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Potential of adventure sports tourism in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Adventure tourism in Himachal Pradesh has emerged out as one of the most important industries and options are made available for tourists to get top quality adventure sports activities. In the recent years it has been observed that there is a lot of potentiality for the development of the adventure tourism and some of its related activities in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh offers a good variety and options for the adventure tourism activities. The destination offers various prominent sports activities related to adventure tourism namely river rafting, camping, trekking, mountaineering, rock climbing, motor cycling, skiing and Heli-skiing. The government has also initiated new marketing strategy for the development of adventure tourism under the guidance and regulation of tourism department. The present paper focuses on the potential of air based Adventure Sports destinations in Himachal Pradesh i.e. Paragliding, Hang Gliding, Hot air ballooning and Zipling and their current operational status. The present study is based on the secondary sources of data collection and most of the research data has been collected from various articles already published in reputed journals, from reference books, official websites of tourism department and Government Journals of tourism etc. Purpose of this study is to bring the adventure sports tourism of Himachal Pradesh on the national map.

Keywords: Adventure tourism, state government, sports activities, destinations, professional

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is a beautiful state having popular tourist destination for Indians, especially for youngsters. This is the land of Gods that have been bestowed with snow capped mountains, fast flowing streams, and valleys, which has a tendency to sink on the ground. Along with the beautiful landscape and scenic beauty, the state also synonymous with adventure sports. Tourists flock in the state each year enjoy the diversity of adventure sports in Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh is an adventure lover's paradise with a nature's bounty in the form of gorgeous mountains and river valleys that will take your breath away. The mesmerizing hills offer a thrilling destination for adventure sports lover. The diverse landscape and difficult terrain is a delight for adrenaline junkies eager to engage in land and water sports. In the lap of Himalayas, Himachal Pradesh surrounded by its flawless beauty has earned fame among adventure junkies for its diverse terrains that provide for performing some exciting activities. Himachal Pradesh is a place of sport and adventure for everyone.

Adventure tourism in Himachal

Tourism in Himachal Pradesh is a major contributor to the state's economy and growth. The Himalayas attracts tourists from all over the world. Hill stations like Shimla, Manali, Dharamshala, Dalhousie, Chamba, Khajjiar, Kullu and Kasauli are popular destinations for both domestic and foreign tourists. Himachal is also known for its adventure tourism sports activities like ice skating in Shimla, paragliding in Bir Billing and Solang Valley, rafting in Kullu, skiing in Manali, boating in Bilaspur, fishing in Tirthan Valley, trekking and horse riding in different parts of the state. Shimla, the state's capital, is home to Asia's only natural ice-skating rink. Spiti Valley in Lahaul and Spiti District situated at an altitude of over 3000 metres with its picturesque landscapes is popular destination for adventure seekers.

Blessed with spectacular and gorgeous mountains and river valleys, Himachal Pradesh is India's outdoor adventure playground. From rock climbing on the deadly terrains of Kinnaur to rappelling on the mountains of Spiti valley to enjoying the treacherous Heli-skiing in Manali, if there is any adventurous activity, it can be shrewdly done in Himachal Pradesh.

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There will be a rapid increase in the adrenaline rush of adventure aficionados once they will step in the heavenly abode of god, Himachal Pradesh. For adventurers, it has always been a great and fascinating experience to enjoy thrilling activities in Himachal Pradesh. Hills of Himachal Pradesh hold the feeling of a fairytale wonderland, but there's another side to it. The captivating hills can thrill and enthrall the groovy backpackers, making Himachal Pradesh a must visit destination for every mountaineer and gliders. River rafting, camping, trekking, mountaineering, rock climbing, campaigning, trekking, motor cycling, motor biking, skiing and Heli-skiing are some of the prominent sports which can be enjoyed here.

Activities like skiing and Heli-skiing can be best enjoyed here rather than anywhere else in India. Himachal Pradesh doesn't disappoint the faint-hearted people as well. Activities like angling and fishing are highly practiced here as the place is home to the world famous trout fishes. Roads of Himachal Pradesh are endless, yet impulsive, offering an amazing opportunity for paddlers and motorcyclist to enjoy the thrill. Trekking is definitely one of the most popular yet affordable adventure activities one can enjoy in Himachal Pradesh. In the present study I will be taking only potential of air based adventure sports activities in Himachal Pradesh i.e. Paragliding, Hang Gliding, Hot air ballooning and Zipling.

