

AN ANALYSIS OF TOURISM STATUS AND PROSPECTS IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Assam is the gateway to North-East India. It is comprised of eight states Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Further, Assam shares international borders Bangladesh and Bhutan. Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. Considering its importance North East India is emerging as a beautiful tourism place. Assam is a land of wild forests, natural beauty, diverse history, rich culture, mighty rivers, historical monuments and over lakhs acres of tea plantations are making magnificent resources for tourism. Besides it, the majestic Brahmaputra River, Majuli the largest river island of Asia, royal hills, rich flora and fauna of the state are the paradise for tourists. It has breath-taking scenery which is known to be one of the pinnacle biodiversity hotspots in the whole world. Today tourism is considered as the biggest tool for generating revenue and employment. Ministry of Tourism is realizing that tourism is becoming an important sector of Indian economy and earning foreign exchange. Hence both central and state governments are adopting various policies to extend new field of tourism. Thus the new approaches are added to tourism which is called Tea Tourism, Golf Tourism, water tourism, agriculture tourism, cultural tourism etc. This paper makes an attempt to Analysis of Tourism Status and Prospects in Assam.

Keywords: Gateway, Biodiversity, Foreign exchange, Employment, Economy.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a charming industry in the world. It is a engine of development and generator of both direct and indirect employment. It requires equally skilled and unskilled workforce for the growth and extension. Tourism is based on wildlife, natural beauty, unique flora & fauna, lush green tea gardens, shining rivers, exciting and colorful cultural festivals in Assam. Assam has immense prospects in tourism. If it is systematically devised and explored than it will become source of income as well as commercial resources. Government of Assam has given tremendous efforts through developing infrastructures for promoting and growing this sector.

In terms of generation of employment, income, foreign exchange and regional development, tourism is playing a significant role to enable the union and state governments. That is why, the Union Government recently has announced ‘five ‘T’s i.e. Tradition, Talent, Trade, Technology and Tourism for overall development of the nation.’ To make popular the destinations of tourism, government encourage the local people to develop satisfactory behavior and quality to impress the tourists. Time has demand the tourism segment for earning maximum benefit that must take steps to minimize leakages and maximize linkages.

STUDY AREA

Assam is one of the states in India. It is surrounded by the kingdom of Bhutan and the state of Arunachal Pradesh, to the east by the states of Nagaland and Manipur, to the south by the states of Mizoram and Tripura, and to the west by Bangladesh and the states of Meghalaya and West Bengal. It is situated in the northeastern part of India. The name of Assam is come from the word Asom meaning “peerless” and the state language is Assamese. The study is confined Guwahati, Golaghat and Sivasagar Districts of Assam.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the present scenario of tourism in Assam.
2. To assess the in the facilities and infrastructure development for tourists..

METHODOLOGY

The Secondary information were collected from government publications/ records, state tourism statistics, periodicals, reports and related plan documents and books, Magazines, journals, official documents and government websites and from the concerned district. Moreover, personal visit has been made to different tourist spots of the district in order to gain an exposure.

PRESENT SCENARIO OF TOURISM IN ASSAM

Today tourism is considered as one of the largest industries in the world. It can easily change the economic situation of any country. To create sustainability in tourism many countries have changed their plan, policy and technology to survive in global prospective. Tourism can contribute financial strength, solve the unemployment problems and open the door of commercial activities. Charming tourism can bring smiles to every household of a state or a country. The movement of tourists across the world have made multi jobs for jobs seekers and able to generate foreign exchange earnings. The North Eastern states of Assam are known as the gateway to India. Trade, tradition and geographically the states have mutually dependent to grow relationship.

In the perspective of tourism growth and strength, Assam is on the way of constructive planning. With a view to develop and promote tourism of Assam has taken practical responsibility and trying to coordinate among the north east states through creating zonal regional circuits and zonal. The first tourism state policy of Assam was adopted in 2008, for

keeping view the importance of Public Private Partnership in order to increase the tourist footfalls to this place. It showed the figures around 45, 00,000 domestic and 20,000 foreign tourists visiting in Assam in 2014. The tourism policy is aiming to create a sound structure and planning to change the tourism into a major economic sector for increasing the inflow of tourists to the state.

