CHAPTER – V
Strategies adopted for Ecotourism in Sikkim

5.1 Concept and Strategies of Ecotourism

Tourists have long been traveling to natural areas under the guise of recreation and tourism. This has led some observers to question whether ecotourism is simply a new name for an old activity (Wall, 1994). However, several changes apparently have occurred in the last decade: i) there has been growth in visits to many natural areas, particularly in developing countries, ii) many economic development professionals increasingly have viewed visit to the natural areas as a tool for providing employment in regions that have experienced decline, or lack of development, in other money-making industries, iii) many conservation and resource management professionals increasingly have viewed visit to the natural area as an avenue for enhancing finance for the given natural area and providing conservation-related benefits, particularly to residents living near natural areas (Lindberg, et.al., 2010).

Ecotourism is growing with market within tourism and travel industry, with the potential of being important sustainable development tool. With billions a dollar in annual sales, ecotourism is the real industry that seeks to take advantage of market trend. At the same time it frequently operates than other segment of the tourism industry because ecotourism is defined by its sustainable development results, conserving natural areas, educating visitors about the sustainability and benefiting the local. The root of eco-tourism lies in nature and outdoor tourism. It is an amalgamation of interest arising out of environmental, economic and social concern. Eco-tourism, therefore, incorporates both a strong commitment to nature and a sense of social responsibility. It is not only the fastest growing branch of the tourism industry, it has also been hailed as a hopeful new approach to both preserving fragile and threatened wild areas. It is about creating and satisfying a hunger for nature, about exploiting tourism’s potential for conservation and development and about averting its negative impact on ecology, culture and aesthetics. The enormous opportunities and awesome risks of nature tourism lie at the heart of the eco-tourism mission (ENVIS Centre of Sikkim on Ecotourism, 2006).
Ecotourism, or ecological tourism, is a type of tourism in which the travelers visit fragile, relatively pristine natural environments in such a way as to both minimize the impact on the environment and to actually benefit the environment and the local communities, with the later helping to provide an economic and social incentive to keep these local areas pristine. The term differs from sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, green tourism, and nature-based tourism in the way ecotourism has the added dimension of actively benefiting the environment and the local communities. The term ‘ecotourism’ refers on one hand to a concept under a set of principles and on the other hand to specific market segment. There are various definition given by people and organization.

The term ecotourism was initially coined in 1987 by Hector Ceballos Lascurian (cf. Ceballos Lascurian, 1996), who defined "Ecotourism as an experience of travelling to relatively undisturbed area with the specific objective of studying, admiring, enjoying its scenery and its wildlife."

The International Ecotourism Society (IES, 1991) defined "Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people."

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO, 1993) described "Ecotourism as tourism that involve travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specified objective of studying admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing culture aspect (both of past and present) found in this area."

IUCN (now called as the World Conservation Union, 1996) as it stated "Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural area, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio economic involvement of local population."

Considering all these statements it can be said that ecotourism means ecological tourism where ecology has both environmental and social connotations. Ecotourism, responsible tourism, jungle tourism, and sustainable development have become prevalent concepts since the mid-1980s and ecotourism has experienced the fastest growth of all sub-sectors in the tourism industry. The popularity represents a change in tourist perceptions,
increased environmental awareness, and a desire to explore natural environments. In short it can be conceptualized as any tourism programme that is nature-based and ecologically sustainable, where education and interpretation are major components and where local people are benefited.

5.1.1 Ecotourism Concept

Ecotourism is a sub-component of the field of sustainable tourism and it gives a reflection of the condition in which ecotourism can be placed within the process of developing more sustainable forms of tourism. Figure 1 demonstrates how ecotourism is primarily appears as a sustainable version of nature tourism by including rural and cultural tourism elements. Ecotourism aspires in all cases to achieve sustainable development results. However, it is important to clarify that in all tourism activities, be they geared to holidays, business, conferences, congresses, fairs; health or adventure ecotourism should aim at sustainability.

This means that the planning and development of tourism infrastructure, its subsequent operation and also its marketing should focus on environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability criteria. The strong orientation of the ecotourism field towards the evolution of principles, guidelines, and certification based on sustainability standards gives it a special position in the tourism field. Over the years, discussions upon ecotourism in global conferences have attempted to arrive at a general consensus on the following components (United Nations Environmental Program, 2001).

