

## Developing Eco-Tourism in the Himalayan state of Jammu and Kashmir, India

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State of Jammu and Kashmir with a geographical area of 101387 Sq. Km, is located on the northern most part of Indian sub-continent in western Himalaya. Population of state is 12.7 million. Out of this 11.9 is tribal population comprising of Gaddi, Bakarwal, Gujjar, Brokpa, Changpa, Shina and Balti. State is blessed with three unique landscapes with abundant natural assets. Jammu province is a subtropical region with ten administrative districts, Kashmir valley is temperate region with ten administrative districts and trans-Himalayan Ladakh is high altitude cold desert with two administrative districts. Elevation of state varies from 300 mts to 4000 mts. This diversity of landscape and climate is reflected in the rich diversity of state's cultural, social and biological diversity. State of Jammu and Kashmir is one of the best gift of nature on earth with abundance of verdant valleys, high rising mountain peaks, some of the biggest and longest glaciers, thick forests, highly productive alpine pastures, number of fresh and brackish water lakes, millions of migratory birds, rich wildlife and rare snow leopard, scenic areas, waterfalls, ethnic tribes and typical art and architecture of historical buildings. State has number of National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and wetlands providing an opportunity to the state to promote Eco-Tourism. These natural assets make Jammu and Kashmir State as one of the best destinations for the Eco-tourism in the world.

Tourism is the key sector of Jammu and Kashmir's economy and accounts for 6.98 per cent of the state's GDP.

In the paper an attempt has been made to describe the eco-tourism destinations of the state using a methodology of primary and secondary data, government sources and direct visit to the sites. The survey and study of some of the important eco-destinations was carried out in the year 2013 using SWOT methodology. In the paper also some of the success stories of Eco-Tourism practices introduced in the year 2003-04 have been discussed.

Based on best practices, in the paper Eco-Tourism policy and the vision to develop these destinations has been discussed.