Enabling Success in Accessible Travel and Events

ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL SOLUTIONS

Background

Around the world, one in five people, over 1.3 billion individuals, live with a disability, representing both a major social responsibility and a powerful economic opportunity. Yet many still face barriers that limit participation in travel, meetings, and events. For instance, recent research highlights that 93% of disabled delegates continue to encounter barriers when attending events, underscoring the gap between provision and experience.

**1 in 5 people globally**
live with a disability

=

1.3 billion people

This whitepaper explores how Accessible Travel Solutions helps destinations and organizations make accessibility a core business strategy. It presents the global context, the business case for inclusion, and introduces the Sage Accessibility Cube, a framework that drives measurable progress across facilities, customer service, and information.

Using real-world examples and proven methodologies, it provides a roadmap for leaders to make accessibility a sustainable and competitive advantage. This need is underscored by global data from the World Health Organization, which shows that disability prevalence varies across regions: Europe (20%), the Americas (19.4%), South-East Asia (15.6%), Western Pacific (15.3%), Eastern Mediterranean (14.7%), and Africa (12.8%).

Prevalence of disability by region

20%
Europe

14.7%
Eastern
Mediterranean

15.6%
South-East Asia

19.4%
Americas

12.8%
Africa

15.3%
Western Pacific
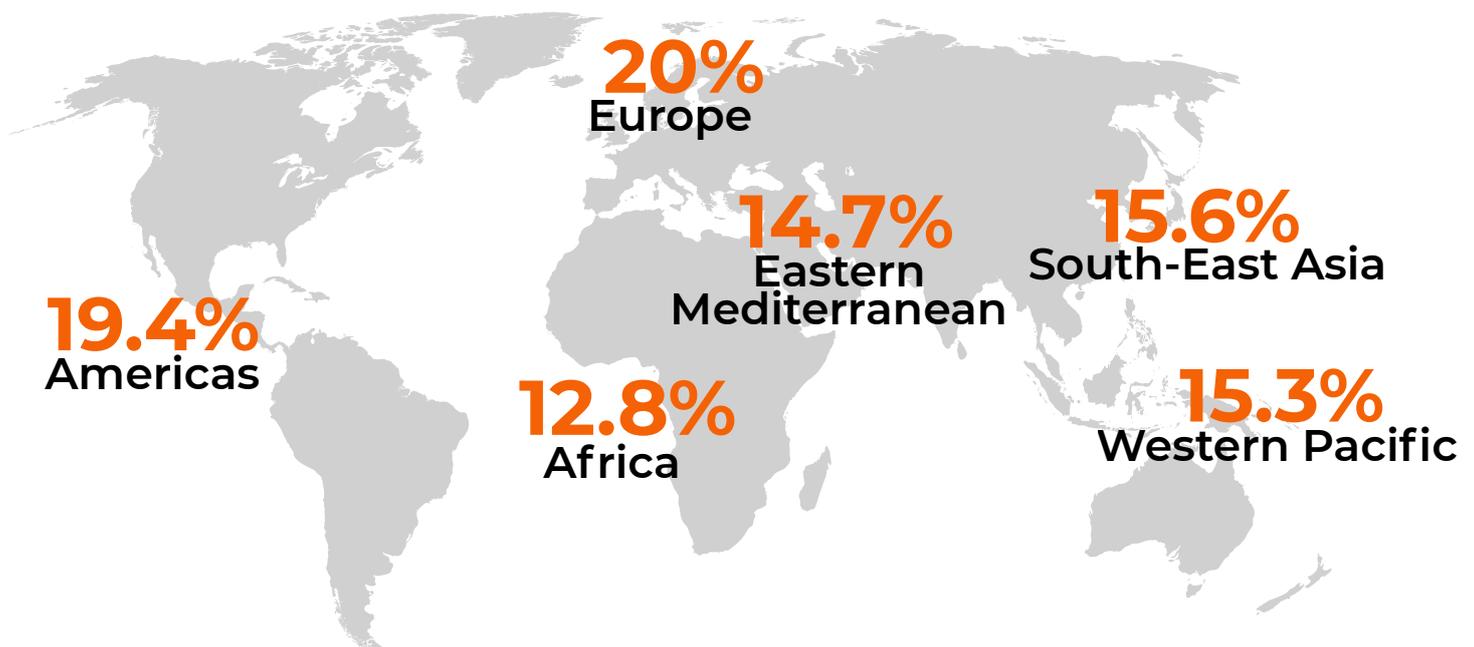
The Business Case for Accessibility

The Accessible Travel Market

With 20% of the population and half of all seniors living with a disability, People with Disabilities (PwDs) represent travel's most untapped opportunity. When accessibility needs are met, they become loyal, longer-stay, and off-peak guests, driving steady demand across leisure, business, and events.

