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HILL TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DESTINATIONS: A SITUATION ANALYSIS OF KUMAON REGION OF UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

Hill Tourism is one of the major revenue earners for any region or country as compared to other forms of Tourism. Tourists are attracted to mountain destinations for many reasons, including the climate, clean air, unique landscapes and wildlife, scenic beauty, local culture, history and heritage, and the opportunity to experience snow and participate in snow-based or nature-related activities and sports. The Kumaon region of Himalayan offers some of the rarest 'tourism' products of nature with a wide ecological range and diversity. Apart from the many-splendored natural attractions and scenic beauty, the religious and socio-cultural dimensions of the tourist resource assume significance in the context of the hill districts lying in the lap of the lower Himalayas. The paper is aimed at identifying the potential of Kumaon region in context of hill tourism as well as to determining future strategic options for effective management of its destinations for sustainable development.

Data for this study was drawn from a review of secondary sources, consisting primarily of official government documents, several research articles, tourism websites and media reports in this context. Situation analysis of collected data was undertaken through SWOT analysis. Information obtained through situation analysis was combined with other related literatures, which provided inputs for determining future strategic options for sustainable development of tourist destinations of Kumaon region of Uttarakhand.

Keywords: *Hill Tourism, Sustainable Development, Kumaon (Uttarakhand) & Situation Analysis.*

Introduction

Hill Tourism, being one of the major revenue earners for any region or country as compared to other forms of Tourism. Tourists are attracted to mountain destinations for many reasons, including the climate, clean air, unique landscapes and wildlife, scenic beauty, local culture, history and heritage, and the opportunity to experience snow and participate in snow-based or nature-related activities and sports. While modern forms of transportation have made even remote mountain areas accessible to increasing numbers of visitors, mountain tourism tends to be very unevenly distributed, with a small proportion of locations having significant tourism infrastructure.

The Kumaon region of Himalayan offers some of the rarest 'tourism' products of nature with a wide ecological range and diversity. Apart from the many-splendored natural attractions and scenic beauty, the religious and socio-cultural dimensions of the tourist resource assume significance in the context of the hill districts lying in

the lap of the lower Himalayas. Tribal life, ethnic culture, folk traditions, folklore and the innumerable religious shrines and sanctified spots seem to have grown with the splendor of nature as an organic whole. In the absence of advance planning in a systematic manner, relentless influx of tourists to such centers has disturbed the demand and supply equilibrium. This has given rise to acute problem of landuse, environmental pollution and degradation, stress condition on infrastructure, transport and services, and creating conflicting conditions. All these have been described as negative impacts of tourism. Keeping in view of the distinctive physical, socio-economic and environmental setting within which hill-tourism as a popular multi-faceted activity should be able to attain sustainable development of its tourist destinations through tourism planning policies and programmes both at macro and micro levels.

Uttarakhand, in spite of being a small state, has certain key features that make it distinct from other states of the country and highlights its potential for development. However, development has predominantly been in the plains, and the hill districts have been left behind. All the hill districts have subsistence farming as their main economic activity. Due to subsistence livelihood, migration and a remittance economy operate in the hill districts. They are land-locked with huge distances between the markets and resources. Because of these constraints, traditional agriculture cannot be the lead sector for development. Thus the state faces the challenge of promoting livelihoods to minimize migration through local employment and income generation, and to enhance the quality of life of people living in villages. The positive features of these hill districts are that they have enormous potential for tourism, a suitable climate for high-value agriculture, and a pleasant environment due to 60 per cent forest cover. These have to be harnessed for a development strategy. The development strategy for Uttarakhand hills should be based on developing brand equity under the name of **Organic Green State** and an Uttarakhand Brand Equity Fund should be set up. This can be achieved by working towards this common goal through infrastructure development, tourism promotion, agriculture diversification, poultry- and wool-based livelihoods, and SMEs based on the above that capture linkages with industry and tourism.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to emphasize the present status of hill tourism and future plan for exploiting maximum benefits of available resources. Further, the paper is also aimed at determining future strategic options for effective management of tourist destinations of Kumaon regions for sustainable development of hill tourism in the area.

Methodology

The objective of this paper is to determine the potential of Kumaon region in context of hill tourism as well as to determine future strategic options for effective management of its destinations for sustainable development. Data for this study is drawn from a review of secondary sources, consisting primarily of official government documents, several research articles, tourism websites and media reports in this context. Situation analysis of collected data was undertaken through SWOT analysis. SWOT analysis is a tool to be profited in order to determine internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors of tourism potential of a country or a region and in order to make clear alternative tourism politics of a country (Avcikurt and others 2003). These strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be analyzed to provide support rationale for developing marketing action plan (Nykiel 1997). Information obtained through situation analysis was combined with other related literatures, which provided inputs for determining future strategic options for sustainable development of tourist destinations of Kumaon region of Uttarakhand.

