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A working holiday: From home to destination with a guide dog

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Introduction

Tourism research is increasingly concerned with the role of animals in the industry (see Fennell, 2012; Kline, 2018a, 2018b; Markwell, 2015; Carr & Young, 2018). Such research often engages ethical debates regarding the human-animal interactions facilitated by tourism, particularly as tourists encounter animals as part of the destination experience or specific attractions. This includes tours to view wildlife in their natural habitat (Fennell, 2012; Carr & Young, 2018), animals performing for tourists' amusement (Fennell, 2012; Markwell, 2015), pack animals that act as transportation within a destination (Cousquer & Allison, 2012; Bertelli, 2014), and even as food in gastronomic experiences of places (Kline, 2018a; 2018b). In addition, tourism research on human-animal interactions is beginning to investigate the relationships that transcend the boundaries of home and away. Carr and Cohen (2009) observe the benefits to tourists' wellbeing when accompanied by a pet, and Carr (2017) contends that tourists increasingly expect their pets to be catered to as a member of the family.

Despite the growing interest in some areas of human-animal interactions in tourism, research has yet to take notice of the role of service animals (Rickly, 2018). This is important given that the industry itself is currently ill-equipped to serve them. In fact, the European Commission (2015) finds that those traveling with a service animal are among the least catered for segments in Europe's accessible tourism market. This is despite the simultaneous expansion of reasonable accommodation legislation around the world and the increasing utilization of service animals to cope with mobility challenges. Service animals are broadly defined as animals trained to support humans, which includes providing assistance and support as well as performing specific tasks (Huss, 2009). While service animals are most often dogs, they can be other animals as well, including monkeys, miniature horses and pigs, among others. Of particular interest to this chapter are assistance dogs, which are trained to mitigate a variety of impairments, including vision impairment, hearing impairment, physical disability, medical disorder response, as well as provide emotional and psychological support. Specifically, the focus of this chapter is guide dogs, the work they perform for and with their owners who are vision impaired, and how this human-dog partnership is utilized outside their everyday environment, particularly in a tourism context.

It has been well established that guide dogs improve their owner's mobility within their local communities while also contributing to higher quality of life through greater independence, confidence and social interactions (Lloyd et al., 2008; Tomkins et al., 2011; Audrestch et al., 2015; Gravrok et al., 2018). Moreover, research indicates a preference for guide dogs as a mobility aid, as opposed to a white cane or other alternatives (Glenk et al., 2019). Importantly, guide dogs are most effective when working in familiar environments wherein they are familiar with specific routes and can better respond to potential hazards. However, while on holiday they encounter unfamiliar environments, limiting the work they can do. Nevertheless, guide dog owners sometimes prefer to be accompanied by a guide dog, even if its capacity to guide is limited, as guide dogs are more than mobility aids, but one part of an inter-dependence that develops with and through the capabilities and communications of both human and dog as partners (Haraway, 2003; 2008; Higgins, 2012).

Because service animals in the tourism industry, and assistance dogs specifically, have been thoroughly underexamined in tourism research, the findings presented here are part of a larger project that utilizes an exploratory approach as the first stage towards investigating the human-assistance dog relationship as it affects travel behavior and tourism experiences. Thus, in an effort to shed light on the experiential dimensions of traveling with a guide dog, this chapter draws upon interviews with guide dog owners to reconstruct travel experiences from home to the holiday destination, highlighting the work performed by guide dogs, the challenges of travelling with a guide dog, as well as the limitations of their abilities when in unfamiliar environments. As one of the first pieces of research to focus solely on the role of guide dogs in tourism, this chapter further uncovers key points in the journey that present common challenges to traveling with a guide dog, while expanding the perspective of human-animal interactions research in the field. We also hope that this project will be a call to research interested in human-animal relations and social justice issues to turn attention to assistance dogs in the travel and tourism sector.

