

ACCESSIBLE TOURISM - INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The concept of “Accessible Tourism” refers to the adaptation of environments and of tourism products and services so as to enable access, use and enjoyment by all users, under the principles of Universal Design. In addition to the legal framework, extensive infrastructure has been developed to cater the disabled, including seven national Institutes for development of manpower in different areas. The Ministry of Tourism has also instituted to encourage other agencies responsible for maintaining monuments /tourist attractions to create barrier-free environment for the promotion of accessible tourism. Many home-based travel agents succeed by specializing in serving this market segment. Various leading travel agencies like Cox & Kings and Thomas Cook are powered by enabled Tour. Qualitative responses form the basis of this research paper. Besides this, secondary data is collected from the Annual Reports of UNWTO, Ministry of Tourism, Newspaper Reports and different journals and books. This paper attempts to understand the accessible tourism is a right of person with disabilities and to insist public and private agencies to implement the guidelines of UNWTO.

I. INTRODUCTION

Accessibility in tourism industry is dedicated to serving the needs of the differently-abled. It is based on the following principle: ‘tourism is a basic need of every individual and it should be accessible to all irrespective of physical limitations’. According to the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) accessible tourism includes:

- Barrier-free destinations: infrastructure and facilities
- Transport: by air, land and sea, suitable for all users
- High quality services: delivered by trained staff
- Activities, exhibits, attractions: allowing participation in tourism by everyone
- Marketing, booking systems, websites and services: information accessible to all

Literature Review

Accessible Tourism Concepts and Issues edited by Dimitrios Buhalis and Simon Darcy, (Channel View Publications, Bristol, 2011) discusses concepts of disability and their experience in accessible tourism with case study. *Report of Tourism for All – promoting universal accessibility Good Practices in the Accessible Tourism Supply Chain* by UNWTO (2016) highlights various good practices in the accessible tourism in the world countries.

Objectives of the Paper

- To understand the accessible tourism is a right of person with disabilities
- To discuss the good practices of accessible tourism in world countries and India
- To insist public and private agencies to implement the guidelines of UNWTO

Methodology

The primary and secondary data and information have been analyzed for preparing the paper extensively. Qualitative responses form the basis of this research paper. Besides this, secondary data is

collected from the Annual Reports of UNWTO, Ministry of Tourism, Newspaper Reports and different journals and books.

Disability

All of us demand accessible environments, products and services at some point of our lives, whether due to a disability, illness, accident, pregnancy, advanced age or simply because we are bringing luggage of large dimensions or because we are not familiar with the environment. These conditions can affect both tourists and local residents of a destination. In 2017 Indian population fell into 5.99 percent were over 65 years of age estimated to reach and 6.3% of over 65 age by 2020.

Definitions of Disability in India

The term "persons with disabilities" includes all persons who, owing to the environment being encountered, suffer a limitation in their relational ability and have special needs during travel, in accommodations, and other tourism services, particularly individuals with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities or other medical conditions requiring special care, such as elderly persons and others in need of temporary assistance. For the purpose of definition, two main govt. documents have been referred, viz NSSO and Disability Act- 1995. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) defines persons with disabilities as: But, it excludes illness /injury of recent origin (morbidity) resulting into temporary loss of ability to see, hears, speak or move. Some examples of common disabilities you may find are:

- vision Impairment.
- deaf or hard of hearing.
- mental health conditions.
- intellectual disability.
- acquired brain injury.
- autism spectrum disorder.
- physical disability.

Accessibility

The concept of "Accessible Tourism" refers to the adaptation of environments and of tourism products and services so as to enable access, use and enjoyment by all users, under the principles of Universal Design.

World Disability Movement

For a better part of history, disabled people remained as ignored groups owing to many physical and socio-economic reasons. However, by the late 1960's, awareness began to expand on various dimensions of disability including how the design and structure of the environment was linked to the limitation of person with disabilities. With this, attitude of the people towards them also started to change across the world, though on varying degree. The year 1981 is considered as a watershed as regards to the rights and condition of the disabled people, owing to declaration of the International Year of Disabled Persons by the United Nations. Some notable initiatives since then are summarized as below:

- The U.N General Assembly resolved to pronounce the World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Person in 1982. In May 1990, the U.N Economic and Social Council authorized the Commission for Social Development to elaborate standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled children, youth and adults. These rules were developed on the basis of experience gained during United Nations Decade of Disabled Person (1983-1992) and were founded on the following International instrument :-
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
 - Convention on the Right of the Child
 - Convention on the Elimination of all Form of Discrimination against women
 - World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Person
 - Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002
 - U.N Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the General Assembly on December 13, 2006. The Article 3 – 'General Principles'- envisions following principles:
 - a. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;
 - b. Non-discrimination;
 - c. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
 - d. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
 - e. Equality of opportunity;
- The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with
- f. Accessibility;
 - g. Equality between men and women;
 - h. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

- UNESCAP and Accessible Tourism- Recommendations in 2007
- San Marino the first UNWTO conference on Accessible Tourism in Europe 2014
- The celebration of the World Tourism Day 2016 under the theme “Tourism for All - promoting universal accessibility” comes at an encouraging time for international tourism as more political decision makers and the tourism industry are advocating for Tourism for All, a tourism which can be enjoyed equally by everybody, regardless of one’s abilities.