Review of literature

Himachal Pradesh is known as the 'Paragliding capital of India'; the towns of Bir and Billing in Kangra district are extremely popular places for paragliding. A fun filled world of its own, Himachal Pradesh is a treat for thrill seekers and adrenaline junkies. The state offers excellent opportunities for enthusiasts to indulge in hair-raising, spine-tingling adventure sports activities. Some of the studies have been conducted to find out the availability and potentiality for the development tourism business in the state of Himachal Pradesh as under:

S. R. Chugh (2012) ^[5] in her study entitled "Tourism Promotion in Himachal Pradesh" has pointed out that tourism has emerged out as an upcoming industry in Himachal Pradesh. Moreover, in this regard a positive image of a tourism industry in the state can be created in the minds of tourists with the help of various promotional techniques.

Jeena Gupta (2015) ^[6] has focused on a number of important factors related to Kullu-Manali, in the Article titled "Tourism in Himachal Pradesh: A Study on Kullu-Manali." The factors discussed are socio economic and political development in the state due to tourism activities, the development of various public utility services like roads, transport services, airports, communication networks and civil amenities etc. The main objective is to know about the facility provided to the tourist and to conduct a SWOT analysis to know about the tourism potential in Himachal Pradesh. The author has also discussed the various problems which occur during tourist's peak season.

Ravi Kumar (2018) ^[8]. In his research paper, Promotion of Adventure Tourism in Himachal Pradesh. Author has described the various aspects and tools related with the promotional activities of adventure tourism.

Dr. Subhash Chandra (2018) ^[3] in his article, Potential of Tourism in Himachal Pradesh, explained the various potentials of the adventure tourism and the other forms of tourism in Himachal Pradesh. Tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh has wide scope to flourish and provide a new direction to the economy of the state.

Ashutosh Sharma & Dr. Praveen Chauhan (2020) ^[9]. In their research paper entitled, 'Role of Hospitality Sector in Promoting Adventure Tourism – Study of Himachal Pradesh', had provided the information related to the present scenarios of the Tourism industry. They have mentioned how adventure tourism is becoming popular day by day and how it has become an important aspect for the hospitality and tourism industry. A growing thirst for adventure and a rapidly growing interest in clean nature are generally considered to be the factors that support regions. With the source of getting adventure tourists, this study focuses on the support and role of hospitality sector in promoting adventure tourism.

Research Objectives

The present study attempts to attain the following objectives

1. To understand the potential of adventure sports tourism in Himachal Pradesh.
2. To identify and highlight preferred adventure sports activities in Himachal Pradesh.
3. To suggest and recommend various ways to promote the adventure sports activities in Himachal Pradesh.

Research Methodology

The present study is based on the secondary sources of data collection and most of the research data has been collected from various articles already published in reputed journals. Moreover, the researcher has also used data from reference books and official websites of tourism department and Government Journals of tourism.

Adventure Sports Destinations in Himachal Pradesh

There are a lot of options for the young and the young at heart for adventure in Himachal Pradesh. Each season offers a new basket of adventurous activities with different levels of challenges. In fact people visit Himachal Pradesh from all corners of the world to participate in the different kinds of adventurous activities like snow skiing, trekking, camping, zorbing, river rafting, horse riding etc. In the present study I will be taking only potential of adventure sports in air in Himachal Pradesh i.e. Paragliding, Hang Gliding, Hot air ballooning and Zipling.

Hang Gliding in Himachal Pradesh

Gliding was first introduced in Bir in 1980. Since then, it has been one of the major attractions of tourists in the area. Hang gliding is a popular sport in which participants must undergo training. The hand gliders take off from Billing (14 km) and land at Bir. Hang Bir- Billing is even listed as one of the most beautiful sites for the sport. Interested people can undergo a training program in the Aero Sports Complex of Bir, which is run by the HTDC. Bir-Billing has been the site of five national and three international hand gliding competitions. Every year, it also organizes annual tournaments. Intkali in Pabbar Valley and Bundla Dhar in Kullu Valley are the famous destinations for hang gliding.

Popular sites for Hang Gliding in Himachal Pradesh

- Biling in Kangra Valley
- Intkali in Pabbar Valley
- Bundla Dhar in Kullu Valley

Paragliding in Himachal Pradesh

Himachal hosted the first Paragliding World Cup in India from 24 to 31 October in 2015. The venue for the paragliding world cup was Bir Billing, which is 70 km from the tourist

town Macleod Ganj, located in the heart of Himachal in Kangra District. Bir Billing is the centre for aero sports in Himachal and considered as best for paragliding.

Himachal Pradesh is famous for paragliding activities which happen at several centers. The lovely scenery and breathtaking landscape in Himachal makes it a perfect backdrop for this daring sport. Paragliding is done in a horizontal orientation on paragliders which are constructed of strong aluminum alloys. This sport gives the experience of flying like an exotic bird.

