

Pilgrimage Tourism of Uttarakhand after Natural Disaster 2013

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ABSTRACT

Pilgrimage tourism in India is a part of life. Uttarakhand is well known as the Devbhumi, pilgrims' visits the land of gods for chota char dham yatra from all over the world between the months of May to November. The state of Uttarakhand is highly prone to disasters, but the government of Uttarakhand promotes pilgrimage tourism as a monetary growth model that totally disregards Uttarakhand's disaster-prone character. Natural disasters like avalanches, landslides, floods, earthquakes and cloud burst affect the state several times in the past. The history depicts that natural disaster disrupt pilgrimage tourists and holy places. This paper investigates the current situation of pilgrimage tourism of Uttarakhand state. This research is mainly based on secondary data. The results show that pilgrimage tourism in Uttarakhand is based on sacred river and natural disasters affects pilgrimage tourism.

KEYWORDS: *Pilgrimage Tourism, Natural disaster, Uttarakhand*

Introduction

Oxford dictionary define Pilgrim is "a person who journeys to a sacred place for religious reasons" and "pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place for religious reasons". Pilgrimage as a form of tourism is very popular in India due to the country's secular nature. The roots of many religions were start from India like Hidhuism, Budhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Although pilgrimage destination for all religions are present in abundance in India like Amarnath, Kedarnath, Tirupati Balaji, Konark Temple and Dwarka are some of Hindu pilgrimage centre. Muslims visits Jama Masjid Delhi, Dargah at Ajmer, Haji Ali Dargah Mumbai and Hazratbal Shrine, Srinagar etc. Sikhs travels to Harmandir Sahib Amritsar, Hemkund sahib Uttarakhand, Takht Sri Patna Sahib Gurdwara Bihar and Nanded sahib Maharashtra. There are many sites for Christian in India like Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa, Christ Church, Shimla, Santhome Church, Chennai and St. Paul Cathedral, Kolkata.

The State of Uttarakhand comprises of 13 districts and has a total geographical area of 53,484 sq. km. The economy of the State mainly depends on agriculture and tourism related activities. Local's income generally depends on pilgrims and adventure tourism. The main pilgrimage centres of Uttarakhand are Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri called as Char Dham, Guptkashi, Rishikesh, Haridwar, Hemkund Sahib, Joshimath, Panch Prayag (Vishnuprayag, Nandprayag, Karan Prayag, Rudraprayag and Dev Prayag) etc.

The State of Uttarakhand with sacred shrines, rivers, valleys, snow-capped mountains and stunning landscapes is popularly called the *Devbhumi* i.e. the Land of Gods and is an important destination for pilgrims and tourists from all over the world. Two of the most sacred rivers of the country, the Ganga and the Yamuna, originates from Gaumukh (Gangotri) and Yamunotri. Shri Badrinath and Shri Kedarnath, the holy places of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva respectively are an important part of the pilgrimage circuit. Kedarnath situated at the bank of river Mandakini whereas Badrinath on river Alaknanda, the two rivers met at Rudraprayg and at this place the river is called holy Ganga. The most important pilgrimage centers known as the "*Char-Dham*", i.e. the Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath, all are situated in the Uttarakhand. Another well-known pilgrimage/religious destination in the State is the sacred town of Haridwar, where the prominent Kumbh Mela is held in every twelve years, attracting millions of pilgrims/tourists from all over the world. Apart from religious/pilgrimage tourism, Uttarakhand also provides great opportunities for nature based tourism and adventure sports like mountaineering, trekking, skiing and water sports. The state receives over 32 million tourists annually, a majority of whom visit the state during the peak summer season (May-July) for pilgrimage and recreation (**JRDNA, 2013**).

