SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLANNING THROUGH TOURISM CRISIS MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The recommendation of having crisis management has been suggested in the National Tourism Policy draft 2015, this suggestion has become a need of hour with the given current situation. This paper aims at establishing crisis/disaster management points for consideration to be incorporated in the National Tourism Policy with a lookout of Sustainable Tourism in the Himalaya. The paper emphasizes on the crisis management/disaster management protocol which could be taken in the Himalayan belt with consideration of Uttarakhand state in particular to have minimum tourism recovery post COVID. In 2017, BBC published an article written by Ms. Jasmin Fox-Skelly, which brought up a concerning issue of World being exposed to deadly viruses and bacteria which are covered under ice of the Poles and due to global warming, the Permafrost soils are melting. The article raises a disquiet hypothesis of may be that the current variance of deadly corona virus is not the only deadly disease we would be encountering in times to come. We shall work closely with people from UNDP, Responsible Tourism Society and other organizations supporting in rebuilding of the tourism destination, who have better insight analyzing the lapse in planning tourism destination. The work will help to get reference for future consideration and will form a base for further research in the topic.

KEYWORDS: *Crisis Management, Disaster Management, Uttarakhand, Tourism Planning, Sustainable Tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an inevitable part of human life, it has been a necessity at one point of time in human evolution, involving luxury commodity in today's era. India the subcontinent, basks in the glory of its rich culture, heritage and diversity, making it a popular tourism destination. Tourism as an industry was first incorporated in the 80's through five year plan program in India and since then a diligent efforts have been made to display nation as a tourism icon. As on September 2019 according to UNWTO reports, 10% of the world GDP was accounted under Tourism and the sector provided one in 10 jobs worldwide. There have been continuous certification programs to train the people involved in tourism and hospitality sector under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, as per January 2019 reports on government portal is total of 2,40,382, this includes both training and certification courses (https://community.data.gov.in/persons-trained-and-certified-in-tourism-hospitality-sector-under-pradhan-mantri-kaushal-vikas-yojana-as-on-24-01-2019/).

Uttarakhand the Dev Bhoomi as it has been recognized is the northern state of India and as quoted by Ms. Ravinder Brar on Dekho apna Desh series, the state is made of two parts the Kedarkhand the present day Gharwal and Manaskhand the present day Kumoan (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoM1q95uJ-0&t=394s). The state is unique in itself, making it a mini India in itself, it has all the characteristic charismatic features displaying the historic existence of India. Uttarakhand is a true icon of being a tourism symbol of India, it has rock shelters, rock paintings, the mountains have been inhabited since the pre historic times- the Palaeolithic and megalith findings are prove to that, along with pilgrimage tourism, the state has successfully established itself as an adventure tourism hotspot, and in recent times MICE along with destination weddings have also taken their turns of trends. Therefore the state is a complete package in itself to offer the tourist of being an ideal place for soul searching through tourism.

Presently the Novel Coronavirus situation also questions our attributes as a world to be prepared for such pandemics/epidemics, which are yet to come. To stop the spread of this deadly virus, lockdown and quarantine protocols have been setup by the nations worldwide, the first step of every country has been to stop any travelling which has indeed affected the tourism industry massively (Basu A et al, 2020). However, in times like this economy is bruised severely and having mention this the impact on Tourism Industry is severe resulting the industry to be crippled and vulnerable, it is the first to be affected and probably the last to be recovered back to its normal state of action. (Pforr & Hosie, 2008)

As per a research conducted by S Choudhury et al. (2020), there has been a finding specified that around 9.6 million foreign tourists visit India annually, which has been a steady source of income for human resource involved in the hospitality sector and a grand revenue generation platform had come to a standstill during the lockdown period. In India, as an estimation calculation the hospitality service providers including Tourism, hotel and aviation has incurred a loss of approximately 85 million, this has been put forth by Indian Associations of Tour Operators (IATO). In January- March quarter, there has been about 67% annually in the January-March quarter in the foreign tourist arrival (FTA), while domestic tourists notched a much lower figure by about 40% (Press Note from Indian Chamber of Commerce), there has been seen a reduction in foreign tourists arrivals as well as in domestic tourists. In times like this, the rolled played by the Government, Business Head and development partners, play a vital role in the crisis management of the situation on the go.

