

The COVID-19 Impact on the Hospitality Industry

Case of Kenzi Rose Garden Hotel



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Jihane El Faiz

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many industries all over the world, one of them being the hospitality sector. This sector was affected severely by this crisis followed by the measures forced by governments that led to a very serious downfall in the hospitality industry (travel and reservations), forcing the sector to change its policy. Kenzi Rose Garden was built in 1980 in Marrakech and is considered a chain of Moroccan hotels that has different popular hotels across Morocco.

The thesis knowledge base consists of a theoretical chapter that is based on a comprehensive overview of the tourism and hospitality sector, the general impact of COVID-19 on hotels, the market strategies adopted by the Moroccan hospitality sector, the changing behavior of hotel customers, as various frameworks may be used to analyze the hospitality sector's impact.

The research method is qualitative since the thesis is based on a case study to demonstrate how COVID-19 has impacted the Moroccan hospitality industry in multiple aspects. A survey and an interview were conducted with the Sales and Marketing Manager of the Kenzi Rose Garden Hotel, plus two other interviews with two hotel guests. The purpose of the survey and the interviews was to find out about the challenges faced by the hotel and its workforce, the situation of the Kenzi Rose Garden during and after this crisis as well as the actions taken, lessons learned, and strategies used to improve their activity and serve them to deal with any potential crisis that may happen.

Based on the insights gained from the study, it is recommended that hygiene and safety measures must be enhanced to protect the safety of everyone, as this is considered as the best way to reinforce the trust between guests and the hotel- Marketing strategies should also be improved to promote the hotel and to increase reservations after this crisis, as well as the training of its employees should be ensured by preparing them to face any crisis in the future.

Keywords COVID-19, Crisis, Hospitality industry, hotels, Kenzi Rose Garden

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1 Introduction

The Crisis of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on all countries around the world, as Coronavirus 2019 has been seen as the greatest threat in history since the Second World War as it was noted by the United Nation Secretary General Antonio Guterres (BBC NEWS, 2020), and the worst global health disaster of the current century, that started in China in December 2019 then spread all over the world.

The pandemic hit hard on people and businesses, it impacted negatively different sectors, as many countries had to follow the measures imposed by their governments, and many countries prevented people from traveling inside and outside the country, this has severely impacted the tourism and hospitality sectors which led to a negative global economic impact (Dudeja, 2021). Since the beginning of the crisis in Morocco many hotels stopped working, coffee shops and restaurants could only deliver food but they were also not allowed to receive customers inside, not only that but tourists were not allowed to enter the country as all the international flights were suspended until further notice (France Televisions, 2020), which led to the cancellation of reservations and bookings in hotels all around the country and especially in the city of Marrakech which is considered as the heart of tourism in the country. (Benargane, 2020). This has resulted in a big loss in employment in the hospitality industry as well as other sectors, in consequence, this has had a profound impact on the Moroccan economy that caused its first downturn since 1995 (Haddad et al., 2020).

1.1 Introduction of the commissioning company

The Kenzi Rose Garden is a luxurious hotel in the city of Marrakech that is part of the Kenzi Hotels Group, which is ranked one of the top 10 hotels in Morocco, the group is a range of hotels that are based in many different cities in the country such as Casablanca, Marrakech. The chain of hotels stands out as a Moroccan group that meets international norms, the Kenzi Hotel Group is always developing in different ways, as it always provides the top hospitality service quality for its clients as this is its main goal to achieve.

Every hotel section has a designed Customer Relations Manager who is in charge of assisting, monitoring, and managing any and every possible issue and problem ensuring that all processes are properly coordinated and handled (Reservations.com, 2023).

The Kenzi Rose Garden Hotel is located in the middle of Marrakech city in Morocco, the hotel includes four floors with 384 spacious rooms containing 10 suites. Each room has been carefully designed to provide customers with the absolute best in terms of comfort and style, all the Kenzi Rose Garden rooms are fully provided with bathrooms and modern furniture, Televisions, and high-speed internet Wi-Fi. Another special thing about Kenzi Rose Garden is its dining room, serving the guests a wide range of different types of cuisine, moreover, the hotel features two bars as well. Besides the catering services provided by the hotel, Kenzi Rose Garden offers a variety of excellent leisure facilities, which includes a gym that is supplied with the latest fitness machines and tools, two outdoor swimming pools and there is also a spa that provides a variety of massages and treatments meant to allow guests to relax and de-stress. The hotel can also be considered and ranked as one of the top hotels for business meetings and events, as it contains all the types of equipment and requirements to arrange different business activities such as conferences, and seminars... (Kenzi Hotels Group, 2019).

1.2 Purpose and goals of the thesis

Using the Kenzi Rose Garden as a case study, this thesis highlights how Moroccan hotels were impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and what happened in the aftermath. This will hopefully serve to help the hospitality sector identify and figure out ways and strategies to follow to successfully deal with different potential crises that may happen in the future.

1.3 Research question

To complete the thesis goal, the following research question will be answered:

- How severely did COVID-19 impact the Moroccan hospitality sector and more specifically Kenzi Rose Garden Hotel?

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The initial part of the thesis mainly concentrates on the COVID-19 situation in Morocco, as well as provides a pandemic general review, it will also investigate the policies and measures adopted by the government in Morocco to limit the spread of the virus that led to deteriorating the activity of the hospitality sector in the country, while also examining the social and economic impacts of the crisis in Morocco such as unemployment, the drop of the economy in the country.

The second part focuses on the hospitality sector, as it will analyze and compare the state of the sector before, during, and after the crisis of COVID-19, as it will treat the serious impact on the industry's human resources. Additionally, this chapter analyses the results of the Moroccan hospitality industry due to the crisis, including the significant decline in the number of tourists, and the decrease in bookings and reservations in hotels.

Finally, the last chapter examines the commissioning company which is Kenzi Rose Garden, as it discusses the method chosen, analyzes the data gathered from the survey and the interviews, as well as discusses the results.

And, to conclude, the author suggests some recommendations and suggestions regarding this industry to revive it and get it back to its normal performance.

2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is designed to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry in Morocco, including its labor force, customer behavior changes and anything else that has been pointed out as a result of the Moroccan government's measures imposed to mitigate the propagation of the virus during this crisis. Additionally, it identifies the strategies used to minimize any threats to survive the crisis, including dealing with the challenges, adapting the safety and security protocols, and ensuring the wellbeing of guests and employees, thus providing valuable insights into how the Moroccan hospitality sector can be prepared to any kind of crisis in the future and knows how to handle it.

Covid-19 is defined as a contagious disease caused by the world's newest and most recently discovered coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARSCoV-2), which was first discovered in Wuhan City in China in December 2019, then spread around the world. The virus mainly spread through human-to-human contact and it ranges from mild to severe, it represents different symptoms such as fatigue, cough, and fever (Shi, et al., 2020), however, when the virus infects a person it does not show symptoms for everyone, people who are aged 65 and over or those of all ages but have ongoing health problems are at the greatest risk of serious illness (Bryant & Stratton College Blog Staff, n.d.).

To respond to the COVID-19 crisis, the World Health Organization has been actively seeking and reaching with nations to find ways to help reduce and end the spreading of the disease, many countries presented different highly effective types of vaccines that are safe and secure to help protect the human population from this pandemic. Different types of Coronavirus19 vaccines were approved and provided and the most known are Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna (mRNA-1273), Sinopharm, and Oxford/AstraZeneca. As the first focus and prioritize people to benefit first from the vaccine were old people, people working in the health industry, and people with health problems, then the rest of the population (World Health Organization, 2023). The Coronavirus-19 has led to a total of 586.5 million total cases and an estimated 6.4 million fatalities through August 2022 in different countries in the world (LI, Taeihagh, & Tan, 2023).

Tourism refers to the act of movement of a person to other lands, countries, or locations situated outside their habitual environments either for leisure or for business reasons, they are termed as visitors or tourists (Waltkon, 2023) The term can be split into two categories: national tourism, which is generated inside the country, and international tourism where a person travels to another country than their own. Tourism is a significant economic generator for many countries in the world, and often popular tourist attractions include a variety of businesses specially adapted to the needs of travelers from other locations (Revfine.com, 2022).

