

Chapter VIII

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and conclusions made following a thorough examination of rural tourism for sustainable development in the Darjeeling Himalaya have been discussed within this chapter. The study results are summarized in this chapter, together with suggestions for how to improve the situation and the framework for future research.

Rural tourism has the capability to encourage economic growth and tourism development serving as a tool for promoting sustainable development. It also provides an economically viable solution for the preservation of natural regions and enhancing local residents' living standards. As a result, rural tourism provides sustainable viability for rural communities.

A balanced relationship should be maintained between the activities of homestay owners, stakeholders, local communities, tourists, and the environment for the successful functioning of rural tourism. Rural tourism must be economically feasible, socially acceptable, and environmentally sustainable in order to be sustainable.

8.1 Summary of Chapters

Chapter I discusses the various approaches to tourism study, concept and understanding of tourism, various definitions of tourism, different types of tourism, concept, meaning and types of rural tourism, understanding of sustainable development, review and study of rural tourism in world, India, West Bengal and Darjeeling Himalaya in particular. The background of the study i.e. objectives, methodology and hypothesis is has been discussed in this chapter. After reviewing the published literature, reports and documents it was found that rural tourism began in India in the 1980s but it started flourishing during and after 1990s. It was perceived that rural tourism is happening all over the world and has created its own space. In terms of rural tourism in India, it is

well documented that a large number of national and international tourists flock to India's specifically Darjeeling Himalaya's rural tourism locations, primarily during the spring and autumn seasons, to experience tranquility and nature. It is understood that rural tourism is recognized as critical to any region's long-term prosperity. The research design is also presented in this chapter. It explains the research problem, objectives and hypotheses, importance and restrictions and different methodologies of the study.

Chapter II deals with the information about the study area, specifically the geographical features like physiography, climate, natural vegetation, drainage, geology and soil, the combination of which plays an important role in attracting tourists. It also deals with the history of Darjeeling during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial phases. It presents the demographic profile of the people of Darjeeling, their economy, language and culture which have great significance in tourism.

Chapter III presents the natural and anthropogenic potential of select rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya. It has been found that most of the rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya have great natural potential especially varied landscapes, scenic beauty, varied species of flora and fauna, views of sunrise and sunset from vantage points, gurgling streams, and pleasant climate as well as comprehensive anthropogenic potential such as ancient monasteries, bridges, orchard farming, organic farming, floriculture, eco-park, trekking sites, bird watching areas, etc. which attract global tourists as well as tourists from different corners of India.

Chapter IV examines rural tourism's role in achieving sustainable economic goals. The chapter also deals with socio-cultural and environmental goals. The economics of all rural tourism locations in the Darjeeling Himalaya has significantly improved as a result of the surge of local, national and international tourists. The socio-cultural exchange has taken place and protection and

preservation of the environment have been given more emphasis by all the hosts, stakeholders and tourists. The number of homestays, the number of rooms and tourist accommodation have increased significantly in all the studied rural tourism destinations. In all the studied destinations, rural tourism has succeeded in creating jobs, income, cultural development, social benefits, environmental development and awareness in a sustainable manner.

Chapter V presents the behavioural and functional aspects of tourists. Tourists' behavioural aspects such as origin, gender, marital status, education, occupational structure, the purpose of visit, frequencies, economic status, etc. have been studied to ascertain their specific impression upon rural tourism in the selected rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya, viz. Takdah, Lamahatta, Mineral Spring, Lepchajagat, Chatakpur and Sittong. Rural tourism in the study area has been influenced by tourists' behavioural aspects. It has been found that most of the tourists from India and abroad visit Darjeeling mostly for nature observation and for peace.

The satisfaction levels of the tourists too were analyzed based on facilities such as accommodation and parking facility, food, service, infrastructure, transportation, the behaviour of the local people, scenic view, peaceful environment, safety, cleanliness, availability of drinking water, hot water for the bath, timely tea and snacks, etc. It was discovered that the majority of tourists were contented with parking facilities in all of the study area's rural tourism locations. Similarly, they were well satisfied with the safety, beauty of tourist places, accommodation and food. However, they were not satisfied with transportation and shopping facilities.