Famous Destinations for Paragliding in Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh has some excellent and world class destinations for paragliding visited by the adventure lovers worldwide:

Bir Billing - the world's 2nd highest paragliding site

Bir is at an altitude of about 2,080 metres and Billing at an altitude of about 2,600 metres above sea level is regarded as best place for paragliding in India and second best in the world. Bir Billing in Himachal Pradesh is one of the most popular spots for paragliding in India. The beautiful Kangra Valley is a delight for every adventure lovers. Surrounded by mountains, Kangra Valley is regarded as the Paragliding Capital in Himachal Pradesh. The beautiful mountainous landscape and the cooler climate make it an ideal destination for this adventure sport. The scenery is stunning, with snow-capped mountains and green valleys. The conditions are also great for flying, with strong thermals and good wind conditions.

Launching for paragliding requires high altitude like mountain peaks, hill top or a cliff. Offering an enchanting view of the majestic Kangra Valley and the mighty Dhauladhar Range, Bir It organizes National and International Paragliding events every year. The 'Para Gliding Pre World Cup' in Bir Billing, organized by the Tourism and Aviation Department attracts a lot of tourists.

Solang Nala in Kullu Valley

12 km from Manali, Solang Valley is one of the best places for adventure in Himachal Pradesh. Enjoying a beautiful view of glaciers and snow-capped mountains as well as offering some exciting sports, the valley is charming for adventure lovers, families, and even daring couples on honeymoon.

Manali is also known as the adventure hub of India. There are many reasons why paragliding in Manali is such a popular activity. The scenery is simply stunning, with the snow-capped mountains providing a breathtaking backdrop. The experience is also very exhilarating, as you soar through the air with the wind in your face.

But what really sets Manali apart from other paragliding destinations is the level of safety and professionalism. The operators here are extremely experienced and will make sure that you have a safe and enjoyable experience.

The picturesque Kullu Valley is a famous tourist destination offering a variety of adventurous activities, with paragliding being the most anticipated sport. Situated at an elevation of about of 8,135 feet above the sea level.

Bandla Ridge in Bilaspur

Today the state of Himachal Pradesh is playing a lead role in the field of Paragliding, in our country. The credit goes to the State Government especially the department of Tourism, which has played a key role in promotion of Paragliding in the State. What is different here from other flying sites at

other places, is that it gives you almost eight hours of flying time as against 3 to 4 hours maximum at Billing or Manali. Moreover it has vast and safe landing grounds on the bank of Govind Sagar Lake at LUHNU. From training point of view, Bilaspur can be considered the best in whole of Asia. It is laid down in the training manual that training in instability maneuvers during advance pilot course i.e. Dynamic Stall, deep stall, spiral drive, spin recovery, asymmetric tuck, front tuck and deployment of Reserve Parachute, should be carried out over a broad base of water for reasons. For this, there is hardly any place, where there is any huge lake just beside the landing site. Bilaspur has the privilege of having unique combination of Air Sports in one stretch, which is very rare. The magnificent Bandla Ridge at an altitude of about 2,600 feet above the sea level is an excellent launching site for paragliding. It stands tall over the beautiful Bilaspur town and has a vast landing site at Luhne, along the bank of Govind Sagar Lake. The paragliding training offered in Bilaspur is the best training offered in the whole of Asia and has lots of national and international takers.

BijliMahadev in Manali

The majestic Bijli Mahadev is a popular place for paragliding. Situated at an altitude of about 2,460 metres above the sea level with the beautiful Parvati Valley and Kullu Valley on either side, the ridge provides an excellent launching site for paragliding with the landing ground being the Bhunter airstrips. Paragliding over this area while looking down on the serene valley and trying to catch a glimpse of the iconic temple is one to be never missed by any paragliding lover.

Rohtang Pass in Manali

The hub of unforgettable experiences in India brings us to Lahaul and Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh. Bordered by the high mountains of Zaskar ranges, Kinnaur, and the Tibetan Plateau, the remote valley challenges visitors. High-altitude, cold-desert landscape, rivers, lakes, trekking trails, and more, provide ample scope for adventures, unlike nowhere else. The breathtaking Rohtang Pass situated at an elevation of about 3,978 metres above the sea level is an excellent spot for paragliding. It is about 15 km from the beautiful Manali city. Tourists come here in large numbers for paragliding and experiencing an unbelievable view of the snow-capped mountains and peaks from the sky are inexplicable.

The paraglider fly over the Pir Panjal and Dhauladhar mountain ranges of Inner Himalayan region. On high fly one can cover the beautiful snow-capped mountains also lush green meadows to dense forest range. One can also see beautiful mountains like Hanuman Tibba, Deo Tibba, Indrasan while flying over the Pir Panjal and Dhauladhar mountain ranges.

