



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD: A CASE STUDY IN KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK

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**ABSTRACT** Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing service sectors at both national and international levels, generating significant livelihood opportunities for the members of the host communities. The expansion of tourism infrastructure and the rising inflow of domestic and international tourists to Kaziranga National Park (KNP) have had a considerable impact on the livelihoods of people living in its surrounding areas. Over the past decade, a gradual shift in livelihood patterns has been observed in the study area, with the younger generation increasingly opting for non-farm employment within tourism-related services and logistics as a means of earning their livelihood. This study seeks to document the process of emergence and development of alternative tourism-based livelihoods in and around Kaziranga National Park. The research is based on both primary and secondary data sources. The study emphasizes the need for creating and strengthening diversified alternative livelihood opportunities to ensure sustainable socio-economic development in the region.

**KEYWORDS :** Tourism, Livelihoods, KNP

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing and most influential sectors of the global economy, playing a crucial role in economic development, social transformation and cultural exchange. As a key driver of globalization, the tourism industry contributes significantly to employment generation, stimulates entrepreneurial initiatives and facilitates interaction among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Owing to these inter-sectoral linkages, tourism generates extensive impacts at both macro and micro levels, ranging from national income growth to livelihood enhancement and socio-economic development at the community level. In recent years, tourism activity in and around Kaziranga National Park has experienced steady growth. The park attracts a large number of domestic and international tourists due to its rich biodiversity, scenic landscapes and distinctive cultural milieu. This sustained inflow of visitors has generated diverse livelihood opportunities for local communities residing in the surrounding areas. Among the various stakeholders engaged in the tourism economy, Jeep Safari Drivers, Handicrafts Sellers and Homestay Owners have emerged as some of the most visible and significant groups. Jeep Safari Drivers play a vital role in enabling tourists' access to the park's natural resources, while Handicrafts Sellers contribute to the promotion of indigenous art forms and the preservation of Assamese cultural heritage. Homestay Owners, on the other hand, offer authentic rural hospitality experiences, thereby strengthening community-based tourism and enhancing local participation in the tourism sector.

Tourism and local livelihoods are closely interlinked, particularly in rural and nature-based destinations. The growth of tourism creates alternative employment opportunities in regions where agriculture and traditional occupations are often uncertain or in decline. Tourism-related activities such as hospitality services, transport operations, guiding and handicraft production have emerged as important sources of income for local communities. In the context of Kaziranga, tourism functions as a primary seasonal livelihood for a substantial number of households, significantly contributing to income generation and livelihood diversification.

The tourist season in Kaziranga typically extends from September or November to April or May, during which economic activities in the surrounding villages increase substantially. During this period, tourism-related services such as jeep safaris, food stalls, souvenir shops and homestays witness heightened demand. However, the economic benefits generated by tourism are largely seasonal in nature. During the monsoon months, when the park remains closed, tourism activities come to a near halt, leading to a sharp decline in tourism-based income. This pronounced seasonality results in livelihood insecurity for local communities, often forcing households to depend on alternative income sources such as agriculture, wage labour or temporary migration. Understanding the seasonal dynamics of tourism and their implications for local livelihoods is therefore crucial for fostering sustainable and inclusive tourism development in the Kaziranga region.

Kalita (2023) stated that tourism creates employment and becomes

vital for policy formulation and developmental planning in Kaziranga. Kalita (2024) stated that the strength of an economy lies on its capacity to maintain sustainable livelihood through the creation of income opportunities. Hussain et al (2012). stated tourism as a significant instrument for linking biodiversity conservation with livelihood enhancement in protected areas, though its outcomes are often uneven. While tourism provides non-consumptive and sustainable use of biodiversity resources, the distribution of income among local stakeholders remains inequitable, limiting its potential to support conservation goals and community well-being. Das (2017) stated that park–people relationship shaped by historical conservation measures, displacement, resource deprivation, and frequent wildlife-induced losses to crops and livestock. Although tourism offers livelihood opportunities to fringe communities, its benefits remain limited and uneven. The study reveals that inadequate community welfare measures weaken local support for conservation, underscoring the need for inclusive tourism expansion and people-centric management strategies. Patnaik et al (2019) stated that Kaziranga National Park as one of Asia's most distinctive protected areas, requiring sustained attention from both state and central governments for long-term conservation. The study emphasize that managing tourism pressure through the promotion of other protected areas in Assam is crucial. Further, the park's future conservation success largely depends on landscape-level management beyond its boundaries, highlighting the need for strategic environmental assessments to ensure sustainable governance as stated by the researchers.

Kakoti (2025) identifies Kaziranga National Park as a global biodiversity hotspot, highlighting its conservation and ecotourism potential alongside challenges from floods, habitat degradation, human–wildlife conflict, and governance limitations. Kalita (2025) reveal that tourism acts as a major source of income and employment, with a substantial portion of respondents demonstrating long-term involvement in tourism-related occupations. Kalita (2025) stated that markets serve a decisive role in in sustaining the livelihoods of rural farming families.

