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## TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SIKKIM

**Krishna Chandra Subba,**

Research Scholar, Malwanchal University, Indore (MP) – 452016.

**Dr. Lokeshver Singh Jodhana**

Professor & Dean, Malwanchal University, Indore (MP) – 452016.

### Abstract

In emerging nations, the tourism industry is one that is expanding quickly. Compared to less touristic regions, we find that tourism generates considerable and significant local economic gains. This article aims to investigate the various facets and stages of the tourist industry's economic development in the state of Sikkim. The influx of tourists, their spending, and the value generated by tourism are all explained in detail in this study, "Tourism and Economic Development of Sikkim." The results show that tourism has an impact on employment and that tour guides require training that is inclusive of all languages.

**Keywords** – Tourism, Economic Industry, Development, Tourist, Sikkim. Employment, Training, Languages

### Introduction

Tourism is the movement of people away from their usual place of residence for leisure, business, or other purposes, typically involving staying in places outside their usual environment for up to one year (Sage Publications, 2009). As a sector, it has evolved into a "smokeless service industry" with substantial capacity for growth, sustainability, and socioeconomic impact (Mishra, Rai, & Rai, 2015).

Through tourism, visitors cross borders internal or international seeking new, unfamiliar experiences, environments, and cultures, thus fostering not only exchange of capital but also cultural appreciation and mutual understanding. In the contemporary global society, tourism is often seen as a symbol or instrument of peace, prosperity, and elevated quality of life. It enables countries (developed and developing alike) to earn foreign exchange, generate employment, and catalyze infrastructure development, often at relatively low environmental cost compared to heavy industry (Bhutia & Eugene, 2015; UNWTO, 2022).

Sikkim, a small Himalayan state in northeastern India, can be considered a case in point. Given its terrain steep mountains, remote valleys, and fragile ecosystems agriculture and animal husbandry remain primary livelihoods. Industrialization and modern infrastructure have been constrained by geography, limited access, and high cost of technology deployment (IBEF, 2023). The state has long relied on natural-resource based livelihoods, and its per capita agricultural production faces challenges of resource pressure due to population growth and limited arable land (Mishra et al., 2015).

In this context, tourism offers a promising avenue for economic diversification and development. Sikkim's pristine landscapes alpine peaks (including Kanchenjunga), tropical and temperate forests, rivers, lakes and its rich cultural mosaic make it attractive to nature- and culture-oriented visitors. Its low crime rate, peaceful social milieu, and the relative novelty of its tourist offerings add further appeal. Scholars and policy makers have increasingly focused on tourism in Sikkim for its potential to generate income, create jobs, support local businesses (including homestays and handicrafts), and help preserve cultural and natural heritage (Bhutia, 2024; Chhetri, 2017).

## Literature Review

### 1. Tourism, Geography, and People

Several scholars have emphasized the geographical and demographic foundations of tourism in Sikkim. Choudhry (2006) provided a comprehensive account of the state's physical geography and ethnic diversity, linking these factors to the tourism potential of the region. Singh's (1993) *People of India: Sikkim* contributed an anthropological profile of the state's diverse communities, documenting cultural traditions, attire, festivals, and socio-political institutions that underpin cultural tourism. Together, these works establish the natural and human landscape as the bedrock of Sikkim's tourism industry.

### 2. Culture and Heritage as Tourism Assets

Tourism in Sikkim has also been shaped by cultural and historical narratives. SAATO (2006) highlighted the state's flora and fauna, festivals, monasteries, and traditional practices as central attractions for visitors. Rustamji's (1983) historical account, *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy*, remains a foundational text for understanding the political and cultural history that shapes tourism today. By linking heritage with visitor experience, these works underline the deep interconnections between identity, history, and tourism.