Accessible tourism and traveling with a vision impairment

Holidays are recognized as a critical feature of modern life, an avenue for individuals to improve their quality of life (Dolnicar et al., 2012) and bring positive emotions and life satisfaction (Evcil, 2018). The United Nations General Assembly (1948) recognizes the right to leisure and international travel as human rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (McCabe & Diekmann, 2015). There have been debates about the extent these rights encompass tourism (Breakley & Breakley, 2013), and it is without doubt that some countries have interpreted them as social rights (McCabe & Diekmann, 2015). However, the rights of people with disabilities are much more clearly defined. In 2006, the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* (CRPWD) recognized that people with disabilities have a right to access services from all areas of citizenship, including transport and the built environment (Article 9), as well as all areas of cultural life (Article 30) (Michopoulou et al., 2015). More recently, the UN has included "Reduced Inequalities" as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, expanding the importance of accessibility. Nevertheless, access issues for people with

disabilities are well-documented within the tourism industry (Nyanjom et al., 2018; Mesquita & Corneira, 2016; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011), which has inspired the rise of accessible tourism (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014; Vila et al., 2015).

According to Buhalis & Darcy (2011: p.10), accessible tourism is defined as:

“a form of tourism [...] that 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”.

As accessible tourism strives to include all people in tourism activities, the idea of reasonable accommodation becomes fundamental to the concept. According to the UN *CRPWD* (2006), reasonable accommodation is the necessary and appropriate modification of a service, which does not impose undue burden on the service provider, in order to ensure equal opportunity for enjoyment. Notably, this principle is captured in some disability legislation, such as the Equality Act 2010 in the UK and the Americans with Disability Act (1990) in the US (Veitch & Shaw, 2011; Nyanjom et al., 2018), which also builds upon the UN’s *CRPWD* in that they focus particularly on access needs stemming from the following dimensions of disability: mobility, vision, hearing, intellectual/cognitive, mental health, sensitivities, and other.

Further, the aforementioned legislation also recognizes the difference between disability and impairment. An impairment is the loss of physiological or psychological function, while disability is a lack of ability resulting from impairment (World Health Organization, 2019). In other words, disability is relational to the environment, as a person with an impairment need not acquire a “disability” if enabling environments are designed (Swain et al., 2004). Unfortunately, the diversity of impairment and disability, and their resulting access needs, are not always understood in the industry. Indeed, this lack of understanding is highlighted by Kong and Loi (2017) who find that stakeholders within destination management often assume people with disabilities were not interested in traveling or they stereotype them as simply wheelchair users (McKercher & Darcy, 2018). Thus, by being wheelchair accessible, their assumption is that attractions are accessible to all disabilities, when in fact this demographic is incredibly heterogeneous. Indeed, Buhalis and Darcy (2011) argue that disabilities are classified into a number of different categories, with each requiring a different level of support which exists along a continuum based on the degree of ability of the individual.

Considering the growing interest in accessible tourism, broadly, it is perhaps surprising that research on traveling with a vision impairment has been largely neglected thus far (Poria et al., 2011; Richards et al., 2010; Devile and Kastenholz, 2018). World Health Organization (2010) estimates that at least 314 million people live with low vision or are blind. In the UK, alone, over 2 million people are vision impaired, a figure that is estimated to increase due to an ageing population and other underlying health issues (Small, 2015). While vision impairment itself is not a barrier to becoming a tourist, Small and Darcy (2010) find that people with vision impairment (PwVI) are much less likely to travel, as compared to other impairments. This is even more so for international travel

(Loi & Kong, 2017). Specifically, Poria et al. (2011, p. 152) identify the “fear of missing information”, such as changes to flight details, train platforms, and so on, particularly in noisy environments, as a source of travel anxiety for vision impaired tourists.

Understandably, independence and confidence have considerable bearings on travel behavior (Loi & Kong, 2017).

Despite the focus on the visual dimensions of tourist experience (Urry, 1990), tourism is an embodied experience (Small & Darcy, 2011; Palmer & Andrews, 2019). As a result, touristic experiences are individualistic and subjective. Thus, vision impairment does not diminish tourists’ experience, but rather results in a different experience in which tactile, auditory and olfactory sensations become critical (Richards et al., 2010; Small et al., 2012; Small, 2015). Nevertheless, PwVI do have specific access needs. As tourism takes place in unfamiliar environments, guiding becomes key for PwVI, and wayfinding is of particular concern where independent travel is concerned (Small et al., 2012). As a result, they are more reliant on others for assistance, be they a carer, friend, relative, a guide dog or even staff (Small et al., 2012), and challenges related to wayfinding are likely to have a negative influence on their enthusiasm to travel (Bosch & Gharaveis, 2017).

