

Namaste Tourism, creating travel demand where none exists

By **admin** - April 18, 2022



Subhash Motwani, Founder and Director of Namaste Tourism, has been in the travel trade for over 34 years, combining a blend of experiences. Having visited over fifty countries, Subhash ensures every bespoke itinerary is unique and authentic, as he believes in encouraging the discerning traveller to explore the world experientially. Excerpts from the interview with Subhash...

– **Prashant Nayak**

Q. With India resuming its scheduled international flights, how excited are you?

The resumption of scheduled international flights augurs well for the tourism industry. However, the challenges will be the efficient management in terms of flight schedules, frequency, pricing, and how the demand outlook will be vis-à-vis supply. It appears that there will be greater demand than inventory available. We do not expect the airfares to go down phenomenally, also considering the rising fuel prices with the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Another challenge is to have efficient personnel at airports to handle pre-COVID level crowds, and here too, we will see at least for a few months, the reporting times at airports will be longer. It's fantastic that scheduled flights have restarted, although one has to be ready to face the harsh reality as highlighted.

Q. With outbound travel opening up, how will you be optimising your efforts to unlock the potential of India's leisure and business travellers?

Most companies are facing the challenge of having a leaner team compared to pre-COVID times. So efficient time management to handle genuine authentic requests will be the top priority.

We have been pursuing a model of a Trip Planning Fee even before COVID-19 and we will continue to do so. Thus eliminating the "window shoppers" looking to book with anyone as long as they get a good deal. Unfortunately, in our country, the tourism industry is not regulated even though we have the unique distinction of being the country with the maximum number of associations catering to tourism and travel services.

With changing times, we have to change our concept of how we deal with our clients as we are experts in our domain. Specialisation is the key and in our case, as we are luxury and experiential travel curators, we will work in a manner where we continue to charge a Trip Planning Fee before sharing itineraries with our clients and if they do intend to book, we would adjust the amount paid towards booking services with us. We have seen that clients too are receptive to this new way of working as they recognise the authentic travel designers from the travel agents who just merely act as intermediaries – buy a product, mark it up and sell it to the clients without applying their mind whether the product would suit the client's profile.

Given our product knowledge and expertise, especially in off-beat destinations and out-of-the-box ideas, we are approached by several retail agents too for a few off-beat ideas. Even in the limited B2B space that we are into for our highly specialised destinations, we will only be assisting agents against payment of a nominal fee which could be subsequently adjusted in bookings. This way we optimise our time and focus on quality and not quantity as we have never been in the numbers game.

Also, we have reviewed our core strength, which is itinerary planning, and we do assist clients in visa consulting and flight tickets only if they are planning their itineraries and holidays with us. Free advice is passé and specialisation is in.

Q. Which are some of the destinations that you are currently promoting with your trade partners?

Our tagline has been "Exploring places like never before." We have always been an experiential-centric company and not destination centric in our approach. Destinations vary based on seasonality, client choices for experiences, budgets, and several other variables. Let us take France as an example; in addition to Paris, we would focus on the Occitanie region and its beautiful villages. For an automobile enthusiast, we would offer Germany, which is home to five major car brands of the world. For those who are into spa experiences, affordable world-class spas are available in Central Europe (which many incorrectly refer to as Eastern Europe) – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia to name a few. Those looking for hiking, trekking trails with a combination of Midnight Sun could venture into the Nordic Countries – the choice

would depend on Covid protocols, flight connectivity, ease of visa, weather and regions to be explored. Self-drive experiences could be offered in Morocco or culinary and historical experiences could be offered in Israel. A wildlife enthusiast may want to explore wildlife either in Kenya or Tanzania or South Africa or ZimZam (Zimbabwe Zambia) combo or Botswana or even Namibia – it all depends if it is the client's first safari or whether the client wants to include varied experiences – such as exploring the Big 5 of the ocean. That is why we distinguish ourselves from others and call ourselves ELIC (Experiential and Luxury Itinerary Curators). We are not travel agents. We are in the business of matchmaking, matching the right product portfolio to a client's needs to ensure that we exceed clients' expectations.

We have classified clients into three categories – the first one who are just seeking accommodation options, the second one who have booked own accommodation but wish to book experiences and the last category where they want us to help them with end to end solutions offering a combination of experiences with accommodation – a Namaste authenticated signature programme. Some clients wish to partake in Volontourism as part of their travel plan, some wish to include active tourism – activities including a hike or a trek built in as part of the programme, some wish to include varied transportation options whilst traversing a country or a region. That is where a role of an ELIC becomes significant.

Q. Are you working out new and attractive packages, to entice Indian travellers? What new attractions and experiences have come up at some of your destinations?

We wish to distinguish ourselves as an organisation that creates demand where none exists. There are some stunningly unknown places in proximity to major cities that many people are unaware of. In Asia, our focus will be on the Indo-China circuit as the Far East sells on its own. In the Australia Pacific region – Australia has amazing experiences to offer across its seven states, South Africa has amazing train journeys – Limpopo, Kwa Zulu Natal province along with the North West could offer several exciting choices along with Eastern and Western Cape, Gauteng and the Mpumalanga Region. Europe is rich in culture, cuisine, wine, and history. If clients want to explore the WWII story trail – we can offer Berlin to Warsaw and take clients to locations that have been part of WWII history. South America has more to offer beyond Machu Picchu in Peru, which is a must-visit. Central America has exciting culture, stunning landscapes, and self-driving holidays covering the longest road trip in the world, the Pan American Highway starting from Prudhoe Bay in Alaska and ending in Ushuaia – the southernmost city in the world, can be broken into segments and offered to driving enthusiasts.

We have been an official travel partner of the BMW Berlin Marathon and we will be taking a few runners to run the marathon later this year, followed by some exciting post tours to offer. In 2023, we plan to include a few more exciting runs across the world. From Svalbard and Greenland in the North to Antarctica in the south, the world is waiting to be explored experientially and we are geared up for it.

Q. Are you working on traditional physical campaigns for your trade engagements like in the pre-pandemic days?

Our products are for a very niche segment of the audience. We do not cater to tourists but to travellers who want to go Glocal (going global and staying local). Our target market is clients who wish to explore offbeat locations from Lake Balaton in Hungary to the biodiversity of Costa Rica, from the Salt Flats in Bolivia to the largest religious monument in the world in Cambodia, from reel to real stories to hub and spoke travel for those who do not wish to pack and unpack each day of their travels, we offer a plethora of experiences which are beyond the scope of traditional physical campaigns. I leave them for the Travel Agents. Our clients are mostly word of mouth and referrals and who want to experience discreet, sustainable and experiential luxury as our focus has always been quality over quantity. The pandemic has enabled us to connect to the best of travel trade partners virtually sitting in the confines of our homes and offices and we have been able to expand our knowledge, product range and connections too without having to participate in trade shows or engage in travel trade gathering as frequently as was the case in pre-pandemic days.



admin

<http://traveltradejournal.com>