



AN OVERVIEW OF NORTHEAST INDIA'S ECO-FRIENDLY TEA TOURISM

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ABSTRACT India's Northeastern region, which includes Sikkim and is comprised of eight states, is fairly unexplored. Tea tourism has recently gained prominence as a result of the region's ecologically diverse flora and fauna, varied topography, and ethnic groups, which have begun to attract both domestic and international tourists. Tea grown on eco-friendly plantations in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur, and other tea-growing districts in the northeast is renowned across the world. Tea tourism is a viable concept of sustainable livelihood in the scenic locations of tea plantations in Assam and other states. Tocklai Tea Research Institute, a century-old heritage tea research institute located in Jorhat, Assam, has the potential to evolve into a tea tourist destination, allowing tea connoisseurs and the general public to witness the entire process of premium Assam tea production. The study examines sustainable tea tourism in Northeast India, as well as the region's potential for growth in tea tourism.

KEYWORDS : Tea, Tea Tourism, Sustainable, Tocklai, Heritage.

INTRODUCTION:

Tea tourism is a niche market that has emerged globally as a means to enjoy nature in a green, sustainable, and environmentally-beneficial manner. This endeavour is motivated by a profound interest in the history and traditions of tea. As a tourist destination, it is essential to include visits to a tea plantation or estate, a tea shop or lounge, and an institution that promotes and preserves the culture of tea. Tea tourism has gained prominence as a niche travel option in recent years. It would require some ingenuity to precisely define what tea tourism entails. People who require a break from their hectic lives may find tea tourism to be an alluring diversion. Students and individuals with an academic bent may find the journey of tea to be intriguing. The scientific interventions associated with tea cultivation may be rewarding for scientists and farmers. The opportunity to witness the complexities of tea cultivation in person may be appealing to tea enthusiasts. Indian tea plantation began in Assam in 1823 and has a long history filled with discovery and adventure, as well as success stories that have revolutionised the global tea trade and commerce. Even though the owner of tea estates has changed from British to Indian, the pioneers' tea culture has persisted.

Ancient tea plantations sites that are revisited will not only satisfy the curiosity of tourists but will also benefit the local economy by creating a regional tea market and providing locals with employment opportunities. To advise tea tourists on the best places to visit, it will be necessary to address the problems, obstacles, and opportunities for sustaining indigenous culture. Therefore, improved planning is required to promote tea tourism in northeast India, which has not yet taken off in the traditional sense and to the same extent. A sustainable and environmentally friendly tea tourism venture will protect the environment, preserve cultural heritage, and bolster rural economies, all of which will benefit local communities and alleviate the region's socioeconomic challenges.

NORTHEAST INDIA'S TOURISM POTENTIAL:

India's northeastern region is full of wonderful hidden natural treasures that everyone must visit at least once in their lives. The region offers tourism attractions in every category imaginable, including heritage, nature, culture, ethnic food and gourmet, and adventure. The mighty Brahmaputra flows through the Assam valley, the valley which is famous for its tea, and is well protected by the Great Himalaya in the north, as well as beautiful Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, the "Land of the Rising Sun," and Meghalaya, the "Abode of Clouds," in the south-west, as well as historical Tripura and vibrant Nagaland, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its folklore, music, and dance. Northeast India is an enticing, sustainable, and alluring tourism destination as a result of this wide range of colours and ethos. The region's primary tourist attractions are its breathtaking green landscapes and bracing climate, beautiful mountains surrounding their valleys, natural forests and exotic wildlife, vast bio-reserves and wildlife sanctuaries, long stretches of extensive green tea gardens in

Assam, mighty rivers and large bodies of water, indigenous people's unique forms of art and craft, vibrant and colourful dances and music, and attractive fairs.

