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Major assignment

Approach to Cultural Tourism

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1 Description of Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh is a state located in the Northern part of India. The capital of Himachal Pradesh state is Shimla which is one of the most popular tourist destinations in India. Because of its location in the middle of The Himalayas it has breathtaking mountain views. The population of the state is 7,5 million people with a population density of 123 people per square kilometer. Before 800 AD, the region was inhabited by tribes such as Halis, Dasa and Khas but was later taken over by King Shankar Verma of Kashmir. After many years of back-and-forth with Great Britain Himachal Pradesh was finally considered a state of India in 1972. Himachal Pradesh has a fairly well-developed infrastructure that helped with smooth domestic mobility and has also supported the development of tourism traffic into the area. (All About Education, 2020)



As a tourism destination, Himachal Pradesh was known as a summer destination, but it worked on developing diverse tourism products to attract traffic in other seasons in addition to summer and is now known as “a destination for all seasons and all reasons.” There were restrictions that limited movement and tourism in the area till the 19th century. The real boom in tourism traffic to the region happened in the mid-80s and early 90s. As mentioned before, Shimla is the top destination in the region, but some others include Dharamshala, Kullu Valley, Manali and Chamba. The beautiful mountain state is known for its parks, temples, valleys, festivals and trekking trips. It is home to many national parks like the Great Himalayan National Park or Pin Valley National Park. Himachal Pradesh also has many sacred and religious sights like the Hadimba temple.



The state has its own Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation that is responsible for tourism promotion of the area (Himachal Tourism, n.d). The estimated number of domestic tourists to Himachal Pradesh in 2019 was 16 829 231 and the number of foreign tourists in 2019 was 382 876 with a total of 17 202 107 inbound tourists to the region during the year 2019. The number of tourists had a total increase of 4,63% compared to the numbers of 2018. The gender distribution of tourists is highly saturated with male inbound travelers. International tourists are coming to Himachal Pradesh from The U.K., Australia, France, Canada, the USA, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Germany for example. The foreign country which had the most inbound tourists to Himachal Pradesh in 2019 was The U.K. (Himachal Tourism, 2019). 7% of the state’s GDP comes from the tourism sector. (Indian Brand Equity Foundation, 2020)

