

CHAPTER-5**INITIATION OF ECO-TOURISM AND ADVENTURE TOURISM IN NORTH BENGAL****ECO- TOURISM :**

Eco-tourism is a new horizon in the field of tourism activity that has just begun to catch on. It is ideally an 'alternate tourism'. The traditional tourism activity has brought an excess of luxury both in means of travel and in accommodation. Man has faded up with this traditional tourism activity. So he wants a variety in tourism especially a yearning for the simple life, a hunger for direct contact with the elements of nature. Increasingly, City-dwellers want to spend their holidays getting in touch with nature, and they often have a profound urge for physical action. Besides these the large influx of tourists can drastically affect the natural balance of an environment. Considering these facts the concept of Eco-tourism has been launched recently.

According to *World Wide Fund (WWF)* for nature, **Eco-Tourism** can be defined as "Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature.... promote conservation.... low visitor impact provide for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local population". It respects social and cultural traditions. It is decentralized in nature and seeks to integrate rural development. Eco-Tourism also refers to Eco-awareness, education on nature and environment. According to WWF estimates at present only 2% of the market share of World tourism can be attributed to such specialized tourism.

From the above definition some salient features of Eco-Tourism are reflected. These are –

- (1) This is an 'alternative tourism' that breaks the traditional nature of tourism.
- (2) It prevents the environmental degradation caused by uncontrolled tourism activity.

- (3) It affords cultural exchange between rural and urban people.
- (4) Rural people are economically benefited for its initiation and hence a tool of rural development.
- (5) Introduction of education on nature and environment.
- (6) But its most avowed objective is to attain a balance between nature and human beings and ensure the co-existence of both.

Considering the abovementioned salient features the Central Forest and Environment Ministry and Tourism Department have launched the concept of Eco-Tourism in 1992.

The wave of Eco-Tourism concept has also reached on the North Bengal. This started its journey at first at Buxa National Park on 15th August 1996 (**Appendix 4**). Under Buxa National park there are several tourism spots like Buxa Duar, Raja Bhatkhawa where *Nature Interpretation centres (NIC)* have been set up to spread the Eco-Tourism. According to Forest and Environment Ministry although 'Non-forestry work' is prohibited in the reserved forests, but yet considering the economic background of the poor forest dwellers this plan has been outlined. There are two advantages of this plan here-

- (1) Forest dwellers dependent on wood and other forest products will keep away themselves from deforestation and consequently the area of the Buxa Natural Park will be increased.
- (2) Forest dwellers will act as guide for the tourists who will visit the forest and so they will be economically benefited.

This 'alternate tourism' has also flourished in **Jaldapara, Murti, Kalimpong** and in **Mahananda sanctuary**. **The Kunj Nagar Eco-Tourism Park** of Falakata and **Gorumara Nature Interpretation Centre** have been developed to spread the

Eco-Tourism. Apart from these, it has been blossomed isolately at **Chuna Bhati Monastery**; Dukpa dominated village, **Rupam Valley**, **Rover's point**, **Tapsa**, **Tasigaon** and **Lataguri** areas of North Bengal.

LIMITATIONS OF ECO-TOURISM :

Eco-Tourism in North Bengal has several negative sides. These include –

- (1) In Eco-Tourism the number of tourists are kept limited to maintain the ecological balance. So the arrival of tourists is bound to be less.
- (2) Lack of proper tourism infrastructure is another drawback of this plan.
- (3) Physical isolation and inaccessibility.
- (4) Apart from these the lack of proper publicity is also hindering the development of Eco-Tourism.

ADVENTURE TOURISM :

The concept of Adventure Tourism includes travel off the beaten track with a component of physically exerting and risk-taking activity in order to experience unfamiliar environments. Rock climbing, trekking, abseiling, diving, river and sea kayaking, white-water rafting, heli-skiing, wilderness camping, mountaineering are all adventure tourism pastimes. Large numbers of visitors are out and its self-selective in that only the reasonably fit can take part. Adventure tourists do not sue the tour company if their boat gets upset in the turbulent rapids – though they might if it does not. They wield a hearty paddle with the native boatman; they get into the water to push and shove their craft up river through the crunching shallows. They carry a full load of equipment uphill and down dale.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF ADVENTURE TOURISM IN NORTH BENGAL :

