

Tourism Practices and Approaches for its Development in the Uttaranchal Himalaya, India

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Abstract

This paper examines the tourism practices and evaluates the possible enhancements towards a sustainable tourism in the Uttaranchal Himalaya. The modes of tourism are discussed broadly and suggestions are given appropriately for sustainable development of tourism. It reveals that the pilgrimage tourism has been practicing here for centuries. Presently, mass tourism as mountaineering, trekking, skiing and river rafting is being common. The practices of tourism have a significant impact on the economy as many of the small towns emerged as the major service provider centers and the economy of the region grew tremendously. But, at the same time, its impact fell badly on the environment and the tourist places and pilgrimages have received severe environmental implications. Data were taken from the secondary sources and references cited in text were well taken from the published materials.

Keywords: Tourism; pilgrimage; socio-economic impact; revenue generation; Uttaranchal Himalaya

1 Introduction

Uttaranchal Himalaya is known for its natural beauty and pilgrims have been attracted to the region for many centuries. The presence of pilgrimages as four *dhams* is the major attraction for the pilgrims. Similarly, the hill resorts such as Mussoorie, Nainital, Almora, Ranikhet and many mores are the major centers of tourist attraction. The scenic and panoramic view of the mainland of Uttaranchal further accelerated the scope of tourism. The rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Saryu, Koshi and their numerous tributaries arise from the glaciers of the Great Himalaya in Uttaranchal and give a distinct sense of tourism practices. Tourism in a broader sense has existed for a long time in the Uttaranchal Himalaya in the form of pilgrimages to Hindu sanctuaries that are located high up in the mountains. Mountaineering, trekking, river rafting, rock climbing and skiing are being the major attraction for tourist in the region. These forms of mass tourism have a huge impact on the environment and on the local social structure. Presently, the trend of tourism is transforming into adventurer tourism. Skiing is being developed in Auli (district Chamoli) as winter sports. Trekking in many natural places and river rafting in the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers are attracting tourist at a large scale.

Tourism has emerged as a smog free industry and biggest source of revenue generation in worldwide. But, it has both socio-economic and environmental implications. Socio-cultural transformation can be seen due to the mass tourism. Similarly, the economic development as

establishment of the new avenues, employment generation and earnings of foreign currency is one of the major functions of tourism. It has a negative impact on environment too. Degradation of forestland in and around the tourist places and garbage problems due to booming up of tea-stalls and shops and as well as mass tourism are the major environmental problems.

2 Study area

Uttaranchal became the 27th state of the Republic of India on November 9, 2000, which was carved out of Uttar Pradesh. It occupies an area of 51,125 sq km and a population of about 6.0 million (94.4 per sq km). This state lies between $28^{\circ} 53' 24''$ - $31^{\circ} 27' 50''$ N and $77^{\circ} 34' 27''$ - $81^{\circ} 02' 22''$ E. Of its total geographical area, about 47,325 sq km is covered by mountains, while 3800 sq km is *Tarai* plains. The total snow covered area of its mountainous region is 7,632 sq km, with an elevation of over 4000 m. The Mid Himalayan region (at a height of 1000 to 3500 m) is found with many high mountain peaks, fertile lands, meadows, mountain rivers and streams, and charming valleys. The Uttaranchal Himalaya has various places of tourism interest as pilgrimages, river valleys, highly elevated snow clad peaks and hill resorts such as Mussoorie, Nainital, Almora, Ranikhet etc. The entire region is geographically important and is comprised of the two distinct landscapes, i.e., the Garhwal and Kumaon Himalayas (Figure 1).

3 Methodology

Wide range of data was collected through secondary sources mainly from Directorate of Tourism, Dehradun. Similarly, data were also collected from the two regional offices of tourism, Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN), Dehradun and Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN), Nainital. References from research papers, books, articles and newspapers were taken appropriately for interpretation of data. To discuss about the impact of tourism on environment and economy, observations after rapid field visits of the tourist places were made.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Major types of tourism

The Uttaranchal Himalaya offers the modern tourism in a widespread range of possibilities. The activities range from visiting the unique cultural attractions, hiking, skiing, to the more adventurous types of tourism. In the last years, the modern (western) trend sports have been established in the Himalayan region, which includes rafting, kayaking, canyoning, rock climbing, mountain biking, bungee jumping, paragliding etc (Nepal Tourism Board 2000). Tourism is practiced in a various manner in the Uttaranchal Himalaya, in which pilgrimage tourism, natural tourism, adventurer tourism (mountaineering, river-rafting, trekking) and wildlife tourism are prominent. Here, detail description is given for pilgrimage, natural, adventurer and wildlife tourisms (Table 1).



