

TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SIKKIM, INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES.

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Abstract - This article analyses tourism in Sikkim, a very small hilly state in the Eastern Himalaya, in light of the most sustainable kind of tourism process and its issues and challenges. It studied to map the state of progress, prospects, and patterns of tourism in the state. Tourism in Sikkim is predominant by domestic and foreign tourists that shot up by nearly 77 percent to 14.25 lakh during 2017, total tourist influx in the northeastern state. A huge number of tourist influxes would also have pressure on the infrastructure, environment, and culture of the state. Sustainable planning involving optimal use of management is required for a viable symbiosis of tourism and environment, and sustainability of tourism in the state. As Sikkim is also under threat from climate change, land degradation, overexploitation, and natural disasters, and devastating consequences, In fact, one out of three mountain people in developing countries is vulnerable to food insecurity and faces poverty and isolation. Unplanned growth of tourism and limited infrastructure in Sikkim is to identify new and sustainable opportunities to arrest further environmental degradation and initiate a new approach to planning in the region.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism, Community based Tourism, Tourist influx*

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Introduction

Tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as comprising “The activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes.” Today tourism became one of the fastest growing economic sectors worldwide in terms of employment and gross domestic product. The key reasons being the socio-economic progress within our society and the inter connectedness of the world where we live in. In this modern age, it changes its dimension at a fast pace. As more people are very much interested in spending their holidays in nature, ecotourism, agrotourism, rural tourism as well as homestays has become one of the segments of the tourism industry. It does not only create opportunities to feel the essence of natural beauty but also helps the local communities to be healthy economically by employing themselves and make the commitment to conservation and sustainable development. The requirement of nature-based tourism emerged as an outcome of the world's acknowledgment and reaction to global sustainable practices. There was an emerging concern to minimize the negative impact of tourism on the environment and also concrete evidence was available that tourists have moved away from mass tourism to more individualistic and enriching experiences. Moreover, these instances were further substantiated with the urge to include natural and cultural component during vacations. This set the ground for the alternative form of tourism emerged which was termed in due course of time as ‘Eco Tourism’, ‘Sustainable Tourism’ and ‘Responsible Tourism’ etc. However, all these terms were rooted in the concept of sustainable development and intended to benefit local communities and destinations environmentally, culturally and economically (Diamantis, 1999). The principles of sustainable tourism were envisaged by the World Tourism Organisation in 1988 as “leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems”. Sikkim is truly a mystical land, a confluence of advancement and mysticism. The population comprises many ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, each characterized by their unique culture, customs, and traditions that exhibit strong bonds with nature. It is also mirroring the rich array of traditional festivals and rituals that take place throughout the year in Sikkim (ECOSS & WWF, 2016). In Sikkim, ecotourism can be a valuable means for promoting the socio-economic development of host communities while generating resources for the preservation of natural and cultural assets.

Nowadays in many developing countries, ecotourism has been particularly successful in attracting private investments for the establishment of privately owned natural parks and nature reserves. It can help to protect and even rehabilitate natural assets and thus contribute to the preservation of biological diversity and ecological balance.

The significance of the Study

Tourism is expected to resume its rapid growth in the future because of improved well being, living standards, rising incomes, and amounts of leisure time, the falling real cost of travel, and improved transportation network around the world. This growth can be harnessed not only for the enjoyment of tourists themselves but more importantly, for maximizing economic benefits and thus increasing the living standards of host communities and countries. Another side of the coin, it is bound to have a negative environmental and socio-cultural impact on those communities, whose involvement in tourism planning, development and management can be crucial to minimizing the impact. The major challenge is therefore not only to minimize the negative impact of tourism but also to ensure that the economic benefits of tourism can contribute to environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources. Consequently, the significance of tourism for people can be examined by how positively economic and social factors impact on each other. As society becomes more mobile and prosperous tourism will become increasingly significant for people. The expected growth in the tourism sector and the increasing reliance of many developing countries including small hill regions like Sikkim depends on this sector as employment generating mechanism and contributor to local, national and regional economies. To protect the unique cultural identity and to curb the negative impact of mass tourism Sikkim pioneered in creating a community supported ecotourism pathway which was based on nature and cultural conservation. Community-based tourism (CBT) sites were evolved in different parts of the state with the core concept of village home stays that ensured the benefits of tourism to local communities. This was further supported through policy initiatives of the government of Sikkim including the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy 2011 prepared by The Forest Environment and Wildlife Management Department along with the JICA funded Sikkim Biodiversity and Forest Management Project (SBFP), and the Sikkim Registration of Homestay Establishment Rules 2013.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this present study was to build upon these resources by analyzing a sustainable tourism development in the study region, not just factors associated with failure, but also factors that contribute to success. Thus it is structured to elucidate with the following main objectives:

- a) To explore the present status of tourism and its impact on the economy of Sikkim hills.
- b) To find out the reasons for selection of Sikkim by the foreign and domestic tourists for recreational and leisure purposes and how it promotes the local economy, socio-cultural changes, and lifestyle of the host community.
- c) To identify the issues and challenges for sustainable tourism development in the study area.
- d) To examine sustainable tourism development and suggestions for future prospects.

Materials and Methods

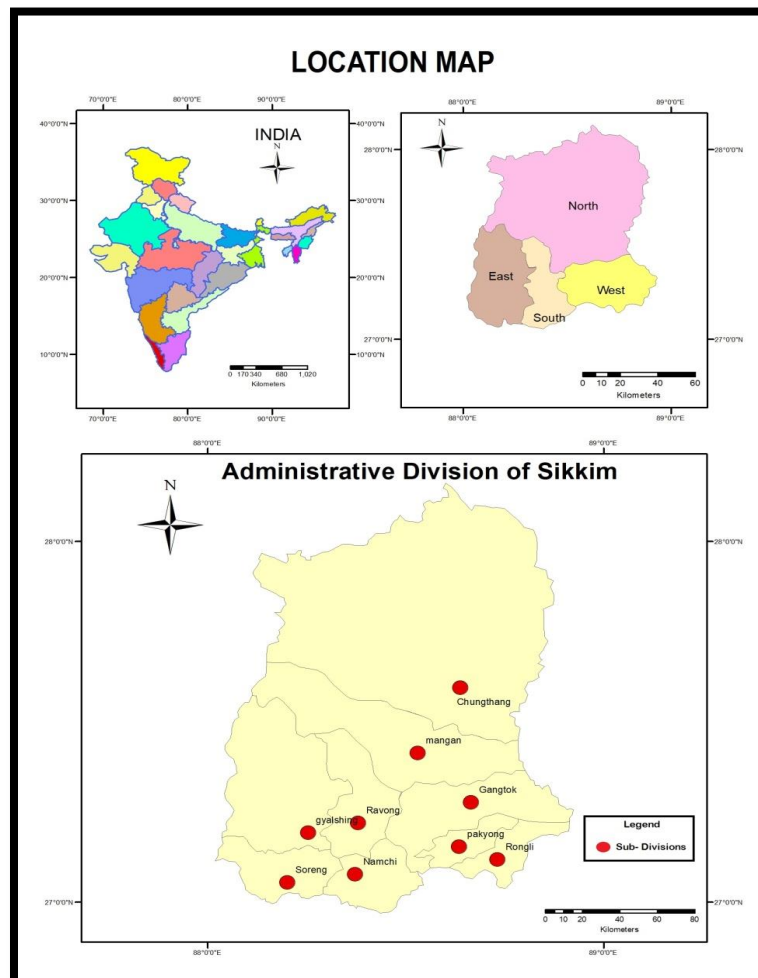
The study was conducted using an empirical observation available from different reports of Government, various journals, and e-journal. Collection of available literature was gathered through personal observations and, collection of related information's. Observations were made based on news reports, interaction with some of the local people associated with tourism and tourist, discussions with some of the Officials, NGOs, and travel agencies etc. who are actively working on tourism. The nature of the present research work is explorative and the whole work has been done by descriptive as well as analytical methods.

