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Strategies to boost in-bound tourism in India

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Abstract

The term "inbound tourism" describes foreign visitors who come to a nation for vacation, business, or other reasons. In India, this industry is vital to job creation, economic expansion, and cross-cultural interaction. India's varied landscapes, historical sites, religious legacy, and lively culture make it one of the world's most popular travel destinations. India's tourist industry is a major force behind economic growth, making substantial contributions to GDP, foreign exchange profits, and infrastructure advancement. As a multi-sectoral industry, tourism boosts a number of related industries, such as retail, entertainment, handicrafts, hospitality, and transportation, which has a cascading effect on growth in other areas.

Because overseas visitors contribute foreign currency, which helps India's foreign exchange reserves and stabilizes the economy, inbound tourism has a significant financial influence. From five-star hotels to little guesthouses, from big restaurant chains to street food sellers, and from luxury brands to traditional artisans selling handcrafted goods, the industry also supports local companies. Because of this broad economic impact, tourism-related activities help people from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, including those who live in rural and semi-urban areas. Millions of people now have jobs because to the tourist and hospitality industries' increased need for qualified workers, which includes everything from tour guides and hotel employees to event planners and transportation companies. In addition to its economic benefits, inbound tourism improves India's standing internationally and solidifies its place on the world map. Travelers become ambassadors of India's culture, sharing their experiences with the globe as they discover the country's rich heritage, ancient temples, regal palaces, tranquil beaches, and vibrant cities. This favorable publicity increases interest in Indian customs, food, festivals, and spiritual practices throughout the world, further elevating the nation as a must-see travel destination. International goodwill and diplomatic ties are fostered by the cultural interchange that occurs through tourism, which promotes appreciation and understanding between nations.

Keywords: Inbound tourism, economic growth, foreign exchange, hospitality industry, cultural exchange, employment generation, heritage sites

Introduction

India is one of the most popular vacation destinations in the world because of its rich cultural legacy, varied landscapes, and historical sites. Millions of foreign visitors visit India every year because it provides a distinctive fusion of heritage, nature, adventure, wellness, and spiritual experiences, from the magnificent Taj Mahal to the tranquil backwaters of Kerala, the colorful festivals of Rajasthan, and the ethereal air of Varanasi. The nation is an internationally competitive tourist destination because it can accommodate a wide range of traveler interests, including luxury, budget, adventure, religious, and wellness tourism. However, India has not been able to fully capitalize on its inbound tourist sector, despite its enormous potential. The smooth expansion of international visitor arrivals is hampered by a number of administrative, infrastructure, and economic issues.

Even though India's GDP contribution from travel and tourism came in at number ten in 2019, it still trails other nations like France, Spain, the United States, and Thailand in terms of the number of tourists visiting the country worldwide.

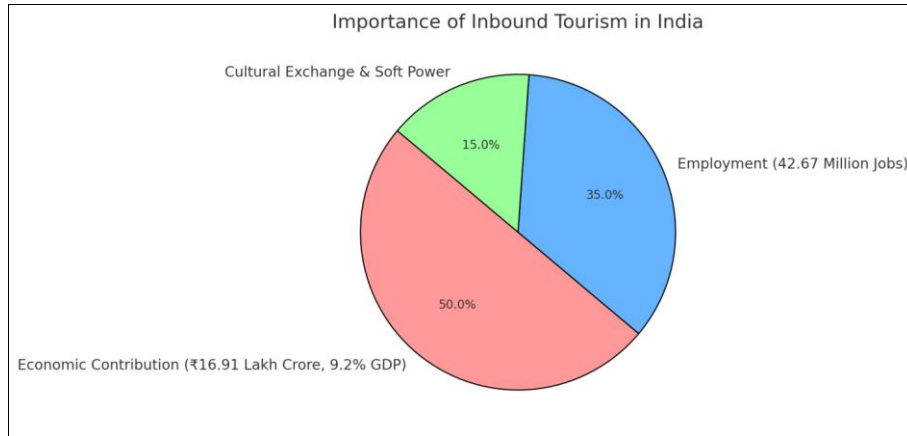
Some key facts highlighting the importance of inbound tourism

- **Economic Contribution:** In 2018, the tourist sector made up around 9.2% of India's GDP, or ₹16.91 lakh crore (US\$240 billion) (Source: Indian Brand Equity Foundation, 2021).
- **Employment Generation:** Prior to COVID-19, the tourist industry in India employed about 42.67 million people directly and indirectly, making it one of the biggest employers in the country.

