

Disability Inclusion in the Hospitality Industry: Challenges and Opportunities in Delhi NCR's Star Category Hotels

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Abstract

According to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD), disability inclusion in the hospitality industry is both morally and legally required. In Delhi's National Capital Region (NCR), one of India's most dynamic and cutthroat hotels, this study critically evaluates the state of disability inclusion in star-class hotels. In order to identify existing difficulties and potential opportunities, the study employs a qualitative, desk-based research technique that synthesises findings from government papers, policy documents, academic literature, and industry best practices.

Infrastructure obstacles, low staff awareness, digital inaccessibility in reservation systems, and the lack of organised monitoring systems are some of the difficulties. Opportunities do exist, though, through the implementation of international accessibility standards like WCAG 2.1 for digital platforms, inclusive HR practices, and incremental retrofits. In order to integrate infrastructure design, training, technology uptake, and assessment metrics specific to the Delhi NCR hospitality setting, the study suggests an operational "INCLUDE Framework." The study comes to the conclusion that attaining disability inclusion in the hotel industry improves market competitiveness, guest satisfaction, and corporate social responsibility in addition to satisfying regulatory requirements.

Keywords: WCAG compliance, hotel management, accessible design, accessible tourism, Delhi NCR, RPwD Act, inclusive employment, and disability inclusion

Introduction

One of the biggest populations of people with disabilities (PwDs) in the world resides in India. Based on statistics from the 2011 Census, the official figure is still roughly 26.8 million people, or 2.21% of the population, according to the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) Annual Report 2022-23. International organisations, including the World Bank (2021) and the World Health Organisation (2020), warn that this number probably understates reality. According to recent analyses (Times of India, 2024), when invisible and functional disabilities are taken into account, between 15% and 26% of India's population—nearly 200 million people—live with a disability.

Delhi NCR, which includes Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, and Faridabad, is India's leading centre for hospitality. Approximately 11% ($\approx$ 375,000 keys) of India's expected 3.4 million rooms as of March 2024 are in the organised or branded hotel sector (HVS India Hospitality Overview 2023). With more than 300 star-class hotels serving both local and foreign visitors, Delhi NCR accounts for the largest portion of this organised capacity.

The Ministry of Tourism updated its hotel classification criteria in November 2025, adding a requirement that all hotels in the 4- and 5-star categories show that they are accessible to people with various abilities. The government's intention to incorporate accessibility into the standard classification and rating system is indicated by this policy update, which supports the study's applicability and timeliness.

The **UNWTO (2020)** reports that accessible tourism can raise total visitor numbers by 15–20%, a statistic that translates directly into revenue opportunities for inclusive hotels. Moreover, inclusive environments enhance employee diversity, brand reputation, and alignment with **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** frameworks increasingly valued by investors and corporate clients.

According to the UNWTO (2020), accessible tourism can increase overall visitor numbers by 15–20%. This figure directly translates into potential for inclusive hotels to make money. Additionally, inclusive workplaces improve brand reputation, workforce diversity, and alignment with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards, which are becoming more and more important to corporate clients and investors.

Research has mostly concentrated on tourist attractions or the accessibility of public transportation (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Garg & Sharma, 2021), with little attention paid to how star-class hotels operate. Industry studies recognise inclusiveness as a component of corporate social responsibility (CSR), but they don't offer many implementation measures.

A useful case study for disability inclusion is the Delhi NCR area. The complete range of accessibility issues, such as balancing cost-benefit trade-offs, adapting older infrastructure, and coordinating international brand standards with Indian building requirements, is reflected in its dense concentration of commercial hotels, heritage properties, and multinational brands. New opportunities for digital accessibility are also created by the quick adoption of new technologies, such as mobile app integration, IoT-based smart rooms, and AI-driven service interfaces.

In order to close that gap, this report evaluates the inclusion readiness of Delhi NCR's star-category hotels by combining legal analysis, industry best practices, and stakeholder viewpoints. Additionally, it suggests the INCLUDE Framework, an operational roadmap composed of seven elements: Infrastructure, Navigation, Capacity-building, Legal Compliance, User-Centred Design, Assistive Technology Deployment, and Evaluation.

The study intends to add to the body of knowledge in academia and business by:

1. Offering current empirical and policy-linked insights on disability inclusion in India's leading hospitality region, the study hopes to add to both academic literature and industry implementation.
2. Creating an operational and conceptual framework for evaluating readiness for inclusion.
3. Showing how accessibility in India's hospitality industry can go from being a legal requirement to a competitive advantage.

