

Growth of Tourism Industry in Assam: It's Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract: *Tourism is an important parameter of socio cultural identity and heritage of a country. In the era of globalization tourism enhances the economic growth by job creation, source of foreign exchange and development of region with potential. In this world tourism is one of the fastest growing industries which have the capacity to create both the direct and indirect employment in this sector in a large scale. Tourism in Assam is based on wildlife, natural beauty, unique flora and fauna, holy shrines, lush green tea gardens, turbulent rivers, vibrant and colorful cultural festivals. The tourism industry has become a growing service sector in the county that adds up to 6.23 % to the nationwide GDP. Gradually Assam has become the hub of tourist destination as loaded with rich culture heritage, ethnic values and economic resources. This resultant good income level in the State by creating more job opportunities hence this market is growing fastest in Assam. Various schemes and plans were led the authorities of the state giving provisions in enhancing the infrastructure and boosting the natural as well as wildlife resources.*

Keywords: Assam, Development, Nature, Tourism

1. Introduction

Tourism refers to people's activity where they travel to an environment which is different from their usual environment for different purposes like recreation, business etc. It plays a great role in the economy of any regions along with the socio cultural and traditional assimilation and exchange among different people of different regions, Assam, being in a region embraced with immense scenic beauty attracts a large number of tourists from both inside and outside the country. The State Assam located in the Northeastern region of India is known widely for various reasons mainly for its widespread bio-diversity, tea plantation, ancient culture, wildlife archaeology. Availability of the India's One-honored rhinoceros makes Assam place a most visit tourist destination from all over the world. Rich minerals resources, huge water bodies with varieties of fish species and petroleum production are other important characteristics of the state. Assam has abundant of plants and that are used for medical purposes in curing diseases.

For the growth of tourism sector, special emphasis has been given to Tourism circuit development, Destination Development, Wayside Amenities etc., though public and private partnership to tap the unexplored potential opportunities. Assam's tourism Policy, 2008 has also been adopted, the State Government giving special emphasis to encourage private investment in tourism sector providing financial and logistic support. Advertisement for the tourism is also a very important part of the Government of Assam, and therefore it has made various strategies and initiatives in this respect.

2. Review of Literature

The literature review is one of the important parts of the whole dissertation that provides detail knowledge and understanding of the topic. This section collects current knowledge with considerable findings on a particular topic which contributes methodological and theoretical aspects. This section includes different statement, views, and opinion

of the various authors regarding the main subject which considers in the whole research study. The Researcher can collect secondary data from various sources about the topic such as several books, journal, online articles, newspaper, govt. reports etc.

Ashish AnkushNaik & Sunil kumarJangir (2013) analyze a social aspect of tourism development in India and mainly focused on the prospects of tourism industry especially in India in the present era of liberalization, privatization and globalization. In present India tourism industry commence of a major breakthrough for greater financial improvement.

Himadri Phukan et al. (2012) focuses on emergence of spiritual tourism in India which mainly touched the various research activities emerged in spiritual tourism and explores the potentials of future work of tourism related research. They analyze research publications on spiritual or pilgrimage tourism appeared in five different journals and major conferences in between 1992 2009.

Leena Kakkar and Sapna (2012) this study generally focuses on impact of tourism on Indian economy and they mainly focus on how India is emerging as a global tourist center because of innovation, and creating value for tourist. The contribution of travel and tourism to country's GDP will grow after passing of time as expected to grow from 4.5% in 2011 to 4.9% in 2021. Simultaneously the contribution of travel and tourism towards employment will grow from 7.5% in 2011 to 8.17% by 2021.

M. Saravanan (2013) carries out a study on the scope of medical tourism in India. People from all over the world visit India for medical needs like cosmetic surgeries, dental treatment etc. The reason behind for the improved infrastructure and technology facilities, Medical tourism expected to bring more than \$2 billion. India is one of the world's most favorable places for medical tourism due to the low-cost treatment, no waiting time, approachability, presence of number of tourist spots and other value added services.

S. K. Thakur (2014) analyzes about tourism education in India that need quality people. It specifically focuses on the different facets of tourism education in India. He investigates how institutions and universities are failing in transforming soft skill people through least measures and also due to presence of poor quality people and lack of infrastructural facilities negating in providing quality. Tourism industry requires badly star - performer. India's vital problem in tourism is its portrayal outside.

