

Living a Day as a Member of Wahkhen Village: Finding a New Dimension of Tourism

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Abstract—This paper focuses on the uniqueness that the destination has and how to create a catalyst to pull the tourists to visit the place. The researcher adopted both primary and secondary sources. Interview, participative observation, and schedule of questions were used. The secondary sources include ranges of information from the internet, journals, write-up about the village etc. The research also identifies some of the key challenges and also the area that needs to create a nexus for marketing the destination. The researchers conclude that the Wahkhen can be one of the potential destinations if the key challenges are taken important.

Keywords: *Indigenous Culture, Community, Tourism, Natural environment, Uniqueness.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the act of travel mainly recreational or leisure purposes, and it also refers to the facility of services in support of this act[1]. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourists are people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited". When we talk about tourism we emphasis on the enchanting landscape, attractive streams, ethnic diversity, customers, festivals and also the facilities that a service provider is offered to the people who visited the place. The tourism industry is not just the world largest industry but it is also considered as the fastest economic driven industry [2].

This paper focuses on the distinctiveness and the new dimension of tourism that the destination possesses and how to convert them into a potential tourism product to attract tourists to visit the place. The village has huge tourism potential due to its geographic and cultural setting. Wahkhen is the only village in the state where the true and pure culture of the Khasi people can be found, and also the only village in the world where the people receding in the village they have their song instead of the name which are commonly followed universally. These things make the tourists who visit the place mesmerizing with these extraordinary works that the people in the region had to offer to the world. The trust areas for tapping the tourism

potential available in the region are: Cultural Heritage, Health Tourism, Adventure Tourism and Rural Tourism

The study is based on Wahkhen village in East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya. This village has so much to offer to tourist but till now this village remains untouched and unexplored. The paper will focus on the study of the indigenous lifestyle of the people of Wahkhen Village, and also the implication of tourism in the village and it's potential.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A well-planned tourism can be a positive factor in national development, which can be creating challenging employment and distributing wealth in various sectors of the economy. If the positive effects of tourism are planned and coordinated on a regional basis, the positive effects of tourism could be enhanced and boost the economy of the country[3]. The rural tourism policy in the state of Tamil Nadu, as pointed out by Rajasulochana state that most of the ongoing schemes, as well as proposed schemes, are concentrating only on religious sites thus reinforcing 'temple' tourism rather than rural tourism. Another form tourism activities remain untouched, such as sports and adventure tourism, eco-tourism, farm tourism and nature tourism were ignored. He suggests that Tamil Nadu should identified the importance of branding, packaging, promoting and positioning of its products from Kerala and Goa who has done a remarkable work in marketing tourism[4] the same format can also be applied in Meghalaya, where rural tourism activities can play a major role to boost tourism especially in the remote area. Bobby Simon and Sree kumar.N.V stress the need for ethics in tourism and its role in protecting the environment, cultural heritage, and tradition and value systems from the impact of factors related to tourism. Further, they have discussed the measures taken globally to implement ethics in tourism and also analyzed the direction of tourism planning in India to see how far the internationally accepted tourism ethics are followed in India [5].attempted to search the potential of traditional and recreational resources and future plan for the maximum benefits by exploring the possibilities of tourism in the Eastern Ghats of Ponnudi Hills, near Trivandrum. In his study, he found out that there is a

great scope for tribal tourism in Ponmudi as the region has a pleasant scenic beauty with attractive streams and landscape, rich in indigenous culture and festivals for the development of tourism. The study of eco-tourism in Kerala is having high potentialities for tapping the opportunities, minimizing the impact of weaknesses and in overcoming threats. Regarding the perception of eco-tourists, they visit for entertainment, the major source of information about the eco-tourism projects being tour operators [6]. Websites constitute the second major source. Majority of the eco-tourist centers were of causal nature, good visitor management and differences existing in the satisfaction level of eco-tourists in Kerala. Further major dissatisfies of the eco-tourists were inadequate promotion, facilities for education and research, the rate charged and facilities for communication [7].

The new concepts in tourism like alternative tourism, rural tourism, plantation tourism, spice tourism, mice tourism etc. Alternative tourism as a type of tourism activity, sustainable in nature, which allows the tourist to directly experience the host culture and environment and provides possibilities for controlled nature-based and small-scale industries. Rural tourism involves visiting rural environments for recreational experiences [8]. The literature on the origin, growth and development of and the demand for rural tourism as a specific sector of the overall tourism market. They have also analyzed the role and potential of tourism in socio-economic development and regeneration of rural areas to promote tourism industry of the developing countries by concentrating on rural heritage and culture [9].

