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The impact of COVID-19 on Florida, California and Virginia regarding tourism and the leisure industry

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Abstract

One of the worst affected industries, when COVID-19 burst out, was travel in the US and all the states, had been hit mercilessly, due to the virus. This paper tries to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the states of Florida, California, and Virginia tourism sectors. These states, which are renowned for their varied attractions and flourishing tourism industries, encountered significant difficulties, during the pandemic. The general economy, local businesses, and jobs were all significantly impacted by the drop in tourism. Around $1.3 trillion in export revenues were lost due to a dramatic reduction in foreign travel, which is 11 times the amount lost during the previous economic crisis in 2009. Due to the global spread of the epidemic, the tourism and hospitality sector experienced one of the most severe operational, commercial, and economic problems. The masterful collaboration between the local authorities' and state governments made these states a success story. There has been an abundance of funding that helped revive the local businesses as well as an expansion of domestic tourism that left the visitors free to explore the states while remaining healthy. Therefore, the vastness of the states and the climate of the states also have played an important role in promoting tourism throughout the year.

JEL classification: P25, Z32

Keywords: Tourism, United States, COVID-19, pandemic, leisure industry

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1. Introduction

The tourism sector is widely acknowledged as the prominent and technologically advanced industry on a global scale, as indicated by its steady annual development rate of 4-5%. The aforementioned industry significantly impacts the worldwide economy, providing employment for around 10% of the global labour force and contributing 8% to the global gross domestic product (GDP) (Nyagadza et al., 2021; Valtolina et al., 2020; World Tourism Organization, 2021). As per the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2019), the tourism industry experienced a 3.9% expansion in 2019, yielding $8.8 trillion in revenue and providing employment for an estimated 319 million individuals across the globe. This illustrates the potential influence that tourism could have on the worldwide economic recovery, provided that sufficient resources are allocated to marketing and measures are in place to tackle potential obstacles.

Tourism is frequently recognized as one of the most technologically sophisticated industries globally. This is evidenced by the industry's yearly average growth rate of 4-5%, its 8% global GDP contribution, and its 10% global employment contribution (World Tourism Organization, 2021). The global behemoth's exponential growth and potential would have persisted into the current and subsequent epochs, albeit hindered by the catastrophic surge of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ongoing pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the global economy, leading to substantial human casualties (Guo et al., 2020; Rezapouraghdam & Karatepe, 2020).

The incident caused an unprecedented worldwide economic downturn, a phenomenon that has not been observed in the past few decades (World Economic Forum, 2020). As a consequence of the pandemic, businesses were forced to close and restrictions were placed on both commercial and leisure travel, thereby restricting the mobility of individuals. According to Bahar and Celik Ilal (2020), the global tourism sector has experienced detrimental consequences as a result of the swift transmission of Covid-19. Enterprises that have invested significantly in hotel construction, tour operator establishments, and airline corporations have been notably impacted by this. Furthermore, the increase in prices was found to have a significant impact on both employees and customers in this sector, resulting in a decrease in business activity and hindering the development of the global socioeconomic situation. In addition, Fernandes (2020) argues that the global economic impact of COVID-19 is more severe than the Great Depression and GFC of 2008 combined.

It is imperative to recognize that the travel and tourism industry has been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a reduction in supply and demand (Nicola et al., 2020; Nyagadza et al., 2021). The observed outcome can be ascribed to the deficiency in productive collaboration and communication between operators and tourist clients, which hinders the conduct of substantial commercial transactions. Notwithstanding the implementation of exceedingly sophisticated strategies, the pandemic has caused a substantial collapse. As stated by Farmaki et al. (2020), the tourism industry has been profoundly impacted by the stringent restrictions on mobility. A variety of personal difficulties have emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the need to maintain a healthy work-life balance, the demoralizing effects of ambiguity on well-being, pessimism, fear of contracting a disease, and job-related anxiety (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). The current conditions have significantly reduced the motivation and eagerness of both tourists and providers of tourism-related services to participate in such activities. The necessity to analyze the interconnected aspects of tourism and hospitality that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic serves as the impetus for this book chapter. The worldwide pandemic has caused considerable apprehension in communities across the globe, resulting in a reduction in the overall demand for services and products in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Despite being one of the most sought-after states in the United States, Florida, California and Virginia have not been immune to the effects of COVID-19. Even while they may have fared better than some other places their tourism industry nonetheless faced serious disruptions and difficulties. With a focus on the tourism sector, this essay will examine how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Florida, California, and Virginia. These states may not have experienced the pandemic's full impact, but it's important to remember that they still faced significant issues. Travel bans, fewer tourists, economic impacts, and the need for recovery activities are just a few of the factors that impacted the tourism industry. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the tourism industry to experience previously unheard-of difficulties on a global scale. Well-known travel destinations including Florida, California, and Virginia have had to cope with the uncertainties and difficulties posed by the pandemic. This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sectors of these countries, emphasizing the unique challenges they faced and the measures they took to overcome them. From their experiences, we may draw valuable insights about the broader implications for the tourism sector and devise strategies for future recovery and resilience.

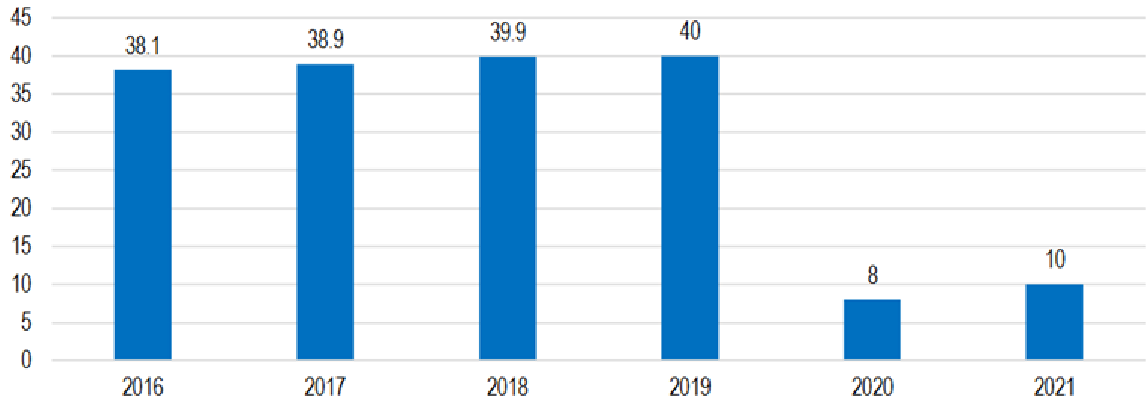
2.1 Literature review

The economic development of countries, including the United States, depends heavily on the tourism industry. The United States has long been a prominent tourist destination, drawing millions of tourists from all over the world to its various landscapes, iconic landmarks, dynamic cities, and cultural attractions. The importance of tourism to the American economy is examined in this chapter along with its benefits, drawbacks, and potential for expansion (Cepni et al., 2023). Contribution to GDP and Employment: In the United States, the tourist sector plays a significant role in economic expansion. Millions of Americans have employment prospects thanks to its enormous contribution to the GDP of the nation. The U.S. Travel Association estimates that in 2019, travel and tourism directly contributed $1.1 trillion to the nation's GDP, or 5.5% of the total. The entire contribution, which equals 8.6% of GDP and includes indirect contributions like supply chain effects, is $2.6 trillion. In addition, the sector directly supported 11 million jobs, or 5.8% of all jobs in the nation (Škare et al., 2021).

