



Understanding the notion of
accessible spaces and places:

Sydney CBD

Visitor Accessibility Web portal

www.sydneyforall.com

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Understanding the broader issues of visitor accessibility is paramount to positive visitor experiences and building capacity for tourism and associated parks, leisure and recreation facilities and services for economic, environmental and social benefits. However, the challenges associated with ensuring that people can freely move within and between urban environments must be fully understood before access can be effectively planned and managed. Visitor accessibility encompasses all potential markets and users including seniors and people with disabilities. There are significant structural barriers that may constrain the experiences of this group in urban centres (Clear, 2000; Goggin & Newell, 2005; Imrie, 1996).

Globally there are over 600 million people with disabilities (Fujiura & Rutkowskikmitta, 2001; Mercer & MacDonald, 2007), equating to about 10% of humanity. Approximately 20% of the Australian population, or four million people, identify as having a disability. Of these people 520,000 have a mobility disability, 480,000 are blind or vision impaired, and 1 million are deaf or hearing impaired (ABS, 2003). The numbers of people with disabilities are set to increase due to the ageing of the population. WHO (2007a) state that by 2020 there will be 1.2 billion people over 60 years of age. The 'greying' of the population has been well documented by the ABS, identified by Tourism Research Australia as a market opportunity (Tourism Australia, 2005) and is a phenomenon that affects all of our major inbound markets. These trends have considerable implications

for global tourism (Dwyer, 2005). The World Health Organisation (WHO) has reflected concerns of ageing with the recent release of *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Global Guide* (2007a). The guide offers directions for urban planners, but also instils accountability through providing a checklist that older citizens can use to 'monitor progress towards more age-friendly cities' (WHO, 2007b).

BACKGROUND

A recent research project undertaken by the authors, sponsored by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) NSW State Node, undertook a detailed examination of visitor accessibility in urban areas. The State node sponsors were the Tourism and Transport Forum, NSW Department of Environment and

Climate Change, and Tourism NSW. Central to the study was defining the main geographic tourism precinct of Sydney and working with the main landholders of the City of Sydney, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, Royal Botanic Gardens and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The study itself focused on the main Sydney tourism precinct that incorporated:

- ❖ The transport hub from Central to Circular Quay;
- ❖ East and West Circular Quay;
- ❖ The Rocks;
- ❖ Royal Botanic Gardens;
- ❖ Sydney Harbour environs & Sydney Harbour National Park; and
- ❖ Manly Ferry, Manly boardwalk and North Head Lookout.

The overall approach was founded on a combination of destination



management (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003), experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and a geographic hierarchy of accessible tourism (Darcy, 2006) that sought to provide the market with the 'sense of place' that anyone would expect in visiting Sydney as a tourist destination. A secondary objective was to estimate the economic contribution of tourists with a disability using the Australian Tourism Satellite Account (Dwyer & Darcy, 2008). For the accessible destination experiences a template was developed to address these conceptual ideas. While the project's origins can be found in the relevant building codes and Australian Standards for access and mobility, this project sets itself apart by focusing on accessible destination experiences rather than the individual facilitators of access. Quite simply, what are the accessible destination experiences that are quintessentially Sydney?

The aim of the research project was to evaluate and assess urban tourism environments, including urban national parks, in the context of universal design principles. This research project incorporates all sectors of the tourism industry present within designated precincts that facilitate the 'essence of experience.'

KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT WERE TO:

1. Provide a framework for assessing access related considerations for all visitors to urban environments;

2. Utilise the framework to audit key urban attractions;
3. Evaluate existing wayfinding systems to consider whether they create barriers to movement in and around urban environments;
4. Estimate the economic contribution of the accessible tourism market; and
5. Make recommendations on accessible tourism to key stakeholders in urban centres.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology was informed by universal design (Preiser & Ostroff, 2001) and the geographies disability (Gleeson, 1999), which sought to understand how people experienced space and place. The conceptualisation of accessibility included people with mobility, hearing, vision, cognitive and environmental sensitivities as outlined in the Australian Disability Discrimination Act, 1992. The preliminary work involved access/management information system reviews of stakeholders within the precinct area, in-depth interviews with key informants, review of other potential experience providers discovered by the interviews and further snowballed interviews. Upon completion a list of possible experiences were identified that had the potential to provide tourists with disabilities a sense of the Sydney experience. The experiences were then access audited, observed and participant observed to validate their selection. Eighteen accessible

destination experiences were then developed through the approach outlined that brought together the 'sense of place', relevant access information, the enablers of tourism experience and the relevant photographs. All of these experiences already existed within the precinct areas. No new product development could be undertaken given the tight timeframe of this research project. However, scope exists to provide a blueprint for developing this approach in other precinct areas and to develop new accessible destination experiences.