Constitutional and Legal Framework for Disability in India

The seeds of a comprehensive legislation on disability in India were germinated after the launch of Asia and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 1993-2000, commissioned by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia & Pacific (UNESCAP) at its meeting in Beijing during 01-06 Dec. 1992. A Proclamation of the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disability in the Asia and Pacific region was adopted in that meet, wherein, India was a signatory. In pursuance to the Proclamation, the Government of India has enacted four major legislations for persons with disabilities as below:

- Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act- 1995, which provides for education, employment, creation of barrier free environment, social security, etc.
- National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act, 1999 has provisions for legal guardianship of the four categories and creation of enabling environment for as much independent living as possible.
- Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 deals with the development of manpower for providing rehabilitation services.
- The Mental Health Act- 1987

In addition to the legal framework, extensive infrastructure has been developed to cater the disabled, including seven national Institutes for development of manpower in different areas. Besides above domain-specific legislations, Part-III of the Constitution of India provides for fundamental rights, including the people challenged by the physical and mental disorders.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Archaeological Survey of India

Adarsh Monuments were identified in State of Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, J&K, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. The scheme was launched on 26th December, 2014 for providing improved visitor amenities, especially for the physically challenged, besides cleanliness, drinking water, and interpretation centres, cafeteria, souvenir shop, wi-fi, garbage disposal etc. The civic amenities are being augmented at these sites.

- 25 ASI sites were launched as “Adarsh Smarak” on 26th December, 2014
- 75 more Adarsh Monuments protected by ASI have been identified and included in the list of “Adarsh Smarak” and the same are also being included in ‘Swachh Paryatan Mobile App’ launched by the Ministry of Tourism. With this a total of 100 Monuments protected by ASI are being developed and maintained as Adarsh Monuments.

Swachh Bharat- Swachh Smarak

The ASI has ranked top 25 Adarsh Monuments on the basis of Cleanliness parameters such as amenities like toilets, green lawns, Polythene Free Zone, signage for awareness, disabilities access, drinking water and provision for garbage bins etc. “Rani ki Vav (Gujarat)” a World Heritage Site has been awarded as the cleanest iconic place in the country. The salient features of the scheme are as under:

- To make monument visitor friendly.
- To upgrade/provide wash rooms, drinking water, signages, cafeteria and wi-fi facility
- To provide Interpretation and audio-video centres
- To streamline waste water and garbage disposal and rain water harvesting system
- To make monument accessible to differently abled
- To implement Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

The Central Region of the Archaeological Survey of India, Bhopal under the Ministry of Culture has provided barrier-free access for persons with disabilities at centrally protected monuments and archaeological sites namely Sanchi, Laxman Temple (Sirpur), Amarkantak, 13 monuments in Chhattisgarh, Residency (Lucknow) and Sarnath Circle with access facilities like signages and information plaques and cultural brochures in Braille and wheel chairs, pathways tiles for the blind from the entrance connecting to area with drinking water and toilets. Also, the Lucknow Circle has prepared five short films in sign language for screening at different sites. The Central Region has contributed in development of a Braille book titled “World Heritage Monuments in India” for visually impaired and has been actively involved in organizing the visits for the children with disabilities to various heritage sites and sensitization programmes for its staff on barrier-free services for persons with Disabilities. Hence, the Central Region, Archaeological Survey of India has been awarded for National Award for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2015 under the category - Award for the Outstanding Work in the Creation of Barrier-Free Environment for the Persons with Disabilities on 3rd December 2015 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.

Accessible India Campaign

Accessible India Campaign (AIC) is the nationwide flagship campaign of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The aim of the Campaign is to make a barrier free and conducive environment for Divyangjans all over the country. It was launched by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3rd December, 2015. The campaign is based on the principles of the Social Model of Disability, that disability is caused by the way society is organised, and not the person’s limitations and impairments. The physical, social, structural and attitudinal barriers prevent People with Disabilities from participating equally in the socio-cultural and economic activities. A barrier-free environment facilitates equal participation in all the activities and promotes an independent and dignified way of life. The campaign has the vision to build an

inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified lives. For creating universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities, the campaign has been divided into three verticals: Built Environment; Transport and Information & Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystem.