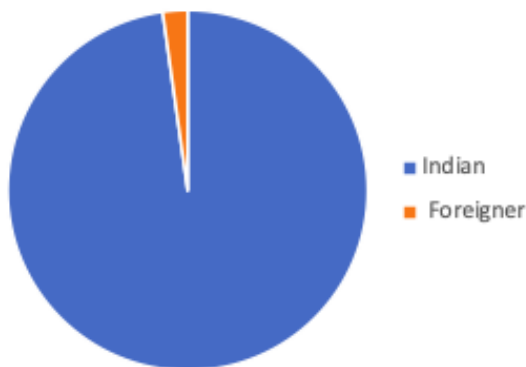


Figure 1 Tourists 2019

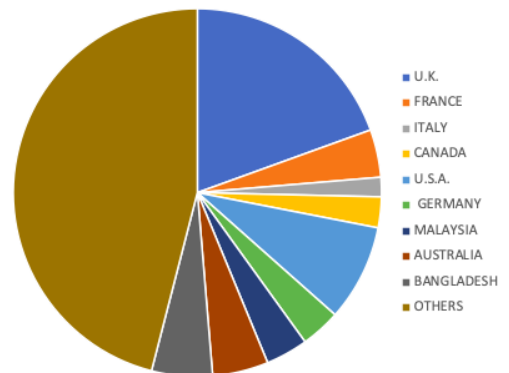


Figure 2 Countries of origin

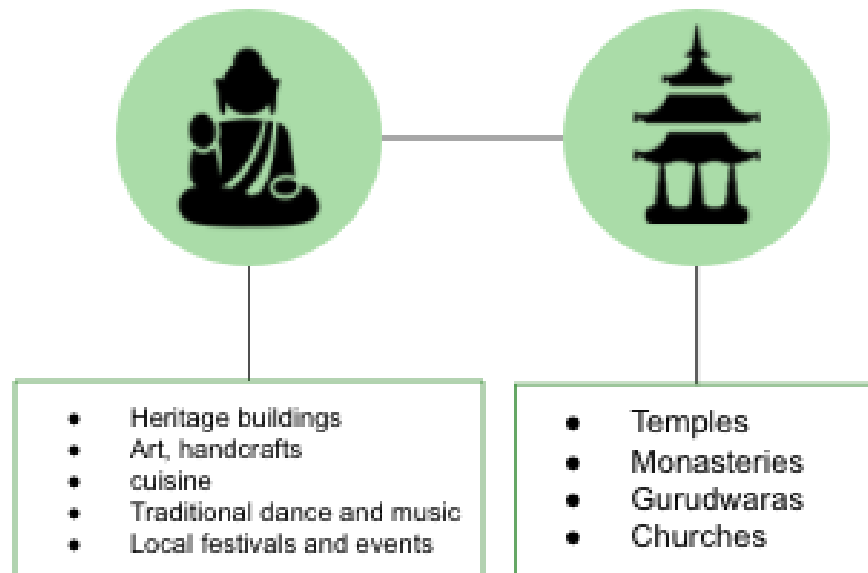
2 The role of culture tourism in Himachal Pradesh



Cultural tourism is all about experiencing the destination through activities, experiences, places that show the culture and the people of that destination in an authentic light and includes historical, cultural and natural resources. In Himachal Pradesh this type of tourism is related to many aspects such as cuisine, architecture, art, religion, cultural landscapes and the everyday life of the people. There is truly a large variety of cultural products in the region. The only type of tourism not necessarily represented in the area in the cultural sector is design. There are handcrafts that are important to the culture, but I would include them to the art category. Cultural tourism is a big part of the tourism sector of Himachal Pradesh. There is a diverse selection of cultural products in the region. The tourism sector in India is very culture orientated in general. (Tour My india, n.d.)



The 2019 Himachal Tourism Policy outlined areas of tourism that will be paid special attention to in the coming years. Cultural and heritage and pilgrimage tourism were a part of the tourism themes that Himachal Tourism wants to promote in the future. The promotion of cultural tangible and intangible products is set to be done by promoting indigenous art, music, dance and cuisine of Himachal Pradesh. Another Short-term strategy is to start conservation of heritage buildings and other architecture. The region is known for its interesting history, architecture, and art but also attracts a significant amount of religious tourism. The policy also states that the promotion of cultural tourism would help indigenous art forms that are being whipped off the map. (The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy, 2019)



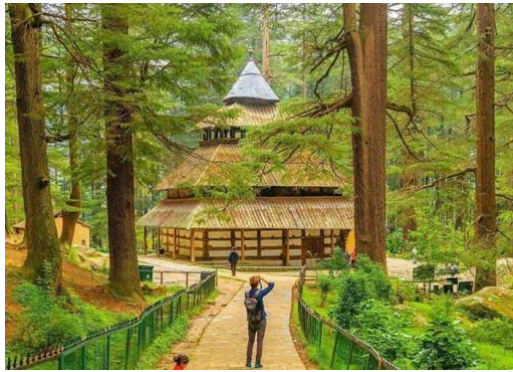
In 2017 heritage tourism objectives were outlined in the Himachal Pradesh Heritage tourism Policy 2017 done by the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department. Some of the objectives include preservation of the culture of the region in a sustainable way, preservation of heritage buildings etc., development of cultural tourism products to diversify the tourism theme and opening up new areas of the state to tourism activities to help push tourism traffic away from the more saturated destinations. (Himachal Pradesh Heritage Tourism Policy, 2017)

Most likely the most notable natural heritage site in Himachal Pradesh would be Great Himalayan National Park as it is on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Trekking is one popular way to see the cultural sites, villages and temples of Himachal Pradesh and as a bonus, tourists get to experience the rich and beautiful ecosystem of the trail. (India Hikes, n.d.) These treks are also a way to grow spiritually and get in touch with oneself. Great Himalayan National Park is not the only trail in the area, others include The British Raj Trail, The Buddhist trail and The Pahaari Trail to name a few. These trails are a part of the cultural landscape of the region and thus important to the cultural tourism sector. (Dissectit, n.d)



