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Tourism sector in India after COVID-19 pandemic: An impact analysis

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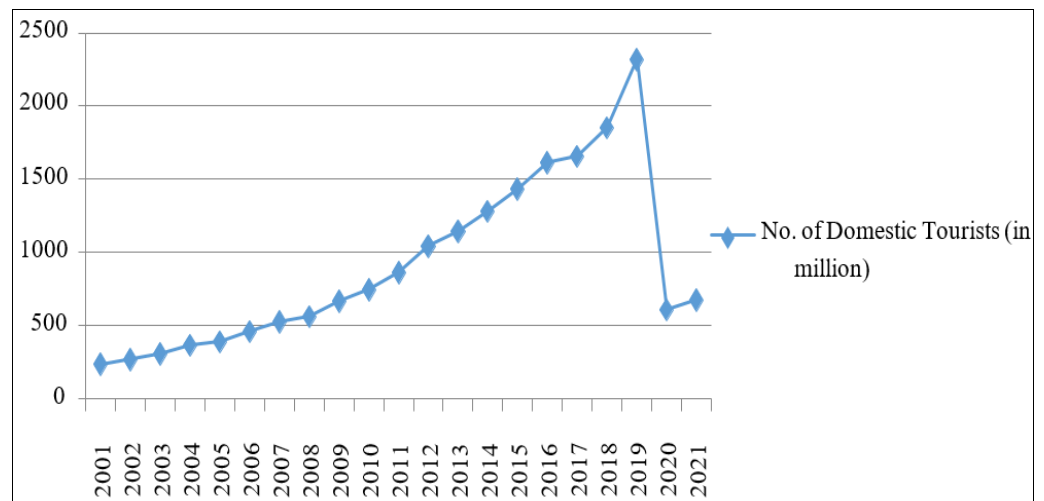
Abstract

The current study focuses on the position of the tourism sector after the COVID-19 pandemic in India. The author also discusses the situation of Indian tourism along with its strengths and weaknesses before COVID-19. The author also compared the Indian tourism industry with other Asian countries' tourism performances post COVID-19. The COVID-19 spread significantly impacted the Indian tourism industry, and the tourism stakeholders', hotels, restaurants, and transportation services. The current study identified tourist intention to travel to any destination was influenced by perceived risks, destination image, electronic word of mouth, and tourist constraints during COVID-19. Due to this, the intention/ motivation for travelling to any destination have also been impacted. The fast vaccination tracks have boosted the confidence level among travelers across India. Lifting of transportation restriction, gave tourists a higher confidence to visit various locations across country.

Keywords: Tourism, India, COVID, pandemic

Introduction

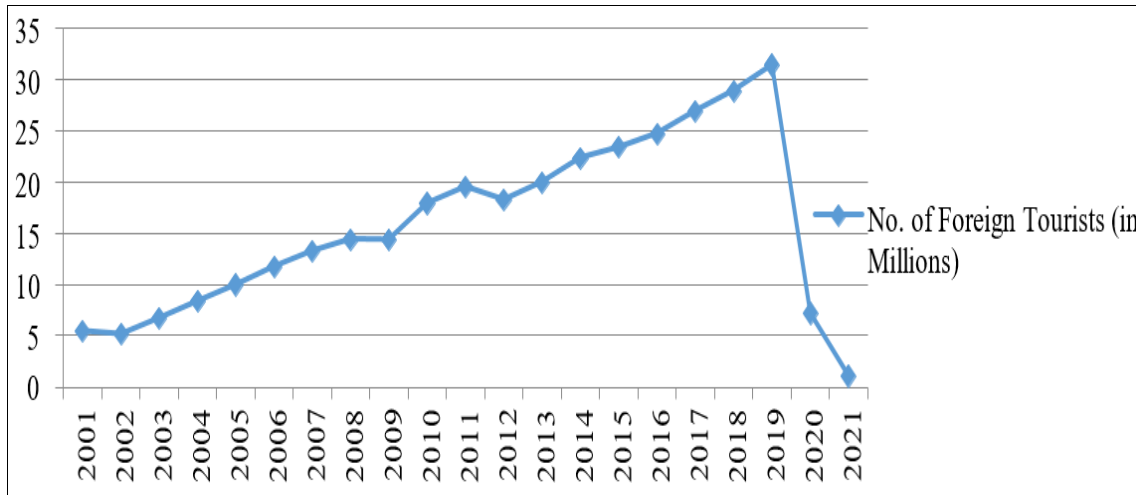
The COVID-19 virus had an impact on nearly every industry in the world (Padhan & Prabheesh, 2021) [16], and the virus had a significant impact on the tourism industry. The tourism industry had a negative growth rate of 97% by March-April 2020 (UNWTO, 2022). The number of foreign tourists visiting Indian states and UTs decreased by 77.2% in 2020 compared to the previous year 2019. When compared to the previous year, the growth rate of domestic tourists visiting Indian states and UT in 2020 was -73.7%. The drastic drop in domestic and foreign tourists from 2019 to 2020 was because of the COVID-19 Impact. The domestic tourists visit as compared to 2021 was positive 11% as compared to negative 73.7 in 2020 and the foreign tourists visit in India was 1.05 million negative 85.4% growth as compared to year 2020 negative 77.2% (7.17 Million). The trend line for domestic and foreign tourists is given in figures 1a and 1b.



