

## **MOUNTAIN TOURISM CHALLENGES AND CONSEQUENCES: A CASE STUDY OF SHIMLA**

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### **Abstract:**

Tourism in Shimla, known as the “Queen of Hills” and the former summer capital during British rule, is emerging as a major source of growth in terms of economic development, cultural diversity, infrastructure expansion, and heritage conservation. However, this rapid growth has brought with it several negative consequences, such as the degradation of tourism quality and increasing environmental stress. Shimla's natural beauty is delicate and highly vulnerable to damage that may become irreversible if not addressed promptly. The city is expanding rapidly with rising population, construction activities, and the entry of external businesses, leading to traffic congestion, overcrowding, pollution, and inadequate sanitation facilities. These factors not only affect the local environment but also reduce the overall experience for tourists. Therefore, there is an urgent need for comprehensive planning and the implementation of sustainable tourism practices. Effective policies must focus on controlling unregulated development, promoting eco-friendly solutions, managing tourist capacity, and ensuring basic amenities are maintained. This study, based on secondary research, highlights the importance of responsible tourism, environmental protection, infrastructure improvements, and the active involvement of both government and local communities. By addressing these concerns through collective efforts and meaningful feedback from tourists and residents, Shimla can continue to thrive as a safe, comfortable, and sustainable tourist destination.

Key word: Sustainable tourism, Environmental protection, Eco-friendly solutions.

### **Introduction:**

Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economic sectors, and in India, Shimla stands out as one of the most famous hill stations, attracting thousands of visitors every year. Nestled in the north-western Himalayas, Shimla is the capital city of Himachal Pradesh and has long been celebrated for its natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural charm. The city's cool climate, lush green hills, and panoramic views of snow-capped mountains make it an ideal escape from the heat of the plains, especially during the summer months. In addition to its natural beauty, Shimla boasts a well-developed tourism infrastructure, including quality accommodation, road and rail connectivity, and a range of recreational facilities.

The weather in Shimla is one of its greatest assets. Summers are mild, with temperatures averaging around 30°C, while winters are cold and often snowy, with temperatures dropping as low as -3°C. This variation allows for both summer vacations and winter sports tourism, including skiing and ice-skating. The city lies between the latitudinal range of 30.45° to 31.44° North and the longitudinal range of 77.00° to 78.19° East. Its elevation ranges from

984 feet to 19,685 feet, providing a diverse topography. The town is spread across seven scenic hills: Jakhoo Hill, Bantony Hill, Summer Hill, Observatory Hill, Prospect Hill, Inverarm Hill, and Elysium Hill. Each of these hills offers unique views and experiences for tourists.

One of the key reasons for Shimla's popularity is its historical and architectural legacy. During the British colonial period, Shimla served as the summer capital of British India, and this legacy is still visible in its well-preserved colonial architecture. Iconic buildings like the Viceregal Lodge (now the Indian Institute of Advanced Study), Christ Church, the Ridge, and Gaiety Theatre attract history lovers and architecture enthusiasts from around the world. The Mall Road, Shimla's bustling shopping and dining hub, is a favorite among tourists for leisurely walks and cultural interaction.

Culturally, Shimla offers a fusion of traditional Himachali lifestyle with modern urban comforts. Festivals like the Summer Festival and Ice Skating Carnival reflect the region's vibrant culture and attract large crowds. According to the 2001 census, the total population of Shimla was approximately 144,975, although this number has increased in recent years. The literacy rate is high, and the hospitality sector plays a vital role in the city's economy.

The growth of transportation facilities has also significantly boosted tourism in Shimla. The Kalka-Shimla Railway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a major tourist attraction in itself, offering a scenic ride through hills, tunnels, and bridges. In addition to this, road transport has improved with better connectivity to major cities like Delhi, Chandigarh, and Manali. There are frequent buses, taxis, and even helicopter services to cater to various types of tourists.

