

Chapter 4: Case Study: Ecotourism in select villages

4.1. Background

Sikkim is strategically situated in a region that has been identified as the biodiversity hotspot of the eastern Himalaya region. The basis on which biodiversity hotspots are classified is exclusively on the consideration that such hotspots have a phenomenal concentration of regional species and areas that are presently witnessing a rapid depletion in their natural habitat. Species are classified as regional if they are exclusively observed only in specific regions or areas and are not present in other parts of the nation. Considering their restriction to specific regions, such species are specifically susceptible to be extinct. In order to foster a culture of conservation and establish an appropriate source of employment for the local residents, the government of Sikkim has structured an ecotourism policy that largely hinges on two primary objectives which are: alleviating poverty and conserving the nature. As a matter of fact, Sikkim has emerged as the first state in India that has structured an effective policy for ecotourism with due support and assistance of experts from Japan and America. The outcome of the ecotourism policy that was formulated and implemented by the government of Sikkim led to the state being accorded the status of the cleanest state on the basis of their conservation initiatives. The state has also largely reduced their crime graph owing to increased economic activities and employment opportunities offered by ecotourism. Subsequently, the state of Sikkim has been declared as the best ecotourism destination on the basis of a survey conducted by the world's leading tour and travel guide 'Lonely Planet' (Kumar, 2014).

4.1.1. Objective

The objective of this case study is to examine the economic and social impact of ecotourism on the environment and local communities located in four prominent regions in the state of Sikkim. These regions would include: Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap.

4.2. Yuksom

Yuksom, is a small quaint town that is one of the many regions in the state of Sikkim. It is said that Yuksom used to be the ancient capital of Sikkim before the kingdom bestowed that honour on Gangtok. Over the years, Yuksom has emerged as an ecotourism destination that provides people who seek peace and tranquillity and yearn to rejuvenate themselves in the calm environment of the region. It also offers people with an opportunity to escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life while enjoying the natural bounties that the region has to offer. Tourists to Yuksom can reach the location by train and alight at the nearest railway station New Jalpaiguri in neighbouring state of West Bengal. Tourists would be required to travel another 150 kms by road to reach the town of Yuksom. Yuksom also acts as base camp from where trips to various locations within Sikkim originate. As a matter of fact, tourists have the option to trek to Goecha La, Tashiding and Dzongri hill from Yuksom. Moreover, new visitors who are unfamiliar with the place can also avail the services of tourist guides and reliable agencies that will escort them to various sites of interest that will help tourists to enjoy the natural bounties and unwind. They will also be exposed to the local customs, cultures and traditions of the communities living in the region. In addition, the Khangchendzonga national park is also in close proximity of the region. The Khangchendzonga area presents spectacular beauty which has the quality to enthrall tourists and is surrounded by mountains which are snow clad throughout the year. Tourists are also presented with an opportunity to taste and sample the local cuisine which includes Yak Cheddar Momo that is a 'must-try' delicacy (Tripoto, 2015).