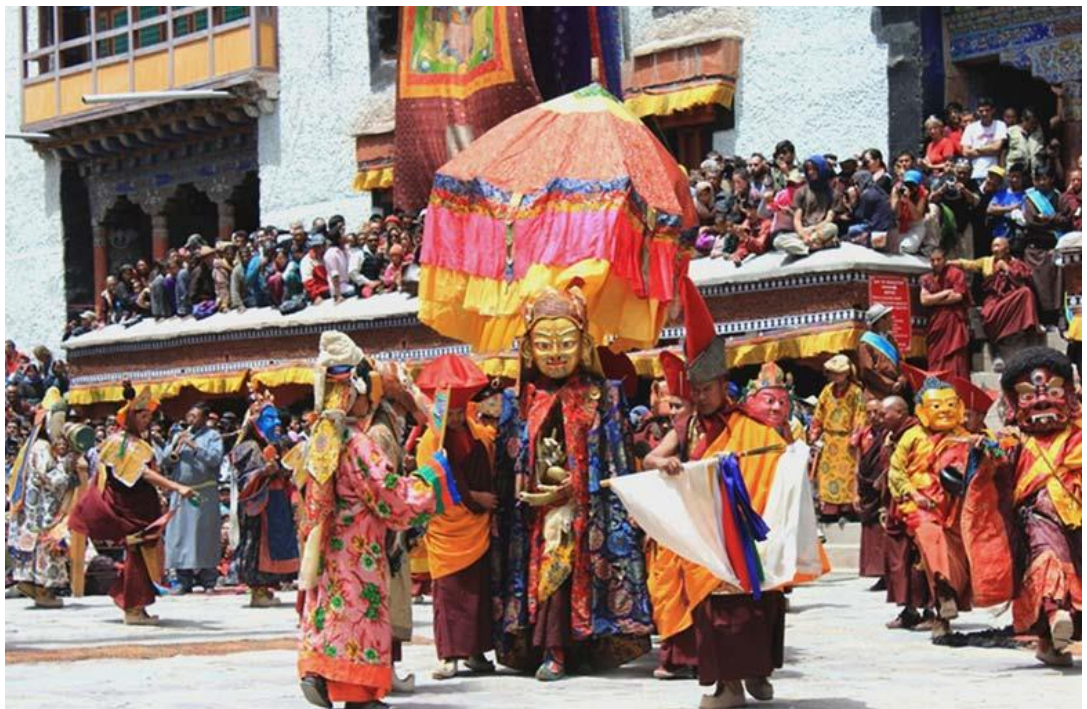
There are 40 monuments that are considered to be of national importance and 327 heritage building in only the Shimla area and 113 on the Mall area. (Himachal Pradesh PCS Free notes, n.d.) Life in Himachal Pradesh villages is surrounded by Temples of gods and goddesses. Most of the tourist attractions in the Himachal Pradesh area are Temples and other architectural places like forts. There are way too many of them to mention them all but here are some. In Shimla some of the most popular cultural attractions are Jakhu hill and temple, Kali Bari Temple, Tara Devi Temple, Christ Church, Himachal State Museum. One notable and local experience tourists can take part in is to go to the Lakka Bazaar market. Here tourists can find locally made products, art and meet the local people. Gaiety Heritage Cultural Complex is a unique attraction in Shimla. Its five 100-year-old beautiful gothic architecture buildings, music and dance events make it a must visit for culture seeking tourists. (Kukraja, 2021) Manali is another popular destination in Himachal Pradesh, and it is full of cultural attractions just like Shimla. Hadmiba Temple definitely being one of the most visited of them. This temple is located in Old Manila

which in itself is a great cultural location. The Himachal Pradesh region is filled with other temples as well like Naina Devi Temple, Jwala Devi Temple all of the temples are great architectural attractions so tourists will have a hard time picking which ones to visit. (Taheem, 2021)