Table 1 presents the tourist flows in India from the year 2001 to 2020. In the year 2020, tourist arrival to India is -64.7% less than in the year 2019 due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Year-wise Tourist Flow in India: 2001-2020

Year	Domestic Tourist Arrival (in Millions)	International Arrival (in Millions)	No. of Indian Nationals' Departures to other Countries (in Millions)
2001	236.47	2.54	4.56
2002	269.60	2.38	4.94
2003	309.04	2.73	5.35
2004	366.27	3.46	6.21
2005	392.04	3.92	7.18
2006	462.44	4.45	8.34
2007	526.70	5.08	9.78
2008	563.03	5.28	10.87
2009	668.80	5.17	11.07
2010	747.70	5.78	12.99
2011	864.53	6.31	13.99
2012	1,045.05	6.58	14.92
2013	1,142.53	6.97	16.63
2014	1,282.80	13.11	18.33
2015	1,431.97	13.77	20.38
2016	1,615.39	15.02	21.87
2017	1,657.55	16.81	23.94
2018	1,853.79	17.42	26.30
2019	2,321.98	17.91	26.92
2020	610.22	6.33	7.29

(Source: India Tourism Statistics at a Glance- 2021, Govt. of India)

The tourism potential of the region suggests a scarcity of tourist attractions. These attractions make up the region's tourism resources in general. There are no hotels, dining, shopping, or entertainment options, or they are quite basic. Tourist development is hindered by infrastructure and resource limits, as well as access restrictions.³ Domestic tourists from other states, for example, are only authorised to enter the majority of Arunachal Pradesh with the assistance of state-issued inner line permits. Though there must be convincing reasons for such a moratorium to be implemented, it serves as an obstacle to domestic tourist expansion. State governments, in particular, do not receive the positive response they want from self-help tourists and family groups. Foreign tourists are also not authorised to enter or reside

in Arunachal Pradesh. International tourists are only authorised to visit a few approved locations within the state, and only with special permits. In some places, even the maximum length of stay is limited.⁴ Despite these challenges, the region offers various chances for tea tourism to expand as an integrated component of related tourism activities.

Eco-friendly Tea Tourism:

Eco-friendly tea tourism has the potential to address the frequently overlooked requirements while also facilitating the socio-cultural and economic development of tea places. Tea tourism also makes a case for itself as an indirect technique for tea marketing, which may be critical for the beverage's long-term sustainability. Northeast India's tea tourism appears to have lagged significantly behind other sectors of the industry. With an abundance of lush green tea plantations forming incredible natural vistas, the rich socio-cultural heritage of the people who live on these tea plantations and their proximity to other tourism hotspots, there are few obstacles to the success of a well-designed and implemented tourism strategy.⁵

Adventure Tourism:

Identification criteria include the location of spots/places which are suitable for adventure sports, the type of activities suitable (e.g., trekking, rock climbing, surfing, water sky, angling etc.), geographical & geological information, nearest city/town and accessibility.

Wild Life Tourism:

Identification of unexplored areas suitable for wildlife tourism (i.e. other than National wildlife sanctuaries like Kaziranga & Manas etc.), mapping of the wildlife, biodiversity of the areas and accessibility.

Pilgrimage Tourism:

Identification of places of pilgrimage that are important from the viewpoint of religion and history, yet are not on the tourism map of the country, the specific significance of the places and accessibility.

Table 2 shows the tourist flows in Assam from 1995 to 2020. Tourist arrivals in Assam in 2020 were lower than in 2019 due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns.

Table 2: Tourist Inflow to Assam 1995-2020 Year

Tourist Arrival Year	Domestic in nos.	International in nos.
1995	3,48,532	2,575
1996	3,27,260	5,885
1997	8,42,656	4,194
1998	9,39,721	3,843
1999	9,64,939	5,218
2000	10,01,577	5,959
2001	11,95,864	6,528
2002	14,35,875	6,785
2003	19,54,565	6,931
2004	22,86,630	7,285
2005	24,67,656	10,782
2006	32,68,657	11,151
2007	34,36,484	13,105
2008	36,17,306	14,426
2009	39,98,706	14,533
2010	40,50,924	15,157
2011	43,39,485	16,400
2012	45,11,407	17,542
2013	45,11,407	17,542
2014	46,84,527	17,638
2015	48,35,492	21,725
2016	54,91,507	24,673
2017	56,42,950	26,320
2018	59,34,791	31,739
2019	48,75,971	27,458
2020	7,21,218*	7,458*

(Source: Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of Assam, * estimated)

EARLY INITIATIVE OF TEA TOURISM:

Late H. P. Boarooah, a prominent tea planter of India, who was the past Chairman of the Tea Research Association and Indian Tea Association,

pioneered tea tourism in Assam. The development of eco-friendly tea tourism in Assam, besides sustaining the environment and preserving the heritage and culture will benefit the State by earning foreign currency and creating employment opportunities such as waiters, security guards, helpers, cooks, gardeners, tourists guides, chauffeurs etc. and boosting rural economy. Eco-friendly tea tourism is an opportunity to earn extra revenue for tea companies, tea estates, and small tea growers. It also helps in alleviating socio-economic problems like poverty, unemployment, etc which creates a problem in the path of economic development.⁶

Table 3: Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) from Tourism in India, Period 2001-2020

Year	FEEs from tourism in India in US \$ Million	Percentage(%) change over the previous year
2001	3,198	-7.6
2002	3,103	-3.0
2003	4,463	43.8
2004	6,170	38.2
2005	7,493	21.4
2006	8,634	15.2
2007	10,729	24.3
2008	11,832	10.3
2009	11,136	-5.9
2010	14,490	30.1
2011	17,707	22.2
2012	17,971	1.5
2013	18,397	2.4
2014	19,700	7.1
2015	21,013	6.7
2016	22,923	9.1
2017	27,310	19.1
2018	28,586	4.7
2019	30,058	5.1
2020	6,958	-76.8

(Source: India Tourism Statistics at a Glance- 2021, Govt. of India)

As the tourism sector develops in the tea garden areas, it will lead to improvement in the infrastructure facility, educational facility, providing better transportation facility, and all-around development of the tea garden area. The standard of living of the people who live in that area will also improve. It also improves community facilities and services. Tea tourism will develop and promote small-scale village industries, contribute to the redistribution of wealth, and increase employment which in turn will facilitate the mitigation of rural poverty and facilitate natural environment preservation and cultural assets conservation in Assam. Table 3 shows the foreign exchange earnings in US dollars from tourism in India from 2001 to 2020. Earnings were lower in 2020 because of fewer tourist arrivals in India as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

TEA TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN ASSAM:

Assam is famed across the world for its Assam tea, Assam silk, Assam oil, and the iconic one-horned Indian rhino. The state's economy is based on tea, oil, and wildlife tourism to the state's two World Heritage Sites, Kaziranga and Manas. Major Robert William Bruce found the indigenous tea plant in 1823 in Rangpur near Sibsagar of Assam, which transformed the tea industry in India. Major Bruce discovered the wild tea plants *Camellia Assamica* in the upper Brahmaputra valley introduced by Bessa Gaum, King of ethnic tribe Singpho and an Assamese aristocrat Maniram Dutta Barbhandar Barooah, who became the first Indian tea planter had established Cinnamara TE and Singlo TE. Today, Assam produces a wide variety of quality teas.⁷ Different types of teas such as White tea, Green tea, Yellow tea, Oolong tea, and Black CTC tea are all distinct varieties of tea made by varying the processing method used to extract the leaves of tea plants. Purple tea, the latest craze, is made from purple-leaved tea plants.

The Assam tea belt covers an area of 304 thousand hectares, on the north and south banks of the river Brahmaputra, and in the Bark river basins in Cachar. The gorgeous sweeping plantations create eye-catching sceneries that complement the immense green carpets of commercial plantations seen throughout Assam's tea areas. The tea ecosystem is completely integrated with the surrounding environment,

and its lush green canopy of tea bushes and shade trees sequesters carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into the soil, so aiding in climate change mitigation.⁹ Tea gardens in Assam operate as small forests, helping to offset emissions from tea manufacturers, and thus qualify for carbon credits.

Tea Estate Heritage Bungalows:

Assam's tea estate bungalows have a rich history as vestiges of the British colonial era. The bungalow culture established by the planters in the nineteenth century has a distinct personality. The Bungalows have a distinct style, with a raised wooden platform, expansive surrounding verandas, a low structure with one or two stories, a fireplace with a visible chimney, and expansive yards filled with an array of flowers, plants, and trees set amidst natural splendour. The majority of planters were English, Scottish, or Irish, and they attempted to construct a miniature world of their dreams utilising indigenous architecture and materials.

