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## Problems and Prospects of Tourism Industry in Sikkim

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### **Abstract**

*In mid 1970s, Sikkim became a part of India. Sikkim also holds the status of 8<sup>th</sup> north eastern state of the country. The state is of strategic importance to the India as it shares three international borders with China, Nepal and Bhutan. The economy of the state is heavily dependent on the central government. Because of its location, the state attracts tourist and the tourism industry also grown manifold in recent years. However, the industry also faces lots of problems in the form of frequent landslides, lack of infrastructure development, poor implementation of government initiatives, lack of proper awareness programme etc. The state of Sikkim at the same time has the potential to be the prime tourist destination of the country with lots of bio diversity, scope for eco tourism, adventure tourism, religious tourism etc. Tourism in the State of Sikkim is growing at a rapid pace in a very well thought of and planned manner. Sikkim now has become one of the best sought after hill destinations at the global level. The leadership is very committed and the State Government has been very effective and successful in educating and guiding the people regarding tourism on the basic principle of Sustainable Development. The present study focuses on the dynamics of tourism development and its positive and negative impacts on resources, environment, and local communities. The scope of the survey is to study about the problems and prospects of the tourism industry in the state of Sikkim. The study uses both the primary and secondary data to elicit information. Basically interview methods are adopted for getting information from the respondents.*

**Key words:** 1. Tourism, 2. Problems, 3. Prospects, 4. Strategy, 5. Sustainable Development.

### **Introduction**

"Tourism is like fire: you can cook your dinner on it, but if you are not careful it will burn your house down." Asian saying. Today tourism is the world's leading industry. It plays a powerful role in the developing world. Globally, tourism initiatives receive considerable public funding and private investment as a means of economically developing low-income communities. NGOs are taking on a growing role in local tourism initiatives, as well as volunteer tourism, in hopes of injecting capital into the communities where they work. Amongst proponents, tourism is seen as a mechanism for local communities to capitalize on assets such as the natural environment and cultural heritage. It is expected to generate over 11 trillion dollars globally by 2020. Tourism can have a significant impact upon the physical environment, both at global and local levels.

Sikkim's comparative advantage lies in tourism sector. Sikkim is a touristic paradise. The geographical location followed by unique geo-environment, unparalleled natural beauty and hospitable people of the state are its competitive advantage. The State is gaining popularity, due to its cultural heterogeneity, monasteries, mountains, crystal clear lakes and high biodiversity. The alpine region of the Sikkim Himalaya is the center of mountaineering and trekking. Since 1990, there has been a tremendous increase in domestic and foreign visitors in the State following the opening of new tourist

areas. Tourism is now considered as one of the world's largest industries with an annual outlay of over USD 3.5 trillion out-put, i.e. 6% of world GNP (3). There has been a growing interest over the past two decades on ecotourism with emphasis on conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage, which attract a majority of tourists. The total number of tourist arrivals in the state has increased from 21,854 in 1981 and 67,547 in 1991 to 2.68 lakhs in 2005. The Tourism Master Plan for Sikkim has made a projection of 371743 tourists for 2011.

Tourism in the State of Sikkim is growing at a rapid pace in a very well thought of and planned manner. Sikkim now has become one of the best sought after hill destinations at the global level. The leadership is very committed and the State Government has been very effective and successful in educating and guiding the people regarding tourism on the basic principle of Sustainable Development.

### **Objectives**

With those mentioned above in mind, a thorough survey, as a part of semester term paper, in different location of Gangtok of Sikkim has been carried out. The main objectives of this term paper topic 'problems and prospects of Tourism Industry in Sikkim' are:

1. To assess the existing to tourism scenario in the state of Sikkim with respect to natural resources, heritage and other socio-cultural sites.
2. To identify the potential destinations and centers of tourism in Sikkim.
3. To review the status of existing development plans of tourism department for the development of tourism in the region.
4. To assess the existing infrastructure levels at identified destinations in terms of quality of roads / transportation facilities, and fooding and lodging.
5. The factors responsible for the increase and decrease of tourism in Sikkim.

