Chapter VI

Conclusion

Tourism sector in Sikkim has emerged of late as a driver of economic development in the state. However, the process of economic development through tourism has brought budget travelers into focus with scant regard being paid so far to ecological considerations. The increasing demand for tourism infrastructure has led to rampant construction work in fragile locations along with frequent movement of vehicles along the hilly terrains overlooking ecological balance of the destination. These have created enormous pressure on the physical structure of the region. There are apprehensions voiced in different quarters that the State might have exceeded its physical carrying capacity in terms of tourist arrivals which is bound to adversely affect tourism prospect of the state in the long run.

Tourism sustainability demands the striking of a balance between economic, social and ecological sustainability. Large scale influx of tourists created economic opportunity for the stakeholders in the one hand, whereas it has affected long term sustainability of tourism growth on the other. Community participation in tourism could have provided a solution for such problems. However, community participation in tourism activities has, by and large, remained miniscule in Sikkim.

The present study adopted 25 indicators for assessing the trends and the patterns of tourism growth in Sikkim. The following paragraphs present a summary of the study’s observations:
6.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:


During the period covered by the study, domestic tourists visiting the State accounted for 94.36 per cent of the total tourist inflows to the State during the period of 1991-2007. It thus indicates that tourist inflows to Sikkim is depends heavily on domestic tourist inflows.

On an average, the State accounted for, till 2007, only 0.09 per cent of the total domestic tourist influx at the national level. The state’s share in foreign tourists’ arrival in India till 2007 was only around 0.13 per cent. The exponential curve suggests that the state’s share in total tourist arrivals in all states in India marginally declined during the study period. In respect of tourist arrivals, Sikkim registered better overall annual growth rates than India during the period of seventeen years. The domestic tourist inflows to India recorded 13.57 per cent overall annual growth rates during 1991-2007 while Sikkim registered marginally higher growth rates (14.16 per cent) during the period. The year to year growth rates for foreign tourists, although higher than the total arrivals in India, show erratic trends with frequent ups and downs.

Tourist density of Sikkim was 28.20 persons per square kilo meter area of the State in 2001 which rose to 68.07 persons in 2007; an increase of 2.41 times in the course of seven years. The total density in Sikkim recorded an increase of 1.44 times during same the period. The average tourism density in the State was 44.94 persons while total use density recorded 123.76 persons during 2001-2007. Tourism density
in Sikkim is higher than the same at the NER level throughout the period of 2001-07.

The estimated tourism receipts of Sikkim were INR 489511 thousand in 2002 which has gone up to INR 1288337 thousand in 2007, recording a growth of 263.19 per cent during the period of six years. The highest annual growth of tourism receipts was 25.72 per cent in the year 2006 while the lowest was 16.75 per cent in 2003. The average annual growth rate of tourism receipts is 17.77 per cent during the period 2002-2007.

The structural changes in the composition of Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) of Sikkim suggest that during 1980-81 to 2007-08, service sector replaced primary sector in terms of its contribution to NSDP. A relationship between TR, NSDP and TD with respect to tourist influx suggests that an increase in tourist inflow has direct positive impact on these variables during 2004-05 to 2010-11. The overall growth of NSDP service is 19.38 per cent during the period. The average annual growth of TR is highest (25.72 per cent) among the three variables while TD recorded least increase during the period of seven years.

**B. Patterns of Growth of Tourism Industry:** Seasonality pattern for twenty five years (1987-2011) divulge that foreign tourist visiting the State prefer summer (March, April and May) and autumn (September, October and November) months and the month of October remains the best choice period for them. The month of April, November, December, May etc. follows it descending order. The month of June and July stands out the lean period for international visitors in the State during 1987-2011. It also reveals that share of domestic tourists arrivals to total tourist influx in the State is as high as 95 per cent during the same period. Like foreign tourists, domestic tourists have also expressed their preference for summer and
autumn months. However, the seasonality index (SI) of month of May (SI 2.36) for domestic tourists witnessed maximum domestic tourists influx followed by month of April (1.94), October (1.36), June (1.33), March (1.24) etc. in that order. The months of July and August (monsoon season) are the lean periods for domestic visitors in the State. The SI curve of successive phases (i.e. 1987-96, 1997-2004 and 2005-2011) represents higher tourist inflows during the period.

