

Religious tourism in Uttarakhand

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Abstract: The Himalayan province of India remains a admired tourist destination as it attracts immense inflow of tourist round the year. The current study is focused on Uttarakhand as it provides pilgrimage tourism which made it one of the important regions of Himalaya in terms of tourism. In the customary Indian life, people give supreme importance to spiritual matters and they habitually visit holy places. At the pilgrim centers various rituals are performed and offerings made for the ending of sins. The state of Uttarakhand is divided in to two divisions the North western part is known as Garhwal and south eastern part is known as Kumaon. It is a hill state with beautiful forest and snow-capped mountains and holy pilgrimage spot which catch the attention of tourists' altogether. It is a developing state and tourism plays an important role for enhancing the employment opportunities which provides basis of living to local population. The tourism business in the state creates ecological and socio economic consequences. The mountain tourism requires main concern as the enormous infrastructural developmental activities are occurring for the promotion of tourism with even estimating the tourism carrying capacity. The present study is focused to understand the Places of religious tourism in Uttarakhand and suggestions for their improvement.

Keywords:- Tourism, religious, devotion , pilgrimage tourism

Objective

1. To know the popular religious tourist spots in Uttarakhand.
3. To know the concerns of tourists at religious tourist spots.
4. Suggestions for the improvement at religious tourist spots.

Economic Importance:

Tourism is one of the vital industries and plays a important in achieving the socio-economic goals of a state. It is motivated by the innate urge of all human being for new experience, adventure, education, knowledge and entertainment. It is significant service-oriented segment which has made quick strides worldwide in terms of gross revenue and foreign exchange earnings. Tourism meets the varied interests and requirements of domestic and international tourists. It facilitates trade and commerce between diverse regions of countryside and also between different countries. As an outcome, over the years, it has acquired the position of a service industry.

Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand is a greatest place for nature lovers. It is a 27th state of India located in north India. Dehradun is the capital of Uttarakhand. Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Himanchal Pradesh, Nepal, Tibet are the neighboring states of Uttarakhand. It is parted from Uttar Pradesh in 9 November 2000. It is also called as **Devbhumi**, it is a second name of Uttarakhand. This means "Land of God". It is origination of two holy rivers named Ganga at Gangotri and Yamuna at Yamunotri. These destinations consist of beautiful nature as pure water, large mountains, snow falls, lakes. If we say it is heaven on earth and one want to explore make a tour of Uttarakhand.

Uttarakhand has three numbers of Airports

- > **Jolly Grand Airport** at Dehradun and
- > **Pantnagar Airport** at Udham Singh Nagar District,
- > Chakrata Base Airport at Dehradun basically used by Air force.

BY RAIL -

Dehradun, Haridwar, and Kathgodam are the main railway stations linked to almost all parts of the country with usual trains. Not lots of places in the state are linked by rail because of dangerous terrains. For those visiting places in the upper altitudes, typically on foot and road routes are the lone options available.

