



## Sustainable Tourism: A Study of Har-ki-doon as a Sustainable Tourist Destination in Uttarakhand

### KEYWORDS

Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Ecology & Environment.

**Ms Alka Maheshwari**

Research Scholar\ Amity Institute of Travel & Tourism Amity University, Noida (UP)

**Dr Piyush Sharma**

Associate Professor Amity Institute of Travel & Tourism Amity University, Noida (UP)

### ABSTRACT

Sustainability has always been a concern in different arena of our life, be it job profession, survival with nature, ecological balance or exploitation of natural resources. Everything has got a cycle in nature and if this cycle is maintained then we can sustain in long run else it has got its own side effects and impacts. The focus of this paper is on development of Har-Ki-Doon in Uttarakhand as sustainable tourism destination which is a cradle shaped hanging valley in the Garhwal Himalayas. It is surrounded by snow-covered peaks and alpine vegetation. It is connected to Baspas Valley by the Borasu Pass in the mountains of Himachal Pradesh. It is situated at top north of Uttarakhand at an altitude of approx 3500 m above mean sea level. It is one of the most beautiful valleys in the Western Himalayas and has been a hot spot for trekking and adventure tourism due to its panoramic views of the surrounding mountain peaks. Though it has been a popular trekking destination but it has not been able to develop as a sustainable tourism to benefit the local habitats of the surrounding villages. There is a deep necessity to study the problems of tourists, locals and develop this place as sustainable tourist destination so that it creates a self-support economy with ecological balance for the region.

### Introduction

Tourism is the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work, and activities during their stay at these destinations; it includes movement for all purposes, as well as day visits or excursions. (Holloway, 1987,). The International Conference on Leisure, Recreation and Tourism, held by the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AIEST) and the Tourism Society in Cardiff in 1981 concluded that: "Tourism may be defined in terms of particular activities selected by choice and undertaken outside the home environment. Tourism may or may not involve overnight stays away from home". (Holloway, 1987)

As the world is shrinking due the technological development and fast growing global economy tourism has become an inevitable part of our life now. It has become a part of fast growing world economy. Though tourism is considered as fastest growing industry but it has its negative and positive impacts on environment, culture, society and local economy. Relevance of sustainable tourism can be explained in many ways. Since the movement of people is increasing due to various purposes, more people are travelling to different destinations which give opportunity to tourism development. New development of tourism needs support from other associated sectors that locals of the destination should become a stakeholder and get the benefit. Tourists will also get better facilities if the local area is developing it gives additional employment opportunities which in turn promote tourism. Now to maintain a natural cycle these activities have to be continued hence our support infrastructure has to be sustainable to keep the development cycle in balance. This is possible when all the stakeholders get equal benefit thus creating balance in system. Due to its impacts there is an imperative need for sustainable tourism for the industry to survive as a whole. Sustainable tourism is about re-focusing and adapting. A balance must be found between limits and usage so that continuous changing, monitoring and planning ensure that tourism can be managed. This requires long-term thinking and strategy and realizing that change is often cumulative, gradual and irreversible. Economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development

must include the interests of all stakeholders including indigenous people, local communities, visitors, industry and government.

The Global Development Research Center (GDRC.org) defines the sustainable tourism as per the WTO resources which state that "Sustainable tourism is the one that establishes a suitable balance between the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, plays an important role in conserving bio-diversity. It attempts to minimize its impact on the environment and local culture so that it will be available for future generations while contributing to generate income, employment and the conservation of local eco systems."

### Advantages of sustainable tourism

- Maximizes the positive contribution of tourism towards poverty reduction and help in achieving common goals towards sustainable development.
- Sustainable tourism provides the required source of income for to survival of local communities and habitat protection.
- Revenue generated from tourists can be channelized for conservation of the nature and capability building of local people.
- Tourism can be a key driver in raising awareness and fostering positive attitude towards bio-diversity conservation across the globe.

### Sustainable Tourism: Need of the Hour

Sustainable tourism ropes in all segments of the industry and creates more business opportunities under guidelines that minimizes the impact on environment and maintain a healthy cycle of re-generation of natural resources. Three major components of sustainable development are graphically shown below:

Tourism has been a major economic activity in developed and developing areas, contributing to economic growth of the local societies. The rapid growth in the tourism sector and increasing number of tourists raised concern that the resources of host destinations might be exhausted. The relationship between

tourism and the environment and to the associated problems due to expansion of tourism has to be considered and addressed. Some of the principles of sustainable tourism development are:

- All the stakeholders should be considered for the development of the area as tourist destination
- Local authorities should pay appropriate attention to the development and maintenance of the area.
- Residents have to be made aware of the benefits of tourist visits and trained for the various roles like escorts, tourist guide and porters.
- Code of ethics for the tour operators have to be established and standardized.
- Tourist should be prepared for the trip according to the facilities available and made aware of the difficulties which might arise on the way.