Source: (Ministry of Tourism, 2022)

Fig 1a: No. of Domestic Tourists (In million)

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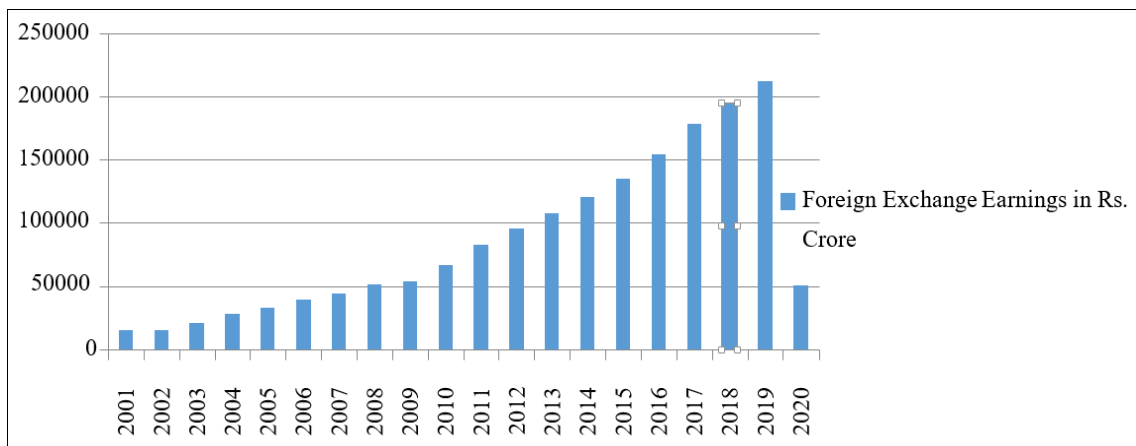


Source: (Ministry of Tourism, 2022)

Fig 1b: No. of Foreign Tourists (In millions)