For this purpose, the following points have been investigated:

1. The scenario of tourism before 10 years and after 10 years
2. Number of tourism from different state
3. Type of means and media
4. Relation with hotels and drivers
5. Necessary documents
6. Government initiative
7. Positive and negative impact
8. Future plans
9. Challenges faced by tourist.

### **Scope of the study**

In Sikkim, attempts are being made to make tourism environmentally friendly, and involvement of local communities is being sought so that they directly benefit from tourism and at the same time protects the biodiversity of the area. The present study focuses on the dynamics of tourism development, positive and negative impacts on resources, environment, and local communities. The survey is to study about the problems and prospects of the tourism industry in the state of Sikkim.

## Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data were gathered for problems and prospects, socio-economic status of the people involved with tourism through a field survey by oral testimony. Extensive informal/ formal interviews and discussions were held with groups representing the tourist industry, both in the private and public sectors, the community (in terms of ethnicity as well as occupation and economic status), tourists and porters. In addition, local people and other government officials were interviewed. The secondary data were generated from tourist inflow figures from the Tourism Department and internet and some other books. Simultaneously, Gangtok market, SNT route and M.G Marg were visited to collect information of the location and use of trekking routes and important stopover villages, trail conditions, lodging facilities, biodiversity and use of natural resources, and community conservation efforts.

## Tourism in sikkim

Sikkim is originally known as Suk-Heem, which in the local language means "peaceful home". Sikkim was an independent kingdom till the year 1974, when it became a part of the Republic of India. Sikkim is primarily a rural and agricultural economy where over 60% of its population are directly engaged in agriculture and allied activities. The state has limited industrial potential due to its geological and geomorphic constraints. The capital of Sikkim is Gangtok, located approximately 105 kilometers from New Jalpaiguri, the nearest railway station to Sikkim. Although, Pakyong Airport is under construction in East Sikkim, the nearest airport to Sikkim is Bagdogra Airport. The Tourism industry is the fastest growing industry world wide and it will continue to hold a pre-eminent position. Sikkim, with its spectacular natural beauty and cultural uniqueness steeped in religious mysticism beckons tourists from the national and international markets. For the Tenth Five Year Plan, the Department has carefully spanned the development of tourism infrastructure in all the viable areas. In the first year of the Tenth Five Year Plan 2002-2003, the Department has projected Rs. 586.00 lakhs against the Plan Outlay of Rs. 3570.00 lakhs. However, during the current financial year the Planning and Development has allocated Rs. 600.00 lakhs and Rs. 182.50 lakhs in first supplementary demand for grants amounting to Rs. 782.50 lakhs for Tourism department under Demand No. 41.

Sikkim Himalaya is an area of high biodiversity and cultural heterogeneity with distinctive ethnic groups, mountain peaks, sacred lakes, and monasteries, making it a place of tourist attraction. Trekking, nature and recreational tourism are growing very rapidly in the Sikkim Himalaya. Tourism in Sikkim is growing and is expected to reach ca. 400 000 tourists per year by the end of this century. The popular sightseeing places include Baba Mandir, Nathula Pass, Rumtek Monastery, Handicraft Shops and Tsangpo Lake. Sikkim is considered as the land of orchids, mystic cultures and colorful traditions. Sikkim is well known among trekkers and adventure lovers. Places near Sikkim include Darjeeling also known as the "Queen of Hills" and Kalimpong.

## Types of tourism sikkim

1. Adventure tourism; 2. Village tourism; 3. Eco- tourism; 4. Volunteer tourism 5. Agriculture tourism; 6. Pilgrimage tourism

## Tourist destination in sikkim

### A) East sikkim

- Enchey monastery
- Flower show complex
- Directorate of handlooms and handicrafts
- Do- Drul chorten
- Namgyal institute of Tibetology (NIT)
- Sri Sidheshwar mandir
- Chogyal palden thondup namgyal memorial park
- Gangtok ropeway
- Rumtek dharma chakra centre
- Banjhakri falls
- Pal zurmang kagyud monastery (lingdum)
- Tashi view point (6100 ft)
- Saramsa flower pavilion
- Water garden
- Ganesh tok (6100 ft)
- Hanuman tok (700 ft)
- Himalayan zoological park
- Bakthang waterfalls
- Fambong lho wildlife sanctuary
- Gonjang monastery
- Sa-ngor monastery
- Aritar
- Zaluk
- Khanchendzonga cultural cum village tourism complex, ranka
- Sikkim science centre, marchak
- Baba harbhajan singh memorial temple
- Nathula
- Tsomgo lake

