



# CREATING TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES



**MAHENDERA VERMA**

## **The Lake Resort, Kumaon**

**A**mong the cacophonies of the well-established tourist locations of Kumaon, Naukuchiatal draws a quiet picture. Until recently, it was not even on the itinerary map of the tourists. However, over a period of time, it has

developed itself and now finds a special mention as a place to visit for tranquility and adventurous sports. The Lake Resort in Naukuchiatal, which is situated by the lake side, was started by Mahendra Verma in 1994.



## UNIQUE LOCATION

Naukuchiatal enjoys a unique location. It experiences an European (cold) climate and the Indo-Malayan (warm) climate as well. The area is full of plants and vegetation which not only thrive in cold climate but also in the warm weather. So, as far as natural resources are concerned, Naukuchiatal is very rich and unique.

The Irrigation department has put considerable efforts in improving the quality of the lake water. Regular aeration has improved the quality of the lake water to an extent that it is now potable.



## THE JOURNEY

In the early 90s, Mahendera Verma was making his ends meet by dealing in agricultural products and livestock. He owned a piece of land by the lake side in Naukuchiatal. At that time, tourism in Kumaon was limited to the established locations like Nainital, Almora, Ranikhet, Bhimtal, Mukteshwar, etc. Mahendera sensed an opportunity of tourism in Naukuchiatal in the coming years.

In 1991, Mahendera Verma started the construction of the resort on his own land. Uttarakhand was then a part of Uttar Pradesh. To raise the capital, he took loan from Uttar Pradesh Financial Corporation (UPFC) at a very high rate of interest. For a resort which was just building up and at a location where tourism was in its nascent stage, it was difficult to repay the loan. As a result, Mahendera had to sell a part of his property. Later on, as tourism started developing in that part, the business grew and the resort also started making profits. The resort, which





began with 12 rooms, now has 30.

Mahendera's contribution to the region extends beyond the tourism sector. He channeled his efforts over the past 30 years to building a robust ecosystem with the vision for sustained growth in the region. As an environmentalist, he has invested on multiple conservation projects, including working with rural communities, to plant over a million trees since the early 1980's. Today, his estate is home to more than 140 bird species and migratory birds, with barking deer,

porcupines, wild boar, thar, and leopards as occasional visitors.

He helped generate more than 50 permanent jobs, ensuring those in the nearby villages are provided with an opportunity to engage locally and look after their families. In addition, his business has provided an enabling environment for other complementary small-scale enterprises to flourish such as kayaking, horse riding, nature walks, paragliding, zip lines, zorbing, bird watching amongst others.

## REASON FOR DEVELOPMENT

Naukuchiatal is a quieter location compared to the other tourist spots in Kumaon. Different types of sports activities, such as paragliding, canoeing, zip line, terrain biking, angling can also be undertaken in this area. People, who are in search of a quiet place and those who are looking for adventure tourism, are now heading towards Naukuchiatal. Hence, it is developing fast as an alternate tourist location.

## CHALLENGES MET

Mahendera shares, "At Naukuchiatal, public buses and regular private taxis are not available from the transit station, like Haldwani. Thus, tourists, coming from locations like Delhi or Haryana, find it difficult to reach Naukuchiatal. Power cut is another reason that is holding back Naukuchiatal from realising its full potential. There are frequent power cuts even during the peak tourist season. Traffic management is another issue."

If tourists, who are coming to spend their much-longed holidays, face such problems, they will be hesitant to return again. These issues are putting up a negative image of tourism in this area.





## PROMOTIONAL EFFORTS

The Lake Resort played an important role in advertising and promoting Naukuchiatal. Different events are organised annually by the resort to bring the region into the limelight.

An international documentary film festival is organised in the resort, where some of the best documentaries from all over the world, are showcased. Another such event at the resort is the annual Music Festival where western and classical