Figure 1 Location map of the Uttarakhand Himalaya

Table 1 Characteristics of tourism in Uttarakhand

Origin of tourism in Badrinath (Tourism inflow in %)	
Places	Incoming tourism
Garhwal	11.3
Kumaon	17.5
Other State	71.2
Duration of stay in Badrinath Tourist Zone	
Stay Days	% of tourism
<1-1	18.6
1-2	59.0
2-3	19.3
3-4	3.1
Tourist by purpose in Uttarakhand	
Purpose	% of tourist
Pilgrimage	60%
Pleasure	25%
Business	10%
Others	5.0%
Tourist by physiographic zones	
Physiographic zones	% of tourist

Siwaliks	67%	
Lesser Himalayas	22%	
Middle Himalayas	6%	
Higher Himalayas	5%	
Tourist by nature of destination		
Nature of destination	% of tourism	
Pilgrim centers	54%	
Administrative and nodal places	31%	
Hill stations	14%	
Wild life nature	1%	
Sources regions of Indian tourism		
Region of origin of tourism	Uttaranchal	
Western zone	10	
Eastern zone	20	
Northern zone	60	
Southern zone	10	
Income categories of tourism %		
Annual income (Rs)	India	Uttaranchal
Up to 25, 000	67	40
From 25001 to 50000	34	30
From 50001 to 1 lakh	4	25
More than 1 lakh	4	5

Sources of Data: Adopted from Dr. Vishwambhar Prasad Sati's 'Tourism Development in Uttaranchal: The Emerging Vistas' in Nigan and Ranga (ed.) 'New Approaches in Tourism Management' Abhijeet Publication, Delhi. Pp. 315-317

4.1.1 Pilgrimage Tourism

Pilgrimage to the Himalaya has played an important role for a long time. The worshipping of holy rivers and nature deities has its roots in the Aryan culture and was later integrated into Hinduism. The whole Himalayan region has an important spiritual meaning for Hindus as a "sacral space" (Grotzbach 1994). This leads to a different Hindu point of view of the Himalaya, not only a collection of natural features or a beautiful landscape, but also a representation of the divine. Four *dhams* (pilgrimage) tourism has been practiced in the Uttaranchal State for the centuries. Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamotry and Gangotry have the religious importance as well as they are known for their natural beauty. Tourists not only from the Indian sub-continent but also from worldwide visit these *dhams* every year. The total number of pilgrims arriving in the pilgrimage places of the Garhwal Himalaya (Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Hemkund) is still rising (Table 2).

Table 2 Tourist Flow in Uttaranchal

Places	Year					
	1998		1999		2000	
	Indian	Foreigner	Indian	Foreigner	Indian	Foreigner
Mussoorie	805290	8163	833428	3395	847191	3555
Kedarnath	82000	-	80690	-	300000	-
Badrinath	350510	-	340100	-	695332	-
Gangotary	237689	-	122754	-	208407	-
Yamunotry	86307	-	105675	-	88672	-
Haridwar*	5811200	6187	4421974	4922	5316980	7659

Nainital	214051	4045	211011	3579	32322	7374
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Source of Data: Adopted from Dr. Vishwambhar Prasad Sati's 'Tourism Development in Uttaranchal: The Emerging Vistas' in Nigan and Ranga (ed.) 'New Approaches in Tourism Management' Abhijeet Publication, Delhi. Pp. 315

4.1.2 Natural tourism

Natural tourism has developed in Uttaranchal after establishment of hill towns. In the late 1830's, the hill stations became more attractive for the civilian residents of India (especially for the colonial middle and upper class), due to the fact that they were an opportunity to escape the hot pre-monsoon months and the summer monsoon, at the same offering a stay in a more pleasant region with a beautiful landscape (Grotzbach 1985 a.). Mussoorie (founded in 1827), Nainital (1839), Almora, Pithoragarh and Ranikhet (1889) became the major centers of attraction. Modern mass tourism started in 1960s and the number of tourists visiting the hill stations increased by the huge numbers. In Mussoorie, the number of visitors increased from 720000 in 1981 to 847191 in 2000. Modern mass tourism in the Himalayan region started in 1950s after Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed the Mt. Everest and made the region popular in other parts of the world, that had until then more or less ignored the region (Walder 2000).