There is rarely seen the systematic planning and development in tourism sector for upgrading the infrastructures due to shortage of fund of Assam government.. On the other hand, government has not shown interest to allow private sectors for investment in this industry due to various reasons. Hence, promotion and marketing activities of tourism leg behind and far away from development. All public sector tourism has been struggling with tough problems and has been functioning uncomfortably with limited financial capacity and human resource since long. . It is also heard from private sectors that government is not doing full support for safeguarding them and develop the tourism. With eye on the future prospect of tourism needs government actions for maintaining security and favorable environment. The private sector should come forward and need to show their interest to invest in this field to get its potential benefit and suck the cream of tourism.

Assam is the land of all seasons tourism. The state is the prime doorway of north east India. The main attractions of Assam tourism are one horn rhinoceros and Indian largest tea producing green tea gardens. The rich multi-culture elements such as Bihu, Jhumoir etc. of Assam and the standing beauty is always busy for welcoming everyone. Kamakhya temple, Nilachal hills, state central zoo, Umananda Island, Srimanta Sankardev Kalakhetra, Majuli Island, Jaganath Temple, Kaziranga national park, Ancient monuments of Sivasagar, Bogeebil Bridge, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Dhola -Hadiya Bridge are some of the hot tourism palaces of Assam. Further, it is worth mentioning that India's first oil well was drilled in Digboi. It is the oldest oil refinery in India as well as Asia. Apart from the above important locations it has better communication, accommodation and security facilities. The entire tourism potentialities of the state can be categorized as (a) Wildlife & Nature Tourism, (b) Tea tourism, (c) Eco Tourism, (d) Cultural Tourism, (e) Pilgrim Tourism and (f) Adventure Tourism.

SPIRITUAL TOURISM

From spiritual tourism pilgrim tourists may get the spiritual ideas and feel mental pleasant through visiting the divine places of Assam. Centering on the most famous Shakti-peeth, Kamakhya Temple, Nilachal hill top in Guwahati city, the religious or spiritual tourism can be capitalised Assam into a major spiritual tourism destinations in the country. Assam is known among the pilgrims and domestic tourists as a wonderland soaked in Shaktipooja, mysticism, tantric practice, mythology and black magic of Mayong with Kamakhya as the epicenter. Capturing this advantage will be helpful in generating revenue and employment.

Kamakhya Temple balanced on top of scenic Nilachal Hill in the middle of the city. It is surrounded by numerous minor temples scattering the hill. Its incomparable position in Indian collection and favorable geographic location attracts thousands of journeyer tourists to the Nilachal Hill. Therefore, it is necessary to develop Nilachal as a brand through utilizing government funds under PRASAD scheme. The government should attempt to help the management committee of the Temple with offering best practices. It celebrates four days Ambubasi Mela which is known as Mahakumbha every year in the month of June at Kamakhya temple and during this festival lakhs of people and sadhus meet. These can be decorated for the purpose of publicity campaigns in the midst of domestic tourist circuits with the help present technology.

Kaziranga National Park:

The Kaziranga National Park is scattered in Golaghat, Karbi Along and Nagaon district of Assam which is 194 km away from Guwahati . The Kaziranga National Park is one of the most attractive heritage sites in the world in terms of its one-horned rhinoceroses and luxury wildlife sanctuary in India. If truth be told, world's two thirds of rhino population and Indian tigers are found at Kaziranga reserve. The Kaziranga Proposed Reserve Forest was created in June 1905 with an area of 232 sq km and after three years, the park area was protected by 152 sq km on the banks of Brahmaputra River., Kaziranga was nominated as a Reserve Forest in 1908 and converted it into a game sanctuary in 1916. Hunting at this region was prohibited and visitors were permitted to enter the park in 1938,. Assam government passed the 'Assam (Rhinoceros)

Bill' in 1954 to stop illegal hunting and killing rhinos and also imposed heavy penalties to those who go against the rules.. After long break, the state government passed 'The Assam National Park Act of 1968' and announced Kaziranga as a designated national park. UNESCO was recognized Kaziranga as a World Heritage Site in 1985.

The park remains closed for visitors from mid-April to mid-October due to monsoon rains. For helping and guiding the visitors the interpretation center was set up at Bagari range Kaziranga to give an idea about the park. Maountaining and climbing are prohibited in the park to avoid probable human-animal conflicts. Towers are situated at few places for tourists to watch and enjoy the beauty of the park. One-hour elephant-back riding and watching a team of elephant's movements, surrounding the rhinos without frightening between them are funning moment.

