



Analysis of Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023: A Sustainable Tourism Perspective

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Abstract: Tourism became the world's largest industry in the 20th century and is expected to grow even more rapidly in the 21st century. The growing concern regarding the sustainable development of the socio-economic and environmental development of tourist destinations has become a matter of serious discussion in the Himalayan region. Uttarakhand tourism, like international tourism, is also facing an important question: can it grow at a rapid pace without harming or destroying the natural and built environment? Both must be protected if future generations can enjoy the same benefits of travel and tourism. Uttarakhand hosted 39.2 million tourists in the pre-pandemic year 2019. This is almost 4 times the population of the state for Uttarakhand. This is undoubtedly a boom for tourism and allied industries. But this also raises the question of how much tourism activity can an area support? Because tourism is as vulnerable to such ecological crises as it itself contributes to it and this sensitivity comes at a heavy cost to nature and local people as tourism adversely affects the physical and cultural environment in most places, unless prohibited by the authorities. Now is the time for tourism policies to focus on sustainability. The Uttarakhand government announced a new tourism policy in March 2023 and passed it in the Gairsain assembly session. This Policy shall remain in effect for 7 years from the date of this policy. In this research paper, Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023 has been analysed from the point of view of sustainable stable tourism and discussion on the new initiative which will be adopted in the policy which encourages sustainable tourism in the Uttarakhand state.

Keywords: Uttarakhand • Sustainable Tourism • Tourism Policy • Development • Environment.

Introduction

A growth in tourism is expected in the 21st century, when it will become the world's largest industry. In addition to supporting the tourism industry, the strategy envisions new initiatives to help create jobs, regenerate the environment, develop remote regions, and empower women and other disadvantaged populations. Rather than focusing on profit and loss statements and balance sheets, tourism growth must be based on values and principles derived from human welfare and happiness.

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development SDG target 8.9, aims to “by 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products”. The importance of sustainable tourism is also highlighted in SDG target 12.b. which aims to “develop and implement tools to monitor

sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products”. Tourism is also identified as one of the tools to “by 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island developing States and least developed countries” as comprised in SDG target 14.7 (Sustainable Tourism | Department of Economic and Social Affairs).

In 1988 Sustainable tourism is defined by the UN Environment Program and UN World Tourism Organization as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”

(<https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>).

A triple principle of environmental, economic, and social sustainability was established at the 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992. As a result, the tourism industry worldwide has adopted sustainable tourism principles (Government of



India 2010). Also, in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, recognising that tourism can play a significant role in economic development, social inclusion, and cultural preservation. (UNWTO 2017). The global recognition of climate action in tourism is evident in the Glasgow Declaration on Climate in 2022, endorsed by more than 300 tourism stakeholders (Munjal 2023).

Himalayan tourist destinations are becoming increasingly concerned with the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of their development. Residents of the hill have seen hill tourism as a development issue. Hence, as with any development activity, sustainability is a major consideration in terms of the environment and socio-economics (Chakraborty and Ghosal 2022). Uttarakhand tourism, like international tourism, is facing an important question: can it grow at a rapid rate without harming or destroying the natural and built environment? Both must be preserved and protected if future generations want to enjoy the same benefits of travel and tourism as they are today.

Most of the development work in the state is also geared towards facilitating and promoting tourism, which is the main economic activity for livelihood in the state. In addition to generating income, tourism also creates jobs in the states. In Uttarakhand, tourism contributes 6.59 percent to the GDP and 26.87 percent to employment, according to a report by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (Sharma et al. 2021). Compared to the national average, these numbers are significantly higher than or comparable to 5.24 % GDP and 14.87 % employment (Government of India 2022; Lok Sabha 2023).

In the pre-pandemic year of 2019, Uttarakhand hosted 39.2 million tourists (Yearly Statics 2020). In other words, these numbers are approximately four times the population of Uttarakhand (as per the 2011 census, Uttarakhand has a population of 10.1 million)

(<https://www.censusindia.co.in/states/uttarakhand>). In 2020-2021, the number of tourists visiting the state fell by over 80 percent, a trend that was seen

worldwide during the covid-19 pandemic. After the covid-19 pandemic, tourism in these states rebounded, with 20 million tourists visiting Uttarakhand (Yearly Statics 2021). It is estimated that by 2026, about 67 million tourists will visit Uttarakhand (Sharma et al. 2021). The tourism industry and allied industries are undoubtedly experiencing a boom. However, it also raises the question of whether a region can support so much tourism activity? People had to walk for long distances, parking spots were full, and administration had to contend with tourists stranded for hours. A similar picture was painted for Uttarakhand, which attracts religious tourists throughout the year. A sustainable tourism is most appropriate when it takes into account coexistence of all human activities with nature and culture, something that is often overlooked.

