



# InOver tourism in Nainital and the role of new destination development for sustainable tourism

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## Abstract

Overtourism has emerged as a critical issue in many popular tourist destinations worldwide, and Nainital, a prominent hill station in Uttarakhand, India, is no exception. Known for its scenic beauty, lakes, and pleasant climate, Nainital attracts a large number of tourists annually. However, the rapid and unplanned growth of tourism has led to severe environmental, socio-cultural, and infrastructural challenges. This research paper examines the phenomenon of overtourism in Nainital, its causes, impacts, and the potential role of new destination development in achieving sustainable tourism.

The study is based on secondary data collected from research articles and government reports. It highlights that overtourism in Nainital is driven by factors such as increased accessibility, digital promotion, rising middle-class income, and lack of proper tourism planning. The absence of stakeholder coordination and effective policy implementation further aggravates the situation.

The impacts of overtime are multidimensional. Environmentally, excessive tourist inflow has degradation of natural resources, including Naini Lake. Socially, it has caused congestion, increased cost of living, and disruption of local lifestyles. Economically, excessive tourist inflow has led to pollution, waste generation, water scarcity, and degradation of natural resources, including Naini Lake. Socially, it has caused congestion, increased cost of living, and disruption of local lifestyles. Economically, although tourism generates income and employment, the benefits are unevenly distributed, leading to local dissatisfaction. Infrastructure in Nainital is insufficient to handle peak tourist loads, resulting in traffic congestion and pressure on public services.

The paper emphasises the importance of developing new and alternative tourist destinations as a strategy to reduce pressure on Nainital. Diversifying tourism to nearby areas such as Mukteshwar, Bhimtal, and Almora can help distribute tourist flow more evenly. Additionally, promoting eco-tourism, community-based tourism, and rural tourism can contribute to sustainable development while preserving environmental and cultural integrity.

The study suggests that sustainable tourism in Nainital requires a multi-pronged approach involving carrying capacity assessment, infrastructure development, strict environmental regulations, stakeholder participation, and awareness among tourists. Furthermore, digital tools and policy frameworks should be used to regulate tourist numbers and encourage off-season travel.

**Keywords:** Socio-cultural, Infrastructural challenges, Waste generation, Water scarcity, Degradation of natural resources

## Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries globally and plays a vital role in economic development. In India, hill stations such as Nainital have long been popular tourist destinations due to their natural beauty and climatic advantages. However, the increasing influx of tourists has led to a phenomenon known as overtourism.

Overtourism refers to the excessive number of tourists visiting a destination, leading to negative impacts on the environment, local communities, and visitor experience. Nainital, often referred to as the "Lake District of India," is facing severe challenges due to uncontrolled tourism growth.

The uncontrolled growth of Tourism has not only affected the ecological balance but has also created social and economic challenges for the local population. Overcrowding reduces the quality of life for residents and diminishes the experience for visitors, thereby threatening the long-term sustainability of tourism in the region.

In this, the development of new tourist destinations emerges as an important strategy for promoting sustainable tourism by diversifying and retaining environmental balance and ensure Equitable economic benefits across regions. Therefore, this study focuses on analysing the causes and impact of overtourism in Nainital and explores the role of new destination development in achieving sustainable tourism and long-term regional development.

## Concept of overtourism

Overtourism is a situation where the number of tourists exceeds the carrying capacity of a destination. It leads to environmental degradation, overcrowding, and reduced quality of life for residents.

## In Nainital, overtourism is characterised by:

- **Excessive tourist inflow during peak seasons:** It refers to strategies that limit the number or offer a unique

experience to a select Group, aiming to reduce the negative impact. This approach prioritises quality over quantity, enhancing visitors' experience while preserving the destination. If limited visitors come, then the over-tourism in a particular season will be controlled. Encouraging during the scheduled season with discounts and special offers can be offered during the off-peak season.

- **Traffic congestion and overcrowding:** The major issue of a proper tourist destination during the peak season is traffic congestion. Increased tourist traffic leads to great longer travel time and frustration of local and visitors alike, as overcrowding of tourists strains local infrastructure resources and amenities dimensions the overall experience. The impact of overturning will increase the accidental risk and reduce the quality of life of residents.
- **Pressure on natural and infrastructural resources:** It occurs when the number of tourists exceeds a destination's capacity, training local system. Natural resources are scarce, like water, because the demand for water supply will increase, leading to land erosion and pollution. Overloaded utilities are increasing power and waste management struggles health services, transports, and emergency services, also impacted by overloading tourism.

