

Geographical Analysis of Strength and Weaknesses of Himachal Tourism

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ABSTRACT: *Himachal Pradesh is a beautiful hill state in India, nestled in the north-west region of western Himalayas. Popularly known as the Devbhumi — “Land of the Gods”. The state is landlocked with the Tibetan plateau to the east, Jammu and Kashmir to the north, and the Punjab to the west. The state stands apart from its neighbors in terms of its sheer topographic diversity. From vast tracts of high-altitude Trans-Himalayan desert to dense green deodar forests, from apple orchards to cultivated terraces, from snow capped high Himalayan mountain ranges to snow fed lakes and gushing rivers. Nature has bestowed Himachal Pradesh with unique beauty and splendour with its lush green valleys, snow covered Himalayan ranges, a serene, peaceful, hospitable and comfortable environment, smiling people and a rich cultural heritage - which tourists would be hard put to find elsewhere. Being in the lap of Himalayas and its Himachal becomes a natural and unique place to visit with global appeal. Being in the lap of Himalayas this fact becomes its natural and unique feature with global appeal. Tourism contributes nearly 8% of the State Domestic Product. Himachal Pradesh is already a well-established and recognized tourist destination. It seeks to harness the fullest potential of the State for development of tourism, which in turn can be a prime engine for economic growth and prosperity of the State, besides effectively addressing the problems of unemployment and poverty. By collecting the data from tourism department an analysis of the state tourism is made so that the better strategies can be adopted for better tourism.*

Keywords: *topographic, hospitable, environment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. The number of tourists worldwide has been registering phenomenal growth and it is expected that this number would shortly touch 1.5 billion. Tourism contributes about 11% of the world workforce and 10.2% of the global gross domestic product. The dynamic growth of this industry is evident from the fact a new job is added to the sector every 2.5 second. Tourism has been a major social phenomenon of societies all over the world. It is driven by the natural urge of every human being for new experiences, and the desire to be both educated and entertained. The motivations for tourism also include religious and business interests; the spread of education has fostered a desire to know more about different parts of the globe. The basic human thirst for new experience and knowledge has become stronger, as communication barriers are getting overcome by technological advances. Progress in air transport and development of tourist facilities has encouraged people to venture beyond the boundaries. Travel and tourism is one of the largest service industries in the world. When tourism is well planned, it can generate benefits at the destination by increasing tourist receipts, government revenue, and employment. For more successful tourism development, it is crucial to attract tourists and to recommend the destination for others to revisit (Chen and Tsai, 2007). The importance of Tourism, as an instrument of economic development and employment generation, particularly in remote and backward areas, has been well recognized the world over. It is a large service industry globally in terms of gross revenue as well as foreign exchange earnings. Tourism can play an important and effective role in achieving the growth with equity – an objective which we have set for ourselves. Tourism has been a major social phenomenon of societies all over the world. It is driven by the natural urge of every human being for new experiences, and the desire to be both educated and entertained. The motivations for tourism also include religious and business interests; the spread of education has fostered a desire to know more about different parts of the globe. The basic human thirst for new experience and knowledge has become stronger, as communication barriers are getting overcome by technological advances.

II. TOURISM IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

During the year 2004, the tourist arrivals in the state were 6.5 million which is roughly equivalent to the population of the State. (2.04 lakhs were foreigners). People coming to Himachal Pradesh from within India has grown by 16.6% whereas number of foreign tourist has increased by 13.2 % from the year 2009 to 2010 (interim report – phase I Himachal Pradesh July – 2012). In terms of numbers therefore the State has done more

than expected. The challenge now is to attract quality tourists and increase the stay of the tourists in the State. We also need to think globally as even the domestic tourists today have a choice unlike in the past. By focussing on quality tourist the State Government also aims at promoting sustainable tourism and encouraging the private sector to develop tourism related infrastructure in the State – without disturbing the existing ecology and environment.

In order to increase the duration of the stay of the tourists, a special emphasis is being placed on the development of activity-based tourism and opening up new sub destinations. To promote tourism in the countryside and to lesser-known areas, appropriate infrastructure will be developed within available resources. Himachal was earlier known only for the summer season. Efforts are being made to break the seasonality factor and tourism products have been diversified to attract the tourists in other seasons too. Now Himachal is known as “A Destination for All Seasons and All Reasons.”

