

North India: A Success Story of a Village Tourism Project

My name is Jeevan Lal Verma, I was born in the village of Sunargaon, which is in the Kanda, Bageshwar District of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand, North India. My family business was in jewellery making, we had a Goldsmith called Sunar, so our village is called Sunargaon. I studied in Inter college Kanda, ITI Training Almora and National Apprenticeship at Scooters India limited Lucknow; after I had finished my studying and life in the city I decided to do social work within my village. I felt called to social work because I had a helping nature, I had always suffered from a lack of money, but my soul told me to serve the local community. I made it my hobby to connect to the whole of the world, so I participated in many training projects, workshops, visits and conferences by the youth leadership and as a social activist.



It was June 1988 when I participated in a workshop where I met some foreign visitors. One was a representative from a volunteer sending organization; he was looking for a host family. The idea was to host overseas volunteers and help them to engage with work camps in rural development, environmental protection, disaster relief and other activities. I was happy to host the international volunteers and accepted the offer.

In August 1988, I hosted eight international volunteers (5 female & 3 male) from different nations. They participated in 15 days home stay, cultural exchange and social & rural development work camps. That was my first experience and it was very successful. My family and the whole community gave the visitors a warm welcome. The community and youth of Kanda participated and my family was very cooperative with hosting the international volunteers, who adjusted very well to our family life. I felt good because the visiting group was very flexible, civilized and had a good sense of humor. It was a valuable exchange because I learnt some skills and increased my knowledge.

As this first experience was such a success more volunteers were sent from the organization. All the visitors had tourist visas and when they came to Sunargoan they appreciated the beauty of their natural surroundings as well as sampling unique Kumoan organic local dishes and exchanging cultural activities. There was also the opportunity to engage in local religious (Hindu) Ceremonies and Festivals. In addition there was practical work such as rural development projects, building construction and craft activities which hugely increased the local villages' social welfare and rural development.



Some of the volunteers suggested that it would be a better idea to invite future volunteers directly so that I could earn money for the community, which previously would have gone to the volunteer organization. Visitors were then able to connect to me directly from places such as the UK, Holland and the USA and I hosted some volunteers every year. Due to lack of marketing skills and adequate communication equipment sometime the number of visitors was not big. However with patience and with new communication equipment I was able to connect to non profit volunteer organizations. I placed an entry detailing this opportunity in an international directory publication. This resulted in more visitors arriving in Sunargoan. At the start of 2000 some of the volunteers published their good experiences in an international magazine.

There has been much interest in our projects at Kanda. Professor T. V. Singh and Prof Shalini Singh of the Centre for Tourism Research and Development in Lucknow studied in Kanda and published a research article on Altruistic Tourism ; 'Another Shade of Sustainable Tourism - The case of Kanda'

In 1999 Brigid McKay, financed by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), of Kathmandu, Nepal wrote an article on Eco-Tourism in Kanda.



Pekka Mustonem (Finland) in 2004 and Eric Coleman (USA) in 2005 both researched here as part of their University work. Many of our visitors are international university students and when they return home they relate the opportunities offered to friends and write articles for their university magazines.

In 2002 we hosted two visitors from Canada television. They were making a TV documentary about remote areas such as Kanda and included the grass root works of our organization ROSE. The news channel of a Canadian broadcasting corporation broadcasted the film.

I participate in international seminars, workshops, training programs, fairs and festivals in India and show photographs of the volunteers and village tourism so people are aware of the opportunities we provide. In 2004 we were able to arrange a computer and connect to the internet.

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