

Prospects of Tourism in Hamirpur District of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Himachal Pradesh is a north Indian state which is popularly known as ‘Devbhumi’ (The abode of gods). The State has a lot to offer in terms of tourism as it has immense natural beauty, historical sites and cultural diversity. Moreover, tourism is one of the top contributors to the State’s economy as it contributes around seven percent to the State GDP. There are a lot of famous tourist destinations in Himachal Pradesh which include Shimla, Kullu – Manali, Dharamshala and Chamba etc. Other than this, there are certain other places in the State that have got tourism potential but still don’t attract enough tourists. One such place is the Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh which ranks very low in terms of tourist arrivals. However, the district has certain historic, natural and religious tourist attractions which are not yet explored properly. Tourism in Hamirpur can add to the variety of tourism in the State if promoted properly. This research paper will explore the tourism attractions of Hamirpur while also highlighting the future prospects of tourism in the District. The study will also focus on the tourism forms possible in Hamirpur.

Keywords: Tourism, Hamirpur and Attractions.

1. Introduction

Tourism in the modern times has become an important economic activity throughout the world. All the countries particularly the developing ones are looking to benefit the most from it as tourism is a simple tool for economic growth. As per Goutam Hazra (2017), India is also updating its tourism infrastructure to attract both the international and domestic tourists. Growth in tourism can provide employment, enhance foreign exchange earnings and can also uplift the economy of India. The State of Himachal Pradesh often called as ‘Devbhumi’ is one of the few states of the country that has immense tourism potential. The State is already very famous among tourists as it has several famous hill stations. However, with the tourism potential in the State, it needs to be among the top States of India in terms of the tourism. But Himachal Pradesh surprisingly doesn’t figure among the top tourism states of the Country. The State lacks very much particularly in terms of quality tourism. Hence, there is need in the State to explore and promote its hidden tourism potential and tourism forms to be among the top tourism states in the Country. This research paper will focus on the tourism prospects in Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh. The study will also discuss the future of tourism in Hamirpur.

2. Tourism in Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh is a north Indian state situated in the lap of Himalayas and has some very beautiful and mesmerising landscapes (Jeena Gupta, 2015). The State is a paradise for travellers as it is covered with mighty snow peaks, gushing rivers, glacial lakes, varied biodiversity, waterfalls and hot springs etc. Other than this, the State also has a very unique and varied culture and history. This all adds to the tourism potential of the State. Tourism is one of the main pillars of the Himachal’s economy as it competes with horticulture and hydro-electric projects in the State. Every year the State attracts a lot of international and domestic tourists. However, most of these tourists prefer to visit only four to five destinations like Kullu-Manali, Shimla, Dharamshala and Chamba. This leads to distortion and chaos in tourism of the State. While destinations like Kullu, Shimla, Dharamshala etc. get overcrowded, the other potential destinations doesn’t get the worth of their tourism share. This even leads to the adverse effects on the famous destinations of the State as they face pollution, traffic congestion, resource mismanagement, and waste disposal etc. issues. Hence, there is need to tap and promote the tourism potential of other places in the State like Mandi, Kinnaur, Sirmour, Bilaspur and Hamirpur etc. if the State wants to uplift its tourism sustainability.