It is very essential for promoting the tourism product through various form of marketing as tourism plays a major role in uplifting the economy of the state or country. The nature and dimension of marketing tourist product are different. To Market a destination or a place proper strategy need to identified, such as the perception, expectations, needs, attitudes, likes and dislikes of the tourists. It covers the use of multimedia in tourism marketing, main applications of interest in tourism marketing such as in marketing research, new advertising techniques in global marketing. In the present context event play a major role for improving the economy of the state, as happen in different part of the world that event tourism act as a catalyst to improve the tourism activities in the destination or country. And it also solve the problem of seasonality for any destination. [10].

ABOUT WAHKHEN VILLAGE.

Wahkhen Village is situated in the southern slope of the East Khasi Hill District of Meghalaya. This village is very rich on heritage, traditional culture and natural resources and also picturesque landscape provide ample scope to attract tourists. The Hills, valleys, the clear stream rivers, forests and biodiversity, are the prevailing wealth of the village. This wealth can be converted as the finest resource for the development of tourism in the region through proper destination and product planning. Trekking, mountaineering,

wildlife tourism, river rafting and other water sports, as well as peaceful retreats, can be promoted under such pristine natural environment. This would need a lot of improvement so that people can stay comfortably and go out for observing natural heritage and come back. Leisure and wellness tourism are important subject, which need to be developed in the region. The built resources such as the bamboo bridge, the living route bridge and living heritage (culture) of the region expressed through dance, crafts and some of the resources which have strong pull factor to attract tourist from different corners of the globe [personal conversation as on 13/4/2019].

At the state level there are some critical issue that the state suffering in term of tourism i.e., infrastructure, connectivity and human resources. INTACT pointed that the state of Meghalaya need a lot of improvement in term of infrastructure as the current infrastructure does not attract the tourist for spending their money be it in term of accommodation, entertainment, shopping etc. As poor infrastructure and low capacity also obstruct the travel agency and other stakeholders in tourism to promote tourism in the state [11]

However, the main issue in the state when it comes to tourism is lack of state Tourism Strategic Plan or Comprehensive Tourism Policy the one which we are having now also doesn't not able to serve the needs of the tourism activities in the state. For the Destination Development (facilities at the specific tourist sites) majority of them are able to construct through the help of different Grant Schemes of the Government of India and state government. The infrastructure that we are having now have not able to cater the high end budget tourists as the expectations are way beyond what is being offered to the tourists at present since they are at a very low quality and capacity to service. Even Connectivity is considering as the essential part of our daily life such as telecom and internet for generating information, communication and confirmations etc. The road is the backbone of Tourism industries. When we look to the present road condition in the state of Meghalaya, we saw that those area where there is scope for tourism the road connectivity to those areas are in bad shape and almost non-existent. However for Human resources, due to the presence of some institution which has been taken up the course of tourism in the state. Therefore the numbers of skilled human resources are stated to increase day by day. This can help in giving better and satisfaction services to the tourists. The present services offered to the tourists are not matched to what the other destination do, in order to attract tourists for income generation and also for the economy. Therefore, it is needed to improve the skill set of the service providers at the tourists' destinations and sites through training or any others programme, right from the road side tea stall, fruit vendor or a handicraft seller. This will support the host communities to impulse the tourists to spend as well as enrich the tourist's experience [personal conversation as on 13/4/2019].

Due to the existing of four-lane in the state. The government along with the state tourism Department had encouraged the

people to start their own businesses such as eating outlet and others amenities along the route. Through this, it can create income to the family and also services to the tourists or travelers who pass through the route.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research methodology adopted in this paper is through a standard procedure of research. The study is both qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. Qualitative methods are used for acquiring knowledge about the inimitable way of life of the peoples in the village. In order to get the data for this study, interview and participative observation was used. Interview was carried in order to know the historical background of the village, and also their distinct and unique lifestyle compare to what the other tribe living in the North East Region. This is don't after the researcher get the permission from the block development officer as well as from the headman of the villages and he provides the chance to stay and experience in the destination along with the local people for nearly 3 weeks. During the stay, the researcher got a chance to meet the tourists as well as organizer of the festival since this is the time for the festival in the village.

The quantitative method was used in order to get the view of the tourists about the destination and the feasibility for enhancing the tourism activities in the village. The data is collected through schedule of questions.