BENEFITS TO INDUSTRY

The research resulted in four major outcomes that benefit industry stakeholders and travellers. First, the economic modelling of the market segment provides a sound understanding of the contribution of the accessible tourism market to the economy. Second, the review of information and facilities provision helps industry stakeholders understand the need of travellers with a disability, and suggests how such provision can be improved. Third, the accessible destination experiences and the Web portal developed are a first of its kind developed to be compliant to international standards of Web accessibility. The experiences offer quality access information to anyone who is planning to visit Sydney. Fourth, the Web portal provides an opportunity for collaborative marketing and branding through Sydney for All. The research team envisage that the study methodology and approach can be replicated in other destination contexts, and that the one-stop portal concept can be extended to a state and national-level.

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings can be split into two major areas:

1. Economic Contribution; and
2. Accessible Destination Experience

Economic Contribution

Based on a disability module included within the National Visitor Survey



Domain	Organisation/Product	Experience
SHFA	Self Guided Walking Tours	Accessible Rocks Rolling Tour
SHFA	The Rocks Discovery Museum	Interactive history of The Rocks pre-European days to the present
	The Garrison Church	Historic insight into Sydney's first church
	Sydney Opera House	Access "Lift" backstage Tour
	Sydney Theatre Company	Sensory Interpreted Performances (SOH and Walsh Bay Theatre)
RBG	Cadi Jam Ora First Encounters	Understand indigenous Australians
RBG	Mrs Macquarie's Chair	Iconic View of the Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge
RBG	RBGardens' Guided Tour	Provides insights into the Gardens
RBG	NSW Art Gallery	After Hours Auslan tours
CoS	Museum of Contemporary Art	Art Gallery and Restaurant
	Dendy Cinema Opera Quays	Accessible Cinema with hearing augmentation + foreign language subtitles;
CoS	Customs House (City of Syd)	Public Exhibition, Meeting & Reading Space
Harbour	Captain Cook Cruises	Guided Sydney Harbour cruise with lunch, dinner or coffee!
Harbour	True Blue	Sydney Whale Watching experience
Harbour	Sydney Ferries	Manly Ferry Trip (All)
NPWS	DECC NPWS	North Head Lookout Scenic Sydney Harbour
NPWS	DECC NPWS	Fort Denison (Pinchgut)
	Sydney Light Rail & the Fishmarkets	Seafood Sydney!

(Bureau of Tourism Research, 2003), it was estimated that in Australia tourists with a disability:

- ❖ Spent between \$8034.68 million and \$11980.272 million;
- ❖ Contributed between \$3075.5243 million and \$4580.219 million to Tourism Gross Value Added (12.27% - 15.60 % of total tourism GVA);
- ❖ Contributed between \$3885.168 million and \$5787.435 million to Tourism Gross Domestic Product (11.02% - 16.41% of total); and
- ❖ Sustained between 51,820 and 77,495 direct jobs in the tourism industry (11.6%- 17.3% of direct tourism employment).

Accessible Destination Experiences

The methodology identified 18 accessible destination experiences (see table on this page).

In reviewing the experiences, it became apparent that most of the experiences are only appropriate for one dimension of access, with some being appropriate for two and a number of experiences being appropriate for all dimensions of access.

All experiences included are those that domestic and international tourists and daytrippers would seek out during a visit to Sydney. They are accessible destination experiences that are quintessentially Sydney. Most visitors would seek information about those experiences either before they travel to Sydney or before they attempt to visit the attraction. The internet is identified as a growing source of information and the vast majority of Sydney's experiences benefit from internet-based accessing of their information. Information availability, detail and accuracy can be a significant constraint to travel. It is the way in which information is conveyed, which can present a constraint. Website accessibility is critical to inclusive organizational practice. For example, font sizes, font colours, contrast, page backgrounds and page design can

Sydney for All Web Portal

The screenshot shows the 'Sydney For All' web portal. The main content area includes a section titled 'Sydney For All' with a description of Sydney as an exciting, colourful and vibrant city. Below this, there are sections for 'Things to do in Sydney', 'Arts and culture', and 'Outdoors'. The 'Arts and culture' section highlights the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Sydney Opera House. The 'Outdoors' section mentions the Sydney Harbour National Park. A sidebar on the right provides information on 'How to use this website' and 'Symbols used in this website', including icons for accessibility features like wheelchair access, hearing loop, and audio description.



Paved pathway

all present a barrier to people with a vision impairment (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2002). Further, even if the content and the accessibility are sound, locating the access information can be a barrier particularly where there are no collaborative outlets for accessible destination experiences.

