



Changing Face of Urban Tourism Post Covid: Asian Experience

6th May 2021



Introduction

Mumbai First in collaboration with CityNet brought together experts from South Asia and South-East Asia to discuss the changing face of city tourism in the post-covid period. The experts discussed post covid strategies for the tourism sector. They talked about tourism plans and strategies of the Government of Maharashtra and Taipei. Moreover, they discussed reviving cities with a global perspective, revitalizing and rethinking strategies. This informative discussion concluded with various suggestions to improve tourism in Maharashtra and other cities.

Key Highlights

- The spectrum of tourist's places and activities in Maharashtra is beyond imagination. Maharashtra is a tourist's paradise.
- The Taiwan tourism plan in the new normal after the pandemic to focus on rebuilding domestic travel, redesigning new travel model and rethinking global marketing strategies to boost tourism.
- Some Important Measures to be taken by Taipei Government to promote tourism -Integrate digital technology to experience large scale tourism events and sightseeing spots in Taipei City, Coach the industry practitioners to obtain safe travel stamps, Cross-industry integration to offer business opportunities.
- Use of digital technology to discover the demands of target groups, and to design tourism themes and marketing strategies.
- Maharashtra has come out with different initiatives like Caravan services, Argo tourism, industry status, and reducing the license requirement for setting up a new establishment.
- The Government is bringing out a sustainable tourism policy in few months to make Maharashtra the most desirable destination for green tourism.
- Safe India campaign/strategies are needed to promote India & Mumbai as a safe tourist destination after India's image was tarnished by western media.

Discussion Summary

Mrs. Valsa Nair Singh

*Principal Secretary, Maharashtra Tourism
Department, Government of Maharashtra*



Mrs. Singh expressed her views on the beauty of the city. Maharashtra has a beautiful spiritual connection that caters to what the tourists need, from a child to an old man everyone can enjoy the tourism of Maharashtra.

Mrs. Singh's presentation on 'Maharashtra, the land of great contrasts' talks about the contrast Maharashtra has from dazzling heights to dazzling sands – mighty Sahyadri's and beautiful Konkan ranges. In terms of monuments, Maharashtra has both manmade and natural monuments like the Lonar Lake, also known as the Lonar crater which was created by a meteorite collision impact and is a notified National Geo-heritage Monument, located at Lonar in Buldhana district of Maharashtra. It has both ancient and modern architecture – Ajanta caves and the New Mumbai Airport. Royal trains of Maharashtra and sky-high aeroplanes, Maharashtra has contrast in transportation as well. It has access to Fine dining in urban restaurants and its glorious street food. In terms of adventure, you get to have both – above water and also underwater. The state has a lot to offer! You get to see a contrast in sports as well- rural and urban sports both are seen in Maharashtra.

Maharashtra is a 'country' in a state with many vibrant cities. It is the most urbanized state of India which ranks 1st in terms of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). It is the leading state in India for industrial developments, foreign investments and agricultural produce. The commercial capital of India, Mumbai is situated in Maharashtra and is the main embarkation point to India. Maharashtra has a robust infrastructure with 4 international airports and Mumbai airport is among one of the busiest airports in the world, also it has 18 smaller airports. Moreover, an amphibian air service has been launched in Maharashtra recently. Maharashtra has excellent connectivity by road and its integrated rail network. The state has 110+ Agro Tourism Centres and it is a hub for medical tourism including wellness centres covering yoga, Ayurveda and naturopathy. Maharashtra has so much to offer!

Mrs. Singh presented the virtual audience with enchanting visuals into Maharashtra's iconic tourist destinations. All holidays in Maharashtra start with Mumbai, "a city that never sleeps", the city where you can see the past, the present and the future. The gateway of India is one of the most important heritage monuments in Mumbai. *Chhatrapati Shivaji*

Terminus, with beautiful marvellous architecture is one of the world heritage sites on the list of UNESCO. Other things for which Mumbai is famous include the Prince of Wales Museum, Taj Hotel, the Mumbai Dabbawalas (the famous Mumbai's tiffin service) which was a Harvard Business School case study, the ten-day Ganpati festival is a unique tourism attraction for the city, the Dahi Handi festival, Sanjay Gandhi National Park which is the only national park in the world that is surrounded by the city of Borivali and the Elephanta caves UNESCO World Heritage site.

Maharashtra is the place to be if you want to know more about the life of Mahatma Gandhi. Mani Bhuvan is the memoir of Mahatma Gandhi and is located in Mumbai. The Aga Khan palace located in Pune is one of the biggest landmarks in Indian history where Mahatma Gandhi was kept as a prisoner. Gandhi Tirth is a 65,000 sq. ft. structure located in Jalgaon; it is a must-visit for anyone who wants to know more about the life of Gandhi. The Sevagram Ashram in Wardha where Gandhi Ji stayed many years is also a good tourism spot.

