



SIKKIM RURAL TOURISM MEET-2025

***A COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT AND BRANDING INITIATIVE
FOR RURAL TOURISM***



<i>Event Dates:</i>	22nd–24th March 2025
<i>Event Location:</i>	Uttarey, Gyalzing District
<i>Organized By:</i>	The Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Sikkim
<i>Supported By:</i>	

Foreword

The Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (SRTM), hosted in Uttarey, West Sikkim, and organized by the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim, marks a pivotal moment in Sikkim's tourism evolution. It is more than an event but it is a movement to transform the rural landscape of this Himalayan state into vibrant hubs of sustainable, community-driven, and culturally rich tourism experiences.

The Meet reflects the State Government's commitment under the Sikkim INSPIRES project to bring rural communities to the forefront of tourism development. In collaboration with the Dentam Tourism Development Committees (DTDC) and key stakeholders, SRTM created an inclusive platform where policymakers, renowned national travel agencies, influencers, travel writers, national media, tourism entrepreneurs, youth, and residents came together to co-create strategies for economic inclusion, cultural preservation, and ecological sustainability by promoting rural Sikkim.

It is our hope that this Meet will serve as the foundation for a new era in rural tourism, one rooted in pride, participation, and prosperity for the people of the entire rural Sikkim.

Executive Summary

The Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (SRTM) 2025, held from 22nd to 25th March in Uttarey, West Sikkim, marked a pivotal step in advancing Sikkim's vision of inclusive, community-led rural tourism. Organized by the Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Sikkim, with support from TSA and TCAD, the event brought together government officials, rural entrepreneurs, homestay owners, tourism professionals, and thematic experts to collectively shape the future of rural tourism in the state.

Uttarey was strategically selected as the pilot destination for its natural beauty, cultural depth, organic practices, and proximity to Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary and Singalila National Park. The Meet sought to position Uttarey as a model for sustainable rural tourism through initiatives focused on capacity building, product development, market linkages, and digital empowerment of local communities.

Over the course of three days, the event facilitated immersive exposure visits, interactive sessions, curated showcases, and business-to-business (B2B) engagements. These activities explored key themes such as community-based tourism, nature and culture-led experiences, and strategic marketing approaches. Importantly, several travel agencies committed to incorporating Uttarey into their travel circuits, signaling real-time market traction.

The event also showcased Uttarey's experiential tourism potential through homestay living, traditional cuisine, indigenous crafts, village life, and cultural immersion. These offerings reflected the state's intent to create authentic, participatory tourism models that directly benefit local families and preserve cultural heritage.

Key outcomes:

- Enhanced market recognition for Uttarey and surrounding rural tourism clusters
- Commitments from national and regional tour operators to include the region in travel packages
- Identification of gaps in infrastructure, service delivery, and digital capabilities, with expert recommendations
- Strengthened coordination among departments, professionals, and grassroots stakeholders
- Greater community involvement in tourism planning, operations, and decision-making

Specific focus areas included:

- Promotion of homestays and alternative accommodations to offer community-rooted hospitality

Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet 2025

- Curated culinary experiences around ethnic Sikkimese food and organic products
- Village-based tourism activities such as farming, workshops, and festivals
- Showcasing of local beverages, handicrafts, weaves, and artisan products
- Cultural performances, traditional welcome rituals, and music showcases by local bands

To build momentum and awareness beyond the event, **a comprehensive digital and mass media promotion strategy was introduced:**

- Collaborations with travel influencers and vloggers to generate engaging, story-driven content
- Digital media campaigns leveraging social media platforms, display ads, and travel forums
- A national mass media outreach campaign across television, radio, and print to encourage families and urban travelers to explore Sikkim's rural charm

The Meet concluded with the formulation of a draft action plan to replicate and expand the Uttarey model across other rural clusters in Sikkim. The plan outlines a phased strategy involving training programs, infrastructure improvements, and sustained marketing efforts.

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Theme and Objectives of SRTM 2025

Theme: Revitalizing Rural Economies through Sustainable Community-Based Eco-Tourism

SRTM 2025 embraced the transformative potential of community-based tourism as a powerful vehicle for sustainable rural development in Sikkim. Rooted in the principles of inclusivity, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation, the Meet aimed to foster a tourism ecosystem that is both people-centric and ecologically sensitive.

The primary objective of SRTM 2025 was to establish a strong revenue-generation mechanism for rural communities by promoting tourism-based livelihoods that are sustainable, locally managed, and community-driven. The initiative sought to create meaningful economic opportunities for rural residents—particularly homestay owners, artisans, and small businesses—while ensuring that the development of tourism infrastructure and experiences does not disturb the region's ecological balance, cultural heritage, or traditional way of life.