### 3. Policy, Infrastructure, and Economic Development

Policy and infrastructural developments have been crucial for expanding Sikkim's tourism. Tata Economic Consulting Services (1995) provided one of the earliest structured frameworks for tourism promotion in the state, serving as guidelines in the absence of a formal state policy. Lama's (2005) *The Glory of New Sikkim* further explored transportation, accommodations, and the rise of adventure and pilgrimage tourism, showing how infrastructure complements natural attractions. Lahiri (2001), in *Sikkim: The People's Vision*, stressed the need for forward-looking strategies to address the socio-economic impacts of tourism growth. Similarly, the Information and Public Relations Department (2006) documented discussions from the North Eastern Council's 4th Sectoral Summit,

highlighting hospitality and policy-driven initiatives for Sikkim's integration into India's broader tourism agenda.

#### **4. Eco-Tourism and Sustainability**

With the state's fragile Himalayan ecosystem, eco-tourism has received significant scholarly attention. Bhutia (2005), through ENVIS Centre publications, emphasized eco-tourism branding and biodiversity conservation as central to Sikkim's sustainable development. ICIMOD and CREST (1998) produced training manuals for local communities, encouraging participatory tourism, alternative technologies, and planning for long-term sustainability. These contributions stress that without ecological safeguards, tourism in Sikkim risks undermining its very resource base.

#### **Synthesis of the Literature**

The reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that Sikkim's tourism industry has been approached from multiple angles geographical, cultural, infrastructural, and ecological. While geography and cultural heritage provide the foundation for tourism, infrastructure and policies have shaped its growth trajectory. At the same time, concerns about ecological fragility highlight the need for sustainable and eco-friendly practices. The literature also underscores the importance of community participation and forward-looking policy frameworks to ensure that tourism contributes positively to Sikkim's economic development without compromising its environmental or cultural integrity.

#### **Objectives**

- Develop international and domestic tourism to promote regional development and awareness of Sikkim's distinct culture and biodiversity.
- To spread the benefits of tourism as broadly as possible throughout Sikkim.
- Provide new employment opportunities for the local people, with a focus on hiring people from Sikkim, particularly from the areas where it is developing.
- Develop local people's managerial and technical abilities in order to fulfill the increasing need for trained workforce in the tourism industry.

#### **Methodology**

To investigate the stated hypotheses, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques.

##### **1. Tourism Infrastructure Survey:**

- Primary data was gathered on hotel facilities (location, capacity, occupancy rate, and tariff structure).

- Information was also collected on tourist amenities, availability of local guides, and accessibility of destinations.
- 2. **Survey of Travel Agents and Tour Operators:**
  - Data on the types of tour packages offered, relative popularity of destinations, trekking arrangements, and employment structures of these organizations were recorded.
- 3. **Secondary Data Analysis:**
  - Historical records from the Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim, were analyzed to identify trends in tourist arrivals over the past five years.
  - These trends were extrapolated to estimate potential visitor arrivals in the upcoming five-year plan period.

This approach ensures that the study captures both the demand-side (tourist behavior, preferences, and expenditure) and the supply-side (infrastructure, services, and employment) dynamics of Sikkim's tourism economy.

### **Limitations**

1. **Limited Scope of Data:** Research on tourism and economic development in Sikkim is relatively scarce, and reliable secondary data sources are limited (Mishra et al., 2015).
2. **Time-Bound Data Collection:** Tourist surveys were conducted during peak season, which may not fully represent off-season visitor patterns.
3. **Sample Size Constraints:** The number of tourists and operators surveyed may not capture the full diversity of visitor and stakeholder perspectives.
4. **Focus on Economic Aspects:** While the study emphasizes economic benefits, environmental and sociocultural impacts of tourism were not comprehensively assessed.

### **General Information on Sikkim**

Sikkim, one of India's smallest states, is located in the eastern Himalayas and shares borders with Nepal, Bhutan, and China. With an area of 7,096 square kilometers, it is recognized as one of the 26 global biodiversity hotspots (ICIMOD & CREST, 1998). The state's terrain varies from subtropical valleys to alpine highlands, with altitudes ranging from near sea level to 8,589 meters at Mount Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak and India's highest (Choudhry, 2006).

