

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

Tourism Industry is one of the biggest industries in the world generating employment for more than 235 million people and contributing 9.2% to the world's Gross Domestic Product (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2010). Tourism has been regarded as the economic driver of the 21st century due to its multiplier effect of spending to the economy and its relationship with other industries (Saayman and Saayman, 2006). However, tourism activities, if not managed properly, will have negative impact to the social, economic and physical environment.

The impacts of tourism on nature have been studied since the beginning of 1960s (Beech and Chadwick, 2006). It is of top most concern in the world today with regard to the conservation of natural resources. Since nature-based tourism uses the natural environment for the purpose of providing tourism activities for the tourism business, it is of paramount importance for the protected area managers to balance between the conservation of natural resources and generation of tourism recreational activities (Beech and Chadwick, 2006).

Furthermore, places such as Bhutan, Nepal, and some part of India, Pakistan and Tibet, located in the fragile Himalayan region, are frequented by many trekkers and mountaineers, (Nyaupane and Chhetri, 2009), resulting to negative impact to the environment. Regarding Bhutan, it is a small country with land area of 38394 square kilometers and population of just over half a million people. Even though tourism in Bhutan is at infant stage, it is steadily mounting its pace. Except for 2009, the tourist arrival in Bhutan was seen a gradual increase. The arrival of tourist in the year 2008 increased by 31% as compared to previous year (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2010).

The main reason for tourist to visit Bhutan is Nature (Asian Tourism Guide, 2010). There are six national parks in the country, namely: Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Park, Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park, Thrumbsingla National Park, Royal Manas National Park, Saktang Wildlife Sanctuary, Bumdeling Wildlife

Sanctuary. These protected areas, used by the tourism industry for tourism activities, have become an important element of the tourism experience.

The increasing trend of tourism and the reason for the tourist arrival indicate a threat to the natural environment of the country as the tourism activities involved in providing the touristic product and services result to detrimental effect on the environment, which is also a home to a great deal of biodiversity. On the other hand, the policy of the government is guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, in which preservation and sustainable use of environment is one of its strategies (Thinley, 2007).

Due to the above reasons, this thesis is written to create a model of good practice of sustainable tourism that can be applied to Phobjikha Valley in Bhutan. The valley is located on the western slopes of the Black Mountains adjoining the Jigme Singye Wangchuk National Park (Lonely Planet, 2009). The very interesting characteristic of this valley is that the endangered black necked cranes migrate to this region during winter. Furthermore, there are a lot other wildlife, such as wild boars, bears, leopards and others in the nearby mountains. Therefore, the valley is an important wildlife conservation area in the kingdom. The valley falls in the buffer zone of Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. This region is chosen for this thesis as it is the most suitable area to study the impact of tourism to the natural environment due to the flow of tourist to the area.

Therefore, the research is carried out using four case studies of protected areas, they are: The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area in Australia, Kuscenneti National Park in Turkey, Sagarmatha National Park, a World Heritage Site in Nepal and Nanda Devi & Valley of Flower Park, a World Heritage site in India. These cases are thoroughly analyzed and compared to extract the best management practices for Phobjikha Valley.

Concise Statement of Research Problem

The purpose of this thesis is to examine good management practice of protected areas in The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area in Australia, Kuscenneti National Park in Turkey, Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal and Nanda Devi & the Valley of Flower National Park in India.

It seeks to establish how these case studies minimized the negative impacts to environment and how the best sustainable practices can be applied to Bhutan context to ensure minimal negative impacts as tourism activity grows.

Project Objectives

The Objectives of this research are:

1. To find out how the case studies sites managed to minimize the negative impacts of tourism to environment.
2. To frame a model for management of sustainable tourism in the protected area.