The length of stay for domestic visitors in the State ranges between two to twenty days. The maximum number of domestic visitors displayed five days (19 per cent) of stay, followed by three days (15 per cent), seven days (15 per cent), two to four days (7 per cent) etc. in that order. The average length of stay for domestic tourists estimated to be 5.5 days per tourist. The length of stays revealed by foreign tourists’ ranges between two days to four months’. The highest number of foreign tourist (17 per cent) accounted for seven days of stay followed by six days (17 per cent), three days (11 per cent), fifteen days (six per cent), twenty five days (6 per cent) in that order. the mean length of stay for foreign tourists is estimated to be 12.7 days while overall length of stay comprising of both domestic and foreign tourists’ stands at 9.1 days during the survey period.

Family tours, group excursion and independent tour represents the prime nature of tour party visiting the State as revealed by tourist during survey. 55 per cent of the domestic tourists’ surveyed visiting Sikkim as a part of their family tour. Group excursion comprised of 28 per cent of the visitors while independent tour while married couple and honey mooners constitute four and eight per cent of domestic visitors respectively. The individual trip accounted for five per cent of the domestic touring the State during the survey period. Unlike domestic tourists, fifty per cent of the foreign tourists opted for individual trips while from the rest, group excursion, family tour, married couple and touring with friends constitutes 26 per
cent, fifteen per cent, eight per cent and two per cent respectively during the survey period. The family tour composition of domestic and foreign tourists ranges between two to nine persons while the same is two to three persons for foreign tourists. The group excursion team for domestic tourists comprised of two to twenty five tourists; however, for foreign tourists, it ranges between two to thirty five persons. 80 per cent of the foreign tourists surveyed arranged their tour through tour operators while 30 per cent of the domestic tourists opted for conducted tour by tour operators.

The spending pattern tourists visiting the State divulge that domestic tourists spend 48 per cent of their total expenditure on accommodation and food followed by transportation (28.5 per cent), shopping (16.7 per cent) and entertainment (2.8 per cent). In contrast, foreign tourist spent 44 per cent on accommodation and food followed by transportation (35.4 per cent), shopping (15.5 per cent) and entertainment (5.4 per cent) respectively.

District wise pattern of occupancy rate portrays that East District accounted for highest occupancy rate 24.07 per cent in 2001-02. The North District (18.57 per cent), West District (13.95 per cent) and South District (10.64 per cent) follow it respectively in descending order. During 2009-10, the hotel occupancy rate of East District has gone up to 62.29 per cent, followed by West (36.61 per cent), North (18.62 per cent) and South (29.75 per cent) respectively. With the exception of North District, every District in the State have shown improvements in terms of increase in hotel occupancy rate during 2009-10. The East District registered highest occupancy rate in both the periods accommodating highest number of tourists both in 2001-02 and 2009-10.
Amongst the domestic tourists, repeat visitors constitute 30 per cent of the same during the survey period. The proportion of repeat visitors among the foreign tourists is limited to four per cent of the tourist surveyed.

The pattern of spots visited reveals concentration of tourists visiting the State in the East District in general and Gangtok in particular during survey. 80 per cent of the domestic tourist surveyed visited Gangtok as a part of their tour campaign in the State. The places like Pelling (41 per cent), Lachung (22 per cent), Tsomgo Lake (19 per cent) follow it descending order. Like domestic tourists, 76 per cent of the foreign tourists also flocked to Gangtok as a part of their tour campaign in the State; followed by Pelling (55 per cent), Yuksam (35 per cent), Ravangla (27 per cent) etc. in that order. The number of spots visited by foreign tourists is higher than the domestic tourists during survey.

In terms of market concentration, the domestic tourists visiting the State largely came from the neighboring State of West Bengal (61 per cent) followed by Maharashtra (11 per cent), Delhi (10 per cent) etc. during 1987-1996. The share of West Bengal, however, came down to 45 per cent in 2009, followed by Delhi (15 per cent), Maharashtra (10 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (8 per cent) in descending order. Tourist survey also confirms almost same proportion of 'states of origin' visitors to the State.

Of the international visitors, the highest number of FTAs came from UK (14 per cent), followed by Germany (13 per cent), French (10 per cent), USA (9 per cent) Japan (5.5 per cent) etc. during 1987-96. During 1998-2007, the FTAs from USA were maximum followed by Germany, French, Australia, etc. in descending order. The tourist survey also confirms the representation of the tourist from foreign
countries along the same line. Continent wise, the FTAs from Europe accounts for larger share in the State followed by America, Asia in that order during 1998-2007.

