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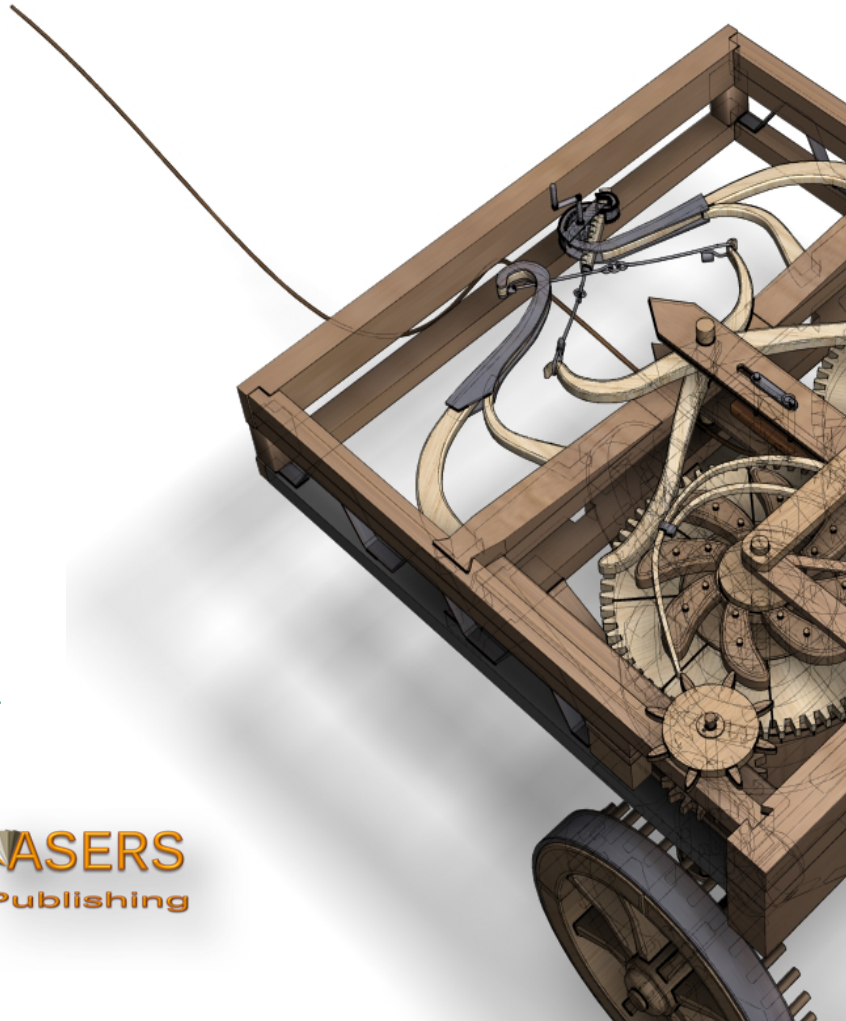
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Call for Papers

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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism

Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism is an open access, peer-reviewed interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences. The Journal publishes original research and seeks to cover a wide range of topics regarding environmental management and engineering, environmental management and health, environmental chemistry, environmental protection technologies (water, air, soil), pollution reduction at source and waste minimization, energy and environment, modelling, simulation and optimization for environmental protection; environmental biotechnology, environmental education and sustainable development, environmental strategies and policies.

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An Importance-Performance Analysis of Accessible Tourism: A Tourist and Resident Perspective with Empirical Insights from Phuket

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Abstract: The fundamental principle of accessible tourism revolves around advocating for the inclusion and empowerment of individuals with disabilities, aiming to facilitate complete engagement for individuals with disabilities within tourism experiences. Previous research established a five-dimensional exploratory framework revealing several barriers that prevent Phuket Island from fully engaging in accessible tourism and increasing its global market share in this emerging market segment. This study sought to build upon previous findings by empirically investigating these barriers through the utilization of the importance-performance analysis method. Methodologically, survey data was collected from 391 tourists and residents in Phuket. The findings align with previous research, highlighting the preparedness of Phuket's international airport, diverse luxury accommodation options, and internationally accredited medical facilities. These elements stand out as exemplary in meeting the needs of accessible tourism. Conversely, the present infrastructure, insufficient transportation systems, and limited recreational options pose significant challenges, marking them as pivotal bottlenecks. The article discusses practical implications to rectify these limitations and advances the discussion about using the importance-performance analysis as a managerial tool to evaluate the quality of tourism experiences in the context of accessible tourism.

Keywords: accessible tourism; importance-performance analysis; inclusive tourism; disability; Thailand; sustainable development goals.

JEL Classification: L83; M39; Z32; Q01; R11.