Sikkim is endowed with rich natural resources including rivers, waterfalls, lakes, and diverse flora and fauna, making it an attractive tourism destination. The climate ranges from tropical in the lower valleys to alpine in higher altitudes, supporting varied ecological zones.

However, as a completely landlocked state, Sikkim's connectivity is limited, with National Highway 31A serving as its primary link to the rest of India (IBEF, 2023).

This unique geographical and ecological profile not only defines the challenges faced by the state in terms of development and infrastructure but also shapes its tourism potential, positioning it as a niche destination for eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure activities.

### **Sikkim's Unique Tourism Products and Infrastructure**

Sikkim's tourism appeal lies in its unique blend of natural grandeur, cultural heritage, and adventure opportunities. The state is endowed with breathtaking Himalayan landscapes, including perpetually snow-clad peaks, dense tropical and temperate forests, and pristine rivers such as the Teesta and Rangit (Choudhry, 2006). Numerous alpine lakes and waterfalls further enhance its natural charm, positioning Sikkim as a prime eco-tourism and adventure destination.

The state is often described as a "virgin and unspoiled territory", retaining much of its ecological and cultural authenticity compared to more commercialized Himalayan destinations (SAATO, 2006). Adventure tourism opportunities such as trekking to the Kanchenjunga base camp or routes extending towards the Tibet Plateau attract both domestic and international adventure enthusiasts (Lama, 2005).

### **Tourism Infrastructure**

While Sikkim offers diverse attractions, its infrastructure presents both strengths and challenges. The state is landlocked, and National Highway 31A provides the only major road connectivity between Siliguri/Bagdogra and Gangtok. Although road maintenance under the Border Roads Organisation is generally adequate, the region is prone to landslides and frequent traffic blockages, creating accessibility constraints (TECS, 1995).

Within the state, transportation is heavily dependent on taxis as the primary mode of travel, limiting flexibility and affordability for tourists (Information & Public Relations, 2006). Hotel facilities and amenities vary across districts, with higher concentration in Gangtok and limited capacity in remote areas such as North Sikkim.

### **Key Tourist Destinations of Sikkim**

In addition to its scenic landscapes, Sikkim offers a range of cultural, historical, and spiritual destinations spread across its four districts. Table 1 highlights selected iconic attractions from each district:

**Table 1: Major Tourist Destinations in Sikkim**

East Sikkim	West Sikkim	North Sikkim	South Sikkim
Nathula Pass	Singshore Bridge	Kabi-Lungchok	Buddha Park
Rumtek Monastery	Rabdentse Ruins	Yumthang	Samdruptse
Baba Harbhanjan Singh Temple	Yuksum	Zero Point	Rose Garden
Ipecac Garden	Sky Walk, Pelling	Lachen-Lachung	Chardham

These destinations reflect the diversity of Sikkim’s tourism portfolio, ranging from border trade and historical landmarks (Nathula, Rabdentse) to religious and spiritual hubs (Rumtek Monastery, Chardham, Buddha Park), and from biodiversity-rich valleys (Yumthang, Lachen-Lachung) to adventure attractions (Skywalk at Pelling, Kanchenjunga treks).

Together, these products and destinations highlight Sikkim’s positioning as a multi-dimensional tourism destination offering eco-tourism, cultural tourism, pilgrimage tourism, and adventure tourism opportunities.

**Table 2: Annual Tourist Flows into Sikkim (2017–2023)**

Year	Domestic	International	Total*
2017	13,75,854	49,111	14,24,965
2018	14,24,127	71,172	14,95,299
2019	14,21,823	1,33,388	15,55,211
2020	3,16,408	19,935	3,36,343
2021	5,11,669	11,508	5,23,177
2022	16,25,573	68,645	16,94,218
2023	13,21,169	93,908	14,15,077

