

The Land of World Tourism and Biodiversity:

A Case Study of Kaziranga National Park, Assam

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Abstract

Tourism as a phenomenon can be traced back to the ancient days when the main reasons of travel used to be either leisure or trade. Now, tourism has become one of the foremost revenue earners round the world, with immense potential for employment generation. Assam is a land of unity in diversity in which diverse physical and cultural features are found. The tropical location of the state is enjoying a very good position in tourism and rich bio diversity. The state is well known for its cultural heritage and natural beauty, can certainly attract foreign tourists from different nations of the world. Assam is surrounded on three sides by hills and mountains. The river Brahmaputra and Barak, in the north and south of the state respectively, carve out deep valleys, high hills, flood plains and river islands which shaped the physical environment and cultural setting. The undulating uplands and lowlands and flood plains make the physical environment more attractive for domestic and foreign tourists.

At present, tourism is a fastest growing industry in the world. Assam is a pioneer state in the entire north-eastern part of the Indian Union in respect of tourism and the state introduces a state tourism department in 1958 to promote tourism activities in the state. Tourism in Assam is based on wild-life, natural beauty, unique flora and fauna, holy shrine, lush green tea gardens, turbulent rivers, vibrant and colourful cultural festivals. Among them the wild-life covering internationally famous Kaziranga and Manas National Parks, the pilgrimage trail to the age-old Shakti shrine Kamakhya, the world famous and largest river island Majuli, etc. are worth mentioning. On the basis of secondary and primary information, this paper intends to highlight some tourism activities in the state of Assam.

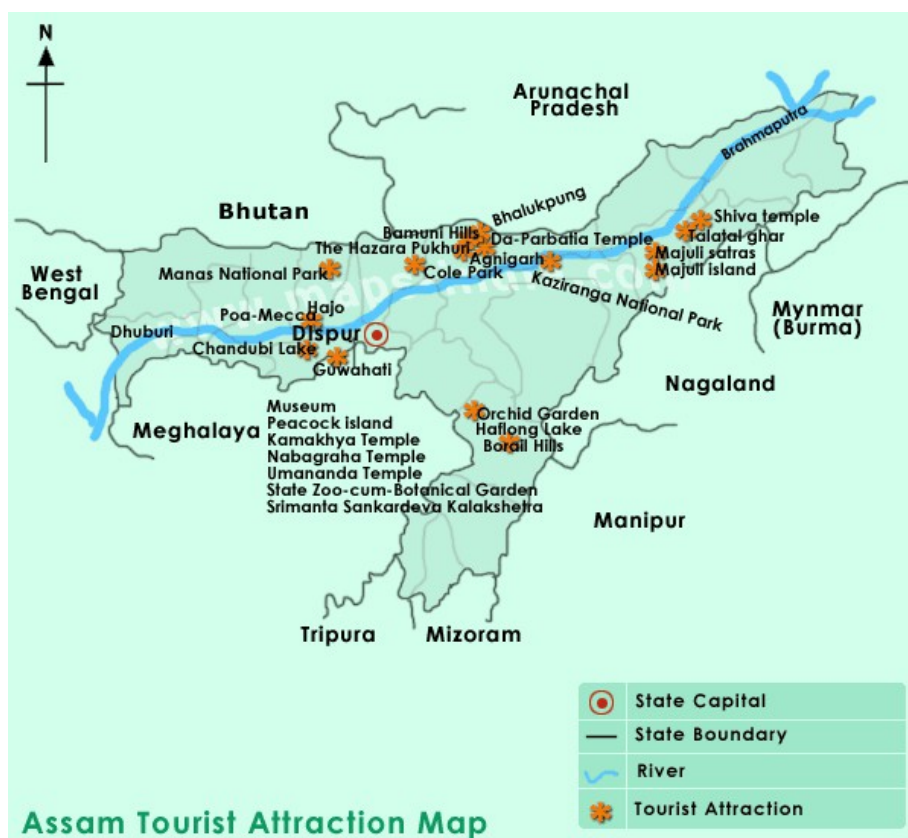
Keywords: Employment generation, cultural heritage, carve out, vibrant, Shakti shrine.