Events, festivals, music, dance, art and cuisine are also a large part of the state's cultural tourism. This region is rich with different festivals and event. Himachali people celebrate in a colourful way with folk dance and music. The region is multireligious with a large Hindu population but also smaller populations of Buddhists and Muslims in the mix. In addition to religious celebrations several tribes have their own festivals. The diverse culture and tradition leave room for different types of festivals. Halda Festival, Kullu Dussehra, Himachal Winter carnival, International Himalayan festival and Losar Festival are examples of festivals in the area. (Tour My india, n.d., Fairs & festivals of Himachal Pradesh) The cuisine in the region is traditional Indian food but each valley in Himachal contributes to the flavors

and the presentation of the food. The culinary tradition was also influenced by Tibetan style. Cooking on a slow flame and heavy usage of yogurt, chickpeas and cardamom are staples in cuisine of the area and they also distinguish the Himachali cuisine from other Indian regions' cuisine. (Tour My India, n.d, Cuisine of Himachal Pradesh) Art and craft is another aspect of cultural tourism in the area. Tibetan markets in Manali, Shimla, Dharamshala and McLeodganj are places where tourists can purchase these products. These products include carpets, blankets, garments, woodwork, metal products, jewelry, and paintings and of course the famous Himachali caps. (Tour My India, n.d., Art and culture of Himachal Pradesh)



3 Description of the most important operators in Himachal Pradesh related to cultural tourism development.

The largest institution within the network of tourism operators and companies is the Ministry of Tourism of the Government of India, especially the Niche Tourism Division. This Division oversees wellness tourism, medical tourism and sustainable tourism among others. The largest tourism agency in India is called "Incredible India" (n.d.). It is an agency created in 2002 that promotes tourism in a centralized way and helps to collect a single site the experiences and places that tourists can visit. It also promotes cultural tourism products and experiences.



The Government of India, under the brand "Incredible India" has suggested numerous projects for the visualization, conservation and care of places of great cultural interest within the tourism sector. One of the most promising projects is the so-called "Adopt a Heritage" (2020) whose function is to develop basic infrastructures to improve the tourist experience in places such as monuments and heritage sites. This project motivates private and public sector institutions to actively participate in the care of these sites and become Monument Mitras thanks to their contribution. We can see that there are several destinations in Himachal Pradesh listed such as the Kangra Fort, the Masrur Temples or the Sapani Fort (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.).



Looking in more detail we find the Tourism Development Corporation of Himachal Pradesh. The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation has acted as an advocate, innovator, and prime agent in promoting domestic and foreign tourism in Himachal Pradesh. They have a wide network of services that is made up of Hotels, Restaurants and Bars. HPTDC hotels have three categories: Heritage, Deluxe and Budget Hotels. HPTDC also operates the Volvo and Deluxe bus fleet to facilitate access for tourists visiting the state.



And finally, we have Himachal Tourism, an agency run by the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation. Himachal Pradesh has always been a summer destination, so this agency is in charge of promoting tourism in the rest of the seasons and thus ending seasonality (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, 2019). They are also responsible for the promotion of sustainable tourism and encourage private sector companies to develop infrastructure that does not affect the current environment and is overseen by the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy (2019).



If we look at the official numbers of the registered accommodation and services given by Himachal Tourism (2019) we can see that it is a region with a lot to offer, and therefore, it is an indicator of high demand.

Accommodation

Hotels	3679
Homestay	2189

Table 1 Accommodation

Services

Travel agencies	3828
Guides	1186
Photographers	1008
Adventures	222

Table 2 Services

4 What makes cultural experience consistent and memorable?

Cultural tourism is a term that combines interest in history, museums, art and festivals, food and drinks, among many others. One of the definitions of cultural tourism can be the one presented by Greg Richards (1996) and says: "cultural tourism is the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather current information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs. These cultural needs can include the solidification of one's own cultural identity, by observing the exotic "other." The recent increase in interest in self-knowledge, personal development and self-fulfillment in Western countries has led to a movement known as the "New Age." This movement is a Western spiritual self-help movement in which followers turn to a variety of different spiritual or religious practices for guidance, but highlight the alienation of Mind,

Body, and Spirit (Gisolf, 2011). Followers of this movement focus on individualization of the knowledge process and deny the group feeling that a conventional religion implies. And when a social movement appears, tourism is affected.

Starting from this base, and from the point of “culture includes the solidification of the cultural identity of each one” (Richards. G, 1996), we can affirm that there are many people who travel for the purpose of self-knowledge. And one of the places with the highest flow of tourists who travel for this reason is the Indian region Himachal Pradesh.



