

SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM IN LADAKH

Review, Recommendations & Action Agenda



Administration of
Union Territory of Ladakh
Leh, Ladakh



G.B. Pant National Institute of
Himalayan Environment (NIHE)
(An Autonomous Institute of Ministry of Environment,
Forest & Climate Change, Govt. of India)
Kosi-Katarmal, Almora.



Sustainability of Tourism in Ladakh

Review, Recommendations & Action Agenda

*[Document based on the session 'Sustainability of Tourism'
under 'Carbon Neutral Ladakh - a New Beginning' 2020]*

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सत्यमेव जयते

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALTOA	All Ladakh Tour Operator Association
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
ASL	Above Sea Level
EPI	Environmental Performance Indicator
ESOI	Eco Tourism Society of India
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Green House Gases
GoI	Government of India
IBM	Incentive Based Mechanisms
IHR	Indian Himalayan Region
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt of India
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NGT	National Green Tribunal
NIHE	National Institute of Himalayan Environment
NITI	National Institution for Transforming India
PES	Payments for Environmental Services
PPP	Public Private Partnership
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STCI	Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization (UN Agency)
UT	Union Territory
w.r.t.	with reference to

Radha Krishna Mathur

राधा कृष्ण माथुर



Lt. Governor

उपराज्यपाल

Union Territory of Ladakh

केन्द्र शासित प्रदेश लद्दाख

FOREWORD



Tourism in high altitude Himalayan region like Ladakh hinges on safeguarding the pristine environment and heritage. Efforts need to be made to protect the fragile ecosystem of Ladakh. While, tourism has boosted economy and generated employment for the locals, sustainable practices need to be encouraged to strike a balance between development and environment.

In the above context, it is a matter of great satisfaction that Ladakh UT Administration and G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment joined hands to organise a summit on “Carbon Neutral Ladakh- A New Beginning” at Leh from 2nd to 5th March 2020. The summit, among others, extensively deliberated on possibilities of making Ladakh a coveted destination for sustainable tourism. Panel presentations during a dedicated session on “Sustainability of Tourism” and the follow-up focus group discussions have yielded this action paper. This document not only includes summit recommendations for sustainable tourism in Ladakh, but also elaborates actions, responsibilities and timelines. Therefore, this document can guide Ladakh UT Administration to take forward the agenda of ‘Carbon Neutral Ladakh’ through promotion of sustainable tourism by encouraging suitable practices.

I congratulate the Ladakh UT Administration and G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment for successfully organizing this impactful summit. I’m sure this is a new beginning in engaging domain experts for drawing action plan for practices and policy framing of a sustainable tourism in Ladakh. The contributors to this document deserve appreciation for their sincere efforts to push Ladakh towards a Carbon-Neutral destination with broader perspective of achieving SDG Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and Goal 13: Climate Action for UT Ladakh in near future.

I hope this proves to be useful for all planners and practitioners.

July 2020

(RK Mathur)

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PREFACE



The promulgation of 'Carbon Neutral Ladakh' by India's Prime Minister, has clearly underlined the need for sustainability in various spheres of development in this newly carved Union Territory(UT). This calls for a strong foundation of the UT framework through holistic planning leading to sustainable development while achieving carbon neutrality. A comprehensive mapping and analysis of opportunities and challenges is essential to outline the way forward. In this context, among various opportunities, development of sustainable tourism remains on top of the agenda.

Among various tourism destinations within the Indian Himalaya, Ladakh is emerging at a fast pace. Ever since it's opening for tourists in 1974, Ladakh has experienced unprecedented increase in number of domestic and foreign tourists. While this growth in tourism has undoubtedly contributed to local economy, it has raised concerns on sustainability of unique ecological systems and cultural heritage of this landscape. Given the elements of uniqueness and sensitivity of Ladakh's landscape, the focus of tourism development could be on the quality of the tourism, and equity in tourism income across the multiple service providers, including the local communities. UT status provides scope for designing and using appropriate set of policies, strategies, and actions. It also gives an opportunity to attract adequate investments for judicious growth of this sector. Tourism infrastructure in the landscape needs to follow a planned and regulated trajectory so that it is aligned with the natural and geo-morphological features of Ladakh and it's cultures. Therefore, engagement of experts from diverse sectors for integrated planning and policies to promote sustainable tourism in Ladakh is need of the hour.

The booklet 'Sustainability of Tourism in Ladakh', an outcomes of the expert deliberations during 'Carbon Neutral Ladakh- a New Beginning' summit at Leh held during 2-5 March 2020, provides comprehensive review, recommendations and action agenda. I am sure, this knowledge product will prove handy for diverse stakeholders, especially the Ladakh UT Administration, associated with promotion of Sustainable Tourism.

Ladakh UT Administration and G.B Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment both deserve appreciation for taking this timely initiative to contribute for the sustainable development of Ladakh following the path of Carbon Neutrality.

RP GUPTA

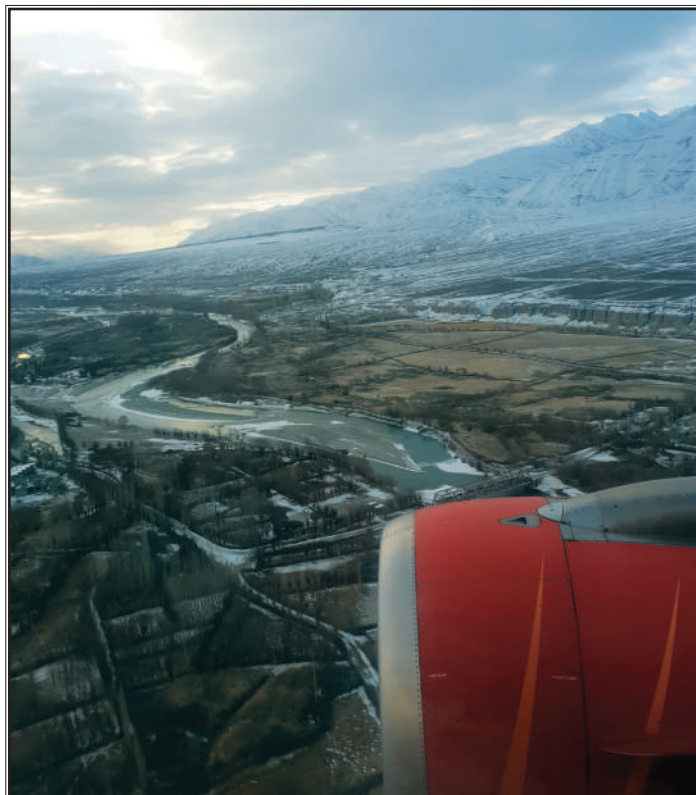
New Delhi, the 18th August, 2020

1. BACKGROUND:

Tourism is the world's largest industry. Globally tourism industry, which accounts for 10.2 percent of the world's GDP¹, is one of the fastest growing industries. In 2017, the growth of this sector (4.6%) outpaced all other major industrial sectors; GDP growth of this industry was 50% higher than that of the global economy². Year 2018 marked the ninth consecutive year of sustained growth in international tourism, when a total of 1.4 billion tourists travelled the world and industry generated US\$1.7 trillion in worldwide exports³. Projections made by the World Tourism Organisation anticipate a growth to 1.8 billion international arrivals worldwide till 2030.

However, the unprecedented tourism growth has resulted in 'overtourism' at popular tourism destinations thereby creating a burden on natural resources, cultural heritage, and quality of people in these destinations. This makes tourism unsustainable. With this realization, there is an upsurge of global debate on making tourism sustainable. As per the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism refers to tourism which meets the needs of tourists and host countries at present while protecting and enhancing the future opportunities of tourists and host countries.

India, with enormous diversity in bio-physical settings and socio-cultural heritage, has emerged as a multiple-interest, all-season tourism destination where livelihood of a very large



Sustainable Tourism

UNWTO points out that the sustainable tourism should:

- (i) make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity;
- (ii) respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance. (iii) ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

UNWTO ((<https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>))

number of people is linked to the tourism industry. In the year 2016, tourism's contribution was 9.6 percent to GDP and 9.3 percent to total employment⁴.

However, the growth of tourism in India, although steady, is yet to reach the expectations. The strategic initiatives by Govt. of India, which include global campaigns such as Incredible India, *Atithi Devo Bhava*, have increasingly made India a welcoming nation for tourists from all around the world. Further, with the e-visa facility for tourist purposes for over 100 countries, and heavy government investments to improve infrastructure and services, the Indian tourism industry has begun to flourish. Towards making the tourism sustainable, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has come up with sustainable visitor strategies based on art, craft, cultural & natural heritage and environment care targeting larger socio-economic yields/benefits which contribute significantly to conservation and to the rural economy in particular. In general, the growth of tourism in India can be understood from the sections below.

1.1. Global Tourism and Foreign Tourist Arrival in India:

Worldwide, growing influence of the tourism has been considered as engine for economic development and this potential has been used for the development in various ways. Number of global tourists increased from 25 million to 1.5 billion between 1950 and 2019. As per the UNWTO report, in 2019 International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) worldwide grew by 4% to reach 1.5 billion⁵. India has also witnessed a steady growth since 1991; foreign tourist arrival increased from

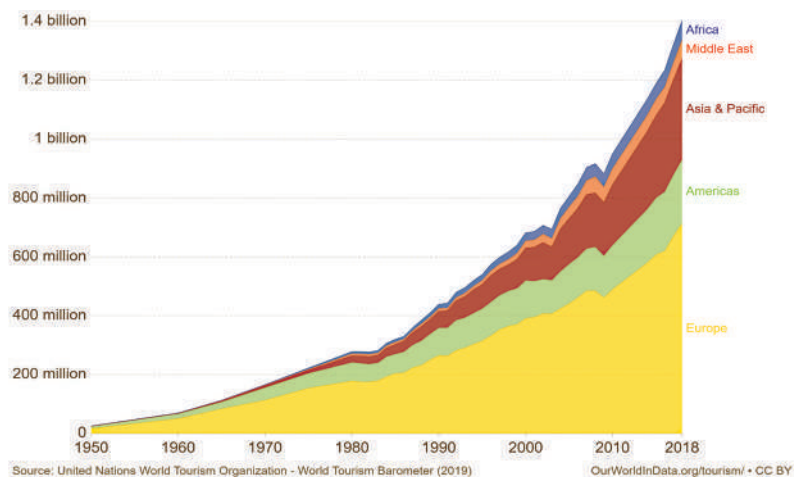


Fig 1.1. Growth of tourism in different regions of the world.
Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/tourism>

1.67 million to 10.56 million (provisional estimate for 2018)⁶.

Despite the fact that India's rank in Asia and the Pacific region for foreign tourists' arrival has improved from 12th (year 2001) to 7th destination country in the year 2018, its share remains to about

5% of the total foreign tourist arrival in the region.

