

Review Article

Sustainable Tourism in India's hill stations

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A B S T R A C T

Tourism in India's hill stations has evolved into a substantial economic and socio-cultural force, influenced by varied landscapes, colonial legacy, and increasing domestic travel demand. This article looks at how tourism has changed over time, what patterns it has followed, and what effects it has had on important hill destinations including Shimla, Darjeeling, Ooty, Manali, and Munnar. It looks at the factors that bring tourists to an area, such as better access, better weather, and marketing methods. It also looks at how these factors affect the local economy, infrastructure, and the environment. Hill tourism helps the region thrive by creating jobs and expanding the service sector. However, it also causes problems like environmental damage, problems with waste management, and stress on vulnerable mountain ecosystems. The report emphasises the necessity for equitable, sustainable tourism strategies that integrate conservation aims with community engagement and policy endorsement. Overall, it gives a full picture of how hill stations fit into India's tourism scene and offers ideas for how to grow in a strong and responsible way.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Hill Tourism, Sustainable Development, Mountain Ecosystems, Regional Economic Impact

Introduction

The word "hill station" comes from Britain and refers to places where people try to improve nature in the wild. These formal settlements, which are located on high ground, sometimes overlap with higher cultural ecologies. The historical trajectories of hill stations in India are not an isolated phenomenon but part of a global trend, necessitating consideration of the broader historical context. The first hill stations in India were built in the 1820s. Shortly thereafter, branch settlements began to appear outside of this original core. This started a different trend of urbanisation that was not planned by the colonists. As the territory became independent, hill station settlements were changed even more into typical tourist-accessible versions of wilderness areas that had never been touched before.¹ There are still new hill-station towns and communities being developed

today, but these are mostly being built as part of community or regional development plans.

The fundamental premise for investigating hill stations in India is that significant community involvement and capacity enhancement are essential for defining and promoting the contemporary hill-station market. Without a significant measure of community participation and collaboration in formal tourism promotion planning, it is doubtful that enhanced market accessibility could at all be realized—not to mention the nature of future tourism development that may occur for those areas and locations lacking the attributes of "community development." A community or region that enjoys high prominence in the broader tourism system of today is often referred to as a "tourist-centered" one, or "community-based tourism (CBT)" as an alternative terminology stressing the focus on the local community.

It has been important to build a rich, complete historical overview of hill-station towns that have been built and maintained up to now, along with the effects on community growth, urban expansion, industrial facilitation, and so on. This has been important as a basis for these main questions about tourism and travel. These hill-station towns, which are mostly found in mountainous areas, are also very different from the urban centres that have been examined more widely around the world.

A Brief History Of Hill Stations In India

After the 1857 mutiny, British authorities and people in the Indian provinces had to create a distinctive colonial identity that was different from the primary Indian culture. One answer was to build hill stations, which are resort communities built on hilltops to get away from the heat and humidity of the plains.¹ Each station gave people of a certain socioeconomic class a place to meet other people who thought the same way. The station of Mussoorie in Uttar Pradesh drew in the newest members of the British army and civil service. The name of this station made people think of England, and it sounded like “Marlborough” and “Wellington,” two names that are well-known in British society (Chaudhary, n.d.). The quick building of roads made it possible for people from all walks of life to visit many hill stations in the Western Himalayas. Table 1 shows the history of hill stations and how tourism grew once they were built.

Geographic and Weather Context

The climate in India’s hill stations is different from that in the lowlands. India has a lot of diverse hill stations in several of its geographical areas. Most of India’s hill stations are between a few hundred and a few thousand meters above sea level. According to the Indian government’s rules, a hill station is a place or area that is more than 1,000 meters above mean sea level. The Himalayan region, the Northern range of hills, the Vindhyan range, and the Sahyadri Range are where these hill stations are found. This is where the most important hill stations in India are located.^{2,3}