To achieve its overarching goal, SRTM 2025 focused on the following key sub-objectives:

- Showcasing Uttarey as a model rural tourism destination that seamlessly integrates nature, culture, and adventure, illustrating the potential of place-based tourism to drive holistic community development.
- Facilitating direct market linkages between local tourism stakeholders—including homestay operators, guides, and artisans—and travel agents, influencers, tour operators, and institutional buyers to strengthen access to demand networks.
- Promoting organic products, traditional crafts, and immersive village-based experiences, reflecting Sikkim's distinctive cultural and ecological identity.
- Introducing digital marketing tools and e-commerce platforms to help local entrepreneurs expand their outreach and visibility in a competitive tourism marketplace.
- Conducting ground-level assessments of infrastructure, service delivery, and market access to identify critical gaps and opportunities for targeted intervention.
- Documenting key learnings and actionable insights to inform the replication and scaling-up of rural tourism models across other clusters under the Sikkim INSPIRES framework.

SRTM 2025 stood as a vibrant convergence of vision, community, and sustainability—paving the way for a resilient rural tourism economy rooted in local ownership and global appeal.

Background

Sikkim, a northeastern jewel of India, is widely admired for its serene landscapes, vibrant cultural heritage, and progressive eco-tourism practices. While tourism has flourished in popular hubs, vast rural regions of the state remain underexplored and underleveraged, especially in terms of community-based sustainable tourism.

In response to this gap, the Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (SRTM) was conceived as the first structured platform to shape a holistic and scalable framework for rural tourism in the state. Organized by the Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim, in collaboration with grassroots stakeholders, the meet aimed to reposition rural Sikkim as a unique destination offering authenticity, cultural richness, and ecological harmony.

The SRTM was anchored on three strategic pillars:

1. **Branding Sikkim's Rural Identity** – Creating a distinct and recognizable image of rural Sikkim rooted in tradition, ecology, and lifestyle.
2. **Enabling Community Participation** – Empowering local communities through skill development in hospitality, financial literacy, and sustainable practices.
3. **Developing a Sustainable Rural Tourism Blueprint** – Designing tourism models that blend eco-tourism, cultural heritage, and adventure while preserving the state's fragile biodiversity.

Why Uttarey? A Strategic Choice.

The venue for the inaugural SRTM, Uttarey in West Sikkim, was selected for its exceptional potential as a cultural and ecological tourism hotspot. Nestled near the Indo-Nepal border, Uttarey offers a rare convergence of natural beauty, biodiversity, and immersive rural experiences:

- **Natural Grandeur:** Phoktey Dara—a rare vantage point offering views of both Mount Everest and Mount Khangchendzonga positioned Uttarey as a prime high-value destination for eco-tourism enthusiasts.
- **Geo-cultural Significance:** The village's proximity to the international Indo-Nepal border enhances its appeal for transnational tourism circuits.



- **Experiential Tourism:** Uttarey is renowned for its organic lifestyle, forest trails, trout farming, and traditional practices, making it ideal for eco-conscious and slow travelers.

Figure 1: SRTM Venue Setup, Gumpa Dara, Uttarey



Program Schedule Overview

Day 1: Arrival and Welcome – 22nd March 2025

The inaugural day of the SRTM 2025 commenced with the arrival of delegates and guests at Bagdogra Airport, where they were accorded a warm traditional welcome. Officials from the Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Sikkim, along with representatives from TSA, greeted each participant with a ceremonial khada (traditional scarf), symbolizing respect and goodwill.

From Bagdogra, the group embarked on a scenic journey toward Rholu in South Sikkim, where a curated lunch experience was organized at a wayside tourism amenity, offering guests their first taste of regional cuisine.

The delegation then continued onward to Uttarey, the host destination for the Meet. Upon arrival, participants were accommodated in local homestays, allowing them to immerse themselves in the authentic warmth and hospitality of Sikkimese rural life. This stay served as an experiential introduction to the Meet's core values of community-based tourism and cultural integration.



Figure 2: Delegates' Reception at Bagdogra Airport on their Arrival



Day 2: Formal Inauguration & Cultural – 23 March 2025

Morning Session: Stakeholder Engagement through B2B Interactions

The second day of the Meet commenced with a focused B2B session, designed to bridge the gap between rural tourism providers and the broader tourism industry. This platform brought together homestay owners, local entrepreneurs, artisans, and community-based tourism stakeholders for meaningful dialogue with national delegates, including tour operators, travel agents, digital influencers, vloggers, travel writers, and representatives from national media houses.

The discussions revolved around strengthening market linkages, co-creating tourism products rooted in local heritage, and exploring promotional strategies to position rural Sikkim as a unique travel destination. Participants exchanged ideas on responsible tourism, storytelling, branding, and leveraging digital tools for market access.

