

A Study on Religious Tourism : Development Potential and Planning Possibilities with Reference to Shrichamunda Nandikeshwar Dham, Himachal Pradesh



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Abstract

India is a place of many religions as followed Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. A secular country under whose shelter dwells multiple religions in utmost peace and harmony, India can rightly be called the 'Land of Faith'. The pious culture of this land attracts tourists of various religions to take up full-fledged religious tourism. With changing times these religious places have become a site for tourism, rather than a mere pilgrimage. Worshipers want safe and comfortable journey and thus to cater to their needs and demands, business houses, individuals, travel agencies and even the government too started playing a vital role in providing services to the pilgrims and creating religious tourism as a huge industry.

Religious tourism industry in India is yet to be explored to its full potential. This sector shall give a sea of opportunities to new business startups and provide a large number of employments in country. It shall also influx development of the infrastructure of the area, such as transport connectivity, electricity, drinking water etc. Hence, the primary objective to present the paper is to study the growing possibilities and potential in Religious tourism at ShriChamundaNandikeshwarDham in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage, Hub and Spoke Model.

Introduction

Pilgrimage is a travel that fulfills a religious or spiritual need. Tourism and religion are historically related through the institution of pilgrimage. Since ancient times, in humanity travelling for fervor and religious devotion purposes have been present. In this way, religious tourism starts from the moment people begin a journey due to a question of belief. Hence, visiting religious sites could, perhaps, be considered one of the earliest forms of tourism.

Now a day's pilgrimage is defined differently, and can be considered a traditional, religious or modern secular journey. According to UNESCO, sixty percent of the world population practices religious tourism. Religious tourism, spiritual tourism, pilgrimage tourism, cultural tourism and Cultural heritage tourism is often referred as synonyms. Based upon the nature, intensity and region of travel, Religious tourism is divided into the following major categories:

1. Pilgrimages
2. Missionary travel
3. Leisure vacations
4. Faith-based cruising
5. Conventions and Fairs
6. Retreats
7. Monastery visits and guest-stays
8. Faith-based camps
9. Religious tourist attractions

However, religious issues are not the only ones considered by visitors to religious sites or events, and their motivation is composed of religious, cultural, traditional, spiritual, and landscape patterns, which often interact in the intention and decision to set out on a trip. This means that, in

the last decades, traditional pilgrimage destinations have also become tourist sites of multifunctional nature that welcome moved by their religious beliefs and those interested in their historical heritage or architectural, cultural, or artistic value.

It is generally acknowledged that tourist inspiration is multidimensional. As a growing trend, religious tourism has emerged an interest area among academics and business people. For the academics, the religious tourism lies in the study of the motivations, interests, spiritual or cultural needs, while for the business people it represents hope for additional income and increased employment. Religious tourism is linked to other types of tourism, especially holiday, cultural, social, and group tourism, which causes it to be linked to seasonality.

According to the World Tourism Organization, an estimated 300 to 330 million pilgrims visit the world's key religious sites every year. Religious tourism generates benefits for all its stakeholders. On the one hand, religious entities can obtain a greater volume of donations. On the other hand, the tourist motivated by faith participates in the local trade by buying some souvenir, which helps the reactivation of certain local craft activities. The religious tourist, in addition, is more faithful to the destinations than the traditional tourist with motivations different to faith, returning to the site in a shorter period of time. In addition, the increase in tourists increases the income and benefits obtained by the companies dedicated to hospitality services in the area.

Religious tourism has great opportunities in a country like India because it has rich diverse heritage of ancient temples, religious festivals and other related activities of a religious nature. The religions originating in India, be it Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism or Buddhism have an incredible culture and spiritual philosophy with an experience that cannot be had anywhere in the world.

India being one of most religiously overwhelmed country, so religious tourism can plays a very important role in its development. The World Travel and Tourism Council has calculated that India revenue from tourism stood US\$240 billion or 7% of India's GDP in 2018 and it contributes approximately 13% to total employment. Today, pilgrimage tourism forms an important segment of domestic tourism. Religious tourism in India is focus of government national tourism policy.