- Contribution to conservation of biodiversity.
- Sustenance of the well being of local people.
- Inclusion, interpretation and learning experience.
- Involving responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry.
- Encouraging primarily the small groups by small-scale businesses.
- Requiring lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources.
- Stressing local participation, ownership and business opportunities, particularly for rural people.
Suffice it to say that ecotourism is a small but rapidly growing industry working within the existing market governed by market forces and regulations. Ecotourism is primarily advertised as being equivalent to nature tourism in the marketplace. Some countries, companies and destinations have social and environmental policies and programs, while others do not. This has led to confusion worldwide about the meaning of the term ecotourism as it is applied in the marketplace.

The above diagram (Figure 5.2) pictorially reflects how ecotourism fits into the larger tourism marketplace. Both adventure tourism and ecotourism are shown as subcomponents of nature tourism, while ecotourism has stronger links to rural and cultural tourism than adventure tourism. In ecotourism the prime motivation is the observation and appreciation of natural features and related cultural assets, whereas in adventure tourism it is rather the physical exercise and the challenging situations in natural environments. From a functional
viewpoint, ecotourism in the marketplace is mostly individual or small-scale tourism that is operated by small- and medium-sized companies in natural areas. It represents a segment of the marketplace that concentrates on leading and accommodating small groups in natural areas in an educational manner through interpretative materials and local specialist guides (United Nations Environmental Program, 2001).

5.1.2 Principles of Ecotourism

Ecotourism was originally just an idea, not a discipline. Many businesses and Governments promoted it without an understanding of its most basic principles. It was established nationally and internationally upon the accepted principles, guidelines and certification approach as proceeded throughout the 1990's but at the modest pace because the process involved many stakeholders from many regions, discipline and many backgrounds. The International Ecotourism Society (IES) has tracked the result of meeting the stakeholders since 1991 to developed sets of principles, which were embraced by the growing constituency of NGOs, private sector businesses, Governments, academia and local communities. Ecotourism activities should adopt the following ecotourism principles (www.IES.org):

- minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts.
- build environmental and cultural awareness, and respect.
- provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- produce direct financial benefits for conservation.
- generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
- deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climates.
- design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.
- recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous People in your community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.

5.1.3 Guidelines of Ecotourism

- Prepare travelers: One of the reasons that the consumers choose an operator rather than traveling independently is to receive guidance: how can negative impacts be minimized while visiting sensitive environments and cultures, and how should one interact with
local cultures; also what would be an appropriate response to begging; should bartering been encouraged?

- **Minimize visitor impacts:** Prevent degradation of the environment and/or the local culture by offering literature, briefings, leading by example and taking corrective actions. In order to minimize accumulated impacts, use adequate leadership and maintain small groups to ensure minimum group-impacts on destination. Avoid areas that are under-managed and over-visited.

- **Minimize nature tour company impacts:** Ensure managers, staff and contract employees know and participate in all aspects of company policy that prevent impacts on the environment and local cultures.

- **Provide training:** Give the managers, staff members and contract employees access to programs that will upgrade their ability to communicate with and manage clients in sensitive natural and cultural settings.

- **Contribute to conservation:** Fund conservation programs in the regions being visited.

- **Provide competitive local employment:** Employ localizing all aspects of business operations.

- **Offer site-sensitive accommodations:** Ensure that facilities are not destructive to the natural environment and particularly that they do not waste local resources. Design structures that offer ample opportunity for learning about the environment and that encourage sensitive interchanges with local communities (International Ecotourism Society, 1993).

### 5.1.4 Policies and planning of ecotourism

Ecotourism policy may be defined as whatever governments choose to do or not to do with respect to ecotourism (Hall, 2004). This definition of public policy covers government action, inaction, decisions and non-decisions, as it implies a deliberate choice between alternatives (Hall and Jenkins, 2004). However, such a simple definition masks the complexity of ecotourism policy and planning. Understanding ecotourism policy and planning is inherently difficult in part because, even on a global basis, there are very few specific agencies that are solely dedicated to ecotourism, although there tend to be various governmental bodies that have interests in ecotourism. As the global tourism industry continues a trend of sustained growth, moving more people and generating more domestic
and foreign revenues, it often does so at the expense of the social and ecological integrity of destination regions. Policy is especially relevant to the ecotourism industry, because of what this ‘type’ of tourism is said to value (ethical approaches to management, local people, the protection of natural heritage, and so on). An absence of sound policy and planning, coupled with the fact that ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of the world’s largest industry (upwards of 20%) of the world travel market as ecotourism (World Tourism Organisation, 1998), demonstrates an impending need for better industry organization. Unfortunately, however, ecotourism policy has only recently come about, as a consequence of insufficient consensus on what constitutes appropriate ecotourism development. The nature of the industry (strong advocates representing parks, the environment, NGOs, government, industry and local people) is one that demands an effective balance between development and conservation, supply vs. demand, benefits vs. costs and people vs. the environment (Dowling and Fennell, 2003).

