

Chapter 16

Prospect of Promoting Sikkim as a Smart Tourism Destination: A Descriptive Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Since 2006, Sikkim progressively switching to a full-fledged tourism-centred state having declared it a predominant industry as an engine for its economic growth. The state accounted for the highest influx of foreign tourists amongst the eight north eastern states of India during the last 20 years or so. The smart city mission was commissioned by government of India as a centrally sponsored scheme destined to provide financial support for the allotted cities to the extent of INR. 100 Crore per city per year spanning over five years. Studies suggest that induction of smart city concept will act as precursor for growth of smart tourism destinations (STDs) across the country. The STD as a concept revolves around “6A’s,” an essential ingredient for promoting smart tourism in destinations. Incidentally, two cities in Sikkim have been enlisted amongst the top 100 cities in India for promoting smart city, instrumental in promoting STD in tourism-driven states. The chapter delves into the concept of smart city as an antecedent for promoting STD along with conditions with respect to Sikkim.

I. INTRODUCTION

Of late, increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools has been common phenomenon across all sphere of life especially to gain competitive advantage over the competitors, tourism is no exception. One way to address such impending societal challenges is the use of cutting-edge technologies (Townsend, 2013) in economic spheres to promote sustainable development. Especially within tourism, technologically driven innovations have had a large impact on the development of the industry (Hjalager, 2010). Robust ICT developments, initiating smartness and smart places have been recognised to cause a paradigm shift within the tourism industry (Buhalis, 2015) in recent times.

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The notion of smartness finds its origin in the 90s, although it proliferated significantly after 2008 (Hollands, 2008, 2015). Initially, the concept was coined as a complex technological infrastructure, embedded within urban areas to foster economic, social and environmental prosperity (IBM, 2014; Meijer and Bolívar, 2015). More specifically, it posited the integration of ICT to improve processes and interconnect sub-systems (Townsend, 2013), to ultimately tackle the economic, social and environmental challenges imposed by urbanism (Caragliu et al., 2011). This implication of cutting-edge technology triggered concepts such as the smart planet (IBM, 2015), smart city (Hollands, 2008) and more recently, the smart tourism destination (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2014). In fact, smart city concept has been seen as a precursor for promoting STDs in recent times.

At the international level, a ranking of Smart Cities Report in 2020-21 suggests Singapore, Seoul, London, Barcelona, Helsinki, New York City, Montreal, Shanghai, Vienna, Amsterdam are the top ten smart cities in the world. During 2019, city of London was considered the world's "smartest" city, New York takes the second spot, followed by Amsterdam, Paris, Reykjavic, Tokyo, Singapore, Copenhagen, Berlin down the order, while Vienna ranked 10th (SCG: 2021) in that list showed its better performance during 2020-21. It goes to show intense competition prevailing amongst the top smart cities based on chosen parameters and benchmarking level increases in each criterion in every successive year's. Unfortunately, none of the Indian cities featured in the ranking of 50 smart cities across the world for 2019 and 2020-21, indicative of the cities selected under the Smart City Mission sponsored by Government of India are yet achieve the required level of performance and competitiveness as shown by the leading smart cities in the world.

Lavasa, a planned hill station in Maharashtra, is the first STD in India overseen by Hindustan Construction Company (HCC) of India acted as special purpose vehicle (SPV) for the project. The destination is suitably placed amidst seven hills and 60 kilometres away from lakefront spread over 25,000 acres land. This place is known for hospitality, health and wellness, education sector for setting up tourism institutions among others'. (Rvo, 2015). In the list of top 50 Indian Cities, Bengaluru, Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat were the top smart cities in descending order for the year 2020 whereas Guwahati (ranked 46) was the lone smart city amongst the eight North Eastern States (NEs) in India during the period (MHUA: 2020).

The concept of Smart City (SC) represents an environment where technology is embedded with socio-economic activities of the city. In fact, technology synergise with city's social components in order to improve citizens quality of life while boosting destination's service efficiency, such as optimising the use of energy and better traffic monitoring (Vicini et al. 2012). "Smart cities are essentially urban clusters with smooth transportation, e-governance, and better social infrastructure, including health care and education. Smart is not just about technology-enabled, but also about power, water, transportation and solid waste management" (Kandpal, 2016). In fact, the dimensions of smart city take the following shape.

Figure 1 illustrates six overriding dimensions of smart city includes smart economy, smart mobility, smart living, smart environment, smart people and smart governance. Each of these narratives is associated with each segment in urban setting in an ICT linked environment literally act as facilitator for transition to smart tourism development in destinations.

In fact, each sub-components of smart city features critical to local decision makers emphasising on the use of smart technologies for enhancing tourism experiences (Boes et al, 2016). It embraces use of innovative technologies in management decision making processes to enhance effectiveness and better quality of life for the stakeholders in the one hand while enhancing smart tourism experience for the

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