CHAPTER - 4
POTENTIALS, CONSTRAINTS & REFORMS

"The traveler sees what he sees, the tourist see what he has come to see"

-Gilbert K. Chesterton
CHAPTER - 4

POTENTIALS, CONSTRAINTS AND REFORMS

This episode is fanatical to Cross Border Tourism Opportunities for Sikkim in terms of Economic Integration, Reconciliation Process of Silk Route Trade with Tourism, and Potentials of developing Unique Tourism Products and Services. In addition, it examines the existing Constraints and Impediments to growth of tourism in the state and puts forward probable reforms for improving the state of affairs.

4.1. SIKKIM TOURISM AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

- POTENTIALS BEYOND BORDERS

Nestled in the lap of Himalayas and bounded by some of the highest mountain peaks, amidst spectacular terrain, pristine lakes, luxuriant forests, roaring rivers and gentle streams, Sikkim is a veritable paradise flanked by Bhutan on the East, Nepal on the West and China (Tibbet) on the North. This land is criss-crossed by harmony, hospitality and tranquility with negligible crime rate and it is now open for international and cross-border linkage too with a free market rules which follow the proven philosophy of mass capitalization that dominates the international political scene over governing ideology. The 1990s was a period seeing rapid economic transition of Asian countries, especially South East Asia and Indian economy. After successful commencement of liberalization era, it was a strategic decision taken by the Union Government towards looking east in its foreign policy. Accordingly, the Indian leadership came up with an idea called ‘Look East Policy’ of India, an active economic proposal of engagement with South East Asian nations to be
implemented as an official initiative in achieving two objectives, namely, the encouragement of business links with individual partners and providing foreign employment for India’s own expanding manpower [Fernandez(2007)]. The highly acclaimed ‘Look-East Policy’ mooted in 1992 was given an initial thrust with the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visiting China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore and India becoming a important dialogue partner with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) at the same time. Since beginning of the globalization, India has put a huge stress on this policy through active involvement in some regional initiatives namely the BBIMSTEC (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) and the Ganga Mekong Cooperation and now becoming a Member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005. In fact, 1991 was a turning point in India's economic integration due to its new framed ‘Look East Policy’. Coming to Northeastern region perspective, it is only with the formulation of this policy in last decade (1992), India had started giving this region due weight-age in its international strategy. Before 1990, India’s main focus was on Soviet Union because of which ties with other major Asian powers like China, Japan were not well-built. India’s inward-looking orientation disconnected it from neighborhood to the east, kept it apart from the economic growth of East Asia. By the turn of 1990s, India had totally marginalized itself. The first phase of ‘Look East Policy’ launched by the Narasimha Rao Government in early 90s focused on renewing contact with a region that India had drifted away from. Now it has entered into second phase of this policy which has a new dimension — the development of India’s isolated Northeast in general and landlocked Himalayan state of Sikkim in particular with special emphasis on cross border trade. Experts believe that enhancing the level of economic partnership with Asian nations should form an important part of the strategy to increase Sikkim’s stand in globalizing world. The neighboring Asian superior China has an abundance of natural resources and significant
technological skills. These provide a natural base for integration between China and Sikkim both in trade and commercial sense. The new breed of Indian migrants in China that include economists, software engineers, financial analysts, management professionals, technical consultants are likely to play a significant role in promoting Indo-Asian ties and more specifically Indo-China economic relations with primary focus on Sikkim state. Again, India's long standing recognition of English as official language breaks down the communication barriers, and in theory, accelerates business opportunities. This is the advantage that India's Look East Policy has over China and should be exploited in full to gain an edge. On the other hand, the reopening of famed Silk Route Trade via Nathu la in Sikkim to Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China on 6th July, 2006, is also likely to have a wider scope both in terms of trade and tourism services. This is because of relatively easier proximity and more developed physical and institutional infrastructures in and around the trading points. This reopening may provide a major boost to tourism industry in the tiny Himalayan state of Sikkim. In long run, its impact may reap a rich harvest in religious tourism too. The people who undertake a pilgrimage to holy Manas Sarovar in Tibet will now opt for Sikkim as the first destination. For not only does this route from Nathu la to Sarovar reduces the distance, it is a less expensive option as well. Moreover, the state is a center of attraction in entire panorama of Buddhist Circuit Tourism amongst Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet and Myanmar. Thus, this could undoubtedly be a most fascinating trade and tourism hub and heritage site on the globe. As a result, a number of memorandum of undertakings and border trade agreement have recently been entered into between China and Sikkim. If the concerned governments, particularly that of India and China and local authorities of these countries are serious about their declared intentions, these new initiatives would indeed rediscover, renew and rejuvenate the age-old cultural and historical ties amongst the people of Sikkim and China. In turn, greater interaction would
unquestionably heighten tourism prospects in the state across its bordering areas [Bora, Adhikary and Sikdar (2006)]. But what is seen is not perceived. This seems to be the case with Sikkim. The new thrust in the foreign policy of ‘Looking East’ has been found wanting in pace of framing some sort of Tourism Agreements between the state and the Chinese authorities. The importance of East Asia for Indian tourism industry, particularly Sikkim tourism at cross border level needs no emphasis after considering its growing potentials in terms of global tourism scenario. Of late, there is a tendency to ride on the wave of information technology in Sikkim’s relations with the neighboring countries. The India-ASEAN partnership should energize this process to move it closer to the shared goal of promoting it over its geographic boundaries [Bora, Adhikary and Sikdar (2007)]. India and in particular Sikkim, has a wherewithal for this vision to materialize but what is needed is a concerted action at all levels. That’s why, there is certainly a giant possibility for marketing Sikkim tourism across its bordering nation China where looking east provides an opportunity to overcome the problems of time and psychological distance. The new generations of travelers who are ‘money rich and time poor’ are increasingly looking for unique experiences. More and more people are looking at tourism as less of a journey and more of an experience – due to which cross-border tourism has been booming and future projections show that this trend will continue for an extended time. For these new and growing breed of visitors, the state of Sikkim with its variety and uniqueness holds immense attraction. Therefore, the strategy in this regard is now identifying new market for tourism and this search should be aligned with the look east trade policy. Such a policy shift is particularly relevant and important for the state of Sikkim. Because, it is situated far away from main entry points of visitors and is also somehow at a disadvantage in attracting foreign tourists from the west. Hence, looking to east is fortunately a natural marketing option for Sikkim tourism. China is already
vigorously developing tourism in its southern provinces to take advantage of outbound tourist market. These areas have cultural, historical and ethnic links with Sikkim in India. The tourism marketing strategy for the state should focus on these links to establish a natural flow of people within the area. The Nathu la Trade Study Group has by now recommended integration of trade with tourism between Sikkim and Tibet Autonomous region of China by 2012. The trade-tourism integration will call for signing of a separate treaty / protocol between India and China. The Government of Sikkim in concert with other northeastern states and West Bengal should put forward proposals for integrating tourism with trade to the Union Government at an appropriate level so as to achieve the goal by 2012. The state government should also initiate discussion with the Union Government on lifting restrictions on the entry of tourists from mainland China, Bangladesh and Myanmar into Sikkim. Networking of the tourism related institutions in Sikkim and other states of India and in Nepal, Bhutan and China may be initiated including starting of Gangtok-Lhasa Bus Service. It essentially requires a comprehensive road map that clearly defines roles for all the government agencies involved, as well as for private service providers, industry associations like Travel Agents Association of Sikkim (TAAS), Hotel and Restaurant Owners Association, and the representatives from eco-tourism projects, NGOs working with local communities and local communities themselves. Accordingly, if the tiny state of Sikkim is to live up to the promise of putting itself in Global Tourism Map, it must imagine a world where border-crossings are not thought of as a primarily issue and in that sense, it demands an adequate and better border management. For this, a fresh bilateral legal basis needs to be concluded to facilitate movement of tourists across the border. The research on the same has suggested that by 2018 onwards this tourism linkages should be extended to SAARC nations and thereby integrating tourism activities of third countries of the region including Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. This means opening of all SAARC visitors to cross the border through Nathu la in Sikkim and it seems to be a realistic visualization. Thus, the present researcher argues with firm belief that the much acclaimed ‘Look East Policy’ certainly has some potentials in transforming India’s Himalayan beauty-Sikkim into a ‘Gateway to China’ bonding through bilateral trade and tourism services.
4.1.1. SILK ROUTE TRADE AND TOURISM via NATHU LA
- TOWARDS BETTER RECONCILIATION

