

# Manipur: The Neglected Tourism Glory

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**Abstract**—Manipur is located in the eastern most part of northeast India. The state has a pleasant moderate climate with rich cultural history and natural heritage. Thus, the state is a hotspot for tourist attraction. Unfortunately, the strategic location of the state and lack of communication with the rest of mainland India, the tourism potentials of Manipur has remained unknown and neglected to the rest of the country and the world.

A survey to assess the level of awareness about the tourist destinations of Manipur among the non-residents of Manipur was conducted. The results showed that there is a general lack of awareness about the tourism destinations amongst the respondents. On the brighter side, most of the respondents have stated their interest to visit the tourist destinations in Manipur if given a chance.

Keeping in mind the current status of tourism in the state there is a need to improve the existing policies and to develop a proper tourism policy arises. Promotion of tourism by highlighting some of the significant monuments, museums, festivals, art and culture to attract the tourist is necessary. It is also important to create awareness among the local inhabitants about the contribution of tourism to the socio-economic growth and development of their areas.

**Keywords:** Manipur, sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, festivals, development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Manipur

Manipur with Imphal as the capital is a state located in the eastern most part of Northeast India. It covers an area of 22,327km<sup>2</sup> lying at an altitude of 790m above sea level, between 23.83°N and 25.68 °N latitudes and 93.03°E and 94.78°E longitudes. It is a mini India in terms of cultural diversity. It is surrounded by Assam to the west, Nagaland to the north, Mizoram to the south and it

shares an international border with Myanmar in the east. With a population of 27, 21,756 it is home to the Meiteis, Meitei Pangals, Nagas, Kukis and other vibrant communities. The kukis and the nagas are further divided into diverse clans, septs and sections with different dialects. The major religions of Manipur are Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, which constitute 41.39%, 41.29%, and 8.40% respectively. The remaining 8.92% is composed of small sects of different religions.

### 1.2 Tourism

According to UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) "Tourism comprises the activities of people setting out to and remaining in places outside their usual environment for not excess of one continuous year for recreation, business and different purposes." There is immense growth in the tourism sector emerging to be one of the largest industries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The year 2016 showed an uninterrupted growth in International tourism to reach 1.2 billion tourist arrivals. There was 46 million or 4% growth over 2015 (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2016). Seeing the importance of tourism as generator of employment, environment re-generation, development of backward areas, and development of disadvantage groups for the overall growth of the economy, the UN General Assembly on its part in December 2015, declared 2017 as the International Year of 'sustainable tourism' for development [7]. In India the Foreign Tourist arrivals (FTAs) showed a growth of 10.7% in 2016. The foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) from tourism was Rs.155650 crores with a growth of 15% [3].

### 1.3 Tourism in Manipur

Manipur has a pleasant moderate climate with rich historical, cultural and natural heritage, a lethal combination for tourist's attraction to the state. To name a few – Moirang (place where, for the first time the Indian National Army flag was hoisted), Imphal War Cemetery (the Second World War Commonwealth burials), Loktak lake (which hosts the Keibul Lamjao National Park, a home to endemic Sangai), Siroi hills (hosts the beautiful endemic flower, the siroi lily), Shree Govindajee Temple (the largest Hindu, Vaishnavi temple of Manipur), Kangla Fort (old palace situated by the Imphal river), Khonghampat Orchidarium (Orchid garden at Impahl), Sadu Chiru Waterfalls, are few highlights of tourist attraction in the state. Also, not to forget the ethnic myths, fairs, festivals and food traditions of the myriad communities of Manipur.

With more than 39 indigenous groups, Manipur is an extraordinary mosaic of conventions and culture with every group established in its own particular tongue, traditions and vivid culture. No doubt, Lord Irwin and Jawaharlal Nehru did refer to Manipur as the "Switzerland of India" and the "Jewel of India" respectively. However, due to its isolated geographical location and poor communicating medium from the mainland India, its glory has remained hidden and neglected for ages. With around 12 flights a day connecting Manipur with major cities of India and blessed with pleasant weather throughout the year, Manipur is a melting pot of indigenous culture. Manipur has all the ingredients for tourist's attractions.