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- **Cultural Exchange & Soft Power:** India's rich history and diversity provide tourists from around the world

with unforgettable experiences, enhancing interpersonal relationships, diplomatic relations, and global goodwill.

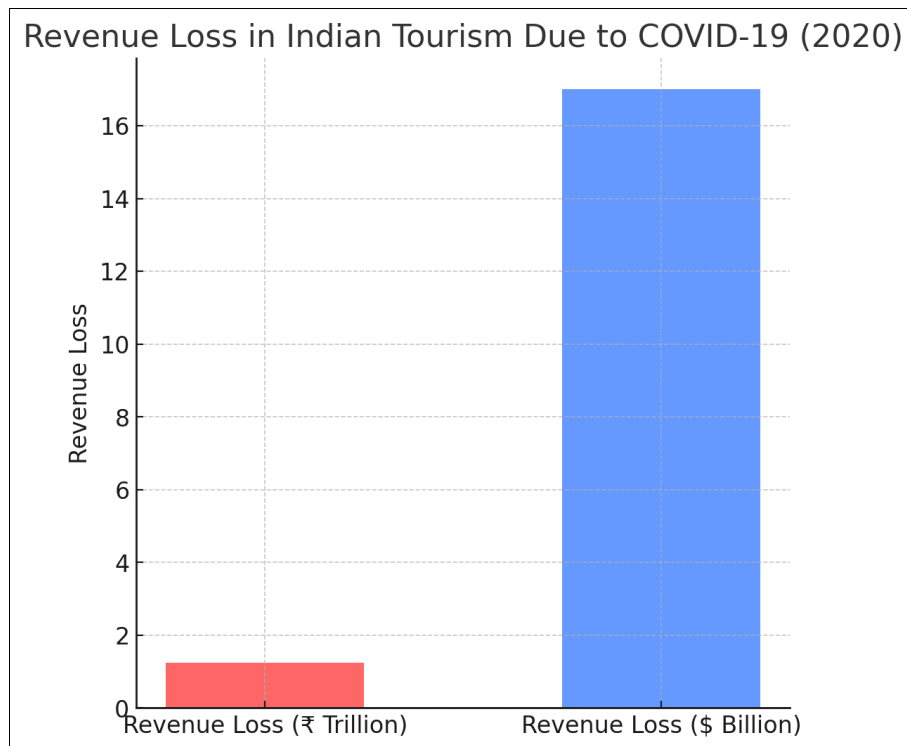


India was among the nations most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a disastrous effect on the world's tourism sector. The pandemic caused significant disruptions to the Indian tourism industry by resulting in lockdowns, extensive travel restrictions, and a precipitous drop in foreign visitor arrivals.

The pandemic-induced crisis is estimated to have caused a historic revenue loss of ₹1.25 trillion (\$17 billion) for

India's tourist and hospitality sector in 2020. Millions of livelihoods were impacted as the sector, which makes a substantial contribution to India's GDP and employment, came to a standstill.

This downturn not only highlighted the economic vulnerability of tourism in times of global crises but also emphasized the urgent need for robust recovery strategies to build resilience against future disruptions.



Key Impacts of COVID-19 on Inbound Tourism
Drastic Decline in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA)

Prior to the epidemic, foreign tourist visits (FTAs) to India had been steadily increasing, with 10.93 million tourists in 2019. However, because of strong international travel restrictions, FTAs fell by more than 75% in 2020, with only 2.74 million foreign visitors registered. The following consequences resulted from the decline in global mobility:

- **Drop in Hotel Occupancy Rates:** Record-low occupancy rates at luxury hotels, low-cost lodgings, and homestays resulted in large revenue losses.

- **Tourist-Dependent Businesses Closed:** A number of local businesses, travel agencies, tour operators, and guides experienced financial difficulties and had to close their doors permanently.
- **Decline in international Exchange Earnings (FEE):** Foreign exchange earnings, a vital source of income for India's economy, fell precipitously as a result of the sharp decline in international visitors.