Tourism conditions:

These protected areas in the form of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are in center of attraction mainly for two reasons. Firstly, it helps generate much needed resources from tourism for its maintenance and secondly, it plays its role in maintaining ecological balance of the destination area. Sustainable tourism practices call for striking a balance between ecological sustainability and economic sustainability. The resource use and economic prosperity conflict demands optimum use of natural resources so its incremental economic benefits percolate down to future generations.

Cultural attractions are offered in the form of arranging cultural festivals, dance, drama’s organized by local communities to showcase their ethnic culture. Tourist – host cultural exchanges can bring welcome changes in the life of resident communities in the form of derived economic benefits. However, its impact upon customs and habits of locals has to be thought through otherwise it can result in social unrest.

The majority of the trek trails in the State are located in fragile mountain regions; limited movement of trekkers can maintain economic sovereignty of the locals, in the one hand, and ecological sustainability of the destination on the other. However, there are reports of overcrowding of trek trails, especially the Yuksam-Dzongri trek trail, would have lasting impact upon the Sikkim in general and concerned destination in particular.

Tourist movement suggests that there are three circuits prevailing in Sikkim i.e. Gangtok Circuit, Pelling Circuit and Ravangla Circuit. However, Gangtok based
circuits are busiest circuit in the State remain overcrowded during peak season had its impact upon the land and masses of the State.

Sikkim has been experiencing growth of a number of hotels especially in the budget category. The growth of accommodation sector indicates the predominance of East District of Sikkim in terms of number of hotels, rooms and beds available during the course of eight years (2001-02 to 2009-10). The district holds 62 per cent of the hotels, 68 per cent of rooms and 69 per cent of the available beds in the State during 2009-10; an indication of haphazard growth of tourism activities in the State.

Sikkim recorded 0.98 and 1.04 vehicle per square kilo metre during the period of 2006-07 and 2008-09, which is higher than North East average for the same. During 2009-10, Sikkim has registered 880 contract/stage carriers and 41 luxury tourist vehicles to facilitate traffic volume in the State. Hence, it, thus, enhances vehicle per square kilo metre area to 1.17 till 2009-10. However, increase in such a huge number of vehicles in would create congestion, vehicular pollution and its direct impact upon land mass of the State.

The State Government attaches prime emphasis on tourism safety measures. In order to instill confidence in the tourism practices, the Government has already established complaint, grievance and suggestion cell within the tourism department. It is further strengthened by involving interlinked departments and tourism service providers. Immediate redressal of grievances will be taken up for discussion, if possible on online basis. Sikkim tourism police is created serve tourists at twelve tourist destinations inside Sikkim.

Creation of concrete structures across Sikkim has recorded highest growth rate during 1991-2001 by replacing traditional houses has had its effect upon the

---

1 Govt. of Sikkim.(2012)Transport Department, Motor Vehicle Division,

188
environment. Access to safe drinking water, electricity as well as latrines has registered marked improvement in rural Sikkim during 1991-2001; a precondition for tourism growth in the State.

Sikkim generates 0.45 per capita of solid waste per day amounts to 8.75 kgs per square kilo meter area of the State. The total quantity of municipal solid waste generated is about 42 tonnes per day (0.27 per cent) and the problem is mainly in urban areas. Further, the lone composting plant at Martam is unable to handle such a quantum of municipal solid waste would result in health problem for the residents' in general and tourist in particular.

Local cuisines in Sikkim are full of nutritional value and served to tourists as a part of culinary tourism. Traditional foods in Sikkim are generally categorized into fermented foods and beverages produced by micro-organism and non-fermented foods. The promotion of culinary tourism in the State itself would benefit local residents in two ways. Firstly, it helps generate much needed revenue for locals by using home grown cereals; and finally would reduce the leakage effect in tourist destinations like Sikkim.

The State government has introduced a good network of tourist information centres, cafeterias, wayside amenities, public convenience etc. to serve tourist as and when required. However, it involves a unique form tokenism rather addressing the issues at hand. Most often, these services are not provided in remote centres which badly affects the information access of tourists in those destinations.

Banking and communication services divulges that the East District is having highest number of telephone connection, post offices and telephone centers spreading over 954 square kilo metre. The density of telephone per thousand
persons is 142.37 in urban areas while the same is 11.28 persons in rural areas. This is another example of lopsided development in the State.

Tourism development index (TDI) indicates concentration of tourism in the East District of the State which has become nerve centre of tourism activity of the State.

76 per cent of the foreign tourist surveyed have rated tourist attractions as excellent whereas 42 per cent of ranked it as average during the course of tourist survey. Foreign tourists’ surveyed expressed keen interest in local culture as 77 per cent of them have the knowledge of the local culture prevailing in Sikkim; 56 per cent of the domestic tourists have revealed their interest for local customs and traditions during their stay in the State.

