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TOURISM SECTOR IN THE NORTH EASTERN STATES-CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Changing lifestyles and economic growth led to rise in tourism sector. India is the ideal tourist destination due to diverse culture, language, art, music, clothing, festivals, religion, wild life and soon. North-East India is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the world's richest bio-geographic areas. It is the treasure house of various economic resources. It has a rich cultural and ethnic heritage that can easily make it a tourist-spot. Tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in North-East Indian states because NE India is not only characterized by the blending of flora and fauna it is also exceptionally rich in bio-diversity. Moreover the wildlife sanctuaries at various places of North-East India can attract the tourists all over the world. Further, tea tourism and golf tourism of NE India will attract the tourists. This paper makes an attempt to explore the potentiality from North-East Indian states which will maintain a bright prospect of economic development in terms of tourism industry in near future. In case of North Eastern Region, proper initiative of tourism development has so far not been undertaken despite the region has tremendous scope for tourism with its cultural heritage and scenic beauty. An integrated approach to promote tourism in the North Eastern Region as a whole is the need of the hour.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays an important role in the economic, cultural, social and industrial development of any nation, Tourism sector has not received due consideration for the researchers in the past. However at present various research institutes, universities and researchers give importance to this sector and publish many literature on tourism which enhance the knowledge of future researchers. Indian tourism sector is growing by leaps and bounds. India's contribution to world tourism sector is increasing with greater pace. Tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings are increasing rapidly There are opportunities, threats, and challenges to continue this growth speed. However, the need is to review quality of service experienced by tourism in the respective region and its contribution towards state. Tourism industry is an upcoming industry in India. Different ideologies and types of tourism followed over the world, which also afloat in India likes Health tourism, Sports tourism, Medical tourism, Eco tourism, Sustainable tourism and Accessible tourism.

To explore the literature in this field, researcher has examined publications from research journals, books, websites, newspapers, Government reports, few unpublished source of information viz. thesis, dissertation, and documents from respective government departments. Tourism is one of the strategically important emerging sector in India economy with tremendous potential for generating sustainable development. The North Eastern Region is highly diverse in terms of agro economic system, socio-cultural mixture of the people, a blend of multiplicity of ethnicity and geo-topographical variability. The region offers spectacular nature and scenery, unique and varied wildlife including mountains and hillock providing tremendous scope for tourism in the region. The paper focuses on the identification of the thrust area in order to evolve a policy of tourism for the North Eastern Region in the line of National policy of tourism.

Review of Literature

The status of tourism research in economics and social development in North Eastern India as well as in India is quite low. There exists so many literatures on whether it actually produces any significant economic growth is limited and that too for emerging countries like India, the empirical researches and evidences are most non-existent.

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Khan *et al*, 1995 Lee and Kwon, 1995, Lim 1997 and Oh 2005, the study discussed the development of tourism has usually been considered a positive contribution to economic growth in Indian economy. Anjan Bhuyan undertakes a study on "A study on the Development of Tourism Entrepreneurship in Assam, with special reference to Accommodation Industry", for his Ph. D. degree from Tezpur University, Assam, India, 2008. This study reveals that Assam is one of the prominent states of the North Eastern region of India and enjoys a scope of destination tourist place because of its diversity and uncharted mysteries. But reality is far different and present that the share of Assam tourism in national tourism is very less over the years due to limited development of tourism entrepreneurship in Assam and poor development of accommodation industry especially hotels, cottages and midways in Assam.

The researcher concludes that the major reason behind these problems is lack of availability of funds and limited role of government in planning efforts. The researcher suggests that this study will be helpful to solve a problem of poor entrepreneurship for tourism in Assam and government will formulate proper policies and strategies to overcome from these problems. Ms. Iyata Maharana publishes an article on "Economic Benefits and Conservation Linkages from Tourism Development in the Sikkim-Himalaya" in 2000. In this article the writer concludes that the role of tourism is important for earning income, generating employment and developing infrastructure in Sikkim state, the eastern Himalayan region. This work analyses the dynamics of tourism growth, economic and environmental benefits and participatory.

Conservation and protection of natural resources by different stakeholders in the Sikkim state of India. The paper concludes that annual tourist arrivals increase by ten times over last ten years in Sikkim state and report that more than 65% of total household income of the people comes from tourism related activities, which increased the income and consumption pattern of the community. The article suggests that Sikkim state has greater economic potential than it realized in earnings and therefore more effort is needed to increase the level of conservation contribution to fulfill the goal of eco-tourism. Mr. Ester Kruk, Tourism specialist drafts a paper on "Tourism in the Himalaya- Mountain of Opportunities in a Changing Climate", in International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, Nepal, 2009.