The research team then developed a mock Web portal as a concept to present to the IRG and stakeholders. From the significant support given at this meeting, Tourism New South Wales decided to move from the conceptual to developing a test Web portal. After further discussions with the IRG and the stakeholders, Tourism New South Wales has decided to brand

the Web portal Sydney for All. The test website was launched in June 2008 and includes a built in feedback loop to test consumer perspectives. The development of the Web portal was assessed for its level of compliance to the international W3C protocols and received the highest level of compliance that the assessors could grant with the reviewer stating, 'The Tourism New South Wales Accessible Tourism Website is by far the most accessible website the reviewer has encountered' (Frederiksen, 2008, p. i)

The research was guided by the principles of independence, equity, and dignity to create enabling accessible tourism experiences. Developing experiences based on the three

underlying principles of accessible tourism, an understanding of universal design and the experience economy need to be placed in context with destination management processes. The outcome should empower people with disabilities to make informed decisions about whether accessible destination experiences are appropriate for their access and mobility needs. Operationalising this philosophy within the website can be seen in the screenshot on the previous page. The symbols were deliberately defined to inform people as to the access provisions available. All the accessible destination experiences were then linked to the organisation's wayfinding systems and detailed access information. This process is outlined in the case study of the North Head Lookout (see page 34).

OUTCOMES

This scoping project has broken new ground in accessible tourism through accessible destination experience development. Where previous work on accessibility has focused on individual enablers—transport, accommodation, attractions, wayfinding and industry attitudes to disability—this research project has gone to the essence of why people travel to destinations in the first place: to experience the 'sense of place.' Whether people have access requirements or not they should be able to have the same 'sense of place' as anyone else travelling to an area. Yet, no research has focused on this aspect of accessible tourism.

The research offers five major opportunities for benefits to stakeholders and travellers with disabilities. They include:

1. The estimated economic contribution of the market segment based on the Tourism Satellite Account provides a sound understanding of the contribution of the accessible tourism market to the economy;
2. The review of information and the destination experience provision helps industry stakeholders understand the need of travellers with a disability, and suggests how such provision can be improved;



Sandstone outcrop



Interpretative plaque

3. The accessible destination experiences and the Web portal are the first of its kind. They offer quality access information about accessible destination experiences to anyone who is planning to visit Sydney;
4. The Web portal can also serve as a collaborative marketing channel for industry stakeholders; and
5. A consolidated access map will provide tourists with disabilities with a single wayfinding instrument in the precinct area.

CONCLUSIONS: PROJECT POTENTIAL AND FUTURE EXTENSION PROJECT

The research team has been working with Tourism Australia and each of the State Tourism Organisation's representatives on the accessible tourism task force to develop an Australian wide approach to accessible tourism information provision across all facets of tourism, including urban

tourism precincts. This research project has contributed significantly to an understanding of the requirements for developing accessible destination experiences in urban environments. Australia is well positioned to be at the forefront of developing accessible tourism market opportunities through not only this research project but also a series of other research projects and initiatives. These are:

- ❖ research agenda accessible tourism (Darcy, 2006);
- ❖ the economic contribution of accessible tourism (Darcy, Cameron, Dwyer et al., 2008);
- ❖ information needs for accessible tourism accommodation (Darcy, 2007a, 2007b);
- ❖ business case studies on accessible tourism (Darcy, Cameron, Pegg, & Packer, 2008);
- ❖ understanding the experiences of tourists with vision impairment (Packer, Small, & Darcy, 2008);
- ❖ the Western Australian **You're Welcome** Program (City of Perth, 2007; Disability Services Commission (WA), 2000); and
- ❖ the Accessible Alpine Tourism Project (Dickson & Hurrell, 2008).

The STCRC has the opportunity to contribute to an innovative approach of an only recently recognised market segment area. The accessible tourism market has been recognised in Europe, by UNESCAP and the United States

as having significant potential. For example, the European Commission's research on the One-Stop Shop for Accessible Tourism Europe (OSSATE), Europe for All that was the outcome of the OSSATE research and the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) provide an insight to developing a national approach to accessible tourism in Australia. Similarly, the ASEAN countries with the facilitation of UNESCAP had held a series of initiatives to develop a cooperative approach to accessible tourism since 2000. It is suggested that there would be synergies to collaborate with Tourism New Zealand on developing an Australasian approach to accessible tourism given that both countries are long haul destinations. Further, both countries use an identical set of standards for access and mobility, which are the basis for understanding the accessibility of the built environment.

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Tourists enjoying the lookout



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Author contemplating the view

