

# Promoting Ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh



**WPI**

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# Promoting Ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

Ecotourism is sustainable, nature-based tourism, that is environmentally conservative while maintaining local culture and contributing to the well-being of the host community. The goal of this project was to develop a list of best practices and recommendations for sustainable tourism and ecotourism that are specific to Himachal Pradesh, India. To develop our understanding of the tourism and ecotourism sector in the region, we spoke with government officials, business owners, and tourists. Additionally, we analyzed tourist locations for their capacity to sustain ecotourism. Finally, we combined the academic best practices and our analysis to create a set of recommendations for sustainable development at potential ecotourism sites in Himachal Pradesh.

## Executive Summary

The term ecotourism emerged to succinctly describe sustainable, nature-based tourism. This kind of sustainable travel is environmentally conservative, while maintaining local culture and preserving the ecology of the host community. These activities can be diverse, as shown in figure 1, below.



Figure 1: Examples of Religious and Adventure Tourism in Himachal Pradesh

As a result, best practices are essential to uphold the tenets of ecotourism. The following list describes best practices that have been adapted from the literature (ESOI, 2013; TIES, 1990; Wood, 2002):

### Best practices of ecotourism

- Minimize negative impacts on nature and culture
- Use of baseline studies and long-term monitoring programs for market analysis and environmental impact
- Educate tourists on environmental conservation and cultural awareness
- Stress sustainable business management
- Direct revenue to the conservation of natural and protected areas
- Maximize economic, environmental, and cultural benefit for the local community
- Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits
- Design plans for regional tourism zoning and visitor management
- Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment

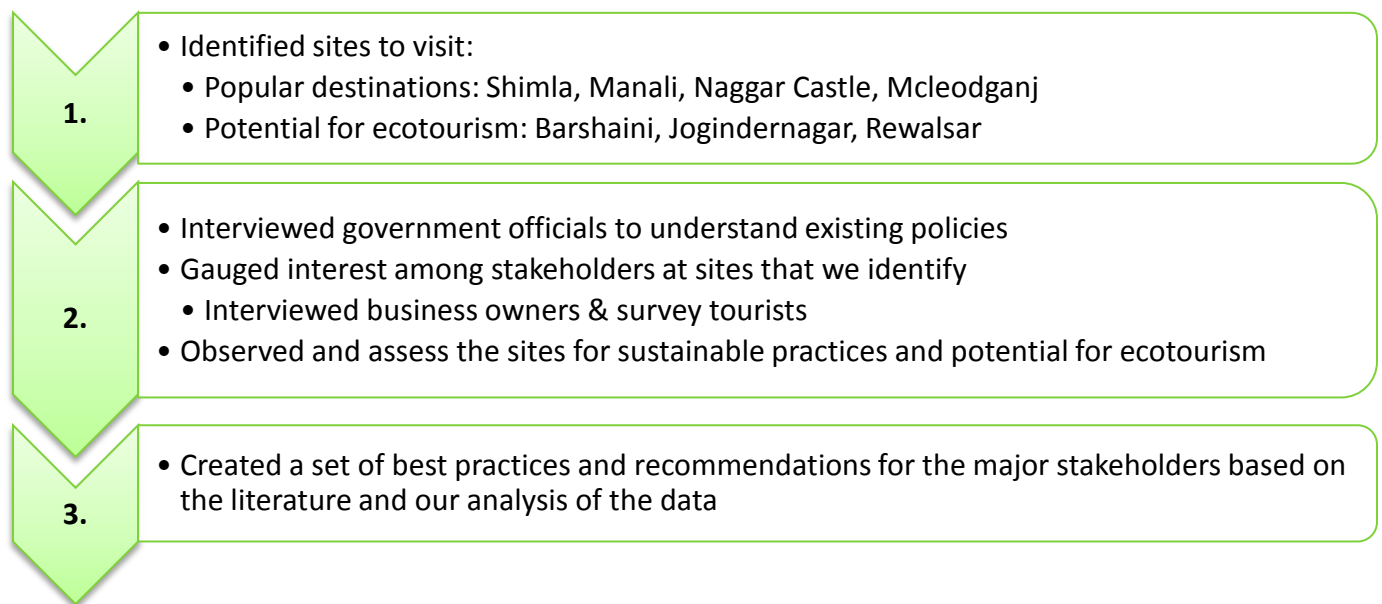
The main directives in ecotourism are to conserve the local environment and culture. The integrity of the local environment and biodiversity are at risk due to development and visitation to the area. For the same reasons, the local culture and traditions are also at risk. The stakeholders possess the responsibility of upholding the best practices to mitigate negative impact. Stakeholders associated with ecotourism include government bodies, non-governmental organizations, local business owners, and tourists. Specifically in India, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Environment & Forests have already established a set of general principles for ecotourism, which encompass many of the topics listed above. Himachal Pradesh has potential ecotourism activities in the areas of adventure, religious, wildlife, culture, and heritage tourism.

## Methodology

The goal of this project was to develop a set of best practices and recommendations for sustainable tourism and ecotourism that are feasible in Himachal Pradesh. To achieve this goal, we developed the following objectives:

1. Understand the Himachal Pradesh government's role in tourism and ecotourism and obtain current policies
2. Gauge interest in ecotourism among major stakeholders
3. Identify and assess existing tourism sites for sustainable practices and potential ecotourism development
4. Develop a set of best practices and recommendations for both sustainable and ecotourism that is feasible for Himachal Pradesh

The major stakeholders for the second objective are business owners and tourists. Our action plan is summarized below:



## Findings and analysis

Our findings revealed that most respondents would be more willing to participate in ecotourism if the government promoted it. Business owners tend to feel that the government should take the first step before they will adopt sustainable practices. In addition, one of the government's attempts to implement ecotourism failed due to a lack of understanding around ecotourism and untrained staff. Upon analysis, four key themes emerged from our data: awareness for ecotourism, receptivity, sustainable development, and cultural awareness.

## Level of understanding and awareness

It was evident from our interviews and surveys that there was a lack of awareness or consensus of the concept of ecotourism from tourists and business owners. Some of our interviewees had an understanding of ecotourism that involved at least one dimension of our definition, typically preservation of the environment. We questioned whether our interviewees simply associated 'eco-' with preservation and sustainability, or if they had a prior understanding of the concept. Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of tourist and business owners with an in-depth knowledge of the subject.

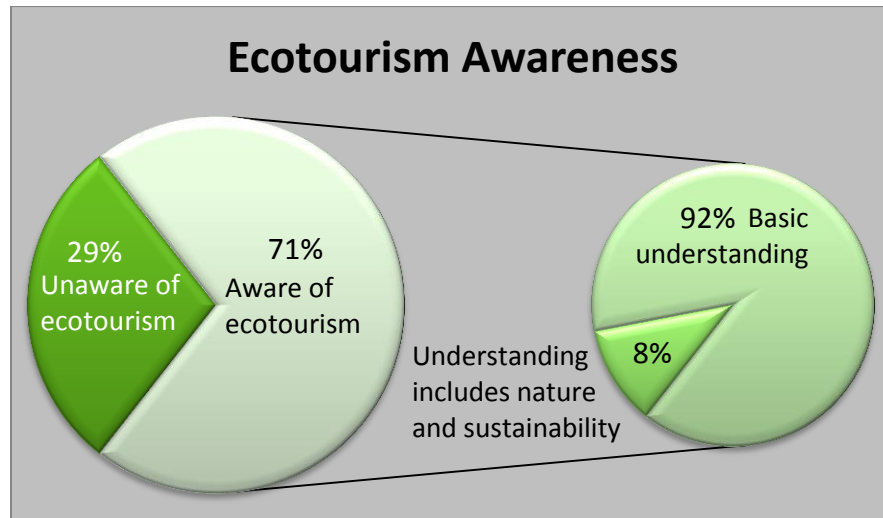


Figure 2: Ecotourism Awareness

In addition, our interview with the District Forest Officer revealed challenges the government faced when trying to establish ecotourism. These challenges included a lack of understanding of ecotourism and untrained staff. He established training camps in hospitality, guiding, and cooking in order to overcome these challenges.

## Receptivity to ecotourism and sustainable practices

Anecdotally, we found that a ban on the use of polythene is strictly enforced in the state. This shows support at the municipal government level, and indicates that HP is receptive to adopting sustainable practices and is making steps to become sustainable. Figure 3 shows a sign located in Shimla, a popular tourist destination, which aims to increase the awareness among local business owners and tourists.



Figure 3: Signage at the Shimla Mall

In addition, the business owners and tourists are also receptive to the implementation of sustainable practices. All of the respondents felt they would be positively impacted if the tourism industry were to move toward sustainable practices. Of the tourists surveyed, majority said that a change in eco-friendliness would encourage them to a location.

### **Reflection about sustainable development**

We found that across different sites people had varying feelings on the development of that specific site. In Shimla and Manali, tourists and business owners both stated that the cities had become too built-up. On the other hand, Billing is regulating the construction of buildings to preserve the tourism to the area. This shows that while some popular tourism destinations in Himachal Pradesh have become crowded, other small sites are learning from these and have opted to create policies to prevent this.

### **Awareness of cultural impact**

Many business owners believe that tourism does not affect their culture. However, one business owner expressed the concern that he is unable to visit the temple and worship regularly because his job in the tourism industry is very demanding. The majority of the time that he would have spent on worship, he now has to put into his business. This is also tied into providing for his family, and these are the costs of doing so. He may think of it as a sacrifice he must make for his family, but he does not see it as a cultural or religious detriment. This indicates that the interviewees may have overlooked the impacts that tourism has had on their culture and religion.

## Recommendations

Upon analysis of our data, we developed a list of best practices and recommendations for the government to implement in different areas of their constituency. We made recommendations to the following stakeholders: State Forest Department, Divisional Forest Officer, Tourism Department, local government bodies in tourism locations, and tour operators.

### **Best practices for Himachal Pradesh**

1. Minimize negative impacts on nature and culture
2. Use of baseline studies and long-term monitoring programs for market analysis and environmental impact
3. Watch for over-consumption of natural resources and negative impacts in the tourism industry
4. Design plans for regional tourism zoning and visitor management
5. Educate tourists on environmental conservation and cultural awareness
6. Direct revenue to the conservation of natural and protected areas
7. Stress responsible business practices
8. Keep economic, environmental, and cultural benefit within the local community
9. Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits
10. Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment

### **Forest Department at the state level**

- Establish a set of sustainable practices in the ecotourism sector
- Establish an ecotourism certification process for private business owners
- Regularly update the Ecotourism Society of HP website
- Further develop the Forest Department run ecotourism rest houses
- Conduct market research
- Work more closely with the Department of Tourism for ecotourism
- Further develop the role of religious tourism in the ecotourism sector
- Utilize wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and nature reserves as ecotourism destinations

### **Forest Department at the divisional level**

- Using the set of best practices, promote ecotourism through a local awareness campaign
  - Hold open workshops about ecotourism geared towards private business owners and local entrepreneurs
  - Distribute informational pamphlets for private business owners
  - Hold environmental conservation awareness events at local schools
  - Station ecotourism signs
- Further develop division-specific Forest Department run ecotourism rest houses



### **Himachal Pradesh Department of Tourism**

- Work with the Forest Department to bring ecotourism principles to the homestay sector
- Develop national tourism day celebrations
- Work with the Forest Department to further market ecotourism locations to domestic tourists from other states
- Expand awareness of existing incentives for following sustainable practices

### **Local government agencies in tourism locations**

- Expand existing waste disposal system
- Make and enforce laws about sustainable practices
- Regulate the construction of buildings in nature-based tourism areas
- Enhance maintenance of local religious tourism sites
- Implement additional water filtration systems in developed tourist locations
- Further establish and post signage to increase awareness about environmental conservation

### **Tour Operators**

- Utilize sustainable practices that minimize negative impact on the environment and culture
- Provide educational materials for tourists on:
  - How to minimize negative impact on the environment and culture
  - The local bio-diversity
- Provide training for employees on:
  - How to guide and educate tourists
  - Current sustainable practices used by the business
- Employ locals
- Direct visitation to less common attractions to reduce crowding at currently popular sites

## **Conclusion**

We have reached our goal of identifying and recommending a list of ecotourism best practices that are feasible in Himachal Pradesh. This study validated the idea that sustainable practices can be adopted in Himachal Pradesh. With the further development in necessary sustainable framework, ecotourism has the capacity and the interest to greatly expand in Himachal Pradesh.

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## Authorship

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Shivansh Agarwal, Ankur Bhatt, and Nandini Kapoor played an instrumental role in conducting and translating interviews in Hindi to English.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“The future depends on what you do today.” –Mahatma Gandhi*

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In the past forty years, the necessity for preserving the environment has been globally recognized. The environmental movement gained momentum in the 1970's, promoting the preservation of the earth's limited natural resources (Hall, 2003). In India, the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 was the first national policy to promote the preservation of the environment (G. o. India, 1972). With the compulsion to be more environmentally conscientious, the concept of sustainable tourism emerged in the tourism industry. “Sustainable tourism implies minimizing the negative and maximizing the positive effects of all forms and activities of tourism on: the environment, local communities, heritage (cultural and natural), and inclusive economic growth,” (IncredibleIndia, 2013b). The concept of sustainable tourism is applicable to all forms of tourism; the most notable partnership is with nature-based tourism.

Within the environmental movement, the 1980's saw an increase in ecologists and biologists travelling to remote and often bio-diverse locations to acquire knowledge about unexplored areas of the globe. This marked the commercialization of nature-based tourism. In combination with a heightened awareness of the consequences of environmental impact, nature-based tourism moved toward an ethic of sustainability; the term ecotourism emerged to define this new form of tourism. Since its conception, ecotourism has developed into the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry (Kanjihal, 2008). In 2000, Bjork defined ecotourism as “sustainable travel to natural areas, that is environmentally conservative while maintaining the local culture and contributing to the well-being of the host community” (Björk, 2000). From this definition, ideal ecotourism is a source of cultural exchange, environmental awareness, and sustainable ecological preservation (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). Although there has been a global evolution in the definition, different countries have defined ecotourism specifically for their location and circumstances.

Over the past 10 years, India has moved toward more sustainable practices by promoting sustainable development in the tourism industry. Indian policy has emphasized incentives for organizations that strive to conserve the environment and to plan sustainable development. The Incredible India campaign was established in 2002 to market India as a prime tourist destination. This campaign was successful in its first year, generating a 16 percent increase of international tourist visits to the country (I. India, 2013). In an active effort to make tourism more sustainable, Incredible India developed a document titled Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) (IncredibleIndia, 2013b). A sustainable tourism model will increase the interest in heritage and culture, strengthen local pride, allow tourists to further appreciate the local Indian culture, and provide economic benefit to the local communities (Drshti, 2003).

India has established and developed policies around sustainable tourism and has recently begun to develop policies regarding ecotourism in 2005. Globally, ecotourism has been explored in academia and extensively developed in the field. This level of globally-available knowledge proposes a significant question: how can India implement ecotourism using the contemporary best practices?

The goal of this study is to develop a list of best practices and recommendations for sustainable tourism and ecotourism that are feasible in Himachal Pradesh. The objectives outlined later in this paper, in combination with the available literature, allowed our team to achieve this goal. To begin our study, we first worked to understand the Himachal Pradesh government's role in tourism and ecotourism and to obtain current policies. In addition to understanding the policies, we gauged the interest in ecotourism among the major stakeholders. The most essential stakeholders are the tourists and the local business owners supporting the tourism industry. We also identified and assessed existing tourism sites for sustainable practices and potential ecotourism development. With data from both the academic literature and our fieldwork, we developed a list of best practices and recommendations, specific to Himachal Pradesh.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter takes a closer look at the literature regarding concepts in ecotourism that are in the scope of our project. We outline the global evolution of the definition of ecotourism, and explore best practices from respected ecotourism organizations. We then illustrate potential ecotourism activities and accommodations. Additionally, we discuss the key concepts of the definition in the setting of our project and examine the stakeholders' role in these concepts. The final section discusses existing sustainable tourism and ecotourism that we were able to find from the literature about Himachal Pradesh.

### 2.1 Global evolution of the ecotourism definition

As discussed in the introduction, ecotourism is the combination of sustainable tourism and nature-based tourism. Conceptually, sustainable tourism leaves little to no negative impact on the surrounding environment and local culture (Hunter, 1997). Nature-based tourism is simply defined as visiting areas for the purpose of experiencing its ecosystem, geography, or climate (Priskin, 2001). As long as ecotourism maintains sustainable visitation to natural areas, it can include many types of tourism such as adventure, religious, heritage, wildlife, and culture tourism.



Figure 1: Ecotourism Diagram

The definition of ecotourism has been continuously evolving since its conception, despite Bjork's concise definition, written in 2000. As a result of the ongoing discussion about the definition of ecotourism, a high level of complexity has formed around what can, and cannot be considered ecotourism. The majority of discussion involving ecotourism occurred in the 1990's, when many researchers developed their own definitions based on personal experiences and theoretical principles. In an effort to consolidate and create a concise definition, Bjork analyzes the definitions proposed by the leading authors in the field of ecotourism during the 1990's. From his study, Bjork defines ecotourism as "sustainable travel to natural areas, that is environmentally conservative while maintaining the local culture and contributing to the well-being of the host community" (Björk, 2000). A table of the different definitions that Bjork analyzed has been adapted and added to for the purpose of this project (refer to Appendix A).

