



Analysing the Impact of COVID-19 on the Tourism Industry in India

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on tourism in India and how tourism in India changed. The research relies on secondary data. Required information for the study was collected from various sources including research paper, journals, web sources (online materials), articles, literature and official government data/records. The government records or data about the incidences regarding corona virus has been collected and analysis of relevant literature has been done. This study uses statistical data from reliable sources for analyzing effect of COVID-19 on India's tourism sector. The outcome show that the corona virus has had a major impact not only in India but also across the globe. The virus outbreak disrupted social fabrics of the society and has created unprecedented disruption for Indian tourism industry. The fear of this pandemic has impacted tourism sector of the country domestically and internationally. This outbreak has created a major and ongoing challenge for tourism and economy. The domestic and international travellers postponed plans to visit anywhere across the country. Corona virus has disrupted the demand and supply chain across the country. The airlines have canceled flights so that the virus is not carried to other regions. Flight cancellations have badly impacted the Indian tourism industry.



The COVID-19 outbreak has presented the new hurdles for economy and has long term impact on tourism. There is an urgent need to take steps to solve key hit areas of the tourism and travel sector to lessen and minimize the effects of the pandemic.

Introduction

The virus was first reported in December 2019. Corona Virus, a global pandemic is a highly contagious viral illness due to the corona virus SARS-CoV-2. Corona cases were started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, caused negative impacts on tourism fabrics globally. Kerala reported the first case of COVID-19 on 30 January 2020. Pandemic is not a small word. If misused, it can spread fear or give false hope that the situation is under control. This can lead to more suffering and death (World Health Organisation,2020).

World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 a serious global health emergency on 30 January,2020. On 11th March,2020, it was officially declared a global pandemic and as of 22nd September 2020, it spread across 235 countries or territories. Around the world, by that date, there were over 31 million COVID-19 cases and approx. 09 lakhs people had died (World Health Organization, September 22,2020). In India, from Jan 30 to 22 September 2020, there have been 5,562, 663 COVID-19 cases with 88,935 deaths (WHO, September 22, 2020).

According to UNWTO (2020) “the outbreak of COVID-19 has brought the world to a standstill,” and stated that “tourism has been the worst affected of all major economic sectors.” As major components of national economy and any sudden shock to tourism industry because of COVID-19 also affects the various components of national economy. During April 2020, OECD in its estimation of 2020 tourism scenario claimed that the international tourism will decline between 45 % and 70%, depending when recovery starts. The recovery within the tourism industry will also delay due to economic slowdown caused by COVID-19 pandemic. According to OECD (2020), the present situation is "first and foremost, a humanitarian crisis affecting people’s lives" and that "this has very tangible impacts for the tourism sector, which is critical for many people, places and businesses." This pandemic caused significant impacts on the major sectors of economic globally, with the world’s GDP declined by about 5.2% in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). In India and other developing countries tourism and hospitality sector were severely affected. Many hotels, restaurants, and travel and tourism-related businesses were temporarily closed to control the spread of the virus. Governments introduced measures like keeping distance, staying



at home rule, travel bans and lockdowns. Even the trade and businesses that remained open experienced a major decline in demand (Bartik et al., 2020; Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Overall, the fear and impacts caused by COVID-19 created serious challenges and uncertainty on global tourism sector as well as India.

Tourism and travel sector plays a major role in India's economy. Both industry is very important for economic growth. In 2019, this sector contributed about 06.8% to India's total GDP and provided around 08% of overall employment (The Times of India, 2020). Additionally, domestic tourism (travel within the country) generates a large amount of income and the biggest contributors to the revenue. In Asian continent, the effect of pandemic is already beginning to seen. The global corona outbreak is worst ever scenario which affects international, Indian tourism and hospitality sector by giving sudden shock to all its geographical segments and tourism verticals. However, it brings many challenges for the tourism industry in India and act as a major hindrance for its development and prospects. Tourism brings foreign exchange, enhance regional development, directly or indirectly creates many jobs and businesses and support host communities. According to FAITH, around 03.8 crores of people could lose their jobs, which is over 70 % of the total 05.5 crore workforce in this sector. To handle and mitigate the effects of crisis, stakeholders should adopt and revise their policies and strategies. This paper discusses how COVID-19 affected India's tourism industry and tries to analyze steps to revive it.