In the case of ecotourism, the role of various enterprises often influence government policy development for (i) tour operators; (ii) forestry companies; (iii) business associations, e.g. the Swedish Ecotourism Association; (iv) special-interest groups (v) interest groups that also have substantial tourism business dimensions and (vi) other non-government policy actors such as universities and significant individuals.

1) Eco Destination planning guides

- Master plans for the entire tourism development region should specify green zones, trails, walking paths, public access areas, and clear rules on the density of development allowed in residential and commercial zones.
- Zones for use in tourism purpose should be clearly designated.
- Visitor management plans and procedures should incorporate public comment during design and implementation phases, with monitoring programs that allow for regular discussion of tourism use and the correction of problems when they occur.
- Full stakeholder consultation should take place on the type of tourism development (if any) desired by local communities, utilizing local neutral intermediaries who understand the communities viewpoints and will not advocate a particular development approach. This process must give the community adequate time to consider its options, with outside counsel and representation available on request.
Integrated natural resource planning should offer residents a variety of sustainable economic development alternatives beyond ecotourism (Wood, 2002).

2) Eco-destination management guidelines

- Provide adequate budget to conserve popular tourist area and earmark tourism fee for consumption.
- Tourism businesses should pay impact fees that fund the infrastructure for solid waste treatment, sewage treatment capacity, electricity and water, because their guests will require these services. Tourism properties should receive clear incentives for conserving electricity and water.
- Environmental Impact Assessment programs should be followed by Impact Monitoring Programs. These programs should be tied to business licensing and certification systems.
- Well-managed trails and camping areas should provide clearly marked rules for low-impact use.
- Published and recognized rules or regulations for public lands should make detail the type of vehicles permitted in specific zones, speed limits, fines for dumping or pollution, clear rules for limiting off-road driving, oversight on the number of visitors allowed in zoned areas, and instructions on how and when to observe wildlife. Guidelines should state what is inappropriate.
- Training programs are necessary to provide local inhabitants with the opportunity to run their own businesses.
- Affordable housing programs should ensure that local residents are not excluded from their own communities due to ballooning real estate prices (Wood, 2002)

3) Eco-lodge Management characteristics

- Provides on-the-job training to community members and local guides.
- Uses a majority of local staff people, and avoids giving city-trained or expatriate individuals all of the key responsibilities.
- Sets up after-hours second-language programs (to assist staff in speaking the language of visiting guests) using a local college graduate with expertise in language training.
- Have guests contribute to staff education and community development projects
involving education or health.

- Encourages interested community members to communicate their knowledge about the area, while encouraging local guides to mingle with guests during communal hours.
- Supports guest learning experiences through visits to local farms, nurseries, reforestation projects, butterfly farms and other efforts to promote sustainability in the region.
- Promotes a system for guests to contribute financially to the preservation of natural areas in the region.
- Insists on recycling everything from table scraps to plastics, paper and metal.
- Uses alternative energy wherever possible.
- Uses biodegradable detergents and avoids the use of toxics whenever possible.
- Does not keep caged or exotic animals on the premises (Wood, 2002).

5.2 Ecotourism Development in Sikkim

Tourism is one of the mainstays of the hill economy and Sikkim is one of the states to equip economic strength through tourism. There is a beauty everywhere in Sikkim whether it is springs, autumn, winter or monsoons. Sikkim has a wide range of aesthetic beauty ranging from the mountains and multitude of rivers and lakes, which are considered as the *sine-qua-non* of Ecotourism. The mighty Kanchenjunga offers majestic scenery, which is considered as the royal crown of this mountain state. The snowy winter and cooler summer serve to invite many tourists to this tiny hilly state. Sikkim is a place where fusion of culture is distinctly visible. This state has now started gaining importance as a major ecotourism destination. It has everything which a tourist can dream of as a land of fairs and festivals, snow-clad mountains, holy lakes and peaks, religious centers, hot springs, trekking, water-rafting, pleasant valleys flora and fauna and so on (ENVIS Centre Sikkim on Ecotourism, 2006).

