

Spiritual Tourism: A tool for Socio-Cultural and Sustainable Development

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Abstract: *With a landmark 1 billion tourists crossing international borders in 2012 alone, never before have so many travelled so widely, nor come into contact with such diverse expressions of spirituality, faith and culture. The interaction spurred by such encounters has the potential to evoke profound spiritual experiences and transformational spiritual growth. Moreover, the cultural exchange and dialogue evoked by spiritual tourism are the very cornerstones of mutual understanding, tolerance and respect, the fundamental building blocks of sustainability. Above all, attaining sustainability requires that the local traditions, spiritual values and rich cultural heritage of visited destinations are understood and respected, and that host communities can directly reap the benefits of tourism development. Hand in hand with economic and environmental concerns, it is essential that the social and cultural dimensions of tourism – including spiritual tourism – receive ever more consideration from decision makers and business leaders. This paper would present a way of healthy life by way of spirituality and control social crime, and also how the responsible and sustainable use of natural and cultural assets in the development of spiritual tourism can create employment opportunities, generate income, alleviate poverty, curb rural flight migration, prompt product diversification, and nurture a sense of pride among communities and destinations.*

Keywords: sustainable, traditions, spiritual, asset

1. Introduction

In the middle ages, people were tourists because of their religion, but now they are tourists because tourism is their religion.

- Robert Runcie, an English clergyman

Over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become the fastest growing economic sector in the world. Tourism has become a thriving global industry and is one of the major sectors of the economy across the globe contributing a large proportion of the national income and generating huge employment opportunities. Looking at the great potential of this sector almost all the countries are focusing their efforts in promoting tourism and are making policies to attract all types of tourists i.e. inbound, outbound as well as domestic. Tourism has a multipurpose and multifaceted aims and objectives. The boom in tourism has brought to the fore a large number of tangible and intangible elements that have economic, eco logical, and cultural ramifications.

The 21st century is the century of tourism magic-the most potent weapon of name, fame and reward. A key element of a successful tourism industry is the ability to recognize and deal with change across a wide range of behavioral and technological factors and the way they interact. Today we see the major changes due to shifts in the leisure and tourism environment reflecting changing consumer values, political forces and explosive growth of information technology. In mature markets the trend away from long trip to short breaks has increased the demand for leisure facilities to the source markets. There is also a counter trend towards high yield and extended vacations that are purpose driven by education, spirituality, wellness, or other forms of programmed self-improvement. The trend toward environment enhancement, heritage protection and spirituality along with anticipation of local people to promote tourism at regional level are the great assets and will be important step in the direction of

natural resource management to meet with calamities and disaster and there is no doubt that Spiritual Tourism would really be a great asset to the economy. The destination in wellness tourism is often an alternative space in which one can engage in self analysis without the stresses and distractions of home. The addition of a supportive, like-minded 'community' can sometimes help to further encourage the individual on a journey of self-discovery.

2. Objective

This paper aims to fulfill the following purposes:

- To study the motives of foreign tourists behind visiting ashrams.
- To study the experience of foreign tourists visiting ashrams in Rishikesh
- To spread the awareness of spiritual tourism.
- To utilize spiritual tourism as a tool of socio-cultural and sustainable development

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed, included the use of secondary data, current papers on spiritual tourism and current books which formed the theoretical bases of this paper.

4. Literature Review

A tourist destination can be considered as a complex product of tourism industry consisting of natural resources, distinctive local features, infrastructure, superstructure, services, and cultural attributes (McIntosh and Goeldner, 1990; Inskeep, 1991; Kim, 1998). Most of the studies related to tourism have focused on developing the conceptual framework to create destination image. The image of a tourist destination is an impression that a person holds about a state in which they do not reside (Hunt, 1975). It can be considered as the mental construct developed by a potential

