

Tourism Potentiality in Tinsukia district of Upper Assam: An Analysis

Anjan Kumar Bordoloi¹ and Binod Kr. Agarwal²

Abstract: *North East of India, popularly known as N.E., comprises of the eight States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim and geographically situated in the North East corner of India with an area of 25.5 million Sq. Km (7.8% of the land mass of the country). N.E. shares the International boundaries of India with China to the North, Bangladesh to the South-West, Bhutan and Nepal to the North-West and Myanmar to the East. It has from time immemorial been the meeting ground of diverse ethnic and cultural streams. Through the long columns of history, people of different races and ethnology have migrated into this land and merged into a common harmonious whole in a rare process of fraternization and assimilation. Tourism in Assam is essentially nature based; therefore, national parks, wild life sanctuaries, rivers, lakes, hot water springs and thick wooded forest and wildlife are the major components of tourist attractions in Assam. Tinsukia is one of the twenty seven administrative districts in the state of Assam. The district occupies an area of 3790 km² and has a population of 1,316,948 (as of 2011 Census) of which males constitute 51% of the population and females 49%. The Tourism potentiality of the Tinsukia district of Assam is immense with a combination of human, natural, cultural, ethnic beauty, religious attractions, heritage sites and deep forests. Most foreign travelers look for ethnic and culture mosaic, adventure and Tourism while a domestic tourist is enthused by religious attractions, wildlife and flora and fauna. In all these areas the Dehing Patkai Region of the Tinsukia District of Assam has tremendous scope for attraction. The lush green valleys and scenic splendour of this area covering the geographical areas of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts and South-Eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh, cast spell on visitors. The lush green rain forest patch of Joypur, Dirok and Upper Dehing locations are ideal for a wide variety of flora and fauna as also for trekking. Thus the whole region of the Tinsukia District of Assam has tremendous potentiality for furthering Tourism development. Hence the area also has tremendous scope for entrepreneurship development. The paper intends to highlight the potentiality of tourism development in the Tinsukia district of upper Assam with that of its infrastructure planning.*

Keywords: Tourism Potentiality, Infrastructure Planning.

Introduction

Tourism is an economic activity of immense global importance. Perhaps there is hardly any field of activity where so many people are involved directly or indirectly. Needless to say, tourism has found a niche for itself as a very effective instrument for generating employment and earning foreign exchange thereby facilitating overall development. Liberalization has brought Indian

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Margherita College, Margherita, Tinsukia.

²Associate Professor, Dept. of Commerce, Margherita College, Margheria, Assam Tinsukia, Assam.

Corresponding author: Anjan Kumar Bordoloi can be contacted at: anjankumarbordoloi@gmail.com

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economy much closer to the International economic scene-creating the right backdrop for the growth of tourism. In a country of diversities like India, each state has its own attractions in abundance to develop tourism. But it is necessary for each state to move forward with clear aims, objectives and programmes to help India realize its tourism potential to the fullest. As per the working strategy for the 12th Five Year Plan, the Ministry of Tourism has adopted a 'pro-poor tourism' approach which could contribute significantly to poverty reduction. Pro-poor tourism signifies all plan and policies directed towards generating jobs, dispersing economic benefits to rural areas, creating business opportunities for small and medium entrepreneurs & protecting socio-cultural and natural environment.

Typical North-East

North East of India, popularly known as N.E., comprises of the eight States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim and geographically situated in the North East corner of India, at Latitude 21.57° N - 29.30° N and Longitude 88° E - 97.30° E with an area of 25.5 million Sq. Km (7.8% of the land mass of the country). N.E. shares the International boundaries of India with China to the North, Bangladesh to the South-West, Bhutan and Nepal to the North-West and Myanmar to the East. This region is connected with the rest of India only through a narrow corridor in North Bengal, known as *Chicken Neck*, having an approximate width of 33 km on the eastern side and 21 km on the western side. About 70% of N.E. are hilly regions, and the topography varies within each state. Mountains and hills cover most of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and about half of Tripura, 20% of Assam, 90% of Manipur and almost entire Sikkim.

