

# Tourism in North-East India: E<sup>3</sup> (Economy, Exploration and Evolution)

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**Abstract**—*The beauty of North-Eastern Indian states remain unhidden to none. Most of its visitors remain smitten by its serene beauty and rich cultural heritage, however, yet it remains a place with minimal tourist attraction and this affects the various part of its state's functioning. The primary objective of this paper is to highlight the importance of tourism for this region and its benefits that are eventually reflected in various fields, majorly in the economic development/growth of the North-Eastern region and the whole nation. The different avenues that may act as potential options for attracting more tourists will be highlighted within this paper and how these options can be converted for commercial usage. Through this paper, we will be focusing on tourism as a solution to this problem and as a facilitating factor for various other developments that are required. Special analysis will be given on the monetary benefits that tourism brings along itself and how this contribution will result in the overall growth of the nation's economy as well as in bringing in more opportunities for better lifestyle options for the people living in this region as well. This research paper will be an attempt to present a comprehensive view about the benefits and misconceptions that are attached to tourism and how the North-Eastern Indian states can come at par with the rest of the nation by simply developing the tourism industry.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

North East India is one of the most visually pleasing regions in the Indian subcontinent. Apart from the geographical beauty and serenity, the North-Eastern States of India, namely the eight states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura are known for their cultural richness and diversity. The wide variety of flora and fauna adds a segment of beautifully rich biodiversity to this region.

The eight different states have something unique to showcase in various aspects. However, despite having

attractive avenues to explore for majority of the tourists, the North-Eastern states of India are struggling to receive huge footfalls by the tourist population. Tourism, as a commercial industry, has two different sides to it, both the negative as well as positive impacts are visible on any region where it flourishes, hence, through this paper, the negative side of the tourism industry will also be categorically identified which will make it easier to understand that why natives are sceptical about the growing rate of this industry. A way of finding the solution for the problems will also be chalked out so that the disadvantages regarding tourism can be minimized and only the benefits of this industry as an outcome are yielded. A major problem that North-Eastern states of India are dealing with is that of inclusion. The conflicted areas, lack of means of connectivity, recent insurgent activities and the shortage of urban lifestyle options has pushed this region in a zone where it is struggling to be identified as a part of the whole nation.

## 2. IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM FOR NEI

Tourism, as an industry holds a significant place when it comes to the monetary contribution to the overall economy of the nation and it holds a certainly advantageous position due to the various benefits that it brings along itself. Thus, it has been noticed that most of the developed nations focus on improving and promoting their tourism industry, which in turn helps in improving their financial conditions. Tourism, for the North-Eastern States too is crucial, as it will attract various other opportunities to the region that will lead to development and modernization of the place. Following are some of the major positive changes that will be witnessed by the North-Eastern states if the industry of tourism is developed in their region with major focus on

the economic benefits that tourism entails along with an interdisciplinary approach of including social as well as environmental aspects.

### **2.1. Provision of Jobs**

Tourism industry generates thousands of jobs directly for the natives on lower as well as higher scale. Hotels, restaurants, tour guides etc. are the jobs that are created when tourism industry flourishes in any state. These jobs create employment for many native citizens and create a way of generating income for those who did not have many lucrative employment options before. These jobs will always be preferred, as the native citizens would not need to displace from their original homes or migrate to other parts of the nation. The income that is generated from this sector of new jobs that are created will help in improving the per capita income of the region, which will eventually contribute towards their development and the growth of the nation as a whole.

### **2.2. Upliftment of the Local Economy**

Inflow of cash from various sectors of the nation as well as the world will help immensely in increasing the state economy and these government funds can then be directed for further activities that need to be undertaken within the state. According to the reports published by the Planning Commission in 2012, the poverty rates in the North-Eastern regions has been increasing except Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh, this situation can also be fought with as increasing tourism will help in uplifting the local economy.

### **2.3. Diversification of Sources of Income**

People of the North-Eastern states do not have many sources of income. They depend on a few activities such as agriculture, small businesses etc. for their livelihood. Inflow of tourists will open up more options of earning for them and they will have choices of profession to choose from. This will also lead to security of income as now they can switch options to whichever is favourable for them.

