THINK INDIA JOURNAL

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

The Importance of Making the Indian Tourism Sector Disabled Friendly

C. Swaminathan,
Principal,
SRM IHM, Trichy.

ABSTRACT

Across the world, adopting a disabled friendly strategy in design, construction and operation of hotels has resulted in enhanced turnover, profitability, customer goodwill, repeat customers and brand value. A qualitative method was adopted using both secondary data and primary data collected from 30 five-star hotels in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. This research found that most hotels in India are not disabled friendly. Staff do not know how deal with disabled guests. Hotel layouts are not disabled friendly. Rooms are fitted out in a manner that is inconvenient to the disabled. This suggest that hotels will need to use a design considers the needs of disabled persons, reserve some of their rooms specially for these guests and create a hotel / room design that is more accessible to such persons. The recommendations on what must be done to make Indian hotels disabled friendly have been given.

1. INTRODUCTION

Making hotels accessible to the disabled, enable people with disabilities to participate in the tourism sector. In India, there are almost 27 million people with some disability (Abidi, 2016). However, it is not known how accessible friendly Indian hotels are. This paper evaluates how Indian hotels can be made disabled friendly.

Research Question: How Can Indian Hotels are made more Disabled Friendly.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Accessible accommodations are places that are provided with those products, services and environment that will enable disabled persons to function independently (Israeli, 2012). According to Crawford and Godbey (2008) the design of accessible accommodations must be flexible. Disabled accommodations must be simple and easy to use (Darcy, 2009). Information related to use of facilities is communicated in a manner that is easy to understand (McGuire, 2008). Accessible accommodations reduce chance of accidents, efforts to get around and fatigue (Israeli, 2012). They are of correct size and space provided for each use and have very good and sensitive customer service (Miller and Kirk, 2012). Accessible accommodations are associated with several benefits such as more turnover, enhanced customer goodwill, loyal customers and improved brand value (Buhalis, 2003).

3. METHOD

A qualitative method was adopted in this paper using primary and secondary data. The literature review was developed from secondary data and highlighted key parameters for assessing accessible accommodations. The primary data was collected from a random sample of 30 five / four star hotels across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Most respondents indicated that the size of the domestic tourist population alone in India is 450 million strong. In addition, at least 5 million foreign travellers visit India annually increasing the total tourist population to 455 million. This means that the target market size for disabled tourists in India is at least 10 million persons. Respondents were asked to state most common complaints that disabled visitors to their hotels complain about. Figure 1 summarizes their responses.

PROBLEMS FACED BY DISABLED GUESTS

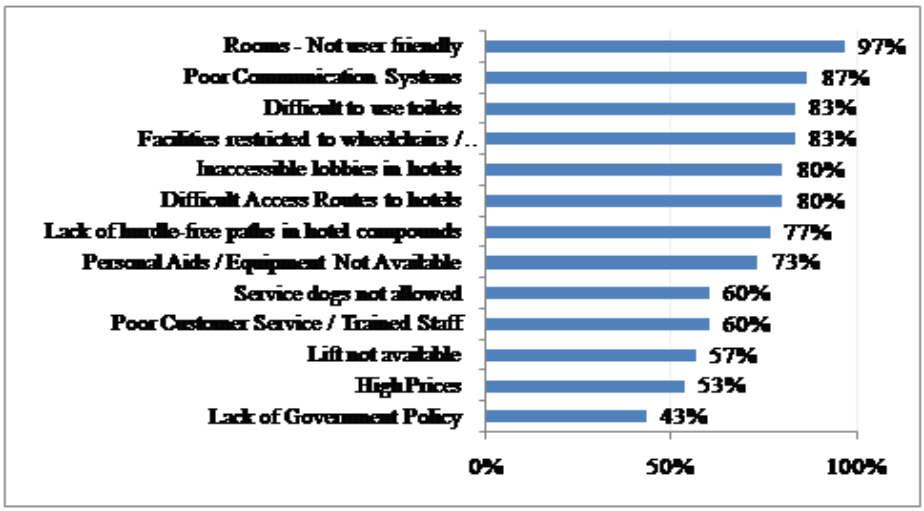

FIG NO 1

A common dissatisfies guests was the lack of facilities in those rooms specially reserved for disabled guests. Guests complain that cupboards take up too much of space in the rooms. The mattresses are too high for guests to climb on or transfer from a wheelchair. The low lighting in the rooms and restaurants make it difficult to see or move about. Door handles are not easy to reach or operate. Toilets and shower rooms do not have support handrails. There are no free spaces next to the toilet for transfers to wheelchairs. Bathrooms are not paved with non – slip floor tiles which make them dangerous to use. Furthermore, rooms for disabled are situated in one side of the hotel which consumes a lot of time for guests to travel to them.

