

DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISM TRENDS IN INDIA: A STATE-WISE ANALYSIS OF TOURIST ARRIVALS AND DESTINATION PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Domestic and international tourism trends in India from 2014 to 2020 are analysed with particular emphasis on state-wise performance, tourism growth, destination rankings, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The quantitative secondary data approach was used with tourism statistics comprising domestic tourist visits, foreign tourist arrivals, foreign exchange earnings, state-wise ranking and growth patterns over the years. At the national and destination level, descriptive analysis, percentage change, growth comparison and Spearman rank correlation were used to assess performance. The results revealed a significant growth in Indian tourism from 2014 to 2019. The domestic tourist visits grew from 1,290.00 million to 2,321.98 million, and foreign tourist visits increased from 7.68 million to 10.93 million. Tamil Nadu had the highest tourism figures of both domestic and international tourists, while Uttar Pradesh showed the most robust growth before the pandemic. A positive correlation was noted for both domestic and foreign tourist ranking however, the same was not statistically significant except in 2016. In 2020, the volume of tourism activity dropped significantly the domestic volume of tourism fell by around 73.7%, while the foreign volume fell by around 74.9%. State-level impact was also highly variable, reflecting varying vulnerability to the destination. The study concludes that domestic tourism is a key component of the Indian tourism economy, but the sector is very vulnerable to external shocks.

Keywords: domestic tourism, foreign tourist arrivals, destination performance, COVID-19, tourism resilience

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1. Introduction

Tourism has a significant role in economic development, as it creates jobs, foreign exchange, infrastructure, regional investment and helps the development of the related services. Tourism also helps in the conservation of heritage, traditional livelihoods, local entrepreneurship and destination-based development in the diverse country of India in terms of geography and culture. It is a major part of the national service economy, encompassing domestic travel, international tourism, cultural tourism, medical tourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism and nature-based tourism. The growth of tourism activity can thus bring advantages to the less developed geographical areas, which have specific cultural and natural assets.

India has many kinds of tourist attractions, such as monuments, places for pilgrimage, beaches, mountains, safaris, hospitals, festivals and various kinds of food culture. These resources offer significant opportunities for destination development and for diversification of markets. But the success of tourism relies on the effective governance, promotion policies, transportation systems, safety of tourists, institutional coordination, and the quality of the tourism infrastructure. In destination planning, investment facilitation, heritage conservation, marketing and developing supporting services, government intervention plays a significant role (Govindu, 2020). Furthermore, the influence of foreign tourists on tourism planning in India, along with domestic tourists, national income, and promotional activity, shows the economic importance of tourism planning in India (Khan, 2022).

Domestic tourism is an important and significant part of the Indian tourism economy. The country's high population, growing disposable income, improved transportation, religious migration and growing interest in vacation travel have contributed to the significant expansion of interstate and intrastate tourism. Domestic tourism can also offer more stability when times are uncertain for international travel, such as due to geopolitical issues, health risks, or economic instability. However, the development of tourism is not uniform across the states due to different destinations having varying accessibilities, accommodation capacity, heritage resources, marketing capacity, environmental quality, and institutional supports. For example, mountain areas have great tourism potentials but are also very vulnerable ecologically, with limited infrastructure, seasonality and stress on resources (Sati, 2020). Thus, sustainable destination planning is critical to achieve economic, environmental and social protection (Vinodan & Meera, 2026).

Tourism is also very sensitive to external shocks. Natural disasters, political unrest, civil unrest, disease outbreaks and transportation disruptions can all have a major impact on the number of visitors and destination revenues. The study in India has revealed that the tourism industry is both vulnerable and resilient but there are differences in its post-crisis recovery depending on the type of crisis and the destination (Barbhuiya & Chatterjee, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic brought an unprecedented disruption with limitations on mobility, on consumer confidence, on tourism facilities and on domestic and international travel. The implications of the pandemic for the broader economy and governance were especially relevant in India, where the crisis response process engaged both central and state-level actors (Alok et al., 2021).

