



Exploratory Study On Culinary Tourism In Uttarakhand: Sustainability Through Native Cuisine

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Abstract

Uttarakhand has a rich natural and cultural heritage. Its cuisines are delicious as well as nutritious. In accordance to the Sustainable Development Goals set by United Nations, the world is promoting and exploring possibilities for Sustainable Tourism Development. However, there are many ways, but with reference to Uttarakhand we can also look at Culinary Tourism to assist with Sustainable Tourism Development of the state. Culinary tourism is an emerging trend and often considered as travelling to a place to experience its traditional cuisines. When a traveler visits a place, he wants to immerse himself in the local culture that also include traditional cuisines. The taste is taken back to his country and is always in one's memory. This research aims at the opportunities that Uttarakhand has in terms of promoting local cuisines among tourist that can further add up to a tourist's experience and can be added as one of the motivational factor in his decision to visit Uttarakhand. The experts from tourism industry, Government tourism bodies, Hotels & restaurants and academics were interviewed to get their perception on this and findings were listed in this research.

Keywords: Uttarakhand tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Culinary Tourism.

Introduction

Uttarakhand, popularly known as "Dev Bhoomi" because of its spiritual importance, became 28th state of India on 9 November 2000. It is the origin of two largest river networks – Ganga

& Yamuna. It is home to the most famous pilgrimage travel of Char dhams – Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri & Gangotri. Other very popular pilgrimage are the Kumbh Mela (Haridwar) & Nanda Devi Rajjat Yatra that is organized in every 12 yrs. In addition, it has numerous smaller and regional temples with historical and spiritual importance. Being in the Himalayas, the state enjoys the diversity of flora and fauna and beautiful landscapes. In addition, Uttarakhand is the source of the two most famous rivers of India – Ganga & Yamuna. These landscapes & rivers makes it an ideal destination for adventure tourism as well. Rishikesh is world famous for white water rafting and the other hilly regions hosts many popular treks such as Kuari pass (Lord Curzon) Trek, Har ki Doon trek, Pindari Glacier trek, Valley of Flowers, Bedni Bugyal, Roopkund trek, Tapovan trek and so on. In 2017, the state attracted over 345 Lakhs domestic tourists and around 1.42 lakhs foreign tourists.

When we talk of Himalayan states, we should be working towards conserving our natural heritage and biodiversity. The more commercial or modern approach you take, faster will be the depletion of these heritage and biodiversity. The modern world is united for the cause of Sustainable Development. The term Sustainable Development was coined for the first time in Brundtland Report that was published in 1987 by the United Nations World Commission. As per the report, Sustainable Development is the development done to meet the requirement of present, but without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The raising concerns on saving the planet leads to the creation of Agenda 21 in 1992. Agenda 21 is the declarations signed by 178 Governments at the United Nations conference on Environment & Development at Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Any activity that has impact on environment are included under this Agenda 21 including tourism. As per UNWTO, Sustainable Tourism (ST) development should consists of making optimal use of environment resources and at the same time conserving the natural heritage and biodiversity. ST should respect socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their traditional value and at the same time should contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance. And last but not the least, that it should ensure a viable long term economic operation by providing socio-economic benefit to all the stake holders.

Culinary tourism (CT) is an emerging travel trend and comparatively a new tourism product. In 2001, CT attracted a lot of attention when, Mr Erik Wolf presented a paper on CT to his organization, that was developed into a book that documented the growing interest of tourists in food & wine tourism and how CT could drive local business and restaurants. According to World Food Travel Association (WFTA) there are different definitions by different academicians, professional and others for food tourism, culinary tourism and gastronomy tourism with some variations, but they all define the same phenomenon. WFTA defines food tourism as an act of travelling for a taste of place in order to get sense of a place. UNWTO defines gastronomy tourism as a type of tourism activity in which a visitor's experience is linked with food and related products and activities while travelling. It may also include beverages as well such as wine tourism, tea-coffee tasting, etc. Speaking of India,

every region, every culture, every tribe, every religion have their own local foods and in addition because of the fusion of different cultures, many fusion dishes have evolved over time.

