

Tourism Development in Northeast India: Changing Recreational Demand, Developmental Challenges and Issues associated with Sustainability

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Northeastern part of India comprising the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura possesses great physical and human diversities to project it as one of the most potential areas of the country in respect of tourism promotion. Landscape constituents of the region viz. hills (60%), plateaux (12 %) and plains (28 %) along with river systems contribute substantially in enriching its scenic component. As a zone of convergence of diverse ethnic stocks, the region is undoubtedly a showcase of cultural diversity. Proper campaigning of the region's wide variety of physical and cultural products (the hidden substances for developing tourism) can bring a dramatic change to the present socio-economic situation of the region. With the potentials as it has, the region should go ahead with the development of tourism industry without farther delay. Considering the significance of the tourism sector as a catalyst for regional development, an attempt has been made in this article to visualize the trend of the sector in Northeastern region and focus on the need for adoption of a sustainable tourism development strategy.

Tourism in Northeast India

In the context of a globally growing sector like tourism, Northeast India with both physical and human diversities is one of the most promising regions of the country in respect of tourism promotion. Among the Northeastern states, Assam took the pioneering step to recognize tourism as a sector of economy in as back as 1958. When the British declared Kaziranga a game reserve in 1916 and wildlife sanctuary in 1950, Assam was projected as an attractive destination for tourists, particularly those who are interested in nature and wildlife observation. In Kaziranga, provision for elephant safari was started for tourists in 1938 at the initiative of forest department (Dept. of Forest 1969). Apart from it, Shillong, the administrative headquarter of the Assam province during the British period witnessed an environment of outdoor recreation initiated by the colonial ruler. In response to this at least some people from inside and outside the state started visiting Kaziranga, Shillong and also the Kamakhya temple (Guwahati) in the later part of 1930s which may be considered to be the humble beginning of modern tourism in the region. Since then significant changes have taken place in the region's

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tourism sector because of the efforts made by the central and the respective state government in this direction. However, tourism as an industry is of recent origin in Northeast India and despite a long history of hosting both international and domestic tourists, tourism sector of this region is still in infancy, witnessing merely 0.9% and 0.2% of the domestic and foreign tourist arrivals respectively of the country (table1).

Changing recreational demand and challenges of development

Naturally the question arises about the poor performance of tourism sector in the Northeastern region of India. Why the region failed to take the advantage of its regional, national and international linkages developed so far in the tourism front? The slow pace of progress in tourism in this region is the result of a lack of experience in planning, developing and managing the sector. In fact, the perception of planners, policy-makers and common people towards tourism guides the process of a healthy development (Bhattacharya 2005). From industrial point of view, tourism promotion should follow a marketing-oriented approach, so that it can stand as a productive sector amidst the competitive tourism market environment. While visualizing the unprofessional tourism development scenario in South Asian countries, Vaidya (1996) rightly stated that “for tourism industry to flourish and contribute to our national development we should learn to cater to the demands of incoming tourists. The mere existence of almighty Himalaya, beautiful blue seas with their magnificent beaches, the grand palaces and forts left as heritage by our forefathers, the varied wild life, archaeological heritage of 5000 years civilization is not going to make foreigners with cash in their purse beg to be allowed to enter our country” (Hall and Page 2001). In Northeast India too, for decades, we are advocating for the development of tourism sector very casually without fixing our strategies, goals and priorities and in most cases without any authentic action plan. But, systematic exploitation of touristic potentiality of the region requires a band of trained manpower having better understanding of different facets of the industry. Moreover, there is necessity of critical judgment regarding the local tourism products prior to their marketing, so that tourism ventures can sustain in local socio-economic situation and contribute meaningfully in the areas concerned. Unfortunately tourism planners of the northeastern region of India often forget these basic issues and try to visualize the industry in such a way that it emerges, performs and brings fruit to the region and concerned destinations in an isolated manner, irrespective of its local socio-economic, cultural, institutional and environmental contexts.