On an average about 97 per cent of the tourist surveyed (both domestic and foreign) expressed their wish to make a trip to Sikkim once again. Precisely, 94 per cent of the domestic and 99 per cent of the foreign tourists have conveyed their pleasure of travelling to the State in the near future. 46 per cent of the domestic tourists surveyed reportedly did not face any problem during the tour while in the case of foreign tourists, 52 per cent of them did not face any problem while touring Sikkim.

43 per cent of the foreign tourists rated quality of food as either excellent or very good while remaining 12 per cent of them rated this service as average. In sharp contrast to foreign tourists, 27 per cent of domestic tourists rated it as excellent, 21 termed it as very good and 45 per cent of them reported as average;

Survey confirms that 77 per cent each of domestic and foreign tourists’ reportedly visited local market/shops during their stay in Sikkim.

Domestic tourists preferred train and shared taxi mode of transportation for reaching Sikkim as 36 per cent of them opted for this combination. Train and
chartered vehicles combination and train and bus combination accounts for 26 per cent and 10 per cent respectively for domestic visitors while air, train and bus/shared taxi (0.5 per cent) have opted by least number of visitors.

Community Participation:

The tourist host (TH) ratio of Sikkim during the period of 2005-2010 for five peak months’ representing about 60 per cent of total tourist influx in the State during the period. It reveals that, with exception of October and November, 2009, every successive period registered higher rate of growth of TH ratio during 2005-10. The TH ratio is highest for the month of May throughout the period followed by April, October, March and November in descending order.

The domestic tourists, being high in number, created more employment opportunities than the foreign tourists during the period 2002-2010. It thus indicate that increased tourist influx would create a number of employment opportunities for the locals in Sikkim.

Community participation in the attraction sector started with Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism Project (SBEP) in 1996-97 and its successful experience spread the concept to entire Sikkim in general and Yuksam in particular. Yuksam experience has also motivated the other stakeholders, including national and international NGOs and governmental agencies to promote community participation in the attraction sector throughout Sikkim.

Sikkim Himalayan Home Stay program is operational at Dzongu, (North Sikkim), Pastenga (East Sikkim), Yuksam (West Sikkim) and Kewzing (South Sikkim). The local NGO ECOSS in conjunction with STDC and other organizations are directly involved in promotion of community based home stays in Sikkim.
The community participation in transportation sector varies with the growth of tourist influx in the State. Community participation in this sector also increases with increase in tourist traffic. Every motor caps and taxis employ at least two persons including the driver. The cleaners, support staff and the owner of vehicles increases the number of involvement in this category. The overall growth of taxis in the State was 19.15 per cent in 2006 gone up to 22 per cent in 2010, recording 23.38 per cent increase in 2010 over the number of caps in 2006. During the same period, the average rate of growth of tourist arrivals in the State also increases by 25.08 per cent. The correlation co-efficient between tourist arrivals and growth of vehicles suggest that every increase in tourist will lead to increase in vehicles available in the State; and thus increases the level of participation in the transportation sector.

The spread of monasteries in the State preserve the ancient religious rituals and are repositories of traditional art and crafts. Among the best known works of craft in this State are handloom products, woolen carpet weaving, mask making, metal craft, wood carving and thangka paintings. The three prominent ethnic tribal communities – Lepcha’s, Sherpa’s and Bhutia’s --- are the chief practitioners of this crafts; practicing the same for years.

Altogether, 99 per cent each of domestic tourists and foreign surveyed expressed their satisfaction about the friendliness of local people while touring Sikkim. In the case of foreign tourist surveyed, 79 per cent of them rated local hospitality excellent, 9 per cent of them termed it as very good while ranked it as average.

70 per cent of the domestic tourists surveyed have prior knowledge about the local residents of Sikkim. 86 per cent of the foreign tourists surveyed are conversant about local people residing in the State.
Majority of domestic tourists (60.71 per cent) reluctant to visit local villages in Sikkim as only 32.39 per cent of them travelled to local villages while touring Sikkim. Unlike domestic tourists', 65.16 per cent of the foreign tourists' surveyed visit local villages during their tour campaign in the State. Altogether, 35 per cent and 34.09 per cent respectively of the domestic and foreign tourists have shown their regard for local people along with other attributes.

