

PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF TOURISM ALONG WITH IDENTIFICATION OF TOURIST SPOTS IN THE HAFLONG REGION, ASSAM

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Abstract : Tourism is one of the best trades as it offers employment to the local youth, foreign exchange earnings, diplomatic and cultural relations, and overall boosts the economy. According to World Tourism Organization (WTO), tourism is the leading sector in the globe in terms of employment creation and income generation. As per the Statista Research Department Report, Foreign exchange earnings have reached 30 billion U.S dollars and 87 million employments from the travel and tourism sector in India in the financial year 2019. Tourism is a modern concept as it has great potency for sustainable development of nature-based resources, vast wildlife, beautiful forest, and landscape. Haflong is the only hill station of Assam, located at the foothill of Borail range in southern Assam. The Haflong region is widely known for her natural lake, cultural diversity, bird mystery, and enchanting nature. The tourism potentiality of the region includes Nature tourism, Eco-tourism, Cultural tourism, Religious tourism, Wildlife tourism, and River tourism. Geographical isolation, poor infrastructure amenities, political instability, and lack of awareness are some of the challenges. The present paper intends to highlight various potential tourist spots and explore the bright prospects and problems of tourism in the Haflong region. The data are collected from secondary sources only.

Keywords: Tourism, Haflong Region, Hill Station, Cultural Diversity, and Sustainable Development

Introduction

In a contemporary world, Tourism is considered as one of the important service industries that creates employment opportunities for the people's livelihood. Khound (2007) alleged that tourism is considered to be the leading sector in the

21st century because it shares significantly in the global economy. Tourism is a short-term movement of people within a certain country, city, or region. Tourism plays an important role to all the stakeholders and creates a significant impact on socio-

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economic systems, environmental integrity, and consumption patterns of the consumers. According to UNWTO (United Nation World Tourism Organization) 2016, travel and tourism have produced 2.3 trillion and 109 million employments globally. During 2019, travel and tourism contributed about 6.8% to national GDP.

Indian tourism has become one of the world's most emerging-growing service industries because of its rich socio-cultural heritage, bio-diversity and wildlife sanctuary, and hospitality. In India, Tourism is significantly important for creating employment opportunities, source of foreign exchange earnings, and promoting the host communities. As per the Statista Research Department Report, Foreign exchange earnings have reached 30 billion U.S dollars and 87 million employments from travel and tourism in India in the financial year 2019. During the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism sector has witnessed volatility because of so many stages of lockdown. The business continues to be hindered and the economy is also threatened. During this pandemic crisis, Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has shown a new path in the form of Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan and urged everyone to produce and promote local products so the economy gets a boost. In making the state of Assam Aatmanirbar Bharat Abhiyaan different sectors like agriculture, animal husbandry, entrepreneurship, handloom, and handicraft has emerged as promising sector. As per the records of Assam Year

Book, the state has 5 National Parks, 18 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 3 Tiger Reserves, 5 Elephant Reserves, 2 Biosphere Reserves, and 2 World Heritage Sites. The state also has the world's largest island in Majuli. Besides, Assam is the homeland of different ethnic tribes and groups, and also well-known for its tea estate, petroleum, and wildlife sanctuary.

Haflong, the only hill station of Assam is an attention-grabbing town, which is widely known for its pleasing weather, mesmerizing hills and valleys, and enchanting nature. Haflong is often referred to as "The Land of Blue Hills" because of its sky-colored, deep fertile hills, and breathtaking views of the surroundings. Haflong is the Headquarters of Dima Hasao District (erstwhile North Cachar Hills) of Assam, located at the foothill of Borail range at an elevation of 966 m above sea level and between longitudes of 93.02 E and latitudes of 25.17 N. Haflong is largely inhabited by indigenous communities like Zeme Naga, Dimasa, Hmar, Kuki, Hrangkhoh, Khasi, and Biate. Haflong Hindi, a pidgin tongue, is known as the local language and identity of the local citizens of this region. The town is known for its lakeside resorts, beautiful Haflong hills, and tranquil atmosphere. Moreover, the region also practices horticulture-based farming of exotic flowers and orchid gardens, pineapple gardens, and orange orchards.

Rationale of the Study

In the present era, the importance of tourism has been growing considerably

with the growth and development of human activity in the globalizing world. The region is naturally blessed with several beautiful environments, ethnic-cultural diversity, and touristic natural resources and so, it encourages different kind of tourism like cultural tourism, eco-tourism, wildlife tourism, and adventure tourism. From the economic, social, cultural, and environmental perspective, tourism performs a vital role in providing the requirements of the stakeholders such as the creation of employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings, diplomatic and cultural relations, standard of living, and environmental preservation.

