CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS
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6.1 Introductory Statement

The concluding chapter is aimed at inferring the final conclusions of the study and drawing its policy implications. Suggestions for sustainable development of tourism will be discussed, which may be helpful in planning for the future of the State. However, before venturing into that task, it would perhaps be convenient to have a recapitulation of the findings of the earlier chapters. Hence, this chapter begins with a summary of the principal findings followed by the conclusions and policy implications.

6.2 Principal Findings

- In India, like other developmental activities, tourism development is region specific, i.e., the growth of tourism has taken place in Northern, Western and Southern parts of India and to some extent Eastern India and not the North Eastern Region of India (except Sikkim) as a whole.
For example, the share of Assam is around 0.57 per cent of the total domestic and 0.09 per cent of the foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2004-05 respectively.

- In the present study, it was found that a good number of tourists came to Kaziranga National Park (KNP) from different States of the country and different countries of the world. In case of domestic tourists, the highest number of tourists came from West Bengal followed by the North Eastern States. This may be due to the relative proximity as well as the easy access of KNP than other sanctuaries and national parks and also the availability of information about the wildlife based tourism especially made available in local regional media. Most of the surveyed domestic tourists to KNP came in a group of two or more. Family groups were common and a good number of domestic tourists were couples. However, majority of the foreign tourists came alone.
• The average level of education of the surveyed tourists was quite high. There was no illiterate tourist in the sample. Majority of the surveyed tourists (53.71 per cent) were graduates followed by post-graduates or higher. These results accord with previous findings of other researchers (Walsh, 1986; Navrud and Mungatana, 1994; Tisdell and Wilson, 2000; and Mitra and Chattopadhyay, 2003) that the demand for non-consumptive nature-based or wild-life tourism rises with the level of education.

• Most of the interviewed tourists were either in the higher middle-income group or in the upper income group. All the surveyed foreign tourists were in the category of annual income of above Rs. 3 lakh.

• From the surveyed tourists, it was found that the largest groups of tourists to the KNP were between the age of 20 to 50. The mean age of the tourists was found to be around 35 years in case of domestic tourists and around 36 years in case of the foreign tourists.
• Most of the surveyed tourists (76.91 per cent) came to watch wild animals followed by 11.50 per cent for recreation. This means 88.41 per cent tourists came to KNP in connection with its rich biodiversity including the variety of wild animals.

• In this study, it was found that the highest head of tourist’s expenditure within KNP was on local transportation (33.09 per cent), followed by miscellaneous (27.53 per cent) and accommodation (21.89 per cent). Relatively, less percentage i.e., 17.49 per cent was spent on food and beverage. This may be due to the fact that the local transport cost (which includes the cost of elephant safari, jeep safari within the park, view fee, vehicle charges etc.) is quite high particularly for the foreign tourists.

• Regarding accommodation, it was found that most of the domestic tourists looked for cheaper accommodation with reasonable comforts where as ‘luxury accommodation’ was the privilege of the rich domestic and the majority of
the foreign tourists. However, majority of the surveyed tourists (93.30 per cent) were satisfied with the condition of accommodation.

- It was observed that 24.81 per cent of the surveyed tourists were of the opinion that the price of the food available was relatively high in comparison to its quality and so the quality of food should be improved.

- During this survey, it was found that a good number of surveyed tourists were not satisfied with communication facilities like internet, telephone, etc.

- However, in spite of the constraints, it was revealed that visiting the KNP was a very satisfying experience and most of the respondents (98.76 per cent) wanted to revisit provided more infrastructural facilities were built up. Moreover, a very high proportion of respondents (99.26 per cent) said that they would talk to their friends and relatives about their experience in KNP and presumably would advise them to visit the park.
- The regression analysis (as applied in TCM) showed that the visitation rate was not only negatively affected by local travel cost (which is theoretically true) but also it was significant at 0.01 level of significance. This means the cost incurred locally was considered as a better index of the price paid by the tourists to visit Kaziranga National Park.

- The education variable had a positive and a significant coefficient. This was consistent with standard recreation economic literature that an increasing educational level had an impact on increasing visitation rate.

