

Chapter 7

Prioritization of Eco-Tourism Forms at Sikkim, India

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ABSTRACT

Sikkim is the one of the smallest states in India. The state government is promoting eco-tourism as a primary sector of economy. Natural and cultural attributes make Sikkim an ideal destination for Cultural, wildlife, adventure and religious tourism. The objective of the paper is to prioritize these four identified forms of tourism with a view to measure their relative appropriateness in the context of Sikkim. The methodology is based on three tools based on continuous scale, Analytical Hierarchy process (AHP) and Quality Function Deployment (QFD) respectively. The data has been collected from 40 respondents (senior civil service officers) The paper concludes that that in terms of appropriateness cultural tourism emerges as best followed by religious, adventure and wildlife tourism in that order. Also the three tools appear valid as they arrive at matching conclusions. Our contribution is that prioritization of forms of tourism has been done for the first time and that too using a comprehensive methodology utilizing AHP, QFD and continuous scale.

INTRODUCTION

The study has been undertaken at Sikkim, a tiny Himalayan state of India and which offers exceptional opportunities for tourists from all over the world because of its diverse flora and fauna, cultural traditions, highly evolved religious philosophy and a terrain that provides possibilities of varied adventure activities. Government of Sikkim is keen to establish tourism as the mainstay of state economy and has evolved policies that cater to the broad concept of eco-tourism. The aim of the chapter is to prioritize four identified forms of tourism (Cultural, Wildlife, Adventure and Religious) with a view to identify their relative appropriateness in the context of Sikkim. The chapter begins by providing an overview of Sikkim, its evolution as a tourism destination, eco-tourism as a concept and in the context of Sikkim. It

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provides the importance of planning and prioritizing in the context of tourism and then introduces a reader to the prioritizing techniques namely Analytical Hierarchy processing, Quality function deployment and Delphi. The third part of the study describes the methodology followed to undertake the study, followed by result and discussion and conclusion. Innovative features of the study are that this is for the first time prioritization of tourism forms has been undertaken using three established prioritizing techniques and has also validated these techniques by comparing the results obtained through them.

Sikkim

Sikkim, second smallest state in India is spread across an area of just 7,096 sq. km, this state has a varied terrain climate and altitude resulting in a wide range of bio-diversity. It is one of the most sought tourist destinations in India. It is completely a mountainous state. Altitudinal gradation ranges from 300 msl to over 8000 msl. It is therefore, we find, tropical, subtropical, temperate, sub-alpine and alpine region in this state, juxtaposed within a miniscule geographical region.

As a component of Eastern Himalayas it is one of the first recognized global biodiversity hotspot. 160 mammalian (Molur *et al.* 1998b; Avasthe & Jha 1999; Agrawal 2000; Mandal 2003); over 500 bird species (Ali, 1989; Chettri, 2000; Chettri *et al.* 2001) Bhoj Kumar Acharya *et al.* (2011) and Chhetri B (2011), 78 reptilian (Jha & Thapa, 2002), Chhetri B *et al.* (2011), and 19 amphibian (Jha & Thapa, 2002); have been reported from Sikkim.

Sikkim has a matching cultural diversity too. It is a proverbial melting pot of cultures where the Lepchas (primordial people of Sikkim) reside with Bhutias and Nepalese – each having diverse, distinct and rich cultural traditions. Because of predominantly mountainous terrain Sikkim also provides ample scope for promoting adventure activities such as high altitude trekking, mountaineering, rock-climbing, river rafting, paragliding and Skiing. Himalayas have always been the spiritual abode for Hindu and Buddhist Philosophers. Even today People of Sikkim are deeply religious and spiritual. Buddhist philosophy is alive here. Many important ancient and modern religious places exist here which attract devotees from all over the world for religious and spiritual experiences.

These attributes make Sikkim an ideal destination for Cultural, wildlife, adventure and religious tourism.

Tourism in Sikkim

Karan (1989) in his research based study discusses the problems of environment and development in Sikkim Himalaya. Jacob (2000) focused upon Sikkim as a home to one of the richest varieties of flora and fauna on the globe. Jha and Jha (2001) defined tourism prospects in Sikkim in its entirety. Bora (2006) considers tourism in Sikkim as the engine of growth and affirms that the same can play a significant part in balanced sustainable development and generates benefits for the poor. Bora, Adhikary and Sikdar (2006) observe that the reopening of famed Silk Route Trade via Nathu la in Sikkim to Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China on 6th July, 2006, is likely to have a wider scope in terms of tourism services. Bora and Adhikary (2006) aim in explored micro level the potentiality of 'Northeast Tourism' as a 'Gateway to Southeast Asia' linking across borders and multicultural nations. Bora, Adhikary and Sikdar (2007) believe that the integration of Northeast Tourism with ASEAN warrants a major highlight in terms of the highly acclaimed 'Look East Policy'. They further anticipate the tremendous potential of promoting Sikkim as a major tourism hub through integrating Trade and Tourism via Nathu la Route

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