Maharashtra has a collection of heritage sites. Ajanta Caves are located on the hillside and are a UNESCO World Heritage site. Close to the Ajanta Caves is the Ellora Caves which is also a UNESCO World Heritage site. Kailash Temple located in Maharashtra is the largest single monolithic structure in the world. Lonar crater is another gem situated in the State of Maharashtra. Hills stations located in Maharashtra include Matheran which has no vehicles allowed, Khandala, Lonavala, Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani famous for paragliding, Chikhaldara and Amboli. There are 354 forts in the state. Forts such as Raigarh fort, Pratapgad fort, Murud Janjira fort, Sindudurgh fort, Daulatabad fort and Shivneri hold historic and heritage value. Sightings of Tigers are the highest in the Tadoba National Park in the State, easily accessible from the Nagpur airport. Melghat National Park, Pench National Park, Dajipur wildlife sanctuary, Karnala Bird Sanctuary and Radhanagari wildlife sanctuary are some of the prominent tourist destinations located in Maharashtra for all the wildlife enthusiasts. Vengurla beach, Ganpati Phule beach, Tarkarli beach are some of the pristine beaches yet to be discovered and experienced. Ramtek Temple, Trimbakeshwar Temple and the Shirdi temple are some of the most frequented spiritual sites with people visiting from across the country. Deccan Odyssey, a luxury transportation service, is a joint venture of the Government of Maharashtra and the Ministry of Railways (Govt of India), connecting so many attractive tourist destinations in the State. It is one of the most luxurious trains in the world.

Be it fashion, food or shopping, Maharashtra has it all. Mrs. Singh recommends tourists to visit and in return savour a slice of India. Visiting Mumbai and Maharashtra is as good as experiencing India. She welcomed everyone to visit the State with all that it has to offer.

Ms. Chuen-huey Jiang

Senior Specialist, Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government



Ms. Chuen-huey Jiang's presentation on Taipei City Tourism Recovery provided insights on the future of tourism, in the new normal that is the post-pandemic period, highlighted the impact of covid-19 on the tourism industry of Taipei, which experienced a 100% decrease in the numbers of visitors due to the restriction on the entry of non-citizens.

She talked about relief and revitalization measures for mitigating the covid-19 impact through measures. Relief Plans for the Tourism industry in Taipei City included fiscal support measures, employment subsidies, grant programs and training programs for people under quarantine. Fiscal support measures such as tax delays for businesses for 12 months, reduction in property tax rates for hotel and travel industries from 3% to 2% and subsidies for hotel and tourism industry overhead expenses. Business revitalization plans included in the relief plans for the tourism industry were specifically quarantined hotels and other Taipei tourism incentives.

Taiwan had a list of quarantine hotels, in Taipei, there were 640 total hotels and 6500 hotel rooms turned into quarantine hotels. They prepared subsidiary programs for guests as well as hotel owners and they had an Incentive Program for travel groups as well as backpackers. For post-pandemic development, Taipei had a travel transformation forum set up with the idea, a new normal after a pandemic is a new tomorrow. It was a three-step process:

1. Rebuild domestic travel to stay inside the country and travel more as travelling overseas is not safe
2. Redesign travel models
3. Rethink global marketing - New travel models for new tomorrow!

Ms. Chuen-huey Jiang talked about the 10 Action plans for the next 2 years brought up in Taipei. Firstly, she talks about the infrastructure plans with a venue equipped with smart traffic data. Then she spoke about the stay-at-home economy utilizing integrated digital experiences into major tourism events and embedding digital technologies in tourist destinations in Taipei. And lastly, industry support via tourism safety programs, incentive pilot programs for travel agencies, certificates for hot spring hoteliers etc.

She talked about the tourism industry policy White Paper in which it was proposed to Integrate digital technology to experience large scale tourism events and sightseeing spots in Taipei City, coach the industry practitioners to obtain safe travel stamps, cross-industry

integration to offer business opportunities, to use digital technologies to discover demands of target groups and to design tourism themes and marketing strategies. She also spoke about promoting the AR BR technologies for tourists and Google search Console that helps to analyse data which would be useful for tourists. Taiwan is the first to coach industry practitioners to obtain safe travel stamps. CityNet is looking for Corporation with members through advertising, meetings, promotions either online or offline in the future.