Uttarakhand- At a Glance

Uttarakhand was carved out of the mammoth state of Uttar Pradesh in the year 2000. It forms the northern border of India with Tibet; on the eastern side is separated from Nepal by the Kali River; has Himachal Pradesh on its West while the plains of Uttar Pradesh lie to its South. Covering an area of approximately 51000sq km, it is larger than either Punjab or Haryana and just marginally smaller than neighboring Himachal Pradesh. This central Himalayan belt has some of the most spectacular mountain peaks of the Indian Himalayas with over a hundred of them towering above 19,680ft/6000m. One of the better- known peaks is the Nanda Devi that lies to

the East. At 25,640ft/7817m it ranks as the second highest mountain in India and twentieth in the world. It is flanked by Trishul (Shiva's allegorical trident), which stands at 23,354ft/7120m.



District map of Uttarakhand

Proceeding westwards, Dunagiri, Neelkanth, Chaukhamba and the peaks of Badrinath and Kedarnath are all in the 23,000ft/7000m league. The Gangotri and Banderpooch peaks lie on the western extreme and below these great Himalayan peaks are the middle and lower ranges. It is here that the popular hill stations of Mussoorie, Nainital, Ranikhet and other lesser known but extremely beautiful destinations lie. The foothills are an extension of the Shivalik range that extends from Himachal Pradesh up to the Corbett National Park. Major rivers originate, join others and flow through this state. Both the Ganga and the Yamuna have their origins here and their tributaries spread through the region like a veritable network. There are five major confluences that are referred to as the 'Panch Prayag', and a pilgrimage to these is ranked a close second to visiting Sangam (at Allahabad), which is the union of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythological Saraswati. The most important of these prayags is Devprayag where the Alaknanda and the Bhagirathi come together as the Ganga.

The Bhagirathi originates in Gaumukh above the Gangotri Temple while the merging of four other tributaries forms the Alaknanda. From East to West, the Pindar meets Alaknanda at Karanprayag, the Mandakini joins it at Rudraprayag; in the North the Dhaulti Ganga merges with the Alaknanda at Vishnuprayag, near Joshimath, and the Nandakini joins it at Nandprayag. Rivers are believed to have great purifying powers and a ritual dip is akin to cleansing one's soul. The purity is meant to be more enhanced at either the source, a major confluence or at the mouth of the river.

Tourism in Uttarakhand

The tourism sector has been a major constituent of the service sector that already contributes almost half (49.6 percent) of the Gross State Domestic Product. Given the factor endowments, there is huge potential for growth in the tourism sector considering the demand from both the domestic and international markets in terms of content and standard of facilities and utilities. The State attracts tourists for pilgrimages, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, eco-tourism, and amusement and leisure tourism. The approach to tourism development in Uttarakhand has to be based on the strengths of this State. Since Uttarakhand is rich in natural beauty with a unique mountain environment as well as rich historical and cultural assets, diverse products have to be designed for various categories of people who travel to this State for different motives.

Kumaon Region

Uttarakhand consists of two main regions, they are Garhwal and Kumaon . Both the regions are culture-wise similar. Kumaon is a beautiful region in the newly formed state Kumaon, a land resplendent in awesome natural splendour is a jewel of the glittering Himalayan necklace. Extending from the northern end of the Ganga plains right upto Tibet, Kumaon's endless panorama of scenic wonders is nothing short of a romance with pristine and soul-lifting nature itself. It is believed that the word "Kumaon" is derived from "Kurmanchal", which means the land of Kurmavata (the tortoise incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Preserver of the Hindu Trinity).

In its range of natural beauty, Kumaon can be likened to a technicolour dreamcoat; rosette dawns and dusks, azure skies, opaline lakes, fields of yellowing corn, alternated by deep green potato beds, blue ribbons of meandering rivers, eye-catching pink and red rhododendrons, snow-white summits and birds of vivid plumage.

Within Uttarakhand, there is marked inequality between the hills and the plains. The hill districts palpably lag behind. Therefore, a well thought development strategy is needed to reduce this gap between the two regions. A development vision for the state should include both human and economic aspects along with environmental conservation. All the hill districts have subsistence farming as their main economic activity. Due to subsistence livelihood, migration and a remittance economy operate in the hill districts. They are land-locked with huge distances between the markets and resources. Because of these constraints, traditional agriculture cannot be the lead sector for development.

At the same time, the hill districts of Uttarakhand have tremendous potential. The vast natural resources add to the state's attractiveness as an investment destination, especially for tourism and agriculture- and forest-based industries. Uttarakhand is the first state in the country to have created a Tourism Development Board by legislation. Also, it is the first one to be called an organic state.

Snow clad peaks , Loads of flowers , fruit orchards , picturesque grass fields ,breathtaking panoramic view of wild life , Dancing rivers , clueless water sources and hard working women they all indicate to one region that is also termed as "Abode of Gods" (Dev-Bhumi) and better known as Kumaon . After Katyuri kings , the Chands of Pithoragarh became the dominant dynasty. The magnificent temple complex at Jageshwar with its cluster of a hundred and sixty four temples, was built by the Chand rulers over a space of two centuries. This temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva.

The lower Kumaon hills have a large number of tals or lakes. Nainital is of course famous, more so nowadays as a vivid example of environmental degradation. Others like Bhimtal and Sattal are in much better shape due to the absence of a major town on their periphery.

Kumaon is, or rather was, classic tiger country. Now-a-days most of Kumaon's remaining Tigers are resident in the Jim Corbett National Park, India's first National Park situated in the lower Kumaon hills (Near Ramnagar) . Jim Corbett with whom this national park shares its name was the famous tiger hunter and he described all about Kumaoni tigers in his book "The man eaters of kumaon" . The loss of tigers and scarcity of them shows the disruption in the natural order due to rising human and cattle population.