On July 6, 2006, Nathu La, a mountain pass connecting Tibet’s Yadong County and Sikkim, was unusually busy, attracting much attention from the world media. On that day, Sino-Indian Silk Route Trade, halted for as long as 44 years, was formally re-opened. This re-opening of Nathu La mountain pass symbolizes a new beginning for both China and India in their steadily improving relationship [Mohanty (2006)]. ‘Nathu’ meaning ‘Sky High’ and ‘La’ implying ‘Pass’ is located on the border between Yadong County in Tibet’s Shigatse district and Indian Himalayan state of Sikkim. It is at a height of about 14500 ft and 460 kms from the Tibetan capital Lhasa and 2 hrs ride from the Sikkimese capital Gangtok. The same once served as a major land-route trade passage between China and India and was part of the ancient Silk Rout. Thus, Nathu La could be Sikkim’s major tourism strength and has the potential of acquiring a status of the backbone of Sikkimese economy and society. Therefore, a conscious attempt may be made to gradually integrate trade through Nathu La with the movement of tourists across the border. Historically also trade was done alongside tourism, mainly pilgrimage. Presently, a significant exchange of tourists takes place between Nepal and Tibet through the land route of Kathmandu-Kodari highway. In this line, tourists are likely to make beeline to watch how trade actually takes place between India and China at the Nathu La trading point. One can expect the proposed Nathu La museum to be rather a prime attraction for the visitors in Sikkim. Equally a large number of tourists can visit from the Chinese end as well. The Tibet tourism is on a developing stage. It was only in post 1980 period that Tibet was opened up to foreigners. Globally known as “Roof of the World”, Tibet lately has focused on ‘Eco-tourism’. Annually there are over 6000 pilgrims who make their way from India to this region via the Nepal China border town of Khasa (Tatopani). Nathu La, also in this regard.
would be logistically more economic, and culturally a better port of entry [Adhikary and Bora (2006)]. The income effects on roadside hotels and restaurants, transport and communication, handicrafts and many other backward and forward linkages are likely to be immense. Besides, Sikkim could be a hub connecting all major Buddhist destinations in India and neighboring nations like Bodh Gaya in Bihar, Rumtek in Sikkim, Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, Lumbini in Nepal and Taktsang in Bhutan to Jokhang and Potala in Lhasa. This is going to be further strengthened by the proposed air link between Bagdogra and Kathmandu. The other most attractive areas of interest for the people of Tibet Autonomous Region and nearby areas will be the health and educational facilities which are available in and around Sikkim. The entire Sikkim-Darjeeling belt has been famed for educational institutions and the quality of education they impart. The huge surge in demand for English speaking students and professionals in China could in fact trigger a beeline for educational institutions in Sikkim and surrounding places. Further, a modern museum that would house all the artifacts, archival materials, memoirs and other objects related to various missions, agreements, physical exchanges regarding Nathu La trade may be set up at Nathu, La introspect. However, the present diplomatic arrangement does not allow the use of Nathu La route as a transit point to visit various parts of Tibet and mainland China. For this reason, as already mentioned above, it essentially demands a separate international protocol which needs to be in place at an earliest. Thus, it is apparent from the aforesaid paragraphs that the tourism sector in Sikkim has global potentials that is yet to be exploited. Moreover, in general, there are other prospects too as noticeable below along with the constraints and hurdles for speedy promotion of the state of affairs. The current study, now makes an attempt to find out the same based on the filed observation followed by an evocative investigation.
4.2. POTENTIAL TOURISM PRODUCTS

Small but beautiful, Sikkim, situated in eastern Himalayas, offers an ample scope to grow tourism as a promising industry with its diverse endowments of tourist interests. In addition to the cross border opportunities highlighted above, the state is having tremendous potentials as regards the following unique tourism products.

4.2.1. ECO TOURISM

Eco Tourism as tourism product is very innovative and a new phenomenon, developed around the idea of travelling to places of natural beauty, moving around and staying with nature for a couple of days. It has twin objectives of conserving the environment and improving welfare of the local people. Countries like Kenya, Costa Rica and South Africa have already successfully promoted eco-tourism. In India, Kerala presents a unique success story of eco-tourism in the country. On this line, the Himalayan province of Sikkim has immense scope for the same, as its natural scenario and climatic condition resemble other hilly places of major attractions in India. The concept of eco-tourism in Sikkim began way back in 1995-96 and became the first state to have started it in the country. The state is virtually free from industrial pollution and an excellent sitting for eco-tourism which has been gaining importance in present day times. Sikkim is gifted with a multitude of lakes, green forests, blue hills and rivers that are unexpected on such a rugged terrain and are imbued with divine significance and thus can be considered as major ingredients of eco-tourism. As such, it attracts attention of visitors and the scholars alike and consequently creating a greater demand for an eco-friendly environment. For that, a host of matters needs to be properly addressed, including: (i) development of good approach road to the tourist spots (ii) creation of well equipped infra-structural facilities like good quality tents with provisions for food and other logistics and (iii) river cruising, water sports and bird watching towers to name a few.
4.2.2. ADVENTURE TOURISM

Adventure Tourism is one of the key tourism products of Sikkim. About 80% of the foreign visitors come to the state with their prime motivation being to go for trekking and biking on the mountains and for water sports in Teesta and Rangit. Among domestic tourists too, the number of youths interested in adventure tourism has been increasing every year. Thus, one can wander up lush green mountain trails in the very footsteps of early travelers marvel at the Stupas, Monasteries and Temples. Acquainted with a culture that is at once bizarre and fascinating with its endless intriguing rituals and festivals, Sikkim offers a holiday which is more than a dream - a voyage of adventure and discovery in the following forms.

