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Tourism in Sivasagar district of Assam: A resident's perspective

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Abstract

Tourism industry has gained wide popularity and profitability in the world recently. It is one of the fastest growing service industries and economically very important in the present-day situation. It has immense scope for the generation of income and employment. The district of Sivasagar in Assam has immense potentiality for the development of tourism. It is the treasure house of the natural beauty with flora and fauna, tea gardens, historical monuments, pilgrimage centres, culture, festivals etc. All these together has the potential to make the study area, Sivasagar, one of the most sought-after destinations for the tourists. The study is an effort to highlight tourism in Sivasagar from a resident's perspective. It is an attempt to focus on the various issues revealing the status of tourism in the study area and the issues yet to be addressed from the point of view of the residents in the study area.

Keywords: Tourism, resident, Sivasagar

Introduction

Tourism is considered to be one of the fastest emerging and growing industries worldwide. If planned right, tourism has the potential to uplift the economy immensely, especially in the case of developing countries like India, which boasts of immense tourism potential. It can be used as an instrument for development. India is an emerging tourist destination and people has shown interest in India more than ever before. Even after the pandemic, when people have started to travel again normally, India has the prospects to be in the spotlight again for Ayurveda, immunity boosting treatments etc.

The study area, Sivasagar is an area that abounds in tourism potential with almost everything that a tourist would imagine to awaken the desire to visit. Picturesque landscapes, bounty of nature, rich history, magnificent archaeology, fairs, festivals, temples of religious importance, tea gardens, museums, to name a few. It can be undoubtedly said that visiting Assam would be incomplete without a visit to Sivasagar.

There are stakeholders involved while considering tourism in a particular place. One of such important stakeholders are the residents of the particular tourist destination. Residents play an important role in the tourism of any location and this paper is an attempt to study this aspect in Sivasagar tourism.

Conceptual Framework

Tourism: It is the sum total of relationships and phenomena that arises from the travel and temporary stay of strangers (Bhatia, 1991) ^[7]. Tourism is defined by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as the circulation of people who travel to or stay in places outside their home country (their normal place of residence and/or work) for short periods, usually no longer than a year, and for different purposes such as leisure, business, or any purposes other than formal employment (Ghalia, 2016) ^[8].

Tourist: In simple terms, a tourist is a person who visits a place for purposes mainly for pleasure and recreation. However, the visit could be for several other purposes like business, meeting friends and family, conferences, medical purposes and so on.

Resident: A resident is basically a person living in a particular place, generally permanently or on a long-term basis or on a continuous basis.

Review of Literature

Rajkhowa D.K. in his paper "Prospects and potentialities of Tourism Industry in Sivasagar District" (2010) ^[1] observes that tourism is an affluent industry which is developed in the world, that too, without smoke. Tourism was declared as an industry in 1992 by the Govt. of Assam to encourage private investment particularly in creating required infrastructural facilities. However, he also states that although Assam is endowed with immense potentiality for tourism development, only a small portion of it has been identified and developed so far. Talking about Sivasagar district, he states that it is a hotspot in the field of tourism with immense potentialities for tourism development. He talks about various spots of tourism in the district and finds out that these spots are not yet properly developed as resources of tourism. Wide publicity measures for boosting up tourism-information brochures, guidebooks, maps, documentaries in television, development of communication networks, roads etc. one important suggestion from his paper is to exploit the famous Shivratri Mela of Sivasagar by organising a world-class festival by the department of tourism.

Mahanta P.J. in the paper "Historical Monuments of Sivasagar District as Tourist Attraction" (2010) ^[2] states that tourism is declared as the fastest growing industry in the world. He then talks about tourism in India in concise and how since ancient times, India has been attracting more people from different countries. Next, he discussed about tourism in Assam as a tourist paradise. He stated about IbneBatuta, a Moroccan traveller, who once visited Assam in 1345 A.D. and narrated the physical landscape, commercial product and the different ethnographic characteristics of Assamese people. The main objectives of the study were to study about the historical monuments, new areas for promotion of tourism, extent of utilisation of tourism resources, economic return from these resources, factor conditions for the slow growth of tourism in Sivasagar. He also tried to suggest some measures for improvement and analysed the local people, government, and N.G.O.'s role in tourism affairs. The primary data was collected through a well-designed schedule of questions. He first states the geographical factors that affect tourism-namely climate, vegetation, and agriculture. Then he goes on to discussing the various historical monuments, cultural heritage, religious spots and the areas of natural beauty. Major findings revealed that the existing remains and monuments are not adequately preserved. Public should be made a stakeholder in their preservation and maintenance. Tourism related NGOs should be set up. Local youth should take up employment as tourist guides. There is also an immense need of well-produced comprehensive publicity materials featuring Sivasagar. Finally, he shows hope that with a coordinated approach between the government and the public of the area, the region will turn out to be a major tourist destination of North-East India.