Review of Literature

According to Chitra Guha and Madhup K. Gandhi (2020), this pandemic caused economic problems within the tourism sector. Local people who depend on tourism for their living were also affected. There was a sharp decline in tourism, especially in major tourist areas, and many people in these communities lost their sources of earning and jobs. To improve the scenario, the study recommended that stakeholders should invest more in the tourism and support products made by local people. In short term, financial support should be given to help the sector recover quickly. In long term, the focus should be on building flexibility and proper planning to handle future situations.

A study by Indranarain Ramlall and Arunava Bandyopadhyay (2025) analyzed the effects of pandemic on India's tourism sector using advanced modeling techniques. The study shows that the pandemic reduced exports, national income, investments, and economic growth. It also emphasized the need for economic diversification to reduce dependence on tourism and improve resilience against future crises.

Pravin Patel et al. (2020) analyzed the pandemic impacts on India's tourism sector. Study shows this scenario caused major drop in visitors' inflow due to travel restrictions and cancellations. Study reported



a 20–30% decline in tourism activity in 2020 compared to 2019 and suggested both immediate and lasting strategies for recovery.

Pavitra Shetty (2020) examined the effect of this global crisis on India's tourism sector. It emphasized that the panic situation created globally and suggested remedies to help the industry regain stability and growth after COVID-19.

Yogita Beri (2015) focused on importance of tourism for economic growth in India, with focus on Uttar Pradesh. The study highlighted tourism as a major contributor in earning foreign exchange, generating jobs and boosting economy.

V. Kumar (2020) emphasized tourism as a key sector for economic growth and earning foreign exchange. However, the study pointed out that the COVID-19 outbreak disrupted the tourism flow significantly and stressed the need for immediate revival strategies.

Shyju P. J. et al. (2024) analyzed the increase of domestic travel and tourism in India after covid crisis. His analysis shows that domestic tourism played a major part to support local economy during the recovery phase.

Recent studies and reports also show major recovery in domestic tourism. Like, tourism data from 2024–2025 shows a major rise in domestic tourist arrivals in India, indicating a shift toward local travel and resilience of the sector despite a slower recovery in international tourism.

General Overview of Tourism in India

Tourism in India is vibrant and flourishing and the country is fast becoming a major tourist destination. India is a country with rich cultural and traditional diversity. India is a country that offers variety of tourism activities and forms like eco-tourism, religious tourism, adventure tourism etc. to the tourists. India is known for its rich art, diverse culture and heritage which fascinate both domestic as well as international tourists. Several types of attractions like picturesque landscapes, monuments, beaches, hill stations, historical sites, architecture, enchanting backwater, places of religious interests that attracts tourist and turn India into a favourite destination for the tourist across the world. At present, there are 44 world heritage sites in India. Out of these, 36 are cultural, 07 are natural and one is of mixed type. For the promotion of both foreign and domestic travel, the government has launched several schemes, such as Visit India 2009, Swadesh Darshan (theme-based circuits), Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASAD), multilingual tourist helpline, organizing international tourism



mart every year in north-eastern states and adarsh smarak (model monuments). The ministry of tourism has also played vital and important role to promote tourism in India and it has also launched International advertising campaigns such as Incredible India to change the image of India globally. Seeing the various facets of tourism in India, it can be regarded as a sunrise industry.

The tourism industry has close linkage with other sectors such as aviation, transport, handicrafts and it also support their growth. This flourishing industry also creates many job and employment opportunities for inhabitants directly or indirectly due to its linkage with different economy sectors. Travel and tourism is considered as major foreign earnings for the nation and one of the most profitable industries of India. In 2019, foreign exchange earnings were 29.96 billion U.S. dollars having increase of 04.8% yearly and during January-February 2020 were US\$ 5.40 billion.

According to ministry of tourism, in 2019 India receive about 10.89 million tourists, with a small growth of 03.2% compared to the previous year. In January and February 2020, around 21,33,782 foreign tourist visited India. In addition to this, about 29,28,303 tourists visited using e-tourist visas, showing a growth of 23.6%. The travel and tourism sector created about 04.2 crore jobs in 2019, which was 08.1% of total employment in India. By 2028, this sector is expected to create around 52 million jobs. In 2020, global hotel groups had about a 47% share in market and likely to reach 50% by 2020.

The rate of growth of Indian tourism industry is 04.9% which is higher than growth rate of global travel and tourism industry (03. 5%). This enables it to contribute \$194 billion to the Indian economy in 2019 and to achieve 10th position globally. As per estimation, this industry will achieve 06.9% growth annually between 2019-2028 and able to contribute approximately 09.9% of India's gross domestic product in 2028. As per WTTC, in terms of tourism and travel contribution to GDP in 2018, India's position was 03rd among 185 countries.