Introduction

At its core, accessible tourism revolves around advocating for the rights of individuals with mental and physical disabilities to fully engage in tourism activities (Benjamin *et al.* 2021). This advocacy entails the removal of barriers that might impede differently abled tourists' participation (Scheyvens and Biddulph 2018), thereby ensuring that people with disabilities can enjoy tourist activities without hindrance (Szmukler *et al.* 2014). Accessible tourism is an emerging field of study and poised to impact the competitiveness of tourism destinations in various dimensions, be it from a human rights perspective, the emergence of a new market segment, or the enhancement of service delivery (Michopoulou *et al.* 2015; Fuchs, 2023). Moreover, accessible tourism is a pivotal consideration, not only because accessibility is a fundamental human right (McCabe and Diekmann 2015) but also due to its significance as a business opportunity (Darcy *et al.* 2010) and as an integral component of sustainable tourism implementation (Sica *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, this type of tourism serves to promote equality in tourism development, embracing individuals of all abilities (Qiao *et al.* 2021). Consequently, it plays a key role in the realm of inclusive tourism, aligning with the objectives of reducing inequalities outlined in Sustainable Development Goal Ten (SDG10) (United Nations, 2022).

An exploratory investigation in Phuket unveiled a range of barriers hindering the island's full engagement in accessible tourism and its global market share expansion for physically disabled tourists (Fuchs 2023). Addressing these barriers, including the enhancement of physical infrastructure, diversification of recreational offerings for the physically disabled, and provision of more affordable accommodation options, has the potential to reduce inequality (Sahoo and Choudhury 2023). To overcome these challenges, an importance-performance

analysis (IPA) was implemented to comprehensively assess Phuket's readiness. IPA can help prioritize areas for improvement while maintaining overall quality (Deepa and Baral 2019). An empirically informed approach can guide tourism stakeholders in Phuket to efficiently plan and implement improvements that benefit both the destination and the emerging accessible tourism segment. Therefore, the study presented in this article extends the existing literature in several ways and provides valuable practical implications for policymakers in Phuket. First, the study presented in this article builds upon prior research, which primarily aimed to understand barriers faced by differently abled travelers (Sisto *et al.* 2022; Fuchs 2023) or recognize the economic potential of specialized travel (Özogul and Baran 2016). Moreover, the article highlights the need for more research dedicated to identifying barriers and understanding tourist preferences from the perspective of differently abled individuals.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Literature on Accessible Tourism

The European Network for Accessible Tourism acknowledges that there is not one universal definition of accessible tourism, but broadly defines it as follows:

“Accessible Tourism' refers to tourism that caters to the needs of a full range of consumers including persons with disabilities, older persons, and cross-generational families. It entails [the] removal of attitudinal and institutional barriers in society, and encompasses accessibility in the physical environment, in transportation, information and communications, and other facilities and services. It encompasses publicly and privately-owned tourist locations” (ENAT, n.d.).

Furthermore, Simon Darcy, a renowned scholar and pioneer in accessible tourism research, said the following more than a decade ago:

“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 traveling with children in prams, people with disabilities, and seniors” (Darcy and Dickson 2009, 34)

Successful implementation of accessible tourism often hinges on a closely coordinated effort involving collaboration among local stakeholders (Michopoulou *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, Michopoulou *et al.* (2015) noted that enhancing the accessibility of facilities, transportation, attractions, and, more broadly, destinations necessitates the collective involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders, including travelers with disabilities. Moreover, accessible tourism can be viewed as a competitive advantage in the global positioning and marketing of destinations (Kourkouridis and Salepaki 2023). Accessible tourism aims to make travel and tourism experiences inclusive for individuals with disabilities and people with special needs (Qiao *et al.* 2023).

Although it is an emerging market segment, accessible tourism gained increasing attention as more destinations and businesses recognized the importance of catering to a diverse range of travelers (Cockburn-Wooten and McIntosh 2020). Notably, Phuket, a tropical island heavily reliant on tourism and esteemed as a world-class destination (Jarumaneerat 2022), plays a substantial role in Thailand's economic prosperity through tourism revenues (Fuchs 2021). In addition, the proposed direction aligns with the government's strategy of positioning Phuket as a premier health and wellness tourism destination (Sopha *et al.* 2019). Despite Phuket's appeal as a destination, the study reveals that inclusivity remains a challenge there, contributing to inequality (Weiss *et al.* 2018; Fuchs 2023).