Tourism contributes nearly 8% of the State Domestic Product which is roughly the same as horticulture sector. With careful planning and infrastructural development, the Policy proposes to increase it to 15% by the year 2020. To achieve the target Himachal Pradesh framed its TOURISM POLICY in 2005

III. HIMACHAL TOURISM- STRENGTHS

Himachal Pradesh offers breathtaking pristine beauty. Tourism, as we understand it today, in Himachal Pradesh, received recognition only in the 19th century, when the British established their chain of hill stations. Earlier, Himachal had been a destination for pilgrims only. A fillip to tourism was administered when British declared Shimla as summer capital of India in 1864. Post independence and up -gradation as fledged State in the year 1971 led to more investment in the infrastructure sector leading to opening up of the state.

However the biggest explosion in tourism occurred in the mid 80s and 90s with the Kashmir problem when the number of hotels and hotel rooms increased within this period from 350 to present 1710 and 6300 to 36000 respectively. The number of hotels in Himachal Pradesh has increased from 1,500 in 2003 to 2,150 in 2010 with the total number of beds rising from 34,000 to 51,000 in the same period (20-year Perspective Plans on Tourism Sector, Himachal Pradesh). With the wisdom of hind sight the State is now more equipped to deal with the problems of yesteryears and this document attempts to address those very problems. The market share of Himachal Pradesh in total number of tourists is still modest as compared to other top performing States. The market share of Himachal Pradesh is 1.8% and ranked 10th. Following are the main strength of Himachal as viewed from the tourism point of view.

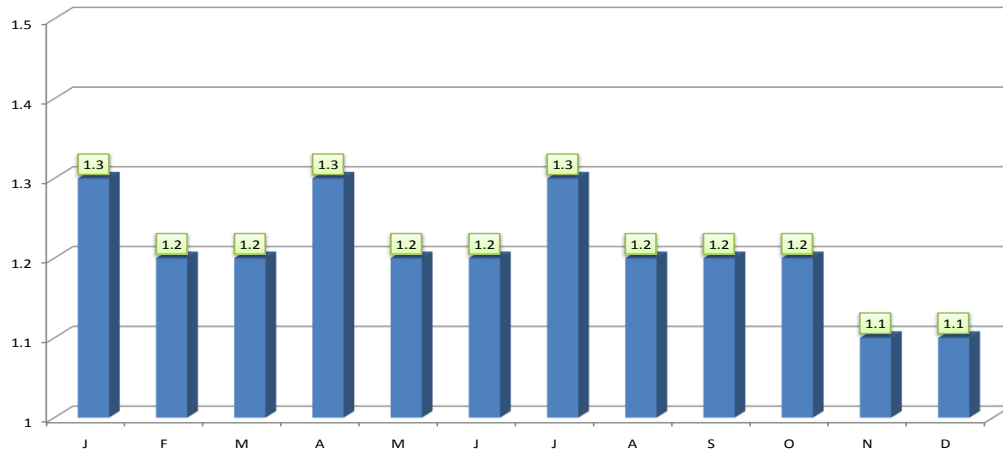
1. Rare place: Himachal Pradesh is one of the rare places in the world offering five distinct seasons, thus having potential to attract tourist inflow round the year.
2. Stable state: Himachal Pradesh is one of the Political and socially stable states in the country which offer peaceful pleasure for the tourists. Himachal Pradesh is recognized as a peaceful and hospitable state
3. Salubrious and pollution free environment: Himachal Pradesh is one of the states in the country which has Salubrious climate whole round the year (International Marketing Conference on Marketing & Society, 8-10 April, 2007, IIMK 258).
4. Rich history and heritage: Himachal Pradesh has rich history and heritage that has something to offer to all. Its, ancient temples, Buddhist monasteries churches and cemeteries are thousands of years old.
5. Himachal Pradesh offers a rare conglomerate of eco-tourism, pilgrimage, adventure, culture, heritage, leisure, and wilderness. All type of tourism activities are offered in the state. Himachal Pradesh has fairly good infrastructure. Himachal Pradesh has high literacy rate and the tourists do not face any problem in language communication.