While guiding PwVI is a form of assistance, it should not be assumed that requiring a guide diminishes the experience for vision impaired tourists. Richards (2013: p. 98) argues that “being guided is a physical and interpersonal act between two bodies which concerns primarily the senses of touch and hearing between the sighted guides, the vision impaired person and their surroundings”. In a sense, the bodies experience the journey in relation to one another. Considering the embodied relationality of guiding, it becomes obvious that PwVI would develop a deep, emotional connection to their guide dog. Guide dogs do not arrive as fully trained mobility devices, but rather after undergoing their basic training they begin their person-specific training. The dogs learn to understand their vision impaired owner’s communication, and ways of communicating, while the person is simultaneously learning the dog’s personality and responsiveness. As such, it is an evolving relationship that is continually unfolding with time and experiences (Higgin, 2012). Unfortunately, research suggests greater access issues for PwVI when they are accompanied by a guide dog, particularly in transport, at visitor attractions and hospitality settings, such as taxis, museums and/or restaurants (Lloyd et al, 2008; Matsunaka & Koda, 2008; Mesquita & Carneiro, 2016; Devile & Kastenholz, 2018). Typically, these barriers are a result of a lack of awareness from the tourism industry in regards the specific needs of PwVI and their guide dog (Devile & Kastenholz, 2018). Thus, it is not surprising that Richards et al. (2010) find that inclusive attitudes towards guide dogs led to safe and enjoyable tourism.

Research design

Guide dogs for people with vision impairment

A guide dog is a domestic dog specially trained to aid PwVI with mobility by guiding them from A-to-B (Craigson et al., 2017). Guide dog training begins when the dog is 6 weeks old, although it does not formalize until it is 14 months, and then lasts an

additional 20 to 28 weeks before the dog is paired with an owner (Price, 2017). Many of the working guide dogs are the result of specialized breeding programs, funded and managed by charitable organizations, such as The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (UK) and Guide Dogs for the Blind (USA), among others.

Previous research has discussed the role of guide dogs from a day-to-day perspective (see Higgin, 2012; Audrestch et al., 2015; Gravrok et al., 2018), but has yet to focus on the role of a guide dog when traveling outside of its home environment. The role of a guide dog is to guide their handler safely past obstacles and hazards once given a direction. The dogs are trained to follow directional commands, stop at curbs, stop to avoid vehicles and locate certain objects (Craigon et al., 2017). Thus, research has demonstrated a number of benefits to owning a guide dog in day-to-day life, such as increased mobility, independence, confidence and social interaction (Tomkins et al., 2011; Audrestch et al., 2015; Gravrok et al., 2018). Indeed, more recent research indicates a preference for the use of guide dogs as a mobility aid, as opposed to the white cane or more modern alternatives among vision impaired persons (Glenk et al., 2019). Yet, challenges remain for guide dog owners as they struggle to locate appropriate facilities for their dogs and the role of the guide dog is also typically misunderstood by the general public (Mesquita & Corneira, 2016).

Importantly, the role of a guide dog is not simply that of a working dog. Only a fractional part of the time is spent “working”, meaning the rest of the time the dog takes the role of a pet, thereby developing a uniquely close bond with its handler (Higgin, 2012; Craigon et al., 2017). This presents real challenges and opportunities for the tourism industry, which is increasingly catering to pets while also obliged to offer reasonable accommodation to guide dog owners. Therefore, in an effort to shed light on the experiential dimensions of traveling with a guide dog, this chapter draws upon interviews with guide dog owners to reconstruct a travel journey from home to the holiday destination. The discussion highlights the work performed by guide dogs, as well as the limitations of their abilities and the barriers experienced in getting to and from the destination. As one of the first publications to focus solely on the role of guide dogs in a tourism context, this chapter uncovers key points in the journey that present common barriers while traveling with a guide dog, as well as demonstrating the human-guide dog partnership as much more than a mobility relationship.