- The age was also a very significant, socio-economic variable but it had a positive coefficient. This may be partly due to the fact that the mean age of sampled tourists was found to be relatively high. For such a sample, an increase in age may not result in an impact of visitation rate.
• The annual household income was also found to be significant with positive coefficient. This was expected since the more the income of the consumers, the more they were willing and able to spend on recreation.

• The gender was not found to influence the visitation rate significantly.

• Since it was found that the visitation rate was more clearly affected by the local travel cost and also the fact that the location of KNP was within easy access than other tourist spots of North East India, it was considered more appropriate to estimate consumer surplus from local travel cost only. This amounted to Rs. 4682.68 per visit of tourist. With tourist number estimated at an average of 65,459 during the last three years (i.e., 2002-2005), this yields a minimum value of Rs. 30.65 million per year. A substantial part of it could be taxed or visitor changes could be increased to yield additional benefits for the park.
6.3 Conclusions and Policy Implications

The study shows that there is enormous potential of eco-tourism in Assam, in general and KNP in particular. A travel cost model was used to estimate the value accruing to tourists and it was found that the consumer surplus amounted to Rs.4682.68 per visit of tourist based on only local travel cost. With tourist number estimated at an average of 65,459 during the last three years, this yields a minimum value of Rs.30.65 million. This number may not be a proper reflection of the actual recreational value of tourism but it has the magic power of making our mind conscious regarding the enormous potential of tourism development in Kaziranga National Park of Assam.

However, there are certain important constraints of tourism development of Assam in general and KNP in particular. The main constraint has been the lack of awareness of the potentials
of tourism among the policy makers and the bureaucrats (Government of Assam, 2005). The other major factor has been the image of the State and the North Eastern Region with regard to the safety factors. The growing violence and insurgent activities have, no doubt, disrupted the development of tourism in Assam. There may be some grievances of local people but they may have acted as a psychological obstacle that is faced by a potential tourist. Tourism as an industry is highly sensitive to potential disturbances. In this context, comments of Buckley and Klemn is worth mentioning ‘The problems of any kind of civil unrest is that unfavourable images are beamed across the world so that even those who are not afraid of terrorism will be discouraged from taking a holiday here. It is not so much the area is dangerous, more it does not look attractive.’ (Buckley and Klemn, 1993).

At the same time the infrastructure and the services required have not been developed to the extent required. The infrastructure development has been haphazard and in many places the Government has constructed lodges and way side
amenities without proper assessment of tourist arrivals and potentialities. The transport and communication bottlenecks to and fro KNP acted as a discouraging factor for willing visitors from high income States like Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat and other Southern States. For example, many tourists have to travel by road of around 239 km from Guwahati airport for visiting KNP since the air services are not frequent at the nearest airport i.e. Jorhat. The internet facilities are also not readily available.

The strategy and approach of the tourism development has been faulty. There is no coordination among various Government departments which are dealing with tourism. The participation of private sector in tourism development is low and the State Government has not come forward with a clear intensive policy. The budgetary provision for tourism sector has been inadequate and there is a huge gap between the amount sanctioned and the amount released. For example, during the Eighth Five Year Plan the amount sanctioned was Rs.439.84 lakh (less than 1 per cent of total allocations). However, out of
the sanctioned fund, only Rs.191.15 lakh i.e. 43.45 per cent was released.

There has also been no integrated development and management of tourist circuits and adequate attention has not been given to product diversification to attract tourists. There has also been over concentration on certain tourist attractions where the capacity to handle tourists has its own limits. For example, in Kazinarga National Park, there are constraints both in elephant safari and jeep rides. It was found that the domestic and foreign tourists spent around Rs.42.89 lakh and Rs.31.27 lakh respectively on jeep safari and elephant safari in 2005-06. However, there were only fifty trained elephants and eighty jeeps for carrying the tourists in KNP. Moreover, after the safari rides, the tourists have limited options as how to spend the rest of their time.

