

# ACCESSIBLE TOURISM, TOURISM FOR ALL: THE CURRENT SITUATION IN CATALONIA AND SPAIN

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article analyzes tourism in terms of an activity that is accessible to everybody, designed and managed for the whole of society without exception on grounds of age, ability, special needs or disabilities.

In the Manila Declaration of 1980, The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) first associated tourism with accessibility, acknowledging that tourism is a fundamental right and that it is necessary for human development.

Tourism must be planned in a way that makes it accessible to all, by designing and developing tourism and leisure activities that are appropriate for all segments of the population regardless of their physical, social or cultural requirements: people with disabilities, older people, children, pregnant women, temporarily disabled people, and families with small children in strollers, etc.

## 2. ACCESSIBLE TOURISM: IN SPAIN AND CATALONIA

Advanced societies have new problems; one of the most important is the aging of the world population, which is why the concept of accessible tourism needs to be rethought. Today, Spain has a population of over 7.5 million people aged between 65 and 80, this number is expected to rise by 2060 to 15.7 million. In addition to the aging of the population, there is a population of disabled people, which in Spain is around 4 million (EDAD 08), while in Catalonia this number is around 512,000.

It is important to note the existence of a more inclusive view of the real extent of accessibility, taking as a starting point the data on the total number of the beneficiaries of the removal of physical and sensory barriers, who are not just people with disabilities. In 2005, a study was conducted in Europe, which recognized a potential market of 127 million European travelers who would benefit from accessibility. These travelers include people with a permanent disability (visually, hearing, physically or mentally impaired), people affected by age (adults and children) and people affected by transient circumstances (pregnant women, temporary injuries...).

### 3. MAIN DIFFICULTIES IN ACHIEVING ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

The difficulties experienced by people with disabilities, when considered in the context of developing a comprehensive tourist experience, include, above all, the general lack of information and knowledge about their actual needs. Unlike other tourists, the attributes of disabled tourists are not being catered for because of erroneous or incomplete information.

The Spanish tourism industry has inaccessible facilities. To offer quality tourism it will need to make changes in both design and content. The customer must be able to enjoy this product in the most independent, convenient and secure way possible.

The reality for disabled individuals, when planning a trip, entails a series of barriers from the time of booking (the internet and travel agents), to the mode of transport (lack of adapted services, airports...) and finally the destination itself (domestic, travel, entertainment...).

### 4. THE FRENCH EXAMPLE: *The Tourisme et Handicaps* model

In France, the national brand *Tourisme et Handicap* was established in 2001 so as to develop a management tool for information on accessible tourist facilities and services. Its main feature is the provision of accessibility adapted from the viewpoint of four disabilities (the visually, hearing, physically or mentally impaired). Thanks to this strategy promoted by public institutions, the French tourism industry has been able to assess the market opportunity that is accessible tourism.

### 5. ACCESSIBLE TOURISM AS A MARKET OPPORTUNITY

Currently, accessible tourism offers the opportunity to expand the target audience without the need to specialize or refocus the business. We are not talking about a niche market that demands specific products, but an extension and adaptation of existing supply

The market opportunity presented covers seasonal demand (since they usually travel off-season), volume (or group travel companion) and quality (value added to the tourism product).

### 6. ACCESSIBILITY WITHIN CATALAN TOURISM

The Catalan government has committed itself to transforming Catalan tourism and becoming an accessible destination for all. Currently, the supply available for this group is negligible compared with the overall tourism range. However, society and the services industry are beginning to take into account the needs of different groups in the development of new areas, products and services.

The Government has introduced the concept «Tourism for All» in order to meet the accessibility standards of all Catalan tourism. This objective is under discussion for La Molina ski resort, to make it an adapted sports center.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusions focus on the idea that accessibility is comfort for everyone. Moreover, management, facility design and the presentation of tourism services that integrate accessibility improve the quality of supply and benefit all tourists, with or without disabilities.

The Spanish tourism industry has a great challenge to take on, which is to cater its facilities and services to the needs of people with disabilities and/or special needs. Because each one of them, linked to the specific requirements of their status, are potential tourists. We need to abolish the prejudiced preconceptions of the tourism industry in relation to this group and seek a more inclusive perspective.

