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ECO-TOURISM IN DISTRICT ALMORA, UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT: District Almora in the state of Uttarakhand, India boasts of its rich natural heritage. It is a beautiful and scenic hill station situated in the lap of Himalaya. Tourism is an important activity both in the state and district. With the increasing number of tourists in the recent past, a threat to natural environment can be sensed here. However, ecotourism provides a sustainable way of development even for the increasing inflow of tourists. The present study focuses on current status of tourism in district Almora and the nature of tourist activities, for which ecotourism is divided into soft-hard continuum. Some eco-tourist spots have been highlighted which are and can further be developed as potential attractions for eco-tourism purposes. Here, the focus is on natural eco-tourist sites which may or may not overlap with the cultural aspect of the region. The secondary data is collected from the Tourism department of the district Almora which is then further analyzed for the study. It is found out that few ecotourism activities are more prominent than the others, however the potential for development is greater in other activities also.

KEYWORDS: Ecotourism, tourists, sightseeing, adventure, biodiversity, quarterly.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been an age-old activity of mankind. Tourism consists of 3 basic elements, viz, man, space and time (Wahab, 1975). Visiting new places, exploring new land, observing different traditions and culture has enchanted man from times immemorial. Tours serve different purposes for different people. Some travel for rest and relaxation or fun, while others for religious beliefs, business purposes, to seek adventure, in quest of knowledge etc. Eco-tourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas. It typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are primary attractions. The International Eco-Tourism Society (TIES) has defined eco-tourism as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people'. (TIES, 1990).

The state of Uttarakhand being situated in the lap of Himalayas is endowed with captivating natural and scenic beauty. Also due to its rich religious and historical significance, Uttarakhand has gained fame as 'Devbhoomi' or 'the Land of Gods'. The presence of mighty Himalayas in the northern part has made it rich in various geomorphological features and biodiversity. Various geomorphological features of the state have become major tourist attractions like Valleys (Dehradun, Valley of Flowers, Pindar Valley etc.); Lakes (Nainital, Sattal etc.); Waterfall (Sahastradhara, Corbett Falls, Dhokaney etc.); Snowcapped peaks (Nanda devi, Panchachuli etc.), Ridge (Phulara, Sankri, Crank's ridge etc.) and so on. The Chardham i.e., Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, Badrinath are major tourist destinations of the state. Such abundant natural sites and eco-sensitive zones make it worthwhile to develop the tourism industry in an ecological way. Uttarakhand is divided into 2 sub-division, i.e., Garhwal and Kumaon, and 13 districts.

For the purpose of study, the area selected is Almora district which lies in the Kumaon division of Uttarakhand state. Being culturally rich, Almora is fondly referred to as 'Sanskritik Nagri'. Nature has also blessed it ecologically. Almora has various scenic beauty spots and natural landscapes which attract lakhs of tourists every year. Tourism is, therefore, an economically important sector in the district. The exploitation of the natural environment is evident in recent years mainly due to high construction work going on in the district. The need for sustainable development of tourism is therefore important. For qualitative growth, development

is mandatory and it is commonly noticed that with development comes destruction of natural resources. As far as the sensitive Himalayan region is concerned the development must be sustainable therefore eco-tourism is the best possible option to promote the tourism sector in the district. However, 'Careful planning and management steps' are crucial before designating a site as an eco-tourism destination (Drumm and Moore, 2005). If carried out irresponsibly, ecotourism can act as an 'agent of increasing disturbances on natural ecosystem' and at the same time as a medium of salvation for the conservation of these regions. (Lowman, 2004)

According to Ahmed (1991), length of stay and place of residence significantly affect the image held by tourists. The high aesthetic value of many areas results from the high value of the natural environment (Zglobicki et al. 2005). According to Kumar et al. (2015), Uttarakhand tourism industry showed almost same trend as in case of Indian tourism but instead of continuous increase in the total number of tourist arrival it showed decrease in number from 2008-13 due to many negative incidents like continuous landslides and cloudburst in rainy season. The total tourist arrival doubled in a decade but due to Himalayan tsunami the tourism trend in Uttarakhand is badly affected by a negative growth rate of -28.07%.

STUDY AREA:

Geographically, Almora district lies in the Lesser Himalayan region of the Uttarakhand state. The study area extends between 29°25'30" N to 29°58'47" N latitudes and 79°02'14" E to 80°04'51" E longitudes, covering an area of about 3139 km² of which 1309 km² is forest area. Almora is a hill district in eastern part of Uttarakhand i.e., the Kumaon Division. This district is surrounded by Pithoragarh district to the East, Garhwal Division to the West, Bageshwar and Chamoli district to the North and Nainital district to the South. Almora headquarter is at a distance of 365 km North-East to national capital New Delhi, while at a distance of 415 km South-East to state capital Dehradun. The nearest airport to Almora is at Pantnagar (127 km), whereas the nearest railway station is at Kathgodam (90 km). From Kathgodam local transport, private taxis and buses are available easily.

