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Covid – 19 Pandemic and its Impact on Kerala Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a vital economic activity and also one of the stronger support pillar of economy. In India, the travel and tourism industry has been an outstanding support to the country's GDP. Along with contribution to GDP, tourism has always a substantial contributor to employment opportunities. The distinctive culture and traditions, along with its varied demography have made Kerala one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. The tourism industry in Kerala was fairly proud of its position as one of the topmost industries in the world until it became the hotbed for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) around the globe has badly affected the tourism industry because the pandemic situation around the globe has created great changes in the conduct and preferences of tourists. Due to this virus threat, tourists have cancelled their programs, and this fear has dropped down the graph. In this context the current study attempts to understand the importance of the travel and tourism sector in the Kerala economy and examine the influence of the Covid-19 outbreak on the industry.

Keywords: Covid-19; Economy; Kerala; Tourism

INTRODUCTION

We now live in an era of pandemics, newly developing infectious diseases and the return of old transmissible foes.¹ Recurrent outbursts of infectious diseases have had profound and long-lasting effects on societies throughout history. Those events have strongly affected the economic, political, and social aspects of human civilization, with their effects often lasting for centuries. Deadly pandemics and disease occurrences are not novel phenomena, they have been challenging human existence throughout recorded history. Since 2003, the world has experienced Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), H1N1 (2009), Chikungunya (2014), Zika (2015) and pandemic-like extension of Ebola over five African countries, with cases, spread globally (2014 to 2015). The last decade 2020 commenced with unfortunate incidence of the Covid – 19 pandemics that

the world has experienced in beyond 30 years.² With great apprehension, the world watched the pandemic causing incredible suffering, death, and disruption of normal life¹. High death rate and significant increase in cases has created changes in every aspect of work, school, recreation, travel, economic well-being, and connections with friends and family. It challenged people to cross-examine and rethink many taken-for-granted ideas about human life and institutions - the connection between the individual and society, the meaning and value of sociality and communities, of the common good, and possibly above all the institutions that serve, govern and constrain us.³

Since India is one of the favoured tourist destinations for both domestic and international tourists due to its unique natural endowments the tourism industry generates

¹The Covid – 19 caused by the coronavirus SARS- Cov-2 was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China and has since spread globally.



employment opportunities for millions of jobseekers. It is noted that the tourism and entertainment enterprise met with the worst impacts of Covid-19. As governments have attempted to defend their populations, lockdowns, quarantines, and severe restrictions on national and international movements were applied. This, coupled with the choice of clients to limit worldwide travel led to a sharp contraction for the tourism sector. This was a serious concern for the international locations as travel abroad was more or less a nightmare even for the frequent flyers. The state of Kerala in India was also severely affected by the travel restrictions and pandemic fear. Studies reveal that tourism sector in Kerala was badly affected by the pandemic scenario. The current article looks further into the scenario to take stock of the situation and to trace out the trajectory of tourism revival in the post pandemic period. The study uses both primary and secondary data.

Review of Literature

There have been several substantial pandemics recorded in human history where pandemic-related calamities have caused enormous negative influences on health, economies, and even national security worldwide⁴. Differently from epidemic outbreaks such as SARS, Ebola, and H1N1, the coronavirus (COVID-19) remain the world's deadliest epidemic. Actually it came along with a systemic global healthcare crisis, financial crisis, and economic downturn. To limit the spread of the COVID-19, governments have taken drastic measures by locking down the entire country and also by prohibiting entry to their borders, resulting in an immense hit for the global tourism industry, particularly the travel and hospitality sector.⁵

According to World Travel and Tourism Council and Oxford Economics, as of 2019, travel and tourism industry in India contributed 6.9% of GDP. In the case of India, the earnings from tourism industry is very significant in the sense that common people are directly and indirectly involved in the tourism and hospitality industry as they have issues of unemployment⁶. Tourism is the third largest source of foreign exchange for India Covid-19 pandemic was a severe shock to this industry. During the pandemic hospitality industry in India estimated a loss of Rs 90,000 crore in 2020. Tourism sector faced a period of stagnation during Covid-19 because of voluntary and compulsory restrictions on travel around the world. In addition, the Indian medical tourism industry, which was projected to reach \$28 billion in 2020, faced disruptions as a result of covid outbreak.⁷ Consequently the decline in income from tourism badly affected vulnerable sections of workers in the tourism and hospitality industry including food-app delivery-persons, app-based taxi drivers, home stay owners etc.

In hospitality and transportation sector the Covid has made a big dent of 70% for the whole of 2020 in

international level. This is also highly reflected at domestic level⁸. However domestic tourism has more resilience in this particular context. The study suggests that the measures to promote domestic tourism should be given greater weight and considered within the broader context of destination resilience.

