



Mining Potential of Budget Tourist Accommodation in and Around Mandi Town (Kashi of Himalayas) of Himachal Pradesh Amidst & Post Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Mandi town is a localized town in hilly state of Himachal Pradesh, popularly known by different names such as 'Chhoti Kashi' and 'Kashi of Himalayas'. Geographically, the town occupies central position in the state, hence is an important halt destination, travelling enroute to different towns within as well as out of state. Numerous historical tourist attractions within the town also motivate tourists and visitors to stay at Mandi. The present research paper is an attempt to explore the potential of existing budget tourist accommodation available in and around Mandi town. During the present research, various budget tourist accommodation units were investigated with help of personal visits & observations. Owners and managers of budget accommodation units were also interviewed. Moreover, secondary information collected from different sources like websites, magazines and newspapers was also utilized for the current research. After comprehensive research, it was revealed that there are adequate budget accommodation units available in the town. There are approximately 26 hotels, 6 prominent guest / rest houses, 3 home stays, 2 heritage hotels and 2 resorts within and around Mandi town. Alternative accommodation units in the form of Govt. rest houses of HPPWD (Himachal Pradesh Public Works Department) rest house, FRH (Forest Rest House) and IPH (Irrigation and Public Health) rest house (3 in numbers) at Mandi also serve numerous tourists and visitors in a calendar year. Room tariffs of these accommodation units range from Rs-500/- to Rs-3500/- except an increase during celebration of major events in the town. The town is expanding year after year. Thus, a number of such budget accommodation units must be constructed in eco-friendly patterns to serve the mounting number of visitors and tourists, so that the potential of budget accommodation in and around Mandi town of Himachal Pradesh may be magnified amidst & post Covid-19 Pandemic.

Keywords: Accommodation, Home stay, Tourist, Budget, Alternative

JEL Codes: Z30, Z31 Z32, Z33, Z38.

INTRODUCTION

Tourist movements cannot be imagined without provision of accommodation facilities across the world. Moreover, tourist's journeys of longer durations cannot be imagined without budget accommodations. Mandi town popularly known as 'Chhoti Kashi' or 'Kashi of Himalayas' is an important halt station for number of important tourist places namely Kullu, Manali, Keylong, Kaza, Reckong Peo, Leh (Ladakh), Jogindernagar, Baijnath, Palampur Dharamshala, Hamirpur, Rampur and Shimla etc. in the state of Himachal Pradesh (**Figure 1**).

The town is famous for its 80 epic stone temples of Lord Shiva built in Shikhara architectural style including prominent Panchvaktra and Trilokinath temples. Other important tourist attractions include Sunken Garden / Indira Market (1993), Seri Manch, Lakkad Hall of Vijay High School (reconstructed), Tarna Devi Temple, Paddal Ground (Place for official celebration of Shivratri Fair; this year 12-03-2021 to 18-03-2021), Victoria bridge (1877), Adjoining sites Kangnidhaar helipad, Dhangsidhar Mandav nature park, Confluence of river Beas and river Suketi, Vallabh Govt. College, Mandi (Himachal's 1st Govt. College built in 1948), Local markets including Gandhi Chowk, Chohata bazaar, Bhootnath gali, Moti Bazaar, Samkhetar

bazaar Thanehra bazaar, Mangwain, Hospital road market and Jail road market as well as local cuisines including Mandyali dhaam and kachauri etc.