► MOUNTAINEERING

Sikkim Himalayas, the epitome of the world's mountains, encompass a wonderland, which for sheer beauty and magnificence remains unbeaten elsewhere in the globe. In southwestern part of Sikkim, in the main Himalayan range, lies the majestic Khangchendzonga, rising to a staggering height of 8,585 m (28,169 ft) above sea level. Beside this third largest peak, other famous mountaineering peaks in the state include- Kabru, Kirat Chulior Tent Peak (7,365 m) and Sinolchu (6,887 m). Mountaineering expeditions, unlike trekking, require more planning and paperwork as clearance is needed from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, New Delhi. The best season to climb in Sikkim is May to October. Foreign expeditions have to book a peak along with a peak fee.

► MOUNTAIN BIKING

Mountain Biking is another adventure that has been recently introduced in Sikkim. Most of the roads in Sikkim are negotiable by mountain bikes. This sport is definitely poised to become popular in Sikkim in the near future and is being promoted in most parts of North Sikkim & West Sikkim. The popular routes for Bikers starting from Gangtok are Phodong - Rangrang - Dikchu - Makha - Singtam and Lingdum - Rumtek - Martam - Sang - Makha - Singtam - Singchuthang - Temi Tea Garden - Ravangla - Dentam – Sombarey.
► RIVER RAFTING
Getting ready to trip! The Teesta and Rangeet rivers sparkle and beckon. Some white water rafting action with every bend of the river revealing new panoramas—gorges with vegetation covered vertical wall soaring from the swift waters, luxuriant waterfalls and tranquil lakes. White water rafting is a later entrant of adventure sport in Sikkim. Only the Teesta and Rangit rivers offer long stretches which are ideal for safe rafting. Teesta has been graded on the International Scale at Grade 4. The icy cold waters of the rugged Teesta have a series of rapids with varying intensity and character. It offers one of the finest rafting stretches in the world. Rangit, a tributary of the Teesta, has more turbulent waters and offers a challenge to more experienced rafters. On both the rivers, the riverbanks have deep forests, with some patches of terraced cultivation and small villages. Plenty of white sandy beaches exist, offering good campsites. Rapids of classification 2 to 4 are interspersed with placid floats, making rafting an enjoyable experience. Facilities for overnight river beach camping is available. Beginners as well as experienced adventurers can seek assistance from department of tourism and travel agents for arranging river rafting trips.

► YAK SAFARI
Yak Safari is an unforgettable and unique experience organized in different areas of the state. Popular trails are Dzongri area and Tsomgo lake. One will get to ride the yak in Tsomgo lake and in various trekking points like Dzongri in West Sikkim.

► ANGLING
Angling is also a wonderful adventure which can be experienced over Teesta and Rangeet river.

► PARA GLIDING
Para Gliding can be a good choice for those who like to have the joy of flying over the sky.
**MOUNTAIN MARATHON**

Mountain Marathon is an extended form of fell running, usually over two days and often with a strong orienteering element. Competitors usually participate in teams of two and have to carry their own food and tent. There are various classes of events like Karrimor IMM - Elite, A, B, C, Long Score and Short Score depending upon the choice. "The Himalayan 100 Mile Stage Race is the most spectacular running course in the world!" said a past winner. During the Race, views of Mt. Everest and Kanchenjunga (4 out of 5 of the world's highest peaks) are visible. Regardless of the level of ability - whether a 10 Km marathon, or ultra marathon runner – one can run at his own pace. There are no age limits or stage cutoff times. Five daily stages of 24 - 20 - 26 - 13 - 17 miles are designed for middle distance runners. Alternating running and walking, one can easily take in mountain views of Sikkim Himalayas, catch a glimpse of national park and wildlife and chat with villagers at fully stocked aid stations every few miles. The trip sets a comfortable pace allowing acclimatization days to relax at eco camp, visit monasteries, tea gardens and enjoy spectacular views of Kanchenjunga. Rural roads allow runners to enjoy Himalayan culture and scenery. Following mountain trails, one have time to stop in hill villages and monasteries along the way, yet have dinners and overnight with the villagers. Walkers have plenty of time to enjoy the cultural diversity of Hindu and Buddhist religions, colonial charm of Sikkim state and scenery during the running events. All abilities and ages supported. As such, more and more routes should be identified in the state to make it more fulfilling.

**TREKKING**

Trekking is one of the most significant adventurous tourism products in the state of Sikkim which can fill in the expectation of any kind of visitors into the state. It is a mild adventure and thus people of all kinds and all age groups can participate in it. The existing routes available are Monastic Trek : (March-May/October-December)-Pemayangtse-Sangacholing-Khecheopalri-Dubdi-Sinon-Tashiding-Ralang, Rhododendron Trek : (March-May)-Naya Bazaar-Hilley/Soreng- Varsey-

4.2.3. WILD LIFE TOURISM

The dense forests, uneven topography, flora and fauna, the majestic Kanchenjunga, and national parks having many rare spices of animals, have made Sikkim a nature-centric destination. An attractive feature of Sikkim's forestry is its colourful wildlife. The diversity in plant world is complemented by a similar variety in the animal kingdom. As if this wasn't enough 600 species of butterflies and 600 species of birds adorn the forest with colour and song. Among the more commonly found animals in alpine zone are yaks. They are
domesticated and reared in North Sikkim mainly for their economic productiveness. The musk deer, found in upper temperate region, is today a species in the endangered list. A common denizen of Sikkim is the muntjac, or the barking deer. It is so called because of the barking noise it makes when alarmed. Among more exotic mammals is the Red Panda which lives mostly on treetops. It is found at altitudes ranging from 6,000 to 12,000 feet. The snow leopard is an almost mythical animal. It has rarely been sighted and to date, only two field zoologists have succeeded in photographing this elusive animal in its habitat which can vary from 5,000 feet to as high as 18,000 feet. Most of this beautiful and virgin area comes under the Kanchenjunga National Park. Sikkim also has large cardamom, orange and tea plantations. The rivers of Sikkim have trout, salmon and carp. Fishing is allowed with a valid permit.

4.2.4. PILGRIM TOURISM

Sikkim’s near about 200 monasteries or Gompas namely Pemayangtse Monastery, Rumtek Monastery, Enchey Monastery, Phensang Monastery, Tashiding Monastery, Ralong Monastery, Namchi Monastery etc belonging to Nyingma and Kagyu order have not only been influencing the cultural heritage and lifestyle of the people, but also demonstrates the ancient rituals in practice. Devoted Lamas robed in red, chant ancient mantras to the rhythm of drums and trumpets while soft lights flicker form decorative lamps placed before statues of the great Guru Padmasambhava. Feel the peace and quiet of being one with nature and close to the almighty as sacred words mingle with whirring prayer wheels. The Gompas are adorned with life-like frescoes of hoary Buddhist legends, rare silk and brocade Thangkas. Also preserved here, are ancient Tibetan manuscripts, exquisitely carved wood work and icons of silver and gold. Pilgrims come for pilgrimage from different places of India as well as from abroad. But most of these places do not provide adequate infrastructural arrangement, for which they fail to attract a large number of visitors.
4.2.5. CULTURAL TOURISM

Sikkim is a conglomeration of different ethnic groups like Bhutias, Nepalis, Lepchas each having a distinct language, culture, way-of-life, festivals, songs and dances. Most of these people have their spring festivals. The songs and dances, display of colourful dresses, tasting of innumerable varieties of vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes mark these festivals. The state’s famous mask dances provide a spectacle, perhaps nowhere to be experienced in the entire world. Performed by lamas in the Gompa courtyard to celebrate religious festivals, these dances demonstrate perfect foot work and grace. Costumed lamas with gaily painted masks, ceremonial swords and sparkling jewels, leap and swing to the rhythm of resounding drums, trumpeting of horns and chanting of monks. The festivals like Saga Dawa, Phang, Lhabsol, Kagyat, Dasain organized at different intervals symbolize a victory of good over evil and represents communities, cultures, religions and customs of different hues intermingle freely in the state. Thus, all these could be a big tourism attraction in Sikkim.