In conclusion, Shimla continues to be one of India's most sought-after tourist destinations due to its favorable weather, stunning landscapes, rich colonial history, and improved infrastructure. Whether one is looking for peace in the lap of nature, a glimpse into history, or adventure sports in the mountains, Shimla has something to offer for every kind of traveler. With responsible tourism practices and sustainable development, Shimla is poised to remain a jewel in India's tourism crown for years to come.

### Major Tourist Attractions around Shimla

Shimla is surrounded by numerous picturesque locations that enhance its appeal as a prime hill station and make it a hub for both short and extended tourist excursions. One such destination is **Mashobra**, located just 12 kilometers from Shimla. This serene and lush green suburb is known for its thick oak and pine forests. It is an ideal place for eco-tourism, offering nature trails, apple orchards, and colonial-era cottages. The area is also home to the famous presidential retreat which is used by the President of India during summer.

Traveling 23 kilometers further, one reaches **Naldehra**, a tranquil destination known for its scenic beauty and the historic **Naldehra Golf Course**, established during the British era by Lord Curzon. Surrounded by deodar forests, the course sits at an elevation of 2,200 meters and is among the oldest in India. Naldehra is also famous for horse riding trails and a spiritual ambiance provided by the local temples.

**Tattapani**, around 51 kilometers from Shimla, is famous for its **hot sulphur springs**, which are believed to have medicinal and healing properties, especially for skin and joint ailments. Located along the banks of the **Satluj River**, it is also a hotspot for river rafting and fishing.

The picturesque setting, combined with therapeutic bathing, makes it a favorite among both religious pilgrims and adventure seekers.

Just 16 kilometers from Shimla is **Kufri**, one of the best-known skiing resorts in India. During winter, its snow-covered slopes attract skiing and snowboarding enthusiasts from across the country. Apart from winter sports, Kufri is known for the **Himalayan Nature Park**, which houses rare Himalayan wildlife such as the snow leopard, Himalayan monal (state bird of Himachal Pradesh), and Tibetan wolves. The Mahasu Peak in Kufri, accessible by horseback, offers panoramic views of the Badrinath and Kedarnath ranges.

Another serene destination is **Fagu**, located 22 kilometers from Shimla. This small village, perched at an altitude of about 2,500 meters, offers terraced fields, dense fog during winters, and distant views of snow-capped mountains. Fagu is popular among honeymooners and nature lovers who seek a quiet retreat away from the more commercial areas.

**Narkanda**, about 64 kilometers from Shimla, is situated at an altitude of 2,700 meters. It is famous for its ski slopes and apple orchards. In winter, Narkanda becomes a skiing paradise with basic facilities for beginners as well as trained skiers. In summer, it offers incredible trekking routes, including a trek to **Hatu Peak**, which offers a spectacular 360-degree view of the surrounding snow-clad Himalayas.

Located 45 kilometers from Shimla is **Chail**, once the summer capital of the princely state of Patiala. It is famous for the **Chail Palace**, built by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh after he was banished from Shimla by the British. Chail is also home to a **wildlife sanctuary**, where one can spot Himalayan black bears, barking deer, and pheasants. The town is particularly famous for having the **world's highest cricket and polo ground**, located at an altitude of 2,444 meters.

Beyond these short trips, tourists can also plan **overnight journeys** from Shimla. A scenic route includes traveling through **Tattapani** to the quiet towns of **Chindi**, **Rampur**, and **Saharan**, each offering lush landscapes and a glimpse into rural Himachal life. For those looking to extend their adventure, Shimla serves as a gateway to the more distant and equally famous destinations of **Kullu** and **Manali**, both known for adventure sports, cultural festivals, temples, and vibrant markets.

## Objectives

- Analysis of Tourist information trends
- Recognizing problems and worries regarding environmental conservation in Shimla.
- Recommendations and actions for environmental conservation from both locals and visitors.

## Tourist Information and Travel Trends in Shimla

Shimla continues to be one of India's most beloved hill stations, attracting a large number of domestic and international tourists every year. Tourists come here to experience the tranquil charm of the Himalayas, enjoy pleasant weather, and spend long holidays in the lap of nature. The serene atmosphere, scenic landscapes, and colonial architecture make it a perfect getaway destination. Travelers arrive in Shimla not only from various states across India—

such as Delhi, Punjab, West Bengal, and Maharashtra—but also from foreign countries seeking relief from summer heat or to explore the unique culture and geography of the region.

