



ISSN: 0975-833X

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### A CASE STUDY OF AN EMERGING TOURIST DESTINATION AT NAMCHI IN SOUTH SIKKIM

\*Rai, Y. K., Lepcha, J. and Rai, L. K.

G. B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development Sikkim Unit, Pangthang, East Sikkim, India

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2015  
Received in revised form  
22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2015  
Accepted 08<sup>th</sup> March, 2015  
Published online 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2015

##### Key words:

Tourist, Tourism, Siddhesvara Dham,  
Samdruptse.

#### ABSTRACT

Namchi is fast evolving into a major tourist destination in Sikkim with the coming up Siddhesvara Dham and Guru Padamasambhava statue at Samdruptse. Total tourist arrival (domestic and international) at Siddhesvara Dham was recorded at 162,747 in the year 2013 and 242,154 in 2014 touching the growth rate at 33 %. International tourists who visited Siddhesvara Dham increased to 8,478 in the year 2014 as compared to 2,882 in 2013 showing growth rate of 66 %. Similarly, domestic tourist arrivals at Samdruptse in the month of May were 15,400, 17,300 and 19,114 in 2012, 2013 and 2014, respectively, with the growth rate of 11 % from 2012 to 2013, and 9.5 % increase from 2013 to 2014. Month of May carried the highest number of tourist load per year at both (Siddhesvara Dham and Guru Padamasambhava statue) tourist destinations. Prevailing tourism activity is observed to be playing a key role in preservation of cultural heritage and also providing direct and indirect employment opportunities to local people.

Copyright © 2015 Rai et al. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

#### INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage is a travel made by people to visit sacred places and other location of religious importance in accordance to an individual's belief and faith and in search of spiritual significance, solace and enlightenment. The locations are normally associated with spiritual importance such as birth or death place of saints, place of religious awakening, sites where miracles were observed or performed, locations where Gods/holy spirits were believed to exist, place where spiritual powers were seen, etc. Such locations of religious importance are time-honoured with temples that devotees visit for their own spiritual journey as well as to pay homage. An individual or group of people who use to make such voyage is/are called pilgrim/s (Cleft *et al.*, 1996). Present pilgrimages generally differ from those found in historical records because the pilgrims nowadays want to use modern way of transportation as well as stay in hotels (Vorzsak and Gut, 2009). In the recent years pilgrimage tourism is becoming one of the reasons for tourists to visit Sikkim and it spells out a sound prospect for the region. There are a number of pilgrimage tourist spot in the state such as Guru Padamasambhava statue, Buddha Park, Chen-Regi statue and Monasteries. New and unique pilgrimage destination such as Siddhesvara Dham, Sai Mandir and many temples in Sikkim cater to a wide range of pilgrimage tourism in Sikkim. Sikkim attracts a substantial number of tourists and the trend is obviously increasing. As a matter of fact the numbers of visitors outnumber the total population of the state bringing in a unique scenario as well as newer challenges in

tourism sector. The established tourist destinations are so far limited to Gangtok and Tsomgo, at north Sikkim (Gurudongmar, Lachen, Lachung, Yumey Samdong, Yumthang) and Dzongri at west Sikkim. The fast emerging tourist destination at Namchi (south Sikkim) has successfully carved a niche in the state tourism map and has proved its worth in regulating the tourist influx at other tourist destinations which usually overflow with touring visitors. This paper tries to bring into light the prevailing situation at Namchi which is in the process of transformation into a new tourist destination in Sikkim.

#### Objective of the Study

- To study the tourism activity in and around Namchi
- To analyze the current situation of tourist flow in newly developed tourism spots

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the present study, secondary data has been used in order to study the tourist inflow. These were collected from the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim. All the Figures and Tables were prepared on the basis of secondary data provided by the tourism department. Other related information has been collected from published papers and books. ArcGIS 9.3 software has been used in order to prepare location map. Satellite image depicting Namchi and surrounding pilgrimage spots were obtained and downloaded from Google Earth.

\*Corresponding author: Rai, Y. K. Email: [raiyk@rediffmail.com](mailto:raiyk@rediffmail.com)  
G. B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development  
Sikkim Unit, Pangthang, East Sikkim, India.