Employment and Small Business Opportunities: There are many different career opportunities in tourism in the United States, especially in places where travel is common. The sector provides support to a wide range of businesses, both large and small, such as lodging facilities, dining establishments, transit, and tourist destinations. Small businesses in particular benefit from tourism because they satisfy the needs of tourists by offering unique products, services, and experiences. These businesses encourage job development, entrepreneurship, and regional economic expansion. (Spenceley et al., 2021).

Regional Development and Economic Revitalization: Tourism plays a significant role in regional development and the revitalization of local economies. Many regions within the United States rely heavily on tourism as a primary economic driver. Popular tourist destinations such as New York City, Los Angeles, Orlando, Las Vegas, and Hawaii attract millions of visitors each year, injecting revenue into the local economies and supporting infrastructure development. In rural areas, tourism can provide opportunities for economic diversification and help preserve local culture and traditions (Roy, 2020). According to the data presented in Figure 1, the year 2019 witnessed the highest recorded number of international arrivals to the United States, amounting to 40 million. During the period preceding the pandemic, the research variable demonstrated a consistent upward trend. As a consequence of the travel limitations enforced in light of the worldwide coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the number of arrivals experienced a substantial reduction, culminating in a minimum of 8 million in 2020.

Figure 1: Number of overseas arrivals to the United States from 2016 to 2021 (in millions)



Source: Fernandes (2020).

As a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, travel arrangements were severely disrupted on a global scale. The scenario indicated above was linked to the exponential proliferation of the COVID-19 pandemic (DEL 2022). Consequently, in response to the situation, the governors of the affected states enacted travel limitations through the issuance of orders or directives that required passengers to report for quarantine upon their arrival, demonstrate a negative COVID-19 test result, or furnish proof of immunization. As of March 2020, travel restrictions were implemented in a combined

27 states and the District of Columbia as a precautionary measure against the ongoing epidemic. There have been instances where certain states have extended the travel restrictions placed on out-of-state visitors and returning residents. A fourteen-day travel restriction is imposed on out-of-state travelers whose origins have been designated as areas prone to the coronavirus outbreak. A mere 11.40% of the respondents to a survey conducted by the USTA in February 2020 stated that the coronavirus outbreak had an impact on their travel plans.

3. Aim and methodology

With an emphasis on finding the states that were least affected, this study intends to analyze the connection between the COVID-19 epidemic and the reduction in tourist visitation in the US. Two core research questions and the accompanying supporting questions were created in order to accomplish this goal.

1) The first sub-question seeks to identify the factors that contributed to some states being less impacted by the fall in tourist numbers, and

2) The second sub-question looks into the steps taken by these states to lessen the impact in comparison to other states.

This study aims to provide insights into the effective techniques used by some governments in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on tourism by examining data from online sources, selected states, and pertinent studies on tourism and the pandemic. The methodology is developed with qualitative elements (qualitative approach) that will allow the deepening and understanding of the different aspects of the pandemic. The sample is the subset of the population that will be selected for the research. It is proposed to be representative, i.e. to reflect the diversity and differences that exist in the population. For the completion of this research, an overview of the relevant international literature and articles will be combined.

First the definition of the research object will be done and then the bibliographic research about what researches has been done by previous researchers. The systematic selection and study, as well as recording and archiving of the main bibliographic sources, is needed in order to clarify the main concepts, content and limits of the object, as well as the methodology for its investigation and the research questions mentioned above. As for the stages of a research work, they start with the design of the research, that is, the choice of the research tool (validity and reliability check), the choice of the sample and the choice of the appropriate statistical model. Specifically, the stages of our research work will be done through data collection (reliability - validity check) and statistical data processing and the results of the research will be listed for interpretation and connection (comparison) of the results with the literature for the writing of the work.

4. Results

4.1 The case of Florida

Florida boasts stunning beaches, thrilling theme parks, captivating national parks, and an array of unique tourist attractions, making it one of the most sought-after states in the union for tourism. Families descended upon Orlando, while travelers heading to South Gulf Coast locations like Miami and Fort Lauderdale sought out the ideal sunset. In addition, Panhellenic's gorgeous white sand beaches drew beachgoers throughout the summer. There was nothing like experiencing island life in the Florida Keys, where Key West felt like a universe apart from the mainland and time appeared to stand still. The state also offered a wide range of activities and sights spread throughout its diverse landscape, including the exhilarating Daytona 500 and the magnificent Kennedy Space Center. The state of Florida deserves to be explored. However, the COVID-19 epidemic had a substantial negative influence on Sunshine State tourism. Visit Florida, the state's tourism development organization, predicted a 60.5% decrease in visitors to Florida in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period the previous year. While international tourism was badly disrupted, falling by more than 91%, American tourists endured a downturn but were still able to maintain a certain level of influx (Chen, et al., 2020).

Visit Florida released information about the pandemic's effects on the state's tourism industry. The government acknowledged that the reported results were vulnerable to larger-than-normal changes when fresh data became available because of the extraordinary nature of the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on data used for visitor estimates. These projections showed that 12.8 million visitors visited Florida between April and June, 12.55 million of whom were from outside the country (Bureau, 2021). When compared to the second quarter of 2019, this demonstrated a considerable decline of 56.4%. The estimated number of foreign tourists, excluding Canadians, was 235,000, a startling 91.1% decrease from the previous year. Visit Florida did, however, provide a warning that the actual number of international visitors may range from 20,000 to 30,000. According to Donthu and Gustafsson (2020), these estimates were produced using a standard technique that did not account for the unique conditions brought on by the epidemic. The flow of Canadian tourists, the second-largest group after domestic tourists, saw a 99% reduction with just an expected 9,000 visits.