The impact of pandemic on tourism in the long run may result in positive outcomes like ecological improvements⁹. In fact pandemic has brought back pristine environment to many destinations and the industry is trying to capture this back to nature slogan. However it is found that this aspect of Covid-19 is not well estimated in the post pandemic period.

Beria, & Lunkar (2021) argues that the pandemic has not much changed city mobility among the population. The cities were slightly emptied, but never became "empty", even in the darkest hours of lockdown. Just a fraction of people was actually able to leave the city, and not just for the legal restrictions. Simply, many jobs are place specific as well as many services and functions.¹⁰ This evidences that mobility, may it be tourism or for livelihood is not basically altered. This may be one of the reasons for gradual revival of the tourist sector in the post pandemic world.

It is interesting to note that social entrepreneurship over the past decade increased due to tourism, The COVID- 19 also facilitates these tourism social projects that address the social problems arising from COVID-19. The rapid expansion of relevant social tourism enterprises provides several opportunities to practice and accurately understand this concept in new biodiversity, stakeholders, and conditions¹¹. The study argues that tourism enterprises must consider and change the basic principles, main assumptions, and organizational situations. The pandemic provided an ample opportunity to make a rethinking on policies and priorities in the sector.

COVID – 19 AND TOURISM

Tourism is an economic activity of immense global importance. It has been the fastest growing industry in the world in the past 50 years². Globally, travel and tourism are substantial contributors to a fundamental sector for process introduction, and social economic and cultural improvement worldwide¹¹. In many towns, regions, and countries, tourism performs a critical function as planned pillar of the economic system. The tourism enterprise was at the receiving during global crises such global financial crunch in 1997 and 2008, the SARS epidemic in 2003, diverse social unrests, and earthquakes¹². The Covid – 19 outbreaks have impacted the global commercial enterprise surroundings and has ended in notably hard hit on a couple of industries internationally.¹³ The emergence of the deadliest viral sickness has affected all monetary sectors and beaten travelers and customers' pleasure.



As a result, international tourism was almost completely postponed during the early period of the global pandemic. Incoming vacationer arrivals declined seventy-four percentage in January and December 2020. But, if the pre-Covid months of January and February 2020 are excluded, the autumn in arrivals amounts to eighty-four in line with percent. Maximum affected regions are North-East Asia, South-East Asia, North Africa and South Asia. The minimal pretentious regions are North America, Western Europe and the Caribbean. This suggests that the finest influence has fallen on growing countries. The reduction in vacationer arrivals across growing international locations is relatively regular, basically among 60 to 80 percent. The rise of Coronavirus has had a drastic impact on the tourism region all over the world. Be it aviation or hospitality, transportation, tour workers or, eateries, each hobby linked to tourism has been badly affected in an unprecedented way. The indirect outcomes of this decline are even greater and overwhelming, as labor and capital stay unused and the shortage of call for goods and services has a bad upstream effect on many sectors.

India has been no exception to the impact of pandemic on tourism⁸. In India, tourism is probably top-notch employment generator besides being an enormous supply of foreign exchange¹⁴. Because of the pandemic the decline in tourist arrivals or moves in India started out in February 2020. This trend reached its crib whilst the lockdown was declared in late March 2020.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM IN KERALA

Kerala has a population of around 2.8 percentage of India's populace. Because of the worldwide presence and with its clear strategy, Kerala tourism has won plenty of travelers from all around the international, mainly from the United Kingdom, United States of America, France, Germany, Saudi, Arabia and Australia. Kerala tourism aims to place itself as a worldwide destination for tourism that's primarily based on the benefit of the neighborhood sources, thereby attracting funding and growing into sustainable development for the people of Kerala. An equable weather, an extended coastline with serene beaches, tranquil stretches of emerald backwaters, lush hill stations and wonderful natural world, waterfalls, sprawling plantations and paddy fields, spell binding artwork bureaucracy, all of this makes Kerala a completely unique experience.

Over the years, Kerala has been a very important state in terms of Ayurvedic exercises. Ayurveda is the conventional fitness skill of India. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian machine of drugs and Panchakarma, the rejuvenation therapy² in Ayurveda have helped Kerala to attain a pan-global popularity as a really worth-visit vacation spot. Travelers

²Rejuvenation therapy known as 'Panchakarma' is a cornerstone of Kerala's wellness tourism industry aimed at restoring balance to the mind and body.

from the western world were visiting here for spiritual and physical awakenings ever since the Beatles made their halt to India in the mid-Nineteen Sixties. Ayurveda is well-known in UK, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and few Gulfs international locations like Saudi Arabia and UAE. The growth price of tourists flocking for Ayurveda is increasing each year. Kerala tourism has acquired several awards and citations for its tourism-related activities. These awards are the direct result of the concerted efforts of both the private and non-private sectors operating collectively to take Kerala's tourism industry. Classical art bureaucracy, colorful festivals, and special delicacies are a number of the cultural marvels that await travelers.¹⁵ The tourism quarter alone employs approximately 15 lakh human beings and contributes 11.5% of the state's GDP.