Ancient Monuments Of Sivasagar:

Sivasagar was one of the ancient kingdom during Ahom era. It is surrounded by many ancient historical monuments. Those are Rang Ghar, Talatal Ghar, Sivadol, Kareng Ghar of Gargaon, Joydol, Sivasagar Tank, Joysagar Tank, Joymati Maydam, Vishnudol, Devidol, Gourisagar dol and Tank, Charaideo, Numdang Stone Brdge, Tai Museam and Uttaran Museam Etc. Apart from it, Panidihing Bird Sanctuary the abode of more than 250 species of birds.

The Sivasagagar district is situated at the heart of Assam. The original name of Sivasagar was - 'Kalansupar' It is about 360 kms distance from Guwahati . Being a historical district, it has numbers of historical monuments which are the major attractions spots for the tourist. Further Sivasagar District plays a vital role in terms of production of tea and oil. This region is mainly inhabitant of Ahom, Tea Tribes, Missing, Musalman, Chutiya etc. Sivasagar district has the highest historical places and monuments than any other districts in Assam. Tourists can arrive Sivasagar by road, rail and air which is located nearest the Jorhat airport. The distance between Jorhut airport to Sivasagar about 55 kms and Simaluguri rail station to Sivasagar city is only 16 kms respectively. Day and night bus services are available from Guwahati and other important stations. The following table shows the domestic and foreign tourists inflows into Assam

Table-1

Year	Domestics Tourists	Domestic inflows %	Foreign Tourists	Foreign inflows %
2008	3617306	7.64	14426	5.85
2009	3998706	8.45	14533	5.90
2010	4050924	8.55	15157	6.15
2011	4339485	9.17	16400	6.66
2012	4511407	9.53	17542	7.12
2013	4684527	9.90	17638	7.16
2014	4835492	10.22	21725	8.82
2015	5642950	11.92	26320	10.69
2016	5713156	12.07	28419	11.54
2017	5934791	12.54	31739	12.89

Source: Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ltd.

It is observed that the inflow of domestic tourists during 2008 to 2017 has been increased from 7.64% in 2008 to 12.54% in 2017 which is increased just 4.90%. On the other hand, the foreigners inflows increased in the same period from 5.85% in 2008 to 12.89% in 2017, the total increased of foreign tourists is 7.04%. After analyzing the above figures, it is found that during the above stated period the inflows percentage of domestic tourists are less than foreign tourists.

The State Tourism Department has witnessed a considerable success and all-round development both in respect of infrastructures development. The department is utilizing central and state government financial assistance in making other facilities. To explore tourism prospects, adequate investments and integrated, coordinated and concerted efforts from all concerned departments are necessary. Moreover, for promoting and infrastructure development in tourism sector government has undertaken various steps in the State in collaboration with

public private partnership. Special stress has been given through development of tourism circuits, destinations, and roadsides services etc., in order to grow tourism as well as to explore potential opportunities. Assam Tourism Policy, 2017 has also been adopted by the State Government giving special emphasis to encourage private investment in tourism sector by providing financial and logistic support. For investment and constructing five star hotels in major cities in Assam, the State Government has taken necessary steps in collaboration with private sector

FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FOR TOURISTS

The true potential of tourism cannot grow alone governmental efforts. To enhance the efficiency of management, investment, promotion and development of tourism plans need public private participation. With view to keep it in mind, at present 45 various projects and units are run by Assam Tourism Development Corporation in association with private participation. A few initiatives are taken by public private association are given below:

- a) Luxury Cruise Vessel between Kaziranga and Guwahati
- b) Amusement Park at Guwahati
- c) Ropeway project at Kamakhya
- d) Luxury resorts, wayside amenities with all modern facilities etc. are in various stages of implementation

- 1. Star Hotel and Resorts:** Guwahati is a premier city which offers large scope of four and five star hotels, resorts and conference hall with sophisticated facilities
- 2. Floating Hotel & Restaurant and Marriage Hall:** As a major centre of tourist attraction and promotion is river tourism where is generous scope to introduce "Floating Hotel & Restaurant and Marriage Hall etc on River Brahmaputra", This kind of project with all modern facilities and amenities have tremendous scope and demand.