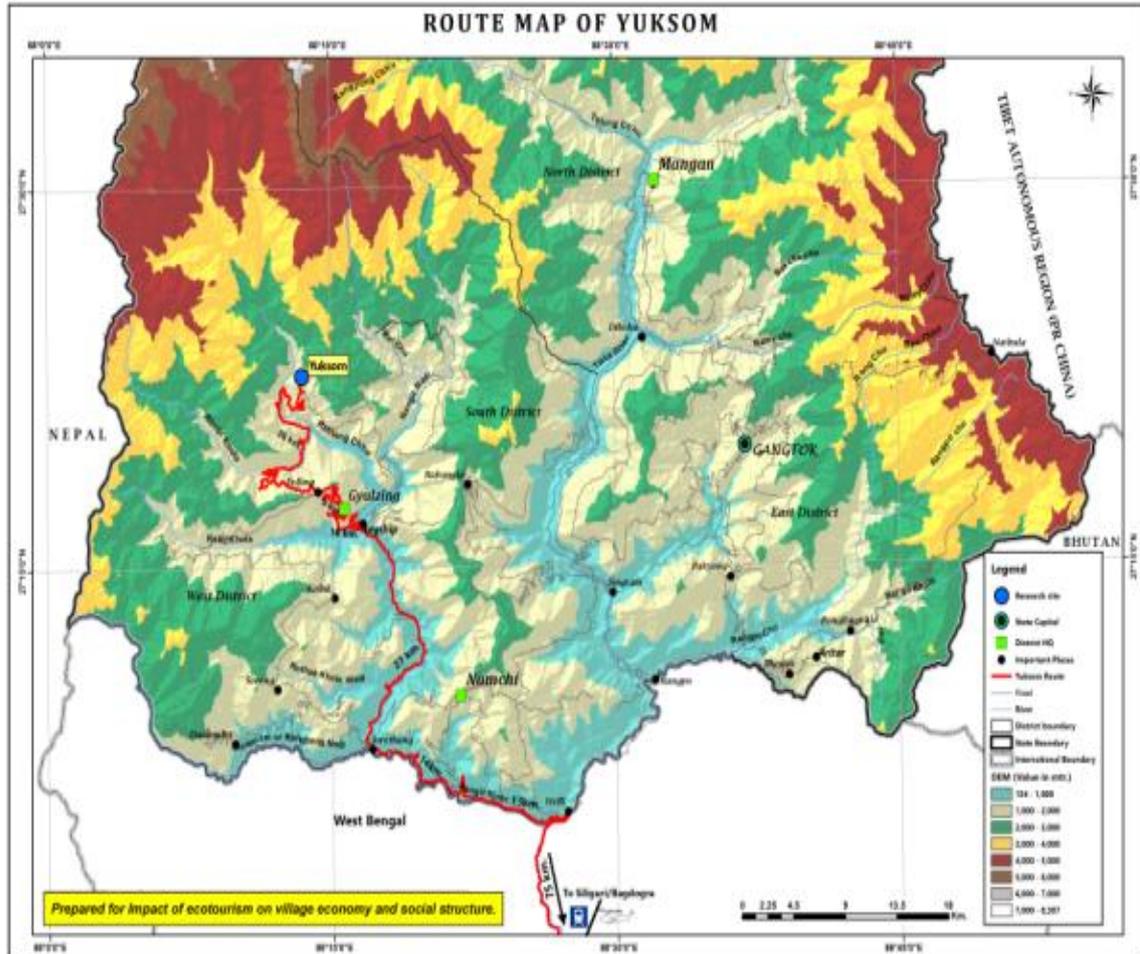
Plate 1 : Yuksom

Tourists to Yuksom are also presented with an opportunity to undertake a high-altitude ‘Yuksom-Dzongri’ trek that trails around the Rathong Chu River to the west of Sikkim. The trail runs through thick forests, placid mountainous lakes and offers tourists with mesmerizing visuals of the Khangchendzonga that is the third highest mountain peak in the world. Records reveal that the number of tourist footfalls to the region of Yuksom has substantially increased over the past 15 years. According to existing records, the number of tourists increased from less than 2000 in 1990 to numbers in excess of 4500 in the year 2005. The two prominent seasons when trekking is at its peak in the region occurs from March to May and September to November, with the maximum number of footfalls being recorded in the month of October. The numbers of tourists drastically drop in the monsoon months of June, July and August and also in the winter season that extends from December to February. However, there has been a significant rise in the number of tourists frequenting the region during the spring season.



Plate 2 : Aerial view of Pelling

Figure 5: Route Map of Yuksom



A large number of international tourists frequenting the region belong to the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland, Australia, Netherlands, France and Germany. Thus it can be concluded that Europe happens to be the largest market for ecotourism for the region of Yuksom (Tambe *et al.*, n.d.). To boost ecotourism in the region, a conservation project is being put in place by the Department of Forests, Environment and Wildlife Management [DFEWM] in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA]. The objective of the project is to reinforce initiatives that conserve the region's biodiversity and capacity for forest management and also to enhance the scope of livelihood for the people from local communities who largely rely on their natural environment. This activity would be oriented around boosting sustainable conservation of biodiversity and initiatives that generate income, and would also take ecotourism under its ambit. The project is expected to be executed over a period of ten years starting from 2010-2011 to 2019-2020 (Kumar, 2014).

4.2.1. The main tourist attractions in the area are:

Norbugang Coronation Throne:

At a 15 minute walking distance from Yuksom sits the most important historical site of Yuksom, the stone throne of Norbugang. It is the place where Chogyal Phuntsog, the first religious king of Sikkim was crowned. The stone throne is shaded by a 300-year-old fir tree and still bears the memory of the ancient past. A foot print in front of the throne is said to belong to Lhatsun Namkha Jigme, one of the three venerated monks who consecrated the first Chogyal of Sikkim. The Chorten (stupa) near the throne contains soil and water from all over Sikkim. The site is protected by the archeological department of India.

Dubdi Monastery

This was the monastery established soon after the consecration ceremony of the first Chogyal. The monastery is located on a hill top above Yuksom surrounded by verdant forest. It can be approached by trekking only, negotiating steep slope for about half an hour. It is an ideal place for lamas seeking meditation recluse.

Phamrong Water Falls

Located between Yuksom and Gerethang, this highest waterfall of West Sikkim presents a magnificent scenario especially during Monsoon. A gentle footpath takes one to a viewpoint for a closer view of this mighty discharge of water. A cafeteria is being constructed for the benefit of tourists and the picnickers.

4.2.2. Socio-Economic Impact of Ecotourism in Yuksom

In the preceding few years, the region of Yuksom has developed new trails for trekking which includes the Everest Singalila in Hee Bermiok, Yambong Singalila at Nambu and Areylungchok Dzungri at Labdang which has been thrown open to tourists. The development of the said trails has enhanced the overall socio-economic situation in villages located in the interiors of Yuksom. A case in point is of Mr. Phupu Tshering Bhutia who sustained a living as a Yak herder since the time he gained senses. Mr. Bhutia's village that is known as 'Chongri or Yak' is located in the remotest part of Yuksom. The primary profession of the people in this particular village is nomadic yak herding. The people of this village have also been known to adopt the vocation of dealing in medicinal and aromatic plants and herbs. A remarkable intervention by the Mountain Institute in the year 2004 came across as a ray of light for the people from this village. This intervention enabled the villagers to venture into growing seasonal vegetables and drinking water restoration, provided them with hygienic toilets, boosted tourism in their village and also established a community campsite. The initiative that promoted community based tourism in the Yambong Singalila trail allowed the villagers to generate additional income from 180 tourists that resulted in bringing in revenues to the tune of Rs.7 lakhs especially to people who were previously involved in Yak herding. The village of Chongri now boasts of an NGO named 'Sindrabong Khangchendzonga Eco-Friendly Society' that has people from the community as key members. The largest impact of this initiative has been in altering the mindsets of the people from the village. People who not long ago were yak herders and used to damage the green cover have now transitioned from being yak herders to promoting ecotourism. People who double up as eco-guides on such trekking activities also stand to make more money. According to Mr. Bhutia, people have now transformed from being *Himal*

Rakshasas [Mountain Devil] to *Himal Rakshak* [Mountain Guardian] (Tambe *et al.*, n.d.).



