

Tourism Sector in Assam: A SWOT Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Tourism could be treated as a key instrument of economic development of a country. It is quite surprising that despite the growth of tourism industry, the residents of tourist spots particularly and the economy of Assam especially have not yet socio-economically enjoyed the impact of tourism industry. The main objective of the proposed study is to study the problems, prospects, strength and opportunities of tourism of Assam. This study has used both primary and secondary data to analyse its strength, weakness, opportunities and threats of tourism of Assam. The present study is expected to provide means and ends to improve the tourism sector of Assam.

1. Introduction

Tourism could be treated as a key instrument of economic development as it generates foreign exchange earnings and direct and indirect opportunities along with a range of other economic activities for a developing country. Tourism's direct, indirect and induced contribution to the economy of a country is significant. It has become an important industry in most countries of the world. It is quite surprising that despite the growth of tourism industry, but the residents particularly and the economy especially have not socio-economically felt the impact or the contribution of tourism industry to the economy of Assam.

2. Statement of the Problem

The 'tourist stay' generally brings prosperity to the area concerned and creates job opportunity for the local people. In this context, Christaller stated, "tourism is a branch of economy which avoids central place and the agglomeration of economy". This means as a sector of economy, it has an inherent tendency to improve the conditions of otherwise backward peripheral areas. Considering the importance of tourism in economic development, State like Assam has made planned effort to promote it in different parts of its region. 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. 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. Tourism is a journey of imagination. It is in the above background that the

present work has been designed to evaluate tourist satisfaction, impact of tourism and prospects tourism of Assam. Moreover the present study tries to highlight the problems, prospects and opportunities of tourism of Assam.

3. Objectives

The main objective of the proposed study is to study the problems, prospects, strength and opportunities of tourism in Assam.

4. Relevance of the Proposed Study

The study is expected to be a useful addition to the growing literature and research on the problems, prospects and its opportunities of tourism of Assam. The present study will provide means and ends to improve the tourism sector of Assam. In this connection, we take the help of available secondary data collected from various secondary sources. The important problems, strength and prospects identified in the study are expected to help policy makers to prioritise resources for interventions to improve factors significantly contributing towards further development of the sector. Assam is situated in the north-eastern part of India. It extends from 24.50N to 28.00N latitude and from 88.250E to 96.00E longitude. The area of the state is 78,438 sq. kms, as against the country's total area of 3,280,483 sq. kms. Thus the state constitutes 2.4 percent of the total land area of the country. Assam ranks 14th in respect of area among all the states of the country (Dhar, 2002).

Assam is bordered by the kingdom of Bhutan and the state of Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur in the east and south east, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya in the south and south-west, Bangladesh and West Bengal in the west and south-west. Thus Assam is bordering seven states of India viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and West Bengal and two countries viz. Bangladesh and Bhutan. In other words Assam has international boundaries with Bhutan and Bangladesh and is linked with the rest of India by a narrow strip in the northern part of West Bengal.

Assam occupies a very important position in the political map of India by virtue her geographical situation. It is the north-eastern sentinel of the frontlines of India and the gateway to

the north-eastern region. On the basis of physiographic characteristics, Assam may be divided into three physical divisions, namely Brahmaputra valley, Barak Valley and the hilly region consisting of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills.

4.1 The Brahmaputra Valley

The Brahmaputra River flows through Assam from east to west over a length 650 kilometers. Its main branch originates in the Tibetan plateau, flowing from west to east as the Tsangpo River and then turns south through the eastern Himalaya as the Dihang River to enter Assam, where it is joined by other branches to form the Brahmaputra, the sacred river flowing right through the middle of the state. The Brahmaputra river valley is the dominant physical feature of Assam. The river enters Assam near Sadiya in the extreme north-east and runs westward across the length of Assam for nearly 450 miles before turning south to enter the plains of Bangladesh near Bhanga.

The valley is studded with numerous low, isolated hills and ridges that abruptly rise from the plain. The valley surrounded on all sides except the west, by mountains and is intersected by many streams and rivulets that flow from the neighbouring hills to empty into the Brahmaputra.

It is an alluvial plain bordered by Arunachal Himalaya in the north, Naga Hills in the south-east and Karbi and Meghalaya plateaus in the south. The plain is about 725 km long and 80 km wide on the average and it covers an area of 56,339 sq. km representing 72% of the total geographical area of the state (Das, 1984). The plain consists of both new and old alluvium deposited by the river Brahmaputra and its numerous tributaries. The valley as a whole has an extremely gentle east-west slope of 12.5 cm per Km. As the river has to flow on a plain of very gradient; braiding takes place and numerous temporary and semi-permanent river islands are formed by the deposition of sediments. These are commonly known as chaparies.