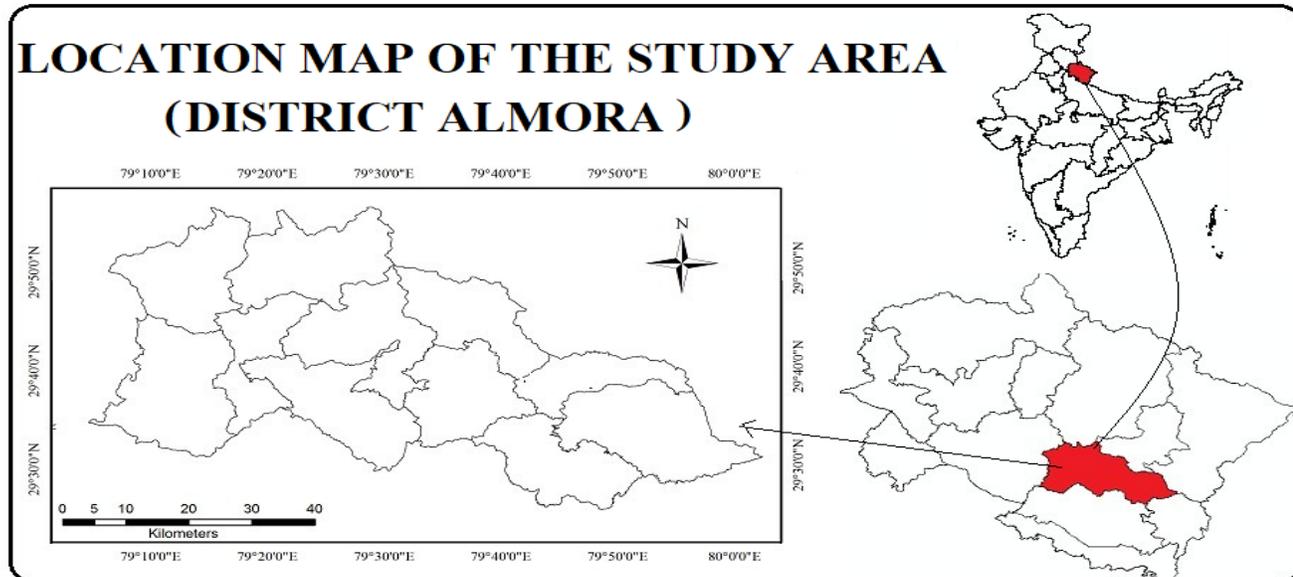


Fig 1: Location Map of district Almora

The average elevation of the study area from the mean sea level is 1861 metres. The maximum monthly temperature is 30 °C in the month of May whereas the minimum monthly temperature is 9 °C in the month of January. The average annual temperature of the study area is 17.9 °C which varies between 23.6 °C maximum and 12.2 °C minimum. The study area receives 1110.9 mm of total annual rainfall. The maximum and minimum rainfall occurs in the month of July (316.1 mm) and November (3.0 mm), respectively. This district experiences climatic conditions varying from sub-tropical to temperate, with the higher reaches experiencing snowfall in the winter season. The study area has a unique geological setup which is made up of mainly crystalline and granite rock groups. Almora has a rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. According to the

census 2011, the total population of Almora is 6,22,506 out of which 2,91,081 are male and 3,31,425 are female. The population density of the city is 155 person/km².

Almora is an important center for art and culture of the Kumaon region. According to renowned historian E.T. Atkinson, Almora city was established by the 43rd ruler of the Chand Dynasty. Formed in 1864 AD, Almora municipality is the oldest municipality in Uttarakhand. The district has snow and forest covered high mountains and fertile valleys. The district is also known for its scenic landscape, rich forests and wildlife. The main Rivers are Kosi, Panar, Suyal, Gagas, Ramganga etc. Apart from this there are small rivulets like Kunzgrad, Naurad, Siraula, Jegani, Vinod and Mallya. The elevation of the district ranges from 750m to more than 2000m above the mean sea level.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

Main objectives of the present study are as follows: -

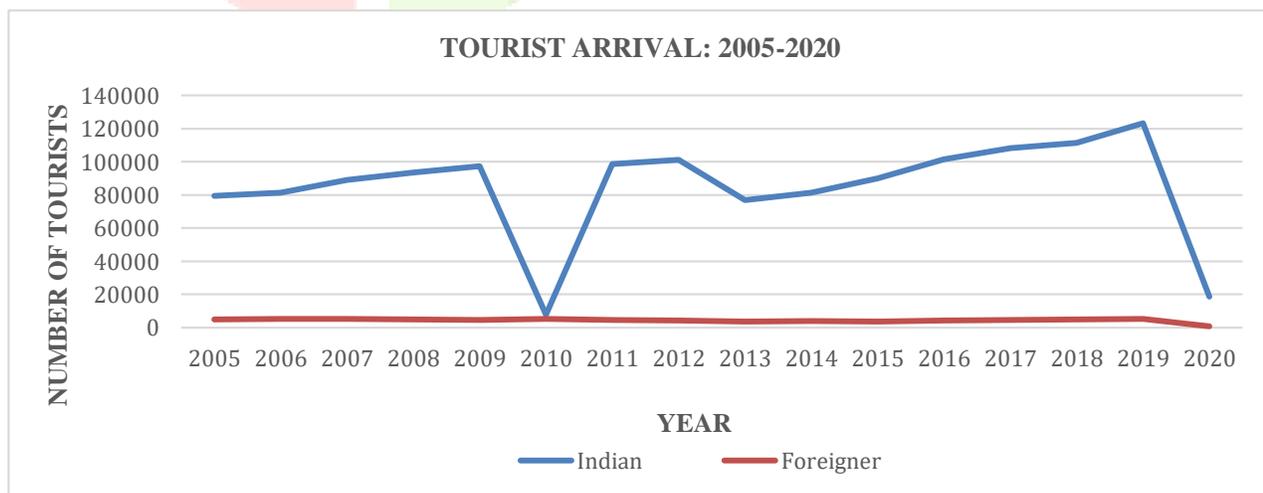
- To know the current status of tourism in district Almora.
- To identify the ecotourism destinations in district Almora.
- To identify the maximum tourist arrival quarterly.
- To spot out the most favoured tourist activity.

METHODOLOGY:

The present paper is based both on primary and secondary data. Secondary data has been collected from office of tourism in Almora city, census of India, district statistical magazine. Various research papers, books, magazines, online articles have also been consulted. Primary data is collected by field visit and observation.