The tourism industry is as vulnerable as it is responsible for contributing to such a crisis. In the hilly Himalayan states of Uttarakhand, there are many other towns which are frequently overcrowded with tourists and sometimes exceed their saturation levels several times during the year. Tourism impacts physical and cultural environments adversely in most places, unless authorities restrict it. Nature and the local community pay a heavy price for this. Tourism policies need to be geared toward sustainability.

Sustainable development is a focus in many countries' policies, and sustainable tourism is becoming more prominent. However, tourism sustainability is not clearly defined, and economic growth policies still play a major role in tourism policy, even though sustainability is an important part of tourism policy (Guo et al. 2019). The Uttarakhand government announced a new tourism policy in March 2023 and passed it in the Gairsain assembly session. This Policy shall remain in effect for 7 years from the date of this policy (Government of Uttarakhand 2023). In this research paper, Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023 has been analysed from the point of view of sustainable stable tourism and discussion on the new initiative which will be adopted in the policy which encourages sustainable tourism in the Uttarakhand state.



Review of Literature

Tourism management is a complicated process – it is directly or indirectly related to numerous areas such as accommodations, catering, transportation, connections, insurance, etc., not only to satisfy tourists but also to satisfy local residents. At the national, regional and local municipal levels, there has been no identification of effective management strategies for the tourism industry. Following the author's statement, “this is a difficult issue to resolve in practice that tourism policy makers face in countries of different economic development levels (Dodds 2007; Paulauskiene 2013). Achieving sustainable tourism goals requires both talking the talk and walking the walk from decision makers who control tourism and tourist destinations. The evidence indicates that achieving these goals is a much harder but ultimately necessary task (Dodds and Butler 2010; Peeters 2013). Mountainous Uttarakhand may follow a different development plan, but the aim is the same: to sustain the resources and enhance locals' lives. An infrastructure-superstructure has been installed in the region and a guideline has been established for sustainable development. Regulation is made by policy makers and stakeholders, but in practice emphasis is more on temporary and biased economic benefits (Kumar et al. 2014). Sustainability implies that environmental and social agendas will be considered alongside more orthodox policy goals and that economic interests won't always be the primary concern of government (Chaperon 2016). Developing integrated and coherent tourism policies will allow countries to better share benefits, address inequalities and boost economies. Governments should strive to develop integrated and coherent tourism policies. The tourism industry will be restarted. To achieve sustainable and inclusive tourism growth, long-term strategies must promote quality employment, skills development, entrepreneurship, innovation, effective investment and regional integration (OECD 2017). Principles of sustainable tourist development satisfy many tourism theorists but remain challenging for practitioners in the sector to operationalize (Edgell and Swanson 2015). In

today's tourism, the growth of sustainable tourism is becoming more important in tourism policy and planning. Such rapid changes and simultaneous development practices have put a lot of stress on sustainable tourism planning, policy, and management. Sustainable tourism is part of a larger shift in thinking about how the tourism industry should grow and how it should be done in a way that protects the environment and improves people's quality of life (Edgell 2019; Coghlan 2019). Almost every document reviewed in the report referred to the importance of monitoring the impacts of sustainable tourism development in terms of developing mechanisms to monitor them. In more than half of the national policies reviewed, the environment is mentioned as an element that needs to be monitored for sustainable tourism development, but it is unclear to what extent these policies are actually implemented. A review of tourism-related intra-governmental coordination mechanisms found no evidence that they are focused on sustainable tourism (UNWTO and UNEP 2019). In research, it has been found that effective sustainable management strategies can help cope with the anti-environmental behaviour of tourists. In this study, it is found that tourism destination management and policy empower local communities and facilitate tourist requirements by controlling and managing activities at tourism destinations. The study found that tourists with a high value orientation have a stronger relationship between destination social responsibility and sustainable tourism development (Khan et al. 2021). As a means of ensuring the sustainability of tourism development, it is imperative that attention be given to the establishment of institutions in all areas related to policy management as well as implementation in order to make progress towards a sustainable model (DeKadt 1992; Welford et al. 1999).

