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Adventure Tourism in Bilaspur: A Framework for Assessment and Strategic Development

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Abstract:- This research paper investigates the state of adventure tourism in Himachal Pradesh's Bilaspur district, employing the NIRVANA framework for assessment and strategic development. The assessment and planning process within this framework aims to cultivate a state of perfect peace and happiness akin to "Nirvana" by fostering sustainable development practices. Through a broad analysis of Bilaspur's adventure tourism potential, encompassing Natural Resources and Geography; Infrastructure, Accessibility, and Investment; Risk, Regulation, and Marketing; Visitor Experience Management; Community Engagement; Sustainability and Conservation; collaboration; and monitoring thereof.

Utilizing a combination of destination survey, secondary research, data extraction from published sources, and primary data acquisition from authorities, practitioners, and subject experts of the region this study was analyzed within the specified framework. Findings indicate Bilaspur's rich natural landscapes and existing adventure infrastructure, such as paragliding sites and water sports complexes, position it as a promising adventure tourism destination. However, challenges in investment, risk management, market understanding, and marketing persist. Recommendations include enhancing infrastructure, diversifying investment sources, improving risk management practices, and implementing targeted marketing strategies. The study contributes to the understanding of adventure tourism development, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that respects natural and cultural heritage while promoting sustainable and innovative practices.

Keywords:- Adventure Tourism, Tourism Development, Challenges, Growth Prospects.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adventure tourism is a niche within tourism that according to the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) is a tourist activity that includes physical activity, cultural exchange, or activities in nature (UNWTO, 2014). Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. (2022) also follows the same definition and approves a trip that includes at least two of the following three elements: physical activity, natural

environment, and cultural immersion as Adventure Tourism. Risk-taking, a person's willingness to engage in uncertain acts, is the major highlight of any adventure. Adventure tourism activities are often classified into hard and soft based on the level of intensity and risk involved in performing them. However, risk perception is subjective based on a person's experience, skill set, and comfort with the activity. Hard adventure involves risks such as exposure to extreme weather conditions, rugged terrain, or hazardous environments where the participant has to face challenges such as navigating cliffs, crossing fast-flowing rivers, or ascending high-altitude peaks. Expeditions to caves, deserts, polar regions, and mountaineering are examples of hard adventures. Soft adventures include Hiking on well-maintained trails, guided nature walks, wildlife safaris, sea kayaking in calm waters, snorkeling or scuba diving in sheltered reefs, hot air ballooning, cultural tours, and visits to national parks or scenic landmarks. Activities are also categorized as land-based, air-based, and water-based.

Bilaspur district in the southeastern part of the state of Himachal Pradesh, India, is blessed with the Shivalik range of the Himalayas. Its location on the route to Manali and Lahaul, sharing a boundary with the neighboring state of Punjab, the hilly terrain formed by seven hill ranges, river Satluj, lush green valleys, and serene lakes adds to its potential for tourism activities. Bandla Hill for paragliding and the Govind Sagar Lake for water sports activities contribute to the exceptional adventure tourism offerings in the Bilaspur district.

Tourism benefits a destination and local population in many ways. Gupta, (2015) highlights that the tourism sector in Himachal Pradesh is expanding quickly and has a favorable influence on political, socioeconomic, and job prospects in addition to fostering the growth of public transportation infrastructure like airports and roads. Bisht et al., (2014) suggest that Himachal should concentrate on rural tourism, agri-tourism, and eco-friendly tourism which are the alternate forms of tourism. A study by Gautam, (2016) at Naggar village however proposes that residents and business owners have a positive attitude towards tourism and do not perceive any negative impact. Bilaspur lies on the route to the major tourist destination of Manali. According to Salerno, (2014), the beauty of its landscapes and religious attractions are the major reasons for tourist flow to Kullu-Manali. The literature

on adventure tourism development encompasses various dimensions including motivations, experiences, marketing, and socio-economic impacts.

According to The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and The George Washington University (GW) prepare the Adventure Tourism Development Index (ATDI) that provides valuable insights into the competitiveness of adventure tourism destinations worldwide. The index includes ten pillars-sustainable development, safety and security, health, natural resources, cultural resources, adventure activity resources, entrepreneurship, humanitarian, tourism infrastructure, and adventure image (ATTA & GW, 2020). India stands at 4th after Bhutan, Nepal, and Maldives in South Asia, and 96th in developing countries. India aims to enhance its ATDI rankings (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). ATDI

indexing framework, while developed to rank countries, guides this research in preparing a framework for the assessment of the potential of a destination and strategies for its development.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Assessing adventure tourism potential requires a comprehensive framework that considers various factors influencing the suitability and attractiveness of a destination for adventure tourism activities. A twelve-point framework called NIRVANA is developed conceptually as given in Table 1. It includes various dimensions of adventure and tourism that are crucial for the assessment as well as the development of adventure tourism.

