

# Sustainable Tourism Awareness in Shimla: A Tourist Perspective

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**Abstract :** This research delves into the realm of sustainable tourism in Shimla, India, exploring the awareness and perceptions of tourists regarding sustainable practices. Amidst the increasing influx of tourists, Shimla, a serene hill station in Himachal Pradesh, faces challenges in preserving its delicate ecosystem while meeting the desires of visitors. Utilizing a structured questionnaire aligned with the recognized dimensions of sustainable tourism by UNWTO and UNEP (2005), insights from 50 tourists were garnered. The data reveals a notable gender disparity, a predominant young to middle-aged demographic, and a moderate level of awareness regarding sustainable tourism practices among respondents. It also encapsulates the tourists' spending behaviour and their brief stays, potentially highlighting a transient engagement with the locale. Diving into sustainable tourism perception, a multifaceted image emerges, reflecting a balance of economic viability, local prosperity, and employment opportunities juxtaposed with areas demanding attention like environmental purity and biological diversity. The analysis presents a comprehensive tourist perspective on sustainable tourism practices in Shimla, offering a robust foundation for future policy formulation and sustainable tourism development initiatives. By unveiling the varying levels of awareness and engagement in sustainable tourism activities among tourists, this study accentuates the need for targeted educational campaigns and collaborative approaches to foster a sustainable tourism paradigm in Shimla, contributing to balanced and sustainable growth in the region.

**IndexTerms - Sustainable Tourism, Tourist awareness, Sustainable practices, Ecosystem preservation.**

## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of sustainable tourism development principles gained prominence in international literature during the mid-1980s. However, it's worth noting that as early as 1965, W. Hetzer introduced the concept of 'responsible tourism,' which closely resembled these principles (Blamery, 2001). The discourse on innovative approaches to tourism development truly began with the concept of 'alternative tourism.' J. Krippendorfer, the author of the definition published in the 'Annals of Tourism Research' in 1986 under the title 'Tourism in the system of industrial society,' is credited with its inception. As the name suggests, it emerged as a counterpoint to mass tourism, which proponents of this concept perceived as the 'undesirable option.' Alternative tourism, often associated with small-scale tourism and regarded as the 'preferred option,' was designed to counter the 'undesirable option' (Clarke, 1997). Some researchers have emphasized the critical role of residents' support for tourism in the success of community participation. This support is more likely to occur when local communities possess a level of comprehension about the tourism development process that aligns with that of other stakeholders (Reid, 2003; Saarinen, 2010). In situations where tourism is a novel concept for a community, the lack of knowledge about tourism systems and a limited understanding of the significance of sustainable tourism can act as a hindrance to their active participation (Aref and Redzuan, 2009). As noted by Simons in Dyer et al., (2007), when a community has limited knowledge and awareness of tourism, significant efforts are required to promote their involvement in the tourism development process. Sihombing et al. (2017) focused on assessing the level of awareness among local communities and their contributions to the advancement of rural tourism. The investigation also delved into variations in awareness and knowledge among different groups of residents based on their occupations. The results of the study indicated that local communities not only acknowledged their crucial role in the development of tourism but also demonstrated a high degree of awareness regarding sustainable tourism principles. Additionally, the study revealed that the

perceived awareness of local communities regarding their role in tourism significantly influenced their perceived understanding of sustainable tourism principles. Interestingly, the study did not identify any significant differences in awareness based on profession, as there were no distinctions observed between individuals working in tourism and those who were not. Bose & Chattopadhyay (2019) conducted a review that examined the evolution of contemporary sustainable tourism concepts and practices over time. Their study also briefly explored three significant early sustainable tourism initiatives in India, referred to as the 'Early Bird States.' Furthermore, the study included a short survey-based empirical investigation to conduct a comparative analysis of opinions concerning 'sustainable tourism in India.' This analysis involved the participation of both Indian tourists and non-Indian/foreign tourists who had travelled to India in recent years.