4.2.6. CONVENTION TOURISM

With an airport in Bagdogra in neighbouring North Bengal having air connectivity with almost all the important places of India, the state has the potential to develop Conference and Convention Tourism. Conferences and conventions bring in bulk tourism which results into economic benefits and wide publicity. This is also an upmarket tourism, because conferences are attended by delegates from corporate houses, govt. bureaucrats, political representatives who prefer high quality and first class amenities in an eco-friendly environment. Hence, the convention centres should have all basic facilities, modern equipments as well as ancillary services for the concerned delegates.
4.2.7. GARDEN TOURISM

Truly a naturalist's delight. The hillsides and mountain slopes of Sikkim are strewn with bright patches of myriad colours. The lower mountain slopes are abundant with lush green bamboos and ferns. And the northern valleys are draped with wild cherry, oaks, chestnuts, pines and white magnolia. The higher altitudes are abloom with a carpet of rhododendrons by way of a splendor of their own. Sikkim's 600 varieties of orchids are a feast for the eye. The International Flower Festival is celebrated during March-May, when most of the state's 600 species of orchids, 240 species of trees, 240 species of ferns, 150 kinds of gladioli, 46 varieties of world famous rhododendrons, equally varied species of magnolias and many other foliage plants are in full bloom. Major categories are orchids, gladioli, annuals, roses, alpine plants, pot plants, cacti, succulents, creepers, climbers, ferns, herbs and even wild flowers. Lectures and seminars are organized by the experts in each field in order to attract a huge tourism traffic.

4.2.8. VILLAGE TOURISM

Sikkim is an ideal Village Tourism destination. Tourists can breath fresh air, relish local food, and get exposed to rich culture of ethnic communities in green locals. Boarding and lodging are available in all four districts of the state. Community efforts are being supplemented and improved upon with the help of NGO's. To promote "Village Tourism", 30 model villages having all basic modern facilities are being constructed in different parts of the state. All these will enable tourists to get a first-hand experience of the rural life of the people of Sikkim.

4.2.9. HIMALAYAN TOURISM

The Himalaya is at present one of the main tourist attractions in South Asia. A regional analysis reveals considerable difference in intensity, forms and traditions of tourism as well as in origin and activities of the visitors. While in Sikkim tourism is a recent phenomenon, it has long historical roots in entire Himalaya. The state, covering an area of 7096 km with a population of 5,40,493 is recognized as
biodiversity 'Hot Spot' of global significance. The Sikkim Himalaya is an area of high biodiversity and cultural heterogeneity with distinctive ethnic groups, mountain peaks, flora and fauna, snow hills, handlooms and handicrafts, ecological scenic beauty, sacred lakes and Buddhist monasteries making it an attractive destination for any kind of visitors. Sacred lakes attract visitors and pilgrims from all over the world for their aesthetic, cultural and spiritual importance. The aesthetic and ecological benefits of lake ecosystems have been recognized for over a century, yet rarely quantified. Recreational and economic values of some sites have been estimated in both developed and developing countries in past few years. A detailed research work has been done by the Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism Project under the supervision of G.B.Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, Sikkim Unit, in areas which are considered to be significant for promoting Himalayan tourism in the region.

4.2.10. ETHNO BOTANICAL TOURISM

Sikkim is a land predominantly alpine in character offering almost all possible mountain panorama. The altitude here ranges from 300 to 8580 mts. That Sikkim is very well endowed with rich biological heritage can be established in present context from the existence of 4,500 flowering plants, 450 odd orchids, 36 species of Rhododendrons, 158 species of reptiles and 19 species of amphibians as well. Thus, it can be opined that the possibilities to promote ethno botanical tourism in the state are immense.
4.3. CONSTRAINTS AND BARRIERS

It is needless to say with its dense green forests - home to thousands of species of exotic plants, shrubs and flowers - mighty rivers, pretty streams and deep valleys, all under the benign gaze of the majestic Himalayas, Sikkim is a unique tourist's destination. It is not just nature at its most breathtaking grandeur that one hopes to find there, but also a rare combination of different cultures and traditions, historical and religious centers long grown in isolation and still untouched. Statistics in Chapter 3 indicates a rising trend in the flow of tourists to the state over last couple of years. As far as revenue collection too is concerned, the tendency is somewhat upward for the same period. The state has been begging best performing state in the entire Northeastern region of India in terms of tourism promotion and its development. But even then, it does not present a happy picture if compared with the stiff examples shown by other destinations in rest part of India. The reasons are manifold and are highlighted below one by one.

4.3.1. POOR CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity has been a stumbling block in bringing tourists to Sikkim. The state is completely dependent on the road transportation system for movement of tourists from one destination to another within or outside the state. Other means of connectivity like airways, railways and waterways do not have any significance in the state. Hence, the road network is the sole medium of transportation whose importance does not need further emphasis. But the state of Sikkim is still in dearth of an adequate road linkage till date. The national highway 31A, the most significant inter-connecting road between West Bengal and Sikkim, is not well developed. Similarly, accessibility to some other central tourist spots of the state is in quite awful condition and time consuming due to which visitors have to drop some of the most beautiful spots from their itineraries. Presently, Sikkim lacks an airport of its own and relies on the nearest airport Bagdogra in West Bengal, which is three and half hours’ drive from Gangtok, as the exclusive airways of
flow of foreign visitors. A helicopter service also operates between Gangtok and Bagdogra, which takes around 20 minutes. But it is also subject to good weather conditions. As such, the poor connectivity is playing as a significant barrier to the desired growth of tourism in the state.

### 4.3.2. PROBLEMS OF ENTRY RESTRICTION

Sikkim is saleable as a tourist destination as any other place on the earth. But it is a sensitive border state. Security concerns make it imperative to put in place special protection. Hence the obstructions to flow of visitors specially foreign tourists are many, like problems of Inner Line Permit (ILP), Protected Area Permit (PAP) etc. All these are posing a big threat to the flow of international tourists into the state. Under ILP requirement, a foreigner intending to visit Sikkim has to undergo a long queue for obtaining permission from all Indian Missions, Sikkim Tourism Offices in New Delhi, Kolkata and Siliguri on the strength of an Indian Visa. Long queue is also visible in main entry point at the Sikkim-West Bengal border town of Rangpo. In the mean time, initiative has been taken by the state government to ease the Inner Line Permit (ILP) issued to a foreign tourist. ILP was initially issued for 15 days, can now be extended for a total period of 45 days. A single window clearance system has been adopted for the easy flow of tourism traffic to prime destinations like Tsomgo and Nathu La in East Sikkim. But even then, the ghost of entry permits still continues and efforts to disabuse the false apprehension in the minds of foreign visitors are minimal.

