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Heading: Seamless Interface, Mobile outreach shaping Visa facilitation trends

Outbound

VISA
TRENDS

SEAMLESS INTERFACE, MOBILE OUTREACH SHAPING VISA FACILITATION TRENDS

Seamless interface with a focus on mobile application, personalized service, and convenience for consumers were some of the key factors influencing the outreach of visa facilitation companies, shared Shikhar Aggarwal, Joint Managing Director, BLS International. He suggested that the Indian outbound was on a constant lookout for uncharted destinations, had an appetite for experiment and a growing propensity to spend more on travel.

Excerpts from the interview:

What are some trends in visa facilitation? What is being done by leading visa facilitation players to make the entire experience of acquiring a visa seamless for tourists? Share with us some steps being taken by visa facilitation companies.

We focus on seamless experience for travellers, therefore we have structured our services accordingly. We provide a host of value-added services to applicants in our Visa Application Centres (VACs). They include several features. First is mobile biometrics where applicants can avail this service at the comfort and convenience of a place of their choice, without having to visit our visa application center. We offer premium lounge which is a dedicated exclusive lounge facility with personalized service while applying for a visa at our center. There is a SMS service. This service eliminates the need for tracking the application status through the website or call center.

We also provide form filling services where applicant can seek assistance from our staff for filling up their visa application forms. We deliver passports to homes through professional courier services, eliminating the hassle of traveling to the application center.

We are contemplating to offer other value-added services for the convenience of applicants – which will serve as a one-stop-shop solution for them. They could be international travel offers, VAT refund process, and travel and forex cards, among others.

What impact has digitization and visa outsourcing had on the growth of overall travel and tourism?

It is undeniable that digitalization has given matchless ease and comfort to travelers and saves them from all the complexity of the conventional process. There are several benefits of digitization in the visa industry. They include increased productivity, cost efficiency, the ease of accessing information and heightened security of personal data.

It is, however, crucial to note that privacy and security controls are issues of paramount importance for the visa industry. It is time that government tapped and utilized the hidden potential of advanced tools, such as artificial intelligence,



SHIKHAR AGGARWAL
Joint MD, BLS International

machine learning, big data etc. to bring more safety and convenience to tourists and visitors.

What are some trends in the visa industry right now? The world has truly opened to travel and trade in the past 30 years, but the ease of travel has been challenged by the sheer

volume of applicants, security concerns, and immigration restrictions etc. Governments will, therefore, continue to seek help in managing visa applications and consular services. The key driving forces behind growth and expansion in this industry can be innovation, new technologies, and ease of application process.

We must also look at the emergence of e-visa and the importance of data security. With inevitable cyber concerns, it has become crucial for visa providers to increase their security audits, encryption of data and introduce watertight password control systems. It is high time that they take the protection of customer and employee data as the top priority and strive to innovate the processes while quickly adapting to the changing trends.

You are looking at expanding and are already in several markets. We



understand that specifically the Middle-east is a big market for BLS. Looking at future markets, where do you see Indians travelling? Do you see them heading to hitherto uncharted territories?

There are several benefits of digitization in the visa industry. They include increased productivity, cost efficiency, the ease of accessing information and heightened security of personal data.

In many ways, yes. There are a number of markets which were not even considered tourism destinations ten years ago. Now, they have turned into some of the biggest tourism markets. Indian travellers are already travelling to Europe. Locales in Asia have already been explored and the Indian traveller is on the lookout for uncharted destinations. The development may not happen in the immediate future, but we will see the shift happening. The appetite for travel has grown and Indians are spending big sums on travel. So, in the future, there will be a huge demand for destinations which are not popular among Indian outbound now. ■

– SHASHANK SHEKHAR