HIMALAYAN ECOTOURISM IN SHIMLA

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Abstract

Tourism has the potential to bring about changes in mountain environments, which are fragile and vulnerable to irreversible damage. Present trends in tourism are oriented towards increasing tourist volume. As a result, it threatens the capacity of tourist attractions because of over-crowding, congestion, traffic snarls and environmental pollution. Aggressive tourism activities without proper planning, effective policy and institutional framework have created serious environmental problems. If a tourist destination becomes environmentally degraded, tourists themselves start shunning it. This study finds Shimla to be one such destination. The main objective of this article is to review the type of tourists arriving, seasonality in Shimla and, more specifically, to focus on environmental problems and suggest action plans in an ecofriendly way. There is need for unified efforts in this direction and to make Shimla an all year round attraction for the visitors as well as Shimla itself. The town of Shimla, a summer capital of the Indian State of Himachal Pradesh during the

British occupation, is the central focus of this study. The Shimla region extends 20 km. from the city limits of Shimla including Mashobra, Kufri, Naldehra, Jatogh etc.

INTRODUCTION

Gone are the days when we neglected the environment for tourists' activity. Ecotourism has become the name of the game to survive, stand and develop. Tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specified object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both of the past or the present) found in these areas may be called Ecotourism. Both a strong commitment to nature and a sense of social responsibility that includes the sensitivity of travelers are elements of ecotourism.

Tourism has always been an industry in Himachal Pradesh. The growth of tourism in Shimla started after 80s. In 1998, 42,55,572 tourists[7] visited Himachal from India and abroad 9,13,117 tourists[7] visited Shimla, capital city of Himachal in the same year. In 1998, Shimla town had 4,918 beds[6] in different categories of hotels. Generally tourists prefers summer months of April, May, and June. There are few tourists in Shimla during the rainy months of July and August. Winter months of November, December and January do attract sizable number of tourists. Snowfall during the month of December, and especially the New Year celebrations on 31st December and Christmas days attract lot of tourists.

PHYSIOGRAPHY:

Himachal Pradesh is one of the smaller states of India in population (5.1 million in 1991) and in area (55,000sq.km.). Map gives the location of tourist centers of Higher Himalayas. Its hilly and mountainous terrain characterizes the Physiography of the region. The Pir *Panjal* ranges continue eastward from the state of *Jammu and Kashmir* and extend to the districts of *Chamba*, *Lahaul* and *Kullu*. The elevation of the region rarely falls below 3,000 meters above sea level. The *Dhauladhar* range (6,380 meters) virtually cuts across the state. The Greater Himalayas ranges have a maximum height of 5,632 meters. The Lesser Himalayas are seen in Western parts of *Mandi* District, and in large portions of *Shimla*, *Solan*, and *Sirmaur* districts. It was in the lesser Himalayas that the British found places for settlement at altitudes of 2,000-2,500 meters.

The lesser Himalayan ranges rise up to 2,600 meters. The British developed a number of summer stations that have, along with other centers in the same latitudinal range, become the

hub of tourist activities-*Dalhousie, Shimla (or Simla), Chail, Chakrata, Mussoorie, Almora, Nainital,* and *Pithoragarh.* The British's were largely drawn by the climates of certain locations in the Himalayas. Some of them have also gained administrative importance.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The magnet of mountain tourism in H.P. is the capital city, Shimla, which was a popular hill station during British occupation and after independence. In recent years, the city has developed into an ill-reputed center of environment degradation. The touristic value of Shimla appears to be on the decline because environmental problems have severely inhibited its capacity to attract tourists. Remedial actions have been formulated, but excess stress on carrying capacity continues to occur, indicating failure of existing policies or their ineffective enforcement. New methods are needed to reduce overcrowding in such areas and to promote tourism in new areas.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of tourists on ecotourism in the Shimla hills, which would optimally predict the integrated development of tourism in this region.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Ecotourism is the main attraction of Shimla.
2. Ecotourism has immense potential for growth of tourist traffic.
3. There is direct Correlation between peak season and environmental pollution.

