

# **“Indigenous Foods and Gastronomy Tourism: Livelihood Opportunities through Buckwheat and Sea Buckthorn in the Warwan Valley”**

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## **Abstract**

Gastronomy tourism offers a sustainable and inclusive approach to tourism development, particularly in remote rural regions. The Warwan Valley of the Kashmir Himalaya possesses rich indigenous food resources that can effectively support this form of tourism. This study examines the role of traditional buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) and sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) as key gastronomic resources contributing to local livelihood generation. Buckwheat, locally known as “Tromba”, and sea buckthorn, known as Kend Kuil, hold significant cultural, nutritional, and medicinal value and are organically cultivated in the region. The increasing interest of tourists in authentic local cuisines has enhanced the demand for these traditional food products. The study concludes that promoting indigenous gastronomy can strengthen community participation, preserve cultural heritage, and foster sustainable economic development in the Warwan Valley.

## **Keywords**

Gastronomy Tourism; Indigenous Food Systems; Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*); Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*); Warwan Valley; Sustainable Livelihoods; Rural Development; Himalayan Tourism

## **INTRODUCTION**

The region possesses the potential for diverse forms of tourism such as ecotourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, and botanical tourism; however, gastronomy tourism emerges as a particularly effective means of boosting the local economy. Unlike other tourism forms, which often require substantial initial investment and infrastructure, gastronomic tourism offers inclusive economic opportunities, especially for underprivileged and marginalized communities.

Not every section of society is able to benefit equally from tourism development due to the heavy financial burden associated with large scale tourism enterprises. In contrast, gastronomic tourism enables local residents to initiate small-scale entrepreneurial activities with minimal capital investment by promoting indigenous and culturally rooted food products. Products such as traditional buckwheat varieties and diverse cuisines derived from sea buckthorn berries and leaves represent valuable gastronomic resources that can be effectively integrated into the tourism framework to support livelihood generation and sustainable local development.

### ***Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) as a Traditional and Gastronomic Resource***

Buckwheat, botanically known as *Fagopyrum esculentum* and locally called Tromba, is an important traditional crop of the Greater Himalayan region, particularly in the Warwan Valley. Its seeds resemble wheat grains in shape but turn black in colour when fully mature and ready for harvest. Buckwheat holds significant cultural and traditional importance in the region, where it has been cultivated and consumed for generations. Buckwheat is rarely found outside the Warwan region and is also cultivated on a limited scale in the Padder and Gurez areas. This restricted geographical distribution enhances its uniqueness and cultural value, making it an important indigenous food product of the region. Botanically, buckwheat is an annual pseudocereal crop belonging to the *Polygonaceae* family. It produces triangular-shaped seeds and is rich in essential nutrients such as proteins, dietary fibre, and minerals. The crop is well adapted to high-altitude conditions and thrives in harsh climatic environments where conventional cereals cannot grow easily. In recent years, particularly over the past two years, the Warwan Valley has consistently witnessed a significant influx of a category of tourists whose primary motivation is to experience local and traditional cuisines. Buckwheat-based dishes form an

important part of this culinary heritage and contribute to the growing interest in gastronomy tourism in the region. After grinding the crop in the traditional flourmill functioning on water, it becomes white flour and is being consumed as traditional food in the shape of green bread, Locally “TROMBI TCHUT” Furthermore diverse varieties are being made from this product

Buckwheat also possesses notable medicinal value and has traditionally been used by local communities to manage and recover from various health ailments. The crop is cultivated organically, without the use of chemical fertilisers, which further enhances its health benefits. Additionally, buckwheat is known for its antioxidant properties, making it a nutritionally valuable and health-promoting food product.

### **Sea Buckthorn**

Sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*), belonging to the family Elaeagnaceae, is a plant commonly found in the Warwan Valley. It generally grows in sandy areas along the banks of the main river, the Maru Sudhir River, as well as along small streams flowing through the region. Locally, the plant is known as Kend Kuil, and its berries are locally referred to as Kend Phal. Recently, a passionate local explorer, Muzaffar Ahmad Rather, has introduced several cuisines prepared from sea buckthorn. These products are purely organic and have brought renewed attention to this traditionally underutilized plant. Sea buckthorn holds significant medicinal value, as it is rich in essential nutrients and is believed to possess anti-cancer properties. The berries of Sea Buckthorn have a very short harvesting period and remain edible for only about one month after ripening. They are round in shape and turn red when they reach the harvest stage. Products such as sea buckthorn berry juice and tea made from its leaves are consumed locally and are known to have no serious side effects. Earlier, sea buckthorn was rarely used in the region. However, after its introduction in local cuisine and awareness initiatives, it has gained popularity among the masses and has started attracting a large influx of enthusiastic tourists to the Warwan Valley.

### **Conclusion**

Gastronomy tourism can play an important role in the development of the Warwan Valley. Local food products like buckwheat and sea buckthorn help preserve traditional culture while creating income opportunities for local people. As more tourists show interest in local cuisines, these indigenous foods can support small scale businesses and improve livelihoods. Promoting local gastronomy can lead to sustainable tourism and balanced economic growth in the region.

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