



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM



DEPT. OF TOURISM & CIVIL AVIATION

STATE TOURISM POLICY 2018

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM





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MESSAGE OF HON'BLE CHIEF MINISTER

The Sikkim Human Development Report 2014 recognised tourism as one of the potential sectors for growth and livelihood creation. With its beautiful landscape, diverse flora and fauna, culture and traditions, and warm hospitable people, Sikkim has a comparative advantage in tourism. Since the last decade of the previous century, the state has emerged as a brand in itself, a feel good destination “Where Nature Smiles”.

For Sikkim, tourism is not only about boosting the economy of the state. It is also as important for building peace between communities and nations and a tool to promote and conserve our unique cultures, and also the environment. We are aware that such a tool if wrongly used, could be costly to our natural and cultural heritage, which makes the need for a guiding policy that makes it much more important.

I congratulate the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department for drafting of the Sikkim Tourism Policy, a policy that is grounded on environmental sustainability and preservation of our cultural heritage. The policy highlights the need for capacity building to develop trained human resource in this sector, without which it will not be possible to raise the standards of the tourism industry, which is one of the important goals of the tourism policy. I sincerely hope that the value of this document is understood by the tourism stakeholders, tourism entrepreneurs, and service providers whose support and cooperation is highly critical for putting the policy into action. Our government has been working for creation of new tourism destinations with development of world class tourism infrastructures. A planned approach for development of the sector is, therefore, envisaged for the future, one that provides employment to upcoming entrepreneurs spreading the benefits to the community at large, while also safeguarding our fragile ecosystems.

I am hopeful this policy shall guide Sikkim’s tourism towards a sustainable pathway for the future.

Pawan Chamling



SHRI UGEN T. GYATSO
Hon'ble Minister



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MESSAGE OF HON'BLE MINISTER

I am delighted to know that Tourism and Civil Aviation Department is bringing out the Sikkim Tourism Policy 2018. I am glad that the policy is coming out just a year after 2017 which was declared by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development and in tune with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. This policy having incorporated the principles of sustainable development will greatly help in ensuring that the path taken by the tourism industry in Sikkim will lead to sustainability of the environment and culture of the state in the long run.

As we are all aware that Sikkim over the last two decades, has evolved as a favourite and successful tourist destination which has been attributed mainly to its picturesque landscape ranging from green fields and forests, pristine rivers and lakes to lofty snow clad mountains and its diverse and rich cultures. Sikkim offers a wide variety of destinations and circuits to attract tourists which together with the proactive approach and policies of the State Government over the last two decades has led to unprecedented growth of the tourism industry. The huge investment in infrastructure and human resources have enabled the tourism industry to emerge as the largest service industry in the private sector. The state has also made concerted efforts to promoting the huge potential of unique products such as village tourism, ecotourism and organic farming. People of Sikkim owe a huge gratitude to our visionary Chief Minister, Shri Pawan Kr. Chamling for taking Sikkim to where it stands today. Under his leadership, Sikkim was conferred the status of first fully organic farming state in the year 2016. His green initiatives have been well appreciated and recognized by all within and outside the country.

In order to reap maximum benefit from tourism and at the same time preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the state, a document prescribing certain principles, guidelines and strategies for the stakeholders as well as the implementing agencies was thought to be of utmost importance. Sikkim Tourism Policy 2018 has been formulated with this aim in the mind. The Policy document has laid great emphasis on maintaining a balance between nature and tourist related infrastructure & activities. It contains a set of guidelines for planning tourism related activities with optimum environmental care and keeping in mind the principles of conservation and sustainability. This document has also set targets and goals for the State in the field of tourism and will act as a guiding document for all the people directly or indirectly dependent on it. Efforts have been taken towards making tourism a key driving factor for economic upliftment while conserving the natural and cultural heritage of the State. I hope that this document fulfils the purpose it is formulated for and brings about the positive changes that are required for complete success of the Tourism Industry in Sikkim.

Ugen T. Gyatso



SHRI C.P. DHAKAL
SECRETARY



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FOREWORD

Sikkim has now transformed itself into a world class tourist destination. Be it in agriculture, cleanliness, health and education, it has set a benchmark for other states to follow and tourism is no exception. As testimony to this, Sikkim has been receiving awards and recognition both at the National and International level. A credit largely attributed to the dynamic leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, the state today has nurtured an environment highly conducive for tourism industry to foster. It is a matter of pride for all of us but this achievement also sets before us great challenges to maintain our position to be amongst the best tourist destinations in the country. Moreover the complexity of the industry, as a result of involvement of independent sectors like transport, accommodation and the fragility of our resources, demands a careful approach to maintain a balanced and sustainable path of development.

A dire need was hence felt of a document that could be a guiding force to regulate the tourism industry of Sikkim. Such a document needed to be based upon a participatory approach consolidating the collective views of all stakeholders. The "Sikkim Tourism Policy 2018" thus is an outcome of a series of brainstorming and successive meetings with the tourism stakeholders, scholars and officers from various line departments wherein the best of suggestions have been incorporated to make this document meaningful.

The Department is highly indebted to ECOSS and WWF -India for their meticulous drafting of the policy by patiently incorporating a series of changes as a result of relay meetings for finalisation of the draft. I also thank TAAS, SAATO, SHRA, SAMA, SUTO, SPA, Sikkim University, G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment & Sustainable Development and all other organisations for their valuable inputs. We have also referred to the National Tourism Policy 2002 and the tourism policies of the other states particularly of those who have similar topography and terrain as that of our state, thus adding to the appropriateness of this document.

I hope this document serves the purpose for which it has been designed as a guiding document towards sustained tourism growth for Sikkim.



C.P. Dhakal
Secretary

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- Establish and strengthen Institutional Structures to promote, manage and implement responsible tourism in Sikkim
- Ensure that Sikkim has the highest level of skills and capacity for quality service delivery through consistent human resource development
- Promote Standards and Certification for the Tourism Industry
- Promote sustainably managed tourism destinations, quality tourism infrastructure and safe Transport
- Promote high value and high quality tourism products
- Ensure strategic and sustained marketing and publicity
- Promote enabling environment for tourism stakeholders
- Facilitate inter-sectoral coordination and convergence

SECTION A BACKGROUND

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Global Tourism Scenario

Tourism is a socio-cultural and economic phenomenon, which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside of their usual environment for recreational, business, medical, or religious purposes. Tourism also encourages governments to develop and improve local infrastructure to handle tourist inflow. Several countries have transformed themselves through tourism and have created a global presence in the tourism industry. Tourist movements have spread geographically to reach practically all countries of the globe, becoming for many of them an important economic sector in terms of income generation, foreign exchange earnings and employment creation.

As reported by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) *Tourism Highlights 2017 Edition*, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) grew by 3.9% in 2016 to reach a total of 1,235 million worldwide, an increase of 46 million over the previous year. It was the seventh consecutive year of above average growth in international tourism following the 2009 global economic crisis. South Asia recorded an 8% increase in international tourist arrivals in 2016, driven by India (+10%), the sub region's top destination. The UNWTO estimates that approximately 1 in 10 persons in the world are employed by the tourism industry. As of 2016, the global tourism industry generated USD 7.6 trillion, constituting 10% of the global GDP. International tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to increase by 3.3% a year between 2010 and 2030 to reach 1.8 billion by 2030, according to UNWTO's long-term forecast report *Tourism Towards 2030*. Arrivals in emerging destinations are expected to increase at twice the rate of those in advanced economies. Market share of emerging economies are expected to grow from 45% in 2016 to reach 57% by 2030, equivalent to over 1 billion international tourist arrivals.





1.2 Tourism in mountain regions

As desired destinations for many tourists, migrants and pilgrims, tourism in the mountains offers places for rest, solitude, adventure, recreation, as well as scenic beauty. It is estimated that more than 50 million people visit mountains each year (Mountain Partnership 2008). The Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that mountains attract roughly 15 to 20% of the global tourism market. Mountain tourism is generally more labour intensive than tourism in the plains, necessitating a greater number of support staff (porters, mountain guides, pack animal owners) to accompany trekking groups or mountaineering expeditions, and to carry supplies up to remote mountain tourism destinations not connected by road or air. While tourism provides considerable economic benefits for many countries, regions and communities, its rapid expansion can also be responsible for adverse environmental (and socio-cultural) impacts.

For years, mountains have attracted tourist attention especially because of the cool climate they offer. With temperatures increasing across the plains due to climate change and the extreme summer months, the mountains are a much preferred destination. Cultural identities and diversity in mountain regions, refined over generations by local habitants and the splendid natural heritage have immense value and attract tourists from all over the world.



The ever-increasing demand for tourism in mountain areas is expected to grow even further as regional tourism becomes more important. However, it presents tremendous opportunities as well as threats for the Himalayas. The investment, as well as operational and managerial decisions of tour operators, along with other tourism professionals and the wider industry can determine the level of both negative and positive impacts of tourism in the mountain environment. The fact that most tourists chose to maintain their relatively high patterns of consumption (and waste generation) when they reach their destinations is being seen as a serious problem for developing countries, since many of these regions lack the appropriate means for protecting their natural resources and local ecosystems from the pressures of mass tourism. [Frederico Neto, 2002]

1.3 Tourism in India

In the Indian context, the first public milestone in the history of tourism was the creation of the Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) in 1966. This organization was established to develop tourist infrastructure and services. Subsequently, India developed its first Tourism Policy in 1982 which provided an action plan based on the development of so-called tourism circuits. This interest also resulted in the recognition of tourism as an export industry (including the implied tax exemptions) and the creation of a special public Tourism Finance Corporation (1987). Apart from identifying a few areas for 'integrated tourism development', the purpose of the plan was to achieve an overall growth and improvement of the tourism sector in India through marketing, infrastructure building and human resource development.

- The importance of domestic tourism was recognized by public policy makers in the 1990s and also in the Tourism Action Plan of 1997. It was decided that domestic tourism would be a state government (policy) issue and the central government would take care of international tourists. In 2002, India came up with a new Tourism Policy, which sought to highlight tourism's contribution to national development and its role as a development tool.

A World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) report for 2014 states that for India the total contribution of tourism to the GDP is Rs. 7,642.5 billion rupees, approximately 6.7% of the GDP. Between 2002 and 2014, foreign tourist arrivals grew from 2.38 million to 7.70 million, the latter of which accounts for 0.68% of global tourist arrivals. Domestic tourist visits have increased from 270 million in 2002 to 1.14 billion in 2013. This has largely been attributed to the emergence of an urban middle class which looks to tourism for recreational purposes. In 2014, tourism in India earned Rs. 1,200,083 million or 1.58% of global tourism receipts.

The Indian tourism industry is responsible for creating 23 million direct jobs (or 5.5% of total jobs in India) and 36.6 million total jobs (or 8.7% of total jobs in India). In 2013, India demonstrated a 4% growth in tourism, or approximately 7 million international arrivals. The WTTC also states that for a period of 2014-2024 international tourist arrivals in India are expected to grow at the rate of 6.4%, whereas global tourism is expected to grow at a rate of 4.5% through 2014 and beyond.





2. TOURISM AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The year 2015 was a milestone for global development as 193 member states including India adopted the “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. Through an unprecedented consultative process involving national governments and millions of citizens across the globe, a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets were developed. This ambitious agenda sets out a global framework to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and fix climate change until 2030. The goals and targets are people-centric, transformative, universal and integrated.

