

# Emergence of Spiritual Tourism and Its Impact on Hospitality Industry with Special Reference to Uttarakhand Region

Yashwant Singh Rawal\*, Vikas Sah\*\*

## Abstract

Spirituality, in general, has recently emerged as an important subject of research in social and business areas. This has given birth to a new dimension to the tourism industry, called 'Spiritual tourism'. It has been observed that there has been an increase in the awareness and research interest in the thematic field of spiritual tourism. Tourism is an age old activity associated with civilized nations around the world. Thus, tourism literature too carries a long history along with it. However, there are very few areas in tourism which has been taken through the domain of scientific investigation only recently. Spiritual tourism is one such area in which only a few researchers had carried out their work in a systematic and scientific way.

Uttarakhand is a state located in the Northern Himalayan Region in India and it has been a prime spot of tourism due to its magnificently diverse landscapes, high biodiversity enough religious tourist potential and rich cultural heritage. Tourism has also generated a good source of income and employment to youths and rural masses. Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the global economy. Tourism has significant environmental, cultural, social, and economic effects, both in positive and negative terms. Tourism has been noted as the world's largest and fastest growing industry. Tourism, as a major service sector industry in state's economy, has multi-dimensional impacts on the society such as Economic, Social and Cultural, Environmental, Crowding and congestion, Community attitudes, Services and Taxes.

The emergence of Spiritual tourism has given a boost to the tourism industry when we talk about the tourism trends in Uttarakhand region. Although, people used to travel to satisfy their religious beliefs since ages but the concept of Spiritual Tourism is bit different from pilgrimage or religious tourism and can be promoted

well as a tremendous tourism product to yield better results in Uttarakhand. Presence of some amazing and unmatched spiritual destination in Uttarakhand, aids to the enhancement and promotion of Spiritual tourism in the state.

The main objectives of the paper is to focus on emerging trends and other aspects of Spiritual tourism that has a direct or indirect impact on Hospitality Industry operating in the region. This paper focuses on the emerging trends of spiritual tourism oriented research activities and explores the potentials for future work in tourism research. This paper is an analysis of the available and relevant literatures in the field of spiritual tourism with special emphasis on the Uttarakhand state of India. This paper will also discuss the challenges and problems that comes in the way in order to introduce new trends to the field of Tourism and Hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Tourism, Impact, Emerging Trends, Hospitality Industry

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered as one of the largest industries in the world. According to the World Travel and Tourism (WTT) Council, tourism and travel have become a global industry and is widely considered to be one of the fastest growing industries (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2006). Based on the forms, nature, preferences, purposes, etc., tourism can be divided in the categories such as Ethnic Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Historical Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Environmental Tourism, Recreational Tourism, Rural Tourism, Wellness Tourism, Pilgrim Tourism, Medical Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Business tourism,

\* Associate Professor, Faculty of Hotel management, Pacific University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India.  
Email: yashwantr84@gmail.com

\*\* Research Scholar, Faculty of Hotel management, Pacific University, Udaipur, Rajasthan.

Health tourism, Nature tourism, Adventure tourism, Agro-tourism and many more. Tourism act as a prime economic vehicle for many countries, due to the income generated by the consumption of goods and hospitality services by tourists, the taxes levied on businesses in the tourism industry, and the opportunity for employment in the service industries associated with tourism.

Concept of Spiritual tourism has been recently developed in marketing, sociology and business research. The reason why this term came into existence is the importance of foreign tourist to any destination. Tourist flying in to any country from another nation brings a whole new set of business opportunities and foreign exchange.

The word 'spirituality' is one of the major factors that heave the foreign tourists to any second or third world countries. The importance of foreign exchange in any developing nation is the same as the need of a lifesaving drug for dying person. The amount of people that visits religious places such as Varanasi, Mecca, Madina, Kashi etc. are increasing constantly every year. There are two aspects of religious tourism in India, One is the faith, beliefs, motivation of domestic tourist who has spiritual attachment. Other is foreign religious tourist who belongs to different religion, region or country, coming to India for exploring spirituality diverse from their own (Strategic initiatives & government advisory team: April (2012).

