



The Survival of Travel and Tourism Industry amidst the Covid 19 Pandemic – Challenges and Opportunities of the Indian Tourism Sector

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Abstract

The Covid 19 pandemic has severely impacted the world and almost brought it to a complete standstill. Most industries have been affected adversely as countries across the world went in lockdowns and imposed restrictions on travel, trade, and businesses. The tourism, aviation, and hospitality industry are among the few that have been most affected due to the pandemic. As pleasure travel had almost ceased and many countries worldwide had closed their borders, restricting international tourists. In order to survive this, the travel industry players had to cut down their employees and their pay. Many tourism professionals have lost their jobs or have their jobs at stake. This paper focuses on analysing the overall impacts of the pandemic on the travel and tourism industry of India. The study aims at understanding the challenges faced by the different players in the tourism industry to survive the pandemic. The study also sheds light on the opportunities that await in the future on a post-Covid scenario and some of the methods adopted by the industry players to manage the future demand in the more sustainable and safe manner. The paper is conceptual and purely based on literature reviews of

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various research papers focusing on the Covid pandemic globally.

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1. Introduction

From the very beginning of the Covid 19 or coronavirus outbreak in the Wuhan district of China in late 2019, questions were raised regarding the spread of the virus on a global level. The impact of the pandemic had been largely underestimated in the earlier stages of the virus outbreak, and hence it affected many countries worldwide. Though there were many studies undertaken on a global level regarding the Covid 19 pandemic and its impacts on the economy and also the psychological and emotional wellbeing of a person, empirical studies with specific reference to the travel and tourism industry had been widely missing in the literature (Aliperti et al., 2019; Cró& Martins, 2017; Song, Livat, & Ye, 2019; Kuo, Chen, Tseng, Ju, & Huang, 2008; Sio-Chong & So, 2020; Wang, 2009). According to Nkengasong (2020), in the past few decades, there were few cases of virus outbreaks like the SARS pandemic in 2002 - 03, reported in some of the Southeast Asian nations, swine flu cases reported in 2012, reported in UK, Hong Kong, Ebola virus outbreak in Africa, etc. However, the Covid pandemic outbreak at the beginning of this decade has surpassed the other virus outbreaks in terms of the rate of spreading and the number of people infected that the world had experienced in the past three decades. The severity of the virus outbreak can be gauged by the manner it has affected some of the major superpowers of the world, including the USA, U.K., Russia, and many other countries. Considering the widespread and fast transmission rates of the virus, many countries started imposing restrictions on cross country or cross border travel and also went under complete lockdown. The whole world was brought to a complete standstill in early 2020 with social gatherings and meetings being cancelled, public events being called off, and travel was completely restricted. The isolation of the cruise ship with infected passengers in Japan in early 2020 marked the beginning of the tragic unfolding of events affecting the tourism industry.

The travel industry was growing at a steady and fast pace since 1950. The World Travel and Tourism Council's *Annual Competitiveness Report on Tourism* (2019) conveys that the tourism industry contributes to around 10% of the total world GDP. One in four jobs are created by this industry on a global scale in the past five years. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization *Reed Travel Exhibitions Report* (2020), international travel was booming with around 1.5 billion passengers travelling globally. The tourism industry contributed about \$1.7 trillion (7% of the value of world goods and services) the economy. The pandemic outbreak has resulted in a sudden decline of international tourist arrivals, and thus, overall receipts in tourism reduced to about one-third of the \$1.7 trillion generated in 2019. IATA (2020) has also predicted that the global airline revenue would be reduced by about \$30 billion by 2021 due to the decline in demand for air travel.

Most of the business, trade, and activities shifted to an online digital platform. The travel and tourism industry was hit hard as most of the destinations and attractions were closed for travel. Though many such pandemic outbreaks were reported worldwide in the past decades, none of them had such devastating impacts on the travel and hospitality sector as the Covid 19 pandemic. Complete lockdowns and shutting down airports and seaports further aggravated the situation. Many flights were cancelled in the aviation industry, and the others operated in less than 20% capacity. The airline companies were the early ones to lay off their employees and cut down their pay scale. Many airports were functioning only on about 10% efficiency and hence did not find it necessary to have staff employed to their full capacity. This, in turn, resulted in many becoming unemployed, and many others faced pay cuts.

