

**PRESENTATION BY MR KEITH TAN,
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AT THE TOURISM INDUSTRY CONFERENCE ON 7 APR 2021,
SUNTEC CITY CONVENTION CENTRE**

Introduction

1. Thank you Minister Chan.

2. My dear friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

3. It has been two years since our last tourism industry conference. Our tourism landscape looks very different now, but I am thankful to be here with all of you, whether physically or virtually.
 - a. And I look forward to the conversations we will have today on how our industry can be a trailblazer for defining "quality tourism" in the future.

Weathering Disruptions

4. First, let me take stock of our journey so far.

5. Exactly one year ago today, we entered Circuit Breaker.
 - a. After Circuit Breaker was over, the reopening of our economy and the tourism sector took place carefully.
 - b. In fact, let's not forget we are still in Phase 3!
 - c. But we must acknowledge that we have come very far since those days.
 - d. Thank you to all of you who stepped up to support our national efforts against COVID-19

6. I am very proud of our collective efforts.
 - a. The way we stepped up as a tourism sector to support our national efforts makes us unique.
 - b. I hope it helped you and your teams to understand that all of us can make a contribution, regardless of our jobs or skills.

- c. And I hope that this sense of solidarity will continue to unite us as we look to the future.

- 7. We will need that sense of solidarity in the months ahead.
 - a. We do not expect tourism on a large scale to return any time soon.
 - b. But I am confident that it will return.
 - c. So we must survive, and get through this challenging period so that we will emerge stronger from this pandemic and are ready to capture growth when it returns.

- 8. STB is fully committed to ensuring the viability of our sector. Earlier, Minister Chan spoke about our continued support measures and grant schemes for tourism. Our support goes beyond financial provisions. It includes efforts in:
 - a. Restoring the flow of travellers to Singapore;
 - b. Facilitating industry and business transformation; and
 - c. Retaining mindshare to keep Singapore top of mind.

Restoring the flow of travellers

- 9. Like many of you, I cannot wait for international travel to resume. We know that this will however be done in a careful manner, putting the safety of both our locals and visitors first and foremost.

- 10. STB has been a strong advocate for the safe reopening of our borders, and we are working with many other government agencies to explore all options. We are prepared to try many different approaches. For example,
 - a. In February this year, Connect@Singapore was launched, with Connect@Changi being its first Appointed Facility;
 - b. To date, Reciprocal Green Lanes with have been rolled out with 7 countries, although 5 have been suspended because of a resurgence of cases; and
 - c. Discussions are underway for Air Travel Bubbles with a number of destinations and source markets.

11. Beyond travel lanes, we have also worked with many of you to resume some high-profile lifestyle and MICE events.
12. We will continue to explore different channels and formats for events, especially in the lead up to the World Economic Forum in order to:
 - a. Build confidence;
 - b. Test our SOPs; and
 - c. Send a clear signal to the rest of the world that we are back in business!

Facilitating Industry and Business Transformation

13. Now, I want to talk about business transformation.
 - a. In times of crisis, our natural instinct is to hunker down, and wait for the storm to pass, with the intention of “going back to normal” after the storm.
 - b. I urge us to work against this instinct,
 - c. Because we should never waste a crisis.

Facilitating Industry Transformation – Pivoting Domestically

14. One of the biggest changes for many of us – including STB – has been the pivot to domestic tourism.
 - a. Engaging a new customer base many of us have not focused on before.
 - b. But you were proactive in pivoting quickly, thinking of new ways to engage locals.
15. For examples:
 - a. Oriental Travel and Tours took to developing new and unique tours for the local market. One of their most popular tours, Creepy Tales of Singapore 2, has now grown a reputation among locals. They have also developed tours in local dialect to attract our senior citizens;
 - b. Royal Albatross has innovated new offerings to cater to locals with different interests, such as launching a new dog cruise where guests will enjoy a dinner cruise around Sentosa with their fur babies;

16. Please keep this creativity coming!

- a. This period may well be one of the most fertile periods in the Singapore tourism sector, with new products and experiences being launched regularly.
- b. I am especially encouraged by collaborations between different companies and across different sectors,
- c. Which have been very well received by locals.
- d. Many of these new products will be relevant to visitors – so don't lose the gains that you have made and make sure you keep expanding your repertoire – so that there is much more to offer to visitors when they come back to Singapore.