ECO-TOURISM IN DISTRICT ALMORA:

Almora has been classified into two regions viz. the Hill region and the Valley region. The Hill region constitutes the high mountains of Dotiyal (Manila), Malikhaet (Syalde), Bhonkhal (Sult), Chaubatiya, Binsar etc. These areas are densely covered with evergreen and deciduous forests of Burans, Baanj, Chir, Deodar, Kafal etc. On the other hand, the region on the banks of rivers at the altitude between 600m to 1200m above mean sea level is the Valley region. This region is locally called Sera viz. Basulisera, Rawalsera, Beratsera, Someshwarsera, Chaukhutiya, Masiser a etc. Almora district is well-known as a beautiful hill station. A decent number of tourists visit the place every year. The following table shows both Indian and foreign tourist arrival and their growth percent in Almora from the year 2005 to 2020.



Graph 1: Tourist arrival in district Almora (2005-2020)

| S. No | Year | Indian | Foreigner | Total | Growth rate |
|-------|------|--------|-----------|--------|-------------|
| 1. | 2005 | 79435 | 4921 | 84356 | - |
| 2. | 2006 | 81314 | 5225 | 86539 | +2.59 |
| 3. | 2007 | 88965 | 5131 | 94096 | +8.73 |
| 4. | 2008 | 93615 | 4821 | 98436 | +4.6 |
| 5. | 2009 | 97492 | 4530 | 102022 | +3.65 |
| 6. | 2010 | 7869 | 5031 | 12900 | -87.35 |
| 7. | 2011 | 98766 | 4465 | 103231 | +700.24 |
| 8. | 2012 | 101125 | 4373 | 105498 | +2.19 |
| 9. | 2013 | 76958 | 3499 | 80457 | -23.73 |
| 10. | 2014 | 81345 | 4020 | 85365 | +6.1 |
| 11. | 2015 | 89850 | 3440 | 93290 | +9.28 |
| 12. | 2016 | 101648 | 4353 | 106001 | +13.63 |
| 13. | 2017 | 108178 | 4524 | 112718 | +6.33 |
| 14. | 2018 | 111448 | 4839 | 116287 | +3.17 |
| 15. | 2019 | 123416 | 5258 | 128674 | +10.65 |
| 16. | 2020 | 18499 | 702 | 19201 | -85.07 |

TABLE 1: - Tourist arrival in district Almora (2005-2020)

SOURCE: Almora Tourism Department

Graph 1 and table 1 shows the arrival of tourist from 2005-2020. Overall, rise in tourists' arrival can be seen during one and a half decade. Although, significant negative growth rate can be seen in the year of 2010, 2013 and 2020 because of natural calamities like heavy rainfall and landslide, floods, spread of deadly virus respectively. However, a slow and steady rise in tourist numbers can be seen in other years. The arrival of foreign tourists is more or less constant during the last one and a half decade.

Ecotourism can be classified into hard ecotourism and soft ecotourism. The concept of hard-soft continuum is apparent in the draft Queensland Ecotourism Plan (Queensland, 1995). Since adventure activities range from non-hazardous to high risk the concept of soft adventure or hard adventure is used for grouping them (Shephard et al. 2005). The former relates to activities pursued by individuals attracted to a perceived risk and adventure but with little actual risk, thus no previous experience is necessary and anybody physically fit and able can get involved. On the other hand, in hard adventure both the participant and the service provider are aware of a high-risk level, as well as requirements of previous experience, competence, and skills are essential for this kind of activity to cope with the unexpected outcome.

| ECOTOURISM | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| SOFT ECO-TOURISM | HARD ECO-TOURISM |
| Sight Seeing | Trekking / Hiking |
| Birdwatching | Cycling or Biking |
| Camping | Rock Climbing |
| Lake view | River Rafting |
| Forest Exploration | |

TABLE 2: - Soft and Hard Ecotourism activities in district Almora

SOFT ECO-TOURISM

Soft or general ecotourism is more oriented towards higher physical comfort, higher services expected, short trips and is physically passive. The scope of soft ecotourism is higher in Almora district. It is a less intense approach which revolves around curiosity about nature. Activities as simple as birdwatching, nature photography, sightseeing, observation of biodiversity, astronomical phenomenon, local traditions and culture etc. falls under the domain of soft ecotourism.