According to a 2018 report by NITI Aayog, during the period of 2011-2015, an average of 16,042,225 tourists visited Himachal Pradesh. The report suggests that the combined contribution of both inbound tourists (foreign and domestic) to Himachal Pradesh's GDP could be as substantial as 26%. Specifically, the contribution of foreign tourists in the state is estimated to be the most significant, exceeding 20%. In contrast, the current contribution of domestic tourists from within Himachal Pradesh to the state's GDP is estimated to be slightly over 1%. It's important to note that the estimates provided above regarding the overall contribution of tourism to the state's GDP might be higher than the official estimate, which typically ranges from 8% to 10% as the core contribution of tourism to the state's economy. (Aayog, N I T I., 2018). Chugh (2018) assessed the current state of creative tourism in Himachal Pradesh and the extent to which it has been embraced and encouraged among tourists visiting the state. The objective of this research was to measure the level of awareness among tourists regarding creative tourism in Himachal and to evaluate their inclination to engage in this unique form of tourism. The findings from the tourist surveys indicated that a substantial majority of tourists expressed strong enthusiasm for participating in this form of tourism.

In recent years, tourism has witnessed a significant surge in developing nations such as India. India, in particular, has experienced substantial growth in domestic tourism over the past decade, with tourists playing a significant role in driving this expansion. However, alongside this remarkable growth in tourism, it becomes increasingly crucial to consider the sustainability of the destinations. Shimla, a highly alluring yet vulnerable tourist destination in Himachal Pradesh, stands out as a prime example. This paper aims to delve into the multifaceted aspects of sustainable tourism and seeks to gain insights into tourists' perceptions and attitudes regarding sustainability. It will specifically address the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainable tourism in Shimla.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research design for this study focuses on gaining insights into tourist perceptions and awareness levels regarding sustainable tourism in Shimla. To collect information from tourists who have visited Shimla, a structured questionnaire was developed, comprising 24 statements aligned with the 12 dimensions of sustainable tourism recognized by the UNWTO, addressing social, environmental, and economic aspects. A Likert scale with five levels was employed to gauge tourists' perception levels. Respondents' responses were categorized into five distinct groups, each assigned a weight ranging from 1 (indicating strong disagreement) to 5 (representing strong agreement). Specifically, a score of 1 was assigned for responses signifying strong disagreement, 2 for disagreement, 3 for neutrality, 4 for agreement, and 5 for strong agreement. The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was gathered through the administration of the questionnaire to 50 tourists who had visited Shimla, selected using a Simple Random Sampling method. Secondary data was obtained from various sources, including records, websites, journals, magazines, and books. Data analysis involved a descriptive approach, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. The primary data collected was analyzed with mean and standard deviation being the key statistical measures employed. The analysis aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of tourist perceptions and awareness levels pertaining to sustainable tourism in Shimla, shedding light on the social, environmental, and economic facets of their experiences.

**Table 1: Tourist Demographic and Sustainable Tourism Perception in Shimla**

Variables	Sub-categories	Total Respondents	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	35	70 %
	Female	15	30 %
<b>Age</b>	Below 30 years	21	42 %
	30 to 50 years	24	48 %
	Above 50 years	5	10 %
<b>Education Level</b>	No formal education	2	4 %
	Undergraduate	17	34 %
	Graduate & above	31	62 %
<b>Frequency of Visit</b>	First Time	23	46 %
	Recurring (2-4 times)	24	48 %
	Frequent (5 times and above)	3	6 %
<b>Length of Stay</b>	1-2 Days	37	74 %
	3-4 Days	11	22 %
	5 Days or more	2	4 %
<b>Daily Expenditure During Visit</b>	Below 2000	7	14 %
	2000-4000	31	62 %
	4000 and above	12	24 %
<b>Awareness of Sustainable Tourism Practices</b>	Low	9	18 %
	Moderate	38	76 %

	High	3	6 %
<b>Engagement in Sustainable Tourism Activities</b>	Yes	13	26 %
	No	37	74 %