### **2.4. Better Infrastructure**

Roads, institutions and such other infrastructure will be developed when tourists will come to stay in North-Eastern Indian states. Government funds will be directed towards making government buildings and other options that will provide people of these states as well as the tourists with cheaper options as compared to the minimal options that are present there as of now. This

infrastructure will make lives easier and many facilities to be accessible and thus people will be able to work in a convenient manner and create more income for themselves resulting in the overall growth of the state economy.

### **2.5. Social Upliftment**

The influx of tourists will also lead to social upliftment in a way that when the local population will realise that their surroundings are such a brilliant attraction for thousands of people from various parts of the world, it will generate a sense of pride and belonging in them. This social upliftment will lead them to innovate more jobs for North-Eastern India and invest their money for the development of the region.

### **2.6. Environmental Advantages**

New technology and better tools of sustainable development will be introduced by the people who visit these regions. Environmental advantages mainly consist of the new technology and schemes of sustainable development that will be brought about by the tourist population and also the central as well as the state government for the sake of preserving the environment. When national agencies and people of the state will realise that the serene environment of the North-Eastern states are attracting tourists and generating employment for them, they will take more care of the environment and keep the surroundings clean.

### **2.7. Promotion to a Global Scale**

Bringing in tourists will lead to the recognition of the wildlife beauty and greenery of this region on a global scale. Investors and industrialists from all parts of the world will pour into this region and thus taking it further ahead on the roads of urbanization and modernisation. The promotion of this state to a global scale will also make it easier for the native people of this region to gain recognition and get identified or project their talents on a bigger scale. There are many local cuisines and products that are made individually at homes by the people of the north east Indian states and the same can be promoted to a global scale where they will be welcomed in a huge market. This globalisation will clearly help them economically.

### **2.8. Better Connectivity**

Connectivity issues to the north east has been a major concern which can be easily solved if tourists show their interest in the region as a tourist destination. Airports

and roads will be built so that this place becomes easily accessible and people can commute to and fro conveniently. Better accessibility and connectivity will result in reducing the time that it takes for traveling and in turn will be helpful for businessmen and those who wish to export their products throughout the nation. The products that are naturally built and found in the North-Eastern Indian states will be readily available for exports and reach the vendors on time and similarly, imports of other goods which are required for the people of NEI will be provided to them quickly through the means of better connectivity.

### **2.9. Exchange of Ideas and Schemes**

When tourist inflows increases, diplomatic relations also starts shaping up and international institutions and agencies come up with innovative schemes for helping out channelling the resources in a better fashion. More centrally funded schemes will be launched with special attention on North-Eastern India and their upliftment that will result in efficiency of work and better opportunities for both jobs and entrepreneurship in the sector. International audience will bring in varied ideas and platforms to the region that will help in making the lives of the natives easier.

### **3. AVENUES OF TOURISM FOR NEI**

There are many potential factors, which can be explored so that the industry of tourism can flourish. Geographical beauty is not the only reason that can attract mass tourists to this region, there are many other avenues which remain unnoticed and there is a need of modern tools and equipments' to make these avenues accessible to people from all over the world so that these avenues can also generate economic returns for the people of North East India. These avenues have a wide range from the fields of sports to the small daily employment opportunities that will generate when these avenues will be commercialised. Following is a list of all the new and creative chances of employment and income generation that will come up in the North-Eastern region of India if the different avenues for tourism are explored.

#### **3.1. Better/ Quicker Air Travel**

Development of airports and availability of cheap flights at a higher frequency makes it easier for the tourists to visit places. There is availability of space that can be easily used for constructing airports in the North-Eastern region of India. These airports will not only provide employment to people of the region at various scales

from small jobs at the airports to regular large scale jobs of management of the airports but it will also make it easier for people to travel to the various destinations of North-Eastern India in a quicker fashion.

Reducing the time of travel will make this region a favourable spot of vacation for many and hence providing economical returns for the people of this region. The building of airports is one of the avenues which will increase tourism and has been neglected by the central and state government agencies which needs to be focused on.

