

A Study on Problems and Prospects of Tourism in Assam

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Abstract

Tourism of Assam has potentialities to be used as a source of economic development of the state's economy. But tourism in Assam is still in infancy. This paper examines the problems and prospects of tourism of Assam. The present study uses both primary and secondary data. For collection of primary data, the study selects five tourist spots of the state namely Kaziranga, Manas, Majuli, Kamakhya and Sivasagar. However the overview of the tourism in Assam in general and the same in Kaziranga, Manas, Majuli, Kamakhya and Sivasagar in particular have been analysed on the basis of secondary data. These include infrastructural issues, insecurity and insurgency, political apathy, lack of proper co-ordination, lack of proper marketing and promotion strategy, lack of basic facilities at tourist destination, absence of trained tourist guides, geological event, clumsy approach towards tourism, catering to the needs of local masses. To ensure all round development of the sector, a complete collaboration should be formed with the help of each stakeholder of tourism of Assam.

Keywords: Tourism, destinations, Problems, Prospects, Assam.

Introduction

Tourism industry of Assam has been facing daunting challenges, but at the same time this industry also has enough potentialities and exciting opportunities to contribute for Assam's economy. The interplay of these problems and prospects create important tasks for researchers to bring reality into the policymakers of the department concerned. Assam is a paradise for tourists. Its enchanting hills, dancing rivers, thick and dark forests, heavy rain during monsoon, innumerable varieties of flora and fauna, countless species of wild animals and plants, melodious folk music, thrilling dances and festivals, variety of many delicious dishes, handlooms and handicrafts and above all its green landscape used to attract people coming from different parts of the world since time of immemorial.

The ungrudging blessings of nature have made tourism in Assam essentially nature-centric, despite the fact there are historical and religious places of tourist attraction. Thus Assam

has tremendous strength of tourist's attraction like scenic beauty, cultural variety, ethnic mixture and diverse flora and fauna. Such wealth of tourism resources endows Assam with comparative advantage over many other states. Yet for variety of reasons this advantage has not brought for Assam the prominent position that it deserves. It is therefore imperative to give a dynamic thrust to tourism promotion and to chart out bold, new directions to tourism growth. Moreover, it can play significant role for the development of the state's economy. Not only that economies of Assam which do not have better infrastructural facilities and economic advantages, can also be developed with the help of tourism development. Most importantly, objective of economic growth can be realized with tourism development. Even researchers from various disciplines and from different countries have given thrust upon tourism as a study in the present time because of its increasing importance and vast linkage with different sectors.

It is in the above background that the present study tries to highlight the problems facing by tourists and required steps to solve the problems.

Objectives

The main objectives of the proposed study are-

- (i) To analyse the problems of tourism sector of Assam.
- (ii) To highlight the prospects of tourism sector of Assam.

Relevance of the Proposed Study

The study is expected to be a useful addition to the growing literature and research on the problems and prospects of tourism of Assam. This study will analyse the positive and negative socio-economic influences on the life of local community and also its impact on improving their living standard. Hence, the present study will provide means and ends to improve the tourism sector of Assam. The important problems and prospects identified in the study are expected to help policy makers to prioritise resources for further development of the sector. The five tourist spots have been chosen for the study: first, these five spots are the most important destinations of Assam; second, all these destinations have been attracting tourists from all parts of the world. In order to assess the problem and prospects of tourism industry of Assam, it is indispensable to conduct systematic analysis on it. It can also help the tourist's organizations and travel firms by way of assessing the need of tourists, identifying potential tourist spots for development etc. Moreover the present study has also been designed to understand present problems of Assam's tourism and its potential to contribute for economic development of Assam.

Data – Nature and Sources

This paper mainly deals with problems and prospects of tourism of Assam and also potentialities identified on the basis of the study conducted on different areas using descriptive survey method and observation method. The present study uses both primary and secondary data. For collection of primary data the study selects five tourist spots of the state namely Kaziranga, Manas, Majuli, Kamakhya and Sivasagar. However the overview of the tourism in Assam in general and the same in Kaziranga, Manas, Majuli, Kamakhya and Sivasagar in particular have been analysed on the basis of secondary data. The local community involved in tourism activities nearby the destinations have also been interviewed regarding their views of problems and prospects associated with their industry. In the present study, 320 sample tourists are randomly selected and interviewed using a well structured pretested schedule.

The secondary data were also collected from some different sources, such as Publications of United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), World Trade and Tourism Council (WTTC), Ministries of Tourism of India, Ministries of Tourism of Assam etc. Some other secondary sources like books, periodicals, research articles, seminar reports, news papers, study reports of expert committees, published and unpublished thesis and dissertations etc are used. In addition to these, a few internet data and literatures have also been used. These are used for the research work after thorough examination of their accuracy.

Problems of tourism of Assam

The important problems facing tourism sector in Assam are mentioned below

Infrastructural issues

Assam suffers from lack of infrastructure and communication bottlenecks, apart from general geographical isolation. Transport system is not properly developed, thus, travel remains a major issue. The entire north east is dominated by the narrow roads, few railway lines and airports. There is also shortfall of facilities like hotels, motels, resorts, lodges and restaurants of global standards. Poor connectivity multiplied by inadequate transportation facilities along with problems related with telecommunication makes tourism highly inconvenient for the tourists.

