

## An Empirical Growth Study of the Char Dham Yatra

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### ABSTRACT

The Peak of the Garhwal Himalaya of the world is well-known for its assorted landscapes, highly sacred pilgrimages, river valleys, mesmerising scenic beauty, and lush green forest cover. Pilgrimage tourism is a key font of socio-economic enlargement of Uttarakhand state. Pilgrimage tourism generates about 40 per cent of the total revenue of the state. It is evident that, though pilgrimage tourism has a route to positive effect through revenue generation, it has another side of the coin: environmental degradation. Pilgrims are the key of financial resources as well as job opportunities. The Char Dham yatra is a spiritual journey made by Hindus to four sacred sites located in the Garhwal Himalayas. This pilgrimage yatra is a clockwise direction tour starting from Yamunotri and ending at Badrinath and it starts from the holy town of Haridwar. It is the largest pilgrimage circuit in Uttarakhand state. This paper focuses on the tourists' satisfaction survey, popularly known as sentiment analysis in the Char Dham yatra. Here, we have discussed neglected, preventive and corrective measures for these pilgrim sites. We have collected the reviews given by the tourists about their perception in the Char Dham Yatra from a popular tour operator entrepreneur named "Trip Advisor". The paper also assesses the health care issues of pilgrims in India through the Char Dham religious circuit.

**Keywords:** disease, health care, public health, infection (of tourists), pilgrims

## I. INTRODUCTION

Pilgrim means when a person who goes on a voyage to a sanctified situation for religious intention with special connotation. According to (Graburn, 2001; Smith, 1992), there is a symposium for the liaison flanked by tourists and pilgrims. The image of the "pious pilgrim" has often been contrasted with that of the tourist as a "superficial hedonist" (Badone & Roseman, 2004). Uttarakhand is renowned as the "debbhoomi" is one of the foremost pilgrimage hubs in India. The Char Dham yatra exerts a pull on several pilgrims every year. This pilgrimage tourism is a foremost donor in the state's economy. Uttarakhand is the most visited tourists' destination in our country. Uttarakhand has four constructive pillars of Deb Bhoomi-Yamunotri, Gangotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath. Char Dham is nestled among the serene heights of the great Himalayas. These are considered the major pick point of the Hindu faith as it is believed that visiting these shrines helps to attain "moksha". The char dham is the root of revenue generator in the state of Uttarakhand. The pilgrim destination is wrapped by the mesmerising scenic splendour of river Alkananda. Similarly, the magnitude of the Mandakini river valley around the Kedarnath shrine in Rudraprayag district and its downstream areas. Astonishingly, the year-wise inflow of inbound as well as outbound tourists has a positive slope in char dham through the decade. Pilgrimage to the peak expanse is the oldest outline of tourism that has been practising from time immemorial. The Garhwal Himalaya is eminent for its pilgrimage tourism wide-reaching, which is customary in the forms of visiting highland shrines, sorting out local festivals through performing formal procedures. Since, sustaining livelihood through traditional agriculture is one of the threats to the livelihoods of local inhabitants, whereas pilgrimage tourism is a key to the threshold. Practising pilgrimage tourism is a prominent font of socio-economic development. Pilgrimage tourism endows with employment opportunities of the local inhabitants.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of religions hypothesise pilgrimage as a means of the physical and spiritual enhancement process. In other words, pilgrimages are voyages to sanctified dwellings as demonstrated by homosapiens to accomplish convinced inherent motives. The functional traits of religion have played a substantial role in establishing the protagonist of pilgrimage in the collective perception of society (Barber 1993) & (Pickering 1984). According to (Bleie, 2003) the pilgrimage is the

merchandise for spiritual reasons of religious causes, externally to a holy place and internally. Since from the Vedic time, Religious and Pilgrimage tourism is the most vivacious forms of tourism in the world. These antediluvian formulae of tourism become more attractive for foreign visitor's worldwide. Many Tourism agencies as well as tour operator detect the implication of religious travel by nourishing their patrons as a mode to contend in the business world. They are espousing the Sustaining qualitative methods to progress the customer understandings within the travel, which effects the travellers to revisit their destinations. (Balaji & Venkatesan, 2015).

The Char Dham is inferred as 'the four abodes', is a domineering religious journey within the Indian Himalayas. There is a rapid lessening in the slope of tourists visiting both inbound and outbound. This phenomenon severely the income of tour operators, travel agents etc. A certain decrease in flight and train reservations affected the economy of our country during COVID-19 tenure (Oruonye & Ahmed, 2020). Tourism has become one of the world's largest smokeless and rapid-growing industries, it is a vital part of our Indian tradition as well as a major backer of economic, social, and physical enlargement (Joveriya & Mariya 2019). Tourism is proficient in several ways, such as medical, cultural, historical, and adventure tourism. Cultural tourism is also a protuberant branch of tourism popularly known as pilgrimage tourism. Pilgrimage tourism is becoming an imperative slice of tourism dedicated to the promotion of peace and brotherhood (Sati 2023). Religious tourism has a major impact on economic development with this it also helps regions to grow, and residents to improve living standards and social ties in their communities. Religious tourism is also important from the point of view of the convergence of cultures and the mutual understanding of different religions (Hvizdová 2018). Uttarakhand, God's own country, major pilgrim destination of northern India and have become a major gateway for religious tourism. The Char Dham Yatra starts in Yamunotri, followed by Gangotri, and finishes at Kedarnath and Badrinath (Semwal and Upreti 2019). The Char Dham Yatra is a physically challenging journey, requiring trekking at an altitude of more than 4000 feet. Therefore, it is advisable for the pilgrims' to plan and prepare properly for this journey (Desk 2023). There is a positive correlation between tourists' arrival and income & employment generation in the Char Dham pilgrimage of the Uttarakhand state. The Char Dham Yatra is bringing in over Rs 7,500 crore each year from huge increased pilgrim numbers. To increase revenue government has consistently used their crumbly Himalayas beyond their carrying capacity which leads to many natural disaster events every year (Sehgal 2023).