The weather of Kumaon is very pleasant . People come here for their treatment and for enjoying the natural beauty . However excessive tourism is deteriorating the natural balance of hills.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Important Tourist Circuits in Kumaon Region

Almora Tourism

Nature's Munificence - Of the three districts of Kumaon, Almora occupies a central location. Being further away from the plains than Nainital, this district provides tranquil spots where one can enjoy the mountain air without jostling against milling holiday-makers. The town of Almora (1646 m), lies along a saddle-ridge amidst a lush amphitheatre of terraced slopes. Overlooking the arterial Mall, where the bus terminus, shops selling bal mithai (a famous milk confection of Kumaon), and private lodges and restaurants are located, is flattish bowl-the virtual picture of fertility with its canals, hamlets and the foaming Kosi river.

Beyond and behind the ridge lie tiers of hills and dales, edged ultimately by a Himalayan panorama. Unlike Shimla, Nainital and Ranikhet - north Indian hill stations discovered and patronized by the British. Almora is truly Indian hill resort. It was founded by Raja Kalyan Chand in 1560 (he shifted his capital here from Champawati).

There is Mohan Joshi Park, a favorite picnic ground close to the Mall. Bright End Corner, 2 km away, commands a grand view of the Himalayas - particularly spectacular at dawn and dusk. Deer Park and Simtola (both 3km away) offer lush environs. Kalimath (5km) is famed for its scenic grandeur and a panoramic view of Almora town. A kilometre from here is Kasar Devi temple, worth a visit for its superb surroundings.

Bageshwar Tourism:

Situated at the confluence of rivers Saryu, Gomti and latent Bhagirathi, lies the holy township of Bageshwar; also revered as the pious land associated with Lord Sadashiva, the redeemer of all sins. This quaint town abounds in religious legends, festive happenings and mind blowing surroundings. Famous primarily as a prominent Shaivaite delight, Bageshwar has its share of patriotic expressions and picturesque interludes. Bageshwar is 90 Kms from Almora.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Baghath Temple plays host to the Biggest Uttaryani Mela. Take a look around and you will find Bhilshwar mountains over looking in the East. Neeleshwar mountains meditating in the West. Suraj Kund basking in legends in the North and Agni Kund radiating in the South.

For trekking enthusiasts too, Bageshwar is an important destination. Because one can reach Pindari, Kaphni and Sundardhunga glaciers only through Bageshwar. So if your are planning a complete yet 'different break' come to Bageshwar.

Champawat Tourism

Champawat, the ancient capital of the Chand rulers is well known for its temples and natural beauty. The historical town 76 kms from Pithoragarh has an ancient fort, which is now headquarters of the Tehsil office. The mythological legends suggest that Lord Vishnu appeared here as 'Kurma avatar' (the tortoise incarnation). The story of Golla Devta is also associated with Gorilla Chaur of Champawat. Jim Corbett, the famous hunter came to this region in the first decade of the 20th century to hunt for man eating tigers. His first book, "Man Eaters of Kumaon" is related to Champawat.

Champawat was declared as a separate district on 15 Dec. 1997 by then CM of UP Ms. Mayawati, then it was a part of UP. Earlier Champawat was only a Tehsil of Pithoragarh district. Champawat once been the capital of the chand dynasty is a historical place of Kumaon. Besides its historical importance, its very famous for the beautiful architecture and carvings on the temples, Baleshwar Temple being one of them. Champawat is a beautiful town with breathtaking landscapes and terraced fields, which cover the valley. A river snakes past these landscapes and fields forming a beautiful picture. Champawat offers the tourists with virtually everything they expect from nature, ranging from pleasant climate to varied wildlife and good places to trek.

Since the time in memorial Champawat district is having its own importance in terms of religious and social aspects. It is believed that Champawat district is the source and origin of religion and culture of Uttaranchal. In the ancient time this region was the origin of Naga, Kinnar and Khas Rajas. The available historical pillars, manuscripts, archeological collection and folk-lore describe the greatness of the area during the period of MahaBharata.

Nainital Tourism:

Naini, a word that brings the cool air with its name, is a secret hide out of the tourists each year. Situated at an altitude of 1,938 M, this dreamland town with its beauteous splendour is one of the most popular summer resorts of the country. The nucleus of Nainital's exquisite beauty is her lake which is a haven for water sports like Yachting, Kayaking, Canoeing and Boating. The lake in the middle of the city is the main attraction of Nainital. The lake at south end is called Tallital and at north end is called Mallital. The city of Nainital is developed around this lake. The lake offers yachting and cool boat rides in its waters. A unique feature of the lake is that it hosts the only Post Office on a lake bridge in whole world. An evening walk on the road, on the banks of the lake, gives an unforgettable experience.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Sattal

Literally meaning seven lakes is a group of small lakes nested together, about 23 kms from Nainital at an altitude of (1370 MT) still untouched by modernisation, one can see the natural beauty at its best.

