

Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in Eastern Himalayas: A Study of Sikkim, India

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Abstract

The main of this research was to find out the development and sustainability of rural tourism in Sikkim. Rural tourism is termed when the rural culture is a vital component of the product on offer in includes also includes cultural tourism. Camping, homestay, flora-tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism has given rise to tourism trade in Sikkim. Both primary and secondary data has been used to get information about the status of rural tourism Sikkim. Primary data was collected through field survey and personal observation. Secondary data was collected through the research paper, government report and web sources. Data has been analyzed by using various methods and techniques and presented in the form of map works, diagrams, pie charts, etc. From the analysis of data, it was found that the rural tourism in Sikkim is in the infancy stage and it should be developed in a sustainable manner

Keywords: Tourism, Rural, Sikkim, Potential, Leisure

Introduction:

Tourism and travel have been part of the human experience from its existence on the earth's surface. The humans first travel in the form of nomads (Stephen L. J. Smith, 2004). In recent decades the growth and expansion of the industry is a highly complex experience that needs multiple disciplinary approaches to study (Ritchie & Crouch, 2004). Tourism is believed to be the main instrument for regional development for many countries as it rouses new economic activities (Salvo, C. and Giulio, Q, 2003). During recent years tourism has been identified by developing countries as their substance for economic development by observing tremendous potential in the form of providing employment and foreign exchange earnings (Kala, 2008). The majority of the population in these areas are living in rural areas and it was

need of the hour that the tourism industry could spread in the rural areas. Rural Tourism is the 'country experience' that includes a wide range of fascinations and activities that place in agricultural or non-urban areas (Krishnakhi Choudhury, 2018). Tourism activity is termed as rural when the rural culture is an important component which we are offering to tourists. The word already says rural tourism is dependent upon the primary component of this product, there is also some related term which is used like agro-tourism, green tourism, historical/culture tourism and many more. Rural tourism has distinguishing features it gives the visitors a feel of the natural, physical and human environment of the villages. Sometimes the visitors are participating in the rural traditions and culture activities (Anjan Kumar Bordoloi, 2012). Rural tourism is also revolutionizing business and promoting economic development across the globe (Irshad, 2010). Rural Tourism in developing countries like India is very important where almost 70% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Development in rural areas can boost the economy of the people as well as social transformation. For the economic development of rural areas, rural tourism can play an important role (Pankaj, 2018). The aim of rural tourism is to solve business motivation, tourism satisfaction and economic issues which is related to depopulation caused by migration from rural to urban areas. Rural tourism is not only significant in the global scene but it has a high potential to equally important in rural India. Rural tourism not only provides holidays but also gives peace from the monotonous life of an urban city, traffic, and pollution (Singh, 2016). It was confirmed from the existing literature that tourism activities can be used for solving the problems of poverty, unemployment, etc. and also will help in skill development, preservation of local cultural heritage and maintenance of ecological balance (Mahesh, 2016). The global travel and tourism sector grew at 3.9% to contribute a record \$8.8 trillion and 319 million jobs to the world economy in 2018 (WTTC 2019). According to the ministry of tourism India (2019), the foreign exchange earned during the period 2018 was Rs 194892 crores with a growth rate of 9.6% over the previous year. The Gross State Domestic Product of Tourism sector in 2016-17 has been valued at Rs 1, 44,735 lakhs with a total contribution of GSDP being 7.68% (Sikkim, 2018). The natural scenic beauty, rich cultural heritage and simple lifestyle of the people are responsible for the attraction of the tourists from throughout the world (Rubita, 2012) and tourism becomes a new source of income for this small Himalayan state of Sikkim. The main aim of the study is to analyze the perception of the main stakeholders with regard to the sustainable development of tourism in the area.

