



TOURISM: ITS IMPACT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF MEGHALAYA

Social Science

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is considered a major tool of economic development round the globe and in the recent decades it has proved its potential by emerging as the fastest growing industry, contributing about 9% to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Meghalaya also known as the "Scotland of the East" is among the most important tourist destinations in India. This paper will focus impact of tourism on the economic development of Meghalaya by examining the parameters of economic development such as employment generation, development of infrastructure etc. It is estimated that many people of Meghalaya are directly and/or indirectly engaged in tourism related activities. Tourism is a potential industry of Meghalaya, concrete steps of its economic benefit on the state are still lacking. Despite having a huge potential to usher in economic growth and development as also employment generation, serious effort have not been made to tap the resourcefulness of this industry in the region. In this paper emphasis will be put on causes/strengths like culture, hospitality and the beautiful landscape which act as facilitators of the economic development of Meghalaya. This paper will also attempt to draw attention towards the new unexplored tourist destinations which may prove beneficial for the development of far flung and remote areas of Meghalaya. The purpose of this study will be to provide some feasible suggestions based on the findings which may prove valuable for the future development of tourism in Meghalaya.

KEYWORDS

Tourism, Economic Development, Employment Generation, Income, Infrastructure Development, Regional Development.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism round the globe is considered as a major tool of development and in the recent past it has proved its potential by emerging as the fastest growing industry contributing about 9% to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating 8.7% of total employment. As per the estimates of United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), global tourism receipts hit a record by earning US \$1159billion in 2013.

Meghalaya also known as, "Scotland of the East" because of its unmatched scenic beauty, attractive landscapes, is among the most important tourist destinations in India. A land of rolling lush green hills, it is located at an altitude of 1500 meters. Pine forested hills, terraced fields, serene river vales, lovely waterfalls, and incredible range of flora, exotic plants, and a warm and friendly people makes Meghalaya a wonderful holiday destination. Travellers from every nook and corner of the Country are visiting Meghalaya. It provides opportunities for Eco-tourism, Adventure tourism, Pilgrimage tourism and Medical tourism. Tourism holds a strategic place in Meghalaya economy by providing economic benefits like Employment, Infrastructure development and development of local industries like Handicrafts and Handlooms which has placed Meghalaya in the limelight at the national as well as international level.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of tourism in the economic development of Meghalaya and to find out the role of tourism in employment, income, infrastructure development, regional development and to provide some feasible suggestions that may prove valuable for the future development of tourism in Meghalaya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In view of the specific objectives, methodology followed in carrying out the present study involved mainly the use of data from secondary sources, collected from various organisations like United Nations World Tourism Organisation, World Travel and Tourism Council, Ministry of Tourism-GOI, Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation and Directorate of Tourism (Meghalaya). In addition to this, data have also been collected from other reliable sources like articles, journals and newspapers.

TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya has a tremendous potential to become a major global tourist destination. Importance of tourism in Meghalaya economy is known for decades now and its role in economic development has been an area of great interest from policy perspective. It is estimated that almost 7Lakhs tourists visited Meghalaya in 2013 which placed Meghalaya on 28th position where as Andhra Pradesh is ranked no.1 in the list of major tourist destinations of India (Ministry Of Tourism,

GOI).

1. Tourism and Employment Generation

Tourism has played an important role in the employment generation from past with a great potential to increase it further in the coming decades. Wilson and John (2001) in their study found that tourism provided income and employment opportunities to the local people in rural areas. Meghalaya possesses a lot of tourist attractions in the form of Pilgrimage, Leisure, Adventure and Eco-tourism with enormous scope to transform the whole economy as a tourist driven economy by providing jobs through trickling down effect. Being a labour intensive industry, its scope in employment generation is vast and the level of investment required here is low as compared to the other sectors of the economy. As per World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates, an investment of 10lakh in travel and tourism industry will generate about 90 jobs which are much higher than its competing sectors like Agriculture and Manufacturing which generate 45 & 13 jobs per 10lakh respectively.

