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Decentralised Tourism Diversification and Climate Resilience

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

Tourism in Himachal Pradesh is a major contributor to employment, regional income, cultural exchanges and infrastructure development. At the same time, the sector is increasingly exposed to climate-sensitive risks, including unreliable snowfall, extreme rainfall, landslides, water stress and seasonality in livelihoods. This study examines how decentralised tourism diversification can support climate resilience and inclusive regional development in Himachal Pradesh. The study analyses the district-wise potential of eco-tourism, agro/organic tourism, snow tourism, lake tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage, cultural and heritage tourism, health and wellness tourism, film tourism and MICE tourism. The analysis shows that Himachal Pradesh already has an uneven but wide tourism base: Kullu, Shimla, Kangra, Chamba, Lahaul-Spiti and Solan perform strongly in selected tourism themes, while districts such as Mandi, Sirmour, Bilaspur, Una, Kinnaur and Hamirpur offer scope for planned expansion. However, diversification cannot be treated merely as market expansion. It must be linked with community participation, homestay development, environmental safeguards, climate-resilient infrastructure, worker protection and better interdepartmental coordination. The study argues that a decentralised and climate-sensitive tourism model can reduce pressure on overburdened destinations such as Shimla and Manali, create livelihood opportunities in less-visited regions, strengthen women's and tribal participation and reduce dependence on climate-sensitive winter tourism. The study concludes that tourism diversification in Himachal Pradesh must be framed as a resilience strategy rather than only an economic development strategy.

Keywords: Himachal Pradesh; tourism diversification; climate resilience; community-based tourism; eco-tourism; mountain tourism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the most important development sectors in Himachal Pradesh because it links employment, infrastructure, culture, local enterprise, transport, hospitality and regional economic growth. The state's mountain landscapes, pilgrimage centres, cultural traditions, adventure resources, snow destinations and emerging rural tourism circuits make tourism central to both livelihood creation and territorial planning. Tourism also produces wider multiplier effects through backward and forward linkages with agriculture, horticulture, handicrafts, transportation, accommodation, local food systems and construction activities (Thakur, 2023; Singh *et al.,* 2023). In this sense, tourism is not an isolated service activity but a regional development system that connects natural assets, built infrastructure, labour markets and community economies.

Himachal Pradesh's tourism economy has expanded around well-known destinations such as Shimla, Kullu-Manali, Kangra, Dharamshala, Dalhousie, Kasauli, Lahaul-Spiti and other hill destinations. The state attracts tourists through trekking, paragliding, skiing, river rafting, pilgrimage, cultural festivals, biodiversity, heritage landscapes and mountain scenery (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, n.d.; Kumar, 2024). However, this growth is spatially uneven. Some destinations face high tourist concentration, infrastructure pressure, water stress, pollution and waste-management challenges, while other districts have untapped potential in eco-tourism, agro-tourism, lake tourism, cultural tourism, wellness tourism and rural tourism. The challenge, therefore, is not only to increase tourism numbers but to reorganise tourism growth so that it becomes more balanced, resilient, inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

The need for such reorganisation has become more urgent because tourism in mountain regions is increasingly affected by climate change. Extreme rainfall, flash floods, landslides, heatwaves, reduced

snow reliability and shifting seasons disrupt tourist flows, damage infrastructure and create uncertainty for workers and local businesses (Gössling & Scott, 2024). In Himachal Pradesh, climate variability affects winter tourism, road connectivity, water availability, tourist safety and the stability of seasonal employment. The state has responded through sustainable tourism policies, ecotourism promotion, resilient infrastructure measures, climate action planning and attempts to diversify tourism beyond snow-dependent destinations (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019; Department of Environment, Science & Technology, Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2012).

This study focuses on decentralised tourism diversification as a strategy for climate resilience and inclusive development in Himachal Pradesh. It examines how district-wise tourism potential, community-based tourism, homestays, eco-tourism, women's participation, tribal livelihoods and climate adaptation can be brought together into a coherent tourism development approach. The central argument is that Himachal Pradesh's tourism future depends not simply on attracting more visitors, but on distributing tourism opportunities across regions, reducing ecological pressure on overused hubs, strengthening local ownership and aligning tourism infrastructure with climate risk.

2. Research Problem and Objectives

The central research problem addressed in this study is that Himachal Pradesh's tourism sector is economically important but ecologically and socially vulnerable. Tourism contributes to employment, income generations and local enterprise, but it is also marked by seasonality, uneven district performance, informal work and dependence on climate-sensitive attractions. Popular destinations such as Shimla, Kullu-Manali and Kangra have strong tourism infrastructure, while several other districts retain underdeveloped thematic potential. This uneven geography can intensify pressure on already crowded destinations and limit the livelihood gains available to peripheral districts.

The study has four objectives. First, it identifies the district-wise tourism themes and potential areas for tourism development in Himachal Pradesh. Second, it examines how tourism diversification can reduce dependence on climate-sensitive winter tourism and overburdened destinations. Third, it analyses the livelihood dimension of tourism diversification, with particular attention to women, migrant workers, tribal communities, homestays and informal employment. Fourth, it discusses how existing policy directions, including sustainable tourism, ecotourism, community-based tourism and resilient infrastructure, can support a decentralised tourism model.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, secondary-source-based methodology including government reports, policy documents, statistical material and research studies published by Government of Himachal Pradesh, non-governmental institutions, research organisations and international development agencies It involves district-wise thematic mapping of tourism types (eco-tourism, agro/organic tourism, snow tourism, lake tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage, cultural and heritage tourism, health and wellness tourism, film tourism and MICE tourism) against climate-sensitive risks (unreliable snowfall, extreme rainfall, landslides, water stress and seasonality in livelihoods). The analysis examines livelihood dimensions (women, migrants, tribal communities, homestays) and reviews existing policy directions (sustainable tourism, ecotourism, community-based tourism, resilient infrastructure) to assess support for a decentralised, climate-resilient tourism model.