Economic Importance and Effects on Livelihood

Hill stations are a special part of India’s tourism scene. People have praised them for more than a century as great places to relax, have fun, and get away from the heat because of their beautiful scenery, varied climates, rich ecosystems, and colonial architecture. Hill-station tourism is one of the most popular and important types of travel for the economy in the country. It includes a wide range of activities and attracts people for different lengths of time throughout the year.⁴ These communities are popular tourist spots in their own right, but they also serve as transit hubs for religious events, adventure

sports, local festivals, and other types of tourism. The hill-station phenomena continues to change, including colonial views, economic policies, educational opportunities, infrastructure development, and changes in society and culture. The colonial heritage may be traced back to its origins, but a separate modern tourist cycle now exists.² India has been at the forefront of the hill station trend since the middle of the 1800s, even though they are now common in the worldwide tourism industry. Over the past few decades, tourism in mountain areas has grown a lot over the world. This is due to a big rise in air travel, infrastructure development, and people’s ability to buy things in their own countries. Climate change has also made people around the world more worried about the environmental and social well-being of mountain regions. There is more and more agreement in both policy and practice that mountain tourism can help local economies and improve quality of life. However, there is also a growing need for sustainable tourism to balance off these demands.

Environmental Pressures And Problems With Conservation

Hill stations in India are facing new environmental problems because of a big shift towards tourism. This is happening since it is easier to get to these places and a new middle class is forming. The number of tourists arriving sharply increased starting in 1991, which was also the year of major economic reforms.⁵ As a result, the pressure on land and freshwater resources has grown, making it more important to manage water and solid waste. Settlements atop hills are more likely to have landslides, and uncontrolled development around hill stations makes the risk of disaster much higher. Current conservation measures are no longer enough and need to be looked at again right away.

Batra found many dangers to delicate alpine ecosystems because too many tourists were coming. Some of the main problems are flattening slopes for building and cutting down more trees (the original building material). Hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops also take more resources, such as sand, clay, and stone. Forest cover and plant growth are still very important for the health of these types of ecosystems, and if these places keep losing trees and plants, the problem will get worse.

Rules and ways to run things

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the hill stations of India grew as spas and were beautiful getaways for the rich. The international expansion of the British Empire, the pioneering work of missionaries and official surveys, and the competition among regional princes all contributed to hill station development. The establishment of hill stations by the British in India followed the evolution of the idea of “amenity” or “resort” towns that had begun as early as

1867 and 1877, Mindful of the fact that India had a “huge geographical diversity” a comparative survey of three hill stations – whose origins lay in colonial times and since independence had emerged as popular tourist destinations – they were selected to throw light on hill stations, and imply comparisons between country economic interventions generally and tourism and the hill stations specifically Shimla – the erstwhile summer capital of British India, and still a favourite with tourists, particularly honeymooners Manali – Himachal Pradesh tourist destination noted for its easy accessibility from Chandigarh and Kullu – an important node on the road from Manali to Leh and centre for the international tourist trade since earliest times.⁶

Building capacity and getting people involved in the community

The sustainable tourism concept for hill areas in India relies heavily on community involvement and building capability. Effective involvement helps to deal with the different social and geographical backgrounds of these communities and the areas around them. These areas, which are home to local communities, are very important for long-term tourism plans. Getting local people involved not only makes planning easier, but it also makes it easier for everyone to enjoy the benefits of tourism, improves fairness among disadvantaged groups, and gives people a sense of ownership, which strengthens the link between tourism and development.⁷ Additionally, it is necessary to assess the residents’ level of awareness regarding tourism. Equal access to important and complete information about investments, decisions, and project design connected to tourism can make people feel like they are being treated fairly and encourage them to take part in development processes.⁶

To get more people involved in tourism development, we should support community-led projects. Starting with small pilot initiatives that directly benefit local communities builds confidence between residents, authorities, and supporting agencies, which encourages more projects to follow. Training programs for local guides and tourist entrepreneurs can greatly increase tourism-related skills and help local enterprises get started. Community-based programs can help people get better at what they do and encourage good behaviour. Workshops that encourage entrepreneurs in the community, bring together different groups to set objectives, and set up ways for everyone to share the advantages fairly help local people feel more confident.

