

Problem and Prospect of Tea Tourism in Assam - A Swot Analysis

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Abstract. There are no too opinions about the importance and significance of tourism sector in an economy. Now the Government of Assam has taken a right approach by looking into the tea sectors as a lucrative tourist destination having great potentiality. The history of tea tourism has recent origin in Assam. There are lots of potentialities in the tea gardens of the state to promote tea tourism industry within tea garden boundaries. Tea estates bungalows are often well preserved relic of the colonial era, with large courtyards swimming pools, century- old trees and green lawns, which capture an old world charm. These places are perfect to attract tourists. If vine-yards in European countries can be a major tourist destination, definitely the tea gardens of Assam can be a major tourist destination of North East India. All bungalows were refurbished to cater the need and taste of foreign tourist. In these places, tourist has the thrill and chance to pluck tea leaves, go on nature walks, trekking and rafting and even play golf at the links. The bungalows in these estates could be transformed into resorts and these would definitely be in great demand. If these ventures are grown up properly, then the surplus labourers can be engaged in various capacities such as chauffeur, waiter, security guard, helper, cook, gardeners etc. The overall SWOT analysis (acronym for strengths, weakness, Opportunities and threats) and problem and prospect of tea tourism sector in Assam based on interaction with the visitors, concern departmental officials, tour organizers, accommodation units and other private stake holders in the state. Along with the interaction, field survey and field visits of selected tourist spots and destinations are also considered. The study will make an attempt to examine present scenario of tea tourism by highlighting the existing lacuna and drawbacks. The study will also make and attempt to address the weakness by means of some valid and practical remedial measures.

Keywords: strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats, tea tourism potential.

1. Introduction.

The history of tea tourism has recent origin in Assam. Tea estates bungalows are often well- preserved relic of the colonial era, with large courtyards swimming pools, century- old trees and green lawns, which capture an old world charm. These places are perfect to attract tourists. If vine-yards in European countries can be a major tourist destination definitely the tea gardens of Assam can be a major tourist destination of North East India. All bungalows were refurbished to cater the need and taste of foreign tourist. In these places, Tourist has the thrill and chance to pluck tea leaves, go on nature walks, trekking and rafting and even play golf at the links. So, by following the forecasting statement, there are lots of potentialities in the tea gardens of the state to promote tea tourism industry within tea garden boundaries also.

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2. Objective of the study:

1. To discuss some issues relating to the performance of the Assam tea tourism sector and the foreign and Indian tourists' arrival in the state.
2. To make suggestion for the improvement of tea tourism sector in the state of Assam.

2.1 Methodology and design:

The study is based on both primary and secondary data covering a period of five years ranging from 2005 to 2009. Primary data is governed mostly by the questionnaires distributed amongst the concerned respondents. Secondary information was collected from government publications/ records, state tourism statistics, periodicals, reports and related plan documents. Moreover, personal visit has been made to different tourist spots of the state in order to gain an exposure. A sample of 100 respondents were selected among 1000 tourist both foreign and domestic tourist from different tourist spots. In the selection of the respondents, a stage stratified simple random sampling technique was adopted. The data have been mainly analyzed by using Tabulation, and Graphical Representation occupies a significant space in the process of analysis and interpretation.

2.2 Review of literature:

Taking into account of Assam, tea tourism sector here has immense potential significance which cannot be overlooked in any manner. The studies on this area have been somewhat new and seem to be in an infant shape. (Jacob: 2000): says that the whole of Northeastern region is a home to one of the richest varieties of flora and fauna on the globe. (Kalisch 2001): extends an overview of issues in international trade and tourism and provides NGOs with suggestions that could lead towards more sustainable and equitable tourism planning. (Bezbaruah 2001): says that the inflow of foreign visitors in India has registered a 6% growth in fiscal 2000-01. Foreign tourism fetched \$3 billion to the union exchequer making tourism the second highest net foreign exchange earned in the country. (Ray 2005): speaks out that a comprehensive answer has to be found out to the question why tourism has not developed in north eastern states in spite of its huge natural resources. He observed that there is a vital need for an integrated marketing to resolve the problem of tourism development as an important input for economic acceleration of the region.

2.3 Research gap:

From the foregoing review of literature it can be understood that though many studies have been conducted on different aspects of tourism in India and even in foreign countries, a study specifically for tea tourism in Assam is missing in literature. Moreover, till date, no research has been conducted on any aspects tea tourism sampled for this study. Hence, the study will make an attempt to examine present scenario of tea tourism by highlighting the existing lacuna and drawbacks.

However, the idea of tea tourism has failed to take off as planned for and has failed to attain its objectives as reflected by the following table:

Table 1. NO OF VISITORS DURING THE TEA FESTIVALS HELD AT JORHAT

| Year | Domestic tourist | P.C | Foreign tourist | P.C | Total |
|------|------------------|------|-----------------|-------|-------|
| 2005 | 18 | 18 | 82 | 82 | 100 |
| 2006 | 08 | 7.14 | 104 | 92.86 | 112 |
| 2007 | 22 | 22 | 84 | 84 | 100 |
| 2008 | Nil | Nil | 80 | 80 | 80 |
| 2009 | 05 | 4.34 | 110 | 95.66 | 115 |

Source: Official record of ABITA 2009.