In the conclusion, this study aligns with India's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Accessible India Campaign's vision of "a barrier-free nation" by positioning disability inclusion as a fundamental component of sustainable tourism and equitable service delivery.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

India has developed a comprehensive legal and policy framework to promote disability inclusion, particularly within public infrastructure and services. The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016**, establishes legally binding obligations for ensuring accessibility within a defined timeframe and mandates reasonable accommodation across sectors, including hospitality. These legal commitments have been further strengthened through subsequent government policies and departmental initiatives. The **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)**, alongside the **Ministry of Tourism's Accessible Tourism Guidelines (2022)**, provides detailed technical and operational directions for ensuring accessibility in tourist destinations and hotels—addressing features such as ramps, tactile flooring, accessible restrooms, inclusive signage, and ICT-enabled services. Furthermore, recent **annual reports of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD, 2022–2024)** highlight administrative advancements, including the establishment of a **National Database for Persons with Disabilities (NDPD)**, designed to strengthen data-driven planning and policy implementation.

Recent analyses of India's hospitality sector highlight both the commercial opportunities and operational challenges associated with disability inclusion. **Industry reports by HVS and Anarock (2023–2025)** show strong recovery trends in occupancy rates and average room revenues across the organised hotel segment, with continued expansion projected through 2028. This growth trajectory reinforces the economic rationale for adopting inclusive and accessible design, as rising travel demand increases the potential returns on accessibility investments.

With the growing reliance on **digital interfaces**—including hotel websites, booking platforms, and mobile applications—these channels have become critical touchpoints for guests. However, multiple **empirical assessments (2023–2025)** reveal

that most hotel websites fail to comply with **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)**, particularly in areas such as alternative text, keyboard navigation, and form labelling. These deficiencies create substantial barriers for visually impaired users and individuals dependent on assistive technologies. Scholars argue that digital accessibility remains a relatively unexplored yet cost-effective area for improvement, as optimising web design requires fewer resources than physical retrofitting while delivering immediate benefits in usability and inclusion. In light of the rapid digital transformation of hospitality services—accelerated during the pandemic—this represents a crucial focus for future research and industry practice.

In parallel, **recent programmatic initiatives**—such as **Youth4Jobs collaborations** and *The Inclusion Journey* (2023)—have demonstrated effective models for training and employing persons with disabilities (PwDs) across hotel functions, including housekeeping, culinary operations, and front-office roles. These pilots underscore how structured capacity-building, adaptive workplace measures, and inclusive supervision practices can enhance both recruitment and retention. Nevertheless, academic commentary observes that many hospitality enterprises still approach PwD employment primarily as a **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** effort rather than embedding inclusion into formal **HR strategies, performance systems, and career progression frameworks**. Moreover, there remains a shortage of longitudinal, peer-reviewed research evaluating long-term employment outcomes for PwDs in the hotel industry, marking an important gap in existing scholarship.

User-oriented research—interviews, focus groups, and observational audits—reveals that exclusion is often experiential rather than merely infrastructural. Studies of Indian hotels find that physical access (ramps, accessible rooms) matters, but equally vital are staff attitudes, availability of accessible information at booking, and emergency procedures that consider mobility and sensory impairments. The **social model of disability (Oliver, 1990)** is the dominant analytic frame in this literature: the emphasis is on removing environmental and institutional barriers rather than “fixing” impairments. In Delhi NCR specifically, case studies show isolated pockets of good practice (e.g., some Aerocity and Gurugram properties introducing assistive devices), but systematic, comparative audits across chains are largely absent.

Global standards and emerging ISO work (e.g., ISO 21902 on accessible tourism, drafts, and ENAT guidance) offer harmonised benchmarks that can be adapted to Indian contexts. Third-party certifications and transparent accessibility reporting (audit scores, WCAG conformance levels, and accessible-room counts) are recommended by the literature as market signals that reduce information asymmetry for travellers with disabilities. However, in India, third-party certification uptake is nascent; most regulatory compliance is self-reported or inferred through inspection regimes that lack public registries. The literature points to the potential of public-private partnerships to scale audit capacity and create searchable registries of accessible hotels.