Plate 3 : Personal Interview at Yoksum Homestay Owner

Ecotourism had a significant impact on the economy of Yuksom. These impacts can be clubbed into three distinct categories such as direct, indirect and induced. Direct impact would relate to impacts that occur owing to the initial spending on tourism like amount spent at restaurants or motels. It creates a chain of activity wherein the restaurant utilizes the amount generated from tourists to purchase products and services from other enterprises which creates an indirect impact. Moreover, as an offshoot of such activity, the employees of the restaurant spend a chunk of their earnings to buy products and services that satiate their basic human requirements which are considered as induced impact (Vishwanatha & Chandrashekara, 2014). However, the scope for indirect impact is negated when the restaurant opts to buy products and services from establishments that are not situated within the local community. The substantially positive and high economic impact of ecotourism in Yuksom resulted in a marked improvement in the local economy and enhanced their budget for conservation. The sources for economic impacts were felt through diverse avenues. These avenues included; entrance fees to national parks and forest ranges, income generated through

the sale of tourism oriented products and services viz., boarding and lodging, expenses on food stuff, transportation, cost of hiring local guides and interpreters, sale of handicraft items etc. Income was also generated through monetary contribution by tourists towards tourism development and ecological and biodiversity conservation, revenues generated from environmental NGOs etc. (Vishwanatha & Chandrashekara, 2014).

Economic impact of Ecotourism also resulted in:

- A marked increase in employment opportunities for people from the local community
- Generated foreign revenue that was utilized for regional and local development
- A substantial increment in the spending power of the people from local communities owing to increased revenues
- Enhanced the opportunities for local micro, small and medium businesses
- Augmented the scope and market for local goods and services

A case in question is the family of Chime Bhutia who is 51 years old & his family comprised of his son Kunzang Bhutia aged 25 and two daughters. The primary occupation of the family was farming and they cultivated cardamom, ginger, rice and tea. However, their farming activity was not enough to sustain their livelihood. To sustain their livelihood they resorted to ecotourism. The family offered competitive prices which totaled to Rs.1880/- per night, per person and included food, lodging and package sight-seeing. 70% of visitors were from international destinations like USA, Switzerland, Germany. They provided customer satisfaction by serving local home grown food. They also presented cultural programs on request in the evenings. Tourists were charged separately for cultural programs that amounted to Rs.1500 per show. In addition, tourists also had the option of buying local handicrafts and other local products like carpets. As a result of ecotourism, the family was able to generate additional income, ensure a high standard of living, facilitated cultural revival and also became aware and understood the importance of cleanliness and hygiene. Thus, it is evident that ecotourism made a sizable impact on the overall economy of Yuksom.

4.3. Aritar

Aritar is a small, peaceful Himalayan village that falls in the Rongli sub-division of Rhenock district of East Sikkim. The village of Aritar is also considered as the gateway to the famous 'Silk Route'. Though the village is considerably small in size, it is soaked in history and endowed with an unmatched natural beauty. The village is set amongst lush greenery and enveloped with sweeping paddy fields and calm lakes that run through deep forests within the region (RED PANDA Ecotourism, 2013). From Gangtok, the village of Aritar is just a three hour drive and spans around 63 kms. Another major attraction that is offered by Aritar is the presence of the Lampokhari Lake. The serene waters of the lake support diverse aquatic life forms. The lake has been spruced up recently with the development of an artificial embankment that facilitates boating and emerges as an added attraction for tourists to this region. The development of this embankment is a unique initiative and is the first of its kind in the state of Sikkim. From Aritar, tourists can undertake a short trek that would take them to Mankhim Dara that is home to a famous temple dedicated to the 'Rai' community who dominate the region. In addition, Mankhim Dara also offers tourists with a 360 degree view of the surrounding areas. Another religious site that the region boasts of and has become a major landmark happens to be the Aritar Gumpa which is an ancient Buddhist monastery that belongs to the Karma Kagyu descent of Tibetan Buddhists (Sikkim STDC, 2015).

Tourists thronging Aritar village in the month of March-April can participate and enjoy the Lampokhari Tourism festival that presents a multitude of activities. Activities during the festival include leisurely boating, horse riding, archery and other competitions. It also facilitates tourists with an opportunity to undertake short treks to hill tops and prominent locations that are in close proximity. Tourists who have an adventurous streak can also partake in paragliding and rock climbing which is an added advantage for adventure lovers. The Lampokhari festival also hosts flower exhibitions, cultural shows that highlight the cultural ethnicity of the region and offers a gastronomical delight for food enthusiasts who can sample the local cuisines (Sikkim STDC, 2015). With due assistance from the government of Sikkim, the village of Aritar has emerged as an ultimate destination that promotes eco-tourism. Tourists to Aritar can be assured of a pristine environment that stands to enrapture them. Apart from

feasting their eyes on the scenic beauty of Khangchendzonga Mountain, tourists can also revel in the marvels of Mount Makalu, Mount Pandim and Mount Sinoulchu. Rhenock happens to be one amongst the many natural wonders that the region has to offer where one can view the many local settlements. These settlements are just at a distance of 6 kilometers from the Lampokhari Lake. Additional attractions for tourists include the Nathang Valley, Jelep La Pass and Zuluk Kupup Lake. The area also comprises of zoological preservation sites and botanical gardens that are simply riveting. These attractions are bound to capture the interest of children. Tourists following the silk route will encounter a tiny hamlet that is enveloped on all sides with flowers and forests. Aritar is also the central point of entry to Tibet and China. Back in the ancient times, the area was utilized by Europeans to conduct silk trade from China to Europe through central Asia. Needless to say, Aritar is an offbeat destination for ecotourism that boasts of snow-peaked mountains, impeccable flower valleys, and undisturbed forest regions that promises to be the perfect location for tourists to unwind and enjoy (Jalal, 2015).



