

Exploring the Cultural Tourism Potentials in North Eastern Region of India



Commerce

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ABSTRACT

The basic assumption of the paper is that a sense of national unity, an appreciation of regional diversity, and understanding of the past and present history of the region be well developed while discussing the cultural tourism. The paper is an exploration of cultural tourism potentials in North Eastern Region of India and develops the working definition of tourism entrepreneurs and cultural tourism. The paper which is descriptive in nature is based on secondary data. The finding of the paper clearly reveals that the region which is endowed with more than hundred ethnic groups which follow different religions and speak different languages is an exotic place for cultural explorers.

Introduction

Promoting tourism is one of the most important steps for the economically least developed areas like North Eastern Region of India. Tourism industry not only provides huge employment opportunities but also help in the economic development of a nation. It is also regarded as highly profitable sector. The region, which is often, projected negatively because of insurgent related killings, lack of infrastructural development, etc., however, witness an increasing trend of foreign tourist inflow in the last few years. According to a report published in The Hindu on August 5, 2014, the foreign tourist visits in the North Eastern Region of India (NER) grew by 27.9 per cent in 2013 over the previous year. The highest growth rate was observed in Manipur (154.7 per cent) which is followed by Arunachal Pradesh (111.2 per cent).

To develop the tourism sector, a unique product is required to be offered to the tourists. NER has a unique product for tourists, that is, the lifestyle of different ethnic groups, their art, architecture, folklore, dress and costumes, food, etc which is not found anywhere in the world, in sum, *the culture* of the region. The region is also well blessed by nature, having the blending of flora and fauna and also known for its rich bio-diversity. It means, it is the treasure house of various economic resources. Its rich cultural and ethnic heritage clearly depicts that the region can be easily made a cultural tourist-spot. The paper is an attempt to explore the possible areas of Cultural Tourism in North Eastern region of India. The paper also presents a working definition of Cultural Tourism and Tourism entrepreneurs.

Research Questions:

- A) Who are Tourism entrepreneurs and what is cultural tourism?
- B) Where are the cultural tourism potentials in North Eastern Region of India?

Objectives:

- A) To develop a working definition of Tourism entrepreneurs and Cultural tourism
- B) To explore the cultural tourism potentials in North Eastern Region of India;

Methodology: The paper is descriptive in nature and based on secondary data.

North Eastern Region of India (NER): an overview:

NER of India, comprising of 8 states Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim has a total area of about 255168 Sq. Km. and has international borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Tibet. The landscape constituents of the region are hills (60%), plateau (12 %) and plains (28 %) along with river systems contribute substantially in enriching its scenic component. The region the most ethnically and linguistically diverse region in India. There

are about 220 languages spoken in the different states of the region, belonging mainly to three language families, namely Indo-Aryan, Sino-Tibetan and Austric. The Indo-Aryan represented mainly by Axomiya and Bangla, Austro-Asiatic represented mainly by Khasi and the Sino Tibetan family of languages is represented by the Tibeto-Burman (Meiteis/ Manipuri, Bodo, etc), and the Siamese-Chinese sub families as well as there are languages of the Tea Tribes. The region has more than hundred ethnic groups which belong to different tribal communities. Each tribal community has its own distinct tradition of art, culture, dance, music and life styles which are attractive products of the tourists. As a zone of convergence of diverse ethnic stocks, the region is undoubtedly a showcase of cultural diversity. Hence, the region may be considered as one of the most potential areas of the country in respect of cultural tourism promotion.

Foreign Tourist inflow in NER, India:

The increasing trend of foreign tourist inflow in the region as well as state-wise is presented here in the form of table and diagramme.

Sl. No	States	2011	2012	2013	Growth Rate 12/11	Growth Rate 13/12
1	Arunachal Pradesh	4753	5135	10846	8	111.2
2	Assam	16400	17543	17638	7	0.5
3	Manipur	578	749	1908	29.6	154.7
4	Meghalaya	4803	5313	6773	10.6	27.5
5	Mizoram	658	744	800	13.1	7.5
6	Nagaland	2080	2489	3304	19.7	32.7
7	Sikkim	23602	26489	31,698	12.2	19.7
8	Tripura	6046	7840	11853	29.7	51.2
	Total	58920	66302	84,820	12.5	27.9

Source: The Hindu, August 5, 2014 & Business Standard August 19, 2014

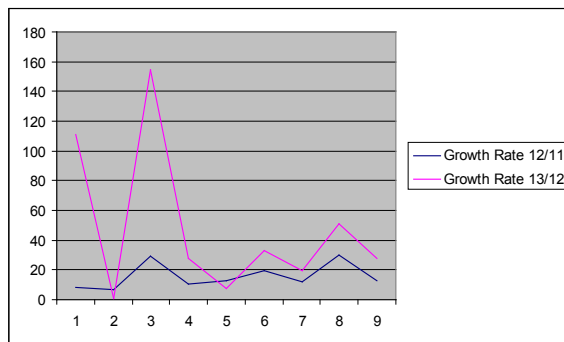


Fig. Growth rate of foreign tourist inflow in NE Region Cultural Tourism and Tourism Entrepreneurs:

Cultural Tourism: Cultural tourism (which is a subset of tourism), is concerned with a country' or region's culture, specific-

ly the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that helped shape their way of life. Few also define as 'the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs'. Cultural tourism includes tourism not only in urban areas particularly historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums, theaters but also tourism in rural areas showcasing the traditions of indigenous cultural communities (i.e. festivals, rituals), and their values and lifestyle, as well as niches like industrial tourism and creative tourism.

