

Chapter 89

Assessing Sustainable Tourism and Crisis Situations: An Investigative Study of a Himalayan State, Sikkim (India)

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ABSTRACT

Sikkim is the 22nd state situated in the Himalayas. It is a small, but beautiful state with endless potentialities for tourism. Tourism is estimated to contribute to around eight per cent of the state gross domestic product (GDP) in Sikkim and its importance has been increasing day by day. This beautiful alpine Himalayan state has a very relevant performance in exploring the quality of public life. At the same time, this distinctive bio-geographic region is fragile and prone to earthquake and other ecological problems arising from out of climate change and increasing industrialization. This chapter is an attempt to analyze the positive and negative socio-economic conditions on the backdrop of disaster management perspective in the state. Based on review of literature on crisis situations and possible disastrous effects exhibiting from out of tourism activities in similar destinations, socio-economic issues have been dealt with through investigation of secondary data and opinion survey.

PROFILE OF THE STUDY

The Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) is the section of the Himalayas within India, spanning the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, as well as the hill regions of two states - Assam and West Bengal. The region is responsible for providing water to a large part of the Indian subcontinent and contains varied flora and fauna. Also, the study incorporates other North-eastern states of Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The IHR physiographically, starting from the foothills of south (Siwaliks), this mountain range extends up to Tibetan plateau on the north (Trans-Himalaya). Three major geographical entities, the Himadri (greater Himalaya), Hi-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-4503-7.ch089

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manchal (lesser Himalaya) and the Siwaliks (outer Himalaya) extending almost uninterrupted throughout its length, are separated by major geological fault lines. Mighty but older streams like the Indus, Sutlej, Kali, Kosi and Brahmaputra have cut through steep gorges to escape into the Great Plains and have established their antecedence.

Sikkim is a northeastern state of India. It borders China in its north and east, Bhutan in its east, Nepal in its west and the Indian state of West Bengal in its south. Sikkim is also located close to the Siliguri Corridor near Bangladesh. Sikkim is the least populous and second smallest among the Indian states. A part of the Eastern Himalaya, Sikkim is notable for its biodiversity, including alpine and subtropical climates, as well as being a host to Kanchenjunga, the highest peak in India and third highest on Earth. Sikkim's capital and largest city is Gangtok. Almost 35% of the state is covered by the Khangchendzonga National Park.

The Kingdom of Sikkim was founded on the Silk Road by the Namgyal dynasty in the 17th century. It was ruled by a Buddhist priest-king known as the Chogyal. Once a vassal state of Qing China, it became a princely state of British India in 1890. After the People's Republic of China invaded Tibet, Sikkim continued its protectorate status with the dominion and republic of India. It enjoyed the highest literacy rate and per capita income among Himalayan states. In 1975, the Indian military deposed the Sikkimese monarchy. A referendum in 1975 led to Sikkim joining India as its 22nd state.

Modern Sikkim is a multiethnic and multilingual Indian state. Sikkim has 11 official languages: Nepali, Sikkimese, Lepcha, Tamang, Limbu, Newari, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Sunwar and English. English is taught in schools and used in government documents. The predominant religions are Hinduism and Vajrayana Buddhism. Sikkim's economy is largely dependent on agriculture and tourism, and as of 2014 the state had the third-smallest GDP among Indian states, although it is also among the fastest-growing.

Sikkim accounts for the largest share of cardamom production in India, and is the world's second largest producer of the spice after Guatemala. Sikkim has the highest share of agricultural land dedicated to organic farming in India. It is also among India's most environmentally conscious states, having banned plastic water bottles and styrofoam products. Tourism is estimated to contribute to around 8 per cent of the state GDP in Sikkim.

Table 1. Comparative position of Sikkim among top ten states/uts w.r.t. Per Capita GSDP State / Union territory

	Rank	GSDP per Capita
Goa	1	₹304,666 (US\$4,500)
Delhi	2	₹275,174 (US\$4,100)
Chandigarh	3	₹250,398 (US\$3,700)
Sikkim	4	₹240,274 (US\$3,600)
Puducherry	5	₹175,701 (US\$2,600)
Haryana	6	₹165,728 (US\$2,500)
Kerala	7	₹155,005 (US\$2,300)
Uttarakhand	8	₹153,076 (US\$2,300)
Maharashtra	9	₹152,853 (US\$2,300)
Himachal Pradesh	10	₹147,330 (US\$2,200)
India (Country)	-----	₹88,533 (US\$1,300)

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