Prior to the new coronavirus pandemic's official debut on March 1st, Florida received 31.3 million visitors in the first quarter of 2020. However, even during that time, there was a 12.3% reduction in visitor numbers compared to the year before, which included both domestic (11.5%) and foreign (20.6%) tourists as well as Canadian tourists (14.4%). Following the lockdown from late March to early April, Florida initiated a phased reopening procedure, although this was temporarily interrupted during the second phase in early June due to a surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths (Shirshat & Luvaas, 2021). Consequently, Florida's economic powerhouse, tourism, experienced a downturn, leading to a significant decline in general revenues, encompassing those from sales and corporate income taxes.

Recent findings from Conrad and Smith (2022), in collaboration with the tourism promotion organization known as the "State of the Sun," which was then the epicenter of the pandemic in the United States, revealed that 32 million tourists visited the state of Florida in the second quarter of that year. This marked a notable increase of 16.3% compared to the prior quarter. According to Visit Florida's statistics, the number of tourists increased to 31.7 million between April 1 and June 30. However, this represented a 2.2% decline from the same period in 2019, before the epidemic. Comparing this to the same period in 2020, which saw a major decline in visits due to closures and travel restrictions, showed a massive 223.4% gain. Visit Florida estimated that 1.1 million visits from foreign visitors occurred during the second quarter of that year, an astounding rise of 854.1% from 2020. However, this still represented a decline of 57.9% compared to the same period in 2019. Domestic visitors accounted for the majority at 96.4%, with Canadian tourists comprising 3.5% and international visitors from other countries making up just 0.05% of the total (Bernet, 2021).

At 35.9% and 64.1%, respectively, the proportion of visitors arriving by plane as opposed to those traveling by car was "comparable" to 2019. Additionally, hotel occupancy increased to 71.1%, a considerable increase from the meager 33.3% in 2020. Compared to the second quarter of 2020, total passenger traffic at 19 Florida airports surged by 607.5%, yet it was still 11.9% less than in 2019 (Hatef et. al., 2020). Orlando International Airport surpassed Miami International Airport as the busiest airport with 5.4 million passengers, an astounding 677.9% increase over 2020. Miami International Airport then came in second with 4.9 million passengers, an astounding 832.7% increase over 2020 (Florida, 2021). In the meantime, according to official data on the pandemic issued on August 16th, Florida hospitals accepted 15,985 COVID-19 patients on August 15th as the state struggled with a rise in cases brought on by the delta form. The number of COVID-19 patients admitted to the ICU increased to 3,349, making up 50.1% of the total. The school year had already started in many counties at the time of this worrying rise in illnesses. The Republican governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, continued to enforce the law against requiring students to wear masks in class (Florida, 2021). Over a year has passed since the initial reports of COVID-19 cases were received in the state of Florida.

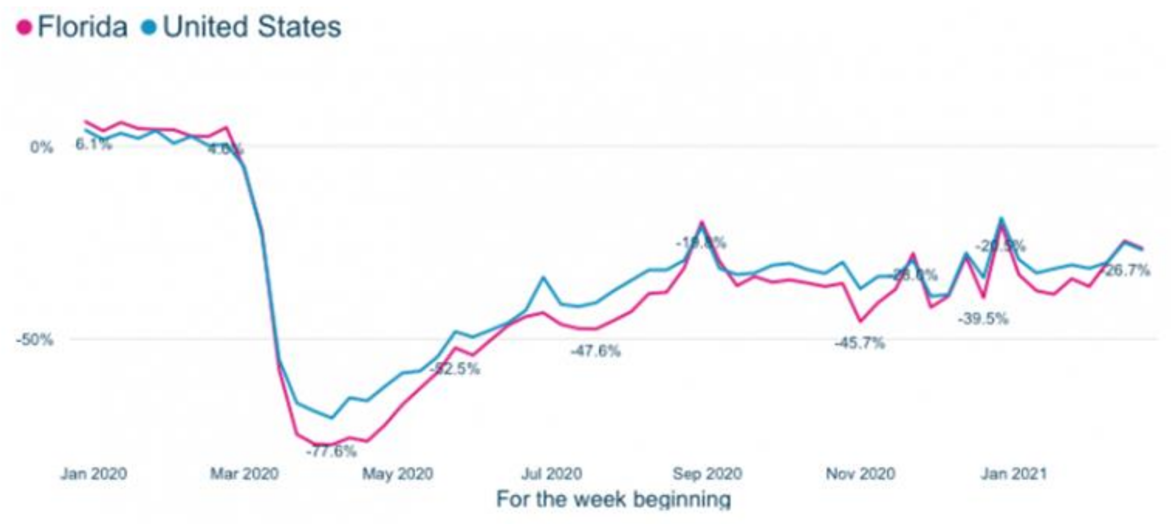
In addition to Florida, the United States, and the international community, the global health crisis has had far-reaching consequences on numerous levels. This analysis will scrutinize the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Florida tourism industry, with a particular emphasis on its significance for individuals organizing an excursion to Disney World. Lew et al. (2021) confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial negative impact on the tourism business. Their findings highlight the almost total stop of travel in 2020, which can be attributed to the tight travel bans, capacity constraints, and social distancing measures put in place to slow the virus's spread. Furthermore, their results probably highlight the pandemic's long-lasting effects on the travel industry, even as things are gradually picking back up. This is consistent with the finding that COVID-19's effects are severe and likely to last, demonstrating the industry's general awareness of the difficulties presented by the ongoing pandemic.

The tourist industry is expected to experience a sustained economic impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, WESH reports. This impact is expected to endure for a considerable period of time, notwithstanding the continuous distribution of immunizations. Based on information from NPR, it is noteworthy to mention that the economy of Florida experienced a significant inflow of more than $90 billion from domestic and international travelers just two years ago. In August 2020, NPR published a report detailing a substantial decline of 91% in the volume of international visitors in comparison to the preceding year. An unprecedented 99 percent decline occurred in the number of journeys taken by Canadian citizens, which had historically been a substantial contributor to Florida's tourism industry (Lew et al., 2021).

The return of tourism has generated considerable interest among various stakeholders in the state of Florida, owing to its substantial impact on the regional economy. Visit Florida has compiled statistics regarding the current state of affairs and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry. In 2020, Florida experienced a substantial decrease of 34% in the number of tourists visiting the state. As previously stated, there was a 34% decrease in visitor arrivals to Florida in 2020 compared to the previous year. The state received a record-low 86.714 million visitors in 2020, the fewest number of annual visits since 2010. A considerable proportion of them were delivered in the late stages of the calendar year. The state of Florida received an estimated total of 20,625,000 visitors in the fourth quarter (Deloitte, 2020). Florida experienced a sustained positive trajectory in its tourism statistics between 2009 and 2019, as evidenced by the annual influx of more than 100 million visitors since 2015 (Ammo, 2021). What is the present condition of affairs in consideration of the aforementioned factors?