1.2. Growth of Domestic Tourism in India:

Over last three decades, domestic tourism has shown a phenomenal growth. Domestic travel visits in the

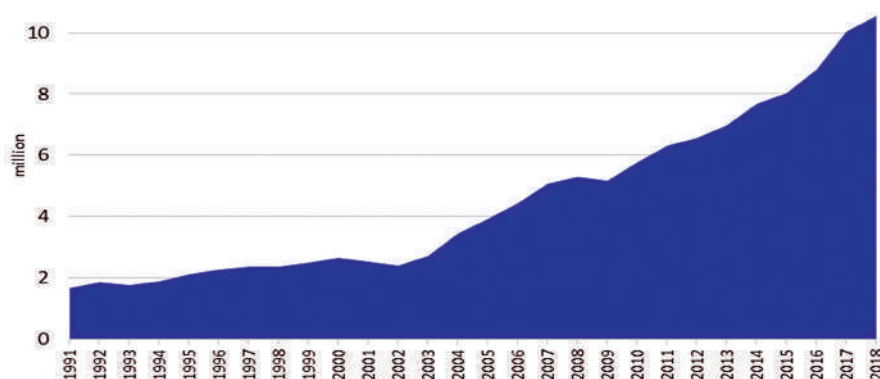


Fig 1.2. Foreign Tourist Arrival in India.

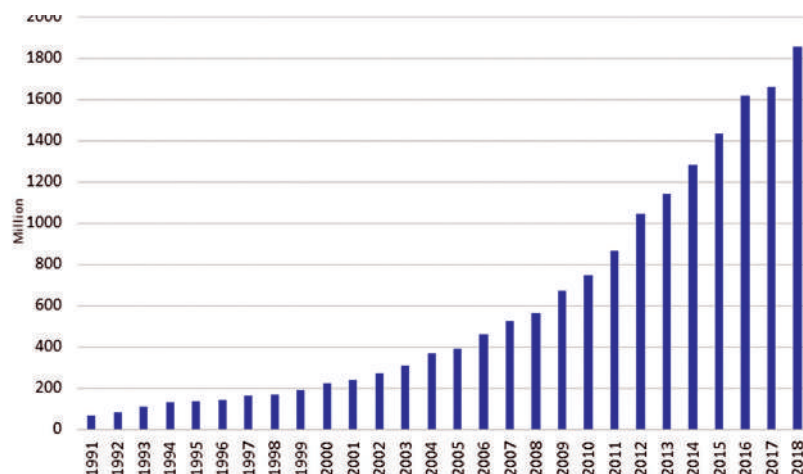


Fig 1.3. Domestic tourist visits in India

Ladakh UT - Towards a New Beginning



In the entire setting of the Himalaya, Ladakh landscapes are unique in their bio-physical and socio-cultural dimensions, which contribute significantly to diversity and uniqueness of the Himalayan Arc and shares international boundaries with other countries.

With average altitude ranges above 3000m asl, and nearly one fourth of landscape under snow and glaciers, Ladakh is characterized by extreme cold, minimal rain, and very sparse vegetation. Despite such harsh conditions, area is rich in diversity of wildlife due to extension of Tibetan Plateau, various rivers and wetlands, and rich grasslands.

Ladakh shares linguistic and cultural links with neighbouring regions of Himachal Pradesh (Lahul and Spiti), Baltistan, and Tibet. It is home to significant cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, which include several dialects of Tibetan and Dardic languages. Ladakh is also home to numerous religious communities such as various sects of Tibetan Buddhism.

The communities that inhabit Ladakh face numerous challenges, especially changing climatic patterns, when environmental impacts are expected to further intensify.

The UT framework is expected to shift Ladakh's developmental paradigm significantly. This paradigm will have to accommodate Ladakh's social and ecological vulnerability.

In the above context, as a beginning towards more robust strategy of development, a firm footing for Sustainable Tourism Development in Ladakh is need of the day.

country were 66.7 million in the year 1991 which has increased nearly 28 fold by 2018 (1854.9 million)⁷. Thus, Indian domestic tourism sector is increasingly making larger contribution to the economy.

But, none of the states/UT of Indian Himalayan Region falls in the top 10 states of the country which share 84.4% of the total domestic tourist visits within the country (year 2018). Total domestic arrivals in the entire Indian Himalaya region falls within the remaining share of the country (15.6% for other 20 states/UT). The same was true for foreign tourist visits (year 2018) where IHR states shared with remaining states/UTs (12.1% for states other than top 10).

1.3. Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region:

Himalaya is a preferred tourism destination for nature seekers, pilgrims, spiritual and adventure tourists, and others. In the region tourism has experienced continuous growth and increasing diversification over last three to four decades, and has become fastest growing economic sector. This trend is in line with predictions for the sector, that is 7.9% growth from 2013 to 2023⁸.

In year 2016, the share of domestic tourists visits in the 10 Indian Himalayan States [Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), Himachal Pradesh (HP), Uttarakhand (UK), Sikkim (SK), Arunachal Pradesh (AP), Mizoram (MZ), Manipur (MN), Meghalaya (MG), Nagaland (NG), and Tripura (TR)⁹ was 3.75% (60.5 million in number) of entire country, which increased by 4.31% (71.2 million) in year 2017. This increment was higher than that observed for the country (2.3%).

However, IHR states registered a very small growth w.r.t. arrival of foreign tourists i.e., 3.07% in 2016 to 3.09 in 2017, compared to the country as a whole (8.8%). Among the IHR Uttarakhand and Himachal accounts for the bulk of domestic tourists (Fig. 1.4). It appears that campaigns of popularization/marketing of Himalayan destinations has enhanced the domestic tourism in the IHR, however, foreign tourists still have remained selective for IHR destinations.

The growth of tourists' arrival within IHR vary across the states and years. For instance, most of domestic tourists visited North-Western Himalayan states (95.7% in 2016 and 83.5% in 2017). While in year 2016, largest share of IHR tourists was received by the state of Uttarakhand (50.4% of the total in IHR), in the year 2017 nearly 60% of the total domestic tourists destined to the state of Himachal Pradesh¹⁰. Many factors seem to play role in the preferences of domestic tourist, and it needs to be analysed.

Of the total foreign tourist arrival in India, nearly 2% visited the IHR state of Himachal Pradesh in 2016 (0.45 million) and 2017 (0.47million). This accounts for ~60% of the total foreign tourists' arrival in IHR (0.75 & 0.83 million in 2016 and 2017, respectively). Uttarakhand (15.4% of the total IHR), State of Jammu & Kashmir (8.34%), Sikkim (8.71%), Tripura (4.8%), and Meghalaya (1.1%) are other Himalayan destinations for foreign tourists. Remaining states have less than 1% share of the total foreign tourists' arrival in the Indian Himalayan Region.

While considering state of J&K (undivided state), in year 2017, domestic tourist visits were 1,42,35,473 which increased

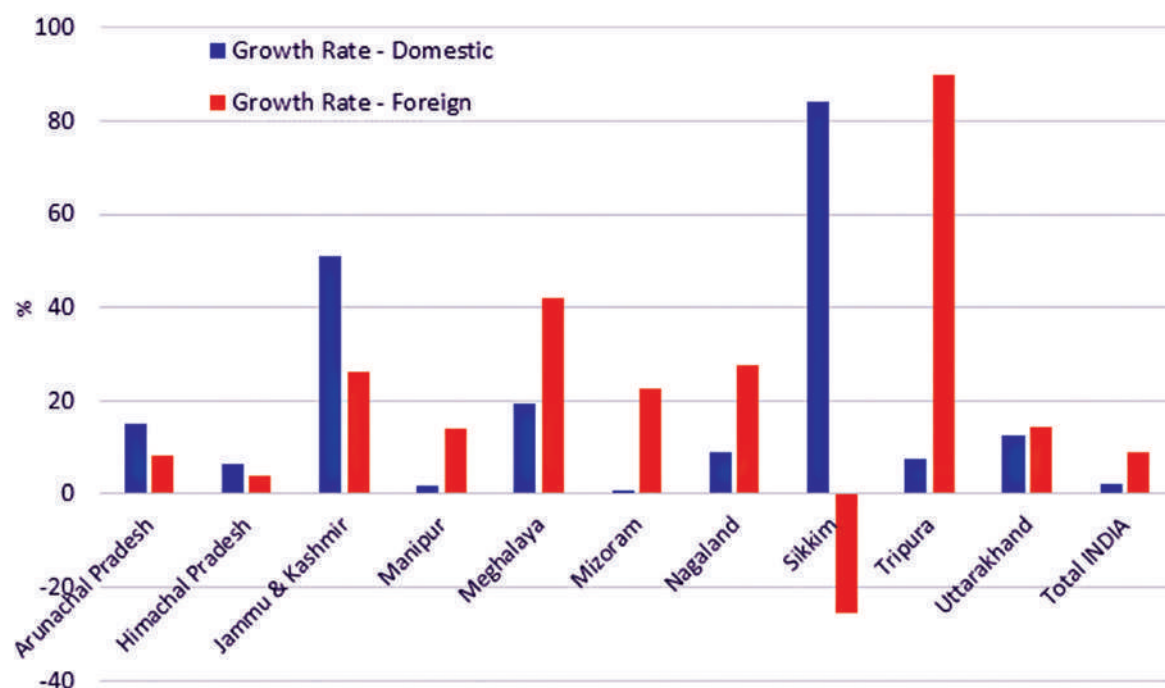


Fig 1.4. Growth (2016-2017) of Domestic and Foreign Tourist Visits in IHRStates⁷.

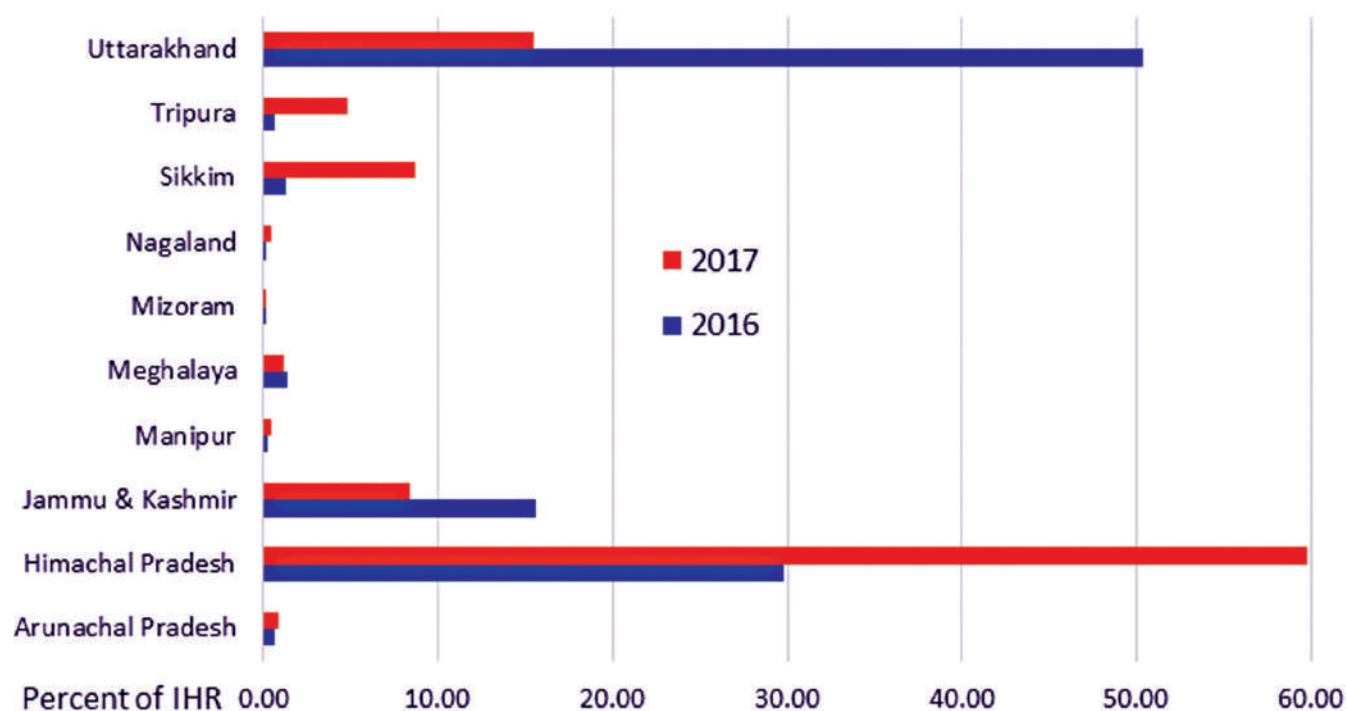


Fig 1.5. Percent share (total of IHR) of domestic tourists in different states of IHR (2016 and 2017).

