

TO STUDY THE EFFECTS ON HUMAN HEALTH OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TOURISM IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This document aims to understand the extent to which the loss has occurred due to the COVID 19 pandemic to the tourism and hospitality industry which provides the chief support to the country by its major contribution to the GDP. The tourism industry is the pillar for many countries all over the world due to its large contribution to foreign exchange, also the economies of definite countries excel on it. In India, the contribution of the Tourism industry towards GDP is in large share along with the great employment opportunities to the people in the far-reaching regions of the country. It also helps in conserving the culture, beliefs, and natural environment of a signified tourist place. Also, it is a matter of profound concern that tourism has been adversely affected due to the spread of the novel coronavirus since the emergence of 2020. Due to the force lockdowns by several governments all over the world, travel plans of the tourists were at stake which led to heavy cancellations in bookings and huge uncertainty to the fate of the tourism industry. The most adverse effect of the pandemic was seen on the service industries like tourism, hospitality, and retail services as well. The United Nations also presumes that there is a decline in the international tourist arrivals by 20% to 30% when compared to 2019 data. Due to prolonged lockdown periods lasting several months, many of the North-eastern states faced several difficulties and challenges. It led to a major loss in the tourism, agricultural, and also rural economy. Still, there is always a hopeful prospect to the aloof situation and the forced lockdown open on to the new technological reforms for the people all over the world.

Keywords: Travel Plans, COVID 19, Tourism, Hospitality.

INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of the novel coronavirus (COVID19) from the starting of 2020, there has been a remarkable but expected, drop in the number of tourists globally as compared with the 2019 data in which the numbers were rising steadily. This shows a serious impact on economic fallout with extensive unemployment, a harmful effect due to lack of maintenance of the tourist spots along with the movement of people in search of another income source for living. Based on the evidence the first case of the covid 19 was reported in December 2019 at Wuhan, China. World Health Organization named the outbreak as a "public health emergency of international concern" on 30th January 2020 and on 11th February 2020 they announced the name of the disease as the COVID-19. The after effects of the pandemic and such forced lockdowns are still

showing on the economy and growth of the health and tourism sector in the country and especially in remote locations such as the North eastern states of the India.

There has been a steady rise in the number of cases and stands at 210 million cases as of 18th August 2021 with 188 million recovered cases and 4.4 million deaths worldwide. In India, this figure stands at 32.3 million cases with 31 million recovered cases and approximately 0.4 million deaths reported (<https://www.mygov.in/covid-19>). To avert the spread of the virus in many countries and states enforced strict restrictions on the travel of tourists and so it impacted the tourism and hospitality industry severely with huge cancellations in bookings, unoccupied hotels, and a decrease of the visitors to the tourist destination. This affected the destinations that majorly depended on the revenue based on the tourist flow. The Northeastern states are famous for the natural beauty of the surrounding and wonderful tourist destinations were negatively affected by the restrictions and it led to the loss of earnings resulting in the loss of several jobs and related avenues. The effect of forced lockdown will take a notable amount of time to overcome and recover to the pre- covid times. However, with the variation in the COVID 19 strains now and then causing the rapid increase in the cases worldwide the situation looks miserable at the moment. Many countries have again banned the flow of tourists and restricted the movement of the people by imposing a lockdown (Deori & Konwar, 2020).

The pandemic has disabled the tourism business, leaving travelers confused to reschedule, extend or postpone their travel plans. It caused unemployment on large scale with its significant effect on the tourism and hospitality industry. No doubt it also impacted several other sore sectors but heavily impacted tourism and service industries which are still trying to overcome its impact and have not yet recovered completely. Based on data by World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2018 India was categorized at 3rd position amongst 185 countries concerning the total contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) revenues. It ranked 34th position in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report published by the World Economic Forum in 2019 (Meitei et al., 2021).

Indian Tourism Industry

India is a vast, multilingual, and diverse country that is considered the birthplace of the four significant religions of the world like Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Jainism. India has Incredible culture, enthralling monumental heritage, and fascinating natural beauty. India is considered a good tourist destination in the world. India has around 40 world heritage sites that fascinate several tourists from all over the world presenting a varying portfolio for travel and tourism (Business Today, 2020). The Statue of Unity which is the world's tallest statue is also found in India, which was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the year 2018 and has developed as one of the favorite tourist spots. Among South Asian countries the tourism industry is observed as one of the largest service industries. As per the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, report 2019, there is continued growth in the number of tourists over the years too, and within, the country which is observed as one of the prime sources of revenue, thereby recovering the economy by developing jobs across different respected sectors each year (Awasthi et al., 2020). The country is also becoming a major hub for development of Medical Tourism in the country with people from several Middle East, Asian and African countries visiting India for availing expert medical treatment and follow up diagnostic procedures for which they are required to stay for a lengthy time duration till the completion of the treatment procedure.