Table 1- NIRVANA Framework

<p>Natural Resources & Geography Natural landscape and unique geographical features</p>	<p>Infrastructure & Investment Adequate adventure tourism infrastructure and investment support</p>	<p>Research and Management of Risk, Regulations, Market, and Marketing Continuous risk assessment Formulating regulatory environment Understanding the market and trends for Effective marketing and promotion</p>
<p>Visitor Experience Management Monitoring service quality and ensuring tourist satisfaction</p>	<p>Alignment Community Engagement Collaboration among Stakeholders</p>	
<p>Nurturing Sustainability and Conservation Minimizing negative impacts, maximizing long-term benefits</p>	<p>Accounting Collaboration, partnership, continuous Monitoring and Evaluation</p>	

A. Natural Resources and Geography

Adventure tourism, as defined, encompasses the appreciation of natural landscapes, cultural immersion, and physical engagement. Giddy (2016) goes further to characterize it as a distinctive form of nature-based tourism and highlights the intrinsic connection between adventure activities and the environment. This underscores the significance of preserving natural resources and landscapes as they serve as the backdrop and playground for adventure tourists. The natural environment is theoretically among the strongest dimensions of adventure tourism Janowski, et al. (2021). Giddy and Webb (2016) shed light on the pivotal role of the environment in driving participation and enriching experiences within adventure tourism. Their findings emphasize the necessity of integrating environmental factors into discussions, planning processes, and policy frameworks for effective adventure tourism management and development strategies. Menon & Kumari (2022) caution that while nature and unique geographical features are magnets for adventure sports enthusiasts, they are also highly susceptible to degradation and require concerted conservation efforts. This underscores the delicate balance destination managers and policymakers must strike between promoting adventure tourism and safeguarding environmental and cultural integrity. Destination managers and policymakers play a crucial role in

identifying and developing suitable locations for adventure activities while ensuring the preservation of environmental and cultural integrity Gartner (1996). Moreover, beyond conservation efforts, Mbaiwa (2005) adds accessibility of these resources is a critical factor in attracting adventure tourists as the presence of diverse and unique natural landscapes is the foundation for adventure tourism activities Beedie et al., (2009).

B. Infrastructure and Investment

The establishment of infrastructure and risk management strategies is called ‘imposition’ by Beedie (2011) suggesting that it might dilute serious leisure into mundane things of tourism. However, when destinations are looking into tourism as an engine of economic growth and prosperity, infrastructure development, and risk management become prerequisites for tourism in the early stage of its development. Adequate infrastructure, including transportation networks, accommodation facilities, and safety measures, is essential for ensuring visitor safety and satisfaction Swarbrooke & Horner (1999). Effective risk management strategies, such as comprehensive safety guidelines, emergency response plans, and training programs for adventure guides, to mitigate potential hazards, and enhance the overall visitor experience. Scholars have highlighted the importance of well-maintained

roads, trails, and visitor centers in tourist access to adventure destinations while ensuring visitor safety Newsome et al. (2012).

The economic impacts of adventure tourism on local economies include job creation, revenue generation, and business opportunities for small-scale enterprises. Public-private partnerships, venture capital funding, and community-based initiatives play a crucial role in financing adventure tourism projects and stimulating economic growth in host communities. Gitau et al. (2023) reported that adventure recreational infrastructure development significantly contributed to rural livelihood. The economic viability of adventure tourism and destinations depends on various factors, including infrastructure development, market demand, and investment opportunities.

C. Research and Management for Risk, Regulation, Market, and Marketing

Risk is the core element of adventure tourism, evidenced by the systematic literature review by Janowski, et al. (2021) where 36 out of 41 studies on adventure included risk and danger. Tourists motivated by risks however also seek safety in adventure activities Donaldson & McKay (2017). Adventure is not risk-free. Risks include physical injury, environmental hazards, and unforeseen emergencies Ballantyne & Pickering, (2013). Continuous monitoring and evaluation of risk management practices are essential to identify areas for improvement and enhance visitor safety. The risk can be avoided through the proper regulatory environment. The regulatory environment plays a crucial role in shaping the development of adventure tourism destinations Murray et al. (2017). New Zealand (2016) makes this clear that adventure activity without registration is an offense, and registration is subject to safety standards and monitoring.