Similar was the case of the cruising industry as cruise and luxury ships were almost out of business since the outbreak of the pandemic in early 2020. Countries like Canada had imposed restrictions on Cruises with more than 500 people and banned entry to such vessels at their ports. Followed by this, in early February 2020, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand also banned

the arrival of all foreign vessels at their ports. They also instructed the foreign-flagged ships in their countries to leave the ports on an immediate basis. Due to the sudden closure of ports and international borders, some of the cruises even had to keep the passengers at sea for days without being able to enter their destination ports. According to the Cruise Line International Association (CLIA), *State of the Cruise Industry Outlook Report* (2020), the overall share price of the major cruising giants like Royal Caribbean and Norwegian dropped down considerably. The primary source of revenue for the cruise lines was from ticket sales and the sale of alcoholic beverages, casinos, spas, and other shore excursions. As the pandemic resulted in cancellations, passengers also had to be refunded for their bookings and reservations. This, in turn, has derived heavy losses for the global cruising industry.

There were losses reported in the education sector as well. With the announcement of nationwide lockdowns and social distancing policies, many educational institutions had no other option but to switch to a completely digital platform. Classes and lectures were digitised and done through online mediums such as Google meet, Zoom, Microsoft teams, etc. The students and the teachers had to remain at their homes and participate in classes. This was particularly difficult for the teachers aged above 50 years as they were more comfortable with the traditional method of teaching and did not switch to a completely digital platform. The fees collected from the students had to be reduced to almost 50%, and therefore most of the teachers were also not paid a full salary during these months. Some of the parents even decided to withdraw their students from academics this year as they were finding it difficult to learn through online classes (Jena, 2020). Nevertheless, on the positive side, such a change brought in much better opportunities and technological advancements in the education sector. Smart classes and augmented reality techniques were introduced in classes to make them more interesting and exciting. New and young professionals in the education sector were given a chance to showcase their skills through an online and substantially new and sophisticated platform (pp 85-86).

The pandemic outbreak has also damaged the tour operations and travel agency business throughout the globe. The advance ticket reservations, hotel booking, and tour packages had to be cancelled and the money refunded back to the clients. The business was largely affected in countries like India, UK, Germany, and Spain as they went under complete lockdown for about three months. Even after the travel restrictions were relaxed to a considerable extent, the anxious travellers were not ready to take up pleasure trips in the near future due to the fear of the spread of infections from crowded destinations and sightseeing places. A survey conducted by the International Air Transport Association (June 2020) showed that about 80% of the tourists are unwilling to travel due to the strict quarantine rules and checks done at airports than the actual fear of getting infected.

2. Review of Literature

The review of the literature is categorised into three major segments. The first segment involves research papers on various pandemic outbreaks that have affected the travel industry in the past two decades. The second segment primarily concentrates on research papers that discussed the impact of the coronavirus on the overall economy and wellbeing of people. The third segment considers research papers specific to the travel, tourism, and hospitality industry.

The travel and tourism industry is not just one segment. It involves various sub-sectors that are closely related and intertwined to each other. For the smooth functioning and coordination of the travel and tourism sector as a whole, it is imperative that all the allied sectors are synchronised and working in harmony.

As the tourism sector is largely related to people and serving the people, it is often referred to as the “service industry”. The tourism sector focuses on selling experiences and adventures rather than focusing on a particular product. Hence the industry is said to be highly intangible and often largely influenced by the attitude and preferences of the tourists.

Considering the travel and tourism sector, as an umbrella, the sub-sectors that form a part of this sector are aviation, accommodation and hospitality, cruising, events, MICE, sports, transportation and communication, tour operations, etc. The industry is influenced by many factors, including geographic, demographic, and psychographic characteristics of various destinations and tourists. The government and regulatory body, economic and fiscal policies, and international relations with other countries also play a major role in the sustenance and survival of a destination's tourism industry.

The previous researches that were reviewed for this study are listed according to the study objectives and area of research (Table 1.1). The articles comprised of four major sets; articles relating to tourism and travel, aviation, hospitality and general papers.

Table 1.1- Classification of literature reviews

From the review of literature, it was noted that in the past two decades, there had been various viral outbreaks and pandemics throughout the globe that had affected mankind in an adverse manner. Table 1.2 discusses a detailed list of pandemic outbreaks and the year, the countries that were majorly affected due to the pandemic and the number of people affected by it.