The plains of the region are mainly made up of separate landmasses - the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley in Assam and the Tripura plains in the South. The Brahmaputra Valley stretches longitudinally for about 730 km, from North Lakhimpur to Dhubri districts in Assam. The Barak Valley, formed by the river Barak and its tributaries covers the districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi of South Assam. In Manipur, the valley is small, comprising only about 10% of the total area of the State. The Tripura plain is an extension of the Ganga-Brahmaputra plain. The topography of the hills is generally rugged and vast areas are inaccessible. The flora and fauna of this region is numerous and varied. N.E. is regarded as one of the most bio-diverse regions of the world (hottest hotspots) (Myers, 2000). Hill ranges forming part of the Himalayas guard the northern side of the region. These unique and varied natures of the region make it one of the most beautiful geographical regions of the country ready to be explored by the tourists of different tastes and habits. Thus North East of India has a tremendous scope for tourism possibilities specifically in the areas of Eco-Tourism, Cultural Tourism and Heritage Tourism. So there lies tremendous possibility for Entrepreneurship Development which will undoubtedly brings prosperity to the region. As Entrepreneurship Development will improve the social mind set and will lead to betterment of Socio-Economic status of the people.

Enchanting Assam

The word Assam is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Asom' meaning peerless. Nestled in the heart of India's North-East region, the international border of the region runs in a manner which leaves only a narrow strip in the submontane region of the Himalayas as that opens out to the Indian mainland. The bountiful monsoon, coupled with mostly humid tropical climate, has stimulated and nurtured the luxuriant green against which the diverse flora blooms in a riot of

colours. The lush green forests and the fresh running waters shelter a wide variety of the denizens of the sylvan worlds, which further deepens the aura of mystery around the frontier state. Through the long columns of history, people of different races and ethnology have migrated into this land and merged into a common harmonious whole in a rare process of fraternization and assimilation. The enchanting land through the ages has attracted waves after waves of diverse human groups and has thus grown into a most colourful mosaic of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversities.

Tourism in Assam is essentially nature based; therefore, national parks, wild life sanctuaries, rivers, lakes, hot water springs and thick wooded forest and wildlife are the major components of tourist attractions in Assam. It is counted as one of the prime Eco-Tourism destinations in India. Eco-Tourism in Assam attracts a large number of nature lovers and animal lovers in the form of national & international tourist who love to see colourful wildlife in their natural habitat. *There are five National Parks and eleven wildlife and bird sanctuaries for protection and preservation of wildlife in the state.* Kaziranga, for instance, has been receiving a steady flow of nature tourists for years. Other areas like Manas are increasingly touted as excellent destinations for bird watchers and nature treks. However what is required is expanding the Tourism market that includes destinations other than the popular wildlife sanctuaries, and innovative strategies to capitalize on this new trend.

Tourism Potentiality with Reference to Tinsukia District of Upper Assam

Tinsukia is one of the twenty seven administrative districts in the state of Assam. The district occupies an area of 3790 km² and has a population of 1,316,948 (as of 2011 Census) of which males constitute 51% of the population and females 49%. The Tourism potentiality of the Tinsukia district of Assam is immense with a combination of human, natural, cultural, ethnic beauty, religious attractions, heritage sites and deep forests. Most foreign travelers look for ethnic and culture mosaic, adventure and Tourism while a domestic tourist is enthused by religious attractions, wildlife and flora and fauna. In all these areas the Dehing Patkai Region of the Tinsukia District of Assam has tremendous scope for attraction.

The Dehing-Patkai encompasses a large area covering the districts of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh in Assam and part of Arunachal Pradesh (the districts of Tirap, Changlang and lower Dibang Valley). The whole tract of land covering the two banks of the river "Buri-Dehing" (a branch of the river "Diyun" that originates from the Patkai range and bifurcates near Miao in Arunachal Pradesh) is the Dehing Patkai region. On being bifurcated, one branch of the river Diyun viz. "Noa Dehing" reaches the river Luhit, while the other "Buri Dehing" dips down into the great Brahmaputra; thereby creating a vast land mass- the river island yet to be traced. Though the whole belt of the Dehing Patkai has great significance from various counts, its discovery is of recent origin. The history of Assam and that of the World War II are very closely related to this area.

The Dehing Patkai area comes under the country's richest "North East bio-geographic zone" and "Brahmaputra valley Biotic Province". It is a part of the World's bio-diversity hotspot. The tourism potentiality which creates possibilities for Entrepreneurship Development at Dehing Patkai belt is immense with a combination of human, natural, cultural, ethnic beauty, religious attractions, heritage sites and deep forests.