OBJECTIVE

The paper focuses on establishes a significant role of policymakers in revival of the tourism sector, the paper has manifested reviews from the general public with a population size of 116 to initiate the focus accordingly.

Uttarakhand had a steady tourist inflow pre COVID period, with the efforts of government, tourism vendors and tourist the state has been seeing growing traveller numbers from past few years. However with the pandemic taking its turn, it had made tourism standstill just before the perfect season, it all began with cancelling of Kanwar Yatra in wake of uprise of COVID19.

Since then the government has been working toward making the situation under control. In the following paper we shall discuss the measure taken by Uttarakhand government to give the tourism a boost, since it is not the first time that the state has been dealing with a crisis situation, therefore the state has been incorporating innovative measures to cop up with the situation and now when the vaccination is still a future scenario, the state has put forth rules so that the new normal of coexisting with COVID a push, which has also been covered in the paper.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Crisis Management has been very tricky and should be case to case basis making an elaborate action. 2013). There have been many previous attempts to define Tourism Crisis and there have not been a universal definition, however, the most accepted explanation is, the tourism crisis is an unexpected event of an enormity to an extent which has a visible impact on day-to-day operation of the tourism (Ghaderi et al. 2014). Crisis can be in various forms and can generally be classified as natural (hurricanes, earthquakes, epidemic or pandemic diseases, tsunamis) or man-made (financial and economic crises, wars, terrorist attacks, political instability, social movements, industrial accidents). (Jurdana, 2020)

Vargas-Sanchez (2018), have observed that in a crisis or disaster situation, tourists are at more risk than the locals, the foremost reason being that the surroundings are not known to them and language can also be an obstacle. Further, the authors have concluded that the negativity of the situation spreads more resulting at a greater impact on the negative publicity of the destination, if the tourist becomes prey to the disaster along with the risk caused by overcrowding. Through the AH1N1 influenza crisis in Mexico (2009), it has been suggested in research of the relevance of chaos theory to other tourism crises as well as the evolution of a conceptual framework for better analyzing, forecasting and better responding to crises (Sharpley & Speakman, 2012). Jóhannesson & Huijbens (2010), while researching the Global credit crunch in Iceland (2008), after interviewing 6 tourism stakeholders in Iceland, the researchers came to conclusion that the involvement of the stakeholders can play a major role in preparing the tourism for future challenges, they have suggested that through open communication and active engagement of all stakeholders plays a vital role and a key element. Further, research on effects of developing sustainable tourism development policy leads to creation of a positive atmosphere.

Since, the paper has been drafted in the wake of current situation, the previous researches have not been found relevance however the current online materials have been incorporated in the paper to make it more relevant for the current situation.

METHODS

The research has been conducted through a survey and interviews of the industry personnel. The survey was conducted with 116 population size with questions majorly focusing on the ease of people on travelling and other details pertaining to the reaction of people on incorporation of no COVID test before travelling to the state. We also interviewed industry specialists who have contributed with their important viewpoints.

RESULTS

The findings from the survey have imparted in understanding the current situation of the Uttarakhand tourism measures better, the questionnaire was filled up in the October 2020 through Google form, the participants from different industry to reduce the biasness and obtaining a holistic approach to the situation.

