

ROLE OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL ECONOMY

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Abstract

(According to World Travel and Tourism Council, India will be tourism hotspot from 2009-2018, having the highest 10-year growth potential. As per the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2009 by the World Economic Forum, India is ranked 11th in the Asia Pacific region and 62nd overall on the list of the world's attractive destinations..Tourism is emerging as one of the fastest growing industries of the world and it is also recognized as the most promising industry globally. It is growing almost at the rate of 6% per annum both in the domestic and international segments. International travelers are projected to nearly double in size by 2020 led by China, India, and South-East Asia. There has been remarkable growth in the recent years in foreign and domestic tourist arrivals to Assam due to various efforts made by Government of Assam, including promoting North-East through the "Paradise Unexplored". According to Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2010), there was 3865503 tourists arrived in Assam during 2009 out of which 3850521 were domestic tourist. Keeping this entire thing in mind the proposed paper shows the potentialities and problems of tourism and the paper is also an attempt to know the various factors that helps to expand tourism industry in the rural areas.)

Keywords: Tourism Industry, Eco Tourism, Gross Domestic Product, Employment Generation

Introduction

Tourism is emerging as one of the fastest growing industries of the world and it is also recognized as the most promising industry globally. Today tourism is the largest service industry in India, with a Contribution of 6.23% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing 8.78% of the total employment. India witnesses' more than 5 million annual foreign tourist arrivals and 562 million domestic tourism visits. The tourism industry in India generated about US\$100 billion in 2008 and that is expected to increase to US\$275.5 billion by 2018 at a 9.4% annual growth rate. The Ministry of Tourism is the nodal agency for the development and promotion of tourism in India and maintains the "Incredible India" campaign.

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Competitiveness Report 2009 by the World Economic Forum, India is ranked 11th in the Asia Pacific region and 62nd overall on the list of the world's attractive destinations. It is ranked the 14th best tourist destination for its natural resources and 24th for its cultural resources. The India travel and tourism industry ranked 5th in the long-term (10-year) growth and is expected to be the second largest employer in the world by 2019. International travelers are projected to nearly double in size by 2020 led by China, India, and South-East Asia.

Dhemaji is an economically backward district of Assam. The economy of Dhemaji is generally agro-based. In Dhemaji district, about 98% of the total population lives in the rural areas. As per 1991 census, 45% of the populations are workers, while 55% of the populations are non-workers Agriculture is the principal occupation and more than 85% of the total population depends on it.

Tourism is mainly a labour-intensive technology and labour is quite abundant in Dhemaji. The district has scattered potential for the tourism industry with natural flora and fauna. Being service sector tourism has done stupendous performance since the adoption of new economic policy in 1991.

Objectives

1. To study the existing tourist spots and to identify potential ones.
2. To study the existing facilities for tourists.
3. To identify the obstacles in the development of tourism industry.
4. Suggest some measures to the concerned authority that are suitable for further development of the tourism.

Methodology

This study is analytical and descriptive in nature. Analytical method is used to analyse the primary data collected through the field survey and descriptive method is used to analyse the secondary data collected from various books and journals.

Discussions

Major Tourist Spots

Gerukamukh

One of the major attractions of Dhemaji, Assam Gerukamukh is situated at a distance of 44 Km from the district Head Quarter. Very well communication is provided from Gogamukh, Lakhimpur and Guwahati to this place. The most interesting thing to observe

here is the Gerukamukh Subansiri River, the largest tributary of Brahmaputra which touches the plains from the hills of Arunachal Pradesh giving gigantic scenery. This is also popular as a picnic spot.

Malini Than

There is an important archaeological site called Malini Than. It is situated at only 42 kms to the north-east of Dhemaji at Likabali, a township in the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. A lot of historical monuments can also be observed here which have been excavated from the place. Malini Mela of this site held in the month of April every year attracts huge number of tourists both from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh along with other parts of India basically from West Bengal.

Maa Manipuri Than

This famous place of worship placed at a distance of 25 km in the south west wards of Dhemaji. It was established by the Ahom King Gourinath Singha as a monument.

Bordoibam Bilmukh Bird Sanctuary

This is an imminent bird sanctuary shared between the districts of Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur, Assam. Nature lovers can get a glimpse of the state diverse natural heritage on a visit to the BordoibamBilmukh Bird sanctuary, Dhemaji.

Gogamukh

Gogamkh is a small town of Dhemaji district. It is also the head quarter of Mishing Autonomous Council (MAC). The secretariat of MAC is in Gogamukh.

Besides the traditional avenues of tourism Dhemaji has the scope of some modern areas of tourism attractions too.

Adventure Tourism in Dhemaji

The Subansiri River and the Simen River of Dhemaji have ample scope for various water sports. River Rafting and Boat racing are two popular water sports that these rivers can offer. Though these sports are not so popular here in this part of North-East but can be transformed into popular sports with the concerted effort of government and the private initiators.

Flood Tourism in Dhemaji

Dhemaji is one of the major districts of Assam affected by flood every year. Loss of lives, property, crops are becoming common in every year. In 2011, the tremendous water forces of Ghai River create a devastating flood in the Sissiborgaon area of Dhemaji. In view of this devastating flood the Assam Government has decided to organise the Flood Festival

Assam from 2011. The chief minister has announced that during the annual floods in Assam foreign and national tourists will be flown in helicopters and shown Assam. This will include watching the people floating in water on bhels, throwing food packets to the people, taking pictures etc. In this regard a Flood Festival Committee has already been formed under the Flood Minister.