Introduction

In any given area over the surface of the earth, environment plays a significant role in the shaping of its various activities be it physical or cultural. As a matter of fact, physical features, to a great extent, determine the nature, quality and significance of the concerned objects. The word 'Tourism' means 'travel', but it has different meanings in different languages and different regions and can be defined in different ways. In the present day context tourism stands for the totality of activities and phenomena arising from 'travel' and 'stay' of strangers. 'Tourism involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects found in these areas' (Ziffer, 1989). In today's world, tourism is an important socio-economic activity, and now it is considered as an industry generating a number of social and economic benefits. Tourism promotes national integration and international understanding, helps in improving infra-structures, create employments in various sectors and a source of foreign exchange earners.

Physiographic setting of an area exerts considerable influence on the nature and development of its various activities. The impact becomes more pronounced, when the area (the environment) is dominated by highly variable features (both physical and cultural). Assam is India's most beautiful place after Kashmir (Swami Vivekananda). The state is perhaps the only place where rivers run red and hills stand blue between green valleys. Brahmaputra or Red River lords over a network of 120 rivers to nourish the landscape along with its high hills and flood plains create favourable environment for tourists, tourism and rich biodiversity.

Assam



Despite the immense scope of tourism development in Assam, the state is said to be far behind, therefore, an in-depth look into the “Tourism, Environment and Bio-diversity of Assam” and inducts it to the ‘Kaziranga National Park.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are

To explore the environmental conditions which reflected the tourism in the state. To examine the number and extent of tourist and tourism activities.

To identify the rich biodiversity in the state in respect of Kaziranga National Park.

Methodology

As the objectives suggest, the paper has to depend on secondary and primary sources of data. The paper selects Assam as the study area in general and the renowned Kaziranga National Park in particular. Secondary data were gathered from various published sources such as census reports, concern Govt. Offices, books, journals, news paper and publication from Tourism Department Govt. of Assam. The core analysis of the paper depends on primary data. Primary data relating to tourism aspects of in and around Kaziranga were collected through a field survey in the said park. Through verbal discussion 20 individuals were interviewed who are associated with the park. On the basis of data collected through this survey and through other qualitative assessment in the park the findings are summarised below.

Overview of Assam Tourism Manas National Park

Manas National Park is another most stunning geographical location in the world, situated at the foot hills of the Himalayas at the lower Assam in the districts of Chirang and Baksa and a part of the southern Bhutan. The most striking feature of the park is the river Manas. The crystal like

clean water of the river passes through the heart of the National Park, and originated in the Himalayas flowing towards south and meets the river Brahmaputra. The National Park is known after the river Manas or the goddess-Manasa. Spread across 2,840 sq. Km. Manas National Park is a world Heritage site, declared in December, 1985 by UNESCO. The park has an unparalleled variation of habitats of flora and fauna and more favourable location for the tiger population and so this site is well known as the Project Tiger Reserve, an Elephant Reserve and a Biosphere Reserve on the earth.

Tiger and Golden Langur





Kamakhya Temple

Kamakhya Temple is another most popular and famous tourist site in the state of Assam. The temple is located at the heart of the Guwahati city at Nilachal Hills at the height of the 525 feet, on the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra, opened in 1565 A.D. The temple is internationally famous spiritual phenomena.

Kamakhya Temple (Guwahati)



Majuli

Majuli Island the biggest river island in the world is located at the midst of the river Brahmaputra in Jorhat district lying 26°25' to 27°11' N latitude and 93°57' to 94°36' E longitude. The area is bounded by the main channel of the river Brahmaputra in the south and Lohit-Kherkatia channel in the north. The present area of the river island is 484.34 sq. km. The average width is about 10-12 km and the average length is about 80 km. and it looks like a pearl. The world largest river island Majuli was formed about 1000 years ago (Goswami, D.C. 1985). The island is very rich in many cultural and spiritual heritages. The most notable religious and cultural heritages of the Satras of Majuli over the centuries have given a direction in the state's cultural sector in general and in the river island in special. There are now around 22 Satras in Majuli, the prominent among them being Auniati, Dakshinpat, Garmur, Kamalabari, Bengenaati and Shamaguri are the showcase spiritual music through Bhaona (Dance- drama), Paalnaam and Apsara dance. The site is also a place where the past blends with the present. The mask making tradition, centuries old scriptures, artefacts, the indigenous traditions of pot making, boat making, etc. are notable cultural activities of the people of the river island and these are the special interest of the tourists and tourism.

Orang Rajiv Gandhi National Park

Orang is the smallest National Park in Assam but it is no less significant from the ecological points of view. Its landscape, flora and fauna are similar to Kaziranga National Park. Aptly, the 78.80 sq km Orang Rajiv Gandhi National Park is often called Miniature Kaziranga. The Park has a sizeable population of elephants, leopards, barking, hog deer, wild boar, porcupine besides primate species, reptiles and 50 species of fish.

