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Managing Health and Safety in International tourism: Towards a safe experience for visitors in India

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Abstract

Safety and security have been identified as one of the five global forces that will drive the tourism industry in the new millennium, owing to a series of shocks that have recently rocked the global tourism industry, including India. Many such direct and indirect incidents have impacted visitor numbers at key destinations. Tourists go on vacations to fulfil certain desires, wants, and needs; therefore, it is in their interest to reduce every single factor that might affect their safety. All risk factors tourists perceive could be a reason for replacing a destination with an alternative. The Governments, industry representative groups, and individual businesses are all seeking to develop improved management of such risks so that potential crises can be avoided. Thus, the originality of the study aims to propose a theoretical framework for managing and mitigating the safety and security issues in India to improve the tourists' image and perception of India as a safe destination. This will enable future tourism specialists to consider and incorporate such a framework while managing the safety and security of the tourism destinations. The study is both descriptive and exploratory, based on a qualitative research approach, and includes analysis of both primary and secondary data sources. The findings of the study reveal that India is not projected as a better tourism destination when it comes to the safety and security of the tourists as observed from previous instances. The current safety measures in India need to be made more robust and resilient in managing the risk effectively. The government and industry initiatives in partnerships can ensure visitors' health, safety, and security.

Keywords: Health & Safety, International Tourism, Visitors, Security issues, Risk Management

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Introduction

Many nations view tourism as having a significant economic impact, accounting for a sizeable portion of their GDP. Therefore, the quantity of international visitors is crucial. However, there are increasing threats and hazards in the world, and as a result, travellers are realizing the importance of safety and security when travelling to a particular destination. Thus, tourist safety is instilled in foreign visitors, and it is crucial to consider this factor while selecting a destination. Tourism quality in any destination depends on the natural and socio-cultural attractions, the social and political atmosphere, law and order, and public safety, which determine the nation's perception of a particular travel destination. A country with a positive reputation for safe travel can leverage this to its advantage and draw in various traveller demographics from abroad.[1] Globally, the issue of safety and security in the tourism sector is crucial. Security and safety are essential to provide high-quality tourism services. More than any other type of economic activity, a tourism destination's ability to give its guests a safe and secure environment determines whether it succeeds or fails. Observed or actual risks to the safety of visitors have an immediate negative impact on a destination's reputation and can have a significant influence on visitor numbers. Unfortunate events can have a major negative influence on a destination's revenue and sustainability if guest safety and security are poorly managed.[2] Issues of safety and security in the travel industry have gained

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significant importance since mass tourism began to develop in the 1950s. The fact that tourism is no longer limited to a specific social class or group and has expanded to the general population due to rising personal incomes and free time—a trend that is affecting an increasing number of nations worldwide—and the development of transportation technologies have led to an increase in geographical mobility are the factors driving this evolution. This has not only signalled an important advance but also raised concerns about safety and security in tourism, one of the world's major global sectors.[3] Given the tens of millions of people who travel each year, safety and security rank among the fundamental human needs and are especially important to the travel and tourist industry. People like to feel secure, and a crisis will likely arise if they perceive a threat to their safety while vacationing in a place of choice. Due to their unusual behaviours, the substantial amount of currency they carry with them, their unfamiliar surroundings, and their tendency to stand out in a crowd, tourists are particularly vulnerable to crime.[4,5] Potential tourists may decide to change their destination, cancel their trip, or re-evaluate their choices due to direct or indirect security difficulties relating to people, such as local wars, terrorist acts, natural catastrophes, and health issues.[6] The travel and tourism industry could not avoid the negative impacts and consequences of these events. Moreover, some of these events manifested the vulnerability of tourism both on global and regional levels. Therefore, this fact necessitates the research and study of the relationship between security issues and tourism, including the creation of a new, up-to-date definition of the notion of “security and safety in tourism”. Studying problems of safety and security became vital for the tourism industry.