The pandemic also brought the question of the future of tourism up for discussion. Instead of the pre-pandemic ways of doing things, researchers stated that it has allowed them to rethink destination management, sustainability, resilience and responsible travel (Brouder, 2020). The same arguments highlighted the importance of rethinking the tourism systems, through reinforcing local economies, enhancing crisis preparedness and not allowing vulnerable business models to be restored (Nepal, 2020). Recovery from tourism depends on more than just opening destinations; it depends on adaptive governance, public-health protections, technological adoption and improved government, community, business and traveller collaboration.

Before and after the pandemic, visitor safety has become a key component of destination competitiveness. Establishing a safe destination image is intimately linked with health standards, sanitation, emergency response, transport security and communication reliability with tourists for India (Kim, 2022). Medical tourism is another

testament to the significance of safety, service quality, cost-effectiveness, and competitiveness of the healthcare system in the broader tourism sector (Mahida, 2024). The tourism recovery should also keep in mind that the health risks and ethical destination management practices are shared responsibilities of local and global stakeholders (Jamal & Budke, 2020).

The pandemic also had an impact on tourism research through prioritizing the related areas of travellers behaviours, resilience, digitalization, crisis communication, and sustainable recovery. In the tourism scholarship, the focus is increasingly on the effects of crises on the demand pattern, business operations and destination management (Sigala, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted deficits in crisis preparedness and highlighted a range of new research interests such as risk perception, mobility, recovery and destination adaptation (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Therefore, pre- and post-pandemic data on domestic and international tourist numbers can serve as useful evidence on patterns of growth, the performance of destinations and their level of disruption in 2020.

Objectives

- To analyse the trends of domestic and foreign tourists' arrival in India on national and state levels for the period of 2014 to 2020.
- To draw a comparison between the various performances, growth and ranking of the major states of the country in the field of tourism.
- To measure the impact of international and domestic tourism on the decline in tourism in 2020 and to compare the vulnerability of destinations.

Research Design

The present study used a quantitative, Longitudinal, and Comparative research design to understand the tourism trends at Indian major state tourist destinations in comparison with their counterparts globally. A secondary data approach was used to analyse the changes in tourist arrivals, to compare the performance of destinations and to assess the disruption experienced during the COVID-19 period. The study period included seven consecutive years (from 2014 through 2020).

Data Source and Study Period

The secondary data considered was the data named “INDIA Tourism 2014–2020” (Kachhadiya, 2022). There are several datasets in CSV format available for domestic tourist visits, foreign tourist visits, foreign tourist arrivals, foreign-exchange earnings, source countries, monthly arrival pattern, visitor characteristics, airport of entry and modes of transport. The 2014–2019 period was deemed the pre-pandemic and 2020 was considered a pandemic-shock year.

Unit of Analysis and Data Coverage

The basic unit of analysis was an Indian state or union territory which featured in the top ten destinations for both domestic and foreign tourists in a given year. Each observation was the annual number of domestic or foreign tourist visits to a state. The dataset used is not complete in the sense that it is only based on the top 10 destinations in each year and not on all states/UTs in India, thus resulting in an unbalanced state-year panel data set. Therefore, the results are reflective of the best performance of the top tourist destinations in India.

Study Variables and Performance Indicators

The variables considered are year, state/UT, domestic tourist visits, foreign tourist visits, tourism rank, national foreign tourist visits, and foreign-exchange earnings. Average tourist visits, annual growth (%), CAGR 2015–2019, market share of the included states, and domestic-to-foreign tourist ratio were used to measure destination performance, whereas frequency of top ten rankings, ranking stability, and visitor reduction 2019–2020 were used

as measures of relative rankings. Therefore, destination performance was primarily looked at in terms of the number of tourists that arrived, increased, stayed stable and were resilient.

