

Nature, Impact, and Implications of Mountain Tourism

Nature, Type, and Characteristics of Tourism

The current inflow of tourists to Kinnaur is very limited. In 1992, there were only about 2,000 tourists and this has not increased substantially. Many of the tourists are participants in package tours operated by the state or private agencies based in Delhi. Most tourists visit Kalpa-Recong Peo and Sangla. Few go to Chitkul. It is mostly those who travel into the district of Lahaul and Spiti who go to Pooh and beyond (Map 5.1).

Very few of the tourists are foreigners. They often go beyond Kinnaur into Lahaul and Spiti and are in groups as required by regulations. Many among them are repeat visitors to Himachal Pradesh who find Kulu-Manali and other areas of Himachal Pradesh too crowded.

The Kinner Kailash *parikrama* (circumambulating the Kinner Kailash peak) is practised among groups of devout pilgrims during specified periods.

Though the number of tourists studied as a sample is too small to draw very specific conclusions, the majority (approx. 75 per cent) visited Kinnaur primarily for recreation; 20 per cent had some official work in Kinnaur; and only five per cent came on a pilgrimage (Figure 5.1).

One of the important characteristics of the tourists is that most of them spend over three days at their destinations. At least 25 per cent of them stay for over a week (Figure 5.2). Most of the tourists visiting Kinnaur are rich; 80 per cent reported annual incomes of over Rs 50,000 and, of them, 30 per cent had annual incomes of over Rs 100,000 (Figure 5.3).

The most interesting aspect of the tourist profile is that Kinnaur is a destination that draws visitors again and again. Only 25 per cent of the tourists are first-time visitors, fifty-five percent reported being in Kinnaur for the third time, and as many as 10 per cent of the tourists were many-time visitors (Figure 5.4). Given the fact that travelling into Kinnaur became really possible only in 1992, Kinnaur seems to have enchanted the early visitors into the area.