Guests complain about rooms and hallways not having clear and easily understandable signage's or pictograms. A constant complaint was that hotel staffs do not know how to provide customer service that is appropriate to the needs of the disabled. Guests find that hotels rooms for disabled persons are disproportionately high. Facilities for disabled guests in most hotels are restricted to wheelchairs and wheelchair ramps. Ramps are either too slippery or too coarse and too steep or too shallow which makes travel along them very difficult for the disabled. There can be a lack of personal aids / equipment in the hotel for the disabled in case they want them.

Most respondents felt that while the Indian government has laid down policy for facilities to be provided to disabled guests by hotels, a lack of enforceability means that these stipulations are often ignored. Most foreign guests with disabilities complain that Indian hotels are not service animal friendly. These animals (mainly service dogs) are either not allowed in the hotel or not provided with appropriate accommodations, water / food and toilet facilities.

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

Figure 2 indicates the equipment and fixtures that respondents mentioned as being necessary in disabled friendly hotel rooms.

DISABLED FRIENDLY ROOM FIXTURES

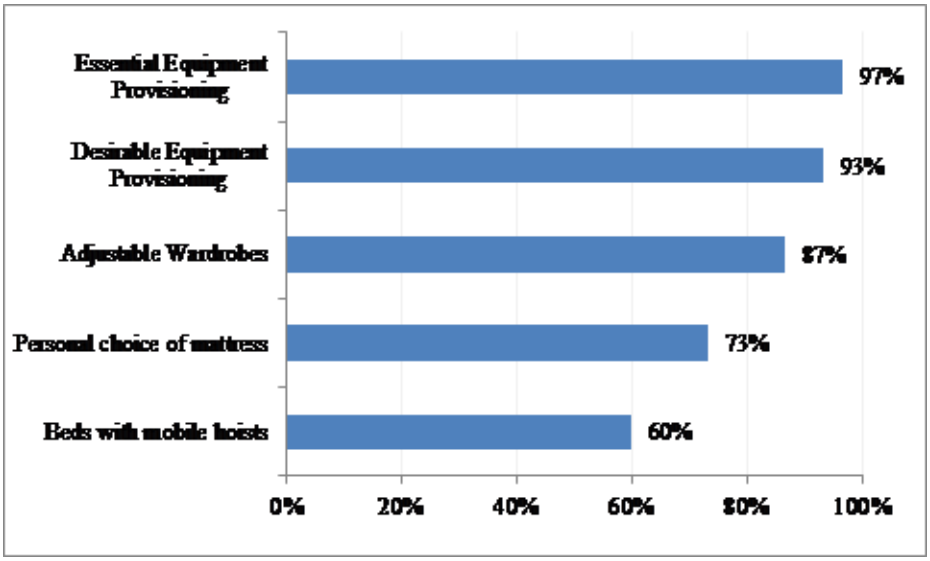

FIG NO 2

Rooms must have equipment like walkers, walking sticks, bath boards, shower and bath seats. Easily accessible wardrobes, providing soft / hard mattresses according to user requirements and beds with adjustable heights are some of the other important features in a disabled friendly room. Figure 3 indicates respondent views on staff training and other infrastructure that must be included in a disabled friendly hotel.

STAFF TRAINING AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE

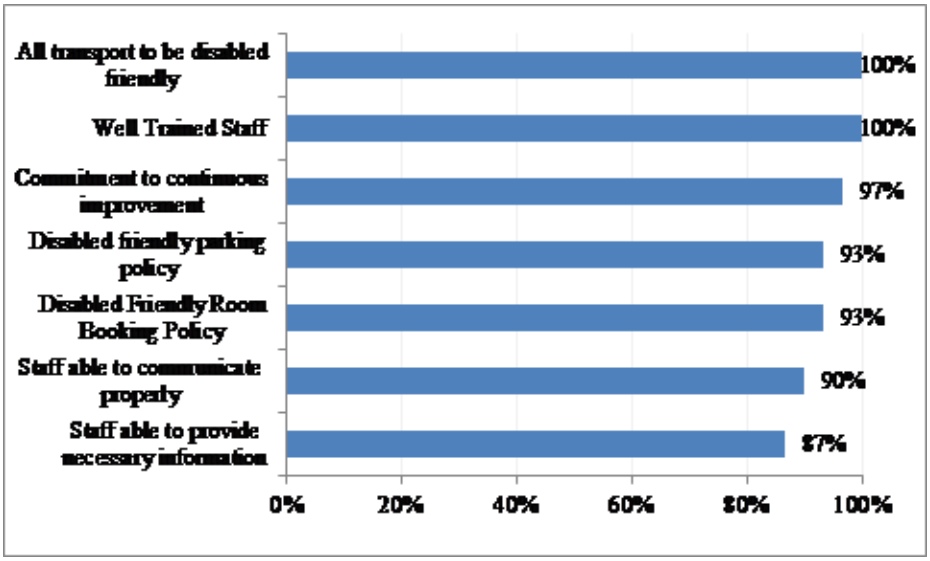

FIG NO 3

Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

Properly trained staff is a very important requirement in a disabled friendly hotel. Staff must learn how to communicate with disabled guests, to provide extra care and assistance and to be sensitive to them. Hotel management must reserve part of their parking for disabled persons and improve on their service based on customer feedback.