BY ROAD -

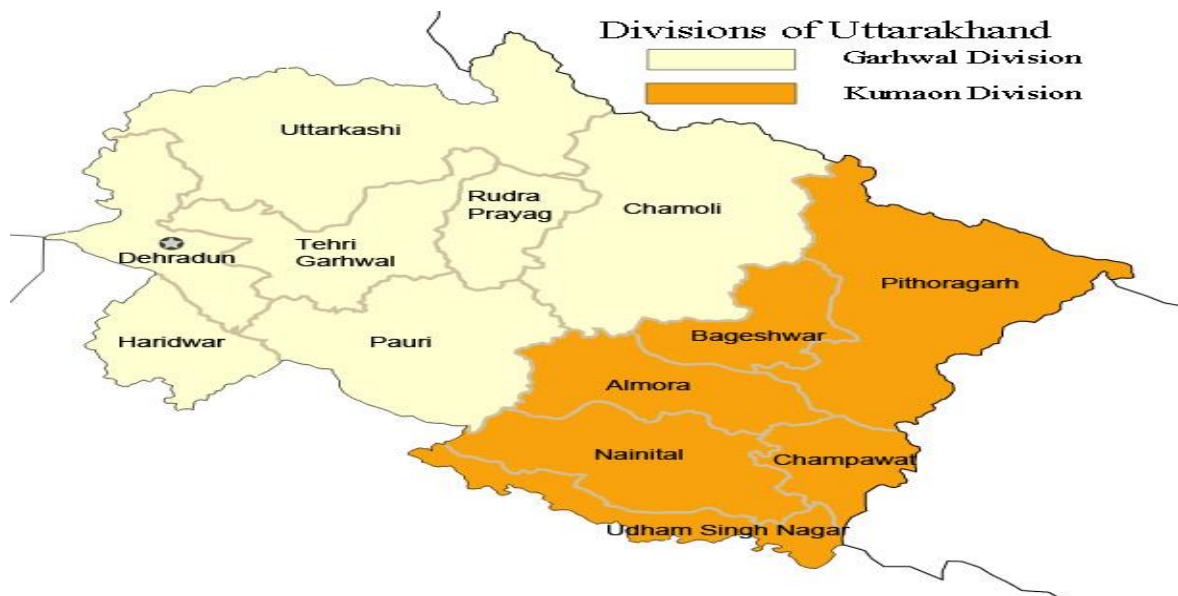
Almost all the main places in the state are attached by roads. Many places in the elevated altitudes may still stay off for a period in the year due to landslides and snowfall. National Highways such as 58, 73, 74, and 87 attach places in the state to different parts of the country.

The population of Uttarakhand is **10,116,752** according to census of 2011. A big part of residents belongs from Villages. Only 12% of this state is land area another 88% is hill area. A big part of population approximately 70% of depends on agriculture. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christians, Buddhists and jains all are living here but 88% of total populations are Hindus and Muslims. Kumaoni and Garhwali are the local languages of Uttarakhand. Haldwani, Kotdwar, Shrinager (Garhwal), Ramnagar are cites to enter in hills areas of Uttarakhand. Kotdwar and Shrinagar are the entrance of Garhwal hills and Nainital and Ramnagar for Kumaon hills. High court of it is situated at Nainital.

Hilly area makes the financial conditions tougher. Geographically, it is positioned in the central Himalayan zone. The giant Himalayan ranges and glaciers wrap almost all of the northern parts of the state. The Ganga and the Yamuna originates in the glaciers of Uttarakhand. The topography of Uttaranchal is characterized by hilly terrain, Rocky Mountains, deep valleys, high peaks, sharp streams, rapid soil erosion, regular landslides and extensively scattered habitations.

SIDCUL, the State Industrial Development Corporation of Uttarakhand has established seven industrial estates in the southern periphery of the state, while dozens of hydroelectric dams are being built in the upper reaches. The state also has big-dam projects, such as the extensive Tehri dam on the Bhagirathi. However, hill development remains an uphill challenge as out relocation of local peoples continues from the highland hinterlands.

Uttarakhand is divided into two regions:- 1) Kumaon Region 2) Garhwal Region



Tourism in Uttarakhand

The Himalayan region in India remains a popular tourist destination as it attracts huge inflow of tourists round the year. The state of Uttarakhand is divided into two divisions the North western division is known as Garhwal and south eastern division is known as Kumaon. It is a hill state with beautiful forest and snow-capped mountains and sacred pilgrimage spots which pull tourists altogether. It is a developing state and tourism plays a vital role for generating the employment opportunities which provide a source of living to the local community. The mountain tourism requires major concern as the enormous infrastructural developmental actions are occurring for the development of tourism.

Introduction of Religious Tourism

Religious tourism, also generally referred to as faith tourism, is a form of tourism, where people take a trip individually or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary purposes. For e.g. The world's biggest form of group religious tourism takes place yearly at Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

There are two divergent aspects to Religious Tourism in India;

- ❖ one, *the devotion of the domestic tourist*, who has a religious connection to the destination aligned with their religious beliefs;
- ❖ The *'foreign' tourist*, related to a varied religions, provinces or countries, for whom the purpose and the religious practices have the aspect of 'novelty', a saintly experience dissimilar from their own, despite the moral values being delivered remaining the same.