This paper studies the tourism in the Himalaya region and argues that tourism is one of the most promising strategies to address these serious poverty concerns, creating innovative livelihood options in the rapidly changing social and economical context of the mountain area. The researcher concludes that the tourism sector proved one of the promising strategies to remove poverty situation in the Himalaya based regions comparative strength and advantages and by increasing links between tourism and local product system result in income retention from tourism for the poor regions of Himalaya.

Rationale of the study

The multiplier effect of tourism is high. The ripple effects are widespread and the benefits are shared by an incredibly large number of service providers, like lodgings, food and

beverages, handicraft, local transportation, guides, shopping, entertainment, photography. In the total range of services, many of the service providers are not visible at all. These are only some illustrative examples and all the observations are relevant to the North east. The employment intensity of tourism in the Indian context was demonstrated by an off-quoted sample survey of the Ministry of tourism. The tourism potential of the Northeast has not been fully exploited. The Ministry of tourism calls the region a 'paradise unexplored.' Global tourism has been booming and future projections show that this trend will continue.

The new generations of travelers who are 'money rich and time poor' are increasingly looking for unique experiences. More and more people are looking at tourism as less of a journey and more of an experience a phenomenon being called the emergence of the 'experience economy'. For these new and growing breed of tourists the Northeast with its variety and uniqueness holds immense attraction. The rich natural beauty and its diversity, exotic cultural and ethnic mosaic, flora and fauna and the serenity of the virgin, unexplored ecosystems provide possibilities of a totally different experience for the tourists.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the overview of tourism and its emerging issues in North- East India
- To identify the constraints associated with the tourism sector in the study area.
- Exploring the avenues of livelihood promotion and generating income including foreign exchange.
- To help in the removal of regional disparities in tourism development.
- Ensuring community participation in tourism development.
- Developing action plan for tourism development.

Data source and Methodology

The entire study is based on secondary sources of data. Primary field survey is not possible due to shortage of time. The present research paper is mainly based on the data from NEDFI Databank with information on Economy, Resources, Tourism Infrastructure States finances etc. Apart from CSO, WTO, TSA, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Statistical Abstract are also providing relevant data base for the study. Important literature on tourism and data was also collected by various published sources like books, journal, magazine, reports, publications, and websites.

Study Area

North Eastern states of India are selected as the domain of the study area. Northeastern India comprises eight states. The tourism in these states based on wildlife, natural beauty, unique flora & fauna, hold shrines, lush green tea gardens, turbulent rivers, vibrant and colorful cultural festivals. The natural beauty of these states attracts tourists from all over India and also from abroad. These industries have become important sources of income and employment of most of the people living in the states.

MATERIALS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tourism in the North Eastern Region

Tourism sector provides direct benefits to the local community and businesses. It has a multiplier effect on other economic activities, providing jobs and incomes to those serving tourists through the supply chain and also as it is a labour intensive industry. The infrastructure required by tourism— transport, communications, water supply and health services—also benefits local communities and can be used for other activities like speeding disaster relief, providing for the local population and fuelling the overall development of the region. Tourism helps to create awareness about natural and cultural environmental preservation. Historical monuments undergo regular preservation if they are tourist attractions rather than fall into ruins. Tourism creates opportunities for small and micro-enterprises and helps in the development of the region. The North- East has a wide array of products in the form of its pristine natural beauty, forests and wildlife, rivers and mountains, and a unique multi- ethnic cultural heritage to offer to the tourist.

The region is endowed with diverse tourist attractions and each state has its own distinct features. Tourist arrivals in India rose to 23.5 percent in December 2004 and crossed 3 million marks for the first time in the subsequent year. The reason might be ‘multi-pronged approach for promotion of tourism’ adopted by Indian government (Singh, 2008). For the development and promotion of North Eastern Region. 10% of the plan allocation of the Ministry has been earmarked. An amount of Rs.100.00 crores has been earmarked in Budget Estimate 2012-13 for the region. In order to develop and promote tourism in the region, Ministry of Tourism has organized the International Tourism Mart with the objective of showcasing the largely untapped tourism potential of the North East region in the domestic and international markets from 18-20 January 2013 in Guwahati.