Inaugural Ceremony

The formal inauguration of the Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet was held in the afternoon and was graced by the presence of senior state dignitaries. The event was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Shri T.T. Bhutia. He was joined by the Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department, Shri Puran Gurung; Hon'ble MLA cum Advisor (Tourism), Shri Sudesh Kumar Subba; Hon'ble MLA Shri L.N. Nepal; and Hon'ble MLA Shri Erung Tenzing Lepcha.

In their addresses, the dignitaries underscored the importance of sustainable, community-led tourism in shaping Sikkim's rural economy. They emphasized the role of such platforms in fostering rural entrepreneurship, preserving local culture, and positioning Sikkim as a model for eco-sensitive tourism development.



Figure 3: Inaugural and Welcome of the Chief Guest

The Hon'ble Minister interacted with participants and visited the community exhibition stalls, where a wide array of rural tourism products and services were on display. These included handmade crafts, organic food products, traditional textiles, cultural artefacts, and thematic village tourism packages. The stalls not only reflected the

ingenuity of Sikkim's rural communities but also highlighted the commercial potential of village-based experiences when effectively branded and marketed.

Cultural Showcase

A curated cultural program followed the inauguration, showcasing the rich and diverse traditions of Sikkim's ethnic communities. The performances—featuring local music, dance, and storytelling—offered an immersive window into the social fabric and artistic heritage of the region, reinforcing the cultural value proposition of rural tourism in Sikkim.

Evening Programme: Community Interaction and Cultural Evening

The evening segment featured informal yet purposeful interactions between community members and tourism industry stakeholders. These dialogues encouraged grassroots voices to share their experiences, aspirations, and ideas for improving rural tourism service delivery and visitor engagement.

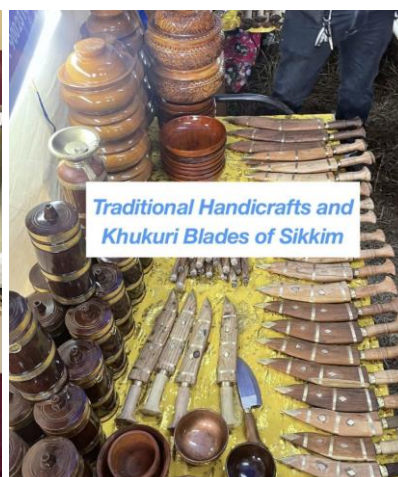


Figure 4: Sofyim- Lepcha Folk-Fusion Band

The day concluded with a traditional folk music performance by local artists, followed by a community-hosted dinner. The meal featured authentic Sikkimese cuisine, celebrating the culinary diversity of the region and offering guests a sensory connection to local traditions.



Traditional sheep wool handicrafts



**Traditional Handicrafts and
Khukuri Blades of Sikkim**



Traditional wine making

Day 3: Exposure Visits and Business Engagement- 24th March 2025

The third day of the Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (SRTM) 2025 was dedicated to immersive field experiences, designed to showcase the region's diverse tourism offerings and facilitate direct engagement between delegates and rural tourism practitioners. Guests, dignitaries, and delegates were organized into thematic exposure groups, each curated to highlight a different facet of rural tourism in Sikkim.

Thematic Exposure Tracks:

► **Adventure Tourism**

This group explored the rugged natural beauty and adventure potential of Uttarey and surrounding regions. Activities included guided trekking routes, birdwatching trails, paragliding demonstrations, hot air ballooning experiences, angling, and mountain biking. These experiences illustrated the area's capacity to host soft and moderate adventure tourists while emphasizing ecological sensitivity and safety.



Figure 5: Photos from the Adventure trek

► **Village and Handloom Tour**

Participants in this group visited key cultural and economic nodes that form the backbone of rural livelihoods. The tour included stops at the iconic Tenzing Hillary Memorial Park, local sheep farms, traditional handloom and handicraft centers, and heritage homestays. These visits allowed delegates to witness first-hand the craftsmanship, lifestyle, and resilience of village communities.

► **Local Food, Culture, and Social Networking**

This group experienced the richness of Sikkimese oral traditions, folk music, traditional attire and ornamentation, and culinary heritage. Guests participated in food-tasting sessions that featured locally-sourced organic ingredients and sampled traditional beverages prepared by community hosts. The segment



Figure 6: Hot air balloon activity

concluded with informal networking aimed at fostering deeper connections between delegates and the host community.

Closing Ceremony:

The day's activities culminated in a closing ceremony, bringing together all delegates for reflection, feedback, and forward-looking dialogue.