The rugged hilly tracts, turbulent river courses and the wilderness of some sanctuaries have been the bases of adventure tourism in North Bengal. The different forms of adventure tourism of this belt can be summarized in the following way –

1. TREKKING :

The most natural way of exploring Nature's trails and the beauty of the hills is to travel on foot- a sport more popularly known as Trekking. Darjiling has perhaps one of the most spectacular treks to offer. Due to this Darjiling has been known as 'Trekking's paradise.' It is said that trekking in India originated in Darjiling as far back as eighty years ago. It is really an experience that can never be paralleled. The Charms of the Himalaya along with its mysteries gradually unfold as trekkers traverse through the dense forests and verdant landscape, through miles of green-carpeted meadows and sleepy hamlets. Trekking will enable one to discover the sublime Himalayan interiors unmarred by mankind.

However, to a visitor who has limited time at ones disposal, treks were always considered as luxury and abandoned as a dream too far. Today, the DGHC Tourism has developed one-day treks with infrastructural facilities, and access to areas of unsurpassed natural beauty has been made possible.

TREKKING SEASON :

The Trekking season in Darjiling generally begins at the end of March and closes around the middle of June. During April, May and June one should be prepared for an occasional shower, which can be most refreshing. The flowers in full bloom adequately compensate the summer haze. The second season begins around

the last week of September and goes right into the first week of December. Panoramic scene is excellent and generally one encounters very good climate during this period.

GENERAL INFORMATION :

Trekkers should keep in mind the following requirements during trekking through the lap of Himalayan trails –

i) **CLOTHES** : Trekkers should carry necessary clothes during their trekking. Such as, for the lower altitudes light sweater, tee-shirts, comfortable trousers; for the higher regions – heavy pullover, wind-cheater, down jacket, woolen cap, gloves, woolen socks, muffler, light rain coat.

ii) **FIRST AID KIT** : Essential.

iii) **FOOD** : Trekkers must carry their own provisions. Although the tastes may vary from person to person, generally speaking the following is recommended – canned meat, peanut butter, cheese, baked beans, rice, dal, noodles, instant tea or coffee, condensed milk, sugar, onions, potatoes, chocolates and dry fruits.

iv) **SHOES** : A good durable, comfortable pair is recommended. Hunter boots or sports shoes are advisable.

v) **EQUIPMENT** : These can be very expensive. The adventure Tourism under the Tourism Department, D.G.H.C is making arrangements for hirings out equipments to Trekkers. The following gear is essential : sleeping bag, foam mattress, rucksacks, torchlight, air pillows, tents (optional). These are also available on hire for local Trekking agencies.

TREKKING ROUTES : The following treks are offered to all who harbour a desire to savour the splendour of Darjiling Himalayan region –

(A) **TREKKING ROUTES ALONG SINGALILA RANGE** :

Moneybhajan – Tonglu – Sandakphu – Phalut – Samanden – Ramman – Rimbick – Bijanbari trek.

(B) **TREKKING ROUTES FROM TIGER HILL** :

TREK I : Tiger hill to Bara Durpin and back.

TIME : 2 and half an hours.

DISTANCE : Approx 6 km to and fro.

TREK II : Tiger hill gate through Ring route and back to Tiger hill gate.

TIME : 2 and half an hours.

DISTANCE : Approx 6 km.

TREK III : Tiger hill to Chowrasta (Mall) via Jorebungalow, Aloobari Monastery and Ganesh gram, Toongsoong.

TIME : 4 hours.

