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# Asia-Pac leads tourism recovery

UNWTO advisor urges continued safety protocol, clear messages, tourist dispersion

**By Cheryl Ong**

As countries cautiously restart their tourism engines and airplanes return to the skies, Asia-Pacific is set to be the first region in the world to rebound, which will provide a blueprint for post-Covid recovery.

“If we look at which regions are going to be at the forefront of (the) recovery momentum, Asia-Pacific is ahead of the race. Reason being, firstly, (it has) a great deal of regional travel. There is a lot of hopping within countries, and across regional countries,” said Anita Mendiratta, special advisor to secretary general, The UN World Tourism Organization.

“And, Asia-Pacific was the first to experience the pandemic. (It is) getting through it first, (showing) the rest of the world what recovery will look like.”

Speaking at the ITB Asia 2020 Virtual session, titled The Future of Travel Post-Covid-19, Mendiratta quashed any notions of a return to normalcy, instead dubbing the new world of travel as the “next normal”, where uncertainty abounds in light of recurring waves, and the many ques-



The future of travel requires careful safety measures

tions surrounding a Covid-19 vaccine.

In this climate of uncertainty, destinations have to adapt to new ways of working and connecting with travellers for tourism recovery to gather pace.

Noting that at the height of the pandemic, 16,000 aircraft were grounded around the world, Mendiratta said that airlines now need to determine route profitability and where the demand lies, while also accessing stability risks in terms of the virus to prevent future groundings.

She also cautioned destinations against

growing lax with safety protocols. “The protocols are critical; they are part of the experience that we must now accept as the future of travel, particularly, in a post-Covid-19 world,” she stressed.

Noting that the need for space will sway future travel decisions, she said destination marketers need to “(unlock) areas in destinations that have really not been discovered before – places that are more remote, less densely populated, allowing dispersion”.

With trust hailed as the new currency for tourism marketing, she also reiterated the critical importance of communication in managing traveller expectations and giving them peace of mind.

“Now is the time for communication, not campaigns. Destinations, airlines, airports, attractions can all speak to travellers, but speak to them as equals, focusing on why – not where – they are travelling.

“Create that connection now, so that when they are ready to travel, they know that there is a place and there are people looking forward to seeing them,” concluded Mendiratta.

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# Transformation aid for players

Singapore to provide AR training, data transformation benchmarks, various resources

**By Pamela Chow**

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) will roll out three programmes by end-2020 to give local tourism businesses a boost in their data transformation journeys, announced the board's acting chief technology officer, Poh Chi Chuan.

Poh shared that the first initiative is an aggressive push for augmented reality (AR) technology. The board aims to build a bank of some 1,000 "high-quality" AR resources on its Tourism Industry Hub, test prototypes to showcase AR applications, launch a set of recommended standards, and introduce AR training courses on its Tech College.

This strategy follows the successes of local attractions, Singapore Zoo and nightclub Zouk, which adopted AR marketing and events to engage with consumers during the pandemic.

Poh said: "We decided to focus on AR



**Poh: data transformation for survival**

as it is an accessible technology that we believe will be mainstream in the next couple months."

The second initiative will see the full-scale launch of the board's Tourism Transformation Index (TXI), which has been in limited pilot phase since June. Once fully launched,

tourism businesses in Singapore will be able to assess their current state of transformation against a holistic set of metrics, as well as access a new dynamic industry benchmark to measure against other companies and gauge the growth of the industry.

Finally, STB plans to enhance its Singapore Tourism Analytics Network by introducing new data domains and features, resources such as the Data College, as well as a governance playbook for companies to guide them on proper handling of data privacy.

"Covid-19 has led a paradigm shift that has accelerated data transformation from something that is good to have to something that is a must-have for survival," expressed Poh.

He added that STB is also launching a white paper, Beyond Covid-19 – Tourism Transformed, detailing its recovery predictions.