It has been analyzed that very few of both the domestic and foreign tourist visited during the period from 2005 to 2009 due to lack of proper publicity and informations.

2.4 Motivating Factor:

One of the important aspects of the study is to find out how tourist becomes motivated to undertake a travel trip to Assam.

Table 2. Source of motivation

| Motivating Factors | Domestic tourist | | Foreign tourist | |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| | No of tourist | % | No. of tourist | % |
| Tourist information | 30 | 30 | 25 | 25 |
| Travel Agencies | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Friends and relatives | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 |
| own experience | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Any other | 05 | 05 | 10 | 10 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey.

It is revealed that 40 percent of both domestic and foreign tourists are motivated by their friends and relatives whereas 10 percent of them are motivated by travel agencies. Moreover, 30 percent and 25 percent of domestic and foreign tourist are motivated by tourist information bureaus established by the state and central government while only 10 percent of them visited through own experiences. It is observed that the functioning of the tourist information bureaus and travel agencies has left much to be desired. For the development of the tea tourism sector, travel agencies should concentrate on motivating both foreign and domestic tourist.

2.5 Purpose of Visit:

The purpose of visit varies from person to person. Hence a study of the purposes of visit of the tourists is essential to identify their expectations and reorient the nature of tourist amenities and service as per demand.

Table 3 Purpos of Visit

| Purpose | Domestic Tourist | | Foreign Tourist | |
|--------------------|------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| | No. of tourist | % | No. of tourist | % |
| Pleasure excursion | 72 | 72 | 64 | 64 |
| Business | 06 | 6 | 16 | 16 |
| Official Work | 10 | 10 | 02 | 2 |
| Academic interest | 07 | 7 | 12 | 12 |
| Any other | 05 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Field Study.

Table 4. Positive and Negative Aspects of Destinations as Viewed by Domestic Tourists in Assam

| Sl.No | Positive aspects | No. Of tourist | % | Sl.No | Negative aspects | No. Of tourist | % |
|-------|----------------------------------------|----------------|-----|-------|--------------------------------------------|----------------|-----|
| 1 | Natural beauty | 35 | 35 | 1 | Unorganized Govt. tourism service | 16 | 16 |
| 2 | Wildlife | 25 | 25 | 2 | Poor quality of road transport | 7 | 7 |
| 3 | Pilgrimage places,Zoo,Museum and parks | 20 | 20 | 3 | uncertain weather | 5 | 5 |
| 4 | Tea Gardens | 05 | 05 | 4 | poor railway service | 6 | 6 |
| 5 | No response | 15 | 15 | 5 | Sense of insecurity | 4 | 4 |
| | | | | 6 | poor service at stay places | 3 | 3 |
| | | | | 7 | Lack of maintenance of road and foot path. | 7 | 7 |
| | | | | 8 | inadequate public service | 3 | 3 |
| | | | | 9 | No response | 49 | 49 |
| | | 100 | 100 | | | 100 | 100 |

Source: Field Study

It reveals that majority of the domestic 72% and foreign tourists 64% belong to pleasure seeking category. Hence tourism promotional activities in Assam should be oriented towards creating more facilities to generate fun and pleasure excursion. Around 7% of the domestic and 12% of the foreign tourists came for academic purposes i.e. (to study wildlife, environmental status, native culture, visit to tea garden etc).

2.6 Strength and Weakness of Destinations:

In order to make the environment of the destinations attractive and healthy, it is essential to know the views of the tourists. The tourism planners then can take the advantage of positive aspects and can try to eliminate the negative elements as perceived by tourists through their travel experience. To understand these aspects, tourists were asked to state their most liking and disliking experiences they encountered during their visit to various destinations of Assam.

Majority of the domestic tourists have positive experiences on natural beauty (35%), and wildlife (25%) whereas the tea tourism could attract very insignificant number of tourist accounting of 5% only. This is mainly because of lack of publicity about the tea tourism in Assam. Attempts should therefore be made by concerned tourism developing agencies to project this item, so that they can attract the attention of more and more tourists.

The most disappointing experiences of the domestic tourists were related to the services of the tourism sector managed by the state department. As much as 16% of them opined that service of the department was very poor quality.