Study Area

Sikkim is a beautiful land located state and has not explored for years, it came in to highlight after it merged with India in 1975. It lies in the eastern Himalaya of the Indian State and is located between 27°55`N to 28°9`N and 87°59` E to 88°56`E. It is positioned in the northeast and is the second smallest state (7096 square km) after Goa in terms of area and least populous state having only 6.11 lakhs. It is oblong in shape with approximate 100 km length from north to south and approximately 60 km from east to west. It is highly dominated by hilly terrain. It hosts the world's third-highest peak Kanchenjunga (8586 meters) and is valued as the guardian deity for the state (Batabyal, 2015). Sikkim is divided into four districts East, West, North, and South. North district being the largest in the area whereas population-wise east has the highest population. The climate of Sikkim can be termed as a temperate climate, where the average temperature in summers goes up to 28°C and in winters below 0°C. Ecologically Sikkim varies from low tropical temperate to subalpine zones having a rich variety of flora and fauna and also shares to a hotspot of India. Forest cover in Sikkim is almost 47% which is the largest in the country. Sikkim has one National Park and seven wildlife sanctuaries covering an area of around 2,183 Sq.km also the largest in the country (Aviation, 2018) Population of Sikkim is largely in rural areas where 60% is, directly and indirectly, dependent on agriculture or allied sources. The state per capita income for 2015-2016 is recorded as Rs 2,59,950 (at current price) which is high among the northeastern states (DESME).

Rural tourism practiced in Sikkim:

Cultural Tourism: It is the kind of journey in which people travel to a specific location offering cultural attraction, historical sites, showcasing cultural events (Definitions, 2019). Sikkim state is rich in cultural tourism having numerous monasteries, temples, holy lakes, historical sites that attract more tourism in the tiny state of Sikkim. Trekking and camping tourism: Trekking is a type of tourism activity in which the main purpose of exploring and enjoying the scenery is through walking. It usually takes in the area of pure untouched wilderness (Cultural Treks and expedition pvt ltd, 2019). Sikkim trekking and camping a large number of tourists from all over the world to enjoy and explore the tiny Himalayan state. Homestay: According to the definition it is a holiday or other period abroad spent staying home of a local family or it is the form of lodging with the great hospitality where visitors live with the local family (Homestay, 2019). Sikkim is known for its hospitality and

management all over the world and presently there has been a paradigm shift from the big hotels to homestays for recreational and eco- friendly purposes. Flora- tourism: Flora-tourism is another form of countryside tourism which is growing rapidly all over the world. Flowers show great pleasure while traveling, research purposes (Shikhar BlogTravel Experiences – Sharing Travel Memories Around the World, 2012). The tiny Himalayan state has a varied species of flora like orchids, rhododendrons, etc. Adventure tourism: It is the type of tourism activity where people travel to experience the unexpected things coming out of their comfort zone. Tourism is popular among young people. It includes skydiving, hill climbing, rafting, paragliding, etc (Tourism Notes Education Portal, 2019). The undulating topography of Sikkim offers lots of adventure in it which attracts people from across the world to experience the adventure and make life more thrilling and exciting.