Background of the study

India is renowned for being the most sought-after travel destination, particularly among travellers, due to its abundance of tourist attractions and rich cultural legacy. Millions of tourists from around the globe are observed in various areas of India each year. Not just to society, but also tourism makes a significant contribution to global economic growth.[7] It promotes all its tourist attractions through various promotional campaigns, which the tourists are willing to visit in India. Travellers are now more aware of their destination due to these promotional campaigns, which have increased both inbound and outbound travel. As large numbers of tourists are visiting India, safety and security have become important factors for them, especially after the 26/11 attack. People must deal with safety and security in all aspects of life, particularly in modern times. Travellers have specific needs, interests, and desires when they go on vacation; it is to their best advantage to minimise any factors that can compromise the level of safety. Any perceived risk that travellers may have could lead them to choose a different destination instead of a certain one. Since modern communication is facilitated by constant technological advancement, information can be disseminated globally through various external channels, including the media, and the general public. Because of this, these sources of information can readily paint a negative image of a place, even though it frequently deviates from reality.[8] Thus, risk perception is an important issue within this context, as it often hurts the tourist's decision-making process, which must be carefully looked into. The purpose of this study is to objectively assess safe tourism in India. The study discusses the significance of health and safety concerns of international tourists in the tourism industry. It also analyses how health and safety need to be given more attention to solidify India's reputation as a safe travel destination. A strategic framework for tourist safety that includes the formulation of safety plans and guidelines, implementation, safety technologies & communication, partnership, and monitoring is proposed for addressing and improving tourism safety concerns in India.

Review of Literature

Generally speaking, safety describes a state of being shielded from or less likely to experience risk, danger, or harm. Travellers’ safety is a fundamental feature of any location.[9] It takes into account things like the rate of crime, riots, political stability, human rights violations, and personal safety.[10] The security in the tourism industry is the act of safeguarding visitors and employees from intentional harm inflicted by third parties. Despite their frequent interchange in travel literature, the terms "security" and "safety" have different meanings. The definition of safety is preventing unintentional harm to visitors and tourism employees.[11] Various perspectives and terminologies have been employed to investigate and explicate the notion of safety in the tourism industry. All things considered, though, the names usually refer to comparable phenomena. The degree of risk that may be endured during travel, for instance, "the collective term for tourism operations in a harmonious, secure, and regulated condition."[12] The general perception of destination safety is captured by the safety climate.[13] In a tourism context, a person's emotional sensations coming from how well the external environment and safety circumstances match their safety demands are referred to as their sense of safety.[14] In addition to being the pillars of general tourist operations, tourism and visitor safety

and security are also critical to the expansion of the tourism sector and for satisfying people's basic physiological needs.[15]

The focus of tourist safety is on stable and orderly circumstances, namely being safe and free from harm or danger when engaging in tourism-related activities.[16] Most tourists to other countries have serious worries about safety and security, which has dominated study designs in recent decades.[17, 18] These concerns may influence travellers' decisions to travel. Undoubtedly, worries over the safety and well-being of travellers have grown throughout time due to several factors, including the rise in international tourism, the events of September 11, 2001, and terrorist strikes in the United States, among others.[19, 20] Travellers and places are impacted by the significant worldwide issue of tourist safety. [21, 22] There is strong evidence that the absence of safety and security in tourist destinations has resulted in a reduction in global tourism visits in recent years.[19, 23]

Travellers may decide to alter their location, cancel their plans, or re-evaluate their preferences due to direct or indirect security risks relating to people, such as terrorist acts, local conflicts, natural disasters, and health concerns.[24] Political stability, public health and sanitation, visitor privacy, and legal protection for travellers are all aspects of the complex, multifaceted concept of safety and security. Since it is a prerequisite for receiving visitors, security is an essential component of supply in a tourist area.[25]

Methodology

Qualitative research was undertaken to examine and achieve the objectives of the study. The study employs a descriptive research approach. The research was carried out by carefully examining the literature from online research databases, mainly comprising research papers.

Results and Discussion

Travel and tourism have always required safety and security as a prerequisite. However, it is undeniable that in the past 20 years, safety and security concerns have become increasingly important in the travel industry. Any tourist destination's definition of safety and security has evolved into a multifaceted, intricate concept with many facets, including public safety, political security, health and sanitation, personal data security, legal protection for visitors, consumer protection, communication safety, catastrophe defence, safeguarding the environment, obtaining accurate information, and service quality assurance.