Decline in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) in India (2019-2021): This bar chart represents the sharp decline in

foreign tourist arrivals in India due to COVID-19.

Year	Foreign Tourist Arrivals (in Millions)
2019	10.93
2020	2.74
2021	1.52

Revenue and Economic Losses in the Hospitality Sector

Prior to the epidemic, the Indian tourism and hospitality sector supported around 39 million employments and contributed 6.8% of the country's GDP, making it a significant economic driver. However, lockdowns, limitations on public meetings, and the suspension of international flights led to:

The drop in inbound travel has had a significant impact, especially on the travel and hospitality industry, which has seen a significant loss of jobs. More than 21.5 million people who worked in this sector lost their jobs, with daily wage laborers, tour guides, and small business owners being the most affected. The abrupt decline in foreign arrivals caused financial difficulties for many people who depended on tourism for their living, including independent tour operators, street vendors serving tourists, and artists selling handcrafted goods.

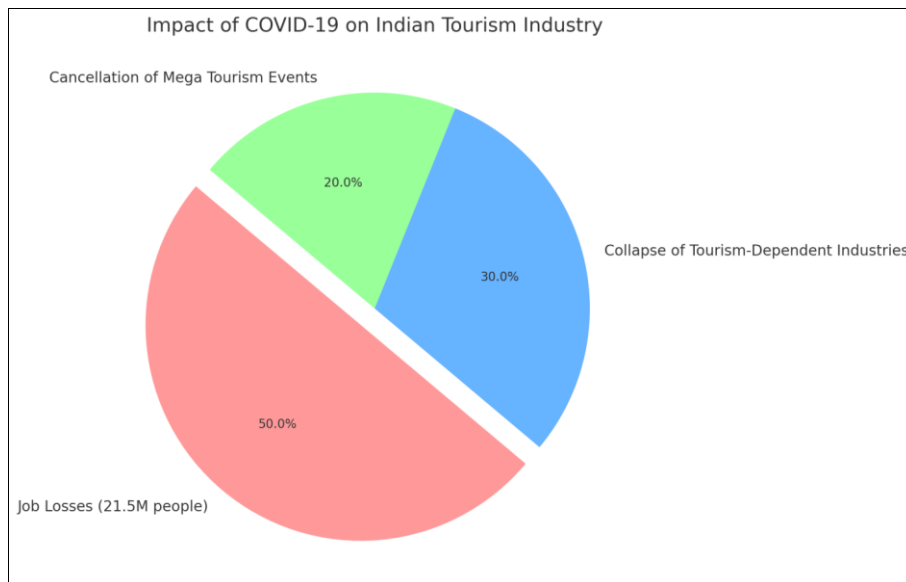
In addition to directly affecting the workers, the loss of jobs in this industry had a ripple impact on their families and communities, which contributed to a wider economic crisis. The job problem was made worse by the hospitality

industry, which includes hotels, resorts, and homestays. Many of these companies closed or only ran at a quarter of their former capacity.

The demise of industries reliant on tourism had a profound effect on other sectors in addition to directly resulting in employment losses. One of the sectors most severely impacted was aviation, as airline revenue significantly decreased due to restrictions on international flights and a decline in travel demand.

In the same way that the handicraft industry, which is heavily dependent on foreign tourists buying traditional Indian art, textiles, and souvenirs, suffered severe losses, the transportation sector, which depends heavily on the movement of international tourists, also saw a sharp decline in demand, with taxi drivers, bus operators, and rental car services seeing a drastic reduction in customers that made it difficult for them to sustain their businesses. Many airlines were forced to cut jobs, suspend operations, or even shut down entirely.

Both urban and rural skilled artisans, weavers, and craftspeople lost a significant market for their goods, which caused financial instability and, in many situations, forced them to give up their profession entirely. The entertainment sector saw a dramatic drop in earnings, which nearly forced several companies to close, especially those engaged in live performances, cultural events, and theme parks that welcome foreign visitors.