tourist on the basis of a few selected impressions among the pool of total impressions (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). It can be viewed as the sum of the beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has about a destination (Crompton, 1979). Studies have been carried out to find out the attractiveness of a tourist destination based on attributes of a destination (Gearingm, 1974; Ritchie and Jins, 1978; Tang and Rochananond, 1990). Some studies proposed the image building towards a tourist destination based on the feelings, belief and opinion that individuals have about a destination's perceived capacity to provide satisfaction in relation to their different levels of needs (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Latest studies emphasize on both multi-attribute approach and holistic impressions of the tourist site to find out its image (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Choi, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004). The information provided through various advertising media arouses lot of interest and expectations in the minds of the visitors about the tourist destination in respect of its key attributes and support services, creating a powerful impression in the minds of the visitors about the destination (Un and Crompton, 1990; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999, Beerli and Martin, 2004).

5. Spiritual Tourism in India

In the Western world, it is currently in vogue to practice elements of far-off religions and spiritually-driven practices. Yoga studios are cropping up all over the United States, as are practitioners of meditation, and believers in Ayurvedic medicine. It is no surprise that some of these individuals take an interest in journeying to the birthplace of their new found beliefs, and in doing so they participate in "spiritual tourism". India is perhaps the most popular destination for so-called spiritual tourism, and it is a logical selection based on the number

6. Role of Rishikesh and Spirituality in Indian Tourism

People from across the world now come to India for Ayurveda, yoga and meditation in Rishikesh, Uttaranchal that is practiced since centuries. In fact India has fast emerged as a health tourism destination because of these. Since time immemorial, India has been known for its spirituality, religious and yoga tolerance and its secular character. India is called the "Yoga-Bhoomi" and the gateway to the heavens. India is internationally renowned for its ancient healing practices and alternative therapies. For more than thousands of years now, we have followed our own indigenous healing systems and medicinal practices such as Ayurveda, Naturopathy, and Pranic Healing to name just a few. It is no wonder then that people from all over the world are turning to the Indian sub continent for guidance towards a more spiritually satisfying way of life. of religions that began in India and still flourish there today.

Places of Interest:

- Triveni Ghat
- Bharat Mandir
- Lakshman Jhula
- Nilkantha Mahadev
- Kaishanand Mission Ashram

7. Elements of Spiritual Experience

Ashrams

Ashrams are typically set deep in the natural world and at the simplest level are a place of religious hermitage. Typically inhabitants of the ashram are involved in activities like yoga, music, or meditation.

Gurus

The role of the guru varies with different religious practices, but they are uniformly respected and revered. Additionally, one need not be in residence at an ashram to follow a particular guru.

Yoga

Yoga is a way of life that offers guidelines for behavior and beliefs, and the "asanas" (poses) are one small aspect of these guidelines. Although yoga stems from the Vedas and the Hindu religion, it has been co-opted by those of many different faiths.

8. Results and Discussions

1) Motives of foreign tourists behind visiting ashrams.

- Majority of foreign tourists visiting Rishikesh believe that religious places give a peace of mind and they feel spiritually satisfied. That's why they prefer to make their trips to religious places rather than adventurous, historical or exotic sites.
- Approximately half of the tourists believe in Indian religion and customs and enjoy the rituals followed in Indian tradition. They have an urge to learn about the religious importance of Haridwar, ashrams and Holy Ganges.
- Foreign tourists like Holy Ganges, prayers at night at the bank of Ganges, temples, Indian cuisines, sermons and interaction with monks.
- Foreign tourists are likely to celebrate and participate in Indian festivals. They feel very pleasant and more satisfying in their lives. • Some of the foreign tourists are even eager to visit Satpuris including Ayodhya, Mathura, Kashi, Kanchi, Ujjain and Dwarka.
- They believe that they are not looking for luxury but their arduous journey to meet the divine goal to make life simple and more fulfilling and rewarding.

2) Experiences of foreign tourists visiting ashrams in Rishikesh.