4.2. The Barak Valley

Like Brahmaputra valley, the Barak valley also forms one of the important physiographic units of Assam. The valley comprising the Barak plain and the northern and southern foothills is the product of the fluvio-geomorphic processes of the river Barak and its tributaries. The Barak River, while moving westward for a distance of 225 km in Assam through the Cachar district and along the northern border of the Hailakandi and Karimganj districts; builds up its alluvial plain, sometimes called Cachar Plain. This plain is enclosed by hill ranges on three sides — the Meghalaya plateau and North Cachar hills on the north, Manipur hills on the east, Mizo hills on the south. The western side is open to the Kushiya-Surma plain of the sylhet district of Bangladesh. The Barak plain is the headward piedonont part of the Barak-Surma-Kushiya plain, which lies largely in Bangladesh. (Taher, 1986).

The plain is essentially a product of erosional and depositional activities of the river Barak and its tributaries. The total area of it is 6,962 sq. km. accounting for about 9% of the geographical area of Assam. The northern, eastern and southern peripheral zones of the plain are dotted with low hillocks, generally used for tea cultivation. The plain supports one of the ancient capitals of Kachari Kingdom, Khaspur with remnants of palaces. The Bhuban hill cave temple is another potential spot

of attraction for tourism development. Besides, Silchar, the focal point of administration and business of the Barak valley, acts as an important transit point of people and material moving towards and from the three adjoining states of Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur.

4.3. The Hilly Region

The region comprising the Karbi Hills and North-Cacher Hills covers an area 15,222 sq. km, which is 19% of the total geographical area of Assam. Geographically, Karbi Hills are projected eastern part of the Meghalaya plateau. Age-old erosion has highly denuded the Karbi Hills and it is detached from the main plateau by the active head-ward erosion of the Kapili and Dhansiri rivers. The slope of the hilly area rises towards north and east. The western part descends gently to the Brahmaputra plain. The ranges have an average height of 600 meters. The central part, however, occasionally rises to isolated peaks reaching more than 1200 meters above mean sea level.

The North Cachar hills lying to the south of the Karbi hills is of tertiary origin and has a comparatively rugged topography. The Barail range passes through this area and separates the Barak basin from Brahmaputra basin. It is a relatively high range with some of its peaks rising up to 1500 meters above mean sea level. The hilly region has ample scope for tourism development, especially for those who prefer wilderness and solitude. Apart from this, the region has peace-loving tribal people with their colourful cultural life. Haflong, Jatinga, Mahur, Maibong, Diphu, Panimur, Umarangso are some of the potential tourist destinations, having special attractions like historical monuments and scenic beauty, scope for water sports and angling, bird watching etc. Besides, almost all these spots have ample scope for the trekking, jungle exploration, cycling, water sports, parasailing etc. Moreover, the Lumding-Badarpur railway track passes through as many as 40 tunnels in this hilly region. These can certainly attract both domestic and foreign tourists towards this region.

5. Methodology

Research methodology is a systematic way applied to explain the research problem.

5.1 Data – Nature and Sources

The present study uses both primary data 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.

5.2 Sample Design

For this study, five tourist spots of Assam namely Kaziranga, Manas, Majuli, Kamakhya and Sivasagar are selected purposively on the basis of the nature of the tourist spots. Taking these five spots into consideration this study aims to showcase the variety of problems, prospects and its opportunities towards the development of the economy of Assam.

Tourism in Assam has faced some major problems. It is fact that the present status of the whole tourism sector of

Assam is not properly monitored and has not been given much importance by the authorities concerned. Only the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are projected as the main tourist attraction in the state. But such tourism sites have to be closed even for the tourists because of flood and inclement weather condition during the summer season. Only during the winter season, these remain open to the tourists. Besides, a number of obstacles stand on the way to make Assam as tourist destination. In this study, problems prospects and its opportunities are examined in order to find out the ways and means of proper development of tourism of Assam.