Justification of Study in light of Review of Literature

It has been observed that there has been research available

¹ Rajkhowa D.K., (2010), "Travel Prospects and potentialities of Tourism Industry in Sivasagar District" in Chutia H.R. and Saikia S., (ed.), Tourism In North East India, Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati, pp 242-245.

² Mahanta P.J., (2010), "Historical Monuments of Sivasagar District as Tourist Attraction" in Chutia H.R. and Saikia S., (ed.), Tourism In North East India, Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati, pp 246-256.

in the context of tourism in Sivasagar, in general. However, the viewpoint of the residents of Sivasagar is not much explored. Since the residents constitute a very important stakeholder in the tourism of an area, their view point of tourism cannot be ignored. This study would try to keep in mind the resident's perspective in the tourism of Sivasagar.

Area of Study

The study has been conducted in the Sivasagar town of Assam. Sivasagar is a district situated on the upper part Assam and at a distance of about 375 km away from Guwahati. Sivasagar holds an important place in the history of Assam. It was the capital of the Ahom kingdom which boasts of its glorious rule of 600 years. The district is bounded by the Brahmaputra River on the north, the state of Nagaland on the south, Charaideo district on the east, and the Jhanji River on the west. It has immense potentiality for the development of tourism owing to its natural beauty, religious historical places, culture, and tradition. It has immense potential to easily attract tourists.

Objectives of the Study

The study has been conducted keeping the following objectives in mind

- To study about the residents' opinion in the tourism of Sivasagar.
- To understand the various problems and prospects related to tourism of Sivasagar.

Methodology of the Study

The study is descriptive and empirical in nature. It is based on both primary and secondary data. For primary data, a sample of 100 numbers of residents from a total of 14 wards on the basis of ratio of the population of the respective wards based on census data of the town. (2011-24). The sample of 100 was distributed as follows:

Ward No. Sivasagar	Sample
Ward No. 1	8
Ward No. 2	8
Ward No. 3	4
Ward No. 4	4
Ward No. 5	3
Ward No. 6	5
Ward No. 7	7
Ward No. 8	2
Ward No. 9	6
Ward No. 10	17
Ward No. 11	8
Ward No. 12	8
Ward No. 13	12
Ward No. 14	8

The respondents from the respective wards are selected via convenience sampling method is. Out of them 100 responses, 72 responses were found to be suitable and used for the purpose of the study. The sample respondents were interviewed with the help of a questionnaire and their replies were collected and observed sincerely which were further interpreted and simple analysis made with the help of tabulation, percentage, etc. Secondary data were collected from books, research articles, departmental records, internet sites etc.

Data Analysis and Interpretation: The demographic and socio-economic profile of the respondents are discussed below:

Socio-economic and Demographic profile of the Residents

Gender: A total of 44 males and 28 females were part of the survey conducted for the research.

Age of the Residents

Table 1: Showing the age levels of the sample respondents

Age levels(years)	No of respondents	% of respondents
Below 20	2	2.8
20-40	62	86.1
40-60	5	6.9
Above 60	3	4.2
Total	72	100

Source: Field survey

Marital Status

Most of the respondents are unmarried persons (47 persons).

25 among the respondents were married.

Ward No. of the Residents

Table 2: Showing the Ward No.s of the sample respondents

Ward Number	No. of Respondents	%
1	3	4.17
2	5	6.94
3	3	4.17
4	2	2.78
5	3	4.17
6	4	5.56
7	3	4.17
8	2	2.78
9	4	5.56
10	15	20.83
11	8	11.11
12	5	6.94
13	9	12.50
14	6	8.33
Total	72	100.00

Source: Field survey

Education of respondents: The following table shows the education level of street vendors.

Table 3: Showing educational qualifications of the sample respondents

Education level	No of respondents	% of respondents
Below 10 th Standard	5	6.9
HSLC to HS	14	19.4
Graduation	32	44.4
Post Graduate	18	25
Above PG	3	4.2
Total	72	100

Source: Field survey

Occupation

Table 4: Showing educational qualifications of the sample respondents

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Student	12	16.67
Homemaker	3	4.17
Private Service	11	15.28
Government Service	15	20.83
Business	8	11.11
Unemployed	23	31.94
Total	72	100

Source: Field Survey

Years of stay in Sivasagar

Table 5: Showing educational qualifications of the sample respondents

Years of Stay (in years)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
0-5	4	5.56
5-10	7	9.72
10-15	12	16.67
15-20	6	8.33
20-25	25	34.72
More than 25 years	18	25
Total	72	100

Source: Field Survey

It has been found from the survey conducted that 84.7% (61 out of 72 respondents) travel for pleasure in their hometown. Majorly visited places include the Shiv Dol premises, Borpukhuri, Rang Ghar, Kareng Ghar, Talatal Ghar, Joysagar, Disangmukh, movie halls, marketplaces, restaurants, visiting friends and family etc. The frequency of such visits can be summarised as:

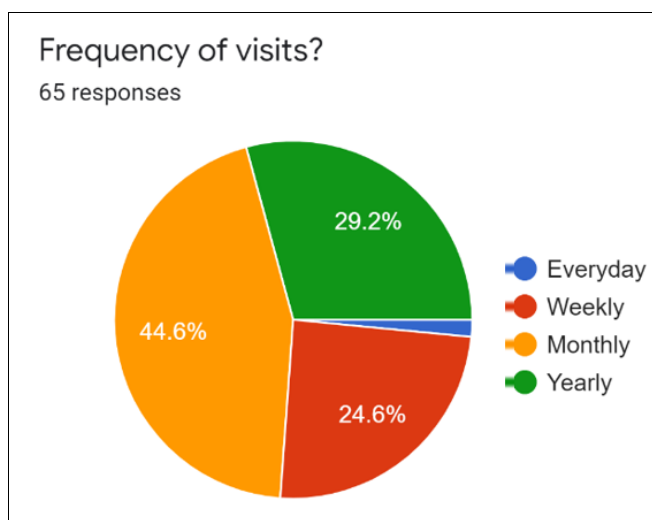


Fig 1: Frequency of visits

52.8% of the residents are of the view that tourism would increase the cost of living of the place. Also, 90.4% of the residents are aware of the socio-economic benefits of tourism like increased employment opportunities, entrepreneurial ventures, increased income etc.

69.9% (51 out of 72) of the respondents are of the opinion that the state of the tourist sites in Sivasagar are not satisfactory. The main reasons found as per the survey conducted are:

- a) Inadequate efforts of preserving the tourist sites and inadequate efforts in beautification of the nearby environment.
- b) Lack of adequate infrastructure (connecting roads, hotels, amenities etc.)
- c) Inadequate marketing of tourist spots, not enough local guides, inadequate planning and marketing systems.
- d) Not adequate tourist utilities like heritage market places (shops), civic amenities (drinking water dispensers, washrooms at tourist sites etc.)
- e) Not enough priority of people towards heritage.

Problems that hamper tourism in Sivasagar

Sivasagar has almost all the potentials that could turn it into

a tourist hub. However, it still has a long way to go to achieve that. Many hindrances and problems need to be overcome to make this into a reality.

Most of the respondents regard the following major problems which hamper tourism in Sivasagar –

- a) Limited infrastructural facilities for travel, stay, entertainment, and communication pose to be a problem. Inadequate public facilities near tourist sites are another hindrance.
- b) Cleanliness and hygiene of surroundings are not maintained on a regular basis.
- c) Limited administrative support to the tourism entrepreneurship projects.
- d) Inadequate marketing of the historic sites.
- e) Another point revealed in the survey is the lack of awareness among the people about the benefits of increased tourism. Also, lack of adequate tourism education among the people poses to be another problem.
- f) Inadequate departmental initiatives, bandh appealed by organizations, corruption etc. are other major problems as per the respondents.
- g) People are not much aware about Assam history due to which much less tourists come than what Sivasagar has the potential.
- h) Narrow roads compared to too many vehicles, irregular power supply, underdeveloped markets, not many good hotels and not up to the mark infrastructural and other supporting facilities etc. are other areas that pose as problems.

Suggestions

Some suggestions that contribute towards the upliftment of Sivasagar tourism could be:

- a) Special efforts to preserve the monuments, maintenance and beautification of the monuments and adjoining areas, developing infrastructure etc. should be undertaken on a continuous basis. Emphasis should be on beautification of the town as a whole.
- b) Adding more tourism products to attract tourists, diversification and creating a complete package for the tourists can make the town more attractive as a tourist destination.
- c) Awareness on the importance of tourism and the priceless heritage, zeal to preserve the local monuments, community participation in these areas is very important.
- d) There should be a special place for Assam history in Indian history syllabus.
- e) Enough promotions, especially in social media about the study area can lead to the upliftment of Sivasagar tourism.
- f) Better services, trained and professional service providers for a more satisfied visit of the tourists should be emphasized on.
- g) Proactive political will in paper and action and implementation of all developmental schemes in practicality will lead to the development of Sivasagar tourism to a great extent.
- h) Moderately priced and standard accommodation, roads, infrastructure, cleanliness of the town, transportation, hospitality etc. should be up to the mark as everything is interlinked in tourism.

Conclusion

Tourism, without any doubt has the potential to upgrade and revive the economy of a country. Immense tourism potential exists in the study area of Sivasagar. However, it still has a long way to go to realize the full potential. The key lies in working closely with all the stakeholders and creating an environment conducive to tourism.

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