

# Emerging Tourists Destinations of Himachal Pradesh: A Case Study on Kullu District

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**Abstract-** Kullu is fast evolving into a major tourist destination in Himachal Pradesh. The tourists come here for nature, wildlife and recreational activity. Total tourist arrival (domestic and foreign) at Kullu was recorded at 27, 86050 in the years of 2013 with 13% increase in the growth rate 3159411 in the year 2022. Present study area is in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. Kullu is situated in average elevation of 1,278 m (4,193 ft) at latitude 31°35'N 77°06'E. This study has examined the present emerging tourist's destinations of Kullu district in Himachal Pradesh. This study utilized secondary information obtained from books, research articles, Tourist's Information Centre and District Tourism Development Office Kullu to assess the existing tourism resources and tourists' details within the Kullu. The study has revealed that emerging tourist's destination in Kullu is mainly related with religious, cultural, rural and wildlife tourism. This study highlights the important role of emerging tourist's destination in the growth of Himachal Pradesh tourism industry.

**Keywords–** Emerging Destination, Tourism resources, Tourism Growth, Recreational Activities.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Himachal Pradesh is a State in Northern India that was anciently known as Dev Bhumi (The abode of Gods) and is rich with natural beauty. The accurate meaning of Himachal Pradesh is region of snowy mountains. The top tourist places of Himachal Pradesh are Shimla, Kullu Valley, Manali, Dharamshala and Chamba. Shimla is the only developed city of the Himachal, its quietness and peaceful atmosphere makes it different from many urban cities in India. It is famous for its temples, parks, valleys and trekking trips. The Kullu Valley offers breath-taking natural beauty. Its temples, apple orchards, gardens, and the festivals make it a worthwhile destination to visit. For shoppers Kullu provides handicraft textile (shawls, caps and other woollen accessories). Himachal Pradesh has scores of beautiful towns and villages all over the state, which offers tourists a diversity of destinations to go and relax and also explore both during summers – when it offers respite from the heat in the plains and during winter – when snow covered terrains delight one and all.

The destination we chose for the case study is Kullu. Kullu known as the 'Valley of Gods', Kullu is a cluster of beautiful valleys in Himachal Pradesh. Located between the majestic Himalayas and river Beas, Kullu is situated at an altitude of 1279 m. Kullu, along with Manali are favourite hill stations with tourists especially honeymooners. Scenic views and snow-clad mountains, towering Deodar jungles, rivers and apple orchards have attracted several feature filmmakers too. Kullu is a hot-spot for adventure sports. Trekking, river rafting, mountaineering, paragliding and hiking over the Himalayan glaciers are some of the activities that Kullu offers. Kullu is also popular as a sister town to Manali which is on much higher altitude and provides more scenic views. Typically travellers cover both Kullu and Manali in one trip. Tourists coming to Kullu and Manali can indulge in a lot of adventure sports activities like river rafting, trekking, mountaineering etc. Set in the lap of nature, the picturesque landscape of this small town is mesmerizing. Kullu also has few important temples like the Raghunath Temple and Jagannathi Devi Temple. Apart from temples, the Pandoh Dam and Chandrakhani Pass are also must visits in this region. Kullu is also used as the base town to reach Manikaran, Kasol, Malana, Bhunter and Rohtang Pass too.

Manali situated at a height of 6260 feet above sea level, Manali is one of the most popular, beautiful and awe-inspiring hill stations in this country. Surrounded by majestic hills and woody forests, the quaint charm of Manali has captured the world's attention and has become one of the most visited tourist destinations in India. The pristine River Beas flows right through the town, creating a mesmerising and spellbinding landscape. Nestled at one end of the Kullu Valley, Manali is a popular hill station with attractions such as the Rohtang Pass and Solang Valley nearby. Rohtang Pass is covered with snow throughout the year and is a good experience in itself. This is the ideal place for tourists looking to unwind and rejuvenate in the lap of nature, for there is no place in the country more vibrant and charming as Manali. This town also has a multitude of options for tourists looking for adventurous activities like trekking, paragliding, skiing, zorbing, white water rafting etc. Besides adventurous activities, Manali also has a lot of temples which all tourists and devotees love to visit including the Raghunath temple and Jagannathi Devith Temple being one of the important ones. Hadimba Temple, a 14<sup>th</sup> century temple is famous for its wooden architecture and for

its religious values. Manali is also used as the base town for the Manali-Leh highway and Leh is around 479 km from here. Lahaul and Spiti district can also be accessed from here during the summers using the same highway (Balokhra-1997).