**Principles of Sustainable Tourism-**Sustainable tourism industry

**Objectives**

Today, the Sustainability and Responsible Tourism are the keys in developing strategies for states to achieve long term objectives of ecological balance and survival. The main focus of the study is to achieve sustainable tourism development as we perceive from the tourist and local's perspective and put it in environment planning and economic development of the tourist destination. Specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To understand issues pertaining to development of Har ki dun as a sustainable tourism destination.
2. To study the regulations stated by state government tourism board for the region
3. To study the perception of local community towards tourism activity in their region.

**Methodology**

In order to accomplish the objectives of this study, it was essential to devise a strategy that how this study is to be carried out in a certain frame-work as the methodology is the backbone of any research and study.

Data sources: As Har-ki-dun destination in Uttarakhand is taken as case study so a personal visit was carried out to study the

approach, experience the problems and issues, and share the findings based on the interactions with the local authorities, residents and visiting tourists.

The secondary data is collected from various resources like the journals, books, government plans and research over internet. Analysis: The collected information was analyzed under the guidance of experts in the field of travel & tourism sector. As a result of discussion and analysis the efforts was to share our observations to contribute in development of Har-ki-doon as a sustainable tourist destination. The methodology is illustrated in Figure1- below.



**Case Study of Har-Ki-Dun**

As the name states, Hari means God and Dun means Valley, Har Ki Dun also known as the Valley of God is a holy place. As per mentioned in Hindu scriptures (Granth), Pandavs went to heaven through this mountain. Duryodhan is worshipped as a God here by a few communities. One can find the temple of Duryodhan located in this valley. This place works as a base to reach to Swargarohini peak and Jaundar Glacier as they are situated in the southeast of Har-ki-dun. Bandar Punch Mountain is located in the west of Har-ki-dun.



Source: [www.palampurbikersclub.com](http://www.palampurbikersclub.com)

**Geographical Location**

Har-Ki-dun valley lies in Utarkashi district of Uttarakhand, situated on the base of Fateh Parvat at 3,556 meters above sea level, at latitude and longitude of 31.14 and 78.42 respectively. Har-ki-doon valley is widely loved by nature lovers and is growing as a popular spot for bird watching & trekking. Figure-1 below shows a picturesque view of the Har-ki-doon valley, a river which flows through it and in the background of Himalayan peak called "Swargarohini".

**Demography:**

The ancestors of the people of this region have great influence

of the characters of the Mahabharata. The ancestors of this area and its surroundings were said to be under the reign of the Kauravas and Pandavas, the mythological royal warriors and kings in the epic Mahabharata. The people in the Mori are followers of Kauravas, considered as anti-heroes in epic Mahabharata.

The isolated villages with simple and innocent villagers ready to interact with the outsiders and share pleasing smile inspire the trekkers. Small beautiful houses made of stones and wood attract the tourists with their beautiful crafts, especially on doors. The crafts are primarily relating to Mahabharata stories. Farming of Rajma, Potatoes and Rice is the major source of survival of the locals in this area. People also rear sheep and goats and use sheep's hair for weaving woolen cloths for them and use goat milk for their family use. House wives and older member of the family survive on farming while youngsters work as porters for tourists.

### Educational Background

There are many villages are on the way to Har-ki-doon starting from Sankri to Taluka, then Gangaad, Osla and Seema. Seema is the village on the foot of Osla. In Osla we have observed population of one and half thousand approximately. There was only one PCO using satellite phone. There was no proper schooling arrangement though a school structure existed. There was no hospital or medical facilities over there.

### Knowledge about Sustainable Tourism/Sustainable Destination (ST/SD)

Locals and tourists we have interacted were not aware of the concept of sustainable tourism or how to develop the area as sustainable tourist destination. There were few shops at Taluka where tourists could get some snacks or pack lunch and thereafter there was no facility till Gangaad village which was on the mid way to Har-ki-doon. The trek from Gangaad to Seema was damaged due to cloud burst and subsequent land slide and offered worst challenge to tourist. Local authorities were aware but not keen to take prompt action required to restore the trek in normal state.

### Trekking Adventure:

Har-ki-doon valley is a popular trekking destination in Uttarakhand district of Dev Bhoomi Uttarakhand state in India offering easy to moderate trekking route. Har-ki-doon is becoming more popular among the nature lover trekking enthusiasts from some years due to its easy to moderate trekking route.

This trek begins from Sankri – Taluka – Osla – Har Ki Dun crossing through many dense forests of walnut, chestnut, chinar and willow trees. The trail from Osla to Har-ki-dun is through terraced mountain meadows, thick forests and lush grassy patches.

Dense forest of pine, bhojpatra and rare brahma kamal considered as sacred beautify the heavenly land energizing the trekkers. Figure-2 below shows a map of trekking to Har-ki-doon.