The present condition of hotel revenue and demand continues to demonstrate a downward trend. As per the findings of Visit Florida, a decline in hotel demand has been observed in comparison to the preceding year. Hotel demand decreased substantially during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in April, falling by 78% compared to the corresponding period the previous year. As of the 21st of February, hotel demand remains negatively impacted, having decreased by approximately 27% compared to the same period last year. There has been a discernible resurgence in demand when compared to the high period of the pandemic that was documented a year ago. However, it remains below the demand observed during the same period last year.

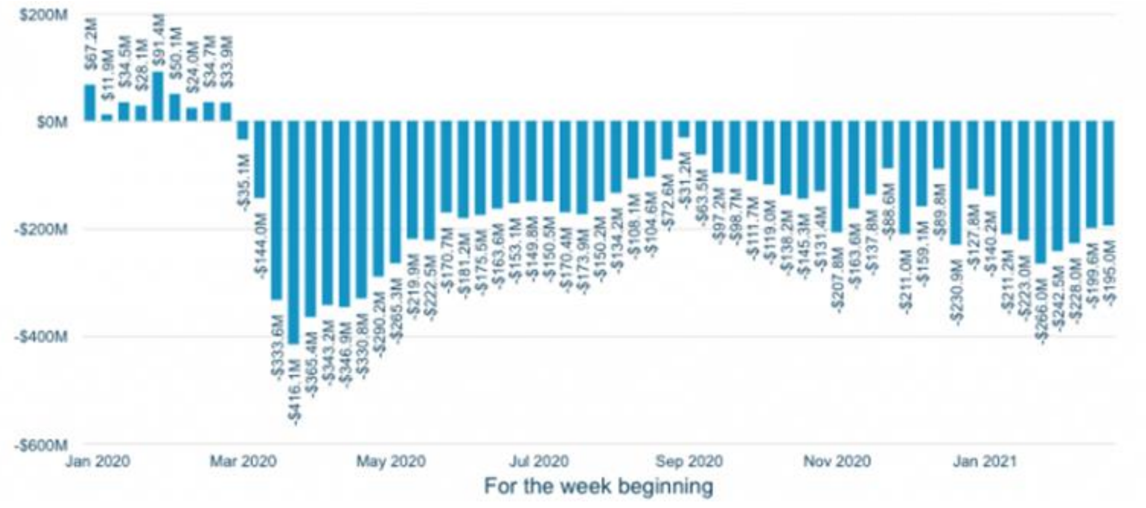
Figure 2: Year-over-year change in hotel demand



Source: Lock (2021).

A reduction in demand leads to an equivalent decline in revenue. A study conducted by Visit Florida revealed that the hotel sector in the state experienced a substantial decrease in revenue from March to May of the preceding year, amounting to a deficit of $416 million when compared to the corresponding period in 2019. The concurrent escalation in income can be attributed to the surge in demand. Nevertheless, according to the most recent weekly data, hotel revenue has declined by $195 million in comparison to the corresponding period of the prior year (Lock, 2021).

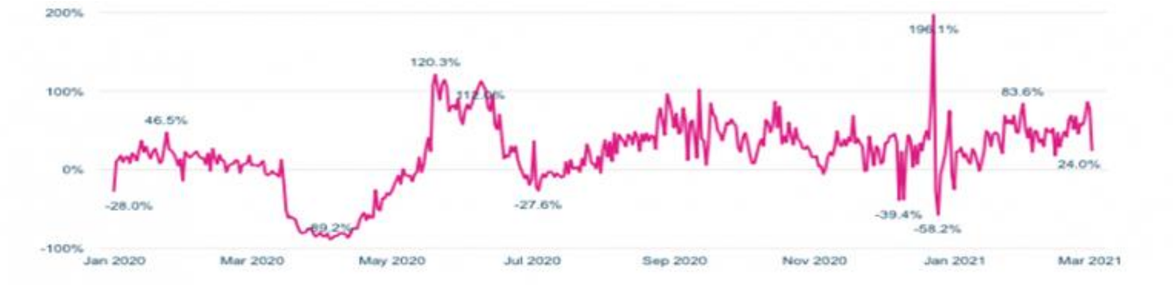
Figure 3: Year-over-year change in hotel revenue



Source: WTTC (2019).

A significant enhancement is observed in a particular metric in comparison to the preceding year. April 2020 saw a substantial 89% decrease in vacation rental reservations in Florida when compared to the corresponding period of the prior year. Despite this, the present circumstance has significantly improved. According to the most recent data, vacation rental reservations have increased by 24% since the corresponding period of the prior year (WTTC, 2019).

Figure 4: Year-over-year change in new vacation rental bookings

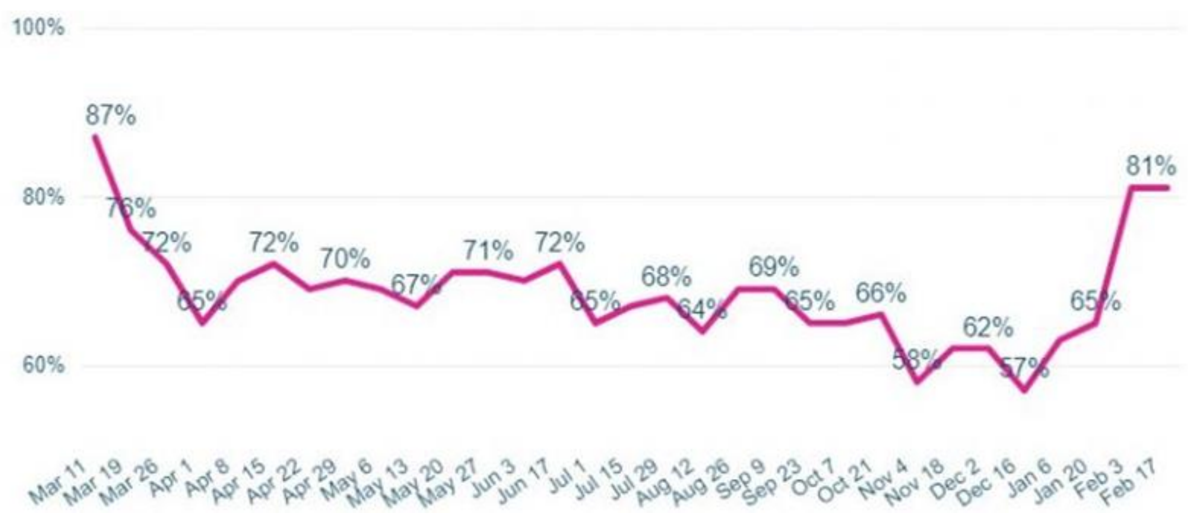


Source: WTTC (2019).