“Harnessing tourism's benefits will be critical to achieving the sustainable development goals and implementing the post-2015 development agenda”

UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, World Tourism Day 2014

The United Nations 70th General Assembly designated 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. In the context of the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the International Year aims to support a change in policies, business practices and consumer behavior towards a more sustainable tourism sector that contributes to the SDGs. In the context of these developments it becomes imperative that the Sikkim Tourism Policy encompasses the principles of sustainability taking into account the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development so as to directly contribute to attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all of the goals. In particular, it has been included as targets under Goal 8 -Inclusive and sustainable economic growth, Goal 12 - Sustainable consumption and production and Goal 14 - Sustainable use of oceans and marine resources. The targets mentioned under the goals specify devising and implementing policies to promote sustainable tourism which creates jobs, promotes local culture and products. Achieving this

agenda, however, requires a clear implementation framework, adequate financing and investment in technology, infrastructure and human resources.

2.1 Key considerations

The Sustainable Development Goals is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity and has been developed to address the three pillars of the economic, socio-cultural and environment. Tourism impacts all three, and therefore is a key sector that can contribute to the achievement of SDGs.

:: Economic

The tourism industry is a provider of employment across the world. Poverty alleviation is one of the greatest global challenges, and sustainable tourism provides immense opportunities to address this issue. Tourism that focuses around communities with targeted pro poor initiatives has tremendous potential to bring about economic as well as social upliftment.

:: Socio-cultural

Providing authentic cultural experiences for visitors lies at the heart of sustainable tourism, which reinforces the need to conserve cultural heritage. At the same time, tourism also provides the opportunity to address gender issues through strengthening women's participation and their role in decision making. The UNWTO Code of Global Ethics for tourism calls for gender equality which provides a strong foundation for this SDG.

:: Environment

For tourism to sustain in the long run, it is imperative that tourism policies take a strong stand on safeguarding the environment. Tourism demands safe water and proper sanitation as well as safe cities and communities for its visitors. Unlike other businesses, tourism has incentive to provide all these to both attract visitors and encourage them to return.





3. TOURISM IN SIKKIM

3.1 State Profile

Sikkim, the Hidden Land for many years, came into lime light after it became the 22nd State of the country in 1975. Previously a tiny kingdom tucked away in an inaccessible corner of the Eastern Himalayas, an air of mystery and mysticism surrounds this small state. Located in the north east of India, Sikkim is a landlocked State spread across 7,096 Km² that shares three international borders with Nepal in the west, Bhutan in the east, and Tibet Autonomous Region of China in the north and east. The State of West Bengal lies to the south of Sikkim. In 2002, it joined the North Eastern Council (NEC) to become its eighth and youngest member.

Sikkim is a wholly mountainous State, with one third of its area lying above 3,000 meters, of which a large portion is covered by snowcapped peaks, glaciers and alpine meadows. This natural steep topography is a determining factor for the state vis-a-vis land-use pattern, connectivity issue, and infrastructure development.

The climate of Sikkim is highly varied due to factors related to wide range of elevation and also partly due to diverse configuration of surrounding high mountains, valleys and water bodies. The weather ranges from sub-tropical humid climate to temperate alpine and arctic. The average temperature of the state varies from sub-zero during winter to 28 degrees centigrade during summers, while precipitation varies from 2,700 mm to 3,200 mm.

With a population of 6,10,577 in 2011, Sikkim is the least populous State of India. The population is unevenly distributed within the State's four districts, East, West, North and South. Sikkim's population is still largely rural, and over 60 per cent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and allied sectors. Sikkim's literacy rate has had a remarkable jump from less than 7 per cent in 1951 to 82 per cent in 2011. The State's per capita income for 2015-2016 is recorded as Rs. 2,59,950 (at current price) which is the highest among the northeastern states. (*State Income Unit DESME*)

Natural Landscape

Sikkim has an altitudinal gradient that rises from 300 meters to the highest point of India, Mount Khangchendzonga, which stands tall at 8,586 meters and is revered as the state's guardian deity. This elevation gradient provides a wide range of ecological conditions from low tropical, temperate to sub alpine and alpine zones. A part of the Tibetan plateau falls in North Sikkim, which adds to the natural variation in the landscape. Thus, Sikkim is a biogeographically unique landscape having a wide range of ecological conditions in a small expanse of geographical area.



Tall mountain peaks that rise above 7,000 meters, glaciers that give rise to numerous wetlands which drain into streams and rivulets characterise the high-altitude areas of the state, which lie above the tree line and have an abundance of stunted vegetation. The other major peaks are Simvo, Pandim, Kabru, and Siniolchu, which adorn the Sikkim skies.

The State has a forest cover of over 47.80 per cent (*FEWMD*), which is the highest in the country. With one National Park and seven Wildlife Sanctuaries that cover an area of around 2,183 Km², Sikkim's protected area network is the largest in the country. Pristine stretches of temperate forests of conifers, oaks and rhododendrons which form important water reservoirs are found at mid to high elevations of 1,800- 3,800 meters. Tropical forests stretch between 250 -1,800 meters.

The high altitude areas of the State are home to the elusive snow leopard, which preys on the blue sheep, Tibetan argali, Tibetan gazelle, Tibetan wild ass, etc. The State animal of Sikkim, the red panda, shares its temperate habitat with musk deer, Asiatic black bear, Himalayan Tahr, Goral, Serow and beautiful Pheasants such as the Blood Pheasant, Himalayan Monal and Satyr Tragopan. Apart from larger fauna, the State has a healthy diversity of birds (574 species) and butterflies of which 689 species have been recorded. Sikkim has a rich variety of flora and around 4458 flowering plants have been recorded in the State, with orchids and rhododendrons being the most highly prized.

Sikkim's two main rivers, Teesta and Rangeet, originate in the North from Teesta Khangshe glacier and West from Rathong Glacier and are fed as they flow down the valleys by numerous other streams and rivulets. Most of the high altitude wetlands that dot the landscape of the state are revered as sacred by locals. The Phamrong in West, Seven Sisters and Lingzya waterfalls in North are some of the state's beautiful scenic spots.

Culture and People

Sikkim's population comprises many ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, each characterized by their unique culture, customs and traditions that exhibit strong bonds with nature and the environment. The three main communities are Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis, of which 'Nepalis' form an umbrella category which includes a large number of communities such as Limboo, Rai, Gurung, Sherpa, Mangar, Chhetri, Bahun, Newar, Tamang, Bhujel, Kami, Damai, etc.

3.2 Tourism Development in Sikkim

Growth of Tourism in Sikkim

Tracing the growth of tourism in the State prior to its merger with India, tourist inflows to Sikkim were negligible. Even after merger, growth was slow till the 1980's as large areas remained inaccessible or restricted to tourists. It was only in the last decade of the century, that tourism growth picked up considerably as more areas came under relaxation of the permit regime and Sikkim gained popularity as an upcoming tourist destination. Tourism saw a big boost between 2010-17 with tourist arrival figures equalling and surpassing the State population. Today, tourism is fast evolving as one of the most important drivers of the State economy.

Tourism centres and circuits began slowly developing from Gangtok, and gradually extended to Rabong, Pelling, Yuksom, Lachung and Lachen. Adventure tourism in the form of trekking along the Yuksom-Dzongri- Goechala trail which had begun in the pre-merger days began to pick up. Around 1988, the State Government took a decision to allow tourists to visit Tsomgo Lake. Located at a distance of only 35 km from Gangtok, the capital town, Tsomgo became the closest accessible destination to experience snowfall for tourists coming from West Bengal. This was followed by opening up of Nathula, which gave visitors an opportunity to go right up till the Chinese border point of this ancient mountain pass. Similar relaxation of permits in West Sikkim, Zuluk in East Sikkim and Gurudongmar Lake and Yumthang Valley and Yumesamdong in North Sikkim, witnessed a surge of tourist flows to these areas. These were major milestones in Sikkim's tourism history. This was also aided by the Government's decision to allow Leave Travel Concession by Air to the North East Region in 2010 for Central Government employees.



With a flourishing tourism industry that was on the one hand more veered towards mass tourism, Sikkim also pioneered in creating an ecotourism pathway weaving in principles of strong community participation, as well as nature and cultural conservation on the other. In 2002, the South Asian Regional Conference on Ecotourism was organised in Sikkim by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS) with support from UNDP and the Ministry of Tourism. This was a milestone in introducing the concept of Ecotourism to Sikkim and the North East Region and in defining community-based tourism in the state. Several ecotourism sites in different parts of the State like Kewzing, Yuksam, Dzongu and Pastanga were some of the first Community-Based Tourism (CBT) sites that evolved as a result, and established themselves. The core component of these CBT initiatives was the village homestay, a new tourism product that ensured spread of tourism benefits to local communities. Since then the Government has taken several initiatives to support village tourism and ecotourism including the notification of the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy in 2011 and the Sikkim Registration of Homestay Establishment Rules 2013 and more recently, the construction of 736 homestays (*Hospitality Division, Department of Tourism, GoS*) under the rural tourism programme funded by the XIII Finance Commission in different villages all over Sikkim.

Tourist arrivals in Sikkim have seen unprecedented growth in the last three decades. From a mere 15,000 tourists in 1980 to a whopping 14,24,965 tourists in 2017 (domestic and foreign), (*Statistical Cell, Department of Tourism & CA GoS*) the growth has indeed been tremendous. Domestic tourists grew at an average annual rate of between 10 to 25% for the period 2005 to 2017. Foreign tourist growth has shown an annual growth rate average of 8% from 2005 to 2013. State-wise domestic tourist breakup shows that the top five state visitors to Sikkim are from West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. West Bengal by itself constitutes around 55% of the tourists (*TECS Tourism Master Plan*). Amongst foreign tourists, the most foreign tourists visiting Sikkim are from Nepal, USA, Germany, UK, France and Thailand and Australia. In terms of proportion of domestic and foreign tourists, the figures show an overwhelming average of 95% in favour of domestic tourists for the past five years.

The Department has made constant efforts for building capacities of local stakeholders in the Tourism sector through regular trainings, such as for guides (trekking, birdwatching, mountaineering, rafting,) cooks, adventure tour operators etc. The establishments of the Institute of Hotel Management in Rumtek and the Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Ecotourism in Chemchey have strongly contributed to these initiatives.

Various steps for facilitating e-governance such as facilities for online Inner-Line Permits, seeking feedback from tourists and Statistical Information System etc. have been executed by the Department which has contributed to tourist facilitation.

With regard to tourism infrastructure development, Sikkim has excelled in leveraging central funds for the construction and development of tourist wayside amenities, destination and circuit development, and unique tourist attractions such as ropeways, skywalks and landmark religious monuments. Religious tourism has been augmented with the construction of several unique and gigantic religious monuments, which includes statues of Guru Padmasambhava in Samdruptse, the Chaardhaam at Solophok, Namchi and Lord Buddha's statue at the Tathagatha Tsal in Rabong. There are several other such statues and monuments in the pipeline. Ropeways have been built in Namchi and Tsomgo Lake. A sky walk, the first of its kind, is under construction in Bhaleydhunga while a green field airport in Pakyong is soon to be made operational.

Owing to its diversity of communities, Sikkim has a number of traditional religious festivals that attract tourists, notable amongst which are the Pang Lhabsol, Drukpa Tseshe, Tendong Lho Rum Faat,

Dasain and Tyohar, Losoong, BhumChu, Saga Dawa and Sakewa. There are also a number of tourism-focused festivals held every year in different locations around the State. Among these, the Gangtok Winter Carnival which is organized to bolster tourism during the lean season is gaining fast popularity.

The adventure tourism sector which has tremendous potential was earlier confined mainly to trekking, white water rafting and mountaineering and had seen slow growth. Recently the sector has witnessed rapid expansion through new adventure activities such as mountain biking, and paragliding. A landmark event was the recent holding of the first Sikkim FAI CATII International Paragliding Accuracy Championship. In mountaineering three new peaks Frey's Peak, Lama Angden and Brumkhangse were opened for Alpine expeditions in 2005 in addition to Mount Jopuno and Tinchekhang. Permission for the Green Lake Trek has been transferred from the Central Government to the State Government. With its immense biodiversity wealth, the State is also attracting a growing band of nature lovers, and many young local youth are aspiring to take up professional guiding in these activities particularly in birding and butterfly watching.