4. Tourism Diversification Potential in Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh has a broad tourism base that extends beyond conventional hill-station tourism. The state's tourism potential includes eco-tourism, agro/organic tourism, snow tourism, lake tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage, cultural and heritage tourism, health and wellness tourism, film tourism and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism. The district-wise profile indicates that tourism diversification is already embedded in the state's policy imagination, but its implementation requires stronger regional planning, infrastructure support and environmental safeguards (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019).

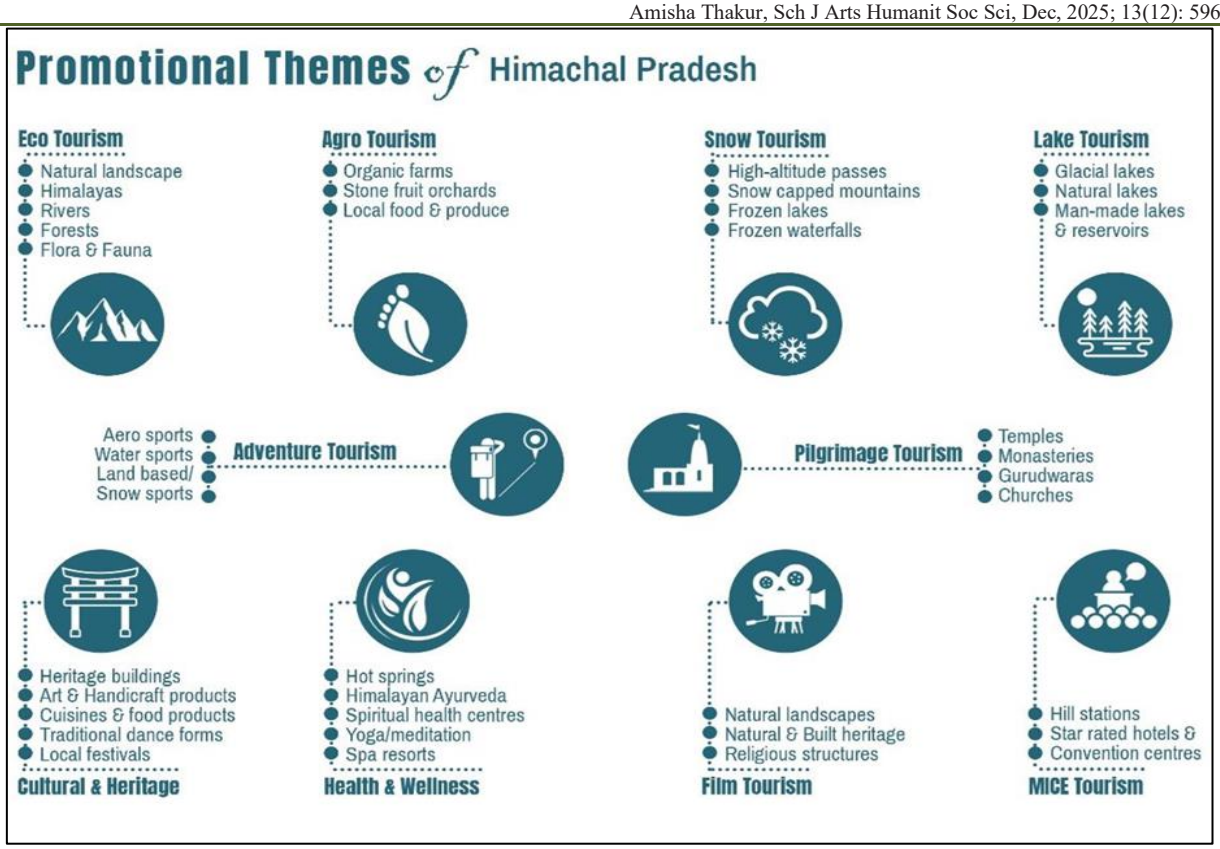

Figure 1: Promotional Themes of Himachal Pradesh Tourism (2019)
Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019

Table 1: Theme-wise Performance of Districts and Potential Areas for Tourism Development in Himachal Pradesh

S. No.	Theme	Existing Well Performing Districts	Potential Districts
1	Eco Tourism	Lahaul-Spiti	Kinnaur, Kangra, Chamba, Mandi (Janjehli, Barot Valley), Kullu, Shimla (Chansal)
2	Agro/Organic Tourism	Chamba, Shimla, Kinnaur	Sirmour (Rajgarh), Mandi (Karsog Valley), Bilaspur (Ghumarwin), Lahaul-Spiti (Spiti), Chamba, Kullu
3	Snow Tourism	Kullu	Shimla (Narkanda and Chanshal), Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti, Chamba
4	Lake Tourism	Lahaul-Spiti, Kangra	Chamba, Mandi, Bilaspur, Una
5	Adventure	Kullu, Chamba, Lahaul-Spiti	Kinnaur, Mandi, Sirmour, Kangra, Shimla
6	Pilgrimage	Promotion and Marketing through Religious Circuits in all districts of HP	
7	Cultural & Heritage	Kullu, Shimla, Kangra, Lahaul-Spiti	Chamba, Sirmour (Nahan), Kinnaur, Mandi, Hamirpur
8	Health & Wellness	Kangra	Solan (Chail), Kullu, Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti, Mandi
9	Film Tourism	Shimla, Kullu	Lahaul-Spiti, Kangra (Palampur), Kullu (Manali), Chamba (Priungal), Shimla (Fagu)
10	MICE Tourism	Shimla, Solan, Kangra	Solan, Kangra, Kullu, Sirmour

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019

Table 1 shows that tourism development in Himachal Pradesh cannot be reduced to one or two dominant destinations. Lahaul-Spiti is already positioned strongly in eco-tourism, lake tourism, adventure tourism and cultural tourism; Kullu performs strongly in snow, adventure, cultural and film tourism; Kangra has a significant position in pilgrimage, cultural, lake, wellness and MICE tourism; and Shimla remains

important for cultural, wellness, film and MICE tourism. At the same time, districts such as Sirmour, Mandi, Bilaspur, Una, Kinnaur, Hamirpur and Chamba have significant potential in underdeveloped tourism niches.