India, since ages, being a culturally different country has been well associated to all major viewpoints and religions of the world and all the sacred groups of the country have constructed various niche forms of religious tourism in India, which ultimately molded many religious centers like Temples, Gurudwaras, Mosques, Churches, and other art, traditions, culture and architecture. Places and shrines in various states of India, such as Varanasi, Mathura, and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh; Somnath in Gujarat; Dargah Khwaja Saheb in Ajmer; Rishikesh and Haridwar in Uttarakhand; Pushkar in Rajasthan; Jagannath Puri in Orissa; Golden Temple and Anandpur Sahib in Amritsar; Tirupati Balajee in Andhra Pradesh and Bodhi Gaya (Bihar) are some of the famed religious and sacred destinations of India.

Religious Tourism in Uttarakhand

Religious tourism has a big future in Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand is richly gifted with ancient temples and religious festivals. Religions originating in India, be it Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism or Buddhism, have a vivacious culture and spiritual philosophy. Together, they present a practical, alternative way of life as compared to the greediness and altercation widespread in the West.

Since ages this constituency is regarded as "Adobe of Gods" due to the existence of divine places. Four valued pilgrimage destinations, regarded as 'Chardham' namely Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath are located in the highland region of Uttarakhand. In addition to these, nearly 40 other destinations in Uttarakhand are known and regarded as favorite destinations for finding peace and sensing spirituality. Tourism and pilgrimage in Uttarakhand add around 27% in gross domestic production of state (GSDP). According to PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industries (PHDCCI), the tourism sector in Uttarakhand alone contributed around 60% in GDP of state as compared to the whole

services sector which contributes nearly 49 % in the GDP of the state. Therefore, tourism and pilgrimage in Uttarakhand generates worthy revenues and variety of employment opportunities for the native residents.

Religious Tourist Attractions in Uttarakhand

Haridwar

No religious journey can ever be considered complete without a visit to Haridwar, one of the holiest pilgrimage sites for Hindus. Literally meaning 'the abode of Lord Vishnu', Haridwar, located in the Garhwal district of Uttarakhand, is a land of tradition and myths. Considered as one of the seven holiest cities in India, Haridwar sees millions of devotees to it every year to pay their homage to the Lord, or to wash away their sins by visiting temples and taking a dip in the holy Har ki Pauri. However, with the course of time, Haridwar has evolved from being a meager religious city to a versatile cultural and spiritual centre.

Ukhimath

It is a chief Hindu pilgrimage destination about 182 kilometers away from Rishikesh, in the district of Rudraprayag in Uttarakhand. It is located on the other side of the Mandakini River Valley at an altitude of 4,500 feet. It is called the winter residence of Lord Kedarnath. When the Kedarnath temple closes during winter, an statue of Kedarnath is carried via demonstration to Ukhimath and it remains there until the Kedarnath temple reopens in April or May. Ukhimath has many temples and shrines of holy Usha, Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati, Aniruddha and Mandhata.

Uttarkashi

Appealingly called as Devbhoomi, Uttarkashi, literally meaning 'Kashi of the North', is a appealing little town tucked away in the hill state of Uttarakhand. Admired by the Hindus as one of their auspicious religious sites, the townhouses two of the total four divine shrines of Hindu tradition. It is one of the most visited cities of holy relevance in the region and an out of the world experience. The region was more in the favour of religious tourism primarily but lately the spurring of trekking and adventure activities invite a lot of non religion tourists as well. Stuffed with ashrams and mandirs, the town has got a religious vibe to it. All in all, the full place boasts of marvelous heritage, thrilling natural beauty, attractive panoramas and a outstanding atmosphere.

Guptakashi

The temple township of Guptakashi is situated at a distance of 47 kms from the divine town of Kedarnath. Perched at an elevation of 1320 m above the sea level, Guptakashi enjoys the thrilling backdrop of the enchanting snow-covered peaks of Chaukhamba Mountains. It has two ancient temples namely Vishwanath Temple devoted to Lord Shiva and Ardhnreshwar Temple. Manikarnika Kund is an additional well-liked destination in the city. In fact, Guptakashi serves as a ideal halt for those travelling to Kedarnath. The extraordinary weather, blossoming green forests and charismatic views of Chaukhamba Range along with its rich heritage, the town is a wholesome package for trip makers.