For the development of theme based tourist circuits of northeast states under Swadesh Darshan, government sanctioned Rs. 1200 crore in Union budget 2020-21. Tourism is also regarded as important pillar of the make in India programme. In starting of 2020 because of pandemic situation, Indian tourism industry suffered a lot which raises concern among all the stakeholders related to the tourism industry. Till now, Indian tourism industry was continuously growing without any concern and hindrance but at present situation has been changed due to the emergence of COVID-19 crisis.



Estimation of consequences of this pandemic crisis on Indian travel and tourism sector is being done on priority basis and accordingly prepares a right strategy involving both government and the industry stakeholders.

Objective of the Study

The Indian tourism industry and world suffered badly due to the occurrence of COVID-19 and entering into a great crisis due to several kinds of restrictions imposed. Tourists are not allowed to visit any destination in India and world. The airlines, hotels as well as the transport were halted. Several kinds of measures taken by government to mitigate this pandemic impact will lead to adverse impact on India's gross domestic product as well as at global level. The effect of COVID-19 also depends on how long it lasts. This paper also attempts to focus on rethinking the tourism sector in future. The objective is to determine how significantly COVID-19 crisis has influenced Indian tourism industry and its development.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive approach and the research methodology used in this study is secondary in nature. All the Information in this research comes from secondary data which has been taken from the website of Ministry of Tourism, World Travel and Tourism Council, Confederation of Indian Industry, Credit Rating Information Services of India Limited, World Health Organization, World Tourism Organization and other sources. Besides this, articles, web sources (online materials.), literature, research papers, official government data & statistical database are also used for the secondary data to carry out study. To assess the consequences of pandemic crisis on India's tourism sector, data collected from reliable sources is being analyzed to reach at the conclusion.

Scenario of COVID-19 and Tourism

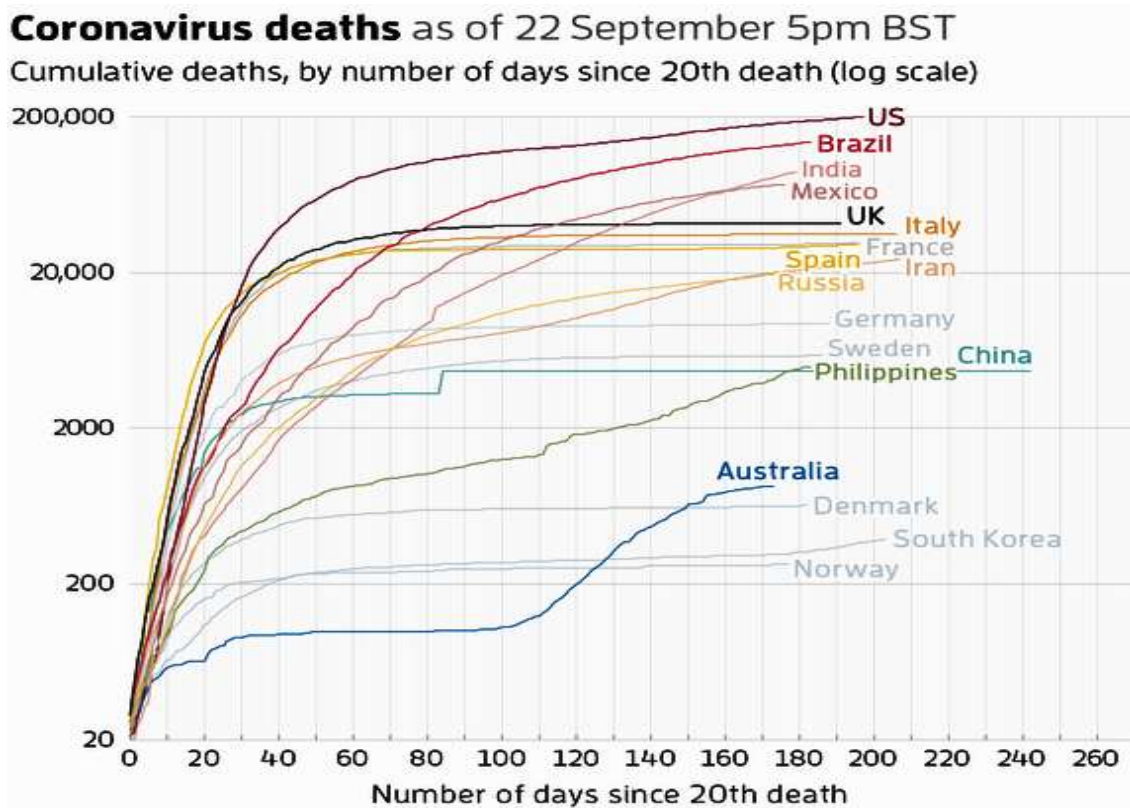
Several kinds of pandemic also occurred in human history and the crisis arises due to these kinds of pandemic caused adverse impact on human health, economy of a country. In nutshell, the pandemic threatens and impacted all parts of the social and economic ecosystem of society.