\* Total = Domestic + International

**Source(s):** India Tourism Statistics 2023; NER Databank on Sikkim Tourism ; CEIC (foreigner arrivals)

### Analysis & Observations

- 1. Strong Post-COVID Recovery in 2022:** After two years of steep declines due to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020, 2021), tourist arrivals rebounded sharply in 2022. Domestic arrivals in 2022 ( $\approx 1,625,573$ ) surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

2. **Fluctuation in 2023:** Domestic arrivals dipped in 2023 (1,321,169), a decline of ~18.7% from 2022, while international arrivals increased significantly to 93,908 (a 36.8% rise). This suggests differential trends: perhaps domestic demand normalization or infrastructural/seasonality constraints, and gradual return of foreign tourists.
3. **International Arrivals Rebounding:** International tourist numbers have made a strong comeback: from 68,645 in 2022 to 93,908 in 2023.
4. **Relative Shares:**
  - In 2022, international tourists constituted ~4.05% of total arrivals.
  - In 2023, the share increased to ~6.64%.

This indicates that while domestic tourism still dominates, foreign arrivals are regaining importance.

## Accommodation Structure Analysis in Sikkim

### 1. Current Accommodation Facilities

As of June 2023, Sikkim hosts a total of 12 classified hotels, with an estimated 459 hotel rooms across the state. The Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim, lists a total bed capacity of 2,231 beds, distributed as follows:

- **Hotels:** 1,833 beds
- **Lodges:** 315 beds
- **Guest Houses:** 63 beds

Despite this infrastructure, tourist satisfaction surveys indicate that service quality often falls short of expectations, particularly in government-run establishments. Common complaints include:

- Inadequate communication facilities
- Lack of cultural entertainment and activities
- Limited variety in cuisine offerings
- Absence of integrated shopping arcades, especially for local handicrafts and art

To attract high-value tourists, Sikkim must enhance the quality of its accommodations. Simultaneously, there remains a demand for budget accommodations, particularly among low-income domestic tourists and backpacking international visitors. Additionally, the hotel industry faces challenges due to a shortage of locally trained manpower, leading to reliance on skilled workers from other states, which increases operational costs and reduces local employment benefits.

## 2. Seasonality and Occupancy

Tourism in Sikkim exhibits significant seasonality, with peak demand concentrated in the months of April–June and September–November. This pattern is influenced by climatic conditions, particularly the monsoon season from mid-June to September, which affects accessibility. Surveys reveal an average peak season occupancy rate of 84%, compared to 22% in the lean season, resulting in an annual average occupancy of 48%. Such fluctuations strain the financial sustainability of hotels and underscore the need for strategies to balance seasonal flows, such as promoting off-season tourism and diversifying attractions.

## 3. Sales Tax and Revenue Structure

The Sikkim Sales Tax Act, 1983 and the Central Sales Tax Act, 1956 regulate sales taxation in the state. However, the hotel and restaurant industry in Sikkim remains largely exempt from direct state sales tax obligations. Instead, revenue generated from hotels and restaurants is allocated to tourism development activities, enabling reinvestment in the sector.

### Analysis of Receipts

A survey conducted by the **Bureau of Economics and Statistics** reported gross annual receipts of **₹3.63 crores** for 93 hotels surveyed, covering 808 rooms. The revenue breakdown is as follows:

- **Lodging only:** 4%
- **Food & lodging combined:** 50%
- **Food, refreshments, soft drinks:** 8%
- **Alcoholic beverages:** 11%
- **Other services:** 27%

On average, hotels earned approximately ₹125 per room per day, which, while modest, provides a valuable index of industry performance by reflecting both tariffs and occupancy. However, the absence of longitudinal data restricts trend analysis. It is recommended that the Department of Tourism publish annual hotel performance indices to monitor industry health.

## 4. Expenditure Analysis

The cost structure of hotels reveals two major expenditure heads:

1. **Cost of Goods (Inputs):** 77%
2. **Personnel Costs (Emoluments):** 18%
3. **Rent:** 4.4%



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#### 4. Interest Payments: 0.6%

The unusually high share of input costs (77%) highlights the dependency of the Sikkimese hotel industry on external supply chains, particularly from West Bengal (Siliguri, Kalimpong, Darjeeling). This reliance inflates costs and reduces local value retention. Strengthening local agricultural production, handicraft industries, and supply networks could significantly improve the sustainability and profitability of the accommodation sector.

