Accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand: A supply perspective

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A thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of International Tourism Management (MITM)

2025
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ABSTRACT

This study explored a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. The objectives of the study were to: 1) determine how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers; and 2) analyse Chinese outbound tour operators' websites accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand.

The first research objective was met through semi-structured interviews with two experienced New Zealand accessible tourism service providers. Their data revealed that customised services, collaboration, and information provision were the key needs for meeting the requirements of tourists with disabilities. The study showed that New Zealand accessible tourism service providers believe these strategies can effectively address the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities.

The second research objective involved analysing the websites of six Chinese outbound tour operators that were recommended as preferred partners by Tourism New Zealand. Applying web content analysis, the study analysed the websites' accessibility and their provision of accessibility information. The results revealed that the websites were inadequate in addressing the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities, especially in terms of the provision of accessibility information.

This study is one of the few in New Zealand that focuses on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities from a supplier perspective. It provides recommendations for improvement for both New Zealand accessible tourism service providers and Chinese outbound tour operators, with the aim of promoting the development of the accessible tourism market between the two countries and enabling more tourists with disabilities to participate in tourism activities.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter establishes the rationale for exploring the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities visiting New Zealand. It emphasises the global rise in disability rate, the influence of ageing, and the growing importance of developing accessible tourism. By adopting the social model of disability and recognising the heterogeneity of disability experiences, the chapter emphasises the necessity of universal design, accurate information, and cultural perspectives. The chapter identifies research gaps on the supply side and outlines two research objectives: to examine accessible tourism services providers in New Zealand and to assess the website accessibility of Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand.

1.1 Research background

Globally, disability is becoming an increasingly significant issue, and one which is expected to intensify further over time (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2022). There is a complex relationship between disability and age (Chatterji et al., 2015; Courtney-Long et al., 2015). According to data from the US (United States of America) *Weekly Report on Morbidity and Mortality*, there is indeed a positive correlation between disability and age, but this relationship does not increase linearly (Courtney-Long et al., 2015). As people age, they tend to accumulate more chronic health problems and experience declines in specific functional areas, which increases the risk of disability (Chatterji et al., 2015; Courtney-Long et al., 2015). In particular, arthritis and back problems often lead to mobility restrictions, which are among the most common causes of disability in older adults (Chatterji et al., 2015; Courtney-Long et al., 2015). As the global disability rate is expected to continue to rise (WHO, 2022), many scholars have begun to explore the specific requirements and experiences of people with disabilities in terms of tourism (Devile & Kastenholz, 2020; Lam et al., 2020; Tao et al., 2019). Regardless of age or specific circumstances, travel is widely recognised as positively impacting on the tourists participants. Indeed, studies have shown that travel can significantly improve the mood of tourists (Mitas et al., 2012), increase the life satisfaction of older adults (Hwang et al., 2020), and provide people with disabilities opportunities to rebuild their social and personal resources preventing feelings of exclusion (Pagan, 2020).

Unfortunately, most tourism services are targeted at people without disabilities, and many destinations offer multisensory experiences (Aitchison, 2009). Consequently, people with disabilities are often unable to participate equitably in tourism activities due to a general lack of accessible design (Agovino et al., 2017), even though there are strong economic and social rationales to support the importance of catering to an accessible tourism market (Gillovic et al., 2024). The travel experience of tourists with different types of disabilities is still significantly influenced by issues such as discrimination and negative stereotypes of tourists with disabilities, as well as a lack of information about accessibility (Devile & Kastenholz, 2020; McKercher & Darcy, 2018; Lim 2020; Somnuxpong & Wiwatwongwana 2020).

With the rapid development of information technology, the internet has become the main tool for tourists with disabilities to obtain travel information and book travel services (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011), highlighting the urgent need to improve the accessibility of websites and information about accessibility. However, for many tourists with disabilities, a website and its provision of accessibility information is often difficult to access (Cloquet et al., 2018; Domínguez Vila et al., 2024), mostly because of the inadequate technical accessibility of them (Domínguez Vila et al., 2024) and unclear or hidden information about accessibility (Cloquet et al., 2018). Inadequate information may reduce the expectations of tourists with disabilities and limit their potential enjoyment of an activity, by forcing them to adapt to the existing environmental conditions (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020).

Against this background, a critical study of suppliers is clearly needed. This study, therefore, aims to provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. As China is New Zealand's third-largest source of international tourists (following Australia and the U.S), its contribution to New Zealand's national economy is significant (Tourism New Zealand [TNZ], 2024). According to Tourism New Zealand (2024), Chinese tourists' total spending in New Zealand reached NZ$1.1 billion in the year ending March 2024, of which NZ$872 million was from holiday tourists. Accessibility requirements in this market are worthy of attention due to the considerable number of people with disabilities in China. In China, there were 85.02 million people with disabilities in 2010 (China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2021). It is important to note that the ageing population is one of the reasons for the

increase in rates of disability, and most individuals who identify as people with disabilities are in the older adult population (Alén et al., 2012). However, some older adults do not see themselves as people with disabilities as defined by the social model, but rather see the decline in their physical functioning as natural aging (Kelley-Moore et al., 2006). The number of older adults in China cannot be underestimated. By the end of 2023, it was estimated that there would be 296.97 million people aged 60 and above in China, accounting for 21.1% of the total population (China Research Center on Aging, 2024).

Moreover, Chinese tourists show a phased information-seeking behaviour during the planning of their trips: they initially searched for travel agencies through search engines (such as Google and Baidu) six months before departure; they started booking air tickets four months before departure; and they checked the weather and shopping options at their destination one month before departure. This phased pattern indicates they make decisions by accessing information at specific stages (Yang et al., 2015). Accordingly, two research objectives were used to guide this study. The first was to determine how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers, and the second was to analyse Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities visiting New Zealand.

1.2   Conceptualising disability

The rapid increase in the global number of people with disabilities demonstrates the importance of gaining a deep understanding of disability issues. According to statistics, the number of people with disabilities worldwide is 16% of the total population, or approximately 1.3 billion people (WHO, 2022). This figure is much higher than the estimated disability rate of 10% in the 1970s (WHO & The World Bank, 2011). The rapid growth in the population of people with disabilities can be attributed to an ageing population (United Nations [UN], 2015), an increase in chronic health problems and non-communicable diseases (Hambleton et al., 2023), longer life expectancy, lower child mortality rates (UN International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2024), and more advanced tools for identifying and measuring disability (WHO & The World Bank, 2011).

People with disabilities are often disadvantaged in Chinese society, partly due to the profound influence of Confucianism on people's attitudes towards people with disabilities (Campbell & Uren, 2011). The Confucian culture emphasises the integrity of the body as the foundation of morality and social order, resulting in the marginalisation and discrimination of people with disabilities for their failure to fully fulfil their supposed social responsibilities (Campbell & Uren, 2011). There is a significant difference between this perspective and the international understanding of disability, wherein disability is discussed within a human rights framework. For example, the WHO defines disability as "complex, dynamic, multi-dimensional and contested" (WHO & World Bank, 2011, p. 3). New Zealand legislation adopts a similar perspective, defining disability in the Human Rights Act 1993 as including physical, mental, psychological or sensory impairments, with an emphasis on the multidimensional nature of disability affecting an individual's functioning (Human Rights Act 1993, s 21). The comparison between different national perspectives demonstrates the importance of gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature of disability. Most of this discussion is founded in the Western models of disability that frame the prominence of disability scholarship.

1.2.1 Models of disability

It can be seen from a review of the literature that the medical model and the social model are the two dominant models that frame discussions on disability; these models show the influences on how individuals and society perceive and define disability in different ways (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; McKercher & Darcy, 2018; Shakespeare, 2006; Zajadacz, 2015). The medical model views disability as a direct consequence of impairment and as a "personal tragedy" (Zajadacz, 2015, p. 192). According to this model, disability is viewed primarily as a loss or impairment of function, with affected individuals requiring medical interventions to adapt to their environment (Zajadacz, 2015). This model also reflects a concern for loss of function in terms of terminology. For example, in the early stages, the WHO defined *impairment* as "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function" (WHO, 1980, p. 27). Similarly, *disability* was defined as "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being (WHO, 1980, p. 28). As

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such, the medical model "prioritised the need for a treatment or cure, intervention or accommodation" (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020, p. 2), often neglecting the broader requirements of the individual and reinforcing a negative view of disability (Zajadacz, 2015). Undoubtedly, this has contributed to societal segregation, creating distinct divisions between people with and without disabilities (Retief & Letšosa, 2018; Zajadacz, 2015). These factors result in social and community exclusions that people with disabilities often encounter in the medical model (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). In contrast, the social model considers disability as "a product of the socially constructed disabling environment" (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011, p. 27).

Critiques of the medical model can be traced back to the late 1970s and 1980s (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Retief & Letšosa, 2018). With the growth of the disability movement and the emergence of disability studies, the focus of attention on disability has shifted from that of a "personal tragedy" (Zajadacz, 2015, p. 192) for people with disabilities to an emphasis on how social structures and environmental factors limit their participation and equality (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Haegele & Hodge, 2016; Retief & Letšosa, 2018). In this way, the shift from an individual deficiency to a social responsibility indicates the development of the social model. In this model, disability is considered to be part of human diversity and understood as having a socially constructed nature (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). The social model emphasises that the challenges and difficulties of people with disabilities mainly arise from the barriers and exclusion of the social environment, rather than from the physical limitations of an individual's body and mind. Specifically, *disablism* refers to a range of intentional or unintentional assumptions and behaviours that lead to unfair or unequal treatment of people with disabilities (Campbell, 2008). Disablism often manifests as the inaccessibility of public facilities and services (Qiao et al., 2021), social attitudes (Friedman & Owen, 2017), and prejudices (Lim, 2020).

These social factors prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society. As such, some tourism scholars have encouraged social change to promote the social participation and inclusion of people with disabilities (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Gillovic et al., 2018). Such social change aims to ensure that all environments are inclusive of people with disabilities (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020)

in terms of changing social attitudes (Friedman & Owen, 2017) and eliminating negative labelling (Gillovic et al., 2018).

However, the social model has not been without critique. Some scholars have argued that the social model does not adequately address the issue of impairment, which ignores the importance of impairment as "integral to the experience of disability" (Palmer & Harley, 2012, p. 358). The lack of a comprehensive understanding of disability in society may be the reason for discussions about how disabilities and chronic diseases affect activity limitations (Thomas, 2004). As a result, the social relational model was developed to complement the social model. As well as acknowledging the influence of social conditions on definitions of "disability," it also adds the personal and social impacts of impairment, which are not addressed in the social model. It emphasises that "even when structural barriers are absent," people accompanied by impairments will experience social oppression, which can negatively affect their mental health and social well-being (Smith & Bundon, 2018, p. 24). In other words, a disability results from the interaction between social conditions and individual impairments (Palmer & Harley, 2012). Therefore, personal experiences, emotional factors, and the manifestation of barriers are all important factors to consider when analysing how society causes disability (Thomas, 2004). As a useful example, the WHO promoted a "bio-psycho-social model" to consider disability by combining the medical and social models (WHO & World Bank, 2011, pp. 4-5), to see disability as not just an individual's physical or mental state, but as result of interactions between individuals and their surroundings (WHO & World Bank, 2011). The promotion of this model represents a move towards the social relational model of disability.

Considering that "the usefulness of any model analysis is limited" (Thomas, 2004, p. 28), it is important to point out that although the social relational model provides a new perspective on understanding disability, many disability-related accessible tourism studies are primarily based on the social mode (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021). Given the focus on a supply perspective of accessibility, this study adopted the principle of the social model, which views that "it is not the person's impairment that 'disables' someone from undertaking tourism experiences but the social, political and economic barriers that create the 'disabling' tourism environment" (Michopoulou et al., 2015, p. 182).

There was another important reason for choosing the social model as the basis for this study. Although China is gradually moving towards the social model of disability rights from the medical model, the relevant policies still tend to take the form of welfare assistance, and comprehensive social rights protection has not yet been achieved (Fisher & Jing, 2008). More critically, "policies do not always give people with disabilities the right to choose" (Zhao & Zhang, 2018, p. 133). Therefore, people with disabilities were not directly involved in disability policy reforms based on the social model, so related changes did not have a significant effect. Therefore, the social model not only shapes my definition and perception of disability as a researcher but also guides me, through prominent Western scholarship, in how I define and approach accessibility issues related to disability in my study.

1.2.2   The heterogeneity of disability

The development of accessible tourism and its market requires a good understanding of the term "heterogeneity". First of all, the heterogeneity of disability is reflected in the fact that it is multidimensional. Types of disability include physical, sensory, intellectual or learning, psychological or psychiatric, and hidden (Human Rights Act, 1993). This diversity means that a tourism industry approach that treats the requirements of people with disabilities as homogenous is a narrow and outdated view and practice (McIntosh, 2020; Small & Darcy, 2011). Some scholars see this approach as exacerbating the unnecessary barriers that people with disabilities encounter in their travel experiences (McIntosh, 2020). The development of accessible tourism and its market requires the tourism industry to recognise the diversity of disabilities (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011).

In addition, disabilities may be visible or invisible (McIntosh, 2020). Most studies have reported on disabilities that can be perceived by others, and more easily connected to the barriers they might face, in accessing physical environments and information, and facing discrimination (Adam, 2019; Kołodziejczak, 2019; Lim, 2020). However, invisible disabilities such as epilepsy, are often not recognised immediately by those around them. Mullins and Preyde (2013, p. 148) define invisible disabilities as those which "interfere with day-to-day functioning but do not have a physical manifestation." Although some of the symptoms of a disability may be exhibited behaviourally, the cause of the disability cannot be seen. In addition, some older adults view the decline in

physical function as part of normal ageing, which is reflected in their reluctance to classify themselves as having a disability (Kelley-Moore et al., 2006). Similarly, cultural factors are also important influences on identity. For example, in the cultural context of Confucianism, disability is often associated with negative social labels and considered a symbol of dependency and vulnerability (Campbell & Uren, 2011). Therefore, even when faced with physical limitations, Chinese people may choose not to acknowledge their disability.

The heterogeneity of disability means that individuals with the same disability may experience the world differently (Ambrose et al., 2012). For example, even if two people have the same disability, their accessibility requirements and experiences may be very different. There are many factors that can contribute to these differences, such as cultural environment and economic factors. For example, in Chinese culture, people with disabilities are considered to be dependent on others and should not expect or demand too much (Yau et al., 2004). In terms of accessibility, income level is a key factor affecting the travel experience of people with disabilities; those with a lower income often seek cheaper travel and accommodation, as their financial situation limits their options (Agovino et al., 2017). However, such affordable accommodation options often lack the necessary accessibility facilities, increasing the barriers that tourists with disabilities may encounter when travelling (Nyman et al., 2018).

As such, the nature of the heterogeneity of disability means that a single solution cannot address all the barriers that people with disabilities encounter in their daily lives and in a travel context. Everyone has different motivations and desired experiences (Michopoulou et al., 2015; Ruhanen et al., 2015). Therefore, when considering the barriers experienced by people with disabilities, it is essential to recognise the heterogeneity of disability to more effectively meet their actual requirements (Gillovic et al., 2024). With this in mind, it is necessary to clearly define the terminology related to disability in the context of tourism, to help define the challenges of disability clearly and better enable those with disabilities to feel the power of inclusion (Gillovic et al., 2018).

1.2.3   Inclusive language

Language is powerful, as it can strengthen negative labels and stereotypes about people with disabilities (Gillovic et al., 2018). Conversely, language can also create an atmosphere of inclusion

and empowerment. It contributes to an inclusive environment, enhances social cohesion, and promotes sustainable development for people with disabilities (Gillovic et al., 2018). For example, describing people with disabilities in positive and respectful language in promotional materials may improve their social image and their participation in tourism activities (Benjamin et al., 2020).

While focusing on disability discourses such as the disability models and heterogeneity of disability discussed above, some scholars have encouraged the use of person-first language to better represent the voices of people with disabilities; that is, referring to them as people with disabilities, rather than as disabled people (Gillovic et al., 2018; Haegele & Hodge, 2016). However, it is worth noting that the use of terminology may vary depending on the culture, geographical location, legislation, and a study's research aims. For example, Gillovic and McIntosh (2015) indicated in their study that, although they supported the social model of disability, they still chose to use identity-first language, (disabled people), within the context of New Zealand legislation.

Given the different conceptualisations of disability between China and New Zealand, the adoption of person-first language and the social model advocated in this study can more effectively reveal a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities coming from China to New Zealand for an inclusive travel experience. Overall, it is undeniable that precise language is essential for a deep understanding and effective communication of the issues faced by people with disabilities (Gillovic et al., 2018). Precise language not only depicts the details and complexity of an issue, but also helps identify and address the core of the problem, which in this case, is the accessibility issues in accessible tourism.

1.3 Accessible tourism

Everyone has rights, including people with disabilities (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2006). The UNCRPD is an international convention that aims to "protect and promote the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities" (Moriarity & Dew, 2011, p. 686). The development and implementation of the convention was a new level of global recognition and protection of the rights of people with disabilities. According to Article 30, countries should take appropriate measures to ensure that people with disabilities have the same

opportunities to participate in major social activities as do other people, and enjoy accessible facilities (UNCRPD, 2006). This includes ensuring that leisure, entertainment, and tourism facilities are open and accessible to people with disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). Unfortunately, people with disabilities still encounter different types of barriers when participating in tourism (Cloquet et al., 2018; Darcy, 2010; Devile & Kastenholz, 2020). The tourism industry often assumes that the infrastructure and services they provide meet the requirements of most people (Michopoulou et al., 2015). However, the reality is that the tourism industry often does not adequately consider the specific requirements and differences of people with disabilities during the design process, which contributes to, or perpetuates, barriers when travelling (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). This seriously hinders the "independence, dignity, equity and self-determination" of people with disabilities, while also reinforcing the stereotype that they cannot travel independently (Michopoulou et al., 2015, p. 183).

Accessible tourism offers a transformative solution for all, enabling everyone to benefit from accessible tourism practices (Darcy et al., 2020). The concept of accessible tourism can be defined as follows:

> Accessible tourism enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments. This definition is inclusive of all people including those travelling with children in prams, people with disabilities and seniors. (Darcy & Dickson, 2009, p. 34)

However, more efforts are still needed to achieve the goals outlined in this definition (Nyanjom et al., 2018). The main reason for this is that the tourism industry still overlooks the disability community as a potential market (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). The concept of accessible tourism is implemented at every stage of the journey, from pre-trip preparation, to during the trip and return, where the integrity and continuity of accessible tourism should be provided. For example, while planning a trip, tourists with disabilities need to be able to easily access detailed information about the destination, accommodation, transportation, and activities (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Darcy, 2010). During the trip, ensuring that transportation, tourist attractions, and accommodations are accessible is a key factor in the travel experience (Chang & Chen, 2011; Darcy & Pegg, 2011; Somnuxpong & Wiwatwongwana, 2020).

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Finally, tourist feedback and requirements should be taken into consideration to improve and adjust tourism services to better meet the requirements of those with disabilities (Zhang & Yang, 2021).

These factors indicate that the implementation of accessible tourism services requires the collaboration of tourism stakeholders. Stakeholders can be considered as "all the persons or groups who have interests in the planning, process(es), delivery and/or outcomes of the tourism service" (Sautter & Leisen, 1999, p. 315). Michopoulou and Buhalis (2011) considered a wide range of stakeholders, including but not limited to governments, tourism service providers, and tourism intermediaries (tour operators and travel agents). Each stakeholder plays a different but crucial role in promoting accessible tourism (Nyanjom et al., 2018). With this in mind, the literature relating to tourism stakeholders provided guiding and useful insights for this study's research into exploring suppliers. However, it is important to also note that the research for this study focused on suppliers, not the wider range of tourism stakeholders mentioned. Therefore, considering that New Zealand has suppliers that provide accessibility services specifically, and these providers often focus on the specific requirements of tourists with disabilities, the term "accessible tourism service providers" is used to describe them. In China, suppliers are mainly responsible for providing and organising travel packages to enable Chinese tourists to visit New Zealand. This aligns with Sheldon's (1986, p. 352) definition of the tour operator as "a company which negotiates with hotels, transportation companies, and other suppliers and combines these vacation components into a package tour." Therefore, the term "tour operator" is used in this study to describe the Chinese suppliers.

A focus on ensuring tourism is accessible is not only a social responsibility but also has essential business benefits. The benefits of an accessible market for the tourism industry are firmly established, and include a competitive advantage, greater profitability, and the creation of positive word-of-mouth recommendations, supporting customer loyalty (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Patterson et al., 2012). Accessible tourism is a whole-of-life concept and forms one of the research focuses of this study, which explores the perspectives of New Zealand accessible tourism service providers with regard to how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities. In addition, given the importance of information accessibility and

information about accessibility for tourists with disabilities (Kołodziejczak, 2019), this study discusses these two aspects and their specific impacts on the travel experiences of tourists with disabilities. It is worth noting that, although the development of accessible tourism can promote the overall inclusiveness and sustainability of the tourism industry, some scholars have pointed out that the potential of the accessible market has not yet been fully realised (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). This indicates that it is important to explore the current situation and potential of the accessible market to reveal the existing problems and potential opportunities in this market.

1.3.1 Accessible tourism market and Chinese market

The importance of the economic and social rationale of the accessible tourism market should not be underestimated (Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021). The accessible tourism market is not a niche market but rather, represents a large and growing market segment (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). Some scholars have pointed out that the accessible tourism market serves a diverse group of customers, including people with disabilities and older adults who develop disabilities as they age (Domínguez Vila et al., 2015). In this context, accessible tourism has extended beyond the scope of a niche market and become an important market segment for the tourism industry that can bring continuous positive growth to the industry (Domínguez Vila et al., 2015). This market segment not only meets the specific requirements of tourists with disabilities but also enhances the service level and market competitiveness of the entire tourism industry by providing accessible services (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). With the trend of ageing populations, there is expected to be a further increase in demand for this market (Michopoulou et al., 2015). The total spending power of this market is over US$18 trillion (Return on Disability, 2024). It is estimated that people with access requirements travel with approximately 1.9 companions on average, which means that their spending capacity is higher than that of people without disabilities (Papamichail, 2024). Moreover, they have the characteristics of staying longer, increased rate of return, and travelling all year round (Papamichail, 2024).