In India, first case of COVID-19 was found on 30 January, 2020. Since March and there after it rises on daily basis. Since enforcing lockdown on 24th March 2020, all the domestic as well as international tourist arrivals have been stopped. All the segments of Indian tourism industry have been affected by

COVID-19. India's measures were considered very strict globally in this regard. Persons of healthcare fraternity along with Government of India working diligently to minimize the effect of crisis.

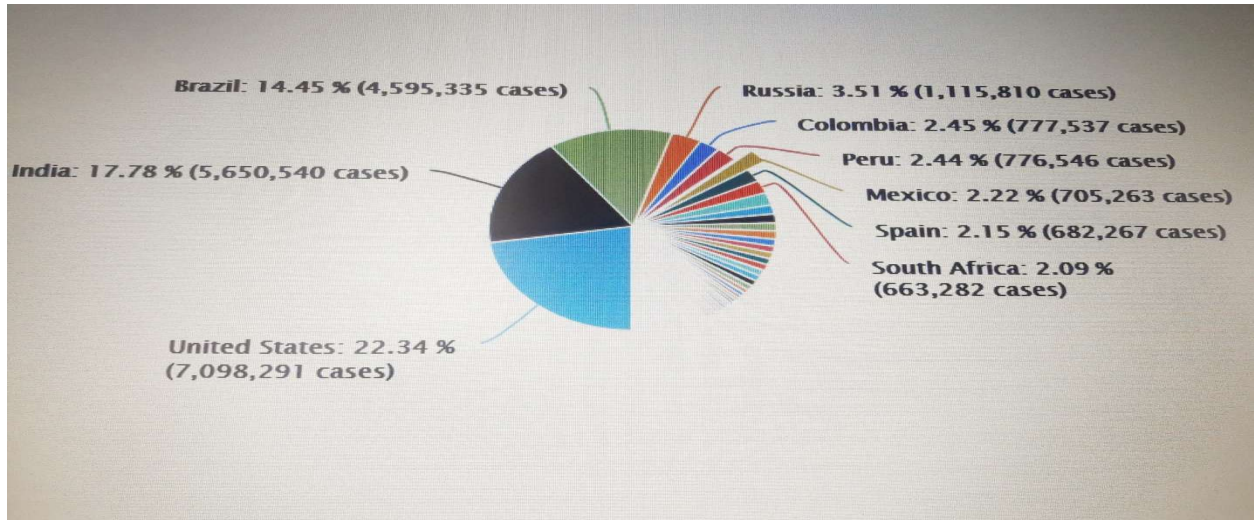
By early 2020, the pandemic had suddenly halted international tourism and severely affected this sector. International tourism lost about of 850 million to 01.1 billion visitors, export earnings fell by 910 million to 01.1 trillion US dollars and 100-120 million jobs, depending on when border reopened (July, September or December), as per UNWTO. Around 96 % of global destinations restricted travel by April 2020 due to COVID-19. UNWTO estimates that during the January-February-March of 2020, this crisis led to 22 % drop in global tourist arrivals. Millions of people's livelihood is at risk, and it may slow down progress toward the UN Nations' Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs).