Facilitating Industry Transformation – Digital Transformation

17. But don't forget that we need to also build up resilience and preparedness for future crises – which will come.

- a. Let's see how three tourism businesses have used this time to build up new capabilities, to prepare for the future.

18. All these are reasons why STB will double down our support for digital transformation. As Minister Chan announced, Tcube will be launched this afternoon. Through Tcube, STB continues to scale up digital transformation initiatives in a three-step Learn-Test-Build framework to help you build capabilities for the future.

- a. Under the “learn” phase, we recently introduced the Tourism Transformation Index (TXI), which is a self-assessment tool to help you understand where you are in, in your transformation journey.
 - i. Based on your TXI score, STB can provide recommendations on relevant programmes to support your transformation journey.
 - ii. In 2020, over 100 tourism businesses benefited from the TXI pilot. Now, we are ready to scale this up.
 - iii. TXI is now hosted on the Singapore Tourism Analytics Network (Stan) and is available for all of you.

- b. To help you to “test” your ideas, we started the Singapore Tourism Accelerator programme in 2019 to help tourism businesses source for the most innovative solutions from around the world to address business challenges.
 - i. To date, the Accelerator has supported 21 start-ups to develop 35 industry solutions.
 - ii. And we will extend the Accelerator for another two years till September 2023.

- c. Lastly, under the “build” phase, tourism businesses can leverage on a suite of existing smart services developed by STB, such as the Tourism Information and Services Hub (TIH) and Stan. I encourage all of you to use these tools to contribute data and shared content to drive innovation and make data-driven business decisions.

19. Last year, we also launched a new Augmented Reality (AR) strategy, to seed industry-wide capabilities in a growth area that remains under-appreciated.

- a. To build up our familiarity with AR, STB will develop a library of up to a thousand 3D assets to augment the current lack of such content in the market.
- b. We will make these assets available via the Tourism Information and Services Hub (TIH) without additional charge,
- c. So that we can help you accelerate the adoption of AR experiences for our visitors and locals.

Facilitating Industry Transformation – Manpower Transformation

20. Beyond digital transformation, we must also press on with our efforts to transform and uplift the tourism workforce because COVID-19 will change the demands and expectations placed on our people.

- a. This year, we will develop a Tourism Sector Capability Development Roadmap together with NTUC, to build the skills needed to support travel and tourism in a COVID-19 world.

- b. For example, what are the skills needed to provide exceptional and consistent end-to-end safe itinerary experiences for group visitors?
- c. I am grateful that these projects have found support from the Emerging Stronger Taskforce Alliance for Action for safe and innovative visitor experiences.

Retain Mindshare – Keep Singapore Top of Mind

21. Through this entire period, we have prioritised efforts to maintain Singapore as a “top of mind” destination for leisure and business travellers.
- a. This is important – because many surveys show that millions of people around the world are desperate for travel.
 - b. So we must make sure that Singapore is top on their list on where they want to go.

Retain Mindshare – Partnerships

22. To support these efforts to maintain mindshare now and over the longer term, we will continue to pursue meaningful partnerships around the world. For example:
- a. With Studio Dragon Corporation in South Korea; and
 - b. iQIYI, which is often referred to as the Netflix of China.

Retain Mindshare – Marketing Partnership Programme

23. But we have not forgotten you! Our Marketing Partnership Programme (MPP) which we created last April to spur more marketing innovations from you, has been very well-received.
- a. To date, we have supported close to 300 big and small establishments,
 - b. And amplified your ideas through domestic campaigns and cross-industry collaborations.
 - c. We are looking to launch a second edition this year, to support your ongoing and new domestic and international marketing efforts.