4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in chapter 4 suggest that most hotels in India are not disabled friendly. The following recommendations are made to make hotels in India disabled friendly.

- Hotels must use room layouts that are disabled friendly. Such rooms must be bigger than normal to provide adequate space, provide easy lobby access, placement of rooms on ground floors of hotels and provide disabled friendly parking and transport.
- Common areas such as restaurants, lobbies etc must facilitate equal standard of use for disabled and able – bodied guests.
- The hotel premises must be easily accessible. This means providing convenient parking and convenient taxi / bus pick up and drop to the hotel lobby without any obstacles.
- The disabled friendly rooms must be fitted with good quality finishes and fittings that are adjustable, automated and comfortable to use and in line with the interior décor of the hotel.
- Disabled guests must be offered choice as per their disability.
- All fixtures and furniture within rooms must be positioned such that they can be easily found, safely used and do not obstruct free movement.
- Hotels must be detail oriented and provide well – designed items for their disabled guests. For example, providing them with instruction / menu cards that are embossed, stick holders at restaurants and electronic card enabled locks facilitate easy movements and access within hotels.
- Hotels stock equipment for the disabled. For example, keeping walkers handy is very important for elderly guests and creates the perception that the hotel is committed to caring for its disabled guests.
- It is important that information about disabled friendly services is available at all stages of the booking process. This includes informing guests clearly what disability friendly facilities are available at the hotel and ensuring that what is provided to guests when they check -in match with what has been informed to them before booking.
- Training must be provided to all staff members on how to specially care for disabled visitors. This includes training in communication methods, providing basic technical solutions for special requirements and providing customized and appropriate services wherever required.
- Hotels must continuously improve their disabled friendly services based on the feedback provided by customers.
- Hotels must state in their promotions that they are disabled friendly and mention what all disabled friendly services / infrastructure they provide. Such promotion will attract more numbers of disabled guests.

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22- Issue-14-December-2019

5. REFERENCES

[1] Abidi (2016) India's disabled struggle while travelling. Available at <https://yourstory.com/2016/08/accessible-tourism/> Accessed on 1st January 2019.
[2] Buhalis, D. (2003) eTourism: Information technology for Strategic Tourism Management. Harlow, Prentice Hall.
[3] Burnett, J. J., Baker, H. B. (2011) Assessing the travel-related behaviors of the mobility disabled consumer. Journal of Travel Research, Vol.40, pp.4–11.
[4] Crawford, D. W., Godbey, G. (2008) Reconceptualizing barriers to family leisure. Leisure Sciences, Vol.9(2), pp.119–128.
[5] Daniels, M.J., Rodgers, B.P., Wiggins, R. (2015) "Travel Tales": an interpretive Analysis of constraints and negotiations to pleasure travel as experienced by persons with physical disabilities. Tourism Management, Vol.26, pp.919–930.
[6] Darcy, S. (2009) Anxiety to Access: Tourism Patterns and Experiences of Disabled New South
[7] Wales People with a Physical Disability. Tourism. Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Vol.9, pp.61–72.
[8] Driedger, D. (2005) Disabled People and International Air Travel. Journal of Leisurability, Vol.14, pp.13–19.
[9] Israeli, A. A. (2012) A preliminary investigation of the importance of site accessibility factors for disabled tourists. Journal of Travel Research, Vol.41(1), pp.101–104.
[10] McGuire, F. (2008) A Factor Analytic Study of Leisure Constraints in Advanced Adulthood. Leisure Sciences, Vol.6, pp.313–326.
[11] Miller, G. A., Kirk, E. (2012) The Disability Discrimination Act: Time for the stick? Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Vol.10(1), pp.82–88.
[12] Ray, N. M., Ryder, M. E. (2013) "Ebilities" tourism: An exploratory discussion of the travel needs and motivations of the mobility-disabled. Journal of Tourism Management, Vol.24, pp.57–72.
[13] Statista (2018) Value of the hotel market in India from 2010 – 2020. Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/750881/india-hotel-market-size/> Accessed on 7th January 2018.
[14] Turco, D. M., Stumbo, N., Garncarz, J. (2015) Tourism constraints for people with disabilities. Parks & Recreation, Vol.33(9), pp.78–84.

 Copyright ⓒ 2019Authors