In 2001 "The Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS)" a registered NGO operating out of Gangtok, founded the home grown initiative to understand and advocate proper eco-tourism practices in Sikkim. The sole purpose was to ensure responsible tourism from the stakeholders who would travel to natural areas in such a way that it conserves the environment and brings benefits to local people and communities. The NGO
has dedicated members who believe in the concept of self reliance and have a mandate towards achieving the goals of sustainable development. It seeks to combine the strengths of rural communities with the experiences of national and international experts for process driven innovation and advocacy.

On the 27th September 2001 "ENVIS Centre Sikkim on Ecotourism" was established in the state as one of the 25 centres of the country so far, to function in close collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology, Government of Sikkim. ENVIS (Environmental Information System) is a plan programme of the ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India. This Centre is a decentralized system which uses the distributed network of databases to ensure integration of national effort in environmental information as well as compilation storage, retrieval and dissemination to all concerned including policy planners, decision makers, research workers and public as a whole. Another body under Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department, Government of Sikkim, known as "Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project" (SBFP) under the financial assistance from Government of Japan through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), worked with the project (duration 2010-2020) in Sikkim. The main objectives are to achieve the goal by promoting sustainable biodiversity conservation, afforestation and income generation activities including eco-tourism for the community development.

With the cooperation of Government of Sikkim and Department of tourism and Civil Aviation along with the help from many other organisations like G.B. Pant Institute, Travel Agent Association of Sikkim (TAAS), The Mountain Institute (TMI), Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation (STDC), Community Based Organisation (CBO) viz. Kanchenjunga Conservation Committee (KCC), Voluntary Health Association of Sikkim (VHAS), etc. and especially the local people, they have been working toward the sustainable development and environment friendly notion promoting and establishing effective projects throughout the state.

Sikkim has a natural setting for Ecotourism. The State is predominantly rural in nature. Approximately 40% of the total land area comprises of fixed land and another 30% of the land is under snow-capped mountains, glaciers and rivers. Hence is one of the rare places in the world where one can travel from almost a level of 300 meters at Jorethang to 8,598m the
level at Kanchenjunga in a space of 110 km. The sharp variation in the altitude naturally provides tremendously rich bio-diversity in the State. (Dong, 2002). An account of ecotourism development is given below:

- Initial step taken by ECOSS was hosting the South Asian Regional Conference on Ecotourism (SARCE 2002) at Gangtok, in collaboration with International Ecotourism Society (TIES), The Mountain Institute (TMI) and the Ministry of Tourism, which essentially brought ecotourism into the development profile of the North Eastern States and putting Sikkim on the ecotourism map of India. The officials of the State Council of Science and Technology Sikkim (functioning the ENVIS Centre Sikkim on Ecotourism), also attended the conference which helped them to refine the objective towards Environmental Information System (ENVIS).

- A detail research work by the Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism project (2003) under the supervision of G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, Sikkim Unit, in area which were important for Ecotourism i.e. Yuksom-Dzongri-GoechaLa trekking corridor inside Khanchenjunga National Park helped identify new avenue for ecotourism development in the areas with economic benefit to the locals.

**Account of the ecotourism development in Sikkim**

- Khanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve (KBR), Trans Boundary Conservation Project (2003) was initiated by The Mountain Institute (TMI) in partnership with Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim and Khanchenjunga Conservation Committee (KCC). The project site was the villages around the Khanchenjunga National Park (KNP) which includes Uttarey Sopakaha, Ribdi Bhereng, Yuksam, Labdang in West Sikkim and Dzongu in North Sikkim. The main objectives of the program were to create opportunities for alternative livelihoods and in the long term seeking to enhance trans-boundary co-operation. The general activities include Community Based Tourism, Strengthening of local Institutions and organizations, Integrated Community Nursery and Medicinal Plants Cultivation.