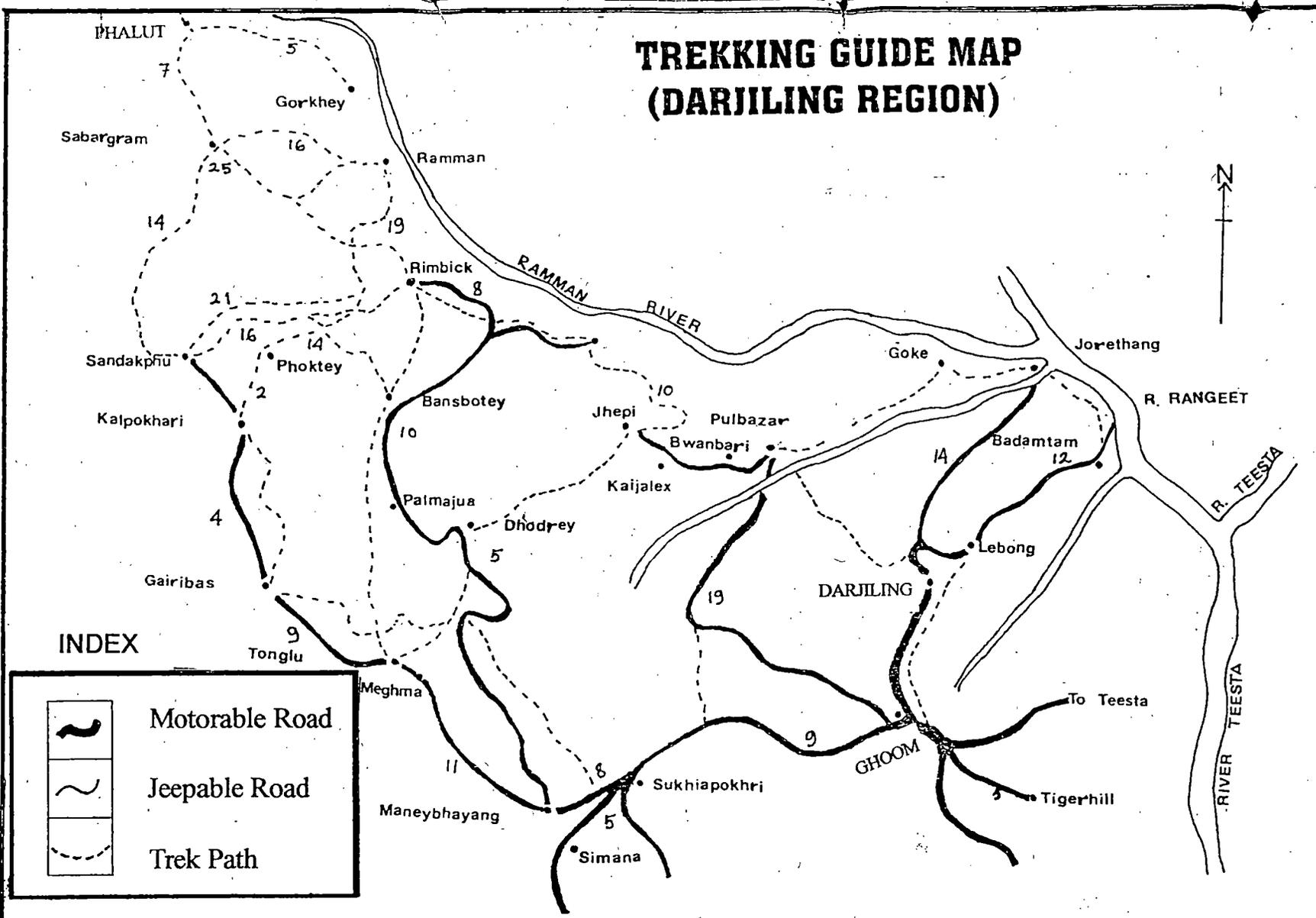
DISTANCE : Approx 9 km.

TREKKING AGENCIES :

There are several trekking agencies, which arrange organized treks with porters, cooks, guides and also provide the necessary equipments. Such as –

1. Clubside Motors (Robertson Road)
2. Himalayan Travels (C/o. Hotel Sinclairs)

TREKKING GUIDE MAP (DARJILING REGION)



(MAP NOT TO SCALE)

(NOS. ALONG ROUTE INDICATE DISTANCE IN KM.)

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3. Mountain Trails (C/o. Glenary's Hotel)
4. Lekhali Tours (4, Zakir Hussain Road)
5. Trek Mate (Nehru Road)
6. Sherpa Sikkim Trekking Tour (Dingpyen Villa)
7. U – Trek (N.B. Singh Road)
8. Ibex Tours and Travels (Durg Lodge, Hill cart Road)

KURSEONG TREKKING :

Kurseong – ‘the place of white orchids’ offers a completely different type of one-day treks in the region. These treks are varied and very pleasant. Some of the most famous tea gardens of the world are situated here and walking through these lovely manicured estates have a charm of its own.

A stroll through the whispering woods above Kurseong during spring or autumn brings anybody so close to nature that one momentarily forget the world beyond. Here, some of these important trekking routes are mentioned –

TREK I : ST. ALPHONSUS SCHOOL VIA DOWHILL RD – DEER PARK VICTORIA SCHOOL AND BACK.

