

## ECO-TOURISM PRACTICES IN SIKKIM

---

Dipankar Karmakar\*

### ABSTRACT

Sikkim, "The Land of Mystic Splendour", has gained its popularity as the 22nd state of India in the year 1975. As per 2011 census it has become the second least populated state after Goa. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) "tourism that involves 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 cultural aspects [both of the past and the present] found in these areas is defined as ecotourism". The objectives of the study are (i) to understand the concept of eco-tourism, (ii) to know the eco-tourism practices in Sikkim, (iii) to understand the challenges of eco-tourism practices faced by the state and initiatives taken to overcome this issues. The present paper is purely based on secondary data collected from various sources like Sikkim Tourism Policy, articles, journals, books etc. Sikkim is the first state which has framed an eco-tourism policy for sustainable development through resource conservation, cultural revival, economic development and diversification. Sikkim is recognized as a mountainous region with 28 major mountain peaks including Mount Kanchendzonga, the third highest peak in the world and Sinolchu, one of the most graceful peak in the world. Besides 39 species of Rhododendron, 558 Orchid species, nearly 600 species of birds, more than 2000 species of moths, 658 species butterflies and roughly 4000 species of flowering plants, numerous medicinal plants make Sikkim an unparalleled destination of Ecotourism. This uniqueness helps the state to attract a large number of tourists across the globe. Lachen, Lachung, Dzongu are the spectacular areas for eco-tourism. Several challenges faced by the state in smooth maintaining of eco-tourism practices which includes lack of infrastructure, lack of government supports towards loans and subsidies, lack of proper telecommunication facilities, threats to indigenous cultures. This paper has also suggested some initiatives to overcome the problems like adequate infrastructure, and subsidised loan facilities, good net connectivity, proper training, active financial support, capacity building, marketing research, standard norms for tourists services, strict rules and regulations, code of conduct etc. The study also uncover that the importance of eco-tourism has been increasing by leaps and bounds. All this happen due to various socio-economic-cultural-religious and political scenarios. The gradual increases in the arrival of tourists have converted the state as a centre of mass tourism. But the tourism industry in Sikkim has been concentrated in a few pockets like Gangtok, Pelling, Lachung mainly. Besides these tourists' pockets, hidden serene beauties have to be unearthed for the wholesome development of eco-tourism in this dragon land of the Sub-Himalayan Sikkim.

---

**Keywords:** Eco-Tourism, UNWTO, Sustainable Development, Eco-System, Capacity Building, Marketing Research.

---

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Mathabhanga College, West Bengal, India.

## Introduction

Sikkim, "The Land of Mystic Splendour", has gained its popularity as the 22nd state of India in the year 1975. As per 2011 census it has become the second least populated state after Goa. Geographically it is a landlocked Indian state situated in the sub- Himalayan Mountains. The state is bounded by Nepal to the west, China's Tibet Autonomous Region to the north and east, and Bhutan to the southeast. The Indian state of West Bengal lies to the south. Owing to its fabulous natural environment and cool climatic conditions Sikkim has become well known tourist hotspots in the globe. According to the Union Tourism ministry, Sikkim is a perfect tourist destination that provides warm hospitality, rich culture, and picturesque natural beauty. The Sub-Himalayan Sikkim is endowed with impressive varieties of tourism products including nature and trekking based tourism, eco-tourism, wild life tourism, adventure tourism, wellness tourism, pilgrimage tourism and heritage tourism, homestay tourism, community based tourism etc. The present study has thrown some light on the sustainable eco-tourism practices in Sikkim.

## Objective of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- To understand the concept of eco-tourism.
- To know the practices of eco-tourism in Sikkim.
- To analyse the challenges of eco-tourism practices faced by states's tourism department and initiatives taken to overcome the issues.

## Data Collection Methodology

The study is purely based on secondary data collected from articles, journals, tourism policy, books, website etc.

## Eco-Tourism

In the entire universe India has possess three biodiversity hotspots namely Western Ghats, the Himalayas and the Indo-Burma region. The state lies in the Eastern Himalayan region. A large number of endemic species are found in this bio-diversity region. But due to their limited ranges, endemic species are particularly vulnerable to extinction. In order to develop conservation incentive and well being of local people, the Government of Sikkim has formulated an Ecotourism policy keeping in mind two objectives; "poverty alleviation" and "nature conservation."

## What is Eco-Tourism?

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) define ecotourism as: "environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations" (IUCN, 1996).

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) "tourism that involves 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 cultural aspects [both of the past and the present] found in these areas is defined as ecotourism".