- Established Himalayan Home-stay in Sikkim to promote community based tourism while helping local communities benefit fully from the economic opportunities of low-impact tourism. ECOSS successfully enacted the Sikkim Himalayan Home stay Project funded by UNESCO under their Cultural and Ecotourism in Mountain Regions of
Central and South Asia programme from 2004-2007 for promotion of community home stays in Yuksom (west), Dzongu (north), Kewzing(South) and Pastanga (east) through capacity building of ecotourism service providers.

- Market Linkage workshop was conducted on 5th October 2004 at Pastanga village organized by ECOSS funded by the Teesta Basin Carrying Capacity Program with the objectives of creating linkages and exchange of ideas amongst village tourism service providers and travel operators within Sikkim to identify the potential village tourism. Travel agents and tour operators, local CBOs and NGOs from all parts of Sikkim, attended the program. Representatives of DGHC were also present in the day’s workshop. The workshop was an occasion to develop some operational guidelines and set regulations for standardizing of village tourism products and the barriers aspect of the same.

- Kanchenjunga Conservation Committee (KCC) of Yuksom in West Sikkim initiated cleaning the garbage in Yuksom-Dzongri-Lamuney trekking trial from 21st to 26th April in 2007. The cleanup campaign was organized by the KCC with effort of the local, tourism staffs of Yuksom along with foreign volunteers and other organisations. It was the successful program which made the environment clean and created awareness about garbage management among the local community, trekkers the travel and tour operators and the caretakers.

- Singalila Trek, one of the Sikkim most famous trekking trails, was reopened in 5th November 2007 with changes in the route, after two and half which was closed in the year 2005 after the Union Home Ministry objected to the trail passing through Nepal in several places including a Camp at Megu. It was the joint effort of the State Tourism and Forest Department, member of Travel Agent Association of Sikkim (TAAS) and representative of Sikkim Association of Adventure Tourism Operators (SAATO) to organize a recap to find alternative route and successful with opening of the trek again.

- Ecotourism Initiatives were taken to promote ecotourism in Yuksom (29th December, 2007) supported by a group of 17 volunteers from "Singapore Management University" who participated in collaboration effort with Khanchenjunga Conservation Committee (KCC). Various activities were fulfilled like creating brochures which
included the new medical trails developed by KCC, enhancing the KCC's visitor information centre which was refurnished with new posters, shelves and banners to allow the Centre to be a comprehensive one stop information resource for conservation efforts in Ecotourism.

- In 3rd July 2008 Hee-Bermiok village Tourism was selected for the consumer News and Business Channel (CNBC) TV and was awarded in the category "Best Village Tourism and Best Community Participation".

- Lachen, one of the villages in North Sikkim with local self Government called "Dzumsa" and colourful culture, was chosen by the Ministry of Tourism in Partnership with UNDP under its 'Explore Rural India Programme' as one of the 100 heritage village sites in the world.

- As ecotourism was emerging in Sikkim Home-stay facilities started getting popularity in different parts of Sikkim. The isolated village like Dzuluk in east Sikkim, with spectacular view of Silk route started Home-stay facility in 2008 under the independent entrepreneurship of Mr. Gopal Pradhan one of the locals, who advanced the ecotourism development of the area.

- On the 9th January 2009 a tiny hamlet of West Sikkim, called Darap, come up with Home-stay facility under the Darap Agro Farm and Village Tourism Development Society to promote sustainable Eco-tourism.

- Sikkim Government decided to set up Ecotourism Committee and maintain separate Directorate of Ecotourism with member of the Tourism Department and related ministries like Forest Department on the 3rd June 2009.

- Indian Himalayan Center for Adventure and Ecotourism (IHCAE) Institute at Chemchey Village, South Sikkim was formally inaugurated by the Union Minister for Tourism on the 7th December 2009. The institute is the first of its kind in the entire North-East region. IHCAE provides high standard ecotourism and adventure related training courses while emphasizing on instilling the concept of adventure tourism without causing any environmental degradation.
Implementation of National Afforestation Programme in Sikkim since 2003 became a success story by Joint Forest Management Concept (JFMC) working under West Territorial Division led by the Forest Department of Sikkim.

In 5th February 2010 with the unmitigated effort at environmental protection, Sikkim was declared an "Eco-friendly Tourism State" by the Union Ministry of Tourism. The Green Mission campaign of Sikkim Government to preserve the environment and forest cover was highly appreciated and credited for setting a great example.

