

A Lonely Planet

Earth has been branded as a lonely planet. The human quest for the unknown and desire to find out about similar living beings across the universe has returned blank over centuries. So far, we have not been able to find another civilization/destination for the human race. On a philosophical note, the same desire to explore the unknown has made us nomads. The reasons for our search are varied, and the methods have been different, but the pursuit of that endless search has remained as ever. Man has ever travelled to find better locations for co-habitation on the banks of rivers across continents- so grew ancient civilizations on the banks of The Nile, The Ganges, and many other rivers across the world. The desire to conquer and be the most powerful globally has driven kings and emperors to travel distances across rugged terrains and mountains to fight wars and win landmasses, ocean routes, and countries. The hunger to gather wealth and bring prosperity to individuals, kingdoms, and nations has made the human race sail through endless seas and oceans, build settlements and bring back fortune is the domain of history. The desire for knowledge has made people travel by foot, cross continents, deliver religious sermons and gain new thoughts, and cultural elements have unified the world through universal brotherhood. Is not it that all religion teaches the same truth, shows the same path, and guides the souls to eternal happiness?

How would the world have been if the man had decided not to travel? How would civilizations have grown had man not decided to look up to the sky, identify and name the stars, and link them to directions? Whether it is the pursuit of peace or power, man has always explored the lonely planet with his inquisitiveness and curiosity to unravel the mystery of mother nature. The color of the sky, the sounds of the ocean, the warmth of the fire, and the speed of the wind have made people wonder about the secrets of nature and be on a sojourn to know the unknown. Come whatsoever be the intent and objective of travel; the nomad has always returned with a handful of success and blissful happiness.

<https://doi.org/10.53908/NMMR.300209>



NMIMS
Management Review
ISSN: 0971-1023
Volume XXX
Issue-2 | April 2022

Tourism and travel bloomed very late as a discipline of study, and its management is of recent origin only. However, there were lost wanderers, poets, religious masters, and saints who have travelled across the nations and around the mother earth to explore something unknown. The Chinese traveller Hiuen- Tsang crossed the Himalayas to come to India and make Buddhism a global religion. Kalidas wrote ‘Megha Dutam’ as an epic to express the love of a cursed Yakshya and described all tourist destinations of India where the cloud messenger has to bow down and pray to the deity of the place. The great saint Shankaracharya travelled across the nation to revive Hinduism. Modern-day travel and tourism date back to a century but it existed in India for centuries. Man’s quest to know and pray the nature’s forces made people build cities and citadels worldwide; Tourism is as old as the earth itself as it is the mother nature that has always attracted the homo sapiens to explore and learn.

Science and Technology, equipped with the spread of modern-day religion, reduced the distance between continents, mapped the flows of sea currents, forecasted weather, communicated about a tourist’s arrival at a destination with so much ease that the travel industry grew leaps and bounds in last century. The religious preachers traveled in ships, trains, and planes and educated people around the world to remove blind beliefs and mean faiths- as the spread of humanity grew, Technology helped in building a robust global industry that came to be known as the hospitality and tourism industry.

The human race is the most critical, unpredictable, and comfort-seeking race that propelled the growth of the hospitality and service industries. The desire for leisure, the adrenaline for adventure, the thirst for cultural learning, and the search for the evolution of civilization segmented the tourism market into leisure tourism, adventure tourism, and many more micro-segments. Though the principal component of the tourism and hospitality industry was human service (per se), however, destinations- both artificial and natural, and products and cultural elements like dance, music, and other artefacts enriched the tourism product mix. As mentioned, growth in science and Technology, reduction in mass maladies like the plague, war, and wiping out of blind beliefs about the shape and structure of the world has made people spend their spendable income on destinations in search of happiness and pleasure. Who would have imagined that Disney Land would be the most travelled destination in the world or that people would be buying African safaris and gaming dens and travel into the middle of a desert in the USA to find a place like Las Vegas?