Natural disasters and tourism depicts entirely different images. When thinking of tourism, images that come to mind are vacationers, fun, relaxation, sightseeing, and beautiful surroundings. Natural disasters, on the other hand, bring to mind images of destruction, death, fear and tragedy. For many people, areas affected by natural disasters are not ideal vacation destinations. It appears that these two elements are on opposite ends of the spectrum and therefore, are mutually exclusive rather than complementary. It was enlightening to learn from this study that there are people interested in visiting destinations that have been affected by natural disasters and that tourism industries do not always suffer long-term negative consequences (**Beattie, 1992**).

Uttarakhand, the 27th state of India has nine mountains and four plains' districts. Its inner mountain region is pristine, remote, rich in biodiversity and fragile. But the State has enthusiastically pushed pilgrimage tourism to make large revenues. In 2008, faced by the challenge of a receding Gangotri glacier, the State government set a limit of 150 persons and 20 ponies or horses a day for the trek from Gangotri to the snout of the glacier at Gaumukh, but curtailing religious tourism is a political hot potato. Thousands of families depend on the annual Char Dham yatra season for most of their annual cash income (**Chopra, 2014**).

In June, 2013, the state of Uttarakhand witnessed one of the worst disasters of the Indian history that caused widespread loss of human life and property. 15th June is a bit early for monsoon to reach Uttarakhand, but in 2013 it reached before time and started with abnormally heavy rainfall all over the state, particularly in the higher areas. This is attributed to the convergence of southwest monsoon channel and westerly disturbances, resulting in the formation of dense clouds over the Uttarakhand Himalaya.

Review of Literature

(**Gupta, 2007**) Discussed that Pilgrimage tourism in India is a part of culture and has been practiced from ancient times. It is the land where several masters

(gurus) blessed for spiritual enlightenment. Pilgrimage tourism offers fabulous opportunities for generating revenues, earning foreign exchange, and providing employment. At present all countries of the world are determined to develop pilgrimage tourism in a huge way to promote own religion **(Ivakhiv, 2003)**.

The frequency of natural disasters has been increasing over the years, resulting in loss of life, damage to property and destruction of the environment. The number of people at risk has been growing each year and the majority is in developing countries with high poverty levels making them more vulnerable to disasters **(Living with Risk 2006)**.

(Anderson, 2000) Studied that the term “natural disaster” is used in reference to an event or situation that overwhelms people and local capacities to cope and even deal with them. The main characteristics for assessing a disaster’s impacts are its speed of inception and availability of perceptual data such as wind, rain, or ground movement, the intensity, scope, and duration of impact, and the probability of occurrence. The speed of onset and availability of perceptual cues affect the amount of forewarning that affected populations will have to complete emergency response actions **(Lindell, 1994)**.

(Faulkner, 2001) Conclude that Nature disasters can cause different impacts on tourists as well as the residents. Numerous authors state that natural disaster cause tourism destinations to lose its nature, economy and socio-cultural assets, not only for temporary and a long term. The fundamental of the three stages of disaster measurement comprising before the event occurs, during the occurrences of event and post flood event **(Momani, 2010)**.

(Dobhal DP, 2013) Found that during 5 to 17 june 2013, Uttarakhand state in India and adjacent areas in the Himalayas received heavy rainfall, which was about 375% more than the standard rainfall during a normal monsoon. Flood and landslide disasters are common in the Himalayan states of northern India, due to the unfavorable interaction of climate, lithology, topography and seismicity **(Nadim F, 2006)**.

(Das, 2015) stated that heavy rainfall in June 2013 triggered many mass movements across the state of Uttarakhand, including two large debris flows on June 16 and 17 which devastated the village of Kedarnath, and the settlements of Rambara and Gaurikund located further downstream (Martha TR, 2014). The tourism that forms the foremost economy of Uttarakhand was ill managed and number of tourist visit at one time was more than the carrying capacity of the destination. According to Tourism Department of Uttarakhand 28 million tourists and pilgrims visited the state during 2012 which was more than twice the local population **(Gupta, 2014)**.

The destruction of bridges and roads left about 100,000 pilgrims and tourists stranded in the valleys that were later rescued by Indian army and air force with the help of other civic authorities. This event is considered as India’s worst natural disaster since December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami **(Dubey C. S, 2013)**.