State	2001		2002		2003		Share of the States, In% (2001)	
	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
Arunachal Pradesh	6349	323	4347	187	2195	123	0.00	0.00
Assam	1010651	6171	1953915	6409	2156675	6610	0.69	0.09
Manipur	76527	183	89633	221	92923	257	0.03	0.00
Meghalaya	178697	2390	268609	3146	371953	6304	0.12	0.09
Mizoram	28771	152	29417	259	35129	279	0.01	0.00
Nagaland	9948	920	14263	657	5605	743	0.00	0.01
Tripura	254912	1512	260586	2602	257331	3196	0.08	0.05
total	1565855	11660	2620795	13481	2921881	17512	0.98	0.24

Table 1: Tourist arrivals in Northeastern States of India (2001-03)

source : Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of India, 2001

Apart from it there is an urgent need to know the expectation and demand of tourists to develop the industry as per the present international, national and regional demand. Recreational demand of tourists witnessed quite interesting change over the years. At a point of time tourist's main aim was to see the places of regional importance. But at present the traditional holidaying being changed to a new trend that can be termed as "activity holidays", where tourist prefers to take part in different recreational activities while visiting a new region. Now tourists are more physically and intellectually active than previously. More and more tourists wish to participate in recreation, sports, adventure and learn about the history, culture, natural environment and wildlife of the areas they visit. The growing diversity of tourism market is well witnessed through the recreational demand (demand of BTPs-background tourism products or tourist attractions) of tourists visiting northeastern part of India too (fig. 1). Interestingly more tourists want to pursue their special interest and hobbies that leads to the growth of "special interest tourism" based on aspects of nature, history, culture, economic and professional activity, academic interest, etc. For a segment of tourists "nostalgia" becomes the pulling factor. In the newly emerged form like "nostalgic tourism", tourists used to visit their ancestral homes or the places where they or their countries had previous associations (interestingly 6-7% of the foreign tourists from Britain and Australia to the Northeast region are driven by such nostalgia, fig.5). In "religious tourism", people visit places sacred to their religion and preference for this segment stands at 53% and 18% of domestic and foreign tourists respectively. It has also been seen that over the years tourists are becoming more experienced and sophisticated in their travel habits and prefer quality attractions, facilities and services to have "good value for money" in their travel expenditure. They are also environmentally and socially sensitive and seek better designed, less polluted destinations, bypassing badly managed destinations that have environmental and social problems.

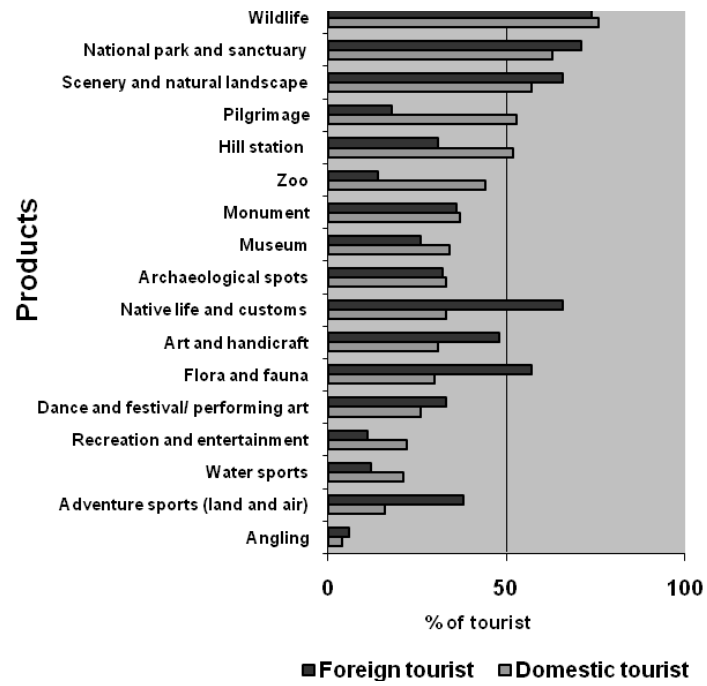


Fig. 1 Demands of BTP in Assam (source: Bhattacharya, 2004)

Considerations for developing sustainable tourism in the Northeast

The rapid change in the nature of tourists, tourism industry and its inter-relationship with natural and cultural environment necessitates new paradigms to manage tourism development. Development of tourism, especially during the last quarter of the twentieth century has also rightly evoked concerns about socio-cultural and environment impacts of tourism at macro, meso and micro level. Could there be a way to develop alliance between different target groups like tourists, tourism developers, tourism service providers and host community? Spirit behind such development should be most humanizing. Wight (1993) argues that sustainable tourism involves a spectrum of experiences, supply characteristics, and market demands. Better understanding of the niche markets and of the consumer has important research and market implications and is critical to the development of suitable services. Appropriate services lead to more value-added products and higher positive economic impact. In the words of Hawkes and Williams “the concept of sustainable tourism embodies a challenge to develop the world’s tourism capacity and quality of its products without adversely affecting the environment that maintains and nurtures them” (Kamra 2002). The very idea speaks that the needs of today’s visitors should not be met at the expense of future generation. In total, sustainable tourism development (STD) advocates for proper exploitation and explanation of touristic resources and the direction of development should be as per the need but not only of the present but also of the future.