Data Preparation and Cleaning

The files were extracted and then, in a wide-to-long state-year format, converted into a format with each row showing a state, year, and tourist category. The names of variables and the tourism abbreviations were made consistent, and any spelling errors like “Telengana” and “Harayana” were corrected to “Telangana” and “Haryana.” The year or tourist arrival variables were converted to the correct numeric data type, blank columns were deleted and any duplicate or implausible entries were reviewed. A state's omission from an annual top ten list was not interpreted as no visitors to the state, but rather as missing data.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed for each of the domestic and foreign tourist visits separately, including totals, means, medians, standard deviations, minimums, maximums, percentages and rankings. The growth of tourism was quantified by annual percentage change and compound annual growth rate, and the main period for tourism growth analysis was limited to 2014-2019. Spearman's rank correlation was used to determine the correlation between domestic and foreign tourism rankings, and Pearson's correlation was used for tourism-arrival values appropriately transformed. To measure the effect of the COVID-19 disruption, the percentage change in 2020 was compared to 2019.

Destination Performance Assessment

A destination-performance index based on arrivals was constructed by means of normalised indicators of the average number of domestic visits, foreign visitors, growth prior to the pandemic, ranking stability, appearances in the top ten and resilience during 2020. All indicators were normalized to a common scale (min–max normalization), and the decrease in 2020 was reverse-coded, with a smaller decrease signifying greater resilience. The scores that were produced were then used to determine the included states as high, moderate and relatively lower performing destinations. These classifications were restricted only to the destinations included in the data set and were not to be seen as ranks of all the states in India.

Data Presentation, Software, and Ethics

The results have been displayed using statistical tables, annual trend lines, State-wise bar charts, heat maps, ranking charts and domestic–foreign tourist scatterplots. Microsoft Excel, SPSS, Python, R or equivalent software were used to process and analyze the data, and statistical significance was determined at 5% where applicable. The study was conducted on a secondary, anonymised dataset and was of an open-access nature, so there was no need to seek formal ethical approval. The dataset and the sources of the data used, however, were duly mentioned.

Results

National Tourism Trends

The number of foreign tourists has grown from 7.68 million in 2014 to 10.93 million in 2019, and the number of domestic tourists has grown from 1290.00 million to 2321.98 million in 2019, as shown in Table 1. The foreign exchange earnings rose from ₹123,320 crore to ₹211,661 crore in the same period. Foreign arrivals, domestic visits, and foreign-exchange earnings fell by 74.9%, 73.7%, and 76.3%, respectively, in 2020. Both categories of tourism saw a positive trend increasing until 2019, as shown in Figure 1. Domestic tourism increased at a higher rate than international tourism, especially in 2018-2019.

Table 1. National tourism indicators, 2014–2020

Year	Foreign arrivals (million)	Domestic visits (million)	Foreign-exchange earnings (₹ crore)
2014	7.68	1,290.00	123,320
2015	8.03	1,432.00	135,193
2016	8.80	1,613.60	154,146
2017	10.04	1,652.49	177,874
2018	10.56	1,854.90	194,892
2019	10.93	2,321.98	211,661
2020	2.74	610.22	50,136