3. Research Methodology

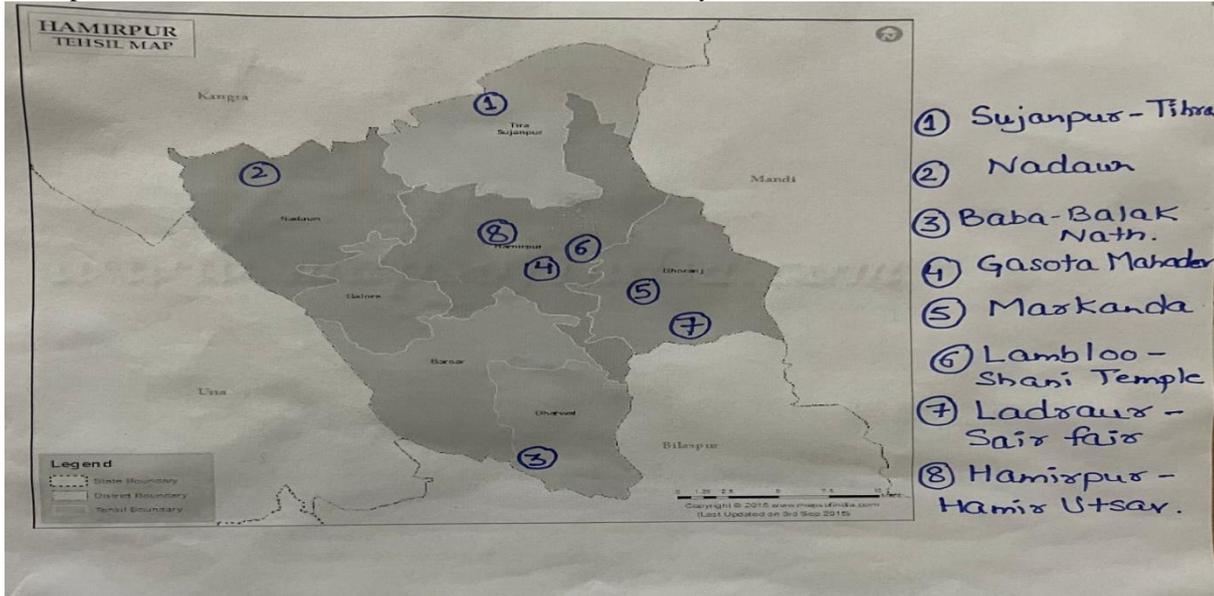
This research followed qualitative methods as it emphasized on collecting data from the already available secondary sources and then analysing it. The secondary data was collected through Books, Tourism and Travel Magazines, Government websites, mass media, journals & e-magazines and reports of tourism organisations etc. Most of the data was collected through government websites and news articles as very little research is done on the study area. The motive of this study is to explore the tourism potential of Hamirpur district and to highlight the possible future of tourism in the District.

4. Hamirpur

It is the smallest district of Himachal Pradesh with an area of 1,118 sq. Km. Altitude of Hamirpur varies from 400m to 1100m in the District and most of the District lies in the Shivalik hills. The district derives its name from Raja Hamir Chand, a Katoch Raja who ruled between 1700 and 1740 A.D. and built the fort at Hamirpur (Official website of Hamirpur District). Earlier Hamirpur was a part of Kangra district and it was in 1972 that Hamirpur became a separate district when it was carved out of Kangra. The district is also known as ‘Veerbhumi’ as a lot of people join the armed forces from the District. Hamirpur is also famous for being the most literate district of Himachal Pradesh. The District also attracts some tourists as it has certain famous tourism attractions.

5. Tourism attractions in Hamirpur

Hamirpur is the smallest district of Himachal Pradesh but it surely has some tourist attractions which are mentioned below



Map: Tourist attractions in Hamirpur

5.1 Sujanpur Tihra:

It is one of the beautiful historical towns of Hamirpur located on the banks of River Beas and was founded in 1748 A.D. by King Abhay Chand of Katoch Dynasty. The town got popular once it was declared the capital of famous Katoch rulers in the early 19th century by Maharaja Sansar Chand. Sujanpur Tihra is famous for palaces/forts and temples. Gauri Shankar temple, Murli Manohar temple and Narbadeshwar temple are the popular temples of Sujanpur Tihra.