- 3. Luxury Cruises on River Brahmaputra:** The national waterway Brahmaputra river is the bless for Assam and it can be used as water transport for domestic and foreign tourists. Luxury Cruise Vessel can be linked between Guwahati and Dibrugarh on the Brahmaputra. With the help of Inland Waterways Authority of India, it can be run for the purpose of promoting tourism to welcome both domestic and foreign tourists..If such a project is developed than can be occupied the overseas market.
- 4. Budget Hotels in district hotels:** Opening of economic hotels in the district headquarters of Nagaon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sonitpur, Dhubri, Barpeta, Silchar, Hailakandi, Karimganj etc. become the possibility of growing tourism.
- 5. Short Distance Flights:** Arrangement of short distance flights connecting with the major cities in Northeast India certainly will create opportunities.
- 6. Ayurvedic and Healthcare resorts:** The fresh environment and beautiful picturesque of nature with vast open areas are the advantages of setting up Ayurvedic and Healthcare resorts.
- 7. Leisure & amusement facilities:** There are immense potentialities for spending leisure time with amusement facilities on the mighty river of Brahmaputra.
- 8. Hover Craft and Boating Services on the Brahmaputra river:** Brahmaputra may be another area for offering hover craft and boating services to the tourists. If the realistic investment and development measures be initiated than there is tremendous scope of improving tourism..
- 9. Air Ballooning and Rafting:** Operating the excitement facilities of hot air ballooning over Kaziranga National Park, Manas, Pobitora, Dibriui-Saikhowa National Park are commercially viable and scope of new destinations. Further, investment on the Brahmaputra and Jia-bharali for introducing water sports like, rafting and para sailing with full facilities and safety may be the important option for the tourists.
- 10. Golf Courses - Up gradation, Modernization and Management:** Assam is the only state in India which can offer more than 20 golf courses within it. There are many golf courses and airstrips in tea gardens of Assam which can be upgraded and modernized. Investment is required to develop the existed golf fields and airstrips for promoting and

marketing it across the world. Management on this line should be exercised in such a way that attract golf-lovers and tourists.

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

In terms of transport connectivity in Assam are roadways, railways, airways and inland waterways. Both roads cum rail bridges are running over the river Brahmaputra. Bogibeel bridge is a combined road and rail bridge over the Brahmaputra river in the northeast India which is situated between Dibrugarh and Dhemaji district of Assam. Dhola-Sodiya Bridge is known as Bhupen Hazarika Setu which is connecting Assam and Arunachal Pradesh over Lohit river a major tributary of the Brahmaputra River.

Roadways: Assam has covering both metalled and non-metalled road length of approximately 69,000 kms surfaces which is approximately 60% of the total road length in the North-east. The major towns are connected by National Highways in the state. The Government is persistently is working for the development of roads specifically in the industrial areas.

Railways: A well connectivity of railway is available in the state to the rest of the country. All the major districts Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Nagaon, Guwahati, Tezpur, Barpeta, Bongaigaon etc. are well connected by the railway set up. Both board gauge and meter gauge lines are connected from Guwahati to Dibrugarh, Haflong and Silchar respectively.

Airways: Airways are well connected from Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport to New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai which is about 18 km from the city of Guwahati. Indian Airlines., Air Sahara, Jet Airways, Air Deccan, Kingfisher Airlines, Spice Jet and Indigo are flying regularly from Guwahati. International weekly flight Druk Air also on the wing between Bangkok and Guwahati. There are also regular Intra-state air services are also available which is connecting the six civil airports Guwahati, Tezpur, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Silchar & North Lakhimpur of Assam.

Inland Water Transport: Brahmaputra river is the 2nd national waterway of the country. It is regulated by both Central Inland Waterways Corporation and Directorate of Inland Waterways of Assam which are offering commercial water transport services for carrying

passengers and goods on the river of Brahmaputra and Barak. There are many remote places from urban areas where transport communication is only waterways. The internal waterway network is connected between Assam and Bangladesh and it is the gateway to the ports of Chittagong of Bangladesh, Kolkata and Haldia in West Bengal. Therefore, the Government of India has taken remedial steps for developing the infrastructures of the port in the State.

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