

# Development of Ecotourism in Biodiversity Rich Religious Places of Chitrakoot

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## Introduction

Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. It means responsible travel to natural areas conserving the environment and improving the well-being of the local people. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds for ecological conservation to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. Several university programs use this description as the working definition of ecotourism.

Generally, ecotourism deals with interaction with biotic components of the natural environments. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where Flora Fauna and Cultural Heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists an insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

Chitrakoot means the 'Hill of many wonders' is indeed a gift of nature and the gods and located on the banks of river Paisuni (Mandikini) and falls in the northern Vindhyan range of mountains spread over the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The Chitrakoot region is included in the District Chitrakoot of Uttar Pradesh and the District Satna of Madhya Pradesh. Chitrakoot Parvat Mala includes

Kamad Giri, Hanumaan Dhara, Lakshman Pahari, and Devangana are famous Religious Mountains. It is a town of religious, cultural, historical and archaeological importance, situated in the Bundelkhand region. The major part of Chitrakoot is situated in the northern region of Satna district of Madhya Pradesh and surrounded on north, northwest and northeast by Karwi (Chitrakoot) district of Uttar Pradesh and west by Panna District of Madhya Pradesh. It lies between 80° 52' to 80° 73' N latitude and 25° 10' to 25° 52' E longitude, covering an area of 1584 sq km. The general topography is hilly, precipitation and undulating cut off by numerous rivers and rivulets. Mandakini, Chakara and Jhuri rivers drain the region.

The Mandakini (a offshoots of the Ganga) is Holy River that is also known as Payasuni. The forest of the Chitrakoot predominantly consists of tropical dry mixed deciduous type. The climate of the Chitrakoot is dry and the maximum temperature goes up to 49-50°C in the month of May and minimum up to 5°C in the month of January. Chitrakoot is a one of the famous place of pilgrimage of Hindus in India and surrounded by lush green hills of legendary Vindhya range. Since times immemorial, it is famous for its religious importance, elegant environment and spiritual peace. Chitrakoot is also well known for its beautiful hill ranges, historical caves, perennial streams and varied flora and fauna regarded as tourist cum religious place. Therefore, the Chitrakoot has been sacred place of worship for sages and hermits since antiquity. Chitrakoot's spiritual legacy stretches back to legendary ages. It was in these deep forests that Rama, Sita and his brother Lakshmana spent eleven and half years of their fourteen years of exile. The great sage Atri, Sati Anusuya, Dattatreya, Maharshi Markandeya, Sarbhanga, Sutikshna and various other sages, seers, devotees and thinkers meditated; and here the principal trinity of the Hindu pantheon, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, took their incarnations.

It has been the centre of devotion, dedication and faith of devout persons of Lord Rama. Lord Rama, the most dignified and the best among the men, excels as an ideal role model in every respect and remains a

timeless source of inspiration for mankind since an eon.

The first known mention of the place is in the Valmiki Ramayana, which is believed to be the first ever Mahakavya (epic) composed by the first ever poet. As Valmiki is said to be contemporaneous with (or even earlier than) Rama and is believed to have composed the Ramayana before the birth of Rama, the antiquity of its fame can well be gauged.

Valmiki speaks of Chitrakoot as an eminently holy place inhabited by the great sages, abounding in monkeys, bears and various other kinds of fauna and flora. Both the sages Bharadwaja and Valmiki speak of Chitrakoot in glowing terms and advise Rama to make it his abode during the period of his exile. Lord Rama himself admits this bewitching impact of this place. In the 'Ramopakhyana' and descriptions of holy places at various places in the Mahabharata, Chitrakoot finds a favoured place. In 'Adhyatma Ramayana' and 'Brihat Ramayana' testify to the throbbing spiritually and natural beauty of Chitrakoot. Various Sanskrit and Hindi poets also have paid similar tributes to Chitrakoot. Mahakavi Kalidas has described this place beautifully in his epic 'Raghuvansha'. He was so much impressed with its charms that he made Chitrakoot (which he calls Ramgiri because of its time-honoured associations with lord Rama) the place of exile of his yaksha in Meghdoot.

