



# POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT IN TOURISM SECTOR OF ASSAM AND ITS ROLE IN INCOME GENERATION

MANABJYOTI HAZARIKA

Assistant Professor

Department of Economics

Harhi College, Dhakuakhana, Assam, India

**Abstract:** Tourism has a wide range of beneficial socioeconomic effects. It is acknowledged as the largest industry in the world. The state Assam located in Northeastern region in India is well-known for a number of reasons like rich biodiversity, tea plantations, old culture, and wildlife archaeology. Its rich ethnic and cultural background makes it a potential tourism destination. Therefore tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in Assam. But unfortunately this potential has not been utilized properly. The present study is an attempt to highlight the potentialities of tourism as a path to the socio-economic development of Assam as well as various challenges faced by the state on the basis of secondary sources of data.

**Keywords:** Assam, Tourism, Economic Development, Employment Generation.

## 1. Introduction:

As a multifaceted activity, tourism has a wide range of beneficial socioeconomic effects. It is acknowledged as the largest industry in the world. Due to its strong inter-sectional links with the manufacturing, construction, and agricultural sectors, as well as its significant multiplier effects, tourism has a wide range of economic impacts. It is viewed as a crucial instrument for propelling an economy's growth by creating jobs, elevating income levels and achieving sustainable human development. As one of the oldest civilizations with a vibrant variety and rich cultural heritage, India has a long-standing tradition of tourism. To advance the country's tourism sector in international markets, the "Incredible India" campaign was launched as a comprehensive initiative to draw both foreign and domestic visitors. It can be stated that this campaign has undoubtedly yielded positive results, as India has improved its ranking among the world's most attractive tourist destinations. Based on the World Economic Forum (WEF) Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024, India occupies the 39th position out of 199 nations.

The tourism industry is also regarded as a significant source of foreign exchange. In recent years, the influx of tourists from abroad into India has exhibited a notable trend. The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) estimates that India is expected to welcome around 20 million international tourists by 2025. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India report in 2024 indicated that in the 1st of 2024 India faces over 4.78 million foreign tourist arrivals and over 9.23 million foreign tourists visited India in the year 2023, representing a 48.6 percent rise from 2022. However, this figure is still 17% lower than the pre-pandemic total of 10.93 million visitors in 2019. In 2023, the domestic tourist count reached 2509.63 million, which is a significant increase from the 1731.09 million domestic tourists recorded in 2022.

The State of Assam, situated in the Northeastern part of India, is renowned for various reasons, primarily its diverse biodiversity, tea plantations, ancient cultural heritage, wildlife, and archaeology. The presence of India's one-horned rhinoceros makes Assam a must-visit destination for tourists from around the globe. The state is characterized

by rich mineral resources, extensive water bodies with various fish species, and petroleum production. Assam is rich in medicinal plants that are utilized for treating ailments. To foster the growth of this sector, a strong emphasis is placed on tourism circuit development, destination development, and wayside amenities, with collaboration from both public and private sectors to explore untapped potential opportunities. The Assam state government is particularly focused on encouraging private investment in the tourism sector by providing financial and logistical assistance. Promotion of tourism is also a vital aspect of the Government of Assam, which has implemented several strategies and initiatives to support this endeavor. The Assam Tourism Policy 2024 highlights how tourism can drive economic growth by enhancing the viability of underdeveloped regions and increasing local community participation in this sector.

### 3. Methodology:

The method applied in this paper is descriptive. The data has been collected from various secondary sources including Govt. website, state tourism statistics, Govt. publication records, reports and plan documents, newspaper, journals etc.

### 4. Objectives:

The study has been taken up with the following objectives.

- 1) To focus on the opportunity of Tourism industry in Assam.
- 2) To find out the challenges faced by tourism sector in Assam.
- 3) To analyze the contribution of tourism in income generation.

### 5. Analysis:

Assam is a land of beautiful nature. It is a popular tourist destination known for its rich cultural heritage, unique wildlife as well as for diverse landscapes. Hence there is lot of potentialities of tourism industry and tourism can be used as an important tool for economic development in this State. The state's entire tourist potential can be categorised as follows:

**Ecotourism:** Ecotourism has emerged as a significant idea in the global tourism industry in recent years. With the dual goals of protecting the environment and enhancing the well-being of the local population, Assam offers a wealth of opportunities for ecotourism, as its picturesque green forests, blue highlands, and captivating rivers serve as the foundation for the growth of eco-friendly travel.

