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EDITORIAL

We feel honoured and privileged to present the Bi-Annual Peer Reviewed Refereed Journal, ISSN (Online): 2583-5203, Volume 4, No. 01, June, 2025 among our esteemed readers and academic fraternity.

This Journal is the outcome of the contributions of insightful research-oriented papers/articles by various eminent academicians, and research scholars in a highly organized and lucid manner with a clear and detailed analysis related to the emerging areas in the fields of Social Sciences and Allied Areas.

The views expressed in the research-oriented papers/articles solely belong to the paper contributor(s). Neither the Publisher nor the Editor(s) in any way can be held responsible for any comments, views and opinions expressed by **paper contributors**. While editing, we put in a reasonable effort to ensure that no infringement of any intellectual property right is tolerated.

We also express our sincere thanks and gratitude to all the contributors to research papers/articles who have taken pain in preparing manuscripts, incorporating reviewer(s) valuable suggestions and cooperating with us in every possible way.

We also express our heartfelt gratitude to all the esteemed members of the Editorial Board, Esteemed Reviewer(s) who despite their busy schedules have given their valuable time, suggestions and comments to enrich the quality of the contributory research paper(s) in bringing to light this June issue.

Last, but not least, we revere the patronage and moral support extended by our parents and family members whose constant encouragement and cooperation made it possible for us to complete on time.

We would highly appreciate and look forward to your valuable suggestions, comments and feedback at editorbr2022@gmail.com

June, 2025
West Bengal, India

PEMA LAMA
Editor-in-Chief

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysing the Contributions of Indian Railways in Encouraging Cultural, Heritage and Pilgrimage Tourism in India

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ABSTRACT

India is a land of diverse culture and heritage. This country has one of the largest networks of railways connecting various parts of the subcontinent. Indian Railways is a pioneer player in promoting tourism throughout the country. The Ministry of Railways oversees the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, or IRCTC, as a Navratna enterprise. India is presently putting more efforts into promoting itself as a top travel destination for pilgrims, history aficionados, and cultural tourists (both local and foreign) who want to experience the country's rich cultural diversity at an affordable cost. Indian Railways started investing in these specialised tourist trains from the year 1982 when the Palace on Wheels first rolled the tracks, taking the tourists on a heritage tour along with premium Indian hospitality.

The primary goal of this research is to showcase the growth and establishment of the cultural and pilgrimage tourism sector with special emphasis on the role of Indian Railways. Now with the HRIDAY, PRASAD and Bharat Darshan Schemes, culture, heritage and pilgrimage tourism are booming. Another aim of this research is to identify the potential of railways in the tourism market and to analyse how the Indian Railways is attracting the specialised tourists who want to enjoy and learn about the Indian history and culture, to get the taste of the world-class Indian hospitality on board. This study will play an important role in making the world aware of the works undertaken by the Indian Government and Indian Railways to encourage travel.

1 INTRODUCTION

With 172 years of operation under one administration, Indian Railways has a rich legacy and is presently one of the world's biggest railway networks. There are over 63,000 kilometres of railway track that connect all parts of the nation, including the Island of Rameswaram that crosses the Bay of Bengal and the Pir Pranjali Range, which is currently under development.

As was already said, Indian Railways is currently the industry leader in the country's tourism industry. Indian Railways has been linking the nation's citizens since 1853, offering services to both the elite and the common man. It also forms a major role in the Trans-Asian Railway Connectivity connecting India with Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, etc. Travelling by rail through India gives an intriguing experience that transports travellers through time and place, culture,

and history. It also provides a beautiful sight of unity amid variety and is enveloped in an alluring atmosphere that calms the spirit and stirs the heart, encouraging travel to the nation.

The oldest steam-driven rail Engine Fairy Queen, is still in operation, which is one of the major matters of discussion among foreign tourists. No one offers such a magical and memorable experience as the Indian Railways. With almost 7,000 stations and 64,000 km of track, it is considered as the second-largest railway network in the world. Approximately 12,000 trains go through it every day. The easy-to-use, well-connected itineraries provide travellers with a hassle-free journey to some of the world's most fascinating locations. Whether it comes to moving people or products, Indian Railways is the backbone of the country. As the primary means of transportation for a wide variety of visitors from both domestic and foreign markets, they make a significant contribution to the tourism industry.