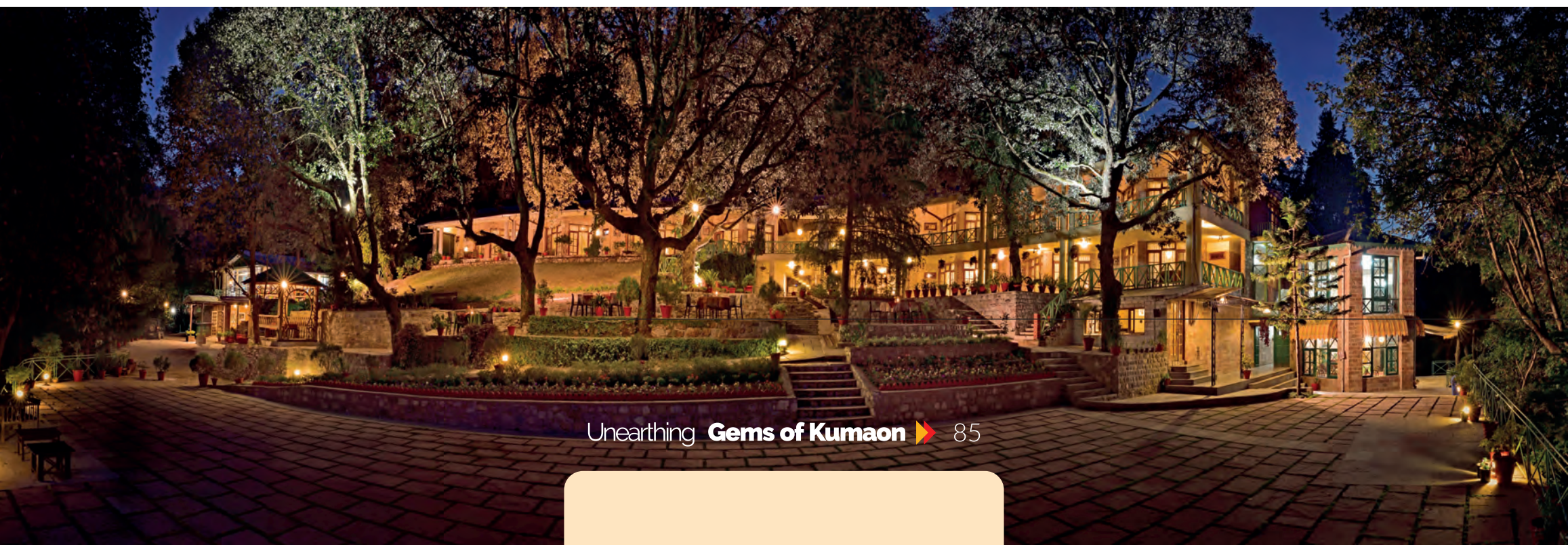
## LOCAL FACTOR

Mahendera encourages the local people to get engaged in tourism-related works like transportation. He supports them to get loans and permits to run taxi services. Today, they are earning well, besides contributing to the development of the area by making the transportation smooth.

Tourism-related activities generate business and create jobs. It has the potential to stop migration and reverse the same. If people find an average source of income at their own home town, they will not hesitate to come back.

## MARKETING – NEED OF THE HOUR

The biggest requirement for the tourism industry is marketing. With the advancement in the information and technology sector, tourism has been pushed a lot. With the help of modern tools, like the internet and mobile phones, it is possible to disseminate information to a large audience in no time. The credit card is also a remarkable development. It has pushed the boundary of the budget. Tourists nowadays don't need to carry cash and if they like a particular location, they can easily extend their stay.





musicians from all over the country are invited to perform. Apart from this, painting workshop is also a regular feature of the resort where painters like Jatin Das and Jatin Hazarika participate.

Mahendera shares, "The main purpose of organising such events is to bring Naukuchiatal in focus. We believe that such type of activities will help promote tourism in the long run. When people are talking about these events, they are actually talking

about Naukuchiatal. When people are visiting the resort to attend these events, they tour the whole area and help in spreading the word."

## SCOPE FOR HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

There are around 300 rooms at Naukuchiatal in hotels and resort combined, which run full house during the peak season. As the

potential of Naukuchiatal is yet to be fully realised, there is a huge scope for the hotel and resort industry. It has the capacity to absorb far more hotels and resorts.

According to Mahendera, tourism is a service industry. Those involved in this industry must treat visitors as their guest. They should leave with a desire to come back again with their family and friends. This is the only success mantra of the tourism sector.



## SUPPORT OF THE FAMILY

In making the Lake Resort in Naukuchiatal, Mahendera's wife, Poonam Verma, supported him throughout his journey. His son, Arjun Verma, graduated from England in International Hospitality and Tourism Management. He is now helping his father with modern ideas and also initiating changes at the resort as per international standards.

Mahendera has a daughter, who after completing her Masters in International Relations and Economics from England, is now working with the UK government in Nepal.