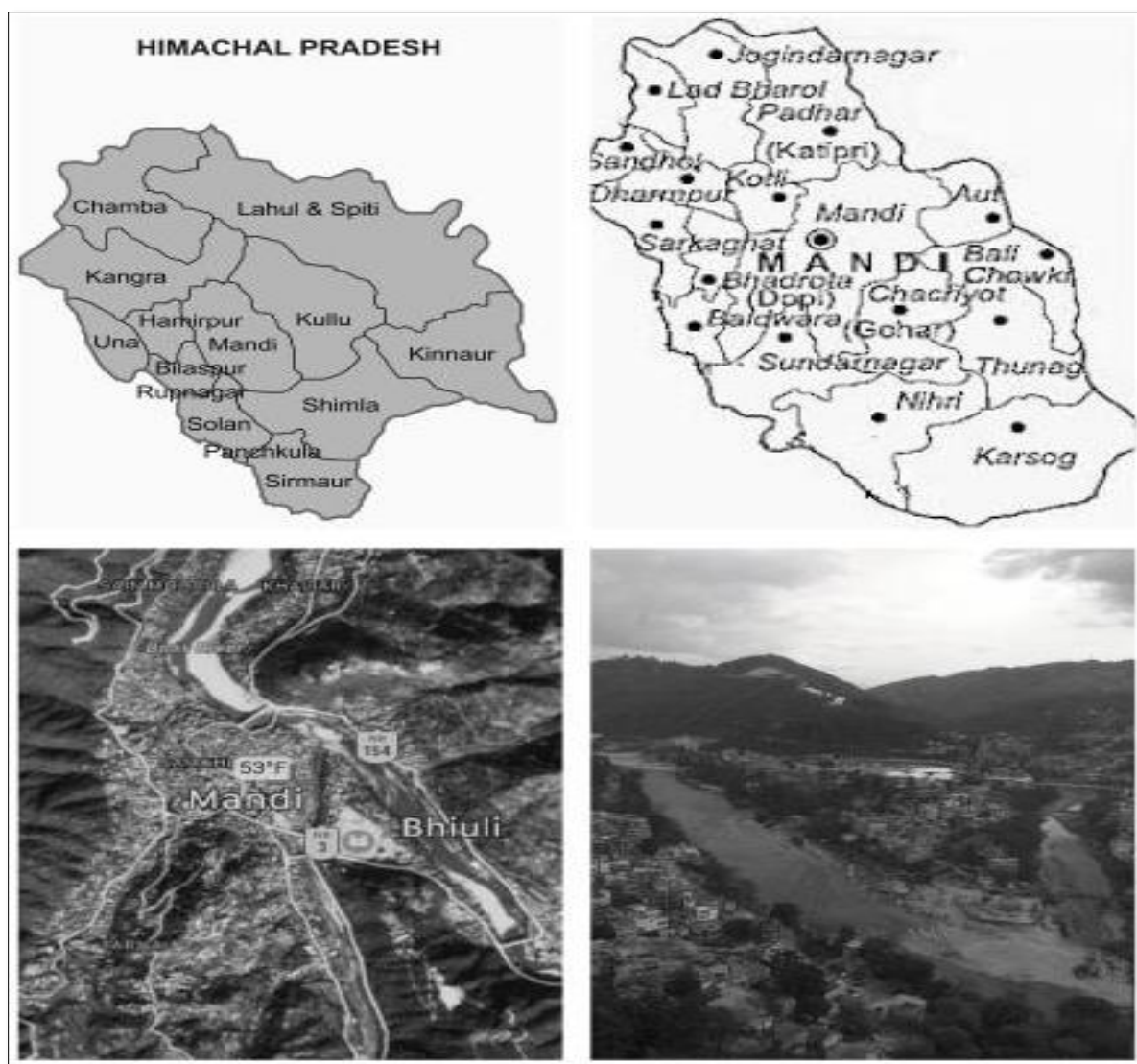


Figure 1. Study Area.