The Built Environment Accessibility component of Accessible India Campaign entails following targets: (i) Completing accessibility audit of at least 25-50 most important government buildings in 50 cities and making them fully accessible by the end of this year; (ii) Making 50% of all the government buildings of NCT and all the State capitals fully accessible by December 2018; (iii) Completing accessibility audit of 50% of government buildings and making them fully accessible in 10 most important cities/towns of States not covered in targets (i) and (ii) by December 2019.

Transport accessibility component of Accessible India Campaign aims to make all international airports fully accessible immediately and domestic airports by March 2018. Out of 32 international airports 25 have been provided with accessibility features namely, ramps, accessible toilets, lifts with braille symbols and auditory signals.

Access to information creates opportunities for everyone in society. People use information in many forms to make decisions about their daily lives. This can range from actions such as being able to read price tags, to physically enter a hall, to participate in an event, to read a pamphlet with healthcare information, to understand a train timetable, or to view webpages. No longer should societal barriers of infrastructure, and inaccessible formats stand in the way of obtaining and utilizing information in daily life.

Sugamya Pustakalaya

Department launched 'Sugamya Pustakalaya'- an online library for Persons with Print Disabilities centred on achieving 'Universal Accessibility'. The Department has also organised awareness workshops at Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Raipur, Bhubaneswar, Chennai and Ranchi to provide an insight into various contours of Accessible India Campaign.

Swachhta Pakhwada

The Ministry also observed a Swachhta Pakhwada from 16th to 30th September, 2016 to spread awareness about the need and importance of cleanliness in all the domains. Ministry of Culture and its various organizations have made all possible efforts for an efficient observance of the Swachhta Pakhwada.

Adopt a Heritage

The Ministry of Tourism project, called "Adopt a Heritage", was launched in September to allow private and public sector corporations to adopt most of India's top heritage sites. The companies will be responsible for building, operating and maintaining tourism infrastructure at 105 monuments and natural heritage sites up for adoption. The infrastructure includes providing amenities like toilets, drinking water, accessibility for the disabled, signage, audio guides, illumination, canteens, ticketing and maintenance of cleanliness and security.

Provisions under Guidelines for Hotels by Ministry of Tourism

- As per the guidelines of the Ministry shall provide, at least one room and bathroom of such rooms should allow wheel chair (made available by the hotel) to enter easily. However, for new hotels coming up after 01.04.2017 the minimum door width of such rooms & their bathroom shall be minimum 90 cm. In existing hotels the door width of & bathroom of such rooms shall have minimum width of 90 cm w.e.f. 01.04.2023.

- Bath room should be wheel chair accessible with sliding door suitable height WC, grab bars etc.
- Entrance of the hotel to allow wheel chair access. Free accessibility in all public areas and to at least one restaurant in 5 Star and 5 Star Deluxe hotel.
- In public Restrooms (unisex), wheel chair should be accessible with low height urinal (24" maximum) with grab bars.
- The almirah in differently abled rooms shall be sliding in cases where no sufficient space is available for opening the almirah doors by the differently abled person.
- Room shall have low height furniture, low peep hole, cupboard with low cloth hangers, audible and visible (blinking light) alarm system & door bell.

The Ministry of Tourism has also instituted a new category of Award of Excellence of 'Most barrier-free Monument Tourism Attraction' in the country to encourage other agencies responsible for maintaining monuments /tourist attractions to create barrier-free environment for the promotion of accessible tourism. Similarly, conditions for making the hotels accessible for people with different abilities has been included in the guidelines for approval and classification of 4 and 5 star category hotels.

Role of Travel Agency

Many home-based travel agents succeed by specializing in serving this market segment. Various leading travel agencies like Cox & Kings and Thomas Cook are powered by enabled Tour. Enable Travel aims to bring people closer to their travel dreams. They believe travel is made for everyone, regardless of their age, gender or disability. They provide service to Wheel chair bound destinations like New Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Uadipur, Goa, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Jodhpur, Kochi, Mararikulam, Kumarakom, Hyderabad, Habarana, Bentota, Colombo, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Singapore, Dubai, Deaf and speech impaired bound destinations like delights of Rajasthan, Karnataka –Palaces, Temples and Coffee and Vision impaired bound destinations like New Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, etc.

