

Hill towns romance the celluloid again, one cinema hall at a time



■ A view of one of the new cinema halls that has come up recently in Almora. HT PHOTO

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DEHRADUN: Every time she came home to Almora, Abhilasha Tewari used to wait for her vacations to end so she could rush back to Delhi, where she studies, to catch the latest blockbuster.

But this vacation, it was a new movie-going experience for her in her picturesque hometown, thanks to a new cinema hall that has come up in the prominent hill station of Uttarakhand's Kumaon region.

Uttarakhand—where the British had set up a number of cinema halls during their rule—witnessed closing down of most of

the theatres in the hill towns over the years.

But things are changing now, one cinema hall at a time, through the efforts of private players, the latest example being a cinema hall that has come up in Almora.

Last year, two British-era cinema halls—the Capitol in Nainital and the Ritz in Mussoorie—were revived, bringing back an era of romance with the celluloid in two of Uttarakhand's most iconic hill stations.

In July, a new cinema, Starplexx Nova came up in Almora, where the only two theatres—the Regal and Jagmath—had closed down years ago.

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VISHNU PATEL, Spokesperson, UFO Movies

Speaking about the reason for choosing the small hill town for setting up the project, Vishnu Patel, spokesperson of UFO Movies that set up the hall in Almora, said, "It was to fill the demand-supply gap in the local cinema-goers' needs."

"Residents from Tier-II, III and IV cities, usually travel more than 25 km to watch movies

as there aren't any theatres in their vicinity. Through the initiative, people of the hitherto untapped region (of Almora and nearby places) have not only gained access to a multiplex-viewing experience but locals are also getting new employment opportunities," Patel told HT.

Welcoming the revival of cinema culture in the hills, experts,

however, pointed out how the process was "painfully slow" and was largely dependent on private initiatives, thanks to lack of government efforts.

According to the Uttaranchal Cinema Federation, more than 48 out of the 70 cinema halls of the hill state have shut down over the years after struggling with a long period of negligence, revenue losses and government apathy.

In 2015, the Uttarakhand government had come up with the state's film policy, which promised restoration of the closed down cinema halls in the hill areas, but not a single hall has been revived under the policy

until now, said filmmaker Pradeep Bhandari.

"The government needs to step in urgently for reviving and reopening of cinema halls, especially in the hills, so that cinema-going culture as well as regional films can once again be revived," he said.

Earlier, the government had said that it will extend all possible help so that owners could revive and renovate the single screen cinema halls. State finance minister Prakash Pant had reportedly said that the BJP government "would review the process of allowing the renovation work" meant for the cinema hall owners.