

Geoffrey Kent of Abercrombie & Kent

Abercrombie & Kent founder shares outlook on tourism to China and Egypt

By [Jim Calio](#)

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China is on its way to being the next big market for luxury tourism according to Geoffrey Kent, executive chairman, CEO and founder of Abercrombie & Kent (A&K).

“China is not just paying lip service to tourism,” Kent said. “China is backing it up with improvements in its infrastructure and, most importantly, China is training its most important asset – its human capital.”

Kent spoke at an annual roundtable for journalists in New York City, where he also discussed his company’s response to the crisis in the Middle East, especially in regard to Egypt, which, until now, has been A&K’s most popular destination.

“We’ve been through this so many times,” he said of the sudden cancellation by clients due to unrest in a foreign country. “But we’re diversified with a worldwide operation so we’re much more resilient than a specialist company that focuses on just one country.”

Even so, Kent said that he was surprised by how swiftly events move in Egypt and the impact the crisis had on tourism there.

He told journalists attending the roundtable that, prior to the Egypt crisis, he had never seen 100 percent cancellation but noted that almost all of A&K’s clients who canceled earlier in the year have rebooked their trips to Egypt.

“At the time, we got every one of our clients out safely,” he added.

As for China, Kent noted that most of A&K’s clients are frequent travelers who have been to China before, so they are coming back

for a second or third trip. They are looking for experiences off the beaten path, such as a journey along the Silk Road or a visit to Diqing, China’s Shangri-la.

“The Chinese see tourism as an industry,” he added. “A lot of countries don’t, and that’s a mistake.”

Kent, who is also the current president of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), cited recent figures showing that 8.2 percent of the world’s jobs are now in tourism, and that number is growing.

Kent first went to China in 1979, touring the country for 67 days and staying in military barracks because the hotel industry at the time was virtually nonexistent.

In 1982, Kent opened an Abercrombie & Kent office in Hong Kong, which was still a British colony, and it was not long until he had set up offices on the mainland. Hong Kong was turned over to China in 1997.

“We were the first international tour operator to open offices in Shanghai and Beijing,” he said.

Most recently, the company has focused on Yangtze River cruises.

“We have a luxury boutique vessel,” he said. “Our passengers enjoy personalized attention and superb service made possible when the guides, staff and crew are able to focus on only a handful of guests, not hundreds of other passengers.”

Despite looking to China, Kent said that A&K is bullish on the return of tourism to Egypt. Most clients who canceled their trips after the unrest last winter have rebooked in the fall.

Abercrombie & Kent started sending clients back to Egypt on April 1, and the first small group is scheduled to depart on April 14 for the 10-day Egypt Unveiled trip.