Travel interest collapsed but is starting to return.

It is possible to read the drop in hotel demand as a sign of a broader reduction in interest in travel in general. According to Visit Florida's data, which was derived from a monitoring survey conducted by Longwoods International, a sizable fraction of respondents (61%) indicated in April of the previous year that they intended to engage in travel-related activities during the ensuing six months. The ratio has increased to 81% as a result of recent events.

Figure 5: Respondents planning to travel in next 6 months



Source: The NGS Data Sheet, 2020.

Similar to the rental statistic, this finding inspires optimism about the current state of travel. One interesting statistic from Visit Florida shows that, in comparison to the same period in February 2020, the average daily volume of automobile travel to Florida decreased by 83% in March 2020. The aforementioned figure indicates significant diversity depending on the specific time frame under consideration. The number of automobiles entering the state of Florida fell by about 20% between the average daily intake in February 2020 and the period starting on March 1, 2021, according to the most recent data available. On the other hand, beginning with a different time period that started on February 22, 2021, the number of cars entering Florida rose by roughly 55% compared to the mean daily tally in February 2020. The variation in issue is dependent on the particular time period being examined. Nevertheless, it is apparent that there exists the possibility of a surge in demand (Bureau, 2021).

Diverse degrees of interest are observed among individuals with regard to alternative vacation activities. Visit Florida utilized additional data from a periodic Harris Poll survey regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The results provide insight into the anticipated duration for participants to resume their routine activities following the resolution of the epidemic. A representative sample of approximately 2,000 individuals who were residents of the United States during wave 53 was surveyed (Bureau, 2021). Based on the data gathered from February 26th to the 28th, it was noted that 25% of the respondents indicated their eagerness to immediately partake in dining out activities following the conclusion of the epidemic. Around 17% of the participants indicated that they would be inclined to expeditiously reserve hotel accommodations following the resolution of the epidemic.

Figure 6: Time between pandemic end and doing activities

Source: Bureau, US Census (2021).

Even still, just 12% of respondents said they would travel by plane as soon as the pandemic passed, and only 10% said they would be ready to take a cruise right away. However, a sizable portion of the participants—more precisely, 24% of the respondents—stated that they were willing to postpone flying for at least a year. According to the survey results, 18% of the participants planned to postpone booking their hotel stays for a year or more once the outbreak has passed. A significant segment of the populace has committed to abstaining from flying travel, hotel stays, and outings throughout the post-epidemic phase (Bureau, 2021).

4.2. The case of California

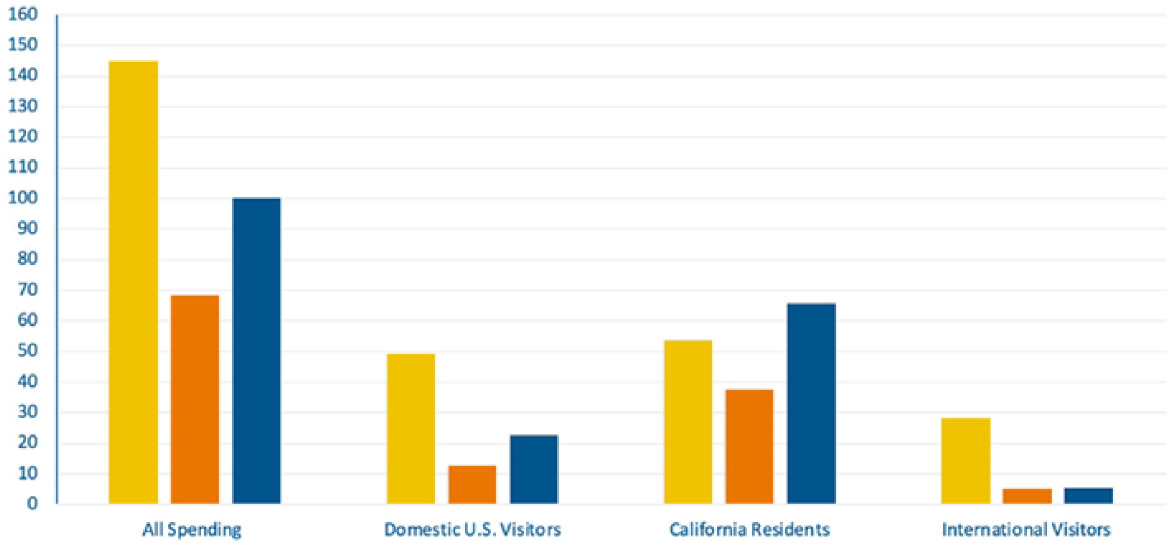
California has always been a popular travel destination due to its distinctive cities, varied scenery, and world-class cultural attractions. But when COVID-19 spread, the state was confronted with enormous difficulties. Strict lockdowns and travel restrictions were imposed in response to the virus's spread in crowded cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco. Not only did the closing of well-known sites like Disneyland and Hollywood Studios cause significant financial losses, but it also had a ripple effect on the tourism industry. There were also major setbacks to the state's sizable entertainment sector, which includes the production of movies and television shows.

Baja California has garnered recognition for its consistent economic growth, driven by the region's manufacturing sectors, tourism for both business and pleasure, and a robust domestic market. But the beginning of the global health crisis brought about unprecedented events in Baja California and around the globe. Unlike past crises, the epidemic has had a dual impact, as adverse shocks have simultaneously affected supply and demand. In instance, the hygienic measures to prevent illness significantly decreased consumption, which is a major driver of economic expansion. The economy was impacted by the significant impact this cut in spending had on citizen mobility in areas like consumption, leisure, business, education, etc. (Hatef et. al., 2020).