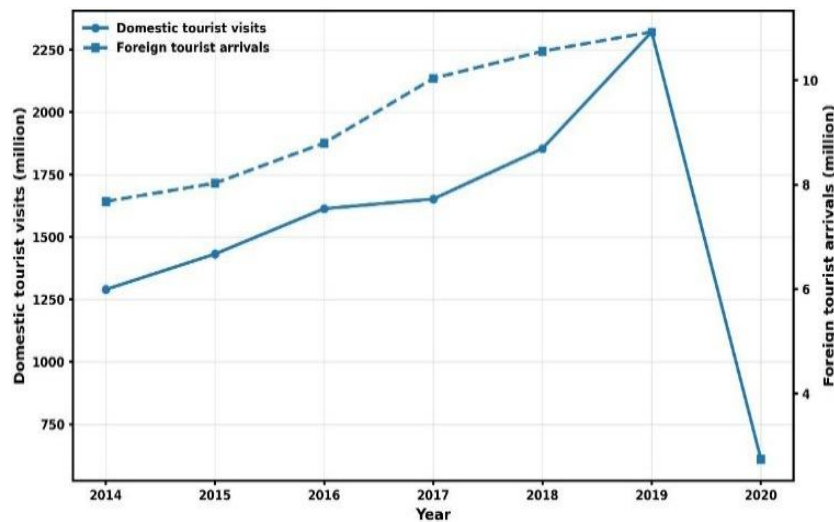


Figure 1. National domestic and foreign tourism trends

Domestic Tourism Performance

Tamil Nadu had the maximum average domestic tourist volume, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in the 2014-19 period. But the growth was the highest in Uttar Pradesh, which grew from 182.82 million visits in 2014 to 535.86 million in 2019. The top five results by state are shown in Table 2. The absolute rise in the case of domestic tourism in UP has been observed from 2014 to 2019 and is confirmed by the comparative pattern depicted in Figure 2.

Table 2. Domestic tourist performance of leading states

State	Average visits (million)	2014 visits	2019 visits	Growth (%)
Tamil Nadu	378.59	327.56	494.87	51.1
Uttar Pradesh	275.72	182.82	535.86	193.1
Karnataka	165.02	118.28	227.93	92.7
Andhra Pradesh	160.89	93.31	237.05	154.1
Maharashtra	116.95	94.13	149.29	58.6
West Bengal	75.23	49.03	92.37	88.4