According to UNESCO (2009), Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing global tourism markets. The Impact of Culture on Tourism by UNESCO further reveals that many locations are now actively developing their tangible and intangible cultural assets as a means of developing comparative advantages in an increasingly competitive tourism marketplace, and to create local distinctiveness in the face of globalization. From the above discussion, the components of cultural tourism are

- ☞👤① Movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs that is going to monument, etc.
- ☞📖① The history and lifestyle of the people in a geographical area,
- ☞🎭① the visual and performing arts, architecture, religion(s), etc of the people;
- ☞🌄① landscapes, and local lifestyles, values, traditions, festivals, rituals, etc., that depicts the traditions of indigenous cultural communities, etc.

Tourism Entrepreneurs:

The term "tourism entrepreneur" may be defined as 'a creator of a touristic enterprise motivated by monetary and/or non-monetary reasons to pursue a perceived market opportunity legally, marginally, or illegally' (Khun et al., 2002). Tourism enterprises in developing countries include multinational corporations, medium-sized enterprises and locally owned small-scale business enterprises (Chang, 2011). Tourism entrepreneurs are also push motivator for the tourism development and responsible for the sustainable tourism development. According to Kensbock and Jennings, 'tourism entrepreneur' is 'an individual who creates a business with some component of originality in provision of a product, service, or experience for tourists' they are also the. Instigators tourism development and play an important role in sustainable tourism.

Studies on Tourism Development in NER:

According to Bhagyashri (2014), India's North Eastern region is less explored as compared to the rest of the country, despite having scenic beauty. According to Das, Dr. Dinesh (2013), the main constraints in the process of tourism development in NE region include Lack of infrastructure, Communication bottlenecks, Geographical isolation, Ethnic clashes leading to political instability, Growth of insurgent activities, Absence of leadership and entrepreneurship ability, Absence of congenial atmosphere to attract the tourists and such many other factors. According to the authors like Bhattacharya, Prasanta (2008) Milli Bhaskar & Duara, Ipsita (2013) the North-East India is plagued by multiple problems, from poverty to insurgency, which have rendered it poorer and less connected than the rest of the country which, prevented the region from realizing its full tourism potential.

Discussions:

Based on the definition on Cultural tourism, which has been mentioned in the text, the possible areas which may be explored as "cultural tourism destination in North Eastern Region of In-

dia" are :

- A) **The monumental heritage and religious heritage:** The monumental heritage of the NER may be divided into three groups. They are Hindu Monuments, Buddhist monuments, and the monuments which do not belong to this category like Kangla Fort of Manipur. The various historical monuments and places of Assam like 'Rangghar, 'Karengghar, 'Joysagar', 'Joydoul'; Neer Mahal etc are the important cultural tourism products. The religious places and temples like Kamakhya, Sri Govindaji and Sanamahi Temple in Imphal Manipur, etc are the places where both the domestic as well foreign tourists may visit.
- B) **The natural heritage:** The region's natural heritage like open lakes, mountains, sanctuaries, rich flora and fauna form another powerful stimulation of cultural tourism. The wide variety of orchids, the one horned Rhino, Sangai the Non-geen and Shiroi Lily, etc which are found only in the region. are the unique products for Cultural Tourism. The largest river island 'Majuli', mighty river Brahmaputra, The Loktak Lake, the Shila Lake, the Dzuko Valley, may also be mentioned.
- X) **Folk music and dances of different ethnic groups:** Every community of the region has a unique form of dance and music which shows their culture. Some of the dance forms of the region like Manipuri and Satriya have worldwide recognition. There are other form of dances like Laiharaoba dance of Manipur, Bihu Dance of Assam, Nongkrem Dance of Meghalaya, Bamboo Dance of Mizoram, etc are the the right place for cultural exploration. Different form of music and song ranging from classical to modern, using the traditional instruments like Drum, Flute, Pena, etc., may also be explored.
- A) **Ethnic foods:** A rich variety of fruits and vegetables, traditional cousins and traditional wines, etc are also the products which may be explored.
- E) **Traditional arts & crafts:** The rich traditional arts and crafts may be explored through cultural shopping. Through this, the lifestyle of different ethnic groups may be explored easily.

Conclusion and Policy recommendations:

There is a wide scope of cultural tourism development in North Eastern region of India. The role of the Tourism entrepreneurs in this regard not only to create of a tourism enterprise but also the push motivator for the development of tourism. The role of Government is also very important in this regard. In conclusion, it is recommended that the Cultural Tourism should be promoted in this region in order to achieved the following results:

- (α) to help in building image of different ethnic groups of the region
- (β) to preserve the cultural and historical heritage of the region,
- (γ) To use culture as an instrument to facilitate harmony and understanding among people,
- (δ) to develop the understanding on the rich natural resources of the region and use it in a sustainable way
- (ε) to have a positive economic and social impact.

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