

## Empowering Local Community and Bringing Awareness for Alternative Tourism

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### Abstract :

Himachal Pradesh is home to amazing natural settings, a thriving cultural legacy, and exhilarating adventure travel options. However, the influx of large numbers of tourists frequently causes damage to the environment, a loss of cultural diversity, and economic inequality. The research paper explores the opportunity for alternative tourism to empower local communities and raise awareness in the Beas Circuit of Himachal Pradesh, with a focus on the Kullu and Mandi districts. The study involves primary survey with the help of questionnaire filled by local community for data collection and utilizes a one-sample t-test for statistical analysis. The outcomes show a strong consent among local population about the importance of implementing various approaches to improve awareness and their involvement in alternative tourism initiatives. The study emphasizes that the community plays an essential role in alternative tourism development which results in preserving socio-economic growth and cultural values in the region. The paper concludes that alternative tourism promotes sustainable growth in the Beas Circuit by empowering local communities and enhancing their awareness level towards more responsible form of tourism

Key Words – Alternative Tourism, Local community, Awareness

### Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is well-known for its splendid natural beauty, breathtaking mountain landscapes and unique and precious hill cultural heritage. Though mass tourism has gained popularity and with the good amount of disposable income and ease in accessibility tourist are regularly coming to the popular tourist destinations of Himachal Pradesh. At one place such large arrivals boost the state's economy, it has also led to alarming situation of environmental degradation and unequal distribution of economic benefits. Alternative tourism has emerged as a potential solution, aiming to offer unique experiences for tourists while promoting responsible practices and supporting local communities.

Beas Circuit in Himachal Pradesh, has the most popular tourist's destinations in district Kullu and Mandi with a variety of attractions, including scenic valleys, adventure sports, and traditional villages which attracts flood of tourists in peak seasons.

Tourism can have significant economic and cultural impacts, but it can also strain local resources and traditions with such a large number of tourists reaching the hill stations . A new approach is emerging to address these challenges by empowering local communities and promoting alternative forms of tourism, such as eco-tourism, sustainable or responsible tourism and culinary tourism etc. This approach involves community participation in decision-making and aims to create authentic and sustainable travel experiences. Raising awareness about alternative tourism will necessitate cooperative efforts from governments, local communities, tourism service providers, and tourists. Cooperation is essential for empowering local

communities and advocating for alternative tourism. Supportive policies can be established by governments to promote community-based projects and sustainable practices, and travel agencies can design travel itineraries that give priority to local experiences and cultural immersion. There are plans to create alternative tourism choices in the Beas circuit in Himachal Pradesh that showcase the region's natural beauty and cultural legacy. Adventure, cultural, and ecotourism are given particular attention. Travelers can play an active role by responsibly researching destinations, respecting local customs, and supporting community-owned businesses. This collaborative approach is not just a trend, but a necessity for fostering local ownership, cultural preservation, and responsible travel practices. It makes the way for a more sustaining and enriched travel experience for everyone participating. These initiatives not only aim to validate the benefits of alternative tourism and being responsible towards the carrying capacity of hill terrain. At the same time making the Beas circuit exemplary for community-driven tourism in Himachal Pradesh.

