

Alternative Tourism Paving Way for Destination Development - A Study of Kullu Manali

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how alternative tourism helps to build destinations, with a particular emphasis on Kullu-Manali as a case study. Using a multifaceted methodology, the study seeks to thoroughly analyse the constituents of alternative tourism in this region. The study includes a SWOT analysis—a review of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats —of alternative tourism in Kullu-Manali to provide light on the current state of Alternative tourism in the region.

Furthermore, the study explores tourists' perspectives on alternative tourism in Kullu Manali, using survey data to identify the activities that are popular, interest locations, and liking for alternative activities. The results show that respondents had a good understanding of alternative tourism, with hiking, camping, and white-water rafting standing out as the most popular activities. These observations highlight the potential of alternative tourism to draw tourists while also advancing the destination's sustainable growth.

The study uses observations and interviews as part of a qualitative research approach to determine Kullu Manali's potential for alternative tourism. To provide insights that might direct sustainable destination development in the Kullu Manali region, this study paper looks at the elements of alternative tourism, comprehends visitor viewpoints, and makes recommendations.

Keywords: *alternative tourism, kullu-manali, destination development, sustainability*

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the tourism industry is growing and making a substantial contribution to economic development and prosperity. Nevertheless, the environment and nearby towns have also suffered because of the tourism industry's explosive expansion. Delicate balance between nature and tourism in mountainous areas like the Kullu Manali region is vulnerable. Mountains are distinct ecosystems that provide a unique fusion of varied forms, heights, and environments, drawing visitors looking for adventure and scenic splendour.

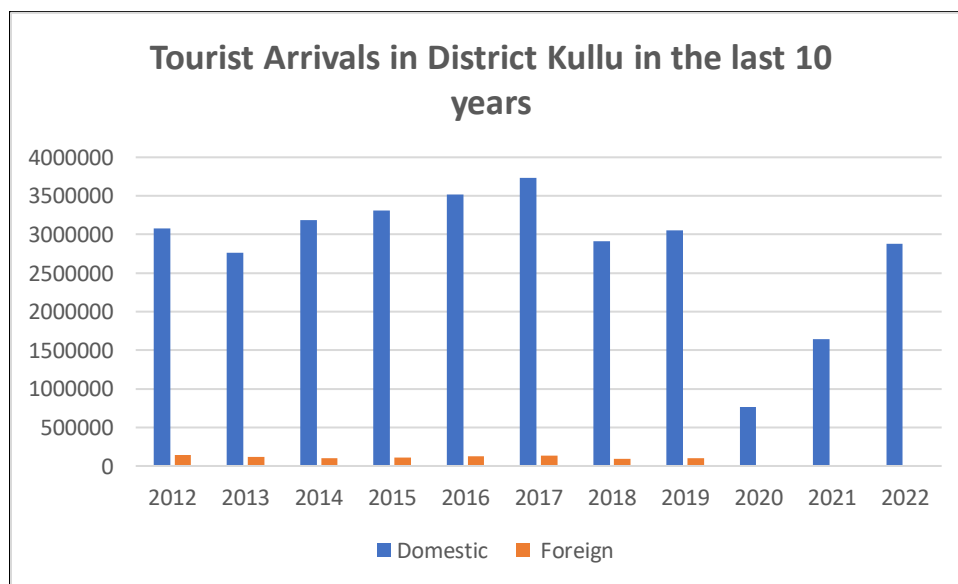
The Indian state of Himachal Pradesh has the Kullu-Manali as a popular tourist destination among tourist, which is well-known for its breathtaking scenery, extensive cultural history, and chances for adventure travel. Popular tourist spots in the area, draw large numbers of visitors every year. However, the unrestrained movement of tourists and the mass level of tourism activities restricted to few destinations have put immense pressure on the region's natural resources and local communities. According to the data from the Tourism Department of Himachal Pradesh, the number of tourist arrivals in District Kullu in the last 10 years (from 2012 to 2022) is as follows:

Table 1: Tourist Arrivals in District Kullu (2012-2022)

Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total
2012	3082545	143900	32,26,445
2013	27,66,709	119341	28,86,050
2014	3187436	104309	32,91,745
2015	3314463	109468	34,23,931
2016	3515169	122064	36,37,233
2017	3732044	133057	38,65,101
2018	2912552	96201	30,08,753
2019	3056463	102948	31,59,411
2020	763379	7080	7,70,459
2021	1647329	252	16,47,581
2022	2876513	3706	28,80,219