20%

Leisure Travel

Business Travel

Meetings and Events

Improve Customer Service
- Accessibility training helps staff anticipate needs and provide personalized, dignified support.
- Better service increases satisfaction, repeat visits, and positive reviews.

Decrease Risks, Complaints, Negative PR, and Lawsuits
- Proactively fixing accessibility issues mitigates legal exposure and compliance risks.
- Reduces complaints and avoids negative viral moments that can hurt brand trust.

Promote Inclusion Across Customers and Companies
- Accessibility reflects commitment to DEI and ESG values that customers and employees expect.
- Strengthens community relationships, employee pride, and brand loyalty.

Increase Revenue and Non-Peak Season Travelers
- Travelers with disabilities and seniors often stay longer and travel during non-peak seasons.
- Meeting accessibility needs grows occupancy, spending, and loyal returning guests.

Competitive Advantage and Brand Reputation
- Accessibility demonstrates quality, professionalism, and care attributes valued by guests, investors, and event organizers alike.
- Recognition through certifications, awards, and partnerships builds long-term brand equity and public trust.

Why should we care about accessibility?

Respecting human rights and equality: Ensures all individuals, regardless of ability, can travel, work, and participate freely.

Enhancing comfort and independence: Improves well-being through thoughtful design and inclusive service.

Building confidence and trust: Creates environments where guests feel respected, safe, and welcomed.

Strengthening reputation and loyalty: Inclusive experiences inspire positive reviews, brand advocacy, and repeat visitation.

Expanding markets and growth: People with disabilities and seniors represent 20% of the global population, a powerful, loyal market often overlooked.

How accessible are your events and facilities to attendees with disabilities?

Complete a survey to evaluate your Travel Business Accessibility

Start Accessibility Progress Check

The Five Disability Categories

Understanding disability begins with recognizing the most common types people experience worldwide, and the data below highlights just how widespread these needs are across the global population.

Manual or Power Wheelchair

Mobility Scooter

Crutches, Canes

Amputees

Slow Walkers

Mobility
13.7 %

Low Vision

Blind

Color Blindness

Light Sensitivity

Visual
4.6 %

Deaf

Hard of Hearing

Individuals with Auditory Processing Disorders (APD)

Hearing
5.9 %

ADHD

Autism

Social Anxiety Disorder

Dyslexia / Dyscalculia

Speech Disorders

Dementia & Acquired Brain Injuries

Neuro divergent
10.8 %

Food Allergies

Skin Allergies

Allergy
6.2 %

Accessibility Etiquette

01 Never touch a mobility device without permission

02 Communicate at eye level where possible

03 Ask before assisting; if declined, respect it

04 Use clear, plain language; avoid jargon

05 Be patient, allow extra time; don't rush

06 Offer options; let the guest choose

07 Describe what you're doing; check understanding

**08** Address the person directly, not their companion or interpreter

Inclusive, Non-Offensive Language

	Instead of this….	**Say this…**
Use People First Language	Disabled People	People with Disabilities
Avoid Potentially Offensive Terminology	Wheelchair Bound Wheelchair Confined	Wheelchair User
	Handicapped or Crippled	Disabled
	Midget	Little Person
	Caretaker	Travel Companion
	Normal Person	Able-bodied Person
Avoid Condescending Euphemisms	Differently Abled Special Needs	Disabled Person with a Disability
Avoid Describing Disability as an Illness or Problem	"suffers from" "victim of"	"has a spinal cord injury"
Phrase Questions and Instructions Correctly	"Can you walk?"	"Would you like assistance?"
	Have a seat (while waiting).	Please wait over there.
	It is a 5 minute walk.	It takes 5 minutes to get there.