**Study Area**

Namchi is the administrative headquarter of south district of Sikkim. It is geographically located at 27.17°N 88.35°E with an altitude of about 1,675 m above the sea level, and is situated at a distance of 78 km from the state capital Gangtok. It is well connected with roads to the nearby towns of Sikkim and the West Bengal. According to the census of India 2011, Namchi town has a total population of 12,190. It has total males population of about 52 % where as total females population in the town constitutes 48 %. Namchi town has an average literacy rate of 78 % which is higher than the national average, i.e., 59.5 %. Literacy rate of total male population in the Namchi town is 81 % and the female literacy rate is 73 %.

The majority of the populace of Namchi town are Hindu and Buddhist, furthermore Nepali language is dominant in the town although Hindi language is also understood by the people. The local population is a mix of people of Sikkimese origin and other migrated people from areas including Darjeeling and Nepal. Namchi town receives heavy rainfall during monsoon season from the month of July to mid-September. The weather for most of the year is pleasant at Namchi barring the cold in the winter season.

**Tourism in Namchi town**

Namchi town has variety of attractions in terms of tourist destinations. However, in recent years pilgrimage tourist spots

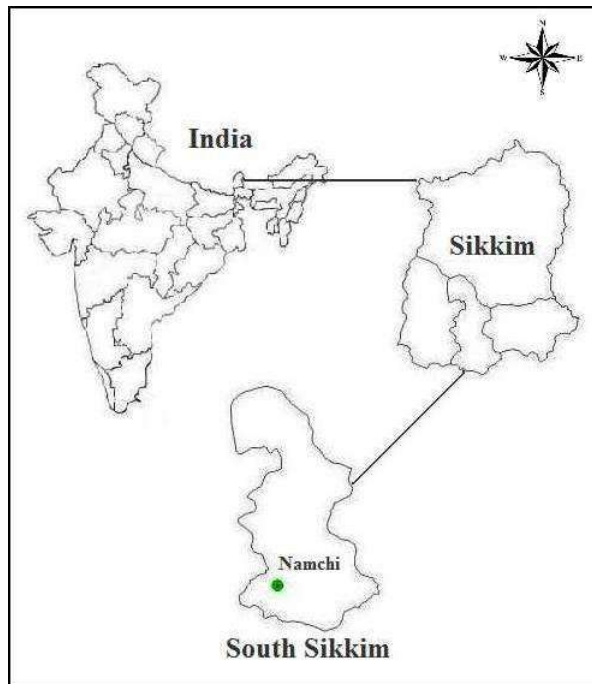


Fig.1. Location map of the study area

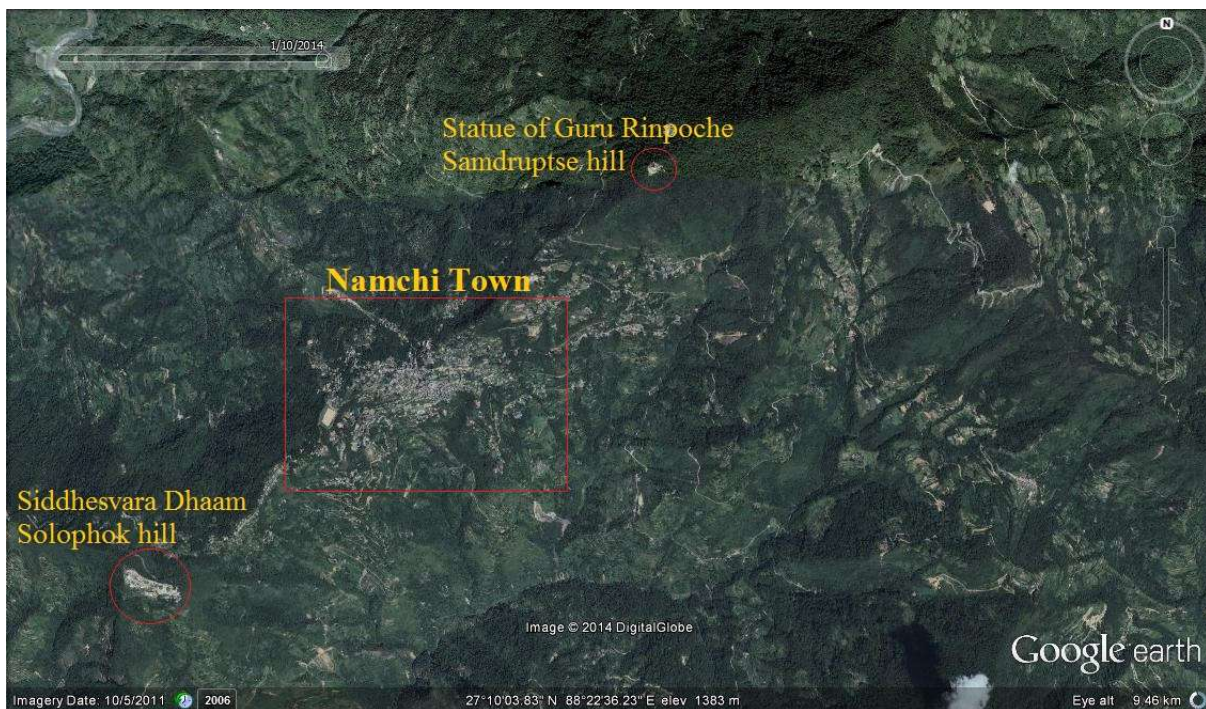
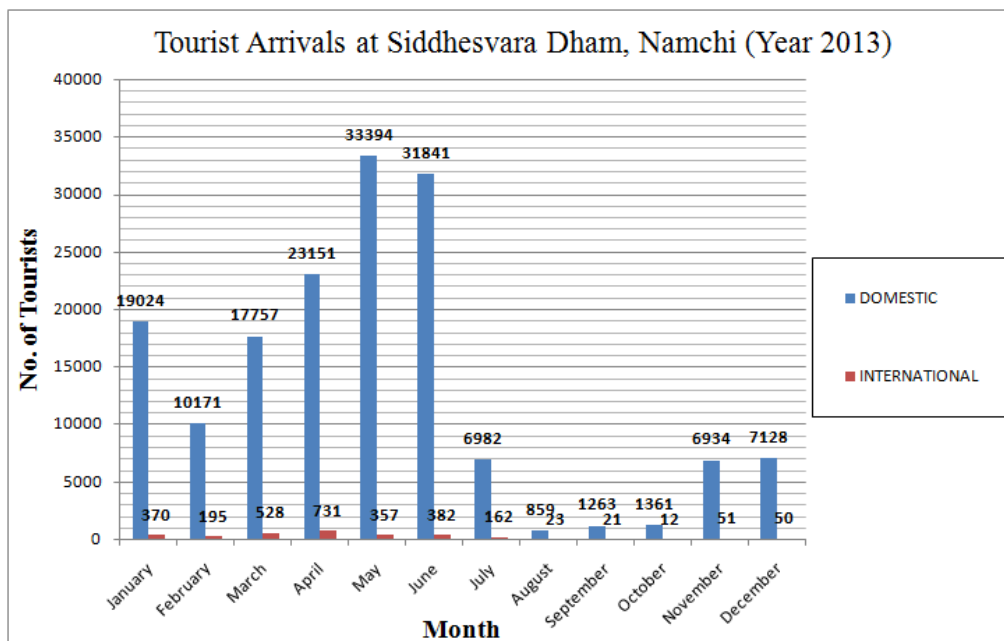


Fig.2. Image showing Namchi town and Pilgrimage tourist spots around Namchi. (Image Source: Google Earth)



Fig.3. Siddhesvara Dham, Namchi



(Source: Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim)

Fig.4. Tourist Arrivals at Siddhesvara Dham, Solophok

around Namchi town are becoming key attractions for tourists. Furthermore, Namchi also offers panoramic view of the Darjeeling, Kalimpong towns of West Bengal and mountains in the Khangchendzonga range. Tourism in Namchi is boosted with the coming up of the Siddhesvara Dham at Solophok hill top. Every year the town attracts thousands of visitors from different part of the country.

