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SITUATION OF TOURISM IN RANIKHET WITH EMPHASIS ON ECO-TOURISM: A STUDY IN TOURISM GEOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

The land of natural beauty and known as "Abode of Gods" Uttarakhand became the 27th state of India on November 9, 2000. It is bounded by Indo-Nepal border in the east, China in the North (International) and the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. There are very much opportunity for eco-tourism in our state Uttarakhand. There are many spots which can be made appropriate hubs for eco-tourism in the great Himalaya as well as in the Middle Himalaya. Ranikhet is a mid Himalayan town situated in district Almora of newly created Uttarakhand state in Kumaun region. Ranikhet is a nice tourist place from earlier. Sun facing southern slopes of Himalaya, moderate climate and peaceful atmosphere attract the tourists. An attempt has been made in this paper to find out the possibilities of eco-tourism in a mid Himalayan town.

Keywords: Mid Himalaya, Eco-tourism and Kumaun region.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the ancient phenomenons which have been existing in society since long ago. Now-a-days tourism has become significant concern economic activity at the national level as well as international level. It has become a major social phenomenon and is derived by social, religious, recreational, knowledge seeking and business interest and motivated by the human urge for new experience, adventure education and entertainment. So tourism is a dynamic concept. It changes time to time. Simply it means to travel somewhere for religious, recreational and business purpose.

Theobald (1994) suggested that "etymologically, the word *tour* is derived from the Latin, 'tornare' and the Greek, 'tornos', meaning 'a lathe or circle; the movement around a central point or axis'. This meaning changed in modern English to represent 'one's turn'. The suffix **-ism** is defined as 'an action or process; typical behavior or quality', while the suffix, **-ist** denotes 'one that performs a given action'. When the word **tour** and the suffixes **-ism** and **-ist** are combined, they suggest the action of movement around a circle. One can argue that a circle represents a starting point, which ultimately returns back to its beginning. Therefore, like a circle, a tour represents a journey in that it is a round-trip, i.e., the act of leaving and then returning to the original starting point, and therefore, one who takes such a journey can be called a tourist."

GENERAL GEOGRAPHY OF RANIKHET

Ranikhet is located on 29°29' north latitude and 79°26' east longitude. Ranikhet is situated on a ridge in the north of Kosi Basin. It comprises Ranikhet proper, Kumpur, Chaubatia and Standing Camp also known as Dulikhet and is about 9.6km long with an average breadth of 4.8km and has an area of 17.25 sqkm. The altitude varies from 5,900 ft. to 6,900 ft. commands a clear view of nearly 200 miles of Himalayan range (Plate B).

The climate is a main observable fact for tourism. The climate is mild and not marked by any great variation of temperature. The distribution of average temperature is following:

Summer- Maximum: 27°C-30°C

Minimum: 15°C-20°C

Winter- Maximum: 10°C-12°C

Minimum: 3°C-5°C

The average rainfall is about 130cm. There is temperate vegetation found in Ranikhet. Coniferous Chir(Pine), Deodar and broad leaved Oak, Rhododendrons, Utis and Surai (Siprus) are dominating trees.

The soil is not so rich. Soils are found from limestone and dolomite rocks. Soil is not very much deep because of the steepness of slope. Near Chaubtiya, Mallroad brown soil is found.

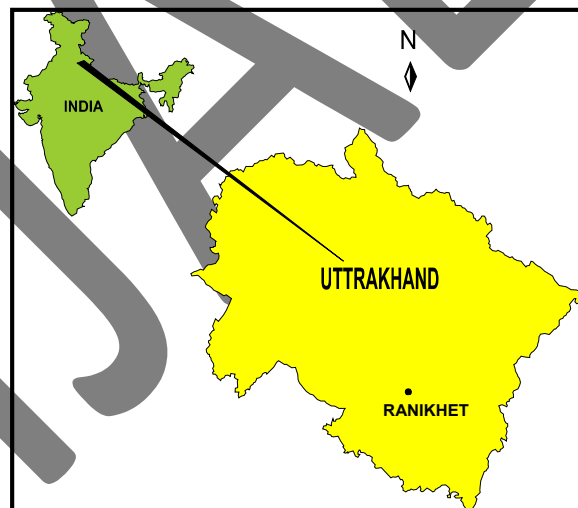


Fig 1: Location Map of Ranikhet

EVOLUTION OF RANIKHET

On May 3, 1815, Kumaun became British territory and Mr. E. Gardner was appointed the first commissioner and agent to the Governor General. Various Europeans subsequently acquired land in different places and amongst others one Mr. Troup acquired, Ranikhet when the cantonment came into existence in 1869. In the Sadar Bazar the oldest portion is still called '**Troup Ganj**' or

Troup's village. The local legend is that the **Queen's Field** from which Ranikhet takes its name is situated in the Cantonment garden close to the club.

