

## **ECO-TOURISM: A STEP TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO UTTARAKHAND)**

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### **Abstract**

*Eco-tourism activities have been expanding rapidly over the past two decades worldwide and further growth is inevitable in the future. Recognizing its global importance, the United Nations designated the year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development requested international agencies, government and the private sector to undertake supportive activities.*

*The state of Uttarakhand which has also acquired an acronym "Dev Bhoomi" (Land of God) because of its tremendous potential for the tourism activities and especially related to Holiday/Leisure was the purpose of the visit of about 58.2% of the foreign tourists visiting Uttarakhand. In addition, about 21.9% visited for the purpose of health, yoga etc.*

*This paper deals with the trends and potential of eco-tourism development in the Uttarakhand.*

### **Keywords**

*Eco-tourism, trends, potential, yoga, Devbhoomi.*

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## **Introduction**

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals worldwide have grown by 4% or more every year since 2010.

Eco-tourism is one such alternative. The rationale behind eco tourism is that local tourism businesses would not destroy natural resources but would instead support their protection. Eco tourism would offer a viable strategy to simultaneously make money and conserve resources. This type of Tourism could be considered a “Sustainable Activity”, one that does not diminish natural resources being used while at the same time generating income and employment.

Uttarakhand has now become an eco-tourism spot. This state is known for its greenery and nature which has made it a beautiful tourist attraction spot that has brought a lot of attention from tourists from all over the world. The state has blessings of great forest, snow-capped mountains, Rolling Meadours, high-altitude lakes, wildlife etc. Uttarakhand is a huge state some many places and spots are famous among tourists and visitors.

Thus, this paper aims: to introduce the spots and places that attracts tourists and visitors for eco-tourism to analyse the potential and possibilities for eco-tourism in Uttarakhand, to discuss the strategies and policies to develop Eco-tourism for employment of local people of Uttarakhand and minimize the population migration from this state.

## **Famous Places and Spots for Ecotourism**

### **Dehradun and Mussoorie**

Dehradun is the capital of Uttarakhand. It has a very mesmerizing location with mountains covered with fog – a beautiful view of the Himalayan ranges. It is one of the most crowded and busiest city of Uttarakhand and yet so peaceful at the same time. Mussoorie is only about 38 km from Dehradun which makes it impossible to miss the visit. It is otherwise known as the “Queen of Hills”. The greenery on both the sides of roads makes the view eye-catching. It’s ideal for a peaceful gateway and road trips.

### **Landour**

With only a few kilometers away from Mussoorie Landour is known as a heaven. This place is not much significant in terms of tourism but it’s among the most serene places to see in Uttarakhand. It is popular for its delicious cheese and homemade jams.

### **Nainital**

This area is not only a hill station or tourist place but it is the gem of Uttarakhand. Nainital sits pretty at the green foothills of the Kumaon ranges in the Himalayas. The hill station attracts tourists around the year.

Today, Nainital offers everything that's required for a perfect holiday. Plenty of hotels, resorts, jungle camps and homestays are set in this place.

Naini Lake is a main attraction for tourists. Naini Lake region and nearby areas have a huge potential for eco-tourism.

Sat-Tal, Bheemtaal, Mukteshwer, Ramgarh, Naukuchiyatal, Pangoot, Kunjkrak, and Jyolikot are the major spot for eco-tourism.

### **Rishikesh and Haridwar**

Popular for the pilgrimage, these two places are the most visited at least once by all. Even the foreigners find these places amazing and interesting. Rishikesh and Haridwar are the prominent centers for pilgrimage, spirituality, yoga and cultural tourism. A huge number of visitors come here throughout the year.

Mostly, people visit these places to find their inner peace and faith.

Both stations are situated on the Bank of the river Ganga that's why these places are popular and sacred among the followers of Hinduism.

Ganga Aarti, various temples and Aashram are the main attraction points. Haridwar is also famous for Kumbh Mela, while Rishikesh has also adventurous places like water sport La and trekking up in the hills.

### **Jim Corbett National Park**

Other than natural wealth and holy pilgrimages, there is also a wildlife presence in Uttarakhand. Jim Corbett National Park was formerly known as Haley's National Park. Jim Corbett was established in 1938 and the main attraction was and are the Royal Bengal Tigers. The park is home to around 600 species of birds and animals. More than 450 different types of trees are present in this sanctuary. The park also organizes safaris, hiking trails throughout the year in the dense forest. These safaris are very popular among school and college students and wildlife lovers and photographers. This park is an important mark of eco-tourism in Uttarakhand.