There is a substantial literature on the evaluation of tourism policies at the national and global levels. It should be noted, however, that there are few literatures available on the study of the tourism policy of the state of Uttarakhand, particularly with regard to sustainable tourism. As a result, the new tourism policy of Uttarakhand



will be studied from the perspective of sustainable tourism in this research paper.

Objectives:

1. To analyse Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023 from the point of view of Sustainable tourism.
2. Discussion on the new initiatives which will be adopted in the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023, which encourages sustainable tourism in the Uttarakhand state.

Research Methodology:

There are many secondary sources cited in the present research paper, including reports from international organizations, the Government of India, Uttarakhand State Government, published information from established agencies, and the opinions of the authors. A wide variety of scholarly materials have been used in this research paper, including newspapers, magazines, books, reports, academic journals, and other relevant publications. To compile a broad range of published documents from academia and business, a desk-based literature review was conducted. To draw conclusions, academic articles were also analysed in conjunction with "grey literature" (primarily government- and Internet-sourced documents). Major findings and recommendations for future policy implications will be summarized in the study.

Sustainable Tourism Initiative in Uttarakhand's Tourism Policy 2023:

In this policy, it is recognized and appreciated that sustainable tourism has a place in all segments and themes of tourism in Uttarakhand and has to be incorporated into the entire tourism sector. All of the state's activities and initiatives are designed with sustainability as a major driving force that permeates all of them. As a result, it is necessary to implement initiatives designed to coordinate with multiple stakeholders and to synchronize efforts in order to create positive changes. Additionally, it is imperative to provide incentives for sustainable practices in order to promote their adoption.

1. Low Impact Tourism- Low impact tourism, also known as sustainable tourism or ecotourism, refers to a form of tourism that aims to minimize its negative impact on the environment, local

cultures, and communities while providing meaningful and enriching experiences for travellers. The goal of low impact tourism is to promote responsible and ethical travel practices that contribute to the conservation of natural resources, protection of biodiversity, and support of local economies. This approach seeks to balance the benefits of tourism with the need to preserve and protect the destinations being visited (Nyaupane and Timothy 2010; Gonzalez et al. 2021).

Uttarakhand tourism policy 2023 shall encourage tourist activities that cause low impact to the environment. Local community and district authorities shall be sensitized to use renewable resources and energy efficient design in the development and operations of tourist destination. Tourism projects abiding Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA) or Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) guidelines shall also be recognized (Government of Uttarakhand 2023).

2. Universal Accessibility - Universal access in tourism, also known as accessible tourism, inclusive tourism, or disability-friendly tourism, refers to the concept of making travel and tourism experiences accessible and enjoyable for all individuals, regardless of their physical, sensory, cognitive, or other disabilities. The goal of universal access in tourism is to ensure that everyone, including people with disabilities, elderly individuals, and those with special needs, can fully participate in and benefit from tourism activities and services without facing barriers or discrimination. This concept is closely linked to sustainable development goals (SDGs) as outlined by the United Nations, particularly those related to social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental protection (UNWTO 2016).

Uttarakhand tourism policy 2023 provision all Tourism sites shall be socially inclusive and incorporate the following measures:

- Ramps, wheelchairs, escalators, washrooms, buggies, and other forms of assisted access for Divyaang visitors, the elderly, etc.
- Facilities for pregnant visitors.
- Braille-enabled signages and infrastructure for visually challenged visitors



(Government of Uttarakhand 2023). These measures will help in making Uttarakhand tourism universally accessible.

3. Inclusive Tourism Workforce - Inclusivity in the workforce within the tourism industry refers to creating an environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds, including different genders, ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, and socio-economic statuses, are welcomed, respected, and provided with equal opportunities for employment, growth, and leadership. Inclusivity enhances the overall quality of the tourism sector, fosters innovation, and contributes to the well-being of both employees and the destinations they serve (Scheyvens and Biddulph 2017; Luu 2021).

Uttarakhand tourism policy 2023 strives to ensure inclusive tourism development across the state with equal participation from women, SC/ST persons, Divyaang persons, and other marginalized groups in tourism workforce. In this tourism policy Targets for 2030 Tourism and its supporting industries to employ 20 lakh people in Uttarakhand, with women accounting for at least

30% of the workforce (Government of Uttarakhand 2023). This target is directly related with SDG Goal 5: Gender Equality.