Key highlights of the closing session included:

- ▶ Address by the Hon'ble MLA cum Advisor (Tourism), Shri Sudesh Kumar Subba, acknowledging the contributions of local communities and stakeholders in successfully hosting the event.
- ▶ Remarks by Shri Neeraj Pradhan, PCE cum Nodal Officer of the Sikkim INSPIRES program, who emphasized the strategic intent of the initiative and shared insights into how key learnings from the Meet would inform the future rollout of rural tourism interventions across the state.
- ▶ An open feedback and interaction session chaired by Shri Neeraj Pradhan, where national and international delegates shared their experiences, offered constructive suggestions, and discussed potential partnerships for promoting rural destinations in Sikkim at wider forums.

Day 4: Departure- 25th March 2025

On the final day, an early breakfast was organized for all guests and delegates at their respective homestays and lodging facilities. Following warm farewells from the local hosts and organizing team, participants departed for Bagdogra Airport, bringing SRTM 2025 to a close with a strong spirit of collaboration, cultural exchange, and renewed commitment to sustainable tourism development in Sikkim.

Key Outcomes and Strategic Insights

4.1 Branding Rural Sikkim: The “Made in Rural Sikkim” Identity

One of the standout achievements of SRTM 2025 was the successful launch and promotion of the “Made in Rural Sikkim” identity. The Meet served as a curated platform to celebrate and elevate the distinctiveness of Sikkim’s rural offerings, with a blend of cultural immersion, local entrepreneurship, and experiential tourism.

- **Cultural Spotlight:** Traditional folk dances, oral storytelling, and ritual performances brought to life the living heritage of Sikkim’s diverse communities, offering delegates a window into the authentic soul of the region.
- **Local Product Showcases:** Homestay hosts, artisans, and farmers presented organic vegetables, spices, fermented beverages, handmade crafts, and wellness products derived from indigenous knowledge systems.
- **Interactive Rural Experiences:** Visitors engaged in cooking demonstrations, handicraft-making, eco-village walks, and trout farming, creating memorable and hands-on tourism experiences rooted in community participation.

4.1.1 Ecotourism Highlights from Uttarey

The village of Uttarey emerged as a compelling case study in sustainable ecotourism. SRTM 2025 showcased how conservation-linked tourism can both protect the environment and generate livelihoods:

- **Trekking and Nature Walks:** Routes like the Uttarey–Phoktey Dara Trek offered delegates breathtaking views of Mount Kanchenjunga and Everest, set amidst rhododendron forests and high-altitude biodiversity.
- **Birdwatching and Wildlife Exploration:** Uttarey’s forests revealed rare Himalayan bird species, including the blood pheasant and Himalayan monal, along with glimpses of elusive mammals like the red panda and Himalayan black bear.
- **Organic Farm Stays:** Tourists experienced sustainable agriculture first-hand, participating in the harvesting of seasonal produce and learning about local farming practices.
- **Water-Based Activities:** Eco-friendly trout farms and guided angling allowed for unique water-linked engagement while ensuring minimal ecological disruption.
- **Sacred and Cultural Trails:** Delegates explored heritage trails that connected spiritual sites like monasteries and parks to culturally significant Limboo, Sherpa, and Gurung villages.

4.2 Influencer and Hosted Buyer Engagement

Recognizing the role of digital media in shaping travel behaviour, SRTM 2025 integrated a strategic influencer marketing component and hosted buyer program.

- **Influencer-Led Content Creation:** Travel influencers and vloggers documented their journeys across Uttarey through visually engaging content, amplifying rural Sikkim's presence on Instagram, YouTube, and travel blogs.
- **Digital Campaigns:** The #ExploreRuralSikkim campaign gained traction across platforms, increasing online engagement and generating user-created content from visitors and locals alike.
- **Buyer Integration:** Curated familiarization tours for high-end tour operators and travel curators resulted in concrete interest in incorporating Uttarey into premium travel circuits for Northeast India.

4.3 Market Segmentation and Positioning Strategy

4.3.1 Target Market Segments

Based on visitor profiles and feedback during the Meet, four high-potential tourist segments were identified:

- **Adventure Enthusiasts:** Attracted by trekking, ziplining, paragliding, and other outdoor pursuits.
- **Eco-Friendly Tourists:** Focused on sustainable travel, organic food, and nature-based wellness.
- **Cultural Travelers:** Interested in heritage, traditional lifestyles, and immersive local living.
- **Luxury Niche Travelers:** Seeking curated, high-value experiences in offbeat and pristine locations.

4.3.2 Positioning Rural Sikkim

SRTM 2025 positioned Sikkim as a boutique rural tourism destination with a unique proposition:

- **Authenticity and Cultural Immersion:** Prioritizing lived experiences in homestays and village settings.
- **Sustainability and Community Ownership:** Showcasing tourism models that directly benefit local residents.
- **Integrated Experiences:** Offering seamless blends of adventure, wellness, agriculture, and cultural tourism under a cohesive brand identity.

