

Garhwal Himalayas: Cultural Tourism and Marketing Prospects

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Abstract—Cultural tourism in the Garhwal Himalaya is the least exploited resource for promotion of sustainable economy for the villagers who are one by one deserting their villages in search of greener pastures in nearby towns or metropolises. The paper attempts to explore the dimensions and extraordinary richness of cultural resource in the region and attempts an analysis of the commercial dimension of religio-cultural tourism to the Four-Dhams. The entire paper anchors on the postulate that Garhwal Himalayas have the rarest traditions which are at the same time exceptionally rich in cultural and artistic contents. The paper first presents a detail discussion on the Four-Dham tourism. It next analyses the commercial dimensions of the livelihood provided by the tourism to the regional populace. The sectors of cultural tourism like Nanda Devi Rajjat, the month long Holi festival, Ramlilas, Mahabharat festivals, festivals dedicated to Lord Shiva, flower festival & thousands of other traditions are little known to the folks themselves; leave alone their national popularity. Such festivals combined with salubrious climate and scenic beauty of the region can draw a large number of tourists to the villages and make for the supplementary income of the folks. The paper recommends measures for achieving the minimum level of infrastructure, data centric research and a proactive government policy to promote such tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Garhwal also known as the land of forts is a land which is bestowed with picturesque landscapes, lush green valleys, cool climate and rich cultural resource. It is the region which is known for its rich cultural heritage but unfortunately this is one resource which has been exploited least to promote the sustainable economy of the populace here. Cultural tourism in this part has been only confined to the Four-Dham Yatra which obviously constitutes the major portion of tourism in this area. As far as scenic beauty and cultural heritage are concerned Garhwal region has got immense potentialities for tourism development. National Tourism Policy, 2002 also emphasize the need to recognise the deep rooted relationship of tourism and our cultural assets. Further, it states that the special thrust should be imparted to rural tourism and tourism in small settlements, where sizable assets of our cultural and natural wealth exist. Cultural resources (i.e. lifestyles, cuisine, ceremonies, music, religious beliefs, traditions, customs and history) have got the strong potential to encourage the tourism.

Over the past six decades, world-wide tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification becoming one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Looking at the commercial dimension of the tourism sector we can say that development of it can help the local economy in the number of ways. The most important is the creation of employment for the local people which can be created in the accommodation, transport, tour operations and other miscellaneous economic activities directly or indirectly attached with the tourism sector.

Garhwal Himalayas consist of the rarest traditions which are exceptionally rich in cultural and artistic contents. It is a rare fact that the culture as a product is still in unknown and unused as a marketing resource. The sustainable use of it can not only help in the community building but can also check the problem of out migration of villagers here. On a whole it can be said that the cultural tourism associated with the sustainable marketing agents or process constituting of various stake holders, local communities, self help groups, private players, educational bodies etc. can help in:

- Reviving the culture.
- Generating employment.
- Dissemination of environmental awareness.
- Maintaining socio-cultural network among the local populace.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism in the world. Its potential has been significantly tapped by the countries and regions who seek to conserve traditional cultures and want to create a cultural image (OECD, 2009). The tourist inflow can be increased by doing the effective marketing through advertising on television, participation in events and use of social media for improving the brand visibility. Other than it the high domestic tourist inflow in the Uttarakhand is due to holy pilgrimages like Haridwar and Char Dham (KPMG and PHDCC, 2012). Further the social significance of pilgrimage tourism measured in terms of employment especially in case of unskilled labour is very large

(Vijayanand, 2012). Cultural tourism in the mountains is needed to be developed according to specific local conditions and culture which will help communities in gaining a niche in an increasingly competitive market (Panigrahi, 2002). In regard to this supportive mountain tourism policy and planning frameworks are needed to be effective. This requires a shift in prevailing policy perceptions, which are generally based on conditions of the plains and interests of urban elites, rather than poor mountain communities or the needs of women and socially excluded mountain groups (Kruk, 2009). By doing so the participation of local people in tourism activities will reduce any socio-cultural problem and will provide opportunities for cross cultural exchange between tourists and residents which will further promote the local handicrafts and culture (Gupta, 2002).

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the commercial dimensions of cultural tourism and four dham circuit.
2. To explore the dimensions and extraordinary richness of cultural resources in the region.
3. To develop some strategies for drawing tourists to other cultural events other than four dhams.

4. METHODOLOGY

Present study is based on the secondary data sources. The various related research journals and reports and brochures published by the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board and Badrinath Kedarnath Temple Committee were reviewed thoroughly for preparing the theoretical frame-work of this study. Other than it the personal observations of the people involved in the tourism business was also taken into consideration.