## Virtual payments the way forward for corporates

A lack of trust in people, the payment system or the overall payment process has hampered corporate adoption of virtual and tokenised payment solutions, opined Kurt Knackstedt, CEO, Troovo who spoke at an ITB Asia 2020 Virtual conference session.

While companies have primarily used corporate cards for supplier purchases for nearly three decades, Knackstedt believes that the time is up for these static card products. The current lull in business will enable companies to take the leap into virtual payments.

"People are no longer in the same office, so the ability to



run physical-proximity type processes – a wet signature on a document, or a rubber stamp that many Asian countries still require for purchases – will not work now. Virtual payments can help out," Knackstedt pointed out.

He encouraged companies to make use of robotic software, managed by a team of people, to centralise these payments, which will in turn take away work that is repetitive and prone to human error.

Doing so would also help to build trust in both the process and employees.

"It has to be as people-free

as possible. No one likes to fill expense reports, do paperwork, or wait two days to get three people to authorise the payment (for an airline ticket for a business trip)," he said.

Instead, an employee would get a virtual card generated, pushed to their phone, tap it at point-of-sale and know that the airline has received the card digitally and issued the ticket confirmation.

"The future of payment is any payment, anywhere in the world, anytime, run through any system, any scheme, any device, but all centrally-managed and all driven from a technology perspective," Knackstedt concluded. – **Rachel AJ Lee**

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# Trips that matter

Soul-stirring and eye-opening destination experiences are top of luxury travellers' wishlist today, and this appetite will change how tours are curated.

By **Marissa Carruthers**



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**Horseback riding with a horse whisperer in Mongolia is an example of an authentic destination experience in demand today**

**T**ransformational travel was slated to be the new buzz-word in the luxury market pre-pandemic. But even with the travel freeze today, experts predict that demand will soar once tourism resumes, fuelled by greater keenness among high-end travellers on curated magical experiences away from the crowds.

Christopher Lund, head of hotels at Colliers International, said there would be a huge shift in focus to itineraries that go the extra mile in allowing travellers to escape and have meaningful experiences.

He noted: "There will be much more of a focus on experiences. Holidays where travellers can take something away, especially around eco-tourism, wellness and conservation, as these all conform with the social distancing that has now become the norm."

Pre-pandemic, Asia's luxury tourism players had already been going the extra mile to curate experiences that money cannot buy. From accompanying a private butler to his village, to helping plant coral reefs

and meditating with monks, ultra-wealthy travellers no longer mind roughing it if it means securing an extra-special experience that pushes personal growth.

Andreas Grosskinsky, general manager at Destination Asia Indonesia, said for the last decade, luxury travel has been moving into the experiential arena, with more high-end travellers willing to splash out to enjoy authentic local experiences in style. That has changed with the pandemic, with guests becoming more willing than ever to trade in traditional luxury comforts for an incredible once-in-a-lifetime transformational experience.

Grosskinsky noted that "it's taken some time to educate travel consultants on this".

Tim Cordon, Radisson Hotel Group's area senior vice president, agreed that transformational experiences will be in high demand, and that hotels and travel companies should work together to make the most of this trend.

Curating bespoke experiences for high-end guests is high on the agenda at The Pavilions Hotels and Resorts, which crafts a range of Curated Journeys for guests, covering a range of niches, including culinary, adventure, recreation, wellness and family.

Simona Chimenti, general manager at The Pavilions Bali, said: "The big next step is somewhere in between experiential and transformational travel. Guests want to mix with locals and get a real feeling of local life. It's still luxury but there's an emphasis on experiences. I call it laidback luxury."

She added the desires of luxury travellers are changing from simply seeking five-star accommodation and high-end restaurants and transport, to experiencing each destination and the lives of the people who call it home.

Noted Chimenti: "The definition of luxury is shifting, it used to be about sitting in a golden cage and not going outside. Today, people are more interested in genuine service and creating memories to take back home and less about that standard luxury version."

For example, The Pavilions Himalayas

customises hikes for guests to meet monks at a monastery. At other properties in Asia, guests can go with their private butler back to his/her home village, and join a horse whisperer for a horseback adventure across Mongolia's plains.