Recognizing the potential and the need to promote tourism as part of India's look east policy, the government of India has relaxed and withdrawn Manipur from the Protected Area Regime since 2011. Outside nationals with travel permit and visa may now visit beautiful Manipur. A vibrant cultural treasure, being popularize as India's gateway to Southeast Asia. Under the theme of Swadesh Darshan during 2016-17, the government of India sanctioned to Manipur the Spiritual circuit for the development of various temples in Manipur (Ministry of Tourism, 2017).

### 2. OBJECTIVES

- To assess the level of awareness about the cultural and natural heritage of the state Manipur amongst the non-residents of Manipur.

- To highlight and create awareness about the rich cultural and natural heritage of the state Manipur to attract more tourists to the state which will contribute to the socio-economic development of its people.

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on primary and secondary data collection. Primary data was generated through online questionnaire having some of the basic crucial questions. Secondary data was collected from published articles, reports, official statistics, research publication and organizational websites. With the help of basic statistical methods the findings were analyzed and then discussed

### 4. SCALE OF AWARENESS ABOUT THE CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE STATE MANIPUR AMONGST THE NON-RESIDENTS OF MANIPUR

#### 4.1 Survey

A survey was conducted to assess the level of awareness amongst the non-residents of Manipur with the help of online questionnaire. The questions were formulated to target two important facets:

- The present awareness amongst the surveyed population about Manipur
- The tourism prospect of Manipur given that some awareness is propagated to the population

#### 4.2 Result & Discussion

The results were obtained from 360 respondents as shown below in the form of pie chart.

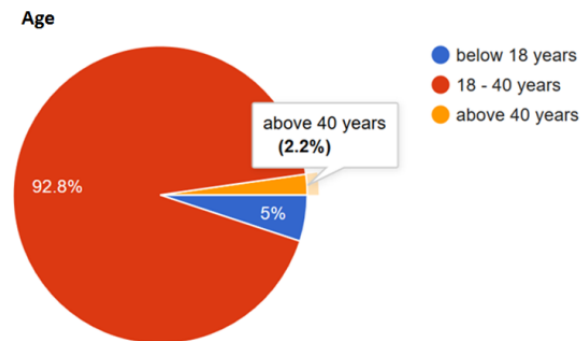


Figure:1.

Profession of the respondents

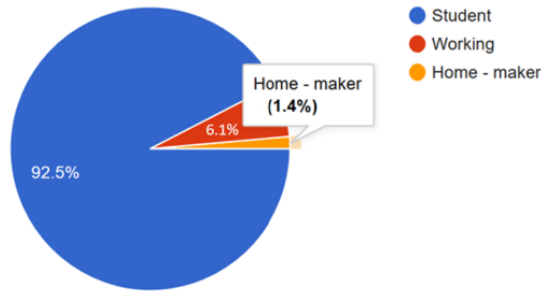


Figure 2.

Manipur, the Jewel of India, is a delight for tourists who appreciate its scenic beauty. If given a chance would you like to visit?

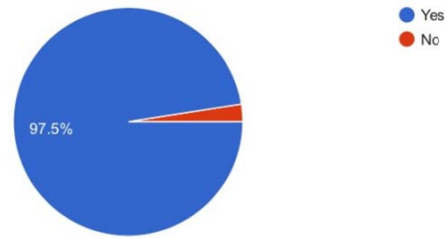


Figure 6

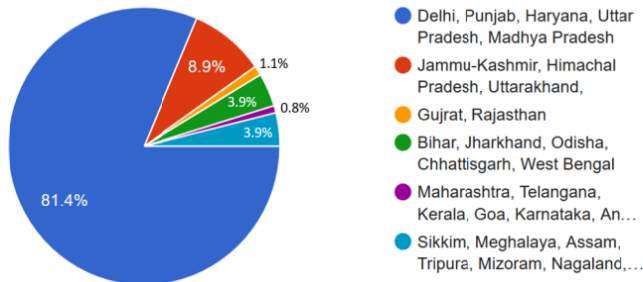


Figure 3

How many of the following tourist spots have you heard/visited before? Lohtak lake, Shirui Kashung, Singda Dam, Yangoupokpi-Lokchao wildlife sanctuary, Khangkhui Cave, Khonghampat Orchidarium, Kangla Fort, Imphal war Cemetery, Shri Gouindjee Temple, Khongjom War memorial complex, Keibul Lamjao National park, INA Martyeir memorial complex, Moreh and Ima keithel (Women's Market).