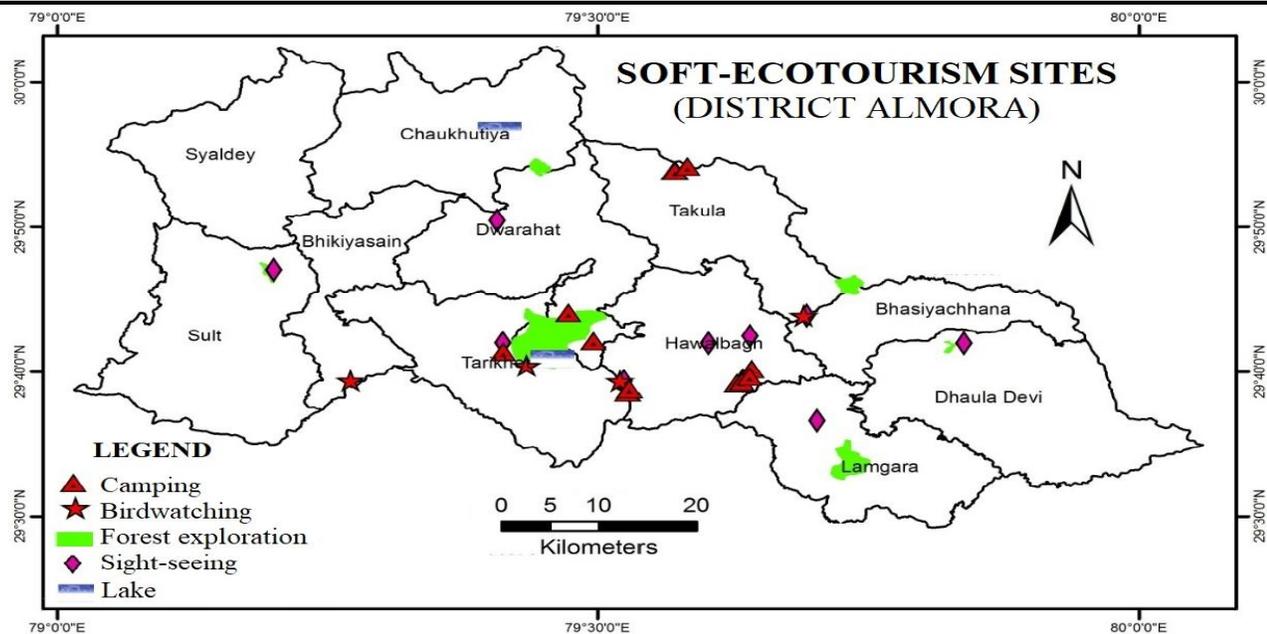


Fig 2: Sites for soft-ecotourism

Potential activities and sites for soft-ecotourism:

Sight-seeing: Viewing the pristine hills and Himalaya is the primary purpose of most tourists visiting the Almora district. Clear weather is a pre-requisite to enjoy serenity of mountains. The latter months of the year are better for the purpose of sight-seeing as the weather is mostly clear from haze, thus providing a mesmerizing view of the mountains and Himalayas. Bright end corner, a popular spot offers a phenomenal view of sunrise and sunset with snow-capped peaks as a background. It is just a 2 km walk from main town. Kasar devi, a 11 km distance away from main town features high-altitude panoramic views and is a major center for meditational activities. Ranikhet, a pristine town offers a magnificent view of Himalayan range, one of the best views can be caught from Hairakhan temple and Majkhali. Syahi Devi at a distance of 30 km from Almora is at an altitude of 1900 meters and gives a 360° view of Almora region. Prominent peaks that are visible from here are Nanda Devi, Trishul, Chaukhamba and Panchachuli.

Birdwatching: Birdwatching is becoming the most rapidly growing and most environmentally conscious segment of ecotourism and provides economic hope for many threatened natural areas around the world (Cordell & Herbert 2002). Despite the potential for disturbance, birdwatching if properly conducted, is far preferable to land clearing, hunting and other exploitative, unsustainable activities (Sekercioglu, C. 2002). Forests of Binsar, Ranikhet and Sitlakhet are paradise for bird-watchers. The tiny hamlet of Binsar is cocooned in the Jhandi hills of Kumaon in Almora. Binsar is also protected as a wildlife sanctuary, thus enriched with abundance of flora and fauna. It is at a distance of 24 km from Almora and enjoys an average altitude of around 7900 feet. Binsar is declared as an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International with over 200 species including tits, forktail, blackbirds, parakeets, woodpeckers and a range of others are found here. The forests of Sitlakhet are also rich in birds' diversity thus a potential site for birdwatchers. Birds found here are Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue whistling thrushes, Eurasian Jay, Green backed tit, Himalayan griffon and numerous other varieties.

Camping: Camping is an outdoor activity involving overnight stays away with or without a shelter. Typically, participants leave developed area to spend time outdoors in more natural surroundings in pursuit of activities providing them enjoyment or an educational experience. Almora is one such place that offers fantastic of camping experiences. Binsar Valley River Camp, Lingurata provides camping facilities for the tourists. The attraction of this place is the solitude, river and greenery. Moksha River side camp in Almora cradled in the wilderness of Himalayan ranges is other such camping facility. Camping is organized in Kosi river valley, thus attracting tourists.

Lake view: Lake tourism in Almora is lesser known by the tourists mainly due to less development in their surrounding areas. Taragtal in Chaukhutiya and Ranijheel in Ranikhet are beautiful lakes which have immense potential to be developed as major eco-tourist spots. Ranijheel is situated in Ranikhet and is an artificial lake. It was built by Cantonment Board for rainwater harvesting. However, it is now open for tourists and boating is the most favoured activity here. Being at a higher altitude of over 1800 meters the surrounding forests are covered in lush green vegetation of Banj and Deodar mainly. Fishes are adequately found here but fishing is not allowed in the lake. Taragtal, a natural lake, in Chaukhutia is about 2 km long and 0.5 km in width. It is at a distance of 28 km from Dwarahat. It is seasonal in nature and 5 seasonal rivers drains it. As it dries out in summers so villagers reap a good harvest of wheat and mustard from the dried-out lake. Swimming is the most favoured activity here. A dam is proposed for the lake recently.

Forest exploration: By the virtue of vast altitudinal range Almora is rich in terms of both floral and faunal biodiversity. However, sub-tropical species are more prominent like chir pine, sal faliyal oak, vijaysar etc. Other species like deodar, ultis, horse chestnut, kal, oak (Banj, Rianj, Tilanj) of sub-temperate type are found above 1800 meters. Sub-alpine to Alpine community is found above 2800 meters. The forests are home to various faunal species like leopard, Himalayan buck bear, Kakar, goral, langur, chital etc. A remarkable variety of birds like kala titar, monal pheasant, kokla pheasant, vultures, eagles etc. can be seen the year round. Thus, exploring these forests can provide unmatched experience to eco-tourists. Monsoonal rainfall helps flora to rejuvenate therefore post monsoonal season is great to explore these forests.