In 2017, the total number of overseas tourist entries was approximately 10 million while in 2018 it was 10.5 million which shows a 5.2% rise (IBEF-2019). In 2019, these numbers expanded to 11 million overseas tourist arrivals- again a 5% rise from 2018 data. In 2017, travel and tourism shared approx. \$ 91 billion to the country's GDP. Internal tourism is also evident as one of the prime revenue-generating sources for industry. The all-over contribution to the country's GDP by the travel and tourism industry is predicted to increase from \$234 billion in 2017 to \$ 512 by 2029 (The Economic Times, 2020). It has been seen that the domestic overseas tourist inflow has been growing sharply due to the travel frantic middle class who are fascinated to spend a large UNWTO. (2020) amount of money than before on domestic travel. The domestic spending on tourism was approx. \$187 billion in 2017 while the government expenditure towards the tourism sector was approximately 2.6 billion dollars World Travels and Tourism Council. (2020).

The Taj Mahal memorial in Agra is considered the most favored heritage site in the country and it stands as the most remarkable destination for domestic as well as overseas tourists. The visitors also explore many other famous destinations like the high-altitude plains of Leh and Ladakh, Jammu, and Kashmir. Also, unexplored North-Eastern regions of India attract tourists for their natural habitat and lavish green environment (World Health Organization, 2020b).

The balance between the maintenance of the country's natural resources and pre-historical sites with the inflow of visitors needs careful planning and systematic management. India is known as the land for the advent of Yoga and related philosophies which is today widely practiced across the world. A lot of travelers visit India to know about different types of yogic techniques and obtain knowledge about meditation and spirituality. They reside in the country for several months to gain knowledge and attain perfection. Many regions of India are famous for their vast diversity in regards to flora and fauna, climatic variations, lifestyles, and rich diversified cultural values. The COVID-19 crisis-caused concerns for tourism globally and severally caused harm to developing countries like India which was growing speedily with boosting foreign revenue generated each year from the tourism industry. It caused major losses in revenues contributed by many hotels and tourist spots along with job reduction resulting in rising unemployment. The fear of the disease still appears as more pandemic and epidemic waves and various mutant strains of COVID-19 are yet to be experienced in some countries which may cause the economies of those countries which are still fighting with the outcomes of the prior COVID-19 crisis. The large scale possibility of Omicron mutant strain originated in 2021 from South Africa could affect the already depleted economies and revenues of the country leading to another phase of imposed lockdown and severe strain on the country's resources cannot be ruled out in the near future (UNWTO, 2020).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Indian and tourism industry all over the world is encountering a serious crisis leading to fallout in the stock markets across all the economic domains. As safety and security of the visitors are major concerns, therefore, the tourism industry of the country and the world is adversely affected as imposed restrictions are still a barrier to the movement of tourists in many countries. Due to such limitations, the business of hotels, the aviation industry, and cruise functioning came to a steady halt causing large-scale unemployment and job recession. This reduced the gross domestic product (GDP) of many countries including India. The COVID-19 virus is affecting global health and is a concern for industries like tourism, healthcare, aviation,

automobile, etc. Also the affects the economic collapse of related activities which offers secondary and tertiary level jobs to the populations. The objective of this work is to assess the effect of the circumstances of the coronavirus on the tourism industry in India and its extensive impact globally (Karmakar, 2020).