Understanding the market is crucial when marketing adventures Sand & Gross (2019). Mass-market adventure tourists are allured through pavement advertising, shopfront sales, and brochures distributed in bars, hostels, lobbies, and airports, and high-value low-volume tourists through word of mouth and long leads Buckley (2011). With rising levels of disposable income, many emerging economies have shown fast growth over recent years, especially in markets in Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (UNWTO, 2014). As Patterson, (2011) notes healthier, financially well-off, better-educated baby boomers have a greater desire for novelty, escape, and authentic experiences and hence indulge in adventure tourism. Additionally, factors like improved accessibility to remote destinations, advancements in outdoor gear and equipment, and media portrayal of adventure activities contribute to the growth of this sector Buckley (2019). Effective marketing and promotion efforts are essential for attracting adventure tourists to a destination and generating economic benefits for local businesses and communities (Pike, 2008).

D. Visitor Experience Management

Providing high-quality and memorable experiences is fundamental to the success of adventure tourism destinations. Scholars have examined the factors influencing visitor experiences, including service quality, authenticity, and personalization Pearce (2005). Research has also explored innovative approaches to visitor experience management, such as adventure storytelling, immersive technologies, and experiential design. Additionally, studies have investigated the role of visitor feedback, satisfaction surveys, and destination branding in enhancing the overall visitor experience Stepchenkova & Morrison (2008).

E. Alignment

Collaboration among stakeholders, including government agencies, tourism operators, non-profit organizations, and local communities, is essential for successful adventure tourism destinations. Adventure tourism in any area must be developed in consultation with the local community (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). Kristin et al. (2012) highlights the significance of stakeholder collaboration in the early stages of adventure tourism development citing Sproule & Suhandi (1993). They further study the roles of different stakeholders in Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve. The roles should be clear and focused on sustainable planning and development. Engaging local communities, indigenous groups, and relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes fosters sustainable development and ensures mutual benefits for all parties involved as their support and involvement can enhance the authenticity and sustainability of tourism experiences Aref et al. (2020). Community-based tourism initiatives, capacity building, collaborative programs, and cultural preservation efforts contribute to the long-term success and viability of adventure tourism destinations. Farooquee, et al. (2008) studied the socio-cultural impact of adventure (rafting and camping) and argued that tourism needs to be sensitive to local people and culture to be sustainable through stakeholder collaboration.

F. Nurturing Sustainability and Conservation

In nurturing sustainability and conservation efforts, it's imperative to expand our examination beyond the environmental effects of tourism. We must delve into how diverse users perceive and interact with landscapes, recognizing the underlying power dynamics. Common problems like overuse and degradation often stem from current usage patterns. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including promoting responsible behavior, educating users, and enforcing restrictions on detrimental practices. Ultimately, fostering a deeper understanding of these dynamics is essential for promoting long-term sustainability and conservation of natural resources Rickly & Vidon (2017).

G. Accounting

Lundqvist, (2016) cites Tribe, (2010) and others to highlight the importance of monitoring in any strategic planning. Managing change and effective communication is crucial in meeting practical challenges of the future beyond theoretical planning or policy formulations. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks are essential for assessing the effectiveness of adventure tourism development initiatives. Continuous data collection, stakeholder consultations, and feedback mechanisms facilitate evidence-based decision-making and enable stakeholders to track progress, identify challenges, and implement corrective actions to ensure the long-term success of adventure tourism destinations.

Applying this seven-point framework allows destination managers and stakeholders to systematically analyze a location's adventure tourism potential, identify strengths and limitations, and build plans for long-term development and growth in the adventure tourism industry. By taking these factors and their interrelationships into account, destinations can develop a strategic approach to adventure tourism development that maximizes economic benefits while minimizing negative social and environmental impacts, contributing to the destination's long-term viability and competitiveness.

III. AIM

The primary aim of this academic inquiry is to comprehensively examine the potential for adventure tourism in Bilaspur, India. This involves a meticulous analysis of the challenges impeding its growth, the opportunities it presents, and the formulation of strategic initiatives to foster its development.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research follows an exploratory research design. Exploratory research though not very scientific, statistical, and defined, holds the importance of being a preliminary idea and brief outline that guides future detailed works Erickson, (2017). However, this research is anchored within a conceptual framework tailored for the advancement of adventure tourism. A theoretical framework is designed based on the findings, ideas, and theories from previous studies on tourism and adventure tourism. The NIRVANA framework scaffolds how nature, infrastructure, investment, risk management, regulation, market, marketing, visitor experience, collaboration, sustainability, and monitoring are related to tourism development. This serves as the conceptual framework for conducting the present study incorporating the theories into the present context of adventure tourism development in Bilaspur. Varpio, et al. (2020) provide an important understanding of conceptual framework, theoretical framework, and theory in research. A conceptual framework is an overview of ideas and practices that shape the way research is undertaken Lew, (2011).