Study Area

Sikkim, the hidden land for many years, came into limelight after it became merged in 1975 with India. Initially, it was a tiny kingdom tucked away in an inaccessible corner of the Eastern Himalaya, an air of mystery and mysticism surrounds the small state. Sikkim is a landlocked state covering 7,096 sq. Kms. having borders with Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal and only open border with China (Nathula-Pass). It hosts the world's third-highest peak Kanchenjunga (8,586 meters) that is also valued as the state's guardian deity. Sikkim became the 22nd state of India in 1975. Geographically the state extends from 27°4'46" to 28°7'48"N and 88°00'58" to 88°55'25"E. In 2001, it joined the North Eastern Council (NEC) to become its eighth and youngest member. Ecologically Sikkim varies from low tropical, temperate to subalpine and alpine zones having a

rich variety of flora and fauna. Sikkim has a forest cover of over 47 percent, which is the highest in India. The protected area network in Sikkim includes one National Park and seven Wildlife Sanctuaries that cover an area of around 2,183 Sq. Km., which is the largest in the country. A part of the Tibetan Plateau falls in North Sikkim, which adds to the natural variation in the landscape.

Sikkim is the least populous state of India having a population of 6, 10,577 in 2011, The population is unevenly distributed within the state's four districts, East, West, North, and south. Sikkim's population is still largely rural whereas 60 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and allied sectors. Sikkim's literacy rate has had a remarkable jump from less than 7 percent in 1951 to 82 percent in 2011. The state's per capita income for 2015-2016 is recorded as Rs. 2, 59,950 (at current price) which is the highest among the northeastern states (State Income Unit, DESME).



Importance of Sikkim as a tourist place

Tracing the growth of Tourism in the state prior to its merger with India, the number of tourists inflows to Sikkim was negligible. Even after the merger, the growth rate was poor until the 1980's as large areas of the mountainous region remained inaccessible or restricted to tourists. In a recent decade of the century, that tourism growth boosts up considerably as more areas came under-relaxation of the permit regime and Sikkim gained popularity as an upcoming tourist destination. Tourism saw a big boost between the years 2010-2017 with tourist arrival figures equaling and surpassing the state population. Sikkim is endowed with tremendous natural beauty with lush green valleys to snow-capped mountains. Mainly tourism centers and circuits began slowly developing from East districts (Gangtok) and gradually extended to Rabong, Pelling, Yuksom, Lachen etc. Now a day's adventure tourism is in the form of trekking along the Yuksam- Dzungri- Goechala trail which had begun in the pre-merger days begun to pick up. Around 1988, the state government took a decision to allow tourists to visit Tsongmo Lake, Located at a distance of only 35 km from Gangtok, the capital town, it became the closest accessible destination to experience snowfall for tourist coming from West Bengal. This was followed by opening up of Nathula, which gave visitors an opportunity to go right up till the Chinese border point of this ancient mountain pass. Similar relaxation permits in West Sikkim, Zuluk in the East Sikkim and Gurudangmar Lake, Yumthang Valley and Yumesamdong in North Sikkim, witnessed a surge of tourist flow to these areas. These were major milestones in Sikkim's tourism history. This was also aided by the government's decision to allow leave travel concession by Air to the Northeast region (NER) in 2010 for central Government employees and it is only in the last few years that the Government's very appreciative "Go East Policy" is trying to break the barriers to socio-economic development of NER.

Historical Background

The congenial climatic conditions, rich biodiversity, panoramic view of mountains and valleys, villages in picturesque settings, pristine lakes and forests, cascading waterfalls, flower blooms and wilderness of trekking trails, Buddhist monasteries, and religious artifacts, and cultural festivals of Bhutia and Lepcha tribes constitute the important elements of tourism in the state. Sikkim thus provides a varied experience ranging from urban mass tourism to village tourism, nature tourism, religious and cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. Tourism in Sikkim also

