

Ecotourism –a strategy for conservation (with special reference to Uttarakhand)

^aJasmeet Kaur, ^bM.C.Pande

^aResearch Scholar Sardar Bhagat Singh Govt. P.G.College, Kumaon University, India

^bPh.D. (Commerce), LL.B., PGDBA Associate Professor in Commerce, Sardar Bhagat Singh Govt. P.G.College, Rudrapur (Udham Singh Nagar) Uttarakhand, India

Abstract

Although the basic purpose of the creation of Uttarakhand as a separate state was to gear up the economic development of the hill region for the improvement of the living standards of residents of the state but lack of employment opportunities, zero innovation in agriculture, crisis of basic civic amenities have robbed the mountains of their residents. Moreover unplanned and uncontrolled growth of tourism in the state often damages the vegetation and disturbs the animal life as well as host communities. In this perspective Ecotourism can be used as a **strategic tool** for enhancing income generation of the local community with the true intention of conserving biodiversity. Furthermore, ecotourism is highly dependent upon natural capital (e.g. forest, wildlife) and culture, therefore providing the sound base for the ecotourism development in the state.

Ecotourism is the most fascinating and recently emerged form of nature's tourism. Tourism and environment are closely related to each other and the latest expression of this relationship is *Eco- Tourism*. It includes all such activities which makes a destination integrated, environment friendly, sustainable and useful for visitors and local inhabitants. Ecotourism is a meaningful fusion of ecology and tourism. Ecotourism in other words, incorporates both a strong commitment to nature and sense of responsibility. It has become a growing force for responsible tourism and conservation. It is about a quality experience rather than necessarily a pristine environment its main emphasis is on local resources and employment. It is one of such forms of nature tourism where comfort and luxury do not matter but visitors prefer to use locally made and available products and services. Also they seem cautious and careful about the conservation of visiting resources. Ecotourism has been accepted as a hopeful new approach to preserve fragile land and threatened wild areas and provide host communities with opportunity for their development specially to protect the following area :-

1. Direct and indirect erosion of resources
2. Misleading promotion
3. Costs of establishing infrastructure
4. Cultural conflicts with natives
5. Better roads access that may exacerbate natural destruction

Ecotourism focuses on what the traveler does plus the impact of this travel on both the environment and people in the host country.

Ecotourism may not be the new process but rather just a new term. The evolution of ecotourism involved the following stages :

MID 17th Century – The beginning of the grand tour. An artistic/cultural pilgrimage popularized by travel writers like Roman Catholic Priest Richard Hakluyt.

1797- Alexander VON Humboldt traveled to central and south America with botanist Aimé Bonpland and covered 6000 miles over 5 years by foot, horse and canoe.

1835- Charles Darwin explores the lush Galapagos island in the HMS Beagle, Collecting Specimens.

1848- Alfred Russel Wallace along with Walter Bates, explores the Amazon river basin to collect insect and animal specimens and seek evidence of evolution.

1968- Dwen Lee moves to Zihuatanejo Mexico founds a nature study center at Las Gatas Beach intending to bring people closer back into our ecosystem.

1983- “Ecotourism” firstly coined by Mexican architect Hector Ceballos Lascurain. And was initially used to travel to relatively undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education element.

1996- Ecotourism explodes in the Global tourism industry.

2002- Recognizing the importance of ecotourism and its benefits the UN general assembly earmarked the year 2002 as the international year of mountains (IYM) and the international year of ecotourism (IYE).

2003- Martha D. Honey, cofounds the centre for responsible tourism in order to support efficient ecotourism.

During the last decade debate over the definition of the new term “Ecotourism” began and still continues to distract the field today. Many professionals insist that we need to move beyond mere definitions and concentrate on action.

The ecotourism society (later to become the international ecotourism society) was founded in May 1990 and helped to develop the first definition for the concept of ecotourism and ecotourism is defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of people” (TIES 1990).

Now ecotourism is defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment sustains the well being of the local people and involves interpretation and education” (TIES 2015) Education is meant for both staff and guest.

