

The Himalaya—A Greatest Architectural Heritage and Tourism Destination of Earth World

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ABSTRACT

Mountains cover around 27% of the Earth's land surface and contribute to the sustenance and well-being of 720 million people living in the mountains and billions more living downstream. In other way, we can say that over half the human population depends on mountains for water, food, and clean energy. The Himalayan region has a very important divine meaning for Hindus as a "sacred space". For Hindus, it is not just an assemblage of natural features or beautiful landscapes, but a representation of the divine. Apart from pilgrimage tourism, "modern" tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) region, which is represented by mass tourism, largely limited to sightseeing and visiting major tourism hubs, is also putting severe stress on the ecology and ecosystem services of the Himalaya as well as on local social structures. This way of tourism needs ever-growing road networks, hotels, related infrastructure, and institutional capacities, and puts huge demands on the water and natural resources of this fragile region. Over the years, mountain climbing, trekking, and nature-based tourism in the IHR have been gaining popularity. These round-the-year activities need to be encouraged and promoted dependably. While tourism is one of the chief development sectors for the Himalaya and can be the engine that drives future development in the region, this will only be possible if it is established and implemented the following principles of sustainability. This report lays out an action-oriented path for the expansion of sustainable tourism in the Himalaya, which can augment economic and livelihood opportunities while maintaining the ecology and cultural values of the region.

Keywords: Himalaya, heritage, infrastructure, mountain, resources, sustainable, tourism

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INTRODUCTION

India has the most share of the Himalaya. Himalaya is an Indian (Hindi) word, 'Himaalaya', which means "a gathering of ice" or 'abode of snow'.

The Himalaya means, *hima* (snow) + *ālaya* (house). It is a mountain range in South Asia separating the plains of the Indian subcontinent from the Tibetan Plateau.

A mountain system of South-Central Asia spreading about 2400 km. The Himalaya include 9 of the world's 10

highest peaks, with Mount Everest. So, the Himalaya is the world's youngest and the highest mountain range home to all 14 peaks including India. A total of five countries part Himalaya: Bhutan, Pakistan, China, Nepal and India [1].

After Antarctica and Arctic, the Himalayan range is the home to third major deposit of snow and ice on this planet.

The Himalayan region has helped develop the cultures of South Asia and many

Himalayan peaks. India gets the highest share of the Himalaya. So, it is India that has the major share of the mighty Himalayas.

The Great Himalaya is the world's highest mountain range and it is the home to planet's highest mountain peaks. The major Himalayan mountain peaks are in the Karakoram ranges, Garhwal Himalaya, and Kanchenjunga. The uppermost Himalayan mountain peaks in India are Kanchenjunga, Nanda Devi, and Kamet. Most of the peaks are positioned in the Uttarakhand state of India [2].

Yet mountains are under danger from climate change, land degradation, overexploitation, and natural disasters, with potentially far-reaching and devastating consequences, both for mountain communities and downstream populations. The challenge is to identify new and sustainable opportunities that can bring benefits to both highland and lowland communities and help to eliminate poverty without contributing to the degradation of fragile mountain ecosystems. With a similar set of threats in the IHR and its adjoining landscapes, existing non-climatic issues are becoming complex as multi-faceted problems such as human wildlife conflicts, water insecurity due to drying of natural springs, land degradation and resultant socio-demographic changes (out-migration), and environmental problems such as solid waste and air pollution are pertinent (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Indian Himalayan region (IHR).

As climate change has affected the Himalayan region, warning indications in the form of shrinking glaciers, increasing temperatures, water scarcity, changing monsoonal patterns, and frequency of severe disasters are obvious. The growing effect of the above-stated problems is leading to ecological and cultural degradation as the “Natural and Sacred Legacy” of the IHR is fast deteriorating. The conservation of the ecological health of the IHR is imperative [3].

It needs an hour to conserve and secure the Himalaya. It's our richest heritage and beautiful cum unique entity of earth. It is the world's best tourism destination, so save it for future for creation of all human living beings.

TOURISM SECTOR TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS

As a first step to understand the extent of tourism intensity in the IHR, data on arrival of visitors were studied. The total share of India in international tourist arrivals in 2015 was only 0.68% of world arrivals. In 2016, 8.89 million foreign tourists visited India. Though not many of these tourists visit IHR as none of the 11 states of IHR figured among the top states in India visited by foreigners.