Literature Review

Das (2017), Borgohian (2020), and Chutia (2020) carried out research work in Assam and came across several tourist spots in the state. The study also identifies numerous prospects such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, medical tourism, and pilgrim tourism. Concurrently, the state claimed that inadequate infrastructure facilities, lack of awareness, political instability, and insurgency problems are the major issues prevailing in the state. The government jointly with local citizens urged for the proper exploitation of the worldly surroundings. Saha (2015) performed research on North East India and highlighted that the region is bestowed with beautiful natural landscape, flora and fauna, biodiversity, wildlife, and colorful culture. He also gave importance to the drawback of tourism in the area like poor infrastructure facilities, political instability, insurgency

issues, Lack of people's co-operation, and extreme geographical area. Subash (2015) dealt with India's tourism and considered as a sunrise industry, employment generator, help local and host communities. He further discussed several problems including deficiency of infrastructure, health and security of tourist issues, and poorly trained employees. It argued that all the stakeholders to put extra effort for the sustainable development. Anandanatarajan and Antonyraj (2017) stressed the tourism industry of India in the planning era and current problems on globalization. The authors further argued the prospects, challenges, and drawbacks of tourism planning in India. Sarma (2003) initiated a study on positioning a tourist destination in North East India. It employed two factors viz. infrastructure and external to determine tourists' preference while deciding the tourist destination. Mitra and Khan (2017) explored eco-tourism in the Northeast region with three-dimensional angles i.e., tourists' point of view, travel agencies' perspective, and citizen opinion of northeastern states. The study highlighted the number of prospects and noticed that the communication gap has been the major challenge, and seeks for tourism development of the region. Choudhury et al (2018) performed research on rural tourism of North-East India. The study gave importance to sustainable rural development and its potentialities like agricultural tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and cultural tourism. Allegedly, these potentialities produce money for

sustainable livelihood, improve the standard of living, and create a mutual relationship between tourists and local citizens. Gogoi (2017) highlighted the economic contribution and challenges of the tourism industry in Assam. It noticed that the creation of employment, revenue earnings from domestic and foreign tourists has not been encouraging. The author insists on public, private, and NGO sectors for participation and encourages eco-tourism and geo-tourism. Brahma (2014) throws light on the tourism development in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) and concluded that despite having substantial qualities of tourism potentiality, the area has not been exploited properly. The author urged the government and private agencies to formulate tourism policy and put intensive campaigns and encourage

setting up hotels, resorts, and guest houses in the region.

Objectives

1. To identify potential tourist spots in the Haflong and peripheral.
2. To examine the prospects and challenges of tourism in the study area.

Methodology

The method employed in this research paper is explanatory and descriptive in nature, as it describes various tourist spots and highlights the essential prospects and problems of tourism. The study area is concentrated on Haflong town (Headquarter of Dima Hasao District) and peripheral. The study is totally based on secondary data, which includes journals, reports, websites, government records, etc.

Table 1: Detailed Information about the Haflong Region

1. Haflong	
• Latitude	25. 16 N
• Longitude	93.01 E
2. Population	43,756 (45% Males and 55% Females)
• Male	19,690
• Female	24,066
3. Literacy Rate	92% (overall literacy rate)
• Male	85%
• Female	75%
4. Human Development Index (HDI)	0.369 (District Index of 2003)
5. Government Body	Haflong Municipal Board
6. Area	12.79 Sq. Km
7. PIN	788819 and 788820

Source: As per the Census of 2011.

Table 2 : Identification of Tourist Spots in Haflong and Peripheral

Places	Distance from Haflong	Specialty
Haflong Lake		Known as “Scotland of Assam” and Placed at the heart of the town. It offers fishing, boating, and is one of the largest natural water bodies in Assam.
Jatinga *	5.4 km	Famously known for its mysterious phenomenon of birds committing suicide.
Haflong Hill	4 km	The only hill station in Assam and one of the most appealing places in the district. Nature enthusiasts mostly planned for trekking and Camping on this Haflong hill.
Ethnic Village *	10.6 km	A village where visitors will discover striking traditional dorms and houses of the different tribal communities.
Tumjang Peak *	20.9	The second highest peak in Assam and the highest peak in the Barail range. One of the finest places for trekking, hiking, and camping.
Bendao Baiglai Waterfalls	9.2 km	A Triple waterfall with an engaging sight of the surroundings.
Thuruk	20.5 km	The only place to witness snowfall in winter.