5. FOUR-DHAM CIRCUIT

The Four-Dham circuit is the religio-cultural identity of the Garhwal region which is flocked over by the millions of tourists every year. The three major sectarian movements in modern devotional Hinduism have representation, with the Vaishnava site (Badrinath) joined by one Shaiva site (Kedarnath) and two Shakti sites (Yamunotri and Gangotri). Today, the four-dham on an average receives an upwards of 5 lakhs visitors during an average pilgrimage season which lasts approximately from May to sometime in November. The rush is heaviest in the two month period before the monsoon. Badrinath gets more visitors than the other three sites as much as twice to what visit the others.

6. YAMUNOTRI

Yamunotri (3165 meters) lies in the Uttarkashi District. Temple is dedicated to Goddess Yamuna. Perched atop of the Bandar Poonch Peak, Yamunotri is situated opposite to Gangotri. Shrine remains open for six months from May to October. The priest or pandas of Yamunotri come from the

village of Kharsali which is on the other bank of the Yamuna river adjoining Jankichatti. With the entire administration of the temple in their hands the pandas are also the Pujaris of the temple.

Road connectivity is upto Jankichatti which is 273 km from Haridwar. From Jankichatti it is a 5 km trek to Yamunotri for which ponies, dandies and kandies (baskets for carrying children and aged people) are also available. Accommodation for tourists is available in Hanumanchatti, Jankichatti and other adjoining places in the route. In Yamunotri accommodation is available in dharamshalas of Mandir Samiti, Kali Kamli Dharamshala and other ashrams.

7. GANGOTRI

Gangotri (3142 meters) is 99 Km from Uttarkashi and 254 Km from Rishikesh by motor road. At Gangotri there is a temple dedicated to Goddess Ganga and the sacred stone where Raja Bhagirath is believed to have worshipped Lord Shiva. Ganga originates from Gaumukh (3892 meters) which is 18 Km (trek) from Gangotri. Temple opens up in May/June to Deepawali Day for six month duration. Because of the easy accessibility and sanctity of Ganga Gangotri receives more tourist influx than the Yamunotri shrine. The Pandas of Gangotri temple hails from Mukhba village which is 30 Km down below Gangotri. Mukhba is also the winter seat of the temple. The pujaris are Brahmins and every year ten of them are selected in rotation to take charge of all the functions concerning the temple. Accommodation for tourists is available in Gangotri, Harsil, Bhaironghati and other adjoining areas. In Gangotri alone as much as 28 hotels, ashrams and rest house are available.

8. KEDARNATH

The temple of Sri Kedarnath is situated at an altitude of 3581 mts. above sea level, against the backdrop of the majestic Kedarnath range. It is one of the twelve "Jyotirlingas" of Lord Shiva. Kedarnath lies at a distance of 258 Km from Haridwar which includes a 20 Km trek from Sonprayag. Helicopter services are also available to Kedarnath from Phata and Guptkashi. Pandas of Shri Kedarnath resides in the village around Guptkashi and Okhimath. Temple opens up in during the last week of April or first week of May, depending upon the day of Mahashivratri and closes on the day after Deepawali. There are as many as 21 types of paid pujas which are performed in the temple which charges from 650 Rs. to 20,751 Rs. All the administrative activities of the temple are administered by the Shri Badrinath Kedarnath Mandir Samiti.

9. BADRINATH

Badrinath is one of the 'four dhams' of the country and is situated at an elevation of 3,133 mts. above sea-level. The temple opens every year in the month of April-May and closes during the winter around the third week of November.

Badrinath is 319 Km from the Haridwar. Hemkund Sahib, an important sikh pilgrimage site, is also on the way to Badrinath so the route remains quite crowded during the summer pilgrimage season. Chief Priest of the temple is known as Rawal who is a Namboodripad Brahmin from southern state Kerala. Other pujaris who assist Rawal in performing worship inside the temple are Dimri Brahmins hailing from village Dimmar in Chamoli District. The outside puja is performed by Pandas which comes from Deoprayag in Tehri district. There are more than 50 hotels, ashrams and dharamshalas which are available in Badrinath for accommodation. There are as many as 17 types of paid pujas which are performed in the temple which charges from 251 Rs. to 27,752 Rs. Like Kedarnath all the administrative activities of the Badrinath temple are also administered by the Shri Badrinath Kedarnath Mandir Samiti.

10. ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF FOUR DHAM CIRCUIT

The major portion of the tourism in Garhwal region comes here for the religious purpose. Till 2012 the number of tourists visiting the four holy shrines was growing at a descent pace until and unless it was struck by the catastrophe of June 2013. Table 1 depicts the number of tourists received by four

Table 1: Tourist Pilgrim Arrivals to Four Dham

Year	Badrinath	Kedarnath	Gangotri	Yamunotri
2009	9,16,925	4,03,636	3,80,157	3,22,242
2010	9,21,950	4,00,014	3,10,561	3,09,634
2011	9,80,667	5,71,583	4,85,137	4,48,945
2012	9,85,631	5,83,176	3,72,768	3,36,791
2013	4,97,744	3,12,201	95,418	96,943
2014	1,80,000	40,832	35,000	23,400

Source: Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board.

holy shrines in the last six years. Figures clearly show that in the circuit Badrinath receives most number of tourists in comparison to other three shrines. The slump in the pilgrim arrivals in the year 2013 and 2014 was due to the flash floods of June 2013 which shocked the entire tourist economy of the state.

The economy of the towns located in the yatra routes is quite much depended on this pilgrimage season which lasts only for six months. Tourists spends on accommodation, travel, food, souvenirs and on their other necessities which directly and indirectly creates employment opportunities for thousands of people during this time which includes work for hoteliers, dhabawalas, local vendors, pony carriers, photographers, peddlers etc. This whole pilgrimage season of six months can be further divided into three seasons namely on the basis of the tourist influx during that portion of pilgrimage season:

- I. **Peak Season:** Tourist influx to Four Dhams is heaviest in this season which lasts for two months. This is the time in entire six months when the maximum numbers of employment opportunities are created directly or

indirectly. Prices remain on the higher side during this duration.

- II. **Bleak Season:** This is the time of monsoon (mid-July to mid-September) during which for the most of the time connecting roads to these pilgrimages remain close. Business is severely hit during this time because of regular blockages on the road due to landslides which keep them close for days. Pilgrimages get struck at various places and are faced with the problem of overpricing and thus exploited economically. In last two years many slide zones on all the routes of Garhwal have literally hit the economic prospects of community dwelling on the tourism.
- III. **Meek Season:** This is after monsoon period in which the number of tourist increases but is quite less in comparison to peak season. Prices are low and tourist can stay longer, also they can visit the adjoining areas to Four Dhams.

During the course of study it was found that the force which drives tourist or pilgrims to these destinations is religion. Very less are affected by the lack of infrastructural facilities on the way as they are pre-occupied by the notion that facing difficulties in the way will lead them to almighty. Disadvantages of poor infrastructure, sanitation facilities, accommodation etc. all are overtaken by this desire which otherwise at a different place are a big hurdle for the tourism development.

11. OTHER CULTURAL RESOURCES

Himalayas are the unique centre of cultural diversity. The customs, lifestyles, traditions, occasions, fair and festivals of it portray the liveliness of the life here. From the tourism perspective this sector is the least exploited resource. The various cultural components of the region are:

- I. **Mahabharat Traditions:** Inhabitants of Garhwal consider themselves descendants of Pandavas. The pandav dances are organized in hundreds of villages all over Garhwal in the valleys of Mandakini, Alaknand, Bhilangana and Bhagirathi. The festivals related to it go on for as much as three months in some villages. Various rituals related and attached with pandavas lives like Moru Dwar, Gainda, Duryodhan Vadh, Swargarohini, Kamal vyoooh, Chakravyyoooh etc. are performed in the village arenas. All these occasions are a part of rich socio-cultural as well as religio-cultural embedding of the local inhabitants with their customs and history.
- II. **Religious Procession:** There are many religious processions which are carried on by the folks in Garhwal region. The processions of Jakh in Alaknanda valley, the deora of Chandika in Mandakani Valley, various processions in Pindar Valley and last but not least the well-known Nanda devi Rajjat are some of the examples of religious processions which are held in the region. Nanda Devi Rajjat is one of the most celebrated and

famous processions of Garhwal region. A procession which lasts for 19 days and covers a distance of around 280 kilometers and scales the height of 1350 meters to 4061 meters is the most sacred and adventurous journey undertaken by the local inhabitants recreating and escorting the Goddess Nanda back to Mount Kailash.

III. **Fairs and Festival:** The religious, social and cultural ethnicity of the people of Uttarakhand is reflected in various fairs and festivals which are in turn closely linked to the economic activities of the region. The fairs and folk festivals of Uttaranchal are very colourful and distinctive, and are the blend of various natural, social and cultural factors. Basant Panchami, Bhitauli, Harela, Phooldei, Batsavitri, Ganga Dusshera, Dikar Puja, Olgi or Ghee Sankranti, Khatarua, Ghuian Ekadashi and Ghughutia are some of the major festivals of Uttaranchal. In tehri district only in the month of Baisakh around 200 small and big fairs are held. A significant number of fairs are also organized in Pindar, Kedar, Nayar, Tons and Yamuna valleys. Mass fishing festivals known as 'Maun' are held in about one dozen places in the month of May/June in Jaunpur, Jaunsar, Rawain, and Pauri Garhwal. Sadly no documentation of the number of festivals being held in all districts is done by the government.