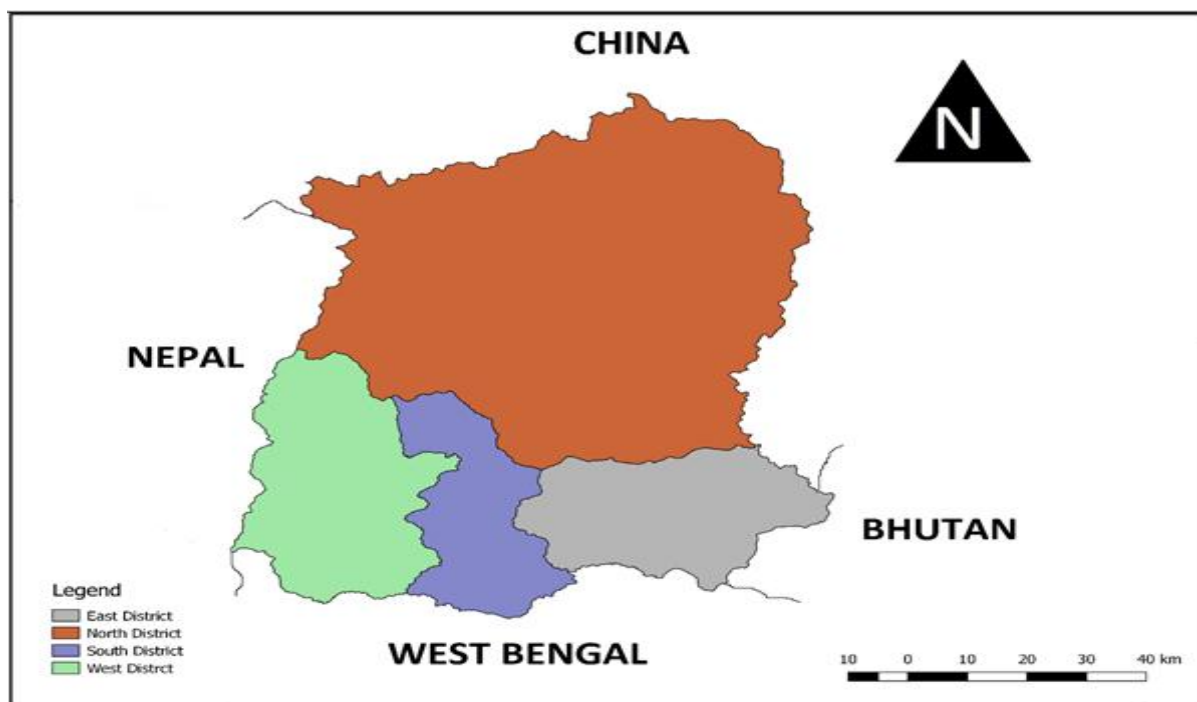


Figure: 1 Study area Sikkim

Database and Methodology:

To analysis the growth and development of the tourism industry in the Sikkim and the perception of the host population about sustainable rural tourism development. Both primary and secondary were used, primary data was collected with the help of a questionnaire survey. The purposive sampling technique was used for the collection of the data. The secondary data was collected from the tourism department Sikkim, from the government's reports, journals, the research paper has been utilized websites and other relative sources from the internet have

also been incorporated. The data collected from both the sources were tableted and analyzed with the help of simple statistical techniques and was presented in the form of the pie chart and bar graphs.

Result and discussion

Sikkim before merging with India, tourist inflow was very difficult to trace as well as it was negligible. It was from the beginning of the 21st century that the tourism sector in Sikkim got flourished as restricted areas came under relaxation by the government and it gained popularity as the safest and healthiest tourist destination in India. The growth of tourism was very slow till the 1980s as many areas were restricted for tourists but from 2005 there was a rapid flow of tourists in the state because most of the area was open for tourism purposes. The figures of tourist arrival were equaling and surpassing the state population. Tourism in present is one of the fastest-growing sectors, and one of the most important drivers in the state economy (Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2018). There is around 460 village in Sikkim (census, 2011). Tourism activity gradually increased and developed from the capital city Gangtok to the various corner of the state especially in rural areas. Sikkim being the hub of natural and scenic beauty it gave a pathway to eco-tourism, with the principles of community tourism while preserving the nature and culture of the state. Government of Sikkim then took several initiatives for the support of village tourism as well as eco-tourism in which the government included the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy 2011 and the registration of homestays under Sikkim registration of Homestay establishment rules 2013 and constructed more than 300 homestays which were funded by XIII Finance commission in different villages all over Sikkim (Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2018).

