

REIMAGINING TOURISM AND RAIL INDUSTRY:TRENDS AND OUTLOOK IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

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Introduction

Tourism Industry

Tourism is a potent force in supporting sustainable development, with the potential to promote education and empowerment of women and youth, as well as foster socio-economic and cultural progress in communities. It plays a crucial role in building the social protection systems that underpin resilience and prosperity. Tourism has been recognized as a key pillar of sustainable development, as it has the ability to generate economic growth and job opportunities, while also contributing to social and cultural development, environmental protection, and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

India is blessed with a diverse and expansive landscape spanning from the snowy mountain tops of the Himalayas to the verdant rainforests in the southern region. This vast land also boasts a rich cultural and historical legacy, coupled with a variety of ecological systems, terrains, and natural wonders scattered throughout the nation. This presents an enormous opportunity to tap into the full potential of the tourism industry.

Tourism is a major economic sector representing 7% of global trade, and in some countries, it makes up more than 20% of the GDP. Ranked third among the largest export sectors of the world economy, tourism sustains one in ten jobs and livelihoods for millions in developed and developing nations. Nevertheless, the tourism industry has been considerably impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with its export revenues estimated to decrease by US\$910 billion to US\$1.2 trillion in 2020, potentially causing a 1.5% to 2.8% drop in global GDP.

The UNWTO reported that in 2019, the total number of international tourist arrivals worldwide reached 1.5 billion, marking a 4% rise from the previous year. This growth was a decade-long trend, as international tourist arrivals had been increasing steadily at an average of 5% per year between 2009 and 2019. Over the course of a decade, the volume of global international tourist arrivals surged by 63%, with remarkable growth seen in the tourism sectors of emerging economies. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major influence on global tourism in 2020, with international tourist arrivals falling by an estimated 74% compared to the previous year.

The tourism industry has become a major socio-economic sector and a significant contributor to global trade and GDP. In 2019, tourism generated export revenue of USD 1.7 trillion, representing 28% of global trade in services and 7% of the total value of goods and services exported.

As per the World Tourism Organization, the year 2020 witnessed the most disastrous time in the history of the tourism industry due to the widespread outbreak of COVID-19. International arrivals declined by 74%, putting as many as 120 million tourism-related jobs at risk. Following a steady rollout of vaccines and other preventive measures, international tourism rebounded to nearly 60% of pre-pandemic levels in the first seven months of 2022 (*UNWTO Report, 2022*). However, international tourism is on its way back to pre-pandemic levels, with twice as many individuals visiting in the first quarter of 2023 as in the same period in 2022 (UNWTO Report 2023).

Although the industry had a downfall, its rapid recovery has extended into 2023. According to the UNWTO World Tourist Barometer, in the first quarter of 2023, foreign arrivals surpassed 80% of pre-pandemic levels and approximately 235 million tourists embarked on international journeys during the first three months, which is more than double the number recorded in the same period in 2022. Tourism has proved its resiliency by restoring a major part of its pre-pandemic levels. According to revised 2022 figures, over 960 million tourists travelled worldwide last year, representing a return of two-thirds (66%) of pre-pandemic levels (UNWTO Report, 2023).

It is imperative to present a new perspective for the future that emphasizes sustainable tourism and circular economy, as these approaches are deemed the most viable way toward a comprehensive recovery. Sustainable tourism refers to tourism that is developed and managed in a way that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. This means that tourism should be developed in a way that supports local communities and businesses, preserves natural resources, and minimizes negative impacts on the environment. The circular economy in the context of the tourism sector means reducing waste, reusing materials, and recycling resources to reduce the adverse effects of tourism on the environment. By focusing on sustainable tourism and the circular economy, the tourism sector can support an integral recovery that benefits all stakeholders and create a more resilient tourism sector that is better able to withstand future challenges, such as pandemics or climate change. The UNWTO has played a leading role in promoting sustainable tourism practices worldwide, encouraging destinations to adopt policies that maximize the positive impacts of tourism while minimizing any negative effects. This includes promoting responsible tourism practices, such as minimizing the environmental impact of tourism, preserving cultural heritage promoting cultural exchange, and creating employment and business opportunities for local communities.

Railway Industry

Public transportation holds immense importance in a vast country like India due to its large population and expansive geographical expanse. The transportation industry here is remarkably diverse, encompassing Rail, Air, Water, and Road, contributing significantly to the country's GDP at 6.4% and playing a pivotal role in its economic growth. The railway sector, a key player in India's transportation industry, boasts an extensive network spanning 67,956 km, ranking as the largest in Asia and the fourth largest globally. India has the fourth-largest railway network in the world after China, Russia, and the United States. In addition to 9,146 goods trains, Indian Railways ran 13,523 passenger trains by the end of the 2023 fiscal year. Its vast network covered 68,103 kilometres in the fiscal year 2022 (*Indian Railways Industry Analysis IBEF*, n.d.). The railway system in India is a significant mode of transportation for both passengers and freight, and it plays a crucial role in the country's development.

Indian Railways serves as an efficient and cost-effective mode for both passenger and freight transport, acting as the economic lifeline for India. It extensively transports various goods such as coal, metals, petroleum, chemical manures, and food grains, significantly supporting sectors like the automobile industry as a preferred carrier. Maintaining its vast assets, Indian Railways heavily relies on a punctual maintenance schedule, emphasizing the value chain crucial for smooth operations, management, and maintenance of infrastructure, services, testing, and procurement of materials.

The government has initiated significant initiatives like the National Infrastructure Master plan (Gati Shakti), aimed at fostering India's growth trajectory by streamlining infrastructure development. Efforts include enhancing cargo handling capacity to 1600 MT by 2024-25, accelerating the construction of dedicated freight corridors, and developing multi-modal transport hubs, promising improved connectivity and economic growth. Moreover, the National Monetization Pipeline (NMP) by the Central Government intends to bridge infrastructure deficits and boost overall development through alternative financing, creating employment opportunities, and enhancing railway efficiency, thereby reducing logistical costs and carbon footprint.

Indian Railways has laid out the National Rail Plan (NRP) 2030, aiming to develop a future-ready railway system, improving infrastructure, electrification, station upgrades, and high-speed train networks, anticipating significant global rail activity by 2050.