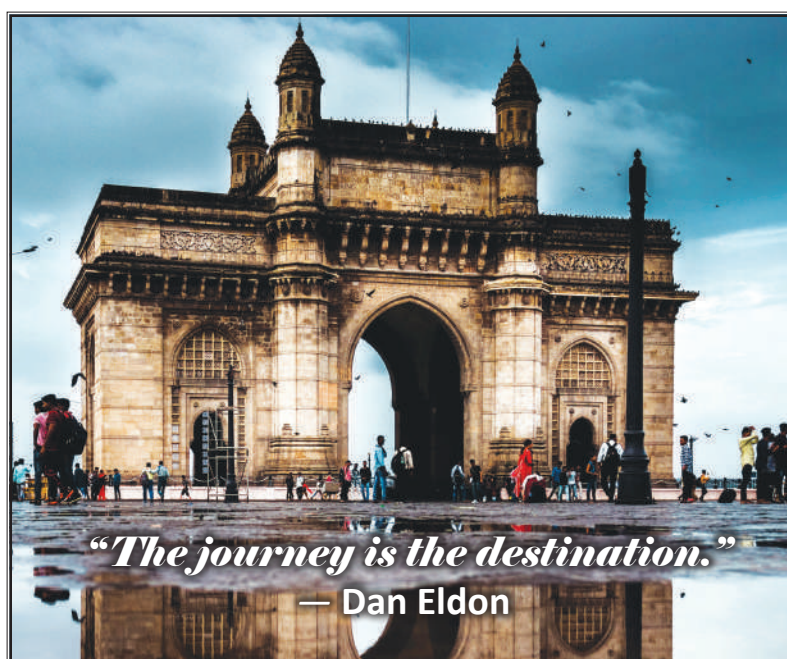
by nearly 20% in 2018, however, a larger increase was observed in the case of foreign tourist arrival. In the year 2017, about 79,000 foreign tourists visited J&K state. This number increased to above 1,39,000 in the following year (2018). Undivided state of Jammu & Kashmir ranked 17 and 20 in the tally of Indian states for Domestic and Foreign Tourist Visits, respectively.

A study¹¹ conducted on foreign travellers visiting to Ladakh and Valley of Kashmir (N=4342) reveals that (i) average size of the foreign groups in Valley of Kashmir was 3.8, and 4.9 in Ladakh, and (ii) average stay of foreign tourist was 10.6 days for the tourist category - staying in India for less than 30 days.

Nearly 64% of foreign travellers to the Valley of Kashmir and Ladakh were independent travellers (they do not buy a tourism package). Visitors do not buy tourism visit to Ladakh, Kashmir and Jammu together. They typically visit/spend a significant part of their tour at one of these two destinations. A significant difference was observed between average stay of foreign tourist visiting Valley of Kashmir and Ladakh which was 5.5 days and 2.9 days, respectively, however, a visitor to Ladakh stays longer (average 9.6 days) and less than a day's stay in Kashmir.

Certain key features for Ladakh bound foreign

tourists include: (i) they are more focused and less likely to buy another destination in India along with the visit to Ladakh, (ii) they spend 74.4% of their holiday time in Ladakh, (iii) their purchase of other destination package in India appears to be affected by distance and access (e.g., Agra is the most popular destination, followed by Rajasthan, Goa and Kerala), (iv) visitors staying longer in Ladakh, tend to buy Nepal package which was not the case with the





travellers staying longer in Valley of Kashmir, (v) travellers satisfaction remains highest with attractions followed by boarding and lodging, and (vi) they are least satisfied with amenities.

It is apparent from the above study that Ladakh visitors stay longer which partly is due to the need for high altitude acclimatization and partly for distantly located attractions. Ladakh offers more of a “niche tourism” due to its topography, culture, and various activities (sightseeing, trekking, mountain climbing, river rafting, wildlife watching, etc.). Recently, Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India, has initiated identification, diversification, development, and promotion of niche tourism products in the country¹² to overcome the aspect of ‘seasonality’ and to promote India as 365 days’ destination. Despite harsh winters Ladakh attracts a certain group of tourists with specific interest. Promotion of eco-tourism is also one of the important initiatives by the Ministry of Tourism (Govt of India) where Ladakh can take an advantage by bringing “Carbon Neutrality” perspective¹³ in the tourism related activities.

¹<https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=171152>

²Sofronov, B. 2018. “The Development of the Travel and Tourism Industry in the World.” *Annals of Spiru Haret university. Economic Series*, 18(4), 123-137, doi: <https://doi.org/10.26458/1848>

³UNWTO (<https://www.unwto.org/market-intelligence>)

⁴Address of Hon’ble President of India on the occasion of presenting ‘National Tourism Awards, 2015-16’ on World Tourism Day (27 Sep 2017).

⁵World Tourism Barometer. 2020. Volume 18 Issue 1 (January)

⁶India Tourism Statistics at a Glance. 2019, and data.gov.in

⁷India Tourism Statistics at a Glance. 2019, and data.gov.in

⁸NITI Aayog 2018. Report of Working Group II Sustainable Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region

⁹Calculated from the data available at data.gov.in. Separate figures were not available for 2 districts of Assam and 1 district of West Bengal, hence these states not included in the analysis.

¹⁰Calculated from the state data available at data.gov.in. Separate figures were not available for 2 districts of Assam and 1 district of West Bengal, hence these states not included in the analysis.

¹¹S Kulshrestha, et. al. 2017. International Travellers’ Prioritisation of Ladakh / Valley of Kashmir. Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management, Noida.

¹²Annual Report. 2019-2020. Ministry of Tourism. Government of India. New Delhi

¹³Carbon neutrality, or having a net zero carbon footprint, refers to achieving net zero carbon dioxide emissions by balancing carbon emissions with carbon removal (often through carbon offsetting) or simply eliminating carbon emissions altogether (the transition to the “post-carbon economy”). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_neutrality

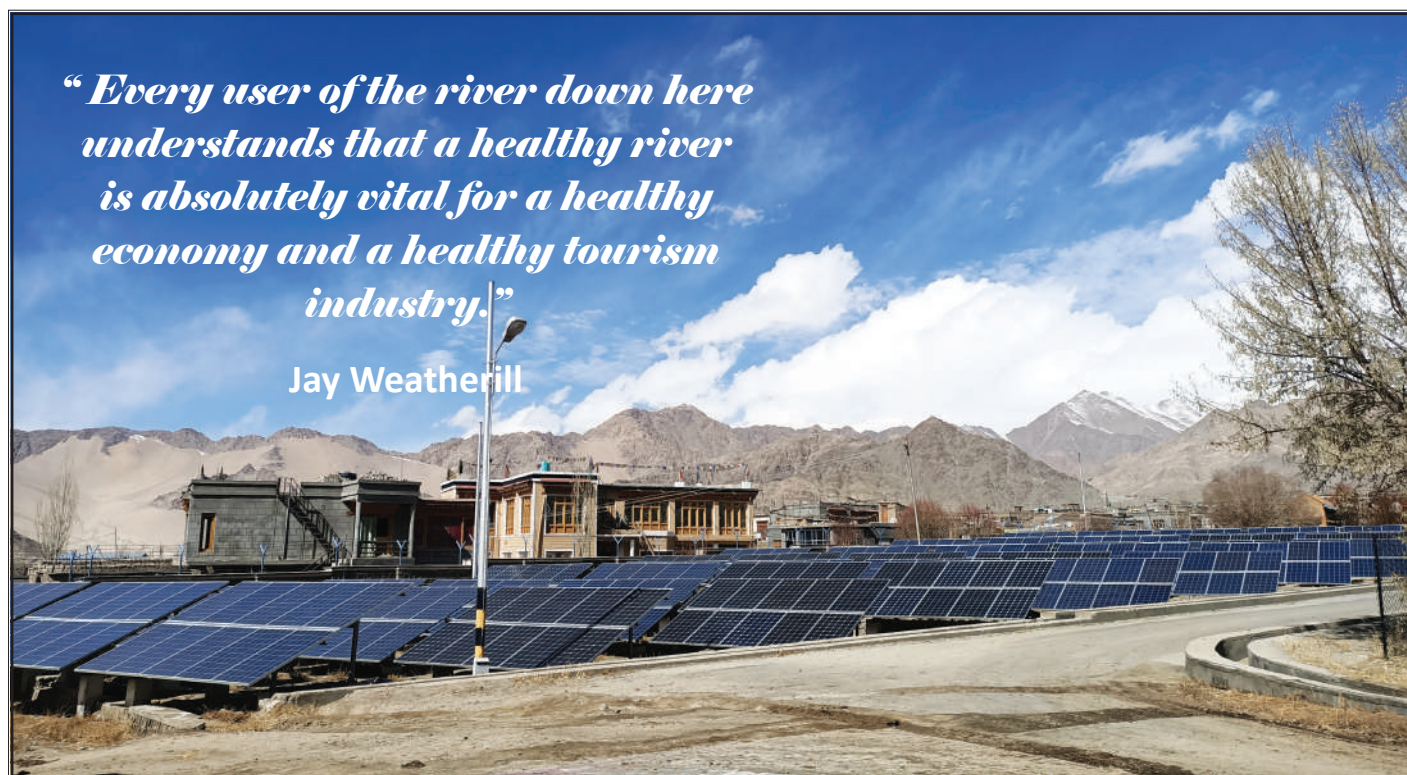
2. NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK and CARDINAL PRINCIPLES

National Tourism Policy (2002) is based on a multi-pronged approach, which includes faster or speedy implementation of tourism projects, development of integrated tourism circuits, capacity building in the hospitality sector and new marketing strategies¹⁴.