developed spontaneously with the growth of infrastructure. However, the real efforts for the development of tourism like consciousness building awareness development and initiatives at the government and community level started in the 1990s. The period also saw the development of tourism-related infrastructure and increasing emphasis on eco-tourism. A number of village tourism sites were developed and entrusted to community control. Sikkim, the ultimate eco-tourism destination, became the policy emphasis of the government and a tourism plan was developed. Development and marketing of at least one place in each of the 32 constituencies as an eco-tourism site/destination was envisaged 16. Today a number of tourist-related fairs and festivals are being organized in various tourist destinations to highlight the specific cultural characteristics and to popularize the important attractions of the concerned destination. Some international events like the International Flower show have also been initiated by the government to expose the visitors to the variety of floristic diversity of the state. Cultural festivals of the local ethnic groups and the various Buddhist monasteries also comprise tourist attractions. Eco-tourism/nature tourism in the state is well supported by the institutional arrangements at village and community levels. Several capacity-building and awareness programmes are being continuously organized by NGOs and the State Tourism Department for the stakeholders to sensitize them on issues related to the environment and for better tourism culture and management in the state. Today, the number of tourists visiting Sikkim has reached 10 lakhs per annum.

Sustainable Tourism in Sikkim

Tourism is a significant user of resources in Sikkim ensuring that it uses resources efficiently is important both for the wellbeing of the local environment and host community and in maintaining global resources. Efficient use of resources, notably energy derived from fossil fuels, is also important in the reduction of polluting emissions. These processes bring down the cost for operating tourism industry and are therefore feasible even in a rural and remote mountain set up. To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including standardized skill and entrepreneurship development, the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination based on gender, disability or in other ways. The concept of sustainability arose from the recognition that the earth's limited resources could not indefinitely support the rapid population and industrial growth. An

immediate concern is needed to pay more attention to the protection of the natural environment. Most tourists wish to visit areas that are attractive, functional, clean and less polluted. Tourism can provide the incentive and means to maintain and, where needed, improve the environmental quality of areas. A high level of environmental quality is also very important for local residents to enjoy. Tourism can help make residents more aware of the quality of their surrounding environment. Tourism and the environment are strongly linked and interdependent. If tourism continues to grow, ways must be found to improve the relationship between the two, making it more sustainable. There is a variety in scenic attractions that tourists would come across here in Sikkim. 'Nathula' Pass at an altitude of 14,200 ft. bordering between India and China in the Tibetan Plateau which is one of the highest motorable roads and richly covered by many varieties of alpine flora and fauna. Tsomgo Lake is situated at an altitude of 12,210 ft., a home of Brahmini ducks besides stopover for various migratory ducks. Lachung has emerged as a tourist destination with the soaring popularity of Yumthang Valley which is just 25 Kms. from Lachung. The village spreads out on either side of Lachung Chu, has managed to retain its unique culture and tradition. Yumthang at an elevation of 11,800 ft. and 140 Kms. from Gangtok is a paradise for nature lovers with a fascinating blend of flora and fauna and breathtaking scenic grandeur. Sustainable tourism must be seen as a goal in tourism development. Achieving such a goal is a difficult task to accomplish; however, developing tourism in a sustainable manner must be an important objective in the developing process. There are many stakeholders in the field of sustainable tourism.

Tourists Inflow and Economy

Tourism arrivals in Sikkim have seen unprecedented growth in the last three decades, from a mere 15,000 tourists in 1980 to a whopping 14,24,965 tourists in 2017(Domestic & foreign), (Statistical cell, Department of Tourism & CA GoS). The growth has indeed been tremendous domestic tourist grew at an average annual rate of between 10 to 25 percent for the period 2005 to 2017. Foreign tourist growth has shown an annual growth rate of an average of 8 percent from 2005-2013. State wise domestic tourist breaks up shows that the topmost five state visitors in Sikkim are from West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh. West Bengal by itself constitutes around 55 percent of the tourists (TECS Tourism Master Plan). Amongst foreign tourists, the most foreign tourists visiting Sikkim are from Nepal, USA, Germany, UK,

France, and Thailand and Australia. In terms of the proportion of Domestic and foreign tourists, the figures show an overwhelming average of 95 percent in favor of domestic tourists for the past five years. However the number of tourists, both domestic and foreign is continuously increasing between 1981 and 2006, there was an overall slowing down in tourists arrival, and tourism was mostly domestic in nature. In fact, between 1997 and 2001, the number of foreign tourists decreased and the inflow of foreign tourists registered negative growth. The growth of domestic tourists had registered an all-time low. It can safely be said that from 2001 onwards, tourism, especially tourist inflow, has picked up in Sikkim.