Government of Japan, through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), is providing financial assistance for Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project (SBFP) which was implemented by the Forest Environment and Wildlife Management Department in the year 2010-11. The project aimed to strengthen biodiversity conservation activities and forest management capacity and simultaneously improve livelihood of the local people who are dependent on forests and are living in forest fringe areas.

With the high promotion of Ecotourism in the state on the 29th October 2010, the first draft of the proposed Ecotourism policy for Sikkim under Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), funded project was released to stakeholders for review.

Review of Restrictions pertaining to Restricted Area Permit (RAP) and Protected Area Permit (PAP) for tourists under taken by ministry of home affairs conveyed relaxation of protected Area Regime (2011) in the following circuits of Sikkim i.e. (i) to issue PAP/RAP to foreign tourist in a group of two or above with recognized travel agent, who acted as an escort. However, restriction on visit of foreigners to Rumtek Monastery and restriction on movement of Tibetan refugees were enforced. (ii) To issue PAP/RAP to visiting foreign tourists ((i) subject to as above) initially for a period of 30 days extendable to another spell of 30 days.

Tourism department came out with a draft rules for regulation of home stays in Sikkim and was released for feedback and views for wider promotion of village tourism which have already come up in several places of Sikkim. It was called the "Sikkim Registration of Home Stay Establishment Rules, 2012", which aimed to regulate the
sector witnessing some individual securing runaway success while other not managing to stay abreast or capture the tourist inflow.

- Ecotourism, being one of the top priority sector in Sikkim, in 20th January 2012, the state formulated the final draft of Ecotourism policy and approved to be presided in future works. The vision of the policy is to establish Sikkim as an ultimate and unique ecotourism destination offering memorable and high quality learning experiences to visitors, and to contribute to poverty alleviation as well as to promote nature conservation. For formulation of Ecotourism Policy a Committee was constituted under the Forest Minister with expert members from Government and international NGO in field of ecotourism TIES (The International Ecotourism Society of USA), local NGOs, national level NGOs, members from Travel Agent Association of Sikkim (TAAS), Sikkim Association of Adventure Tour Operators (SAATO) etc. The main work was initiated by the JICA assisting Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project (SBFP).

- A separate body called as "Sikkim Ecotourism Directorate" is established working under the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department (FEWMD). It consists of Sikkim Ecotourism Council as an autonomous council as outlined in the organizational diagram. The Council consists of local village level operational system which incorporates various community-based organizations (CBOs) working in tandem with Panchayat, Non-Governmental Organisation, Tourism Development Committee (TDC), Self-help Groups (SHG) and other local people’s representative groups.

5.3 Commitment pattern of Ecotourism in Sikkim

Ecotourism has flourished in Sikkim with different issue in hand leading environmental conservation and awareness, village tourism / home-stays, revival of tradition and aesthetic value of the places and sustainable development. The Sikkim Ecotourism Council as an autonomous body, having an executing arm, which is the Ecotourism Directorate (ED) working under the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department (FEWMD) and operational system at local village level incorporating various community-based organizations working in tandem with Panchayat, Non-Governmental Organisation, Tourism Development Committee (TDC), Self-help Groups (SHG) and other
local people’s representative groups altogether work hand in hand for organizing and ensuring effective management and implementation of the ecotourism works in the state.

5.3.1 Key principles of Sikkim Ecotourism

The following key principles are directed, for all forms of ecotourism for the development, planning, management, and promotion in the state of Sikkim (Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, 2012):

- to conserve nature, including biodiversity and ecosystems as well as the culture and traditions of Sikkim.
- to respect local communities’ culture, tradition and customs.
- to adhere to international ecotourism principles, guidelines and standards for the development of ecotourism in the state of Sikkim.
- to generate income sources to local communities, preferably to economically disadvantaged, through ecotourism activities.
- to promote sustainable use of natural, cultural and local resources to develop and promote ecotourism in the state with the emphasis on the use of renewable energy.
- to facilitate partnership for planning, implementation, coordination and monitoring ecotourism activities with key stakeholders such as local communities, NGOs, government organizations, tour agents and tour operators.
- to enhance cooperation between local entrepreneurs, such as home stay operators, tour operators and tour agents, and government organizations and other key players in the development of ecotourism infrastructures and promotion of ecotourism products.
- to encourage visitors to learn about biodiversity and ecosystems as well as local people’s cultural and traditional.