The Indian Railways network covers a vast expanse, binding the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the country. The government has committed to electrifying the entire rail network by 2023–24, with the aim of becoming a "net zero (carbon emissions) railway" by 2030. This ambitious electrification plan is a part of the vision to achieve targets of 2024 MT freight loading by 2024, demonstrating a strong commitment to modernizing and greening the railway network. The Indian Railways' focus on electrification and modernization, including the implementation of Wi-Fi at numerous railway stations and the solarization of over 1000 stations, reflects a concerted effort to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of the railway network. The railway industry in India is rapidly progressing towards its target of 100% electrification, aiming to become the largest green railway network in the world.

The prolonged lockdowns due to the pandemic severely impacted the transportation sector, especially passenger travel. Although air travel in India has nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels, railway travel is still lagging behind. The data for the financial year 2020-21 reveals a decline of over 1,815 million passenger bookings compared to the same period in 2019-20. Railway statistics from recent years show a gradual rise in passenger numbers after the steep decline in 2020-21, yet it remains about 24% lower than pre-pandemic figures, encompassing both suburban and non-suburban traffic. The slow recovery in railway passenger numbers is attributed to factors like inflation, dissuading many from spending on travel. Increased travel generally signifies economic growth, indicating India's rapid recovery from the pandemic. However, the discrepancy in railway travel suggests that those at lower economic levels are not traveling as much as before (Online, 2023).

Nevertheless, the railways show signs of a speedy recovery. Record-breaking freight loading and increased revenue during FY 2022-23 signify progress. The railways' revenue earnings from the passenger segment surged by 73% from April to January 2023 compared to the same period last year. This growth aligns with substantial investments in infrastructure development, new train launches like Vande Bharat, station redevelopment, and track electrification, indicating promising growth prospects for the railway sector in the upcoming years.

In the face of formidable and unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19, Indian Railways has not just sustained the national supply chain and facilitated the return of millions of individuals to their homes amidst extremely challenging conditions. Alongside these operations, Indian Railways undertook significant initiatives in their fight against the pandemic.

Utilizing the lockdown period, they conducted extensive training programs to educate their personnel on handling the crisis safely. Additionally, pandemic awareness camps were organized for railway workers, the general public, and residents of Railway colonies across the country. It has also propelled an unparalleled surge in infrastructure development, innovation, network capacity expansion, diversification in freight operations, and transparency initiatives. Leveraging the challenges of the pandemic, the Railways have seized the opportunity to lay the groundwork for future growth and elevate the travel experience for passengers to a new level.

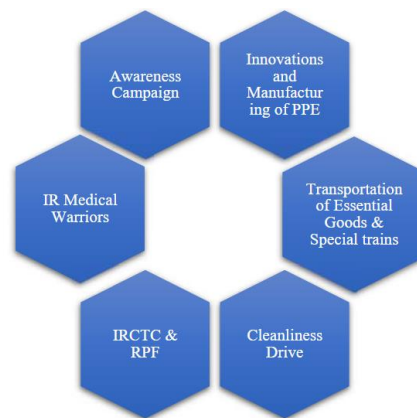


Fig 1: Contribution of Indian Railways towards COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Akhila Rao, et al, (2020)

Objectives of the Study

The paper examines some of the key trends and outlooks for the tourism industry and railway industry in the post-pandemic era, including the rise of domestic and nature-based tourism, the importance of sustainability and responsible tourism practices, and the increased use of technology and contactless solutions. By understanding these trends and adapting to the new reality, tourism businesses can position themselves for success in the years to come.

Methodology

The study was conducted through a detailed investigation of the latest relevant literature, which was gathered from academic sources, online news portals, and other relevant online platforms. The goal was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the most up-to-date knowledge in the field.

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM

The COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching impacts on the tourism sector, and its effects on tourism policies may persist for a long time. Among the potential lasting implications are:

1. **Sustainability:** is likely to play a greater role in tourism choices as tourists become more aware of climate change and its adverse effects on the environment. Consequently, the revival of the tourism sector is expected to be driven by natural areas as well as regional and local destinations. Additionally, the emphasis on shorter travel distances may lead to a lower environmental impact of tourism. This means that tourism policies may need to prioritize sustainability and promote responsible and eco-friendly practices to ensure that the industry remains sustainable in the long term.
2. **Domestic Tourism:** is likely to be favored by tourists who prefer to travel within their own country due to the pandemic. Domestic tourism may benefit from this trend and see an increase in demand. However, domestic tourists are often more price-sensitive and tend to spend less than international tourists. As a result, tourism policies may need to focus on promoting domestic tourism and creating affordable and attractive travel packages to encourage domestic travel.
3. **Safety and Hygiene:** The importance of safety and hygiene has significantly increased in the selection of tourism destinations and activities, with travelers preferring to avoid large gatherings and opting for private means of transportation.
4. **Reduced Investment:** Due to the pandemic, investment in the tourism sector has been reduced significantly, which will require active policies aimed at incentivizing and restoring investment to maintain the quality of tourism products and services while promoting a sustainable recovery.
5. **Digitalisation:** The digitization of tourism services will continue to progress, resulting in a rise in automation, contactless payment and service options, virtual experiences, and real-time access to information.
6. **Tourism Policy:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector has realized the need for more reactive and flexible policies to deal with sudden changes in policy focus and crises. This has highlighted the importance of effective crisis management and the need to prioritize safety and health policy issues to ensure the well-being of travelers and industry workers. To achieve this, tourism policies need to be reviewed and updated regularly, taking into consideration

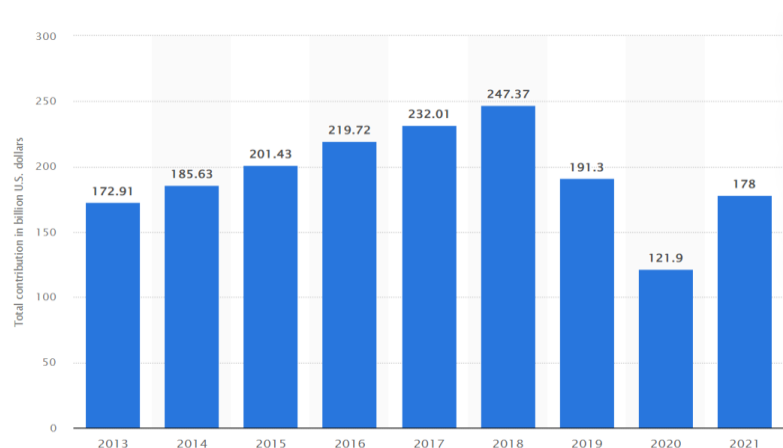
emerging trends, technological advancements, and global events that can impact the industry. Governments, tourism boards, and private sector stakeholders need to work together to develop policies and protocols that can be quickly adapted to address unforeseen challenges. In addition to crisis management and safety and health policy issues, there is also a need for sustainable tourism policies that promote responsible tourism practices and support local communities. This includes initiatives such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, and community-based tourism, which provide economic benefits while minimizing negative environmental and social impacts.