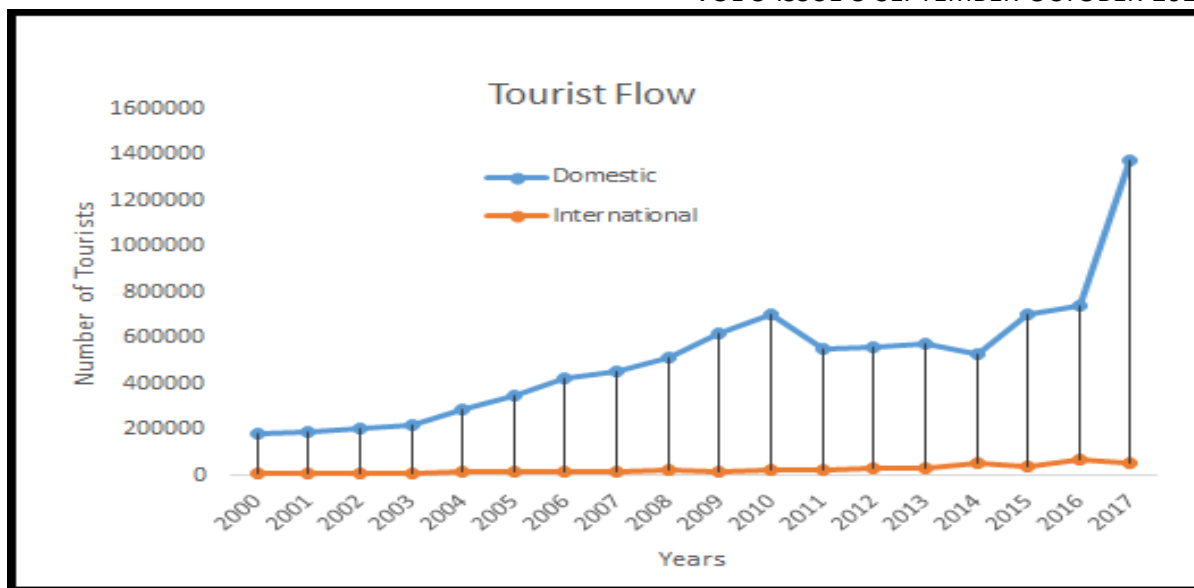


Figure 2: Tourist Arrival (2000-2017)

Source: Annual Tourism (2017-2018)

There has been a tremendous growth rate in both domestic and foreign tourist arrival of 86% and 81% respectively from 2000-2018. It was found during the field survey that the main reason behind the tremendous growth of tourist inflow in the tiny Himalayan state is due to the best hospitality, its mesmerizing scenic beauty, peaceful nature. Furthermore, the department of tourism and civil aviation has been constant as regular training is been given to the local stakeholders in tourism sectors like guides, tour operators, birdwatching, trekking, etc. Furthermore, the institution has been made which contributes towards tourism like the Institute of Hotel Management in Rumtek and the Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and ecotourism in Chemchey (Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2018). There has been a good inflow of tourists till 2010 then the graph slightly came down in 2011 as Sikkim was hit by a massive earthquake which made the tiny Himalayan disastrous and inflow came down. Till 2015 the inflow was quite regular as it was recovering at that phase with infrastructural, transportation, etc. After 2015 tourist inflow again increased as it was declared as the first organic state in the nation and many tourists were attracted to it. The year 2017 was recorded as the year where maximum tourist arrival was recorded. To improve the accommodation condition in the rural areas homestay concept was developed and the registration of the home started and it reached a maximum in 2013. Apart from policies and infrastructure the seasons are also playing its role in shaping the tourist flow to this area, from the below graph it can easily depict that in different seasons we have a different kind of tourist inflow. It was found during the field survey as the monsoon arrives the tourist flow starts decreases in this area as

it creates the threat of landslide and floods in this area. Being a hilly state and receiving an ample amount of rainfall in the monsoon period and lack of railways and airport transportation, the state relies on-road transportation which maximum times get blocked due to landslides causing disruption in the flow of tourists.

