

A RESEARCH EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM: TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIAL AND IMPLICATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY !

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ABSTRACT

Indeed, one might say that tourism is itself one of the wonders of the world. That is why it has been so painful to see how tourism has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond the immediate pain of the pandemic, we should not miss the chance to make full use of the crisis. For the tourism sector in India, it is no longer going to be business-as-usual and we will need to redefine, refocus and change the game plan going forward. It is essential to measure the impact of Covid-19 and prepare a cogent strategy involving both the government and the industry stakeholders, which can be categorised into three phases: Survive (short-term), revive (medium-term) and thrive (long-term). We will see a trend towards taking cognisance of environmental costs beyond economic costs; destinations that will move towards a zero carbon footprint along with higher levels of hygiene; tour operators and hoteliers gravitating towards more responsible and meaningful experiences through minimising food miles; showcasing the local for the global; and positioning the host community as the centrepiece of the tourist experience.

KEYWORDS –

TOURISM, COVID 19 PANDEMIC, ECONOMIC LOSS, SOCIAL DISTANCING.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To study post-Covid effect on tourism industries.
- 2) To study policy responses and recovery in the some countries of the world.
- 3) To study Innovations initiated to win back traveller confidence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For detailed study secondary data has been used.

For analysis a descriptive method has been used.

INTRODUCTION

1. PRE-COVID 19

INTERNATIONAL TOURISM GROWTH CONTINUES TO OUTPACE THE GLOBAL ECONOMY IN ALL REGIONS.

1.5 billion international tourist arrivals were recorded in 2019, Globally. All regions saw a rise in international arrivals in 2019. Looking ahead, growth of 3% to 4% is predicted for 2020, an outlook reflected in the latest UNWTO Confidence Index which shows a cautious optimism: 47% of participants believe tourism will perform better and 43% at the same level of 2019.

2. POST-COVID

1 Billion Fewer International Arrivals Makes 2020 Worst Year in Tourism History, Global tourism suffered its worst year on record in 2020, with international arrivals dropping by 74% according to the latest data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Destinations worldwide welcomed 1 billion fewer international arrivals in 2020 than in the previous year, due to an unprecedented fall in demand and widespread travel restrictions.



REBUILDING TOURISM FOR THE FUTURE: COVID-19 POLICY RESPONSES AND RECOVERY

Domestic tourism is helping to soften the blow, at least partially, and governments have taken impressive immediate action to restore and re-activate the sector. Many countries are also now developing measures to build a more resilient tourism economy post COVID-19. These include preparing plans to support the sustainable recovery of tourism, promoting the digital transition and move to a greener tourism system, and rethinking tourism for the future. Encouraging news on vaccines has boosted hopes for recovery but challenges remain, with the sector expected to remain in survival mode. Domestic tourism has restarted and is helping to mitigate the impact on jobs and businesses in some destinations. However, real recovery will only be possible when international tourism returns. This requires global co-operation and evidence-based solutions so travel restrictions can be safely lifted.

While positive news on vaccines has boosted the hopes of tourism businesses and travellers alike, challenges remain. Vaccine roll out will take some time, and the sector is potentially facing stop/start cycles for some time. Countries need to develop collaborative systems across borders to safely resume travel, restore traveller and business confidence, stimulate demand and accelerate tourism recovery. More efficient international co-ordination systems are also needed to respond to the future. Clear communication, well-designed information policy and clarity on the epidemiological criteria will be particularly important where there is a need to change travel restrictions

and containment measures in response to virus outbreaks and the shifting sanitary situation.

UNWTO ANNOUNCES BALI TO HOST WORLD TOURISM DAY 2022

Bali will be hosting the World Tourism Day 2022 activities under the theme of "Rethinking Tourism" scheduled to take place in September 27, 2022.

DIGITAL IMMUNITY PASSPORTS

- Estonia has started to test one of the world's first digital immunity passports, created by a team including founders of global tech startups. A digital immunity passport collects testing data and enables people to share their immunity status with a third party using a temporary QR-code generated after digital authentication.

•INDIA

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, Working capital/personal loans will be provided with 100 percent guarantee with a limit of Rs 10 lakh for travel and tourism stakeholders and Rs 1 lakh for registered tourist guides, with no processing charges and waiver of prepayment charges. The Indian Government announced it will issue free tourist visas for the first 5 lakh tourists after global air travel opens up till March 31, 2022 to garner excitement from the industry and will also provide financial support to more than 11,000 registered tourist guides/travel and tourism stakeholders. Talking about the tourist visas that will be issued free of charge, a spokesperson of Rategain, a travel technology company, said that the first five lakh free VISA (worth approximately Rs 100 crore) will give much needed kick start to the inbound segment mainly for tourists. However, he added that this will not be a boost as such but will act as a kick start.

As climate change is a big issue, we are planning for sustainable tourism in the long run. In the last three-four years we've put emphasis on rural tourism, promotion of homestays and upgrading tourist-related infrastructure in those villages, and ensuring that people have activities to do there. Homestays are being made only at places of tourist importance. Three things have emerged from this: people are shunning highly dense urban areas and going to lesser-

known destinations; they don't want to travel in big groups now; and the road less taken is one of the things which has come out.