Tulsidas, the saint-poet of Hindi has spoken very reverently of this place in all his major works-Ramcharit Manas, Kavitawali, Dohawali and Vinaya Patrika. The last-mentioned work contains many verses which show a deep personal bond between Tulsidas and Chitrakoot. He spent quite some part of his life here worshipping Rama and craving his darshan. It was here that he had what he must have considered the crowning moment of his achievements i.e. the darshan of his beloved deity Lord Ram at the intercession of Hanumanji. His eminent friend, the noted Hindi poet Rahim (i.e. Abdur Rahim Khankhana, the soldier-statesman-saint-scholar-poet who was among the Nav-Ratnas of Akbar) also spent some time here, when he had fallen from favour

with Akbar's son Emperor Jahangir. Kamadgiri, the original Chitrakoot, is a place of prime religious significance. A forested hill, it is skirted all along its base by a chain of temples and is venerated today as the holy embodiment of Rama. Lord Rama is also known as Kamadnathji which literally means fulfiller of all wishes. The Kamadgiri (Chitrakoot hill) is a sacred grove, it is clearly mentioned in Ramcharit Manas as — all the forests of Gods existing in the universe were filled with envy at the sight of Rama's hill forest. This holy place has provided spiritual inspiration and energy to many sages and dignitaries and changed their attitude of life like Maharishi Valmiki, Goswami Tulsidas, Abdul Raheem Khankhana, Tansen and even Aurangzeb etc.

## Biodiversity in Ancient Literature

In ancient time, Chitrakoot was very rich in biodiversity. Maharishi Valmiki and Goswami Tulsidas illustrated a comprehensive account of biodiversity in their epics Ramayana and Ramcharit Manas respectively. According to Valmiki Ramayana, Chitrakoot is a beautiful and sacred place where different types of herbs, shrubs, trees and climbers bearing variety of fruits, flowers and roots are available. The richness of biodiversity of Chitrakoot is described four chapters of Ramayana. Names of several trees found on Kamadgiri are also mentioned. He has also described varied fauna of Chitrakoot. He has mentioned the names of different variety of birds, animals and movements of elephants and deers in the forests. Goswami Tulsidas has also described similarly the beauty and diversity of flora and fauna of Chitrakoot in Ramcharit Manas — Chitrakoot hill has luxuriant vegetation of herbs, shrubs, trees and climbers. He has also mentioned the names of different variety of birds like blue jays, koels, parrots, cuckoos, kakavas, partridges, and animals like elephants, lions, monkeys, boars and deer's etc. Chitrakoot was very rich in respect of medicinal plants too. It is mentioned in Valmiki Ramayana that “Thousands of herbs of this Chitrakoot Mountain, glittering with their lovely light, are sparkling like points of fire”.

## Present Biodiversity of Chitrakoot

### A. Floral Diversity

The Chitrakoot forest survey was carried out by the author during the year 2007 and it is found that there are over 745 species of flowering plants excluding cultivated and ornamental plants found in Chitrakoot (Sikarwar, 2014). These 745 species belongs to 473 genera and 118 families. The dicots represent 93 families, 362 genera and 575 species and monocots represent 25 families, 111 genera and 170 species (Table-1).

**Table-1 Distribution of family, Genera and species.**

Taxa	Dicots	Monocots	Total
Families	93	25	118
Genera	362	111	473
Species	575	170	745

The life form analysis shows that out of 745 species, trees are 119, shrubs are 73, climbers are 77 and herbs are 474 (Fig.1).

The flower colour analysis reveals that out of 743 species, 212 plants have yellow flowers, 234 have white flowers, 65 have purple flowers, 43 have blue flowers, 39 have pink flowers, 31 have red flowers, 6 have orange flowers, 91 green flowers and one has black flower (Fig.2).

The analyses of families show that, the 10 dominant families having maximum number of species of Chitrakoot region are Fabaceae (79), Poaceae (74), Asteraceae (45), Euphorbiaceae (32), Cyperaceae (28), Acanthaceae (26), Convolvulaceae (24), Scrophulariaceae (20), Malvaceae (19), Mimosaceae and Cucurbitaceae (16 each) (Fig.3).