As mentioned, the Chinese market has been the third primary market for New Zealand since COVID-19 (Tourism New Zealand, n.d.). According to data from Tourism New Zealand (2024), 87 million Chinese internet users aged 18-74 believe that New Zealand is attractive to tourists.

Statistics show that Chinese tourists in New Zealand spend NZ$1.1 billion on accommodation, food, shopping, car rentals, and entertainment (TNZ, 2024). Most tourists choose hotels or apartments through online booking (TNZ, 2024). In China, there were 85.02 million people with disabilities in 2010 (China Disabled Persons' Federation, 2021). Therefore, when Chinese tourists with disabilities want to travel to New Zealand, barriers experienced during their journey may prevent them from fully participating, thereby reducing their travel experience (Devile & Kastenholz, 2020; McKercher & Darcy, 2018). In addition, the influence of Confucian culture may contribute to differences in the definition of disability between Chinese and the dominant Western culture in New Zealand. The Chinese market not only provides a significant economic benefit to New Zealand but also offers a considerable population of potential tourists with disabilities. Therefore, it is particularly important for New Zealand's accessible tourism market to explore and adapt to the requirements of the Chinese market. With this in mind, the next subsection discusses existing accessibility and barriers in tourism.

1.3.2   Accessibility in tourism

As mentioned, a disability is a product of the interaction between an individual and the environment. While many people without disabilities may also encounter barriers in accessing and participating in travel experiences, such barriers are often more severe and complex for people with disabilities (Darcy, 2010; Devile & Kastenholz, 2020; McKercher & Darcy, 2018). Barriers are "factors in a person's environment that, through either their absence or presence, limit functioning and create disability" (WHO & World Bank, 2011, p. 214). Accordingly, barriers can be physical, related to information and communication, and attitudinal (Devile & Kastenholz, 2020; Eichhorn & Buhalis, 2010).

Physical barriers are the inaccessible aspects of the tourism supply chain, mainly related to mobility (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). These are barriers in accommodation, transport, and attractions, such as a lack of space to pass through a narrow hotel entrance (Piramanayagam et al., 2019), facilities relying on manual operation, a lack of understanding of the requirements of people with disabilities by service staff in the public transportation system (Velho, 2019), and the difficulty of physical access to a beach where there is no beach access technology (Verdonck et al., 2024).

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"Information barriers" refers to the lack of accurate or reliable information about accessibility level or its nature, such as incorrect or outdated information on websites (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; Kołodziejczak, 2019). Information-related communication barriers include the format aspects of information, such as the lack of pictures, videos, text descriptions of audiovisual materials, braille, and letters (Caldwell et al., 2008).

Finally, "attitudinal barriers" refers to the lack of awareness and knowledge about accessibility among tourism providers, as well as negative attitudes towards people with disabilities in society in general (Zhang et al., 2019). Such attitudes are reflected in preconceived assumptions, stigmas, and stereotypes about tourists with disabilities (Lim, 2020; McIntosh, 2020). The revealing of disability barriers highlights the importance of tourism service providers needing to provide accessible services and facilities. However, the tourism industry often fails to meet the requirements of tourists with disabilities, especially in understanding and responding to their accessibility requirements (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Devil & Kastenholz, 2020; Velho, 2019) and ensuring the accessibility of online information (Cloquet et al., 2018; Teixeira et al., 2021). As a developed country, New Zealand still faces challenges in terms of accessibility and accessible tourism provision, which may be due to the tourism industry's ignoring of the disability community, considering their requirements to be difficult to meet (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). Therefore, the following section discusses universal design in more detail.

1.3.3 Universal design

Tourism scholars consider the concept of universal design (UD) to be an essential concept and method for creating social inclusion (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Kołodziejczak, 2019; Michopoulou et al., 2015). Universal design is defined as "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability" (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2024a, para. 1). While implementing universal design can significantly improve accessibility in the tourism industry, there are still many challenges in the implementation process (Gillovic & Mcintosh., 2020). For example, as previously discussed, the existence of physical barriers prevents people with disabilities from participating successfully in tourism and leisure activities (Darcy & Pegg,

2011). Therefore, in this context, it is crucial to provide an accessible environment that enables people with disabilities to participate in tourism activities on an equal basis with people without disabilities. Here, "accessible environment" refers to the creation of a social or built environment that is open, inclusive and equitable for all through the implementation of universal design principles (Small & Darcy, 2010). Some countries, such as those in Europe, as well as the US and Australia, have begun to proactively promote the implementation of the accessible tourism concept by complying with relevant legislative requirements, which include the development and improvement of needed infrastructure (Darcy et al., 2020). However, according to Nyanjom et al. (2018), the fragmentation of the tourism industry has led to a lack of cooperation and coordination between different stakeholders (e.g. government, people with disabilities, hospitality and tourism (H & T) providers), which makes the process of providing quality services complex and challenging. As such, it is important to explore the supply perspective on the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities in this context.

The definition of universal design aligns with the concept of accessible tourism, which aims to ensure that everyone can benefit from the accessibility of an environment through a human-centred design concept that prioritises the user experience (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). This concept also applies to the provision of accessibility information on websites such as the *Take the Web Accessibility Initiative* launched by the W3C in 1997 and the subsequent development of the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* (WCAG) (Persson et al., 2015). Both these groups aimed to ensure that websites are accessible to all, especially people with disabilities, which is the practical application of universal design principles to website accessibility (Persson et al., 2015). The relationship between WCAG and accessibility is discussed in detail in the subsequent section on website accessibility and the provision of accessibility information.

Universal design is assessed according to accessibility, usability, and convenience; these assessment criteria are closely related to the seven principles of universal design (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2024b). These seven principles are encouraged to be applied to all "environments, products and communications" (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003, p. 61) and are as follows:

1) Equitable Use: The design is practical and appealing to individuals with varying abilities.

2) Flexibility in Use: The design can cater to a wide range of different abilities.

3) Simple and Intuitive Use: The design is simple and intuitive, easy to understand, and adapts to various users' experience levels, knowledge backgrounds, language skills, and states of attention.

4) Perceptible Information: The design ensures that key information is clearly communicated in any environment and for users with various sensory abilities.

5) Tolerance for Error: The design will reduce the risk and negative impact of accidents or wrong operations.

6) Low Physical Effort: The design ensures efficient and comfortable use, greatly reducing fatigue during use.

7) Size and Space for Approach and Use: The design provides appropriate space and dimensions to ensure that users of all sizes and abilities can easily access, operate and use it. （Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2024b）

1.4 Accessible tourism service providers

The accessible tourism market is a growing business opportunity that requires service providers to continually understand and meet the requirements of people with different types of disabilities (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020). Although tourism products are primarily designed for people without disabilities (Aitchison, 2009), this is not necessarily with the intention of exclusion, but because the tourism industry has not understood the social and economic potential of the accessible tourism market (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). However, this significant oversight can inadvertently create and exacerbate exclusion in the tourism industry, regardless of individual abilities. Tourists with disabilities emphasise the importance of tourism services' provision of education, training, and experience (Devile et al., 2024; Fuente-Robles et al., 2020), especially in terms of disability awareness and attitudes of employees (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020). Some studies have shown that the attitudes of employees towards customers with disabilities are related to their own experience and knowledge of interacting with them (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). Focused training in disability awareness and accessibility skills cultivates empathy (McIntosh, 2020).

Therefore, successful service delivery relies on ensuring that every aspect of a journey can be converted into a positive experience for the tourist (Camilleri, 2018).

Achieving this goal is not easy. Research shows that there are gaps in the provision of appropriate tourism services, promotion, education, and training, and the standardisation of services and facilities by tourism service providers (Agovino et al., 2017; Benjamin et al., 2020; Devile et al., 2024; Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; McKercher & Darcy, 2018). These findings are also reflected in the research of wider tourism stakeholders (Gillovic et al., 2015; Nyanjom et al., 2018). However, some tourism scholars have observed a shift in stakeholders' attitudes towards the accessible market (Gillovic et al., 2015; Obigbesan et al., 2024). They have recognised the value and potential of the accessible market, but may not yet perceive it as a profitable business opportunity due to misperceptions such as the low spending ability of people with disabilities, the perception that they do not go out alone, their inability to afford expensive travel products, and that people with disabilities share similar attributes (Lim, 2020; Gillovic et al., 2015; Qiao et al., 2021). Consequently, it remains often difficult for tourism stakeholders to see the accessible market as a way to make profits for companies (Gillovic et al., 2015).

Increasing numbers of consumers are purchasing tourism products through digital media (Xiang et al., 2015), which means that tour operators must ensure that their websites are easy to navigate and align with universal design principles and those of accessibility guidelines, such as WCAG. Some scholars have stated that inaccessible websites may prevent customers, like people with disabilities, from accessing information (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; Kołodziejczak, 2019; Randle & Dolnicar, 2019). As such, a website that complies with universal design principles and guidelines for website accessibility (WCAG) will provide a wider range of accessibility, which could ensure that all users, including people with disabilities, can access information and services without barriers (Persson et al., 2015). Therefore, the discussion of information per se is particularly significant, and more attention needs to be given to website accessibility and the provision of information about accessibility on the websites of tour operators.

1.5 Accessibility information

The internet has become an essential tool in the tourism industry, as it helps tourists access information and make decisions (Darcy, 2010). To make informed decisions, tourists with disabilities rely on accurate and reliable information (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). The discussion of information in this study can be divided into two parts: accessibility of information, and information about accessibility. Accessibility of information is a significant challenge for tourists with disabilities, and relevant at every phase of the travel process and decision-making (Zins, 2007). Previous studies have shown that tourism websites have consistently ignored and overlooked the importance of website accessibility (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2021), and that information on some tourism websites does not always comply with the WCAG guidelines (Teixeira et al., 2021). The WCAG guidelines are published by The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) for assessing the online accessibility of websites (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018).

WCAG 2.0 is a set of guidelines widely used by academia to evaluate website accessibility (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; Teixeira et al., 2021). These guidelines are based on four core principles: "perceivable," "operable," "understandable," and "robust" (W3C, 2008). When designing a website, these principles must be considered to ensure that people with disabilities can easily access the content. Based on these core principles, 12 guidelines specify the basic requirements to be met when designing a website (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; W3C, 2008). For example, the guidelines require the provision of text alternatives for audio and video materials and ensure that all functions on the website can be operated with a keyboard. In addition, WCAG 2.0 provides three conformance levels of success criteria for each guideline: Level A (lowest), Level AA (medium), and Level AAA (highest). These levels indicate the different stages of achieving accessibility for websites, which allows website developers to make improvements based on the existing shortcomings of the website (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; W3C, 2008). The official WCAG 2.0 guidelines also provide detailed technical implementation information for each core principle and guideline, including specific technical solutions and related informative technologies that clearly show how to achieve each level of success criteria (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; W3C, 2008). This information helps developers understand and implement the specific details of website

accessibility design, ensuring that all users, especially those with disabilities, can effectively access and use the website (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018)

Aside from website accessibility, information about accessibility is also important. Many services claim their services and products are accessible, but often fail to provide further details, or the product is simply inaccessible. For example, some hotels indicate on their websites whether they have accessible rooms and provide some basic accessibility features, such as "accessible shower" and "toilet with grab rails." However, most of the information they provide is for wheelchair users and rarely covers the wider range of disabilities (Gillovic & Harkison, 2023), such as hearing and vision. Research has shown that a lack of information can create barriers to travel. In terms of accessibility services, for example, tourists with disabilities encounter a lack of information on the availability of accessible rooms (Darcy, 2010), unreadable information at airports (Small et al., 2023), and limited representation of people with disabilities in tourist brochures for attractions (Benjamin et al., 2020; Cloquet et al., 2018), which significantly limits their travel experience.

Although some studies have explored the accessibility of travel information and websites for people with disabilities, these studies have focused on global or Western tourism websites (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; Eusébio et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2021), so there is a lack of analysis on the accessibility of Chinese outbound tour operators' websites and the provision of accessibility information. As this study aimed to provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand, it was necessary to analyse Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand.

1.6   Research aim

The study aimed to provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. This research used both semi-structured interviews and website content analysis to achieve the following research objectives:

1. Determine how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers.

2. Analyse Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand.

The study fills a gap in the extant accessible tourism literature. Although Western scholars have broadly discussed the importance of accessible tourism (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Michopoulou et al., 2015), there is still a lack of research on specific groups, such as Chinese people with disabilities and their market. By gaining an in-depth understanding of New Zealand's accessible tourism service providers and Chinese outbound tour operators' websites, this study provides the perspective of suppliers in different cultural contexts to gain insights into how they view the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities visiting New Zealand. In addition, the results of this study may promote New Zealand's understanding of the Chinese market and thus enhance the international competitiveness of New Zealand's tourism industry.

1.7   Structure of the thesis

Following the introductory context provided thus far, Chapter 2 provides a literature review. This chapter critically reviews previously published literature to provide a background to the study. A review of traditional Chinese culture, the social status of people with disabilities in China and the related travel patterns is revealed, along with a discussion of the constraints of accessible tourism for Chinese tourists and how accessibility barriers generally affect the travel experience. Finally, the review addresses how accessible tourism services providers respond to the requirements of tourists with disabilities by realising the importance of collaboration. Similarly, whether the websites of tour operators can meet the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand, in terms of website accessibility and information about accessibility is also examined.

Chapter 3, Methodology, explains and justifies the research methods used in this study. It begins with an introduction to the research paradigm, the interpretive paradigm. The research aim is divided into two objectives, and their data collection and data analysis methods are separately

addressed. This chapter also clarifies how the methods used fit with the research objectives. Finally, this chapter discusses the ethics, trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4, Findings and Discussion, reveals the themes emerging from the analysis of the interview data. Three key themes of: customisation, collaboration, and information are discussed. This chapter also presents the findings of an analysis of the website accessibility provided by Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand. Based on the WCAG 2.0 guidelines, the findings of this analysis are discussed in relation to how they are "perceivable," "operable," "understandable," and "robust." In addition, the findings of web content analysis of the websites are presented and discussed (relating to: accessibility information and interactivity, accessibility information in promotional materials and the language of people with disabilities, and online reviews and trustworthiness of accessibility information). This chapter discusses these results in conjunction with the wider literature to provide new insights.

Chapter 5, Conclusion, summarises the main findings and results and provides related recommendations. Finally, the limitations of this study are discussed along with proposed directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter critically reviews previous literature on accessible tourism with a focus on the cultural values, travel patterns, and accessibility barriers faced by Chinese tourists with disabilities. This chapter emphasises the unique nature of the Chinese market, shaped by Confucianism, family-oriented travel, and limited policy implementation. The chapter identifies key constraints: physical, attitudinal, and informational. Moreover, the chapter emphasises the need for collaboration among tourism stakeholders and improvements in website accessibility and information about accessibility. These insights reveal a significant research gap and establish a foundation for exploring how accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand and Chinese outbound tour operators can address the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities.

2.1 Cultural values and travel patterns of Chinese tourists

In the tourism literature, the attention paid by scholars to disability and accessible tourism has transformed from a marginal topic to an increasingly valued research area (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Michopoulou et al., 2015; Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021; Zajadacz, 2015), and one that is gradually maturing (Darcy et al., 2020). However, existing Western accessible tourism research, while providing a rich source of data and insights, also reveals limitations. Many studies point to the need to consider the specific circumstances of different countries, such as language (Gillovic et al., 2018), culture (Harju-Myllyaho & Jutila, 2016), and economic conditions (Agovino et al., 2017). Notably, global tourism has been dominated by Western liberal ideas, values, and para-digms, and tourism is still assessed according to Western standards and criteria (Harju-Myllyaho & Jutila, 2016).

The discussion of Chinese inbound tourists by scholars, for example, supports the view that Western knowledge of Chinese tourists is still very limited (Li et al., 2011; Ruhanen et al., 2015). Research has shown that most Chinese tourists display travel motivations that are different from those of international tourists (Jiang et al., 2020), as are their characteristics and preferences (Liu et al., 2020. Despite China being an important market segment for New Zealand with significant spending capacity and market potential (TNZ, 2024), there is a lack of research on disability issues

related to Chinese tourists with disabilities, except for a few exceptions (Qu, 2020). A review of studies conducted in New Zealand reveals that some research has been carried out on tourism stakeholders' perspectives on accessible tourism (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015), the New Zealand accessible agenda (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020), and the accessibility of the New Zealand tourism market (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020), but these studies rarely address the specific requirements and experiences of Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a more detailed investigation of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand. Notably, it is important to first understand the heterogeneity of Chinese tourists with disabilities, which is different from that of Western tourists.

A review of previous research found that when discussing disability in China, the influence of Confucianism is inevitably involved in the discussion (Campbell & Uren, 2011; Zhang & Rosen, 2018). Confucianism, based on the philosophy of Confucius, is mainly regarded as "a philosophy or school of thought" (Zhang & Rosen, 2018, p. 1114). Within this philosophical framework, benevolence/virtue, filial piety, and universal love play a central role among Chinese tourists (Wang et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021; Zhang & Rosen, 2018), while disability is blamed as a punishment from God (Zhang & Rosen, 2018). These values have profoundly influenced the social status and social support received by people with disabilities in China. For example, the literature has shown that, despite the existence of laws and policies aimed at improving the welfare of people with disabilities, both the historical welfare policies and the Confucian attitude towards people with disabilities in China show that people with disabilities in China have always been socially marginalised (Qu, 2020; Zhang & Rosen, 2018). Qu (2020) pointed out that the legal identification and welfare application of people with disabilities in China requires an application for a "Disability Certificate." The certificate can now be applied for online via a mobile phone, but the interface is clearly not designed for all types of disabilities (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2023). This reflects the continued lack of visibility in public spaces of Chinese people with disabilities, as earlier identified by Campbell and Uren (2011). While major events, such as the Beijing Paralympics and the Sichuan earthquake, have raised the attention of society towards people with disabilities, government-promoted disability policies have not significantly improved the accessibility of public spaces for those with disabilities. This indicates that, while policies exist in

name, their actual implementation and improvement of the lives of people with disabilities are limited (Campbell & Uren, 2011; Qu, 2020).

In addition, a review of Chinese literature on accessible tourism shows that Confucianism is reflected in the family structure of Chinese tourists, and this influence affects the unique travel patterns of Chinese tourists (Wang et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021). Studies have shown that older Chinese adults often travel with family members (Chen & Gassner, 2012; Lee, 2016; Mary et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021). A study of older Chinese adults by Lee (2016) found that only 3% of older adults travel alone. Influenced by Confucianism, Chinese adults often take on the role of facilitators, often accompanying their parents on trips (Wang et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021). According to a study on older adults visiting integrated resorts in China, the decision-making and planning of trips is often dominated by family members and is particularly influenced by their level of education. The level of education was also related to the barriers encountered, with language being the most prominent barrier. However, they showed a strong interest in the accessible design and facilities of the resorts that were new to them and were willing to pay for using these facilities (Mary et al., 2020). This view is supported in the literature, which shows that older adults generally have a high frequency of, and demand for, accessible recreational and accommodation facilities (Darcy et al., 2010). It also validates the close relationship between age and the requirement for accessible facilities (Alén et al., 2012).

Reviews of accessible tourism literature relating to Chinese tourists with disabilities found that the terms used to describe tourists with disabilities in all these studies showed a preference for the social model of understanding disability, which is person-first language (Bi et al., 2007; Qiao et al., 2022; Tao et al., 2019; 2024). This indicates that these studies recognise the social and environmental barriers to travel experienced by people with disabilities (Kastenholz et al., 2015; Michopoulou et al., 2015) rather than just the individual's physical or functional limitations (Hammel et al., 2015; Tough et al., 2017).

Overall, the literature indicates that Chinese tourists with disabilities have significant differences in cultural and travel preferences compared to those of other international tourists (Chen & Gassner,

2012; Jiang et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2011; Mary et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important for New Zealand accessible tourism service providers to have a better understanding of the cultural background of Chinese tourists and their market, including their culture and family structure (Campbell & Uren, 2011; Wang et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021). At the same time, New Zealand tourism service providers should also be aware of the specific services required by the family-oriented travel patterns formed by cultural factors. This may include providing large and clear signs to increase the autonomy of older adults when exploring facilities (Mary et al., 2020). Certainly, and based on this understanding, New Zealand tourism service providers should be able to provide products and services that better meet the requirements of tourists with disabilities from different cultures, such as those from China.

2.2   Constraints and barriers to accessible tourism

Understanding the cultural backgrounds and travel patterns of Chinese tourists with disabilities is the first step towards solving accessibility issues. Scholars often use leisure constraints theory to study the constraints of people with disabilities in travel, such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Devile & Kastenholz, 2020; McKercher & Darcy, 2018; Tao et al., 2019). These factors indicate that the relationship between leisure preferences and leisure participation is significantly affected by behavioural constraints (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Intrapersonal constraints are personal psychological states, such as a lack of knowledge and health-related issues (Lyu, 2017; Lyu & Lee, 2016; McKercher & Darcy, 2018). The literature shows that age and poor health remain main constraints affecting travel motivation. However, previous negative travel experiences or doubts about the level of hospitality of local residents are also significant factors that reduce the travel motivation of Chinese tourists (Lai et al., 2013). Interpersonal constraints are related to the difficulties that people with disabilities encounter in social relationships, such as with their travel companions and communication (Lyu, 2017; Lyu & Lee, 2016; McKercher & Darcy, 2018). In the post-pandemic period, for example, many potential Chinese tourists may have delayed or cancelled their travel plans due to health concerns caused by social concerns and prevention measures against the pandemic, especially those who planned to travel with family members (Zhang et al., 2022). In terms of structural

constraints, these are related to participation restrictions due to environmental and economic conditions, including inappropriate accommodation facilities, financial difficulties, and a mismatch between tourism products and itineraries (Lyu, 2017; Lyu & Lee, 2016; McKercher & Darcy, 2018). According to Wen et al. (2020), Chinese tourists, especially older tourists, often encounter more accessibility issues than do younger tourists. The reason for this is the lack of suitable tour operators (e.g. travel agencies) and information support.

