Sunil Tuli calls for urgent industry support for APTRA advocacy efforts

ASIA PACIFIC. Asia Pacific Travel Retail Association (APTRA) President Sunil Tuli has called on more industry stakeholders to join the representative body and help support its advocacy efforts with decision makers in the region.

As reported earlier, among other initiatives APTRA has stepped up its support for the travel retail sector by joining with other regional travel and tourism associations in pushing governments to aid business recovery.

Speaking at the TFWA China Reborn virtual event today, Tuli noted that Asia Pacific will be the first region to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and will lead growth and change in the global travel retail market.

He said: “It’s essential we do everything in our power to safeguard [the industry’s] future and get it back to growth. The big question is how do we do that? The answer is APTRA. Our purpose is to strengthen, nurture and protect our industry. And in a crisis like this one, advocacy is APTRA’s priority.”
This in turn means influencing governments and bodies such as ICAO – which it has done effectively – to listen to and acknowledge the industry’s challenges.

But, Tuli said, “I’m not seeing enough support for APTRA and frankly, I’m disappointed. Let me explain. Ours is a complicated ecosystem… we’re wholly reliant on other stakeholders to provide our footfall. And at this point in time, recovery is hard to predict. So much depends on outside forces.

“Of course health is the priority and APTRA fully supports the global focus on safe travel above all else. But business needs open borders and this is the pivotal aspect for 2021 – the difference between it being a make or a break year. It’s the absolute focus of APTRA at the moment.

“The political influencing work we’re doing is vital. It is having an effect and it will pay off for everyone. It’s already getting travel retail noticed, acknowledged and factored into the bigger picture of how governments go about opening borders and find ways to balance the scales between health, business and jobs.

“But we’re not stopping there. APTRA knows we have to fuel change, be an active part of it and to finance it. An inward-looking industry isn’t going to fix anything. So we’re leading from the front, looking beyond the back-yard of travel retail. We know how inter-dependent our industry is on the aviation and tourism ecosystem. And we know we can’t fix the crisis by ourselves.

“So we’ve recently taken the initiative, joining forces & partnering with associations outside travel retail in APAC (as noted in our story here) to amplify our voice with theirs and deliver the biggest impact possible.”
United we stand: An open letter to ministers penned jointly by Pacific Asia Travel Association; Association of Asia Pacific Airlines; Airports Council International (ACI) Asia-Pacific; International Air Transport Association; and Asia Pacific Travel Retail Association

While noting that working with governments is slow and bureaucratic, Tuli pointed out that campaigning is vital for businesses large and small, regardless of category.

“Every business in travel retail must stay connected to the bigger picture even if they can’t see immediately what’s in it for them, or can’t demonstrate an instant ROI on the cost of membership.

“We’re not seeing enough willingness among the players in travel retail – the airports, the brands, the retailers – to join together in partnership with APTRA to amplify the magnitude and power of the collective voice. The unengaged lack of support from our own industry is what frustrates me most as President of APTRA.

“Far too many businesses tell me they can’t afford it but we are talking about the cost of a couple of cups of coffee a day.
“Being a member of APTRA – a not for profit organisation – is the single most effective way businesses can support the future of our industry. There are over 45 governments to influence. There’s no central regional political forum like in Europe. So that means we have to target each government individually.

“The bigger our member base the more government influence we can have. And the bigger and more impactful our voice can be at getting help for travel retail.

“I urge you to join us. We need each other. We are stronger together.”