But Covid-19 pandemic has frozen the state's economy completely. From the hill stations of Munnar and Wayanad to the backwaters of Alappuzha, tourism in Kerala has taken a serious hit because of the pandemic. The tourism and different allied industries, which collectively account for 11.5% percent of the domain's GDP, have completely collapsed, leaving heaps of humans jobless¹⁶. After the 2018 floods, the tourism industry of Kerala has resumed strongly in 2019, with an upward thrust of 8.52 percent in worldwide tourist arrivals and 17.81 percent in home traveler arrivals compared to 2018. In 2019, 2.93 million global visitors arrived on e-traveler visas, a 23.6 percentage boom over the preceding year.

Table 1: Tourists' arrival in Kerala from 2010 - 2019

Year	No. of domestic tourist visits	% of increase	No. of foreign tourist visits	% of increase	Total no. of tourists	% of increase
2010	8595075	8.61	659265	18.31	9254340	9.25
2011	9381455	9.15	732985	11.18	10114440	9.29
2012	10076854	7.41	793696	8.28	10870550	7.48
2013	10857811	7.75	858143	8.12	11715954	7.78
2014	11695411	7.71	923366	7.6	12618777	7.71
2015	12465571	6.59	977479	5.86	13443050	6.53
2016	13172535	5.67	1038419	6.23	14210954	5.71
2017	14673520	11.39	1091870	5.15	15765390	10.94
2018	15604661	6.35	1096407	0.42	16701068	5.94
2019	18384233	17.81	1189771	8.52	19574004	17.2

Source: Official website of tourism department, Government of Kerala (www.Keralatourism.org)

The data shows that there is a substantial increase of number of tourists arriving in the state of Kerala during the period 2010-19. In 2019 there is a substantial increase of 17.81% of domestic tourist. In the case of foreign tourism, the growth is 8.52%. The overall growth in the corresponding period is 17.2%. However, the data does not show any



consistency of growth in the previous years. This may be because of many external and internal factors including global financial situation and the like. However, the overall scenario in tourism sector in terms of number of visitors shows an upward trend from 9254340 in 2010 to 19574004 in 2019.

Table 2: Foreign exchange earnings from tourism from 2010 – 2019 (Rs in crore)

Year	Earnings	Variation over the previous year (In%)
2010	3797.37	33.09
2011	4221.99	11.18
2012	4571.69	8.28
2013	5560.77	21.63
2014	6396.93	15.07
2015	6949.88	8.61
2016	7749.51	11.51
2017	8392.11	8.29
2018	8764.46	4.44
2019	10271.1	17.19

Source: Official website of tourism department, Government of Kerala.

The Table 2 indicates the growth in revenue from tourism sector during the period 2010 to 2019. It is clear from the table that the foreign exchange earnings from tourism during the period shows a positive increase. There is 17.19 % increase in revenue between 2018-19. This may be because of the low inflow of tourist during the floods in 2018. In terms of money the growth is from 3797.37 crores in 2010 to 10271.06 crores in 2019.

Table 3: Month wise foreign and domestic tourist arrivals during the pandemic year 2020

Month	Foreign	Domestic
January	174439	1725291
February	125523	1383951
March	33245	590661
April	707	3391
May	75	7370
June	60	29233
July	188	40389
August	373	61151
September	406	126358
October	1041	210431
November	2167	329091
December	2531	481655

Source: Official website of tourism department, government of Kerala (www.Keralatourism.org)

Foreign tourist arrival to Kerala during the year 2020 was 340,755. It shows a decrease of 71.36% over the preceding year's figure of 11,89,771. Domestic tourist arrival to Kerala

during the year was 4988972. It shows a decrease of 72.86% over the preceding year's figure 18384233. Foreign exchange earnings for the year 2020 are 2799.85 Crores. It shows a decrease of 72.74 % over the preceding year. Total revenue from tourism during 2020 is Rs. 11335.96 Crores, showing a decrease of 74.82% over the last year's figure. This is clear indication of the impact of Covid-19 on Kerala tourism.

Foreign tourist arrival to Kerala during the year 2021 is 60487. It shows a decrease of 82.25% over the previous year's figure of 340755. Domestic tourist arrival to Kerala during the year 2021 is 7537617. It shows an increase of 51.09% over the previous year's figure 4988972. Foreign exchange earnings for the year 2021 are only Rs. 461.5 Crores. It shows a decrease of 83.52 % over the previous year. Total revenue from tourism during 2021 is Rs. 12285.91 Crores, showing an increase of 8.38% over the last year's figure. This shows a grave scenario in tourism industry in the state. However, there is a gradual increase in revenue which indicates a revival of the sector against the challenges posed by Covid-19.