Demographic of the Participants

The participation was majorly from urban population from the metro cities, the figure 1 signifies that 67% of the participants were men and 33% were female, while in figure 1A the age has been depicted which signifies the major population is from 25 – 35 years. The below population is majorly involved in tourism directly or indirectly and also other occupation including government and other non – governmental sectors.
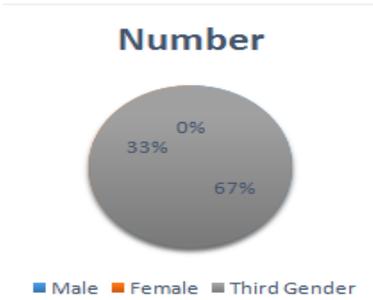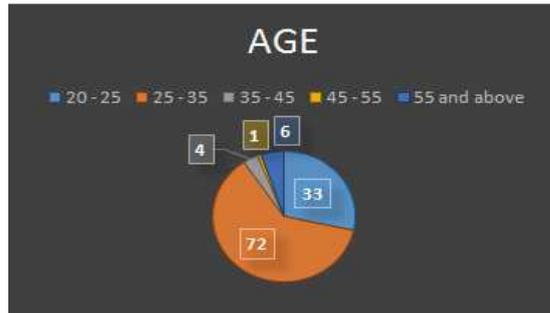
Figure 1   **Figure 1A**

Last Visited Uttarakhand, The Purpose of Visit and Destination Popular in Uttarakhand

The purpose of asking this question was to understand the visiting Uttarakhand pattern by the population, the findings show that 25% of the considered population have never visited Uttarakhand, however 24% and 18.9% visited Uttarakhand in 2019 and 2018 respectively. While the sample size is small, however it shows how popular Uttarakhand is as a tourism destination within the population. As depicted in fig 2A, the 65.5% visited the state for leisure purpose and remaining had either visited for business or had never visited. We had also enquired about the inputs they have on bringing the tourism alive and improvements with the current arrangement, which have discussed in our conclusion section.

We had also enquired irrespective of the current situation, which was the most popular destination of visit in the state and the outcome shows that 50% of 116 people have concentrated their choice on Nainital (14.6%), Rishikesh (12.9%), Mussorie (12.9%) and Dehradun (9.4%), which clearly shows that the above mentioned destinations have peaked the interest of the major people, the same has been depicted in figure 2B. This has a clear indication of the accessibility to the destinations, in time where time is compared to money, people are more comfortable for a quick getaway trip than a long at ease once in a year trip, well we much not forget the sample considered are from majorly the urban part of India, therefore the choice will follow accordingly.

Figure 2

Figure 2A

Figure 2B
Willingness to Travel and Comfortable in Travelling to Uttarakhand without COVID Test.

While the unlock is in full swing and the Indian population under assistance of the government is all geared up to face corona alongside their normal lives, we, through our survey have found that 80.17% people have not travelled since the unlock, which surely marks the current situation of corona virus and the level confidence built up as on date in the population. We have also enquired if people are willing to travel and 67.24% have shown a positive response to that therefore a conclusion can be drawn that there may be some infrastructure or some policy lapse that has been stopping to build up the confidence for them to go out, although we accept that the numbers attaining to 67.24% is 78 and majorly range between the age group 25 – 35, and yet we cannot ignore them. We had also kept the option of too early to say, and 25% of them have agreed on still wait to make a decision over travelling to anywhere other than staying back at home, it again puts a show light upon the current measures taken to control the pandemic have not been reassuring enough to take a firm decision on travelling