This spatial distribution matters because decentralisation can reduce the pressure on overvisited destinations while opening livelihood opportunities in less-visited regions. For example, eco-tourism in Kinnaur, Kangra, Chamba, Mandi, Kullu and Shimla can align tourism with conservation if it is supported by carrying-capacity limits, waste management and community participation. Agro/organic tourism in Sirmour, Mandi, Bilaspur, Lahaul-Spiti, Chamba and Kullu can connect tourism with agriculture, local food and rural livelihoods. Lake tourism in Chamba, Mandi, Bilaspur and Una can diversify visitor flows beyond mountain towns. Cultural and heritage tourism in Chamba, Sirmour, Kinnaur, Mandi and Hamirpur can strengthen local identity while distributing tourist benefits more widely (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019).

The diversification framework also has a climate-resilience function. Climate-sensitive tourism models, especially snow tourism, are vulnerable to unreliable snowfall and shifting winter seasons. By promoting year-round and less climate-dependent tourism activities such as cultural tourism, wellness tourism, agro-tourism, pilgrimage, film tourism and community-based tourism, Himachal Pradesh can reduce the livelihood risks associated with seasonal disruptions. Diversification therefore should not be viewed only as a product-development strategy; it is also a risk-reduction strategy.

A district-sensitive reading of Table 1 suggests that tourism diversification should proceed through different pathways rather than through one uniform model. In Kullu and Lahaul-Spiti, where adventure, snow, nature and cultural tourism are already strong, the priority should be to reduce ecological stress, improve safety standards and strengthen low-impact visitor management. In Kangra, the combination of pilgrimage, lake, wellness, cultural and MICE tourism creates scope for a more diversified and less season-bound tourism economy. In Chamba, tourism can be organised around cultural heritage, agro-tourism, lake tourism and eco-tourism, with stronger support for local communities and craft-based livelihoods. In Mandi and Sirmour, the identified potential for agro/organic, adventure, wellness, cultural and MICE tourism indicates a need to link tourism with rural enterprise, local food systems and improved connectivity. Bilaspur and Una, which appear in the lake-tourism category, can benefit from carefully planned water-based tourism if ecological safeguards are built into destination planning (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019).

This district-wise interpretation is important because mountain tourism often becomes concentrated around established destinations due to easier visibility, road access, hotel supply and marketing. Such concentration can generate short-term revenue but also produces uneven development. The districts that already possess recognised tourism brands continue to attract investment, while areas with emerging or potential tourism resources remain underdeveloped. A decentralised strategy would therefore require public support in destination branding, digital promotion, homestay training, safety infrastructure, local guide certification and small-enterprise finance. The aim should not be to replicate Shimla or Manali in every district, but to develop distinctive tourism identities based on local ecology, culture, agriculture and community capacity.

Eco-tourism is one of the most important components of this diversification model because it can connect conservation with livelihoods. Lahaul-Spiti as an existing well-performing eco-tourism district and lists Kinnaur, Kangra, Chamba, Mandi, Kullu and Shimla as potential eco-tourism districts (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019). However, eco-tourism must be treated as a regulated and community-oriented practice. If it becomes only a marketing label for increased visitor flow, it can intensify waste, water stress, trail degradation and pressure on fragile landscapes. A more responsible model would involve community-managed nature trails, local interpretation centres, limits on visitor numbers in sensitive zones, waste-return rules, trained local guides and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms. In this form, eco-tourism can support both conservation and income generation.

Agro/organic tourism is equally significant because it can reduce tourism's dependence on conventional hotel-based development. The districts identified for agro/organic tourism, including Chamba, Shimla, Kinnaur, Sirmour, Mandi, Bilaspur, Lahaul-Spiti and Kullu, are not merely tourist spaces; they are also agrarian and cultural landscapes. Agro-tourism can bring visitors into contact with orchards, local food, traditional farming practices, village stays and seasonal agricultural activities. This model can provide supplementary income to rural households while preserving local practices. It is also more compatible with smaller-scale infrastructure than mass tourism, provided that waste management, water use and local participation are built into planning from the start.

Cultural, heritage, pilgrimage, wellness and film tourism further broaden the state's tourism base. These forms of tourism are useful because they are not entirely dependent on snow conditions. Cultural and heritage tourism can strengthen local identity in districts such as Chamba, Sirmour, Kinnaur, Mandi and Hamirpur. Pilgrimage circuits can distribute visitors

across districts if they are supported by basic amenities, safe roads, sanitation and crowd management. Wellness tourism can be linked with landscape, climate, local food, traditional practices and quieter destinations. Film tourism can create visibility for less-visited areas, but it must be managed to avoid sudden environmental pressure. Together, these thematic pathways show that decentralised tourism is not only about new destinations; it is about matching each district's ecological and cultural profile with appropriate forms of visitor engagement.

5. Tourism, Employment and Inclusive Livelihoods

Tourism in Himachal Pradesh has generated employment through hospitality, transport, local craft, guiding, restaurants, travel agencies, homestays and other service activities. District-level evidence shows that tourism-related employment is shaped by both the concentration of infrastructure and the emergence of local enterprises. Kullu and Kangra, for example, have benefited from tourism-driven local economic activity, while Shimla has recorded strong employment growth because of its infrastructure and established position as a major tourist destination (Gardner *et al.,* 2002; Parmar, 2012; Singh & Nitu, 2014).