The Three Pillars of Accessible Travel

What Disabled Travelers Need

Extensive research (and our own 200,000 hours of accessible trip planning) has identified that disabled travelers require **The Three Pillars of Accessible Travel:**
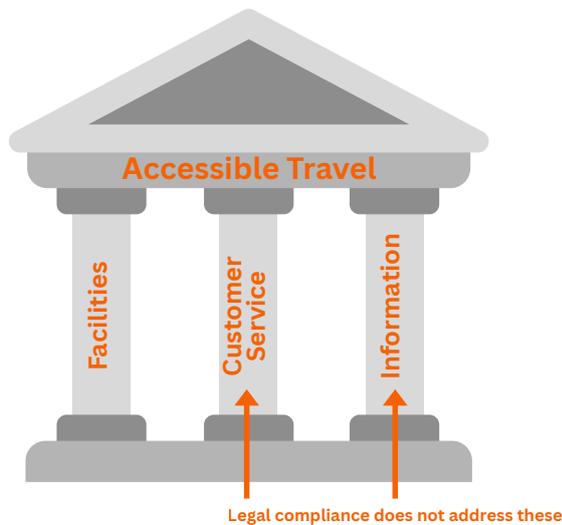
1. **Accessible Facilities**

2. **Accessible Customer Service**

3. **Accessibility Information**

1. Accessible Facilities

Accessibility is more than ramps and wide doors. It includes both the built environment and the digital environment. While laws and building codes guide physical accessibility, they often overlook elements like furniture. Digital accessibility is defined by WCAG standards, which ensure websites can be read by screen readers for blind users.

2. Accessible Customer Service

Policies, processes, and training often sit outside legal requirements and are where trips succeed or fail. How you take a booking, how you confirm access features, how staff respond on site, and how exceptions are handled will determine whether the experience works in practice. In fact, customer service is often more important than physical accessibility for neurodivergent travelers.

3. Accessibility Information

The biggest industry gap is reliable information. Travelers must trust they won't face barriers before leaving home. Effective information is:

Accurate - Verify and keep up to date
Detailed - Provide exact measurements
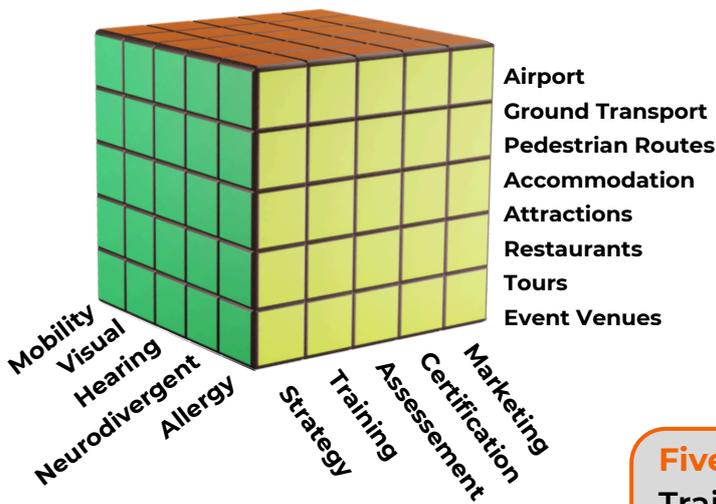**Clear** - Include photos

Comprehensive - Cover all of the journey
Trusted - Support it with a trusted source

The Sage Accessibility Cube: A Framework for Measurable Inclusion

At Accessible Travel Solutions, our goal is to address these three pillars in a comprehensive way. This approach saves time, reduces costs, and maximizes return on investment for our customers.

The Sage Accessibility Cube

Airport
Ground Transport
Pedestrian Routes
Accommodation
Attractions
Restaurants
Tours
Event Venues

Mobility
Visual
Hearing
Neurodivergent
Allergy

Strategy
Training
Assessement
Certification
Marketing

The Sage Accessibility Cube defines accessibility through multiple dimensions that align with every part of the traveler journey and every type of access need. We address accessibility across:

Eight Traveler Journey Parts: Airport, Ground Transport, Pedestrian Routes, Accommodation, Attractions, Restaurants, Tours and Event Venues.

Five Components of Success: Strategy, Training, Assessment, Certification and Marketing.

Five Disability Categories: Mobility, Visual, Hearing, Neurodivergent and Allergy.

Case Studies - DMOs

Ras Al Khaimah

Ras Al Khaimah partnered with Accessible Travel Solutions to improve accessibility throughout the visitor journey. Over 22 months, 42 sites including hotels, attractions, an airport, and transit hubs, were assessed using the Sage Accessibility Cube Framework along with ISO 21542, ISO 21902, the UAE Universal Design Code, and local RAK building regulations. The project also delivered staff training, a Sage Accessibility Leadership Workshop, and competitive benchmarking to help strengthen RAK's position as a leading inclusive tourism destination. **Click here to view the full case study**

Project Dates: 2023-2025

Project Components:
- Accessibility gaps identified with clear, prioritized recommendations
- Frontline staff across five key roles trained for inclusive service
- Digital accessibility improved for 10 tourism websites
- Increased visitor confidence and satisfaction
- RAK positioned as a forward-looking, inclusive destination of choice.

