



“CORONA PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON RAJASTHAN TOURISM”

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ABSTRACT The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) which is one of its kinds of humanitarian disasters has affected people and businesses worldwide, triggering a global economic crisis. The impact of coronavirus pandemic has been widespread and affected adversely to all sector of the Rajasthan economy. The tourism sector had to bear the maximum brunt as activities related to it such as hotels, restaurants, handicraft purchases and art & culture, all came to grinding halt. Since, the pandemic outbreak in March, 2020, the state government become proactive in extending a helping hands to the tourism industry and to revive new life in tourism industry, government of Rajasthan announced many measures such as reimbursement of state GST to hotels and restaurants, provide relief in terms of waiver of road tax, include tourism of the state as major thrust areas under Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme and even state's new tourism policy provide fiscal benefits to the travel trade stakeholders and separate tourism development fund of Rs. 100 crore is being created for overall promotion of tourism in the state, which will revive and stand back tourism industry on its feet.

KEYWORDS : Tourism, Corona Pandemic, Rajasthan Tourism, Relief Package

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry in India is fast growing industry in terms of employment and revenue generation and for its immense national and regional development. Tourism in India has come into its own brand – **India Tourism** and Ministry of Tourism designs national policies for the development and promotion of tourism and develop the “Incredible India” campaign focused on promoting the tourism in India. The World Travel and Tourism Council calculated that tourism generated Rs.16.91 lakh crore or 9.2% of India's GDP in 2018 and supported 42.673 million jobs, 8.1% of its total employment. The sector is predicted to grow at an annual rate of 6.9% to Rs.32.05 lakh crore by 2028 (9.9% of GDP).

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is an ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019, which is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern regarding COVID-19 on 30th January 2020, and later declared a pandemic on 12th March 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the travel and tourism industry's employment loss is predicted to be 100.08 million worldwide (statista, 2020). As the number of infected cases rising throughout the nation, and with the implementation of actions like social distancing, nation wise lockdown, stay home, self quarantine result in fall in foreign tourists arrival rate by 68% from February to March 2020 and hence fall in foreign exchange earnings by 66.32%, which has a significant impact on the indian economy (statista, 2020). As per a Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Hotelivate study, the Indian tourism industry is set to lose around Rs. 5 lakh crore. The report further adds that tour operators and agencies are expected to incur a loss of Rs 35,070 crore with hotels likely to see 80% to 85% erosion in the revenue streams. A second wave hit India in April 2021, placing healthcare services under severe strain. By late April, the government was reporting over 300,000 new infections and 2,000 deaths per day, with concerns of undercounting. Tourism is one of the central industries in Rajasthan and is most terrible beat by COVID-19. With a dip in the number of coronavirus cases, the Rajasthan government has eased further lockdown restrictions. After the lockdown, most of the industries bodies including Hotel, Restaurant Association of Rajasthan and Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators have been raising the issue at every forum as the tourism sector struggles to find its feet.

RAJASTHAN TOURISM

Rajasthan is one of the most popular tourist destinations in India, for both domestic and international tourists. Rajasthan has emerged as one of the leading state in India and Rajasthan is the third preference of tourist after Goa and Kerala as travel destination in India. Rajasthan is a state of vibrant folk dance and music, extremely large forts and palaces, colorful and large turbans, extensive golden sand desert, wildlife and bird sanctuaries, camels and rich handicraft. Tourism industry in Rajasthan is a vital breath in the economic activity and accounts for eight percent of the state's domestic product. The state government has already realized the potentials of this industry and

adopted schemes like “**Padharo Mhare Desh**” means “**Rajasthan Invites You**” to promote tourism in the state.

IMPACT OF CORONA PANDEMIC ON RAJASTHAN TOURISM

Rajasthan's biggest revenue generators tourism sector appears to be the hardest hit by the corona pandemic. The tourism industry has been the biggest casualty primarily because, despite the lifting of the COVID-19 lockdown, connectivity hasn't been fully restored. Travel is still restricted to urgent matters resulting in a sharp decline in tourist footfall across the state. Industry figures show every tourist who visits Rajasthan provides direct and indirect employment to 8 people. But the setback in the tourism industry affects tourist arrival, hotel industry, art & culture and many more.

Tourism is second-highest foreign exchange earner for Rajasthan after the trade in gems and jewellery but the setback in the tourism industry could mean job cuts and hotel owners struggling to stay afloat. The data on tourist arrivals from the Rajasthan tourism department, shared that in 2020, the state has seen a fall of 69.3% in Indian tourist arrivals. Last year, 3,96,85,822 Indian tourists had visited various places in Rajasthan while this year, the number stood at 1,21,75,524. Similarly, the foreign tourist arrivals also dropped by 59.54%, as compared to 2019. Last year, 10,92,724 foreigners had visited the state while only 4,42,011 foreigners could arrive this year, that too before the national lockdown was imposed in March.