DATA COLLECTION

Data is the basic input to any decision it making process in the research. To get an appropriate statistic for the research, data are very important to be it secondary or primary data. Therefore the researcher had collected data through both secondary and primary sources. Primary Data was collected from different tourists as well as from the village headman and people in the village through observation, interaction and interview and schedule of question. Primary data is the real-time data collected for the topic. Secondary data was collected from various published books, journals, official websites of Tourism Ministry, other websites and expert's literature.

DATA COLLECTED

The primary data analysis is one of the research methods which are used to get the appropriate output from the respondents The demography details have also been collected to study the gender and age of the tourists in village and its persuasion towards tourism industry. The collected data has been properly analyzed with the help of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). However, percentage analysis has been conducted in order to understand the group opinion over the place. The respondents were classified under specific groups to get the perception of the tourist in various points of view. The demographic features were described below with proper descriptions. The respondents view may change according to the groups like as they may have similar opinion. In most of the cases primary data collections would be more

essential to understand the in-depth truth that too from the correct set of respondents.

Table 1

Demographic		Frequency	%
Genders	male	142	56.8
	female	108	43.2
	Total	250	100.0
Age group	Below 18 years	87	34.8
	19-30 years	67	26.8
	31- 40 years	27	10.8
	41 - 50 years	32	12.8
	50 YEARS ABOVE	37	14.8
	Total	250	100.0
Qualification	under matric	2	.8
	10 +2	42	16.8
	under graduate	143	57.2
	post graduate	41	16.4
	PhD above	22	8.8
	Total	250	100.0

Sources : Questionnaire

According to the table: 1, the researcher project the demographic data extracting from the field. In the table the researcher show both in term of frequency and also in percentage, where the total numbers of sample size are 250, where 56.8%of them are male and the rest 43.8% are female. From the table most of the tourists travel to Wahkhen are in the age group of below 18 and also 19-30, this is due to the present of adventure activities in the study area when it comes to qualification most of them are under graduates.

Table 2 Evaluation the aspect

Please evaluate the different aspects of our area		Frequency	Percent
Feeling of safety	Very poor	0	0
	Poor	0	0
	average	22	8.8
	good	212	84.8
	very good	16	6.4
	Total	250	100.0
Adventure	Very poor	0	0
	Poor	0	0
	Average	0	0
	good	93	37.2
	very good	157	62.8
	Total	250	100.0
Accommodation	Very Poor	0	0
	Poor	60	24.0
	average	180	72.0
	good	10	4.0
	Very Good	0	0
	Total	250	100.0
Value for money	Very poor	0	0
	Poor	0	0
	average	16	6.4

	good	140	56.0
	very good	94	37.6
	Total	250	100.0
Tourist information	Very poor	0	0
	Poor	0	0
	average	114	45.6
	good	130	52.0
	very good	6	2.4
	Total	250	100.0
Nature	Very poor	0	0
	Poor	0	0
	average	13	1.6
	good	173	69.2
	very good	64	25.6
	Total	250	100.0
Hospitality	Very poor	0	0
	Poor	0	0
	average	29	11.6
	good	209	83.6
	very good	12	4.8
	Total	250	100.0

Sources: Questionnaire

As shown in the table 2 that most of the tourist visiting Wakhken village they are feeling very safe, this is because the local community present in the village are very helpful and hospitable towards the tourists, this also show the welcoming attitude of the host community toward the tourism activities. Adventure is an activities where most of the youth would love to experience it. Wakhken is a very which is suited for the adventure because of the topography present in the area which attract the adventurous people to visit the village. As stated in the table around 62.8% of the tourists were very happy visiting and experiencing the activities in the destination. Accommodation is one of the key issue in the village, because there is no hotel or guest house present in the village, people who want to this village they have to stay in Shillong the state capital. However, there are some houses who welcoming the tourists to stay in their home, but the problem was that these houses cannot be able to accommodate more than 2 tourists, and above all they are not able to provide the services as expected by the tourists who stay in their homes. When it comes to the value of money that they spent in the village, most of the tourists state that they are willing happy to pay for the services provided by the local community such as tour guide, adventure activities, teaching them handicraft and making of Khasi Music instrument

FINDINGS:

Wakhken village is lying in the cradle of lush green hills of the Khasi Hills. This village has a unique feature which is very distinct from other in terms of lifestyle and their day to day activities. Wakhken is considered as the only village that still preserves the true identity of the Khasis be it in ritual and other forms. One of the uniqueness that this village has and which are occurring and preserve till today is the song in which they sang for calling out names. In Wakhken each and

every person resided in the village has its own song as an identity instead of name. Through interaction and observation, the research came to know that these songs are of two type the first hum come from the mother just one week after giving birth of her own child so she makes a song for her beloved child. This song shows the love to their child's by singing a song for their own kids. Basically, the song is making by the mother to lull their child but later the song became their identity. This first song is also known as "jingrwai iawbei" or a song of the primitive ancestress of a clan meaning song making by their own mother. The second type is the song of youth where their children after they have grown up they make their own song. Apart from the song of identity the person living or residing in this village they also have different type of song like "ka rwai ia siat khnam" a song for shooting bow and arrow, "ka rwai phawar shad dngiem" a song of Proverb for hunting bear it is one of their festival, "ka Phawar ngohkrai" a song of proverb for beating millets this is one of the agricultural product they produce, "lehnam thangiap ha ka kur" a song of ritual for funeral of burning the dead body and other.

The village has also their own industry for making the khasi drum and it is considered as one of the best drum making industry in the state. Like other villages in the region this village also has its own dance festival it is known as the Shad Raid Wakhken. This festival occurs during the month of April and May after they had finish selling all the broom, and other agricultural good they have been cultivated into the market, this festival is for 3-day long festival. The dance festival was to pay homage to God for all the good things happening throughout the year by taking care of the village and the Raid from external influences. The festival and dance play an important role in the social life of the people besides providing entertainments and social festivities to them. They also act as the integrating force for the raid as a whole. This festival is connected with agriculture and cultivation rites of the people. It is during the observation of the festival that the people propitiate God their creator for his blessing and kindness throughout the year, so that they will have a prosperous harvest, good health, general prosperity and that they could live happily throughout the year being free from disease and evil spirit.

Apart from the song the village has also the folk song and folk dance like the 'Lumpaid', 'KsingLynti', 'Skit Tem Sur', 'Shad Mastieh', 'Shad Skain' and 'Shad Kyrdem were the major attractions, 'Tied Kdor', 'PynshadDngiem', 'PhawarIaSiatKhnam' and 'PynshadKhun' ka shad tyngkoh, ka shad kyntuidsleit, ka shad kiewiing, ka shad rongkhli / tiger dance, ka shad shajer, ka shad kyllamastieh, ka shad mastieh, ka shad kyrdem/ ka shad Mawja, ka shad ngohkrai, ka shad skain/ flies dance.

One of the major drawback face by the tourism in the village is because they don't have any guest house or hotel, restaurant, etc. In short, though they have many things to offers to the

tourists there are no basic amenities for the tourists. If the people want to visit the village they have to stay from Shillong which is 39 km that is 1:30-2:00 hours' drive by road. The other way for reaching the village is through trekking they have to take a Shillong Tamabil Road and step down in Rngain village which is just 34 km from Shillong and from the village you have to walk half hour to reach the village this is the only way to reach the village. Trekking to the village you get a chance to enjoy the scenic beauty of Bangladesh and the thick forest of the Rngain village where you will get a chance to see a lot of animals like the wild boar, the monkey, the deer, the snake, and the different type of migration birds.

This village is being blessed with natural beauty in its. Just behind the village, there is a clear stream river known as wah Mru, which flow throughout the year and this river is the source for drinking water and irrigation in the village of Wahkhen and also the nearby village. The water in the river is so clear that you can clearly see the bottom of the river. This river flows through the foothill of the Khasi hills till it reaches Dawki joining with Wah Umngot, Wah Umiew and many other till it reaches Bangladesh. Just next to the river there is a beautiful Rock. The local people called it Mawryngkhang. This rock has its own history. Which is considered as the legend for the present generation.

In the southern slope of the East Khasi Hills, Living Roots Bridge is very popular. People in the area told me there are around 400 plus living roots bridge in the region. Since, as we all know that this side of the state is receiving the highest rainfall in the world. So, the ancestor of the people residing in this region of the state found out that by planting or making living roots bridge is the only option for them to cross the river especially in the monsoon season where the river is becoming wild and unpredictable. However, they need to cross the river to go to the market and also to their field for cultivation. In Wahkhen village also the ancestors are making the living roots bridge for travelling from one place to another. In the outskirts of the village to the eastern part, there is one living roots bridge where you have to trek around half an hour to reach the spot. , this living route bridge, unlike the other routes bridge where tourist come and see it. This living route bridge is total away from the residential place of the village and it is also situated in a dense forest and lot of wild animal. The bridge connects the two villages the Wahkhen and the NongBlai village. In the Nangblai Village alone there are 16 Living roots bridge.

