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# RESEARCH FRONTS

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**From the Desk of Chief Editor...**

*This volume has the following features. **First**, it covers the regional diversity as it represents northern region (Delhi), central region (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) and eastern region of India. **Second**, it caters the academic diversity by addressing the issues of Education, Health, Food & social Security, Tourism and Portrayal of Women in Indian TV Advertisements from the social science stream. **Third**, it also enhances the academic coverage by including paper on Fish Fauna Diversity from the natural science stream.*

***Generous and timely contributions from the authors are greatly appreciated for regular publication of this journal which is fully financed by the autonomous cell of the college with the sole aim of enhancing research environment in the country.***

## Development of Tourism and Eco-Tourism in West Sikkim

Nima Lhaky Sherpa\*

### *Abstract*

*West Sikkim is one of the four districts of the state of Sikkim. Located at the latitudinal and longitudinal extend of 27000'46'' to 28007'48'' N Latitude and 88000'58'' to 88055'25''E longitude respectively , it lies in the Eastern Himalayas and covers a total area of 1166 sq km. The region has developed as an important tourism destination of the state and has earned its name as one of the important eco-tourism regions of the country. The tremendous growth in the tourism sector in the district has led to the development of infrastructure and aided in the income generation for the native communities.*

### **Introduction**

The word 'Tourism' has been defined by different organizations and individuals from time to time. The word tour is derived from a Latin word "tornos" which means a circle or a circumference. The word signifies journey through different parts of the globe. The *World Tourism Organization* defines tourism as, "the movement of people away from their normal place of residence and work for a period of not less than 24 hours and not more than 1 year". In Sanskrit literature three terms **Paryatna** (to travel for pleasure and knowledge), **Desatna** (to travel outside the borders of one's country for economic returns) and **Tirthatna** (to travel for pilgrimages) can be identified. These words are derived from the Sanskrit word "atna" which means to travel. According to the 'Oxford Dictionary' the word Tourism means the business activity connected with providing accommodation, services and entertainment for people who are visiting a place for pleasure.

Although there is a wide connotation of the word 'Tourism', it is primarily accepted as an industry and an activity. As an industry it functions as any other industry by operating through land, labour, capital, knowledge and enterprise. However, it is often referred as a '**smokeless industry**' because of its capacity to

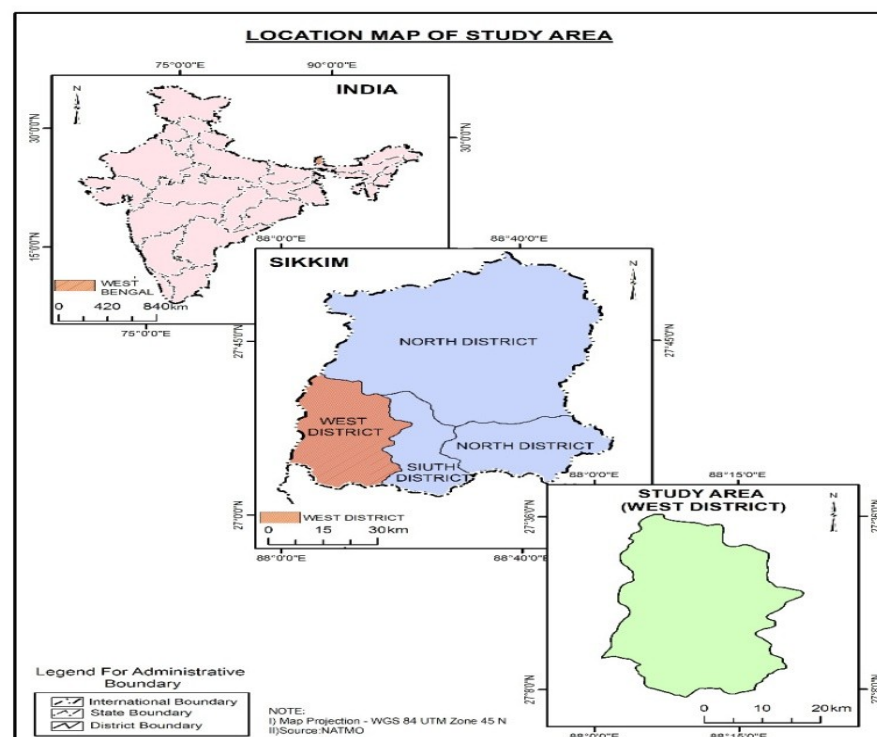
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perform without smoke. Recently the concept of ‘*Eco-tourism*’ has emerged as an important offshoot of the tourism sector. Eco-tourism is regarded to be educative and environment friendly. It is widely known for increasing environmental capacities unlike the classical form of tourism.