IV. HIMACHAL PRADESH-WEAKNESSES

Over the past two decades, several researches attempted to find out reasons behind tourists’ return intention to the destination. Due to lack of this vision Himachal is unable to attract quality tourist.

1. Himachal Pradesh has negligible air and rail link. Recently air flights were also stopped due to some administrative problems. Due of which quality tourists stay away from the state
2. Himachal Pradesh has inadequate flow of foreign tourists. Data show that the foreign tourists inflow has increased from 2.8 to 4.8 million. But that is not enough because the average nights spent by the foreign tourists is just 1.2 which is less (Fig.1).

Average bed nights spent in Himachal Pradesh by Foreign Tourists



Source: Department of Tourism, Himachal Pradesh

Figure.1

- There is non-disbursal of tourists round the year, putting severe strains on civic infrastructure during the peak season. 64 per cent (Fig. 2) of the tourist inflow is in the season of six months from March to June and September and October. About 46 per cent tourist visit state during four months from March to June, when summer start in the plains.
- There is lack of trained tourist guides at important tourist places and historical tourist sites.
- No new tourist destinations have come up as a result there is saturation at the established tourist destinations. Once a tourist visits a place do not want to visit the place time and again. Following figure 3 shows that 52 per cent tourists visit three tourist destinations in Shimla, Kullu and Kangra only.
- There are inadequate parking places at important tourist places as result there is chaos during their pleasure time and people go back with bad experiences
- There is poor marketing of the State tourism abroad and inadequate marketing with in the country so that less people are aware about the places of interest in the state.