Sl no	Name of the Researcher	Year	Travel/ Tour Ops	Hospitality sector	Aviation sector	Others / General
1	Aliperti et al.	2019	✓			
2	Allen, F., & Carletti, E.	2010				✓
3	Bagliano, F. C., & Morana, C.	2012				✓
4	Buhalis, D.	2002	✓			
5	Buhalis, D., Laws, E.	2011	✓			
6	Bezemer, D. J.	2011				✓
7	Caponecchia, C., & Tan, D.	2019	✓			
8	Cramer, V.,	2004				✓

	Torgersen, S., &Kringlen, E				
9	Cró, S., & Martins, A. M	2017	✓		
10	Ding, W., Levine, R., Lin, C., Xie, W.	2020			✓
11	Etehad, B., Karatepe, O.M	2019		✓	
12	Gaiotti, E	2013			✓
13	Gössling, S. et al	2012			✓
14	Hakanen, J.J., Schaufeli, W.B., Ahola.	2008			✓
15	Kopczuk, W.	2020			✓
16	Lepp, A., & Gibson, H	2013	✓		
17	Lord, P., Saad, L	2020			✓
18	Mandel, A., Veetil, V	2020			✓
19	Mian, A., & Sufi, A.	2010			✓
20	Niesen, W et al.	2012		✓	
21	Nkengasong, J	2020		✓	
22	Ozili, P.K, Arun T	2020		✓	
23	Page, S., Song, H., & Wu, D. C.	2012	✓		
24	Radelet, S., & Sachs, J.	1998			✓
25	Rady, D. A. M.	2012			✓
26	Reisinger, Y., &Mavondo, F	2006	✓		
27	Ritchie, B. W	2008	✓		
28	Ritchie, B. W., & Jiang, Y.	2019	✓		
29	Ramelli, S., Wagner	2020			✓
30	Sarmon, I., Curtale, R., &Hajibaba, H	2020	✓		
31	Seabra, C., et al.	2013			✓
32	Scott, N., & Laws, E.	2006	✓		
33	Seabra, C., Reis, P., & Abrantes, J., L.	2020	✓		

34	Yang, F.X., Lau, V.M.C.	2019		✓
35	Page, S., Yeoman et al.	2006	✓	
36	Pranav Kumar Jena	2020		✓

Table 1.2 – Pandemic outbreaks in the past two decades

*the number of people infected and number of deaths as of December 2020

Source – World Health Organization

(https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIxOaH5pOJ7gIV1gRyCh0BowW5EAAYASAAEgKf1vD_BwE)

Outbreaks	Year	Countries affected	Infections	Deaths
Marberg Hemorrhagic fever	1967	Germany, Belgrade, Yugoslavia (Present Serbia) and some parts of Africa in 2005	466	373
Ebola	1976	South Sudan and Congo West Africa (2014-16)	33,577	13,562
Hendra	1994	Australia	7	4
H5N1 bird flu	1997	Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt Canada (2014)	861	455
Nipah	1998	Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand Bangladesh (2001) India (2018)	513	398
SARS	2002	China, Taiwan and Hong Kong	8096	774
H1N1	2009	USA, Canada, Caribbean Most parts of Europe, Parts of East Asia	762,630,000	284,500
MERS	2012	Saudi Arabia Middle East, Africa and South Asia	2494	858
COVID-19*	2020	220 countries worldwide	8,72,00,000 0	1,88,00,000 0

It is evident from table 1.2 that since the 1950s, there had been various pandemic outbreaks in different parts of the world. However, the consequences of these outbreaks largely depend on the source region and the magnitude of the spread of the virus to other parts of the world. Considering the impact of these viral outbreaks on the economy, the pandemic outbreak of SARS in 2002 and H1N1 in 2009 had major impacts on the global economy as trade and businesses were disrupted. The travel and tourism industry also had a significant setback as the number of travellers declined considerably during these years.