Frankenmuth CVB

Frankenmuth, Michigan partnered with Accessible Travel Solutions to strengthen accessibility across its historic tourism community. Over 13 months, 55 facilities were assessed, digital accessibility was reviewed, and five staff training modules were delivered. A Leadership Workshop prepared local stakeholders to sustain improvements. The initiative led to multiple ATS Accessibility Certifications, reduced compliance risks, and an enhanced reputation as a welcoming destination for all visitors. **Click here to view the full case study**

Project Dates: 2024-2025

Project Components:
- Accessibility assessments completed at 55 facilities.
- Digital accessibility reviews improved online visitor experience.
- Five training modules delivered for hospitality and attraction staff.
- Leadership Workshop strengthened community knowledge and commitment.

Case Studies - Events

Professional Convention Management Association

PCMA partnered with Accessible Travel Solutions to enhance accessibility at its Convening Leaders conference, covering venues, stages, registration, and networking spaces. ATS assessed on-site and digital touchpoints, integrated inclusive design into event operations, and trained staff and volunteers to better support attendees with disabilities. The initiative positioned PCMA as a leader in accessible event management and established a model for future global meetings. Click here to view the full case study

Project Dates:
November 2024 - February 2025

Project Components:
- Conducted accessibility assessment of all event venues and digital platforms
- Reviewed registration, signage, and attendee materials for inclusive design
- Delivered staff and volunteer training on accessibility and disability awareness
- Advised on accessible stage design, seating, and networking layouts
- Developed post-event accessibility recommendations for future PCMA events.

Project Dates:
January – March 2026

Project Components:
- Comprehensive accessibility assessment of Pennsylvania Convention Center (PCC)
- Assessment based on Sage Best Practices, ADA, ISO 21542, ISO 21902
- Identification of non-conformities and areas for improvement
- ATS Accessibility Certification based on evaluation results and PCC's response with corrective actions.

Pennsylvania Convention Center

The Pennsylvania Convention Center (PCC) in Philadelphia partnered with Accessible Travel Solutions to obtain Sage Accessibility Certification, demonstrating its commitment to providing an inclusive experience for all visitors. The certification involved a full-day, on-site assessment covering mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, and allergy-related accessibility. ATS analyzed compliance, identified areas for improvement, and verified PCC's alignment with national and international accessibility standards. Click here to view the full case study

Case Studies - Cruises

MSC Cruises

MSC Cruises partnered with Accessible Travel Solutions to improve accessibility aboard the MSC World Europa during the shipbuilding stage. For 2 months, ATS reviewed all guest areas using ADA, ISO 21542, ISO 21902, and ATS Best Practices. The final report outlined key barriers and provided clear recommendations to enhance accessibility, guest service, accessibility information, and inclusive marketing.
Click here to view the full case study

Project Dates:
June – July 2023

Project Components:
- Accessibility assessment of the public areas and cabins on MSC World Europa
- Application of accessibility standards (ADA, ISO 21542, ISO 21902, Sage Best Practices).

Project Dates:
May – September 2025

Project Components:
- Accessibility assessment of 1 ship (Star Pride)
- Application of accessibility standards (ADA, ISO 21542, ISO 21902, ATS Best Practices)
- ATS accessibility training for crew
- Certification of 2 of 5 disability types.

Windstar Cruises

Windstar Cruises partnered with Accessible Travel Solutions to enhance accessibility aboard the Star Pride. Over a 3.5-month assessment, ATS reviewed the guest journey from embarkation to onboard amenities, using the Accessibility Cube Framework, ADA, ISO 21542, ISO 21902, and ATS Best Practices. Crew members received Accessibility Awareness Training to strengthen service and support. The Star Pride earned ATS Certification for two disability types and ATS Checked status for three others.
Click here to view the full case study

Case Studies - Tourism

World Travel & Tourism Council

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) partnered with John Sage to develop the Inclusive & Accessible Travel Guidelines, a practical framework that helps the global travel industry create more inclusive experiences. The guidelines combine research, expert insights, and lived experience to give companies clear direction on improving accessibility across every stage of the traveler journey, supporting industry-wide consistency and accountability.