Map 5.1: Distribution of Tourists in Kinnaur

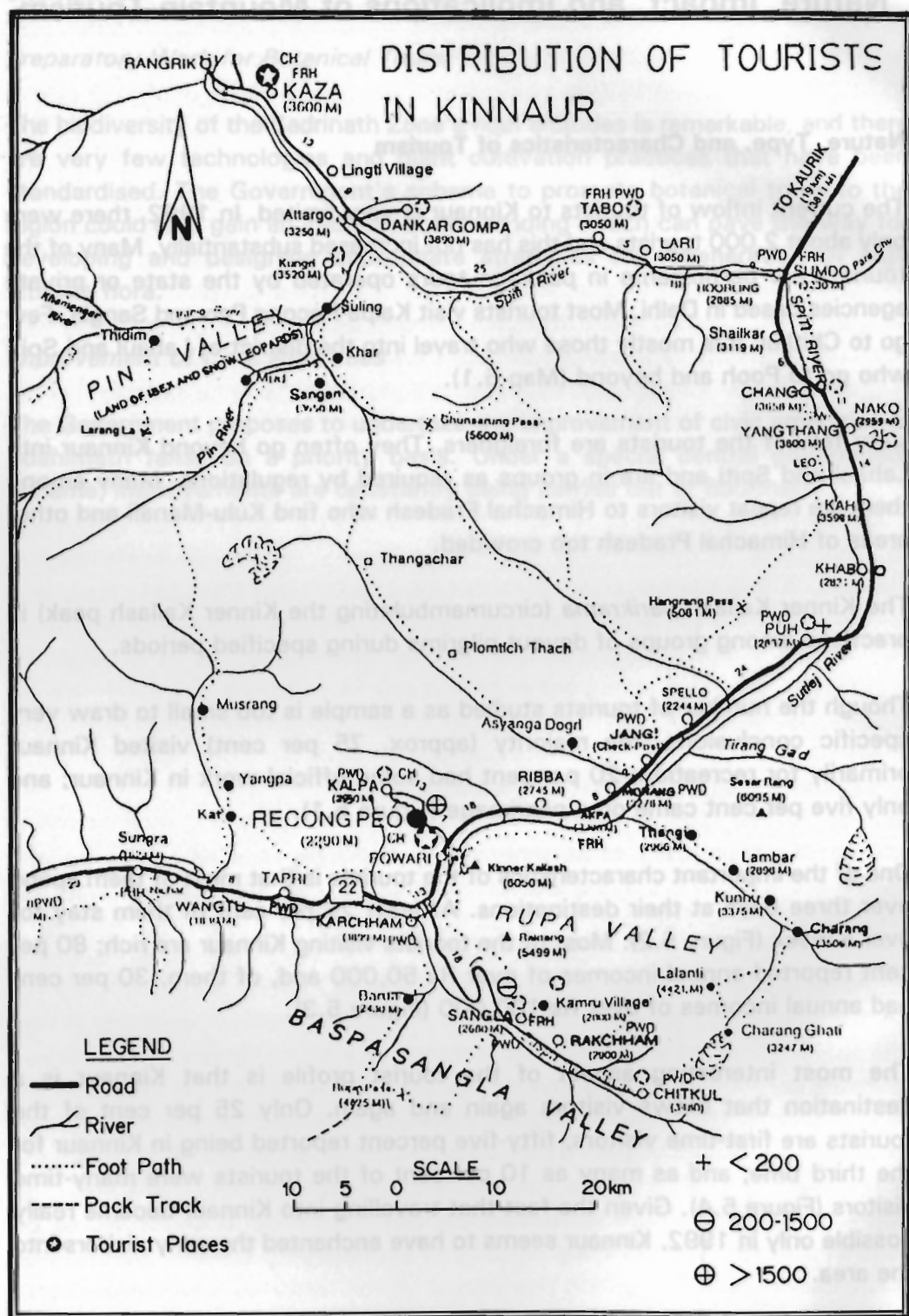


Figure 5.1:
Purpose of Visit to Kinnaur District

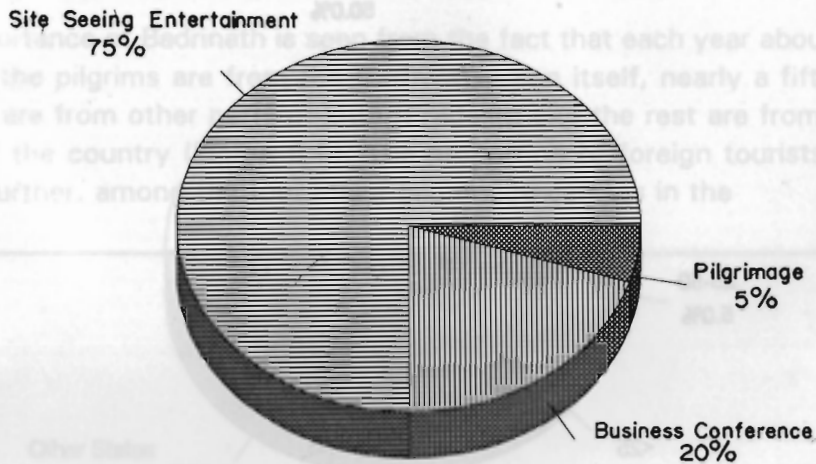


Figure 5.2:
Duration of Stay in Kinnaur District

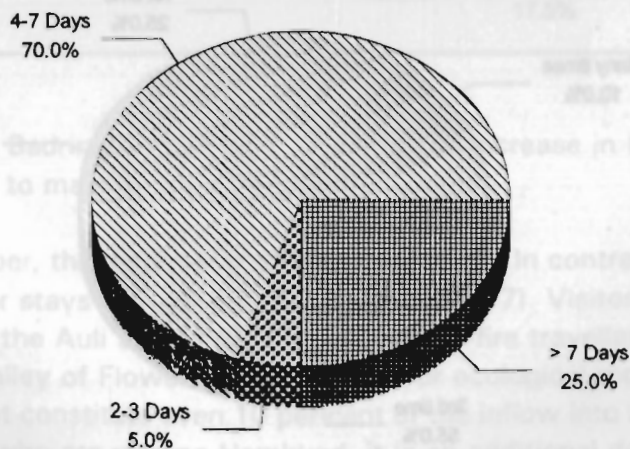


Figure 5.3: Annual Family Income of Tourists in Kinnaur District (Rs in ,000)

