



ITQ MAKES TOURISM AND TECHNOLOGY WALK HAND-IN-HAND

Travel and Tourism is an industry that excites most businesses and people. It has been there for a long, and it extends a hand in contributing towards comfortable travel for their customers across the country. Technology made a lot of things easy and had stirred a major reform within tourism companies. Here is an exclusive talk with Sandeep Dwivedi, COO at Inter Globe Technology Quotient, giving insights on the current scenario of the industry, and our major future goals.

How will a good technological approach towards Travel and Tourism work?

SD – As witnessed across centuries, we thrive in disruptions. The major example is the discovery of the wheel and using that wheel for mobility. Everything that drives the business of mobility today is rooted in the discovery of the wheel. The way disruptions back in the 4th century BC inspired our ancestors to invent the wheel and then transform potter's wheel into the wheel for chariot is an innovation we can base our future technological inventions on. If we talk about this millennia, all our industrial operations have been driven by technology, where most of the last century was dedicated to physical developments in mobility and travel, this century, as we see, is mostly about the mental or software aspect of it, emphasized further by the ongoing pandemic. So, a good technological approach for our sector at this time will be thinking differently and building technologies that empower decision-making while enhancing mobility choices within the confines of safety and sustainability. The outcome will be advanced technological prowess to offer individually aligned travel and itinerary recommendations, virtual travel experience in real-time, and reduced processing time for both booking travel and taking the planned trip among other things. The advantage for businesses will be efficient mechanism and operational capabilities with increased trust in the industry, and for customers, better and safer travel options, more time for fun, and a simpler experience that calls for an encore.

Looking at the current situation, when do you expect a tangible recovery in the tourism sector?

SD – The good thing about the present day is, recovery is quite dominant in the minds of decision-makers both in the public and private sectors. Strategies are already in place and actions, underway to drive recovery. Recently, the centre announced it is considering extending tourist visas to vaccinated individuals, opening lines for international tourists. This is a huge step considering India earned international tourism revenue worth 31,661 million USD in 2019. Domestically, airlines are now allowed to operate at 85% capacity, a decision taken by the centre after monitoring the current status of scheduled flight operations and passenger demand for travel. So, directing strategies within the lines of safety to revive the industry will in turn increase the inflow of money in the country. It is important to note that the inflow of money is quite significant at this point considering rising inflation across the national and global economy and its adverse impact. With that in mind, a tangible recovery can be expected anytime between 2022 and 2024. The coming year will play a crucial role and be a deciding factor.

How are you calibrating your strategy to meet new reality?

SD – Our community of travel agents has been and will always be our top priority. The only thing closer to this priority now is the traveller's safety. For the former, we are focusing on building operation-boosting technologies that will further smoothen the

flow of ticket booking and management. Our leading products like VR3, short for Void, Reissue, Refund, and Revalidation are being infused with modern technologies to enhance their processing power. We have our chatbot readily available to answer and process booking-related queries in real-time on any mobile phone. For travelers, we are focusing on better safety deliverables and securing their travel with new-age insurance options.

Artificial Intelligence is an emerging tool in various industries? How can it impact the Tourism Industry, and help regain its lost potential?

SD – The prime advantage of artificial intelligence is increased predictability. That is something we, in the travel industry, need at the moment. To be able to predict safe destinations for travelers and offer them the same would be a huge turning point. At the moment, there is a tremendous ebb and flow between willingness to travel and the risk of another wave hitting the major tourist attractions. Between these risk-averse and risk-prone options, a traveller needs safer selections offered to them, at the right time, right price with the right safety net. It is fair to say we can depend on artificial intelligence to separate the wheat from the chaff and deliver such safer options to travelers in the least possible time. If we can top this with chatbot technology, where AI-driven selections are offered by chatbots in real-time, the final result will be a highly advanced industry ready to serve and delight. Once industry gains this prowess, we will likely witness a heightened trust in travel and a boost in tourism without ending in overcrowded destinations tampering with safety.

AI should be used as a Growth booster, fastening our Travel and Tourism industry, and making it more dependable and sustainable. What domains under Travel and Tourism can be touched by AI technology?

SD – Overcrowded destinations have been a big detriment in recovery as driven by its impact the state ministries are compelled

It is important to note that the inflow of money is quite significant at this point considering rising inflation across the national and global economy and its adverse impact.

to impose regulations for the safety of its natives and that of travelers. This pushes the recovery trajectory further backward, and what we need at the moment, and need direly is a forward push. To ensure a moderate inflow of tourists at a given destination, we would need the predictability of artificial intelligence. So, to answer your question in short, the domains which can use AI at this time are, firstly, destination recommendations, including real-time recommendations of less crowded local attractions by personalizing journeys with IoT and wearables. Secondly, improving price forecasting because the more the demand rises, tracked through clicks and other means, the higher the price. This shift is necessary to be caught in real-time to help maintain price thresholds to not drive travellers away. Thirdly, ensuring customer data received for offering personalized options are secured to enhance trust in travel.

How do you see the role of technology in mitigating the impact of the current crisis?

SD – Firstly, India is in congruence with first-world countries in terms of technological developments. This is accelerated further by schemes like AtmaNirbhar Bharat. Secondly, we are keeping pace with other countries in terms

of vaccine and digitalization of vaccine certificates. So, when digital passports become a norm, we'll be running strongly in the race. Together, digitization and technological advancements will pave way for safer travel options and experiences. Consider advancements like robotic and biometric technologies that minimize human contact, especially in the air travel segment; VR and AR that assist in personalizing choices, while booking, and many others that are already underway. All this will lead to building more trust in travel even amidst the current crisis, minimize the risk of the virus, and give a boost to the industry as more customers take that trip.

What new technologies will be the world witnessing by ITQ in coming times?

SD – Bot technology is our leading priority at the moment, considering the pandemic. We are in a constant quest for bringing advanced chatbot capabilities to our community of travel agents. This is to ensure there is a safety net in every transaction, especially within physical limits, and enhanced efficiency in delivering cost-effective, relevant, and personalized selections.

Are you planning to launch any new product to assist travel agents in the COVID-19 world?

SD - It is too early to reveal as many of our developments are still in the nascent stage. What we can reveal with surety is something intelligent and advanced is building up behind the scenes. As with any new technology, there needs to be rigorous testing; we are ensuring our product is ready for the market that needs something to simplify routine operations, enhance prediction capabilities, and be technologized to offer better travel selections. ■