Religiously motivated travel (pilgrimage) has grown tremendously during the past few years. Religious tourism shall not only be a blessing to employment concerns, but would help to develop the local market of the area, lead to revenue generation and rise in standard of living for the locals. In the near future, pilgrimage tourism is likely to assume greater cyclical growth patterns due to phenomenal growth of pilgrimage related travel for religious purposes, the development of greater tourism infrastructure has been facilitated at religious sites all around the country as well as at the traditional pilgrimage sites.

The modern type of pilgrimage indicates the need for more traditional touristic characteristics, and

also novel ways of marketing the destinations and tuning in to the consumerist behavior of visitors. It has greater needs, wants and expectations of pilgrims/tourists from the supply side. Sites need to satisfy the demand raised by growing pilgrimage tourism for basics such as water, food, accommodation, transportation sanitation etc. The present study focuses on potential and possibilities of development at Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham Shrine and serves as a practical example of what needs to be done to achieve superior tourism experiences.

Aim of the Study

The primary objectives of the research paper are:

1. To find out development Possibilities and Planning Potential of Religious Tourism in Shri ChamundaNandikeshwarDham
2. Whether the continuousgrowth in the number of pilgrims is properly handled by tourism suppliers and local authorities
3. To find out the issues and demands of pilgrims.

Study Area

The present study is based on Shri ChamundaNandikeshwarDham Shrine which is situated inKangra district of Himachal Pradesh which is a north-western state in India. It is located at a distance of about 20 km from the district headquarter Dharamshala, 18 km from Palampur, 10 km from NagrotaBagwan and about 215 km from Shimla. Shri ChamundaNandikeshwarDhamShrine is considered to be the famous sites that is claimed to be a Shidh Pitaha.

Geographically Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham is positioned at 32°14' North latitude and 76°41' East longitude in the foothills of snow cladded Dhauladhar mountains. Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham is situated on the banks of BanerKhad river in Kangra Valley. Shri ChamundaNandikeshwarDham is well connected by air, rail and roads with all the national and state level major cities.

The National Highway-154 links the town with neighbouring States as well as interior parts of State. Apart from this a good network of inter and intra district roads provide accessibility to town from its hinter land. Beside this, nearest rail Stations on narrow gauge are Kangra and Chamundamarg respectively. Broad gauge rail stations are located at Amb (92 km) and Pathankot (100Km) respectively.

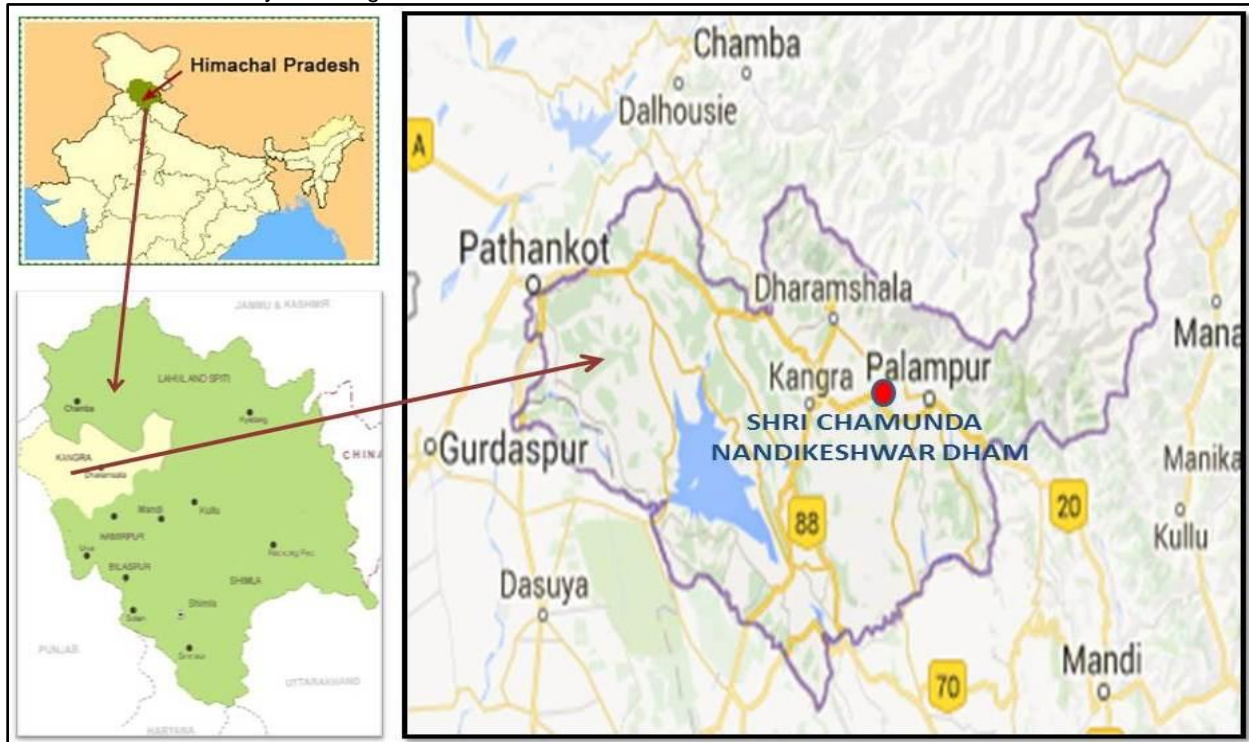
The economy of the region is predominately agrarian as most of the population is dependent on agriculture and activities allied to it, for earning their livelihood. Kangra Valley is known for producing quality wheat, paddy, and vegetable. The crops of corn maize, potato, wheat, mustard, Pulses and vegetables are grown in the area.

