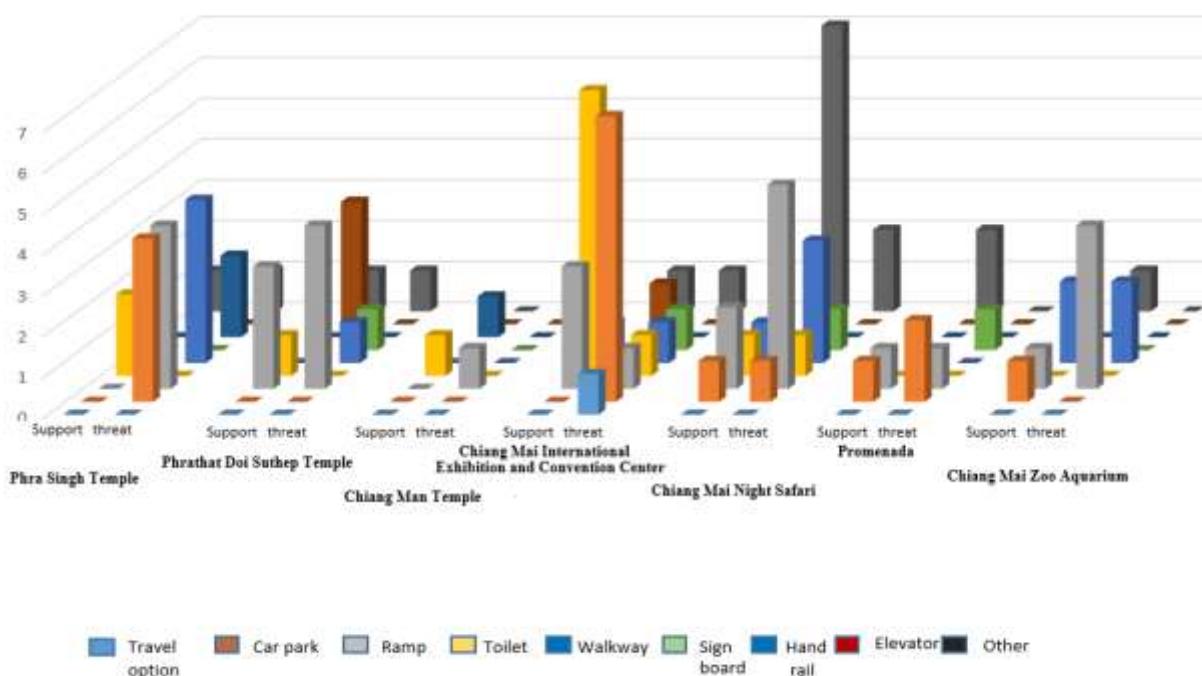


Figure 2. Survey results of 28 disabled tourists on 7 recommended attraction in Chiang Mai.



From figure 2, the supporting and obstructing factors on the physical environment of the accessibility in the seven attraction are described according to the tourists' experience. The results focus on all facilities for the special tourists in order to access to these places such as car parks, ramps, toilets, sign boards, handrails, elevators and wheelchairs including other services such as seats, services and admission fees. Meanwhile, they also described the obstructions and problems for this group of tourists to access the attraction, for example, lack or insufficient of the facilities. The results appear to show that the majority of the tourist's opinions are on Chiang Mai International Exhibition and Convention Center (26 comments), then Chiang Mai Night Safari (25 comments), Phra Singh Temple (18 comments), Phrthat Doi Suthep Temple (15 comments), Chiang Mai Zoo Aquarium (11 comments), Promenada (8 comments) and Chiang Man Temple (4 comments) respectively.

It can be seen that most of the comments are negative comments that describe the obstructions of accessing the attraction rather than positive comments describing the convenience of these places. They complain that there are limited facilities, which are not adequate to serve them right (about 12% of obstructing factors more than supporting factors). Phra Singh Temple gained the highest negative comments on this issue (25%), followed by the International Exhibition and Convention Center as well as Night Safari (21.67%), Phrthat Doi Suthep Temple (11.67%), Zoo Aquarium (10%), Promenada (6.67%) and Chiang Man Temple (3.33%) respectively.

Although most of the attraction gained more negative opinions than positive ones, there are still some attractions that have the ratio between the positive and negative comments at the same level, which are Chiang Man Temple, International Exhibition and Convention Center and Promenada. The ratio between negative and positive comments on Phra Singh Temple was 76%, follows by Chiang Mai Night Safari (11.09%), Phrthat Doi Suthep Temple (10%) and Chiang Mai Zoo Aquarium (9.09%) respectively.

To study the readiness of Chiang Mai province to accommodate accessible tourism market, the researcher applied the elements that support an accessible tourism market management in accordance with Puhretmair and Buhalis (2008). This was to determine the study framework in three aspects of readiness: physical accessibility, information regarding accessibility, and accessible information provision on-line.