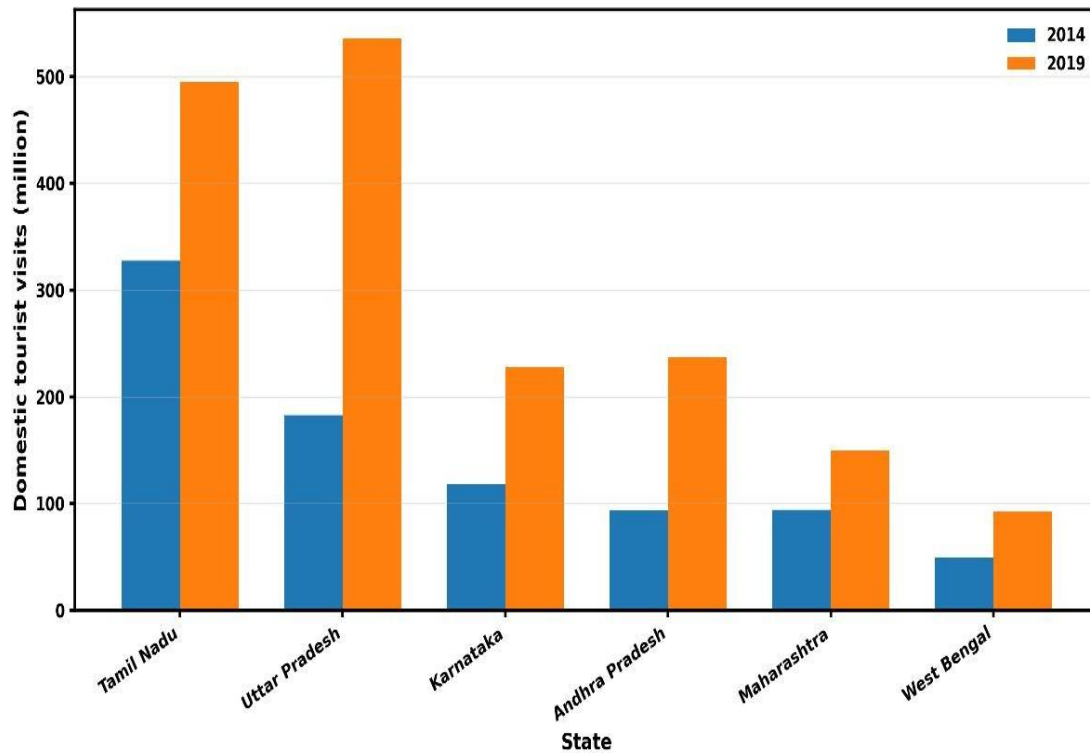


Figure 2. Domestic tourist visits in leading states, 2014 and 2019

International Tourism Performance

Tamil Nadu was the top state for foreign tourism in terms of average on a per capita basis, followed by Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The biggest growth was seen in Uttar Pradesh, with foreign visits increasing by 63.1% during 2014-19. The results are summarized in Table 3. In both the years 2014 and 2019, Tamil Nadu continued to have a clear lead in foreign tourist arrivals in the country, as per Figure 3.

Table 3. Foreign tourist performance of leading states

State	Average visits (million)	2014 visits	2019 visits	Growth (%)
Tamil Nadu	5.31	4.66	6.87	47.4
Maharashtra	4.86	4.39	5.53	26.0
Uttar Pradesh	3.54	2.91	4.75	63.1
Delhi	2.61	2.32	2.98	28.6
Rajasthan	1.58	1.53	1.61	5.2
West Bengal	1.54	1.38	1.66	20.4