4.1.3 Adventurer tourism

Adventurer tourism is getting enormous attraction in the Uttaranchal Himalaya as winter sports skiing is developing in Auli (Chamoli District), river rafting in the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda Rivers, trekking in various natural places and pilgrimages (Tungnath, Rudranath, Madhamaheshwar, Triyuginarayan, Rookumd, Gomukh, Purnagiri, seven lakes of Nainital district, national parks, wild life sanctuaries and mountaineering in many of the snow-clad peaks.

4.1.4 Wildlife tourism

Uttaranchal Himalaya is famous for national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, bird sanctuaries and biosphere reserves. Its 67% geographical land is covered by forest. Among national parks Rajaji National Park, Govind Ghat National Park, Chilla National Park and Corbett National Park are prominent. Rajaji and Chilla National Parks are world famous for conservation of elephants, while Corbett National Park is known for conserving tigers and known as 'tiger project'. Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve is declared as world heritage site and known for Kasturi (musk) deer. There are also many sites, where bird sanctuaries (in Asan barrage, Dehradun District) are found. These areas have altogether the potentials of promoting wildlife tourism.

Apart from these types of tourism, cultural tourism also plays an integral role. The state is woven by the fabrics of rich cultural heritage in the forms of fairs and festivals, which occur throughout the year. Recently, Nanda Devi Rajrat is getting a moment. Similarly, there are many other festivals celebrated in the state.

4.2 Impact of tourism

4.2.1 Economic impact of tourism

Tourism has multiplier impacts on economy, as it helps for augmentation of employment, increasing living standard of the local people and as well as increasing national income (Sati 2004). The dawn of the mass tourism era in the Himalaya had an enormous influence on the local economy. With the number of visitors increasing dramatically, the total amount of money spent by them increased in the same way. In fact, it is a major source of income as Rangan (2000) reported that Garhwal earned between 10-15% of its revenue from taxes and levies imposed on pilgrims each year. In India, tourism is the second-largest source of foreign currency behind the gem and jewelry business (TED N/A). The money spent by the tourists has diverse effects on the local economy. It stimulates the economy and induces the so-called “multiplier-effect” – jobs are created, capital is accumulated and local workers that used to be dependent on subsistence farming start their own businesses that serve the tourists, selling or renting supplies, providing guides or selling souvenirs to the tourists. Those businesses, in turn, employ people as guides or workers, which thereby benefit indirectly of the tourist money. But a part of the money can also be used to improve the local living standards through better health care, education and building structure. With the scarcity of jobs, tourism offers a lucrative and interesting avenue for income. The economic impact of tourism can be noticed along the roadsides from Rishikesh to Badrinath and Kedarnath, where mushrooming of small tea-stalls, dhabas, and other shops are earning a noticeable amount of wealth from the tourist everyday. A study reveals, the villages lie on the major routs to the pilgrimages are now fully dependent on the income coming from the tourist by providing them accommodation and other basic facilities at their stay.

Observation/appreciation of alien and diverse cultures is an essential aspect of the tourism experience. In spite of this essential interrelationship, the tourism-culture linkage is a contentious issue everywhere and more so in mountain areas. Mountain communities have evolved the ensembles of their culture through centuries of isolation and compulsions of their survival strategies. Historically, cultural change in these communities has been invariably slow. The fact that tourism can accelerate an otherwise slow process of change in directions that may not be desirable is a matter of concern, although the perceptions of the ‘hosts’ and the ‘guests’, and the ‘outside observer’ on these issues may differ. It is also difficult to differentiate between the impact of tourism and those resulting from the national education system, increased exposure to the worldwide media network, or impacts resulting from increased incomes. The impact of tourism on culture, however, is not unidirectional: there are both negative and positive sides to it.

Perceived Impact of Tourism on Culture in the Uttarakhand Himalayas

Negative Impacts	Positive Impacts
Agriculture decline	Promotion of the idea of the National Park
Decline in the number of pilgrims in the pilgrimages	Increased sense of belongingness to the area
Decline of traditional crafts	Increased popularity of the festival
	Increased living standards of the people living