Several Bungalows have been developed as tea garden resorts to attract tourists, such as Mancotta Heritage Chang Bungalow in Dibrugarh District, Chowkidindinghee Heritage Chang Bungalow in Dibrugarh District, and Wathai Heritage Bungalow in Tinsukia. There are numerous other old bungalows in tea estates throughout Assam that have yet to be developed for tourists. If bungalows are erected, a big number of tourists will flock to the area. The tea estates are a hive of activity, with its colourful workers converting the green gold into the world's most consumed delightful beverage, "tea." Their culture and music are inextricably linked to the tea world.

Tocklai Tea Research Institute:

Founded in 1911, the Tocklai Tea Research Institute is a century-old tea research institute located in Tocklai, Jorhat district. It is a major worldwide tourist attraction. Tourists from Europe, America, Australia, and other countries, particularly those whose parents or ancestors worked in the tea gardens or Tocklai in the nineteenth century, are especially welcome. If it is developed successfully for tourist purposes, it may become a point of attraction for students and research experts from other states in India and other countries. Since the name Tocklai is inextricably linked to tea throughout the world, the institute has the necessary resources to build and promote Assam as a tea tourism hub by utilising its extensive network within the tea industry. Few businesses can legitimately claim to display the full range of complexities associated with tea cultivation, processing, production, and, most importantly, the scientific interventions that aid in delivering this delightful beverage to consumers' tea cups. In addition, Tocklai's rich history, excellent geographic location, and expansive 39-acre campus already attract a substantial number of tourists annually. This expansive campus also contains heritage buildings, a series of laboratories, workshops, a tea factory, bungalows, and a heritage guesthouse constructed in 1926 with the assistance of the governments of India, Assam, and Bengal.

World's First Commercial Tea Plantation at Chabua:

Chabua Tea Estate takes its name from the indigenous words "CHAH" and "BOWA". "CHAH" is the indigenous term for tea, whereas "BOWA" signifies planting. Thus, "CHAHBOWA" evolved into 'CHABUA,' the town adjacent to the estate, while the estate became known as CHABUA. The tea estate holds a special role in tea plantation history. Tea was initially planted in upper Assam in 1835, near the junction of the rivers Dibru and Brahmaputra, but the plant failed to thrive and eventually died. Tea saplings were planted in Chubwa in 1836 and flourished. As a result, Chubwa became the world's first successful tea plantation, which is well connected by road, rail, and air.

The Singphos - Discovery of the Assam Tea Plant:

Major Robert William Bruce was credited with discovering the Assam tea plant in 1823 on a military and trading mission. He is said to have observed the plant growing wild in some hills near Rangpur (near present-day Sibsagar), the state's capital at the time.¹² He made arrangements with the Singpho (an ethnic tribe) King Bessa Gaum to supply him with tea saplings. After his untimely death, his brother, Charles Alexander Bruce met the Singpho Chief again, who provided him with some tea saplings and seeds.¹³ The majority of these seeds were planted in Bruce's garden in Sadia, while others were handed to Commissioner Jenkins at Gauhati. A few leaves from these plants were delivered to Dr. N. Wallich, the Superintendent of Botanical Gardens at the time, who identified the leaves as *Camellia* but did not believe they

were the same species as the China tea plant.¹⁴

The Singpho tribe of Assam's involvement in bringing the indigenous plant to the attention of the outside world cannot be overlooked. Another Singpho Chief had supplied 35 of the 130 chests of tea transported to Calcutta by C.A. Bruce in 1841. This demonstrates unequivocally that the Singphos were familiar with the plant and were brewing and drinking tea in antiquity and Singphos are the first tea drinker in India.¹⁵

Jorhat Gymkhana Club:

Jorhat has been dubbed the "World's Tea Capital" due to its tea production, and thus tea holds a special place in this town. Jorhat Gymkhana Club is a major tourist attraction in the state. It is Asia's and the world's third-oldest golf course. In Assam, the Jorhat Gymkhana Club is also well-known as a horse racing venue. Tourists visiting Jorhat would never pass up the chance to see such an illustrious club. The British established the Jorhat Gymkhana Club, one of the world's oldest golf courses, in 1876. The club was founded in Secondihara village by D Slimmon, the club's former secretary.¹⁶ Later, the club was relocated, and the current structure opened in 1885.

