

## Prospects and problems of tourism in Assam

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### Abstract

Tourism is considered as an important industry in 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has vast scope for the generation of income and employment. Assam is the land of varied exhilarating existing and potential tourist sites. It has unique natural beauty with flora and fauna, historical monuments, pilgrim centre, tea gardens and its colourful cultural festivals. Moreover the wildlife sanctuaries at various places of Assam can also attract the tourists all over the world. This paper makes an attempt to explore the tourism potentiality of Assam and also the problems faced by the industry and suggest measures for the development of tourism industry in the state.

**Keywords:** income and employment, potential, tourism

### 1. Introduction

Assam, the North-Eastern sentinel of the frontiers of India is richly endowed with places of tourist attraction. Assam is known as the land of red river and blue hills with an area of 78,438 sq km. Assam represents 2.39 percent of the total land area of the country. The area of Assam extends from latitude 24° 10' N to 27° 58'N and longitude 89° 49'E to 97° 26'E between the foothills of eastern Himalayas and the Patkai and Naga ranges. The mighty river Brahmaputra flows through it serving as a life line for its people settled on both of its bank. Assam is surrounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the North, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the East, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura on the South and Bangladesh, Meghalaya and West Bengal on the West. Assam is the gateway to the North-Eastern states. Assam is one of the centres of world's richest biographic areas. Tourism has the potentiality to generate employment in different parts

of the state. It has also the potentialities for creating job opportunities such as tourist guides, conducted tours, establishment of hotels, and so many other avenues in the tertiary sector.

### 2. Objectives of the study

- To review the various tourism destination in Assam.
- To assess the potentialities of tourism in Assam.
- To unearth the problems which affect the tourism industry

### 3. Methodology

To cope with the objectives of the study, an evaluative and descriptive method has been adopted for the study. The present study is based on secondary data collection. The secondary data was collected from various published sources like books, journal, magazine, reports, publications, etc.

### 4. Analysis of the study

#### 4.1 A brief review of tourism destinations in Assam

##### Existing places of tourist attraction

**Table 1:** Nature related

Places	Distance from Guwahati in km	Speciality
1. Bhairabkunda	137	A beautiful place at the border of Arunachal Pradesh
2. Bhalukpong	205	A beautiful place by the side of river Jia Bhoroli, famous for angling and water sports
3. Chandubi	64	A natural lagoon, beautiful picnic spot
4. Dibru-Chaikhowa	490	70 km from Dibrugarh, national park, the habitat of elephants, buffaloes, famous for wild horses
5. Haflong	355	One of the hill stations in Assam with unsurpassed sylvan beauty
6. Jatinga	364	Near Haflong, North Cachar district, a beautiful hilly place, where birds behave in a mysterious way, the local people call that the birds commit suicide here on certain specific days
7. Kaziranga	217	Internationally famous national park, the home of great Indian one-horn rhinoceros, tigers, elephants, buffaloes, deer, wild ducks and geese, breeding place of pelicans, habitat of reptiles and monkeys more particularly golden langurs and host of other species
8. Manas	176	Situated in the foothills of the Himalayas, one of the magnificent national parks

		in the country, the Manas river flows through it, famous for the tiger project, a habitat for various wild animals
9. Orang	150	A wild life sanctuary, known as a miniature Kaziranga
10. Pabitora	65	A wild life sanctuary
11. Potasoli	173	38 km from historic town of Tezpur, near the picturesque river Jia Bhoroli, famous for eco-camp set up jointly by the Department of Forest and Assam Anglers Association

Source: Directorate of Tourism, Guwahati

Table 2: Religious

	Distance from Guwahati in km	Speciality
1. Barpeta	137	Famous for a Vaishnava monastery
2. Batadrawa	134	Birth place of Shri Sankardeva, the Vaishnava reformer, saint and a great literary figure
3. Hajo	35	Sacred place for Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists
4. Kamakhya		An important religious place of the Hindus within the city of Guwahati, on the top of Nilachal hill, attracts thousands of devotees and other tourists every day by its natural grandeur
5. Madan Kamdev	35	Vast archeological ruins of fine erotic sculpture
6. Majuli	326	The largest river island in the world, centre of Vaishnava culture, seat of many satras which are known as the centres of Assamese art, dance, drama, music, a safe heaven for various migratory birds
7. Surya Pahar	162	Situated on a hill surrounded by innumerable statues of Durga Devi, Ganesh, Surya, Chandra, Buddha

Source: Directorate of tourism, Guwahati

Table 3: Historical

Places in alphabetic order	Distance from Guwahati in km	Specialty
1. Digboi	523	Famous for the first oil refinery in Asia, war cemetery of World War II
2. Sibsagar	369	Seat of the Ahom rule, famous for royal palaces, monuments, temples and massive ponds
3. Tezpur	137	Ruins of an ancient capital of the Mahabharata time, famous for the love story of Usha-Anirudha

Source: Directorate of tourism, Guwahati

#### 4.2 Prospects of tourism in Assam

Assam could be real gateway not only northeastern states but also other Asian countries like Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. The 'Look East' policy initiatives of the Government of India would be helpful for marketing Assam Tourism in South Asian and south East Asian markets. Development and diversification of eco-tourism will also be a new enchanting aspect for both domestic and foreign tourists. The proper implementation of State maiden tourism policy 2008 can make Assam a major national and international tourism destination.