SITUATION OF TOURISM IN RANIKHET

Ranikhet is a beautiful tourist destination, which attract thousands of tourists from all over the country and outside. It is an idyllic hill station in Kumaon. The main tourist spots are Chaubatiya garden, Golf course (Plate C) and Haidakhan temple. In 2009 total 89079 tourists came here consisting 573 foreigners out of total number of tourists (Table.1). There are many hotels in Ranikhet for providing good facilities to tourists. To see nature and its element in full harmony the right place to be is Ranikhet.

Table 1: No. of tourists in Ranikhet (source: Tourism Office Ranikhet)

Year	Tourist Places	Indian Tourists	Foreign Tourists	Total
2006	Ranikhet	76261	873	77134
	Doonagiri	76261	873	77134
	Shitlakhet	413	-	413
	Manila	60875	06	60661
2007	Ranikhet	77597	506	78103
	Doonigiri	86400	1200	86600
	Shitlakhet	132	24	156
	Manila	560	04	564
2008	Ranikhet	76261	873	77134
	Doonigiri	88300	1300	89600
	Shitlakhet	974	-	974
	Manila	630	10	640
2009	Ranikhet	88506	573	89079

Eco-tourism is made up of two words: Eco and tourism. Eco word is derived from ecology and tourism is travel for recreation. The complete meaning of eco-tourism is "Tourism which saves environment"

Eco-tourism is responsible travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and (often) small scale (as an alternative to mass tourism). Its purpose is to educate the traveler; provide funds for ecological conservation; directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980s ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention.

There are so many spots which can be developed as ecotourism in the area near Ranikhet e.g. Shitlakhet, Dudoli and Soni-Binsar etc.

CHAUBATIA

Chaubatia is a perfect place to view the Himalayas. The place is 10 Km from Ranikhet. Set amidst gardens, the point provides a clear view of Nanda Devi, Trishul, Nandaghunti and Nilkanth peaks.

Shitalakhet

35 kms from Ranikhet, it is a retreat into a peaceful land. It is full of lush orchards, herbal and medicinal plants. The place is also known for the view from here of Himalayas.

Manila

Manila literally means enchanting. This enchanting place is 84 km from Ranikhet and is the seat of Manila Devi. The thick forests here on the hills are worth watching.

Doonagiri

This is a very lively place 47 kms from Ranikhet with rich history to boast. It is said that while Hanuman was carrying Sanjivani, a piece had fallen here. The place is also blessed with beautiful landscape. There is also a temple of Goddess Durga here and the place also offers some exciting views of Himalayas. A lot many festivals during the months of Aswin and Chait keep the place bustling with pilgrims.

Pandukholi

It is 8 km from Doonagiri. It's a beautiful track of 5 km. After climbing 5 km there is an ashram in the lap of nature. Pandukholi is known for medicinal plants and herbs.

Dudoli

Dudoli falls also near Doonagiri. It is famous for apple orchard.

Soni-Binsar

Soni-Binsar is 20 km from Ranikhet. Here is a temple of lord Shiva. It is surrounded by the forest of deodar and pine.

RANIKHET THE CITY OF CHURCHES

Ranikhet is not only famous for its eye soothing beauty but it is also famous for its beautiful churches which manifest the peerless Victorian Architecture. Along with the advent of Britishers, they started establishing churches in Ranikhet, therefore Ranikhet is also known as the "city of churches" (Plate A). Britishers established churches near Narsingh ground, near Deolikhet ground and in several places near Mallroad and Chaubatia. Saint Michel church in Chaubatia is accorded as the church established on the highest altitude in Northern India at the altitude of 7000ft.



(A) View of a Church near Deolikhet (B) View of Himalayan Range from Ranikhet
 (C) Golf Course (D) A women is conducting restaurant

SUGGESTION FOR PROMOTING ECO-TOURISM

1. The temperate climate of Ranikhet is suitable for the fruit production. Tourist can be attracted by installing stalls of fruits in graded sequence.
2. The byproducts of fruits made by preservation like jam, jelly, juice and pickle can be sell in the attractive packs.
3. The tourist could be served with the dishes made from the regional serial grown by the inhabitants. This kind of activity is very common in the areas where accessibility is tough. The author has seen in the upper Kali catchment (way to Kailash Maansarovar Pilgrimage) that people have established small huts. They call it “hotel” and selling their own products which they are growing on their farms. It can be example for all areas (Plate D).
4. Regional products (pulses, fruits & serials) can be sold at the tourist facility centers.
5. Government should encourage the regional trade and provide sufficient information on that account to the tourists.

Ranikhet is beyond doubt paradise on earth. Here are several ways to please the tourist who love to live in nature. The expansion of nature in Ranikhet is much more than any other hill station in Uttarakhand.

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