Tourism scholars have conducted preliminary studies on individual differences and specific market segments to explore the travel constraints of people with disabilities. However, these studies often ignore the impact of tourists' cultural and personal characteristics on the travel experience. Devile et al. (2024) studied the physical barriers and social treatment that people with disabilities encounter in tourism. Their findings highlight the interaction between individual and structural barriers. Notably, some studies have emphasised the role of social factors in shaping travel constraints, encouraging tourism stakeholders to listen to the views and strategies of people with disabilities in relation to overcoming these constraints (Devile & Kastenholz, 2020 Fuente-Robles et al., 2020). However, and unfortunately, the Chinese Government's definition of "disability" appears based on the medical model, which classifies the severity of disability according to physical ability (Tao et al., 2024). Tao et al. (2024), by segmenting the Chinese market for tourists with physical disabilities, explored in depth, the travel constraints perceived by people with physical disabilities. Their study particularly examined the impact of disability status, demographic characteristics, and travel characteristics on market segmentation, and showed that structural constraints were considered the most important travel barriers in all market segments, while the importance of intrapersonal and interpersonal barriers differed by market segment. The results also highlighted the significant influence of cultural traditions and personal experiences on their travel behaviour and experience, which they highlighted appear to be different from those of the Western market (Tao et al., 2024).

For accessible tourism research, it is also important to identify and address the physical, attitudinal, and informational barriers that people with disabilities encounter when travelling. Physical barriers are manifested as a lack of or inappropriate accessible facilities for people with disabilities (Bezyak et al., 2017; Piramanayagam et al., 2019; Somnuxpong & Wiwatwongwana, 2020). Indeed, one

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study revealed that some low-star hotels were less accessible, as evidenced by the lack of accessible emergency exits, parking spaces, shower chairs, and bathroom grab bars (Piramanayagam et al., 2019). Attitudinal barriers are also a problem that people with disabilities often encounter when travelling (Kong & Loi, 2017; Lim, 2020). Negative social attitudes and stereotypes about people with disabilities often exacerbate the barriers they encounter. For example, misconceptions and discrimination against people with disabilities often lead to social exclusion or unreasonable differential treatment of people with disabilities and of their families (Kong & Loi, 2017; Lim, 2020). Finally, information barriers are another challenge to accessible tourism (Agovino et al., 2017; Benjamin et al., 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Kołodziejczak, 2019). Research has demonstrated the requirement for accessibility, reliability, and the latest information in travel information (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Kołodziejczak, 2019). Some scholars have also emphasised the requirement to consider the type of information delivery needed to enable people with disabilities to access travel-related information more effectively (Lam et al., 2020; McKercher & Darcy, 2018). For example, consideration should be given to those with disabilities that find it difficult to perceive visual or auditory information (Devile & Kastenholz, 2020; Jain et al., 2019). This means that the format in which information and other communication materials are delivered needs to include not only traditional methods of communication such as clear labelling on websites and brochures (Benjamin et al., 2020; Kołodziejczak, 2019), but also assistive technologies that are multi-sensory in nature, such as Braille for the visually impaired, along with audio-visual materials and audio descriptions (Devile & Kastenholz, 2020; Kong & Loi, 2017). For people with hearing impairments, this may mean providing sign language and real-time transcriptions to enhance the travel experience (Jain et al., 2019).

In summary, after considering the various constraints and barriers discussed in the literature, it is clear that the development of accessible tourism requires more consideration of potential differences for the market of Chinese tourists with disabilities, which may be different from the market of those in the West (Tao et al., 2024). There is a clear need to improve physical facilities (Pirmanayagam et al., 2019), change public attitudes (Kong & Loi, 2017), and optimise the way information is provided (Devile & Kastenholz, 2020). Therefore, it is important to explore how

New Zealand's accessible tourism service providers meet the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities. Secondly, it is crucial to analyse the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand in terms of their accessibility and information about accessibility, to address the requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Accessible tourism service providers, website accessibility, and the provision of accessible information are therefore discussed in detail in the next section.

2.3 Tourism accessible service providers and website accessibility

This section explores how accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand and tour operators in China as suppliers, meet the requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities visiting New Zealand, by focusing on the terms "collaboration" and "accessibility"; these are key themes evident in the extant literature and frame important considerations for the study. These two themes are discussed in detail in this section.

2.3.1   Collaboration in accessible tourism

As discussed in Chapter 1, any research that focuses on accessible tourism stakeholders can provide valuable insights. Recent research has increasingly recognised the important role of tourism stakeholder collaboration in enhancing accessible tourism (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015; Michopoulou et al., 2015; Nigg & Eichelberger, 2021; Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Sisto et al., 2022). Research has identified the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders, not only with people with disabilities themselves (Nyanjom et al., 2018), but also with tour operators (Sisto et al., 2022) and governments (Michopoulou et al., 2015). A review of the accessible tourism stakeholder literature indicates that there is an emphasis on the importance of stakeholder collaboration in the development and implementation of accessible tourism strategies. This collaboration needs to be organic, iterative, and developmental (Nyanjom et al., 2018, Sisto et al., 2022). However, such ideal collaboration requires a deep understanding of the complexity and multidimensional nature of accessibility and accessibility requirements by tourism stakeholders (Nyanjom et al., 2018). For example, Nyanjom et al. (2018) conducted research in Western Australia and found that the resolution of physical, attitudinal, and informational barriers requires

a comprehensive approach to collaboration to reach a consensus and then resolve the barriers. Some scholars have advocated that people with disabilities, as one of the stakeholders in tourism, could collaborate with tourism-related institutions and organisations to take advantage of their experience and knowledge by providing theoretical guidance to help and improve accessible tourism products (Nyanjom et al., 2018; Qiao et al., 2022).

The findings and observations in this literature provided an opportunity to consider how research could be conducted to enable accessible tourism service providers to more fully respond to the accessible tourism requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities, particularly in terms of understanding and addressing the complexities of tourist cultures and travel patterns. From the review of relevant literature, it became evident that existing research has explored the efforts of tourism service providers to improve accessibility. However, research findings consistently indicated that, although service providers have taken action to improve accessibility, these efforts have not fully met the requirements of those with disabilities (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Darcy, 2010; Somnuxpong & Wiwatwongwana, 2020). For example, many tourist attractions do not provide parking close to the attraction, despite the provision of ramps, handrails, accessible toilets, and signage (Somnuxpong & Wiwatwongwana, 2020).

Some studies have demonstrated that the benefits of providing accessible tourism-related businesses are significant (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Nigg & Eichelberger, 2021). This view is consistent with the results of a study conducted in New Zealand, which pointed out that the provision and availability of accessible services will bring tourism companies or organisations customers with greater loyalty than that of tourists without disabilities, and can revitalise the competitiveness of the international accessible market (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). Some scholars have pointed out that the potential benefits of the accessible market far outweigh the initial costs of investment (Darcy, 2010). Therefore, it is important to conduct a study of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand to determine their perspectives on how the New Zealand tourism industry can collaborate to best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities.

2.3.2 Website accessibility

Providing detailed and accurate travel information to tourists with disabilities is crucial. Research has shown that providing detailed travel information not only enhances the travel experiences of tourists with disabilities but also helps them cope better with any challenges they may encounter during their trip (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Kołodziejczak, 2019). The internet has become the main channel for obtaining travel information (Kołodziejczak, 2019; Lam et al., 2020); however, the literature shows that people with disabilities still face many challenges with website accessibility (Domínguez Vila et al., 2024; Eusébio et al., 2023; Lam et al., 2020) and information about accessibility (Gillovic & Harkison, 2023; Harkison et al., 2018). These findings confirm earlier research results that the internet has not become accessible for people with disabilities, especially when booking travel, and is considerably below its potential (Williams et al., 2007).

The majority of previous studies that discuss website accessibility refer to the WCAG principles (Agrawal et al., 2019; Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; Eusébio et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2021; Teixeira et al., 2021). The literature shows that most of the analysed websites generally have poor accessibility, which increases difficulties for people with disabilities attempting to access such websites (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018; Eusébio et al., 2023; Teixeira et al., 2021). The main accessibility issues can be categorised as a lack of text alternatives, poor navigation, and a lack of assistive technology compatibility. The lack of text alternatives is particularly limiting for people with visual and hearing impairments (Shiver & Wolfe, 2015). This lack of appropriate text alternatives, such as Braille, symbols, images, videos, audio, and screen readers, can prevent users from successfully accessing and obtaining information, thus limiting their website experience (Hackett et al., 2003; Teixeira et al., 2021). Navigational issues may be reflected in a website's confusing or non-intuitive navigation system. The complexity of a navigation system not only increases the difficulty of finding information, but may also lead to user misuse, especially for those who rely on assistive technologies (Teixeira et al., 2021). The literature has certainly established the role of assistive technologies in promoting the accessibility of websites (Domínguez Vila et al., 2018, 2019; Teixeira et al., 2021). However, some scholars have criticised the web accessibility standards, arguing that they are an idealised representation (Lewthwaite,

2014). Within the context of global diversity and cultural sensitivity, WCAG promotes a perspective on standards that may unintentionally reinforce Western perspectives in the process of implementing standardisation, while ignoring the specific practices and needs of non-Western cultures (Lewthwaite, 2014). Therefore, further research on the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand is urgently needed.

It is important to note that the foregoing studies analysed web accessibility according to the WCAG 2.0 principles (Caldwell et al., 2008). Although WCAG 2.0 was published some time ago, and version 2.1 was published in 2024 (Campbell et al., 2024), Jung et al. (2024) pointed out that it is still the most widely used standard based on current global usage. This fact not only highlights the popularity of WCAG 2.0 but also provides a framework for the subsequent exploration of the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand in terms of website accessibility in this study.

2.3.3 Information about accessibility

Research has explored the importance of information about accessibility provision for tourists (Benjamin et al., 2020; Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Cloquet et al., 2018; Darcy, 2010; Kołodziejczak, 2019; Zhang & Yang, 2021). While these studies have raised awareness of the requirement for information about accessibility provision, an important question remains as to whether this information about accessibility is available on the websites of tour operators for people with disabilities. The literature reviewed also shows that scholars generally pay attention to the challenges that people with disabilities face in accessing information about accessibility (Benjamin et al., 2020; Cloquet et al., 2018). Common issues include insufficient visibility and usability of information, and a lack of understanding of disability on the part of information providers. These issues often lead to the over-simplification of the image of people with disabilities (Benjamin et al., 2020; Cloquet et al., 2018). The literature also identifies that helpful information about accessibility can reduce feelings of disappointment and perceived risk among those with disabilities (Kołodziejczak, 2019; Zhang & Yang, 2021). As such, it is evident from the research that inaccessible information and inappropriate presentation (see Section 2.3.2, Website accessibility) make it more difficult for people with disabilities to access information and limit

their travel options and freedom. Although research has been conducted on this issue worldwide (Benjamin et al., 2020; Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Cloquet et al., 2018), there is still a lack of research on the accessibility of Chinese outbound tour operators' websites.

Table 1 summarises the literature related to information about accessibility provision and presents the relevant research themes and recommendations. The findings and recommendations of this literature can serve as a useful reference for following up on the provision of accessibility information on the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand.

Table 1

Research Summary of Literature on Accessible Information Provision

Author(s)	Themes	Recommendation(s)
Benjamin et al. (2020)	Tourism promotional materials	Include people with disabilities in tourism promotional materials and promote inclusive advertising.
Cloquet et al. (2018)	Tourist attraction marketing materials	More fully integrate the disability community into tourism marketing and advertising.
Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh (2020)	Accessible tourism consumer expectations and experiences	Ensure that information is available through multiple sources and formats, as well as being authentic and usable. Encourage the participation of accessibility consumers in the development and improvement of tourism services.
Darcy (2010）	Accessibility accommodation information provision	Provide detailed information (e.g. room and bathroom sizes and facilities), enhance visual and graphic materials, cultivate accessibility awareness among service staff, and improve accessibility information systems.

Author(s)	Themes	Recommendation(s)
Kołodziejczak (2019)	Accessibility information	Systematically include accessible information on facilities and services in all publications for tourists.
Buhalis & Michopoulou (2011)	Information and communication technology	Encourage destinations and tourism businesses to use available technology to meet the unique requirements of the accessible market to provide customised services and information.
Zhang & Yang (2021）	Online reviews	Enhance the professional and objective nature of eWOM content to reduce the perceived risk for people with disabilities.

It is clear that research on accessible tourism information for people with disabilities is currently fragmented. However, by sorting and summarising these studies, it became evident that they are interrelated. The effectiveness of information about accessibility provision is crucial to ensuring that people with disabilities can fully participate in tourism activities. First, the appropriate use of information and communication technology (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Zhang & Yang, 2021) is critical. Research shows that tour operators need to strengthen the use of information and communication technology to improve the travel experience of people with disabilities, especially in terms of customised services and reducing perceived risks. Second, systems integration and the inclusion of all relevant tourism-related publications is needed (Benjamin et al., 2020; Cloquet et al., 2018; Kołodziejczak, 2019). Benjamin et al. (2020, p. 2) stated that "promotion and advertising in marketing is an essential and crucial component of enabling and empowering PWDs' interests and motivations for planning and visiting tourist destinations." Therefore, more comprehensive integration of the requirements of people with disabilities in tourism marketing and advertising could reflect Chinese outbound tour operators' in-depth understanding of, and respect for, the disability community. Finally, consumer expectations and experience feedback (Cockburn-

Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Darcy, 2010) are also needed; that is, consumers expect to receive services and facilities that suit them and provide feedback. For tourists with disabilities, "accurate, quality and honest information is essential" (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020, p. 9). Therefore, to meet these requirements, tour operators should ensure that accessible information is available to facilitate advance travel planning.

The foregoing studies collectively point to an important trend, which is that the tourism industry can more effectively serve a wide range of consumer groups, including people with disabilities, with improved information provision and communication strategies. This points to a need for more in-depth research analysing Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. The literature summarised in Table 1 serves not only as a reference, but also formed the basis for the subsequent design of a table for analysing the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand (see Table 7) in Chapter 3.

2.4 Summary

The literature review revealed a number of significant knowledge gaps regarding the traditional culture and travel patterns of Chinese tourists as compared to Western tourists, the provision of accessible tourism services, website accessibility, and the provision of accessible information. There is a lack of research on the Chinese market and Chinese tourists with disabilities in the Western accessible tourism literature. Considering the considerable number of people with disabilities in the Chinese market (see Chapter 1), and the fact that a proportion of these people with disabilities are older adults, this indicates a need for studies on disability, limitations and barriers, and the accessibility of information in China. From a review of the extant literature, it was clear that there is a gap in the knowledge of the requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities for both New Zealand and Chinese suppliers. This provided an opportunity to explore how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers. Secondly, there was an opportunity to Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. This is particularly

relevant, as research in the field of accessible tourism is largely dominated by Western ideas (Harju-Myllyaho & Jutila, 2016), and there is a significant lack of research on disability in China (Qu, 2020). A literature review can provide a theoretical and empirical basis for the subsequent development of research, paving the way for communication and collaboration between accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand and Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand. By exploring how both can respond to and meet the specific requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities, this research aimed to contribute to the development of an accessible market and the improvement of the travel experience for tourists with disabilities. This will not only promote inclusive growth in the tourism industry but also potentially open up new possibilities for tourism collaboration between New Zealand and China, ensuring the sustainable and inclusive development of accessible tourism.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research paradigm, design, and methods used to explore the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. This study adopts an interpretive research paradigm and a qualitative case study method, divided into two phases: semi-structured interviews with New Zealand accessible tourism service providers and web content analysis of the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites. This chapter provides a detailed account of the research participant recruitment, data collection and analysis methods, including thematic analysis and website evaluation based on the WCAG 2.0 standards. Additionally, the research addresses ethical considerations, research reliability, and limitations to ensure the methodology is rigorous and transparent.

3.1   Research paradigm

According to Davies and Fisher (2018), a paradigm is a worldview or belief system used to observe and understand the world. Pringle and Booysen (2018 p. 21) argued that the choice of paradigm is based on "a researcher's ontology or belief system that guides the way we think about and do research." Fundamentally, a paradigm can be understood as a framework or tool representing how researchers perceive and define the world (Kamal, 2019). An appropriate paradigm can help a researcher better understand and explore the research topic, which can also help clarify the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research and thus determine the appropriate methodology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Therefore, paradigms provide researchers with a way to observe and understand the world and are often the starting point for research, enabling them to effectively explore and understand their research topic, thereby ensuring consistency and coherence in the research process.

As Guba and Lincoln (1994) pointed out, the philosophical foundations of research include the ontology, epistemology and methodology, which collectively form the core framework of research design and profoundly influence the thinking patterns and methodological choices of researchers. The ontology explores basic assumptions and perceptions of reality and asks, "how does it exist?" (Pringle & Booysen, 2018, p. 21). The epistemology, which concerns the nature of knowledge and

the methods of acquiring it, asks the question, "how do we know, what we know?" (Pringle & Booysen, 2018, p. 21). Finally, the methodology deals with research methods and asks, "how do we inquire into what we want to know?" (Pringle & Booysen, 2018, p. 21). In short, the ontological and epistemological foundations shape the methodological approach, which can guide researchers in their thinking and modes of inquiry (Pringle & Booysen, 2018).

In considering and identifying these issues, a research framework started to take shape, and the explanatory paradigm chosen for this study became the basis for the subsequent research design and methodology. Botterill and Platenkamp (2012) pointed out that the concept of paradigm can be used in various ways. This means that different research paradigms enable researchers to understand different phenomena and generate different research objectives (Deetz, 1996). Therefore, it is particularly important to identify and justify the paradigm underpinning the research process. Based on the previously raised points in this study and considering that the experiences of different people in different contexts may differ (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Darcy & Dickson, 2009; Kołodziejczak, 2019), an approach consistent with the interpretive paradigm, to acknowledge the existence of multiple realities (Davies & Fisher, 2018) was selected.

The interpretive paradigm provided an important philosophical foundation for this study. From an ontological perspective, interpretivism considers reality to be subjective and socially constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective is highly relevant to the aims of this study, which was centred on providing a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Therefore, the research aim is not a single objective reality but one that involves both New Zealand accessible tourism service providers and Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand. Epistemologically, interpretivism emphasises the importance of understanding the meaning of social phenomena through interactions between the researcher and participants (Klein & Myers, 1999). This is reflected in the data collection methods used in this study: semi-structured interviews and website content analysis. These methods aimed to capture the subjective experiences of interview participants and the hidden meaning of website content respectively. In relation to the methodology, interpretivism emphasises the flexibility and contextual nature of research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These characteristics

guided the methodology of this study. For example, semi-structured interviews were used to identify the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand, while a website content analysis was used to interpret the deeper meaning behind the information on the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand. This study, therefore, aimed to provide theoretical support and practical significance for the realisation of accessible tourism based on interpretivism by giving an in-depth explanation of the current situation and challenges in accessible tourism services in New Zealand and China.

Notably, this study rejected positivism as a research paradigm. Positivism is a philosophical position that derives from the natural sciences and focuses on dealing with social reality by observing reality and formulating universal principles (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Compared with interpretivism, positivism focuses more on pure data and facts and strives to eliminate the interference of human bias (Scotland, 2012). Positivist approaches are mainly applied in the field of natural sciences and may not be suitable for social science research (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The method is characterised by reducing complexity through simplification and control of variables and may overlook the heterogeneity of people with disabilities and their interactions with the surrounding environment.

In summary, the interpretive paradigm emphasises the exploration of research by understanding the subjective meaning and context of social phenomena, and therefore, it was an appropriate research paradigm for this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The application of this paradigm not only provided an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and practical experiences of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand, but also theoretical support for analysing the cultural background of Chinese tourists with disabilities (e.g., Confucian thinking and travel patterns, as discussed in Chapter 2) and its impact. In addition, using an interpretive paradigm, the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators could be situated in their cultural and social context for analysis, to reveal the websites' accessibility and provision of accessibility information. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm not only provided a solid theoretical framework for this study but also supported the achievement of the research objectives.

3.2 Research design: Case study method

The primary aim of this study was to provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. To achieve this research aim, the study was conducted in two separate phases. The first phase was conducted through semi-structured interviews to understand how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers. The second phase analysed Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. The two phases were complementary, as the first phase provided a subjective perspective and in-depth understanding, while the second phase provided clarity about website accessibility and information provision for tourists with disabilities.

This study adopted the case study method, focusing on tourism suppliers in New Zealand and China. The case study method can obtain reliable data through in-depth analyses of multiple cases, which helped to achieve the specific objectives of this study (Gray, 2004). This method allows the researcher to thoroughly explore specific phenomena in a single instance (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Some scholars have criticised case studies as being potentially "speculative, unreliable and too specific" (Beeton, 2005, p. 38). However, the strength of a case study method is that it allows researchers to drill in depth into a situation when attempting to comprehensively understand a phenomenon or series of events, thereby providing a comprehensive situated perspective (Noor, 2008). In addition, these multiple sources of data allow researchers to focus on integrating the information in a certain way (Gray, 2004). The specific way of integration is discussed later, with examples (see Section 3.4.4, Web content analysis).

The case study method with the interpretive paradigm was considered most suitable for exploring the views and websites of tourism suppliers in New Zealand and China. The first research objective was to determine how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers. By conducting semi-structured interviews with accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand, it was expected that their perceptions and practices around accessible services would be explained. The

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second objective was to analyse Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Assessing the accessibility features and information provision of Chinese outbound tour operators' websites, not only explained the current accessibility status of their websites but also reflected the responsiveness of these operators to the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities. Therefore, the case study method helped to analyse accessibility issues, website accessibility, and the provision of accessibility information, which provides a tourism supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand.

3.3   Accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand

The first phase aimed to achieve research objective one, which was to determine the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand with regard to how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers. A detailed discussion follows.

