

Tourism refers to a temporary and voluntary movement of people mainly for holidaying, seeking pleasure or business collaboration.

India has adopted the definition of tourist as a person who temporarily travels to an area other than that in which he has his usual residence and the main purpose of whose visit is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated in some material way.

### Potentiality of Tourism in Assam:

The state has suitable natural infrastructure for the promotion of tourism. It has wide ranging physical, biotic and socio-cultural potentiality in this regard. Situated beneath and encircled by the Himalayan ranges to the north and north-east, the state is surrounded even to the south by hills.

The river plains with numerous criss-crossing tributaries have provided beautiful landscape. There are also two hill districts (North Cachar and Karbi Anglong) ranging from 150 m to about 1800 m in altitude with unique landscape. Hill destinations like Heflong, Jalinga, Diphu and Hamren can offer a lot in the field of adventure tourism, viz. walking, trekking,

Jeungle exploration, scuba climbing, etc.

Hot water spring like Barapani (Golaghat district), water bodies in Chirang (N.C. Hills), water fall at Chapana (Nagaon district), rapids along the courses of the river Jamuna at Silhet (Khasi-Anglong district) and Kopili river at Panimur have tremendous potentiality to attract tourists.

Assam is well known for its exotic flora and fauna. In fact, it forms a part of global bio-diversity 'hot spot' characterised by variety of habitats ranging from swamps and savannah grasslands in the plain to the sub-tropical broad leaved forest in the high Borail range. About 180 species of mammals and more than 800 species of birds are found here, which is the highest among individual states in India. It also has ornamental plants like orchids, both common and rare varieties. Besides, Assam possesses 13 important wildlife areas, which provide scope for 31 types of endangered and rare species of mammals and 14 types of amphibians and reptiles. Hence it can be said to have all the natural infrastructure to develop tourism.

In cultural front, the state is rich enough to attract the attention of tourist. The colourful life of people, their traditional customs, festivals and dances are some of such important sources of tourist attraction. Assam has the tradition of weaving which is rich also among the tribal people.

Assam also practices "muga" "endi", and "pat" silk, woven rearing and weaving. It has also the tradition of folk and classical dance forms, mask making, puppetry, wood and ivory carving, bamboo and cane craft etc. Besides, various forms of performing arts of "sattria" institutions like "Bhona", Jatra etc are worth mentioning in this regard.

Assam is also rich in antiquity assets like ruins and monuments. The existing archaeological ruins of Assam go as far back as Gupta period, though their numbers are very few. There are as many as 12 archaeological sites and about 25 major monuments dating back from 7th to 17th century AD.

Despite the variety of attractions the focal point of tourism in Assam continues to be only the wild life covering internationally famous Kaziranga and Manas NP along with ruins and monuments, especially the pilgrimage trail to the age-old "sakti" shrine Kamakhya.

Fairs and festivals, adventures activities, ethnic culture, cuisine are other relatively new segments with potentiality for development of overall tourism scenario of the state.

## Problems and Prospects of Tourism In Assam

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Though the state has a lot of tourist resources; it has not been able to give due publicity in national and international arena. As a result of this, tourists' mobility is restricted to only a couple of destinations; viz. - Guwahati and Kaziranga.

Other destinations lack standard government tourist accommodations as well as way side amenities to fulfil the demand of foreign and domestic tourists. Even the well publicized destination, Kaziranga has limited beds under Tourism Department to accommodate tourists.

It is found that the government initiative in tourism sector is far below expectation in the context of modern day tourism. Though one horned rhinoceros continues to be the major source of attraction in Kaziranga, there are other four protected areas having rhinoceros along with a variety of other rare species of animals and birds which are found to attract relatively less number of tourists.

Regarding cultural tourism segments, only a couple of archaeological spots and monuments have been renovated so far. Practically nothing has been done to sell the rich folk and cultural heritage as well as crafts of the state through tourism. Hence, well planned publicity both in domestic and international spheres is an urgent need to attract more tourists in near future.

By well-planned publicity, trained manpower, improved service quality, informative publicity, literature,

tourism can be geared up in the state.

The process of diffusion of positive information regarding the state is an urgent need which is ~~basically~~ basically entrusted to government agencies.

Renovation of major monuments, while presenting the unique and natural atmosphere, promotion of crafts and projection of folk and classical dance forms that exist in the rural areas will not only help in promotion of tourism venture, but will also provide economic benefit for local people and craftsmen as well as to re-evaluate their own cultural root.

There should be mutual cooperation, and understanding between government and private agencies.

Considering all these aspects one can say that, though tourism is a budding activity till now, a well planned strategy can make it a major industry like that of the tea and oil industry of the state.