The National Tourism Policy (2002) includes following key objectives: (i) positioning and maintaining tourism development as a national priority activity, (ii) enhancing and maintaining the competitiveness of India as a tourism destination, (iii) improving India's existing tourism products and expanding these to meet new market requirements, (iv) creation of world class infrastructure, and (v) developing sustained and effective marketing plans and programmes. On the front of improving and expanding product development the policy recommends capitalizing on unique 'traditional cuisines' and develop 'village tourism' in new geographic areas for **endemic tourism** with special mention of Ladakh and few other destinations in the country. Himalaya, in general, has been identified for both (soft and hard) 'adventure tourism' and being a bio-diversity hotspot for 'eco-tourism'.

In harmony with national policy, Ministry of Tourism (Govt of India) has recognized¹⁵ following cardinal principles for promotion and development of eco-tourism in India: (i) Involvement of local community and lead to the overall economic development of the area, (ii) identification of likely conflicts between use of resources for eco-tourism and the livelihood of local inhabitants and attempt to minimize such conflicts, (iii) compatibility of type and scale of eco-tourism development with the environment and sociocultural characteristics of the local community, and (iv) planning as a part of the overall area development strategy, guided by an integrated land-use plan while avoiding inter-sectoral conflicts and ensuring sectoral integration associated with commensurate expansion of public services. Policy also explores the possibility of eco-tourism in wildlife areas (national parks, sanctuaries, etc.) hence Ministry of Tourism has extended support to the 'Policy for Eco-Tourism in Forest and Wildlife Areas' of The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India.

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (Govt



of India) has recently (2018) prepared a policy with a view to practice eco-tourism in an eco-friendly manner, primarily for wildlife, forest and areas having significant aesthetic appeal for nature. This also includes areas outside designated protected areas. The studies have revealed, Protected areas and nature-based tourism can impact on human well-being in developing countries. For example, households located within 10 km of a protected area with documented tourist visits had 17% higher wealth levels and 16% lower likelihood of poverty than similar households living far from protected areas across 34 countries of the developing world¹⁶. However, it has been cautioned that the weak institutions and governance systems may lead to mass tourism controlled by powerful stakeholders as apparent from a study of four Protected Area of Indian Himalaya¹⁷ which concludes that hierarchical three-tier institutional arrangement may achieve the goals of sustainable tourism in the areas of conflicting interests among stakeholders.

Landscape of UT of Ladakh qualifies as a candidate for sustainable tourism in protected areas where an area of about 12,350 km² falls under protected area network (one national park and two wildlife sanctuaries). Hence sustainable tourism is very significant aspect of future development. A draft policy on similar lines was already prepared much before (2016) in the undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir¹⁸. Also, an Ecotourism Development Plan¹⁹ for the state of J&K (undivided) is available. The National Ecotourism Policy²⁰ emphasises on promoting better understanding of nature and wildlife conservation while generating income and opportunities for the local communities. The policy focuses on following objectives: (i) adoption of low impact nature tourism which ensures ecological integrity, (ii) promotion of biodiversity richness and heritage values of India's wilderness, (iii) engagement of

“The basis of tourism is perception of otherness, of something being different from the usual.”

Lucy M. Long

local communities and mechanism development with a view of enriching the local economy, and promotion of sustainable use of indigenous materials, and (iv) partnerships with all stakeholders for developing and promoting nature tourism. While Eco-tourism Plan, Eco-tourism zone, Community Participation, and Infrastructure Development are guiding principles for this policy, its implementation strategy includes: (i) identification of potential sites, (ii) assessment of carrying capacity, (iii) capacity building, (iv) sharing of revenue benefits, (v) monitoring, (vi) education and interpretation, (vii) interface with District/State administration, and (viii) institutional mechanism for implementation. The policy also identifies legal provisions for management of eco-tourism within the protected areas.

The policy identifies local communities as the principal stakeholders, and benefits flowing from eco-tourism must accrue to the local communities by way of livelihood opportunities arising from the activity. This will reinforce their interface and sense of ownership to make it responsible tourism. This need is being strongly felt in the UT of Ladakh.



¹⁴ National Tourism Policy. 2002. Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Govt. of India.

¹⁵ Annual Report. 2019-2020. Ministry of Tourism. Government of India. New Delhi

¹⁶ R Naidoo et.al. 2019. Evaluating the impacts of protected areas on human well-being across the developing world. Science Advances. 5(4). pp. 1-4.

¹⁷ R Badola et.al. 2018. Institutional arrangements for managing tourism in the Indian Himalayan protected areas. Tourism Management 66: 1-12.

¹⁸ Jammu & Kashmir Ecotourism Policy (Draft). 2016 and 2017. Forest, Environment & Ecology Department, Govt of J&K.

¹⁹ Ecotourism Development Plan for Jammu And Kashmir. Department of Wildlife Preservation, Govt of J&K.

²⁰ Policy for Eco-Tourism in Forest and Wildlife Areas. 2018. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India. New Delhi

3. FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM:

Concept of sustainability is equally applicable in tourism sector²¹ and needs to consider three aspects of tourism development (i.e., environmental, economic, and socio-cultural) with an appropriate balance. Bali declaration on sustainable tourism development²², underlines that the sustainable tourism development should be environmentally sound and socio-culturally acceptable, and its long-term economic viability should be ensured. In few international destinations of Kerala, it was observed that local residents of community perceived that responsible tourism plays a pivotal role in the formulation of perceived destination sustainability, which in turn impacts their perceived quality of life²³. Thus, responsible tourism offers successful management of tourism businesses as well as the sustainability of community and their well-being. Presently, understanding of responsible tourism behaviour is based on the concept of sustainable tourism²⁴.

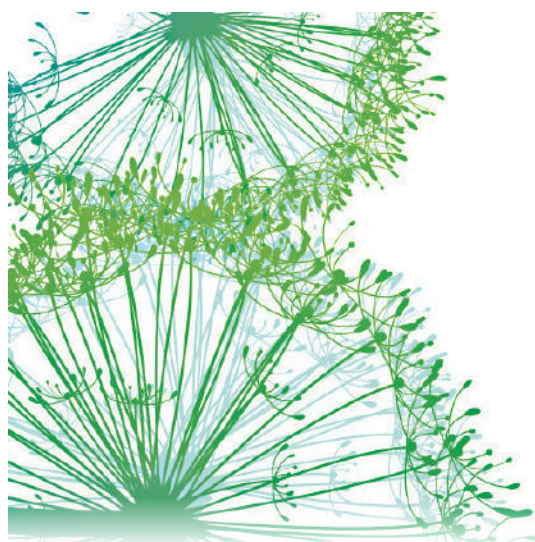
While considering sustainable tourism development, UNWTO²⁵ advocates for innovations in investments and digital transformation. It states, harnessing innovation and digital advances provide tourism with opportunities to improve inclusiveness, local community empowerment and efficient resource management, amongst other objectives within the wider sustainable development agenda. Thus, the concept of sustainable tourism lies in the tourist visit to a destination and making a positive impact on three pillars (i.e., environment, society, and economy) of that destination. Such development requires an informed participation of all stakeholders to ensure wider participation and consensus building in practice. Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India, has evolved²⁶ Comprehensive

Sustainable Tourism Criteria (STCI) for major segments of the tourism industry (viz., accommodation, tour operators, beaches, backwaters, lakes and river sectors) applicable for the entire country. The Criteria have evolved following wide consultations with the diverse set of stakeholder, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Eco Tourism Society of India (ESOI) has been in place to inform and educate tourism stakeholders (hoteliers, tour operators, individuals from transport industry, resort managers, tourist guides, community representatives, and government departments like culture, forest, environment, ASI, museums, district officials, etc.) about the importance of Sustainable and Responsible Tourism practices to ensure and promote Sustainable and Responsible

Sustainable Tourism

“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”

UNWTO



World Tourism Day 27 Sep 2017

**Sustainable
Tourism**
a Tool for Development



Frozen River

practices in this industry. UNWTO emphasizes that achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process which requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism can contribute in the development of society by improving the quality of people's lives through creation of diverse employment opportunities at destination on one hand, and by providing meaningful experience to the tourists through raising awareness on sustainability issues and promoting sustainable practices on the other.

Analysing scope of sustainable tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region, NITI Aayog²⁷ suggests to embrace two, integrated, elements of the sustainability of tourism: (i) 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 (ii) the ability of IHR communities and the environment to absorb and equitably benefit from the impacts of tourism in a sustainable way. The report also realized that socio-economic development and conservation is increasingly challenged, along with conventional problems of fiscal deficits, gaps in environmental compliance and minimal investments to promote sustainable tourism, however, there is great potential for tourism growth. Tourism must be managed so that it is inclusive (focusing also on marginalized

areas and groups) and sustainable (ensuring jobs, promotion of local culture and tourism products) and contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Realizing the uniqueness of each state/location it has been emphasized that the implementation strategy should be state/location specific and must be based on business plans that clearly relate to eco-labelling parameters, investment planning, monitoring and evaluation. Following primary set of actions for developing sustainable tourism in the IHR have been highlighted: (i) Institutions and Processes, (ii) Capacity Building, (iii) Research/ Science and Technology, (iv) Finance and market, Planning, (v) Implementation and Monitoring, and (vi) Policy and Regulations. Document recommends that strategy must be on multi-year destination and associated business plans including land use plans with landscape zoning concepts, carrying capacity assessments and environmental auditing of tourism service providers with a focus on sustainability.

²¹ Sustainable tourism is responsible tourism, also.

²² ESCAP 2007. ESCAP Tourism Review No 26; Bali declaration on sustainable development plan.

²³ PV Mathew and Sreejesh S. 2017. Impact of responsible tourism on destination sustainability and quality of life of community in tourism destinations. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 31: 83-89.

²⁴ T Mihalic. 2016. Sustainable-responsible tourism discourse e Towards 'responsustainable' tourism. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 111: 461-470.

²⁵ <https://www.unwto.org/innovation-investment-and-digital-transformation> (visited on 6 April 2020)

²⁶ Annual Report. 2019-2020. Ministry of Tourism. Government of India. New Delhi. Page 34.