Apart from local sightseeing, tourists often extend their journey from Shimla to explore other prominent destinations in Himachal Pradesh, such as **Kullu and Manali**. These towns, located at a distance of about 250 to 270 kilometers from Shimla, are well-connected by road. Kullu is known for its lush green valleys, riverside views, and traditional festivals like the Dussehra Fair, while Manali is a hub for adventure sports like river rafting, paragliding, and skiing, especially in nearby Solang Valley and Rohtang Pass. Together, Shimla, Kullu, and Manali form a popular tourist circuit, offering a mix of natural beauty, spiritual sites, and thrilling experiences.

**Seasonal Tourist Variation** shows that the maximum influx occurs during the summer months. According to statistical data, about **48% of tourists arrive during the summer season**, when Shimla provides a refreshing escape from the scorching plains. The remaining **52% visit in other seasons**, including winter, when snowfall draws snow lovers and honeymooners. This steady distribution shows that Shimla is not just a seasonal destination, but a year-round retreat.

**Table:1 Tourism Data: Shimla (2001–2011)**

Year	Indian Tourists	Foreign Tourists	Total Tourist Arrivals
2001	11,43,261	9,687	11,52,948
2002	11,63,104	10,236	11,73,340
2003	12,35,286	10,820	12,46,106
2004	13,87,092	11,541	13,98,633
2005	14,56,321	11,982	14,68,303
2006	16,47,286	12,405	16,59,691
2007	18,13,541	12,954	18,26,495
2008	19,87,000	13,200	20,00,200
2009	21,75,314	8,070	21,83,384
2010	24,85,564	10,485	24,96,049
2011	25,84,000	11,200	25,95,200

Source Annual Reports of Directorate of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh,

The decade spanning **2001 to 2011** marked a transformative phase for tourism in **Shimla**, with the total number of visitors—both domestic and foreign—witnessing a **consistent upward trend**. In **2001**, Shimla received approximately **11.52 lakh tourists** (11,43,261 Indian and 9,687 foreign visitors). By **2011**, the total number had risen to **25.95 lakh**, comprising **25.84 lakh Indian tourists** and **11,200 foreign tourists**. This represents a **growth of over 125%** in overall tourist inflow within a span of ten years, underscoring Shimla's rising appeal as one of India's premier hill stations. The increase in **domestic tourism** was particularly significant, as numbers more than doubled—from **11.4 lakh in**

**2001 to 25.8 lakh in 2011.** This surge can be attributed to several factors: growing middle-class income, improved road connectivity through NH-5, better hotel infrastructure, and the promotion of Shimla by both state and private tourism agencies as a summer and winter holiday hub.

The **foreign tourist segment**, though comparatively smaller in size, also showed a positive trend. From **9,687 in 2001**, it gradually increased to **11,200 in 2011**, with most foreign tourists coming from countries like the UK, USA, Germany, France, and Japan. However, there was a **notable dip in 2009**, when foreign arrivals declined to **8,070**, likely due to the **global economic recession, visa restrictions**, and health concerns related to the **H1N1 pandemic**. Despite this, the number bounced back in subsequent years, suggesting resilience and recovery in the international travel market.

An analysis of **seasonal tourist variations** during this decade also shows interesting patterns. Roughly **48% of tourists visited during the summer months** (March to June), when Shimla's cool climate offered a welcome escape from the extreme heat of the Indian plains. The remaining **52% arrived during the post-monsoon, autumn, and winter months**, especially around December and January, when snowfall transforms the city into a winter wonderland. This consistent flow of tourists across all seasons helped boost Shimla's **year-round tourism economy**, unlike some destinations that rely solely on seasonal peaks.