Luxury trains of India are one of the best sources for international tourists to witness the culture and heritage and experience the world-class Indian hospitality. With the introduction of various schemes like Dekho Apna Desh, PRASAD, HRIDAY, etc., special trains (Bharat Gaurav Tourist Trains) have been introduced by IRCTC and the Government of India for tourists (both domestic and international) to boost cultural, heritage and pilgrimage tourism. Various circuits have also been developed to promote pilgrimage tourism. The Ministry of Railways, Government of India, governs the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), a public sector organisation which is in charge of ticketing, catering and tourism-related services. In order to enhance and professionalise these services, it began operations in 1999. IRCTC is divided into several business divisions, such as State Teertha, Internet Ticketing, Rail Neer and Catering.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While studying for the topic, we came across several research articles and journals. Some are mentioned below:

Sakshi, Y. (2018) mentions that luxurious trains

form a tourism product in India from a historical & cultural perspective and are a major motivation for travel. Giovanni, P. (2022) says that the touristic railway can revitalise the neighbourhood, which will boost the local economy. Ravikumar, L. and Lenka, S. K. (2016) mention that IRCTC is trying to provide their clients with exceptional service quality to promote tourism. S. Kanimozhi and Sherlin, P.D. (2016) state that in India, the railways are a key factor in promoting travel.

Shinde, K. A. (2022) says that the government has launched a comprehensive, practical, dependable tour package on the Buddhist circuit as a result of the influx of numerous foreign tourists. With the introduction of the Mahaparinirvan Express, a unique luxury train owned and run by IRCTC, which is air-conditioned. Ha., Inhyuck Steve; G. and Sandra S. (2011) mention that railways have helped to improve the region's distinctiveness, expand its tourism offers, and boost its tourism sector. Verma, N. (2015) in her article says that India has experienced a remarkable increase in train tourism. Kumar, P. (2017) has mentioned that Indian Railway offers many train tours the tourists for the advancement and growth of tourism.

Singh, S. and Khan, M. A. (2012) mentions that the Company (IRCTC) is adding a great degree of professionalism to the operations and has created a big impact on its passenger-services focused business lines, such as the establishment of Food Plazas on railway premises, Railneer, Rail Tour Packages and Internet Ticketing. Karthilingam, K. P. and Kannan, R. (2020) say that a study reveals that the PRASAD Scheme activities are a commendable and alluring way to regularly and piously visit pilgrimage sites. Batabyal, D. (2010) in his article mentions that the growing number of visitors and reliance on tourism is a significant business that creates jobs.

3 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

Indian Railways is a pioneering player in the tourism sector, which has a great importance in promoting cultural, heritage and pilgrimage tourism. The aims of the research are as follows:

- To recognise the importance of Indian Railways in

the Indian tourism industry

- To evaluate the role of Indian Railways for the development of the cultural, heritage and pilgrimage tourism.
- To determine the potential of railways in the tourism market.
- To measure the capacity of Indian Railways in attracting rail tourists.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this article is secondary data, as it is based on observation and interpretation of the available data. The data used in this study were collected from various government websites and journal articles. The Google Scholar search engine is used to search for relevant literature.

Keywords mentioned in the search engine are Cultural Tourism or Heritage Tourism or Pilgrimage Tourism, IRCTC or Bharat Darshan and Palace on Wheels. The time frame for the articles is selected

