


Chapter 5

Community–Led Tourism Initiatives for the Conservation of Mountain Heritage in India

Ruchika Kulshrestha

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5188-9204>

GLA University, Mathura, India

ABSTRACT

The research has imposed a detailed analysis of the mountain heritages of India along with demonstrating the significance of sustainable tourism. In the methodology choice, the research has chosen qualitative research performing interviews of research participants and taking on secondary resources. From the case study of Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim, it has been found that there are considerable challenges faced by tourism due to lack of finance as well as weather conditions. It has also been found that stakeholder integration and training can assist in dealing with natural hazards more effectively through advance planning. The financial crisis, conflict among conservation and the tourist demand and the lack of adequate training are some major challenges, which the mountain tourism faces.

1. INTRODUCTION

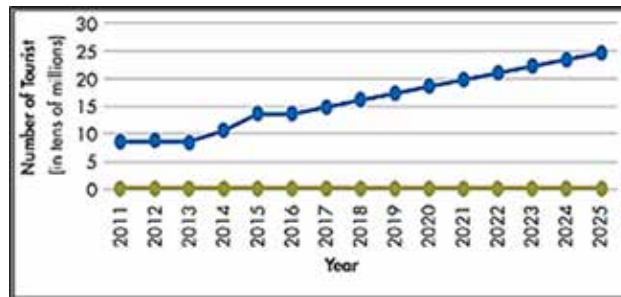
1.1 Background of Mountain Tourism in India

“Overview of Tourism in Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim”

In Himachal Pradesh, the main centre of attraction is the Snowy hill range of the Himalayas along with cultural heritages such as ancient temples, Monasteries, Gurudwara and churches denoting a religious diversity (Global tourism India, 2018). On the other hand, In Sikkim, tourism development is manifested based on global recognition for its biodiversity and the magnificent existence of Kanchenjunga where in 2024, Sikkim is among the top 30 spots of best travel destinations of the world (Sikkim Tourism, 2024). The mountains are an inevitable natural resource of Indian Tourism and for the Himalayas; India got UNESCO world heritage recognition (Chowdhury, 2022). On the other hand, the number of tourists is also growing eventually year-on-year based on the mountain tourism of India as shown in Figure 1. Based on this, it can be stated that, mountain tourism may signify the natural and cultural heritages of India to the whole world where economic gain and international recognition develops sectoral endurance.

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Figure 1. Increase in number of visitors in the mountain regions of India



(Source: Pande and Bhardwaj, 2024)

1.2 Tourism's Impact on Mountain Heritage

In the research area, the main problem of community-led tourism in the form of mass tourism is the environmental degradation and cultural erosion. For instance, in Himachal Pradesh between 2001 and 2021 more than 4.82 kilos hectare area has been deforested to accommodate more tourists, open transportation routes where more than 80,000 trees have been cut for power plants, hotels and highways (Gunthey, 2023). On the other hand, in Sikkim the major reason for environmental degradation is the development of hydropower dams which have degraded the cultural heritages and people's emotion over there (Sherpa, 2022). These instances were evident enough for cultural disruption as well as environmental degradation.

In this manner of instance, a need for a sustainable tourism model is a prior thing to be considered by the Indian mountain tourism sector. According to Purnomo *et al.* (2020), a sustainable tourism model can benefit in a programmed and performed way where the needs of the present generation can be nurtured along with preserving a good amount of the same for the next generation. Based on the model, negative impacts and activities can be prevented generating more awareness benefiting the environment, economy and cultural integration of the host community.

1.3 Purpose and Scope of the Study

Community-led tourism can uplift local assets and cultural heritage of any sites where involvement of local communities can bring more socio economic benefits. According to Rytkönen and Hotakainen (2020), community-led tourism can foster more collective capacity, self-awareness and decision-making strengths of the sector empowering the communities for alleviating the development opportunities. From a statistical viewpoint, the revenue of Indian Tourism in the year 2022 was accounted for 16.92 billion USD (Statista, 2024). In this manner, the recovery of the sector as shown in Figure 2 might certainly get benefitted for community-led tourism to nurture mountain heritages especially in Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

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