Impact on Niche Tourism Segments

India offers a wide range of tourism experiences, such as adventure, spiritual, wellness, medical, heritage, and ecotourism. These portions each faced particular difficulties:

- **Medical Tourism:** Patients from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa traveled to India in large numbers for medical tourism. Medical travel was stopped by border closures, which resulted in a sharp decline in revenue.
- **Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism:** The Golden Temple, Varanasi, Tirupati, and Ajmer suffered sharp drops in tourists, which had an impact on the economies of temples.
- **Eco and Adventure Tourism:** Funding for conservation and nature-based tourism were impacted

by the closure of national parks, wildlife reserves, and hiking routes.

Shift in Traveler Behavior and Perceptions

Global travel habits were altered by COVID-19, as travelers became more health-conscious and favored experiences that were more isolated from society and focused on the outdoors. Among the significant modifications are:

- **Preference for Domestic Travel:** Indian tourists are increasingly choosing to visit unusual and rural locations as domestic travel is still restricted.
- **Growth of Contactless and Digital Tourism:** The travel industry has to adjust to new technologically driven solutions as a result of travelers' preference for digital check-ins, e-payments, and virtual guided tours.

- **Growing Interest in Wellness and Sustainable Travel:** Tourists' preference for eco-resorts, Ayurvedic clinics, and yoga retreats increased demand for wellness travel.

Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis and the Need for Resilient Strategies

The pandemic served as a wake-up call for the Indian tourism industry to build a more resilient, sustainable, and technology-driven ecosystem. Some crucial lessons include:

1. Developing Crisis Management Protocols

During the pandemic, responses were disorganized due to the lack of a formal tourism crisis management plan. In order to be resilient in the future, tourism enterprises must receive emergency financial assistance during times of crisis.

Creating recovery funds for the tourism industry to offer financial assistance during crises. Creating digital monitoring tools to evaluate visitor flow and effectively handle emergencies.

2. Strengthening Health and Safety Standards

To regain tourist confidence, global-standard health and hygiene measures should be adopted, such as:

- Mandatory COVID-19 insurance coverage for international visitors.
- Expansion of quarantine-free travel corridors for vaccinated tourists.
- Implementation of smart touchless technologies in airports, hotels, and attractions.

3. Diversifying Tourism Offerings

The heavy reliance on heritage and city tourism proved to be a vulnerability during the pandemic. Future strategies should promote alternative tourism models such as:

- **Rural and Agri-Tourism:** Encouraging international travelers to explore lesser-known destinations.
- **Eco and Sustainable Tourism:** Strengthening initiatives that focus on conservation, green infrastructure, and responsible travel.
- **Virtual and Augmented Reality Tourism:** Expanding digital tourism through 360-degree VR experiences and virtual guided tours for those unable to travel.

4. Strengthening Digital and AI-Driven Marketing Strategies

- AI-driven travel recommendations based on changing tourist preferences.
- Use of social media influencers and online campaigns to attract foreign visitors.
- Smart tourism apps with real-time travel advisories, health guidelines, and virtual bookings.

Strategies for Revitalizing Inbound Tourism

1. **Incentives and Policy Reforms Simplifying Visa Procedures:** By making visas easier to get, India may become more accessible to international travelers. The visitor experience can be improved by lowering administrative barriers and putting in place user-friendly e-visa systems.
2. **Financial Incentives:** You can draw in more tourists by offering incentives like tax refunds or the waiver of

tourist visa costs at certain times. The national government can also consider reimbursing Value Added Tax (VAT) on purchases made by international visitors, making travel to India more economically enticing.

3. **Infrastructure Development o Transportation and Connectivity:** It is essential to enhance road, rail, and air connectivity to popular tourist locations. Developing regional airports and enhancing last-mile connectivity can make travel within India more easy for international tourists.
4. **Accommodation Facilities:** Promoting the creation of a variety of lodging choices, from high-end hotels to low-cost lodgings, can accommodate a range of traveler preferences. Public-private partnerships can play a significant role in developing the hospitality infrastructure.
2. **Marketing and Promotion o Global Campaigns:** Reviving international marketing campaigns such as "Incredible India" can highlight India's attractions to a worldwide audience. Reach and engagement can be increased by leveraging digital platforms and social media.
5. **Targeted Promotions:** You can draw in particular types of tourists by concentrating on niche tourism markets like adventure, wellness, and cultural tourism. India can stand out from other travel destinations by emphasizing distinctive experiences like yoga retreats, heritage walks, and culinary tours.
6. **Safety and Security Enhancements:** Tourist Police Force: Establishing a dedicated tourist police force can protect the safety of international visitors. The entire experience can be improved by teaching staff to be accommodating and responsive to tourists.
7. **Health and Hygiene guidelines:** In the post-pandemic period, maintaining high standards of health and hygiene is crucial. Implementing and publicizing stringent cleanliness guidelines helps generate trust among potential tourists.