Transformative Outcomes and Critical Insights

Surge in Homestay Bookings

Direct exposure to influencers and hosted buyers led to an immediate increase in online visibility and confirmed bookings for local homestays. Uttarey homestay owners reported increased inquiries and new tourism partnerships.

New Tour Products in the Pipeline

Leading tour operators expressed commitment to designing premium itineraries integrating Uttarey's nature-based and cultural tourism experiences—ranging from organic farm stays to spiritual and adventure trails.

Replication Across Sikkim

Encouraged by the success in Uttarey, multiple delegates proposed replicating the SRTM model across other Community-Based Tourism (CBT) sites in Sikkim under the “Made in Rural Sikkim” banner.

Unveiling the Roadblocks: Challenges on the Path to Scale

Challenge	Description	Strategic Need
 Internet Connectivity	Low digital penetration in rural clusters hampers marketing and e-commerce efforts.	Rural broadband and digital literacy programs.
 Infrastructure Gaps	Inadequate roads and amenities—especially for women—affect tourist comfort and safety.	Investment in all-weather roads and public sanitation.
 Lack of IEC Content	Absence of a centralized, user-friendly repository of branding, training, and itinerary resources.	Development of a state-level IEC platform and knowledge portal.
 Access to Training	Remote locations, travel costs, and home duties keep many away from formal capacity building.	Decentralized, village-based training models and mobile academies.

 Seasonal Homestay Dependence	Over-reliance on peak season results in income instability and underutilization of assets.	Support for year-round tourism themes (wellness, culture, learning).
 Lack of On-site Training	Few institutional training programs are delivered at the grassroots.	Village-level satellite training hubs linked to IHM/IHCAE.
 Economic Vulnerability	Heavy dependence on tourism makes communities susceptible to seasonal shocks.	Promotion of allied enterprises (crafts, agri-tourism, food processing).
 Limited Exposure to Success Models	Most communities lack access to real-world case studies from other Indian states.	Organizing exposure visits and peer-learning events.

Capacity Building and Training: The Engine for Sustainable Tourism



Hospitality and Service Training

- ▶ **Homestay Management:** Delivered by IHM Sajong experts, these modules focused on guest communication, cleanliness, and operations management.
- ▶ **F&B Service Excellence:** Practical training in preparing local meals, menu planning for tourists, hygiene, and food presentation to global standards.



Women-Led Enterprise Models

- ▶ Entrepreneurship programs for women in homestay operations, community kitchens, and value-added food processing.
- ▶ Hands-on mentorship for women to take leadership roles in rural tourism governance and micro-business management.



Digital Empowerment for Rural Entrepreneurs

- ▶ **Social Media Mastery:** Training modules on Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook to amplify rural stories, destinations, and products.
- ▶ **E-Commerce Enablement:** Practical sessions on how to list and promote local goods (organic products, handicrafts) on Amazon, Flipkart, and curated tourism portals.



Advanced Certification and Technical Upskilling

- ▶ **Academic Collaborations:** Partnerships with IITs and IIMs to offer certifications on Google Ads, branding, and digital analytics. Programs include field immersion and village-level mentoring.
- ▶ **Adventure Tourism Training:** Skill development in high-risk tourism areas like paragliding, bungee jumping, and mountain safety, aligned with national safety standards.

Q&A Session Summary

The interactive Q&A session held during the Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet in Uttarey offered an open platform for dialogue between tourism professionals, media representatives, and the project leadership. Moderated by the Project Coordinator and addressed by Shri Neeraj Pradhan, Principal Chief Engineer cum Nodal Officer for Sikkim INSPIRES, the session brought forth actionable feedback, strategic recommendations, and clarifications on ongoing initiatives. The discussion focused on five key themes:

i. Enhancing Digital Visibility through Hashtag Campaigns

Raised by: Mr. Ajay Sood, Travel Writer

Observation: Mr. Sood emphasized the importance of leveraging social media to promote rural destinations like Uttarey. He recommended initiating a hashtag campaign with a target of at least 1,000 posts to enhance digital visibility and traveler engagement.

Response: The PCE cum Nodal Officer acknowledged the critical role of digital outreach but highlighted current limitations due to weak internet infrastructure in rural clusters. The proposal was well-received and has been forwarded to the TSA's Marketing Expert for integration into the broader digital strategy.

ii. Positioning Uttarey on the Tourism Map

Raised by: Ms. Shrutika, Outlook Express

Observation: Concerns were raised about Uttarey's lack of visibility in mainstream tourism publications and online platforms.

Response: The issue is already under review. The TSA's Marketing Expert is working to reposition Uttarey within Sikkim's regional tourism circuits, with efforts expected to show tangible results within the next two to three months.

iii. Access to IEC Materials for Itinerary Development

Raised by: Ms. Vandana Mishra, Vendy Tours

Observation: Ms. Mishra requested a centralized directory of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) resources to assist tour operators in designing rural experience-based itineraries.