- Drinking water is a necessity for everybody. But the available water at Rishikesh is insalubrious. The visitors had to buy a mineral water bottle every day.
- Assistance offices
- The poor availability of tourist offices at Rishikesh was another issue, which cropped up as a problem for the foreign tourists.
- Facility of a tour guide
Poor availability of a guide was yet another problem faced by them (especially by the ones from France and Russia). Unfamiliarity with local language and lack of information were the problems faced by tourist due to the non-availability of a bilingual guide who can converse with them in their language.
- Misguiding tour operators

Most of the tourists complained that the tour operators duped the tourists by misguiding them about the various transport facilities available.

- **Accessibility**
Rishikesh lacks the accessibility ease. Airline facility is not available and the road infrastructure is also problematic. One-sided lanes for roads and narrow railway gauge make the journey slow and risky.
- **Security**
Majority of the tourists considered it to be unsafe while traveling in buses or walking on streets because of the pickpockets and thieves.
- **Donations seekers**
The tourists complained that they were often forced to cough-up money as aids and donation at the ghats by non-authorized people.
- **Quality standards at hotels**
Accommodation facilities of various hotels were quite dissatisfactory for the tourists. Quality of cleanliness was found to be really very poor. Illiteracy is also a major hurdle in communication. The language barrier was another problem in communication with the local residents.
- **Credit card acceptance**
Due to lacks of credit card acceptance facility, tourists have to carry money along with them which is not safe.
- **Recreational facilities**
Tourists find the Indian culture (traditions, music, dance, etc) fascinating and they carry zest for experiencing our culture.
- **Expectations of tourists**
Many tourists craved that some local events should be conducted like cultural dances. Some even said that there should have been professional instructors for teaching yoga.

9. Economic Impact of Spiritual Tourism in Rishikesh

Uttarakhand was carved out of Uttar Pradesh and given an independent status as the tenth Himalayan state of the Indian Union on 9th November, 2000. Tourism has been playing a major role in building and sustaining the economy of this nascent state. Tourism has been a major driver of economic growth and livelihood promotion in most of the remote areas of Uttarakhand(Rishikesh is one of them). The income earned from tourists by providing various services including transportation, food and beverage, pony and porter services, etc. sustain the livelihood of people of Rishikesh. Interesting information available with Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board is that about 58.2% of the international tourists's visits were for holiday/ sightseeing, 21.9% for health/yoga, and about 19.4% for pilgrimage/ religious functions in Rishikesh. For domestic tourists, on the other hand, the main purpose of 44.2% of the tourist visit was pilgrimage/religious while that of 43.6% was holiday / sightseeing. Spiritual beliefs of common Indian people contribute to this observed higher ratio of domestic spiritual tourists. It is important to note that during the year 2007, approximately 21% of the total international tourists visiting the state were spiritual tourists. It is clear from the Table that there have been increasing trends in the number of tourists to

the both in total and spiritual. Significantly, there has been a big jump in the inflow of tourists to Rishikesh during the year 2010 with respect to the corresponding number in the year 2009; whereas there were fluctuations in the total numbers in the preceding nine years. Thus, if the number of spiritual tourist can be enhanced through various motivational/promotional programmes, the revenue earned by the state can be significant.

Total Number of tourists visiting Rishikesh during the years 2000 – 2010 (Data source: UTDB, 2011).

Year	Domestic	International	Total
2000	230,857	6,414	2,37,271
2001	224,792	6,536	2,31,328
2002	268,882	4,573	2,73,455
2003	220,097	6,047	2,26,144
2004	323,734	5,918	3,29,652
2005	369,573	5,538	3,75,111
2006	329,392	5,912	3,35,304
2007	558,062	5,109	5,63,171
2008	551,495	5,052	5,56,547
2009	581,869	4,550	5,86,419
2010	1,093,164	5,548	10,98,712