Plate 4 : Aritar Village Home Stay Source : www.gharebairetravels.com

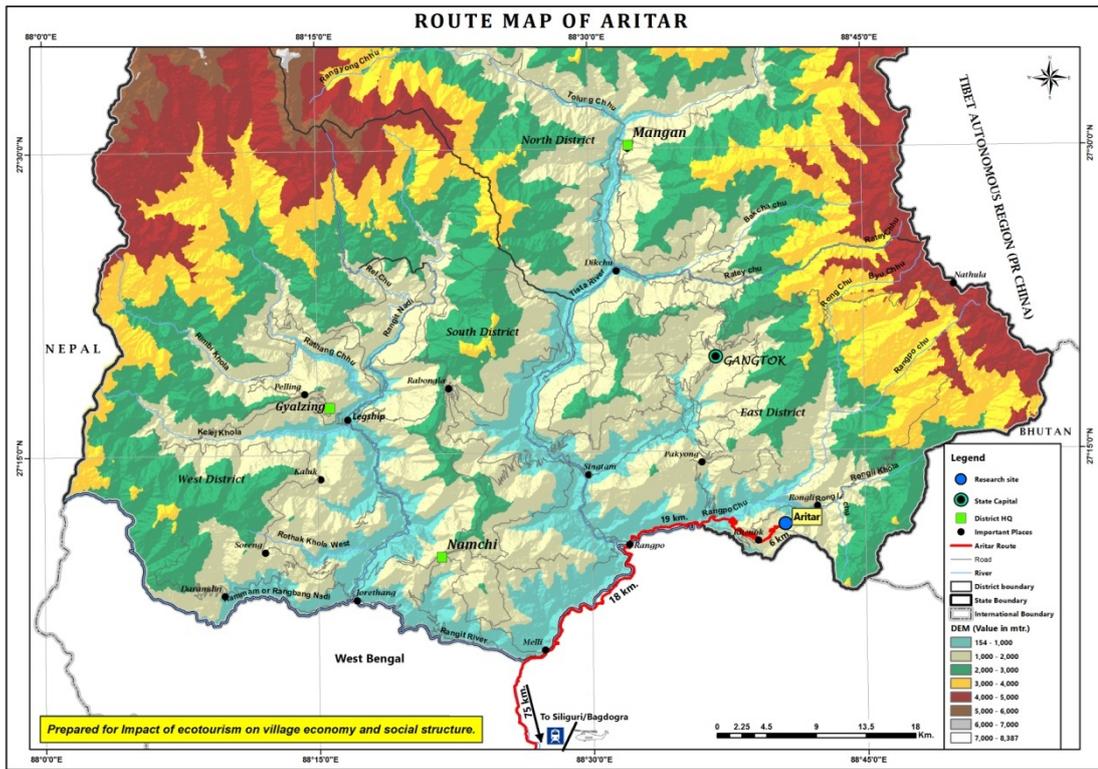


Figure 6: Route map of Aritar

4.3.1. Places of interest in Aritar



Plate 5: Aerial View of Aritar Source : www.sikkimstdc.com

1. **Lampokhari:** Initially one of the oldest natural lakes in Sikkim and recently artificially constructed to facilitate boating for the tourists. At an altitude of 4600 ft (1,400 m) it is the only lake with boating facility in Sikkim.
2. **Dak Bungalow:** Popularly known as Ari-Bangla it is an old British built bungalow built by Sir James Claude White (first political officer of Sikkim during British rule in India) in the year 1895. At the same premises Sikkim's first treasury was built as well as Sikkim Police was raised and the first outpost started functioning in the year 1897.
3. **Aritar Gumpa:** A monastery of the Kagyuapa order, considered as one of the holiest and oldest in Sikkim. The visitors can imbibe the tranquil air with splendour of monastic arts reflected in its traditional architecture, carved & painted murals and treasure of manuscripts and icons.
4. **Mankhim:** Mangkhim, a Temple of the Rai of Nepali origin is located at a height of 6500 ft at Maity Village (Kheselakha). Hattipailay is another virgin village where the visitors can see elephant footprints on rock.
5. **Phursey Lake:** Phursey Lake is located few km uphill from Aritar is an isolated jungle, where years old logs stand still delivering nice reflection on the water.
6. **Rachella:** Trekking to Rachella is indeed another splendid experience.
7. **Love Dara:** Low Hills Picnic spot in Aritar.
8. **Parbateyswar Shivalaya Mandir :** The shrine with picturesque splendour is considered a very holy Hindu pilgrimage site, where thousands of devotees throng for the blessings and participate during the month of Sawan to offer water and sip the sacred water from a sacred vessel.
9. **Nirmal Dham:** This place situated about 5 km (approx.) from Rhenock Bazar, is an abode of Nirmal Guruji (a.k.a) Kopchey Baba, known for his miraculous healing power, which has attracted hundreds of devotees from all over India and neighbouring countries.
10. **Ever green nursery & Ram Gauri Sangrhalaya :** Located at Rhenock Bazar, the nursery and museum is privately owned and has drift wood collections, botanical & other varieties of flowers.
11. **Kali khola falls (Lonely falls):** 100 m in height (Rorathang-Rongli road)
12. **Changey water fall:** 50 m in height (Near Lampokhari)
13. **Lungchokvalley:** Trekking destination (Lokdara, Chujachen)

4.3.2. Socio-Economic Impact of Ecotourism in Aritar

The ecotourism industry in India witnessed an unparalleled growth owing to an increase in destinations that promoted ecotourism, the inflow of finance and the number of people involved, in the last few decades (Grenčíková *et al.*, 2012). In many regions within India, tourism is instrumental in driving the Gross Domestic Product [GDP] and offers sufficient opportunities in employment to scores of people from the target area. The widespread acceptance of ecotourism as a concept and means for sustainable development is directly related to the fact that ecotourism happens to be economically feasible and emerges as an alternative to environmental sustainability (Vujadinović *et al.*, 2013). Other than helping the region in achieving an economic viability and nurturing sustainable development, eco-tourism also stands to significantly improve social cohesion, increase the overall environmental awareness amongst the local residents, conserve natural and cultural heritages and reduce the unwanted impact that is otherwise witnessed in usual practices of tourism (Ondicho, 2012). The economic impact of ecotourism amongst the local community of Aritar was extensively studied. The growth of ecotourism in Aritar has had several vital economic impacts. Ecotourism in Aritar enabled the local community to boost their livelihood which was previously dependent on cattle rearing and farming. Enterprising locals from Aritar also adopted the practice of providing home stay facilities to tourists which further augmented their income. Along with home stays they also provided proper meals and facilitated trekking and sight-seeing activities. As of now around 43 households are providing home stay facilities in addition to the local lodging and boarding houses. Needless to say, these home stay enterprises are operating on a profit which has improved the local economy substantially. These home stay facilities often find it difficult to manage the huge demand generated from the increasing number of tourists to Aritar. The season that witnesses a large influx of tourists has been identified as the months from October to November and February through April. Though initially the region of Aritar witnessed a large number of tourists from within the country, of late, there has been a sizable increase in the number of international tourists (Datta & Banerji, 2015).

