

Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the study. It presents, in brief, a background, and it identifies the major issues and specific objectives of the case study phase of this research programme. Towards the end, it summarises the outcome in relation to each of the major objectives and also indicates the organisation of this report.

Background to the Case Study on Mountain Tourism

This report is part of the NORAD-sponsored ongoing research programme on Mountain Tourism for Local Community Development in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region being coordinated by the Mountain Enterprise and Infrastructure Division of ICIMOD. The Academy for Mountain Environics, Dehradun, which incorporates the activities of the erstwhile TARU, Dehradun, has been participating in this research endeavour. An overview report on the state of Mountain Tourism in Himachal Pradesh and the hills of Uttar Pradesh has been prepared.

The second phase of the research programme concentrated on attempting a draft action plan for Mountain Tourism Development in two specific areas in each of the participating nations. This report presents the methods and processes used in the case study, elaborates the concern regarding 'carrying capacity', and draws up a draft action plan for Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh and the Badrinath Tourist Zone of the Garhwal Himalayas in Uttar Pradesh.

Major Issues for Investigation

The overview assessment and detailed evaluation of the scope of mountain tourism indicates the need to investigate a number of issues. The critical among them include the following.

1. Is mountain tourism, in the specific areas, already an important development intervention? To what extent does it have a role?
2. Can mountain tourism directly address the concerns of poverty alleviation and gender inequities?

3. What are the limits in terms of 'carrying capacity', including the acceptable levels of tolerance in hosting tourists as perceived by the community and also acceptable to the tourists?
4. What are the constraints in tourism development, and what strategic thrusts are required?
5. How can a policy-programme-plan-project continuum be established to promote tourism as one option for local community development ?

Objectives of the Case Studies

As a rational sequence to the overview studies, the overall objective of the case study programme is to develop an action plan and an implementation framework for sustainable tourism in the specific destinations. The specific objectives are as follow.

1. To prepare an inventory of biophysical, socioeconomic, and infrastructural resources in Kinnaur district and the Badrinath Tourist Zone of the North-west Indian Himalayas.
2. To classify and categorise broad tourist zones, in terms of routes or areas and various experience zones, to enable the prioritisation of actions.
3. To evaluate singular and synergetic impacts on the environment and map the perceptions of the local people on the seriousness of the impacts.
4. On that basis, to set and determine the 'carrying capacity', to assist in making decisions about acceptable visitor use and the infrastructural and managerial support systems required, and to express critical thresholds in terms of 'communicable indicators'
5. Then, through such a process as given above, to develop specific action plans and implementation frameworks for Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh and the Badrinath Tourist Zone in the Uttar Pradesh hills.

Rationale for the Choice of Kinnaur District

1. Kinnaur has very recently been opened to tourism by changes in 'inner-line' permits and other restrictions.
2. There is total uncertainty in the policy environment, and the local administration, which will be directly responsible, seeks assistance.
3. Kinnaur has the twin advantages of a diverse physical environment with Cis and trans-Himalayan habitats and their cultural diversity.
4. The region claims a Puranic link with the Pandavas and the community still practices polyandry. However, the most important aspect is the relatively

- better status of women. This is also reflected in their higher, formal educational level. Therefore, it offers an opportunity to better appreciate the cultural dimension and impact that tourism has, and can potentially have, in a different setting.
5. Horticulture came to Kinnaur two decades earlier, and this has made the region relatively stronger in terms of its economy. Thus, the impact of tourism, in an area that has seen some development, is well documented.
 6. There are specific plan-layouts which have been made and intervention, now, can directly demonstrate the utility of this project to the user agencies.

Rationale for the Choice of Badrinath Zone

1. Badrinath is an important pilgrimage centre, and over 80 per cent of the people coming to the region are pilgrims. The fact that large numbers of people have been coming since time immemorial could give us some insights into the factors contributing to sustainable tourism. The region also draws Sikh pilgrims and, therefore, also shows a diversity of pilgrim traffic.
2. Among the emerging areas of tourist interest, some areas offer the potential for understanding the possibility of extending the tourist season and length of stay of tourists. The Valley of Flowers (Bhyundar Valley) offers a unique situation for a popular destination. Fortunately, this ecological wealth is not unique to the Valley but can refer also to a dozen other high-altitude alpine meadows (*bugyal*[s]). This gives a wider applicability to the understanding of Bhyundar *bugyal*.