In a state with a total population of just over 1 crore, the number of tourists visiting it is 2.5 crore, both figures being for 2011. And most of these tourists visit the mountain state in summer. Tourism is a huge opportunity for the people of the state, especially those living near the popular circuits like the Alaknanda valley, Mussoorie, or the lake district of Nainital **(Varma, 2013)**.

(Goyal, 2014) Concluded that Majority of the families in the disaster-affected region were depended on tourism, pilgrimage and farming for their subsistence. As there is little hope of revival of both pilgrimage and tourism in near future and income from agriculture is too meager to support the family, hardships would haunt the masses for a long time to come. More than two third of the studied villages were depended on Kedarnath shrine for their livelihood. For more than 90 percent families of 5 of the 13 villages, the main source of income was pilgrimage to Kedarnath temple. It has been officially reported that inflow of tourists of all types has been sharply reduced in the state during 2014-15 season. Chardham circuit was worst hit this year due to psychosocial impact of catastrophic events, occurred during June 2013 **(Rautela, 2015)**.

Objective of the Study

1. To study relationship between Pilgrimage tourism and natural disaster.
2. To describe current situation about pilgrimage tourism in Uttarakhand.
3. To study planning of government regarding Pilgrimage tourism after the natural disaster.

Research Methodology

For the purpose of study, Extensive review of literature was done to collect information and get an understanding of the kind of research previously conducted on similar topics. Published matter and opinion given by various eminent scholars and researchers have been observed and analyzed in order to understand the different aspects of the problem.

Tourism in Uttarakhand

Table-1 Tourist Arrival in Uttarakhand (Since Formation of the State)

SR. No	Year	Indian Tourists (Million)	Foreign Tourists (Million)	Total (Million)
1	2000	11.08	0.57	11.137
2	2001	10.55	0.055	10.605
3	2002	11.65	0.056	11.706
4	2003	12.93	0.064	12.994
5	2004	13.83	0.075	13.905
6	2005	16.28	0.093	16.373
7	2006	19.36	0.096	19.456
8	2007	22.15	0.106	22.256
9	2008	23.06	0.112	23.172
10	2009	23.15	0.118	23.268
11	2010	30.97	0.136	31.106
12	2011	26.67	0.143	26.813
13	2012	28.29	0.125	28.415
14	2013	19.94	0.097	20.037
15	2014	21.99	0.102	22.092

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Yes Bank Analysis

The number of tourists visiting Uttarakhand has consistently increased from around 11 Million in 2000 to 28 Million in 2012. But in the year 2013, the State was washed away by devastating floods and landslides that resulted in significant 30% decline in tourist visits. In 2014, the State regained its momentum and witnessed 10% growth in total tourist visits

A survey conducted by UNWTO revealed that about 58.2% of the foreign tourist visits were for holiday/sightseeing, 21.9 % for health/yoga and about 19.4% for pilgrimage/religious purpose. The most popular destinations for foreign tourists to Uttarakhand were Rishikesh, Haridwar, Gangotri, Uttarkashi, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Auli, Nainital and Gaumukh. For domestic tourists, the main purpose of 44.2% of the tourist visits was pilgrimage/religious while that of 43.6% was holiday/sightseeing. The most popular destinations for domestic tourists are Haridwar, Rishikesh, Nainital, Badarinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Uttarkashi, Mussoorie, Yamunotri, Almora, Ranikhet and Dehradun. Above data indicate that the most of tourists visit to religious sites.

Details of the pilgrims visiting Kedarnath, Uttarakhand

Month	Number of persons visiting Kedarnath					Percentage reduction in 2014 against the average
	2011	2012	2013	Average	2014	
May	2,45,821	2,98,182	1,49,689	2,31,230	13,823	94.0
June	2,49,386	1,96,830	1,82,551	2,09,589	14,091	93.3
July	29,216	27,712	—	28,464	3,041	89.3

Source: dmmc.uk.gov.in.