From the above discussion we can categorize the prospects of tourism in Assam as follows:

##### i) Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism attracts pilgrim tourists to Assam from different parts of the world. The kamakhya temple situated at the Nilachal Hill in the middle of Guwahati is surrounded by numerous minor temples dotting the hill. Its unique position in Indian mythology attracts thousands of pilgrim tourists to Nilachal Hill. Hajo is another centre where people form different religion also comes for pilgrimage. Assam is also well known for tantric practice, mythology and black magic of Myong. This advantage shall be turned into local employment

creation by right intervention.

##### ii) Ethnic Tourism

Assam has various ethnic tribes and groups, each have its own cultural heritage. Each tribes possesses unique tradition in its socio-cultural life including customs, language, culture, religious beliefs, dress, way of life, food habits etc. The tourists are attracted due to its unique culture. Ethnic tourism can be a major destination for tourists if properly planned and promoted as a sustainable form of tourism.

##### iii) River Tourism

Assam has an extensive river network. Brahmaputra and Barak are the two major rivers in Assam and both the rivers are intrinsic to the socio-cultural life in Assam. Assam has immense opportunities to develop river tourism and water leisure activities such as boating, water sports and lighters, river rafting etc. River tourism in Assam could be a great way to spend holidays for the tourists. Domestic as well as foreign tourists can be attracted by providing international standard facilities in river tourism.

##### iv) Eco Tourism

Eco-tourism is a new concept, developed around the idea of

travelling to places of natural beauty, moving around and staying with the places of nature for a couple of days. It has twin objectives, firstly conserving environment and secondly improving the welfare of the people. Assam has immense potentiality for Eco-Tourism. Assam is generally free from industrial pollution. Its blue hills, green forests, enchanting rivers are the basis for which Eco friendly tourism can be developed in Assam

#### v) Wildlife Tourism

Assam has a colourful wildlife forestry, different types of species are found in the hilly and plain areas of Assam. Some of the species are exclusive to the State. Some of the endangered species found in the state are- hollock gibbon, the capped langur, the golden langur, the clouded leopard, the white winged wood duck etc. All these can make Assam as one of the best destination for the tourists. Assam is famous as the home of one horned Rhino. Most of the domestic and international tourists attract towards Kaziranga, but other 18 wildlife sanctuaries and 4 national parks can also be a major wildlife destination for the tourist of the world.

#### vi) Tea Tourism

Tea tourism is a recent concept, its potentiality remains unexplored. Assam tea is world famous and one of the largest producer of tea in the country. The green tea gardens of Assam is a treasure house of exotic beauty of nature with colourful people and their attractive songs and dances, sprawling bungalows is a major attraction for the tourists. Many of these tea gardens have polo fields and golf courses. The bungalows, the rest houses with modern facilities located in the tea garden are generally kept ready for visitors and guests.

#### vii) Adventure tourism

Assam has enormous scope for the development of water based adventure tourism because of the enchanting blue hills and speedy rivers. Adventure tourism can generate a lot of employment opportunities for local youths. The adventure sports activities like trekking, rock-climbing, para-sailing, water sports, river rafting are promoted by the Department of Tourism.

### 4.3 Problems associated with tourism industry in Assam

From the above discussion, it is clear that tourism has a great potentiality for generating income and employment opportunities in Assam. But even then, no perceptible change has been seen in this sector of the economy due to some problems. The main constraints that are coming into the way of its development are self-explanatory which can be identified as

**(a) Lack of infrastructure:** Infrastructure deficit such as quality hotels, transport facilities to tourist destination, food and beverage arrangements, air connectivity by all standards remain poor and negligible in Assam.

**(b) Publicity:** Due to absence of publicity of tourist spots of Assam, people from different parts of our country as well as world are not able to know about the tourist spots of Assam.

**(c) Absence of proper tourism policy:** It is also a notable problem of tourism development in Assam. Government initiatives as well as public awareness to develop the tourist spots are very poor.

**(d) Climate factor:** Climate of the Assam also not always suitable for tourism throughout the year, as heavy rain during the rainy season and temperature drop during winter.

**(e) Insurgency:** Due to insurgent activities by terrorist groups such as ULFA, NDFB, tourists hesitate to visit Assam.

**(f) Absence of tourist guides:** Due to absence of trained tourist guide, when tourists arrive at various tourist spots, there is hardly anyone to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the tourist.

**(g) Lack of coordination:** Lack of coordination among several agencies like Department of Tourism and Department of Archaeology, the tourism industry of Assam faces various problems in handling the demand of the tourists in places of both religious and historic importance.

### 5. Threats of tourism industry in Assam

- The image of Assam in the rest of the world is as an insecure state due to the problem of insurgency and violent political movement.
- Frequent bandh and strike due to political instability in the state is another major threat of state tourism.
- Unrestrained growth in tourists can result environmental degradation.
- Construction of resorts and amusement parks and other tourism developments causes ecological damage including deforestation and pollution of rivers and lakes.
- Tourism project often fails to consult, engage or adequately compensate local communities for loss of livelihoods, agricultural land and access to natural and common property resources such as forest, river, lakes etc.
- In the state eco-tourism sector fails to adopt Global code of ethics adopted by World Tourism Organization.
- The state tourism has been facing stiff competition of other north eastern state specially Sikkim and Meghalaya.

### 6. Conclusion and recommendation

The development of tourism industry Assam largely depends upon the formulation of a proper tourism development policy and people's co-operation and consciousness. The High Powered Shukla Commission has recommended for establishing a North-East Tourist Development Corporation to develop tourism in the region. It has also recommended to issue Inner-Line Permits relax the Restricted Area Permits as well as to introduce Charter Flights for NE Package tours etc. Moreover, an honest and strong will of the government coupled with people's hearty co-operation will definitely boost up tourism industry in Assam in near future.

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