



Sustainable tourism planning and development: a study of selected destination of Sikkim

Mr. Jeckme Namgyal Bhutia

Research scholar, Department of Tourism, Sikkim university

Dr. Jigmie Wangchuk Bhutia

Assistant professor, Department of Tourism, Sikkim university

Abstract

Tourism planning and development strategies in Sikkim, which is a popular tourist destination in India, as well as the identification of sustainable tourism practises that can be implemented to promote economic growth while maintaining the natural environment and cultural heritage of the region are the focuses of this project. The present tourism planning and development strategies in Sikkim, which is a major tourist destination in India, as well as to discover sustainable tourism practises that may encourage economic growth while also maintaining the natural environment and cultural legacy of the region. While there are efforts underway in Sikkim to advance more environmentally responsible tourist practises, these efforts face obstacles on the road to full realisation. Inadequate infrastructure, a lack of resources for conservation and waste management, and a lack of understanding among visitors about responsible tourism practises are some of the obstacles. The community is not involved in the planning and development of tourism, therefore this presents a problem.

Key words: Tourism, planning, development, Sustainable, environment etc.

Introduction

Tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as "the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, or other purposes." In modern times, tourism has become one of the most rapidly expanding economic sectors worldwide in terms of employment and gross domestic product. The most important causes are the socioeconomic advancements taking place within our society as well as the interconnectedness of the globe in which we now reside. In this day and age, there is a rapid shift in the way that it is construed. Homestays, ecotourism, agrotourism, and rural tourism have all emerged as important subsets of the hospitality and tourism business in recent years. This trend may be attributed to the growing number of individuals who want to spend their vacations outside. It not only helps local communities become economically healthy by employing themselves, but it also encourages communities to make a commitment to environmental preservation and sustainable development, in addition to creating chances for people to experience the essence of natural beauty. The world's recognition of global sustainable practises and the subsequent response to those practises led to the demand of nature-based tourism emerging as a result. There was a growing awareness of the need to lessen the toll that tourism takes on the natural world, and there was growing body of research indicating that travellers are gravitating away from collective tourist activities in favour of more individualised and personally fulfilling adventures. In addition, these occurrences were further supported by the need to include both



environmental and cultural aspects into vacations. This laid the foundation for an alternate kind of tourism to arise, which in due course of time came to be known as things like "Eco Tourism," "Sustainable Tourism," and "Responsible Tourism," amongst other names. All of these concepts, on the other hand, have their origins in the idea of sustainable development and were designed to be of use to regional communities and destinations from an economic, cultural, and environmental perspective.

Review of literature

(Das, 2019) Studied "*Towards the Development of Sustainable Tourism in Sikkim, India: Issues and Challenges*." It discovered that the majority of Sikkim's tourism industry is driven by both local and international visitors, the combined numbers of which increased by about 77% to 14.25 lakh in 2017 to make up the state's total tourist intake. The state's infrastructure, ecology, and culture may all come under strain if there were a significant "increase in the number of tourists visiting the state. The viability of the symbiotic relationship between tourism and the environment, as well as the long-term viability of tourism in the state, requires sustainable planning that makes best use of management. In fact, one out of every three mountain people in developing countries is vulnerable to food insecurity and faces poverty and isolation. This is due to the fact that Sikkim is also under threat from climate change, land degradation, overexploitation, and natural disasters, and these threats have devastating consequences.

(Dam, 2020) Studied "*STATUS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES IN SIKKIM, INDIA: USE OF SELECT RELEVANT PARAMETERS TO ASSESS ISSUES AND CHALLENGES*" and came to the conclusion that sustainable tourism is an example of the notion of "sustainable development," which was discussed at the Earth Summit in 1992. In the last thirty years, scholars have offered a variety of perspectives, which have contributed to the concept's development in the tourism academic discourse and continue to contribute to its development. The idea of sustainable tourism development was given appropriate weight throughout the 1980s in order to establish methods for alternative kinds of tourism, which were supported as the antithesis to mass tourism. The primary impetus for the development of alternative tourism was an expression of concern over the adverse effects of mass tourism.