Overall, the tourism industry will need to be more agile and responsive to changing circumstances in the future, and tourism policies must be developed with this in mind.

Impact Of Covid-19 On Indian Tourism: Statistical Data

India ranked 54th in the travel and tourism development index in 2021. The ranking was based on the industry's enabling environment, policies, infrastructure, demand drivers, and sustainability. For India, it was a significant drop from 34 in 2019. (*Statista, n.d.*)

I. The total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in India from 2013 to 2021 (in billion U.S. dollars)



The travel and tourism sector added approximately \$178 billion to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021 which shows the revival of the tourism industry from the pandemic.

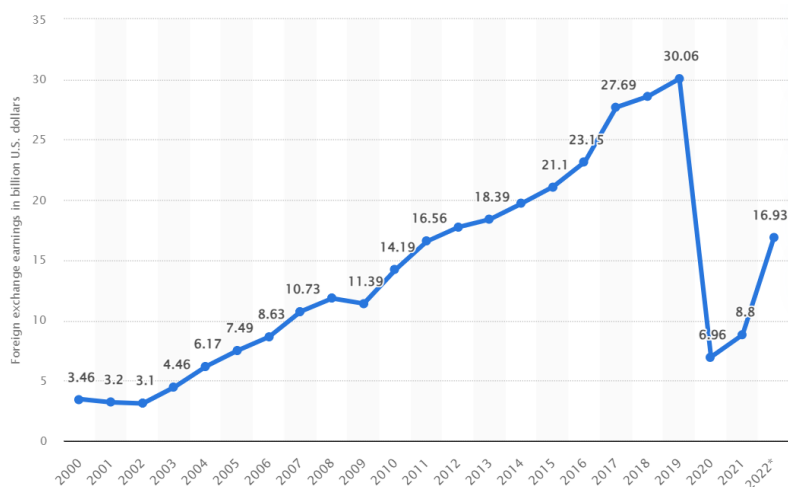
A table representation is given below:

Contribution of the Tourism Industry to the Indian Economy			
	Total Contribution to GDP (%)	GDP Contribution (USD billion)	Employment (‘000)
2019	6.90	191.3	40,111.90
2020	4.70	121.9	31,785.20

Source: World Travel & Tourism Council

The travel & tourism industry contributed ~6.9% to India’s GDP and accounted for 40.1 million jobs in 2019. In 2020, the contribution to the GDP was 4.7% and accounted for 31.8 million jobs. This decline was due to lockdowns imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which negatively impacted the hotel and tourism sectors. (UNWTO Report, 2022)

II. Foreign exchange earnings from tourism in India from 2000 to 2022 (in billion U.S. dollars)



Source: Statista 2023

The tourism industry in India generated almost \$9 billion in foreign exchange earnings in 2021, marking an increase of more than 26 percent compared to the previous year. In 2019, tourism was ranked as the country's third-largest source of foreign exchange revenue.

III. Number of Foreign tourist arrivals in India from 2011 to 2022 (in millions)

Year	Foreign Tourist Visits (in Million)	Annual Growth Percentage
2011	19.50	8.87
2012	18.26	-6.33
2013	19.95	9.24
2014	22.33	11.94
2015	23.33	4.44
2016	24.71	6.95
2017	26.89	8.79
2018	28.87	7.38
2019	31.41	8.80
2020	7.17	-77.17
2021	1.05	-85.36
2022	8.59	714.26
Growth rate in 2022/19		-72.68

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India Report 2023

IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON INDIAN RAILWAYS

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have affected the rail sector not just economically but also in how the sector will adapt when it comes to passenger experience and innovation. The sector is prioritizing customer experience through design and services to support the needs of the post-pandemic rail customer. The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected railway operations, suspending all passenger services from March 24, 2020. Until February of the fiscal year 2019-20, Indian Railways' revenue stood around 48,801 crores. During the suspension of passenger trains, the railways focused solely on transporting essential goods like medical supplies, food items, and agricultural produce. Consequently, there was a notable 36% decrease in cargo loading, a 41% decline in goods earnings, and a 19 % drop in the productivity parameter NTKM (net tonne kilometre) in March 2020. Industries like steel, thermal power, and others experienced reduced production, impacting the transportation of materials such as coal by 24%, cement by 25%, fertilizer by 30%, and container movement by 21%, thereby affecting industry revenue. During the lockdown period, the railways took on an additional role of operating increased freight and parcel trains to facilitate the transport of essential supplies like medicines, medical equipment, and milk.

While freight services continued to operate and fulfill essential duties during the pandemic, the overall volume of freight transported and the revenue generated took a significant hit. Despite the operational continuity, the disruption caused by the pandemic led to a notable decrease in both the quantity of freight moved and the revenue generated by these services. Indian Railway served as a vital lifeline, and the focus was solely on ensuring the transportation of these critical goods without consideration for revenue generation. Railways contribute around 1% to the overall GDP of India and a significant part of India's economy is freight transport by rail (Saxena & Yadav, 2022).

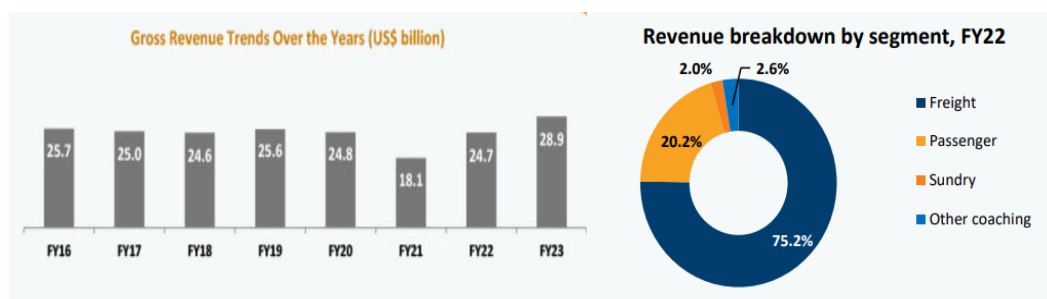
Statistical Data:

Category	2019-20 (A)	2020-21 (B)	Increase/ Decrease (B)-(A)
Passenger Revenue	50669.09	15248.49	-35420.60
Other Coaching Revenue	4640.79	2096.76	-2544.05
Goods Revenue	113487.89	117231.82	3743.93
Sundry Other Revenue	5862.75	5938.61	75.86
Total Traffic Revenue	174660.52	140515.66	-34144.86

Source: Newspaper Report

Compared to the previous fiscal year, Indian Railways had a decrease in total traffic income of Rs 34,145 crore in the 2020–21 fiscal year. This was primarily due to a decline in passengers. However, the decrease in the revenue was partially offset by an increase in Freight and Sundry Other Revenues.

