



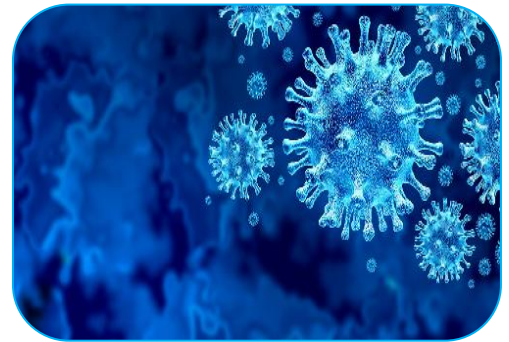
NOVEL CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19) IMPACTS ON TOURISM IN KULLU VALLEY OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Tourism, one of the biggest and fastest growing sector has been considered as a vulnerable industry i.e. in comparison to other industries, tourism industry gets more affected due to any external or internal shocks or stresses. The first case of the COVID-19 pandemic in India was reported on 30 January 2020, originating from China. Slowly, the pandemic spread to various states and union territories including the state of Himachal Pradesh. The first case was recorded in this region on 20 March 2020. In this regard, the latest outbreak of Corona (COVID-19) virus has caused havoc across the world. The aim of this discussion is to gather the status of impacts of the virus on tourism of Kullu valley as a whole.



KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Kullu Valley Tourism & Corona, Corona virus alert, covid-19 effects in Himalayan Region.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a backbone of economy for many countries of the world. Tourism is a big source and always helpful in generating revenue and a mean of foreign exchange. Scenario in our country is not much different and Tourism contributes to GDP of this country in a big proportion. However it's a deep matter of concern for all the stakeholders associated with tourism industry that tourism is the most affected sector in the world due to corona virus disease (COVID-19) in the beginning of 2020. COVID-19 is spreading rapidly at an unprecedented scale across continents and has emerged as the single biggest life threatening health risk in the world has faced in modern times. This paper focuses on the COVID-19 issue in Kullu Valley of Himachal Pradesh and its impact on the tourism and hotel industry, the paper has some significance, as the tourism is greatly affected by the COVID-19 crisis worldwide. India is the 7th largest country of the world and rich with various tourism resources and millions of tourists arrive annually, which contributes to the country's GDP. The need of the hour is to take early steps to overcome the present slowdown in tourism industry by analyzing its long term impacts at the earliest.

ENTRY OF COVID-19 IN INDIA:

In the beginning of 2020 Indian tourism industry was all set to accelerate its pace towards development. India was unaware about the impact of biological disaster called Corona virus disease (COVID-19) threat originated from central China's Hubei province in Wuhan city in the month of December 2019 and continues to adversely affect more than 150 countries and claimed more than

50,000 lives globally so far. (WHO INDIA-2020) In the context of India on 30th January 2020, a laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported in Kerala. Kerala state is one of the favorable state among foreigner tourist, which is also known as 'God's own country'. Since January 2020 COVID-19 has spread in almost all the states & Union territory of India and claimed more than 20 lives and approx 1000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 so far. On 24th March 2020 Prime Minister of India announced 21 days lockdown and banned all domestic and international arrival and departure through all means of transportations. Hotel Industry will also not entertain any kind of new booking and check-in in the hotels. This lockdown to handle COVID-19 affected all segments of Indian tourism industry adversely. Tourism product is a perishable product which cannot be stored and sold later, this feature of tourism product push tourism industry in to heavy loss in terms of poor revenue generation. This is one of the worst crises ever to hit the Indian tourism industry. As the news of the virus start picking up from November, the percentage of cancellation started going up in this segment exponentially and is reaching peak of almost 80% now in March in many Indian locations.

Yearly update of Corona virus in Kullu Valley:

March 7, 2020: Tourists asked to submit travel history

With Covid-19 all set to destroy the tourism season, officials are preparing to set a guideline for all the hotels, guesthouses and homestay units. The foreigner tourists staying anywhere in Kullu Manali will have to fill a form to declare his health and past travel history. The tourists entering Kullu will undergo medical check-up.

March 17: Manali decides to stay open, fight Covid-19

While tourist destinations of Himachal are imposing ban on entry of tourists one after another and Himachal government has advised to avoid congregation of public in large number, the hoteliers and tourism entrepreneurs in Manali on Tuesday decided to stay open and welcome tourists as usual.