In 2015, 1432 million (P) domestic tourists had visited as compared to 1290.12 million in 2014, with a growth rate of 11.6 % (India Tourism Statistics, 2015). In terms of the number of domestic tourist visits, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka are the top five destination states, accounting for 61.3 % of total tourist visits in 2016. It is important to note here that the human population of IHR is approximately 60 million, so the much higher floating population and overall impacts on IHR are expected to be high and not fully understood. Hence we can say that tourism in IHR has become one of the fastest growing sectors in terms of economic activity and industry transects. According

to the survey of World Travel and Tourism Council in 2016, tourism sector in India paid 9.6% of GDP creating 40.343 million jobs and 9.3% of total employment. Tourism in the IHR has shown a persistent upward trend over many decades despite several natural disasters and political unrest. Adventure, pilgrimage, spirituality, summer and winter delights have become the predominant attractions for tourists to visit Himalayan destinations [4].

ENABLING AND DISABLING TRENDS DUE TO TOURISM

Financial aspects of investments made by states in the tourism sector—with an ever-increasing number of tourist arrivals—become a very significant parameter in assessing whether increasing demand is being met by the supply side. Thus, revenue receipts in Uttarakhand—which tops as IHR top earner—are worth approximately. However, what is substantial is the percentage of the total state spending that each state is ploughing back into the development of the tourism sector. Accordingly, as a generic statement, it is safe to say that states are hardly investing in tourism despite the potential and earnings from the sector. West Bengal, which had the highest tourist arrival numbers, invests a mere 0.0001% of the total state expenditure on promoting tourism. Uttarakhand, which positions second in tourist arrival, invests miserly 0.15% in this sector. To some extent, such low investments can be clarified by the fiscal deficits IHR states are trying to address. Both Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal have whopping economic deficits of over Rs.100 billion. With both central government funds flowing into states in trickles, and IHR states more interested in generating revenue than spending on the promotion and sustenance of tourism, it is going to be very inspiring to manage the 240 million tourists by 2025 without seriously disturbing the carrying capacity of IHR [5].

ANALYSIS OF SUPPORTING POLICIES AND PLANS

Sustainable tourism has been widely debated in sustainable development discourse as a panacea to mass tourism and environmental degradation. Different forms of tourism around the world have evolved on the principles of sustainable tourism such as ecotourism, nature tourism, green tourism, and rural tourism, among others. Based on it, countries around the world have sought to reform existing policies and plans and analyze potential gaps to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes. In the IHR, many states have been making efforts to bring sustainable tourism into the mainstream development agenda through policies but are unable to implement them fully. This research has tried to analyze policies in the IHR associated with sustainable tourism. Policies and plans that were analyzed include tourism policy, tourism plan, ecotourism policy, forest policy, and industrial policy. A total of 12 IHR states were considered for this purpose: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal. It is interesting to note that almost all IHR states have industrial policy and tourism plans. However, forest policy and ecotourism policy are restricted to some key states and usually those that figure among well-developed states such as Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Jammu and Kashmir. To understand the extent to which these 12 Himalayan states can address sustainable tourism practices and key features of development related to tourism (see earlier analysis), 12 core areas of current policies and plans were assessed. These areas of assessment are: (1) pollution control (2) visitor control (3) tourist traffic management (4) disaster management (5) natural resource and ecology management (6) waste management (7) crisis management (8)

energy (9) tourism enterprise development governance (10) quality standard/control mechanism (11) gender, and (12) marketing and branding.

The above assessment is adapted from a draft UNESCO checklist for Sustainable Tourism Strategy that aims to preserve pristine natural environments that form the basis of tourism and ensure that these assets are protected and remain healthy [6].