The scenario of Covid 19 Pandemic: North-eastern states of India

As per the report of the World Health Organization WHO (2020), the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in India was detected on 30th January 2020 in the state of Kerala, when a student came back from Wuhan city, in China which was evident to be the epicenter and place of origin of the life-threatening disease. On 14th March 2020, there were 84 confirmed cases and on 28th March 2020, it raised to 909 confirmed cases in India, though several actions were taken by the Government of India to restrict its spread. On 26th May 2020, India recorded 138,845 confirmed cases and 4,021 deaths. The highest numbers are reported in the States of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat. The first COVID-19 case in the North-East part of India was recorded in Manipur in a 23-year-old student on the 24th March 2020, who had come back from the UK. In Assam, the first case was noted in a 52-year-old man who returned from Delhi after being a part of a convention at the Nizamuddin Markaz on 31st March 2020. The State of Tripura confirmed its first case on 5th April 2020 when a 45 years old woman who returned from Kamakya Temple in Guwahati was found to be infected with the virus. In the state of Meghalaya, the first case was confirmed on 13th April 2020 in a 69 years old doctor of a prestigious hospital located in Shillong, who died later due to comorbid complications. The other states of the north-eastern region, such as Arunachal Pradesh showed 02 confirmed and 01 recovered cases, Sikkim with 01, and Nagaland with 03 fresh confirmed cases during the same period (Skare et al., 2021). Mizoram showed one positive case which got recovered later on. The number of confirmed cases in the entire North East reached 50 in number by 17th March and 100 on 5th May 2020. As of 26th May 2020, the Government of India data showed that Assam had the highest number of active COVID-19 cases with 526 confirmed cases, 62 recovered and 4 deaths, Tripura was next with 194 confirmed cases, 165 recovered and 0 death, Manipur showed 39 confirmed cases, 04 recovered and 0 death, Meghalaya had 14 confirmed cases, 12 recovered and 01 death, Mizoram showed 01 confirmed cases, 01 recovered and 0 death, Arunachal Pradesh showed 02 confirmed cases, 01 recovered and 0 death, Sikkim showed 01 confirmed cases, 0 recovered and 0 death, Nagaland with 03 confirmed cases, 0 recovered and 0 death. However, slowly with time many of these North-eastern states became a major source of worry for the government due to high number of cases and mortality rates among the population. Also, due to ill-conceived notions the population of these states were reluctant to participate in the vaccination drive and the reported percentage of population vaccinated in the states was quite low than the national average.

Impact on Indian Hospitality Industry

Due to imposed lockdown in the country succeeded by COVID-19 widespread, the activity of reservation cancellation is done largely which has severely impacted the tourism and hospitality business that would majorly affect revenue loss in 2020 as well as in coming years. A similar negative effect can be seen on employment in the upcoming days as an economizing tool. The fall in arrivals of visitors will cause an approximate loss of \$300-450 billion in international tourism receipts, it is almost one-third of the \$1.5 trillion created in 2019, Tourism is among the

bad hit of all economic sectors, due to restrictions on international flights and entry of travelers from neighboring countries. The arrival of overseas tourists is the prime source for foreign exchange revenue and the earnings earned by the hospitality and medical tourism industry gets impacted badly (BBC News, 2020a).

Impact on Employment

The North-eastern states of India bear major economic losses due to the imposed restrictions due to the COVID19 pandemic since this area has a handful of economic sources except for tourism. Due to this several hotels, shopping malls, restaurants, marketplaces, etc. were shut down. Even tourist taxi services were seen to be non-operating during the first two stages of the lockdown period. In India, around 12.2 Crore people got out of their jobs and 27 million youths of age group 20-30 years were found to be jobless till April 2020 due to lockdown (BBC News, 2020b).

Impact on Agriculture and Tourism

The lockdown was imposed in the month of March 2020 simultaneously with the harvesting season, due to which several crops got damaged or rotten in the field as the crops were unable to be supplied to the market due to restrictions. This led to major losses in the agriculture sector affecting the rural economy of India. Due to this, even the tourism sector was also impacted especially in the north-eastern state of Sikkim, which is considered best for its natural beauty and wildlife diversity that depends primarily on tourism. Every year around 20 million visitors used to visit the State and it impacted the tourism industry heavily (Chowdhury, & Chhikara, 2020).

Impact on Education

Due to the forced restrictions, many educational institutions had to stop operating which affected the ongoing academic classes, scheduled examinations, and academic calendar of these organizations. To well organize things, post lockdown was found to be the biggest challenge concerning the educational institutions (Kolata, 2001). To handle the situation and provide reassurance to the stakeholders, several actions were taken by educational institutes sticking to the protocols and also abiding by the guidelines of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Government of India. Some of these actions include the CR School in Meghalaya which facilitates the platform for many other schools for conducting online e-learning classes in Meghalaya. SEBA online classes in Assam conduct classes for the class X students in Assam. In Mizoram, Doordarshan Kendra Aizwal broadcasted virtual classes for the well-being of the students (March, 2020).