Response: The PCE confirmed that this is a priority under the Sikkim INSPIRES initiative. A structured IEC repository is being developed, supported by a database of 60 identified rural tourism clusters, each with their own Unique Selling Proposition (USP). These will guide the creation of customizable travel packages.

iv. Infrastructure, Road Connectivity, and Post-Convention Tours

Raised by: Ms. Niyati, Sor Excursion

Observation: Recommendations included improving last-mile road connectivity, offering subsidized post-convention familiarization tours (as practiced by IATO), and enhancing public utilities—especially those catering to female travellers. It was also noted that the short duration of the event limited deeper delegate immersion.

Response: While infrastructure upgrades fall outside the Tourism Department's direct purview, the PCE shared updates on upcoming railway connectivity to Sikkim by 2026, which will reduce dependence on road travel. Proposals for post-convention tours are under active review. Public utility concerns will be conveyed to the appropriate line departments. Delegates were encouraged to engage directly with TSA for extended visit facilitation.

v. Designing Long-Stay Village Itineraries

Raised by: Ms. Meenu Nagpal, Gate 1 Holidays

Observation: Ms. Nagpal advocated for longer-duration rural itineraries (2–3 nights), allowing travellers to immerse themselves in village life, traditions, and community experiences.

Response: The suggestion was fully aligned with the long-term goals of Sikkim INSPIRES. Many rural homestays are now equipped to host extended stays and even provide reliable internet access. TSA is currently developing tourism products that cater to immersive and customizable long-stay itineraries across multiple village clusters.

Closing Remarks

The Project Coordinator concluded the session by expressing sincere gratitude to all delegates for their active participation, insightful observations, and constructive suggestions throughout the Meet. He acknowledged the significant contributions made by community members, local entrepreneurs, and tourism stakeholders in making the event a success.

While noting the absence of the Hon'ble Chief Minister due to concurrent Parliamentary and Budget Sessions, he emphasized that the overwhelming community participation—fueled by grassroots energy and word-of-mouth promotion—was a testament to the ownership and relevance of the initiative at the local level.

He further shared that several state-level authorities have expressed strong interest in replicating the Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet model in other districts, recognizing its potential to strengthen rural livelihoods, preserve cultural identity, and promote sustainable tourism practices.

In his concluding remarks, the Project Coordinator reiterated that while branding and marketing are important, the overarching vision of the Sikkim INSPIRES program is to develop a resilient and authentic rural tourism ecosystem—one that celebrates and sustains the rich heritage, diversity, and identity of Sikkim's rural communities.

Figure 10: Feedback and Q&A Session with Delegates



Monitoring and Evaluation: Tracking the Impact of SRTM 2025

To ensure sustained impact, transparency, and data-driven planning, the Sikkim INSPIRES program has adopted a results-oriented framework to monitor the progress of initiatives launched under the SRTM 2025.

The monitoring approach will focus on both quantitative and qualitative indicators, reviewed annually in collaboration with stakeholders. Key performance indicators (KPIs) will serve as measurable benchmarks to evaluate the program's effectiveness in areas such as outreach, income generation, digital visibility, and capacity building.

Table 9.1: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Rural Tourism Development

Performance Metric	Target Outcome by 2026
Annual Tourist Footfall	20% year-on-year growth in domestic and international arrivals
Social Media Engagement	1,000+ user-generated content (UGC) posts using #ExploreRuralSikkim
Local Revenue Generation	₹50 Lakhs per year through homestays, craft sales, and local experiences
Trained Hospitality Providers	300+ rural youth, women, and service providers formally trained
Villages on Digital Tourism Map	60+ rural tourism clusters digitally mapped and integrated

Regular reviews of these KPIs will be undertaken by the Department of Tourism and the TSA team, in coordination with local governance bodies, to inform program recalibration, identify gaps, and ensure timely course corrections.

Way Forward: Scaling Sustainable Rural Tourism in Sikkim

The Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (SRTM) 2025 held in Uttarey has emerged as a landmark initiative in advancing inclusive, community-driven tourism in the state. To translate the insights, experiences, and enthusiasm generated during the event into long-term impact, the following structured roadmap is proposed under the Sikkim INSPIRES framework:

10.1 Strategic Priorities

- Institutionalize SRTM as an Annual Flagship Conclave

Establish SRTM as a recurring event hosted in rotation across districts to foster broad-based participation. Theme-based editions (e.g., heritage tourism, organic trails, women-led circuits) can be introduced to showcase regional diversity and deepen sectoral dialogue.

- **Strengthen Capacity Building at the Community Level**

Design and implement targeted training programs for homestay owners, local youth, artisans, and tourism service providers. Modules will cover hospitality, food and beverage service, digital literacy, financial planning, and eco-tourism practices.

