
A GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF ECOTOURISM IN TRIPURA

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Abstract

Tourism is considered as a significant factor in the economy of many nations. Today tourism related infrastructure in various parts of the country has improved the quality of life of the local people and helped to promote local arts and crafts. Tourism has contributed to increase awareness about conservation of the environment and the cultural heritage. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in modern world. It is multifaceted phenomenon which involves movement to and stay in destination outside the normal place of residence. Tourism is composed of three basic elements:

(a) Dynamic element which involves travel to a selected destination or destinations.

(b) A static element which involves the stay in the destination.

(c) A consequential element resulting from the two preceding elements, which is concerned with effect on the economic, physical and social subsystems with which the tourist is directly or indirectly in contact.

Tourism, especially ecotourism is the most promising sector in India. The rich diversity in the flora and fauna with a blessing of the beautiful natural attractions has encouraged Ecological Tourism in India. Tripura is such a state which has abundant natural beauty and potential for the development of Ecotourism. The purpose of this study is to understand the present status of ecotourism in Tripura and to study the problems and prospects of ecotourism development in Tripura. This study is based on secondary data. The study reveals that although Tripura has a huge potential of ecotourism development, not much efforts being made for its development. This may be because of lack of proper planning and interest from the government. The state lacks in basic infrastructural facilities like good hotels, accessible roads etc. For proper development of ecotourism government along with private partnership must take initiative to develop ecotourism in the state.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, Tripura, Problems, potential,*

Introduction

Tourism is vital for many countries, due to the income generated by the consumption of goods and services by tourists, the taxes levied on businesses in the tourism industry, and the opportunity for employment and economic advancement by working in the industry. For these reasons NGOs and government agencies may sometimes promote a specific region as a tourist destination, and support the development of a tourism industry in that area. Due to growing economic significance of tourism, it has a spectacular increase in tourism worldwide and increase in tourist earning. That money is absorbed by the local economies of the nation, and helps to Destination Country / Region / Local areas Tourism Generating Areas 25 increasing jobs as well as opportunities. Tourism mostly depends on the range and types of accommodation available at the destination. Accommodation is a core of the tourist industry, and plays a distinctive role in the development of this ever - expanding industry. Tourism also tends to give support to local handicrafts and cultural activities; both in urban and rural areas. Expenditure by tourists has a multiplier effect and also generates considerable tax revenue for local economy. It has also become a major and an integral part of economic, social and physical development. It comprises complete system of nature, the universe, the space and the galaxy which includes the man and his activities, wildlife, mountain and valleys, rivers and waters, forest

and trees, social and cultural system, flora and fauna, weather and climate, sun and the sea. The contemporary phenomenon of mass tourism may sometimes result in over development, however alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism seek to avoid such outcomes by pursuing tourism in a sustainable way. The state of Tripura is endowed with natural landscape of hilly terrain, green vegetation, flowing river. The ethnic diversity of the state offers diverse lifestyle and culture. The tourism state of Tripura is endowed with natural landscape of hilly terrain, green vegetation. The tourism industry in the state could well become an organized sector with significant potentiality. The major focus of tourism in the state however was largely publicized in the area of wild life tourism and related fields. Due to restrictive procedure regarding entry, area permit has been a major limiting factor for augmentation of tourism. This has since been lifted in 1995. Endowed with rich variety of tourist attractions. Tripura offers vast potential for growth to tourism, with an area of 10491.69 sq.km. Tripura is one of the smallest states in the country. But the legendary state with its natural beauty of lustrous green valleys, the hill ranges with its flora and fauna, the fascinating blend of cultural, glorious history and traditional unique craftsmanship is in a highly advantageous position for development of tourism. For convenience of tourist the state has been divided into two tourist circuits. One is west-south Tripura circuit covering the tourist destinations of West, Sepahijala, Gomati and South Tripura Districts and the other is west-north Tripura circuits covering the tourist destinations of North Tripura, Unakoti and Dhalai Districts. The entire state is having huge potentiality in tourism specially eco-tourism, religious, heritage and cultural tourism, rural tourism, water tourism etc.

Agartala, the capital of the state surrounded by greeneries. It has Ujjayanta Palace- a palace of erstwhile Maharajas, many temples including Buddhist temple and international borders, Maharaja Bir Bikram College complex, Museum, Government complexes etc. The famous Chatturdas Devata temple located about 6 km away is a old temple established by then Maharaja of Tripura. Sipahijala is a wild life sanctuary with distinctive flora and fauna.