Pithoragarh Tourism:

While you are at a tour of Pithoragarh, you can check out a number of lakes around Pithoragarh. There are two of them which are quite famous, one of them being Jolingkong and the other one being Ancherital. While the former is at a height of 4,634 meters, the latter is situated at an altitude of 3,658 meters. The district is dotted all over with many old temples that you visit. There is a shrine at Purnagiri, which is only 20 kms from Tanakpur, and there is another Sikh shrine near Lohaghat called Ritha Sahib. According to a belief, Guru Nanak touched the bitter ritha and it turned sweet after his touch.

A tour to the White Manu Temple is also a must if you are in Pithoragarh. It is dedicated to the Goddess, who on invocation brings rain thus good fortune to the mountains.

Udham Singh Nagar Tourism:

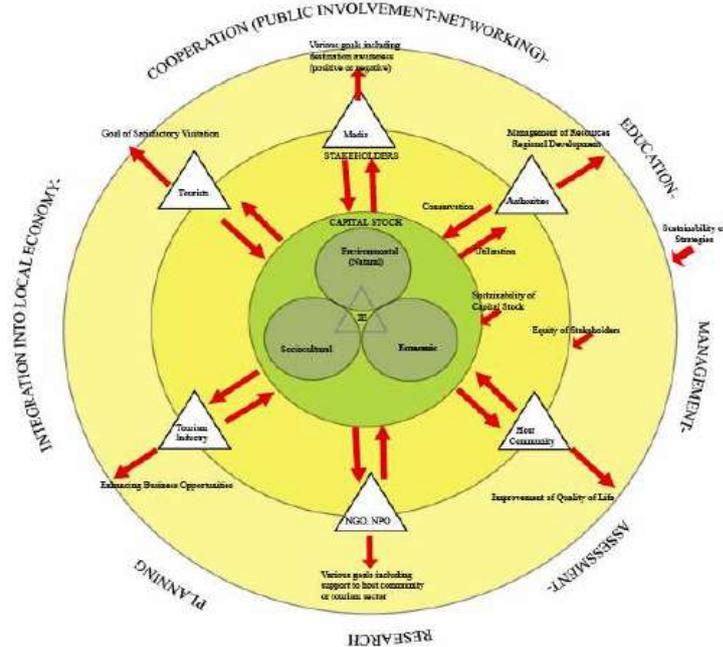
Udham Singh Nagar district was carved out of Nainital district in October 1995 and was named after Shri Udham Singh, a great freedom fighter, who killed General Dyer and took revenge for the Jalianwala Bagh massacre. Udham Singh Nagar is basically an industrial district and many industry related professions are prevalent here, it is perfect example of 'Unity in Diversity' for which India is so widely known, on the other hand different cultures, religions and life styles are blended in absolute harmony.

It is also known as the gateway to Kumaon because on seeing the beauty of this district alone, one can very well imagine what kumaon is waiting to offer. Udham Singh Nagar is full of Wildlife and Natural beauty. The Himalayan ranges that surround Udham Singh Nagar are perfect in beauty and serenity. Places of tourist Interest in this area are Atariya Temple, Nanak Matta, Chaiti Devi Temple, Giri Sarovar, Pantnagar.

Review of Literature

Most tourism activities take place at destinations, and so the destination forms a pillar in any modelling of the tourism "system" [Leiper, 1990]. It has even been suggested that destinations have emerged as "the fundamental unit of analysis in tourism" [WTO, 2002]. Given the prominent place of destinations in the tourism system it is surprising there have been few texts to date that have focused on the operations of Destination Management for sustainable development.

Concentric Sustainable Model of Sustainable Tourism



Source: Naik A. B. (2012)

There are a not many research papers and books that have tried to identify growth and development in Uttarakhand in the 7-8 years since the creation of the state. Bisht (2006) argues that the state has to sustain forestry and agriculture for the survival of the people who largely live in rural and hilly areas.

A study by Kar (2007) highlights the importance of equitable growth focusing on GDP growth and distribution of growth to all sections of the population and geographical regions of the country. The study shows that the higher growth rate of the state in the initial years has helped the state to transform itself, but most of the growth has been restricted to the plains, while the hill areas have grown slowly due to structural problems. The development has been mainly in the plain districts of the state and not the hills, which have remained cut off from the rest of the country. Thus, there is a need to modify or reschedule the current schemes according to the hill districts of the state.

Hill Tourism & Sustainability

There is an increasing concern with sustainable development in recent years. The socio economic as well as the socio cultural aspects of development of tourist destination regions have become a topic of serious discussion in the Himalayan region. Hill Tourism is being perceived more as a development issue from the inhabitants' perspective. Thus, as with any kind of development, the issue of the sustainability of the environment and the sustainability of the pace of the said development activity comes to the fore front. (Sharma, 2000).

Impact of Hill Tourism on Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions

Tourism can have a range of impacts on mountain ecosystems, communities and economies. While many of the impacts described below are negative, tourism can also generate positive impacts as it can serve as a supportive force for peace, foster pride in cultural traditions, help avoid urban relocation by creating local jobs, increase visitor awareness and appreciation of natural, cultural and historical values and assets.