Tourist facilities, infrastructure, and connectivity

To get hill stations ready for changes in the environment, we need to improve transportation, waste management,

water supply, and tourism amenities. Accessibility limits the viability of development. Lack of critical infrastructure makes it hard for people to get ahead. Seasonal travel franchises connect cities and towns, which could lead to duplicate services and wasted resources. Planning that strengthens connections between cities and rural areas, makes the most of current investments, and fits with the identities of hill stations is very important. Compact hill stations can host satellite towns and strategically place urban attractions, public services, and adaptable technical systems to link services. Resilient designs use materials and building styles that are common in the area. Adding more storage and pipelines underground makes water safer. Tourism facilities generally don’t have the right ways to separate, treat, and get rid of garbage, which makes urban risks and environmental pressures worse. Very few hill stations have better amenities or infrastructure that is controlled by master plans and frequent checks. In many circumstances, state-level frameworks require citizens to get involved. Hill stations that don’t have these kinds of documents get less government funding, make planning less clear, and move away from long-term goals. Surveys of fitness and income show that there is a lot of potential for improvement in how people take care of their public and private assets. Strengthening a region’s own resources encourages community maintenance that goes beyond just money.^{8,2} Cultural Heritage and Keeping Traditions Alive

Indian hill stations have a lot of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.² Many parks and conservatories show off these cultural gems. The impact of tourism on the expression and display of local customs and norms, together with the transmission of traditional arts and skills to future generations, warrants meticulous scrutiny. It is important to promote tradition, culture, and local customs because more and more people want to share these important traits. It is hard to find a balance between keeping both concrete and intangible culture alive and letting customs change and grow.

Tourism has a big effect on the people who live in hill stations, especially on communities who have always relied on land use. Changes in culture that come with tourism often have bad effects that aren’t looked at closely enough in conversations about development. To protect significant urban heritages and the traditions that go with them, people must actively support and take part in actions that preserve them. This shows that the people in the area understand the city’s identity and the heritage’s larger importance. Instead of only seeking to maintain fixed traditions, attention should move to the foundation of living culture and the formation of a mutually beneficial relationship with tourists.

Ethical Considerations and Responsible Tourism Practices

Responsible tourism focusses on reducing the bad consequences of mass tourism by encouraging real and long-lasting engagement with local populations. The Cape Town Declaration lays forth a variety of goals, such as making life better for people in the area, creating long-term job possibilities, and giving tourists meaningful experiences.⁹ Visitors can learn a lot about a place through ethical tourism initiatives. These kinds of activities not only satisfy tourists' requirements for authenticity, knowledge, social contact, and self-fulfilment, but they also help tourists learn more about the area and its culture, which helps them get along with locals. Tourism should let people of equal worth talk to each other, understand each other better, and work together on common goals. Sustainable tourism meets the needs of both tourists and the host country while also conserving future prospects. It promotes a mature attitude that includes ethics and responsibility, with everyone being aware of how their actions affect the land and the people that live there.

Responsible tourism includes promoting visitors during the off-season and to other places to cut down on crowds. Tourists should choose tour companies that are known for being ethical and good for the environment. They should also act in ways that respect the environment and local culture, such as not leaving behind any trash that can't be broken down. It's important for people in the area to be involved; getting the community involved in making decisions will help prevent problems. There are also a number of hotel practices that can help, such as making the most of natural light, collecting rainwater during the monsoon season, and employing recycled materials. Green marketing and eco-friendly activities can help even more to protect the environment and culture. There also has to be a lot of work done on the infrastructure, especially to modernise the sewer and sanitation systems by building a central treatment plant. Since 2002, eco-tourism policies have changed over time to focus more on sustainable practices and getting the community involved.⁶

Case Studies Of Famous Hill Stations

During the colonial period, the British government and its officials used hill stations as a place to relax and have fun. In the post-colonial period, people moving from different parts of the world caused changes in the way hill stations were settled, how land was used, and how land was owned. The situation slowly changed from being used for colonial purposes to being a place for modern and cosmopolitan recreational activities. These developments sped up after the fifth generation gained independence in 1919. After India became independent, a number of hill stations opened up. Now, Sumit, Kasol, Barot, and Mcleodganj in Himachal

Pradesh, Patnitop in Jammu, and Landsdown in Uttarakhand are becoming more popular. These hill stations are seen as alternative summer vacation spots for people who reside in the plains. They are also known for how quickly the area is becoming urbanised and how people's lives are changing.¹

Models Of Sustainable Development And New Ideas

It is still very hard for hill stations in India to find a balance between protecting the environment and growing the economy.² These settled places show how people can adapt to the limits of their environment while also helping to absorb resources, change the land, and trade goods through connections between different places. This duality necessitates a strategic examination of sustainable development models that protect the natural environment and local communities while striving for economic prosperity. Hill stations are hybrid socio-ecological systems with many actors, flows, and stocks. These systems have problems with resilience, governance, and community-based tourism that can be solved by using integrated theoretical frameworks.⁸

Some promising models and new ideas are ecotourism financing, working with academics and civil society on nature-based solutions, planning cities that can handle climate change, and expeditions that turn trash into resources. Nature-based solutions that restore natural drainage structures can help make urban development in hill stations more sustainable. Pilot projects that go beyond hill stations and create synergies between climate action, garbage recycling, and other goals seem to be quite important.

