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# POTENTIAL OF ECO- TOURISM IN CONTEXT OF EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN ASSAM; PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

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## ABSTRACT

*The concept of Eco-tourism is, developed around the idea of travelling and staying nights in different places of natural beauty. It has the aim of both environment conservation and improvement of welfare of the indigenous people. In Assam, tourism is primarily developed around the nature. Therefore, various natural components like parks and sanctuaries, lakes, rivers, forests and its habitants like wild life, are the main tourist attraction of the State .But, it is found that absence of adequate publicity at national level, there is no co-ordination committee on tourism among all the seven sisters of North East region which may establish a link to attract the same group of tourists or target customers to different states one after another. No Market segmentation is made on the basis of geographic, demographics and socio-economic aspects to have a clear picture of the tourism users. The lifestyle, personality, religion, literate, illiterate, rich, poor etc. all these elements have deep bearing on development and promotion to tourism. Yet, the tourist agencies and departments have not studied the changing needs and requirements of different segments with a view to innovate their strategic decisions. Therefore, this study has been undertaken with the objectives of importance of tourism in the economy of Assam in context of employment generation. This study also analyses the steps taken by the central as well as the Govt. of Assam in the process of development of tourism sector in the state and the role that can be taken by regional planning for the promotion of tourism industry.*

**Keywords:** *Eco-tourism, Regional planning, Tourism industry, Tourist agencies.*

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## Introduction

The concept of Tourism is very wide and it reaches every aspect of human life. Tourism plays an important role in terms of employment, socio-economic benefit, national income and it makes sustainable cultures and heritage. In present time, tourism is considered as an industry, in the form of attracting people to destination, transporting them there, housing, feeding and entertaining and returning them to their

homes. Tourism industry makes regional development by way of making infrastructural development. In India, recently, tourism sector is one of the single largest sources of foreign exchange. This sector also gives large employment opportunity to large number of people. These two main aspects of tourism, i.e., its capacity to create employment, both directly and indirectly and its potential to earn international currency for the domestic country have made this industry high priority for all concerns, including Govts., economic planners and for common people.

Initially, Eco-tourism describes nature-based tours and travel to relatively calm and quite area with scenic beauty with the purpose of educational study or exploring nature. Later on, the concept has become wide and developed around a scientific based approach including planning, programming, management and development of tourism products, its sale and activities, which become sustainable in nature.

### **Objectives:**

This study is based on the following objectives:

1. It highlights importance of tourism sector in the economy of Assam in context of employment generation.
2. The study also analyses the steps taken by the central as well as the Govt. of Assam for the development of eco-tourism sector in the state and role that can be taken by regional planning for the promotion of tourism industry.

### **Research Methodology:**

This paper is based on secondary sources of data and information published in various newspapers, articles, books, tourist directory and websites.

### **Discussion:**

Tourism Industry has great potential of generating employment opportunities as it is a labour-intensive industry. Tourism can generate job directed in the industry itself and indirectly in other sectors which are the component of this industry and help the tourism industry. Some jobs are created directly in the tourism related facilities and in the tourist destinations. For e.g., Hotels and Restaurants, Shop selling goods produced locally, producers and artisans who produce goods with local cultural heritage, travel agencies, tourist guides etc. Employment opportunity is also like to be created for thousands of jobless indirectly in the sectors, which serve the tourism sector like manufacturing, construction, transportation, banking, agriculture etc. Apart from jobs, specialised persons are also engaged in other related fields like management of tourism, accounts, travel guidance, hotel management, entertainment etc. Side by side, some jobs with less skill requirement like porters, kitchen staff, waiters, gardeners may also be created. Thus, for many underdeveloped and developing countries suffering from massive unemployment problem, tourism sector can be a major source of employment opportunities. Referring to State, Assam has also ample scope for eco-tourism, as it is rich in natural beauty and having favourable climatic conditions. Assam's blue hills, green forests, beautiful rivers are the potential based on which the concept of eco-friendly tourism develops. Certain points like (a) Well-structured approach road to the tourist spots (b) Development and design of infra-structural facilities like good quality tents for night stay with provisions for food and other logistics,

(c) river cruising and water sports, bird watching towers etc. can make Assam as Eco-tourism hub. If these facilities are developed, there is a possibility to attract tourist to these places.