**Tea Tourism:** Since its initial discovery in Assam in 1823, tea has grown to be an integral part of the state's economy. This is one of the biggest industry in the state by making a larger contribution to the state's revenue. Every Assamese tea garden is a veritable gold mine of breathtaking natural beauty. Many of these have golf courses and polo grounds, which draw tourists' attention.

**Cultural Tourism:** With its diverse range of cultures and ethnicities, Assam has been a special place of this region. The State is a homeland of various ethnic tribes and groups, each having its own cultural heritage. Many tribes have distinctive sociocultural characteristics, such as customs, religious beliefs, dialects, traditional attire, festivals, eating habits, music, and dances that set them apart from other people.

**Pilgrim Tourism:** Assam has many ancient temples and shrines, some of which like Kamakhya Temple, Borpeta-Famous for a Vaishnava monastery, Batadrawa- birthplace of The Vaishnava profounder Shankardeva, Majuli-The largest river island in the world and center of Vaishnava culture, seat of many satras which are known as the center of Assamese art dance, drama, music.

**Wildlife Tourism:** The vibrant fauna of Assam's forests is one of its most alluring features. Hillock gibbons, stamp-tailed macaques, golden cats, capped langurs, pigmy hogs, clouded leopards, white-winged wood ducks, and other endangered species can be found in Assam. The state's wildlife is protected and preserved by seventeen animal and bird sanctuaries and seven national parks.

**Adventure Tourism:** Assam's swift rivers and enthralling blue hills provide ample opportunity for adventure tourism to flourish. Adventure sports like trekking, rock climbing, parasailing, water sports, fishing, and river rafting are also promoted by the tourism department.

**Medical Tourism:** The rapidly growing healthcare sector in state capital Guwahati attracts international patients from neighboring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh as well as also from remote countries like African nations.

**River Tourism:** Assam holds a special place in terms of its natural beauty, ecology, biodiversity, green valleys, and virgin forests. All of these factors make Assam a tourist haven. In last few years the various rivers are becoming as the primary destination for nature tourism.

## 6. Challenges of the Tourism sector in Assam:

Although Assam has considerable potential for generating income and employment opportunities, there are various complications in this sector. They can be stated as follows:

**Lack of professional tourist guides:** Assam essentially lacks any trained guides at crucial tourist sites. As a result, when tourists arrive at such locations, there is scarcely anyone available to address their curiosity.

**Lack of proper infrastructure:** To draw tourists and enhance tourism, robust infrastructure, effective communication, dissemination of information, and the availability of equipment for diverse sports activities are essential. Most tourist attractions are not located near national highways, and access roads are in poor condition. This presents a significant discouragement, which negatively impacts tourist inflow.

**Lack of coordination among the agencies:** There is found absence of coordination among various agencies, such as the Department of Tourism and the Department of Archaeology, in addressing tourists' needs at historical and religious sites. There is virtually no collaboration between different public industries and private sectors like tea, oil, and coal, on one hand, and the Department of Tourism or Assam Tourist Development Corporation (ATDC), on the other. This is indeed a major hindrance to the tourism industry.

**Improper human resources:** Tour operators, hoteliers, transporters, and tourist guides are not sufficiently trained to provide thorough information to tourists about the region, which obviously obstructs the advancement of the tourism industry in Assam.

**Issues related to insurgency:** The media frequently emphasizes ethnic conflicts and the underdevelopment of the State, overlooking the significant development efforts underway in the region. Hence foreign and domestic tourists perceive it as risky to visit this region of the country, given the current law and order situation.

**Deficiency of well-developed tourism policy:** A tourism policy was formulated in Assam in November 1987. Unfortunately, this policy is not accessible in any offices associated with tourism. However, these measures have not led to any tangible outcomes. The State still lacks an adequate tourism policy.

**Lack of essential facilities at tourist destinations:** Facilities essential for attracting tourists are still considerably deficient in nearly all tourist locations. These include fundamental services such as clean drinking water, cafeterias, 24 x 7 electricity supply, properly maintained and hygienic waiting areas and restrooms, first aid, and roadside amenities like lounges and parking areas, etc.

Thus, despite the wealth of natural beauty, the number of incoming tourists has been limited due to these complications and some other related facilities at various tourist sites in the state.