Shri ChamundaNandikeshwarDham temple dates back to the 16th century. The temple is dedicated to Chamunda Devi, who is a form of Durga / Shakti. ShriChamunda Devi Mandir is believed to be the abode of 'Shiva and Shakti'. Due to this reason, it is also known as ' Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham'. There is also a small temple of Shivalinga in a

small cave below the temple climbing down few stairs. The temple is commonly known as Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham and the complex holds a Kund in it where devotees take a holy dip in it because it is considered to be sacred.

There is nothing extra-ordinary about the architecture of this temple, but the divine aura spell bounds the devotees with its spiritual appeal. The main shrine is adored by the images of Lord Bhairav

and Lord Hanuman on its sides. Actually, these lords are considered as the guards of the Goddess. The main image of the Goddess is visible draped in rich clothes. Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham Temple witnesses a big rush of devotees, especially during the Navratris. During "Shravan Ashtami" during the month of July-August, a grand fair is held here. Devotees and tourists come from different places to visit there.



The population of the Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dhamas per the census 2001 was 8,062 which increased to 9,891 in 2011. The Table below shows the increase in population and growth rate of the Special Area since 1971- 2011.

Table: Population and Growth Rate of Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham during 1971-2011.

Sr. No.	Census Year	Population	Growth Rate
1	1971	4,327	-
2	1981	5,502	21.36%
3	1991	6,855	19.74%
4	2001	8,062	14.97%
5	2011	9,891	10.59%

Source: Census of India

Methodology

The Research Paper based on Primary and Secondary data. Personal observation was conducted on the road from Dharamshalato Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham, in and around the Temple, facilities in the city and attitude of local people towards the visitors. The secondary data were collected mainly from journal papers, reports, books, online information, etc.

Religious Tourism at Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham

The Government is very much aware of the importance of religious tourism not only as an economic enabler, but also a tool to ensure communal harmony. Religious tourism activities contribute in economy of temple area and also in employment as here large number of tourist come for religious visits and to accommodate them and fulfill their requirements, many indirect activities have come up which also leads to economy generation.

The success of any travel destination relies heavily on different attributes such as its attraction; its amenities or facilities; and its accessibility for tourists, in addition to its safety, reasonable price, sanitation and hygiene, and good accommodation are important in any destination success story.

Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham area has a limited number of hotels and lodges. There are few hotels in the town which offer general accommodation to the pilgrims. There are no star category hotels at nearby area of temple. Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham Sarai located near the temple which provides accommodation in a very reasonable and economical rate. There are few homestays in area which offer fair accommodation with a reasonable price. There are few budget hotels within a radius of 500 m from the main Temple.

