

Ecotourism And Economic Wellbeing - A Case Study Of Banjar (Kullu)**Mr. Deepak Kumar Singh****Assistant Professor****Dept of Geography****Govt. College Banjar****Kullu**dksgeography@gmail.com**(Received:16April2024/Revised:9May2024/Accepted:13May2024/Published:17May2024)****Abstract:**

This research paper examines the role of ecotourism in fostering economic well-being, focusing on the case study of Banjar. Ecotourism, defined as sustainable and responsible visitation to natural regions, has emerged as a potential driver of economic development while also promoting environmental conservation. The study looks into the impact of ecotourism in Banjar, namely the economic benefits, community involvement, and environmental sustainability of this type of tourism. This study discovered that the majority of Banjar residents are economically secure, and that tourists visiting surrounding places improve the well-being of the community. However, the months of April, May, and June generated the most revenue, with tourists providing the primary source of income.

Key Words: Ecotourism, Economic Wellbeing, Community Involvement, Banjar, Case study**Introduction**

With their broad diversity of species, ecosystems and a multiplicity of communities and cultures; mountain regions have long held a fascination for visitors, especially those drawn by natural landscapes, adventure, outdoor activities, cooler summer temperatures and the unique features of the mountain cultural heritage, with a sense of spirituality reinforced by mountains' isolation and soaring heights (Romeo et al., 2021).

Ecotourism is part of the broader concept of alternative tourism that emerged in the 1980s in response to the social, economic, and biological impacts of mass tourism. The World Conservation Union in 1996, explored ecotourism as "environmentally responsible visiting of relatively unspoilt natural areas to enjoy and appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations." Ecotourism has become a strategy to merge environmental protection and development in both discussion and practice (Gray, 2002). Ecotourism has been defined by the Ecotourism Society

as ‘responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people’ (Cochrane, 1996: 241), a definition which emphasizes the view that ecotourism should have positive impacts. Although scholars still have different views on ecotourism, it is generally believed that the place of ecotourism should be the relatively primitive and simple areas, especially the nature reserves which are of great significance to the ecological environment (Ross and Wall, 1999).

Ecotourism has emerged as a sustainable alternative to conventional tourism, emphasizing responsible travel that conserves the environment and benefits local communities. Ecotourism is more than just going to natural locations or sights; it's about going there in an ethical and sustainable way. As a term, it describes visiting natural regions with an emphasis on conservation of the environment. The intention is to provide visitors with opportunities to explore nature and to learn about conservation efforts. In Himachal Pradesh, known for its natural landscape and honest people, is amongst the top tourist destination in the country, both for domestic as well as international tourists. The revised ecotourism policy of 2016 focused on bringing the wilderness and virgin ecosystems of the state closer to the visitors. District Kullu of the state is famous for many tourist attractions in the world; out of which Banjar region is known for its rich biodiversity and natural beauty, presents an ideal case study to analyze the economic implications of ecotourism. In this study, we analyse the Ecotourism, community involvement with economic wellbeing and economic impact of ecotourism in Banjar, district kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

Literature Review

Tourism and travel-related services are among countries’ main parts of the service sector. By creating the flow of tourists, tourism services can lead to capital transfer, job creation, cultural exchange (globalization), and increasing welfare in the country hosting the tours. Yunfeng Shang et al., (2023) and Year book of Tourism Statistics published by the World Tourism Organization observed that international tourism has increased from 522.2 billion US dollars in 1995 to nearly 1.86 trillion US dollars in 2019. This increase showed the importance of tourism services in generating income for countries, especially in the era of Corona and post-corona. Casado Aranda et al. (2021) express that tourism services can be a central driver of economic growth recovery in post COVID era. Jeyacheya and Hampton (2022) argue that tourism can make high incomes for host countries leading to job creation and economic flourishing in destination cities for tourists.

Holzner (2011) focused on the consequences of tourism development on the economic performance of 134 countries from 1970 to 2007. They found out that excessive dependence on tourism income leads to Dutch disease in the economy, and other economic sectors need to develop to the extent of the tourism sector. In another study, Sokhanvar et al. (2018) investigated the causal link between tourism and economic growth in emerging economies from 1995 to 2014. The main results confirmed that the linkage is country dependent. Brida et al. (2020) studied 80 economies from 1995 to 2016 to determine how tourism and economic development are related. The paper's conclusions highlighted tourism's-positive role in economic activities.

Another group of previous studies has linked tourism to sustainability targets. Sorensen and Grindsted (2021) expressed that nature tourism development has a positive and direct impact on achieving sustainable development goals of countries. Ahmad et al. (2022) explored the role of tourism in the sustainability of G7 economies from 2000–2019. The primary findings revealed the positive impact of tourism arrivals on sustainable economic development. Zekan et al. (2022) investigated the impact of tourism on regional sustainability in Europe. They concluded that tourism development increases transport, leading to increased carbon dioxide emissions. Therefore, tourism development causes environmental pollution.

