

Prospects and Problems of Tourism Industry in Assam

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Abstract:

Assam is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the worlds richest bio-geographic areas. It is the treasure house of various economic resources. It has a rich cultural and ethnic heritage that can easily make it a tourist-spot. Tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in Assam because Assam is not only characterized by the blending of flora and fauna it is also exceptionally rich in bio-diversity. Moreover the wildlife sanctuaries at various places of Assam can attract the tourists all over the world. Further, tea tourism and golf tourism of Assam will attract the tourists. This paper makes an attempt to explore the potentiality from Assam which will maintain a bright prospect of economic development in terms of tourism industry in near future.

Keywords: *Tourism Industry, Infrastructure, Economic Development, Assam*

I. Introduction:

Tourism is the world's largest industry and it represents the fastest growing segment of this market. The concept of tourism is new with tremendous potentiality for sustainable developments of nature-based tourist resources include beautiful forest and wild life and landscapes. But, before going to explore the prospects for economic development in the Assam in terms of tourism industry, it is better to have a look into the present socio-economic and political conditions prevailing in Assam.

Today's Assam is composed of twenty seven districts. It is one of the most backward state in the whole country. Its socio-economic condition reveals that though India has attained political freedom, yet it has not been able to gain freedom from wants, hunger, unemployment and exploitation. Growing political instability, insurgent activities, ethnic classes, frequent violation of human rights coupled with maladministration and corruptions are the common events in today's Assam. Moreover, prevalence of mass illiteracy, socio taboos, superstitious belief, usage of traditional methods of production etc. are the prominent feature of the socio-economic life in Assam. It is characterized by low per capita income, poor rate of capital formation, heavy population pressure, lack of infrastructure, excessive

dependence on agriculture and very backward transport and communication. Thus, Assam is extremely a backward state.

II. Objectives of the Study:

1. Tourism is preferred by both domestic and foreign tourists that would help to earn total revenue generation.
2. Tourism ventures in potential areas can make the local people aware of the objective of conservation and economic gain through job opportunities.
3. Tourism can help for improving tourism infrastructure in the areas of transport, communication, power, water supply, etc.
4. Tourism can also help to increase higher rate of utilization of natural resources including national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

III. Methodology:

This research paper is the form of an explanatory study in analyzing the potentiality from Assam which will maintain a bright prospect of economic development in terms of tourism industry. The present study is based on secondary data collection. The secondary data was collected by various published sources like books, journal, magazine, reports, publications, etc. The findings were discussed in the light of published literature.

IV. Prospects of Tourism Industry in Assam:

Though Assam is a very backward state in the whole country, yet it has the greatest potentiality to develop the state into a potent force through tourism industry. Let us explore its potentiality from various angles.

Tourism is one of the enormous service industries in India with its contribution of 6.23 percent to national GDP and 8.78 percent of total employment, witness more than 5 million annual foreign tourists arrivals and 562 million domestic tourists. According to WTTCR 2007, India ranked 6th in terms of price competitiveness and 39th in terms of safety and security. Assam is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the worlds richest bio-geographic areas. It is the treasure house of various economic resources. It has a rich cultural and ethnic heritage that can easily make it a tourist-spot. Tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in Assam because Assam is not only characterized by the blending of flora and fauna it is also exceptionally rich in bio-diversity.

Moreover the wildlife sanctuaries at various places of Assam can attract the tourists all over the world. For example, the national park of Kaziranga in the district of Golaghat is a gift of Nature which covers approximately an area of 429.93 sq. km. situated on the southern

bank of the river Brahmaputra. It is a heavenly place for the tourists because of its world famous one-horned rhinoceros. Herds of rhinoceros, vast grassy and green forests of the park can easily enamor any tourist of the world. Besides Kaziranga, there is the Manas riverine situated towards the western part of the district of Baksa. It is extended to both the banks of the river Manas and covers almost an area of 519 sq. km. It is especially famous for its wild buffaloes and also for other animals and birds. Besides Kaziranga and Manas sanctuaries, the wildlife sanctuaries of Pobitora and Orang can attract the tourists all over the world. Moreover, the golden languor pygmy hog and other endangered species can easily enchant the minds of the tourists.

Chakrashila is a newly declared wildlife sanctuary in lower Assam falling under Kokrajhar district with an area of 45.66 sq. km. It was declared as wildlife sanctuary in 1994. This sanctuary is a hilly tract running north-south. The lower reaches are covered with Sal coppice regeneration while middle and upper reaches are covered with mixed deciduous forests. Chakrashila is well known for existence of golden langur. It is a segregated habitat from main Indo-Bhutan habitat in the north. The important sites to visit are Sikhrisikhla, Bhalukjhora, Baokhungri Peak, Dibil Thakur Beel, Anthai Gufur, Goshain Bhita, Jarnagara etc. Dheer Beel, Diplai Beel are other attractive tourist spots to visit nearby Chakrashila wildlife sanctuary.

Besides the animals and the birds of various kinds roaming singing and playing in the vast green forest, the state has many ornamental fishes, rare plants, medicinal herbs and exotic orchids. It has many tranquil lagoons and reverie locations like Deepar Beel, Barnadi, etc. that will attract the tourists for angling and boating. There are many other wonders and important things for the tourists in the state. For example, even today, when science and technology have achieved miraculous success in unearthing the hidden things of the world it has totally failed to unearth the mystery of the Jatinga Hill where thousands and thousands of birds commit suicide every year. This mysterious Jatinga Hill is a great source of attraction for the tourists all over the world.