### 4.3.3. DEARTH OF ADEQUATE AMENITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The most important challenge comes from the infrastructure sector. To attract tourists, there must be dissemination of information, infrastructural facilities, adequate railway network, affordable and reliable communication, clean and hygienic food and accommodation, availability of adequate power and lightings and the like. As mentioned in Chapter 2, majority of the places of tourist attractions are not by side of the national highways and approach roads are in quite unpleasant condition. Frequent power failure, fluctuations etc. lead to
irritation to the visitors. The existing power stations are not in a position to generate adequate power due to fund crunch and carried out repairs and renovations. Moreover, hygienic and cost-effective accommodation also seems to be lacking in many parts of the state. There is still no strict regulation/control over hotel tariff rates from the government side. This is a strong discouraging factor which works against a good inflow of visitors into the state. Though Sikkim is consciously emphasizing on non-mass tourism so as not to exceed the carrying capacity of various amenities in the state, it is unfeasible to restrict the flow of tourists to a limited number. The only alternative available is to enhance the level of infrastructure facilities and drastically improve upon the quality of existing amenities. This is where the state is lacking much behind to reach to a targeted level.

4.3.4. VISA FORMALITIES

Coming into the international perspective, the visa formalities need to be rationalized urgently. Stringent requirements and cumbersome procedure put off many international visitors from visiting India. One of our major policies restrictive to growth of tourism is 'reciprocity' where India provides visa to those nations who grant to Indians. But countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Singapore, Malaysia, Hongkong, Thailand, Maldives and Taiwan have Visa-on-Arrival policy without reciprocity as a condition. Accordingly, the flow of tourist from some specific foreign nations to India is restricted to a great extent and consequently visit to the tiny Himalayan state of Sikkim is getting hampered.

4.3.5. LACK OF COORDINATED EFFORTS

As far as government initiative is concerned, it can be opined with farm belief that the approach is somewhat 'disjointed'. Effective linkages are not established amongst various government departments or with local bodies. There is a palpable lack of coordination between several agencies like department of tourism and department of archaeology in handling demands of tourists in places of both historic and religious importance. As a result, partial fulfilment of target has been a striking mark of the status of tourism in the state.
4.3.6. POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN SURROUNDING AREAS

Sikkim and for that matter most part of eastern region of India has been experiencing violent movements since beginning of the year 1984. There has been an ongoing demand for a separate state-hood for neighbouring Darjeeling district in West Bengal for past twenty years or so after formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1989. A memorandum of understanding was signed amongst the central government, state government and the regional party to hand over all functional areas to the council except law and order, higher education and revenue department which are in direct control of the state government till date. But the demand for a separate state ship as Darjeeling Gorkha Land still continues and paralyses the political stability in the area. Since Sikkim lies on eastern tip of Himalayas bordered by West Bengal, it has been encountering lot of complexities from its neighboring Darjeeling on the aforesaid political grounds. Repeated strikes and bandhs called on fulfillment of pre-conceived demands in the town are greatly hampering the flow of tourists into Sikkim as most of the entry and exit points in the state share with Darjeeling district in West Bengal. As a result, the situation plays as a direct barrier in smooth flow of visitors into the Himalayan state. The tourists consider it risky to visit this part of the country in view of the prevailing law and order situation. The general impression has been that any foreign or domestic visitor could be a soft target and thus, they are reluctant to undertake an adventurous journey with a calculated risk in hand.

4.3.7. LOCATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Sikkim is a remote and land-lock mountainous state. It is someway at locational disadvantage in attracting visitors from rest of the country and even from abroad. The nearest airport and railhead are at 120 kms away from the capital town Gangtok which is about a 4 (four) hours drive. In addition to distance, the road is entirely dependent on the weather condition. During monsoon season it often gets disrupted due to frequent landslides and adverse climatic condition. There are instances of the state being cut off from other parts of the country for several
months. The urban towns are highly congested and adequate spaces are not available for creation of basic amenities. The situation seems to be very pathetic and greatly hampers the flow of tourists into the state. Further, some of beautiful tourist spots are still in remote location and accessibility thereof is quite limited.

4.3.8 LACK OF EFFORT FOR ORGANIZING CROSS BORDER TOURISM

As civilizations progress and with rationalization in economic regulations of the government through initiation of LPG policy in 1991, Indian economy welcomes to widening the area of operation from all fronts. But, Northeastern region seems to be an exception to this. Referring to the state of Sikkim, as already mentioned in beginning of this chapter that the state has tremendous potentials to organize cross-border tourism with the eastern neighbour China. The re-opening of Nathu La trade-rout can provide a big boost to this. The state shares international boundaries with China, Bhutan and Nepal paving a way to market it across the borders. But unfortunately, there is no any direct road connectivity between Sikkim and Bhutan and Nepal as well and also the effort to organize cross-border tourism along Nathu La border remains in the domain of adhocism till date.

4.3.9. SHORTAGE OF TRAINED MANPOWER

It has been increasingly realized that the training facilities for development of manpower, especially for improvement of managerial skills, needs to be given more emphasis in tourism development programme of a state. With this avowed objective in mind, the state government of Sikkim has accorded top most priority on developing skilled manpower with adequate policy and financial support in the form of annual grant. Besides these, training courses and capacity building programmes for Guides, Taxi-Drivers and Travel Agents are also organized time to time. But the effort did not yield a remarkable result for the purpose. During interaction with the concerned respondents, it is found that there is acute shortage of trained manpower related to tourism sector and adequate exposure of the local people to tourism business is extremely limited. As such, it can certainly be considered as a serious hurdle for speedy upliftment of the prospect in the state.
4.3.10. OTHER CONSTRAINTS

Absence of cost effective transportation system, delay in implementation of tourism projects proposed at different stages, problems of fund crunch, dearth of ample publicity at national and international level, absence of skilled tourist guides, psychological distance towards the region, the existing bracket of taxation, untimely release of the central assistance, lack of rescue operation for the adventurous sports and more specifically Sikkim's low visibility on 'Domestic Tourism Map' if compared with other states of India are some of the major impediments for a targeted promotion of tourism sector in the region.

Thus, we have seen above in different perspectives what ails tourism in Sikkim. The study will, at this instant, proceed to point out few probable reforms for improvement of the prospect in the state.

4.4. REFORMS

Tourism industry is a complex and multi-disciplinary phenomenon. As a logical component of development, it requires a multi-dimensional approach, careful planning, strict guidelines and regulations that will guarantee sustainable operation. Governments, private enterprises, local communities and non-governmental organizations, all have a crucial role to play in improving the state of affairs. As such, in terms of tourism industry in Sikkim, first we will try to examine what has already been done for upliftment of the prospect before venturing into probable reforms.