Satellite Location Map of Religious Tourist Places near Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham

At regional level, good number of the star category hotels and home stays are available at Dharamshala, Palampur town and Bir village. Tourist information center and tourism department office are in Dharamshala. Many community toilets are available in Area for local public and visitors. At many places especially near to the tourist centers, benches are provided for the tourists. There are health facilities, Busservices and Parking facilities available in Area.

Issues/Challenges

Tourism acts as a crucial enabler in facilitating development of basic infrastructural facilities, generates income for the local community as well as the government, balances regional development strategies through 'umbrella' effect, and fosters peace and socio-cultural harmony. However, tourism development in any region needs to be regulated to prevent the negative impacts. Though tourism is the major economic activity in the area, the current average duration of tourist stay is 1 day only due to lack of adequate activities, infrastructure and facilities for the tourists. The shrine hosts a large floating population coming for tourism and business purpose. The following issues and concerns need focus from the concerned authorities:

1. Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham suffers from short but intense seasons that alter the dynamics of the region for the rest of the year. Lasting from May till about November, it puts a serious

pressure upon the infrastructure of the region, which coupled with the monsoons and a lot of road construction still under progress imply landslides, meaning frequent road blocks, accidents and loss of life.

2. In part a derivative of the problem of carrying capacity, the waste management problem has aggravated as science and technology grew to usher us into the 'era of plastic'.
3. In the race for developing as many niches as possible, there is often the issue of religion being 'monetized', as the host community gets increasingly driven by the 'profit motive'.
4. Parking demand increases manifolds during Navratri season in the area.
5. The shrine is not properly maintained and promoted on the existing Dhauladhar Tourist Circuit.

In spite of the excellent facilities available to the tourists the number of foreign visitors to Himachal state is almost negligible compared to domestic tourists. The major reason for this is inadequate marketing. It is the same case in Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham which receives a dismal number of foreign tourists.

One of the main reasons for this poor performance is lack of facilities and effective marketing strategy. The identification of core deficiencies and manage the issues are essential for paving the way for development of tourism sector in a

way so that it can become a major attraction for tourists.

Recommendations and Strategies

India has abundance of religious centers running across the country. Religious tourism in India can provide a unique experience to the keen observer of faith and culture, it is imperative that the tourism is developed professionally rather than the haphazard manner in which the sector has been growing.

People undertake travel and tourism activity to have a change from the day-to-day monotonous routine so that they can rejuvenate themselves. The tourist has to select a destination, which can be any place in the world. Here comes the role of marketing of tourism. The following recommendations can pave the way phase in the development of religious tourism in the country:

Developing Religious Tourism Circuits through a Hub and Spoke Model

One of the first steps in this aspect is to create nodes nearby religious center, where there is already a basic infrastructure present and plan day trips from there. As the influx of crowd is already sizeable in famous spots, a hub and spoke model will ensure tourist spread to all the nearby attractions.

Provide The Tourists A Holistic Tourism Experience

Attracting the tourists segments that are not attracted to religious sites needs a holistic package. These religious tourism destinations can also become an alternative tourism destination. For example, Rishikesh is marketed as both a religious and an adventure tourism destination.

Marketing Religious Tourism Destinations Needs Special Training as Quite A Major Part of The Visitors are Attracted to These Destinations Due To Reasons Like Studying Old Culture, Evolution of Practices and Research

The religious tours can be blend with informative, cultural and philosophical inputs. Traditional dances, music, art, literature and theatre related to the religious shrine will have to be built into the itinerary. Discourses on the essence of the religious beliefs, workshops on yoga and Ayurveda practices can add immense value to religious tourism.

Developing Integrated Infrastructure for Religious Tourism Development

Infrastructure development requires that religious tourism circuits be identified and State Government is required to streamline the development of the entire religious tourism circuit existing in a given region/area.