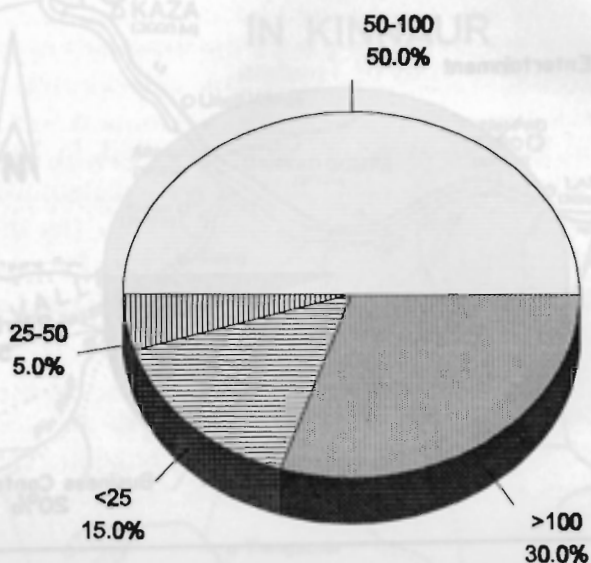
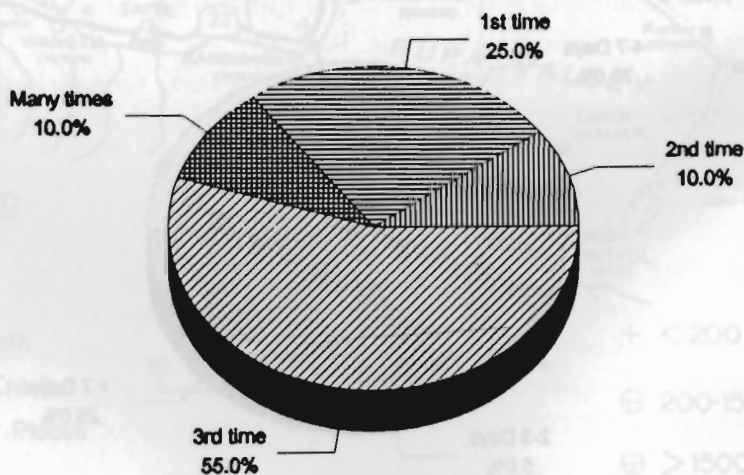
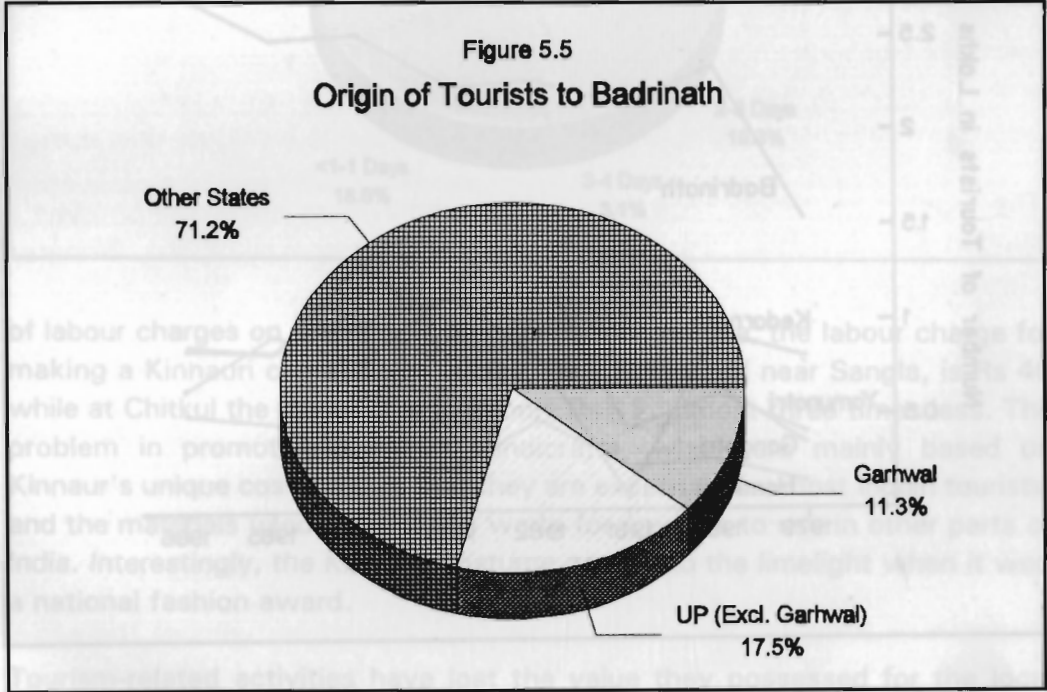


Figure 5.4: Frequency of Visits to Kinnaur District



Most (over 98%) of the tourists who come to the Badrinath Zone are pilgrims. While there is a wide range of economic classes, the pilgrimage economy is entirely operational on low economic turn-overs. The religious sanctions and austerity associated with pilgrimage are essential for the pre- dominance of this category of tourist.

The importance of Badrinath is seen from the fact that each year about 10 per cent of the pilgrims are from the Garhwal region itself, nearly a fifth of the tourists are from other parts of Uttar Pradesh, and the rest are from various parts of the country (Figure 5.5). The proportion of foreign tourists is very small. Further, among the four major pilgrimage centres in the

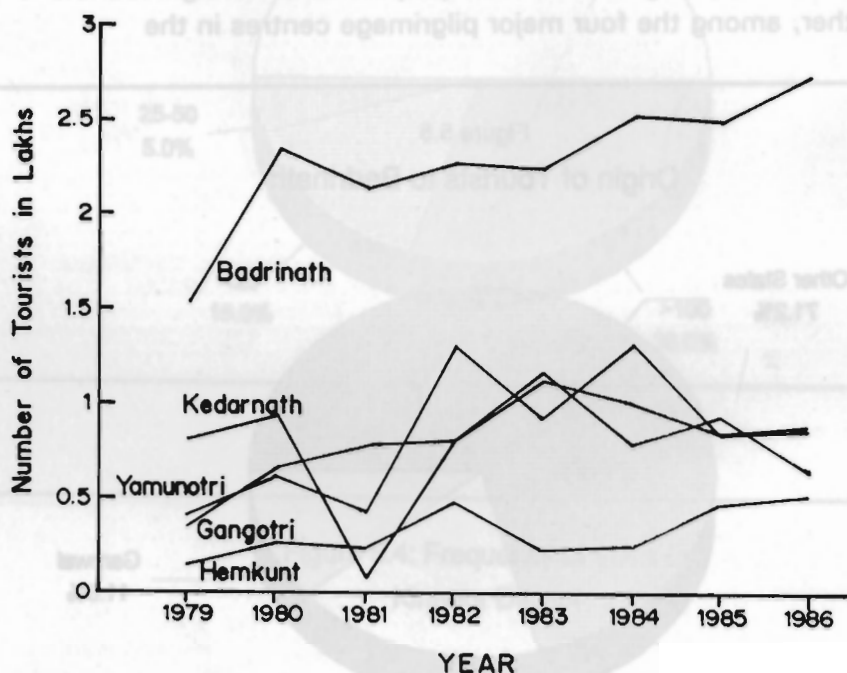


Garhwal region, Badrinath has had a much higher increase in tourist inflow, and it continues to maintain this trend (Figure 5.6).

