

Rural Tourism of North East India: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract: In this paper an attempt have been made to study how the rural tourism helps to generate sustainable livelihood in North-East India. The study is based on secondary data. Development of rural tourism can be considered as a possible way to enhance economic empowerment and employment generation of rural communities through sustainable livelihood. Rural tourism is the showcase of rural life, art, culture and heritage, picturesque landscape at rural locations or in villages. Rural tourism also the concept of homestay can provide direct benefits to the local communities or stakeholders, both economically and socially. It also enable interactions between tourists and local population for a mutually enriching experience. The government have taken various initiative and policies at central and state level to enhance tourism potential. Consequently there has been considerable growth of rural communities in North East India through village tourism, natural tourism, cultural tourism etc. In this paper an attempt is made to study the potentiality of rural tourism and its various aspects in North East India for sustainable rural development.

Key Words: Economic empowerment, home-stay, Rural tourism, sustainable livelihood, village tourism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industry in the world. Tourism is frequently supposed to be a viable means of raising the economic activity of regions. Rural tourism can be defined as the 'country experience' which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Rural tourism is not just farm-based tourism. It includes farm-based holidays but also comprises special interest nature holidays and eco-tourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some areas, ethnic tourism. A major form of tourism is agri-tourism, which refers to the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. Rural tourism is also revolutionizing businesses and prompting economic development across the globe. (Rural tourism - an overview, 2010)

The development of Rural Tourism is very much useful for a developing country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Rural development implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. In order to provide the rural people with better prospects for economic development, rural tourism can play a crucial role. In the developed countries, people use to visit village settings just to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle in fresh atmosphere, and this concept has now emerged as a formal kind of Rural Tourism in various developed and underdeveloped countries.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the prospects of rural tourism in North-East India.
2. To identify various challenges of rural tourism.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research paper is the form of an explanatory study in analyzing the prospects and challenges of North-East Indian states which will maintain a bright potentiality of economic development in terms of rural tourism. The present study is based on secondary data collection. This secondary data was collected by various published sources like books, journal, magazine, reports, publications, etc. The findings were discussed in the light of published literature.

IV. PROSPECTS OF RURAL TOURISM IN NORTH-EAST INDIA:

As per the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2009 by the World Economic Forum, India is ranked 11th in the Asia Pacific region and 62nd overall, moving up three places on the list of the world's attractive destinations. It is ranked the 14th best tourist destination for its natural resources and 24th for its cultural resources, with many World Heritage sites, both natural and cultural, rich fauna, and strong creative industries in the country. India also bagged 37th rank for its air transport network. The Indiatravel and tourism industry ranked 5th in the long-term (10-year) growth and is expected to be the second largest employer in the world by 2019. (Gao-Liang Wang, Harold Lalrinawma , 2016)

This beautiful North East Indian state, bounded by Himalayan foothills and cut through by the powerful currents of the Brahmaputra River, has little existing tourism infrastructure and low market awareness. North-East India is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the worlds richest bio-geographic areas. Though NE India is a very backward region in the whole country, yet it has the greatest potentiality to develop the region into a potent force through tourism industry.

Rural tourism is a multi-faced activity that takes place in an environment outside heavily urbanized area. It is an industry sector characterized by small scale tourism business, set in areas where land use is dominated by agricultural pursuits, forestry or natural area.” (Dept. of Tourism, GOI, 1994).

Rural tourism brings people of different culture, faiths, languages and life style, close to one another and it provide a broader outlook of life. Possible ways for developing Rural Tourism in North East India. Eco tourism: It is a responsible type of tourism which preserves natural resources as well as maintaining the well-being and social values of the local people.