Scope of the Study

1. The research is conducted to examine good management practice in the protected areas in The Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area in Australia, Kuscenneti National Park in Turkey, Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal and Nanda Devi & the Valley of Flowers National Park in India.
2. In-depth analysis of these case studies is done to find out how the protected areas managed to minimize the negative impact to the environment.
3. The focus of the study is the application of the results of the analysis to Phobjikha Valley and its surrounding area in Bhutan

Definition

Protected Area: “A protected area is defined as an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and of natural and associated cultural resources, managed through legal or other effective means” (United Nations Environment Programme, 2010)

Nature-based Tourism: According to Rinne and Saastamoinen (2005, p. 90), Nature-based tourism is the phenomenon of visiting those places by the tourist where the natural facilities and characteristics are most important attractions, and tourism activities are located and executed in natural environment.

Sustainability Tourism: “Tourism which is developed and maintained in the area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human

and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and wellbeing of other activities and processes” (Butler, 1999 as cited in Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010, p. 117).

Environment: natural environment (flora, fauna, land, air, water) in the protected area.

Basic Assumption

There is evidence that increased tourism activity can have negative impacts on the natural environment so it is important to set up guidelines to minimize damage in a recently emerging destination, especially Bhutan.

Limitation

All the case studies taken for the thesis are case studies from countries other than Bhutan. Furthermore, the research is based on the information sought from the literatures such as case studies, journals and books, which have their own limitations. They can, however, offer guidance to the formulation of good practice. Lastly, a very small conservation area is taken as a focus site.

Practical Significance

The result of the finding is of great importance for a country like Bhutan, which is an emerging nature-based tourist destination with its vulnerable and fragile natural environment. Therefore, the outcome of this project will be of help to the following stakeholders:

1. Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB): it is an autonomous organization under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Bhutan with its mandate to formulate and implement tourism Policy and Planning. Furthermore, the objective of Tourism council of Bhutan is guided by the principle of sustainability. Therefore, the results of this finding would help the council to provide guidelines to the tourism stakeholder as to how the protected areas should be used for the business.

2. Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators (ABTO): All the tour operators are the member of this organization. With the results of these findings, they can encourage the tour operator to sustainably use the protected areas.

3. Guide Association of Bhutan: Guides are important player in the conservation of the natural resources, as they are the one who are with the tourist all the time. This association can sensitize and educate the guide on sustainable use of natural resources in the protected areas.

4. Hotel Association of Bhutan: The hotels require the environmental awareness so that they can also contribute to preservation of environment.

5. Local Government: With the help of the local government, the local community will be informed about their contribution for sustainable use of the resources in the protected area

6. National Environment Commission: It is an autonomous organization of Royal Government of Bhutan with the responsibility of environmental policy making in Bhutan. The result of the research will be of great help to this organization in formulating the environmental policy for the protected areas.

7. Royal Society for Conservation of Nature (RSPN): They are non-profit environmental organization in Bhutan with the task of conservation of environment. The findings of this research shall be of additional information for future planning to protect the nature.

8. Provide a valuable case study of how an emerging destination can plan, manage and market a sustainable nature based tourism product. This will inform further academic research.

Conceptual Framework

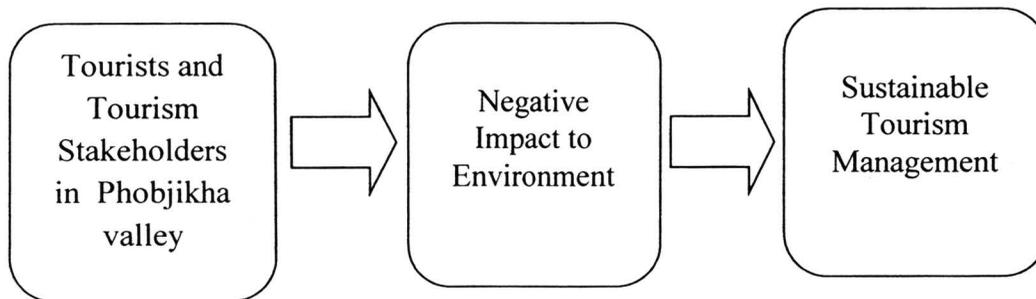


Figure 1 The Conceptual Framework of Research

It has been noticed that tourism and hospitality industry in Bhutan is gaining its pace and has been contributing to the country's economy using the natural resources as base. However, at the same time, it has been observed that the activities of tourism have a negative impact to environment. Due to this reason, an extensive review of the literature was done to gather information on the management of Nature-based tourism area. The observation of the current situation in Bhutan and the information gathered from the literature review has influenced on the research question.

