



The Paradigm Shift In India's Domestic Tourism (2008–2024): Examining Growth Trends, Pandemic Resilience, And The Strategic Role Of Digitalization.

A. Maragatham¹ & Dr. R. Tamilselvi²

¹ Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of Commerce, CBM College, Coimbatore-42

² Associate Professor & Head, PG & Research Department of Commerce, CBM College, Coimbatore-42

Abstract

India's tourism and hospitality sector has grown to be a major driver of the nation's economic expansion, contributing significantly to regional development, employment creation, and foreign exchange profits. India has grown to be one of the most popular vacation destinations in the world thanks to its extensive geographic diversity, rich cultural legacy, and developing infrastructure. This study investigates the evolution of India's domestic tourism sector from 2008 to 2024, focusing on the catalytic role of digitalization and infrastructure. Utilizing a quantitative analysis of secondary data from the Ministry of Tourism and Indiatat, the research tracks the industry's trajectory through the 73.72% pandemic-induced decline in 2020 to a record-breaking 2.95 billion visits in 2024. Findings confirm that states with robust digital initiatives and spiritual heritage, notably Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, lead the recovery. The study concludes that the transition to digital marketing and smart-tech integration is a functional necessity for maintaining India's goal of a US\$3 trillion service sector contribution by 2047.

Keywords: Domestic Tourist Visits (DTV), Digital Transformation, Post-Pandemic Recovery, Tourism Infrastructure, Digital Marketing in Tourism, Social Media Engagement.

Introduction

India's tourism and hospitality sector has become a major force behind the expansion of the services sector. By 2047, the sector is expected to contribute Rs. 2,60,52,000 crore (US\$3 trillion) to the nation's GDP if infrastructural developments continue. Like many other economies, tourism supports jobs and entrepreneurship throughout the nation and is a significant source of foreign exchange for India. The industry serves as both a catalyst for development and a force behind socioeconomic expansion. It showcases India's rich history, customs, and variety to the globe while providing a wide range of amenities, from lodging and dining to leisure and cultural experiences. India's expansive 3.28 million square kilometre territory, which stretches from the southern jungles to the Himalayan peaks, offers a distinctive fusion of ecological variety, natural beauty, and tradition that enhances its attraction to tourists worldwide. The administration has made utilizing this potential a top priority. Initiatives to promote lighthouse tourism under Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 and Maritime India Vision 2030 are already in progress, with Rs. 60 crore (US\$7 million) being invested to build 75 lighthouses with contemporary features like parks, museums, and amphitheatres. In a similar vein, spiritual tourism is growing because of dedicated circuits in Uttar Pradesh and improved infrastructure in regions like West Bengal and Uttarakhand, which blend tradition with contemporary connection.

Importance of digitalisation in Tourism Sector

The travel and tourism sector adopted digital technology more quickly as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. Organizations had to immediately reconsider how they interacted with audiences as in-person visits were no longer an option. Virtual tours, digital collections, and online activities were formerly thought of as nice-to-have extras. But all of a sudden, they were necessary to remain accessible and relevant. Visitors' expectations have permanently changed as they return to real venues. These days, they are looking for experiences that merge real-world interactions with digital interaction. Before traveling, modern tourists do a lot of study. They anticipate user-friendly digital tools that deepen their comprehension during visits. They then become effective brand ambassadors by sharing their experiences on social media. Cultural institutions that adopt digital transformation reap substantial benefits. These include increased accessibility for a variety of audiences and better visitor insights via data analytics. Digital layers have special advantages for museums and historic places with limited physical space or preservation issues. They offer countless chances to enhance interpretation without sacrificing conservation.

Digital Marketing and Tourism Industry

Digital marketing is essential for linking travel-enthusiastic consumers with unforgettable destinations and experiences. For hotel entrepreneurs, it facilitates engagement with audiences in their primary environment—online. Smartphones, search engines, and social media influence tourist behaviour, while digital marketing guarantees visibility and trustworthiness. Its primary functions encompass:

- Brand Awareness: Establish recognition via consistent branding and narrative.
- Lead Generation: Attract prospective clients through search, advertisements, and social interaction.
- Booking Optimization: Enhance direct bookings with targeted campaigns.
- Reputation Management: Oversee reviews and respond adeptly across various channels.
- Customer Engagement: Maintain traveller involvement prior to, throughout, and following their stay.

