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Designing for Inclusion

Universal design: A prerequisite for enhancing tourism

The principle of universal design is to ensure that products and processes cater to the needs of people with different abilities. The design should be such that anyone: tall or short, young or old, with locomotive disabilities, hearing, speech or visual impairments: can access facilities with minimal or no assistance.

The Indian hotel industry is currently undergoing severe challenges in terms of business. In large part, this is because of India's dismal sanitation facilities and questions about women's safety, following the Nirbhaya incident in December 2012. Both have led to declining tourist footfalls. However, there is always an opportunity in crisis and the industry must step up and identify new avenues to help it to get business through a new segment, disability tourism.

The disability tourism market is valued at \$75 billion approximately as per some international reports. However, this business does not come to us because the overall infrastructure of the country is weak on universal design principles. 60 per cent of infrastructure in India is yet to come up by 2030. This offers an opportunity for the Indian industry to design barrier-free infrastructure to garner disability tourism.

The principle is simple: To make spaces safer, easier and more convenient for everyone to use. The next step is to begin implementing these principles

There are many examples of Universal Design Principles being integrated in product and processes. For instance:

- Old cell phones have two dots on the number five. The dots are an indication for the visually impaired to navigate the keyboard. In smart phones, the voice feature helps navigate the menu and functions.
- Elevators are integrated with voice instructions and the floor dash board has the numbers of different levels in Braille.

- Newly constructed metro systems across the country have integrated universal design principles such as the provision of ramps and elevators to make it access-friendly. Similar design principles have also been incorporated in new airports in the country.

The Indian Railways, however, has a long way to go to care for the needs of the senior citizens and people with disabilities. One of the simple





ways by which the railways can take a step towards inclusivity is to introduce portable ramps which can be easily docked against the bogey door. This will allow wheel chairs to be rolled in for persons with locomotive disabilities to access the system. The Railways can take a cue from Indigo airlines which have user-friendly ramps to board the aircraft.

The principle is simple: To make spaces safer, easier and more convenient for everyone to use. The next step is to now begin implementing these principles of simplicity, flexibility and equitable to make spaces useful and marketable to people with a range of abilities.

There is a range of assistive technologies which help to make life a little better for people with different disabilities. It is of paramount importance that the facilities for people with disabilities are made available in holistic manner for creating a level playing field.

(views expressed in this article are of the author, Niranjan Khatri, the Ex General Manager Environment Initiatives of ITC hotels)



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