The sudden shift of people attention towards spirituality has resulted a noticeable change on number of industries other than just tourism. The reason for that is the way it has been marketed as a self-actualization product, as social phenomena and personal well-being, but the most affected industry among all with the concept of spirituality, is Tourism. (Brownstein 2008: Fernand & Jackson 2006: Lewis & Geroy 2000: Mitroff & Denton 1990: Cohen 1972: Tilson 2005: Smith & Kelly 2006). Now a day's tourism is budding service industry in India because 20% of revenue generated from movement of domestic tourist who visit spiritual places. Above 70% of domestic tourist visit spiritual places every year (Cox & Kings).

## **SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN UTTARAKHAND**

As Uttarakhand is considered as the spiritual capital of India. The state offers a number of unmatched destinations to the tourists for quenching their spiritual thirsts, for holidaying and for sporting thrills. The mid Himalayan region consist of Garhwal and Kumaon, which are known

by the name Kedarkhand and Manashkhand in the *Purans*, is known as Uttarakhand today. This entire hilly region covers an area of 53,483 square kilometer, which is 1.63 percent of India's total area, comprises of 16,828 villages in 13 districts. Uttarakhand extends from 28° 43' N to 31° 27' N longitude and 77° 34' E to 81° 02' E latitude. The state in the northern part of India is surrounded by Nepal in the East, China in the North, Himachal Pradesh in the west and U.P. in the South.

In Uttarakhand tourism is considered to be an important source of economic and social development. As Tourism products and hospitality services are the two major pillars of tourism industry and it is quite important to understand the role of these factors and their respective impacts on certain fields. Tourism, as a major service sector industry in state's economy, has multi-dimensional impacts on the society such as Economic, Social and Cultural, Environmental, Crowding and congestion, Community attitudes, Services and Taxes. Each of these impacts has both positive and negative aspects. Some of the features that describe the positive impacts are, it creates ample of employment and business opportunities in sectors like food, transport, education and hospitality, it aids in improving a state's infrastructure, it brings capital and foreign currency to a state's economy. However, at the same time, it could adversely affect the region with factors like Environmental disturbance, congestion, price rise, creating temporary scarcity of land, labor, and housing etc. Thus, it is important to adopt a scientific method to analyze the possible impacts of Spiritual tourism on hospitality industry of a state that has significant tourism potential. Appropriate strategy to tap these potentials could yield effectively for the growth and advancement of hospitality services that will help in providing a better experience for the tourist and encourage return visits.

On 9<sup>th</sup> November 2000, Uttarakhand was separated from Uttar Pradesh and given an independent status as the tenth Himalayan state of the Indian Union. Tourism has been playing a major role in building and sustaining the structure of this nascent state. Tourism plays a crucial role in overall growth and livelihood promotion in most of the remote areas of Uttarakhand. The income earned from tourists by providing various services including food and beverage, transportation, lodging and porter services, etc. sustain the livelihood of several villages in the remote hilly regions of the state. An interesting fact about tourism in Uttarakhand is that the number of tourists to the state,

both domestic and international, has been increasing. The districts of Kumaon region have been remaining the major source of attraction and pilgrimage and religious sites for the centuries, such as

- Narayan Swami Ashram (Pithoragarh),
- Mirtola Ashram (Ramgarh),
- Mayawati Ashram (Champawat),
- R Reetha Sahib Gurudwara (Champawat),
- Jageshwar Dham (Almora),
- Baghnath Temple (Bageshwar),
- Nanda Devi Temple (Nainital),
- Kaichee Dham (Nainital) and many more other tourist destinations.

Thus, if Spiritual tourism can be enhanced through various motivational/promotional programs, the tourism sector will surely get a noticeable boost in the region.

Tourism has become a competitive industry in the Uttarakhand state of India in the recent years. The location of the region and its richness in biodiversity has become a place of attraction for tourism industry. This state has the state-of-the-art infrastructure so as to develop tourism industry to its best. Uttarakhand being the land of hills, mountains, plateaus, rivers, forest and varieties of exotic flora and fauna attracts large number of foreign tourist to this place.