After a careful examination of the relevant literature, the following safety and security threats have been identified that affect the tourism industry worldwide:

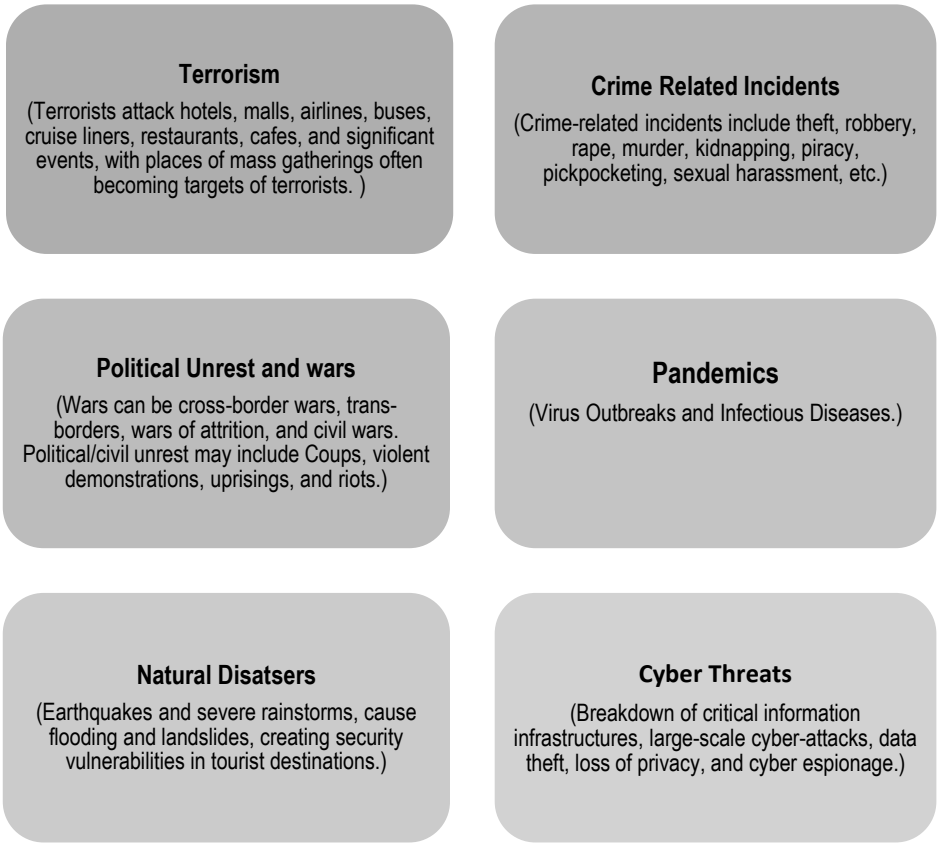


Figure 1. Safety and Security threats affecting tourism (Source: Author's Own)

The safety and security of India's tourism sector are impacted by several issues, including terrorism, prior criminal instances, food preferences and tastes, health and hygiene, and natural disasters.[26] Robbery, pickpocketing, handbag snatching, and fraud are just a few of the incidents that can happen, especially in busy places, tourist destinations, and transit hubs. There have been reports of violent crimes, such as harassment and assault, albeit in their rarity. Natural disasters linked to the country's climate result in significant losses in terms of lives and property. The biggest tourist hazards are avalanches, flash floods, cyclones, landslides caused by heavy rain, and snowstorms. Protests and rallies for political causes often cause disruptions to public movement and tourists. India is a culturally varied country; thus, it's important to respect regional traditions and customs. This entails knowing religious customs and acting and dressing appropriately. Sometimes, the foreigners are not aware of it, leading to annoyance among the local people, and thus they hold a negative attitude towards foreign tourists. On November 26, 2008, Mumbai, the financial and entertainment centre of India, was the target of a terrorist attack. Over four days, twelve planned shooting and bombing attacks left several hundred people injured and 164 people dead. The attack mostly targeted foreign visitors staying at hotels in Mumbai, including The Taj Mahal Palace and Tower, Oberoi Trident, and Leopard Café.[27] Poor sanitation and hygiene are a significant health concern in many low- and middle-income nations, including India. Visitors to India with inadequate standards of hygiene and sanitation run a higher risk of contracting diseases spread by the faecal-oral route. Travellers' diarrhoea (TD) is one of the disorders that are linked to consuming faecally contaminated food or water, as well as being exposed to faecally polluted settings. Up to half of foreign visitors to underdeveloped countries report having TD, the most common sickness.[28] An estimated 2.3 million Indians, primarily in regions like Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland, were HIV positive as of 2019. Travellers who engage in condom-free intercourse run a higher risk of contracting HIV and other STDs, such as syphilis, gonorrhoea, and chlamydia. Kumbh Mela is the world's largest religious pilgrimage and mass gathering event, drawing millions of people. It is a Hindu religious fair observed four times over twelve years. Every time this typically four-month festival is observed, pilgrims take a ceremonial bath in one of India's four holy rivers. The more dangerous dangers to health and safety connected with attendance include the spread of enteric and respiratory diseases, antimicrobial-resistant organisms, and mass casualty trauma such as crush injuries and stampedes.[29] These all indicate that the tourism safety and security system is partly defective in India, which necessitates a more robust and structured approach to address the concerns.