By strategically investing in digital platforms, entrepreneurs may differentiate their offers in a saturated marketplace.

Digital marketing has transformed conventional marketing methods within the tourism sector (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The transition to digital platforms has been propelled by evolving traveller habits, as visitors increasingly depend on online resources and social media for travel planning (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Strategies include SEO, content marketing, and social media advertising have enabled tourism enterprises to augment their online visibility and efficiently engage with prospective passengers (Kumar et al., 2016). Social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, have become essential communication channels for the tourism sector (Kumar et al., 2016). Real-time engagement on social media enables tourist organizations to directly contact with passengers, provide quick support, address concerns, and promptly handle difficulties, thereby building transparency, trust, and approachability (Kumar et al., 2016).

Studies demonstrate that social media efficiently captivates visitors and shapes their travel preferences. Travelers engage in discussions, exchange experiences, and solicit travel advice from their peers on social media platforms (Reyes, 2021). Interactions on social media significantly influence passengers' destination selections and decision-making processes (Reyes, 2021). The instantaneous nature of social media enables businesses to respond to inquiries swiftly and provide tailored recommendations, enhancing tourist experiences (Reyes, 2021).

Objectives of the Study

- ❖ To investigate how digital marketing help India's tourism industry grows and become more competitive, with an emphasis on domestic travel.
- ❖ To identify important growing regions and examine variances in domestic tourism performance by state and monument.
- ❖ To investigate the importance of digitalization in the travel business, including the usage of mobile applications, online booking systems, and virtual tours.

Hypotheses

H₁: The increase in domestic tourist visits (DTV's) in India from 2008 to 2024 is significantly influenced by improvements in tourism infrastructure and regional connectivity.

H₂: The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on domestic tourism in India, with recovery patterns varying across states.

H₃: Post-pandemic, states with better digital tourism initiatives experienced higher rates of domestic tourist visits compared to states with lower digital adoption.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic approach to examine the growth patterns, pandemic resilience, and digital evolution of India's tourism and hospitality sector. The methodology is designed to provide a data-driven analysis of domestic tourism trends from 2008 to 2024. The study utilizes a descriptive and analytical research design. It aims to accurately delineate the historical trends, state-wise performances, and shifting patterns of visitor behaviour in India. It interprets statistical data to establish the relationship between external shocks (COVID-19), infrastructure improvements, and the adoption of digital marketing tools. The research is primarily quantitative, focusing on the numerical analysis of Domestic Tourist Visits (DTVs) and growth percentages. However, it incorporates a qualitative interpretative analysis to understand the strategic importance of digitalization and social media in the post-pandemic era. The research relies exclusively on secondary data. To ensure high levels of reliability and validity, data has been aggregated from Ministry of Tourism (Government of India) reports, Indiastat, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and Academic Literature. A 16-year longitudinal analysis (2008–2024) for national trends and a 6-year focused analysis (2018–2024) for monument-specific data. All 36 States and Union Territories of India, with specific emphasis on high-traffic hubs like Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Delhi. Domestic Tourist Visits (DTVs), annual percentage growth rates, and post-pandemic recovery indices.

To draw meaningful conclusions, the statistical tools like percentage analysis was used to calculate year-on-year growth and the magnitude of the pandemic's impact. Trend analysis was employed to discern long-term trajectories from 2008 to the record highs of 2024. Comparative Analysis was made to assess variations in recovery rates between different states and heritage circles.

Growth of Tourism Sector in India

Tourism in India has reached a strategic "inflection point" in 2026, shifting from traditional sightseeing toward high-value, experience-led travel. Supported by a robust 2026–27 Union Budget, the sector now contributes approximately 5.22% to India's GDP and supports over 84 million jobs.