²⁷ Sustainable Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region.2018. NITI Aayog. Report of Working Group II. New Delhi

Sustainable Tourism

Key Points

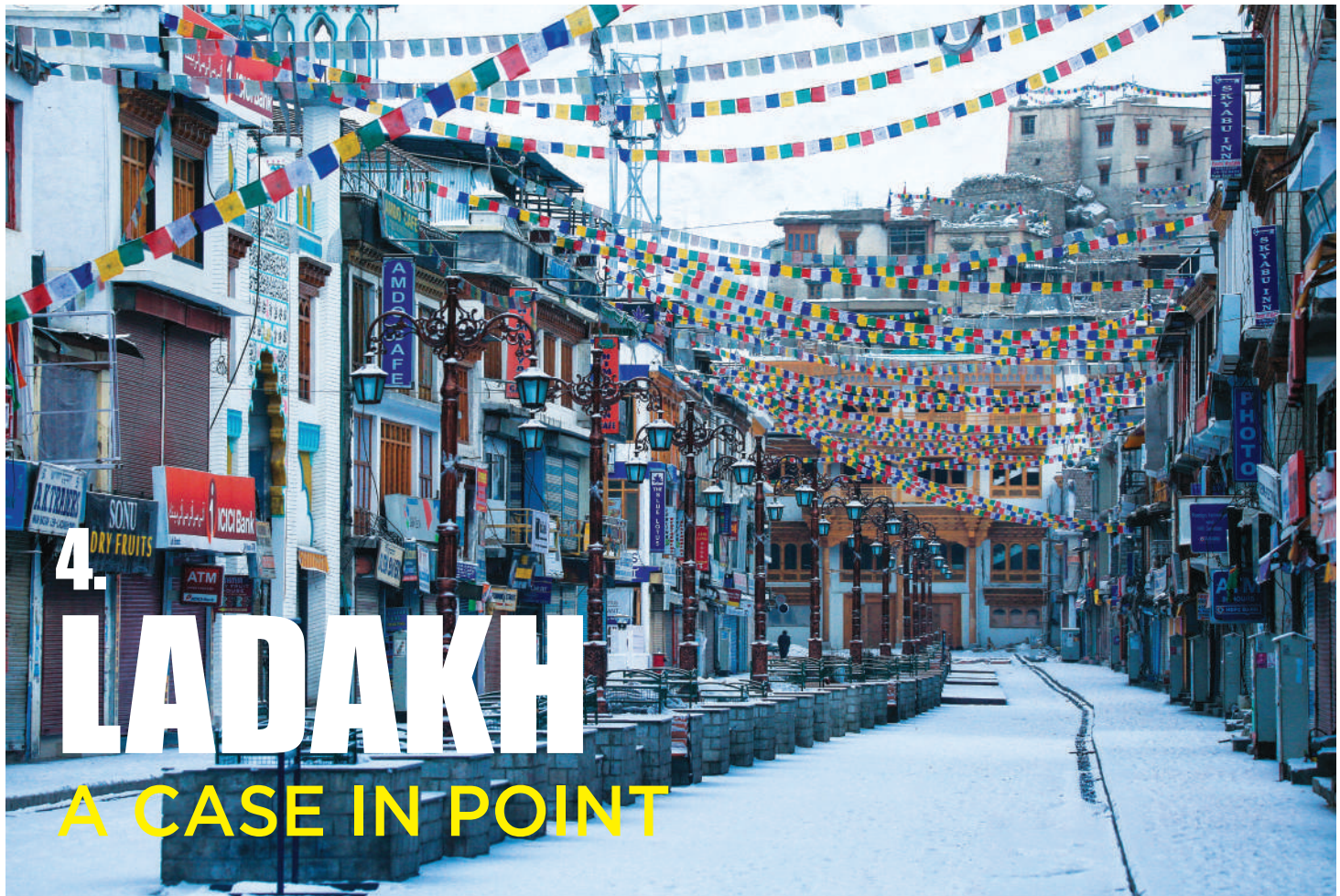
- » No adverse impact
- » Optimal use of resources
- » Respecting and conserving socio-cultural Ethos
- » Local employment opportunities
- » Benefit sharing
- » Resource sharing with future

Needs

- » Code of conducts
- » Wide stakeholders on board
- » Participation mechanism
- » Promoting best practices
- » Capacity Building
- » Incentives

Outcome

- » Improved Life
- » Aware society
- » Sustainable practices
- » Resource for future



4. LADAKH A CASE IN POINT

4.1. Need for sustainable tourism development

The global experiences are indicative that the tourism, if harnessed sustainably with a long-term vision, can be the engine of growth. However, uncontrolled mass tourism can be disastrous. This understanding has resulted in a growing global realization that tourism development and promotion requires to essentially follow the principles of sustainability.

The Himalaya has historically been an attraction for visitors - pilgrimage, spiritual seekers, nature lovers, trade, scientific voyages, adventure and mountaineering, etc. In recent decades, tourism has substantially increased in the Himalayan region. Estimates suggest an increase by 50 to 60% since the 1990s. More recently, NITI Aayog, Government of India, has highlighted the great potential for tourism growth in IHR provided it is well managed to become inclusive (focusing also on marginalized areas and groups) and sustainable (ensuring jobs, promotion of local culture and tourism products). By doing so, it contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDGs 8 and 12²⁸.

In the entire setting of the Himalaya, Ladakh is unique in its bio-physical and socio-cultural dimensions. By being unique it contributes significantly to the diversity of Himalayan Arc

A study of tourism traffic volume of Leh district in 2010 indicates that tourism system is “complex and non-linear” and reflects to a “non-resilient” market, which is dependent on several factors beyond the local control, and incidences, determining the growth/fall in annual inflow of tourists can emerge at unpredictable time²⁹. For example, fall is expected due to pandemic of year 2020, while sudden growth of domestic tourist, after year 2008, is attributed to popularization by Hindi Movie (3 Idiots).

and, therefore, remains an area of attraction for domestic and foreign visitors. The Ladakh region, when opened for tourism in 1974, had 542 visitors. However, the number of tourists in 2018 reached over 3,00,000, which is higher than the population of this newly created Union Territory of Ladakh. This exponential increase in flow of tourists in such a remote region, with relatively inadequate infrastructure, calls for an introspection and deeper analysis on short and long-term gains and losses.

4.2. Ladakh Tourism - Current scenario

The trend of increased number of tourists to Ladakh are depicted below (Figure 4.1). While a rapid growth of domestic tourists beyond 2010 is apparent, an upsurge of growth is seen

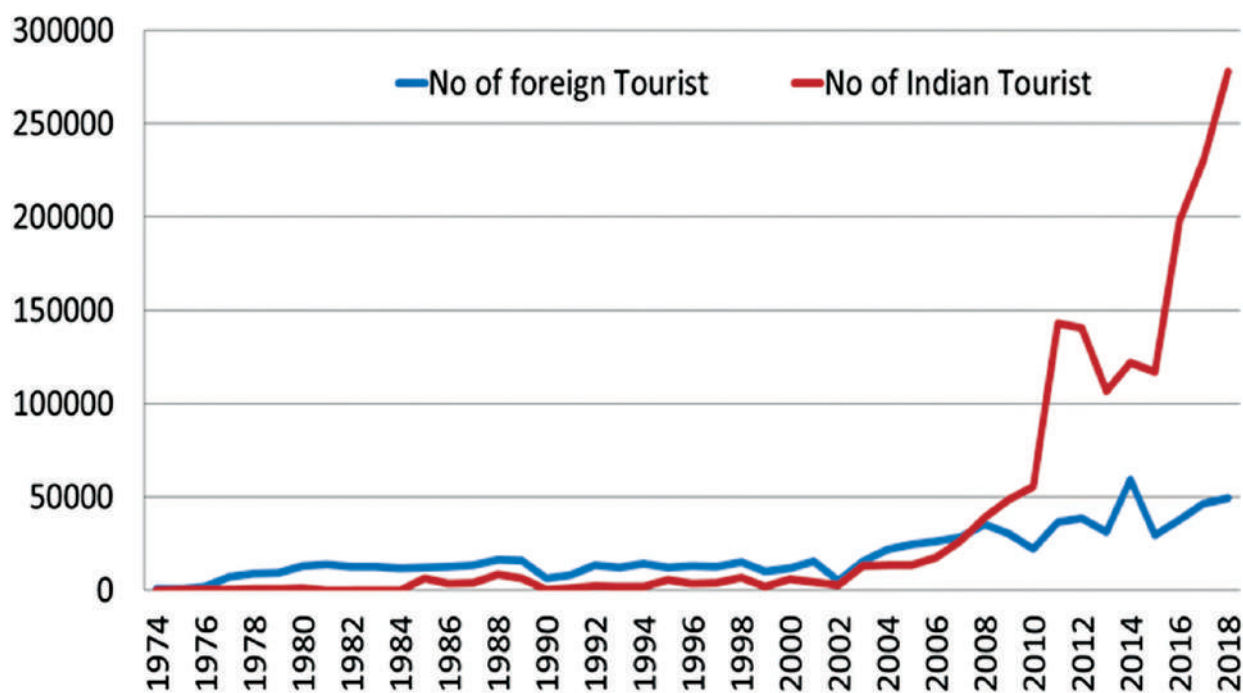


Fig. 4.1. Growth of Domestic and Foreign Tourist Visits in Ladakh.

in 2016 and onwards. Increase in the number of foreign tourists has been relatively gradual with an acceleration in 2004 and thereafter. Together, the number of tourists outcompetes the resident population of the region.

In the absence of carrying capacity and impact assessment data it is difficult to say if the current rate of tourist flux is sustainable. In popular destinations worldwide, “Overtourism”, is being visualized as a potential hazard, as the dynamic forces that power tourism often inflict unavoidable negative consequences if not managed well. Even in some areas/countries, this may result in a decline in tourism as a sustainable framework is never put into place for coping with the economic, environmental, and sociocultural effects of tourism. Consequently, the impacts on local residents are expected to be very high.

A study of tourism traffic volume of Leh district in 2010 indicates that tourism system is “complex and non-linear” and reflects to a “non-resilient” market, which is dependent on several factors beyond the local control, and incidences, determining the growth/fall in annual inflow of tourists can emerge at unpredictable time²⁹. For example, fall is expected due to pandemic of year 2020, while sudden growth of domestic tourist, after year 2008, is attributed to popularization by Hindi Movie (3 Idiots).

Tourism in places like Ladakh hinges on a pristine environmental image, but the visitors most often don’t pay any respect to delicate ecology and cultural sensitivity while visiting these areas. They produce tons of trash each year,

“The world does not need tourists who ride by in a bus clucking their tongues. The world as it is needs those who will love it enough to change it, with what they have, where they are.”

Robert Fulghum

which not only spoils the beauty of the landscape but also causes environmental and health threats. In fact, the prevailing model of tourism in Ladakh is characterized by a high potential to environmental damage and pollution in a landscape that is inherently vulnerable.

The potential of high-end tourism and wildlife conservation is yet to be harnessed through a science based understanding and efficient planning. Ladakh landscape is predominantly represented by pastures/grasslands which are also home for ethnic communities relying on animal husbandry produces. These pasturelands reflect a complex of natural, social and culture landscapes. Without a proper understanding of the delicate inter linkages of different landscape components the rapid development of tourism may affect the unique grassland ecosystems of Ladakh. In comparable conditions of Tibetan Plateau of China, it has been observed that tourism in



grasslands may influence adversely the ecology of plant-soil system (species diversity, litter biomass, nutrients and enzyme activities in soil) through frequent trampling and crushing³⁰. Therefore, it is essential to look into sustainability prospects of tourism development in such areas in Ladakh landscape. Threats to the socio-cultural heritage, intense use of scarce resources, and negative externalities, as elsewhere, could have other negative impacts including the replacement of traditional eco-friendly and aesthetic architecture with inappropriate, resource-intensive and environmentally dangerous constructions, poorly designed roads and other associated infrastructure, inadequate solid waste management, increased air pollution, decline of water sources, and the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Hence, targeting the larger number of tourists cannot form the sole basis for sustainable tourism development particularly when the carrying capacity of the region is limited. Given the elements of uniqueness and sensitivity of Ladakh landscape, the focus of tourism development could be on the quality of the tourism, and equity in income across the multiple service providers, particularly the local communities.