Domestic Tourists in Sikkim during 2011-2017

YEAR	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JANUARY	42314	28560	30292	28824	54229	78538	166824
FEBRUARY	50652	29642	31278	19830	44366	87813	189358
MARCH	62438	45231	48102	24597	32515	74872	217762
APRIL	89238	65341	69054	63730	89648	93220	265055
MAY	124323	120212	131804	92199	138695	144225	195890
JUNE	69784	65673	68205	85763	86218	89654	109334
JULY	29540	18628	17161	19472	19521	20250	14350
AUGUST	38964	35294	7713	11875	19535	20310	16680
SEPTEMBER	13943	12678	20115	25478	25535	26570	34736
OCTOBER	9682	42390	50461	75025	75908	78948	41281
NOVEMBER	8326	39602	42836	53275	55827	10607	56438
DECEMBER	13249	55287	59728	62350	63026	15756	68146
TOTAL	552453	558538	576749	562418	705023	740763	1375854

Source: Tourism and Civil Aviation Dept., Govt. of Sikkim

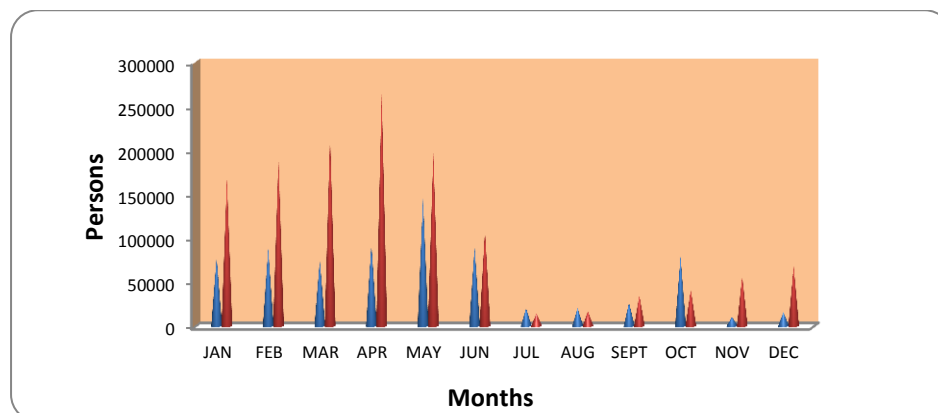


Figure 1 Domestic Tourists inflow in Sikkim during 2016-2017

Foreign Tourists inflow in Sikkim during 2011-2017

YEAR	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JANUARY	1436	1904	873	4145	3458	2946	5883
FEBRUARY	1065	2406	1247	3803	3119	3108	5054
MARCH	2423	3199	2524	5211	4971	6797	5888
APRIL	2615	3939	4895	2855	6909	8477	8474
MAY	2875	2058	1312	4927	2326	4800	3407
JUNE	643	1152	804	3939	1727	2779	1933
JULY	553	1282	563	2496	1382	1678	1000
AUGUST	873	1048	2579	1429	1563	2067	1043
SEPTEMBER	1415	1432	3942	2410	1406	1844	2182
OCTOBER	4286	4486	5292	8906	4431	12090	5892
NOVEMBER	3323	2300	3210	5537	3877	14405	4084
DECEMBER	2438	1283	4457	3517	3310	5021	4271
TOTAL	23945	26489	31698	49175	38479	66012	49111