Patal Bhuvaneshwar

Patal Bhuvaneshwar is a miraculous place with several unseen and unexplored aspects to it. Located at an altitude of 1350m above the sea level, this place is tagged as a religious place famous for its Shiva Temple cave. The name of the place itself comes from two terminology meaning earth and Gods of creation. Lying amidst the thick cover of oaks and cedars, this attractive place has a lots of myths attached to it. The cave is said to be home of about 33 crore Gods and Goddesses. It is said that this place was revealed by the ruler of Sun Dynasty, King Rituparna.

Kedarnath

This is one of the Char Dhams and one of the busiest pilgrim centers in the Garhwal Himalayas. It is assumed that in order to dodge the Pandavas, Lord Shiva hid himself in the appearance of a bull at Kedarnath, and when found by the Pandavas, he went further into the earth parting the hump on the surface.

Kedarnath is admired for its ancient Shiva Temple, shrines, Himalayan ranges and surging landscapes. Marked by the Kedarnath temple, near Chorabari Glacier, the area is flanked by the Kedarnath peaks and numerous more ranges with peaks silver with snow. The most far-off of the Char Dhams, one of the most majestically gorgeous, Kedarnath remains closed for the six months of winters due heavy snowfall.

Chamoli

Chamoli often referred to as the "Abode of Gods" has a tough bond with spirituality. Chamoli is a holy place where the beauty of nature shared with interesting culture is found in abundance.

Apart from being spotted with temples all across the village, this beautiful place is also well-known as the origin place of Chipko Movement. Enriched with flora and fauna, this village offers attention-grabbing panoramic vistas that will take your breath away. Mana, a neighboring village is also power packed with natural world and many Hindu shrines while providing some wonderful trek trails.

Nainital

The Naina Devi Temple is a divine site that is positioned on the northern coast of Naini Lake, in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand. This temple is one of the most famous places of Hindu worship all over the country. Devotees from all parts of India and world flock to this region all year round to see Naina Devi Temple Devoted to Devi Sati's eyes

The presiding deity of the Naina Devi Temple is Maa Naina Devi or Mata Sati. According to Hindu myths, the temple is built on the correct spot where Goddess Sati's eyes fell on the Earth after Lord Shiva carried her burnt body after taking it out from the fire of the yagna that was performed by Sati's father- Daksha. Inside the Naina Devi Temple, you will find the two eyes on the roof, depicting Goddess Naina Devi, placed in the centre; with the statues of Goddess Kali and Lord Ganesha surrounding it. It would be interesting to note that the city of Nainital got its name from the temple of Naina Devi only.

Badrinath

Perched on the Garhwal hill tracks, near Alaknanda River, the most blessed Badrinath Temple or the Badrinarayan Temple is devoted to Lord Vishnu. The temple is one of the four Char Dham and Chota Char Dham pilgrimage yatras. Positioned at the altitude of 10,279 feet, the temple is enclosed by lofty snow-clad Himalayas. Assumed to be originally established by the saint, Adi Shankaracharya, the black stone statue of Lord Vishnu is 1m high and is considered to be one of the 8 swayam vyakta kshetras or self-existing statues of Vishnu. The religious significance and purity of Badrinath Temple fascinate devotees.

Located between Nar and Narayan mountain ranges, Badrinath has been mentioned in many Vedas as well. It also obtains huge importance due to mention in Hindu mythology mainly related to Lord Shiva but, several other gods and saints are housed inside the temple. From November to April end, the temple remains closed due to paramount weather conditions. Badrinath is reachable by road and therefore driving up to this pilgrim spot is not hard

Badrinath Temple has a Tapt Kund, a hot water spring which is considered to have therapeutic values. River Alaknanda is known to originate from here. The vibrant festivals of Mata Murti Ka Mela and the Badri Kedar Festival give you another reason to visit the temple. The temple with its purity and serene beauty brings you to a different world, lacking of confusion. and wrongdoing.

Yamunotri

The origin of Yamuna River, the pilgrim centre nestled in the laps of Garhwal Himalayas at 3293 mts elevated uses its natural elements to attract you with its visuals and build a religious fascination.