Moreover, the world's largest river island 'Majuli' will encourage tourism industry in Assam to a great extent. The various historical monuments and places like 'Rangghar, 'Karengghar, 'Joysagar', 'Joydoul', etc. will encourage tourism in Assam. Besides these, the various historical places like Sonitpur (at present Tezpur)-the capital of Ban Raja, Garhgaon-the capital of the Ahoms, Jerangapathar-a place where Joymati sacrificed her life for her husband, etc. will attract the tourists. Moreover, the various religious places and temples like

Kamakhya temple, the Umananda temple, the Agnigarh and the Mahabhairavi temples, the Mahamaya temple etc. will encourage tourism industry in Assam.

Besides it, the wooded hill stations like Haflong, Badarpur, etc. will attract the tourists for hiking, trekking and camping. Further, tea tourism and golf tourism of Assam will attract the tourists. Assam is also very rich in cultural heritage. It is a heavenly abode of various tribes, castes and communities having their religious and cultural festivals, the 'Bihu' for the Assamese, the 'Bathou' for the Bodos, etc.

V. Problems to Rise Tourism Industry in Assam:

From the above findings, it is clear that tourism has a great potentiality for generating income and employment opportunities in Assam. But even then, no perceptible change has been seen in this sector of the economy due to some problems. The main constraints that are coming into the way of its development are self-explanatory which can be identified as (a) Lack of infrastructure, (b) Communication bottlenecks, (c) Geographical isolation, (d) Ethnic clashes leading to political instability, (e) Growth of insurgent activities (f) Lack of fund (g) Absence of leadership and entrepreneurship ability, (h) Indifferent attitude of the Government both at State and Central level (i) Defective socio-economic and political set up (j) Lack of a proper tourism development policy of the Government (k) Lack of people's co-operation and consciousness, (l) Lack of proper friendly investment atmosphere (m) Absence of congenial atmosphere to attract the tourists and such many other factors.

VI. Suggestions to Improve the Scenario:

In spite of the constraints as listed above, Assam is still maintaining a bright prospect of economic development in terms of tourism industry. But for this, some immediate as well as long term measures, as mentioned below, are to be adopted-

i) A strong political will is of excessive in need for the restoration of peace and political stability in the area with a whole hearted efforts including political dialogue with the various insurgent groups working in Assam should be made to redress their grievances within the framework of Indian constitution in a democratic manner.

ii) Government should make huge investment to break the geographical isolation and remove communication-bottlenecks from Assam.

iii) Planned efforts are to be made by the Government to build up the required infrastructure of the state.

iv) Proper tourism development policy is the need of the hour and for this Government should make a thorough survey in the state.

v) Moreover, maintenance of a friendly investment atmosphere is very important for attracting foreign investors as well as the tourists. International and national confidence is to be restored for attracting the national and foreign tourists.

vi) Planned, sustained and well-thought long term efforts are to be made by the Government to improve the socio-economic and political set up of Assam.

vii) Above all, people's consciousness to develop their own area through the development of tourism-industry is a great need of the hour. People should voluntarily come out and desist the terrorists from doing anti-national activities.

viii) In short, restoration of peace and tranquility to attract the foreign tourists is of utmost importance for the development of trade and tourism in Assam.

VII. Recommendations:

However, though the process of economic liberalization could not create any impact on the economy of Assam, yet it has widened the scope of the development of tourism industry in Assam. For example, the signing of the MoU with the USA based company "Ogden Energy of New Jersey" by the government of Assam for taking over a lease of the Bongaigaon Thermal Power Station (BTPS) for its renovation, submitting proposals by another US based company named "American Power Gen System Association" for setting up a 300 MW coal based power project at Borgolai, inauguration of NEDFi at Guwahati, entry of some new Indian Company for promoting industrial projects like Premier Cryogenics Ltd., Reliance Industries Ltd., etc. are, no doubt, a strong indication of the restoration of national and international confidence.

According to an international agency named "Coopers and Lybrand Report", Assam has the potential to emerge as a strategic base for foreign and domestic investors for two reasons. Firstly, it is argued that the foreign as well as the domestic investors would be encouraged to set up their export-oriented industries in Assam to enjoy the vast potential of contiguous markets of ASEAN countries namely Myanmar, China, Malayasia, Thailand, Phillipines, Combodia, Indonesia, etc. which are regarded as the fastest growing regions in the world and secondly, to utilize its rich and abundant natural as well as human resources. Now it is expected that with the arrival of the region as well as domestic investors in Assam, there will be an influx of tourists into the region from various parts of our country as well as from abroad. Thus, it is expected that the influx of these tourists will directly give a big push to the growth and development of the tourists industry in the state.

According to Mr. K. P. Singh, the President of the Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India, Assam has the 17 domestic tourists create one job for Assam's people.

Hence, it is very important to attract the foreign tourists into Assam from the economic point of view. At present 5 million foreign tourists come to India annually and soon it is expected to increase a large percentage of these tourists can be attracted to Assam by restoring national and international confidence.

VIII. Conclusion:

Thus, the development of tourism industry Assam largely depends upon the formulation of a proper tourism development policy and people's co-operation and consciousness. The High Powered Shukla Commission has recommended for establishing a North-East Tourist Development Corporation to develop tourism in the region. It has also recommended to issue Inner-Line Permits relax the Restricted Area Permits as well as to introduce Charter Flights for NE Package tours etc. Moreover, an honest and strong will of the government coupled with people's hearty co-operation will definitely boost up tourism industry in Assam in near future.

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