Elaborating the concept, David Western (1993) says “Ecotourism is about creating and satisfying a hunger for nature about exploiting tourism’s potential for conservation and development and about averting its negative impact on ecology, culture and aesthetics”.

Forestry Tasmania (1994) focuses on provision of learning opportunity while providing local and regional benefits and demonstrating environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability.

Goodwin (1995) called ecotourism as “purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care of not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make the

conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people. Hindberg and Mc. Kercher (1997) define ecotourism as a blend of tourism and recreation and both are based on natures and sustainability.

The UNWTO (United Nation World Tourism Organization) in 2002 defined ecotourism as “Tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific objective of studying admiring and enjoying nature and its wild plants and animals as well as existing cultural aspects (both of the past and present) found in these areas.

Ecotourism lacks a universal definition. However the core elements remain same the common elements includes-

1. Visiting natural areas
2. Having low impact on the environment.
3. Contributing to conservation of environment
4. Benefitting the local communities.

Principles of Ecotourism

- Minimize impact
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, cultural and social climate
- Support international human rights and labour agreements

Ecotourism in Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand- The youngest Himalayan state came into existence with high dreams of turning its economy into a thriving one. Thus the creation of the new state threw up several challenges. Industry presence is almost negligible in the state and limited to the plain areas. Agriculture is only subsistence type with little scope for expansion due to the difficult hilly terrain. Therefore farming is uneconomical in scattered staircase type & sloppy land. Lack of other jobs, entrepreneurship skills, backwardness of infrastructural facilities and many innumerable problems leads to the ‘MIGRATION’ of population from hard hills to the pleasure plains. No doubt Uttarakhand is a heaven for nature loving people but deep rooted socio-economic problems of the state make it miserable to live in. This is the state worst hit by the problem of migration. People are educated, honest and healthy. Thousands of youth are serving for national and state security forces. But lack of entrepreneurship blocks the path for the development of this state.

Earlier, hill economy was known as money order economy. They were sending money to their families but now they are shifting their families from hills to plains. So many villages are deserted and losing their identity. While in other parts the young migrate to the cities and elders guard uttarakhand’s ghost villages. At the same time villages are suffering from the shortage of drinking water in summers. It is indeed an irony that the birth place of many rivers is itself is facing water deficiency. Roads are the carrier of development does not ride upward but slips down through good roads. It

is said that ‘Pahar Ka Pani aur Jawani is ke Kaam nhi aate’. Both are drained toward the comfortable plains.

Behind this dark picture, Tourism appears as ‘**Knight with his shining armour**’. Tourism is the only sector that offers tremendous potential for income generation and employment generation. The nature has blessed uttarakhand with generous beauty. Therefore uttarakhand economy mainly relies on tourism industry rather it is the backbone of state’s economy. The industrial development finance corporation has declared uttarakhand to be a ‘**Pure tourism**’ state. In the eighth and ninth decades of the last century uttarakhand become the tourist destination and attracted large number of tourists. The state government and central government realizing the potential of tourism in the state has taken many steps to attract more and more tourists.

No doubt developing these areas as tourist destinations give an impetus to economic activity in the region but the poor planning and uncontrolled tourism deteriorates the natural resources. As during the past few decades tourism has become one of the world’s most profitable industries but in the same time one of the most harmful human activities in terms of environmental degradation. The massive influx of tourists has led to the construction of hundreds of hotels in a haphazard manner. Also in the last couple of decades, the traditional low wooden construction of the hills have given away to concrete structures that often rises upto three or even four storeys . Too many road projects have become the other curse of the hills.

Highways are being widened because increasing tourism traffic demands more road space. New roads are being laid to the remotest and sparsely populated corners because there is money to be made under the “Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana”.

The rush has invited contractors who have little understanding of the mountains Random blasting of rocks has led to the mountains Random blasting of rocks has led to the land slides.