Clearly, the whole economy had been affected, particularly the unemployment rate; by April 2020, Baja California had lost more than 22,000 formal jobs, in addition to a rise in the number of unofficial job losses. As a result, it became imperative to apply governmental and private incentives strategically and promptly in order to lessen the situation. Almost all of the state's 482 cities—that is, all of them—collected hotel taxes for the 2017–2018 fiscal year, according to the California State Comptroller. In order to support the state's economy as California began to plan for life after the coronavirus, visitor spending had to rebound. The tourism industry has a track record of rebounding from economic downturns faster than other industries, creating jobs 60% faster than the private sector as a whole. Notably, the tourism sector saw a major drop after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Governor Gray Davis invested an initial $8.3 million in a state-wide marketing push to aid in the industry's comeback. Through these efforts, California businesses received a direct return of $304 on every dollar invested, or $3.2 billion in visitor income. Despite the horrific events and subsequent economic collapse, California was one of only three states to improve its market share in 2001, indicating the tourism industry's resilience and recovery (Lock, 2021).

As per the findings of a recent study commissioned by Visit California and conducted by Dean Runyan Associates, an exhaustive examination of the economic consequences of tourism throughout the state in 2021 was undertaken. The findings presented by Shirshat and Luvaas (2021) demonstrate a notable increase in visitor expenditures during the year 2021, with expenditures rising by 46% compared to the preceding year, totaling $100.2 billion. Additionally, tax revenue generated by visitors for the benefit of state and municipal governments experienced a significant surge of 33% in 2021, amounting to $9.8 billion. Furthermore, the authors report a substantial reduction of 50% in tourism employment when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2020. However, a phased resurgence occurred in 2021, with employment increasing by a moderate 6.4%, resulting in a cumulative count of 927,000 positions.

Figure 7: Visitor spending, 2019-2021 (Billions)



Source: Roy (2020).

Nevertheless, the amount spent by tourists in California in that year fell to 69% of its peak levels observed in 2019, prior to the imposition of closure measures and subsequent restrictions mandated by the government in response to the pandemic. Trinity County, located in the secluded northwest region of the state, was the only one of the 58 counties in California to witness an increase in tourist expenditure beyond its previous peak in 2019 (WTTC,2019). The upward trends that have been observed in 2021 provide evidence of the successful implementation of marketing initiatives by Visit California. After the significant repercussions of the year 2020, there has been a noticeable revival in tourist expenditure. However, it is crucial to recognize that a substantial path remains to be traversed before complete recovery can be achieved. Urban areas continue to face persistent difficulties as a result of the lack of vital international and group commercial sectors.

Historically, a substantial number of visitors to the state's hotels, venues, and restaurants have been drawn to the meeting market in California. However, due to the protracted period of inactivity caused by the pandemic, this sector has encountered obstacles in its efforts to recover. On the other hand, the revenue generated by international visitors, amounting to approximately $28 billion in 2019 and serving as the principal source of exportation for California, experienced a substantial reduction, diminishing to a meager $5.4 billion by 2021 (Roy, 2020). Gursoy et al. (2021) have underlined that San Francisco has seen the most severe impact. Visitor spending has significantly decreased, with an estimated $4.5 billion in 2020. When compared to pre-pandemic levels, this significant decline signifies a nearly two-thirds reduction in tourism expenditures. Despite a slight 21% rise in tourism spending in San Francisco in 2021—which can be ascribed to the progressive relaxation of regulations—the total amount spent by tourists fell short of 50% of what was recorded in 2019. This emphasizes how difficult it has been for San Francisco's tourism industry to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic's effects (Gursoy et al., 2021).

The pace of recovery for the local governments of Los Angeles, Orange County, and other places has been quite slow, coming in below the statewide average of 82%. The tendency of tourists to engage in outdoor activities and explore large areas had a positive impact on California's rural attractions, especially considering the limitations imposed by pandemic-related measures on other forms of recreation. In 2021, there was a notable surge in tourist in several rural areas of California, which expedited the restoration of job prospects, economic vibrancy, and tax collections (Gursoy et al., 2021).

The road ahead

Visit California is actively engaged in efforts to revitalize the state's tourism industry during a critical period in the state's rehabilitation from the COVID-19 pandemic. The detriments encountered due to the pandemic ensue subsequent to a phase of unparalleled progress spanning a decade, culminating in its zenith in 2019. In the current year, visitor expenditures reached a total of $144.9 billion, representing an increase of 3.2% in comparison to the preceding year. Furthermore, the travel and tourism industry witnessed a surge in employment prospects, as the total number of job openings increased by 20,000 to reach 1.2 million. Over the past decade, the employment growth rate in the tourism sector of California has averaged 3.2% per year (Deloitte, 2020). Travel-related tax revenue has risen dramatically over the past ten years, reaching an astounding $12.2 billion in 2019 alone—a 3.4% increase from the year before. This is a pioneering trend. Families in California have benefited from the state's thriving tourism industry, with an average annual savings of $920 per home. Supported by state stimulus funds, Visit California has led creative campaigns to encourage professional meetings and events throughout the state as well as increase travel for business and pleasure to major cities (Deloitte, 2020).

Similar praise for the organization's efforts to position California as a top conference and event destination has been offered by other experts (Batabyal & Das, 2023). Since border operations were just resumed in November 2021, Visit California has taken the initiative to resume marketing initiatives aimed at important foreign markets. By promoting California as their top long-distance destination, these programs hope to take advantage of the state's growing demand. The organization's "All Dreams Welcome" campaign, which highlights the state's dedication to inclusivity by fostering a welcome atmosphere for visitors of varied backgrounds, including varying sexual orientations, gender identities, ethnicities, and religious affiliations, is at the center of these efforts. Visit California is proactively promoting destination stewardship and sustainability through the provision of an assortment of innovative tools and information designed to assist travelers. In addition, webinars and seminars are being offered by the organization to inform travel operators of the most effective procedures in these domains. According to Visit California's earlier this year and Tourism Economics' early economic predictions, travel-related spending is predicted to reach $144.6 billion in 2023. This number is approximately equal to the numbers reported in 2019. If this goal is accomplished, the tourism industry will have rebounded to its previous levels in 2019, one year ahead of the original projection made the previous year. It is projected that at the end of 2024, the total amount spent will be $155.9 billion (Bureau, 2021).

4.3 The case of Virginia

Virginia, known for its historical landmarks, natural beauty, and vibrant arts scene, had been a popular destination for history enthusiasts and nature lovers alike. As of 2021, there were an estimated 8,693,149 people living in the Commonwealth of Virginia, which lies on the east coast of the United States and covered an area of 110,787 square kilometers (Bureau, US Census, 2021). The gorgeous Blue Ridge Mountains and the enormous Chesapeake Bay, which served as important habitats for much of Virginia's flora and animals, defined the state's geography. The most populated city in the Commonwealth was Virginia Beach, while Fairfax County was the most populous governmental subdivision. Richmond served as the capital of the Commonwealth. These elements helped Virginia stand out among other US states as a popular travel destination (National Geographic Society, 2019).

