

## Potential of Ecotourism in Dehradun District, Uttarakhand

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### Abstract

Mountains are sacred because they possess beauty and they inspire mankind to meditate and grow spiritually. There should be something very unique in an area to attract the tourists. Basically there are three elements of tourism – locale, transport and accommodation. If the place is rich in natural beauty, amenities can be provided later on to make it a tourist destination. Hence scenic beauty is the primary plus point for a place to become a tourist destination. Tourist spots of Dehradun District are replete with marvelous beauty and packed with the grandeur of nature. Divinity manifests itself in the lap of the Himalaya. This land of sages, religion and culture is rich in natural assets with a variety of landscapes, the lush green valleys, majestic snow-covered peaks, soft pastures, gushing rivers, bubbling streams, tranquil tarns, majestic waterfalls, natural geysers, gaping gorges

and salubrious climate. This divine wilderness is adventurer's challenge, the trailer's delight, artist's super eminent inspiration, photographer's paradise, nature's superlative and a sanctuary of variegated fauna.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism | Dehradun | Himalayas | Uttarakhand

### Introduction

Tourists like to spend their long holidays away from their usual residence, where they can enjoy nature and avoid urban agglomeration with least interference. General attractiveness of an area or its scenic quality is today a much sought after commodity. More often, the physical characteristics of natural features determine scenic quality of a landscape. Identification of the existing attractions is the first priority of tourism development. Later comes the infrastructure, market analysis and profit loss etc. while all the components of tourism are essential and important for its growth, attractions provide the energizing power. It can be called the stimulator, the motivator for the tourist. Attractions not only

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provide the things to see and do but also lure the tourist.

Himalaya and its fascinating scenery are the great assets of the region. Really so outstanding and unique are they that the entire tourist industry of the region can bank on them. Ecotourism is the form of tourism which is simply based on the natural and cultural characteristics of the area. The natural and scenic beauty, mountains, rivers, forests and wildlife all together attract the nature lovers and eco-tourists. People now-a-days are more interested in visiting new and unspoilt places of natural importance. Tourists prefer less crowded and attractive natural areas in comparison to the popular congested old tourist destinations.

### **Study Area**

Dehradun is the most important and capital district of the newly formed State of Uttarakhand comprises two distinct tracts-the vally part called Doon Vally and the hilly tract of Chakarata tehsil in the north west also known as Jaunsar Baber. The valley itself is composed of two sub valleys, the pachhawa doon sloping down to the Yamuna towards the south west, and the other called Parva Doon towards the ganga in the south- east. The district is located between  $29^{\circ} 56'$  to  $30^{\circ} 57'$  north latitude and  $77^{\circ} 35'$  east to  $78^{\circ} 23'$  east longitudes. The total area of the district is 3088sq kilometers. It is bounded in the North and North East by Utterkashi district, in the east by the district of Tehri Garhwal and in the South by the Saharanpur district of Utter Pradesh whereas Southern boundary surrounded by Haridwar District. Its western

boundary adjoins the Sirmour District of Himachal Pradesh.

Garhwal Himalayas has been described as one the most beautiful land in the mountains of the Asian sub-continent. Being one of the seven districts of Garhwal 'Dehradun' is the most cherished destination for the nature lovers, peace seekers and all types of visitors. Its dense forest, scenic landscape, meandering rivers, majestic mountain ranges on either side of wide-long valley, chirping and chilling winds, numerous picnic spots, temples, historical monuments, comfortable climate, wilderness, cultural diversity and altitudinal variations have together created a vast potential to attract the tourists. Natural factors that play major role in creating potential for ecotourism have been studied on three basis – (i) scenic beauty (ii) flora and fauna and (iii) climate (Siddiqui S., 2000).The district of Dehradun is fortunate to have immense spots, showcasing scenic beauty of the area. It can also be called visitors' paradise. The magnificent view of the snow covered Himalayan peaks on the North, serrated Siwalik range on the south adds grandeur to the study area.