The cuisines of Uttarakhand can be broadly divided into Garhwali cuisines & Kumaoni cuisine. Garhwali cuisine belongs to the Garhwal region that consists of districts viz. Chamoli, Tehri, Pauri, Uttarkashi, Dehradun, Haridwar & Rudraprayag. Kumaoni cuisine on the other hand belongs to Kumaon regions that consists of districts viz. Nainital, Almora, Pithoragarh, Udham Singh Nagar, Bageshwar and Champawat. The cuisines may have regional influences because of their geographical location. Geographically, Uttarakhand is located in the North India and is surrounded by Tibet region of China to the north, Nepal on the east, Uttar Pradesh to the South and Himachal Pradesh to the west and north-west. The local seasonal produce and weather also has an influence in its cuisine. Depending on the regions, we can also classify Uttarakhandi cuisine into Garhwali cuisine & Kumaoni cuisine. Some of the popular Garhwali cuisines are – Gahat or Kulath soup, Stuffed Gahat Chapatis, Urad ke Pakore, Bhangjeera ki Chutney, Aloo ke Gutke, Chainsoo, Kafuli, Phaanu, etc. Some of the popular Kumaoni cuisines are – Bal Mithai, Mandua ki roti, Singodi, Lesu, Jhangure ki kheer, Sani hui Mule & Nimbu, Kumaoni Raita, Kaapa, Singal, etc. Ofcourse, being in the same state all the dishes are being consumed in both the region as per personal taste and raw material availability (UTDB website). In addition, the food is organic as its being produced through local produce.

There is very limited literature available, as the potential of CT is not being explored fully in Uttarakhand. There may be tremendous potential for CT due to its unique taste and nutritional value.

2. Statement of the Problem

World Food Travel Organization conducted various research & interviews, and in September 2020 they published a report that a visitor normally spends 25% of their travel budget on food and beverages. The above research strengthen the fact that tourist does spend a significant amount on food & beverages services and it can help to increase the sales of local restaurants/hotels. Uttarakhand has lots of traditional cuisines that can be offered to a tourist, but there is hardly any restaurant that offers Pahadi cuisines on regular basis or provides only Pahadi cuisine menu. Research on Uttarakhand Cuisines for Culinary tourism is very rare in existing literature. This study aims at finding the limitations and opportunities of Uttarakhandi cuisine and how it can be used to promote Sustainable Tourism. Apart from that this will also help in further research on Uttarakhand cuisine and Culinary tourism in Uttarakhand.

If we are able to combine CT with ST in Uttarakhand, we will be able to achieve:

- Promoting CT will not only popularize the culinary of Uttarakhand, but it will also give boost to the production of organic raw food items.
- It will help in keeping the traditional food alive, will popularize the local culture, and could be promoted to International level.
- It will also help with the socio-economic development of locals who will be selling and preparing the cuisines, and producing the ingredients.

3. Review of Literature

Lucy M. Long in her book “Culinary Tourism” defines CT as the intentional, exploratory participation in the food ways of another including food items, cuisines, meal system, or eating style that belongs to a culinary system of some other place. According to her CT is adventurous eating.

WFTA published a report in 2020 wherein they enlisted experts in tourism & food tourism from 33 countries to provide insight on current and projected state of food tourism. The report mentioned that now travelers have more information about food and drinks of a place before they travel. It also mentioned that the Millennials and Generation Z are more interested in food and drink experiences.

Previous studies have shown that local cuisine is perceived a simple and traditional but does adds up something special to a tourist’s overall experience of a destination (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2013). Food experiences provides a lifelong impression of a destination and it can be a determinant factor for tourist satisfaction and can be a driving force to motivation tourist to visit a particular destination (Henderson, 2009).

In a case study done on Amsterdam, research showed that a tourist normally spends 34 & 30% of the average daily budget on accommodation & food, respectively. (Van Loon, R., Rouwendal, J., 2017). They also find out that a tourist spend on average Euro 130 per person per day. In average, a tourist in Sweden spends 20-30% of total travel expenditure on restaurants (Paulsson, 2014).

Centre for International Development (CID) collaborated with MasterCard and researched on the money spent by tourist using MasterCard. It did not involve the transactions in cash. The research showed that the share of Accommodation and restaurant is 30% of total indexed spend by merchants type in all countries.

In her paper, Moushumi Banerjee (2015) signifies the importance of culinary tourism in India. She also mentioned the importance of below marketing tools in boosting culinary tourism in India:

- The Incredible Tiffin Campaign by Ministry of tourism launched in May, 2015.
- Introduction of Culinary classes in Tourist Itinerary

- The different flavors in India and their dining culture and tradition
- Culinary heritage from the households
- Medicinal advantage of Indian foods & spices
- Food festivals organized by government at various places to promote tourism
- International Mango festival being organised in Delhi every year

Talking about Uttarakhand, as discussed in introduction, its cuisine and food culture is mainly divided into two regions: Garhwali cuisines & Kumauni Cuisines. Overall, being in the same region there is a lot of similarity and common dishes, but due to the border sharing with different regions, both of them have some influence with the neighboring regions. For example, Singal (sweet semolina spirals) is the dish for any good occasion in Kumaon that resembles to the Sel roti that is prepared in Nepal. The only difference is that the Singal is made up of semolina batter while Sel roti is made up of Nepali rice batter. (Gokhale, 2018).