The significant low inflow of tourists has left a deep impact on the hospitality industry which is struggling with very little demand. Many owners of resorts in Rajasthan said that the opening of resorts and hotels after the lockdown was lifted proved to be an even bigger loss for them due to very low footfall. As resorts and hotels are allowed to operate with only 50 per cent occupancy, and even they are struggling to fill it which results in a huge loss to hotel industry and couldn't generate money to even pay off their staff.

Due to connectivity issues, potential tourists from Delhi, Mumbai and West Bengal are also not able to reach Rajasthan. Since September, 2020 only tourists from surrounding areas are arriving mostly from places that take just a day to drive down like Gujarat. The state tourism department is promoting tourism only from nearby areas with concept of 'Short Stay, Safe Stay' is meant to ensure that travel enthusiasts from nearby states can come to rejuvenate in a safe and secure ambience. As the tourists now prefer to travel in their private vehicles, local taxi drivers are also facing difficulties in earning a living. In the lack of demand for taxis, many drivers who worked under contractor have lost their jobs. The contractors are not able to pay the monthly installment of their cars which is why they are laying off the drivers.

This pandemic has a far-reaching impact on local folk musicians like Manganiyars in Rajasthan who were totally dependent on tourists and other upper caste households for monetary and nutritional support. To welcome guests, hotels and resorts organise performances by

Manganiyars involving folk music and Kalbelia dance. They are given a monthly stipend ranging between Rs 20,000 and 40,000. However, due to low turnout of tourists this year, many of them have lost this source of income and now paid only in accordance with the number of performances. Similarly camel riding assumes a significant place at most of the tourist spots across Rajasthan. However, due to low tourist arrivals, camel drivers are unable to take care of their pet camels. Many of camel owners face huge crisis and spent entire savings to provide food to camels for all these months but now they run out for money and if the tourists are not going to turn up, they might have to sell off their camels. Thus lack of tourist arrival and less availability of tourism activities, pandemic gives a very serious adverse effect on revenue and employment generation and problem of job losses and financial crisis begin.

MEASURES TAKEN TO ACCELERATE THE RECOVERY OF TOURISM IN RAJASTHAN

The tourism sector in Rajasthan is getting momentum again after facing slow down due to the COVID-19. After the lockdown and restrictions being relaxed, tourism activities started getting momentum from October, which increased rapidly in November and December. More than 2.33 lakhs tourists have visited the forts, palaces and museums of the state. The State Tourism Department reports that the arrival of domestic tourists is increasing rapidly and domestic travelers willing to explore historical monuments and rural landscapes are gaining importance during the downtrend in new COVID-19 cases. Several schemes and campaigns have been launched to attract domestic tourists from neighboring States and new initiatives in the tourism sector include options for domestic tourists, Tourism Department has adopted the motto, "short stay, safe stay", to draw in the target group. In this manner, eyeing to domestic tourists, the stakeholders are not just looking at the demand for venues where work and vacation could be combined, but they also expect to develop newer tourist experiences for local travelers, for that purpose concept of "weekend getaways" has received a special attention in the State's policy. With Covid-19 taking its toll on the hospitality sector, the Rajasthan Government has extended a helping hand to hotels and tour operators registered in the State and the State government issued an order in March, to reimburse State Tax due and deposited by hotels and tour operators registered under Rajasthan Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017. Even to revive tourism in the state government of Rajasthan, deploy separate tourism development fund of Rs. 500 crores in budget which is the highest in times past.

CONCLUSION

Due to COVID-19, tourism is such a highly affected sector since last 1.5 years and may remain affected in the long term. Similarly, the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has again clouded the prospect of the tourism industry that was beginning to recover. Tourism is one of the most important industries in Rajasthan and is worst hit by COVID-19 as football has totally dried up. Because of corona pandemic, state has entered the absolute lockdown stage and all foreign and domestic tourists are banned in the state, which results in loss in terms Goods and Service Tax (GST) collection alone around Rs. 2000 crores, revenue loss in Hotels/Restaurants and other travel services around Rs. 12-15 crore and loss of direct and indirect employment of more than 10 lac people. In this era, Rajasthan has witnessed a steady recovery in tourist footfall since the lockdown was lifted slowly and people started to travel albeit under restrictions and Rajasthan government announce many new schemes and government also announce many reliefs in tax collection and plan to allocate Rs. 500 crore in budget which is the highest in history of the department, so that tourism industry in the state revive and reach to previous heights.

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