Fig 01: Showing Corona Virus Deaths



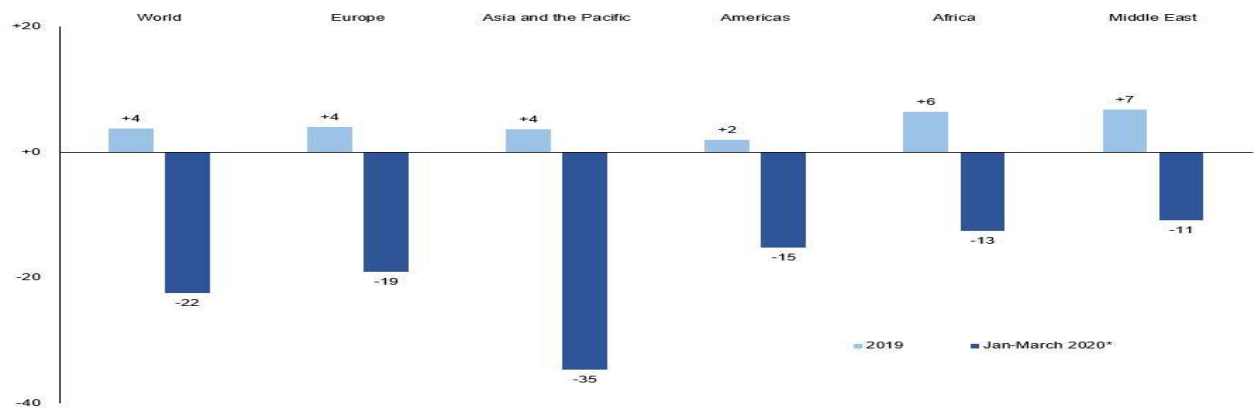
Source: New Scientist analysis of Johns Hopkins University, CSSE

Fig 02: Countries Corona Virus Case Distribution



Source: Worldometer

Fig 03: Comparison of global tourist arrivals (%) in early 2019 and 2020.



Source: UNWTO, 2020

Fig 04: International Tourist Arrivals by Region during Jan-June, 2020





Source: UNWTO (September,2020)

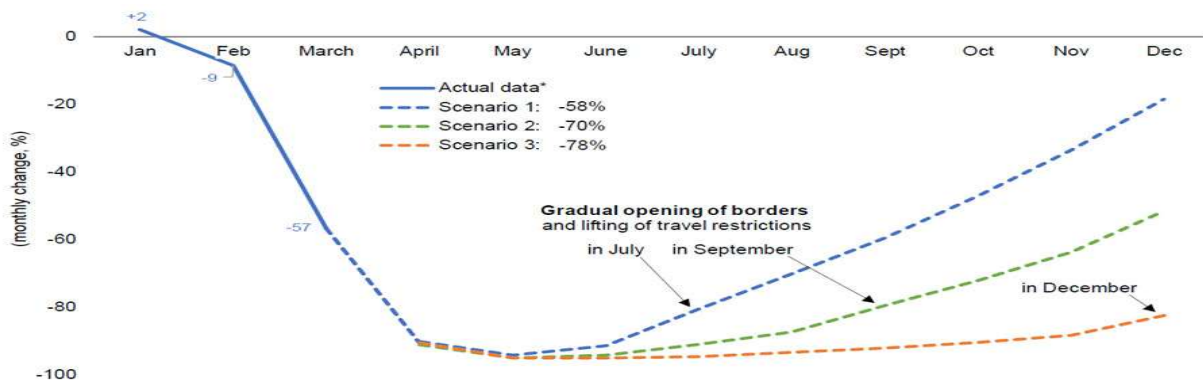
A decline of about 65% has been seen in global visitors because of coronavirus crisis and there was a 72 % drop in Asia-Pacific area during January-June of 2020.

Different Scenarios of Global Tourism in 2020

These scenarios show a major drop in visitor’s arrivals, between 58% and 78%. The UNWTO has projected three scenarios for the possible play of tourism in 2020 based on the opening-up dates of international borders. They are as follows:

- **Scenario-1:** A decline of 58% is to be seen if the travel restrictions ease in early July along with the opening of international borders.
- **Scenario 2:** A decline of 70% is to be seen if the travel restrictions ease in early September along with the opening of international borders.
- **Scenario 3:** A decline of 78% is to be seen if the travel restrictions ease in early December along with the opening of international borders.

Fig: 05: Shows Prediction of Global Visitors Flow for 2020 based on given scenarios



Source: UNWTO, 2020

Three possibilities were projected by the UNWTO, directed towards a decline of 58% to 78% in the footfall of international tourists in 2020. Following the trends through August, a demand decrease of around 70%(as in scenario 2) can be seen, taking into account the restriction restructuring in lots of destinations regarding travel. In different global regions, the impact of varying degrees will be felt, and it is expected that the Asia-Pacific region will rebound first. Around the start of September 2020, about 53% of the destinations showed relaxation in travel restrictions.