The evolution in the definition of ecotourism has largely come to rest due to the increasing respect that The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) has gained for its work in the field of ecotourism. Thus, TIES's definition has become more widely accepted throughout the literature. TIES states that, "Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people" (TIES, 1990). This definition is the most basic form of ecotourism, which also has contributed to the agreement in the field. Many definitions use these basic tenets of ecotourism, and elaborate the degree to which these dimensions must be upheld. The definition on a global level is more varied than at the national level.

Recently, India has been active in the conceptual development of ecotourism. In 2008, EcoIndia summarized ecotourism as contributing to the local economy, "providing an educational experience, and combining aspects of both nature-based and sustainable tourism" (EcoIndia, 2008). This definition highlighted the same dimensions as the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) definition in 1993 (EcoIndia, 2008; E. India, 2008). The Ecotourism Society of India aims "to connect conservation of nature and the environment, communities and sustainable travel" (ESOI, 2013). There is a similar statement on the TIES

website when referring to the principles of ecotourism. A wide variety of ideas and field studies have contributed to the progression in the definition of ecotourism.

## 2.2 Ecotourism in academia

Beyond the evolution in the definition for ecotourism, we must also look at best practices of ecotourism that have been established by organizations and authors such as The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), and The Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI). The points below are paraphrased from sets proposed by these organizations (ESOI, 2013; TIES, 1990; Wood, 2002).

### Best practices of ecotourism

- Minimize negative impacts on nature and culture
- Use of baseline studies and long-term monitoring programs for market analysis and environmental impact
- Educate tourists on environmental conservation and cultural awareness
- Stress responsible business practices
- Direct revenue to the conservation of natural and protected areas
- Maximize economic, environmental, and cultural benefit for the local community
- Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits
- Design plans for regional tourism zoning and visitor management
- Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment

### Minimize negative impacts on nature and culture

Minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on nature and culture is the basis for ecotourism. This practice aims to keep any effects of ecotourism from degrading the environment or the values and traditions of the local community. For example, actively working to reduce the use of non-renewable resources at an ecotourism location helps to decrease environmental degradation. Another example is implementing proper waste disposal systems for both biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste material. This practice can help to diminish pollution in natural areas. The following best practices all work to minimize negative impact.

## **Use of baseline studies and long-term monitoring programs for market analysis and environmental assessment**

Baseline studies and long-term monitoring programs are tools to measure the progression of impact in areas that see tourism. The set of ecotourism best practices emphasizes the use of these tools to minimize negative impact on the environment and culture. For example, if a site were to implement ecotourism, first a baseline study of the site would be conducted. Then the site would continue to monitor any environmental, social, or cultural change that might occur. A continuous study would provide information about the positive and negative effects that occurred due to the implementation of ecotourism in an area. With this information, the government, business owners, and/or community can work to adjust the existing system to mitigate the negative and augment the positive effects.

In addition, this best practice can add to the literature of ecotourism. More case studies will help communities that are developing ecotourism to account for issues that others did not take into consideration. For example, a case study of the Wolong Nature Reserve for Wild Pandas in China found a large disparity between rural stakeholders and other stakeholders. In particular, the rural residents living farthest into the reserve received the least amount of economic benefit from the ecotourism establishment. This resulted in the necessity for other means of income, which often caused environmental degradation of the panda habitat. Communities and governments can use this case study to develop a better structure for ecotourism that accounts for this form inequality (He et al., 2013).

## **Educate the tourist about conservation and culture**

Educating tourists about conservation of the environment and cultural respect is important for ecotourism. Education about the site is a great way to showcase the site's sustainability and conservation efforts. In addition, the site can tell the visitor how to help the site's efforts, such as composting organic waste. This will raise awareness among visitors of these sustainable practices. This knowledge might help the visitors to utilize conservation practices in their daily lives. One benefit of educating the visitors on conservation is that local residents will also learn about the conservation efforts of the site. Holding school-age programs

can generate a change in different places throughout the community, like schools and homes. In addition, the residents in an ecotourism community benefit from a sense of pride and empowerment by sharing their knowledge about the local culture. The direct cultural exchange from tourist to local host creates a connection between visitor and host that lasts beyond the visit (Lindsay, 2003).

### **Stress responsible business practices**

Responsible business is when the government, business owners, and residents work together to both meet the needs of the people and conserve natural resources. The local authorities are involved as the enforcers, while the residents want regulation of private businesses to ensure that their needs are met. One example would be a business owning the only easily-accessible fresh water source in a village. Responsible business brings all these stakeholders together to come to an agreement where everyone can utilize the water source without detriment to the other stakeholders, or the water source.

In ecotourism, responsible business is important for providing benefits to local communities and its members. Stressing responsible business also emphasizes incentives for the community to utilize sustainable practices both as a whole and as individuals. The revenue generated might reduce the need for the people to rely on environmentally damaging industries such as logging, mining, and hunting. Instead, their sense of pride in the surrounding ecology may increase as their return on investment grows.

### **Direct revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas**

The revenue generated from ecotourism will not only benefit the local community, but may also go toward further conservation of the area. The money generated from entrance fees to national parks pays for the maintenance of the facility and employees' salaries. The majority of the profit, in this model, is designated for large conservation projects such as developing sustainable infrastructure.

### **Maximize economic, environmental, and cultural benefit for the local community**

Ecotourism strives to maximize the economic, environmental, and cultural benefit for the site. This might be feasible by creating a cooperative to help share the wealth of some businesses. In a cooperative, the residents also reap environmental and cultural benefits. For example, a cooperative model would allow for the community to continue their traditional religious practices by keeping the emphasis on the community's values. In another model, community members might have multiple jobs in relation to ecotourism. One example of this would be a homestay owner who also guides treks for the visitors to his community.

### **Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits**

One way to minimize the impact of ecotourism on a site is to ensure that the site develops sustainably in response to ecotourism. Studies, as mentioned above, can be conducted to find a range of the social and environmental limits of the sites. Enacting policy and creating awareness for these limits among the community will help to ensure that the development does not exceed the limits.

### **Design plans for regional tourism zoning and visitor management**

It is important in ecotourism for extensive planning to be thought out. In sustainable development, tourism zoning is a tool to balance conservation and exploitation and where each occurs (Emmelin, 2006). Visitor management planning is encouraged in best practices, because too much visitation can cause unsustainable development and negative consequences. These consequences can include trail erosion, litter, deforestation, and resulting loss of biodiversity. In regards to ecotourism, small groups are ideal to minimize the negative impact on the community. When combined, these are effective tools that foster sustainable development.

### **Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment**

Ecotourism relies on progressive infrastructure that is developed in harmony with the environment and acts to minimize the use of natural resources and pollution. For example, the use of local building materials minimizes the amount of impact that results from the



construction of the building. Local materials have a low impact on the environment because they provide economic benefits to the local people, maintain traditional forms of construction, and do not require transportation.

Best practices of ecotourism are crucial in directing the development of these sites. The guidelines listed above are the culmination of years of work in the field, and have been found to be the best guiding principles for ecotourism. Although the above practices are not specific to Himachal Pradesh, they contain important concepts about ecotourism that require consideration. It is the application of a set of best practices that transforms a conventional tourism activity or accommodation into ecotourism.

### 2.3 Potential ecotourism activities and accommodations

There are a variety of activities that typically fall into the realm of ecotourism. Although the main attractions are the most apparent place to enact the best practices of ecotourism, overnight accommodations must also follow the list of best practices that constitute ecotourism. To help illustrate ecotourism, we present a list of ecotourism activities and accommodations below. These activities and accommodations all have the potential to be ecotourism when best practices are utilized.

- **Nature walks**



Figure 2: A guided nature walk from Vandiperiyar to Kerala, India (PeriyarFoundation, n.d.)

- **Bird-watching**



Figure 3: A Western Tragopan, an endangered pheasant native to Himachal (Atula, 2011)

- **Horseback riding**

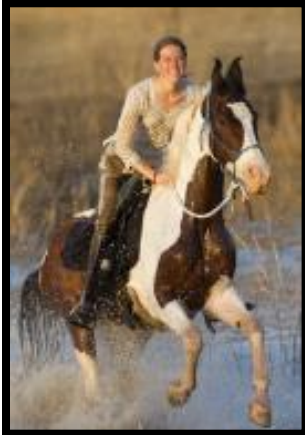


Figure 4: Horseback riding on Marwari in Rajasthan (RealAdventures, n.d.)

- **Rafting**



Figure 5: Rafting in Zaskar gorge, eastern Jammu and Kashmir, India (Ibex, n.d.-g)

- **Paragliding**



Figure 6: Paragliding in Bir (Billingvalley, n.d.-b)

- **Hiking**



Figure 7: Hiking in Sterling (Billingvalley, n.d.-a)

- **Camping**



Figure 8: Camping by Siang in Arunachal Pradesh (Ibex, n.d.-a)

- **Trekking**



Figure 9: Chagar ice trek in eastern Jammu and Kashmir (Ibex, n.d.-i)

- **Religious tourism**



Figure 10: The 1000-year old tabo monastery in Spiti Himachal Pradesh (Ibex, n.d.-f)

- **Cultural tourism**



Figure 11: Traditional dance in the village of Spiti (Ibex, n.d.-c)

- **Climbing**



Figure 12: Climbing up Meru Shark Fin with Shivling in the background (Ibex, n.d.-b)

- **Angling (Fishing)**



Figure 13: Fishing in Barot (BillingValley, n.d.)

A wide range of accommodations can become ecotourism. Each of the accommodations illustrated below provide differing levels of comfort and proximity to nature. Tents are minimalist and immerse the ecotourist in nature. Hotels simply provide a place to stay, without cultural or environmental interaction. Eco-lodges are constructed using sustainable materials and aim to maximize the renewable resources available. Homestays are an appealing option, because they provide a unique cultural experience for the ecotourist who is interested in cultural tourism (Wood, 2002).

- **Tents**



Figure 14: Tents at Kuari Pass Trek Gahwal (Ibex, n.d.-h)

- **Hotels**



Figure 16: Hotel Amanlora Punakha Bhutan (Ibex, n.d.-e)

- **Eco-lodges**



Figure 15: Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve eco-lodge, Madhya Pradesh (ResponsibleTravel, n.d.)

- **Homestays**



Figure 17: Homestay at a Ladakhi home (Ibex, n.d.-d)

## 2.4 Conservation and preservation in the Himalayas

At the beginning of this chapter, we defined ecotourism as educational and responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, participates in sustainable development, and contributes to the well-being of the host community. From this definition, we can see that there are many elements that contribute to ecotourism, the most noteworthy being conservation of the environment and preservation of local culture. The ecosystem of Himachal Pradesh is both extreme and delicate. Himachal Pradesh lies mostly among the foothills of the Himalayas, and contains some of the Himalayas within its borders. Thus,

emphasis on how ecotourism can affect the Himalayan region is important to discuss (TourismConcern, 2012).

### Conservation of the Himalayan mountain biome

An essential aspect of ecotourism is environmental conservation. This includes low impact on the environment and the preservation of biodiversity, as ecotourism is often located in naturally beautiful areas that often have a great level of biodiversity. Therefore, ecotourism sites are intrinsically sensitive to human impact, and are at risk from being damaged by an influx of tourists. The responsibility of maintaining a low impact on an ecotourism site rests on the shoulders of the stakeholders (ConservationInternational, 2013).

From fertile valleys at 500 meters, to snowcapped peaks at over 8000 meters, the Himalayas are home to a high level of biodiversity. The thriving ecosystems of the Himalayas sustain over 10,000 species of plants, and nearly 2,000 species of animals. This ecosystem has species that represent all families in the animal kingdom; this most notably includes mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Unrepresented in these figures is the vast population of insects and arachnids that hold a key role in this mountainous biome (ConservationInternational, 2013).

As a result of the growing pressure from the global market, there is an increased demand for natural resources. Being a largely untapped region, the Himalayas are seeing an increase in exploitation of resources, and thus human impact. There has been deforestation due to cultivation of the land, disruption of ecosystems due to hydro projects, and loss of biodiversity from mining and the use of natural resources. Furthermore, poorly managed tourism has increased environmental deterioration (ConservationInternational, 2013). However, when developed in a sustainable manner, tourism has the potential to have a positive impact on the environment. There are many ways that each stakeholder in the tourism industry in Himachal can work to create a positive impact on the Himalayan mountain biome.

In sustainable tourism, the carrying capacity limits the number of tourists that can visit without negative cultural or environmental impact. This limit can be either an environmental, structural, or sociocultural induced limit. When the carrying capacity of a tourism location is exceeded, it can result in various negative consequences. These consequences can include, but

are not limited to: soil erosion, forest degradation, loss of biodiversity, waterway pollution, environmental degradation due to garbage and litter, and an overburdening of infrastructure and sanitation systems. Ideal sustainable tourism continually evaluates the carrying capacity of a location to ensure that it is not exceeded (Wood, 2002).

### **Cultural preservation in Himalayan indigenous populations**

In the Himalayas, indigenous peoples have been living harmoniously with nature for thousands of years. There is a large amount of cultural diversity, because communities developed in isolated pockets, due to the geography of the Himalayas. In Himachal Pradesh specifically, this is shown by the great number of languages spoken throughout the state. There are regional languages that correlate to the districts, such as Mandiali, Kullavi, and Chambaeli, and some of these break down further in that valleys or even villages might have their own dialect. There are approximately twenty different languages spoken in the state, all of which derive from the ancient language of Sanskrit, or Indo-Aryan languages (HimachalYellowPages, 2013).

The growing population of India has created an increase in pressure applied to the Himalayan mountain region. As discussed above, the pressure that is being applied to the environment is the most noticeable. However, visitation and usage of this region can have a negative impact on the indigenous culture of the Himalayan peoples as well. Tourists introduce new culture to the area and create a demand for the necessary social infrastructure that contributes to degradation of several aspects of the local culture (ConservationInternational, 2013).

First and foremost, a location that receives visitation can see degradation in the local spiritual and cultural traditions. Commercialization can erode the authenticity of local traditions and cultural products. This loss in authenticity propagates through the community, and touches all aspects of the local culture. It is seen that, although many indigenous peoples have a strong connection to the land, land stewardship quickly degrades with the introduction of tourism to an area. This loss of land stewardship can be attributed to a disregard for the value of land, due to the increase of income that results from visitations. However, even with positive economic benefits, the culture suffers from communal tension due to uneven distribution of the

economic gain. Where the locals once worked together as a humble community, tension and disagreement can diminish the original sense of community (Wood, 2002).

Some of these negative impacts from tourism can be avoided with proper planning and development of a location. Social and cultural degradation can be limited through sustainable development, and the establishment of cooperatively run ecotourism. Community-based ecotourism cooperatives allow for the values of the people to dictate the practices of the site. This helps to keep the profits within the local community, and allows the people to maintain their traditions (Wood, 2002). Proper integration of an ecotourism site into the local community is the most effective way to create a sustainable and successful establishment (Lindberg, Furze, Staff, & Black, 1997).

## 2.5 Stakeholders in ecotourism promotion

There are several entities that serve as stakeholders in the development, maintenance and support of an ecotourism industry. The Indian Ministry of Tourism and Culture, and the Himachal Department of Tourism state that the key stakeholders are the business owners and tourists. Each of these stakeholders can either have an effect on, or be affected by impacts to a tourist location (Drshti, 2003). In the following sections we will discuss the stakeholders, focusing on government bodies, NGOs, local business owners, and tourists.

### National, state, and local government bodies

The national, state, and local governments each have a role in the sustainable development of ecotourism. At the national level, the government can aid the tourism industry, by promoting and advertising to both international and domestic customers. India has started this form of advertisement through the Incredible India campaign. In some cases, the government takes the responsibility of spreading awareness about ecotourism in order to increase visitation to an area (Wood, 2002).

Infrastructure and building codes are two of the most important responsibilities of the state and local governments with regard to sustainable development. With policies that ensure the sustainable development of naturally attractive areas, the local businesses and residents have the appropriate guidance to ensure that the infrastructure is capable of supporting an

influx of tourists. The infrastructure must support this influx without significantly impacting the environment. For ecotourism it is also important to include regulations on the usage of natural resources to limit deforestation and over-cultivation of land. One way to ensure the preservation of natural resources is to create national parks and wildlife reservations. One example of this is the Great Himalayan National Park in Kullu district, Himachal Pradesh. The park offers a variety of ecotourism options from trekking to bird watching (GHNP, 2013). Within this protected land, the government can provide ecotourism and collect entry fees for proper maintenance of the facilities in place. Furthermore, the government can create regulations that help to protect indigenous populations, and preserve rural communities. Lastly, the government can work to help the local business owners in the ecotourism sector by conducting market research, offering certification for ecotourism, and developing a database of cultural and ecotourism attractions that are established in the state (Wood, 2002).

