

ROLE OF INDIAN RAILWAYS IN THE PROMOTION OF TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

One of the world's industries with the fastest growth rates is tourism. Traveling for pleasure of people while returning to one's starting point is called tourism. For tourists, India offers a variety of transportation options. Among all modes of transportation, railroads are one of the most popular. Indian Railway is a tourist destination in and of itself, in addition to transporting visitors there and back. The tourism industry in India is undergoing unstoppable growth as a result of the expanding number of inbound tourists from the prosperous Indian working class, the rising number of foreign tourists, and the effective government lobbying for promoting 'Unimaginable India.' The objective of this paper is to study the role of Indian Railways in the promotion of tourism. The information used in the study is of a secondary nature. It was found that Covid-19 has resulted into decreased operating revenue of tourism in the year 2020-21. But for the promotion of tourism Indian Railway is continuously making efforts in terms of offering various tour packages, special trains, accommodation facilities, Air ticketing and Air Packages etc. to its passengers.

KEYWORDS- Indian Railways, IRCTC, Tourism, Trains etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Railways are the most cost-effective, convenient, and popular mode of transportation, particularly for long-distance travel around the world. The railroad was invented in Germany in the seventeenth century, with wooden tracks. During the early 1800s, the first steel rails were developed in the United States. In India, railways are the most important mode of inland

transportation. After China, India has the world's fifth largest railway system (US, Russia, Canada, China).

The first train left Bombay (Mumbai) for Thane, a 34kilometer journey, in April 1853. The Indian Railway is owned and managed by the Indian government. Steam engines have been replaced by diesel and electric engines, which has increased speed. Tourism, as an interaction between tourists and host societies, changes not only the socioeconomic conditions of host communities, but also their value system. Tourism causes changes in people's individual and collective value systems, behavioural patterns, social structures, life styles, and quality of life. Tourism influences a community's socioeconomic conditions by increasing racial and cultural tolerance, creating new job opportunities, developing infrastructure and contributing to its overall economic development. Furthermore, recognized the socioeconomic impacts of tourism in terms of labour force displacement, changes in employment form, increase in female labour force participation, increase in worker social status, changes in standard of living, and increase in social cohesion (Deshpandey 2020).

Furthermore, it has been proposed that as people travel around the world and get to know each other, understand each other's customs, and appreciate the qualities of the people of each nation, an international understanding is formed, which significantly improves attitudes toward world peace. Another school of thought holds that tourism brings happiness to the host community by boosting economic growth and development (Kumar 2017).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kumar & Komaraiah (2014) identified and highlighted the problems faced by Indian Railways while developing tourism. For this purpose, perception of foreign tourists was analysed. It was found that there is great need of infrastructure development and improvement in the quality & quantity of basic amenities provided to them. Indian Railways should do marketing and publicity of its services.

Bundalo & Gavrilović (2016) studied the role of railways in promotion of tourism in Western Serbia. The tourism industry in Serbia has taken prominence in the development of the economy as a whole and has emerged as one of the primary drivers of overall economic development. Further, this was highlighted in the study that high degree of interaction in the growth of tourism and railroads necessitates stronger cooperation between railways and tourist organizations in Western Serbia in the planning and implementation of tourism offers.

Ravi and Kumar (2016) in their paper examined the role of IRCTC in promotion of tourism.

For this purpose, Bharat Darshan train operators and passengers travelled in this train were taken as sample. It was found that projected and perceived image of railways differs in the eyes of passengers. It was suggested that passenger focussed marketing strategies need to be implemented for the better future of Indian Railways.

Mazumdar & Ghosh (2017) studied the role of rail vendors in the promotion of tourism. For this, aspects with reference to Northeast frontier railway vendors were considered. It was discovered that if suitable training and skill development programmes are implemented for hawkers through separate state authorities and administration, a highly beneficial effect from a tourism perspective may be gained. Even progress in recognising antiquities, indigenous things, and agricultural items can be encouraged via the channel of hawkers on a train as they supply their services to the moving market with their potential clients on board. As a result, train hawkers have the potential to be a high-impact agent in tourism, as well as a conduit of promotion.