Emerging Stronger – Upcoming Projects

24. All these efforts are meant to help us get ready for recovery.
- a. So please do not think we are in “hibernation” mode!

- b. In fact, we can still look forward to new projects this year to support the tourism sector and to increase our vibrancy and destination attractiveness.

25. For example, 3 new attractions:

- a. Museum of Ice Cream (MOIC), the popular US-based attraction will launch its first ever international location outside of US in Singapore, later this year.
- b. Slingshot – Asia’s tallest slingshot – a new thrill ride concept, will be opening later this year at Clarke Quay
- c. And lastly, SkyHelix Sentosa, Singapore’s first open-air panoramic attraction that allows visitors scenic views of Sentosa and our Southern Waterfront, will open in 2022.

26. Our work in refreshing tourism attractions and precincts continues and the next phase of IRs are going very well:

- a. For example, Orchard Road
 - i. The transformation of Grange Road carpark into a lifestyle and event space is underway since the tender was awarded last year. It is expected to be completed in 2022.
 - ii. Together with URA and SLA, we will also launch a tender for a new attraction concept at the vacant site between Somerset skate park and Killiney Road, later this year.

Preparing for our Future

27. These projects are a welcome breath of fresh air amongst the COVID-19 negativity and bad news in the past year.

- a. Since the pandemic hit, we have focused on weathering this “long winter”.
- b. But now, it is time for us to start thinking about the future – what do we need to do today, so that we can thrive and succeed tomorrow?
- c. I will spend the rest of my time focusing on the future, beyond COVID-19.

28. I want to single out four key trends relating to travel and tourism that we must deal with collectively.

- a. **“Remote nearly everything”** – which I refer to as the acceleration of remote working and virtual events.
- b. **Holistic wellness** – not just physical wellness, but also mental, and emotional wellness.
- c. **Environmental sustainability** – Minister Chan has already mentioned.
- d. **Technology everywhere, everyday, for everyone** – in other words, a turn towards ubiquitous tech infrastructure that can enable businesses to provide top customer experiences, even during tough times like COVID-19.

29. Over the past two years, we have studied these trends very carefully and have distilled them into **four challenges** for all of us over the next 5-10 years.

“Remote nearly everything”

30. Our first challenge, in a world of “remote nearly everything”, is this: **How can we reinforce Singapore’s position as the world’s most trusted, valued, innovative and safe destination for business and corporate travellers?**

- a. There is a lot of talk about business travel being the slowest to return because of the convenience of tools like Zoom, Webex and Teams,
- b. But this is a rather sweeping statement.
- c. It is probably true that a lot of routine, lower-value business travel can be replaced by virtual meetings – and frankly that is a good thing for many of us.

31. But we believe that there will still be demand for business travel.

- a. It’s one thing to travel around the world to listen to presentations that you can listen to from home through Zoom,
- b. But it’s quite another thing to travel to an event to exchange ideas and knowledge that can in turn produce new ideas, products, and knowledge.
- c. Or, to experience, touch, and taste new products and innovations that can revolutionise your sector.

32. So the challenge for us is to ensure that Singapore continues to offer these sorts of value-adding, world-leading, knowledge-building events and activities.

33. Let me suggest some very broad ideas, which I hope you will follow up or think about.
- a. There are many major problems or issues that need urgent attention from corporates and governments today – for example, **food security, energy security**. Can we anchor and grow conferences and tradeshows in Singapore that gather leading thinkers and businesses from around the world to discuss and find solutions for these problems?
 - b. There are other issues where the divide between east and west has become more contentious, such as in **technology**. Can Singapore become a trusted and neutral “Global-Asia node” for events that bridge these differences, bringing corporates from east and west in mutually beneficial directions?
 - c. There are also many growth-oriented, world-ready **Asian companies** now compared to even just ten years ago – especially right here in Southeast Asia. Can we do more to bring their executives to Singapore, for incentives, corporate education or to participate in our existing slate of MICE events?
34. To achieve the vision of becoming the world’s most trusted, valued, innovative and safe business destination, we need a strong MICE industry.
- a. To date, we have been able to do so due to the strong partnership with SACEOS.
 - i. It was a landmark effort to develop the events Industry Resilience Roadmap last year which laid out clear directions for the capabilities that our MICE sector needs to build up, as well as the opportunities in the future.
 - b. STB will do our part to support and profile the industry
 - i. We organised the SingapoReimagine MICE virtual show last month to create a marketplace to connect Singapore MICE suppliers with international buyers. The event received strong interest from over 1,000 attendees and 40 international media.

