



Tourism and its Impact on the Economy and Environment of the Kumaon Region

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Abstract:

Tourism plays a significant role in the global economy, and it has been a vital driver of economic growth in many regions. The Kumaon region, situated in the northern part of India, has witnessed a surge in tourism over the past few decades. This paper explores the multifaceted impact of tourism on both the economy and environment of the Kumaon region. It discusses the economic benefits, challenges, and environmental implications of tourism and offers recommendations for sustainable tourism development in the region.

Keywords: Tourism, Kumaon Region, Economic Impact, Environmental Impact, Sustainable Tourism Development, Uttarakhand, India.

Introduction:

The Kumaon region, nestled in the northern part of India, is a picturesque and culturally rich destination that has gained popularity in the global tourism landscape. Because it has so many well-known tourist destinations that both Indian and foreign visitors visit year-round, the Kumaon area of Uttarakhand draws travellers from all over the world. Kumaon is one of the two regions of the state of Uttarakhand, nestled in the lap of nature. It is a hilly area having three totally hilly districts (Almora, Bageshwar, and Pithoragarh), two partly steep and partially plain districts (Nainital and Champawat), and one plain district (Udham Singh Nagar). All of these characteristics restrict the potential for industrial development in the area and reduce job prospects for the local populace. The tourism sector in the area has grown to be a significant industry, accounting for over half of the GDP in the area. Due to the development and establishment of several tourist destinations in the area, employment opportunities are offered by the tourism sector through both direct and indirect means. The government has also recognized the potential of the tourism business in the past ten years, and as a result, we can observe that the government has launched a number of programs and efforts to support the sector. The Deen dayal upadhyay home stay scheme and the Veer Chandra singh Garhwali project are two significant initiatives that the government has introduced to encourage tourism in Uttarakhand. In addition to all of this, there are some difficulties that related stakeholders must consider in order to overcome them and seize the chance to profit from them.

Objective

- To Assess the Economic Contribution of Tourism
- To Examine the Environmental Impacts of Tourism
- To Explore Strategies for Sustainable Tourism Development
- To Recommend Policy Interventions and Best Practices

Methodology:

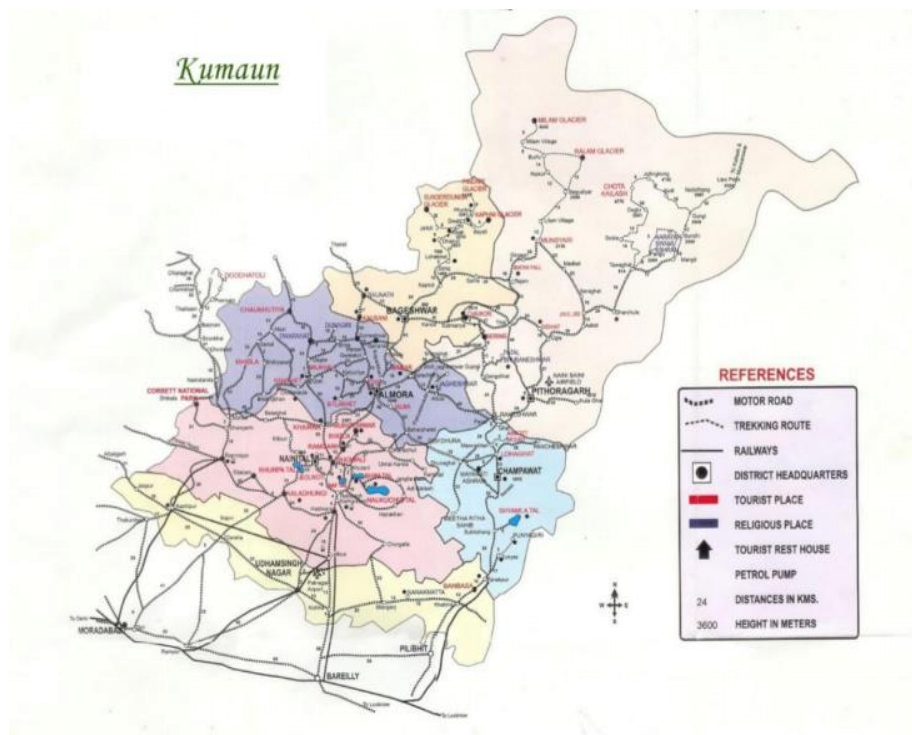
The methodology for this study on tourism in the Kumaon region involves several key steps. First, a thorough Literature Review explores existing scholarly articles and reports to understand the economic and environmental aspects of tourism. Case Studies provide deeper insights into local tourism dynamics, highlighting successes and challenges. Policy Analysis evaluates current tourism policies in Kumaon, identifying areas for improvement. Finally, Recommendations are formulated to promote sustainable tourism practices, aiming to maximize economic benefits while minimizing environmental harm.