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In Namchi town, the pilgrimage sites, particularly Siddhesvara Dham and Samdruptse, are the primary draws for tourists. Namchi demonstrates substantial potential for pilgrimage tourism. These pilgrimage centers are instrumental in safeguarding the cultural heritage of the state and the nation while also creating employment opportunities for the local residents, directly and indirectly (Rai, 2015). The study of Malana town in the Kullu district highlights its reputation as an untouched paradise, celebrated for its breathtaking natural beauty and rich, ancient culture. Traveling to Malana is strongly advised for an enriching experience. Nonetheless, it is essential for visitors to familiarize themselves with the town's specific rules and regulations before beginning their journey (Maidullah, 2019).

## 3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

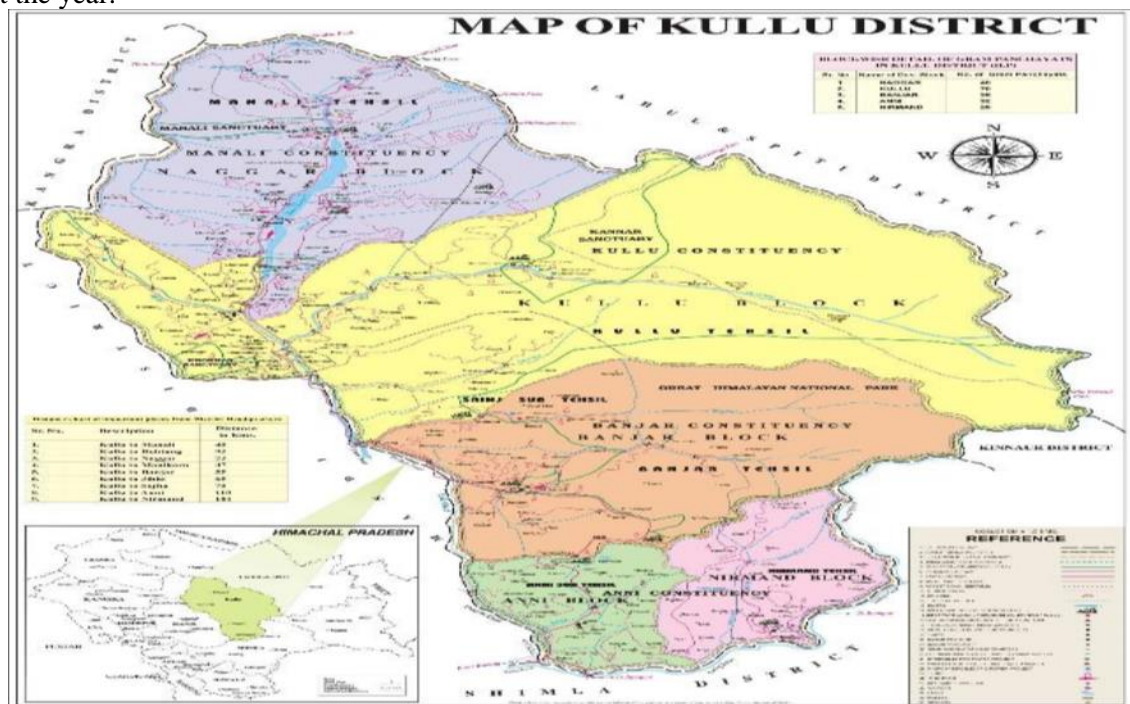
1. To investigate the emerging tourist destinations within the Kullu district.
2. To highlight the tourism activities in and around the Kullu district.

## 4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the present study, secondary data has been used in order to study the emerging tourists' destination of Kullu district. These were collected from the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh. All the Figures and Tables were prepared on the basis of secondary data provided by the tourism department. Other related information has been collected from published papers and books.

## 5. STUDY AREA

The Present Study area is Kullu District. Kullu is situated in average elevation of 1,278 m (4,193 ft) at latitude 31°35'N 77°06'E. For the purpose of data collection from the tourists, it will be required to visit the destinations throughout the year.



(Fig. 1): Kullu District Map

(Source – Internet)

## 6. FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

### 6.1 EMERGING TOURISTS' DESTINATION OF DISTRICT KULLU

#### Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP)

Great Himalayan National Park was constituted in 1984 and was formally notified as a national park in 1999. It is located in Banjar Sub-Division of Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh, India, in the far Western Himalayas. GHNP is one of the most recent additions to a huge network of wildlife reserves found in Himalayan region in India and adjoining countries.