4. Tourism development through Determining Incentives- Incentives are offered by governments worldwide to encourage development by reducing capital costs, operating costs, and improving investment security (Jenkins 1982; Wanhill 1986; Wanhill 1994). This strategy addresses the unique challenges and opportunities presented by remote parts of the State in developing tourism through classification and incentives in order to promote sustainable and responsible tourism. During the formulation of the tourism policy, remote areas in the state with tourism potential were evaluated comprehensively. The districts and regions of the state are divided into 3 categories to administer the incentives defined under the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023. In this, those areas of the state have been kept in the category of maximum capital subsidy which are remote areas/districts of the state (Government of Uttarakhand 2023).

Table 1: The "Maximum Capital Subsidy" in different sector categories:

Region Category	Criteria for categorization	Maximum Capital Subsidy
Projects in Category A regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Districts of Haridwar, Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar • Areas of District Dehradun which are not included in Category B • Ranikhet and Almora Tehsils of District Almora 	25% of Eligible Capital Assets
Projects in Category B regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remaining area of District Almora (which are not included in Category A) • Kalsi, Chakrata and Tyuni Tehsils of District Dehradun • Garud Tehsil of District Bageshwar • Kotdwar, Lansdowne, Yamkeshwar and Dhoomakot tehsils of District Pauri Garhwal • Dhanaulti and Narendranagar tehsils of District Tehri Garhwal 	35% of Eligible Capital Assets
Projects in Category C regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Districts of Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Champawat, Rudraprayag and Pithoragarh • Remaining area of Districts Bageshwar, Pauri Garhwal and Tehri Garhwal (which are not included in Category B) 	50% of Eligible Capital Assets

5. Responsible Tourism- Tourism usually centres on so-called "mass tourism". Mass tourism has been defined as 'a phenomenon of large-scale packaging of standardized leisure services at a fixed price for sale to a mass clientele. While

responsible tourism aims to minimize negative impacts while maximizing positive contributions to the places being visited. Transitioning from mass tourism to responsible tourism involves a shift towards more sustainable, ethical, and



mindful travel practices. This shift prioritizes the well-being of destinations, local communities, and the environment. Transitioning from mass tourism to responsible tourism within tourism policy requires a comprehensive and strategic approach that aligns with sustainable development goals (Mihalic 2016; Mondal and Samaddar 2021). The concept of responsible tourism has been adopted in the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023. Most of the provisions of the tourism policy emphasize making Uttarakhand tourism responsible tourism.

6. Hub and Spoke Model - The "Hub and Spoke" model is a common concept used in various industries, including tourism, transportation, and business. In the context of tourism, here's how the hub and spoke model works:

Hub: The hub is typically a major tourist destination or a central point with good transportation infrastructure, such as an airport, a city, or a resort area. It's the primary point of arrival for tourists. This hub is usually well-developed and offers a range of amenities, accommodations, attractions, and services to cater to travellers' needs.

Spokes: The spokes are the secondary destinations that are easily accessible from the hub. These could be smaller towns, attractions, natural landmarks, cultural sites, or other points of interest. The spokes are connected to the hub through transportation options like buses, trains, or short flights.

The Uttarakhand tourism policy for the year 2023 acknowledges and respects the various natural endowments and terrains in Uttarakhand, and this policy is going to promote tourism in the state. It is therefore recommended that Hub and Spoke models be implemented in order to enable regional development to take place at a balanced pace. In order to overcome problems pertaining to carrying capacity, prominent tourist destinations will have to implement the policy in order to ensure the availability of basic amenities at all tourist destinations, such as parking, toilets, signage, ATMs, dispensaries, ticket counters, internet and telecommunication facilities, and more (Government of Uttarakhand 2023).

Overall, the hub and spoke model is a strategy to efficiently manage and distribute tourism flows, offering convenience and diversity to travellers while benefiting the destinations involved. It's important to note that the success of this model relies on effective transportation connections, infrastructure, and collaboration between various stakeholders in the tourism industry.

