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## **Tourism Sector in Assam: Its Economic Contribution and Challenges** **Purabi Gogoi**

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### **Abstract**

*Assam is endowed with natural and cultural resources which can form the basis for a very lucrative tourism industry creating employment and generating revenues. Though, it has the great potentialities for the development of tourism, but due to very limited government funds made available to the tourism sector and other various types of challenges, its contribution is not so much encouraging. To encourage tourism sector in Assam, proper infrastructure facilities, trained tourist guide and also proper cooperation and help of public, private and NGOs sector is needed.*

**Keywords:** *Assam, Tourism, Economic contribution*

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**Introduction:** Tourism primarily relates to movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the usual motivation. It induces economic activity either directly or indirectly. This could be in terms of economic output or in terms of employment generation, besides other social and infrastructural dimensions. Assam is endowed with natural and cultural resources which can form the basis for a very lucrative tourism industry creating employment and generating income not only in the urban centers but also in the rural areas. Assam can become one of the most destinations of tourism in India because of its magnificent tourism products like exotic wildlife, awesome scenic beauty, colorful fairs and festivals, age old historical monuments, lush green tea gardens and golf courses, massive river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Tourism activities in Assam have developed sporadically and in an unplanned manner. Also due to very limited government funds made available to the tourism sector and hesitation of the private sector to invest due to various issues tourism promotion and marketing activities have always taken a back seat.

**Review of literature:** Rizal Praveen and Asokan R. (2013) made a study on “A comparative study of Tourism Industry in North-Eastern states of India”. Major findings are the inflows of tourists are higher in Assam state and lower in Nagaland and share in Gross state domestic product is also high in Assam. The growth rate of tourist’s influx is much higher in Arunachal Pradesh. Density of Tourist population (DTP) and per capita Tourist arrival is higher in Sikkim and it is lowest in Nagaland.

Sikder Uttam Kumar (2014) studied “Tourism and Economic Growth of North-East State” by collecting the data from secondary sources. Using multiple regression models, the study reveals that the growth of NSDP at constant (2004-05) price at factor cost is not satisfactory at all for the Northeast Indian states.

Subash Dr.T (2015) studied “tourism in India: Potentials, challenges and opportunities” and it reveals that though tourism in India is a sunrise industry, an employment generator, a significant source of foreign exchange, it faces various types of challenges such as lack of infrastructure, lack of adequately trained and skilled manpower etc.

### **Objectives:**

- I. To discuss about Assam as a Tourist destination
- II. To know the Economic contribution of tourism in Assam
- III. To find out the challenges in the development of tourism in Assam.

**Methodology:** The present paper is based on secondary data. To study the economic contribution of tourism in Assam, the data are collected from Ministry of tourism, Govt. of Assam, statistical handbook of Assam and Regional Tourism Satellite Account Assam etc. Moreover, various e-journals and books have been used for required information. To analyze the data different tables have been used.

### **Analysis:**

**Assam as a tourist destination: An overview:** Assam is a state of breath taking scenic beauty. Its rolling hills, dense forests, green valleys, large waterways and rich bio-diversity make Assam one of the splendid tourist destinations in the world. The places attracted by tourist can be explained as follows –

#### **(i) Nature –related:**

- ❖ **Bhairabkunda:** It is a beautiful place at the border of Arunachal Pradesh
- ❖ **Bhalukpong:** A beautiful place of the side of the river Jia Bhoroli, famous for angling and water sports.
- ❖ **Chandubi:** A natural lagoon, beautiful picnic spot.
- ❖ **Dibru chaikhowa:** Famous for wild horse, in Dibrugarh district of Assam
- ❖ **Haflong:** one of the hill stations in Assam with unsurpassed sylvan beauty.
- ❖ **Jatinga:** Near Haflong, North cachar district, beautiful hilly places, where birds behave in a mysterious way, the local people call that the birds commit suicide here or certain specific days.
- ❖ **Kaziranga:** It is an internationally famous national park, the home of great Indian one-horn rhinoceros, tigers, elephants, buffaloes, deer, wild ducks and geese.
- ❖ **Manas:** It is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas, one of the magnificent national parks in the country, the Manas River flows through it, famous for the tiger project, a habitat for various wild animals.
- ❖ **Orang:** A wildlife sanctuary, known as miniature Kaziranga.
- ❖ **Pabitora:** It is a wildlife sanctuary.