Source: Tourism and Civil Aviation Dept., Govt. of Sikkim

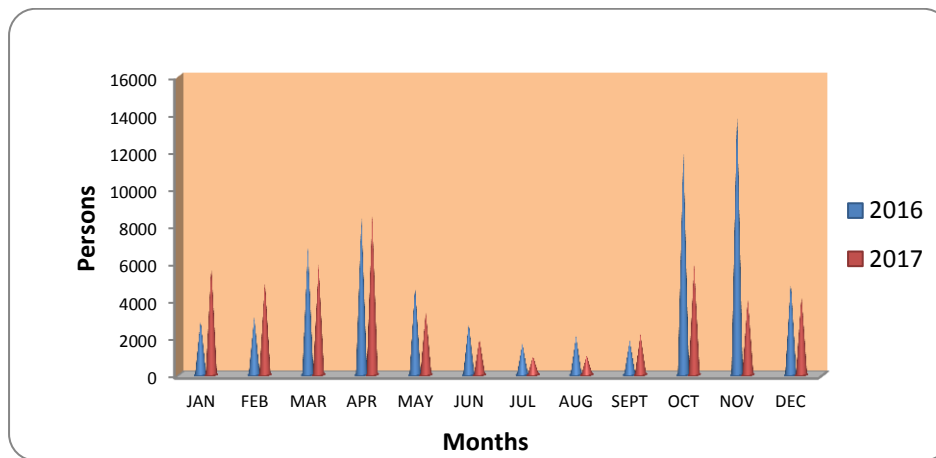


Figure 2 Foreign Tourists inflow in Sikkim during 2016-2017

There is a proportionate relationship between the infrastructural development and number of tourist influx. Based on the figures of tourist accommodation available and the number of service providers, direct employment generated by this sector can be roughly estimated to be around 12,000 to 15,000 jobs at present. At the same time, the human development index also notes that the industry has 61 percent direct workers employed from the outside the state. Even a significant proportion of the transport sector also engages employees similarly. There is also a

reluctant of local youth to take up jobs offered by these service providers. In the last decade, the tourism sector in Sikkim has seen a growth rate of 10-12 percent. The Gross State Domestic product of tourism sector in 2016-2017 has been valued at Rs. 1, 44,735 lakhs with a total contribution of the tourism sector to GSDP being 7.68 percent (DESME, State Income Unit).

In terms of existing capacity and strength and as per figures available, there are currently 1,021 hotels, (with over 16,945 rooms and 34,133 beds capacity), 1,119 travel agents, 69 restaurants, 66 Tourist guides and 371 homestays registered with the department. In addition, there are 47 hotels registered at the project level (under construction) stage (Carrying Capacity Survey, 2017. Dept. of Tourism, GoS). There were 646 taxis registered under the luxury Taxi category and 6,445 under local (non-Luxury) taxis as on 31st March 2015 (Regional Transport Authority, MV Dept. GoS). The indirect employment generated by the industry is however much larger and encompasses a broad section of the population ranging from construction to supplies and various services. Clearly, tourism has emerged very strongly as one of the key drivers of the state economy with potential for generating long term sustainable employment.

Issues of Tourism

With regard to tourism infrastructure development, Sikkim has excelled in leveraging central funds for the construction and development of different attractive tourist wayside amenities, destination and circuit development, and unique tourist attractions such as ropeways, skywalks, and landmark religious monuments. Religious tourism has been augmented with the construction of several unique and gigantic religious monuments which includes statues of Guru Padmasambhava in Samdruptse, the Chardham at Solophok, Namchi and Lord Buddha's Statue at Tathagata Tsal in Rabong. There are several other such statues and monuments in the pipeline. Ropeways have been built in Namchi and Tsomgo Lake. A skywalk, the first of its kind, is under construction in Bhaley Dunga while a Greenfield airport in Pakyong is already being started its journey. Owing to its diversity of communities, Sikkim has a number of traditional religious festivals that attract tourists, notable amongst which are the Pang Lhabsol, Drukpa Tseshu, Tendong Lho Rum Faat, Dasain and Tyohar, Losoong, Bhumchu, Saga Dawa and Sakewa. There are also a number of tourism focused festivals held every year in different locations around the

state. Among these, the Gangtok winter carnival which is organized to bolster tourism during the lean season is gaining fast popularity.