The district is endowed with vast variety of flora and fauna which are a tangible resource for recreation. Various species of plants, trees and flowers exist in the district along with wide range of wild animals that has the potential to attract tourists. The study area is well forested, mainly with Sal on the lower slopes and mixed deciduous forest and chir pine higher up. The higher hills (above 1500m) of the outer Himalayas around Mussoorie and

beyond have three species of oak (ban, moru and kharshu), with blue pine, deodar, spruce and silver fir (Osmaston, B.B *et al.*, 1989). There are many species of birds that exist in the region which includes winter visitors and the resident birds providing great feast for bird watchers and nature lovers. The vast variety of animals found in the region is vital tourism resource. Rajaji National park of natural significance is a major attraction for wildlife enthusiasts and eco tourists.

The climate of Dehradun is excellently pleasurable. Some spots of natural importance remain cool even in scorching steamy days of summer. Doon Valley with its semi-temperate climate attracts tourists from adjoining districts of warm plains. Winters are also not so severe resulting in an overall mild-comfortable climate throughout the year. Snowfall occurs on the hills of Mussoorie and Chakrata during the winter months. Fog less and clear skies during the cold weather attract people in their winter breaks from surrounding areas. The presence of mighty rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Tons add to the charm of the district and act as an attraction for water based activities for the tourist visiting the area. These rivers are of great spiritual and adventurous significance. The rivers are used in multiple ways for river rafting, angling, kayaking, boating and river crossing. Tourists can even have fun of water sports and nature camping on their banks. Several cascading waterfalls invite adventurous and fun loving people for canyoning.

Dehradun has its own rich cultural and historical background. Its culture has its own

characteristics and follows primarily the traditions of a Hindu society. Fairs and festival, folkdances ornaments, colorful traditional dresses etc. are the cultural assets of the study area. The fairs like Bissu mela, Jhanda mela, Bhadraj mela and Shivaratri mela are very popular among the local people. The places like Kalsi, Lakhamandal, Hanol, and Kalanga are of great historical and archaeological importance and have been considered national heritage. This attracts large number of people with historical interests along with students, research scholars and ordinary visitor. The presence of three tribal groups – the Jaunsaris, the Bhoksas and the Gujjars add colours to the cultural life of the study area. Their unique traditions, colorful fairs and festivals, vibrant dances, songs and traditional attires are all cultural attractions of the area.

### **Objective**

Dehradun, is the well known tourist destination and famous for its scenic beauty, charismatic climate and peaceful socio- cultural and political environment. But the unplanned and non regulated tourism has posed some serious threats to the natural environment of the study area. The main objectives of the present study is to study the potential of Dehradun district as eco-tourism destination.

### **Methodology**

The present study aims to analyze potential of eco-tourism in Dehradun District. First step of the research is to collect the secondary data on different issues from various published and unpublished sources of different governmental and non governmental agencies. Then the

reconnaissance survey was made to the study area.

### **Potential Attractions for Tourist in Dehradun District**

#### *Climatic Attractions*

Climate is of particular significance to tourism. In fact, tourist market of hills totally depends upon the weather and climate. The months of May and June attract maximum number of tourists and pilgrims to Badri-Kedar, Gangotri-Yamunotri and higher reaches of Garhwal Himalaya, but from the first week of July this number starts declining. The increase and decrease is due to weather and climatic variation in the region. Important climatic elements are temperature, precipitation, cloud cover, sunshine, wind velocity, and pressure conditions. Study area experiences some typical weather of north India. With mountain effect cold winter, warm summer; rainy monsoons and a pleasant spring season are moderated to a large extent. December and January are the coldest months. Temperature changes with altitude. Fine weather with warmth and sunshine is one of the most important attractions of a tourist area. Good weather is particularly an important ingredient in holidaying.

In the study area tourist potentials are located at an altitude above 3000 m and have Alpine climate. Incidentally, Chakrata and other higher Himalaya of the study area and most of the treks are located in this zone, but higher altitude treks and snow-covered peaks are in glacial zone. In alpine zone during summers the days are cool but the nights are colder.

Winter is severely cold spreading over a period of seven months

#### *Water System Based Attractions*

**Asan Barrage** - It is situated in the western part of the Doon Valley and is also known by the name Dhalipur Lake. It was created in the year 1967 by harnessing the waters of the Yamuna through power channel discharge and the Asan River. This place is famous for bird watching as it attracts 53 species of water birds of which 19 are winter migrants from Eurasia. During winter months 90 per cent of the water bird population comprises the migratory species such as Brahming, Duck, Pintail, Red Crested Pochard, Mallard Coot, Common Teal, Tuffed Duck and Sloveller. In spring, the Gargeny and Bare Headed Goose stop by on their return from the south.