(Sharma, 2015) Studied "*Nature Based Tourism Planning: A Case Study of Aritar, East Sikkim*" I discovered that ever from the beginning of time itself, travelling has been everyone's favourite way to pass the time. Traveling for pleasure and travelling in luxury become popular activities for many wealthy travellers. As a consequence of this, lords in the western terrene and royals in India developed a penchant for travelling, a practise that in the modern age became known as "tourism." In later years, as more people began to take an interest in travelling, the concept of mass tourism began to take shape. The gradual migration of large numbers of people from one location to another resulted in the use of the natural resources that were unique to each of those locations. Following it, the phenomenon of tourism went through a period of development.

(Karmakar, 2022) Studied "*A STUDY ON BEST PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SIKKIM*" He came to the conclusion that Tourism is the whole of the connections that are formed as a result of the interaction between visitors, host governments, and communities.

According to George Young's definition from 1973, a tourist is someone who goes on trips away from their normal environment. The term "tourism" refers to the temporary relocation of a group of people away from their usual place of residence and employment for a time period of at least 24 hours but no more than one year (WTO). Many developing nations rely heavily on tourism as a significant source of both foreign currency and job opportunities. Tourism is one of the businesses with the highest rates of global expansion.

(Bhadauria, 1990) Studied "*DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF ECO-TOURISM IN SIKKIM*" and discovered that It is not necessary to utilise the whole of the forest area in any one place in order to promote and grow ecotourism in forest regions. This may be done in any location. In addition to the landscaping, plantation, regeneration, and protection components, which would be jointly managed by the Tourism Department and the Forest Department and for which no specific diversion may be required, only a small portion of the land that has been degraded or is completely unusable could be brought back into use. For this particular project, diversion is the only option that may be explored. The lands that are set aside for a particular conservation initiative would not be considered for inclusion in the proposal.

It is essential to ensure sustainable tourism planning and development in order to preserve the natural environment and cultural heritage while promoting economic growth in the state of Sikkim, which is a small state located in the northeastern region of India and is known for its picturesque landscapes, diverse culture, and rich biodiversity.

A comprehensive strategy that takes into consideration the social, economic, and environmental aspects of tourism is required for the planning and development of sustainable tourism”.

The following are some strategies that can be implemented in Sikkim to promote sustainable tourism:

- **Community Involvement:** Because they have a stake in the preservation of their natural and cultural resources, the residents of the surrounding area need to be included in the planning and development of tourism. It is possible for the community to generate cash by providing visitors with real cultural insights and one-of-a-kind experiences that are exclusive to the community.
- **Conservation of Natural Resources:** Sikkim is well-known for the rich variety of its flora and wildlife; hence, it is imperative that efforts be made to preserve these natural riches. It is possible to lessen the negative effects that tourism has on the natural world by encouraging ecotourism pursuits such as hiking, bird watching, and animal safaris.
- **Sustainable Infrastructure:** It is important to practise sustainability while developing infrastructure, especially in areas like lodging, transit, and waste management. The utilisation of renewable energy sources, environmentally friendly products, and effective waste management systems are all ways in which the environmental damage caused by tourism may be mitigated.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Sikkim has a diverse cultural history, and it is important that this history be preserved for future generations. It is possible to teach visitors about local

customs and traditions, and it is also possible to promote cultural events in order to offer visitors with an experience that is both distinctive and genuine.

- **Responsible Tourism:** It is important that visitors be taught to behave responsibly and respectfully toward the local people as well as the natural surroundings. Education and awareness programmes, which may also encourage environmentally responsible tourist activities, are one way this goal can be accomplished.