The International Ecotourism Society define ecotourism as: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people".

Over the last two decades various terminologies have been used with respect to eco-tourism are sustainable tourism, green tourism, rural tourism, community based tourism etc. The basic purpose of eco-tourism is not only the conservation and protection of the natural and cultural environment but also revenue generation, joint participation in tourism management, quality education and the capacity building.

## Eco-Tourism Practices in Sikkim

During the year 1995-96 eco-tourism practices in Sikkim have been started. As a part of this project various training and awareness programmes have been organized to a great extent. In order to cope up with the mountainous terrain environment and entry of foreign tourists in many restricted and protected areas some rules and regulations have been changed accordingly by the Sikkim government.

With the active support of American and Japanese scholar Sikkim has framed the first eco-tourism policy for sustainable tourism development through resource conservation, cultural revival, economic development and diversification.

Sikkim, “ The land of orchids” has been recognized as a kingdom of bio-diversity. A large number of species of flora are found in this region. Though the state has occupied only 0.2% of the total geographical area of the country but almost 25% of all the plant species are found in this state. Sikkim is recognized as a mountainous region with 28 major mountain peaks including Mount Kanchendzonga, the third highest peak in the world and Sinolchu, one of the most graceful peak in the world. Besides 39 species of Rhododendron, 558 Orchid species, nearly 600 species of birds, more than 2000 species of moths, 658 species butterflies and roughly 4000 species of flowering plants, numerous medicinal plants make Sikkim a unique destination of Ecotourism. This uniqueness helps the region to attract a large number of tourists across the globe. Lachen, Lachung, Dzongu are the popular areas for eco-tourism (Devi T., 2021). Following table exhibited the various parks and sanctuaries for eco-tourism activities in Sikkim.

**Table 1: Protected Parks/ Sanctuaries for Eco-Tourism Activities**

Name	Park/Sanctuaries
1.Kanchedzong National	Park
2. Singba Rhodendron	Sanctuary
3.FambongLho Wildlife	Sanctuary
4.Kyongnosla Alpine	Sanctuary
5.Maenam Wildlife	Sanctuary
6. Varsey Rhododendron	Sanctuary

As the state possess uneven land and acute poverty the state has emphasized on eco-tourism development because it utilizes the abundant natural resources and unique culture. During the last decade the arrivals of tourists in the state has increased at a great extent. As a result of these natural environment has been affected in a considerable extent. So the government has taken many initiatives to strike a balance between nature and development. For this reasons home stay tourism concept has been developed in Sikkim.

Eco-tourism in rural areas of the state has been initiated by Sikkim Himalayan Home Stay Association. The UNESCO, Paris, Norwegian Govt. and the Principality of Andorra have supported this initiatives and it was finally implemented by Ecotourism & Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS). The Sikkim Himalayan Homestays Program is operational at Dzongu (North Sikkim), Pastanga (East Sikkim), Yuksam (West Sikkim) and Kewzing (South Sikkim). ECOSS has explored new rural eco-tourism spots at Naitam (East Sikkim), LingeePayong (South Sikkim) and Ray Mindu (East Sikkim).

In collaboration with the TIES (The International Eco- Tourism Society) and TMI (The Mountain Institute) ECOSS (Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim) organized an international conference on “The South Asian Regional Conference on Eco-Tourism “which was held in Gangtak from 21<sup>st</sup> January to 24 th January, 2002. The objective of this conference was to promote and implement eco-tourism in Sikkim in a sustainable manner.

After that the State tourism Policy (,2010) has suggested several guidelines regarding the promotion of eco-tourism. The policy suggested that the environmental awareness and education to be integrated with ecotourism campaign. The policy also suggested that rivers, wetlands, waterfalls, lakes etc. would be included as a part of eco-tourism plan. Keeping the importance of State tourism policy (2010) in mind Sikkim government organized an international workshop which was held at Gangtok .The outcome of the workshop was formulation of unique policy on eco-tourism to conserve the biodiversity and ecosystem of protected areas of Sikkim.

#### **Challenges for Eco-tourism practices in Sikkim**

Though the State has endowed with impressive varieties of tourism products including mountain peaks, glaciers, exhotic flora and fona, hot springs, rivers, beautiful bio-diversity, dense forests, adventures but the state suffers from serious limitations in maintaining smooth eco-tourism practices which are mentioned below:

- **Lack of Infrastructure:** Though Sikkim is a paradise blessed with green lush topography, a wide variety of flora and fauna but the infrastructure of the state is not up to the mark. There are some areas which are great destination for the thrill-seeking activities for tourists but due to poor

infrastructure, the number of tourists are quite less. For example, in the high altitude areas, JCBs are required to clear the snow. But due to less number of JCBs, on time snow cannot be cleared and it creates problem for the tourists.