Emergence and Evolution of Ecotourism

The origins of nature travel are truly remote. Nature travel during the 19th century was essentially a quest for spectacular and unique scenery. During this time, the national park concept was created, and while the founders of national parks wanted to protect the environment rather than provide resorts, it was the tourists who 'provided the economic and political rationale needed to translate philosophy into accomplishment' (Butler, 1992).

Not until the mid-20th century did worldwide travel become possible for more than just the elite. The technological revolution in communication and transport now permits an ever growing number of people from different parts of the world to undertake trips to remote destinations previously inaccessible to the common traveler. However, there was a growing emphasis being placed on the social, environmental and cultural aspects of tourism. Out of the most critical observations of past practice, a new vision of future tourism planning was beginning to form. Notions of 'sustainable development' that were hatched in the Brundtland Commission's report on environment and development in 1987 also found widespread support during the 1990s. The idea that economic growth could serve to stimulate development and protect the environment appealed to governments, academics and grassroots organizations. While 'sustainable development' was not intended to be a planning tool, it can serve as a catalyst for promoting discussion on how development and environment ought to be balanced (Wall, 1997). The philosophy was well suited to tourism, and has arguably had a major influence on how planning has been viewed. This is evident, to some extent, in the proliferation of 'alternative' forms of tourism, including community-based tourism, cultural tourism, sustainable tourism, nature-based tourism, and ecotourism etc., which occurred during this period.

The term ecotourism emerged in the late 1980s as a direct result of the world's acknowledgment and reaction to sustainable practices and global ecological practices. The current positioning of ecotourism is that the concept is at the consolidation stage of its product life cycle, especially in Australia and India (Lindberg and McKercher, 1997; Lindberg, Furze, Staff and Black, 1998). In the late 1980s ecotourism was regarded as a small-based niche product which was a specialized form of nature-based-or adventure tourism (Lindberg and McKercher, 1997; Lindberg et al., 1998). This niche concept changed in the early 1990s, and ecotourism became a popular term, in terms of its definitions, applications, and evaluation stemming from the viewpoint that ecotourism was a 'politically correct form of mass tourism' (Lindberg and McKercher, 1997).

Objectives:

The main objective of this paper is to highlight the issues relevant to the problems and potentiality of ecotourism in Tripura. However the specific objectives areas follow:

1. To know the current scenario of ecotourism in Tripura.
2. To understand the problems associated with the development of ecotourism in Tripura.
3. To suggest some improvements for the development of ecotourism in Tripura.

Methodology: The study is based on the information from secondary data sources. The secondary data were collected from published books, different published research works, newspaper, magazines, reports of various government and non-government authorities, websites, and official statistical documents. Data recorded by all concerned authorities like Tripura Corporation, Tripura Economic Review and reports from World Tourism and Traveling Council etc. are used for this study. All the data obtained from secondary sources are considered for draw a conclusion. Furthermore, some suggestions are prescribed for the betterment of ecotourism in Tripura, so that the economy can take absolute advantage from them.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is defined as 'a responsible travel to natural areas, that conserve the environment and improve the welfare of the local people, has caught the attention of diverse interests, both as economically profitable leisure activity, and as a means of conservation and development'.(Das, 2011). Ecotourism has emerged as a most natural way of tourism which more environments friendly and economically beneficial. Wikipedia describes ecotourism as 'Ecotourism is a form of [tourism](#) involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial [mass tourism](#)'. It means responsible travel to natural areas conserving the environment and improving the well-being of the local people.^[1] Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds for [ecological conservation](#), to directly benefit the [economic development](#) and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for [human rights](#).

The main objective of ecotourism is to observe and appreciate nature culture of the local people. It minimizes the negative impacts on natural and socio cultural environment. Ecotourism also generates economic benefits to the local people; provide alternate employment and income opportunities for local people. Ecotourism also creates awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets both among the locals and the tourists.

Study Area:

Tripura is a [state in Northeast India](#). The third-smallest state in the country, it covers 10,491 km² (4,051 sq mi) and is bordered by [Bangladesh](#) (East Bengal) to the north, south, and west, and the Indian states of [Assam](#) and [Mizoram](#) to the east. Its extension is from 22°56'N to 24°32'N latitude and 91°09'E to 92°20'E longitude. Its maximum extent from North to South is 184 km or 114 miles and from East to West is 113 km or 70 miles. In 2011 the state had 3,671,032 residents, constituting 0.3% of the

country's population. The Bengali Hindu people from the ethno-linguistic majority in Tripura. Indigenous communities, known in India as scheduled tribes, from about 30 per cent of Tripura's population. The Kokborok speaking Tripuri people are the major group among 19 tribes and many sub tribes.