### B) West sikkim

- Pelling
- Rabdentse palace ruins
- Pemayangtse monastery
- Sanga-choling monastery
- Darap cherry village
- Khangchendzonga waterfalls
- Dubdi monastery
- Phamrong waterfalls
- Tashiding monastery

- Kongri-labdang
- Shiva mandir, legship
- Soreng
- Chakung
- Limbo cultural centre, tharpu
- Limbo cultural centre, tharpu
- Bassey rhododendron sanctuary
- Rinchenpong-kaluk
- Hee bermiok
- Dentam valley (4,800 ft)
- Singshore bridge (6,500 ft)
- Uttarey valley (7,600 ft)
- Phoktey dara-singalila peak (12,900 ft)
- Chewabhanjyang pass (10,300 ft)
- Singalila range tensing-hillary eco-tourism trekking trail towards khangchendzonga (6,700 ft to 17,000 ft)

### C) North sikkim

- Kabi lungchok
- Seven sisters waterfalls
- Phensang monastery
- Phodong monastery
- Labrang monastery
- Sirijunga Yuma mangheem-mangshila
- Rong lungten lee
- Chungthang
- Lachung
- Yumthang, the valley of flowers
- Lachen
- Thangu
- Guru-dzongmar lake (17,000 ft)

### D) South sikkim

- Namchi
- Siddheshvara dham, solophok
- Samdruptse
- Rock garden
- Rabong
- Tendong hill
- Temi tea garden
- Maenam hill
- Borong
- Buddha park, rabong
- Sikip

- Phur tsa chu
- Yung drung kungdrakling: bon monastery
- Indian Himalayan centre for adventure & eco tourism (ihcae), chemchey

#### **Restricted areas for foreign tourist in sikkim**

- Nathula ( North Sikkim)
- Tsomgo lake
- Guru-Dongmar Lake

#### **Positive impact of tourist in the state**

- Employment opportunity
- Improve in socioeconomic condition
- Cultural exchange

#### **Negative impact of tourist in the state**

- More environmental pollution
- Danger for endanger species
- Exploitation of culture and lifestyle

#### **Challenges faced by the state**

- Fading away of the traditional culture
- Fading away of the endangered species of the state
- Disturbance to the harmony of the state

#### **Future plans for tourism**

Even though Sikkim is facing problems with tourism, the industry have a bright future. About 400 00 tourist arrivals are expected by 2011-2020. The positive expectations have been based on the current growth rate of the industry despite various problems; this growth is being attributed to the fast-growing Indian economy for the past three to four years.

#### **Benefits that tourist acquire from the state**

- Hospitality of local people
- Can take various products as souvenirs Canvas wall hangings, Thangkas, Woolen Carpets (Dens), Choksees, Tea, Fruit juice, Pickles, Sikkim liquor, Chhurpi and so on.

#### **Restrictions for the tourist**

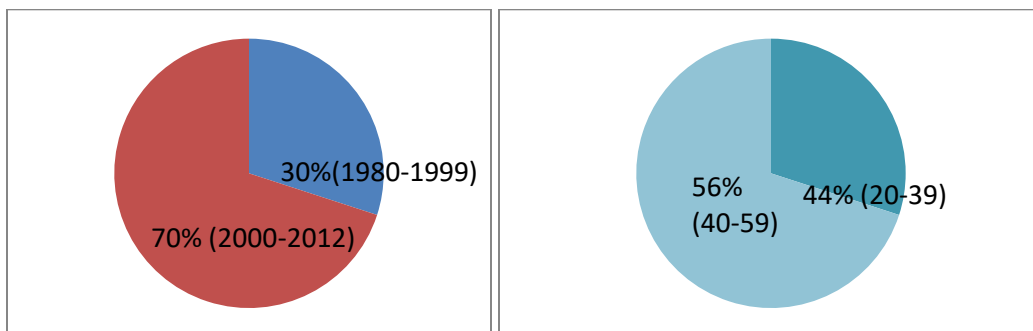
- No smoking in public places
- Do not litter
- Do not spit
- Patronize eco-friendly products
- Use water sparingly
- Help to keep Sikkim clean and green
- Respect local customs, beliefs, culture and tradition
- Do not disturb monks at prayers
- Do not deface monuments, trees and a utility with graffiti
- Do not make noise and play loud music
- Avoid overtaking especially at road blocks

