

MARKETING OUTLOOK & ANALYSIS OF UTTARAKHAND TOURISM

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Abstract:

Tourism emanates from societal structures; hence people are an integral part of any tourism product. Socially sustainable development through tourism is envisaged in a manner such that the socio economic benefits can span out to all the strata of society.

The sustainable tourism development through integrated planning in Uttarakhand it may be suggested that there is enormous tourist potential the Uttarakhand has been receiving a large number of tourists annually since ancient times. As we know that sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long term sustainability. The present influx of tourists to the Uttarakhand can be attributed to enumerable number of factors. The existing tourist potential in terms of natural beauty, historical and archeological sites, games and sports activities, culinary and religious sites and other factors as the major pull factors. Tourism in Uttarakhand is still in a discovering stage. Many sites are still lying untapped. Not only the natural or historical sites, but also huge reservoirs of traditional and cultural heritages still remain to be unearthed. People are fully keen to explore it all, for the development of whole state.

In this economic scenario, if tourism is expected to emerge as a tool for inclusive development, it is imperative that domestic tourism be given special policy attention. Domestic tourism traffic will only increase as Indians are travel oriented not only for leisure but as a socio-cultural or religious norm.

Key Words: *Trends, Tourist preference, Social Indicators, Tourism carrying capacity, sustainable growth*

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Tourism in India: A Historical Perspective

Indians, since historic times, have been avid travelers, with the firm beliefs of Panch-Tirtha before death and the social structure remaining close with the family members, even the farthest of kin. Without digital innovations, travel on public means (even on foot in certain cases) was the only option. The trend continues today also with lower income households going out for bus trips for days together pooling in their resources and visiting new places.

Current Trends & Preferences

Product positioning for domestic market

The domestic market, albeit similar in the innate characteristics of the tourism product components, differs from the inbound offerings in the following aspects.

Domestic Tourism: Salient Characteristics

Greater cognitive connect

Sub 3-star category utilization

Shorter trips/ Weekend

Getaways

Rail / Road – centric

We see that the product positioning, especially with respect to tourism, is more about targeting the consumer's perception of the product rather than doing anything to the product itself.

Tourist Preferences

While this on one hand implies that visiting friends and relatives (VFR) remains a perennial segment in the domestic tourism space with very strong immunity towards external exigencies, the spin-off has been the growth in the leisure and recreation segment, as the traveler often clubs the VFR motive with some sort of recreational activity.

Emerging Trends

Emerging Sectors & Niches

With increasing disposable incomes, modernized lifestyles and better life quality, the leisure and recreation sector in tourism has emerged as the biggest attraction for the domestic tourist in recent years. Tourism for the middle class city dwellers has become an important getaway from the busy schedule of urban lifestyles. With more studies showing that children are better off with quality time spent in parent's company, the strata is becoming more prone to short but multiple holidays. The requirement is evolving around varied destinations along with affordability and connectivity

Changes in the visitor profile

With the destinations, interests and economic scenarios constantly evolving, the profile of visitors within domestic tourism's ambit is also changing. While the religious and social visits will always remain the biggest reason for domestic travel undertaken, now cross cultural exchange between destinations are more common with Indians realizing the options that the sheer geographic size of India offers.

Socio-educational dimensions to Domestic Tourism

Visiting the other states, understanding the cultures and values of the other casts, creed and population, not only makes people more tolerable, but also promotes ownership and nationalism. Even though the educational aspect of tourism is well known, we need to take cognizance of the fact that while children actually learn from experiential holidays, every human being is affected by the cross-cultural interaction. The social impact works both ways - while the residents of the place get to meet people from various ethnicities, the visitors understand the different terrains of India.

Due to this strong socio-economic impact of tourism, development and management of a destination has to be in line with the aspirations of local communities, which would not only provide for a more authentic tourist experience, but also attract a stronger community support for

tourism. As a consequence, a growing number of destinations want to ensure that local residents have a say in how tourism evolves. Efforts are therefore being put into inculcating local community views on tourism planning and destination management.

Tourism as a tool for development

Tourism as tool for development needs to address all these issues while making the place comfortable and inviting to the visitors. The onus beyond the state government needs to be addressed by the local governments and the local community. Only if the ownership is transferred to the grass-root level, can this be used as a developmental too

While inbound tourism dictates that marketing and promotion lines have to simultaneously project the country as a destination while highlighting the different USPs of each state, domestic tourism is where the states come out a bit more aggressively, competing for a piece of the lucrative leisure and recreation segment, since religion, VFR and business are segments where marketing and promotion has little scope to influence the propensity to travel.