The Tourism Satellite Account for 2018–19 showed tourism's direct contribution to Himachal Pradesh's Gross State Domestic Product at 3.46%, rising to 7.53% when indirect effects are included. Direct employment in tourism-related industries accounted for 3.89% of total jobs, while indirect employment effects expanded tourism's employment support to approximately 14.42% of all jobs. In 2018, tourist arrivals reached 164.5 lakh, including 160.9 lakh domestic tourists and 3.5 lakh international visitors (National Council of Applied Economic Research, 2021). These figures demonstrate that tourism is not marginal to Himachal Pradesh's economy; it is one of the central livelihood systems through which district economies are connected to state development.

Table 2: Tourism Infrastructure and Employment in Himachal Pradesh

Sl. No.	District	Hotels/ Guest Houses	Home Stays	No. of Restaurants	Travel Agencies	Photographers	Tourist Guides	Employment
1	Bilaspur	105	54	13	68	1	34	626
2	Chamba	326	360	47	70	138	206	4471
3	Hamirpur	76	20	40	18	0	2	929
4	Kangra	939	460	193	787	3	301	8359
5	Kinnaur	160	189	9	32	0	19	626
6	Kullu	1553	1244	97	1736	835	532	17710
7	Lahaul & Spiti	136	960	0	45	0	26	1061
8	Mandi	297	313	47	253	3	82	1817
9	Shimla	623	809	171	1830	128	409	10100
10	Sirmaur	149	141	102	23	0	56	1537
11	Solan	438	379	276	205	0	72	4995
12	Una	141	19	28	14	0	0	1202
Total		**4943**	**4948**	**1023**	**5081**	**1108**	**1739**	**53433**

Source: Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2025

The employment data in Table 2 reveal a highly uneven tourism geography. Kullu has the highest employment figure at 17,710, followed by Shimla with 10,100 and Kangra with 8,359. Solan and Chamba also show significant employment, whereas Bilaspur, Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti, Hamirpur and Una have smaller employment bases despite important thematic potential. This pattern suggests two simultaneous realities: first, tourism already supports a substantial workforce in leading districts; second, several potential districts require strategic investment, skill development, destination planning and market access to convert tourism potential into sustained livelihoods.

The inclusive dimension of tourism is especially important. Women participate in the tourism sector through homestays, restaurants, small shops, handicrafts, handlooms and other local enterprises. Their participation has contributed to economic empowerment, greater visibility and improved social status in local communities (Rewal Chugh, 2012). Tribal communities and marginalised groups in Kinnaur, Lahaul, Spiti and Chamba are involved in eco-tourism, adventure tourism, trekking, mountaineering and cultural tourism, which creates opportunities to preserve and showcase cultural heritage while generating income (Singh & Singh, 2019). Migrant workers also form an important part of the tourism economy, especially during peak seasons, working in hospitality, food services, guiding, driving and infrastructure-related activities (Thakur, 2017).

However, the livelihood benefits of tourism are weakened by informality and seasonality. A large proportion of tourism jobs in hotels, restaurants, travel

agencies, transport services and local craft remain informal, often lacking written contracts, social protection, job security and stable income. Women are overrepresented in informal tourism work, particularly in housekeeping, catering and handicraft production. Estimates indicate that approximately 70–80% of Himachal Pradesh's tourism workforce is informal, women constitute about 40–50% of this informal workforce and migrant workers represent around 30–40% (Tiwari & Singh, 2021). Thus, tourism diversification must include labour protection; otherwise, expansion may reproduce insecure work rather than sustainable livelihoods.

Homestays and community-based tourism offer one route to more inclusive development. Homestays have emerged as a source of self-employment in districts such as Kinnaur, where they reduce out-migration by generating income aligned with local cultural practices. Rural tourism can create alternative income in agricultural regions, especially when local communities participate in planning and benefit-sharing (Verma *et al.,* 2023). Homestay tourism in the Indian Himalayan region also supports local traditions while providing economic gains to host communities (Thakur *et al.,* 2023a). For this reason, decentralised tourism should prioritise community-owned and locally managed models rather than only externally driven infrastructure expansion.

The employment structure also indicates that tourism diversification must be linked with skills and dignity of work. A district may attract tourists, but the developmental value of tourism depends on whether local people can participate as owners, guides, hosts, artisans, transport providers, food suppliers, photographers, cultural interpreters and service workers. The infrastructure and employment table shows that Kullu and Shimla have very high numbers of travel agencies, photographers, guides, hotels and homestays, while other districts have fewer tourism-support services. This suggests that less-visited districts require capacity-building before they can benefit from new tourism flows. Training in hospitality, digital booking systems, language skills, disaster response, waste management, local guiding, food safety and enterprise management can help convert tourism potential into actual livelihood opportunities.

Women's participation requires particular attention because tourism can either reproduce gendered informal work or create routes to economic autonomy. The women participate through homestays, restaurants, small shops, handicrafts and handlooms, contributing to household income and social recognition (Rewal Chugh, 2012). Yet women are also concentrated in lower-paid and informal tourism work. A decentralised tourism strategy should therefore include women-led homestay clusters, producer groups, local food enterprises, craft markets, digital marketing support and credit access. If tourism planning recognises women as entrepreneurs rather than only service workers, diversification can become a mechanism of social empowerment.

Tribal communities also require a careful approach. Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti and Chamba possess cultural and ecological assets that can support eco-tourism, adventure tourism and cultural tourism. However, tourism in tribal regions must avoid turning culture into a superficial visitor product. Community consent, cultural protocols, local control over tourism interpretation and safeguards against land pressure are essential. Tourism can support cultural preservation when communities decide how traditions, festivals, architecture, food and landscapes are represented. It can become extractive when external actors control the narrative and capture most of the revenue. Therefore, tribal tourism development must remain community-centred and culturally sensitive (Singh & Singh, 2019).

Migrant workers are another important but often less visible group in tourism. Seasonal demand in hotels, restaurants, driving, construction and support services brings migrant workers into the tourism economy (Thakur, 2017). Because climate shocks can reduce tourist flow and disrupt construction or hospitality activity, migrant workers are exposed to sudden income loss. A resilient tourism model should therefore include worker registration, access to emergency support, occupational safety, temporary housing standards and grievance mechanisms. These measures are not peripheral to tourism development; they are part of making tourism socially sustainable.