Rural Tourism in Dhemaji

The Assam government has taken an initiative to explore rural tourism which has largely remained untapped as there are many places in the state's vast rural swath that speak of culture, history and religion. For instance, Sissi-Tongani is a small village under the Sissiborgaon Development Block of Dhemaji District which lies on the bank of Brahmaputra River. It is inhabited by the Mishing tribal Community. The community has their own culture and tradition. The government can proposed this village to develop a tourist destination. Tourists can be taken around the place to get them acquainted with the tribal practices of the residents.

The same way many villages of Dhemaji carry some unique features which also can promote for rural tourism. The JunKareng, the Malinipur, the Nari- Basti are some villages of Dhemaji district where by promoting rural tourism the socio-economic condition of the village can be uplifted.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a new form of tourism based on the idea of sustainability. Ecotourism has tremendous potentiality in the district of Dhemaji. With the existing variety of flora and fauna, the district can provide a sound base to start eco-tourism project. Such projects can be used for advocating environment awareness, long-term conservation measures and economic benefit to local people. The district has already one ecotourism project at the outskirts of Dhemaji town name as "the Moumari Eco-Tourism Project." The district has already submitted one more ecotourism project to the government of Assam.

There is also possibility of tourism development in the greenery part of Dhemaji. In this case we can definitely mention the scenic beauty of Dimow, Simen, Gali and Pova forest areas of Dhemaji. These forest area lies at the foot hill of Arunachal Pradesh in one hand and on the other site of National Highway. These forest site natural scenic beauty areas surely can be developed as tourism spot in Dhemaji.

The district has number of rivers and tributaries. The existing small and big river islands also can be developed as tourism centre by making these places film making centre and recreation centre. For recreation centre the concerned authority can built cottage and provide other facilities which can attract national and international tourist. So far film making is concerned several Mishing video films have made on the river island of Subansiri and on the bank of Simen and Dimow River of Dhemaji. After Majuli, the second largest river island 'KabuChapori' also lies in Dhemaji. The authority can developed this river island as a major tourist spot with due publicity. This island can also be an important place of film making.

Besides the above sited spots there are few more towns and place that can attract domestic as well as foreign tourist in Dhemaji. The road site scenic beauty between

Dimow and Jonai can be developed as tourist spot. Silapathar and Jonai are the small towns of Dhemaji which also can be developed into major domestic tourist destination.

Elements of tourism attraction

Pleasing Weather-

It is the most important and crucial attractions of any tourist place. It plays an important role in making a holiday a pleasant or an unpleasant experience. As the major part of the Study Area is located near the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, it exhibits difference in temperature, rainfall, fog, wind etc. The climate of the district is Per-humid characterized by high rainfall, mild summer and cool winter. The annual rainfall of the district ranges from 2600 mm to 3200 mm. Rainfall generally begins from April and continues till the end of September. July is the rainiest month of the year in Dhemaji. So the best time to visit this area is from October to March while the weather remains pleasant.

Transport Facilities:

It is a very crucial factor as it is a means by which a tourist can reach the area where attractions are located. Tourist attractions of whatever type would be of little importance if their locations are inaccessible by the normal means of transport. Dhemaji is well connected by road and railway network. The NH 52 connects Dhemaji via BaihataChariali. Dhemaji is also connected to Guwahati via Kaliabor- Nagaon. Dhemaji has also railway connection by Metre Gauge track. Presently, work is going on to transforming of existing Metre Gauge into Broad Gauge. This would be a drastic development in the railway transport which ultimately can attract a huge number of tourists to this place from different parts of India. The district has no direct air connection but someone may take the flight of Lilabari, Lakhimpur which is the nearest airport of Dhemaji, Assam

The ASTC and Under ASTC have been continuously providing bus services to the nearest districts. It is observed that a number of private operators like Network Travels, Blue Hills Travels, Green Valley Travels etc. giving emphasis on operation of night-services buses from Dhemaji to Guwahati and some cases to other towns of the state too. A number of inter-state buses run from Silapathar via Dhemaji to Siliguri and Coochbehar.

Accommodation:

Availability of tourist lodge, good quality hotel, resort etc. plays an important role for tourist attraction. A number of tourists visit a particular tourist region simply because there is a first class hotel which provides excellent services and facilities. In the centre of the Dhemaji town there is a Govt. Tourist lodge which has been providing lodging facility basically to tourists from other states of India since the last couple of years.

Besides Govt. Lodge, there are a small number of good quality private hotels too in Dhemaji and Silapathar. Silapathar is a business hub of Dhemaji district. Malini Than is just 8 kilometers away from Silapathar town. Tourist for Malini Than and other places to this area can stay in good quality private hotel at Hotel Nova Palace and Hotel Green Lake in Silapathar.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In spite of huge potentiality tourism is still a very poor industry in Dhemaji, Assam. Though there is lack of exact statistics but whatever is available it is found that only 2-3% foreign tourists to the state visited the district. According to Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2010), there was 38, 50,521 domestic tourists arrived in Assam in 2009 and out of which only 7-8% visited the district. Most of domestic tourists visited the district for business and administrative purpose rather to enjoy the various tourist spots. The poor accessibility due to the deplorable state of road and railway network as the area is chronically affected by flood is the main obstacle of tourism development in Dhemaji. Moreover negative perception among the outsiders regarding the place and lack of marketing and publicity are also few impediments in the development of tourism in the area.

Before conclusion, in order to improve the tourism activities in Dhemaji, Assam few suggestions can be put in front of the authorities and organizations who are responsible for the development of tourism in the concerned area. Some of the suggestions are as follows:

- The road and railway connectivity definitely need to be improved along with the transport service.
- Publicity about the tourism spot and facility should be given on state as well as national electronic and printing media.
- Authority should come forward with more tourist lodge and also provide tax exemptions to the private hotels.
- The private tour operators like Network Travels, Blue Hills Travels etc. should manage package tours with reasonable cost.
- Government tourist lodges should be cleaned properly and preference should be given tourists from other state in these lodges.

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