Chapter VI deals with the testing of considered hypotheses. It has been found that the considered hypotheses have been proved positive. As per the hypotheses, it has been found that –

- ✓ *Rural tourism promotes the expansion of the service sector and creates new job opportunities,*

- ✓ *Rural tourism is unique in the study area,*
- ✓ *The rural tourism growth in the study area has been steady over the years,*
- ✓ *Rural tourism has a significant impact on the local population's quality of life.*

Chapter VII presents the challenges and opportunities in tourism. A SWOT analysis was conducted to determine the rural tourism industry's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in Darjeeling Himalaya. It has been found that despite certain weaknesses and threats Darjeeling Himalaya has a considerable amount of strength and opportunities for tourism development in near future.

8.2 Findings

8.2.1 Findings based on Homestay Owners' and Stakeholders' feedback

Exceptional tourist influx

It was found that the arrivals of domestic tourists in the studied rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya, mostly Takdah, Lamahatta, Mineral Spring, Lepchajagat, Chatakpur and Sittong showed five times increase between 2008 and 2017, while foreign tourist arrivals doubled during the same period. Darjeeling is the most preferred hill station in West Bengal with the highest number of foreign and domestic visitors compared to other hill stations in India. During the peak season i.e. in autumn and spring, the number of tourists remains much higher than the accommodation. Darjeeling Himalaya has already faced the heat of influx due to an excessive number of tourists and as a result, the tourists are diverting from the city to the villages. All the rural tourism destinations have registered an upward trend in terms of popularity.

The steady growth of foreign tourist arrivals

The top foreign countries such as the U.S.A., United Kingdom, Germany, France, Denmark, Canada, Sweden, and Australia remain the leading source countries for foreign tourists to all the

tourist destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya. The growth of tourist arrivals from France and Germany saw a steady increase from 2008 to 2017. Meeting friends and relatives is a very important motivation for the citizens of these countries to visit Darjeeling.

The steady growth of domestic tourist arrivals

All rural tourism destinations in the Darjeeling Himalaya attract domestic tourists from different parts of West Bengal, Delhi, Mumbai, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar due to their cultural proximity. They also attract tourists from other states, namely Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The flow of tourists from these states is steady.

Employment opportunities

The establishments of homestays, guest houses and cottages in rural areas of Darjeeling have created employment opportunities for the locals. Darjeeling Tourism Board is also creating employment opportunities for people in all rural tourism destinations in Darjeeling Himalayas. Most of the local community has been benefitted from the employment opportunities created by such homestays; the best instance is the employment opportunities given to 25 households by M.K. Pradhan, the owner of Darjeeling Blossom Homestay, Takdah. However, few people disagree in terms of employment opportunities for the people.

Livelihood opportunities and standard of living

Rural tourism in all the rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya has given good livelihood opportunities not only for homestay owners but to the local community as well. The majority of the residents of rural tourism destinations got the opportunity to avail benefits from rural tourism which enhanced their living standards. From the homestay owners to the local community, the standard of living has improved considerably since the inception of rural tourism in their areas.

Social services and infrastructure

Rural tourism in all the destinations has provided good social services and developed a good infrastructure for the tourists. The majority of the respondents accord that the development of social amenities and infrastructure has increased due to rural tourism in Darjeeling Himalaya, though a few respondents disagree, while for some of the respondents it did not make any difference.

Local communities' active participation in rural tourism

Within the entire examined locations of Darjeeling Himalaya, particularly in Takdah, Mineral Spring, and Lepchajagat, the majority of local community people took advantage of the opportunity and actively participated in various rural tourism activities. A good understanding and active participation of local community members with the homestay owners and tourists have helped rural tourism to prosper in all the destinations. There is a close connection between the locality of the villages and the tourists which helped the growth of rural tourism in Darjeeling Himalaya. Community members have dealt with the impact of rural tourism better than any other tourism-related stakeholders.

Homestay owners and stakeholders' active participation in the preservation of Environment

Regardless of their location in the villages, both homestay owners and other stakeholders figured prominently in environmental protection. Dealing with environmental protection, all the stakeholders – the hosts, local community, different travel agents, showed active concern in all the rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya.

8.2.2 Findings based on Tourist's feedback

Homestays as a tourist attraction

The concept of Homestays in rural areas is a developing idea that is getting popular with the rise in the arrival of tourists. Tourists are making the most of their stay in rural areas while encountering the life of a resident. The majority of the respondents feel that the idea of living with host families in the rural area rather than living in hotels has caught up and therefore, attracts lots of tourists in rural destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya. Tourists in all the rural destinations feel that homestays, especially in peaceful and nature-friendly rural areas have inspired them to revisit.