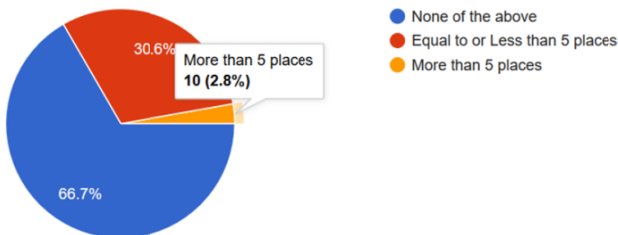


Figure 4

How many of the following fairs and festivals have you heard/ attended before? Gang Ngai Festival, Heikru Hitogba, Kang Festival, Kut festival, Sangai Festival and Lui Ngai ni.

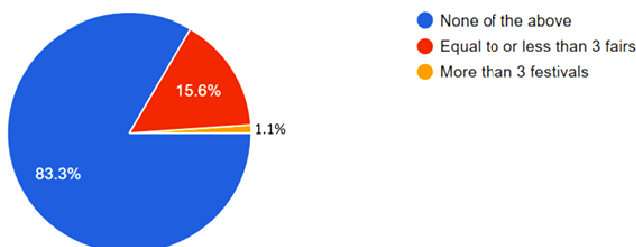


Figure 5

In the sample though all the states and regions of India did not have equal and proportionate representation, the respondents were from all over India except Manipur. All the regions of India had at least some representation (Figure 3). In the sample the majority of the respondents were students (92.5%) and individuals falling within the most energize age group (18 – 40 years). Apart from the students there were working people as well as home makers (Figure 1& 2).

It was no surprise that out of 360 respondents 66% of them were not aware of any of the most popular 13 tourist spots mention in the survey questionnaire (Figure 4). Only 30.6% of the respondents were aware of at least 5 or less than 5 tourist spots in Manipur which is very less and even more disappointing is that only 2.8% i.e., 10 people out of 360 respondents were aware of more than 5 tourist spots. The results obtain shows that there is very less awareness about Manipur among the non-residents.

Talking of awareness about the fairs and festivals of Manipur, out of the 360 respondents, 83.3 % of the respondents were not aware about any of the fairs and festivals celebrated in Manipur, 15.6% of the respondents were aware of at least 3 or less than 3 and only 1% of the respondents were aware of more than 3 festivals out of the listed 7 festivals of Manipur (Figure 5). There are many festivals all over India. Some are celebrated all over India and some are confined to regions and certain states. In Manipur as well there are many festivals which could be attractive festivals for tourist but there is a lack of awareness about the different festivals in Manipur for various reasons.

The results obtained are disheartening considering the fact that all the respondents were literate and educated. The lack of awareness could be due to

different reasons. One of the reasons could be due to minimal connectivity between Manipur and the mainland of India even after 7 decades of India's independence. Another reason could be lack of media coverage of Manipur and even the rest of northeast India. We hardly see any discussion or coverage of Manipur and the rest of northeast India in the media other than occasional mentions related to Chinese incursions [2]. According to Basnett (2010) all Indian festivals celebrated in India are reported by the media but the Indians are never aware of the festivals and cultures of the Northeast Indians as they are never reported. He further reported of a case about a 15-minute short English documentary film named as 'Last of the Tattooed Head Hunters' which was directed by Vikeyeno Zao and produced by Indrajit Narayan Dev and Hawksbill Productions. This film was screened at the Cannes Film Festival on May 2010. Unlike other Indian films that goes to Cannes this film was not reported by the Indian media. Therefore discussion of topics related to Manipur on the media forum and coverage of Manipur on other issues would help in bringing about more awareness of Manipur, thus creating an inform opinion about Manipur.

## 5. CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE OF MANIPUR

As a prop to the above survey and in the light of our second objective, we here present few of the tourist attractions of the state in an attempt to promote tourism industry in Manipur.