3.3.1   Sampling and recruitment method

To select a sample of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand, a set of inclusion criteria (see Appendix C) was used. The samples were chosen to ensure that the providers had some knowledge of the research topic, which was important to ensure that their responses were comprehensive, relevant and likely to generate insights into the issue being studied (Patton, 2002). These inclusion criteria included:

- The operation had been running for more than two years.
- Its official website indicated that it could provide help for tourists with disabilities.
- It provided services for Chinese tourists with disabilities.
- The supplier was located in New Zealand.

Based on these criteria, a list of suitable contacts was generated from the official website of Tourism New Zealand (https://www.newzealand.com/nz/) and through a Google search using the keywords "New Zealand accessible tourism service providers" and "New Zealand tour operators."

The websites of these suppliers were accessed, and publicly available contact emails were obtained. An invitation email was then sent to the service providers, along with a consent form and participant information sheet (see Appendix B, C, D), inviting them to participate in the study. Generally, it was expected that the email would be received by the manager or an employee of the supplier. If the manager received the email, they responded directly to the invitation, but if an employee received the email, they usually replied that they needed to report to their supervisor and asked the researcher to wait for a response. A purposive sampling method was adopted, which aligned the reasons for selecting the sample with the overall objectives of the study (Campbell et al., 2020). This sampling method is considered "to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" (Kelly, 2010, p. 317).

3.3.2 Interview participants

Ten sample suppliers met the inclusion criteria. Therefore, 10 invitation emails were sent, resulting in five responses. Three declined to participate for reasons such as "peak tourist season" or "have moved out of the tourism market." Despite a follow-up attempt with them, no further response was received. In the end, only two accessible tourism service providers confirmed their participation in the study. As the semi-structured interviews would be conducted with the sample to collect data, the interview participants were allocated codes to ensure their privacy. Both interviewees operate within New Zealand's accessible tourism industry. The first one represents a specialist organisation that advocates accessible tourism, collaborating with adventures operators and regional destinations to produce access guides and operational guidelines. The second is a qualified operator with extensive experience working with people with disabilities whose extensive experience in clinical practice also provides a solid foundation for customising services for people with disabilities and serves as an important basis for evidence-based guidance provided to other tourism service providers. With this in mind, both interviewees were acknowledged experts whose professional qualifications and knowledge enabled them to provide authoritative insights and opinions on accessibility issues. Despite the small sample, their well-informed expertise provided a meaningful and credible basis for exploring the perspectives of accessible tourism services providers in New Zealand. It was considered that semi-structured interviews with these

participants would determine how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers.

3.3.3   Interview questions

Interview questions were developed following the guidelines of Tracy (2019) to ensure that they closely aligned with the research aim and objectives of the study. The questions were designed with reference to the research aim, two research objectives, and the literature review discussed in Chapter 2, which served as empirical material to help shape the interview questions (Tracy, 2019). For example, in most cases, the answer to some questions could be as simple as "yes" or "no." In this case, to obtain more information, the interviewer probed by asking "in what ways" or "how did that experience unfold?" (Tracy, 2019, p. 164). The second phase of the interview question, "During the trip," serves as an example. In order to understand how New Zealand's accessible tourism service providers deal with accessibility requirements or complaints that may arise during travel, the interview participant may have been able to propose a solution, but without offering specific examples. Therefore, the follow-up question "could you please provide some examples?" was used to obtain more specific answers or solutions to dealing with accessibility requirements and complaints during travel (See Appendix F). Furthermore, the guidance from Tracy (2019) was reflected in the design of the first few questions at the beginning of the interview, which were kept simple and easy to understand to help the participants feel comfortable and enter into the discussion easily (see questions 1 to 3 in Appendix F) (Tracy, 2019).

Based on the guidelines offered by Tracy (2019), the interview questions were divided into three sections; each section was designed to acquire more data and information related to the research topic. The first section focused on asking participants about providing information to inform tourists' preparation before the travel, exploring how they could provide accessible services for Chinese tourists with disabilities (Cloquet et al., 2018, Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). It also focused on implementing accessible services during travel and learning how to monitor and deal with the requirements for and complaints about accessible services (Piramanayagam et al., 2019; Somnuxpong & Wiwatwongwana, 2020). Finally, this section focused on collecting feedback after

a trip, aiming to evaluate the effectiveness of service improvement and opportunities for future development (Zhang & Yang, 2021).

3.3.4 Data collection

This study adopted online semi-structured interviewing to collect data from two accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand. Traditionally, when collecting tourism industry stakeholders' perspectives and opinions, many studies have tended to use semi-structured interviews as the data collection method (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). In contrast, although questionnaires may include open-ended questions, the format and structure often limit in-depth understanding of the details and the ability to obtain additional information by the interviewer. Moreover, as the two interview participants were accessibility tourism service providers that specifically served people with disabilities, they could share their professional knowledge and experiences about accessible tourism. The limitation of only being able to interview two participants was not surprising given the general lack of available accessible tourism providers in New Zealand.

Two pilot tests were conducted before the formal interviews to identify any shortcomings and better manage the interview pace. Since the interview participants were not in the same location, the interviews were conducted in New Zealand via Microsoft Teams conferencing software. Online video interviews thus simplified the choice of location and time. Furthermore, considering the participants' busy schedules due to their daily work, the participants were able to participate at times that were most convenient to them. Before the start of the formal interviews, the consent of the interview participants was gained to record the interviews for accuracy and take appropriate notes during the interviews. The interviews were carried out in English. At the start of each interview, the interview participants were welcomed; then the purpose of the study, terminologies (e.g. accessible tourism and accessibility) and privacy issues were explained to them to avoid possible terminological problems during the interview. The formal interview started once the researcher received a response indicating that the terms were understood.

The interviews lasted from 50 to 60 minutes. After the interview ended and the recording stopped, the researcher asked the participants if they wanted to receive the transcripts to review. Both participants indicated that they did not require this. After each interview, the notes taken during the interview were appropriately organised, and the interview was reflected upon (Tracy, 2019).

3.3.5 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected in the semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the thematic analysis revealed the underlying meanings and phenomena behind the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Clarke and Braun (2017) defined thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data" (p. 1). Research on how to use thematic analysis in tourism research by Walters (2016) pointed out that thematic analysis is often used to describe written documents, such as interview transcripts. Thematic analysis is theoretically flexible and allows the researcher to concentrate on connections between participant experiences and meanings across data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002). Moreover, the thematic analysis method has been used in previous qualitative research on tourism stakeholders (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). It was therefore considered the most appropriate analysis method for analysing the data collected in the semi-structured interviews. The important limitation of carrying out thematic analysis on a sample size of two is noted, although analysis of the two detailed transcripts did in fact reveal significant common themes.

Terry et al. (2017) explained the framework for thematic analysis, based on the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This framework was chosen because it is flexible and suitable for new qualitative researchers. The authors divided the thematic analysis into six phases. They explained that the term "phase" represents a process of thematic analysis that is not strictly linear. However, it asks the researcher to switch frequently between several phases, which are recursive and iterative (Terry et al., 2017, p. 9). The process for thematic analysis was outlined as follows:

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Phase One – Familiarisation with the data

The aim of becoming familiar with the data is to provide the researcher with a starting point for analysing the data and asking questions about the data. It is a process of actively engaging with the data (Terry et al., 2017). To achieve this, the researcher must "read and re-read all textual data, making casual observational notes" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 13). In this study, a general introduction and summary of each participant's interview data was made to help develop concepts for the initial data analysis (See Table 2).

Table 2

The Summary of Interview Data with Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1

Accessible Tourism Service Provider 1
Data from Tourism Service Provider 1 shows that they provided comprehensive information and accessible services, which demonstrated the nature and professionalism of their services. However, this interview participant reflected the industry's general service shortcomings and limitations, especially in terms of meeting the accessibility requirements of people with disabilities, which were still very limited. In addition, it was evident that the industry lacked the necessary focus on the requirements and experiences of tourist with disabilities, and tourists with disabilities were rarely considered as a separate identity category. While the industry claimed to provide accessible services, the minimum standards and best practices for accessible services were often not clearly stated, which increased the lack of transparency in the services. Issues with current service provision also included fragmented information and inadequate services, which required more attention and improvement to ensure the quality and effectiveness of accessible services.

Phase Two – Generating codes

In comparison to casual observational notes, coding creates meaningful labels for specific parts of the data set related to the research question (Terry et al., 2017). In this study's analysis, keywords or a pithy phrase were used to name the relevant data within each data item (Terry et al., 2017), which helped conclude and capture the meaning of each data segment. The codes differed in their highlighted content, as shown in Table 3. Each code had a meaning; that is, it was a descriptive code. For example, the code selection in Table 3 is "Focus on information within the context of accessible tourism." This captures "the surface meanings of the data, but that does not need to equate to a superficial or purely descriptive reading" (Terry, 2017, p. 38). In contrast, a potential meaning that extends beyond what the participants expressed is known as an interpretive code (Terry, 2017, p. 38). In Table 3, the selected interpretive code is "Enhance customer autonomy in

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decision-making"; this code "goes beyond participant-expressed meanings, to the underlying patterns/stories in the data" (Terry, 2017, p. 38).

Table 3

Example of a Code from the Interview Data

Data from accessible tourism service provider 1	Code
Yeah, <u>it's about information because it's tourism accessible and inclusive tourism</u>, it's not understanding your client's got a disability. <u>It's understanding that you provide information of what you have and then the client can choose what is best for them.</u>	Focus on information within the context of accessible tourism. Enhance customer autonomy in decision-making

Phase Three – Constructing themes

In this phase, codes and related data are reviewed first. Afterwards, coding should involve "examining codes (and associated data), and combining, clustering or collapsing codes together into bigger or more meaningful patterns" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 18). The new meaningful pattern could be "provisional themes" through this approach. However, the researcher can decide to keep or discard these before choosing themes (Terry et al., 2017). Thematic maps or tables can help the researcher identify the relationship between different themes and datasets (Terry et al., 2017). In this study, an early thematic map was used to help understand the interconnections and relationships among various provisional themes (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

An Early Thematic Map of the Data from the Interviews
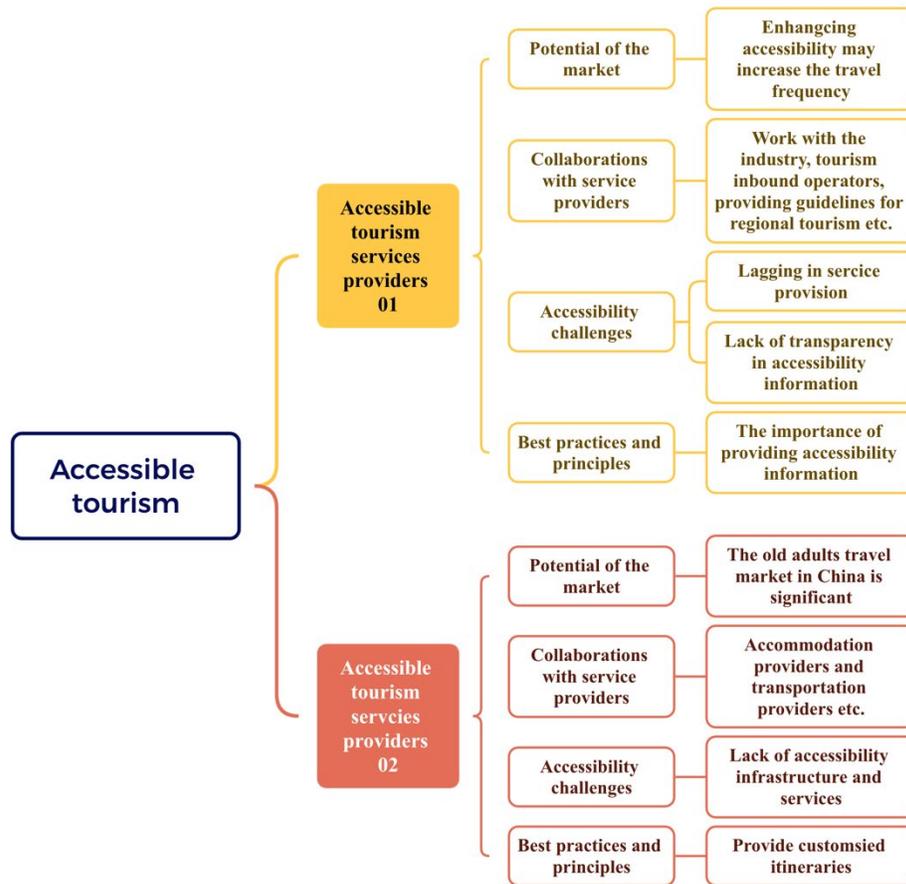
Note: This figure is a mind map of key themes collected from the two interview participants

Phase Four – Reviewing potential themes

Once the provisional themes and thematic map have been developed, a second review is vital to the thematic analysis process. This review focused on those themes that accurately reflected the data and aligned with Research Objective One, which was to determine how the tourism industry

can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers.

The second review involved assessing the internal consistency of each theme and confirming its unique nature amongst the different themes (Terry et al., 2017). This can help the researcher determine if all the themes comprehensively cover the dataset and represent significant patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A draft thematic map should be developed based on the changes during the review process to form a final thematic map (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Final Thematic Map for Thematic Analysis
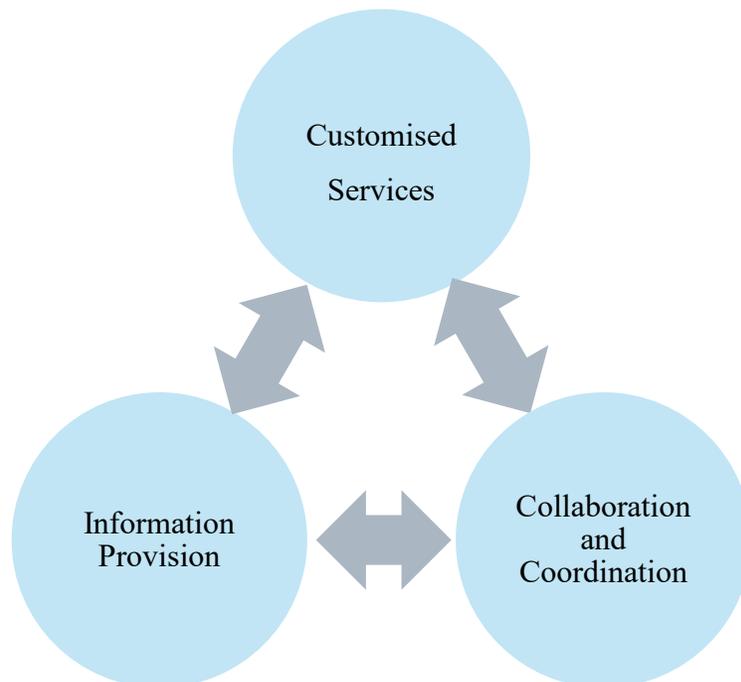
Note: This figure is the final thematic map of key themes collected from the two interview participants

Phase Five – Defining and naming themes

In this phase, the researcher's position shifts from a summative position to an interpretative orientation. This means that the researcher begins to construct data-based stories that make sense of the diversity of patterns and meanings in the data. This involves writing analytic texts that ensure "clarity, cohesion, precision and quality" in the thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017, p. 23). However, in this process of defining themes, there is still a possibility that the definition of themes may not be precise enough, and a short definition of themes can help the researcher have a summary of each theme to better understand the core ideas and meanings of each theme (Terry et al., 2017).

Phase Six – Producing the report

In this phase, researchers link the data and analysis to the literature to form a single output that answers the research question. In this process, researchers move from a purely analytical perspective to a focus on the overall project. Processing the cited data excerpts is crucial. There are two styles of data analysis in thematic analysis: descriptive and interpretative (Terry et al., 2017). The descriptive style focuses on examples in the analysis narrative and is used to illustrate key factors or arguments in the analysis. Conversely, the interpretative style involves research personnel discussing the details of data excerpts, and specific aspects or characteristics of the topic form the basis of the analytical statement (Terry et al., 2017). This study, therefore, began with a descriptive analysis approach to help establish a basic understanding of the subject, which is reflected in the findings of interview participants' data (see the example provided in Phase Two). Subsequently, an interpretative analysis approach was used to move towards a more in-depth discussion to demonstrate how the data supported the research questions, as overviewed in the discussions of the findings in Chapter 4 (see the example provided in Phase Two). The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three key themes through inductive reasoning: "customisation", "collaboration" and "information". Each theme revealed shared characteristics among the interview participants. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Although mainly inductive reasoning was used to derive themes from the data to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand,

inductive and deductive methods are generally complementary in qualitative content analysis (Armat et al., 2018). Although the research objectives and theoretical framework established at the beginning of the study guided the analysis process (Armat et al., 2018), the continual comparison of theory with actual data during the data analysis not only served to validate the established theory but also facilitated the discovery of new theoretical insights (Thorne, 2000). Therefore, whilst deductive reasoning played a role in some stages of the analysis, inductive reasoning remained dominant throughout the study (Armat et al., 2018), ensuring that the findings were grounded in and relevant to the actual data.

3.4 Chinese outbound tour operators' websites

The second phase was designed to analyse the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand in terms of website accessibility and the provision of accessibility information, Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. This is discussed in more detail next.

3.4.1 Sampling and recruitment method

When selecting sample websites of Chinese outbound tour operators, samples that clearly provided detailed tourism products or services for Chinese tourists to New Zealand were sought. With the aim of finding Chinese outbound tour operators in China that cooperate with New Zealand, the researcher searched for "New Zealand preferred partner (新西兰首选合作伙伴)" on the Tourism New Zealand (https://www.newzealand.com/cn/). This website provided a webpage with a list of Chinese outbound tour operators that facilitate travel to New Zealand (Clements, n.d.). The samples in the list were Chinese outbound tour operators that Tourism New Zealand considered to be committed to developing high-quality tourism products with a good reputation in the tourism market. These Chinese outbound tour operators were suitable as samples for analysing website accessibility and the provision of accessibility information on their websites. The researcher accessed these websites on December 04, 2024.

3.4.2 Websites case studies

The Tourism New Zealand website is funded by the New Zealand Government and provides authoritative and secure information (TNZ, n.d.). It has 14 Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand on the list (Clements, n.d.). However, for some unknown reason, the websites of six Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand could not be accessed; two had a confusing navigation system and could not successfully access the interface the researcher wanted based on the given main menu, or provide any tourism services or products from China to New Zealand. Therefore, they had to be excluded. In the end, six websites met the sampling criteria (see Table 4). The names of the Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand did not require pseudonyms or codes, as the websites of the samples were available to the general public. These samples were recognised as providing tourism services and products for inbound tourists from China to New Zealand. As Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand operated these websites, the data collected from them came from China. It is important to note that the data collected from Chinese tour operators' websites was different from the data collected from New Zealand accessible tourism service providers. This is critical for providing a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Therefore, analysing the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand in terms of website accessibility and provision of accessibility information was considered likely to identify the requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand.

Table 4

Sample of the Chinese Outbound Tour Operators' Websites

Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand	Names allocated	Web links
China Cyts Tours Holding Co., Ltd.	Aoyou	http://www.aoyou.com
Shanghai Chunqiu Travel Agency Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Chunqiu	https://www.ch.com
Shanghai Airlines International Tourism (Group) Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Airlines	https://www.satrip.com/Home/Index
Shanghai Ctrip International Travel Agency Co., Ltd.	Ctrip	https://www.ctrip.com
GZL International Travel Service Ltd.	GZL	http://www.gzl.com.cn
China International Travel Service Shenzhen Co. Ltd	Nice Tour	https://www.nicetour.cn/shop.html

3.4.3 Data collection

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 on website accessibility and information about accessibility, it was decided to use the WCAG 2.0 guidelines (Caldwell et al., 2008) to analyse the website accessibility of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand (see Section 3.4.4, Web content analysis). Whilst the approach of Domínguez Vila et al. (2020) and Eusébio et al. (2023), used automated analysis tools, in this study, a manual inspection method was used to identify whether the website had accessible features and accessible information content provision that complied with WCAG 2.0 (Caldwell et al., 2008). Some scholars have pointed out the possibility of misreporting the results of testing website accessibility using automated analysis tools (Brajnik, 2008). Therefore, it was decided to use a manual inspection to identify and check whether the

websites met the WCAG 2.0 guidelines. This approach is presented in the form of a "tick box." It has the advantage of being "based on evaluators' opinions, producing failure modes (in the form of violated checkpoints) possibility with defects and solutions" (Brajnik, 2008, p. 71). Details on the specific content of each guideline are explained in more detail in the next subsection.

This step not only facilitated the subsequent in-depth analysis of the data against the accessibility guidelines, but also ensured the reliability and transparency of the research results. It is also worth noting that a single tick did not directly indicate that the tourism service provider lacked the relevant conditions or functions. However, it enabled the researcher to identify and record those websites' accessibility and provision of accessibility information that was clearly marked and provided, thus providing a basis for further in-depth analysis, which was crucial for achieving research objective two. In Chapter 4, the Findings and Discussion section elaborates on the analysis and findings behind these tick options.

3.4.4   Web content analysis

To determine the provision of information about accessibility, the researcher used the web content analysis method proposed by McMillan (2000) to analyse the content of the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites systematically. The research followed a clear five-step process based on the web content analysis framework by McMillan (2000). Web content analysis was first proposed by McMillan (2000) and is a research method based on content analysis, specifically used to analyse and assess a website's content structure, characteristics and functions. The detailed steps involved in this framework are expanded on next.

This process ensured the accuracy of data collection and analysis; the analysis method has already been used in studies on the website provision of accessibility information (Gillovic & Harkison, 2023) by New Zealand Luxury Lodges. This assessment is critical in matters revealing current practice, as it provides a basis for future website design and content provision improvements. The specific steps by McMillan (2000) are as follows:

Phase One — Formulate the research questions and/or hypotheses

This step aims to "narrow" the research questions (McMillan, 2000). Therefore, based on the findings of the literature review in Chapter 2, the following research objective was formulated:

> **Research Objective:** To analyse Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand.

Phase Two — Select samples

As discussed in the previous subsection, the selection of samples relied on the list of relevant Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand on the Tourism New Zealand website (see Section 3.4.1). The five Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand were: Aoyou, Shanghai Chunqiu, Shanghai Airlines, Ctrip, Nice Tour, and GZL International Travel Services.