RECOMMENDED SUSTAINABILITY NEEDS IN IHR

The potential and forecasted footprint of both international and domestic tourists in the IHR can be estimated. Even if a set of state-of-the-art policies and plans are in place, the magnitude of challenges including that of climate change forecasts described earlier raises questions about whether the aims of such strategic and action-oriented documents will be met. In the Indian context, it is expected that the IHR will receive 240 million tourists by 2025. The dire need of implementing sustainable tourism must also emerge from the fact the Indian Himalaya now has a population of 60 million. With India sharing borders through six countries, transboundary tourism circuits are bound to experience much more severe tourist traffic. Further, Pulan County in the Tibet Autonomous Region (China) is envisaging an International Tourism Cooperation Zone, including for Kailash Sacred Landscape, and China is also rolling out the “Belt and Road Initiative”. Considering the general concept of sustainability, we need to embrace two integrated elements of the sustainability of tourism. The ability of tourism to continue as a key development activity in the region, ensuring that the enabling conditions to unfold its employment, revenue, and GDSP potential are right; and the ability of IHR communities and the environment to absorb and equitably benefit from the impacts of tourism in a sustainable way. Hence, recommendations

need to be articulated in alignment with economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts that need to be achieved [7]. Even if some of the above policy/strategic documents/ plans are good vision documents, or have well-formulated intentions and actions lined up, given the current scenario in IHR, it is unlikely that most of these will be implemented. This assumption is already made at this stage and hence some of the recommendations made below may be well known to mountain states, and while a few actions may have been initiated. These need to be mentioned so that upscaling and outscaling best practice learning and evidences can be pursued. For ensuring that actions under each sustainable tourism indicator/aim are harmonized and consolidated, so that these are not repetitive; some of these have been merged and presented accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Based on the key principles outlined for sustainable tourism by World Travel and Tourism Council, numerous actions have been proposed and the implementation of actions could contribute to sustainable tourism in the IHR. Overall, this requires improved access to existing national and state funding streams so that actions are implemented in a timely manner. It is important that revenues made from tourism are ploughed back in the development of this sector and a ceiling can be fixed by each state based on key recommended actions. It is important that enabling conditions are created for the business sector to invest in conservation and in inclusive tourism business with local stakeholders as key partners. Funding must be ensured to develop and implement standard sustainable tourism norms. Identification and development of new activities and destinations, and throughout-the-year pursuits like rural/heritage tourism and farm tourism, have the potential to enhance associated livelihoods and reverse migration. Also, projects in the hills and mountains take time to implement, due to

which the allocated budget is not utilized within stipulated time and hence lapses. IHR states need more time for implementation *vis-à-vis* states in the plains. The existing institutional and governance landscape in IHR needs to be updated and oriented to the possibilities for developing IHR in the long term. As an outcome of this comprehensive analysis, based on secondary data from public domain of Government of India and the IHR states, we have added interpretations based on regular observations made by compilers of this report in IHR. There is a clear indication that, at policy and practice levels, all mountain states are very much on the spot when it comes to documenting, understanding, and planning for sustainable tourism. There are key best practices in each state and especially in some leading mountain states such as Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttarakhand. Similarly, there are ongoing public and private initiatives and schemes that have lots of potential for being upscaled and outscaled. However, in real terms, things on the ground are of great concern. This is evident from the strong directives that NGT has sent to mountain states (e.g. Himachal Pradesh on Jammu and Kashmir on Vaishno Devi, Rohtang Pass). Tourist destinations in IHR are reporting disturbing trends of drug abuse amongst youth, prostitution, exploitation of labor, and uncontrolled land sales despite states having put stringent norms for outsiders. All these issues are related to mass tourism/pilgrimage that is grossly harming IHR. This also underlines that our country is marketing the natural and cultural glory of the Himalayas at a very low premium and allowing development in IHR as we do for the plains of India. If the list of actions suggested here are incorporated into the current tourism development plans and implemented, there is a likelihood that they will contribute to conservation and development of IHR landscapes and improve the well-being of

people. The implementation strategy should be IHR state specific and must be based on business plans that clearly relate to eco-labelling parameters, investment plans, and monitoring and evaluation. The integrated implementation of the above business plans and the performance on composite sustainability indicators could then be used to assess the performance of IHR states and incentivize these accordingly. These business plans must also serve as the basis for outscaling and upscaling the learning harnessed from the best practices. Based on the analysis and policy and practice gaps, in the next five years, we must also assess the opportunities and respond to challenges that are emerging due to economic growth-related investments and partnerships planned or ongoing in the neighborhood of six border countries. Lastly, it is crucial that climate change mitigation and adaptation actions are reflected in state and national policies and strategic plans and investments for sustainable tourism in the IHR.

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