- **Market Linkages and Tourism Entrepreneurship**

Build a functional rural tourism marketplace by linking community-based providers with national tour operators, OTAs (Online Travel Agencies), digital marketplaces, and international buyers. Enable rural entrepreneurs to monetize local experiences and products.

- **Develop “Discover Rural Sikkim” Circuit-Based Itineraries**

Promote circuit tourism by connecting 60+ rural clusters through 3–5 day experiential routes. These circuits should integrate nature, heritage, food, wellness, and agro-tourism, while also exploring cross-border linkages with Nepal and Bhutan.

- **Improve Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity**

Prioritize investment in last-mile infrastructure (roads, signage, sanitation) and rural internet access. Introduce QR-coded trail maps, WhatsApp Business accounts, and content creator networks to strengthen visitor experience and local visibility.

- **Embed Rural Tourism in State Policy and Budget Frameworks**

Integrate rural tourism goals into the state’s tourism development plans with cross-departmental support and dedicated funding. A Rural Tourism Fund under Sikkim INSPIRES should be established to catalyze investments in priority interventions.

- **Promote Responsible and Community-Led Tourism Models**

Encourage local governance structures (e.g., village tourism committees) to lead tourism planning and benefit-sharing. Ensure tourism activities are ecologically sensitive, culturally respectful, and economically inclusive.

- **Establish a Results-Based Monitoring Framework**

Track the socio-economic and environmental impact of rural tourism through defined KPIs (e.g., footfall, revenue, employment, training, digital engagement). Data-driven monitoring will guide mid-course corrections and future investments.

10.2 Implementation Timeline and Action Plan**Table 10.2 – Comprehensive Action Plan (April 2025 – March 2026)**

Timeline	Activity	Expected Outcomes
April–May 2025	Homestay Training Programs (IHM Sajong)	Enhanced hospitality standards and guest experience
June 2025	Authentic Cuisine & Hospitality Skills (IHM Sajong)	Strengthened destination branding through culinary experiences
Aug–March 2026	Digital Marketing Bootcamps (IIT or similar, 6 programs with gender inclusion)	Greater online visibility for villages and rural tourism assets
Aug–March 2026	Combined Training: Housekeeping, Guest Handling, Local Wine Making, Accounting (Village-based)	Professional service delivery, pricing models, and rural enterprise growth
Oct–Nov 2025	Launch of Curated Village Circuits (TSA, IHCAE, Sikkim University)	Increased tourist stays and circuit-based travel revenue

This strategic roadmap ensures that Sikkim continues to lead by example in India's rural tourism landscape—fostering inclusive economic growth, preserving cultural identity, and setting new standards for sustainable and community-led travel.

Testimonials from Delegates, Guests, & Tourists

a. Blogs/Reels uploaded by delegates

- **Darpan Khurana:**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DH54zipSI97/?igsh=MXJmOWYxbmJ6aDRIZw==>
- **Sundeep Bhatia (Delhi Fundos) :**
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1GWjaKb3Vh/>,
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHszTJjyeMw/?igsh=amVnaHNweWRidmRm>
- **Rohan Gupta (BOTT):**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DH34JSEyCwk/?igsh=d2xlb2x4YjRxNHlp>,
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHwDBCqS-iA/?igsh=MTM0dmJpdGlvdG04OA==>,
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DHtoMfpS1f5/?igsh=bTA4bXRxdXhvN2lw>
- **Manjulika Pramod:**
https://www.instagram.com/stories/pendown.manjulika/3599806942491747169?utm_source=ig_story_item_share&igsh=ZWpuazRhM21rZXI4,
https://www.instagram.com/p/DHtkoyqT_0S/?img_index=19&igsh=MXBkaTN0cWthNXZhZA==
- **Ajay Sood:**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHyYvxVSPp6/?igsh=aGw5aTNocm16amY4>,
https://www.instagram.com/p/DHr_zKsYl29/?igsh=MWt6dTVsejFuYTA4NQ,
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHhIHhByK4A/?igsh=NmYyd2VtbWF0MzEz>
- **Mahesh Chandra Barik:**
https://youtube.com/shorts/kxGvb2ksJAA?si=gsQCr8hiE_cuFPJQ,
<https://youtube.com/shorts/68gxslUEPJU?si=iQ8ixSDEesrxSu>
- **Ravi Makkar:** <https://youtu.be/jTiqUOgTfKU?si=ISsDyK1PJY9InNY>
- **Tanayesh Talukdar:**
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DHxkdH5S2vx/?igsh=MXF2YTVweGs4cmJnYg==>
- **Gangdhar Krisnan:** https://www.linkedin.com/posts/gangadhar-krishnan-07b6474_uttarey-west-sikkims-hidden-poetry-sikkim-activity-7309797275956928512-KLk1?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_android&rcm=ACoAAADOe58BWv6EMIQZFH1nps3p9OqI7RuerfE
- **Ankit Panchal:** <https://youtu.be/AhCVe6P568U?si=fOBBXM71b-kKxX6t>
- **Rohit Srivastava:**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHsRIIkzK8R/?igsh=MWNzeHB6YWVkaDU5dQ==>
- **Taruna Sharma (Gypsy Soul):**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHpcz0gP8XM/?igsh=MTRydW1jOW9tYjdscg==>,
https://www.instagram.com/p/DH-0UIDRPPC/?img_index=15&igsh=MTVzb3lza3UyaWxxMA==
- **Aditya Roy (Soul Excursion):** <https://www.instagram.com/share/p/BBGef059Jz>