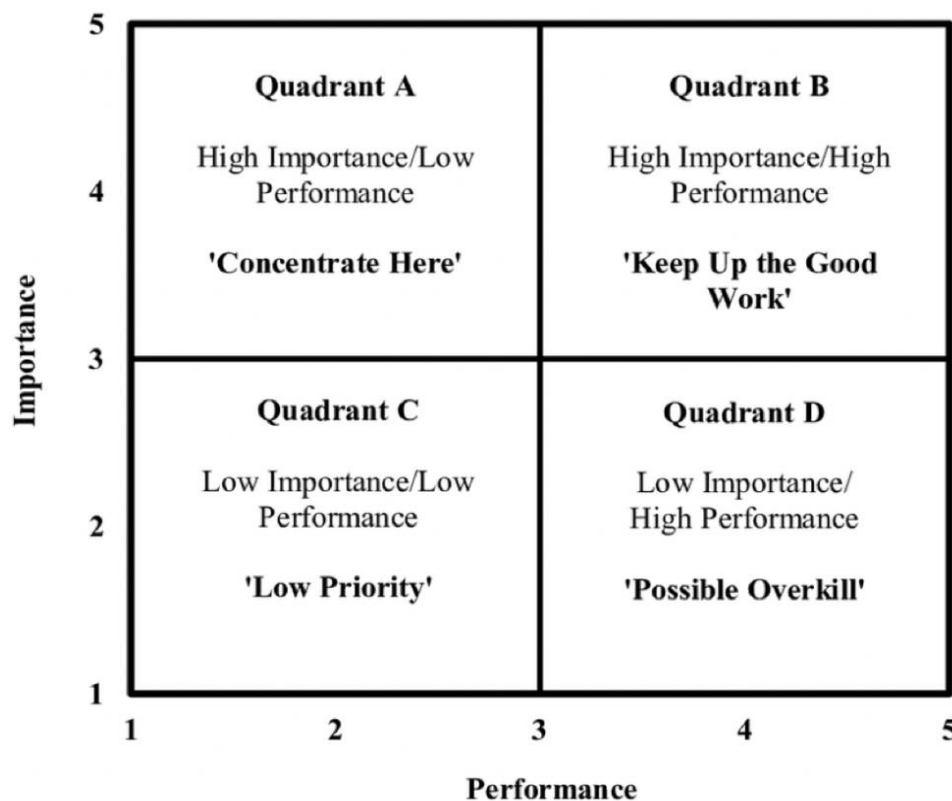
1.2. Importance-Performance Analysis in Tourism

Importance-performance analysis (IPA) is a well-established methodology employed in various fields to evaluate and improve the quality of products, services, or experiences (Agyekum *et al.* 2023). IPA is rooted in the field of marketing and was initially proposed by Martilla and James in the late 1970s (Chen *et al.* 2023). This analytical tool has since found widespread application in diverse sectors, with tourism being a prominent context (Simpson *et al.* 2020). The core purpose of IPA is to identify the critical dimensions or attributes of a product, service, or experience that deserve attention and improvement by categorizing them based on their importance and performance (Saleem *et al.* 2023).

In its fundamental form, IPA involves a two-dimensional matrix in which one axis represents the importance of various attributes and the other axis gauges the performance of the entity in delivering those

attributes (Mimbs *et al.* 2020). The resulting matrix is divided into four quadrants, each providing distinct insights and recommendations for action (Kokkhangplu and Kaewnuch, 2021; Boley and Jordan, 2023) as exemplified in Figure 1. Kokkhangplu and Kaewnuch (2021) as well as Boley and Jordan (2023) described these quadrants as "Keep Up the Work" (high importance, high performance), "Concentrate Here" (high importance, low performance), "Low Priority" (low importance, low performance), and "Possible Overkill" (low importance, high performance).

Figure 1. A visualization of the importance-performance analysis showing a two-dimensional matrix divided into four quadrants



Source: A modified version adapted from Ferreira and Fernandes (2015)

The importance of an attribute is usually determined through market research, while simultaneously, performance is evaluated by assessing the level at which the entity meets the standards or expectations set by its stakeholders, typically the customers (Boley *et al.* 2017). In the context of tourism, the application of IPA is of considerable significance (Simpson *et al.* 2020). Tourism is an industry that heavily relies on customer satisfaction and positive experiences (Simpson *et al.* 2020). The demand for destinations, accommodations, and attractions often hinges on the perceived quality of the experience offered (Yin *et al.* 2020). Consequently, managing the factors that contribute to a visitor's overall experience becomes paramount (Yin *et al.* 2020).

Tourism is inherently multifaceted, and tourists have diverse expectations and preferences (Cohen *et al.* 2014). Identifying which aspects of a destination, service, or experience matter most to various segments of tourists is a challenge that IPA can effectively address (Boley *et al.* 2017). By gathering data on tourists' perceptions of attribute importance and their corresponding assessments of performance, the tourism industry can better tailor its offerings to meet the needs and desires of different customer segments (Cohen *et al.* 2014). In doing so, it not only improves the overall tourist experience but can also gain an edge in a highly competitive market (Cohen *et al.* 2014; Singjai *et al.* 2018).

1.3. Accessibility Research in Phuket

Fuchs (2023) conducted an exploratory study in July 2022 focusing on the accessibility of Phuket for differently-abled individuals. The exploratory research collected data through semi-structured interviews. Moreover, the study revealed several noteworthy findings regarding the barriers and opportunities in this context. The research established a comprehensive framework to assess Phuket's readiness for accessible tourism, shedding light on the island's potential in this emerging market segment. Namely, the dimensions were: (1) airport facilities, (2)

accommodation services, (3) transportation and infrastructure, (4) recreational activities, and (5) health and wellness (including medical facilities). Within this framework, various dimensions were explored, encompassing different aspects of the travel experience (Fuchs 2023).