Chimenti said: "We really want to capture the essence of a destination and offer something that goes off the traditional beaten path."

Climate change concerns are also shaping the transformational travel trend, with high-end clients wanting to leave as little impact on the environment as possible while helping to create a better world during their stay – another area Lund expects to see an uptick in demand within the luxury arena.

Five-star resort The Datai Langkawi gives transformational experiences an environmental twist. Located in a remote alcove at the foot of a 10 million-year-old rainforest, the resort has recruited naturalists and marine biologists to curate a series of nature-based experiences.

Spokesperson Celine Maginel said luxury travellers now sought more than the usual "bling bling", and the property could inject something extra from its presence among nature and biodiversity.

The resort works with local NGOs and involves guests in conservation and community work. This includes helping to transport coral from onsite nurseries and joining local artists in upcycling waste.

Rascal Voyages has also tapped into the conservation movement, curating transformational experiences onboard its exclusive floating villas while embracing the shift away from traditional luxury.

CEO Stephen Ebsworth said: "We're trying to move away from privilege and stuffiness."

"Exclusive, private, remote experiences that are close to nature will be well positioned for luxury travel in the near future."

As part of offerings, Rascal Voyages operates bespoke exploration cruises that team up with environmental NGO Conservation International to deliver unforgettable experiences with three of the world's best marine biologists. Guests can help to tag sea turtles, follow their migration path, and help marine biologists with their work.

During the first five exploration cruises, 25 new species of fish and a walking shark were discovered. Guests can even get to name any species they find.

Said Ebsworth: "By very definition, travel should be submerging visitors in an experience and be educational. People want to learn something and take that away."

# The event pirouette

Event companies that have made their digital shift are discovering it to be a positive and educational journey. By **Caroline Boey** and **Rachel AJ Lee**

Ducklin said: “The overall shift towards hybrid and virtual events meant that the types of jobs we were getting had changed. We are now seeing more remote interpretation jobs, and a change in attitude towards the technology.”

## Learning curve for all

The advancement in hybrid and virtual event format is no doubt an educational journey for event organisers and suppliers.

Working recently on a dental association meeting with attendees across five continents, Kenny Goh, founder, miceNeurol, said the virtual event had to be “market” and “target” focused, and session times limited to two time zones.

He noted that speaker management was more challenging because a speaker who gets the date and time mixed up “will have consequences down the line”.

Organisers must also invest in live support. Goh shared that 80 per cent of the delegates had “computer problems” like university firewalls or users not clearing their cache, adding that delegates often don’t read the sign-in instructions and smartphones users may not be able to access the event if YouTube or Vimeo is banned in their country.

Meanwhile, GlobalSign.in created a Digital Event Academy offering checklists, templates, guides and case studies to educate users when it launched its GEVME Live platform, which allows organisers to create events by populating the content.

“We know at this time we have to do a lot of education as many clients are not familiar with live streaming production,” said Daniel Tjan, director of customer success.

GEVME Live was tested for a Hong Kong event with some 300 exhibitors and where China was the target market. It garnered more than one million views. Tjan said the challenge was to keep attendees engaged eight hours daily for the week-long event.

Ace:Daytons Direct, founder, Nancy Tan, observed converting physical events to hybrid or virtual does not come cheap if very high quality engagement and professional studio facilities and personnel are needed.

“Clients are now probably just familiar with Zoom and do not know much about the reliability and safety of streaming platforms, the different components of creative production, etc,” she added.

Still, she believes such events will stay relevant even as physical gatherings resume because some delegates may not be able to travel to an event for whatever reason, or if attending a live event was too costly. – *Additional reporting by Karen Yue*



Corporate live-streams are becoming increasingly common

With ‘pivot or perish’ being the battle cry for event firms amid this pandemic, many traditional setups have found themselves sharpening their digital capabilities to remain relevant.

Embracing the online shift, Chab Events invested in staff training to grow them into digital product experts to drive the growth of its digital platforms under Chab LAB.

