

# INCLUSIVE TOURISM

## - The Way to Go!



**A**s India takes centre-stage in world affairs and more and more people want to discover its past and present, travel to and in India assumes the kind of importance not seen in recent years (and happily, visitors with disabilities are increasingly recognised as part of this scenario.) Tourism per se is a revenue-generating industry for any country whether the visitor is disabled or not. Catering to the needs of ALL and making travel comfortable should be the prime focus of a hospitality industry. What is being done, what can be done,

to receive this welcome trend? One must bear in mind however, that tourism is not confined to tourist spots. This feature thus explores the underlying principle, the essential prerequisites that should govern all aspects of travel: Universal Design.

*“Inclusive Tourism is a global movement to ensure the full social participation of all persons with disabilities in travel, citizenships, and cultural contribution – and in the process, to assure the same for everyone else,” writes DR. SCOTT RAINS, an active promoter of inclusive tourism. With this disclaimer, “As a person with a disability who researches, writes, and lectures on Inclusive Tourism as an industry practice and a framework for tourism policy, I do so with a bias toward illustrating its potential by using travel with a disability as an example. As human-centred design, I naturally apply Universal Design according to the measure of my own body and its capacities,” he explains the strategy for aligning tourism to be in compliance with Article 30 of UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities).*

**A** frisky goldfish follows my pen across the page from inside a fishbowl that sits on my desk.

A pair of caged finches exchanges pecks and carefully chosen bird words as they converse, over in the corner. Each has access to my home – each within their strictly defined range - but mere access is much less than inclusion. None will ever participate in our family life in the way that our pet dog takes as her birthright. Access might be sufficient

for survival. Only inclusion allows the joy of participation.

Inclusion in tourism is lacking. Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) makes it clear that this must not remain so. Fishbowl observation from a distance or commentary from outside the spaces and activities that non-disabled visitors enjoy is for pets, not people. Inclusive Tourism is the systematic application of Universal

Design by the travel and hospitality industry at every stage of its product, service, and policy life cycle. It starts by looking at real people as they exist in all their diversity of abilities. It looks at them at all stages of the human life cycle: children, adults, and seniors. It looks at them whether they walk with a cane in a school, or high fashion boots in a mall, or with a water pot on their head, returning from the village well.

Of course, such a terse definition



just raises more questions like, “Why not ‘accessible’ instead of ‘inclusive?’” and “What is Universal Design?”

When people hear the word “accessible” attached to tourism they think they have a pretty good idea what that means. And there is the problem.

Almost everybody thinks they know what it means but, since it has never been fully defined, almost everybody has invented their own personal definition. That is a recipe for disaster. If travellers and the industry have no common language, then imagine how frequent disappointment and disputes will become? If hotel owners and construction teams have no way to describe the solutions they want designed and built, then how likely is either side to be satisfied with the result?

Inclusive Tourism, and the related concept, Inclusive Destination Development have been defined in lectures and in academic journals to avoid just those mistakes.

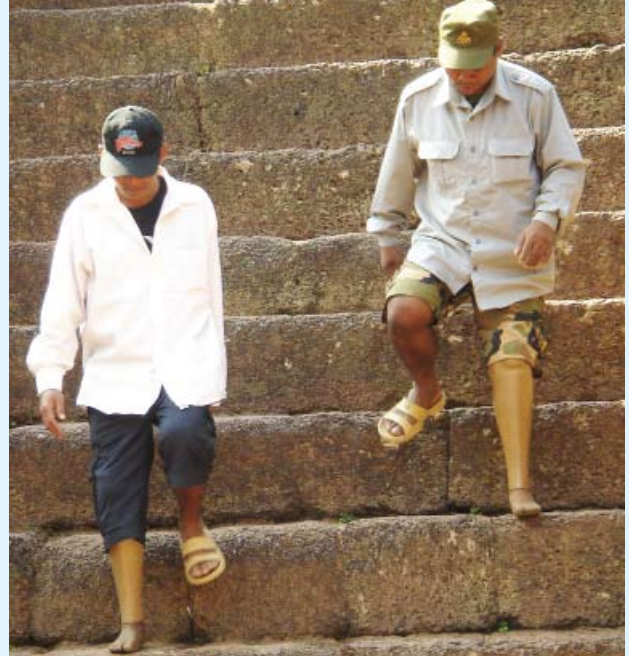
The word ‘inclusive’ refers to the concept “social inclusion” – the opposite of the exclusion found in stereotyping, pity as a substitute for justice, and outright discrimination.