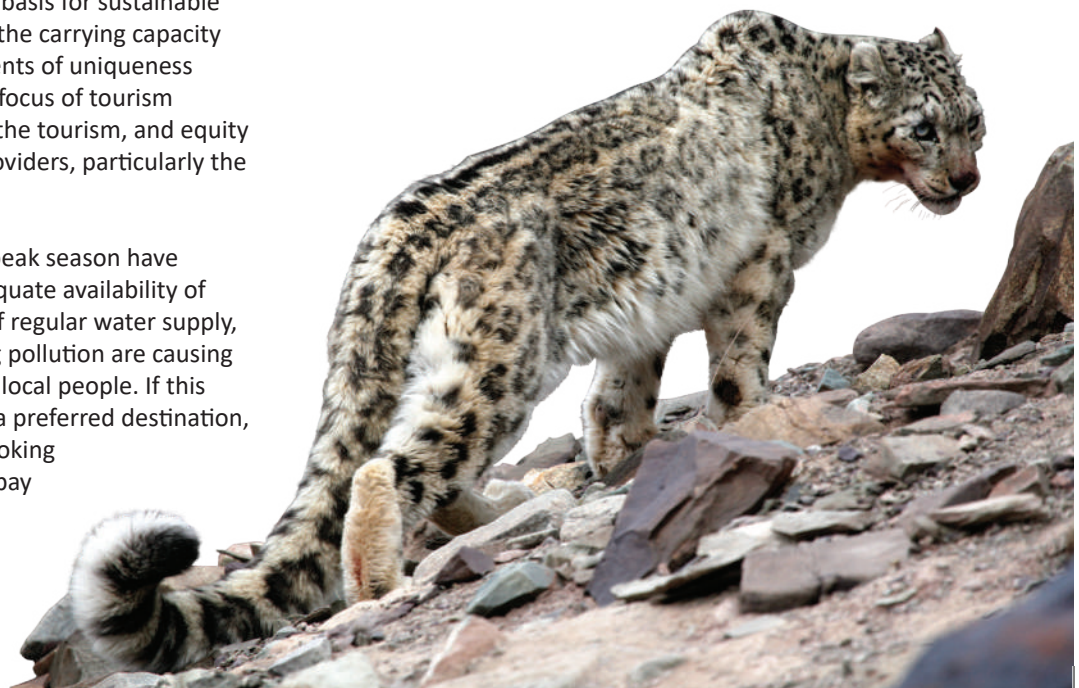
The mass tourist arrivals during the peak season have already caused a huge challenge for adequate availability of civic services. Endless traffic jams, lack of regular water supply, poor waste management, and increasing pollution are causing enormous difficulties to the tourists and local people. If this goes unabated, Ladakh may not remain a preferred destination, particularly for those tourists who are looking for a different experience and willing to pay more for it. Therefore, in the context of

tourism development, Ladakh currently is on crossroads of the opportunities emanating from its unique landscape elements and the cultural heritage, and the challenges largely posed by 'overtourism'. This scenario calls for a broader analysis and outcome for charting a carbon-neutral path for tourism in the fragile landscape of Ladakh.

²⁸Sustainable Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region.2018. NITI Aayog. Report of Working Group II. New Delhi

²⁹V Pelliciardi. 2010. Tourism Traffic Volumes in Leh District: An Overview. Available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272474950>

³⁰L Feng et.al. 2019. Effects of Grassland Tourism on Alpine Meadow Community and Soil Properties in the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. Pol. J. Environ. Stud. 28(6): 4147-4152



5. LADAKH TOURISM AND WINTER CONCLAVE:



options, the UT, would heavily depend on tourism as a major contributor to the economy, and has strong relevance for charting the course to overall sustainable development and carbon-neutrality in particular. As of now this region in Indian Himalaya is gaining an authentic brand as tourism destination. However, as stated in earlier chapters, this authentic brand is struggling to retain its' niche value under the threat of 'overtourism'.

5.1. SWOT Analysis:

With the Union Territory (UT) Status, Ladakh as an independent governance entity, is finding ways to lay a foundation of sustainable development with focus on carbon neutrality. For a region as remote as Ladakh with a ramshackle infrastructural base it is really a challenging task. Considering the possible

The UT of Ladkh, therefore, requires a more robust strategy for development of tourism that can play strong role in overall sustainable development. This strategic planning can be built on Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) analysis. In this context, following SWOT matrix for Ladakh has been prepared based on consultation with diverse stakeholders:

Strengths

- Topography/Scenery- Undulating lakes, rivers, highest number of 6000+m peaks in the Indian Himalayas
- Cultural heritage – Unique traditions, Language, Lifestyle, Food, agricultural practices and resource use
- High awareness about environmental/ecological fragility
- Strong local bodies for implementation of policies (Women Alliance, ALTOA, etc.)
- Limited Population Density (4.2/sq km) - Space, Escape
- Relatively pristine environment/landscape
- Diversity and uniqueness of flora & fauna
- Positive image of Ladakh in the domestic and international tourism market
- Good number of accommodation options, across price points
- 300+ Tour operators and 7000+ taxis- strong tourist infrastructure

Weaknesses

- Access (both remoteness and seasonality)
- Poor infrastructure in terms of public conveniences/road connectivity
- Small business structures, which prevent economies of scale
- The destination brand is not well known and lack of a clear market image
- Limited product experiences and destination diversity and increase in homogenous tourism activities
- Harsh environmental conditions
- No Waste management systems
- Inadequate policy framework and implementation of policies on the ground
- Lack of research into demand and needs of visitors
- Urban centric tourism- benefits do not reach the villages
- Pressure of tourist numbers on local social fabric
- Inadequate financing channels & sources to cultivate local entrepreneurship (Green Financing)

Opportunities

- Branding and positioning Ladakh as a high value low impact tourist destination
- High potential for growth in Wildlife and Adventure Tourism
- International and domestic niche markets largely untapped (e.g., Buddhist Circuit)
- Possibilities of engaging far flung areas with Rural Tourism
- Strong implementation of regulations to promote sustainable tourism

Threats

- Limited natural resources
- Accelerated Infrastructural growth without regulation leading to ecological degradation
- Lack of localized economy
- Not resilient to climate, health and economic risks
- Sensitive geo-political location
- High dependency on tourism due to lack of other opportunities
- Increasing population of Feral Dogs causing threat to the human and wildlife population



People walking on Frozen River
(Photo: <https://banbanjara.com>)



5.2. Winter Conclave:

UT of Ladakh organized its first “Winter Conclave 2020” (21st to 23rd February 2020) to bring together diverse stakeholders and shape the foundation as well as mould a sustainable model for tourism. Conclave targeted to explore alternatives of the current, heavily summer dependent, tourism model. Ladakh’s winter reflects high potential for poorly explored segments including, wildlife, winter sport, and cultural experiences³¹. Chadar Trek (Walk on frozen Zaskar River) is a popular winter tourism but often results in accidents. An adequate arrangement for rescue operations is required³².

Conclave 2020 engaged experts and industry leaders from the fields of Wildlife, Tourism and Winter Sport, and participants experienced showcasing of Heritage Walk, Ice-Hockey (uncommon in India), etc. Interactive sessions deliberated on branding and marketing, culture and heritage, wildlife and adventure, and sustainable tourism. A need was felt for (i) policy formulation and implementation, (ii) strong data Collection and dissemination system, (iii) community-wide involvement and benefit-sharing, (iv) skill development and awareness building, (v) preservation of the tangible/intangible heritage, and (vi) de-centralization from the existing tourist routes.

³¹ <https://ladakh.nic.in/winterconclave>

³² <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/destinations/chadar-trek-41-trekkers-rescued-temporary-shutdown-of-ladakh-famous-trek/as73266936.cms>



6. CARBON NEUTRAL LADAKH SUMMIT 2020

6.1. The Summit

In this backdrop, and realizing that the administrative framework of new UT is expected to shift Ladakh's developmental paradigm significantly which will have to accommodate Ladakh's social and ecological vulnerability, Ladakh UT Administration and G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (NIHE) joined hands to organize a four days (2-5 March 2020) summit under the banner of **'Carbon Neutral Ladakh- a New beginning'** at Leh to lay the knowledge based foundation of the new region. The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC), GoI, provided the necessary guidance. The detailed programme of the event is placed (Annexure – I). The summit was organized to seek inputs from diverse domain of experts to formulate a strategic plan for the sustainable development of Ladakh. The summit provided a platform for meaningful debate and dialogue to generate inputs for long term strategic development plan to: (i) draw various pathways to achieve Carbon Neutrality in Ladakh, (ii) ensure the conservation, protection, and promotion of Ladakh's unique ecological and bio-cultural heritage without compromising developmental aspirations, (iii) explore possibilities and suggest for a way forward for innovative

and sustainable livelihoods for rural communities, and (iv) provide inputs for making Ladakh a smart destination for sustainable tourism and green investments.

6.2. Good Practices adopted in Summit

The summit made an attempt to set examples of good practices that would contribute for sustainable development of Ladakh following carbon neutral path. Some of such good



practices included – (i) as a norm of equitable distribution of benefits, the accommodation for outstation participants was equally distributed amongst three properties with comparable facility (although each property was having enough space to accommodate all the guests), (ii) maximum use of e-media for presentation and distribution of resource material, (iii) use of multi-purpose biodegradable bags to carry conference material, and (iv) the conference kit included: (a) Diary made from eco-friendly form of paper (handmade 100% tree free paper made from using cotton rag waste from the cotton garment industry without using toxic chemicals, and solar dried), and (b) pen and pencils made-up of old newspapers and recycled papers³³.

6.3. Tourism focused sessions

Towards making Ladakh a coveted destination for sustainable tourism and green investments, as one of the major objectives of the summit, a dedicated session was organized on “Sustainability of Tourism” (March 4, 2020) followed by an intensive focus group discussion (FGD) on this subject (March 5, 2020). Expert presentations, intensive deliberations on them, and FGD yielded several useful recommendations and action points for follow-up on short, mid and long-term basis to ensure sustainability of tourism sector in Ladakh. List of Panellists and participants of focussed group discussion is placed in Annexure – II.