Environmental impacts in Sustainable Development: Mountain landscapes are particularly fragile and susceptible to change and degradation. Landslides, avalanches, lava flows, earthquakes, torrents and rock falls can alter the landscape unexpectedly. Mountain ecosystems include a wide range of small and unique habitats, with flora and fauna that may have very short growing and reproductive seasons, and may be particularly

sensitive to disturbance by human activity. Tourism activities often involve the development and intense use of tracks, paths and sports slopes by vehicles, non-motorized transport and pedestrian traffic. Visitor presence is also usually concentrated in small areas, contributing to increased noise and waste. The negative environmental effects of poorly managed tourism activities can include vegetation clearing and soil erosion, removal of scarce habitat, altering of critical landscapes and water flows, water and air pollution, and wildlife relocation or behavioral changes. The introduction of exotic and invasive species and diseases can also have a significant negative impact on local plant and animal species.

Socio-cultural impacts in Sustainable Development: Mountain communities can also be very susceptible to impacts and change from tourism activities. The negative social impacts of poorly managed tourism can include disturbances from high levels and concentrations of visitor noise and activity, and reduced availability of scarce shared resources such as firewood, fish and fresh water. In addition, exposure to and adoption of foreign traditions, lifestyles and products can pose a threat to the unique culture, traditions, knowledge and livelihoods of mountain populations, particularly in remote and indigenous communities.

Economic impacts in Sustainable Development: While tourism can provide significant local employment, if not properly managed, this employment can be short-term and seasonal, providing little skill-building or training to local people. Working conditions can be poor, and revenue can easily leak out of local economies to externally owned companies. However, well-managed tourism can play an important role in attracting revenue and supporting poverty alleviation. It can also improve infrastructure, provide community services and help diversify local economies. Employment and income can, in turn, improve the self-sufficiency and sustainability of mountain communities.

A destination is always affected by the various factors from the environment, both internal and external. For proper understanding of these factors, situation analysis of destinations needs to be conducted. Situation analysis is the systematic collection and study of past and present data to identify trends, forces, and conditions with the potential to influence the performance of the business and the choice of appropriate strategies (American Marketing Association).

Situation Analysis- SWOT

Situation analysis of Kumaon region of Uttarakhand has been conducted to understand its current situation and potentials by SWOT technique. These strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be analyzed to provide support rationale for developing marketing action plan.

STRENGTH

Region of Great Scenic Beauty

Kumaon Himalayan region is one perhaps the most attractive region from scenic as well as floristic point of view among all the sectors of Indian. It is one of the two administrative divisions of the state of Uttarakhand and is headquartered at the hill station of Nainital. Located at the foothills of the mighty Himalayas, Kumaon provides views of the snow covered peaks and is ideal for a mountain holiday. The place is as much known for its pleasant weather as it is for its natural beauty and view of the mountains. Blessed with natural abundance, the Kumaon division is known for its snow capped mountains, green valleys, luxuriant forests of deodar and pine trees, meadows, lakes and streams, and a variety of animals and birds species.

Diversified Flora and Fauna

Kumaon has, or rather had, a large variety of wildlife. As with other parts of the Himalayas, wildlife is gradually becoming extinct in the region. The areas around Nainital are the last known habitats of the elusive Himalayan Mountain Quail. Kumaon of course is also famous for its tigers, which have been known to roam about in its lower districts. Sacred groves are the common and ancient practice of conserving biodiversity since time immemorial in the Himalayan region. These are tracts of virgin forest with rich diversity, which have been protected by the local people for centuries for their cultural and religious beliefs and taboos that the deities reside in them and protect the villagers from different calamities. Some of the documented sacred groves in

Uttarakhand are Bughyals, Hariyali, Debvans etc. As evident from the highly diversified geographical, climatic and floristic conditions this district of Uttarakhand state is rich in biodiversity. National parks and wildlife sanctuaries are a prime feature of Uttarakhand. Wildlife lovers, naturalists, eco-tourists and holidaymakers keep flocking to the region all the year round. The state is known for its diversified flora and fauna.

Unique Culture and Tradition

The culture of the present Kumaon is a blend of influences from the indigenous population as well as from the immigrants to this region. Consequently, the myths, dialects, languages, folk literature, festivals, fairs and forms of artistic expression are examples of the creative influences of the different cultural groups that constitute Kumaon. Aipan is one of the traditional art (painting form) of Kumaon. Folk tales are still told around the fireplace witty word games, are popular at social occasions. The people close to nature and practice conservation through the prehistoric sacred forests and agricultural practices. A culture in transition is worth experiencing their culture in transition, with the people themselves whose hospitality and etiquette is par excellence.

Pleasant Weather

The region of Kumaon experiences a sub tropical climate, and the weather is extremely pleasant throughout the year in Kumaon. Summers, winters and monsoon constitute the basic seasons. Summers in Kumaon are mild and moderate, and winters can get uncomfortably cold in some towns. The weather is generally dry except for the monsoon season, when mild showers strike the city. The region of Kumaon can be visited all through the year, as the general weather is always pleasant.

Good carrying capacity

Carrying capacity is a two-dimensional concept involving number of users and intensity of per capita use. The number of individuals of a species that can be supported by an ecosystem depends on the quantity of resources that each individual of that species uses. Kumaon region of Uttarakhand is being moderately populated, less number of arrivals of tourists and limited exploitation of resources qualify it to achieve a good carrying capacity.