Indru Nag in Dharamshala

One of the finest and amazing sites across the globe to enjoy various aero sports activities, Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh is a heaven for adventure activities. Indru Nag is the take off point for paragliding at Dharamshala. It is situated at a height of 2000 meter from the sea level. It is 4 km far from Dharamshala Main Market. Landing point is 6 km down from the take-off point. The time and duration of the flight are depended on actual weather condition but most of the paragliding trip takes 5 to 15 minutes to reach the landing point. Indrunag is known for its easy and safe take offs.

The place has incredibly smooth and favorable winds, which are needed as you leave contact with the earth and start flying.

The thrilling adventure spot can be done solo by an experienced pilot or by two people, including one licensed pilot. All controls and directions are handled by the pilot. They have the knowledge of air speed, altitude, the wind, clouds, and route.

Lahaul and Spiti

The magnificent Lahaul and Spiti twin valley is located along the Indo-Tibet border. It is a popular spot for paragliding as the mighty Himalayas have the ideal climatic and physio geographic conditions for paragliding. The best season for paragliding at Lahaul and Spiti is between May to October.

Hot Air Ballooning destinations in Himachal Pradesh

Ballooning in Manali-India's honeymoon capital, Manali, is also one of the best places for a hot air balloon ride in India because of its topography. Manali is sandwiched between Pir Panjal and Dhauladhar peaks, giving guests the amazing experience inside the hot air balloon basket while embracing the lush green valleys and the snow-capped Himalayas.

Floating around in the hot air balloon in the beautiful valleys and scenery in Himachal will allow a unique opportunity to experience its beauty from all altitudes. Generally tourists avail of the hot air balloon joy ride which provides a guide along with the Hot Air Balloon so that the ride can be safe and convenient too.

Other Sites popular for Hot Air Balloon Rides in Himachal Pradesh are equally good among the best places to have venture sports in India, balloon ride here is just unbelievable.

- Billing in Kangra Valley

Ziplining in Manali, Himachal Pradesh

There is no shortage of reasons to visit Himachal whatever time of year and ziplining is just one more reason to visit this amazing State. A zipline – similar to a flying fox – is a pulley suspended on a cable above the trees. Basically, you are zipping down the mountains from tree to tree in one awesome adventure. While you are up there on the decks, you'll have the chance to enjoy marvelous Himachal from up high, with striking views of the mighty Mountain Ranges and lakes.

The highest Zip Line in India can be found in Manali. Most of Himachal cities offer a huge variety of adrenaline-pumping zip lining activities to get your heart beating faster. So whether you want to fly like a plane or superman, or just have some near-misses with trees, get ready to feel the air rush past as you zip through these super-fast, super-high zip slides.

Best Places for Ziplining in Himachal Pradesh

- Manali (Highest and best Zipline in India)
- Shimla
- Bir Billing

Conclusion

Adventure tourism activities are becoming very much famous and popular part of the tourism industry nowadays. Adventure tourism in Himachal Pradesh has emerged out as one of the most important industries and options are made available for tourists to get top quality adventure sports activities. It has been observed that the number of participants are increasing every year in case of adventure sports activities. As the previous data suggests, adventure tourism is attracting many new tourists or participants for last two decades. On the other hand, it is not easy or convenient to operate, conduct and deliver services in the Adventure sports activities. A lot of logistics along with various materials/tools/equipment is required as an essential and

important part of the activity. Moreover, the availability of professional Instructors and Trainers is the one of the most important requirement for commencing adventure sports activities. Therefore, it is mandatory to be equipped with the latest technological gazettes and tools, which enhances the safety features at these sites. And the instructors or trainers appointed for operating these activities should be strictly professionals, acquiring good experience of the related sports fields. There is always an element of risk of life or accidents involved in the types of tourism/sports activities, so we must take care of the various safety related aspects for the proper operations of the adventure sports tourism activities.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Keeping in view, it can be said that the present conditions of the adventure sports activities in Himachal Pradesh is good, but can be better in many ways. Of course, the logistics and instructors are most important aspects in this, but to enhance the standards and quality of services, like we see in the foreign countries, the government bodies (Central & State both) needs to take more interest and involvement in Adventure Tourism sector. Government bodies need to create more awareness regarding the government schemes, subsidies, policies related to the adventure tourism amongst the new entrepreneurs, investors and local people. The state government should develop unexplored places for tourism destinations since the state has a lot of tourism potential. More training centre in adventure sports like Atalbihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports Manali, Himachal Pradesh, India should be opened in the state to provide specialized and professional personal.

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