In a groundbreaking approach, the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) strategically leveraged the state's renowned global brand as a premier tourism destination to attract travelers to Virginia, showcasing its diverse assets and attractions. The influx of tourism spending boosted the state's economy and stimulated community development and job creation efforts across Virginia, making a substantial contribution to the state's overall economic prosperity (Goenaga et al., 2021). Although Virginia has a wealth of interesting cities, charming towns, and scenic locations that have historically drawn tourists, the COVID-19 outbreak interrupted many travelers' plans for last-minute weekend escapes (Dadayan, 2023). This unplanned travel stop highlights the need for creative approaches to boost tourism and pique tourists' interest in the area's distinctive attractions.

Hotels and other businesses with contracts nevertheless faced difficulties, even though industry experts predicted a rather solid summer season for the tourism-related sector (Ponton, 2021). Following the most recent executive order from the Governor of Justice, all capacity restrictions, social distance limitations, and coverage orders in West Virginia were repealed as of June 20, 2021. The authority to enforce face mask policies remained with private enterprises and school systems, even though masks were still necessary where required by federal law (West Virginia, 2021). The employment landscape of the tourism industry in Virginia experienced a significant upswing in 2022, directly supporting 210,721 jobs. Although this number signifies a significant increase of more than 25,000 employment opportunities in comparison to the previous year, it remains below the pre-pandemic year of 2019 by more than 30,000 employment opportunities (Rephann, 2020).

There was a rise in the daily expenditure of travelers in Virginia, which amounted to $83 million in 2021, from $69 million. The increase in tourist arrivals to Virginia led to a substantial direct contribution of nearly $2.2 billion in state and local tax revenues, representing a significant expansion of 19.1% in comparison to the $1.8 billion generated in the previous year. There was a significant increase of 10% in the overall count of overnight visitors to Virginia, which amounted to 42.2 million in comparison to the previous year's total of 38.3 million (West Virginia, 2021). As stated by Governor Glenn Youngkin, the economy of Virginia is significantly influenced by travel and tourism. Tourism sector revitalization has been designated as a primary objective in our effort to achieve economic recovery. Positive results have resulted from our concentrated efforts to promote employment opportunities and encourage the expansion of businesses within the Commonwealth.

Significant advancements have been made in the Commonwealth's recovery from the pandemic; however, there are geographical discrepancies and variations in the extent of this recovery within the transport sectors. In 2020, the travel industry was profoundly impacted negatively by the initial phases of the pandemic. In 2021, however, domestic leisure travel experienced a significant resurgence as individuals sought out opportunities for outdoor activities and destinations within driving distance. Virginia possesses a notable geographical advantage due to its strategic location, which grants nearly half of the United States' population the ability to reach the state within a single day's travel. Due to the increase in road journeys, a number of municipalities in Virginia reaped the benefits of heightened travel (Houston, 2023). Leisure and food & beverage are the principal sectors propelling tourism in Virginia, experiencing a significant surge of 10% in comparison to the levels observed in 2019. Although the rehabilitation of the transportation industry, especially air travel, has been relatively lethargic, 2022 marked its year of greatest expansion. This expansion has been advantageous for Commonwealth regions that are more dependent on air travel (Houston, 2023).

Secretary of Commerce and Trade Caren Merrick expressed her excitement about the quick rise in tourism spending in Virginia, which has already topped levels seen before the pandemic. The results are consistent with studies by Davis and Zuniga (2023), who noted that Virginia's tourism industry has shown resilient, as seen by its quick recovery and rising expenditure. Forecasts for 2023 point to a longer recovery period and an additional increase in travel activity. The American Recovery and Reconstruction Act's additional marketing funding infusion has been a major factor in increasing tourism expenditure in Virginia and its localities. Virginia Tourism was able to significantly improve its reach to over 15 million households in 2022 by wisely utilizing recovery grant funding to enhance advertising activities in new markets. Virginia Tourism Corporation's President and CEO, Rita McClenny, asserts that the state is augmenting its standing as a preeminent vacation spot through the expansion of its marketing efforts to entice a greater influx of visitors to areas that were previously unexplored. The aforementioned awareness generates an increase in bookings and arrivals, which in turn causes a rise in visitor expenditures throughout the entire state.

Economic implications and recovery efforts

The economic implications of the pandemic on the tourism industry were profound in Florida, California, and Virginia. The loss of tourism revenue had a ripple effect on related sectors, including transportation, hospitality, retail, and entertainment. Small businesses faced closures, and many workers in the tourism industry were left unemployed or underemployed. Governments at the state and local levels implemented various strategies to support recovery, including financial assistance programs, marketing campaigns to attract domestic tourists, and collaborations with industry stakeholders. The gradual easing of restrictions and the vaccination efforts provided a glimmer of hope for the revival of the tourism sector (WTTC, 2019). The travel and tourism sector of the United States contributed approximately $1.9 trillion to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019. However, as indicated by a study carried out by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the travel and tourism industry's contribution to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased by 41% in 2020. The business may ascribe this decline to the catastrophic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. With its status as the largest economy in the travel and tourism industry worldwide, the United States exerts a substantial impact on the global recovery of this sector (Ponton, 2021).

The research findings indicate that the Travel & Tourism industry played a substantial role in generating employment opportunities in the United States in 2019. This contribution amounted to more than 16.5 million jobs, which accounted for approximately 10.5% of the total employment in the country during that year. The Travel & Tourism sector witnessed a substantial decline of 33.2% in employment in the United States in 2020, amounting to a mere 11.1 million positions, or approximately 7.5% of the nation's total labour force. Worldwide, the industry experienced a substantial contraction of 62 million employment opportunities in 2020, signifying a decline of 18.5% (Ponton, 2021). Gloria Guevara, President and CEO of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), asserts that the travel and tourism sector significantly contributes to economic growth and employment opportunities in the United States. Many stakeholders, including tour operators, business proprietors, and families whose economic well-being is reliant on a thriving industry, have been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is expected that the reinstatement of international travel will generate an increased quantity of employment opportunities and contribute to the rejuvenation of the country's economy. The potential resurgence of international travel and mobility during the summer of this year may result in a substantial increase in the sector's contribution to the global Travel & Tourism GDP in 2021, according to the findings of our study (Houston, 2023).

Global and domestic travel exerts a substantial impact on the revitalization of the United States economy. Nationwide, the travel and tourism sector has been significantly impacted negatively by increased unemployment and decreased passenger spending, with the smallest and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up 80% of the sector, being hit particularly hard. Furthermore, considering its reputation as one of the most diverse sectors on a global scale, it exerted a significant impact on underrepresented groups, young people, and women (Houston, 2023). It is anticipated that the resurgence of private sector travel and tourism enterprises in the United States will increase industry-wide profits, constituting a vital component of the total financial support that propels public programs and campaigns.