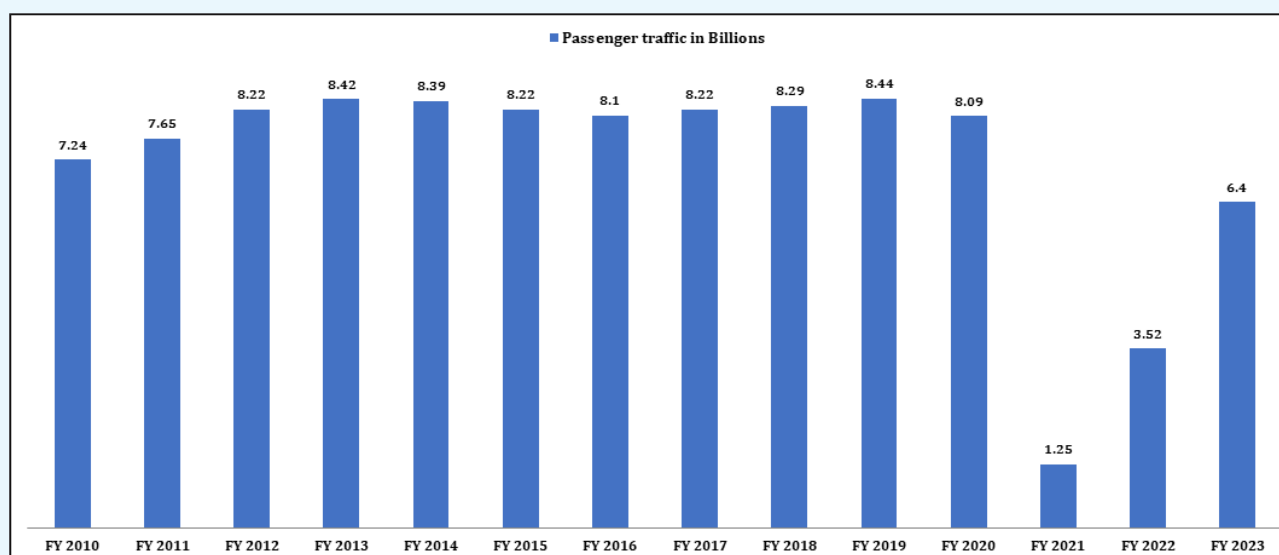
between 2010-2023, and the articles are sorted by relevance. While considering the final selection after sorting by duplication, the authors have come up with 25 literature reviews suitable for the present study.

5 IMPORTANCE OF INDIAN RAILWAYS IN TOURISM

With almost 7,000 stations and 64,000 km of track, the Indian Railways is considered as the second-largest railway network in the world. It operates 12,000 trains daily. With the chance to experience the renowned Indian hospitality, the easy-to-access routes provide travellers with a hassle-free journey to some of the most fascinating locations on earth.

Though in the financial year of 2022-2023, the number of passengers dropped to 3.52 billion due to the aftereffects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Indian railways still played a vital role in connecting every corner of the nation. In the financial year of 2023-24, the passenger traffic increased to 6.4 billion, which is a sharp increase, showing the bounce back of the industry.

Graph 1
NUMBER OF PASSENGER TRAFFIC
(2010 TO 2023)



Source: Statista, 2025

In India, railways play a crucial role in the advancement of the nation's socio-economic conditions. The IRCTC is a section of the Indian Railways which takes care of the tourism, catering, and internet ticketing for the railways. Indian Railways promotes tourism by providing both local and international travellers with a variety of promotional programs, tour packages, opulent trains and special circuit trains. With the accessibility of high-quality transportation, hygienic meals, cosy accommodation, visitors' facilities, guide service, entertainment, and retail alternatives, all contribute to the tourism industry.

The technological advancements in the railways and special schemes developed by the Government of India, like Dekho Apna Desh, PRASAD, and HRIDAY, along with IRCTC, have led to a major boost in the tourism sector. The tourists mainly seek convenience, comfort, affordability, and safe travel options, which the trains provide with the help of recent development.

The modern trains like Vande Bharat and Tejas provide space, speed and efficiency that distinguish them from coaches and aeroplanes. These trains are able to transport many passengers in one single trip while providing hygienic food onboard. Though the choice of the tour depends on several factors like status, income and costs. Rail tours in India are one of the best ways to explore the country. The extensive railway network that is spread across the country enables tourists to explore the diverse culture and enjoy the world-renowned Indian hospitality while getting an overview of each state.

To further promote tourism, Indian Railways has collaborated with the State Tourism Development Corporation and some private players like IRCTC (a subsidiary of Indian Railways) to introduce several rail tour circuits, along with catering to both domestic and international tourists.