Healthy understanding between homestay owners, stakeholders, and tourists

Rural tourism runs effectively if there is a healthy understanding between homestay owners, stakeholders and tourists. It has been found that in all the rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya a healthy understanding and cooperation between homestay owners, stakeholders and tourists have developed. It has been noticed that due to rural tourism the homestay owners, stakeholders and tourists come in contact with each other and understand each other in a better way.

Friendly nature of residents

Apart from homestay owners, the residents are an important aspect of developing a good relationship and handling the tourists. The good behaviour of residents allows a healthy relationship and a socio-cultural exchange between them. It has been found that most of the residents in tourist destinations and most of the tourists develop good and friendly relations between them. The residents in all the rural tourism destinations of the study area are found to be cooperative and always ready to extend possible help to the people in need and particularly the guests.

The attraction of rural tourism

As rural areas provide peace, closeness to nature and environment, socio-cultural exchange, and exposure to rural livelihood, tourists get increasingly attracted to rural destinations to utilize their leisure. The intrinsic rustic character of the selected tourism destinations in Darjeeling Himalaya mostly Takdah and Chatakpur attract lots of urban tourists. Homestays, cottages, tent stays, in rural areas play important role in attracting visitors. The lived-in rural life experience has become a great means of tourist attraction. Rural tourism is thus, getting much popularity.

Healthy local foods

Almost all the homestays of the studied rural destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya namely Takdah, Lamahatta, Mineral Spring, Lepchajagat, Chatakpur provide healthy and delicious local food, along with ethnic delicacies such as *gundruk*, *kinema*, *saag*, *mula ko achaar*, etc. to the tourists which allow tourist with a different taste. The majority of the tourists in all the rural locations opine that the local foods are delicious and healthy.

A safe place for travel

Darjeeling Himalaya is a well-known, safe and secure place to travel. The sober rural areas of Darjeeling are considered safe for tourists. The safety and security of tourists are taken good care of by all the members of homestays in all the rural destinations. Consequently, many tourists return with positive views regarding the safety of the rural areas of Darjeeling.

Well-informed guides

All the tourist destinations need good and knowledgeable persons to guide tourists through different villages, and short treks to different places. Some homestay owners and residents play the role of guides by taking the tourists to exotic rural places of Darjeeling Himalaya. Tourists

agreed that guides in all the rural areas were good, humble and knowledgeable, which made their travel more enjoyable.

High-quality accommodation facilities

All the homestays in rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling provide high-quality accommodation facilities to the tourists. Ample homestays and rooms are available in all the destinations, especially at Takdah, Lepchajagat and Sittong. Room capacities have been raised in all the destinations to accommodate more tourists with more facilities. Most of the homestays are equipped to provide a comfortable stay.

Well-connected transportation facilities and good communication

Except for Chatakpur, in all the studied rural tourism destinations, the communication and transportation facilities are reasonably good and the places are well connected. The majority of the tourists believe that the transportation facilities are good and they enjoyed their trip while a few tourists are unhappy with transportation facilities.

8.2.3 Findings based on impacts of Rural Tourism in Darjeeling Himalaya

Socio-economic impacts

It is seen from the study that the income generated by rural tourism has been instrumental in upgrading the local governments and local communities to improve physical infrastructure, thereby strengthening the local economy as a whole. Rural tourism and the well-being of local communities have also improved. Families who earlier had no known wellspring of income, now have the option to support a better livelihood through rural tourism, while those previously having a reasonable and sustainable source of income could increase their income significantly. The local community has been profited by it regardless of the social texture to deliver the activity suitable from a financial point of view and consistent in the long run. Regarding the six

rural tourist destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya namely: Takdah, Lamahatta, Mineral Spring, Lepchajagat, Chatakpur and Sittong, it has been seen that women and youths are more engaged in rural tourism activities as they work as a cook, guide, driver, receptionist, gardener and manager in the host family receiving good earnings and improving living standards.