Figure 3

While scrutinizing the current scenario, the nation has been steady and firm to open up the economy and the feeling has been mixed. As per the press note on estimates of gross domestic product for the first quarter (April-June) 2020-2021, there has been a contract of 23.9% compared to the 5.2% growth in 2019 – 20 as estimated by National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, while these figures surely urges for opening the economy to gear up with the life where million have been jobless due to lockdown, the figures of active case as on 6 October 2020 is 9,19,023, which is not a relief. In Uttarakhand currently there are 51,991, total cases recorded, these data have been recorded from https://www.mygov.in/corona-data/covid19-statewise-status/. The state has now opened its doors for tourism and made it non mandatory to take a COVID test before entering the state, this had a mixed feeling and therefore we had incorporated this question that whether people are willing to travel to Uttarakhand without test and as indicated through the below graph, that 51% people share a positive view about it and are not perturbed to travel without the test.
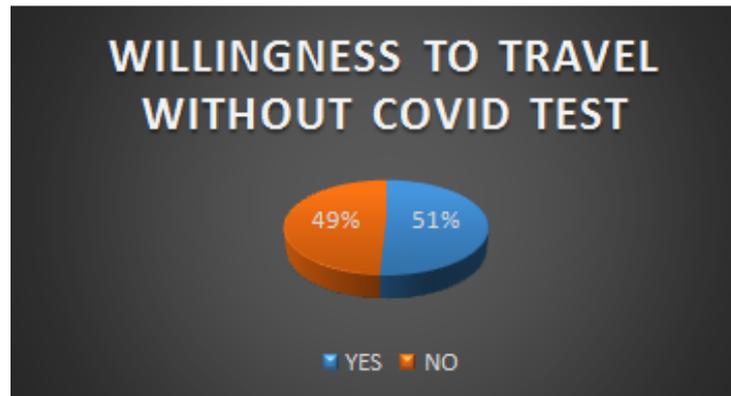
Figure 4

While we were researching for the reaction of Uttarakhand's state opening to tourism through our survey and interviews, a lot has been unearthed about the infrastructure setup of the state today's attracting tourists and the mannerism of handling crisis. Although suggestions on paper are simpler than being incorporating we have tried enlisting few suggestions on different aspects including boosting tourism, the way forward as well as making tourism successful along with the pandemic

- Since the restrictions in state have been eased, there has been a sudden spurt in booking, as mentioned by reporter Vishakha Talreja through financial Express, there are three destinations that are being delighted by the weekend getaways as Rishikesh, Mussoorie and Jim Corbett (Uttarakhand hotels witness higher occupancies as Covid-19 restrictions check-out, 2020). While this is good news along with hotels confirming to have been abiding by the safety measures by word, we are more concerned of the travellers who are checking in with being tested, some might be ignoring the symptoms or may not be having any symptoms, they can be of immediate danger to the staffs and others. We suggest if hotels can show diligence in incorporating swab test on arrival, which would have assured not only the staffs but also the hotel staffs to work fearlessly. To add up to it, it has been observed taking the Kumamoto earthquake in Japan, that there are different disaster phases and contribution of tourism are different in individual phases, however, it is mainly significant when it comes to transparency of information, communications and emergency accommodations for tourists.(Chan et al. 2019), therefore as per current situation hotels and other tourist places has to be transparent about spreading a cautious word about corona and the status they are dealing with along with updating the guests truthfully about the advancements, the measures taken to make the stay as comfortable as possible.

- Considering the above scenario, we can say that the current rush of tourists are the result of population's confinement in the homes for so long and adrenaline rush may dry up soon, the destinations have to hold on to the same. It can be said that this sudden rush may stop abruptly if a consistent pattern is not developed to portray the destination in a positive picture, through a research conducted by Choi et al., it has been suggested that a destination to promote itself mass media to circulate information about actions carried in order to make tourists feel confident and assured (Choi et al., 2016). While hoteliers and other service providers have been putting forth great come back offers to re-gain the visitors, there has been very less on the social media about the measures taken by the service providers to make the whole process of travel (end to end) corona free, we feel speaking more on this shall help people to look forward to travelling.

- Also the promotions should age specific, Uttarakhand is a state that has a lot to offer for every age group, while we know the most vulnerable to this disease are the children and the old age group, the promotions should categorically emphasize them, this would include sharing of real experience travel stories for visitors who have visited after unlock and relaxation of the rules.