Source: Directorate of Tourism, Guwahati

*Jatinga: Jatinga is well-known for the strange phenomenon of “committing bird suicide”. This phenomenon happens at the end of monsoon month (August-November), especially on the foggy dark night between 7 pm to 10 pm. Nearly 40 species of local and migratory birds commit suicide. Local citizens believe that mythical spirits are answerable to these birds’ death. Ornithologist experts believe that magnetic force is the reason for this mysterious phenomenon. In the dark, foggy, and blustery weather, the birds

look for light sourcing objects, and miserably, birds get hit by the trees, bamboo poles, buildings and vehicles. The real cause of this strange phenomenon has not been proven yet.

*Ethnic Village: The Ethnic village in Haflong was built under Rashtriya Sama Vikash Yojana and managed by the Department of Forestry. This village is one of the newest tourist attraction spots, which has been designed entirely with the traditional dorms and houses of different

ethnic tribes living in the Dima Hasao District. This place reflects the tribal people's lifestyle, culture, and tradition they practice in the region.

*Tumjang Peak: At 1860 meters above sea level, Thumjang is the second highest peak in Assam and the highest peak in Borail Range of the Dima Hasao District.

This destination offers a thrilling experience because of its beautiful landscape and breathtaking views. Borail range and Tumjang peak is one of the finest place for trekking, hiking, and camping to the nature enthusiasts. It is one of the most trending tourist spots in Assam in the recent years.

Trends of Tourism

Table 3 : Number of International Tourists Visited Haflong from the Year 1981 to 2001

Year tourists	No. of	Year	No. of tourists	Year	No. of tourists
1981	2	1990	15	1997	4
1982	5	1991	12	1998	12
1983-1985	0	1992	9	1999	16
1986	2	1993	3	2000	30
1987	2	1994	10	2001	32
1988	2	1995	5		
1989	3	1996	22		

Source: Additional Superintendent of Police, Haflong

The above table clearly shows that international tourists (foreigners) have been visiting since 1981. The number of visitors was incredibly less during the initial period and subsequently from the year 1998, the number of tourists' increases significantly. However, the number of tourists visiting to Haflong is still in its infancy as compared to other

regions and states. The probable reasons for fewer visitors could be due to lack of proper transportation and communication, insurgency issues, political instability, and inadequate information about the area. Besides, the Haflong region is also vulnerable to natural disasters like a landslide, cyclones, earthquakes, etc.

Table 4 : Domestic Tourists Arrival in Haflong

Year	Number	Year	Number
1990	743	1993	456
1991	703	1994	366
1992	824	1995	210

Source: collected from the Directorate of Tourism.

The above table showed a clear fluctuation of domestic tourists visited during the period from 1990 to 1992. Nonetheless, it further reveals that domestic tourist visited to Haflong was found the highest in 1992. In the subsequent year, the number of domestic tourists has decreased significantly from

824 to 456 displaying a loss of 368 tourists. The flow of domestic tourists decreases in the following two years. The possible reasons for the sudden fall and constantly decreasing of tourists could be the rise of insurgency, political conflict in the region, or other socio-economic issues.

Table 5 : Number of Domestic and Foreign Tourists Visiting in 2017-2018 in North East India

State	2017		2018		Growth Rate	
	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
Arunachal Pradesh	4,44,005	7,147	5,12,436	7,653	15.41	7.08
Assam	60,52,667	21,760	58,56,282	36,846	3.24	69.33
Manipur	1,53,454	3,497	1,76,109	6,391	14.76	82.76
Meghalaya	9,90,856	12,051	11,98,340	18,114	20.94	50.31
Mizoram	67,772	1,155	76,551	967	12.95	16.28
Nagaland	63,362	4,166	1,01,588	5,010	60.33	20.26
Tripura	3,98,669	69,899	4,14,388	1,02,861	3.94	47.16

Source: India Tourism Statistics, 2019

Table: 5 showed that the increasing trend of domestic and foreign tourists arrival (except Assam, domestic and Mizoram, foreign in 2018) in North East India in the two calendar years. Assam has the

highest number of domestic tourists visit in 2017, and Tripura has the highest number of foreign tourists visit in 2018. Nagaland and Meghalaya have the highest domestic growth rate with 60.33%

and 20.94% respectively. Likewise, Manipur has the highest foreign growth rate with 82.76%, followed by Assam with 69.33%. Assam has the lowest domestic growth rate with a 3.24%, and

Arunachal Pradesh has the lowest foreign growth rate with 7.08%. From this table, we can conclude that Meghalaya has the preeminent growth rate in terms of domestic and foreign tourists.