Impact on Tea Industry and petroleum Industry

The North East Tea Association (NETA) assumed that Assam would notice a loss of approximately Rs. 1,218 crores in the tea Industry because of restrictions. Since the state of Assam is the major supplier that supplies more than 50% of India's tea production but because of extended lockdown, 35% of the plantation needs to be skiffed, which causes extra costs. In the month of April 2020 during 40 days of lockdown, the usage of fuel products reduced to 80% in

India. This caused major revenue loss amounting to Rs. 40,000 Crore in the April month itself. The government of many states took a significant decision to raise the fuel prices to recover some of these losses. In one such north-eastern state, the Assam govt. raised petrol price from Rs. 71.61 to Rs. 77.46 and the diesel price from Rs. 67.07 to Rs. 70.50 per liter which was implemented from 22nd April 2020 (Springer, 2020).

Impact on Technology

Amongst all the losses, a handful of technology companies of North East India are raising opportunities due to restrictions. As work from home was encouraged and the students were studying from home, a large population were relying on technology. The technology start-up companies of Manipur showed a revenue increase of 20-30%. The lockdown increased the working efficiency of the people of the North East in the context of technology usage. It showed significant change in the way people started making use of technology (Folinas & Metaxas, 2020).

Impact on Travel and Airlines Business

Travel companies and tour operators confronted a major financial constraint due to a decrease in the frequency of visitors who planned their visits to India. A large number of hotel bookings were also canceled, similarly, travel packages sold by travel companies and tour operators for inbound, outbound, domestic segments were suspended. The Business Today-2020 reported that Make My Trip's founders were to draw zero salary with the company's top brass taking a 50% pay cut due to huge losses in the revenues (RTE, 2020).

The aviation industry was hit badly by this pandemic crisis that led to a financial constraint in the aviation industry. The IATA-2020 noted airlines' revenues in the year 2020 decreased by 44% when compared to 2019 data. This showed that almost half of the revenue decreased in the aviation industry by 2020, which will be the biggest issue for the aviation sector worldwide. During the COVID 19 crisis, most of the airline business staff and travel operators were sent on leave without pay, which led to uncertainty and increased unemployment in the travel and airline industry. The economy reported a negative decline while facing a recession (Statista, 2020a).

Suggestions to Overcome the Impact

To recover the impact caused due to COVID 19, government and stakeholders must present financial support to the tourism industry. The central government has offered several strategies in this regard, which yet is to commence. The tourism industries should act quickly towards the situation by adapting both short as well as long-term strategies, in terms like cost control and human resource associated policies (Statista, 2020b). Tourism industries need to remain competitive as the market is uncertain, and they should sustain a price chart throughout the situation. The Economic Times (2020) Tourism industries could take several steps to sustain their cash flow for a specific period by restricting unnecessary or minimizing unimportant operational staff purchases, holding outsourcing payments, and inspiring employees to have annual leaves and leaves without payment. Also, tourism enterprise stakeholders can sustain the business by other means such as adapting their market mix and marketing channels. The current

lockdown time could be used by scheduling online training and several development programs for the staff, which will be led to the enhancement of hospitality skills or uplift their expertise in the various field of the Tourism industry to engage well in the current digital environment (Horowitz, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This research paper examined the large-scale effect being caused by the virus on tourism. Huge impacts from COVID-19 led to a decrease in hotels and airlines bookings, suspensions of events, decreased number of staff as a cost-cutting tool with the threat to hotels, airlines, and travel companies jobs soon as the generated profit by the tourism sector severely fall. More than half of the revenue decreased in 2020 when compared to the previous year's data, however, despite several fall out in business and assumptions that normal travel routine would take long enough to return to normal. To manage these circumstances and for the boost of the tourism sector, the industry-government should assist the industry without which it would be hard to prevail over the current situation and financial constraint. The government must offer definite relaxations on imposed taxes on the tourism sector, or offer assured soft loans with minimum interest rates and other funds for the enhancement of the tourism industry in the upcoming days. One thing that came to light by this crisis is the brittle nature of the tourism industry, and therefore the need to have certainty for even unforeseeable events as this pandemic shook the whole tourism industry worldwide. People must sustain discipline and stick to the rules and regulations in post lockdown period. To beat this pandemic situation, people must join hands with the government as the government cannot fight alone with this situation. Last, but not least, service providers as well as tourists - should stick to CORONA protocols and undergo vaccination by complying to government norms with complete sincerity and commitment, if they wish to win this fight against the present pandemic situation.

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