10. Economic Beneficiaries of Spiritual Tourism

1. Religious – Religious Stakeholders are mainly those who live in or are attracted to Rishikesh due to spiritual purposes. **a. Ashrams**- These are many big organizations like the Divine Life Society and Swarg ashram which are run by trusts. They are involved in charitable work like running hospitals and giving out kutirs and at the same time spread the spiritual message. **b. Temples**- There are many temples in Rishikesh, devoted to many different Gods, like the Neelkanth temple in the middle of Rajaji National park and the Satyanarayan Mandir next to Laxman Jhula. There is also a prominent Sikh Guradwara a little out of Rishikesh called Hemkund Sahib. So it is a focal point for the meeting of many religions. **c. Kutirs**- Many saints are leased small huts by bigger organizations for meditation, like the ones given on the left bank by Swarg Ashram. **d. Pilgrims**- From all over India and the world, Pilgrims tend to start the Char Dham Yatra from Rishikesh. Hindus especially prefer to bathe in the Ganges as it is believed that the Ganges will wash away their sins.

2. Cultural: **a. Gemstones**-There are many Jewellery and gem shops all over Rishikesh selling amber, amethyst, crystal, sapphire, rudraksh and other stones of religious significance. They import these from outside but because of the sheer volume of tourists, it is a very good marketing place. **b. Woodwork** –A lot of wooden handicrafts and statuettes are sold in Rishikesh. Child labor is used to produce wooden toys, beads, bracelets and curios. The wood is imported from other places. **c. Bookshops**- There is a lot of bookshops selling books on religion and spirituality for the tourists. **d. Religious Accessories and Ganges water**- A lot of shops sell incense and herbs which are very culturally significant. Ganges water is also available for sale at Rs. 5 per litre. **e. Yoga** –There are many yoga instructors and

schools and many spas also offer traditional services to tourists like ayurveda and herbal massages.

3. Tourist:

a. Transport- A wide variety of vehicles such as Jeeps, Taxis, Ferries, Buses, Tempos and Motorboats, cater to the transportation needs of both the local and the tourist populations. Jeeps ply on the road through Rajaji National Park and they connect Laxman Jhula with Neelkanth Temple, carrying about 8 to 10 passengers. These jeeps do not have pollution checks and tend to be very noisy. Their drivers are ill trained and they drive extremely rashly through the mountain roads, endangering their own live and those of their passengers. Taxis are never local but interstate and they keep on transporting tourists from bigger cities to Rishikesh. Ferries and Motorboats are mainly for the thrill of being on the river and are a purely tourist attraction, though the latter is for speed lovers and big spenders. Buses work in the town but mostly connect the locals with the outside world. Tempos ply up and down the road along the right bank and are mainly used to connect Ram and Laxman Jhula for those in a hurry. Ferries and jeeps have governing bodies by the government and a person gets a seat by allotment, not booking. These two forms of transport are meant for bulk transport of people.

b. Travel Agencies- Rishikesh is filled with travel agencies all offering the same things hiking in the Himalayas, Rafting and Kayaking on the Ganges and camping on the banks of the river. The market is highly competitive with 50 or so companies working to woo tourists.

c. Eating- Rishikesh is filled with a variety of restaurants all offering multi-cuisine. Their specialty is that they are all vegetarian due to religious purposes. Also since there are a lot of foreign tourists, the restaurants are now offering Mexican, Italian, Israeli and German cuisine also. This food is relatively expensive while compared to North and South Indian but overall the food is very cheap for tourists from bigger cities. For increasing their service span, restaurants such as the Tip Top Restaurant send their cooks to Goa for training.

d. Living –There are a huge variety of living places for tourists and pilgrims alike – hotels, spas, guest houses and ashrams. Depending on what a person wants to do in Rishikesh, there is accommodation available. These can be five star or very small.

e. Foreign tourists- Compared to anywhere in India, except for probably Goa, Rishikesh might have the highest number of per capita tourists. There are many foreigners- Americans, Italians, Chinese, Britishers, Spaniards, Germans and people from many other countries seeking Yoga and spirituality. And there are two beaches on the left bank between Laxman Jhula and Ram Jhula. The foreigners enjoy sun bathing and having fun in the water. Also, they love the spas and massages that they get in various places all over Rishikesh.

f. Cyber Cafes – Rishikesh is teeming with Cyber Cafes, for use of foreign and Indian tourists. They are extremely well done up and provide decently fast high speed internet service.