It was observed that the airport facilities at Phuket International Airport (IATA: HKT) generally provided adequate support for travelers with disabilities, including dedicated wheelchair services. However, the research also highlighted a noteworthy contrast between the ease of arrival at the airport and the challenges faced in departing from it. In terms of transportation and infrastructure, the study found that Phuket had limited options for disabled tourists, particularly when it came to the availability of accessible taxis. Furthermore, the absence of a well-developed public transportation network and the existence of insufficient infrastructure, such as roads and sidewalks, posed significant hurdles for differently-abled individuals moving around the island. The sentiment among participants was that “there are not many options for differently abled to independently move around the island” (Fuchs 2023, 801).

Accommodation services in Phuket varied widely, from budget to luxury options. Generally, lower-end accommodations were less accommodating for individuals with physical disabilities due to inadequate infrastructure. On the other hand, high-end hotels were better equipped to cater to the needs of disabled tourists. The availability of recreational activities for differently-abled tourists in Phuket was found to be limited, with the extent of options decreasing as the severity of physical disabilities increased. Inclusivity in these activities was lacking, partly due to additional costs associated with accommodating disabilities. For example, some participants in the study voiced their concern by noting that “the additional costs [for recreational activities] make it less desirable and financially sustainable” (Fuchs 2023, 801).

Table 1. Positive aspects and areas for improvement concerning Phuket’s readiness for accessible tourism

Positive Aspects
The airport provides adequate support for travelers with disabilities (including dedicated wheelchair services)
High-end hotels are well-equipped to cater to the needs of differently-abled tourists
Availability of state-of-the-art private medical centers operated by world-class physicians
Areas for Improvement
Limited transportation options for differently-abled tourists, with a need for pre-booking accessible taxis
A lack of a well-developed public transportation network
Inadequate infrastructure (including road crossings and sidewalks that pose a significant barrier)
Limited availability of recreational activities for differently-abled tourists in Phuket

Source: Summarized in tabular form based on the findings from Fuchs (2023)

One of the most contentious findings emerged in the area of health and wellness. Phuket was recognized for its private medical centers staffed by world-class physicians. While some interviewees highlighted concerns about the cost of health insurance for people with disabilities, the quality of medical assistance in Phuket was generally regarded as meeting international standards. Access to high-quality healthcare facilities was deemed essential for selecting a vacation destination for differently-abled individuals. The aforementioned Table 1 presents a summary of the findings from Fuchs' study (2023), categorizing them into positive aspects and areas requiring improvement. This establishes the foundational framework for further exploration of Phuket's readiness for accessible tourism.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study Site

Phuket, a tropical island heavily reliant on tourism and esteemed as a world-class destination (Jarumanerat 2022), plays a substantial role in Thailand's economic prosperity through tourism revenues (Fuchs 2021). Phuket is Thailand's largest island, with a total land area of 543 km². In comparison, Phuket is somewhat smaller than the sovereign island city-state of Singapore (728.6 km²) and about half the size of Okinawa in Japan (1,199 km²). Given the island's location in the Andaman Sea, Phuket is often referred to as “The Pear of the Andaman Sea.” Overall, Phuket is the second-smallest province in Thailand but a substantial contributor to the national GDP.

2.2. Research Instrument

A survey was used as the research instrument for this study. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on various aspects connecting Phuket to the realm of accessible tourism. In total, 10 statements were asked, including but not limited to the readiness of hotel staff to cater to differently-abled customers,

infrastructure, transport systems, accessibility, and marketing activities (Table 3). The questionnaire design for the IPA largely followed the guidelines in Simpson *et al.* (2020) based on the five themes identified in Fuchs (2023). The first draft of the questionnaire, including the phrasing of each statement, was established by the lead researcher and reviewed by two academics in similar research fields. After minor adjustments to improve comprehension and avoid ambiguous phrasing, a pre-test was conducted with a sample of 15. The final questionnaire asked the respondents to rate the 10 statements on their importance and performance on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = “Not at all important” and 5 = “Extremely important” for the importance of an attribute and 1 = “Highly dissatisfied” and 5 = “Highly satisfied” for the performance of that attribute.

2.3. Sampling and Data Collection

Five hundred questionnaires were administered to obtain the desired number of responses. In total, 391 responses were included in the final analysis, corresponding to a response rate of 78%. The data collection was conducted during 2023 in three tourist locations (Patong Beach, Phuket Town, and Laguna Area). Research assistants were employed to distribute the questionnaires and collect them a few minutes later. To minimize selection bias by the fieldworkers, every fifth person was approached for participation. Informed consent about the research aim and objective of the study was a prerequisite for participation. After returning the questionnaire, each participant received a souvenir as a token of appreciation for their participation. Those who declined to participate in the survey and unreturned/incomplete questionnaires were considered as non-respondents. The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