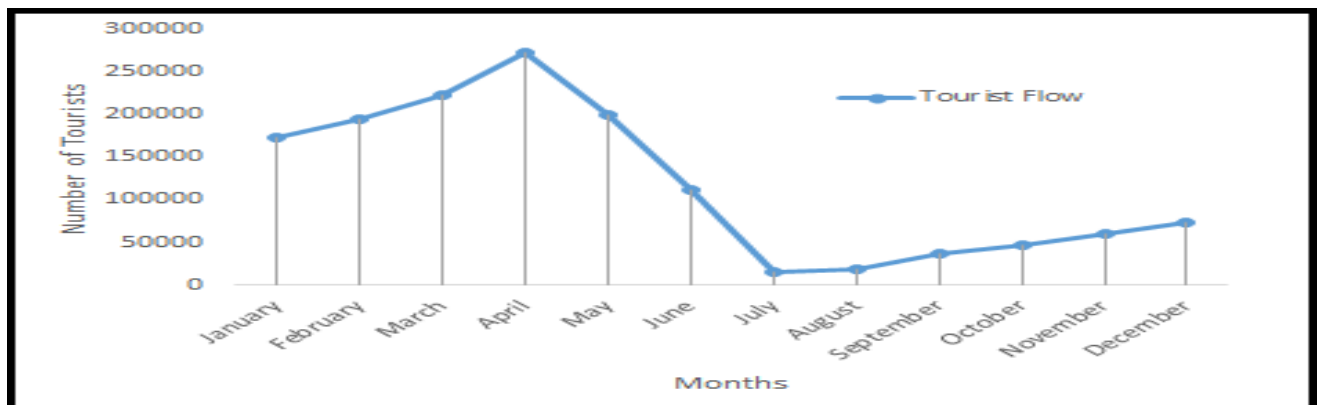


Figure 3 Tourist arrival in Sikkim (2017)

Source: Annual Report 2017-2018

Infrastructure

In the tourism industry infrastructure plays an important role in attracting tourists and for accommodation. Tourist loves to reside where they get maximum services, satisfaction on cleanliness, behavior, etc. Sikkim has a great capacity in terms of hotels, travel agents, transportation, guest house, homestay. According to the latest report, there are 1021 hotels, 1119 travel agents, 69 restaurants, 66 tourist guides and 371 homestays which are registered under the department of tourism and civil aviation (Policy, 2018). Besides, there is a lot number of unregistered infrastructures due to lack of registration process and indirect employment in the tourism sector which is boosting the local people's economy and as well a living standard.

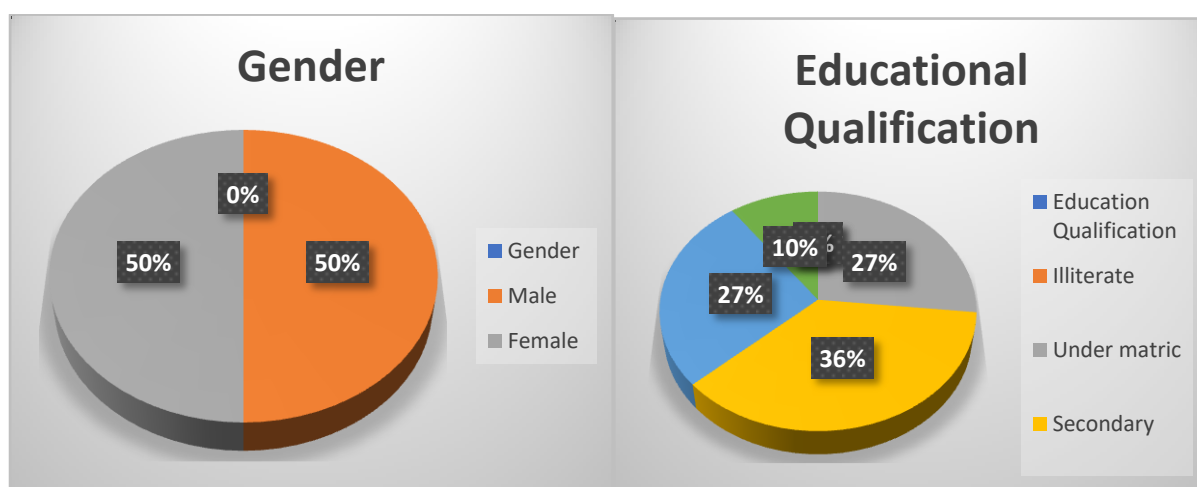
List of Infrastructure	Number of Infrastructures
Hotels and Guest House	1021
Travel Agents	1119
Restaurants	69
Tourists Guides	66
Homestays	371