IV. **Agricultural Rituals:** Related to the socio-cultural traditions of the area there are many rituals which are celebrated by the folks in different districts of Garhwal. These rituals consist of festivals like Anduri or Butter festival in Uttarkashi, Seluku, Phooldeyi, Bagadwal rituals, Nanda Paati, Bagwal In Rawain, Jaunsar, Tehri and Uttarkashi.

Fairs and Festivals of the Garhwal region are the prime source of social and economic activities of the folk here. Cultural Fairs provides place not only for recreation but are also the medium through which the customs of one generation passes to another. Furthermore these are the places of reunion of friends, relatives and communities. The market place in these fairs earlier was the place where the trade of local handicrafts and products was done, however in the changing time local products are replaced by the accessories produced in the factories.

12. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Rich Cultural Ethnicity of the region.
- Scenic beauty eloped with traditional scenery.
- Pleasant Weather Conditions
- Hospitable People

Weakness

- Absence of Information Channels.
- Poor Communication Services in rural areas.
- Poor Infrastructure and public amenities.

Opportunities

- Huge Cultural Resources other than four dhams are yet to be explored.
- Rural Tourism and Eco-Tourism are gaining popularity.

Threats

- Environmental Factors.
- Competition by other Himalayan states.

Need for Effective Marketing Strategies

The essence of marketing in the modern world is well known. Garhwal Himalayas are full of attractions and traditions which can lure a large number of tourists to visit these places to experience the salubrious climate and rich cultural customs. Effective tourism planning can be done by identifying the target markets, improving the infrastructure and designing the effective advertising and promotional campaigns. For it there is a need of strategic marketing planning which can cater to the needs of the local populace, stakeholders attached with it and as well as the tourists who intend to visit. This can be done through:

1. **Market Research:** There are five hill districts in the garhwal region encompassing the various river valleys having a very diverse culture. There are immense opportunities for tourism related economy based on Cultural Diasporas of these localities. A sound market research of all the opportunities present and how they can be enhanced for the local benefits will pave the way for necessary steps to be taken in consideration.
2. **Market Development:** Culture of any region plays an important role in attracting tourists to that place. There are examples of states like Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Goa who have attracted domestic and international tourists by using their rich cultural resources. The rich cultural aura of garhwal region is exemplary in nature and creates immense potentialities for the culture based tourism.
3. **Target Marketing:** Different group of tourists have different needs and they might desire different core benefits from the same service. For this the complete marketing programme can be devised for each of these sub-groups. The tastes and needs of tourists vary and their intention to visit different destinations is different. Target Marketing will help in identifying the similar group of customers and preparing a sound marketing mix for the potential tourists.
4. **Market Positioning:** Creating a distinctive place in the mind of tourists will not only lure the potential tourists to get attracted towards a specific tourism product but will also help in their retention over a long period of time.
5. **Holistic Marketing of Destinations:** The holistic marketing of a tourist destinations leads to efficient utilization of resources. The thorough analysis of all the

factors associated with the destination paves way for a sound marketing plan.

13. SUGGESTIONS

- Cultural Tourism can be enhanced by investing in the rural economies. For this the opportunities should be realized and investments from public and private sector should be enhanced and encouraged.
- Infrastructural facilities in many of the tourist destinations in garhwal region are not up to the mark which is needed to be consolidated.
- Poor Communication facilities are a big problem in the remote and rural areas which should be enhanced.
- Other Cultural resources other than four holy shrines located in Garhwal region are needed to be brought in the tourist map and much more information is needed to be disseminated about them through various information sources.
- Promotion to Local cuisine and handicrafts will create the better job opportunities for the local inhabitants..
- UNESCO declared World Heritage Event “Ramman”, yearly procession of “Nanda Devi Lokjaat” and “Anduri (Butter Festival) and “Seluku” (Festival of Flowers) can be developed as the Cultural Tourism Product.
- Printed material on the villages, culture and customs of the area should be developed.
- Proper hospitality training to the local inhabitants should be provided.
- Community Lodging should be provided to the tourists in the villages.

14. CONCLUSION

Cultural Tourism in the Garhwal Region is mostly confined to the four holy shrines of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath which remain open only for six months. Other Cultural resources present in the state can be developed as new tourism products which can attract the tourists. This cultural distinctiveness can also promote the village development and help the local inhabitants in finding the employment at their homes thus checking the problem of out-migration. This can be achieved through developing minimum level of infrastructure in the hills, data centric research, innovative campaigns and pro-government policies.

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