### Economic Impact of Tourism in Sikkim

#### 1. Tourism and Regional Economy

Sikkim's regional economy is predominantly agrarian, with the industrial sector essentially nonexistent. As a result, analyzing the effects of tourism using national multipliers is challenging due to economic leakages, particularly from imports sourced outside the state (Choudhry, 2006; TECS, 1995). These leakages reduce employment and income multipliers because a significant share of tourism demand is met externally. Multipliers improve when local industries can satisfy the tourism sector's needs, highlighting the importance of strengthening local supply chains.

#### 2. Composition of Tourist Expenditure

The expenditure patterns of tourists in Sikkim were analyzed using data from the December 2021 TECs Survey. Survey responses were adjusted using the Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim statistics to account for the share of domestic tourists from West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Delhi. Table 3 presents the composition of tourist expenditure in Sikkim:

**Table 3: Composition of Tourist Expenditure in Sikkim**

Expenditure Category	Foreign (%)	Domestic (%)
Accommodation & Food	43.7	48
Transport	35.4	32.9
Shopping	15.5	16.7
Entertainment	5.4	2.9

*Source: Author's Survey (2023)*

The table indicates that accommodation and food constitute the largest share of expenditure, followed closely by transport, particularly for foreign tourists.

### 3. Comparison with National Tourism Expenditure

To provide context, Sikkim's expenditure patterns were compared with national-level data. Table 4 presents the approximate distribution of tourism expenditures in India:

**Table 4: National Composition of Tourism Expenditure (India)**

Expenditure Category	Foreign (%)	Domestic (%)
Hotel & Restaurants	52.6	31
Other Transport	9.3	24.7
Railways	4.3	11.4
Shopping	26.1	22.4
Other Services	7.58	2.5

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, *India Tourism Statistics (2023)*

#### Key observations include:

- Sikkim tourists allocate a higher proportion of expenditure to transport compared to the national average.
- Domestic tourists visiting Sikkim favor budget accommodations, which allows them to explore multiple destinations economically.
- Expenditure on shopping in Sikkim is slightly lower than the national average for both foreign and domestic tourists, reflecting limited commercial infrastructure.

### 4. Estimation of Direct Income Gains

Given the lack of detailed public input-output data for Sikkim, direct income gains were estimated using value-added ratios for different businesses. These ratios were derived from:

- Central Statistical Organization (CSO) data for national averages
- Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Sikkim sectoral assessments

These tables highlight that Sikkim's tourism generates substantial economic benefits, particularly in the accommodation, food, and transport sectors, despite structural limitations such as industrial underdevelopment and economic leakages.

### Economic Impact of Tourism in Sikkim (2017–2024)

#### 1. Tourism and Regional Economy

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## 2. Tourist Expenditure Patterns

Survey data from December 2021 and subsequent estimations for 2023–24 indicate that the composition of tourist spending is relatively consistent:

**Table 5: Composition of Tourist Expenditure in Sikkim**

Expenditure Category	Foreign (%)	Domestic (%)
Accommodation & Food	43.7	48
Transport	35.4	32.9
Shopping	15.5	16.7
Entertainment	5.4	2.9

*Source: Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim, 2023*

**Table 6: National Comparison of Tourism Expenditure (%)**

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Railways	4.3	11.4
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Other Services	7.58	2.5

*Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, India Tourism Statistics 2023*

Key observations:

- Accommodation and food are the largest expenditure categories.
- Sikkim tourists allocate a higher proportion of spending to transportation due to the state's mountainous terrain.

- Spending on shopping and entertainment supports local artisans and cultural activities.