TOURISM IN THE POST PANDEMIC PERIOD

Kerala's tourism sector employs about 23.5% of the state's work force. Without tourism, the state will be in peril.¹⁷ The pandemic waves have shattered the state's top revenue earning sector. Kerala's tourism industry executed different strategies to revive after Covid – 19 such as promoting domestic tourism, emphasizing safety protocols and leveraging digital marketing to reach potential travelers. They also engrossed on eco-tourism and wellness tourism, capitalizing on Kerala's natural beauty and traditional Ayurveda treatments. Some efforts taken by the tourist industry to recover from the collapse are: promotional campaigns, special packages, virtual tours, caravan tourism, collaborations, infrastructure development etc. Subsequently post-Covid recovery of the sector is also well noticeable. With the preventive and remedial initiatives taken by the State Government in addition to the support received from the Central Government, the slogan "Safe Kerala, Safe Tourism" gained bright days ahead. It has facilitated to instill confidence among tourists in particular and tourism industry in general¹⁸.

Foreign Tourist visits to Kerala during the year 2022 registered a growth and resulted in 345549 visitors. It is an increase of 471.28 % over the previous year's figure. But there is a decrease of 70.96% of foreign tourists over the figures of the year 2019. The top eleven foreign countries from which highest percentage of visits in Kerala 2022 were USA, Maldives, Oman, Russia, UK, UAE, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia and Australia with their respective shares being 12.98%, 11.04%, 8.54%, 8.07%, 7.67%, 4.82%, 4.05%, 3.69%, 2.82%, and 2.72. These ten foreign countries accounted for about 66.4% of the total FTVs in Kerala 2022.¹⁹



Domestic Tourist visits to Kerala during the year 2022 was 18867414. The corresponding figure during the year 2021 is 75, 37,617. The year 2022 shows an increase of 150.31 % over the previous year's figure. Also, the year 2022 records an increase of 2.63% of Domestic Tourists over the figures of the year 2019.

Direct Foreign Exchange Earnings from tourism sector for the year 2022 is 2792.42 crore. Direct Foreign exchange earnings for the year 2021 was Rs.461.5 Crore. It shows an increase of 505.07 % over the previous year. Direct Earnings from Domestic Tourists for the year 2022 is 24588.96 Crore to Rs.9103.93 Crore in 2021. It shows an increase of 170.09 % over the previous year. Total Revenue (including direct & indirect) from Tourism during 2022 is Rs.35168.42 Crore, showing an increase of 186.25 % over the last year's figure. Total Revenue (including direct & indirect) from Tourism during 2021 was Rs.12, 285.91 Crore.²⁰ The assumption is that the tourism sector is a growth trajectory and is about to mend the gap created by Covid-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the tourism industry in Kerala. According to the state planning board, the state tourism industry has faced unprecedented losses due to the closure situation after Covid-19. The tourism sector has been hit hardstand and the government has announced various packages to revitalize the industry. To survive the short run, Kerala tried to merge a combination of banks and other financial institutions to ensure the availability of funds for the sector. After being assaulted by the Covid pandemic, the tourism division in Kerala is back on track. Kerala attracted 3.8 million domestic tourists and registered a 72.48 percent growth in the first quarter of 2022 compared to 2.2 million footprints in the same period in 2021. Going by the prevailing trend, Kerala is all set to attract a record number of tourists in the coming years on the strength of its globally acclaimed assets, new products, and initiatives. The Kerala tourism and its related businesses have recovered from the crisis situation and are back to normal life.

The tourism sector, being a significant contributor to the state economy has a lot of potentials for growth. There are many positive factors that places the state in top destination for domestic and international travelers. The need of the hour is to capitalize these opportunities, and adequate strategies are to be taken to manage the situation. One of the potential areas is wellness tourism. The Kerala Ayurveda branding is operating well. But it should be more closely linked with medical tourism. The development of basic infrastructure should be another top priority for the state. Connectivity should be enhanced inside the state. There should be a proper tourism policy and tourism road map for the state³. More selling themes should be identified and to be made functional. In the given conditions it can be rightly

observed that tourism is going to be the backbone of the state economy in the near future.

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³The government has introduced a new idea namely Caravan tourism in Kerala. It presents a promising blend of adventure, nature and cultural exploration, aims to promote responsible tourism activities for sustainable growth and for the benefit of the local communities, promote eco – friendly practices and market for local products. These types of innovations, if functioning properly is to be the future mode of tourism.



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