Enhanced Emphasis of Minimizing the Impact on The Environment and Maintaining The Ecological Balance

Appropriate checks and balances need to be put in place to ensure that the negative impact of tourism on environment is minimized. These checks and balances can be in the form of fines.

Pricing of Religious Tourism Products

The pricing of religious tourism products needs to be in tandem with the different sectors of people visiting the sites. In India, the prices paid are

only for the tertiary services provided and not for the actual services of the religious flavors one intends to experience. Hence, attempts need to be taken to ensure that the pricing of the tourism product is such that it compensates for educational and cultural services provided to those interested. But extreme caution must be exerted while attempting the pricing of these products. As we know that majority of pilgrims are either from middle or budget classes, therefore, pricing of products needs to be done to suit their budgets.

Limiting The Impact of Globalization on Places With An Endemic Flavor Ofbeing A Distinct Religious Tourism Attraction

Since religious tourism is based on the values, customs, practices, traditions and beliefs of a particular region, the same need to be maintained. It is only by preserving these local values and customs.

Improving Connectivity to Specific Religious Tourism Circuits to Promotethem

Attracting tourists to remote religious areas will require improving the connectivity to these regions to develop these into commercially viable tourism sites.

The Strategic Action Plan for religious tourism development in Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham will cover the following areas:

1. Marketing and Branding oftourism
2. Creation of new tourismproducts
3. Employ trained personnel in hospitality and tourism
4. Tourism to be considered as a means for are a development
5. Creation of tourism relevant infrastructure
6. Exploring opportunities to increase Tourism Revenues

The recommendations for religioustourism development in and around the temple area are as follows:

1. The tourism department in co-ordination with the private sector should develop tourist circuits towards making tourism an important economicsector
2. Promote responsible tourism that will be welcomed as both preferred employer and communityindustry
3. Use Tourism as a means of providing new employment opportunities
4. Increase private sector participation in tourism, both as means of generating employment and providing newinfrastructure.
5. During Navratri period the demand for basic physical infrastructure increases for which theplan recommends to have mobile toilets and additional water supply system.
6. Devote special attention to the promotion of religious tourism. Development of Hindu Temple Destinations - Jawalamukhi - Brajeshwari - Chintpurni - Naina Devi -Bajjnath Temple – ChamudaNandikeshwar Temples Circuits. These destinations need to be created, branded andpromoted.
7. Efforts are needed to step up measures to promote tourism more aggressively, so as to tap

its potential to themaximum

8. Requirement for up-gradation of tourist spots, especially provisions regarding planning along river Baner in Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham.
9. Police control room for event monitoring and control should be established with the increase in number of tourists in area. The lighting facilities in and around public spaces should be improved in order to make the visitors feel safe.

In order to promote sustainable tourism in Shri ChamundaNandikeshwarDham potential of the sites have been studied and schemes like Heritage Hotels, Eco- Tourism, fairs and festivals, development of wayside amenities, safety and security in all important tourist centres, signage's etc. are proposed. Thus, following proposals identified:

1. Proposals for development of Amusement park, Zoological Park, Botanical Park/ Herbal Garden, Thematic Parks, Farm tourism or Eco-industrial Park research.
2. Beautification along temple side. Bio- remedial for cleaning water bodies and converting them into scenic spots suck like developing Food Court/ Cafeteria.
3. The forest area is proposed as a city forest. It is a flat patch of land at a height of 1100 meter above mean sea level and offers a view of valley. A mini zoo, botanical garden etc. can be proposed in this pocket.
4. Proposal to designated Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham as Religious Hub. The proposed activities in Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham Religious Hub shall include Temple Complex, Yoga and Meditation Centre, Garden of Five Senses/ Botanical Garden etc.

Accessibility, transparency, safety and security, hygiene, authenticity and harmony are some of the standardized parameters of the tourism industry in order to strive to meet and satisfy the needs and wants of tourists.

Conclusion

Shri Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham can be developed as areligious tourism huband can create a better potential for development of the area. In spite of all facilities available yet there is a scope to develop and grow. Better efforts have to be made by the government in a righter perspective so that Shri ChamundaNandikeshwarDham can grow as one of the best place of religious tourism.

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