5.3.2 Guidelines

The objectives of the guidelines are to conserve the biodiversity and ecosystem of the protected areas in Sikkim and address the rules for trekkers, mountaineers, tour operators, guides, researchers and all other visitors to the protected areas. Guidelines set out for the outside of the protected areas for the ecotourism operators and guides operating within
Sikkim attempt to facilitate the nature conservation as well as ensure their clients’ safety. The guidelines as laid down for the people mentioned below.

- for visitors such as trekkers, mountaineers.
- for ecotourism services operators such as trekking service providers, trekking companies.
- for guides such as, trekking guides, mountaineering guides, bird watching guides.
- for research scholars.
- for visitors other than the types mentioned above.

The following guidelines are defined by the areas which are protected areas and the outside of them (Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, 2012).

1. Protected Areas:

Guidelines for Ecotourism Operators and Guides and for the Visitors and Research Scholars for the protected areas are described below.

- **Guidelines for Ecotourism Operators and Guides:**

  **Instruction for the Service providers – What to do**

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<th>Instruction for the Service providers – What to do</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>a.</strong> engage trekking service providers who are genuine Sikkim subjects and possess the certificate of identification.</td>
<td><strong>i.</strong> obtain permission from the State Home Department and also from State Chief Wildlife Warden, Forest for Alpine Expedition;</td>
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<td><strong>b.</strong> engage pack animals owned by genuine Sikkim subjects and possess the certificate of identification.</td>
<td><strong>j.</strong> segregate degradable and non-degradable litters and burn or bury all biodegradable items and carry back all other non-degradable items;</td>
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<td><strong>c.</strong> ensure that fair wages are paid according to the prescribed rates.</td>
<td><strong>k.</strong> keep to the permitted nature trails and treks</td>
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<td><strong>d.</strong> provide adequate cooked food for the trekking service providers while in a wildlife area and ensure that they do not use firewood.</td>
<td><strong>l.</strong> inform the nearest wildlife check post, in case the parties come across forest fire, wildlife offence by someone, death/carcass of wild animals during their nature trip;</td>
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<td><strong>e.</strong> obtain a permit and pay prescribed fees before entering a wildlife area.</td>
<td><strong>m.</strong> prepare and carry medical first aid kits for your clients take them to the trip;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>f.</strong> register at the forest/wildlife check posts before entering a wildlife area;</td>
<td><strong>n.</strong> arrange insurance for your clients when you take them to the trip;</td>
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<td><strong>g.</strong> arrange to carry sufficient kerosene and LPG for heating and cooking purpose.</td>
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<td><strong>h.</strong> the pack animal operator shall arrange for fodder for the pack animals and ensure that they do not graze freely in wildlife areas.</td>
<td><strong>o.</strong> educate visitors on community based ecotourism initiatives and the guidelines before start of the tour/trek.</td>
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**Instruction for the Service providers – What not to do**

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<tr>
<td><strong>a.</strong> use firewood or kindle fire or throw cigarettes butts in wildlife and forest areas <strong>k.</strong> camp within 500 meters of the periphery of any lake;</td>
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<td><strong>b.</strong> damage or cut shrubs or thickets <strong>m.</strong> defile sites of religious and cultural significance such as sacred monuments, lakes rocks, caves and shrines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c.</strong> pollute water body <strong>n.</strong> commit any other act that may be injurious to forests, water bodies, plants animals or disturb the natural tranquility of such sites or become a nuisance to other trekkers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d.</strong> collect plants or their parts <strong>o.</strong> leave any non-biodegradable materials in wildlife area during a trek, and such materials shall be declared at the forest/wildlife check post both before and after the entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>e.</strong> bring with them dogs, cats and other pet animals <strong>p.</strong> sell liquor, drugs and other intoxicants;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>f.</strong> feed, shout, tease, chase, disturb or molest wild animals <strong>q.</strong> carry out any research study or study within wildlife area without the prior permission of the Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>g.</strong> play loud music or use loud speakers <strong>r.</strong> indulge in hunting of any animals or carry on the business of buying and selling any animals, animal articles, antique cultural artifacts, trophy, uncured trophy or meat of wild animals and specified plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>h.</strong> camp outside the designated campsites <strong>s.</strong> destroy or remove any wildlife, infrastructures and plants/trees, sign boards of the protected areas;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>i.</strong> trek outside of the designated natural trails <strong>t.</strong> swim in lakes, rivers or approach glaciers inside the National Park/Protected Areas or camp in areas of wildlife interest or their habitats;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>j.</strong> defecate within 100 meters of any water body <strong>u.</strong> collect specimens of wildlife without permission of the competent authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