In Badrinath proper, the duration of stay is very short. In contrast to Kinnaur, hardly any visitor stays for over three days (Figure 5.7). Visitors to the other sites, excluding the Auli Ski Centre, are also quick-fire travellers. Only those who visit the Valley of Flowers with botanical or ecological motives stay for long. They do not constitute even 10 per cent of the inflow into the Valley. For most travellers who are visiting Hemkund, it is an additional day's tour from Ghangaria.

Figure 5.6

COMPARISON OF TOURIST INFLOW IN 'CHARDHAM'

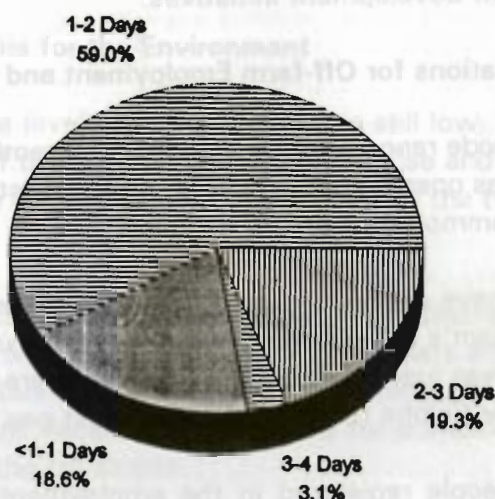


Impacts and Implications for the Production System

The current flow of tourists is small and has no immediate implications on the local production system. Indeed, the fact that tourism development may not positively influence the local production system necessitates more careful analysis in terms of its role as a leading sector in the district.

The only sector that can particularly benefit from tourism is the Kinnauri craft industry. Given the low volume of tourists, unless the industry is given a greater market orientation, passive sales to incoming tourists will not account for large turnovers. Notwithstanding, tourism has led to an increased payment

**Figure 5.7: Duration of Stay in
Badrinath Tourist Zone**



of labour charges on craft items produced. For example, the labour charge for making a Kinnauri cap in Kothi village, near Kalpa and near Sangla, is Rs 40 while at Chitkul the labour charge is only Rs 15, almost three times less. The problem in promoting Kinnauri handicrafts, which are mainly based on Kinnaur's unique costumes, is that they are expensive for most Indian tourists, and the materials used make it too warm for any one to use in other parts of India. Interestingly, the Kinnauri costume came into the limelight when it won a national fashion award.

Tourism-related activities have lost the value they possessed for the local economy, particularly the use of local products by tourists in the Badrinath area. The impact of causal factors other than tourism itself has been severe. The road to Badrinath virtually demolished the concept of *chatti*, which were wayside lodges along the trek route to the temple. The pilgrimage economy, though austere, had to depend on the services provided *en route*, as the pilgrimage took over 20 days from the nearest roadhead.

With the advent of the road, the services have also assumed a commercial character, with more outsiders taking up key establishments. The attitude of the local people still continues to be one of honour for the devotees, and any involvement by them is more in the nature of serving them rather than seeing them as consumers of their products.

The development initiatives undertaken by the Government have also not been received well by the people, for they mostly ignore their concerns. In the current unrest among the citizens, those from the Joshimath area have been in the forefront even during current encounters with the state, a major cause being the impact of development initiatives.

Impact and Implications for Off-farm Employment and Income Generation

Tourism offers a wide range of niche activities. Currently, these are restricted to activities such as opening guest houses, running restaurants, and providing paying-guest accommodation or taxi services.

At present, there have not been very large tourist inflows, but there are some indications of tourism's impact on employment. For example, in Rekong Peo, until 1986 there was just one taxi, but now there are nearly fifty, and even remote villages like Skibba today boast of at least one local taxi operator.

The number of people registered in the employment exchange showed a sudden fall in 1992. This coincided with the removal of the Wangtoo checkpost, and the spurt in tourism activity since then.

Even though there has been no substantial increase in tourist arrivals, people are very much aware of the benefits of tourism. For instance, the *pradhan* of Sangla village intends to promote, among the people in the *gram sabha*, the idea of establishing a paying guest system for tourists. This could be in the form of tents in orchards, or separate rooms with toilet facilities, which are still uncommon.

In Garhwal, the local population is still very limited and almost the entire community could be involved in the tourism sector to varying degrees. However, the timespread and the limited stay of the pilgrims in the region reduces the possibility of large numbers being wholly involved in tourism. The Government's programme needs to reduce their monopoly over infrastructure by systematically divesting control to local agencies and community organisations.