Cultural tourism: It is concerned with the culture, religion, history and archaeology of local people. Village based tourism: It is a type of tourism in which tourists share in village life and villagers gain economic and other benefits from tourist activities. Tourists often come to witness the life style of the people of this village. The traditional way of life right from their traditional attire to their traditional food, forms a delightful destination for tourists. (Nitashree Mili, 2012)

V. TRENDS OF TOURISM IN NORTH EAST INDIA

Today's North-East India is composed of eight sister states namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim. Tourism is the world's largest industry and it represents the fastest growing segment of this market. Also rural tourism has its potentials in North Eastern States as the North Eastern Region is full of rich natural resources and diversity, also rich cultural heritage is the great Potential for Adventure tourism across the North Eastern regions.

Table : 1, Foreign Tourist Arrival in North East India:

Year	No of Foreign Tourist Arrival
2005	37380
2006	38496
2007	43665
2008	47761
2009	47595
2010	50950
2011	58920
2012	66302
2013	84820
C.G.R (%)	9.73*

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, available at: <http://www.mdoner.gov.in/content/report-studies-ner>, **Note:** *-Significant at 5% probability level

Table:1 showed that the increasing trend of foreign tourist arrival in North East India. In the year 2005 number of Foreign Tourist Arrival was 37380 thousand and in 2013 it has increased up-to 84820 thousand. number of Foreign Tourist Arrival in North East India from 2005 to 2013 was showed an compound growth rate of 9.73 which was found to be statistically significant at 5% probability level. This indicates the growing importance of tourism sector in North Eastern regions.

Fig: 1, Foreign Tourist Arrival in North East India:

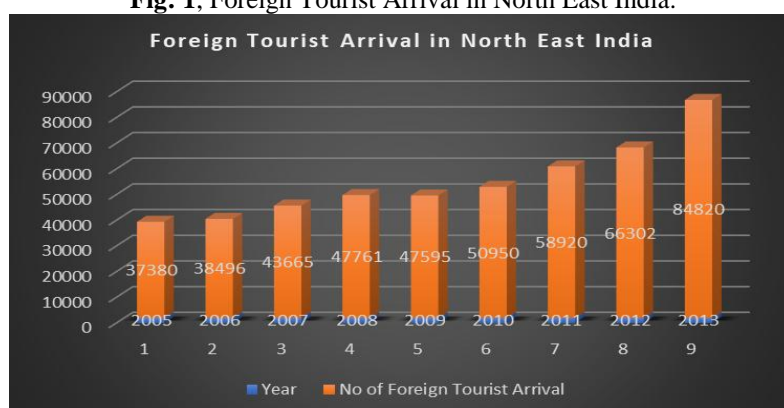


Table :2, Foreign tourist in 2010 (NE region):

NE States	Foreign Tourist inflow in 2010
Arunachal Pradesh	3395
Assam	15157
Manipur	389
Maeghalaya	4177
Mizoram	731
Nagaland	1132
Sikkim	20757
Tripura	5212
C.G.R (%)	7.45

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, available at: <http://www.mdoner.gov.in/content/report-studies-ner>, Note: *-Significant at 5% probability level

Table:2 showed that the increasing trend of foreign tourist arrival in various states of North East India in the year 2010. In the year 2010 number of Foreign Tourist Arrival was 389 in Manipur, 731 in Mizoram, 1132 in Nagaland, 3395 in Arunachal Pradesh, 4177 in Meghalaya, 5212 in Tripura, 15157 in Assam and 20757 in Sikkim respectively. Foreign Tourist Arrival in various states of North East India in 2010, was showed an compound growth rate of 7.45 which was found to be statistically significant at 5% probability level. This indicates the growing importance of tourism sector in various states of North Eastern regions.