The town occupies central geographical position for different popular tourist spots namely Rewalsar lake, Naina devi temple, Barot valley, Prashar Rishi temple, Dhumavati temple, Janjhli valley, Shikari devi temple karsog valley, Kamrunag lake, Sundernagar, Murari devi temple and many more. Mandi town attracts a number of visitors and tourists each day, because it serves as a halt destination for prominent places also having touristic significance across the state; Hence the existence, construction and development of budget accommodations becomes very important in and around the town. The present research paper is an attempt to explore the potential of budget tourist accommodation in and around Mandi town of Himachal Pradesh. During the research, various accommodation units like home stays, guest houses, hotels, resorts and Govt. rest houses were studied with the help of personal visits, personal observations and interviews of people managing and owning these units. The research findings are discussed ahead in a comprehensive manner after review of concerned literature.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature for the present research study was executed under following sub parts as:

Accommodation: Accommodation refers to variety of places for stay across different parts of the world. It includes various units like guest houses, home stays, bungalows, hotels, motels, resorts, Govt. rest houses and camp sites. Accommodation may refer to a place of temporary lodging [1,2]. Accommodation or lodging refers to the renting of a short-term dwelling. People who travel and stay away from home for more than a day need lodging for sleep, rest, shower, food, safety, shelter from cold temperatures or rain, storage of luggage and access to common household functions. Lodging is a form of the sharing economy. Lodging is done in a hotel, motel, hostel, inn or hostel, a private home (commercial, i.e. a bed and breakfast, a guest house, a vacation rental, or non-commercially, as in certain home stays or in the home of friends), in a tent, caravan/campervan (often on a campsite). Lodgings may be self-catering, whereby no food is provided, but cooking facilities are available. Lodging is offered by an owner of real property or a leasehold estate, including the hotel industry, hospitality industry, real estate investment trusts, and owner-occupancy houses. Lodging can be facilitated by an intermediary such as a travel website [3].

Budget Accommodation: Budget accommodations include different types of accommodation units providing rooms / overnight stays at low prices. It includes guest houses, bungalows, home stays, hotels, resorts and motels etc.

Budget Guest House & Bungalow: Budget guest houses and bungalows are low cost accommodations providing comfortable and homely environment during stays. A guest house is a kind of lodging. In some parts of the world (For example, the Caribbean), guest houses are a type of inexpensive hotel-like lodging. In still others, it is a private home which has been converted for the exclusive use of lodging. The owner usually lives in an entirely separate area within the property and the guest house may serve as a form of lodging business. This type of accommodation presents some benefits such as: personalized attention, healthy and homemade food, quietness and inexpensiveness [4]. A bungalow is a small house or cottage that is either single-storey or has a second storey built into a sloping roof (Usually with dormer windows) and may be surrounded by wide verandas. The first house in England that was classified as a bungalow was built in 1869. In America it was initially used as vacation architecture, and was most popular between 1900 and 1918, especially with the Arts and Crafts movement. The term is derived from the Gujarati bungalow (Meaning "Bengali") and used elliptically to mean "a house in the Bengal style" [5].

Budget Hotel: Budget hotels are commercial buildings providing overnight stay and allied services like food, beverages, laundry services and internet facility etc. during the course of stay at low prices. A hotel is an establishment that provides paid lodging on a short-term basis. Facilities provided inside a hotel room may range from a modest-quality mattress in a small room to large suites with bigger, higher-quality beds, a dresser, a refrigerator and other kitchen facilities, upholstered chairs, a flat screen television, and en-suite bathrooms. Small, lower-priced hotels generally offer only the most basic guest services and facilities contrary to larger, higher-priced hotels that provide additional guest facilities such as a swimming pool, business center (with computers, printers, and other office equipment), childcare, conference and event facilities, tennis or basketball courts, gymnasium, restaurants, day spa, and social function services. Hotel rooms are usually numbered (or named in some smaller hotels and B & B's) to allow guests to identify their room. Some boutique, high-end hotels have custom decorated rooms. Some hotels offer meals as part of a room and board arrangement. In the United Kingdom, a hotel is required by law to serve food and drinks to all guests within certain stated hours. In Japan, capsule hotels provide a tiny room suitable only for sleeping and shared bathroom facilities [6].