Great Himalayan National Park covering an area of 754.4 sq. Kms. in 1994, two major changes were made in land use around the Park. A buffer zone of 5 km from the Park's western boundary, covering 265.6 sq km. and including 2,300

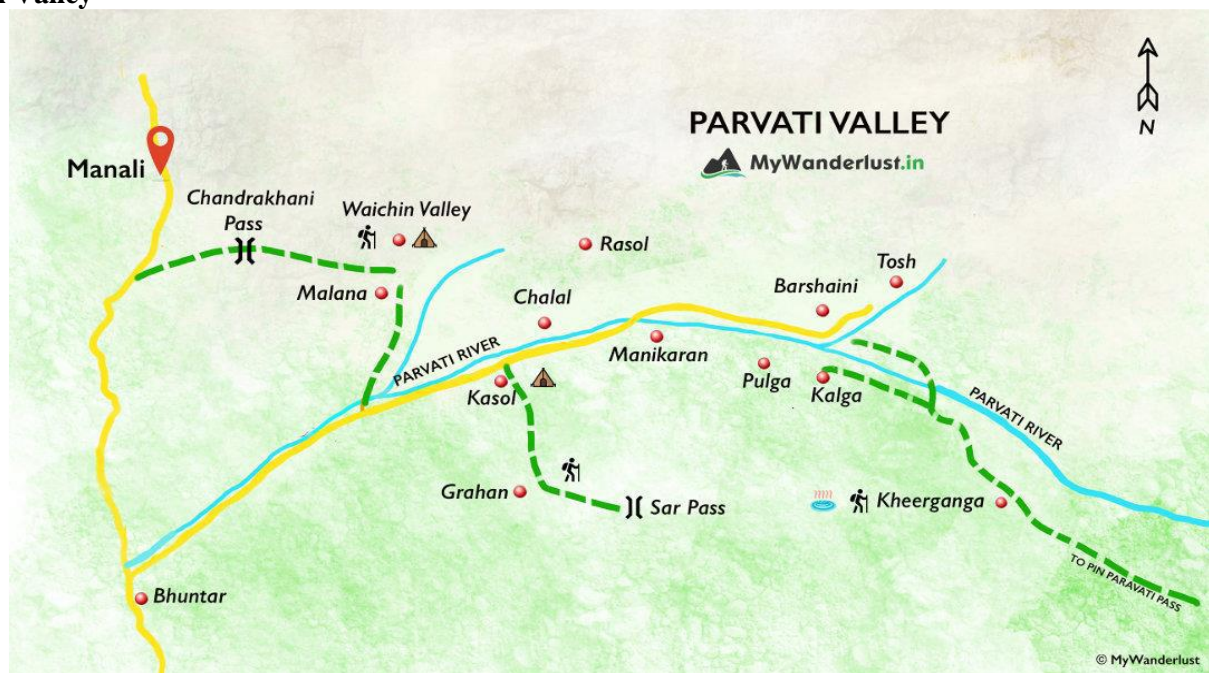
households in 160 villages, was delineated as an Eco-zone. Most of the population (about 15,000 to 16,000 people) in the Eco-zone are poor and dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods.

The second change was the creation of the Sainj Wildlife Sanctuary (90 sq km) around the three villages of Shagwar, Shakti, and Marore. On the southern edge of the GHNP, another Protected Area (PA) was declared, known as Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuary. This covers 65 sq km and is without habitation. More recently, in 2010, both the Sainj and Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuaries were added to GHNP, but will not be formally incorporated until a process known as settlement of rights has occurred. Thus the initiated merger of Sainj and Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuaries with GHNP will be followed by a process of settlement to relocate inhabitants and make the area free of traditional pressures, which may take some time. The total area under Park administration (National Park, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Ecozone) is 1171 sq km, which is together referred to as the Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (GHNPCA). In 2010, an area of 710 sq km of the Parvati river catchment contiguous to the northern boundary of GHNP was initially notified as the Khirganga National Park, adding significant biological diversity, conservation value, and physical protection to GHNP. The boundaries of GHNP are also contiguous with the Pin Valley National Park (675 sq km) in Trans-Himalaya, the Rupibhabha Wildlife Sanctuary (503 sq km) in Sutlej watershed and the Kanawar Wildlife Sanctuary (61 sq km), adding additional protection and conservation value and opening up extended wildlife corridors.