6. Climate Change, Seasonality and the Need for Year-Round Tourism

Mountain tourism is deeply climate-sensitive. Snowfall, rainfall, temperature, road stability, water availability and disaster risk all shape tourist decisions and destination viability. Climate change is already altering global tourism geographies through extreme rainfall, flooding, drought, heatwaves, storms, wildfire risks, unreliable snowfall and rising travel costs (Gössling & Scott, 2024). In Himachal Pradesh, such pressures are particularly significant because tourism depends on mountain roads, seasonal attractions, fragile slopes, snow destinations, water systems and natural landscapes.

Himachal Pradesh has adopted strategies to sustain tourism amid climate-related challenges, especially variable snowfall patterns affecting winter tourism. The state has promoted sustainable tourism practices, including ecotourism, eco-friendly accommodation, conservation-oriented activities and community participation. Infrastructure investments have focused on resilient roads, bridges and buildings designed to withstand landslides and heavy snowfall. The state has also sought to diversify its tourism portfolio

by promoting adventure, cultural and wellness tourism, which are less dependent on snow conditions (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019; Mahajan, 2023).

This shift is crucial because overdependence on winter tourism creates vulnerability for both businesses and workers. When snowfall becomes unreliable, tourism flows decline or shift, affecting hotels, guides, transport operators, food services, vendors, artisans and seasonal workers. Local businesses have responded by offering wellness retreats, adventure activities, cultural experiences, off-season packages and eco-friendly tourism products. Workers have also adapted by diversifying their skills and taking up roles in agriculture, construction, hospitality, ecotourism, handicrafts and sustainable practices (Singh & Arun Kumar, 2024). These trends show that livelihood resilience depends on the ability to move from single-season tourism to year-round tourism.

Decentralised tourism diversification directly supports this transition. Eco-tourism, agro/organic tourism, pilgrimage, cultural and heritage tourism, lake tourism, health and wellness tourism, film tourism and MICE tourism are not equally dependent on snowfall. If planned responsibly, they can help flatten seasonal peaks, distribute visitors across districts, reduce income volatility and create a broader employment base. However, such diversification must be environmentally governed. Without carrying-capacity limits, waste management, water regulation and land-use controls, new tourism circuits can reproduce the same ecological pressures already visible in established destinations.

The climate dimension of tourism is not limited to snowfall. Extreme rainfall, landslides, flash floods, water scarcity and energy interruptions affect the everyday functioning of destinations. Road blockages can cancel trips, isolate villages, disrupt supply chains and reduce tourist confidence. Landslides can damage hotels, homestays, trails, parking spaces, bridges and access roads. Water scarcity can create conflict between visitor demand and local household needs. Power interruptions can affect hotels, restaurants, communication networks, heating, cooling and safety systems. For this reason, tourism diversification must be accompanied by destination risk assessment. New circuits should not be promoted without first assessing slope stability, drainage, water availability, emergency access and disaster-response capacity.

The emphasis on resilient infrastructure is therefore central to tourism planning. Roads, bridges, buildings, tourist facilities and public spaces in mountain destinations must be designed with climate risk in mind. Sustainable construction materials, improved drainage, energy-efficient design, renewable energy systems and disaster-preparedness measures can reduce vulnerability while lowering environmental impact (Grafakos *et al.,* 2019; NIDM *et al.,* 2021). This does not mean that tourism development should be construction-led; rather, whatever infrastructure is necessary for tourism must be planned for long-term resilience instead of short-term visitor accommodation.

Year-round tourism also requires year-round public services. A destination cannot become resilient simply by adding new tourism products if waste collection, water supply, health services, transport, communication and emergency systems remain seasonal or underdeveloped. Less-visited districts may attract visitors through eco-tourism or agro-tourism, but without sanitation, waste management, safe roads, basic medical access and digital connectivity, tourism growth can become unsafe and environmentally damaging. Thus, diversification should be tied to basic service strengthening. This is especially important in rural and high-altitude areas where infrastructure gaps are already significant.

The move from seasonal tourism to year-round tourism also changes labour requirements. Businesses that operate through the year require workers with flexible skills. A guide may need to work across trekking, cultural interpretation, local food experiences and eco-tourism. A homestay operator may need training in hospitality, waste segregation, digital booking, emergency response and local storytelling. Artisans and women's groups may require market linkages beyond peak tourist months. Skill development is therefore an adaptation strategy. It allows workers to move across tourism niches as climate conditions and visitor preferences change (Singh & Arun Kumar, 2024).

Finally, climate-sensitive tourism requires better communication with visitors. Tourists need reliable information about weather, road conditions, safety advisories, local rules, waste protocols and responsible behaviour. Digital platforms, local tourism offices, hotel associations, guide networks and transport operators can all contribute to risk communication. If visitors understand ecological limits and safety requirements, destination management becomes easier. If tourism is promoted without such communication, the burden of risk falls on local communities, emergency responders and informal workers.

7. Policy Framework for Decentralised and Sustainable Tourism

Himachal Pradesh already has policy foundations that support sustainable and diversified tourism. The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2019 emphasises eco-tourism, agro/organic tourism, adventure tourism, infrastructure development, environmental conservation, community benefits and inclusive tourism. The State Action Plan on Climate Change identifies sector-specific priorities for mitigation

and adaptation, including energy-efficient buildings and sustainable tourism practices. The Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism Development Project supported by the Asian Development Bank aims to conserve existing tourism sites, develop new facilities, strengthen institutions and implement environmental safeguards (Asian Development Bank, 2024; Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019, 2021).