The scenario of travel and tourism in India is not in good phase due to trip cancellations by locals as well as foreign tourists, which ultimately affected the tourism in India badly. The scenario of coronavirus pandemic as well as tourism in India will be better with the coordinated efforts of the government, stakeholders and people.

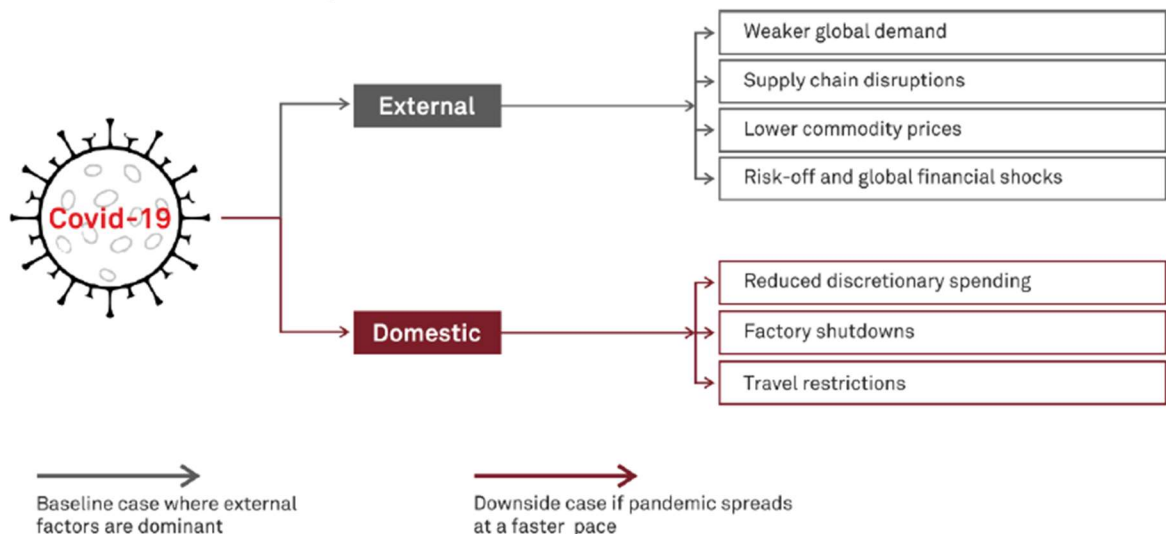
Impact of COVID-19 on India's Tourism Sector

An epidemic badly affects population and economy of each country. Almost all sectors, departments, and industries go through a recession. Tourism is a very important aspect for a country's economic progress. Due to coronavirus outbreak worldwide, tourism sectors are in great loss. The most severe effect of pandemic was seen within hospitality and tourism sector across world. In 2020, a shrinkage of the global economy by 0.3% took place due to this pandemic as per International Monetary Fund (IMF) prediction.

The COVID-19 virus was recorded to spread speedily in March 2020 in India. Therefore, a 21-day lockdown was imposed by the government of India on 24 March, 2020. During this period, whole country was under complete lockdown and suspended all types of work for an unknown period of time. Most businesses faced hardships and came close to closing due to the irregular market during the lockdown. Various measures like quarantine and complete lockdown seem to be a difficult affair for developing countries like India, as the period of the current crisis is not predictable.

Due to various measures and initiatives taken by the government, India ranked 34th among 140 nations in WEF'S World Travel and Tourism Competitiveness report. Every year, lots of people come to visit Indian tourism from abroad. "Atithi Devo Bhava" is India's tourism slogan means "guest is god." Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all foreign tours and conferences were cancelled. It's a big loss for tour and travel booking agencies. Because they don't have another option for survival. The Indian tourism industry has never faced such a crisis till now, which deeply affected all its components and verticals, such as heritage, MICE, cruise, leisure, and niche segments. Tourism is one of the biggest service sectors in India. Approximately, 40-50 million jobs will be at risk related to both directly and indirectly in 2020 due to this pandemic. (FICCI, 2020). The Indian tourism industry depends majorly on domestic tourism as much as so that it received around 01.8 billion visitors in 2019, which was responsible for the generation of around 83% of total earning from tourism. Seeing the important role of domestic tourism, it was also effected by the pandemic crisis. As data released by the Ministry of Tourism suggests, the arrival of foreign tourists has declined by 67% annually in early 2020. The issuance of global travel advisories by most countries, putting section 144 into effects, and the visas suspension make the situation worse. The aviation industry in India is performing consistently better. Due to the imposition of global travel