The term hospitality on the other hand comes from the original Latin word "hospitalitis" which stands for the relationship between guest and host. (Hollander, 2022). According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word hospitality stands for the act of providing a friendly and

generous welcome and hosting guests and visitors (SCHULFER, n.d.). The hospitality industry is a broad and large of businesses (hotels, motels, resorts...) that focuses on offering accommodation and lodging services to guests, (Statista , 2022). The main objective of the hospitality sector is to always satisfy customers in their travel needs, as well as give them a pleasant experience and take care of them from all aspects for example with food, accommodation, entertainment and transportation as well as providing facilities for them and responding to their needs (Cvent, 2020).The hospitality industry is a broad and large group of businesses (hotels, motels, resorts ect). that focuses on offering accommodation and lodging services to guests, (Statista , 2022). The main objective of the hospitality sector is to always satisfy customers in their travel needs, as well as give them a pleasant experience and take care of them from all aspects for example with food, accommodation, entertainment and transportation as well as providing facilities for them and responding to their needs (Cvent, 2020).

Although the words" hospitality" and" tourism" are commonly seen together, there is a difference between these two terms: The hospitality sector concentrates on offering accommodations for travelers in industries associated with the hospitality industry like hotels while the tourism industry focuses on delivering high-quality entertainment to attract tourists to visit and revisit the place (Bryant & Stratton College Blog Staff, n.d.).

2.1 Overview of the Moroccan tourism and hospitality industry

Morocco is one of the most visited countries in the continent of Africa, always attracting visitors with its rich culture (Thapar, 2021). The country is known for its stability in the economical and political level, its good infrastructure and its closeness to the continent of Europe, it is also considered as a great travel destination for westeners, especially with its mixture of Africa-arab and french-speaking where the majority of its citizens can speak fluently Arabic, French, as some can speak Spanish and English. Morocco provides a prime illustration of how the tourism industry can contributes to the national economy and enhances its appeal to potential investors (Choufany, 2023). International tourists frequently visit the city of Marrakech in Morocco as it is known as the most popular city in the country, Marrakech was ranked 84th among the top popular cities in the world. In 2020. (WorldData.info, n.d.).

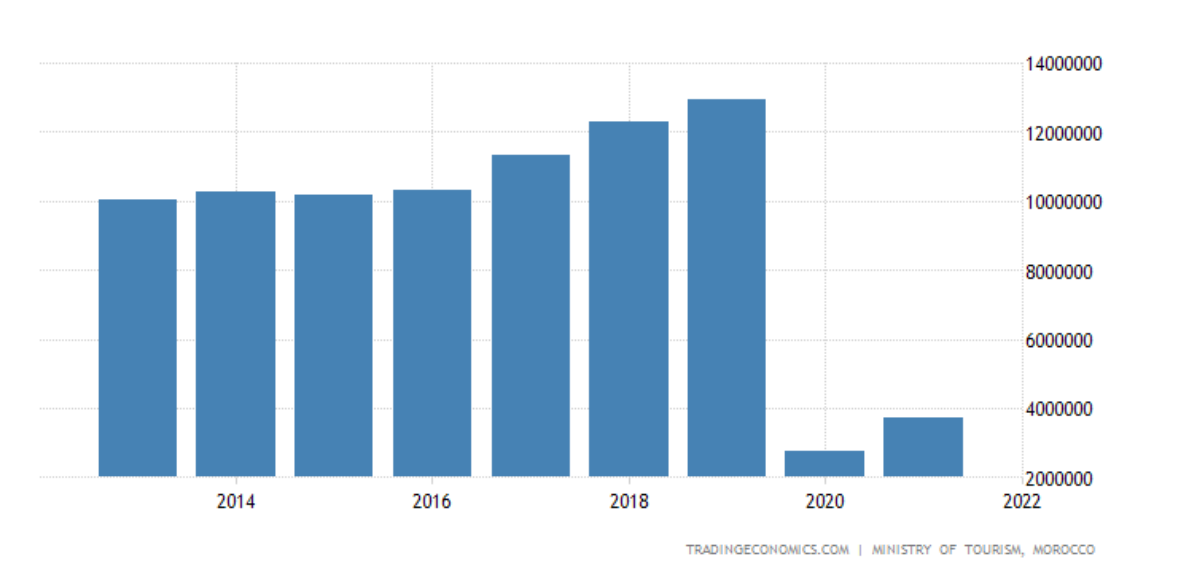


Figure 1. International tourist arrivals in Morocco (2014-2022) (Trading Economics, 2023)

The graphic above is showing that before the outbreak of COVID-19 Morocco was receiving a big number of international tourists from different countries in the world and the Moroccan tourism was experiencing a consistant growth, when the pandemic arrived, the number of tourists dropped from more than 12,000,000 tourists in 2019 to 2,777,802 tourists in 2020 then increased to 3,721,702 tourists in 2021.

There are 46 establishments of different sizes in Morocco, a number that is expected to increase given the attractiveness of the destination worldwide. The country's hospitality sector is a mix of both national independent and international hotels, although international accommodations are mainly located in big cities of Morocco, whereas independent brands are largely distributed throughout the country (mordor Intelligence, 2023). The Moroccan hospitality market is expected to grow between 2021 and 2026 by \$1.87 billion, at a compound annual growth rate of 6.40%. According to the most recent "Hotel Chain Development Pipeline" report published by the W Hospitality Group; Morocco has succeeded in taking the third position among the top hotel sectors in the African continent. The kingdom of Morocco has a total capacity of 6369 beds. The report states that the African top 10 countries represent 68 percent of the continent's total hotels and 74 percent of all available beds (Industring.com.ma, 2023).

2.2 The key role of global tourism and travel in GDP

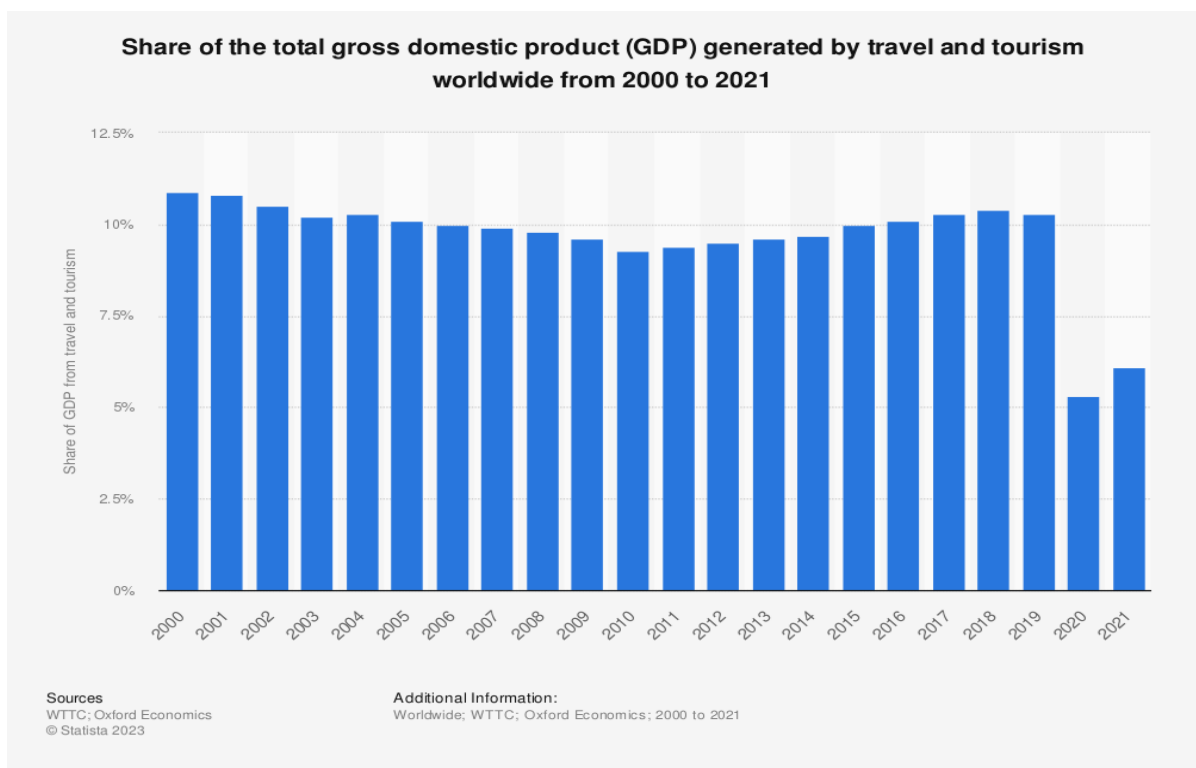


Figure 2. The GDP share of Travel and tourism to Gross Domestic Products in the whole world for the period (2000-2021) (Statista, 2023).