Ecotourism is particularly important because it links tourism growth with environmental stewardship. According to the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2019, ecotourism involves observing and appreciating natural landscapes and traditional cultures while minimising environmental impacts. In a climate-vulnerable state with glacial regions, biodiversity hotspots, fragile slopes and pressure on water systems, ecotourism can connect visitor experience with conservation, local livelihoods and low-impact infrastructure (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019). Yet ecotourism must not become only a label. It requires carrying-capacity assessments, waste systems, local ownership, benefit-sharing, ecological monitoring and accountability.

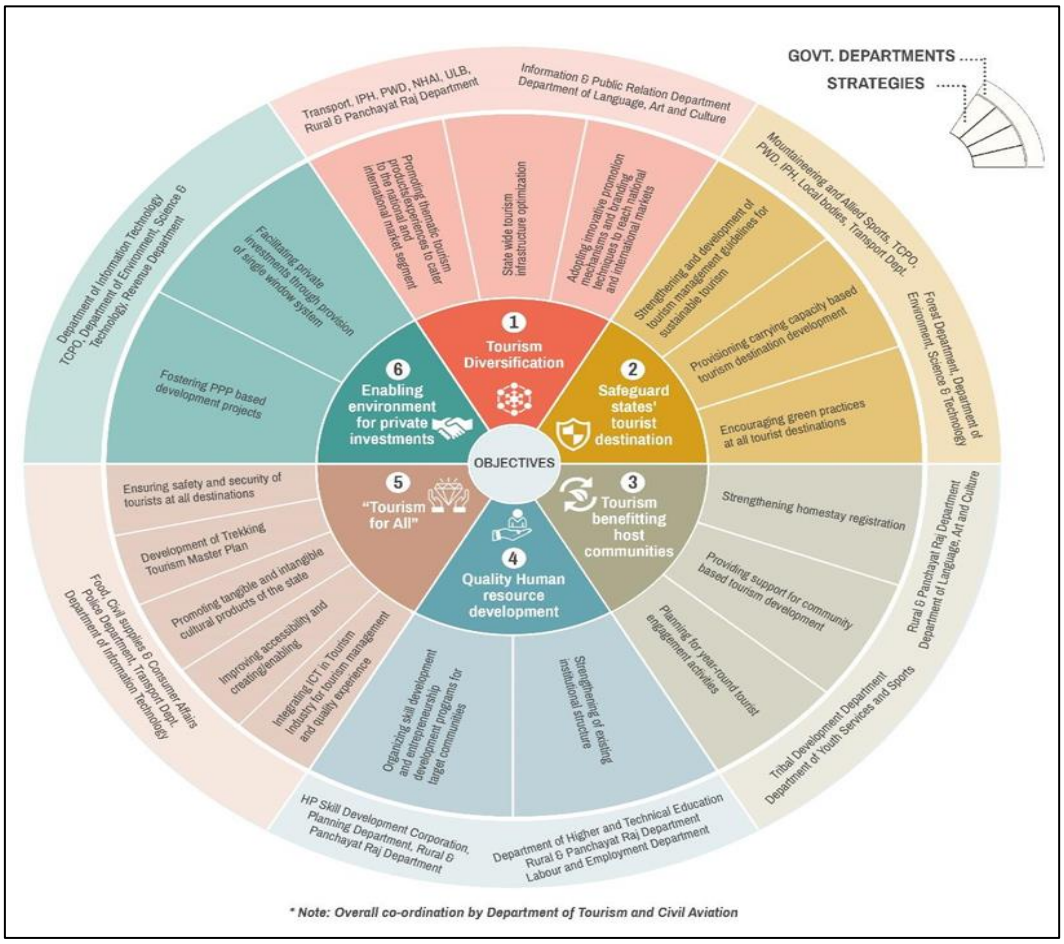

Figure 2: Strategic Framework for Sustainable Tourism Development
Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019

The strategic framework for sustainable tourism development centres on diversification, safeguarding destinations, benefits to host communities, quality human-resource development, "Tourism for All," and enabling private investments. Its focus areas include optimising tourism infrastructure, promoting sustainable practices, strengthening homestay registration, supporting community-based tourism, enhancing safety standards and fostering skill development. It also recognises the need for coordination among departments such as Transport, Environment, Language, Art and Culture, Rural Development and Skill Development, with the Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation playing a coordinating role (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2019).

Despite these policy directions, implementation gaps remain. There is inadequate climate-impact data, weak monitoring and evaluation capacity, financial constraints, limited cross-sectoral coordination and insufficient integration of climate adaptation into urban planning as major challenges (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2021). These gaps affect tourism planning because climate resilience depends on data about weather, disasters, visitor flows, water resources, land use, infrastructure condition, energy consumption and

social vulnerability. Better data systems, remote sensing, GIS, IoT-enabled monitoring and interdepartmental coordination can improve decision-making and help prioritise interventions in vulnerable destinations.

A decentralised tourism policy also needs a clearer institutional architecture. Tourism development in Himachal Pradesh involves multiple departments: tourism, transport, environment, rural development, skill development, language and culture, forest, public works, disaster management, urban local bodies and panchayats. If these agencies work separately, tourism diversification can become fragmented. For example, the tourism department may promote a destination, but roads may remain unsafe, waste services may be inadequate, forest permissions may be unclear, local communities may not be trained and disaster-response systems may not be prepared. Coordination is therefore not an administrative detail; it is the condition for sustainable tourism.

The strategic framework in Figure 2 is useful because it already recognises the need for interdepartmental coordination. However, implementation should move from general coordination to destination-level convergence. Each destination cluster can have a management plan that identifies the tourism theme, ecological sensitivity, infrastructure needs, community institutions, safety protocols, skill requirements, financing sources and monitoring indicators. This would allow the state to avoid isolated projects and instead build integrated tourism regions.

Financing is another crucial issue. Sustainable tourism infrastructure, homestay upgrading, waste systems, renewable energy, local training, interpretation centres and digital platforms require investment. There are financial constraints and competing economic priorities restrict climate action (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2021). Public-private partnerships may help, but they must be designed carefully so that private investment does not override ecological safeguards or community benefits. Small grants, subsidised credit, green incentives, women's enterprise support and community-managed funds may be more appropriate for rural and eco-tourism destinations than large capital-intensive projects.