This holy home of sage Asti is encircled by rolling peaks, Himalayan glaciers and thermal springs. Hindu mythologies call Yamuna as the sister of Yama- the God of Death, and it is assumed that a bath in Yamuna can make death trouble-free. It appeals to all sorts of tourist from the pilgrims, to the ones in seek out for a romantic intention as well as adventure enthusiasts who are sure to find lot of thrill and stimulation in its grand and awe stimulating sceneries.

Gangotri

This pilgrimage place situated in Uttarkashi is mostly well-known for the four religious centers, or the Char Dham spots.

Legendary stories consider that King Bhagirathi's self-punishment spread over centuries, Goddess Ganga changed herself into a river to wash away the sins his forefathers. Lord Shiva then gathers Ganga into his knotted locks to reduce the massive impact of her fall, and ever since the Himalayan glacier from which Ganga become visible has also been called Bhagirathi. Ganga derives its name after the river crosses Devprayag and merges into the river Alaknanda."

Madhyamaheshwar

A small holy town of Madhyamaheshwar is a place full of mysteries and blessed with gift of nature. Famous for its Madhyamaheshwar Temple devoted to Lord Shiva, it gathers the whole village to pray in the evening along with many tourists.

Dusted with small huts, villages with their own culture and distinctive traditions, this old-fashioned little town has an essence of old world. Its beautiful background of snow enclosed Himalayas, extensive alpine meadows and thick cover of forests adds more fascination to its beauty. Temple in typical North Indian style structure and clean weather throughout the year completes the beautiful sepia decorated picture of this place. Situated at an elevation of 3265 m above the sea level, Madhyamaheshwar has divine vibes oozing out of it which are hard to ignore.

Jageshwar Tourism

Jageshwar, is a little town in Uttarakhand is like a township engraved specifically for temples. The main temple out of the lot of the 124 temples here is the one that is the most visited, the Jageshwar Mahadev Temple is situated on the Jataganga Valley.

Mostly built in the 9th century, the temples are outstandingly well preserved here. The place will leave one feeling delighted, with an voracious thirst of exploring beyond.

Rishikesh

Situated beside the union of Ganga and Chandrabhaga, Rishikesh on the foothills of Himalayas is the heart of many ancient temples, well-liked cafes, yoga ashrams and adventure sports. Rishikesh is the most beautiful combination of spiritual and adventurous experiences. Rishikesh, over the years, has develop into very popular as the top spiritual purpose in the world. This place has been a center of Sadhus (saints) and there are many ashrams teaching religious studies, yoga, meditation and Ayurveda.

Devprayag

Marked by the meeting point of rivers Alaknanda and Bhagirathi, Devprayag is a spiritual hub and is quite well-liked among tourists coming for pilgrimage or looking for some isolation close to nature.

Located amidst rolling Himalayan ranges, Devprayag is a accepted pilgrimage centre for Hindus. Scattered with ancient temples and idols in the mid of the lush green atmosphere, this place is a very attractive and quiet place. It derives much of its religious meaning from the lively and vivacious natural elements that encloses it such as the rivers. Dasharathachal Peak, Chandrabadani temple and Raghunathji temple are among some of the well-liked attractions here.

Rudra Prayag

Lying at the meeting of River Alaknanda and River Mandakini, Rudraprayag is a holy place regarded as one of the Panch Prayags and place of great religious importance Settled in Uttarakhand, this beautiful town is full of inexplicable charm and the saintly vibes that will tranquil your senses.

Offering stunning views and compelling panoramic, sites the town boasts of being blessed by Mother Nature in its full glory. The town got its name from the Hindu god Lord Shiva who is said to have appeared at the place in the figure of Lord Rudra. Rudraprayag is dotted with several olden temples and serves as a entrance to two most important pilgrimages of Kedarnath and Badrinath, offering its visitors a surrounding of peacefulness and harmony Tourists also get charmed by its natural stunning beauty and fascinating landscapes. Tourists and devotees accumulate at this place in huge number seeking spirituality as well as nature's beauty.