Study Area:

Kumaon is located in the state of Uttarakhand, often known as "Dev Bhumi" or the "Land of Gods" due to its numerous temples and spiritual significance. The Kumaon region lies in the northern part of the Indian state of Uttarakhand. It is located in the south-east section of Uttarakhand, bounded by the Garhwal area to the west, Nepal to the east, and the state of Uttar Pradesh to the south. Kumaon is geographically diversified, with beautiful green valleys, dense forests, and high Himalayan peaks.

Aerial views of snow-capped mountains, glistening lakes, and winding rivers are some of the region's most famous natural features. Nainital, Almora, Ranikhet, Pithoragarh, and Bageshwar are some of Kumaon's major towns and cities, each with its own set of cultural, historical, and natural features that attract visitors from all over the world.

Kumaon's height varies substantially, with temperate weather at lower altitudes and alpine conditions at higher altitudes. Kumaon's geographical diversity and natural beauty make it a popular destination for both adventurers and those seeking peace in unspoiled landscapes.



Source: KUMAON DIVISION Office of Commissioner Kumaon, Nainital <https://kumaon.gov.in>

Cultural Heritage: The Kumaon region is steeped in history and has a rich cultural heritage. It is home to a variety of ethnic groups, including the Kumaoni people, who have their distinct language, art, music, and dance forms. The region boasts a multitude of ancient temples and shrines, reflecting its deep-rooted spirituality and traditions. The cultural festivities in Kumaon, such as the Nanda Devi Jat Yatra and various fairs and festivals, provide a window into the region's vibrant traditions.

Tourist Attractions: An increasingly important area for the region's growth and development, as well as the wellbeing of its residents, is the tourism industry. The area is home to several internationally renowned tourist destinations, one of which is "Nainital," also known as India's Lake District. The Kumaon region has developed and promoted a variety of tourism activities, including trekking, wildlife viewing, adventure, and leisure travel. Surrounded by the magnificent Himalayas, the area attracts nature enthusiasts with its breathtaking views of snowcapped mountain peaks, including Trishul, Panchachuli, and Nanda Devi. The Jim Corbett National Park and Askot Animal Sanctuary are significant attractions for those who enjoy the outdoors and wildlife. The Kumaon region is home to several stunning hill stations, including Kausani,

Nainital, Munsyari, and Ranikhet. These are ideal travel destinations for vacationers and leisure travelers. Visitors to Naukuchiyatal can enjoy both trekking and paragliding. Due to its ancient landmarks, which include the Garjiya Temple, Haidakhan Temple, Kainchidham Mandir, Nainadevi Temple, Gairargoludevata Temple, and many more, the Kumaon region attracts a significant number of pilgrimage tourists. The renowned Sikh pilgrimage site, Nanakmatta Sahib Gurudwara, is located in the Udhamsinghnagar district of the area. Numerous annual fairs and festivals, such as the Jauljebi Fair, Purnagiri Mela, and Kainchi Mela, draw large numbers of travelers to the region. The region is dotted with captivating destinations and attractions, Some of them including:

Modern towns Nainital, Almora and Ranikhet: The trio of hill stations, are located approximately 40 km from each other, forming a triangle in the southern part of Uttarakhand. Each of them boasts several points of interest. While Almora town itself doesn't offer many attractions, it is close to various viewpoints, waterfalls, and ancient Shiva temples. The Sharayu river valley flows deep below the ridge where the town is situated. Nainital takes pride in its Naini Lake, around which the city has developed. "Nainital" literally means "The Eye Lake" because

the lake is considered to be the eye of Sati. Thus, the temple by the lake's shore, Naina Devi, is one of the 64 Shaktipeeths. You can enjoy boating and yachting on the lake. Ranikhet is a captivating town with numerous forest trails and breathtaking views of some prominent mountains in the Himalayan range that borders Nepal. On a clear day, you can see Nanda Devi and Trishul looming in the distance. The Kumaon Regiment, headquartered in Ranikhet, has an extensive museum about the Indian Army.

Religion Places: While there may not be as many religious sites in Kumaon as there are in Garhwal, there are still numerous historically significant temples and other sites. As a Shaktipeeth, Naina Devi temple is a famous religious place. The Shiva temple complex at Garud, built by the Katyuri lords, is even more intriguing.

The term Baijnath, which is the local pronunciation of Vaidyanath, refers to this complex. It is situated along the banks of the Sharayu River. The town of Bageshwar, which houses a Shiv shrine called Bagnath and reveres the confluence of the Gomti and Sharayu rivers, also holds significant religious importance. However, the most noteworthy religious activity in Kumaon is more appropriately categorized as an adventure activity because it crosses international boundaries.