It is possible for a place to be accessible while the activities taking place there or the attitudes of those employed there remain grossly exclusionary. It is even possible for a location to be made accessible for a wheelchair user in such a way that it impedes the access for a blind user or someone who is 2.5 metres tall.

Inclusion refers to the active acceptance of one person or group by another. It involves communication at the level of values and traditions. It is a cultural transformation process where all participants receive appropriate value. Cultural identities may remain intact but quality of interaction expands the capacity for tolerance and understanding on all sides.

In a manner of speaking, Inclusive Tourism, as an approach, models the best of what one would hope for in one’s personal experience of travel and as the social impact of travel as an industry.

That is why Inclusive Tourism can never be separated from the seven principles of Universal Design. An approach to tourism that is to serve all people with disabilities in a manner that does not further stigmatise



and isolate them as objects of pity requires Universal Design which is defined in this way: *Universal Design is a framework for the design of places, things, information, communication and policy to be usable by the widest range of people operating in the widest range of situations without special or separate design. Most simply, Universal Design is human-centered design of everything with everyone in mind.*

*Universal Design is also called Inclusive Design, Design-for-All and Lifespan Design. It is not a design style but an orientation to any design process that starts with a responsibility to the experience of the user.*  
(Source: Adaptive Environments)

Inclusive Tourism involves a circle of communication between travellers, industry professionals, policy makers, designers, and builders to become stakeholders in the best possible outcome for all. That outcome is a product and quality of customer service that is predictable and understandable.

Where industry may be hesitant to meet needs in a way that eliminates exclusion, it may be necessary to enact protective policy. However, it is preferable to discover – or invent – means that are sustainable through the regular mechanisms of the market.

A transformation in attitude, practice, and design takes place when travellers with disabilities are recognised





for their potential as profitable customers. Even the most reluctant or disabled traveller can enjoy a successful trip if due consideration is given by the industry to inclusion at every step because they can know exactly how they must supplement what is offered through their own ingenuity and personal resources.

Once industry seriously begins to consider the variability in capabilities of the individuals they serve practical questions arise related to creating products, spaces, or policies that honor individuals of differing abilities. The need for principles that guide design and construction decision is another reason why Inclusive Tourism is inseparable from Universal Design. In this case it is the Seven Principles of Universal Design that provide the coherent vision for excellence to the industry. These are:

1. **Equitable Use:** The design does not disadvantage or stigmatize any group of users.
2. **Flexibility in Use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
3. **Simple, Intuitive Use:** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
4. **Perceptible Information:** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
5. **Tolerance for Error:** The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
6. **Low Physical Effort:** The design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue.
7. **Size and Space for Approach & Use:** Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

Two significant custom applications of Universal Design have evolved since the emergence of the idea in the early 1970's and the formulation of these principles in 1997.

The first takes principle number 4 to much greater depth. This approach is known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). It is most appropriate to the industry when designing staff training or customer education/product promotion materials. The world's foremost promoter of UDL is the Trace Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The second approach has only recently been formulated. They address a specific aspect of Inclusive

Tourism – water travel. Significantly, it has been leadership on the part of the Indian tourism ministry and the Indian travel industry that accelerated formalisation of this approach known as the Waypoint-Backstrom Principles.

These principles, published first in the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi journal Design for All India, also begin with an unshakeable affirmation of the Seven Principles of Universal Design. They go on to specify areas of particular emphasis when designing inclusion in a marine environment.

Soni Samarajan is an Indian travel product developer and vice-president of an Indian Destination Management Company. He has written an article entitled, "Creating an Inclusive Travel Product: Challenges in India." In it he notes that medical advances may make some disabilities disappear while new technologies such as keyboard and joystick overuse in youth may make certain uncommon disabilities much more commonplace. He calls for the flexible user-centered guidance of Universal Design as the way forward.

In that way Samarajan parallels what is referred to as the "evolving definition of disability" in which disability is understood as an interaction between human variability of capabilities and socially constructed responses to those differences in capability.

We hope there are enough pointers here for the industry, government departments and all those associated with travel to make the guests feel at home. But all this is advice for the hosts. What about the targets of these efforts, people with disabilities? To them this is what we would like to say:

*"Make those trips you always wanted to. Be the people who prefer to bypass barriers rather than wait for them to disappear. Be tourists who face the hurdles of travel with a sense of humour and a spirit of adventure."*  
*Bon voyage!*