One thing that the researcher emphasizes in this study is "the voice of persons with special accessibility needs" that reflects the readiness of various tourist spots in Chiang Mai province through their experience sharing. However, there is a limited number of research done on an accessible tourism market, especially in light of the direct voice of the target group. Therefore, the target group's word of mouth is presented in this study to reflect a more in-depth and clear picture. The tourism characteristics in Chiang Mai province are diverse e.g. ecotourism, agro-tourism cultural heritage tourism and creative tourism. All these are based on two major types of tourism resources, namely, natural and cultural tourism resources and man-made tourist spots such as zoos and amusement parks. To travel to these tourist spots, it is important for entrepreneurs to manage the tourist attraction accessibility for accommodating tourists. Also, the important tourism facilities such as accommodation, hotels, toilets, electrical systems and public transport systems should be managed along with the provision of convenient accessibility (Moyo & Tichaawa, 2017).

The standards and regulations under the law on Universal Design (UD) are now enforced in public buildings; however, this enforcement is not applied to the buildings or establishments in the municipality area resulting in voluntary application of such establishments. Meanwhile, the penalties for failure of public buildings to comply with the law are not stringent enough as in foreign countries (Rung Sripot, Vice President of Chiang Mai Municipality, Interview Date: 8 November 2018). The interviews and surveys of common areas in terms of tourism resources

and services and of physical and service accessibility in seven tourist attractions, which are in the study sample, are as follows:

1. Chiang Man Temple is an old and important temple for Chiang Mai people because of its status as the first royal temple within the city wall area and its beautiful interior architecture. Also, 'Sarakphak' festival, the local people's significant tradition, is held here. As renowned places among tourists, they can admire the beauty around Wiharn Luang (Monastery) and Chedi Chang Lorm (pagoda surrounded by elephant sculptures) and the outside area of a chapel. The flat surface pathway allows convenient accessibility by wheelchairs. However, tourists with special accessibility needs will not be able to go inside Wiharn Luang to pay respect to the Buddha images because there are only stairs at the entrance.

2. Chiang Mai International Exhibition and Convention Center is the largest conference center in Chiang Mai province and an important venue for organizing events. It has a reception hall for indoor exhibitions, an outdoor courtyard and a food court. Persons accompanying tourists with special needs and tour guides agree with its full readiness for accommodating tourists with special needs to conveniently enjoy sightseeing and shopping. However, its vast area results in a quite large distance between car park and exhibition hall. Nonetheless, the overall picture of the parking area is convenient. The flat surface connecting different areas is suitable for tourists with wheelchairs, travelling alone or with relatives. There are ramps and handrails along the relatively-smooth surface routes in the exhibition hall. The toilets and signboards are well prepared for accommodating tourists with special accessibility needs. It can be said that the visitors can walk around to enjoy the event conveniently.



Figure 3. Internal pathway inside the building of Ching Mai International Exhibition and Convention Center installed with ramps and handrails.

3. Chiang Mai Night Safari is open day and night and boasts good lighting as well as feeding and close sightseeing of animals. Tourists can enjoy sightseeing on their own or by a tram equipped wheelchair lifting system to facilitate boarding of tourists with special needs. Besides, wheelchairs are also available at its entrance. The majority of tourists with special needs travel with a tour agency, tour guide or relatives who take care of them during the course of travel. Additionally, the inner walkway has a relatively flat surface and handrails, while the floor level is suitable and not too steep. The signboards throughout Safari and toilets are available for tourists with special needs. The personnel and service staff are pleasant and willing to provide services and assistance at all times.

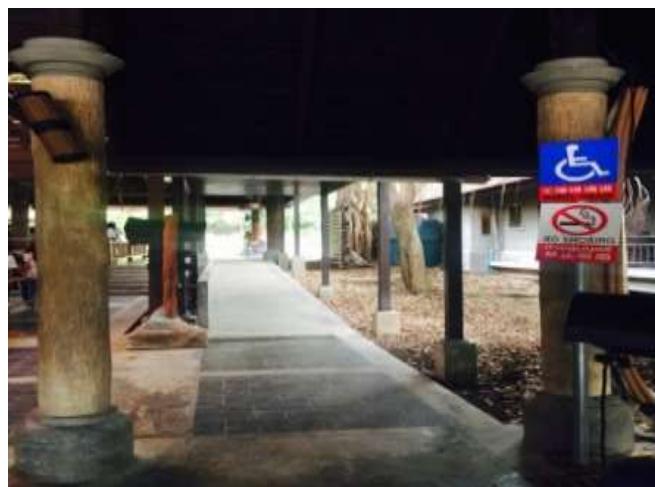


Figure 4. Inner walkway of Chiang Mai Night Safari.

