

# Accessibility information on the websites of New Zealand luxury lodges

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People with disabilities should be able to participate with equity and dignity in tourism and hospitality [1]. An essential aspect of this, is the provision of accurate, reliable, and detailed information that can enable travel participation, and ensure those with disabilities make informed decisions based on their individual needs, noting the heterogeneity of disability [2, 3]. This article is a snapshot of our wider study determining the provision of accessibility information on the websites of New Zealand luxury lodges.

The luxury tourism sector has experienced significant growth globally; while in 2019 it was worth USD891 billion, despite the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is estimated to increase to USD1.6 trillion by 2026 [4]. Luxury tourism comprises a range of products and experiences that draw on extraordinary events, activities, and experiences, along with hospitality that provides innovative service and excellence [5]. In a post-COVID world, New Zealand is now seeing the return of tourists who are willing to pay a premium price for bespoke luxury experiences that cater to a wide range of preferences and interests, and which are therefore likely to include luxury accommodation.

In our study, we utilised the national tourism board’s dedicated “Inclusive and accessible travel” webpage to locate the sample, which was of Qualmark endorsed New Zealand luxury lodges. The Qualmark framework rating system makes it easy for tourists to determine the level of quality and service to expect, as does its categorisation of different accommodation types. New Zealand luxury lodges, for example, provide unique and inspired luxury experiences to domestic and international tourists. Our search generated an initial sample of 24 luxury lodges, however, this reduced to eight when we applied the “disabled access” filter. We then carried out a content analysis of each luxury lodge’s website to determine its provision of accessibility information [6].

Initial findings suggest that all eight luxury lodges were inaccessible to guests with disabilities. Beyond a simple statement by two providers confirming that they had an accessible room, minimal additional information was provided. Further information was therefore solicited via the “Contact us” function, and all eight providers responded, revealing that they did

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indeed have accessible rooms, bathrooms, and wider premises, which was promising. These responses were generally brief however, with most of the detail relating to the accessible bathrooms. Inherent in these responses was also the perception that accessibility is tied to physical access, and predominantly for wheelchair users and those with other mobility impairments, suggesting a narrow view of disability, access, and inclusion.

Our study highlights that there is minimal consideration of the importance, role, or requirements for website provision of accessibility information by New Zealand luxury lodges, and the wider hospitality sector generally [3]. The potential opportunities arising from website provision of accessibility information are notable, in terms of meeting the information needs of potential guests, obtaining a competitive advantage, and stimulating latent travel demand [7]. As a first step toward positive change, providers could explicitly include detailed information about the accessibility of their offerings on their websites. While beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that providers should also consider the mode and format of delivering accessibility information, and whether this aligns with standards set by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) [2]. The useability of a website has implications for different users, as people with vision impairment, for example, might require screen reader compatibility [8]. Website accessibility and the provision of accessibility information is one avenue through which to provide an offering of equality [1], and contribute to the social sustainability of the accommodation sector [3, 7].

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