Before the COVID-19 crisis, between 2000 and 2008 the share of the hospitality sector's share of GDP had its biggest decline between 2008 and 2010 and that can be attributed to the mortgage crisis, but even then, the decline was modest and indistinguishable, showing that the industry is essentially resilient. But to show how different Covid-19 was, the industry's contribution to GDP was a little above 5 percent and only grew by 1 percent between 2020 and 2021. By the year 2021, Travel and Tourism provided 6.1 percent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which represents a growth compared to the year 2020, but remains below the estimates made before the Coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19). In general, Travel and Tourism contributed about 5.8 trillion American dollars to the world GDP in 2021 (Statista, 2023).

According to the previous minister of tourism Nadia Fettah Alaoui, the Tourism industry represents the driving economic growth in Morocco with a 7 percent GDP share.

The ex-minister also stated that the achievements of the tourism industry developed in the country during the period of (2010-2019) as the annual average overnight accommodation achieved 3.9 percent. Therefore, in the year 2019, the number of arrivals tourists went from 12.93 (+5 percent when compared to the year 2018) and to a total of 25.2 million total overnight accommodation stays (MAP TOURISME, 2021).

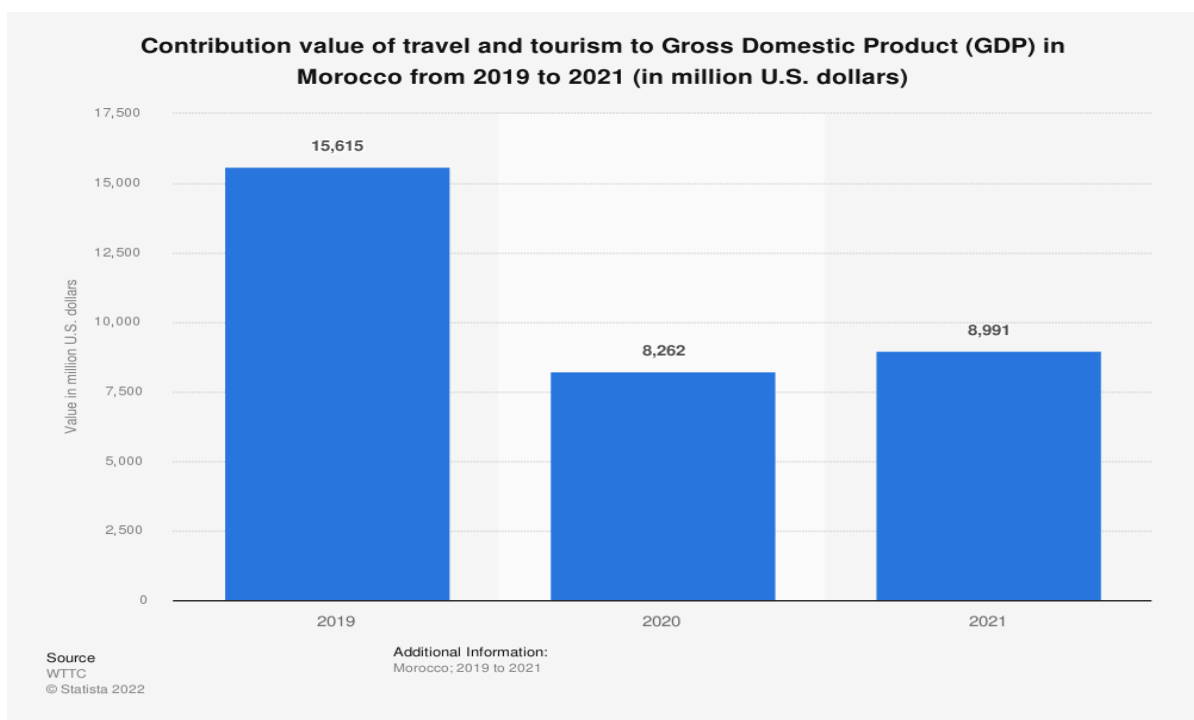


Figure 3. The GDP share of travel and tourism in Morocco (2019-2021) (Statista, 2023).

Figure 2 above, as can be seen, shows how Morocco's tourism and travel sector contributed approximately \$16 million to the nation's Gross Domestic Product in 2018, as it dropped from 2019 to \$8.2 million, and it raised again in 2021 and reached nearly \$9 million in tourism's GDP (Statista, 2023).

2.3 Moroccan domestic tourism spending value

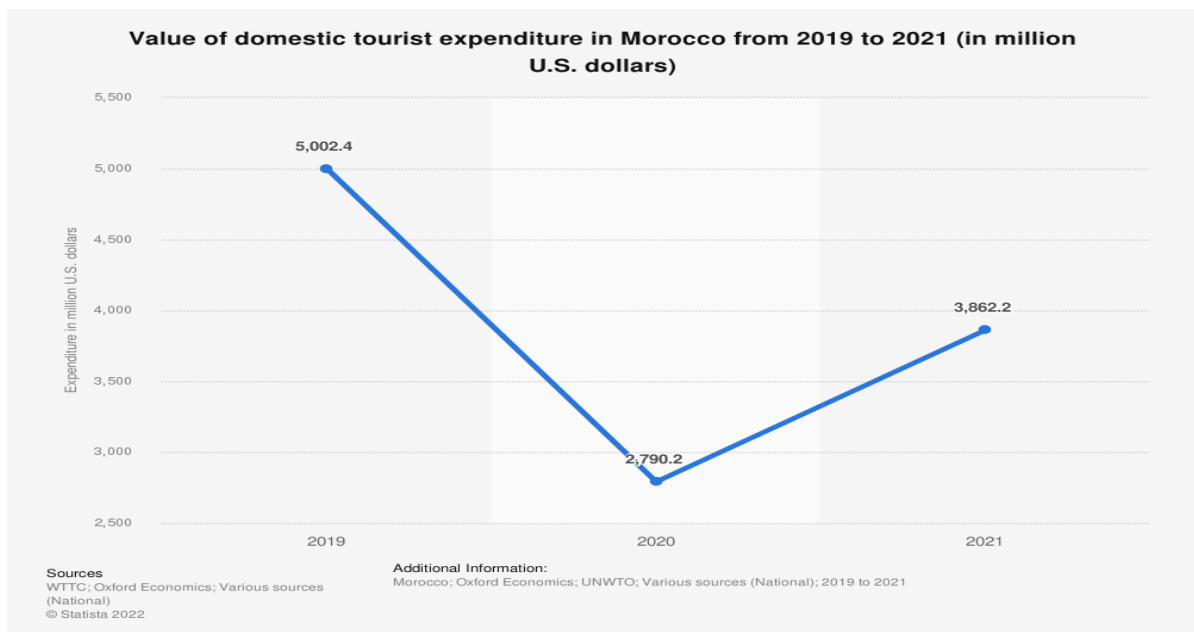


Figure 4. The value of the Moroccan Domestic Tourist Expenditure (2019-2021) (Statista, 2023).

Based on the graphic above, the spending of the national domestic tourists in Morocco has risen to an estimated \$3.9 billion in the year 2021, this represents considerable growth compared to the year before (2020), where expenditure by domestic tourists was around \$2.8 billion and this is due to a range of factors especially in the period of COVID-19 when the Moroccan government was promoting the domestic tourism as a way to grow the national economy (Statista, 2023).

2.4 The Moroccan market leaders in hospitality

The Moroccan hospitality sector is experiencing rapid growth, as its competitive market is tight and strong, with several top actors fighting to dominate the market.

The following are among the leading market players in the Moroccan hospitality sector:

- **Accor SA:**

It is considered one of the world's leading hotel groups, it is operating in over 100 different countries, with more than 100 accommodations, (Accor, 2019), in the Moroccan Kingdom the Accor Hotel Group runs many hotels such as the fancy Sofitel, Novotel... in different cities (Accor, 2019).

- **Louvre Hotels Group:**

It is ranked as the second hotel group in the world and second in the continent of Europe and has a chain of more than 1600 establishments that range from 1 to 5 stars located in 60 different countries across the world (Louvre Hotels Group, 2022).

- **Wyndham Hotels and Resorts:**

It is a large American hotel group that contains over 8900 hotels in about 95 different countries (wyndhamhotels, 2023). In Morocco, the hotel group runs a portfolio of different hotels in different cities of the country such as Fez and Tangier under the chain of Ramada Encore which is a chain of Wyndham (Wyndham, 2023).