6. Discussion

The present study has used SWOT analysis to have a better idea about the present status of tourism industry of Assam. By SWOT analysis, we can know and plan accordingly about the better future and faster growth of the industry. SWOT analysis in tourism industry is an acronym for the internal strength and weaknesses and also opportunities and threats facing the industry. The main use of this technique is to have an effective strategy that maximizes strength and opportunities on the one hand and minimizes its weaknesses on the other hand. Thus, SWOT analysis in this study is used to identify systematically all these factors so that effective and adequate strategies should be adopted by the respective authority for the betterment of the industry.

6.1 Strengths

Strengths of tourism industry of Assam imply its internal attributes and resources that support a successful outcome of the industry.

- Scenic beauty of the State makes it feel like in heaven for the tourists.
- Warm climate of the region.
- Religious and historical monuments.
- Unity in diversity i.e. multicultural people of Assam is staying together in the same periphery. Assam is also a state of rich heritage, culture and traditions, colourful festivals having a multi ethnic groups that never fails to captivate the imagination of the tourist.
- Well known hospitality and cordial behaviour of Assamese people
- Manpower costs require to run tourism industry is perhaps one of the lowest in the country. This provides better margins for this industry.
- Increasing literacy rate among the local people and improving infrastructure leading to increase in tourist arrivals.

6.2 Weaknesses

A weakness is a limitation or deficiency in resources that work against a successful outcome of tourism industry of Assam.

- Lack of all weather roads specially connecting roads from district headquarter to the destinations, special mentions in this connection requires about the connecting road from Barpeta to Manas, Jorhat to Majuli and even Guwahati to all connecting roads to destinations.
- Lack of basic facilities like transport and accommodations, clean and hygienic desired food,

power supply, easily accessible banking facilities, medical facilities etc.

- Safety and security problems of tourists.
- Lack of maintenance of historical monuments, religious places etc.
- Weak business dynamics of tourism industry of Assam.
- Poor railway connectivity from Guwahati to almost all tourist destinations of Assam.
- Lack of tourism policy from the part the respective authority of Assam's tourism.
- No appropriate marketing of Assam's tourism even within the country.
- Lack of well arranged package tour.
- Lack of adequate professional training facilities for those who engaged in tourism industry of Assam and as such, the quality of services provided by them is not up to the standards.
- Lack of necessary awareness, education and knowledge and publicity amongst local community regarding socio-economic and cultural benefits of tourism.

6.3 Opportunities

An opportunity is a major favourable situation in terms of development of tourism sector. Tourism industry of Assam can capitalize these factors to its advantage.

- There are many beautiful places of Assam which are still to explore as a tourist destinations.
- The natural wealth and beauty and wildlife sanctuaries continue to attract a considerable number of domestic and foreign tourists to Assam.
- Rich heritage and cultural features, religious temples, historical monuments, colourful festivals could be used to attract tourist to Assam.
- The 'Act East' policy of the central government would be helpful for aggressive marketing on Assam Tourism in South Asian and South East Asian countries.
- Development of tourism industry can be the most important source of revenue for the government of Assam.
- Availability of both skilled and unskilled workers to provide timely and better services to visitors.
- Potential for private sector's investment in tourism industry of Assam.

6.4 Threats

There are some external factors that are directly or indirectly stand on the way to the growth of tourism industry of Assam.

- Ethnic and communal clashes, threats from anti-social groups such as ULFA, NDFB etc, fear of terrorism, frequent Assam bandh etc have an impact on the psyche of the visiting tourists.
- Assam's tourism is facing stiff competition from other tourist destinations such as Meghalaya, Sikkim, Goa, Kerala, Rajasthan, Uttaranchal etc. in terms of providing better infrastructures and basic amenities,

and also by marketing aggressively about themselves as a great tourist destination.

- Negative perception about the whole north-eastern region as insurgency prone region still prevails even among the domestic tourist of the country.
- Natural calamities such as frequent floods, landslides etc are the major threats for the tourism industry of Assam.
- Limited investments both from Government and Private Sector in relevant infrastructures.
- Low information dissemination, lack of trained man power, paucity of well versed and better knowledgeable staff engaged in this industry.
- Unplanned growth of tourism of the State has created a detrimental effect on environment.

7. Conclusion

Tourism has received considerable attention in the last decades because of its potential for regional development. Tourism has been providing economic benefits to the local residents, although, the level of this economic benefit varied immensely in different tourist destinations. But it is fact that tourism is a major driving force for the growth and development of the economy. The tourism policy must target to expand overall tourism demand, stimulate employment and income in rural areas, support tourism opportunities for medium and low income segments of population. Such a tourism policy could help to achieve a faster rate of growth and development of tourism industry of the state.

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