There are high altitude tribal villages in the region where the populations are largely of Tibetan descent. These villages, particularly Mana which is very close to Badrinath, could earn additional income if some of their crafts were promoted as souvenirs. Mana village, which also forms the last post on the border along this road, was an important centre in terms of the trade with Tibet and it used to cater to the requirements for woven and knitted woollens,

apart from trading in basic items like salt, which were traded along this route. It is more a revival of trade that could bring about the integration of these people, as the current process of tourism development has totally excluded them.

Impact and Implications for the Environment

In Kinnaur district, the level of tourist activity is still low. However, the first and very clear signs of the impacts it is going to cause and the implications to local communities are already evident, particularly in the twin settlements of Recong Peo-Kalpa.

At Peo, waste disposal systems, at the market and settlement hub, are grossly inadequate. The solid wastes generated by both tourists and local commuters in and around the bus-stand area is an aesthetic blight. The smell is nauseating. Most small vacant plots are used for dumping waste. Plastic is seen strewn all over the hill slopes.

Significant construction waste is generated as new buildings are being constructed for various offices and shops. The main impacts of the ongoing rapid pace of construction include:

- the new buildings coming up in the style of ugly modern concrete structures are totally devoid of any aesthetic considerations;
- construction activity along the roadside is narrowing the thoroughfares and raising dust on the specific sites where material is dumped;
- overflow of drain water, when some of the excavated or demolished material fills open drains along the road, drainage itself becomes an area of concern as the public systems are not being maintained and sewage is released at several locations.

The wastes and the concrete constructions combine to the most unaesthetic effect, and this is one factor that the local citizens immediately recognise as something detrimental to their living conditions. Of course, they feel that the contribution of tourists to this degradation is not so great as that of establishing the district headquarters in this place and making it a nucleus for various activities.

The presence of the various offices of the district and state also means that an increasing area is brought under development, and, without a proper area plan, the entire stretch of land between Peo and Kalpa is becoming degraded.

The major environmental problems in the Badrinath zone relate to the sanitation facilities in Joshimath and Badrinath which, during peak tourist inflows, are inadequate to cater to the needs. This is in spite of constant efforts and seasonal preparations as the number of tourists increase considerably each year. Sanitation and solid waste management require truly innovative solutions as the expansion of the system cannot occur beyond a certain point, and there is a relentless increase in the number of tourists. The only period that saw a sizeable reduction was the post-monsoon period of 1994 because of the agitation going on in the region.

The route along the Lakshman Ganga leading to Ghangaria, from where one visits Hemkund and the Valley of Flowers, is also a zone that has seen an increased flow of tourists and a depleting forest cover. This is, however, not on an alarming scale.

The Valley of Flowers, which has now been declared a biosphere reserve, suffers trampling and other damage at the entrance. With night camping disallowed in the valley, it is the zone immediately within reach that faces a rapid decline in species' diversity. Another cause for the loss of diversity that is inaccessible to the conservationists is the banning of seasonal grazing which was practised in the past. Large animal grazing is known to be ecologically conducive to increasing and maintaining diversity.

The Auli Skiing Centre has had, until now, a very small volume of tourists, and the impacts are still not very visible. The initial construction activities did have some impacts and the ropeway system has caused localised soil erosion.

Impact and Implications for Local Infrastructure and Community Development

Kinnaur has basic amenities such as electricity, water supply, medical facilities, roads, transportation systems, and telecommunications. However, to cater to the demands of the tourists, the existing facilities have to be increased manifold, even if for a short period.

The Government has to make investments in water supplies, medical facilities, telecommunications, and transportation. These investments will be significant for a district that receives rather limited resources. Even though Kinnaur boasts that all its villages are provided with drinking water, the supply is grossly insufficient. In all the villages we visited, people had to trek long for distances to fetch drinking water. The normal daily water supply is usually only for a couple of hours in the morning and one hour in the evening.

Water availability at Recong Peo, which was adequate until a few years ago and probably a factor responsible for choosing it as the location for the district headquarters, has become an issue for concern. Shortages are suffered by the residents, particularly during the pre-monsoon periods. A detailed assessment of the water demand for current and proposed construction activities alone will reveal whether this is likely to be a problem that will be resolved after mandatory constructions are over.

Local infrastructural development has been slow, and tourism can bring in critical inputs for the Badrinath Zone. Most of the basic infrastructural facilities have still not reached the villages that are away from the road.

For the township of Badrinath, a Master Plan was devised taking into account the future growth of tourism. The land use in the town was surveyed. Only 26 per cent of the land was shown to be in the developed land-use category, amounting to approximately 33ha. The principal categories of land use that were envisaged were the residential areas and the tourist accommodation zones, which together constitute about 48 per cent. The transport zone, which is the other main use category, accounts for another 25 per cent of the developed area (Table 5.1). One of the main problems with the Master Plan's process is that the designing agencies are overwhelmed with the methods that they normally adopt in the larger townships of the plains, and the distinct character of the religious settlement and the necessity for a design for a mountain environment are never brought to the fore. Thus, the structures that have come up are not appropriate for the mountain environment; over the years, the distinct characteristics of the Badrinath *dham* have been lost and it now resembles an unkempt small town in the plains. Further, the municipality has not had any regular fund devolvement, and, for over a year, the conservation workers have not received their wages. Most recently, the municipal employees have threatened to stop even minimum upkeep activities.

