

A Study of Opportunities and Problems Associated with Tea Tourism in Assam

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Abstract: Assam holds an important place in the global tea industry. The state is also one of the foremost states with enormous tourism potential. It is rich in diverse natural flora and fauna, cultural heritage, monuments, and abundant wildlife population. Although the government has recently taken a number of actions to revitalize the state's tourism industry, one important area that it has overlooked is the potential of agritourism. India's tea tourism industry, which is a part of the agritourism sector, is expanding quickly. As there are a growing number of tourists visiting to enjoy the stunning green tea estates throughout the nation. This study focuses on the state's tea and tourism industry. One of the main drivers of Assam's employment and economy is tea. With over 800 significant tea estates, Assam has the greatest potential of any state in the country to grow as a destination for tea tourism. There is too much for tourists to enjoy in Assam's tea estates. If carefully planned and implemented, these gardens, with their century-old bungalows, verdant lawns, and widely spaced, exquisite tea trees, have the potential to completely transform Assam's tourism industry. In addition, there are golf, rafting, trekking, nature hikes, and tea-picking activities. Therefore, the goal of this study is to highlight the potential for tea tourism in the state and to talk about different strategies that could improve it.

Keywords: agritourism, bungalow, tea, tourism

I. INTRODUCTION

State of Assam apart from being the gateway of North East India, is home to breathtaking natural beauty. This region of India attracts tourists because of its blue hills, rivers, waterfalls, natural forests, natural caverns, and animals. The large, expansive tea gardens of Assam are another reason for its fame. Two British explorers named Robert and Charles Bruce made the initial discovery of tea in Assam in 1828. Since then, tea has grown to be a vital component of the economies of the North-eastern states, including Assam.

Tourism is one of the most prominent and rapidly expanding industries in India. An important tourism

industry in a state like Assam is Tea Tourism. Assam has the predominant potential to grow as a tea-based agritourism destination in the nation, as it is the largest producer of tea in the country. Tea tourism is also a kind of Community-based tourism. It helps in the development of local communities. These communities welcome tourists into their homes and offer authentic local experiences that let them fully immerse themselves in the way of life there, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and the chance to discover new customs. Visitors have the opportunity to learn about the operation of the tea gardens and the commerce.

The term "tea tourism" refers to this type of tea-based agritourism, and the purpose of this study is to examine how it might help the state become a prospective tea tourism destination.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the paper is

- 1) To emphasize the opportunities associated with tea tourism in Assam
- 2) To become familiar with the tea gardens which can be considered as potential tourist spots.
- 3) To find out different problems associated with tea tourism in Assam.
- 4) To find out different steps that can be taken to further development of the Assam tea tourism industry.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is done using the explorative and descriptive methodologies. Since this study discusses the potentiality and the future of tea tourism in the state, the data collected are both primary and secondary.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different research scholars and academicians have already conducted some research work on different issues on tea tourism. Some reviews are given below

According to Jolliffe and Aslam (2009)[9] in Sri Lanka, tea tourists always want facilities such as homely environments, a comfortable place to relax, and tea plantations, while visiting a tea destination. Sarmah Papori.(2020) [3] mentioned that the tea industry is one of the largest industries of Assam. It could encourage small-scale village industries, aid in wealth transfer, and boost employment, all of which could help to lessen rural poverty.

Das Barnali (2020)[6] mentioned the potential for tea tourism in Assam, the study aims in identifying the fundamental infrastructure components -human capital which are necessary for the growth of the state's tourism sector.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

V.1. Opportunities associated with tea tourism in Assam

1) Assamese tea estate bungalows, which are remnants of British colonialism, have a rich history. The 19th-century planters' creation of the bungalow culture gave it a distinct identity. The raised wooden platform, roomy surrounding verandas, low one- or two-storied house, fireplace with visible chimney, and large yards filled with a variety of plants and flowers amid picturesque natural surroundings are characteristics of the Bungalow architectural style. Using local materials and architecture, the majority of the planters were of English, Scottish, and Irish descent and attempted to build their ideal tiny world. There are various old Bungalows in various tea estates in different parts of Assam which are yet to be developed for tourists. If these Bungalows are developed then it can attract a large number of tourists.

2) The majority of Assam tea plantations have airstrips connected to them along with a Golf course. Modern amenities being added to these golf courses will draw golf-loving visitors like Japanese, Americans, and Europeans.