#### Siddhesvara Dham

Siddhesvara Dham is a pilgrim-cum-cultural heritage complex which was built with the aim of encouraging pilgrimage

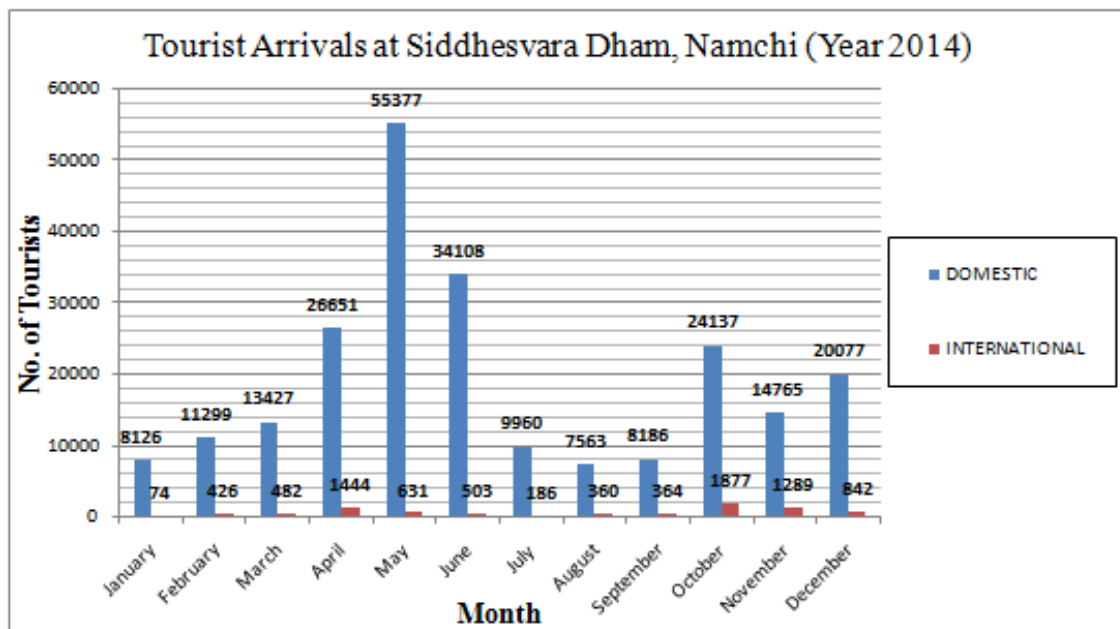
tourism in the state and to provide commercial opportunities for the local public. The project was completed almost after six and half years and the Dham was inaugurated on 8 November 2011. Siddhesvara Dham a unique pilgrim centre covers an area of 28.96 ha on Solophok hill top about 5 km away from the Namchi town. The pilgrim centre has a main temple “Shiv Mandir” on which 108 foot tall Statue of Lord Shiva is built on a sitting posture. The pilgrim centre also has replicas of the twelve Jyotirlingas placed around main temple, viz., Kedaresvar, Ghumesvara, Somanatha, Mallikarjuna, Mahakala, Omkaresvara, Baidyanatha, Bhimasankara, Setubandha Ramesvaram, Shri Nesvara, Visvesvara and Shri

Tryambakesvara. The replicas of four sacred Dhams of the Hindus in different part of India namely Jagannath, Dwarka, Rameshwaram and Badrinath were also replicated under one roof at Siddhesvara Dham. The pilgrim centre also has Sai Temple and 18 foot tall statue of Kirateshwar hunter incarnation of Lord Shiva. The Siddhesvara Dham offers other facilities such as car parking, stalls, VIP Guest house, auditorium, cafeteria, musical fountain and prayer hall. There is an accommodation facility for the visitors or devotees at Yatri Niwas within the complex.

### Tourist inflow at Siddhesvara Dham

It was observed from the data that Siddhesvara Dham a unique pilgrimage centre attracts thousands of visitors from all over the country. Accessibility, pleasant climate, accommodation facility and scenic beauty of the place enhance the tourist spot. The Dham plays a key role in terms of tourism in the town and also providing employment opportunity for the local people.