Alexis Lhoyer, Chab Events’ chief business officer, said: “Before, the teams needed to be comfortable with construction and carpentry, audio and lighting, or registration and set-up logistics. (We shifted our focus to) training our existing live events teams, as digital events are about stronger video content, streaming and conferencing technologies, HTML, online event platforms and interactivity solutions.”

The investment has provided the company with “the opportunity to create additional capabilities in the company”.

Reading the market right, Singapore events company, Jublia, developed a one-to-one meetings software called Match Virtual, which “has been used widely in various virtual and hybrid events since March 2020”, shared Errol Lim, COO and co-founder.

Malaysia’s Aavii Worldwide has also

found success in supporting its clients in the online space as soon as the country enforced its nation-wide Movement Control Order in March. Between April and July, it managed nine webinars and five live-streaming launches and award shows.

The company’s group CEO Francis Cheong recalled that the transition was not easy, with some “casualties” along the way.

“Some of our team members simply weren’t savvy enough for platforms like such Zoom, GoToWebinar, Webex and Microsoft Teams, and they stumbled. I had to transfer certain employees to manage social media or write articles. Many of them had numerous late-night (meetings) via Zoom and private training sessions during the lockdown, and they encountered numerous trial-and-error to ensure that our webinars work,” said Cheong.

“I was extremely lucky to have a dedicated team,” he concluded.

Jeremy Ducklin, managing director of Congress Rental Australia & Singapore, too, shared that event specialists had to endure a rapid transition, as clients that relied on remote interpretation as a plug-and-play solution in the beginning soon learnt that a “successful, smooth and professional” online event requires a “team of experts”.

# New cruises on the horizon



From left: Explorer Dream begins Taiwan island series; Majestic Princess cruises around Australia and New Zealand; Silversea Cruises' new voyages cover Antarctic

Cruise companies are thinking far ahead, beyond the cruising freeze, to announce new sailings around the globe

## Dream Cruises

Dream Cruises has rolled out a series of Island Hopping itineraries from July 27 this year, luring Taiwanese cruise fans onboard *Explorer Dream* to call at Peng Hu, Matsu Island, Kinmen and Hualien.

A highlight of these sailings is the opportunity to enjoy Taiwan Council of Agriculture's "2020 Top 100 Premium Agricultural Products" through an order-to-room retail service.

In addition, guests can sample popular local food brands including Sharetea, Taihu Beer, SunnyHills, and Mark's Teppanyaki from Marriott Taipei. Local travel experts who have been recruited as Dream Ambassadors will assist and guide guests in their native languages.

In launching its global cruising schedule, Dream Cruises will take a cue from the success of these island-hopping itineraries. Sailings will depend on the Covid-19 situation in affected markets and when homeport and destination countries reopen their borders.

For now, under Genting Cruise Lines' Cruise As You Wish programme, new and existing Dream Cruises and Star Cruises bookings prior to or on October 30, 2020, can be cancelled up to 48 hours before sailing for a 100 per cent cruise credit refund, which can be redeemed for any Dream Cruises or Star Cruises sailing embarking on or before March 31, 2021.

## Princess Cruises

Princess Cruises has released its Australia and New Zealand 2021-2022 season, which includes calls at South Pacific tropical destinations of Fiji, Papa New Guinea, New Caledonia, and Vanuatu.

One of its largest deployments ever offered, five ships will sail to 82 destinations in 19 countries on 59 unique itineraries. *Royal Princess*, *Emerald Princess*, *Sapphire Princess*, *Coral Princess*, and *Pacific Princess* will cruise this season with voyages ranging in length from two to 36 days. Options abound with sailings between a variety of homeports including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Auckland.

Itinerary highlights comprise roundtrip New Zealand sailings ranging from 11 to 14 days, from a variety of homeports in Australia; round-rip Tasmania voyages lasting five to 10 days; island-hopping in the South Pacific on voyages ranging from 11 to 35 days; and four one-way Australia and New Zealand voyages.

