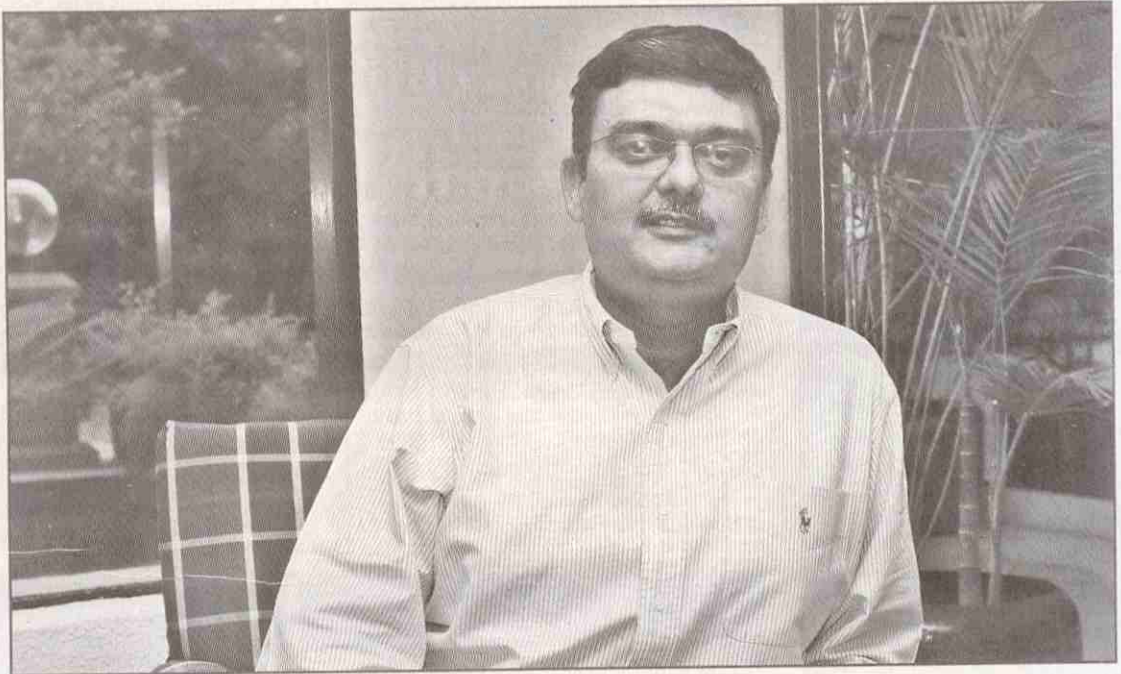


# The focus of Nepal should be to ensure that no negative travel advisories are there



**Dipak Deva** is the Chief Operating Officer of KUONI Destination Management where he looks after the India and South Asia sectors. Starting his career in the tourism industry, in 1989, as the Manager for Travel Corporation Pvt. Ltd, Jaipur, he went on to work in different positions in different cities of India for the same company. In 1999, he became the Director of Distant Frontiers Tours Pvt Ltd in New Delhi and was promoted to the capacity of Vice President in 2006. With much experience and outstanding work, Deva joined as the COO for KUONI Destination Management in 2008. During his career he has extensively traveled to several countries and is also a Member of World Travel and Tourism Council, India Chapter. Deva was recently in Kathmandu for an official visit, during which NTTR had a chance to meet him. Excerpts:

By Sunjuli Singh

*Since you are the COO of destination management, could you share what your job mainly involves?*

I am responsible for all the inbound business, which includes destination management business for India Nepal and Sri Lanka for KUONI destination management.

*Since you have been looking after the Indian and South Asian sector, what potentiality do you think Nepal really has?*

With the new positive situation that is prevailing today, in the political front, I think Nepal has tremendous potential. Nepal always had potential for tourism and has a glorious past in terms of successful tourism development. I think those glorious days are back again.

