

Role of Rural Tourism in Assam: Case study of Assam state and its tourism outcome.

Bhopal Pulami ¹, and Dr. Shikha Sharma²

¹ Student, Chandigarh University, Mohali, India

² Associate professor, Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Chandigarh University, Mohali, India

* Corresponding author: shikhasharma.uthm@cumail.in

Abstract. Tourism in Today's Day have contributed large portion of Global business, and it has been the major catalyst for economic development in the global level as it will remain for the future times to come as well. Ever since with the increasing tourism boom also tackles with major challenges too. The main pressures of the tourism boom are on the environment and the society as well. Since Tourism have become the global business due to which have emerged for that the concern nations need to work on the sustainable mode to make sure that this sector would effectively sustain in the generations to come. Hence Rural tourism or Village are the alternative form of tourism, which can somehow influence both the tourist and community host to actively participate in creating the niche for the tourism products. In the past two decades the community-based tourism have been popular, since most of the reviews claimed their favorite destinations as the rural sites. Thereby, The Northeast India with its abundance natural beauty is an ideal set up for the community-Based tourism Projects. The main features that lure the tourists from all over the world is due to its natural environment and cultural heritages and unique food items of Assam. community-based tourism engagements. This study will ensure the community's active participations in rural tourism activities reaps in huge benefits of rural folks. It also focuses on how community based conservational approach which has made Assam as state with diversities and sustainable practice of tourism product. Nevertheless, it lets us know about the initiatives and involvement of proper guideline and the follow up that these people have ensured. This clearly indicates the norms and regulations on rural based tourism activities and community-based tourism projects. Not only that but also the pride that they hold as a unique identity. This have enhanced the alluring nature of the Village..

Keywords: Sustainability, Community-Based initiatives, cultural heritage, the employment opportunities.

1. Introduction

Assam is the state with diverse natural environment, rich greenery, scenic beauties and gate way to other seven sister states. Which somehow lures the attentions of the people globally. Assam tourism showcases the state's rich biodiversity, including lush landscapes, the mighty Brahmaputra River, and diverse wildlife, particularly known for its one-horn Rhinoceros population in national parks like Kaziranga and Manas, making it a prime destination or we can say the attraction of the outsiders for which this reserve areas are used as tourism product as well as for research and education purpose. Not only that but Assam also boasts the vibrant cultural heritage with unique festivals like Bihu, an ancient historical site, and a blend of ethnic communities, offering a captivating mix of natural beauty and cultural immersion for the visitors around the globe. Assam is also filled with the tea gardens which adds to its natural environment. Assam is known for Assam tea and Assam silk. The state was the first site for oil drilling in Asia. Assam

is home to the one-horned Indian rhinoceros, along with the wild water buffalo, pygmy hog, tiger and various species of Asiatic birds, and provides one of the last wild habitats for the Asian elephant. Furthermore, the trivial language they spoke is also the unique identity of the Assam. It has been the living place of various races, tribes and ethnic groups since time immemorial. The dynamics of synthesis and assimilation of the races make Assam glorified and rich. Having said that Assam is one of the tourism hotspots in India. The famous colorful Assamese Zappi (headgear), Terracotta of Gauripur, Cane Furniture, Bamboo Mug, Table Light, Bamboo Tray and various native items witness the craftsmanship of Assam, these above traditional arts of Assamese are the reason the foreigner to allure them and enhanced the local communities as well, basically this research shall empower us to know about the community based tourism, sustainable practices and the means way or we can say the strategy involved in sustaining. Assam has been a melting pot of various racial stocks, viz. Indo-Burmese, Mongoloid, Austro-Asiatic, Aryan, Dravidian etc. The state is inhabited by a large number of tribal groups; viz. the Boro-Kacharis, the Deori, the Misings, the Dimassas, the Karbis, the Lalungs, the Rabhas etc. Ahkhomiya or Assamese is the lingua- franca of Assam. The state has a reputation for warm hospitality. People are homely, charming and openhearted. The small and serene hilly villages shelter the lovely people, warm and fascinating and as colourful as the land itself. They robe themselves in the choicest cloths, which are blended on their tiny looms. Thus, the information or the references are all from the secondary sources that I have gone various study materials like encyclopaedia, and other online platform. Assam is the state which have greatly impacted to the economy of the India as it produces the huge amount of tea leaf and other spices as well which is due to its fertile land scape and healthy soil texture. It also lures the researchers to do medicinal study because of its rich herbs that can be used as medicine products. The core aspect of this case study is to acknowledge the contribution of people from the Assam in conserving the bioreserves and later on alluring the attention of the outsiders, hence in boosting economy of the regional and rural area as well. Because the core focus is on the rural tourism of Assam and the sustainable practice that they follow to preserve the cultural heritage, traditions, and the art and crafts which signifies the identity of the Assam as a whole.

