

Chardham Yatra: A Trend of Tourism before and After 2013 Flash Floods, Uttarakhand Himalaya

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ABSTRACT

Uttarakhand, the devbhoomi, is one of the major pilgrimage centre in the country. The chardham yatra attracts lakhs of tourist every year. Indeed, the pilgrimage tourism is a major contributor in the state's economy. This tourism suffered a harsh blow in June 2013 flash floods of Kedarnath which killed thousands of pilgrims and left many stranded. The devastation was so vast that it was even termed as 'THE HIMALAYAN TSUNAMI'. The paper analyzes the spirit of tourist before and after the disaster. An analysis of both the foreigner and national tourist has been done to study the trends of tourism in the chardham region. Religion, faith, customs being intangible beliefs can still be measured in terms of number of people visiting a place in a particular span of time. Thus, this paper not only analyzes the number of tourist inflow but also their faith and undying spirit before and after the floods. For the study the tourist inflow the data from 2008 to 2018 has been accounted for the chardham only.

Keywords: Chardham yatra, flash floods, tourism, Uttarakhand

INTRODUCTION

Uttarakhand, one of the most visited tourist destination in the country, has four prominent pilgrim-destinations namely Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath, collectively known as Char Dham, Nestled among the serene heights of the great Himalayas. These pilgrimage centers draw the maximum numbers of pilgrims each year, thus becoming the most important hubs of religious travel in the whole of Northern India. Traditionally, the pilgrimage begins from the West and ends in the East. Thus, the Char Dham Yatra commences from Yamunotri, then proceeding to Gangotri and finally to Kedarnath and Badrinath. These are considered the major centres of Hindu faith as It is believed that visiting these shrines helps to attain 'moksha'. The importance of

this yatra can be cited from the fact that tourist inflow has increased on year to year not just for the locals but for the foreigners too.

From 15 to 17 June 2013, the Indian state of Uttarakhand and adjoining area received heavy rainfall, which was about 375% more than the benchmark rainfall during a normal monsoon. This has been one of the worst Himalayan tragedies in recent years in which the actual number of people buried or perished is not known as thousands are still missing. The entire Rambara, a large part of Gaurikund and many villages of Mandakini valley were also fully wiped out. Government sources have reported large number of deaths including missing of over ~5000 people in the wake of the devastating flooding. The worst impact was witnessed in the

Mandakini river valley around the Kedarnath shrine in Rudraprayag district and its downstream areas. The entire Kedarnath town was converted into a dumping ground of glacial debris and boulders within a short span of time

Effects on state's economy after 2013 flash floods: Uttarakhand's economy primarily depends on tourism. According to Saurabh Sanyal, executive director of PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI), a Delhi based body of industries, tourism contributes about 27 per cent or Rs 26,500 crore to Uttarakhand's

gross state domestic product (GSDP). PHDCCI estimates Uttarakhand has incurred a loss of about Rs 12,000 crore, based on gross state domestic product (GSDP) figures from the state budget for 2013-14. "GSDP of Uttarakhand at factor cost at current prices stands at about Rs 1,07,548 crore in the year that came to an end on March 31, 2013. Eleven per cent of the GSDP has been washed away in terms of prospective tourism earnings due to floods that engulfed the state in the middle of this month," says Sanyal in a statement issued on June 27.

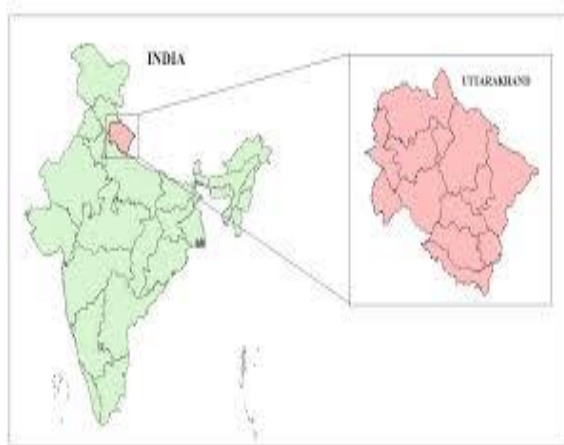


Figure 1 : location map of Uttarakhand



Figure 2: route Map of chardham



TABLE 1: Tourist data (Individuals in lakhs) from 2008-2018.