Market Size and Sector Composition



Source: IBEF Report, Indian Railways, 2023

Measures taken during the pandemic by the Indian Railways

- During the COVID-19 lockdown, the Ministry of Railways collaborated with Production Units and Zonal Railway workshops to repurpose manufacturing facilities.
- Railway coaches were modified to serve as isolation wards, planning initially for 5,000 coaches equipped with basic amenities like toilets and bathrooms (*Sharma & Strategic Investment Research Unit, 2020*).
- In support of COVID-19 relief, Indian Railways committed over 6,500 hospital beds, converting the Jagjivan Ram Hospital of the Western Railway into a specialized COVID-19 facility.
- To ensure the timely movement of essential foodgrains, 'Annapoorna' and 'Jai Kisan' trains were deployed by the Northern and South Central zones, respectively, capable of transporting 5,000 to 5,200 tonnes of food grains in a single trip.
- Indian Railways' proactive measures also included manufacturing PPEs for healthcare personnel, producing reusable face masks, hand sanitizers, and supplying cooked food to the needy through IRCTC's coordinated efforts with Railway Protection Force (RPF) and other Railway Departments.
- Parcel trains operated on 65 routes, aiding in the transport of essential goods, with over 20,400 tonnes of consignments loaded, generating earnings of INR 7.54 crores.
- E-commerce giant Amazon India announced its partnership with these COVID-19 parcel trains to expand its operations in 55 additional lanes during the lockdown.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indian Railways introduced Swift and Efficient Transport of Utilities (SETU) to ensure uninterrupted services of scheduled parcel trains for transporting essential commodities nationwide. SETU features a 24/7 all-India helpline number and within the first 24 hours, facilitated the delivery of 30 tonnes of items.
- The Railway Emergency Cell for COVID was established as an extensive nationwide unit, incorporating approximately 400 Officers and staff from Railway Board to Divisions.

These initiatives underscored the railway's concerted efforts to address the pandemic's challenges, repurposing resources and services to aid in relief and essential transportation during the COVID-19 crisis. (*Sharma & Strategic Investment Research Unit, 2020*)

KEY FORCES RESHAPING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AT A GLOBAL SCALE

1. **Responsible travel:** The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to responsible travel, where travelers are more conscious of their impact on the environment and local communities. This shift in mindset has led to a greater emphasis on sustainability in the travel industry, as consumers actively seek travel options and destinations that are in line with their environmentally friendly values. Travel companies are reconsidering their practices in order to decrease their impact on the environment. They are also rethinking their operations to reduce their carbon footprint and create a more efficient and sustainable tourism sector in the future. This transformation is crucial for a responsible and sustainable future of travel.
2. **Changing Travel Demand:** Emphasis on Domestic Travel and Outdoor Destinations- Due to the pandemic, people's travel preferences have changed significantly, and many now favor domestic trips and outdoor locations instead of traveling internationally. Travelers are seeking more predictable and reliable travel experiences, often traveling in smaller groups and booking at shorter notice. In addition, travelers are opting for shorter travel distances, with domestic visitor spending proving to be less negatively impacted than international visitor spending during the pandemic. These changes in travel behavior are likely to continue into the post-pandemic world.
3. **Leisure Travel Takes the Lead, While Business Travel Faces Potential Long-Term Changes:** The recovery of the travel industry is likely to be led by leisure travel, while the future of business travel could be significantly different. As the pandemic has forced companies to adapt to virtual meetings and remote work, some experts predict that the changes in business travel patterns could be permanent. While leisure travel is expected to bounce back, it remains to be seen how business travel will evolve in the post-pandemic world.
4. **Technology and Innovation:** The pandemic has unexpectedly become a catalyst for innovation in the travel sector, with businesses re-evaluating their efforts towards digitization. One area of focus for innovation in the travel industry is the utilization of technology to stimulate demand and promote safe travel. A technology that is gaining popularity is virtual reality (VR), which can be utilized during the customer's decision-making stage to provide an immersive experience of destinations without leaving their homes. Online VR tours offer a glimpse of hotel and restaurant interiors, outdoor locations, famous landmarks, and other tourist spots which can help motivate them to make reservations in the face of increased uncertainty.
5. Another technology that is being explored is augmented reality (AR), which combines real-world experiences with virtual elements to provide a more

comprehensive experience. For example, travelers can use AR-based applications to navigate around tourist attractions or a destination.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous countries are seeking to establish a more robust tourism economy by supporting sustainable recovery, encouraging digital transformation, and creating a more environmentally friendly tourism system. There is a need for a collaborative and strategic approach to revitalizing the tourism industry following the COVID-19 outbreak. While the challenges are significant, the opportunities for positive change and innovation are also significant, and governments, businesses, and stakeholders across the tourism industry will need to work together to create a more sustainable and resilient future for tourism.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO BOOST TOURISM IN INDIA

The Government of India has acknowledged the significance of tourism in generating employment opportunities and foreign currency in recent times. The Government has implemented a range of fiscal and non-fiscal measures to support the post-COVID recovery of the tourism sector in the country. These measures include:

1. The **Atmanirbhar Bharat Package**, which offers a collateral-free automatic loan of Rs. 3.00 lakh crore for MSMEs with a 4-year tenure and a 12-month moratorium period.
2. Temporary reduction of both employer and employee PF contributions to 10% each from the existing 12% each for all EPFO-covered establishments for three months.
3. Extension of return filing deadlines by three months with no penal interest for companies up to Rs. 5.00 Crore, and 9% penal interest applied to the rest.
4. Relaxation of various regulatory compliances under the Income Tax Act, Companies Act, and GST Act for different durations to ensure business continuity and survival during the COVID-19 crisis.
5. The **Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) 3.0** to support eligible MSMEs and business enterprises, including those in the Hospitality, Travel & Tourism, and Leisure & Sporting sectors. An additional corpus of Rs. 50,000 crores was allocated for the hospitality sector, and the validity of ECLGS (ECLGS 1.0, ECLGS 2.0 & ECLGS 3.0) was extended until 31.03.2023 or until guarantees totaling Rs. 5.00 lakh crores were issued.
6. The **'Loan Guarantee Scheme for Covid Affected Tourism Service Sector (LGSCATSS)'** to provide collateral-free loans to distressed tourism businesses affected by COVID-19. The scheme covers approved

tour operators, travel agents, tourist transport operators, RLGs/IITGs, and tourist guides. Its validity has been extended until March 31, 2023, or until Rs. 250 crores in guarantees are issued. It is an important initiative by the Indian government to support households that have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in the tourism service sector. Under this scheme, working capital or personal loans are provided to households in the tourism service sector to discharge liabilities and restart their businesses. The scheme is designed to provide relief to those who have suffered financial losses due to the pandemic and support the recovery of the tourism service sector.

7. **SAATHI** (System for Assessment, Awareness & Training for Hospitality Industry) was developed to implement guidelines and SOPs for safe hotel, restaurant, B&B, and other unit operations during and beyond COVID-19.
8. Modification of guidelines for the **Market Development Assistance (MDA)** scheme to enhance support for promoting domestic tourism. Additional promotional activities, including online promotions, were included, and the financial assistance scope was increased.
9. The **first 5 lakh visas** to foreign tourists from potential tourism markets were offered for free to encourage inbound tourism and attract foreign visitors. This can help to support the recovery of the industry and create employment opportunities for those who have been impacted by the pandemic.
10. **The Swadesh Darshan scheme**, a flagship programme, was launched by the Ministry of Tourism in 2014–15. The scheme aims to encourage theme-based tourism to promote, develop, and capitalize on India's tourist potential. As of March 2022, under this scheme, the Ministry of Tourism had invested Rs. 5,500 crores (US\$ 687.84 million) and sanctioned over 76 projects in 31 states/union territories. (*IBEF, n.d.*).
11. **E-Tourist Visa:** In 2014, the Indian government implemented the E-tourist Visa program with the objective of making it easier for foreign nationals to obtain a tourist visa. This effort has effectively encouraged tourism in the country.
12. **Advertising Campaign:** The 'Incredible India' campaign, initiated by the Indian Government, aims to showcase the country's abundant cultural heritage and promote tourism globally. To further boost tourism, the government has introduced various measures, such as the virtual roadshow '*Incredible India Reconnect 2022*,' which was launched in Italy to lure foreign visitors to travel to India.
13. **NIDHI:** The creation of the National Integrated Database of Hospitality Industry (NIDHI) will help the Ministry of Tourism to have a comprehensive view of the accommodation units in the country and their

characteristics. This will enable them to create policies and strategies to better promote and develop tourism. This can help to enhance the quality of services and facilities provided to tourists, which will ultimately improve the overall experience of visitors to the country.

14. **RCS-UDAN scheme:** The Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) - UDAN is a significant initiative by the Indian government to enhance regional air connectivity across the country. "To date, 31 tourism routes have been operationalized. The Ministry of Tourism has given in-principal approval for the inclusion of 28 new tourism routes; therefore, the total number of approved Tourism RCS air routes is now 59" (*Year End Review: Ministry of Tourism, n.d.*). Under the RCS-UDAN scheme, the government provides financial support to airlines by offering Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to make regional air connectivity more affordable. The RCS-UDAN scheme can boost economic activity in remote and underdeveloped regions by attracting business and tourism.
15. The Ministry of Tourism has launched the "**Dekho Apna Desh**" **campaign**, which aims to promote domestic tourism by showcasing undiscovered destinations and unique aspects of popular tourist spots through photographs and webinars. The objective of the campaign is to motivate people from India to discover their own country, thereby contributing to the growth of local economies.
16. The Ministry of Tourism in India has launched the **Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Programme (ITFC)**, an e-learning initiative designed to create a group of skilled professionals who can assist and guide tourists during their travels across the country while enhancing their overall tourism experience. This programme aims to provide comprehensive training to individuals to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to facilitate the smooth functioning of tourism activities thereby aiding the growth of India's tourism sector.
17. The Ministry has taken a great step by introducing the **Utsav Portal** to promote the rich cultural heritage and diversity of India on a global platform. By showcasing festivals, events, and live darshans, the portal can attract tourists and travelers from around the world to visit and explore the different regions of India.

These measures aim to support the recovery of the tourism sector, which has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO REVIVE RAIL INDUSTRY

- **National Railway Plan 2030** aims to meet traffic demands until 2050 by developing infrastructure up to 2030. Vision 2024 targets a 40% increase in freight rail share by 2024, outlining crucial projects like track upgrades and network electrification. Innovative financing through IRFC supports these plans, ensuring timely completion and sustainable debt service.
- **SHRAMIK Special trains** were a lifeline during the COVID-19 crisis, aiding millions of stranded migrants desperate to return home. Prompted by the urgent need, the Ministry of Railways swiftly organized these emergency train services with state governments' support, starting on May 1, 2020.
- **Accelerating Vital Projects:** During the pandemic lockdown, Indian Railways seized the opportunity of reduced train operations to finish over 350 crucial bridge and track works that had long been pending. These projects, vital for safety and operational efficiency, had been delayed due to high traffic density. Railway personnel showcased their adaptability by completing these tasks during this challenging period.
- **Railways Electrification & Green Mission:** With sustainability as a priority, 66% of India's railway tracks were electrified by November 2020. Railways aim for net-zero emissions by 2030, planning complete electrification by 2023 and generating 20 GW of solar power by 2030. This initiative also provides track fencing, safeguarding railway property.
- **Time-tabled parcel services** have been launched to provide reliable services to courier services, and e-commerce companies.
- **Kisan Rail Services** have been started to enable our farmers to send their produce across the nation with enhanced speed & reduced cost.
- **Doubling the speed of freight trains:** The speed of freight trains has nearly doubled from a level of 24 Kmph one year ago to 46 Kmph which means half the time taken for sending products.
- **Transforming Railway Safety Measures:** The strategic safety initiatives of Indian Railways include
 1. Elimination of Unmanned Level Crossings (UMLCs) on the Broad Gauge network.
 2. Establishment of Rashtriya Rail Sanrakshan Kosh (RRSK).
 3. Transition to safer Link Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches.
 4. Priority focus on track renewal and bridge rehabilitation.