## 7. Current Tourism Situation in Assam:

The significance of the tourism industry in the economic sector escalates swiftly with each passing year. Assam is richly endowed by nature, situated at the heart of one of the world's most biologically diverse regions. Data indicates that income generated from tourism rises annually, directly contributing to the economic advancement of Assam. The growth of the tourism industry can enhance economic development directly and also boosts local incomes and effective demand by promoting the growth of other interlinked sectors through backward and forward linkages. This sector can positively impact the economic development of the State. The number of domestic tourist that state have been receiving in the last two years is 9812054 (2022-23) and 7041206 (2023-24) which is much greater than the previous years. In these periods the inflow of foreign tourist increased subsequently from 18946 in 2022-23 to 26129 in 2023-24. (Source: Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of Assam.)

## 8. Contribution of Tourism to Economic Development:

Travel and tourism play a crucial role in India's economy. In 2023, the direct contribution of tourism and hospitality to India's GDP was over 231 Billion Dollar. The tourism industry has been one of the fastest sectors to recover from the pandemic. In 2022 this sector created 14.6 million jobs, bringing the total number of jobs in the sector to 37.2 million. This was one in 13 jobs in India. This industry is expected to create 5.82 crore jobs by 2033. In Assam large number of people engaged in agriculture sector and which is seasonal in nature. As tourism sector has huge potentiality to generate employment opportunities, this industry can sustain the income of people. Though there is not a rapid development in the industry, but revenue gathered from this sector increased by every passing year in Assam. This is a bright sign of great earning source of the state in near future as this sector has a great potentiality of employment in the state.

In India, employment generation through tourism is a determining factor of economic growth. The industry creates multiple job opportunities across distinct skill levels, availing both urban and rural areas. These functions range from hotel staff and tour guide to small businessmen and large entrepreneurs. In the financial year 2023-24 travel and tourism sector in India come up with employment to nearly 42 million people and adding 201.37 billion US dollars to the country's GDP. This sector is expected to grow at a rate of 7.1% per year. By 2028, the industry is expected to contribute 512 billion US dollars to India's GDP, and by 2029, it is expected to create about 53 million jobs. In the financial year 2023-24, the travel and tourism sector in India contributed around 9.1 percent to the total GDP of the country. This amounted to over 11.10 trillion U.S. dollars, and an increase of nearly 12.1 percent compared to the previous year. (Sources: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India)

The main source of tourism-related revenue in Assam is the influx of both domestic and foreign visitors who come to the state's many attractions, which include historical sites, religious pilgrimage sites like the Kamakhya Temple, lush tea gardens, wildlife sanctuaries (particularly Kaziranga National Park), and lively cultural festivals. The share of tourism in a state's GDP varies depending on the number of tourists, their spending patterns, and the size of the economy. However, the contribution of tourism to a state's GDP tends to increase in absolute value. The Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) which is nestled in the heart of Assam has experiencing a significant upsurge in tourism. It has registered around 4 per cent rise in tourist arrival and 2.20 per cent revenue earning increase during 2022-23, as compared to the same period of the previous year. As per the official record, as many as 1,79,573 tourists, including foreigners, visited the park from October 2022 to January 2023, while Rs 4,58,776,39 was earned during this period. In comparison, 1,72,903 tourists visited the park and Rs 4,48,75,100 was earned as revenue between October 2022 and January 2023. Historically in 2023-24 session, a total of 3,27,493 tourists visited this park which includes 13,919 foreign tourists.

## 10. Conclusion:

While the tourism industry is led by the private sector, the government has a crucial role in enabling tourism in terms of planning and policy creation, developing cultural and natural resources, and investing in physical and social infrastructure. This requires effective governance for the tourism sector to grow in a sustainable manner and benefit a wide range of stakeholders across the state. Assam has vast tourism potentials, which are to be explored yet. It is necessary to get adequate investment and attached and correlated efforts from the entire concern department to explore tourism potentials. With the great potentialities of tourism sector in Assam it contributes various economic benefits to the economy of the State. But the development of tourism industry Assam largely depends upon the formulation of a proper tourism development policy and people's co-operation and consciousness. Basically the tourism infrastructure is inadequate in the state. For a smooth development of this sector, first of all the basic challenges should be removed., So by providing good transport and communication and making sufficient provision for accommodation of the tourists at and near the tourist sports with all types of civic facilities, the states can earn massive amount of income from tourist sector. Moreover, an honest and strong will of the government coupled with people's hearty co-operation will definitely boost up tourism industry in Assam in near future.

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