Commercialisation of art

around the tourist destination

Easy acceptance of new ideas

Change in demography due to migration

Increased burden on women

Family break-ups

4.2.2 Impact on Environment

The most obvious and visible impact of tourism is the impact on the ecology. Deforestation in general in the Uttarakhand Himalaya has been the source of long-lasting debates. Eckholm describes the Himalaya as a fragile ecosystem, where “forces of ecological degradation building so rapidly and so visibly” (Eckholm 1975) and adds that “the pace of destruction is reaching unignorable proportions”. It is reported that Himalaya, once fertile and productive, could become a desert within 25 year. These calculations are based on the fact that a huge percentage of the population relies on firewood as primary source of energy. With a rapid increase in the population growth, the amount of firewood needed and thereafter the area being cleared will increase in the same way. This will in turn, according to Eckholm, intensify the monsoon-induced erosion and soil loss from the mountain slopes and leave these mountain slopes barren and infertile. But Eckholm's theory is, according to other authors, not only oversimplified, but also “seriously distorted” (Ives & Messerly 1989). Aerial photography of the Middle Hills, taken between 1964 and 1977, showed that only 1.5% of the original tree cover was lost – a rather insignificant number. Nonetheless, Walder states, “This is not to suggest, however, that the mountain areas are free of environmental problems, notably deforestation. The more pragmatic view is that while there are inevitably conflicts between man's activities in the mountains and the natural ecological balance, it is the extent of the resulting problems that has been overstated.” Which role does tourism play in the deforestation of the Himalaya? With an increasing number of tourists in the region, this leads to an increasing pressure on the forests close to the main trekking corridors. The environmental problems result from the clustering of shops, tea stalls, hotels, restaurants and inns around the temple. In addition, there exists an environmental threat peculiar to the region. Grotzback (1985 b) reports on the facts that in Badrinath's undeveloped areas are used as garbage dumps and even the water of the holy river Vishnuganga is contaminated with feces and sewage.

Another severe problem related to tourists and trekking in the Himalaya is waste disposal. It is estimated that one group of trekkers (consisting of 15 people) creates 15kg of waste that is not biodegradable or burnable during a 10 day trek. According to a Mountain Agenda report on the Everest region, it is estimated that there are 17 metric tons of garbage per kilometer of tourist trail – for this reason, the Everest region is sometimes labeled as “the world's highest junkyard” and the trail to the Everest Base Camp as “the garbage trail” (Mountain Agenda 1999). The disposal of human waste can also pose a threat to the environment, if not buried at least 50 m away from water, human waste can pollute the water. But even, if human waste is buried correctly in a so-called “cat hole”, the sheer amount of people having to do so is a problem. Nowadays, areas in the vicinity of popular campsites look like “moonscapes” because of the amount of “cat holes” dug.

Trail degradation is due the increasing number of tourists in the Uttaranchal Himalaya. When trails are not maintained properly, soil erosion and deep ruts along trails will occur because of heavy use by tourists and local people (Nepal 1997). These obstacles make the trails difficult to walk, thereby inducing people to seek alternative paths and leave the formal routes. These informal paths, in consequence, lead to increased damage of the vegetation cover through trampling. The damage to the vegetation cover, in turn, can lead to habitat loss and a change of species composition.

Environmental Impacts of Different Types of Tourism

Trekking/Mountaineering	Resort Tourism
Deforestation/forest degradation due to demand for firewood along treks	Deforestation/forest degradation due to demand for timber and firewood
Trail degradation	Soil instability and slope failures due to heavy construction along slopes
Pollution of campsites	Discharge of untreated sewage, human and solid waste along slopes and rivers
Wanton disposal of degradable and non-degradable wastes contamination of creeks and rivers	Traffic congestion, noise and vehicular pollution
Pollution of soils and glaciers at higher altitudes	

5 Approaches for sustainable tourism

Given the intensity of adventure sports and tourist activity in the region, the need to promote ecologically sustainable tourism has been felt by both the Government and Non Governmental Organisations. Indeed, it is very difficult to alter the mode of prevalent tourism that is wasteful and exploitative. However, it is not altogether impossible. The Government through its agencies is involved in dissemination of information in an attempt to encourage ecologically viable tourism. Individual efforts at greening by locals find encouragement and have met with tremendous success. The Garhwal and Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigams (GMVNs) is a corporation established by the Uttar Pradesh Government, now under the Government of Uttaranchal to function in the region. As an organisation, the GMVN and KMVN need to become more institutionalized, if it is genuinely concerned with regional development. In the view of several experts, the GMVN and KMVN should be privatised and should be concerned with monitoring and promoting tourism rather than indulging in profit based tourist activity. Notably, in 1996-97, the Department of Tourism had initiated a project on 'Development and Beautification' of the Badrinath-Kedarnath pilgrim route with a view to encouraging more pilgrims to visit the area. This work has now been completed. It was understood that taking local people into confidence while initiating reforms that purported to benefit them and also incorporating local institutions to suit current needs should be done rather than looking at other