#### Causes of overtourism in Nainital

- **Increased accessibility-**Improved Road connectivity and proximity to major cities like Delhi have made Nainital easily accessible.
- **Digital promotion and social media-** Online platforms and travel blogs have significantly increased the popularity of Nainital.
- **Economic growth-** Rising disposable income among the middle class has increased domestic tourism.
- **Lack of planning-** Absence of a comprehensive tourism development plan and poor stakeholder coordination are key reasons for overtourism.
- **Seasonal tourism-** Peak seasons witness massive tourist inflow, causing temporary overburdening of resources

#### Review of literature

- **Dr. Daleep Kumar, Dr. Richa Ginwal, Dr. Jitendra K Lohani, Padam S Bisht, Rajnish Pande (2022)** <sup>[5]</sup>: The title of research paper "Tourism and its evaluation: A case study of district Nainital". In this study is an attempt to assess the impact of tourism in district Nainital. Nainital known as the 'Lake city of India' is one the most favoured destinations of tourists. The study was primarily focused on Nainital town and its surrounding tourist area. It was analysed during the study that tourism creates a lot of opportunities for people in these areas and thus prevent migration.

- **Dr. Kalpana Bhakuni (2018)** <sup>[6]</sup>: The title of research paper "Overtourism in Nainital: tourism at Peril". In this research paper researcher can briefly talk about the negative experiences of the both visitors and locals undermine the spirit of tourism that often leads to confits which result into greater complexity. Nainital is a lake town in the Himalayan zone facing the challenges of over tourism. Overtourism may not be the endpoint of tourism growth but it certainly need a diagnostic system that helps in identifying the risk of tourismphobia among the local people and visitors alike.
- **Dr. Farhat Banoo Beg., Dr. Shakeel-ul-Rehman, Dr. Syed Irfan Shafi (2015)** <sup>[7]</sup>: The title of research paper "Sustainable Tourism Development in India with Special Reference to Nainital-Uttarakhand". In this research paper researcher can study on specifically Nainital district. Nainital which occupies a place of pride on the tourist map of India, is a growing centre located on the outer margin of central Himalaya, about 300 km north east of Delhi. Although the town holds great potential for development of various grades of recreation for tourists, there is an intense and unplanned tourist activity going on in its limited space with little touristic infrastructure. However, as Tourism and environment are inextricably linked and interdependent, this rapid growth is not preceded by planning strategies, negative effects are evident. Therefore, there is a great need of judicious land use and planned development that conforms to the laws of nature to ensure a healthy socio- economic growth in tourist areas. This calls for Tourism which is economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment, and the social fabric of the host community.

#### Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the concept and causes of over tourism in Nainital
- To examine the environmental, social, and economic impacts of over tourism
- To evaluate the carrying capacity and infrastructure challenges
- To explore the role of new destination development in reducing tourism pressure.

#### Research methodology

The research adopts a descriptive and qualitative approach to understand the impacts and solutions related to overtourism. This study is based on secondary data analysis, including: Research papers and journal articles, Government reports and tourism policies, and case studies on Nainital and other hill stations.

**Table 1:** Tourist Arrival trends in Nainital (2015-2025)

Year	Domestic tourists (in Lacs)	Foreign tourists (in Thousands)	Total tourists (lacs)	Growth rate (%)
2015	8.5	32	8.82	5.2
2016	9.3	35	9.65	9.4
2017	10.8	40	11.20	16.0
2018	12.5	44	12.94	15.5
2019	13.2	48	13.68	5.7
2020	6.0	12	6.12	-55% (COVID Impact)
2021	9.5	18	9.68	58% recovery
2022	15.3	52	15.82	63% surge
2023	18.5	60	19.10	20.7
2024	20.0	65	20.65	8

**Source:** Uttarakhand statistical department Nainital

The above table shows the tourist arrival trend in Nainital over 10 years (2015-2024), highlighting the industrial growth and the sharp decline during the pandemic and its subsequent recovery. The vast majority of visitors are Destination Management Organisation (DMO) measures in place while foreign tourists, major in numbers, represent a much smaller segment. In 2015, the total tourists were 8.82 lakhs, but in 2024, the number increased to 20.65 lakhs.