Monitoring and evaluation should also be strengthened. Tourism success should not be measured only through visitor numbers. A resilience-based tourism model should track local employment, women's participation, informal-worker protection, homestay income, waste generation, water use, visitor satisfaction, disaster incidents, trail conditions, biodiversity pressure and community feedback. Such indicators would help determine whether diversification is actually producing sustainable development or merely shifting pressure from one destination to another.

8. Tourism Diversification as a Resilience Strategy

The analysis suggests that tourism diversification in Himachal Pradesh should be reframed as a resilience strategy. Conventionally, diversification may be understood as expanding products and markets to attract more tourists. In a climate-vulnerable mountain state, however, diversification has a deeper role. It reduces dependence on climate-sensitive attractions, spreads tourist pressure across regions, creates multiple livelihood channels and gives communities more adaptive options when seasonal flows are disrupted.

A decentralised model can address three major vulnerabilities. The first is spatial concentration. When tourism is concentrated in a few destinations, environmental pressure, traffic congestion, waste generation, water stress and infrastructure overload intensify. Developing less-visited districts through eco-tourism, agro-tourism, lake tourism, cultural circuits, wellness tourism and community-based tourism can distribute pressure more evenly. This does not mean uncontrolled expansion into fragile areas; it means planned, low-impact tourism development guided by local carrying capacity.

The second vulnerability is livelihood seasonality. Many workers depend on summer and winter tourist peaks and climate disruptions can quickly reduce income. Tourism models that operate across seasons includes wellness retreats, cultural tourism, pilgrimage, agro-tourism, local food experiences, handicraft markets, film tourism and nature trails, which can support more stable employment. Skill development can help workers move across tourism services and related sectors during off-peak periods (Singh & Arun Kumar, 2024).

The third vulnerability is social exclusion. Women, tribal communities, migrant workers and informal workers are central to the tourism economy but often receive limited protection and unequal benefits. A resilience-oriented tourism model must therefore include social protection, formalisation pathways, women-led enterprise support, tribal cultural tourism safeguards, access to credit, local cooperatives and community participation. Without these measures, tourism growth may increase employment numbers without improving job quality.

The policy implication is that Himachal Pradesh should not pursue tourism growth through infrastructure expansion alone. Infrastructure is necessary, but it must be climate-resilient, locally appropriate and ecologically regulated. Eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient designs, renewable energy systems, improved drainage, flood-resistant infrastructure, early warning systems and smart water and waste management are necessary to support tourism in fragile mountain environments (Grafakos *et al.,* 2019; NIDM *et al.,* 2021). At the same

time, community-based tourism and homestays should be strengthened so that local residents are not merely service providers but active decision-makers and beneficiaries.

A practical implementation framework can be organised around four linked dimensions: destination diversification, livelihood inclusion, ecological safeguards and institutional coordination. These dimensions are mutually dependent. Destination diversification without livelihood inclusion may benefit external investors more than local communities. Livelihood inclusion without ecological safeguards may increase income in the short term but damage the resource base on which tourism depends. Ecological safeguards without institutional coordination may remain only policy statements. Institutional coordination without community participation may produce top-down plans that lack legitimacy. The strength of a decentralised tourism model lies in bringing all four dimensions together.

Table 3: Implementation Framework for Decentralised Climate-Resilient Tourism in Himachal Pradesh

Dimension	Core concern	Possible action	Expected resilience outcome
Destination diversification	Overdependence on crowded and climate-sensitive destinations	Promote eco-tourism, agro-tourism, wellness tourism, cultural tourism, lake tourism, pilgrimage and film tourism according to district potential	Wider distribution of tourist flows and reduced pressure on major hubs
Livelihood inclusion	Informality, gender inequality and seasonal income instability	Support homestays, women-led enterprises, tribal tourism groups, guide training, craft markets and worker protection	More stable and locally retained tourism income
Ecological safeguards	Waste, water stress, slope instability and unregulated construction	Use carrying-capacity assessment, waste management, water regulation, resilient infrastructure and low-impact design	Reduced environmental degradation and safer destinations
Institutional coordination	Fragmented planning across departments	Create destination-level convergence among tourism, transport, environment, rural development, disaster management and local bodies	Better implementation, monitoring and crisis response

The framework in Table 3 also clarifies why tourism diversification should not be evaluated only by the number of new destinations promoted. The more important question is whether diversification reduces vulnerability. A new eco-tourism circuit is successful if it protects ecological assets, creates local income, respects cultural practices and prepares for climate hazards. A new homestay cluster is successful if it improves household earnings, empowers women, strengthens local identity and manages water and waste responsibly. A new adventure destination is successful if it creates employment without compromising safety or slope stability. In other words, tourism success must be measured through resilience, equity and ecological sustainability.

The discussion also points to the importance of scale. Some tourism interventions are suitable at the state level, such as policy guidelines, digital platforms, skill standards and marketing. Others must be district-specific, such as theme selection, destination branding, local training, road improvement and enterprise support. Still others must be village- or site-specific, such as carrying capacity, waste rules, trail management, community consent and visitor behaviour protocols. A decentralised tourism model must work across all three scales. If state-level policy is not translated into local practice, it remains abstract. If local initiatives lack state support, they remain under-resourced.

Finally, the relationship between tourism and construction should be managed carefully. Tourism requires roads, accommodation, public facilities and visitor infrastructure, but infrastructure expansion can also increase ecological vulnerability when it ignores slope stability, drainage, water availability and land-use limits. Tourism and construction are interconnected. For the purposes of this study, the key point is that tourism diversification must not trigger unregulated construction in new destinations. Infrastructure should follow ecological assessment and community planning rather than speculative land development. This is especially important in a fragile mountain state where the environmental costs of poorly planned construction can undermine the very landscapes that tourism depends upon.