March 19: Manali calls for complete lockdown

All the hotels, restaurants, shops, travel agencies, taxi service, tourist bus service and almost all the services in Manali shall remain shut from Monday till March 31 as the residents on Thursday decided to brace for "lockdown". The tourists have been given time till Sunday to leave the town.

March 20: Himachal seals border for tourists

As Himachal sealed its borders for tourists for few days as a preventive measure against Covid-19, over 75 per cent of the tourists left the state on Friday and those who had just entered the state had to face nakas. Implementing the order to stop tourist movement, the police had laid nakas everywhere in the state.

March 31: Travel Agents asked to work from home

Himachal Pradesh Travel Agents' Association (HPTAA) president Budhi Parkash urged all the travel agencies to ask their employees to work from home as maintaining social distancing from offices was impossible.

April 1: Hoteliers seek financial help from govt

The whole year's tourism of Himachal is set to demolish due to Covid-19, with thousands losing their jobs, peak summer tourism season from April to June sacrificed to deadly disease and even three month EMI moratorium incapable of saving many hoteliers from bankruptcy in next few months. Hoteliers demanded financial help from the government to cope with the present crisis.

May 20: Kullu's first Covid-19 positive case

A 27-year-old man from Anni region of Kullu has been tested positive for Covid-19 today. The person had returned from Mumbai in a special train to Una from where he reached Kullu in HRTC bus on May 18.

May 31: Kullu gets second Covid-19 positive case

A day after the only Covid-19 positive case of Kullu was tested negative on May 30, another person from Nirmand area of Kullu district has tested positive for Covid-19. The district has now two positive cases of which one is active. The 65-year-old person had returned from Delhi with his family.

June 2: Kullu-Manali not ready to host tourists

The hoteliers and travel agents said they are not ready mentally and strategically to host the tourists in current times. They requested the government to frame hoteliers and tourist-friendly policy where hoteliers get business and tourists enjoy the sightseeing without fear of the spread of the coronavirus.

June 22: Hotels will get proper business after 2 years

As Covid-19 cases are increasing rapidly in the country, hoteliers are assuming that they will not get any guest for two years and they will have to manage to survive during this time.

July 03: Tourists may enter Himachal with conditions

The government said that tourists can enter Himachal without need of any permit/curfew pass. But, tourists need to book hotel for at least 5 nights in advance. Tourists will have to bring Covid-19 negative certificate that should not be older than 72 days. Tourists also need to furnish true information in online Covid-19 portal of the Himachal government and will have to follow all Covid-19 preventive guidelines.

July 21: Manali's first Covid-19 case

A 22-year-old woman from a village in Manali, who had returned from Kyrgyzstan on July 11, has been tested positive for Covid-19. This is the first case of Manali. However, Kullu's total tally now stands at 22.

July 29: Virtual meeting with hoteliers

Himachal Tourism department organised a virtual training programme for hospitality/hotel sector of Himachal where stakeholders were made aware of Covid-19 and were asked how they can run business during this time of pandemic.

August 19: Jibhi, Tirthan Valley to open from Sept 5

Jibhi and Tirthan valley of Kullu are opening for tourists from September 5 with some strict conditions to prevent the spread of coronavirus. After holding a meeting of the owners of hotels, guesthouses, and homestays of Jibhi and Tirthan valley, it was decided that they will allow booking from September 5 onwards provided that advance booking is made for a minimum of 10 days.

August 25: Hotels in Manali to open from October 1

The hotels in Manali will open from October 1. The tourists from all the states of the country will be able to visit Manali from October onwards as hoteliers today unanimously decided in a meeting that they will make all arrangements including staff re-recruitment, arranging for high standards of sanitisation, and educating staff till September 30 and will open from October 1.

September 11: First Covid-19 death in Kullu

Kullu district reported the first death due to Covid-19. A 75-year-old woman had died of hypertensive heart disease has tested positive for coronavirus two days after her death. The total number of positive cases in Kullu-Manali now stands at 375.

September 17: Himachal opens border for tourists

Himachal government today issued a notification that tourists (or anybody) from other states can enter Himachal without requirement of registration or e-pass. They also need not to bring Covid-19 negative report. However, inter-state bus movement should remain suspended until transport department issues dedicated SOPs.