4. Government:

a. GMVN-The Garhwal Mangal Vikas Nigam is an organization which is in charge of promoting tourism in the state of Uttarakhand. It plays a very important role in Rishikesh as its policies shape the tourist industry. It approves guest houses, gives rafting and paragliding licenses and builds infrastructure in order to benefit tourists and speed up the travel trade. It also performs checks into the

treatment of tourists.

b. Waterworks-The Public waterworks department of Rishikesh draws and purifies water from the Ganges and supplies it to the Residents in the area.

11. Marketing Strategies to Boost Spiritual Tourism in Rishikesh

The graph of tourist inflow in India is showing an upward trend. Effective marketing by ashrams to attract the maximum number of tourists include the following marketing strategies:

- Product strategies- • Organizing more events throughout the year. • Conducting short-term classes to teach Hindi language, Indian cuisines, Indian classical music and folk dances. • Conducting classes to teach Indian traditions. • Organizing cultural evenings. • More events throughout the day like some music concerts etc. • Availability of guides having the knowledge of different languages (Russian, Spanish, German, Japanese, French etc.). • Proper sanitation. • Good Hygiene. • Development of the infrastructure. • Strict vigil and law to stop and make Rishikesh free from illegal constructions. • Eco friendly projects. Pricing strategies- • Opening up of economical hotels in the region. • Coming up with more Economical ashrams. • Economical traveling for the passengers.
- Promotional strategies- • Publishing of materials in all major languages (Russian, Spanish, German, Japanese, French etc.) and providing the same on the various tourism web-sites so that tourists coming for different regions of world find it easy to reach and explore Rishikesh and Haridwar.
- Place Strategies – • Connecting Rishikesh with major tourism circuits. • Connecting Rishikesh by Rail and Air links with major tourist destinations. • Building an International Airport at Rishikesh. • Opening of Tourist help and guidance office at major places like railway station, bus-stand, airport in order to make their stay and journey easy and comfortable.

The Path Ahead IIMK Part XI – Health, Spiritual and Heritage Tourism IIML Conference on Tourism in India – Challenges Ahead, 15-17 May 2008, IIMK 463 Tourism industry is the largest employment generator of the world. India had always beckoned visitors from all over the world to experience its 5000 years old civilization. Even with the recent boom, industry experts say that in order to attract more visitors, India needs to upgrade its airports, roads and other infrastructure to global standards. The success of tourism industry will be largely determined by the success achieved on all strategic fronts. India needs to change its traditional marketing approach to one that is more competitive and modern. It needs to develop a unique market position, image and brand, which cannot be held by any other competitor. It can be done by presenting India as a place of spirituality, meditation and yoga. Places like Rishikesh and Haridwar which had already been known as the yoga capital of the world, still have a lot of potential to attract the tourists, especially the foreign tourists who are visiting to India for learning yoga and to give a break to their lives.

Strategies To Enhance Religious Tourism Through Corporate Market Responsibility (CRP)

- a) Marketers could participate in providing basic sanitary facilities along with they could promote their products viz. If X company sponsors the Free or Paid Rest room facilities, its products would only be sold. b) Marketers could also participate in constructing rooms for devotees to stay and promote their products
- b) Marketers could offer free/paid transportation facilities which will carry the promotion of their products/ services
- c) Pharmaceutical companies could sponsor free medical camps in which their products could be promoted
- d) Food products companies could set up their outlets to sell products with subsidized /actual prices
- e) Clothing/Garment companies could set up their stalls to promote their products and services. It clearly shows that there is enough room for marketers to participate in Corporate Market Responsibility which offers the dual benefit of offering services to the society as well to promote their products/services. This would definitely provide a lucrative mind space in potential target group in which would not have done by spending millions on conventional promotion tools.

