

Chapter 12

Overtourism in the Himalayan Region: Envisioning Sustainable Visitors Management Practices

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ABSTRACT

Due to inadequate management practices historically associated with tourism development in the Himalayan region, significant repercussions have arisen. While studies have explored the phenomenon of over-tourism in the region, there is a need for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of over-tourism in the Himalayan region, and to revisit the existing tourism management practices and effective mitigation strategies concerning the ecological, socio-cultural, and economic impacts caused by excessive tourist influx to be evolved. This study explores sustainable visitor management practices as a means to address the challenges posed by over-tourism in the Himalayas. Existing contextual literature has been reviewed to understand the pros and cons of over-tourism in the Himalayan region. Accordingly, the study suggested measures to overcome the impacts of over-tourism through sustainable visitor management practices and offers valuable insights for policymakers, destination managers, and local communities in fostering sustainable tourism practices in the Himalayan region

1. INTRODUCTION

The Himalayan region, spanning across multiple countries, including India, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, and Pakistan, has long been a hotspot for tourists seeking solace in its majestic mountains, serene valleys,

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and rich cultural heritage. Moreover, with its unique geological features and rich natural and cultural heritage, has attracted tourists worldwide, leading to significant tourism-driven economic growth and development (Chauhan et al., 2021; Nepal, 2000). The region is predominantly inhabited by indigenous societies that rely heavily on the rich biodiversity of the area to meet their livelihood needs (Chauhan et al., 2021, Samant et al., 2011). However, the increasing footfall of tourists in recent years has raised concerns about the sustainability of tourism activities in the region. Tourism in the Himalayas faces adverse effects including youth outmigration, disruptive road construction, economic vulnerability, and potential long-term impacts from climate change. (Bennike & Nielsen, 2023). Overtourism, characterized by an excessive influx of visitors beyond the carrying capacity of the destination, has become a significant challenge.

The Himalayas have always been a captivating destination, for tourists due to their landscapes diverse wildlife, and vibrant mix of cultures (Nyaupane & Chhetri, 2009). From the revered peaks of Mount Kailash to the tranquil valleys of Bhutan this region offers a combination of natural wonders and cultural treasures. However, the recent surge in tourist numbers has put a strain on the balance of the area ecosystems (Chandra & Kumar, 2021) The rapid growth of cities, construction projects, and unregulated tourist activities have left lasting effects on these mountain environments leading to deforestation, soil erosion and depletion of water resources (Rawat et al., 2023). What's more the influx of visitors has also worsened issues concerning waste management and pollution posing a threat to the pristine beauty of this region. The lack of coordination between agencies is causing inconsistencies between tourism development activities and regional sustainability (Chandra & Kumar, 2021). Exploitative practices that prioritize profit and uncontrolled growth neglecting the enduring repercussions of accelerated resource utilization cause damage to the social and natural environment and are linked to people's deteriorating well-being (Bhalla & Chowdhary, 2022)

At risk is the rich cultural heritage held by Himalayan communities. As traditional societies become increasingly integrated into the tourism market there is a growing concern that their customs and way of life are being commodified. This runs the risk of diluting their authenticity and diminishing their significance. Although numerous factors contributing to the disaster have been the subject of research and media discourse, there has been a noticeable lack of extensive examination and debate surrounding the historical evolution and continued expansion of tourism, as well as the socioeconomic dependencies and vulnerabilities it has engendered (Lorenz & Dittmer, 2021). While there are studies and frameworks available that discuss sustainability in tourism, there remains a distinct gap in research that holistically examines the design, implementation, and impact of sustainable visitor management practices tailored specifically to Himalayan regions, including natural and cultural heritage sites, urban areas, and remote regions.

This study aims to explore trends and practices in tourism management within the Himalayan region with an eye, toward sustainability. It seeks to identify strategies that can help minimize the impacts caused by overtourism. Additionally, the study seeks to make a contribution, to discussions surrounding tourism practices and policies. It aims to provide insights that are beneficial for policymakers, local communities, and stakeholders, within the tourism industry.

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