- **Digital Transformation:**
 - a) Rail Drishti Portal: A single dashboard offering various details from passenger reservations to freight loading promotes transparency and accountability. Users can access PNR inquiries, complaint tracking, and even contact housekeeping staff on trains, enhancing transparency across Railway operations.
 - b) E-Office Implementation: The E-Office mission on IR is streamlining documentation and increasing transparency.
 - c) GeM Integration: IREPS (Indian Railways E-Procurement System) integration with GeM will digitize procurement processes on IR, further promoting transparency.
 - d) CCTV Provision: Critical locations like stations, train coaches, hospitals, and major offices are equipped with CCTV, enhancing security and oversight.
- **Meri Saheli** initiative ensures women's safety during train travel. With increasing passenger numbers post-lockdown, a modified version aims to prioritize women's safety as footfall rises.

TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES FOR INDIAN RAILWAYS

Here are three key areas that can assist the railway in restructuring its operations and establishing a novel business model (Shah, 2020):

1. Revamping Passenger Services

Indian Railways acknowledges the need to reduce cross-subsidy from freight to the passenger segment. With passenger services currently suspended, it's an opportune moment to reassess their necessity and viability. Employing a zero-base analysis could determine which services to retain or discourage, considering factors like alternative transportation modes, affordability, distance, and local requirements. By strategically pruning less utilized services and aligning with other efficient travel options, such as well-developed road and air sectors, the railway can optimize its presence.

2. Restructuring Freight Operations

Once the passenger segment is reorganized, resources can be redirected toward optimizing freight traffic. With enhanced focus on network capacity, rolling stock, and manpower, the railways can achieve more efficient transportation, leading to increased freight volumes. This shift allows for a more economic-based pricing system for freight services, fostering competitiveness against road transportation.

Collaboration between rail and road sectors can create comprehensive logistics solutions, stimulating economic recovery and minimizing transportation costs.

3. Diversification of Freight

Indian Railways has been exploring alternative freight services like container services, parcels, and cargo express trains, aiming to reduce transit times and uncertainties. The pandemic-induced decline in traditional traffic presents an opportunity to experiment with scheduled parcel and container cargo trains. The successful aggregation and transport of parcels through scheduled trains indicate the potential for a long-term strategy focused on scheduled parcel and cargo trains. Consolidating these gains could optimize freight operations and reduce transit times for various industries.

These three pivotal areas present a transformative opportunity for the railway industry. This strategic overhaul not only optimizes operations but also aligns the railways with modern transportation demands, ensuring resilience and competitiveness in the dynamic Indian transport sector.

EMERGING TRENDS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY POST-PANDEMIC

Though early indicators point to a robust post-pandemic rebound for the industry, changing consumer choices and behaviors have given rise to new tourism subsectors that are expected to surpass more conventional travel options in the near future. Although experiential and sustainable tourism had already begun to gain traction, the pandemic acted as a spur for these subsectors' expansion. The growing awareness of the global climate crisis has spurred a significant number of travelers to seek eco-friendly and responsible holiday options. This indicates that the pandemic has been a turning point for many travelers, leading to a strong consumer preference for sustainability within the travel industry. Furthermore, the Ministry of Tourism's flagship program, Swadesh Darshan 2.0, aims to enhance tourist destinations by developing sustainable tourism infrastructure throughout the country.

1. **Sustainable tourism** considers both its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, while addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities. This definition underscores the three fundamental pillars of sustainable tourism:
 - Environmental: Prioritizing the responsible use of resources, preservation of ecological processes, and the conservation of biodiversity and natural heritage.

- Economic: Ensuring a fair distribution of benefits from economic activities, promoting stable employment, and contributing to poverty alleviation.
 - Cultural: Fostering intercultural understanding, tolerance, and the conservation of cultural value and historic sites.
2. **Rural Tourism** is a type of tourism that focuses on promoting and developing the cultural, historical, and natural heritage of rural areas. The main goal of rural tourism is to encourage visitors to explore and experience the unique lifestyle, traditions, and environment of rural communities. Rural tourism offers the opportunity to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life and to experience a slower, more relaxed way of living. It can also provide opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, fishing, and horseback riding.
 3. **Adventure tourism** is a type of tourism that involves traveling to remote or exotic locations in order to engage in physically challenging activities or experiences. This type of tourism is popular among individuals who seek excitement, thrills, and a sense of adventure. It typically includes a range of activities that involve physical exertion, such as trekking, bungee jumping, river rafting, rock climbing, and other outdoor activities.
 4. **Medical tourism** is a type of tourism that involves travel to another country or region to receive specialized medical treatments, procedures, or therapies. Medical tourism often includes alternative or complementary therapies such as Ayurvedic, spa, or other treatments that are not available in the traveler's home country or region. The primary purpose of medical tourism is to achieve, promote, or maintain an optimal physical condition and a feeling of wellness.
 5. **Eco-tourism** is a type of tourism that focuses on sustainable travel to natural areas in order to appreciate, experience, and learn about the environment and its wildlife. Eco-tourism is becoming increasingly popular as people become more aware of the importance of environmental conservation and responsible tourism. The first ecotourism destination in India is Thenmala, located in Kerala.
 6. **Sports tourism** industry is experiencing rapid growth as an increasing number of travelers are interested in participating in or watching sports-related activities during their trips, even if sports aren't the primary reason for their travel. Major sports events such as the Olympics and World Cups have the potential to drive tourism development.
 7. **Heritage tourism** focuses on exploring and experiencing the cultural and historical heritage of a place. In India, heritage tourism is a popular form of tourism, as the country has a rich and diverse cultural and historical

heritage that is reflected in its various cities. Some of the popular heritage tourism destinations in India include the Taj Mahal in Agra, the Red Fort in Delhi, the Hawa Mahal in Jaipur, the Khajuraho Temples in Madhya Pradesh, the Ellora Caves in Maharashtra.