Kumar (2017) in his research paper examined the role of Indian railways in the promotion of tourism. He has studied infrastructure of railway, tour packages, luxury tourist trains and hilly trains. It was found that for the expansion of the travel and tourism industries, India has a number of opulent and hill trains. Indian Railway offers the IndRail Pass facility in order to encourage foreign tourists. Additionally, Indian Railway offered tourists catering services and tour packages. Foreign visitor quota booking services are also offered.

Supan & Chaigasem (2018) analysed the factors that are affecting tourism of Indian Railways. It was revealed in the study that Tourist behavior is important in economic evaluation because it distinguishes between Travel both during the working day (for business) and outside of it (commuting and leisure). Factors that may influence a visitor's motivation to participate in railway travel included as directional lines throughout the framework. This could include their prior experiences or recommendations from friends and family who have hiked a specific trail.

Deshpandey (2020) in his research paper studied impact of tourism on the growth of the India. The tourism sector is an important social phenomenon in almost every society due to the basic human desire for novel and memorable experiences in the realm of adventure activities, education, and entertainment. It was found that in the last few decades, advancements in technology, advancements in knowledge, and reductions in communication barriers have been removed, transportation has improved, tourist friendly facilities have grown and contributed to the expansion of the tourism industry. As a result, it is well understood that tourism can play

an important role in achieving inclusive and long-term growth and development.

Pieraet al. (2022) in their paper revealed that the railway tourism process always begins with an effort to restore railway history, potentially preserving authenticity. The voluntary associations and its "railfans" are the primary stakeholders in not just preserving rail heritage but also creating railway tourism activities. The tourist railway could revive the local community while also benefiting the local economy. Many tourists may be drawn to railway tourism locations because they want to have unforgettable experiences associated to nostalgia for the past.

Mishra & Kumar (2023) studied the role of Indian Railways in the promotion of tourism. It was revealed that Tourism is made up of five major components: attraction, accessibility, facilities, lodging, and activities. The mode of accessibility is critical in tourism as compared to other components. In India, travellers can choose from a variety of types of transportation. It is one of the most popular modes of transportation among all railways. It provides views of the magnificent terrain that are rarely viewed by road or air. To boost tourism, Indian Railways offers a variety of rail package tours for tourists.

Shu et al. (2023) studied the relationship between High Speed Railway and tourism efficiency in China. For this purpose, difference-in-differences (DID) model and a global data envelopment analysis (DEA) decomposition analytical framework was used. Further, a sample of 280 cities in China was taken. The data had shown that opening of HSR can contribute to increased efficiency, owing to its role in optimizing resource allocation. Furthermore, the stimulating effect of high-speed rail on tourism efficiency exhibits significant geographical variation, necessitating the implementation of specific support programmes.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this paper is to examine the role of Indian Railway in promotion of tourism in India.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objective of the study, the research material has been taken from various secondary sources such as newspapers, articles, website of IRCTC and journals etc. Statistical Data for the study ranges from 2017-18 to 2021-22.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Railways in India have been transporting both domestic and international visitors. The Government of India has mandated the IRCTC, which was established in 1999, to professionalize and upgrade rail based tourism in the country. Over the last two decades, IRCTC has been a driving force in the overall promotion and development of rail tourism in the country. IRCTC is likely the only organization that offers packages ranging from Rs. 900 to USD 900 per day.

6. CONTRIBUTION OF INDIAN RAILWAY IN TOURISM

An Indian railway is offering various services like catering, rail neer etc. Tourism is one of the services provided by it. Contribution of Tourism sector towards the operating revenue of Indian Railways is shown below in the Table 1.

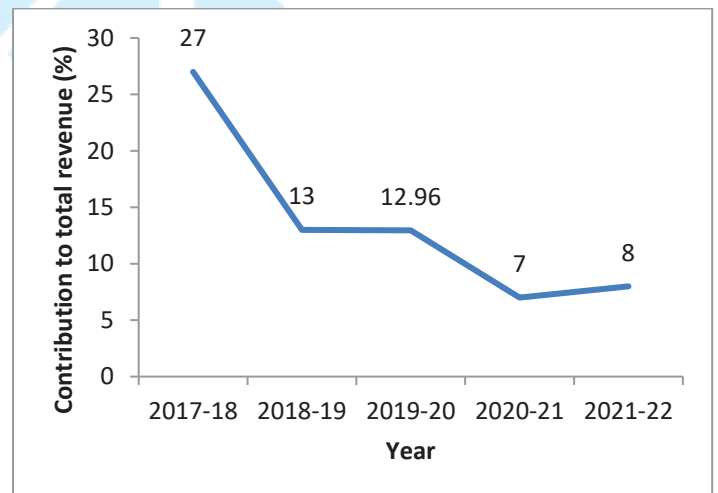
Table No 1:

Contribution of Tourism in total revenue of Indian Railway (%)

Year	Contribution to total revenue
2017-18	27
2018-19	13
2019-20	12.96
2020-21	7
2021-22	8
CAGR	-26.22%

Chart No 1:

Contribution of Tourism in total revenue of Indian Railway (%)



Source: Annual Reports of IRCTC

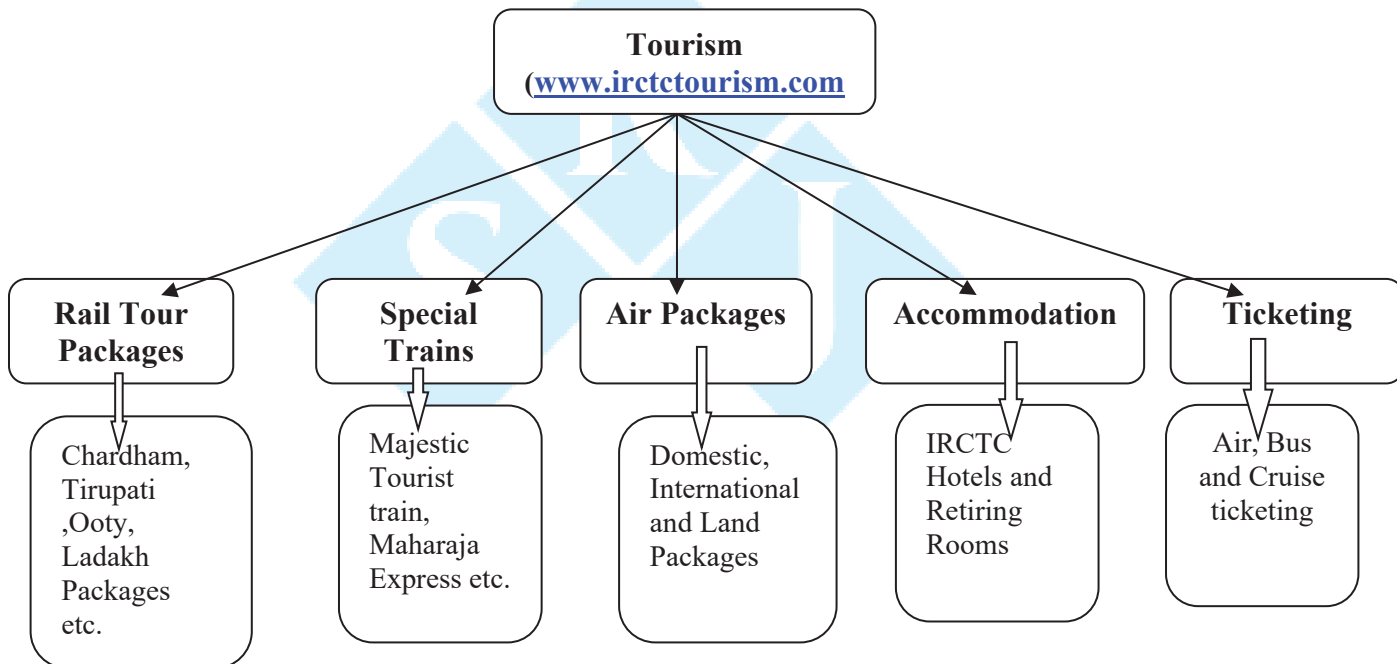
Table 1 shows the contribution of Indian Railway in Tourism during five years i.e. from 2017-18 to 2021-22. It reveals that contribution of Indian Railways in tourism sector is declining till 2020-21. The reason behind the decline was poor infrastructure, lack of technology and lack of safety. COVID-19 was also the reason of sudden fall in revenue of tourism sector in the year

2010-21. It starts increasing in the year 2021-22 i.e. 8% as compared to 7% in the year 2020-

21. Indian Railways has started working on all limiting factors and that resulted into increase in operating revenue. CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) indicates contribution has decreased by 26.22%

IRCTC operates a website www.irctctourism.com with a plethora of offerings including Rail based Packages, Hotels and Railway Retiring Rooms to provide users with a One Stop Solution to all their travel needs. Here below figure 1 shows the structure of www.irctctourism.com and different facilities provided by the railway department.

