

Environmental impacts of tourism in bhutan

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Environmental Impacts of Tourism in Bhutan The concept of tourism development in Bhutan took place in post 1974 period during the reign of late majesty, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk in national assembly. However, tourism business begun its operation with 274 tourist in 1974 at the time of coronation of fourth king, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk and since then tourism business started growing in Bhutan. Tourism is now recognized as having considerable potential as a tool for development and as a contributor to national revenue.

In other words, the Royal Government of Bhutan now recognizes that its tourism industry is second only to hydropower in terms of its potential to generate foreign exchange and provide for national sustainable development. With tourism development, it is undeniable to say that there are environment impacts which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Assessment and evaluation of the environment impacts of tourism in Bhutan The three main impact areas of tourism in Bhutan are; i. Depletion of Natural Resources ii.

Air and noise pollution iii. Physical impacts Depletion of Natural Resources Tourism development in Bhutan puts pressure on natural resources when it increases consumption in areas where the resources are already scarce: Water resources The tourism industry and in particular hotels and resorts generally overuse water resources. In major cities like Paro and Thimphu, many tourist hotels and star hotels for tourists are built and some are under construction and others are yet to be constructed for tourism development.

Hotel Taj Tashi at Thimphu, Uma resort in Paro and other tourist hotels like Hotel River View in Thimphu are really overusing the water as compared to other industries. The impact is such that the people residing in those places are experiencing water shortages. Thimphu residents say that they don't water in time and that they have to minimize water consumption. Pollution Tourism can cause the same forms of pollution as any other industry: air emissions, noise, solid waste and littering, releases of sewage, oil and chemicals, even architectural/visual pollution. Air pollution and noise

As in any other country, tourism in Bhutan involves travelling, normally by motor car, buses and aero plane. So, the contribution of each to air and noise pollution is declarable. Many tour operators in Bhutan like Etho Meto Tours and Treks, Gangri Tours and Treks have latest model Japanese Toyota Cars, Land Cruisers, Haice Buses, Mini-buses and Coaster Buses being offered to tourists depending upon the group size. Sewage Especially with reference to Thimphu city, construction of tourists' hotels, recreation and other facilities have lead to increased sewage pollution.

People staying nearby Babesa in Thimphu where the sewage tank (reservoir) is located are complaining of the unpleasant smell or the sewage pollution. Physical impacts Physical impacts such as degradation of ecosystems are caused not only by tourism-related land and construction, but by continuing tourist activities. Construction activities and infrastructural development In every district in Bhutan, there are tourists' hotels being built and while constructing such hotels and resorts, the trees have to be cut from the forests causing damage to the environment.

In addition, construction of Paro airport in early 1980s and the ongoing construction of one airport in Gelephu under Sarpang district, Yongphu airport in Trashigang lead to the land degradation and loss of wildlife habitats and deterioration of scenery. Another example that can cited is with reference to ongoing construction of road to Merak and Sakteng in Trashigang for making accessible to the village in making that area as tourist destination are causing damage to the environment like spoiling the beautiful landscape. Tourism and vegetation

Vegetation is one of the major attractions of many destination areas in the world as well as in Bhutan. The highlands of Laya and Lingzhi (Gasa district), the southern foothills like Trirang and Samtse, the densely covered forests of the temperate zones of the places like Zhemgang, Trongsa, Mongar, Bumthang, TrashiYangtse are examples of vegetation which have allure for tourist. A variety of tourist activities bring impact upon vegetation. They include the following activities and effects; The collection of flowers, orchids and plants can result in changes in species composition.

Deliberate chopping of trees for tent poles and firewood in the cold places like Gasa, Trongsa and Lhuntse are done. People say this creates some sort of impact on vegetation if it is continued. For example, such practices have removed many younger trees from forests which alter the age structure of the plant community. This also leaves fewer trees to mature and provide shelter for the site. Lack of proper inspection by the government in high altitude campsites like the one in Taupang campsite in Trashiyantse, the tourists are not concerned about the waste and they leave behind the waste in the area.

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This can result in changes in nutrient status of soils and damage ecology by blocking out air and light. The Bhutanese tour agents are making camping program in their itinerary list. As a result of camping, it also brings impact environment. For instance, the construction of campsites in Nabji-Khorphu trail in Trongsa has involved in the removal of vegetation. The camping has similar effect to trampling and the damage extends into the surrounding area with the development of trails and picnic sites. Within the category of nature based attractions, Bhutan's trekking routes represent the most important product currently marketed.