TIME : 3 hours.

DISTANCE : Approx 7 km.

TREK II : KURSEONG RLY STATION – KURSEONG COLLEGE VIA DOWHILL RD – FOREST MUSEUM AND BACK.

TIME : 3 hours

DISTANCE : Approx 7 km.

TREK III : KURSEONG TOURIST CENTRE – MONTEVIOT T.E. – A.I.R. STATION – KURSEONG RLY STATION.

TIME : 3 hours

DISTANCE : Approx 7½ km.

TREK IV : KURSEONG TOWN – NAYA BASTI – GIDDA MANDIR – GIDDA PAHAR AND BACK.

TIME : 4 hours

DISTANCE : Approx 9 km.

TREK V : ST. ALPHONSUS SCHOOL – FOREST SCHOOL – DEER PARK – DEORALI – CHIMNEY – RANGER’S COLLEGE – ST. MARY’S AND BACK.

TIME : 6 hours

DISTANCE : Approx 11 km.

TREK VI : ST. MARY’S (HOLLY CROSS) – RANGER’S COLLEGE – DEORALI – CHIMNEY – CHITRAY – MAHANADI AND BACK TO KURSEONG TOWN.

TIME : 6 hours

DISTANCE : Approx 13 km.

TREK VII : ST. ALPHONSUS SCHOOL – CAFÉ BARI THROUGH AMBOTIA T.E. – SPRINGSIDE T.E. AND BACK TO KURSEONG RLY STATION.

TIME : 7¹/₂ hours

DISTANCE : Approx 14 km.

TREK VIII : ST. ALPHONSUS SCHOOL – SINGELI T.E. – RINCHINGTON HYDEL PROJECT – NAMSU BRIDGE – TINGTINGAY – MIRIK BAZAR.

TIME : 9 hours

DISTANCE : Approx 20 km.

Apart from Darjiling Himalayan belt some sanctuaries also provide a unique opportunity for trekkers such as Buxa National Park. Here it is popularly known as '*JUNGLE SAFARI*'.

2. ROCK CLIMBING AND MOUNTAINEERING :

These two also attract a number of adventure lover tourists. In Darjiling Rock climbing is practiced on **Tenzing Rock**, situated at Lebung Cart Road. The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute conducts this course. The Institute is one of the premier schools of Mountaineering in the world.

3. CANOEING AND RAFTING :

Canoeing and Rafting are also two forms of adventure tourism. Recently much emphasis has been given by W.B.T.D.C¹ in the Darjiling area to lure more foreign tourists. Being a part of adventure tourism, this game will be very fruitful for the promotion of tourism industry in the area. At the confluence of Teesta and Rangeet River, this game will be very attractive. The swift waters of the Rangeet flow over rocks and crags, turbulent and delirious. Flanked on both the sides by steep cliffs and lush green forests, the river rages on, dissipating its energy only when it reaches the plains. This charming, frothing water is just perfect for white water rafting. It's a struggle with elemental forces, a thrilling adventure that takes one right into the heart of Himalayan fury. One has to try and tame the untamable. And later as one rests, all passions spent, one will want to re-live the experience over and over again.

¹ West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation.

(4) PARA GLIDING :

Recently the Darjiling Gorkha Hill council is taking up the Para gliding sport in Darjiling area to promote the adventure tourism. Meanwhile seven sites have been identified for it. Mirik and Sonada are most suitable place for this sport (**Appendix-5**).

Recently DGHC has taken several steps to promote the adventure tourism in and around Darjiling. A number of projects have been identified for this reason. Some prospective ventures are –

- (1) Jorepokri Tourist Lodge in Sukhia Pokhri.
- (2) Tribeni Riverside Resort at the confluence of Teesta and Rangeet and wayside facility at Chitray.
- (3) Deolo Tourist Lodge, Kalimpong.
- (4) Kafer Tourist Lodge, Kalimpong.
- (5) Traditional Tea House, Durpindara, Kalimpong.
- (6) Singla water sports complex for sports of International repute like rafting and canoeing.
- (7) Tourist Resort at Relli near Kalimpong.
- (8) A Passenger cable car between Tiger Hill – Darjiling and Ghoombhanjang. This is a long-term project.
- (9) Reception centre at Kalimpong.