Figure.2

Source: Department of Tourism, Himachal Pradesh

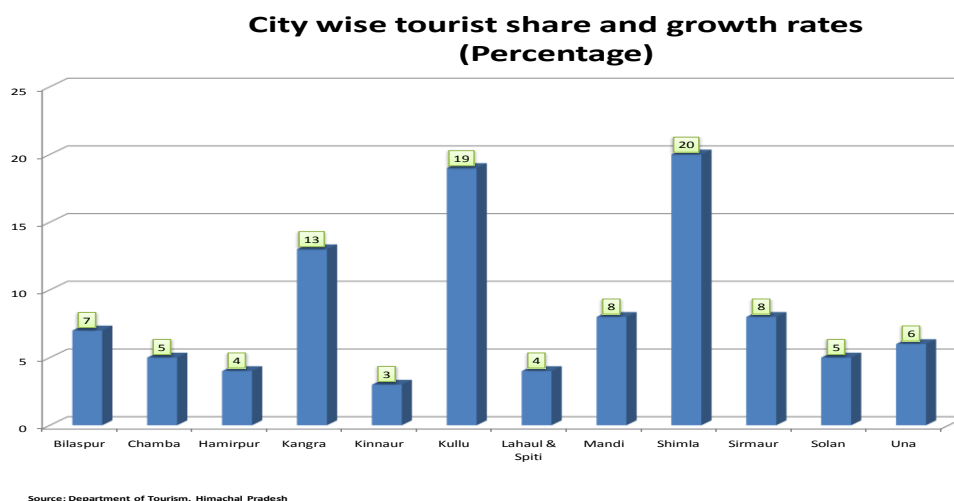


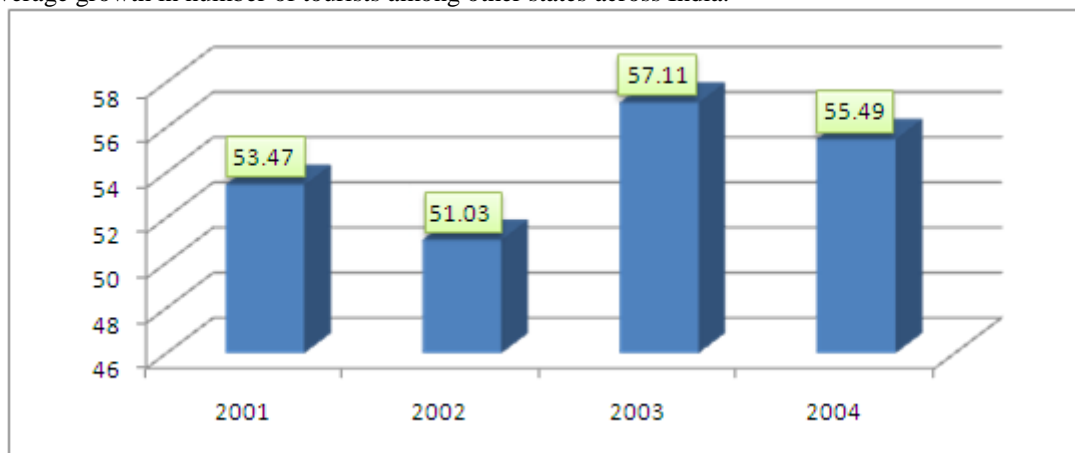
Figure.3

8. Very little budget is allocated to tourism related activities. Only 0.28% of the state budget is allocated to tourism in Himachal Pradesh which is inadequate depending upon the states physiographic conditions.
9. There are poor waste disposal systems in the leading destinations, posing threat to the environment like Rohtang Pass. There is lack of coordination in the different Government Departments leading to mismanagement.

V. HIMACHAL TOURISM AT A GLANCE

Himachal Pradesh has strong potential for activity based tourism such as white water rafting, Paragliding, trekking, mountaineering, water sports, mountain biking, Car Rallies etc. it has a strong base for heritage tourism to attract persons from all walks of society and religious beliefs. Himachal Pradesh has an ideal destination for eco-tourism. Himachal Pradesh has wetlands, which can be developed in the state to attract nature lovers especially bird watchers especially during the winters when migratory birds visit these places. Himachal has something to offer to persons of all ages, groups, beliefs and interests. There is unlimited scope for development of varied tourist packages. Himachal can become one of the leading adventure destinations in the world.

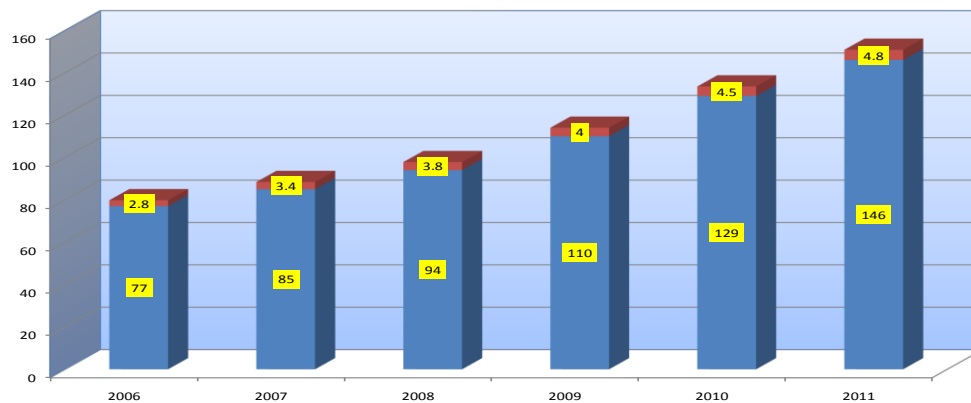
Despite all these weaknesses and drawbacks there is a continuous rise in the tourist numbers. Following fig. 4 show the tourist inflow before 2005 when he tourism policy was framed. It is clear from the figure that there is rise and fall in the number of tourist inflow. The total number of tourists (foreign as well as domestic) visiting Himachal Pradesh has consistently increased over the last 5years. An analysis of the foreign tourist arrival data in Himachal Pradesh in 2011 shows that visitors from UK comprise the largest proportion of foreign tourists with 15 percent share of the total foreign visitors followed by USA and France with 7% share. Germany and Australia contribute 4% of the tourist share of the state and Canada share is 3%. Italy Japan and Malaysia share 2% of the state. The performance of Himachal Pradesh in attracting tourists has been better than the average growth in number of tourists among other states across India.



Note: All values in lakhs Figure.4

After the policy was framed in 2005 the no of tourists arrival in the state saw a continuous rise (fig.5) . The total number of tourists (foreign as well as domestic) visiting Himachal Pradesh has consistently increased over the last 5 years increasing from 80 lakhs in 2006 to 151 lakhs in 2011.foreign tourist inflow rise to 4.8 lakhs in 2011from 2.8 in 2006. The domestic tourist inflow was 77 lakhs in 2006 and it rose to 146 lakhs in 2011.

