

**Special
Olympics**
Bharat



THOUGHTS FROM BERLIN

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A World Apart!



As a first timer witnessing the games my first impression was just, ‘Wow!’

I was amazed by Berlin, the capital city of Germany, and its commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. There are several accessible facilities and services available for people with disabilities in Berlin such as the public transportation system, including buses, trams, and trains equipped with elevators, ramps, tactile guidance systems and designated spaces for wheelchair users, where all the drivers are meticulously trained to assist passengers with disabilities.

As we in India are on a different, more basic set of challenges, it was inspiring to see what can be. They often say, ‘Visualize your end goal’ and I was fortunate enough to literally see our vision manifested in some areas of inclusion.

In Berlin, some of the things I noticed, as a visitor, were:

Wheelchair Accessible Taxis: Berlin has a fleet of taxis that are specifically designed to accommodate passengers using wheelchairs. These taxis have ramps or lifts to facilitate easy entry and exit.

Accessible Accommodation: Hotels in Berlin provide accessible rooms with features like widened doorways, grab bars in bathrooms, and roll-in showers.

Museums and Cultural Institutions: Many museums and cultural institutions in Berlin offer accessibility features and also provide guided tours for visually impaired visitors and offer sign language interpretation making tourist places truly inclusive.

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Parks and Gardens with paved pathways for PwDs to access.

Accessible Toilets: Public toilets with accessible facilities located throughout the city specially shopping malls and tourist destinations.

Barrier-Free Websites: All official government websites accessible for those using screen readers and assistive technologies.

This has resulted in a number of wheelchair users independently moving around the city even during the busiest traffic hours.

As we focused on Special Olympics through the year, several people questioned the need for resources to go into play. I've strongly believed that inclusion cannot be one-dimensional and needs to encompass every single aspect of a person's life.

The Games gave that extra confirmation that inclusion through sports was a great way to get youth to start thinking about inclusion. Larger systems, by their very nature, take time to pivot, but if the seed of inclusion is planted in young minds, the sky is the limit.

Personally, the Games have had a great impact on me, as I return home with more resolve to work harder for the cause of inclusion.



Inclusivity and Empowerment: The event brings together athletes with intellectual disabilities, providing them with a platform to showcase their abilities and foster a sense of pride, confidence, and empowerment.

Awareness and Education: The Summer Games increases public awareness about intellectual disabilities and promotes understanding, acceptance, and inclusion within society. It helps challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about people with disabilities.

Community Engagement: The inauguration saw as many as 70,000 people at the Olympic Park stadium. Also, the game brought together 20,000 volunteers as people from diverse backgrounds came together to support the athletes, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

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Accessible facilities and inclusive infrastructure can contribute to creating a more inclusive city overall.

The Summer Games also provided an opportunity for athletes, coaches, and supporters from different countries to connect, share experiences, and build relationships and helped develop a sense of global unity.

I was also amazed by the scale and inclusivity of the event. I found it extremely inspiring to witness athletes from around the world with intellectual disabilities competing at such a high level of skill and dedication.

I could witness and appreciate the emphasis on inclusivity and the positive message it conveyed about the abilities and potential of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Seeing the athletes perform and excel in their respective sports evoked feelings of admiration and respect.

For someone from India, where disability awareness and inclusion are ongoing challenges, the event was an eye-opening experience.

I was also be struck by the sense of unity and camaraderie among the participants and the strong community support surrounding the event. Witnessing people from different countries and cultures coming together to celebrate the achievements of these exceptional athletes fostered a sense of pride and connection to the global disability community.

Overall, attending the Special Olympics Summer Games in Berlin I was deeply moved by the dedication, talent, and spirit of the athletes.



I am coming away with a renewed commitment to promoting inclusivity and working towards creating a more accepting and supportive society for people with disabilities in India.