Due to rampant blastings and concrete constructions, Uttarakhand has recorded significant strains on its ecosystem for instance:-

1. CHAUKORI in Pithoragarh, also known as Switzerland of east has been converting into concrete jungles. The capitalists interference for their profits and ignorance of government is responsible to degrade this beautiful tourist place. Terraced tea gardens are loosing their heritage due to extra load of outsiders. Again destruction on the name of development.
2. Take the case of Nainital, a popular tourist destination of Uttarakhand that was being affected by Pollution. The people of Nainital realized the ill effects of pollution which would one day threaten the very existence of the town itself “Nainital, a beautiful butterfly is said to be turning into an ugly caterpillar”. The growing traffic and big turnout of tourists has contributed much to the environmental pollution.
3. Moreover we have to take lesson from the recent tragedy happened on 16th June, 2013 at Kedarnath. The National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) in one of its first report on this worst calamity has blamed “Climatic conditions combined with haphazard human intervention” in the hills for the disaster. Uncontrolled tourism is destroying the ecology of the mountains. Uttarakhand cannot afford ravage of nature’s gift by erecting jungles in place of planting trees.

Keeping the ecology of the Himalayas and the fragile zones in the mountains, it is an obvious fact that it cannot take any more load on itself.

The greed to earn money from this blind tourism is digging its own grave. The end result was *price rise, scarcity of goods, unaesthetic building construction, destruction of forests, garbage heaps, exploitation of natural resources and recession of glaciers*. This resulted in government restriction on the access to the tourism areas and confrontation between the local communities and the government authorities. **Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve** is a very fresh example.

Economic development through rational utilization of resources and environmental conservation are the two main problems associated with the development of the newly carved state, Uttarakhand where resources are limited and Tourism is perceived as a very important component of the economy. Thus it becomes imperative for the state to conserve its rich bio-diversity while at the same time promote ecologically sustained tourism which aims at providing livelihood for its people. Ecotourism is the only way out of which can conserve the ecology and make people of this region self-reliant.

Ecotourism ventures assist in protecting the ecosystems by providing alternative sources of employment, which limits the damage caused by depletion of natural treasures. Further motivates the local communities to take necessary steps for the conservation as a major stakeholder. **‘Conservation works when it pays’** fits perfectly here.

The concept of eco tourism is entirely a new side of tourism industry. Eco tourism has been developed to appreciate the natural beauty, culture and history of the environment without disturbing the eco system. It is one way creating economic opportunities for conservation of natural resources and wildlife on the other hand it is creating awareness among people to protect nature to maintain a balanced ecosystem. This kind of initiative not only helps to preserve the nature's resources but also awakens the human responsibility towards Mother Nature.

It is not just about the geography of the place but in a way of life to where one is expected to adhere to all possible eco-friendly measures such as rain-water harvesting, tapping solar energy and organic farming. An integral part of eco-tourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation for the local communities.

Nature and culture are the very source of ecotourism. Uttarakhand is blessed with natural wonders as well as established by cultural heritage, which make it the most suitable place for ecotourism.

Of the state's area of 53,484 sq.km, 65% is various categories of forest with amazing bio-diversity. To conserve this bio-diversity, it has a vast network of protected areas (PAs) spread over more than 13% of the state's geographical area and is three times more than the national average. The PA network includes six national parks, seven wildlife sanctuaries and four conservation Reserves spreading over the elevation of 800 meters to 5400 meters.

S.No	Protectected Area	Area (km ²)	Inaugration year
1	Corbett National Park	520.82	1936
2	Nanda Devi National Park	624.60	1982
3	Valley of Flowers National Park	87.50	1982
4	Rajaji National Park	820.42	1983
5	Gangotri National Park	2390.02	1989
6	Govind National Park	472.08	1990
	TOTAL	4915.44	

Wildlife Sanctuary:-

S.No	Protectected Area	Area (km ²)	Inaugration year
1	Govind wildlife sanctuary	485.89	1955
2	Kedarnath wildlife sanctuary	975.20	1972
3	Askot wildlife sanctuary	599.93	1986
4	Sonanadi wildlife sanctuary	301.18	1987
5	Binsar wildlife sanctuary	47.07	1988
6	Mussoorie wildlife sanctuary	10.82	1993
7	Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary	269.95	2012