As far as social impact is concerned, rural tourism has encouraged social interaction between tourists and local communities, which brought about mutual appreciation, understanding, forbearance, consciousness, learning, good relations, mutual admiration and empathy. The local community has subsequently benefitted from rural tourism in all the rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya. Tourists from various parts of India and the world got an opportunity to learn about local traditions and customs. Further, the extravagance of the regular habitat and the ethnicity of the Darjeeling Himalaya are what draw in tourists to an area and it empowers the preservation of nearby traditions, works of art and painstaking work which confronted the threat of steady annihilation.

Cultural Impacts

Tourism has a significant cultural significance as it can augment people of groups of various races, nationalities and ethnicities and enrich cultural exchanges between the tourists and the host communities. This type of communication may have useful impacts, yet it may likewise be socially upsetting. It has been seen that significant cultural exchanges of language, knowledge, culture, traditions and customs have taken place between the residents and the tourists.

Though rural tourism has a significant cultural impact in the study area, at the same time, few host community members view that rural tourism may create hostility between residents and visitors.

Environmental Impacts

Rural tourism has significant impacts on the environment. Educated host communities, stakeholders, local communities and tourists may take good steps in environmental protection and spreading awareness among the people, whereas uneducated host communities and locals may lead to degradation of the environment.

8.3 Recommendations

- ✓ The policies, guidelines and rules for rural tourism should be changed to guarantee that biodiversity, lives and governance systems of communities should not be affected by tourism.
- ✓ The government and private organizations should grant financial assistance and necessary training programs and capacity building programs to the host community and the local community to develop their skills, enhance their communication skills and tourism management for effective dealing with different types of tourists; and adequate training must be guaranteed to the host communities as well to offer quality services to the tourists and hence, for the successful operation of rural tourism.
- ✓ The government, host communities, local communities and stakeholders and private organizations should take initiatives to keep rural tourism areas clean and hygienic. As garbage removal and its effective management are significant for advancing rural tourism, hence all the rural tourism destinations should be made plastic-free zone. Indeed, sufficient dustbins or naturally made bamboo dustbins, separate use of biodegradable and non-biodegradable garbage is highly recommended for all rural tourism destinations to keep the environment clean. The motto of all the rural tourism destinations should be a ‘clean and green area’.

- ✓ The various divisions of the public sector associated with tourism must team up and arrange their work and keep each other educated about their exercises and plans.
- ✓ During entry into the forest regions for untamed life watching or journeying, any plastic holders or plastic water jugs ought to be accounted and any slips ought to be punished vigorously.
- ✓ Numerous new potential zones reasonable for rural tourism ought to be opened to tourists so that pressure on the natural life territories will be decreased.
- ✓ Neighbourhood investment is to be energized by making it mandatory for the travel industry administrators in Darjeeling Himalaya to utilize at any rate a specific level of their workers from the nearby populace.
- ✓ Locally produced goods should be promoted among the tourists by all the rural tourism operators in Darjeeling Himalaya.
- ✓ The terrible state of roads in various rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya needs the critical consideration of the concerned specialists. Government should construct all-weather roads to improve transportation and to attract foreign tourists. The support work ought to be appropriately done like clockwork.
- ✓ Various kinds of pollution should be controlled in all the rural destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya. Policies should be enhanced for anti-littering.
- ✓ In rural tourism destinations, generally in forest villages such as Chatakpur, Lepchajagat and Lamahatta, an environmental fee could be charged from the tourists at the entry point which would provide revenue for environmental management.

- ✓ The promotion of rural tourism in all the rural destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya should be enhanced by developing different websites, magazines, Facebook pages, and videos on youtube.
- ✓ All the media platforms must be used to broadly highlight the natural and anthropogenic potentials of rural tourism in Darjeeling Himalaya.

8.4 Scope for Future Research

Sustainable development is necessary in every sphere of today's world and there are further scopes to explore this concept and its applications in the world's fastest-growing service industry, the tourism industry.

In order to evaluate the sustainable rural tourism programs adopted by local governments in the Darjeeling Himalayas, more study is needed. In addition, researchers have great potential to propose a sustainable rural tourism model for other destinations of similar nature in Darjeeling, Himalayas.

Dropout study paves the way for substantial planning and development of tourism for the Darjeeling Himalayas' long-term benefits and overall growth.

A multi-functional team of specialists should conduct an Integrated Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) based on a specific project to explore future tourist prospects and risks of the proposed tourism project.

The scope is left out for performing new pioneering research works to explore and develop several unexplored and virgin rural tourism destinations in Darjeeling Himalaya.