Accolades and Awards

In view of the above, Sikkim has always been a forerunner in tourism development. Sikkim's success in tourism has brought the State many accolades; some notable ones are presented in the table below:

Awards	Period	Awarded by
Best Tourism Performing State in the North East (National)	Every Year from 1998 -99 to 2002-03 and 2005-2006	Ministry of Tourism GOI
Best Ecotourism Destination	2005	Hospitality India
Best State for Tourism Related Programmes (National)	2006-07 and 2007-08	Ministry of Tourism GOI
Best Adventure Tourism Destination	2008	PATWA & Safari India National Award
Best State for Tourism Related Programmes (National)	2007-08	Ministry of Tourism GOI
Best State/Union Territory in Tourism Related Programmes & Development of Infrastructure (National)	2010, 2011	Ministry of Tourism GOI
India's Most Progressive Tourism State	2010	Today's Traveler
Best State for Comprehensive Development of Tourism (National)	2012	Ministry of Tourism GOI
Most Innovative & Unique Tourism Project for Siddhesvara Dham Solophok project (National)	2012	Ministry of Tourism GOI
Best State -Campaign Clean India	2012-2013	Ministry of Tourism GOI
Best State in the Country in implementation of Rural Tourism Projects – 2012 (National)	2012-13	Ministry of Tourism GOI
Best Region to Visit in the World	2014	Lonely Planet Global Travel Guide
Ranked 17 th out of 52 Places to go in 2017	2017	New York Times
Most Responsible Tourism Project (Joint Winner)	2017	Ministry of Tourism GOI

3.3 Tourism in the State economy

There is a lack of comprehensive data to understand the contribution of the tourism sector to the State economy. Based on the figures of tourist accommodation available and the numbers of service providers, direct employment generated by this sector can be roughly estimated to be around 12,000 to 15,000 jobs at present. At the same time, the Human Development Report also notes that the industry has 61% direct workers employed from outside the State. Some of the factors contributing to this are that a majority of hotels in the State are leased out to parties outside Sikkim who prefer to source their workers from outside the State, and that a significant proportion of the transport sector also engages employees similarly. There is also a reluctance of local youth to take up jobs offered by these service providers.

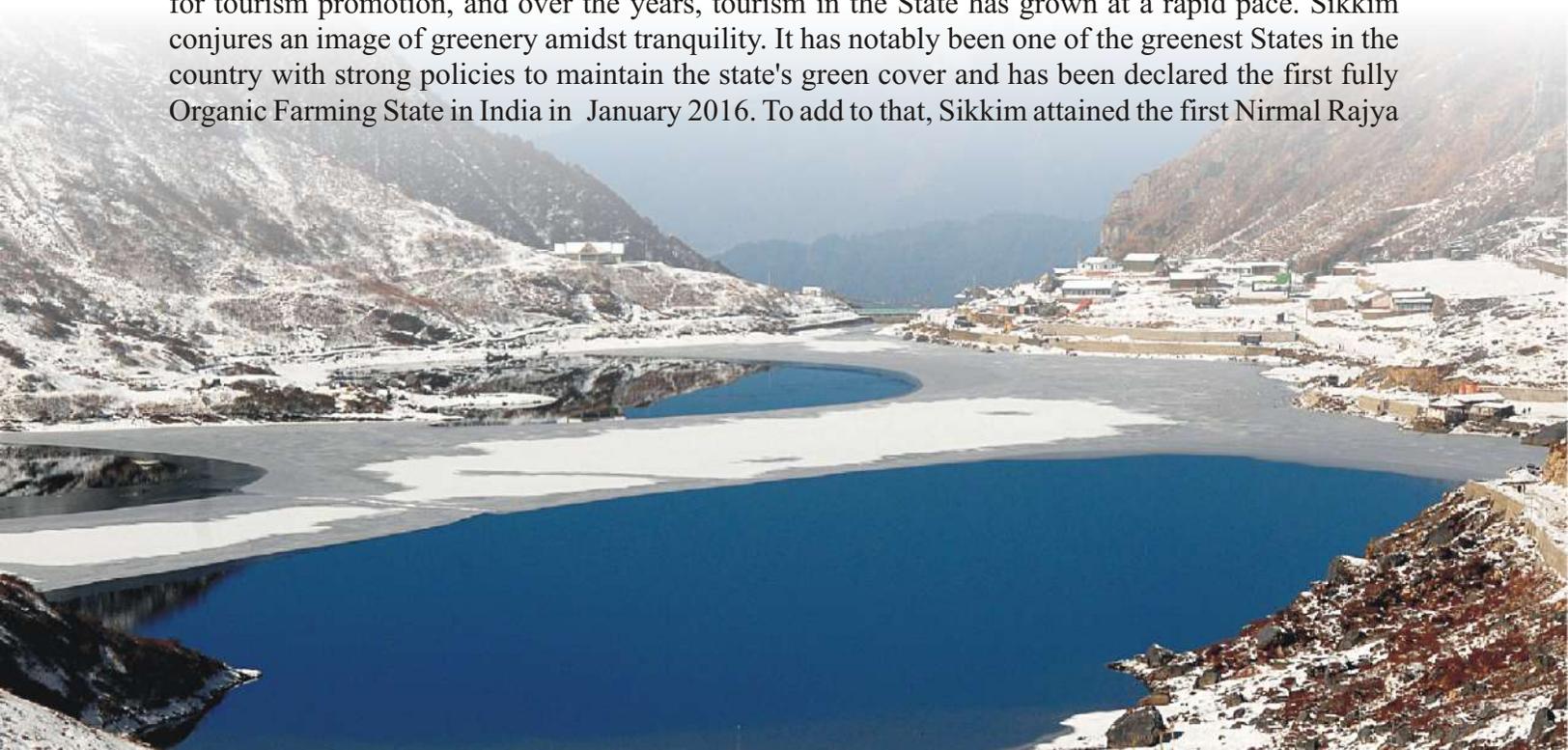
In the last decade, tourism sector in Sikkim has seen a growth rate of 10-12 %. The Gross State Domestic Product of Tourism Sector in 2016-17 has been valued at Rs 1,44,735 lakhs with total contribution of tourism sector to GSDP being 7.68% (*DESME State Income Unit*).

In terms of existing capacity and strength and as per figures available, there are currently 1021 hotels, (with over 16945 rooms and 34133 beds capacity), 1119 Travel Agents, 69 Restaurants, 66 Tourist Guides and 371 homestays registered with the Department. In addition there are 47 hotels registered at project level (under construction) stage. (*Carrying Capacity Survey 2017 Dept of Tourism GoS*) There were 646 taxis registered under the Luxury Taxi category and 6445 under local (non luxury) taxis as on 31st March 2015 (*Regional Transport Authority, MV Dept. GoS*). There are also a significant number of service providers who have not come within the ambit of the official statistics due to a laxity in the registration process. The indirect employment generated by the industry is however much larger and encompasses a broad section of the population ranging from construction to supplies and various services. Clearly tourism has emerged very strongly as one of the key drivers of the State economy with potential for generating long term sustainable employment.

3.4 Strengths and challenges of tourism in Sikkim

Strengths

Green and clean image - Sikkim's tag of being a peaceful State has been one of its key strengths for tourism promotion, and over the years, tourism in the State has grown at a rapid pace. Sikkim conjures an image of greenery amidst tranquility. It has notably been one of the greenest States in the country with strong policies to maintain the state's green cover and has been declared the first fully Organic Farming State in India in January 2016. To add to that, Sikkim attained the first Nirmal Rajya





status in the country, and a recent addition is also that of Gangtok, the capital city being ranked as the cleanest city in India in the Cleanliness Index, 2015 conducted by Ministry of Tourism. Sikkim has an Ecotourism Policy which will pave way for shaping tourism in protected and forest areas of the State. The ban on firecrackers and agricultural waste burning are also exemplary green initiatives that the State has undertaken.

Community participation - Sikkim has also led the way in community based tourism initiatives, and has models that showcase good practices of revenue generation and sharing. The State has been a frontrunner in promotion of homestays which ensures tourism benefits directly for communities and there are various forms of homestay tourism currently in the State. The Pokhri Sanrakshan Samiti model formed under the Lake Conservation Guidelines of the Sikkim Government that puts community at the forefront for management of wetlands that are prime tourism destinations in the state has also been very successful. Tourism stakeholders are also well organised in Sikkim and there are strong private investments in this sector which also bolsters the overall state of tourism.

Diverse tourism products - Blessed with natural attractions, Sikkim has great potential for developing its tourism around its assets such as its rich biodiversity, natural attractions of mountains, rivers, snows, etc. Coupled with this, Sikkim's history and its diversity of culture brought about by the presence of different ethnic groups in the State elevates the State's tourism value to another level. The adventure sector which has tremendous potential for attracting high value tourists in the future has been little explored till date, and can become a key strength of the State's tourism.

However, in the absence of a long term vision for tourism in the state, this sector has developed in a largely unplanned manner and has veered inadvertently towards promotion of mass tourism, and is not without challenges.

Challenges

Ecological impacts - Sikkim occupies only .02 per cent of the Indian subcontinent but this tiny piece of landmass that falls in the Eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot harbors some of the most interesting and endemic flora and fauna that occupy all corners of the State. The high altitude areas of the State that are ecologically fragile are important habitats as well as crucial in terms of water security. Many of the State's ecologically fragile areas are subjected to large inflow of tourists which has serious environmental concerns. Vehicular pollution, disturbance to wildlife, garbage accumulation are some of the current major challenges brought about by tourism which need to be addressed. Moreover, a

major challenge is bio-piracy. Instances of smuggling of seeds and other wild products by visitors in the garb of tourists have been reported in the past which lead to violation of the National Biodiversity Act.

Connectivity and communication - Owing to its location and topography, connectivity has always remained a broad challenge for the State that has grappled with bad road conditions for many years. Tourist's feedback on their experience in Sikkim place bad road conditions foremost among their grievances. Poor communication through internet and mobile connectivity is also an issue that has reflected negatively for Sikkim's tourism.