Figure 1: structure of www.irctctourism.com



Source: www.irctctourism.com

A. RAIL TOUR PACKAGES

IRCTC organizes packages to numerous destinations for which Indian Railways allocates seats/berths on trains for the outbound and return journeys. These packages emanate from various regions of the nation and offer tours to pilgrimage sites, vacation spots etc. IRCTC

presently offers over seventy Rail Tour Packages.

B. SPECIAL TRAINS

The IRCTC organises train tours with fixed departure dates and itineraries for budget travelers. Bharat Darshan Trains and Aastha Circuit Trains are the names of these trains. Bharat Darshan and Aastha Circuit Trains operated 99 trips in 2018-19, with over 50,000 tourists travelling on them.

- **Special Interest Trains:** With the introduction of the Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train in 2007, IRCTC pioneered special interest train tours.
- **Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train:** Launched in 2007, this train tour visits key locations associated with Buddha's life. In order to provide better facilities to guests, a new train with cutting-edge features was introduced in 2018. Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Sarnath, Sravasti, Rajgir, Varanasi, Lumbini, and Agra are all included in the 7-night/8-day package.
- **Majestic Tourist Train :** This train tour will begin in September 2019 and will visit important Rajasthan destinations.
- **Maharajas' Express:** Maharajas' Express, arguably the best luxury train in the world, has been named the Leading Luxury Train of the World for 7 years in a row by World Travel Awards since 2012. The tours cover a wide range of Indian history, culture, and wildlife. The interiors of the train showcase the best of the modern world. The train's itineraries have been revamped for the 2019-20 season as it enters its tenth year of operation.
- **Golden Chariot Train:** In January 2020, IRCTC took over the marketing and operations of the Golden Chariot Luxury Train from Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation Limited for a 10-year period. The Golden Chariot is a window into the soul of South India, with three well-curated itineraries covering destinations in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Goa.
- **Train, Coach and Saloon Charters:** In 2018, the IRCTC launched an online booking module for trains, coaches, and saloons on a charter basis. Through this online module, groups, families, and corporate houses can now book full trains on their preferred routes as well as exclusive coaches and saloons to be attached to regular trains.

C. AIR PACKAGES

Domestic Air Packages In 2015, IRCTC offers domestic tour packages by Air that include flight tickets, accommodation, all transfers and sightseeing, and meals. These packages originate in various parts of the country and offer tours to a variety of destinations.

- **International Packages:** IRCTC has taken a significant step toward dominating the outbound travel market by introducing popular travel destinations at competitive prices and unrivalled service. The IRCTC Tour Manager escorts the tour to ensure that all passengers receive proper services. IRCTC has popular foreign tour packages to destinations such as Dubai, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Russia, Australia, the United States, China, Europe, Hong Kong and Macau, Nepal, and Dubai.
- **Land Packages:** IRCTC offers Land Tour Packages or Holiday Packages, which is a unique product. Land Packages are designed with the customer's interest in sightseeing, visiting famous temples for Darshan, and so on in mind. It includes pick-up and drop-off by AC/Non-AC road transport from the station/airport, travel insurance, sightseeing, and lodging.

D. ACCOMODATION

IRCTC provides a variety of lodging options ranging from short layovers to extended stays in a variety of locations.

- **IRCTC Hotels:** It provides a diverse range of hotel booking options to meet all budget requirements.
- **Railway Retiring Rooms:** IRCTC has taken over the management and operation of Railway Retiring Rooms at various railway stations. These Retiring Rooms can be reserved online and through the website.