The wider contribution of this analysis lies in repositioning tourism diversification as a planning framework rather than a promotional slogan. In many mountain destinations, diversification is often understood as adding new attractions, creating new circuits, or increasing visitor arrivals. The Himachal Pradesh case shows that diversification has to perform a

more complex function. It must manage climate uncertainty, regulate ecological pressure, include informal workers, support women and tribal communities and shift benefits beyond established tourist hubs. This means that tourism policy must be evaluated through its capacity to produce adaptive and equitable outcomes, not only through its ability to generate revenue.

There is also a strong need to connect tourism diversification with destination-level evidence. The tables and figures show that Himachal Pradesh possesses district-wise differences in tourism infrastructure, employment and thematic potential. These differences should guide planning decisions. Kullu, Shimla, Kangra and Solan may require stronger congestion management, water regulation and waste governance because they already have larger infrastructure and employment bases. Chamba, Kinnaur, Mandi, Bilaspur, Sirmour, Una, Hamirpur and Lahaul-Spiti may require targeted investment in capacity building, local enterprise, safety infrastructure and destination visibility. Such differentiation prevents one-size-fits-all planning and allows policy to respond to actual regional conditions.

The analysis further suggests that climate-resilient tourism must include both adaptation and mitigation. Adaptation involves preparing destinations, businesses, workers and infrastructure for changing climate conditions, including erratic snowfall, extreme rainfall, landslides, water stress and seasonal uncertainty. Mitigation involves reducing the environmental footprint of tourism through low-carbon mobility, eco-friendly accommodation, renewable energy, waste reduction and responsible visitor behaviour. These two objectives should not be treated separately. A homestay using local materials, solar energy, water conservation and community-based management can contribute to both adaptation and mitigation. Similarly, decentralising tourism away from heavily burdened destinations can reduce localised pressure while creating alternative livelihoods.

At the same time, this study recognises that tourism diversification has limits. Not every potential destination should be rapidly opened to tourism. Some landscapes may be too ecologically sensitive, too water-stressed, too disaster-prone, or too culturally vulnerable for intensive visitor activity. In such areas, the appropriate strategy may be low-volume tourism, conservation-linked tourism, seasonal restrictions, or even non-promotion. Therefore, the purpose of diversification is not to spread mass tourism everywhere; it is to identify appropriate forms and scales of tourism for different ecological and social contexts. This distinction is essential for a mountain state whose long-term tourism economy depends on the protection of natural and cultural resources.

9. Recommendations

First, Himachal Pradesh should prepare district-specific tourism diversification plans based on the thematic potential identified in the tourism policy framework. Each district should be assessed not only for market potential but also for carrying capacity, water availability, disaster risk, waste-management capacity, community readiness and livelihood inclusion.

Second, tourism development should reduce excessive pressure on major destinations such as Shimla, Manali and other high-use tourist hubs. Eco-tourism, agro-tourism, cultural tourism, lake tourism and wellness tourism should be promoted in less-visited areas through planned infrastructure, digital marketing, local entrepreneurship and environmental regulation (HP Forest Department, 2024).

Third, homestays and community-based tourism should be treated as central to inclusive tourism development. Registration systems, training, quality standards, credit support, digital platforms and local tourism cooperatives can help communities capture a larger share of tourism benefits while maintaining cultural and environmental safeguards.

Fourth, tourism worker protection must be built into tourism policy. Since a large share of tourism employment is informal, schemes for social protection, health insurance, skill development, wage security, occupational safety and women's enterprise support are necessary to make tourism livelihoods more resilient (Tiwari & Singh, 2021; Tiwari & Sher Singh, 2020).

Fifth, climate-risk planning should be mainstreamed into all tourism infrastructure projects. Roads, bridges, hotels, homestays, trails, parking areas and visitor facilities should be assessed for landslide, flood, water-stress and energy risks. Early warning systems, disaster response plans and tourist safety protocols should be integrated into destination management.

Sixth, stronger data systems are required. Tourism planning should use climate data, visitor-flow data, land-use data, water-resource data, infrastructure-risk data and socio-economic vulnerability data. Remote sensing, GIS, drones, IoT-enabled sensors and AI-based predictive tools can support monitoring and decision-making in mountain destinations.

Seventh, tourism promotion should be tied to responsible visitor management. Marketing campaigns for new destinations should be accompanied by information on local rules, waste practices, weather risks, cultural sensitivity, transport behaviour and ecological limits. Tourist education is important because unmanaged visitor behaviour can undermine even well-designed policies. Responsible tourism communication

can help protect host communities while improving the quality and safety of the visitor experience.

10. CONCLUSION

Himachal Pradesh's tourism sector stands at a critical point. It is economically valuable, culturally rich and regionally diverse, but it is also exposed to climate risk, seasonality, informality and ecological stress. The study shows that the state has significant district-wise potential across multiple tourism themes, including eco-tourism, agro/organic tourism, snow tourism, lake tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage, cultural and heritage tourism, wellness tourism, film tourism and MICE tourism. This diversity can become the foundation for a more resilient tourism model if it is planned carefully.

The strongest pathway is decentralised tourism diversification supported by climate-sensitive planning and community participation. Such a model can reduce dependence on snow-based and overcrowded destinations, distribute economic benefits across districts, create more stable year-round livelihoods and strengthen the participation of women, tribal communities and local entrepreneurs. However, diversification must not be allowed to become unregulated expansion. It must be accompanied by environmental safeguards, carrying-capacity assessment, waste and water management, climate-resilient infrastructure, worker protection and institutional coordination.

The study concludes that the future of tourism in Himachal Pradesh should be framed around resilience rather than growth alone. Tourism can support sustainable development only when it protects ecological systems, strengthens local livelihoods, reduces vulnerability and distributes benefits more equitably across regions. Decentralised and climate-sensitive tourism diversification offers one of the most practical ways to move toward that future.

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