Table: 2.1: Infrastructure related to tourism Activity

Source: Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2018

It was found from the literature survey that, no-doubt the tourism is playing an important role in the socio-economic development of the people and same is the case with the Sikkim, but it

brought a lot of negative things with it in the form of pollution of both natural as well as the cultural and that is not a good sign for the sustainable development of the tourism. During the field survey, it was trying to get the feedback from the local people (Host Population) with regard to the negative impacts of the tourism apart from the positive impacts. Both males and females with different educational qualifications and different occupations were consulted in this regard. And it was found that there was equal participation of both male and female respondents. But having the different educational background like out of the 90 respondent 36% are in secondary level, while 27% are in Under matric and graduate level and 10% are above the graduate level and having different occupational structure like 3.8 30% of the respondent are the students, 27% are engaged either in Non-Governmental Organizations, Self Help Groups housewives or the retired personals, while 17% are farmers, 16% in business and 3% are employees in various departments. During the field survey, it was found that 37% of respondents were directly engaged in tourism activity, while 33% are indirectly engaged in tourism and 30% are not engaged in tourism activity which can be shown in the below figure.



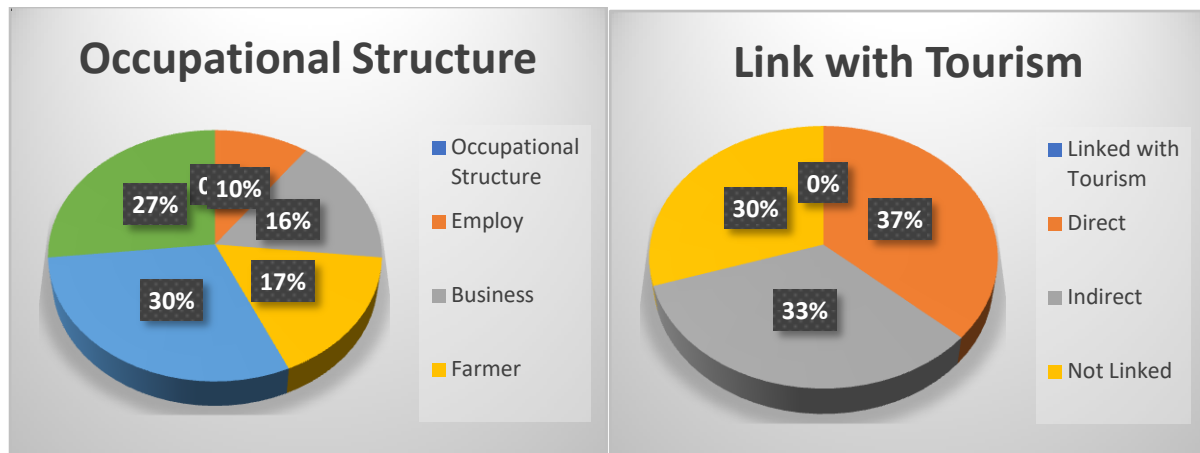
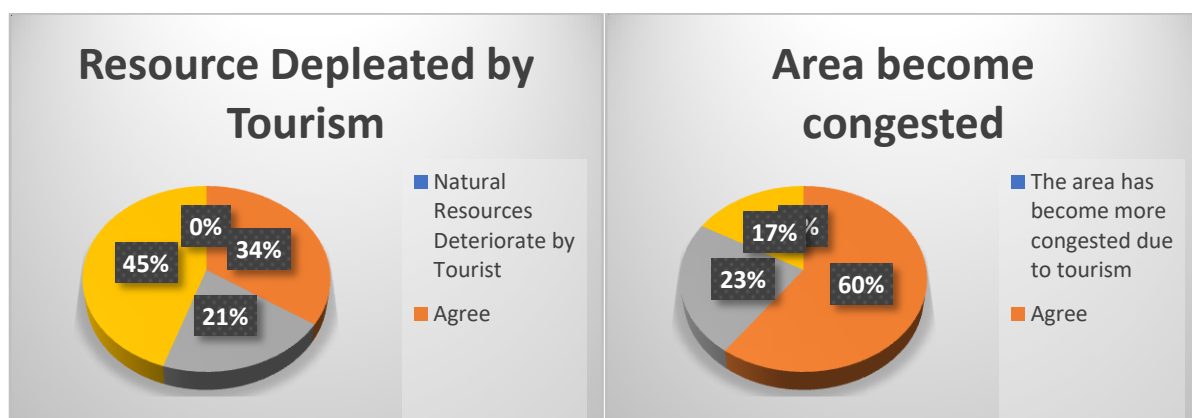