Besides, Rubiaceae & Lamiaceae have 15 species each, Tiliaceae & Celastraceae have 14 species each, Asclepiadaceae have 13, Moraceae have 12, Solanaceae & Amaranthaceae have 11 each, Boraginaceae and Verbenaceae have 10 each, Commelinaceae have 9, Apocynaceae have 8,

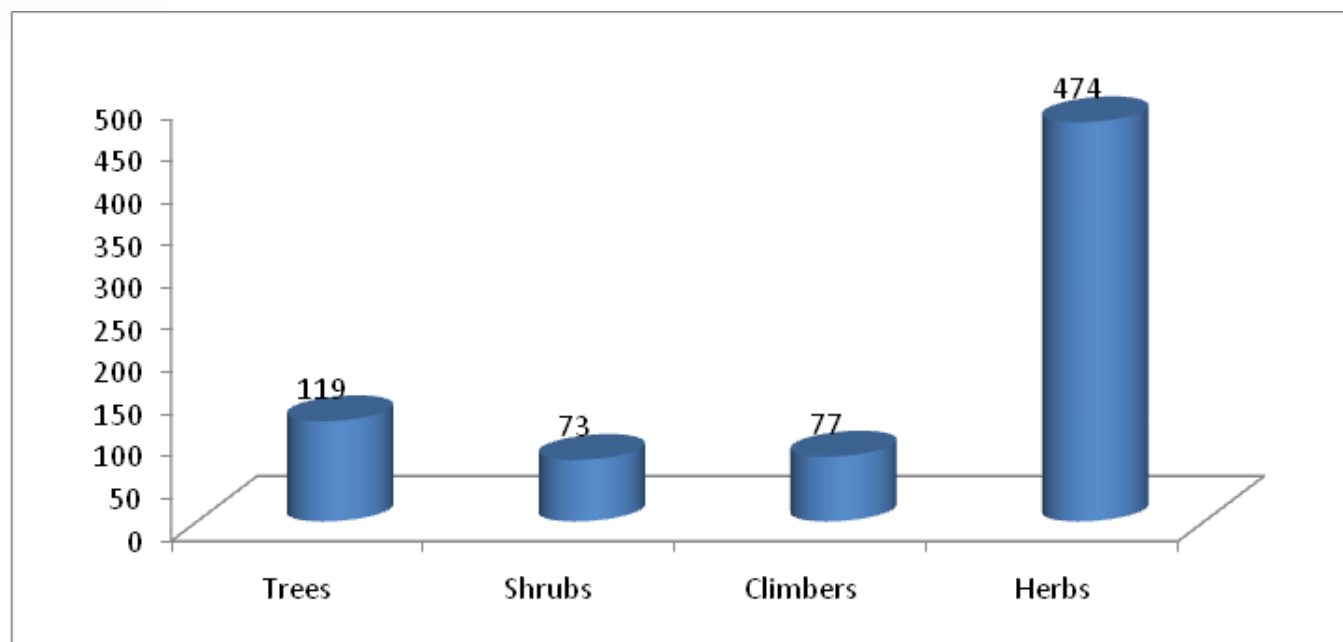


Fig.1 : Life form analysis of the plants

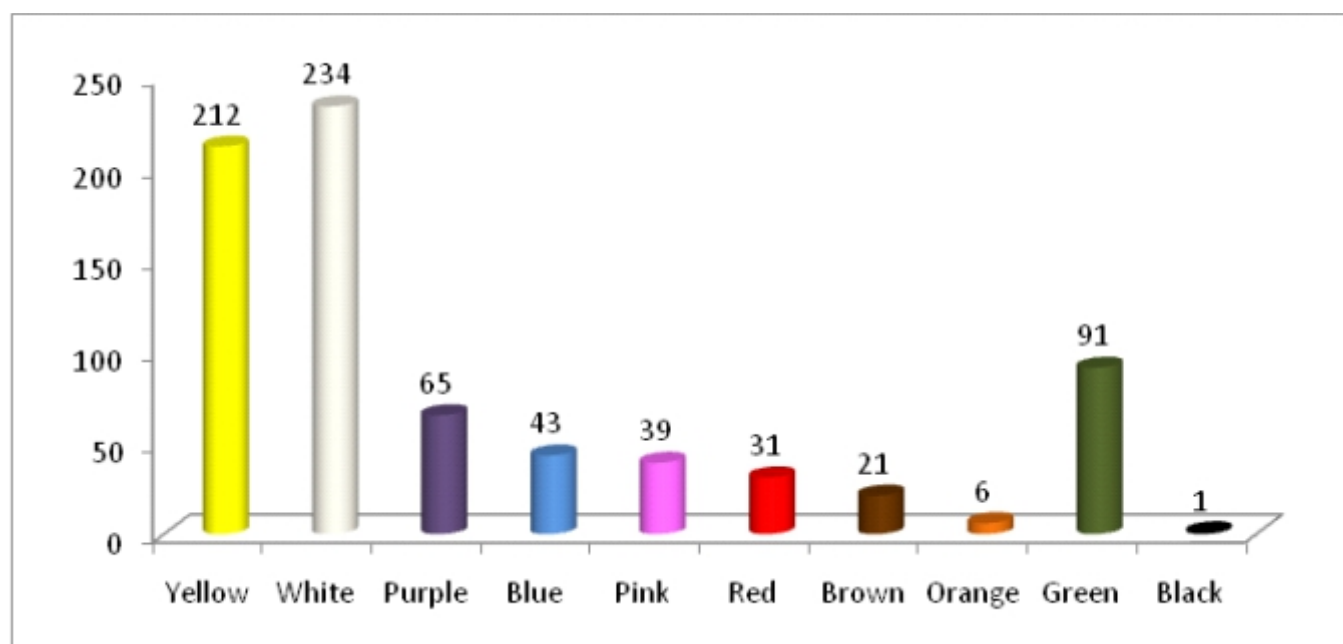


Fig. 2 : Flowers colour analysis of the plants



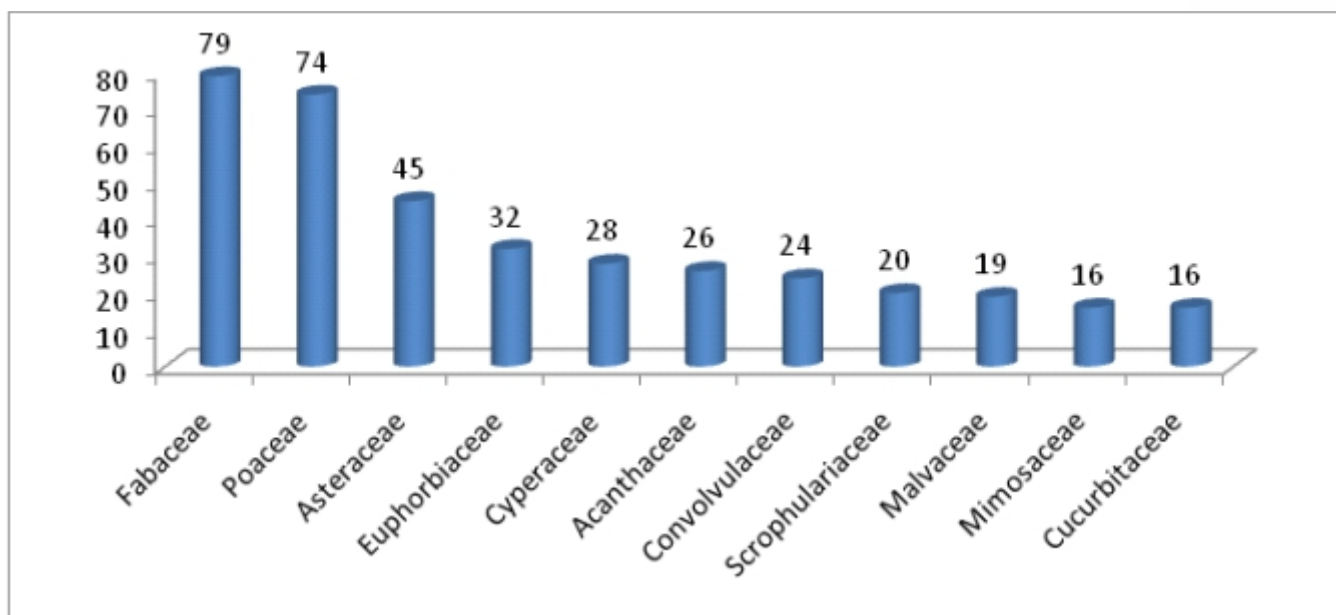


Fig. 3 : 10 dominant families of the area

Liliaceae & Araceae 7 each, Rhamnaceae, Vitaceae, Combretaceae, Gentianaceae & Orchidaceae have 6 each; Menispermaceae, Sterculiaceae, Lythraceae & Dioscoreaceae have 5 each; Oxalidaceae, Rutaceae, Celastraceae, Anacardiaceae, Onagraceae, Campanulaceae, Polygonaceae and Gingiberaceae have 4 each. Apart from this 16 families have 3 species each, 18 have 2 species each and 42 families have 1 species each.