### Literature Review

It's widely agreed that Himachal Pradesh is favored by most tourists for its natural beauty and pleasant weather. It's been observed that the choice of destination for the majority of tourists is heavily influenced by the climate and personal safety considerations. This underscores the immense tourism potential of Himachal Pradesh that needs to be professionally tapped and serviced to cater to holidaymakers, Singh, Balbir. (2023). As per "Alternative Tourism Market Research Report" 2024 the Alternative Tourism market is expected to experience an annual growth of 10.7% (CAGR 2024 - 2031). Alternative Tourism describes distinctive and sustainable travel experiences that emphasize immersing travelers in local cultures, advocating for environmental conservation, and backing community development. The primary goal of Alternative Tourism is to offer genuine and conscientious travel choices that contribute to the well-being of local communities and the environment, Revidease (2024). A good destination harnesses its natural resources and potential in a sustainable and effective manner, all while considering the economic and social well-being of society. It is crucial for destination developers and marketers to understand how communities perceive responsible tourism activities and how these activities can enhance their quality of life through destination sustainability. Notably, responsible tourism is not directly linked to quality of life, but it does have a significant impact on the quality of life of local communities when destination sustainability acts as a complete mediator. Aikal, Liyani, Mohd, Rasdi. et. al (2022) The participation and awareness of the local community plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism development. Empowering the community also contributes positively to the sustainable growth of tourism. Moreover, the local wisdom of the community serves as a mediator in the connection between community empowerment and sustainable tourism development, I., W., C., Adyatma., Desak, Rurik, Pradnya (2023). An essential aspect of advancing ecotourism in the area is the active participation of the local community. Their valuable input yields crucial feedback on the ongoing enhancements and progress within the region, Kumar Vineet, Gupta Dikshit, Kumar Jaswinder. (2020). Residents need to be educated about the long-term benefits of tourism. To boost local tourism, we can provide financial support to local entrepreneurs for constructing infrastructure, arrange training sessions for activities like guiding and trekking, and highlight the significance of preserving the environment and local culture. These initiatives will not only generate more job opportunities but also increase income for the local population in the tourism sector, Kumar Ajay (2023). There is a necessity for tourism infrastructure development, education and training, resident involvement in decision-making processes, and the formulation of effective promotional strategies to promote community-based tourism, Bagri, Satish & Kala, Devkant. (2020)

**Objective :**

- Understand the current level of awareness and participation in alternative tourism initiatives among local communities.
- Identify potential strategies for promoting alternative tourism practices within the Beas Circuit.
- Explore how alternative tourism can contribute to the empowerment of local communities and promote sustainable development in the region.

**Research Methodology**

The given table depicts the research methodology of present study

This study results will provide valuable insights for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities in the Beas Circuit. The findings could guide the development and implementation of alternative tourism programs that benefit both tourists and local residents, fostering a more sustainable and equitable tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh specifically in Beas Region

**Table 1. Research Methodology**

Research Design	The study utilized an explorative research design to delve into the topic. The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources, employing a survey method through personal interviews and Google Forms. The research instrument used was a structured questionnaire.					
Sample	The study targeted the local population of Kullu, Manali, Naggar, Mandi, and Rewalsar, using purposive sampling, resulting in a sample size of 188 participants. Following is the sample distribution :					
	Table 1.1: Sample Distribution					
	Gender		Age		Occupation	
	Male	71	Less than 25	77	Private Sector Employee	60
	Female	117	Between 26-50	101	Businessman/Entrepreneur	38
			Above 50	10	Student	23
					Not Working	58
				Government Employee	9	
Analysis	The statistical tools used for the analysis were SPSS, with both descriptive and inferential analysis techniques. Descriptive analysis employed the percentage method, while inferential analysis utilized the one sample t-test.					

### Research Findings

According to the data, findings from the one-sample t-test indicate that there is considerable consensus among the local communities in the Beas Circuit concerning a range of strategies aimed at increasing participation and awareness in alternative tourism endeavours. Increasing the number of community-based training programmes and skill centres was overwhelmingly endorsed by 78.19%. In addition, subsidised loans for small enterprises received substantial support from the local populace, comprising 56.91% of the total. Furthermore, an overwhelming 81.38% of respondents concur that the government should develop essential infrastructure in a sustainable fashion. The inclusion of the local community in sustainable decision-making and planning processes was also favoured by 64.89% localites. Apart from that, the establishment of policies and legislation to promote the positive impact of tourism on the local community was overwhelmingly endorsed by 89.36% of the participants. Conversely, 89.36% of the respondents expressed support for the practice of maintaining an accessible channel for feedback from the local community. 57.35% of respondents expressed support for the training of locals to become knowledgeable transportation drivers and tour guides. Conversely, 94.68% of respondents strongly endorsed disaster management training for local members. The formation of cooperatives or community-based tourism initiatives was endorsed by 71.28% of the locals. Supporting the promotion of local communities' goods and services to travellers was also endorsed by 84.04% of the participants. The aforementioned results highlight the considerable enthusiasm that communities in the Beas Circuit have to actively participate in and derive advantages from alternative tourism initiatives.