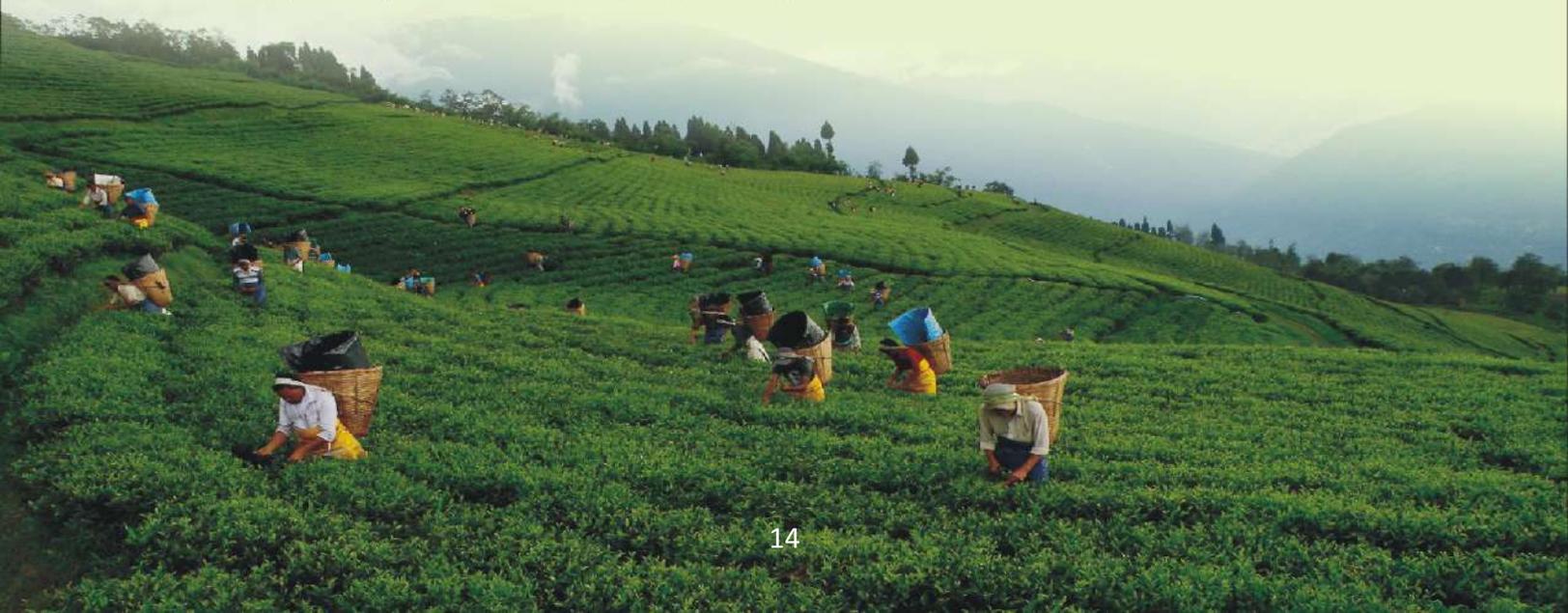
Limited employment opportunities to locals - Capacities of local people have not been adequately strengthened to address the needs of the tourism sector. On the other hand, the willingness of local youths to be involved in this sector and creation of an enabling environment for them is a challenge that needs to be addressed. While all tourism stakeholders strongly stress on the need to generate local employment from tourism, the reality is that a large part of the tourism sector is currently run by people from outside the state, be it hotels, transport sector or travel operators.

Lack of regulations/ standards - Absence of stringent regulation and standards in the tourism service sector has been detrimental for Sikkim's tourism growth. This has also led to some negative publicity for the state, which needs to be corrected. For a state like Sikkim which is situated in a high seismic zone, enforcement of BIS guidelines for all construction becomes highly pertinent and crucial. Setting of standards in all these aspects and its compliance by all stakeholders will lead to enhanced visitor experience.

3.5 Need for a tourism policy for Sikkim

Over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and diversification to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Modern tourism is closely linked to development and encompasses growing number of new destinations. These dynamics have turned tourism into a key driver for socio-economic progress.

Tourism in Sikkim has come up in a big way, with the number of tourists, both domestic and foreign, continuously increasing. The domestic tourist inflow increased from 552453 in 2011 to 13,75,854 in 2017 thereby showing an increase of approximately 15.75% per annum. (*Statistical Cell, Department of Tourism & CA GoS*). Between 1981 and 2006, the compound annual growth rate for tourists has been calculated to be 11.37 per cent. For the same period, domestic and foreign tourist arrivals grew at an annual compound rate of 11.68 per cent and 8.28 per cent respectively. Sikkim declared tourism as an industry during the 10th Five Year plan (2002-07).





Understanding the need to have guiding policies, several attempts were made by the State Government to prepare guiding documents for shaping Sikkim's tourism through development of Tourism Master Plans. As early as 1998, when the initial tourism development was taking shape in Sikkim, the first Tourism Master Plan (1998-2011) was prepared by the State Government. This five-volume master plan clearly outlined the need for planned, inclusive growth and for targeting high value visitors. This was followed by a second Master Plan in 2010.

In 2010, a Sikkim Tourism Mission- 2015 was released by the State Government, which emphasized the need for both, ecological and economic sustainability in tourism, through promotion of quality tourism and enhanced participation of local stakeholders. As with other green policies of the State, this Tourism Mission Statement elucidated strong political will to guide Sikkim's tourism towards a sustainable future. The Sikkim Ecotourism Policy, 2011 was also developed by the State Government. It set guidelines and strategies for development of tourism around protected areas and forest areas of the State, which highlights the issues of zoning and carrying capacities in fragile areas.

However, tourism continued to develop in an arbitrary manner with various government departments such as the Department of Tourism; Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, Rural Management and Development engaged in tourism development and facilitation but working in isolation of each other. Thus, a need was felt for a joint and collaborative approach, which would address tourism in a holistic manner through an integrated approach.

There was an urgent need, therefore, to consolidate all existing missions and plans, and together with strong participation of the tourism stakeholders develop a Policy for Sikkim Tourism. In the face of a growing and changing tourism industry, the policy shall provide guidance for bringing sustainability through inclusive growth, enhancing capacities of tourism stakeholders as well as for developing regulatory frameworks, which shall ensure quality experience for visitors to the State. At this stage of tourism development, the visitors' perspective also needs to be factored in. Increasingly people are looking for authentic and distinctive experiences. Additionally, the objective of conserving

culture and nature has gained even more importance. This requires a comprehensive guiding document in the form of a policy for shaping Sikkim's tourism sector, which also has been a long felt need in the State.

3.6 Methodology for Policy Development:

The need for a comprehensive policy was a key takeaway point from a workshop on “Strengthening Sustainable Tourism in Sikkim” organized in 2014. There was robust participation of tourism stakeholders of the state. The process of preparation of Sikkim's Tourism Policy was designed to be a participatory and inclusive process with involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. Major steps taken were:

Setting up of task force/ committee - As an outcome of the workshop, a task force led by WWF-India and ECOSS was set up by the Tourism Department to work on the policy formulation with involvement of all stakeholders.

Consultations - Several consultation workshops and one to one interviews to engage actively with various stakeholders were organised between March 2015 August, 2015. These included the travel agents, hoteliers, home-stay operators, STDC and taxi drivers. The main purpose was to understand stakeholders' perspective on tourism in Sikkim and the challenges thereof. Facilitated discussion points were captured from each workshop. These have been fed into specific sections of the policy.

Inputs from the tourists - Visitor feedback was recorded with the help of hotels and travel agents. Care was taken to cover all types of hotels so as to reach out to a wide category of visitors. The information was collated and analysed for specific inputs into the policy.

Policy reviews - Review of tourism policies of other states and countries was conducted as part of the policy drafting process. The draft National Tourism Policy was also thoroughly studied and utilized to align the State Tourism Policy wherever relevant. The study of master plans of Sikkim prepared earlier by various agencies such as the Tourism Master Plan (1997-2011) by Tata Economic Consultancy Services, Sikkim Tourism Master Plan- 2011 prepared by Master Consult Services of Singapore, 20 years Perspective Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in Sikkim - 2002 by Horizon Industrial Consultancy Service for the Ministry of Tourism, the FEWMD's Sikkim Ecotourism Policy- 2011, Sikkim Tourism Mission - 2010 of the State Government.

Inputs were taken from within the Tourism Department on the draft framework of the policy document to provide greater clarity and seek suggestions towards finalization of the policy document.

SECTION B
SIKKIM TOURISM POLICY

1. VISION

Sikkim becomes a highly valued responsible tourism destination with tourism contributing significantly to the State economy while conserving its natural and cultural heritage

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles shall guide the tourism sector in Sikkim

i) Environmental Sustainability

Tourism development will not be at the cost of degradation of the environment and natural resources of the state.

ii) Cultural integrity

Tourism development will ensure appreciation, promotion and conservation of Sikkim's diverse culture.

iii) Equity, Inclusiveness & Social Justice

Opportunities and benefits of tourism shall not exclude those disadvantaged by gender, remoteness and poverty, and tourism practices shall ensure the upholding of human rights and justice.

iv) Atithi Devo Bhava

Tourism development shall focus on providing quality experiences and services for all visitors and ensure their safety and satisfaction.

3. GOALS

In line with the need for tourism to contribute significantly to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the five main goals that the policy objectives of tourism development in Sikkim will achieve are:

Goal 1 - Develop tourism as a key sector in Sikkim's economy

The Human Development Report (HDR) 2014 has identified certain potential sectors for growth and livelihood creation, of which tourism ranks the highest. The HDR recognizes that Sikkim has a comparative advantage in tourism with its beautiful landscape, diverse flora and fauna, culture and traditions and hospitable people. Other factors that contribute to positioning Sikkim as a prime tourist destination are its peaceful environment, political stability, high literacy rate, its green policies such as organic farming and easy accessibility. Sikkim's Tourism Mission 2015 aspires to “make tourism the main livelihood of the people of Sikkim, and each and every household and individual, a skilled force for the tourism industry”. At the same time the Government of India's increased focus on the development of the North East Region has earmarked tourism as a priority area (Draft National Tourism Policy 2015). New opportunities

are emerging such as the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage through Nathula Pass, which was flagged off in 2015, the declaration of the Khangchendzonga National Park as a natural and cultural World Heritage Site, opening of new peaks and the relaxation of the permit process for the Green Lake Trek. Improved core infrastructure such as completion of the ongoing widening of National Highway 10 to Sikkim and the commissioning of the Green Field airport in Pakyong and a proposed rail link will facilitate the flow of tourists to the State. Leveraging of information technology, such as online availability of ILPs and RAPs, web-based booking portals and mobile tourism information application, high social media presence for tourist information dissemination, will make Sikkim more readily accessible to visitors. There is also a growing demand for new products like village tourism and homestays, mountain biking, paragliding, bird and butterfly-watching, all of which can generate a host of new service providers from amongst the local youth. Tourism has linkages with a wide range of allied sectors and services that can provide employment and income to locals. By developing local capacities for entrepreneurship, and service delivery and a focus on high-value nature and culture-based products, the State has the capacity to leverage these opportunities to make tourism a key sector in Sikkim's economy.

Goal 2 - Promote low impact sustainable tourism for the State

An emerging trend in tourism is the increasing demand to develop tourism in new destinations. While this can help to increase tourism development, unless carefully managed, it can also lead to irreversible negative impacts on ecologically and culturally sensitive areas. Existing ecologically fragile destinations like Tsomgo Lake, Yumthang Valley and Lake Gurudongmar already have heavy tourist traffic during the peak season. Sikkim's natural and cultural heritage has been the main attraction for tourists visiting the State, and their conservation should be the primary objective, through promotion of responsible tourism, which does not focus on maximizing number of visitors but on enhancing the visitor experiences, while generating benefits for local communities and minimizing the ecological footprint. Future tourism development in Sikkim shall focus on low-impact/high value models while better managing the mass tourism destinations. Zonation of specific areas marketed as high-value destinations to regulate numbers of visitors and activities, implemented in convergence with the State Ecotourism Policy -2011 will be vital. At the same time, existing fragile destinations shall be carefully re-examined through an understanding of 'carrying capacity' and if necessary new regulations and management systems shall be put in place. Following sustainable guidelines in infrastructure development in the tourism sector to lower the environmental impacts is also critical. While increased tourist arrivals may be desirable to a certain extent and is an indicator of Sikkim's popularity as a tourist destination, there is an optimum limit to the maximum number of tourists that the State with its small area and limited resources can handle before the negative impacts outweigh the benefits. A close watch on numbers and impacts and a definite shift from mass to high value tourism is what needs to be ultimately targeted to make tourism viable/sustainable for future generations.

Goal 3 - Make Sikkim a prime round the year destination for nature, adventure and culture based tourism within India and globally

Tourists visit Sikkim for a variety of reasons and while many of them might be notionally based around visits to natural or cultural areas, not all tourists get the opportunity to fully experience or appreciate the natural beauty or cultural heritage of the State. Although Sikkim is blessed with outstanding natural and cultural sites that are at par with the best in the world,

many of these have been reduced to simply areas for recreational tourism (e.g. Tsomgo Lake) that also end up as mass tourism destinations that are highly seasonal in demand. By focusing on supporting and promoting nature and culture-based tourism that is spread throughout the year (including monsoons and winter periods) over recreational or leisure tourism, Sikkim can attract tourists that will spend more, appreciate the natural and cultural heritage of the state, and contribute more to the local economy all year round. This can come in the form of carefully planned and implemented itineraries that include hiking, trekking, mountain biking, nature walks, bird watching, rural homestays, organic farming holidays, cultural and religious interpretation, meditation, monastery and local festival tours. Such quality experiences will also ensure repeat visits.