Tripura lies in a geographically disadvantageous location in India, as only one major highway, the National Highway 8, connects it with the rest of the country. Five mountain ranges—Boromura, Atharamura, Longtharai, Shakhan and Jampui Hills—run north to south, with intervening valleys, Agartala, the capital, is located on a plain to the west. The state has a tropical savanna climate, and receives seasonal heavy rains from the south west monsoon. Forests cover more than half of the area, in which bamboo and cane tracts are common. Tripura has the highest number of primate species found in any Indian state. Due to its geographical isolation, economic progress in the state is hindered. Poverty and unemployment continue to plague Tripura, which has a limited infrastructure. Most residents are involved in agriculture and allied activities, although the service sector is the largest contributor to the state's gross domestic product.

Mainstream Indian cultural elements, especially from Bengali culture, coexist with traditional practices of the ethnic groups, such as various dances to celebrate religious occasions, weddings and festivities, the use of locally crafted musical instruments and clothes and the worship of regional deities. The sculptures at the archaeological sites Unakoti, Pilak and Devtamura provide historical evidence of artistic fusion between organized and tribal religions. The Ujjayanta Palace in Agartala was the former royal abode of the Tripuri king.

Table 1 Number of Tourists Visited and total Revenue Earned

Year	Domestic	International	Revenue Earned (Rupees in Lakhs)
2009-10	320,931	4763	105.68
2010-11	354006	5290	164.58
2011-12	359731	6550	184.45
2012-13	358625	7817	169.88
2013-14	359995	15376	189.27
2014-15	361581	29086	203.47
2015-16	363828	35619	207.16

Source: Economic Review, Tripura 2015-16

Major Ecotourism Destinations in Tripura:

Tripura is endowed with splendid natural beauty. The state, an abode of rich floral and faunal biodiversity, treasure of plants, shrubs and herbs of medicinal value, unique ecosystems, wet lands, their grandeur and awe inspiring beauty are the source of perennial attraction. The verdure expanse of undulating landscapes intermittently adorned with water bodies and rivers accommodates unique amalgamation of cultures of nineteen tribes. The state has over 68% is under protected areas in the form of four wildlife sanctuaries. Seven parallel hill ranges clothed with forests of varying density and nine major rivers occupying the valleys between two adjacent hill ranges dotted with tribal hamlets provide a perfect landscape for tourists with different preferences and tastes for the kind of recreation and enjoyment. Some of the ecotourism places in Tripura as follows:

Sipahijala wildlife sanctuary

Sipahijala Wildlife Sanctuary is a wildlife sanctuary in Tripura, India. The sanctuary is located on Agartala-

Udaipur main road, just 25 kilometers away from Agartala town. It is woodland with an artificial lake and natural botanical and zoological gardens. It is an ideal place for biodiversity conservation covering an area of 18.532 sq. km. The terrain is green throughout the year and the weather is temperate except for the two humid summer months of March and April. There are more than 150 species of native birds and migratory birds have been recorded in the sanctuary. Besides these the sanctuary is also famous for orchid garden, boating facilities, picnic spot, and wild life, botanical garden, zoo and elephant joy-rides. Rubber and coffee plantations are another major attraction of this sanctuary.

Tepania Eco Park

Tepania Eco Park is located in Udaipur sub-division, which is 47 km from Agartala town and 5 km from Udaipur. Established in 1995, inside Radhakishorepur Reserve Forest, the park has been upgraded over the years and it now covers an area of 155 hectares.

Tepania Eco Park is fast becoming a favourite tourist destination in Tripura. Tepania Eco Park is set amidst a charming ambience of natural beauty. This park is covered with lush green and amazing nature. This park is equipped with a rare orchid house, unique tree houses, tented accommodations, watch tower, picnic block, hanging bridge, children enclosure, food court and bamboo garden. The Eco Park harbors a fascinating range of bio-diversity. It is also home to cap langur, red jungle fowl, hares and a variety of reptilian fauna.

