

Pilgrimage Tourism in Uttarakhand: A Critical Review with Reference to the Char Dham Yatra**¹Dr. Subhash Chand***¹Assistant Professor (AC), School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani**²Dr. Lavkush Mishra**²Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, Dr. B R Ambedkar University, AgraDoi: <https://doi.org/10.36676/jrps.v15.i1.1647>

* Corresponding author

Accepted : 15/01/2024 Published: 29/03/2024

ABSTRACT

Uttarakhand, Dev Bhoomi, or the Abode of the Gods, is a land that deserves all of its nicknames. Despite its historical status as a pilgrimage destination, Uttarakhand is rapidly establishing itself as an attraction for adventure enthusiasts. An important part of Uttarakhand's economy is the travel and tourism sector. Review the numerous works of literature about Uttarakhand pilgrim tourism in relation to "the Char Dham Yatra" in this article. It concluded that pilgrim tourism in Uttarakhand, particularly along the Char Dham Yatra, holds immense potential due to its spiritual significance, scenic beauty, and cultural heritage. However, inadequate infrastructure and limited connectivity, especially in remote areas, hinder its full development. Enhanced accommodation, roadways, and ropeways are essential for increasing accessibility and boosting both domestic and international pilgrim inflow. A comprehensive master plan promoting infrastructure, awareness, and sustainable tourism is crucial to unlock untapped destinations, enhance visitor experience, and support local community development, thereby positioning Uttarakhand as a prominent global pilgrimage tourism hub.

Keywords: Dev Bhoom, Pilgrim Tourism, Uttarakhand, India, Char Dham Yatra, Yamunotri, Gangotri, Badrinath, Kedarnath, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every year, tourists go to India, a country rich in culture and prosperity, to engage in religious, spiritual, and educational activities. India experiences an annual surge in pilgrimage, which includes both domestic and international travellers. Kedarath, Badrinath, and Banaras are a few pilgrimage locations that continue to be popular tourist destinations. The emergence of pilgrimage tourism has served as a means to generate employment, alleviate destitution, and promote sustainable development in any pilgrimage site [1]. The term "pilgrim" refers to a person who travels to a place of worship for religious reasons and has a particular meaning. Tourists and pilgrims are on each side of the liaison symposium. The tourist as a shallow hedonist has often been juxtaposed with the image of the devout pilgrim [2]. One of India's most important pilgrimage sites is Uttarakhand, which is known as the "dev Bhoomi." Every year, a number of pilgrims are drawn to the Char Dham yatra. One of the biggest contributors to the state's economy is pilgrimage tourism. Our nation's most popular tourism destination is Uttarakhand [3].

Yamunotri, Gangotri, Badrinath, and Kedarnath are the four beneficial pillars of Dev Bhoomi in Uttarakhand. Nestled in the tranquil heights of the vast Himalayas sits Char Dham. Since it is said that visiting these shrines aids in achieving "moksha," they are regarded as the main focal point of the Hindu religion [4]. The foundation of Uttarakhand's revenue-generating system is the char dham. The captivating natural beauty of the Alkananda River envelops the pilgrimage site. Comparably, the size of "the Mandakini river valley" and its downstream regions around the Kedarnath temple in



Rudraprayag district [5]. Surprisingly, Char Dham's annual inflow of both incoming and outgoing visitors has an upward trend throughout the course of the decade. The most ancient form of tourism has been the practice of pilgrimage to the highest range since the beginning of time [6]. "The Garhwal Himalaya" is famous for its extensive pilgrimage tourism, which often takes the shape of local festivals organised via official processes and visits to highland shrines. Since "pilgrimage tourism" is a crucial component of the threshold, conventional farming is one of the dangers to the lives of the local population. One of the main drivers of socioeconomic growth is the practice of pilgrimage tourism. Local residents have access to job options thanks to pilgrimage tourism [7], [8].