The Generic analysis show that Indigofera L. and Ipomoea L. are the dominant genus having 11 each, followed by Ficus L. & Cyperus L. have 10 each, Euphorbia L. have 9, Crotalaria L. 7, Corchorus L., Grewia L., Alysicarpus Desv., Senna Mill., Blumea DC., Justicia L., Phyllanthus L. & Fimbristylis Vahl have 6 species each; Sida L., Ziziphus Mill., Desmodium Desv., Acacia Mill., Dioscorea L., Commelina L. & Eragrostis Wolf have 5 species each; Butea Koenig ex Roxb., Tephrosia Pers., Terminalia L., Ludwigia L., Hedyotis L., Solanum L. and Kyllinga Rottb. have 4 species each. Besides 25 genera have 3 species each, 80 have 2 species each and remaining 339 genera representing single species each.

## B. Faunal Diversity

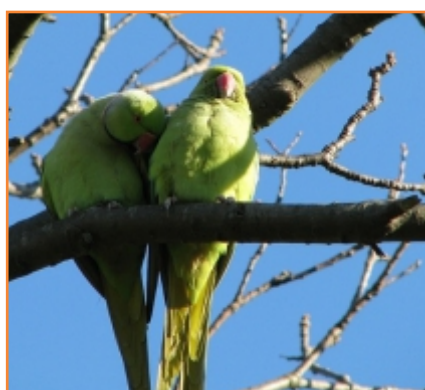
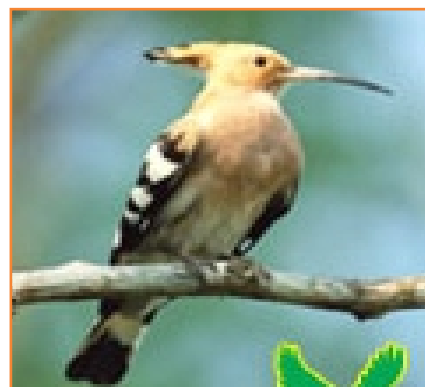
A large number of wild animals are found in Chitrakoot forests such as Tiger (*Felis tigris*), Panther (*Panthera pardus*), Spotted deer (*Cervus axis*), Indian gazelle (*Gazella benentii*), Deer (*Axis axis*), Sambhar (*Cervus unicolor*), Antelope (*Cervus duvoursali*), Hyaena (*Hyaena striata*), Jackal (*Canis aureus*) Fox (*Vulpus vulpus*), Hare (*Herpestis auropunctatus*), Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*), Wild pig (*Sus scrofa*), Blue Bull (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), Porcupine (*Hystrix indica*) Black faced Monkey (*Presbytis entellus*) Red faced Monkey (*Macaca mulatta*), Indian mongoose (*Herpestis auropunctatus*) and Squirrel (*Scillrus palmarium*) etc.