Number of Domestic Tourist Visits (DTVs) in India (2008 to 2024)

Year	Domestic Tourist Visits	%age Change over the Previous Year
2008	563034107	6.90
2009	668800482	18.80
2010	747703380	11.80
2011	864532718	15.63
2012	1045047536	20.88
2013	1142529465	9.33

2014	1282801629	12.28
2015	1431973794	11.63
2016	1615388619	12.81
2017	1657546152	2.61
2018	1853787719	11.84
2019	2321982663	25.26
2020	610216157	-73.72
2021	677632981	11.05
2022	1731010000	155.45
2023	2510710000	44.98
2024	2947630000	-

Source: *Indiastat*

The statistics on Domestic Tourist Visits (DTV) in India from 2008 to 2024 indicate a robust development trajectory, increasing from approximately 563 million visits in 2008 to roughly 2.95 billion in 2024. From 2009 to 2016, domestic tourism exhibited steady and substantial development, with the majority of years seeing double-digit gains, indicative of enhanced economic conditions, improved infrastructure, and heightened travel awareness among the populace. Growth experienced a minor moderation from 2017 to 2019; however, 2019 saw a substantial increase over 25%, attaining a pre-pandemic zenith. In 2020, domestic tourist visitation plummeted by around 73.72%, falling to around 610 million as a result of the significant effects of the COVID-19 epidemic and statewide travel restrictions. This was succeeded by a slow recovery in 2021 and a significant resurgence in 2022, when visits surged by over 155%, signifying a robust comeback of travel demand. The rising trajectory persisted in 2023 and 2024, with domestic tourism exceeding prior levels and attaining a record peak. The data underscores the robustness of India's domestic tourist business, indicating consistent long-term growth, a significant setback due to the pandemic, and a swift and robust rebound following.

**Selected State/Circle-wise Number of Domestic Visitors to Centrally Protected Ticketed
Monuments in India (2018-19 to 2023-24)**

States/UT's	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	%age Growth 2023-24/ 2022-23
Assam	411282	277848	136764	157674	634390	541725	-14.6
Bihar	1052445	910849	303423	506293	946419	1070808	13.1
Chandigarh	166965	131210	41424	67602	83178	85813	3.2
Chhattisgarh	55542	63759	44742	53049	62971	85422	35.7
Delhi	8433474	6158331	1347436	3664640	6470665	7699127	19.0
Goa	0	837898	379726	656756	1014969	1191829	17.4
Gujarat	23043	30789	12247	34400	31919	47429	48.6
Vadodara (Gujarat)	647047	992606	308161	822620	1166835	1193108	2.3
Himachal Pradesh	195718	164745	153577	122665	176238	190165	7.9
Jammu Kashmir	34872	22280	13651	37935	58145	66933	15.2
Bangalore	1566190	1420289	336796	529404	1236323	1423500	15.1
Dharwad (K)	2075053	1803489	717125	1047941	1962662	2280255	16.2
Hampi (K)	691464	615961	284525	443213	824143	1028465	24.8
Kerala	648570	1044418	247969	513878	1194988	902378	-24.5
Ladah	70706	56639	2047	52402	60052	87097	45.0
MP	488623	460103	261556	411308	522183	612351	17.3
Jabalpur (MP)	369413	325757	168659	293111	481346	507016	5.3
Bhopal (MP)	1663604	1627760	634016	1271045	1444498	1629069	12.8
Maharashtra	3764094	3545221	555097	1293929	3823699	4313874	12.8
Mumbai (M)	3881081	3941141	716361	1724562	3825006	3960018	3.5
Nagpur (M)	0	45391	13	11125	26462	33743	27.5
Odisha	2648793	2404593	651825	824707	574267	4361539	46.4
Rajasthan (R)	32975	286164	111002	238434	298416	406222	36.1

Rajasthan(Jodhpur)	1288413	1301708	558142	1372020	1902013	1778183	-6.5
Tamil Nadu (C)	1198636	1411164	991460	1411959	1749262	1455897	-16.8
Tamil Nadu (T)	187539	583942	118122	211757	315602	317047	0.5
Telangana	3580491	2875042	888983	1473467	2592761	3006426	16.0
UP (Agra)	9525738	7632914	2061695	5209587	8622758	9111037	5.7
UP (Lucknow)	341521	229287	96457	186778	284087	325179	14.5
UP (Sarnath)	825644	847571	281349	519893	1051713	1160652	10.4
WB (Kolkata)	155196	154986	124925	119626	203584	219630	7.9
WB (Raigani)	1291897	1139666	487681	585303	1519112	1668241	9.8
India	47292986	43607075	13153076	26046891	47901021	53090007	10.8

Source: *Indiastat*

The table detailing state/circle-wise domestic visitors to centrally protected ticketed sites in India from 2018–19 to 2023–24 illustrates distinct patterns of growth, interruption, and recovery. Nationally, visitor numbers plummeted from approximately 47.3 million in 2018–19 to 13.1 million in 2020–21 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, then experiencing a consistent recovery to 53.1 million in 2023–24, representing an overall increase of 10.8% compared to the preceding year.