- **Kenzi Hotel Group:**

It is a chain of Moroccan hotels that has different popular hotels across the country, such as the Kenzi Tower Hotel in Casablanca, Kenzi Rose Garden in Marrakech, Kenzi Azghor in Ouarzazate, Kenzi Salazyr in Tangier... (Kenzi Hotels Group, 2019).

- **Marriott International, Inc:**

It is known as one of the leading hotel groups around the world, with a global number of more than 8000 hotels in about 139 countries in the world (Marriott International, 2023).

2.5 The impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry

The hospitality industry was hit severely by COVID-19, all industries all over the world were affected and the hospitality sector is one of them. This industry has never experienced such a massive hit before, many hotels around the world found themselves in the same situation, with no guests and many hotels chose to open their doors and host medical staff. This crisis has had a hard impact on operators, managers, and hotel owners, countries like France, Spain, Switzerland, and other countries in Europe and the world have promised and provided aid to all kinds of businesses that suffered from the COVID-19 crisis, this action would have had some positive impact on the hospitality industry in these countries. This was to reduce the financial impact for businesses that had to close either temporarily or to reduce their capacity of hosting guests and this is due to many factors such as lockdowns and travel restrictions.

This crisis has impacted also people working in this sector as many employers had to reduce their workers cost by reducing their shifts (Djeebet, 2020).

In Morocco, the unemployment percentage grew from 10.5 percent in the first quarter of the year up to a total of 12.5 percent in the same period of the following year (2021), and about 600.000 jobs in different industries were lost (Williams, 2021). Moreover, in terms of companies and businesses, around 142.000 companies decided to close permanently and stop their activities (Abouzzohour, 2022). Additionally, the crisis has also impacted poverty in the country, a percentage of 3.6 percent suffered from poverty in 2021 compared to 3.3 percent in the year of 2020, in the same year over than one million citizens started to face social and economic problems, and this challenge has caused students for families with low resources to quit and drop out of schools, particularly girls (Williams, 2021).

Moreover, many other industries suffered from the pandemic including the customer service sectors such as private schools, public baths (hammams), and gyms, the revenues of these businesses decreased as they had to stop their activities. Furthermore, the logistics field has been hit by the drop in domestic goods trade and the decrease in exports and imports, as it was considered that the loss of trade activity will lead to a monthly trade loss of 2.6 million tons (Bouhia, 2020).

2.6 Government aid towards employees and businesses because of COVID-19 in Morocco

After the lockdown made by the Moroccan government to stop the spread of the virus, many employees found themselves with limited or without income, as it was the same issue for businesses who got affected by this crisis and had to stop their activities, the government came up with a decision to help these affected people by providing an average income of 220 \$ per month for workers in the formal sector, as it pledged a revenue that ranges between 90 \$ to 134 \$ monthly for employees working in the informal sector, taking in consideration the factor of the family's size, even though this government's aid was never enough to meet the survival necessities of many people such as rent, food, payment of bills. The impacted businesses also benefited from the government's aid, especially small businesses that were given a tax deferral, while three-month loan suspensions and zero-interest loans were granted to small and medium-sized firms.

Additionally, around 9000 loans totaling 350 \$ have been granted to enterprises who got less or equal to 50 \$ in revenues, and this is under the initiative of the newly established program called the New Damane Oxygene. And regarding the self-employed individuals who suffered from the crisis as well, they were provided with financing loans to a maximum of 1.500 \$ with zero interest (Abouzzohour, 2022).

2.7 The Moroccan tourism industry during COVID-19

It seemed that the year 2020 was going to be a year of great opportunities for the Moroccan hospitality sector, however, the pandemic of COVID-19 has unexpectedly turned everything upside down, with closed hotels, the sudden fall in hotel occupancy levels caused by the border closing, effects of sanitary restrictions. During this emergency period, and according to the National Tourism Confederation has measured the full impact of the crisis with a 34.1 billion Dirham (\$9.2 million) loss in tourism revenues by 2020 and a 14 million Dirham (\$3.8 million) drop in turnover of the hotel industry, this resulted in a total loss of almost 6 million tourists, which generated a complete drop of 11.6 overnight stays. According to the Department of Economic Development and Finance, the number of tourists arriving in the Kingdom of Morocco declined by 78.9 percent by the end of November 2020, and the volume of overnight stays by 72.3 percent (Benjelloun & Benjelloun, 2021).

The pandemic had severely impacted the tourism and hospitality sector as many other businesses in these sectors had to put an end to their business operations temporarily or permanently, hotels and catering establishments are the most impacted ones where a percentage of 89 percent of businesses registered a total interruption of work as stated by The High Commission for planning (HCP). According to the National Confederation of Tourism (NCT) the year 2020 has seen an overall decrease of 34.1 billion Dirham about (\$3.3 billion) in tourism revenue, this sector faced also a loss of 11.6 million overnight stays and 14 billion Dirham about (\$1.9 billion) in terms of revenue loss in the hotel sector and this is because of the absolute decrease of about 6 million tourists (GHOUFRANE & Darbali, 2020).

2.8 The rate of Moroccan room occupancy

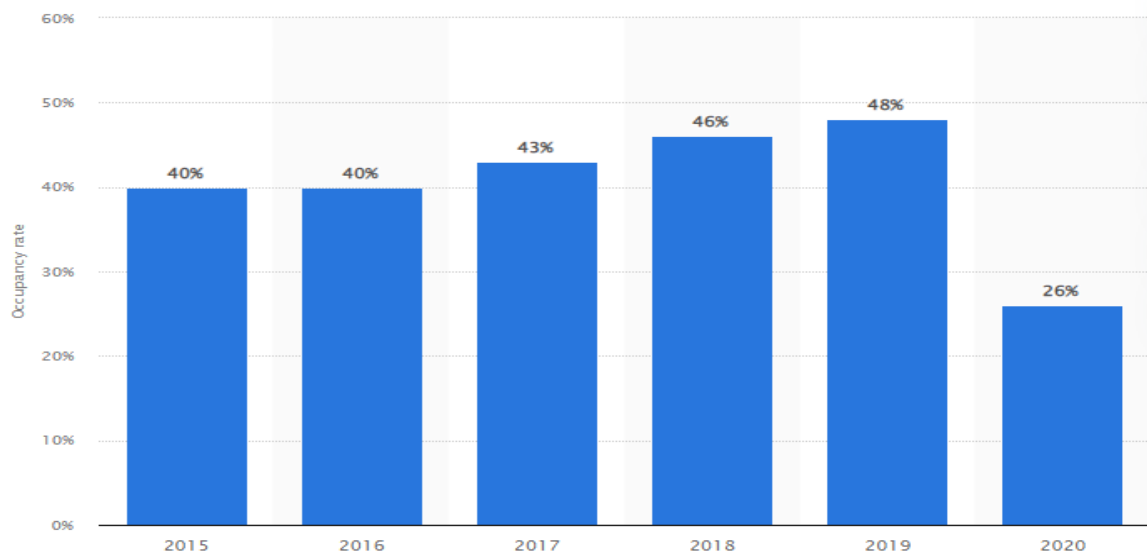


Figure 5. The rate of Moroccan room occupancy (2015-2020) (Statista, 2023).

The Moroccan hospitality sector experienced a big fall in the hotel rooms rate occupancy in the year 2020, thus, the rate declined to 26 percent compared to the previous year which had 48 percent, despite that, the country had a capacity of accommodation in 2020 (Statista, 2023).

2.9 The COVID-19 impact on the hospitality sector's workforce.

The hospitality industry is one of the most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Many people lost their jobs, according to the world travel & tourism council, it had been warned that the COVID-19 crisis led to an unbelievable cut of more than 50 million jobs all around the world in the travel and tourism sector. And Oxford economics research shows that Asia had the worst impact from this pandemic, as the sector is still taking many long months to recover. Regarding travel probation, the closure of borders, and confinement measures, thus many employees were not able to move to their workplace or perform their designated jobs which have many serious effects on future incomes, especially for informal or offhandedly employed workers. As the environment gives a sense of uncertainty and fear, enterprises were more likely to postpone investments, purchases of goods, and the employment of many employees. According to information and data research, the Indian hospitality sector has also been impacted thus rendering a mass amount of the people in hospitality in the country, unemployed. Correspondingly to this crisis, the tourism sector in India is investigating most Indian bankruptcies, the closing of many firms, and mass joblessness (Dogra, n.d.).

In Morocco, a great number of the workforce in the hospitality industry were laid off or lost their employment, that period was considered a big massive challenge for workers in the Moroccan hospitality sector, as it was already expected that the industry will take a long time to recover from the hard impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, according to Naima Hilali who is a member of the hotel union at Lulido Hotel in Casablanca.