restrictions, the aviation industry in India is facing job reductions. The Indian tourism industry and its dependent industries are estimated to lose about US\$ 11,221 million due to flight operations delay and cancellation that may result in unemployment of 02.93 million after the pandemic outbreak. In COVID-19 phase, there is an estimated drop of 25%-30% in inbound tourism for international tourists. Inbound and outbound tourism have respectively dropped by 67% in January and 52% in February compared to last year. Indian aviation industry bears a loss of nearly \$0.36 billion in April-June 2020 as per a report by the Centre of Aviation (CAPA). The COVID-19 virus has also had a devastating impact on occupancy rates in hotels. Because of pandemic crisis, movement of trains has been stopped, due to which Indian Railways will lose around INR 17 billion. Various kinds of events such as conferences, sports events, and trade shows have been postponed, which affected host countries. As per an estimate, the revenue loss of the Indian hospitality sector was calculated to be approximately Rs 90,000 crore during 2020. This crisis affected both footprints and monetary receipts. At the same time, the present coronavirus crisis brought about a lot of changes in technical infrastructure, and now the tourism industry should give more emphasis on developing technical platforms and preparing for the future human resources. A study done by CRISIL showing possible channels of the COVID-19 impact on India (external or domestic) is shown below (Fig. 06).

Fig 06**Possible channels of Covid-19 impact on India****Source: CRISIL**

The tourism supply chain, encompassing tour operation, travel agents, hotels, and all modes of transportation, has been adversely affected. Tourism committee of CII reported that inbound foreign



tourism, valued at 28 billion US dollars, accounted for an average of 60% to 65% from October to March (The Economic Times, 2020). However, MICE travel budgets are expected to decrease. Companies encouraging remote work and online work culture in order to minimize hazards and cost. Around 50 million jobs in global tourism are in danger because of Covid-19, with Asia being most affected. Its impact is felt by all businesses and service providers connected to tourism. Many people, including farmers, restaurant workers and taxi drivers also affected.

Category	Region	2019 (Pre-Pandemic)	2020 (Pandemic Year)	Change / Impact
GDP Share	Global	10.4%	5.5%	-4.9% drop
	India	6.9%	4.7%	-2.2% drop
Employment	Global	343 Million	272 Million	71 Million lost
	India	40 Million	31 Million	9 Million lost

WTTC Report 2020

As per Research findings, the tourism in India is severely affected because of crisis and gradually it will recover in coming days. Seeing present scenario, it is still too soon to know the total effect of the pandemic on India's tourism sector. The Indian government helps in growth and tourism industry development. To face the challenges of COVID-19, Tourism Ministry (GoI) formed a national task force that includes state tourism ministers, association representatives such as CII, ASSOCHAM, WTCII, and FICCI. This task force is led by the Minister of State for Tourism. Hence, it can be said that there was a major change because of pandemic, which made this sector face loss for an uncertain duration.

How COVID-19 Affected Global Tourism

In 2019, the tourism sector worldwide contributed \$08.9 trillion to global GDP. However, due to the financial stress of the pandemic, there was a total revenue loss of \$195 billion in the first four months of 2020 (UNWTO, 2020). The countries whose economies mostly rely on tourism experience more negative



employment and wage effects. Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and fear of the virus led to drop in visitors' movement around the globe. Most of nations have closed their borders and stopped flights, making movement difficult. This has resulted in financial losses for hotels, airlines, travel agencies, tour operators, and related sectors. Most bookings were cancelled, and tourist places became lonely places. All this scenario also affected other sectors like transport, hotels, restaurants, and local markets that depend on tourists. The global tourism sector is facing a delay in recovery because of restrictions, lower earnings and lack of confidence. As a result, the industry has suffered significant losses, amounting to \$3.3 trillion as per a recent report, namely 'COVID-19 and Tourism' published by UNCTAD.