### **Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)**

In the ecotourism sector, NGOs have a more personalized role in spreading awareness. These organizations are stakeholders because they have a role in making tourism sustainable and environmentally friendly (Drshti, 2003). They are typically involved with either the protection of biodiversity and the environment, or creating sustainable community development (Halpenny, 2000). Where the government creates policies and regulations for ecotourism, NGOs can sometimes serve as an interface between the government and the local people. These organizations can have varying roles in their involvement with the businesses and local people. They can contribute to developing additional certifications, training programs for guides and business owners, and conducting research about ecotourism. NGOs can often influence the improvement of policies and regulations that the government implements. They also can act as a form of enforcement for the established policies that govern ecotourism (Wood, 2002).

### **Local business owners**

In ecotourism, businesses are owned by local community members. This gives the greatest control over site-specific impacts that occur due to tourist visits. These business



owners have the role of regulating tour group size and environmental impact. There are several ways in which they can actively limit the negative impacts on the site. These efforts include, but are not limiting to, minimizing consumption of non-renewable resources, production of waste, and pollution in the community. They can do this by limiting the number of tourists that visit an attraction; thus ensuring that the impact the tourists cause can be appropriately absorbed by the environment (Denman, 2001). It is the responsibility of the business owners to increase the tourists' awareness of environmentally and culturally conscientious behavior. Businesses that focus on preserving the environment can also have a positive impact on it by using profits to maintain the environment. An example of this kind of sustainability is planting indigenous trees to increase biodiversity and offset the emissions from their transportation (Weaver, 2005).

Since ecotourism is attractive to many tourists, some businesses can succumb to the short-sighted benefits of 'greenwashing'. This is the act of deceiving consumers into believing that an organization engages in ecotourism practices when, in reality, the site does not uphold sustainable practices (UL, 2013). From inadequate conservation and maintenance, a tourism site can quickly become a risk to the surrounding ecosystem and culture. Without an active effort to uphold ecotourism best practices, a site can degrade as a result of a short-lived spike in high profitability, at the cost of natural preservation (Lindsay, 2003).

### Tourists

Just as all of the previous stakeholders have a role in upholding the practices of ecotourism, the tourist must also consciously participate in behavior that preserves the environment and culture. A large portion of the responsibility lies in the hands of the other stakeholders, but without the cooperation of the tourists, all of their efforts go to waste. Tourists have the responsibility to listen and learn about the environmentally and culturally conscientious behaviors that the business owners present. Tourists apply pressure to the infrastructure by creating waste and consuming resources; therefore, they are one of the largest factors that cause negative impacts on the site. On the other hand, it is their actions that govern the amount of impact that the environment endures. The increase of pressure on the environment from tourists' actions can cause damage to local biodiversity, contribute towards deforestation, and pollute natural waterways. However, with proper awareness and

conscientious behaviors, the tourists can play an important role in maintaining the integrity of an ecotourism location.

All of the stakeholders play an integral role in the stewardship of the environment at tourism sites. Specifically, they are important for the promotion of ecotourism at these sites. Thus, to understand the level of promotion and stewardship existing in Himachal Pradesh, it is important to explore the existing sites and policies.

## 2.6 Existing ecotourism sites and policies in Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh is the third largest state in the mountainous Himalayan region in northern India. It offers an array of tourism activities, such as camping, hiking, trekking, fishing (angling), wildlife sanctuaries, nature tours, rafting, and cultural and religious visits. These attractions can be found in all of the districts of Himachal Pradesh. In addition, the districts of Shimla, Kullu, Kangra, Lahaul & Spiti, and Mandi host the most popular tourist destinations in the state. A unique aspect of tourism in Himachal Pradesh is the existence of wide-spread religious tourism. Many domestic visitors come to the mountains to worship at religiously significant locations and temples. Figure 18, below, shows Prashar Lake, a small tourist destination in Mandi district.



Figure 18: Prashar Lake and Temple

The Indian Ministry of Tourism has created several lists of guidelines for tourists traveling in India. One set of guidelines, “Do’s and Don’ts for Ecotourism,” includes items that touch on cultural values, pollution, and proper disposal of waste. Another list generated by the Ministry of Tourism, “Golden Rules When You Travel,” involves similar themes (see Appendix B). Some different items include actively buying from local business owners, and being aware of the culture and policies of the area. These lists are meant to create awareness around how the tourists affect their surroundings. Thus, the government is beginning to utilize sustainable tourism practices.

In 2000, the Himachal Pradesh Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation proposed to develop ecotourism at existing camp sites. They proposed establishing trekking trails, rain-shelters, and bird-watching towers. They later stated that the registration process for village tourism will be simplified, and small village tourism units that meet their criteria will receive a luxury tax subsidy (HPGovernment, 2000). Five years later, the department listed that they offered “a rare conglomerate of ecotourism, pilgrimage, adventure, culture, heritage, leisure and wilderness” as a strength (HPGovernment, 2005). The Indian Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Environment and Forests also have a set of general principles of ecotourism for the establishments. These general principles include topics like community involvement, low environmental impact, educational aspects of tourism, and stimulating local economy.

The state government of Himachal Pradesh also has a list of guidelines for ecotourism that are considerably more specific. For example, these guidelines state that the use of wood as fuel is prohibited, unless used for a campfire and bought from a Ministry of Environment and Forests booth. The policy states principles, similar to those listed in the best practices, which the guidelines are trying to meet. Specifically, conservation training for employees is one of the major concerns, along with education of visitors. The policy goes on to state laws relevant to protected areas, and the 5km radius around them. One of these rules is that no new tourism locations are to be created in protected areas. Tourist locations within 5km of a protected area are to be monitored by a local committee, and must pay a percentage of their profit to the State Forest Department to help conserve the protected area. In efforts to promote

sustainability, there is a ban on dumping and burning non-biodegradable waste in protected areas. In addition, the policy states that ecotourism sites should aim for fifty percent of their energy consumption to come from renewable sources (Appendix C).

The state government has also been working extensively with the Ecotourism Society of Himachal Pradesh (EcoSoc), the most predominant ecotourism society in the state. EcoSoc is an independent body that works with the Tourism and the Forest Departments. Their aim is “to preserve and protect the natural, historical and cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh” and their core objective is to increase awareness of cultural and historical heritage of Himachal Pradesh. Along with the Forest Department, these two bodies are responsible for the majority of ecotourism activities within the state (EcoSoc, 2010).

## 2.7 Summary

In our synthesis of the literature in the field of ecotourism, we explored the origins, best practices, definitions, activities, and stakeholders. We learned how each of these topics works in unison to create a sustainable, ecotourism location. Furthermore we explored the available literature about existing tourism and ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh. We have identified a disparity in the literature regarding the application of best practices and policies for private sites in the state. Our study will focus on increasing our knowledge about the potential for advancement in the existing Himachal Pradesh ecotourism sector.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The goal of this project was to develop a set of best practices and recommendations for sustainable tourism and ecotourism that are feasible in Himachal Pradesh. To achieve this goal, we developed the following objectives:

1. Understand the Himachal Pradesh government's role in tourism and ecotourism and obtain current policies
2. Gauge interest in ecotourism among major stakeholders
3. Identify and assess existing tourism sites for sustainable practices and potential ecotourism development
4. Develop a set of best practices and recommendations for both sustainable and ecotourism that is feasible for Himachal Pradesh

This chapter will outline the methods that we used to accomplish our objectives. Interview and survey questions are located in Appendix D.

### 3.1 Understand the Himachal Pradesh government's role in tourism and ecotourism and obtain current policies

To identify the best practices of ecotourism for Himachal Pradesh, we needed to develop an understanding of existing tourism and ecotourism policies within the state. In order to understand how ecotourism is promoted and perceived at the governmental level, we conducted semi-structured interviews with several government officials. With this strategy, we obtained information for the essential questions using a conversational tone. We designed a scripted list of questions to acquire information about how the government plays a role in tourism and ecotourism within the state. We also obtained the current policies for tourism and ecotourism throughout the state. In addition, we asked follow-up questions to accurately communicate ideas between the interviewers and respondent (Berg, 2007).

We interviewed the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) for Himachal Pradesh, because he is the official in the Forest Department who has a major role in state-run ecotourism. The perceptions and actions of the CCF play a major role in the Ecotourism Society of Himachal Pradesh. Learning about his responsibilities as CCF was essential for understanding the

government's role in ecotourism. We also interviewed the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Mandi and the Inspector of Tourism in Mandi. Similar to the CCF, acquiring knowledge about the responsibilities of the DFO played an important role in gaining a thorough understanding of the government's role at the divisional level. We interviewed the Inspector of Tourism in Mandi to gain insight on the government's role pertaining to tourism. The information obtained through these interviews assisted the creation of recommendations that are specific to Himachal Pradesh (Berg, 2007).

### **3.2 Gauge interest in ecotourism among major stakeholders**

To gauge interest in ecotourism among the stakeholders, we used two different strategies. Using a sample of convenience, we conducted semi-structured interviews with business owners and semi-structured surveys with tourists. These sampling techniques are designed to provide us with a set of responses from a wide range of business owners and tourists across 9 sites. The semi-structured interviews were designed to solicit information, while they allowed for additional unexpected information to present itself. We used semi-structured surveys that were questionnaires that we dictated to respondents, which allowed us to ask clarifying questions about their answers. These were designed with simple questions, both open-ended and multiple-choice, which took a short amount of time. This strategy allowed us to acquire an adequate sample and gain enough information to draw accurate conclusions. For the business owners, we used a snowball sample. This allowed us to find a sample of businesses that have varying levels of involvement and interest in ecotourism. We interviewed business owners, including tour operators, hotel managers, restaurant owners, and shopkeepers (Berg, 2007).

From these two sets of stakeholders, we sought to obtain similar information. From both the business interviews and tourists, we grasped their understanding and opinions of ecotourism and sustainable practices. In addition, we found out what activities the tourists are interested in. With both points of view from the tourists and the business owners, we attained a data set that is representative of the interest encompassing ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh.

### 3.3 Identify and assess existing tourism sites for sustainable practices and potential ecotourism development

From the literature, we identified several popular tourism destinations. We also utilized tourist guide books and advice from locals to ensure that these destinations were pertinent to this project. We also employed our IIT partners' knowledge of the area to brainstorm other sites that we did not find in the literature. From these sites, we chose those that were most feasible to visit. After which, we visited and assessed these tourism and ecotourism locations.

The main sites that we visited are as follows: Shimla, Manali, Barshaini, Mcleodganj, Rewalsar Lake, and Jogindernagar. We traveled to Shimla, a well-known tourist destination and the capital of Himachal, to interview the Chief Conservator of Forests, survey tourists and interview business owners. Manali is already a center for nature-based and adventure tourism activities, which include trekking and paragliding. In the District of Kullu, we assessed a small village, Barshaini, which is the trail head of a religious trek to Kheerganga. We chose Barshaini because it offers homestays and is the base for treks into eastern Kullu (Vishnu, 2012). Mcleodganj is also a well-known tourist destination because it is the home of the Dalai Lama's temple. Thus, Mcleodganj attracts many religious tourists ("McLeod Ganj | Everything about McLeod Ganj," 2013). Rewalsar is home to three religious groups living in harmony and respective holy places. This has caused the town to receive a great amount of religious tourism (MapsofIndia, 2013). Jogindernagar was chosen because it is near to Bir, Billing, Barot, and the Nagru Wildlife Sanctuary. These locations offer nature-based and adventure tourism such as trekking, wildlife observation, and paragliding. In addition, we found some other small sites in our fieldwork that we chose to visit and assess. These included Naggar, Prashar Lake, Tosh and Nathan, Rohtang Pass, and Manikharan.

In the assessment of tourist locations, our team observed indicators of receptivity, capacity and compliance. We used the following list of indicators adapted from Dr. Wood's 2002 report on ecotourism:

### **Receptivity:**

- Preservation of natural features
- Prosperous small businesses run by the local community
- Areas designed for interaction between locals and visitors
- Thriving accommodations with welcoming and motivated staff

### **Capacity:**

- Evidence that tourism does not harm the ecosystem; such as:
  - Limiting the number of visitors
  - Evidence of paths, and trails

### **Compliance:**

- Minimum development where natural areas dominate
- Clean and simple public facilities (Wood, 2002)

We also took photographs to document these indicators when applicable. The team's joint observations and comparisons of the locations provided a complete representation of the sites from various perspectives (Mayoux, 2001).

## **3.4 Develop a set of best practices and recommendations for both sustainable and ecotourism that is feasible for Himachal Pradesh**

The data gathered from the previous three objectives and the literature review enabled us to create an appropriate set of best practices and recommendations for Himachal Pradesh. We presented our findings and set of best practices during an Indian Institute of Technology Mandi open house presentation.



### 3.5 Schedule

We have provided a Gantt Chart (see Figure 19, below) to illustrate the time frame in which we completed each task.

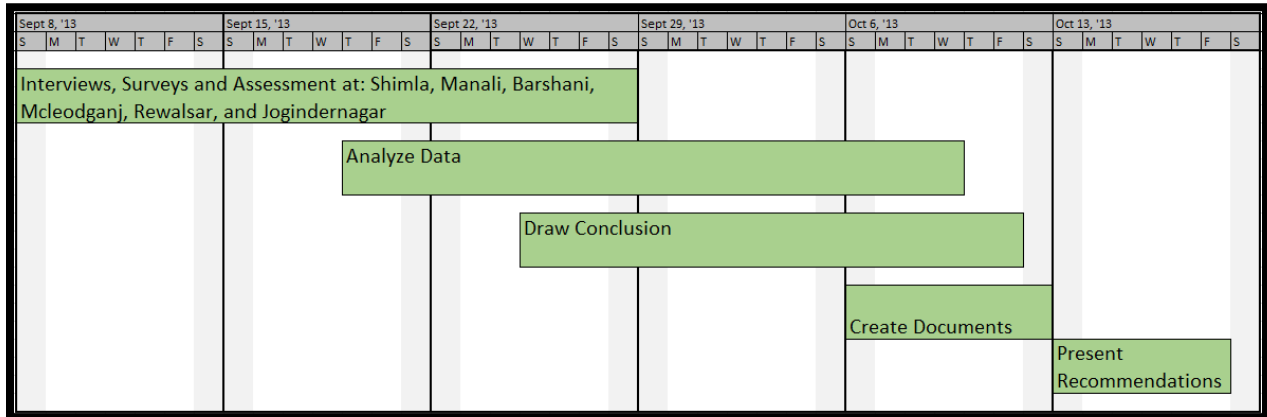


Figure 19: Gantt chart

All interviews and surveys were conducted in either Hindi or English. Those conducted in Hindi were transcribed into English before analysis. All the information gathered during the seven week process, including data collected through interviews, participant observation, and surveys, remained confidential and was only collected with the participant's consent. The data was stored on a password-protected computer and was not distributed in any manner. All raw data was destroyed upon completion of this project.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

This chapter is organized in two parts. Part 1 presents our findings by objective. Part 2 provides some discussion about the reoccurring themes that arose during our analysis of our findings.

### Part 1: Findings

The data presented in our findings is separated into the objectives identified in the previous chapter. Figure 20, below, illustrates a map of Himachal Pradesh that shows the different locations we visited to collect our data.



Figure 20: Tourism Map ("HPTDC Tourist Map," n.d.)

## **Objective 1: Understand the Himachal Pradesh government's role in tourism and ecotourism and obtain current policies**

Our interview with the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) in Mandi created an initial baseline of knowledge about recent ecotourism policy in Himachal Pradesh. From this interview we learned more about the 2005 ecotourism policy goal of becoming a leading ecotourism destination by 2010. The DFO stated that although their goal was not officially reached in 2010, the Himachal Forest Department has continued to work toward this goal. As the interview progress, the DFO continued to talk about ground level ecotourism initiatives that the Forest Department has implemented in Himachal. He expressed excitement about an ecotourism site that is currently being developed in Jhiri, Mandi district. This new site in Mandi is being created because the Forest Department received a grant of 2 billion rupees from the Asian Development Bank to develop four new ecotourism sites in Mandi district (Interview 1, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013). The department used a portion of this grant to initiate a training program that includes educating staff about cooking, proper guiding, and general hospitality. In regards to advertising, the DFO stated that the Forest Department uses newspapers, online blogs, and a website to publicize ecotourism rest houses around the state. The website that he directed us to is the Ecotourism Society of Himachal Pradesh website; he informed us that this website is updated by the Forest Department.

During this interview one team member asked about the challenges that the Forest Department has face when developing ecotourism in the state. In reply, the DFO stated that there has been difficulty due to, "Lack of knowledge and untrained staff.' In a further elaboration on the topic he mentioned that the employees who have been running the ecotourism sites often are not fully aware of the concepts behind ecotourism and lack knowledge about how to interact with ecotourists.