A. Pilgrim Tourism

A pilgrimage is a trip to a sacred location that can result in a personal transformation, following which the pilgrim resumes to their daily routine. A pilgrim, derived from the Latin peregrinus, is a person who is travelling to a sacred location; in other words, someone who has travelled a great distance [9]. The journey is typically a physical one, frequently undertaken on foot, to a location that holds particular significance for the adherent of a specific religious belief system. The act of travelling to pilgrimage places is basically known as pilgrimage tourism. The primary purpose of these destinations is religious, and they may have even served as an early form of tourism [10]. For religious reasons, pilgrimages are usually lengthy trips that last many days, weeks, or even months. People of faith go on this journey to deepen their connection to their faith. Pilgrimage tourism, on the other hand, might include going to certain churches, mosques, or other places of worship in the city you may be vacationing in. It is not necessary for the journey to be lengthy and drawn-out, as is the case with a typical pilgrimage. Rather, it can be a brief visit that is incorporated into any other form of tourism [11].

B. Char Dham in Uttarakhand

With its many temples, Uttarakhand—also referred to as "Devbhoomi or the Land of Gods"—welcomes pilgrims throughout the year. The Char Dham Yatra is one of the most well-known of the many spiritual destinations and circuits that pilgrims go to in Uttarakhand. The four sacred locations—Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath—that are tucked away high in the Himalayas are visited during this yatra or pilgrimage. 'Char' signifies four in Hindi, whereas 'dham' denotes places of worship. Every year, the high-altitude shrines are closed for about half of the year [12]. They open in April or May during the summer and close in October or November when winter arrives. It is widely held that "the Char Dham Yatra" should be completed in the clockwise direction. As a result, the pilgrimage begins in Yamunotri, continues to Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. The trip may be completed by air (helicopter options are available) or by road. Some followers even go to the shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath as part of a pilgrimage known as the Do Dham Yatra [10]. The Yamunotri temple is devoted to the goddess Yamuna and is located in the Uttarkashi district at the source of the Yamuna River, which is the second-most holy river in India after the Ganga. Gangotri, a shrine to the Goddess Ganga, the holiest of all Indian rivers, is also located in the Uttarkashi district. Kedarnath, a temple devoted to Lord Shiva, is situated in the Rudraprayag district. Lord Vishnu is worshipped at Badrinath, which is also the location of the revered Badrinath Temple. "The Char Dham Yatra" fulfils the soul and is both difficult and magnificent [13].

C. The Spiritual Significance of Char Dham

Translating to "four abodes," Char Dham alludes to the four sacred locations that are said to purify the soul and bring about salvation.



Yamunotri: The Goddess Yamuna is worshipped at this temple, which is the Yamuna River's source. In the belief that the hot springs at the temple cleanse sins, pilgrims come to bathe in them.

Gangotri: Devotees come here to conduct rituals and seek blessings from the Goddess Ganga's temple, which is located where the Ganges River originates.

Kedarnath: Lord Shiva is worshipped at this temple, which is tucked away in the Garhwal Himalayas. Both pilgrims and hikers find it more appealing because of its distant position, which necessitates a trip.

Badrinath: One of the most popular temples, it is devoted to Lord Vishnu and draws both visitors and devout.



Figure 1 (a) Pilgrims are in queue for worshipping Lord Vishnu at Badrinath, (b) pilgrims are standing in front of the Kedarnath temple, (c) the Gangotri temple remains snow-clad during four months of winter, and (d) the pilgrims trekking 16 km to Yamunotri temple [14]

D. Economic Impact on Uttarakhand's Tourism

One of the main factors supporting Uttarakhand's tourist industry has been the Char Dham Yatra:

Employment Generation: Many employment in local guide services, transportation, and hotels have been generated by the trip.

Infrastructure Development: In order to handle the increasing number of tourists, the state has made investments in improved highways, lodging, and healthcare facilities.