8. **Pilgrimage tourism** is a type of tourism that focuses on visiting religious and spiritual destinations. In India, pilgrimage tourism is one of the biggest contributors to the tourism industry, as the country is considered a religious hub for different cultures. These destinations attract many tourists every year who come to seek spiritual solace and connect with their faith.
9. **Lighthouse Tourism:** The Indian government is devising plans to enhance tourism by capitalizing on the country's lighthouses. 71 lighthouses have been identified in India for development as tourist spots. These lighthouses will be developed into tourist attractions that feature museums, amphitheatres, open-air theaters, cafeterias, children's parks, eco-friendly cottages, and landscaping, depending on the lighthouse's capacity. Some of the lighthouses that have already been developed as tourist attractions in India include the Alappuzha Lighthouse in Kerala, the Mahabalipuram Lighthouse in Tamil Nadu, and the Sunk Rock Lighthouse in Maharashtra.
10. **Camping tourism** is a type of tourism that involves setting up temporary campsites in natural or outdoor locations. The Ministry of Tourism has developed a policy to encourage camping tourism in India, specifically through the advancement and promotion of caravan and caravan camping parks. These parks are designed to provide visitors with basic facilities like parking, electricity, water supply, and waste management.
11. **Wellness tourism** is a type of tourism that focuses on promoting health and well-being. India is renowned as a wellness destination due to its extensive usage of Ayurveda, yoga, Siddha, and naturopathy, coupled with the spiritual beliefs of the nation. Many tourists come to India seeking rejuvenation and relaxation through various wellness practices, including massages, meditation, and other natural remedies.
12. **Staycations** are another emerging trend in India, where people stay at luxurious hotels and resorts within their own city or nearby locations. The aim of staycations is to get away from the stress of daily life and to find relaxation and rejuvenation within a peaceful and serene environment.
13. **Cruise tourism** is a rapidly growing segment in the global leisure industry, and India is looking to tap into its potential. The Indian government has projected that the country could potentially host 1.2 million cruise visitors by 2030-31. To support this growth, the government is taking steps to develop cruise tourism infrastructure in the country. With

the country's long coastline and rich cultural attractions, India has significant potential for the growth of this segment.

14. Mountain tourism: Due to its strong ties to other economic sectors, GDP contribution, job creation, and ability to spread demand, mountain tourism has a great deal of potential to spur social transformation and local economic progress.

15. Gastronomy and Wine tourism: Wine and food production are essential components of many places' histories and identities and have evolved into major branding components. It offers the opportunity to widen the number of professional sectors involved, diversify and rejuvenate the tourism industry, encourage local economic growth, and provide the primary sector with new purposes through culinary and wine tourism.

FUTURE OUTLOOK OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

With the pandemic situation improving, the tourism sector's future prospects appear promising, and India's travel and tourism industry is poised for significant expansion.

- According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the travel and tourism sectors across the world are expected to bounce back to their pre-pandemic levels by 2023 and expand at a rate surpassing that of the global gross domestic product (GDP) growth. The report projects an average annual growth rate of 5.8% from 2022 to 2032, compared to a 2.7% increase in global GDP.
- The Indian Government has introduced a range of infrastructure initiatives aimed at promoting tourism within the country, and it is anticipated that this pattern will continue in the future. Over the last 8.5 years, India has invested approximately US \$1 billion (INR 7,000 crore) to build extensive tourism infrastructure to improve the tourist experience.
- The FICCI projected that India's tourism industry will achieve a value of USD 125 billion by 2027.
- During India's G20 Presidency, 2023, the government has set a goal of earning US\$56 billion in foreign exchange and creating around 140 million jobs in the tourism sector by 2030, with a specific focus on promoting cruise, ecotourism, and adventure tourism.
- The government is also introducing a new initiative, called Swadesh Darshan 2.0, which aims to facilitate the sustainable and responsible development of tourist destinations.
- The tourism sector is one of the leading job creators in India, having generated 79.86 million direct and indirect employment opportunities in

the industry during the financial year 2019-20. It is predicted that this trend will persist, resulting in increased foreign exchange earnings.

- Additionally, India is likely to concentrate on the North Eastern states, capitalizing on the area's vast potential, rich culture, heritage, and stunning landscapes. The Ministry of Tourism authorized 16 new projects worth over INR 1,300 crore (USD 162.58 million) in the region in February 2022, with such projects expected to promote tourism and create job and business opportunities in the future (*IBEF, n.d.*).
- The industry is eagerly anticipating the expansion of the e-Visa program, which is projected to result in a twofold increase in the number of tourists visiting India.
- It is estimated that by 2028, the tourism and hospitality industry of India will generate \$50.9 billion in earnings from visitor exports and will contribute \$512 billion towards the country's GDP.
- The Medical Tourism sector is predicted to increase at a CAGR of 21.1% from 2020-27. (*IBEF, 2022*)
- The tourism sector is estimated to contribute 250 billion USD to India's GDP by 2030, with 56 billion USD in foreign exchange earnings and 25 million foreign arrivals expected by that time. The United States emerged as the leading source of foreign tourist arrivals, followed by Bangladesh, the UK, and Australia in 2022.
- The number of international tourist arrivals is projected to reach 30.5 million by the year 2028.
- The Indian travel market is expected to grow to \$125 billion by the financial year 2026-27, as compared to an approximate value of \$75 billion in the financial year 2019-20.
- Tourism provided employment for approximately 39 million people in India in the financial year 2019-20, which is approximately 8% of the total employment. It is projected to increase to around 53 million jobs by the year 2029.

FUTURE OUTLOOK OF THE RAILWAY INDUSTRY

Indian Railways have drafted a National Rail Plan (NRP) for India – 2030 with the purpose of making the railway network in India future-ready by 2030. This strategy aims to expand the participation of Indian Railways in freight traffic by developing operational capacities and implementing regulatory initiatives, in addition to building capacities ahead of demand (*Shah, 2022*).

The following are the main goals this plan outlines:

- Elevate the existing 27% share to 45% and maintain this rise in order to increase the share of railways in freight traffic.
- Boost Freight Train Speed: Increase freight trains' average speed from the current 23 kmph to 50 kmph.
- Total Electrification: By 2024, all Indian Railways routes should be fully electrified.
- Finding of Novel Corridors: Determine and create new High-Speed Rail Corridors (HSR) and Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs).
- Building of Multi-Tracks: To increase capacity, construct multi-tracks on crowded routes.
- Evaluation of Rolling Stock Requirement: With an eye towards greater freight share and 100% electrification, assess locomotives, waggons and coaches for use in both passenger and freight transportation.
- Engage the private sector in a range of railway operations and rolling stock initiatives.
- Terminal Development: Construct passenger and freight terminals in addition to the track system.