2. Literature review

As stated by many researchers or the scholars who have the abundant knowledge regarding the Tourism phenomena, that the Tourism activity can bridge the gap between the people's perception and the motive of life. As it creates the space for the human development, where the mindset of the people would change and get new experience and also explore the new things around them. Since Tourism is the phenomena which uplifts the rural region to the widely explored destination, unrecognized to the recognized, unexplored to the best rated destinations.

The review stresses on findings from various studies and report samples to provide authentic understanding of how rural tourism can promote sustainable development in Assam. Additionally, it presents relevant data analysis to quantify its effects and identify key trends.

A well-structured literature review basically includes the following features:

- Introduction: Defines the scope and purpose of the reviews.
- Thematic Organization: Groups the literature into themes or categories.
- Critical Analysis: Evaluates and compares previous research findings.
- Synthesis: Identifies gaps between areas for further research.
- Conclusion: Summarizes the key findings and suggests direction for future study

2.1 Role of Rural Tourism in Assam

2.1.1 Economic Impact

Research by Sharma (2018) one the researcher emphasizes how rural tourism has become a key factor of economic development in Assam. Tourism activities create direct employment in the hospitality, transport, and service sectors, as well as indirect employment through handicrafts and local businesses which ensures the betterment for localities.

In villages like Majuli and Sualkuchi, tourism revenue has improved the living standards and supported infrastructure development. Sharma (2018) reported a 25% increase in household incomes among rural families involved in tourism-related enterprises or the small-scale business firm.

2.1.2 Socio-Cultural Impact

Das (2019) analysed the role of rural tourism in preserving cultural heritage to further promote the customs and identity. Tourists often engage in traditional practices such as pottery, weaving, and traditional Assamese cuisine preparation. Participating in local festivals like Bihu and Rongali Bihu fosters cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, homestay experiences provide tourists with an immersive understanding of Assamese traditions.

Community-based tourism initiatives have empowered local women through self-help groups, promoting gender equality. Furthermore, cultural exchanges enhance pride and awareness in cultural heritage preservation and promotion.

3. Environmental Impact

Baruah (2020) highlighted the potential of rural tourism to support environmental conservation. Sustainable tourism practices, including eco-lodges, nature trails, and wildlife sanctuaries, help generate funds for conservation efforts these are actually the sustainable schemes and programs to improve and promote sustainable way of living.

A case study in Kazi Ranga National Park showed that community-based tourism programs reduced illegal logging by providing alternative livelihoods. Gogoi (2021) further emphasized the positive environmental impact through controlled tourism in sensitive areas.

Data Analysis on Rural Tourism in Assam

3. Visitor Statistics

According to the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (2023), rural tourism destinations welcomed over 1.5 million domestic and international tourists in 2023, marking an 8% annual growth rate. Majuli, known as the world's largest river island, accounted for approximately 40% of total rural tourism visits.

2. Economic Contributions

- Revenue Generation: Rural tourism generated an estimated ₹500 crore in 2023.
- Employment Creation: Around 50,000 direct and indirect jobs were created, with significant contributions from handicrafts, eco-tourism projects, and cultural programs.

3.1 Tourist Preferences

A survey conducted by Das (2019) showed that 60% of tourists preferred staying in homestays for an authentic local experience. Additionally, 70% of visitors engaged in traditional activities such as weaving, pottery making, and folk dancing.