#### **3.2. Geographical Attractions**

The geographical beauty of North-Eastern Indian region is definitely one of the biggest and most noticeable tourists avenues which needs to be popularised in the whole world. Places such as Nathu La Pass, Gorichen Peak, Nuranang falls, Cherrapunji and Jaintia Hills are some of the places in the North East India which are simply a treat to the eyes. Their beauty remains unexplored by most of the people in this world which makes it important for the government as well as the people in the North East to take help of the new media tools that are available and promote the significance of these places. Apart from these, North East is home to almost 70 percent of the world's orchids. There are about 1700 species of orchids found in India, of which 800 are found in the northeastern states. This will attract more and more tourists to the above said places amongst many others and thus strengthening the economy and giving it a boost.

#### **3.3. Internet booking/ advertising**

Internet availability and access to book tickets as well as to know the events that are popular in the region is necessary. Making internet readily available to the people of the North-Eastern region will also ensure that they are able to showcase their local products and talents at a global scale which will expand their markets and give many other reasons for tourists to visit the North-Eastern region. Hence, improving the Internet services and facilities will become one of the major reasons that will attract more and more tourists to this destination.

#### **3.4. More unusual tourist destinations and attractions**

For every place, there are certain tourist attractions that are unique and act as an identity for that place. Their

uniqueness and charm becomes one of the most important reasons why the tourists plan to come back again and again. North-Eastern states of India offer many of such places to go to and thus the unique and unusual attraction of this place becomes another tourist avenue which needs to be explored. Adventure sports such as river rafting and trekking become an unforgettable experience when it is enjoyed in the beautiful hills, rivers and valleys of the North-Eastern state. The rich wildlife species that are endangered and can be witnessed here are the Indian rhinoceros, Assam roofed turtle amongst many more. The specialities of Assam that are unique in its essence and are potential tourist avenues which needs to be explored are the variety of products that they offer. It is only in Assam that three important types of indigenous silks are produced – white Pat, golden Muga and warm Eri silk, all of them are distinctly beautiful and cannot be compared to the other popular forms of silk that are available in the country. Assam in the north east India is also the state which is the largest producer of tea and has vast expanses of tea plantations that act as tourist attractions.

### **3.5. Business Opportunities**

Due to the wide range of products that the North-Eastern states of India has on offer, there are many opportunities for tourists to visit the area regarding business opening and opportunities. The passage of import and export can be improvised and made better in order to attract more tourists to the area which will not only give them a chance to do their own business but also create various opportunities of unique professions for the natives. This will also help in popularising the native culture of the north east and taking it to much larger global scale where it will get a world audience to appreciate it and hence, making it easier to turn it into economical gains or daily income options. Culture preservation will be done in this way as well.

### **3.6. Religious Visits**

Religion and the holy places such as temples and monasteries feature a very attractive avenue for the tourists as they provide an interesting insight to the ethnic and cultural fabric of the region. Some of the major pilgrimage attractions in the North-Eastern region of India are 'Kamakhya Devi Temple', which is situated on top of the Nilanchal Hill in Guwahati, Assam. Guwahati also hides in its beautiful region, another well-known temple – the 'Bhuvaneswari Temple', another

mythologically significant place is situated on the banks of the Lohit River of Arunachal Pradesh called the 'Parsuram Kund' which is a famous pilgrimage site of the North-Eastern region. The very famous 'Tawang Monastery', one of the most important Buddhist monasteries in India which was established in 1965 can also be found in the North-Eastern Indian region only. The 'Bomdila Monastery', which is located in west Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, is yet another significant site of Buddhism pilgrimage in North East India. Promoting the above-mentioned sites will draw attention of a lot of tourists from India and abroad.

### **3.7. Educational Opportunities**

Schools and colleges that offer scholarships and opportunities for on-field research must promote the same and that will attract foreign students and their families to visit this area. Mizoram and Meghalaya are states of the nation that rank one of the highest in the literacy rates with Tripura at 94.65% literacy. Short visits and student exchange programs will spread information about the daily life activities of the people of the north east around the world. Such short visits by teachers from around the world will also prove beneficial for other states in the North-Eastern region such as Arunachal Pradesh which is struggling with its literacy rate falling to as low as 66.95 %. Thus, improving the educational opportunities will create more avenues for attracting tourists. There is a special program that runs in the Jawaharlal Nehru University which focuses on the North East India Studies.