The adventure tourism sector which has tremendous potential was earlier confined mainly to trekking, white water rafting, and mounting and had seen slow growth. Recently the sector has witnessed a rapid expansion by introducing new adventure activities such as mountain biking, and paragliding. Recently holding of the first Sikkim FAI CATTI international paragliding Brumkhangse were opened for alpine Expedition in 2005. In addition, to mount Jopuno and Tinchenkhang permission for the green lake, trek has been transferred from the central Government to the state government.

Environmental degradation likely land erosion is a particular area of concern in hill region. This may be caused, for example changing of vegetation cover as seen in the loss of forest cover for heavy infrastructure and road building in Sikkim. Air and other types of pollution may also impact many local destinations through the consequences of climate change. There is a need for a profound change in the way we generate and use energy and in other activities that release greenhouse and other gases into the atmosphere. Tourism-related jobs are often paid quite lowly, with poor conditions, low-level security of employment (seasonality factor and family business) and linked to external investments. Part-time and often family-based employment often leads to service industry jobs that are non-professional or just casual work with limited skills (tour guides). Tourist destinations in Sikkim often are reporting disturbing trends of drug abuse amongst youth, exploitation of labor, and uncontrolled land sales despite states having put stringent norms for outsiders. All these issues are related to mass tourism that is grossly harming. Similarly, the facilities and services deteriorate sharply during the peak season as the amenities available can't cope up with the huge rush. There is a shortage of drinking water, waste, deterioration of municipal services, congestion in public transport and lack of accommodation all these leading to a chaotic condition. Not only the visitors are inconvenienced and put to unnecessary tensions, but even the local inhabitants also get exasperated. Demand for better star graded tourist accommodation and provision of service industries associated with tourist activities need more space. Uncontrolled urban growth, vertical development like high-rise building construction, over-looking government regulation, dumping of dirt and filth has robbed the scenic beauty of Sikkim. Moreover, during the peak season, the visitors are greatly inconvenienced by soaring prices. Not only the essential commodities are in the short supply but

the traders also charge undue prices. Even the hotel and vehicle charges fluctuate according to the demand. The private transport owners demand higher fares and accommodate more passengers than the available capacity. Even service conditions in the hotel deteriorate sharply there by affecting the valuable customers. In addition to that political turmoil such as strike often hampers the tourism as for the communication purpose Sikkim is dependent on Bagdogra airport and NJP railway station.

Challenges of Tourism

Sustainable Tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on destinations. It attempts to find a balance between these impacts to create an improved quality of life for the host community and the destination.

➤ **Ecological impacts-** Sikkim occupies the area only .02 percent of the Indian Subcontinent but this tiny piece of landmass falls under the eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot harbors some of the most spacious and endemic flora and fauna that occupy all the corner of the state. The high altitude zones of the state that are ecologically fragile areas having a large inflow of tourist which has serious environmental concerns, disturbance to wildlife, garbage accumulation, and vehicular pollution are some of the immediate major challenges turned up by tourism which needs to be addressed. Indian State Forest Report, 2015 reveals that the negative growth rate of forest cover in the current year. According to ENVIS Sikkim has generated 0.06 gm. per capita solid waste per day.

➤ **Connectivity and communication-** Owing to its high altitudinal location and difficult topography, connectivity has always remained a major challenge for the state that has experienced bad road conditions for many years. Tourist's feedback on their experience is having a bad road condition foremost among their grievances. Poor communication through internet band mobile connectivity is also an issue that charged negatively for Sikkim tourism.

➤ **Limited employment opportunities to the local-** Capacities of local people have not been adequately strengthened as well as equipped to address the needs of the tourism sector. On the other hand, the willingness of the local youths to be involving in this sector and the creation of opportunities for them is a challenge that needs to be addressed. While all the tourism stakeholders strongly appeal on the need to generate local employment from tourism, the reality

is that a major part of the tourism sector is currently run by the outsider people, be it hotels, transport sector or travel operators.

➤ **Lack of regulation/ standards-** Absence of stringent regulation and standards in the tourism service sector have been a major issue for Sikkim's tourism growth. This has also led to some negative publicity for the state, which needs to be an immediate correction. For a state like Sikkim which is situated in a high seismic zone, enforcement of BIS guidelines for all construction becomes highly pertinent and crucial, setting standards in all these aspects and its compliance by all stakeholders will lead to the enhanced visitor experience.