The growth of tourism has made many countries survive and flourish. Many island nations’ primary source of income is tourism and hospitality. This smokeless industry contributes to the maximum number of employees globally (after agriculture, of course). The industry itself brought many challenges- water, land, and air pollution, prostitution, wilful waste, and littering and trafficking are some of the fallouts of this

industry. Though countries did legislation to control the evil effect of tourism, they were not sufficient to create a clean, lean, and loving world. Over the decades, we have been dumping our desire on mother earth and making many tourist destinations inhabitable for the local community. The industry has been negatively impacted due to war, international politics and embargos, terrorism and religious hate, and many more factors. This is the most sensible industry globally that gets impacted first for any unwarranted reason. While it takes a few wrong moves to get a high decibel impact on the industry, the recouping time is longer and leaves irreparable marks on the life of people associated with the industry. The recovery process is longer, and that creates un-manageable wounds in the growth of the tourism industry.

The emergent challenge in the post-Covid-19 world is the revival of the tourism industry. Though vaccination has temporarily withheld the mobility of the dreaded virus, the world is yet to become a safer place for travel. International travellers are still sceptical about spending time in crowded places. The most popular destinations worldwide have receded to the footfall of the early 60s. Parallel to this phenomenon, there is an upsurge in domestic travel. People have started securing safe travel plans to lesser-known and closer destinations. While the travel and tourism sector may bounce back to the new standard, the distribution of a tourist dollar will see a significant shift from international destinations to domestic circuits.

The coronavirus pandemic is one of the most impactful events of the 21st century. Close to seventy-five million jobs are lost, and the likely drop in revenue is around 2.3 trillion USD. This impactful phenomenon has created research opportunities, and many intelligent researchers are already busy gap-spotting. New research topics are emerging from the impact of Covid, and cases are being written, keeping Covid-19 in focus. The new research should develop theoretical advancements and managerial implications. The researchers need to find out deeper underlying relationships than just descriptive findings. The primary focus should be on how Coronavirus will change the practices of tourism and hospitality management.

Researchers have started looking at the Corona virus-related pandemic as a disaster than a crisis. A crisis is a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992) and disasters as ‘situations where an enterprise.. (..)is confronted with a sudden, unpredictable catastrophic change over which it has little control (Scott and Laws, 2005). The main difference is whether the cause of internal organizational failure to act or an external event over which the organization has no control (Ritchie and Jiang, 2019). The Coronavirus pandemic is a natural disaster and a human-made socio-political disaster (Panda, Mishra, 2007). However, the issue is not unique. Researchers have studied their impact on a small scale with SARs virus (Zeng, Carter and Delacy, 2005), the bird flu (Rittichainwat and Chakrabarty,



NMIMS
Management Review
ISSN: 0971-1023
Volume XXX
Issue-2 | April 2022

2009), Ebola (Cahyanto Wiblishausser, Penningtom Gray and Schroeder,2016) and influenza pandemics (Page, Yeoman, Munro, Connel and Walkr, 2006).

Suppose researchers are looking for work on Corona virus-induced economic crisis. In that case, one can draw research parallels from Papatheodorou, Rosello, and Xaio (2010) work on the 2009 economic crisis or traveller behaviour and rationalization following tourists economizing strategies during the economic crisis (Campos- Soria, Inchaust-Sintes and Eugenio Martin 2015). The meta-analysis can help build structural breaks covering various aspects, including tourist behaviour and how tourists develop crisis-resistant, resilient behaviour.

This special issue on hospitality and tourism is an outcome of an international research conference organized jointly by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and the School of Hotel Management, Faculty of Hospitality & Tourism Management, SOA University. We have only handpicked some of the research-based path-breaking of papers for inclusion in this particular issue. I am sure many hospitality and tourism areas need further attention and in-depth research in the future.

Dr Tapan K Panda

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NMIMS
Management Review
ISSN: 0971-1023
Volume XXX
Issue-2 | April 2022

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NMIMS
Management Review
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