Tourism sector in Assam is mainly nature based, therefore, natural parks and sanctuaries, lakes, river, pond, warm water springs, forests, wild life, are the principal components of tourist attraction. Following are the some of the tourist places in Assam.

1. Bhairabkunda: It is situated at the border of Arunachal Pradesh, known for its natural beauty.
2. Bhalukpong: It is situated by the side of river Jia Bhoroli. It is famous for angling and water sports, also well known for picnic spot.
3. Chandubi: It is a beautiful picnic spot, nearby Chandubi lake.
4. 4.Dibru-Chaikhowa: It is a national sanctuary, its distance from Dibrugarh is 70 km. It has the habitat of elephants, buffaloes, famous for wild horses
5. Haflong: It is the beautiful hill stations in Dima Hasao, famous for sylvan beauty.
6. Jatinga: It is a beautiful hilly place, where birds behave in a mysterious way, the local people believe that the birds commit suicide here on particular days. Lots of people come here to see different types of migratory birds. It is situated near Haflong, North Cachar district.
7. Kaziranga: It is a famous national park with international acclaim. It is the home for great Indian one-horn rhinoceros, tigers, buffaloes, elephants, wild ducks, deers and breeding place of pelicans, home of reptiles and monkeys more specifically golden langurs and host of other species
8. Manas: It is one of the magnificent national parks in the country, situated in the foothills of Himalayas. The river Manas flows through it, famous for the tiger project and a habitat for various wild animals
9. Orang: It is a wild life sanctuary, known as a mini Kaziranga, in Sonitpur district, famous for different animals.
10. Pobitora: A wild life sanctuary situated in Morigaon district, famous for wild ducks and its natural beauty.

Source: Directorate of Tourism, Assam has also the opportunities for development of adventure tourism with enchanting blue hills and speedy rivers. Assam tourism has promoted some of the adventure sports activities like rock-climbing, trekking, para-sailing, water sports, river rafting and angling. Every year, an annual angling competition is held at Bhalukpong-Potasali side in November where lots of Indian and foreign tourists participate. Assam has a number of ideal Holy places like Nilachal hills (where the Kamakhya temple situated), Sukleswar temple, Ugratata temple, which are also the places of tourist attraction. Most of the tourist come to visit Kamakhya temple in Guwahati.

The following table shows a recent statistics of tourist inflows, both domestic and international to Assam.

**Tourist Inflow to Assam 2004 -2020**

| <b>Tourist Arrival/Year</b> | <b>Domestic tourist</b> | <b>International tourist</b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2004-05                     | 22,86,630               | 7,285                        |
| 2005-06                     | 24,67,656               | 10,782                       |
| 2006-07                     | 32,68,657               | 11,151                       |
| 2007-08                     | 34,36,484               | 13,105                       |
| 2008-09                     | 36,17,306               | 14,426                       |
| 2009-10                     | 39,98,706               | 14,533                       |
| 2010-11                     | 40,50,924               | 15,157                       |
| 2011-12                     | 43,39,485               | 16,400                       |
| 2012-13                     | 45,11,407               | 17,542                       |
| 2013-14                     | 45,11,407               | 17,542                       |
| 2014-15                     | 46,84,526               | 17,638                       |
| 2015-16                     | 48,35,492               | 21,725                       |
| 2016-17                     | 54,91,507               | 24,637                       |
| 2017-18                     | 56,42,950               | 26,320                       |
| 2018-19                     | 60,27,002               | 41,209                       |
| 2019-20                     | 51,46,307               | 18,594                       |

Source: Directorate of Tourism, Assam

In recent years, tourism sector has contributed most to economic & social development of the country. Any other economic sector can earn domestic as well as foreign currency unlike tourism. It's a testimony itself that Tourism sector's contribution to Govt. and employment generation at the global as well as national level is at the highest level.