During the pre-pandemic time, 2015-2019, Nainital showed constant growth with the domestic arrivals rising from 8.5 to 13.2 lakhs, but in the time of the COVID-19 impact, there was a massive 55% drop in tourists visiting, with the total falling to 6.12 lakh as travel restrictions took hold.

Since 2021, Nainital has marked the start of recovery by increasing 58%. 2022 shows a massive surge of 63%, surpassing the pre-pandemic level. 2024 reached a new high with over 2 million total tourists visiting Nainital.

**Table 2:** Carrying capacity vs actual tourist load

Parameter	Estimated capacity	Actual peak load (2023-2024)	% Exceeding capacity
Daily Tourist Capacity	25000	60000-70000	+160%
Vehicles Capacity	8000	20000+	+150%
Hotel Capacity	30000 beds	55000 demand	+83%
Water Supply Capacity	20 MLD	32 MLD Demand	+60%

**Source:** Uttarakhand statistical department Nainital

The above compares the estimated carrying capacity of a key infrastructure in Nainital, Uttarakhand, against the actual tourist load in 2023-24. It is significantly overloading capacity, particularly in the number of daily tourists and vehicles. The

table shows that daily visitors will be increased, but the capacity of our infrastructure, like parking, hotels and water supply capacity are not satisfying the actual requirements of tourists.

**Table 3:** Environment impact indicators in Nainital

Indicator	2015	2020	2024	Change (%)
Solid Waste (tons/day)	25	40	65	+160%
Lake Pollution Index (Naini Lake)	Moderate	High	Very High	Deteriorating
Forest Cover (%)	62%	59%	55%	-7%
Water Availability (liters/person/day)	135	110	85	-37%

**Source:** Uttarakhand statistical department Nainital

Arises several environmental strains in Nainital from tourist overload from 2023 to 2024, exceeding infrastructure capacity and implying ecological impact. It serves as a key indicator for the research on sustainable tourism in Uttarakhand Hill stations, where overcrowding from 60,000 to 70,000 daily tourists leads to deforestation, habitat loss, and biodiversity decline around Naini Lake.

Vehicle influx beyond 8000 capacity causes air pollution, traffic congestion, and landslide risk on fragile slopes. Water demand of 35 MLD targets the shortage of wastewater pollution and lake eutrophication. The table highlights exceedances driving this pressure in Nainital.

**Table 4:** Economic Contribution vs Cost

Parameter	Positive impact	Negative impact
Employment	+35% growth	Seasonal jobs only
Local Income	Increased by 50%	Unequal distribution
Cost of Living	-	Increased by 40%
Infrastructure	-	High maintenance burden

**Source:** Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board

The above table provides the economic impact, both positive and negative, of activities in Nainital. Employment will be increased 35% positive impact, but in a seasonal job because tourists visit during a seasonal time. Local income will be

increased by 50% but it is not equally distributed. The reason Seasonable job visitors can visit in a Nainital the living standard will not increase. The reason are seasonable jobs are present because Nainital is so expensive. For the residents of Nainital therefore 40% negative impact on the cost of living of

residents of Nainital the infrastructure is not increased according to the burden of visitors are increased therefore the capacity of Nainital its decline the holding the capacity of visitors are visit daily.

**Table 5:** Alternative destinations for tourism diversification

Destination	Distance from Nainital	Tourism type	Development potential
Bhimtal	22KM	Lake tourism	High
Mukteshwar	50KM	Eco-tourism	Very High
Almora	65KM	Cultural tourism	High
Ranikhet	60 KM	Hill tourism	High

*Source:* Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board

The 4 destinations are near the Nainital district, which is economically and culturally hilly, and a lake can divert tourists; it can help reduce the overload in Nainital.

**Table 6:** Tourist perception survey data

Parameter	Satisfied (%)	Unsatisfied (%)
Scenic Beauty	85	15
Cleanliness	45	55
Traffic Management	30	70
Accommodation	75	25
Overall Experience	60	40

*Source:* Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board

This table can explain that tourists are satisfied with the beauty but not satisfied with cleanliness. Because cleanliness is 55% of unsatisfied can be defined that the overloaded tourist is not managed by our Authority.