Previous research was conducted on tourism demand and the impact on the tourism and hospitality industry due to various crises like the global financial crisis in 2007-08 (Gössling, Scott, Hall, Ceron, & Dubois, 2012; Lepp& Gibson, 2003), H1N1 swine flu (Page, Song, & Wu, 2012, Yeoman, Munro, Connell, and Walker, 2006), 9/11 Attack on the USA (Ritchie, 2003) SARS in 2002 (Scott, N., & Laws, E. (2006) etc. Such pandemic outbreaks and political instability causes tourists to avoid travelling to the destination as they may be concerned about their safety and health (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006).

Skare, Soriano and Rochon (2020), in their study on the economic impact of the Covid 19 pandemic in the travel sector, has clearly shown a loss of about U.S. \$6 billion in the United States during the H1N1 bird flu outbreak in 2009. The methodology adopted by the researcher was an autoregression model with data collected from over 185 countries worldwide to assess the extent of the impact of various pandemic outbreaks on the major destinations in the world. The study concludes that the pandemic outbreak will not just affect some parts of the world where the spread of infections is large but also is likely to have a spillover effect to other major world destinations (Ding et al., 2020). Ramelli and Wagner (2020) suggest that the economic impact of the Covid 19 pandemic is very different and of a much higher magnitude concerning the other pandemic outbreaks in the past few decades.

Madel and Veetil (2020), in their study on the impact of Covid 19 on the overall global production, estimated that the lockdown and restrictions in China have resulted in a decline of production of

goods and services up to 23%. This has, in turn, affected the trading and distribution around the globe. Though the number of deaths may be significantly less in countries with well-developed medical facilities, the overall economic impact of the pandemic is devastating as major industries are on a total shutdown of operations due to lockdowns and restrictions.

Folinas, Sotiris and Theodore (2020), in their study, portray the degree of impact the Covid 19 pandemic has posed on the travel industry in major tourism destinations of China, Europe, Australia, and North America. The study pointed out that the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic has put more than 50 million travel, aviation, and hospitality jobs at stake worldwide. Destinations like Italy, Ireland, Egypt, Thailand, India, etc, where travel is a major contributor to the GDP, and foreign exchange are in constant fear of losing up to 90% of their inflows. Not only leisure travel, but corporate travel, MICE, educational travel, and to a large extent, health travel has also reduced to almost zero in the past year.

Kaushal and Srivastava (2020) researched the challenges faced by the Indian hospitality sector during the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic. The study employed qualitative methods of data collection through email interviews and the distribution of questionnaires through an online medium to industry professionals and academicians. A content analysis of the data derived four significant themes and 27 sub-themes from a management perspective on the effect of the Covid 19 pandemic on the hospitality sector in India. These themes encompassed human resource management, healthhygiene, concerns and apprehensions of the employees and commitment of staff towards the organisation. Based on the findings, the study also gave some recommendations to the management to survive the pandemic and its challenges. This includes basic health and hygiene of the employees by using masks, sanitisers and social distancing within the office premises, offering the flexibility of work timing and space to the staff to motivate and encourage them, make the staff prepared to face such unforeseen challenges by giving them proper training and guidance etc.

Kumar (2020) undertook a detailed investigation of the spread of the Covid 19 virus in India, the rate of spread of infections, and recovery within the country. The study was based on a qualitative interview method with hospitality industry professionals and entrepreneurs in the hospitality sector. The results highlight the disastrous impact of lockdown on the country's hospitality sector and the huge losses incurred during the year 2020. Though international tourism was slowly on the rise in January 2020, it began to decline as the Covid 19 virus spread was extensive in many parts of Europe, China, and North America. By March, as India went into complete lockdown, the borders were closed for leisure travel, and most of the destinations also remained closed. The Archeological Survey of India (ASI) reported a loss of 30 - 40% in the total income from the sale of tickets at archaeological and heritage sites throughout the country compared to the last year.