Growth of Domestic and Foreign Tourists in Himachal Pradesh



Source: Department of Tourism, Himachal Pradesh and HIMACHAL IN FIGURES Economics & Statistics Department

Note: All values in lakhs Figure.5

The average bed nights spent in Himachal Pradesh by a foreign tourist in 2011 is just 1.2 highlighting that the avenues of entertainment for these visitors need to be increased as well as communication program around them need to be reinforced to make tourists stay longer. In order to increase the duration of the stay of the tourists, a special emphasis is being placed on the development of activity-based tourism and opening up new sub destinations. To promote tourism in the countryside and to lesser-known areas, appropriate infrastructure will be developed within available resources. Himachal was earlier known only for the summer season. Efforts are being made to break the seasonality factor and tourism products have been diversified to attract the tourists in other seasons too. Now Himachal is known as “A Destination for All Seasons and All Reasons.”

There is less total budget with the Department of Tourism in comparison to the other tourism-oriented States in the country. Tourism is one industry, which is linked with all other important development departments. Under their normal programmes, they are required to meet the infrastructure demands for promotion of tourism in the state. What is needed to mechanise and accelerate the activities of the tourism department is to integrate and coordinate with other departments.

In order to bring the State on to the international tourist map and to increase the inflow of the tourists the following actions will be taken up for strengthening the marketing strategy of the State:

1. Creation of ‘Destination Himachal Funds’ which will be a joint effort of Tourism Development Board, the major Temple Trusts and the private sector and some other agencies.
2. Printing of new brochures, posters and other tourist literature to make people know more about the state.
3. Developing 10 minutes, 20 minutes films on state tourism in order to telecast in the electronic channels and also display these during the tourism fairs on TV.
4. Up-gradation of Information Centres. These centres will not only provide information about the tourist destination but also provide booking facilities for HPTDC & Private Hotels for reservation of accommodation/ transportation and other facilities etc.
5. Touch screen kiosks with full information about the State should be installed at important international airports/national airports and railway stations of the country. Information about the state through modern means like website, e-mail, around the clock should be available. Advertisements should be released in the electronic and print media.

6. Participation in leading local, national and international tourism fairs. In this the private sector will also be involved so put up a unified 'Destination Himachal' campaign'. Organization of tourism events in the State, particularly during the off season in order to attract the large number of tourists.
7. Himachal has less professional guides. They should be trained in the professional manner to encourage the tourists curiosity to know more about the state.

Tourism, as we understand it today, in Himachal Pradesh, received recognition only when the British established their chain of hill stations. Earlier, Himachal had been a destination for pilgrims only. In terms of numbers the State has done more than expected. The challenge now is to attract quality tourists and increase the stay of the tourists in the State. We also need to think globally as even the domestic tourists today have a choice unlike in the past. In the present study an attempt is made to analyse the strength of tourism in Himachal Pradesh on the basis of tourists inflow.

VI. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

There are five factors that can increase inflow of tourist in Himachal Pradesh. First factor is increase in the travel due to business opportunities. Second is better roads and communication network in terms of air network, better sanitation facilities and better tourist experiences of past, third is availability of better tour packages, fourth factor is the rise in the income level of people especially the middle class, fifth factor is better options for travel and the sixth factor is various initiatives taken by the govt. such as unforgettable Himachal In order to achieve the policy objectives some thrust areas need to be recognised and explored Himachal offers a new era of nature enjoyment and learning. It also provides visitors an excellent exposure to the nature. This makes it an ideal area for developing eco-tourism rural tourism, adventure tourism and activities like jungle safaris, trekking, rock climbing, forest trails, nature walks, camping etc.. All these activities are to be conducted in a manner that promotes awareness of the environment and helps maintain the ecological balance.

Himachal Pradesh may channelize investment to showcase its natural beauty, develop newer circuits along with holy pilgrimages to attract tourists to the state. The state realizes the importance of investing in the above mentioned facilities and there has been action in these areas however, these efforts need to be sustained to continuously reap the benefits.

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