Suggestions:

Out of the state's total geographical area, 86% is hilly and 14% is plain area (<https://shm.uk.gov.in/pages/display/6-state-profile>). Implementing effective tourism policies in Uttarakhand hill areas requires a nuanced approach that takes into consideration the unique geographical, cultural, and socio-economic factors of the region. As a result, implementing the new tourism policy effectively requires a few key considerations. The District Tourism Development Office should be made fully competent to implement the tourism policy because the challenging conditions of hilly areas cannot be guessed by officers in Dehradun, but the tourism policy is actually implemented at ground level. For implementation, only the head unit of the districts has knowledge of the actual situation. Therefore, it is necessary that the District Tourism Development Officer be empowered by the State Tourism Administration to effectively implement the tourism policy according to the special conditions of its district and area.

Uttarakhand is full of trekking and skiing tourist places; for example, Dayara Bugyal, Bedni Bugyal, Rudranath, Madhmaheshwar, Kedar kantha, Roop Kund, Harkidoon, etc. are popular attractions among people from other states. In the new Uttarakhand tourism policy, several provisions have been mentioned to promote adventure tourism in the state. But along with promoting adventure tourism in the high-altitude grasslands (Bugyals) of the state, the Uttarakhand government should give full responsibility for the maintenance and management of the bugyals to the local tourism unit. Waste management in high-altitude areas (Bugyals) should be done strategically, and coordinated efforts should be made towards conservation and management of



bugyals with the help of 'van panchayats' (village forest councils) and local people.

Uttarakhand is very sensitive from the point of view of the environment; therefore, a proper environmental impact assessment has to be done before the construction of resorts, roads, tourism complexes, and other structures of tourism in the hilly areas of the state and before approving such developmental projects. Appropriate mitigation plans have to be made. Although provisions related to environmental impact assessment have been made in the new tourism policy, it is more important to follow them effectively and strictly.

Today the central government is giving a lot of emphasis on the development of tourism in Uttarakhand and the central government is also providing a lot of finance for the tourism development of Uttarakhand, the state government should ensure that the projects funded by the central government are well implemented in the state. That's why the state government should implement tourism policy keeping in mind the projects of the central government. So that tourism development in the state gets momentum.

Conclusion

There are several fundamental differences between sustainable tourism and conventional tourism, as a result of which the strategies also differ. In conventional tourism plans, the growth requirements of the tourism industry are usually viewed as the key determinant of the plan's success. A marketing plan or a capital investment plan can either be referred to as a revenue plan or a job creation plan, and both are usually designed to increase traffic, visitor numbers, turnover, and employment. Additionally, they are seeking to exploit national and local resources without considering any of the social, cultural, or economic interests of communities that they operate in. A sustainable tourism plan would, on the other hand, be based on an analysis of the regional region as a whole, a much broader view. In the plan, you will see the concepts which have been refined and tested in many different places in the world.

In the Uttarakhand tourism policy 2023, for the first time, the state recognized the fact that the private sector within the tourism sector is largely unorganized in the state, and has grown organically in a variety of regions and areas of the state. This tourism policy has been developed with the goal of bringing stakeholders in the tourism industry into the organized sector. In order to achieve 100% registration, the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board will be responsible to develop online registration systems, under the aegis of the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, for all tourism service providers (travel agencies, tour operators, guides, etc.). As a result, the Department will be able to maintain a database of all the stakeholders involved in the Uttarakhand tourism ecosystem (establishments, performers, service providers, etc.).

It has been determined that the policy and planning process is never ending, since any decision or action usually requires approval and implementation prior to being implemented. However, it has been concluded that economic growth has resulted in economic factors taking precedence over social and environmental concerns, which is a major cause of the non-implementation of policies. In order to position Uttarakhand as one of the leading global tourism destinations for inclusive economic growth, the State Tourism Policy, 2023 has been designed with the vision that it will become a leading global destination for sustainable tourism. It is expected that the State of Uttarakhand will accomplish its goal of moving towards a greener economy through the implementation of this tourism policy, which focuses on sustainable development, innovative tourism products, concepts, and destinations.

The researchers call on the state and the union governments in India to take similar actions with an immediate focus on a sustainable tourism policy. Considering the carrying capacity of the region is essential when addressing tourism needs. The use of economic tools such as higher taxes and similar ones should be prescribed in order to deter mass tourism to vulnerable locations. Due to the ecologically sensitive geographies of



Uttarakhand state as well as other areas, it is high time to turn attention to sustainable tourism as well.

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