3.2 Environmental Impact

GIS analysis by Gogoi (2021) identified a 15% reduction in deforestation in areas with eco-tourism initiatives. In Kazi Ranga, revenue from eco-tourism supported wildlife conservation programs, benefitting species such as the Indian rhinoceros..

4. Challenges and Opportunities of Rural Tourism

in Assam Challenges

1. Infrastructure Deficiency or limitation

Assam's rural areas often lack proper road connectivity which creates certain drawbacks for reliable electricity, and sanitation facilities since no proper waste control measures are been followed and also Inadequate transportation systems makes accessing remote tourist destinations difficult (Baruah, 2020).

Limited accommodation facilities reduce the capacity to host large numbers of tourists, particularly during peak seasons.

2. Lack of Skilled Workforce

Tourism service quality is compromised by the lack of professionally trained staff in hospitality and customer service which is another drawback (Gogoi, 2021).

Limited access to tourism education and training programs in rural regions restricts local employment opportunities lack of knowledge on tourism management.

3. Environmental Degradation

Unregulated tourism activities can lead to waste generation, deforestation, and water pollution. Popular sites like Majuli are facing erosion and environmental issues (Das, 2019).

Poor waste management practices and lack of awareness among tourists and locals have further created the problem.

4. Limited Digital and Marketing Reach

Many rural tourism initiatives lack digital presence and effective marketing strategies. As a result, they struggle to attract a wider audience (Sharma, 2018).

Lack of collaboration between tourism stakeholders and poor online visibility limits growth potential.

Opportunities

5. Sustainable Tourism Development

Establishing eco-friendly accommodations and sustainable tourism practice ensures in promoting renewable energy usage, and implementing waste management systems can minimize environmental impact (Baruah, 2020).

Community-based conservation programs and schemes can provide sustainable livelihood opportunities while protecting the environment.

6. Government Support and Policy Implementation

Increased government investments in infrastructure and capacity-building programs can drastically improves rural tourism experiences (Gogoi, 2021).

Developing tourism circuits linking with popular rural destinations can distribute tourism benefits even more evenly.

5. Community Empowerment

Promoting local entrepreneurship through financial assistance and training programs can empower and motivates the local communities in upbringing the various possibility (Das, 2019).

Encouraging women's participation in tourism enterprises can lead to economic independence and social upliftment which can also reduces the bias regarding stereotype notion of the communities.

4. Digital Transformation

Implementing digital marketing campaigns and promoting rural destinations through social media platforms can expand visibility which is by using the internet platforms to advertise and promote the culture and heritage. (Sharma, 2018).

Collaborations with travel platforms can facilitate bookings and increase tourist inflow. As it is the driving factor in tourism resource management system, which says that the more links with the travel agents the more possibilities in further engagement.

General overview

Since it is very much sure that everything has its own pros and cons that are intact with it. Rural tourism in initial phase is very much challenging because the local communities won't have much ideas and knowledge about the tourism management and how to engage them for better inflow for all time to come. However, with the plans and schemes or we can say the government support and diligent effort from the communities as well can improve the future scope. The employment opportunity and increase in the per capita income can boost the living standards of the people of rural region. Nevertheless, sustainable tourism practice has become most concern and stressed one.

6. Conclusion

The literature and data analysis indicates that rural tourism has a multifaceted role in Assam's development. It serves as a significant economic factor fosters cultural preservation, and promotes environmental conservation. However, addressing challenges related to infrastructure and policy implementation is essential for sustainable growth.

Future research could focus on the long-term impacts of rural tourism, assess community perceptions, and analyses the effectiveness of government initiatives. Promoting inclusive and responsible tourism practices will be key to ensuring its continued success in Assam.

Furthermore, Assam with the diverse cultural manifestations and conserved identity have given the outsider the choice to visit and explore more. As outsider could learn the unique culture and heritage which is thrilling and new experiences for the tourist, in a way it lures the attention of the outsiders as well.

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