Himachal Pradesh is considered the Land of Gods, and it is the usual residence of the Dalai Lama. This makes it a place with great interest among pilgrims of different religions. In this territory there are six religions that are part of its culture and landscape: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Islam and Jainism. Religion is a segment of culture that is not ephemeral or transitory, meaning, it has always been and will always be present in our societies. This means that tourists' interest in religion remains linear or even increases in certain areas, where religion is mainly represented.

Religious tourism and spiritual tourism are now fast-growing forms of tourism in India. It has two main subgroups: pilgrimage tourists who travel to these sites for spiritual fulfillment, and other tourists, who visit these sites for non-religious purposes to know the culture (Piramanayagam et al., 2020). In this study it is also mentioned that there are 4 types of visitors. Budget pilgrims visit specific sites, and they prefer basic facilities and services. Comfort pilgrims visit the full circuit or a big part of it and travelers can be independent travelers or traveling in a group. Budget

explorers travel independently and prefer to visit some of the historical sites as a quick tour of an itinerary. And finally, high-end explorers are foreign package tourists on a broader itinerary, as well as domestic travelers on a holiday break (Piramanayagam et al., 2020).

According to the study carried out by Collins-Kreiner, N. and K., Sagi-Tueta (2011) to visitors from Dharamsala (capital of Himachal Pradesh) for the University of Haifa, concludes that most visitors, after visiting the region, could sense a change in themselves. Or at least, they anticipated some change in themselves after the visit. Tourists were not considered themselves tourists, but students or pilgrims with the objective of studying religion and its practices. Many stayed more than a year in the territory, so the line from spontaneous tourists to permanent inhabitants is very diffused.

5 Analysis of the cultural sustainability of Himachal Pradesh

The importance of tourism to the cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh is apparent. Local traditions, beliefs and resources are key pillars in the development of sustainability in the region. Usage of already existing resources and social values will reinforce the cultural heritage and will attract culture-seeking tourists. Remembering all aspects of sustainability (social, environmental, economic and cultural) will work together to increase the quality of life, sustainable development and growth of the destination. Himachal Pradesh has two main types of cultural elements to look at ethnic and architectural heritage. In rural areas of Himachal traditional art forms and skills are staying a flote because of the tourism traffic and it is important to note because without these cultural products a part of Himachal's culture would be less rich.

The Sustainability of cultural tourism is definitely an issue to bring to light in Himachal Pradesh. Diversifying trends in the cultural tourism sector give attention to the needed preservation of the resources of the state. This also brings up a point in the promotion of cultural tourism attractions and how it should be done to ensure the sustainability of the destination. In the 2015 journal called *"Exploring Heritage of a Hill state- Himachal Pradesh, in India"* Sharma states that: "tourists do not only come to enjoy but also destroy the resources at the destination." This all encapsulates the need for management, education and development in the sustainability of cultural tourism. The growth in tourism traffic has also been a contributing factor to the increased attention to the cultural heritage and inhabitant cooperation. The current solutions they are trying to come up with are to ensure the growth of tourism in a sustainable manner with possible alternates. One alternative solution is creative tourism in Sharma's opinion. Through their research they have found that creative tourism with the use of cultural resources could be a solution for this destination. This would help open up the tourism product space for new ideas but also enhancing Himachal natives and preserving cultural qualities of the destination at the same time. Creative tourism is defined by UNESCO as "travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, and it provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture". According to Shaman this type of alternative cultural tourism would ensure a more sustainable future for the cultural tourism in Himachal Pradesh for tourists, locals and the destination. (Sharma, 2015)