Table 6 : Classified Hotels and Hotel Room in North East India as of 31st December 2017

	Assam	Arunachal Pradesh	Mizoram	Meghalaya	Manipur	Tripura	Nagaland
5 Star Deluxe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No. of room	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5 Star	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No. of room	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4 Star	01	0	0	01	01	0	0
No. of room	196	0	0	50	171	0	0
3 Star	08	01	01	01	01	0	0
No. of room	327	53	45	51	28	0	0
2 Star	04	02	0	0	0	01	01
No. of room	141	33	0	0	0	36	19
1 Star	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No. of room	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Star Hotel	13	03	01	02	02	01	01
Total room	664	86	45	101	199	36	19

Source: India Tourism Statistics, 2019

From the above table, it can be seen that North East India has a negligible number of Star hotels. The seven states have neither 5 Star Deluxe nor 5 Star hotels. Out of seven states, Assam has the highest number of Star hotels and rooms with 13 and 664 respectively. Arunachal Pradesh has the second-highest number of Star Hotels with 3, and Manipur has the second-highest number of rooms with

199. On the other hand, Tripura and Nagaland have the least number of Star hotels and rooms.

Scope of the Study

Undoubtedly, tourism is one of the emerging service industries in the globe. The tourism industry has been a key role in generating job opportunities for the youth and improving the standard of

living of the local communities. Despite having immeasurable potency, the region has remained largely untouched and untapped. Therefore, the study related to tourism in the Haflong region will help to understand the significance of the tourism industry and how to create

awareness to the local citizens about potential sites, promote setting up hotels and restaurants, and most importantly, encourage financial institution and private investors to invest for the tourism development.

Table 7 : Prospects of Tourism in the Study Area

1. Adventure/Nature tourism	Enchanting hills with beautiful landscapes and breathtaking views offers trekking, camping, and hiking to the nature enthusiasts.
2. Eco-tourism	Preserves natural resources, anti-pollution and plastic-free, and improves the well-being of local citizens.
3. Cultural tourism	Homeland of different ethnic tribes and groups showcase their cultural diversity and festivals.
4. River/Watercourse tourism	Rich in aquatic resources and offers watercourse leisure activities like fishing, and rafting.
5. Religious tourism	Some indigenous communities believe and practice different and some follow same with different denomination.
6. Wildlife tourism	Barail range provides substantial scope for sightseeing the natural world with its diverse flora and fauna, and bio-diversity.

Source: Compiled by the authors

Since the Haflong is situated at the hills of the southern region of Assam, it offers a mixed feeling of satisfaction to the visitors mentally and physically due to geographical area. The region has countless touristic natural resources to exploit and yet, the entire stakeholder has been subjected to neglect on purpose. Haflong is otherwise called the land of blue hills because of its bluish tinge, some verdant hills, and breathtaking views of the surroundings. Haflong is a place for nature-based tourism. From one end to the other, the town offers scores of the

natural world with a wide variety of beautiful landscape and tranquil atmosphere, and as a result, the tourists experience gratifying weather and get to see awe-inspiring views of the surroundings. Having more than dozens of indigenous communities, the local citizens exchange their original identities through the medium of language, beliefs and practices, dressing style, food habits, and way of living. Boral Range is the highest mountain range in Assam. This range has immense scope for adventure tourism and sightseeing the natural

environment to the nature enthusiasts. Trekking, camping, and hiking have been some of the most common forms of tourism in this region. Borail Range also provides different types of flora such as exotic orchids, rare plants, Ornamental fishes, and medicinal herbs.

Haflong is one of the cleanest-pollution-free towns bounded with peaceful environment and wellbeing of the people under ethnic-cultural diversity. Eco-tourism seeks to create environmental awareness among the people and implements the course of anti-pollution collectively. Tumjang peak of Borail range is one of the most trending tourist sites that encourage visitors to practice sustainable living, acquire contentment to tourists, and preserve the natural environment. The region is not merely characterized by varied flora and fauna but also possesses a watercourse network. For example, picnic on the river banks has been pursued regularly in Haflong, and the Jatinga River, Chiry River, Harangajao River, and Divyung River offer River-based tourism like rafting, angling, and other water sports. Having a wide variety of ethnic