The time has come for the industry to explore — not only to go beyond its traditions and the way it used to sell, but also to find new methods as to how tourism will be accepted. IRCTC believes in reselling diversification and, over a period of time, we've really diversified. It's only due the Covid-19 that we were pulled back a little. The dip was mainly due to international and domestic travel restrictions, lockdowns and social distancing measures implemented by the Govt. of India. There is pent-up demand as people want to go out.

•IN CHINA

Public health is of great significance and very important for immediate implementation. If public health fails to meet the requirement, tourists will reduce their willingness to travel. They will not be able to consume with confidence even when they arrive at the destinations, which will ultimately affect the sustainable development of tourism. The high-speed railways are still under construction, and the fare is planned to be lowered with the purpose of benefiting more people. High-speed railways will become a crucial driving force for the high-quality development of China's tourism industry and an important guarantee for national tourism rights, even more importantly in the current context when domestic tourism is playing a crucial role for the recovery of the tourism industry.

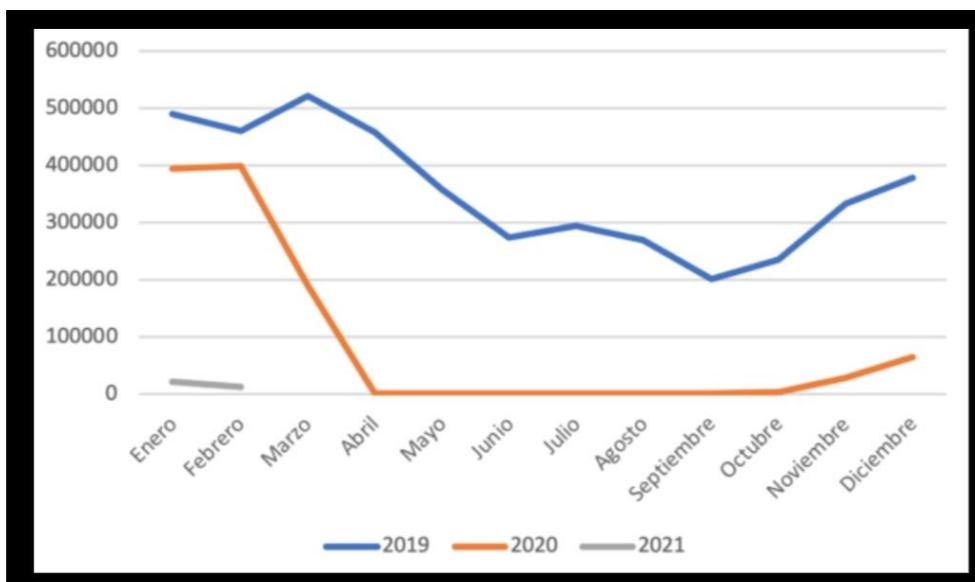
INNOVATIONS TO WIN BACK TRAVELER CONFIDENCE

Self-admission machines at the entrance check visitors' ID cards, showing health status (through a health code) and reservation history. Temperature measuring equipment, both at the entrance and in sites, monitors visitors' body temperature and gives an alert if a high temperature is recorded. Technologies are being deployed with 5G infrastructure, which helps to speed up entry with rapid temperature detection and increase coverage. While physical visitor numbers have been slashed, live streaming for sites has attracted thousands of viewers.

Huazhu Group, one of the largest hotel groups in China, is enabling customers in Hangzhou to make room reservations through an App, as well as touch less

payments, self-check in /out with facial recognition, and even order robot delivery of goods from outside the hotel (restaurant food, parcels, etc).

The Group's hotel system is also linked with the government's "Check-In in 30 seconds" platform, which verifies customers' ID and travel details.



WHEN DO YOU EXPECT A REBOUND IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM IN YOUR COUNTRY?

The overall prospects of a rebound in 2021 seem to have worsened. 50% of respondents now expect a rebound to occur only in 2022 as compared to 21% in October 2020. The remaining half of respondents still see a potential rebound in 2021, though below the expectations shown in the October 2020 survey (79% expected recovery in 2021). As and when tourism does restart, the UNWTO Panel of Experts foresee growing demand for open-air and nature-based tourism activities, with domestic tourism and 'slow travel' experiences gaining increasing interest.

Looking further ahead, most experts do not see a return to pre-pandemic levels happening before 2023. In fact, 43% of respondents point to 2023, while 41% expect a return to 2019 levels will only happen in 2024 or later. UNWTO's extended scenarios for 2021-2024 indicate that it could take two-and-a-half to four years for international tourism to return to 2019 levels.

CONCLUSION

Many countries are looking to domestic tourism to help stimulate economic recovery. Furthermore, promoting domestic tourism is not straightforward. Many people will have less disposable income for leisure activities, and social distancing and other containment measures may make it difficult or unappealing. Equally, where the tourism attractions are geared toward foreign markets it may take time to reorient toward domestic preferences.

Due to the evolving nature of the pandemic, many countries are now reintroducing stricter travel restrictions. These include mandatory testing, quarantines and in some cases a complete closure of borders, all weighing on the resumption of international travel. At the same time, the gradual rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine is expected to help restore consumer confidence, contribute to the easing travel restrictions and slowly normalize travel during the year ahead.

The latest UNWTO Panel of Experts survey shows a mixed outlook for 2021. Almost half of respondents (45%) envisaged better prospects for 2021 compared to last year, while 25% expect a similar performance and 30% foresee a worsening of results in 2021.

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