## Study Area

West Sikkim is one of the four districts of the state Sikkim (**Fig.1**). Located at the latitudinal and longitudinal extend of 27°00’46’’ to 28°07’48’’ N Latitude and 88°00’58’’ to 88°05’25’’ E longitude, it lies in the Eastern Himalayas and covers a total area of 1166sqkm. It is divided into two administrative sub-divisions of Gyalshing and Soreng. It has one hundred and twelve revenue blocks, nine forest blocks and two towns.



**Fig.1**

## Methodology

The study was carried out on the basis of primary and secondary data collected from various sources. Secondary data has been collected from various government gazettes, publications and official records. Primary data has been generated through questionnaires,

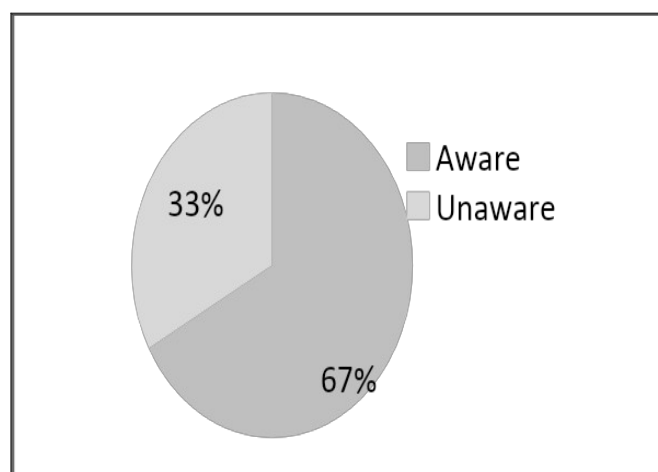
public interviews and self-observation. After the collection of data through various sources, findings were represented through suitable cartographic techniques.

### **Historiography of Tourism and Eco-Tourism Development In West Sikkim**

The development of tourism in the district has some deep historical underpinnings. West Sikkim was an important political centre of the Kingdom of Sikkim. Sikkim which was earlier known as 'Dremoshong' (Tibetan word for valley of rice) was under the reign of Chogyals of the Namgyal Dynasty from 1642-1975. During the reign of the Chogyals this region was specifically listed for the consolidation of Buddhism through construction of important Buddhist monasteries. During the initial period of Chogyals construction of important monasteries such as Pemayangtse Monastery (1705), Dubdi Monastery (1701), Sangachoeling Monastery (1701) and Tashiding Monastery (1641) attracted pilgrimages from the nearby kingdoms of Tibet, Bhutan etc. Some accounts of their migration and permanent settling can be found in the Gazetteer of Sikkim. However the earliest records of tourist inflow are still obscure. The development of this region as a pilgrimage center definitely gave some leverage and provided some solid grounds for the development of tourism.

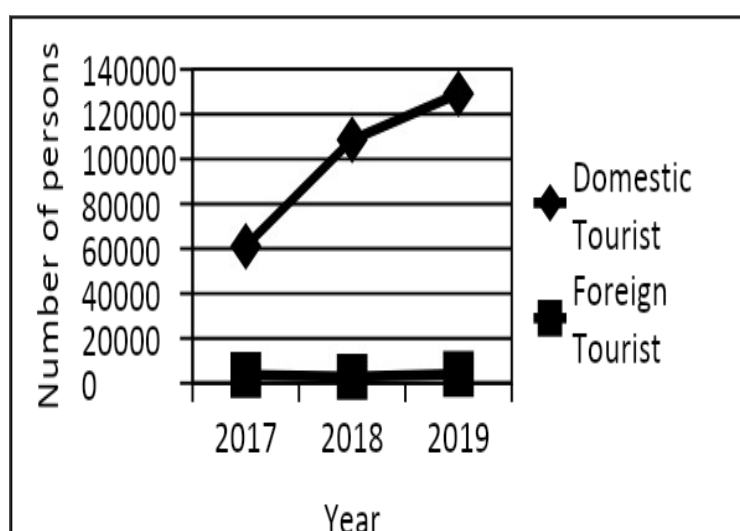
Most of the tourism destinations of the district display historical and cultural legacies left by the earlier generations. The earliest record of tourist inflow can be traced to as early as 1981, five years after the merger of Sikkim with India. However coordinated and planned effort for the development of this sector was started by the Tourism Department through the first Tourism Master Plan prepared in the year 1998. Gradually Tourism Centre was extended to West Sikkim. Since then tourism industry recorded a spur with positive growth in the domestic and international tourist inflow. Sikkim also became the first state to have started the concept of eco-tourism and sustainability in India {Dong (2001)}. Eco-tourism began way back in 1995-96 when Sikkim Biodiversity and Eco-tourism project, a venture in collaboration of the mountain institute, the G.B. Pant institute, the Green Circle and Travel Agents Association of Sikkim began {Charles Horton Cooley (2007)}. The year 2001 marked an important year for the state as a whole when South Asian Regional Conference on Eco-Tourism was organized in Sikkim jointly by The International Eco-tourism Society (TIES), Eco-

Tourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim with support from UNDP and Ministry of Tourism.



**Fig.2** Level of Awareness about Eco-Tourism in Sikkim

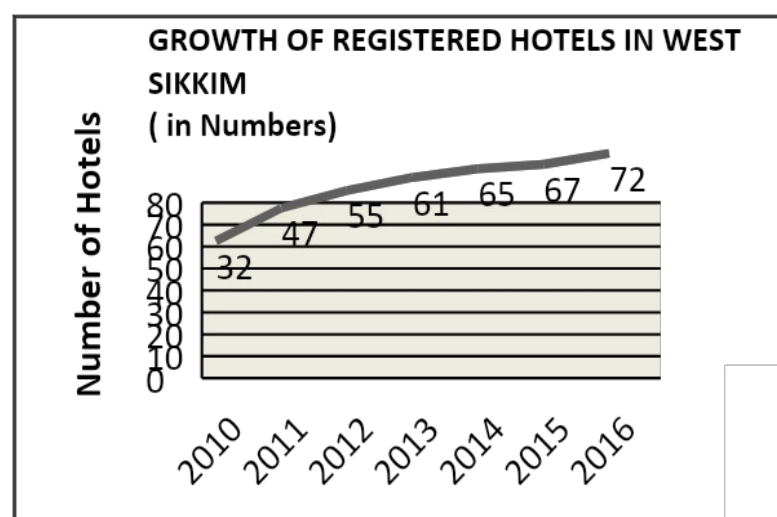
In terms of community awareness about tourism, after collecting data through field survey from 200 individuals in 2018 it was identified that 67% of the respondents were aware about eco-tourism (**Fig.2**). The high percentage of eco-tourism awareness among the natives indicated that people were interested to pursue eco-tourism as an alternative economic activity. Lack of finance, infrastructural facilities and vague knowledge were some of the reasons cited for not venturing eco-tourism an economic activity



**Fig.3** Tourist Inflow in West Sikkim



The domestic and international tourist inflow has recorded an upward growth (Fig.3). The recent data for the year 2017-2019 reveals the upward growth in terms of the domestic tourist influx but fluctuating trend for the foreign tourist inflow. The numbers of domestic tourists increased from 61113 persons in the year 2017 to 108632 in the year 2018. There was a percent increase of 77.8% domestic tourist influx in the year 2017-2018. The numbers of domestic tourist visiting West Sikkim further increased to 129118 persons in the year 2019. The percentage increase for the year 2018-2019 was recorded as 18.9%. On the contrary the inflow of international tourists showed a fluctuation trend. The inflow of international tourist has always been lower than 50000 persons. It recorded a decline in the year 2017-2018 but increased in 2018-2019. The international inflow declined from 3692 persons to 2837 persons in 2017-2018 but increased to 4137 persons in 2018-2019. The data reveals that more thrust is needed in terms of attracting international tourist. To capture the global market promotion at an international level is required.



**Fig.4** Growth in Registered Hotels in West Sikkim

West Sikkim has undergone transformation since past few decades. There has been a gradual growth in the hotel sector (Fig.4, home-stays and numbers of vehicles. Tourism has been one of the major reasons for the spur in these sections.

The numbers of registered hotels as per the 'Tourism Information Center' has increase from 32 in the year 2010 to 72 in the year 2016. Considering the fact that the

majority of the population of West Sikkim is rural, more hotels are being constructed in larger towns and villages such as Gyalshing, Pelling, Yuksom, Tashiding etc. Increase in unregistered hotels in the recent years has also been one of the major issues that need careful attention. Such instances can hamper proper management and systematic planning at the ground level.