Promotion of Local Culture: Cultural tourism is promoted by pilgrims' frequent interaction with local craftspeople, food, and customs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

(Rauthan & Pant, 2023) [15] There are numerous positive and negative consequences to this type of tourism. Natural and cultural marvels abound in "the Holy Mountain of Dev Bhumi Uttarakhand", which is also referred to as the Land of God and Goddess. There is "spiritual, cultural, touristic,



sacramental, or financial value" in every square inch of Uttarakhand. For decades, the well-known tourist destination Pauri Garhwal has served as a centre for pilgrimages and religion. The tourist sector offers several social and economic benefits, making it strategically significant to the Indian economy. The tourism business provides a number of important economic benefits, including jobs, cash, and foreign exchange. Other industries, such as building, handicrafts, and agriculture, gain from the expansion and advancement that tourism may bring.

(SATI, 2023) [14] The purpose of this page is to outline "pilgrimage tourism in the Uttarakhand", including trends and inflows of pilgrims. The availability of transport and lodging infrastructure was the primary cause of the shift in pilgrimage numbers during these mountain and valley pilgrimages. There is variation in the patterns of pilgrims' inflows during the time period. In addition to causing soil degradation and obstacles, climate-induced disasters may have disastrous effects on the state of Uttarakhand. During the monsoon season, when there is abundant rainfall, the Himalayan pilgrimage season takes place. The overall number of pilgrims has changed as a result of the high unpredictability in rainfall. According to this report, if appropriate tourist infrastructure is provided, pilgrimage tourism offers enormous potential for the Uttarakhand Himalaya's economic growth.

(Banerjee & Sharma, 2022) [13] This article attempts to evaluate the issue and the potential for tourism growth in the state, as well as to shed light on the patterns of domestic and international visitor traffic to Uttarakhand. An intriguing finding was that, as a result of a lower carbon footprint, "tourism in Uttarakhand" has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. This suggests that, in the future, the tourism sector will need to include sustainable and eco-friendly practices in addition to focussing on its restoration. In addition to concentrating on other environmental factors and introducing new ideas in tourism, the study recommended that the state make use of Uttarakhand's rich cultural heritage and beautiful scenery for its socio-economic development, given the state's enormous potential as a tourist destination.

(SATI, 2020) [16] The nature of tourism and the influx of pilgrims and tourists in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand's natural areas, pilgrimage sites, and administrative towns and cities are examined in this article. It has been noted that the inflow of pilgrims is much greater in pilgrimages than in "natural locales and administrative towns/cities". Furthermore, between 2000 and 2018, almost 50% of pilgrims travelled to the two river valley pilgrimages of Haridwar and Rishikesh. The author noted that not all tourist and pilgrim places had the same pattern of influx of visitors. Inaccessibility, a lack of infrastructure, and natural calamities have all been shown to have an impact on the number of visitors and pilgrims visiting the Uttarakhand Himalaya.

(Semwal & Upreti, 2019) [10] The devbhoomi, Uttarakhand, serves as one of the nation's main pilgrimage sites. Each year, thousands of tourists go to the Chardham Yatra. Indeed, a significant portion of the state's revenue comes from pilgrimage tourism. In June 2013, the tourism industry was severely impacted by the sudden floods in Kedarnath, which resulted in the deaths of countless pilgrims and left numerous others stranded. "THE HIMALAYAN TSUNAMI" was even coined due to the extent of the devastation. The study examines the attitudes of travellers prior to as well as following the catastrophe. To investigate the tourism trends in the Chardham area, a research of both domestic and international visitors has been conducted. Despite being intangible beliefs, religion, faith, and customs can still be quantified by the number of individuals who visit a location within a specific time frame. Additionally, this paper examines the faith and unwavering spirit of tourists both prior to and subsequent to the disasters, in addition to the quantity of tourists who arrived. Chardham is the sole destination for the study's data on tourist influx from 2008 to 2018.

