



## ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ASSAM

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### Introduction

Tourism is a temporary movement of people for recreation, leisure, acquisition of knowledge and sometimes for a business purpose from the places where they normally live and work to outside. Tourism as an industry is the largest in terms of revenue generation as well as an employer in the world.

In the field of tourism activities there has been a lot of debate to the limit of ecotourism where biodiversity preservation, local socio-economic benefits, and environmental impact can be considered as a basic norm. For this reason, environmentalists, special interest groups and governments define ecotourism differently. Environmental organizations have generally instated that ecotourism is nature based, sustainably managed, conservation supporting, and environmentally educated. The tourist industry and governments, however, focus more on the product aspect, treating ecotourism as equivalent to any sort of tourism based in nature. As in advance difficult situation, many terms are used under the umbrella of ecotourism as nature tourism, low impact tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, ecologically tourism, although they are not necessarily synonymous with ecotourism.

### Objectives

- \*To analyze the concept of ecotourism.
- \*To explain the sources and sites of eco-tourism in Assam.
- \*To discuss the problems associated with eco-tourism industry in Assam.

### Methodology

The study is based on descriptive and explanatory way. Assam has a bright future in the field of ecotourism and which we can try to highlight on the basis of secondary data collected from the various research journals, articles, books, newspaper etc.

### Concept of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a form of tourism which means responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the wellbeing of the local people. It typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists an insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a great appreciation of our natural habits. According to some critics, true ecotourism must, above all, sensitize people to the beauty and the fragility of nature. They condemn some operations, who using the label of green and eco-friendly, but behaving in environmentally irresponsible ways. Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. For many countries, ecotourism is not simply a marginal activity to finance the protection of the national economy. It also supports human rights and various democratic movements related to ecosystem, local culture etc.

Ecotourism is the latest trend among tourism industry in India today. Although ecotourism accounts for a merely 2-4% of the entire tourism industry, it is the fastest growing sector. More and more people are willing to extra for tours that are eco-friendly. But being a responsible tourist and generate tourism in a sustainable manner is a difficult task especially in Assam where local people are not much aware about the concept-sustainability, conservation, and other commercial aspects of tourism.

Generally, responsible ecotourism programs include those that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities. For these reasons, ecotourism often appeals to advocates of environmental and social responsibility.

For the development of ecotourism natural resource management can be utilized as a specialized tool. There are several places throughout the world where a number of natural resources are abundant. But with human encroachment and habits, these resources are depleting. Without the sustainable use of certain resources, they are destroyed, and flora and fauna species are becoming

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extinct. Ecotourism programs can be introduced for the conservation of these resources. Several plans and proper management programs can be introduced so that these resources remain untouched. Several organizations, NGOs, and scientists are working on the field.

### **Ecotourism in Assam:**

Assam-gateway to the North-East India is a hotspot for tourists due to its natural beauty and favourable climate. It is a regional where nature herself has painted the vibrant landscape, hillocks, brooks and streams, flora and fauna and above all the affectionate people. Crafted with much special care, the state of Assam in India cast a spell on the travelers exploring the treasures of pleasure. It is a legendary state in terms of traditions and civilization. This state is surrounded by Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. Assam also shares its border with Bhutan and Bangladesh. The state is spread across an area of 78,438 sq km which represents 2.39% of the Indian landmass. (Economic Survey, Assam, 2010-11) the whole state is divided into two distinct natural regions, the plain and hills. The plain region comprises of the Brahmaputra and Barak valley. The hill region consists of two hills namely the Karbi-Anglong and the North Cacher hills. The state is allied to India by a narrow strip in West Bangle called the Siliguri corridor or the Chicken Neck of India. Thus, Assam is in isolation from the rest of the country. Yet she is famous for her unique psychological beauty with flora and fauna, historical monuments, pilgrim centres, tea gardens and her colourful cultural festivals which are considered as her tourism resources. Assam is rich in natural resources. About 35% of the state is covered with forest.

Due to unique presence of its wildlife (flora and fauna) and climate condition, Assam has a very good scope of ecotourism. The national park, birds and wildlife sanctuaries of Assam are good example of wildlife tourism. About 180 species of mammals, 195 species of reptiles and more than 800 species of birds are found here which are significant in any other states of India. One horn Rhino is the major wildlife species of Assam. Along other species which inhabits in Assam are pigmy hog, elephant, wild buffalo and tiger. Besides these, various kinds of ornamental fishes, rare medicinal plants, various type of herbs and orchids are found in Assam.

