

## **Chapter III**

### **RURAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN DARJEELING HIMALAYA**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The goal of this chapter is to determine the resource potential of a few rural tourism locations namely Takdah, Lamahatta, Mineral Spring, Lepchajagat, Chatakpur and Sittong in the Darjeeling Himalaya. It also covers tourist services such as lodging, transportation, and communication, as well as entertainment, recreation, and other amenities.

The term tourism potential refers to something that occurs but has yet to be completely recognized. As a result, it represents the set of descriptive and analytical variables that determine the degree and scope of tourism exploitation in the region. It's challenging to quantify potential in the tourism industry because there are so many aspects to consider (Marvah and Ganguly, 1999).

Any natural, cultural, or manmade entity with the potential to attract tourists and lead to development is considered to have tourism potential. As a result, natural landscapes and natural resources such as a river, a mountain, a hill, a waterfall, a lake, wildlife, and historical and cultural sites such as preserved heritage monuments, sculptures, architectures, historic landmarks, and so on, as well as resorts, parks, and other points of interest, can all become potential tourist attractions. Tourism potential is already reflected in infrastructure and cultural features (Munian Sushani, 2014).

Rural tourism potential exists when rural communities' long-term growth is built not only on appealing landscapes and infrastructure but also on competitively priced, high-quality services. Since the region's rural areas have a lot of cultural and historical value rural tourism has a lot of growth potential. Improving infrastructure, historic landmarks, rehabilitating architecture, and

encouraging the preservation of the environment in rural regions all benefit the development of rural tourism. Several variables, including the suitable infrastructure, development of different sites, viewpoints, attractions, etc. along with improvement in services, provision of parking facilities, provision of safety and security of tourists leads to tourism development in rural areas. Rural tourism which is an important source of income for the residents should be given special consideration in terms of diversifying rural economic sources.

As has been stated earlier, six rural tourism destinations, namely Takdah, Lamahatta, Mineral Spring, Lepchajagat, Chatakpur and Sittong have been selected from across Darjeeling Himalaya based on aesthetics and pristine location.

### **3.2 Methodology for assessing Rural Tourism Potential:**

Tourism potential in all of Darjeeling Himalaya's rural tourism destinations has been assessed based on two factors: natural potential and anthropogenic potential. All rural tourism destinations' location factors, especially the natural, cultural, and historical components of tourism, are examined.

The tourism potential of six rural tourism places in Darjeeling Himalaya, namely Takdah, Lamahatta, Mineral Spring, Lepchajagat, Chatakpur, and Sittong, has been assessed using the methods mentioned above.

### **3.3 Rural Tourism Destinations in Darjeeling Himalaya**

Darjeeling Himalaya is a repository of great tourism potential. The rustic mountain hamlets located at the back and beyond the typical hill stations are replete with rich tourism potential. However, inadequate infrastructure and remoteness of most of these places have held them unexplored. Based on natural tourism potential e.g. landscape relief, climate, hydrologic and biographic conditions, Chatakpur, Lamahatta and Takdah get greater importance since they have beautiful

landscapes and pleasant climates. While Lepchajagat has a colder climate, Sittong and Mineral Spring are a bit warmer. Chatakpur, Lamahatta and Takdah have scenic beauty while Lepchajagat, Sittong and Mineral spring give exposure to pristine locations. In terms of natural potential, it can be said that Chatakpur, Lamahatta and Takdah have an edge over Lepchajagat, Sittong and Mineral spring, but all have firmly established their places on the map of rural tourism in Darjeeling Himalaya.

**Table 3.3: Location and Locational Advantages of Different Rural Tourism Destinations**

<b>Destinations</b>	<b>Location</b>		
	Distance from NJP/ Bagdogra in Km. (apprx.)	Time taken (hours)	Transport Cost (as of 2020)
<b>Takdah</b>	65 (via Jorebunglow)	3.5	Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle
<b>Lamahatta</b>	60 (via Jorebunglow)	3	Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle
<b>Mineral Spring</b>	85 (via Darjeeling)	4	Rs. 800 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 4000 approx. by reserved vehicle
<b>Lepchajagat</b>	70 (via Ghoom)	3	Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle
<b>Chatakpur</b>	62 (via Sonada)	3	Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle
<b>Sittong</b>	78 (via Mungpoo)	3.5	Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle

(Source: Darjeeling Tourism Department, GTA, Darjeeling)

The Darjeeling Himalaya possesses natural potential as a rural tourism destination, such as various terrain configurations, breath-taking landscapes, geographical representation by flora and fauna, good weather conditions and clean water and air. The ingenuity of the Darjeeling Himalayas selected six rural areas that are Takdah, Lamahatta, Mineral Spring, Lepchajagat, Chatakpur and

Sittong is beneficial to the growth of rural tourism. With a rich cultural and historical potential and huge agricultural areas, there is indeed a significant deal of cultural and natural diversity. The environment, as well as local customs and identity, have been effectively preserved. In addition, the rural areas of the Darjeeling Himalaya have a relatively high tourism potential due to favourable conditions, beautiful landscapes, presence of natural resources, pleasant climate, good infrastructure and precious religious and cultural heritage.

**3.3.1 Takdah**, an old British cantonment area, is 65 km from NJP railway station (via Jorebunglow) and about 65 km from Bagdogra airport. The journey takes approximately 3.5 hours. The cost is Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle (as of 2020). Takdah, a quiet and serene place, attracts a lot of tourists from India and abroad. The meandering road, the scenic views, the nature trails through the forests make the journey beautiful and provide the traveler immense pleasure. The condition of the road is good. All-weather roads make it easy and comfortable for travelers. Except for traffic jams at Jorebunglow, the rest of the road remains open.

**3.3.2 Lamahatta**, a small village, is 60 km from NJP railway station (via Jorebunglow) and about 60 km from Bagdogra airport. This eco-tourism destination is around 3 hours away. The cost is Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle (as of 2020). The Lamahatta tour offers a quiet, serene and romantic atmosphere along the forest road. The beautiful metallic road makes for a fun trip to Lamahatta. Roads and the rest of the places are open except for traffic congestion at Jorebunglow.

**3.3.3 Mineral Spring**, a tiny village near Darjeeling town is 85 km from NJP railway station (via Darjeeling) and about 85 km from Bagdogra airport. The journey to the village takes roughly 4 hours. The cost is Rs. 800 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 4000 approx. by reserved vehicle (as of

2020). Mineral Spring is known for its clean water, lush greenery, and beautiful views of the mountains. Though traffic is slow between Jorebunglow and Darjeeling, paved and steep roads in the rural area offer an exciting travel experience to the tourists.

**3.3.4 Lepchajagat**, a small forest village is 70 km from NJP railway station (via Ghoom) and about 70 km from Bagdogra airport. This forest village is around a 3-hour drive away. The cost is Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle (as of 2020). Lepchajagat is connected with Ghoom with Sukhia Pokhri by an all-weather road. Lepchajagat offers a calm, serene and matte atmosphere through a maze of dense pine forests, oak and rhododendrons and spectacular mountain views along its way. The well-paved road offers a pleasant journey to Lepchajagat.

**3.3.5 Chatakpur**, a tiny forest village near Sonada is 62 km from NJP railway station (via Ghoom) and more or less 62 km from Bagdogra airport. This forest village is around 3 hours away. The cost is Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle (as of 2020). Chatakpur is entered through dense pine forests, oaks, and rhododendrons, providing a calm and peaceful environment. The rough road makes a thrilling trip to Chatakpur. Chatakpur is mainly inhabited by tribal communities.

**3.3.6 Sittong**, a horticulture village is 78 km from NJP railway station (via Ghoom) and about 78 km from Bagdogra airport. The journey to this forest village needs around 3.5 hours. The cost is Rs. 500 approx. by shared taxi/ Rs. 3000 approx. by reserved vehicle (as of 2020). The journey towards Sittong offers a calm and peaceful atmosphere through pine forests and rich orange gardens. The well-metalized roads to Sittong give the tourists pleasure and a happy journey.

### **3.4 Rural Tourism Destinations and their Potential for Development**

#### **3.4.1 Takdah**

Takdah village is around 28 kilometres from Darjeeling, nestled in a luscious green Himalayan forest at an elevation of around 4,000 feet above sea – level and at 27° 2' N latitude and 88° 22' E longitude. Takdah remains cold although being much lower in elevation than Darjeeling. Takdah got its name from a Lepcha term that meant mist or fog, and it was originally called 'Tukdah'.