Tourism in Meghalaya is a multi -segmental industry by providing different types of jobs like hotel managers, guides, tour operators, restaurants, nightclubs, taxis, and souvenir sales, and indirectly through the supply of goods and services needed by tourism-related businesses etc which further strengthens the Meghalaya economy by increasing income and standard of living of the people.

2. Tourism and Income

Tourism industry in Meghalaya is also of much significance in the sense that Meghalaya is considered as one of the industrially backward states of the country. Apart from agriculture, tourism industry is the most popular source of income in Meghalaya. Government revenues from the tourism sector can be categorized as direct and indirect contributions. Direct contributions are generated by taxes on incomes from tourism employment and tourism businesses, and by direct levies on tourists such as departure taxes. Indirect contributions are those originated from taxes and duties levied on goods and services supplied to tourists.

Assessing and quantifying the economic impact of tourism development is not straightforward because of the wide range of activities associated with growth in this sector and because of the difficulty in defining the tourism industry. Tourism revenues go beyond hotel operators and employees, tour operators, restaurateurs and shop-workers who sell goods and services to tourists. Tourist expenditures typically extend, at least in part, to local goods and services, further raising output and incomes. The total impact of tourism on income generation and distribution depends on more than just the direct spending by tourists on various commodities and services.

3. Tourism and Infrastructure Development

Tourism and development of infrastructure are interrelated sectors in the sense that better infrastructure, will provide the way for more tourism related activities. Lack of infrastructure is among the main causes of underdevelopment of tourism (A. K. Bhatia, 1997). Development of infrastructure includes Transportation infrastructures, Accommodations infrastructures, communication infrastructures as well as utilities infrastructure. Transportation infrastructure encompasses roads, railway, airport, transport facilities (vehicles, wagons, etc). Easy access to tourism destinations in terms of international transport and facilities for easy movement within the destinations are generally considered to be prerequisites for the development of tourism. Accommodation infrastructure includes hotels, restaurants, and campsites. Good accommodation services to the tourists attract them to stay longer to the park hence increase income of the hotel or campsite and the entire country. The absence of quality food, quality rooms, customer care and recreation in hotels discourage tourist to stay at a particular area of tourism destination. Communication system infrastructure includes communication networks through internets and telecommunication system. Reliable internet connections as well as good telephone networks are the key issue for tourist attraction within the area. Utility infrastructures utility infrastructure includes water supply and power supply.

The influence of infrastructure facilities on tourism development have also been emphasized by Crouch and Ritchie (2000) whereby they pointed various factors that are suitable for tourist attraction in a specific area that, various infrastructures like shopping, food services, travel services, transportation as well as accommodation services were regarded as catalysis for tourism development. Apart from the requirements shown above, it is essential to put more stress on the maintenance of existing tourist spots because tourists are attracted to a particular place only if they feel that the arrangements being made at a tourist destination are sufficient to satisfy them.

4. Tourism and Regional Development

Meghalaya is a place calling Eco travellers to explore its rich natural heritage. Home to the many of beautiful peaks, mysterious caves, waterfalls, untouched jungles, rivers, and pleasant hillocks. Meghalaya is blessed with abundance of natural heritage, and have plenteous sightseeing Eco places. There are many of waterfalls like Sweet Falls, Elephant Falls, Spread Eagle Falls, Dainthlen falls, Nohkalikai falls, Nohshngithiang Falls, Weinia Falls, Tyrshi Falls, Pelga Falls, Imil-Chang-Dare etc which are very scenic, and are flocked by heaps of nature lovers. Either it is nature walk on numerous of its hillocks located at popular peaks like Shillong peak and Tura peak or it is jungle viewing at Botanical garden and Balpakram Wildlife National Park, Meghalaya is full of Eco excursion. The abundance of Eco places of Meghalaya are of best use for Eco lovers and persons who has got insatiable appetite of adventure. The common Eco activity one can enjoy here comprise of Wildlife viewing, Angling, Bird watching, Nature walk, visit to many of waterfalls and lakes. Along with it, some of the best Trekking Routes like Living Root Bridge, Kyllang Rock, David Scott Trail, Sohpet-bneng invite adventure loving people to Trek. Enjoying Caving in its popular caves of Syndai and Siju is a kind of unusual and exciting adventure sports. Besides, many of the rivers and Umiam Water Sports Complex (at Khasi hills) are paradise for water sport lovers.