Assam has 5 National Parks, several wildlife sanctuaries, Reserve Forests and Birds Sanctuaries etc to attract tourist. The major eco-tourism prospects of Assam and their specialty can be introduced with the help of following table.

**Table no. 1: List of National Park and Specialty.**

Name	Area (sq. km)	District	Speciality
Dibru-Saikhowa	340	Dibrugarh and Tinsukia	Feral Horse, Wood Duck, Elephant.
Manas	500	Chirang, Kokrajhar, Udaguri, Darrang And Baksa	Golden Langur, Pigmy Hog, Elephant, Tiger etc.
Kaziranga	858.98	Golaghat, Nagaon, Sonitpur, and Karbi-Anglong	One Horned Rhino, Swamp Deer, Elephant, Tiger etc.
Orang	78.81	Darrang and Sonitpur	Rhino, Elephant, Leopard, Deer etc.
Nameri	200	Sonitpur	Wood Duck, Hornbill Lagur Capped
Raimona	422	Kokrajhar	Rhino, Hog Deer, Sambar, Elephant etc.

**Table no. 2: List of Wildlife Sanctuaries and Specialty.**

Name	Area (in Sq. km)	District	Specialty
Pobitora	38.80	Morigaon	One horned Rhino, Tiger, Leopard.
Pabho	49	Lakhimpur	Wild Water Buffalo.
Laokhowa	70.13	Nagaon	Wild Buffalo, Swamp Deer, Cormorant, Rhino.
Bherjan-Borjan Podumoni	7.22	Tinsukia	Hoolock Gibbon, Pigtailed Macaque, stump-Tailed

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			Macaque.
Chakrashila	45.56	Dhubri and Kokrajhar	Golden Langur and Aquatic Birds.
Sonai-Rupai	220.00	Sonitpur	Tiger, Elephant, Hornbill.
Garampani	6.05	Golaghat	Elephant, Hoolock Gibbon And Birds.
Nambar	325.25	Karbi-Anglong	Elephant and Hoolock Gibbon
Burha sapori	44.06	Sonitpur	Water Buffalo, Aquatic Bird, Bengal Florican, Rhino.
Barnadi	26.22	Udalguri	Pigmy Hog, Elephant, Hornbill, Hispid Hare.
Gibbon	20.98	Jorhat	Hoolock Gibbon, Birds.
Amcheng	78.64	Kamrup	Vulture, Python, Cobra, Butterflies.
Borail	326.26	Cachar	Himalayan Black Deer, Horn Bill, Clouded Leopard.
Morat logri	451	Karbi-Anglong	Wild Pig, Woodland Birds, Rock Python.

Sources: Statistical Handbook of Assam 2014-15.

Table no. 3: List of Birds Sanctuaries and Specialty.

Name	Area (in sq. km)	District	Specialty
Pani-Dehing	33.93	Sivasagar	Aquatic birds, Migratory birds
Deepar beel (only Ram-Sar site in Assam)	4.14	Kamrup	Aquatic and Migratory birds
Bordoibam- Billmukh	11.25	Dhemaji and Lakhimpur	Aquatic and Migratory birds

Sources: statistical Handbook of Assam 2014-15.

Besides these are several places where natural beauty is tremendously available and there is a huge potentiality for the development of ecotourism industry. In this regard we can highlight the following places as a prospect of ecotourism.

Table no. 4: List of Places Where Eco-Tourism Industry Can Develop.

Name	district	Specialty
Bhalukpong	Sonitpur	Evergreen forest, mystic blue hills and Bank of river Jia bhoroli (Recently Introduces river adventure).
Chandubi	Nogaon	Chandubi lake, tea garden, deep forest.
Haflong	NC Hills	Haflong lake, hill station.
Jatinga	NC Hills	Famous Birds Mystery (suicide zone of Migratory birds).
Majuli	Jorhat	Rare migratory birds like Pelican, Water Sports, World's biggest river island.
Digboi	Tinsukia	Garden City.
Sasoni Merbil	Dibrugarh	Biggest lake in Assam.
Koyakuji	Bongaigaon	Koyakuji lake.
Diphu	Karbi-Anglong	Botanical garden, Boating.
Umransu	NC Hills	Hills and greenery view.