Phrase Three — Categories are defined for coding

As suggested by McMillan (2000), a standardised list of categories was used to guide data collection and analysis. Based on the WCAG 2.0 guidelines for website accessibility and literature review on website provision of information about accessibility, two lists were developed to assess and analyse secondary data systematically (see Table 5 and Table 6). The first list (Table 5) evaluated the accessibility of Chinese outbound tour operators' websites. Following the WCAG 2.0 guidelines, the themes were: "perceivable," "operable," "understandable," and "robust." "Perceivable" generally included the provision of text alternatives for images, providing audio and video materials, and ensuring that content could be presented in multiple ways (Caldwell et al., 2008). "Operable" indicated that user interface components and navigation were operable, enabling users to operate all website functions by keyboard (Caldwell et al., 2008). "Understandable" indicated that text content was easy to read and ensured consistency in the operation and navigation of web pages (Caldwell et al., 2008). Finally, "robust" referred to the website's compatibility with various assistive technologies, such as screen readers (Caldwell et al.,

2008). In this study, due to equipment limitations, the VoiceOver (Gay, 2023) on Apple computers was used as the test tool to verify whether a website was compatible with this assistive technology.

The second list (Table 6) was used to assess the provision of information about accessibility on Chinese outbound tour operators' websites and drawn from the literature review in Chapter 2. First, accessibility information and interactivity focused on the comprehensive provision of accessibility information by Chinese outbound tour operators' websites, using clear and simple symbols to illustrate information for tourists with disabilities. Second, promotional materials were assessed to determine whether the websites provided information about accessibility for tourists with disabilities. Third, reviews and the information provided on the websites were assessed for reliability.

Table 5

Guidelines for Analysing Website Accessibility

Principle	WCAG 2.0 Guidelines	Standard
Perceivable	1.1 Text alternatives	Provision of any non-text content.
	1.2 Time-based media	Provides alternatives for time-based media.
	1.3 Adaptable	Provides a simple layout without losing information or structure.
	1.4 Distinguishable	Easy for users to see and hear.
Operable	2.1 Keyboard accessible	All functionality available from a keyboard.
	2.2 Enough time	Provides users enough time to read and use content.
	2.3 Seizures	Content design will not cause seizures or physical reactions.
	2.4 Navigable	Provides ways to help users navigate, find content, and determine where they are on the website.
Understandable	3.1 Readable	Text content is readable and understandable.
	3.2 Predictable	Web pages appear and operate in predictable ways.
	3.3 Input assistance	Help users avoid and correct mistakes.
Robust	4.1 Compatible	Maximise compatibility with current and future user agents, including assistive.

Table 6

Guidelines for Analysing the Provision of Accessibility Information on Websites

Themes
Accessibility information and interactivity
• **Comprehensive accessibility information**: Accessible tourist attractions, accommodation, transport, and other facilities and services (including key details such as addresses and contact information).
• **Clear, simple, graphics and symbols:** Internationally recognised symbols for accessibility to help users quickly identify relevant information.
• **Feedback and customer support:** Provides an easily accessible feedback channel and customer support to ensure users can get help quickly if they encounter a problem.
Accessibility information in promotional materials and the language of people with disabilities
• **Publicity materials:** Provision of accessible information in a transparent manner.
• **Inclusive language:** Uses positive and respectful language to describe marginalised groups and accessibility facilities.
• **Communication:** Multi-sensory presentation of information (e.g. Braille, audio-visual materials, text description, pictures, text, etc.).
Trustworthiness of accessibility information and online reviews
• **Online reviews:** Positive online reviews and activities with customer feedback.
• **Information reliability:** The degree of trustworthiness of information.

Phase Four — Train the coders, code the content and check the reliability of the coding

According to McMillan (2000), detailed manual training of coders is usually required before the start of the coding analysis to ensure consistency and accuracy in the coding process. However, in this study, since the coding work was performed solely independently by the coder, and the lists were designed based on the WCAG 2.0 and a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature (see

Table 1), coder training was not deemed necessary; rather, the researcher carried out independent research.

Phase Five — Analyse and interpret the data

McMillan (2000, p. 93) pointed out that researchers should demonstrate "rigor in analysing and interpreting the findings." This study used descriptive and interpretative analysis approaches (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3 in Chapter 4) to interpret the data while exploring the potential meaning and relevance of these data (Terry, 2017). For the analysis and interpretation of website accessibility and the provision of information about accessibility data, screenshots were used to supplement the collected data to address the research objective, to analyse the accessibility of the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators in terms of website accessibility and provision of information about accessibility to address the requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Since the researcher is fluent in Chinese, the researcher translated the content in screenshots of the websites. The complete content of the data collected is presented in Table 7 and Table 8.

The codes and themes for website accessibility and the provision of information about accessibility by Chinese outbound tour operators' websites were based on WCAG 2.0 guidelines and previous literature, which can be considered deductive analyses (Armat et al., 2018). However, the subsequent research conclusions drawn from the analysis are inductive, though they are less dominant than deductive (Armat et al., 2018).

3.5   Ethics approval

This study was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 22nd August 2024, AUTEC reference number 24/153. The AUTEC principles and guidelines were strictly followed during data collection and analysis. This study did not involve any discomfort or employment risks. Furthermore, the researcher adopted different data protection measures to ensure that the data could effectively distinguish and support the two research objectives separately (as described in Chapter 1).

First, to ensure the privacy of the New Zealand accessible tourism service providers explained in Phase 1 to meet Research Objective 1, the study used coding as a privacy protection measure to protect the personal information of the respondents—for example, Accessible Tourism Service Provider 1. Further information on the use of data and the confidentiality of the study can be found in the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix C).

In contrast, the data on the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators used to achieve Research Objective 2 were public and accessible. Therefore, the names of the Chinese outbound tour operators and related public information on their websites for analysis were used when processing this part of the data. According to AUT policy, the data collected in this study will be destroyed after being stored for six years.

3.6   Trustworthiness of the thesis

The trustworthiness of the research must be considered, especially when evaluating qualitative research (Adler, 2022). Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out that trustworthiness should be assessed by focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To ensure the transparency and trustworthiness of the research, these criteria are discussed next to explain how trustworthiness was assured.

Firstly, credibility is concerned with truth value (Amankwaa, 2016). The reliability of this study was verified by checking with the interview participants. During the interviews, the researcher frequently checked with participants that he was accurately interpreting their responses, which enhances the reliability of the study.

Secondly, transferability focuses on applicability concerns, which relate to the ease in which some researchers could "replicate the study with similar conditions in other settings" (Anney, 2014, p. 278). According to Bitsch (2005), the researcher should use detailed descriptions and select participants intentionally to ensure the study's findings are applicable across different contexts. The researcher in this study clarified the terminology and research background for readers or other researchers. Thus, participants or other researchers could decide if the research applied to them depending on their specific contexts and conditions.

The data collection and analysis of this study was against the cultural background of Chinese tourists with disabilities and tour operators' websites in China. It should be noted that this study did not directly address specific issues related to the specific Chinese context, such as language and translation issues. Although these factors are important for a comprehensive understanding of the cultural context, they were not the core interest of this study, which was to provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Therefore, although these cultural factors were considered, they did not directly affect the main research aim and objectives of the study.

Thirdly, dependability relates to concerns about consistency (Anney, 2014) and is "the stability of findings over time" (Bitsch, 2005, p. 86). In this study, consistency was ensured by adopting a systematic data collection and analysis process to ensure consistency in the analysis of each interview participant's data and website.

Lastly, confirmability concerns neutrality, which ensures that the investigation is not affected by the interests of the researcher (Anney, 2014). Research findings must be "clearly derived from the data" (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). This is reflected in the findings and discussions presented in Chapter 4. The interview data and screenshots of websites were used as empirical evidence to support the research results, ensuring the findings were based on data and that the research results could be traced back to the data.

3.7   Limitations

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm and qualitative research approach, primarily focusing on providing a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Given the small sample size of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand, the results should not be generalised to all tourism service providers. Furthermore, the geographic scope of this study was limited to New Zealand and China, and the results may not be applicable to other countries. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to other contexts. Expanding the scope of the study to other regions, especially those with different cultural backgrounds, such as other Asian countries, may provide different insights and broaden the applicability of the results.

Semi-structured interviews are well suited to exploring accessible tourism issues, as this interview format allows for flexibility in a conversation by asking open-ended questions. This allows for the researcher to obtain background information or insights related to the research topic that may be volunteered during the interview. However, although many accessibility studies have been conducted in China (e.g., Qiao et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2019; 2024), many Chinese outbound tour operators' websites lack accessibility, and the provision of accessibility information is fragmented. Recently, research has also begun to focus on obtaining data directly from people with disabilities, to gain an in-depth understanding of their specific requirements and the barriers they encounter when travelling (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Devile & Kastenholz, 2020). Similarly, studies on accessible tourism in China have begun to focus on more specific types of disabilities such as people with mobility/visual disabilities (Qiao et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2019). Therefore, conducting a study on more specific types of disabilities (visible or hidden) may reveal different perspectives and knowledge about accessibility.

A further limitation lies in the use of Chinese outbound tour operators' websites, as their content may change. The researcher ensured the dependability of the analysis process by capturing screenshots of the website data and strictly following the discussed analysis method framework to obtain and analyse each website during the data collection period.

Although this research was conducted with New Zealand and Chinese suppliers to provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand, it is important to clarify that the researcher does not have a disability, which may have limited the understanding of the depth and real requirements of the experience of tourists with disabilities, as the researcher's perspective may not fully represent the actual feelings and require-ments of the disability community. That said, the researcher does have an interest in accessible tourism and thus is familiar with this area of scholarship, which brings important insights to a supply perspective.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis processes outlined in Chapter Three. Three key themes emerged from analysis of the semi-structured interviews: "customisation", "collaboration", and "information". These themes emphasise the importance of customised service design, cross-sector cooperation, and trust building through clear communication. The website analysis guided by WCAG 2.0 revealed limited accessibility and fragmented information provision. Most websites were found to lack essential features such as audio-visual materials, keyboard navigation, and clear accessibility symbols. These results indicate that there is a lack of standardisation and awareness regarding the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities. These results highlight the need for targeted service design, improved website accessibility, and the integration of information about accessibility into travel facilitation.

4.1   Perspectives from New Zealand's accessible tourism services providers

This section discusses three themes that were inductively derived from the interview data: "customisation," "collaboration" and "information." These themes reflect the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand with regard to how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities.

4.1.1   Customisation

In the first theme, the responses of both New Zealand accessible tourism service providers indicated that *customised* services can bring better accessibility to tourists with different types of disabilities. In this study, "customisation" refers to the specific adjustments and arrangements made by New Zealand accessible tourism service providers to meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities. Key aspects of customised services include: customised travel itineraries, provision of special facilities, and adapted accommodation. Considering that both interviewees were professionals in providing accessible tourism services, both offering specialist knowledge and guidance on accessibility practices, their statements reflected the importance of customised services:

Businesses should contact advisors with the user. You know, I have a disability, so I understand what is required. I have my understanding of people with vision impairment more. with everything. Because of that empathy and their understanding of being a barrier rather than an able-bodied consultant. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1)

You're a young man. You've probably got a really strong upper body. You'll be able to lift yourself in and out of things, and you won't need much assistance. Me, I'm older. I've got some degeneration already happening. I'm not as strong. I'm also not as confident. So, I'm going to approach my life quite different to you. And having the same diagnosis doesn't make us the same and what our needs are for holidays. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)

Both participants described the types of services they provided in a very positive way and emphasised the broad and diverse nature of the group of people with disabilities. They pointed out that providing customised services for different types of tourists with disabilities not only catered to this diversity but also benefited older adults. The following quote illustrates this point:

It doesn't matter if they are, you know if they're seniors or if they have some form of disability or you know. It's a huge market. Anybody that falls outside the norm which is significant amount in this day and age. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1)

So, we have people predominantly physically disabled. So quite a lot of that degenerative conditions like MS (Multiple Sclerosis). I'm finding that market probably because that demographic tends to be a little bit older and so they're probably in that group of people that are travelling anyway, so they're over 65s. There's quite a lot of that group. Also, sensory impairment groups of people... Pretty much anybody with a disability likes to do anything that anybody without a disability likes to do. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)

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Both interview participants expressed the importance of designing and adapting customised itineraries. One provided a detailed process for providing customised services for tourists with disabilities. This customised service allows tourists with disabilities to freely access the web links in the email sent by the accessible tourism provider and access the required information. In addition, tourists with disabilities can communicate their accessibility requirements directly with the accessible tourism service operator through a video call.

> *I then send them a welcome e-mail and give them a bit more information about what we offer on that e-mail. It also has connections to Google reviews and Facebook reviews from previous clients so that they can do their own research and feel comfortable from there. We also send them a planning form. It's called a holiday planning form. They fill that in. And once I receive that, then we will set up a video call. So that video call could be whatever medium they like to use, so WhatsApp, Teams, um, Zoom, yeah, whatever. Whatever they like to use…and put it in a more and a realistic itinerary. It's all verbal. I make notes at the end of that. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)*

The other participant explained the case of a successful customer travel wish that was fulfilled after providing customised services. In this case, the tourists with disabilities were from China and were facing difficulties due to the lack of accessible public transport. However, the accessible tourism service provider offered a facility that enabled them to participate in the tour conveniently. This facility also provides convenience for other tourists with disabilities visiting Queenstown in the future.

> *Every client was to come from China and they needed to be able to get in and out of a bus service. They were flying to Queenstown. They arrive in Queenstown. They want to go to Fiordland. They want to go to Milford Sound. It's impossible to get on the bus coach line if you are [disabled] unless you're manhandled into the bus because there are no accessible bus services. So there is another option. That is an air chair climbing wheelchair and we purchase them and put that*

down in Queenstown for people to be able to use that to be able to get into the coach services, also if they wanted to fly to Queenstown (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1).

Both interview participants emphasised the requirement for customised services. Their responses highlighted that some suppliers may not be able to meet the requirements of all tourists with disabilities, partly because the heterogeneity of disability is not adequately considered. Their specific comments were:

Every person's ability is different and say somebody with [a] vision impairment doesn't necessarily want to be in a large room that's accessible because they'll get lost. You understand? They would like rather be in a room that's got colour, colour, contrasting areas so they can find their way around. Um and also going to places that don't think of disability as a medical issue in that you don't [want to] go into the bathroom when you're on holiday and [find] it looks like a bloom-ing hospital. Um, you know, create creation, and it happens all the time, so cre-ating normality out of accessibility. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1)

Everyone's so different and what they need, like someone might say, "oh, I need the bed height this high," and the next person says, "oh no, I need it this high," but they've both got a similar disability, so it's difficult for accommodation to providers to meet all the needs. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)

The participants described in detail the frequent negotiation and compromises that were necessary when providing customised accessibility services.

I've had clients book an accessible accommodation. They show up and then they can't get in without…. they call it accessible, but there's a lip on the door. They have gravel outside the door and they can't get in. There was another incident where somebody had just put in a plastic chair in a bathroom and called that accessible because the fold-down seat, which is required for a building code,

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had broken, but they never considered fixing it… Still, the seat was broken and had never been fixed, so they put something like a plastic chair in the shower and expected the person to use that. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1)

Oh, yeah, so there are always compromises, always. I have a bit of an idea of, um, what type of holiday people want… So sometimes with the clients, I'll say, "look, we've got two options for accommodation: 1. A wonderful accessible bathroom, big doorways. But, you won't be able to wheel or roll into the restaurants in town. Or we've got another accommodation that's right in town…" We're going to do with not perfect accommodation because the location is so good. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)

The aim of providing customised services is to meet the requirements of tourists with different types of disabilities, such as mobility impairments, sensory impairments and visual impairments. One participant particularly emphasised the flexibility of customised services, as they can be adjusted at any time to changes that may occur during the journey, such as fatigue, mood, or energy changes.

Once the client arrives, which often happens, and that's why these bespoke trips are great. You know, people fall, people get tired. You know, people change their minds, what they want to do, or they're on form, feel more energetic, and they want to do more, and we can build that into the trip as it goes. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)

Both interview participants, as professional accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand, provided advice on how the tourism industry in New Zealand could best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities, by providing customised services. These findings suggest that customised services not only provide for the physical requirements of accessible tourism, such as accessible accommodation, but also take into account the individual differences and varying accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities, such as age and specific physical or sensory

conditions. This approach considers the specific requirements of each individual in detail, thereby creating a more inclusive accessible tourism market.

Customised services can address the accessibility requirements of different types of tourists with disabilities. This is aligned with the literature discussed in Chapter 2, and which relates to the fact that tourists from different countries and cultural backgrounds may have very different requirements and travel patterns (Campbell & Uren, 2011; Wang et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021). Both participants emphasised that the advantage of customised services was not only to meet basic accessibility requirements, but more importantly, it enabled tourists with different types of disabilities to choose the products and services that best suited them (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013). Therefore, as a tourism service provider in New Zealand, it is important to ensure that tourists with different types of disabilities can get services that suit them. Previous research in New Zealand suggests that for tourists with disabilities, as consumers in the tourism industry, "there is a greater need to hear about their needs and experiences as consumers" (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020, p. 6). Furthermore, the participants' descriptions of customised services suggest that the successful implementation of customised services depends on the provider's ability to gain an in-depth understanding of each tourist's specific requirements. Therefore, it is necessary to educate suppliers to mention their awareness of the heterogeneity of disability types and requirements, which is consistent with the approach proposed by Devile et al. (2024) and Fuente-Robles et al. (2020) (see Chapter 1) to train tourism service providers on disability awareness and attitudes.

Because people with disabilities have a strong desire to participate in travel activities (Darcy et al., 2020) and the disability rate is rapidly increasing (WHO, 2022), the provision of customised services helps tourism providers develop customised accessible tourism products and services for tourists with disabilities (Lyu, 2017). New Zealand suppliers can take the lead in the accessible market by increasing the participation of people with disabilities as consumers (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020), improving accessible service awareness through training and education (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020), and developing flexible and inclusive customised service solutions (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013).

4.1.2 Collaboration

The second key theme that emerged from the analysis of the interview data was related to collaboration. Both participants mentioned that their business could not be conducted without *collaboration* with other suppliers. Therefore, this theme is about collaboration among tourism suppliers, through which accessible tourism service providers have the opportunity to share knowledge.

In particular, advisory services contribute by offering expert guidance to help businesses improve accessibility through assessments, staff training, and support in developing accessible products. Both participants emphasised the importance of collaboration rather than operating independently. Their insights showed that the implementation of accessible tourism does not depend on a single supplier but requires collaboration between different suppliers within the tourism industry to create an accessible environment. Specific examples included working with other tour operators and regional tourism agencies to develop access guides and provide guidelines. Such collaboration also extends to tourist information services, involving inbound tourism both domestically and internationally. The following quotes support this point:

> *We work with the industry. We also work with tourism inbound operators. And adventure tourism operators themselves we work with also like visitor experience, so things like creating access guides, providing guidelines for regional tourism and tourism operators… So that's the industry side of it. We also work on the other side of it, 'cause we are an advisory service. And so we also work with both domestic and international inbound travel into Aotearoa. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1)*

> *Yes, so I'm constantly working with accommodation providers. I have a selection of those that are my preferred ones that I prefer to use because they have the facilities that generally meet my guests' requirements, and the key is their willingness to go above and beyond. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)*

This finding emphasises the importance of collaboration across different business sectors to meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities. However, both participants expressed concerns about the current level of collaboration within the tourism industry. They pointed out that there is still much improvement to be made in New Zealand in terms of providing tourism products and services that are accessible to tourists with disabilities.

> *I think New Zealand's lagging in the offerings to people with disabilities. All with access needs and 'cause people with their seniors, for example, they won't tell you that they have a disability they just need. Yeah, you know? So it's access need and this is everything from hidden disability vision to hearing, right through. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1)*

> *So there's scope to develop some more products and potentially some self-drive itineraries. Small group, set tours, there's definitely scope there, and whether we just stay purely bespoke, I'm not sure… For us it's definitely a developing market with a lot of potential to be bigger. I don't think we're meeting the needs of all the people who want to travel to New Zealand. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)*

These points show that although there have been some collaborations and product developments, there is still a need for further collaboration within the tourism industry in order to better serve tourists with disabilities. Both participants indicated that they often educated the partners they worked with to raise their awareness of the accessible tourism market.

> *And for that to happen, it's all well and good, however, a lot think that it's too much like hard work, so they won't if they don't see the market, Jason. The biggest thing is people don't understand the market. I've even talked to tourism in NZ and Tourism NZ, they're like, what's the market? People in this country don't understand that in the next 50 years, there's going to be a lot of seniors*

travelling. Yeah. And also [those] with a disability. (Accessible Tourism Services
Provider 1)

It's not just about the width of the door, which I try to educate many of our hotels
about. Just because the person says they're in a power wheelchair doesn't mean
to say it's bigger than a manual wheelchair user. Generally, a power wheelchair
will be narrower than a manual wheelchair because the wheels are underneath
the person, not on the outside. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)

One participant also commented that focusing on accessibility not only helped them meet customers' requirements but also contributed to service improvements at the partner hotel.