6

DUTY OF INDIAN RAILWAYS IN PROMOTING CULTURAL, HERITAGE AND PILGRIMAGE TOURISM

Indian Railways is a pioneering player in the tourism industry. With the introduction of special schemes like

Dekho Apna Desh and Bharat Darshan, it has been investing heavily in the rail tourism sector along with its subsidiary IRCTC. The primary focus of the railways is to promote India's diverse culture, heritage and to take the tourists on a spiritual and holy tour across various pilgrimage destinations. Various new circuits are being introduced every day to promote cultural, heritage and pilgrimage tourism, which caters to both domestic and international tourists. The tour packages provided by IRCTC are extremely economical as they cater to all classes of society. There are various special tourist trains which cater to the needs of tourists. Some of them are as follows:

Luxury Trains

The Palace on Wheels has been operating since 1982 by the Indian Railways with the purpose of not only promoting heritage tourism throughout Rajasthan but also providing world-class facilities and Indian hospitality to the tourists. Since then, more luxurious trains got added to the list like the Maharajas Express, Deccan Odyssey, Royal Rajasthan on Wheels and the Golden Chariot.

These trains are centrally air-conditioned and are independent to embark on a weeklong journey. These trains are not only decorated in the most traditional form representing the culture of the country but also are equipped with the most modern amenities like different types of saloons, multi-cuisine restaurants, gym, lounges, spa, bar, conference room, WIFI, laundry, money changer and many more. These trains operate with 18 different itineraries across various tourist destinations, showcasing the heritage of the country. The packages cover transportation, accommodation, sightseeing, food and other requirements with individual attention.

Semi-luxury Trains

In order to bridge the gap between budget and luxury tourist trains, semi-luxury tourist trains were introduced in the year 2015 and 2016 to satisfy the demand of high-end Indian and foreign travellers. To meet the needs of the tourists, IRCTC few circuits during the 2016-17 fiscal year.

- Udaipur - City of Lakes, Including Mt. Abu, Udaipur, Chittorgarh, and Ajmer.

- Tiger Trail: Including Kanha, Bandhavgarh National Park and Bhedaghat.
- Tiger Express, which serves Sawai Madhupur, Chittorgarh and Udaipur through City of Lakes-Udaipur.

Buddhist Circuit Train

One unique train is the Mahaparinirvan Express or the Buddhist Circuit Special train that caters to tourists who want to explore the path taken by Lord Buddha. The journey starts from New Delhi and covers Nalanda, Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar, Varanasi, Lumbini, Rajgir, Sarnath, Sravasti and Agra. These trains consist of air-conditioned coaches along with other modern facilities.

Bharat Gaurav Tourist Trains

These are special, distinctive theme-based Tourist Circuit trains as part of the Bharat Gaurav Trains (BGT) Policy in 2021. The main aim of these trains is to showcase the glorious Indian culture and provide the tourists with the best possible hospitality. The said policy mandates that the State tourism development agencies, governments, or any other potential service provider may operate tourist circuit trains based on themes covering whichever locations they choose. The provider of services provides comprehensive packages including accommodation, rail transportation, meals, local transportation, tourist attractions and many more.

Bharat Darshan Tourist Trains

These are a series of special trains that enable common men to embark on a journey to visit various destinations with historical, cultural and religious importance at affordable prices. The packages include accommodation, transfers, meals, sightseeing and rail travel at affordable rates. The trains keep operating throughout the year on different itineraries.

Aastha Circuit Trains

These trains mainly cover the pilgrimage destination of the country. It also provides economical

packages to the common man so that they can avail the services. These packages include rail travel, meals, accommodation, insurance, and sightseeing.

State Special Tourist Trains

These trains are operated by IRCTC on behalf of the State Government of a few states like Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, against the payment of all Tariff Rates on the circuits suggested by the local government. These trains cover several pilgrimage destinations like Vaishno Devi, Shirdi, Rameswaram, Tirupati, Somnath, Dwarka and many more.

Steam Trains

The Fairy Queen, built in 1855, is the oldest operating steam train in India. It rolled out on 1st February 1997 from Delhi to Alwar. Its locomotive is one of the oldest steam locomotives in the world. This train operates on every second Saturday from Delhi Cantonment to Rewari and back from October to March every year.