Case Study: Rajasthan's Tourism Sector amid COVID-19

Renowned for its ancient sites and rich cultural legacy, Rajasthan has long been a top travel destination for both domestic and foreign travelers. However, the state's tourism industry had previously unheard-of difficulties in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, resulting in severe economic downturns and high unemployment rates in sectors that depend on tourism.

Impact on Tourist Arrivals

Both local and foreign visitor arrivals to Rajasthan fell precipitously as a result of the pandemic. The state received over 1.6 million foreign visitors and 52.22 million domestic visitors in 2019. However, these figures fell to 446,457 foreign visitors and 15.12 million domestic tourists in 2020, a 71% drop from the year before.

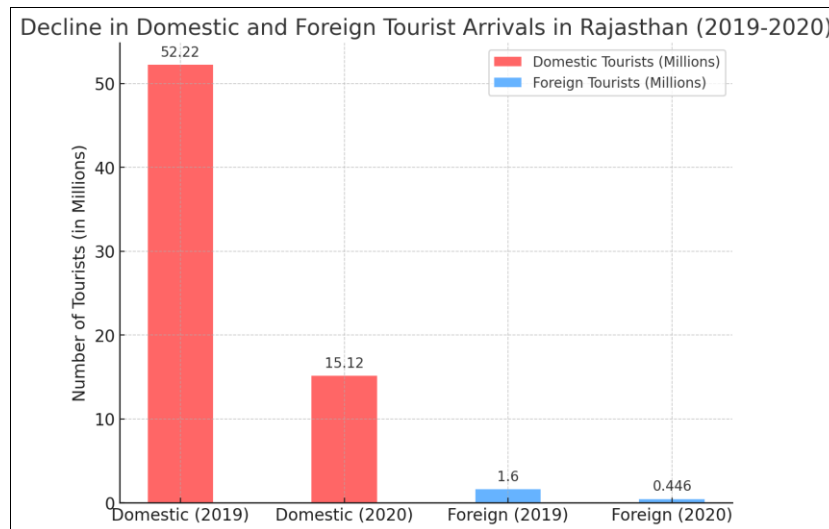
Economic Consequences

Serious economic consequences resulted from the steep drop in visitor arrivals:

- **Revenue Loss:** Rajasthan's tourism industry, which accounts for 15% of the state's GDP, suffered large revenue losses as a result of the decline in visitor numbers.

- **Employment Impact:** The tourism downturn caused a large number of job losses, especially for daily wage

workers, tour guides, artisans, and small business owners who depend heavily on visitor spending.



Cancellation of Major Events

Important religious and cultural events, including the Pushkar Fair and other international trade shows, had to be canceled or postponed due to the pandemic. These gatherings typically attract sizable audiences and make a substantial economic contribution to the community. Their absence impacted the livelihoods of individuals who depended on these events in addition to causing acute financial losses.

Adaptive Strategies for Recovery

The pandemic's challenges highlighted the need for flexible approaches to guarantee the resilience of Rajasthan's tourism industry:

1. **Diversification of Tourism Offerings:** Creating niche tourism markets like eco-tourism, rural tourism, and wellness tourism to draw in a wider range of tourists.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Investing in infrastructure upgrades, such as improved connectivity and upgraded amenities at tourist destinations, to give travelers a safer and more comfortable experience.
3. **Digital Marketing Initiatives:** Using digital platforms to advertise Rajasthan's attractions, involve prospective travelers, and offer virtual experiences to sustain interest during travel restrictions.
4. **Health and Safety Protocols:** Implementing stringent health and safety measures to restore traveler confidence, including sanitation protocols, health screenings, and the promotion of less crowded destinations.

Conclusion

Reviving inbound travel to India requires a multifaceted strategy that takes into account infrastructure, marketing, safety, and legislation. India can guarantee sustainable growth in the tourism industry and increase its appeal as a top travel destination by putting these strategies into practice.

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