

## Singapore tourism suffers from bus driver shortage

-A Monitor Report

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Singapore : Local travel agencies in Singapore are saying that their tourism sector is suffering from a shortage of tour bus drivers, despite the expectation of the Singapore Tourism Board that the tourism sector will recover fully from the pandemic by 2024.

Reports claimed at least 50 per cent of a travel agency's coaches are currently not in operation due to a "tremendous" shortage of drivers. Travel agencies of Singapore offers coach services to popular destinations in Malaysia too, such as Genting Highlands and Melaka, and also provides tours here. They are having to turn down potential customers owing to the shortage, reports added.

STB said in January that international visitor arrivals to Singapore are expected to hit 12 million to 14 million in 2023, with full tourism recovery expected by 2024.

Singapore saw a total of 6.3 million visitors in 2022, a fraction of the record 19.1 million in 2019.

However, factors such as the retirement of ageing drivers, a lack of new young drivers and the Covid-19 pandemic have contributed to the severe shortage of tour bus drivers, said travel agencies and bus companies, which have not been able to capitalize on the tourism boom.

Reports said, irregular working hours and the availability of other jobs with more flexible hours are some potential reasons for the lack of new blood coming through.

Other than bus drivers, there is also a shortage of tour guides and workers in the reservations and operations positions.

Amid the shortages, the newly launched Manpower for Strategic Economic Priorities scheme has helped some agencies with the recruitment of foreign workers, reports claimed.

Introduced in December 2022, the scheme allows firms that advance Singapore's key economic priorities to temporarily hire a few more foreign workers beyond prevailing S Pass and work permit quotas for their industry.

Other industries that can benefit from this scheme include the maritime, logistics and supply chain, and hospitality sectors.