There are journeys farther to South-east Asia and North America, with several that connect North America to Australia in fall 2021 and spring 2022; each trip ranges from 27 to 29 days. For short getaways, there are two- to four-day getaways in Australia.

Princess has also announced a 2022 World Cruise which features 51 destinations, 29 countries and six continents, with two roundtrip options – from Fort Lauderdale (January 5, 2022) or Los Angeles (January 19, 2022).

This world cruise will cross the equator twice, feature 11 late night calls including an overnight stay in Dubai, visit 25 UNESCO World Heritage sites including the Archaeological City of Petra from Aqaba and the historical city of Jerusalem.

The cruise line has also released a number of itineraries outside of Asia-Pacific.

Guests sailing in summer 2021 for the US and Europe or from fall 2021 to spring 2022 cruise season for Panama Canal or to the Caribbean have a number of itineraries and cruise ships to choose from.

## Silversea Cruises

Silversea Cruises has announced 157 expedition voyages from January 2021 to July 2022, comprising new itineraries in the Galapagos with new ship *Silver Origin*, a 51-port Arctic grand voyage, the world's first ultra-luxury fly-cruise package to Antarctica, as well as the first-ever expedition world cruise.

Of its Galapagos Islands sailings, 68 new voyages will incorporate five maiden calls at Fernandina and Isabela islands with improved onshore programmes.

Departing on July 16, 2021, *Silver Cloud* will debut the Arctic Grand Voyage, spanning 51 destinations across seven countries. Over 63 days, *Silver Cloud* will journey through some of the world's most remote waters, retracing the route of famous explorers via the Northwest Passage crossing.

In Silversea's longest voyage to Antarctica to date, passengers will cross the Antarctic Polar Circle on a 20-day exploration aboard *Silver Explorer*. Departing on January 27, 2022, the cruise will venture to Marguerite Bay and potentially as far south as the Bellingshausen Sea.

For even greater luxury, Antarctica Bridge is the world's first ultra-luxury fly-cruise to the White Continent onboard the *Silver Explorer*.

Setting sail on January 25, 2022 is the 167-day Uncharted World Tour. *Silver Cloud* will call at 107 destinations in 20 countries. Joining guests on board will be 70 experts and 20 guest speakers who will share their insight into some of the most remote locations on Earth.

# Mark Ridley

The travel crisis has not disrupted New Distribution Capability (NDC) progression and has instead emphasised the standard's ability to improve critical servicing and communication functions for airlines and agencies. Mark Ridley, head of airline distribution solutions and NDC [X] program, Amadeus, talks to **Karen Yue** about its progress and what is being done to ensure it works for agencies

**Airlines are generally in a bad state during this travel crisis. How has this impacted NDC adoption by airlines, particularly those in Asia-Pacific?**

We haven't had any partners stop their projects. Some have slowed down a little because, as you know, they are facing bigger problems – they want to get back in the air and have passengers onboard, which are their top focus.

I think everybody is seeing NDC as the medium- to long-term future. The oil tank has started to turn, and it may take a while to make that complete change in direction but it is not going to stop now.

Most airlines see the advantages for themselves and want to move to this future of retailing. Those who can are continuing. In Asia-Pacific, we've had a number of large airlines, like Singapore Airlines, that are using our NDC tools.

But it isn't just Amadeus that is doing NDC; there are other aggregators in the market that is taking NDC content from airlines.

**How is the progress in Asia-Pacific compared to the rest of the world?**

I'm seeing airlines in this region really wanting to put differentiating content in NDC, whereas there are some airlines in other regions that are still trying to get the plumbing in place, or are replicating what they are doing now on EDIFACT, perhaps with slight alterations for NDC.

We've got other things happening in this region too. When we start to make a big travel agency roll-out of our products, I get the feeling that Asia-Pacific will be in a really strong position (for NDC adoption)

and to achieve an essential airline-agency collaboration (for mutual benefits from an improved buying and selling process).