And the majority of workers in this industry who are also part of the Union of Moroccan Workers (UMT), were against taking unpaid holidays during the off-season and required a guarantee of salary coverage until the month of June when the confinement was supposed to be over, and the situation expected to come back to normal (Connel, 2020).

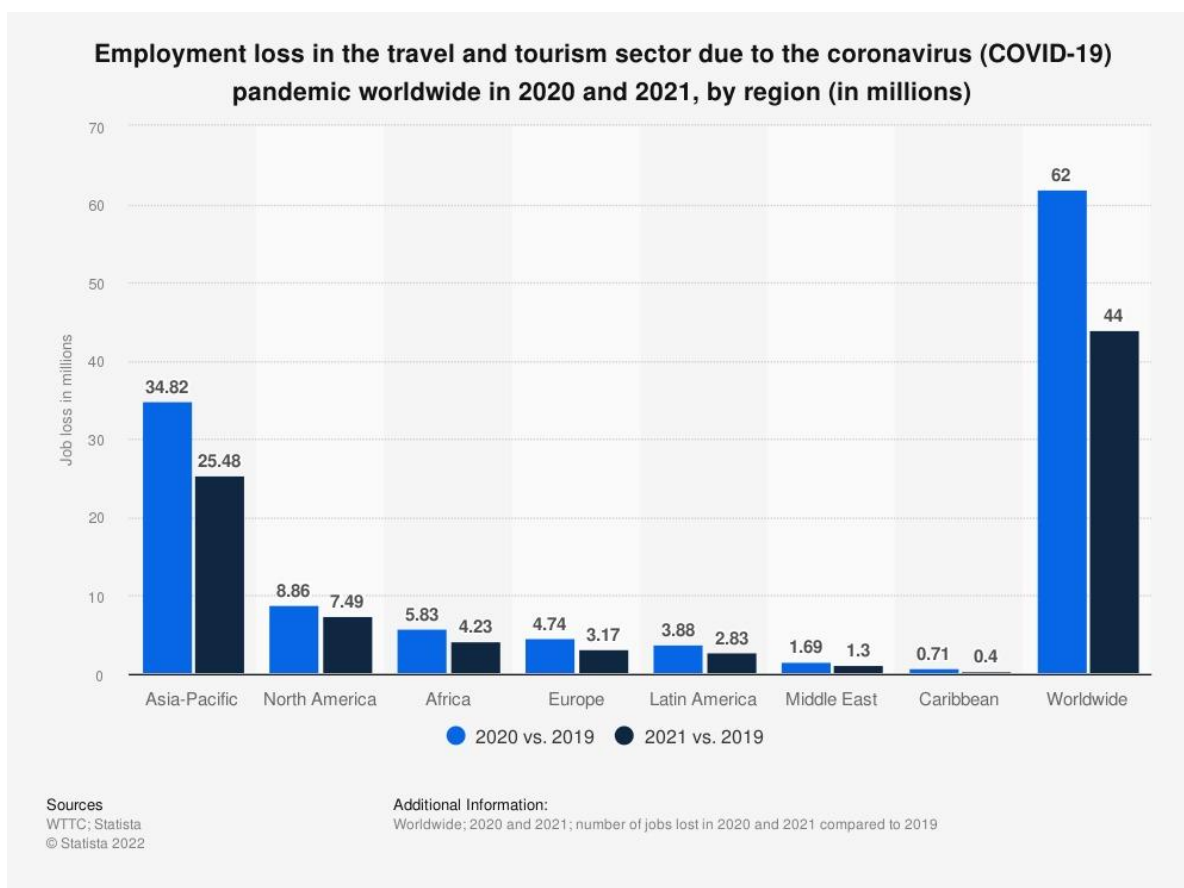


Figure 6. Global job loss in the tourism and hospitality sector due to COVID-19 pandemic. (Statista Research Department, 2022)

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, it was expected that the employment in the global travel and tourism industry to drop by an estimated 62 million jobs in the year 2020, although this forecast has been adjusted upwards in the year 2021, there are still around 44 million less jobs in the industry globally than in the year 2019. As a whole, the Asian region has experienced the greatest job loss from the COVID-19 outbreak, with about 25.5 million less tourism and hospitality jobs in 2021 when compared to the year 2019. (Statista Research Department, 2022)

2.10 Market strategies adopted by the Moroccan hospitality industry

To revive the tourism sector and help hotel establishments to turn to their normal performance many strategies were discussed in the Ostelea School of Tourism's webinar. As many hospitality specialists were present during the discussion, they all suggested different strategies, for example, Zineb Jabri who is a revenue management advisor

suggested hotel operators to revise their business operations and pricing strategies, especially after this hard period, she also insisted on the importance of a strong and proper local market positioning to meet the requirements of Moroccan customers. Moreover, she stressed on the need of re-establishing confidence in the sector after the challenging time faced by the employees of the industry with a near total shutdown of the activity and resulting unemployment. Meanwhile, Mohamed Daoudi who is a general manager of a hotel suggested that hotel owners must keep their prices as low as they can without sacrificing the service quality to reduce the negative impacts of the health crisis, and to protect the hotel's reputation and image as well as to diversify their services to raise their revenues. Furthermore, Assil Bernossi who is an industry expert in hospitality marketing and digital strategy, urged hotel owners to get connected with their customers on social platforms in order to serve them and meet their needs, as he also advised hotel operators to develop an attitude of curiosity and proactivity to get back on their feet quickly (MAP TOURISME, 2021).

2.11 Measures taken to ensure the safety of employees and guests

To control the propagation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kingdom of Morocco followed different strict sanitary measures advised generally by the World Health Organization to ensure the security and well-being of all.

To protect the health of tourists and employees during a stay of a tourist in Morocco, it was required to follow many instructions such as:

- Keeping a minimum distance of 1.5m between people
- Frequently giving the hands a 20-second detergent or hydro-alcoholic fluid wash
- Ensuring the face mask is donned and avoiding making any interactions or contact.
- Make sure of using a paper towel and throwing it away each time a person sneezes or cough

Another measure that was implemented in hotels, restaurants, and other places is temperature checks.

The Moroccan government has also provided locals and visitors a list of numbers for help, security, or an emergency regarding Covid-19 matters (Moroccan National Tourism Office, 2023).

The Moroccan Ministry of Tourism has established the "Welcome Safely" badge for all tourism and hospitality establishments in Morocco, it is a training program provided in Arabic and French to employees in a variety of aspects such as front desk, housekeeping, kitchen, welfare... and once it is completed, it allows the hotel or the tourism business to make a self-diagnosis of the hygiene and health precautions taken to ensure the engagement in the control of the pandemic.

This label was developed to revive the tourism industry (Toutate, 2020).

2.12 Hotel guest behavior change after the pandemic

The Travel and Hospitality sector has globally changed because of the Covid-19 Pandemic situation, the sector is way different than what it used to be before the crisis, and customer behavior is as well.

Digital technologies are used more than before in people's daily life, as they started using them a lot, especially in online hotel bookings and reservations, with the adaptation to digitalization also comes a demand for more flexibility, since recently hotels provide flexibility in terms of payments and cancellation policies get the most conversion rates. Some guests choose to prepay for different reasons, but generally, most guests prefer to make the payment at the hotel.

Hotels must realize that the post-pandemic change is about to become the new standard in the hospitality industry, and investing in digital technologies is mandatory, as the mixed demand between offline and online reservations has changed considerably towards the former. Nowadays, consumers tend to spend time doing travel research, for this reason, hotels must concentrate on establishing and developing good websites and creating good quality content to attract consumers. Hotels must choose the right communication tool to be in contact with consumers, as they should take into consideration two important things that became an opportunity for guests, especially after the pandemic which are health and hygiene, as well as gathering comments while keeping the social distance in mind. It is also suggested that hotels get the right pricing strategy, for example adopting all-in packages as this option is becoming common with hotels, as consumers nowadays would rather eat in the hotel than go out or provide more packages with different options (Goyal, 2022).

2.13 The Moroccan tourism industry after COVID-19

As the tourism and hospitality industry is seen as a vital sector in the Moroccan economy, and after the hard hit of the crisis of COVID-19, all governments around the world and especially the Moroccan one, trying to recover this industry which is an important aspect to the development of the country. According to the Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts and Social Economy Fatima Zahra Ammor stated that Morocco's tourism growth rate grew by 80 percent, which is higher than the global norm average of 70 percent by the end of October 2022. She also highlighted that when compared to pre-Covid 2019 rates, domestic foreign exchange tourism revenues have increased, and they were up to 103 percent through the end of September 2022. Moreover, the revenues from domestic sources have also risen strongly, as the number of overnight stays of internal tourists has jumped from roughly 30 percent before the outbreak to around 45 percent by late September 2022.

