

# Tourism Industry in Meghalaya: Problems and Challenges due to the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** In this paper an attempt is made to highlight the importance of tourism industry in the state of Meghalaya and also the problems and challenges during the Covid-19 Pandemic. It will give some views also on its contribution in terms of revenue collection and receipt to the state. The paper also will throw some lights on the jobs and employment opportunities especially during this pandemic and how the tourism industry has struggled to a considerable extent due to the frequent lockdowns, banned of entries of tourists, maintain of social distancing and Covid-19 protocols enforcing by the governments and health departments. It will give also a glimpse about the stakeholders and the operators of tourism activities especially in the rural areas who are in the midst of closing down the business because of unaffordable and lacking of money to maintain the tourist spots and the maintenance costs which is also increasing rapidly. This paper also will study and analyse the problems affecting the industry, how to manage, survive and generate it income when there is a lack and decline of tourists and footfalls during the period of Covid-19 pandemic.

**Keywords** - Covid-19, tourism, unemployment, matrilineal, sustainable, environment, vaccination.

## Introduction

An attempt is made in this paper to discuss about the problems and challenges of tourism industry in the state of Meghalaya during the period of Covid-19 pandemic. The main focus of the study is on the problems of income and unemployment and also on the challenges that the tourism industry is facing during the period of Covid-19 pandemic.

Meghalaya is one of the most beautiful states among the eight Northeastern states in India. The land, once upon a time, is also known as the Scotland of the East. The state has become a tourist destinations and attractions not only from within the country but from around the world also because it has many fantastic and beautiful places to visit and admire. This land is also literally means as the Abode of Clouds.

Mawlynnong is one of the places which got its own name and fame because it has achieved and become as the cleanest village in Asia [1] and the tourists from around the world come to see and experience its beauty with their own eyes. In Meghalaya, one could find many peculiarities and specialities of gems and to name a few of these wonderful and beautiful gems that the state have owned are such as the Khasi, which is one of the last existing Matrilineal Societies in the world [2], the Seven Sisters Waterfalls [3], the Living Roots Bridges [4] (present in many places of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, tapped and untapped), the Jakrem Hot Spring [5], the Second Largest River Island in Asia (Nongkhnum) [6], the World's Largest Sandstone Cave (Krem Puri) [7], the Meghalayan Age [8] and many more flora and fauna.

## Problems of Tourism Industry due to the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

In the last 17/18 months of the pandemic, tourism industry in the state of Meghalaya has remained under lockdown, where most of the tourist destinations and tourist attractions have been closed. The main reason is to contain the spread of the virus not only in towns and cities but also in the rural areas and places of the state where the tourists might explore because most of the tourist spots are located in the rural areas of the state. The state government have been in line with the Central Government to prevent the spread of the virus, that is why these tourist sites in the state are closed. But this has led to another problem where the tourism industry has been incurring losses to a large extent in the Covid-19 era.

The Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected the tourism industry in the state of Meghalaya. The revenue that the state government is earning from this sector is also declining considerably. The annual tourism revenue has dipped to Rs 3 crore from Rs 20 crore due to Covid-19 as informed by the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad K Sangma in the Assembly. The state government's revenue up to December last year was only Rs 3.48 crore as compared to the previous years where the revenue was 20.89 crore in 2019, Rs 24.77 crore in 2018 and Rs 22.95 in the year 2017 [9].

Thus, the Covid-19 has affected not only the individual variable or activity but everything in the state or economy. It has affected the income levels of the people, the industry and the state. This has resulted to the problem of unemployment in the tourism industry and the state too. Therefore, the problems of income and unemployment severely affecting and hitting hard not only to the casual laborers and workers, who are working and depending their incomes and livelihoods from this sector but to all the people who are engaged in this industry in the state. That is right from the grass root level and up to the higher level or the government. As we could interpret this scenario from our own experience and understanding that once the site is closed, everything is closed.

Thus, Covid-19 has made thousands and ten thousands of people in the state sitting idle and later on become jobless. It is difficult for them to search and find an alternative job during this period of crisis. Even the employers also finding it very hard to continue paying the salary to the workers during this period of Covid-19 pandemic.

The statistics also shows that the number of tourists who visited the state of Meghalaya in 2019 was declining to 1,84,429 domestic and 7506 foreign tourists from 11,97,768 domestic and 18,047 foreign tourists respectively in 2018 [10]. But during the Covid-19 pandemic, it has come down to a standstill and to a very dismal number. The reason is because during this period, cases of Covid-19 have raised in India, the state government of Meghalaya also have to implement the rules, regulations and guidelines and follow the Covid-19 protocols to contain the spread of the virus. Therefore, its necessary to ban the entry of tourists from outside the state. This means that you could not travel and visit to the favourable and beautiful tourist spots in the state [11].