**Speaking of that essential buy-in from both seller and buyer for NDC's success, what is the level of adoption and acceptance today from both parties?**

It is still quite low at the moment. We are piloting a few things in the market. We will need all the airlines in the region to be ready, you know, to be fully behind us and in the same way. Although the level of adoption is still low, I expect the next few months to see a great lift-off.

NDC is a two-sided thing and relies on the network effect. What we see on our side is that travel agencies are very demanding about what they want with NDC. What's the point of (going through the changes) if they are going to get the same air content that they do through EDIFACT channels?

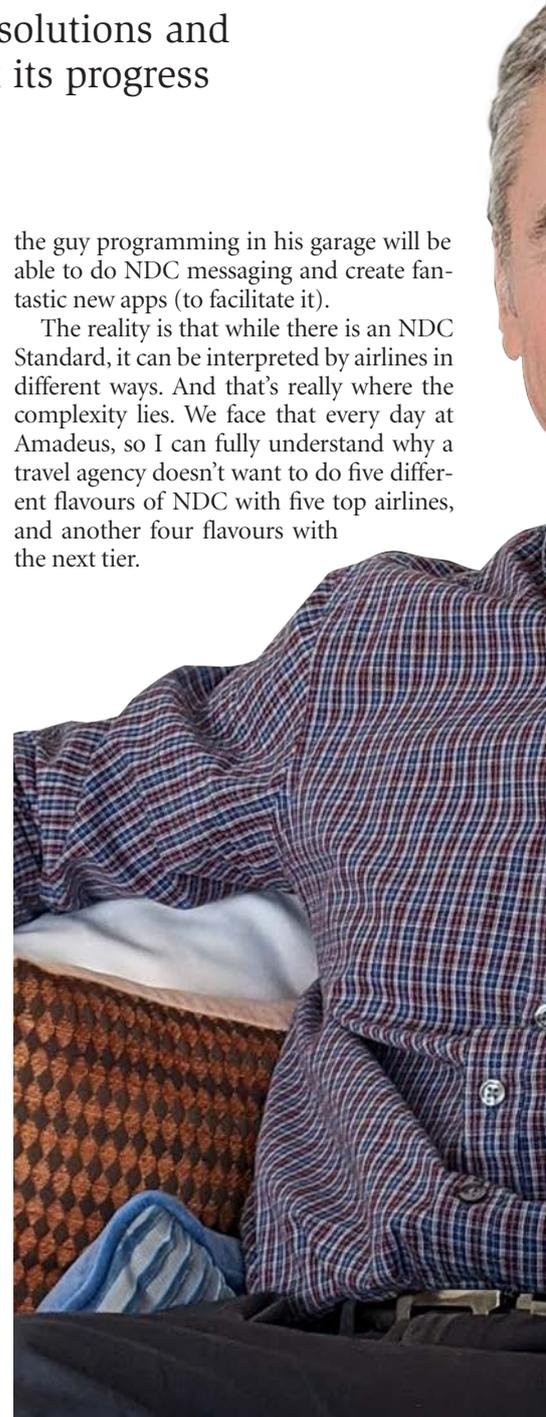
On the other side, airlines need to be ready to put their content (on NDC) and bring something more, something special, or something targeted to the table.

**There is still a sense of apprehension among travel agents about NDC, stemming largely from its complexity, the cost of having to alter their processes to accommodate NDC, and fear of losing GDS incentives just so they can access NDC content. Is NDC really as difficult and restrictive?**

When NDC was first announced, it was a great, new idea started by IATA with all the airlines pushing for it. It sounded like it was going to be a plug-and-play solution, and

the guy programming in his garage will be able to do NDC messaging and create fantastic new apps (to facilitate it).

The reality is that while there is an NDC Standard, it can be interpreted by airlines in different ways. And that's really where the complexity lies. We face that every day at Amadeus, so I can fully understand why a travel agency doesn't want to do five different flavours of NDC with five top airlines, and another four flavours with the next tier.



(The differences could come from) NDC version 18.2 from one airline and 19.1 from another. The data can also be different.