## Amphibians and Reptiles

Common frog (*Rana tigrina*), Toad (*Bufo melanostictus*), Tree frog (*Hyla hyla*), Common Karait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), Common earth snake (*Eryx johnii*), Garden lizard (*Calotes versicolor*), Monitor lizard (*Varanua monitor*), Land tortoise (*Testudo elegans*), Cobra (*Naja naja*), Common pond snake (*Tropidonotus piscator*) and Common green tree snake (*Dryophis*) etc.



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## Birds

Peacock (*Pavo cristatus*), Koel (*Eudynamus scolopacea*), Redvented Bulbul (*Pycynotus cafer*), Common Myana (*Acridotheres tristis*), Owl (*Bubo bubu*), Pandubbi (*Podiceps ruicollis*), Crow Cattle egret (*Bubulacus ibis*), Cotton teal (*Nettapus coromandelianus*), Grey quail (*Coturnix coturnix*), Pigeon (*Columba livia*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Neelkanth (*Coriacias benghalensis*), Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Papiha (*Clamator jacabinus*), Parrot (*Psittacula krameri*), Crane (*Grus antegone*), (*Upupa epops*) Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), Titihari (*Vanellus indicus*), Weaver bird (*Ploceus philippinus*) etc.

## Fishes

The most commonly found fishes are Katla, Rohu, Saur, Chitra, Margal and Kalbasu etc.

## Religious Places

The religious places which are rich in biodiversity can be developed as tourist places for more attraction of pilgrimage.

## Kamadgiri Hill

Kamadgiri is the main hill which has highest peak in Chitrakoot region and covering an area of 5 sq. km. According to Ramayana Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman resided on this hill during 14 year of exile. The foot prints of Lord Ram and Bharat are still marked on the stones. The pilgrims perform parikrama of this entire hill without shoes with devotion, dedication and faith to Lord Ram. The Kamadgiri hill is a sacred grove, as clearly mentioned in ShriRamcharitmanas as “all the forest of Gods



existing in this universe were filled with envy at the sight of Rama's hill forest. The Kamadgiri hill is also called Ramgiri and has also been residing place of Yaksha (ademi God) of Kalidas's Meghdoot. The Yaksha sent a message through Megh (Cloud) to his beloved wife who was living at Alkapuri and Alkapuri was situated near Himalaya. Kuber (The God of Wealth and King of Alkapuri) expatriated Yaksha who was a servant of Kuber and not being regular to his duty. The richness of Kamadgiri hill has been described by Adikavi Valmiki in Ramayana. The name of 27 tree species has been described by Adikavi Valmiki. Out of which 14 species has been lost.

## Mandakini River

Mandakini is a holy river of Hindus and considered an offshoot of Ganga. It is also called Paisuni in *Shriramcharitmanas* originates from Sati Ansuiya ashram and flows from amid hills, rocks and the deep forests. The either side of the bank is very beautiful. Sadhus and mahatmas made their huts along the banks. The floral, faunal and avian biodiversity richness and beautifulness of Mandakini River have been described comprehensively in *Valmiki Ramayana*. Concrete banks have been prepared on both side and thousands of tourists have holy bath.

## Sphatic Shila

It is also one of the holy places of Chitrakoot. There is a big rock of white marble situated on the bank of River Mandakini. According to Ramayana





Lord Ram and Sita used to take rest on this rock during wandering in the forests. Once, Lord Ram was sitting with Sita on the rock. Ram plucked wild flowers, made ornaments of these flowers and garlanded Sita. Jayant, the son of Indra came here in the form of crow and attacked on Sita in her feet. Lord Ram gave an appropriate punishment to the Jayant for his misbehavior.