4.4.1. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

Tourism is one sector which has been unanimously identified by all concerned - economists, development planners, social scientists, environmentalists, politicians, government and the people - as one of the most significant, suitable and viable industries in Sikkim - with tremendous potential for growth. Prior to become a part of India, this tiny Himalayan state, practically perched on the lap of Mount Kanchenjunga, was a protectorate under the Government of India and ruled by the Chogyal dynasty. Under the Pawan Chamling Government, the
tourism sector in Sikkim has enjoyed an unprecedented boom with various initiatives and opening up of new destinations that were earlier unexposed to outside world.

► As such, the first initiative taken by the state government is to ease the Inner Line Permit (ILP) issued to foreign tourists. The ILP, initially issued for 15 days, can be extended for a total period of 45 days. The ILP is now readily available. A single window clearance system has been adopted for the easy flow of visitors to prime destinations like Tsomgo and Nathu La in East Sikkim.

► Stress is being laid on creation of more basic infrastructure for the visitors. Apart from the existing tourist lodges, one more is under construction in Chungthang, North Sikkim, which is a transit point for tourists visiting Yumthang, the Valley of Flowers. A lodge is being built in Tashiding village for visitors to the famous monastery there. The department has refurbished many of the heritage Dak Bungalows for accommodating tourists. Dak bungalows and rest houses have been upgraded and wayside amenities were being set up in all four districts of the state. With regard to improving the transportation system, emphasis is given on widening the Siliguri-Gangtok-Nathu La Road (National Highway 31A) and opening an alternative parallel route and connecting it to the Golden Quadrilateral with Kolkata, New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai.

► Recreational parks have also been set up in various parts of the state. During different financial years, the government prioritized different projects under Centrally Sponsored Schemes, incorporating the proposals as been mentioned in Chapter 3.

► The Tsomgo lake in East Sikkim, situated at an altitude of 12,400 feet (3,720 metres), is on the route to Nathu La. The lake gets its waters from melting snow of the surrounding mountains. Legend goes that lamas could forecast the future by studying the colour of the lake's water. This is a very popular tourist destination, and for that reason the tourism department has constructed a massive parking area and undertaken an ambitious project of beautifying the place, complete with a cafeteria and other facilities.
To involve the local people, the Tsomgo Lake Development Committee has been constituted for upkeep and maintenance of the place. Sikkim tourism takes views, opinions and feelings of all stakeholders including tourists into account while planning development of tourism in the state. For this, a close contact is being maintained with NGOs like Travel Agents Association of Sikkim, Sikkim Hotels and Restaurants Association, Kangchendzonga Conservation Committee, Sikkim Development Foundation, and Green Circle etc.

Again, around 12 km further up, at an altitude of 14,000 feet (4,200 m), is the Nathu La, opened for the first time to domestic tourists in September 1999. Traders and porters crossed this gateway to Tibet in the days of fabled Silk Route. The landscape is stark alpine with occasional blossoms of primulae and the Himalayan rhubarb. A tourist is treated to a hot cup of tea by the Indian Army and can walk up to the view point and look beyond into China, and even shake hands with the green-uniformed Chinese Army personnel guarding on the other side.

While North Sikkim is known for its natural beauty and South Sikkim for some of the oldest monasteries in the region, the western part of the state is a preferred destination for the adventurous. From white water rafting down the Teesta to treks through beautiful, dense rhododendron forests, this district offers a rarely experienced encounter with nature. A number of trekking routes ranging from a height of 300 feet (90 m) to 16,500 feet (4,950 m) have been identified and all well-maintained and complete with camping spots. The state has invested in buying equipments needed for adventure tourism activities like trekking, river rafting and mountain biking. These would be leased out to adventure sports facilitators in private sector. To protect the environment and ecology, garbage bins have been provided along the routes and kerosene is made available to dissuade trekkers from cutting trees for firewood.

Further, a helicopter service, connecting the state capital Gangtok to Bagdogra in West Bengal from where regular flights to New Delhi and Kolkata are available, has greatly benefited the tourism industry in Sikkim. This service also conducts chartered flights to all four districts of the state. Eleven more helipads
are being constructed, which will link all subdivisions of the state. An airport is under construction at Pakyong in East Sikkim.

► On the other hand, the mountain flights operated from Gangtok have gained popularity among the visitors. A ropeway at Gangtok linking Deorali with the Tashiling Secretariat is already commissioned and another linking Namchi, the headquarter of South Sikkim, with Samdruptse, where a 135-feet statue of Guru Padmasambhava is installed, is under execution.

► Till recently, the tourism department has installed a number of touch-screen kiosks at many places, including government offices and guesthouses, both within the state and outside. The department has actively participated in tourism fairs in Mumbai, Bangalore, Kolkata and New Delhi to promote Sikkim as a viable eco-tourism destination. The state government's tourism policy is driven by the single aim of making Sikkim a "Number 1 Eco-Tourism Destination in India". With this affirmed aim in place, the government has made special efforts to develop tourist villages, trekking routes, adventure activities, biodiversity parks and cultural centers in different parts of the state.

► The 'State Green Mission' has been launched to convert Sikkim into a 'Garden State' by 2009. This is a part of the government's efforts to sustain, maintain and enrich the state's environment and ecology and also to develop eco-tourism.

► To promote 'Village Tourism', 30 model villages having all basic modern amenities are being constructed in different areas of the state. All these will enable tourists to get a first-hand experience of rural life in Sikkim.

► Moreover, to make visits to old temples, monasteries, churches and other religious destinations in the state comfortable, the government is promoting pilgrim tourism in a big way. The Buddhist Circuit has been identified as one of the priority areas in Tourism Policy of the Government of India. Sikkim could well be the hub connecting all major Buddhist destinations in India and neighboring countries.

► As already mentioned in beginning of this chapter, the Nathu La trade route, if opened to tourist traffic, can integrate tourism industry of the Himalayan States in
Northeast India with regions having similar features in the neighboring nations of China, Bhutan and Nepal.
► As far as private initiative is concerned, a 15-year Tourism Master Plan and a 20-year Sustainable Development Plan prepared by the state takes into account a greater role for the private sector in hotels and hospitality industry in Sikkim. Private industry is all set to play a bigger part in tourism sector of the state with the government deciding to restrict its role to that of a facilitator in this regard. Agreements have been entered into with two private players for setting up of a five-star eco-resort — at a place, which is a 45-minute drive from Gangtok — and a three-star hotel in the capital. It was not disclosed at the moment the parties who would take up the initiative for the same.
► All projects that are taken up would have to be eco-friendly. For this, there is a close co-ordination between eco-cell of the forest department and the tourism department. The projects in this sensitive bio-diversity areas are cleared through eco-cell of the forest department. Thus, it is ensured that the tourism development projects do not infringe on the environmental laws. Government has declared ecotourism as an industry and lot of emphasis is given on the infrastructure development. New rules for the protection of environment and cultures have come up and umpteen numbers of institutions in town and villages have sprung up to cater to the needs of the people for sustainable tourism. Besides, in this regard, to address the issue of the educated unemployed, employment would have to be provided to locals as well.
► In addition, the tourism department and STDC have started conducting orientation program for all those involved in providing service to the visitors. The objective is to make them aware of importance of tourism and need for following code of conduct for conservation and protection of the environment. Various NGOs were established by the like minded people to help community level training in ecotourism and village tourism. Consultancy services were provided for marketing and infrastructure development of the region where most tourists frequented.
Las but, not the least, tourist arrival in Sikkim has recorded an annual growth of almost 10 per cent during the period 1994-2007 as reflected in Chapter 3. This increase will be accelerated when some major ongoing projects and facilities are completed. The increase in tourist inflow is mainly on account of the state's participation in tourism fairs and festival programmes in various parts of India. Tourist arrivals at present have been devoid of any element of seasonality. Earlier tourists usually used to visit the state during summer months. Now, the hills have begun to beckon visitors even during winter. It's no wonder that the Union Ministry of Tourism has awarded Sikkim a 'Best Performing State' in Northeastern region of India for four consecutive years.