Great Absorbing Capacity

Absorbing Capacity of the ecosystem is defined as a capacity of the ecosystem to withstand the negative environmental impacts mostly in the form of degradation/ pollution without any major effects on the ecosystem yield. It makes earth re-generative; the living organisms (plants, animals and microbes) absorb, recycle and regenerate the organic wastes and to some extent the inorganic wastes, thus maintaining the life support system. Kumaon region has got greater absorbing capacity as an important ecosystem property for tourism planning.

Ecosystem Integrity

Ecological integrity is a characteristic of healthy ecosystems: those that have complete food webs; a full complement of native plants and animals that can maintain their populations; and functioning ecosystem processes such as nutrient, water, and natural fire cycles that ensure the survival of those species. Kumaon has got a well-integrated system of abiotic components, biodiversity and ecosystem process which makes it more stable and qualify it to support higher diversity and hence could attract more nature or eco-tourist.

Popular Pilgrim Destination

In Kumaon (Devbhoomi), there are lot of Pilgrimage destinations which attracts lakhs of devotees every year. Baijnath is another important pilgrim destination in Kumaon. Here a set of ancient temples of the 12th and 13th century lie in the banks of the Gomti River. People come here to visit the various pilgrimages and obtain the divine blessings of God. Purnagiri Devi Temple, Barahi Temple (Devidhura), Jageshwar Temple, Nanda Devi Temple, Gurudwara Reetha Sahib, Chitai Temple etc. The temples at Jageshwar, Bageshwar, Binsar, Thalkedar, Rameshwar, Pancheshwar, Baijnath and Gananath are devoted to Lord Shiva. The temples of Devidhura, Gangolihat, Pumagiri, Almora, Nainital, Kot Ki Mai and Kotgari Devi are associated with the Shakt tradition,

while the region of Lohaghat - Champawat (Mount Kandeo) is associated with Kunna Avatar. This region also has two famous Sun temples.

Legend Tourism

Every peak, lake or mountain range is somehow or the other connected with some legends or the name of a God or Goddess, ranging from those associated with the Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava traditions, to local Gods like Ham, Saim, Golla, Chhurmaal, Kail Bisht, Bholanath, Gangnath, Airy and Chaumu.

WEAKNESS

Inadequate Infrastructure

Major setback of Kumaon region as a successful tourism destination is majorly an outcome of inadequate infrastructure facilities. Inefficiency and inability to create and improve infrastructure along with better management of mega tourism projects is one of the biggest weaknesses of the region. The State as well as tourism department has failed in facilitating world class tourism infrastructure at the destinations of Kumaon region. Major areas which require improvements in terms of infrastructure are:-

- Transportation
- Proper signage
- Accommodation
- Electricity
- Drinking Water supply
- Communication facilities
- Sanitation arrangement

Ineffective strategic marketing plan

The weakness of tourism destination promotion in Kumaon region also lies because of the ineffective marketing plans. State Government has failed in developing an effective marketing strategy linked with regional and national initiatives through a collaborative mechanism to project a positive identity for Kumaon region in the national and international tourism markets as a unique and preferred destination.

Poor Accessibility

Many a hill resorts have been losing tourists every year due to lack of proper accessibility and facility to move about. This has adversely affected the local economy. In the Himalayan foot-hills of northern, north-western and north-eastern India, there are over 60 major and minor tourist centers and hill resorts. Of these hardly nine are located on the railway. It is apparent that accessibility factor in respect of hill resorts is heavily dependent on road transport. It is imperative that despite the heavy costs of road-building and improvement in hilly terrain, an integrated Road Development Programme should be formulated region-wise and implemented in suitable stages to promote tourism. Such a road network should comprise of a minimum two-lane black-topped carriageway with maneuverable gradient and curvature limitations and an alignment merging with the landscape. There should be appropriate traffic signs and signals, pull-out bays and protective fencing wherever necessary. However, such tasks should not be undertaken if they have an adverse effect on ecology and environment.

Deficiency networking and synergy among public and private organization

There is a deficiency in networking and a synergy among public and private organizations, which is a major weakness, lies in the development of tourism in the region. The enormous tourism potential together with a peaceful and secure atmosphere is an ideal environment for investment in the state. The Department should facilitate the development of tourism infrastructure projects on a Public Private Participation mode. But somehow, the state has left behind in Promoting investment through Public Private Partnership (PPP) Mode

Inadequate community participation

Not much encouragement and assistance is provided to promote entrepreneurship within the local communities in the field of tourism. There is a lack of importance to be given to tourism projects which are based on community participation.

Untrained Manpower

Ever since the formation of the new State in the beginning of the last decade, tourism, hospitality and trade sector has shown an upward trend in its contribution to the State GDP. As per our estimates, the total human resource requirement for tourism, hospitality and trade sector in 2012 is approximately 0.30 million, which is expected to grow to 0.45 million in 2017, and 0.69 million in 2022. Incremental manpower requirement for Tourism, Hospitality and Trade sector during next 10 years will be 0.39 million (growth of 18.9 percent or second highest). Sector's share in total human resource requirement is currently 7.9 percent and is expected to grow to 9.7 percent and 11.7 percent in 2017 and 2022 respectively. There is insufficient availability of trained work-force in the hospitality sector. The State has shortage of trained cooks, waiters, front office staff, tourist guides to cater to the requirements of domestic as well as international tourists for which training facilities are needed.