There are various issues pertaining to nature-based tourism such as diverse stakeholders and negative impact of tourist to flora, fauna, water and land, disposal waste and pollution of air, water and aesthetic. Hence, the answer to all these issues boils down to sustainable tourism practices in the tourism destination, in this case is Bhutan.

The idea of sustainability of tourism shall help combating against the negative impact of tourism on environment. Furthermore, the collaborative approach of stakeholders eases managing the natural resources in the protected area. Not only that, it becomes a marketing tool for attracting more visitor to the area resulting in benefiting the industry and the local community. Finally, the sustainable tourism practice shall support the country's economy as a whole.

The model of sustainable tourism management practice that is designed from this research can be used by other regions also to protect environment from tourism activities. Moreover, the thesis provides a base for future research in the nature-based tourism sector.

Background of Phobjikha Valley

Phobjikha Valley is located in Wandue Phordhang, one of the districts of Bhutan. It is a buffer zone of Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. It is located at an elevation of 2900 m. The animals that are mostly available in this area are wild boars, Himalayan black bear, red fox and leopard. The valley provides home to 121 species of birds and 50 species of trees (Royal Society for Conservation of Nature, 2008). This valley is a winter home of the endangered black-necked crane. There are 4716 residents in the area, and agriculture is the main sector for sustenance. The valley has an area of 402.9 square Km as shown in Figure 2. The highest elevation is 3380 m and the highest camp area is at 3330m.

The valley provides a very good trail for walking and trekking. The trekking activities in this region are favorable throughout the year except for the month of July and August. Apart from trekking activities, the valley provides other activities such as cultural tour, bird watching and mountain biking. Tourist arrive in the valley has been noticed as a gradual increase every year. The tourist bed-night in the year 2008 was 6173 as compared to 3527 in the year 2007 (Wangmo, 2010). The infrastructures developed in the valley to cater the services to the tourist have detrimental effect to the overall environment. There are two hotel chains in the valley apart from other farm houses, namely: Aman Resorts and Dewachen Hotel.

To protect the black-necked crane, the management has developed the observation hall with glass windows for watching the crane. Even zoning has been done for walking in the area. The most of benefit out of the tourism business is reaped by the tour operators, who are not based in the valley; hence the local community of the valley does not depend on tourism, instead they depend on agriculture for sustenance. With regard to the conservation of the protected area, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature has been taking the responsibility to preserve the area and safeguard the biodiversity since 80s. The responsible tourism, where the tourists are aware of the protection of environment, is practiced (Wangmo, 2010). Furthermore, the guided tour and trek organized by the tour operator contribute to protection of environment.