Takdah began as a military cantonment in the early 1900s in the British colonial period. Many prominent British commanders lived in the area at the time, and others came to see them regularly. As a result, for their accommodation, several houses and bungalows were made. Paving stones and sloping rooftops were used to construct the dwellings at the time. These century-old bungalows give Takdah a quaint look and add old-world charm. The village wore a deserted look after the British left and was not known to the tourists till the year 2000. The first homestay in Takdah was started in 2000 with four rooms and accommodations for eight persons. Run by a local Gurung family, it is the trend-setter for rural tourism and homestay in Takdah. As people started visiting the place, the homestay facility expanded to accommodate more people. Now this simple yet charming guesthouse has four double bedded rooms, four quadruple rooms, two deluxe rooms, and one cottage. It is located amidst a beautiful garden. Side by side, an ecotourism facility emerged in the place with two rooms and accommodations for four persons. Within 2017, seven more rooms have been added with a total of twenty accommodations. Another homestay was established in 2012 with nine rooms and accommodations for sixteen persons. It is now the largest homestay in the Takdah region. The families that run these homestays are very hospitable. They have improvised their humble cottages and added modern amenities to their homestays. In most of the homestays, there are double, triple and quadruple rooms with geysers and western-style

bathrooms. Of late, some of the British residential bungalows have been converted into lodges and resorts and cater to high-end tourists. Now there are no less than a dozen homestays in Takdah. The trend-setter Abiraj Homestay was followed by the establishment of Rai Resort (2013), Anugrah homestay, and Saino heritage guest house (2014), Norlah homestay, Tinchuley Gurung's homestay (2016), Shiwani homestay and Pradhan homestay (2017).

**Tourism Potential of Takdah:** Takdah is a rural tourism destination area with spectacular natural landscapes, mild climate, vegetation and peaceful environments as **natural potential** and nurseries, agriculture, structured landscapes monasteries, monuments and guest houses as anthropogenic landscapes. It is known for its mild climate, which features an average temperature of 22° C, with a relative humidity of 50 percent as well as an average rainfall of 850 mm. Forest reserves, the construction of various landscapes, attractive surroundings, unique flora and fauna and ultimately, climatic conditions are all conducive to tourism expansion in Takdah.

**The anthropogenic potential:** The development of educational resources and knowledge has simultaneously developed cultural values. Takdah is a fast developing rural tourism destination influenced by anthropogenic potential such as economic, social and historical-cultural factors. In the Darjeeling district, Takdah is known to a few of the best tea farms such as Teesta Valley, Poomong, Rungli-Rungliot, Namring, Gielle and Jinglam. The processing and manufacturing processes at factories can be watched by tourists. One of the beautiful tea estates is Rungli Rungliot located around 2 km from Takdah. Gielle tea estate is another beautiful rural tea estate that offers a panoramic view of many places such as Mungpoo, Tiger Hill, Takdah, 6th mile village, Ranju Valley, Kalimpong, Durpin Dara, Rambhi Khola, and so on.

Takdah has a large orchid centre that spans a large part of the area. The unusual and colorful Himalayan orchids are the source of an additional attraction for tourists. There is also a historic

monastery on the property. Takdah is reputed to have some of the beautiful British heritage bungalows and gardens. Around 12 colonial bungalows are there, some of which are now being used for the stay of tourists with well-equipped western-style bathroom, fireplace, and hot water facilities.

Tinchuley, a small village, usually associated with Takdah as Takdah-Tinchuley, is another charming retreat located about 3 km away from Takdah which provides a 360-degree view of beautiful surroundings especially view of different ranges of the mountain.

The infrastructure and transportation of Takdah are reasonably good. It is well connected to Darjeeling town and Kalimpong town with well-maintained metalled roads.