The following trekking routes are currently officially opened for international tourists: Jomolhari Treks 1 & 2, Laya Gasa & Gasa Hot Spring Trek, Snowman Trek, Druk Path Trek, Dagala Thousand Lakes Trek, Nub Tshonapata Trek, Bumthang Cultural & Duer Hot Spring Treks, Gangtey Trek, Rodong La Trek and Samteygang Trek. The use of same trekking trails can bring trampling impact on environment. Alteration of ecosystems by tourist activities Habitat can be degraded by tourism leisure activities in Bhutan. Tourist activities like viewing and photographing of wildlife brings disturbances and impact on wildlife in Bhutan. There are quite a good numbers of places where tourists can go and visit national parks and wild life sanctuaries. Some of them are Thrumseglia National Park in Bumthang, Bumdelling Wildlife Sanctuary at Trashiyangtse, Manas National Park in lower kheng areas of Zhemgang, Jigme Singye Wangchuk National Park at Trongsa. The development of such national parks can perhaps disturb the predator-prey relationships in future. Some positive impacts of tourism with regard to environmental impacts: Educates local people to manage waste properly

Rural people learn from tourists who are very particular in managing the waste. Whenever, European tourist visits villages and the festivals, they do not throw wastes like chocolate wrappers or plastic bottles anywhere they like. Instead they may be seen throwing in proper dustbins or take along in their bags helping environment to keep clean. Protection of endangered species Developing of national parks help to preserve and protect endangered species in Bhutan. In a way, tourism helps to environment to be protected from deforestation.

It allows environment to give home and to have continuous flow of ecological life of endangered species like Black-necked crane, Golden Langur, Red Pandas, Musk Deer and Himalayan Black Bear. Solutions to reduce negative impacts of tourism on environment Although we cannot fully do away with negative impacts of tourism on environment because with development, it brings in the costs and that costs is directly or indirectly harming environment. But still, we can hope to find a light shining at the end of the tunnel in reducing detrimental impacts of tourism on environment which can make a difference.

Following points can suffice the above phrase of reducing negative impacts; Identification of proper waste disposal areas The government should identify proper waste disposal areas wherever necessary and important. In addition, dustbins must be placed in urban areas and pits must be dug wherever necessary. Reforestation The government in collaboration with people should take initiatives in reforestation of plants and trees in converting barren places or tourist destinations. Recycling of waters The hoteliers should take the responsibility of recycling and re-using of the water resources.

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Restriction of opening up of many new trails The government should allow selective trails and not open all for camping and trekking purposes. Allow environment friendly developments If government or the communities can develop tourist destinations through establishment of botanical gardens and develop nature tourism in the designated national parks, it can help in the environmental conservation. Making tour agents responsible and accountable to environment The tour agents should be made responsible and accountable if any damages are caused to the environment.

The government should make inspection of the tourist-destinations and levy fines to the tour agents if the places are kept dirty after the camping or so. Making quiet hours observations to avoid noise pollution In the cities like Thimphu, if the government could frame a rule in observing quiet hours where the tourist vehicles and others are not allowed to move after 9pm on working days can perhaps reduce the noise pollution. Global environment impacts affect tourism industry: The global environment impacts do affect tourism industry. Following details will explain on the global environment affecting tourism industry;

Natural disaster: Catastrophes like floods, earthquakes, wildfires, volcanoes, drought and diseases can have a serious effect on inbound and domestic tourism and thus on local tourism industries. The outbreak of the foot and mouth disease epidemic in England in 2001, has severely affected Great Britain's inbound tourism market such that 75% of hotels in England, 81% in Scotland and 85% in Wales were affected resulting over 60% forecast a decline in business in the June- September 2001 period. Climate change:

Tourism contributes to climate change but it is also affected by climate change phenomenon.

Climate change is likely to increase the severity and frequency of storms and severe weather events, which can have disastrous effects on tourism in the affected regions. The world is at risks of having drought, diseases and heat waves as a result of global warming. For instances in high peaks, the glaciers are said to be melting just as it is in the case of Bhutan where by as a result of melting snows and glaciers; the formation of lakes at the bottom of the high mountains and the increasing volume in the lakes like Raptresang Tso are found.

Such formation of lakes and if the lakes burst out then, it can bring floods and disasters to the valleys and towns located at sea level. These negative impacts can keep tourists away from holiday destinations. In addition to the above points, global warming may cause: Less snowfall at ski resorts, that will result to shorter skiing season in the Alpine region. In already hot areas like Asia and Mediterranean, tourists will stay away because of immense heat, and out of fear of diseases and water shortages.

Harm will be caused to vulnerable ecosystems such as rainforest and coral reefs because of rising temperatures and less rainfall. The sea levels will rise as a result of melting glaciers and polar ice. This rising sea levels will threaten coastal and marine areas with widespread floods in low-lying countries and island states, increasing the loss of coastal land. Beaches and islands that are major tourism attractions may be the first areas to be

affected. Increased events of extreme weather, such as tornadoes, hurricanes and typhoons will occur.

These are already becoming more prevalent in tourist areas in the Caribbean and South East Asia. Hurricane Mitch in 1998, for instance, heavily affected tourism in the Caribbean. Wind damage, storm waves, heavy rains and flooding caused major losses in tourism sector. Reference: 1. Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy Bhutan 2005. Published by: Department of Tourism, Royal Government of Bhutan. 2. Tenth Five Year Plan 2008-2013 Volume 1: Main Document. Published by: Gross NationalHappinessCommission (2009), Royal Government of Bhutan