A small part of Bhyundar Valley has been declared a National Park, and most of the tourists to the Valley are satiated with the first few kilometres of walking/camping there. This has caused tremendous pressure on some of the camping grounds and areas around them, which are being so trampled that regeneration has stopped. Concern has been raised, in various quarters, about the 'carrying capacity' of the Valley, and it would be pertinent to address this concern.

3. The Valley is generally visited during the late pre-monsoon and post-monsoon pilgrimage seasons. Most often the pre-monsoon visitors are disappointed, as the rhythms of flowering seem to have altered and a very limited range of flowers is seen during the pilgrimage season. The documentation of the rhythmic cycles of flowering would add a temporal dimension to the understanding of environmental disturbances and also enable the identification of periods when tourism can be best promoted.

4. The *bugyal*(s) have a strong linkage with the social economy of the high-altitude settlements. During the rainy season, the cattle are taken to these high altitude meadows, often by the elder members of the family. This brings in an element of concern for the maintenance of the regenerative capacity of the *bugyal*(s). If the local people understand the value of tourism, and evaluate their own ability to participate in it, this can provide the basis for people's participation and enable them to capitalise on their resources. Unfortunately, they are not at all involved in the current tourism profile.
5. In order to increase the length of the tourist season in this region, the Government of India, through its corporation, started the Auli Ski Centre. The nodal point of the region is Joshimath. In the last three years, National Winter Sports have been conducted twice in Auli. However, skiing is not yet popular among Indians, and Auli is unknown to foreigners.
6. Studying the area can enable the documentation of the range and diversity of tourists, from pilgrims to trekkers; this will certainly add value to the research programme.

The Organisation of This Report

1. The first chapter is the introduction.
2. The second chapter elaborates upon the methodological framework and presents the context of the application in each of the case study areas.
3. The third chapter presents an inventory of the tourist resources of Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh and the Badrinath Tourist Zone of Chamoli district of Uttar Pradesh.
4. The fourth chapter details the specific nature of the impact and implications of mountain tourism. It investigates the role of mountain tourism as a means of poverty alleviation, as well as its scope as a positive development intervention.
5. Chapter Five provides the linkage of the methodological pursuits of this research programme, the specific case study situation, and the practical requirements of the tourism sector to contribute to local community development. The core theme of this chapter is the concept of tourism carrying capacity and its practical applications.
6. Chapter Six sets up the agenda for tourism in the context of the local communities and attempts a framework and action plan for sustainable tourism development.
7. The last chapter summarises the situation in the two selected areas and makes specific recommendations. It also uses the results of the case studies to lay out a broad strategy for the region.

Summary of Inferences on Major Issues

Issue	Kinnaur District	Badrinath Tourist Zone
Is mountain tourism already an important development intervention? To what extent does it have a role?	Tourism has really yet to begin. Even over the next 10 years, it is likely to have a very minor role.	Tourists trebled in the last two decades. The role of tourism in local development became negligible after the road to Badrinath was built.
Can mountain tourism directly address the concerns of poverty alleviation and gender inequities?	The poor have not the skills to provide priced products and services to the current types of tourists. On the contrary, tourism may destroy the commons and impoverish the poor. The Gender inequities are low and tourism can be of little aid.	The communities that live in villages that are away from the road are relatively poorer. They are skilled in knitting and weaving. Tourism could help these marginal communities if properly targeted. Gender concerns are not an issue at all.
What are the limits in terms of 'carrying capacity'? acceptable levels of tolerance for hosts, also acceptable to tourists?	Over 10,000 people-days, twice the current number, spread over the various centres, could be physically hosted. However, returns from investing in tourism are much slower and less efficient than orchard cropping. The need for tourism is debatable.	While specific limits exist for every site, the area can accommodate a 10% rise from the present annual 5 lakh over the next decade. The promotion of high-investment elite tourism will create a conflict with local communities.
What are the constraints in tourism development and what strategic thrusts are required?	Communications and the climate reduce the time-spread. Equity should be accorded higher priority if the role of tourism is to be enhanced.	Communications, the climate and the norm for opening the temple, reduce time-spread.
How can a policy-programme-plan-project continuum be established to promote tourism as one option for local community development ?	The policy-programme linkage has to be made explicit. Specific research inputs are needed to assess alternative projects. Tourism has to piggy-back on horticulture and be reinforced positively.	The prevailing uncertainty restricts any useful inferences. A policy needs to be formulated and the necessary institutional mechanisms need to be developed.