Today, the prime booking flow is relatively standard. We are finding that the important (functions) now are servicing, ticketing and payment, and that would include schedule changes and cancellations. These processes can be different from airline to airline, partly due to messaging and partly due to the business practices of the airline. These differences

are the ones causing travel agencies to go, “Whoa, I don’t really want to manage all that, just let me get my NDC content from someone with a simplified flow.”

There are a bunch of travel agencies that don’t book (air content) that fre-

quently (and therefore do not see the need to deal with the complexities), but even some of the really large travel management companies are not building direct NDC connections themselves. They are waiting for an aggregator like Amadeus to be in the middle and handle all that complexity in the backend.

Now, at Amadeus, we focus on making it simple for the travel counsellor who can always follow the shop, order, pay workflow no matter which airline he is buying from.

As you can imagine, we are doing a lot of work behind-the-scenes to normalise all that data so that everything (the interface) looks the same and travel agencies are not confused.



When we start to make a big travel agency roll-out of our products, I get the feeling that Asia-Pacific will be in a really strong position (for NDC adoption)...

We have three common interfaces today – the travel API, Amadeus Selling Platform Connect, and Amadeus cytric corporate booking tool. All handle NDC and traditional traffic. With Amadeus cytric in particular, (NDC and traditional) content looks exactly the same because it is normal people booking and they don’t know anything about NDC and want content as straight-forward as possible.

### What about the loss of incentives in booking NDC content?

The thing is, a lot of airlines are using NDC as an opportunity to change their commercial model. There are some travel aggregators in the market that can offer NDC content and are charging travel agencies for accessing their content directly.

From the airlines’ perspective, they see that there is less work for GDSs to do in the middle, so they feel they should not be paying as much. These are commercial discussions that go on between the airlines and us. That might lead to some adjustments to the model, and with that, some adjustments to incentives too.

At Amadeus, we try the best we can to retain the model that is in place and has been very successful for a very long time. We believe the current model can continue to work and bring value to all parties.

### The pandemic has led to some significant transformations in the travel and tourism industry. Does the crisis have an effect on NDC progress, perhaps in emphasising certain advantages of NDC that were never before appreciated?

There has been a big focus on NDCs being primarily a selling tool, but it is more than that.

One good thing about NDC is that it can bring along a wealth of information to travel agencies, not just pertinent to the sales process. There is now a lot of talk about rebuilding passenger confidence in the post-Covid phase. Airlines could share information (that helps educate and reassure passengers) on NDC, such as their social distancing rules, their enhanced hygiene and sanitisation procedures on the aircraft or at their lounges, etc. NDC has the capability to convey such information all through the different stages to the sellers and onwards to the customers.

The pandemic (and travel crisis) has also emphasised the importance of servicing. Amadeus has been working hand in hand with travel agencies since the day it was formed, so we know that the servicing side, such as duty of care, emergency support for corporate customers, flexible changes due to shifting meeting plans, etc. are just as important as the price point. In fact, a low price point isn’t enough to make a sale.

At the same time, the use of vouchers was previously not well supported by NDC, but we are starting to discuss how vouchers could be best used going forward.

### Are there already airline partners using NDC for such communications?

Not yet. NDC has the rich media capability, but airlines need to understand how they intend to use it (alongside other current communication channels like the press and online) and how to craft their message.

### What is Amadeus doing to get the NDC story right with its travel agency community?

It differs with each market segment. Generally though, once travel agencies start looking at the tools Amadeus has put in place (to access NDC content), they will understand that NDC is not a scary thing.

We also take feedback from our travel management and agency community to heart, and invest in making sure the servicing capability works. We cannot do this on our own, so we are sharing feedback with our airline partners and IATA.



# An essential market to tap

Large population with spending power makes South-east Asian Muslims an attractive segment for tourism



Muslim traveller preferences differ across the region

By Mimi Hudoyo

With one in three people in the world being a Muslim by 2060, destination marketers will need to realise now that the Muslim travel market is an essential one to tap, opined Hannah Pearson, founder of Pearson Anderson, a consultancy firm for NTOs and tourism companies based in Malaysia.