### 5.1 Nature, Wildlife and gardens in Manipur

Speaking of nature and parks in Manipur the principle fascination of Manipur must be the **Loktak Lake**. The lake is a standout amongst the most noteworthy topographical sights with roundabout fish ranches and floating islands. The Loktak Lake is the largest fresh water lake in North East India. It is located in Bishnupur District, 48km away from Imphal city. It is uniquely marked by the presence of floating islands called **phumdi**. In the southeastern side of the lake lies the largest phumdi with an area of 40km<sup>2</sup>. It stations the **Keibul Lamjao National Park**, the only floating national park in the world and also, the only suitable habitat for endemic ***Rucervus eldii eldii*** or the dancing deer locally referred to as **Sangai**. The best time of spotting the exquisite **Sangai** deer is amid December, January and March, in the mornings and afternoons. The floating park also houses other wildlife such as the Hog Deer, Otter,

water fowls and the migratory birds which are generally sighted from November to March. A day spend here is a lifetime of memory. Manipur is also known to harbor some of the rare, endangered and endemic bird species such as Green Peafowl (*Pavo muticus*) and the Babblers of the genus *Sphenocichla* in the **Yangoupokpi-Lokchao Wildlife Sanctuary** which can be reached easily from Imphal by road.

**Loukoi Pat Lake** is located near tiddim road on N.H. 150 under Bishnupur district where boating facilities are available and the scenic beauty is a treat to the eye of the visitors. Unfortunately the hilly picnic spot side has been occupied by the Indian Army and declared as a restricted place for common people.

Another striking wonder of nature is the **Shirui Kashung** which is a 3000 meters high peak at an altitude of 2,835 metres above sea level located in Ukhrul ditrict. This peak, 18 kms distanced from the main city is famous for the **Shirui lilies (*Lilium Macklinae*)**, the state flower of Manipur and for the origination of major rivers flowing across Ukhrul. The locals call the lilies, **Kashing Timrawon**. It is a unique species of lily which is not found to be anywhere else except on the upper incline of Shirui slope. The peak is also home to rare birds such as Mrs. Hume's bar-backed pheasant and Blyth's Tragopan. Manipur is also a host to a variety of orchids along with other North East states and **Khonghampat Orchidarium** is one exquisite orchid garden in Manipur spreading over an area of 200acres of land just 7 km away from Imphal city. It has more than 110 varieties of orchids. The peak blooming season of the orchids is March-April. Amongst the peaks and rich fauna and flora, are the waterfalls. Manipur's most popular waterfall is the **Sadu Chiru Waterfall** or more commonly known as Leimaram Fall, 29km away from Imphal. It is surrounded by mountains displaying a charming sight.

### 5.2 Monuments, memorials and Museums in Manipur

Manipur tourism is not only about its scenic beauty but also holds stories of national bravery and sacrifice. There is **Kangla** in the core of Imphal city which unfurls the historic glory of the Asiatic Kingdom of Manipur, going back to 33AD. The British assumed control in 1891 embedded their influence in architecture. Being the quintessential of the state cultural heritage, the Kangla is preserved and developed into a unique archeological heritage park.

**Khangkhui Cave** located at Ukhrul district of Manipur is one of the most important sites of the Paleolithic age in northeast India. Tools made of bone and stone were discovered at this location during an archaeological excavation. Due to its historical importance the Government of Manipur has declared this cave as a protected archaeological site; vide government order in the year 2011.

There are also memorials to commemorate the martyrs of war - **Bir Tirkendrajit Park** build to commemorate the martyrs during the Meitei Revolt in 1891, against the British, is position at Imphal close to Polo Ground; **War cemetery**, Commonwealth Second World War burial ground devoted to a large number of allied fighters who lost their lives in the battle to defend Imphal during the Japanese invasion in the World War II; **Khongjom War Memorial** dedicated to the khongjom war of 1891 where Major General Paona Brajabashi, demonstrated his valor against the more powerful attacking British Army; **Maibam Lokpa Ching**, a site where a devastating battle took place between the British and the Japanese armed force amid world war-II. It parks the Indian Peace Memorial, constructed by a Japanese war veteran, Lt. General Iwaichi Fujiwara in honor of the Japanese martyrs. It is visited every year by many Japanese to pay their respect to the soldiers who lost their life during the unfortunate incident.