In this light, we take few of the major tourism states in the country and analyze the policy measures as well as the action steps taken towards boosting domestic tourism within their respective product offerings.

Social Indicators of Tourism in Uttarakhand

Social indicators play an important role for the development of the tourism industry in a region. Although both the social as well as the environmental indicators are interdependent on each other, but in the modern concepts of tourism more emphasis given on the social indicators. Social indicators include place of living, health, longevity nutrition, literacy, employment, education, people, transport, tourist services and more others. These modern days the environment influences less on people as compared to the human impacts on the environment. Man controls the environment wholly and solely and less impact of environment on man. The type of tourist visiting a destination depends on the nature of destination. They can be broadly categorized into Domestic and International Tourists. This further affects the physical and socio-

economic development of a destination as spending patterns determine the related multiplier effects. It also governs the type and scale of infrastructure required.

Integrated planning for Tourism development in Uttarakhand

Although in the region the tourist potentials are in abundance but not explored at par with the neighboring region like Himachal Pradesh. The region has been identified as an important ecotourism destination and others tourist potentials in the form of types of tourism are found. There are intraregional as well as interregional disparities within the region in the tourist flow.

Carrying Capacity

The carrying capacity assessment and sustainability of tourism in the circuits identified is an important component of the study as it will form the basis for resource allocation and future development. The carrying capacity assessment has been done separately for the circuits, based on city population (resident), population density and tourist population and density (floating population). The estimation has been done by comparing the total density with the city density norms for small, medium and large town / cities set by Urban Development Plan Formulation and Implementation Guidelines (UDPFI). Only such places have been considered that can offer a sustainable value proposition to the tourists such that when tourism products are offered in those places, they can be maintained as well.

Carrying Capacity Assessment

Tourism carrying capacity(TCC) is defined as the maximum number of people that may visit the tourist destination without causing destruction of the physical, economic and socio cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction.' (Alvin Chandy, 2009)

Assessment of TCC is based on three major indicators: Physical-Ecological, Socio-Demographic and Political- Economic.

Physical and Ecological Indicators are based on fixed components (ecological capacity, assimilative capacity) and flexible components (infrastructure systems like water supply, electricity, transportation, etc).

Socio-demographic Indicators refer to social and demographic issues and importance to local communities, as they relate to the presence and growth of tourism. Some of these can be expressed in quantitative terms but most require suitable socio- psychological research.

Political-economic Indicators refer to the impacts of tourism on local economic structures, activities, etc. including competition to other sectors.

The objective of the interventions intended by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India is to improve the quality and quantity of tourism infrastructure at tourist destinations/circuits in a sustainable manner. Hence, for the purposes of this report the primary focus would be on the Physical and Ecological Indicators. It is expected that improvement in physical infrastructure at destinations/circuits would translate into improvements in the socio-demographic and political-economic conditions of these places.

Roadmap for Sustainable Growth of Uttarakhand Tourism

Develop Hygienic Budget Accommodation

While many budget accommodation options are available in the country in the form of youth hostels, dharamshalas, hotels etc., the cleanliness and hygiene standards are mostly below par. This is not only detrimental to the destination image, but also means that the tourist at the 'middle' of the value chain has to opt for higher categories of accommodation, implying that the expenditure on other principles of the product (sightseeing, shopping etc.) goes down, leading to skewed earnings

Improving Connectivity

This refers to both improving the infrastructure in terms of roads, rail networks etc., and providing a greater number of options in terms of services like buses, trains, flights etc. Many

destinations in the country fail to realize their worth owing to poor connectivity options. Pahalgam, for instance, despite being a popular tourist destination, only has one bus service to and from Srinagar, even during the peak season with heavy spin-offs from Amarnath, forcing tourists to choose the much costlier rented vehicles.

Niche based Capacity Building

Certain niches can be made affordable for the domestic market by simply up-scaling the capacity building measures. Take the instance of adventure sports, bungee jumping in particular. The few private set ups in the country have sourced technical manpower from countries like New Zealand, which then reflects on the higher pricing of the product. Although certification measures are in place, there are no training facilities to complement such adventure activities. Capacity building measures in these areas could go a long way in expanding the affordability of experiential products.

Accessibility to remote areas:

Elaborating further on adventure tourism, many places in the Himalayan (and other sensitive) regions of the country require permits and other permissions to be issued for exploration, procurement of which often becomes an arduous process owing to the multiple agencies involved (tourism department, forest department, police/ army etc.), and some of the best destinations of the country are left unexplored. There is a need to have a single window clearance system in place.

Educational Trips

Introducing inter or intra state trips for educational institutions, particularly schools, has a twofold advantage. While it brings numbers into the state, students are the most probable clientele to become repeat tourists, desirable for any market in the long run.