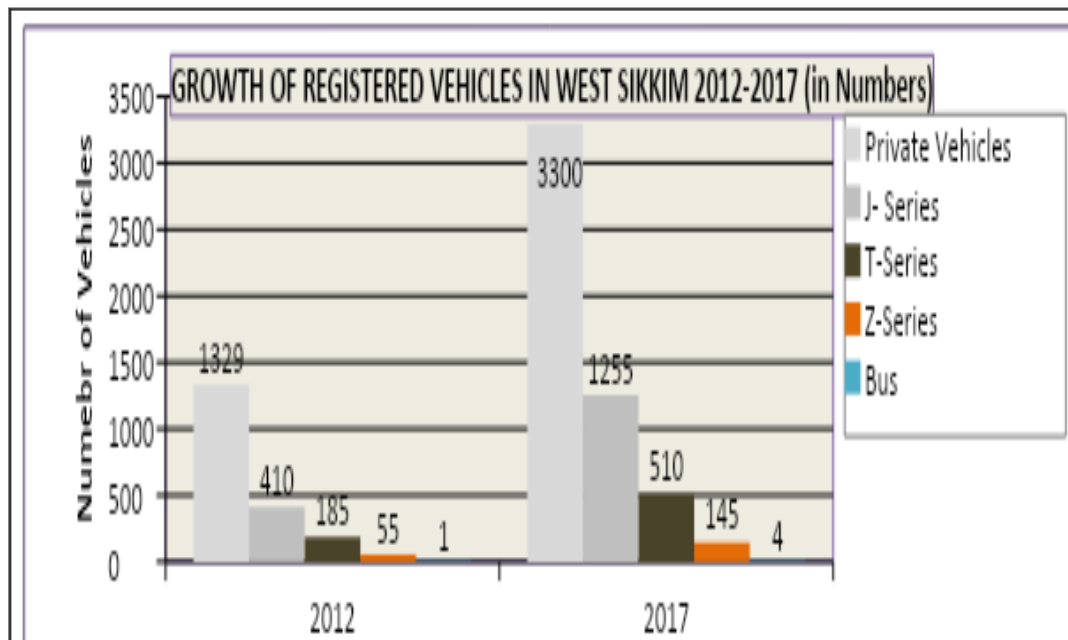
The numbers of ‘Registered Home-stays’ has also gradually increased since past few decades. The pace of the growth is however slower when compared with the transport sector. Growth of home-stays is a recent phenomenon that took off initially on PPP basis. The state government provided funds for the setting up of Home-stays. Initial registration of Home-stays started off in the year 2014 and till 2016 there were a total of 56 registered home-stays in the district (**Table 1**).

**Table 1 Growths of Homestays (Registered) in West Sikkim 2014-2017**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Privately Owned</i>	<i>Government funded</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>2014</i>	--	08	08
<i>2015</i>	23	07	30
<i>2016</i>	18	--	18
<i>Total</i>	41	15	56

Transportation sector has recorded a highest growth in absolute numbers since 2012. The vehicles plying west Sikkim are put into three broad categories. The three categories are as follows:

1. Taxi- Series : Taxi- Series comprises of smaller vehicles with a capacity of 4-5 persons
2. Jeep Series: Jeep-Series are bigger vehicles that include seating capacity of 10-11 persons.
3. Luxury Vehicles: Luxury Vehicles offer quality travel and included vehicles such as Zylo, Innova etc. A private vehicle on the other hand does not ply tourists.



**Fig.5 Growth of Registered Vehicles in West Sikkim, 2012-2017**

The total numbers of vehicles comprising private vehicles, J-Series, T-Series, Z-Series and buses increased from 1980 vehicles to 5214 vehicles from 2012-2017. There was a marked increase in the numbers of registered J-Series vehicles from 2012-2017. There were 410 registered J-Series vehicles in the year 2012 which increased to 1255 vehicles in 2017. The registered T-Series vehicles increased from 185 vehicles to 510 vehicles from 2012-2017 (**Fig.5**). The numbers of registered Z-Series were 55 in the year 2012 which increased to 145 in 2017. The number of government run buses increased from 1 in 2012- 4 in the year 2017. The growth in the numbers of vehicles can be attributed to the development of tourism industry. The recorded vehicles meet the tourist's needs throughout the year.

## Conclusion

The development of tourism has been a major support to the economy of West Sikkim. The industry has provided increasing employment opportunities for the people of the region and has improved its infrastructural base. The main challenge to the development of the district as an eco-tourism destination is the maintenance of clean and green environment. The region truly has the potential of developing as a model tourism destination if environment-product approach and proper management goes hand in hand.

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