

PILGRIMAGE AND RURAL TOURISM CIRCUITS IN KEDARVALLEY FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

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Abstract:

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1988) has defined sustainable tourism as *“leading to management of all resources in such a way that economics, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support system”*.

Tourism is one of the biggest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the global economy and also world’s largest growing industry and has significant environmental, cultural, social, and economic effects, both positive and negative. The main objectives of our study are formation of tourist circuits, promotion of eco-tourism, village tourism and find out the problems and suggest a suitable plan for sustainable tourism development in Uttarakhand and promote and propagation of local custom, culture and traditional foods, dishes, folklore, handicrafts, architecture heritage etc, which have high valued at local communities but yet to set proper exploration & recommendation to the world. Sustainable tourism can be taken in four different interpretations that include socio-economic sustainability of tourism, the ecologically sustainable tourism, sustainable tourism development with both focus of environment as well as long term practicability of the industry and finally tourism as a part of a strategy for sustainable development. Therefore, the purpose of the present treaties is to adopt integrated approach and establishment of new plans for the sustainable development of village eco-tourism in Kedar Valley with pilgrimage tourism in Uttarakhand.

Key wards : Kedar Valley, Chardham Yatra, Devbhoomi, Tirth Yatra, Village tourism, Rural tourism, Ayurved, Ukhimath, Rudra Prayag, Uttarakhand

While tourism has a relatively recent origin as a global phenomenon, the history of tourism (religious/pilgrimage) in the Himalaya particularly in Uttarakhand (Central Himalaya) is very old known *Tirth Yatra* where thousands of pilgrims, since time immemorial, have been attracted to its numerous holy shrines. Uttarakhand is a complete package. It has something for almost every type and category of traveler. Even when it comes to spirituality, Uttarakhand happens to be one of the best destinations to go on pilgrimage tours. In fact, the state is a treasure trove of holy destinations. It's not just the Chardham circuit that makes the state popular. There are numerous other temples, sacred sites, ashrams and *ghats* that attract the attention of people. Hindu followers arrive in the state in large numbers every year to offer their prayer and seek blessings from different Hindu deities. A pilgrimage tour to Uttarakhand is the most wonderful way of digging into the culture, customs, traditions, rites and rituals of the Hindus and Sikhs. The state is sharing major part of its revenue from pilgrimage tourism.

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The 2013 natural disaster tourism sector had the major hardship for the natives who were solely depending for their livelihood on it. However onwards 2015 again the situation flourish gradually. The *Devbhoomi* Uttarakhand is the land of pilgrimages and it has a history that dates back to several thousand years. It is a land where traditions and culture blend and continue to live in harmony. The state abounds in various temples and Holy River that are ancient and each has its own story of religious, artistic and cultural accomplishment and specialty waiting to be heard. Among these various pilgrimages Centre the *Chardham Yatra* which is operated for six months during summer and monsoon attracts lakhs of devotees across the world. The other important religious tourist destination in the state is the Hemkund Sahib which attracts lakhs of sikhs devotees from the world. The State as well as the local people get a handful of income from these pilgrimage, but the tourist/pilgrimage remain restricted to on route towns and hotels and the scope of entrepreneurs development by using local bio resources is ignored which has high potential for livelihood.

The state has enormous potential in *Ayurved* and herbal medicine, various bio-resources with its products, indigenous knowledge of dying in woolen product with highly potential for weaving and knitting, organic products of various food stuff with high medicinal values which could be also an option for entrepreneurship development for the pilgrimage. The state spread over geographical area of 53,483 sq km of which 93% is mountainous and 64% is covered by forest. The state is rich in cultural diversity and is even richer in bio-diversity of region. A home to 6 National Parks, 1 Biosphere Reserve, Holy rivers, Himalayan peaks covered with snow, the tourist attraction of this region such as wildlife sanctuaries, trekking routes, pilgrimage sites such as *Chardham, Panch badri, Panch Prayag* and various ancient temples of different god and goddess. Despite being one of the best tourist place in country and pilgrimage centre region is still perceived as backward or undeveloped state in term of road network and other social infrastructure. Even as sacred *Chardham yatra* and various ancient temples and pilgrimage sites and nature's rich bounty, region is still struggling on the path of Development. It has to travel a long distance to be in the league of developed states. Education, health, poverty, unemployment, migration are the major causes of state under development. Lacks of basic facilities in rural areas have major effect on regions development. The *Chardham Yatra* in Garhwal region starting from last week of April or first week of May to end of September or up to mid of November every year gives main sources of income to the people of this regions and also gives maximum revenue to Uttarakhand Govt. In the present paper study on Kedar valley is shown for different scope of activities of tourism by which a tourism circuit may be develop for sustainable livelihood among the people of the regions through village tourism with Kedarnath pilgrimage tourist. The following table shows the tourist visited to Rudraprayag district and Kedar valley in the last 10 years.