Globally number of Spiritual tourists has been on the rise in the recent years. India being one of the most preferred spiritual destinations has witnessed the impact, particularly, in the holy places in the Northern India. Tourism industry in the state act as a prime source of income generation; several areas of Uttarakhand already got recognition as centers of pilgrimage tourism. Uttarakhand state is a unique tourist destination with excellent opportunities for development of a diverse range of products involving nature, spirituality, adventure, leisure etc. to satisfy a tourist's desire. Uttarakhand state promotes 'spiritual tourism' through its religious diversity and heritage. Other forms of tourism such as Eco-tourism hotels, spa, resorts, amusement parks and ropeways along with adventure tourism are also in the focus. The state is the first in the country to have created a tourism development board by legislation in 2001. Uttarakhand Tourism was also encouraged by the Government of India in 2003 by awarding the prestigious 'National

Tourism Award' in the category of "Best practices by the state government". Although government has been working very hard in promoting Uttarakhand tourism on the national and international platforms, Uttarakhand tourism is still struggling for making a mark on national and international map. Government keeps on launching different schemes and policies in order to provide a better experience to the tourists that could make them to visit again. Despite of all the efforts put by government and other private sectors there are lot of potential areas yet to be exploited. Hospitality standards, infrastructure and transports services needs to be upgraded to attract tourist from all over the world.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As we know, Tourism is an age old activity associated with civilized nations. Tourism has a long history if we look into the past. However, there are very few areas of tourism which are picked are taken through the domain of scientific and systematic investigation. Spiritual Tourism is one of the dimension of tourism very few researchers have worked on in a systematic way. Dr. Vinay Sharma Dr. Rajat Agrawal, Pramod Chandra, (2016) stated that spiritual tourism is a wider form of religious tourism whereby the visitors experience more than satisfying their beliefs. Spiritual tourism includes people who have been looking for peace but with a different perspective other than entertainment. Shingai N. Kagunda, (2016) mentioned that the state governments has now started to take 'Spiritual tourism' seriously, state tourism authorities, even the United Nations agency responsible for global tourism. Rachin Suri & Jitender Rao, (June 2014) stated Spiritual tourism is a term that has been recently developed in marketing, sociology and business research. Reason why this term came in use is the importance of foreign tourist to any destination. Tourist flying in to any nation from another country brings a whole new set of business and foreign exchange. Moushumi Banerjee, (2014) identifies some basic features for Spiritual Tourism. Most importantly the foreign tourists are not just looking for luxury but arduous journeys to meet the divine goal or simple life & the technology, which makes their traveling easier. Kavoura, (2013) said that Religious tourism focuses on the visitation of religious sites or destinations, in order to consolidate a particular faith, and development of identity that refers to spiritual or religious enlightenment. These places attract the attention of visitors, not only for religious reasons, but also in terms