The Garhwali cuisines of Uttarakhand are quite nutritious and have great health benefits (Negi, Vinod, 2017). Being so beneficial, the scope of Culinary tourism is vast and it can be a major source of earning, but for this the region need to showcase and market the food product of Uttarakhand (Rawal, Y.S, Takuli, S.S., 2020).

Having said all about culinary concept and importance, if we talk about tourism, the cultural resource and environment are main factors for the development of any tourism destinations, and hence they should be conserved and developed responsibly through Sustainable Tourism. (Swanson and Chen, 2018). Massimo Montanari in his book "Food is culture" tried to prove that food is a well-established part of a local culture. This was further studied and stated in the book "Food & Culture" published by Taylor & Francis. We can try to develop this relationship in Uttarakhand and can make effort in promoting Sustainable Tourism (ST) through Culinary Tourism (CT).

4. Research Methodology

The exploratory research method was found to be suitable for this study because it will look for CT as a new tourism paradigm in Uttarakhand. The underlying principle for choosing a research approach is to aid in the exploration of CT's potential and challenges, with a focus on Uttarakhand. The insights of CT in Uttarakhand were gathered through an in-depth review of the literature and an exclusive unstructured interview with different stakeholders of CT (Table 1), including academicians, hoteliers, and government officials. These in-depth interviews contributed to the development of a CT theoretical framework by answering the research question and providing qualitative interpretation.

Five academicians and ten hoteliers working as senior managers of star-rated hotels with extensive experience in Uttarkhand tourism industry were interviewed using an unstructured open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended question facilitated discussion on issues relating to the potential of CT in Uttarkhand; potential challenges in developing this

type of specialized tourism in Uttarakhand; and potential interventions to help this sector through CT.

To identify the common pattern of responses by the respondents across the data set, the thematic content analysis method of qualitative data analysis was used. The study gathered respondents' common responses, coded the texts, and compiled a list of the most common opinions and arguments. As a result, those common viewpoints were presented in the findings and discussion section. The responses to the following research questions were compiled and summarized in the findings section.

1. What are the prospects for Uttarakhand culinary tourism?
2. What are the barriers to CT becoming a mainstream tourist attraction?
3. In this case, what interventions are appropriate?
4. Who could be the culinary tourism's potential target market?
5. Which Uttarakhand's indigenous food item/food product mix could be promoted nationally to promote CT?

5. Findings and Discussion

The study's findings are based on the most common responses provided by the respondents. The potentials and challenges of Uttarakhand's CT are discussed in the following section.

5.1 Uttarakhand culinary tourism – Opportunities and Prospects

With the arrival of multiple national and internationally branded hotels in Uttarakhand, CT is now gaining momentum in terms of reach and recognition. All the respondents belonging to hotel industry and professional chefs acknowledged the demand showcased by tourists toward experiencing native food from Uttarakhand. Hotels would also like to introduce special menu's and food events displaying regional food to generate a unique selling proposition. Respondents also mentioned that food from Uttarakhand is not yet talked about among tourists from other part of India and international tourists, this gives hotels an opportunity where they can come forward with a cuisine which is completely new for travelers. They also mentioned the fact that tourist really like native food from Uttarakhand and special events showcasing local food are appreciated by the guests, this eventually motivates hotels to introduce menu's and food events focusing on native food which helps in the introduction of native food among tourists. Respondent from Hotels also mentioned the fact that they are now hiring natives from surrounding villages specifically for preparing local food as well as the nearby villages and farmer groups are being utilized as a source of fresh local produce. The increasing number of branded hotels in Uttarakhand is positively affecting the need of Native Food, which is eventually creating a conducive environment towards sustainable development of local community through CT.

5.2 Barriers to CT in becoming mainstream Tourist Attraction

As per our discussion with respondents following reasons were identified as barriers to CT in becoming major tourist attraction –

Community Migration – The state of Uttarakhand is seriously impacted with the phenomenon of community migration, a majority of natives from Uttarkhand live in other parts of country, the lack of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities has forced the local community towards migration. Respondents marked the phenomenon as a contributor towards lack of awareness regarding native food from Uttarakhand, the hotels operating in Uttarakhand has a less number of local staff due to which the hotels are not able to communicate much about the native food, unavailability of local community also results in lack of agricultural practices that turn out to be the major reason behind irregular supply of native ingredients and local delicacies.

Availability of local produce – The respondent chefs from reputed hotels mentioned the fact that one of the major constraint behind development of CT is irregular supply of native ingredients and raw material. The reason why local delicacies don't find a prominent place in the regular menu's is the unavailability of local produce and irregular supply of native ingredients.