Trishna wildlife Sanctuary

Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary is a Wildlife Sanctuary in Tripura, India. It covers an area of about 163.08 square kilometres (62.97 sq mi). This sanctuary is situated in South Tripura District. It is 18 kilometers away from the sub divisional town of Belonia and is connected with Agartala by state highway. It can be approached either from Belonia in the south or Sonamura in the northern side. The sanctuary has the total forest area of 194.708 square kilometer. Among the four major sanctuaries in the state, Trishna is one of the attractive destinations for nature lovers. This sanctuary has a numbers of perennial water rivulets, water bodies, and grass land. In this sanctuary, there are patches of virgin forests which are rich in rare vegetation. Sizeable population of Indian Gaur (Bison) is the great attraction of this sanctuary. Apart from it, there are varieties of Birds, Deers, Hollock Gibbon, Golden Langur, Capped Langur, Pheasant and many other animals and reptiles. Another facet of trishna is that, it is also the habitat of and home to highly endanger only ape species of Indian sub-continent i.e. the hoolock, gibbon and primates like capped langur. Lakes herbs, deep forest wild life and human habitation have made it a natural paradise. It is also a home to migratory birds.

Baramura Ecopark

This park is located at about 37 km from Agartala in Baramura Hill Range through which 44 National Highway winds its way to Shilong and Guwahati. It is an area surrounded by sylvan green forest with a stream flowing through it. This park has got a lot of other attractions of panoramic environment. This park has a unique hut like structure in the middle of the stream connected by a wooden bridge for viewing the surrounding in a perfect and panoramic environment. This is an ideal destination for eco-lovers. This park has the attraction of picnic facilities, boating facilities, jungle tracking, children enclosure and park. It also has a watch tower to view the beautiful scenery of the natural view.

Kalapania Nature Park

Kalapania Nature Park is located in Sabroom sub-division, which is 120 km from Agartala town and 20 km from Sabroom. It is a wonderful natural area attracts tourists for all time. The main attraction of this park is a nature interpretation centre located in the middle part. A lake with serene blue water in midst of two hillocks adds beauty to the surroundings. A beautiful well maintained garden enriches its scenic canvas. Total area of this park is 21 hectors. Traditional hut 'tan garh' is also inside this park.

Jampui Hills

Jampui hills are located in Kanchanpur sub-division, which is 220 km from Agartala and 100 km from Dharmanagar. The luxuriant forest of Jampui hills is the premier one among the 6 principle hill ranges this state. Jampui the permanent seat of spring is situated at an altitude of about 3000ft above the sea level and about 220 km away from Agartala. In the eastern side of hill range bordering with Mizoram and in the southern part lays Chittagong hill tract, Bangladesh. Jampui is famous for its charming landscape, bracing climate, neat and clean traditional wooden house of their local inhabitants combined with greenery all round provide excellent opportunities for eco friendly tourism in this hill range. Vangum, Phuldangrai, Sabowal, Belianchip etc villages consist evergreen beauty in the Jampui hills. The view of rising and setting sun from various viewpoints the Jampui hill is an excellent feeling and emotion to a tourist. Jampui is famous for its tasty oranges.

Dumboor Lake

Dumboor Lake is a charming and largest water body in the state, located in Gandacherra and Amarapur sub-division. It is 142 km from Agartala town. A massive and breathtaking water body of 41 sq.km. with an unending spell of luxuriant green vegetation all around stands majestic for her exceedingly charming beauty and 48 islands in the midst of the lake. The look of the lake is like a tabour shaped small drum, "Dumboor" of Lord Shiva from which the name "Dumboor" originates. The surrounding hills and the islets are enchantingly emerald green and present a captivating scenic spectacle. It is home to the different types of migratory birds. There is a hydel project near the lake where the river Gomati originates and the area is called Tirthamukh. A big fair is held every year on Paus Sankranti at Tirthamukh. The Lake is the confluence of rivers Raima and Sarma. Various species of migratory birds are visible in the winter and it has rich reservoir of natural and cultured fishes. In one of the island "Narkel Kunja" has been developed.