- ❖ **Potasoli:** It is situated at 38 km distance from Tezpur town. It is famous for eco-camps set up jointly by the department of forest and Assam anglers association.

**(ii) Wildlife tourism:** Some of the endangered species found in the state are hillock gibbon, the stamp tailed macaque, the capped langur, the golden langur, the pigmy hog, the clouded leopard, the golden cat, the white winged wood-duck, and the like.

There are five national parks and eleven wildlife and bird sanctuaries for protection and preservation of wildlife in the state.

**(iii) Religious:**

- ❖ **Barpeta:** It is famous for a *vaishnava* monastery.
- ❖ **Batadrawa:** Birth place of *shri Sankardeva*.
- ❖ **Hajo:** Sacred place for Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists.
- ❖ **Kamakhya:** Religious place for Hindus within the city of Guwahati on the top of Nilachal Hill attracts thousands of devotees and other tourists every day by its natural grandeur.
- ❖ **Majuli:** The largest river island in the world, seat of many *satras*.
- ❖ **Surya pahar:** It is situated on a hill surrounded by innumerable statues of Durga Devi, Ganesh, Surya, Chandra, Buddha.

**(iv) Ethnic Tourism:** Assam has been a unique place on earth for the cultural and ethnic diversities. The state is a homeland of various ethnic tribes possesses some unique features in its socio-cultural like including customs, religious belief, language, cultural dress, way of life, festivals, food habits, songs and dances which are different from others.

**(v) Tea Tourism:** Tea was first discovered in Assam in 1823 in British rule, since then tea has become an integral part of Assam's economy. Each of these lush green tea gardens in Assam is a treasure house of exotic beauty of nature with colorful people. Many of these tea gardens have polo fields and golf courses.

**(vi) River Tourism:** The state of Assam has an extensive river network. Brahmaputra is intrinsic to the socio-cultural life in Assam. Assam has immense opportunities to develop river tourism and water leisure activities, colorful canal barges, boating, luxury cruisers, motor boats, dolphin shows, under water-world, water sports and lighters and more.

**(vii) Adventure Tourism:** The enchanting blue hills and speedy rivers of Assam provide an enormous scope for the development of water based adventure tourism. Recently, some of the adventure sports activities like rock-climbing, trekking, para-sailing, water-sports, river rafting and angling are promoted by the Department of tourism.

**(viii) Eco-Tourism:** Eco-tourism is also a new concept, developed around the idea of travelling to places of natural beauty, moving around and staying with the places of nature for a couple of days. It has twin objectives of conserving environment and improving the welfare of the local people. Assam has immense scope for eco-tourism. The state is virtually free from industrial pollution. It's green forest, blue hills, enchanting rivers are the basis on which eco-friendly tourism can be developed.

**(ix) Medical Tourism:** The rapidly growing healthcare sector in state capital Guwahati has gradually started to attract international patients not only from neighboring countries such as Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh but also from far-off countries, especially African nations.

**(x) Mining Tourism:** The history of coal mining in the region of Assam dates back to the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the erstwhile Assam Railway and trading company. Assam will develop mine tourism in the eastern coal fields and oil fields of the state.

**Economic significance of tourism in Assam:** Assam is rightly endowed with nature and has the appreciable possibilities for developing into a compelling force if tourism is encouraged as a thriving industry, with cultural and ethnic heritage, the state of Assam has gradually grown into a hub of tourist destination, thus producing abundant income and job possibilities across Assam.