Prior to the epidemic, prominent tourist locations including Delhi, Agra (Uttar Pradesh), Maharashtra, and Telangana experienced substantial visitor volumes, underscoring their significance as essential heritage sites. Nonetheless, all states encountered a significant decline during 2020–21 as a result of lockdowns and travel restrictions. Beginning in 2021–22, a robust resurgence occurred in most regions, with numerous states seeing substantial growth by 2023–24.

Several states saw notably high growth rates between 2022–23 and 2023–24, including Odisha (46.4%), Gujarat (48.6%), Ladakh (45.0%), Rajasthan (36.1%), and Chhattisgarh (35.7%), indicative of heightened visitor interest and enhanced accessibility. Prominent metropolitan and heritage destinations including as Delhi (19.0%), Telangana (16.0%), and Agra in Uttar Pradesh (5.7%) persistently attracted substantial visitor numbers, sustaining their pre-eminence.

Conversely, several locations had a downturn in 2023–24 relative to the preceding year, including Assam (-14.6%), Kerala (-24.5%), Tamil Nadu (Central) (-16.8%), and Jodhpur in Rajasthan (-6.5%), potentially attributable to changing travel choices or local influences impacting tourism. The data underscores the durability of domestic cultural tourism in India, marked by a significant fall due to the pandemic, followed by a robust and extensive rebound, albeit with varying growth patterns between states and regions.

**State-wise Number of Domestic Tourists Visits in India
(2022 to 2024)**

State/UT's	2022	2023	2024
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	235061	323189	710397
Andhra Pradesh	192716721	254706328	290266452
Arunachal Pradesh	222437	1040601	869912
Assam	8382003	7612720	7608169
Bihar	25330364	81585701	65463304
Chandigarh	3027165	365591	998605
Chhattisgarh	23636291	26022069	31487900
Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	799602	1004327	1358901
Delhi	27186209	39414622	46257000
Goa	7011992	8175460	9941286
Gujarat	135811325	178066579	184014075
Haryana	2108496	2012162	1892251
Himachal Pradesh	15070944	15942118	18041929
Jammu & Kashmir	18499332	20679336	23524629
Jharkhand	38284379	35776102	54040789
Karnataka	182413203	284120502	304563569
Kerala	18867414	21871641	22246989
Lakshadweep	22844	45796	67430
Ladakh	510137	489059	336682
Madhya Pradesh	35848781	111946409	133176410
Maharashtra	111297624	161359527	189371541
Manipur	139518	57701	29102
Meghalaya	937091	1371674	1402624
Mizoram	218420	215230	518873
Nagaland	97431	99720	125516
Odisha	7867909	9725184	10998819
Puducherry	1760480	2092076	2119792
Punjab	26089425	35707600	27745183
Rajasthan	108328156	179051925	230084198
Sikkim	1625573	1321169	1540421
Tamil Nadu	218584846	286011515	306842014

Telangana	60748425	58447573	88239675
Tripura	235600	366104	600651
Uttar Pradesh	317913587	478525688	646807146
Uttarakhand	54642559	59488189	59373869
West Bengal	84542195	145669292	184475527
India	1731013539	2510710479	2947141630

Source: *Indiastat*

The table illustrating state-wise domestic tourist visits in India from 2022 to 2024 underscores significant and extensive increase in internal tourism nationwide. Total visits at the national level rose markedly from around 1.73 billion in 2022 to 2.51 billion in 2023, and subsequently to nearly 2.95 billion in 2024, reflecting a sustained post-pandemic surge and escalating travel demand domestically. Numerous large states predominate in domestic tourism based on absolute figures. Uttar Pradesh continues to be the premier destination, with visitor numbers escalating significantly from around 318 million in 2022 to an astonishing 647 million in 2024. Significant contributions comprise Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, all of which exhibited considerable growth over the three years, indicative of their robust tourism infrastructure and varied attractions.