In the socio-economic context, the revenue generated through ecotourism stands to enhance the local economy of Aritar and also extends adequate support to the local governing bodies (gram panchayats) to enhance their overall infrastructural capacities.

It also allows them to ensure the social welfare of the local community at Aritar. Studies conducted previously to evaluate the economic impact of ecotourism in the Aritar region executed extensive surveys amongst local residents and stakeholders who stood to gain from ecotourism. Respondents were asked to grade ecotourism as a sustainable source of income as compared to income generated from other sources that were open to the people of Aritar and was executed on the basis of pair-wise comparison. Coming back to evaluating the impact of ecotourism on the local populace, the economy of the village and infrastructure, stakeholders from all households were required to grade the major infrastructural and economic developments that occurred in Aritar owing to ecotourism on a 5-point Likert scale in 2009 and 2012. This was done with an objective to evaluate the economic status before adopting ecotourism and after implementation (Datta & Banerji, 2015). The primary idea behind assessing the sustainability levels of ecotourism in any region is to learn about the economic advantages presented through ecotourism. Further, it was also essential to gauge the overall impact of ecotourism and the significant advantages that it presented to people from all segments of the local community at Aritar. It emerged that ecotourism activities in Aritar was a secondary source of income for the people as a large number of the local populace were actively involved in cattle rearing and farming which provided them with a primary option for livelihood. Nonetheless, people from the younger generations were the ones who gained largely with the introduction of ecotourism as they were actively engaged in offering home stay services and they also doubled up as cooks, drivers, guides and managers in the home stay facilities. According to these members from the younger generation, ecotourism made a significant impact on their lives and the income from ecotourism activities is continuing to grow with each passing year. As a result, more people from the local community are now inclining towards adopting ecotourism to augment their income. Thus, ecotourism is gradually turning to be a prominent livelihood option for the people of Aritar and substantially impacts the overall economy (Barna *et al.*, 2011).



Plate 6: Aritar Homestay Overview Source : www.goibibo.com

In Aritar, some of the people who are involved in ecotourism activities include H.P.Chettri, Bimal Gurung and Mrs. MamtaThapa. These people play a key role in providing home stay facilities to tourists thronging the region for ecotourism. These three individuals along with other members of the family not only provide tourists with a place to stay but also serve them with home cooked food. The food that they cook in general involve local meat, poultry and fresh vegetables like nettle, squash, potato, fern shoot, mustard leaves and nakima –*Tupistra aurantiaca* Wall (a plant delicacy which has medicinal properties), which is a local vegetable that is highly recommended for its high medicinal value. As a direct outcome of their involvement in eco-tourism activities, these families are able to afford a good living, ensure that their children receive good education, contribute towards conserving the environment, created increased awareness amongst the public, were able to supplement their income by opening small restaurants, curio shops and other similar establishments, improved awareness amongst the locals with regards to tourism etc. In addition, it also enabled guests to learn about the living patterns of the local community and enjoy the local customs and cultures.

4.4. Kewzing

The village of Kewzing in Sikkim is set against the backdrop of snow-capped mountains and is a picture of scenic beauty. The village is also surrounded by Mount Narsing and Mount Kabru. The village on the whole comes across as a peaceful hamlet

that presents an image of rustic simplicity in all its splendor. Kewzing is situated in South Sikkim, just 8 kms from Ravangla and 76 kms from Gangtok and the number of households totals to thirty. Most of the residents of Kewzing are from the Bhutia community and practice Buddhism (Sikkim Tourism, 2013). Kewzing literally means the land of wheat and is located at an altitude of 4600 ft. Apart from wheat, the village also boasts of a rich cultivation of cardamom and tea plantations (Sikkim Home Stay, 2014). The highest point happens to be the Maenam Hill that slopes down to River Rangit and stands opposite Tashiding. Kewzing is also sometimes termed as 'Sosing' which means 'Land of Chestnut Forest'. The sparsely populated village comprises largely of people from the 'Bhutia' community and is endowed with nature's richest bounties. With close to zero pollution levels, the area boasts of vast green forests and is an abode to exotic plants and animals (BON Farmhouse, 2010). Apart from the picturesque beauty presented by the area, Kewzing is also enveloped with a lavish green cover and is home to some very rare and endangered species of birds. The village of Kewzing is isolated and surrounded by mountains without any sign of the hustle and bustle witnessed in the city. This is an aspect that attracts tourists in droves to this quaint village. The people of this village are extremely hospitable and openly welcome all tourists - domestic or international. The village is also in close proximity to several ancient monasteries that preserve and uphold the Buddhist culture. Some of the monasteries include the Tashiding monastery in the south-west, Mangbru and PemaYangtshé monastery in the west, Ralong and Ravangla monastery in the south-east, Doling monastery in the east and Bon monastery in the north (Tour my india, 2015).