We've been working with some hotel chains to purchase those, so they have them
to offer their guests, not just us. But yeah. So I take a proactive approach to the
accommodation providers. So, it benefits my service and their service by provid-
ing access to more people. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)

However, both interview participants expressed concerns about the current situation of responsibility avoidance and resource constraints in the provision of accessible tourism services when discussing collaboration. Specific issues included the blurring of responsibility boundaries, such as the avoidance of responsibility, and insufficient resources, especially the lack of accessible vehicles. The following are specific quotations relating to this:

We're not paying premium dollars to be somewhere that's [not] accessible and
trusted. And then when I decided that this wasn't good enough, they denied that
they didn't want to give money back to the client. They [said] oh, we've had
people use it before and [had an] attitude where they said they were fine, so I
actually had to go write a proper e-mail explaining the laws and the rules, and
I carbon copied the New Zealand manager of that hotel chain. (Accessible
Tourism Services Provider 1)

Have vehicles. Yeah, and New Zealand, if I'm driving, if I'm guiding a trip, we have to have a PSV [Passenger Services Vehicle]-certified vehicle… So we hire, and there are only two places I can hire from in New Zealand that have PSV-certified accessible vehicles. So many providers will have PSV certified SUVs [Sports Utility Vehicles] or regular vehicles, but they don't have accessible vehicles. So, a vehicle with a platform lift. So I'm very much limited, and that is particular at the two companies we do use. I don't have heaps, so. And they aren't luxury vehicles. (Accessible Tourism Service Provider 2)

Interviews with two accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand revealed the second key theme of this study, "collaboration." This theme was important for determining the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand with regard to how the tourism industry can best work together to meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities. The content of these interviews highlighted that collaboration is not only crucial for tourists with disabilities, but also for accessible tourism service providers, as industry insiders involved in providing and promoting accessible tourism. For example, two interview participants emphasised the importance of collaborating with tourists with disabilities. One interview participant noted that while the entrances to many hotels are theoretically wide enough to allow the access of both manual and power wheelchair users, there is a common misconception that power wheelchair users require wider entrances. This misperception demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of power wheelchair users. By engaging directly with tourists with disabilities, hotels can more accurately identify and address their accessibility requirements, and thus design facilities that are truly accessible.

Both participants expressed concerns about the current New Zealand tourism industry in terms of meeting the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities. This perspective is similar to the results of previous accessibility research conducted in New Zealand (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). That is, the New Zealand tourism stakeholders are not aware of the value of the accessible tourism market, nor do they see the market for people with disabilities as a niche market, so they are unwilling to make initial investments in seeing its value

(Darcy, 2010). One interview participant said that she often uses her own experiences to teach suppliers with whom she collaborates, so that they can provide better services to tourists with disabilities. This shows that when accessible tourism service providers share knowledge and experiences on how to better serve tourists with disabilities, they can motivate more suppliers to improve their services and make them more accessible.

Although tourists with disabilities have clear requirements and valuable experience in terms of accessibility, there is a lack of collaboration among suppliers in New Zealand, which limits the potential for knowledge sharing. According to Nyanjom et al. (2018), there was a significant difference between service providers and tourists with disabilities in terms of their understanding of accessibility. This difference highlights the urgent need to establish a knowledge sharing platform, as the lack of this platform hinders knowledge creation and enhancement. Given the experience of tourists with disabilities and their specific requirements for accessibility and support, their voices are particularly important (Gillovic et al., 2015; Michopoulou et al., 2015; Nyanjom et al., 2018). However, many studies have pointed out that the voices of tourists with disabilities are often ignored (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Gillovic et al., 2015; Darcy et al., 2020), so that they often "have limited opportunities to contribute to tourism policy, planning and development in a meaningful way" (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020, p. 8). Conversely, collaboration with tourists with disabilities can increase their satisfaction and make them more willing to pay (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Nyanjom et al., 2018). The responses of two interview participants show that knowledge sharing can drive resource optimisation. By collaborating, different suppliers can share their resources with others, thereby creating a win-win situation for all involved. The different perspectives and expertise that collaboration brings can solve complex problems and develop new solutions (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Nyanjom et al., 2018).

Consequently, accessible tourism service providers should utilise the potential of the accessible tourism market more effectively. Therefore, the current challenge for accessible tourism service providers is strengthening cooperation among suppliers and sharing knowledge (Nyanjom et al., 2018). In addition, accessible tourism service providers should enhance collaboration with tourists with disabilities, as they are the ones who know best what kind of accessibility services and designs

they need (Gillovic et al., 2015; Michopoulou et al., 2015; Nyanjom et al., 2018). Through these efforts, the different accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities can be addressed.

4.1.3 Information

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the third key theme: Information. Both participants agreed that providing accurate, reliable, and effective *information* by tourism service providers for customers is essential to improving the customer experience and itinerary. This theme relates to the interview participants' issues of missing and misleading information and the central role of information sharing in enhancing accessible tourism services.

One accessible tourism services provider pointed out that providing reliable and valid information to potential customers is closely linked to trust. This trust is particularly important, especially for tourists with disabilities, as it determines whether they can have a pleasant experience or not.

> *Trust is trust. It is massive when it comes to travelling with a disability or with your senior. Um, you know, your grandma and grandpa. It's like you want them to have a good time. You don't want them to be struggling. You want them to be able to have an experience somewhere that is welcoming, so they want to enjoy it. They don't want to struggle. Nobody wants to struggle when they're travelling. The whole point is an experience. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1)*

The other accessible tourism services provider had a similar view when discussing the benefits of information, but their comments indicated that the exchange of information was a mutual process. By providing their details, customers enabled tourism service providers to understand their specific requirements better. This understanding was considered crucial for designing suitable itineraries and selecting the required facilities.

> *And that part of that video call is really important because it helps me get to know the person. And I can ask leading questions to help me design the itinerary and also choose the type of equipment we might require. So some people might*

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be walking wheelchair users, so that means they potentially walk indoors, but they require wheeled mobility for outdoors.

And then some people they might be travelling with. Like I've got a lady who's coming with her two adult sons. They're in their 20s and she said they'll lift me so that changes things. That opens up... gives me more options because we're really limited if we have to use accessible vehicles in New Zealand, we don't have a whole lot of hire ones. And the quality of them. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 2)

One accessible tourism services provider highlighted a general lack of information within the tourism industry that affected not only tourists but also created challenges for certain stakeholders, such as tour operators. It was evident that while tour operators could offer some basic accessible information, they frequently lacked expertise in more specific implementation details, such as selecting appropriate accommodation and transport, and effectively utilising these facilities.

We really lack information. And that's even for the tour operators bringing clients in to do tours because it's hard for them as well to know what accommodation to use to know, you know, what transportation to use and how to use the transportation. And that's even before offerings and things like that.

Information is the number one for a good experience. However, the information needs to be updated often, and that information needs to be able to be provided so it can be developed. (Accessible Tourism Services Provider 1)

One accessible tourism services provider also emphasised that not only tour operators, but also other stakeholders across the tourism sector, should actively participate in "information sharing." Information sharing plays a crucial role in this process.

So they have these ....they are the ones who should be working with their communities to create a more inclusive destination, and that's where information

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sharing is very important. But each one of those operators is like a spot, you know, the person at the top goes all the way down to all the operators that have accessibility, but then them sharing that accessibility on their own marketing platforms and our websites.

So it's about sharing the information. They might not have an access need as physical, but cognitive definitely. So it's about making reassurance [and] reassuring that this will be a good activity or this will be… an accommodation or you know, and even having the information about [if] there's an airport right overhead… So it's huge, there's… it's about being honest with your offering cause people are paying good money. (Accessible Tourism Service Provider 1)

The last major common theme that emerged from the data analysis was related to information. The results of the data analysis of the interviews with the two accessible tourism service providers confirmed the importance of developing a relationship between tourists with disabilities and accessible tourism service providers. Establishing trust is a two-way process that allows both parties to share information that not only meets the specific requirements of tourists with disabilities but also enables accessible tourism service providers to provide more accurate services, thus improving service quality and customer satisfaction (Small & Darcy, 2011). In order to build this trust, it is important that accessible tourism service providers provide accurate, timely and detailed information, including information on the accessibility of tourist attractions, accommodation and transportation (Agovino et al., 2017; Cloquet et al., 2018; Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Dary, 2010; Kołodziejczak, 2019). This information is crucial for tourists with disabilities as it determines whether they can have a satisfactory travel experience. However, some studies have shown that people with disabilities may not proactively request special services due to feelings of shame or a reluctance to emphasise their disability (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; McIntosh, 2020), or that tourism suppliers may fail to provide suitable accessibility information (Cloquet et al., 2018; Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Darcy, 2010). Therefore, the lack of accessibility information can arise at any time, resulting in services that do not adequately meet the requirements of tourists with disabilities.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the findings suggested that two-way communication can provide accessible tourism service providers with a more precise understanding of the specific requirements of tourists, as it is often the tourists with disabilities themselves, who have the best knowledge of the accessibility of services (Nyanjom et al., 2018). The statements of the two accessible tourism service providers also indicated that the direct involvement of people with disabilities in products and services that are specifically designed for them, could make solutions more sustainable and effective. This view is consistent with the perspective of Nigg and Eichelberger (2021). In their collaborative framework, people with disabilities are depicted as not only consumers of services, but also important providers of information and feedback. Therefore, in order to improve the travel experience of tourists with disabilities and address their accessibility requirements, the accuracy of information and delivery needs to be improved. However, the analysis of the two interview participants showed that there are currently perceived deficiencies in this area of the New Zealand tourism industry. As a result, a systematic approach to the sharing of information to develop and maintain such partnerships is necessary. This could involve developing a central database accessible to all (Nyanjom et al., 2018). The sharing of vital information is often done via the websites of tourism service providers. As such, the discussion now turns to answer Research Question Two of the thesis research.

4.2   Web accessibility

This section presents the findings of the analysis of the accessibility of the websites of the six Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand, and a web content analysis of the websites' content. The websites' accessibility were evaluated based on the WCAG 2.0 guidelines introduced in Chapter 2, and in relation to: "perceivable," "operable," "understandable," and "robust." These four themes aligned with established guidelines for analysing the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand in terms of their ability to meet the requirements of tourists with disabilities. Table 7 summarises the 12 specific rules related to these four themes. Compliance with the guidelines is indicated by a check mark (✓), and if the website did not meet the relevant guidelines, the corresponding cell was left blank. The accessibility guidelines for websites are determined through WCAG 2.0. However, it is worth noting that as shown in Table

7, non-compliance with the guidelines does not necessarily indicate a lack of relevant functions on the website, but because the relevant functions were not necessarily observed in the analysis. The findings presented in Table 7 will be discussed in detail below.

Table 7

Principles Followed on the Six Case Study Websites

Principle	WCAG 2.0 Guidelines	Standard	Aoyou	Shanghai Chunqiu	Shanghai Airlines	Ctrip	GZL	Nice Tour
Perceivable	1.1 Text alternatives	Provision for any non-text content.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
	1.2 Time-based media	Provides alternatives for time-based media.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	1.3 Adaptable	Provides a simple layout without losing information or structure.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
	1.4 Distinguishable	Easy for users to see and hear.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Operable	2.1 Keyboard accessible	All functionality available from a keyboard.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	2.2 Enough time	Provides users enough time to read and use content.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
	2.3 Seizures	Content design will not casue seizures or physical reactions.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
	2.4 Navigable	Provides ways to help users navigate, find content, and determine where they are.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Understandable	3.1 Readable	Text content is readable and understandable.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
	3.2 Predictable	Web pages appear and operate in predictable ways.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
	3.3 Input assistance	Help users avoid and correct mistakes.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐
Robust	4.1 Compatible	Maximize compatibility with current and future user agents, including assistive.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐

4.2.1 Perceivable

In terms of the theme "Perceivable," the analysis showed that the websites of the Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand performed well in the three aspects of "Text Alternatives," "Adaptable," and "Distinguishable." Specifically, all the websites in the study provided effective text alternatives, mainly using pictures and simple and clear icons. In terms of "Adaptable," all websites used a simple interface layout. For example, the websites of Spring Airlines, Ctrip, and Nice Tour, provided interfaces for booking flights, hotels and car rentals, while other websites

mainly displayed tourism products. All the websites were equipped with a search box on the homepage to help customers search according to their personal requirements. In relation to "Distinguishable," the booking interface provided clear text descriptions to indicate the purpose of each input box. In addition, the menu options on each website clearly conveyed the functions through text or icons, so that users could understand the purpose of each option easily. However, performance was weaker on the success criterion "Time-based Media," which WCAG defines as audio-only, video-only, or synchronised audio-video content, such as promotional clips and virtual tours, whose comprehension depends on temporal progression. Only Ctrip met this requirement. However, even on that platform, the majority of time-based media were user-generated travel videos rather than official material directly provided by tour operators.

4.2.2   Operable

In terms of the theme "Operable," Ctrip's website met the standards under the rules outlined. The design of the Ctrip website took into account the time it takes users to browse and use the page content. The homepage had an automatically playing travel service advertisement window that automatically scrolled to the next page every few seconds. At the same time, Figure 3 shows the button for moving forward or backwards on a website in the top left corner of the window, which enhances user control (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Function for Moving Back or Forward on the Website

The figure shows the button for moving forward or backward on a website. From *Ctrip homepage*, by Ctrip.com International, Ltd., 2025. (https://www.ctrip.com). Copyright 2025 by Ctrip.

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In relation to "Seizures," Ctrip and the other Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand did not use flashing or strong light effects on their websites that may trigger seizures. In terms of "Navigable," all the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand in the study

provided multiple navigation methods, such as highlighting the current page the user was on with different colours in the menu bar.

In addition, Ctrip was the only website for a Chinese outbound tour operator to New Zealand in this study that provided keyboard accessibility. Users were able to activate keyboard shortcuts by enabling the website's "accessible reading mode" to access all content on the website, which greatly enhanced its navigability and accessibility. Figure 4 shows accessible keyboard shortcut commands on the Ctrip website (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Keyboard Shortcuts in Accessible Mode

The figure shows accessible keyboard shortcut commands. From *Ctrip homepage*, by Ctrip.com International, Ltd., 2025. (https://www.ctrip.com). Copyright 2025 by Ctrip.

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4.2.3   Understandable

In terms of understandability, Nice Tour's website failed to meet the specifications for "input assistance." The websites of the other Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand met the requirements for "readable," "predictable" and "input assistance." Unlike the websites of other Chinese tour operators, Nice Tour did not clearly indicate on its interface which form fields were mandatory. This is usually done by labelling fields with a special symbol such as an asterisk (*), exclamation mark (!) or red text (see Figure 5) to highlight the importance of this information. Figure 5 also shows how the Ctrip website uses red text to help users identify and correct input errors. Blue text has been inserted in this figure to explain the red text, to more clearly demonstrate how the website enhanced user understanding and operation through visual aids. In contrast, the Nice Tour's website prompted users to use their mobile phone when trying to view tourism products or fill out forms. This design restricted the user's ability to interact on the web page and increased the complexity and difficulty of obtaining information.

Figure 5

Example of Input Assistance in Red Text

The figure shows filling out the information form. From *Ctrip Checkout*, by Ctrip.com International, Ltd., 2025. (https://vacations.ctrip.com/travel/orderv3?dc=2&a=&p=1979848&shopping-gid=66f33df0d3d44a0083f368ca0f783530). Copyright 2025 by Ctrip.

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4.2.4   Robust

In terms of the theme "robust," due to equipment limitations, the test was conducted using the VoiceOver screen reader built into Apple computers (see Chapter 3). The research results showed that, with the exception of Nice Tour, the websites of the other Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand supported VoiceOver, ensuring the accessibility of content. This means that the front-end technology of these websites was compatible with modern assistive technologies, ensuring stability and accessibility on various user devices. Specifically, these websites were able to maintain the consistency of information and user interfaces on different technical platforms, allowing screen readers to accurately interpret web page content, which is particularly important for people with visual disabilities. Using Ctrip's website as an example, Figure 6 shows the adaptability of the VoiceOver when it was turned on on the Ctrip website, users could clearly identify the structure of the webpage; for example, the title was clearly read as "Heading 2" (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Implementation of VoiceOver

This figure shows the adaptability of the VoiceOver function on the Ctrip website. From *New Zealand 11-day group tour*, by Ctrip.com International, Ltd., 2025. (https://vacations.ctrip.com/travel/detail/p1979848?city=2). Copyright 2025 by Ctrip.

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4.3 Discussion about web accessibility

This study assessed the website accessibility of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand against established accessibility guidelines. It was found that there were significant shortcomings in terms of "Perceivable" and "Operable" compared to "Understandable" and "Robust." In particular, "Perceivable," was also found to be one of the most common overlooked principles according to Eusébio et al. (2023). Although all the websites in the study generally used images when providing text alternatives, the use of audio and audio-visual materials was relatively rare, and even when there was video content on the website, it was usually uploaded by users rather than provided by the operator. This situation suggests that Chinese tourists with disabilities may face difficulties in accessing the website and its information in the manner that they require.

In terms of "Operable," the results indicated that Chinese outbound tour operators' websites performed well in terms of the clarity of the navigation structure, consistent with research by Domínguez Vila et al. (2020), who pointed out that the accessibility of a website often depends on effective navigation and compatible management. However, keyboard accessibility was unsatisfactory, which revealed the lack of awareness among Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand of the diversity of disabilities. For example, for people such as visually impaired users who cannot use a mouse (Angkananon et al., 2020), or those with limited mobility/hand function (Domínguez Vila, 2020), keyboard accessibility is the key to their effective use of the website. The findings of this study highlight the importance of website developers further improving and expanding accessibility support when providing equal access for all users, ensuring that websites are not only clear in terms of navigation, but also have adequate accessibility support for functional operations. This is particularly important for ensuring that Chinese tourists with disabilities can access the websites for the essential information they need to enjoy travel services without barriers.

In terms of "Understandable," the research results suggested that most Chinese outbound tour operators' websites met basic user requirements, such as assisting form completion by marking required fields, which meets the requirements of understandability. However, the analysis revealed

shortcomings in terms of "3.1 Predictable." Although most websites were consistent in their hierarchical layout, studies have shown that grouping all links in the same place and in the same order is important for ensuring easy navigation for people with disabilities (Michalska et al., 2014; Puhretmair & Nussbaum, 2011). In this study, although most websites had a tick in the checkbox under this guideline, most achieved basic predictability through labels for their navigation menu, although there were differences in the location and order of functional menus between websites. For example, the menu bar on Ctrip's website was located on the left side of the page, while on other websites it was located at the top. Such inconsistencies may lead to navigation difficulties. Therefore, although the website may formally meet the predictability standard, in practice, such layout differences may affect the website experience of specific user groups, indicating a requirement for further optimisation to improve their overall accessibility and user-friendliness.

In terms of "Robustness," the results showed that the websites of most Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand, except Nice Tour, were compatible with the VoiceOver screen reader built into Apple Computers, which showed that the front-end technology of these websites could adapt to modern assistive technologies. This compatibility showed that these websites could maintain the consistency of information and user interfaces on different technical platforms, thereby allowing screen readers to interpret web content accurately, which is particularly important for visually impaired tourists. This result contradicts the views of Eusébio et al. (2023) and Teixeira et al. (2022) in their website accessibility studies, as they found that robustness was often one of the most easily mistaken principles.

These results highlight the urgent requirement for Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand to develop their websites to be accessible. It is therefore important to recommend that Chinese tour operators further improve their website design, particularly by adding audio, video and voice alternatives, and that they optimise their websites for keyboard accessibility, to support a wider range of user devices and assistive technologies.

4.4 Website provision of accessibility information

In addition to determining the accessibility of the websites against established guidelines, this study also conducted a web content analysis of the information about accessible services on the websites of six Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand. Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 on the information about accessibility that tourists with disabilities require during their travels, categories were developed to assist with analysis (see Chapter 3). The themes emerging from the web content analysis of the accessibility information provided on Chinese outbound tour operators' websites were: "Accessibility information and interactivity," "Accessibility information in promotional materials and the language of people with disabilities," and "Trustworthiness of accessibility information and online reviews." As noted earlier, if a website contained accessibility information, a check mark (✓) is indicated, and if the website did not contain the accessibility information, the relevant cell is left blank. The following is a detailed discussion of the findings (see Table 8 for a summary of the web content analysis findings across the sample of websites).

Table 8

Data on the Website Provision of Information About Accessibility

Themes	Aoyou	Shanghai Chunqiu	Shanghai Airlines	Ctrip	GZL	Nice Tour
Accessibility information and interactivity						
Comprehensive accessibility information: Accessible tourist attractions, accommodation, transport, and other facilities and services (including key details such as addresses and contact information).	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐
Clear, simple graphics and symbols: Internationally recognised symbols for accessibility to help users quickly identify relevant information.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Feedback and customer support: Provides an easily accessible feedback channel and customer support to ensure users can get help quickly if they encounter a problem.	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐
Accessibility information in promotional materials and the language of people with disabilities						
Publicity materials: Provision of accessible information in a transparent manner.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Inclusive language: Uses positive and respectful language to describe marginalised groups and accessibility facilities.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Communication: Multi-sensory presentation of information (e.g. Braille, audio-visual materials, text description, pictures, text, etc.).	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Trustworthiness of accessibility information and online reviews						
• Online reviews: Positive online reviews and activities with customer feedback.	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑
• Information reliability: The degree of trustworthiness of information.	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑

4.4.1 Accessibility information and interactivity

The findings of the web content analysis showed that, with the exception of Ctrip, none of the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand provided direct accessibility information on transportation, attractions, or accommodation. This indicates that when tourists with disabilities try to use these websites to check in advance or confirm whether a particular travel itinerary is suitable for them, they would not be able to obtain relevant accessibility details from the travel itinerary information. In terms of specific accessibility information, although all the websites provided basic information about transportation, attractions, and accommodation on the itinerary page, such as the selected airline, the historical background of the attractions, and the

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names of the hotels, the descriptions generally lacked accessibility details. For example, the descriptions provided only the selected airline, attraction description, or accommodation name, without giving information such as address, contact number, or website address, which limits the ability of people with disabilities to obtain further information. In Figure 7, an example is presented of one of the tour operators' websites that only provides basic information and hence demonstrates the simplicity of some websites in providing information.

Figure 7

Example of Basic Information Provided on a Chinese Outbound Tour Operator's Website

The figure shows screenshots for travel itinerary. From *Australia New Zealand North Island/or Australia New Zealand North and South Island 12-13 days*, by Aoyou, 2025. (http://www.aoyou.com/domesticgroup/g159247i2). Copyright 2025 by Aoyou.

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In contrast, Figure 8 shows the attractions and accommodation information for a tourism product on the Ctrip website. Users of this website would be able to jump to specific pages by clicking on the relevant links and obtain detailed information about accessibility by clicking on "Show all facilities" (Figure 8). This type of detailed information display is particularly critical for meeting the requirements of different users and helps ensure accessibility information is readily available.