### **3.4.2 Lamahatta**

Lamahatta is a revenue village situated at an altitude of around 5,700 feet above sea level at 27° 3' N latitude and 88° 21' E longitude and around 24 kilometres outside the town of Darjeeling. It is surrounded by lush greenery and rivers amidst picturesque terraced fields. Lamahatta is a mixture of two words: Lama, which means Buddhist monk, and Hatta, which means hut, which refers to a hermitage of a monk. Lamahatta is well connected to Kalimpong and Sikkim by the Darjeeling-Kalimpong as well as Darjeeling-Sikkim national highway which offers the locals to open different hotels, restaurants, homestays and shops which attracts more tourists. The residents of Lamahatta built ecotourism sites through government funding to attract more tourists. The practice of agriculture and animal husbandry still occurs among some rural people.

In this village, the balance between the environment and biodiversity remains almost unchanged, and the residents of this place cooperate closely with the development of tourism activities that are profitable and sustainable. Consequently, many homestays emerged, all owned by locals. About fifteen homestays stand on one side of the road and later many more emerged.

Two homestays, (Druk Homestay and Kanchenjunga View) came up in 2012 with a total of seven rooms and accommodations for fourteen persons. This was quickly followed by the opening up of more homestays, viz., Everest Hut Resort (2013), Mountain View (2014), Dukpa Homestay, and Private Lodge (2017). The Mountain View is the largest with seven rooms and 17 accommodations, while the others are relatively small. In 2017, the Everest Hut resort has expanded the most with an addition of four rooms and 10 accommodations. It is now the second largest in this region.

**Tourism Potential of Lamahatta:** Although Lamahatta is a small place, it has a high tourist potential and attracts many tourists from different parts of India.

In terms of **natural potential**, Lamahatta has a dense pine forest and panoramic view of the Kanchenjunga. The pines form a continuous dark green canopy that is easy to traverse. When the sky remains clear, Lamahatta offers great views of the distant mountains and snow-capped peaks on the horizon. Lamahatta offers a spectacular view of Mount Kanchenjunga.

**The anthropogenic potential of Lamahatta:** Homestays and the kind hospitality of Lamahatta's local families contribute significantly in luring visitors. The homestays are all basic and modest, but they are all clean and have western-style restrooms. Almost all homestays have geysers in the attached bathrooms, so hot water, which is a prerequisite in cold places, is always available. All of these accommodation options are extensions of the existing homes of residents. They offer homemade dishes to the guests; some also have a separate dining area. It is the perfect way to discover the local culture.

Lamahatta is also famous for its short hikes as follows:

- i) A short stroll through the Lamahatta eco-park gets to a small sacred highland lake.
- ii) A 3 km trek towards a fortress peak named Gari Danda.

- iii) Hike to various tea farms in the area, primarily, Takdah, Rungli-Rungliot and Glenburn.
- iv) From Lamahatta to Takdah within a distance of about 8 km a thrilling jungle trek can be done on a trail.
- v) A long trek of about 15kms to the Orchid Centre of Takdah.

### **3.4.3 Mineral Spring**

Mineral Spring is a revenue village located at 27° 2' N latitude and 88° 18' E longitude and 16 km away from the main town of Darjeeling. It is situated in the Lebong Valley. It is a plantation-controlled area where villagers primarily grow potatoes, millet, maize, vegetables and tea.

In this area, the first homestay (Tathagata Farm) came up in 2007 with five rooms and accommodations for ten persons. Now it is the largest one with eight rooms and 21 accommodations. After five years another homestay (Gautam Paradise) was established with four rooms and accommodations for eight persons. After four years more homestays (Zimba and Humro homestays) came up with three rooms and accommodations for six persons that later expanded to five rooms and fourteen accommodations. The homestays in Mineral Spring offer a broad perspective through experience and interaction with nature, environment and lives around it, maintaining the authentic rural taste of a typical farm in the Darjeeling Hills.

The local entrepreneurs understand the value of sustainable living through organic farming and ecotourism. Some of them have started their organic farm by recruiting several young men from local villages to work and live on the farm. They grow tea plants, cardamom, ginger, corn, vegetables and fruits, e.g. oranges. There is also a small dairy. While everyone is actively involved in farming activities, most are doubling up filling other roles such as cooking, repairing, increasing guidance, and customer service.

**Tourism Potential of Mineral Spring:** The surrounding mountains and spring water are the **natural potential** and major attractions of Mineral Spring. Apart from the mountains, rivers, forests and pleasant climate, the other attractions of Mineral Spring are the nature trails. The trails around the estates led to the chalets and tents for tourists.