The state government's active involvement during this decade also contributed to the tourism boom. Initiatives by the **Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC)** included promotion of adventure sports (like skiing in Kufri and Narkanda), development of eco-tourism circuits, and preservation of colonial heritage sites. Furthermore, the **Kalka-Shimla narrow gauge railway**, which gained **UNESCO World Heritage status in 2008**, became a major tourist attraction, especially among foreign and heritage enthusiasts.

From an economic standpoint, the growth in tourist numbers generated substantial income for local residents through the hospitality sector, handicrafts, transport services, and food businesses. With over **800 hotels and guesthouses**, ranging from luxury to budget accommodations, Shimla managed to cater to tourists of all income levels. The rising tourist demand also spurred the growth of private tour operators, homestays, and local handicraft industries, strengthening **employment opportunities** in the region.

In conclusion, the tourism data from 2001 to 2011 reflects more than just statistical growth—it tells the story of Shimla's successful evolution into a **year-round, multi-segment tourist destination**. Backed by natural beauty, improved connectivity, cultural richness, and supportive government policies, Shimla emerged as a model for sustainable and inclusive tourism in India. The city's continued popularity into the next decade was built on the strong foundation laid during this crucial ten-year period.

### **Economic Facilities That Attract Tourists in Shimla (In Detail)**

Shimla has evolved into a major tourist destination not only because of its natural charm but also due to its **well-established economic infrastructure** that supports tourism. The availability of modern **transport, communication, accommodation, and dining facilities** plays a crucial role in encouraging tourist inflow from across India and abroad. One of the



most important economic enablers is **transportation**. Shimla is easily accessible via **three major modes—air, road, and rail**. The city is connected to the plains by **National Highway 22 (NH-22)**, which links Shimla to **Chandigarh (120 km away)** and further to Delhi. The road journey offers beautiful mountain views and is served by **private taxis, luxury Volvo buses, and state-run Himachal Road Transport buses**. For rail travel, the famous **Kalka–Shimla Railway** offers a breathtaking narrow-gauge train journey that passes through **102 tunnels, 864 bridges, and 900 curves**. It was declared a **UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008**, making it a major attraction in itself. Air connectivity is provided by the **Jubbarhatti Airport**, located 12 km from the city, with direct flights (depending on the season) to Delhi and Chandigarh. These facilities make Shimla easily reachable, especially for high-income and short-duration tourists.

Shimla is also equipped with **modern communication infrastructure**, which plays a key role in enabling tourism in today's digital age. **All major telecom providers** like Airtel, Jio, BSNL, and Vodafone operate here, offering 4G connectivity even in hilly areas. There are numerous **cyber cafes, Wi-Fi-enabled hotels, and mobile data services** that allow tourists to stay connected with family, use online maps, book hotel rooms, or share their experiences on social media in real-time. Shimla's integration into the **digital tourism ecosystem**—such as online hotel bookings, travel planning apps, and GPS navigation—has significantly improved the visitor experience.

Another core strength of Shimla's tourism economy is its **robust hospitality sector**. The city offers **over 800 registered accommodations**, including **luxury hotels, government-run guest houses, budget lodges, homestays, and resorts**. Renowned hotel chains like **Oberoi Clarkes, Radisson, and Willow Banks** cater to upscale tourists, while **Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC)** operates reasonably priced hotels such as Hotel Holiday Home and The Peterhof. For middle- and lower-income travelers, there are affordable hotels in areas like **Lakkar Bazaar, New Shimla, and Chhota Shimla**. All accommodations are equipped with basic to luxury facilities, such as 24-hour hot water, central heating, travel assistance, guided tours, and scenic views of the mountains.

The city also has a vibrant **food and restaurant culture** that caters to diverse culinary tastes. Tourists can enjoy everything from **authentic Himachali cuisine** like Siddu, Chha Gosht, and Madra to **Indian, Chinese, Italian, and continental** dishes. Popular food streets such as **Mall Road, The Ridge, and Lower Bazaar** are lined with cafés, bakeries, fast food outlets, and fine dining restaurants. Fast food giants like **Domino's, Café Coffee Day, and local chains** like Indian Coffee House coexist with traditional eateries and **street vendors selling momos, chana kulcha, and thukpa**. This wide variety of food options enhances the comfort and satisfaction of tourists.