Budget Home Stay: Budget home stays refers to registered homes of people with tourism department of the concerned state offering stay with provision of homely amenities and cuisines at low prices. Home stay is a popular form of hospitality and lodging whereby visitors

share a residence with a local of the city to which they are traveling. The length of stay can vary from one night to over a year and can be provided gratis (Gift economy), in exchange for monetary compensation, in exchange for a stay at the guest's property either simultaneously or at another time (home exchange), or in exchange for housekeeping or work on the host's property (Barter economy). Home stays are examples of collaborative consumption and the sharing economy. Farm stays are a type of a home stay, in which the visitor stays on a working farm. The terms of the home stay are generally worked out by the host and guest in advance and can include items such as the type of lodging, length of stay, housekeeping or work required to be performed, curfews, use of utilities and household facilities, food to be provided, and rules related to smoking, drinking, and drugs. Home stays offer several advantages such as exposure to everyday life in another location, opportunities for cultural diplomacy, friendship, intercultural competence, and foreign language practice, local advice, and a lower carbon footprint compared to other types of lodging; however, they may have restrictions such as curfews and work requirements and may not have the same level of comfort, amenities, and privacy as other types of lodging. Independent travelers typically arrange home stays via social networking services. Home stays can also be arranged by academic institutions (for their students that study abroad or participate in student exchange programs) [7].

Budget Resorts: Budget resorts are those establishments that provide accommodation and allied services at low prices. These generally occupy larger area than any standard hotel. A resort is a self-contained commercial establishment that tries to provide most of a vacationer's wants, such as food, drink, lodging, sports, entertainment, and shopping on the premises. The term resort may be used for a hotel property that provides an array of amenities, typically including entertainment and recreational activities. A hotel is frequently a central feature of a resort, such as the Grand Hotel at Mackinac Island, Michigan. Some resorts are also condominium complexes that are timeshares or owed fractionally or wholly owned condominium. A resort is not always a commercial establishment operated by a single company, but in the late 20th century, that sort of facility became more common. In British English, "Resort" means a town which people visit for holidays and days out which usually contains hotels at which such holidaymakers stay for examples Blackpool and Brighton [8].

Budget Accommodation in Mandi Town of Himachal Pradesh: Mandi town of Himachal Pradesh has number of hotels, home stays, guest houses and rest houses that are providing accommodation and allied services at very low prices for the visitors and tourists. Namely these are Standard hotel, Evening Plaza, Hotel Four Seasons, The Regent Palms hotel, Amar guest house, Durga guest house, Panchvati estate and The Raj Mahal Palace etc. [9].

RESEARCH DESIGN

The framework utilized during the present research work was comprised of following sub-parts:

Need of Study: There is need of study because Mandi town of Himachal Pradesh geographically occupies central position in state. The town serves as a halt station while travelling to major tourism destinations not only of Mandi district but also to many other tourism destinations in other districts of the state. Hence, budget tourist accommodations are important in Mandi town. Thus, there was need of study in order to explore the potential of budget tourist accommodations in expanding town.

Scope of Study: The scope of study was in exploration of existing infrastructure of budget tourist accommodations in Mandi town of Himachal Pradesh. The significance and importance of budget accommodations in Mandi town was also assessed.

Objectives of Study: The prime objectives of study were:

- 1) To explore the potential of budget tourist accommodations in and around Mandi town of Himachal Pradesh.
- 2) To suggest measures to develop budget tourist accommodations in and around Mandi town of Himachal Pradesh.

Data Collection: During the present research study both primary data (Obtained through personal visits, personal observations, interviews of managers and owners of different accommodation units) as well as secondary information (Obtained through websites, magazines and organizational records) were utilized.

Research Findings

During the research, it was revealed that there are number of budget accommodation units, which are functional within the periphery of the city. These budget accommodation units are uncategorized hotels, heritage hotels, guest houses, home stays and resorts. The government guest / rest houses & FRH being run by HPPWD, Forest department, Irrigation and Public Health department of state government are also serving the purpose of budget accommodation for visitors as well as tourists. Following table represents the list of varied budget accommodation units at Mandi (Kashi of Himalayas):

From **Table 1**, it is quite evident that there are approximately 26 hotels located within Mandi town and its close proximity. Majority of hotels (14) are located near Indira market or the city center, followed by hotels (9) at Sauli Khad and hotels at RTO (1), Bindrabani (1) and Bijni (1).