**Table 2 One Sample t-test of the Awareness of Alternative Tourism Among Local Community**

Areas	Agreed	%	t	df	Sig.
Bringing More Skill Center and Training Programme for community	147	78.19%	-70.987	187	.000
Financial Support to local communities (Loans for small business should be subsidized)	107	56.91%	-71.855	187	.000
Necessary Infrastructure Development by Government in sustainable manner	153	81.38%	-92.092	187	.000
Involving the local community in the sustainable planning and decision-making	122	64.89%	-97.722	187	.000
Setting up policy and Law wherein local community to be benefitted by tourism	168	89.36%	-140.075	187	.000
Maintain an open channel for feedback from the local community	168	89.36%	-98.222	187	.000
Train locals to become knowledgeable tour guides/taxi Drivers etc.	108	57.45%	-61.459	187	.000
Train locals for Disaster Management	178	94.68%	-125.259	187	.000

Establish community-based tourism initiatives or cooperatives that manage tourism activities and revenue distribution.	134	71.28%	-82.833	187	.000
Help local communities market their products and services to tourists.	158	84.04%	-106.636	187	.000

Source: Data collected with the help of primary research



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A growing consciousness is being observed within the local communities of the Beas Circuit with respect to alternative tourism. The results of the sample t-test, represent the viewpoints of local inhabitants, indicate a significant propensity to adopt a wide range of tourism approaches that go beyond conventional paradigms. The consciousness arises from a multitude of sources, encompassing heightened exposure to worldwide tourism patterns, initiatives by local governing bodies to advance sustainable development, and the acknowledgement of the economic prospects intrinsic in alternative tourism endeavours. Furthermore, endeavours targeted at enhancing community capacity and empowerment have significantly contributed to the cultivation of consciousness and admiration regarding the intrinsic worth of alternative tourism. Awareness-raising initiatives have underscored the advantages of alternative tourism by means of involving stakeholders, including community leaders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and tourism practitioners. These benefits include the promotion of cultural preservation, the conservation of natural

resources, and the creation of income opportunities for residents. Moreover, the incorporation of educational programmes and seminars has bolstered communities' appreciation and comprehension of the Beas Circuit's distinctive assets and points of interest, thereby motivating them to actively endorse and engage in alternative tourism endeavours. Local communities are poised to have a significant impact on the sustainable development of tourism in the region, as optimism regarding its future trajectory increases in tandem with rising awareness.

**Reliability analysis of the statements**

Upon conducting the study, an analysis was performed on the responses pertaining to various factors. The reliability of the statements has been thoroughly examined, and the corresponding results have been presented in Table . Utilizing Cronbach Alpha, the internal consistency reliability of the mentioned factors has been calculated. It is worth noting that all factors exhibit a Cronbach Alpha greater than 0.7, signifying the presence of internal consistency reliability across the board.

**Table 3 Analysing the reliability of collected Data**

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Bringing More Skill Centre and Training Programme for community	4.34	1.09	0.89
Financial Support to local communities (Loans for small business should be subsidized)	4.04	1.14	0.90
Necessary Infrastructure Development by Government in sustainable manner	4.35	0.84	0.90
Involving the local community in the sustainable planning and decision-making	3.41	0.92	0.90
Setting up policy and Law wherein local community to be benefitted by tourism	4.13	0.57	0.90
Maintain an open channel for feedback from the local community	4.15	0.82	0.90
Train locals to become knowledgeable tour guides/taxi Drivers etc.	3.91	1.36	0.90
Train locals for Disaster Management	4.57	0.59	0.90
Establish community-based tourism initiatives or cooperatives that manage tourism activities and revenue distribution.	4.29	0.94	0.90
Help local communities market their products and services to tourists.	3.90	0.78	0.90

**Research Implications**

Overall, the increasing awareness and concern for sustainable development among the local communities of the Beas Circuit concerning alternative tourism represents a significant paradigm shift. Driven by endeavours focused on educating and empowering the community, inhabitants are progressively coming to acknowledge the multifarious advantages that can be gained by adopting alternative tourism strategies. The results obtained from the one-sample t-test emphasise a substantial agreement among residents concerning a variety of approaches aimed at improving awareness and participation in alternative tourism initiatives. These approaches encompass skill development programmes as well as community engagement in decision-making procedures. The aforementioned outcomes demonstrate a shared resolve to utilise the environmental,

cultural, and economic capacities of tourism in a manner that guarantees fair compensation for the community's inhabitants. Therefore, the Beas Circuit is positioned to become a model of responsible tourism, propelled by the proactive involvement and dedication of its local communities in constructing a future that is both sustainable and inclusive.

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