TABLE 3: Activities and sites for soft-ecotourism

| ACTIVITY | SITES |
|--------------------|---|
| Sight-seeing | Bright end Corner Deenapani Binsar Zero Point Chiliyanaula Chaubatia |
| Birdwatching | Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary Sitalkhet |
| Camping | Binsar valley River camp Almora The Moksha River side Almora Youreka pinewood cliff, Sitalkhet LETS Camp Sitalkhet |
| Lake | Taragtal Ranijheel |
| Forest Exploration | Manila Pandukholi Binsar Jageshwar Lamgara |



Fig 3: View of eco-tourism sites in district Almora

HARD ECO-TOURISM

Ideal hard-core ecotourism needs strong environmental commitments and is more adventurous in nature. Hard ecotourism tends to involve a scientific interest in natural surroundings, wildlife and/or biodiversity. It is not luxurious, often involving lack of hotel accommodation or additional amenities. Hard ecotourism activities in Almora district are mainly confined to trekking, cycling, mountain biking and rock climbing.

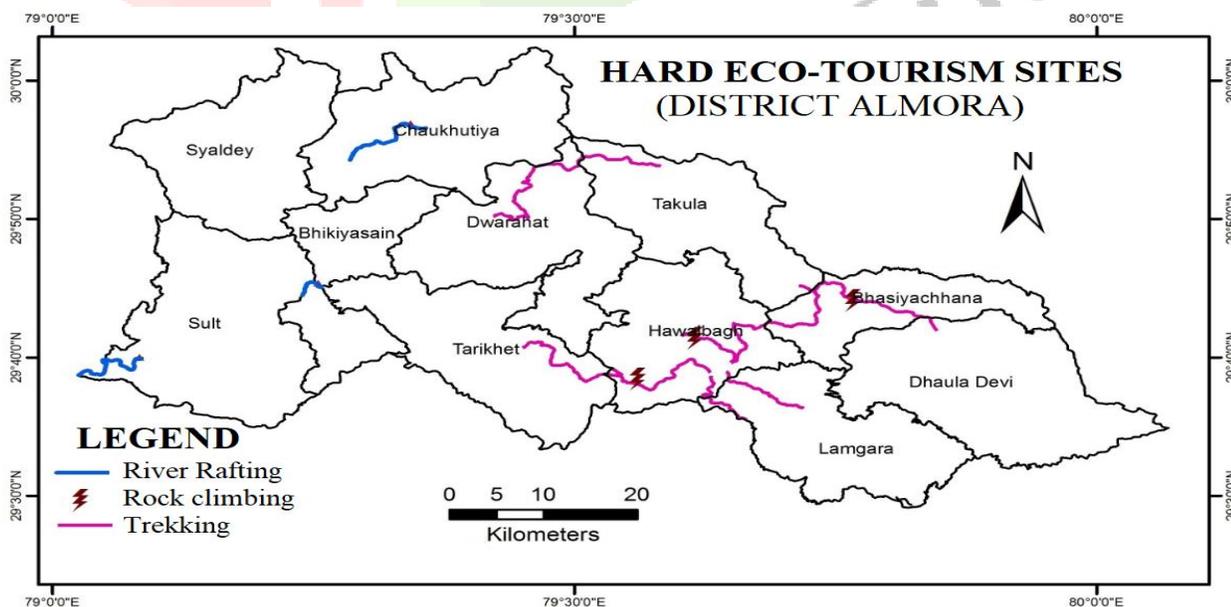


Fig 4: Sites for Hard Ecotourism

Trekking –Trekking is a form of tourism practiced in difficult terrain and climate, requiring specialized equipment, clothing, and food, implying connotation of risk, jeopardy, and wilderness (Weber 2001, Hall and Weiler, 1992, Gyimothy and mykletum,2004, Buckley, 2006). Almora is blessed with scenic hilly terrain that renders the district as one of the most enjoyable in the country. Almora has maintained a separate identity for its beauty. The beautiful hills of the Himalayas are visible from many places of Almora, due to which trekking routes have been made from place to place. Some of the most famous tracks: Jageshwar, Kasar Devi, Banri Devi, Pandukholi, Binsar.

Jageshwar –It is a temple town located at a distance of 36 km from Almora. It is at an altitude of 1860m. The trek from Artola to temple complex passes through dense deodar woods with Jaat ganga flowing side by side all through the route.

Banri Devi – Banri Devi temple is situated at a distance of 26 km from Almora on Lamgara road. To reach the temple one has to pass through the middle of the forest in which different types of birds and biodiversity are seen. After a 2 km walk one comes to Banri Devi temple at a height of 1900m. Due to the high altitude, a beautiful view of Almora can be seen from here.

Pandukholi – Pandukholi is famous for its caves and beautiful view. This place is situated at an altitude of 8000 ft. which is located at a distance of 27 km from Dwarahat of Almora district. The trek route from Dunagiri temple is 5 km while from Kukkuhhina is 3km long. Rhododendron, Oak, Himalayan Bear, leopard, boar, langur and various types of birds can be seen in the route. Tourists from far come for trekking in this route because the atmosphere here is very attractive. On reaching Pandukholi one can get a beautiful view of the surrounding places.

Binsar –The trek to Zero Point amid the Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary is calm and pristine. The sanctuary is rich in deciduous and evergreen vegetation. Broad-leaved oaks, deodar, rhododendron are the main tree species. Leopard, deer, wild boar, antelopes, birds, butterflies are abundant thus enriching the trekker's experience. Himalayan peaks of Kedarnath, Trishul and Nanda Devi can be enjoyed from destination point.