**Anthropogenic potential:** The homestay farms and man-made landscapes attract tourists to this village. A short walk from the Tathagata farmhouse is a small pool with fountain water, a garden and a shaded area for relaxing, sitting and enjoying the surrounding greenery. A long walk through the farm leads to various sections including the gardens, cottages, kitchens and dairies. The homestays make tea from the leaves collected from the tea plants grown on the farm. Not only do they harvest the tea, but they also process it by hand, dry it, roll it, and prepare for drinking. The purchase of an agricultural tea bag by tourists contributes to the cause of the socio-economic growth of the villages here. The homestay owners' main goal has been to pursue a sustainable lifestyle and create alternative sources of income for local villagers who depend solely on agriculture. In line with this vision, it also encourages villagers to open their homes to tourists and create host families in the aspiring villages. And several villagers turned their houses into foster families.

The organic farming of Mineral Spring has great potential whereby tourists enjoy fresh and organic vegetables and ingredients for lunch and dinner. The Farm allows visitors to participate in farming, milking and raising cows. A short 15 to 20-minute walk to the local mountain stream allows travelers to relax or do fishing. The tourists can take short hikes and walks in the village and beyond. The homestays offer a five-hour guided hike to Majitar, a place in South Sikkim, 13 km from Mineral Spring. Rangeet Forest across the Rangeet River is another

attraction. Tourists can enjoy natural views on their way towards Rangeet. Around 4 hours of the walk will lead to various villages such as Sinadura, Balbirudura and Gudamdura.

#### **3.4.4 Lepchajagat**

Lepchajagat is a small forest village located within 27° 0' N latitudes and 88° 11' E longitudes with an elevation of around 6,956 feet in a wild and tranquil atmosphere. It is 19 kilometres from Darjeeling Hill's main town and 4 kilometres from Sukhia.

Lepchajagat as the name itself says – the world of Lepchas - was once a hamlet of the Lepcha tribe. Lepchajagat is a combination of two words – ‘Lepcha’, a tribe, and ‘Jagat’ meaning the world. The hamlet was later acquired by West Bengal Forest Development Corporation (WBFDC) and is now a forest reserve.

Lepchajagat is a wonderful place for nature lovers. Nestled amidst the forest, it interacts with wildlife, beautiful plants, mainly rhododendrons. Lepchajagat is a dense forest area covered by pine, oak and rhododendron and offers a magnificent view of the Kanchenjunga peaks, tranquility and amazing birdlife.

In this region, the first homestay (Pakhrin Homestay) came up in 2008 with six modest rooms and accommodations for ten persons. It is now the largest with eight rooms and accommodation for eighteen persons. Rooms are well-appointed, clean, with western-style bathrooms. The Pakhrin family manages the homestay quite efficiently. The place is gaining popularity and attracts both domestic and foreign tourists. The early sunrise gives tourists a feeling of deep peace and happiness. All basic services are available to tourists. The homestay combines wonderfully with beautiful views and interaction with flora and fauna. The beauty of blossoming rhododendron, pines and oak gives tourists immense pleasure and happiness. This is the only place where tourists

can even experience an unusual interaction with wild animals such as wild pigs, porcupines, jackals, boars, etc. Bird lovers enjoy the beautiful chirping of various birds early morning.

After five years another homestay (Kanchankanya Homestay) was established with modest capacity and quickly grew to reach the capacity of the former. The spectacular view of Kanchenjunga can be witnessed from this homestay. After three years Salakha and Humro homestays came up with a total of three rooms and accommodations for six persons that increased to a total of five rooms and fourteen accommodations. WBFDC (West Bengal Forest Development Corporation) Lodge is another budget lodge operated by the government with six rooms and two suites.

**Tourism Potential of Lepchajagat:** The **natural potentials** of Lepchajagat are as follows:

Lepchajagat is a tranquil spot located in the lap of nature. The picturesque splendour of Lepchajagat, as well as the view of the majestic Kanchenjunga, are widely recognized. Early in the morning, guests can enjoy a breath-taking view of the sunrise. Gum Rock, which is generally a place of large boulders but is recognized as a sunrise point, is another sight of tourist attraction. A magnificent view of the Balasan valley opens up from here.