Mr. Ashwini Kakkar

*Managing Partner IndVenture Partners LLP and
Director of the Travel Partnership Corporation
(TTPC) Washington DC*



Mr. Ashwini Kakkar talks about the current scenario that does not look encouraging and says that it would be worthwhile to look a little beyond and try to pre-imagine what things will look like in a few months. He suggests '**Reward Tourism**'- people must treat themselves for bearing all the many difficulties through Covid and reward themselves with tours and travels. India must adopt to *implement this reward system, starting from domestic travels and then eventually leading to international travels*. Every city will want the tourists to visit their city first and it will be a very challenging situation for each city. Some cities like Dubai and Maldives have become very innovative and strategic. **Vaccination** is an idea introduced by Dubai- which means one can travel to Dubai, get vaccinated and stay there for 14 days for the second dose if you want and then come back. *Vaccination is an innovation but there are many more such innovations in the pipeline*. The question arises who will be these first travellers. 70% of Israel, 60% UK and 50% of the US and many more countries have been vaccinated and in these countries' vaccination drives have already taken route. *Another parameter he talks about is the people with passports*. Many countries have more than half a billion people who already have passports. The majority, which is 80% of the vaccinated population globally, includes those above the age of 45 and they are one of the largest traveller segments of the world. These are the people who travel the most. A lot of countries do not require a VISA. Those countries which do not permit entry without VISA can rescript their policy to give out VISA with long gestation visas, say 120 days between the date of issue and the date of travel. This will not impact the VISA duration validity. This way, they can build loyalty to various tourist destinations for better demand and great opportunities.

He also talked about what cities need to be thinking of as we try to find our way out of these tough times. *The first step is to enhance and enlarge outdoor spaces and then encourage the customers to use these outdoor spaces*. And people should check into city Hotels with large outdoor spaces. This would be a great opportunity for the hotels as well as the hotels would

be full. After being locked in for such a long time, outdoor spaces are what people need. Hotel chains especially global hotel chains should launch a monthly package not a daily package to have long staying customers. It should include everything like WIFI and food so people can come and enjoy it with their families. **Cities should encourage virtual tours of the city's museums and historic sites.** Customers can be encouraged to contribute, even the smallest contribution for the maintenance of these monuments, it is almost like crowd-sourcing. A lot of people living in the same city have not visited these monuments. They will want to be going through a virtual tour and to pay a little something for upkeeping these monuments. He discussed using this period for a technological transformation of utmost importance. *Taipei has shown a great example of technological transformation.*

Expediting infrastructure transformation could take place during this time as there is not much traffic and utilization on those roads. **Sustainability transformation** is of the utmost importance and all humans should start taking it seriously within our geographical areas and try to make it a plastic-free environment. Similarly, it is important to find a balance between the visitor inflow and the permanent residents in cities where there is an overflow of tourists. It is vital to **harmonize health documentation** and leverage it for health safety and security during these times. To harmonize the cities can allow people into areas such as Cinemas, restaurants while ensuring all are protected during all this. He spoke about *frugal living is a beautiful concept.* It is very important to increase the share of voice either on social media, advertisements or seminars. As various countries open up for global travelling, it is very important to keep upgrading the voices.

It must be recognized that people will be willing to spend a little more as they have made savings and they haven't been travelling during these times. So, the customers are willing. But it also has to be encouraged because the number of planes in the world has fallen by a very large number and the capacity itself has fallen to almost a half and so plane travels are going to become rather expensive not only because of the shortage of planes but also because of the rising oil prices and mostly because of the sustainability factor.

Mr. Kakkar strongly recommends *that cities and countries waive taxes on travel and tourism.* Also, presently the government has not collected much from these sectors. These are the majorly hit areas since the arrival of the covid-19 situation. By waving off taxes, jobs will be rejuvenated again, the GDP will multiply and those who suffer job losses in the sector, they as well may become the quickest GDP multiplier for the country's economy. 10% of the world's GDP comes from this sector and revitalizing this sector is vital. The world economy cannot show growth unless and until this sector which contributes 10% comes back to life. Enhanced and upgraded preparedness will go a long way in attracting tourists to cities and countries worldwide.

Mr. Bharat Gothoskar

Founder and CEO of Khakhi Tours and the Khaki Heritage Foundation



In the beginning, Mr. Gothoskar specifies that he believes that ***the one who adapts and innovates will be the most successful and this pandemic will change the way business is done.*** At the near end of the discussion, he talks about what he and his team at Khaki Tours in the last year have focused on. They have focused on the citizens of Mumbai so that they understand and take interest in Mumbai's tangible and intangible heritage conservation. They have been conducting *virtual walking tours, talks, quizzes, workshops, meetings and creating interesting audio-visuals regarding the city to keep the brand salient.* They employed the whole time to research more about the city and train recruits to handle the future tourists when they arrive after the pandemic ends.