*How do you think Nepal can benefit from the chain entity like KUONI itself?*

It is truly a global and a large company. Today, we are a worldwide 4.6 billion Swiss Franc company. Destination Management, which is one part of the business is worth 1 billion Swiss Franc as per the report of 2007. Destination Management is a very serious player, being present in Europe, America, entire Far East, where we own a company called Asian Trails. Presently, we are evolving under SITA, in the regions like Nepal, India, Sri Lanka

Last week we acquired a company in Dubai, so we are covering the Middle East which again has great potential. We have a company in Africa which covers South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and the entire area. We also have a vast tour operating business which functions in different parts of the world.

As far as Nepal is concerned we have tremendous potential to promote Nepal. Now that the situation has turned better, we see a huge probability to develop tourism here. Every sales person at KUONI knows that Nepal is a unique destination to sell. So every effort is being put in different ways and segments to promote it. Only a global company like ours can get leisure business and incentive business, which we have already operated into Nepal. International conference business is

also on our agenda, especially smaller international conferences which can be an excellent opportunity for us to promote in Nepal. We would also work on charter flight business, already having different companies that KUONI owns which specialize in this segment from Russia and Scandinavia.

A very important tool in destination management for us is a product called FIT@KUONI. This is a B to B to C (Business to Business to Consumer) tool, which is basically a hotel booking agent where we already have Nepal listed. If we find the situation improving, definitely there is business going to be generated from Nepal.

*What should Nepal focus more on to tap the international market?*

The focus of Nepal should be to ensure that no negative travel advisories are there. Whatever marketing effort you may do, if you have travel advisories that are adverse to your destination you cannot get enough tourists. So the first and foremost task of Nepalese entrepreneurs should be to convince the world that, there is no threat to tourists in any form and the situation is normal.

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has to have a long term agenda and marketing plan to go out into different parts of the world in an effective way. A good example is the Indian campaign of 'Incredible India'. It is the responsibility of the board to market the destination with its brand.

*How potential is MICE tourism in Nepal?*

There are two segments; one is the conferences from the SAARC region. You have conference facilities and lovely hotels and decent air connectivity, so I think it could be an exciting destination in that part.

From an incentive point, I think it is truly a matter of security. Product is available. If you have no security then there is no travel plan.

*So what do you think tourists are attracted to Nepal?*

Today, the first thing if you would ask me would be the splendid nature available in Nepal. There are beautiful valleys, mountains, trekking which brings you more closer to nature. These are the true reasons why tourists come to Nepal. The experience of visiting places like Kathmandu and

Pokhara for the regular tourist is worth paying for. You have nice hotels, nice areas to visit, culturally you have temples and everything that a tourist looks for in a place.

*Do you think that air connectivity to Nepal especially from India and Europe still needs an urgent attention?*

I think air connectivity from India to Nepal has a better situation than few years ago. But definitely improvement is needed. If you want to promote a destination in a long run and if you want to sustain growth, one important factor is to have direct flights. People don't like to change flights. So, yes connectivity between Europe and Kathmandu and more flights between India and Nepal definitely would be an advantage for the industry.

*Could you share your experience about your visit to Nepal this time?*

We do one Management meeting outside Delhi every year and this year we chose to hold it in Nepal. As a destination, Nepal is getting popularity. We have got here all our 15 members from the management and core team. The main idea was to showcase Nepal and explore the country for future possibilities. From an experience point of view we have had a wonderful time.

*Any piece of message to the Nepal's Tourism industry.*

Nepal has gone through many years of hardship. KUONI as a company has always been committed to Nepal in good and bad times. The times ahead I think are going to be great for Nepal. The industry has to make sure that they grow in a sustainable manner, which means that tomorrow it should not suddenly start increasing all prices in all directions like air, hotel, and transport. This way at the end of the day it would end up doing more damage than good.

At present, I see that Nepal should upgrade its infrastructure to meet its soaring demand in the international market. It should upgrade the product as a whole in order to cater to the future tourists. Renovation and construction of new hotels, better transport facilities, improving air connections; everything needs a thorough revision. The government needs to see tourism as a major economic tool and invest more in marketing and promotional activities.