### **3.8. Historical and Cultural Significance**

The history of a certain place attracts many tourists who are history enthusiasts. Sibsagar in Assam holds an important place historically as it has ruins of many forts and things that belonged to people from the Ahom dynasty. Agartala is another place which can act as an important attraction to many tourists due to the lineage of Manikya kings that can be traced back to that place. The royal culture and its lifestyle remains a major tourist attraction which needs to be promoted and taken care of in the northeastern region so that more and more people get to know about it. Assam also creates history when it comes to warfare as it is proud to be home to the largest and oldest paramilitary force of India called the Assam rifles. Cultural significance such as the folk dance and songs along with the food of North-Eastern states will draw more and more people towards it.

Improving the above mentioned factors regarding North-Eastern States of India will drastically improve their tourism rate and act as separate reasons for many tourists to visit the area. Government schemes and funding is required to be invested in these areas which will bring huge amounts of returns in the future in the form of income generated due to increased tourist attraction.

#### **4. PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES WHILE INCREASING TOURISM**

There are many reasons why tourism, as an industry, has not been able to prosper in the North-Eastern region. Tourism industry entails many benefits but it also has certain negative outcomes which need to be taken care of and the procedures that are undertaken while developing tourism industry should focus on minimising or completely eliminating these negative outcomes. Natives of North East India are reluctant about developing the Tourism Industry due to the following negative aspects that it may bring along itself.

##### **4.1.1 Loss of Language and Culture**

Tourism and migration of people from other countries or state to the North-Eastern India may result in constant interference in the language and culture of the North-Eastern region. The tendency of copying trends from the population of tourists that will burst out in this region will lead to a loss of its original culture. For example, the local industry of producing silk might be badly affected if new elements (such as machine made cheaper fabric) are introduced in the markets by foreign population.

##### **4.1.2. Exploitation of Natural Wildlife**

Incidents of poaching and illegal hunting may increase drastically if the foreign populations realise the importance of the wildlife products. Many rare and endangered species are still living safely and found in good numbers in the North-Eastern India, however, this situation might change for the worse if people from different parts of the world realise the importance of the skins, tusks and other parts of these animals and visit North-Eastern India with an intention of exploiting the natural wildlife with an aim of gaining selfish economic interests.

##### **4.1.3. Exploitation of Natural Vegetation**

For the purpose of gaining tourism, many trees are being cut off to make roads and hotels for accommodating the tourists, this disturbs the natural ecological balance of

the place thus leading to exploitation of the natural resources. This completely defeats the beauty of this region because not the original beauty of nature is being compromised here but this also deprives the native people from their clean lands. Industries set up by foreign nationals employ labour at cheap rates and exploit the natural vegetation of the area without being concerned of the harmful impact that it will bring as its consequences.

##### **4.1.4. Environmental Damage**

Cutting of trees and cutting through rocks and hills for making roads or laying railway tracks for the purpose of tourism brings a lot of environmental change and damage with itself. Tourists are generally unconcerned regarding the cleanliness of the place and damage the environment by throwing off their personal garbage out in the open. Swachhta (cleanliness) survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) named Sikkim as the cleanest state in India and this has been possible because the original inhabitants of this place were very careful about the maintenance and cleaning of the area. This will be disturbed by an onset of tourists who are there for a temporary stay and behave irresponsibly by not taking care of the environment.

##### **4.1.5. Social changes in the life of people**

People are displaced and forced to shift their houses whenever governments undertake any development programs in an area. This will disturb the routine lives of the people of the North-Eastern states of India as they will be the one who will be dealing with all these changes and will be forced to adapt to it. There is also no guarantee of employment because many big industries and hoteliers can encash on the opportunity provided by the increased tourism by setting up hotel chains and industries. This will take away the comfort of their routine lives from the native people without even giving them the reasons to change.

