

TEA TOURISM OF ASSAM: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES

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Received: 14 March 2020 Revised and Accepted: 8 July 2020

ABSTRACT: Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industries of the world. Tourism contributes to job creation both directly and indirectly, particularly for women and young people. In 2019 the sector accounted for some 330 million jobs worldwide directly and indirectly, equivalent to 10.3 per cent of total global employment. The importance of this sector as a driver of growth through for job creation and the promotion of local economic development, culture and products is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 8, 12 and 14, which set forth tourism-specific targets. Now the tourism sector has developed in various dimensions such as eco tourism, wildlife tourism, nature tourism, tea tourism etc. Assam is famous for tea all over the world. Assam alone produces 16% of the total world's production and 50% of the India's total tea production. The tea garden of Assam with lush greenery so called green carpet with rows and rows of shade trees, tea estate bungalows standings as relics of British colonial heritage, the ethnic people with their distinct rhythmic music, dance carry potentialities to attract both domestic and international tourist interest which can provide a meaningful revenue and employment opportunity to the state. The history of tea tourism has recent origin in Assam and still in its infancy stage. If the tea tourism is highlighted with proper planning and with proper prospects then it can help the government to earn much revenue and also create a new shape of Assam in the world tourism sector.

I. INTRODUCTION:

In the world tourism scenario tea tourism has emerged as a very recent development. It is a contemporary concept talked about since beginning of the 21st century. In 2007 Jolliffee defined Tea tourism as "tourism that is motivated by an interest in the history, tradition and consumption of tea." She than define" tea tourists as a tourists experiencing history culture and tradition, related to the consumption of tea." Tea tourism is a wonderful recreational experience to the tourists. Walk through the tea plantation, the process of tea plucking, the cultural festivals of the tea tribes, stay at the luxurious tea bungalow provides a unique tour experience. Tea tourism is already popular in counties like China , Srilanka, Kenia. It is now catching up in India .Number of tourists to the lush green tea estates of Darjeeling, the Nilgiris and Assam has been increasing. Science 1990, some tea estates in India have started accommodating guests in their Bungalows flagging of tea tourism. Historically, Assam is the second tea production region in the world after Southern China. Assam along with southern China is the only region in the world with native tea plants and Assam is the only region where tea is grown in plains. Development the tea tourism in Assam besides sustaining the environment and preserving the heritage and culture will benefit the state by creating employment opportunities and boosting rural economy.

II. OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the paper is to highlight the potentialities and challenges of tea tourism of Assam and find out some measures for further development of tea tourism sector of Assam.

III. METHODOLOGY:

The study is a descriptive one and based on secondary sources of information.

Tea tourism and economic development:

Among the various agricultural based industries, tea occupies an important place in Assam economy which is grown in both in Brahmaputra and Barak valley plains as well as the hilly area of Assam. About 17% of workers of Assam are engaged in the tea industry of Assam. The scientific name for the tea plant is *Camellia sinensis*. The Assam variety is known as *Assamica*. The tea plant was discovered in 1823 by Robert Bruce during his visit to Rangpur, when he was imprisoned by the Burmese and a Singpho Chief furnished Bruce with some

plants. In 1824 Robert Bruce gave some plants to his brother C.A. Bruce who handed them over to David Scott. Scott in turn gave a few specimens to the Botanical Garden Calcutta. The Discovery of tea Plant in Assam enabled the East India Company to develop a trade. Bruce was appointed as superintendent of the government tea forest, who in 1837 sent 46 boxes of Assam tea to the tea committee. When, in 1824, Dr. N. Wallich of Botanical Garden identified these specimens it was beginning of scientific study of tea in India. Dr Walliah visited Assam in 1834 and submitted his report in 1835. The Assam company was accordingly formed in England in 1839 with a capital of 5 lakhs. The Assam company with its headquarters in Nazira is the oldest commercial tea company of Assam which is still functioning. The second company was formed in 1859 as the Jorhat tea company and even today its central office is on Jorhat. The first tea auction of tea took place in London on May 26, 1841, which was conducted by Ms McKenzie Lyll and Company and 35 chests of tea made by the Singphos and 95 chests from the government plantation Assam were offered. The biggest research centre of tea in the world was started in Calcutta in 1900 by the Indian tea Association. In 1912, the laboratory was shifted to Toklai of Jorhat district and renamed as Toklai Experimental Station. In 1964, the experimental station becomes Tea Research Association.

The first Indian to start tea plantation was an Assamese nobleman named Maniram Dutta Barua, popularly known as Maniram Dewan. Due to the Mairam Dewans pioneering Efforts many others come forward to plant tea. From 1823, the tea industry in Assam came a long way. According to a report in the year 2000, the total area of Assam under tea production was 26739 hectares and total production of tea was 451236 thousand kilogram, thus showing a yield (kg/hectare) of 16888. According to directorate of Tea, Govt. OF Assam, there are about 2800 small tea gardens in the state producing about 70 million kilogram tea annually. On an average, Assam produces over 480 million kilogram of tea per year, making it second largest tea growing region of the world.

H.P.Boarooah a former chairman of the Indian Tea Association was the pioneer in tea tourism in Assam. His tourism venture Heritage North East promotes to old bungalows at Gatoonga and Sengsua Tea estate near Jorhat in upper Assam. Heritage North East mostly targets Europeans, especially those who have old links with Assam people whose parents or grandparents worked in the tea garden in the 19th century.