Conservation Reserve:-

S.No	Protected Area	Area (km ²)	Inaugration year
1	Jhilmil Jheel Conservation Reserve	37.84	2005
2	Aasan Wetland Conservation Reserve	4.44	2005
3	Pawalgarh Conservation Reserve	5.82	2012
4	Nainadevi Himalayan Bird Conservation Reserve	111.91	2015

Biosphere Reserve:- Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve

1-Nandadevi National Park, Valley of Flowers National Park, Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary Biosphere Reserve and buffer zone together cover total area of 2,26,271.75 ha.

2- Corbett National Park, Sonandi Wildlife Sanctuary and the buffer zone covering Corbett Tiger Reserve together cover total area of 1,28,832 ha.

3- Bharat Ratna Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant high altitude Zoological Park established in the year 1995 is spread over 4.963 ha

Source: Forest Department , Uttarakhand

Wildlife tourism has witnessed a massive growth in the recent years. Uttarakhand is fortunate to be blessed with incredible range of wild life. It's a nature's gift that makes Uttarakhand an ideal location for wildlife tourism including Bird watching.

Uttarakhand Popularly known as abode of gods is studded with places of pilgrimage and magnificent shrines. Here, the gods are with us every step of the way. Infact the state is a treasure trove of holy destinations. **Char Dham, Panch Badri, Panch kedar, Panch Prayag** are the most popular destinations for pilgrims.

This state of pilgrimage and highly blessed by the smile of natural beauty promises the highest degree of the enjoyment with adrenaline excitement. Of course, this state is paradise for adventurous activities. One, who has landed in this state for adventurous activities, returns with the unforgettable memories. Its snowy peaks, rugged slopes and wide valleys offer splendid opportunities for mountaineering rock climbing, skiing, hand gliding, trekking and river rafting. The wide variety from mountaineering, skating, water sports to aero sports make Uttarakhand one of the most attractive destinations for adventurous sports not only in India but the world over.

Also being the reservoir of enormous natural resources of medicinal wealth and traditional medicinal knowledge Uttarakhand is an important wellness destination and is associated with wide range of wellness activities. The state caters to all aspects of wellness –physical, social and spiritual. Rishikesh and Bhowali are important wellness spots.

Uttarakhand is also a major destination for sports lovers many national and international competitions of skiing, mountaineering, waters rafting, rock climbing etc are held annually.

This richness in culture also goes a long way in projecting Uttarakhand as cultural tourism destination. **The Regional Cultural can be used as strong a Tool of Development of Ecotourism in the state.**

Community based tourism (CBT) has been identified as a viable option in the state for generating livelihood opportunities to the local communities residing in villages nearby the forest areas and to provide experience of rural village life to the visitors. **Home Stay** is an important product of CBT. A program has been started at Chhoti Haldwani, a quiet little village in foothills of Nanital, to provide the rural experience and it has received good response. Working together with local people, homestays are managed by the Corbett Gram Vikas Samiti. Many other villages like **Tolma, Supi Marchula, Dalar** also understood the significance of the concept, managing successfully the Home stays

Being rich in scenic beauty with its pristine hills and lakes, Uttarakhand always a one of the favourite choice for bollywood film makers for movie locations and song picturization. The state has several unexplored areas which could be tapped as good shooting locales. It will provide good opportunity to earn revenue for the state like Ali Bugyal, Munsiyari, Gwaldam, Lohaghat etc. Hence film tourism has also good scope.