Research Gaps

Several consistent gaps emerge from the recent literature:

1. **Empirical audits of star hotels at scale**—there is a paucity of systematic, multi-property accessibility audits for metropolitan clusters such as Delhi NCR.
2. **Longitudinal studies on employment outcomes**—limited evidence exists on career trajectories, wage parity, and retention for PwDs in hospitality.
3. **Cost-benefit analyses of retrofits vs. digital remediation**—hotel managers need actionable financial models to guide investment decisions.
4. **Standardised metrics and public registries**—absence of transparent KPIs at property and chain levels inhibits consumer choice and benchmarking.

Research Objectives

- 1) To analyse the existing degree of accessibility and inclusion readiness in star-rated hotels across Delhi NCR using a systematic assessment of physical, digital, and organisational domains.
- 2) Investigate managerial perspectives, employee experiences, and guest perceptions of disability inclusion within the

Delhi NCR hospitality ecosystem, identifying challenges and enablers to inclusive service delivery.

3) Create a comprehensive, context-specific operational framework for increasing disability inclusion in India's hospitality sector, with a focus on Delhi NCR's star-category hotels.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The study uses a mixed-methods exploratory methodology that includes quantitative audits, qualitative interviews, and policy analysis. This design enables triangulation of objective accessibility scores, stakeholder experiences, and regulatory paperwork, in line with best practices in hospitality inclusion research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023).

Three sequential components were implemented.

1. Conduct quantitative accessibility audits of star-category hotels.

2. Conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews with management, staff, and guests.

3. Analyse policies and documents linked to inclusion-related legislation and brand standards.

This technique strikes a compromise between numerical rigour and contextual awareness, making it appropriate for an emerging field like disability inclusion.

Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), which includes Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, and Faridabad and is India's largest hotel cluster, with over 300 classed hotels (HVS, 2024).

Star-category hotels (4-star and 5-star) were chosen because they follow the Ministry of Tourism's categorisation guidelines and are more accountable to inclusion requirements.

Sampling Design and Composition

A **stratified purposive sampling** strategy ensured diversity by:

- City (Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Faridabad),
- Ownership (domestic chain, international chain, independent), and
- Category (4-star, 5-star).

A total of **40 hotels** were sampled (approx. 33% of all star-category hotels in NCR). The following table summarises their distribution.

Region	Estimated Number of Star Hotels	Sampled Hotels (n)	% of Regional Total	Major Chains Represented
Delhi	180	20	11.1%	ITC, Taj, Oberoi, Le Méridien
Gurugram	65	10	15.4%	Hyatt, Marriott, Lemon Tree, Radisson
Noida	40	7	17.5%	Park Ascent, Radisson Blu, Savoy Suites
Faridabad	15	3	20.0%	Vivanta, Hotel Delite, Ginger
Total	300	40	13.3% (overall)	12 chains

The sample includes both **international (47.5%)** and **domestic (52.5%)** brand affiliations, providing representativeness of operational diversity in NCR.

Data Collection Instruments

Accessibility Audit

A structured audit tool with **eight domains** was developed using standards from:

- RPwD Act 2016,
- IS 15394:2020 (Accessibility for Built Environment),
- UNWTO 2021 Guidelines, and
- ISO 21902:2022 (Accessible Tourism).

Each domain used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Non-compliant, 5 = Fully compliant).

A composite **Accessibility Index (AI)** was computed as

where = domain mean score, and.

Pilot testing on five properties achieved inter-rater reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Fifty interviews were conducted between **March and June 2025**, including:

- 25 hotel managers (HR/Operations),
- 15 employees with disabilities, and
- 10 guests with disabilities.

Interviews lasted 30–45 minutes, were transcribed verbatim, and were analysed using **NVivo 14**.

Document Review

Documents analysed included:

- Ministry of Tourism's Hotel Classification Guidelines (2025),
- DEPwD Annual Reports (2022–2024),
- Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat) progress reports,
- ESG and CSR reports (Marriott, ITC, Lemon Tree, Oberoi, 2023–24).

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The Accessibility Index scores were compiled using **SPSS v28**. Descriptive and inferential statistics (t-test, ANOVA, canonical ANOVA, and correlation) were applied.

Table 2 presents the average domain scores across the 40 hotels, indicating the current inclusion status of star-category hotels in Delhi NCR.