**Impacts of overtourism**

**1. Environmental impacts**

- **Pollution of Naini Lake:** Over tourism has led to severe pollution in Naini Lake due to the disposal of plastic waste, sewage discharge, and tourist activities such as boating. The increasing number of visitors contributes to water contamination, reducing water quality and threatening the quality of life. This also affects the extent and cultural value of the lake, which is mainly affected by Nainital
- **Deforestation and biodiversity loss:** The acquittal rising tourists demand forests being cleared for hotels, roads and other infrastructure. This deforestation disputes the local ecosystem and leads to habitat loss of wildlife as the biodiversity in the region is declining, and Ecological Is increasing
- **Increased waste generation:** A large number of tourists generate excessive solid waste, increasing plastic bottles, food packaging and other non-biodegradable materials due to an inadequate waste management system, which results in this waste accumulating in open space forests and water bodies, causing environmental degradation and health hazards
- **Water scarcity:** Over Tourism puts enormous pressure on local water resources, hotels, restaurants, and tourist

consumers, leading to a shortage of residents during the peak tourist season. Nainital faces an acute water crisis, highlighting the unsuitable use of natural resources.

- **Unplanned tourism development threatens the natural beauty that attracts tourists:** Rapid and unplanned structure of building and tourist infrastructure has negatively impacted the natural landscape of Nanda, as stock hills are being cut and the natural drainage system is disturbed, increasing the risk of landslide. This not only harms the environment but also reduces the scenic beauty, which is a major attraction for tourists.

**2. Social impacts**

- **Overcrowding and reduced quality of life:** Overtourism leads to heavy overcrowding in Nainital, especially during the peak season. Roads, markets, and public spaces become congested, making daily life difficult for residents. Increasing traffic noise and pressure on basic services like water and electricity reduce the overall quality of life for the local population.
- **Cultural commodification:** With this rise in tourism, local culture and traditions are often customised to attract visitors. Festival customs and traditional practices may be modified or staged properly for tourists' entertainment. This leads to a loss of authenticity and weakens the cultural identity of the local community over time.
- **Conflicts between locals and tourists:** Over-tourism can create tensions between residents and tourists. Issues such as overcrowding, rising prices, inappropriate customer behaviour, and pressure on local resources often lead to dissatisfaction among locals. These may result in reduced hospitality and a negative impact on the destination.

**3. Economic impacts**

- **Increased employment opportunities:** Tourism creates more job opportunities in sectors such as hotels, restaurants, transport, and local markets. Many local people get employment directly or indirectly from a tourism activity, which helps in improving income levels and boosting the local economy.
- **Unequal distribution of tourism benefits:** Although tourism generates income, the benefits are not equally

shared. Large businesses, hotel owners, and external investors often earn more profit, while small local vendors and workers receive limited financial gain. This creates economic inequality within the community.

- **Rise in cost of living:** Due to high tourist demand, the price of goods, services, land, and housing increased significantly. Residents often face difficulty in affording necessities as the cost of living rises beyond their income level.

#### 4. Infrastructure impacts

- **Traffic congestion:** Overtourism leads to a significant increase in the number of vehicles entering Nainital, especially during the peak tourist season. Narrow hill roads become heavily congested, resulting in long traffic jams, increasing travel time and high air pollution. This creates an inconvenience for both tourists and residents.
- **Insufficient parking facilities:** The existing PE infrastructure in Nainital is not adequate to handle the large influx of tourist vehicles. This leads to illegal parking along the roadside, which further worsens traffic conditions and creates safety issues. The lack of proper parking management reflects poor planning in the tourist infrastructure.
- **Overburdened public services:** Public services such as water supply, electricity, sanitation, and waste management become overburdened due to excessive tourist numbers. The local infrastructure, designed for a small population, struggles to meet the increasing demand, leading to service shortages and reduced efficiency

#### Carrying capacity of Nainital

Carrying capacity refers to the maximum number of tourists a destination can sustain without environmental degradation. Nainital has a limited land area and fragile ecology, making it highly vulnerable to overtourism. Exceeding the carrying capacity leads to:

- **Environmental stress:** Nainital's carrying capacity is severely overbought with a peaked tourist inflow (up to 30,000 per day) and over 75,000 daily vehicles for exceeding its 11-to-12-kilometre square area capacity, resulting in several water storage, exclusive traffic and ecological damage. Environmental stress includes steep sloping loading to landslide vulnerability, Lake collision, and Emerson Infrastructure steam home waste management and land use.
- **Infrastructure breakdown:** The carrying capacity of Nainital is currently expected to reach seven units of breakdown and environmental day irrigation. The whole network cannot accommodate the value of mixers, leading to congestion and gridlock. The finale on the double connection of popular lake areas. The town experiences severe water shortage during peak season as tourist demand outstrips the supply capacity, compounded by a failing distribution network.
- **Drainage and waste management:** The existing sewage and waste management systems are overloaded by the

floating population, causing degradation of the Naini Lake and environmental distress.