Importance of Sikkim as a tourist place

When looking back at the history of tourism in the state of Sikkim before it was merged with India, it is clear that the state did not get a significant amount of visitors. Even after the merger, the growth rate was dismal until the 1980s because significant portions of the hilly terrain remained inaccessible or limited to visitors. This was the case despite the fact that the two companies had merged. In the most recent decade of this century, there has been a noticeable acceleration in the development of tourism thanks to the relaxing of permission requirements in an increasing number of places and Sikkim's rising profile as a promising new tourist destination. Between the years 2010 and 2017, there was a significant increase in tourism, with the number of tourists arriving in the state catching up to and even exceeding the population of the state. The state of Sikkim is gifted with an incredible amount of natural beauty, ranging from snow-capped mountains to lush green valleys. Mainly tourist hubs and circuits started progressively expanding from East districts (Gangtok), and they subsequently stretched to Rabong, Pelling, Yuku, and Lachen, amongst other locations. Trekking along the Yuksom-Dzongri- Goechala path, which had its beginnings in the days before the merger, is one kind of adventure tourism that is becoming more popular in modern times. It was around this time (1988) that the state government made the decision to open Tsongmo Lake to tourism. Given its proximity to Gangtok, the state capital, and the fact that it is only 35 kilometres away, Tsongmo Lake quickly became the most convenient location for tourists coming from West Bengal who wanted to witness snowfall. This was then followed by the opening of Nathula, which enabled travellers to go via this historic mountain pass all the way up to the point where it meets the Chinese border.

Historical Background

The favourable weather “conditions, abundant 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 artefacts, and cultural festivals of Bhutia and Lepcha tribes are the important elements that contribute to tourism in the state. As a result, visitors to Sikkim may choose from a wide variety of activities, including urban mass tourist, tourism in rural areas, tourism in natural settings, religious and cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. Sikkim's tourism industry was another sector that evolved naturally with the state's expanding infrastructure. However, the actual efforts for the development of tourism, such as raising awareness and developing initiatives at the government and community level, didn't commence until the 1990s. These efforts included growing consciousness and developing initiatives. Additionally, during this time period, infrastructure relating to tourism was developed, and an increased focus was placed on ecotourism. The local



community has been given responsibility over a variety of tourist destinations that have been created in the area. The state of Sikkim, widely regarded as the pinnacle of ecotourism locations, emerged as the primary focus of government policy, leading to the formulation of a tourist strategy. It was envisioned that at least one location in each of the 32 constituencies would be developed and marketed as an ecotourism site or destination 16. Today, a number of fairs and festivals related to tourism are being organised in a variety of tourist destinations all over the world. The goals of these events are to bring attention to the distinctive cultural aspects of the location in question and to increase awareness of its most notable attractions. The state government has organised a number of international events, such as the International Flower Show, in order to provide tourists with an opportunity to learn about the state's extensive floral diversity. In addition, tourist attractions may be found in the form of cultural celebrations held by the many local ethnic groups and Buddhist temples. The institutional frameworks that are in place at the levels of villages and communities in the state provide strong support for ecotourism and environment tourism. The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the state tourism department are continuously organising a number of capacity-building and awareness programmes for the stakeholders. The goal of these programmes is to educate the stakeholders on issues that are related to the environment and to improve tourism culture and management in the state. The number of visitors that come to Sikkim each year has increased to exceed 10 lakhs at this point. The favourable weather conditions, abundant 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 artefacts, and cultural festivals of Bhutia and Lepcha tribes are the important elements that contribute to tourism in the state. As a result, visitors to Sikkim may choose from a wide variety of activities, including urban mass tourist, tourism in rural areas, tourism in natural settings, religious and cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. Sikkim's tourism industry was another sector that evolved naturally with the state's expanding infrastructure. However, the actual efforts for the development of tourism, such as raising awareness and developing initiatives at the government and community level, didn't commence until the 1990s. These efforts included growing consciousness and developing initiatives. Additionally, during this time period, infrastructure relating to tourism was developed, and an increased focus was placed on ecotourism. The local community has been given responsibility over a variety of tourist destinations that have been created in the area.

Sustainable Tourism in Sikkim

Sikkim's tourism industry is a big consumer of the state's natural resources; thus, ensuring that it does so in an effective manner is critical not only to the health of the local environment and the community that serves as its host, but also to the preservation of global resources. In order to cut down on emissions that contribute to pollution, it is necessary to make effective use of all available resources, particularly the energy that is obtained from fossil fuels. These procedures reduce the costs of running a tourist company, making them doable even in a rural and isolated mountain setting. to increase the quantity of local jobs created and supported by tourism as well as the quality of those jobs, including the development of standardised skills