Table 5. Positive and Negative Aspects of Destinations as Viewed By Foreign Tourists in Assam

| Sl.No | Positive aspects | No. of tourist | % | Sl.No | Negative aspects | No. of tourist | % |
|-------|--------------------------|----------------|-----|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----|
| 1 | wildlife | 48 | 48 | 1 | Polluted environment & lack of maintenance of road & building. | 18 | 18 |
| 2 | Nature beauty | 22 | 22 | 2 | Poor quality of transport service | 10 | 10 |
| 3 | pligrimag,Zoo, and parks | 10 | 10 | 3 | Unsafe way of driving and traffic congestion | 12 | 12 |
| 4 | Tea gardens | 6 | 6 | 4 | poor quality of service of tourist lodge and staff | 10 | 10 |
| 5 | no response | 14 | 14 | 5 | Inadequate of public service | 4 | 4 |
| | | | | 6 | exploitative nature of rickshaw and taxi driver | 5 | 5 |
| | | | | 7 | Uncertain whether rain. | 5 | 5 |
| | | | | 8 | Poor food quality. | 3 | 3 |
| | | | | 9 | poor quality of service of hotels | 10 | 10 |
| | | | | 10 | Sense of insecurity and political unrest | 10 | 10 |
| | | | | 11 | No response | 13 | 13 |
| | | 100 | 100 | | | 100 | 100 |

Source: Field study.

In the foreign tourist segment, wildlife, scenery and natural beauty of the local people are most liking experience for 48% and 22% of tourists respectively. However, attractions like pilgrimage, zoo, and parks and tea gardens 10% and 6% of the state and also contribute to positive experience for many foreign tourists respectively. However, the negative experiences of the foreign tourists are concerned, the growing environmental pollution, especially in the town, is the major source of dissatisfaction, apart from polluted environment of the towns and cities, lack of maintenance of roads and building and inadequate transport service are the most disliking experience as 18% of them stated it to be the vexing experience during their field visit.

It is analyzed that both the positive and negative experience of the tourists in the tour period calls for a reorientation of development perspectives of tea tourism in the state. Strategies should be developed by the concerned agencies to exploit the positive aspects meaningfully for tea tourism promotion. Similarly, except natural disturbances, other negative aspects can be removed to gear up tea tourism promotion activities.

2.7 Strengths:

Tea tourism is one of the important economic activities of modern time. Tea tourism is, at present a budding industry in Assam. It has tremendous scope for expansion. Tea estates bungalows are often well-preserved relic of the colonial era, with large courtyards swimming pools, century- old trees and green lawns, which capture an old world charm. Assam is one of the best destinations of tourism where tourist can experience a great variety of wild life. Assam is one of the best destinations of tourism where tourist can experience a great variety of wild life.

2.8 Weaknesses:

It has many unorganized government tourism service. Lack of maintenance of road and building. Poor quality of transport service. Poor quality of service of tourist lodge and staff. Sense of insecurity that prevails in the state is a cause of concern. Lack of coordination among several agencies like Department of Tourism and Department of Archaeology in handling the demands of the tourists in places of both historic and religious importance. Lack of Infrastructure facilities like good hotels and tourist lodges, affordable and reliable communication network, clean and hygienic food and accommodation, availability of water sports equipment etc.

2.9 Opportunities:

Formulation of a need-based tea tourism policy is an urgent requirement for the promotion of tea tourism in Assam. The natural beauty and wildlife wealth continue to attract a sizeable number of domestic and foreign tourists to Assam. Coordination with the management of the tea gardens can effectively do a lot in promoting tea tourism in the state. It may be noted that tea tourism is a recent concept, its potentiality, remains unexplored. Many of these tea gardens have polo fields and golf courses. There are as many as 30 air strips and helipads maintained by the tea garden management. These facilities can form into an attractive package for tourism. The road communication to most of the tea gardens is fairly well maintained, and the rest houses and bungalows with modern facilities located there are generally kept ready for visitors and guests.

2.10 Threats:

Assam virtually does not have any trained guides placed in important places of tourist attraction. The problem of insurgency and violent political movements, which stands as the stumbling block to the development of Assam. The central assistance to upgrade facilities and infra-structural development should not be tapped and properly utilized. The tea planters have to play a dual role as a planter as well as a host to the tourist without proper training.

2.11 Suggestions:

1. Private companies should be encouraged to promote tea tourism venture in the state.
2. Transport service of the state should be improved.
3. Priority should be given to tourists from both outside and country in government tourist lodges.
4. The state government should open four information complexes each at Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Delhi to motivate both the domestic and foreign tourists to Assam.
5. Tea tourism promotional activities of the state should be parrallely supported by promotional venture of potential tourism products like pluck tea leaves, go on nature walks, trekking and rafting and even play golf etc.

3. Conclusion:

The evaluative study carried out so far on tea tourism sector in Assam portrays a clear picture about the state of affairs in terms of performance and its different stages of growth and development. Tea tourism though relatively new in concept has tremendous potentiality. A proper cheeked out design and plan to entire tourist is the need of the hour. That's why, it's a time to rethink, plan, manage and then act. "Even a five thousand mile journey must start with the first step", quotes an old Chinese proverb. It is yet again right saying that "One will have to go out and sell, instead of waiting for customers to come and buy" in a market

stiff competition. As such, a beginning has to be made soon, and together we could envisage in ushering in a new tea tourism era not only for the untouched eastern paradise of India, but the entire country as a whole.

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