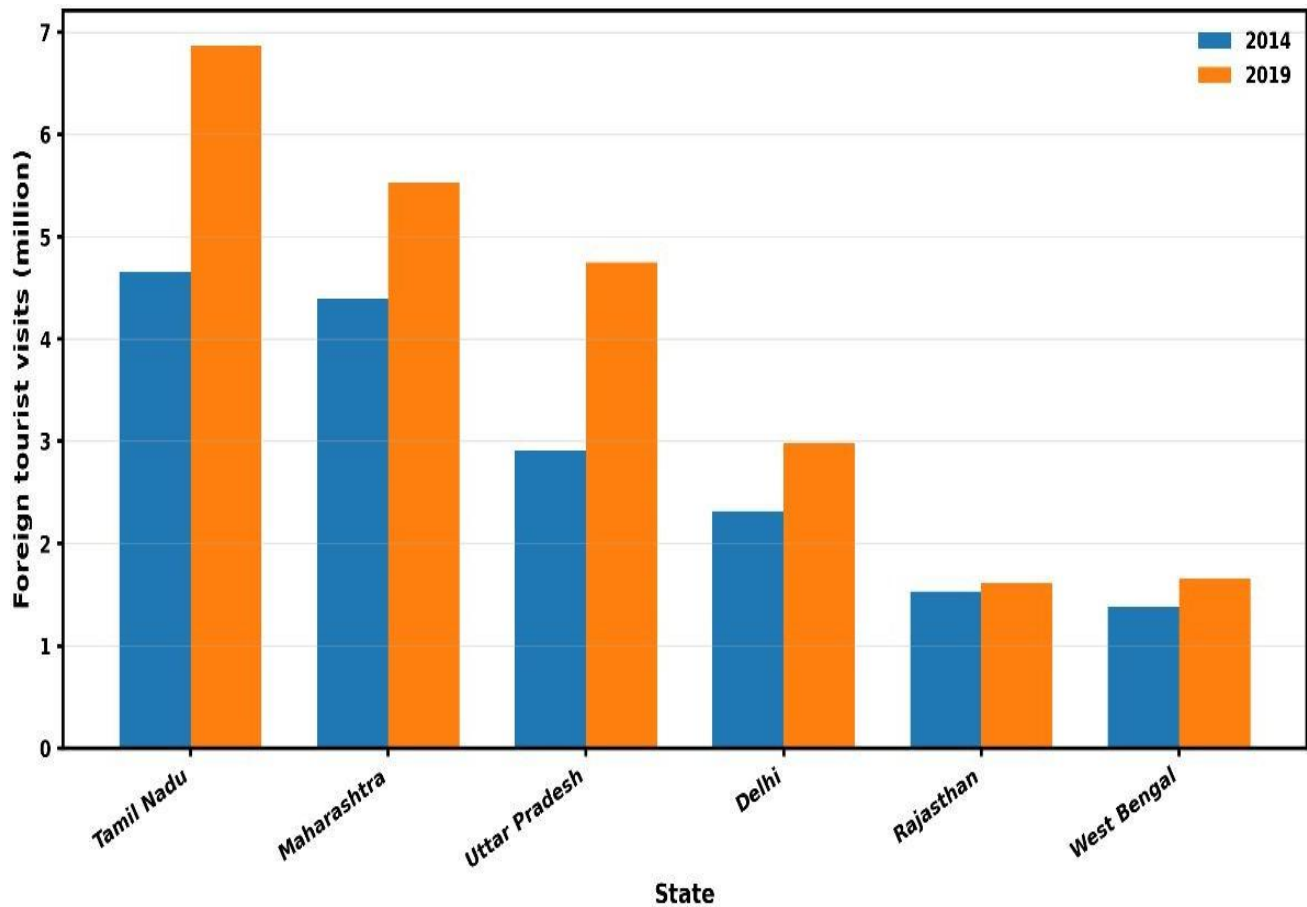


Figure 3. Foreign tourist visits in leading states, 2014 and 2019

Aggregate Destination Performance

The ten leading states' domestic visits have risen from 1,067.64 million in 2014 to 2,020.20 million in 2019, while foreign visits have gone up from 20.04 million to 27.71 million. The domestic tourism grew, however, at a higher rate than the international tourism, as reflected in Table 4 and Figure 4.

Table 4. Combined tourist visits among leading destinations

Year	Domestic visits (million)	Foreign visits (million)
2014	1,067.64	20.04
2015	1,197.37	20.62
2016	1,358.82	21.50
2017	1,421.75	23.55
2018	1,566.37	25.36
2019	2,020.20	27.71
2020	542.81	6.28