- ii. I am also happy to announce that STB will be setting up two new offices in Brussels and San Francisco later this year, allowing us to engage a larger base of international organisations and key decision makers to secure more high-quality business events for Singapore.

Holistic Wellness

35. The second challenge I want to issue relates to holistic wellness – not just physical, but also mental and emotional wellness.

- a. This is not a surprise as COVID-19 has made wellness a top priority for all of us.
- b. And even long after COVID-19, we know that the growing middle class, especially here in Asia, will pay a premium for products and offerings that enhance their sense of duty and well-being.
- c. The challenge for us is this: We will never become a destination that can provide wellness offerings complemented by greenery, mountains, hot springs, onsens, and we shouldn't aspire to be. It is not our right to win. But **can we become known as a leading urban wellness haven – where wellness offerings and experiences are easily available and fully integrated into the daily life of a modern city?**

36. This is a serious challenge, as “wellness” is not a top of mind association with Singapore yet.

- a. But if we want to stay relevant to Quality Tourists of the future, we must adapt and innovate to meet their expectations and demands.
- b. Other cities are already stepping up.
 - i. Shanghai – The Living Room by the Octave Institute is “the first comprehensive urban wellness centre created in China, providing customised holistic wellness and learning programmes rooted on Mindfulness.”
 - ii. London – BelleCell, a clinic that gives “regular people” access to “hyper-personalised science-based solutions to health, wellness and beauty”.
- c. We are not quite there but we are not starting from zero.

- i. Heritage brands like Yue Hwa and Eu Yan Sang are stepping up to make traditional Chinese medicine more accessible, they have found a growing following in the region;
- ii. More hotels are either creating or are partnering with lifestyle and wellness brands to offer a wider range of experiences to support their guests' health and wellbeing; not just yoga or meditation but also about light controls in rooms
- iii. New businesses are coming up too, such as the Trapeze Rec Club, which is a one-stop destination that offers busy urbanites a full range of holistic wellness services starting mid-2021.

37. So let me offer three ideas in this area:

- a. First, can we create more innovative partnerships between “traditional” tourism industries like hotels, cruise, attractions and MICE on the one hand, and wellness offerings, brands and enterprises on the other hand? For example, a hotel partnering with Peloton.
- b. Second, we know there is a clear link between wellbeing and exposure to nature. Can we create more experiences that support this link, by tapping into the wonderful green and blue resources of Singapore?
- c. Third, can we create more world-class wellness-related B2B and B2C events in Singapore?

Environmental Sustainability

38. Our third challenge is environmental sustainability.

- a. A major area we must focus our minds on – because this will be one of the most important considerations for future travellers.

39. The challenge for us is this: **How can Singapore become a top sustainable and innovative urban destination?**

40. Many of you already recognise the urgency.

- a. For many years, Wildlife Reserves Singapore has been championing the cause for environmental sustainability and conservation.
- b. Sentosa has set ambitious targets such as achieving carbon neutrality by 2030!
- c. And of course, some of our hotels are already globally known for their efforts in environmental sustainability.

41. These efforts are extremely heartening, but for Singapore to achieve the vision of becoming a top sustainable urban destination, we must tackle sustainability collectively as a destination, rather than enterprise by enterprise.

- a. Over the coming months, STB will reach out to you as we develop an industry roadmap for destination sustainability.
- b. We will broaden the scope of the Singapore Tourism Accelerator to develop solutions for sustainability. In fact, some of you are already raising problem statements relating to the reduction of waste, water and energy use in your properties.
- c. Ultimately, we want to be known not just as a sustainable urban destination, but as a great location for companies to testbed sustainable tourism solutions. For example, a net zero-carbon hotel or entertainment event. We want to do it here, in Singapore.