Figure 8

Example of Specific Information Provided by Ctrip

The figure shows the First step for more information about accessibility. From *12-day guided tour of the North and South Islands of New Zealand*, by Ctrip.com International, Ltd., 2025. (https://va-cations.ctrip.com/travel/detail/p1927557?city=2). Copyright 2025 by Ctrip.

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With the exception of Ctrip, Figure 9 shows the second step for more information about accessibility (See Figure 9), none of the websites employed specific signs or symbols to highlight

information relevant to people with disabilities or accessibility services. This approach potentially indicated that most service providers do not adequately consider the clarity and understandability of information communication when designing their websites, particularly for user groups that require accessibility services. Yet, Chinese tourists with disabilities are likely to expect tour operators' websites to provide clear and easy-to-understand signs and symbols so that they can easily identify whether the tourism products include accessibility features.

Figure 9

Example of Provision of Information About Accessibility Provided by Ctrip

This figure shows the Second step for more information about accessibility. From *Sudima Kaikoura*, by Ctrip.com International, Ltd., 2025. (https://hotels.ctrip.com/hotels/88774784.html). Copyright 2025 by Ctrip.

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In terms of feedback and customer support, with the exception of Shanghai Airlines International Tourism, all travel service providers' websites had a live customer communication tool on the site, introducing the tourism products. Most websites are equipped with this dynamic dialogue box, which is crucial for customers, particularly those who may have enquiries about an itinerary after reviewing the travel package details. This instant chat feature would allow Chinese tourists with disabilities to communicate directly with customer service to resolve queries or acquire further travel information quickly. Unfortunately, Shanghai Airlines International Tourism did not perform well in this aspect. The tour operator's website lacked the instant customer service chat feature and required customers to navigate a more complicated process to reach customer service. Specifically, customers had to first scan the QR (quick response) code on the website and make an appointment before speaking to customer service. This process complicated contacting customer service and may have resulted in delays or increased difficulties in obtaining information. For example, individuals with visual impairments may need to use specific assistive technologies or seek assistance from others to scan QR codes, which would negatively affect their customer experience and satisfaction.

4.4.2 Accessibility information in promotional materials and the language used for people with disabilities

In examining the provision of accessibility information on the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand, it was notable that none of the websites explicitly included information about accessibility for tourists with disabilities in their promotional materials for tourism products. This finding was not surprising, as it is consistent with the previously observed lack of accessible details about itineraries. However, it is still worth noting that specific content areas, such as the "visa information" or "additional notes" sections, did include special considerations and requirements for people with disabilities and the elderly. The language used in these sections was positive and respectful, reflecting the inclusiveness of these groups (for example, "people with disabilities [残障人士]" or "special population group [特殊群体]"). Figure 10 shows the description for age and population restrictions on GZL website (see Figure 10). One of the tour operator websites serves as an example, as it showed that it gave attention to special considerations and requirements for people with disabilities and the elderly mentioned in a specific area.

Figure 10

Special Considerations and Requirements in Specific Areas

Description for age and population restrictions. From *New Zealand North and South Islands 10 days*, by GZL international travel service ltd., 2025. (https://www.gzl.com.cn/abroad/402880248a422169018a834f9ffb652b.html). Copyright 2025 by GZL international travel service ltd.

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Although the language about these groups was indeed included in sections such as "visa information" or "additional notes," these sections often involved age and other specific restrictions on people. However, the specific standards for these restrictions were not consistent among the various tourism service providers, especially the relevant provisions for the elderly who may also have accessibility requirements.

For example, the Aoyou website required people aged 75 and over to provide a medical report when booking; Shanghai Chunqiu accepted bookings from people aged 80 and over, but also required a medical report; Shanghai Airlines did not set a specific age limit, but instead decided themselves, whether a customer could join a group tour; the Ctrip website stated that tourists under the age of 18 must be accompanied by an adult, but did not mention the elderly; GZL did not accept customers aged 80 and over, or pregnant women, and also stipulated that those aged 70 and over must be accompanied by a relative or friend aged 18 to 69 when travelling.

These differences led to a new finding: there was a notable lack of standardisation in the tour operators' consideration of tourists with disabilities and older adults. Although some of the demographic characteristic restrictions set by the tour operators may have been based on concerns about the safety and health of customers, this lack of uniform standards may lead to some older adults who do not meet the specific conditions for a tourism service, having to find other travel options. It is worth noting that, although tourists with disabilities or other special requirements were not explicitly excluded from the warnings provided, it could be assumed that an increase in age could lead to disabilities, and that older tourists may have accessibility requirements. However, tourism promotional materials, such as brochures and detailed itinerary descriptions, do not necessarily clearly provide accessibility information for these groups. This contradiction in the provision of information may cause confusion among prospective tourists, who might not be sure whether the service provider can truly meet their needs. This also indicated that the Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand in this study failed to effectively communicate and fulfil their commitment to provide tourism to all potential customers.

4.4.3   Online reviews and trustworthiness of accessibility information

In terms of online reviews, except for Shanghai Airlines, all provided a place for customers who have experienced their packages to give their reviews. The most recent reviews were found by clicking "Sort by recommendation" and then clicking "Latest reviews." This would be very useful for customers who seek the latest information. Among these websites, the Ctrip website was able to provide the most detailed information. On Ctrip, when customers click on the links related to

attractions and accommodations (see Figure 9), in addition to providing basic information about the attractions and accommodations, Figure 11 shows the customer reviews of the attractions and accommodations with the date (See Figure 11). The only disadvantage was that the reviews were not always in time order, although in most cases the most recent reviews were shown (see Figure 11). However, it is worth noting that it is difficult to identify whether these reviews were sent by tourists with or without disabilities. Tourists with disabilities may need to rely heavily on the reviews, along with the additional information provided on the website, to confirm whether their requirements could be met.

Figure 11

Examples of User Reviews with Different Time Orders

The figure shows the description for customer reviews with the date. From *New Zealand 11-day group tour*, by Ctrip.com International, Ltd., n.d. (https://vacations.ctrip.com/travel/detail/p1979848?city=2). Copyright 2025 by Ctrip.

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In terms of the credibility of the information, all the information on the websites about the travel package appeared reliable and up to date. This was reflected in the fact that all Chinese outbound tour operators' websites in the study provided a calendar on the interface where tourism products were offered, so that those with disabilities could clearly view the specific dates and prices of each travel package. Figure 12 shows the calendar function on the GZL website. As all websites have this calendar function, one of the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites is presented as an example (see Figure 12). The grey parts in the calendar represent uncheckable options, while the blue parts represent specific travel dates.

Figure 12

Confirming the Latest Information via a Calendar

This figure shows the calendar function on the web page . New Zealand North and South Islands 10 days by GZL international travel service ltd., 2025. (http://www.aoyou.com/domesticgroup/g158300i2). Copyright 2025 by GZL.

<center>*This content has been removed by the author due to copyright issues*</center>

However, from the perspective of accessibility information, information that is crucial for tourists with disabilities, such as room types, vehicle types, and safety warnings about attractions and activities, was often presented in a fragmented manner and its importance not fully emphasised. Although such information was listed on the websites, it was usually not specially marked or highlighted as accessibility information, which indicated that the travel service provider may not have been fully aware of the importance of this information for tourists with disabilities. For people with disabilities, this information is not only related to the convenience and comfort of the travel experience, but also directly affects their safety and autonomy. Therefore, simply listing information without proper labelling, explanations, and classifications, may limit the accurate understanding of the applicability and safety of travel products for tourists with disabilities.

4.5 Discussion about website provision of accessibility information

The results of this study revealed shortcomings in Chinese outbound tour operators' websites in terms of the provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. Three main issues were identified. The first issue was the lack of provision of accessibility information and opportunity for interaction. The second was the fragmented and contradictory accessibility information in the tourism products, and the third issue related to the lack of a clear understanding of their business by tourism service providers.

First, the lack of information provided on accessibility and interactivity was the main problem identified in this study, which is consistent with previous studies on the lack of information about accessibility (Cloquet et al., 2018; Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Darcy, 2010; Gillovic

& Harkison, 2023). For example, the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand analysed in this study provided little detailed information on accessibility or transport options, which is crucial for tourists with disabilities when planning their trips (Small et al., 2023). In addition, the lack of key information, such as foldable shower chairs, grab rails next to the toilet, and wider bathroom door entrances and shower grab bars (Gillovic & Harkison, 2023), further exacerbated the information barrier. This is consistent with the findings of Buhalis et al. (2012), who noted that a lack of information about accessibility is common in tourism services. This study indicated that while some basic information could sometimes be found, in many cases key details were missing. For example, information about the accessibility of accommodation was often missing, which undoubtedly increased the difficulties for Chinese tourists with disabilities when visiting New Zealand. This lack of information about accessibility may be attributed to a poor understanding among Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand about the accessible tourism market and the requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities, or the need for New Zealand commercial accommodation providers to promote an accessible room. As the internet is the main source of information for people with disabilities (Kołodziejczak, 2019), it is particularly important to provide Chinese tourists with disabilities with detailed information on websites about the accessibility they require.

The study also found that, although tourism product information was widely available on websites, images or symbols related to disabilities were rarely used, making it difficult for tourists with disabilities to access information on the website (Cloquet et al., 2018; Teixeira et al., 2021). Successful examples in the International Symbol of Access System usually include detailed descriptions of specific facilities or locations accompanied by relevant icons (Kołodziejczak, 2019). However, the findings of this study showed that the Chinese outbound tour operators do not use clear symbols or icons to indicate whether travel packages are suitable for people with disabilities and use icons only for general information such as photography, dining, and accommodation. This practice shows that the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites ignore the heterogeneity of people with disabilities (Ambrose et al., 2012; Gillovic et al., 2024), while detailed information can often enhance the autonomy of tourists with disabilities to explore on their own, such as older adults (Mary et al., 2020).

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Another issue was the fragmentation and contradiction of accessibility information. Chinese outbound tour operators' websites in this study did not have an accurate standard to clarify the type and scope of tourists they were happy to receive. This issue was particularly prominent in the provision of accessibility information for tourists with disabilities and the elderly. The study and analysis results showed that the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites did not explicitly exclude tourists with disabilities in their descriptions of service scope, the inclusive language and unrestricted types of tourists. As such, it can be reasonably assumed that tourists with disabilities were included in their target customers. However, the tourism products offered on the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites did not provide any information for tourists with disabilities. Therefore, although there were no apparent restrictions, the lack of provision of accessibility information that tourists with disabilities require would be likely to limit their participation (Cloquet et al., 2018; Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). Consequently, the issue of their accessibility requirements cannot be resolved. Similarly, it was evident that the information provided by Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand in this regard was not only incomplete, but also varied from one operator to another, resulting in fragmented and contradictory information. For example, one Chinese outbound tour operator's website required that people aged 75 and over provide a physical fitness certificate, while others required it for people aged 70 and over. Such inconsistent regulations and incomplete information not only affect the transparency of services but may also limit the accessibility of certain potential customers. This finding is noteworthy, as there has been relatively little discussion about the specific information provision issues surrounding the service norms for the older adults, especially in the Chinese market.

Finally, it was found that potentially the Chinese outbound tour operators in the study experienced challenges in understanding their own services as they relate to accessibility provision. More positively, the results showed that most websites provided users with online reviews and online customer service, which is extremely important for all tourists, but especially for those with special requirements. This is aligned with the work of Filieri et al. (2015), whose research findings showed that reviews help potential customers understand the quality of products and services in advance, so as to further understand the travel route and decide whether to purchase.

Less positively, Chinese outbound tour operators' websites seemed to lack the awareness needed to provide information about accessibility. They often did not distinguish between general and information about accessibility, which reflected a lack of attention to accessibility requirements. This was specifically evident in the fact that certain information, such as specific room types, vehicle model options, and safety warnings for attractions and activities, were often not identified as accessible information by these tourism service providers. These accessibility details, which should have been clearly labelled and highlighted, were often only provided as general information, which did not effectively guide tourists with special requirements to make appropriate travel decisions. Although Ctrip provided more informative information about accessibility than did the other Chinese outbound tour operators' websites (see Figure 9), this information was not easily accessible to tourists with disabilities, as it required multiple clicks to access. To improve this, Ctrip and other Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand could consider more prominently integrating and highlighting information about accessibility in their promotional materials and marketing. Relevant literature suggests that websites are best served by two ways of accessing information: one is "pointers to the entirety of the information," and the other is "context-related shortcuts to categorised pieces of information on a website" (Shetty & McIntosh, 2024, p. 256), which will help the users know where they are on a website (Michalska et al., 2014; Puhretmair & Nussbaum, 2011).

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1   Introduction

The purpose of this thesis was to provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. The reason for this research was that Western accessible tourism studies often fail to consider the potentially unique influence of the diverse and specific requirements, expectations, and cultural differences of Chinese tourists with disabilities. Affected by their culture, the travel patterns of Chinese tourists with disabilities differ from those of Western tourists. Given the large number of Chinese tourists with disabilities in China, which is expected to continue to grow as the population ages, and the fact that China is New Zealand's third largest tourism market, it is important to study tourism suppliers in New Zealand and China. This study, as exploratory research, aimed to improve the understanding of Chinese tourists with disabilities in New Zealand and Chinese suppliers on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. This chapter first reviews the most significant findings of the study, then discusses the limitations of the study, and proposes recommendations based on the research results, along with some directions for future research.

5.2   Key findings

Previous accessible tourism studies have shown that tourists with disabilities encounter various access issues, or barriers, when participating in tourism. The literature review demonstrated that there is also currently a poor focus on people with disabilities in China (Qu, 2020). Although there is some research on Chinese tourists with disabilities in the field of accessible tourism in the West, most of the research focuses on how the tourism industry as a whole can cater to different types of tourists with disabilities from different cultural backgrounds. However, there is very limited research from a New Zealand perspective on Chinese tourists with disabilities. Therefore, this research aimed to provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. The research had two main research objectives:

1. To determine how the tourism industry can best meet the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities from the perspectives of accessible tourism service providers.
2. To analyse Chinese outbound tour operators' website accessibility and provision of accessibility information for inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand.

Through the analysis of interviews with two prominent accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand, this study revealed three key themes: "customisation", "collaboration" and "information", all of which are perceived to be crucial to understanding and meeting the requirements of tourists with disabilities. First, customisation is seen as an effective strategy to meet the diverse needs of tourists with disabilities. As customisation allows tourists with disabilities to choose the right products and services for them based on their accessibility requirements (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013). By understanding and adapting to the specific needs of each tourist, accessible tourism service providers can provide a more customised travel experience, which emphasises the importance of a deep understanding of tourists with disabilities.

Second, collaboration is the key to providing high-quality accessible services. Accessible tourism service providers in the study emphasised the importance of collaboration with other suppliers, which can facilitate knowledge sharing and enable everyone to contribute their expertise to solving complex accessibility issues (Nyanjom et al., 2018). In addition, direct collaboration with tourists with disabilities can ensure that the designs and services they provide better meet their specific requirements (Gillovic et al., 2015; Michopoulou et al., 2015; Nyanjom et al., 2018). This mutual collaboration not only improves service quality, but also promotes the improvement of accessibility standards across the industry.

Finally, accurate and updated accessibility information is critical to enhancing the travel experience of tourists with disabilities, which helps them plan their trips more effectively and improves their satisfaction. However, the study results found that accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand still have shortcomings in the provision of information. Successful customised services rely on tourists with disabilities providing accurate information (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013), while effective collaboration needs to be based on information sharing (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Nyanjom et al., 2018). These findings are supported by

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the literature, which indicates that tourists with disabilities are willing to pay for accessible tourism products that meet their requirements, which not only enhances customer loyalty but also improves market competitiveness for accessible tourism service providers by meeting these requirements (Fuente-Robles et al., 2020; Lyu, 2017; Michopoulou et al., 2015; Nigg & Eichelberger, 2021).

This study analysed the accessibility of six Chinese outbound tour operators' websites through web content analysis and explained key findings under the four themes of "perceivable," "operable," "understandable," and "robust" on the basis of the WCAG 2.0 guidelines. The study shows that Chinese outbound tour operators' websites performed well in terms of being "perceivable" and "operable," such as by providing text alternatives and clear navigation structures to achieve these guidelines. However, there were shortcomings in fully meeting the requirements of tourists with disabilities. In particular, in terms of operability and robustness, significant improvements are still needed to provide a better accessible online environment. This is mainly because the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites performed poorly in terms of providing audio and video materials, which limits the ability of specific disability groups, such as people with visual and hearing disabilities, to access information (Eusébio et al., 2023; Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013). This also indicates that Chinese tour operators' websites do not have a deep understanding and awareness of the heterogeneity of disability. Therefore, Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand must understand that disabilities are not homogenous (Darcy, 2010; Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013). In addition, although most Chinese outbound tour operators' websites support modern assistive technologies, such as VoiceOver, the websites in this study were inadequate in ensuring that all functions can be operated with a keyboard. Specifically, with the exception of Ctrip, none of the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites provided an "accessible reading mode" to provide assistive technologies such as high contrast, keyboard accessibility, and zoom in/out of web pages. The existence of these problems not only affects the accessibility experience of tourists with disabilities using the website but also indicates that the Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand are inadequate in serving the Chinese tourist market with disabilities in terms of providing access to important trip planning information.

This study also analysed the accessibility information provided on the websites of these six Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand through web content analysis. The research results revealed three main themes: "accessibility information and interactivity", "accessibility information in promotional materials and the language of people with disabilities", and "online reviews and trustworthiness of accessibility information". The results showed that Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand have largely failed to address the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand.

In terms of "accessibility information and interactivity," the study found that most Chinese outbound tour operators' websites failed to provide adequate accessibility information, which posed a substantial barrier to tourists with disabilities planning and implementing travel plans. Effective accessibility information is critical for tourists with disabilities, consistent with the findings of research related to New Zealand's tourism suppliers (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Gillovic & Harkison, 2023). Given the significant gaps in the provision of accessibility information on transportation, accommodation, and attractions, Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand should consider adopting strategies identified in previous research, such as including detailed descriptions of accessible room facilities (see Darcy, 2010; Gillovic & Harkison, 2023) and using technology to provide customised services and information (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). This lack of information not only demonstrates the neglect of the requirements of tourists with disabilities on these websites but may also explain why Chinese tourists with disabilities are often marginalised in the tourism market (Campbell & Uren, 2011). Furthermore, this lack of information may lead to tourists with disabilities feeling ignored or inferior when making decisions without adequate information support. This feeling may also stem from wider social prejudices against disabilities or personal self-perceptions of one's own disability (Lam et al., 2020; McIntosh, 2020).

In terms of accessibility information in promotional materials and the language of people with disabilities, it is worth noting that, although none of the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites explicitly included information about accessibility for tourists with disabilities in the promotional materials for their tourism products, some websites included special considerations for people with disabilities and the elderly, in areas such as "visa information" or "additional notes." In contrast to

prior findings that highlighted tourism service providers' negative attitudes toward people with disabilities (Bi, 2007), such expressions of information show respect for people with disabilities and reflect the growing awareness of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand for respecting people with disabilities. However, this information was often fragmented across subsections and lacked a unified and centralised presentation, which would make it difficult for tourists with disabilities to access systematic information about accessible tourism (Kołodziejczak, 2019). Instead of providing extensive information on the history of attractions and other basic information, Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand should also consider adding detailed descriptions of accessibility services and facilities to promotional brochures and marketing materials (see Benjamin et al., 2020; Cloquet et al., 2018). This will not only improve the accessibility of information but also make it easier for tourists with disabilities to find services that suit their requirements when planning their trip. Such improvements not only enhance the accessibility of information for tourists with disabilities but also demonstrate the inclusiveness of the tourism industry.

Finally, there was an issue with online reviews and the trustworthiness of accessibility. Most tour operator websites had customer review sections, which are useful for providing real-time feedback and increasing access to information (Filieri et al., 2015; Zhang & Yang, 2020). However, it could not be determined if the reviews were from tourists with disabilities or whether information related to accessibility requirements could be found. This suggests that Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand could improve their review systems to ensure that detailed and usable accessibility information is provided for tourists with disabilities. Therefore, Chinese outbound tour operator websites to New Zealand could consider improving their review systems by adding filtering functions or tags to clearly identify reviews by tourists with a disability, or by directly providing a special area for accessibility feedback for tourists with disabilities to share. In addition, the establishment of a central database to collect and share information related to accessibility would greatly help tourists with disabilities make more informed decisions when choosing tourism products and services. Such a database would not only improve the reliability of information but also promote the tourism industry's better understanding and response to the requirements of tourists with disabilities (see Nyanjom et al., 2018).

5.3 Future research

As this study is one of the few to explore tourism suppliers in New Zealand and China separately, it is reasonable for the researcher to argue that more studies and greater sample sizes are needed to validate and support the findings of this research. Given the limited number of accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand that specialise in providing accessible services, it is notable that accessibility research on mainstream tourism service providers has been conducted, but not with a focus on Chinese tourists with disabilities (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Gillovic & Harkison, 2023; Shetty & McIntosh, 2024). There is a need for more in-depth research on how New Zealand mainstream tourism service providers can meet the specific accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities. In addition, given the deficiencies in website accessibility and the provision of accessibility information on Chinese outbound tour operators' websites, it is even more important to explore in-depth the practices and challenges of accessible tourism in the context of the region. In addition, given the deficiencies in terms of accessibility and the provision of accessible information on the websites of Chinese outbound tour operators facilitating travel to New Zealand, it is even more important to focus further research on these deficiencies and their specific impact on tourists with disabilities.

In order to more effectively enable New Zealand tourism service providers to meet the requirements and expectations of Chinese tourists with disabilities, further research could explore the specific challenges and requirements faced during tourism from the perspective of Chinese tourists with disabilities themselves (e.g. Tao et al., 2019; 2024). These aspects of the study could enable the New Zealand tourism industry to better understand and cater for this growing and important group of tourists. As revealed by the findings of Liu et al. (2020), Chinese tourists have more critical and diverse sentiments than international tourists. Chinese tourists show a strong interest in the natural environment, landmarks, and architecture. By contrast, international tourists are more interested in cultural experiences and local life (Liu et al., 2019).