Methods

This study sought to gather guide dog owner experiences of traveling with a guide dog, the role it plays in guiding its owner in unfamiliar environments and the challenges they encountered in tourism settings. The focus is on overnight trips away from home in order to capture the tourism context, specifically, rather than trips taken during everyday life. Qualitative approaches are considered useful and necessary in the context of research that focuses on the complexities of visitors’ needs and experiences (Ryan, 2000; Cetin & Biligihan, 2016). Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of the specific issues for this topic, semi-structured interviews were employed (Flick, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016). A total of 27 interviews were conducted, averaging 45 minutes in duration. Each took place

over the phone and was audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. All of the participants were current guide dog owners or had recently retired their dog and were on the waiting list for another one. Over half of the participants were female, with ages ranging from 20s to 70s. Some had only recently acquired a guide dog (2 years), whereas others had a guide dog for 40+ years. To protect the participants' identity, pseudonyms were employed instead of their names, similarly the guide dogs' names have been replaced with "guide dog" to anonymize the participants.

Participants were sourced from the membership database of the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (simply "Guide Dogs" henceforth), and interviews were conducted in conjunction with a survey as part of a larger study about traveling with a guide dog. Guide Dogs is a UK-based charity that provides guide dogs, as well as other services and technologies, to people in the UK who are blind or partially sighted. For the purposes of this chapter, findings are derived from responses to specific questions related to experiences with their guide dog: how they prepare for an overnight trip, how they got to their destination and how they experienced the destination. The audio recordings were transcribed and the resulting transcripts were analyzed through thematic analysis, with the development of themes guided by the literature review (Boyatzis, 1998).

Findings

Preparing for an overnight trip away from home

While owning a guide dog increases levels of mobility, independence, confidence and social interaction (Tomkins et al., 2011; Audrestch et al., 2015; Gravrok et al., 2018), much less is known about potential benefits, challenges and limitations of traveling away from home with a guide dog. Due to this uncertainty, Guide Dogs has created an extensive travel checklist for those considering international travel with their guide dog (Guide Dogs, 2019). Arranged in the style of a "frequently asked questions", the checklist attempts to address all matters concerning international travel with a guide dog and particularly emphasizes the implications of travel for the dog's welfare. Importantly, it begins by questioning the reader as to whether it is necessary to bring the guide dog.

Based on our findings, traveling domestically with a guide dog is a common occurrence, whether for visiting friends or relatives, for holiday or work purposes. However, the level of preparation required prior to travel depends on the type of trip planned. While travelling domestically requires extensive logistical planning, traveling abroad involves especially complex preparations. Veterinary records and the dog's pet passport are required. Certain vaccinations and treatments must be up-to-date, some depending on which destination handlers are traveling to (UK Government, 2019). According to current UK regulations, guide dog owners are required to have their guide dogs vaccinated for rabies and have blood tests taken at least 30 days after the vaccination, then wait at least 3 months from the date the successful blood sample was taken before travel is permitted. Finally, the vet has to provide an animal health certificate (AHC) no more than 10 days before travel. Proof of microchipping, vaccination history and a successful rabies antibody blood test result must be carried when traveling (UK Government, 2019). It is

important to the note that regulations do vary across countries, and this must be observed in addition to the UK regulations.

Participant 8, a guide dog owner of 7 years in their 50s, explained that for them, preparing for going abroad with their guide dog involves even more than vet visits and paperwork, but also communicating with service providers and confirming reservations:

“Letting the accommodation know, making sure that the airline were prepared for him [...]. And then getting all his paperwork done in time, his tapeworm treatment and the animal reception can be bad through Gatwick. And then in terms of his preparation, making sure that he had all of his home comforts, so his blanket and having to weigh his food out”.

Further, the role of the guide dog is more than that of a working dog. It also takes the role of a pet, as well as developing an intimate partnership with its owner (Higgin, 2012; Craighan et al., 2017). When preparing for an overnight trip, other than the veterinary responsibilities, packing for a guide dog is somewhat akin to packing for any companion dog. Food has to be measured for dispensing on a daily basis, bags for cleaning up after toileting. Toys and other home comforts, such as blankets, are included as well to ensure the guide dog is comfortable and to help alleviate any anxiety when traveling. Some guide dog owners have different leads and collars for their dog, one for work and one for play, which are included. Towels are also brought for bedding and any cleaning that might be required.