4. Promenada is a shopping mall with beautiful architectural design in a contemporary Lanna and European style. Its Building A and Building B are connected with a skywalk. The parking area has a special zone for tourists with wheelchairs, while wheelchairs are also available around the public relations counter in front of the shopping mall. The signboards provide information and online data. The inside walkways and flat escalators fully accommodate tourists with special needs, while toilets with amenities are also available for them.



Figure 5. Signboard in front of the Promenada.

5. Phrathat Doi Suthep Temple has Lanna architectural style and is the most important temple in Chiang Mai province and renowned for tourists to pay respect to 'Phra That Doi Suthep'. The temple management aims to accommodate tourists with special needs, for example, elevators at the rear of temple as well as ramps and handrails are for the convenient accessibility of tourists with wheelchairs. The ramp also leads tourists to the scenic point where they can enjoy the beautiful atmosphere of Chiang Mai province. In addition, toilets and signboards are available for tourists with special needs. However, they may need close attention from relatives, caretakers and tour guides because the parking area may be quite far from the entrance to Phra That Doi Suthep.



Figure 6. Ramp designed for the accessibility tourists at Phra That Doi Suthep temple.

6. Chiang Mai Zoo Aquarium, located inside Chiang Mai Zoo, has a ramp leading to the entrance where parking area and wheelchairs are available for tourists with special accessibility needs. The tourists visiting the aquarium will be amazed with undersea life tunnel, which is its highlight. The majority of guides says that most of area has flat walkway and handrails, while toilets and signboards are quite ready to accommodate tourists with special needs. However, some places are quite steep and unsuitable for tourists with special needs or wheelchairs. With regard to the provision of information in advance, the tourists with special needs still receive unclear data. Caretakers or relatives need to accompany the tourists while visiting the aquarium.

7. Phra Singh Temple is an important temple of Chiang Mai province and boasts some beautiful architecture. The sacred Phra Singh Buddha Image is enshrined here. It is one of the temples where tourists and local people wish to visit and pray for blessings of prosperous life. The flat walkway around the chapel facilitates tourists with special needs to walk and look around. However, it may be inconvenient to enter the chapel to pay respect to Buddha Images because there are only stairs at the entrance. The signboards and online signage provide data on the historic background and sightseeing as well and are very convenient to access them. In addition, toilets with amenities are sufficiently available for tourists with special access needs.

The above review indicates capability of all seven tourist attractions in accommodating tourists with special needs. However, personnel must be trained and possess specific knowledge to provide relevant services because these tourists are unable to travel on their own. Apart from information accessibility, there is a need to create a sense of normal accessibility or physical accessibility in tourist spots or establishments. Moreover, the accessibility includes another two aspects: information regarding accessibility and accessible information provision on-line. In the viewpoint of most service providers, there is not much attention or readiness paid in this regard. Physical improvements are found in some places only. Mr. Pong Phaloprakan, Secretary of Tourism Social Press Association (TSPA), Chiang Mai province, said that "in the past, there was little information related to the tourist with special needs, especially the disabled persons with wheelchairs or with visual impairment." This is consistent with Khorakotch Khongnongnutch, President of Chiang Mai Tour Guide Association, (interview date:) who argues that, five years ago, the online access to information about tourist with special needs was quite difficult to find and, despite the improvements nowadays, there is still too little in such regard. This results in a small number of tourists and establishments to access the information and it is then inconvenient to travel. The service providers should thus adjust themselves to accommodate tourists with special accessibility needs – online narrative clips explaining what tourist services are available at one given establishment or tourist attraction; what the tourist attraction looks like; and how much the service charge is. A tourist route in Sankampaeng Hot



Springs in Sankampaeng district, Chiang Mai province is now under trial with capability to accommodate tourists with visual impairment (Braille signboards) and wheelchair allowing them to enjoy convenient travel.

Discussion of the Results and Conclusion

The research on the readiness of Chiang Mai province in terms of tourism management for tourists with special access needs can be summarized and analyzed according to the concepts of Puhretmair and Buhalis (2008) as follows:

1. The physical readiness of seven tourist attractions for impaired persons is recommended. The physical accessibility in terms of ramps, toilets surface/walkways and parking area, etc. is required by tourists with special accessibility needs. However, the overall picture of these seven tourist spots is not yet ready in light of accessibility. There is a bit more experience on obstacles or difficulty in travelling than on the enjoyment of convenience. Respecting the readiness of each location, Wat Chiang Man, Chiang Mai International Exhibition and Convention Center and Promenada are considered more prepared than other places. The experiences of difficulty and of enjoyment of convenience in these three places are in the same proportion. Respecting physical characteristics, Wat Phra Singh is the most unsuitable for this group of tourists. This is followed by Chiang Mai Night Safari, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep and Chiang Mai Zoo Aquarium, respectively.
2. This research based on tourists' experiences, is still unable to conclude that information on the accessibility to seven tourist attractions is enough ready for this group of tourists in terms of dissemination and comprehensiveness of information because no tourists have searched information before traveling to the destinations. Also, the findings indicate the unpopularity to systematically look for online information related to tourist spot accessibility. Friends are usually consulted, especially those without disability or accompanying persons.
3. Friends without disability are an important factor for tourists with special accessibility needs to travel. A large number of them say that they like to travel with persons without disability so that the latter can give assistance. According to some of tourists with special accessibility needs, they will not travel without friends. This agrees with experiences of goods and service providers who claim that almost every tourist with special accessibility needs often travel with persons without a disability.
4. The attitudes towards disabled persons in tourism activity leads to the unpreparedness in tourism management for tourists with special accessibility needs. The research findings are that the attitude towards disabled persons is a key factor for the readiness of tourism management for this group of tourists. On the one hand, in a direct manner, the failure to recognize the importance of travel of tourists with special accessibility needs to travel leads to the negligence to provide facilities for their accessibility.

On the other hand, in an indirect manner, tourists with special accessibility needs accept that they are unable to access the tourism attractions because they have to rely on accompanying persons without disability. This leads to the negligence of other important factors for the readiness of tourism management in terms of physical facilities and provision of information related to tourist attraction accessibility for this group of tourists. Moreover, the acceptance of attitude that disabled persons are unsuitable to travel means that the target group expresses the ignorance to travel or cites other reasons for not traveling e.g. lack of time. This will increase the unpreparedness of tourism management for tourists with special accessibility needs because they fail to use the services. This can be seen from the 'Deto' case study revealing the parking area facilities.



The tourism operators may use this concept in analyzing and formulate marketing plans to accommodate this group of tourists, which are both disabled persons and elderly. This tourism market may be overlooked by operators. In most travel, tourists with special accessibility needs usually have accompanying persons who may be relatives, siblings, friends or couples. This can be a potential market segment due to the emergence of aging society resulting in the rising number of this group of tourists. It is thus important for governments to formulate marketing strategies to accommodate tourists with special accessibility needs. Also, the public sector, travel agencies and tour guides agree that, in today's world of the 4.0 era, the accessibility to tourist spot information should be improved using mobile applications to promote equitable accessibility. It includes, for example, data on restaurants with good reviews and a nice atmosphere where tourists with special accessibility needs can enjoy the services or certain places, which connect with other tourist routes or attractions.

Recommendations

1. The physical facilities should be provided for tourists with special accessibility needs in several tourist attractions as in other tourist attractions, especially ramps, parking areas, surfaces/walkways and toilets. Apart from the provision of facilities, they must be truly accessible.
2. Attractions should promote the positive attitude towards disabled persons and show greater understanding towards tourists with special accessibility needs. The collected data on the attitude expected from people in the society by this group of tourists reflects their expectation for social changes.
3. The tourism business in Chiang Mai province should be improved to accommodate tourists with special accessibility needs. The understanding and awareness of the impaired and elderly should be improved. A data center should be established to promote accessibility to central information of the Department of Tourism, Tourism Authority of Thailand and Tourism and Sports Office in each province. When these organizations possess complete information, tour agencies can search and use it in planning tour programs for tourists with special accessibility needs, while tour guides can provide accurate travelling services.
4. For data accessibility, there should be the data center using technologies to gather websites and applications that provide information on facilities. The information available nowadays is general; therefore, the information should be adjusted into the specific ones needed (e.g. transportation system) for tourists with special needs. These tourists, who can be the elderly, disabled persons or relatives accompanying them during travel, will thus be able to easily and conveniently find such information.
5. The public system should be adjusted to accommodate tourists with special accessibility needs such as convenient ramps, elevators to visit higher floors and flat surface walkways without potholes or water pipes that obstruct tourists with special accessibility needs.
6. Tourist attractions must have facilities and be ready to accommodate tourists with special accessibility needs.
7. The establishments of tourism activities should be fully inspected and certified that they have implemented Universal Design standards of the Department of Tourism and Tourism.
8. It is suggested that the Immigration Bureau should collect the data in Chiang Mai province in order to know the statistics of tourists with special accessibility needs. This



promotes the formulation of measures to appropriately accommodate and plan the tourism management and public systems.

9. There should be training courses for providers of services for tourists with special accessibility needs such as safety, travel facilities, receipt of information, data accessibility and specific signboards for tourists with special accessibility needs.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to show gratitude to Chiang Mai University and National Research Council of Thailand for supporting through the Integral Research and Innovation Fellowship Program and also would like to thank to the qualified advisor for examining this research. This article is part of the research on The Ability to Support Accessible Tourism in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

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