The visitor's data from Tab.1 reveals that, the number of domestic tourists at Siddhesvara Dham increased to 233,676 in 2014 as compared to 159,865 in 2013. It gives a clear view of potential of the tourist spot. The site is not only visited by the domestic tourists alone. The international tourists also visit this place, although the total numbers of foreigners were less than that of domestic tourist arrivals. The number of international tourists who visited Siddhesvara Dham increased to 8,478 in the year 2014 as compared to 2,882 in 2013 with a growth rate of 66 %. The total number of tourists (domestic and international) was 162,747 in the year 2013 and the number increased to 242,154 in 2014 with a growth rate of 33 % per cent. Breaking a year into quarters, i.e., from January to March, April to June, July to September and October to December and also comparing the total tourist visits quarterly it reveals that the total number of tourists or devotees visiting Siddhesvara Dham were recorded highest in April to June with a total visit of 89,856 in 2013 and the visitors increased to 118,714 in the year 2014 with a growth rate of 24.3 %. On the other hand the minimum tourist visits were witnessed in July to September with 9,310 and 26,619 visitors in 2013 and 2014, respectively.



(Source: Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim)

Fig.5. Tourist Arrivals at Siddhesvara Dham, Solophok

Table 1. Domestic and International tourist arrivals at Siddhesvara Dham, Solophok

Sl. No.	Month	Domestic Tourist Arrivals		International Tourist Arrivals	
		2013	2014	2013	2014
1	January	19024	8126	370	74
2	February	10171	11299	195	426
3	March	17757	13427	528	482
4	April	23151	26651	731	1444
5	May	33394	55377	357	631
6	June	31841	34108	382	503
7	July	6982	9960	162	186
8	August	859	7563	23	360
9	September	1263	8186	21	364
10	October	1361	24137	12	1877
11	November	6934	14765	51	1289
12	December	7128	20077	50	842
Total Arrivals		159865	233676	2882	8478

(Source: Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim)

The Figs. 4 and 5 also clarify that the month of April, May and June receives more tourists as compared to other months in a year.

### Statue of Guru Padamasambhava, Samdruptse

The word Samdruptse came from local Bhutia language meaning 'wish-fulfilling hill'. It is situated at a distance of 75 km from the capital city, Gangtok and about 7 km far from the Namchi town. It is a short distance of about 2 km uphill breaking away from Gangtok route. Samdruptse is a popular pilgrimage centre in the state and is deeply revered by the local people of Sikkim. On Samdruptse hill top, stands a huge 135 foot high statue of Guru Padamasambhava also known as Guru Rimpoche. It is the highest statue of Guru Padamasambhava in the world. It took nearly three years to complete this statue which was finally completed in February 2004. Each year devotees from Darjeeling and Kalimpong of West Bengal, Bhutan and Nepal visit the place to attend Vajra Guru Dhungdrup ceremony to be part of the sacred mantra recitation.

### Tourists inflow at Samdruptse

From the Tab.2, it is evident that the total number of international tourists who visited the place in the year 2012, 2013 and 2014 were 1270, 1072 and 976, respectively. The Table shows a declining trend in numbers of international tourist arrivals. It also reveals that there was a slight increase of 94,908 in domestic tourist arrivals in the year 2014 as compared to 2013.