Indrail Pass

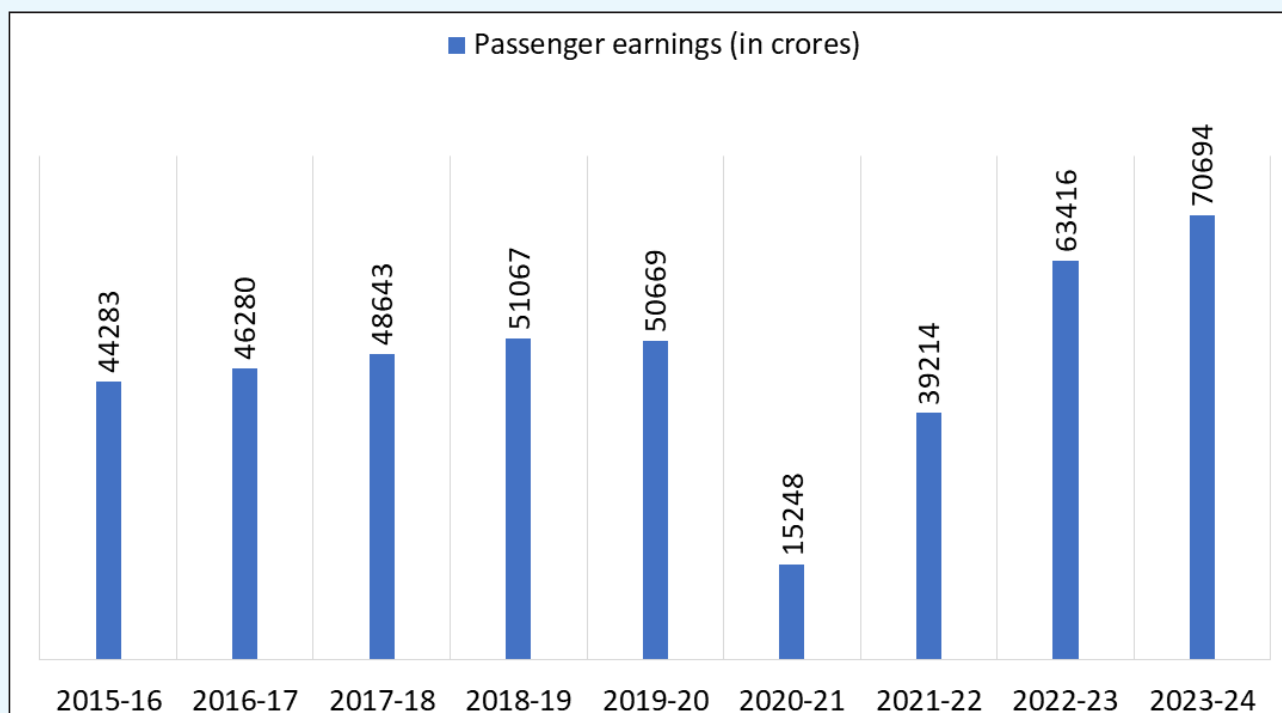
To explore India's culture, Indrail passes provide excellent value for money for foreign visitors as they provide unrestricted travel through the Indian Railways system within its period of validity.

7 POTENTIAL OF INDIAN RAILWAYS IN THE TOURISM MARKET

The Indian Railways are a major player in the tourism market. With the development of new schemes, Indian Railways is soaring to new heights despite being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of earning a good amount of revenue through passengers as well as freight.

In the graph shown below, we can see a substantial growth in the revenue earned by the Indian Railways through the flow of passengers for the past seven years.