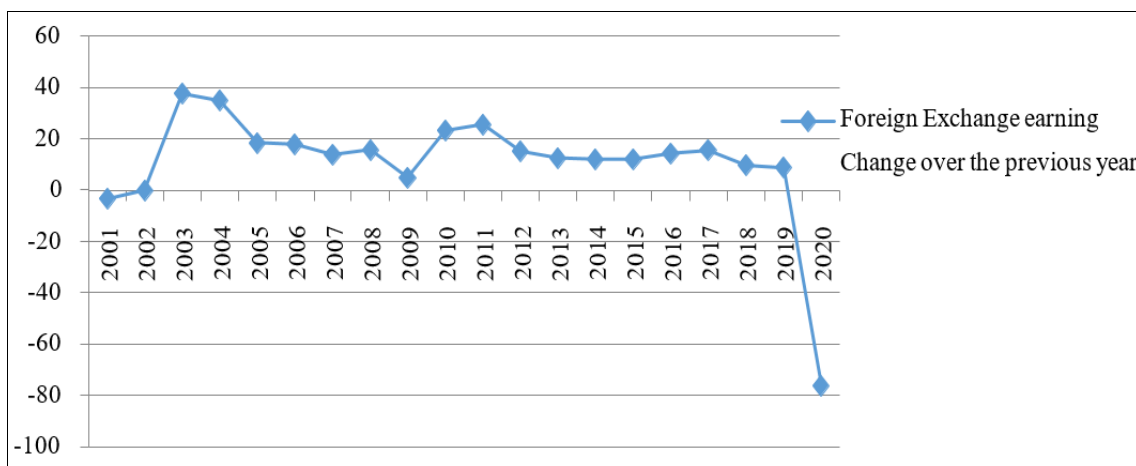
Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world. France, Spain, the United States, China, Italy, Turkey, and other countries accounted for the majority of global tourist arrivals in 2018 and 2019 (Ministry of Tourism (MOT), 2020). Tourism plays an important role in many countries' GDPs (Madden, 2020; Venkatesh & Raj, 2017) [13, 22]. This sector helps the local community and the government to generate employment opportunities as well as income. It also helps in establishing the tourism sector through the

incorporation of more service providers, thereby generating employment for many. It also results in raised living standards for people, an improved quality of life, foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure development, education, and training for many. India's foreign exchange earnings were down by negative 76.3% in 2020 as compared to 2019. The foreign exchange earnings and the earning change over the previous year details are in Figure 1c and 1d.



Source: (Ministry of Tourism, 2022)

Fig 1c: Foreign Exchange Earnings in Rs. Crore



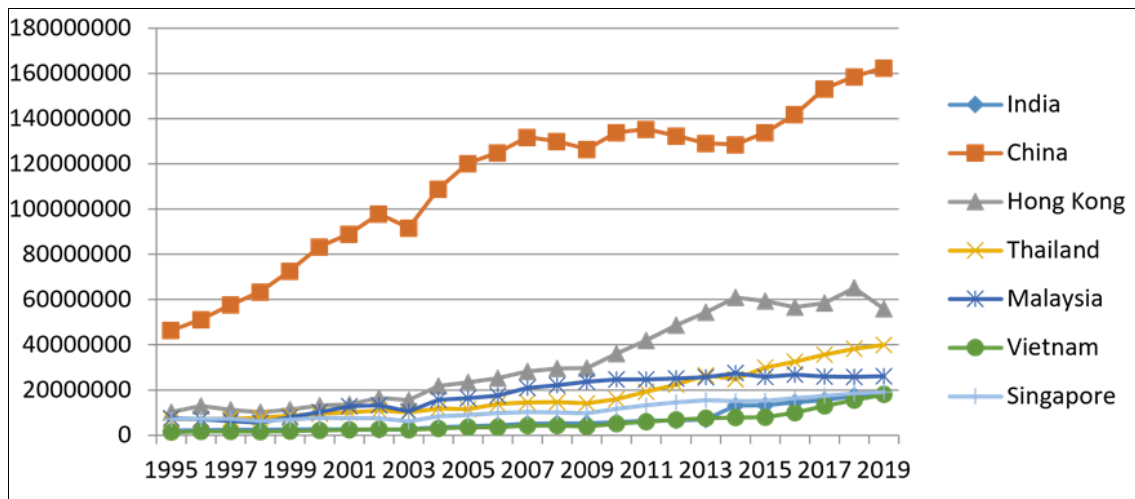
Source: (Ministry of Tourism, 2022)

Fig 1d: Foreign Exchange earning change over the previous year

India was a popular travel destination among tourists around the world before COVID-19. India is a tourist's paradise because of its cultural sites and natural variations. India is a good place to go on vacation because of its history and culture (Dixit, 2020) [2]. There is a wide range of landscapes, from snow-covered mountains to sizzling sands to evergreen forests. It has a lot of things to do for tourists. Furthermore, it has ancient and majestic monuments, forts, and palaces, a rich culture, lively fairs, folk arts, and hospitality that is second to none (Dixit, 2020) [2].