Har-ki-doon has got tremendous tourism potential. Har-ki-dun, surrounded by glittering peaks and dense forests, rich in wild life and is a veritable paradise for bird-watchers and nature lovers. This trek provides enjoyment for all age groups as the trek is not too tough, and valley is full of flora and fauna. One can spend time identifying herbs & shrubs used for Ayurveda. Photography is an activity that will leave an indelible mark on the visitor's memory, as there are a large variety of birds and mountains to be clicked.



Source:

[http://trekking.himadventures.net/garhwal/har\\_ki\\_dun.htm](http://trekking.himadventures.net/garhwal/har_ki_dun.htm)

### Har-ki-doon valley-accessibility

Har-ki-doon valley offers a challenging trek at present due to ignorance of local authorities to maintain the place as a sustainable tourist destination. Although the tourist traffic is significantly higher during the season from October to March but the arrangement required are in no shape to support the tourists to give them a positive memorable experience.

### Major Findings

The flora and fauna in Har-ki-doon valley area need special care due to the fragile eco system. The tourists coming to the area have to be sensitized towards the environment and the local community. They come from all age groups i.e., youth to retired adventure enthusiast. Har-ki-dun gets family groups as well as organized trekking groups from all corners of the country.

Following are the major observations:

- There is only one tourist lodge at Seema village but in no condition to support tourist traffic in the season due to insufficient accommodation, poor maintenance and no catering facilities. There is no electricity at Seema village and no telephone network of land line or mobile. The only means of communication is a satellite phone available at Osla which is again a 2 km uphill trek again poorly maintained and is difficult to use in emergency situations
- The local population is ignorant about the relevance of tourism and the need for sustainability. There is a dire need to educate them in this regard.
- Tourism development would provide employment to the locals. The development plans should be based on the age groups of the tourist as well as the educational background.
- There was only one shop at Gangaad run by local person which offers a halt mid-way and provide refreshment in form of light snacks e.g. tea, biscuits etc.
- Sustainable Tourism Development should take care of the environment and indigenous culture of the area.

- An awareness campaign has to be done to promote tourism and sustainable practices.

### Conclusion

- The tourists have to be more responsible while using the natural resources in the region. They have to be conscious while visiting the crescent shaped valley to admire its pristine beauty and help in maintaining it.
- The Government needs to plan strategies for the development of this area keeping sustainable tourism development focus in mind.
- Tourism development would provide employment to the locals. The development plans should be based on the age groups of the tourist as well as the educational background.
- The stakeholders also need to be aware about the problems which would arise due to growth of tourism and develop strategies to overcome them. Sustainable Tourism Development should take care of the environment and indigenous culture of the area.
- A community based tourism model can be implemented in the region. This will fulfill the objectives of community development as well as sustainable tourism.
- There is a lot of scope of tourism activities in the region, but unplanned development can lead to destruction and excessive use of natural resources of the region.
- To make tourism sustainable in the region, local community, tourism stakeholders and government policies have to be aligned. Thus, can have sustainable tourism and development in the region.

### References & Bibliography

1. Dr. Nawaz Ahmed, (2013 April), International Journal of Management and Social Sciences Research, Volume 2, Number 4.
2. March 2009, url: <http://computingforsustainability.com/2009/03/15/visualising-sustainability/>
3. Anne Hardy, Robert J.S. Beeton, Leonle Pearson, Sustainable Tourism: An Overview of the Concept and its Position in Relation to Conceptualizations of Tourism, url: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09669580208667183>
4. Sustainable tourism Case study, url: <http://www.sustainabletourism.net/case-studies/policies/>
5. Tourism Theories, (2010 October 6), url: <http://www.tourismtheories.org/>
6. Har-ki-doon, url: <http://www.har-ki-doon-trek.com/>
7. Har-ki-doon, Mori, url: <http://www.euttaranchal.com/tourism/har-ki-doon.php>
8. Uttaranchal Tourism, url: [www.uttaranchaltourism.in/har-ki-doon.html](http://www.uttaranchaltourism.in/har-ki-doon.html)
9. Valleys of Uttarakhand, Har-ki-Doon Valley, url: [www.digplanet.com/wiki/Har\\_Ki\\_Doon\\_valley](http://www.digplanet.com/wiki/Har_Ki_Doon_valley)
10. A trek to the Valley of gods, url: [www.bikatadventures.com/Home/Itinerary/Har-Ki-Dun-Trek](http://www.bikatadventures.com/Home/Itinerary/Har-Ki-Dun-Trek)
11. S.B. Agarwal, 2003, Tourism for Sustainable Economic Development.
12. Rob Harris, Tony Griffin, Peter Williams, 2002, Sustainable Tourism: A Global Perspective.
13. Martin Mowforth and Ian Munt, 1998, Tourism and Sustainability, New tourism in the third World, London.
14. Victor T.C. Middleton, Sustainable Tourism, Oxford, 1998