

# Pilgrim tourism to holy places



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“ Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destination outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination. It includes movements for all purposes (1976, Tourism Society of England, 1976) “. Tourism has been described in various ways but may be thought of as the connection and experience arising out of the journeys and temporary stay of people travelling primarily for leisure and recreational purpose. Tourism is thus a multifaceted activity and geographically complex one as different services are sought and supplied at different stages from the origin to the destination.

Tourism has emerged as one of the most important instruments to boost economic development in many of the countries across the globe as an engine for economic development, the earnings of foreign exchange, its contribution & creation of employment.

India has diverse culture and heritage in the North, it has the great Himalayas which gives tremendous opportunities for mountain tourism or adventure tourism. It provides great challenges and difficulties to mountaineers. In the Southern part of the country there is Indian Ocean which gives opportunities to beach tourism and attract large number of foreign and domestic tourists. In the North West there is Thar Desert with Aravalis mountains range. It is highly suitable for desert tourism and heritage tourism. In this way India have very rich natural resources like geographical and cultural diversity, forests, lakes, mountains, rivers and rivulets, sacred shrines, historic monuments and hospitable people, which are necessary for thriving tourism activity (Singh, 2002).

Pilgrims with pilgrimage tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism in the world. Not only has it become an important component of the Indian life style (Adrian Ivakhiv, 2003 ) but it has had a profound impact on other peoples of the world and the environments in which they live.

Pilgrim tourism to holy places (tirtha-yatra) is an ancient and continuing religious tradition of the Culture of Hindus. Here religion, as a cultural dimension, assumes the vital role and central focus of tourism in which the tourists (pilgrims) from all strata of the Hindus participate. In pilgrim tourism, the dimension of religion forms the basis of tourism of pilgrimage by offering the reward of purification of the soul and attainment of objectives related to the problems of routine life. Hindus from time immemorial were attracted to their numerous holy sites spread throughout India. Pilgrimage is thus a pan-human and pan Indian phenomenon, the meaning of which within the traditional structure of each religion, if not, within castes and communities. According to Skandapurana (a religious treatise), truth, forgiveness, control of senses, kindness to all living beings and simplicity is tirtha. Thus, tirtha yatra not only means physically visiting the holy places but implies mental and moral discipline as well. It has rightly said that following the Vedic period, the practice of religious tourism or pilgrimage seems to have gained increased popularity as evident from the great epic Mahabharata (Bhardwaj 1973: 5).

The number of pilgrimage sites in India is extremely large but some primary pilgrimage sites include the four Dhams, the Seven Sacred cities and their primary temples, Ashtvinayakas, twelve Jyotirlingas, Svayambhu and Pancha Bhutta linga Temples, the Shakti Pithas, the Kumbha Mela sites, major

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Vaishnava sites, the Nava Graham Sthalas, the Seven Sacred Rivers, the four Muths of Sri Adi Sankaracharya, the Arupadaividu, Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliva, Jama Masjid, Dargah of Muinuddin Chishti, Hazrathbal Mosque, Haji Ali Mausoleum, Church of St. Catejan, Church of the Sacred Heart, Patna Sahib, Sachkhand Sahib, Hemkund Sahib, Little Mount and certain other places that do not fit into any of the categories listed here. In India all temples, Gurudwaras, Mosques and Churches are considered sacred places. As is evident from the list these sites are not related with one religion only and therefore, they attract people of different religions for pilgrimage.

Further, many of such places are visited by pilgrims of various religions. It is worth mentioning that Uttarakhand has many important religious places which are quite popular at national level. Some of these places are well known at the international level as well. A brief description of of such places has been given as Haridwar, Rishikesh and Neelkanth in Uttaranchal.

## **Tourism in Uttarakhand**

Uttarakhand 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 \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_\_ per sq km). The entire region is geographically important and is comprised of the two distinct parts i. e. eastern part (known as Kumaon) and western part (known as Garhwal). Uttarakhand is surrounded by a number of states like Himachal Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh and country like Nepal. Uttarakhand give a distinct sense of tourism practices such as, Adventure tourism activities, leisure activities, wild life national parks and eco tourism activities etc. It is also a home of

several religious places belonging to the Hindus and the Sikhs like Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri, Gangotri, Lokpal and Hemkundsahib.

To promote tourism Uttar Pradesh Parvatiya Vikas Nigam was established on 30th March 1971, with authorized capital of Rs. 2 crore, under Companies Act 1956. The main objective of this government body was the development of seven hilly districts i. e. Haridwar, Dehradun, Tihri, Pauri, Uttarkashi, Chamouli and Rudraprayag. After this on 31st March 1976, two more Government companies i. e. Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam and Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam were established for the development of these regions.

The main objectives of these apex bodies in the context of tourism were to work in the area of tourism development and provide basic tourism infrastructure facilities, to promote tourism, a state tourism policy was formulated in 2002 in which emphasis was given on three things i. e. development of eco-friendly tourism with the help of both the public and private sectors and local communities, promote tourism as a source of economic growth by employment and revenue generation, develop Uttarakhand as a leading tourist destination and place Uttarakhand on the tourist map.

To promote the pace of tourism a Board named Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board was also established in 2002. This board is the supreme institute which gives suggestions to the government related to all tourism matters. Along with tourism this board also works as a regulatory and licensing authority.

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.

All above facts relating to the Uttarakhand reveal that the state government view tourism as a source of economic development and employment generation. They have shown their interest in infrastructure development on public-private participation. Further, efforts have been made to keep environmental aspects into consideration while developing tourism. If these steps implemented properly can lead to tourism growth in the above states.

The presentation is written for tourism industry analysts and public officials, who would like to better understand, evaluate, or possibly reduce the negative impact of tourism in Uttarakhand.

## **Haridwar**

Haridwar is regarded as most sacred destination among Hindu pilgrimages. A staggering number of pilgrims visited Haridwar every year. Haridwar is also a historic and cultural destination, older than many other ancient towns in the world, and is deeply rooted in the history and development of Hinduism and Indian culture from its earliest days. Haridwar meaning “Gateway to God” is one of the seven holiest places of the Hindus, located on the banks of River Ganges. With Ujjain, Nasik and Allahabad, Haridwar forms the four important pilgrimage centers of India where Kumbh Mela is celebrated after every 3 years rotated over these 4 destinations. Har-ki-Pauri is the most holy place where thousands of devotees take a dip. Haridwar is located

around 200 km north east of Delhi and 54 km south of Dehradun and is probably the most important gateway to Uttarakhand by rail and road. It would also be justifiable to describe it as one of the most important "pilgrimage tourism" destinations in India.