Table-1 (Domestic and foreign tourist visit to Rudraprayag (except Kedarnath) and Kedarnath during 2010-2019)

Year	Tourist place	Domestic Tourist	Foreign Tourist	Total
2010	Rudraprayag	4,04,527	380	4,04,907
	Kedarnath	4,00,243	268	4,00,511
2011	Rudraprayag	4,64,516	1,222	4,65,738
	Kedarnath	5,69,863	738	5,70,601
2012	Rudraprayag	6,37,706	800	6,38,506
	Kedarnath	5,72,442	598	5,73,040
2013	Rudraprayag	57,375	214	57,589
	Kedarnath	1,49,689	26	1,49,715

2014	Rudraprayag	85,963	3,228	89,191
	Kedarnath	40,694	228	40,922
2015	Rudraprayag	3,93,307	329	3,93,834
	Kedarnath	3,33,575	81	3,33,656
2016	Rudraprayag	3,08,667	108	3,08,775
	Kedarnath	3,19,141	695	3,19,836
2017	Kedarnath	4,70,517	718	4,71,235
2018	Kedarnath	7,30,346	1,895	7,32,241
2019	Kedarnath	---	---	781715 (5/7/19

Rural Tourism for Sustainable Development in Kadar Valley

Rural Tourism does not only have impact on local economy but also has impact on culture. As the tourist visits the rural areas or villages they came to know about the culture and tradition of that area which helps to promotion of culture and tradition. Rural tourism not only helps in promoting culture but also food habits, clothing, and lifestyle. Since there are many pilgrimage sites located in Kedar valley, tourist also love to visit these rural areas which have enormous potential to attract tourist for its natural landscape as well as sacred shrines. So there is a need to promote rural tourism in Kedar valley which has immense potential in the following sectors for the local.

1- Employment, 2- Income generation, 3- Cultural Strengthen, 4- Protection and development of rural landscapes and natural environment .

Ukhimath is a Thesil/ Block in the Rudraprayag District of Uttarakhand. Total area of Ukhimath is 1,125 sq km out of which 1,122.66 sq km is rural area and 2.75 sq km is urban area. There are about 241 villages in Ukhimath Block. The following villages have the Potential

Gaundar, Ukhimath Block, Rudraprayag District: About 2 hours' of drive away from Ukhimath and 7kms trek from Ransi is Gaundar situated in the lap of serene beauty of nature. The place is situated near the bank of river Madhu Ganga which is formed by the confluence of two streams Morghunta originated from Mandini Mountain and Morkhanda from Chaukhamba Mountain. The village is very well enriched with its own flora and fauna which often attracts the visitors by its peaceful surroundings and forest cover which helps in relieving their mood. This place is slightly popularized with 75 families with a total population of 325 persons (Male- 150, Female- 175) is very keen to accepting latest ideas. Their mindset blended with proactive measures of government towards socio-economic development schemes is promoting tourism in the village and it is gaining ground to welcome tourist by maintaining its serene environment and hospitality.

A trek of 14 kms from village goes to Madhmaheshwar a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and is one of the Panch kedar pilgrimage circuit situated at an elevation of 3,497 m (11, 473 ft). The Madhmaheshwar signifies the middle (Madhya) or belly part or navel of the bull, considered a divine form of Lord Shiva, is worshipped at this temple, believed to be built by Pandavas, heroes of Hindu epic Mahabharat. The temple is located on a plain grassland or meadow surrounded by Panpatia glacier and Chaukhamba peak. The clear view of Chaukhamba peak can be seen from old Madhmaheshwar which is about 1.5km of trek from Madhmaheshwar. Once in 3 years at the month of December the villagers devote Bhairav Nritya (Dance) to Lord Shiva. Apart from these places there are numerous places are Khachni khal, Pandavshera and Nandi kund. Khachni khal is a lush green meadow flourished with its own beauty and natural habitat. Pandavshera is around 15kms of trek from

Madhmaheshwar is a very well known place as it is believed that Pandavas resides here for a long time and dug a canal and transformed the land into fertile ones when they were in search of Lord Shiva in Himalayas. Nandi kund is a high-altitude lake located at 4800 m (15,748 ft) above sea level. It is located in the Chaukhamba group of peaks and is of 1.5 kms wide it is also known as gem of trek in the lap of Himalayas of Garhwal as the trek connects the valleys of Kedarnath and Badrinath. The trek offers a close view of peaks like Chaukhamba, Mandani, Neelkanth, Parvati and elegant Nanda Devi. A fair organized in every 12 years at a temple of Nanda devi at Nandi kund when Nanda Raj jat (the longest yatra of the world 280kms) return from Hemkund via Roop-kund .