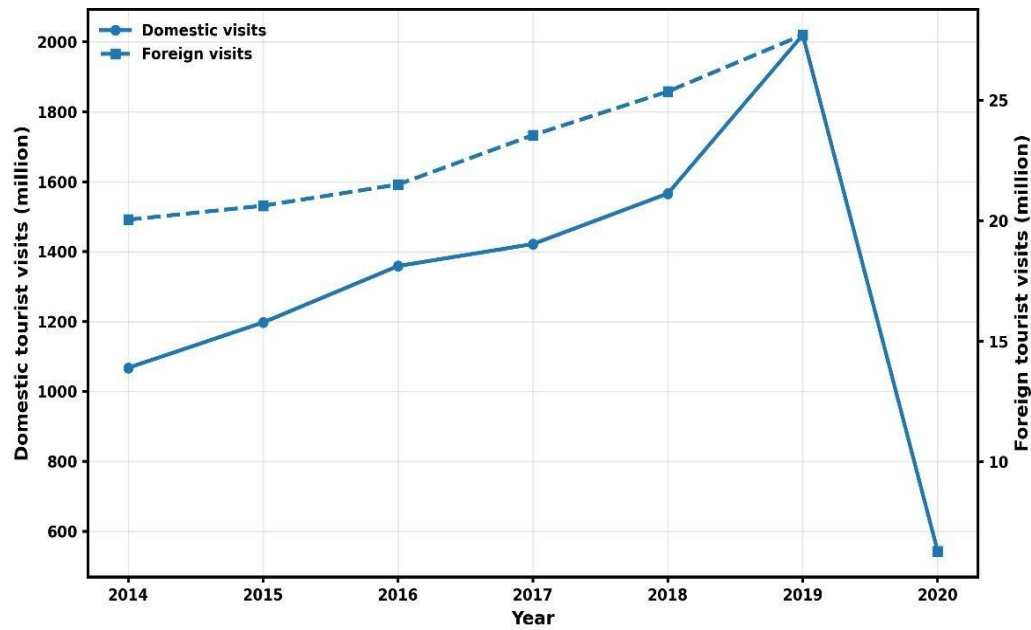


Figure 4. Combined domestic and foreign tourist volumes

COVID-19 Impact

In 2020, there were significant decreases in all of the major destinations. The state with the highest domestic drop was Uttar Pradesh (83.9%) and the state with the highest drop in foreign tourism was Tamil Nadu (82.1%). The domestic decline was lowest in Telangana at 51.8%. Table 5 shows the decline in tourist visits between 2019 and 2020.

Table 5. Decline in tourist visits between 2019 and 2020

State	Domestic decline (%)	Foreign decline (%)
Tamil Nadu	-71.6	-82.1
Uttar Pradesh	-83.9	-81.2
Maharashtra	-73.7	-77.2
West Bengal	-68.8	-72.0
Karnataka	-66.0	—
Andhra Pradesh	-70.1	—
Telangana	-51.8	—
Delhi	—	-77.2
Rajasthan	—	-72.2
Kerala	—	-71.4

Relationship Between Domestic and Foreign Rankings

Throughout the study period, positive associations were seen in the domestic and foreign tourism rankings. The highest correlation was found in 2016 ($\rho = 0.900$, $p = 0.037$). This means that states that scored high in domestic tourism also had fairly high international tourist numbers. Table 6 presents the Spearman rank correlation between domestic and foreign tourism rankings. A strong positive and statistically significant association was observed between the two rankings ($\rho = 0.742$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that states with higher domestic tourism rankings also tended to achieve higher foreign tourism rankings.

Table 6. Spearman correlation between domestic and foreign rankings

Year	Spearman's ρ	p-value
2014	0.486	0.329
2015	0.543	0.266
2016	0.900	0.037
2017	0.600	0.285
2018	0.800	0.104
2019	0.700	0.188
2020	0.700	0.188

Summary of Results

Overall, tourism in India expanded substantially between 2014 and 2019, with domestic tourism growing faster than international tourism. Tamil Nadu maintained the strongest combined destination performance, while Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest growth. The severe decline in 2020 demonstrated the vulnerability of tourism destinations to large-scale mobility restrictions.

Discussion

The results reveal that the volume of tourism in India has increased significantly from 2014 to 2019, but has declined sharply in 2020. The pre-pandemic period saw the number of national tourists increase from 7.68 million to 10.93 million, while domestic tourist numbers went up from 1,290.00 million to 2,321.98 million. This means that inbound and outbound tourism were already picking up momentum before COVID-19 hit. In volume, however, domestic tourism increased at a higher rate and was still much bigger, thus establishing its critical importance to the Indian tourism economy (Moya Calderón et al., 2022).

There was a marked variation in the performance of the destinations state-wise. The average number of domestic and foreign tourists for Tamil Nadu was the highest, reflecting a robust and diversified tourism industry. This performance can be related to the combination of the state's cultural, religious, heritage, medical, and coastal tourism resources. Between 2014 and 2019, Uttar Pradesh had the highest increase in both domestic and foreign tourists. The increase could be due to the significance of pilgrimage centres, heritage sites and attractions, transport infrastructure, and promotion of the destination. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the accessibility of a tourist destination, infrastructure, cultural resources, institutional support, and other factors have a significant impact on the performance of tourism in India (Dash & Sharma, 2021).

The domestic tourism activity was high in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal as well, but in different growth patterns. The difference between states indicates that national growth in tourism is not the same everywhere, and that destination characteristics are still very significant. States with higher performance than others may be due to differences in tourism products, connectivity, accommodation, promotional strategies and visitor markets. The same destination-specific impacts were found in the study of Uttarakhand, where dependence on seasonal travel, pilgrim activity, and mobility restrictions facilitated local tourism results (Kumar et al., 2020).