E. TICKETING

- **Air ticketing:** IRCTC Ltd., a public sector undertaking under the Ministry of Railways, is an IATA accredited agency that has been in the air ticketing business since 2010. Domestic and international tickets for almost all airlines from anywhere in the world can be booked on IRCTC's dedicated web portal www.air.irctc.co.in. IRCTC charges only INR 59 as a convenience fee when issuing tickets through our website, which is not only the most economical and lowest in the industry, but also the only portal that offers free travel insurance worth up to 50 lakh on flight tickets booked through our

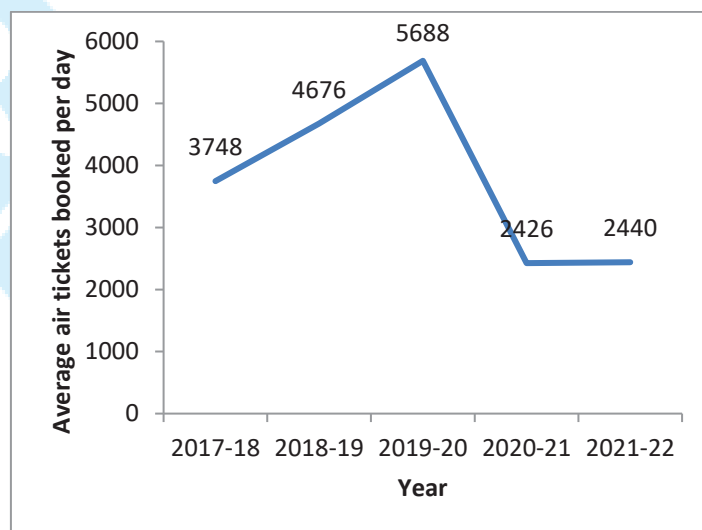
website. For both domestic and international sectors, the IRCTC Air Portal offers multicity options. With 50+ payment gateway options to choose from, booking through the portal is simple and convenient. IRCTC has a fast E-Commerce network that processes 15-18 million transactions per day. IRCTC has introduced a user-friendly E-Mobile App - IRCTC Air for Android and IOS users as a step toward promoting the Government of India's digitalization initiative. The Ministry of Finance has authorized IRCTC to issue LTC by air tickets to employees of the Government of India and selected PSUs. For group bookings of 10 or more passengers, IRCTC offers attractive fares.

Table No 2:

Number of Air Tickets through IRCTC Portal	
Year	Average air tickets booked per day
2017-18	3748
2018-19	4676
2019-20	5688
2020-21	2426
2021-22	2440
CAGR	-10.17%

Chart No 2:

Number of Air Tickets through IRCTC Portal



Source: Annual Reports of IRCTC

Table 2 reveals number of air tickets booked by passengers through IRCTC portal from the year 2017-18 to 2021-22. It reveals that number of tickets has increased till the year 2019-20. After that it has declined in the year 2020-21 due to Covid -19. Due to government restrictions passengers were allowed to travel in case of emergency. In the year 2021-22 as conditions of Covid -19 were improved and it results into increase in the number of air tickets booked. CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) indicates average number of tickets booked has decreased by 10.17%.

- **Bus ticketing:** IRCTC offers bus reservations for interstate travel within India. It is an initiative to provide IRCTC customers with multimodal transportation options, including private and public buses, via the website and mobile apps. Thus, IRCTC now offers all three modes of transportation, namely rail, air, and bus, on its online platform, making it a one-stop shop for customers' travel needs.
- **Cruise booking:** IRCTC has entered the domestic and international cruise markets, focusing on the domestic market as well as potential outbound guests. The products are designed to provide complete service, hospitality, and the highest quality in the tourism industry.

7. CONCLUSION

In India, the tourism industry is a multi-billion dollar industry with numerous sectors. The growth and promotion of tourism rely heavily on these industries. One such area in the hospitality industry is transportation. The Indian tourism industry's key USP is now its railroad network. Railways are now eager to promote travel and enhance the infrastructure. By adding more amenities and facilities, railroad companies are attempting to make travel for passengers as comfortable as possible. The results of the study have indicated that over the past five years contribution of Indian Railway towards tourism has decreased gradually in terms of operating revenue and air tickets booked through IRCTC portal. But now it has introduced various tour packages, tourist special trains, special tickets for air, bus & cruise, accommodation in form of hotels and retiring rooms etc. That signifies the efforts of Indian Railways to promote tourism. Now several domestic and international businesses are also currently looking to invest in rail projects in India. The Indian Railways is actively pursuing tourist attraction. Thus, it can be said that the Railways are crucial to the nation's efforts to promote tourism.

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