### Ansuiya Ashram

It is very beautiful and legendary place situated 10 km away from Chitrakoot in amid forests. It was a place of penance of hermitage sage Atri and his wife



sati Ansuiyaji. It is situated on the river Mandakini. Ansuiya ji practiced severe penance for thousand years, and by virtue of the religious merit that she had thus acquired, she created the river mandakini. Lord Ram, Lakshman, and Sita visited this place and the Sati Ansuiya gave the advice to Sita about chastity and virtuous duty of women.

### Gupt Godawari

It is 20 km away from Chitrakoot towards south. It is also a very beautiful place of Chitrakoot. There are two naturally made beautiful caves are existing in the Thar Pahad. According to Ramayana, these caves were constructed by deities for summer residence of Lord Ram. According to Hindu mythology, the latent water current of the river Godawari was appeared and flown to the service of Lord Ram. This water current are still flowing in the caves but disappear outside. Thousands of tourists visit this place daily.



### Hanuman Dhara

This place is situated in Mandakini hill range. It is 4 km away from Ramghat. There are about 300 stairs have to ascend to see this place. It is believed that, when Mahaveer Hanuman afflicted with warmth heat after combustion of Lanka, Lord Ram told to Hanuman, you go to Chitrakoot where cold water



current will fall upon your body, then you will get rid off from this warmth heat. It can be seen even today. The cold water current is still flowing on the left arm of the statue of Mahaveer Hanuman. The Panchmukhi Hanumanji is also situated near this place. Thousands of tourists/pilgrims visit this place. The place is very beautiful and rich in biodiversity. The four lane road has been constructed and rope way is being constructed by the government of Madhya Pradesh to attract the tourists.

## Janaki Kund

Janakikund is a place bathing of Mata Janaki in Mandakini River. The foot prints of Mata Sita are also visible.



Other most beautiful and biodiversity rich places found in and around Chitrakoot region, but due to the lack of proper road connectivity and heavily infestation by the dacoit problems, these places are not properly developed. While development of these places by the both states governments (M.P. & U.P.), earn crores of money per year through providing security facility to the pilgrimage. These places are-

## Dharkundi

This place is 60 km away from Chitrakoot and situated between the dense forests of Uttar Pradesh region. This is one of the most beautiful places of



Uttar Pradesh region. It can be developed as ecotourism place. One Ashram is there.

## Sarbhanga Ashram

This is also situated in amid forests. Sarbhanga muni performed penance here and Lorm Ram visited this place. The temple of Sarbhanga muni is there and perennial stream is still flowing in this Ashram. This region is rich in floral and faunal diversity.

## Sutikshana Ashram

5 km away from Sarbhanga ashram, a Sutikshana ashram is situated. Lorm Ram visited this place also.

## Mordhwaj

Mordhwaj is situated on Thar Pahad hill and 15 km away from Chitrakoot. There are 200 stairs have to ascend to see this place. Rooms (Madhis) have been made thousand years ago by cutting of hill rocks. Perennial stream is flowing. This place is very rich in biodiversity. Very beautiful place of Chitrakoot but now has become the adda of lawless elements.

## Ramsaiya

Ramsaiya is a big rock on which Lord Ram used to sleep. Marks of sleeping of Lord Ram and Sita are still marked.

## Pampapur

Pampapur is situated in Devangana Valley which is a most beautiful lush green valley of Chitrakoot falls in U.P. It is mentioned that Lord Ram gave Darshan to the wife of Jayant, the putrabadhu of Indra.

## Madpha

Madpha is about 25 km away from Chitrakoot. This is a penance place of Mandav rishi situated in Uttar Pradesh on a peak of hill in dense forests. An ancient Shiva temple still exists.

## Banke Siddh

Banke Siddh is also a very beautiful place and situated in a hill. Hanumanji temple is exists. Perennial stream is flowing. This place is also rich in biodiversity.





### Devangana Ghati

This is a valley of hills and very beautiful and dense forested. It is said that Lord Ram gave darshan to the apsaras here.

### Sabri Pripat

This place is 25 km away from Chitrakoot situated near Barua village. This is a beautiful natural fall of water of Payashwini River. It can be developed as

tourist place. Scenic beauty of this place is marvelous and rich in biodiversity and home of rare and endangered plants.

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