Figure 4. Demographic profile of respondents

The responses collected during the field visit is discussed below on social and environmental issues. According to the perception of locals towards the deterioration of natural resources 45% of respondents say that they don't know about the deterioration of natural resources by tourists, whereas 34% of total respondents believed that due to tourist inflow the natural resources are deteriorated in the area and 21% of respondents disagree. It was found that 60% of respondents agreed upon the statement that because of the tourist development there is congestion in the area while 17% disagreed on the same. As congestion increases, the pollution also increases and it was found that 50% of respondents believed that the area is getting polluted because of tourist inflow, 36% said they don't know, and the rest has different views as 14% disagree with it. As the tourist inflow in the state is surpassing the state population which is bringing impact on traffic congestion, 75% of respondents agree upon the statement that the traffic system is having a problem in the peak season of tourism while 11% disagree on it.



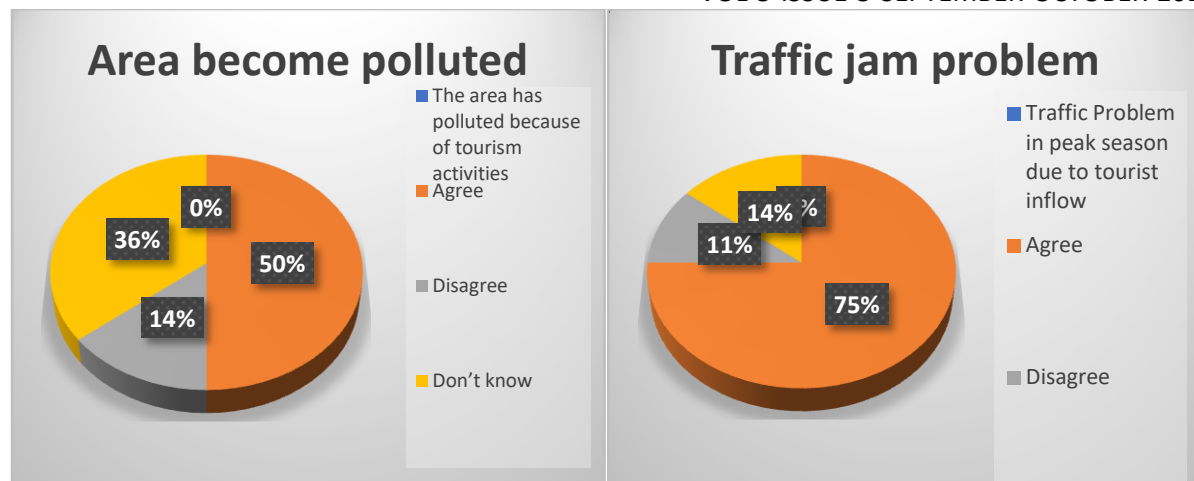


Figure 5 social-cultural problems facing the host population

Conclusion and Suggestion

This conclusion is driven by the outcomes of the study. The study reveals that Sikkim tourist inflow is increasing every year with equaling and surpassing the state total population. There is great potential in the rural tourism industry as people are more engaged in rural areas relating it village tourism, adventure tourism, trekking, and camping tourism, flora-tourism, and eco-tourism which can also be sustainable tourism in the Himalayan state Sikkim. Rural areas have been a gift to the people of Sikkim, its scenic beauty, the environment can attract anybody towards it as in the period of climate change everybody wants a peace and happy environment and tourism is the best activity by which people can enjoy their monotonous life in peace and harmony as concluded from the review of literature and field survey. Many rural areas have been explored and many villages are still to be explored. There are many villages in Sikkim in which the local community is trying to boost the economy and standard of living through tourism. Everything in this universe has both positive and negative impacts. Although being the major factor for boosting the economy of Sikkim it has some negative impacts. The rural entrepreneurs, the locals as well as tourists face some problem. Sikkim rural entrepreneurship started as the Community Based tourism, where people engaged themselves in various activities related to tourism, like a homestay, practicing agriculture organically, small household industries, etc. Sikkim is one of the biggest hubs of the tourism industry, the tourism sector is increasing day by day with an encasement in entrepreneurship. The entrepreneur faces various problems in day to day life. Some of the major problems are given

below: Lack of Infrastructural facilities: Government and department are trying their best to improve the infrastructure of the state. Infrastructure here means the roads, bridges, homestays, etc. The transportation to the rural areas is very pathetic as observed in the field survey and maximum people are only having 1 story homestays which are small in number as per the tourist inflow in Sikkim. Marketing Problems faced by the rural entrepreneurs in which lack of advertisement is one of the major problems. In the era of globalization, only a few international people know about rural tourism or village tourism in the Himalayan state Sikkim. The proper advertisement should