The club is attempting to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list as one of the world's oldest golf courses. Constructed during the British era, the club offers all the amenities that are expected of a modern golf course. The nine-hole golf course at the club is lush green. It boasts of an established tree line, numerous small ponds and water bodies that will challenge the patience of any golfer. Additionally, the club has a unique pony racing tradition known as the historic Jorhat Race. The Jorhat Gymkhana Club hosts the tea tourism festival regularly. The club offers grass tennis courts, a swimming pool, billiards, polo, a cricket ground, a gentlemen's bar, and a movie theatre. Several tea plantations in Assam are connected to Gulf courses through airstrips. No other state in the country has as many golf courses as Assam. The modernization of these golf courses with state-of-the-art amenities will attract golf enthusiasts and tourists from Japan, the United States, and Europe.

Amgoorie Tea Estate Linkage with First CTC tea manufacture site:

The first machine developed for CTC manufacture of tea was brought into service in 1930 at the Amgoorie Tea Garden under the supervision of Sir William McKercher. The method was widely accepted by the tea industry in India and across the world and the popularity of the machine started picking up rapidly in the 1950s in India and Africa. The intended visit to the site will give the tourists a first-hand experience of the heritage factory and the picturesque undulating tea landscape from where tea is exported throughout the world.

Heeleakah Tea Estate - Linkage with Tea Research:

In 1902, Dr. H. H. Mann, the ITA's first Scientific Officer proposed establishing a tea experimental station in the central region near Jorhat, which was well-connected by train and river, the prevailing modes of transportation at the time. The station was to resemble an American Experimental Station, with approximately 20 hectares of land devoted to testing planting, manuring, plucking, and pruning techniques, as well as their effects on the tea bush and its quality. With the assistance of the governments of India, Assam, and Bengal, as well as contributions from tea associations, a station was finally built in 1904 on the Heeleakah Tea Estate, near Mariani. A visit to the Heeleakah Tea Estate to learn about the estate's historical ties to tea research and Tocklai will be a crucial component of tea tourism.

Cinnamara Tea Estate:

As the first Indian tea planter, Maniram Dutta Barbhander Baruah founded the Cinnamara TE and the Singlo TE near Sonari. Maniram was executed by the British at Jorhat on 26 February 1858, for participation in the 1857 revolt. The Cinnamara TE is currently owned by Assam Tea Corporation Limited, a State Government subsidiary. In the garden that the pioneering entrepreneur and patriot established, a statue of Maniram Dewan was erected in his honour.

Organic Tea Estates:

Organic tea becomes a priority for the world's health-concerned population. Numerous Assam planters have begun using organic methods of tea growing and production in the last few years. Health-conscious travellers from throughout the country have begun to visit those plantation locations to physically witness the manufacturing process and connect with the planters, bringing a new dimension to the

region's tourism.

Home Stay with Small Tea Growers:

Small Tea Growers of Assam's success storey is well-known. Some of Assam's small tea growers have combined their plantations to produce speciality teas, organic teas, and ethnic teas such as Singpho tea *Phalap*, which will make for attractive homestay tourist destinations.

Assam Tea Festival and Tea Tribe culture:

The Assam Tea Festival is held annually in November in multiple Assam districts and is organised by Assam tourism. The holiday festivities may include a trip to scenic tea plantations. Cruises on the cold river waters are also a popular festival activity. The tea festival allows playing golf at the Kaziranga Golf Resort and the Jorhat Gymkhana Club, the world's third-oldest golf club still in operation. The tea tribe of Assam is an amalgamation of communities originating from Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and the Chota Nagpur region of Jharkhand. Ethnic fairs and food festivals are organised similar to the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland, and tours are arranged to various tea heritage sites showcasing the rich culture of the tea tribe of Assam.

Tea Auction Centre:

The Guwahati Tea auction centre (GTAC) is one of the busiest tea trading facilities in the world which is established in the year 1970. A visit to the Gauhati Tea Auction Centre is also encouraged during the tea festival of Assam. The newly established Jorhat Tea Auction Centre is a must-visit to have a glimpse of online tea auctions and tea trading systems.