The table illustrates the demographics and sustainable tourism perceptions among 50 tourists in Shimla, revealing a notable gender disparity with a majority of male respondents (70%). The age distribution leans towards a younger to middle-aged demographic, predominantly encompassing individuals below 50 years of age. A significant portion of the respondents hold a graduate degree or higher (62%), reflecting a relatively high educational level among the respondents. The frequency of visits shows a near equal split between first-time visitors (46%) and recurring visitors (48%), whereas frequent visitors constitute a minimal portion (6%). A large majority of tourists have a short length of stay of 1-2 days (74%), with a conservative daily expenditure, as 62% spend between 2000 to 4000 per day. Delving into sustainable tourism awareness and engagement, a substantial majority have a moderate level of awareness (76%), yet only a small fraction (26%) engage in sustainable tourism activities. This data encapsulates a broad spectrum of tourist demographics, their spending behavior, and their varying levels of awareness and engagement in sustainable tourism practices, providing a foundational understanding for further exploration into sustainable tourism in Shimla.

**Table 2: Perceptions of Sustainable Tourism Among Different Tourist Demographics in Shimla, based on the 12 Aims of the 'Making Tourism More Sustainable' Agenda by UNWTO and UNEP (2005)**

No.	Descriptive Statistics	Mean	SD
<b>Economic Viability</b>			
1	Tourism services in Shimla are reasonably priced.	1.34	1.0212
2	Local individuals generate sufficient income through tourism-related businesses.	4.12	0.5247
<b>Local Prosperity</b>			
3	Local businesses in Shimla appear to be thriving.	4.41	0.5731
4	Tourists frequently patronize local businesses during their stay.	3.43	0.8954
<b>Employment</b>			
5	Tourism establishments in Shimla are predominantly staffed by locals.	4.21	0.6138
6	Local staff in tourism sectors are knowledgeable and skillful.	3.12	0.9475
<b>Social Equity</b>			
7	Efforts to support fairness and equal opportunities in the tourism industry are noticeable in Shimla.	2.87	1.1363
8	Diverse groups of people are employed within the tourism sector.	3.94	0.9618

<b>Visitor Fulfillment</b>			
9	Tourist expectations are met during their visit to Shimla.	3.51	1.3145
10	Tourists are likely to recommend Shimla as a travel destination to others based on their experiences.	4.19	0.9772
<b>Local Control</b>			
11	The local community appears to have a say in the tourism development of Shimla.	2.38	1.0729
12	Community-led tourism initiatives are present in Shimla.	3.14	1.2451
<b>Community Wellbeing</b>			
13	Positive impacts of tourism on local communities are observable.	4.71	0.7324
14	Interaction between tourists and locals is friendly and engaging.	3.82	0.8973
<b>Cultural Richness</b>			
15	Tourists are able to learn about and experience the local culture.	4.17	0.6327
16	Tourism in Shimla is actively preserving and promoting its cultural heritage.	3.89	0.9151
<b>Physical Integrity</b>			
17	Natural and built environments are well-maintained in Shimla.	4.21	0.7846
18	Conservation efforts at tourist sites are noticeable.	4.79	0.5147
<b>Biological Diversity</b>			
19	Opportunities to learn about or experience local biodiversity are available.	3.14	1.0798
20	Informational materials or guided tours focusing on biodiversity are provided.	1.94	0.9758
<b>Resource Efficiency</b>			
21	Resource conservation practices like water-saving or energy-efficient measures are noticeable.	3.69	1.2104
22	Recycling facilities are easily accessible and utilized.	1.65	1.1784
<b>Environmental Purity</b>			
23	Pollution or environmental challenges are minimal during the visit.	0.84	0.5315
24	Measures to manage waste and maintain cleanliness in tourist areas are evident.	3.73	0.8175



