

ABSTRACT

People with disabilities are becoming more common throughout the world, and it is possible that disabled people will participate in the travel and tourism industry. As a result, tourism workers should prioritize accessible tourism. The SLTDA (2018) reported that 2,333,796 tourists visited Sri Lanka in 2018. Every year, 88 percent of people with physical disabilities take vacations, and 15% of the world's population (1 billion people) has some form of disability (WHO, 2018). The study leads us to know how hoteliers are being ready to facilitate differently-abled community when come to the hospitality sector and will get an idea about the how far hoteliers know about this new tourism trend. Perception of hoteliers towards the differently-abled community, contemporary practices used to cater differently-abled community and strategies used to capture the new markets are the main things could identify as objectives of study. The study is primarily based on primary data gathered from hoteliers. Primary data were collected from 5 respondents in selected star class hotels in the western province who had registered with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in conjunction with the purposeful sampling technique. The qualitative data analytical method was used, and the collected data were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis. According to the study's findings, the differently-abled guest market is a new emerging market in Sri Lanka. It is a somewhat complex industry, and Sri Lankan hoteliers must seize opportunities for potential developments in this new market. In the Sri Lankan context, five-star hotels have necessary accessible facilities, but there are not enough facilities for the differently-abled community below five-star hotels. There is a lack of literature about the differently-abled market in previous studies, and Sri Lanka has a lack of accessible accommodations for differently-abled guests. Other findings include a lack of strategies for managing differently-abled guests and a lack of modern practices for gaining a competitive advantage. Finally, the study revealed that more research should be conducted in order to gain a better understanding of this market. Learn from other countries, develop staff knowledge, skills, and attitudes, develop and implement new contemporary practices, and develop strategies to manage differently-abled markets.

Keywords: Accessible tourism, disabled tourist, hotels, Differently-abled community.