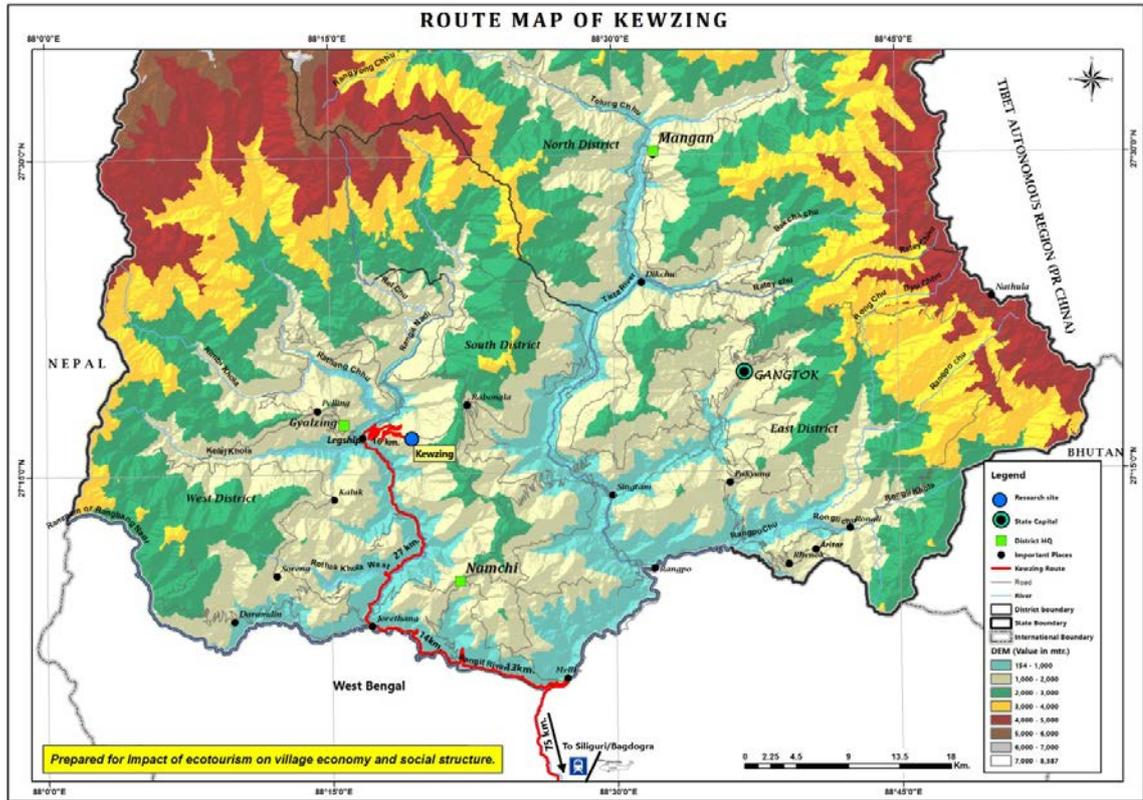


Plate 7: Kewzing Source : <https://shaggyley.wordpress.com/tag/sikkim/page/2/>

The village of Kewzing offers tourists with a flurry of activities that help them to relax and enjoy village life. It presents tourists with ample activities that help them to connect with nature and observe nature in an unpolluted environment. Some of the activities that tourists can partake while visiting Kewzing includes touring the village and experiencing first hand village life. Tourists can also keep themselves occupied by going on nature treks, hikes to prominent pilgrimage sites and monasteries. They can also engage in day to day village activities like ploughing fields, milking cows and making butter, collecting fodder and feeding cattle, cardamom weeding and harvesting, collect and cook edible fruits and vegetables etc. In addition, they can also participate in traditional sports and games, listen to folk songs and tales, seek remedies for common ailments from traditional healers through conventional healing methodologies, partake hot stone herbal baths etc. Kewzing also has a bird watching trail where tourists can watch exotic birds and butterflies. Tourists in the mood for shopping can visit the local handicraft center and browse through the traditional handicrafts created by locals using natural resources (Peaty, 2004). The peaceful and extremely serene environment offered by the village of Kewzing is a far cry from city life. Far from boisterous crowds and in the lap of nature with the mountains of Himalaya as a background, presents tourists with a spell binding environment which is exceptional for people with an inclination for prayer and meditation. Tourists who are keen to meditate are combined in groups and exclusive meditation camps are organized. Helpful locals from the village offer suggestions for potential meditation sites and an expert leads such groups

through their meditation schedule. In addition, tourists can also visit monasteries with an objective to pray and meditate (Sikkim Home Stay, 2004).

Figure 7: : Route Map of Kewzing



Kewzing - experience of a lifetime

Sikkim might not be on most tourists’ itinerary but what add to its charm are the gracious people, untouched scenery and an experience of a lifetime. The seven things to do in Kewzing that attract tourists are:

1) **Trekking**

Kewzing seems to have jumped out of an artist’s canvas; such is its picturesque, placid beauty. The best way to experience this bounty of nature is by trekking it. One can trek to the local monastery, through the cardamom fields and along the village to be enlightened about the village’s history and culture.

2) Festivals

Festivals are an integral part of the Sikkimese culture. Celebrations are ongoing, almost all year round, throughout the state, and Kewzing is no exception. Festivals are celebrated here with great vigour and joy. Guests are encouraged to join in the festivities. Special cultural programs, which include music and dancing, are enthusiastically organised for those guests who have the misfortune of missing the festival season

3) Organic Food

Most homes in Kewzing grow organic vegetables in their fields, which are unbelievably fresh and juicy. The organic food grown in Kewzing is true pleasure for those who appreciate the rare and exotic.

4) Local Drinks

Sikkim is known for its unique locally produced wines, beers and spirits. In Kewzing, most homes produce their own homemade millet-based drinks that have a distinct and rich flavour. They have to be tried.

5) Hot Stone Baths

This relaxing and curative bath is arranged for guests every winter and allows them to laze in a hot water while cloaked above by the nippy air of Kewzing's winter.

6) Village Life

A typical day in a local's life involves getting up at the crack of dawn to milk the cow, feed the animals, tend to the fields and pick fresh vegetables to prepare for meals. Villagers realise that partaking in these activities is a novelty for most visitors.

7) Photography

The idyllic and enigmatic surroundings of Kewzing are almost custom-made for budding as well as professional photographers. The sunsets, sunrises, vibrant hues of green and ever-smiling people are inspiration to start clicking away.