To help this sector to revive again, the government has supported it with 2 billion Dirham which is around 186 \$ for the recovery of this vital sector, not only that but another initiative was taken by the government to 1 billion Dirham was approved for the restoration of many hotel accommodations. According to the same minister, the Moroccan Kingdom received around 3.4 million tourists in June 2022 (Sahnouni, 2022).

2.14 The future of the hospitality industry in Morocco

The hospitality sector's future is a matter concerning everyone, especially after the three years since the global pandemic hit that has changed the travel sector and affected the way people live, the world is not the same as before that is why hoteliers should evolve to survive. As establishments move from the past to the future, it is necessary to take priorities into account. Hotels must change their mode of service offering to a more adaptable and flexible model that can respond to the demands of an evolving market, hotels should build customer experiences to meet these needs, with a strong focus on hygiene and safety (Valtr, 2023).



Figure 7. The global hospitality market (2023-2027) (Research and Markets, 2023).

The global Hospitality industry market has increased from USD 4,390.59 billion in 2022 up to USD 4,699.57 billion in the year of 2023, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.0%. The hospitality sector is estimated to hit USD 5,816.66 billion in 2017, with a CAGR of 5.5% (Research and Markets, 2023).

The Kingdom of Morocco aims to boost the revival of its tourism industry with the launch of a great new roadmap worth 6.1 billion Dirhams (\$595 million) in the next four years.

According to Morocco's minister of tourism, Fatima-Zahra Ammor Morocco is going through a period of great growth and this roadmap is an ideal opportunity to turn the sector around.

The roadmap, which has been approved in a collaboration between the Moroccan government and the national tourism confederation, seeks to reassess the position of tourism as a key sector of the national economy said Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch (Hajbi, 2023).

Regarding the hospitality industry, it is estimated that the Moroccan hospitality sector will experience an accelerated growth dynamics of around 6.40 percent per year. Therefore, the hotel market share in Morocco is likely to grow by 1.87 billion dollars over the period 2021 to 2026 (Technavio, 2022).

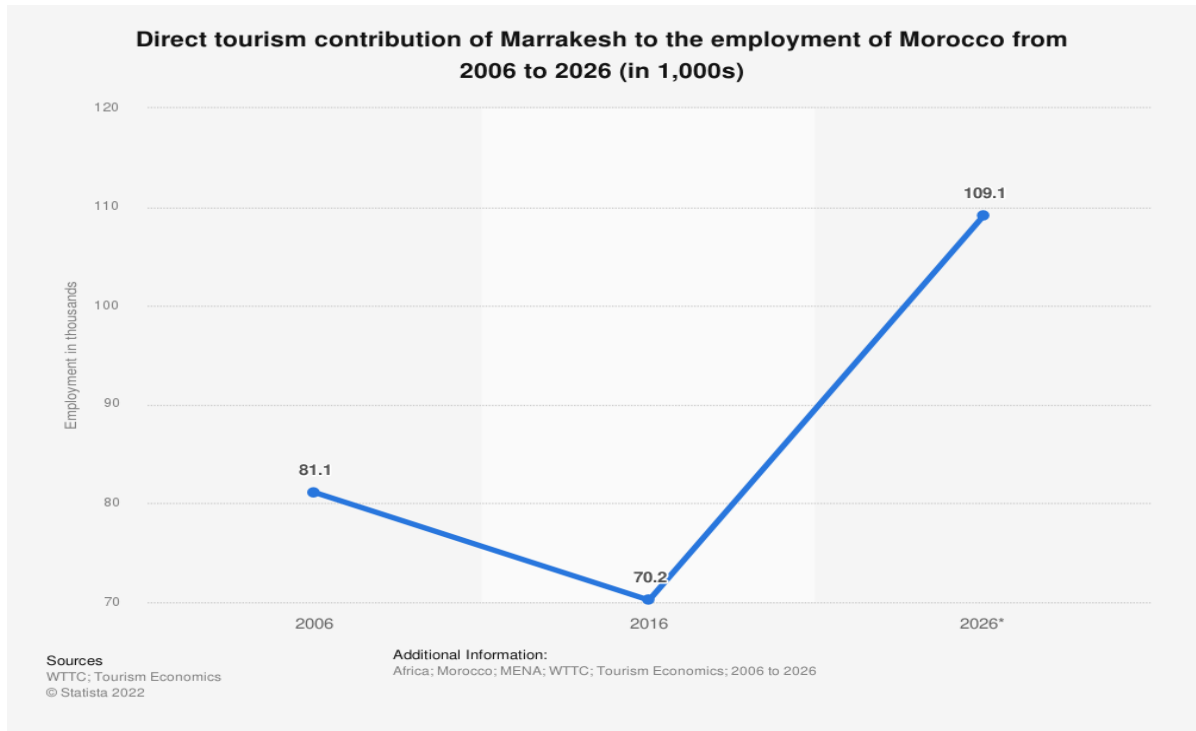


Figure 8. The estimated contribution of the tourism sector in Marrakech to Moroccan employment in (1,000s) (Galal, 2023).

It is estimated that the tourism sector in the city of Marrakech is expected to directly provide about 109.1 thousand job positions which will attribute to almost 30 percent of the whole national employment in the country (Galal, 2023).

3 Methodology

This thesis uses a qualitative approach, as the researcher talks about the invention of a survey and interview questions used for gathering and looking through information and data.

Using qualitative research methodology is the main approach used to collect information based on distinct questions with easy answers, while allowing the interviewee to give a clear image of their thoughts and point of view on the topic utilizing language and giving them the flexibility to share their opinions and thoughts (Bhandari, 2020).

3.1 Data collection process and analysis

The main information and data needed for this research were composed through two methods of data: survey and interview. To recognize potential interviewees, the author used many different methods and tried to contact them through platforms like LinkedIn and WhatsApp. The interviewees agreed to take part in the interview to provide extended details and information regarding the research topic. After answering the survey and conducting the interviews to boost the information claimed through the survey and obtain an extended understanding of the topic, the interviews were conducted in the French language which is commonly spoken in the country and to make sure that there were no language barriers, to make the communication easier, and to get clear responses. Initially, a survey was sent to the respondent, but was later followed up with interviews as the answers to the survey were not clear enough. The first interview which was done with Hiba Ech-Charif, a sales and marketing manager and lasted around 33 minutes, while the other two interviews with loyal customers of the hotel were done remotely through WhatsApp calls and lasted 15 mins each and were done in an efficient and effective manner, which permitted both the interviewer and the interviewees to communicate efficiently. A range of different questions were asked during the interviews that covered some aspects and factors related to the pandemic situation and its impact on the Kenzi Rose Garden as well as implemented detailed responses related to the changes that happened to the hotel establishment such as the changes happened, the situation of employees, the measures taking during the crisis, the customer's behavior changes. At the end of the first interview with Hiba, different strategies taken by the Kenzi Rose Garden were discussed to enhance the situation of the hotel after this difficult crisis and to revive the Kenzi Rose Garden so that it can come back to its normal productivity.

As the interviewees did not accept the calls to be recorded, notes were taken to save and organize data properly. The survey and interview questions can be obtained in Appendix 1 and 2. The information gathered from Ms. Hiba, who was also the lead informant for the research project was particularly informative as she is also experienced and has an expanded knowledge of the hotel's study, which made her give a better understanding of the important aspects of the industry in a detailed and deep way to analyze the study's research questions, and to ensure the validity of its findings.

Secondly, the interviewees are familiar with COVID-19 and its impact on the hospitality sector, thus, there is a much-needed deeper understanding of the response to the crisis, its effect on the industry, the challenges faced, and the policies taken toward this pandemic.

3.2 Implementation of the survey

Before collecting the data, an online survey was prepared and sent to the interviewee, and the responses received provided a major portion of the data used in the study, consisting of valuable information, and answering the questions in an effective way. It was important to limit the number of survey questions to nine not long and quick to complete and to make sure that it included a comprehensive picture of the research topic, the questions were designed very carefully to obtain the essential information, formatted as multiple-choice questions, with space areas for the respondent to elaborate and develop their answers when it is necessary, as well as open questions where the respondent can feel free to express their ideas and thoughts.