**Robbers' Cave** - The Robbers' cave is situated 9 kms from Dehradun in the north-west of the city, is an enchanting picnic spot. It is also known as Gucchu Pani. The shallow water of the rivulet is the best option for the kids and women who fear to enter in the deep water to enjoy here. They can be seen enjoying freely in the water flowing in and outside the cave. The natural surrounding add fascination to the place. The spot with the mystic surroundings, clear water and natural beauty attract large number of people during the summer season.

**Sahastradhara** - Water drips from rocks in hundred streams like form, because of which this place came to be known as Sahastradhara. It is situated 14 kms from Dehradun railway station on the bank of river Baldi. The other significant feature of the place are natural cave

where water falls in the form of droplets. Sahastradhara is also famous for its sulphur springs. These springs are said to be of great significance from health point of view.

Sahastradhara is a spot of great attraction for the tourists and fun loving people. Numerous people can be seen taking bath and playing in the water of the river. Tourists can be seen floating on the water with the help of air filled tubes. People from nearby places come here for picnics and can be seen cooking their own meals.

*Lacchiwala* - 22 kms from Dehradun is a beautiful water spot with a garden and forest cover. Tourists come here for sporting and enjoying in the water. It is flooded with tourist in the summer months. The flowing stream here attracts numerous men women and children.

*Dakpathar* - It is Situated 45 kms from Dehradun at the western most point of Doon Valley. It has emerged as beautiful tourists spot under the Yamuna Hydly Scheme. Dakpathar, the lush green lawns and blooming gardens are the charm of the place. Presence of Shiwalik ranges in the south-west and views of Himalayas in the north add beauty to the place. The dam constructed on the side of the park is of great significance as tourists from nearby regions come to see the dam and increases the tourists' inflow of the spot.

*Tiger Fall* - 7 kms from Chakrata this water fall is beautiful and highest in this region. Here water falls from the height of 50 meters making a natural swimming pool beneath it. The natural surroundings, jungles, fresh cool air around the fall have everything to attract

eco tourists. Tourists come here for enjoying natural beauty and water pools made by the cascading water fall. The spot because of its unspoiled natural beauty and peace provides comfort and give relaxation from the hectic urban life.

*Kimona fall* - Kimona fall is situated 6 kms from Chakrata at Mohana village. The natural splendor and quietness are the main attraction of this fall. Tourists prefer this spot as it provide them with natural view all around. The abundance of natural vegetation is the remarkable specialty of the water fall. The fall is easily accessible by road which increases its attraction.

#### **Natural Vegetation and Wildlife Attractions**

'Wilderness is a necessity' said John Murr. The hills have a capacity for welding into a harmonious whole the physical, mental and spiritual qualities of man (Bisht H., 1994). Nature with all its grandeur has the capacity to rejuvenate all the mental, physical and spiritual characteristics of human beings. The wilderness has the strength to heal a sorrowful mind, a crying heart giving comfort to heart and soul. Our study area the district of Dehra Dun has been gifted by nature a variety of species of natural vegetation and wild life.

*Rajaji National Park* - According to Indian Board of Wildlife, "A National Park is an area dedicated by State for all time to conserve natural and historical objects of national significance and wildlife and where provision is made of enjoyment of the same by the public." (Bisht H., 1994). Named after C. Rajagopalachari, the first Governor General of

free India, the Rajaji National Park covers an area of 820.42 square kilometers.

The rich flora and fauna of the park makes it a lovely and important place for the eco tourists, students, scholars and wild life enthusiasts. Wild life lovers are lured by the opportunity of getting sight of wild animals in the park. The park is a paradise for bird watcher as nearly 315 species of birds inhabit the park. There are *machans* constructed all over the park to help tourists in sighting of wild life with naked eyes. The dense jungle of the park offers peace and freshness. The park helps children and adults to create better harmony with nature and wild life. Here they get opportunity to be in the close vicinity of nature. This helps them in learning more about the importance of nature and spreading awareness about the conservation and protection of natural life.

**Mussoorie Wildlife Sanctuary** - The eastern flank of Benog hill is also known as Benog Mountain Quail Wildlife Sanctuary. It is rich in its natural wealth. A vast variety of flora and fauna along with herbivorous and carnivorous are found in this region. Animal like Himalayan goat (*Ghero*), panther and Himalayan bear are seen here. This is the only area where the endangered bird 'Himalayan Baler' (Mountain Quail) was seen long back. Varied kinds of plant species along with the medicinal plants, panoramic view of majestic peaks like Chaukhamba, Bandar Punch presents a complete scenario for tourists and a feast for nature lovers.