Ecotourism and all its subsets can be clubbed together for greater benefits to stimulate the economic growth to increase the viability of underdeveloped locations and to improve the living standards of local populations. The following

recommendations have been put forward for the healthy growth of Ecotourism in the state:

- Basic infrastructure such as Laying of trails, transport arrangement, drinking water facilities, accommodation facilities, interpretation skills for guides and development of other civic amenities are important steps for ecotourism development.
- Private sector players may be encouraged to participate in development of tourism infrastructure by provision of fiscal as well as non fiscal incentives. The Investments can be invited from NRI's, Uttarakhand migrants and International Funding Agencies
- Celebrity endorsements like Amitabh Bachchan for the campaign to promote Gujarat tourism, could help in formation of Brand image. Tom Alter's contribution in Chhoti Haldwani is also a good example. The same strategy should be replicated for other places.
- Attractive presentation of ecoproducts like cultural distinctiveness in dress, folklore and local products can be promoted.
- A well designed marketing strategy can be formulated to allocate resources and responsibilities judiciously to ensure that appropriate tourists are targeted and encouraged to visit the state.
- Tourist police is also recommended by many other researchers to provide adequate safety and Security Measures
- Tourist information bureaus and. Qualified official websites for providing requisite tourist information. The websites should be updated regularly. The information technology can provide a sound base for Ecotourism industry.
- Waste management is an important aspect for promoting ecotourism. As the use of polythene is already banned in the state. In the same continuity the tourist spots should be made 'plastic free'.
- We need separate policy for ecotourism for the long term planning, distinguishing it from mainstream conventional tourism operations.
- Ethics or Voluntary codes of conduct are very important for the successful ecotourism development as well as to minimise the negative impacts of tourism and should be strictly followed.
- Eco tourism generates additional employment for local people as eco-tour guides, camp managers, sales assistants, caretakers, cooks and drivers. Therefore, capacity building programmes in terms of trainings, field study, short-term courses and workshops shall be organised in eco-hubs of the state.
- Maximum participation of locals especially community women. Local communities work as partners with ecotourism organizations rather than just as participants.
- Less emphasis on the common, exploited tourism locations by spreading tourists throughout the state that is more manageable for all locations.
- The Environmental Laws (do's and don'ts) should be strictly implemented in the tourist sites. The Fines and Penalties should be made clear to every stakeholder.

Besides the above, proper utilisation of existing resources available in the state facilitates effective functioning of ecotourism projects.

Though ecotourism is the new concept developed recently, it has gained momentum for addressing the needs of eco-tourists and promoting eco-tourism in the state people are becoming conscious of the environmental hazards and the importance of the diverse flora and fauna. Everyone is the stake holder in the process. So it is our duty to maintain an eco system for the betterment of mankind and environment. Each one of us has a responsibility towards the environment, whether a nature camping tour or the trekking trip, one should always keep in mind not to disturb the nature. It is well said “**take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints**”.

REFERENCES

A) - Books

1. Mehta G.S “Impact of tourism in the economic development Uttarakhand” Giri institute of development studies, Lucknow.
2. Pande M.C. and Kumar subodh- “Indian Economy -Issues and options”, Anamika 2007.
3. Joshi P.C. “Uttarakhand: Issues and challenges”, Anand publication 1995.
4. Pande P.C. “Economy of Uttarakhand: profile and dynamics of change”, New Delhi, Anamika 2007
5. Sinha P.C. “Eco-Tourism and Mass Tourism”, Anmol Pulication, New Delhi, 2005.
6. Weaver D.B. “The Encyclopedia of Eco-Tourism” ,CABI Publication 2001
7. Dr. Harimohan “Uttarakhand Mein Prayatan : Naye Kshitiz” Taksh Shilla Prakashan ,New
8. Sati V.P.& Kumar Kamlesh “Uttaranchal: Dilemma of Plenties and Scarcities”Mittal Publication (2004)
9. Sati M.C and Sati S.P “Uttrakhand Statehood-Dimensions of Development” Indus Publishing Company (2000)
10. Eco-Tourism Wing, Forest Department, Uttarakhand “Uttarakhand Nature Handbook” (2013)

B) -Magazines and periodicals

1. Yojna
2. Entrepreneur

C) - Websites

1. www.uttranchaltourism.in
2. www.google.co.in
3. Wikipedia

D)-Newspapers

1. Amarujala
2. Dainik Jagran

E)-Documents

1. National Tourism Policy
2. Uttarakhand Tourism Development Master Plan