METHODOLOGY OF THE CASE STUDY

The present study makes use of both primary as well as secondary data. The primary data was collected through personal interviews according to the viewpoints of tourists. The present study relies on information from respondents, the validity of which depends on their own powers of recall, their honesty and fundamentally, their answers to the questions included in a questionnaire. Sample surveys on visitors were conducted during peak and off season to gather details on tourist profiles and attitudes towards the environment of Shimla. To undertake a survey of 100 tourists (domestic and international), the researcher visited Shimla five times (April 1997-July 1998); on each occasion, twenty tourists were interviewed at random (It should be noted that total responses could be

more than respondents because of multiple responses). Frequency distribution system has been used to reach conclusions.

The secondary data has been collected from published as well as unpublished sources. The published data includes information from various publications of Central and State Governments, books, journals and newspapers. The unpublished data has been collected from Shimla Municipal Corporation, Shimla Development Authority, Directorate of Transport, Himachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board, Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation and other non-government agencies.

RESULTS OF TOURIST RESPONSES

a) TOURIST ARRIVALS

Shimla finds its place on the world tourist map. An inspection of Table No. 1 reveals that visitors originate from different geographic regions, domestic and international. The ratio of Indian and foreign tourists was in the order of 74:26. In 1998, 16.0 percent of domestic tourist arrivals were from Maharashtra, followed by Gujarat (10.0 percent) and West Bengal (8.0 percent). The sample revealed that there were a high percentage of the British, with some Australians, Germans and Israelites.

b) SEASONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS IN SHIMLA

The climate of Shimla follows the pattern of India in general, which may be divided into four seasons of about three months each. Beginning in January, the first quarter is rough, snowy, stormy and raw. The second quarter is dry and sunny, with gradually increasing dust and heat. The third is rainy, damp and relaxing and the fourth bright, clear and bracing[15].

The best seasons in Shimla can be broadly divided into two: winter that starts from September to mid January and summer that extends from March to June[15]. In summer, visitor numbers increase as it is a peak tourist season and they decline with the beginning of the monsoon. After this, during the snowfall, tourist season begins again. (See Table No. II for tourist arrivals in 1998).

c) PURPOSE OF VISIT

Mountain tourism in Shimla is, by and large, nature tourism, to view the splendors of nature and to experience nature in an unmodified state. Tourists visit mountain areas for diverse reasons. Findings showed in Table No. III reveal that 93.93 percent Indians and 84.61 percent foreigners came to Shimla for pleasure and sightseeing. The scenic value of the mountains is an attraction. They provide opportunities to observe and study the rhythm of nature.

d) ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS

Since most of the tourists come from large metropolitan cities with all types of pollution, Shimla, by contrast, looks like heaven with its cool fresh air and dark blue sky. The findings in Table No. IV imply that most of the tourists including Indian and Foreigners rated position of sanitation in Shimla (about 55.26 percent) to be average. 23.68 percent thought Shimla to be a clean city whereas 15.79 percent tourists considered Shimla to be polluted and very polluted.

e) ECOTOURIST ACTIVITIES

Proper knowledge of Ecotourist activities is important to understand the tastes and preferences of tourists. This information will be useful for concentrating on certain Ecotourist activities. Observation of Table No. V depicts that among Indian tourists, Nature Photography was given the top first priority, Sightseeing was recommended with 2^{nd} top priority followed by Mountain Climbing with 3^{rd} top priority.

Among foreigners, Nature Photography was chosen as the first preference among Ecotourist activities. Sightseeing got the second priority followed by Trekking as the third preference.

PRESENT STATUS

The Peak summer season creates a sad state of affairs with utter chaos and mismanagement of the traffic in this hill station. Traffic jams, which can be prolonged, range from two to several hours. This is not the only hardship that tourists have to endure at a time when they come to relax and enjoy their holidays.

Unplanned and haphazard growth of Shimla town is causing deforestation and environmental problems. Shimla is in danger of being buried by huge quantities of garbage, which is left behind by visiting tourists. Mountains of filth and plastics, ranging from plastic mineral water bottles to soft drink cartons can be found in the mountains. The HP Government's decision to ban the use of polythene bags has not yet been enforced. The Mall in Shimla is not a pedestrian's paradise. The frequent digging up of the road, sometimes by telecom department and at other times by water and electricity departments, causes many inconveniences to strollers.