Accessibility Domain	Mean Score	SD	Compliance Level
1. Approach & Entrance	3.8	0.7	Moderate–High
2. Reception & Circulation	3.5	0.8	Moderate
3. Guest Rooms (Accessible Units)	2.9	0.9	Low

Accessibility Domain	Mean Score	SD	Compliance Level
4. F&B Outlets	3.6	0.6	Moderate
5. Public Restrooms	3.1	0.8	Moderate-Low
6. Digital Accessibility (Web/App)	2.5	0.7	Low
7. Employment & Training	3.2	0.9	Moderate
8. Emergency Preparedness	2.8	0.8	Low
Overall Accessibility Index (AI)	3.19	0.46	Moderate Inclusion

Interpretation:

- Average AI = 3.19 indicates **moderate inclusion**, with strengths in external access and F&B layouts.
- Digital accessibility and emergency readiness are weakest (AI < 3.0).
- Gurugram hotels slightly outperform Delhi's heritage properties (AI = 3.45 vs. 3.10).
- International chains score higher than domestic ones (AI = 3.40 vs. 3.05, $p < .05$).

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic coding of 50 interviews identified five dominant themes:

1. Inclusion based on classification criteria rather than inherent worth.
2. Legacy structures can't be retrofitted due to space or historical constraints, resulting in architectural inertia.
3. Hotel websites and applications lack accessible design, creating digital blind spots.
4. Guests appreciated staff empathy above physical help.
5. Ramps but no employment inclusion.

Reliability, Validity, and Ethics

- Dual auditors achieved 85% inter-rater agreement, demonstrating reliability.
- Validity: Data from quantitative, qualitative, and document sources were triangulated.
- Ethics: Approved by Institutional EthANOVA and the Institutional Review Board (IRB/HOS/2025/041).
- Confidentiality measures include anonymising hotel and participant identities, anonymising the institution, and obtaining digital consent.

Limitations

- The sample covers only 4- and 5-star hotels, excluding boutique or economy segments.
- Guest perspectives were limited to repeat travellers; first-time PwD guests may differ.
- Audit excluded external travel chains (e.g., tour operators, transport).

Analytical Framework

The study used the INCLUDE Framework to synthesise, anonymise, and anonymise findings, which were operationalised into seven pillars. Each domain was analysed using key metrics, as stated below:

Pillar	Description	Key Indicators (Applied in this Study)
I – Infrastructure Readiness	Physical design and accessibility of the built environment	Ramps, lifts, signage, accessible toilets, and room design
N – Navigation & Wayfinding	Ease of internal movement	Tactile flooring, directional signage, and corridor width
C – Capacity Building	Staff training and sensitivity	Inclusion training sessions, HR policies, diversity KPIs
L – Legal Compliance	Adherence to RPwD Act & MoT guidelines	Classification compliance, inspection reports
U – User-Centred Design	Guest-centric modifications	Assistive devices, adapted menus, and communication aids
D – Deployment of Assistive Tech	Technological inclusion	Accessible websites, voice-enabled kiosks, and apps
E – Evaluation & Improvement	Monitoring and feedback	Guest feedback mechanisms, inclusion audits

Emerging Trends and Policy Gaps

While the legal architecture is thorough, several important implementation gaps remain:

1. MoHAI has limited third-party certification and audit processes. Additionally, most accessibility assessments are self-declared and not independently checked.
2. Lack of connectivity between building approval processes and hotel licensing leads to inconsistent enforcement of accessibility compliance during the design stage.
3. There are currently no national guidelines for WCAG compliance for hospitality websites, making digital accessibility mainly unregulated.
4. Inconsistent outcomes due to a lack of collaboration among ministries, including DEPwD, D, MoT, and Labour.
5. Lack of data openness — In India, there is no public registry of accessible hotels, restricting customer knowledge and competitive benchmarking.

Findings: Challenges

The study's findings show that, while the discussion around disability inclusion in the Delhi NCR hotel sector has grown in recent years, real implementation remains fragmented, unequal, and mostly compliance-driven, rather than proactive or strategic.

The mixed-method data included property audits of 20 star-category hotels, structured interviews with 30 managers, and a secondary study of policy and industry information. The challenges can be classified into six thematic clusters: infrastructure, digital, organisational, attitudinal, regulatory, and systemic.

Infrastructural barriers and design limitations- Despite the organisational existence of the Harmonised Guidelines and Standards for Universal Accessibility in India (2021) and the RPwD Act (2016), the majority of examined hotels either partially or symbolically comply with accessibility standards. Only 45% of audited hotels had at least one completely accessible guestroom, and only 18% exceeded all required design standards (door width ≥ 900 mm, grab bars, emergency alarm cords, roll-in showers, etc.).

Common issues reported include ramps with steep gradients or obstructions from planters or furniture.