Akhilesh Sharma et al. (2012) carry out a study on the foreign direct investment in Indian tourism industry, it's flow in Indian tourism industry and its impact on the economy of India. FDI can play a significant role in developing tourism sector in India. There is a great need to develop proper policy and plan to grow new tourist destinations and facilities because there is increase of foreign direct investment in tourism. There is definite scope of increase of contribution of travel and tourism to country's GDP. They suggested certain measures required to be implemented in India to attract more and more FDI in tourism industry such as to rationalize taxation on hotel industry, to be implemented pollution control equipment and energy producing devices to protect environment, Service tax should be based on value of service given, concessions under section 10 (5) (B) of IT act should be implemented and 5% air travel tax should be asked based on base price.

Methodology

The secondary information is collected from Govt. website, state tourism statistics, Govt. publication\ records, reports and plan documents, newspaper, journals.

Objectives

The prime objectives of the proposal study are

- 1) To focus on the prospect of Tourism industry in Assam.
- 2) To analyze the challenges faced by tourism sector in Assam.
- 3) To find out the contribution in income and employment generation.

3. Analysis

Tourism can be used as an important tool for economic development as we can not underestimate the potentialities of tourism industry in the State Assam. It is important to mention that with its pleasant climate and a landscape, Assam is a popular tourist destination. Assam's tourism sector has recorded 511 percent and 763 percent growth in domestic and foreign tourist inflow respectively in 2022 compared to 2021 as per January 2023 data.

Prospects of Tourism Industry in Assam: The whole tourism potentialities of the state can be classified together under the categories like

- 1) **Wildlife:** An attractive feature of the Assam's forestry is its colorful wildlife. Some endangered species found in Assam, these are hillock gibbon, golden langur, the stamp tailed macaque, the golden cat, the capped langur, the pigmy hog, the clouded leopard, the white winged wood-duck and the like. There are seven national parks

and seventeen wildlife and bird sanctuaries for protection and preservation of wildlife in the state.

- 2) **Nature:** Assam occupies a unique place in terms of natural beauty, the environment, the unique flora and fauna of the region, its biodiversity, rolling hills, green valleys, virgin forest, all these can make Assam the paradise of tourists. Nature tourism in Assam is mainly covered with forests, rubber plantation, and River.
 - 3) **Ecotourism:** Nowadays, ecotourism has been approaching as an important concept in the tourism sector across the world. It is one of the fastest growing tourism segments and therefore significance the natural beauty and resolution of the ecology. It has the twin objectives of conserving environment and improving the welfare of the local people of Assam has immense scope for ecotourism , as its scenic green forest, blue hills, enchanting rivers are the basis on which the eco-friendly tourism can be developed.
 - 4) **Cultural Tourism:** Assam has been a unique place on earth for the cultural and ethnic diversities. The State is a homeland of various ethnic tribes and groups, each having its own cultural heritage. Various tribes possess some unique features in its socio cultural like including customs, religious belief, languages, cultural dress, and way of life, festivals, food habits, songs and dances which are different from others.
 - 5) **Tea Tourism:** Tea was first discovered in Assam in 1823 by two intrepid British adventurers, Robert and Charles Bruce, since then tea has become an integral part of Assam's economy. By contributing a bigger share in the State income this single industry become one of the largest sectors in the state Assam. Every tea garden in Assam is a treasure trove of marvelous beauty of nature. Many of these attract tourists by having polo fields and golf courses.
 - 6) **Adventure Tourism:** The speedy rivers and captivating blue hills of Assam gives wide scope for the development of adventure tourism. Tourism department also promotes some adventure sports activities like trekking, rock-climbing, parasailing, water sports, angling and river rafting etc.
 - 7) **Medical Tourism:** The rapidly growing healthcare sector in state capital Guwahati has gradually started to attract international patients not only from neighboring countries such as Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh but also from remote countries, mostly African nations.
 - 8) **Pilgrim Tourism:** Assam has many ancient temples and shrines, some of which like Kamakhya, one of the most revered religious places in the country. Every day an average of 1000 visitors visits the Kamakhya temple over the year. The other religious places where visitors often come are- Borpeta ,Famous for a Vaishnava monastery, Batadrawa, birthplace of Shankardeva, the Vaishnava reformer, saint and a great literary figure, Majuli, The largest river island in the world, center of Vaishnava culture, seat of many satras which are known as the center of Assamese art dance, drama, music.
- **Challenges of Tourism sector in Assam:** However Assam has a significant prospective for producing income and employment opportunities, but even then, no appreciable change has been seen due to some complications in this sector.

