

Welcome Address
Mr. Steven Ler | President – NATAS

NATAS – STB Travel Agent Industry Forum
Friday, 16 November 2018 | 1 pm
Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre

Mr Keith Tan, Chief Executive, Singapore Tourism Board,

My Fellow NATAS Members,

Travel Industry Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Introduction

Good afternoon.

Over the years, NATAS has tirelessly dedicated our efforts towards strengthening and upgrading the professionalism of the travel agents under our charge. We have, in recent times, placed much emphasis towards the Travel Agent Roadmap, working collaboratively with the Singapore Tourism Board and other industry partners to tackle challenges and disruptions in the areas of Business Transformation, Manpower and Technology. I wish to echo what Keith has already highlighted, that the Travel Agent Roadmap has seen good traction and NATAS is all geared to bring forth new initiatives into the next lap of this exciting journey.

NATAS Achievements 2018

2018 has been a busy period for all of us at NATAS and let me reflect on some of the key initiatives on the Association's front:

2. NATAS Travel Fairs and NTO Engagements

The biannual NATAS travel fairs are one of our most definitive events of the year. The latest fair in August (which was also our 53rd fair), featured over 90 exhibitors and attracted more than 110,000 visitors over 3 days.

Visitorship was up by 39.6% as compared to the same show last year. The success of the NATAS travel fairs amidst the vast changes in the tourism landscape in recent times is solid proof of the travel agents' relevance and foothold in the travel industry.

Over the past year, NATAS has been working in tandem with the respective tourism bodies and industry partners to facilitate destination workshops and networking events for our members. These collaborative efforts seek to inject new elements into the travel agent's repertoire of travel offers at the fairs and beyond.

3. Inaugural NATAS General Membership Meeting

NATAS recognises the importance of creating an environment that supports a sustainable network of leaders within the travel business.

More importantly, we see our role in galvanising leaders in our membership towards open sharing and staying connected with each other as well as players within the travel and tourism eco-system.

The concept of the NATAS General Membership Meeting (or GMM in short) was mooted and I am happy to note that the first NATAS GMM concluded with a positive note at the Paulaner Brauhaus last month.

There were opportunities for attendees to network as well as hear from partners like TripAdvisor, SNEF as well as Talent+ on useful business tips.

We have since received requests from members to bring in speakers to talk about trending topics such as the impact of the New Distribution Capability (or NDC), creative business strategies, partnerships and collaborations in travel as well as ever-green topics relating to customer service recovery and stress management. We certainly look forward to hosting the 2nd GMM in Q1/2019.

4. Social Events by NATAS

As the saying goes, "Work Hard and Play Even Harder"!

In April this year, NATAS organised an Udders Ice Cream Making Workshop for the Travel Agency Front-liners. In October, we concluded the NATAS Bowling Tournament successfully at the Orchid Bowl. And coming up later this month, we will be holding the NATAS Golf Tournament at the Warren Golf and Country Club. These are just some exciting bonding events that our members and their staff can look forward to.

5. Engagements with future travel professionals

In line with NATAS' aim of bringing in fresh and new talents into the industry, an MOU was signed in April 2018 between NATAS and Temasek Polytechnic (TP). This renewal of the MOU first signed in 2011 signifies the close partnership between NATAS and TP over the years. This partnership provides TP students a common assemblage for networking and professional development. It also seeks to attract and retain them through collaborative activities between NATAS and TP, such as via the formal framework for the Student Internship Programme.

NATAS also participated in the ITE Career Talk 2018 where our speakers from member agencies shared their personal journey in travel to over 800 NITEC students.

6. NATAS Seminars and Workshops

One of the key deliverables in 2018 for NATAS are the seminars and workshops facilitated by the NATAS Secretariat. These includes a host of Outbound Destination workshops; PDPA and GDPR workshop; Change Masterclass, as well as Cyber Security Awareness talks, just to name a few.

Year 2019 And Beyond

Looking ahead at 2019, NATAS will certainly move towards forming collaborative partnerships with organisations whom we believe share our vision. It is also another milestone year for NATAS as we celebrate our 40th Anniversary.

7. Membership Engagements

Membership Engagements will continue to take centre stage in the new year ahead.

Alongside this comes opportunities to offer appropriate and timely assistance to members, and that at the end of the day, is what renders the Association relevant.

8. NATAS Resource Centre

For the first time, NATAS is also looking at developing a Resource Centre in 2019. The Resource Centre may feature a hybrid of online and offline facilities and is poised to be a one-stop shop where travel agents can access toolkits and resources, and obtain timely advice on business transformation projects.

9. NATAS Travel 2019

NATAS Travel 2019 will be held from 22nd to 24th February at Singapore Expo. We look forward to more exciting and quality tours being offered by exhibitors in this upcoming fair. We are also looking at a Staycation Pavilion where local tour operators curate and offer staycation holidays for locals in Singapore!

10. Offline-to-Online Travel Fair Platform

As mentioned at the last TAIF, NATAS is looking at the potential of developing an Offline-to-Online (O2O) portal to support travel agents in moving into the online domain. This is also an additional resource to complement the existing physical fairs and also to tap on the growing numbers of holiday-makers who are booking their trips online.

The portal will feature themed travel fairs throughout the year, and will serve as a plug-and-play solution for travel agents who currently do not have an online presence.

We have pushed back the launch of the portal as NATAS wants to explore more collaborative efforts with potential leads, and present an O2O portal that is poised to host a wider network of players within the travel & tourism eco-system to bring forth a more holistic user experience.

11. Travel Technology Challenge 2019

In the coming year, NATAS will also be launching a Travel Technology Challenge, that builds on the Tourism Innovation Challenge to further proliferate new technology solutions among the industry.

12. NATAS Talent Development Portal

The NATAS Talent Development Portal announced at the last TAIF was originally mooted as a platform for NATAS to address the human resource needs of the industry.

With the timely launch of MyCareersFuture website this year, NATAS will dovetail our efforts with Workforce Singapore (WSG) to list available jobs in the travel agent industry on MyCareersFuture.sg. This will allow job seekers to understand the career options within our sector and therefore attract more talents into our current pool of travel professionals.

13. P-MAX programme

As the sectoral outreach multiplier, NATAS will continue to help travel agents leverage on the P-MAX programme under WSG's Adapt and Grow Initiative to meet their manpower needs.

14. NATAS Manpower Initiatives

Last but not least, NATAS will also be looking at a series of engagements to gear the travel agencies for change. We are talking about the C-Suites and key agency staff as they are essentially the change agents who will be instrumental in embracing new initiatives and bring about business transformation within their respective outfit.

15. Conclusion

Lastly, I would like to conclude by thanking all of you for your presence here. And most importantly, I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to Chief Executive of STB, Mr. Keith Tan and the team at STB for their invaluable support. We look forward to continued partnership in the year ahead.

Thank you!

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