The hill station, which was neat and clean, is getting more polluted each day. Increasing air pollution in Shimla is associated with the rapid rise in population. According to data obtained from air pollution recording station, the pollution level touches the maximum in winters and minimum during the rainy season. The main reason behind a higher pollution level during the winters

is the use of heating devices, mainly bukharies that use coal or wood as fuel for cooking and other purposes in many houses and hotels in Shimla. Garbage burning and decay are equally responsible for air pollution which is higher between September and November, the peak tourism and apple harvest season. The number of vehicles coming to Shimla increases tremendously during these days. Vehicles of visiting tourist buses and apple carrying trucks (more than 1,000 trucks a day) along the circular road raise the pollution level in the area by smoke emission.

CONCLUSION

Shimla is endowed with immense potent as a place of tourist attraction, besides being a gateway to other parts of Himachal Pradesh. Shimla requires special consideration in conservation of ecological order. There are certain spots, which are environmentally rich and need conservation. Many of the problems, which make tourism unsustainable, relate to the fact that many principles fundamental to Ecotourism are not being acknowledged. This is not evident in the conception, planning, design, development, operation or marketing of tourism in the town of Shimla.

Policy for the Hill Area

It is essential to have a clear long-term policy on what is desired from tourism in the context of mountain development. The growth must complement environmental conservation if tourism development is to be sustainable, especially in the fragile environment of mountain areas. Tourism development cannot be viewed in isolation from conservation, natural resource management, and mountain development. Initiatives should be designed to reduce the negative impact of human activities on the mountains. This should be encouraged by using Information and education for improving the relationship between man and his environment.

Transport Management

Important techniques for limiting and controlling visitor flows include the use of guided tours, timed tickets, advance booking for groups and dispersal within the site. To avoid congestion, positive routing of visitor traffic should be adopted. For example tourist signposts could be used to channel cars and coaches away from the town center. Environmentally acceptable means of travel such as walking or cycling should be encouraged. Park and ride schemes can be used to encourage visitors to leave their cars in an appropriate car park and go to their destination by public transport. All this can be implemented easily and at a minimal cost.

Marketing & Information

A site or locality that is seen to be

over-visited should not be promoted or 'demarketed'. Out-of-season promotion can encourage visitors to come at a time when numbers are less. Different pricing can be used to encourage off-season visiting. Alternative destinations can be promoted to stimulate visits to other locations or sites. Information and interpretation at entry point can give visitors a greater understanding and appreciation of Shimla. In the long term, such measures are likely to produce more responsible visitors who have a greater awareness of the sensitivity of the environment.

These suggestions which focus on initiatives, transport solutions and marketing information, may seem simple but demand political will at local, regional and central levels. Such will may require education in sustainability as well as a greater understanding of ecotourism.

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Table No. I

Shimla Tourists : Indian and Foreign during 1998

Indians	Frequency
Andhra Pradesh	02
Delhi	06
Goa	02
Gujarat	12
Haryana	08
Kerala	02
Maharashtra	16
Punjab	06
Rajasthan	06
Tamilnadu	02
Uttar Pradesh	04
West Bengal	08
Foreigners	26

Source : Primary Data

Table No. II

Estimate of Tourist Arrivals (Monthwise) for 1998 in Shimla

Month	**Indian**	**Foreigner**
January	56694	403
February	44145	5412
March	52390	917
April	60514	1043
May	111402	1259
June	194361	1381
July	75098	1792
August	46043	1844
September	52318	1824
October	58911	1581
November	57013	912
December	90104	627
Total	**898993**	**14124**

Source : Published Records of Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation, Shimla

Table No. III

Shimla Tourists : Purpose of Visit

Purpose of Visit	Foreign	Indian
Pleasure / Sight seeing	22	62
Adventure	04	-
Business	-	04
Official	-	-
Any other	-	-
Column Total	26	66

Source: Primary Data.

