# CHAPTER 9 TOURISM

The tourism industry in Bhutan began in 1974. It was introduced mainly to generate foreign exchange revenue and publicize the country’s unique culture and tradition. The government agency, erstwhile Bhutan Tourism Corporation, controlled tourism until its privatization in 1991.The potential as far as foreign exchange earnings are concerned is very high. The revenue generation from the tourism sector has increased from over US$ 2 million in the late 1980’s to over US$ 29 million in 2007.

The main statistics of interest in the field of tourism relate to the characteristics of visitors, details of existing tourist facilities, interest centers, visitor arrivals, where they come from, when they come and the purpose of their visit. Earning of foreign exchange from the overseas visitors is another important aspect.

There has been a steady rise of tourist arrivals in the country during the 1990s through 2000, while in 2002 there was a comparative decrease in tourist arrivals owing to the terrorism and outbreak of SARS. In 2007, there were 21,094 tourists’ arrivals compared to 17,342 in 2006. The large number of tourists come from the Europe, United States of America, Asia and Pacific and African regions. Bhutan has always been aware of the negative impacts that an unrestricted voluminous flow of tourists can have on its pristine environment and unique culture. The government, therefore, adopted a policy of “high value-low volume” tourism to control the quality and quantity of tourists entering the country.