Frequent Natural Calamities

The impact of natural disasters has been more profound during the last few years and this can be attributed to the changing weather patterns around the world as well as the increased number of tourist spots. Today, more and more natural reserves and areas that were once inhabitable are being made accessible to attract tourists. Though this gives a boost to the local tourism, it also increases the impact of natural disasters. In fact, natural disasters cause many tourist destinations to lose their beauty, culture and economy for a temporary or extended period of time. The scale of the damage depends to a large extent on the fury of the natural disaster. For e.g., The tourism sector in Uttarakhand has virtually come to a halt in the wake of the deaths and destruction caused by natural calamities such as floods, landslides, cloud burst, forest fire and many more. In this context, it is important for the tourism industry to take into account the possibility of natural disasters to ensure business sustainability.

OPPURTUNITIES

Wildlife Tourism

In India there is a lot of wildlife to be seen and more nature to be experienced in the raw than almost any other country in the world. Wildlife Tour in Uttaranchal is an exhilarating experience. Wild life tours in uttarakhand are having great potential. There are several national parks such as Jim National Corbett parks, Nanda Devi National Parks, Rajaji National Parks, Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary which can be promoted for Wildlife tourism.

Ecotourism

The ecotourism in kumaon region of Uttarakhand is still very much in an emergent state. With the notable exception of some prime, outstanding ecotourism products such as Corbett National Park, most of the natural resources in Uttarakhand, including the rivers and mountains, are mostly being exploited for adventure or specialist sports tourism and interpretation of the environment is very low. Eco tourism is being promoted in Uttarakhand, as a part of the 'Green India' mission, which is a ten-year plan and is divided into six to seven phases.

Cultural Tourism

Uttaranchal falling under the broad disciplines of Sangeet, Natak, Lalit Kala and Sahitya should promote the rich diversity and uniqueness of various arts and to upgrade and enrich consciousness of the people about their cultural heritage. Special efforts should be done to encourage folk and tribal arts and to frame special programmes for the preservation and strengthening of the vanishing art through evolution of styles and their contribution to the larger composite identity of cultural heritage of India.

Adventure Sports Tourism

Geographical variations of Uttaranchal has attracted the adventure tourists for a long, as exploring the hidden has always been more adventurous than moving on the same trail. Governments of Uttaranchal and India have also promoted Adventure tourism in Uttaranchal. Since last few years, the 'Residence of Gods' has given way to the adventure freaks. Tourists from all over the world have started coming to Uttaranchal to enjoy sports like

Skiing, Trekking and Safaris. Adventure Sports like river rafting, parasailing, snow skiing, rock climbing and bungee jumping could be developed on a much higher scale to tap the interest of the youth aside of their traditional inclinations. The Department of Tourism has proposed gliding points in Chandak, Munakot and Dwaj.

Mice Tourism

Though, Uttarakhand is a lovely place to visit with stunning landscapes, snow-clad peaks of the imposing Himalayas, charming valleys, holy shrines, fantastic wildlife spots, wonderful treks, etc. But, lately, it has also emerged as a top business/MICE destination in India -- thanks to its superb hotels/resorts, offering all related facilities and services. Striking resorts and special business hotels compete with meeting & board rooms, large & spacious convention facilities, business centres, apart from a vast range of attractive conference facilities to choose from make the destination something to look forward to by those wishing to have business meetings in the state's sylvan surroundings.

Wellness, Health & Herbal Tourism

With a long history of Ayurveda, Yoga and meditation, Uttarakhand has become an ideal destination to learn, practice and master these ways of life. The state has lately come to be known as the Yoga Country on account of the number of ashrams, health centres, retreats and high-end spas, it is home to. These institutions have retained the essence of an age-old wisdom of the land in order to cater to the novel needs of an ever-evolving society. Hence, provides a greater opportunity for Wellness, Health & Herbal Tourism.

Farm & Flower Tourism

The climate of Uttarakhand spans across different agro-climatic zones making it conducive for growing flowers. As an alternative to traditional farming there is great interest among the local youth to pursue floriculture. They need field based demonstration on flower cultivation which will help them pursue it at a scale and derive economic benefits. Training on organic farming has enormous scope in the entire hill Districts. Spreading awareness among the farmers and providing them with training on farming techniques will generate interest and attract the agrarian population towards commercialization of organic produce. Skill development was required in organic farming methods, sorting, grading and processing of food products.

THREATS

Strong competition prevail with neighbouring states

Strong competition prevails with the neighbouring states pose a big threat to the development of tourism in Kumaon region of Uttarakhand.. The most popular tourist circuit of northern hills lies in State of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh & Sikkim, which is highly popular among the tourist. The neighbouring states are doing magnificent work for the promotion of tourism in their respective state. Emerging tourism activities in these states will be a threat to the hill destinations of Kumaon region for its tourism promotion.

Strong Competition with abroad

Kumaon tourism is also facing a tremendous competition from abroad. The countries, especially South-east Asian nation such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and etc. are the major competitors to hill destinations of Kumaon region. Availability of economical tour packages in these countries which are much cheaper, with a world class infrastructure and better connectivity, in term of tourism, will pose a major threat to the tourism promotion and development in hill destinations of Kumaon.