For the formulation of a sustainable tourism strategy in the Northeast region, tourism planners may need to concentrate on some key areas like (i) conservation and neo interpretation of natural, archaeological/historical and cultural tourism products, (ii) seasonality aspects of tourism operation, (iii) enhancement of tourist facilities and services (transportation, accommodation, etc), (iv) public health and safety, (v) promotion of tourism infrastructure, (vi) focus on community involvement, (vii) allocating/ zoning spaces for recreational land use, (viii) extending efforts on need based tourism education and training, (ix) tourism financing, (x) prioritization of domestic tourism sector and (xi) evolving strategies for better management of the sector.

Conservation and interpretation of natural tourism products: being a part of global bio-diversity hot spot, natural environment of northeastern region of India offers many attractions and has potential for developing products for the expansion of tourism industry (fig.1). Hence conservation of natural environment is not only important for the development of riverine tourism, nature-based tourism in parks and sanctuaries but also

for other reasons including conservation of biodiversity assets and protection of water bodies. But destruction of natural assets and deforestation for the expansion of agrarian land use is at an alarming state in the entire northeastern region. For example in Assam, due to encroachment, the area under notified forest has gone down to 16% of the total geographical area of the state (in terms of closed forest, 2000), which is well below the norms of 33% recommended in the National Forest Policy. Interestingly, the state has a small area under the protected area scheme accounting for merely about 3.63% (2851.76 sq km) of the total geographical area and possesses 5 national parks and 16 wildlife sanctuaries. However, the important fact is that, out of the 21 such potential nature tourist destinations only 5 are (23.8%) adequately protected. It is the result of lack of awareness regarding the significance and benefit of conservation which led people to exploit such resources as an easy alternative for economic gain and sustenance. On the other hand, conservation agencies are required to work with little fund and practically lack of support from local people in concerned areas. As there is no alternative than to depend on forest resources, threat and pressure will continue to mount in near future. In such situation, remedy lies in ecotourism venture, especially in national parks and sanctuaries for advocating the message of environment awareness, long-term conservation measures and economic benefit for local people through job opportunities. Apart from Assam, rests of the hilly states of the region may provide ample scope for nature as well as land and water based adventure tourism activities, where traditional expertise of trekking, hiking and jungle exploration of native people may be well accommodated as alternative source of earning. Interestingly, there also exists the tradition of preserving forest assets in many parts of the northeastern region. For example, the tribal people of Meghalaya preserve sacred groves around their settlements for millennia. Though such preservation practice is guided by religious motives, it presents an excellent example of traditional conservation ethics of biodiversity (Upadhyaya 2003). Such ethical components of the society can be nurtured to face the challenge of nature-based tourism product conservation in present day context.

Preservation and interpretation of archaeological/ historical and cultural heritage: the northeastern region has a legacy of archaeological and historical monuments, though not yet properly focused at the national level. It has sites of archaeological remains and monuments, dating back from 7th to 18th centuries A.D., which can play an important role in attracting tourists to the region in near future. Among the northeastern states of India, the first and the oldest specimen of sculpture or iconoplastic art of Assam have been found in the stone door-frame of a temple at Da-Parvatia near Tezpur town in the district of Sonitpur. This

iconograph represents the Gupta-School of Art of the fifth and sixth centuries AD. An early rock inscription considered to be the work of the fifth century AD was found near Kamakhya temple (Guwahati) and known as Umachal rock inscription. The entire state is dotted with about 260 ruin and monument sites belonging to the period from seventh century AD to the eighteenth century AD (Chaudhury 1964). Among these archaeological treasures, it has 12 major ruin sites and 25 major monument sites. Apart from Assam some other states like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Tripura poses a few archaeological sites and states like Manipur and Tripura have the legacy of monumental palaces built during early part of 20th century. Interestingly some parts of Meghalaya and Assam retain prehistoric sites of megaliths. Unfortunately, preservation of such rich archaeological heritage has not yet been a priority of the concerned states. Some of the monuments are preserved at the cost of their historic flavour and most of them are at a neglected state, witnessing harsh wounds of time.