Torres et al. (2020) researched the impacts of Covid 19 in the tourism supply chain in Spain. As the tourism sector comprises multiple players and allied sectors, close coordination between these players has to be ensured for the smooth flow of services across the travel industry. The study points out that the suppliers of tourism face two kinds of risks, i.e. operational risks and disruption risks. Operational risks include the risks associated with demand fluctuations and are short-term so that they can be controlled and managed to a certain extent. On the other hand, disruption risks are those risks that result in the complete disruption of services caused due to natural disasters, war or spread of pandemic like Covid 19 (Kinra et al., 2019; Ivanov, 2019). The study through a qualitative research design analyses the relationship between the various hotel chains in the tourism supply chain and among other stakeholders in the tourism industry. The study points out the kind of relationship between the hotel chains and the government of the country. It sheds light on the importance of liquidity to survive the economic disruption and the tough decisions that have to be taken by the management regarding the temporary layoff of employees, pay cuts, and liquidating certain assets to avoid bankruptcy. The study also highlights that major hotel chains have assisted the government by letting out infrastructure and funding for passengers to avail

quarantine facilities at the destination (Kopczuk, 2020; Lord and Saad, 2020). It was also pointed out that economic disruptions to the supply chain may result in conflicts among partners and players in the tourism sector (Buhalis, 2000)

Another significant contribution to the literature was by Pappas and Glyptou (2020), who researched the accommodation purchase decision-making complexities in the Covid pandemic. The study was based in Athens, Greece, and adopted a quantitative methodology to collect data from the local residents and tourists. The data collected with the help of questionnaires were then interpreted, and using a correlation test and exploratory factor analysis test, the major factors that contribute to the decision-making process were assessed. Based on the results, the major factors were categorised as health and safety risks, pricing policies, level of disposable income and demographics of the tourists. The primary concern for tourists was the health and safety conditions for staying in an external environment amidst the Covid-19 pandemic (Kaushal and Srivastava, 2021). The respondents were concerned about the basic hygiene at the accommodation, which included proper use of masks, sanitiser etc. by the staff. The second concern was the pricing of the accommodation. As most hotels and resorts have slashed down their prices to almost 50%, the tourists still preferred those accommodations that provide them with the best possible quality of service at the most reasonable prices. The pandemic has resulted in many losing their jobs or facing substantial pay cuts. This was also a major contributor to the decision-making process as the disposable income at hand was limited. Finally, it was noted that the demographics of the tourists, i.e., their age, gender, nationality, level of education, family status, largely influenced the decision-making process.

Neuberger and Eggar (2020) researched the risk perception in the minds of travellers during the Covid 19 pandemic in the DACH regions of Europe, comprising Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The study used a cluster analysis by considering each region as a cluster and found that the travellers' risk perception and readiness to alter their travel plans, either postpone them or cancel them, significantly increased in two weeks as soon as the spread of the

Covid 19 pandemic was reported. The researcher highlights the influence of media and communication in instilling fear and confusion among the minds of the travellers by propagating only the negative image and facts. They concluded that for the industry to bounce back, proper communication of facts and government regulations to safeguard the interest of travellers has to be highlighted.

Tan and Caponecchia (2020), in their study, focused on the perception of travel insurance during the spread of the pandemic. Before the spread of the epidemic, only a limited or very small number of passengers used to get insured before travel (Sarmon et al., 2020). However, the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic has seen a considerable rise in the number of passengers opting for travel insurance globally. The study points out that more than 70% of the residents were unwilling to take up travel immediately due to the fear of potential infections. Nevertheless, the travellers who are willing to take up travel in recent months are likely to purchase travel insurance for their trip. Also, it was highlighted that the passengers would have to look through and interpret the policy terms and conditions and exclusions of the insurance policy to choose the right kind of insurance policy for their trip (Cavlek, 2002; Seabra et al., 2013).

The perceptions and responses of the resident community to the risks associated with tourism activities during the Covid 19 pandemic was deliberated by Qiu, Park, Li and Song (2020) in their study on the social costs associated with tourism during the pandemic outbreak. The study was conducted in three major urban destinations in China. The study analyses the attitude of the residents towards tourism during the pandemic outbreak and whether they are ready to pay additional for adopting extra safety measures at the destination. The residents at the destination become more responsible and accountable to their home country during the pandemic. Previous studies show enlightened behaviour and positive change in the attitude of residents towards protecting the destination (Lindberg and Johnson (1997).

Silva et al. (2020) researched the burnout, work stress and job satisfaction among hospitality industry workers during the

pandemic. The study points out that pandemic outbreaks like Covid 19 may result in the anxiety of lay off among the employees. The various management decisions like pay cuts, termination of the contract of employment etc., can create work stress and, in turn, affect the performance of the employees. Also, a feeling of emotional burnout may arise, and the staff starts feeling they are not significant for the organisation. This results in lower productivity and negative outcomes (Hakanen et al., 2008; Yang and Lau, 2019).