Infrastructural development has not extended to the smaller settlements en route, and the local people have received no particular benefit from tourism development in the region.

Although hospitals exist, they are not equipped with modern medical facilities. Even though the number of buses has increased, travelling from one place to another is quite difficult. Local commuters face hardships, as the same buses ply for long distance travellers. **It is not just time consuming, but also quite tiring to move on these overcrowded buses, and** all these services are dependent on weather conditions.

Table 5.1 : Badrinath Land-Use Master Plan 1979

Undeveloped Land Use	Area	%	Developed Land Use	Area	%
Agriculture	34.14	36.78	Residential Area	9.02	27.28
Open Space	32.40	34.90	Visitor's Housing	6.60	19.96
Low Land	07.18	07.75	Commercial Area	2.12	06.42
River Sides	19.10	20.57	Government Buildings	3.12	09.44
			D.G.B.R. Area	2.52	7.62
			Community Services	0.75	2.27
			Transport Zone	8.56	25.83
			The Temple	0.39	01.18
	92.82 (73.72%)	100.00		33.08 (26.28%)	100.00

Source. Town and Country Planning Organisation, U.P.

Investment Implications

Tenure laws in both regions do not permit outsiders to buy land. This implies that, although people are ready to welcome tourists, the investments have to come from the Government and, in the case of Kinnaur, supplemented by larger orchard farmers. As of now, the Government and the local elite seem to be keen on establishing a '3-star' hotel at Sangla. The Government might do well to enable the local people to invest in it and find alternative sites for themselves or, still better, it should concentrate on strengthening civic amenities and devising various mechanisms for the local people to participate in the accommodation sector.

While government systems have suddenly mired themselves in uncertainty, they have also begun a process of privatisation. The first public announcement has come through an advertisement asking prospective sellers to respond.

The state, through this, plans to obviate land laws by acquiring property through notification and payment of compensations. This land will then be leased to outside agencies and corporate bodies. This process of land alienation has created discontent among the local people as well as among the employees of government agencies, particularly those in government-run corporations, who see that their resources will be given away at very low prices.

The government programmes in each of these areas is discussed, along with the draft plan that seeks to first alter these proposals, while developing a sustainable plan formulation and monitoring system.

Impact and Implications for Culture and Traditional Institutions

Even before the influx of tourists began, one significant impact that Kinnaur faced was the theft of valuable idols from the Kamru temple. This, it is now known, was part of a larger racket involving international entities (some of the idols have been traced to Italy). There has been a definite concern voiced by many people, including senior officials in the district. This has resulted in circumspection towards foreigners freely moving in the district. Many people expressed the need for a vigilant approach to the promotion of tourism in the district, particularly as foreigners seem to be keener than Indian tourists to visit some of the traditional shrines.

Crime has been on the rise in Kinnaur, particularly in recent years. The local people are of the opinion that social disturbances are mostly caused by those who have received some education and have travelled outside the area. They are the people who lack respect for the traditional lifestyle. It is not education or exposure to the world outside Kinnaur which are responsible for the increase in crime, but large amounts of money in the hands of a few and sudden exposure to outside culture (satellite TV is very popular in Kinnaur).

Media exposure is incomparable as an acculturation factor. Over the last few years, Kinnaur has witnessed a sort of media revolution, with the setting up of a television relay station at Rekong Peo. Now television has become the most popular form of entertainment in most villages. Dish antennae are seen in some villages. The impact on consumption habits is still minimal. The radio, newspapers, and magazines are not very popular.

Tourism has existed for ages and it has not altered traditional lifestyles as such. The exposure of these communities to the outside world, through education and the media, have had a greater bearing on the cultural norms.

The most striking aspect is the 'modernisation' that seems to be catching up with most pilgrimage centres, and Badrinath has not escaped this process. There does not seem to be a direct relationship between modernisation and tourism alone, but, probably because the majority of people visiting the pilgrimage centres are from towns and other urban centres, a diffusion takes place. The local people give in to the basic economic datum of demand and supply and transfer themselves as per the needs and wants of tourists (i.e.,

in their dress sense, dialect used, the food consumed, and goods provided). *Ogla* and *fafra* for instance, which used to be the staple foods of this area, are all but gone.

In recent times, there have been demands from certain traders and politicians to extend the period during which the Badrinath Temple is opened. Their emphasis has been on the rationale that the climate allows for the extension of the period and also that technology is now available to clear the snow to extend the period. This is argued to be the easiest method of tackling the problem of seasonality. While this suggestion itself is seen by the local people and the devout as the greatest affront to their religious sentiments, this would be the critical test of whether market forces in the tourism sector can dislodge a time-honoured religious rule. Of course, local sentiments send very clear signals that, if this were to happen, the already soured relationship with the governmental machinery will turn into a movement of uncontrollable anger against the state.