**Table: I, Total employment in Tourism industries in Assam and India**

| Item                              | Assam  | India  |
|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Total employment (In lakh)        | 121.11 | 5355.4 |
| Tourism characteristic industries | 3.47   | 234.2  |
| Tourism connected industries      | 0.99   | 203.7  |
| Tourism specific industries       | 4.46   | 437.9  |
| Shares in total Employment (%)    |        |        |
| Tourism characteristic industries | 2.87   | 4.37   |
| Tourism connected industries      | 0.82   | 3.8    |
| Tourism specific industries       | 3.68   | 8.18   |

Source: Regional Tourism Satellite Account Assam, 2009-10

The overall workforce (number of jobs) in Assam was 121.11 lakh in 2009-10. The number of jobs in tourism industries in the state stood at 3.47 lakh. This refers to the tourism employment of the state. The direct share of tourism employment in total state employment is 287 percent, as compared to the corresponding national share of 4.37% here, it is seen that the tourist employment in Assam is lower as compared to the all India level.

**Table: II, Indian and Foreign tourists to Assam and Revenue Earned from the Tourists**

| Year    | Tourist staying in tourist lodges |         | Tourist in other accommodation like hotel etc. |         | Total revenue earned from tourist lodges<br>In lakh |
|---------|-----------------------------------|---------|--|---------|---|
|         | Indian                            | Foreign | Indian   | Foreign |   |
| 2009-10 | 25665                             | 669     | 3869860  | 14030   | 131.63  |
| 2010-11 | 25831                             | 594     | 4101616  | 15039   | 143.60  |
| 2011-12 | 26439                             | 696     | 4381897  | 15964   | 184.49  |
| 2012-13 | 22057                             | 711     | 4522609  | 16997   | 248.19  |
| 2013-14 | 23890                             | 579     | 4420503  | 18507   | 191.32  |
| 2014-15 | 21092                             | 422     | 4842734  | 19583   | 211.77  |

|         |       |      |         |       |         |
|---------|-------|------|---------|-------|---------|
| 2015-16 | 42988 | 1077 | 5599962 | 25243 | 1057.24 |
|---------|-------|------|---------|-------|---------|

**Source:** Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016

Here, the total revenue earned from tourist lodges increases from 2009-10 to 2012-13 and it reduces in the year 2013-14 and again it starts increasing and it is highest in 2015-16 as compared to the other years.

**Challenges for the development of tourism:** From the above analysis, it is seen that though Assam has a great potentiality for generating income and employment opportunities in Assam, but even then, no perceptible change has been seen in this sector due to some problems. The main challenges are as follows –

**(i) Lack of infrastructure:** To attract tourists, there must be dissemination of information, infrastructural facilities like good hotels and tourist lodges, affordable and reliable communication network, clean and hygienic food and accommodation, availability of water sports equipments and the like. Most of the places of tourist attraction are not by the side of the national highways, and approach roads are in bad condition.

This is a strong discouraging factor, which works against a good inflow of the tourist. It appears that the potentialities for developing tourism to a stable source of revenue are not matched by proper policy and strategy.

**(ii) Lack of coordinated Efforts:** For proper development of tourism industry, there should be proper coordination among all the agencies related to industry. But in Assam, there is no tangible and effective coordination among the agencies associated with the tourism industry.

**(iii) Absence of trained tourist Guides:** Assam virtually does not have any trained guides in important places of tourist attraction. Consequently, as the tourists arrive at such a place there is hardly anyone to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the tourists.

**(iv) Problems related to finance:** The local entrepreneurs in major tourist destinations in the state are not getting proper financial assistance from the government, bank and other financial institutions. The financial institution in the state are interested to provide financial assistance mainly to the industrial undertaking. Financial institutions have their common notion that state tourism sector is not in a viable position to earn profit. So, they are reluctant to invest and encourage in state tourism sector.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** The present study concludes that with the great potentialities of tourism sector in Assam, it can contribute various economic benefits to the economy of Assam. The employment creation through tourism sector in Assam is not so much satisfactory and the revenue earnings from the Indian as well as foreign tourist also not encouraging. For the development of tourism sector in Assam, the challenges should be totally removed. Moreover, some recommendations can be put as follows –

- i. Tourism in Assam can be developed based on the concept of eco-tourism and geo-tourism products of the state needs immediate identification and should have taken utmost interest to restore and develop for attractive tourist destination.
- ii. The problems which have been mentioned above may be solved by the cooperation and help of public, private and NGOs sectors.
- iii. Tourism infrastructure in new as well as old should be improved as per the necessary requirements.

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