- Discourage trade in wildlife product
- Do not pick flowers and uproot plants
- Be friendly

**Table show the name of the tourism agency and owner in sikkim**

S.l no.	Name of the agency	year of establishment	Name of the owner	Age
1.	Modern Tours & Travel	2001	Taktuk Bhutia	57
2.	Explorateur Eco Treks & Tours	1998	T. N. Bhutia	40
3.	Newmen Tours & Travel	1998	A.K. Gupta	52
4.	Ultimate Tours & Travel	2012	--	--
5.	Dreamland Tours & Travel	2004	Sonam Bhutia	27
6.	Alternative Tours & Travel	2007	I.K. Rasaily	29
7.	Blue Sky Tours & Travel	1987	Palzor Lachungpa	40
8.	Shi Sadafal Tours & Travel	2012	Ankit Sada	28
9.	Sovenior Tours & travel	2005	Swraswati Gurung	57
10.	Altitude Tours & Travel	2003	Bhaichung Bhutia	36

Source: Collected by the author



The first pie chart shows that few of people have started with the tourism business as the tourism agency from 1987 – 1999 is only about 30% it has slowly started growing as the tourism industry became the main means of earning, and more inflow of economic in the state “Sikkim”. Today many people are showing their interest in tourism as it is proved by the table that starting from 2000 till today 2012, tourism agency have increased to 70% in Sikkim.

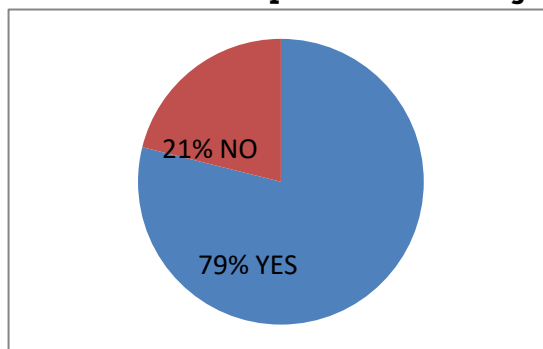
The second pie chart shows that people with the age starting from 27 – 59, have shown their interest in tourism industry. It even tells us that in future tourism industry will be the main industry providing maximum number of employment and also maximum GDP to the national income.

**Table shows the response of tourism agency**

S.l no.	Questions	Yes	No
1	Any other chain of same office?	3	7
2	Do you offer tourism consultation?	7	3
3	Do you keep relation with hotels & drivers	8	2
4	Do you provide food & lodging?	5	5
5	Is there any positive & negative impact from geographical features to tourist?	9	1
6	Is there any restricted area for tourist?	10	0
7	Is there any impact on environment?	9	1
8	Does tourism industry think about sustainable tourism?	10	0
9	Can tourism help in biodiversity?	10	0

Source: Collected by the author

**Pie chart shows the response of tourism agency**



The above pie chart shows that 21% of the tourism agencies do not have any other branch of the Offices, does not provide tourism consultation and thinks that tourist do not have any negative impact on environment neither they harm the society. But more than 50%, about 79% of the tourism agencies provide all most all the necessary tourism consultation to the tourist and even they keep a very good relation with the hotels and the cab drivers. Even they think that some of the tourists have harmful impact on the environment as well as towards the society thus they maintain the sustainable tourism and sustainable environment.