In our quest to find additional tourism pamphlets, we happened to find ourselves in an interview with the Mandi tourism inspector. He was knowledgeable about the formalities for homestays, also known as tourism units. Homestays are required to participate in a registration process in order to achieve approval from the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Board (refer to Appendix E to read the requirements for a homestay in Himachal Pradesh). One piece of

information that our team first learned from this interview is that the sector of the Forest Department that governs ecotourism receives partial funding from the Department of Tourism. We also learned that hotels in Himachal Pradesh can apply to receive subsidy based on the execution of sustainable practices (Interview 2, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

Our interview with the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF), located in Shimla, revealed several additional findings. There are 241 forest inspection rest houses within the state and the forest department converted 14 of them into ecotourism rest houses. The ecotourism rest houses are distributed among five districts throughout the state (Kangra, Kullu, Sirmour, Bilaspur, and Chamba). The DFO in each respective district inspects each of these locations once per year to ensure they are upholding ecotourism practices. In addition to the ecotourism rest houses, the Forest Department also established a Private Public Partnership (PPP) plan that allows private entrepreneurs to develop ecotourism sites approved by the government. At these PPP sites the Forest Department does not collect revenue. In a report we received from the CCF, we learned that there is a list of practices that each PPP ecotourism site is instructed to uphold in order to pass the yearly inspection. The following list of activities that are to be carried out by the PPP sites and ecotourism rest houses is transcribed in Figure 21 from a document that the CCF provided:

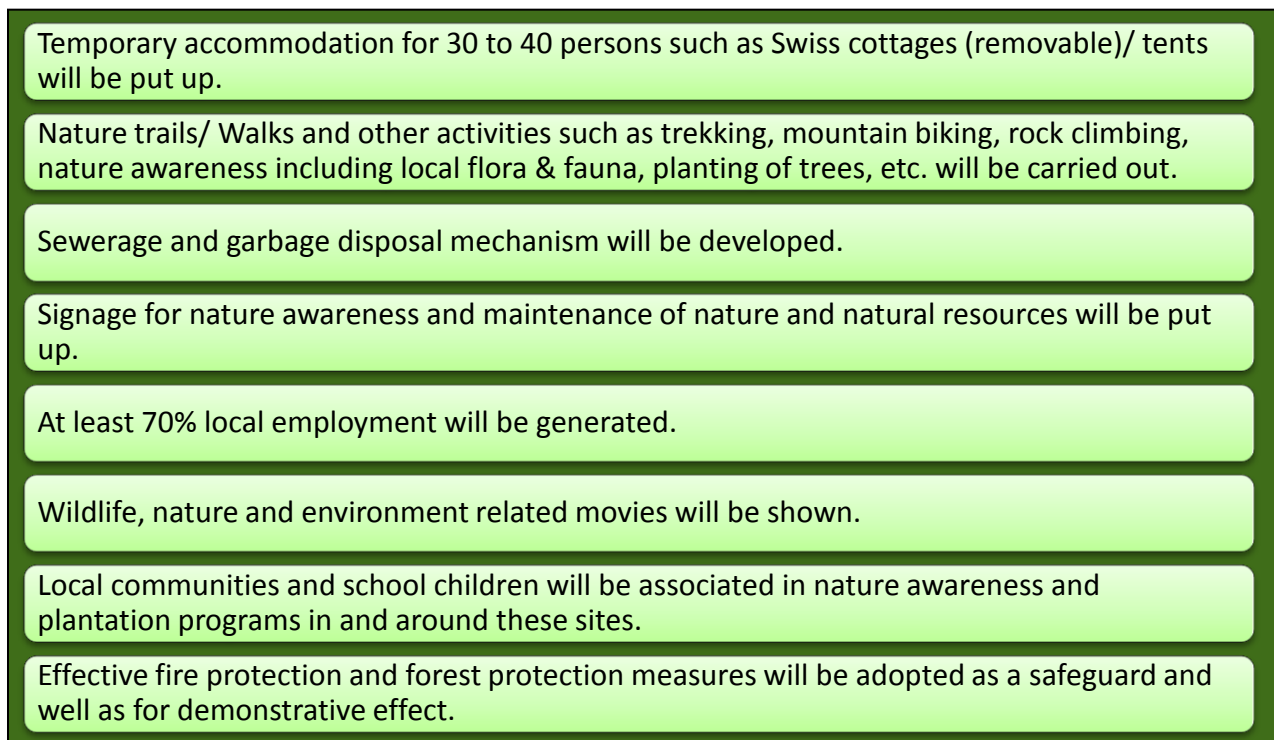


Figure 21: List of requirements for ecotourism rest houses

The Forest department plans to use this set of practices at all of the governmental ecotourism sites in Himachal Pradesh. We also learned that the director of the Great Himalayan National Park has begun implementing these practices in and around the park. He hopes to make the tourism activities, such as bird watching, in the park more sustainable.

While waiting to talk to the CCF we spoke with another employee of the Himachal Pradesh Forest Services. The Forest Services employee stated that there are twenty-six wildlife sanctuaries, five national parks, and three reserves in Himachal Pradesh. Often tourists will visit these sites for trekking, nature walks and bird-watching. Himachal Pradesh is the only home to an endangered species of pheasant, the Western Tragopan. These birds can be found at high altitudes in Kullu, Kaghan Valley, Chamba, Kohistan, and near the Satluj River.

The employee emphasized that certain types of companies must pay the Forest Department as compensation for their environmentally degrading practices. For example, logging companies deforest the land, and they must forfeit some of their profit for the resulting loss of biodiversity. In large construction projects and at mining locations, companies must also compensate the Forest Department for loss of biodiversity. All compensation received by the

Forest Department contributes to biodiversity. The funds generated by this compensation initiative are used in the national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and forest reserves to better preserve the biodiversity, monitor various activities in these protected areas and aid the ecosystem by afforestation. Also, the state maintains breeding facilities for the preservation of endangered species.

## **Objective 2: Gauge interest in ecotourism among major stakeholders**

The following section reports our findings from the business interviews and tourist surveys. Due to our time constraints, we conducted business interviews with nine tour operators/travel agents, four homestays, four tourism rest houses/hotels, six small retail stores, and one fish hatchery. In our survey of tourists, we spoke to thirty-three visitors, ranging in age from 18 to 63. The sample showed an even distribution between male and female respondents.

### ***Business Interviews***

We found that the majority of the business owners were willing to answer our questions. They were eager to give us any information that would be beneficial to our project. They were also excited to share about their businesses and personal experiences from working in the tourism industry. As stated above, we interviewed a variety of businesses, the majority of which were tour operators.

Tour operators offer attractions such as adventure tourism, religious tourism, and cultural tourism. Adventure tourism includes trekking, camping, fishing, horse riding, rafting, jeep safaris, and paragliding. Religious tourism is visiting different places of worship than near the tourist's home. Cultural tourism includes bringing tourists to villages to learn about the lifestyle of the community, along with their traditions and history. The tour operators stated that they received more foreign tourists than domestic tourists for adventure tourism and the opposite spectrum for religious tourism. There was a mixed number of foreign and domestic tourists for cultural tourism.

Tour operators enlightened us about the registration process for becoming a licensed tour operator. In order to get approval, they must complete an application on the Himachal Pradesh tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC) website. After receiving approval they are

able to place the HPTDC on their advertisements. The majority of tour operators use websites to advertise their business. The operators that do not use a webpage advertise through different forms of media, such as newspapers or commercials. However, the homestays that we interviewed do not use any form of external advertisement; they generate their business through word of mouth and local signage.

In Shimla, the ratio of domestic to foreign tourist visits is 7:3. However, in points north of Shimla the trend is reversed, and the ratio of domestic to foreign tourists is approximately 3:7. All business owners report that the peak season is between April and August, though many had varying time periods within that range. The locations further north see a shorter peak season between May and June. For all trekking tour operators, the peak season is between May and September.

The majority of business owners believe that tourism causes economic benefit for the community. One business owner stated that he believes that tourism creates employment opportunities for the local youth. However, there are mixed feelings about tourism's impact on the local culture; twenty percent believe that tourism has a positive impact, seventy-three percent feel there is no impact, and seven percent have seen a negative impact on the local culture. In one case, we interviewed a manager of a retail store in Manali, who has lived in Manali for thirty years. He contributed a unique point of view on the subject by stating that Manali developed too quickly due to an increased number of tourists visiting the area. This development was done in an unsustainable manner and has resulted in degradation of the local culture. The high demand on the tourism industry in Manali also limits the amount of time local business owners can worship, which has also caused a change in the local culture.

When business owners were asked about ecotourism, we found that seventy-one percent of business owners were aware of the term ecotourism. Of that group, eight percent have an understanding of ecotourism that includes both nature and sustainability (see figure 22). Those who had a basic understanding identified ecotourism with preservation of the environment or green tourism.

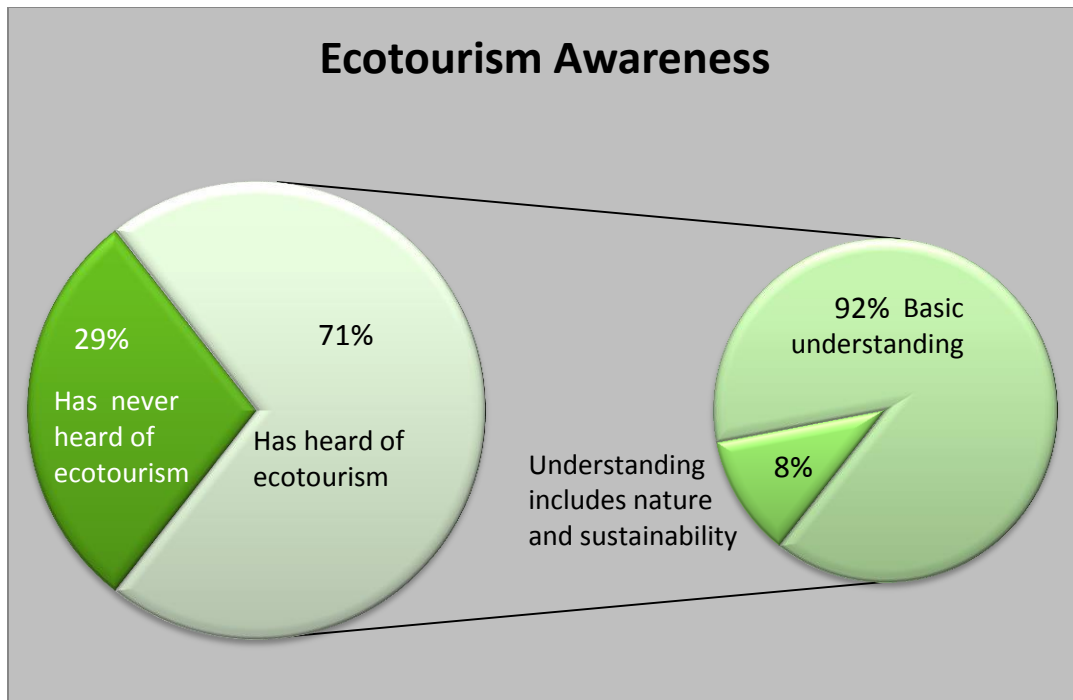


Figure 22: Ecotourism Awareness

When business owners were asked about how they aim to conserve the environment, their responses were varied. It was apparent from the business owners that there is not a large-scale garbage disposal system in Himachal Pradesh as they resort to burning their garbage. This contributes to garbage disposal practices in Himachal Pradesh. Although this is highly common, a few business owners aim to conserve the environment in other ways: i.e. keeping garbage off the trails, using dead wood for campfires, using organic waste as compost, and planting trees.

While a few business owners take the initiative with some conservation practices, many tour operators want the government to take an initiative to conserve the environment. Currently, the government aims to promote sustainability by giving travel agents ten percent commission for the promotion of ecotourism and government-owned ecotourism sites, such as Potter Hill, located in Shimla. Potter Hill offers adventure tourism and leisure camping as two major ecotourism activities. This is a major incentive that the government offers to businesses.

### Tourist Surveys

We surveyed 14 domestic and 19 international tourists, whose ages ranged from 18 to 63 years old. Approximately 50 percent of the tourists found out about that location through



word of mouth and 25 percent said that the location was a well-known tourist destination in India. When asked about what they enjoy most when visiting Himachal Pradesh, the tourists gave a variety of answers. The word cloud in figure 23, below, illustrates the responses from tourists. The most popular responses were the scenic views, cultural experience, and spiritual atmosphere.



Figure 23: Word cloud of tourists' response

Many tourists spoke highly of Himachal Pradesh's cleanliness compared to the rest of India. However, approximately thirty percent of tourists reported that they see room for improvement in areas such as site cleanliness and waste management. When asked about sustainable practices, thirty-three percent surveyed expressed that it does impact their vacation planning. Of that thirty-three percent, seventeen percent were domestic tourists. Two tourists seem very concerned about carrying capacity as a sustainable practice, as they stated that they try to go to locations during their off-season to avoid the crowds.

Of the tourists we surveyed, 45 percent had never heard of ecotourism. Of the tourists who are unaware of ecotourism, 60 percent were domestic. For those who did not have an understanding of ecotourism, we explained our definition to them. The majority of tourists who possess an understanding about ecotourism, state that the primary aim of ecotourism is to minimize the negative impact tourists have on the environment. A positive economic impact in

the local community was also a part of some tourists' definitions. Many people also associated ecotourism with green tourism, while four tourists identified some kind of sustainable practices in their definition. Five tourists stated, as part of their definition, that it is the responsibility of the tourist to be environmentally conscious in proper waste management. Twenty-eight of our thirty-three surveys stated that a positive change in eco-friendliness would encourage them to go to a location, while the remaining tourists said that it would not impact their decision. Overall, most people expressed that they would be more likely to participate in ecotourism if the government promoted it. However, one tourist who said that they would not be more likely to participate told us they think that "NGO's could carry it [the promotion of ecotourism] out better" (Tourist Survey 8, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013). Another tourist stated that it would not affect her decisions to participate in ecotourism, but the "government should promote it [ecotourism]," because it would encourage others who were less environmentally conscious to participate in ecotourism (Tourist Survey 31, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

In our collection of data from the tourist surveys, the most influential factor when planning a vacation is cost. Word of mouth is ranked second, followed closely by attractions/activities. Interestingly, hospitality and natural resources are tied at fourth in ranking. While this is what the hard data shows, we observed that many tourists take attractions/activities most into consideration. The attractions responses were broken into five thematic groups: culture, adventure, leisure, nature, and popular destinations. One noteworthy observation is that the majority of responses fell into the nature category, and the domestic to international ratio for those responses is 1:1. The culture category has the second-most responses, but the ratio of international to domestic responses is 5:1, respectively.

In addition, we analyzed the other destinations that tourists were visiting. We stratified the data to find the difference between international and domestic tourists. Of the fourteen domestic tourists surveyed, nine were only visiting the site where we surveyed them. In contrast, all of the international tourists were visiting other places. Another observation is that many of the tourists were going to a number of different places, and in total they were visiting 35 other locations. However, of these locations, Delhi, Manali, and Dharamshala were the only locations shared among more than five tourists.

We divided the tourists' responses to the ideal vacation spot question into three categories: popular destinations, natural beauty, and novel places. More than half of the tourists surveyed gave responses that fell in the natural beauty category, roughly split in half between international and domestic. The ratios between international and domestic tourist responses, in the popular destination and novel places categories, were inversely proportional. The popular destinations category had more domestic responses, while the novel places had more international responses.

In this survey, we found that a few people think that Shimla is over developed and over construction in the town has ruined Shimla's natural beauty. In their words, Shimla "should be small cottages" and it should not be as developed as it has become (Tourist Survey 7, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013). Another couple that we surveyed had a similar outlook on Shimla. They were most attracted to peaceful, naturally beautiful hill stations. The only complaint they had about Shimla was that it has become densely populated and commercialized. This couple also said that eco-friendliness is a must for them when they plan a vacation. Additionally, they said that the government needs good and clean facilities for ecotourism to function properly.

### **Objective 3: Identify and assess existing tourism sites for sustainable practices and potential ecotourism development**

We identified thirteen locations with existing tourism. We visited these sites to assess the implementation and promotion of sustainable practices, as well as the potential for ecotourism development. We observed the sites to find indicators of receptivity, capacity for development, and compliance with sustainable practices and ecotourism.

#### **Shimla**

Shimla, the capital of Himachal Pradesh, is a popular tourism hill-station that is located on top of a ridge. The city offers scenic views of the surrounding hills which are best from the Shimla Mall, located at the crest of the ridge. The mall is a pedestrian-only zone that has look-out areas as well as restaurants and hotels. Shimla was developed largely by the British and it was known as the 'summer capital' of British India. Buildings of British style, such as the church and museum, were preserved over the years; thus, Shimla is not only known for its views, but

also its British heritage. From the British influence and the popularity of Shimla as a tourist destination, many of the business owners are comfortable interacting with tourists in English.

In an attempt to find a place to park, we learned that Shimla has a limited amount of available parking. Cars line the streets and all of the parking lots are full. The lack of parking causes traffic congestion in many of the popular tourist locations. Even with a parking garage on the outskirts of the city, the roads remain congested with pedestrians and motor vehicles.



Figure 24: Shimla construction and traffic

The buildings in Shimla are built into the hill and are stacked on top of each other. It appears to have had little planning or urban design consideration. There are many hotels and it is evident that the town has been developed in due to a great number of tourist visits (refer to figure 24, above). There is an elevator that tourists can use to get to Mall Road. On the road that leads to the upper Mall area, there are many shops and restaurants. Near to the Mall area, there are many more tourist-oriented shops and tour operators. Once we reached Mall Road, we found that the road was lined with shops on one side, and the hill on the other. Many of the tour operators were advertising types of adventure tourism.