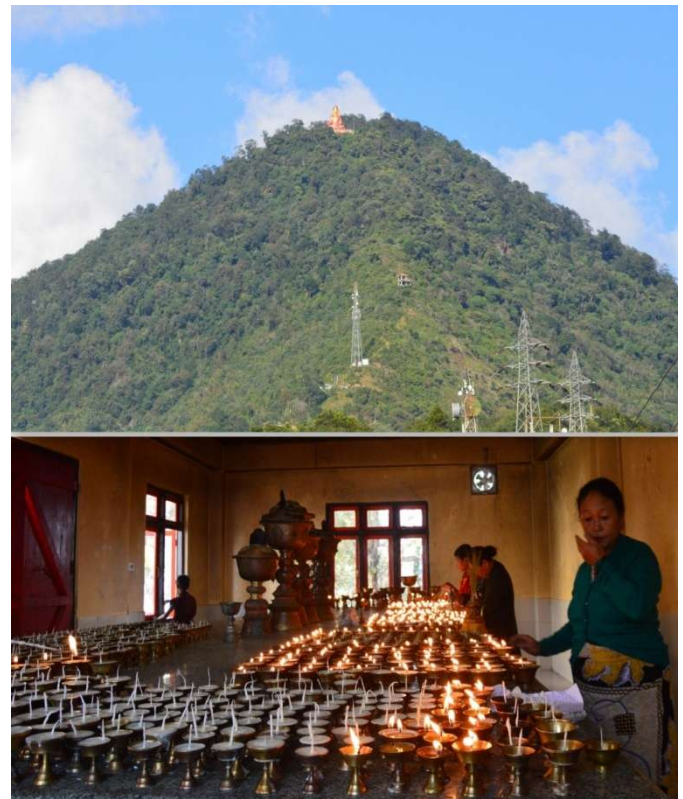


Fig.6. Statue of Guru Padamasambhava on Samdruptse hill (top photo) and Local Buddhist devotees offering light, Choimee (bottom photo)

Table 2. Domestic and International tourist arrivals at Statue of Guru Padamasambhava, Samdruptse  
(Source: Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim)

Sl. No.	Month	Domestic Tourist Arrivals			International Tourist Arrivals		
		2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014
1	January	10313	8500	8044	65	70	47
2	February	8300	5500	4842	110	80	67
3	March	5210	7100	8525	150	130	153
4	April	9500	11000	8665	165	152	176
5	May	15400	17300	19114	120	118	148
6	June	12800	14000	11866	40	50	34
7	July	5800	4100	4584	50	35	16
8	August	4300	2500	2990	50	115	10
9	September	3500	3600	3191	100	70	09
10	October	8500	9174	13480	250	00	158
11	November	5700	4506	1168	90	163	96
12	December	10500	1863	8439	80	89	62
Total Arrivals		99823	89143	94908	1270	1072	976

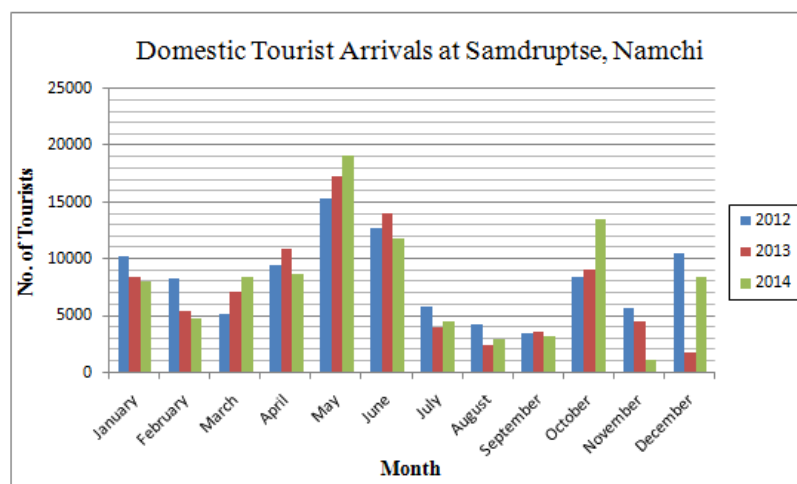
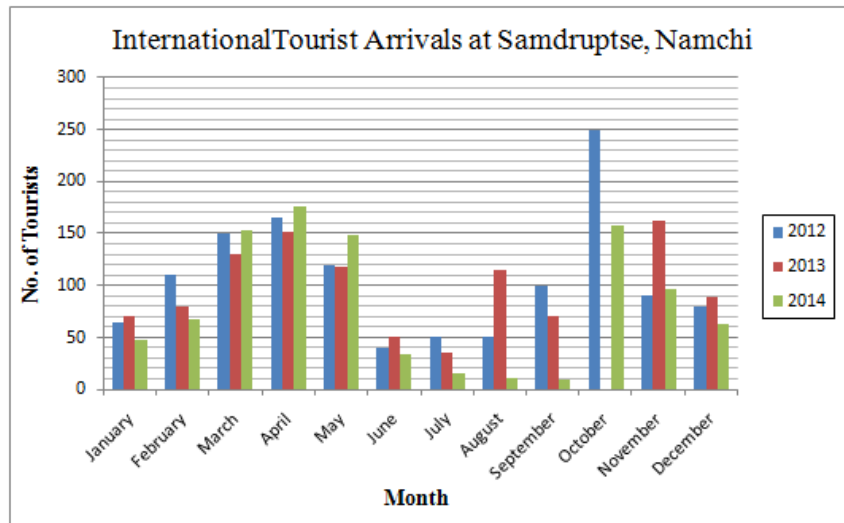