Conclusion

Sikkim became a highly valued responsible tourism destination while conserving its natural and cultural heritage. The Human Development Report (HDR) 2014 has identified certain potential sectors for growth and livelihood creation, of which tourism ranks the highest. The HDR recognizes that Sikkim has a comparative advantage in tourism with its beautiful landscape, diverse flora and fauna, culture and traditions and hospitable people. Other factors are its peaceful environment, political stability, high literacy rate, its green policies such as organic farming and easy accessibility. Sikkim's tourism Mission 2015 aspires to "make tourism the main livelihood of the people of Sikkim, and each and every household and individual, a skilled fore for the tourism industry". New opportunities are emerging such as the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage through the Nathula pass, which was flagged off in 2015, the declaration of the Khanchendzonga National Park as a natural and cultural World Heritage site, opening of new peaks and the relaxation of the permit process for the green lake trek. Understanding the need to have guiding policies, several attempts were made by the state government to prepare guiding documents for shaping Sikkim's tourism through development of tourism master plan(1998, 2011) was prepared by the state government. In 2010, a Sikkim Tourism Mission -2015 was released by the state government, which emphasized the need for both, ecological and economic sustainability in tourism, through the promotion of quality tourism and enhanced participation of local stakeholders. As with other green policies of the state, this tourism mission statement elucidated strong political will to guide Sikkim tourism towards a sustainable future. The Sikkim ecotourism policy, 2011 was also developed by the state. It is important that economic benefits generated from tourism are distributed as widely and equitably as possible and that they

primarily contribute to the socio-economic development of the people of Sikkim as well as contribute to the goal of a poverty-free state and provide enhanced opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups such as school dropouts and educated unemployment. The policies shall provide guidance for bringing sustainability through inclusive growth, enhancing growth, enhancing capacities of tourism stakeholders as well as for developing regulatory frameworks, which shall ensure a quality experience for the visitors to the state at this stage of tourism development, the visitors perspective also needs to factor in. Diversification of tourism into ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, nature tourism etc. is a welcome step. Such ventures should, however, need to be rationally planned and scientifically managed.

Strategy & Suggestions for Sustainable Tourism Development

- a) Tourism should cater a wide range of local economic activities, taking environmental costs and benefits into account, but it should not be permitted to become an activity which dominates the economic base of an area.
- b) The conservation and sustainable use of natural, social and cultural resources are very crucial. Therefore, tourism should be planned and managed within environmental limits along with due regard for the long term appropriate use of natural and human resources.
- c) Local communities should be encouraged and expected to involve in the planning, development, and control of tourism with the support of government and the industry. Particular attention should be paid to participating of indigenous people, women, and minority groups to ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of tourism.
- d) All tourists, organisations, and individuals should respect the culture, the economy, and the way of life, the environment and political structures in the destination area.
- e) All stakeholders of tourism should be aware of the need to develop more sustainable forms of tourism which include staff training and raising awareness, through education and marketing tourism responsibly, of sustainability issues amongst host communities and tourists themselves.
- f) Research should be undertaken throughout all stages of tourism development and should monitor impacts, to solve problems and to allow local people and others to respond to changes and to take advantages of opportunities.

g) It is the right time of the Government, after reviewing the growing tourist arrivals and the socio-economic benefits of the tourism phenomenon, accord it the status of a priority sector. The Government should also ensure more resource allocation for the overall development of this sector.

h) Tourism is a highly labor-intensive industry, there should be an integrated HRD system with both public and private sector participation to develop human resources to meet the requirements of the industry is also need for refresher training courses for the staff of the tourism industry. Proposals for running such courses by private institutions including NGOs should be encouraged and supported.

i) Wildlife depletion has to be checked and to be increased in its number by appropriate conservation programmers and improvement of other infrastructures as stated above at the earliest.

j) Need to conduct frequently Seminars, conference, and workshops to discuss the problems and prospects of tourism and development at the local, national and international level.

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