High domestic tourism rankings are associated with relatively high foreign rankings, as indicated by the positive correlation between these two rankings. The highest association was obtained in 2016, where the association was statistically significant. This means that the existing destinations could enjoy shared benefits, including transport systems, tourist facilities, branding, safety, and array of attractions. However, the relationships were not statistically significant in most years, suggesting that it is not usually the same factors that affect both domestic and foreign markets. Domestic tourists might be more likely to be influenced by the affordability, religion, family visiting, short-distance mobility, while foreign tourists seem to be more influenced by international connectivity, destination image, heritage value, and safety.

The significant drop in 2020 was the biggest finding. Domestic tourist arrivals fell by around 73.7%, and foreign tourist arrivals fell by around 74.9%. These findings reflect the huge scale of impact that the pandemic has had on the tourism industry in India. Previous studies also found that the widespread closures of the Indian tourism sector and hospitality businesses resulting from lockdowns, border closures, outbreak fears, suspension of transportation, and closure of hospitality establishments resulted in severe losses across the entirety of the Indian tourism and hospitality industry (Dogra, 2020; Gautam, 2021). The decrease is also reflective of broader reports of the pandemic's impact on tourism globally, including the interruption of travel and a general drop in tourist demand (Gössling et al., 2020; Škare et al., 2021).

Uttar Pradesh had the highest negative domestic tourism, and Tamil Nadu had the highest negative foreign tourists' arrival. Pilgrimage, urban or heritage tourism, and international tourism relied on large gatherings or physical movement, and were particularly vulnerable in states which were heavily relying on these forms of tourism. The drastic reduction in tourism activity is in line with the findings that the lockdown and reopening period in India caused substantial disruptions in the tourism-related industries and investment markets (Pandey & Kumar, 2022). The findings of Jaipuria et al. (2021) also show that the pandemic brought significant economic losses to the Indian tourism industry due to a decline in arrivals, income and employment.

The results also indicate that the tourism recovery will not come from simply lifting tourist restrictions. The recovery will take place through coordinated actions that include safety measures, destination information, financial help, digital technologies, market diversification and support to tourism companies. In a resilience-based approach, resilience is considered to be the capacity to adapt, the role of stakeholders, innovation, and readiness for future crises are given special importance (Sharma et al., 2021). Domestic tourism might be a crucial avenue for recovery as domestic travellers are more likely to return to short-distance and familiar travel before long-distance and international travel. Engaging the right communication and suitable interventions can lead to higher participation in domestic tourism in times of uncertainty (Volgger et al., 2021).

But recovery should not be just about replicating vulnerabilities of the pre-pandemic tourism system. The crisis offered a chance to rethink overcrowding, environmental pressures, employment insecurity and over-dependence on the niche market of visitors. The principles of tourism transformation do therefore need to include sustainability, engagement from the community, public-health readiness and destination resilience (Hall et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The research analyzed the domestic and international tourism performance in India from 2014 to 2020, highlighting the state-wise performance, trends and growth, ranking of the destinations and impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector. The results indicated a gradual increase in tourism from 2014 to 2019. The domestic tourist traffic grew faster than foreign tourist traffic, thus establishing the fact that domestic tourism has dominated India's tourism industry. In terms of the average numbers of domestic and foreign tourists, Tamil Nadu was the top performer, and Uttar Pradesh had the highest growth pre-pandemic. The results also showed that states that had well-developed tourism infrastructure, a variety of attractions, accessibility and developed destination identity tended to perform better in both domestic and international markets. The connection between domestic and foreign tourism rankings, however, was a different one in every year, and it shows that there are some factors affecting domestic tourism which do not affect foreign tourism and vice versa. This drastic drop in 2020 highlighted significant tourism's dependence on mobility limitations, health crises and external shocks. The domestic and international tourist traffic was considerably reduced at main tourist centres, but by varying degrees between states. The results indicate a need for improving the preparedness of crises, diversification of tourism products, destination security and local tourism businesses.

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