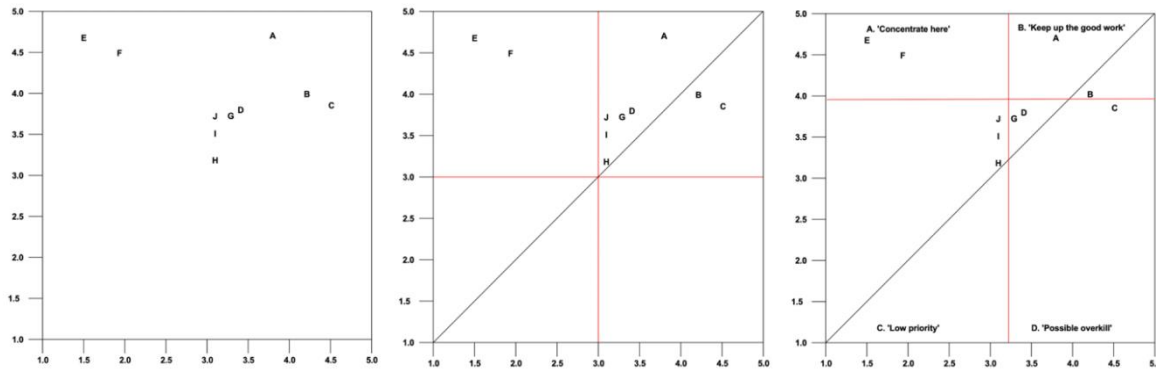
Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Type	Tourist	287	73%
	Resident	104	27%
Gender	Male	183	47%
	Female	208	53%
Nationality	Thai	86	22%
	Foreign	305	78%
Age	18 – 29 years old	92	24%
	30 – 39 years old	123	31%
	40 – 49 years old	51	13%
	50 – 59 years old	77	20%
	60 years old or over	48	12%
Education	Not Graduated	28	7%
	High School Diploma	135	35%
	University Degree	212	54%
	Other	16	4%

Source: Summarized in tabular form based on the empirical data

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data was converted into a spreadsheet and cleaned by performing a consistency check before proceeding to a detailed analysis. For example, incomplete questionnaires with many missing responses were discarded. Furthermore, unengaged responses (*i.e.*, 3-3-3-3 or 5-5-5-5) were removed (Guin *et al.* 2012). The data set was analyzed using a combination of JASP (V.0.18.1) and Microsoft Excel. This process included calculating the mean values for each statement, the perceived gap between importance and performance (Table 3), and, finally, several iterations of plotting the results into graphs (Figure 2) until the final result emerged (Figure 3).

Figure 2. A visual representation of importance–performance analysis by plotting the mean values onto the graph (left), adding the four quadrants and a diagonal line where importance and performance align (center), and adjusting the quadrants based on the empirical results (right)



Source: The visualization plot is based on the collected empirical data

3. Empirical Results

The first statement asked the respondents to rate the importance and performance of medical facilities in Phuket. The exact statement read, “The medical facilities are well-equipped and prepared for differently-abled tourists.” The perceived importance yielded a high average rating of 4.70 out of 5.00, whereas the perceived performance yielded 3.82 out of 5.00. This negative gap (-0.88) indicates that the perceived performance does not live up to the perceived importance (Statement A). The second statement inquired about the “variety of accommodation options for differently-abled tourists.” The perceived importance yielded an average rating of 4.00 out of 5.00, whereas the perceived performance yielded 4.22 out of 5.00. This positive gap (+0.22) indicates that the perceived performance is higher than the perceived importance (Statement B).

The third statement, “The hotel staff is ready to help and assist differently-abled tourists,” received an importance rating of 3.84 (out of 5.00) and a (relatively high) performance rating of 4.54 (out of 5.00). This positive gap (+0.70) indicates that the perceived performance is higher than the perceived importance (Statement C). The fourth statement asked the participants to rate the access and facilities for differently-abled tourists at Phuket International Airport. The importance rating was 3.80 (out of 5.00), whereas the performance rating was slightly lower at 3.46 (out of 5.00), creating a negative gap (-0.34) (Statement D). Fifth, the participants were asked to rate the following statement: “There are inclusive transportation options available for differently-abled tourists.” The perceived importance yielded an average rating of 4.67, whereas the average performance yielded a 1.61 rating (Statement E).

Next, the participants were asked about the infrastructure, *i.e.*, “The infrastructure in the tourist areas supports access for differently-abled tourists,” resulting in 4.47 for importance and 1.86 for performance (Statement F). Sixth, respondents were asked if Phuket brands itself as an accessible destination for differently-abled tourists. This resulted in average ratings of 3.67 out of 5.00 for importance and 3.33 out of 5.00 for performance (Statement G). The next item asked about recreational activities, *i.e.*, “There is a range of recreational activities catering to the differently-abled tourists,” which yielded average ratings of 3.13 for importance and 3.07 for performance (Statement H). Furthermore, the participants were asked if “Restaurants around the island are prepared and cater to differently-abled tourists,” which resulted in mean values of 3.52 (out of 5.00) for importance and 3.08 (out of 5.00) for performance, creating a negative gap (-0.44) (Statement I).