Corbett National Park: Located in the foothills of the Himalayas The animals of Jim Corbett National Park make up the lion's share of Kumaon's tourism, or more accurately, the tiger's share. Approximately 200 tigers inhabit this vast conservation forest, situated between the towns of Ramnagar, Nainital, and Haldwani. Additionally, there are numerous leopards and elephants. Along with a variety of birds, you can also spot sambar, spotted, and barking deer.

Munsiyari: Munsiyari is a gateway to the Milam and Ralam Glaciers. Munsiyari is a picturesque town and a popular tourist destination located in the Pithoragarh district of the Indian state of Uttarakhand. It is situated in the Kumaon region of the Himalayas and is known for its breathtaking natural beauty and proximity to some of the highest peaks in the Indian Himalayas. Munsiyari is renowned for its stunning natural landscapes, including lush green valleys, dense forests, and panoramic mountain views. The town is nestled in the Johar Valley, surrounded by snowcapped peaks and is often referred to as the "Little Kashmir" due to its resemblance to the landscapes of Kashmir. Munsiyari serves as a starting point for various treks and expeditions in the region. Trekkers and adventure enthusiasts come here to explore the beautiful trails that lead to glaciers, alpine meadows, and high altitude lakes. The Milam Glacier trek is one of the popular trekking routes that originates from Munsiyari. One of the main attractions of Munsiyari is the stunning view of the Himalayan

peaks it offers. You can witness majestic peaks like Nanda Devi, Trishul, Panchchuli, and several others from different vantage points within or near the town. The region around Munsiyari is abundant in diverse flora and fauna. The forests are inhabited by various species of birds and wildlife, making it a haven for nature enthusiasts and birdwatchers.

Adventure Tourism: Kumaon is a hub for adventure tourism, offering a range of thrilling activities such as trekking, river rafting, paragliding, and wildlife safaris. The region's challenging terrains and unspoiled natural beauty make it a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts. So the Kumaon region, is renowned for its scenic beauty, rich cultural heritage, and biodiversity. Over the years, it has become a popular tourist destination, attracting travellers from across the globe.

Economic Impact of Tourism:

1. Job Creation:

Tourism in the Kumaon region has played a pivotal role in creating employment opportunities, particularly in the hospitality and service sectors. As the region has witnessed a steady influx of tourists, local communities have benefitted from the resulting job opportunities. Hotels, resorts, restaurants, tour guides, and transportation services have experienced increased demand, which has led to a reduction in unemployment rates. Local residents, many of whom were previously engaged in agriculture or other traditional livelihoods, have found new prospects in the tourism industry (Singh & Mishra, 2017). This not only bolsters the region's economy but also enhances the livelihoods of its residents, ultimately contributing to higher income levels and an improved standard of living.

2. Infrastructure Development:

The growth of tourism in the Kumaon region has necessitated the development of essential infrastructure, including roads, hotels, and restaurants. This infrastructure development benefits both tourists and local residents (Dwivedi, 2019). Improved road networks facilitate access to remote and scenic destinations, making travel more convenient for tourists (Singh & Mishra, 2017). Local residents also benefit from upgraded roads, which enhance connectivity and accessibility to urban centers, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. The construction and expansion of hotels and restaurants provide employment opportunities during their development and continued employment once they become operational. Additionally, the presence of better infrastructure enhances the overall quality of life for local communities.

3. Income Generation:

Tourism has emerged as a significant source of income for the Kumaon region. The revenue generated from various tourism related activities, including accommodation, food services,

and transportation, has made substantial contributions to the economic wellbeing of the region. Hotels and resorts, in particular, contribute to the local economy through room bookings, dining services, and other amenities offered to tourists. Local restaurants and food vendors benefit from

4. Cultural Promotion:

The tourism industry has not only brought economic benefits but has also contributed to the promotion and preservation of the Kumaon region's rich cultural heritage. Tourists are drawn to the unique cultural practices, traditional art, crafts, and festivals of the region. This heightened interest has led to the revitalization of cultural practices that might have otherwise declined. Local artisans and craftsmen find a market for their products, allowing them to sustain traditional art forms. Cultural festivals and events attract both domestic and international tourists, showcasing the cultural vibrancy of the region. This not only enhances cultural pride but also creates opportunities for local communities to share their heritage with the world, fostering a sense of identity and unity.

Environmental Impact of Tourism:

1. Deforestation and Habitat Destruction:

The increasing influx of tourists in the Kumaon region has led to a surge in construction activities and infrastructure development to accommodate the growing number of visitors. Unfortunately, this has often resulted in deforestation and habitat destruction. Forested areas are cleared for the construction of hotels, resorts, and related amenities, which disrupts the local ecosystem and threatens the flora and fauna that call the region home. Loss of habitat can lead to the displacement and endangerment of indigenous wildlife species, posing a significant environmental challenge.

