

AUSTRALIA'S SOUTH WEST SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OBSERVATORY:

INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF AUSTRALIA'S SOUTH WEST



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As part of the annual progress report, the Sustainable Tourism Observatory analysed the travel accessibility of Australia's South West and how inclusive travelling is for people with disabilities.

CONTEXT

Australia's South West Sustainable Tourism Observatory (ASWTO) is currently the only UNWTO-INSTO Observatory in Australia. The Region covers the Southwest corner of Australia and stretches from south of Mandurah to Albany and east to Bremer Bay. It is the second most visited tourism region in WA, with 3.19 million overnight visitors in 2021. The popularity of the ASW tourism region is due to the combination of natural attractions, with high-quality wine, food and arts.

With one in five Australians presenting some form of disability, this specific portion of the population should not only have the right to travel, but also presents an immense economic opportunity in a vastly untapped market. The project aimed to explore perceptions of travellers with access needs regarding travel experiences in ASW, highlight challenges and opportunities for the accessibility of travel in the region, and recommend ways to enhance accessibility.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River (awarded 'Most Accessible Community in WA' for the third year) experts observe an overall staff commitment to make improvements on accessibility due to the greater percentage of residents in the region who have access needs.
- A number of tourism attractions in the region have undergone changes to increase the accessibility of their product.
- A key challenge identified by experts was the lack of standardisation and regulation. With no benchmark for what classifies as an accessible and inclusive offer, disabled travellers are often met with tourism products that fall short of their access needs upon arrival.
- As another significant barrier for travel accessibility, both experts and participants with disabilities pointed out the lack of information and awareness.
- From the supply side, a barrier raised was the high cost of installation requirements and maintenance costs, especially considering most operators in the region are small family-owned businesses. Many providers continue to see accessible tourism as a high-risk venture and often don't know what changes are necessary.
- Participants argued that further enhancements are required to suit non-physical ('invisible') disabilities, such as hearing impairments and cognitive disabilities.
- There is consensus among experts that co-design and consultation with the disabled community is fundamental.
- The majority of participants with disabilities were satisfied with their travels to the region. The biggest disappointments occurred with accessibility of accommodation, nature places, and of tours.

METHODOLOGY

- Expert interviews (online, semi-structured with open questions) with accessibility consultants, shire community coordinators, member for parliament representatives and tourism providers
- Online survey among people with disabilities who had previously travelled to the region or would consider travelling there in the future.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- The Shire of Augusta-Margaret River has been recognised for its accessibility and most visitors with special needs are somewhat satisfied with their stay.
- However, more than half of the tourism offerings in ASW are still not accessible to visitors with disabilities.
- Travel accessibility in the region needs to be improved, in particular the communication and business capacity.

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