Role of NGOs

Svayam

Svayam- Global Centre for Inclusive Environments, is an initiative of Sminu Jindal Charitable Trust based at New Delhi, India and works for promoting dignity for people with reduced mobility. It advocates an enabling and accessible environment for all. Walkability, Urban Mobility, Green & Inclusive mobility, Accessible Transportation system, Accessible Tourism and Accessible Public Infrastructure and accessible Information and Communication Technologies are few areas it works with special focus to make communities more inclusive and liveable. Svayam is also the Permanent Secretariat for Transed Series of Conferences (www.transedconferences.com) under the aegis of Transportation Research Board of National Academies, USA. Svayam aspires to make India barrier free and provide universal access to all. Svayam has taken the lead to make the public places universally accessible and barrier free to all and focuses on Public Infrastructure, Transportation Systems & Tourism Products & Services for people with reduced mobility. Svayam facilitated first ever research on Accessible Tourism with Govt. of India (2010) titled "Problem & Prospects of Accessible Tourism in India".

Good Practices in the Accessible Tourism in India

Accessible Heritage Tourism: Best Practices of Universal Accessibility in India

By Centre for Accessibility in Built Environment (CABE), India

India has 32 UNESCO recognized World Heritage Sites(WHS),which generate important revenues due to the large numbers of both domestic and international tourists. The case presented here is about accessibility improvements taken up at four sites, namely Qutub Minar (New Delhi), Red Fort (New Delhi), Fatehpur Sikri Group of Monuments (Agra), and Taj Mahal (Agra), all under the control of Archaeological

Survey of India(ASI).The accessibility challenges included multi-plinth levels within monuments, stepped access to reach important areas of tourist interest, lack of accessible amenities and facilities and a resistance by the heritage conservation professionals to make changes in the built environment. It was necessary to strike a balance between the strict conservation norms and the needs of incorporating accessibility to make the sites “visitable” by all. The ramps put up at the selected sites to address the level differences, are mostly wooden and placed without any prior digging or damaging the character of the heritage site. The public conveniences are either assembled porta- cabins (Fatehpur Sikri) or permanent structures matching the aesthetics (Red Fort Delhi). The materials and colours used on the interventions do not stand as an eyesore but match the site’s character. The access interventions thus strike a balance between the access needs of diversity of visitors & the conservational concerns presenting a win-win situation for all.

Challenges for persons with disabilities include:

Untrained professional staff capable of informing and advising about accessibility issues, Inaccessible booking services and related websites, Lack of accessible airports and transfer facilities and services Unavailability of adapted and accessible hotel rooms, restaurants, shops, toilets and public places, Inaccessible streets and transport services and Unavailable information on accessible facilities, services, equipment rentals and tourist attractions.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strength

- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes it as an enforceable right to the extent that the Member States of the United Nations ratify and implement the Convention.
- Setting appropriate standards through legal and mandatory means is an important step toward more responsible practice of accessible tourism.
- Indian Tourism culture and heritage will increase foreign and domestic tourist arrivals
- Web-based Public Delivery System
- Skill Development Mission

Weakness

- The challenge of transport
- Safety and security
- lack of understanding about needs of persons with disabilities /reduced mobility among booking staff and their inhospitable attitude
- lack of proper information and inadequate signage of facilities at transport stations/ ports
- Absence of lifts, non-availability of personal aids/ equipment in the hotel and higher prices of rooms meant for tourists with reduced mobility.
- Absence of public utilities at convenient locations, unmanageable difference in the level of ramps, insufficiently laid pathways and so on.

Opportunities

- As the demand for accessible tourism for all is growing, it is now seen as an opportunity rather than an obligation.
- Many senior tourists can have a stable income, more leisure time and greater availability, and therefore demand accessible services in order to travel without difficulty.
- Development of ICT in tourism

Threats

- UNWTO, UNESCAP and many countries framed broader guidelines for accessibility in public environment including tourism and transport infrastructure but most of those continue to remain unimplemented
- There's no concession for companions of the disabled
- only few studies were found addressing those problems in a scientific manner

Conclusion

Accessibility must be present throughout the tourism chain, the links between all sites, services and activities must be well planned and tested. The recommendations of UNWTO should be implemented in India. Passenger vehicles, including private vehicles for hire, buses and coaches, taxis, trams, funiculars (cable cars), trains, commuter ferries and cruise ships should be designed to allow safe, comfortable and equitable transport of people with disabilities or reduced mobility. An adequate number of restaurants, coffee shops, cafés and bars in the area should be provided, with accessible facilities which take into account the ease of external access, furniture designed to be used by wheelchair users, counters at different heights, menus with easy-to-read text, in Braille or in alternative formats (web or applications for mobile computers), accessible toilets, etc. Efforts should be made to ensure that audio-visual information is supplemented with audio description and subtitling and/or sign language, as required. Beaches should have access via walkways and ramps, enclosed areas of sun and shade, adapted changing stations and services, amphibious chairs and crutches to bathe in the sea, with the assistance of a team of professionals. Staff should be trained to treat people with disabilities with courtesy and efficiency, provide complete information on services and facilities available, and facilitate access to non-accessible services.

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