Plate 8: Aerial View of Kewzing

4.4.1. Socio-Economic Impact of Ecotourism in Kewzing

In the year 2002, a community based tourism project termed ‘Kewzing Tourism Development Committee [KTDC]’ was established with an objective of boosting the economy of the local community. This initiative was implemented in association with a local NGO ‘Sikkim Development Foundation [SDF]’. In addition, the ‘Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim [ECOSS]’ an NGO that was based in Gangtok setup a committee with a view to promote community based tourism. The said committee comprised of 15 Bhutia families from Kewzing village. This was one of the key factors that led to the initiation of this project. The committee is headed by three prominent members who act in the capacity of President, Vice-President and General Secretary. At the time of initiating the project, amongst the 15 Bhutia families only ten of them had a sustainable source of revenue whereas the remaining five families survived on odd jobs that were irregular and too scant in frequency. The SDF joined hands with KTDC and offered a meager financial assistance and helped the families without any regular source of income to modify their houses and include some basic facilities (Travel Blog, 2014). Further, these families were offered detailed hospitality training and extensive training on handling guests, proper etiquettes and preparing proper traditional delicacies. The idea was to help these families to earn a livelihood by facilitating home stays which involved accommodating tourists at their homes for a reasonable remuneration. The home stay packages were extensively marketed through the medium of two primary websites and a travel agency based in Gangtok. The home

stay package was holistically developed wherein tourists were traditionally welcomed by monks and taken to the home where they were going to be accommodated. A unique revenue sharing model was adopted wherein the agency marketing the initiative was entitled to 25 per cent of the income generated, while 10 per cent was allocated for maintenance and 10 per cent was the margin of the committee. The families accommodating the guests were entitled to receive Rs.700/- for a one night stay (Travel Blog, 2014).

Out of the said households with no known source of income, each of them is allowed to take a maximum number of four guests at a time. Similarly, families who are keen to avail the home stay provision in order to augment their overall income but are unable to accommodate guests at their homes owing to lack of facilities are provided with the option to provide home cooked food to the tourists. One family reportedly hosted around 131 guests over a period ranging from 2003 to 2009. A majority of the guests the family hosted were of Swiss, German, American and Australian descent. The President of the KTDC stated that from the time of inception of this home stay initiative, the village of Kewzing had hosted around 1500 international tourists and a sizable number of Indian tourists too. With due support from the state government, a community center and handicraft center was also established within the village. This community center is now leased for tourism and various other purposes. ECOSS has been responsible to provide necessary training to the villagers that helped them to market Kewzing as an ecotourism destination. As the result, the village and local population of Kewzing have remarkably benefitted from these initiatives. Households with no income sources were able to sustain themselves in a fair manner while families who were already generating income from traditional activities were able to enhance their income considerably (Peaty, 2004). With the changing preferences of tourists who opted for eco-tourism rather than regular tourism, the scenario is set to improve further. As far as social impact is considered, the local communities were presented with an opportunity to interact with people from diverse cultures both national and international that helped them to gain a perspective on the varied cultures that exist in society. Moreover, this initiative was also instrumental in prompting the local residents to acquire new skills like learning new languages that

facilitated smooth interaction with tourists. Overall, ecotourism as a concept has made a sizable impact on the socio-economic aspects of Kewzing(Travel Blog, 2014).

The Kewzing Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) has established and successfully runs Kewzing's community development programme. The area of Kewzing offers 15 home stay facilities where guests are accommodated on a rotational basis. 70 per cent of the income that is generated through the home stay programme is taken by the host whereas 10 per cent each is shared by the monastery, KTDC and the local guide. The Bon Farmhouse in the area offers tourists with an option to experience nature by residing in a typical village ambience with a Bonpo family. The farmhouse run by Chewang Rinchen aged 34 offers three rooms where guests are accommodated on rotational basis in tandem with the local NGO. The farmhouse has been in operation since 2002 and has received the Governor's award for home stay. The home stay programme is instrumental in helping the local community to generate income and creates an opportunity that facilitates an equitable benefit distribution through ecotourism for the community. It also fosters the local community to build more efficient and skilled ecotourism operators within rural areas to harness the potential of rural tourism.



