

Consultation on people's Vision for Tourism in Uttarakhand

Organised by Himal Prakriti and EQUATIONS

13th & 14th June 2012
Munsiyari, Pithoragrah

Background

Uttarakhand became an independent state in November 2000. One of the first policies to be announced by the government was the tourism policy in 2001 and the setting up of the Uttarakhand Tourism Board. The intent to focus on this sector was set through the vision statement stating "...to make Uttaranchal synonymous with tourism." Tourism in the region has existed for time in immemorial with several areas of Uttarakhand already established as centres of pilgrimage and with tourists frequenting forest areas like Jim Corbett National Park, Valley of Flowers, Nanda Devi NP, Rajaji NP, etc. The state is also known for attracting enthusiasts of mountaineering, hiking and rock climbing and recently other adventures sports. Rural tourism is a new trend in many villages of the state.¹

The focus has been to attract a higher number of tourists and keen to get more investments into the region. However over the years the State's ranking in arrivals in comparison to overall tourists in India has dropped from 5 in 2001 to 7 in 2010 for domestic tourists and from 14 to 16 for foreign tourists, for the same period. In 2001, Uttarakhand received 9551669 domestic and 44429 foreign tourists as compared to 30206030 domestic and 127258 foreign tourists in 2010.

In spite of this decline, the tourism industry has been accorded the status of a thrust sector with the State coming up with many schemes and rebate in taxes for new developments. The Government of Uttarakhand is probably the most ambitious state in the country to promote tourism for revenue generation, and has raised the state budget allocation for tourism by nearly 224% between the 9th and 10th Plans. The state has enthusiastically embraced Public Private Partnerships as the main method of developing the state's infrastructure. Within the tourism sector, 74 projects are running / set to be run on the PPP model.

In the rush to 'develop' tourism (e.g. year long Char Dham yatras which was until now open for only 4 months due to their ecologically sensitive location) as well as the other sectors has led to irreversible damage. The heavy influx of tourists has led to visible stress signs on the natural ecosystem – with a meltdown of glaciers, water sources drying up, deforestation, pollution, etc. The issue of land is also a serious problem, as there is little land available (with 64% as forest areas and 93% being mountainous) with many players vying for it. The Tourism Board plans to create land banks. The question is from where will the land come? How much land will be available for the common people? Other impacts of tourism such as employability, leakages of tourism revenues, exploitation of women and children, use of drugs all exist.

Though there has been an increase in tourist numbers and hotels in Uttarakhand but the vision that was shared before the formation of the new state was of employment to locals, preservation of local culture and traditions, and preservation of the environment – not of which have been realised. Also while the State does have a Vision 2020, this does not reflect the views, challenges and aspiration of the people.

Community level engagement in tourism development is needed at all levels. Can we find answers to some of these questions so as to influence the way tourism is planned and developed in Uttarakhand?

1. Has tourism generated quality and secure employment for local communities?
2. To what extent does tourism contribute to local community development?
3. How can tourism be non-exploitative?
4. How can tourism be more inclusive, participatory, transparent?
5. Where does the accountability in tourism lie?
6. What is the kind of tourism that we want?
7. What should be the principles on which tourism is developed?
8. What is the role and responsibility of each stakeholder?
9. What is our vision for tourism in the Uttarakhand?

This Consultation is being organised by Himal Prakriti and EQUATIONS with an aim to:

- Sharing of experiences - aspirations, realities, challenges of tourism development – from the region
- To work towards building a People's vision for tourism in Uttarakhand
- To evolve strategies for policy & advocacy work at the local & state level

2 day consultation

- **Day 1: Sharing of ground realities and experiences: will include presentations by participants on current realities and describe alternative models for tourism**
- **Day 2 : People's vision for tourism and evolving strategies for policy & advocacy work at the local & state level**

Participants: People from the local community, people involved in tourism, movements / organisations, Panchayats / Municipalities members

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