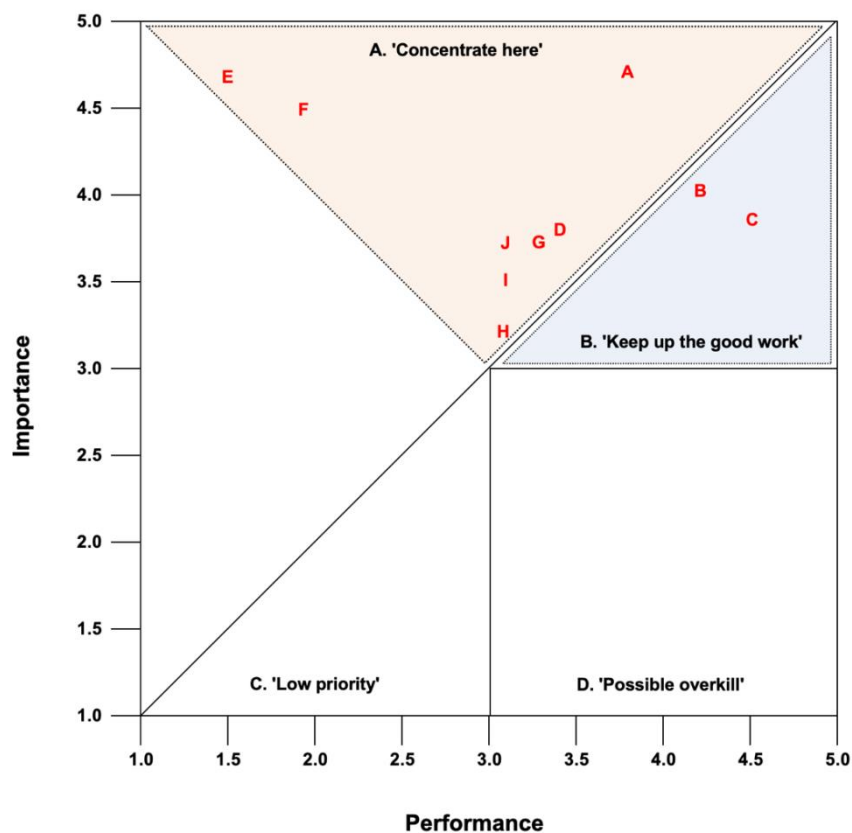
The last statement required the respondents to provide their overall sentiment, asking them if “Phuket Island is generally prepared and equipped for differently-abled tourists.” This resulted in average ratings of 3.68 out of 5.00 for importance and 3.05 out of 5.00 for performance. This negative gap (-0.63) indicates that the perceived performance does not live up to the perceived importance (Statement J). A summary of all mean ratings and the corresponding gap are reported in Table 3 below. After descriptive analysis of the results, it is noteworthy to mention that two items had a positive gap (Statements B and C, respectively), indicating that the perceived performance outperforms the perceived importance. On the other hand, eight items had a negative gap ranging from -0.06 (Statement H) to -3.06 (Statement E). In the following step, the results are visualized through a plot graph to identify areas requiring attention (Figure 3).

Table 3. Results of the importance-performance analysis including mean values for each category and their gap dimension

Code	Abbreviation	Statement	Mean Value		Gap
			Importance	Performance	
A	MEDICAL	The medical facilities are well-equipped and prepared for differently-abled tourists.	4.70	3.82	-0.88
B	ACCOMMODATION	There is a good variety of accommodation options for differently-abled tourists.	4.00	4.22	0.22
C	READINESS	The hotel staff is ready to help and assist differently-abled tourists.	3.84	4.54	0.70
D	AIRPORT	The international airport provides access and facilities for differently-abled tourists.	3.80	3.46	-0.34
E	TRANSPORT	There are inclusive transportation options available for differently-abled tourists.	4.67	1.61	-3.06
F	INFRASTRUCTURE	The infrastructure in the tourist areas supports access for differently-abled tourists.	4.47	1.86	-2.61
G	MARKETING	Phuket brands itself as an accessible destination for differently-abled tourists.	3.67	3.33	-0.34
H	ACTIVITIES	There is a range of recreational activities catering to the differently-abled tourists.	3.13	3.07	-0.06
I	RESTAURANT	Restaurants around the island are prepared and cater to differently-abled tourists.	3.52	3.08	-0.44
J	OVERALL	Phuket Island is generally prepared and equipped for differently-abled tourists.	3.68	3.05	-0.63

Source: Summarized in tabular form based on the empirical data

Figure 3. A revised importance-performance analysis plot graph divided into four quadrants



Source: The visualization plot is based on the collected empirical data

As initially stated, the importance-performance analysis plot graph is divided into four quadrants following good practice (Kokkhangplu and Kaewnuch 2021; Boley and Jordan 2023). These quadrants are labeled as "Keep Up

the Work" (high importance, high performance), "Concentrate Here" (high importance, low performance), "Low Priority" (low importance, low performance), and "Possible Overkill" (low importance, high performance). Notably, the quadrants "Low Priority" and "Possible Overkill" yielded no results. This indicates that none of the reported statements are perceived as exceptionally unimportant or particularly high-performing. Both statements with the positive gaps (Statements B and C, respectively) are placed in the quadrant "Keep Up the Work." This indicates that Phuket – as a destination – is perceived as well-positioned regarding the variety of accommodation options for differently-abled tourists and that lodging staff is ready to assist these tourists (Figure 3).