Government-issued statistics and reports are primary sources for evaluating the existing infrastructure and policy landscape. A comprehensive examination of the region is undertaken through meticulous surveys and analysis. Additionally, engagement with stakeholders from local entities such as the Gobind Sagar Adventure and Water Sports Association, alongside agents and operators operating within the district's adventure tourism sector, professors, and government officials is pursued. The structured open-ended questionnaire is designed as per the framework in both languages -Hindi and English for interaction with the stakeholders. Open-ended interviews or exploratory interviews as they are often called are emphasized in exploratory studies as long as they bring in new ideas Elman, et al. (2020). The first six questions focus on the assessment of attractions and infrastructure, policies, and challenges. Following questions, other themes from the framework include marketing, investment, sustainability, and monitoring growth. Open suggestions beyond the designed set are also welcomed in the end.

Table 2: Structured Questionnaire for Data Collection

No.	Questions
1	What are the natural landscapes, cultural assets, and hidden gems in the Bilaspur district?
2	In your opinion, what are the unique experiences that the Bilaspur district can offer to adventure tourists?
3	What existing infrastructure is available for adventure tourism in the Bilaspur district?
4	What infrastructure is required that should be added and improved for adventure activities?
5	What are your views on the regulatory framework of adventure tourism? Have you faced any challenges due to these rules?
6	What do you perceive as the main challenges or barriers hindering your participation or interest in adventure tourism in Bilaspur?
7	What strategies do you suggest for fostering community-based tourism initiatives in the Bilaspur district?
8	In your opinion, what sustainable practices should be prioritized in adventure tourism development in the Bilaspur district?
9	What are the key risks associated with adventure tourism in Bilaspur district, and how can they be mitigated?
10	What marketing strategy do you think would be most effective in promoting adventure tourism?
11	What is the scenario of investment in adventure tourism in Bilaspur District?
12	Do you think different stakeholders including locals are involved in adventure tourism development decisions in Bilaspur?
13	What measures should be taken to ensure high-quality and memorable experiences for adventure tourists in the Bilaspur district?
14	According to you, how should the success of adventure tourism initiatives in the Bilaspur district be monitored?
15	Any other suggestions or insights that you would like to share?

Responses are gathered until there's no new or novel information found in them to ensure that all relevant information has been captured and repeating responses with no new insight gained are avoided.

V. FINDINGS

The findings of the initial secondary research and primary responses are summarized in table 3

Table 3: A Summary of Findings within NIRVANA Framework

Basis	Current State	Development Measures
NATURE & GEOGRAPHY	<p>Natural Landscapes: Satluj River and Govind Sagar Lake, Bahadurpur Hill, Bandla Hill, and Naina Devi Wildlife Sanctuary</p> <p>Unique Geographic Features: Paragliding site offering landing at a huge water body. Among only three sites in the world suitable for advanced training in paragliding</p> <p>Weather conditions: Suitable wind conditions for long paragliding rides</p>	<p>Facilitation: Identification of Scenic viewpoints and sunset points</p> <p>Beautification: Through the plantation</p> <p>Year around water sports facility: The proposed dam construction at Tassal be completed</p> <p>Conservation: Safeguarding attractions from littering and other activities</p>
INFRASTRUCTURE & INVESTMENT	<p>Adventure Infrastructure: Water Sports Complex at Luhn Water Sports Centre at Koldam Paragliding Site at Bandla Construction of a Jetty in Bilaspur for boating activities</p> <p>Accessibility: Four Lane Highway connectivity, new heliports announced, Railway lines sanctioned</p> <p>Accommodation: Growing trend in accommodation infrastructure Hotels, Homestays, and Government rest houses Growing number of Cafe/Restaurants/Food Outlets</p> <p>Investments: Largely Public Sector</p>	<p>Infrastructure: High-End Accommodation Options are not available, Superstructures that facilitate the visitor experience should be added.</p> <p>Creating Attractions such as Water-based Theme Park, A glass bridge/sky walk</p> <p>Investments: Public, Private, or Public Private Partnership investments are required for creating attractions, infrastructure and superstructure for diversifying experiences. Support local operators in the procurement of pieces of adventure and safety equipment</p>
RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT OF RISK, REGULATION, MARKET, & MARKETING	<p>Risk and Regulations Risks are assessed and regulations, guidelines are also established by concerning authorities through institutions such adventure sports training institutes are established. Ministry of Tourism and Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) issued guidelines on safety Voluntary Adventure Tour Operator (ATO) Registration scheme Associations of every adventure sports Himachal aero sports rules concerning registration, training, equipment, etc. Himachal water sports rules</p> <p>Current Market : Serious Leisure (Adventure sports participants, trainees, and trainer), Transit Tourists (Who utilize wayside amenities en-route Manali and Lahaul), and Religious Visitors to Shri Naina Devi Temple</p> <p>Marketing: event based marketing initiatives such as Adventure Tourism Mela 2024, 31st National Canoe Sprint (Men and Women) 2021, Paragliding Acro Accuracy Cup 2019, Distt. Level Canoe Sprint 2019, Water Sports Training/Basic Course Camps</p>	<p>Climate Change is a major risk for nature and human civilization. Efforts should be aimed at minimizing climate change.</p> <p>Cleanliness: the steps should be taken to ensure cleanliness at the places</p> <p>Tourist Police: in the lines of other states, tourism inspectors should be recruited</p> <p>Sponsor Studies on market demands and trends Tourism students of local colleges can be leveraged for this research by providing them with basic training in research tools and a volunteering opportunity to work on the project.</p> <p>Social media campaigns (huge reach): through state and national tourism handles targeting national and international adventure enthusiasts</p> <p>Audio Video Campaigns: Include local to connect people with the authenticity of the place</p> <p>Wayside Banners/Hoardings on NH: to aware Manali and Lahaul tourists of adventure activities in Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh</p>