The appropriate services, such as transport and accommodation, also need notifying. While it is illegal to refuse service to someone with a guide dog, notifying hotels prior to arrival is common to avoid negative encounters. It seems common practice to book a room online first, then call the hotel afterwards to inform them they would be bringing a guide dog. Guide dog owners believe such practices are necessary, even among major accommodation brands, to avoid being refused a room or other uncomfortable situations upon arrival. However, some participants highlighted how Hilton Hotels, in particular, offers a service dog option when booking online, although this seems the only accommodation provider known to do so.

Participant 26, a guide dog owner of 10 years in their 40s, described the planning behind their domestic overnight trip:

“Preparing [guide dog] for the trip, obviously there’s the basics of packing his food, making sure he’s got what he needs, food, blankets and so on. [...] What I did obviously I booked in advance with the train company, made sure I booked an extra seat so that [guide dog] had enough space and you know, we got assistance to Kings Cross. [...] Got assistance off the train in Edinburgh”.

Thus, much preparation goes into planning an overnight trip with a guide dog, which is only made more challenging when traveling abroad. In addition to their other recommendations for travel, Guide Dogs recommends notifying the airline at least 48

hours prior to travel. However, they also ask owners to strongly consider whether it is appropriate to undertake such a journey with their guide dog. Appropriateness of the guide dog for the destination situation is particularly important to the dog's welfare. This includes the distance and therefore the length of the flight, the weather – especially worrisome are warmer destinations than the dog might be accustomed to – but also potential cultural differences that might not view dogs as positively as the UK, and the extent of the legal system of the destination to support reasonable accommodation legislation must all be considered. If PwVI are accompanied by another person who can assist with guiding, it should be considered as to whether the dog's limited guiding abilities in the unfamiliar environment are worth the potential stress and anxiety that travel may cause for the dog.

Getting to the destination

The United Nations' *CRPWD* (2006), as well as the UK's Equality Act (2010) recognize that people with disabilities have a right to reasonable accommodation in accessing services from all areas of citizenship, including transport, the built environment and tourism (Michopoulou et al., 2015). As an example, under part 12 of the Equality Act (2010) it is specifically against the law for taxis and minicabs to refuse service to a guide dog owner traveling with their guide dog, unless the driver has a medical certificate for exemption. Yet, traveling by taxi can be notoriously challenging for guide dog owners, with many experiencing regular refusals. For example, Participant 16, a guide dog owner of 25 years in their 40s made the following comment:

“Taxis, I don't use black cabs unless I absolutely have to because it's just a lottery you know, turning up at the [taxi] rank knowing whether they're going to pick me up or not”.

The issue relating to taxis is typically due to a lack of awareness and poor training for staff that is in fact common across the service sector when confronted with PwVI. Little accountability exists from local councils, meaning such discrimination is far from uncommon. As a result, Devile and Kastenholz (2018) called for the promotion of disability awareness programs to improve tourism policy and increase awareness. More broadly, negative experiences, such as taxi refusals, can deter travel for guide dog owners and may have further ramifications for longer travel journeys where timely connections to other transport modes need to be taken. Therefore, a lack of training and awareness of front-line staff creates critical barriers to travel with a guide dog.

Despite airlines having official policies on service animals (see for example, <https://www.easyjet.com/en/terms-and-conditions/passengers-with-specific-requirements>), front-line staff are not always aware of these or how to handle such situations. Participant 18, a guide dog owner of 3 years in their 30s, described their experience at an airport in which airline staff were unprepared for handling a guide dog's booking and were further unaware of the kinds of paperwork that were required to manage the situation:

“the airport, the check-in lady [...] tried to charge me for the dog’s bag. When I told her I didn’t have to pay for it, she then said I just need to ring. So she rang up someone and had a whispered conversation, then turned to me and said can you show me the dog’s documentation. And I said well what would you like to see? And then she goes I don’t know. [...] the fact the security didn’t know what the hell was going on, the fact that the person helping me kept touching the dog”.