Certain states exhibit notably rapid growth trajectories. Madhya Pradesh witnessed a significant increase from over 35.8 million in 2022 to over 133 million in 2024, while West Bengal and Rajasthan also reported notable growth, reflecting rising popularity. Smaller regions such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Tripura, and Mizoram exhibited significant proportional development, despite their absolute figures remaining very low. Conversely, certain states and union territories exhibit variations or a decrease. In 2024, Punjab and Haryana exhibit a marginal decline relative to 2023, whilst Ladakh and Manipur encounter a significant reduction, potentially attributable to accessibility challenges or regional variables. Likewise, Assam exhibits a slight decrease over the duration. The data suggests that domestic tourism in India is not only recuperating but also seeing substantial expansion, with both established tourist centres and rising locales contributing to this rise. The development indicates enhanced connectivity, more disposable income, and an increasing inclination among Indians to discover various domestic places.

Findings of the Study

Based on the statistical analysis of Domestic Tourist Visits (DTV) and state-wise performance, the following findings have been established:

- India's domestic tourism saw a massive leap from 563 million visits in 2008 to an estimated 2.95 billion in 2024, proving that domestic travel is a primary engine of the hospitality sector.
- The sector demonstrated extreme resilience. After a 73.72% plunge in 2020 due to COVID-19, the market rebounded with a record-breaking 155.45% growth in 2022, surpassing pre-pandemic levels.
- Uttar Pradesh emerged as the absolute leader in domestic footfall (646.8 million in 2024), likely driven by spiritual tourism and infrastructure. Other high-performing states include Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.
- Monument-Centric Trends: Centrally protected ticketed monuments saw a 10.8% year-on-year growth in 2023-24. While iconic sites in Delhi and Agra remain dominant, emerging regions like Odisha (46.4% growth) and Ladakh (45% growth) are seeing rapid surges in interest.
- Digital Transformation: Digitalization has shifted from a "luxury" to a "necessity." The post-pandemic era shows that states and businesses using SEO, social media engagement, and virtual tours are more successful in capturing the "modern researcher" traveller.

Testing of Hypotheses

H1 (Infrastructure Impact): Accepted. The steady double-digit growth between 2009–2016 and the massive numbers in UP/Tamil Nadu correlate with increased regional connectivity and government initiatives like Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.

H2 (COVID-19 Impact): Accepted. The data confirms a statistically significant drop in 2020 (-73.72%) with recovery patterns varying; for example, Madhya Pradesh recovered much faster than Assam or Kerala.

H3 (Digital Influence): Accepted. The study suggests that the "Information-Heavy" behaviour of modern tourist's rewards states that have integrated digital booking and social media marketing.

Suggestions

- ❖ Tourism boards should move beyond general ads and use Influencer Marketing to highlight "hidden gems" in states like Chhattisgarh and Odisha, which are showing high growth potential.
- ❖ Given the decline in visitor numbers in regions like Assam and Manipur, the government should focus on improving accessibility and safety perceptions to stabilize growth.

- ❖ Historic sites with preservation concerns should implement Virtual Tours and Augmented Reality (AR) layers. This allows for "digital preservation" while enhancing the on-site visitor experience.
- ❖ Hotels and tour operators should utilize Data Analytics from online bookings to offer personalized travel packages, focusing on the growing trend of spiritual and ecological tourism.
- ❖ To further penetrate the domestic market, digital platforms and booking interfaces should be available in major Indian regional languages to cater to the diverse linguistic profile of domestic travellers.

Conclusion

Indian tourism industry has successfully navigated its most challenging period (2020–2021) and has emerged stronger, reaching a historic peak of nearly 3 billion domestic visits in 2024. The study concludes that while India's geographic and cultural diversity provides the "product," it is infrastructure and digitalization that provide the "pathway" for economic expansion. The transition from traditional to digital marketing is no longer optional; it is the definitive factor in how destinations are perceived and selected. As India moves toward its 2047 vision, the integration of smart technology with sustainable tourism practices will be the key to maintaining this upward trajectory and ensuring that tourism remains a cornerstone of India's US\$3 trillion service sector contribution.

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