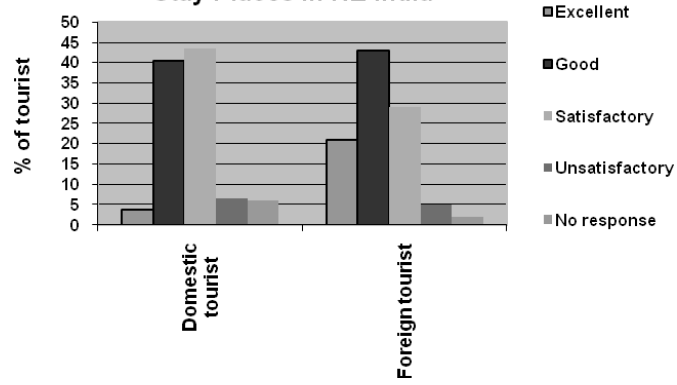
Cultural products for tourism in the region include the visual and performing arts, crafts, traditional ceremonies and costumes, fairs and festivals, oral literature, life and lifestyle, dietary habit, etc. In terms of all these components the northeastern region is rich enough with greater spatial diversity. However, gradual intrusion of market economy, even to the interior parts of the region distorts such uniqueness. Adaptation of a "supply oriented approach" in cultural tourism expansion strategy may go a long way in reevaluating and preserving its unique cultural components with necessary value addition as cultural tourism starts with commodification of culture.

Seasonality of tourism venture: seasonality has an important role to play in the pattern of use of the available tourist product base of an area. It is more important in the case of northeast region of India, as almost all the tourist products of the region are meant for out-door tourism activity. Cultural fronts too, ceremonies and festivals are closely associated with the climatic calendar of the essentially agrarian society of the region. A considerably long tourist season is generally treated as an asset, which provides the scope for expanding tourism activity for a long period, while short tourist season with a considerably long off-season has limitation in this regard. Interestingly, around 69% of foreign and 77% of domestic tourist generally visits the region within six-month span of autumn and winter season (Bhattacharya 2004). So, amidst a basically agrarian economic situation, tourism industry should be seen and designed as complementary seasonal economic activity to agriculture. Otherwise in many parts of the region such activities will not prove to be economically viable at this point of time. Study in this regard presents a model for tourism promotion in hill districts of Assam, which may go a long way in

making tourism a sustainable activity in the N.E. region (Bhagabati and Bhattacharya 2005). This model attempts to focus on alternate seasonal priorities for the yearlong alternative activities with active participation of local community through “small-scale” tourism venture. As the main tourist season for the region extends for six months, from September to February, this period may be organized as the intensive tourism phase, emphasizing on: (i) marketing of local tourism products through small scale tourism ventures managed by local community, (ii) prioritize non-fixed roof accommodation unlike traditional focus on fixed-roof accommodation like hotel, guest house, tourist lodge, etc and (iii) adopt local knowledge base, introduction and reevaluation of locally available food/dietary habit, etc. The region also experiences a brief phase of tourism activity for two months, viz. August and March that may be treated as preparatory / retreating tourism phase. August can prove to be the best time for intensive campaigning of local tourism products and services in front of regional and global audience while the month of March, the retreating phase, may be devoted to evaluate the achievements of the tourist season. The pre-monsoon and monsoon season in the region is characterized by comparatively high temperature and heavy downpour that results in a very feeble flow of tourists. This is the season of wet paddy and Jhum cultivation, may be termed as phase of agricultural activity. Apart from the traditional practice of paddy cultivation this phase can also be fruitfully designed for indoor activities like craft promotion, both decorative and utilitarian to meet the need of local and tourism market for forthcoming coming tourism phase.

Enhancement of tourist facilities and services: facilities and services are one of the important components of the whole gamut of tangible and intangible tourism products. Facilities and services encompass all the economic activities that are related to the tourism industry and produced primarily for tourists, generally designed with an aim of direct economic return (Jafari 1982). Study regarding consumers' perception on some of such service products, i.e. accommodation, quality of food and beverage, transport facilities and behaviour of the staff of tourism organizations reveals a quite interesting picture (Fig. 2 and 3). It shows the need of immediate renovation in tourist transport component, apart from strategy building for optimizing performances of other components too. Till 2002, the region possessed merely 21 classified hotel units against 1541 units in its Indian counterparts. Similarly in the sphere of centrally recognized tour operators and agencies too, the picture is quite disappointing. Interestingly, quality of facilities and services for tourists are polarized in couple of pockets of the region, restricting horizontal expansion of tourism industry (Bhattacharya 2005).