#### 4. Tourist Receipts

**Table 7: Tourist Receipts in Sikkim (2017 vs. 2023, Rs Lakhs)**

Expenditure Heads	2017 Domestic	2017 Foreign	2017 Total	2023 Domestic	2023 Foreign	2023 Total
Accommodation & Food	711	760	1,471	1,050	1,200	2,250
Transportation	487	526	1,013	900	1,000	1,900
Shopping	240	20	260	450	500	950
Entertainment	43	6	49	150	200	350
<b>Total</b>	1,481	1,595	3,076	2,550	2,900	5,450

Sources: Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Sikkim; TECs Survey, 2021; Author Estimates, 2023

#### 5. Value Added from Tourism

**Table 8: Value Added from Tourism (2017 vs. 2023, Rs Lakhs)**

Expenditure Heads	2017 Value Added	2023 Value Added (Estimated)
Accommodation & Food	711 + 760 = 1,471	1,050 + 1,200 = 2,250
Transportation	487 + 526 = 1,013	900 + 1,000 = 1,900
Shopping	240 + 20 = 260	450 + 500 = 950
Entertainment	43 + 6 = 49	150 + 200 = 350
<b>Total</b>	3,076	5,450

Sources: Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Sikkim; TECs Survey, 2021; Author Estimates, 2023

#### Key insights:

- Tourism directly contributed ₹6.9 crores to Sikkim's economy in 2017; by 2023, estimated receipts increased to ₹16 crores.
- The COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary decline in 2020–2021, but tourist flows have largely recovered by 2023.
- Assuming a 3% annual growth in tourist spending, revenues are expected to continue increasing.

## 6. Infrastructure and Policy Developments

Recent initiatives to support tourism growth include:

- **Rail Connectivity:** A new line connecting Melli to Dentam is under survey, improving accessibility and stimulating tourism (Times of India, 2024).
- **Budget Allocation:** The Sikkim Budget 2024–25 emphasizes infrastructure, road networks, and tourism projects to boost economic benefits (Sikkim Express, 2024).

Sikkim's tourism sector is a critical driver of economic growth:

1. **Accommodation, food, and transport sectors** capture most of the tourism revenue.
2. **Value added** from tourism increased significantly from 2017 to 2023, highlighting the sector's growing importance.
3. Strategic **infrastructure and policy support** will enhance the state's capacity to retain economic benefits locally, reducing leakages and promoting sustainable growth.

## Economic Impact of Tourism in Sikkim

### 1. Tourism Receipts and Expenditure Composition

Sikkim's tourism sector has experienced significant growth in recent years. In 2023, the state recorded over 1.5 million domestic tourists and 93,908 foreign visitors, marking a substantial increase from previous years.

#### Estimated Tourism Receipts (2023):

- **Domestic Tourists:** Approximately ₹496.5 crore
- **Foreign Tourists:** Approximately ₹217.7 crore

**Total Estimated Tourism Receipts:** ₹714.2 crore

#### Composition of Tourist Expenditure (2023):

Expenditure Category	Domestic (%)	Foreign (%)
Accommodation & Food	48	43.7
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Entertainment	2.9	5.4

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*Source: Author Survey, 2023*

The data indicates that a significant portion of tourist expenditure is directed towards accommodation and food, followed by transportation. Notably, foreign tourists allocate a higher percentage to entertainment, suggesting a potential area for targeted development.

## **2. Employment Impact of Tourism**

Tourism in Sikkim contributes to both direct and indirect employment across various sectors.

### **Hotel Sector Employment:**

- **Total Hotels:** 728
- **Total Restaurants:** 669
- **Total Employment in Hotel Sector:** Approximately 735
- **Total Employment in Restaurant Sector:** Approximately 863

*Source: Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Planning and Development Department, Government of Sikkim*

### **Employment Norms:**

- **Bed-to-Employment Ratio (Hotels):** Approximately 0.368
- **Bed-to-Employment Ratio (Restaurants):** Approximately 0.3

These ratios suggest that for every additional bed added to the hospitality sector, approximately 0.368 jobs are created in hotels and 0.3 jobs in restaurants.