6.3.1. The key problems that lead to the rationale for acting judiciously on carbon-neutral approach on promoting responsible Tourism are:

- Concentrated tourism with tourist density higher than the carrying capacity
- Overall there has been rapid increase in number of tourists in the region following a “3 Idiot Syndrome” which is concentrated in few areas/trekking routes overshooting the local supply of services capacity at the specific destination causing degradation of the landscape.
- Local communities at the disadvantage of inequitable benefits
- The benefits and profits of unregulated tourism are mostly derived by the top-end value chain actors such as tour operators and hotels and local communities are marginalised so that often these do not benefit from higher incomes, number of jobs and preservation of their cultural heritage and natural landscape.
- Damage to culture and heritage
- Given the limited set of regulations



6.4. Recommendations & Action Points:



The summit agreed that the key assets of Ladakh from a tourism perspective are pristine nature including charismatic wildlife, rich culture and aesthetic values. Union Territory (UT) status provides a wider scope for designing and using appropriate set of policies, strategies, actions and incentives, and finally investments in this engine of

growth judiciously. The tourism infrastructure needs to follow a planned and regulated trajectory so that it is aligned with the natural and geo-morphological features of Ladakh and its culture. This also means following safe building standards and eco-friendly norms, and maintaining local architectural heritage. Some areas of Ladakh attract an increasingly large number of visitors, thereby placing enormous pressures on them, while many other areas remain unvisited or have little tourist activities. Therefore, there is a great scope to diversify and deconcentrate the tourism and redirect the tourists to less visited destinations in order to mitigate pressure from excessive tourism.

The key recommendations, action areas and responsibilities and timelines, that emerged from deliberation were as following:

6.4.1. Policy Level Recommendations

6.4.1.1. Integration of tourism policy/zonation with land use planning/policy

A land use policy must be prepared that delineates specific tourism zones with assessed carrying capacity. It must be ensured that future towns and existing key cities are planned as walkers friendly and adequately suitable for differently-abled people. Unlike most other Himalayan regions, Ladakh can afford to allocate sufficient area to motorable roads, and lanes for bicycling and walking.

6.4.1.2. Make community an integral part of tourism policy that is linked to value chain

Tourism sector in Ladakh is managed by the stakeholders that are at the higher end of its value chain. To bring equitable development to the fore that harnesses local economy and heritage while bringing benefits to local communities, demands a set of rules and regulations that make community-based tourism mandatory (e.g. equitable benefit sharing, conservation of local landscape and culture and knowledge, local microplans). This is also to maximize the contribution of

tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally. The engagement of local communities in various forms needs to be highlighted/reinforced through Public-Private partnership (PPP).

Responsibility (6.4.1.1& 6.4.1.2): The responsibility mainly lies on the Ladakh Tourism and Wildlife departments. These departments should coordinate with/for establishment of a committee with the proposed committee for Landuse policy and planning (see recommendation Under Group -I); Further, involve rural development department and community institutions; engage expert agencies for zonation, planning and carrying capacity assessment.

Timeline: One year for zonation and policy framing; 2 years for carrying capacity assessment, planning and framing set of rules and regulations.

6.4.2. Governance

6.4.2.1. Introduce a standardized certification system and mechanism for sensitization of tourists

There is a need to set Ladakh's customised standards and monitoring of implementation of these standards as responsible tourism for tour operation service providers/hotels/transporters, and to make it mandatory to introduce a standardised certification system that sensitises tourists prior to their entry in Ladakh. This include: improving in-advance destination information pertaining to tourism responsibilities for visitors, tour operators and other service sector actors; Documentation of various facets of the IHR heritage; A vision of showcasing the same in the most inspired manner, possible ways of bringing it to potential clients/visitors by involving historians/social researchers/artist groups etc.; Initiate and use visitor feedback intensively and in organized way for improving tourism sector systemically (e.g. as open accessible database).

A Tourism Satellite Account should show all aspects and types of databases and their collection procedures that shows number and types of visitors and their contribution to the UT's development. Subsequently an open access "One-Window Online Information" on number of hotels/homestays, rooms available, tourist sites, parking places, camp sites, traffic surveillance, highlands medi-care and rescue logistics, number of tour guides, and tour operators could be collated. Similarly, information on expenditure made on promoting sustainable tourism could be added (e.g. public schemes, private sector investments, etc.).

An advance technology based visitor information and registration system must be created that can clearly delineate online and real time site specific details to tourists at their place of departure before travelling to the destination. Control mechanisms need to be local context specific but are inevitable for successful implementation of "Carrying Capacity Concept".

6.4.2.2. Promote theme based tourism

Ladakh offers a great scope for diversification and decentralisation of tourism, from wildlife to spiritual tourism, adventure to heritage tourism, citizen's science to research/study related tourism, and potential for corporate events (e.g. workshops, seminars etc.). This offers a wide spectrum of avenues that can be harnessed for responsible tourism in Ladakh. Diversification and decentralization of tourism would require mapping of a wider circuit, new routes and treks in unexplored destinations integrated with landscape potential, which makes it an inclusive option for tourists. All along STCI guidelines (Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India- Principles and indicators for tour operator and accommodation sector) must apply and theme-based tourism must be offered as per the zonation and carrying capacity studies for potential sites. In this context, de-concentration of existing core destinations needs to be done so that responsible tourism is truly decentralized and developed.

Responsibility (6.4.2.1 & 6.4.2.2): Responsible departments (Ladakh Tourism and Wildlife departments) need to engage services of expert agencies for framing such standards. Operation Practices for theme based tourism including circuit mapping and developing systems for sensitization of tourists on diversified possibilities, which may be reviewed and accepted by departments for implementation; Timeline: Two years (concurrently with 6.4.2.1).

6.4.2.3. Develop robust institutions and processes for promoting responsible tourism

Create separate divisions within tourism departments or other relevant departments to look after the key aspects of tourism and related information: Capacity building, marketing, and promotion including product development, standards, certification and guidelines, data management & research, and integrated destination and infrastructure planning and implementation with other departments (e.g. Sikkim Eco Tourism Policy, PES Policy of Himachal Pradesh). Planning Department must oversee the convergence and performance. Establish mechanism of uninterrupted investments for advancing databases and technology to provide "live statistics" as universal information system (e.g. carrying capacity at the destination, hotel rooms, parking places, road blocks, traffic jams). It must include all other emerging datasets onsite and state-wide with the passage of time.

Create a network of support system of experts consisting of hospitality professionals/accountants/legal experts/volunteers who can ensure good operational protocols and processes. To ensure quality control (guest managers) or marketing support (social media champions) capacity of local enablers must be boosted through branding/marketing inputs, skills development.

Responsibility: Responsible departments (Ladakh Tourism

and Wildlife departments) need to engage services of expert agencies for framing such institutions and processes;

Timeline: Two years (concurrently with 6.4.2.1 & 6.4.2.2).

6.4.3. Infrastructure, designs and processes

6.4.3.1. Create enabling environment for multi-stakeholder processes and designs of CSR & CER norms for the key stakeholders

Customised designing of the Corporate Social/Environmental Responsibility (CS/ER) for the services/business sector through a multi-stakeholder process is important, which should include hotels, local bodies, tour operators, monasteries, yak herders and others, apart from the key departments of Wildlife and Tourism. This would, however, need a monitoring system for the performance evaluation of each stakeholder. The monitoring should include carbon neutrality, wastewater treatment, use of ground water, waste management, heritage and biodiversity conservation, construction of energy efficient buildings and location of hotels, etc., in the targeted zones assigned to these as per the Land Use Plan and Policy.

Responsibility: Planning Department needs to be engaged with the process right from the beginning and involving other relevant departments (i.e., Ladakh Tourism and Wildlife Departments) along with expert agencies and hotel & tour operators associations; Timeline: 2-3 years.

6.4.3.2. Identify and popularize unique selling points (USPs) by way of branding events & market showrooms

As the tourism touches newer thematic areas and destinations, interactions with living, thriving communities that are a model of an integrated concept of sustainability, would have the potential to create the Unique Selling Point. This uniqueness in respecting and enhancing the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness of host communities or rare landscape and wildlife in the area can be branded. Ladakh thus can use Tourism in Ladakh for the conservation of unique wildlife (such as snow leopard, brown bear and kiang, etc.), historic and cultural heritage, and also to stimulate arts, crafts and other creative activities within communities. Thus, current brand "Ladakh" needs to be revisited, re-jigged and prepared for marketing. After designing of such a brand, key display and road-show events in and outside the Union Territory must be held. The branding can be done as part of putting credible "Eco-Labels" promoting sustainable consumption patterns by providing concise and accurate information to consumers to help them identify those products and services which incorporate a credible level of environmental performance. Moreover, this could be the basis for High end and Low impact tourism products. However, preparing the capacities of hospitality sector of tourism to deliver all aspects of "Eco-Labeling" will need to be ensured. Strategies should be developed to take advantage of open rangelands when wild animal sighting is easier than in forests. However, sparseness

of wild animals can be a limiting factor, so high density spots should be recorded, used for tourism and conserved effectively.

Responsibility: Relevant departments (Ladakh Tourism and Wildlife Departments), which need to engage with expert agencies; **Timeline:** 2-3 years.

6.4.3.3. Establish a multi-product showroom at airport

It will be important that apart from key cities in India, Ladakh establishes a state-of-the-art Tourism Showroom at the Airport in Leh that not only displays the diversified tourism products but also sensitises the visitors towards an improved socio-cultural and environmental behaviour.

Responsibility: UT Administration in consultation with relevant authority (e.g. Airport Authority of India) and private partners; **Timeline:** within 2-3 years.

6.4.4. New Knowledge, Skills & Capacity Building

6.4.4.1. Build capacity and skills of diverse stakeholders to promote responsible tourism

Design and deliver a Ladakh specific Awareness and Sensitization Package of different actors and sectors, including all key service providers and producers and unleash this information through a proactive media campaign and existing travel related websites and tourism information centres. For instance, Hotel Staff, Monasteries, Tourist guides, etc., are engaged with waste management, development and implementation of the sustainability management system and receive periodic guidance and training regarding their roles and responsibilities in its delivery.

The updated capacity building packages and systems promoting sustainable tourism and its packages (i.e., Homestays, Rural Tourism, Heritage Management) need to be blended within the curriculum and delivery design of trainings/ education institutions (e.g., vocational centres, universities, schools) serving the host of actors and public/private sectors. This should be accompanied with periodic “follow-up” assessments and Training of Trainers (ToTs).

Rapid Crash Courses on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) should be introduced in primary and secondary school curriculum and teachers training. Any non-compliance must be responded to with non-renewal of permissions needed for operational procedures and investments.

The organizations such as hotels, and business sector must be made to support initiatives for the development of local infrastructure (e.g. signages, and hoardings) and communities. Examples of initiatives include education, training, health and sanitation, and projects which address the impacts of climate change and contribute to SDGs.

Professionally certified trainings of all travel trade industry service providers must be introduced on mandatory basis for every group of tourism service provider such as hotels, tourist guides, porters, cooks, and drivers. Certified training programmes need to be offered by selected recognized institutions for Occupational Standards. Any non-compliance must be responded to/with non-renewal of permissions needed for operational procedures and future investments.

Responsibility: Training and capacity building organizations/ agencies in Ladakh; Ladakh University and other agencies/ institutions; Relevant departments (Ladakh Tourism and Wildlife departments); **Timeline:** within 3-5 years.