The survey was made to obtain the desired information to answer the research question concerning the impact of COVID-19 on Kenzi Rose Garden Hotel, as it is mainly designed to examine several factors impacted such as the overall performance, revenues, and challenges faced. Moreover, it intended to analyze the COVID-19 impact on the workforce of the hotel more specifically how this pandemic impacted different jobs status and incomes of employees. As well as to determine the response of the Kenzi Rose Garden hotel towards the crisis and the policies and measures taken to reduce the negative effects and to protect the hotel and its workforce. Google Forms is a survey tool that is free and gives many different important resources like slides, papers, and documents that are integrated with Google Docs. Using Google Forms, users can quickly and easily collect and look through data and information via assessments and surveys. To produce surveys and quizzes, users can simply use an online form in Google Apps. Once the survey is produced, it can be spread by direct links, social networks, or emails. To put Google Forms to use, a Google Account is important, which needs personal data and information like the first and last name, username, and password. Google double-checks the user's personal data and information by sending a text to the designated phone number. After producing a Google Account, users can start producing surveys through Google Forms. (template.net, n.d.)

The author aimed to use Google Forms as a survey tool to collect the data as it is considered as an easy and quick way to gather the insights efficiently.

4 Findings and discussion

4.1 Impacts of COVID-19 crisis on the Kenzi Rose Garden

The analysis case showed that the crisis of COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the Kenzi Rose Garden as many other hotels, which have experienced a set of challenges and difficulties, the pandemic has affected the hotel in all aspects, as it also had a profound impact on its employees, as the hotel has had to face many challenges related to its workforce as it has been decided to either reduce the working shifts for the employees or their working hours, while some workers preferred to resign and leave their jobs as an answer to this circumstances “ The pandemic impacted our hotel’s workforce in a bad way, as it has been decided to reduce the employees shifts and working hours, and many employees left their jobs in our hotel during this crisis.”(interview #1). Data analysis revealed that the hotel was performing normally until the start of the pandemic in March 2020 which had a huge impact on the Kenzi Rose Garden’s activity and performance due to the restrictions and measures imposed by the Moroccan government. “Before the COVID-19 the hotel was performing well.” (Interview #1). The research also demonstrated that the crisis was not expected to last as long as it did. “We actually were only expecting that it is only going to be a short crisis that will only last for one to three months and we will be back performing normally but that was not the case because of the extension of the state of emergency and curfew.” (Interview #1). Regarding the measures taken by the Kenzi Rose Garden to manage the pandemic, it has been reported that the hotel was aware of the situation of the pandemic and its impacts on the Kenzi Rose Garden and the drop of its arrivals one week before the announcement of the official lockdown in the country, but no plans were in place to handle the pandemic. “We were aware of the situation of the pandemic, but we had no plans in place” (Interview #1).

Moreover the Kenzi Rose Garden decided to put its resources to help the community during this severe crisis, the establishment’s choice to serve the community is considered as a way to support the society and this was not only in the Kenzi Rose Garden but that was the case

of all the Kenzi Hotel Group across the country, in addition to that, the hotel was providing other ways to minimize the crisis impacts and to offer a good service quality to its guests after the pandemic by doing some renovations as many other hotels did. "During the crisis, we were serving the Kenzi Rose Garden as a place for medical, paramedical, and administrative personnel to stay as a way to help the community during this hard period, as we were also providing other ways to minimize the impacts for the crisis by doing some renovations in the hotel" (Interview #1).

However, the analyzes also indicate that the hotel faced many challenges and issues during the COVID-19 crisis due to a variety of reasons that led to the resignation of some employees or the limited shifts and working hours for some others because of the lower or no reservations in the hotel, and managing this issue was really challenging because of the lack of the government assistance as the hotel was responsible for supporting its workforce without the government help. This situation shows the necessity for getting support and assistance from the government for businesses and the workforce during a difficult crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, especially the hotel sector which is very susceptible to the economic hit, The hotel's staff showed its commitment to deal and handle all kind of circumstances to ensure and guarantee the safety and wellbeing of everyone was considered as a crucial aspect, The COVID-19 is considered as a real test for the hospitality sector's capacity to adjust to shifting conditions, maintain high standards of client service, and making the customer and staff's health and safety as the top priority. "Indeed, the COVID-19 period was not easy as it was considered as a real test for our hotel, we faced many challenges and difficulties, but we were always supporting each other and at the same time focusing on everyone's safety as it was considered as our top priority" (Interview #1).

4.2 Covid-19 during the reopening

After the first stage of reopening the country's borders four months after closing them on July 14, only for Moroccan citizens to enter the country and for foreigners to leave it, (Guerraoui, 2020), the hotels were able to reopen their establishments after the first wave of the virus, and in terms of the situation after the reopening in Kenzi Rose Garden, the interview analyzes demonstrate that the situation in the hotel was not perfect but ok, since even that was the first reopening since March 2020 but it was always uncertain because the

government would stop the movement from a city to another if the cases of the pandemic increased, especially that in that period the Moroccan hospitality not only Kenzi Rose Garden were depending on local tourists only (tourists coming from different cities in Morocco) even that in normal situations the Kenzi Rose Garden received more international tourists than the internal ones. "After the first stage of the reopening the situation was not as it was, but in general it was ok, we were uncertain because of the government decisions about stopping the movement between cities as we were only focusing on the local tourists in that time." (Interview #1).

In order to measure the degree of satisfaction of the hotel principal regarding their performance after the reopening in the summer of 2020 against the situation in March 2020, it has been stated that the situation in the Kenzi Rose Garden had a better performance than it was expected, due to the process of reducing restrictions that the government had imposed and that also made internal tourists so excited to move from their cities and travel around the country. "If we compare the summer of 2020 to the period of March 2020 i would say that summertime was much better than it was expected." (Interview #1).

4.2.1 The COVID-19 situation in winter 2021

In the wintertime and especially on December 2021 the Moroccan government has announced a curfew for a duration of three weeks starting from December 23rd, 2021 in the whole country, generally at this time of the year "Christmas vacation" Morocco receives a significant number of tourists from the country and from abroad, hotels were only allowed to receive the hotel customers to their restaurants and this is every day till 08.00 pm, as they were able to provide room service food after that time." Everyone at the hotel was respecting the curfew time that was imposed by the government, our bars and restaurants were working till 08.00 pm and we were only allowed to receive the hotel's guests." (Interview #1). Data analyses also showed that during that period, everything was unusual, only a limited number of tourists were at the hotel and the majority of them were Moroccans, the hygiene protocols were set up and everyone was respecting them from employees to guests to ensure the safety of everyone, as the hotel was providing face masks and asking everyone to wear them and offering hand sanitizing to every guest and requiring social distance. "As a person who usually resides in the Kenzi Rose Garden, especially in the

Christmas period of each year, I would say that during the Christmas time of 2021, everything was different and unusual, with a limited number of guests in the hotel and the majority of them were Moroccans.” (Interview #2).

And to give an overview of the situation in the hotel during this period, it was expected that the Kenzi Rose Garden receives a number of internal guests, especially during the Christmas period but when the curfew was announced many potential guests were afraid of the closing of hotel establishments again, but at least the hotel staff informed the guests about the situation because to the hotel it is better to cancel reservations than to lose a client.” Usually during the Christmas period, our hotel receives a big number of guests but in 2021 the situation was different and we only received a limited number of guests and since the government announced the curfew for three weeks, some internal guests were afraid and they canceled their bookings and some foreign guests were planning to spend their holidays in our hotel and had no idea about the curfew measures that is why we have decided to inform them about the situation because for us it is better to get a canceled reservation than to lose a client.” (Interview #1).

4.3 The hotel’s situation in 2023

As of March 2023, the crises seem to be over as it was expected from the staff of the hotel and the hotel’s performance turned back to normal, and the hotel is receiving and welcoming tourists from both inside and outside the country as it has even reached the number of tourists, it had in 2019. “Since the hotel’s activity turned back to normal, I would say that till now we are reaching the number of tourists we had before the pandemic in 2019 and we are getting guests in our hotel from the inside and outside the country.” (Interview #1).

it has also been stated that the situation is more stable nowadays, and everything turned back to the way things were, all activities are back to normal (hotel rooms, restaurants, bars, pool, spa...) and to take the well-being and the safety of everyone as a priority, the hotel increased the standards of cleaning and hygiene. “I frequently reside in the Kenzi Rose Garden, the last time I resided there was in last new year vacation, and I also resided there in Summer of 2020, I would say that everything turned back to normal, and everything is

back to how it was before the pandemic. And one thing that I have noticed is the fact of the increased standards of cleaning and hygiene more than before.” (Interview #3).