**Malsi Deer Park** - This is a mini-zoological park which provides and preserves deer in a natural habitat and surrounding with common

flora and fauna (Bisht, D.S. 2001). Situated on Dehradun-Mussoorie road it is a paradise for children with a park having various swings, animals, birds, lake, varied vegetations and monkeys. Walking trails are made through the park for the tourists to go around the park admiring its natural beauty. These trails are also used by the health conscious people for walking and jogging. These trails pass through well forested area refreshing all together mind, soul and body along with rejuvenating spirits.

### **Cultural Attractions**

With the advent of tourism relationship between pilgrimage and religion has changed from their traditional form. Esteemed holy places have become tourist destinations even for visitors who do not have a strong spiritual motivation. Every nook and corner of the Great Himalayas throbs with the vibrations of the gods and goddesses. There are temples after temples dedicated to numerous Gods. Cultural attraction of the area can be studied by classifying them into three categories – (i) Archaeological, (ii) Religious and (iii) Fairs and Festivals.

### **Archaeological Attractions**

**Lakhamandal** - It is a quite unique place. The word 'Lakhamandal' means lakh of Mandals or Mandaps *i.e.* sacred places of worship scattered all over (Bhatt H.D., 2000). Idols of all the great gods and the goddesses are seen here. Lakhamandal is an astonishing treasure house, replete with huge stone figures situated on the banks of river Yamuna. Lakhamandal (1090 m.) is known for its historical and mythological significance as well as cultural and architectural richness (Shailza K., 2002).

All these mythological and historical stories increases the charm of the place and lures the tourists with historical bent of mind.

*Kalsi* - Kalsi is a place of historical importance. It is situated on the confluence of two rivers, the Yamuna and the Tons. Here we also find Emperor Ashoka's Stone Pillar on which his edicts are engraved. It is a 10 ft long, 10 ft high and 8 ft wide pear shaped boulder. The preaching of King Ashoka are written on it in Pali and Brahmi script, in which the followers are advised to be generous, kind and moral. It has an outline of an elephant with the word 'Gajatme' written between its legs which symbolizes coming of Lord Buddha. The town is of great historical significance as it is believed to have been the capital of Raja Virat who provided shelter to Pandavas during their exile. Some bricks were also found here in 1953 which resembles to those referred in Yajurveda.

*Hanol* - The temple of Mahasu Devta is situated in the village of Hanol on the eastern bank of river Tons. The temple is of historical and archaeological importance dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is situated 189 kms from Dehradun at an altitude of 1492m.. The temple and its surrounding are said to be linked with Pandavas of Mahabharata. The temple is a great example of ancient architecture and art. The antique wood work done here is extremely beautiful and captivating. There are two heavy stone like structure in the premises which are said to be kept there by Lord Bhima. It is said that if any one manages to lift the stones his or her wishes are fulfilled by the Mahasu Devta.

### **Religious Attractions**

*Lakshman Sidh* - 12 kms from Dehradun is a beautiful place situated in the forest. According to a legend, younger brother of Lord Rama Laxman underwent penance at this place for being involved in killing of Ravana as he was a Brahmin. People come here for prayers and offerings especially on Sunday. Hordes of people can be seen here on Sundays otherwise the place remains calm and peaceful. The natural surroundings offer peace and tranquility. The place is crowded by the monkeys also. They can be seen enjoying the food given and sometimes snatched from the pilgrims.

*Tapkeshwar temple* - 5.5 kms from clock-tower, the temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The spot is well connected up to Garhi and a distance of about half a kilometer has to be covered by foot. The temple is famous for a cave and number of Shiv Lingam inside it. According to legend in the olden days water used to drop on the Shiv Lingam from the rocks of the cave .The presence of the big rocks and a rivulet flowing besides the temple increases the holiness of the place. Big fair is held here on the occasion of Shivratri attracting devotees in a large number.