Cycling/ Biking –Cycling is a form of physical activity. It can result in most of the health benefits. It is therefore no surprise that cycling has been recognized as an important potential means to promote public health (Bassett et al, 2008; Bauman & Rissel, 2009). Almora district also provides umpteen cycling trails, and bicycling is a great way to explore the scenic areas. Most trekking routes pass through paved roads and cycling is done on most of those routes. For the last few years, cycling is being promoted in the Almora district and people are enjoying the natural scenery by cycling, at the same time being aware of nature and knowing about it. The same trek can be used by biking enthusiasts, thus increasing the scope of tourist activities in the district



Fig 5: Rest houses specifically for bikers enroute to Jageshwar from Almora

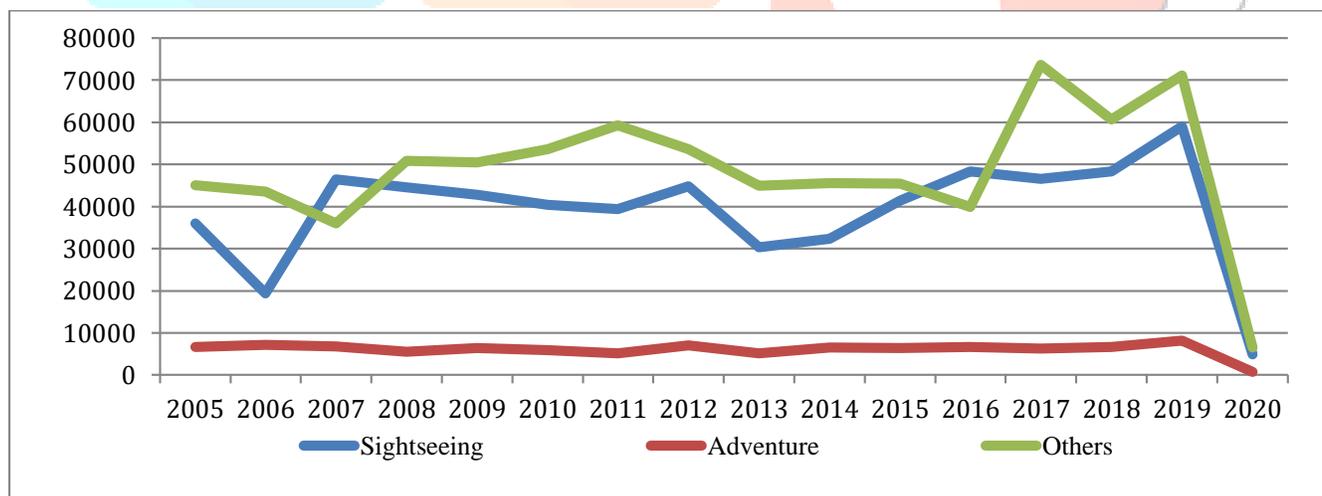
Rock climbing: Ideal rocks suitable for rock climbing are granite, sandstone, and limestone. Although hills and rocks that are ideal for rock climbing and mountaineering are present in pockets in different areas but rock climbing is not yet much developed in the district as compared to other districts of the state. Some entities organize rock climbing for tourists on a personal basis. Some places like Dhaulchhina, Sitlakheta, Kosi valley has a larger potential of rock climbing, if properly utilized.

River Rafting: Rafting is a recreational outdoor activity that uses an inflatable raft to navigate a river or other body of water. The development of river rafting as a leisure sport has become popular since the mid-1970. Rafting is done on which water or different degrees of rough water dealing with risk is often a part of the experience. It is a kind of adventurous action that is done with the balance of body and mind. Due to physical activity along with entertainment, many people come to the picture of rafting from far and wide. The Himalayan region is famous for rafting activities. However, rafting in Almora is held in small pockets of which Marchula, Bhikiyasain, and Chaukhutiya place are suitable for rafting, but more development is possible in this activity

| ACTIVITY | SITES |
|-------------------|--|
| Trekking/ Hiking | Almora-Syahidevi Syahidevi-Chaubatiya Almora-Kalimath-Binsar-Jageshwar Dwarahat-Dunagiri-Pandukholi-Bhatkot-Pinak-Kausani Almora-Chamu-Kalseema-Kapleshwar Almora-Khagmara-Banridevi-Jalna Almora-Dhar ki Tuni-Kosi-Katarmal |
| Cycling or Biking | Same routes as mentioned |
| Rock Climbing | Dhaulchhina Sitlakhet Kosi Valley |
| River Rafting | Marchula Bhikiyasain Chaukhutiya |

Table 4: Hard ecotourism sites and activities

In the following tables and graphs the purpose of tourists’ arrival in district Almora is shown. A cumulative of tourist arrival data is done for different activities.



Graph 2: Total no. of tourists engaged in different activities (2005-2020)