- **Ragini Puri:** <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DH-0XTsTmBW/?igsh=M2xhbDFkaW42bGx4>
- **Vikram Dewan:** <https://www.instagram.com/p/DIBD-YYJGQA/?igsh=am5xZ3hiNGdIM241>
- **Meenakshi Gupta:**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DIA9KqURh5M/?igsh=MTh1bnVsN3ZqYWw2aQ==>
- **InstamanGangtok:** https://youtu.be/JK-POqAd91I?si=tNi_ZX6jqvtv1P8V,
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHaZ9dEC1tl/?igsh=MTN4MmJ1c3M4bjF5>
- **Tanmay Das (Team Leader TSA):** https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tanmay-dash-179851b_pioneering-rural-tourism-through-the-first-ever-activity-7310177696607592449-UWSE?utm_medium=ios_app&rcm=ACoAAAIVLK0BQxBArc09PchQXF31pgXTc1HCknM&utm_source=social_share_send&utm_campaign=whatsapp

b. Media/Official pages :

- **Sikkim Express:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FeNANy43E/>
- **India Today North East:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/16CUEForxT/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/15fN9CuQp1/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15ECQn1y3E/>
- **Outlook Group:** <https://www.outlooktraveller.com/destinations/india/uttarey-offbeat-destination-in-sikkim>
- **Government of Sikkim:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/18hdG1H9rp/>
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DCwpkart6/>
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/19RGfERpqD/>
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1K7CAfrm98/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1ARr4WUF2d/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1BnmBuukgz/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/15Rov9RiE7/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1AZcnUPGxZ/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15tVsrk2MV/>
- **Sikkim Chronicle:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1C8vsTNVYu/>
- **Sikkim Express:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1APhte2vok/>
- **Sikkim Review:**
<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1Ams7HumTd/?mibextid=wwXlfr>,
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/16CUEForxT/>
- **Tourism and Civil Aviation Department:**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHfdZfSxOz8/?igsh=eTUxZjEwZzVkMmJy>,
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18sKw8AkGt/>
- **Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (Instagram):**
<https://www.instagram.com/share/BAdCu5VuWw>,
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHfXUPLRsbw/?igsh=MTRkczBwMTIIMmEwbQ==>

- **Business of Travel Trade (BOTT):**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHVmxk5zWwF/?igsh=c2pxNmt1dXZocXAz>
- **Daily Himalayan News:**
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHUxkHnhgAT/?igsh=enExdXhlaGhldHdl>
- **Awalokan Sikkim:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/14stswwsdqB/>
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/161stFXtb7/>
- **Sikkim News:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1PSWpJ5r6v/>
- **The Voice Of Sikkim:** <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/15xe1YgB87/>

Post-Event Outcomes & Reflections

The Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (SRTM) 2025 stands as a pivotal milestone in reimagining and repositioning rural Sikkim within the broader landscape of sustainable and experiential tourism. Grounded in the principles of community-led development, environmental stewardship, and cultural authenticity, the Meet successfully convened a diverse set of stakeholders—including government officials, tourism experts, grassroots practitioners, influencers, and local entrepreneurs.

Uttarey, the chosen host destination, emerged as a powerful example of the untapped potential that lies within Sikkim's rural heartlands. The village's pristine environment, cultural richness, and deeply rooted community spirit offered delegates a first-hand experience of the state's unique rural tourism promise. Through curated interactions, immersive exposure visits, and strategic dialogues, SRTM 2025 helped translate vision into action. The meet catalysed tangible outcomes: direct market linkages, renewed policy direction, and actionable plans for training, digital outreach, and product development.

As Sikkim advances on its rural tourism journey, the knowledge shared, partnerships formed, and commitments made during SRTM 2025 will serve as a strategic blueprint. The Meet has not only highlighted the state's readiness to lead in sustainable tourism but has also reaffirmed its vision of building a tourism economy that is **resilient, inclusive, and future-ready**.