- **Deficiency of well-developed Tourism Policy:** A policy on tourism has prepared in Assam in November 1987. Unfortunately, this policy is not available in any of the offices related to tourism. But these steps did not bring ahead any definite result. The State still has no any satisfactory tourism policy.
- **Restricted Area Permit:** The RA to the North-Eastern region was enforced in 1955, under which, a foreigner intending to visit North-East including Assam had to undergo a long arduous procedure of obtaining permission from the Home Ministry. RAP was in force till May 18, 1999, and the presence of RAP still continues to loom large and create false anxiety in the mind of the foreign tourists.
- **Insurgency:** The problem of insurgency hampered all the development work and has become the drawback in every development strategy of the state. Bandh, strikes, curfews, kidnapping, killing and extortion converted as the structure of a day. The foreign and domestic tourists consider it risky to visit this part of the country, in view of prevailing law and order situation.
- **Lack of Basic Infrastructure:** To attract tourists and promote tourism infrastructural facilities, well-founded communications, circulation of information, availability of equipment for different sports activities etc. are needed. Most of the places of tourist attraction are not by the side of the nationals' highways, and approach roads are in bad condition. This is a strong discouraging factor, which works against a good inflow of the tourists.
- **Lack of coordinated Efforts:** For development of tourism industry properly, there should be proper coordination among all the agencies related to the industry. Special focus should be given on partnership of public and private to tap the undeveloped potential opportunities. But the coordination among the agencies that are associated with tourism is not effective and appreciable enough in Assam.
- **Need of Trained tourist Guides:** Practically Assam does not have trained guides in important places of tourist attraction. As a result, there is barely someone to satisfy the curiosity of the tourist, as the tourists arrive at such a place. The Department of Tourism initiated a program to train tour, but the effort does not yield good result.
- **Problem related to finance:** The local entrepreneurs are not getting proper financial assistance from government, bank and other financial institutions. The financial institutions are interested to provide financial assistance mainly to industrial undertaking. These institutions have common notion that state tourism sector is not in a viable position to earn profit.
- **Lack of basic facilities at tourist destination:** Facilities which are basic to attract tourist are still very much lacking almost all tourist spots of this study. These include basic services such as pure drinking water, cafeteria, 24 x 7 hours electricity supply, well maintained and clean waiting rooms and toilets, first aid and wayside facilities such as lounge, and parking facilities etc.
- **Cluster proposal towards tourism:** The perception of tourist places in Assam is not set up 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 destination.

Tourism and Its Contribution to Economic Development:

The importance of tourism industry in economic field grows rapidly each and every passing year. Assam is well blessed by nature, and it lays at the center of one of the world's richest biography areas. Sources revealed that revenue collected from tourism increase year by year, and it directly helps in economic development of Assam. Assam is well known for its cordial behavior for all visitors, whether they come from any place across the world. The development of the tourism sector can increase economic growth directly and also increases domestic incomes and effective demand by stimulates the growth of other related sectors through backward and forward linkages. This sector can contribute to economic development of the State positively. The following table shows the inflow of both domestic and foreign tourists to the state. The table reveals an increasing trend of both Indian and foreign tourist inflow.

Sources: Directorate of Tourism, Assam

Table 1: Number of Domestic and Foreign Tourists to Assam.

Year	Domestic Tourist	Foreign Tourist
2005-06	2586428	8309
2006-07	3479870	13657
2007-08	3489814	13799
2008-09	3698706	14533
2009-10	3895525	14694
2010-11	4127447	15585
2011-12	4408336	16660
2012-13	4544666	17708
2013-14	4444393	19086
2014-15	4863826	20005
2015-16	5642950	26320
2016-17	5413877	28419
2017-18	5934394	31739
2018-19	6027002	41209
2019-20	5146307	18594
2020-21	1351690	347

Revenue Collects from Tourism

Travel and tourism play a crucial role in India's economy. By contributing 6.23 percent to national GDP and 8.78 percent of total employment, testimony of more than 5 million annual foreign tourists and 562 million domestic tourists' arrival, this industry become one of the immense service industries in India. In Assam large number of people engaged in agriculture sector and which is seasonal in nature. As tourism sector has huge potentiality to generate employment opportunities, this industry can sustain the income of people. Though there is not a rapid development in the industry, but revenue gathered from this sector increased by every passing year in Assam. The following table shows the collection of revenue from tourist lodges.

Table 2: Year Wise Total Revenue Earned From Tourists in Assam

Year	Total revenue earned from Tourist Lodges only (Rupees in Lakh).
2006-07	81.3
2007-08	94.99
2008-09	103.92
2009-10	131.63
2010-11	143.6
2011-12	184.49
2012-13	248.19
2013-14	191.32
2014-15	211.77
2015-16	1057.24
2016-17	252.39

Sources: Directorate of Tourism, Assam.