Goal 4 - Tourism benefits are broad based to support local, social and economic development in Sikkim and also ensure social justice.

It is important that economic benefits generated from tourism are distributed as widely and equitably as possible and that they primarily contribute to the socio-economic development of the people of Sikkim. This means that different areas and service providers all have fairly equal opportunity to benefit from tourism and not limited to more resourceful and well-connected groups from either outside the State or certain pockets of the State capturing most of the benefits. However, this should not be at the cost of service quality or the overall visitor experience. Therefore, consistent standards of service and infrastructure support need to be ensured across regions and service providers in the state. A strong focus on promotion of rural tourism to showcase Sikkim's vibrant and diverse culture shall also serve to diversify tourists from the urban pockets and seek to spread benefits accrued from the sector to more people. At the same time, opportunities and benefits of tourism shall contribute to the goal of a poverty free state and provide enhanced opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups such as school dropouts and educated unemployed. More opportunities for rural people shall also curb the rural urban migration. Tourism services shall be strictly monitored to ensure upholding human rights and justice such as the non-exploitation of children and women and ensuring fair wages.

Goal 5. All tourism infrastructure and services shall be of the best standards and quality delivering a consistent high level of satisfaction and hospitality to tourists.

Sikkim is already a sought after tourism destination, known for the hospitable nature of its people. However, with the growing number of visitors and service providers, and a high component of leased out hotels, there is increasing concern about lowering of standards and of the quality of services and infrastructure. To ensure that the tourist is assured a high level of satisfaction to encourage revisits and positive feedback, the department and industry shall work to establish standards and certification systems amongst all service providers. These shall be at par with the best of the industry and shall also confirm to the Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) and indicators. At the same time all tourism infrastructure shall be designed for low environmental impact that confirm with green building concepts, upgraded and sustainably maintained to be of the highest standards and in conformity to STCI and its indicators. Regulatory and management guidelines in both existing mass tourism destinations and new destinations shall be effectively implemented.

4. KEY TOURISM PRODUCTS

Sikkim's main attraction is its nature and cool climate which makes it a perfect getaway for travelers. The richness of the State's diverse culture and tradition with strong bonds with nature and religion also add to the attraction. To address the policy goals of promoting cultural and natural heritage of Sikkim for developing high value low impact tourism in the State the key products are proposed as -

- **Conventional leisure based tourism**
- **Nature based tourism or Ecotourism**
- **Adventure based tourism**
- **Culture based tourism & village homestays**
- **Religion based tourism**
- **MICE (Meetings, Incentive Events, Conferences and Exhibitions)**
- **Health and Wellness tourism**

Conventional Leisure based Tourism

Conventional leisure based tourism pertain to that section of tourists who come with the prime purpose of sightseeing and recreation, to enjoy Sikkim's natural scenery along with its cool climate and peaceful atmosphere. They are the casual holiday makers and currently comprise the bulk of the tourists who visit Sikkim. This form of tourism with high volumes and limited spending is the main driver of the tourism industry. However this sector has high impact on the environment and local resources in the form of high generation of waste, high consumption of energy and water, high pollution from vehicles and traffic congestion.

This form of tourism shall be encouraged but with a close watch on numbers and with a designed shift to higher value tourism with softer footprints and through improved quality of services. Such measures taken to upgrade the infrastructure and services with a resultant hike in tariff can serve as a disincentive for the unchecked rise in high volume tourism. Further this will be backed by regular carrying capacity studies to determine negative impacts and peak capacities of tourist traffic permissible in all high tourist density areas and mechanisms to ensure that the recommended capacities are not exceeded.

Nature based tourism or Ecotourism

Nature and natural scenery forms the main draw for tourists to Sikkim. According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) "Responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and which provides benefits to local communities while ensuring enriched experiences for visitors can be termed as ecotourism." The Forest Environment and Wildlife Management Department has prepared the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy 2011 which advocates for certain strategies and guidelines for ecotourism development particularly for protected areas and also to bring consensus on the concept of ecotourism.

For serious nature lovers, Sikkim has a host of products to offer such as birding, butterfly watching, botanical and zoological excursions, nature walks and soft trekking around protected areas. Sikkim's wealth of biodiversity that include some of the most enigmatic species of flora and fauna can

be leveraged to attract researchers, students and hobbyists for high value tourism, with development of specific action plans.

Adventure based tourism

Sikkim with its stupendous mountains, gorges and valleys, glaciers, snows, lakes and rivers, forests and altitudinal and topographical diversity, has tremendous potential for development of adventure tourism which would also be in alignment with the tourism policy goals of bringing in high value tourists to the State. Some of the key adventure tourism products are trekking, mountaineering, paragliding, mountain biking, rafting/ kayaking, zip-lining. With the establishment of the Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure & Ecotourism (IHCAE) at Chemchey, there is an excellent opportunity to develop high class training and certification within the state. There is a need to have long term comprehensive planning, high quality infrastructure, encouragement of local stakeholders, improvement of standards and training with strict regulation and aggressive marketing in adventure sports. Focused efforts to improve and promote tourist traffic in routes other than the already popular ones such as the Yuksom-Dzongri-Goechela route.

Culture based tourism & village homestays

Sikkim with its plethora of ethnic communities has tremendous potential for offering tourists a multidimensional cultural experience. At the heart of the rural experience are the homestays spread across the state which provide a glimpse into the village lifestyle and culture. Village based resorts catering to the high end tourists are growing in number. Ethnic cuisine and food products, organic produce, ethnic songs and dances, traditional dresses, handicrafts, vernacular architecture, festivals, traditional medicines, folktales, are some of the items on offer in the cultural basket. There is a growing concern that rapid development and modernization is slowly eroding these cultural treasures and tourism can play a major role in its conservation. The Tourism Department's project to create over 1500 homestays in villages across the state and the State's organic mission shall support the culture and rural based tourism provided linkages are developed.

Religion based Tourism

Sikkim has wide acceptance as a place for understanding Mahayana Buddhism as practiced by the Karmakargyudpa and Nyinmapa sects and owing to the strong association it has with Guru Padmasambhava and Lhatsun Chenpo. The *Nay-Sol*, a religious scripture, details and describes Sikkim as a sacred landscape and is like a travel guide for location of the sacred sites in the State. Buddhism in Sikkim while retaining the basic principles of Mahayana Buddhism has assumed a characteristic distinct from that of Tibet by its amalgamation with the Bon religion practiced by the Lepchas the original inhabitants of Sikkim in the pre-Buddhist period. Buddhist Monasteries and numerous places of hermitage and meditation are present in all corners of the State, some dating back nearly 300 years, offering great spiritual pull for visitors. Monasteries such as Tashiding, Pemayantgtse, Phodong, Dubdi, Tholung, Ralang and Rumtek see a constant stream of pilgrimage visitors and tourists throughout the year and especially during religious festivals. Sikkim's close association with Bhutan religiously has also drawn many visitors from the neighbouring country for religious purposes. The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology with its storehouse of ancient Buddhist manuscripts and texts and a long history of research in Tibetan Buddhism serves as an asset for the State, drawing in researchers and scholars from all across the world.

Apart from this rich religious heritage, the State Government has also developed religious monuments and religious places such as the statue of Gurupadmasambhava in Samdruptse, Tathagatha Tsal, Char Dham, etc. that are boosting Sikkim's pilgrimage tourism. Sikkim is therefore well positioned to attract pilgrims and tourists with religious interests. Char Dham or the four abodes are four pilgrimage sites in India that are widely revered by Hindus which comprises of Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri and Rameswaram. The replicas of these four sites have been constructed in South Sikkim at Solophok along with a main temple having the statue of Lord Shiva making it a unique Pilgrim Centre which bagged the 'Most Innovative and Unique Tourism Project' from Ministry of Tourism in 2012.

MICE Tourism

In recent years Sikkim has become an important destination for the holding of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. Many hotels have upgraded or planned their infrastructure to include proper conference hall venues with the necessary equipments to cater to the demand for this fast growing form of tourism. Sikkim's peaceful atmosphere, salubrious climate and numerous cultural and natural attractions forms the perfect combination for institutions and companies to hold their MICE events in the state. MICE tourism also offers an excellent product to tide over the seasonality of tourism. It can also be linked with other tourism products on offer as part of the pre-/post leisure activity for such packages. Current capacity for hosting MICE events is very limited, with very few venues big enough to hold large events indeed some of these belong to the Government. Quality of the infrastructure and supporting equipment generally needs improvement. Current customers comprise mainly the Government, local companies and institutions, though the number of companies and organizations from outside holding events in Sikkim is slowly growing. There is a strong need to build more high quality and larger MICE infrastructure to attract the corporate world.

Health and wellness Tourism

With increasing consumer demand for wellness services and products, the global wellness market is now estimated to be around US\$3.4 trillion (*The 2014 Global Spa & Wellness Economy Monitor*). While a large section of visitors specifically travel for seeking wellness experiences to maintain their health, there are growing numbers of tourists who want to keep up with their healthy habits when they travel for business or pleasure.

Sikkim's cool climate and unpolluted environment makes it ideal as a retreat for those seeking recuperation and well being. Moreover, there are rich traditions in the landscape that make use of the vast treasures of medicinal plants and healing herbs that are available along with hot springs and hot stone baths (*Dotho*). An important part in the wellness sector Sikkim is on spiritual healing and Sikkim also has a lot to offer in this through various meditation techniques, Yogasthans and setting up of *Ekanta Vaas* getaways. Also a number of spas have already been established and initial capacity building exercises for this sector conducted through various agencies. The wellness industry has a strong potential for jobs in the North East Region. This is reflected in the large number of trainees graduating in this sector from the training institutes. There is a need for herbal medical centers, Yogasthan, etc.

5. POLICY OBJECTIVES

Based on the guiding principles and the overall goals of tourism development in Sikkim described above, the following policy objectives are outlined:

- Objective 1: Establish and strengthen Institutional Structures to promote, manage and implement responsible tourism in Sikkim**
- Objective 2: Ensure that Sikkim has the highest level of skills and capacity for quality service delivery through consistent human resource development**
- Objective 3: Promote Standards and Certification for the Tourism Industry**
- Objective 4: Promote sustainably managed tourism destinations, quality tourism infrastructure and safe transport**
- Objective 5: Promote high value and high quality tourism products**
- Objective 6: Ensure strategic and sustained marketing and publicity**
- Objective 7: Promote enabling environment for tourism stakeholders**
- Objective 8: Facilitate inter-sectoral coordination and convergence**

OBJECTIVE 1:

Establish and strengthen Institutional Structures to promote, manage and implement responsible tourism in Sikkim

To realize the vision of the policy and achieve its goals, it is critical to establish appropriate institutional structures for implementation at various levels and to strengthen existing ones. Besides the Tourism Department itself, there are institutes existing in the state which can be further strengthened and reorganized to meet the emerging needs and challenges of tourism, along with the creation of new institutions to address the issues of coordination and convergence.

1.1 Tourism Department strengthening and reorganisation

1.1.1: There is a need to have the Tourism Department play a stronger and more proactive role in the implementation of this policy. Challenges faced by the tourism industry are of establishment and maintenance of standards, coordination between departments, skill development, marketing, infrastructure planning and lack of institutional structures thereof to oversee these critical issues. There is also a need to improve the present system of collection of tourism related statistics. To address these, there shall be creation of separate divisions to look after the key aspects of tourism viz. Capacity Building, Marketing and Promotion including product development, Standards, Certification and Guidelines, Data Management & Research, and Destination and Infrastructure Planning.