<p>VISITOR EXPERIENCE</p>	<p>Amenities for Tourists: Rejuvenation and provision of visitor facilities at Markandey Temple Proposed Hanging Restaurant and Tourist Complex at Mandi-Bharari Junction with ATM, food court, and other basic amenities that will enhance tourists' experience Licensed Guides and Photographers that are registered with Himachal Tourism will help provide a meaningful experience for tourists</p>	<p>Diversify Activities: bring in Experiential Activities, wellness centers, and create attractions. Smart Tools: Using AI, VR, and AR tools digital museum that provides a virtual experience of the submerged city and palace Authentic local experience of food (famous milk cake, fried fish, etc), dance, music, and stay through local participation.</p>
<p>ALIGNMENT</p>	<p>Community members of Jukhala were given vocational Training under ADB to promote local participation and livelihood in and through tourism activities Local Bodies Village level society is formed Adventure and Water Sports Association Bilaspur is registered with Himachal Government Local Spokespersons raising their issues such as sunk opportunity cost of not meeting the tender requirements of the government that are favorable for big businesses only</p>	<p>Inform and Aware local people about tourism through local and traditional mediums of communication Capacity building through Training and guidance: offer free courses in adventure sports for youth Support financially by Incentives and loan grants Promote Collaboration among Stakeholders: Creation of Mega Stakeholder Committee to ensure alignment in actions as per the shared objectives Delegating clear role to every stakeholder involved</p>
<p>SUSTAINABILITY</p>	<p>Conservation of submerged temples and creation of artificial island: a 1500 crore project is sanctioned under Government of India for the restoration with Larsen and Toubro (L&T) Sustainability finds a place in state tourism policy, and national strategy</p>	<p>Sponsor impacts and mitigation studies: invite projects and provide funding for the research on conservation and sustainability Practices: Sustainability in Energy options and resource use in adventure tourism operations</p>
<p>ACCOUNTING</p>	<p>Monitoring: Tourist Statistics Accounting: a record of registered Homestays, Hotels, Bed Capacity, travel agents, guides, restaurants is maintained</p>	<p>Monitor: Effectiveness of Marketing Initiatives and development strategies Socio-Economic and Environmental Impact Assessment</p>

A. Potential for Adventure Tourism

As per the information available on the official website of Bilaspur District, Himachal Pradesh, Bilaspur emerges as a prominent destination for paragliding enthusiasts. Renowned for its advantageous conditions, facilitating up to 8 hours of flying time, Bilaspur is recognized as a premier training ground in Asia. Notably, advanced pilot courses conducted here entail executing intricate manoeuvres such as Dynamic Stall, deep stall, spiral drive, spin recovery, asymmetric tuck, front tuck, and deployment of Reserve Parachute, often performed over a substantial water body for safety considerations. The huge Govind Sagar Lake adjacent to the landing area constitutes a unique proposition, amalgamating various adventure sports activities within a singular locale, which is a rarity elsewhere.

Furthermore, Bilaspur offers a spectrum of adventure activities spanning different risk levels, ranging from low to high. The genesis of this endeavor can be traced back to

retired CRPF Commandant R.P. Gautam's imaginative endeavors, with crucial financial support supplied by Shakti Singh Chandel, former Director of Tourism and Civil Aviation. This support facilitated the establishment of paragliding courses in Bilaspur through the Himachal Aero Adventure Institute. Under the expert guidance of instructors such as Mr. Bruce Mills from New Zealand and Alexi Garisimov from Russia, pilots underwent comprehensive training, marking a significant milestone in the evolution of paragliding within the region.