Environmental degradation because of Unplanned Development

The grassland-forest interfaces of Kumaon region in the lower and mid-Himalayan ranges are changing rapidly, mainly due to increasing population pressure, rapid urbanization, growth of tourism, and resultant land use changes. More than 15% of the total area of Dabka watershed changed its land use between 1982 and 2012, mainly as a result of increased human encroachment on forests, and there was a reduction in the proportion of forests, grassland, and wetlands in the watershed. These changes have disrupted the hydrological regime of the

watershed through reduced groundwater recharge, drying of natural springs, and decreased stream flow. Villages in both the mountains and the adjoining foothill zone are facing scarcity of water for domestic and irrigation purposes, and agricultural productivity has declined. Degradation of natural forest and grassland ecosystems and resultant loss of ecosystem services, particularly freshwater, is likely to increase the vulnerability of rural communities both upstream and downstream. It is imperative to monitor the land use dynamics, understand the social and economic drivers of land use change, and develop a comprehensive land use policy for the lower to mid-Himalayan ranges. Rangeland conservation should constitute an integral component of an overall land use and sustainable resource development action plan for the region.

Discussion

Despite the fact that Kumaon region of Uttarakhand is having great potentials for tourism in the State but, number of tourist arrivals has been marginal due to lack of adequate infrastructure and other tourist amenities at various tourist attractions in the region. In the purview of SWOT Analysis these astounding facts are revealed. The creation of an attractive, viable and sustainable tourism environment is about utilizing and enhancing the uniqueness of a destination's natural, historic and cultural environment. The Kumaon region has seen high rates of growth in recent years. However, in spite of this there remains a significant problem of urban and rural poverty. Thus the Government of Uttarakhand has identified Tourism as a major engine for generating employment and sustainable livelihoods. Kumaon region has various attractions that qualify to become a new and important tourism destination but, poor connectivity and under-developed infrastructure is the major impediments to the development of tourism in the State. In order to improve connectivity and infrastructure in the state a large sum of money needs to be allocated. Cooperation between public and private stakeholders to improve image of the region and try to market the region as a whole, implementing tourism master plan, providing sustainable tourism development, developing alternative types of tourism to produce year around tourism throughout the whole region and developing policies specifically aimed at developing type of alternate tourism based on the culture, historical, and natural richness of the region which very few other provinces in the world possess. There has been a low awareness of the various tourist spots not only to the domestic tourist, but also the foreign tourist. May be as a result Kumaon region is still remained as an untapped tourist destination. The image of the region with respect to tourism is not very high. The Tourism Department, Government of Uttarakhand needs to through better-focused promotional strategies and provision of suitable infrastructure facilities to address these problems. It is necessary to create specific tourism policies for developing a long term plan for tourism industry and to avoid the long term problems associated with faulty tourism development. In order to eliminate these problems, it is essential to develop long term plans and policies relating to the development of types of alternate, sustainable tourism.

Strategic Options for sustainable development of Kumaon Regions

The vision and strategic objectives must be appropriate to the country or its tourist's destinations and fully embrace concerns for economic, social and environmental sustainability. This includes identifying targets for the volume and value for the sector and for performance against other indicators relating to sustainability. Following are the strategic options for sustainable development of Kumaon regions of Uttarakhand by proper and prompt destination planning, development & marketing:-

Destination Planning

1. Amalgamation of Government, Industry and Community Stakeholder Organizations for destination planning.
2. Engaging the local communities in all steps of planning.
3. Undertaking and utilising research to inform decision making.
4. Undertaking an assessment of current and future market situation for decision making
5. Engaging experienced tourism consultant.
6. Specifying realistic time frame.
7. Identify priority actions and implementation strategy.
8. Integration of Central and State government plans and policies for destination management.

Destination Development

1. Developing appropriate infrastructure and support facilities.
2. Developing effective transport infrastructure and system.
3. Developing a range of appropriate visitors products and experiences
4. Preservation of natural, built and socio-cultural environment.
5. Proving quality visitor's information and interpretation services.
6. Developing festivals and events.

Destination Marketing

1. Fostering co-operative marketing approach.
2. Developing an integrated strategic marketing plan.
3. Establish effective and consistent brand and image.
4. Develop innovative advertising, sales and promotion strategies.
5. Promote festivals and events to support destination image.



Author's own model

Conclusion

A hill environment presents ideal conditions for outdoor recreation, and tourism, if scientifically exploited. It has also been observed that the most backward regions of kumaon offer the most exotic resource base for tourism promotion. But, in current scenario, only few of the destinations were highlighted. As a result, these destinations have become overcrowded and all types of scarcities have emerged. It is time to realize that tourism can play a positive role in sustainable socio-economic development of these destinations from hill towns of the Himalayan and Sub-Himalayan region by providing resource planning and sustainable management. The Kumaon region of Uttarakhand has many opportunities that have remained unexplored and subsequently unexploited. This can be overcome by strategically sustainable destination planning, development & marketing. Also, the Tourism Department, Government of Uttarakhand needs to through better-focused promotional strategies and provision of suitable infrastructure facilities to address these problems should be made available. There is a need to promote tourism whether it is of environmental, cultural, adventure and of other interests.

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