1.1.2: Induction of professionals from the hospitality industry for ensuring quality planning, research, decision making, capacity building, setting of standards and certification and effective marketing. The

Tourism Department shall also hire professionals in an advisory capacity as and when required.

1.1.3 Creation of a separate cadre for the Tourism Department with officers having basic degrees in tourism studies or experience in the tourism trade. A Directorate of Tourism shall be created for execution of the Tourism Policy. The post of Director Tourism shall be held by a professionally qualified and experienced person in the field of tourism.

1.1.4 Capacity building needs of the Tourism Department in light of the reorganisation reviewed and planned. Capacity building / training programmes organised for staff working in the Tourism Department to gear them for meeting emerging opportunities and challenges. Staff shall be encouraged to take up higher studies in reputed tourism institutions.

1.1.5 The Data Management and Research Division shall look into revamping of the current system of data collection so as to provide regularly updated and accurate information on tourist arrivals, visitor profiles, trends and preferences, bed capacity, visitor feedback, etc. which shall also form the basis of research for developing marketing strategies. This shall be done in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism's Market Research Division.

1.1.6 The Data Management and Research Division shall also maintain a database of all certified and registered tourism service providers which shall be made publicly available in the department's website.

1.2 Constitution of Inter-Departmental Coordination Committee

1.2.1: Coordination and collaboration with other line departments for bringing convergence in tourism related matters are most essential. This includes single window systems for licences/permits and their renewal, ensuring core infrastructure support during tourist seasons, etc. The National Tourism Policy, 2015 (Draft), mandates the formation of an Inter-Departmental Coordination Committee, which shall be duly notified bringing together all relevant departments. The committee shall be chaired by the Chief Secretary with Secretary Tourism Department as the Member Secretary. The rules and regulations and operational guidelines for the functioning of this committee shall also be notified.

1.3: Strengthening and streamlining other tourism related institutes

1.3.1: Review of the functioning of State Tourism Development Corporation to clarify its role and to realign its objectives so that it plays a well defined and positive role for tourism development in the state.

1.3.2: Roles and functioning of Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Ecotourism (IHCAE), the Ecotourism Directorate of the Forests, Environment and Wildlife Management Department shall be examined and redefined to bring them in alignment with the Tourism Policy objectives.

1.3.3 Existing community based tourism development committees from across the State shall be listed and duly recognised based on a set of criteria with adequate representation from all the districts. The department shall provide support to these recognised tourism committees and ensure their

participation in tourism development in their respective areas.

1.3.4: The Department shall develop guidelines for recognition of trade associations and the formation of apex committees of such associations in consultation with the tourism trade representatives.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Ensure that Sikkim has the highest level of skills and capacity for quality service delivery through consistent human resource development

Human resource planning and development to cater to the tourism sector is currently inadequate. Currently, there is little coherence between the various trainings being provided in the state and a significant mismatch between the skills that the trainees develop and the requirement of the sector. With 61% of the people currently employed in the tourism sector coming from outside of the state (Sikkim Human Development Report 2014), there is a lot of potential for generating employment for locals, should the right capacities and incentives be created.

2.1 Institutionalizing capacity building in the tourism sector

2.1.1 Comprehensive analysis shall be undertaken by the department of the needs and gaps in terms of existing capacity building programmes. This shall include revisiting the curriculum of the courses on tourism being offered in the state by various institutes and actors to bring uniformity in curriculum content and to make these more relevant. A Human Resource Development Plan for the tourism sector shall be prepared by the department in consultation with concerned capacity building organisations. The plan shall include development of uniform and standardised training modules, and training manuals for all types of tourism service providers based on which certified capacity building programmes shall be regularly carried out covering all districts. All capacity building institutes both in the Government and private sector shall conduct courses in conformity with this HRD Plan.

2.1.2 IHCAE shall play a vibrant role to become the apex institute in HR development for the tourism sector, and courses shall be designed in collaboration with tourism stakeholders, training institutes and NGOs.

2.1.3: HRD Plan will encourage more participation of women in the tourism sector by designing special training courses for them.

2.1.4: Apprenticeship programmes for new trainees shall be created in collaboration with the travel industry as part of the HRD plan.

2.1.5 Sensitization and training of tourism stakeholders to address the issue of bio-piracy and violation of Environmental Laws shall be an integral part of the training modules. IEC materials shall be developed in collaboration with FEWMD for sensitization of tourists.

2.1.6 The warm hospitality of the Sikkimese people has been appreciated by all visitors and is a strong factor for their repeat visits. To ensure that this positive trait is not diluted, it shall be a main component of all training programmes for service providers.

2.2 Developing allied sectors of tourism

2.2.1 Quality local handicrafts and souvenirs are an important part of the tourism industry which can provide substantial livelihood opportunities for local communities. Sikkim has a considerable gap in availability of these products with sub-standard imported products dominating the market. The department shall identify local handicrafts and souvenirs for the tourism market and shall provide support by way of developing product design and skills training. Marketing of these products shall also be supported by the department through souvenir outlets at important tourism destinations. This shall be done in collaboration with the Directorate of Handicrafts and Handlooms.

2.2.2 Sikkim has a wide array of local cuisine that is much sought after by tourists. Local cuisine and value-added food products shall be encouraged through hotels, restaurants and homestays. Documentation of local cuisine shall be undertaken by the department and training on local cuisine preparation shall be a part of capacity building programmes in collaboration with the Institute of Hotel Management. Local value added food products will be encouraged through SHGs as takeaway in souvenir outlets. Use of Sikkim's organic produce shall be encouraged in hotels and restaurants.

OBJECTIVE 3:

Promote Standards and Certification for the Tourism Industry

Tourism standards and certification can help ensure a consistent quality of service, safety of tourists, enhance the reputation of the tourism destination and lead to greater visitor satisfaction. For example “Green” standards and certification schemes aim to make tourism operations more sustainable by providing participating businesses with an action plan for improvement which is linked to market incentives. Currently, Sikkim does not have any certification schemes for tourism related businesses or services.

The Ministry has recently announced the Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) and its indicators. It is now imperative that the tour operators and accommodation industry in the state adopt the STCI through their various associations and also take steps for its implementation. Sustainable tourism criteria also needs to be developed for rural tourism, homestays and other tourism service sectors.

3.1 Establishing and strengthening Trade Acts, Rules and Guidelines

3.1.1: There are already existing Acts and Rules such as Registration of Homestay Establishment Rules (2012), Sikkim Registration of Tourist Trade Act (1998) and the Tourist Trade Rules (2008) to govern the tourism trade in the State. These shall be reviewed by a committee formed for this purpose for inclusion of criteria related to environmental sustainability and for necessary amendments to reflect relevancy and alignment with the National and State Tourism policies. Issues like hotels doing travel agency business which at the moment is unregulated shall be addressed.

3.1.2: Adventure tourism in Sikkim has emerged as a key tourism product and for maintaining standards and ensuring safety in this sector, specific guidelines and rules shall be framed in consultation with relevant trade bodies. Matters such as insurance and rescue shall also be looked into.

3.1.3: Guidelines for health and sanitation for hotels, restaurants, wayside amenities and homestays shall be established, which shall seek to maintain continuous strict standards to ensure safe food for tourists. A regular process for monitoring of this shall be done in coordination with the Department of Health, Urban Local Bodies and PRIs.

3.1.4: A policy of zero tolerance shall be adopted by the Tourism Department in all matters related to malpractices and violation of regulations with strict penalties for defaulters of any regulation.

3.2 Registration and standards of trade service providers

3.2.1: An all inclusive database of tourism service providers is essential for informed tourism decision making and planning. A major challenge has been in the registration of the trade service providers with only a miniscule percentage of trade operators registered with the Tourism Department. Trade operators do not seek registration/ renewal of registration with the Tourism Department once their licenses are obtained/ renewed from the Urban Local Bodies. The department shall seek to ensure 100% registration of all service providers. Existing procedures and guidelines for registration of travel agencies, hotel industry and other tourism service providers shall be reviewed to prepare a clear strategy to fulfill this task, which may include incentives, disincentives, publicity programmes, cooperation with other departments, etc.

3.2.2: To facilitate the registration, provision for registration of trade service providers at the level of local governing bodies such as Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies shall be worked out, with regular data gathering mechanisms from these sources put in place.

3.2.3 The department shall set certain basic minimum standards for tourism service providers to be included in the process of registration through suitable amendments of the Tourism Trade Act and Rules, 1998.

3.3: Professional Certification of all travel trade industry service providers

3.3.1: Certification of every group of tourism service providers such as tourist guides, porters, cooks, drivers, etc. shall be made mandatory through certified training programmes. IHCAE shall be the nodal certification institute and shall design the certification process for existing and new service providers in collaboration with industry representatives, educational/ training institutions, and NGOs. Information regarding registered service providers shall be made readily available to tourists through appropriate media.

3.4 Standards & Certification for Accommodation Sector & Tour Operators

3.4.1 The Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India and Indicators recently announced by the Ministry for accommodation sector and tour operators shall be taken up for ratification by the industry associations in the state. Implementation of the criteria and indicators (for tour operators and the accommodation sector) and the development of criteria and indicators for rural tourism and home-stays, and other sectors will be taken up subsequently along the guidelines/suggestions, support mechanisms and action steps as laid down by the Ministry in this regard.

3.4.2 Green Certification Scheme for the hotel industry shall be promoted and incentivised for reducing their environmental impact and to make them socially responsible. Green building design, sustainable waste management, reduction in use of plastics, energy efficiency, etc. shall be the main components addressed in the green certification scheme, which shall be implemented in collaboration with recognised industry certification agencies.

3.4.3 Bed and breakfast establishments shall be encouraged to increase the bed capacity in the state, which shall function under a set of guidelines as developed by the department or the Ministry of Tourism.

OBJECTIVE 4:

Promote sustainably managed tourism destinations, quality tourism infrastructure and safe transport

Tourism infrastructure is developed with the objective of providing essential services and quality experiences for tourists while enhancing their engagement with local culture and nature. The main components are accommodation facilities, gastronomic facilities, wayside amenities and information / interpretation centers. Key challenges in terms of tourism infrastructure have been in appropriate site selection and effective maintenance and sustainable management of tourism amenities that have been created by the State. Interpretation is a weak area that needs major improvement for enhancing visitor experience. Lack of adequate and standard signage in roads and trekking routes also needs to be looked into. Application of appropriate designs for tourism infrastructure that considers the landscape, disaster risks, local architecture and materials needs to be addressed.

4.1 Sustainable management of tourism destinations, infrastructure and amenities

4.1.1 Investment in new circuits and destinations shall be on the basis of its tourism potential and sustainability. Emerging destinations shall be properly planned with local community participation and with regulations in place to avoid unregulated growth and congestion.

4.1.2 Tourism infrastructure planning shall be need based and follow a system of feasibility and assessments of existing infrastructure. New amenities to be developed shall go through a rigorous process of site selection, sustainability and the overall design shall also be in keeping with local architecture.

4.1.3 All tourist amenities shall be of high quality and located at convenient intervals along all tourist routes with proper plans for sustainability and management of these assets. This shall include adequate parking space. Public private partnerships shall be encouraged with local communities wherever feasible. Well-trained entrepreneurs shall be a key prerequisite for management of any such assets.

4.1.4 Toilet facilities shall be strictly well maintained, with adequate provision of water and frequently inspected for cleanliness.

4.1.5 All infrastructure shall include good practices of sustainable designs such as rain water harvesting, use of renewable energy, efficient waste disposal systems, fuel wood reduction designs for high altitude areas, etc. with retro-fitting of existing structures where necessary.

4.1.6 All tourism infrastructures shall be so designed to ensure adequate access to the facilities for use by persons with disabilities, as per prescribed norms and guidelines.