The above-mentioned fears are becoming a strong reason why people from the North-Eastern region are reluctant about developing the tourism industry. However, many of these fears are baseless and can be eliminated by creating awareness and by introducing well thought out and planned schemes by the help of centre and state government. Through the means of this paper, the following solutions are proposed to deal with the problems and still reap only benefits from the

tourism industry and its development in the North-Eastern region. The proposed solutions are as follows-

#### **4.2.1. Strict rules and regulations**

A system of strict norms and policies must be introduced in the region wherein those who intend to harm the wildlife and natural vegetation of the area for personal gains will be punished severely. Control and strict patrolling of those who are involved in poaching and hunting must be done along with adhering to the norms of the green tribunal which sets up rules and regulations regarding safeguarding the environment.

#### **4.2.2. Well planned infrastructure schemes**

Due to the new modern machinery and innovation in the sector of architecture which has been done in the last few years, it is possible for us to create building and roads and lay railway tracks without disturbing the general population which lives there. Hence, people should be made aware that they would not need to make major changes in their routine lives for accommodating the new infrastructure that will be built. Moreover, if people are to be necessarily evacuated, then advance notice will be given to all so that they can prepare themselves and the requirement of new temporary shelters must be fulfilled by the government itself, this will reduce the burden and stress of people and create trust and reliability in the plans of the government along with making it easier for them to welcome more tourists.

#### **4.2.3. Awareness Programs**

There is an urgent need of devising effective awareness programs for tourists that will ensure that the tourists visit any place with a sense of responsibility. Tourists must be made aware and careful of the fact that they are responsible for keeping their surroundings neat and clean and must not involve themselves in any rowdy or unruly behaviour. Compliance with the local laws is essential and is for the purpose of their benefit. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasising specially on the need of cleanliness with his Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the upkeep and maintenance of the cleanliness of these states is an important issue. Adhering to the local laws is a must for the tourists and that must be made clear by penalising those who not follow the rules or break the general code of conduct.

## **5. NATIONAL BENEFITS FROM THE NORTH-EASTERN STATES TOURISM**

North-eastern states of India have been struggling lately to be identified as a part of the nation and their region remains ignored by rest of the nation. The natives of the North-Eastern region remain unaware of the maximum number of policies that are applicable in the country and its benefits. This is due to the communication and distance gap that exists between these states and the rest of the country. However, this whole situation can take a complete turn towards a better and harmonious position if we explore the tourism potential of North-Eastern region of India. Not only will this be diplomatically beneficial for us, it would also be a great step towards a number of measures that we need to take in order to create a feeling of inclusivity in the hearts of the people of north east. The various benefits that have been highlighted in the above sections of this paper make it crystal clear that tourism has a lot of monetary benefits for the region of north east and thus it becomes obvious that if this region benefits and grows economically, our whole country will be in a better position. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) which was published in 2016, India's Travel & Tourism sector rests at 7th in the world in terms of its total contribution to the country's GDP and these GDP growth rates will improve significantly through the economical contributions from these states through various sectors. More employment will be created which will result in better performance in the aspect of per capita income and reducing the poverty rates of the North-Eastern region as this has been clearly supported by the latest statistics that say that the Travel and Tourism sector supported 40.3 million jobs in 2016, which brings India to 2nd in the world in when it comes to total employment supported by Travel & Tourism. The sector accounts for 9.3% of the country's total jobs as published in the same 2016 report by the World Travel and Tourism Council. A continuous channel of exchanging ideas, information, culture, food and people between the rest of the nation and the North-Eastern region will take birth. This is an excellent exercise in reviving the relations between the different states of India and creating a nation that is built on strong interpersonal ties.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The North-Eastern states of India have immense beauty and are rich in flora and fauna but it is saddening to see that people of our nation and the whole world are ignorant of this and are depriving themselves from witnessing the grandeur of this region. Tourism is one such industry that holds the power to explore this region in all respects and make it possible for the people who stay there or those who are connected to them to live easier and better lives. An intelligent mixture of technology, modernization, planning and execution is required to showcase the North-Eastern region and its real beauty to the world. A successful attempt towards developing the tourism industry will obviously give away major economic benefits but also expose the various benefits that are waiting for the people of North East India in the social, environmental and political aspects.

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