6.4.4.2. Promote avenues for research and use of science & technology

A detailed survey of tourists should be carried out in the near future to elicit visitor perceptions on what services they are looking for and identifying the gap areas, which then become part of future planning and implementation plan for consumer satisfaction.

Specific strategy for marketing off-season events and attracting round the year visitors should form a part of visitor services. Accordingly, demand-supply of natural resources can be planned.

Promote new opportunities and technologies to widen the spectrum of green and inclusive entrepreneurship and associated skills (e.g., digital technologies and local data management and use, agro-enterprise and link to tourism, waste management and local economy, local heritage conservation, destination carrying capacity, planning and monitoring, public safety and security during disasters and rapid reliefs and rescue, and community based ToTs).

Support veterans from the Indian Army, Indo Tibet Border Police and local Police to establish adventure tourism based entrepreneurship. These veterans are specially trained to be deployed in difficult terrain (e.g. high altitude areas) and have specialized skills (e.g. mountaineering and landscape survival). These skills could help to promote safe adventure sports tourism in the UT.

Document best practices on sustainable tourism especially from the aspects of sustained entrepreneurship, skill development and social security to develop or strengthen tourism circuits that focus on adventure sports, heritage value, wildlife, religious/spiritual aspects, wellness/ yoga/ aroma therapy/ naturopathy, handicrafts and handloom, and cultural festivals.

Responsibility: Various R&D organizations/agencies in Ladakh; Ladakh University and other agencies/institutions; Relevant departments (Ladakh Tourism and Wildlife Departments); **Timeline:** within 5 years (continual process).

6.4.4.3. Create incentives, attract finances and establish markets

Working with communities on the sensitive issues and promotion of culture and traditions using “Incentive Based Mechanisms (IBM)” (e.g. for good stewardship/waste management, etc.) needs to be designed based on tested eco-labelled or any other feasible sites.

Payments for environmental services (PES) based on eco-certification and charging adequate entry fees (as described above) might also offer a long term solution for conservation of various systems, as tourism relies heavily on the existence of sound natural environments. Green bonus or “IBM” could be invested in further development of eco-tourism, associated livelihoods and cultural conservation in the region.

On the pattern of smart cities, “Smart Highland Tourism Destination” business plans could be prepared, and the private sector may be invited to invest in responsible tourism based on a PPP-bidding process or through involvement of security forces for offsetting their GHGs.

Market/State instruments for entrepreneurship and start-ups (e.g. adventure tourism, sports equipment, waste management technologies) should be encouraged by facilitating access to credit and low interest loans.

Third party “End Line Surveys” done on the funds provided for promoting responsible tourism and rank districts/destinations and link subsequent quantum of funding on performance. Composite indicators can be built to assess the ranking of destinations in sustainability performance [e.g. Environmental Performance Indicator (EPI), poverty and inclusiveness, fiscal performance on tourism investments (public and private)].

Responsibility: UT Administration and Relevant departments (Ladakh Tourism and Wildlife Departments) in consultation with community based organizations and private partners, monks & monasteries; **Timeline:** within 5 years (continual process).

6.4.4.4. Promote planning, implementation and monitoring

All districts/key destinations must link their tourism related plans and investments according to envisaged Ladakh’s green-growth/carbon neutral models that integrate targeted private sector investments for promoting in-situ job opportunities and local community partnerships. While preparing green growth models key private sector actors must participate and articulate their interests and planned complementary investments.

Multi-year destination strategy and associated Business Plans must be made mandatory and should include a focus on sustainability and sustainable tourism that covers environmental, economic, social, cultural, quality, health, and safety issues. It should include: Public participation, Holistic Plan and Implementation Strategy, and Political Commitments.

The above strategy must include: (i) a system to monitor and publicly report visitor satisfaction, and, if necessary, to take action to improve visitor satisfaction; (ii) install a visitor management system for sites that includes measures to preserve, protect, and enhance natural and cultural assets; (iii) publish and provide guidelines (also as signage and hoardings) for proper visitor behaviour at sensitive sites. Such guidelines are designed to minimize adverse impacts on sensitive sites and strengthen positive visitor behaviours. Given that increased development investment is an ongoing phenomenon, it is opportune time to assess opportunities and challenges this might bring in promoting inter-state and transboundary tourism (and other economic connects) and overall populating of high altitude area affected by depopulation.

Responsibility: UT Administration and Relevant departments (Ladakh Tourism and Wildlife Departments) in consultation with community based organizations and private partners, monks & monasteries; **Timeline:** within 5 years (continual process).

³³<http://www.papernest.in/>



7. SUM-UP

Based on the key principles outlined for responsible tourism, many actions have been proposed, which could lead to sustainable tourism in Ladakh. Unique highland landscape and wildlife and wilderness of Ladakh provides opportunity to link it with high-end tourism, but it calls for studies on various aspects of conservation and sustainability.

It is important that revenue generated from tourism is ploughed back for development of this sector and a ceiling can be fixed on key recommended actions. It is imperative that enabling conditions are created for 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 round the year pursuits like rural/heritage tourism and farm tourism, have the potential to enhance associated livelihoods and reverse migration.

The existing institutional and governance landscape in Ladakh is expected to change due to its new Union



Territory Status and hence there is a need to plan in the longer term. As men and youth migrate and there is increasing feminization of local landscape, updated capacity development programmes are needed, which not only mentor future policymakers and practitioners from public and private sector but also enables local green economic and entrepreneurship avenues through responsible tourism. **This would require mountain specific vocation centres to be in place and updated with modern facilities and knowledge on the subject.** Networking with other institutions (e.g. NGOs, Key Local Institutions) must be ensured.

Sustainable Tourism: Considerations for Governments

- » Sufficient attention for sustainable development
- » Participatory Structure with stakeholders for jointly agreed strategy
- » Strengthening and integration of sustainability concept in existing policies
- » Long term political support, technical competence and sufficient allocation of resources
- » Multinational and bilateral consultations on trans-boundary/regional/global facilitation

Stakeholders

- » Improvement in own performance and actions
- » Strengthening of collective response
- » Putting pressure on governments to take appropriate action

Continual Communication

- » Effective communication
- » Dissemination of strategy and policies
- » Regular Reporting
- » Regular Monitoring and Review
- » Appreciation

*Based on
Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide
for Policy Makers. 2005. UNEP & UNWTO*



There are ongoing public and private initiatives and schemes having good potential for being up-scaled. However, across Indian Himalaya including Ladakh, in reality, things on ground are of great concern. This is evident from the strong National Green Tribunal (NGT) directives to mountain states in different issues (e.g. Himachal Pradesh on Rohtang Pass, J&K on Vaishno Devi). In the longer run, tourist destinations in different parts of globe, are reporting disturbing trends of drug abuse amongst youth, prostitution, exploitation of community labour, and uncontrolled land sales or groundwater harvesting, despite stringent norms for insiders/outsideers. All these issues are related to overtourism that can grossly harm. **This also underlines the fact that we are marketing the natural and cultural glory of the Himalaya at a very low premium and allowing development in Indian Himalayan Region in similar lines as we do for the plains of India.**

The shared history, culture, ecology, and the bonds among people are the fundamental driving forces of regional cooperation, so these have to be promoted through regional initiatives. In Ladakh, there is also a rich potential for development of intra-regional tourism through specialized tourist circuits (heritage/cultural and ecotourism).

Pandemic and Tourism

- » Recent crisis of Corona Pandemic owes its dimension to global travel and tourism.
- » Recurrence of such a crisis cannot be kept outside tourism. Some thinking and action plan should be in place.
- » Alternative short term economic activities would be required keeping in view that tourism may be damaged on a long term basis.
- » As for Ladakh, airport should be given more importance in terms of technology.

It is, therefore, important to **develop an appropriate tourism model for Ladakh, which is built on the pillars of sustainable development goals, people-to-people interaction, state socio-economic, environmental (carbon neutrality) and cultural sensitivities, people's aspirations, and collaborations.**



Annexure I



Annexure II

"Sustainability of Tourism" - Session Panellists (March 4, 2020)

- Mr Rajan Kotru, Redefined Sustainable Thinking (REST) - Moderator
- Ms Rigzin W Lachic, Ladakh Winter Conclave 2020
- Mr C Phunsog, University of Ladakh
- Ms Gitanjali JB, Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh
- Ms Anu Kumari Lama, ICIMOD
- Mr Sushil Bahuguna, Environmental Journalist, NDTV
- M. Sajid Sultan, Chief Wildlife Warden, UT Ladakh

Focus Group Discussion - Participants (March 5, 2020)

- Mr Rajan Kotru, Redefined Sustainable Thinking (REST) - Group Leader
- Dr Subrat Sharma, Ladakh Regional Centre, NIHE
- Ms Deskrit Angmo, Environment Planner
- Lt. Col. Rahul Raman, Army
- Ms Samita Sharma, ICIMOD
- Mr Raza Ali, Dept. of Leh Wildlife, Ladakh
- Ms Namjail Angmo, Leh
- Mr Zabir Ahmed, LOFF, Leh
- Ms Rigzin W Lachic, Ladakh Winter Conclave 2020

"Carbon Neutral Ladakh: A New Beginning"

Ladakh Sustainable Development Summit 2020

2-5 March 2020

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Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh

Ladakh became a Union Territory on 31st of October 2019. In August 2019, a reorganization act was passed by the Parliament of India which contained provisions to reconstitute Ladakh as a union territory, separate from the rest of Jammu and Kashmir. Ladakh is renowned for its remote mountain beauty and distinct culture. Under the terms of the act, the union territory is administered by the Lieutenant Governor acting on behalf of the Central Government of India. Shri Radha Krishna Mathur became the first Lt. Governor of the Ladakh UT. Ladakh UT has its administrative headquarters at Leh. Ladakh UT has two districts viz., Leh and Kargil.

<https://ladakh.nic.in/>



G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment

(An autonomous Institute of Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt. of India)

Kosi-Katarmal, Almora

G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (NIHE, formerly known as G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development) was established in 1988-89 as an autonomous Institute of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt. of India, which has been identified as a focal agency to advance scientific knowledge, to evolve integrated management strategies, demonstrate their efficacy for conservation of natural resources, and to ensure environmentally sound development in the entire Indian Himalayan Region (IHR).

NIHE has decentralized setup with HQs located in Almora (Uttarakhand), and different regional centres in Indian Himalayan states (Mohal-Kullu in Himachal Pradesh, Srinagar in Uttarakhand, Panthang-Gangtok in Sikkim, Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh). With creation of Ladakh UT a new centre “Ladakh Regional Center” (LRC) has been established at Leh to ensure NIHE’s R&D outreach in Trans-Himalayan region of IHR with following objectives - (i) To promote alternative livelihoods for climate change vulnerable cold-desert communities, (ii) To facilitate conservation of critical/important cold desert habitats and biodiversity, (iii) To strengthen and establish approaches for addressing issues of water scarcity, and (iv) To foster climate smart communities in the trans-Himalayan landscape.

<http://gbpihed.gov.in>