Moreover, Shimla has various **supporting economic services** such as **travel agencies, tourist information centers, local guides, car rental services, and shopping arcades**, which add to its appeal. Shops selling **handicrafts, woolen clothes, wood-carved souvenirs, Himachali shawls, and local jams and pickles** are particularly popular with tourists. These economic activities not only boost the regional economy but also provide employment to thousands of locals.

In summary, the presence of **efficient transportation, strong communication systems, diverse lodging options, and rich dining and shopping experiences** forms a well-rounded economic ecosystem in Shimla that actively supports and enhances tourism. These economic

facilities ensure that tourists find comfort, connectivity, and convenience at every step of their journey. As a result, Shimla has succeeded in maintaining a high level of **tourist satisfaction and repeat visits**, making it one of the most economically tourist-friendly destinations in India.

**Table: 2 Growth of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Shimla (2001–2011)**

Year	No. of Hotels	No. of Rooms	No. of Guest Houses
2001	270	2,600	150
2003	295	2,900	160
2005	320	3,200	180
2007	345	3,600	200
2009	360	3,850	210
2010	375	3,950	220
2011	379	3,988	230

Source Annual Reports of Directorate of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh,

Over the decade from **2001 to 2011**, Shimla witnessed steady and structured growth in its **hospitality infrastructure**, primarily to meet the increasing demands of domestic and foreign tourists. In **2001**, there were around **270 hotels** offering **2,600 rooms**. By **2011**, this number had risen to **379 hotels** with **3,988 rooms**, reflecting a **53% growth in hotel infrastructure** and a **nearly 54% increase in room availability**. Similarly, the number of **guest houses increased from 150 to 230**, driven by demand from budget travelers and educational tours.

This expansion was closely aligned with the surge in tourist arrivals, which more than doubled during this period. The growth in hotels included a range of categories—from **budget lodges and mid-range hotels** to **luxury and heritage properties**. The government also encouraged private investment in tourism infrastructure, while promoting sustainable and eco-friendly tourism under the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Policy.

The **quality of facilities also improved** during this decade. Many hotels started offering deluxe and super-deluxe rooms, conference halls, central heating, parking, and internet services. In parallel, the rise of **five-star accommodations** (with 217 luxury rooms by 2011) catered to high-end international and corporate travelers.

In conclusion, the decade from 2001 to 2011 saw a **significant increase in the quantity and quality** of hotels in Shimla, transforming it into a well-equipped, all-season tourist destination. The growing number of hotels and rooms not only supported higher tourist volumes but also contributed to local employment, entrepreneurship, and the overall economy of the city.

## Present Condition of Shimla: A City at an Environmental and Infrastructural Crossroads

Shimla, once hailed as the "Queen of Hills" and known for its pristine environment and colonial charm, is now grappling with **serious environmental degradation and infrastructural strain** due to unplanned urban expansion, high tourist influx, and administrative lapses. What was once a peaceful hill station has become increasingly congested, noisy, and polluted, threatening both the local ecology and the visitor experience.

- **Pollution and Environmental Stress**

The city faces **multi-dimensional pollution**—including **air, water, noise, soil, and visual pollution**. Shimla's environment is deteriorating under the weight of thousands of vehicles that crowd its narrow roads daily, particularly in sensitive areas such as **Mall Road, Summer Hill, Jutogh, Jakhoo, New Shimla, Kasumpti, Kufri, and Panthaghati**. The constant traffic jams, exhaust fumes from diesel taxis and buses, and construction dust contribute to rising levels of **air pollution**, which were once unthinkable in a Himalayan hill station.

Simultaneously, **soil and water pollution** are escalating due to unregulated construction and the dumping of garbage into natural drains and slopes. There is **inadequate waste management**, with few authorized landfill or segregation sites. As a result, **garbage is often burned in open spaces**, producing toxic smoke and creating harmful **smog**, especially in winter. Moreover, the accumulation of **non-biodegradable waste**, including plastics, water bottles, snack wrappers, and packaging materials along hillsides, severely impacts the **natural beauty and biodiversity** of the region.