Consequently, the eight negative gaps are placed in the remaining quadrants, *i.e.*, "Concentrate Here" indicating that there is still room for improvement (Figure 3). However, it is noteworthy that not all eight statements are equally weighted. For example, priority should be placed on those with the largest gap between importance and performance, namely, "inclusive transportation options available for differently-abled tourists" (Statement E) and "infrastructure in the tourist areas supports access for differently-abled tourists" (Statement F). Moreover, it is important to see the results in context (to perceived importance) without entirely relying on the severity of the gap. For example, MEDICAL (statement A) yielded the third largest negative gap (-0.88) following TRANSPORT (Statement E) and INFRASTRUCTURE (Statement F), though this stemmed primarily from the high level of importance placed on this item (4.70 out of 5.00). Therefore, it is important to evaluate the gap (between perceived importance and perceived performance) in context to the perceived performance of each statement.

4. Discussion and Implications

The study focused on understanding the dimensions influencing the engagement of differently-abled tourists within Phuket, revealing a nuanced picture. The empirical investigation shed light on various aspects, showcasing both strengths and areas requiring substantial attention to foster a more inclusive and accommodating environment. Certain elements stood out positively. Notably, the variety of accommodation options available for differently-abled tourists and the readiness of lodging staff to assist these individuals were perceived as commendable. This indicates a level of preparedness and a proactive approach within the lodging sector, reflecting positively on Phuket's potential to cater to this specific segment of tourists (Scheyvens and Biddulph 2018). However, the study brought forward several critical areas demanding immediate focus and improvement.

Foremost among these are the inadequacies in transportation options and the deficiency in infrastructure supporting access for differently-abled tourists in the tourist areas. These findings underscore the pressing need for substantial enhancements to make Phuket more accessible and accommodating to individuals with disabilities (Fuchs 2023). Notably, the negative gaps between perceived importance and performance were not uniform across the surveyed dimensions. While some aspects like medical facilities showcased a negative gap, it is important to contextualize these results against the perceived importance assigned to each dimension. For instance, the high level of perceived importance of medical facilities (rated 4.70 out of 5.00) contributed to the negative gap despite a relatively high performance rating (3.82 out of 5.00). This underlines the high expectations and critical importance attached to this aspect.

The transformation of Phuket into a more inclusive destination requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing not only physical infrastructure but also cultural awareness and sensitivity toward diverse tourist needs. In light of these findings, the implications for the tourism industry in Phuket are significant. For example, addressing the identified shortcomings and implementing practical solutions will put Phuket on the map for another segment of tourism (*i.e.*, inclusive tourism). In particular, improving transportation systems and the local infrastructure (streets, sidewalks, road crossings, etc.) should be a priority (Natalia *et al.* 2019; Gillovic and McIntosh, 2020). Devile and Kastenholz (2020) add that these factors influence travel decisions and satisfaction, and therefore, Phuket is not maximizing its full potential with this customer segment.

Improving ground transportation options and enhancing the accessibility infrastructure within tourist areas can substantially boost Phuket's appeal as an inclusive and accommodating destination for differently-abled tourists (Fuchs 2023). Additionally, stakeholders within the tourism industry in Phuket should leverage the positive aspects identified, such as the readiness of lodging staff and the existing variety of accessible accommodations. Strengthening and further promoting these attributes can support Phuket's image as an attractive and hospitable destination for individuals with disabilities (Devile and Kastenholz 2020). Ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and sustained investment in accessibility infrastructure will be crucial in ensuring Phuket's long-term success as an inclusive tourist destination (Adshead *et al.* 2019; Darcy *et al.* 2020).

Lastly, the study confirms the validity of the IPA as a managerial tool for evaluating accessible tourism experiences in Phuket. It not only identifies key areas for improvement but also assists in prioritizing efforts,

allocating resources effectively, and fostering a continuous cycle of enhancement. Its structured approach and ability to provide actionable insights make it an invaluable instrument for decision-makers aiming to enhance the inclusivity and quality of tourism experiences for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, the iterative nature of IPA lends itself well to continual assessment and monitoring (Deepa and Baral 2019). It offers a mechanism for tracking improvements over time, allowing managers to gauge the effectiveness of interventions and measure progress in enhancing the quality of accessible tourism experiences in Phuket (Simpson *et al.* 2020).

5. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study add to our understanding of accessible tourism in Phuket while also highlighting avenues for future research (constrained by the methodology of this study or emerging from its findings). First, the study surveyed 391 tourists and residents in Phuket. Future research could aim for a larger and/or more diverse sample to enhance the representativeness. Additionally, including perspectives from a more extensive range of stakeholders (for example, interviews with local authorities or disability advocacy groups) could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Second, the study focused primarily on Phuket Island. Future research could expand the scope to include other tourist destinations in Thailand or compare other island destinations on a global scale and contrast the challenges and successes that various destinations face in promoting accessible tourism. Third, the study might not have fully accounted for cultural nuances or specific contextual factors that influence perceptions of accessible tourism. Therefore, future research should consider these cultural complexities that might impact the experiences of differently-abled tourists. Moreover, the study has natural limitations related to the time frame during which data was collected. Tourism landscapes evolve, and improvements might have occurred after the study's completion. Thus, continuous reassessments are needed to monitor the progress and evaluate the status quo.