Fig.7. Domestic tourist arrivals at Statue of Guru Padamasambhava, Samdruptse  
(Source: Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim)



**Fig.8. International tourist arrivals at Statue of Guru Padamasambhava, Samdruptse**  
(Source: Tourism and Civil Aviation Department. Government of Sikkim)

It is clear from the Fig. 7 that domestic tourist arrivals in the month of May were increased over the year with the total number of tourists 15,400, 17,300, 19,114 in 2012, 2013 and 2014, respectively, with the growth rate of 11 % per cent from 2012 to 2013, and 9.5 per cent increase in number from 2013 to 2014. Moreover, rise and fall of the numbers were recorded over the years except in the month of March, May and October. From the Fig. 8, it reveals that the international tourist numbers were not satisfactory as compared to the domestic tourists flow at this destination, so it is clear from the numbers that the destination is mostly visited by the domestic tourists. Samdruptse is a Buddhist pilgrim centre as a result, the place is predominantly visited by the local Buddhist people from all over the districts.

### Conclusion

The present study finds that the pilgrimage spots around Namchi town are the main attraction for the tourists, especially Siddhesvara Dham and Samdruptse and the town has a good potential for pilgrimage tourism. These pilgrimage tourist centres play a key role in preservation of cultural heritage of the state and the nation and also providing direct and indirect employment opportunities to local people. There were other pilgrimage tourist spots in Namchi town, namely, Sai Mandir and Monasteries (Buddhist temple) which is also accountable for the attraction of tourists in the town. State Government has taken initiatives to boost tourism in Namchi by introducing ropeway facilities, which connects town with Samdruptse through the rock garden. This type of supporting facilities should be increased in the area and also for providing accommodation facilities, because during the peak tourist season these accommodation facilities are inadequate in numbers as compared to the total arrivals in the town. Tourism activity mostly depends on the accommodation facility available at the destination and it is considered as the most important aspect.

### Acknowledgement

Authors are grateful to Dr. P.P. Dhyani, Director, G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development, for availing all kind of institutional facilities. We are thankful to Mr. D.D. Rai, Tourism Department, Govt. of Sikkim, Namchi, South Sikkim. This study is a part of the In-House Project 01 "Eco-tourism as a potential tool for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods in Indian Himalayan Region: Sikkim Perspective".

### REFERENCES

- Anonymous (2012). Siddhesvara Dham becomes hit with locals, Tourists. ENVIS Centre Sikkim on Ecotourism, Newsletter, pp.12, Vol. 10 No. I, ISSN: 0974-6072.
- Anonymous (2004). Samdruptse a hit with tourists even before official inauguration. ENVIS Centre Sikkim on Ecotourism, Newsletter, pp.11, Vol. 3 No. 2, ISSN: 0974-6072.
- Cleft, Jean Darby, Cleft and Wallace, 1996. The Archetype of Pilgrimage: Outer Action with Inner Meaning. The Paulist Press. ISBN 0-8091-3599-X.
- Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2010. Tourism Department.
- Vorzsak, M. and Gut, C. M. 2009. A Strategic Prognosis of Religious Tourism in Romania. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Cultural Heritage and Tourism, pp. 29-34, WSEAS Press, Rhodes. Available at [www.wseas.us/elibrary/conferences/2009/rodos/CUHT/CUHT03.pdf](http://www.wseas.us/elibrary/conferences/2009/rodos/CUHT/CUHT03.pdf)
- [www.sikkimtourism.gov.in/Webforms/General/PlacesOfInterest/Samdrupste.aspx](http://www.sikkimtourism.gov.in/Webforms/General/PlacesOfInterest/Samdrupste.aspx)

\*\*\*\*\*