Perception of Consumers on Room service at Stay Places in NE India



Perception of Consumers on Food and Beverage Service in NE Region

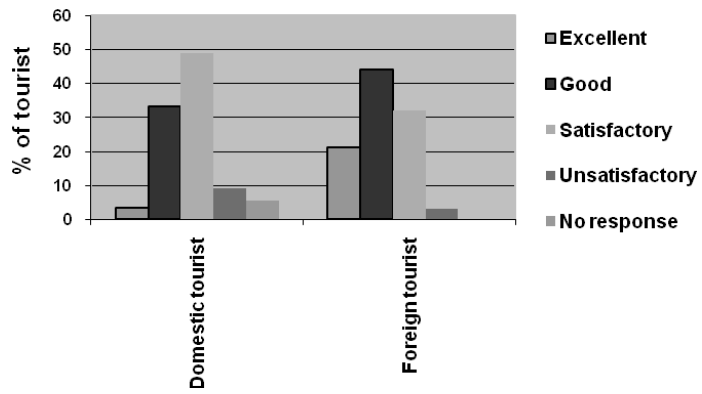
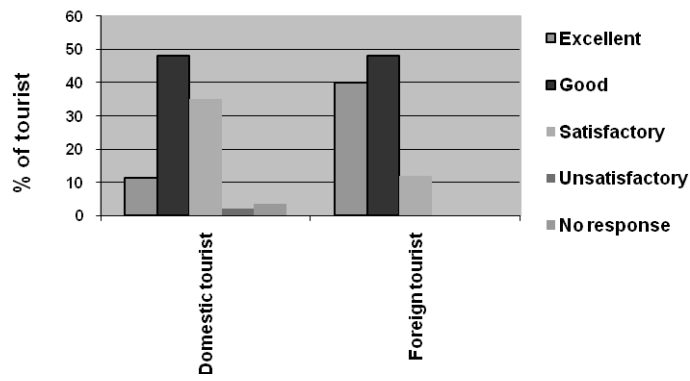


Fig. 2 (Source: Bhattacharya 2004)

Perception of Consumers on Staff Behaviour in NE Region



Perception of Consumers on Transport Service in NE Region

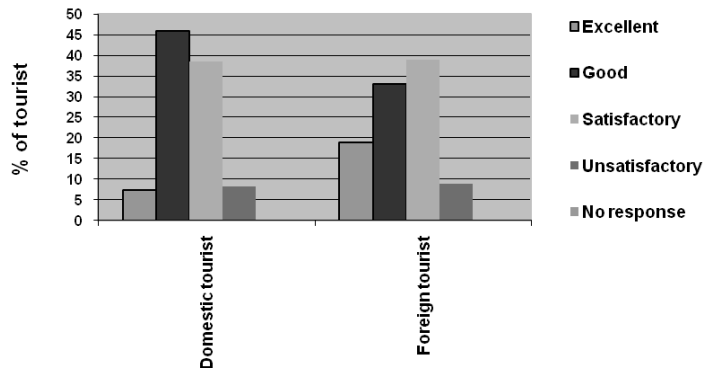


Fig. 3 (Source: Bhattacharya 2004)

Public health and safety: generally the Northeastern part of India is environmentally hygienic but its urban islands are gradually suffering from increasing stress and strain in this regard. Such problems are well

experienced by town and city dwellers of the region. It is also badly experienced by tourists to the region as the urban centers are the major pockets of facility providers to tourism sector (fig.4). So, there is an urgent need to give priority to these areas by maintaining at least a standard for health and sanitation and public facilities, not only for tourists but also for residents. Crime against tourists is not yet a problem in Northeast India, though the region is a sufferer of negative media propaganda both at national and international level. Even a sizable number of tourists appreciated the friendliness of locals while visiting this part of the region (fig. 5).