➤ **Guidelines for Visitors and Research Scholars:**

**Instructions for the Visitors and Research Scholars – What to do**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructions for the Visitors and Research Scholars – What to do</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a.</strong> engage trekking service providers who are genuine Sikkim subjects and possess the certification of identification. <strong>b.</strong> ensure proper permits are taken by their service providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c.</strong> register at the forest/wildlife check posts before entering a wildlife area. <strong>d.</strong> ensure that the service provider is carrying sufficient kerosene and LPG for heating and cooking purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>e.</strong> keep to the permitted nature trails and treks. <strong>f.</strong> segregate degradable and non-degradable litters and burn or bury all biodegradable items and carry back all other non-degradable items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>g.</strong> also inform the nearest wildlife check post, in case the parties come across forest fire, wildlife offence by someone, death carcass of wild animals during their nature trip <strong>h.</strong> obtain permission from the State Home Department and also from State Chief Wildlife Warden, Forest for Alpine Expedition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Instructions for the Visitors and Research Scholars – What not to do

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a.</strong> use firewood or kindle fire in wildlife and forest areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b.</strong> damage or cut shrubs or thickets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c.</strong> pollute water body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d.</strong> collect plants or their parts;</td>
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<td><strong>e.</strong> bring with them dogs, cats and other pet animals</td>
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<td><strong>h.</strong> camp outside the designated camp sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>i.</strong> trek outside of the designated natural trails.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>j.</strong> defecate within 100 meters of any water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>k.</strong> camp within 500 meters of the periphery of any lake.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Non-protected Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecotourism Operators and Guides shall</th>
<th>Visitors and Research Scholars shall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a.</strong> do small scale tourism limiting group sizes to optimum carrying capacity minimizing negative impacts on fragile ecosystems.</td>
<td><strong>a.</strong> listen to the opinions of scientists and conservation NGOs as well as local communities when planning tour activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b.</strong> do not allow clients to purchase endangered animal parts or antique cultural artifacts.</td>
<td><strong>b.</strong> follow all the rules and regulations enforced the visiting areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c.</strong> prepare and carry medical first aid kits for clients.</td>
<td><strong>c.</strong> hold orientation sessions for tourists prior to running activities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d.</strong> arrange insurance for clients.</td>
<td><strong>d.</strong> hire guides who are familiar with ecotourism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>e.</strong> collect feedback from the local community as well as tourists when planning future tours.</td>
<td><strong>e.</strong> support local conservation effort and income generation activities such as, favour accommodation services managed by local individuals or community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Penalties**

1. Penalties for the person, private entities, such as tour operators, tour agents, or any other organizations who violate the guidelines set for the Protected Areas under the Notification No:887, Sikkim Wildlife (Regulation of Trekking) Rules, 2005, dated 10/02/2006, and Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.

2. FEWMD (Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department) / CBO (community based organisation) should devise penalties based on social auditing to the service providers who are at fault for cheating tourists to ensure that it is not repeated in future.

### 5.3.3 Required Permits for Visitors

At present, there are three kinds of permits for the people of non-Indian nationalities to visit some places in Sikkim. On top of these permits, there are certain areas which the people of non-Indian nationalities are not allowed to visit due to the issue of the border between India and China.

- **Entry Permit**: to enter to Sikkim, all the people of non-Indian nationalities have to get the entry permit prior to visit Sikkim.

- **Permit for the Entry to Each of the Protected Areas**: to enter to each of the Protected Areas, all the people including the people of Indian nationalities have to get the permits from branches at each of the district or the headquarter of DFEWM (Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department). DFEWM is currently working on the streamlining the issuing the permits.

- **Permit for the Entry to Restricted Areas**: all the people of non-Indian nationalities have to get the permit from Home Department to visit the restricted areas for the foreign nationalities.
Reference:


ENVIS Centre Sikkim on Ecotourism(2006): Eco destination of India - Sikkim Chapter, Department of forest, environment and wildlife management, Government of Sikkim


www.unep.org

www.WTO.org