### **The Challenges of the Tourism Industry during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The challenges of tourism industry during the Covid-19 pandemic is different from the challenges during the normal time. In normal time, the author have seen that the common problems and challenges of the tourism industry are mainly due to the lacking of infrastructural facilities such as proper connectivity, road and air, health and sanitation facilities, safety and security, human resources, promotion of marketing, etc [12]. However, the challenges during the pandemic might be the strengths and weaknesses because how far the industry could cope up with the present situation and move forward if it does not have the strength to continue and to face the challenges ahead during this time of crisis.

Partial and total lockdown is a big challenge for the industry. In this 17/18 months of the impact of the Covid-19 in the country and the whole world, on and off of the lockdown have been imposed in the state by the government and this has resulted to the risks and uncertainties to start and restart the business in the industry. It has reduced the mode and the spirit of confidence among the people, who are working and running the tourism industry and also to the tourists who are anxious to go and visit to new places. However, to make everything looks good, it is important to coexist with these problems and challenges as long as the virus is still there and wait till the government and health department could control it and also the World Health Organization could find out and provide a solution to contain the virus.

In short, amid the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, the strength of tourism industry in the state should remain strong and resilience to overcome the crisis. Further, domestic tourists can be a buffer to the industry during this pandemic. The adaptation capacity, safety and hygiene protocols is to be maintained, trips and travels closer and nearer to home, value for money and responsible consumer behaviors. The government also needs to help and support the industry at this period.

The weaknesses, on the other hand, is the disruption in the industry in regards to the transportation and communication facilities, lack of concentration and business confidence in the industry during this crisis. The expectation and perception of travel as a risk factor during the pandemic. Further, lack of tourists inflow, low levels of demand due to Covid-19 protocols and maintaining of social distancing.

However, it is impossible to leave out the opportunities even it is in the midst of the crisis but it is important for the industry to grasp the opportunities and come what may, the tourism industry should be saved and the world is also safe. Thus, tourism industry has to restart and rethink the scopes and opportunities of the business. New innovations, new techniques, new ideas, etc is encouraging during this period of Covid-19 pandemic to make the industry safe and sound. Economic development, sustainable development and environmental sustainability in tourism industry is the need of the hours.

As it has been experiencing from the previous months of Covid-19 crisis, there is also a threat to the industry if this virus continues to spread again and again. It may lead to further economic and environmental issues, rising unemployment opportunities, closure of business ventures, risks and uncertainties among the people will further dampen and damage the business confidence. Low per capita income and low income levels forcing the masses to poverty and hunger, which further endanger their well-beings and livelihoods. The poor people are also prone to other diseases and sufferings due to lacking of access to healthcare facilities. Further,

unavailability and uncertainty of vaccinations and medications for all the people in the state, in the country and in the whole world puts the industry in the dark not only at present but in the future also. It could create a sense of fear and even a sense of frustration among all the stakeholders in the tourism industry because of uncertainty of travel restrictions, Covid-19 protocols, lockdowns, etc imposed by the government from time to time and also of waiting for the new normal to come back again [13].

## Conclusion

What we have learned from this Covid-19 pandemic is to stay safe and strong and to face the problems, challenges and uncertainties ahead to make the tourism industry and the economy to survive. Because to keep playing the hid and seek with the virus is a dangerous game. It could drain out the revenues and resources not only of the people who are engaging and depending their livelihoods on it but of the government and also accelerate the rates of unemployment problems and the level of poverty in the state to a further extent. Incidence of poverty and unemployment problems hamper the economy and the environmental sustainability. The people will be automatically encroaching and forcing themselves to land and forest areas in search of foods and vegetables, woods and fire woods especially in the rural areas and making the forest and forest covers to decline, the environment to degrade and become fragile. The scenic beauty of the nature will be gone when the flora and fauna are destroyed. The fantastic and beautiful places for the tourists to visit, explore, admire and enjoy might be encroached and interfered by the poor, destitute and downtrodden just to support and sustain their livelihoods. Thus, to enable the people to avoid and escape this problem, it is encouraging to the state government to find out an alternative solution to protect, promote and support the tourism industry during this time of Covid-19 crisis, so that once again it will be flourishing and become the backbone of the state and country's economy.

## Acknowledgments

### Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest in this paper.

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