Negative RTPs of Foreign Tourist in NE Region

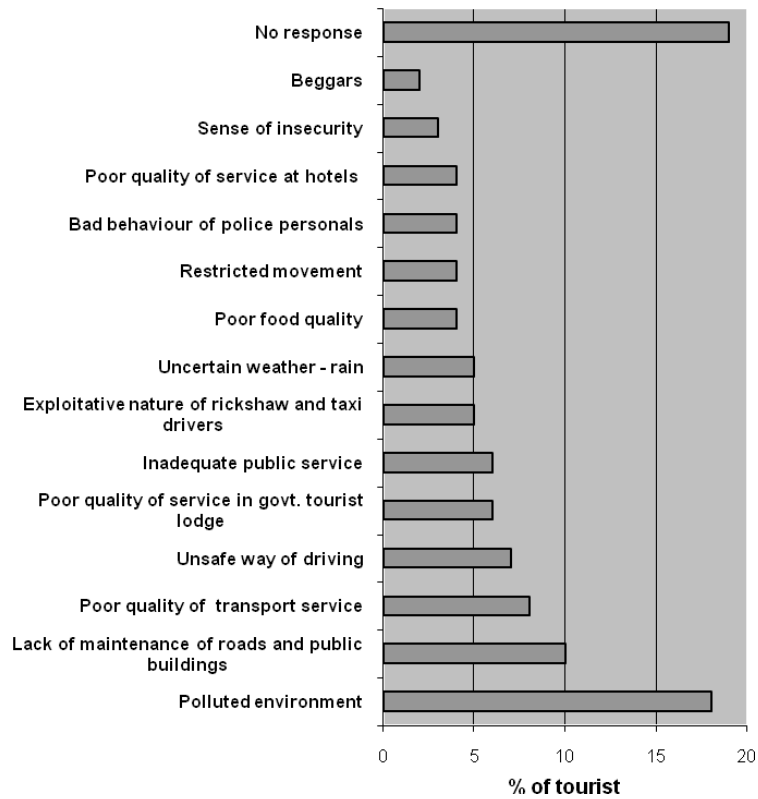


Fig. 4 (RTP: retrievable tourism product/ experience sold to tourists)

Positive RTPs of Foreign Tourist in NE Region

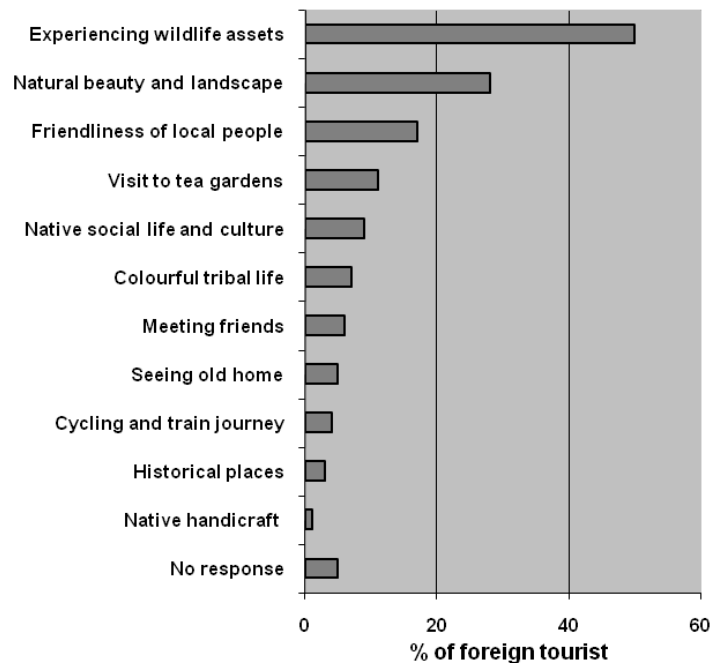


Fig. 5 (Source: Bhattacharya 2005)

Promotion of tourism infrastructure: over the years attempt has been made by concerned state and central tourism organizations in the Northeastern region for improving tourism infrastructure in the areas of transport, communication, power, water supply, etc. but quantum is quite limited. Such infrastructural improvement generally polarized in pockets of the region which were explored and campaigned under conventional “circuit specific strategy” of tourism planning adopted by govt. of India and subsequently by the concerned states of the region. Strategy of such nature, minimizes the possible “spin-off effect” of tourism development in lesser known potential pockets, which are not projected by such “tourist-circuits specific” promotion. For example, till mid 1990s, tourism development thrust of the region was confined to Guwahati-Kaziranga-Shillong circuits, which minimize development possibilities of Mayang-

Pabitar area, located only about 60 km from Guwahati. Mayang continues to be rich in terms of native life and culture, while Pabitara wildlife sanctuary possesses more rhino density than that of Kaziranga national park. Interestingly more than 66% of potential tourist destinations of Assam lie in the countryside and accessibility continues to be a major problem for some of them (Bhattacharya 2004). On the other hand, in urban pockets of the northeastern region, traffic congestion, waste disposal, air and noise pollution etc are some of the growing problem yet to be properly addressed.