### A UNESCO World Heritage Site

GHNP was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 2014, in recognition of its outstanding significance for biodiversity conservation. The park protects over 1,000 plant species, including many medicinal herbs, 31 mammal species and 209 bird species, as well as amphibians, reptiles and insects. (Source <https://www.greathimalayannationalpark.org>)

### Parvati Valley



(Fig. 1.2)

(Source – Internet)

Parvati Valley is situated in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. From the confluence of the Parvati River with the River Beas, the Parvati Valley runs eastwards, through a steep-sided valley from the town of Bhuntar, in the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh in Northern India.

The precipitous valley road climbs past a side valley leading to the village of Malana near the famous tourist spot Kasol. From here, the road passes through the Sikh and Hindu pilgrimage town of Manikaran and terminates at Pulga, where the construction of the ParvatiHydel Project, a hydroelectric dam, dominates the landscape. From Pulga, the footpath climbs to a temple and small dhaba at Rudra-Nag waterfall, apparently after its resemblance of a water snake. Beyond Rudra-Nag waterfall, the trail ascends further through thick pine forests to the spiritual site of Kheerganga where Shiva is said to have meditated for 3000 years. The hot springs at Kheerganga are extremely important for Hindu and Sikh pilgrims as well as many others who believe the waters have sacred healing properties (Balokhra-1997).



### Malana

An ancient village nestled away amidst the towering mountains of Himachal Pradesh; Malana is rather famous as the perfect holiday destination for hipsters. The location is surrounded by lush, green trees and incredible valleys, making it apt for those who love the nature in its truest essence. The village is bordered by Parvati valley on the north-east and Kullu valley on the other side with peaks of Cahndrakhani and Deotibba shadowing the tiny, paradise of India.

Apart from the natural beauty, Malana is also known for its unique lifestyle and social structure that the locals essentially follow. Their dressing sense, the kind of food they eat, the festivals they celebrate, the way those festivals are celebrated and more reflect the vibrant culture and tradition that is quite unique to the place. This perfect holiday destination is situated at a height of 2,652 meters i.e. approximately 8,701ft above the sea level. There is so much beauty underlying in this town that there are numerous documentaries made on this town, depicting the wonders that Malana encompasses. A few popular documentaries that interested readers can check out are: Malana: Globalization of a Himalayan Village and Malana, A lost identity.

The traditional language spoken in Malana is Kanashi. Apart from that, there is much history that lies behind the existence of this beautiful location. Local legends suggest, the revered sage namely Jamlu Rishi was a resident on this place and he has been given major credits for setting up the rules, traditions and culture among other regulations of Malana. Locals even claim that Malana reflects the world's oldest democracies with a well-established parliamentary system as well. Malana is believed to have held immense respect during the pre-Aryan times (Balokhra-1997).

### Kasol

Kasol is a quaint little village in Himachal Pradesh situated along the banks of the river Parvati. Commonly known as the 'Amsterdam of India', Kasol is a tourist attraction that is rapidly gaining fame as a popular hub for trekkers, backpackers, and nature lovers. Kasol is situated 23 kms from Bhuntar and next to the religious town of Manikaran and is one of the best places in the country just to sit back and chill in the panorama of snow-clad mountains, pine trees and gurgling river.

Kasol is famous for its trekking trails, which include treks to Kheerganga, Yanker Pass, Sar Pass, and Pin Parbati Pass. To get a real feel of the culture in this region, go on a visit to the village of Malana. Located a few kilometres away from Kasol, Malana is a tiny hamlet inhabited by people living in self-imposed isolation. The people of Malana claim themselves to be Aryan descendants, as a result of which they avoid interaction with outsiders. The village has plenty of scenic sights, though, and is often called 'Little Greece'. Kasol is inhabited by a huge number of people from Israel, which is discernible from the plentifully available Israeli food, and the street signposts inscribed in Hebrew. Kasol has quite a few street side cafes which serve delicious food, and the experience of sitting and enjoying a meal amidst the dark green forests and the awe-inspiring mountains make the meal even more enjoyable. Kasol has a flea market that sells a variety of items, so you can pick up trinkets, souvenirs, pendants, and even semi-precious stones to take back home for family and friends (Source: [www.himachaltourism.gov.in](http://www.himachaltourism.gov.in)).