Tourism and outdoor recreation have two-fold aspects. The demand for tourism and supply of tourist facility. The twin market force, the demand and supply interaction made an effective design of tourism and outdoor recreation. It has been well observed that there exists a strong positive two-way co-relation between tourist arrival – the demand aspect and the provision of tourist facility, the supply of high standard facility would by and large together determine the level and pace of growth of tourist's facilities and vice-versa.

### **Share of Tourism Sector in GDP and Employment Generation:**

Tourism industry in India generates several employment opportunities that positively contribute global economies. Both in rural and urban areas, this industry creates multiple job opportunities across different skill levels. The type of job ranges from hotel staffs and tour guide to different craft making person and entrepreneurs. In the financial Year 2020-21, In India, Tours and travel sector come up with employment opportunity to nearly 80 million people and contributes five percent of the country's GDP. According to the

report of WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council) in 2022, travel and Indian tourism industry contributes worth Rs. 15.7 trillion to its economy and gives employment opportunity to 37.2 million people.

#### Share of Tourism Sector in Country's GDP

| Year                | 2015to16 | 2016to17 | 2017to18 | 2018to19 | 2019to20 |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Share in GDP( in %) | 5.09     | 5.03     | 5.02     | 5.01     | 5.16     |
| Direct share(in%)   | 2.66     | 2.62     | 2.62     | 2.6      | 2.68     |
| Indirect share(in%) | 2.44     | 2.42     | 2.41     | 2.41     | 2.47     |

Source: Annual Report 2020-21

#### Problems of eco- tourism in Assam:

Despite of abundant potentiality and prospects of tourism in Assam, the statistics shown in the above tables does not present a happy picture. There are a lot of reasons for this.

##### a. Lack of Proper Tourism Law and Policy

Tourism sector is an important source of hard foreign currency. It becomes the second largest foreign exchange currency earner source. In order to attract foreign tourists, the Government of India adopted and implemented various steps to make tourism sector more attractable. It has revised the National Tourism Policy, 1982 and to reformulated the draft policy of 1993 in order to envision global tourism, based on four S –ie, Swagat (welcome), Soosna (information), Suvidha (facilities), and Suraksha (security). In Assam, tourism policy was also formulated in 1987 and in 1992, certain exercises were done to frame the rules for tourism, but, unfortunately, it is not available in any of the offices connected with tourism. But later on, these steps did not bring any concrete result. In recent times, role of tourism in economic development of the state is highlighted by the media. Frequently, a good number articles have been published in various newspaper highlighting various aspects of tourism and its potentiality in the sustainable development of Assam. Various ideas have been formulated to develop tourism, but these are yet to be properly implemented.

##### b. Implementation of Restricted Area Permit (RAP)

In North-Eastern region, the RAP was enforced in 1955 in the backdrop of alleged missionary involvement in the Naga rebellion. As a result, foreigner willing to visit North-East including Assam had to undergo a very long and hectic procedure of obtaining permit from the Home Ministry. Until, May 18, 1999, i.e., RAP in force, it was a bigger task for any foreign tourist to visit Assam and other places in the North-East.

##### c. Insurgency Problem

Earlier, Whole North east including Assam, has been experiencing different insurgency problem and violent movements. As a result, domestic as well as foreign tourist hesitate to visit here, in view of security reasons. There was a general impression that any tourist, either domestic or foreign could be a soft target of the insurgents. Therefore, they are reluctant to go to Assam and North-East.

**d. Lack of Infrastructure**

To attract tourists, certain infrastructural facilities are required. It includes tourist lodges, star hotels, clean and hygienic food and accommodation, affordable and reliable communication network, availability of water sports equipment etc. Most of the places of tourist attraction are not situated in the roadside, and approach roads to these places are in bad condition. This is one of the most disadvantageous factors in respect of tourist inflows. It appears that the potentialities for developing tourism needs proper policy and action.