Lu et al. (2021) expanded the concept of the ecotourism industry. The significant results expressed that smart tourist cities are essential for efficient ecotourism in countries. Thompson (2022) expressed the characteristics of ecotourism development through survey methodology. The results confirmed the importance of transparent regulations, government support, and social intention to promote ecotourism. Hasana et al. (2022) reviewed research to analyze the earlier studies about ecotourism. The conclusions expressed that ecotourism is necessary for environmental protection. However, it is a challenging plan for the government, and they should carry out various policies toward ecotourism development. Kunjuran et al. (2022) studied the role of ecotourism on rural community development in Malaysia. The significant results confirmed that ecotourism could transfer-positive impacts. Jin et al. (2022) studied the role of local community power on green tourism in Japan. They concluded that the concept of agricultural village activity and regional support positively influences the development of green tourism in Japan as a developed economy. Baloch et al. (2022) explored the ecotourism specifications in the developing economy of Pakistan. They found that Pakistan's ecotourism needs government support and the social well-being of the visited cities.

Although, all these studies addressed different aspects of tourism and ecotourism, yet the issue of economic impact and community involvement in the Banjar, district Kullu, state of Himachal Pradesh remain untouched. According to the forest department total forest area of the state is 35407 square kilometres. In this context, this study has been conducted to find out the role of ecotourism in economic development of the area through community involvement.

Methodology

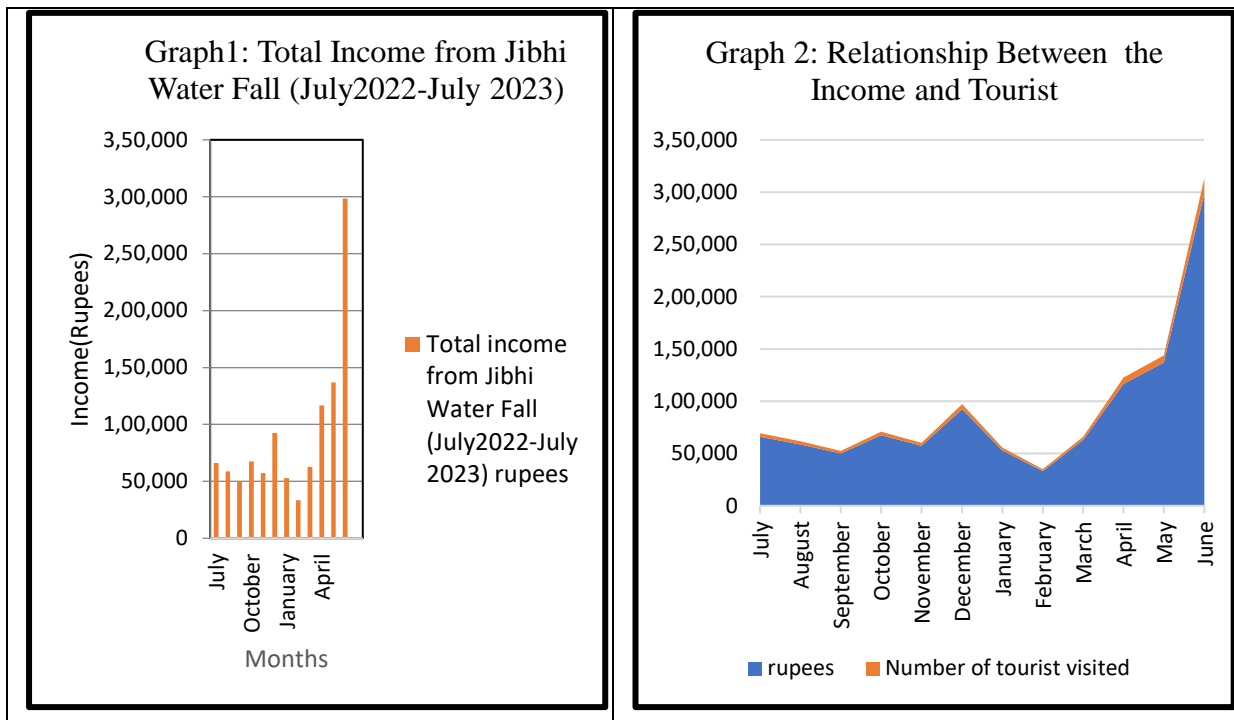
Department of Forest is the nodal agency for implementing eco-tourism policy in the state. They have created a special purpose vehicle in the form of ‘Himachal Pradesh Ecotourism Society’ (HPECOSOC) for implementing the ecotourism policy in the state of Himachal Pradesh. HP ECOSOC will cover the entire state. At the Divisional level another society will be framed and headed by the Conservator of that circle. Banjar is a Forest Division, under Kullu Circle. It includes three ranges named Banjar, Tirthan and Sainj. Banjar forest range (99.17 Sq.km) has been chosen for the study; because, it has three different sites for ecotourism activities. They are Sojha Rest House, Jibhi Rest House and Jibhi Water fall. Banjar is situated in the foot hill of Jalori Dhar which connects Kullu to Shimla and Kinnaur via Road. It is one of the growing tourist destinations and has some fascinating tourist location like, Great Himalayan National Park, Tirthan Valley, various Water Falls and picturesque landscape etc. Therefore, a Case study of Banjar is selected for the study by the investigator. The paper finds to seek the relationship between ecotourism sites and their role on the economic development of the area and it also helps to find out how local community involved, and get advantage from these eco-tourism activities in the region. Various government sites, ecotourism policies of Himachal Pradesh government were reviewed and other primary data were collected for this paper. The indicators related to study were economic indicators (revenue generation, job creation, business growth) social indicators (community involvement) policy and governance of Ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh. Visitor experience and satisfaction survey was conducted in summer 2023, the peak tourist season in the area.