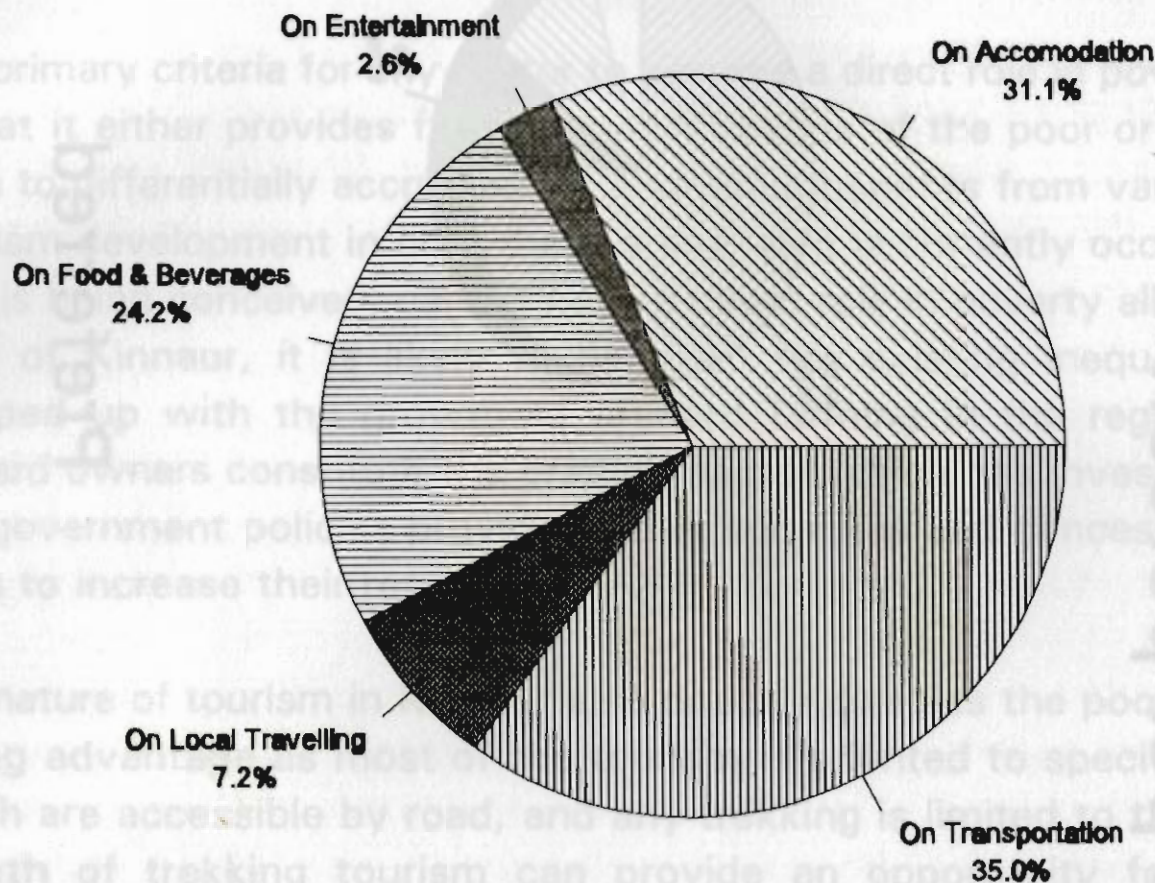
Assessment of Tourism as a Development Intervention

The role of tourism is limited in the context of Kinnaur. As noted earlier, unless there is a phenomenal growth in tourist numbers, which is unlikely, the volume of tourist inflow is not going to be significant in generating incomes that can also be retained within the local economy. The current expenditure per tourist per day is quite low (Figure 5.8), and the total financial input into the local economy is limited as the bulk of the expenditure is incurred by travellers. The accommodation costs are high and this is the only area where specific people can earn substantially. The currently available accommodation facilities are mostly government-owned rest houses which, on average, charge less than Rs 50 a day, and the paying guest houses which, on average, charge over Rs 200 a day. The availed and preferred accommodations (Figure 5.9) indicate that there is scope for creating an infrastructure for higher ranges.

The paying-guest scheme which was introduced by the state is one positive programme. Though the scheme has been operational in a limited manner, it has the advantage of dispersing tourists over a larger area, and individual house owners who have created an additional capacity for visitors may find gainful use for this accommodation during the off-season. This also has the advantage of enabling a larger number of people to cater to the tourists' accommodation needs. The existing paying guest accommodations are close to the tourist centre itself, and they are approached when government accommodation is not available or when directed by those who had visited them earlier. In Sangrattan Guest house in Kalpa some of the guests were

Figure 5.8

Tourist Expenditure in Kinnaur (In Rs)