- **Decline in tourist satisfaction:** Nainital's carrying capacity is severely strained, with over 7500 and 30,000 tourists entering daily during peak season, far exceeding its infrastructure. This overcrowding causes salary traffic, water shortage and ecological dangers, directly causes a decline in tourist satisfaction and leads to calls for regulatory measures to restore the tourist experience

#### Role of new destination development

1. **Concept:** Developing alternative tourist destinations helps distribute tourist flow and reduce pressure on overcrowded areas. The new destination development is the strategic planning, enhancement of the marketing offer, and location to turn it into a visible and competitive attraction. It focuses on improving infrastructure, creating unique experiences, and ensuring sustainable long-term growth that balances economic benefit with community and environmental needs.
2. **Potential areas near Nainital:** The areas around Nainital are rapidly developing into a high-potential real estate investment and tourist destination. The primary area Bhimtal, Almora and Ranikhet, offers distant advantages, ranging from luxurious resort projects to ecotourism and commercial opportunities, providing an aspect of a less crowded lifestyle
  - **Bhimtal:** Bhimtal is located just 22KM from Nainital. Bhimtal is a fast-growing alternative to Nainital, offering a similar but less crowded, more serene lake environment. Bhimtal has potential for residential holiday homes and vocational rent with a high rental potential due to its popularity among tourists, as it has large legs with an island present climate, and a better infrastructure compared to more remote areas.
  - **Mukteshwar:** Mukteshwar is a cynical, hill station in a Nainital district located above 51km from Nainital and 40km offering a high attitude alternatives for to the boosting city It is known as a panoramic Himalayan view apple and colonial charms former it is ideally for nature walks Dragons and bird watching it is famous for shift temp located on a high clock providing a ritual significance and Steam views It is Properly area known for its colonial style bungalows and scenario because, located at earth evolution around 6000 feet. It is known for its peaceful, quiet and relaxing atmosphere, making it a perfect getaway from the crowd of Nainital
  - **Almora:** Almora offers a more authentic, rustic charm with panoramic views of the Himalaya. The potential is very highly suitable for ecotourism, meditation centres, and boutique homestays. It is growing as a retreat location, offering affordable land for organic farming and eco-friendly investment. Almora is famous for its cultural heritage and peaceful isolation, surrounded by pine forest
  - **Ranikhet:** Ranikhet is well developed scenery town known for its forests and magnified snowcraft Himalayan.

Ranikhet is also known as the Queen's meadows. Ranikhet is highly sought after for its luxurious villas and upscale second homes. It attracts both permanent residents and luxurious tourists. The highlight of Ranikhet is the golf courses, Chaubatia Garden, and a secure environment

### 3. Benefits

- **Reduces congestion in Nainital:** Developing new destinations around Nainital, combined with parking hubs, is essential to reduce extreme traffic congestion, improve the experience and address the city's severe parking situation. These measures include developing the farm to the Metropole Hotel site, aiming to prevent bottlenecks
- **Promotes regional development:** Promoting a new destination in religious development drives economic growth through job creation, impressive improvement, and increasing foreign exchange. It fosters road development, diversifying the local economy, preserves cultural heritage, and encourages environmental protection, improving the quality of life for residents.
- **Enhances tourist experience:** New destination in an ethical Distilleries, equitable and job resource government while preserving local Kumaoni culture and environment. Developing sustainable Community and ecotourism initiatives encourages residents to take responsibility for conserving the local biodiversity and compounding traditions.
- **Supports local communities:** Developing new destinations and medical design supports local communities by creating jobs genetic income through homestays and local product sales, and rural migration. These initiatives foster sustainable development from a preserved cultural heritage like the Kumaoni Handicap and diversify livelihoods beyond traditional agriculture.