The rich flora and fauna of Lepchajagat forest are a major source of tourist attraction. Extensive flora with pine, rhododendrons and oaks gives the traveler a sense of fascination. Some faunal species such as wild pigs, boars, dears, porcupines, etc. offer tourists an opportunity to interact with animals. Lepchajagat is a place for bird watchers who enjoy watching wild birds. There are different types of birds in the forest, including several species of birds and sunbirds.

**The anthropogenic potential** of Lepchajagat includes the scope of additional housing, human resources, hiring new workers to get back the village youth, leveling up of standard of living, establishing new family businesses such as setting up of new farms and cottages to attract tourists.

WBFDC Forest Lodge offers great views of the snow-capped peaks. A staircase and path leading from the forest lodge cross a dense forest. There is also a hiking trail that leads to a place called Hawa Ghar, a resting place about 1 km away.

Lepchajagat offers some nearby sightseeing areas which include:

- i) Jorpokhri (about 5 km away), a beautiful lakeside and a famous tourist attraction is known for the rare Himalayan salamander. It is a famous tourist attraction well known for its serene beauty and views of Kanchenjunga.
- ii) Chataidhura viewpoint and Chataidhura natural lake around 2 km away.
- iii) Rock Garden around 15 km away.
- iv) Beautiful and quiet Ghoom Monastery (about 10 km).
- v) Peaceful Sukhia Monastery around 4 km away.
- vi) Simana viewpoint located around 10 km away.
- vii) Pashupati Market situated on the border of India and Nepal (about 15 km away), well known for cheap foreign goods' market.
- viii) Maneybhanjyang, a valley located between India and Nepal is a base of Sandakphu trail (about 15 km away).
- ix) Mirik (about 27 km away) - Famous for Mirik lake, its forest and tea garden.

### **3.4.5 Chatakpur**

Chatakpur is a small forest settlement within 26° 58' N latitudes and 88° 18' E longitude at a height of 2350 meters. With a stunning view of the mighty Kanchenjunga and an atmosphere of a verdant wilderness in a tranquil village of just twenty in number and with a few population, it is a delight for peace and nature lovers.

The first homestay (Dhanmaya Niwas homestay) in this village came up in 2009 with five rooms and accommodations for ten persons. Now it is the largest one with six rooms and fourteen accommodations. After four years another homestay (Sherpa homestay) was established with four rooms and eight accommodations. Now it is the second largest one with five rooms and ten accommodations. After three years two more homestays (Tamang and Humro homestays) came up with a total of three rooms and accommodations for six persons, later expanded to a total of five rooms and fourteen accommodations.

**Tourism Potential of Chatakpur:** The **natural potentials** of Chatakpur are as follows:

Surrounded by hills, mountains, forests, and rivers, Chatakpur is primarily an ecotourism destination where residents actively participate and develop non-agricultural alternative forms of income. The Kanchenjunga range, which is a popular tourist destination, may be seen in the autumn and clear winters.

The forest is about 100 meters from the tourist hut. Chatakpur leads to many lush forest roads that are suitable for short hikes preferred by trained guides.

The ecology and wildlife of Chatakpur are well-known. Wild bores, black cheetah, fox, nilgai, and a variety of other creatures call this ecosystem home. The Red Panda is one of the forest's most valuable assets.

Chatakpur is a popular destination for birdwatchers, and indeed the forest is home to a variety of brightly coloured birds, including the Rufous Sibia, Kalij Pheasant, Green-backed Tit, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Hornbill, Verditer, Blue-fronted Redstart, Fire-tailed Sunbird and other species.

**The anthropogenic potentials** are as follows:

'Chimal' and 'Guras' are the famous governmental cottages of Chatakpur. The cottages give exposure to the fascinating view of Kanchenjunga.

Agriculture and tourism are important sources of income for the people. Tourists not only get the opportunity to eat organic vegetables but they can also partake in rustic activities such as picking fresh organic vegetables from a farm's garden. Tourists can even feed and milk cows if they desire.

Near the eco-cottages lies a small pond, locally known as Pokhri, another tourist visit point.

The famous sunrise viewpoint of Darjeeling i.e. Tiger Hill is situated nearby. Darjeeling, Jorebunglow, Ghoom, and Sonada are other popular destinations close to Chatakpur.