Manipur also houses the **INA Museum** (INA = Indian National Army) at Moirang, 24 miles from Imphal. It is here, where the INA hoisted the Tricolour for the 1<sup>st</sup> time on Indian soil on April 14, 1944, amid world war-II. It primarily exhibits war antiques unveiling the story of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's and INA's contribution to the freedom movement of India.

### 5.3 Art and culture

Representing Manipur's art and culture is its classical and folk dance forms. The most renowned classical dance of Manipur is the Raas-Leela woven around the love of Radha and Krishna. The tribal folk dances are outpouring and articulation of nature, of creation, of aestheticism in the tribal way of life. There are many indigenous games of Manipur played by the people of Manipur since historical times. Some of the most prominent indigenous games are Sagol Kangjei (the modern game of polo originated from Sagol Kangjei), khong kangjei, Yubi Lakpi, Mukna (Manipuri wrestling), Hiyang Tannaba (boat race), and Kang. Besides several indigenous games, its

glorious tradition in martial arts (Thanta & Sarit Sarak) is quite impressive.

### 5.4 Other Tourist destinations

**Imphal** is the heart of all cultural and economic activities of the state. Another tourist attraction is the **IMA market**, a stone thrown away from the western gate of Kangla. It is the largest all women market in Asia, it is here were anyone can shop for household articles, jewelry, local handicrafts and handloom, etc.

Another welcome attraction in Imphal city is the **polo ground** (Mapal Kangjeibung) which is the oldest polo ground in the world. This ground is a proved of how important the game is to Manipur. Present day polo as played and promoted by the British is believed to be derived from the traditional polo played in Manipur state.

Also, the **Shree Govindajee temple** is Imphal's noteworthy vaishnavism focus. This temple draws in extensive number of devotees and tourist.

Apart from the above places, **Moreh** is an important tourist destination in Manipur with great commercial importance. It is India's gateway to Southeast Asia with its international border with Myanmar barely 62miles away from Imphal is under Tengnoupal district. The tourist gets opportunity to reach out to Myanmar's kabaw valley. Through the border town of Moreh the tourist can venture out to the Myanmarese town Tamu to experience the different culture and lifestyle of Myanmar.

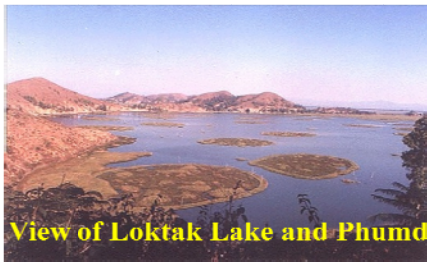
### 5.5 Festivals

There are many colourful and vibrant festivals celebrated in Manipur which serve as major highlight of Manipur's rich cultural heritage and attraction for tourism. Among the tribal's in Manipur the most prominent festival of the naga's is the seed sowing festival known as the **Lui-ngai-ni** which is celebrated in the month of February wherein traditional songs and dances of the different Naga communities are the highlights of the festivity. Among the Kuki-chin-Mizo tribes the most prominent festival is the autumn post-harvest festival known as **Chavan-kut** which is celebrated on the first of November every year. It is a joyous occasion for the people celebrating the fruits of a year of hard labour. Among the meiteis inhabiting the valley of Manipur the most prominent festival is the Manipuri New Year celebration **Chheiraoba**. On this occasion special festive cuisines are prepared

and offered to various deities. It is celebrated during the month of April every year. It is an important part of the ritual which requires the people to climb the nearest hill tops in the conviction that it will empower them to ascend to more prominent statures in their common life. To give the tourist a glimpse of its rich cultural heritage, vibrant traditions of hand looms, indigenous games and cuisine in a ten days capsule the state tourism department organizes, the Sangai festival every year

from 21<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> November. It is an opportunity which no tourist should miss.

Other noteworthy festival is **Yaoshang** (Holi) which is a festival of Manipuri Hindus celebrated in February/March. A Manipuri folk dance known as the Thabal Chongba, is especially connected with this festival. Just like Bihu in Assam, Diwali in North India and Durga Puja in Bengal, Yaoshang is celebrated in Manipur. There is also, **Heikru Hitongba**, a royal boat racing festival which is celebrated in the month of September.