2. Water Resource Stress:

The tourism sector's demand for water has stressed local water resources in the Kumaon region. Hotels, resorts, and recreational facilities require substantial amounts of water for various purposes, including guest services and landscaping. Over-extraction of water from rivers, streams, and groundwater sources can deplete local water supplies, potentially harming the delicate balance of the local ecosystem. This overuse can have adverse effects on the availability of water for agriculture, domestic use, and the survival of aquatic life in these water bodies.

3. Pollution:

Tourism related activities generate pollution in various forms, including solid waste, sewage, and vehicular emissions. Solid waste, often generated by tourists and tourism related businesses, can lead to littering and the accumulation of nonbiodegradable waste in natural areas. Sewage from hotels and resorts, if not managed properly, can contaminate

increased patronage. Additionally, transportation services, such as taxis and tour operators, experience higher demand, further adding to the region's income. This income, in turn, circulates within the local economy, benefiting various sectors and supporting sustainable economic growth.

local water bodies, impacting both water quality and aquatic life. Vehicular emissions from increased transportation and tourism related activities contribute to air pollution, which can have detrimental effects on the environment and the health of local residents.

4. Erosion and Land Degradation:

High intensity tourism areas in the Kumaon region are susceptible to soil erosion and land degradation due to unregulated construction and recreational activities. Improper land use, such as haphazard construction of roads and buildings, can lead to soil erosion, which, in turn, affects the fertility of the land and can lead to landslides in hilly terrains. Land degradation may also result from the trampling and compaction of soil in heavily visited natural areas, negatively impacting the local environment and landscape.

In short, the environmental impact of tourism in the Kumaon region encompasses deforestation and habitat destruction, water resource stress, pollution, and erosion and land degradation. These environmental challenges underscore the need for responsible and sustainable tourism practices to mitigate the adverse effects on the region's natural surroundings. Balancing economic development with environmental conservation is essential to preserve the ecological and aesthetic beauty of the Kumaon region for future generations.

Sustainable Tourism Development:

1. Community Involvement:

Engaging local communities in decision-making and revenue sharing processes is a fundamental pillar of sustainable tourism development. By involving the local population, the benefits of tourism are distributed more equitably, ensuring that the economic gains are not confined to a select few. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and pride among local residents, making them active stakeholders in the preservation and development of their region. Initiatives such as community-based tourism and revenues haring arrangements can help empower the local population, creating a more sustainable and inclusive tourism model.

2. Environmental Conservation:

Sustainable tourism development emphasizes the importance of environmental conservation. Strict regulations and sustainable practices in the tourism industry are critical to mitigate environmental damage. This includes robust waste management systems to minimize the

impact of tourism related waste on local ecosystems. Responsible tourism guidelines can help control activities that could harm the environment. Moreover, the protection and preservation of natural areas and wildlife are crucial to maintaining the ecological balance of the Kumaon region.

3. Infrastructure Planning:

The careful planning and design of tourism infrastructure are essential to minimize its impact on the environment. Sustainable architecture and the use of ecofriendly materials can reduce the carbon footprint of construction projects. Additionally, thoughtful planning can help ensure that the natural beauty and ecological integrity of the region are preserved. Infrastructure should be designed to minimize disruption to local ecosystems, maintain the scenic beauty of the area, and enhance the overall visitor experience without harming the environment.

4. Education and Awareness:

Promoting environmental awareness among both tourists and local residents is a key element of sustainable tourism development. Informational campaigns can educate tourists about the importance of respecting the natural environment and adhering to responsible tourism practices. Guided tours that highlight the region's ecological significance can be a powerful tool for fostering environmental consciousness among visitors. Local communities should also be educated about sustainable practices and the importance of preserving their natural heritage. These educational efforts create a shared understanding of the value of the environment and the role each stakeholder plays in its protection.

Conclusion:

Kumaon region of Uttarakhand stands as a testament to the intertwined dynamics of tourism's economic benefits and environmental challenges. Situated amidst stunning landscapes and cultural richness, Kumaon has experienced rapid tourism growth, significantly boosting its economic profile through employment generation, revenue influx, and infrastructure development. However, this progress has not been without consequences, as evidenced by mounting environmental pressures such as habitat degradation, deforestation, and water pollution. Addressing these challenges requires a balanced approach that prioritizes sustainable tourism practices, ecosystem protection, and community engagement. Strategies like promoting eco-tourism, investing in green infrastructure, and enhancing education and awareness among stakeholders can pave the way for a sustainable future in Kumaon. By embracing these measures, the region can ensure that its natural and cultural treasures continue to thrive, offering enriching experiences for generations of visitors while preserving its ecological integrity.

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