### Sustainable tourism strategies

- **Diversification of tourism:** By shifting from mass ecotourism centered on Naini lake boating and peak season pilgrimages to a multifaceted portfolio including adventure activities like paragliding and trekking in the surrounding Kumaon hilly areas, cultural heritage tours off sites like High Altitude Zoo arrow tourism experience showcases organic apple orchards and Herbal farms and Eco-lodges promoting zero waste homestay to mitigates overcrowding and seasonal fluctuation. Integrating renewable energy-powered infrastructure, community-led waste management, and biodiversity conservation initiative ensure long term availability, fast, inclusive growth for local stakeholders while preserving the lakes' fragrant ecosystem and reducing carbon footprint.
- **Infrastructure development:** To boost sustainable tourism in Nainital, infrastructure development must prioritise eco-friendly, resilient designs that support carrying capacity without compromising the hill stations. Key strategy including upgrading transportation with electric shelter service along the Nainital-Mukteshwar

Corridor reducing vehicle emission and constitutions around Nainital Lake, constructing solar power smart parking facility at entire points like railway station to discourage private car and developed rainwater harvesting system integrated into predestined pathway and viewpoints such as snow viewpoints for water self-sufficient model building for visitor centre and homestay using local surrounding bamboo and cycled materials which minimize constructions impact while accommodating area year around low impact tourism

- **Policy implementation:** Sustainable tourism in Nainital requires a robust governance framework integrating state-level directives with localised enforcement to address the hilly station carrying capacity challenges and ecological sustainability. Drawing the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy and emerging Eco Tourism Framework, established a Nainital-specific sustainable tourism authority under the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB), empowered to enforce Eco-sensitive Zone regulations, mandate environmental impact assessment for all new development, and monitor the Digital report portal audit. Community involvement and review of the program for local stockholders will ensure equitable benefit, align with the national sustainable goal to preserve Nani Lakes' biodiversity and Cultural heritage.
- **Community participation:** Sustainable tourism in Nainital, involving residents to actively shape tourism growth while safeguarding the region's nature and cultural assets. Forming local tourist committees and delivering skill building workshops in hospitality guiding home stay management, and eco-tourism entrepreneurship particularly for women's and youth ensure equitable income from natural camps, bird watching trails, and cultural immersion activities as seen in ongoing community tourism pilots Reviewing Kumaoni heritages collaborative decision making through participation forum with the Nainital Municipal Board faster ownership align economic benefit with biodiversity conservation around Nani lake and promoting year around local impact visitors experience.
- **Carrying capacity assessment:** Sustainable tourism in Nainital, determining the maximum number of visitors and vehicles the hill station's fragile ecosystem and infrastructure can support without degradation. Recent Uttarakhand initiatives, including the state's first tourist carrying capacity survey in Nainital launched in 2025, evaluate physical limits like parking, water availability, waste, management, and road networks, while factoring in ecological sensitivity around Naini Lake as directed by the National Green Tribunal.

### Challenges in implementing sustainable tourism

- **Lack of coordination among stakeholders:** Implementing sustainable tourism is hindered by poor coordination among stakeholders, leading to fragmented efforts, conflicting goals, and ineffective policy

enforcement. Key issues include inconsistent communication between the government, private sector, and local communities, which prevents unified action, creates high benefit leakage, and leads to failed sustainability initiatives.

- **Insufficient funding:** Implementing sustainable tourism is heavily constrained by insufficient funding, which limits infrastructure development, eco-friendly renovations, and essential staff training. This financial lack leads to poor waste management, reliance on high- volume, low- value tourism, and inability to maintain carrying capacities, ultimately causing environmental damage and local dissatisfaction.
- **Weak enforcement of regulations:** weak enforcement of regulations in sustainable tourism creates significant challenges, including unchecked environmental damage (e.g., in protected areas), uncontrolled over- tourism, and illegal infrastructure development. This failure often stems from corruption, limited technical capacity, and prioritised short-term economic gains. Without strict enforcement, voluntary sustainability initiatives often fail, resulting in pollution, habitat degradation, and community marginalisation.
- **Low awareness among tourists:** It is a major challenge to sustainable tourism, leading to unintentional environmental degradation, such as littering, high waste production, and disturbance to natural habitats. Tourists often fail to differentiate between conventional and sustainable options, causing a lack of demand for eco-friendly practices. This ignorance frequently results in irresponsible behaviour, over -tourism, and resistance to adopting sustainable behaviours while on vacation.