The Ministry of Tourism strategically outlined the National Tourism Policy 2002 on the central principle of ***'Atithi Devo Bhava'*** (Guest is God). Thus, every tourism practice in India will align with guest satisfaction and offer them a better feeling in India. In this regard, safe and honourable tourism will be practised to ensure tourist safety. Thus, tourism activities will be undertaken, integrating the need to protect the dignity, safety, and the right to freedom from exploitation of all tourists and residents involved in or impacted by tourism. Nearly every facet of tourism requires attention on both a local and national level. However, the national government bears primary responsibility for several aspects of tourism security and safety. A strategic framework is recommended for a better implementation of safety and security plans to ensure the tourists' health and safety:



Figure 2. Tourism Safety and Security Strategic Framework (Source: Adapted from tourism safety strategy, Western Cape Government)

1. Tourism Safety Committee:

A multi-stakeholder collaborative tourism safety committee is required for the establishment of a robust safety ecosystem to formulate safety plans and guidelines for the implementation of such programs at national, regional, and local levels. The plans and guidelines should include the following areas to be taken care of:

- The estimation of possible risks to tourists based on travel categories impacted tourism industries and destinations;
- Identifying and preventing crimes against tourists;
- Defence of locals and visitors against the trafficking of illegal drugs, prostitution, and child sex activities;
- Establishment of a code of ethics for travel trade operators while dealing with tourists;
- Crisis management coordination in the case of an emergency or natural disaster;
- Adoption of safety procedures and standards for fire prevention, theft, and hygienic and health requirements in tourism facilities and locations;
- Aspects of security and safety in licensing for travel trade establishments;
- Supplying the public with the necessary information and documentation regarding the health and safety of tourists, both arriving and departing;
- The establishment of national laws governing visitors' health, including channels for reporting health-related concerns;
- Dissemination, gathering, and promotion of trustworthy research data on crimes against travellers;
- Provision of interaction with the media, both domestically and internationally;
- The international travel trade must receive information on safety and security issues.

2. Enforcement of the Task Force

A specialist squad tasked with guaranteeing visitors' safety and security at a location is required to be formed. To enforce safety measures, this task force will work with a variety of stakeholders while operating under the direction of regional or federal authorities. They should carry out routine evaluations of potential risks to the safety of tourists, put preventive measures into place based on those risks (e.g., stepping up patrols in high-risk areas), enforce local tourism-related laws and regulations (e.g., safety standards), deal with crimes against tourists (e.g., theft, fraud, and harassment) with an emphasis on prompt resolution, and coordinate prompt responses to emergencies affecting tourists (e.g., accidents, natural disasters, or health outbreaks).

3. Tourists' Safety and Support

The coordinated measures and procedures put in place to safeguard tourists in the event of an emergency or other safety issues are referred to as tourist safety support or responses. This entails taking preventive steps as well as responding to events as they happen to manage and lessen their effects. There should be a 24-hour response capability and practical and emotional support to be provided to tourists in need. Tourists feel safe, and crises or threats are dealt with quickly when there is a well-organised Tourist Safety Response.

4. Tourist Safety Technology

The employment of innovative technologies and systems to improve tourists' safety and security should be made to guard against mishaps, keep an eye out for any threats, and handle crises with efficiency. The ability of a resort to protect its visitors can be greatly enhanced by integrating technology into tourist safety initiatives. Technological facilities such as mobile apps, CCTV cameras, drone surveillance, emergency alert systems, smart tourism solutions, wearable health devices, telemedicine, and environmental monitoring systems can be leveraged to greatly improve their visitors' safety and security and offer a more comforting and pleasurable travel experience.

5. Tourist Safety and Communication

It is necessary to create a thorough communication plan that incorporates all significant players in the tourist value chain, including the government, corporations, travel associations, industries, local communities and the tourists. This communication aims at creating awareness, participation, and ensuring commitment among all the stakeholders of tourist safety.

Further, techniques and approaches are to be used to educate and mentor visitors on safety measures, possible hazards, and emergency protocols. To guarantee that visitors are aware and capable of reacting effectively in the event of any dangers or emergencies, effective communication is essential. Travel advisory through online portals, safety mobile apps, SMS alerts to the tourists, signage, and posters, and provision of a help desk are the major aspects upon which the tourist safety communication needs to be structured.

