

# **Strategies for Development of Tourism in Assam**

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## **Introduction**

Assam has the second largest area among the north eastern states and it is the third largest forest covered state next to Arunachal Pradesh in the country. The state is already in the tourist map of India because of its unique and diverse people and culture, beautiful rivers, valleys, green mountains, religious places of ancient cultures like Kamakhya Temple, Umananda, Bhogeswari, Hajo, Nagaon etc. The State of Assam is one of the most beautiful regions of India. There is hardly any other state which has greater variety and colour in its natural scenery and the cultural treasures of the people that inhabit it. It is a region where nature herself has painted the vibrant landscape, hillocks, woods, brooks and streams, flora and fauna and above all the affectionate people. Crafted with much special care, the state of Assam cast a spell on the travelers exploring the treasures of pleasure. An abode of one horned rhino, blue rivers and red mountains, aromatic tea gardens make tourism in Assam a special experience.

The state has many national park and wildlife sanctuaries, some state park and biosphere reserves. The mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries provide immense scope for recreational facilities. There is ample scope of a variety of eco-tourism activities in the state. Many wildlife sanctuaries and National Parks in Assam make this state a unique habitat for the wild beasts. Among the well known are Kaziranga National Park (famous for sheltering the rare one horned rhino), Manas National Park (famous for the largest tiger reserve and a World Heritage Site), Orang National Park (a mini Kaziranga), Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary, Milroy Sanctuary, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (a biosphere reserve), Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Namer Wildlife Sanctuary, Pani Dihing Wildlife Sanctuary, Barandi Game Reserve.

Basically tourism involves travelling for a fairly long distance with a specific purpose other than for changing ones permanent residence. People of all categories have been touring various places at different times for various reasons since the dawn of civilization. Global trotting for knowledge, pleasure trips, recreational roundups are part and parcel of human journey in life. Conventionally based on purpose for touring by the tourists tourism may be divided into six types viz: recreational tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, ethnic tourism, environmental tourism, and adventure tourism.

Tourism as an industry is the largest in terms of revenue generation as well as an employer in the world. It has become a major source of foreign exchange earnings, a place of employment and a very important contributor to government revenues. It creates employment especially for guides, restaurants, hoteliers, local shopkeepers, merchants etc and brings revenue or income for economic development for the regions belonged there. It plays an important role in the social culture and economic development of the nation and preserve traditional potential heritage. Tourism is not only a major social phenomenon of the modern society which manages socio-ecological balance but also a source of foreign income for the nation. It brings boost to the economy and a sound of human lives with mass knowledge and trainings. There should have people orientation skill and awareness among the people of the nation. As per the source in 2000, this industry contributed over US \$100 billion to global revenue and its number has been increasing exponentially over the years. The estimated direct and indirect employment in this service industry was 5.3 million and 8.5 million, recording a total of 13.8 million people in 2001. This industry also provides an opportunity to display the skills of local people in handloom and handicrafts through fairs and festivals (Gupta, 2007). India has also taken rapid strides in this industry. From a modest 17, 000-tourist arrival with Rs.7.7crores foreign exchange earnings in 1951, the industry has progressed to earn Rs.5073, crores foreign exchange in 2008 with a tourist inflow of over 39 lakhs. In terms of World Tourism Receipts India's rank improved from 34<sup>th</sup> in 1998 to 20<sup>th</sup> in 2007. Average Indian foreign exchange earning per tourist in 2005 was 1462 which was 2<sup>th</sup> to USA that stands at \$1698.

**Table-1:  
Tourist Arrival and Foreign Exchange Earning in India**

Year	Tourists Arrival (Lakhs)	Foreign Exchange Earning (Lakhs)
1951	0.17	770
1991	17.6	4, 31,800
2008	39.2	5, 07, 300
Source:Indiastat.com		

The Central Government also gave a special emphasis to boost this sector and in 2007-2008 has sanctioned nearly Rs.146 crores in 86 projects for the creation of better tourism infrastructure. In 2006-07 budget also, it has allocated about Rs.350 crores for the creation of better tourism sites. For many developing countries tourism has become one of the major contributors to social and economic development, whereas for many others, tourism the prime source of foreign exchanges revenue. During this period, 29 projects were also sanctioned under centrally sponsored schemes for Rs. 1586.03 lakhs. The schemes are implemented through Assam Tourist Development Corporation. And many reputed organizations like srimanta sankardev kalakhestra society and other NGOs were associated.

Tourism being a very important source of revenue and employment in the state of Assam and the state endowed with diverse scenic natural beauty, attracts a large number of domestic and foreign tourists. Moreover, the state as well as the central tourism departments, having foreseen the recreational and tourism potential of the state has envisaged special packages to boost this industry. The annual plan allocation for the year 2005-06 was Rs. 496.00 lakhs. During this period emphasis was given on destinations and tourist infrastructure development and employment generation. Out of the total allocation 92.85 lakhs were spent for reinnovatives and up-gradation of eight tourist lodges and interior decoration of two numbers of information counters at Guwahati railway station and at LGBI airport, Guwahati. Besides, one new tourist lodge was taken up for construction at Borkhola. An amount of Rs. 100 lakh was spent for providing incentive to 27 self help groups of educated unemployed groups. They were engaged in various promotional activities like transport, wayside amenities, food kiosk, restaurants, dhabash, cottages or accommodation etc along with bank loans. Under capacity building youths studying in the institute of hotel management provided with stipend and also incentive to the institution costing the budget Rs. 8.57 lakhs. The

department also took up training programs for jeep safari drivers based in national parks spending 2 lakh benefiting 100 youths. An amount of Rs. 49.96 lakhs were spent for direction and administration.