The culture of the Khasi is very unique and rare in the world, firstly the follow the matrilineal system and apart from that the Khasi tribe whenever they settle in any part of the state, the clans who come first into that place for permanent stay in that place, they have to put a monolith at the centre of the place and consider it as a sacred place for ritual. Which act as a symbol of ownership and idol where they can pray to God for protecting the village from any evil. This village also adopts the same method like every Khasi did. At the center of

Wahkhen village also there is a sacred grove and in the center of the sacred grove there is a monolith, monolith or a memorial stone where the lyngdoh or the priest from the clan in the village uses to perform the ritual to protect the village from any evil or a pestilence or a plague this place is considered as the religious place of the village where the village is not allowed anyone to enter this place with shoe or chapal but they have to remove it before entering the forest. And they also not allowed and camera or killing any animal or plucking and tree or flower from the forest.

lastly the village is the center for Khasi music where each and every person in the village known how to place the instrument of the Khasi like the Tangmuri, Bisley, Ksing Kynthei, Mieng, ka Padiah Ka bom and many others. As the ancestor of the village saw the threat of the strong influence of the Western Culture in the State. Therefore the Village started an institution that each and every person living in the village they should know to play all type of instrument that the ancestor used to place. This show a positive step by the village for preserving their own culture.

SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

As the researcher has stated earlier, one possibility for reaching the village is through trek from the beautiful mountain of the Khasi. Though the village already promoted trekking in the village. However, installing of few more adventure activities in the village like the rock climbing, gliding and other adventures activities is best suited for the village. Trekking in the village and outskirts of the village is very much adventures because of the topography of the place. Since the place is full of obstacles and not so easy to walk for an old aged person. Rock climbing since this village is situated in the valley of the beautiful hills and there are so many small mountains that can be used as rock climbing. Apart from rock climbing gliding also is suited for the place and other such as fishing and farm tourism.

Lodging and food are considered as the basic need of any tourists in the tourism industry. And it is also one of the areas where people can sustain their livelihood especially in areas where rural areas where farming is the only backbone to sustain their livelihood. However, the people of this village tried their level best to cater to the needs of the tourists in term of providing accommodation and food to the tourists who visited the village. According to the interaction with the tourists, they pointed that accommodation are provided on request in the houses of the local community, where basic amenities are able to provide. However he said this village is overwhelming with picturesque landscape and culture, so he would not mind to take along his wife to this village if there is accommodation such as guesthouse and restaurant. Though people in the village are very interactive and helpful, they treated us very kindly but one sad thing is that there is no guest house but if you want to stay you have to request the local people. The other things are the amenities like the Restaurant, the ATM Machine or any office that would help the tourist to get information about the village.

In the village their so many people who know the technique of using herbal plants and making of traditional medicine. This could be one of the opportunities that could attract tourists to the village by a starting an Ayurveda centre or guest house for treatment of those people or tourist who want Ayurveda treatment like what we saw in Kerala. This can be done through better promotion and branding. So that people can know about this place. And also by providing proper training to the local people for proving good services to the visitors. Since the benefits will be to the local people because through this they can earn income. The people who know about this Ayurveda treatment use to go to the place where the customer calls them. So instead of going to the place of the customer they provide the service to the customer and visitors in their own village.

Almost every year the state Tourism Department in collaboration with the North Eastern Hills University (NEHU) or the Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) or the Sangeet Natak Academy use to organize the cultural event in the village. Therefore the suggestion is to use these opportunities as a tool for promoting this village as a tourist's destination to attract a large number of tourist through this kind of programme because such program till today is hardly telecast or documented. As promotion is not being done therefore no one came except the guest and the organizer are from outside but the person who attends are all local.

Earlier, the research have stated that the village are producing the best drum instrument in the Khasi Hills. Therefore, what if the person who is behind the making of this type of instrument in the village can also teach the tourist who wants to learn the making of such an instrument. Since Khasi Musical instrument is sold only in Meghalaya and the business is not that big therefore through this method of teaching the tourists they can earn side income and impart knowledge also to the tourists who visited the village. And the instrument making by the tourists can be kept as the footprint or souvenir for the tourist who visits the village.

Tourism potential is something in which each and every destination has a uniqueness. But the problem lies on how to identify the potential like in the case of Wakhken tough it is in the Corner of the state but their uniqueness which we can say as their attraction able to pull the tourist from all over the world to visit the place. But the only thing which is needed is the proper promotion and advertising.

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