Technology everywhere, everyday, for everyone

42. Lastly, the fourth and final challenge relates to technology.

- a. Over the last few years, the tourism sector has made great strides in becoming more tech- and digitally-enabled.
 - i. Many of you made serious investments in robotics, data analytics, and smart technologies.

- ii. As a result, approximately 7,000 man hours were saved daily between 2016 and 2020. We are making great strides in productivity.
- iii. More recently, many have adopted contactless solutions to manage crowds and queues. For example, more than 30 hotels have or will be transitioning towards STB's E-Visitor Authentication system (EVA) by end 2021, to reduce physical touchpoints and simplify check-in processes.

b. But we are just scratching the surface.

c. Advances in data connectivity, 5G, artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, gamification, voice recognition, and many other areas – all will have a profound impact on the way people travel and experience destinations.

43. There are many opportunities for our tourism sector arising from these trends, but the challenge statement to me is quite clear: **Can Singapore become a thriving marketplace that brings together the most innovative and promising technology solution providers on the one hand, and the most forward looking, hungry, tech-savvy tourism companies – that's all of you! – on the other hand? So, demand and supply, here in Singapore.**

a. STB will work with our partner agencies to attract companies with tech and digital solutions that are relevant for tourism, to Singapore.

b. But that's not enough – that is just the supply side – we need you to provide the demand to test these solutions, to run pilots, and to see if you can scale them up.

c. If we don't do this, we will run the risk of becoming outdated, unable to keep up with the demands and expectations of discerning quality visitors.

44. I end this segment with my final video, which will hopefully inspire you to think about your own future and how you can leverage these trends to create more value for your businesses and to differentiate Singapore from our competitors.

Conclusion

45. I recap the four challenges I have issued today and I hope you will take the 4 challenges seriously:

- a. How may we reinforce Singapore's position as the world's most trusted, valued, innovative and safe destination for business and corporate travellers?
- b. Can Singapore become a leading urban wellness haven – where wellness offerings and experiences are easily available, fully and seamlessly integrated into the daily life of a modern city?
- c. How can Singapore become a top sustainable and innovative urban destination?
- d. Can Singapore become a thriving marketplace for great technology solution providers and tech-savvy tourism companies?

46. Success in each of these areas is by no means guaranteed.

- a. A lot will depend on how we weather the next few leaner years together
- b. Please do not expect to go back to "business as usual".
- c. Because if we go back to doing things in the same way, we would have wasted this crisis.
- d. And will be unprepared for the next one, which will most certainly come.
- e. But if we successfully address these challenges, we can ensure Singapore will be an attractive and compelling destination through 2030 and beyond.

47. I want to end off by answering a question that many of you have asked me this past year: Is there anything that we can be hopeful about? Indeed, despite all the challenges and bad news, I am hopeful.

- a. The Singapore brand remains very strong, buoyed by our positive handling of the pandemic. Travellers want to come to Singapore, as soon as they can.
- b. Despite severe disruptions to air travel, our connectivity to key cities and nodes around the world remains largely intact.

- c. Local and foreign companies remain confident in Singapore's appeal as a top travel destination – and want to invest in improving existing tourism products or to create new ones.
- d. We have managed to hold on to key skillsets and capabilities, despite the big hit from COVID-19. In fact, many of you are upgrading and building new skills!
- e. Driven by necessity, we are going through what is possibly the richest and most exciting phase of cooperative innovation and product development we have ever experienced.
- f. And finally – all of you, from the frontline staff in our airport, hotels, attractions and cruise ships, right to my colleagues in STB – all of you have demonstrated resilience and optimism while rolling up your sleeves to get all the work done.

48. These factors give me a great deal of hope for the future. We will get through this crisis, and we will remain one of the world's top cities for international travellers for years to come.

49. Thank you and have a great TIC 2021.