and entrepreneurial practises, the level of pay, conditions of service, and accessibility to all individuals without discrimination of any kind based on gender, disability, or any other factor. The realisation that the earth's limited resources could not permanently support the fast population and industrial expansion gave rise to the notion of sustainability. Protecting the natural environment has to be a pressing priority, and greater attention should be paid to it right now. The vast majority of visitors want to go to places that are aesthetically pleasing, have useful amenities, are relatively clean, and have low levels of pollution. Tourism has the potential to give both the motive and the resources to preserve and, in some cases, even increase an area's existing level of environmental quality. The ability of local inhabitants to take pleasure in a high degree of environmental quality is another extremely significant factor. Travel and tourism have the potential to raise locals' consciousness about the state of the environment they live in. The environment and tourism are inextricably intertwined and rely on one another. If tourism is going to continue its upward trajectory, then creative solutions need to be discovered to strengthen the connection between the two in order to make it more environmentally friendly. The 'Nathula' Pass is one of the highest motorable roads and is richly covered by many varieties of alpine flora and fauna. It is located at an altitude of 14,200 feet and borders India and China in the Tibetan Plateau". Sikkim is home to a wide range of scenic attractions that are sure to please visitors. Brahmini ducks make their home in Tsomgo Lake, which is located at an elevation of 3,740 metres and serves as a resting spot for a variety of migratory duck species.

Selected destination of sikkim

The state of Sikkim is located in the northeastern part of India and is well-known for its breathtaking scenery, extensive cultural history, and wide variety of flora and animals. The following are some of the most well-known tourism spots in Sikkim:

- **Gangtok:** The city of Gangtok, which serves as the seat of government for the state of Sikkim, is also a renowned tourist destination. It is famous for the gorgeous monasteries, breathtaking vistas of the Himalayas, and lively cultures that can be found there. The Enchey Monastery, the Rumtek Monastery, the Tashi Viewpoint, and the Gangtok Ropeway are some of the most well-known tourist destinations in Gangtok.
- **Pelling:** Pelling is a tiny village in the western part of Sikkim that is well-known for the stunning views it offers of the Kanchenjunga mountain range. It is a well-known location for mountaineering, hiking, and other types of extreme activities. Pemayangtse Monastery, Khecheopalri Lake, Rabdentse Ruins, and the Sangachoeling Monastery are just a few of the well-known tourist destinations that can be found in Pelling.
- **Lachung:** The hamlet of Lachung is located in northern Sikkim and is well-known for the natural beauty of the area as well as its distinct culture. Skiing, hiking, and other outdoor activities, as well as sightseeing in the Yumthang Valley, are all quite popular here. Yumthang Valley, Zero Point, the Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary, and the Lachung Monastery are just a few of the places that visitors like seeing the most when they come to Lachung.

- **Tsomgo Lake:** Tsomgo Lake is a high-altitude lake in the eastern part of Sikkim that is well-known for both its breathtaking beauty and its significant religious role. In addition to being a well-known site for hiking and trekking, guests may also take yak rides around the lake during their stay.
- **Nathula Pass:** Nathula Pass is a high-altitude pass that may be found on the boundary between India and China in the eastern part of Sikkim. It is a well-known vacation spot for those who like exciting outdoor activities and provides breathtaking panoramas of the Himalayas. To enter Nathula Pass, visitors must first get a permission, and the pass is restricted to Indian nationals exclusively.

These are just few of the many stunning locations that Sikkim has to offer, but the state is home to many more. Because each location in Sikkim has its own special allure and attractiveness, the state continues to be a favourite vacation spot for many people.

Conclusion

This article, "Sustainable tourism planning and development: A study of selected locations of Sikkim," stresses the relevance of sustainable tourism practises in the preservation of Sikkim's natural environment and cultural heritage while simultaneously fostering economic growth. Inadequate infrastructure, limited resources for conservation and waste management, and a lack of awareness among tourists about responsible tourism practises are some of the obstacles that the study identifies as being obstacles to the implementation of sustainable tourism practises in the state of Sikkim. In general, the research highlights the significance of sustainable tourism planning and development in order to guarantee the long-term preservation of Sikkim's natural and cultural resources while simultaneously fostering economic expansion. The suggestions that were drawn from this research may assist stakeholders in the tourist sector in adopting environmentally responsible practises and ensuring that tourism is beneficial to both the local community and the environment. The results of this research may also be used to influence tourism policy and planning in other locations that are trying to strike a balance between the growth of tourism and the preservation of the environment and cultural traditions.

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