Developed nations such as UK, France see major GDP drop by this pandemic. In 2020, international tourism fell by 60 to 80% because of COVID-19 pandemic. This caused about 910 billion to 01.2 trillion USD in revenue loss and reduced the global GDP by approx. 01.5 to 02.8%, according to World Tourism Organization. Not only tourism and travel jobs are at risk but jobs in other allied sectors such as aviation, food service are also at risk. In Europe worst affected countries are France, Germany, Spain, Italy and UK due to Covid-19. Asia pacific region suffers highest job loss approximately 63.4 million jobs. As per WTTC "this impact would depend on how long the epidemic lasts and could still be exacerbated by recent restrictive measures, such as those taken by the U.S. administration on travel to Europe". OECD estimates suggest global tourism declined by 60% in 2020 and could fall to 80% if recovery is late. IATA estimate that airline could loss \$ 29.3 billion due to lower global air travel demand. This loss is expected to be between USD 63 billion (11%) and USD 114 billion (19%) for the passenger business in 2020.

Suggestions and Measures for the Revival of Indian Tourism Industry

The Indian economy is facing its first such situation since independence due to pandemic crisis. Tourism in India adds a significant amount to the GDP, making it a vital component of India's economy. The tourism industry, a collective entity, hit hard by the pandemic outbreak. Tourism sector, however, is not a single entity; its components work together. When one component of a system faces severe challenges, the entire system suffers the consequences. In the face of the current crisis, the government's role is crucial on many levels, helping tourism and economy recovery. It is necessary to know the problems and concerns that various stakeholders and businesses are facing at present. By doing so, government should be able to take right and appropriate measures. Recovery will also depend on how the tourism industry will be able to change and innovate itself.

The following measures and suggestions are aimed for revival-



- To overcome the challenges posed by this crisis, focus on diversification, digitalization, and innovation.
- Introducing new operational plans and to identify demand-supply pattern arises due to COVID-19 crises.
- The need today is situational and effective leadership that will adjust its strategies according to the present situation and reinvent tourism for the future. The Central, State governments and stakeholders of the industry have to do multiple strategies to bring the industry back on the track.
- Hotels must follow proper hygiene and sanitation to keep guests safe.
- Offers one year of tax exemption and benefits for supporting hotels, travel agents, and other concerned parties.
- The country is already distinguished by red, orange and green zones on the basis of number of pandemic cases, with green having the fewest. Industry can open up tourism in green zone by ensuring safety measures so that the people employed in the sector can earn their livelihood.
- India can attract international tourists again by promoting medical tourism, ayurveda, yoga and wellness tourism.
- Governments and private businesses/parties must work together to find innovative and desired solutions and follow global travel standards.
- Governments should have made laws or rules that provide financial aid or rewards for sustainable practices while ensuring everyone should follow environmental rules.
- Travel and tourism industries in India should develop new plans and policies for sustainable growth and infrastructure.
- Use a combination of technology, business intelligence and more effective marketing techniques along with focus on grievances of stakeholders for revival of industry.
- Identification of 'safe destination' from health safety prespective and its promotion as 'safe tourist destination'.
- Relaxation in taxes and charges related with travel and tourism industry and providing financial package.
- Domestic tourism should be promoted, as it is an indispensable part of the Indian tourism industry. Immediate focus on domestic tourism because it will begin first after post lockdown period.



Conclusion

Due to this global pandemic crisis and situation, tourism sector is among most adversely affected and requires immediate and future solutions. Tourism in India as well as world tourism is deeply affected by the pandemic. This crisis causes severe influence on tourism in India and worldwide in terms of revenue loss, job loss and slowdown economy growth. There's an urgent need to develop a multi-dimensional, sustainable, and responsible tourism economy. The sector's outlook will really depend on how quickly this virus spreads or how effectively it's contained. As the present crisis is still an ongoing therefore we will not able to get the knowledge of the picture as a whole. Seeing the present situation, we can predict that tourism sector will take longer time to recover completely and in 2021 it will recover to some extent. The present crisis has presented numerous obstacles and challenges to tourism sector, while simultaneously offering valuable perspectives on link between responsible development and tourism. This outbreak offers many lessons for the industry and gives a chance to rethink and improve tourism sector for the future and ahead. It also provides prominent lessons to the concern stakeholders, tourism researchers and policy makers regarding effects of global change. Adopting advanced and modern technology as per situation is need of an hour. In order to rebalance the economy, short term, intermediate and long term planning is required following this crisis. Travel and tourism sector should assume a proactive role as forward looking early mover w.r.t. policy and planning.

This crisis offers valuable lessons for navigating unforeseen situations, particularly in decision-making and policy-making for future challenges. By learning from the past, we can live in the present and hope for a better tomorrow. In view of above, we can confidently predict a brighter future and growth after pandemic crisis phase.

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