On our way to the mall, we observed a few signs that showed an effort that Shimla's has worked to move toward sustainable practices. For example, the figure below shows a water

filter for filling plastic or reusable water bottles free of charge for a “green and clean Himachal”. We saw several of these filtration stations throughout the city. In addition, all the shops have changed over to using fabric bags instead of plastic.



Figure 25: Filtered drinking water in Shimla

The mall is one of the main attractions in Shimla. We were approached several times, and asked if we wanted to pay for our picture taken and printed. There were options to dress up in different styles of wear for pictures and other interesting backgrounds. In addition, there was an option to ride around the mall area on horseback. A guide would lead you along the length of the large pedestrian area. In the mall area there are many souvenir shops with various goods such as wooden handicrafts displayed on the road.

Anecdotally, we learned that there are many homestays in the surrounding towns; such as Narkanda and Fagu. These are beautiful destinations that offer a variety of activities for tourists. There are several activities offered that have the potential for ecotourism such as trekking, camping, and experiencing the local culture through cuisine or Natty, a traditional form of dance.

## Rewalsar Lake

Rewalsar Lake is a small town where the three religions, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Hinduism peacefully coexist. The town has gurudwaras, monasteries, and temples for each respective religion. As a result of the unique religious environment, this town sees a great number of religious tourists who come to worship at these sacred places. There was one HPTDC hotel that expressed that they are typically full, but that their guests on average stay only one night.

Another attraction to the town is the lake which is populated with many large coys. It is a religious custom here for people to feed the fish, as seen in figure 26 below.



Figure 26: Man feeding fish at Rewalsar Lake

There is a road surrounding the pond that is lined with buildings and temples. There were a number of shops that sold religious items, such as prayer flags and incense. These items are typically sold to local people for worshiping purposes. In addition, there were a large number of cafes and a handful of hotels. As we walked along the road, we found three tour operators, two of which were closed. There were also a few street vendors that were selling religious items as souvenirs.

We then went up the hill to the Buddhist monastery. From here, there was a beautiful view of the town and the pond, as well as the surrounding scenic beauty prevalent in Himachal.

It was also apparent that the density of the buildings in the town was high, but it was limited to a smaller portion of the area around the lake. On one side, the ridge rose sharply with little room between it and the lake. On the other side, the town had packed into the flatter area, as seen in the figure below.



Figure 27: Rewalsar Lake

### **Prashar Lake**

Prashar Lake is a religious location approximately 45 kilometers by road from Mandi. Prashar Lake is a small lake containing a floating island that moves around the lake. This religious tourism site has a three-story, pagoda-style temple built in the 1500's. As the lake is at approximately 2700 meters above sea level, there is also the option to hike higher up from the lake to another peak at around 3000m.

As we approached the lake we observed a welcome sign posted by the Himachal Pradesh Tourist Department (see figure 28). In contrast to Rewalsar Lake, this lake is surrounded by a fence that is at least one meter away from the edge of the lake. There is one gate, but it is monitored. There were fifty to sixty visitors around the temple, lake, and tea stalls, which surround the lake. The only religious practice concerning the lake is to walk around the lake after receiving a blessing from the sage.



Figure 28: Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department sign near Prashar Lake

In the area near the temple, a sign was hung by the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India in Mandi (see figure 29, below). This sign shows that some local stakeholders are aware of environmental impact and receptivity to change that will benefit the environment. This particular local body aims to increase the awareness of both tourists and the local community.



Figure 29: Sign near Prashar Temple

We also observed the garbage disposal method at Prashar. While there is a sign that speaks about saving the environment, the main method of garbage disposal was a large pit near the government guesthouse, where the garbage is periodically burned. It is unclear if the rest of



the small areas use the same pit. Regardless, this method of garbage disposal does not create a positive impact on the surrounding environment and contradicts the sign posted by the LIC.

### Jogindernagar

Jogindernagar is a typical crowded Indian town, where the streets are narrow and lined with shops. Upon reaching Jogindernagar, we came across a few hotels. The streets were lined with shops for women's suits, dupattas, bags, jewelry, sweets, etc. We did not observe any vendors selling souvenir items to tourists.



Figure 30: Himachal Tourism welcomes you to Jogindernagar

The traffic in Jogindernagar was relatively heavy. There were many large vehicles going both ways through the town on a narrow road. One difference between Jogindernagar and the

other sites was a traffic light. There was also a parking issue here, as many cars parked along the side streets.

Jogindernagar is appealing to tourists for several reasons. First, the town hosts three hydropower projects. One of these hydroelectric power houses is the second oldest in India. Thus, some tourists come to the area to visit that attraction. In addition, the large town is surrounded with natural beauty. There are a few hotels that lead treks from the outskirts of the town. In addition, there are a few smaller towns in the surrounding area that have other natural attractions for tourists. We visited a few of these as well; specifically Bir, Billing, and Barot.

### **Bir and Billing**

Bir and Billing are stationed on the outskirts of Jogindernagar. These two villages host an international pre-world cup paragliding festival every year, where people from all over the world come to enjoy the beautiful setting. Billing is a small village that hosts the take-off site, and is situated near the top of a hill. Bir, located at the bottom of the hill, accommodates the landing site. The landing site is a large open plain just beyond proper Bir when coming from Jogindernagar. This slightly sloping plain was an amazing viewpoint for scenic mountain landscapes (see figure 31 below).



Figure 31: View from Bir

Many businesses were located in upper Bir. It hosts several paragliding businesses that offer rides with a tandem guide. Additionally, there is a tourist information center located in upper Bir. This information center was geared mostly toward giving permits for tourists to paraglide. There were a number of hotels in this area as well. Between upper Bir and Bir proper, there were many tea gardens which are another attraction to the area.

Bir proper features a few shops and monasteries collectively forming the small town. Throughout the town, there were small green garbage receptacles with “use me” written on them in white lettering. It was unclear if they were installed by the government in the area, or if it was a private institution that installed them. Regardless, this shows dedication from the people in Bir to use sustainable garbage disposal methods to limit their impact on the environment.

The Deer Park Institute in Bir is a non-profit Buddhist institute. They host students from all over the world in their facility, which was once a monastery. The goal of the institute is to make Buddhist teachings easily accessible to all people, regardless of religion, language, and cost. They hold workshops given by faculty around the world on a variety of topics. One of the workshops they held recently focused on the environment and sustainable practices given by a professor from Southeast Asia. This workshop was several days long and they had more students than space in the institute, which holds over 80 people. Showing the dedication of the institute to environmental preservation, they have developed a system used in their facilities aimed at zero waste, as seen in the figure below.



Figure 32: Deer Park's Zero Waste Poster

In addition, the institute has many community outreach programs on various topics. These include waste segregation, and recycling clothes and non-degradable waste into decoration or other items. They have also strategically placed water filtration systems throughout the town for the well-being of the local people.

### **Barot**

Barot is also located approximately 40 km from Jogindernagar. Due to its proximity many tourists often visit the Herbal Garden near Jogindernagar. Barot is a very small town situated on the river Uhl with few shops or restaurants. During our visit, we found a few homestays and one tent campsite along the river. One homestay sign in the village encouraged tourist to leave nothing behind and to take only memories.

During our interview with the owner of one homestay, we observed a certificate frame on the wall (see figure 33 below). When we asked about it, the business owner was very enthused to tell us that he registered with the HPTDC, unlike other business owners we interviewed.



Figure 33: A homestay owner with his HPTD homestay certificate

One of the biggest attractions in Barot is trout fishing. The river is the “cleanest in Himachal,” according to one interview here (Barot Interview 1, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013). There is also a dam on the river which acts as a bridge. Just upstream from this dam is a government fish hatchery. We found that the fish hatchery gives trout fishing permits to tourists. They limit the catch for each permit to six fish that are heavier than 250 grams. In addition, the permits are only for sale from March to October. This is the government’s way of preventing overfishing in the area.

### **Naggar**

Naggar is located next to the Beas River and close to Manali. Naggar is known as a heritage tourism location. Naggar Castle is one of the main tourist attractions in the town, and was once home to the Maharaja of Kullu. The castle is built from stone and wood, has garbage bins, and solar powered lights in the courtyard (see figure 34 below). During our interview with the manager; he seemed very receptive to the idea of engaging in more sustainable practices.



Figure 34: Solar powered light at Naggar Castle

Naggar is also the home of the famous Roerich Art Gallery, located a few meters from Naggar Castle. It is a memorial and art gallery for the Russian artist Nicholas Roerich. One building at the gallery had a sign that indicated that only 20 visitors can enter at a time. The gallery also had signage asking visitors to refrain from littering in the area, as shown in figure 35, below. The management cares about the sustainability of the building, which is why they have this limit. Similar to Naggar Castle, Roerich Art Gallery has shown evidence of sustainable practices.



Figure 35: Sign in the Nicholas Roerich Gallery, Naggar

The two locations are situated on the side of the hill where there is an amazing view of the valley and mountains beyond. A few small shops can be found around both of locations. Near the gallery, there was a few tea stalls, a handful of street vendors, and a shop or two

selling specific items. Adjacent to Naggar Castle, there were more establishments. There were a few tour operators, a general store, and a few small cafes.

Many of the homes in the area are constructed in the traditional form of construction using wood and stone. In Naggar, we also interviewed the guest house owner; he stated that he used mud as a binding agent instead of mortar. Thus, he had reduced the impact of his building on the environment by reducing the use of materials that needed to be transported. In addition, there was a tour operator who put a great emphasis on preserving the environment in every way he could. He has set a maximum number for groups he takes on treks. He also provides training and education for local guides about how to preserve the environment and culture of the area.

## **Manali**

Manali is another well-known tourism destination in Himachal Pradesh. Similar to Shimla, Manali has a pedestrian zone located in the center of the mall. As we approached the mall, we observed a great number of hotels and tour operators approved by the HPTDC. A few of these businesses try to set themselves apart by marketing fresh air and nice views. This may be to attract ecotourists as these are two nature-based attractions. The tour operators offered a lot of adventure tourism like paragliding, hiking, tracking and camping.

The city has two parts, Old Manali and New Manali. New Manali is more commercialized than Old Manali. As such they see more tourists than Old Manali, even though the difference in numbers is small. The majority of the shopping in New Manali is located around a central pedestrian mall. Many shops sell women's clothing, Kullu shawls, handicrafts, or souvenirs. New Manali was crowded with tourists, which leads us to believe that tourism is an important part of the local economy. In addition to the shops, there are many restaurants, a few hotels, and a temple surrounding the mall. Old Manali is a collection of shops along a road in another section of Manali. There were less shops here than in New Manali, and the shops sold more mountain gear and handicrafts, such as embroidered t-shirts and jewelry.

## Rohtang Pass

Manali is the beginning of the road called the Rohtang Pass. Rohtang Pass twists and turns its way into the mountains, its highest point at over 13,000 feet above sea level. The road offers scenic views that change nearly every hairpin turn. A small rest stop at about 10,650 feet hosted a paragliding landing site. We observed that the paragliders would take off from an outcropping only a few hundred feet higher than the landing site. As we continued up the pass, we passed a few signs advertising paragliding booking, but did not see any office or building that constituted the place to book a flight. After passing the takeoff area, we passed a number of the tandem guides on the side of the road, screaming to get us to pull over and participate. While we did not observe the guides get any business from this form of advertisement, we did observe a significant number of landings.



Figure 36: Paragliding at Rohtang Pass

Unfortunately, our arrival to the highest point of the pass was in the midst of a cloud, thus we did not experience any of the spectacular views from that height. However, there was a flat stretch where cars were pulled over to the side to allow their passengers to walk around the flat area. There were a few street vendors selling food at this altitude. Additionally, there were several herds of horses. One man in particular was riding a horse adorned with a traditional bridle and saddle, and offering rides to tourists.



## **Mcleodganj**

Mcleodganj is the location of the Tibetan government in hiding and the home of the Dalai Lama. Because of this, the town has a significant Tibetan influence. Mcleodganj is home to several temples, including the Dalai Lama's home temple. In addition, we observed many Tibetan Buddhist monks roaming the streets among the tourists.

We also observed many international tourists in Mcleodganj. This leads us to believe that Mcleodganj is a large international tourist destination. Our suspicions were confirmed later from our interviews, which showed that this was the international tourist peak season for the town. To accommodate this high visitation, there were also many hotels in the surrounding area.

Mcleodganj was more developed than most of the other sites we visited. The shops lined the narrow streets, but there were a large number of multi-level buildings. This added to the feeling of crowdedness in the city. The shops lining the streets sold an assortment of items. Many were handicraft, souvenir shops, while there were a higher number of cafes.

## **Kullu Town**

While driving along the Beas River, travelling toward Manali, we made a brief stop in Kullu town. This town is home to a large white water rafting industry because it is stationed in a valley that was carved by the Beas River. An initial observation of people cleaning the streets of Kullu showed our team that the local government has an established waste management system. While driving in and out of Kullu center, our team noticed that there are many hotels, guest houses, and shops that are in place for the benefit of visiting tourists. There is also a large field that is famous for housing the Hindu Dusherra religious festival each year. This field also has a large open auditorium with many surrounding continental restaurants that serve various types of cuisine, including Italian and Spanish in an effort to target tourists.

## **Manikharan**

During our trip to Barshaini, we stayed a Public Works Department (PWD) rest house that is located in Manikharan, a town on a river surrounded by beautiful mountains. We were able to spend enough time there to make observations about the local tourism industry. This location is known for receiving religious tourists because there are several large Hindu temples and Sikh gurudwaras in the area. These religious sites were initially developed because there are many hot-springs in the area, which are often the central attraction that religious buildings are built around. There is one location where a hot spring feeds a large pool of water, and many tourists come to bathe and relax. It was clear that this town receives many tourists because there are several large hotels and rest houses. While exploring the town, many tourist shops further confirmed that this is a flourishing religious tourism attraction.

## **Barshaini, Tosh, and Nathan**

Barshaini is a small rural village located in Kullu district. Upon approaching the village, we noticed several tea stalls, general stores, and restaurants. While we were in the center of town, a bus stopped and let off few groups of tourists. As we surveyed the tourists in the area, we found out that the majority were on their way to Kheerganga, a sacred religious location only accessible by trek. While observing the town, we talked with one local who expressed the community's concern that tourists are ruining the natural beauty and magnificence of Kheerganga by demolishing nature and littering.

The trail that leads to Kheerganga was not maintained and it was noticeable that many trekkers did not practice responsible waste disposal. In Nathan, a small village on the way to Kheerganga, we interview the owner of a homestay. He has not registered with HPTDC because he felt there are too many formalities and does not see any benefit in registering his homestay. Past Nathan, we came to a religious location. It is a waterfall and there is a dharamsala, a free rest house with no caretaker, for religious trekkers to spend the night.



Figure 37: Dharamsala on the trail to Kheerganga

In this area, there is also a small shop and a single room homestay. Unfortunately, the family who runs the homestay was not available to speak with us. A noteworthy observation was that outside the dharamsala there is a sign posted by the government that emphasizes responsible tourist behavior.

## Part 2: Analysis

During our analysis of the data, we realized that there were four major reoccurring themes. These are the level of awareness with regard to ecotourism, receptivity to ecotourism and sustainable practices, reflections about sustainable development, and awareness of cultural impact.

### Level of understanding and awareness of ecotourism

Lack of understanding was a major obstacle of the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department when creating ecotourism. The staff was unaware of ecotourism, its tenets, and how to use sustainable practices. Additionally, the staff was unable to tend to the needs of the visitors, as they were not trained in basic hospitality skills. Without the necessary research and educational facilities, it is obvious that implementation of ecotourism would be unsuccessful. This leads us

to believe that the government was not aware of the necessity of this base foundation prior to execution. We found a similar issue among other stakeholders.

It is evident from our findings that there was a lack of understanding of ecotourism from the tourists and business owners. One interesting observation that we made was that some interviewees seemed to infer a definition on the spot from the term ecotourism. We believe this to be true as some of our respondents gave a definition, but they did not have a concrete opinion on the subject. This raised the question of whether our interviewees were simply associating 'eco' with preservation and sustainability. Preservation and sustainability are topics that reflect positive attributes, and likely the interviewees did not want to be perceived negatively. This leads us to question the validity of some of our data points based on this observation. In the final stages of our fieldwork, our team began asking demographic questions to the business owners. Due to this information, we were able to highlight that the few people who had an in-depth knowledge of ecotourism held post graduate degrees. In contrast, those who had a basic understanding of ecotourism had a '10+2' education, meaning they had completed twelve years of education.

### **Receptivity to ecotourism and sustainable practices**

From our findings, we concluded that the majority of people are receptive to changes toward sustainable practices in tourism and ecotourism. When we asked business owners if they thought making tourism 'greener' would be beneficial, no one opposed the idea. It was the general consensus that eco-friendly tourism would be beneficial to the community. In addition, the tourists would be encouraged to visit a location that had made a change toward sustainable practices. Approximately 75 percent of tourists said they would be more likely to participate in ecotourism if the government promoted it. Moreover, the implementation of the DFO's training camp shows that some of the Forest Department is receptive to the best practices of ecotourism, and is working to ensure that they are implemented correctly. In conclusion, the majority of our respondents were receptive to the idea of ecotourism and the utilization of sustainable practices in the tourism industry.