Fig:2, Foreign tourist in 2010 (NE region):

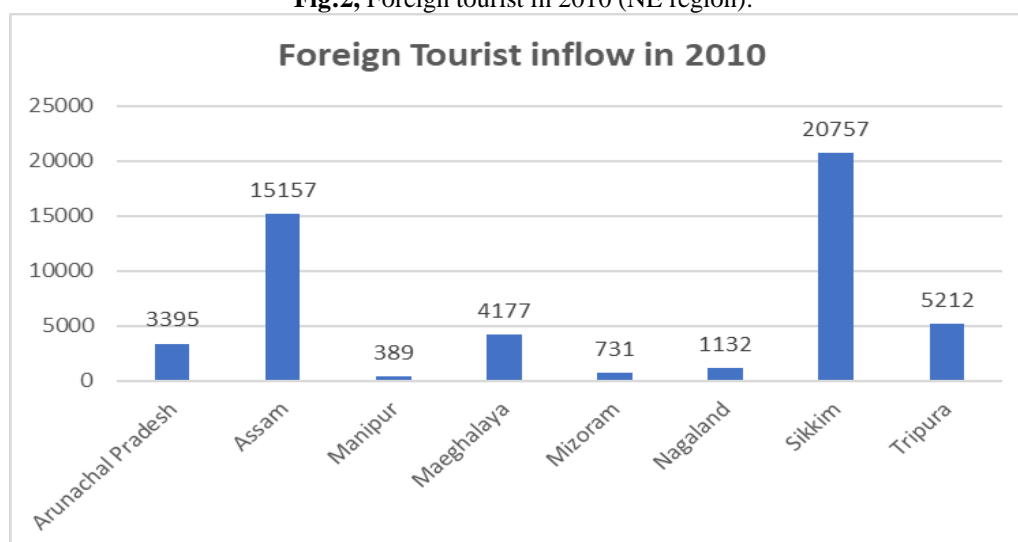
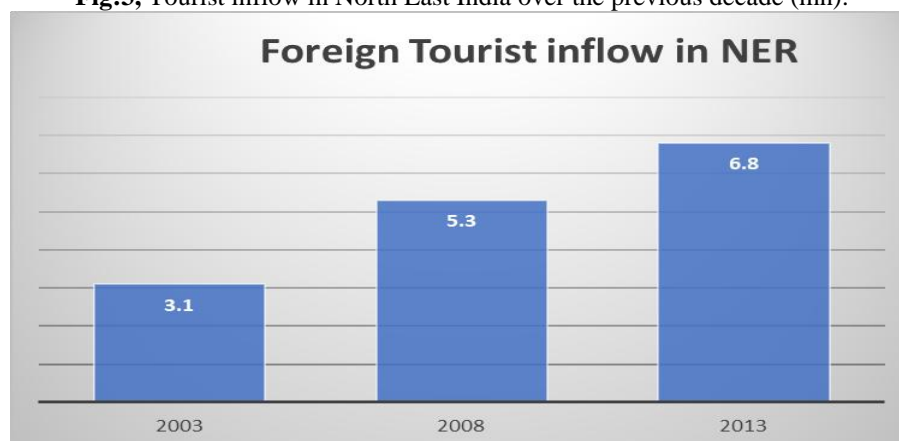


Fig:3, Tourist inflow in North East India over the previous decade (mn):



Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Available at: <http://www.tourism.gov.in/market-research-and-statistics>

Fig:3, showed an increasing trend of Tourist inflow in North East India over the previous decade (mn), it has grown from 3.13 mn in 2003 to 6.68 mn in 2013 displaying a CAGR of 8% during the period.

VI. SWOT ANALYSIS OF RURAL TOURISM IN NORTH EASTERN REGION

The SWOT analysis is very much important to provide a strategy for development by consolidating the strengths, overcoming the weaknesses, building on the opportunities and mitigating the threats.

STRENGTHS:

- North East India is full of rich natural resources and diversity.
- Rich cultural heritage is the great Potential for Adventure tourism across the North Eastern regions.
- Homestays may be a good option for the people because, in North-East India people from all the communities are very much fit for hospitality industry.