At the same time, KNP the study area, suffers from certain peculiar problems. For example, most of the tourists used to visit KNP to watch wild animals and birds specially one-horned rhino. However, in this park around 583 rhinos were killed within a
period of twenty seven years (The Assam Tribune, 18th May, 2007). The forest guards failed to protect the rhinos which were the main source of attraction for tourists. The foresters and the task force, deployed to detect the poachers, were able to recover sixty two rhino horns from the poachers during the last twenty years (The Assam Tribune, 18th May, 2007). Further, they do not have proper arms and ammunitions to fight against the poachers. At the same time, rhinos straying out of KNP has become a major concern for the State Government. This has happened because of shrinking of grassland and the drying up of some wet lands due to dry spells over the last few years. There is also massive erosion of the river Brahmaputra. An area of around 30 sq. km of the park has been lost due to soil erosion. There are also allegations that human interference i.e. a large number of illegal migrants have encroached some areas of the park. All these factors have led to the loss of natural habitat and food for one-horned rhinos and other wild animals.
The findings summarized above and the conclusions thereof, lead to the following main policy suggestions of the study.

- Public-private partnership should be treated as an essential ingredient of the policy for promotion of tourism in KNP. The Government can build up the infrastructural facilities for tourism but the private sector is best suited for the management and delivering of the services. Although there are a number of Government and private lodges and hotels in KNP, during the peak season, there is acute shortage of accommodation.

- It was found that after the elephant rides or jeep safari, the tourists have little options for recreation in KNP. Therefore, there is need to provide additional recreational facilities in KNP. Further, from the surveyed tourists, it was found that the average age of domestic tourist was 35 years and that of foreign tourist was around 36 years. This fact emphasizes the need to organize more and more
challenging adventures and thrilling activities for the energetic youthful tourist population. This would mean greater investment in activities like trekking, hiking, angling etc. in the nearby areas along with fascinating cultural activities. This would encourage the tourists to stay in KNP for longer periods since it was found from the survey that a large number of tourist spent only one night watching wild animals and the number of tourists spending three or four days are very few indeed.

- In order to attract more tourists, it is necessary to develop integrated tourist circuits covering the areas close by. For example, there are a number of tea gardens near by KNP. There are around ten golf courses located mostly within the compact areas of tea gardens in upper Assam. If offers a unique opportunity to integrate with eco-tourism in KNP with tea tourism as well as golf tourism.

- The participation of local people should be encouraged. For example, it may be possible to provide a unique
experience to the tourists by building low cost infrastructure in the villages adjoining KNP, by using local materials and local design inputs and providing local food at a normal price tag. This will create employment opportunity among the locals. From the survey, it was found that a good amount was spent on shopping, particularly the purchase of handicrafts, showing that there is a good potential market for indigenous handicraft products. It may be encouraged so that the local people are benefited economically.

- The Government should develop an interactive and properly managed website for KNP which should have links with national websites, websites of private industries, service providers etc.

- All the developmental activities, particularly infrastructure for facilitating tourism in KNP should be planned with futuristic view on environmental sustainability. The tourists visiting KNP should be instructed to carry food items or
essential items in biodegradable packages in order to reduce the problem of solid waste accommodation. In fact, the tourist’s waste disposal is the major environmental problem faced in Sikkim and Nepal.

- The State Forest Department finds itself ill-equipped to fight against the poachers and smugglers and contain this menace due to the limited resources available with it for protection of wild animals. Therefore, there is an urgent need to modernize the forest guards in order to protect these wild animals from the poachers and encroachers.

- At the same time there is an urgent need to acquire stretches of the riverine areas (that will constitute excellent rhino habitats) which would go a long way towards securing the future of this endangered animal and therefore the sustainability of tourism in KNP.

If the above mentioned suggestions and guidelines are planned and implemented properly, there is no doubt that sustainable eco-tourism can be achieved successfully in KNP.
The study has found that the consumer surplus value for KNP is around Rs. 30.65 million per year. The total biodiversity recreational value of the park has been found to be Rs. 27.08 million per year. These valuations are for only one year and therefore are static estimates. With further development in eco-tourism infrastructure and improvements in transportation in the future, the value is likely to increase. As a result of global rising income (including India), the demand for recreation in KNP can be expected to grow and the tourism value of KNP to rise. In addition, there is opportunity in the future to estimate the recreational value of other National Parks in North East India when eco-tourism is better developed. Hence, it is expected that this study will form the basis of future research work in the field of valuation of environmental resources of North East India.