- **Water Crisis and Sanitation Issues**

Water availability and cleanliness are growing concerns. **Tourist hotels and commercial establishments** are often prioritized in water distribution, while many **local residents face shortages** and receive **contaminated or untreated water**. Improper sewage disposal, the mixing of drainage with drinking water lines, and neglected **rainwater harvesting systems** have worsened the water crisis. These issues have resulted in periodic outbreaks of **waterborne diseases**, including **jaundice, diarrhea, and typhoid**, affecting both residents and tourists.

- **Urban Overcrowding and Housing Pressure**

The scenic charm of Shimla is under threat due to **unchecked construction and overpopulation**. Trees are being felled to make space for expanding residential colonies and new commercial establishments, leading to **deforestation, slope destabilization**, and the destruction of green cover. Popular locations such as Jakhoo and Summer Hill have seen excessive **real estate development**, causing ecological imbalances and increasing the risk of **landslides**—especially during the monsoon.

Shimla's core infrastructure was originally designed for a population of around **25,000–30,000** during the colonial period. As of 2021, the city's population has exceeded **2 lakh**, not including the daily floating tourist population. The narrow roads and steep terrain cannot accommodate this growth. As a result, **pedestrian spaces are shrinking, footpaths are**



**missing**, and tourists find it increasingly difficult to enjoy the city by foot—particularly along **Mall Road**, which suffers from continuous digging for telecommunication and power lines.

- **Traffic Congestion and Transport Strain**

With a rise in both **resident-owned vehicles and daily incoming tourist vehicles**, Shimla's transport system is under intense pressure. Despite being a hill town with limited road space, vehicle registration continues to rise. The city lacks multi-level parking structures, and **parking spills onto main roads**, creating dangerous driving conditions and **long traffic jams**, particularly during the tourist season and festivals. These delays significantly reduce the quality of the tourist experience, as valuable time is spent stuck in traffic rather than enjoying the scenic beauty.

- **Waste Management and Health Hazards**

Shimla generates several tons of solid waste per day, a large part of which includes **plastic, food waste, packaging, and e-waste from hotels and restaurants**. Due to limited solid waste management infrastructure and poor municipal enforcement, garbage is often dumped in public areas or down slopes, directly entering natural water sources and forests. Open burning of garbage, a common practice in peripheral areas, releases **toxic gases** that are harmful to both locals and wildlife. Poor sanitation and dumping have also contributed to a surge in **stray animals**, further complicating public health.

- **Tourism and Economic Paradox**

While tourism has created thousands of jobs and is the backbone of Shimla's economy, it has also led to **ecological stress**. Shimla has become saturated with **hotels, guest houses, and restaurants**, many of which have been constructed without proper environmental clearances or land-use planning. During peak tourist seasons (summer and snowfall in winter), the city becomes overburdened, with **inadequate water supply, overloaded electricity grids, and poor waste disposal systems**.

Although the **Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department** continues to improve services—like guided tours, digital promotion, eco-trekking routes, and improved transport connectivity—the **over-commercialization** of Shimla has reduced its natural tranquility. The **toy train** and **Volvo bus services** have added convenience, but the rising number of tourists, often exceeding the carrying capacity of the town, has brought diminishing returns in terms of **ecotourism quality and sustainability**.

## **Conclusion**

Shimla is at a crucial tipping point. While its infrastructure, economy, and tourism services have evolved, the lack of **sustainable urban planning and ecological conservation** poses a serious threat to its future. Without immediate steps to manage population growth, restrict unauthorized construction, regulate tourist numbers, promote **eco-friendly transport**, and **implement strict environmental policies**, Shimla may soon lose the very charm that once made it India's most beloved hill station.

Protecting Shimla requires a joint effort—from **citizens, government, tourists, and private stakeholders**—to prioritize **ecological preservation over uncontrolled expansion**, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the magic of the mountains.

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