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## TOP TALK

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# Survival of the fittest

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Hemant Mediratta May 03, 2020, 01.38 PM IST



**Hemant Mediratta**  
Founder, One Rep Global



**F**rom predictions of futurists to data scientists to veteran industry leaders, enough and more has been said about the disruption caused by the pandemic on the tourism business. Most of them are in the realm of doom and gloom. However question facing all of us in the tourism business is “what do we need to do today, tomorrow and day after? Simply put Survive – Revive – Thrive.



Often faced with the question which in top of mind with everybody today – when are we going to back to normal? Some say 12 months, some say 18 months and some 24 months. I believe the question should be what the “new normal” will look like. More simply put – when are we going have a market and what will that look like?

9/11 changed the way we fly. Checking in hours before a flight, crossing multiple security checks, frisking, standing in X ray machines to removing shoes, belts, jewellery and what not.

Covid 19 will change the way we travel and how tourism operates.

There is definitely no going back to normal but adjusting to the new normal.

Some segments of the business will revive earlier than others. Predictions indicate and logically so that domestic travel, corporate Travel, FITs, staycations etc would be the first segments to recover. However the key is which component of the business will not just survive but thrive.

Darwin’s theory of “Survival of the Fittest” tells us that it was not the strongest, not the largest or the most deadly species that survived. It was the most adaptable species that piped others and thrived.

Our industry is extremely fragmented and made of small enterprises that compete ferociously with each other. With limited clients in the near future, the competition will be even more intensified especially amongst travel agents. Inbound specialists for lack of any light at the end of the tunnel are contemplating getting into domestic travel. Outbound agents have HNI clients and they are

domestic travel agents who were anyway operating on low margins will do everything to guard their turf. The travel agent market is in for some interesting times.

On the other hand highly capitalized businesses like Large Hotel Chains and Cruises will try to aggregate demand and put their muscle behind for recovery. Chain strength will come handy and lower their marketing costs. Cross sell between group properties will be more intensified. The luxury hotels on top of the food chain will tend to show faster recovery.

Cruising is relatively new to Indian travelers. To most Indians it means large ships with thousands of passengers eating and drinking. However with international borders being closed for the near future, there will be emergence of a relatively nascent segment of “Luxury River Cruising” within our own country. A lot of good quality operators have been operating this “best kept secret” mostly on the Ganges starting from Kolkata. Till now reserved for foreign travelers, this is likely to change and these intimate small luxury river boats will open up the world of Luxury River cruising to our Indian domestic travelers. Worldwide agents make huge commissions on selling cruises, maybe this will be a start for the travel agents to start promoting river cruising in India. New segments and markets have to emerge for travel agents to differentiate themselves.

Once the crisis is over there will be an entirely new set of customers that will seek advice of a qualified travel professional or consultant to assist them. So it's time to reskill and upskill for agents as the theory of survival of the fittest will hold true now more than ever.

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