Community involvement in tourism: community involvement is one of the key areas for attaining sustainability in tourism operation. In this regard WTO's STD policy says the bottom-up approach to development must be combined with top-down approach of central government. Community involvement is particularly important in towns, villages and rural areas in order to bring benefits of tourism to local residents and gain their understanding and support for this sector (WTO 1999). But traditionally, in India, tourism development policy adopted a top-down approach. As tourism is a state concern, different state tourism administrations of the northeastern region too, follow the same approach till today, converting tourism to an "enclave type" of development, where in many tourist destinations locals in general by and large are mere spectator of a strange phenomenon called "tourism". Even in a popular destination like Kaziranga, hardly around 3% of the park fringe dwellers are able to associate themselves with tourism activity in one way or the other. Hence, structural flexibility of tourism administration is an urgent need to make tourism "people-friendly" and "participatory" in nature. In the areas of accommodation development, organization of village tourism ventures, development of craft promotion and arrangement of "small-scale tourism" facilities at the initiative of local community is a must and inevitable in the context of Northeastern region. Such development will certainly provide interesting and enlightening experiences for both the guest and host community.

Availability of land for tourism: land for tourism development must be made available when needed. Concerned state governments of Northeast region should earmark areas available for tourism promotion. Land inventories for different sites should be made available for public and private tourism investors. Department of tourism, Govt. of Assam has already developed a prospective invest plan in 1995 to inform investors about tourism potentiality and land availability in some selected sites of the state. However, due to dearth of professionalism and a touristic environment, the state is not yet able to motivate private investors in tourism sector. The land areas of the region are under possession of separate government departments and in the case of states like Arunachal

and Meghalaya system of community ownership prevails. Hence, interdepartmental as well as government-community cooperation is needed in this regard. Apart from it zoning technique may be adopted in land use planning strategy to reserved suitable land for tourism promotion along river banks, peripheries of protected areas and urban pockets, for the present and future recreational use.

Tourism education and training: in northeast India tourism education and training is an area of prime importance as there is dearth of trained manpower in both managerial and technical levels. At present the region requires education and training of people to work in tourism sector at all levels, including operational, managerial and personal. At community level too, there is the need for training, so that local people gather appropriate knowledge base to work for the tourism industry. In true sense, general public education and awareness programmes, fruitful utilization of local media, active co-operation of government decision makers and technical personal are yet some of the grey areas in the context of northeast India. At present, under the patronage of central government two hotel management institutions are offering a three-year diploma programme in the region. At university level, Tezpur University is offering a one-year post-graduate diploma course in tourism management and a three-year vocational tourism management course is being introduced in the undergraduate level of Gauhati University. In Dibrugarh University tourism is being taught by introducing a paper amalgamated with the subject history. Similarly two other university affiliated private institutions of Guwahati, viz. NERIM and AIM are also engaged in expanding tourism management education. However, how local issues are addressed and incorporated in such course curriculum is an area of great concern. Along with it, there is a need for judicious blending of both knowledge base and narrow-skills in such curriculum design. Similarly, at government level too, policy formulation is an urgent need to create a job market for those who trained in the area of tourism to streamline the affairs of the sector.

Tourism financing: up to 1980s financial constraint had been an important problem for different state departments of tourism in northeastern region. Financial allocation to tourism sector was quite minimal in the northeastern states. But after mid 1990s central finance to different state owned projects became a major source of assistance. Even at present, northeastern states of India are getting 10% of total national financial allocation earmarked for tourism sector (Rs 500 million in annual plan outlay of Ministry of Tourism, GOI during 2004-05 for Northeast region including Sikkim). Now, the problem is not so much of finance but of the dearth of technical know-how for productive utilization of resource and management of the industry. Gradually, other financial and banking

sectors too, have started opening their door for tourism entrepreneurs. Even very recently, Assam government also initiated schemes to finance entrepreneurs in small projects associated with tourism. But the strategy seems to be not so organized to meet the requirement of the sector in true sense of the term. Apart from it the presence of a well organized private sector is not yet being felt amidst tourism landscape of the entire northeast region of India.