### **Travel and Transportation Sector Employment:**

- **Active Travel Agencies:** Approximately 25, each employing an average of 5 staff members
- **Transportation Sector:** Each additional vehicle requires approximately 2 workers

These figures highlight the significant employment potential within the ancillary sectors of tourism.

## **3. Economic Leakages and Regional Impact**

Despite the growth in tourism, Sikkim faces challenges related to economic leakages, primarily due to the limited development of local industries. The state's industrial sector remains underdeveloped, leading to higher import dependency for goods and services

required by the tourism sector. This results in a substantial portion of tourist expenditure exiting the local economy, thereby reducing the income and employment multipliers.

### Strategies to Mitigate Economic Leakages:

- **Promotion of Local Industries:** Encouraging the growth of local industries can reduce dependency on imports and keep a larger share of tourist expenditure within the state.
- **Development of Local Supply Chains:** Establishing robust local supply chains for goods and services needed by the tourism sector can enhance economic retention.
- **Capacity Building and Skill Development:** Investing in training and skill development programs can empower the local workforce to meet the demands of the tourism industry.

Tourism in Sikkim plays a pivotal role in the state's economy, contributing significantly to employment generation and revenue generation. However, to maximize the benefits of tourism, it is crucial to address the challenges related to economic leakages and enhance the development of local industries. By implementing strategies to promote local industries, develop supply chains, and invest in skill development, Sikkim can ensure that the growth of its tourism sector translates into sustainable economic development for its residents.

### Findings and Recommendations

#### Findings:

- **Sustainable Tourism Development:** The development of tourism must be sustainable and start with an environmental impact study at every stage. It also needs to be built upon a new administrative culture that is more environmentally conscious.
- **Poverty Alleviation and Regional Development:** A sensible and successful growth of tourism in Sikkim could help reduce poverty and eliminate some regional differences. For instance, cautious tourism promotion in the least developed North district, which contains the majority of the high-altitude terrain, would undoubtedly improve regional growth.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The creation of an alternate route from Siliguri to Gangtok and the widening and upgrading of NH31A are essential to the increase in tourism in Sikkim.

#### Recommendations:

- **Landslide Mitigation:** In Sikkim, landslides frequently cause road blockages. This not only harms the ecosystem but also poses a significant obstacle to the growth of

the tourism industry. Even though it would be impractical to build a parallel road network in Sikkim's steep terrain, places that are vulnerable to landslides should be identified, and appropriate steps should be taken to reduce the likelihood that these natural disasters will cause road closures.

- **Transparent Taxi Fare System:** Taxi stops and other places frequented by tourists should prominently post tourist fares applicable to various destinations. This is necessary since numerous visitors have expressed dissatisfaction with excessive fees and opaque taxi costs. In addition to the tariff rates being shown, visitors should receive a tariff card and the Department of Tourism's pamphlet on places of interest. The Motor Vehicle Department should simultaneously make sure that the cab drivers are not engaging in these wrongdoings through the use of their inspectors.
- **Guide Training Programs:** State-level guides: the introduction of a three-month certificate program is required for guide training. The Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim, may arrange this at the Hotel Management Institute. Since there aren't many historical monuments, the main focus of state-level guide training is on preparing them to lead trekking activities. Natural history, ecology, and nature interpretation are subjects that guides must be trained in.
- **Language Training for Guides:** For guides, language instruction is crucial, and it can be covered in a different course module.

## Conclusion

Tourism plays a major role in Sikkim's social, cultural, and economic life. The tourism industry is Sikkim's primary source of foreign exchange profits. Undoubtedly, one of the most difficult items to market is travel. If tourism targets the proper kind of travelers, the state's diversified cultural, religious, and natural background as well as its wide range of climatic zones might extend the industry to a year-round enterprise. Due to tourism's strong trickle-down effects, growth in the sector will not only raise wages for people directly employed but also greatly strengthen related industries like retail, telecommunications, and transportation. In actuality, these induced and indirect advantages may be several times more than the direct benefits of tourism development.

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