Rock climbing is popular among tourists near the village's rocky walls. The hiking routes through forests to multiple spots are available to tourists. The watchtower is conveniently located for seeing the sunrise and admiring the grandeur of Sandakphu, a well-known high-mountain tourist destination. Small tourist trips are organized by locals in Tiger Hill, Sola Village, Rambhi Village, Jorebunglow, Labda, and other locations.

The culture of Chatakpur is well expressed by the old folks in the village. In the evening, traditional folk dances are performed by the locals to entertain tourists. Myth, culture, heritage, and traditional values are well preserved by locals for tourist attraction.

#### **3.4.6 Sittong**

Sittong is a large village located at an elevation of around 4000 feet within the Kurseong subdivision at 26° 52' N latitude and 88° 21' E longitude. Located amidst beautiful nature and a peaceful environment, Sittong is a Khasmal village.

The first homestay (Pujan homestay) in Sittong came up in 2009 with five rooms and accommodations for ten persons. It was the largest one. After five years another homestay (Hankim homestay) was established in 2014 which was quickly followed by the opening up of more homestays, viz., Mukhia, and Chhyalomkyong homestay (2016), and Sittong homestay (2018). Sittong is the smallest homestay with three rooms and six accommodations. The region's

total capacity increased from twenty rooms to twenty-five rooms with a growth rate of 25%. Accommodations increased from forty persons to fifty-four persons with a growth rate of 30%. In this region, the average size of homestay increased from 4.0 rooms and 10.0 persons to 5.0 rooms and 10.8 persons respectively.

**Tourism Potential of Sittong:** The **natural potentials** of Sittong are as follows:

Two famous sanctuaries are located in Sittong. These are the Mahananda and Latpanchar Wildlife Sanctuaries, which are home to the great hornbill and daisy horn. Both the sanctuaries attract nature lovers. Aal Dara is another attraction for tourists which provides a beautiful sunrise viewpoint. One of Sittong's famous lakes is Namthang where rare species of Salamanders are found.

**The anthropogenic potential** of Sittong are as follows:

Sittong is well known for its orchard cultivation and is also known as Orchard Village. It is a resourceful area which opens to the best of nature away from the cities.

Sittong is privileged to have old bamboo bridges, a century-old church along a rivulet, and an old monastery. The Steel Bridge at Jogi Ghat on the Riyang River is another tourist attraction that connects the two towns of Mungpoo and Sittong. Short hikes from Sittong to Labda village give chances for interaction with the local Lepcha community and to visit their traditional houses.

Another tourist attraction is Rabindranath Tagore's house in Mungpoo, which is about 8 km away.

### **3.5 Hypothesis: *Rural tourism is unique in the study area***

Rural tourism in the studied destinations is unique in its way. The salient features/ characteristics of rural tourism in the study area are:

- i) Rich natural potentials such as the beautiful and spectacular scenery, magnificent view of Mountains (Mount Kanchenjunga), configured landscapes, moderate

climate, flora, and a peaceful environment along with anthropogenic potential such as nursery, agriculture, monastery, monuments, guest houses, bungalows, etc. are the typical features found in rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya.

- ii) Short trekking to different places, village tours, interaction with the local people, exchange of culture are the typical features found in all the studied rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya.
- iii) The vegetables and ingredients for cooking come directly from the farms and kitchen gardens and therefore they are always very fresh. The tourists enjoy organic food in all the studied tourist destinations.
- iv) Another typical feature of the rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya is the provision to participate in the farming activities, milking & feeding the cows by the tourists.
- v) Some of the tourist destinations are places for bird lovers who enjoy watching the rich birdlife. Thus, rich biodiversity, forest reserves, eco-friendly environment are the typical features of studied rural tourism destinations of Darjeeling Himalaya.
- vi) Local food, a cultural program in the evening, barbecue, etc. for the tourists are the typical features of all the studied destinations.

As these are rarely found in other types of tourism and other areas of tourist importance, therefore, it has been proven to be unique in the study area.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Different rural tourism destinations have different tourism potential. Some have high natural tourism potential and some have low and again, some have high anthropogenic potential while some have low depending upon their location and accessibility. But, most crucially, both

potentials, that is, natural and anthropogenic, help to attract tourists from all over the world, which helps to drive economic development.

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