4.4.2. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE
Taking into consideration of the above facts, it can be inferred that Sikkim Tourism has committed itself to make it a premier dream destination in India. Because of its geo-physical location, it is not feasible to develop any heavy or medium industries in the state. Only light industries that will not cause damage to the local fragile geo-physical and cultural environment will be suitable in a mountainous region like Sikkim. However, what is striking as well as challenging to a tourism planner is that the whole of Sikkim, except its capital Gangtok, is virtually a virgin and unspoiled territory for tourists, thus creating an aura of mystery around it. With a backdrop of history, nature-majestic mountains, wonderful snowy hills, magnificent monasteries and new-fangled opportunities along with architectural legacy and richness of the destinations, it could have firmly spaced itself in 'Global Tourism Map'. But what is perceived is not actualized. It seems to have happened with tourism in Sikkim. There are still some issues emerging out of our observations which are not yet addressed resulting in prospects being untapped and unexplored to a great extent. Below follows an attempt to portray the same in this regard.
► REGULATED PUBLIC TRANSPORT SYSTEM

In the absence of a well-connected bus service, the government should encourage the private taxi services, but should strongly regulate them. Bus services should be reliable, frequent and routes and timings should be planned so that they link all the villages, markets and towns. The transport system should be tailored to the growing needs of tourism and adventure sport travel. A luxury bus service connecting Gangtok and Bagdogra Airport could be timed to link with the arrival of flights to and from Calcutta and Delhi, to allow seamless travel into the state. A major reason why visitors prefer to visit Sikkim as part of organized tour is the lack of regulated and reliable transport options. It is seen that there is no strict regulation and control regarding the fare charged from the tourists by the private transporters depending upon the prevailing situations.

► AVIATION MANAGEMENT

As already indicated above, Sikkim still lacks an airport of its own. Until a full-fledged airport is built (which is at present under construction at Pakyong in East Sikkim), the existing Helicopter service between Bagdogra and Gangtok should be expanded to accommodate more people and more flights. The possibility of introducing small (50-seater) commercial plane services from Bagdogra to Gangtok should be explored at medium-term level. Coming to the national aviation scenario, it is encountered with myriad challenges for not having adequate access to scheduled international airlines. Following this, nearest Bagdogra airport in West Bengal needs an urgent modernization plan and should be declared international soon as it has already been proposed at the ministerial level. Again, another factor hampering tourism in Sikkim is the expensive airfares from other distant places in India. It needs a special mention that the airfare from Cochin to Bagdogra and then to Gangtok via Heli service is much higher than a complete package of airfare and five nights of 3 * hotel stay in Malaysia or Thailand. Accordingly, a calculative domestic visitor from Cochin will definitely prefer to have an international exposure rather than coming down to Sikkim at the same financial involvement. Therefore, aviation authority should urgently have a rationalization of airfares in terms of international tariff regulation.
► UPGRADING ROAD NETWORK

Roads connecting major tourist destinations have to be ranked in priority and upgraded to international standard to provide all-weather access, an important pre-requisite to lengthening the tourist season. One method would be to invite private sector investors on a ‘Build, Operate and Transfer’ (BOT) basis, which has been successfully done in other states of India. New roads have to be carefully planned, particularly as the threat of landslides becomes exacerbated as more roads are built. Building the proposed second highway linking Darjeeling, Singla, Naya Bazar, Namchi and Singtam will increase mobility of people and goods, and bring down the cost too. Not only will it provide an alternative route to the NH31A, it will also form an important road link between several towns of the state. Thus, maintenance of hill roads is imperative as there are usually no alternate routes, nor can traffic be diverted. Repairs and removal of debris have to be done promptly, because if delayed they can snowball into major crises, with severe effects on the ecology and environment. Most of the roads lack an efficient drainage system, and this has further weakened their structure and resulted in distress. Effective drainage on both sides of the road is a way of drastically reducing maintenance costs. Therefore, the increased movement of goods and people have made it important that the major connecting links (many of which were built to handle a different type of traffic) are widened, the steep gradients and curves smoothed, and bridges strengthened and widened to handle heavier loads.

► CHANGING TOURISM SEASONALITY

Although tourist arrivals in Sikkim presently have shown devoid of any element of seasonality as indicated above, still it proves to be a major challenge to change the same so that it spreads over through out the year. As indicated in Chapter 3, traditionally most of the tourist arrivals are in the months of March, April, May and October. This is because of both the ‘holiday season’ months and also scorching summer in plains of India. There are very small number of visitors both during monsoon (July-September) and winter months (December – February). To
change this clustered seasonality is a daunting task. This would allow more efficient year-round use of tourism infrastructure, which would result in lower prices during the 'season months', as well as provide more regular income for those in the hospitality industry. It requires major policy interventions and investment in upgradation of existing facilities and creation of new amenities. This is also related to the average length of stay of visitors which are found to be rather quite short. Once the very nature of origin of tourists and seasons change, the experts believe that the length of stay will steadily improve.

► CREATION OF A UNIQUE BRAND

Another formidable challenge is to create a unique brand name for Sikkim as an ultimate eco-tourism destination and find niche for it in both India and overseas market. Tourism’s importance, as an instrument for economic development and employment generation, particularly in remote and backward areas, has been well recognized all over the world. It is a largest service industry globally in terms of gross revenue as well as foreign exchange earnings and given Sikkim’s low visibility on ‘Tourist Map’ of India, strong branding and marketing of the state’s attractions is an utmost necessity. Though a few brands like “Sikkim- The Hidden Paradise”, “Sikkim-Small but Beautiful”, “Sikkim-The Ultimate Eco-Tourism Destination” exist, adequate promotion of the same is still lacking behind at present. In addition, a unique brand along the lines of “Incredible India” may be framed to promote the state in domestic level. And at international level too, particularly in Southeast Asian Tourism Market, the make like that of “Uniquely Singapore”, “Malaysia- Truly Asia”, “Discover Hongkong”, “Thailand-The Land of Emerald Buddha”, “Amazing Bali” etc may be a source of creating some superior brands to focus Sikkim in “International Tourism Map”. Thus, branding of states has already been done successfully by the governments in Rajasthan, Himachal, Orissa, Goa, and Kerala, and the State Tourism Development Corporation of Sikkim could use a variety of media avenues to similarly highlight Sikkim’s uniqueness as an ultimate paradise in eastern India.
As far as the management of projects at different levels is concerned, it is reflected that only local tenders have usually been floated. NH-31A is maintained by the Border Roads Organization, which is also responsible for any expansion activities on NH-31A. Following this, simply local tenders have been suggested for road and bridge building projects. Projects costing less than Rs 5 lakhs are tendered at the panchayat level, and usually contracted by a local resident. Accordingly, larger projects can be tendered at the national or even international level so that the state can have access to the latest technology and high-quality construction, which will mean better service and perhaps eventually lower costs.

