Chapter 6

Perception of Residents on Ecotourism in Uttarakhand

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ABSTRACT

Uttarakhand has immense tourism potential for growth of tourist traffic. With the adverse effect of mass tourism and a growing environmental awareness, ecotourism now represents the fastest growing sub sector of the tourism industry, generating billions of dollars annually. Ecotourism plays an important role in economic, socio-cultural and environmental development of the society. Therefore the present research answers the question as to how does ecotourism affect the local community, economy, culture and the environment. According to the collected data the results of the study indicated that when residents in the community were asked to reveal ecotourism impacts, they assessed the perception of impacts in both negative and positive ways.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Uttarakhand has increased by 168 per cent (213 per cent according to the Uttarakhand tourism department) over the past twelve years. Unregulated and unplanned growth in tourism has led to environmental degradation. The state is a site of high biodiversity value, but is facing growing threats from a variety of sources including commercial logging, farming practices and tourism. The consequences of unchecked tourism in the state were seen on 16th June, when cloudbursts and extreme rains caused massive flooding and devastation in the state. As concern grows over the loss of both natural and cultural heritage in the region, attention is turning to strategies, which seek to link conservation with tourism development and generate incentives to conserve the resources.

Ecotourism is a tool for sustainable development in the region. It is defined by Ceballos-Lascurain (1996), of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), as an environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features—both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor negative impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations. Ecotourism means conservation of environment and to provide economic benefits to the local communities.

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NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Uttarakhand has immense ecotourism potential for growth of tourist traffic and to provide lively hood to local communities. It is undoubtedly India’s most beautiful canvas studded with green strokes, wild splash and quaint highlights. Ecotourism holds a very bright future and has acquired a great significance in the recent times but this potential has not been tapped effectively. The importance of environmental education is an important component of ecotourism. It has both positive and negative impacts. As concern grows over the loss of natural heritage in the area, it appears that this is the ideal time to facilitate ecologically and socially responsible to support the local community. Therefore the present study evaluates the perceptions of environmental, economical and socio-cultural impact of ecotourism in Uttarakhand.

Study Area

In the present research, Uttarakhand has been selected as it has immense ecotourism potential for growth of tourist traffic. It is divided into two broad regions Garhwal and Kumaon. So, Hardwar, (Rishikesh) and Dehradun, (Mussoorie) districts from Garhwal region and Nanital, (Corbet National Park) and Almora from Kumaon region were selected deliberately by the researcher.

Data Collection Techniques

The present study makes use of both primary as well as secondary data. For the selection of sample, Convenience sampling method was applied in this survey. Wide range of data was collected through secondary sources mainly from Directorate of Tourism Dehradun. References from research papers, books, articles, internets and newspapers were taken appropriately for interpretation of data.

Survey Instrument

The questionnaire that was used for the local people perception regarding the environmental and socio-cultural impact of ecotourism consisted of two sections. The first part of the questionnaire gathered demographic information. The second part consisted of item that utilizes a 5- point Liker scale. The anchors include strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree

Sample Size

Respondents younger than age 18 were automatically excluded. A total sample size of 110 local people participated in the study.

Research Question

How Does Ecotourism Affect the Quality of Life of Local Community?

Data Processing

In this study the method of collecting and gathering data from a part of population was used by the structured questionnaire. The software approach for the data analysis in this research was SPSS 12.version.