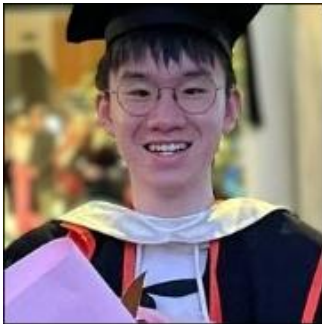


Ensuring hospitality and tourism websites are accessible to all users

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Research shows that hospitality and tourism organisations often overlook the importance of website accessibility, resulting in their information remaining inaccessible to a growing market of people with disabilities [1]. Website accessibility benefits people with physical, sensory, intellectual, and other disabilities by enabling effective pre-trip planning, helping visitors assess hospitality and tourism offerings, and facilitating independent and dignified travel experiences. International standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, developed by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), offer a structured framework for identifying and addressing website accessibility issues. As New Zealand's third largest inbound tourism market, China makes a substantial contribution to the national economy [2]. This study evaluated the accessibility of Chinese tour operators' websites. As the Chinese visitor market continues to age and the prevalence of disabilities increases, enhancing website accessibility is becoming increasingly important for facilitating travel to and within New Zealand.

Website accessibility is based on four main principles outlined in the WCAG 2.0 Guidelines [3]:

1. Perceivable - Ensuring the website presents content in multiple sensory formats, such as text alternatives for images, captions for videos, and the use of high-contrast colours and readable fonts to improve visual and auditory accessibility.
2. Operable - Ensuring the website supports navigation of content by keyboard without a mouse, such as providing keyboard shortcuts.
3. Understandable - Ensuring website content is easily comprehensible through consistent layouts, uniform visual designs, and structured navigation to facilitate user interaction and information access.
4. Robust - Ensuring the website is adaptable for various assistive technologies, such as screen readers and magnifiers.

The study applied these four principles to evaluate the accessibility of the websites of seven Chinese tour operators

identified as Tourism New Zealand's preferred partners in China [4]. Issues related to the 'perceivable' principle included the absence of alternative text for images, videos, and audio, which can hinder access to content for users with sensory disabilities. Challenges related to the 'operable' principle included limited keyboard navigation and inconsistent layouts, which can impede access for users with limited hand mobility. Conversely, websites generally performed well in relation to both the 'understandable' and 'robust' principles, offering clear instructions, consistent design, and appropriate support for assistive technologies through the use of properly structured HTML elements (e.g., header, navigation, main).

Implementing the four accessibility principles ensures that websites can be accessed by all, including people with disabilities. These guidelines apply to hospitality and tourism organisations' websites worldwide. Further enhancements may include using accessibility symbols and icons to denote accessibility features and setting up a dedicated accessibility information page on the website. Importantly, integrating reviews from people with disabilities who have used the organisation's services can significantly improve the ease and efficiency of locating essential accessibility information. By adhering to internationally recognised website accessibility standards, and considering the accessibility of their websites, hospitality and tourism organisations can reach a wider audience and demonstrate social responsibility.

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