Nameri National Park

A sub-Himalayan expanse of semi-evergreen and moist deciduous forests, Nameri is home to one of the largest and endangered groups of the Asian elephant situated at a place 40 km away from north-central Assam's Tezpur town, the Park is known for more than 600 varieties of trees and plants many with medicinal properties.

Dibru-Saikhowa National Park

This Park is situated at the easternmost part of the state with 425 sq km. The Park has a sizeable number of tigers, leopards, elephants and Asitaic water buffaloes. The Park is also rich in varieties of precious orchids as well as the endangered White Winged Wood Duck are some natural wealth. The Park comprises semi-evergreen, deciduous, littoral and swamps with patches of wet evergreens forests.

Kaziranga National Park

Kaziranga National Park is a remarkable biodiversity hot spot unlike any other in the world. Lying at the south bank of the river Brahmaputra at the middle part of the state in the districts of Golaghat, Nagaon and Karbi Anglong, the world Heritage site covers an area of approximately 858.98 sq. Km. with its swamps and tall thickets of elephant grass making an area as the safe haven for a wide range of rare and endangered animals, birds and flora along with many beautiful orchids. The vast open country makes it very accessible and wildlife viewing fairly pleasurable.

Rhinoceros (Kaziranga National Park)





A herd of elephant (Above), Elephant Safari (Below)



Bio diversity

Kaziranga is the stronghold of one horned Rhinoceros, where the rhinoceros population is over 1000 and is about 80% of the world's population of one horned rhinoceros. This area is also the highest ecological density of Royal Bengal Tiger, world's largest population of Asiatic wild Buffalo, significant population of Asiatic cain this place are Hog Deer, Tiger, Wild Boar, Hoolock Gibbon, Capped Langur, Bear, Chinkara Gazelle, Leopard, Leopard Cat, Sambar, Gaur, etc. are worth mentioning along with a verity of the primate family.

Assam is famous for the bird life. About 958 species and subspecies of birds have so far been recorded or are likely to occur (Choudhury, A.U., 1990, 1999c), of which nearly 500 species of

birds are found in the Kaziranga National Park. Some notable are Pelican, Greater Adjutant Stork, Lesser Adjutant Stork, Hornbill, Fishing Eagle, Swamp Partridges, Red Jungle Fowl, Bengal Florican, Herons, Black Necked Stork, Open Billed Stork, etc. The richness and diversity in bird species is due to the suitable location of the national park and this area is considered as the highest diversity of birds in any of the Indian states. All the resources of the national park are adequately accessible. The destination can enjoy a tourist season of over six months, from September to March. Kaziranga National Park is a park where ideal conditions for easy animal sighting. Elephant safari and Jeep safari are generally used to see the interior places of the park and one can see rhinoceros from a zero distance which is most romance and pleasure.

Connectivity

The world famous national park is well connected by road, rail air services. The park is 217 km away from Guwahati city by road and only 97 km from Lilabari Airport (Jorhat). Regular bus services are run by Assam State Transport Corporation and by Private operators and Tourist Taxis round the clock from Guwahati, Nagaon and Jorhat. The nearest railhead is Furkating Railway Station (Golaghat) 75 km away from Kaziranga National Park.

Accommodation: For the accommodation of Tourists well accommodation are available. There are various Tourist lodges run by Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of Assam along with many private hotels and resorts in and around the National Park. For more information one can contact to the following addresses:

Tourist information Centre, Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of Assam, Station Road, Guwahati-781001, Assam, India, Phone No. +91361-2547102, Fax : +91361-2542748

Deputy Director of Tourism, Govt. of Assam, Kaziranga National Park, Golaghat District, Assam, India, Pin – 785105, Phone : 03776-262423

Tourist Information Office, ATDC Ltd, Aranya Lodge, Kaziranga, Assam, India, Phone : 03776-262429

Security

So far the security is concerned in the Kaziranga National Park, one can feel full security either in lodges or in sightseeing inside the park.

During the time of survey, as many as twenty individuals were interviewed regarding the National Park. Out of the twenty individual persons the fractions are as follows :

Table : I Number of person interviewed

Tourist	Tourist	Hotel Owner	Service Provider	Service Provider	Total
Domestic	Foreign	Hotel Owner	Guide	Driver	Total
5	3	5	3	4	20

Source

Surveyed by the writer from the verbal interviewed of the above noted persons it is found that all the visitors as well as individuals were satisfied on the accommodation, linkaged and security matter of the National Park. Sometimes due to bad weather condition in and around the Park, daily visitors were deprived of their destination.