The web accessibility results suggest that Chinese outbound tour operators' websites need improvement in terms of assistive technology. In addition, considering that this study analysed the website accessibility manually and was limited by the researcher's equipment, future research

could employ automated detection using online tools such as TAW, in order to more accurately assess and identify website accessibility issues (Eusébio et al., 2023; Domínguez Vila et al., 2018), as well as JAWS (Job access with speech) or NVDA (Nonvisual desktop access) to detect compatible aspects of websites. Moreover, considering that such automated tools can mark website accessibility issues (e.g., Eusébio et al., 2023), further research could focus on the specific changes in website accessibility before and after the implementation of these improvements, and how these changes affect the actual user experience for people with disabilities.

In terms of the accessibility of Chinese outbound tour operators' websites, the importance of information for the marginalised, including people with disabilities, has been repeatedly demonstrated in the findings of previous studies (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Kołodziejczak, 2019; Nyanjom et al., 2018), and the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to provide tourist services and information has also been widely acknowledged (Domínguez Vila et al., 2024). Future research should therefore focus on how these technologies, especially artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT, can be used to improve access to information for people with disabilities and other marginalised groups (Gursoy et al., 2023).

5.4　Concluding remarks

While previous research has drawn attention to the difficulties that tourists with disabilities face in participating in tourism (e.g., Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015), there is still limited understanding of how suppliers address the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities, website accessibility, and the provision of accessibility information on websites. Through the analysis of two accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand and six tour operators in China, it was found that to address the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand, New Zealand accessible tourism service providers must provide customised services, collaborate with different suppliers, and provide accurate information to build trustworthies. The cases shared by the two accessible tourism service providers indicate that having these (but not all) features in place can certainly address the accessibility requirements of more tourists with disabilities, but this approach has not been widely adopted by all suppliers. This is consistent with previous findings that the potential of the accessible market has not been valued

and developed by the New Zealand tourism industry (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). In fact, the search through this study revealed that there are only a few accessible tourism service providers in New Zealand, which indicates that the New Zealand tourism industry needs to include more suppliers in the accessibility-related agenda in order to promote the inclusive development of the entire industry (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Nyanjom et al., 2018).

The analysis of Chinese outbound tour operators' websites reveals accessibility issues and the provision of accessibility information. If websites are inaccessible, it means that tourists with disabilities cannot access information successfully, which may lead to difficulties in planning and booking trips, thereby reducing their willingness to travel (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020). The findings of the accessibility of the websites of the six Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand can be used as best practice information to improve their own websites or those of other tour operators. In terms of accessibility information, it is surprising that the findings reveal that accessibility information is not always found on the Chinese outbound tour operators' websites and that this information is fragmented. Accessibility information is important for tourists with disabilities, as it can help them make informed decisions and prepare for their trip in advance (Cockburn-Wootten & McIntosh, 2020; Darcy, 2010; Yang et al., 2015; Zins, 2007).

For suppliers, the development of accessible tourism may not only be about meeting the accessibility requirements of tourists with disabilities, but also about becoming the leader in the field of accessibility and advocating for social change to encourage more people to follow suit (Shetty & McIntosh, 2024), thereby developing accessible tourism. This approach, which emphasises addressing accessibility-related issues through social change, aligns with the social model of disability adopted in this study, which aims to remove the social barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating in society (Zajadacz, 2015). The findings of this study provide a supply perspective of the accessibility requirements of inbound Chinese tourists with disabilities to New Zealand. To achieve the above-mentioned changes, future research can be more practical. For example, researchers can conduct research on other mainstream service providers in New Zealand to assess how they meet the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities, ensuring that accommodation, transportation, and attractions are accessible to Chinese

tourists with disabilities. In addition, researchers could conduct an in-depth study of the website accessibility of Chinese outbound tour operators to New Zealand, in particular analysing the specific changes experienced by the website before and after implementation based on the WCAG 2.0 guidelines, and how these changes affect the actual user experience of people with disabilities. Such a study would provide detailed information on which specific measures are most effective, as well as the challenges and solutions that may be encountered during implementation.

Although this study shed new insights into the potential accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists with disabilities wishing to visit New Zealand, website accessibility and accessibility information gaps, the findings cannot be generalised as they do not represent a comprehensive evaluation of the entire tourism industry, nor are they based on a representative sample. Whilst recognising the limited sample size of this study, there are very few accessible tourism specialists in New Zealand to support the facilitation of accessible tourism experiences in New Zealand nor relative knowledge of Chinese tourists with access needs/disabilities. These aspects need much greater attention if New Zealand is to better serve a growing market of visitors with disabilities in the future.

An accessible tourism service provider from New Zealand expressed a profound understanding of the value of accessible tourism. The participant believed that the core of accessible tourism is not about making a lot of money, but rather for the enjoyment of tourists being able to freely do what they want to do and making their dreams come true. This perspective emphasises the importance of providing travel opportunities for people with disabilities, with the aim of enhancing their quality of life, rather than just seeking commercial gains. This concept is essential to understanding and promoting accessible tourism, and emphasises the social value and humanistic spirit of accessible tourism. Through such services, the tourism industry can become more inclusive and accessible, ensuring that everyone can enjoy the fun and benefits of travel.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Approval of ethics application

27 August 2024
Alison McIntosh
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Alison

Re Ethics Application: **24/153 Inbound and outbound tour operators' perspectives of accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists visiting New Zealand.**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions. Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 27 August 2027.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the <u>Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research</u> and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online <u>http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics</u>

For any enquiries, please contact <u>ethics@aut.ac.nz</u>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: nss4647@autuni.ac.nz

Appendix B – Email to Tour Operators

Subject line: Invitation to participate in tourism research

Dear Madam/Sir

My name is Haozhe (Jason) Han, and I am currently studying for my Master's degree at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. I am conducting research on the views of Chinese outbound and New Zealand inbound tour operators on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists under the supervision of Professor Alison McIntosh and Dr Brielle Gillovic. This research aims to gain insights into the perspectives and future plans of tour operators in relation to accessibility requirements for this market. As your tourism business is listed on www.newzealand.com as one of the trusted providers of tourism services to Chinese tourists travelling to or within China or New Zealand, your input is invaluable, and I hope that you will consider participating.

Accessibility-related issues are an under-researched topic worldwide, especially in China, despite the ageing Chinese population. Accessible tourism seeks to ensure that tourism is equitable and accessible to all people in society, including seniors and people with disabilities. Therefore, accessibility requirements refer to the specific support and services that seniors and people with disabilities need, in order to participate in tourism, for example, by providing accessibility information, wheelchair access, braille, and friendly service attitudes that ensure services and activities are accessible to everyone.

Therefore, I seek your support and permission to collect data through interviews with any of your staff who have knowledge and experience of the Chinese visitor market. These interviews will help me evaluate experiences and service initiatives, explore possibilities for improvement, and provide insights and recommendations for catering to this important group of visitors. The interviews will be conducted in English.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and the identity of participants will be confidential. The attached Participant Information Sheet provides detailed information about the research. To participate, please complete the attached Consent Form and return it to me by replying to this email within three weeks.

I look forward to your participation and valuable input. If you have any questions, please email me at nss4647@autuni.ac.nz. Thank you for considering this invitation - I look forward to your positive response!

Best wishes,
Haozhe Han

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *27 August 2024*, AUTEC Reference number 24/153.

Appendix C.a - Information Sheet for Tour Operators

Date Information Sheet Produced:

22nd August 2024

Project Title

Outbound and inbound tour operators' perspectives on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand.

An Invitation

My name is Haozhe (Jason) Han), and I am a Master's student at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. I am currently doing research into the views of outbound and inbound tour operators on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand. The information I gather in this research will help me understand the views of tour operators on accessibility requirements in order to better understand China's position in the accessible tourism market.

This research is focused on aspects related to accessible tourism. Accessible tourism seeks to ensure that tourism activities are accessible to all people, including seniors, people with disabilities, and travellers with special requirements. This type of tourism considers the barriers that such visitors may encounter when using transport and accommodation, accessing attractions, searching for accessibility information, and so forth. By improving information, facilities, and services, such as providing accessible toilets and making special assistive devices available, everyone can enjoy travelling without accessibility barriers.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to investigate the views of outbound and inbound tour operators in China and New Zealand on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand. The research pays particular attention to the role and experiences of tour operators, because they directly provide tourism services and respond to accessibility requirements. The views of outbound tour operators in China can provide information on how Chinese tourists prepare for their travel experiences in New Zealand and what they expect, as

well as how the tour operators can help tourists cope with possible barriers to travel. The views of inbound tour operators will help me understand how the specific requirements of Chinese tourists can be met within New Zealand.

The research results will provide a basis for improving the quality and accessibility of tourism services in China and New Zealand, which will help promote the development of accessible tourism for the Chinese and New Zealand markets. It will also ensure that relevant, accessible tourism services can more comprehensively meet the requirements of tourists, which is important, given the ageing population in China.

The results may also be used in academic publications and presentations, as well as my Master's thesis. However, none of the above will contain any information that identifies participants.

How was I identified, and why am I invited to participate in this research?

As a tour operator listed on www.newzealand.com as one of the trusted providers of tourism products and services to Chinese visitors to New Zealand, I invite your organisation to participate in this research. No specialised knowledge is required. The purpose of your participation is to provide important information and your perspectives on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists.

Your organisation meets the criteria of tour operators that can be included in the research. These criteria are: 1) Directly serving the Chinese tourist market; 2) Operating for over two years; and 3) Willing to participate in the research and provide the required data.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate in this research, please sign and return the Consent Form attached to the email. Signing the consent form gives me permission to conduct interviews with staff within your organisation, and that you will help me identify potential participants who may wish to participate by circulating an invitation to employees within your organisation. If you have any questions before you agree to participate, please email me at nss4647@autuni.ac.nz.

What will happen in this research?

The purpose of this research is to understand the perspectives of tour operators on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand; it is essential to consider their experiences and initiatives in relation to accessibility services. I will conduct interviews with employees in your organisation who have knowledge and experience of providing tourism products or services to Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand. Interviews will be conducted in English.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Discomforts and risks are not likely in this research. This research will use privacy measures to protect the confidentiality of your organisation and the participants involved in the research.

What are the benefits?

By participating in this research, you will help contribute to improving accessible infrastructure and services. The improvements that may be achieved through this research will help make the travelling experience more inclusive for Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand.

This research will allow me to develop a broad understanding of how accessible tourism and accessibility requirements can be understood by tour operators, especially in relation to Chinese tourists. This will help me to complete my thesis for the Master of Tourism Management degree at Auckland University of Technology.

How will my privacy be protected?

I will protect the privacy of all tour operators and participants. All personally identifiable information will be removed, and codes used to replace the organisations' and participants' names. Interview data will be treated with strict confidentiality during transcription and storage, and only my supervisors and I will have access to it. Data will be stored on an encrypted cloud service and in a locked filing cabinet in my supervisor's office to ensure information security. Six years after the completion of the research, all data will be destroyed.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

Interviews will be conducted in English over Microsoft Teams or any other convenient platform for your employees for approximately 30-40 minutes. Your and their time are the only costs.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have three weeks to consider this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will receive a short summary of the research results, which will be sent to the email address you used for contact throughout the research. If you do not wish to receive a summary, please tick "No" on the consent form.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to my primary supervisor, Professor Alison McIntosh, *alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz,* (+649) 921 9999 ext 6983.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC (Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee) at *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Haozhe Han, email: *nss4647@autuni.ac.nz.*

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Alison McIntosh, email: *alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz* telephone: (+649) 921 9999 ext 6983

Appendix C.b - Information Sheet for Participants

Date Information Sheet Produced:

22nd August 2024

Project Title

Outbound and inbound tour operators' perspectives on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists

travelling to and within New Zealand.

An Invitation

My name is Haozhe (Jason) Han, and I am a Master's student at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. I am currently doing research on the views of Chinese outbound and New Zealand inbound tour operators on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand. The information I gather in this research will help me to understand the views of tour operators on accessibility requirements in order to better understand China's position in the accessible tourism market.

The research is focused on aspects related to accessible tourism. Accessible tourism seeks to ensure that tourism activities are accessible to all people, including seniors, people with disabilities, and travellers with special requirements. This type of tourism considers the barriers that such people may encounter when using transport and accommodation, accessing attractions, searching for accessibility information, and so forth. By improving information, facilities and services, such as providing accessible toilets and special assistive devices, everyone can enjoy travelling without accessibility barriers.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to investigate the views of outbound and inbound tour operators in China and New Zealand on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand. The research pays particular attention to the roles and experiences of tour operators because they directly provide tourism services and respond to accessibility requirements. Your views can provide information on how Chinese tourists prepare for their

travel experiences in New Zealand and what they can expect, as well as how you assist tourists in coping with possible barriers to travel. The views of inbound tour operators will help me understand how the specific requirements of Chinese tourists can be met within New Zealand. They will also help ensure that relevant, accessible tourism services can more comprehensively meet the requirements of tourists, which is important, given the ageing population in China.

The research results may also be used in academic publications and presentations, as well as my Master's thesis. However, none of the above will contain any information that identifies participants.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

This research is being carried out with the permission of the organisation you work for. You are invited to participate in this research because: 1) You work in a role that has direct experience with Chinese tourists visiting New Zealand; and 2) You have indicated you are willing and have the time to participate in an interview. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may withdraw from the research at any time before data analysis begins, and request that your interview data is destroyed.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate in this research, please email me. If you agree to participate, I will send you an information sheet and consent form for you to sign, which gives your agreement to participate in this research.. If you have any questions before you agree to participate, please email me at *nss4647@autuni.ac.nz.*

What will happen in this research?

This research aims to explore the perspectives of tour operators on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand. I will conduct an interview with you that will last approximately 30-40 minutes and include questions about your experiences of providing tourism products and services to Chinese tourists travelling to and within New Zealand, and their accessibility requirements.

You do not require specialised knowledge about accessibility requirements; I seek only to discuss your opinions and general experiences. The interview will be conducted in English over Microsoft Teams or any other convenient platform for you. At the start of the interview, I will record your oral consent to reconfirm that you understand the research and participate voluntarily. I will record the interview and transcribe it for the purpose of analysis.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Discomforts and risks are not likely in this research. Your participation is voluntary and not subject to influence from anyone. Your data will be protected and can only accessed by my supervisor and me.

What are the benefits?

By participating in this research, you will help contribute to improving accessible infrastructure and services. The improvements that may be achieved through this research will help to make the travelling experience more inclusive for Chinese tourists travelling from China to New Zealand.

This research will allow me to develop a broad understanding of how accessible tourism and accessibility requirements can be understood by tour operators, especially in relation to Chinese tourists. This will help me to complete my thesis for the Master of Tourism Management degree at Auckland University of Technology.

How will my privacy be protected?

I will protect the privacy of all participating organisations and individuals. All personally identifiable information will be removed, and codes used to replace the names of organisations and the participants. Interview data will be treated with strict confidentiality during transcription and storage, and only my supervisors and I will have access to it. Data will be stored on an encrypted Cloud service and in a locked filing cabinet in my supervisor's office to ensure information security. Six years after the completion of the research, all data will be destroyed.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

Interviews will be conducted on a date and time that is convenient for you over Microsoft Teams or any other convenient platform, and will take approximately 30-40 minutes.. Your time is the only cost.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have one week to consider this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will receive a summary of the research results, which will be sent to the email address you used for contact throughout the research. If you do not wish to receive a summary, please tick "No" on the consent form.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to my primary supervisor, Professor Alison McIntosh*, alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz, (+64) 09 921 9999 ext 6983*.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC (Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee), at ethics@aut.ac.nz. (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Haozhe Han, email: nss4647@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Alison McIntosh, email: *alison.mcintosh@aut.ac.nz,* telephone: (+64) 09 921 9999 ext 6983

Appendix D.a – Access form: Permission for researcher to access company employees

Project title: ***Outbound and Inbound Tour Operators' Perspectives on the accessibility requirements of Chinese Tourists travelling to and within New Zealand***

Project Supervisors: *Prof **Alison McIntosh** and Dr **Brielle Gillovic***

Researcher: ***Haozhe Han***

○   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 22 August 2024.

○   I give permission in response to the researcher's request to conduct research within the company (tour operator).

○   I give permission in response to the researcher's request to interview the volunteers (employees) of the company (tour operator).

○   I give permission in response to the researcher's request to help the researcher send the recruitment information to WeCom.

Corporate Counsel/Relevant Representative's Signature:

....……………………………………………………………

Corporate Counsel/Relevant Representative's Name:

....……………………………………………………………

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 27 August 2024, AUTEC Reference number 24/153

Note: The head of the organisation should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix D.b - Consent Form for the Participant

Project title: ***Outbound and Inbound Tour Operators' Perspectives on the accessibility requirements of Chinese Tourists travelling to and within New Zealand***

Project Supervisors: *Alison McIntosh & Brielle Gillovic*

Researcher: *Haozhe Han*

○   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 22 August 2024.

○   I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the research project and to have them answered.

○   I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and will also be recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

○   I understand that participating in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research at any time before data analysis begins without being disadvantaged.

○   I understand that if I withdraw from the research, I have the right to delete any data that can be identified with me. However, once the results of the research are released, it may not be possible to delete my data.

○   I participate in this research voluntarily.

○   I understand that I will not be named or identified by my organisational role in the research.

○   I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○   No○

Participant's signature: ....…………………………………………………………

Participant's name: ....…………………………………………………………

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

…………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………..

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 27 August 2024 AUTEC Reference number 24/153

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix E – Recruitment Information

An invitation to participate in tourism research

Dear potential participant,

I invite you to participate in my research. My name is Haozhe (Jason) Han, and I am currently studying for my Master's degree at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. I hope you will consider this invitation to participate in my research, given your experience of providing tourism services for Chinese tourists visiting and travelling around New Zealand. I am conducting research on the views of outbound and inbound tour operators on the accessibility requirements of Chinese tourists travelling to and around New Zealand under the supervision of Professor Alison McIntosh and Dr Brielle Gillovic.

Accessibility requirements relate to the specific support and services that seniors and people with disabilities and need in order to participate in tourism, such as accessibility information, wheelchair access, braille, and friendly service attitudes that ensure services and activities are inclusive for everyone.

Interview Details

Duration: Approximately 30 to 40 minutes

Time: At your convenience

Location: Online via Microsoft Teams or any other platform that is convenient for you.

Language: English

Interview mode: Semi-structured (that is, you are free to express your thoughts and feelings.

The research follows the principle of voluntary participation, which means you can withdraw from the research any time before data analysis begins, without being disadvantaged in any way.

The interview will give you an opportunity to discuss and share your personal opinions, knowledge, and experiences of providing services to this visitor market (specifically, meeting accessibility requirements) and I will not ask you to give company information, although the provision of accessibility may relate to company policy or procedures. Prior knowledge of accessible tourism and accessibility requirements is not required for this interview. I just want your general insights and personal experiences, which will help me understand accessible tourism provision to this visitor market.

Participation Information

Your participation is voluntary and confidential.

Response

Please inform me of your interest in participating in the research as soon as possible. To protect your privacy, I encourage you to use your private email to contact me. Please let me know if you have any questions: my email address is nss4647@autuni.ac.nz.

Warm regards,

Haozhe Han

Appendix F – Interview Schedule

Pre-trip:

1. Please tell me a bit about the visitor markets your organisation caters to.

2. Please describe the accessible travel services offered by your organisation to help clients prepare for their trip.

3. How have these services been designed with the Chinese market in mind?

4. What accessibility principles or best practices are followed in designing tourism products for Chinese tourists travelling to/in New Zealand? What accessible travel services does your organisation provide?

5. What are the most prioritised accessibility elements considered when designing tourism products for seniors and people with disabilities from China?

6. How can you ensure that your service staff are adequately trained in understanding Chinese cultural needs and the accessibility requirements of senior travellers and people with disabilities? What training has been given that will help trainees better understand and serve people in these specific communities?

7. Have you worked with specific service providers (e.g. hotels, transport companies) to ensure that their services meet accessibility standards? Please explain your answer.

8. According to some specifications for elderly travellers, those over 75 years old are recommended to be accompanied by a family member. However, based on news reports, travel agencies may have more stringent requirements and even refuse senior tourists. Is this something you have experienced?

9. How is information about tourism products and services communicated to seniors and people with disabilities? What communication strategies and tools were used?

During the trip:

1. How do you monitor and ensure that accessibility services are consistent with the standards set and are properly implemented during travel?

2. How do you deal with accessibility requirements or complaints that may arise during travel? Could you please provide examples?

3. What safety measures do you have specifically for seniors and people with disabilities in case of emergencies? For example, how do you ensure their safety when they are mobilised, or during activities (e.g. with special contingency plans or by cooperating with medical service providers)?

4. Please describe a practical example of a challenge and solution when dealing with the accessibility requirements of a person with an older adult or person with a disability from China.

5. According to research, people with disabilities have specific requirements (e.g. wheelchair users require a wide entrance doorway to their hotel, and Chinese seniors are stricter about food and drink, for example, by preferring a Chinese rather than Western breakfast). What measures will be taken to address these and similar accessibility requirements?

6. What aspects of accessibility do you prioritise most when managing accessibility services on the journey? Why do you think these are important?

Post-trip:

1. After travelling, how do you usually collect and process feedback from tourists to improve accessibility services in the future?

2. What specific improvements have you made to your accessibility services based on tourist feedback? What improvements were successful or unsuccessful?

3. Please describe in detail how you have adjusted your accessibility services in response to feedback from Chinese tourists either during a service experience, or post-travel. What changes were made as a result of this adjustment? Have these changes been consistently adopted in subsequent service offerings?

4. Based on your experience, what do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities in providing accessible tourism services to seniors and people with disabilities from China?

5. Research shows that China is in the early stages of developing accessibility services for travellers in the Asia-Pacific region and that tour operators do not recognise the importance of the accessible market. What are your comments on this?

6. What key improvements or innovations do you think are needed in accessible tourism services for the Chinese market?

7. How do you view the long-term development of accessible tourism services? Are there any plans to develop additional accessible tourism services or products to meet future market demand.