**e. Lack of Coordinated Efforts**

There is a huge lack of coordination between several agencies related to tourism like various public industries and private sectors like tea industry, oil and coal on one hand, and the Department of Tourism or Assam Tourist Development Corporation (ATDC), Lack of coordination between Department of Tourism and Department of Archaeology in handling the demands of the tourists in places of both historic and religious importance. Again, there is no proper coordination between the twin bodies of Assam tourism, that is, the Directorate of Tourism and ATDC on one hand, and road and river transport system run by both Government and private sectors on the other.

**f. Insufficient Tourist Guides**

In Assam, the concept of skill and trained tourist guide is totally absent. As a result, the inquisitiveness of the tourists cannot be satisfied by anyone visiting to that particular place. Eventually, the Department of Tourism initiated a programme to train tourist guides. But this effort has not yielded much results as most of the trainees left the job. It is a chicken-and-egg syndrome which could be resolved by the state government by adopting a two-front strategy – (i) tourist guide training programme for a very few numbers of youths, and (ii) setting a target of inflow of the tourists.

**Adopting SWOT analysis:**

SWOT analysis is very important for outline the strategic planning for promoting tourism and a workable framework for preserving and sustaining eco-cultural tourism in the region. Some of the points are given herewith:

**Strength** –It includes Natural beauty, good hospitality; Environmental and Cultural heritage; Alternative healing through traditional massages, indigenous medicinal plants and its soothing climate.

**Weaknesses** – Major weakness in eco-tourism include absence of awareness regarding tourism as sustainable livelihood; Absence of human resource development; Low-literacy level; Poor connectivity; Insurgency in some areas.

**Opportunities** – There are lots of opportunities for developing the tourism sector in the region. The Government of India gave special emphasis on North East Tourism in the form of Investment by far-sighted entrepreneurs and local bodies like the MTDf members (Meghalaya) and Special Central assistance schemes to local entrepreneurs.

**Threats** – Tourism growth is adversely affected by the natural calamities, ecological imbalances in environmentally fragile locations; insurgency problem; Superstition and backwardness amongst some tribes.<sup>5</sup>

### **Steps undertaken by the Tourism Department of Assam:**

Following is the some of the steps undertaken by the tourism department to enhance tourism sector.

1. Setting up of Five Star Hotels in Guwahati.
2. Assam Tourism has introduced a scheme under Chief Minister's Self-Help programme to provide incentive to the unemployed educated youths of the state to ease out unemployment and motivating them towards entrepreneurship.
3. To promote national integrity, statue of Lachit Borphukon is made up in the river Brahmaputra.
4. Grant of Rs. I 15.00 lakh to promotional campaign at the domestic and international level through media.
5. The Ministry of Tourism, Govt. Of India in collaboration with Assam Tourism organises International Tourism Mart in 18th January to 20th January, 2013 in Guwahati for the first time. In the event delegates from almost 23 countries participated.
6. To promote Assam Tourism, Priyanka Chopra was selected as brand ambassador.

### **Conclusion:**

Assam has lots of attractive tourist places and becomes the hub of tourism industry. There is a true blessing of nature upon the State. Unfortunately, it is not yet up to the mark. For more tourist attraction, a proper tourism policy is essential, under which, policy steps should be taken to develop tourist circuit house and resorts, to produce human resources for the management of tourism, to establish professional tour operators and marketing of tourism products. Developing cultural and eco-tourism is an incremental process, and it requires both commitment and an investment, a commitment for human resources, and investment in financial resources which results strong leadership. The N.E. states of India have immense potential for both eco and cultural tourism. Tourism is one of the safest means of sustaining local and indigenous livelihoods, its traditions and their cultural heritage. Further, the brand-image of Assam Tourism can help the State to be a destination of the domestic as well as foreign tourist.

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