Above mentioned places promote eco-tourism. But eco-tourism is not merely a name; it allows everyone to explore the beauty of nature in its existing natural environment.

### **Possibilities and Measures of Eco-tourism in Uttarakhand**

The maximum area of Uttarakhand was under forest cover, therefore, eco-tourism has great potential in the state and it would also help to generate more employment.

The Forest Department of the state will have to play an important role in this regard. The forest officers and workers would have to get out of the regulatory mindset and play their part in the development of the state without harming the environment and forests.

The state government should implemented the use of natural materials to develop Eco-tourism sites, instead of concrete structures. All hotels and resorts must have keep pamphlets to provide information to tourists and spread awareness about forest ecosystems and the natural beauty of the area.

Uttarakhand is taking visionary steps towards helping preserve the environment while also promoting tourism. The state has identified five Ecotourism circles and three eco-tourism destinations which are going to be developed by the forest department to boost tourism in the region.

The Department believes that this initiative will greatly help conserve the environment and forest regions in the state. The specific spots that have been identified have been grouped together based on two parameters--- their proximity to each other and similarities in biodiversity.

#### **The Spots that have been Selected are:**

- Yamuna-Tons Valley
- Tanakpur-Champawat-Devidhura-Nainital
- Dehradun- Rishikesh-Tehri
- Ramnagar- Almora-Nainital
- Ramnagar-Kaladhungi-Nainital-Bheemtal-Sattal

#### **How the initiative will be implemented in Uttarakhand**

Ramnagar, Lohaghat,Ranikhet, Kotdwar and Dhanaulti are the five eco-tourism destinations that will be developed. School children, researchers and environmentalists will be encouraged to visit these spots and be given top priority. The objective of the policy is ultimately sustainable tourism, which includes giving back to nature and letting local communities benefit.

In these regions each destination and circle will have an official carrying capacity, indicating the limited number of tourists that can enter and visit the spot. The carrying capacity also will be extremely important and remain in focus to maintain quality tourism for the Sustainable Development of the state.

Local residents who stay in the area might also be involved in this new initiative. They will also be trained to guide visitors in bird watching, spotting plants and butterflies etc. Old treks routes will also be developed to encourage tourists to explore the area.

Uttarakhand state is mostly visited for its Hindu pilgrimage sites. The state also sees a lot of tourists visiting Jim Corbett National Park. This new eco-tourism initiative might help tourists become more sensitive to nature around them and be more responsible when they travel.

Some appreciable steps will be helped to enhance the eco-tourism in Uttarakhand e.g.,

- Home Stay Scheme
- Eco-Friendly Resorts
- Huts & Cottages
- Jungle Camps and Tents
- Various adventurous activities.

#### **Home Stay Scheme: A Step towards sustainable and eco-friendly Tourism**

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grah Awas Yojna has been started by the government of Uttarakhand for the well-being of the local people along with providing unprecedented experience to the domestic and foreign tourists visiting Uttarakhand. Local people can improve their financial condition by using their old home as a resting place for tourists.

#### **The objective of the Home Stay Scheme**

- To improve their economic condition by providing self-employment to the local people.
- To introduce tourists to the state's cuisine, culture, heritage and traditional rituals and style.
- To stop population migration from the state by creating local environment.
- Target to develop 5000 homestays under Vision 2020, benefits of the Home Stay Scheme.
- State assistance will also be provided to the eligible applicants for taking a loan from the bank for setting up the homestay/renovation of the house.
- The amount of SGST will be reimbursed by the department for the first three years on the income received from the homestay.
- A separate website and Mobile app will be developed for the promotion of the scheme.

- Homestay operators will be given hospitality training.
- Reimbursement of charges payable on bond deed against the sanction of Business loan to the extent of thirty lakhs rupees.
- Upgradation, furnishing, maintenance in old buildings and construction of new toilets to the extent of Rs.2 lakh will not require land changes.

### **Tourism Policy 2023 in Uttarakhand**

The policy aims to channel the unique tourism offering unmatched experiences for various tourist segments. The cornerstone of Uttarakhand's tourism is its authenticity around nature.

### **Conclusion**

Uttarakhand is naturally a very beautiful region. Being a Himalayan state, dense forests, large water streams, beautiful lakes and land is full of biodiversity, so promoting Eco-tourism will not only benefit the state economically but Uttarakhand can do excellent work in the field of sustainable tourism as well. With increase in economic development and sustainable tourism, population migration from Uttarakhand and unemployment in the state will also be cured. By promoting tourism like Eco-tourism and green tourism, we can save the biodiversity, environment, ecology and culture of this small state of the Himalayas very well.

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