Monitoring, Evaluation, And Signs Of Success

Monitoring and evaluation play a central role in determining whether the development of hill stations in India is achieving its intended objectives. To have a good monitoring and evaluation framework, you need to choose your indicators carefully. These indicators should not only track how well driver intervention is working, but they should also measure the desired effects, both direct and indirect. This means that choosing the right indicators will show both the goal of having an effect and how the driver can adapt to help figure out what happens when more attention is paid to adaptation. There are several ways to create an indicator system, and there are currently a few well-known ones.¹⁰ The input-process-output-impact (I-P-O-I) framework is a simple and frequently used way to group indicators into clusters that show how resources were used, what processes were followed, what changes were made, and what consequences were felt. In the I-P-O-I framework, inputs cash and staff dedicated to the driver, together with funding secured for it, comprise the type of resources typically associated with a driver. The second category encompasses the diverse distribution

and engagement processes that form the implementation activities for this sort of intervention—these processes are extensively addressed in certain driver reports and deserve specific acknowledgement within an indicator framework. Output indicators are designed to measure early responses directly attributable to the particular intervention, such as greater awareness, promotion and discussion of adaptation experiences and approaches, increased participation and leadership in networks and initiatives, and the existence of new collaboration mechanisms in support of the topic. At the impact level, the focus shifts to changes that resonate with the broader development objectives of the development strategy, namely productivity and growth, investments, and changes in living conditions fundamentally related to adaptation.

Future Prospects and Strategic Recommendations

India's hill stations provide magnificent landscape diversity and climate fluctuation. They emerged from colonial India's political, climatic, and cultural need for the upper-class elite to escape the summer heat and associated illnesses.² English officials developed hill stations as colonial settlements, which later attracted wealthy Indian families and domestic migrants. Hill stations today usher millions of urban dwellers searching for relaxation and recreation to a range of natural and built attractions.⁶ While their colonial heritage continues to define tourism styles and influences international perceptions, it is imperative to modernize the hill-station brand. Opportunities exist for scaling up urban rentals, experiential learning, food tasting, weekend outbounds, travel clubs, and coaching centers, while assuring ethical participation under the leadership of current community-based tourism models. Future prospects lie on integrating tourism development with conservation necessity. The fact that tourists are interested in hill stations shows that they are committed to them, so conservation measures must be clearly visible in order to encourage compliance. New techniques are available to evaluate ecosystem state affected by tourism and to benchmark overexploitation among regions to gauge urban nature exposure. Standardized rating criteria with globally accepted indications could enhance market for ethically positioned hill stations.

Conclusion

Sustainable tourist development is a complex subject. India's hill stations reflect the polarities of overwhelming expansion and complete stagnation. Contemporary trajectories are shaped by patronage and precedents set during British colonisation. Sustained formal governance is wanting, preventing inclusive planning and discourse over conflicting visions. Sales of bus,

taxi, and tourist licenses give an opportunity to limit external migrations and codify property interests. The hill station phenomenon arose in the early 1800s, spurred by the British need for climatic relief and recreational retreats in uplands. The dynamics of today are very different. In the summer, tourists come to get away from the heat of the plains for a short time. In the winter and during festivals, tourists come to have fun. Interstation migration is the most common way for people who go to summer retreats to move around. During the spring, autumn and winter holidays, people from the same state come to the same place. The results mean that policymakers and people in the tourism business need to put sustainable governance, decentralisation of tourism, community involvement, and faster technology integration at the top of their lists. To make sure that Kerala's important tourism industry is strong, welcoming, and good for the environment in the long run, these suggestions must be put into action. More attention needs to be paid to the bigger areas that hill stations draw people from. Downhill towns, which are really extensions of hill stations, encourage social and cultural exchanges and physical connections, but they are often left out of conversations about tourism. As tourists move from lower-end to higher-end hotels in the stations, these demands for urban expansion and development come up. [2]

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