- **Lack of trained professional people:** Though there is a high demand in the state for bird watching, butterfly watching and flower watching by the domestic and international tourists but very less number of trained professional person are working in this sector.
- **Lack of Telecommunication Network:** Lack of proper telecommunication facilities is a serious problem in some areas of the state.
- **Lack of Financial Support:** Ecotourism in Sikkim has enormous potentiality for generating revenues. This can be made possible only through active financial support from the government. But the local communities did not get adequate loan subsidy facilities from the state government. As a consequence, they get more dependent on foreign ecotourism investors.
- **Threat to indigenous Cultures:** Last but not the least challenge faced by the Sikkim eco-tourism practice is threat to indigenous cultures.

### Suggestions

Following initiatives have been suggested to promote and strengthen the eco-tourism practices in Sikkim:

- **Easy Loan and Credit Facilities:** Loans and credit facilities should be easily accessible so that the entrepreneur get encouraged to take more risk, thereby develop ecotourism enterprise at the community level.
- **Proper Education:** Proper tourism related education should be given to the tourists before they enter into the destination. Besides, during visit good tourists guide should be provided to them so that they can understand pros and cons of the destination.
- **Good Marketing Research:** For developing suitable products good marketing research should be needed. In this case state government and research institutions should work together which helps to get more reliable information towards the eco-tourism hot spot.
- **Capacity Building:** At the various levels increased capacity building for ecotourism should be required.
- **Strict Rules and Regulations:** In order to monitor entire eco-tourism activities, tourism related rules and regulations, guidelines, code of conduct etc. should be strictly followed.
- **Develop Standards:** There is an urgent need to develop and establish suitable standards for eco-tourism services like lodges, hotels etc. and activities like trekking, rafting etc.
- **Good Infrastructures:** Adequate infrastructure should be required to attract more tourists.
- **Net Connectivity:** Good net work systems should be required to develop and promote eco-tourism practices in Sikkim.

### Conclusion

Though the Sikkim has converted as a center of mass tourism but till the date the tourism industry in Sikkim has been concentrated in a few pockets like Gangtok, Pelling, Lachung mainly. Besides these tourists' pockets, hidden serene beauties have to be unearthed for the wholesome development of eco-tourism in this dragon land of the Sub-Himalayan Sikkim.

### References

1. Banerjee Sukanta K. (2006), "Ecotourism Initiative in Sikkim" A *Seminar Paper* presented at Center for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University.
2. Chandel Namender (2020) "Impact of Eco Tourism on Community Livelihood and Nature and Cultural Conservation: A Case Study of Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve in Sikkim Region" M.Phil Dissertation paper. .
3. Devi Tulika (2020) "Opportunities and Challenges of Tourism Sector in Sikkim "International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR) ISSN: 2319-7064 SJIF (2020): 7.803.
4. Kumar Amit " Sikkim : A Role Model of Eco-Tourism in India : A Critical Analysis" , Indian Streams Research Journals, ISSN 2230-7850 , Volume-4 | Issue-6 | July-2014 Available online at [www.isrj.net](http://www.isrj.net)..

5. Sikkim Ecotourism Policy; Published by: Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project (SBFP), Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, Government Of Sikkim, Deorali, Gangtok - 737102 India
6. Sattar, Sanjukta and . Shaban, . Abdul (2000), "Development of Tourism industry in
7. Silddm: A Spatio-Temporal Analysis", *Geographical Review of India*, Calcutta.
8. Shah, N .V. (1994 ), *Status Survey of Southern Kiang in Sikkim*, Department
9. Sikkim Tourism Policy ,2010
10. Sikkim Tourism Policy,2016
11. Sikkim Eco-Tourism Policy (2011) Published by Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project (SBFP) Department Of Forest, Environment And Wildlife Management, Government Of Sikkim, Deorali, Gangtok - 737102 India.
12. Tamang Lama Nisha ( 2021 ) "Community Based Eco-Tourism: Looking into the Government Policy Initiatives in Sikkim", *International Journal of Advances in Engineering and Management (IJAEM)* Volume 3, Issue 7 July 2021, pp: 1368-1377www.ijaem.net ISSN: 2395-5252 DOI: 10.35629/5252-030713681377 Impact Factor value 7.429 | ISO 9001: 2008 Certified Journal Page 1368.