Plate 9 : Kewzing Home Stay :Bon Farmhouse

4.5 Darap

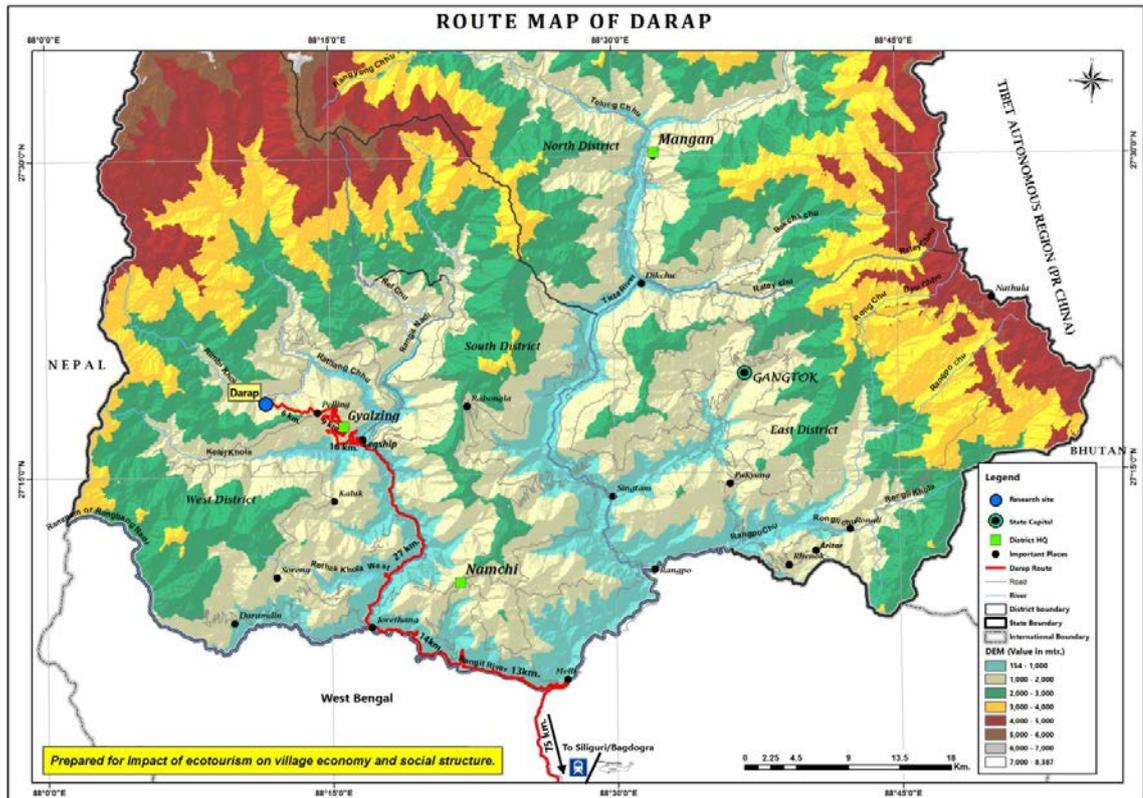
The village of Darap is situated in Sikkim's West district and is around 6 kms away from the prominent tourist hotspot of Pelling. The village almost borders the periphery of the Khangchendzonga National Park. More accurately the village of Darap can be described as clinging to the Sikkim Himalayan foothills and basks in the shadow of the Khangchendzonga Mountain which is the third highest mountain peak in the world. The village is located at an altitude of 1600 meters from the mean sea level. The origins of the word 'Darap' can be traced to the 'Limboo' language and literally translates to mean plain or even land. Darap, in its natural setting is rather gentle as opposed to other regions within west Sikkim. The local population of Darap comprises largely of people from the Limboo community and is also home to a minor number of people from diverse communities such as Bhutias, Tamangs, Chettris, Gurungs, Lepchas and Rais. Since the village is strategically placed, Darap presents tremendous opportunities for tourism in general and ecotourism in particular. The region is resplendent and comes across as a feast for the eyes, especially around the time buckwheat farms are in bloom and at the time of harvesting (Cajee, 2014). The mystical and enchanting village of Darap is one of the many locations in the world that is yet to be fully explored. This village that experiences a cold climate throughout the year and rests at a high altitude has gained prominence as a spot for eco- tourism only recently. The village experiences variations in temperatures ranging from -5 degree centigrade to +28 degree centigrade. This is what renders Darap a repository of several rare species of flora and fauna (Tamang, 2013).



Plate 10 : Darap Home Stay

Because of its close proximity to Pelling, Darap has now become a potential destination for Village tourism. There are various ways one can be engaged in: milking the cows in the morning and evening; gardening in the fields; interaction with the local children; processing butter and cheese; walking in the villages and nearby streams; hiking to other nearby villages; engaging in the daily activities of the village people; and a visit to the 200 year old Limboo traditional house. This ancient structure, with solid mud floors and tar-encrusted ceilings from the constantly burning fire, has been passed down from generation to generation of Nepali Limboo tribesmen.

Figure 8: Route Map of Darap



4.4.2. Socio-Economic Impact of Ecotourism in Darap

Though the village of Darap boasted of an opulent natural environment and favorable climatic conditions, the people from the village faced several challenges when it came to earning a livelihood. Poverty was rampant and means to daily sustenance revolved around activities such as cattle rearing, breeding poultry, extracting medicinal herbs, felling timber for construction, charcoal and firewood. Farming and cultivation also formed a crux of their activities wherein villagers opted to cultivate rice, maize, millets and certain varieties of vegetables and spices. However, the produce was just enough to meet the local requirements and couldn't be used for extensive trading. Thus, the economy in the region was insignificant. However, the introduction of tourism in the village presented the residents with an array of employment opportunities that helped the residents to enhance their livelihood through direct and indirect sources. Moreover, the concept of promoting the area as a potential destination for eco-tourism was instrumental in altering the lifestyles of the local community (Cajee, 2014). This is evident from the fact that almost ninety per cent of

the meat and vegetables produced by the village is largely consumed by tourists. In the year 2005, the concept of home stays was introduced. Initially, only eight families participated in this initiative and not much income was generated. However, the concept became hugely popular from 2009 with the increase in number of tourists thereby generating significant income for the local community. The increase in the number of tourists can be attributed to several marketing initiatives undertaken by the state government and word of mouth publicity by tourists who were satisfied with their experience at the village. Home stay rates fluctuated between Rs.1500/- for two people to Rs.3000/- for a cottage. Home stays in Darap catered to more than 5000 tourists both domestic and international in the year 2012-13. Records reveal that each family providing home stay facility managed to earn around Rs.1,15,000/- during peak tourist season in 2012-13. Again in this case, it can be concluded that eco-tourism was instrumental in boosting the economy of the region, provided adequate employment and fostered sustainable development within the community (Cajee, 2014).

Tek Bahadur Chettri aged 38, used to be a potter in the village of Darap. Pottery was his traditional profession. However, he was unable to sustain a decent livelihood by making and selling pots. To augment his income he opted to harness the tremendous potential of eco-tourism and set up and began running a home stay facility from his home. Another family that successfully runs and manages a home stay facility in Darap is Gurung family. The Gurung family comprise of Shiva and his wife Radha who go out of their way to ensure a pleasant and satisfactory stay for guests. Guests to these home stay facilities are presented with fresh, local, rustic food that is largely prepared from products that are locally produced. Other villagers who have significantly benefitted from ecotourism activities in Darap include Manmaya Subha, Goma Chettri and Kiran Gurung.

As a result of their home stay service, these families were able to augment their income and ensure a decent lifestyle. Guests in turn are presented with an opportunity to witness and experience village life first hand and acquire a better knowledge about the local customs and culture. Needless to say, ecotourism has proved to be a major boon to these villagers.

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