Speaking at the October 21 session Destination Marketing: How to Attract Southeast Asia's Muslim Travelers Post Covid-19, Pearson said: "They are high spenders; by 2024 Muslim outbound travel spend is estimated to reach US\$274 billion."

South-east Asia's population of over 240 million Muslims, and an expanding middle-class, makes the region an attractive one for destinations wanting to get a slice of the

Muslim travel pie, added Pearson.

To attract this segment of travellers, an understanding of their preferences is needed. According to a recent survey by Pearson Anderson and Singapore-based travel meta-search engine Wego, Indonesian Muslims prioritise safety while Malaysian Muslims are drawn to value-for-money deals.

Apart from basic requirements such as halal food and Muslim-friendly facilities, health and safety have become critical considerations today.

Fellow speaker Faried Ismunandar, co-founder/CEO, Pergiumroh.com, a digital marketplace for umrah in Indonesia, pointed out that young Muslim are drawn to new experiences and Instagramable attractions.

Tourism Australia, which has seen strong growth out of Indonesia and Malaysia, is rolling out welcoming messages to Muslim visitors, pointing out the country's big Muslim population and easy access to halal meals and services, said Brent Anderson, regional general manager, South and South-east Asia. In addition, Tourism Australia works with travel agents to provide information for their Muslim customers, as well as collaborate with Muslim publications and key opinion leaders to showcase what Australia has to offer. – Mimi Hudoyo

## In brief

### Crystal's extended confidence

Cruise company Crystal is updating its Crystal Confidence 2.0 programme to extend the no-money-down deposit window until January 5, 2021 for new and existing bookings. Crystal Confidence 2.0 is combinable with the company's Easy Book programme, which offers reduced deposits of just 15 per cent (from 25 per cent) and waived admin fees. For departures through the end of April 2021, final payment is only needed 60 days prior to first date of service.

The programmes apply to all 2021-2024 sailings aboard Crystal's fleet of luxury travel experiences.

### RedDoorz launches lifestyle brand

RedDoorz has created SANS Hotels, an economy lifestyle hotel brand as part of its strategy to build the largest new-age hospitality company in South-east Asia. The launch signals RedDoorz's new vision to become an ecosystem of various accommodation products, each backed by distinct brands and catering to the different consumer needs.

Properties under the new brand will feature trendy furnishings and amenities, and come with affordable room rates.

## Soundbite

"With up to 60% of global holiday excursions or experiences involving animals and nature, and up to 96% of travellers to Asia taking a wildlife tour, we must take positive actions right now (to protect wildlife and nature)." – Helen Usher, co-founder & director, Animondial

# Leadership reflections: MakeMyTrip's Deep Kalra

A revival of projects that were placed on the back burner and focusing on motivating team members were among the approaches MakeMyTrip took to ride out the pandemic.

Taking the audience into his mind during ITB Asia 2020 Virtual's Leadership in times of crisis keynote session on October 22, founder and group executive chairman, Deep Kalra, said the travel and tourism crisis shaved 95 per cent off his company's revenues in 1Q2020.

He recalled that one of his challenges was keeping the team motivated and busy at a time when revenues were zero and the travel outlook was gloomy.

Besides cutting costs which Deep regarded as a necessary step to ensure the company's survival, he also used the business down time to work on projects that were previously put on hold. One of that was the integration of two independent air ticketing technology systems, Goibibo and MakeMyTrip into a single system.

While the process would typically take years to complete, the team was able to finalise the integration in less than six months.

However, the one project that stood out most for Deep was the development

of a contact tracing app for India, done pro bono for the Indian government.

Deep said the app had 130 million downloads in just a few weeks since launch – the fastest app in the world to garner such huge numbers in a short time.

He described entrepreneurship as being able to navigate through uncharted waters and learn very quickly how the pandemic will impact the business, and staff, as well as make plans to take the company forward, past the crisis and into the future.

– S Puvaneswary