Joshimath

Joshimath is a tempting hill town huddled amid the lap of snow-capped Himalayas in the state of Uttarakhand. This valley is very gorgeous beautiful surrounded on all sides by visually attractive scenes. Hovering at an altitude of 6000 ft, this captivating town also gives the spiritual vibrations that can be felt at numerous ancient temples. In fact, Joshimath serves as a important religious hub for Hindu pilgrims and lies in the close immediacy to one of the four 'maths' originated by Adi Guru Shri Shankaracharya in 8th century namely Badrinath. This 'math' devoted to the holy manuscript of Hindus called Atharva Veda. The clouds tease, with the hilltop, a verdant cover of lush green, winding rivers and streams and the mystique of several ancient temples dotted in the area will make sure of a luring you back again and again.

Hemkund Sahib.

It is sited near the valley of Flowers. This is a vital pilgrimage of the Sikhs and Hindus. It is the world highest place of worship, believed to be the place where tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh in an prior personification had worshiped the frightening mother, Goddess Kalika Mata. close by is the Lakshman temple where Lakshman, the brother of Lord Rama, performed his apology. The indication of surrounding snow-clad peaks in its calm water offers a pretty sight.

Tungnath Tourism

An ancient holy town more than 1000 years old and is admired among pilgrims and devotees. It consists of of Alaknanda and Mandakini river valleys.

Tungnath Temple devoted to Lord Shiva located here is one of the highest temples in the world and also highest amongst the five Panch Kedar temples situated in the Tungnath mountain range. With an air of secrecy and beauty, this Tungnath also offers various other attraction trails. This delightful town with the vibes of spirituality and mystery, rich in flora and fauna and surrounded by nature on all sides for an experience one never had.

Concerns at religious tourist spots:

- ✚ Limitation of Carrying Capacity: Most religious places in Uttarakhand, major or minor, suffer from short but extreme seasons that change the dynamics of the state for the rest of the year. The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand is an example. Fixed from May till about November, it puts lot of pressure upon the transportation infrastructure of the Garhwal region, which backed by the monsoons and a lot of road construction still under advancement imply landslides, connotation frequent road blocks, accidents and loss of life.
- ✚ Waste Management: a derivative of the dilemma of carrying capacity, the waste management problem has provoked as science and technology grew to lead us into the 'era of plastic'.
- ✚ Air pollution: The steep volume of travel in this place makes the figures mind blowing. Uttarakhand are only reachable by road or foot, or a combination of the two.
- ✚ Monetizing of Religion: In the event for increasing as many niches as probable, there is often the concern of religion being 'monetized', as the host population gets more and more driven by the 'profit motive'.
- ✚ Lack of scrutiny of religious trusts:: There is a need to put forward set of laws which governs the monetary status and guideline of religious trusts as it looks to allay global concerns about money laundering and terrorist financing actions .

Suggestions to improve religious tourism in Uttarakhand:

- ✚ Prepare a list of those tourist places which are fully developed (Bus service, accommodation, medical etc). Now Bus stand to navigate these tourist places should be in Uttarkashi, Dehradun, Haldwani, Pauri because these places are key places to enter in Kumaon, Pauri, Dehradun, Jaunsar. Ensure ticket availability both online and offline.
- ✚ Improving connectivity to specific religious tourism circuits to promote them
- ✚ Introduce a documentary comprises of all the religious tourist places and advertises it on TV channels of different languages.

- ✚ Launch a mobile app which will show distance and time to reach the destination and all about how to opt for the tour. Packages that are available and what all amenities are provided in it.
- ✚ Marketing is significant factor now days. It should be advertised on the digital media to increase awareness about the options available for religious tourism in Uttrakhand. Information on accessible tourism destinations and products in Uttrakhand may be collected and published in English as well as major Indian languages for wider diffusion. This will definitely increase the revenue.
- ✚ Connectivity is the most important factor. Till now only road connectivity is there. Government should look into the feasibility of rail facility as well.
- ✚ Tourist's opinion and their suggestions will be given priority and measures would be taken to improve the anomalies.
- ✚ Developing integrated infrastructure for religious tourism development.
- ✚ Enhanced emphasis of minimizing the impact on the environment and maintaining the ecological balance.
- ✚ Scrutiny of religious trusts
- ✚ Pricing of religious tourism products should be considered.
- ✚ Having provisions of available vehicles at larger attraction sites may be considered. Further, necessary arrangements for providing mobility equipments, public comforts, utilities etc. at tourist destinations may be made

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