Source: Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department official Statistical report 2023. <https://himachaltourism.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Tourist-Statistics.pdf>

From the above table the number of tourist arrivals in District Kullu has been steadily increasing for the past few years, with a peak of 38,65,101 tourists in 2017. However, the number of tourist arrivals declined in 2018 and 2019, and then drastically declined in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of tourist arrivals has since rebounded in 2021, but it is still below the levels seen in 2017. It is important to note that these numbers only include the tourists who arrived in District Kullu by air, road and rail.



Source: Generated by the researcher through the tourist Statistics for District Kullu

Over the past ten years, several tourism-related factors have contributed to the degradation of the ecosystem in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu District, including:

Increased Traffic: As tourism has grown over the past ten years, Kullu Manali has seen a considerable increase in the number of automobiles. Traffic congestion, noise pollution, and air pollution have all degraded because of this.

Deforestation: In certain areas of Kullu, the building of hotels, resorts, and other tourism infrastructure has resulted in deforestation. As a result, there is now less forest cover, which increases the risk of flooding, landslides, and soil erosion.

Water Pollution: The Kullu District's growing tourist population has put a pressure on the area's water supply. As a result, there is now more sewage and other pollution in rivers and streams, which may be harmful to aquatic life.

Solid Waste: The Kullu District's growing tourist population has also resulted in a rise in solid waste. A common result of improper disposal of this garbage is litter and contamination.

Overcrowding: The Kullu District's well-liked tourist spots are frequently overrun, which can be detrimental to the surrounding ecosystem and communities. This may result in a lack of access to necessities, traffic jams, and noise pollution.

Table 2: Adverse impacts on natural environment due to unplanned tourism in the Himalaya

Forms of Activity	Pressures on	Adverse impacts
Over construction	Land	Increase in disasters (deforestation, floods, cloud bursts and landslides, etc.)
Increase in roads	Forests	Soil erosion, landslides, floods
Fuelwood		Air pollution and shrinkage in forests
Timber extraction		Air pollution and loss of forests cover
Forest fires		Drying up of springs
Trekking,	Fauna	Disturb wildlife habitat
Hunting & poaching		Reduction in wildlife
Increase in road traffic	Air	Increase in air and/or noise pollution and respiratory problems begin
Waste dumping	Water	Water borne disease/ contamination of water sources,
Sewage disposal		fading scenic beauty

Source: Research Paper on Environmental Impacts of Tourism in Kullu-Manali complex in North Western Himalaya, India. Part 1: The Adverse Impacts in International Journal of Fieldwork Studies.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237448071_Environmental_Impacts_of_Tourism_in_Kullu-Manali_complex_in_North_Western_Himalaya_India_Part_1_The_Adverse_Impacts

One of the most important strategies to lessen the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and society is alternative tourism. It aims to achieve equilibrium amongst environmental preservation, socio-cultural preservation, and economic development. Alternative tourism is essential to the Kullu Manali region's preservation of the pristine beauty of its natural surroundings, the socioeconomic well-being of the local people, and the long-term survival of the tourism sector.

Alternative tourism is a sustainable and responsible form of tourism that focuses on cultural, ecological, and social experiences instead of traditional relaxation activities. Alternative tourism is becoming more and more popular as travellers look for unique and authentic experiences while supporting local communities and preserving natural resources. Destination development is the process of promoting and developing a destination's tourism industry to attract more visitors to the destination and generate economic opportunities for the local community. The two terms are closely linked as alternative tourism often sets the stage for destination development. Promoting sustainable and responsible practices in tourism can help destinations attract more visitors who seek authentic and meaningful experiences. Kullu Manali, a destination in India, is a prime example of an alternative tourism destination. The study on alternative tourism in Kullu Manali highlights how alternative tourism is paving way for destination development in this beautiful region of Himachal Pradesh

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Alternative tourism, also known as sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, or eco-tourism, has gained considerable attention in recent years. It is a concept that seeks to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, culture, and local communities while maximizing the positive socio-economic benefits. Alternative tourism goes beyond traditional mass tourism by emphasizing community involvement, environmental conservation, and authentic cultural experiences (Triarchi & Karamanis 2017). It promotes a more sustainable and responsible approach to tourism development, focusing on the preservation of natural resources and the well-being of local communities. Sustainable tourism development is a holistic approach that aims to achieve a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and socio-cultural preservation. It recognizes the interconnectedness between tourism, the environment, and local communities. Sustainable tourism development involves the integration of environmental sustainability, social inclusiveness, and economic viability (UNWTO, 2015). It emphasizes the need to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, promote community participation, and ensure the equitable distribution of benefits throughout the destination.