Potentialities of Tourism Industry in North-East India

Though NE India is a very backward region in the whole country, yet it has the greatest potentiality to develop the region into a potent force through tourism industry. Let us explore its potentiality from various angles. Tourism is one of the enormous service industries in India with its contribution of 6.23 percent to national GDP and 8.78 percent of total employment, witness more than 5 million annual foreign tourists arrivals and 562 million domestic tourists. North East India is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the world’s richest bio-geographic areas. It is the treasure house of various economic resources. It has a rich cultural and ethnic heritage that can easily make it a tourist-spot. Tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in North-East Indian states because NE India is not only characterized by the blending of flora and fauna it is also exceptionally rich in bio-diversity. Moreover the wildlife sanctuaries at various places of North-East India can attract the tourists all over the world. For example, the national park of Kaziranga in the district of Golaghat is a gift of Nature which covers approximately an area of 429.93 sq. km. situated on the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra. It

is a heavenly place for the tourists because of its world famous one-horned rhinoceros. Besides Kaziranga, there is the Manas riverine situated towards the western part of the district of Baksa. It is extended to both the banks of the river Manas and covers almost an area of 519 sq. km. Besides Kaziranga and Manas sanctuaries, the wildlife sanctuaries of Pobitora and Orang can attract the tourists all over the world. Moreover, the golden langur, pygmy hog and other endangered species can easily enchant the minds of the tourists. Besides the animals and the birds of various kinds roaming singing and playing in the vast green forest, the region has many ornamental fishes, rare plants, medicinal herbs and exotic orchids. It has many tranquil lagoons and reverie locations like Bhalukpong, Loktok, etc. that will attract the tourists for angling and boating. There are many other wonders and important things for the tourists in the region.

For example, even today, when science and technology have achieved miraculous success in unearthing the hidden things of the world it has totally failed to unearth the mystery of the Jatinga Hill where thousands and thousands of birds commit suicide every year. This mysterious Jatinga Hill is a great source of attraction for the tourists all over the world. Moreover, the world’s largest river island ‘Majuli’ will encourage tourism industry in NE India to a great extent. The various historical monuments and places like ‘Rangghar’, ‘Karengghar’, ‘Joysagar’, ‘Joydoul’, etc. will encourage tourism in NE India. Besides these, the various historical places like Sonitpur (at present Tezpur)-the capital of Ban Raja, Garhgaon-the capital of the Ahoms, Jerangapathar-a place where Joymati sacrificed her life for her husband, etc. will attract the tourists. Moreover, the various religious places and temples like Kamakhya temple, the Umananda temple, the Agnigarh and the Mahabhairavi temples of Sonitpur etc. will encourage tourism industry in NE India. Besides it, the wooded hill stations like Haflong, Towang, Shillong, Gangtok, etc. will attract the tourists for hiking, trekking and camping. Further, tea tourism and golf tourism of NE India will attract the tourists.

Challenges and Opportunities in the NER

The NER has been richly endowed with natural resources and its human resource is an asset to the economic development given the sense of gender equality and the higher levels of literacy that already exists. However, the social environment is yet not conducive to the economic growth of the region. The region poses some special challenges to the State that must be overcome before the gap between the financial situation of the NER and the rest of India is bridged. Several shortcomings prevent the North-East and Assam from realizing its tourism potential.

The region suffers from lack of infrastructure and communication bottlenecks, apart from general geographical isolation. Security handicaps add to the woes of the region and prevent tourists from preferring the region for a holiday. Lack of an integrated policy by the Government is also a hindrance. Conducive investment opportunities are lacking. Other regions in the country offer better tourism deals and conditions. The tourist operators in the North-East, along with the government tourism website should have facilities for online payment,

accommodation, food and beverage arrangements, transport conveniences and travel bookings within the state and to the state, or provide links to other websites that provide such services. The North-East governments and the Indian Government should attract tour operators both the national and international levels to establish offices elsewhere where North-East region-specific tours are made available to the population. If pre-packaged plans can be arranged, it may ease the travel planning for potential tourists to North-East.

In order to fulfill the goal of the North-East as a connective between mainland India and South East Asia, the North-East tourism websites and operators must provide details in Southeast Asian languages and perhaps have updates stressing the historical and cultural linkages between people and places in the North-East with the South-East Asian countries. In 2003, the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) commissioned a study to formulate twenty year plans for a tourism programme. However, its recommendations still remain to be implemented. Undoubtedly, the North-East and Assam can provide tourism of many kinds- eco-tourism, ethno-tourism, golf and tea – tourism, heritage tourism, tourism, adventure tourism, yet there is no brochure that is easily available where a foreign tourist can access the costs of a trip to plan a holiday where he/she can enjoy all these activities.

Problems to Rise Tourism Industry in North-East India

From the above findings, it is clear that tourism has a great potentiality for generating income and employment opportunities in NE India. 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, (b) Communication bottlenecks, (c) Geographical isolation, (d) Ethnic clashes leading to political instability, (e) Growth of insurgent activities (f) Lack of fund (g) Absence of leadership and entrepreneurship ability, (h) Indifferent attitude of the Government both at State and Central level (i) Defective socio-economic and political set up (j) Lack of a proper tourism development policy of the Government (k) Lack of people's co-operation and consciousness, (l) Lack of proper friendly investment atmosphere (m) Absence of congenial atmosphere to attract the tourists and such many other factors.