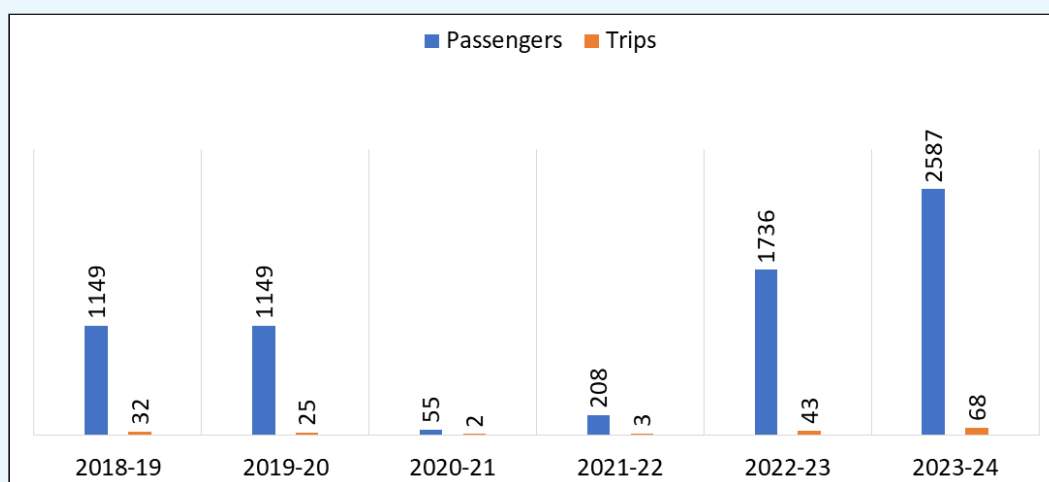
Graph 2
AMOUNT OF REVENUE EARNED BY INDIAN RAILWAYS FROM PASSENGERS (2015 - 2023)



Source: Indian Railways Statistical Summary

In the following graph, we can see that there is an average 20 per cent rise in the amount of revenue earned by the Indian Railways through the flow of passengers till the year 2019-2020. In the year of 2020-2021, we can see a 70 per cent decrease in the revenue earned by the railways due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The revenue earned in the year 2021-2022 has seen a 62 per cent growth in revenue earned in despite being in the middle of the pandemic. The revenue earned in 2022-23 is 39 per cent more than 2021-22 and 10 per cent more than 2023-24, showcasing that the earnings of the Indian railways are increasing at a rapid rate.

Graph 3
NUMBER OF PASSENGERS OPTING FOR LUXURY AND DELUXE TRAINS AND THE NUMBER OF TRIPS CONDUCTED BY THE TRAIN (2018 - 2023)



Source: Indian Railways Annual Reports

In the above graph, we can see that there is an increase in the quantity of passengers travelling by the luxury trains of India (Palace on Wheels, Maharaja Express, Deccan Odyssey and Golden Chariot) and Deluxe Trains of India (Garvi Gujarat, Ramayana Special, Northeast Circuit and many more). In the year 2020-2021, we can see a 95 per cent decrease in the

number of passengers travelling by luxury trains. In the year 2021-2022, there has been a 73 per cent growth in the number of passengers travelling by luxury trains despite being in the middle of the pandemic. In the years 2022-23 and 2023-24, we can see a sharp rise in the number of passengers travelling by luxury trains (88 per cent and 49 per cent respectively).

Graph 4
NUMBER OF PASSENGERS OPTING FOR BHARAT DARSHAN AND BHARAT GAURAV SPECIAL TOURIST TRAINS AND NUMBER OF TRIPS CONDUCTED BY THE TRAIN (2018 TO 2023)