Gradually and constantly, the village is moving forward in the field of tourism not only by enabling villagers with economic affluence but also maintaining the natural habitat and river bodies through various cleanliness programs.

Chaumasi, Ukhimath Block, Rudraprayag District: Nestled on the lap of serene beauty, Chaumasi, a small village in the Rudraprayag district where one can reach from Kalimath via Guptkashi. This is the last village where a motorable road exists. With a total population of 320 people out of which 140 are male and 180 are female, Chaumasi is an ideal destination for tourist and hikers as Kedarnath can be reached from Chaumasi by doing a trek of 22km. The people business is generally dependent on Kedarnath yatra where shops, milk production, hotel-lodge, trek guide, mule and porter are the main source of income.

The village is very well-enriched from the perspective of pilgrimage and cultural activities. It has Chamunda devi temple, Jakh devta temple where a fair is organized every year in the month of Baisakh(April-May). Pandav dance is organised every year by local people and in the year when Pandav dance is not performed, the Bagadhwal dance takes place. The other places are Kham Bugyal (meadow) and Manana mai temple which is 10km and 17km walk from here.

Apart from this, people are being linked to self-employment by Himotthan NGO, which have to provide employment to people through honey production, milk production and milk products.

Kaviltha, Ukhimath Block, Rudraprayag District: Situated in the pristine valley of guardian angel Himalaya, Kaviltha is the birth place of Great poet Kalidas. Perched on the laps of Himalayas the village is very beautiful where Kalidas had composed his numerous poetries and literatures. The three famous poetries which Kalidas composed here are Meghdutam, Raghuvansh mahakavya, Kumarasambhavam. Every year poet convention is organized where poets from different regions take part. After the 2013 catastrophe, the poet convention held in November which goes on for three days. The nearby pilgrimage sites are Kalimath which is regarded as a divine place and shakti peeth of goddess Kali, Kal-shila temple, Chamundamai temple, Ruchhh Mahadev temple where lord Shiva had incarnated to calm the goddess Kali, Manana mai temple(Maa Parvati temple), it is situated at bank of river Madhuganga and Saraswati and is a trek of 2 km downhill from road. It is said that Devi Parvati reside at this place during her childhood days and there is also a water fall and pond where she used to take bath and is considered as sacred place.

Mandakini river , footprint of lord Shiva, Vanaushadhi, Brahma kamal etc described by great poet Kalidas in his composition Meghdutam, Kumarasambhavam, Abhigyan Shakuntalam are in close proximity to Kaviltha village. Customs and culture mentioned by Kalidas in his epics remain intact even today in Mandakini Valley.

Makkumath, Ukhimath Block, Rudraprayag District: When Kedarnath was on a pedestrian journey, it was travelled through Makkumath's way. By the construction of road, travelers now go to Kedarnath via Guptkashi. Here is the mythological temple of Lord Shiva built by Pandavas. Tungnath is the highest temple situated in Panch Kedar. Six months after the closure of valve in Tungnath, worship of god occurs in Makkumath. Sri Markandeshwar temple (Makkumath temple) is of

Markandeshwar rishi(sage) who is considered to be the 11th incarnation of Lord Shiva. The temple is of Pandav era which is later renovated by Shankaracharya. Here the priests are Maithani people, who came here with Shankaracharya from south India and settled here.

With 400 Families residing here total population of Makku is 1030 out which 480 are male and 550 are females. The main business of people here is ringal (bamboo) industry, mule, porter, hotel-lodge, agriculture and animal husbandry. People's business is generally based on travel and most of the people relied on agriculture and animal husbandry. Ninety percent of the people do animal husbandry, in which most cows are raised. Products made from milk (milk, butter, ghee) are also sold in the market. In agriculture especially paddy, Mandwva (ragi), Jhangora (finger millet), Rajma, Potato, Gourd, and Pumpkin etc. are cultivated. Along with people are being trained by NGO located in Parkandi where different products (basket, *kandi*, *solta* etc.) are made from ringal trees.

Jamu Viilage , Ukhimath Block, Rudraprayag District: About 90 minutes' drive away from Guptkashi is Jamu village which is located in Ukhimath tehsil of Rudraprayag district in Uttarakhand. It is situated 32 km away from Ukhimath and 59 km away from Rudraprayag . Jamu village is a gram Panchayats, Jamu village is administrated by Pradhan (Head of Village) who is elected representative of village. Jamu village is perched in the lap of serene beauty of nature. This small village with a total population of 950 people out of which 480 are male and 470 are female is very open to accept new ideas for encouraging tourism in their village. Their positive attitude towards Government schemes like home stay and promoting Rural Tourism will help to promote tourism in village. More and more tourists will be attracted to visit this village.