The table delineates the perceptions of sustainable tourism among different tourist demographics in Shimla, grounded on the 12 aims of the 'Making Tourism More Sustainable' agenda by UNWTO and UNEP (2005). The mean and standard deviation (SD) values, derived from the responses of 50 respondents via a Likert scale, provide an understanding of tourists' level of agreement or disagreement on various aspects of sustainable tourism. In the Economic Viability domain, the noticeably low mean value for the pricing of tourism services suggests a perception of high costs, while the contrasting higher mean value for local income generation from tourism-related businesses implies a positive economic impact on the local community. Under Local Prosperity, the higher mean values indicate a positive perception of thriving local businesses and tourists' patronage. The Employment domain presents a positive perception regarding the employment of locals in tourism establishments, though the lower mean value for the knowledge and skillfulness of local staff suggests room for improvement. Social Equity displays mixed perceptions, with a lower mean suggesting less visible efforts towards fairness and equal opportunities, but a higher mean indicating a perception of diverse employment within the tourism sector. Visitor Fulfillment shows a balanced perception with tourists generally finding their expectations met and likely recommending Shimla to others. However, Local Control showcases a more neutral to negative perception, especially concerning local community involvement in tourism development. Community Wellbeing and Cultural Richness are perceived positively, particularly noting the observable positive impacts of tourism on local communities and the ability of tourists to engage with the local culture. Physical Integrity also scores high, reflecting well-maintained environments and noticeable conservation efforts. Biological Diversity and Resource Efficiency domains depict mixed perceptions, with notably low mean values suggesting a lack of informational resources or guided tours on biodiversity, and moderate mean values indicating some visibility of resource conservation practices. Environmental Purity presents a stark contrast with a very low mean suggesting negative perception towards environmental challenges, but a higher mean indicating some measures are in place to manage waste and maintain cleanliness.

The SD values reflect the dispersion of responses, with lower SD values suggesting closer agreement among respondents, and higher SD values indicating a wider spread of opinions. In essence, this analysis reveals a multifaceted perception of sustainable tourism in Shimla, aligning with the broader narrative of the paper on Sustainable Tourism Awareness. It underscores areas of strength, such as Community Wellbeing, alongside areas necessitating attention, like Environmental Purity and Biological Diversity, thus providing a comprehensive tourist perspective on sustainable tourism practices in Shimla.

The findings from the tables elucidated in this study echo the results from several previous research endeavors examining sustainable tourism in Shimla and similar hill towns. For instance, a study conducted by Kumar, A., & Raj (2019) assessed tourism sustainability in Shimla, highlighting the popular niche hill towns occupied as tourism destinations. This correlates with the present study's findings where a substantial proportion of tourists showed a moderate level of awareness towards sustainable tourism practices, signifying an existing engagement with the unique offerings of Shimla. Furthermore, a review by Das (2014) stressed the need for a sustainable tourism approach in Shimla, underscoring the environmental deterioration due to tourism activities. This mirrors the concerns raised in this study regarding the environmental purity and biological diversity dimensions where the mean values suggest negative perceptions towards environmental challenges and a lack of informational resources on biodiversity. Moreover, the emphasis on community engagement and local prosperity as seen in the present study aligns with Sharma (2016) exploration on responsible residents and tourists' roles in promoting ecotourism in Shimla. Similarly, an assessment by Batra (2001), on the impact of tourism on Summer Hill, Shimla, utilized a Likert Scale for impact analysis, resonating with the methodological approach adopted in this study for gauging tourists' perception levels. Lastly, Batra (2009) focusing on sustainable tourism in Shimla highlighted environmental challenges and offered recommendations for sustainable tourism development, which corresponds with this study's aim to assess tourists' perception and awareness regarding sustainable tourism and its impacts on social, economic, and environmental aspects. Through a juxtaposition of these findings with previous research, a comprehensive understanding of the sustainable tourism paradigm in Shimla from a tourist perspective is achieved, offering a robust foundation for future policy formulation and sustainable tourism development initiatives.

## CONCLUSION

The research underscores a nuanced understanding of tourist perceptions and awareness levels regarding sustainable tourism in Shimla, revealing both strengths and areas for improvement. The gender disparity and moderate awareness levels highlight the necessity for targeted educational and promotional campaigns to foster greater sustainable tourism practices. The alignment with previous studies reinforces the validity of the findings, offering a solid base for policy recommendations. The identified gaps, especially in Environmental Purity and Biological Diversity, call for a collaborative approach between stakeholders to enhance sustainable tourism initiatives. This investigation paves the way for a more thorough exploration of sustainable tourism strategies that can harmonize the economic, social, and environmental facets of tourism in Shimla, ensuring a balanced and sustainable growth.

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