Tourism acts as a catalyst in the development of backward and far flung regions of a particular area. Development of tourism will lead to the progress in rural / backward regions (Smith- Stephen, 1989). It is often seen that most of the scenic & beautiful destinations of a state are located in the backward areas which have a significant contribution in the economic development of these areas through the development of local industries. Same is the case of Meghalaya where tourists are attracted towards the areas which are located in remote regions of the state. Tourists visiting such unexplored attractive spots can give fillip to the economic condition of the residents by promoting local art like Handicrafts, Handlooms etc.

STRENGTHS OF MEGHALAYATOURISM

There are many factors responsible for the huge potential of tourism in Meghalaya. Some of them are listed below.

1. Meghalaya is well known destination for its great hospitality, rich cultural heritage and scenic beauty.
2. Meghalaya is a suitable destination for several other types of

tourism which are yet to be exploited like Adventure tourism, Medical tourism, Eco-tourism and Leisure tourism.

3. The local residents of Meghalaya have lot of experience in tourism related activities

It is evident that Meghalaya tourism has vast potential by looking through the prism of strengths which can outweigh the weaknesses like unexplored destinations, low government spending, poor infrastructure and security concerns provided the strengths and opportunities are properly maintained.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

From the above findings it is clear that tourism is an important sector of development for Meghalaya economy but there are some weaknesses which if sorted out properly could become the main strengths of Meghalaya tourism. Following are some of the suggestions with regard to the future development of tourism in Meghalaya.

1. The first and the foremost thing in this regard would be to have a well documented tourism policy because Meghalaya does not have a tourism policy which should give equal rights to all the stake holders involved in tourism related activities like local people, private sector and NGOs.
2. As tourism is mainly a private sector driven industry, it is important for Meghalaya govt. to act as a facilitator and not a regulator with respect to tourism. (if you can get some comparison for your statement)
3. Infrastructure development with regard to tourism is lacking. We do not have enough space in hotels and resorts to handle the tourist rush in peak seasons, transport facilities are meagre and sanitary conditions are pathetic. So there is a need for proper maintenance and development of infrastructure in Meghalaya.
4. There are number of unexplored tourist destinations in Meghalaya, Such new unexplored attractive destinations need to be explored.
5. Meghalaya tourism needs enough measures to provide proper security to tourists so that a sense of safety will be felt by the tourists.
6. Meghalaya is one of the best destinations with regard to some new areas which include Adventure tourism, Medical tourism, etc which needs to be explored and thus giving a new sense of hope to tourism.
7. All the new projects, having an impact on tourism and environment should be carried out in a sustainable way without damaging the fragile ecology of the state.
8. The government should come up with measures to check the traversing cabs from other states into the nook and corners of the state. In fact tourists' cabs should halt at designated places from which local cabbies can take over to ferry people to various destinations. This will not only enhance the state's revenue but it will also provide employment opportunities and incentives to the local people.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the above summary that tourism has been an important source of economic development for Meghalaya economy and will continue to be a significant contributor in future also because of the changes taking place on both demand and supply sides. Supply side changes are due to the growth of new areas like Adventure tourism, Eco tourism and Medical tourism. Moreover the factors which increase its scope from demand side include, change in the standard of living, rise in disposable income, late marriages, long leisure time and better education. Owing to the growth of tourism industry in Meghalaya, economic parameters like employment, income, infrastructure and competition will improve, leading to the entry of new products in the market and thus resulting in better services and more satisfaction to the people of the state as a whole. This will be possible only if the situation in the state and region remains normal and the organisations mainly responsible for the development of tourism like, Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) and Directorate of Tourism (Meghalaya) are able to beautify and maintain the existing attractive tourist spots by providing better and affordable facilities to the visitors in the form of good infrastructure, better sanitary conditions, decent entertainment avenues and proper security measures which are presently lacking. While several plans and programmes have already been framed for tackling these challenges, successful implementation would be critical to accelerate them.

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