be done by the government or the stakeholders itself to attract more international tourists towards rural areas. The natural resources in a certain area are degrading it can be in wildlife resources as trekking and camping are done in tiny Himalayan state Sikkim where lots of waste is generated in the present days. The traffic congestion is also a serious problem in the area as tourist inflow is surpassing the population of the state the air pollution is also increasing day by day. Due to congestion in the area is being polluted and the natural environment is getting harmed. The transportation is one of the majors constrain in the tiny Himalayan State as the major mode of transportation is only through roads network. In-state there is an absence of railways network and the nearest railway station is West Bengal, Siliguri which is approximately 120 km away from Capital City. The State recently inaugurated Green Field Airport but due to uncertainty in weather condition that has also been closed for now and for the state presently the nearest Airport is also at West Bengal, Siliguri which is approximately 130 km away from the capital city. Apart from these, the landslides are also the major factor which creates problems among the tourist as well as in local people.

Suggestion

From the review of the literature and from a filed survey it can be said that tourism is one of the growing sectors in the world as well as in Sikkim. Although being the biggest sector in the state, it has some gapsthat can be fulfilled if some of the measures are taken into action.

Improvement in a mode of transportation: Being the Himalayan state, one can travel Sikkim only through road transportation where no other means of transportation is available like railways and roadways. From the research, it was found that the period between June and September tourist inflow decreased as compared with the other months because of monsoon. Roads usually get blocked in this period allowing only a few tourists to visit the state. The

government and department should work on the road condition of Sikkim as it has only one highway which connects Sikkim with mainland India.

Transportation fares: Although the state government has prepared a rate chart for transportation fares sometimes it is not followed properly. Sometimes tourist has to pay high fares. The department should have regular checking of commercial vehicles for transportation charges.

Lack of marketing and advertisement: Especially rural areas of Sikkim lack in marketing and advertisement. Around 75% of the population resides in rural areas and people have started rural tourism as a profession in which people are directly and indirectly linked with it. People should advertise their places to attract more tourists towards it and the department should also advertise and upgrade local entrepreneurs especially in rural areas.

Decentralization of permit section: Sikkim has a lot of restricted areas for both domestic and international tourists. One should have a permit to enter the restricted area. Presently only the main towns have permit section office. It can be decentralized to certain villages where a permit is required for the tourist in the purpose of trekking and camping.

Meetings of stakeholders with departments: Government and department along with local community groups, NGOs, SHGs should provide regular quarterly meeting

So that new policies can be framed according to the need of the area.

Infrastructure should be improved: Infrastructure here means good electricity supply, water supply, roads networks, banks, which can be improved for the local's entrepreneurs and tourists.

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