India tourism status before COVID-19: India as a travel

and tourism destination isn't getting enough foreign tourists, even though it has a lot of history, culture, and geographical location (Khan *et al.*, 2018) [10]. Despite having many tourist destinations, India is in 23rd position in the world of tourism (Ministry of Tourism (MOT), 2020). As per the tourist share among different countries in 2019, China had 65.7 million, Thailand had 39.8 million, Malaysia had 26.1 million, Hong Kong had 23.8 million, Vietnam had 18 million and India had 17.9 million travelers who visited these countries (Ministry of Tourism (MOT), 2020). This shows India has a long way to go to become a preferred travel destination among Asian countries and the world.



Source: (Roser, 2021) [20]

Fig 1e: Indian tourism from 1995 to 2019 with compare to China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.

In the Indian scenario, many Indian tourist destinations lack basic facilities like water, cleanliness, and required hygiene. During their trip, tourists run into a lot of problems, such as not being able to speak the language (because there are different languages), not having clean rooms, not feeling safe and secure, not having good transportation options, bad behavior from locals, high prices, and untrained staff (IITM, 2010; Kumar & Gupta, 2018) [8, 11].

There are different types of scams done on tourists in India. These scams are beggars, touts, street hustlers, commission agents, religious, fake products, and charging too much for any goods, services, and transportation (Rock's, 2021) [18]. These scams create a negative image, and these images have directly impacted the prospective travelers' minds as a perceived risk. Tourists who have already visited India report their experiences via blogs and social media posts, which also have a great impact on future prospective tourists (Erik, 2020; Rock's, 2021) [4, 18].

Problems of tourism sector during COVID-19

COVID-19 is a transferable disease. It can be spread through an infected person's cough, sneeze, sing, breathe, or speak (World health organization, 2020). Many people lost their loved ones due to COVID-19 and its starting phase in January 2020, when no prescribed medication and vaccine were available. The tourism sector always has small, medium, and large gatherings around the tourist places and there are more chances that a person will have physical contact with another person. Due to this, COVID-19 has a serious impact on tourism sector stakeholders, including restaurants, hotels, transportation services, tourists, etc. This period was one of the darkest for the tourism sector and the

COVID-19 threat is not over yet. The Indian government called for a full-flagged lockdown in all of India during COVID-19, except for a few sectors, for example medical staff, medical shops, daily consumable products etc. Now we will discuss some of the main problems that the tourism sector has faced during COVID-19.

Perceived Risk: Perceived risk refers to the examination of potential loss, harmful impact, and lack of conscious control of any event during travel (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011) [6]. There are many types of perceived risks, but during COVID-19, perceived risks played an important role in preventing travelers from travelling to any tourist destination.

- Physical Risk:** This refers to life-threatening illnesses, unfavorable weather conditions, natural disasters, accidents, and any event which can cause travelers' personal health (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992) [19]. People died due to the COVID-19 spread, and it didn't have any prescribed medicine or vaccine during the spread. This creates a negative destination image in travelers' minds. This was the reason why people were afraid to visit tourist attractions.
- Financial Risk:** If a tourist purchases anything that isn't worth their money, they're taking a financial risk (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998) [21]. Travel restrictions were imposed during COVID-19, and transportation services were disrupted as a result of the impact of COVID-19. The restrictions on transportation services impacted both foreign as well as domestic tourists' ability to travel to any destination.
- Performance Risk:** This kind of risk happens when the quality of tourism goods and services doesn't live up to

what tourists expect (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011) [6]. The hotels and restaurants were interrupted due to the human touch factor as well as the chances of the spread of COVID-19. Is it possible for hotels and restaurants to follow the COVID-19 protocol and adhere to the COVID-19 guidelines correctly? This is a big question for the tourism service industry. The tourists might not get the real experience or expected experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- d) **Time Risk:** Time risk refers to the possibility of delays, taking longer than usual and other factors that may cause tourists to waste time (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006) [6]. The COVID 19 restrictions, interrupted transportation service, and COVID-19 serious impacts on human health create a time-risk when visiting any destination.

Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM): EWOM refers to any positive or negative expression made by prospective, actual, or previous customers about a product or corporation, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet (Litvin *et al.*, 2008) [12]. During the COVID-19 spread, all newspapers, television, and social media platforms were occupied with the COVID-19 spread, the number of deaths per day, the number of COVID-19 infected patients per day, how to save ourselves and our family members from the COVID-19 spread, and what are the safety guidelines to follow if anyone in the family member gets COVID positive. The whole internet and social media platforms were filled with this information. The serious impact on personal health and death causes creates a negative image of COVID-19.

Destination Image: The destination image is the overall image of an individual that they carry in their mind (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993) [3]. The negative impact and continuous causalities of information about COVID-19 through newspapers, magazines, television, radio, internet and social media platforms have possessed a negative image about the destination. Before visiting any nearby location, many people looked up the number of COVID-19 infected people online.

Tourists' Constraints: Travel constraints are defined as the barriers or reasons that prevent tourists from visiting a specific destination (Huang & Hsu, 2009) [7]. The government of India (GOI) called for a complete lockdown during the COVID-19 spread. People were trapped in their homes, and many tourists were stranded as a result of the sudden lockdown and disruption of international flights and cruise ships. The number of deaths due to COVID-19 makes everyone scared, and no prescribed medicine makes this fear more severe. People are scared to go out because they might get infected with COVID -19. Family members are not willing to go out and restrict their younger ones from going out until it is very necessary. GOI has given some relaxation after the COVID-19 cases were settled with proper guidelines to be followed by each and every citizen of India. These guidelines create constraints on the tourists' travel intentions. The transportation disruption also plays an important role in tourists' constraints during this period.

Tourist's Motivation: The perceived risk, EWOM, destination image, and tourist constraints during COVID -19 spread, bring the motivation level of the tourist to its knees.

So, the tourism sector all around the world was seriously impacted. Very few people were willing to take the risk of travelling during this period, and the cost of travel was also sky high due to the disruption of transportation services.

Possible options for revitalization tourism sector

The COVID-19 has given people more faith in companies that focus on technology, online delivery, robot-based technology, drone technology, etc. (Dash & Sharma, 2021; Ranasinghe *et al.*, 2020) [1, 17]. The news and media also play an important role in providing the latest information and gaining the trust of the people (Dash & Sharma, 2021; Ranasinghe *et al.*, 2020) [1, 17]. The COVID19 scenarios can be taken care of by the fast track vaccination and the proper medical support has boosted the confidence level of travelers. The possible options for the revitalization of the tourism sector will depend on the government's rules and regulations towards COVID-19 norms, proper hygiene, cleanliness, health safety measures, less crowded places, etc. (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021) [9]. This will assist the tourism industry in getting back on track. People are now more accustomed to the COVID-19 regulations and a new way of life. We have provided the month-wise foreign tourist arrivals from January 2020 to June 2022 (Provisional) in Table 1a. Foreign visitor arrivals in India are very low during the first phase of COVID-19, which runs from April 2020 to January 2021. Only from February to March 2021, the number of foreign tourist arrivals increased slightly, but beginning in April 2021, the second phase of COVID-19 took effect across India, and the number of foreign tourist arrivals decreased once more. The fast vaccination effort by the Indian government and made it mandatory to complete two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. This effort has yielded results, as we can see from September 2021 onwards, foreign tourist arrivals have steadily increased (Until June 2022). The travel restriction also lifted at this time played a key role in increasing foreign tourists' arrivals in India. The foreign tourists' numbers are not up to the previous mark, but we assumed that things will be on track by 2023.

Table 1a: Month-wise foreign tourist arrivals in India (Jan 2020 to June 2022)

Month	Year -2020	Year -2021	Year -2022
January	11,19,250	94,662	2,01,546
February	10,18,440	1,10,312	2,40,896
March	3,28,304	1,33,768	3,42,308
April	2,820	78,718	3,92,930
May	3,764	19,765	4,23,930
June	8,590	36,070	5,22,737
July	12,655	72,501	
August	19,761	92,728	
September	28,167	1,15,661	
October	41,494	1,91,415	
November	70,977	2,63,867	
December	90,544	3,17,647	

(Ministry of Tourism, 2022) Note – Provisional data

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