Khumulung Eco Park

Khumulung is a town in the West Tripura district in Tripura, India. It is the headquarters and the largest town of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. Khumulung was established in 1991. Various socio-cultural clubs are coming up to develop the local culture, flora and fauna. The cultural beauty and abundance in Khumulung is invaluable. The town is a blend of tribal culture and the Christian influence. Khumulung means "valley of flowers". This beautiful hilly park has been situated at West Tripura and 18.8 km away via NH8 from Agartala, the state capital of Tripura, India. This eco-park has been developed at the bank of a beautiful natural lake. The entire area is naturally blessed by charming weather and enriched with ancient Tribes of Tripura. Every winter this eco-park has lots of visitors around the world i.e. the winter birds and butterflies make the garden like as heaven. This place attracts many travellers and it is a very popular picnic spot in Tripura, where people can spend their quality time with friends and family at every holiday. This khumulung eco park has been developed at Khumulung, head quarter of the Autonomous District Council (ADC). The park has a very beautiful spacious garden along with a natural water body with boating facilities. One children park is also there with many funny objects. This draws large number of picnickers every holiday.

Rowa Wildlife Sanctuary

Rowa wildlife sanctuary is situated in the north Tripura district, it can be approached from Panisagar and is adjacent to the national highway. It is 150 km from Agartala. It is a small sanctuary with an area of 86 hectares and it is one of the few remnants of the natural forests left that is easily accessible to the visitors. It presents ample scope for study by the botanists. It harbours more than 150 species of birds, wild beasts and primates. The site was originally chosen for having tall trees with thick undergrowth, which was assiduously

protected by some 'Khasi' tribal families for cultivation of pan (betel leaves). This also provided perching place for a multitude of birds. Forest department took over the area when they left. The whole area over 86 hectares was fenced and staff were posted to manage it. It has potential for development as a centre of awareness generation in the northern parts of Tripura through regular organized visits of the school children, college students and other people including the tourists from within the state as well as from outside.

Gumti Wildlife Sanctuary

Gumti Wildlife Sanctuary is a Wildlife Sanctuary in Tripura, India. It covers an area of about 389.54 square kilometres (150.40 Sq. km). Gumti Wildlife Sanctuary is spotted at South Tripura region. Gumti Wildlife Sanctuary is the second sanctuary of the South Tripura district located in the south-east corner of the state. This is a very ideal destination for the tourists interested in eco-tourism. The sanctuary boasts of a rich flora and fauna. One can find numerous medical and therapeutically botanical species in abundance in the surroundings of the sanctuary. This sanctuary is the place for many animals like elephants, sambar, buffalo, yapping deer, sarow and wild goat and numerous more. Reptiles have additionally discovered a home in the sanctuary. The home spreads a range of 389.54 km² and is rich in flora and fauna. It is found close to the sanctuary is a huge water reservoir involving a region of 300 km². A few inhabitant and migratory birds flock to this repository and henceforth might be spotted effectively.

Problems of Development of Ecotourism in Tripura

1. Improvement of transportation facilities is the foremost requirement for the development of ecotourism in Tripura. Lack of proper developed transportation network is hampering the growth of tourism industry in the state.
2. Other infrastructural facilities like good hotels, affordable accommodation facilities, good and hygienic food, medical facilities in case of emergencies are required to attract tourists to these places.
3. Proper information and guidance should be provided to the tourist through trained guide. But in Tripura trained guides are not available at important tourist destinations.
4. In Tripura it is found that there is no coordination between different agencies involved in tourism.
5. Lack of tourism awareness among the domestic people.
6. Lack of properly trained manpower in this sector.
7. Environmental pollution and unplanned development, particularly in tourist resorts.
8. Shortage of budgetary allocation also widening the problem. The government should allocate a special fund for the development of the tourism sector.
9. Security and safety for the foreign tourists is one of the prime concerns for not developing the ecotourism.
10. Immature long term vision both government and private sectors as well, to become a prominent

Suggestions

1. Proper implementation of tourism policy by the Tripura Government is essential. For the sustainable development of tourism in the state, ecotourism must be promoted.
2. Participation of corporate companies and local people in ecotourism must be encouraged.
3. Basic infrastructural facilities development (suvidha-samrachna) like roads, communication network, hotels, lodges and information dissemination are the most prerequisite for the development of ecotourism in the state and should aim at creation of adequate infrastructure in the tune with nature.
4. Security (suraksha): Tourist wants tension free and secure environment during transit, boating, picnic, stay etc. are to be ensured. Safety measures display, whom to contact in distress, first aid facility, what to

do while an encounter with wild animal, snake, wasp shall be properly displayed, organized and communicated.

5. Basic education & awareness for the visitors and as well as for the local people should be provide such as health and sanitation Skill development for preparation of local souvenirs as appropriate Codes of conduct, Forest and Wildlife conservation, Litter control Forging partnerships with tourists & tourism industry. To help bring socio-economic benefits to the local communities that would in the long run help state to improve its economy.

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