When you think of a hill station, what comes to mind? Undoubtedly, lush vegetation, majestic vistas, snowfall, and cascades. The view from mountains is supposed to be peaceful and dreamlike, as they represent the pinnacle of paradise. People travel from all over the world to visit peaks like those found in the great Himalayan range because of the natural beauty of the area. After all, travellers come to places like Kullu and Manali to explore their rich biological riches, which are also known for their exceptionally pleasant and healthful weather. Even the government has suggested using solar lighting, dustbins, eco-biodegradable and electronic toilets, and scientific rubbish disposal to maintain the cleanliness and hygienic conditions of India's top honeymoon destination.

The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2019 is a comprehensive and forward-looking document that aims to transform the tourism sector in the state. If implemented effectively, the policy has the potential to make Himachal Pradesh a leading global tourism destination. Tourism can have both positive and negative impacts on the environment. Positive impacts include environmental awareness, conservation initiatives, and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. However, the rapid growth of tourism can lead to environmental degradation, habitat loss, increased pollution, and overconsumption of resources (Ruhanen, 2016). The concentration of tourism activities in specific areas can put additional pressure on fragile ecosystems, leading to soil erosion, deforestation, and disruption of biodiversity. Alternative tourism approaches aim to minimize these negative impacts by promoting responsible resource management and sustainable practices. The impacts of tourism on local communities are multifaceted. While tourism can bring economic benefits, such as job creation and income generation, it can also result in social and cultural changes. The commodification of local traditions and customs, the displacement of residents, and the loss of traditional livelihoods are some of the negative consequences of tourism (Hall, 2010). Community participation and empowerment are crucial for mitigating these negative impacts. Alternative tourism approaches encourage the active involvement of local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring their ownership and control over tourism development. Community participation is recognized as a key element in sustainable tourism development. Engaging local communities in the planning, implementation, and management of tourism initiatives can lead to more inclusive and equitable outcomes. Community-based tourism, where local communities directly benefit from tourism activities, has gained popularity to empower communities and preserve cultural authenticity (Saarinen, 2016). By involving residents in decision-making, capacity building, and revenue sharing, alternative tourism approaches can foster a sense of ownership and enhance the social and economic well-being of communities. Preserving indigenous quality experiences is essential for maintaining the authenticity and cultural integrity of a destination. Traditional knowledge, customs, and practices are valuable assets that can differentiate a destination and provide unique experiences for tourists. Alternative tourism approaches focus on creating opportunities for tourists to engage with the local culture, traditions, and lifestyles in a respectful and sustainable manner (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). This involves promoting cultural exchange, supporting local artisans and entrepreneurs, and ensuring that tourism activities align with the values and aspirations of the local community.

Community participation, environmental conservation, and the preservation of indigenous quality experiences are crucial elements in achieving sustainable tourism. By adopting alternative tourism approaches, the Kullu region can protect its natural environment, support local livelihoods, and offer tourists authentic and enriching experiences.

III. OBJECTIVE

- To study the components of alternative tourism in the context of Kullu Manali.
- To study the SWOT Analysis for Alternative Tourism in Kullu Manali
- To find out the view point of Tourists on Alternative tourism in Kullu Manali
- To give recommendations on how enterprises, local communities, and government might use alternative tourism to support sustainable destination development.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper adopts Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation in Kullu and Manali from tourist. 100tourists (Respondents) were asked questions based on tourism activities ,their interest, and alternative tourism scope through semi structured interview. Using primary surveys and secondary sources, a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is carried out to evaluate the situation in the Kullu Manali region and determine the possibilities for alternative tourism. A popular methodology for assessing a destination's internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external possibilities and dangers is the SWOT analysis. An in-depth analysis of the situation and emerging trends surrounding alternative tourism in the area is made possible by the primary data obtained through observation and interview methods.

V. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

SWOT Analysis based on key findings:

Strengths:

- 1. Distinctive Natural Landscapes:** The Kullu-Manali is home to a variety of stunning natural locations, such as big mountains, green valleys, and clean rivers. The promotion of alternative tourism, which emphasises eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and nature-based experiences, is greatly aided by these natural resources.
- 2. Rich Cultural Heritage:** The area boasts a diverse range of traditional arts, music, and festivals. Travellers looking for engaging and meaningful interactions with regional customs may be drawn to destinations that preserve indigenous culture and offer genuine cultural experiences.
- 3. Spiritual Tourism:** With its historic monasteries and temples, Kullu-Manali has spiritual significance. In the calm surroundings, those looking for spiritual experiences, yoga, and meditation can find acceptable settings.
- 4. Organic Farming and Local Cuisine:** The area promotes organic farming in addition to providing visitors with access to fresh, organic vegetables and fruits used in local cuisine. Local farmers profit from sustainable farming practices, which also contribute to environmental preservation.
- 5. Existing Tourism Infrastructure:** The basis for the growth of alternative tourism is provided by the existence of established tourism infrastructure, such as lodging, transportation, and recreational amenities. Sustainable tourism practices can be supported by improving and repurposing this infrastructure.

Weaknesses:

- 1. Limited Awareness and Training:** When it comes to sustainable tourism practices and alternative tourism concepts, local communities, tourism stakeholders, and service providers are not aware and trained. Initiatives aimed at developing local community capacity are required to improve the comprehension and application of sustainable tourism principles.
- 2. Inadequate Regulatory Frameworks:** The development of alternative tourism is hampered by the lack of comprehensive regulatory frameworks and guidelines tailored to this industry. The implementation of suitable rules and regulations can furnish a structure for sustainable tourism methodologies and guarantee the safeguarding of ecological and cultural assets.
- 3. Infrastructure Challenges:** There may be issues with inadequate waste management systems, a lack of water and sanitation facilities, road congestion and poor connection in some parts of the Kullu Manali region. It is imperative to bridge these infrastructure gaps to promote sustainable development.

Opportunities:

- 1. Emerging Tourism Trends:** The Kullu Manali region has a chance to establish itself as a premier location for alternative tourism, given the increasing interest around the world in sustainable and genuine travel experiences. By conforming to the latest developments in tourism, such as wellness, cultural, and ecotourism, the area can attract a niche market of responsible and mindful travellers.
- 2. Government Support:** Because of the government's dedication to sustainable development and the promotion of tourism, there is a chance to work together to create laws, rewards programmes, and other frameworks that will help alternative tourism ventures succeed. Investment in eco-friendly tourism initiatives can be stimulated by financial incentives and public-private collaborations.
- 3. Involving Community:** The active contribution of local communities in development of tourism is an opportunity to create socio economic benefits and entrepreneurial opportunities while preserving local cultures and traditions.

Threats:

- 1. Environmental Degradation:** The region's delicate ecosystems may be threatened by an increase in tourists and irresponsible tourism activities, which could result in habitat loss, environmental degradation, and the depletion of natural resources. To reduce these effects, it is essential to control tourist flows and put sustainable procedures into place.
- 2. Competition from Other Tourist Destination:** Other mountain locations that provide comparable natural charms and unique travel experiences compete with the Kullu Manali region. The area must set itself apart to stay competitive by highlighting its distinctive cultural legacy, genuine experiences, and environmentally friendly travel methods.
- 3. Climate Change Impacts:** The Kullu region is prone to the effects of climate change, which include different weather patterns, glacier retreat, and a rise in natural disasters. The potential for tourism in the area may be impacted by these environmental changes, thus adaptation measures will be needed to guarantee the long-term feasibility of tourism-related activities in a sustainable manner.

The Kullu Manali region has a lot of strengths and chances to promote alternative tourism, according to the SWOT analysis results. However, for successful and sustainable tourism development there is a need to address the weaknesses and

threats as well. By benefit from its strengths, resolving weaknesses, focusing on opportunities, and minimising threats, the region can make the way for a prosperous alternative tourism sector with sustainable and responsible growth opportunities providing positive benefits to the local communities and environment.

