

Rural Tourism in Indian Himalayan Region: A Scope for Sustainable Livelihood

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Abstract : The present-day tourism sector is globally developing at a fast pace, searching for new ideas and new venues. In the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), tourism has experienced a vast growth and continuous diversification over the last few years, thus becoming one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in India. With its majestic landscape, high peaks, rich floral and faunal diversity, and cultural history, the IHR has continuously attracted tourists and pilgrims from across the globe. The IHR has attracted a vast range of visitors who seek adventure sports, natural and spiritual solace, peace, cultural assets, food, and festivals, etc. Thus, the multi-functionality of the region has turned tourism into a key component of economic growth for the rural communities in the hills. For the local mountain people, it means valuable economic opportunity for income generation, and for the government and entrepreneurs, it brings profits. As the urban cities gain attention and investment in India, efforts have to be made to protect, safeguard, and strengthen the cultural, spiritual, and natural heritage of IHR for sustainable livelihood development. Furthermore, the socio-economic and environmental insecurities, along with geographical isolation, adds to the challenging survival in the tough terrains of IHR, creating a major threat of outmigration, land abandonment, and degradation. The question the paper intends to answer is: whether the rural community of IHR is aware of the new global trends in rural tourism and the extent of their willingness to adapt to the evolving tourism industry, which impacts the rural economy, including sustainable livelihood opportunity. The objective of the paper is to discuss the integrated nature of rural tourism, which widely depends upon natural resources, cultural heritage, agriculture/horticulture, infrastructural development, education, social awareness, and willingness of the locals. The sustainable management of all these different rural activities can lead to long-term livelihood development and social upliftment. It highlights some gap areas and recommends few community-based coping measures which the local people can adopt amidst the disorganized sector of rural tourism. Lastly, the main contribution is the exploratory research of the rural tourism vulnerability in the IHR, which would further help in studying the resilience of the tourism sector in the rural parts of a developing nation.

Keywords : community-based approach, sustainable livelihood development, Indian Himalayan region, rural tourism

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