Support Backpacking:

Although hitchhikers/ backpackers have traditionally been associated with the Hippie movement of the 70s, the present movement is entirely different, with people from all walks of life, including those from the upper economic strata, choosing this option owing to the freedom of travel and the 'authenticity' of travel that it offers. While this segment cannot be the target market

owing to the low economic benefits that it has to offer, backpackers are the best 'ambassadors' and 'word of mouth' marketers, and can really enhance the destination profile.

Student Discounts for Events/ Festivals:

Although a majority of the states have successfully adopted the analogy of promoting destinations through events and festivals, there is a need to offer affordable facilities for travel segments like students. Take for instance the Rann Utsav package offered by Gujarat Tourism at INR 3000 per day per tent. While this is competitive pricing for the average tourist, it often becomes a notch high for students, for whom these events are a platform for academic research as well.

ICT based tools

While certain states like Kerala have adopted IT based tools and services to leverage their product offerings and promotional efforts, other states also need to tap these tools to fully harness their tourism potential. Mobile-based technologies can be tapped as an enabler for mountainous and other remote regions of the country, where electricity is an issue.

Conclusion: An Overview of Uttarakhand Tourism Marketing

Domestic Media Campaigns:

Social awareness campaigns on leading television channels to promote tourism in the Uttarakhand region, also outdoor campaign to be undertaken at the terminal of airport to showcase the tourism destinations and products of the region.

Incredible India International Campaigns:

Global television campaign as a part of 'Incredible India' theme in leading channels with pan-regional reach should be the part of media plans besides this the leading publications across the globe will act as booster to such campaign.

National Tourism Awards:

National Tourism Awards to various stakeholder segments of the travel, tourism and hospitality industry. These awards are presented to State Governments / Union Territories, classified hotels, heritage hotels, approved travel agents, tour operators and tourist transport operators, individuals and other private organizations in recognition of their performance in their respective fields and also to encourage healthy competition with an aim to promote tourism.

Marketing Objectives of Overseas Offices:

Endeavours to position Uttarakhand in the tourism generating markets as a preferred tourism destination, to promote various tourism products vis-à-vis competition faced from various destinations, and to increase India's share of the global tourism market. These objectives are met through an integrated marketing and promotional strategy and a synergized campaign in association with the Travel Trade, State Governments and Indian Missions. The specific elements of promotional efforts undertaken overseas include Advertising in the Print & Electronic Media, Participation in Fairs & Exhibitions, organizing Seminars, Workshops, Road Shows & India Evenings, Printing of Brochures and Collaterals, Brochure Support/Joint Advertising with Travel Agents / Tour Operators, Inviting the Media and Travel Trade to visit the Uttarakhand region under the Hospitality Programme, etc.

Assistance to Service Providers under the Market Development Assistance (MDA) Scheme:

Under the Market Development Assistance Scheme, financial support to approved tourism service providers (i.e. hoteliers, travel agents, tour operators, tourist transport operators, etc.), for undertaking the following tourism promotional activities overseas:

1. Sales-cum-Study Tour
2. Participation in Fairs / Exhibitions
3. Publicity through printed material

Familiarization Tours under the Hospitality Programme:

One of the important elements of the Marketing Strategy and Plan is the Hospitality Programme. Under it, the invitation to editorial teams of travel publications, journalists, photographers, T.V. channels, travel agents, tour operators, etc. from overseas, through the a tourism offices overseas,

to effectively project Uttarakhand region as an attractive multi-dimensional tourist destination offering a vast range of attractions. These invited guests are able to get first hand information / knowledge of the tourism product during their familiarization tours. Travel Agents, Tour Operators and Media Representatives from important tourist generating markets overseas could be invited, not only to visit the varied tourist attractions of the region.

Participation in Travel Fairs and Exhibitions:

India tourism offices overseas participation platform can be used in the major international Travel Fairs and Exhibitions in important tourist generating markets the world over as well as in emerging and potential markets to showcase and promote the tourism products.

Some Major Promotional Activities Undertaken for Overseas Promotion:

Series of promotional initiatives is required to aggressively promote tourism as a part of the promotional plan, road Shows to be organized in important tourist generating markets overseas with participation of different segments of the travel industry. The Road Shows comprises of presentations on Uttarakhand followed by one-to-one business meetings between the trade delegation from India and the travel trade in the respective countries.

Some other major steps to be taken to promote tourism potential in Uttarakhand are:

Publicity through film festivals

Food Festivals

Outdoor Publicity

Printing of Brochures

International Accolades

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