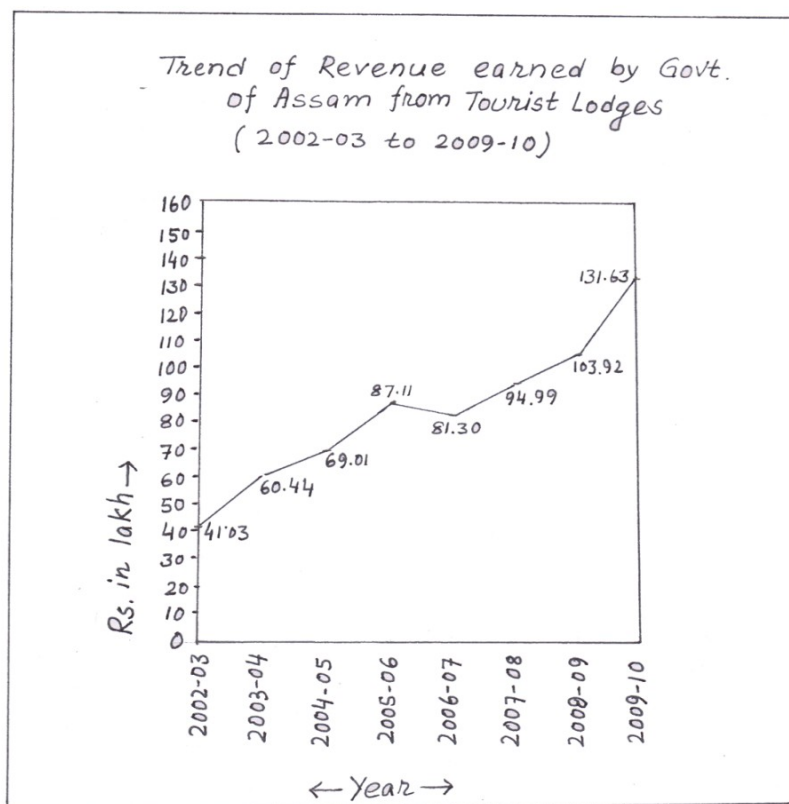
So far the tourist, tourism and environment are concerned, the department of tourism, Govt. of Assam earned huge amount of revenue from the tourist in every year. The volume of tourist traffic and magnitude of revenue earning by the state is given below.

Table: II Number of Domestic and Foreign Tourist to Assam and Revenue earned from the Tourist.

Year	Tourist Staying in Tourist Lodges of the Directorate	Tourist Staying in Tourist Lodges of the Directorate	Tourist Staying in other accommodation like Hotel etc.	Tourist Staying in other accommodation like Hotel etc.	Total Revenue earned from Tourist Lodges (Rs. In Lakh)
Year	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Total Revenue earned from Tourist Lodges (Rs. In Lakh)
2002-03	18427	520	122215	5466	41.03
2003-04	19894	508	2010213	6337	60.44
2004-05	20820	804	2165430	8561	69.01
2005-06	24280	755	2562148	7554	87.11
2006-07	20279	649	3459591	13008	81.30
2007-08	24057	960	3465757	12839	94.99
2008-09	26349	674	3672267	13859	103.92
2009-10	25665	664	3869860	14030	131.63

Source : Economic Survey, Govt. of Assam, 2010-11

Figure : Showing the trend of revenue earned by Govt. of Assam from Tourist.



Conclusion

There is no doubt that tourism is one the fast growing industries in the present day world. These industries are now considered the high potential for employment generation, foreign exchange earner and helped economic development of the area concerned. It is one of the important economic activities of modern man. Tourism is the outcome of the modern technical development, industrialization, standard of living, changing world view and growing human curiosity towards the culture of leisure. Assam's glorious tradition and rich cultural heritage are closely linked with its physical and cultural environment. The wealth and cultural traditions, natural surroundings, colourful festivals, music, dance, customs, languages etc. all these go to make the region a tourist paradise. The state is relatively cool than other parts of the country where clouds float at feet, hills emerge from its bosom and soar high like a chorus and panorama changes with unbelievable frequency. Assam is a place where a visitor feels the pristine freshness of natural. Comparing to the other states of India, Assam is less developed but the state is possesses unique areas of natural diversity and scenic beauty.

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