However, traveling with a guide dog need not be so complicated and full of obstacles if well prepared for what to expect. Indeed, as some participants explained, it can seem a rather straightforward affair, especially when traveling a familiar route. Participant 21, a guide dog owner of 9 years in their 60s, for example, described how their recent overnight trip went:

“When we go down to our friends in Norwich, then it’s going over to the bus with all the stuff in a rucksack or a case and that adds slightly logistically to it all because you’ve got your own stuff, you’ve got the dog’s stuff and then it’s getting on and off the bus, finding the train. Usually getting assistance to ring through if you’ve got to change trains. I usually end up booking a seat for the dog as well, which they’ll do. So there’s my wife and myself and then an area for the dog to be able to sit in front of as well”.

Moreover, travel can be made simpler for guide dog owners when accompanied by a person not reliant on the guide dog. Participant 19, a guide dog owner of 11 years in their 60s, travels with their wife and described a rather easy holiday journey by car:

“You just go and load the dog up in the car and what have you and off you go. And depending how far you’re going, around about two hours you try and plan for a stop so the dog can have a busy [toilet break] if they need it or stretch their legs. We’d normally do that at a service station. And you learn about service stations by experience because some of them have fairly large grass areas, some of them have designated dog spending [toileting] areas. Some of them are absolutely abysmal. So you learn that by experience. So you have a checklist of service stations, if they’ve got good facilities you go and use them, if not you find the next closest one that does”.

Getting to the destination can present the guide dog owner with considerable challenges, despite pre-planning the trip, with challenges more prevalent for those traveling alone. Guide dog owners have experienced problems with most transport providers, be they taxis, trains or airplanes.

Relief areas for toileting

While some guide dogs are able to last up to 12 hours without needing to toilet, most recommendations suggest adult dogs receive a toilet break every 3-6 hours. As such, toileting the guide dog and finding relief areas can become an issue when traveling,

especially over long distances, and many transport hubs, such as train stations and airports in the UK and abroad, are not adequately equipped with toileting areas.

With regards to rail stations, one exception is Birmingham New Street in the UK, which developed its dog relief area in collaboration with Guide Dogs. The availability of relief areas is on the rise in airports; however, such areas are sometimes located prior to security, making them inaccessible immediately before boarding and when changing planes. Further, among those areas located within security checkpoints, many airports still expect guide dogs to spend on a designated area of the tarmac. This raises a number of challenges for the guide dog: the designated areas are typically in the vicinity of jet engines and other tarmac traffic, making the guide dog too anxious to spend, while not all guide dogs are trained to spend on concrete and therefore prefer grass. While newer installations that place relief areas within the terminal is more convenient, there are complaints that these are “too sanitized” so that the dog does not want to toilet.

Participant 13, a guide dog owner of 2 years in their 50s, explained how long-haul flights were challenging for their guide dog:

“I think the toileting is one of the bigger issues because you’ve got to find it yourself [...] when you fly with a dog [...] the airports don’t cater that well for spending for them prior to the flight [...] they don’t have a spending area. [...] they like you to check-in two and a half hours in advance [...] I think that is a bit of an issue that they ought to really resolve”.

Participant 5, a guide dog owner of 14 years in their 50s, also argued for designated toileting areas at airports:

“I think it would be good to actually see sort of designated relief areas at airports [...] I know at Liverpool John Lennon Airport, it’s either where the people go for a cigarette or [...] on the runway. They probably should have a designated area for the dogs really shouldn’t they”.

Thus, the need for such basic facilities to be present at all transport hubs is about supporting the guide dog’s welfare and complying with reasonable accommodation legislation. Further, the lack of basic facilities can contribute to anxiety among guide dog owners, due to concern for their guide dog’s welfare, while adding to the extra planning involved with their travel and may even act as a demotivator.

At the destination

The biggest challenge for PwVI, once at the destination, is wayfinding (Bosch & Gharaveis, 2017). Recent research suggests that guide dog owners prefer to work their guide dogs, even in unfamiliar places, as they are perceived to be faster and safer mobility aids, as opposed to the white cane or technological alternatives (Glenk et al., 2019). Additionally, the very presence of their guide dog adds comfort, companionship, confidence and a sense of independence. While even in unfamiliar places some guide

dogs can be relied upon to avoid obstacles on the pavement, stop at curbs and avoid cars, PwVI will still be reliant on additional support for wayfinding (Small et al., 2012), such as locating the correct platform at train stations or specific street addresses. Notably, some adaptive technologies, such as mobile GPS applications, can assist in wayfinding and support their independence in unfamiliar environments, contributing to their confidence to guide themselves to locations while on foot, such that assistance is only required upon arrival.