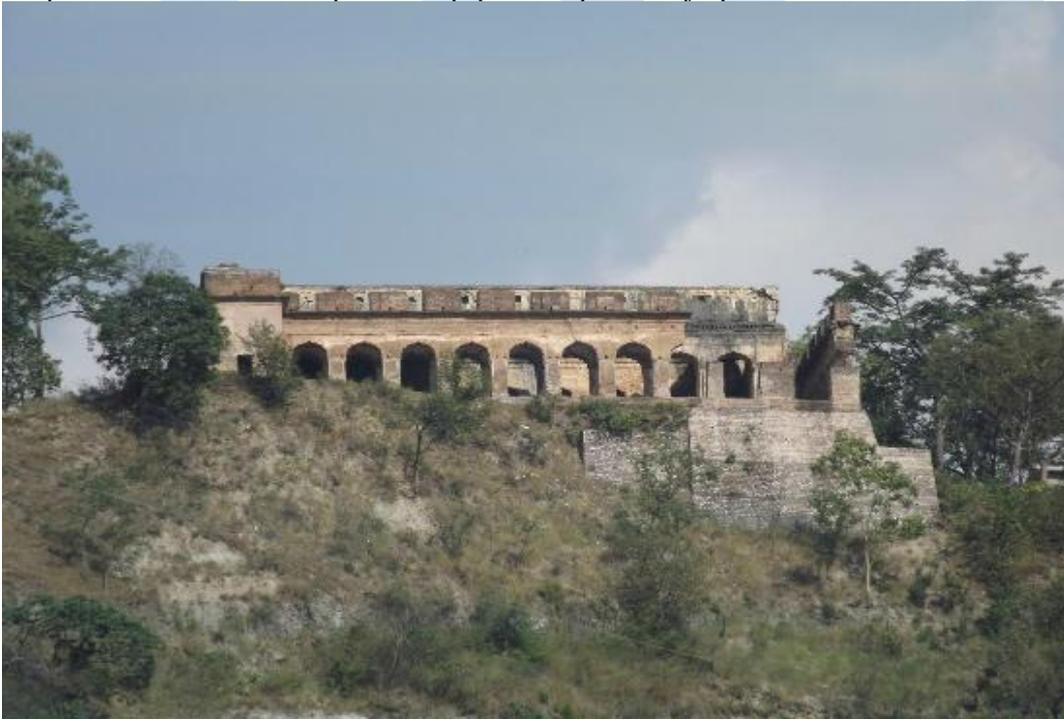


Image 1: View of Sujanpur Fort

- i) **Narbadeshwar Temple:** Surrounded by the Dhauladhar range and Beas River, this is a famous Lord Shiva temple located in the Sujanpur Tihra of Hamirpur district. The interiors of the temple are covered by the murals depicting the legends of Shiva and stories of Ramayana. The temple was built in 1823 by Rani Prasana Devi, one of the wives of Sansar Chand. The temple architecture represents the Rajput Mughal Style.
- ii) **Sujanpur Fort:** It was built in 1758 by Maharaja Abhay Chand. The fort is popular for its Kangra style paintings. In the early 19th century, it was the residence of Maharaja Sansar Chand (the patron of Kangra School of miniature paintings). The other main attraction of the fort is the Gauri-Shankar temple which is present within the premises of the fort.

- iii) **Murli Manohar Temple:** This temple was built in 1785 by Maharaja Sansar Chand in the memory of his mother. The temple has Shikhar style architecture. It is dedicated to Lord Krishna. The walls of the temple have murals of Lord Krishna, Radha and Gopis.

Apart from these, Sujanpur Tihra is also famous for the Chaugan which is the largest ground of Himachal Pradesh. This Chaugan hosts the famous four days national level Holi fair. Tourist activities like paragliding, trekking and angling are also possible in Sujanpur Tihra.

5.2 **Nadaun:** It is another famous town of Hamirpur. Earlier Nadaun was a popular historic town of princely state of Kangra as it was the headquarters of Nadaun Jagir. Maharaja Sansar Chand prominently held his court here in summers for a number of years during his rule. The beauty and peace of Nadaun is also appreciated by a Sufi poet Bulleh Shah (1685-1757 A.D.) who said 'Aye Nadaun, Jaye Kaun' (who comes to Nadaun, doesnot go back). Some of the popular tourist attractions of Nadaun are

- i) **Amtar Palace:** It is situated on the left banks of River Beas and is around 2km from the Nadaun headquarters. It was Raja Sansar Chand who built this palace and the palace was his residence too. The palace also has some Kangra miniature paintings.
- ii) **Amtar Cricket Stadium:** It is also famous as Atal Bihari Vajpayee Cricket Stadium. This stadium is managed by Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association and it often hosts Ranji matches for the State team.



Image 2: Amtar Cricket Ground

- iii) **Bilkleshwar Mahadev Temple:** It is a famous Shiva temple which is believed to be built by Pandavas during ancient times. The temple is very popular and is visited by pilgrims every day.
- iv) **Gurudwara Shri Dasvi Patshahi:** It is another famous pilgrimage centre of Nadaun. Originally built by Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, this Gurudwara is dedicated to 10th Guru of Sikhism Guru Gobind Singh. As per historical records, Guru Gobind Singh with the help of hill kings defeated Mughals led by Alif Khan in the 'Battle of Nadaun' and stayed at this particular place for eight long days once the battle was over.
- v) **Kopra:** Kopra is popular for the Kopra hot water spring which is often visited by a number of people.