### Tosh

Popular for its cannabis plantations, the tranquil village of Tosh is just another example of the unparalleled natural beauty that Himachal Pradesh holds within its bounds. Located at the far end of Parvati Valley, Tosh is untouched by modernisation and fast-paced life. With its gradual terrain and the waters of river Parvati flowing through its bosom, the Tosh Kasol trek is the go-to expedition for all adrenaline junkies. The hippie culture and otherworldly vibe of this village will surely transport you to another world. Tosh has scattered villages across the lush green hills juxtaposed against snow-dusted peaks. Here you can experience the bounty of nature in all its glory, combined with some indigenous as well as exotic experiences. This destination is quite often thronged by visitors from other countries, and you can interact with them and experience their cuisine at local eateries as well. Tosh has become quite popular in recent years due to its proximity to the famous hippie town - Kasol. It is popular among backpackers who are looking for an escape from the humdrum of their chaotic life. People often throng here to practice yoga and meditation in the clean, fresh air and peaceful surroundings. It is mostly visited by backpackers from Israel and Europe. One of the first things that hit you when you enter Tosh is the distinct smell of marijuana. Tosh is most famous for the trek route here, Kheerganga being the most popular. With every step you take into this quaint village called Tosh, you feel more in love with this city of hash and trance (Source: [www.himachaltourism.gov.in](http://www.himachaltourism.gov.in)).

### Manikaran

Manikaran is located in the Parvati Valley on river Parvati, northeast of Bhuntar in the Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh. It is at an altitude of 1760 m and is located 4 km ahead of Kasol and about 45 km from Kullu and about 35 km from Bhunter. This small town attracts tourists visiting Manali and Kullu to its hot springs and pilgrim centres. An experimental geothermal energy plant has also been set up here.

Tourists to Kullu and Manali make it a point to visit Manikaran, to pay obeisance at the Gurudwara and Hindu temples, and also to soak in its hot water springs. About 5,700 ft from mean sea level, Manikaran lies next to the

Parvati River. The river gets its name from mythological stories connecting it to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. According to Hindu mythology, Hindus believe that law giver Manu recreated human life in Manikaran after the flood. Other legends associate Manikaran with Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Once while roaming through the valley, Shiva and Parvati came across the place called Manikaran and they decided to stay for some time. They stayed for over a millennium and during their stay, a jewel from Goddess Parvati's earring fell in the river. Goddess Parvati was upset and all attempts to locate the jewel failed. Raging with anger, Lord Shiva opened his third eye. Shesh-Naag (Serpent God) was approached by the gods to repress Lord Shiva's anger. The Serpent God hissed and hot water started oozing from the place where the jewel had fallen which brought out numerous jewels like the one that was being sought.

The sight of the jewels subdued Lord Shiva's anger. The Guru Nanak Devji Gurudwara also known as Manikaran Gurudwara is associated with Guru Nanak (the founder of Sikhism). There gurudwara has a langar (kitchen) that offers free food. Temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Ramchandra are other places of worship in Manikaran. It is one of the most visited temples in all of Himachal. Manikaran is famous for the natural hot springs. The hot springs is said to possess curative powers. Many pilgrims take a dip in the holy water to wash away their sins and others seek its curative qualities. Manikaran enjoys pleasant weather throughout the year. Best time to visit Manikaran is from March to May (Balokhra, 1997).

## 7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlights the growing prominence of tourist destinations in the Kullu district, particularly the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), Parvati Valley, Malana, Kasol, Tosh, and Manikaran. The district stands as a captivating embodiment of nature's magnificence and cultural opulence. GHNP and Parvati Valley emerge as primary attractions, showcasing India's untamed wilderness in a spectacular display of flora and fauna.

Tourism practices in the region encompass religious, adventure, sustainable and eco-tourism, creating a diverse array of experiences for visitors. Kullu district, nestled in Himachal Pradesh, offers a rich tapestry of cultural diversity, from the unique traditions of Malana to the modern influences of Kasol, often referred to as the 'Amsterdam of India.' Tosh, a tranquil village, appeals to both adventure enthusiasts and those seeking serenity.

Manikaran, renowned for its hot springs and religious significance, draws pilgrims and tourists alike. In essence, Kullu district seamlessly weaves together natural beauty, cultural heritage, and spiritual depth, establishing itself as a destination that caters to various tastes and preferences. Whether one seeks the tranquillity of nature, the exploration of diverse cultures, or a spiritual retreat, the evolving and compelling region of Kullu offers an all-encompassing experience. These emerging tourist destinations are poised to captivate the hearts and imaginations of adventurers from around the world, solidifying Kullu's status as a must-visit destination for travelers seeking a truly enriching journey.

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