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Travellers will gravitate towards booking through agents: Mediratta

Senior Luxury Hotelier and Global Hospitality Consultant Hemant Mediratta, spoke of the times ahead and how he felt strong leadership could translate to success.

Bikramjit Ray ETTravelWorld Updated: April 27, 2020, 13:19 IST



The post Covid-19 trends emerging according to Senior Luxury Hotelier and Global [Hospitality](#) Consultant [Hemant Mediratta](#), include heightened environment and social consciousness, people talking fewer, more immersive trips, rather than 10 trips a year.

He says, off season travel will also see a boost as it is less crowded. Travellers in general will pack differently, with more emphasis on sanitisation and personal protective clothing like gloves and masks. They may also carry a health card along with their passports, he thought.

Initially there will be more car trips, followed by trains, busses and then planes. Private jet, yacht and villa rentals will increase, he said. [Travel insurance](#) will also go up, given recent experiences.

Social distancing, will be the name of the game, whether it's restaurants or sightseeing. Institutions will have to adapt to the new reality. It will take more time at airports, immigration, monuments though, Mediratta added

“The travel industry will be a different world and this change will come sooner than we think. The manner in which we approached our business is going to change dramatically. 9/11 changed the way we travel by airplanes forever, Covid will change the entire process of travel - right from planning the choice of a destination, how we get there, where we stay, how we stay, what we eat, what we experience and how we interact with people,” he said.

Mediratta, who was most recently the Sr Vice President Sales for [The Oberoi Group](#) for the past 15 years, has also served on the board of several tourism industry associations.

Mediratta believes that travel agents would gain when the market emerges from this crisis.

“Now more than ever, consumers will seek inputs and advice from travel agents on which components of the travel to choose that are safe, immersive and fit the style of the traveller. It was also evident that during this crisis bookings made through travel agents got a higher rate of refunds as compared to self-booked holidays. The travel agents were following up with the airlines, hotels, transport companies on behalf of the guest to seek refunds. So experienced agents in luxury travel will be in demand and more travellers will gravitate towards booking through agents,” he thought.

Taking on the topic of luxury, Mediratta began by explaining what he meant by luxury. “Luxury is very fluid and personal. It has different meanings for each one of us. For some it may mean five star [luxury hotels](#) and [Michelin](#) starred restaurants, however I believe luxury is more of thoughtfulness – I get what I want, as I want it, at the time I want it. Basically doing what you love in the best possible manner,” he said.

Almost the entire world is battling this pandemic and over 100 countries are in some form of lockdown so it's not a localised or regional problem. The virus is here to stay, so the moment some kind of cure appears, we need to start thinking of management rather than avoidance. The key for any traveller is safety and hygiene and as a result the Luxury traveller's behaviour will change, he said.

Hotel amenities may have to include safety protective gear and sanitizers. Air quality may become a defining feature now. Travellers will choose based on safety and hygiene ratings hotels to stay in so there be certifications that will have to be displayed. Off location resorts which are small in size and adhere to safety norms will see a boost in revenue, he added.

“There will be pressure on pricing and rates will be depressed but it will not be all bad for Luxury Hotels. Considering they are at the top of the food chain and usually follow strict protocol on safety and hygiene, if they manage the communication well, they will be able to garner not just their share of business but would also eat into the secondary competitors by offering compelling value. This will ensure depressed ADRs but may end up in higher occupancy than anticipated,” he said.

“Clearly Delhi and Mumbai are big feeder markets and they impact business all over the country. Their prolonged lockdown is likely to bring deeper pain to hotels that depend on these two major markets. In my estimation the opening of markets is likely to be in a phased manner across the country. The pick-up from Delhi and Mumbai will also be gradual and in line with other markets. The key is to get consumer confidence back when the lockdown lifts and how we learn to live with Covid-19,” he added.

Mediratta believes management of any crisis lies with the leadership. “The leader should infuse confidence in the team and provide a clear path out of this situation. This helps the team to see the light at the end of the tunnel,” he said.

“Stay in touch with your current and prospective customers on what you are doing, what the team is doing, how you are making the hotel a safer place for them when they return. Social media is an effective tool apart from emailing or personal calls by front of the house staff who know the customers. Now is the time that each employee should in some shape or form connect with consumers and customers they know. This will build a bridge and will go a

long way in cementing the relationships. Over communication at this stage is good. Create communication that is emotive and touches the hearts of people,” he added.

“Be gracious in your deals as the market will anyways force you to reduce price rapidly. Be the first one out of the door with real value deals as business on books for the next 30 days post May 4 (if all goes according to schedule) will be literally ZERO. Establish leadership position on this as customers will remember the first hotel to do it,” he stressed.

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