

# Destination Management Organizations and the Evolving Digital Landscape of Travel

*As travelers turn to digital platforms for every leg of their travel journey, destination management organizations face new technology and marketing challenges.*

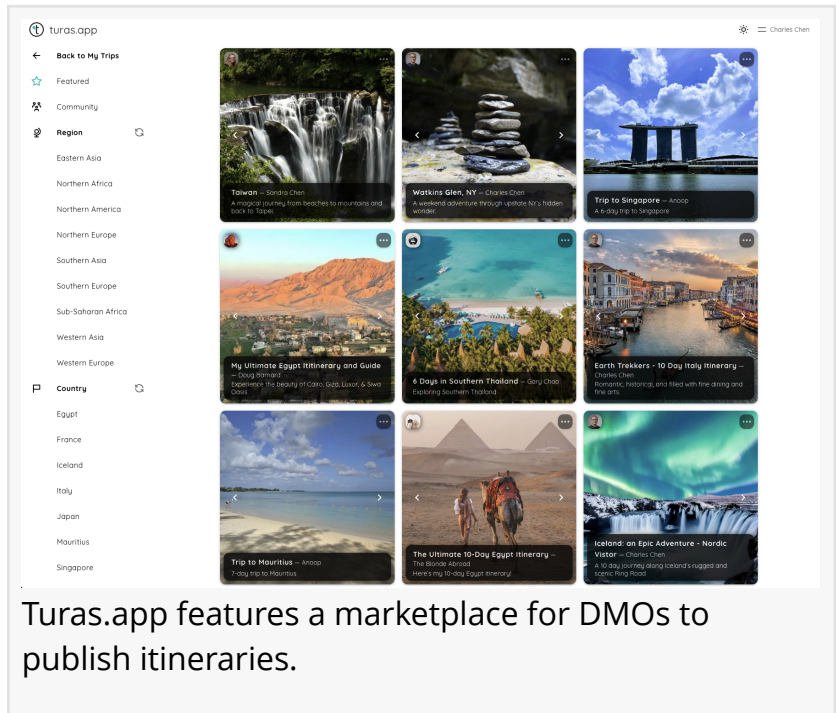
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/EINPresswire.com/ -- As the US enters the busy summer travel season, one thing is clear: travel is finally recovering to pre-COVID rates. Data from the TSA checkpoint passenger volumes shows that heading into the peak summer travel period, aggregate traveler volume in May 2023 was at 99% of the same period in 2019 (74,199,490 versus 74,588,923) and for June 2023, is just a tick off of 2019's volume (74,034,258 versus 74,139,874).

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Even as traveler behavior is becoming more social, more personal, and more experience-oriented, DMOs are still leaning on PDF guidebooks and static websites that aren't serving the modern traveler.”

*Gary Chao, COO Turas.app*



Turas.app features a marketplace for DMOs to publish itineraries.

Even as the volume is now matching that of pre-pandemic levels, there are notable differences in both how travelers are discovering and planning their travel as well as how destination management organizations (DMOs) are thinking about serving this shift in traveler behavior.

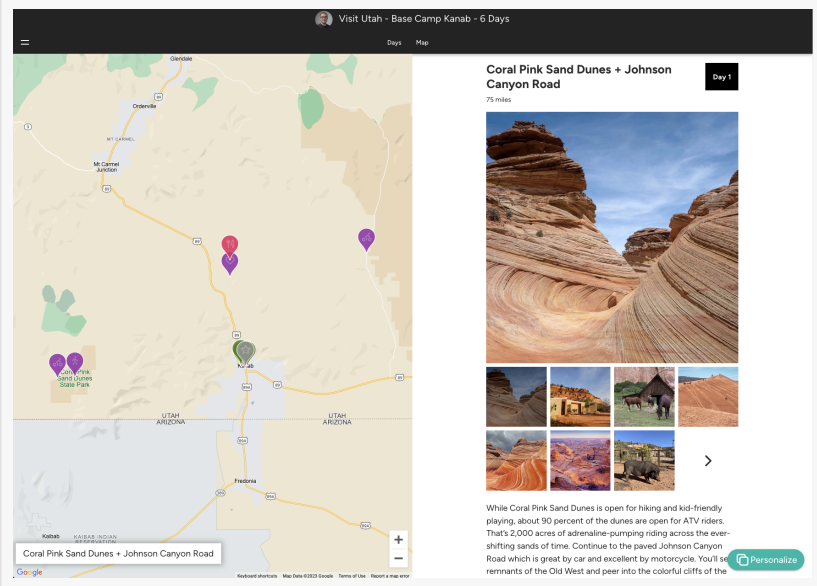
## SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON TRAVEL

While social media has always been an important driver of traveler behavior, the rise of media-oriented platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok has had a strong impact on travel behavior. According to Data.ai, TikTok registered

583 million monthly active users (MAU) in Q1 of 2020 and that number has tripled to 1,677 million MAU in Q1 of 2023.