Table 1. Hotels in Mandi Town of Himachal Pradesh.

S. No.	Name of Hotel	Address
1.	Hotel Standard	Near Mahamritunjay Temple, Above Indira Market, Mandi
2.	Hotel Evening Plaza	Near Mahamritunjay Temple, Above Indira Market, Mandi
3.	Hotel Grand	Near Mahamritunjay Temple, Above Indira Market, Mandi
4.	Hotel Four Seasons	Behind Narender Book Depot, Above Indira Market, Mandi
5.	The Regent Palms Hotel	Seri Bazaar, above Indira market, Mandi
6.	Hotel Koyal	Thanehra, Near Mahamritunjay temple
7.	Hotel Sangam	Thanehra, Near Mahamritunjay temple
8.	Hotel Partap Palace	Mangwain, Mandi
9.	Hotel Deep Palace	Mangwain, Mandi
10.	Hotel Monal	Mangwain, Mandi
11.	Shiva Hotel	Tarna Devi Hill, Mandi
12.	Hotel Prakul	Palace Colony, Mandi
13.	Bhasker Hotel	Palace Colony, Mandi
14.	Hotel Comfort	Near Skodi Bridge, Palace Colony, Mandi
15.	Hotel Manjul	Sauli Khad, Mandi
16.	Hotel River Bank	Sauli Khad, Mandi
17.	Hotel Highway	Sauli Khad, Mandi
18.	Hotel Chopra Residency	Sauli Khad, Mandi
19.	Hotel Ekant Palace	Sauli Khad, Mandi
20.	Hotel Shingar	Sauli Khad, Mandi
21.	Hotel Paras	Sauli Khad, Mandi
22.	Hotel Dhruv	Sauli Khad, Mandi
23.	Hotel Mandav Valley	Sauli Khad, Mandi
24.	Hotel Shubham	Near RTO, Mandi
25.	Anmol Hotel	Bindrabani, Mandi
26.	Hotel Park View	Bijni, Mandi

From **Table 2**, it is evident that there are only 2 heritage hotels, which are located within Mandi town. These are located at near Seri Bazaar (1) and Samkhetar bazaar (1).

Table 2. Heritage Hotels in Mandi Town of Himachal Pradesh.

S. No.	Name of Heritage Hotel	Address
1.	Hotel Raj Mahal Palace	Above Seri Bazaar, Bhagwan Muhalla, Mandi
2.	Hotel Aryan Banglow	Samkheter Bazaar after Moti Bazaar, Mandi

From **Table 3**, it is evident that there are only 2 prominent resorts located within Mandi town and its close proximity. These are located at Gutkar (1) and Bhiuli (1).

Table 3. Resorts around Mandi Town of Himachal Pradesh.

S. No.	Name of Resort	Address
1.	Visco Resort	Gutkar, Mandi
2.	Munish Resort	Bhiuli, Mandi

From **Table 4**, it is quite evident that there are only 3 home stays that are located within the close proximity of Mandi town. These are located at Gutkar (1), Bhiuli (1) and Sauli khad (1).

Table 4. Home Stays in Mandi Town of Himachal Pradesh.

S. No.	Name of Home Stay	Address
1.	Thakur's Residency, Home Stay	Dudar, Nela, Sauli Khad, Mandi
2.	Panchvati Estate, Home Stay	Bhiuli, Mandi
3.	Shaivy Home Stay	Gutkar, Mandi

From **Table 5**, it is quite evident that there are approximately 9 rest houses located within Mandi town and its close proximity. Majority of them (4) are located at Sauli Khad and remaining are located at Tarna Devi hill (1), Bhiuli (1), Tarna Devi road (1), Purani Mandi (1) and Bijni (1).