Most foreign travellers today look for ethnic and cultural mosaic, adventure and eco-tourism; while a domestic tourist is enthused by religious attractions, wild life and flora and fauna. To mention a few, one can enjoy the socio cultural life style (their food habit, dress,

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ornaments, religious practices, games and sports etc) of the large number of ethnic tribes like Singphos, Noctes, Tai Phakes, Wangchos, Tangsas, Sonowals, Kacharis, Duantias, Khamtis, Deoris, Sema Nagas and many more in addition to those of non-tribals like Ahoms, Morans, Mottacks, Tea Gardens Labourers Communities, Nepalise etc. The Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (rich in bio-diversity, Salix forest, wild animals like Tiger, Elephant, Gangatic Dolphin, Hollok Gibbon, White Winged Wood Duck, Black Breasted Parrot Bill etc.); the Maguri Beel (hotspot for bird-watchers); the Bherajan-Borjan Padomoni Wildlife Sanctuary (ideal for bird watching and private studying) all within a radius of 12 km. from Tinsukia town and are most attractive for tourists. The Namdapha Tiger Reserve in Changland district of Arunachal Pradesh is still another bio-diversity hotspot with Tiger, Leopard, Snow Leopard and Clouded Leopard.

Being a prominent industrial belt of the entire North East India, tourists here get not only the opportunity of enjoying the scenic beauty of century old lush green tea gardens but also a peek into the manufacturing process and the unique culture that thrives within the plantation of Assam; Coal mines under the North-Eastern Coal Fields near Margherita; one of the World's oldest functioning crude oil refineries and oil museum at Digboi and plywood manufacturing units at Tinsukia, Margherita and their vicinity. In addition, the sprawling British era clubs within these industrial establishments would offer tourist the unique opportunity of amusement through their standard quality golf courses, tennis courts, billiard tables, bars, swimming pools, etc.

Thus the whole region of Tinsukia District and more prominently Dehing Patkai in a broader way has tremendous potential for development of tourism industry. The strength of this region lies in the product quality which can create a unique experience that most travellers now look for. It is a combination of all types of tourist interest. More particularly, the unique bio-diversity of the region has wide opened its scope for development of tourism industry.

Significance of the Study

The Tourism potentiality of the Tinsukia district of Assam is immense with a combination of human, natural, cultural, ethnic beauty, religious attractions, heritage sites and deep forests. Most foreign travelers look for ethnic and culture mosaic, adventure and Tourism while a domestic tourist is enthused by religious attractions, wildlife and flora and fauna. In all these areas the Dehing Patkai Region of the Tinsukia District of Assam has tremendous scope for attraction. Thus the Tinsukia District of Assam has tremendous potentiality for furthering Tourism development. Hence the area also has tremendous scope for entrepreneurship development.

Objective of the paper

The paper intends to highlight the potentiality of tourism development in the Tinsukia district of upper Assam with that of its infrastructure planning.

Research question

Whether the Tourism Infrastructure is highly developed in the study area?

Research Methodology

The sample for the present study is the tourists visiting Tinsukia district particularly visiting Dibru-Saikhowa and adjacent locations at Tinsukia district of Assam. Convenience sampling has been adopted to collect the data which has been collected during September- October, 2015. Total of Hundred (100) tourists (Both National & International) has been selected for the

purpose. For collection of primary data, a structured schedule has been designed keeping in view the specific objective of the paper. Tourists have been sourced from NGO's operating Tourism enterprises at Dibru-Saikhowa (Tinsukia) and adjacent locations. Secondary data has been collected from Books, Journals, Magazines and from Internet.

Analysis & Results

The samples for the study were the tourist (National & International) visited Dibru Saikhowa and adjacent locations during September- October, 2015. The distribution of Tourist was 16% (16 No's) International & 84% (84 No's) National Tourists. Data analysis indicates that 90% of the respondents (Tourist) responded that they have visited the site through tour package, 88% remarked that Travel Agencies/ Tour Operators were the sources through which they came here and enjoying the pristine beauty of Dibru-Saikhowa and adjacent locations.

Of the total sample tourist 78% have not visited the site before and 20% had visited the site once. On analyzing the purpose of visiting the area the broad interpretation were which being articulated from their multiple viewpoints--maximum tourist 80% remarked to enjoy the nature & migratory birds, 57% remarked it for to enjoy wildlife, river dolphin & scenic beauty, 03% remarked for boating & trekking. The other viewpoints were to see feral (wild) horse, gibbons, to enjoy photography, river Brahmaputra, tea gardens of upper Assam etc.

On responding to the attractions of this site, their multiple viewpoints were--maximum 80% of the respondents remarked it for migratory birds & natural beauty, 61% remarked it for river dolphin, 57% for feral horse, 22% for boating 07% for sunset view etc. On the rating of the image of the site before they visit were 75% (Above Average), 22% (Average) & least 03% (Below Average) but in response to the rating of the image of the site after visit shows 05% (Excellent), 77% (Above Average), 08 (Average) & least 10% (Below Average). On the rating the experience of tourists on the site was 81% (Excellent), 12% (Above Average) & 07% (Average). Maximum 61% of the tourists remarked that the area conserves natural resources and the same time promotes tourism. 32% of the tourists remarked that the place provides support to the Assam's Economy and 43% of the tourists remarked that the place provides support to the local entrepreneurs.