WEAKNESSES:

- Accessibility & Transportation, because most of states in the region are hilly areas.
- Security Threats/ Perceptions: people always make some wrong perception on the basis of one or two spot incidents.
- Regional spread of resources is not uniform- most of the places are still undiscovered in whole North Eastern Region.
- Very poor brand recall/ Less advertisements.
- Marketing strategy: This is very much important in rural tourism sector also, without marketing mix no will no about the region, marketing can be done in three ways e.g. by government, by local people itself or by the tourist itself, and all the three sector is essentially important for marketing of rural tourism sector.
- Few accommodation facilities at rural places in the whole region, e.g. homestays are running by only few individuals in some selected places over North East India.
- Scarcity of skilled as well as unskilled labour, if we consider homestay as a sustainable source of livelihood than people from that community where homestays are available, should be trained enough in every possible way for the hospitality of the tourist.
- Travel Permit Procedures should be in online mode with full information about the state or the region.
- Visitor Information Services should be available easily.
- Intra State Linkages should be there- Tourists Have No Geographical Boundaries

OPPORTUNITIES:

- North east region offers all what a tourist looks for- culture, heritage, nature, experiential tourism, community- Enormous Potential Tourism Resources.
- North East has a wide unexplored areas, while they present very high potential for tourism.
- Development of the handicraft industry and local community involvement can improve tourist inflow trend.
- Presence of international border.
- Easy facilitation for travel permits and Co-ordinated tourism circuit and tourists across 8 states.

THREATS:

- Instability in the region and neighbouring regions affects tourist inflows in North Eastern States.
- Other competition circuits are equipped with better tourist infrastructure and facilities. Thus there is strong competition to North Eastern Region circuit from other circuits.
- Increasing urbanisation.
- Probable cultural fabric degradation, which may result in dissolving tourism attraction.
- Over use and commercialisation of sensitive eco zones would lead to depletion of resources and dilution of attraction
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VII. HOMESTAY AS A POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

In the sector of rural tourism especially in the North Eastern Region, homestays can be a good option for the people because, herein North-East India people from all the communities are very much fit for hospitality industry. Rural tourism is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism and with this if people increase their knowledge and awareness on the concept of homestay, they can earn a good amount of money for their livelihood by which they can also increase their standard of living. Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for reduction of poverty and Rural Development.

VIII. STRATEGIES TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL TOURIST SPOTS FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE HOMESTAY TOURISM AS LIVELIHOOD IN NORTH EAST INDIA

- To collect data regarding rural activity Mapping through various base line survey programmes like GDPDP.
- Festivals, Art & Culture, Agro-based Industry, Handicraft & Sericulture, Handloom, Unique Agricultural cultivation (e.g. jhum, zabo cultivation, apatani cultivation etc.), Places of historical importance, Unique biodiversity/ Forest/ Orchids/ Wild species other flora and fauna.
- Based on the above Identify village/cluster having potential tourist spot.
- Interaction with local people to seek their opinion about tourism/ develop skill / motivate people for welcoming tourist .
- Develop products/ activities to engage the tourist during the day and evening so as to make them stay in the village. For e.g. organising cultural programmes/ dance/ music/ food festivals/ adventure activities /exhibition cum sell outlet of local products etc.
- Identify households to serve tourists and provide accommodation under “Homestay”.
- To channelise relevant Government schemes for construction of homestays and village/community level infrastructure among the poor households.
- To train the homestay owners about the hospitality and guiding of the tourists.

SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR HOMESTAY:

- ◆ Promote formation of community level institutions/existing community institutions who will be involved in data collection, planning for promotion of rural tourism and homestay, including registration of homestays etc.
- ◆ Such community institutions shall be encouraged to keep the following in view while selecting the households for homestay- Involvement of poor, women, youth and other weaker sections of the society.

IX. CONCLUSION

The development of Rural Tourism is very much useful for a developing country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Rural development implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. North-East India is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the worlds richest bio-geographic areas. Though NE India is a very backward region in the whole country, yet it has the greatest potentiality to develop the region into a potent force through tourism industry. rural tourism has its potentials in North Eastern States as the North Eastern Region is full of rich natural resources and diversity, also rich cultural heritage is the great Potential for Adventure tourism across the North Eastern regions. Rural tourism is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism and with the help of concept of homestay, people from especially North Eastern Region can earn money for their livelihood by which they can also increase their standard of living.

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