View of Loktak Lake and Phumdis



War Cemetery in Imphal



Leimaram waterfall



Loukoi Pat (Lake)



Shree Govindajee Temple



Kangla Museum houses



The INA memorial, Moirang



Ruins of Kangla Fort



Women's Market (Ima Keithel)



Ras Lila dance in Manipur

## **6. THE PRESENT TOURISM SCENARIO IN MANIPUR**

Tourism is an important tool for the socio-economic growth and development of any place. It creates diverse opportunities of employment and revenue generation. Tourism in Manipur is still in its nascent stage. It got seeded in 1972 but it was only in the year 1987 that tourism was declared as an industry by the government of Manipur. Besides Mizoram and Nagaland, it is the least visited state in the Northeastern India both from domestic as well as foreign tourists. With the geo-political instability, low productivity in its agriculture sector, and the emerging free global economy, we cannot expect Manipur to be an industrially leading state. But with each natural scenic beauty, ethnic and cultural diversity, rich natural heritage, Manipur has high prospect for the development of tourism sector. Though in recent times, there has been positive increase in the number of tourists visiting Manipur both domestic and international, from 127929 in 2009-10 to 145647 in 2013-2014 [1]. It still has a long way to go to be at par with other leading tourist states of the country both domestic and international, considering the tourism potentiality of the state. For the year 2015, when we look at India as a whole, the percentage of international tourists visit to the North east region of India was a miniscule 0.5 percent when compared to other regions (The Telegraph/Sunday/24<sup>th</sup> July, 2016).

## **7. INITIATIVES/STEPS TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN MANIPUR**

Manipur though endowed with rich tourists attractions, has not been able to garner tourists at par with its potentiality. Manipur Tourism Department, the government of Manipur, in its bit to promote tourism in the state has partly sponsored many famous local festivals such as Lui-ngaini, Kut, Orange festival, Loktak day celebration, Shirui lily week, etc. However, in our recent survey shown above, majority of the tourism attractions in the state are unknown to nationals outside the State which is one of the major drawbacks to tourism in the state. Therefore, there is a need to take up many more promotional activities to showcase Manipur's tourism potential, sites, opportunities, security, hospitality and facilities available to both the national and foreign tourists majorly outside the state.

The dissentious portrayal about the law and order situation in Manipur is another major drawback to

tourism industry in the state. So, there is a need to work out ways to tackle and focus more on the peace loving nature of the inhabitants of the state.

Also, there is a need to generate awareness amongst the local inhabitants about the significance of tourism in the overall development of the area. How tourism could serve as a means to create employment and a platform to promote local art, culture, handicrafts, cuisine, at the national and international level which could be channelize as a medium to generate source of livelihood.

Proper maintenance and supplementing of existing tourism infrastructure to ensure sustainable tourism, facilitating and easing on visit permit regimes, providing information relating to travel and tourism and efficient security helpline to the visitors through friendly medium such as 24x7 multi-lingual toll free line, guideline maps in the form of handouts to the visiting tourists, assurance of quality standards in services and security from tourism service providers.

Setting up and increasing the number of state wise professional training system such as Institutes of Hotel Management (IHMs), Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM), Indian Culinary Institute (ICI), with necessary infrastructure support capable of generating both quantity and quality manpower.

Strict vigilance of funded developmental projects to ensure proper and correct channelizing of the funds for said purpose. Abolishment of tax evasion to avoid malpractice of amassing huge wealth from government funded projects.

Promotion of tourism in the state should have a holistic approach. It should take into account good medical, transportation, communication, social political situation, hospitality, eco-friendly environment facilities.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The state of Manipur though not widely known or considered a tourist destination has so much of untold story to tell, share and a lot to offer to its guests. It has in every sense the entire infrastructure to be viewed, preserved, developed and promoted to draw tourists. It has the potential of a blooming tourism industry, to generate revenue to make the state self sufficient. Therefore there is a need to generate awareness about the benefits of tourism development among the local inhabitants. Proper maintenance of existing tourism

infrastructure, setting up of hospitality institutions, strict vigilance & management of funds generated for development projects of Tourism and promotion of tourism at the state level as well as national & international level through proper developmental policies is the immediate need of Tourism in Manipur.

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