At present, physical plans are made for development of tourism facilities and infrastructure, but management plans are not prepared or followed. As a result, hotels are constructed but waste management is neglected. Maintenance of hygienic standards, sanitations, signboards, horticulture development around the attractions is not given any priority. Again, the program for creating public awareness about importance of conserving bio-diversity is also not executed on a continuous basis. This should be part of annual plan of forest, education, rural development and tourism department as well. In line with this, preparation and follow up of management plans in and around the places of tourist interests may be made obligatory.

A master plan drawn up for the courses of action to be taken till the year 2022 envisages directions for sustainable tourism in Sikkim. Certain targets should be fixed among the concerned bodies in respect of tourist inflow, infra-structural development, commissioning of new projects, annual revenue to be earned and employment to be generated in order to create a tourism synergy in the state. The state policy of tourism has to be evolved on the line of National Policy of Tourism which incorporates broad guidelines to attract both domestic and foreign visitors. The general principles announced by the Ministry of Tourism as
Soosna (Information), Swagat (Welcome), Suvidha (Facilities) and Suraksha (Security) should form core of the strategy for Sikkim Tourism.

► FORMULATION OF TOURISM ACT

It is observed that the government regulation over different functional areas of tourism in Sikkim is somewhat lenient in nature. As been mentioned earlier that there is absence of strict guideline over the hotel tariff rates from the government side till date, control is also entirely missing as far as fixation of transportation fare in private sector is concerned. As a result, the hoteliers and transporters get tremendous opportunities of exploiting visitors, particularly during season period, by charging much higher than the stipulated limit prescribed by the government. Hence, to govern the various activities associated with tourism in the state, a separate ‘Tourism Act’ should be formulated which will equip the department to regulate and monitor the whole issue in a tourist friendly way.

► PUBLICITY DRIVE

Although Sikkim tourism has taken adequate steps towards marketing and publicity of the state through regular participation in all leading domestic tourism fairs and festivals as well as in prominent international fairs, like WTM London and ITB Berlin and releasing advertisements and articles featuring different aspects of tourism in leading travel and tourism magazines of the country, the effort still seems to be inadequate and is at a micro level only. Hence, there should be some sort of initiative to make tourist related information available in extensive manner in the embassies in New Delhi and diplomatic offices in major Indian cities. Colour pictures of large size depicting natural beauty of the state and its rich culture should be displayed in national and international airports and basic information about the points of tourist attraction and the facilities available should be kept in special corners in the places of major entry points. The tourism websites should be updated in regular manner giving all details of information on tourism related services. The existing publications in the form of brochures, posters, coffee-table books and other publicity materials should be distributed through its offices both in Sikkim and outside for generating ample publicity. On
the other hand, the media has been playing a significant role in promoting tourism in recent years. But, only a few national dailies have so far given coverage to the state of Sikkim. As such, the government should insist upon purchasing space in national dailies focusing on attractive spots of attraction in the region.

► DESIGNING A COST-EFFECTIVE TOURISM PACKAGE
Tourism in Sikkim cannot be viewed in isolation. Sikkim is the last inclusion in Northeast, which, as already stated, is a reservoir of natural beauty with great variety. But as found from the filed investigation where most of the visitors are of the opinion that the state is not cost effective so far as tourism services are concerned. They view that the accommodation in the state is extremely expensive along with fooding and transportation as well. As such, designing of an affordable tourism package is a need of the hour and State Tourism Development Corporation of Sikkim can play a vital role in this regard. There should be an integrated approach to promote tourism in the state with a cost-effective package of eco and adventure tourism. To that end also, there is a need to have a regional approach involving neighbouring Darjeeling in West Bengal in order to achieve a tourism synergy for the purpose.

► FISCAL INCENTIVES
Today's generation is the days of professionalism in all sectors of the economy. In tourism sector too, it is not an exception, which can only be achieved through an active private-public participation in most of the proposals and policies. In that front the government may offer fiscal and other incentives to private entrepreneurs to take up a host of tourism projects by making provisions for soft loan and reducing tax rates. In other words, transport, accommodation and other logistics of tourism should be left over to private sectors with adequate regulation making the way for a healthy privatization of the tertiary segment associated with tourism.
► PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT
Perception of the tourists visiting Sikkim and especially Northeastern region of India is of great significance. It is observed that the visitors have a very negative perception about the region in various aspects and this is only because of a wrong focus made time to time. Thus, it is a time to create a lasting tourism impression about all the sister states, which will stimulate a positive perception of the visitors.

► MARKETING TOURISM IN TERMS OF DIFFERENT SEGMENTATIONS
Tourism marketing enables a state to invite guests spanning across different cultures, traditions, customs and countries to visit them to enjoy their rich heritage, sculptures, cuisines, hospitality, entertainment, arts and architectures by creating exiting experience through leisure and entertainment. Keeping this in mind, Sikkim should insist on marketing its adventurous destinations according to various segments viz. age, sex, income, class, nationality, and preferences of the visitors. The whole process has to be revitalized and a full-fledged marketing process is to be undertaken.

► UPGRADING COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF TOURIST GUIDES
It is already stated in the above that training courses and capacity building programmes for Guides, Taxi-Drivers and Travel Agents are organized time to time depending upon the prevailing demand of tourism sector. But what Sikkim Tourism needs urgently the guides who can converse in multiple languages like German, French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese etc. As Sikkim attracts visitors from different parts of the globe, augmentation of tourism personnel with speaking skills of foreign languages can cater to the needs of varied visitors at different points of time.
INVITING FOREIGN INVESTMENT

There are varied reasons why enterprises invest abroad. Investment in a foreign country is induced by a number of considerations—economic, financial and behavioral along with diverse strategic issues. Development of international activities of business enterprises has taken different forms with the passage of time. Globalization of markets, greater possibilities of setting up business in foreign nations, removal of exchange controls, new technologies have all stimulated the foreign direct investment sector. Taking into consideration of Sikkim state, the scarcity of resources, technological gap, inadequate infrastructure arrangements, dearth of research and developmental facilities can also contribute a lot for attracting foreign capital towards it. The state with huge geographical variations and diversities in different sectors and with rich natural heritage may certainly invite foreign investment for setting up new tourism projects and ventures and thereby contribute towards economic growth of the region. That is why, it can be argued that Sikkim must promote foreign direct investment for a faster augmentation of tourism industry—not just only permit it.

Thus, by now we have seen that there is an imperative need for improvement in infrastructure, making an enormous publicity and last but not the least a progressive analysis which might help in creating a viable tourism base in Sikkim Himalayas. Accordingly, the specific objectives (iii) as set in Chapter 1 justifies itself to have been fulfilled.
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