**Table-2**  
**Growth of Tourist arrivals in Assam (Number)**

Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total Revenue Earned (Rs.in lakh)
1	2	3	4
2002-03	1240562	5986	41.03
2003-04	2030107	6845	60.44
2004-05	2176250	9365	69.01
2005-06	2586428	8309	87.11
2006-07	3479870	13657	81.30

Source: directorate of Tourism, Assam

The tourist inflow during the period which was shown above surpassed all earlier records and touched all time as above. The total number of domestic tourists who visited different tourist places of Assam has increased significantly from 1240562 to 3479870 during 2002-03 to 2006-07 while that of foreign tourist increased from 5986 to 13657. However, its share of revenue from total tourists visited in the state of Assam as a whole declined over the years from 87.11 to 81.30 lakhs.

The tourism department took up innovative steps for the self-employment of the educated unemployed youths by introducing new schemes chief ministers self help tourism scheme. This attracted a large number of youths to take up schemes for their employment. During the year 2005-06, an amount of Rs. 47.80 lakhs were released for development of IT for Assam tourism by Govt. of India.

However, the benefits of tourism may be outweighed by the damages done the local environment and the repatriation of profits by the foreign investors. Therefore, maintenance of tourism resources has become an important issue in the context of development of tourism activities for its sustainable progress. The nature of tourism economics has parallels with ecological and environmental economics and with economics of development. The tourism industry relies heavily on commodities, which are not marketed and therefore have the characteristics of public goods or semi-public goods. This industry also depends on commodities, which are only partially marketed and therefore involve externalities. So its relationship to the environment ( natural, social and man-made ) is both of dependence and of impact. In nearly all

cases, tourism modifies the environment and the modifications can be viewed as favorable or destructive depending on an individual's point view as well as ground realities. Furthermore, depending upon circumstances tourism development may be either a force favouring the conservation of the existing environment or one hastening its destruction and deterioration. Thus tourism and recreational activities may have certain negative impacts on the environment of a place, the socio-cultural life and even the economic aspects of that place. For instance, valuable flora and fauna may be lost, delicate habitats may be permanently altered by the reckless dumping of non-biodegradable wastes by holiday-makers, invaluable natural resources may be over-utilized due to greater inflow of tourists, contamination of air as water bodies by tourism related activities, and the like can greatly alter the quality of the environment of a place. However, one should not construe tourism as an element that is always responsible for bringing about an adverse impact, as there are ample evidences to show the benefits of tourism. For instance, tourism in the Seychelles has been a driving force for environmental conservation and tourism. It also contributes nearly 70 percent of the GDP in Maldives

### **Strategies for development of tourism:**

It should be kept in mind that tourism is not an end in itself. It is only a means to an end which is human welfare. Therefore, there is a great concern about its strategies for development of tourism. Tourism being a serious business, it also needs professional planning and management. Therefore, it needs serious efforts to bring standard destinations with attractive strategies.

- i. The action should start with a policy which puts tourism on high priority so as to manage a change in the mind set of the policy makers. The policies should be futuristic and sustainable considerations with multi-disciplinary nature of tourism. Tourism policy should start with regional lowest level. Every district should draw up a survey of tourism potential of the area. Therefore, those attractions which satisfy primarily local requirements should be included in the direct development plans. The regional attractions should be taken care of by the district and state plan schemes and schemes of national and international importance should be

taken care by the nation and international agencies so as to wide the area of tourism.

- ii. The tourism policy must be translated into concrete action plans and there must be time bound completion on action of tourist policies. The contents of the policy must be materialized so that just policy implementation itself tells the true sense of it.
- iii. The inflow of tourists both domestic and foreign nationals would be attracted with qualitative involvement of innovative characters by the informative tourist policies initiated by the govt., this would encourage development of infrastructure and help in solving to erase the stigma of difficult places to visit. Tourism and peace has symbolic relationship and development of tourism largely depends on nature of peace of the territory around. "Travel is the language of peace" as said by M.K. Gandhi, so peace is necessary for attraction tourists.
- iv. The concept of sustainable tourism is that "Tourism is not an end itself but is only a means to the end. It is not worthwhile if it destroys the very roots on which it grows. Tourism not affect all belong cultures and natural heritage of present generation but is obligated to leave behind for the future generations. Sometimes environmentally destructive and unpleasant construction practices in the style of tourism development affect the quality and beauty of the place. Both the govt. and private individual need to adopt an architectural code for all kinds of constructions.
- v. Sustainable tourism depends on awareness and understanding of both of the tourists. They are to be educated with local cultural affairs and their traditions along with ecological nature of the local community.

**Conclusion:** In order to make strong the economy of the state, the govt. should provide larger scope to the tourism sector. Good administrative policies and law and order should be improved in the line of LPG and should encourage free flow of tourists into the state from other states.