Adventure activities in Bilaspur are not limited to paragliding; several water sports activities are conducted in Govind Sagar, an artificial lake in the district. Seven Hills, especially Bahadurpur Hill (which receives snowfall), offers a range of activities, including trekking, camping, and wildlife. Shri Naina Devi, a pilgrimage site, receives many religious tourists and has the potential for water-based, community-based, and wildlife-based activities. Here are the activities

offered by the specified operators: The Kahlur Adventures: Trekking, Paragliding, Camping, Water Sports (Govind Sagar Lake, April to September), Boating (Govind Sagar Lake, April to September), Fishing (Govind Sagar Lake, April to September), Birdwatching (Govind Sagar Lake, April to September); Tour My India: Water Sports of Rowing, Canoeing, Kayaking, and Rafting (Govind Sagar Lake, April to September).

The Himachal Pradesh tourism survey submitted to the Ministry of Tourism (Market Research Division) Government of India (2020) studied 10 destinations (Shri Naina Deviji, Naina Devi Bhakra Dam, Bahadurpur Fort, Markandeya, Kahlur Fort, Rattanpur Fort, Laxmi Narayan Mandir, Swarghat, Rukmani Kund, and Talai) of Naina Devi, Bilaspur, and Talai towns of the district and found ratios of 1.80, 1.95, 1.0, 1.0 for overnight visitors (domestic) and same-day visitors

(domestic). The overnight visitor (foreign) and the same-day visitor (foreign), respectively.

The attractions are accessible with road connectivity; the newly built four-lane national highway to Manali has surely amplified the footfall. The government is making efforts to develop and upgrade adventure sports infrastructure. Press Information Bureau, 2022: The Water Sports Centre, the very first of its kind in Himachal Pradesh, was jointly initiated by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) at Kol Dam or the Water Sports Centre at Luhnu under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports (ABVIMAS).

The accommodation options available in the district are given in the table below based on information from a document titled "Hotels and Bed Capacity" published by the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation.

Table 4. Accommodation Units (with bed capacity), Restaurants, Registered Travel Agencies, Photographers, and Tourist Guides in Distt. Bilaspur (Source: Himachal Pradesh Tourism)

Year	NO. OF HOTELS/ GUEST HOUSES & HOME STAY UNITS	NO. OF RESTAURANTS	NO. OF ROOMS						BED CAPACITY	TRAVEL AGENCIES	PHOTOGRAPHERS	TOURIST GUIDES
			SBR	DBR	DOR	FS	TBR	TOTAL				
2022	89	10	46	745	9	75	17	892	1842	50	1	32
2021	88	9	46	721	9	73	16	865	1793	44	1	31
2020	89	7	46	725	8	71	13	863	1835	37	1	31
2019	86	12	43	710	8	67	10	838	1793	35	1	31

Table 4 shows a record of registered hotels, homestays, travel agencies from 2019 to 2022. A positive trend can be noted in infrastructure development. The increase in the number of accommodation options, including hotels, guest houses, and homestay units (from 86 in 2019 to 89 in 2022), along with a rise in bed capacity and room availability, signifies an expanding tourism infrastructure. Besides the commercial hotels and restaurants, the Bilaspur district has 42 government-operated guesthouses.

The presence of essential services like travel agencies, photographers, and tourist guides further supports the district's commitment to enhancing the tourist experience. This data underscores the potential for growth in the tourism sector of Bilaspur, reflecting an ongoing improvement in facilities and services to accommodate an increasing number of visitors. The recently inaugurated National Highway, two proposed railway line projects, and the projected Helipad in nearby locations will provide further prospects for expanding hospitality in the next few years.

The district museum situated in Bilaspur serves as a pivotal endeavor in the preservation of historical legacies. Among the array of revered sites within the region, including the Markandeya, Dholara, Shri Naina Devi, and Lakshmi Narayana Temples, echoes of ancient sacred beliefs are meticulously conserved within contemporary architectural frameworks. Notably, the Markandeya Temple has undergone recent enhancements to its visitor facilities facilitated by the Asian Development Bank (Asian Development Bank, 2017), accentuating efforts towards the preservation and accessibility of cultural heritage sites. Notably, efforts are underway to conserve submerged temples, with a major project sanctioned for the construction of an artificial island sponsored by Larsen & Toubro.

Salasi's story has been captured inside the "Har Gaon ki Kahani" campaign, which is led by the state tourist department. Furthermore, community-operated eateries have been established with governmental backing, empowering self-help groups across the district. Community members from Jukhala received vocational training via institutional channels, fostering skill development and economic empowerment. The inception of the local entity, "Govind Sagar Adventure and

Water Sports Association," exemplifies concerted efforts towards promoting recreational activities within the region. Additionally, the formation of a society by villagers underscores the burgeoning interest and active engagement of the local community in the tourism sector.