Insecurity and insurgency

Insufficient tourist safety and security standards are one of the major issues for tourists coming from outside Assam.

Political apathy

Lack of an integrated policy by the government both from the centre as well as the state is one of the reasons for failure to promote tourism as well as its development in Assam.

Lack of proper co-ordination

There is a lack of coordination among several agencies of tourism like Department of Tourism and Department of Archaeology in handling the demands of the tourists in places of natural, historic and religious importance.

Lack of proper marketing and promotion strategy

Without aggressive marketing strategy, the efforts to attract tourists are likely to be haphazard and inefficient. Media and print coverage are also not enough which in turn, made this region almost unnoticed to the eyes of probable domestic and foreign tourists.

Lack of basic facilities at tourist destination

Facilities which are basic to attract tourist are still very much lacking almost all five tourist spots of this study. These include basic amenities such as pure drinking water, well maintained and clean waiting rooms and toilets, 24 x 7 hours electricity supply, first aid and wayside amenities such as lounge, cafeteria, and parking facilities etc.

Absence of trained tourist guides

Trained guides are important requirement of tourist spots. But, Assam virtually does not have any trained guides in important places of tourist attraction. Consequently, as the tourists arrive at such a place there is hardly anyone to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the tourists. **Geological event**

Frequent floods, landslide cause challenges on the way to make Assam as a tourist paradise. During flood, animals and flora and fauna have always been adversely affected the most, roads and bridges almost collapsed which become major challenges of the tourist department of Assam.

Clumsy approach towards tourism

The awareness of Assam's tourist places is not found even among the people of the state. There are hardly any proper organizations working towards the goal of commercializing and bringing pride to Assam's tourism.

Catering to the needs of local masses

Problems like traffic, crowd, poor infrastructure, pollution, littering, underdevelopment, crime etc are not just the problems of the tourists but also affect the local population residing in and around of the destinations.

Prospects of tourism industry of Assam

Tourism is a sunshine industry and a highly potential Foreign Exchange Earner for a nation like India. The North Eastern Region of India, especially Assam is one of the most potential States to make it as tourist's attraction.

Natural beauty

Assam is well blessed by Nature and it lies at the centre of one of the world's richest bio-geographic areas. Assam has beautiful valleys and mountain ranges. Nature's beauty is at its best in this state of India.

Cultural heritage and festivals

Assam has a rich cultural and ethnic heritage that can make it a famous tourist spot. Rich cultural heritage with various indigenous handicrafts creates wonderful aesthetic value. Locally celebrated festivals can attract a lot of tourists across the world.

River Brahmaputra

The mighty Brahmaputra passes through a considerable part of the State and makes picturesque spots and riverine islands like Majuli.

Flora and Fauna

Assam is among the major ecological hotspots of the world, hence endowed with a rich flora and fauna. Many ornamental fishes, rare plants, medicinal herbs, exotic orchids and endangered species are found in this state. Eco-tourism, thus, is highly possible.

Look East Policy

India's Look East Policy seems to offer huge potential and developmental scope for India's North Eastern Region. However, the present Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi has focused and accorded high priority to turn India's erstwhile 'Look East' policy into an 'Act East' policy. His 'Act East' policy seems to be helpful to make Assam and North Eastern States as a tourist hub of India.

Wildlife Tourism

The major thrust area of the tourism potential in Assam is forest and wildlife. The two natural world heritage sites namely Kaziranga and Manas national parks and many other sanctuaries and wildlife reserves are the key areas of nature tourism or wildlife tourism in Assam.

Tea Tourism

Assam is well known to the world for its rich quality of tea and its beautiful tea gardens. There are lots of potentialities in the tea gardens of the state to promote tea tourism.

Adventure tourism

The natural topography of the state, hills and fast flowing rivers offers great potential of adventure tourism in the form of rafting, trekking, para sailing, mountaineering etc.

Cultural tourism

Assam is very rich in folkloric components of the various tribal and non tribal communities, which are indeed good resources for the development of tourism.

Film tourism

Recently various films have been shot in different places of Assam. Its scenic beauty, tea gardens etc. can be effectively used to attract the film producers and directors towards the mainland of Assam even at a faster rate than before.

Health tourism

Compared to other States of India, Assam has the most pristine environment with very clean air and water and also low level of pollution. This feature can be leveraged to develop health tourism.

Conclusion

From the study it is apparent that Assam has developed a considerable image as a tourism destination. It offers all the potentialities to become Assam as tourist destinations however few categories of tourism need more awareness and marketing. The study analyses that prospects of Assam tourism is dependent on tourism traits identified as economic development, infrastructure development, proper presentation of local and tribal culture, involvement of local community, environment management and pollution control etc. However, the study concludes that the prospects of Assam tourism exist though heavily dependent on economic and infrastructure development. To ensure all round development of the sector, a complete collaboration should be formed with the help of each stakeholder of Assam tourism. There should be collaboration from tourism authority and academicians, from the public sector and the private sector and also from civil society and local community.

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