The primary study through interviews also collected information on alternative tourism from tourists visiting Kullu Manali region. The analysis of the visitor opinion survey is as follows:

- Most respondents (tourists) surveyed are aware of alternative tourism (72%).
- The most popular activities for alternative tourism in the Kullu-Manali region in the opinion of respondents are-
 - Trekking (60%)
 - Camping (52%)
 - White water Rafting (48%)
 - Nature Walk (44%)
 - Yoga (40%)
 - Farm Tourism & Village Homestays (40%)

These activities show a diverse range of possibilities, catering to different preferences and interests among tourists.

- Top 3 categories (as per tourist responses) tourists are keen to know more about, during their visit to Kullu Manali : (In Percentage)
 - The history and culture of the Kullu region (64%)
 - The local cuisine (56%)
 - The sustainable practices of alternative tourism (52%)
- Top 3 categories (as per tourist responses) for which they are willing to pay more for alternative tourism experiences: (In Percentage)
 - Educational (68%)
 - Culturally Rich (64%)
 - Sustainable (60%)
- The survey reveals that there is an increasing demand for alternative tourism in Kullu Manali
- An authentic and immersive experience of the local culture and environment attracts Tourists towards alternative tourism experiences .
- Tourists get opportunity to support local communities through alternative tourism.
- There is a shift towards experiential and responsible tourism, as seen by the diversity of activities offered and the interest in cultural and sustainability components.
- To help the growth of alternative tourism in the area, more funding and investment is required for marketing and infrastructural improvements.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To conclude the study, show that alternative tourism in Kullu Manali has a tremendous scope and tourists are inclined towards more ecotourism practices. This will ultimately benefit the local community, as well as the environment. Together, the government and local communities can save the environment and contribute towards encouraging alternative tourism.

Recommendations for encouraging sustainable growth and improving the tourist experience can be offered to the government based on the results of the survey on Tourists' opinions regarding alternative tourism in Kullu Manali:

- **Invest in Infrastructure:** Infrastructure for popular alternative tourism activities such as trekking, camping, and white water rafting etc. to be developed and maintained in a sustainable manner ensuring safe and accessible stay and activities for tourists.
- **Cultural and Historical Promotion:** Initiatives to be implemented for promotion of the heritage and cultural richness of the Kullu Manali region. This may include heritage walks, cultural festivals, and ecotourism activities etc.
- **Promoting Culinary Tourism:** Events and programs like Food festivals or culinary art display, cooking classes for tourists etc. to be promoted that showcase the local cuisine. This is going to help getting more tourists to the region those are interested in exploring the culinary delights of the region.
- **Educating Tourists and Locals on Sustainable Practices:** Start public awareness initiatives/campaigns to inform travellers about environmentally friendly alternate forms of transportation. This covers waste management, conservation initiatives, and responsible travel practices.
- **Community Involvement:** Through village home stays community to be encouraged and involve in alternative tourism. This involvement will ultimately lead to economic benefits for local communities from tourism activities.

- **Creation of Cultural and Educational Experiences:** Collaborate with local guides and specialists to provide tourist-focused cultural and educational experiences, such as interactive sessions, workshops, and guided tours that offer insights into the customs, history, and practices of the area.
- **Sustainable Practices Certification:** Establish a certification programme for companies and activities that follow sustainable practices. This can assist tourist make ecofriendly decisions and be used as a marketing tool.
- **Partnership with Tour Operators:** Work together with tour operators to develop and market environmentally friendly and culturally immersing travel packages. This can improve visitors' overall experience and support the destination's responsible development.
- **Promotion of Eco-Friendly Accommodations:** Promote and provide incentives for the construction of eco-friendly lodging options, such as green hotels or eco-lodges. This is in line with the desires of travellers who are prepared to spend more for environmentally friendly experiences.
- **Frequent Monitoring and Feedback:** Set up a method to track how tourism affects the local community and environment on a frequent basis. Ask visitors and locals for their opinions to make well-informed decisions for continuous sustainable ecofriendly development.

By putting these suggestions into practice, the government may encourage the development of alternative tourism in Kullu Manali while making sure that it continues to be profitable, culturally enlightening, and advantageous for visitors and locals alike. Alternative tourism can contribute to environmental preservation, local economic growth, and the provision of a more genuine and sustainable travel experience for visitors with the right investment and support.

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