TEA TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN MEGHALAYA:

There are a few tea estates in Meghalaya, mostly in the East Khasi Hills and Ri-Bhoi districts, i.e. not far from Shillong. The good thing about this region is that it is a very touristy region anyway, which makes it easy to combine it with other visits to Shillong and Laitlum easily. Mawlyngot is the latest addition to the tea tourism sector in Meghalaya. The picturesque village situated in the East Khasi Hills is a beautiful destination hidden in the lush green landscapes of Meghalaya. With natural beauty in abundance, Mawlyngot has been gaining attention among tea lovers around North-east India. The tea grown here is known as Urlong Tea. Situated about 40 km from Shillong, at an altitude of 4800 ft, Mawlyngot is a peaceful hamlet in the lap of nature. The village is said to be more than a century old. Tea has been growing in the wild for a long at Mawlyngot and the villagers were not aware of it. Currently, the village has a tea-processing unit producing one of the best quality teas in India. The Urlong Tea Integrated Village Co-operative Society Limited is behind the success of the village and its people.

TEA TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH:

Although not too prevalent, Arunachal does boast of a few tea gardens and some of them have been making waves lately with their trademark varieties. Most of these tea estates are found along Siang and Lohit Valleys, near Pasighat and Wakro. Some of them have tourist lodges but overall, the tourism infrastructure is not as extensive as that in Assam. Tourists may get the experiences at-

- Siru-Rijo, a private tea garden in a remote location of Arunachal Pradesh has emerged as a much sought-after tourist destination in the scenic Himalayan state. Siru-Rijo Tea Garden, located 5 km from Gankak village in West Siang district, is nestled atop a hill. The garden can be reached after a 17 km drive on the winding hilly road and is surrounded by lush green forests and mountain springs. The tea garden has a private helipad, a mini hydel, a sugarcane factory, a poultry farm, a sawmill, fisheries, shops, cottages and barracks to accommodate about 600 people. The guest house in Siru-Rijo is also equipped with all modern amenities.
- The scenic Potin tea garden nestled in the hills of Lower Subansiri district is a potential tourist spot and the perfect place to taste some organic tea.
- Resort and Water Sports at Donyi Polo Tea Estate, Oyan, Pasighat, District – East Siang

TEA TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN NAGALAND:

Nagaland does not have too many tea estates but there are some in the areas bordering Assam, especially in the Mon district bordering Sivasagar. These are still early days but some tea retreats are coming

up. One can combine it with the usual exploration of Mon and Longwa. Konyak Tea Retreat, located in the middle of Sayeang Tea Estate, Shiyong village, Mon District, Nagaland, is a stone-walled farmhouse with an open kitchen living dining space with 2 bedrooms (double and twin-bedded rooms) and 2 bathrooms. The Retreat overlooks a picturesque valley below with clouds rolling by and highlighted by spectacular sunsets in an area surrounded by tea gardens.¹⁸

TEA TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN SIKKIM:

Considering its proximity to Darjeeling, Sikkim has a similar landscape and climate suitable for tea, although it has one major tea estate which is also a major tourist attraction. It is called Temi Tea Estate and it is a short drive from the town of Namchi in South Sikkim. Nestled in Ravangla, Temi Tea Garden is one of the most charming gardens in Northeast India. It has a very good reputation globally for its organic tea with its reportedly impeccable quality, drawing several tourists throughout the year. Lined with beautiful cherry blossom trees, the pathway leading to this tea field is truly fascinating. The lush green serenity and the fragrance of various types of tea leave provide a unique experience. Other than visiting the garden, a stay at the Temi Dak Bungalow is also an experience in itself. The best time to visit this scenic spot is during the period March to May, as Temi Tea Garden is adorned with rich fields of eye-catching rhododendrons and orchids during these months. The cool and clear weather during winters makes it perfect for sightseeing and spending some refreshing moments amidst this magnificent setting.

TEA TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN TRIPURA:

The climatic conditions in Tripura are suitable for tea plantations. Currently, Tripura has 60 Tea Estates and about 3,000 small tea growers, producing close to 7.5 million kg of tea every year. Although Tea Tourism in Tripura is an unexplored area, few of the tea estates located in the state could provide excellent tourism opportunities.