### Findings of the study

- **Overtourism in Nainital is primarily due to unplanned development:** The town faces immense pressure on water supply, electricity, and waste management. Tourist numbers frequently equal or exceed the permanent resident population, causing a sharp decline in local life quality. The structure designed for city are few visitors, but exponential tourism growth has resulted in severe traffic congestion, particularly when thousands of vehicles enter a town with minimal, congested parking spaces.
- **Environmental degradation is the most critical issue:** Unplanned tourism can directly impact on eco system of Nainital district because over-consumption of water resources, Unplanned construction of hotels, and infrastructure development to accommodate tourists have resulted in deforestation. High tourist influx leads to massive waste disposal issues, with non-biodegradable waste such as plastic and glass bottles, etc.
- **Infrastructure is insufficient for peak tourist loads:** While the peak weekend traffic brings over 4000 vehicles, the city's maximum designated parking capacity is only about 2000, causing severe jams on mountain roads. Roads are not broad enough for the high vehicular traffic, leading

to massive traffic congestion. In the summer time, tourism overload increases year to year, because the carrying capacity of the city is less than the number of visitors.

- **New destination development is essential for sustainability:** Developing nearby areas (such as identifying eco-tourism potential in surrounding villages) allows for the diversion of footfall from the overcrowded, traditional “lake City” core. Moving tourists to newer, less developed sites relieves pressure on Nainital’s fragile ecosystems and existing infrastructure. Expanding the tourism map creates new employment opportunities in surrounding areas, diversifying income sources beyond the urban centre.

### Suggestions

1. **Implement strict tourism policies:** Visitor Capacity of daily cabs on particular sides, and enforce a mandatory pre-booking system to prevent overcrowding, implement bans and restricted licensing for short-term use in residential areas to prevent local housing laws. Enforce a strictly designed Tourism Free Zone, and implement strict zoning regulations in sensitive areas to protect natural resources. Actively promote alternative destinations to distribute tourist traffic more evenly across the A regions, reducing the pressure on hot spots
2. **Promote off-season tourism:** Develop specialised, lower-cost packages for the low season, such as “4<sup>th</sup> night free” or inclusive local experiences that aren’t available in the summer. Engage residents to create, manage, and promote eco-friendly and community- led tourism alternatives such as homestays or cultural experiences.
3. **Develop alternative destinations:** Alternative destinations can help in reducing the burden of Nainital city at a peak time, because it reduces pressure and spreads overtourism and lack of parking facilities. Developing alternatives can also help in promoting the unexplored part of another area, which is not popular, like Nainital city.
4. **Encourage eco-friendly practices:** To mitigate overtourism in Nainital, implementing strict vehicle restrictions, promoting “leave no trace” tourism, and encouraging visits to lesser-known surrounding areas is crucial. Eco-friendly practices can be enhanced by restricting single-use plastics, enforcing strict waste management, and encouraging staying in certified eco-lodges.
5. **Improve waste management systems:** Nainital’s overtourism necessitates a shift to decentralised waste management, mandatory source segregation, and strict plastic regulations. Effective solutions include implementing Material recovery facilities (MRFs), enforcing tourist fees for waste disposal, conducting mandatory segregation at households/hotels, and adopting community-led campaigns to manage the high influx of waste.

## Conclusion

Overtourism in Nainital is a growing concern that threatens the sustainability of the region. While tourism contributes significantly to the local economy, its negative impacts cannot be ignored. The development of new tourist destinations, along with proper planning and management, is crucial for achieving sustainable tourism.

A balanced approach that integrates environmental conservation, economic development, and social well-being is essential. By adopting sustainable tourism practices, Nainital can continue to thrive as a popular tourist destination without compromising its natural and cultural heritage. This study defines sustainable tourism strategies for Nainital city. Nainital currently faces challenges in implementing sustainable tourism, which is essential to address the problems it encounters. Based on our findings, we provide suggestions to reduce overtourism and promote unexplored destinations in the surrounding area. These recommendations aim to balance the heavy tourism influx with the necessity of Environmental Conservation. The actively diversifying tourist hotspot, Nainital, can alleviate chronic pressure on its core infrastructure and ecosystem, while systematically fostering inclusive economic growth in lesser-known regional locations

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