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Objectives of the study are as follows:

- To assess the trend of tourist inflow in Char Dham yatra from 2000 to 2023.
- To identify preventive and corrective measures.

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is purely based on secondary data. The data have been collected from various national and international journals, books, websites, newspapers the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board etc. The data analysis is done through the percentage method and using software like MS Word, MS Excel and SPSS. Through this paper, we have analyzed the pilgrimage inflow data from 2000 to 2023 and found out the trend analysis using data every year.

**Area of Study:** Char Dham Yatra is a devout pilgrimage encompassing of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri located in the Garhwal Himalayas ranges in Uttarakhand, these are the four most consecrated Hindu tabernacles that is the source of allurements of devotees from India and around the world. In this paper, my study area is concentrated on four pillars of char dham, now popularly known as The Chota Char Dham.

**Data Collection:** Here, we have gathered the secondary data on tourists' arrival year-wise from the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board. After that, we categorised the data in tabular form for each pilgrim centre like Kedarnath, Badrinath and so on.

### V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

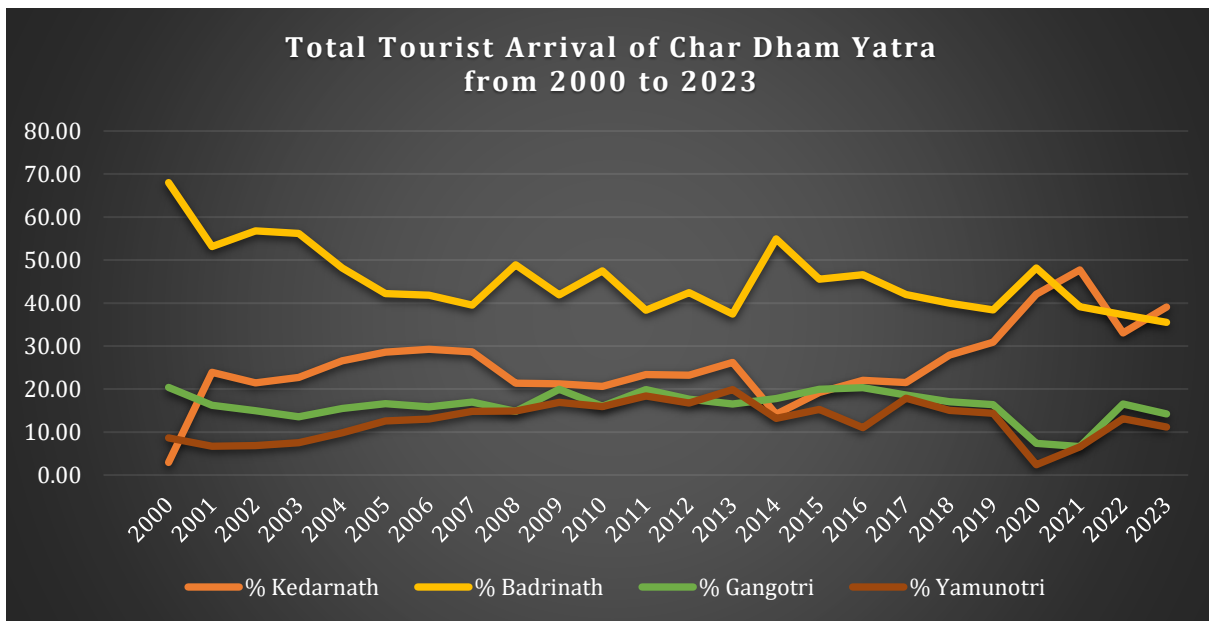
The first objective of the paper includes trend analysis of Char Dham Yatra. The result of the trend analysis shows the maximum inflow of pilgrimage tourist arrived in Kedarnath, followed by Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri in the 25-year of span. The result analysis is discussed below:

**Table 1:** Total Tourist Inflow Trend Analyses in Char Dham from 2000 to 2023  
**Source:** Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board