(Joshi & Saxena, 2019) [17] Uttarakhand is the subject of the present research because it offers pilgrimage tourism, making it one of the Himalaya's most significant tourist destinations. The whole tourist population is drawn to this hill state because of its stunning forest, snow-capped mountains, and sacred pilgrimage site. The state is still in its infancy, and tourism is crucial to expanding job possibilities and giving the locals a means of subsistence. There are socioeconomic and ecological repercussions from the state's tourist industry. Because of the massive infrastructure development projects being undertaken for tourist promotion, including the estimation of the carrying capacity for tourism, mountain tourism has to be given top priority. The goal of this research is to better understand Uttarakhand's religious tourist destinations and provide recommendations for enhancements.

(UNIYAL, 2019) [18] The paper examines pilgrimage tourism, which is regarded as one of the most prevalent and ancient forms of tourism. These locations are the focus of important pilgrimages that draw tourists from all around the globe. A questionnaire survey approach was used to ascertain the present status of the mix of marketing communications in pilgrimage tourism. Two theories were developed in order to achieve the goal of the aim. ANOVA, or single factor examination of variance, was used to analyse the connection among a dependent variable and an interval variable. The test of Bartlett and Levene was used to confirm homogeneity of variance. The analysis's findings are used to formulate recommendations for Uttarakhand's communications strategy and the development and marketing of pilgrimage sites.

(Nath, 2018) [19] During pre-colonial times, pilgrims from all across India travelled to the four sacred places known as the char dhams in the Garhwal Himalayas, which were profoundly ecological and sensory experiences. The pilgrims' sensual, acting, and thinking personae were seen by colonial officials as nothing more than suffering bodies. Officials carried out conservation plans, forestry projects, and road construction in ways that made caste and class disparities in the pilgrimage worse. A high-Hindu, upper-caste narrative of the yatra's significance was favoured in both "state gazetteers and neo-Hindu guidebooks". I contend that the centre of the sacrosanct has progressively shifted from the transitory encounters of pilgrims with the world of nature to the precincts of temples.. According to my argument, this historical trajectory explains the government's current aspirations to construct "all-weather highways" to connect the char dhams in the post-colonial setting.

III. CONCLUSION

The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand, comprising the sacred pilgrimages of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri, holds immense spiritual significance for both domestic and foreign pilgrims. The review highlights that pilgrimage tourism in the Uttarakhand Himalayas has substantial potential for development, particularly due to its spiritual appeal, scenic beauty, and cultural richness. However, inadequate infrastructure remains a key challenge. Pilgrimage centers with better connectivity, such as Badrinath and Kedarnath—linked by all-weather roads and air services, respectively—witness significantly higher pilgrim inflow. This trend underscores the need for enhanced accessibility, including road and ropeway connectivity to remote pilgrimage sites like Yamunotri. Furthermore, accommodation and essential facilities must be upgraded to meet the growing demand. The relatively low inflow of international pilgrims—restricted mainly to better-connected sites like Kedarnath—points to the need for targeted promotion at the global level. A comprehensive tourism master plan, focused on infrastructure development, international outreach, and local community engagement, is essential. Promoting untapped destinations, preserving cultural and natural heritage, and leveraging unique regional offerings such as cuisine, adventure, and heritage tourism can help transform Uttarakhand into

a globally recognized spiritual tourism hub while contributing meaningfully to the local economy and sustainable development.