YEAR	KEDARNATH			BADRINATH			GANGOTRI			YAMUNOTRI		
	Indian	Foreigner	Total	Indian	Foreigner	Total	Indian	Foreigner	Total	Indian	Foreigner	Total
2008	0.46	0.11	4.70	10.75	0.002	10.75	3.26	0.0029	3.26	3.27	0.0019	3.28
2009	4.02	0.10	40.36	7.98	0.001	7.98	3.79	0.0048	3.80	3.22	0.0024	3.22
2010	4.003	0.0026	4.01	9.21	0.002	9.22	3.10	0.0031	3.11	3.09	0.0018	3.09
2011	5.69	0.0073	5.71	9.36	0.005	9.36	4.85	0.0031	4.85	4.48	0.0019	5.59
2012	5.72	0.0059	5.73	10.46	0.0032	10.47	4.35	0.0033	4.36	4.13	0.0025	4.14
2013	3.34	0.0008	3.341	4.76	0.002	4.76	2.09	0.0032	2.10	2.53	0.0008	2.53
2014	0.41	0.0023	0.412	1.59	0.0017	1.59	0.52	0.0014	0.52	0.38	0.0008	0.38
2015	1.54	0.0061	1.544	3.66	0.0015	3.66	1.59	0.0051	1.60	1.23	0.0022	1.23
2016	3.11	0.0069	3.098	6.54	0.0022	6.54	2.84	0.0111	2.85	1.55	0.0057	1.55
2017	4.76	0.0072	4.712	9.20	0.0039	9.20	4.08	0.0046	4.08	1.23	0.0048	3.92
2018	7.30	0.016	7.32	10.47	0.011	10.48	4.48	0.0061	4.47	3.94	0.0048	3.94

Source: Uttarakhand Tourist Development Board (Department of Tourism, Govt of Uttarakhand, India)

Efforts to restore tourism after 2013 flash floods: Since 2013 flash floods, extensive relief and rehabilitation work has been carried out across the state. According to official figures, about 600 affected villages had to be relocated after the June floods. A Medium and Long Term Reconstruction (MLTR) package of 6,259.84 crore was funded by the Government of India (GoI), Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank, and Government of Uttarakhand (GoU) under five different sources of funding namely Special Plan Assistance (SPA-Reconstruction) (1,100 crore), Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS-R) (2,135.41 crore), Central Plan (50 crore), Externally Aided Projects (EAPs) (2,700 crore), and National/State Disaster Response Fund (NDRF/SDRF) (274.43 crore). The State Government demanded (September 2013) 809.64 crore for this Sector. The proposal included new projects for giving a boost to the tourism sector and facilitate the Char Dham Yatra in particular; and expansion of existing infrastructure of Helipads to improve disaster preparedness. In the disaster, 995 Public Buildings were damaged (212 fully and 783 partially damaged) out of which 836 partially/fully damaged buildings [21 government buildings under UDRP where a dedicated PIU was set up; 32 ITI buildings under SPA-R; 736 school buildings under SSA (CSS-R); 47 buildings under Integrated Child Development Services (CSS-R)] were planned/ sanctioned under MLTR for reconstruction. Presently, in 2018, the life in the region is back on track. Tourists are coming in large numbers and the state's economy is gaining from it. Today not only the chardham infrastructure has been restored but the state government has also been able to restore people faith in states tourism.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of data in table 1 and table 2 clearly indicates that the tourism was flourishing high before 2013 flash floods in

Uttarakhand. It rapidly declined in the year 2013 and after showing an steady increase thereafter. Tourist inflow in the state clearly demonstrate that 2013, 2014 and 2015 were the most challenging years for states economy heavily dependent on tourism. The low tourist inflow in chardham could directly be inferred as low revenue generation for the state. These were the most difficult years for people directly involved in tourism. Tourist inflow saw a rapid downfall of almost half from the year 2012 to the year 2013. It further declined by 80% in 2014 as compared to the previous year. Such a sharp fall was due to two reason a.) Suspension of tourism for 3 consecutive years in 2013, 2014 and 2015 b.) Fear in tourist to visit chardham. Tourism efforts of the state government after 2013 have been fruitful. as evidently could be drawn from the data in the table 2 the number of tourist after 2015 increased 3 times in 2018. This clearly shows undying faith of pilgrims visiting chardham. It could be very much said clearly that the state of Uttarakhand has a huge potential for tourism growth. It is already one of the most visited state in the country and provided better tourism facilities, which were badly hit in 2013 disaster, the state would surely prosper and develop as any other best tourist destination in the world.

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