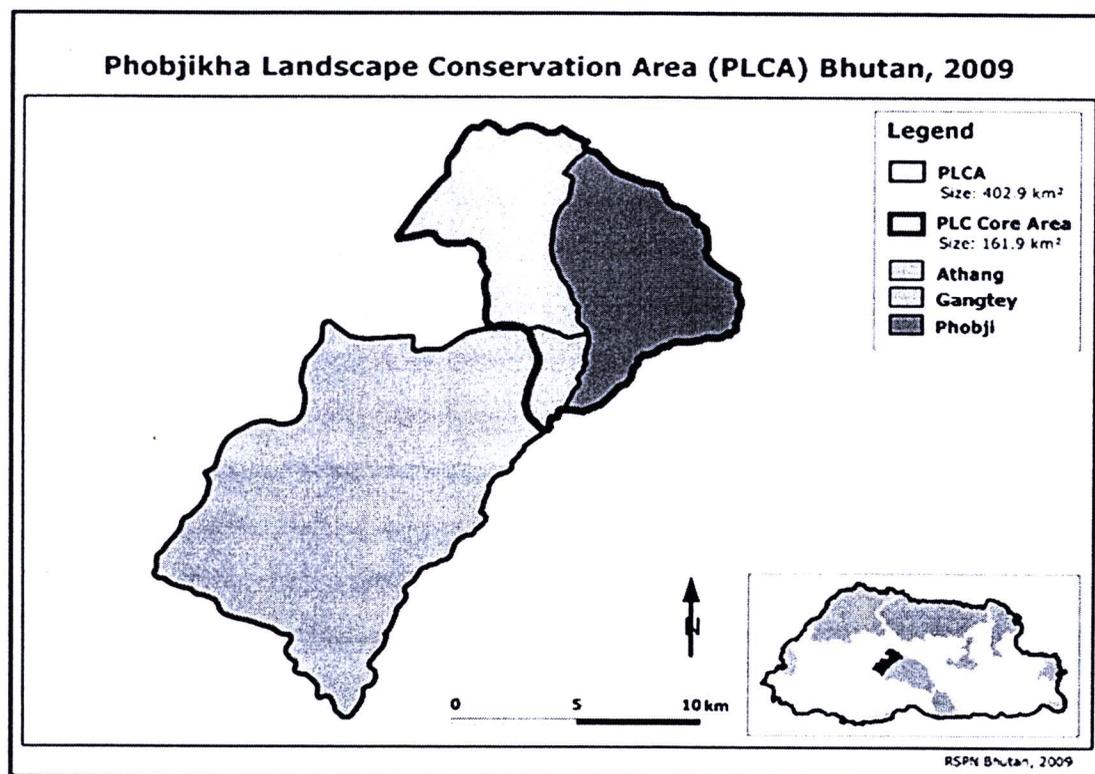


Figure 2 Phobjikha Landscape Conservation Area

Source: Royal Society for Protection of Nature, 2008

Table 1 highlights the background of the protected area in Bhutan. There are seven major protected areas in Bhutan. Phobjikha valley, even though is the smallest one with 402.9 sq. km, is the most popular tourist destination in Bhutan.

Table 1 Overview of National Parks in Bhutan

National Parks	Area	Flora & Funa
1 Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park	1300 sq. km	Mature fir, pine and other types of broadleaf forests musk deer, Himalayan black bear , golden langur, clouded leopard, red panda and the Royal Bengal tiger, 391 bird species
2 TrumshingLa National Park	768 sq. km	Alpine to subtropical broadleaf forest, rare plants snow leopards, tigers, red pandas 341 species of birds
3 Royal Manas National Park	1000 sq. Km (www,2009)	900 types of plants Royal Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, greater one-horned rhinoceros, clouded leopard, Himalayan black bear, dolphin and pangolin, golden langur 365 species of birds
4 Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Park	4349 sq. km	blue poppy, edelweiss, orchids, rhododendrons e snow leopard, takin, tiger, black bears and red panda
5 Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary	1545 sq.km	Snow leopard, Royal Bengal tiger and red panda. Black-necked cranes & butterflies:
6 Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary	650 sq. km	Snow leopards, red pandas, Himalayan black bear, barking deer, Himalayan red fox, the hoary-bellied Himalayan squirrel and Yeti. Assamese macaw, blood pheasant, grey backed shrike, grey headed woodpecker. Alpine meadow, temperate forest, blue poppy, rhododendrons.
7 Phobjikha Valley	402.9 sq.km	Barking deer, wild boars, Himalayan black bears, leopards and red foxes winter home for 260 cranes

Source: Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2010; Royal Society for Conservation of Nature, 2007