Development of tea tourism in Assam, besides sustaining the environment and preserving the heritage and culture will benefit the state by earning foreign currency, creating employment opportunities such as waiter, security guards, helper, cook, gardeners, tourist guide, chauffeur etc. and boosting rural economy. It also helps in alleviating socio economic problem such as poverty which creates a problem in the path of economic development. As tourism sector developed in tea garden area it improves the infrastructure facility, educational facility, provides better transportation facility as a result all round development of the tea garden area will be happened. The standard of living of the people live in that area also improved. It also improves the community facilities and services. If the tourism of tea will developed it will have the potential to promote small scale village industries, contribute to the redistribution of wealth, increase employment which in turn will facilitate the mitigation of rural poverty and facilitate natural environment preservation and cultural assets conservation of Assam.

Potentials of tea tourism in Assam:

- ❖ **Bungalow culture:** Tea estates bungalows of Assam carry a rich heritage being the relics of British colonial. The Bungalow culture that the planters created in 19th century has its unique identity. The Bungalows have a signature style with its raised wooden platform, spacious surrounding verandas, a low house having one or two stories, a fire place with a visible chimney, a spacious yards with arrays of flowers plants and trees located in the midst of natural beauties. Most of the planters were from English, Scottish and Irish who tried to create a small world of their dream, using local architecture and material. Some of the Bungalows has already developed as a tea garden resorts to attract tourist such as Mancotta Heritage Chang Bungalow of Dibrugarh District, Chowkidindinghee Heritage Chang Bungalow of Dibrugarh, Wathai Heritage Bungalow of Tinsukia. There are various old Bungalows in various tea estate of the different part of Assam which yet to be developed for tourists. If this Bungalows are developed then it attracts large number of tourist.
- ❖ **Toklai Tea Research Centre:** Being a century old tea research institute, The tea research centre at Toklai, Jorhat district has international tourist potential. if it is well developed for tourist purpose then it may be a centre of interest for students and research fellow from any place.
- ❖ **Tea Auction centre:** The Guwahati Tea auction centre (GTAC) is one of the busiest tea trading facilities in the world which is established in the year 1970.
- ❖ **Golf courses:** Most of the tea gardens of Assam have Golf course along with airstrips attached to them. No other states in the country offers as many as 24 recommended golf courses as Assam does. The upgrading of

these golf courses with state of the art facilities will attracts golf loving tourists like Japanese, American and European.

❖ Organic Tea Estates: Recently organic tea becomes a matter of concern for the health conscious people of the world. In the last few years many planters of Assam have started practicing organic methods of tea cultivation and production. Health conscious tourists, from across the country have started to visit those plantation sites to see the manufacturing procedure personally and interact with the planters, adding a new chapter to the tourism of the region.

❖ Tea festival and tea Tribe culture: The Assam tea festival is held in several parts of the states of Assam in the month of November every year. The festival organized by Assam tourism. The festival comes across as an exquisite blend of pleasure and work. Conferences are held to address the current issues of the tea industry and delegates from different parts of the world come to attend them. The celebrations during the festival may include a tour of the tea estates and gardens that abound the state of Assam. Cruising on the cold river waters is also a prevalent activity of the festival. A visit to the Guahati Tea Auction Centre is also encouraged in the tea festival of Assam. Assam tea festival also brings along the time to enjoy some golfing in the Jorhat gymkhana which is the world's third oldest golf club that is still in use. Ethnic fairs and food fests are held, tours are made to various tea heritage sites.

The tea tribe of Assam, an admixture of communities transported from various places of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Chota Nagpur region of Jarkhand and their tribal cultures may be of research interest and attract tourists.

Problems of Tea tourism in Assam:

❖ One of the most important problems is the deficiencies of infrastructures. Poor road conditions or sometimes non accessibility of road and poor solid waste management system fails to attract the tourist.

❖ To provide better quality of service adequate professional training facilities for human resource development is required. But in Assam these facilities are very negligible. Assam virtually does not have any trained guides in important places of tourists attraction.

❖ There always seems to be a lack of coordination among administrator's owners of the hotel industry, travel and tourism association and other constitutes of government.

❖ The security cover in the tea garden area is not adequate. Sometimes some incidence happens in that tea which create a fear in the minds of the people to visit the tea estate.

❖ There seems to be lack of sufficient awareness, education and publicity amongst local residents regarding economic, social and cultural benefit of tea tourism.

❖ Lack of comprehensive policy framework of the state govt. for long term development of tea tourism, despite having lots of potentiality.

❖ Mob lynching, strikes, insurgency of Assam also affected the tourism sector of Assam.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

❖ Improvement of tourism infrastructure and amenities including transportation should be needed.

❖ Proper initiatives being taken by Tourism department of Assam .There are utmost needs of synergistic inter linkages with other concerned departments of the state government in the development of tea tourism in Assam.

❖ Special emphasis should be given on public and private partnership to tap the unexplored potential opportunities. Private agencies and local communities are encourages to involved in development of tea tourism in Assam.

❖ There should be availability of the information regarding tea tourist places. Media should publish different articles, photos of different tea tourist places of Assam both nationally and internationally. Prepare printed materials such as brochures, posters, maps, postcards and travel agent manuals and distributing these to travel agents, tour operators and the tourist consumers. Latest information technology such as internet and mass media should be used in creating and providing relevant information.

❖ Social problem like insurgency, mob lynching should be curbed and provision should be made to provide complete security cover for the tourists.

Conclusion: Tea industry is one of the largest industries of Assam, if the tourism of tea will developed it will have the potential to promote small scale village industries, contribute to the redistribution of wealth, increase employment which in turn will facilitate the mitigation of rural poverty and facilitate natural environment preservation and cultural assets conservation of Assam. The development of tea tourism is still in its infancy and its potentiality remained unexplored. Formulation of need based tea tourism policy is an urgent need for the promotion of tea tourism in Assam. If the tea tourism is highlighted with proper planning and proper prospects it

can help the government to earn much revenue also create a shape of the state like Assam in the map of the World tourism sector.

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