[Click here to view the full case study](#)

Project Dates:
January – May 2021
(5 months)

Project Components:
- Development of the Inclusive & Accessible Travel Guidelines for the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)
- Comprehensive analysis of existing accessible travel research and global standards.

UN Tourism

Project Dates:
February – March 2024
(3 months)

Project Components:
- Reviewing the structure and content of the first draft of accessibility guidelines targeting tour operators, travel agencies, and travel professionals.
- Providing expert recommendations to ensure the guidelines address real-world accessibility needs within the tourism industry.

UN Tourism issued accessibility guidelines to tour operators and travel agents on how to implement ISO 21902, the international standard for accessible tourism. Drawing on more than 15 years of experience planning trips for travelers with disabilities, John significantly revised the structure and content of the initial draft, transforming it into a clear and operational resource for tourism professionals rather than philosophical or academic material.

The final document was published in September 2024. Following the successful collaboration, UN Tourism invited John to develop event accessibility guidelines.

The Sage Difference

John Sage is a global leader in advancing accessibility within the travel and meetings industries. His extensive advisory roles span multiple sectors, including leisure travel, business travel, and MICE. Mr. Sage's perspective is shaped by his vast experience and significant contributions, which include:

- Manual wheelchair user who has **traveled to 50+ countries**
- **Founder and CEO** of two companies:
    - Sage Traveling (B2C) - The largest provider of accessible travel in Europe
    - Accessible Travel Solutions (B2B) - The provider of the majority of the cruise industry's accessible shore excursions & the world leader in accessible travel consulting, training, certification, and marketing.
- The **only accessible travel CEO** on the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)

> **Did You Know?**
> John Sage authored the accessibility standards for WTTC, EIC, GSTC, and UN Tourism?

- **Accessibility advisor** for:
    - Tourism: World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), UN Tourism, Destinations International (DI), Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), Airports Council International (ACI), the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA), and the US Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (TTAB)
    - Business Travel: Global Business Travel Association (GBTA)
    - MICE: Professional Convention Managers Association (PCMA) and IMEX
    - Sustainability: Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (WSHA)
    - Inclusion: Tourism Diversity Matters (TDM), Travel Unity (TU), and the Global Diversity Alliance (GDA)
- Certified Professional in Accessibility Core Competencies (CPAAC) by the **International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP)**
- Speaker on accessible travel topics at GBTA, PCMA, CLIA, Destinations for All, WTTC, ASTA, FITUR, Arabian Travel Market (ATM), Travelability, and B Tourism
- Winner of Travel Unity's **Inclusion Champion of the Year** (2025), Travel Weekly's **Tour Operator of the Year** (2019 and 2025), and Women Leading Tourism's **Committed Company of the Year** (2026)

John Sage's unique insights and extensive network enable him to meet the current needs of the travel industry while also anticipating future demands. His pioneering efforts have significantly enhanced the inclusivity and accessibility of travel, making it possible for individuals with disabilities to enjoy travel experiences worldwide.

Our Solutions

	Training Build Skills That Last	Industry-leading accessibility training for: • Destination Managers • Hospitality Professionals • Event Planners • Tour Guides • Travel Agents Graduate becomes certified in accessible travel.
	Assessments Know Where You Stand	Identify accessibility strengths, compliance risks, and customer service opportunities across: • Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) • Hotels, attractions, and restaurants • Convention centers and event venues • Cruise ships
	Certification Gain Trusted Recognition	Earn trusted recognition and demonstrate leadership in accessible travel.
	Marketing Share Your Success	Showcase your accessibility achievements and grow your customer base through: • Inspiring and compelling content creation • Targeted digital marketing campaigns • Exposure to Sage's global audience
	Consulting Get Expert Guidance	Not sure where to start? We'll help you to create, actionable accessibility plan that fits your goals, resources, and timeline. Our team brings global expertise and a practical approach to every project.

Email contact@accessibletravelsolutions.com for a free consultation

ATS Key Differentiators

In the realm of accessible travel and events, one company stands unparalleled in its commitment to inclusivity and excellence. The trailblazing organization Accessible Travel Solutions has achieved numerous accolades and boasts a level of expertise that sets it apart from all others in the industry.

✓	Comprehensive accessibility analysis based on 8 accessibility standards and Sage Best Practices
✓	Experienced team with 200,000+ hours of accessible trip planning experience over 15+ years
✓	Convenient one-stop-shop for all your accessibility needs including consulting, training, certification, and marketing
✓	Trusted leadership by a World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) member and IAAP certified access professional

Partners and Clients

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