In response to the elements do they think that indicate the success of an Tourism site were being rated as per preference and in the context to studied area. The results so obtained were Guide (32% remarked it as Excellent at Dibru-Saikhowa), Hospitality (26% remarked as Excellent), Fooding (13% remarked as Excellent), Accommodation (51% remarked as Excellent) & Cost (72% remarked as Excellent). On the rating of the Tourism Hospitality in the area the results were 24% remarked it as Excellent, 37% remarked it as Above Average, 39% remarked it as Average. In response to the evidence being traced by the tourists regarding the local people involvement in the area in the promotion of the Tourism projects the results obtained were 91% responded as 'Yes' and rest 09% as 'No'. On the response to the entrepreneurial participation at the study area the results so obtained from the respondents were, 57% remarked it as Above Average, 20% as Average, 13% remarked it as Below Average and 10% as Poor. In response to the local people benefits from Tourism the results so obtained were as it promotes local entrepreneurship, locals are employed, employment opportunities created promotion of culture and traditions etc. In response to the problems the local people have encountered at the time of developing their Eco-Tourism enterprises were (77%) found to be lack of sufficient capital and poor access to the promotional agencies. Of the total respondents surveyed a low percentage of

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27% respondents have visited other Eco-tourism sites. Those respondents responded rated Dibru-Saikhowa as one of the best Tourism sites they have seen.

Table 1: showing level of satisfaction of the respondents regarding the study area

Factors of satisfaction	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Average	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Idea
Accommodation	-	42%	24%	26%	08%	-
Transport/ Accessibility	24%	56%	17%	03%	-	-
Food & Beverage	08%	37%	41%	08%	06%	-
Sanitation & Hygiene	-	14%	27%	59%	-	-
Guide Service & Interpretation	06%	44%	23%	27%	-	-
Hospitality	24%	37%	39%	-	-	-
Security	02%	23%	37%	34%	04%	-
Travel Cost	09%	27%	53%	11%	-	-
Package tour arrangement	09%	34%	57%	-	-	-
Information about the site	04%	32%	60%	04%	-	-
Promotion & Marketing	06%	36%	34%	22%	02%	-
Information & interpretation about local culture, history and resources	07%	23%	31%	37%	02%	-

(Source: Field Survey)

Results of the data analysis regarding level of satisfaction of the respondents regarding the study area the results indicates as for accommodation highest 42% of the respondents responded satisfied, for Transport/ Accessibility highest 56% of the respondents responded satisfied, for Food & Beverage highest 41% of the respondents responded average. For sanitation highest 59% of the respondents responded dissatisfied, for guide service and interpretation highest 44% respondents responded satisfied. For hospitality highest 39% of the respondents responded satisfied, for travel cost highest 53% of the respondents remarked as average, for package tour arrangement highest 57% of the respondent's responded average, for information of the site highest 60% of the respondent's responded average, for promotion & marketing highest 36% of the respondents responded satisfied and for Information & interpretation about local culture, history and resources highest 37% respondents responded as dissatisfied.

To answer the research question '*whether Tourism Infrastructure is highly developed in the study area*' it can be stated that, the Tourism facilities in the study area are not highly developed rather it has been partially developed or we can said that the facilities/ tourism services are not up to the standard. The tourists responded negatively regarding Sanitation & Hygiene (59% of the respondents responded dissatisfied), for Information & interpretation about local culture, history and resources (37% respondents responded as dissatisfied), for accommodation (34% of

the respondents responded under category dissatisfied & very dissatisfied), for Food & Beverage highest 41% of the respondents responded average, for package tour arrangement highest 57% of the respondent's responded average and for information of the site location highest 60% of the respondent's responded average which indicates the respondents mixed views. Thus furthering the development of Tourism Infrastructure in the study area following important points needs to be taken care of:

- (a) To overcome the problems of accommodation the state Governments should adopt more distinct policy of certification, monitoring and registering of lodges, inns and paying guest accommodations with standard facilities considering the increase inflow of tourists.
- (b) With the increase in tourist inflow we also need trained and qualified manpower in hospitality Sector- tour operations, ground operations, tour guides and in adventure sports.
- (c) Distance, cost of travel, hygienic and hassle free rail and road journey are important considerations to attract tourists. Most people travel for leisure and hassle free enjoyment than anything else. This is an important area that Assam in particular and the North Eastern Region in general should take serious note of. The internal rail and road networks and the sub-standard condition of the existing roads must have to be improved. To entertain ethnic tourism, connectivity with the ethnic tribe's prone areas needs serious attention. This as a corollary will invite a boost to their economic conditions as well. Moreover, national highways within the town areas should be of one way roads to avoid hassles in traffic.
- (d) Reopening possibilities of the historic Stillwell Road that stretches from Lekhapani (near to Ledo) in Assam to Kunming in Yunnan province of South China via Myanmar would be a viable link for connecting India to the South-East Asian nations. Since this region has high potentiality to attract foreign tourist from the South-East Asian country including China and Myanmar; as also people from other parts of India, given adequate infrastructure, would find it both convenient and cheaper to travel around those countries; reopening of the Stillwell road will give a real boost to the tourism effort.
- (e) Lack of high standard hotels and resorts in the region is an important deficiency. It is therefore pertinent to invite private investors in the area. New resorts and shopping centres considering upon demand should be open up at Makum, Digboi, Margherita, Ledo, Lekhapani and Udaypur areas of Dehing Patkai belt.
- (f) Today's tourism marketing is characterized more by Information Technology driven micro marketing than macro deceptions. Tourists want specific information on their specific areas of interest. Therefore, tourism managers should be trained and well-equipped to face this emerging trend.
- (g) Tourism as an important subject under curricula at the University and College levels is yet to be introduced in Assam as also in other North-Eastern states. Introduction of the subject would not only create local skills to serve and supplement the tourism effort; but would also contribute significantly towards continuous qualitative improvement of the industry through persistent research and consultancy services including seminars, workshops, symposia etc. Moreover such initiative would be taken by the Degree Colleges of the region.
- (h) It is observed, some tribal people are gradually abandoning their traditional cultural practices in domestic useable, dress habits and even in house building in the name of

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modernization. The trend, if not checked, may appear as a mighty blow to our tourism effort. It is therefore essential to cajole and motivate them to restrain from such practices.

- (i) As a safeguard against gradual exhaustion of tradition and cultural of various ethnic groups due to modernization and assimilation, it is essential to setup cultural museums at higher educational centers like Universities and local Colleges with financial accommodation from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Govt. of India. Such museums may be tied up either with that of tourism of such institutions. Else, the institutions may set up tribal research study centers and maintain such museums in addition to other research oriented activities. Such museums, if maintained in right earnest with gusto, will be unique places of attraction for many tourists.
- (j) Tourism is primarily a private sector driven industry. Most tourism successful countries have built strong partnership with the private sector. Therefore, the states of the North East region must come up with bold positive policies to enable private initiatives to grow.
- (k) Last, but not the least, tourism and peace has symbolic relationship. The prevailing turbulent situation in the entire North East India is not conducive for the investors and tourists to penetrate. However, we shall have to face the challenge keeping in mind that most factors contributing to such a situation are the fallout of unemployment problem faced by the youths of the region. The immense employment potential of tourism industry will serve as a positive check against such malice. A sincere and planned effort by the Govt. can solve many such problems.

Conclusion

The government regards tourism as of immense consequence can hardly be overstated; indeed, this dedication is fervently declared at every meeting, convention and seminar that is held for discourses on the subject. The tourism policies of the North-Eastern states are extremely well-meaning in their aims and in their grand-standing. However, despite the collective keenness in tourism development, the translation of assurances from paper to reality has yet to be realized and actual results are just as obscure as they were yesterday. The primary hurdles of publicity, tools of infrastructure facilitation and administrative and security review and reform ought to be first taken into consideration in conjunction with community participation for the successful execution of a dynamic tourism policy. Indian tourism has vast potential for generating employment and earning large sums of foreign exchange besides giving a flip to the country's overall economic and social development. Much has been achieved by way of increasing air seat capacity, increasing trains and railway connectivity to important tourist destinations, four-laning of roads connecting important tourist centers and increasing availability of accommodation by adding heritage hotels to the hotel industry and encouraging paying guest accommodation. But much more remains to be done. Since tourism is a multi-dimensional activity, and basically a service industry, it would be necessary that all wings of the Central and State governments, private sector and voluntary organizations become active partners in the endeavour to attain sustainable growth in tourism if India is to become a world player in the tourist industry. So, let us all strive together to realize our dreams, let us wait for the visitors with infinite resources to satisfy them, let us welcome them with a "golden heart"!

Authors' Note

This manuscript is the authors' original work, has not been published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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