Influence of Tibetan, Nepalese and other popular cuisines – The state of Uttarakhand shares its border with Nepal and has a good number of Tibetan refugees. Respondents from academia pointed out the role of dominance showcased by Nepali and Tibetan cuisine specifically in the street food segment. To establish the CT it is important to have local food showcased through the street vendors, popular tourist spots in Uttarakhand like Mussoorie and Nainital exhibit multiple eating joints dedicated towards Tibetan, Nepalese and popular food from North and South India, the humble cuisine from Uttarakhand is finding it difficult to sustain in such a fierce competition.

Lack of modernization and novelty - Few of the respondents suggested an acute need of novelty in existing native cuisine. The food from Uttarakhand still represents old age processes and presentation, with time and change in the demography of traveler's it is now required to tweak the traditional food according to the taste bud of young travelers from other parts of India and international tourists.

5.3 Required Interventions and initiatives

As per our discussion and inputs received from expert respondents, following points can be considered as positive interventions and initiatives required to develop sustainable model of CT in Uttarakhand

Resource building – CT can only be developed with inputs and efforts from all stake holders, the local community being directly involved in the tourism centric activities need to be

trained and developed as a critical resource. In Our discussion with the Chefs from reputed hotels, it was emphasized that the local community should be made aware of benefits from CT, the local vendors can be trained for utilizing native ingredients and local produces, this will reduce the cost of purchasing products which are expensive and difficult to find, the visibility of local food items will improve the demand for native food items and will mutually benefit both the community and CT in the state of Uttarakhand

Supply Chain management – As discussed above, round the year availability of native ingredients and local produce is a must prerequisite in developing ecosystem for CT in Uttarakhand, for the same purpose the government and private players in the field should come forward with storage units and supply points for procurement of local ingredients and goods. The hustle free supply of ingredients will empower the restaurants and local vendors to keep specific year-long menu's dedicated towards cuisine from Uttarakhand.

Promotional programmes – Many of the respondents mentioned the lack of initiative from government and private agencies towards developing a marketing ecosystem for local food items and native cuisine. As suggestions to improve the state of CT it was suggested that the tourism bodies should organize fairs and festivals in the peak season highlighting the traditional cuisine and delicacies from hilly regions of Uttarakhand.

Incentives and Subsidization – The state government has several initiatives already active in the field of Tourism development in the form of training and support for startups, there are multiple schemes that offer incentives and subsidy for starting tourism related ventures, on similar lines certain incentives or subsidies can be planned for the businesses who deal specifically in promoting and displaying ethnic food from Uttarakhand and who are somehow attached to it. Farmers who are specifically producing indigenous crops with traditional processing styles can also be included in the programme.

5.4 The Potential Target client

As the outcome of discussion the market that can be looked upon for promoting CT was identified as the budget traveler, the leisure client with good spending capacity are less in numbers and they choose branded hotels which are already showcasing local delicacies in their menus. Budget traveler being the majority stays in budget hotels and cherishes road side delicacies, targeting budget traveler will be the right thing as it will have greater reach and will communicate the word of mouth more efficiently.

5.5 The Food items that should be promoted on the national level

The local cuisine should be promoted at various levels. Surveys could be conducted for the feedback of visitors towards local cuisines. Based on the feedback, we can identify certain cuisines and start promoting it on the national level through various means such as participating in various fairs, organizing special events on Uttarakhand, showcasing

Uttarakhand cuisines in hotels, and can think of certain more options of promotion. We can also capitalize on the Chefs that are from Uttarakhand and are working in kitchen of reputed hotels. A fraternity or group of Chefs can be organized and connected so as to start introducing popular local cuisines in their hotels. Promotions of Uttarakhand tourism should keep local cuisines as an attraction.

6. Conclusion and Scope for future research

Cuisines can become a strong pull factor to attract tourist. The taste last longer and can often result as a positive referral marketing through offline and online modes. Local cuisines are made with local available ingredients that are grown locally thus helping in economic development of not only farmers but all stakeholder from production to retailing. As, the demand of Uttarakhandi cuisines is not much, the local farmers are not so enthusiastic to increase the production. But, once the demand increases, it is quite possible that the local farmers start focusing on increasing the produce. Due to very limited research material in this area, there is scope of further research as in establishing relationship between the increased demand and attitude of farmers towards production.

There is a need of stakeholder's association for promoting local cuisines. As there is no such directed and collective efforts could be seen from any of the stateholder's and may be that is why even the local Government is not so aggressive on marketing local cuisines. It could be another open research question as in whether the stakeholders are really interested in the promotion or working towards the promotion.

As the world is getting health conscious and the focus is on organics and healthy food, it could be a perfect time to start promoting the local cuisine by focusing on its nutritional value as well as taste. Himalayas are being associated with Ayurvedic herbs and some of the herbs are used in the local cuisines as well. The wellness resorts can surely highlight local foods by associated them with health benefits. Potential is there, but a collective effort in right direction is required by the stakeholders as well as Government.

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