Apart from all these, various adventure activities like rafting, angling and fishing are also possible in Nadaun and this already attract a good number of tourists. Rafting is possible in River Beas near Nadaun and it starts from Nadaun to Dehra and can be extended even further then.

5.3 Deotsidh:

Deotsidh is a famous temple dedicated to Baba Balak Nath in Chakmoh area of Hamirpur District. The temple is located on the hilltop where a natural cave is present in the hills. This cave is considered to be the abode of Baba Balak Nath and there is an Idol of deity Baba Balak Nath here in this cave. Baba Balak Nath is a Hindu deity worshiped in Northern India mainly in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana. The shrine is called Deotsidh and is around forty five kilometres from Hamirpur city near Hamirpur - Bilaspur Border. It is also believed that Baba Balak Nath was the re-incarnation of Lord Kartikeya, the elder son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. As per the official government records, Baba Balak Nath is one of the most revenue earning institutions of Himachal Pradesh.



Image 3: Baba Balak Nath Temple

Approximately 45 lakhs of devotees from around the country visit this temple every year. Sunday is the most auspicious day for visiting this temple and the day attracts number of visitors every week. Temple is accessible throughout the year but most of the devotees visit it during 'Navrataras' and particularly during festival of Chaitra Mela Shri Baba Balak Nath Ji which is celebrated every year from 14th of March to 13th April.

5.4 Gasota Mahadev:

It is another famous temple dedicated to Lord Shiva which is around nine kilometres from Hamirpur city. This temple is believed to be more than 400 years old. As per a legend, a farmer was ploughing his field in Gasota and suddenly his plough collided with a large stone which was later found to be a Shiva lingam. Then as the Lingam was very huge to be moved to another place, Shiva temple was constructed in the very place itself which is now known as Gasota Mahadev temple. A lot of devotees visit the temple throughout the year particularly during Shivaratri. The temple has a very pleasing location as it is stands between two rivulets which further enhance the overall beauty of the temple.



Image 4: Shiva Linga inside the Gasota Mahadev Temple

Gasota Mahadev temple is also very popular for a week long 'Cattle fair' that is organised every year on the first Monday of Jayeshtha Mahina (Month) which usually comes on mid of May. This fair has both religious and commercial significance as a lot

of people from Himachal Pradesh and nearby states come here during this fair to take blessings from Lord Shiva and for cattle trading.

5.5 Markanda:

Another important religious site of Hamirpur is Markanda which is believed to be the place of Markandya Rishi (As per official site of H.P. Government). This shrine has an idol installed of Markandya Rishi and is located on the banks of Kunah Khad around six kilometres from Dera Parol. A natural water spring is also located here. The shrine is also very popular for Markanda fair which is held every year on Baisakhi. Other than the above mentioned attractions, Hamirpur district also has various other tourist attractions like Shanni Dev Temple in Lambloo, one of the largest charitable hospital constructed by Radha Swami Satsang Vyas in Bhota, Channari Devi, Awah Devi, Tauni Devi etc.

6. Famous fairs of Hamirpur: There are a lot of popular fairs and festivals celebrated in Hamirpur District. Two of the most famous of them are

6.1 Holi fair in Sujanpur: Festival of colours is celebrated with a lot of passion in Sujanpur Tihra town of Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh which is popular for weeklong annual fair during the Holi festival. It is a national level fair which is organised every year in the Chougan at Sujanpur – Tihra. People from all over the Himachal and even from various parts of the country come to participate or witness it (Balokhra, 2017).



Image 5: Holi fair in Sujanpur

This weeklong fair ensures a lot of entertainment through a number of games, folk drama, dance and song performances and skits by renowned local and national artists. Full swing of business activities can also be observed throughout the fair.

6.2 Hamir Utsav:

The state level two day Hamir Utsav is another very popular fair of the District. This is a cultural fair that starts with the Shobha Yatra from DC office to Shiva temple where puja is offered (Amarujala, 2019). This event showcases a lot of cultural performances in the form of dance and music of Himachal Pradesh and other states. The motive of celebrating this event is to remember and admire the existence of Hamirpur District. Hamir Utsav also displays exhibitions put up by different Departments, Boards and Corporations. This festival is very famous among locals of Hamirpur and is also attended by visitors from all over the State.