REFERENCE

- [1] P. Rani, "Pilgrimage tourism and sustainable development : Significance and challenges before pilgrimage tourism in India," *Int. J. Humanit. Soc. Sci. Res.*, vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 116–122, 2022.
- [2] R. Bora and H. B. Rout, "Issues and challenges in pilgrimage tourism: An Indian context," *Manag. Pract. Pilgr. Tour. Hosp.*, no. September 2023, pp. 78–91, 2023, doi: 10.4018/979-8-3693-1414-2.ch006.
- [3] G. Rana and S. Kumar, "Prospects and Problems of Tourism Industry in Uttarakhand," *Int. J. Adv. Sci. Technol.*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 1336–1338, 2020.
- [4] N. Yadav and P. V. K. Gangal, "The Role of Pilgrimage Tourism in Enhancing Spiritual Values: An Analytical Study," *Int. J. Soc. Impact*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2023, doi: 10.25215/2455/0803020.
- [5] H. Phukan, "A Study on Tourism Logistics in the Spiritual Sites of Haridwar and Rishikesh in Uttarakhand," *Int. J. Emerg. Technol. Adv. Eng.*, vol. 4, no. 9, pp. 165–170, 2014, [Online]. Available: www.ijetae.com
- [6] K. Aukland, "Pilgrimage expansion through tourism in contemporary India: the development and promotion of a Hindu pilgrimage circuit," *J. Contemp. Relig.*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 283–298, 2017, doi: 10.1080/13537903.2017.1298908.
- [7] Y. S. Chawda, "Tourist Guide Application (Char Dham Yatra & Other Places) in Uttarakhand State," *Int. Res. J. Mod. Eng. Technol. Sci.*, no. 12, pp. 96–101, 2022, doi: 10.56726/irjmets31888.
- [8] A. Kumar, "The Economic Impact of Kumbh Mela on Uttar Pradesh : A Multidimensional Empirical Analysis .," *Int. J. Innov. Sci. Eng. Manag.*, 2022, doi: 10.69968/ijisem.2022v1i154-62.
- [9] Ministry of Tourism, "Study on Identification of Hindu Pilgrimage Circuit Linking Various Sites in Nepal with Bordering states of India," 2016. [Online]. Available: <http://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/report/Final Report-Hindu Pilgrimage Circuit Nepal India February 2016.pdf>
- [10] S. Semwal and B. M. Upreti, "Chardham Yatra: A Trend of Tourism before and After 2013 Flash Floods, Uttarakhand Himalaya," *Int. J. Res. Rev. Vol.*, vol. 6, no. November, p. 11, 2019.
- [11] P. Kandari, "Economic Impact of Tourism : A Study of Srinagar Garhwal," 2019.
- [12] D. D. Sharma, "VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT AND MEASURES OF RISK REDUCTION OF CHAR DHAM YATRA IN UTTARAKHAND," *EPRA Int. J. of Economic Bus. Rev.*, vol. 259, no. March, pp. 2347–2350, 2018.
- [13] D. J. Banerjee and D. S. Sharma, "An Overview of Uttarakhand Tourism – A Case Study of Garhwal Region," *Int. J. Math. Stat. Invent.*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 21–26, 2022, doi: 10.35629/4767-10022126.
- [14] V. P. SATI, "Pilgrimage tourism in Uttarakhand Himalaya: Pilgrims' inflows and trends," *J. Multidiscip. Acad. Tour.*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 109–117, 2023, doi: 10.31822/jomat.2023-8-2-109.
- [15] S. Rauthan and V. Pant, "Growth and Opportunities of Religious Tourism in the Pauri Garhwal Region," *Int. J. Hosp. Manag. Sci.*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 97–105, 2023.
- [16] V. P. SATI, "The nature of tourism and tourists/pilgrims' inflow in Uttarakhand Himalaya," *J. Multidiscip. Acad. Tour.*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 115–124, 2020, doi: 10.31822/jomat.731386.
- [17] P. Joshi and S. Saxena, "Religious tourism in Uttarakhand," *J. Emerg. Technol. Innov. Res.*, vol.



- 6, no. 6, pp. 864–869, 2019, [Online]. Available: www.jetir.org
- [18] D. M. UNİYAL, “A STUDY ON MARKETING COMMUNICATION FOR PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN UTTARAKHAND,” *J. Emerg. Technol. Innov. Res.*, vol. 6, no. 6, pp. 834–838, 2019.
- [19] N. Nath, “From pilgrim landscape to ‘Pilgrim Road’: Tracing the transformation of the char dham yatra in colonial garhwal,” *J. Study Relig. Nat. Cult.*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 419–437, 2018, doi: 10.1558/jsrnc.34317.