Table 5. Guest / Rest Houses in Mandi Town of Himachal Pradesh.

S. No.	Name of Guest / Rest House / HPPWD Rest house / FRH (Forest Rest House) & Sadan	Address
1.	Highway Shikara Guest House	Sauli Khad, Mandi
2.	Amar Guest House	Sauli Khad, Mandi
3.	Shree Hari Guest House	Sauli Khad, Mandi
4.	Durga Guest House	Sauli Khad, Mandi
5.	Vinay Guest House	Tarna Devi Hill, Mandi
6.	Beas / Vipasha Sadan	Bhiuli, Mandi
7.	HPPWD Rest House	Tarna Devi Road Mandi
8.	Forest Rest House (FRH)	Purani Mandi, Mandi
9.	IPH Rest House	Bijni, Parasher Road, Mandi

Therefore, it can be concluded that there are approximately 26 hotels, 9 prominent guest / rest houses, 3 home stays, 2 heritage hotels and 2 resorts within Mandi town and its close proximity. These budget accommodation units are providing basic facilities for the visitors and tourists ranging from rooms, food & beverages, laundry services and restaurant facilities in some of them. The prices of rooms in these accommodation units range from Rs. 500/- to Rs. 3500/- except during any event of state, national or international levels is celebrated in the town. These accommodation units are situated within close proximity of Mandi town or either in the city center, hence local market as well as many prominent places of the town are located at walking distance and are also supported by frequent auto & taxi services. However, there is strong need of reforms in some of hotels and guest houses with respect to infrastructure and services. The Mandi town is expanding year after years, thereby mounting tourist inflow is

indicating towards construction of more budget properties within the town or to its close proximity with provision of better services and economic prices.

SUGGESTION OF MEASURES TO DEVELOP BUDGET TOURIST ACCOMMODATIONS IN AND AROUND MANDI TOWN OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

There are many initiatives that can be worked out to develop budget tourist accommodations in and around Mandi town of Himachal Pradesh. However, few of them are enlisted as follows:

- 1) Existing budget accommodation units must be improvised with better infrastructure and modernized services.
- 2) Local people must establish new budget hotels, resorts and guest houses.
- 3) Government must fund eligible local people for construction of budget accommodation units with subsidized loans.
- 4) DTDO must ensure easy registration of newly constructed accommodation units and also time to time inspection of existing accommodation units.
- 5) People who own houses in Mandi town must offer their least used rooms under home stay scheme with necessary guidelines for the visitors and tourists.
- 6) Proper marketing of existing as well as new budget accommodation units must be ensured at individual as well as at collective levels.
- 7) Various budget accommodation units' owners in and around Mandi town must construct their websites detailing about variety of rooms they offer, empowered with online booking and payment facility.
- 8) Ease of access of these budget accommodation units may be ensured through the use of mobile apps.
- 9) These accommodation units may also be marketed through different tour operators and travel agents like yatra.com, Make My Trip, colors of India, Himalayan Saga etc.
- 10) District Tourism Development Office may also provide information about such budget accommodation units through their official websites, besides HPTDC accommodation units.

CONCLUSION

After comprehensive research, it can be concluded that, Mandi Town (Kashi of Himalayas) of Himachal Pradesh has a good number of budget accommodation units. Currently, there are approximately 26 hotels, 2 heritage hotels, 9 guest / rest houses, 3 home stays and 2 resorts located within Mandi town and its close proximity. Room tariffs of these accommodation units range from Rs-500/- to Rs-3500/- except an increase during celebration of major events in the town. However, there is strong need of construction of new budget accommodations in and around the town. There is also a strong need of linking unused houses by the local residents of the town with home stay scheme, so that ethnic accommodation facilities along with indigenous services may be provided to the visitors and tourists. This will surely develop tourist inflow to Mandi town enhancing prolonged stays and enriching local tourism industry post Covid-19 Pandemic.

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