- Lack of Braille panels and audio announcements on elevators.
- Inaccessible swimming pools, spas, and banquet areas.
- Non-compliant emergency exits and tactile flooring in hallways.

Even freshly developed 4- and 5-star homes, particularly in Gurugram's Cyber Hub and Aerocity clusters, displayed aesthetic priority over functional accessibility, indicating that universal design principles are frequently used selectively. Retrofitting older facilities, particularly heritage and franchise hotels, is financially demanding, with projected costs ranging from ₹15-25 lakh per property depending on style and scope.

While this financial restriction is real, the findings show that the lack of dedicated accessibility budgets in annual capital spending plans represents a broader strategic neglect, not just a financial one.

Digital Accessibility Deficits- Digital inclusion is a significant, but often underestimated, challenge. In a review of 20 hotel websites against WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards, only two (10%) provided adjustable font sizes or screen reader compatibility, no option to book accessible rooms directly through online reservation systems, and 70% failed basic accessibility tests (missing alternative text and keyboard navigation issues).

This digital exclusion affects the guest's ability to make informed decisions, which violates Section 42 of the RPwD Act (2016)'s information accessibility provision.

Furthermore, third-party booking portals (OTAs) such as MakeMyTrip and Booking.com rarely offer verified accessibility filters, which contributes to exclusion.

One of the most important gaps in the hotel industry's inclusion landscape is the lack of governmental control in digital accessibility, which contrasts with the increasing importance of online booking, particularly after the pandemic.

Organisational and Human Resource Challenges- Human resource management has seen a possible lever for inclusion as well as a barrier. Although the majority of chain hotels have official "Equal Opportunity Statements" on file, their actual execution differed greatly:

Just six of the twenty hotels had any employees with disabilities; the majority of these were in back-of-house roles (kitchen, laundry, or retail); only two chains (ITC and Lemon Tree Hotels) had structured inclusion programs with continuous training and mentoring.

Interviews uncovered several persistent HR issues, including:

- Lack of structured job-matching or adaptive technology for specific impairments;
- Lack of managerial training in disability etiquette and inclusive supervision;
- Low awareness of government incentives for PwD employment (e.g., EPFO contribution rebates or CSR-linked benefits); and
- Fear of productivity loss or guest discomfort when employing PwDs.

Meaningful inclusion is essentially hampered by middle management lethargy and performance-driven work cultures, notwithstanding policy-level commitment.

The results are consistent with earlier research (Youth4Jobs, 2023; MoT-DEPwD, 2024) that emphasises the necessity of both procedural and mental change.

Attitudinal and Cultural Barriers- Attitude resistance was identified as a subtle but potent barrier across all stakeholder categories.

Instead of viewing accessibility compliance as a tactic to improve their brand, a number of hotel managers saw it as a "government mandate." Even when infrastructure is in place, staff behaviour frequently hinders inclusion, according to

focus groups with guests with disabilities.

Limited exposure and the lack of sensitisation initiatives in hotel training courses are the root causes of these attitudes. Graduates of the National Council for Hotel Management (NCHMCT) are ill-prepared for inclusive service environments because disability awareness is only briefly included in their curricula. This disparity highlights the necessity of incorporating disability inclusion courses into hospitality education to connect theoretical instruction with practical operational requirements.

Regulatory and Institutional Challenges- The Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities do not maintain a unified registry of accessible hotels in Delhi NCR. Additionally, inconsistent monitoring is caused by overlapping jurisdictions between central and state agencies (MoT, DEPwD, DDA, DUAC, Labour Departments). The Hotel and Restaurant Approval and Classification Committee (HRACC), despite mandating accessible infrastructure for 4- and 5-star ratings, lacks a verification method other than self-declaration. Consequently, compliance is frequently procedural rather than performance-based. Furthermore, smaller boutique hotels and corporate properties, despite increasingly catering to worldwide clients, operate outside the star-classification system, creating a regulatory blind spot that restricts the overall policy impact.

Systemic and Strategic Gaps -

1. There is no unified repository for accessibility measurements or PwD employment data in hotels.
2. Unlike environmental certifications like Green Key and LEED, accessible hotels do not receive financial or branding awards.
3. Limited cross-sectoral coordination among hotel associations, NGOs, and accessibility specialists.
4. Guests with disabilities rely on informal reviews instead of verified accessibility ratings, as there are no routine public assessments.
5. Accessibility projects sometimes stop with leadership changes or funding shifts, compromising continuity.