The Indian Railways is exploring new avenues for growth and performance enhancement in the post-pandemic era. IRCTC, the sole entity authorized for specific services within Indian Railways, has expanded its scope into tourism, introducing Bharat Gaurav Tourist Trains across the nation to showcase historical and religious destinations. The railway's signaling system is undergoing continuous upgrades towards automation, aiming for complete electrification of the network by 2023, fostering an estimated annual energy saving of \$1.55 billion. Notably, Indian Railways achieved its highest-ever loading of 1512 MT during the Financial Year 2022-23.

Looking ahead, the future prospects for the Indian Railways industry appear promising, driven by increasing urbanization and rising income, particularly stimulating growth in the passenger segment. Additionally, there are substantial investments planned for railway infrastructure, projected at Rs 50 lakh crore (US\$ 715.41 billion) by 2030. Furthermore, the government's decision to permit 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the railway sector adds an additional dimension to its future trajectory.

RESILIENT APPROACHES FOR A POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased awareness of global issues and made people more capable of dealing with them. While sustainable development models have been developed over the past three decades, they have not been effectively

implemented across the world due to a lack of sincerity and effectiveness in carrying out the sustainability model. The COVID-19 outbreak has led to a reduction in air pollution and a significant decline in the unsustainable exploitation of the natural environment. Thus, it is time to use this experience to redesign the tourism and travel industry for a more sustainable future. The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a stimulus to reformulate the tourism and hospitality industry into a more sustainable model that benefits all stakeholders.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has identified five priorities for the restart of tourism that aim to ensure a more resilient, inclusive, and carbon-neutral sector. These priorities are:

1. Mitigate socio-economic impacts on livelihoods, particularly women's employment and economic security.
2. Boost competitiveness and build resilience through economic diversification and encouragement of MSMEs.
3. Advance innovation and digital transformation of tourism
4. Foster sustainability and green growth
5. Enhanced focus on coordination, and responsible leadership.

Below are a few of the strategies suggested by experts from academia and industry in recent literature regarding the revival of the tourism sector post-pandemic.

1. Businesses should abide by ethical guidelines concerning natural resources, waste management, and labor exploitation.
2. To encourage sustainable and equitable development of the tourism and hospitality sector, it is essential to not only ensure that tourism destinations receive substantial economic advantages but also to sustain ecological and social equilibrium. This includes promoting gender empowerment and regenerating marine ecosystems.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unpredictable impact in terms of duration and location. As a result, the tourism industry must adjust to a "new normal" rather than return to the way things were before the pandemic. "The government should develop a recovery plan focused on two key areas: capacity building and digitization of the tourism industry. Capacity building would involve training tourism professionals in areas such as hygiene, safety, storytelling, and service quality" (Khan & Hashim, 2020). Digitization would entail using information technology to transform the entire tourism industry, creating a "Smart Tourism" ecosystem.
4. The use of social media is crucial in reviving the tourism industry in the aftermath of the pandemic. Engaging on social media can help combat

discrimination and negative perceptions caused by the pandemic on affected destinations and tourism businesses. Social media can also be a source of inspiration and a tool for promoting tourism in the post-pandemic era.

5. In the aftermath of the pandemic, the tourism industry faces the challenge of rebuilding the trust of both domestic and international tourists. To address this challenge, one approach could be to introduce a "clean and safe destination" initiative, which would grant certification to tourism businesses, such as hotels, that adhere to the standard operating procedures (SOPs) recommended by pertinent authorities to regain visitors' trust.
6. To establish a tourism sector that is fair and more just, it is crucial for instructors, researchers, and students in the field to engage in constructive discussions to develop a critical approach that will change and improve the industry, rather than perpetuate the existing system. Moreover, there should be an open exchange of ideas to challenge conventional tourism practices and discover new methods to create a more sustainable and equitable industry in the post-pandemic era. This includes preparing future leaders to take on this task.

CONCLUSION

India's rich cultural and historical heritage, diverse geography, and natural beauty provide a huge potential for the tourism industry. The tourism sector has emerged as a significant contributor to the growth of the services industry in India, playing a substantial role in the country's economy and creating employment opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting effect, significantly hampering the progress of the tourism industry and resulting in unintended degrowth. The study discovered that in order to thrive in the post-pandemic era, the industry must abandon the approaches of the "old normal" and adjust to the "new normal." Therefore, fairness and equity must be given priority in the management, operations, and impact on local communities in post-pandemic tourism. These findings suggest that the industry should utilize the degrowth period to implement structural changes and concentrate on sustainability. The pandemic has brought to light the industry's significant issues and vulnerabilities, presenting a revamp and restructure of its faulty system for an improved "new normal" version.

The tourism industry in India has faced some challenges in the past due to issues such as lack of infrastructure, safety concerns, and bureaucratic hurdles. However, the Indian government has implemented several measures to encourage the tourism industry, such as developing new tourism destinations, promoting tourism circuits, and easing visa restrictions. These efforts have resulted in significant

growth in the industry, with foreign exchange earnings increasing at a healthy rate in recent years.

The global tourism industry has been considerably affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and India is no exception. Nevertheless, the Indian government has implemented a range of measures to provide assistance to the tourism sector during this challenging period, such as providing financial assistance to tourism stakeholders, promoting domestic tourism, and ensuring safety measures at tourist destinations. With these efforts, the tourism industry in India is expected to recover gradually and continue to contribute to the country's economic growth. The tourism industry needs to go green in order to become more resilient and competitive, not just for the sake of the environment but also for the tourism industry itself.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, the Indian rail industry is navigating a transformative phase marked by resilience and adaptation. Despite challenges posed by COVID-19, the sector has showcased remarkable agility in restoring operations, ensuring passenger safety, and driving innovative reforms. Initiatives like digital payment portals, enhanced safety measures for women travelers, and the integration of e-platforms demonstrate the industry's commitment to modernization and efficiency. The shift towards digital governance, the accelerated adoption of technology for safety and operations, and the push for transparency through online platforms depict a sector embracing a future-oriented approach. The focus on electrification, greening initiatives, and infrastructure development portrays a commitment to sustainability and modernization. Additionally, the restructuring of the Railway Board and the unification of services under IRMS signify a monumental reform aimed at streamlining processes and fostering a more cohesive approach to railway management. As the industry continues to evolve post-pandemic, these strategic measures position the Indian rail sector on a trajectory of innovation, efficiency, and adaptability, laying the foundation for a more resilient and customer-centric railway system in the years ahead.

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