The amount spent on domestic travel within the nation experienced a relatively minor change, decreasing by 37.1%. On the contrary, the level of spending by international tourists experienced a significant decline of 76.7 percent in 2020. As a consequence of this contraction, the amount decreased from $181.2 billion in 2019 to a meager $42.2 billion in 2020 (Fernandes, 2020). The travel and tourism sector, domestically and internationally, is currently demonstrating a favorable trend towards recuperation, which can be primarily ascribed to the endeavors initiated by the Biden administration. The expeditious execution of vaccination campaigns, in conjunction with the $14 billion allocation to airlines as specified in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, provides aviation sector businesses with the opportunity to recoup financial setbacks and reinstate employment opportunities throughout the industry (Houston, 2023).

The WTTC commends the expeditious measures implemented by the Biden administration to address the Covid-19 pandemic. These measures include a comprehensive vaccination campaign, a significant focus on mask utilization as a means to prevent transmission, and a crucial economic infusion into the travel and tourism sector. Gloria Guevara, President & CEO of WTTC, asserts that the resumption of international travel and the revitalization of the U.S. economy through the travel industry are inextricably linked to these initiatives. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the recommencement of international travel by June of this year will stimulate economic expansion and reinstate employment opportunities in the United States.

Furthermore, in order to revitalize the sector, the international tourism organization asserts that productive collaboration between the public and private sectors is vital. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) is optimistic that the Biden administration will sustain a strong collaboration with the private sector in its efforts to recommence global travel, following a recent conference with business leaders. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) concurs with the recent statements issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that acknowledge the effectiveness of vaccines in ensuring that travelers have safe transportation. For the purpose of facilitating the safe and efficient resumption of travel, WTTC expects the CDC to endorse a standardized methodology. The reestablishment of vaccine distribution in the United States has rekindled confidence in international travel. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in order to restore numerous employment opportunities and safely revitalize the industry, it is imperative to implement several measures. These include universally implementing improved health and hygiene protocols, mandating the use of face masks, and establishing a comprehensive testing system for individuals lacking vaccinations. Gloria Guevara, Chief Executive Officer: The path forward entails the secure resumption of operations in the travel and tourism sector both domestically in the United States and internationally. The successful resurgence of the sector could be significantly aided by the establishment of a standardized and precise framework concerning comprehensive pre-departure screening for unvaccinated individuals, enhanced health and safety protocols, and mandatory mask usage.

5. Conclusions

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is escalating daily, and the World Health Organization has predicted that the worldwide economy is currently undergoing a dreadful period since the end of World War II. The apprehension surrounding the virus epidemic not only discourages individuals from approaching travel institutions but also keeps them at home. Consequently, the travel industry is confined to a precarious situation. Therefore, avoiding direct contact, observing social restrictions, and adhering to precautionary measures are the most effective ways to avoid contracting a virus disease; therefore, prevention is preferable to treatment.

An examination of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the number of visitors to the United States indicates that the tourism sector has been badly hit by the worldwide health catastrophe. The current state of affairs necessitates a reassessment and reorganization of the economy away from tourism as its principal driver, but less unexpectedly than officers had anticipated. Nevertheless, there is hope that the tourism sector can overcome its obstacles and grow stronger than it has in the past. Every setback or challenge in the tourism sector is inevitably followed by a phase of recuperation and then stability.

Reestablishing the confidence of passengers and business owners is the most difficult duty during the recovery period, as the vaccine does not provide a 100 percent guarantee against contracting the infection. Thorough examination of the aforementioned movements is imperative in an effort to substantially restore the development opportunities within the tourism sector. Furthermore, it is imperative that all individuals involved, including commuters, residents, workers, business owners, and tour operators, adhere to their designated duties by consistently donning a disguise and maintaining a social distance (Rezapouraghdam & Karatepe, 2020). The burgeoning corpus of knowledge regarding the impact of the global health crisis on the tourism industry will eventually be significant. Due to the ongoing global devastation caused by the virus, further investigation is necessary to ascertain the full extent of the COVID-19 crisis's reach and to determine whether the vaccine will assist in restoring tourists' confidence in the tourism industry's complete resumption. Travel and tourism exert a substantial influence on the economy of the United States, capable of sustaining employment across the nation. In an era of globalization, travel and tourism policy encompasses a vast array of business activities, including those that are not related to the travel and tourism sector.

The President has stated that the expansion of the travel and tourism sector will be the administration's main goal. With this approach in mind, the National Travel and Tourism Strategy will be implemented, and detailed projects that verify the feasibility of the guidelines, procedures, and suggestions presented in this book will be developed right away. The Tourism Policy Council will classify the implementation of this National Strategy in line with Executive Order 13597 and the enhancement of progress measures to guarantee the full focus of agency leadership. Organizations shall coordinate their efforts, work with corporate industry partners, and help state, local, indigenous, and territorial authorities in their efforts to grow in the travel and tourism sector by actively participating at the highest levels of the Administration. These steps will help the US economy grow and provide more jobs and opportunities for employment.

As the states of Florida, California, and Virginia navigated the recovery phase, the future of their tourism industries remained uncertain. The lessons learned from the pandemic necessitated a reevaluation of strategies and the adoption of new approaches. In addition, the states of California, Florida, and Virginia were comparatively less affected in the tourism industry during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their geographical diversity and abundance of outdoor activities available in these states, including beaches, national parks, hiking trails, and water sports, allowed visitors to retain their social distance and engage in leisure activities during the epidemic (Newsome, 2020).

Furthermore, these states had domestic tourism as a result of safety constraints and limitations on foreign travel, which benefited them and these states' well-established infrastructure for tourism, which includes hotels, resorts, amusement parks, and entertainment venues, allowed them to adapt and put safety measures in place to draw tourists. Moreover, state governments in California, Florida, and Virginia gave money and other forms of assistance to the tourism sector, assisting companies to withstand the effects of the pandemic (Fernandes, 2020). To make tourists more resilient in the event of future crises, policymakers and business players could gain insight from understanding the elements that make a state resilient. Through the application of lessons learned from the least affected states, the tourism sector may recover with greater strength and resilience. Furthermore, embracing digital technologies, boosting domestic and local travel, investing in sustainable practices, and broadening the tourism services are some of the future directions. The tourism industry needed cooperation from government organizations, travel boards, companies, and local communities in order to be rebuilt and strengthened.

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