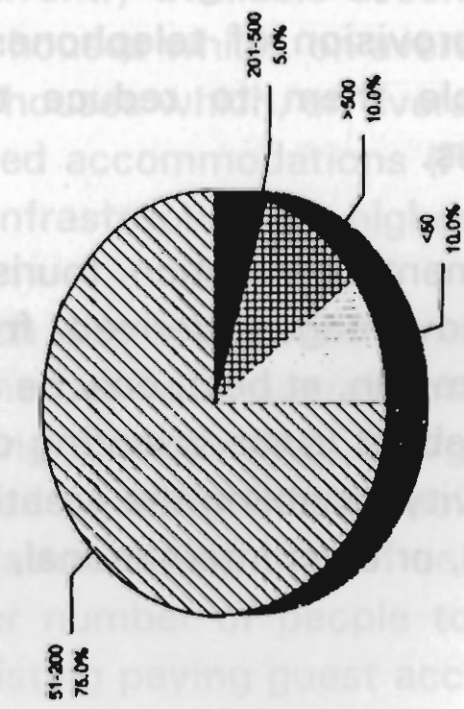


repeat visitors. Considering the fact that over 80 per cent of the visitors to Kinnaur are repeat visitors, a guest house with accommodation for about eight to ten persons may develop a regular clientele over a period of time and thus ensure its viability. The Government can provide a useful service with a centralised system for providing information on the availability of accommodation. The provision of telephones on a priority basis to these houses will also enable them to reduce the costs of marketing their accommodation facilities.

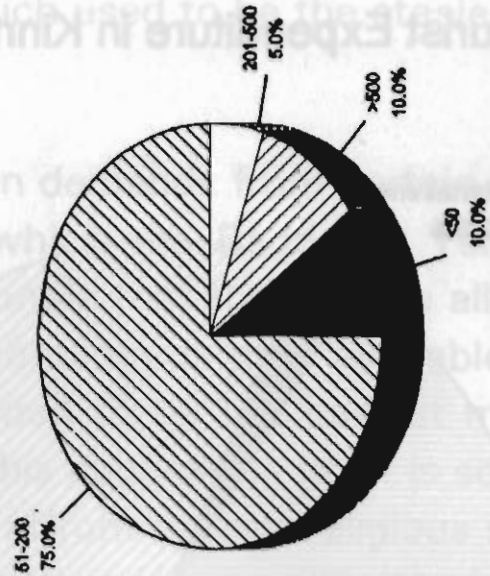
However, as a development intervention, tourism is not a particularly exciting area, as the initial advantages derived from orchard farming can be strengthened and tourism can, at best, only be an adjunct. The particular focus that tourism can bring about is the orienting of tourism itself into a function of the horticultural activity, enabling the creation of a special status in terms of developing a national, or even international, market centre for high-altitude fruits and nuts.

The Badrinath region has immense scope for transforming the existing tourism activity into an important tool for development. In fact, by doing so it would only restore its historical role. This would require much greater political will

Figure 5.9: Aailed & Preferred Rates of Accomodation per person



Aailed



Preferred

and closer work with the communities, than has ever been displayed by the Government in the past.

Tourism Development and Poverty Alleviation

The primary criteria for any sector to assume a direct role in poverty alleviation is that it either provides for the specific needs of the poor or that it enables them to differentially accrue better economic benefits from various activities. Tourism development in both these areas, as it is currently occurring and also as it is being conceived, cannot have a direct role in poverty alleviation. In the case of Kinnaur, it is likely to heighten the existing inequities that have cropped up with the growth of orchard farming in the region. The richer orchard owners constitute the primary sector which has investible surpluses, and government policies provide further subsidies and concessions to enable them to increase their returns.

The nature of tourism in Kinnaur also directly disables the poorer sector from taking advantage as most of the tourism is oriented to specific destinations which are accessible by road, and any trekking is limited to the locality. The growth of trekking tourism can provide an opportunity for the poor to contribute in terms of guide and porter services, although it might be the last form of support that the local poor would seek.

Another scope, limited to poor artisans, is in making Kinnauri costumes. This could, however, be enhanced, not necessarily as a product for the tourist, but as an occupation in itself.

In the case of Uttar Pradesh, the paying-guest scheme has really not taken off, and, in the context of the Badrinath Zone it will be a poor replication of the concept of the *chatti* dotting the trekking route to Badrinath from Rishikesh. Further, there have been complaints in parts of Garhwal about the significant mismanagement of the subsidy offered on this account, which is seen to have only helped richer individuals to construct additional or fresh spaces for their own use at the cost of the public.

The scope for involving the poor in trekking in the region is enormous. One area in which local people could specialise, and which the majority of tourists find inadequate, is the identification of the plants on the trek to the Valley of Flowers. This is something that many of the villagers are adept at and, given some training to familiarise them with scientific terms, they could fill an important niche and also earn a significant income.

The concern with addressing poverty in a region, and the existing mechanisms for it, has always been a point of debate. The existing concessions for large industries, and also large investors, have definitely been a cause for increasing inequities across the country. The step that is seen within the Government as positive in terms of enabling more people to cater to the tourists' needs is in itself a cause for developing inequities, but it should be seen to be positive only, as it is at least a couple of steps down the ladder from their original hope of trickle-down effects.

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