Q & A

Q: *What help does the private sector look forward to from the Government in terms of supporting the tourism sector? Also, many tourism professionals are unemployed and looking for different avenues for money. What soothing balms can be given to them?*

Mr. Kakkar: Different countries have used different models. For example, the United Kingdom used the model in which they took care of 80% of the salary of all professionals in the space of travel and tourism for almost 12 months. In the last 3 months, the support has been reduced to about 50%. Overall, the scheme is still on and will be on till October. The other thing is what Taipei has done which is worth emulating. A quick start for our government should be that if all the forms of governments can provide one year tax holiday for the tour and tourism industry, it can help the industry growth, job creation and provide a push to the GDP multiplier. If Travel and Tourism can get back to their 10.6% GDP contribution from around the world then the world growth can be very fast and very high. Places like Dubai and a few other countries in Southeast Asia either have zero taxes or very low taxes like 2-3 % tax. So, this would be a very positive step for the government of India and lots of other governments which have a reasonable level of taxation. Currently, there is no revenue generated from the tour and tourism industry. This is the only sector that has not got any relief from the governments. *By providing a tax holiday the government does not have to provide any hard cash or financial assistance or loan which could run into losses or become defunct. This measure helps the industry and the government equally.*

Mrs. Singh: The proposal of the tax holiday and tax waiver is a little difficult to lodge due to the bad financial situation of the government. Moreover, all the resources are now being pulled into the healthcare sector. The revenue collection such as the property tax, stamp duty, GST and other taxes has all dried up due to covid-19 which makes it even difficult to provide tax relief. *Though the Government of Maharashtra has still managed to provide a waiver for all the excise license by 50%. Maharashtra is the only state which has provided such a relief in the country.* So, the government is doing a lot to boost tourism in the state.

Further talked about all the initiatives taken by the Maharashtra government and the policies it has been working on to implement. Since the beginning of the year, the tourism department has sent at least five major policy decisions to the state cabinet, all of which have been approved. *Among other things, these decisions seek to put in **place a framework** to revive Maharashtra's stunning Konkan coast, devising **an agro-tourism policy** that would draw tourists curious about the state's agricultural offerings, a long lease with two hospitality giants for resorts, and reforming the tourism department's land policy to allow private participation for its development.*

Q: In Taipei, how do they see the future? What are the steps and the plan expected in the coming years and how is the city preparing for the arrival of tourists?

Ms. Jiang: By being very cautious about the ongoing development in the world, the city is looking forward to the vaccination progress across the world. Travel has been difficult due to the 14-days quarantine period which is constraining many travellers. The incoming travellers will be allowed only after taking a lot of things into consideration such as the spread of the virus in the country, number of cases, vaccination status etc. Due to this, it is not yet clear when the borders will be opened.

Q: The kind of image western media portrayed about India's falling healthcare system can potentially be damaging the prospect of tourism in India? In terms of managing the image when things normalize, how do we communicate clearly to the world that India is safe to travel?

Mr. Kakkar: This is a pandemic. This is not country or region-specific; the whole world is suffering from it. This has been clarified with the United States being the worst affected country, now the question is are we not going to visit the US in future? That's not the point. Each country is trying to manage the situation to its best. Initially, there was a lack of global cooperation in handling the pandemic but now slowly the global leaders are coming together to handle it more efficiently. They have started to believe that either we all are safe or we are not safe at all. This phase too shall pass as more and more people are vaccinated and the number goes beyond 60%, herd immunity will be developed and the situation will improve in the coming days and international travel will come back to more or less normal levels. The Spanish flu also went away, similarly, this will also go away and things will be normal.

Mrs. Singh: The collapse of healthcare has raised many eyebrows about safety in India. By the time the vaccination process is 50% completed, say within 6-months, India should start

a campaign called '*Safe India*' to promote India as a *safe tourism destination*. With the help of social media, it can be communicated that India is a safe place to travel. The world needs to know that they are about to travel to a new India.

Audience Interaction

1. Sustainability will be important in the post-pandemic world where 1/6th of the city is a forest. How can Mumbai leverage the sustainability agenda to push its tourism? Is there a plan to utilize Aarey for tourism?

Mrs. Singh: There are no plans for Aarey as of now. More than sustainability, we need to push and promote sustainable tourism practices by practitioners, the hotel industry and others.

2. In terms of city-to-city cooperation, can we start working now where we tie up with educational institutes in the post-pandemic world?