Tourist places Near Jamu –

1 – NAAGTAAL → 1 km away from Jamu, Water pond covered with natural beauty, wildlife, and forest where every year a fair is organized to show their faith for Nag devta.

2 - JAMESHWAR TEMPLE → **Jamadagni**, one of the Saptarishis and father of lord Parshuram stayed here for a long time and established lord Shiva temple here. He was blessed by Kamdhenu cow from Lord Brahma at this place and gets married to Renuka. At this place he ordered his son Parshuram to cut down his mother's head which Parshuram followed.

3 – CHANDI DEVI TEMPLE → **Ancient** temple of Goddess Chandi that is 500 m away.

Village is gearing up to welcome tourists by maintaining its serene environment in its natural form. Local food is to be served which creates a market and appreciation for local food, products and service. Due to home stay project tourists will be able to know the rural life and culture as staying under one roof there will be exchange or mutual sharing of culture, traditional festivals, architecture, crafts, food and practices.

Dewar Village, Ukhimath Block, Rudraprayag District: Dewar is a medium size village in Ukhimath block in Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand state. It is situated 6 km away from Guptkashi and 45 km away from Rudraprayag. Dewar village is a gram Panchayats and is administrated by gram Pradhan the elected head of the village.

Language – Garhwali, Hindi. Tourist places near Dewar –

Jwalamukhi Temple → Goddess Jwala Temple, **Pandavas Nirtya**→ Held every year in the month of October- November.

Pandav dance is a most famous folk dance form of Garhwal. This dance form shows about the birth and life of Pandav brothers. This dance form shows the whole story of Mahabharata in the form of dance. The flow of performance keeps the audience attached to the flow of story. This dance form is mainly performed in the month of October-November at the time of Diwali or Dusshera.

Bansu/Tyuri Village, Ukhimath Block, Rudraprayag District: Bansu/Tyuri are small villages located in Ukhimath tehsil of Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand state. They are situated 6 km away from Guptkashi and 45 km away from Rudraprayag.

Bansu/ Tyuri are situated 1 km away from each other.

Language – Garhwali , Hindi.

Byung (1 km), Rudrapur (2 km), Dewar (3 km), Maikhanda (3 km), are nearby villages to Bansu/ Tyuri.

Tourist places Near Bansu/ Tyuri

Jakh Temple → Temple of god Jakh .

Dona Bugyal → 5 km away

Bugyal is a beautiful and distinctive landscape or meadows. Dona Bugyal is 5 km trek from Bansu/tyuri village covered with forest , natural scenery and covered with series of flowers (kukhdi mukhdi flowers).

Why these 8 villages for Rural Tourism

These places are located in Rudraprayag district which is the central part of Uttarakhand. These regions are not only famous for religious tourism but also for cultural tourism. Beside this the regions are rich in cultural diversity as well as in natural beauty. The important tourist destinations for which tourist came away from different parts of India as well as from other country are Kedarnath, Chopta, Madhmaheswar, Kalimath and various other pilgrimages sites. Tourism in Kedar valley plays an important role in increasing state economy and these are the sites which are untapped and can be developed as a major tourist destination because of its natural as well as cultural beauty.

Challenges for Rural Tourism in study Area

- Transportation
- Poor infrastructure facility
- Seasonal tourism
- Natural Calamity
- Public awareness
- Lack of trained manpower
- Lack of financial aid
- Lack of publicity and marketing.

CONCLUSION

Uttarakhand has a special status in India in terms of various kind of tourism. The main reason for this is the natural spellbound beauty and pilgrimages. That is why religious and adventure tourism is primarily a means of livelihood. More than 82 percent of the total population of Uttarakhand resides in rural areas whose main business is relied on agriculture, animal husbandry and travel. Especially to the lack of industrial development, the problem of migration from the rural areas of the state is showing economic inequality as well as other challenges, in which the wastage of agriculture land, expansion of waste land, excessive natural disaster and population growth in urban areas and social economic problem are becoming visible.

In order to deal with economic and social challenges in hilly areas of the state, permanent solution can be taken in local level through development and extension of tourism. Tourism will also prove useful in migration with the employment of locals and disparities in urban and rural areas. Kedar valley of Rudraprayag district has been selected in the research, as there are other religious and tourist sites along with Kedarnath temple where travelers come from different parts of India and abroad.

This study will be useful from the perspective of tourism development, recognition of local tourism and products, awareness and expansion of possible activities in the field of tourism and economic development.

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