Conclusion

The results of the research provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of Phuket's accessible tourism landscape. Phuket can significantly enhance its reputation as an inclusive and welcoming destination for all by addressing the highlighted areas of improvement. This approach aligns with the core principles of accessible tourism, fostering greater engagement among differently-abled tourists. Therefore, this research serves as a roadmap for stakeholders to focus on improving these key areas, positioning Phuket to excel in accessible tourism and offer fulfilling experiences to tourists with diverse needs. This can be achieved by leveraging the existing strengths while diligently addressing the highlighted bottlenecks. Thus, Phuket can establish itself as a leading and exemplary destination for accessible tourism, ensuring enjoyable and fulfilling experiences for all visitors, irrespective of their abilities. Moreover, the results highlight the economic potential of catering to accessible tourism, opening doors to a wider market and enhancing Phuket's competitiveness on the global tourism stage. Finally, emphasizing inclusivity not only benefits differently-abled tourists but also aligns with a broader global movement toward more equitable and accessible tourism practices.

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The author confirms sole responsibility for the conception of the article and its design, the empirical data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and the final manuscript preparation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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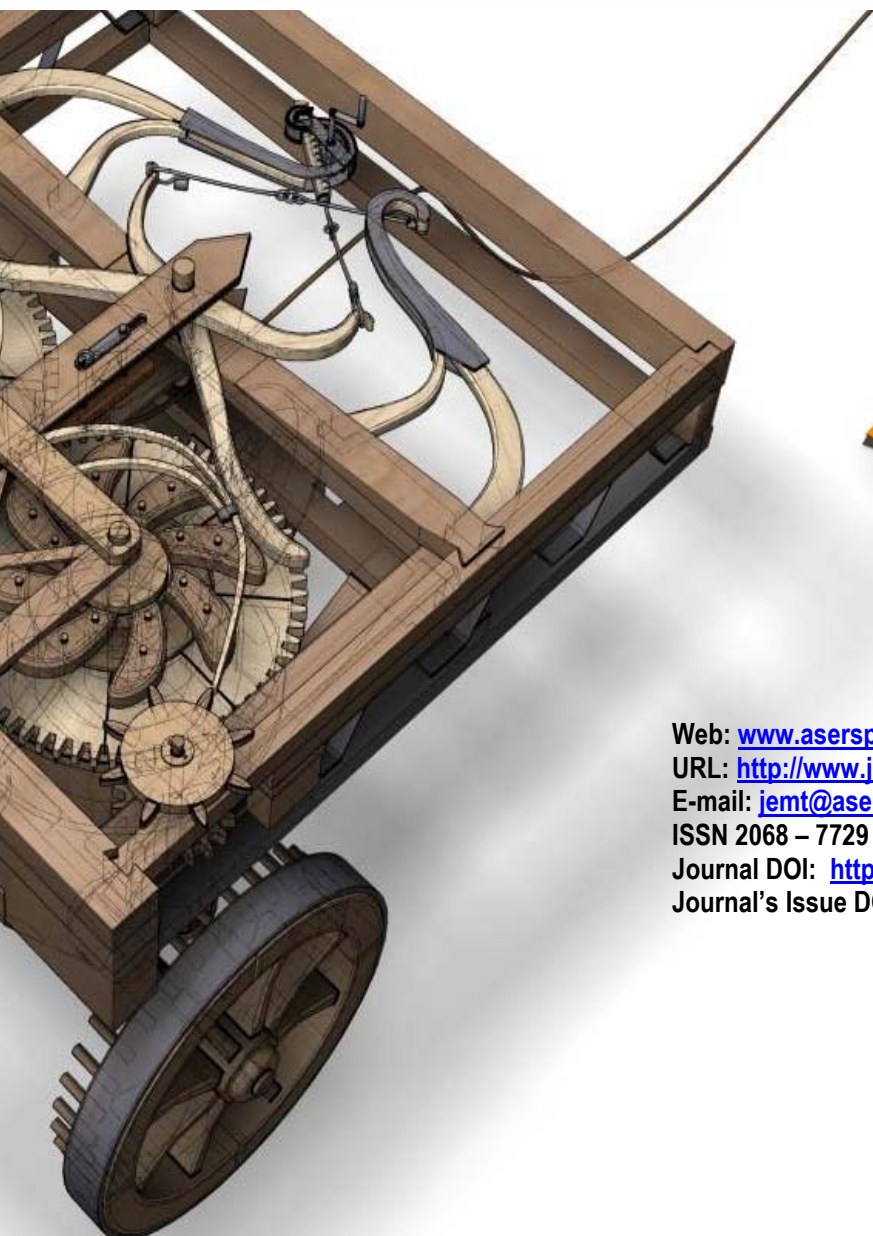
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