4.4 Kenzi Rose Garden plans for the future

The Kenzi Rose Garden planned multiple ambitious goals for its future, focusing on enhancing and expanding many of its offerings and facilities for customers. An important aspect of this goal is to have newly constructed buildings and enlarge its range of hotels suits and rooms, in doing so unlocking the ability for the hotel to reside a larger number of customers and give a wider set of choices to reach their needs. Another plan is to keep investing consistently in digital marketing tools, and to keep realizing the extreme importance of digital networks in bringing in more and more customers in our current time. By providing its digital marketing plans and using the newest and enhanced tools and technologies, The Kenzi Rose Garden wishes to keep its position as of the leaders in the Moroccan hospitality market, generating more hotel guests and increasing revenues. As well as the hotel aims to grow in different aspects and intends to provide unique hotel guest experiences. “ We are planning to enhance our offers and facilities for our customers, build new hotel rooms and suits to extend our customer’s number, invest more in the digital marketing tools as it is considered as the present and the future of our industry, we also wish to keep our position in the Moroccan market as one of the leaders even with the challenges faced, as we aim to grow in different aspects” (Interview #1).

4.5 Lessons learned.

The interview analyses were examined and analyzed the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, which impacted the Kenzi Rose Garden hotel as many other hotels in a hard way. The interviewee shared valuable and significant ideas and mentioned how was the hotel’s answer and reaction to the crisis as well as how they will react if they face similar crisis in the future.

The interviewee stressed on the importance of providing the positive and optimistic mindset and never giving up in that kind of thought times, as this is the best way for them to come up with good and effective solutions.

Moreover, the interviewee highlighted on the importance of keeping the good communication and engaging the employees in the decision-making as this is considered as one of the best methods to stay united. Not only with employees, but also with guests to inform them about the measures and protocols taken by the hotel to ensure the safety of everyone. “We cannot deny that the COVID-19 is considered as a hard period for our hotel, but we have learned many lessons from this pandemic, more specifically the importance of the good communication not only between staff but also with guests, and how much it is important to engage the employees in decision-making and how it is essential to keep the positive mindset and being optimist” (Interview #1).

In the future, and in case that the hotel face a potential similar crises, as they hope not face any, but in case they would apply the lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic, if the crisis is similar to COVID-19 they would try to identify the risks of the crisis and adapt protocols and measures to minimize the risk, as the hotel should be ready to any kind of challenges and changes.

The hotel is aiming to continue providing training for its employees to make them more adaptable to be ready to any type of challenges that may happen to the hotel in the future. “In case that if someday we face any crisis even that we wish not to face any, we will for sure apply these lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic” (Interview #1)

5 Recommendation

Based on the findings collected from the research, it is important that the Kenzi Rose Garden needs to look at a variety of different factors and embrace new trends and strategies to grow its customer numbers, increase its revenues and keep its leading market position in Morocco’s hotel industry in the future. To accomplish these objectives, it is important to follow these measures:

The Kenzi Rose Garden is required to keep making the hygiene and sanitary to its customers as a priority by providing strong cleaning measures, and by encouraging the social distances protocols in different common parts of the hotel, as this is not only a way to protect the guests and employee’s safety, but it is considered as the best way to enhance trust between customers and the hotel.

Another important point is that the hotel must enhance its marketing strategies to promote the hotel and boost the reservations, by collaborating with travel agencies and social media

influencers and this is the best way to attract the attention of travelers, this is also to advertise the hotel's services, facilities, and activities.

The hotel should also start investing in smart items such as making a hotel mobile application, an automatic check-in and check-out machines to give guest the best customer service and to facilitate their operations, without forgetting the fact of keep allowing payment by different digital payment options.

The Kenzi Rose Garden should organize different events as part of entertainments to attracts different customers tastes as well as to provide guests with unforgettable and unique trip experience, as this can also help the hotel to get more extra revenue.

The hotel must ensure the training and development for its employees in different areas (communication, customer service, problem solving...) as this is the best way to enhance their job performance to provide a great work environment and a good customer service for guests.

Finally, the Kenzi Rose Garden must be prepared to any type of crises.

6 Conclusion

The main goal of the thesis was to find how the Kenzi Rose Garden was impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, thus, it was determined that the hotel is a great example of how the hospitality industry was hardly impacted by the pandemic, though the insights gathered and the qualitative method used which included a survey and interviews with a project manager and two customers, in the study research the author gained many information regarding that matter with an emphasis on the instance of Kenzi Rose Garden from the effects of the pandemic on the hotel, the measures made by Kenzi Rose Garden, and the lessons learned during this hard crisis.

The study has shown that the COVID-19 epidemic has significantly harmed the Moroccan hospitality sector with the different restrictions made by the government in the country like the travel restrictions that caused a drop in hotel occupancy and increased the income of the hotel, the industry in general has faced different challenges.

Additionally, the crisis has made the hotel customers more vigilant about their safety and health during this global pandemic and stressing about the necessity of the implementation of these safety precautions in the hospitality industry, that is why the Kenzi Rose Garden putted in place safety protocols to guarantee the safety of its guests and its staff.

The research has also revealed a number of important lessons learned from the outbreak for the hospitality industry in general and especially the Moroccan one, First, the importance of providing a positive mindset and attitude in that kind of crises and never giving up, to find solutions and to deal with the crisis even if it is hard, second, the significance of communication in between staff and engage them in the decision-making to keep the hotel team united even in the hard crisis, as well as with guests to keep them informed about all updates regarding everything related to the hotel and the pandemic.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on the Moroccan hospitality industry, the findings of the study can be useful for hotels if they face any kind of crisis in the future.

In conclusion, the research study has made an important and valuable addition to understand the impact of COVID-19 outbreak on the Moroccan hospitality industry, as the case of Kenzi Rose Garden being a useful model of how hotels were struggling and had to adapt different strategies during this challenging period.

The results of this research study will ideally serve as a valuable contribution to further research and policy initiatives in the hospitality sector and will ultimately help other hospitality establishments to use strategies used by Kenzi Rose Garden during the COVID-19 outbreak in different future crises that might be faced by any type of hotel in the future as well as to develop a more resilient and stronger hospitality industry in Morocco and abroad.

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Appendix 1: Survey questions

The impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality sector

Thank you for the time you're taking to participate in my survey concerning my thesis research.

It will take you only few minutes to complete the survey. Let's begin.

What is your job title?

- General Manager
- Assistant Manager
- Sales and Marketing
- Other: _____

How has your business been impacted by the coronavirus?

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Moderately
- Severely

Were you housing essential workers such as health-care workers or serving as quarantine spaces?

- Health-care workers
- Quarantine Spaces
- None
- Other: _____

Did your hotel receive government assistance?

- Yes
- No

What are the measures taken during COVID-19 with employees ?

- Reduce shift / hours
- Pay Cut
- Freeze Hiring
- Encourage employees to take Annual leave
- Encourage employees to take No Pay leave
- Other: _____

From 0 to 10, how would you evaluate the current situation of your business after the COVID-19 Crisis ?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

Did you hotel closed temporary or completely during the COVID-19

- Temporary
- Completely

What are your biggest concerns or challenges for your business as a result of the Covid-19 crisis?

To increase the turn over

As an employee or manager, what's been the hardest part of this?

Managing between health and work

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Appendix 2: Interviews

Questions for Kenzi Rose Garden

- How was the Kenzi Rose Garden doing before the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How the pandemic impacted the workforce of the Kenzi Rose Garden?
- What were your expectations regarding the crisis and its impacts on your hotel?
- Did you have any plans in place to protect the hotel from the Covid-19 crisis?
- How did you serve your hotel during this big crisis?
- What about the challenges and the difficulties you faced during this crisis? And how did you handle them?
- Could you please tell me about the situation of the hotel after the first stage of reopening?
- Were you satisfied by the performance during that period?
- What about the 2021 wintertime situation in your hotel?
- Were you respecting the curfew time? And how was the hotel working? Was your hotel respecting the hygiene measures?
- How is the situation in 2023?
- Do you have any plans for Kenzi Rose Garden in the future?
- What are the lessons learned from COVID-19?

Questions for the hotel customers

- As a loyal customer 1 of Kenzi Rose Garden how was the situation when you visited the hotel (during Christmas time 2021) comparing to previous times?
- Was the hotel respecting the protocols of safety and hygiene?
- According to the last time when you visited the hotel in 2023 tell me how is the hotel performing? And what changed between then and now?