4.1.7 Management of existing tourism complexes shall be reviewed and comprehensive management plans developed to ensure their viability and sustainability. Criteria for leasing out of department's properties shall be reviewed. Strict action through appropriate forums shall be initiated against defaulting lessees of the department's properties.

4.1.8 An enhanced role for local tourism committees is envisaged who shall monitor and check illegal activities at popular destinations such as littering, bio-piracy, etc.

4.2 Managing trekking infrastructure

4.2.1 Trekking and camping infrastructure (campsites, trekking huts, and trekking trails) shall be adequate, eco-friendly and high-quality. Camping sites shall be identified on the basis of established guidelines. Guidelines shall be developed for construction of trekking trails which shall be kept natural as far as possible. Eco-friendly toilet facilities such as bio toilets should be provided at camp sites.

4.3 Conservation of vernacular architecture and heritage buildings

Sikkim has a rich heritage of vernacular architecture and historical buildings which are fast disappearing due to modern influences. It is imperative to conserve these not only from the point of view of their cultural and historical value but as key tourism attractions.

4.3.1 Documentation of vernacular architecture and heritage buildings such as bungalows of the British era shall be taken up in coordination with the Department of Culture, local architects, PRIs and outside agencies like INTACH/ Archeological Survey of India.

4.3.2 Conservation of vernacular architecture shall be promoted through incentives such as support for restoration and maintenance, promotion as tourist attractions with proper interpretative materials, and a system of visitor fee.

4.4 Information and interpretation for visitors

4.4.1 Tourist facilitation centres at important tourist towns manned by well-trained staff shall be established for information dissemination for tourists. Adequate information brochures and maps shall be made available at these centres at all times.

4.4.2 Interpretation centres shall be set up in the districts to enhance visitor knowledge on local culture and biodiversity that shall also be hubs for the sale of local handicraft products, organic produce, etc.

4.5 Feedback and complaints handling mechanism

4.5.1 A proper feedback and complaints handling system, both online and manual from visitors shall be set up, with mechanisms for quick response and redressal clearly outlined.

4.6 Improving signage

4.6.1 Quality and adequacy of signage has been a major shortcoming in the state. Improved systems of signage and milestones having a uniform code shall be established at adequate intervals, keeping in mind local names, the historical and cultural significance and ecofriendly material.

4.6.2 All major towns and tourist destinations shall have sufficiently large signboard maps of the area displayed at prominent locations

4.6.3 Appropriate signage with ecofriendly materials that provides accurate and relevant information shall be established along all trekking trails. International sign codes shall be referred to for this purpose.

4.7 Addressing environmental and sustainability concerns

Overcrowding of popular nature based destinations and tourist hubs is a major cause of concern ecologically as well as from the perspective of visitor experience and welfare of local communities. Present tourism trends indicate a doubling of tourism footfalls by 2020 which shall put tremendous pressure on existing infrastructure and local natural resources. Many of Sikkim's tourist destinations are around important wetlands such as Khecheopalri, Gurudongmar and Tsomgo, and high altitude areas which are pristine and of ecological significance.

4.7.1 For reducing pressure on overcrowded tourist hubs, tourist traffic shall be diverted to new or lesser frequented destinations and rural areas, and appropriate tourism infrastructure and products shall be developed for these places.

4.7.2 For sites of ecological importance, carrying capacity analysis shall be undertaken to arrive at optimum number of footfalls for those areas and measures put in place to confirm to the prescribed carrying capacity.

4.7.3 To reduce air pollution, tourist buses with optimum capacities shall be introduced for popular tourist circuits to reduce the number of vehicles along with promotion of vehicles running on cleaner fuels.

4.8 Sustainable waste management in tourism destinations

High generation of solid waste at tourist sites is a critical issue that is evident across the state and one that needs much attention, through coordination with relevant departments and local bodies. For solid waste management, there have been a set of rules that have recently been introduced by the Central Government which shall be relevant in the tourism sector such as The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, and The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.

4.8.1 Convergence with the Swacch Bharat Mission of the Government shall be sought for promoting Sikkim as a Zero Waste destination, and following the norms prescribed under the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 and The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.

4.8.2 Regular awareness generation on waste management shall be conducted for tourism stakeholders and tourists through trainings and appropriate signage. Strict penalties shall be imposed on those found polluting tourism sites.

4.8.3 Waste and sewage management systems shall be designed for all popular tourist sites with a focus on collection, segregation, and linking with local scrap dealers. Adequate infrastructure support for dustbins, resource recovery centers, collection vehicles and manpower, etc. shall be arranged in convergence with other departments.

4.8.4 For reduction of waste being generated, there shall be a complete ban on disposable non-biodegradable items used for serving food, such as plastic/styrofoam cups, spoons and plates etc. across the state. Eco-friendly alternatives shall be encouraged. To reduce the use of packaged drinking water, which is a major source of waste, provision for safe drinking water through water refilling points in shops and public areas shall be arranged at all tourism destinations.

4.8.5 Reusable garbage bags shall be made mandatory for all tourist vehicles, along with designated points for disposal of their contents.

4.8.6 Efficient waste management of the hotel industry shall be given priority. Schemes shall be worked out for separate collection of segregated waste from hotels which could be linked to recycling streams, scrap dealers and farms in collaboration with Urban Local Bodies.

4.8.7 There shall be a complete ban on burning of waste at all tourist destinations and tourist infrastructures.

4.9 Tourism transport sector

In the tourism industry for Sikkim, the transport sector is most critical as tourists spend maximum time traveling between destinations. Hence the quality of transport services and the role of the vehicle drivers are very important. The main issues in this sector are that of unregulated pricing during tourist seasons, overcrowding leading to vehicular pollution in some key areas, inappropriate behavior of drivers towards tourists, and monitoring and maintaining safety and driving standards.

4.9.1 Prepaid taxi services and online booking systems for popular destinations for hiring taxis shall be introduced.

4.9.2 Continuous certification process for tourist drivers shall be made mandatory, with phase-wise training of drivers conducted through capacity building institutes to enhance their capacities. Capable drivers also to be trained as tourist guides to enable them to provide enhanced services.

4.9.3 To facilitate movement of larger groups of tourists, local entrepreneurs shall be provided licenses to operate tourist buses on major tourist circuits.

4.9.4 The department in consultation with trade bodies and the Traffic Police shall work out a convenient system for pick up and drop of tourists within town and city limits.

4.10 Role of Tourist Police

4.10.1 Role of Tourist Police shall be strengthened. During peak tourist seasons, the Tourist Police services shall be engaged to curb malpractices of overcharging, as well as checking on safety aspects of drivers, such as driving under influence, over speeding, etc.

OBJECTIVE 5:

Promote high value and high quality tourism products

Current capacities in terms of hotel rooms and transport vehicles are already stretched in the urban centres as observed during peak tourist seasons. The main tourist hubs of the state such as Gangtok, Pelling, Ravangla, receive the highest number of visitors leading to overcrowding in these areas with negative impacts on local resources and environment. Therefore, future growth in tourism needs to be broad based to the villages and towards activities that shall reduce the pressure of footfalls in the main tourist circuits while ensuring conservation of the environment and culture. This shall be achieved through development of high value nature based adventure tourism, rural tourism, MICE based tourism, religious tourism and health and wellness tourism.

5.1 Promote high quality adventure tourism products

Adventure tourism has seen an increasing demand among visitors, and there is potential for Sikkim to emerge as leading adventure tourism destination. This is a sector that assures high value returns from low impact, nature-based tourism. Key products that shall be highlighted are trekking, mountaineering, paragliding, mountain biking, rafting, while various new activities that can be promoted in the future such as zip-lining, skiing, kayaking, bungee jumping, car rallies and river-boarding, etc. shall also be explored. Strong measures shall be ensured to sustain high quality of services in the adventure tourism sector which includes equipment, porters, cooks, pack animals and guides.

5.1.1 Survey and revaluation of all existing adventure sports routes, trails and areas and infrastructure thereof and identification of potential new ones shall be undertaken by the Department in collaboration with experts and experienced agencies. This shall include identification of trans-boundary trails and identification of new peaks for mountaineering.

5.1.2 For existing areas, plans shall be prepared for upgrading infrastructure and facilities, conveniences, signage and quality of routes wherever necessary to bring at par with the best in the country based on a uniform set of guidelines that shall include the avoidance of use of concrete materials, and encourage maximum use of natural trails and local materials.

5.1.3 Preparation of new and updated overall professionally prepared maps and information material for all of Sikkim and detailed maps of individual areas and routes, and making these available for dissemination.

5.1.4 A comprehensive strategy shall be developed to promote adventure tourism sector at both national and international forums with engagement of local stakeholders that includes holding of biking / trekking / paragliding expeditions/competitions, and rallies and participation in national/international tourism fairs and events.

5.1.5 All adventure related activities shall function only under strict technical guidelines drafted and approved with the help of technical experts of the respective fields. Existing guidelines shall be reviewed for all adventure activities and immediate steps for notifying guidelines for those activities operating without them shall be taken.

5.1.6 Certification of all adventure tourism stakeholders and their training shall be organised with IHCAE and recognized agencies playing a central role. Modalities of certification process shall be worked out in conjunction with trade bodies and institutions.

5.1.7 A sustainable high altitude, quick response rescue team system in collaboration with the industry, military and paramilitary forces and the STDC shall be established.

5.1.8 Better communication facilities (such as through use of SAT phones / radio-amateur radio (WLL) with dedicated channel and tower) which are a prerequisite for the adventure sector and for ensuring safety/rescue of the tourists in collaboration with concerned departments shall be facilitated.

5.1.9 Incentives to local entrepreneurs in the form of infrastructure support, subsidy for import of quality equipment, marketing and training facilities, etc. shall be provided in a timely manner.

5.1.10 Together with the industry associations, standardization of adventure related packages and rates, elimination of unhealthy competition, review of rates for guides and service providers and group insurance for service providers and tourists shall be undertaken.

5.2 Promote nature and culture based village tourism products

5.2.1 Tourism based on rural homestays that showcase Sikkim's cultural heritage has emerged as a much sought after experience. However, quality homestay destinations are limited in number. A holistic approach to promotion of village tourism with homestays as the nucleus shall be developed with supporting cultural and nature based activities such as birding and butterfly watching, organic farming tours, etc. Existing homestays and those developed by the Tourism Department shall be supported through capacity building, financial and market support.

5.2.2 All new homestay infrastructure created by the Tourism Department shall be on the basis of co financing by the beneficiaries. Financial support in the form of facilitated finance through banks and capital and interest subsidy shall also be made available to local entrepreneurs. Leasing out of Government funded homestays shall not be allowed.

5.2.3 Capacity building and training for a wide range of tourism stakeholders (homestay operators/ village guides and cultural interpreters/ cooks /porters/ community based organizations promoting tourism) using standard training modules shall be undertaken. Gender and marginalized sectors shall be targeted and included.

5.2.4 Documentation and developing handbooks / brochures/ information material on ethnic foods and cuisine, festivals, traditional medicines, folktales, traditional dresses, handicrafts, etc. shall be undertaken in collaboration with universities, colleges, Department of Cultural Affairs and Heritage and research institutions. Traditional knowledge and resource persons in these areas shall be identified and included to utilise their knowledge and skills.

5.2.5 Training for production of local handicrafts items shall be promoted in all homestay villages and existing ethnic handicrafts production shall be strongly encouraged. Outlets shall be made in all homestay destinations, districts and key tourism centres for sale of handicrafts items.

5.2.6 Measures shall be taken to conserve vernacular architecture by incorporating traditional designs in all new homestays constructed by the Government. Incentives for conservation of vernacular architecture in the form of maintenance support, architectural advice and tourist visitor fees shall be employed.