A similar study was conducted by Jung, Jung and Yoon (2019) on the effects of job insecurity on the overall employee performance and turnover in the hospitality sector with special reference to deluxe hotel employees. Even before the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, the revamping of the hotel industry in terms of updating technology and structural management changes had affected the employees to a certain extent as senior-level employees and an aged group of workers found it difficult to cope up with the changing technological environment and continuous up-gradation to the system (Niesen et al., 2018, Etehadi and Karatepe, 2019). A multiple correlation test was conducted to understand the relation between three major components, i.e. employee engagement, job insecurity and turnover intent and its impact on generation X and generation Y. The results of the study show that the feeling of job insecurity is high in generation Y than in generation X. The study suggests the management to identify the potential threat and risks associated with the Covid 19 pandemic and take timely decisions with proper and transparent communication of facts to the employees. The study also recommends the management to develop constructive policies to keep the employees, especially generation Y, engaged and committed to the organisation.

Song, Yeon, and Lee (2020) also undertook a similar study on the potential effect of the pandemic outbreak on the restaurant industry in the United States of America. The study focuses on the impact of the pandemic on the stock prices of various restaurant chains in the U.S. A research model was proposed to assess the relationship between the stock prices of various restaurant chains on a weekly basis and the total number of cases in the United

States. A correlation test and multivariable regression test were performed, and the results stated that the restaurant industry was one of the most affected segments during the pandemic. The study gives suggestions and recommendations to attain financial leverage and survive the Covid 19 pandemic by managing the funds and timely decision making by the shareholders and management.

El Erion (2020) stated that the impact of Covid 19 was sudden and disruptive, that it has resulted in a spillover effect on many allied sectors and created demand and supply shocks in almost every sector. This has been noted in every economy in every part of the world as employees or entrepreneurs, top management employees, or lower-level employees have been affected somehow due to the pandemic outbreak. Ozili and Arun (2020) researched the spillover effect of the pandemic on the various sectors and industries across the economy. Many countries like Italy, France, Iran, Egypt etc. were reported to have implemented stay at home policies nationwide which has resulted in a fatal economic recession (Financial times, 2020). Previous researches on economic recession shed light on the global financial crisis of the year 1997 with the fall of Thai Baht in Asia and the recession in 2016 in Nigeria due to the fall in the price of Crude oil and the aftermath of the global financial crisis in Greece in 2012 (Gaiotti, 2013; Bezemer, 2011; Mian and Sufi, 2010; Bentolila et al., 2018; Bagliano and Morana, 2012; Radelet and Sachs, 1998; Allen and Carletti, 2010; Rady, 2012).

The spillover impact of the Coronavirus outbreak to other sectors are very prevalent and widely researched in sectors like the global aviation industry; with most of the international airlines suspending their operations and cutting down the staff count were badly hit, and many airlines like Virgin Australia, Compass Airlines, Trans State Airlines, Flybe (U.K.) have declared bankruptcy and seized operations by early April 2020 (Business Insider, 2020). The hospitality industry was also one among those walloped by the pandemic. As countries went in total lockdowns, people preferred to stay at home and eat home-cooked meals as they were more safe and healthy. This has resulted in many of the small pubs and restaurants shutting down operations completely. The aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic in the hospitality industry

is worse than the global financial crisis and 9/11 attack combined (Ozili and Arun, 2020). The sports industry was also severely affected, with most of the international games getting postponed or cancelled. The Tokyo summer games, FIH Pro League, Pro 14 rugby championship, Motorsport games, European Aquatic Championship etc, have been postponed or cancelled, resulting in huge losses to the sponsors and organisers. Governments throughout the world have adopted various economic, monetary and fiscal policies to save their people and economy from the global financial crisis in 2020 (pp 23).

3. Covid 19 and Indian Economy

The Indian tourism sector was at a booming stage in the 20th century, with many new airports inaugurated, world-class hospitality services and better infrastructural facilities at destinations. There were new tourist circuits that were introduced by the government of India in different parts of the country to boost tourism and focus on tourists to spend more of their time in the country. Around 10 million tourists visited the country in 2019, which was triple the numbers compared to the previous year. The tourism sector contributes almost 6.23% to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generates employment opportunities for more than 8.78% of the total population. The overall revenue generated out of the tourism sector in 2018-19 is estimated to be about \$275.5 billion which shows, an annual growth rate of 9.8% compared to the previous year (Financial Express, 2020).