Hence, it is the marketers and the state and central government could join their hands in order to generate business and employment opportunities as well to promote their products/services. The government could seek help from marketers to offer necessary infrastructure support viz. transportation, water and sanitation, power and other basic facilities which ensure the influx and pleasant stay of pilgrims.

1) Positive Impacts

Creation of job opportunities; local people are employed in different sectors of the tourism industry; opportunities for women. New fields for commercial activities; Tourism opens up new possibilities for ventures; attracts new investment in the city. Tourist spending; Tourist spending provides the necessary income for preserving and managing places of attraction. Such spending also becomes a source of revenues for municipal councils (eg.parking, tourist taxes etc). MULTIPLIER EFFECT: Tourist spending are spread in different sectors and create jobs and revenues on sectors indirectly related to the tourism industry; contribution to local wealth, economic development and regeneration.

2) Negative Impacts

Increased expenses for a town; Spending on cleaning garbage collection, water disposal lighting, marketing and promotion can impact severely on the municipal budget. Increase in the price of real states; Prices of land and houses increase; competition for the use of land; poorer section of the population sometimes have to move out of the town. General price increases; Retailers and suppliers increase the prices of goods services; segregation between tourists and locals; desertification or tourist appropriation of creation of ghettos of gentrification.

12. Conclusion

Spirituality is found to be one major attraction for international tourists in Rishikesh. This study Identifies

some basic features for Spiritual Tourism. Most important of them are that foreign tourists are not looking for luxury but arduous journeys to meet the divine goal or simple life & the technology, which makes traveling easier. An extensive market research programme should be launched in the target source markets and tourism products developed to cater to the interests of each source market. An effective and ongoing market representation presence should be established with the travel trade in each source market and an Internet portal should be set up in various languages to provide information. The government should represent India as a destination of yoga and spirituality. Various policies should be made to encourage the tourists from the various parts of the globe. Rishikesh has outstanding tourism products and has potential to become a major spiritual tourism destination. The city has a greater value for domestic tourist because of its spiritual sites. There has been a phenomenal increase in spiritual travelers in the recent years owing to generic changes in the people's attitude towards spirituality. No study has been carried out regarding the marketing and logistics aspects of spiritual tourism. Infrastructure has been reported as one of the important aspects in spiritual tourism marketing. There are many tourism products like fairs and festivals, handicrafts, proper transportation, accommodation that boost tourism of an area, but these are taking a back seat in Rishikesh as of now. It should be made an important and integral part of spiritual tourism. Foreign tourists visit Rishikesh to get a satisfaction with divine spirituality and self discovery. The temple, the river and the tranquil environment and hygiene at the hotel rooms of Rishikesh are highly appreciated by all foreign tourists. Although they feel quite satisfied with visit to Rishikesh but still a gap exist between their expected and perceived services. The reasons for this gap have been identified as poor conditions of ordinary buses and share taxies plying between tourist places, awful maintenance of city road was well as in the rural areas, traffic congestion, and unhygienic condition of restaurant at Rishikesh. Based on this identification recommendation have been offered for eliminating the gap. This may result into a tourists delight and an increase in tourist arrivals at Uttaranchal. This Case study based investigations has revealed facts about the specific spiritual activity centers Rishikesh and will help formulating tourism management strategies. The tourism marketing for Rishikesh needs to change from its traditional marketing approach to one that is more competitive and modern. It needs to develop a unique market position, image and brand, which cannot be held by any other competitor. It can be done by presenting Rishikesh as a place of spirituality, meditation and yoga. Places like Rishikesh which had already been known as the yoga capital of the world, still have a lot of potential to attract the tourists, especially the foreign tourists who are visiting to India for learning yoga and discovering their spiritual side.

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