*Santla Devi temple* - 15 kms from Dehradun is situated a temple of Santla Devi. One can go here by bus till Jaitanwala and by light vehicle till Punjabiwala and from there 2 kms on foot to the temple. The way for the temple goes through the hilly tract with a beautiful view of its surroundings. It is also a good hiking trip and helps you in toning your leg muscles. In earlier days hens and goats were sacrificed here on the name of god but now it is totally

abandoned. Beautiful natural surroundings make it a good picnic spot also.

*Sai Darbar* - 8 kms from Dehra Dun is situated temple of Sai Baba on the Rajpur Road. The sanctity of the place give you peace and relaxation from humdrum city life. Holy scents coming from the incense sticks burned by the devotees fills the air with the sacredness. The temple is well packed on Thursdays which is said to be the day of Lord Sai Baba. The temple is visited by a large number of national, international and local tourists. (Plate).

*Tibetan Sakya Temple* - Situated near Sai Darbar is the Tibetan temple. The unique and varied architecture makes it a distinct religious centre. The colorful look of the temple makes it very attractive. The temple gives you the glimpse of Buddhist art, culture and religion. Tibetan people, followers of Buddhism and people belonging to other religion can be seen visiting this temple in a large number.

*Chandrabani* - Also known as Gautam Kund is 7 kms from Dehradun and 2 kms interior from Dehradun-Delhi highway. According to a legend Rishi Gautam, his wife Ahilya and daughter Anjani had worshipped here for 12 years. This is what that makes this place holy and pious. The serene and quiet environment of Chandrabani increases its sanctity. This is the best place for the peace loving people who want to do prayers and meditation in peaceful environment.

*Guru Ram Rai Darbar* - In the year 1675 Guru Ram Rai came to the Doon Valley. But the modern temple founded in 1756 is of more significance. The main building is a beautiful

structure with Mughal architecture. There are three water tanks in the vicinity of Darbar. Annual fair is organized here after Holi. A large crowd of people collect here for the ceremony and on the sixth day a flag is hoisted on a big flag staff standing between the temple and the tank with the help of the devotees. Large number of people from Bareilly, Moradabad, Punjab and surrounding region come for the ceremony (Plate).

### **Conclusion**

Dehradun city as a capital of the state is a beautiful town situated in the north-western corner of the Garhwal Himalayas. Though the city is a very well known tourist destination on the tourist map of India, the district as a whole has much more to offer. Right from the foothills of Siwaliks in the South to the Lesser Himalayas in the north, there are several spots and places of tourists interests. The potential of these places are not fully exploited because of the lack of proper planning and infrastructural facilities. The study area with its vast natural wealth and unique topography has the potential to become a most cherished eco-tourism destination.

Lesser Himalayan region in the north is the most beautiful part of the study area. From here one can have panoramic view of higher Himalayan peaks and landscapes. Natural vegetation and wildlife increase the attraction the area. The region provides ample opportunities for eco-tourism as well as other types of tourism. The two well known hill stations Mussoorie and Chakrata fall in this region. Although the potentials of Mussoorie proper have been already tapped yet there are

several places around Mussoorie which can be developed as alternate tourist destinations. The places like Lal Tibba, George Everest Estate, Hathipaon, Cloud's End and Benog Hill are waiting for proper development.

The Doon Valley region is the most developed and urbanized part of the study area. It is one of the prettiest valleys in the Himalayas. It is also well known for its natural beauty and temperate climate. The places of tourists importance is scattered all over the Doon Valley right from the river Yamuna in the west to the river Ganga in the east. The whole valley is immensely beautiful and has vast tourism potentials.

This part of the study area is also well known for its institutions of national importance with rich library resources providing extensive material for research scholars and students. Some of institutions like Forest Research Institute, Wildlife Institute of India and Survey of India have large campuses with variety of vegetation. By promoting these institutes and providing food and lodging at reasonable rates, the students, research scholars and eco-tourists can be attracted to these places for study and long duration stay. Good and efficient transport service can help in this endeavour. Peace, security and vigilant law and order can also help in the expansion of tourism industry in the region. Southern most part of the study area is a separate Garhwal Himalayas from the Gangetic Plains. The rich Sal Forest with enjoyable under story is well spread over the foothill zone particularly in Siwalik and Doon.

Rajaji National Park is the major attraction of this region. It is of great

ecological significance and can further become most sought out place for wildlife enthusiasts. Though the park area is evenly endowed with vast range of flora and fauna, yet only few places are visited by the tourists

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