Image 6: Artist performing in Hamir Utsav

Other than the above mentioned fairs, several other fairs like Sair fair of Ladrour, Jhaniari fair, Awah Devi fair, Tauni Devi fair, Cattle fair of Jahu, Baggi Mela and Ghasian fair are also very popular as they are of both religious and commercial importance to the locals.

7. Famous events organised in Hamirpur:

Organising events is also seen as an important marketing tool in tourism these days. Hamirpur District also has hosted some sporting events which are

7.1 Rafting Marathon:

In October 2021, a four day All India National Rafting Series was organised jointly by Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC), Indian Rafting Foundation and District Administration in Nadaun. A total of forty three teams (10 women, 16 mixed and 17 men teams) from throughout the country participated in this event. As per The Tribune (2021), the event attracted a lot of tourists which include both active participants (players competing) and passive participants (spectators).



Image 7: Participants performing in Nadaun Rafting Marathon

This Rafting Marathon held in Nadaun exposed the water sports and specifically the rafting potential of the area which can be further developed and promoted for attracting tourists in future.

7.2 State Olympics – Himachal Pradesh:

The State Olympics were held in Hamirpur in 2017. It was a 4 day event in which state level competitions for 11 different sports were held. As per The Indian Express (2017), a total of 1100 athletes from Himachal participated in it whereas it attracted about 50,000 students throughout 4 days. The event was a very good step towards providing exposure to the young sportspersons of the State as it was an opportunity for all the athletes to get ready for the elite competitions.



Image 8: Inaugural Session of Himachal Olympics

Apart from this, the event also was an attraction and it was directly or indirectly witnessed by more than fifty thousand people.

8. Future of Tourism in Hamirpur

Hamirpur has a lot of tourist attractions. However, due to lack of proper infrastructure, policies and tourism promotion the District is not attracting enough tourists. Hence if tourism is given due consideration, Hamirpur can have a good future in terms of tourism development. The District has a lot of potential in terms of cultural and historical tourism. Apart from this, there are a lot of tourism activities possible like paragliding, trekking, rafting and angling/fishing etc in Hamirpur. The tourism policy makers need to properly identify all the tourist attractions and activities, and then market the complete product accordingly for the efficient development of tourism in the District. The infrastructure and the facilities for tourism in the host District must also be uplifted if more tourists are to be brought to Hamirpur. The development of tourism in Hamirpur in future can also add to the variety of tourism in the State of Himachal Pradesh.

Conclusion

- ❖ Himachal Pradesh attracts a lot of international and domestic tourists. While destinations like Kullu, Shimla, Dharamshala etc. get overcrowded with tourists, the other potential destinations doesn't get the worth of their tourism share. Hence, there is need to tap and promote the tourism potential of other places in the State like Mandi, Kinnaur, Sirmour, Bilaspur and Hamirpur etc. if the State wants to uplift its tourism sustainability.
- ❖ Hamirpur, the smallest district area wise do have tourism potential. Some of the popular tourist destinations of the District are Sujampur – Tihra, Nadaun, Gasota Mahadev, famous Baba Balak Nath temple and Markanda etc. Most of these destinations offer either historical or cultural tourism.
- ❖ The District also have potential for activity based tourism as a lot of activities like rafting, trekking, hiking, fishing, angling and paragliding etc. are possible here. Apart from this, Hamirpur also have a quality cricket ground Amtar Cricket Ground that hosts Ranji matches.
- ❖ District also hosts some famous annual fairs like national level Holi fair of Sujampur Tihra, State level Hamir Utsav, Sair fair of Ladraur, Chaitra Mela of Deodsidh, Cattle fair of Gasota and Markanda fair. All these attract a lot of tourists from around the country.
- ❖ Apart from annual fairs, Hamirpur also has hosted certain sports events which have exposed the sports tourism potential of the District. Most popular of these are four day rafting Marathon Series held in River Beas near Nadaun and Himachal state Olympics organised in Hamirpur.
- ❖ The future of tourism in Hamirpur is bright provided the District uplifts its tourism infrastructure, provides proper tourist facilities and markets its tourism product efficiently.

Suggestions

- ❖ Hamirpur can develop sporting infrastructure to promote sports tourism in the District and in Himachal Pradesh. Sports like Cricket, Polo and Hockey can be promoted in the District.
- ❖ The District can also include developing and promoting MICE tourism in its tourism policies.

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