areas for inspiration. Col Balwant Sandhu (Singh 1985) suggested three ways in which the environment could be preserved on mountaineering trails. These included minimum impact camping, a national policy of approach to parks, sanctuaries, mountain resorts, recreational areas and shrines to specify what was busable, jeepable, cycleable and motorable and regulating wilderness area to within regenerative limits. Mehta (2001a) suggested a two-way development approach vis-à-vis tourism. Developing infrastructural facilities in different tourist areas; and developing various traditional crafts and area-specific productive activities, based on the use of endogenous production technology and family labour including women. Planning for tourism should also contain within its elements that ensure gainful employment; production potentials based on comparative advantages and marketing opportunities for local production; skills and capabilities of local communities; accessibility of local people to basic health and education facilities; economic financial support systems; requisite technology and related extension and credit facilities needed for tourism related activities; and promote women's involvement in community development (Mehta 2001b). Over the years, local communities have been viewed as being detrimental to development and have been pushed to the fringes and their homelands and the wildlife surrounding the same subjugated and exploited (Gadgil and Guha 1995, Guha 1994).

The interdependence between tourism and the environment is recognized worldwide. A recent survey by the Industry and Environment Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/IE) shows that the resource most essential for the growth of tourism is the environment. Tourism is an environmentally sensitive industry whose growth is dependent upon the quality of the environment. Tourism growth will cease when negative environmental effects diminish the tourism experience. Tourism that sustains the physical and social environment has come to be known as "ecotourism". The precise definition of this term remains ambiguous even within the tourism industry itself. However, ecotourism can be differentiated from traditional tourism in that ecotourism not only attempts to minimize the environmental impact of tourism, but also has as a goal that local communities and the physical environment will actually benefit from tourism.

Nowadays, there is an increasing awareness of the effects that mass tourism has on the local economy, ecology and society. With this increasing awareness, the concepts of a sustainable tourism became more and more accepted:

- a. Tourism should be one part of a balanced economy.
- b. The use of tourism environments must allow for long-term preservation and for use of those environments.
- c. Tourism should respect the character of an area.
- d. Tourism must provide long-term economic benefits.
- e. Tourism should be sensitive to the needs of the host population.

6 Conclusion and suggestions

The Uttarakhand Himalaya is unique for its beautiful and charming landscapes as it forms an integral part of the Himalayan Mountain System. It has three major vertical zones such as Great Himalaya, Middle Himalaya and Shivalik Ranges or Lesser Himalaya. The panoramic and magnificent zones attract the tourism for centuries. The four *dhams* are the major attraction, which further enhance the promotion of tourism in this land. In a nutshell, we can conclude that the Uttarakhand Himalaya has a vast potential for tourism development. It has been noticed that tourism has not only enhanced the economy and society of the state but also has a negative

impact on the environment because the mainland of Uttarakhand is more prone to natural hazards and environmental degradation and tourism activity has further accelerated its intensity.

Tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalaya has a long tradition. But the dawn of modern tourism, induced by the extension of modern transportation deep into the region, has had serious consequences for the local economy, ecology and society. For sustainable and eco-tourism the following suggestions are given:

1. A seasonal dispersal and regional diffusion of the trekkers could help in taking pressure off the local ecosystem. This could be achieved by either regulating the number of tourists allowed in a certain area, or, by introducing a more dynamic pricing policy, creating incentives to visit less frequented areas or to visit outside of the peak season.
2. The use of alternative energy sources such as micro-hydro can help in reducing the use of firewood by locals and tourists and, thereby, reducing the pressure on local forests (SHERPA 2002)
3. When designated campsites are created that offer certain amenities (such as washing facilities, for example), the amount of “wild” camping along the trails could be reduced.
4. The management of the environment can involve an enormous amount of money. The revenue from user charges and mountaineering royalties should not only help the governments, but should be shared between the governments and the areas where this revenue is created (Gurung 1998).
5. Training programmes can help the local people to develop the skills needed to guide tourists. This, in turn, can give these people the confidence to get involved in the tourism business and start an own enterprise. Additionally, by setting a minimum skill level for porters through training, the service to the tourists is improved and a higher income can be expected.
6. The creation of community-based, participation-oriented tourism management committees allows locals to participate in the decision-making process and influence the decisions that have a direct effect on their lives. At the same time, participation increases the support and co-operation of the locals for protection projects. Additionally, the amount of knowledge that the locals have of their environment and the ways to save it should not be underestimated.
7. At the same time, participation by the private sector and the local communities in the decision making process has increased and there has been a 50% rise in the number of households involved in tourism-related activities. This rise can be partly attributed to training courses and enterprise support of porters, guides, etc. These training courses have also increased the base daily rate for porters and pack-animal operators by 30%.

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