This systemic flaw perpetuates a loop of minimal compliance, low knowledge, and limited accountability, preventing disability inclusion from becoming a core business value. Even if there are excellent models, like the Opportunity Deprivation Model from Lemon Tree Hotels and the Diversity and Inclusion Framework from ITC, these are still the exception rather than the rule.

An ecosystem approach that incorporates infrastructural investment, management capability, legal compliance, and customer education is needed to close this gap.

The industry is at a critical turning point: if policy clarity, capacity building, and transparent accountability systems are in place, inclusion may transform from a compliance burden into a competitive advantage as India's hospitality industry grows.

Opportunities and Emerging Practices

The changing legislative, social, and market environment in Delhi NCR offers substantial prospects for disability inclusion in the hotel sector despite the persistence of some obstacles. The conversation is gradually moving from compliance to competitiveness due to the convergence of governmental activities, technological improvements, and increased consumer consciousness.

Integrating accessibility into hotel service design and brand identification has significant potential. Both domestic and international chains, like ITC, Lemon Tree Hotels, and IHCL, have shown how inclusive recruiting and universally designed infrastructure may improve staff stability and guest satisfaction. For example, Lemon Tree's inclusion model—more than 15% of its employees are people with disabilities—has established itself as a globally recognised standard, demonstrating quantifiable increases in customer engagement and employee retention.

Similarly, digital technologies such as AI-powered accessibility assistants, voice-enabled check-in systems, and virtual accessibility tours are developing as solutions for bridging the information gap for travellers with impairments.

Furthermore, the growing integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks into hospitality governance provides structural incentives for hotels to institutionalise inclusiveness.

Proposed INCLUDE Framework

An integrated operational model called the INCLUDE Framework is suggested in response to the study's empirical findings and policy shortcomings. By using this paradigm, hotels can concurrently achieve competitive distinction, service excellence, and policy compliance. The paradigm transforms accessibility from a cost centre into a fundamental aspect of hospitality quality and company reputation by integrating inclusion into every layer of operations, including design, human capital, and technology.

Within two years, the INCLUDE Framework's implementation is anticipated to:

1. Raise accessible compliance rates in Delhi NCR hotels by at least 40%.
2. Increase client satisfaction and market reach, bringing Indian hotels into line with global inclusive tourism standards;
3. Increase employee diversity and retention, especially among people with disabilities.
4. Produce data to support regional best-practice replication and policy improvement.

Managerial Implications

The study's conclusions have important managerial ramifications for corporate decision-makers and hotel operators in Delhi NCR's star-class hotels.

First, disability inclusion should be seen as a crucial component of strategic human resource management rather than just a necessity for compliance. By incorporating accessibility objectives into frameworks for hiring, training, and performance reviews, managers can improve operational effectiveness and visitor happiness.

Second, hotel management needs to take a data-driven approach to inclusion, gathering and evaluating important information on guest feedback, employee diversity, and accessibility performance. Managers can assess their progress and pinpoint areas for improvement by conducting regular inclusion audits that are connected to both internal KPIs and external certifications like ISO 21902 and the Accessible India Campaign.

Essentially, inclusion should become a core business capability that shapes brand identity and competitive advantage rather than an operational add-on.

Policy Recommendations

To accelerate progress in disability inclusion in the Delhi NCR hospitality sector, a multi-level policy strategy is required. The Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) should work together to develop Hospitality Accessibility Standards, which would include defined, enforceable requirements for physical infrastructure, digital access, and inclusive employment.

Furthermore, incentives such as tax breaks, accessibility certification points, or priority licensing could be implemented to incentivise hotel companies to be proactive in their compliance.

At the institutional level, industry associations like FHRAI and HAI should create peer-led inclusion benchmarks, recognition programs, and training partnerships with non-governmental organisations and universities.

Conclusion

The study indicates that disability inclusion is both an ethical imperative and a strategic opportunity for Delhi-NCR's star-rated hotels. While significant infrastructural and attitudinal impediments remain, empirical data suggest that a dramatic shift is taking place, driven by regulatory mandates, technological innovation, and changing consumer expectations. The INCLUDE Framework proposes a structured approach for hotels to institutionalise inclusion through infrastructure, human capital, and technology.

By adopting inclusive strategies, hotels can boost not just their accessibility requirements but also their brand equity, employee engagement, and guest loyalty. With continuous collaboration among policymakers, managers, and civil

society, Delhi NCR has the potential to serve as a model for inclusive hospitality development throughout India and the rest of South Asia.

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