Because of the increase in visitors Himachal Pradesh needed a better sustainable tourism policy to bring economical development, minimize social inequality, reduce poverty and preserving tangible and intangible heritage, The Sustainable Tourism Development Policy, 2019 gave the tools for this. Specifically interesting from the cultural tourism standpoint is that this policy aims to protect the state's distinctive natural and cultural heritage and to make sure that the long-term prosperity and good quality of life are ensured for the future generations of Himachal Pradesh. (Singh, et al, 2020) The assets to protect in the state include the Himalayas, lakes,

pilgrimage places such as temples, gurudwaras and monasteries, heritage buildings, forts, cultural dance forms and attires, local crafts and cuisine and some well-established commercial destinations. The mission statements of the 2019 sustainable tourism policy are to defend the natural and cultural patrimony, improve the quality of life, improve employment opportunities, enhance the tourism experience and increase innovation. With this policy they are trying to engage vulnerable communities in tourism activities. The Himachal Pradesh tourism policy 2019 aims to accomplish diverse tourism development with a thematic approach, using sustainable intervention to protect the attractions, ensuring tourism benefits the host community, build capacity and providing accessible tourism for all by the year 2029. (The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2019) The government of Himachal Pradesh is prioritizing sustainable tourism development because they want to ensure the growth of the sector in a sustainable manner.

6 Ideas on how to develop cultural tourism in Himachal Pradesh and cultural tourism services that could fit to the area but is not there yet

We have chosen this region because we have seen how the interest in spirituality and cultural tourism to help people know oneself is increasing. Himachal Pradesh has a lot of potential for the development of cultural tourism and in a sustainable way. In the following list we can find the different proposals to develop cultural tourism in Himachal Pradesh:

- Creation of a year-round calendar with events that includes local festivals, traditional sports, dance shows, etc. and its promotion through print (national tourism) and social media (national and international tourism).
- Branding of local products from rural areas. This might help popularize their products and improve the economy of the locals.
- Offer opportunities for interaction with the locals. Promote the “Live Like a Local” experience.

- Collaborate with tourism operators in Europe and America for a better visualization of the region.
- Use of applications/webpages such as TripAdvisor and Zoover. Tour guides, restaurants and hotels could benefit from this collecting quality feedback from the customers.
- Promote the region in travel forums such as Lonely Planet and Civitatis. Thus, potential tourists have the information more at hand and summarized on the same web page.
- Invest in the ICT development of official web pages so that the user experience is better and clearer.
- Maintain a consistent presence on the Internet and an online marketing strategy in social networks. Collaborating with engaging “travel influencers” on blogs and social media. An example would be: @hownototravellikeabasicbitch or @followmeaway.
- Encourage the visitors to share their story and trip on social media tagging official tourism operators, associations, NGO’s and institutions.
- Promotion of UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites. Highlight that the sites are unique to the destination.

7 Conclusion

Himachal Pradesh is a Hill state in northern India that has rich culture and diverse resources. Tourism is playing a very important role in the development of Himachal Pradesh from a social and economic standpoint. With 7% of its GDP coming from the tourism sector, the state is heavily reliant on tourism traffic. Before the COVID-19 pandemic Himachal Pradesh was seeing consistent growth in the tourism sector and this growth will most likely continue after the pandemic as well. Himachal Pradesh is dedicated to tourism development and willing to diversify their offering as we have

seen from their past. Himachal Pradesh is marketing itself as “a destination for all seasons and all reasons” and has a diverse selection of cultural tourism products ranging from architecture, art, cultural landscape to rich cultural life of the people and everything in between. The rich culture of the region needs to be conserved as well as the architectural and natural resources.

Himachal Pradesh is a clear example of a cultural destination that provides first-hand information on the growing phenomenon of Westerners visiting the East for their personal and spiritual fulfillment. With the recent and growing interest of the Western “New Age” movement, Himachal Pradesh may establish itself as a destination for this niche market segment. This movement also favors sustainable tourism and the development of the region, since the tourists who are identified by this trend are sustainability-minded tourists. It is difficult for a destination to be sustainable, if it receives tourism with a tendency to not believe in sustainability. Although there are also groups of non-religious travelers interested in the factors associated with such religious sites, historical attractions, monuments, temple design, landscapes, etc.

The Government of Himachal Pradesh is investing in resources to enhance and make this region visible. The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy (2019) collects information on the tourism products to be promoted. The mission is to create an inclusive and sustainable tourism economy in which the State of Himachal Pradesh is a leading global sustainable tourism destination. They have identified six types of objectives (with their respective strategies) to be able to reach this objective. So, from our point of view, they are on the correct path to become a known cultural and sustainable destination.

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