of history, architecture or artistic value. Anita Medhekar, Dr. Farooq Haq, (2012) stated that spiritual tourism is a product emerges from the global need of people to be spiritually developed and aware, which seems to be embedded in religion but in fact it goes beyond the spirit of religion. Spiritual tourism is suggested to be a subset of special interest tourism that practically contains religious tourism and pilgrimage. Holman, Sharpley & Jepson, (2011): Raj & Morpeth 2007: Hall 2006: Tilson (2005) stated that Spiritual and religious tourism are still under research, there are undiscovered potentialities in the area waiting to be discovered. Herntrei & Pechlanner, Sharpley & Japson, (2011): Coachrane 2009: Finney, Orwing & Spake 2009: Geary 2008: Timothy & Olsen 2006: Rountree 2002) agreed that Many scholars from unique discipline in tourism, religious and spirituality, recognized that spiritual tourism has a unique identification. Halman, (2011): Burton (1855): Shackley (2002): Rountree (2002): Smith & Kelly (2006): Straitwell (2006): Timothy & Olsen (2006) defined 'Spiritual tourism' on the contrary is a term that's wider in scope as it has got religion as a mere part of it and spirituality makes a person explore more than just one religion. Spiritual tourism has become an informal part of tourism industry since a very long time. In the history, oral, archaeological, and written document suggests that people were affected by spiritual experience and use to travel for spiritual activities. Muhammad Farooq Haq, (August 2011) mentioned in his study that very religious tourist as well as pilgrims in search of God or a supreme power of God is a spiritual tourist, but every spiritual tourist may be or may not be pilgrims or religious tourist. Biswajit Satpathy & Debendra Mahalik, (2010) mentioned in his study that A spiritual tourist is also a tourist who visit to any place of their personal interest with a aim of spiritual growth concerned with his/her personal faith, there may or may not be any other religious and non-religious compulsion. Vinnie Jauhari Gunjan M. Sanjeev, (2010) stated that spiritual tourism has certain differences as compared with conventional tourism and there are certain distinct cultural underpinnings which are unique in spiritual and cultural tourism. Haq & Wong (2010): Raj & Morpeth, (2007) stated that Spiritual tourism is a new phenomenon for tourism industries to adopt marketing strategies, specifically branding. (Dev et al., (2009) suggested that positioning the spiritual tourism product using a market segmentation differentiation strategy is the most likely way to achieve a competitive advantage for business operators in the special interest tourism market. Haq and Jackson, (2009) Stated that

Someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without overt religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred, or experiential in nature, but within a Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling. Haq et al., (2008) stated that This trend has given recognition to the term spiritual tourism, which seems to be a new concept but is certainly not a new phenomenon with the rise of commercial packages and marketing efforts. Tilson, (2005), Jackowski, (1987), and McGettigan (2003), stated that Spiritual tourism is a niche form of religious tourism. Spiritual tourism aims to explore the elements of life that are beyond one's perception and help to balance the body-mind and spirit. It may or may not be related to religion. Visitors are trying to develop their own spirituality, or discover the spirituality of others. Browan, (1998): Coher 1979: Burton 1855) stated that Spiritual tourism is a new concept in tourism and business research but not a new phenomenon.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The information for this study were collected from the literature available related to Spiritual tourism. All the information is picked from the sources in which tourism activities are discussed especially focusing on Spiritual destinations. Majority of study is carried out through the available reviews and opinion of tourists as tourist visiting any tourist destination plays a key role in developing tourism opportunities in local region and communities. Mainly, this research is based on secondary data such as brochures, journals, books, newspapers, magazine, internet, advertisement etc.

## FINDINGS

As we sum up the matter related to the topic, there are many lessons to be drawn from the available literature on Spiritual tourism. Though the spiritual has deep reverence and rituals as well, the issues of professionalism, systematic channel and customer experience need to be better managed and executed. A dynamic and innovative approach needs to be adopted where different stakeholders come together to offer various linkage points for the tourist to encourage return visits.

Whether it is Hospitality, logistics, darshan (visit to the shrine/diety), everything need to be well planned and seamless by using technology and well equipped multiple customer service points.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study clearly demonstrated that Spiritual tourism is playing a major role in socio-economic development of the region. If appropriately used, such foreign exchange can purchase the investment goods necessary to support more broadly based economic development policies. Spiritual tourism-related interventions can play a role in raising the standard of living and in reducing the rate of unemployment in local communities. It is often necessary, however, to develop and implement policies that take advantage of the potential benefits of Spiritual tourism in socio-economic development.

As per the above study we can conclude that Uttarakhand region has tremendous potential to be developed as a prime Spiritual destination. This form of tourism has some serious positive impacts as we talk about Hospitality industry. Spiritual destinations could be well exploited in order to uplift the revenue and business generated through tourism. Tourism has opened new doors of opportunities in the region as its emergence has led to employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, better living standards, and overall eco-socio growth of the region. Hospitality standards and services has to be polished and refined to deliver best of the experience to the visitors that will encourage their return visit to the place. Lot of work is still needed to be done on the tourism policies and marketing promotional programs carried out by the state. Marketing of Spiritual tourism should be much more systematic and intense that will come handy to attract tourist from different part of the world.

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