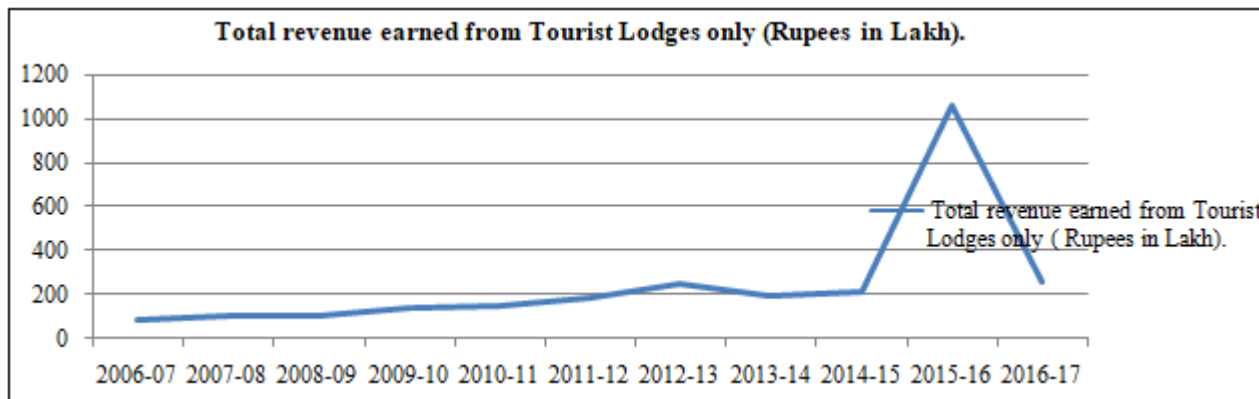


Figure: Year Wise Total Revenue Earned From Tourists in Assam

From table 2 and figure we can see the growing trend of tourist inflow in the state as well as the revenue collection also in an increasing trend. It also depicts a picture of huge inflow of tourist in future and great earning source of the state. This sector has a great potentiality of employment in the state.

Share of tourism in GDP and Employment Generation

The tourism industry is a wind farm, generating several employment opportunities that positively smash global economies and societies. In India employment generation through tourism is a determining factor of economic growth. The industry creates multiple job opportunities across distinct skill levels, availing both urban and rural areas. These functions range from hotel staff and tour guide to crafts person and entrepreneurs. In the financial year 2020 Travel and tourism sector in India come up with employment to nearly 80 million people and Making up of five percent of the country’s GDP. In 2021, around 5.8% contributed to the total GDP of the country which amounted to over 13 billion Indian rupees. As per the report of WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council) in 2022 travel and tourism industry contributes worth Rs 15.7 trillion to India’s economy` and 37.2 million people was employed in this sector. Estimation in accordance with 3rd TSA the contribution of tourism and employment of the country

Table 3: Share in GDP of Tourism Sector

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Share in GDP (in %)	5.09	5.04	5.02	5.01	5.16
Direct (in %)	2.65	2.62	2.61	2.6	2.68
Indirect (in %)	2.44	2.42	2.41	2.41	2.48

Source: Annual report 2020-21

Table 4: Share in job creation in both direct and indirect.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Share in jobs (in %)	14.78	14.87	15.34
Direct (%)	6.44	6.48	6.69
Indirect (%)	8.34	8.39	8.65
direct + Indirect jobs due to tourism (in millions)	72.69	75.85	79.86

Source: Annual report 2020-21.

Note: The above estimates have been updated using NAS 2021.

4. Findings

Assam is the most vibrant of eight states comprising the Northeast; the state is a treasure trove of natural beauty and diverse history. Assam in particular has vast tourism potentials, which are to be explored yet. It is necessary to get adequate investment and attached and correlated efforts from the entire concern department to explore tourism potentials. With the great potentialities of tourism sector in Assam it contributes various economic benefits to the economy of the State. Assam’s tourism sector contributes to state GDP around 5.5%, and it also has been providing approximately 10.5% of the total employment of the state. For the development of the tourism sector in Assam, the challenges should be removed. Tourism infrastructure is inadequate in the state, so by providing good transport and communication and making sufficient provision for accommodation of the tourists at and near the tourist sports with all types of civic facilities the states can earn massive amount of income from tourist sector.

5. Conclusion

Assam is lavishly blessed by nature to become a center stage of tourism and have a sufficient number of attractive tourist places, unfortunately these are not enough unless all the minimum requirements are not available. Tourism being such an important role player, must be taken more seriously by the government and more policy for its uplifting must be taken and implemented and also by promoting more the safety measures and facilities that will be provided now to ensure people with their safety. Assam's government should have to bring appropriate and effective tourism policy and take proper initiatives to increase awareness about the potentialities among the people. Although the state has tremendous tourism potential, the tourism industry in the area is still miles to go to exploit the proper potentialities.

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