Table No. IV

Distribution of sampled Tourists by their views regarding Environmental Status

Nature of Problem	Opinion of Tourists											
	Foreign Tourists						Indian Tourists					
	Very Clean	Clean	Avg.	Polluted	Very Polluted	Total	Very Clean	Clean	Avg.	Polluted	Very Polluted	Total
Air	08	12	-	-	-	20	24	26	06	-	-	56
Water	-	08	12	-	-	20	02	30	28	-	-	60
Sanitation	02	06	10	02	02	22	06	12	28	04	04	54
Noise	06	08	06	-	-	20	02	18	30	02	02	54
Visual	06	12	02	-	-	20	16	28	06	-	-	50

Source : Primary Data

Table No. V

Indian Tourists

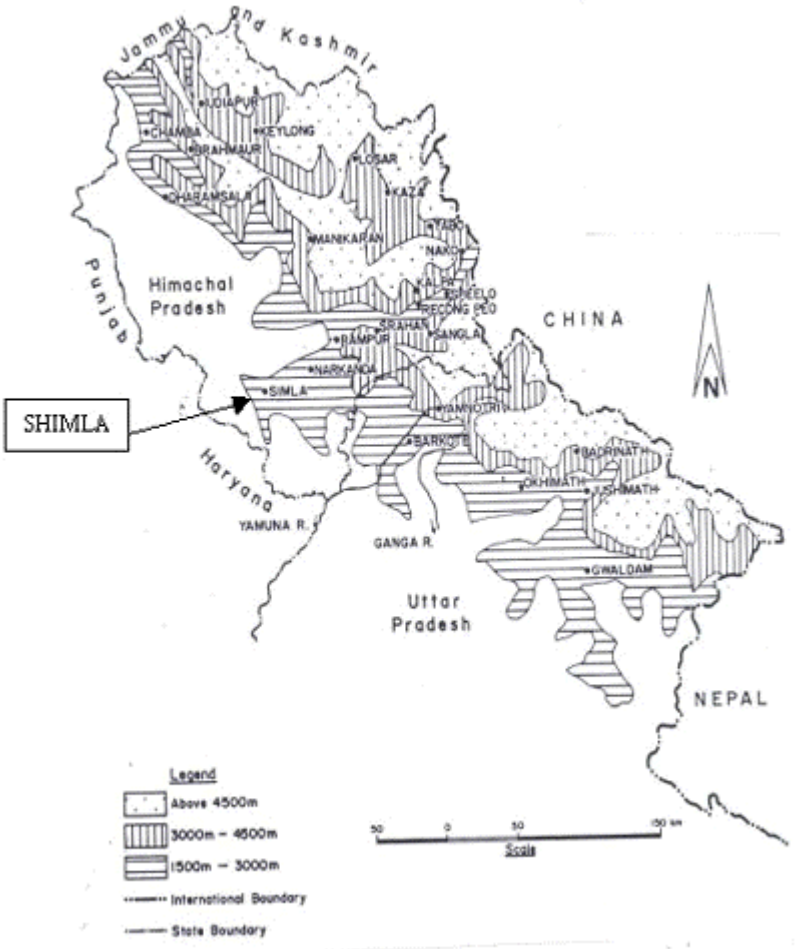
Order of Priority / Activity	Frequency								
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
Sight Seeing	08	06	10	-	-	02	-	-	-
Trekking	04	04	02	02	04	-	-	-	-
Wildlife	-	04	06	02	-	-	-	-	-
Bird Watching	02	04	02	06	-	-	02	-	-
Nature Photography	14	06	02	04	-	-	-	-	-
Camping	-	02	-	02	-	04	-	02	-
Fishing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Botanical Study	-	-	-	02	04	02	-	-	-
Mountain Climbing	02	04	06	06	02	-	04	-	-

Foreign Tourists

Order of Priority / Activity	Frequency								
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
Sight Seeing	06	04	-	02	02	-	-	02	02
Trekking	04	06	04		-	-	-	-	-
Wildlife	-	04	-	02	-	08	-	02	-
Bird Watching	02	-	06	-	02	04	02	-	-
Nature Photography	04	04	04	04	04		-	-	-
Camping	04	02	-	-	02	-	04	-	-
Fishing	-	-	-	02	-	-	02	04	-
Botanical Study	-	-	04	02	-	-	-	04	02
Mountain Climbing	-	-	02	04	02	-	04	-	-

Source : Primary Data

Map : Tourist Centres of the Higher Himalayas



Source: Academy for Mountain Environics Dehradun, MEI Discussion Paper No. 95/6