Joypur	Dibrugarh and Tinsukia	Rain Forest.
Gerukamukh	Dhemaji	Hills and Scenic beauty of river Subansiri.
Pancharatna	Goalpara	Reserved Forest.
Maibong	NC Hills	Hill Station.
Panimoor	NC Hills	Thrilling waterfall of Kopili river.
Rani	Kamrup(Metro)	Reserved rain forest, hilly terrain.
Haju	Kamrup (Rural)	Vast wetland area can enjoy fishing. The Hills and forest have wide scopes of Development eco-friendly adventure Sports like trekking, mountaineering, Rock climbing etc.
Bhairabkunda	Udalguri	Plenty of scopes for trekking, canoeing and angling along the Jia Dhansiri.

These are some places which can be recognized for ecotourism spots. In spite of these, some more places are yet to be discovered from tourist perspective. It is obvious that the state has a bright future in respect to the tourism industry as a whole and the ecotourism segment in particular. Most the places of the state are attractive to tourists-be it for natural beauty or wildlife, religious or cultural reasons, history or archaeological studies and so on. In fact, the large biodiversity, rolling hills, green valleys, virgin forests, the mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries, numerous beels and other wetland etc-all can make the state a major centre for ecotourism. The tea garden of Assam has also a large potentiality to generate ecotourism. The tea garden of Assam is a huge reservoir of natural beauty and biodiversity.

#### Problems of Ecotourism in Assam:

According to the definition of International Ecotourism Society-Ecotourism industry may develop with the concept of conserving the environment and improves the welfare of local people. But most of recent studies show that ecotourism as practiced is growing at the cost of loss of various ecosystems which actually claim to preserve. Ecotourism in reality is a perversion of the real thing which endangering the life of wild animals and unfair use of local resources to meet the demands of tourists. Assam is in her infant stage in this sector. If it is continuous in this manner than one day ecotourism industry in Assam will destroy the all assets of the state. Some major problems noticed in this sector are summarized as follows:

1. Lake of publicity and promotion.
2. Lake of undated tourist agency and well-trained tourist guide.
3. Shortage of accommodation for tourist during the visiting season.
4. Inconvenient transportation network.
5. Frequent natural calamities specially flood and landside.
6. Insurgency problem.
7. Lake of communication skill among the local people.
8. Tendency to disregard the Government rules and make personal profit.

#### Findings and Suggestion:

Though the natural beauty of Assam is God gifted, it is even more unsuccessful in segment of Ecotourism. If we use it properly then the ecotourism industry of Assam will be one of the largest contributors to our nation's economy. The policy frame work and facilitation service in Assam needs to be improved and upgraded for attracting private investors in the tourism sector. It is therefore important, that publicity and promotion of the tourist attraction of Assam are intensified particularly in case of tourist generation. Famous celebrity Priyanka Chopra promotes Assam tourism in global context as Awesome Assam. But responds of this venture is not satisfactory. We should take some other measures to promote the industry by depicting all our assets. It is also important to develop strategies for enhancing the duration of stay of both domestic and foreign tourist. Though there are available scope for tourism, occasionally some natural incidents lead troubles for it which is sometimes unmanageable. Government should plan some precautionary measures to mitigate this problem.

Ecotourism is slowly but surely becoming a trend. Although having a deep passion for nature is nothing new to many people, yet the term ecotourism (having been coined in recent years) is becoming more of a fashion statement than anything else.



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## Conclusion

Tourism is a sector which can grow and sustain by the efforts of the government and people's participation. In fact, tourism is a multi-dimensional activity and so, proper care should be taken to develop interlink among stockholders. Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, and relatively undisturbed natural area, intend as a low impact and often scale alternative to standard commercial mass tourism. It is needless to mention that Assam has a prospect of several ecotourism resources. It should be a heart of nature-based tourism in India. As such, it is an obligation of each and every citizen to preserve this ecologically fragile state and conserve its rich biodiversity as well as develop the tourism as a major industry here.

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