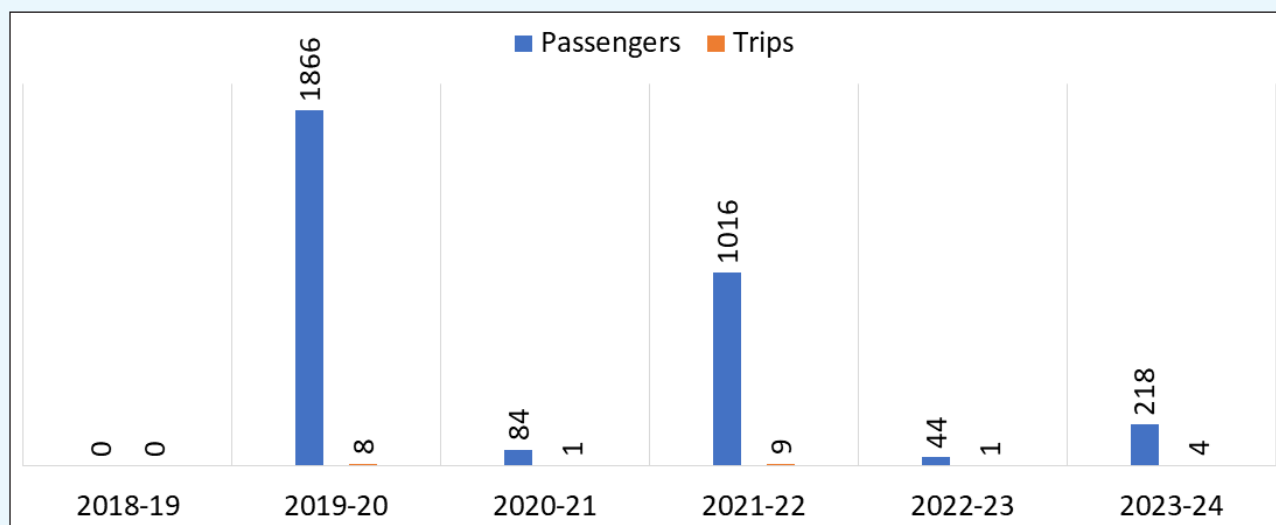


Source: Indian Railways Annual Reports

In the above graph, it can be seen that there is an increase in the number of passengers travelling by Bharat Darshan Tourist Trains. In the year of 2020-2021, we can see a 72 per cent decrease in the number of passengers travelling by train. In the year 2021-2022, there has been a 62 per cent growth in the number of passengers travelling by the Bharat Darshan and Bharat

Gaurav Tourist trains despite being in the middle of the pandemic. The year 2022-23 has marked an 87 per cent decline due to unknown reasons, but it again got up to the normal levels in the following year 2023-24, where we can see a sharp increase of 88 per cent from the previous year.

Graph 5
NUMBER OF PASSENGERS OPTING FOR BUDDHIST CIRCUIT TOURIST TRAINS AND THE NUMBER OF TRIPS CONDUCTED BY THE TRAIN (2018 TO 2023)



Source: Indian Railways Annual Reports

The above graph shows that there is an increase in the number of passengers travelling by Buddhist Circuit tourist trains. In the year of 2020-2021, there was a 96 per cent decrease in the number of passengers travelling by train. The year 2021-2022 has seen a 91 per cent growth in the number of passengers travelling by the

Buddhist Circuit tourist train in despite being in the middle of the pandemic. The Buddhist Circuit tourist train has seen a rapid decline of 96 per cent in the year 2022-23 due to an increase in the popularity of Bharat Gaurav Trains, but there is a growth of 79 per cent in the year 2023-24.

Graph 6
NUMBER OF PASSENGERS OPTING FOR STATE TIRTH SPECIAL TOURIST TRAINS AND THE NUMBER OF TRIPS CONDUCTED BY THE TRAIN



Source: Indian Railways Annual Reports

State Tirth Special Trains are operated by IRCTC and the state government to promote tourism in various states like Karnataka, Goa, Rajasthan, Jharkhand,

Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Delhi. These trains operate to promote pilgrimage tourism in the state.

Indian Railways markets its products with the help of IRCTC, with 66 million registered users as of December 2023, with a daily average of 7.31 lakh tickets booked through the site. This strong, omnipresent website markets itself using certain marketing strategies which help it to cater for the needs of the tourists. Some of them are as follows:

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

The success of IRCTC's SEO tactics is demonstrated by the rise of organic visitors to all its websites. IRCTC has improved its search engine ranking by making sure its content is mobile-friendly, optimising with pertinent keywords, and speeding up the website loads. Visibility is further increased by utilising backlinks and frequently adding insightful content. IRCTC's online reach has grown dramatically because of these SEO tactics, drawing in and keeping more visitors.

Social Media Marketing (SMM)

To expand its audience and raise brand awareness, IRCTC makes use of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and X. IRCTC informs users about its services and offerings by publishing creatives, videos and promotions on a regular basis. IRCTC also uses social media platforms to advertise several services, such as booking tour packages, the Maharaja's Express, the Buddhist Circuit Tourist train and exclusive deals. IRCTC uses paid activities on Facebook, Instagram, and Google to advertise a range of IRCTC goods and services to strengthen its marketing initiatives. With 1.2 million subscribers as of May, 2025, on its IRCTC Official YouTube channel, 32.4 thousand watch hours and 2.3 million views as of June 2024, IRCTC has accomplished a noteworthy milestone. This achievement confirms IRCTC's position as a pioneer in digital engagement in the tourism industry and is the result of efficient content strategies, focused promotions and interesting customer interaction.