Prioritizing domestic tourist segment: it is estimated that the domestic tourists constitute 80-85 % of the of the world's total tourists. For instance, 94% of travel by Americans is within their own country. Though Germany has one of the largest shares in international tourists, it also subscribes to domestic tourism significantly (Chib 1989). In recent time, the ratio between Indian domestic and outbound tourists stands at 58:1 (2001). Thus, domestic tourism has been playing an important role in tourism development of the country. Domestic tourism can bring economic benefits to the local area without the concern for handling foreign tourist from different cultural and language background. Apart from economic benefit, domestic tourism helps to promote regional understanding within a country. After independence, with the rising standard of living and emergence of a leisure-seeking middle class, domestic tourism has become increasingly important. However, not much attention has been given so far, to the rapidly expanding domestic market of tourism in India. Annual plan outlay of 2002-03 shows that under central sector scheme for 10th plan (90 crore), merely 6.6% (6 crore) is allocated for domestic tourism promotion and publicity including hospitality, whereas, 37.7% (34 crores) has been allocated for overseas promotion, publicity including market development assistance (Market Research Division, Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of India 2001). In the northeastern region too, promotion of domestic tourism segment is still a neglected sphere. Study in this regard shows that role of both the government and private sector as domestic tourist motivators is found to be minimal (table 2). However, lack of participation of tourists from the region itself and a lesser degree of interstate tourist interaction among the north -eastern states make the region dependent on the comparatively affluent Indian counterpart for domestic market too. The poor economic development scenario of the entire northeastern region, dearth of the culture of leisure related travel, as well as inadequate publicity of tourism products are some of the factors responsible for such a situation.

**Table 2: Tourists to the Northeast region and their sources of information
(Source: Bhattacharya 2001)**

Source of information	Domestic tourist		Foreign tourist	
	No. of tourist	%	No. of tourist	%
Tourist information bureau	118	36.31	26	26
Travel Agencies	3	0.92	27	27
Friend and relatives	152	46.77	41	41
Own experience, any other	85	26.15	37	37
	14	4.31	21	21

Managing tourism sector: management of tourism is more important in regions like northeast India, where in true sense, the sector is not well understood and private sector is yet to develop. For example, the lack of proper orientation and management has been responsible for widening the gap between income and expenditure of the tourism administration at local government level, the major player of tourism sector in the region. Though some of such tourism development ventures should be seen in the light of “social marketing”, one cannot ignore the economic condition of the region. The available data in this regard indicates that the annual expenditure of the state tourism organization of Assam is about eight times more than revenue it earns, which is quite alarming for an economically backward state (Bhattacharya 2004). So, a reorganization and adjustment of the existing state tourism organizational structure of northeastern region of India is the immediate need to handle the sector in an organized way. Respective state tourism organizations may be reorganized by incorporating four structural components, viz. (a) planning and development, with a task of formulating need based policy and planning; coordination of development, implementation and control on facility and service standard, (b) statistics and research for generating touristic database, conducting periodic studies on product status and consumer behaviour and to operate the tourism information system, (c) marketing service-entrusted with market planning and development; operation of regional and local tourist office and information centers; overseas marketing through government of India’s overseas office and developing tie-ups with other possible channels and (d) education and training, for manpower planning and development; raising the standard

of training; operation of training programme; encouraging institutions, groups activities engaged in generating manpower for tourism sector.

Conclusion

Despite having a comparatively long history of tourism most of the tourism authorities in Northeast India have not yet gained much experience in planning, developing and managing tourism sector. Consequently, in most cases their efforts in tourism promotion are misdirect and waste valuable resources of the region. Amidst political quarters, local tourism promoters and managers in some parts of the region, image of tourism development is attraction centric rather than based on a sound and organized developmental perspective. As a result, the region is not yet in a position to offer better experience to tourists. Successful development and operation of tourism sector in this region requires better management at the local government level to guide, facilitate and coordinate the process, so that tourism ventures can sustain in local socio-economic situation and contribute meaningfully in the areas concerned. Creation of a band of promoters and policy-makers is also the need of the hour. It can be done by extending need-based tourism education and short and long-term tourism manpower development strategies which will help in emerging an organized tourism sector in the region capable of giving the fruit of tourism to the tourists as also the locals. Hence, adoption of a sustainable tourism strategy is an urgent need to utilize the tourism potential of the northeastern region of India.

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