groups under the same environment, religious and cultural-based tourism is another essential prospect. The visitors were able to learn about different ethnic tribes, beliefs and practices, fairs and festivals, folk dance and music, indigenous arts and crafts of the local people. Borail wildlife sanctuary provides different species of fauna like Wild Boar, Golden Langur, Hillock Gibben, and many more. This sanctuary has the potential for wildlife tourism, and may possibly be the ideal state or national wildlife sanctuary in the coming years. In addition, there are several fascinating places in the area. For instance, Borail range is otherwise considered as the Assam communication tower for its feasibility of network connection to any place in India. Haflong is also well-heeled in language, especially the lingua franca of Haflong Hindi. Besides, Jatinga is famously known for the mysterious event 'the birds committing suicide. Hundreds of ornithologists and tourists visit frequently from all over the world to study the strange phenomenon, and so, this place has become one of the most tourist attraction spots in the Haflong area.

Table 8: Challenges of Tourism in the Haflong Region

1.	Geographical isolation
2.	Poor transportation and communication services
3.	Lack of awareness from the local citizens.
4.	Poor assistance from financial institutions and private investors
5.	No publicity and official website
6.	Absence of trained tourist guide
7.	The communication gap between tourists and local people
8.	Political instability and Insurgency issues

Source: Compiled by the authors

From the above discussion, it is obvious that Haflong has been blessed with countless natural resources and ecological systems. Hitherto, the region has remained greatly untapped and unexplored. Haflong is a hilly town, which is located at a geographically isolated region and the amenities of transportation and communication is truly a major challenge. Haflong is also vulnerable to natural disasters like landslides, cyclones, and earthquakes. The local citizens have lately realized the importance of tourism. Lack of awareness and poor role played by local people affects the growth of tourism in the region. For instance, tourist site like Borail range and Jatinga has been recognized very recently due to ignorant of tourism development in this region.

Despite having vast potential, the tourism department has not inspired private investors and financial institutions to invest for the socio-economic development of tourism. The tourism policy of Assam 2008 and 2017 formulated to harness tourism potentiality of the region has not been compatible to the small scale tourism unit like the Haflong region. Due publicity to the state and national level is missing and at the same time, there is no official website that gives factual information about Haflong tourism. Having attractive spots is incomplete unless trained tourist guides make clear about the spots. A communication barrier is another challenges faced by the tourists and local community in the region. Consequently, citizens barely satisfy the inquisitiveness

of the tourists. The political differences and insurgency issues are other major problems. In the functioning of government, political instability arises because of misinterpretation between the politicians and ethnic clashes. Likewise, the problems of insurgency also become the stumbling block in the course of development and tourists consider it risky to visit. Regardless of breathing in diversified cultures and ethnicity, the town has done nothing for the growth and development of tourism.

Suggestion

Despite having vast potentiality for tourism development in the region, it has remained unmarked and unexploited. So, to tackle and overcome these entire problems, an obligatory of long terms actions and dealings, as stated below, need to be properly implemented.

1. The transportation and communication of the region should be improved.
2. The concerned government should make huge financing to eliminate the blockage of geographical isolation and encourage financial institutions and private investors to invest in the tourism industry.
3. The approach of political harmony in the area should be encouraged and grievances related to insurgency issues be considered.
4. The return to normalcy and peacefulness of the people's livelihood is the supreme value that a good citizen should chase for it.
5. Local citizens should be encouraged to

set up hotels, restaurants, and showrooms and also the create awareness towards the ecosystem and environmental integrity.

Conclusion

The descriptive study of tourism depicts a clear picture of the importance of tourism development in the region. In the present world, tourism plays a central role in socio-economic development and environmental integrity. Haflong is naturally blessed with the number of bio-diversity, ethnic-cultural diversity, and ecological systems, and conversely, citizens have never realized the importance of tourism and highly neglected by the stakeholders of tourism potentiality in the Haflong area. As a catalyst of regional development, the region provides numerous potential like eco-tourism, cultural and ethnic tourism, adventure and nature tourism, and the like. Likewise, poor infrastructure facilities, political differences, lack of awareness, communication gap, and inadequate information on tourist spots are some of the challenges encountered in the region. Therefore, the region is not in a position to give a better experience to tourists. In regards to identifying the prominent places, Jatinga, Haflong Lake, Borail range, ethnic village, etc, are some of the eye-catching spots in the study region. Understanding the requirements of the tourists, the host community must look for better design- hygienic and comfortable living accommodation, good transport system, and decent shops particularly catering to ethnic art. It calls for the sincere and true contribution of

the concerned government with the involvement of local citizens for the sustainable growth of tourism in the Haflong region.

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