6. Safety Partnership and monitoring

The strategy entails creating networks for coordinated safety initiatives that unite every relevant stakeholder, including the public and commercial sectors, local communities, and international organizations. To provide funding and carry out safety programs, public and private organizations must work together more closely, utilizing

the resources and knowledge of each other. Towards the implementation of safety plans and programs, the tourism workers can be trained so that they will be skilled in managing tourism health and safety. This includes evaluating the success of partnerships and safety actions regularly. Make revisions in response to fresh difficulties or input from visitors and local stakeholders. By implementing these safety initiatives and developing strong relationships, destinations may improve the entire experience of tourists, make the environment safer, and establish India's reputation as a secure destination to visit.

Conclusion

Travelling with people is not as easy as it seems. Proper planning is necessary, as there are financial and time costs involved, and there is an expectation that the trip—whether for business or pleasure—will yield returns on investment that will justify the expenditure. The modern world has required travellers to become considerably more sophisticated. They now understand that travelling comes with challenges, from dealing with airport security to fearing assaults at airports, and that they might have to worry about more than just criminal incidents—our world is plagued by terrorism. The problems posed by natural calamities such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and bad weather, etc are also added to these, and the fact that not all of the industry's spokespeople are typically the sincerest means that the tourism industry cannot escape being impacted by the consequences of such events. Thus, tourist safety has become a key issue for every tourist destination. However, providing quality tourism requires addressing such safety issues to project a better image of the destination. Thus, the goal of every tourist destination is to provide high-quality travel experiences that will integrate safety and security concepts. Safety and security concerns have adversely affected the reputation of India as a tourism destination, as well as its economic development, in addition to generating revenue. The government of India and institutional entities bear a great deal of responsibility for developing strategies and standardized policies aimed at ensuring the safety and security of international visitors in order to address problems and challenges facing the tourism sector. The Indian public should also assist and show respect for foreign guests. Foreigners are also required to adapt to Indian customs and traditions. The tourist business has more room in India to grow in the foreseeable future, but only if institutional organizations and law-abiding citizens focus on the proper path to ensure the safety of international visitors to our nation. Local police stations and security officers are also to be encouraged to strictly maintain the safety and security of the tourists. The key elements influencing foreign visitors' safety and security in India are to be emphasized are the road and local area surveillance, guidelines regarding what foreign visitors should and shouldn't do while there, information booth setup, round-the-clock security services, helpline centres, police night patrols, well-established transportation, communication, health, and sanitation, security checkpoints at tourist destinations, online travel and safety information, and the installation of CCTVs to raise awareness of early warning systems, etc. to improve the tourist's image and perception of India as a safe destination.

Highlights

What Is Already Known?

- Safety and security of the tourists have a positive impact on the travel decision and destination image.
- Emergencies such as natural disasters, terrorism, crimes and health emergencies reduce the tourism demand for a destination.
- Past studies have examined individual safety risks affecting tourism destinations worldwide.
- For sustainable tourism development, safety management should be considered as an essential element.

What Does This Study Add?

- A strategic six-pillar framework is proposed towards health and safety of tourists in India.
- Destination choices of international tourists are strongly influenced by their perceptions.
- The major tourism risks in a tourist destination includes Health, Hygiene, Crime, Terrorism and disaster.
- Technology and multi-stakeholder collaboration can strengthen tourists' safety.
- Policy recommendations support sustainable and safe international tourism.

Authors' Contributions

Dr. Mukunda B G (Corresponding author), conceived the study, developed the research design, and drafted the introduction and methodology. Dr. Shwetasaibal Samanta Sahoo conducted the literature review, developed the conceptual framework, identified the research gap, validated the manuscript, and contributed to manuscript writing. Dr. Ravish Mathew, contributed to the results and discussion. Dr. Sampada Kumar Swain, prepared the conclusion, edited the manuscript, checked the language, and formatted the references.

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest Disclosures

The above authors do not have any conflicts of interest.

Ethics Approval

In our research paper or for our study, we have not collected any data or samples by directly or indirectly involving human beings. The study is entirely based on a review of literature and secondary sources.

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The Extent of AI Use

The AI is used for language refinement, grammar correction, sentence restructuring and improving the readability of the manuscript. The authors take responsibility for originality, accuracy, interpretation and integrity of the work.

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