5.2.7 Priority rural tourism clusters and circuits shall be developed and promoted based on criteria of unique natural and cultural attributes and feasibility. Important potential areas for promotion of nature tourism (birding, butterfly, biodiversity) shall be identified in collaboration with the FEWMD, universities, colleges and research institutions and with involvement of tourism stakeholders, tourism development committees, NGOs, etc.

5.2.8 A comprehensive strategy for promotion of nature based tourism shall be prepared that shall include promotion of annual meets at national and international level related to nature based activities (birding/ butterflies/ flora / fauna) to attract interested visitors, preparing packages and marketing bird, butterfly and other nature tours with the help of local travel agents and guides, along with a calendar list of festival events with the listing of key villages and towns where these can be witnessed.

5.2.9 Linking of the tourism sector to the organic mission of the State Government shall be actively sought in coordination with the relevant departments. These linkages shall be brought about by facilitating a steady market supply for the organic produce to the hotel and restaurant industry, as well as in homestays. Organic produce shall also be promoted as takeaways for tourists.

5.2.10 The existing Sikkim Homestay Establishment Rules shall be reviewed by bringing better clarity and further strengthen it by including criteria for beneficiary selection.

5.3 Promote MICE tourism that is integrated with adventure and village tourism

5.3.1 Sikkim is emerging as a destination for MICE tourism. This trend can be leveraged to draw these visitors to selected rural tourism sites. These sites shall be supported by development of low impact carefully designed conference facilities with accommodation provided through homestays.

5.3.2 Formation of State Level MICE bureau as mandated by the National Tourism Policy for promotion of MICE tourism shall be given a priority. This body shall regulate and set standards and guidelines for operation of MICE tourism service providers as well as provide linkages for marketing of MICE tourism in collaboration with national level MICE bureaus.

5.4 Promote Religion based tourism

5.4.1 Develop specific packages in consultation with experts of this sector including the Ecclesiastical Department and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology that integrates monastic tours, meditation and Buddhist learning.

5.4.2 Connect the various monasteries in the state for conducting religions tours.

5.4.3 Build capacities of locals to become trained guides through experts to provide good and meaningful interpretation.

5.4.4 Upgrade facilities for housing pilgrims during festivals with linkages established with monasteries and homestays for housing the religious tourist.

5.4.5 Establish interpretation centres supported by competent trained staff around the main monasteries in coordination with the relevant departments such as the Ecclesiastical Department and the monastic bodies.

5.4.6 Integrate Sikkim's religious tourism circuit with existing Buddhist circuits in the region.

5.4.7 Leverage the recently launched Manasarovar pilgrimage to provide opportunities to local travel agents for conduct of the tours.

5.5 Promote Health and Wellness Tourism

Sikkim's pollution free, cool mountain air, salubrious climate, lush greenery and beautiful mountain landscapes supported by a peaceful atmosphere and friendly people makes it an ideal destination for the rejuvenation of mind, body and soul. Thus the state is rightly positioned to promote high value health and wellness tourism. This shall be done in consonance with the draft National Tourism Policy.

5.5.1 Documentation of traditional healing and health rejuvenating practices such as under the Tibetan, Lepcha, Limbu and other ethnic groups medicine systems shall be undertaken.

5.5.2 Specific training opportunities shall be organised for creating a local talent pool of practitioners in both local traditional systems as well as in, spa, yoga, Ayurveda and other systems.

5.5.3 Products and processes related to this sector shall be standardized with involvement of relevant stakeholders and experts.

5.5.4 Suitable infrastructure required for promotion of this sector such as meditation centers, traditional healing clinics, spas, yogasthans, *Ekanta Vaas* and herbal medical centers, etc. shall be developed while also reaching out for adequate marketing of the products.

OBJECTIVE 6:

Ensure strategic and sustained marketing and publicity

Lonely Planet's recognition for Sikkim as the top region to visit in the year 2014 and the New York Times' 52 destinations to visit was helpful in catapulting the state into the international scene. The opening of Mansarovar Yatra through the Nathula Pass in East Sikkim and the declaration of Khangchendzonga National Park as a World Heritage Site has also expanded possibilities for attracting more tourists. Other factors which will contribute to increased flow of tourists to Sikkim are widening of the NH10 to Sikkim linked with the completion of North- South- East - West highway corridor project and Sikkim being linked by air with the commissioning of the airport in Pakyong and by rail link. It is also observed the impact of global warming is resulting in increased flows of tourists from the hot plains to the mountain areas of India.

Sikkim has the potential to see a substantial increase in tourist inflows, which is targeted to be around 20-25 Lakhs by 2020. However given the environmental impacts of mass tourism, marketing efforts for the future shall be focused at attracting high value low impact tourism.

Marketing and publicity efforts of Sikkim both at national and international levels have been very low key. This situation needs to be changed with focused attention on marketing high value products to up market clients in targeted domestic and foreign markets.

6.1 Market research

6.1.1 Market research shall be consistently undertaken to understand visitor profiles and preferences, visitor spending, market trends, focus source markets etc with a view to developing appropriate marketing strategies. This shall be done by the Marketing Cell of the Department in collaboration with leading educational institutions, research scholars and agencies, trade bodies and experts in the field of tourism.

6.2 Arranging resource for marketing and promotion

6.2.1 One of the major constraints in tourism marketing for Sikkim has been the lack of adequate funds and a sustained and robust marketing strategy for the state. Adequate and sustained funding for marketing and promotion of Sikkim shall be arranged both through Government sources, including the Market Research Division of MoT and private sector participation. Besides the regular schemes of the Central Government, the department shall explore innovative means to generate the necessary funds for marketing and promotion.

6.3 Brand equity for Sikkim

6.3.1 Professional agencies shall be engaged for the creation of strong brand equity for Sikkim tourism in consonance with the vision of this policy and for the development of a comprehensive long term marketing plan. This shall be done in consultation with trade bodies and on the basis of reliable data and research studies that shall take into account past trends and future opening markets. Target markets in terms of states, countries, age groups, gender and occupation shall be clearly identified through these studies.

6.3.2 A professionally designed and sustained long term marketing campaign supported by high quality publicity materials and strategies such as the use of a Brand Ambassador, Mr A R Rahman and a wide media presence shall be prepared and executed.

6.4 Strong online marketing strategies and use of social media

6.4.1 The marketing plan shall maximise use of information technology to ensure that Sikkim has a strong online presence through websites, portals, mobile applications and social media with well researched and up to date information.

6.5 Participation at Travel and Tourism Marts

6.5.1 There shall be strong participation of Sikkim in national and international travel and tourism trade marts with a clear strategy and long term marketing plan. Adequate representation of local trade bodies shall be encouraged through adequate financial and other support.

6.6 Promoting Sikkim as an all season destination

6.6.1 Festivals, events and competitions shall be held all year round to highlight and promote Sikkim's unique tourism products. A calendar of such items shall be drawn up a year in advance and promoted extensively through trade bodies, government agencies websites and various other media.

6.6.2 In alignment with the national policy of SWADESH Darshan, opportunities for local people of Sikkim to travel to rural areas of the state shall be developed.

OBJECTIVE 7:

Promote enabling environment for tourism stakeholders

For the tourism sector to establish itself as a main driver of the State's economy, tourism development should ensure maximization of local employment and the creation of an enabling environment for investment by local tourism stakeholders. This will also result in benefits from the industry circulating within the state.

7.1 Supporting local tourism entrepreneurs

7.1.1 Institutional financing on soft terms for encouraging local entrepreneurs to take part in tourism ventures shall be arranged.

7.1.2 Local entrepreneurs shall be supported through provision of incentives for self - run hotels and restaurants, as well as hotels that employ locals. Incentives such as support in marketing through Sikkim Tourism website, travel support for participating in tourism marts and fairs, rebate in electricity tariff, recognition through awards and by making Centrally Sponsored Schemes for marketing available for local entrepreneurs only.

7.1.3 Current incentive schemes such as that of providing licenses to local youths for operating luxury taxis shall be examined for any loopholes and misuse, and the norms strengthened or changed accordingly to ensure only genuine and deserving locals are benefited.

7.2 Simplified permit regimes and adopting single window system

7.2.1 Introduction of single window systems for streamlining and simplifying processes of obtaining or renewing licenses related to the tourism sector.

7.2.2 A simplified and streamlined process of permits for hassle-free experience for visitors entering restricted areas and protected areas, with efforts to increase awareness about Sikkim's regulations and requirements shall be put in place. Liaisoning with the Central Government to free up more areas from the permit regime shall also be a priority.

7.3 Public Private Partnerships

7.3.1 Public Private Partnerships for tourism ventures shall be encouraged through a transparent regulatory framework to ensure sustainability. A policy in this regard shall be framed by the department.

OBJECTIVE 8:

Facilitate inter-sectoral coordination and convergence

The Tourism industry is a multidisciplinary sector relying on a large number of stakeholders with each having a significant role to play. The implementation of the Tourism Policy shall require many action points that will go beyond the jurisdiction and functioning of the Tourism Department. Addressing issues of core infrastructure such as roads, water supply, electricity, telecommunications are of utmost significance for ensuring quality services to visitors. Moreover, a large part of tourism occurs within areas that are under the jurisdiction of the Forests, Environment and Wildlife Management Department, which also needs due consideration. The Police Department, the Transport Sector, Paramilitary forces and the Indian Army are also key stakeholders as the State has strict permit regimes that need to be adhered to. Coordination and convergence with these allied departments and sectors shall therefore be critical for the policy to be implemented in true spirit.

8.1 Constitution of Inter Departmental Coordination Committee

8.1.1 In alignment with the draft National Tourism Policy (2015), constitute an Inter- Departmental Coordination Committee (IDCC) to address issues of convergence and synergy. This shall be chaired by the Chief Secretary with the Secretary Tourism being the Member Secretary. Guidelines and rules shall be laid down by the IDCC for the proper functioning of the committee.

8.1.2 The IDCC shall lay down specific guidelines that shall ensure that all those activities and interventions of other departments that impact tourism or are related to tourism shall have the prior approval/ informed consent of the Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation or are done in consultation

with the Department. Like wise, the Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation shall inform relevant departments of any issues, policies, interventions that may impact the work of these departments.

8.2 Core infrastructure support

8.2.1 Strategies for providing special attention to popular tourist circuits and destinations in terms of core infrastructure support from the allied sectors shall be developed in collaboration with the line departments.

8.3 Tourism in protected areas

8.3.1 Tourism development within forest limits and protected areas shall be in coordination with the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department in consonance with the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy, 2011 and the WPA and FCA . Zoning of ecotourism areas in the state in collaboration with the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department and in alignment with the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy. High tourism impact zones in the state shall be identified for ensuring regulation on numbers of vehicles and visitors based on a principle of carrying capacity.

8.4 Safety and security

8.4.1 A comprehensive disaster management plan for relief and rescue of tourists shall be put in place in collaboration with State Disaster Management Authority, Police Department, travel bodies, PRIs and NGOs.

8.4.2 The department shall coordinate with Army for support in relief and rescue and facilitating access to restricted areas for tourists.

8.5 Promoting organic and religious tourism

8.5.1 Linking of the tourism sector to the organic mission of the State Government shall lead to benefits for both sectors. These linkages shall be brought about by facilitating a steady market supply for the organic produce to the hotel and restaurant industry, as well as in homestays. Organic produce shall also be promoted as takeaways for tourists.

8.5.2 For promotion of religious tourism, department shall seek coordination with the Ecclesiastical Department in developing monastic tours, and interpretation of the religious history of the state.

8.6 Facilitating tourist permits

8.6.1 The department shall coordinate with the Police Department for addressing issues of permits, facilitating the processes related to the permit regime and to obtain information on tourist arrivals.

8.7 Waste management in tourism areas

8.7.1 For waste management in tourism areas, convergence with the UDH/RMD departments and NGOs and consonance with the Swachh Bharat Programme shall be sought.

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