3) Every year in the month of November, several regions of the state hosts the Assam Tea Festival which is sponsored by the state's scheme called Assam Tourism. The festival seems to be a beautiful synthesis of enjoyment. Attendees at conferences from all around the world are there to discuss the current problems faced by the tea industry. A visit to various gardens and tea estates across the state of Assam could also be part of the festivities during the festival. Another popular festival activity is sailing on the chilly river waters. When Assam celebrates its tea festival, a trip to the Guwahati Tea Auction

Centre is highly recommended. Enjoying a round of golf at the third-oldest golf club in the world, Jorhat Gymkhana is another highlight of the Assam tea festival. Many tea heritage sites are visited, and ethnic fairs and food festivals are organized.

4) Organic tea has recently drawn the attention of those who value their health. Many Assamese growers have begun using organic methods for growing and producing tea in recent years. A new chapter in the history of the area's tourism has been added as health-conscious travellers from all over the world have begun to visit those plantation sites to observe the production process up close and engage with the planters.

5) The Tocklai Tea Research Centre, located in the Jorhat area of Tocklai, is a century-old tea research institute with potential for worldwide tourism. If it is designed successfully for tourism, research fellows and students from all over the world may find it interesting.

6) The government of Assam launched the "Promotion and Development of Tea Tourism Infrastructure in Assam" scheme in response to the enormous potential for tea tourism in the state. This initiative encompasses, in general, the entire experience of tourists in the middle of a tea garden or state, with lodging provided in a classic bungalow with contemporary amenities.

Some tea gardens with tourism facilities are
A few of the bungalows are

- 1) Mancotta Heritage Chang Bungalow in Mancotta Tea Estate of Dibrugarh district.
- 2) Chowkidinghee Heritage Chang Bungalow of Dibrugarh district.
- 3) Wathai Heritage Bungalow in Limbuguri Tea Estate of Tinsukia district.
- 4) Chameli Memsab Bungalow in Cinnamora Tea Estate of Jorhat district.
- 5) Bura Sahib bungalow in Kaziranga Golf Resort, in Moubandha tea estate of Jorhat district.
- 6) Banyan Groove in Gatoonga Tea Estate.
- 7) Wild Mahseer in Addabarie Tea Estate.

V.2. Different problems associated with tea tourism in Assam.

1) The local population doesn't seem to be sufficiently informed, educated, or publicized about the economic, social, and cultural advantages of tea tourism.

2) Infrastructure deficits are among the most significant issues. Bad road conditions or

occasionally a road's inaccessibility, prevent tourists from visiting the tea estates.

3) There is insufficient security covering in the tea estates. Occasionally, some unfortunate incidents in the tea estates, does leave a negative impression and also make people afraid of the tea estates.

4) Sufficient professional training facilities for human resource development are necessary to deliver higher-quality hospitality services. However, these facilities are extremely minimal in Assam.

5) Land ownership disputes and conflicts between tea estate owners, local communities, and government authorities can impede the development of tea tourism projects and investments in Assam.

6) Many tea estates in Assam lack facilities and amenities required to cater to tourists, such as guided tours, accommodation, and recreational activities.

V.3. Suggestions to improve the present scenario of tea tourism in Assam.

1) The government needs to start working on developmental policies for tea tourism. That is designed scientifically to remove the obstacles of geographical isolation and bottlenecks of connectivity; the government should invest heavily in infrastructure development.

2) Quick and competitive elimination of anti-social behaviours that causes tourists to feel unsafe and reluctant to visit the gardens.

3) Improvement of the population's health and hygiene in the tea gardens to offer a positive image of the area to tourists

4) Launch targeted marketing campaigns to promote Assam's tea tourism both domestically and internationally. Utilize various channels such as social media, travel websites, and travel agencies to reach potential tourists.

5) Develop diverse tour packages and experiences that cater to different interests and preferences of tourists. This can include guided tours of tea estates, tea-tasting sessions, cultural performances, and outdoor activities like nature walks and bird watching.

6) Provide training programs for local guides, hospitality staff, and artisans to enhance their skills in catering to tourists. This can include training in hospitality management, customer service, and cultural awareness.

7) Foster collaboration between government agencies, private sector stakeholders, NGOs, and

local communities to coordinate efforts in developing and promoting tea tourism sustainably.

8) Other amenities like transportation facilities, 24-hour electricity connectivity, internet connection, mobile or telephone service are the key requirements for attracting tourists.

VI. CONCLUSION

The tea sector is one of the biggest industrial sectors in Assam. If the tea tourism industry grows, it could support small-scale village industries, help redistribute wealth, and create jobs. As one of the biggest producers of tea worldwide, Assam has the greatest potential to develop into a tea tourism destination. The potential of tea tourism has not yet been fully realized as the industry is still in its infancy. Need-based tea tourism policies must be developed in order to boost tea tourism in Assam. Assam can become a prominent state in the global tourism sector and generate significant cash for the government if tea tourism is promoted with appropriate planning and opportunities.

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