In contrast, two interviewees elaborated on their idea of ecotourism. Although they agreed that a more green tourism is beneficial, they also said that "the term ecotourism is a

fashionable word” and “it makes you feel good about your vacation” (Interview 1, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 and Business Interview 18, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013). While this is a small portion of our sample, it shows that not everyone is receptive to ecotourism and its best practices. It was also interesting to note that these two interviewees were both highly educated and advanced in their other ideas about sustainability. One of these respondents, in particular, felt that ecotourism was simply a marketing ploy. She felt that the visitor had to ensure that they did not make an impact on the culture and environment. Similarly, several tourists we surveyed felt it was their responsibility to practice sustainable practices themselves.

The business owners are receptive, but most are looking to the government for support. While we found options for the support of businesses that use sustainable practices, we also observed that many business owners are not aware of these incentives. However, there were two business owners who showed that they do not need a sign from the government in order to utilize sustainable practices. As stated in our findings, one non-profit supplies a drinking water filtration system for the town, segregates all waste generated, and composts organic waste. Another built drains next to the roads to keep water away from the lanes of travel. We feel that these businesses are role models for others due to their receptivity and implementation of sustainable practices. In addition, their aim to extend their sustainable practices to the surrounding community is exemplary of ecotourism best practices. We believe that they are truly concerned about the environment and are working hard to mitigate any negative impacts.

While the majority of people that we spoke with were receptive, we made some interesting observations where this may not be the case. In Rewalsar, for example, we observed the religious practice of feeding the fish in the lake. We believe that as this practice has developed, more fish have been able to survive in the lake. However, this has added to the nitrogen content of the lake, allowing for more algae to bloom. The lake seems to be overpopulated with fish and covered in algae. Thus, we feel that the tourists and locals who feed the fish have impacted the ecosystem of the lake. This is an interesting situation, because to decrease the environmental impact on the marine ecosystem, the religious practice of feeding the fish would have to change. However, this would cause some kind of cultural impact,

which is also against the tenets of ecotourism. In addition, one of the business owners we talked to in Rewalsar was extremely unreceptive to the idea and did not wish to speak with us beyond our basic questions. From these experiences and observations, we feel that Rewalsar is not exceptionally receptive to ecotourism or sustainable practices.

Anecdotally, we found that the polythene law is strictly enforced in the state. This shows that the government is receptive to adopting sustainable practices and is making steps to become sustainable. As mentioned in a few interviews, one must take small steps to become more eco-friendly and establish a sustainable ecotourism industry. These small conservation practices are a positive sign. In addition, many business owners expressed that they want the government to take charge of ecotourism practices. This has caused us to highlight that the people are very dependent on the government, and thus are more likely to participate when the government takes the first step. Figure 38 is a sign from Shimla showing that the government is aware and is taking the initiative to endorse sustainable tourism practices. Figure 39 shows another positive sign that Himachal Pradesh Tourism Board has posted in the Shimla Mall.



Figure 38: Signage in Shimla



Figure 39: Signage in Shimla Mall

As Shimla and Manali have developed into popular tourism destinations, the government has chosen to strategically station signage at these locations. This leads us to believe that the government is taking small steps toward sustainability at large tourism sites, in order to reach a larger audience. As mentioned in the previous section, there are public water

filtration systems in Shimla, which indicates that local agencies are trying to decrease the use of plastic, which is a step in the right direction toward sustainable practices.

### Reflection about sustainable development

As ecotourism is the intersection of nature-based and sustainable tourism, sustainable development is an important factor to consider. In our observations, we saw that in some popular destinations, such as Manali and Shimla, tourism demand grew too quickly for sustainable development. In several interviews at these locations, respondents expressed their dissatisfaction in how crowded these places had become. They also expressed their concern about construction practices such as building close to rivers and into the sides of the mountains. A few interviews cited a recent “land tsunami,” flooding and landslides in the mountains, in the neighboring state where thousands of people died. Many buildings were along the rivers and built into the hills and had no protection from the raging water. These people were also stranded or washed away from the monsoon rains. These interviewees felt that the pace of development led the buildings to be built in these areas. Thus, in sustainable development it is important to use zoning to slow the pace of development and identify safe areas for buildings.

Some smaller locations that we visited are limiting new construction to help preserve the location for future tourism. Bir and Billing are one such example, as their main attraction is paragliding. They have limited construction specifically in Billing, the village near the paragliding take off site. Construction below the site would make take off difficult for paragliders, which would make paragliding tourists less likely to visit. In addition, other construction would spoil the views in the area. The views are one reason why Bir and Billing are world-renowned for paragliding. If this were to happen, the tourism to the area would decrease, and consequently the micro-economy of the area would suffer.

In other locations, such as Barot, the infrastructure has been a limiting factor for tourism in the area. Barot was a backpacking destination for an extended period of time and only saw a small number of tourists. This changed when a road connected Barot to Jogindernagar. However, the condition of the road to Barot remains a limiting factor because

few tourists choose to make the trip on this narrow road. Consequently, this has limited development of the tourism industry in the town.

It was also evident in our findings that many business owners thought that more sustainable tourism would lead to economic benefits. Unfortunately, this idea does not reflect the sustainable development tenet of ecotourism. It is hard to determine if these business owners want 'greener' tourism because of environmental benefits, or because they see that they will benefit in the long run through their increased business. This is a great concern when converting businesses to sustainable practices. We will not be able to determine their motivation because business owners were not willing to speak extensively on this topic.

### Awareness of cultural impact

As stated in our findings, many business owners believe that tourism does not affect their culture. However, a few had varying opinions that they contributed. One interviewee emphasized that tourism has impacted his culture by changing the way he dressed, as he no longer wore traditional clothing. This raised some thought-provoking questions: what if tourism has impacted the culture so much that it is hard for the business owners to identify this change? Are these societies oblivious to any change because it has become their new way of life? These are a few questions that arose during our discussion. While parts of Himachali culture may not be affected by tourism, we believe that the style of dress may have been impacted. While dress is a constantly evolving part of the culture and the impact might seem acute, we believe that this is a significant impact. It is unclear as to whether the business owners have changed their dress to attract more tourists, or because it has become the new style due to westernization. If the latter is true, the business owners might not see this as a cultural impact as they are making this change to better provide for their family, which is also a large part of their culture.

We also interviewed another business owner, who expressed a different concern on this topic. He stated that he is unable to visit the temple and worship regularly because his job in the tourism industry is very demanding. The majority of the time that he would have spent on worship, he now must put into his business. This is also tied into providing for his family, and these are the costs of doing so. He may think of it as a sacrifice he makes for his family, but he



does not see it as a cultural or religious detriment. This indicates that the interviewees may have overlooked the impacts that tourism has had on their culture and religion.

### 4.3 Summary

We have found that an understanding and awareness of ecotourism is one area where there is room for improvement. We concluded that the stakeholders are generally receptive to the idea of ecotourism, if they understand it; also, those who do not are receptive to sustainable practices. We have also found that reflecting on sustainable development is important to mitigate the negative impacts of expansion. In addition, we found that the interviewees were generally unaware of the impact that tourism has had on their culture, if any. This will ensure that our recommendations stay with the true tenets of ecotourism.

## Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

In this chapter, we will discuss our recommendations for Himachal Pradesh government bodies, and local business owners specifically interested in further establishing ecotourism in the state. After reviewing our findings and analysis, we developed a set of best practices and recommendations specific to Himachal Pradesh. We made recommendations to the following stakeholders: State Forest Department, Divisional Forest Officer, Tourism Department, local government bodies in tourism locations, and tour operators.

### 5.1 Recommendations

Upon analysis of numerous surveys, interviews, and observations, our team established the following collection of best practices and recommendations for tourism and ecotourism specific to Himachal Pradesh. The set of best practices is adapted from those established in our literature review, such that they focus on the most essential practices for ecotourism in the state. The recommendations are a combination of the TIES recommendations for ecotourism, local suggestions from our field study, and synthesis within our team. We made recommendations to the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department, Department of Tourism, local government bodies in tourism locations, and tour operators. Additionally, we explore the areas that future teams could expand on that we discovered through our fieldwork.

#### Best practices for Himachal Pradesh

The following compilation of best practices was originally adapted from The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), the Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). We utilized the information obtained through our fieldwork to further develop the original set of best practices. In addition, we have further employed the literature to expand our recommendations to the state. To further aid the utilization of our recommended best practices, we have ordered them based on importance and feasibility for the state. Each item is outlined more fully below.

## **Best practices for Himachal Pradesh**

11. Minimize negative impacts on nature and culture
12. Use of baseline studies and long-term monitoring programs for market analysis and environmental impact
13. Watch for over-consumption of natural resources and negative impacts in the tourism industry
14. Design plans for regional tourism zoning and visitor management
15. Educate tourists on environmental conservation and cultural awareness
16. Direct revenue to the conservation of natural and protected areas
17. Stress responsible business practices
18. Keep economic, environmental, and cultural benefit within the local community
19. Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits
20. Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment

### **1. Minimize negative impacts on nature and culture**

This practice is the most important to keep in mind going forward with ecotourism, and thus is the first in our recommended list. Without this one practice, ecotourism can easily turn into greenwashing. This practice can encompass many different concrete actions within ecotourism. The ESOI has several objectives that fall under this best practice. Specifically, these objectives are to encourage:

- Use of appropriate local practices, materials, art, craft, architecture, food
- Minimal conspicuous consumption and prevent excessive consumption of energy
- Energy saving practices, water harvesting, use of solar and other natural energy sources
- Good waste management practices especially non-bio degradable materials
- Low pollution-generating practices minimize carbon footprint (ESOI, 2013)

These objectives are great examples for how to utilize this practice. We feel that if Himachal Pradesh can keep this over-arching theme of ecotourism in mind, this can aid in making policy choices in the future.

## **2. Use of baseline studies and long-term monitoring programs for market analysis and environmental impact**

Using baseline studies and having a plan for long-term monitoring of sites is an important aspect of ecotourism that should not be overlooked. These are tools to determine the impacts on the sites in the ecotourism sector. Himachal could benefit from the use of studies to monitor on the new ecotourism sites that are being developed. This practice is ranked second as these studies are worth the return on investment to help to mitigate the negative impacts on the environment. In addition, they will help to augment the positive impacts from ecotourism to continuously contribute to the return on investment for the people.

## **3. Watch for over-consumption of natural resources and negative impacts in the tourism industry**

These two items are important for the Himachal government to watch and enforce policy to safeguard natural resources and the environment. The state could benefit from an active effort to use more renewable resources. This best practice is extremely important because the government is the enforcing stakeholder in tourism and ecotourism. Therefore, the government must confirm that natural resources are used in a sustainable manner.

In addition, the monitoring as stated in the second best practice will aid the government to watch for negative impacts in the ecotourism sector. However, the government could also look to the tourism industry to ensure that sustainable tourism practices are utilized throughout the state. In doing so, the tourism industry will have to adopt sustainable practices, therefore decreasing their impact on the environment.

## **4. Design plans for regional tourism zoning and visitor management**

In Himachal, there are several locations such as Shimla and Manali that see a large percentage of the tourists who visit the state. The state could benefit from actively working to distribute the visiting tourists throughout the state to reduce the high level of impact that is

affecting these popular sites. Utilizing these tools is important for the state, as it will promote sustainable development in tourism destinations.

#### **5. Educate tourists on environmental conservation and cultural awareness**

Himachal already has signage that emphasizes responsible practices that tourists should follow. However, these signs are only located in a few sites. Spreading awareness among tourists at the site is important, as some of our respondents expressed that tourists are less environmentally conscientious when they visit a place for a short time. This is important for not only the ecotourism sector, but for tourism in Himachal as a whole.

#### **6. Direct revenue to the conservation of natural and protected areas**

Since Himachal has many wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, and forest reserves, it is important that these locations receive proper funding to work to preserve the environment. This funding can come in part from tourist entrance fees, and also from logging and mining companies. The state could also direct some of the profit from the ecotourism sites within these national parks to these protected areas. This will also help to fund new projects that will help to better conserve the ecosystems of these areas.

#### **7. Stress responsible business practices**

The Himachal government has a role to play in the regulation of ecotourism businesses. These businesses use the natural attractions to attract tourists. The government could create regulations that will create guidelines for the private tourism sector to adopt sustainable ecotourism practices. The government can also act as a liaison and enforcer between businesses and community members to help the community work together as a whole. This will help to mediate any problems in regards to natural resources.

#### **8. Keep economic, environmental, and cultural benefit within the local community**

At the business level, tour operators have the responsibility to hire local people and ensure that the economic benefits go toward conservation of the environment and local

culture. Conservation of these two resources will help to make the ecotourism industry sustainable for many years to come. Specifically in Himachal, there are many different cultural traditions and a large level of biodiversity that is at stake. Utilizing and encouraging community-run ecotourism will help to keep these benefits within the local community.

### **9. Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits**

It is possible for the impacts of tourism to exceed the social and environmental limits at tourist sites. With monitoring and a conscious effort to remain below acceptable levels, Himachal may be able to maintain low impact on ecotourism sites. As these limits are difficult to quantify, a lot of research is required to ensure these limits are not exceeded. Thus, we have ranked this best practice as less feasible and of lower importance for Himachal Pradesh. However, this is still important to keep in mind.

### **10. Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment**

Himachal could implement this best practice in the water supply, power, and waste disposal infrastructure. The government has a role in regulating and creating guidelines for businesses and companies that are building private infrastructure. A large amount of state-owned infrastructure could utilize this practice. This practice is less feasible for Himachal, as converting all of the infrastructural systems used within the state to those that are harmonious with the environment would require a lot of time and money. However, if the state can utilize this practice moving forward, this would help mitigate the negative impact from the infrastructure.

### **Recommendations for developing and maintaining ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh**

We have made recommendations for several government bodies within Himachal. First, we will discuss our set of recommendations for the Forest Department. These recommendations are the focus of our project as they are at the forefront of developing ecotourism within the state. Within the Forest Department, we have tailored two sets of recommendations: state- and division-wide.

## Himachal Pradesh Forest Department at the state level

- Establish a set of sustainable practices in the ecotourism sector
  - Regulate the construction of buildings in naturally beautiful areas
  - Create a list of building codes that represent traditional forms of construction
  - Create and advertise additional incentives for following sustainable practices
- Establish an ecotourism certification process for private business owners
  - Refer to business owner recommendations section for further information
- Regularly update the Ecotourism Society of HP website
  - Add new ecotourism locations
  - Provide learning materials about ecotourism
  - Create a forum where ecotourism business owners can communicate
  - Advertise the ecotourism-certified private business owners
  - Establish an EcoSoc membership
- Further develop the Forest Department run ecotourism rest houses
  - Create a reservation process on the Ecotourism Society of HP website
  - Increase advertisement for these locations
  - Provide information about ecotourism for DFO's in the divisions that have ecotourism rest houses
- Conduct market and environmental impact research
  - Establish figures that estimate the carrying capacity of popular tourist attractions
  - Work to either increase the carrying capacity in these locations or limit visitation
  - Advertise other smaller locations to distribute visitation throughout the state
  - Create a report with this information for private business owners
- Work in conjunction with the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation on ecotourism
  - Further advertise ecotourism
- Further develop the role of religious tourism in the ecotourism sector
  - Use the best practices to maintain temples and other religious locations
- Utilize wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and nature reserves as ecotourism destinations
  - Establish additional sanctuaries, parks, and reserves

### **Establish a set of sustainable practices in the ecotourism sector**

Himachal Pradesh has a vast number of natural attractions. However, through development and growing populations, these locations are at risk. With the development of policy that emphasizes sustainable practices, Himachal can begin to actively preserve its naturally attractive features.

We recommend that the Forest Department creates policies that regulate construction of buildings on hill stations and in naturally diverse areas. Our team observed that in Billing, the local government has enacted regulations that limit new construction in the area. These regulations are in place to preserve the natural beauty of the famous paragliding take-off location in Billing. We believe that many tourism locations can benefit from regulations similar to those active in Billing. Shimla and Manali both could have benefited from regulation of construction. In both locations, we interviewed business owners who expressed concern that these tourism locations had been degraded due to unplanned construction and over development.

While assessing Naggar, and observing the surrounding communities, such as Rumsu, our team observed the traditional architecture that is prevalent in the area. We noted that the traditional construction used locally-obtainable materials, such as rock and wood. Furthermore, it does not rely on concrete or mortar. In several interviews we learned that these buildings are a more appropriate option for the regional seasons. When these designs are compared to the modern concrete and brick buildings, the traditional materials are better insulators as they keep the heat out during the summer and trap the heat in the winter. From our field work, we recommend that the Himachal Forest Department create a list of building codes that emphasize the benefits of constructing buildings in the traditional convention.

Lastly, we recommend that the HP Forest Department creates an incentive to help increase the local people's interest in following policies that emphasize sustainable practices. We suggest that the Forest Department gives subsidies to ecotourism businesses that uphold sustainable practices. This subsidy will also help to publicize the sustainable practices that the Forest Department would like to focus on. This incentive process could take the form of lower taxes for businesses that follow a set of practices or additional advertising on the HP Society of Ecotourism website.