Reduction of the E visa fee and reduction of GST on room rates by the government of India in 2019 further contributed to an increase in the tourist inflow throughout the country. Also, another very interesting project that was developed by the Indian Tourism Department in collaboration with the culture department and the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) was "Adopt a Heritage Project" which was aimed to introduce better facilities at heritage sites and make them more tourists friendly (Ministry of Tourism, Annual Report 2019-20).

Other notable initiatives by DOT, Indian Government were Swadesh Darshan to boost domestic tourism, National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD), the launch of the Incredible India 2.0 campaign, the launch of 24x7 toll-free, multilingual tourist helpline, Organization of Annual International Tourism Mart, etc. (pp 37-42).

Jaipuria, Parida and Ray (2020) investigated the effect of the Covid 19 pandemic on the Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) and the Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) of the Indian economy. The study uses an Artificial Neural Network (ANN) to assess the pattern of FTA in India from Jan 1993 to March 2020. The study showed an increase in the total count of foreign tourist arrivals to the country, except for in some years, the growth was on a slower pace. The results of the ANN model showed a decline of about 68.9% foreign tourist arrivals in the country from Feb 2020 to March 2020 and post lockdown. It was narrowed down to almost zero tourist arrivals. The researchers concluded that the Foreign Exchange Earnings in the country would continue to fall; to below \$1790 if the government does not adopt timely appropriate measures to contain the spread of Covid 19 and take all preventive measures to bring down the rate of spread of the infection.

The Financial Express (2020) reported that the Covid pandemic has 'brought the tourism industry to its knees' and highlighted that it was one of the industries that got completely crippled due to the virus outbreak. Businesses directly related to tourism like tour operators, travel agents, guides, hotels, resorts and restaurants and those indirectly related to tourism like transportation, local shops and establishments etc were badly affected. The revenue sources for these sectors had a sudden decline of about 40% in the month of March and continued to decline until May due to the suspension of international flights. Though the exact figures of total loss incurred for the industry cannot be calculated as the pandemic is still underway, it is estimated to be about 30% on a year-round basis.

Varma and P.V. (2020) researched the revival of the tourism industry post lockdown in India. The study used qualitative methods to assess the prevailing situation of the industry in the

country and suggested measures for sustainable tourism and methods to revive the industry and boost the economy.

Some of the states that majorly focused on tourism as their revenue were severely affected. The tourism industry had lost nearly 25,000Cr of revenue in 2020 in the South Indian state of Kerala. Kerala tourism had a major setback in 2018 due to massive floods in many parts of the state. The industry had slowly bounced back in 2019, but the Covid pandemic further aggravated the situation (The Indian Express, 2020). A similar scenario was reported in the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and parts of the North East.

The Economic Times (2020) also reported that 2021 is all about survival for the travel and hospitality industries. As the recovery of the industry is set to be on a slow pace, the major focus of the industry remains on survival and sustenance with the support of the government. The government is extending all possible support and help to the citizens to tackle the present economic conditions as many have lost their jobs or are subjected to salary cuts. These measures include introducing tax exemption schemes, up to 12 months moratorium benefits etc.

4. Discussions and Recommendations

Experts have suggested that the safety of the citizens and the revival of the economy are of prime importance during the present situation. Though the Covid 19 pandemic is not entirely eradicated from the economy, the Indian government has relaxed their initial lockdown and self-distancing policies. Many states have started organising public events and other celebrations while abiding by the Covid regulations.

Resorts, hotels and other lodging facilities have slowly started opening up to cater to the needs of local tourists. Some accommodation providers are also letting out their rooms as quarantine facilities for Indian citizens returning from foreign countries.

Restaurants, local food courts, and cafes have opened up post lockdown in June, providing options for dining as well as takeaway. According to the Business Standard (2020), the country earned close to Rs. 2.49 trillion annually as excise duty revenue on alcohol. Being an important source of revenue for the country, the decision by the government to shut down bars had further led to negative growth and an unprecedented downfall in excise revenue.