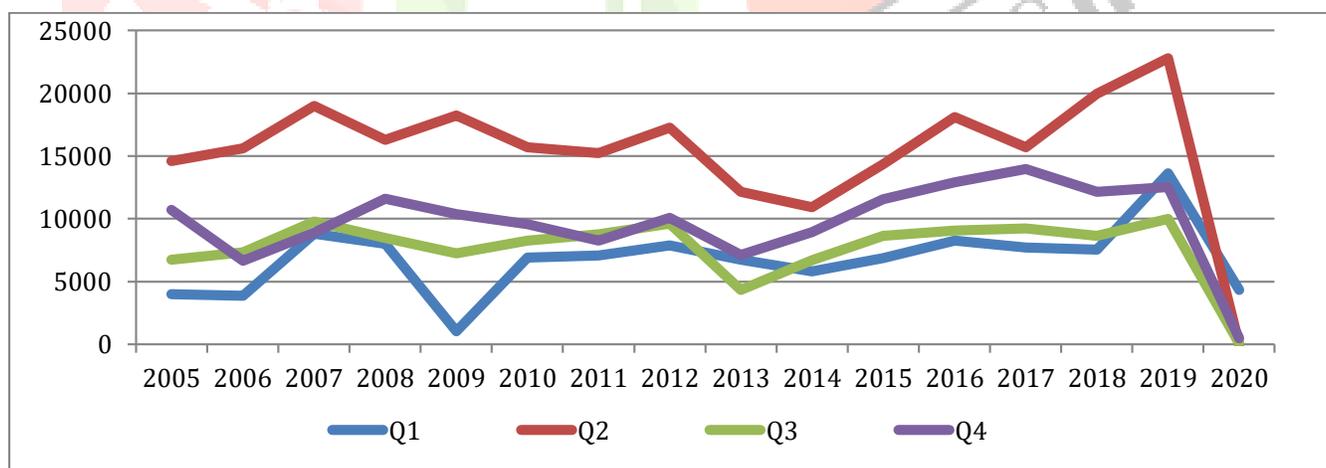
| S.NO. | YEAR | SIGHTSEEING | ADVENTURE | OTHERS |
|-------|------|-------------|-----------|--------|
| 1 | 2005 | 36027 | 6725 | 45010 |
| 2 | 2006 | 19430 | 7121 | 43604 |
| 3 | 2007 | 46466 | 6761 | 36041 |
| 4 | 2008 | 44594 | 5482 | 50837 |
| 5 | 2009 | 42778 | 6373 | 50485 |
| 6 | 2010 | 40431 | 5880 | 53570 |
| 7 | 2011 | 39359 | 5208 | 59331 |
| 8 | 2012 | 44854 | 6998 | 53658 |
| 9 | 2013 | 30310 | 5172 | 44974 |
| 10 | 2014 | 32331 | 6484 | 45550 |
| 11 | 2015 | 41441 | 6379 | 45460 |
| 12 | 2016 | 48355 | 6712 | 39908 |
| 13 | 2017 | 46629 | 6247 | 73633 |
| 14 | 2018 | 48289 | 6653 | 60701 |
| 15 | 2019 | 59009 | 8228 | 71143 |
| 16 | 2020 | 4901 | 802 | 6551 |

TABLE 5: Tourist numbers according to activity pursued

Graph 2 is representation of the table 2. It shows the purpose of visit of tourists in district Almora from 2005-2020. It can be noticed that tourists are attracted more for sightseeing purposes rather than adventure purposes. Other purpose of visit is cumulative of reasons like religious, business, training etc. From the graph, it can be noticed that the tourists in adventure field are less attracted in the district and graph for sightseeing is much higher.

QUARTERLY ANALYSIS:

The graphs and tables below show the quarter-wise arrival of tourist. The year is divided into four quarters of three months each starting from January and ending on December. Its is done for both soft and hard ecotourism activity.



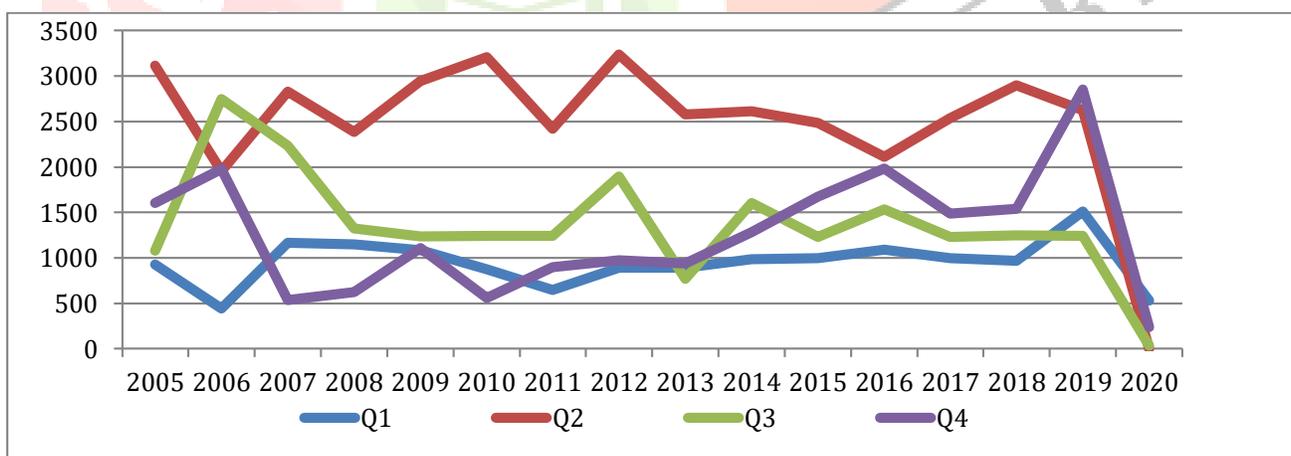
Graph 3: Quarter-wise tourist arrival for sightseeing (Soft-Ecotourism)

| S. NO. | YEAR | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 |
|--------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | 2005 | 3995 | 14610 | 6722 | 10700 |
| 2 | 2006 | 3870 | 15630 | 7354 | 6676 |
| 3 | 2007 | 8800 | 18997 | 9775 | 8894 |
| 4 | 2008 | 8019 | 16306 | 8464 | 11605 |
| 5 | 2009 | 6890 | 18236 | 7266 | 10386 |
| 6 | 2010 | 6916 | 15691 | 8270 | 9554 |
| 7 | 2011 | 7085 | 15229 | 8761 | 8284 |
| 8 | 2012 | 7903 | 17273 | 9615 | 10063 |
| 9 | 2013 | 6723 | 12152 | 4350 | 7105 |
| 10 | 2014 | 5810 | 10905 | 6689 | 8927 |
| 11 | 2015 | 6885 | 14336 | 8652 | 11568 |
| 12 | 2016 | 8255 | 18127 | 9058 | 12915 |
| 13 | 2017 | 7697 | 15703 | 9244 | 13985 |
| 14 | 2018 | 7556 | 19964 | 8625 | 12144 |
| 15 | 2019 | 13646 | 22820 | 10012 | 12531 |
| 16 | 2020 | 4325 | -- | 67 | 505 |