Tourism activities abound in every season, catering to tourists' preferences regardless of whether it's the brisk months of winter or the balmy days of summer. During the summer season, as water levels recede, submerged temples evoke awe among visitors, showcasing remnants of a bygone era. Notably, in the State Tourism Policy 2019, the Himachal Government has identified lake tourism in Bilaspur as a promising sector for development. To this end, the government of Himachal Pradesh envisions repurposing artificial reservoirs into tourist hubs, offering a plethora of adventure activities such as watersports, angling, bird watching, and eco-tourism, thereby enriching the tourism landscape of the region. Ongoing infrastructure endeavors, exemplified by the construction of a jetty, reflect a proactive stance toward fostering the development of adventure tourism in the area.

Hosting events such as Adventure Melas, water sports competitions, training camps, and the Paragliding Accuracy Cup serves as a strategic approach to attract tourists and help promote the destination. The burgeoning enthusiasm for adventure sports underscores the potential of places like Bilaspur, which have natural landscapes suitable for such activities and are becoming desirable destinations for domestic and foreign tourists. In addition, training programs supported by institutions such as ABVIMAS and the Ministry of Tourism ensure professional standards among instructors and guides. Safety standards, environmental protection measures, and market surveillance mechanisms are in place to maintain quality and sustainability in tourism.

Table 5 presents an analysis outlining various aspects related to tourism development, focusing on the natural, infrastructural, investment, regulatory, marketing, visitor experience, cooperation, sustainability, and monitoring and evaluation dimensions. In terms of nature and geography, the region boasts natural attractions and unique geographic features, making it an appealing destination. Accessibility to these attractions is facilitated by a well-developed road network and frequent transportation services, while accommodation options and food and beverage points cater to the needs of visitors. Adventure infrastructure, including sites and training centers, adds to the appeal for adventure enthusiasts. However, there are gaps in beautification and conservation efforts, as well as in the involvement of private sector stakeholders and public-private partnerships for investment. Risk management and regulations are addressed through risk assessments, site approvals, and regulatory frameworks, although more comprehensive market research, branding, and marketing activities are needed to promote the destination effectively. Visitor experience management is emphasized through enhancements at religious places and the provision of amenities, but there's a lack of focus on local guides, cultural experiences, and local participation in tourism activities. Efforts towards sustainability and conservation, such as heritage conservation and restoration, require further attention, along with initiatives for environmental sustainability. Cooperation among local bodies and stakeholder associations is highlighted, yet stakeholder involvement in planning and regulations, as well as efforts for local participation in tourism activities, remain limited. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including tourist statistics and infrastructure data, are in place, but there's a need for impact studies and evaluations of policy, plans, and government initiatives to ensure effective tourism management and sustainable development in the region.

Table 5: Assessment of Adventure Tourism Potential and Challenges in Bilaspur

Nature and Geography	Natural attractions and Unique Geographic Features	✓	Market & Marketing	Market Research	✗
	Accessibility to Natural Attractions	✓		Destination Image and Branding	✗
	Beautification & Conservation	✗		Marketing Activities: Event Marketing	✓
Infrastructure	Superstructure & Accessibility: Road network, frequent transportation services	✓	Visitor Experience Manage	Visitor facilities enhancement at religious places	✓
	Accommodation options growing	✓		Local guide, audio-visual experiences, culture	✗

	Food and Beverage points	✓	Cooperation	Amenities: health infrastructure, network, shops	✓
	Adventure Infrastructure: Site, training centers, jetty	✓		Local bodies and stakeholder associations (spokesperson on behalf of locals)	✓
	Adventure Infrastructure: Operators, entrepreneurs	✗		Stakeholder involvement in planning and regulations	✗
Investment	Public Sector	✓	Sustainability & Conservation	Conservation of heritage	✗
	Private Sector/ Public-Private-Partnership	✗		Environment sustainability: resource use/carbon footprints	✗
Risk t & Regulations	Risk Assessment- site approvals	✓		Restoration	✓
	Regulations- registrations, training, & licensing	✓	Monitoring	Tourist statistics, infrastructure data	✓
	Guidelines: Safety, sustainability	✓		Evaluation of policy/plans	✗

Overall, Bilaspur presents a dynamic and evolving tourism landscape, characterized by its natural beauty, adventure offerings, infrastructure development, and community involvement, supported by robust governance efforts and people participation.

VI. CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS

To promote the development of adventure tourism in the region, several challenges and proposals need to be comprehensively addressed. First, identifying scenic viewpoints and sunset points is crucial to providing unforgettable experiences for tourists. Enhancing the tourist experience at Bandla could indeed be achieved by implementing the suggestion of installing a glass bridge or skywalk. Such a structure would provide visitors with a thrilling vantage point to admire the natural beauty surrounding the lake. The panoramic views of the lake, the cricket ground, and the hills would undoubtedly leave a lasting impression on tourists, enticing them to explore and appreciate the area even more. Moreover, the unique perspective offered by a glass bridge or skywalk would likely attract photography enthusiasts and adventure seekers, further boosting tourism in the region. Once, at the Nalwari fair, helicopter rides were offered by the district administration, and the public enthusiastically took part in that. Beautification measures through planting initiatives can further enhance the aesthetics of the area. However, a challenge lies in the availability of upscale accommodation, which necessitates the construction of superstructures to facilitate visitors' experiences.