Promotional Campaigns

To draw in new clients and encourage repeated business, IRCTC uses targeted online advertising

campaigns to promote seasonal discounts and special offers to meet the spike in demand for travel. Exclusive offers and packages are introduced during holiday seasons to satisfy the rise in travel demand. Additionally, the increased convenience of the user-friendly mobile app for managing trips, booking tickets and accessing travel information is highlighted.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

IRCTC uses email marketing to send clients customised messages, including booking updates, targeted promotions and surveys to get feedback. To continuously improve the services, customer feedback is gathered through online platforms on websites and mobile applications.

Brand Loyalty Programmes

Frequent travellers are awarded discount benefits through the IRCTC cobranded program, which fosters customer loyalty. Users gain loyalty reward points for booking trains, which can lead to free tickets. Additionally, it encourages pleased clients to post gratifying reviews online, establishing credibility and trust with prospective clients. Based on the domestic RuPay and Visa platforms, IRCTC has partnered with numerous banks to offer a co-branded credit card. The purpose of the co-branded credit card is to encourage the use of domestic financial technology. Customers can earn and burn reward benefits by integrating it with the IRCTC loyalty program (cobranded with SBICard, HDFC and BOB Card). In addition to publishing travel blogs with beautiful images and educational content, IRCTC allows users to exchange points for train tickets.

In recent railway documents, we can find that nowadays Indian Railways has become more customer-centric. The recent development shows that the railways are catering more to theme-based tourism. After COVID-19, when tourism got rejuvenated, Indian Railways, along with IRCTC, started a series of theme-based trains, the Bharat Gaurav Tourist Trains, to cater mainly for the pilgrimage, cultural and heritage tourists at affordable prices. In the graphs given, we can see a

62 per cent increase in the revenue earned by railways through passenger transportation despite being in the middle of a pandemic in the year 2021-2022. The year 2023-24 has seen a rapid growth in passenger earnings. This shows how railways are focusing more on marketing strategies and how it has emerged as a key player in the tourism sector along with IRCTC.

There has been a growth of 49 per cent in the number of passengers travelling by luxury trains to explore the culture and heritage of India. The passengers opting for Bharat Darshan Tourist Trains and Astha Circuit tourist trains has increased by 88 per cent, and the number of passengers travelling by Buddhist Circuit Train or the Mahaparinirvan Express has increased by 79 per cent. By doing this, we can say that the tourism demand is on the increase. Though the industry had seen a setback in the year 2020-2021, it has bounced back at a blistering pace. With the passing of time, Indian Railways has upgraded its marketing styles and strategies to keep up with the requirements of the generation. It has focused on segmentation, targeting, and positioning to acquire more customers. It has also launched various marketing campaigns and social media marketing in order to reach various types of tourists, mainly focusing on the cultural, heritage and pilgrimage tourists. IRCTC, on behalf of Indian Railways, has also launched its mobile app and e-commerce website with various attractive packages and offers to attract customers.

10 CONCLUSION

India is a land of diverse culture and rich heritage, and Indian Railways plays an important role in promoting it to the world. With a set of trains and tour packages, IRCTC, a subset of the Indian Railways, is one of the top players in promoting heritage, cultural and pilgrimage tourism in the nation. With the increase in tourism demand, Indian Railways is continuously upgrading its products to meet the requirements of the dynamic industry.

Indian Railways has also been modernising its facilities and trains to cater to the needs of tourists. Cultural and heritage tourism has always been a

booming market for a country like India. So, the railways have continuously been focusing on the development of special trains with world-class facilities. Though being affected by COVID-19, cultural, heritage and pilgrimage tourism have boomed. IRCTC, a subset of Indian Railways, is consistently updating itself according to the requirements of the industry and to cater to the needs of the tourists. Indian railways is growing every day as new railway lines are laid and expansion is done in busy routes, more and more stations are coming up, and upgradation of existing stations is being made to meet the international standard requirements. This always shows the way that shortly, the Indian Railway network is going to play a very crucial and productive role in the country's development, with special reference to the Indian tourism industry.

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