### Objectives

1. To assess the scenario of livelihood creation through tourism-related activities in and around Kaziranga National Park.

### Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to analyze the impact of tourism on local livelihoods in the Kaziranga region. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in the study. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and personal interviews conducted among selected tourism stakeholders. A total of 30 respondents were purposively sampled, comprising 10 Jeep Safari Drivers, 10 Handicrafts Sellers and 10 Homestay Owners, as these groups represent key livelihood categories directly dependent on tourism activities around Kaziranga National Park. The questionnaire was designed in vernacular language containing closed-ended and open-ended questions in order to have a quantitative as well as qualitative dimension of livelihood impacts.

### Analysis

Jeep safari services constitute one of the most important components of Kaziranga's tourism sector. Jeep Safari are mostly local residents who operate under permits issued by the forest department and other concerned authorities. They are the important stakeholders of in promoting and preserving the tourism resources in the study area. Their income is largely seasonal and depends on the volume of tourist arrivals during the peak season. Several factors such as weather conditions, park entry regulations and safari timing significantly influence their earnings. During peak tourist months, jeep safari operators generate substantial income, supporting household expenses and employment. However, during the off-season, especially when the park remains closed due to monsoon flooding, they experience income instability, highlighting their vulnerability to seasonal tourism fluctuations.

Handicrafts Sellers form another vital group within the local tourism economy. They sell traditional products including bamboo and cane items, hand-woven textiles and indigenous jewelry, which reflect the cultural identity and artistic heritage of Assam. Tourism provides them with a valuable market to showcase and sell their products directly to visitors. This interaction not only supports their livelihoods but also contributes to the preservation of indigenous craftsmanship. Despite this potential, handicrafts sellers face several challenges such as limited access to organized marketing platforms, price competition from machine-made goods and inconsistent tourist demand. These constraints often reduce their overall profitability and economic security.

Homestay Owners represent an emerging form of rural entrepreneurship around Kaziranga. With the growing emphasis on eco-tourism and sustainable travel, many local households have converted parts of their homes into homestays. These accommodations offer tourists an opportunity to experience traditional Assamese hospitality, local cuisine and cultural practices. For the owners, homestays provide an important supplementary source of income, particularly during the tourist season. Additionally, homestays encourage cultural exchange and community participation in tourism development. However, their success largely depends on tourist inflow, service quality and access to promotional networks.

### Demographic Profile of the Respondents:

Most of the respondents (73%) belong to the 25–45 years age group, showing that tourism-related work is mainly done by people in their active working years. The small number of older respondents suggests that these jobs involve physical effort and regular interaction with tourists, which may not be suitable for elderly individuals.

Tourism activities in Kaziranga are mainly dominated by men, particularly in jobs like jeep safari driving. However, women play an important role in handicrafts selling and homestay management, indicating a growing involvement of women in tourism-related businesses.

### Income of the Respondents

The income distribution shows that most respondents (63.3%) earn between Rs. 25,001 and Rs. 50,000 per month, indicating moderate income levels from tourism-related activities. Jeep Safari Drivers and Homestay Owners are more concentrated in the higher income brackets, while Handicrafts Sellers are largely found in the lower income ranges. Only a small proportion (6.7%) earn above Rs. 50,000, suggesting limited high-income opportunities and highlighting income variability within the tourism sector around Kaziranga.

Impact of alternative tourism on livelihood of local communities

In order to analyse the impact of tourism related activities on livelihood the following hypothesis is framed

H<sub>0</sub>: Tourism related activities have no significant impact on the livelihood of local people.

Since the calculated p-value is less than the 5 percent level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. It can be concluded that tourism related activities have a significant impact on the livelihood of local people, contributing positively to livelihood improvement and economic sustainability.

### Challenge Faced by the Respondents

The most significant challenge reported is seasonal dependency, cited

by 80% of respondents. Tourism activities are largely confined to the park's open season, and income declines sharply during the monsoon months when the park remains closed. This creates income instability and livelihood insecurity for local communities. Lack of sufficient promotional and marketing is reported by 65% of respondents. Many local entrepreneurs, particularly handicrafts sellers and homestay owners, have limited access to formal advertising platforms, digital marketing tools and tourism networks. As a result, their services and products often fail to reach a wider audience, restricting business growth. Competition is considered as another problem by 60% of respondents. 50% of the respondents reported their issue of limited access to formal source of finance.

### CONCLUSION

The study concludes that tourism in Kaziranga has emerged as a cornerstone of local economic development. It provides vital income, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for hundreds of households living around the park. Tourism has not only diversified livelihoods but also strengthened community identity and environmental consciousness. However, the impact is not uniform. The comparative analysis reveals that while all groups benefit economically, the extent and sustainability of those benefits vary significantly. Homestay Owners represent the most stable and profitable sector, whereas Handicrafts Sellers face challenges of competition and limited demand. Jeep Safari Drivers, though directly linked to tourist activity, are heavily dependent on seasonal operations.

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