- As suggested by Jiang and Ritchie through their literature review results that there are three key strategies for effective tourism recovery namely, crisis communication, recovery marketing, and stakeholder collaboration (Jiang & Ritchie 2019). There have been a lot of brainstorming through webinars, research papers and other medium, where scholars and industrial experts have put-forth their opinion, keeping in mind the industrial experience they share, however there has not been a confident plan to look up to since the pandemic is a never before situation. Amongst the most spoken resilient plan, taking the path of sustainable tourism and incorporating rural tourism has been the most agreed one. Uttarakhand has, as update through a government report in 2019, a total of 267 home stays in urban area and 755 in rural area, including all three gold, silver and bronze categories, this statistics show that people in rural area are eager to promote sustainable tourism. Rural tourism being the theme of 2020Word Tourism Day, has put a light of hope in way of going forward wisely. Since a rural destination has limited capacity alongside the local traditions to offer on visit, this adds up advantage of the situation.

- While conducting the survey, we had asked about suggesting one point of improvement so as to boost tourism in Uttarakhand, while there have been few suggestion as to not promote tourism at all currently however there have been major concerns relating to connectivity have been raised, there are currently three airports in Uttarakhand, Dehradun, Pithoragarh and Pantnagar, while Dehradun takes the major chunk of passengers and thorough connectivity along with many commercial airlines as an option, Pithoragarh and Pantnagar are not common, not even promoted thoroughly since it is unknown to many that these airports exist. Promotions of connectivity is need of the hour and making flight schedule so that other airlines can also be part of this should be one of the agenda, as a flight journey is the shortest time of travelling with the mass, with the unknown and it helps in gaining the confidence of the visitors too.

- Uttarakhand is also an adventure tourism destination, white water rafting in Rishikesh, along with bungee jumping, trekking, hiking through Himalaya has been a common affair. Promotion of adventure tourism is also in benefit of the state since it promotes minimum closed space tourism practicing the social distancing. Companies like Snow Leopard Adventure Pvt Ltd. have even started promoting 100km challenge of hiking, biking or rafting, promotions like this also add on to as motivation when sitting during lockdown has been criticized and people have been innovative to keep up with their health.

- As in September 2020, Mr. Satpal Maharaj, the state tourism minister has launched 'Tourist Incentive Coupon' scheme in the light of promoting 'workation' by giving INR 1000 rebate per day or 25% of the stay charge (whichever is less) with minimum staying of 3 consecutive night stay in a destination. This can be a grab of opportunity for the state hotels and homestays to promote their property however they need to make sure that the internet connection should be flawless in the area for consistent flow of guests. (Tourism Breaking News, September 2020)

- It has been seen that there has been alternative selection of employment due to tourism being standstill, as report by Vineet Upadhyay in The new Indian Express, priests from Haridwar have been factories to keep up with the household expenditure (Vineet Upadhyay, August 2020), pilgrimage tourism has been a concern given the crowd created, the states has opened online registration to access the incoming crowd, however there can be policy of strict social distancing and no touching policy to safeguard the vendors and priests, like tikkas can be put by make shift arrangement from a distance and online booking of Prasad can be a way out to control the situation.

- There has been a mixed feeling about government's proactive steps in opening the doors for tourism, however we must come in terms with the fact that a pandemic can never be put to a full stop without vaccination, while it is still in process we cannot see the economy at brink of collapse which give away a decade of estimated recovery. A study conducted through studying the SARS in 2003, shows that the policymakers acting in a current scenario crisis management, a crisis which has severely impacted the demand of the tourism, must be in relation to the crisis management to be taken in future.(Wang, 2009) Therefore the policymakers should now be specific in action and transparent in approach to win the confidence of the public to get slowly involved in the activities of pre COVID era in sync with incorporation of the new normal. The foremost step has to be although with as on date updated Uttarakhand government portal, recording every data along with easy to read through loophole so that a quick rectification can be made, these actions will help form the base of state tourism policy with specific crisis management details.

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