

Book Review: Tourism as Development: Case Studies from the Himalaya

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Tourism as Development: Case Studies from the Himalaya

Edited by Pitamber Sharma. Himal Books, Kathmandu, Nepal, and STU-DIENVerlag, Innsbruck, Austria, 2000. xiii + 179 pp. DM 36.80, SFr 34.00. ISBN 99933-13-009 (Nepal), 3-7065-1451-6 (Austria).

Mountain issues have been on the international policy agenda since the publication of Agenda 21. The World Mountain Forum in Chambéry, France, in 2000, the more recent International Workshop on Mountain Ecosystems held in Cusco, Peru, and a series of other preparations for the International Year of Mountains 2002 have put mountain issues at the forefront of academic and public discussions. These forums provide a platform to discuss mountain tourism issues within the context of sustainable mountain development.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing list of recent publications on mountain tourism issues (cf, East et al 1998; Godde et al 2000). It is a collection of 6 independently researched case studies that elucidate the complexity of tourism development in various settings, including remote communities (Fairy Meadows in northern Pakistan and Upper Mustang in Nepal), urban areas (Shimla, India, and Pokhara, Nepal), and a pilgrimage destination (Badrinath, India).

The book is divided into 3 parts, with a total of 7 chapters. The first part deals with the specific characteristics of mountain environments and their implications for tourism development. Issues of sustainability, carrying capacity, and local development are discussed. Apparently, these issues are of great relevance to the mountains. The second part of the book includes detailed case studies of 5 popular mountain destinations.

The first study, on the Fairy Meadows of Nanga Parbat, Pakistan, discusses the negative impacts of logging on the natural environment and suggests tourism as one of the strategies to diversify the local economy and reverse the process of landscape degradation. It is noted that, due to the current lack of tourism facilities and the limited number of visitors, both economic impacts and negative environmental changes have been minimal. While opportunities for tourism development are appreciated by the local communities, there is a general lack of awareness of the negative impacts of tourism and carrying capacity considerations. It is argued that the income potential from tourism might be expected to serve as a major incentive for local communities to be sensitive about preserving the environment.

The misuse and abuse of a common-property resource, in this case a lake, is the focus of the second study. The Phewa Lake and its vicinity in Pokhara, one of Nepal's prime

tourist destinations, has seen a dramatic increase in the number of visitors and haphazard development of hotels. Despite the lake being one of the main sources of water, adjacent hotels are primarily responsible for water pollution. The growth of food and accommodation services is beyond the capacity of the municipality to provide the necessary infrastructure. The absence of strong local institutions, partnership between the public and private sectors, and environmental monitoring systems has created uncertainty about sustainable development of the region. Critical initiatives include demarcation of the lake boundary, institutional development, legal provisions, formation of user groups, and strengthening of linkages between tourism and the local economy.

The third case study focuses on linking tourism and local development in Upper Mustang in Nepal. Tourism policy in Upper Mustang is an exception in Nepal in that it emphasizes low-volume, high-value tourism (visitors must pay US\$700 per person per visit for 10 days; each additional day costs US\$70). However, the significant revenue that has been generated since 1992, when the region was opened for tourism, has not been mobilized for local development projects; this is the primary reason for local dissatisfaction with the project. A tourism management plan focused on community development, human resource development, and institutional development is proposed.

The fourth study examines the problems of urban tourism in Shimla, one of the Himalayan hill stations established during the British Raj. Rapid urbanization has taken a heavy toll on local flora and fauna, while tourism-related development activities have caused several natural disasters, problems with solid waste disposal, traffic congestion, and a shortage of drinking water.

Badrinath, one of the most revered religious sites for the Hindu

pilgrims, is the focus of the fifth study. The last 2 decades of intensive tourism development have resulted in haphazard construction of tourism infrastructure, such as roads and hotels, at this once remote and inaccessible pilgrimage site. Problems of solid waste disposal, depletion of forest cover and species diversity, roadside landslides, and inappropriate land use are discussed and remedies suggested. Despite the tremendous scope for transforming existing tourism activity into an important local development tool, efforts in this direction have been significantly lacking.

The third part of the book provides a comparative assessment of the case studies. It identifies the need for appropriate tourism development policies and strategies; proactive planning and program interventions; local-level institution

building and participatory tourism planning; sharing benefits and enhancing linkages between tourism and the local economic base; local-level human resources development; detailed information on visitor use patterns, perception, and experience; and carrying capacity considerations.

The theme of the book is that the tourist industry should not only meet its environmental goals but recognize its social and economic responsibility as well. Tourism is capable of contributing to local-level sustainable development. The tourism–environment synergy is well highlighted, and the role of various stakeholders in partnership, institutional capacity, and monitoring mechanisms is emphasized.

The book follows a standard research format, which makes it somewhat less attractive to general

readers. It is a highly compact volume with very narrow margins. The emphasis on text rather than graphic illustrations makes it less appealing, and its layout is not very attractive. Despite these shortcomings, it provides a rich discussion of tourism problems in the Himalayas and is a useful reference for planners and academicians.

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