

Malls turning friendly for the disabled

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Malls are doing their bit to make the world a better place for people with disability. With Braille signage, wheelchair on call, disabled-friendly washrooms and specially allotted parking space, malls are looking to increasing footfalls by becoming more socially conscious.

Interestingly, several States such as Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have also asked mall managements to remove "infrastructure snags" and create a conducive environment for people with disabilities.

According to the 2011 Census, the number of disabled in India is 2.68 crore — 1.5 crore men and 1.18 crore women.

Industry watchers say several States had said merely making a ramp available in a mall was not enough and fa-



cilities needed to be put in place while approving the building plans.

Mumbai-based Viviana Mall recently had a unique audio-tactile labelling system in place to provide a variety of accessibility solutions for visually-impaired consumers.

The feature gives visually impaired shoppers the option of 'reading' the shop names either with their fingers or hearing it. In addition, the mall is also making its restaurant menus fully accessi-

ble in terms of sight, touch and hearing.

Ashwin Sheth, MD, Sheth Developers and Realtors, said: "It's an attempt to give each and every visitor in the mall, visually impaired or not, a chance to experience a life without limitations and drive inclusiveness through these efforts."

Managers say malls are themselves making attempts to be inclusive.

"Malls are looking to get closer to consumers. Last

year, we had done an audit by an external agency to understand the needs of consumers with disability. Several new malls are factoring in these things at the concept stage itself," Nirzhar Jain, Vice-President, Oberoi Mall, said, adding that their mall has designated parking slots and washrooms for the differently-abled.

Several companies are also developing apps that help people with disability know the building and facilities that address their needs.

Anand Sundaram, CEO, Pioneer Property Zone, a mall management firm, said: "Besides offering usual services like washroom and parking, international apparel retailers are trial rooms that are disabled-friendly and can accommodate a wheelchair. It not only brings additional customers but also a lot of goodwill."