Table 6: Quarter-wise tourist arrival for sightseeing (2005-2020)

| | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Q1- January, February, March | Q2- April, May, June |
| Q3- July, August, September | Q4- October, November, December |

Graph 3 and table 6 shows the arrival of tourist for the purpose of sightseeing on a quarter-wise scenario. It can be noticed that at any given point of time second quarter (April, May, June) has high inflow of tourists than other quarters. Fourth quarter or the months of October, November and December are next favourite months for tourists to visit the area.



Graph 4: Quarter-wise tourist arrival for adventure activities (Hard-Ecotourism)

| S.NO. | YEAR | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 | 2005 | 925 | 3115 | 1080 | 1605 |
| 2 | 2006 | 445 | 1956 | 2746 | 1974 |
| 3 | 2007 | 1164 | 2829 | 2234 | 534 |
| 4 | 2008 | 1146 | 2386 | 1324 | 626 |
| 5 | 2009 | 1086 | 2942 | 1238 | 1107 |
| 6 | 2010 | 873 | 3208 | 1241 | 558 |
| 7 | 2011 | 645 | 2418 | 1242 | 898 |
| 8 | 2012 | 892 | 3236 | 1897 | 973 |
| 9 | 2013 | 891 | 2576 | 767 | 938 |
| 10 | 2014 | 986 | 2615 | 1603 | 1280 |
| 11 | 2015 | 995 | 2483 | 1230 | 1671 |
| 12 | 2016 | 1088 | 2110 | 1532 | 1982 |
| 13 | 2017 | 996 | 2537 | 1228 | 1486 |
| 14 | 2018 | 968 | 2898 | 1245 | 1542 |
| 15 | 2019 | 1510 | 2622 | 1244 | 2852 |
| 16 | 2020 | 530 | ---- | 33 | 239 |

Table 7: Quarter-wise tourist arrival for adventure activities (2005-2020)

Graph 4 and table 7 shows the arrival of hard ecotourists for adventure specific purposes. The graphical representation clearly indicates that Q2 which include summer months of April, May and June attract the highest number of tourists. However, a noticeable shift can be seen for the next favoured quarter for adventure tourists. Before 2013-14, Q3 was preferred after Q2 but a major shift to Q4 as next favoured quarter is easily noticeable. This shift can more or less be related to frequent disasters during Q3, which coincides with rainy season in the area during the recent years.

CONCLUSION:

Almora district presents remarkable opportunities for the growth of both soft and hard ecotourism. Most of the potential is still underutilized. A good networking is important to fetch tourists' attention for tourism activities and its allied businesses.

Secondary data is analyzed to know the current status of tourism in the district. Lakhs of tourists visit the district annually for reasons mainly like rest and relaxation, adventure and others. The year is divided into four quarters (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4) of three months each for the study purpose. Months in Q1 are January, February, March; Q2 is April, May, June; Q3 is July, August, September; and Q4 is October, November, December; which also likely resemble the seasonal character of the study area. Data from 2005-20 is considered for the study purpose. The purpose of dividing tourists' data in different quarters is basically to understand which quarter of the year is preferred by tourists to visit the study area. From the graph it is clear that tourists prefer second quarter of the year to visit district Almora. Second quarter is attuned with summer months in the region. As summers are mild here as compared to plain areas thus tourist from hotter regions prefer to visit mountainous areas to get rid of harsh weather conditions. The major purpose of visit at any point of time is sightseeing. An increase in tourist numbers can be noticed from 2005-09 but a steep dip is seen in the year 2010. The major factor behind this is attributed to heavy rainfall accompanied with disaster like landslide in the study area. However, the next year is followed by a steep rise of about 700% in tourists' arrival. In 2013, the state of Uttarakhand came under the grip of heavy rainfall and natural disasters which severely affected the tourist's arrival and a negative growth rate of - 23.73% is noticed. Nonetheless, after the year 2013 a slow and steady rise in tourist numbers in the district followed until the year 2020, when the restriction was imposed on travel due to unforeseen circumstances of Covid-19. However, arrival of foreign tourists has remained more or less constant in the past one and a half decade. A major dip of - 85.07% is noticed in the year 2020 due to

travel restrictions. In reference to domestic or Indian tourists the year 2019 witnessed the maximum number of tourists at around 1.2 lakhs.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Governmental support is a must for sustainable development of tourism. State government should take necessary steps to enhance the ecotourism activity in the district. A separate budget must be allocated for ecotourism development in the state.
- Local communities should be motivated to develop Almora as eco-tourism spot. Participation of local self-help groups and women must be encouraged by giving governmental support.
- Conservation and protection of biodiversity and natural environment must be practiced rigorously both by government and local people. Tourists must also be encouraged to maintain the sanctity of natural areas.
- Use of eco-friendly techniques must be encouraged for construction purposes, and new buildings and rest houses must comply with green technology. Utilization of solar energy, rainwater harvesting, organic production of food crops, aquaculture etc. should be encouraged. Ecotourism in this regard must be promoted.
- More of private participation must be encouraged and given friendly atmosphere to develop as ecotourism entities.

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