### **Establish an ecotourism certification process for private business owners**

Currently, the Tourism Department offers hotel certifications that are based on sustainable practices. Since the Forest Department is already creating government ecotourism



rest houses and has the Private Public Partnership ecotourism development plan, we see opportunities for the department to establish a similar certification process for private businesses. We feel that the Ecotourism Society of Himachal Pradesh could have a greater impact on the ecotourism sector by adding existing, private ecotourism to the sites that are being created. This certification process can take the practices that the Forest Department identifies as sustainable and necessary for ecotourism. With the act of certifying businesses, the department could create a database of the existing ecotourism and sustainable tourism businesses within the state. This database could help with market analyses and the formation of future policies involving ecotourism. This will benefit the government as well as the certified businesses. The government can increase cooperation with the private sector and work toward reaching the goal of becoming the leading ecotourism destination in India. The certification will also aid the private businesses through additional advertising. This form of incentive may increase the number of business owners that are interested in adopting sustainable practices.

#### **Regularly update the Ecotourism Society of Himachal Pradesh website**

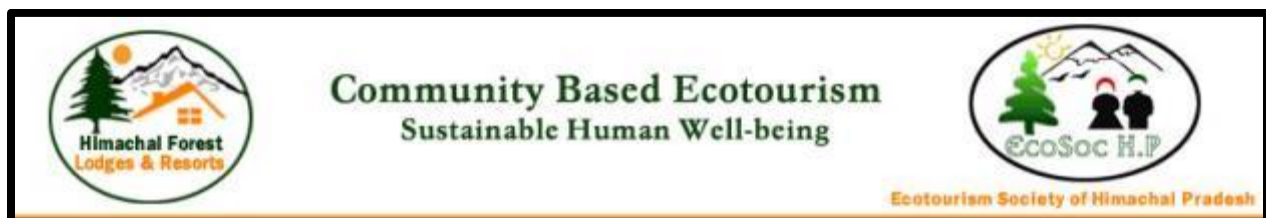


Figure 40: EcoSoc website banner

Himachal Pradesh has several current online ecotourism resources, one of which is the Ecotourism Society of Himachal Pradesh (EcoSoc) website. It is currently functioning to provide educational materials on the current ecotourism in the state. This website, although filled with a great level of material, was last updated in 2010. We recommend that the Forest Department further develop this website to include more information on the existing ecotourism rest houses, and provide learning materials about ecotourism directed at interested private business owners. Along with a creation of an ecotourism certification, business owners could become members of EcoSoc. This will contribute more ecotourism locations to the state's ecotourism database and they could also be advertised on the EcoSoc website. One addition to

the currently available resources could be a forum page for business owners and government employees. The forum would allow these two groups to communicate about ecotourism sustainable practices and new ideas. A forum could help to push the ecotourism sector forward in the state by organizing ecotourism ideas in one location. Evolution of this existing web resource could be a low cost, quick way to jump start ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh.

### **Further develop the Forest Department run ecotourism rest houses**

To expand on the previous section, EcoSoc could work to establish an easier reservation process for the ecotourism rest houses. The website already has a database with the necessary information to book a room in one of the many ecotourism rest houses, but it could be made more efficient by establishing an online booking option. This may increase the automation of the process, and make for a simpler system that could increase visitation to these rest houses. In addition, the caretakers could attend training sessions to provide them with information on how to utilize sustainable practices and new initiatives being taken by the Forest Department. Another step that the state Forest Department could make would be to provide additional information for the DFOs in each division that has an ecotourism rest house. This will aid them to efficiently run the existing ecotourism houses and possibly establish more. These rest houses can be seen as the ideal ecotourism model for private businesses to aspire to become.

### **Conduct market and environmental impact research**

In Dr. Wood's report about ecotourism published in 2002, we learned that a government body conducts research in many situations of ideal ecotourism. For Himachal Pradesh, we see the Forest Department as the governing body that is in the position to contribute to the ecotourism sector in this way. Mainly, the Forest Department could conduct research about the market. In this research, they would look into what ecotourists are most interested in and how the industry could improve to better serve them. Also, they would establish a baseline of where the environment is currently and continually assess to monitor if there is a positive or negative impact from ecotourism. With all of this information, the government could create estimates as to the carrying capacity of the ecotourism sector and

work to improve the system dynamically. Three areas that the government could work to improve in order to increase the total carrying capacity of the state might be to build infrastructure to increase the carrying capacity at specific sites, encourage visitation to less visited sites to distribute visitation more evenly, and to publish reports for private business owners to get involved in this effort.

### **Work in conjunction with the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation on ecotourism**

The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation and Himachal Tourism Department have a well-established advertisement plan that has existed for many years. The Forest Department has recently begun working to establish ecotourism in the state. We recommend that the Forest Department work with the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation to learn about past successes and failures. This could help the Forest Department to more efficiently advance their advertisement campaign.

### **Further develop the role of religious tourism in the ecotourism sector**

India is in a unique situation when compared to other countries that are working to maintain or establish ecotourism. Specifically in Himachal, there is a large influx of religious tourists visiting the state each year on pilgrimages or for other religious purposes. This type of tourist, although not visiting for typical ecotourism activities, sometimes participates in religious treks, such as the trek from Barshaini to Kheerganga. We recommend that the Forest Department investigates ways to include the religious tourists in the ecotourism sector by using ecotourism best practices at religious sites and temples. These practices could include regulations for waste management at temples, or opportunities for religious tourists to participate in environmentally positive activities, such as planting trees at religious sites.

## **Himachal Pradesh Forest Department at the divisional level**

- Promote ecotourism through a local awareness campaign
  - Hold open workshops about ecotourism geared towards private business owners and local entrepreneurs
  - Distribute informational pamphlets for private business owners
    - Promote: recycling, proper waste disposal, composting, and up-cycling
  - Hold community workshops to promote involvement
  - Hold environmental conservation awareness events at local schools
  - Launch advertisements in all forms of media about environmental conservation and ecotourism
  - Station ecotourism signs
    - Advertise locations
    - Publicize set of environmentally friendly practices for tourists
- Further develop division-specific Forest Department run ecotourism rest houses
  - Increase advertisement for these locations
  - Provide ecotourism training for the employees who maintain these sites
  - Work to uphold the best practices of ecotourism

### **Promote ecotourism through a local awareness campaign**

We recommend that at the divisional level of operation, the Forest Department launch an awareness campaign for the local businesses, communities, and children. The local business owners have a large role in controlling the existing tourism market. The involvement of the local communities is important to maintain high-functioning ecotourism. In addition, creating awareness among the next generation of business owners and community members early on is instrumental to the sustainable development of ecotourism.

We recommend that the Forest Department begins with providing workshops to local businesses and entrepreneurs associated with the tourism industry. If the Forest Department could work with an established starting point, such as the tourism businesses, there may be an incredible increase in ecotourism development. The divisional officers could hold workshops that distribute information about becoming involved and obtaining certification as ecotourism sites. These workshops could also include information about recycling, waste disposal, composting, and up-cycling for use within businesses and homes. Refer to Appendix F to see an

example of a pamphlet that the Forest Department could distribute to spread awareness about ecotourism among business owners.

Another basic workshop could target community members from locations that don't have well-established tourism. This would target how to establish community-based ecotourism. School children are another important demographic to inspire environmental awareness and conservation through community awareness campaigns. The divisional officers could work to create advertisements for these workshops and existing ecotourism incentives in all forms of media. With a widespread distribution of awareness about ecotourism, each division could increase the local interest and the benefits of ecotourism.



Figure 41: Signage to increase awareness of ecotourism and sustainable practices

Our final recommendation for the divisional Forest Department is to position more signage in ecotourism locations. These signs could work to spread awareness for environmentally conservative practices to the local communities and tourists. In locations where we observed signs, such as the one in figure 41, we noticed that those locations were positively affected by the existence of signs. In addition to signs about environmental conservation, the department could place signs along the road that promote ecotourism locations by drawing the attention of tourists who may have time to make minor detours.

### **Further develop division-specific Forest Department run ecotourism rest houses**

Our initial recommendation for the Forest Department run ecotourism rest houses is to increase accessibility through increased advertisement. We had difficulty discovering and booking these locations. It may be possible to increase awareness and visitation through more direct advertisement on the EcoSoc website or through other forms of media.

Before increasing the awareness of these ecotourism rest houses, we recommend that the Forest department works to uphold a list of best practices of ecotourism and provide additional training for the employees who care for these rest houses. The divisional officers could provide workshops for the caretakers to provide information about how they can properly maintain these sites under a set of best practices of ecotourism. The provided information could include ideas for creating a positive impact such as community outreach or planting native trees.

#### **Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation and Himachal Tourism**

- Work with the Forest Department to bring ecotourism principles to the homestay sector
- Develop national tourism day celebrations
  - Increase number of locations that participate
  - Provide additional information about how to hold this as a cultural festival
  - Spread awareness about environmentally conservative principles
- Work with the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department to further market ecotourism locations to domestic tourists from other states
- Expand awareness of existing incentives for following sustainable practices

### **Work with the Forest Department to bring ecotourism principles to the homestay sector**

In our field work, we learned that the homestay sector is under the Himachal Tourism Department, and not controlled by the Forest Department. In our literature review, we saw that homestays can be an integral part of ecotourism. We recommend that the Tourism Department collaborate with the Forest Department to include homestays in the state in the ecotourism sector. This could be greatly beneficial for the development of ecotourism as there is already a body of established homestays that could adopt ecotourism best practices.

### **Develop national tourism day celebrations**

We observed a small Tourism Day festival in Mcleodganj that displayed local traditional music. We recommend the promotion of sustainable practices as an addition to these cultural tourism festivals. From the literature and our interviews of government officials, we found that there are some existing incentives to use sustainable practices. We observed that most of the businesses we interviewed were not aware of these incentives. We recommend that the Forest Department could work to publicize these incentives and increase the awareness that the government is interested in preserving the environment. This form of awareness can be done in part during this tourism day celebration.

### **Work with the Forest Department to further market ecotourism locations to domestic tourists from other states**

We recommend that it may be beneficial for the Forest Department to create advertisements directed at the population in surrounding states. This could help to draw tourists away from the crowded Shimla mall, and increase visitation to ecotourism locations spread throughout the state. There is a large body of domestic tourists that visits the popular tourism locations, such as Shimla and Manali. Thus, there is a large body of tourists to advertise to for locations near to these.

## **Local government agencies in tourism locations**

- Expand existing waste disposal system
  - Non-biodegradable waste material
    - Establish a recycling system
  - Encourage use of organic waste in form of compost and fertilizers
  - Place additional garbage bins in communal areas
- Regulate the construction of buildings in nature-based tourism areas
  - Building codes that emphasize traditional forms of architecture
- Enhance maintenance of local religious tourism sites
  - Work to develop environmentally positive practices such as planting native trees around temples
- Implement additional water filtration systems in developed tourist locations
- Further establish and post signage to increase awareness about environmental conservation
  - Signs directed at tourists to spread awareness about environmentally conservative behaviors (refer to tourism recommendations section)
  - Spread awareness about currently active sustainable initiatives
  - Promote ecotourism in the local area

### **Expand existing waste disposal system**

While visiting Bir, Jogindernagar, and McLeodGanj, we observed an existing waste disposal system that collects both organic and inorganic waste. We recommend that more local government agencies follow suit and create waste disposal systems. While in Manali and Bir, we also observed that there were garbage bins distributed throughout common areas to keep litter off the roads. In Manali, we noticed that there was less litter in the roads near the garbage bins. This tells our team that, when given the opportunity, tourists and locals will use the garbage bins over littering. We recommend that garbage bins are distributed throughout more tourism locations and are properly maintained.

### **Regulate the construction of buildings in nature-based tourism areas**

Similar to the recommendation for the Forest Department, we also suggest the regulation of construction to the local government bodies. From the example of the local government regulation of construction in Billing, the paragliding take-off location, many nature-



based tourism areas could also benefit from this form of regulation. This will help to preserve fragile locations where nature and society meet for future generations.

### **Enhance maintenance of local religious tourism sites**

Just as the Forest Department has a role in maintaining religious sites, the local government is also a key stakeholder. There are many temples spread throughout the hills and mountains of Himachal, far too many for the Forest Department to have control of all their maintenance. In addition, the local government already has a major role in maintaining these religious sites. Thus, we suggest that the local bodies work toward implementing sustainable practices set forth for religious sites by the Forest Department.

### **Implement additional water filtration systems in developed tourist locations**

In Shimla and Bir, our team observed several public water filtration systems. We recommend that the local government bodies implement and maintain public drinking water filtration systems in tourism locations. This could help to encourage the reuse of plastic water bottles and encourage the use of durable, reusable water bottles, thus decreasing plastic pollution. Locations that may benefit the most from these systems could be McLeodGanj, Manali, Kullu, Naggar, and Manikaran.

### **Further establish and post signage to increase awareness about environmental conservation**

Again, the local government also holds a stake in stationing signs around ecotourism areas. We recommend these signs are directed at tourists to spread awareness about environmentally conservative behaviors. The signs could be an adaptation of the Incredible India list of “Dos and Don’ts for Tourists,” located in Appendix B. Furthermore these signs could display the current sustainable initiatives that local government is actively supporting. Lastly, these signs could work to advertise locations that may not be extensively advertised in broader forms of media.

## **Tour Operators**

- Utilize sustainable practices that minimize negative impact on the environment and culture
  - Minimize environmental impact
    - Small tourist groups
    - Develop private infrastructure that is environmentally conservative
  - Proper waste disposal
  - Participate in conservation projects
    - Support national parks and local protected areas
- Provide educational materials for tourists on:
  - How to minimize negative impact on the environment and culture
  - The social and political state of the location
  - The local biodiversity
- Provide training for employees on:
  - How to guide and educate tourists
  - Current sustainable practices used by the business
- Employ locals
- Direct visitation to less common attractions to reduce crowding at currently popular sites

### **Utilize sustainable practices that minimize negative impact on the environment and culture**

Tour operators have a direct stake in the ground level of ecotourism, and without their support of the system no amount of governmental regulations will lead to high functioning ecotourism. We recommend several sustainable practices that are feasible in the private sector of the tourism industry. Tour operators could begin by further mitigating the negative impact that they and their tourists have on the local environment and culture. To begin this process, tour operators may choose to guide small tourist groups and develop their private infrastructure in an environmentally conservative manner. They may also participate in, or maintain, their own waste disposal system. Lastly, tour operators could participate in conservation projects that aim to actively preserve national parks and local protected areas.

### **Provide educational materials for tourists**

Just as the Forest Department has a role in educating tourists of proper conservative behavior for ecotourism, tour operators can also aid in this responsibility. We recommend that

private ecotourism tour operators provide educational materials for tourists on minimizing their own impact on the local environment and culture. This educational material can also contain information about the social and political state of the locations. Furthermore, tourists may also be interested to learn about the local biodiversity and ecosystem. Tour operators may find that it is beneficial to present this information verbally or in other forms of media (i.e. pamphlets or signs).

### **Provide training for employees and employ locals**

We recommend that the tour operator provides training for their employees. This training will teach employees how to interact with and present information to the tourists. It is important that each employee knows how the business is actively conserving the environment and how to appropriately convey information to the tourists. This training may also include how to work with tourists that are less environmentally conscientious.

Often in the tourism industry it can be more work to hire and train a local community member to work for a tour operator. However, it is also beneficial because often the local people have personal experience with the local biodiversity and ecosystem. It is important that tour operators make an effort to hire local community members to help distribute the economic benefits from tourists throughout the local community.

### **Direct visitation to less common attractions to reduce crowding at currently popular sites**

In Himachal Pradesh, our team observed that there are several locations that receive the majority of the visiting tourists. We recommend that local tour operators place less emphasis on the common, exploited locations and bring tourists to less common tourist attractions. This could help to decrease the negative impact at the large tourism locations and distribute a low level of impact throughout the state that is more manageable for all locations.

### **Recommendations for future project teams**

As we have created a baseline idea for tourism and ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh, there are several ways future project teams could continue to work with ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh. Future teams can expand upon our work by selecting one location, such as

Bir, and conducting a feasibility study for implementation of ecotourism in that community. This might result in the beginning of community-based ecotourism.

If a future project team could be sponsored by the CCF or DFO Mandi, there are many other ideas that they could further explore. A project team could also evaluate the ecotourism rest houses and develop recommendations for these sites. Another continuation of this project might be to work with the Private Public Partnership sites to further develop the Forest Department's regulations for these sites.

In our findings and analysis, we came across several points which are not in the scope of our project due to our time constraints. We merely scratched the surface of how culture is impacted from tourism. Cultural impact is a part of ecotourism, but it is a dimension of a more developed definition. We feel that a future project team might be able to look at the impact of ecotourism on smaller villages, where it is ideally practiced. In addition, we have addressed religious tourism in relation to ecotourism in this report, yet we have not fully tackled the impact of religious tourism in Himachal Pradesh. Another project team in the future might be able to assess moving religious tourism in the state as a whole towards more sustainable practices.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi once stated, “The future depends on what you do today.” When we consider the future implications of our actions today, we are able to actively influence what the future may look like. The Himalayan Mountain range in Himachal Pradesh today exists as a beautifully scenic landscape, with a vast wealth of biodiversity. From Gandhi’s words, it becomes clear that actions today will influence the Himalayan condition of the future. Today, Himachal Pradesh can use ecotourism as one tool to actively preserve this valuable resource.