The cultivation of tea in Tripura was started entirely by Indian enterprise, unlike in other parts of the country where British planters had taken the lead. Tripura has a history of tea plantations dating back to the year 1916 when the erstwhile ruler of the princely state of Tripura, Maharaja Birendra Kishore Manikya, granted leases of extensive land for tea cultivation exclusively to Indian planters. Thus, tea cultivation started in Tripura in the first quarter of the twentieth century owing to the industrious efforts of some Indian entrepreneurs, with the active encouragement of the state, as opposed to the other places in the country, where it was mainly propagated by European planters. Tea is the second largest organized industry in the state of Tripura after Rubber and has great potential for tea tourism.¹⁹

CONSTRAINTS OF TEA TOURISM:

Inadequate infrastructures, poor road conditions, inaccessible roads, and a lack of solid waste management in remote locations are the primary obstacles to fostering sustainable tea tourism. As a result, northeastern India's tea plantations fail to attract tourists. In addition, the state tourism authorities' maintenance of tourist infrastructure is inadequate and out-of-date; particularly Assam Tourism's various tourist facilities. In tourism, trust, honesty, and friendliness are crucial factors that determine the number of visitors to this region. The lack of professionalism among local tour operators, as well as tour operators from New Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata, is palpable in the northeastern region. In key tourist destinations, the region lacks sufficient professional tourist guides, which could be a lucrative career for local youth. Table 4 presents the availability of the number of approved hotels and hotel rooms in India as of 28.6.2021 as listed by the Tourism Department, Government of India.

Table 4: Number of approved Hotels and Hotel rooms in India (as of 28.6.2021)

Sl.No	Category of Hotels	No. of Hotels	No. of Rooms
1	One Star	10	346
2	Two Star	27	914
3	Three Star	533	18,193
4	Four Star	419	21,351
5	Five Star	226	28,833
6	Five Star Deluxe	149	33,877
7	Heritage Hotels	59	1,778
	Total	1,423	1,05,292

Source: India Tourism Statistics at a Glance- 2021, Govt. of India)

To develop and promote eco-friendly tea tourism, adequate guidelines, restrictions, and print and broadcast media awareness campaigns are required. Commonly, coordination issues arise between tour operators, hotel owners, travel and tourism associations, and other government entities. There appears to be a lack of local awareness, education, and promotion regarding the economic, social, and cultural advantages of tea tourism. In addition, despite the region's abundant potential, state governments lack comprehensive policy frameworks for the long-term expansion of tea tourism. The rural tea garden area in the northeastern region lacks proper security for both domestic and foreign tourists. Any negative incident may instill fear in the hearts of anyone considering visiting the tea estate. The tea tourist industry has also been impacted by mob lynching, strikes, and insurgency incidents.

Table 5: Tour operators in India recognized by the Ministry of Tourism (As of 31-05-2021)

Sl.No.	Operator	Nos.
1	Travel Agent	183
2	Inbound Tour Operator	434
3	Tourist Transport Operator	101
4	Adventure Tour Operator	46
5	Domestic Tour Operator	138
	Total	902

(Source: India Tourism Statistics at a Glance- 2021, Govt. of India)

Table 5 presents the number of approved tour operators in India as of 31.05.2021 as listed by the Tourism Department, Government of India. Infrastructure and amenities for tourists, especially transportation, and air connectivity need to be improved adequately to boost tea tourism in the region. There is an urgent need for synergistic collaboration with other state government ministries involved in the development of tea tourism in northeast India.

CONCLUSION:

Tea tourism is a speciality tourism category that has risen to prominence as a kind of sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism throughout the world. It is built on an evolving concept prompted by a curiosity about the tea industry's history, culture, and traditions. Tea tourism is essential in northeast India, where Assam, the home of the Indian tea plant, has a lengthy history of tea industry development dating back to 1823, complete with tales of discovery, adventure, and success that altered the face of the global tea trade. The tea plantations have predominantly changed hands between British and Indian owners, but have preserved the pioneers' tea tradition. A route to revisit historical tea plantation sites will undoubtedly satisfy a traveller's curiosity, tea tourism will also benefit the region by expanding the regional tea market and creating employment opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Effective planning is required to increase the allure and ensure the sustainability of tea tourism in northeast India, which has not yet taken off in a significant way. Developing tea tourism to protect the environment and preserve heritage and culture will benefit the region by creating jobs, boosting rural economies, and resolving the region's socioeconomic problems.

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