By December 2020, there was much relaxation to the strict social distancing and lockdown policies and saw a rise in domestic and local tourism. Tourists started booking resorts, homestays and other accommodation properties for spending their Christmas and New Year. This pushed the central and state governments to relax the rules and speed up the opening of local bars, pubs and other establishments (The Hindu, 2020)

Airports and airlines have started functioning post lockdown. The country has opened up its borders to Indians working and studying abroad or residing abroad to return to the country. Ensuring their safety is of utmost importance for the health department. They work closely with the airport authorities to locate the residents and tourists who are staying in quarantine and thoroughly check if they are following the quarantine rules.

Every individual returning to India from a foreign country as well as every domestic traveller has to register themselves in the "Air Suvidha" portal by giving their passport details, countries visited in the last one month, contact details and their quarantine facility address. The quarantine period and their Covid test results post quarantine are closely monitored by the health department.

International leisure tourism is brought down to a complete standstill as many people are still anxious and worried to travel to foreign countries. Also, embassies have not started issuing tourist visas to many countries. The number of flights has also reduced considerably. However, with the introduction of vaccines in many countries, the situation is believed to improve considerably by 2022.

5. Way Forward – Revival of the Indian Tourism Sector

An effective plan and good leadership have to be in place to tackle the economic situation that has affected the Indian tourism sector. Some of the recommendations would include;

1. Careful planning and development of strategies by the central and state government to aid the tourism and hospitality sector.
2. Policies that support the present financial status of travel, tourism and hospitality undertakings and exempt them from taxes and other charges.
3. Domestic and local tourism to be promoted and marketed more aggressively. The domestic travel market has more demand as tourists prefer to spend their vacation in places nearby and known to them rather than travelling to foreign countries.
4. Attractions and destinations are to be equipped with hand sanitisers and digital thermometers to check and record the temperature of the tourists visiting the destination. Additional training is to be provided to the staff employed at destinations to ensure hygienic and safe conditions at the destination.
5. Control the entry of tourists to maintain proper social distancing and to avoid overcrowding at the destinations. Enable ticket purchases through websites and online portals can help to reduce queues in front of the ticket counters at destinations.
6. Enable artificial intelligence and web technology for tourist mapping and focused marketing. IATA has introduced the concept of the IATA Travel Pass, which is a standardised pass that can be used worldwide for passengers travelling during the Covid 19 pandemic. Also, a contactless travel app that enables the passengers to scan digital passports, carry vaccination and other test reports on an electronic medium is being introduced. Such a system

can ensure contactless travel, offering a seamless experience to the passengers (IATA Report, 2020).

7. Even for business meetings and conferences, local destinations and domestic tourist facilities can be utilised so that much revenue can be generated from corporate tourism and the MICE segment.
8. Tour operators and service providers focus more on meaningful experiences and environment-friendly, responsible tourism initiatives by involving the local community and at the same time ensuring hygiene and safety of the travellers.
9. The virtual tourism initiative of the Ministry of Tourism, 'Dekho Apna Desh', offers virtual experiences of safaris, heritage sites, monuments, museums and much more. Such initiatives have to be promoted as they attract domestic and local tourists as well as set a strong foundation for foreign and international tourists once the boundaries open up.
10. The government must take initiatives to instil a sense of confidence among the minds of tourists and assure them that the country is safe to travel to. Additional training and awareness to be provided to the travel industry professionals to ensure the safe conduct of business.

6. Conclusion

The Covid 19 pandemic has not just impacted the Indian economy, but the whole world has been brought to a complete standstill. Every business, every industry and every individual in every company, be it the top-level employee or the lowest level employee, have been affected due to the pandemic. Such devastating impacts have prolonged effects on the economy and the population. Nevertheless, as situations are being improved and vaccines are being administered in different countries, the tourism industry will soon be revived and brought back to its glory. As citizens, it is the responsibility of every individual to follow and abide by the rules and regulations set by the government and health departments to

impede and limit the fast spread of the virus. With responsible citizens, strategic implementation of timely policies, and focused marketing using technology and artificial intelligence, the industry can prosper and flourish.

7. Scope for further research

The present study is purely conceptual and based on the review of literature related to the topic. A quantitative analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the travel and tourism industry by involving the prime stakeholders of the industry can be further researched. The progress of the tourism and travel industry post-Covid pandemic is another central area with scope for further extensive research.

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