To capitalize on the natural resources, it's proposed to release water into the lake from dams from January to August, ensuring year-round water adventure sports activities. A proposal for new dam construction in Tassal is also proposed Jagran (2022). Additionally, establishing a water-based theme park and sports arena can diversify the offerings. A proposed lake resort, facilitated through public-sector investments or private-sector partnerships, can elevate the tourism experience.

Marketing initiatives in adventure tourism vary, with some operators targeting adventure tourists directly, while others adopt a more diversified approach by combining adventure activities with other tourism products to appeal to a broader market Alwi et al. (2018). Leveraging social media campaigns targeting adventure enthusiasts and local audio-video campaigns can amplify outreach efforts. Sand & Gross (2019) suggest cross-promotion and online channels, leveraging imagery and social media, as effective for adventure tourism marketing. Guides working for multiple operators facilitate cross-marketing. They cross-market with other operators, equipment stores, and entertainment venues Buckley (2011).

The concept of risk goes from physical science to psychological and social constructs of uncertainty in objectives Haegeli & Pröbstl-Haider (2016). One of the respondents also transcends the global risk of climate change when discussing the risks of adventure tourism in Bilaspur. Addressing climate change concerns and ensuring cleanliness at tourist spots are imperative for sustainable tourism practices. Some forts remain at Bahadurpur, Kahlur, and Tiun, which people rate “not worth it.” The remains of the

submerged temples. Poor or no conservation efforts have resulted in the loss of potential heritage attractions. Initiation of conservation efforts, introducing tourist police, and conducting studies on market demands and trends can enhance safety and market alignment. Diversifying activities to include experiential and wellness centers can attract a broader audience. Mawarni et al. (2022) suggest economies with more ability and success in innovation, a higher health expenditure per capita, and cultural diversity influence how appealing a destination is to adventure travelers. Hence, utilizing smart tools such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) for digital museum experiences and promoting authentic local experiences through food, dance, and music can enrich visitor experiences. It's essential to inform and engage local communities through traditional communication mediums and capacity-building initiatives, offering free courses in adventure sports for youth.

Bilaspur lost its heritage to the construction of the Bhakhra Dam when numerous temples, towns, and heritage sites were submerged in the lake. The restoration of the lost glory was initiated recently when the government announced the construction of an artificial island and the conservation of submerged temples. Vasudev, (2024) reports that the state has sent a ₹1,500 crore proposal to the Centre to restore the submerged temples of Bilaspur and promote religious tourism. This project will prove as a major milestone in conservation.

Furthermore, sponsorship of impacts and mitigation studies can contribute to conservation efforts, while promoting collaboration among stakeholders can ensure alignment towards shared objectives. Regular monitoring and impact assessments of marketing initiatives are necessary to gauge their effectiveness financially and environmentally, thereby fostering sustainable tourism development in the region.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Bilaspur, blessed with natural beauty and unique landscapes, stands poised to become a thriving hub for adventure tourism. The NIRVANA framework underscores the importance of integrating various factors such as nature, infrastructure, risk management, regulation, market dynamics, marketing strategies, visitor experience, sustainability initiatives, community engagement, partnerships, and monitoring mechanisms in the planning, development, and evaluation of adventure tourism endeavors. Leveraging the district's inherent strengths, including its stunning natural landscapes, well-developed infrastructure, and robust safety measures, presents a solid foundation for growth. However, the research also underscores the critical need for investments in key areas, comprehensive market research, and active community involvement to unlock Bilaspur's full potential. To capitalize on its strengths and address identified challenges, Bilaspur must prioritize enhancing infrastructure, diversifying investment sources, implementing effective risk management

strategies, and leveraging innovative marketing approaches. Embracing a balanced approach that honors its natural and cultural heritage while fostering innovation and sustainable practices will position Bilaspur as a premier adventure tourism destination within Himachal Pradesh, offering memorable experiences for visitors while benefiting local communities and the environment alike.

VIII. FUTURE STUDIES

Subsequent investigations should aim to comprehensively comprehend the market demand for adventure tourism in Bilaspur across diverse demographic segments, encompassing both domestic and international tourist cohorts. Understanding their behavior is paramount for the success of the destination. A systematic assessment of potential socio-economic impact is also crucial. Further studies should explore strategies for involving local communities in adventure tourism development emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices in adventure tourism development to preserve the natural environment, biodiversity, and cultural heritage of Bilaspur.

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