Mr. Kakkar: Within the city-net framework, cities can come together in sharing knowledge, best practices, and other collaborative efforts. Mumbai First and London First have a working model of exchanging knowledge and best practices which can be taken up as a model to sustain the city-to-city cooperation. There are many goals such as sustainability goals, New Urban Agenda, and other guidelines which cities can look onto. So, there are lots of frameworks already in place for cities to work jointly in handling any crisis. The current discussion provides an opportunity for Mumbai and Taipei to connect and learn from each other by exchanging ideas. Cooperation is the way to save us at this time.

3. There are more forts in Maharashtra than the rest of India put together? What is the government plan regarding promoting fort tourism?

Mrs. Singh: The government is trying to create basic facilities across all forts in the state like proper washrooms, visitor rooms, etc. Many activities aren't allowed in the forts because of their archaeological importance. The ~~govt.~~ government has already started the heritage tour of the BMC building and is planning more for other heritage structures such as Police headquarters etc. A lot of unknown museums have been opened to the public such as the high court museum, DG office etc. Tourists are not coming but the tourism department is very much in action.

Mr. Kakkar: There was great city-to-city cooperation between Mumbai and New York initiated by Maharashtra Tourism which can be replicated with other cities.

Ms. Jiang: We are all happy to connect with Mumbai and see how we can connect.

Concluding Remarks:

Tourism lingers to be one of the hardest-hit segments by the coronavirus pandemic and the outlook remains highly uncertain. The idea is to have the industry ready for revival when the threat of Covid-19 lifts.

To establish a Working group in cooperation with the Government of Maharashtra, led by Mumbai First and experts from City Net, London First, Singapore, the EU, to develop strategies for tourism, aviation, and businesses to promote and amplify local, state and national travel, tourism, businesses and employment post pandemic.

› **Inspire potential customers**

By inspire I mean to give incentives to the customers to travel. Give discounts like family discounts, air ticket discounts and other possible discounts which will tempt the customers to travel. As said earlier by Mr. Kakkar that the customers are willing to travel and spend due to the long lockdown period as they have saved a lot, they just need a slight push. Also, to inspire potential customers the hotel industries can provide great packages for the customers which should include everything including food, Wi-Fi, etc. As mentioned by Mr. Kakkar, these inclusive packages will help boost tourism.

› **Product development**

While the states are under lockdown, the state government and tourism departments could work on systems providing better services to its tourists. Like transport connectivity, allocating adequate resources for clean drinking water, dustbins, clean public toilets and many more such services which need attention. Also, maybe clean and beautified tourist spots, this will help improve the overall tourist's experience.

› **Improved public infrastructure**

Many beautiful tourist's spots have unclear pathways, while the city is shut the government can work on improving the paths to reach these locations by refining the roadways. The government can also work on the needs of many tourist spots, for example, if any location requires white-washing.

› **Re-establishing traveller's confidence**

It is important to restore the confidence of travellers in India so that they feel safe while travelling to India and they do not need to worry about the healthcare system, hygiene or any other such thing while visiting India. Safety and hygiene have become crucial factors to select tourist destinations and tourism activities. It is the most important element to boost tourism in India. As Mrs. Valsa also said that the need of the hour is to launch a campaign called 'Safe India' to improve the image of India as a safe tourism destination. This will help in advertising India as a safe tourism spot for visitors.

› **Supporting tourism businesses to adapt and survive**

To support the tourism businesses to adapt to the post-pandemic conditions and survive, the government can give tax reductions for the tourism industry, if not a tax holiday. This will help to boost travel and tourism activities in India. The government has the power to incentivize people and give them a much-needed push to travel.

› **Promoting domestic tourism**

While the states and cities are under a lockdown, the state or city government can promote their popular tourist destinations by advertising them with the help of social media or television or any other ways. They should list out the reasons why people should come to their city and what are the famous or the unknown things about the city. This will attract the tourists to visit the city. They can decide to visit the city once the pandemic is over.

› **Supporting safe return of international tourism**

Many visitors are scared to pre-book their air tickets because they will not get a full refund if they had to cancel for any unforeseen reason. So, one way to solve this problem is that air travel should provide safe returns to the international tourists so that they are not scared to invest in the tourism of India and they can pre-book their tickets to visit India. This will also help the tourism of India look more reliable and trustworthy to the tourists.

› **Virtual Tourism**

Tourists enjoy the virtual world; So, one thing that can be done is to explore virtual tourism activities. This can be done by providing audio or video presentations about the place and many more such things can be done to increase and encourage Virtual tourism.