**Current sinario of sikkim tourism**

Sikkim is a hilly State nestled in the Eastern Himalayas. The State takes pride in its natural beauty manifested by the snow clad mountains, landscape dotted with perennial streams & waterfalls, lush green forests, picturesque villages, natives in traditional dresses and indigenous architecture. The crime free society adds to the natural attractions of the state, making it one of the most sought after tourist destination in the country.



Tourism is an important sector in the prosperity of a Nation and the State. It is one of the best and convenient platforms for educating people. Tourism provides an opportunity for cross –cultural communication and eliminates social barriers that impede progress towards understanding and harmony between people and nation. It opens up new areas for promoting national integration and international understanding.

Tourism is one of the priorities and important sector of the State and it is to become the main economy of the State development. It is non-polluting, low cost and high return oriented industry for the State subjective to certain precautions. For this, the State has adopted the Integrated Development for making the Tourism most viable sector.

Tourism is going to be developed as most important sector for contribution of the GDP. Tourism has created a substantial employment, directly or indirectly. Number of Domestic tourists in 2003 were about 1, 76,659 while in 2008 were more than 5, 00,000 tourists visited the state and in 2009 the number may be about 6, 00,000 tourists. Number of foreign tourists in 2003 was about 11,966 while in 2008 about 23,000 tourists visited the state and in 2009 we expect about same response due to various global issues.

## Findings

Sikkim is the land of peace and tranquility. It is situated in the Eastern Himalayas; Sikkim is one of the most beautiful states of the Indian union. Sikkim is adorned with snowy mountains, luxuriant forests with exotic flora and fauna, pristine waterfalls, sacred lakes, holy caves, medicinal hot springs, cascading rivers and gentle streams, ‘a destination for all seasons and all reasons’. Sikkim offer tours for everyone from those seeking solitude for meditation and those seeking leisure holiday to the more adventurous. People of Sikkim are peace loving with rich culture and traditions and delightful cuisine.

The above mentioned highlights were about Sikkim in brief. After gathering both the primary and secondary data our findings came to be positive and successful as we ever thought off. And this can be explained with the following:

- Tourism industry of Sikkim mainly faces the problems like shortage of worker, insufficient accommodation, unclean rooms, lack of proper infrastructure, excessive bureaucracy which delays in new hotel and transportation projects, and most importantly lack of government incentives in rural interior.
- Maximum of the tourism agencies agrees that, they do not face problems during off season.
- Tourism agencies are not happy with the road condition of Sikkim as it makes them insecure for the tourist. They are looking forward to have a better road facilities in coming years
- Tourism agencies are even not happy with the transportation facilities as Government does not allow all type of vehicles to the tourist destination.

## Basic problems of tourism industry in sikkim

### 1) Lack of proper infrastructure

Infrastructure is the major factor which affects the tourism industry in sikkim. These include access of roads, electricity, water supply, sewerage and tele communication. The sectors related to the travel and tourism industry include airlines, surface transport, accommodation (hotels), and infrastructure and facilitation systems, among others.

## 2) Amenities

Amenities available at various tourist destinations and on route of Sikkim need to be improved. These include drinking water, well maintained and clean waiting rooms and toilets, first aid and wayside amenities (to meet the requirement of the tourists travelling to tourist destinations) such as lounge, cafeteria, and parking facilities, among others.

## 3) Human resources

Lack of skilled manpower is a major challenge faced by the travel and tourism industry in Sikkim. To sustain growth in the travel and tourism industry, trained manpower/ workforce is required at every level — managerial, supervisory, skilled or semi-skilled. Attrition, shortage of tourism training infrastructure, qualified trainers, and lack of proper strategies and policies for human resource development also affect the industry.

## 4) Taxation

Travel and tourism in India is a high-taxed industry, which makes Sikkim expensive as a tourist destination. This is affecting the growth of the industry in Sikkim and is losing out to other low-cost destinations. Various taxes are levied across the entire industry right from tour operators, transporters, airline industry to hotels and these include service tax, luxury tax, tax on transportation, tax on aviation turbine fuel (airline industry), and various taxes on transportation.

