

Thomas Cook India to tap Tier-II & III airports for retail forex biz



Realising that Tier-II and III cities in India have emerged as growth engines for outbound travel, Thomas Cook (India) is increasingly focusing on tapping these markets for its foreign exchange business. As part of this initiative, the company is looking at expanding its retail forex outlets at airport across cities. Deepesh Varma, Senior VP, Foreign Exchange – Sales & Relationship Management, Thomas Cook (India) Ltd., said, “Last year, we recorded a growth of 10-12% for the forex business, and for FY18, we are expecting this figure to reach 15%. The focus is on the retail and corporate business and acquiring bids for Tier-II and III airports in India. We have taken a conscious decision to bid for airports across India to expand our reach. We have recently opened foreign exchange outlets at Varanasi, Coimbatore, Gaya and Bhubaneswar airports.”

Currently, Thomas Cook operates 26 foreign exchange counters in 8 airports—Delhi, Kochi, Trivandrum, Gaya, Bhubaneswar, Guwahati, Varanasi and Madurai.

Besides, the company will start offering AED (Emirati dirham) as the 9th currency to its borderless prepaid card (BPC) product by end of this month. “We want to push the BPC and the addition of AED is a step in that direction.”

As part of the overall group strategy to focus on digitisation, the forex division is deploying data analytics to increase conversions. “We are focusing on leveraging analytics and be proactive in terms of identifying potential customers as well as understand traveller behaviour. This will help us understand the number of days prior to departure a traveller makes forex purchase. The conversion rate for forex on the online platform is 14-15%.”

In terms of segments, the forex division is focusing on corporate customers as well as student travellers. “We are seeing nearly 15-20% in terms of students travelling overseas as well as emergence of new destinations for education tours. We are looking at key markets like Lucknow, Varanasi, South India, Gujarat, etc., to further tap this segment.”

Another area of focus for Varma is remittance. “We have partnered with Western Union, Express Money and Money Gram, and are looking at growing this segment with focus on Kerala, Gujarat and Punjab.”

Thomas Cook has launched the third edition Grand forex festival. It is a three-month-long promotion, where for the first week the company is selling forex at IBR rate. “Looking at the changing dynamics of customers, this is the first step towards acquisition of customers. We are already seeing a good response.”