It is important to understand, though, that the PwVI-guide dog relationship is a dynamic one in which the communication between the two results in an ever-evolving partnership (see Higgin, 2012). As a result, guide dogs can become familiar with new routes and adjust to new environments, even temporarily. So while the role of the guide dog is reduced while accompanying their owner on holiday, additional support from destination front-line staff at the start means guide dogs can add to independence within a destination. At the hotel, for example, initial assistance is needed in showing the guide dog owner to their room and back to the reception again, as well as to a relief area for the dog and back again, and other similarly necessary locations. In such circumstances, the guide dog owner will typically also count the steps in both directions to ensure accuracy along the route. Once the person and guide dog are familiar with the route, they can navigate it independently.

Participant 1, a guide dog owner of 37 years in their 60s, illustrated this process during a recent trip:

“Once I got there to the hotel, the Premier Inn, they were fine, they gave me a downstairs disabled room you know, they were quite happy to give me anywhere but she said being a ground floor, that way you know, it’ll make life a lot easier for [guide dog] because it’ll have more room for her. My friend showed me where the nearest park was or where I could free-run her and relieve [toilet] her. Also, my friend showed me the route from the hotel to the conference center. Once she’d showed me that there and back and where I could take [guide dog] at lunchtime to relieve [toilet] her and whatever, things slotted in nicely for the whole week”.

Once settled at a hotel, typically, the guide dog owner will also search the room to ensure nothing is present that the dog might eat and cause illness. Indeed, the dog’s behavior in unfamiliar environments also has to be managed, particularly in regard to eating. It is important to remember that the guide dog is still a dog, albeit a highly trained one. While it has been trained to work for its owner, it is also reliant on that person for its welfare. Indeed, Participant 26, a guide dog owner of 10 years in their 40s, spoke of the challenges the behavior of others and their dog presents:

“One of the big challenges is actually litter. I mean it sounds really basic but the amount of rubbish that’s dropped on public transport. And of course, he’s a Labrador, so he eats it and you know, it actually has made him quite ill”.

By initially receiving assistance, guide dog owners are able to learn new routes, meaning once unfamiliar environments can become familiar and thus enable guide dog owners to explore these areas more independently. This demonstrates the ways reasonable accommodation inspired legislation acts to foster the three values of accessible tourism: independence, equity and dignity (Darcy, 2006). A relatively minimum effort by front-line staff can have tremendous implications for PwVI traveling with their guide dog. Yet, the debate concerning the efficacy of taking a guide dog on trips to unfamiliar places, as the dog's abilities are limited and travel may add further stress and anxiety into the experience, is ongoing.

Conclusion

The role of guide dogs within the travel and tourism industry remains an under-examined area of research. While there is burgeoning research on the role of pets in holiday decision-making and travel behavior, little is known about traveling with a guide dog. As such, this chapter provides first insights into traveling with a guide dog in a tourism context: the role of a guide dog when traveling away from home overnight has been outlined, as have the subsequent challenges experienced by both guide dog and owner while on their travels. In their home environment, the use of guide dogs is the preferred option as a mobility aid for PwVI. However, this chapter has found that guide dogs also have a critical role to play during travel to the destination and subsequently guiding their owner around the destination. While the guide dog offers practical contributions, the companionship provided is also significant to the guide dog owner when away from home.

The preparation for travel for PwVI with their guide dog varies depending on a number of elements and can become quite complex. While Guide Dogs provides guidance for taking a guide dog on international travel, they also encourage guide dog owners to explore whether it is indeed necessary to take the guide dog abroad, due to its diminished role and the implications of travel for the dog's welfare. While the primary role of the guide dog is mobility support, it also provides comfort, companionship and supports confidence, leading to a more independent life for the guide dog owner. This makes the decision of traveling with the guide dog or leaving it at home while away on holiday a difficult one for many guide dog owners, which can be further exasperated by access challenges encountered along the journey. Reasonable accommodation legislation supports access for guide dogs across the travel and tourism industry. Yet, much remains to be done to improve the consistency of services and staff training in this area, while doing so has important implications for assistance dog welfare more broadly.

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