Survey of locals divulges that 67 per cent of them have accepted hospitality as their way of life in spite of not involved in tourism directly. They prefer hosting tourists as a part of their livelihood. 51 per cent of them, who are involved in tourism, divulge that tourism gave them alternative livelihood options. However, there is some apprehension relating to seasonal character of tourism activity which keeps them jobless during lean periods.

Tourist survey divulges that foreign tourists have expressed their preferences for homes stay/cottage arrangements as 66 per cent of them opined in favor of it. Contrary to foreign tourists, only 38 per cent of the domestic tourists have conveyed their interest for staying in these sorts of arrangements. An overwhelming 86 per cent of foreign tourists reportedly stayed in home stay/cottages. Among the domestic tourists surveyed, only 26 per cent have stayed in such accommodation.

31 per cent of the domestic tourists and 24 per cent of the foreign tourists termed the transportation facilities in the States as excellent. 19 and 12 per cent of the domestic and foreign tourists rated it as very good while larger portion of them (42 and 44 per cent respectively) termed it as average during survey.

**6.2 PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION:**

The tourist survey as well as macro-level data indicates that the sustainable tourism practices in Sikkim needs immediate attention of the planners and policy makers of
the state. The priority areas of action that came out in the course of the study are listed below:

1. Data reveals tourism concentration in east district in general and Gangtok in particular during the period of 1991-2007. Survey result showed that 80 per cent of the domestic tourist surveyed visited Gangtok as a part of their tour campaign in the state. Similarly, 76 per cent of the foreign tourist travel to Gangtok during their stay in Sikkim. Such a Gangtok centric tourism development has badly affected the prospect of tourism growth in the state, on the one hand; and leads to uneven distribution of revenue generated from tourism, on the other. For overall tourism development in the state, dispersal of Gangtok centric concentration to other destinations and satellite areas is called for.

2. Distribution of hotel beds suggests that around 90 per cent of the hotels in the state are concentrated in the east and west districts during 2001-02 to 2009-10. Similarly, highest occupancy rate was observed in the east and west districts during the same period. The other two districts, namely, north and south districts, fails to reap the benefits generated from tourism during the period under review. Thus, dispersal of hotels to north and south districts is of paramount importance for overall growth of tourism in the state.

3. The domestic tourism markets in Sikkim are, by and large, based on tourist inflows from the neighbouring state of West Bengal. 45 per cent of the total domestic tourist visiting Sikkim came from West Bengal during 2009. Such a huge number of states of origin visitors from neighbouring state had affected the visitors’ length of stay in the state as well as tourist expenditure per day generated by tourists. So, wide dispersal of ‘states of origin’ visitors can produce positive impact
on ‘length of stay’ and ‘average expenditure per tourist’ on the one hand and increase in tourism receipts on the other.

4. Tour arrangement pattern of foreign tourists suggests that 70 per cent of them visited Sikkim through conducted tours by tour operators. Such travel companies, because of their bargaining power, offer less lucrative offers to hoteliers and other service providers. In doing so, the state usually loses a bulk of revenue to such tour operators. Promotion of independent travel from abroad can produce desired results for service providers of the state in general and Sikkim in particular.

5. During 1991-2001, the number of concrete houses in the state increased by 14.93 times, 16.39 times and 13.4 times respectively for the west, north and south districts in Sikkim. Traditional houses are conducive for ecologically fragile region like Sikkim. Such a huge transformation in favour of concrete structures had its effect upon the land and masses of the state.

6. Sikkim generated 0.45 per capita of municipal solid waste per day amounts to 8.75 kgs per square kilo meter area of the state. The total quantity of municipal solid waste generation is about 42 tonne per day. The lone solid waste treatment plant at Martam, East Sikkim could not handle such huge quantum of wastes resulting open burial in the bank of rivers and jhoras. So, the alternative arrangement for treatment of solid waste in the state is called for.

7. The state registered highest vehicle per square kilo meter amongst the North Eastern States during 2006-07 (0.98) and 2008-09 (1.04). Growth of such a huge number of passenger vehicles has had its impact upon the land surface of this ecologically fragile Himalayan state. Dispersal of vehicles throughout Sikkim, instead of concentrating on one or two destinations, can lessen the impact caused by movement of vehicles.
8. Lastly, tourist survey suggests that Sikkim targets only the budget segment of the tourists as evidenced by growth of budget category hotels in every corner of the state. Targeting of premium segment of tourists by drawing suitable marketing strategy can increase the return generated from the tourism in the one hand and reduce the present excessive pressure on land, eco-system and the tourism resources of the state.