The pilgrims, who come in large numbers to the Sacred Char Dham Yatra every year, would hardly have any desire to come back again. It might take several years to restore the confidence of the pilgrims to visit the region. There is heavy migration to the plains which is sure to have an impact on the carrying capacities of the towns and small kasbas in the lower region of the state. It is important to look into the reasons for this loss of faith of the people as well as the increased frequency and impact of disasters.

From 2014, Uttarakhand Government started Registration of pilgrims who are visiting the Uttarakhand State for the Char Dham yatra by issuing biometric cards after registration. The registration can be easily done at various Biometric Registration Counters at many destinations on Char Dham Yatra route. Chardham yatra Registration is Compulsory after the incident of 2013 for all the devotees who are interested to go for Chardham yatra. Each of the visitors will be tracked with a GPS-based monitoring system so that tourist flow can be checked for a particular Dham and this will help to make their journey safe as regular updates will be recorded for their location whether they are going for pilgrimage, adventure or Leisure holidays.

Pilgrims can also avail special facilities by government such as food and lodging using Registration Card. Chardham Yatra Registration is also known as Yatra pass, Yathra Permits, Registration Cards.

Biometric Registration Counters Locations on Chardham Yatra

Place in Chardham Yatra	Registration Counter Location
Haridwar	Railway Station
Haridwar	Pandit Dindayal Upadhyay Parking
Rishikesh	Roadways Bus Stand
Rishikesh	Hemkund Gurudwara
Janki Chatti	Janki Chatti
Gangotri	Gangotri
Guptkashi	Guptkashi
Phata	Phata
Sonprayag	Sonprayag
Kedarnath	Kedarnath
Pandukeshwar	Pandukeshwar
Govindghat	Govindghat
Uttarkashi	Hina
Uttarkashi	Dobata

CharDham and Hemkund Sahib Yatra Report

S.No	Dham	2015	2016
1	Yamunotri	92046	212809
2	Gangotri	105098	253716
3	Kedarnath	232353	393702
4	Badrinath	302874	402486
5	Hemkund Sahib	75126	72526
6	Total	807497	13,35,239

Source: Data collected from Trilok Photometric registration Hub, Rishikesh

The above table depicts that the situation is changing and pilgrims/tourist taking part in holy Char Dharm and Hemkund Sahib Yatra. In the year 2016 the total tourists visit to the chardham yatra was 13, 35,239 whereas in 2015 the tourists were only 8, 07,497. So the pilgrim tourism is increasing day by day.

Conclusion

Tourism Department of Uttarakhand is planning for promotion of three more religious circuits of Bhagwati, Shiv and Vaishnav in the state. Now Uttarakhand Government drafting a new tourism policy 2017 and the key initiatives will be undertaken like Laser shows, Sound and Light Shows Pilgrim management efforts like biometrics and vehicle registration, Smart solutions for temple town management shall be implemented with services like with CCTV cameras, display screens, Prasad vending cash cards etc at religious destinations. But the tourism policy 2017 is not working on issues like safety of Visitors, Riverbed walls, eliminate buildings and move hundreds of villagers from within flood-prone areas. The government continues to treat pilgrimage as just source of income from another form of tourism by widening up roads and opening hotels, building helipads to Badrinath and Gangotri, it makes no distinction between a family vacation and pilgrimage tourism. It is necessary to limit numbers of pilgrimage tourist to restore

religious sites to their former pristine state. The concept of carrying capacity must be followed by government while drafting of policy. But torn between the revenue generated by mass unregulated tourism and people's safety, the Uttarakhand government continues to promote Pilgrimage tourism in Uttarakhand. The current situation of pilgrimage tourism is that the number of visitors increasing year after year. After some year the situation may be same and this type of event may cause huge loss of life and destruction, if state government doesn't take strong action regarding environment protection and sustainable development.

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