## 5) Regulatory issues

For inbound international tourists, visa procedures are seen as a hindrance. A number of states are competing with Sikkim for tourists provide visa on arrival. Sikkim should provide visa on arrival for more countries or for certain categories of tourists for a specific duration.

## Prospects

Healthy economic growth recorded in past few years, especially in the services industry, has led to increase in business travel. Higher disposable income and affordability have increased domestic leisure travel in Sikkim. Foreign tourist arrivals in Sikkim have also grown. The total number of tourist arrivals in the state has increased from 21,854 in 1981 and 67,547 in 1991 to 2.68 lakhs in 2005, to 371743 tourists by 2011 and 400, 000 in 2012. This is a clear indicator that the long-term prospects for the Sikkim travel and tourism industry are bright. Sikkim is expected to witness increased tourist activity both in the eco tourism and adventure in the coming years. International inbound traffic is expected to grow rapidly with increasing investment and trade activity.

## Future strategies for tourism in sikkim

Tourism is directly linked with the biodiversity and the generation of economic resources for the community and the government of Sikkim. The State government has provided many facilities to promote tourist activity in Sikkim, e.g., logistic support to register travel society and media advertising time about Sikkim. The Government of Sikkim have identified the potential of tourism in Sikkim thus has projected USD 2 million in the 8th Five Year Plan for tourism promotion activities. The Department of Tourism is putting an effort in opening many new sites and hopes to increase the

number of visitors. Even the Forest Department is putting an effort in undertaking measures for the conservation of biodiversity and in promoting afforestation. Field visits and interviews with tourism agencies revealed that tourism plays an important role in socioeconomic and cultural change in the region. At present, trekking and eco-tourism is mainly focused and are concentrated in isolated places where culture is most vulnerable to change. Mass tourism has an adverse effect on social behavior, attitudes, religious sentiments, tradition, culture as well as on the economy. Among some of the adverse impacts of tourism in Sikkim, there is evidence of changes in socio cultural outlook, young people have become strongly attracted to western culture and fashions and culture of the state is being washed away.

### **Suggestion**

Diversification of tourist destinations can be helpful in avoiding overcrowding at a few places, and for this there is a need to open new sites for visitors. Relaxation in permit regulations and off-season and winter tourism activities can lead to more tourists throughout the year. Most of the conservation programs are run by the Forest Department, while the Tourism Department publishes some material and sign boards to stop environmental deterioration. Tourism in Sikkim is becoming popular, and it is expected that there will be more visitors in the near future. Therefore, the time is right to improve and manage the resources on which this tourism depends. At the same time, the benefits of tourism must percolate down to the grassroots levels of communities and stakeholders. If some of the above mentioned points are planned and implemented properly, there is no doubt that ecotourism, sustainable tourism, adventure tourism, village tourism and biodiversity conservation programs can be launched successfully. So that there will be less problems face by the industry.

### **Conclusion**

There is a vast scope for increased tourism in Sikkim that must be viewed with response to environment preservation, and local communities must be involved with such programs. In view of limited industrial growth in mountain areas, tourism could become a potential source of income, if properly planned. At present Sikkim is promoting more ecotourism as to protect biodiversity and rational use of resources of the state and even there is the enforcement of government and army regulations in helping to protect biodiversity. The local people possess broad knowledge on biodiversity, resources and the local environment. They also have their own traditional ways of managing resources. However, they lack a broad global perspective. Local stakeholders need to be trained as nature guides in specialized activities, e.g. birds, animals, forest and other plants, cooking, etc. Small village resorts can also provide economic benefits for local people for example in Kerala. Local management skills must be built on, so that local people can maintain their culture and also improve tourist sites. Promotion of vegetable growing, poultry and milk production at remote tourist sites can help local communities to earn money from tourists. Travel agencies is also promoting the purchase of local produce through tourist and helping the local people. Promotion and training in the use of indigenous products, e.g., traditional food, handicrafts, and indigenous culture can be attractive to tourists, and a money spinner for locals. The socioeconomic conditions for people involved in the tourism business have also improved. The State has a rich tradition of nature conservation. However, local needs and increased tourist activities are causing some environmental degradation to this unspoilt region.

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