September 25: Hotels occupied fully

Most of the hotels, guesthouses, homestays and camping sites in Jibhi and Tirthan valley are showing over 70 per cent occupancy while many of them are fully occupied. Hotels in Kasol are also doing brisk business as many tourists are heading to remote areas of the state. Many tourists are heading to Kullu Manali to work from the mountains.

October 1: Hotels open

A large number of hotels, guesthouses and homestay units in Manali have opened. Many hotels are fully occupied ahead of the inauguration of Atal Tunnel, Rohtang. Hotels are prepared to fight Coronavirus (Covid-19) with extra hygiene.

November 23: Night Curfew in Kullu Manali

In an effort to contain the spread of Covid-19 in Himachal, the government has imposed night curfew in Kullu, Shimla, Mandi and Kangra districts from November 24 to December 15. The curfew shall remain in force from 8pm to 6am everyday. No vehicle other than those engaged in medical services and essential supplies will be allowed. No social, religious or political party/gathering will be allowed during this time.

November 25: Hoteliers seek relaxation in curfew

Saying that night curfew will totally destroy the tourism of Himachal which is struggling to come back on track, the hoteliers demanded relaxation for tourists during curfew hours. Hoteliers said travel time from Delhi to Manali is more than 14 hours and it will be impossible for tourists to reach Manali before curfew time. They said they are with government in its fight against Coronavirus but either government should think about problems that tourists will face due to night curfew or it should impose full lockdown so that they shut their hotels till March 31.

December 24: Night curfew relaxation

Himachal government has given a relaxation of one hour in night curfew in Kullu, Shimla, Mandi and Kangra districts. Now night curfew will be imposed from 10 pm to 6 am everyday till January 5. Also, markets will remain on Sunday as well.

December 31: Tourists fined

Hundreds of irresponsible tourists visiting Manali for New Year celebrations who are not wearing face cover have been fined by police. Cops are fining drivers and are checking tourist buses to check if Covid protocols are being followed. Rustom Volunteers of police are spreading awarenesses among tourists at tourist places.

January 5, 2021: Night curfew ends

Himachal government has decided to lift the night curfew from Kullu, Mandi, Shimla and Kangra districts. Now tourists can travel even in night time.

January 21: Covid-19 cases dip

With Kullu-Manali reported zero cases or one or two cases of Covid-19 every day, the authorities have taken sigh of relief. Tourism has also come back on track as tourists are visiting Kullu Manali, Shimla, Dalhousie, Dharamshala and other tourist places without fear.

March 3: Atal tunnel becomes favorite destination

Atal tunnel, Rohtang has become the main attraction for tourists visiting Manali and other parts of Himachal. Tourists are visiting tunnel, traversing it and entering the Lahaul valley to enjoy snow. The Covid-19 pandemic has failed to stop tourists from planning their trips to favourite hill stations.

March 4: Covid-19 test report not required

Covid-19 negative test report is not required to visit Manali, Shimla, or any other tourist destination of Himachal. Tourists can visit without any test but they need to follow Coronavirus safety protocols like wearing face mask and maintaining social distancing. Tourists need not pay attention to hoax regarding Corona report.

CONCLUSION

With fears of a new recession and financial collapse, times like these call for resilient and strong leadership in healthcare, business, government and wider society. This research paper has examined the greater impact that is being created by the virus on tourism. Instant relief measures need to be implemented and adjusted for those that may fall through the cracks. Intermediate and longer term planning is needed for how the economy is rebalanced and re-energized following this crisis. A broad socioeconomic development plan including sector by sector plans and an ecosystem that encourages entrepreneurship so that those with robust and sustainable business models can be allowed to flourish. It is prudent that governments and financial institutions constantly re-assess and re-evaluate the state of play and ensure that the whatever it takes promise is truly delivered. This research work has also showcased the ultimate damage it created on the tourism in Kullu Valley of Himachal Pradesh. It is being thought that the impact will continue for some more time and that is of much more concern in recent times. The Corona virus as also enabled the tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh to face the huge threat as well as the economic slowdown is seen. Though the measurements were undertaken, but they are seen to be not fruitful for prohibiting the spreading of corona virus.

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