Result and Discussion

Economic Impact of Ecotourism

In the graph 1, the biggest month for tourists and revenue for the Forestry Department was found to be June in this study's analysis of the overall revenue from the Jibhi Water Fall for the 2022–2023 year. Nevertheless, January's expected income was lower. Hence, we can

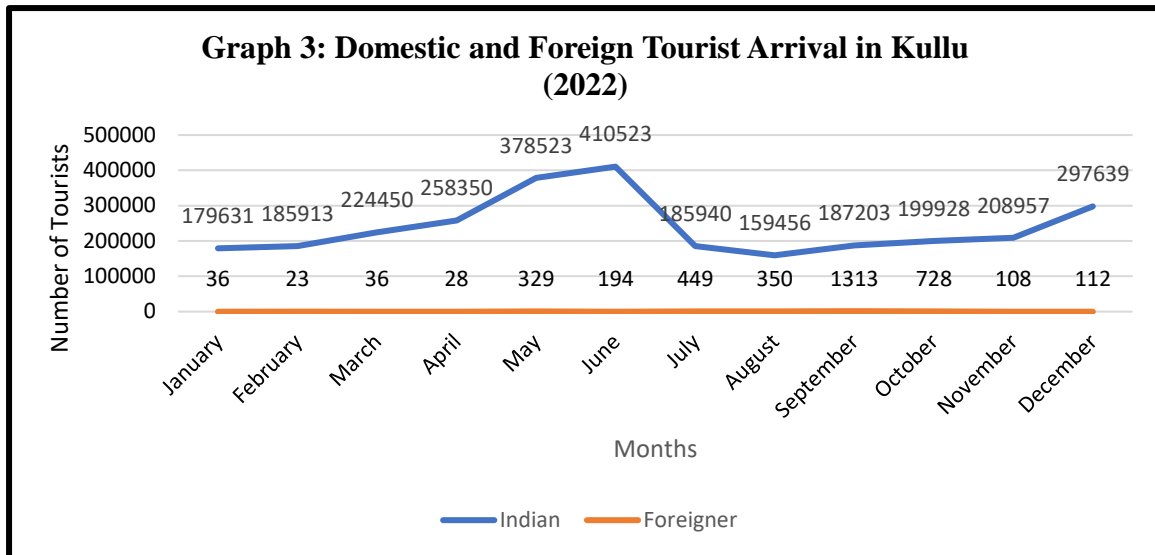
conclude that the Department of Forestry generates the most revenue during the months of April, May, and June from tourists.



As a result of the importance of the summer travel season, we discovered while looking at Graph 2 that the months of April, May, and June had the largest generation income. The tourist spent many days in this location, and by doing so, they contributed to the local communities' financial wellness. According to the Banjar local community, the months of April, May, and June yielded the most revenue creation, with tourists being the main source of income.

Domestic and Foreign Tourist in District Kullu (H.P.) during 2022

According to graph 3, the month of June had the greatest number of visitors (410523), followed by the months of May (378523) and December (297639). Nevertheless, the months of August (159456), January (179631), February (185913), and July (185940) saw the least number of visitors to the Kullu. The study's peak travel seasons were therefore the summer and the months of April, May, and June. Nevertheless, December was an uncommon month as it was wintertime.



Conclusion

In this study, we look at ecotourism, community involvement with economic welfare, and the economic impact of ecotourism in Banjar, district Kullu, Himachal Pradesh. Ecotourism has a promising future for upgrading and protecting forests and animals. It also provides natural-based livelihoods and a source of income for the enormous population that lives in the vicinity. This is more compatible in the case of Banjar because it enhances tourist activities in the area while simultaneously helping to protect the environment. Ecotourism also contributes to increased tourist inflows in Banjar. This study discovered that the majority of Banjar residents are economically secure, and that tourists visiting surrounding places improve the well-being of the community. However, the months of April, May, and June generated the most revenue, with tourists providing the primary source of income.

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