Promoting tourism destination in the North-East

The components of tourism industry like hotel, communication and transport are showing enormous growth that leads to tourism growth. To support this statement scenario of tourism is desirable. The Vision 2020 document released by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2008 for the Northeastern region earmarks infrastructure-led tourism development as one of the primary hopefuls for revenue generation. M/O DONER has supported tourism industry of the North-East in the form of infrastructure development and capacity building, and in the form of training youth in tourism related activities, holding workshops on community based ecotourism. It supports aviation hospitality training as well as pilot training.

It promotes tourism advocacy programme which includes expos & business summits in major cities, craft & culture festival at Delhi haat, cultural shows in major cities, seminar /conclave on tourism, culture & heritage through FICCI. It has also provided support for Kaziranga centenary celebration and INDO-ASEAN & SAARC car rallies. The NEC (Northeastern Council) has made significant contribution to the development of tourism related infrastructure in the North-Eastern region which includes the creation of the north east tourism development fund of Rs.2 crore for preparing project profiles for setting up of budget hotels in all North-Eastern states. It provided support of Rs. 11.24 crore for construction of Yatri Niwas at Guwahati. The NEC has introduced a new scheme for development and promotion of inter-state tourism circuits under its annual plan 2007-2008.

It is working with Ministry Of Civil Aviation for setting up a pilot training institute and upgrading airports. It has proposed to support a mountaineering and adventure sports institute. The NEC also proposes to support setting up heritage museums. There are number of tourism research reports available on the website of Ministry of tourism, Government of India. These reports provide the information about tourism in India and approaches of Government towards tourism. India has huge potential for conventional businesses to take off in the coming future. Recent initiatives from the Finance Ministry to propose the Viability Gap funding is an acknowledgement of the fact that, investment is required in this sector and this has been lauded as a positive step, which can contribute to the growth of the nation. In spite of the constraints as listed above, NE India is still maintaining a bright prospect of economic development in terms of tourism. Specific measures for promoting the tourism sector may be summarized as follows:

- Government should make huge investment to break the geographical isolation and remove communication-bottlenecks from NE Indian states.
- Planned efforts are to be made by the Government to build up the required infrastructure of the region.
- Proper tourism development policy is the need of the hour and for this Government should make a thorough survey in the region.
- Moreover, maintenance of a friendly investment atmosphere is very important for attracting foreign investors as well as the tourists. International and national confidence is to be restored for attracting the national and foreign tourists.
- Planned, sustained and well-thought long term efforts are to be made by the Government to improve the socio-economic and political set up of NE India.
- Above all, people's consciousness to develop their own area through the development of tourism-industry is a great need of the hour

Conclusion

Thus, the development of tourism industry in North-East Indian states largely depend 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 North-East Indian states in near future.

Recommendations

Tourism cannot be developed in a vacuum. It requires social and economic infrastructure for proper growth. As a first step to planning, a survey of infrastructure gaps should be undertaken. Tourism planning for the Northeast states, whether at the domestic or the foreign tourist would be most attractive and cost effective if based on an integrated NE perspective. Second, the lack of an organizational set up. There is no organizational set up that can harmonize action for projecting NE tourism as a whole. There are only a few illustrative areas where action has to start on a priority basis. The action agenda is long because the Northeast has a lot to catch up with. Human resource development, creating institutional arrangements for people's participation, looking at ways to harness greater resources for tourism, creating public-private partnerships are some of the issues which will demand attentions tourism grows. Since tourism is a multi-dimensional activity, and basically a service industry, it would be necessary that all wings of the Central and State governments, private sector and voluntary organizations become active partners in the endeavor to attain sustainable growth in tourism if India is to become a world player in the tourist industry. Infrastructure development is central to attracting tourists. High hygiene and sanitation standards should be maintained.

Accommodation, Roads and other communication, Wayside facilities, Transport, Product development and destination management, Information guides should be upgraded and constructed. Human resource for the tourism industry should come from the region and for this each state should be equipped with a food and beverage institute and an institute of hotel management. This will provide opportunity for the locals. For tourism to help poverty alleviation and employment creation, meaningful arrangements for people's participation should be evolved. Although there are several measures being taken by the State and the Centre to upgrade tourism potential improvement, infrastructure up gradation, and administrative and security concerns need to be handled for tourism to flourish as a development industry with community participation. Tourism in present day does not confine itself to hotels, restaurants and sea beaches. Its broad arena touches upon rural area, health sector and environment. The new approach is to position tourism as a major engine of growth for employment generation and economic development. There is thus an urgent need to position Assam as an international brand like Kerala's "Gods own country" and include the State into the highly successful "Incredible India" campaign. Tourism is the most important of all resources available to man in the State of Assam.

If tourism is developed through careful planning, it is sure to bring revolutionary transformation in its economy.

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