We have achieved our goal of identifying best practices and presenting a set of recommendations for ecotourism and sustainable tourism that are feasible in Himachal Pradesh. Our field study consisted of a series of surveys, interviews, and observations. We found that Himachal Pradesh has great potential for hosting ecotourism. The state is home to a large variety of tourist attractions, many of which have the capacity to be transformed into ecotourism. The vast amount of capability within the state for the future existence of ecotourism is profound. Himachal also provides a unique religious tourism sector, which provides the potential for growth in the academic field of ecotourism.

Each stakeholder, for whom we have provided recommendations, has a unique role in the ecotourism industry. Progress can be made in Himachal ecotourism with the implementation of our set of recommendations. However, without cooperation among the stakeholders, ecotourism will remain a small part of the tourism sector in Himachal Pradesh. Himachal has the potential to see a growth in economic benefit from the tourism industry. Nevertheless, the future longevity of this economic benefit depends on the development of sustainability in the industry today.

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## Appendix A: Table of ecotourism definitions adapted from Bjork

### DEFINITIONS SEPERATED INTO DIMENSIONS

Authors	Year	Dimensions			
		Characteristics of area	What the tourists do	Object	Behavior
Hetzer	1965	Natural and archaeological areas			
Ziffer	1989	Indigenous and undeveloped areas	Appreciating, participating, & seeing	History & culture	Non-consumptive & contributes to sustainability
Ceballos-Lascurain	1991	Undisturbed and uncontaminated areas	Admiring, studying, & enjoying	Wild plants and animals, & culture	
P. Figgis	1992	Remote or natural areas	Understanding, appreciating & conserving	Nature & culture	Non-damaging or deterioration
Young	1992	Natural areas	Understanding, appreciating & conserving	Nature & culture	Includes conservation & sustaining aspects
Ecotourism Association of Australia	1992		Understanding, appreciating & conserving	Nature & culture	Includes conservation aspects
Valentine	1991, 1993	Undisturbed areas		Nature	Non-damaging and non-degrading
Wight	1993	Natural areas	Experiencing and observing	Nature	Conservation of ecosystem and respect for host communities
Scace	1993	Natural areas		Nature	Conservation; maintaining and enhancing the natural and sociocultural elements
IUCN	1993	Undisturbed natural areas	Enjoy, Appreciate & conserving	Nature & culture	Low impact, beneficial so socio-economy and includes local participation
Hvenegaard	1994	Nature and culture based activities		Nature & culture	Non-consumptive
Steele	1995	Natural areas		Natural world	
Bjork	1995	Natural areas	Admiring, studying, & enjoying	Nature & culture	Includes a non-exploitation and a conservation aspect
Wallace & Pierce	1996	Undisturbed natural areas	Studying, enjoying and assisting	Flora, fauna, geology, ecosystem of an area, culture and people	Conservation & sustainable development
TIES	1990	Natural areas	Understanding, appreciating & conserving	Nature & culture	Conservation & contribute to the well-being of local people
Denman	2001	Natural areas		Nature	Minimize impact

Table 1: Dimensions of Ecotourism. Table has been adapted from Björk (2000, p.192).

## Appendix B: Government Guidelines for Tourists (IncredibleIndia, 2013a)

### Do's

- Carry back all non-degradable litter such as empty bottles, tins, plastic bags etc. These must not litter the environment or be buried. They must be disposed in municipal dustbins only.
- Observe the sanctity of holy sites, temples and local cultures.
- Cut noise pollution. Do not blare aloud radios, tape recorders or other electronic entertainment equipment in nature resorts, sanctuaries and wildlife parks.
- In case temporary toilets are set-up near campsites, after defecation, cover with mud or sand. Make sure that the spot is at least 30 meters away from the water source.
- Respect people's privacy while taking photographs. Ask for prior permission before taking a photograph.

### Don'ts

- Do not take away flora and fauna in the forms of cuttings, seeds or roots. It is illegal, especially in the Himalayas. The environment is really delicate in this region and the biodiversity of the region has to be protected at all costs.
- Do not use pollutants such as detergent, in streams or springs while washing and bathing.
- Do not use wood as fuel to cook food at the campsite.
- Do not leave cigarettes butts or make open fires in the forests.
- Do not consume aerated drinks, alcohol, drugs or any other intoxicant and throw bottles in the wild.
- Do not tempt the locals, especially children by offering them foodstuff or sweets. Respect local traditions.
- Polythene and plastics are non-biodegradable and unhealthy for the environment and must not be used and littered.

### Golden Rules When You Travel

- Learn about your destination before you get there. Read guidebooks, travel articles, histories, and/or novels by local authors and pay particular attention to customs such as greetings, appropriate dress, eating behaviors, etc. Being sensitive to these customs will increase local acceptance of you as a tourist and enrich your trip.
- Follow established guidelines. Ask your eco-tour operator, guide and/or the local authorities what their guidelines are for limiting tourism's impact on the environment and local culture. Staying on trails, packing up your trash, and remaining set distances away from wildlife are a few ways to minimize your impact in sensitive areas.
  - Seek out and support locally owned businesses. Support local businesses during your eco-travels to ensure maximum community and conservation benefit from your spending.

## Appendix C: Guidelines for the State of Himachal Pradesh

Below are mentioned some of the guidelines formulated by the State of Himachal Pradesh:

- a) The State Government is bound to develop a State-level Ecotourism Strategy – a comprehensive plan to ensure:
  - Wilderness conservation in ecologically sensitive landscapes
  - Local community participation and benefit-sharing
  - Sound environmental design and use of locally produced and sustainable materials
  - Conservation education and training
  - Adequate monitoring and evaluation of the impact of ecotourism activities
  - Capacity building of local communities in planning, providing and managing ecotourism facilities
- b) According to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and the directives of the Honorable Supreme Court, no new tourist facilities can be set up on forest lands.
- c) State Forest Department will have the power to settle any kind of disputes and will have the final say in any case relating to the ecological advisability of any tourism plans, whether Protected Area Management, private entity, temple board or community, as the welfare of wildlife and Protected Areas/ biodiversity takes precedence over tourism.
- d) The Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) of the State has the duty of preparing an ecotourism plan for the state which could either be site specific or as a whole and he/she must also develop a monitoring mechanism for the same.
- e) There is a State Level Steering Committee which contains Chief Minister as the chairman, CWLW as the Member Convener and representatives from the local community that live in and around the protected areas, tribal welfare department, panchayati raj institutions and civil society institutions. This committee sits quarterly for discussing the progress and future plans.
- f) “Local conservation Cess” a percentage of turn-over, on all privately-run tourist facilities within 5 km of a Protected Area is to be paid to the government. The rate is fixed by the government and fund collected is used for the development of local livelihood and protected area management.
- g) A Local Advisory Committee (hereinafter referred to as LAC) has been constituted for each Protected Area by the State government. The LAC constitutes of:
  - District Collector (Chairman)
  - PA Manager (Member Secretary)
  - Local Territorial DFO (District Forest Officer)
  - Honorary Wildlife Warden (if present)
  - Official of State Tourism Department
  - Block Development Officer (1)
  - Members of Local Panchayats (2)
  - Wildlife scientist (1)
  - Local conservationists (2)

- Representative from Civil Society Institution (1)

The work of this committee is to review the strategies with respect to the protected area and make recommendations. Another task of this committee is to regularly monitor all tourist facilities falling within 5 km of a protected area, which would be things like ownership, type of construction, number of employees etc.

- h) All tourist facilities, old and new must aim to generate at least 50% of their total energy and fuel requirements from alternate energy sources that may include wind, solar or biogas.
- i) There is a complete ban on burning or disposing non-biodegradable waste within the Protected Area or in surrounding eco-sensitive zone or buffer area.

The use of wood as fuel is prohibited, except for campfires for which wood must be procured from State Forest Department/Forest Dev

## Appendix D: Interview Questions by Interviewee

### Forest Department/Ecotourism Official Interview

1. What is your definition of ecotourism?
2. Is there a certification program for ecotourism establishments?
3. If so, what is the certification process? Do you have a list of the currently certified establishments?
4. Does HP advertise sites as “ecotourism”? Do any establishments?
5. Is your website up to date? How important do you feel the website is?
6. Have you run into any resistance in implementing ecotourism in HP?
7. If so, what were people particularly opposed to? Where was the most resistance?
8. Are there any committees that are ecotourism related? If so, how do they work and what are their missions?
9. Do you participate in ecotourism?
10. If so, what kinds of ecotourism and where?
11. Do you feel that you have reached the goal of becoming the leading ecotourism destination in the country?
12. Was one of your goals to make existing tourism more ecofriendly?
13. Have you tried to make existing tourism more ecofriendly?
14. Do you have any documents and resources that are available to us?
15. What is your e-mail address?
16. Is there anything else you feel we should know?

## Tourist Survey

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: September \_\_\_\_\_, 2013

Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:    M        F	Age: _____	Home: _____, _____
Traveling with a family? Y   N	Duration of visit? _____	Other destinations this trip (in order)? _____
What season do you usually go on vacation? Spring   Summer   Autumn   Winter	Have you experienced a language barrier on this trip? Y    N	Likes? _____
Dislikes? _____	How did you learn about this location? _____	_____
Ideal vacation spot? _____	What attractions are you most interested in? _____	What is your understanding of ecotourism? _____
Does eco-friendliness impact your decision when planning a vacation? Y    DNA    N	Would a change in eco-friendliness <b>encourage</b> / <b>discourage</b> you from a location? _____	Would you be more likely to participate in ecotourism if it was promoted by the government? Y    N
What factors do you take into consideration when planning a vacation?		
Cost Distance Hospitality Publications	Attractions/Activities Word of Mouth Special Offers Travel Agency Recommendation	Online Reviews Natural Resources News Other: _____

## Business Interviews (variety of businesses)

1. What tourist attractions do you offer?
2. What forms of advertisement do you use?
3. How many tourists do you get in a year?
4. How many international & domestic tourists do you see a year?
5. Are you comfortable with interacting with tourists in different languages? English, Hindi or other languages?
6. When is your busy season/peak time of the year?
7. Have you ever heard of ecotourism?
8. What will be the impact on your business if the tourism industry transforms into a more “green” business?
9. If yes, what is your opinion on ecotourism?
10. Are you aware of The Ecotourism Society of Himachal Pradesh?
11. Do you aim to conserve the environment?
12. Are you endorsed by the government?
13. If so, how do they endorse you?
14. Are you affiliated with one or more travel agencies?
15. Do you feel that tourism is beneficial to the community?
16. Has tourism affected your cultural traditions? If yes how?

### Homestays:

How frequently do tourists stay here?

What is the procedure that you follow in order to become a homestay?

What benefits do you gain from ecotourism?

### Souvenir Shops:

What do domestic tourists buy versus the international tourists?

### Tour Operators:

What do domestic tourists want to participate in?

What do international tourists want to participate in?



## Appendix E: Homestays

### Formalities for the Approval of a Tourism Unit

1. Application on plain paper.
2. Revenue papers (Tatima & Jamabandi of land).he same
3. Map of the building duly approved by the competent authority.
4. NOC from the local civic body.
5. NOC from the Highway Authority in case the unit is on NH
6. Affidavit to the effect that if any loan/subsidy is availed, the same will be utilized on the construction of the unit and the unit will be run as such for at least ten years.
7. Project report
8. Memorandum and Article of Association in case of co. or partnership deed in case of partnership.

Dimensions:

DBRs: 120 Sq. ft.

SBRs: 100Sq. ft.

Bath/toilets: 30 Sq. ft.

Height: 9 feet clear

Ventilation: 15% of the carpet area

Stores (2) for Linen and Provision

Kitchen:

Dining Hall:

Reception/lobby:

Office room:

Parking:

Restaurant/Dining Hall: 50 persons capacity with the minimum area covered shall be square feet per person means  $50' \times 8' = 400\text{sq feet}$  or more.

## Appendix F: Sample Brochure for Business Owners

### Himachal Forest Department

#### Why?

We want to create a sustainable ecotourism sector in Himachal Pradesh.

#### Ecotourism Resources

The International Ecotourism Society  
[www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org)

Ecotourism Society of India:  
[www.ecotourismsocietyofindia.org](http://www.ecotourismsocietyofindia.org)

The Ecotourism Society of Himachal Pradesh:  
[www.himachalecotourism.nic.in](http://www.himachalecotourism.nic.in)

Eco India: [www.ecoindia.com](http://www.ecoindia.com)

### A short guide about **Ecotourism**

An informative brochure to increase awareness of Ecotourism among business owners.





## Ecotourism

Ecotourism is sustainable travel to natural areas, that is environmentally conservative, while maintaining local culture and preserving the quality of the well-being of the host community.

### Best Practices of Ecotourism

- Minimize negative impacts on nature and culture
- Watch for over-consumption of natural resources and negative impacts in the tourism sector
- Educate tourists on environmental conservation and cultural awareness
- Direct revenue to the conservation of natural and protected areas
- Stress responsible business practices
- Keep economic, environmental, and cultural benefit within the local community
- Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits
- Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment

## Do's and Don'ts of Ecotourism

Here is a list of a few Do's and Don'ts that you as a business owner should aim to uphold.

### Do's:

- Use sustainable practices that minimize negative impact on the environment and culture
- Provide educational materials for tourists on minimizing negative impact
- Provide training for employees on how to guide and educate tourists
- Employ locals
- Direct visitation to less common attractions to reduce crowding at currently popular sites

### Don'ts:

- Do not degrade the ecosystem by carrying an excess number of tourists to a site
- Do not leave non-biodegradable waste at tourist sites



## For Your Customers

Here are some facts you should make the tourist aware of:

### Do's:

- Preserve the sanctity of holy sites and local cultures
- Be aware of the noise you generate in nature resorts, sanctuaries and wildlife parks.
- Respect people's privacy when taking photos
- Carry back all non-biodegradable trash

### Don'ts:

- Do not use pollutants in streams
- Do not use wood as fuel to cook food at campsites
- Do not leave cigarette butts or make open fires in the forests
- Do not consume alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants and throw trash in the wild

## For More Information

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[www.hpforest.nic.in](http://www.hpforest.nic.in)

# Appendix G: Open House Poster



**WPI**

## Ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh

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Ecotourism is "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (TIES, 1990)

### Abstract

Ecotourism is sustainable, nature-based tourism, that is environmentally conservative while maintaining local culture and contributing to the well-being of the host community. The goal of this project was to develop a list of best practices and recommendations for sustainable tourism and ecotourism that are feasible in Himachal Pradesh. To develop our understanding of the tourism and ecotourism sector in the region, we spoke with government officials, business owners, and tourists. We analyzed tourist locations for their capacity to adopt ecotourism. Finally, we combined the academic best practices and our analysis to create a list of recommendations for sustainable development at potential ecotourism sites in Himachal Pradesh.



### Activities



### Tourism Sites

- Shimla
- Manali
- Kullu
- Rewalsar
- Prashar
- Barshaini
- Bir and Billing
- Jogindemagar
- Barot
- Nagar
- Rumsu
- Rhotang Pass
- Mcleodganj
- Manikaran

### Stakeholders

- Government Officials
- Business Owners
- Tourists

### Project Goal

Develop a list of best practices and recommendations for sustainable tourism and ecotourism that are feasible in Himachal Pradesh

### Best Practices

- Minimize negative impacts on nature and culture
- Educate tourists on environmental conservation and culture awareness
- Maximize economic, environmental, and cultural benefit for the local community
- Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits
- Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment

### Findings

### Recommendations

- Himachal Pradesh Forest Department at the state level**
  - Establish a set of sustainable practices in the ecotourism sector
  - Establish an ecotourism certification process for private business owners
  - Regularly update the Ecotourism Society of HP website
  - Further develop the Forest Department run ecotourism rest houses
  - Work in conjunction with the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation for ecotourism
  - Further develop the role of religious tourism in the ecotourism sector
  - Utilize wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and nature reserves as ecotourism destinations
- Himachal Pradesh Forest Department at the divisional level**
  - Promote ecotourism through a local awareness campaign
    - Hold open workshops about ecotourism geared towards private business owners and local entrepreneurs
    - Hold environmental conservation awareness events at local schools
    - Station ecotourism signs
  - Further develop division-specific forestry department run ecotourism rest houses
- Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation and Himachal Tourism**
  - Work with the Forest Department to bring ecotourism principles to the homestay sector
  - Develop national tourism day celebrations
  - Expand awareness of existing incentives for following sustainable practices
- Local government body in tourism locations**
  - Regulate the construction of buildings in nature-based tourism areas
  - Enhance maintenance of local religious tourism sites
  - Implement additional water filtration systems in developed tourist locations
  - Further establish and post signage to increase awareness about environmental conservation
- Businesses in the ecotourism sector**
  - Utilize sustainable practices that minimize negative impact on the environment and culture
  - Provide educational materials for tourists on minimizing negative impact
  - Provide training for employees to guide and educate tourists
  - Employ locals
  - Direct visitation to less common attractions to reduce crowding at currently popular sites