Industry insights published by TikTok show just how powerful social media platforms can be when it comes to influencing travel behavior:

- 87% of TikTok users believe TikTok has inspired them to travel (TikTok Summer Break Study (Mexico) conducted by Ipsos, March 2022 (n=500))
- 43% of TikTok users have discovered a travel destination on TikTok (TikTok Marketing Science EU Travel Vertical Research 2021 conducted by Walnut Unlimited (n=4,000))



Turas.app lets DMOs build experiences like Visit California's bespoke roadtrip web app at a fraction of the cost.

- 31% of TikTok users go to TikTok to get travel inspiration from creators (TikTok Marketing Science EU Travel Vertical Research 2021 conducted by Walnut Unlimited (n=4,000))

These trends are not unique to TikTok. According to Destination Analysts' publication titled "The State of the American Traveler: Technology Edition", both millennials and Gen-Z are more likely to embrace social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and even livestreaming platform Twitch as an inspiration for their travel journey. Travelers are increasingly relying on a digital-first approach for every stage of their travel journey from discovery to purchasing to planning.

## NEW CHALLENGES FOR DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

In the US, state-level destination management organizations (DMOs) have started to embrace this trend towards digital travel journeys. For example, the Utah Office of Tourism's [Content Creator Collaboration program](#) allows content creators to apply for grants to participate in digital and social media marketing campaigns. Large states like California have out-sized budgets to spend building interactive digital experiences like the [Visit California Road Trip Republic website](#) to promote iconic road trip routes within the state.

However, for many smaller state and regional DMOs, it can be cost prohibitive to evolve from traditional solutions like downloadable PDF guides and static content websites. Building custom creative campaigns – especially highly interactive apps and experiences – often requires big budgets and long procurement cycles.

“Many organizations simply do not have the budget of a large entity like Visit California to build

bespoke solutions” says Gary Chao, COO of travel planning startup [Turas.app](#). Chao believes that DMOs need better tools to serve the emerging digital needs of their members and the regions that they represent: “Even as traveler behavior is becoming more social, more personal, and more experience-oriented, DMOs are still leaning on PDF guidebooks and static websites that aren’t serving the modern traveler.”

His company – Turas.app – is releasing a software as a service (SaaS) offering that provides DMOs with the tools to build rich, interactive experiences similar to the Visit California Road Trip Republic website for a fraction of the budget and time. “Consumers already love our itinerary planning tool and how easy it is to build itineraries and share their travel stories,” says Chao “and we see an opportunity for DMOs to use these same tools to engage with travelers who are digital-first consumers”.

Chao believes that a key benefit of Turas.app for DMOs is that it can help reduce the friction of planning a trip and increase what he calls “the impulse factor” by helping travelers visualize the trip. “One of the reasons why social media has had such a big impact on how people travel is the visual element. This is where Turas.app can help DMOs incorporate a more visual, more engaging experience,” says Chao.

## EMPOWERING DMOS FOR THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

One challenge with the rise of social media is that it can be difficult to correlate “low-intent” signals such as impressions, likes, and shares with high-intent travel.

Chao says that “Likes and shares are really shallow in terms of intent.” At Walmart, Chao was an e-commerce category manager where mastering the customer acquisition funnel was key to driving consumer behavior and conversion. “The travel industry is still evolving in that sense. The top of the funnel signals – impressions, likes, and shares – aren’t very strong. DMOs need new ways to not only create and market interactive content, but also measure the impact of that content on the conversion funnel.”

His company is betting on providing tools to DMOs to build rich, interactive travel content as well as travel-ready itineraries to align with a DMO’s strategic objectives. In addition, integrated analytics aim to help organizations measure the efficacy of marketing campaigns and identify trends in real-time.

Chao, of Turas.app, says “We think that there’s an opportunity here for DMOs to use Turas.app stories and collaborations with content creators on social media platforms to not only bring higher conversion, more authentic travel engagement, but also help DMOs manage the dispersion of traffic by highlighting less traveled destinations.”

One thing is for certain: even as traveler volume finally reaches parity with pre-pandemic levels, the digital transformation in travel consumer behavior and increased focus on social media

means that DMOs need to shift how to engage consumers on these platforms and move beyond the PDF guidebook.

Charles Chen

Turas Global, Inc

charles@turas.app

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