Year	Kedarnath Total Tourists Arrival	% Kedarnath	Badrinath Total Tourists Arrival	% Badrinath	Gangotri Total Tourists Arrival	% Gangotri	Yamunotri Total Tourists Arrival	% Yamunotri	Total Tourists Arrival
2000	30000	2.93	695332	68.01	208407	20.38	88672	8.67	1022411
2001	193628	23.93	430065	53.14	131499	16.25	54074	6.68	809266
2002	169217	21.41	448597	56.77	118374	14.98	54023	6.84	790211
2003	234497	22.69	580943	56.22	139934	13.54	78050	7.55	1033424
2004	276406	26.57	500579	48.13	160839	15.46	102331	9.84	1040155
2005	382973	28.55	566224	42.21	223061	16.63	169036	12.60	1341294
2006	487003	29.29	695242	41.81	263807	15.86	216883	13.04	1662935
2007	557423	28.69	768107	39.54	329385	16.95	287870	14.82	1942785
2008	470048	21.37	1075583	48.90	326366	14.84	327611	14.89	2199608
2009	403636	21.20	798204	41.92	380156	19.96	322242	16.92	1904238
2010	400511	20.62	921526	47.45	310561	15.99	309634	15.94	1942232
2011	570701	23.38	936172	38.35	485137	19.87	448945	18.39	2440955
2012	573152	23.21	1046619	42.39	435552	17.64	413615	16.75	2468938
2013	333874	26.21	476430	37.41	210239	16.51	253110	19.87	1273653
2014	41046	14.12	159575	54.91	51694	17.79	38294	13.18	290609
2015	154535	19.22	366455	45.57	160192	19.92	122926	15.29	804108
2016	309864	22.06	654355	46.58	285459	20.32	155129	11.04	1404807
2017	471335	21.50	920466	41.98	408738	18.64	392208	17.89	2192747
2018	732091	27.92	1048051	39.96	447838	17.08	394445	15.04	2622425
2019	1000121	30.86	1244993	38.41	530334	16.36	465534	14.36	3240982
2020	135449	42.06	155055	48.15	23774	7.38	7728	2.40	322006
2021	243112	47.71	199409	39.13	33771	6.63	33311	6.54	509603
2022	1564248	33.06	1763578	37.27	781961	16.53	621538	13.14	4731325
2023	1958863	39.08	1780429	35.52	712749	14.22	560918	11.19	5012959

From the above table we analyze that pilgrimage in Char Dham were constantly decreased from 2001 to 2004 due to the partition of Uttarakhand state from the state of Uttar Pradesh and many political turmoils are the main reason for decreasing trend. From 2005 to 2006 it has almost a positive sloped graph. From 2007 to 2013 all the pilgrimage destination has a parallel trend as per the tourist's arrival statistics. After the flash flood occurred in 2013 Kedarnath has suffered more among the others. But, Badrinath has almost contributing more in the economy as compare to others. Kedarnath regained its own popularity from 2019 to 2023 and Gangotri and Yamunotri had achieved a remarkable growth in respect of tourists from 2022 to 2023. So, it can be said from the above data, that Kedarnath has performed well from other destinations as per the tourist arrival statistics.

**Figure 1:** Graphical Representation of Total Tourists Arrival of Char Dham Yatra From 2000-2023



## VI. SUGGESTED CORRECTIVE AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Through the observed secondary data of Char Dham, it can be stated that Char Dham pilgrim destinations have contributed to the economy of Uttarakhand state but if they follow certain suggestive plans, they will better their position.

- The Government should follow some strict rules relating to the pollution of the environment like charging fines and penalties for throwing water bottles and garbage which pollute the soil and ecosystems largely.
- Government should follow a compact tourism policy to cater a proper service to the pilgrims' who come to the 'Deb Bhoomi' to achieve their 'moksha'.
- The administrator should follow a disaster management plan to recover the tourists from any kind of natural calamity as the Char Dham is situated in the lap of the Himalayas which is the natural calamity zone.
- Helicopter service should be more frequent and the cost will have to be minimized so that more number of pilgrims reap the service and manage the altitude sickness which is faced by them in this long pilgrimage journey.
- Proper signalling systems and street lights have to be incorporated into the road transport system of Char Dham. Alternative road transport system will have to manage as huge traffic congestion occurred in the time of yatra. Pilgrims have to wait 10 to 12 hours as the NH-07 is blocked.
- Immediately stop the permit sanction to hotels as the state had already witnessed a rapid growth of hotels like mushrooms.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study highlights the trend of tourist inflow in Char Dham from 2000 to 2023. The total tourist arrival consistently increased every year during the Char Dham Yatra except when

- The state partition of Uttarakhand state from the state of Uttar Pradesh,
- Kedarnath Floods, and
- The COVID-19 Pandemic.

The total tourist arrival is maximum in Kedarnath (19.58 lakhs in 2023) compared to Badrinath (17.80 lakhs in 2023). From 2018 tourist arrivals in Kedarnath constantly increased whereas in Badrinath total tourists decreased. On the other hand, the total tourist arrival in Gangotri and Yamunotri is much less compared to Kedarnath and Badrinath. Poor road connectivity and natural disasters are the main reasons compared to other Dham. The Government of India and Govt. of Uttarakhand take many initiatives like the Char Dham road project, helicopter services, Rishikesh-Karan Prayan railways etc to increase the tourism industry in Uttarakhand which will boost the economic condition of Uttarakhand as well as the country.

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