

Tea Tourism: Navigating the Future of Assam's Agritourism

ABSTRACT

Assam, a state brimming with diverse tourism opportunities, boasts rich wildlife, cultural heritage, monuments, and abundant natural flora and fauna. **Despite its vast potential, Assam has yet to secure a prominent position on the global tourism map.** While recent government initiatives aim to rejuvenate the state's tourism, one overlooked sector is Agritourism, a facet of Community-based Tourism that allows visitors to engage directly with the host community. This study specifically delves into the agricultural realm, focusing on Assam's tea sector, a pivotal contributor to the state's economy and employment with over 800 major tea estates. Positioned as a prime candidate for Tea tourism, these estates offer a wealth of attractions, including century-old bungalows, lush green lawns, and expansive tea plantations. The study aims to explore the untapped potential of tea tourism, proposing approaches for development while addressing current challenges and presenting viable solutions. With its roots in community-based tourism and agritourism, tea tourism not only has the capacity to elevate the state's tourism industry but also positively impact the host communities involved.

Key words: Tourists, Tourism Sector, Tea Tourism, Agritourism

INTRODUCTION

Tea, a globally cherished commodity, is cultivated in more than thirty countries worldwide. The primary tea-producing nations, including India, China, Sri Lanka, Kenya, and Indonesia, collectively account for a substantial 76% of global tea production and 79% of global tea exports. India, in particular, holds a pivotal role in the global tea industry by contributing a significant 26% to the world's total tea production. Within India, Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala are noteworthy states in terms of tea production. Among these, Assam stands out with its distinctive position. This north-eastern state is a true powerhouse, generating an impressive 53% of India's entire tea output, with vast tea plantations spanning approximately 3.22 lakh hectares, covering more than half of the nation's tea acreage. The tradition of tea cultivation in India has deep historical roots dating back to the British colonial era, when Robert Bruce serendipitously discovered wild tea bushes in Assam. This discovery marked the genesis of Indian tea production. In contemporary times, India is distinguished by three primary tea-producing regions: Assam, Darjeeling, and Nilgiris. Notable areas for tea cultivation and tea tourism destinations in India encompass Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Assam, each offering insights into the thriving tea industry. Assam tea, a well-known Indian black tea, is specifically renowned for its robust flavour and is traditionally enjoyed with milk and sugar.

Assam's close association with tea dates back to 1823, when British explorer Robert Bruce claimed to have found tea plants in the region. Interestingly, the Singpho tribal communities residing in the border areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have been cultivating and

consuming tea for its rejuvenating properties for generations. Assam's impressive tea landscape comprises over 800 major tea estates and a remarkable 60,000 smaller ones, spread over a vast expanse of 300,000 hectares. This concentration of tea plantations is unrivaled on a global scale, solidifying Assam's position as a central hub of the world's tea production. Notably, the tea industry in Assam plays a pivotal role in the state's economy, employing approximately 17% of Assam's workforce. Assam is the dominant player in India's tea production, contributing a substantial 55% of the country's total tea output and fuelling 80% of India's tea exports. The significance of Assam's tea sector in both national and international markets underscores its economic importance and underscores its potential as a leading force in agritourism within the region.

Within the global tourism landscape, tea tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon that has gained significant prominence in the 21st century. This concept began to gain traction in the early 2000s. In 2007, Jolliffe provided a precise definition for tea tourism, characterizing it as "tourism driven by an interest in the history, tradition, and consumption of tea." Jolliffe also defined tea tourists as individuals who seek experiences related to the historical, cultural, and traditional aspects of tea consumption. Tea tourism offers an engaging and delightful experience for travelers, encompassing activities such as leisurely walks through tea plantations, observing the tea plucking process, participating in the cultural festivities of tea-producing communities, and enjoying luxurious stays in tea bungalows, all of which contribute to a unique and unforgettable journey. While tea tourism has flourished in countries like China, Sri Lanka, and Kenya, it has also been making substantial strides in India. The number of tourists exploring the verdant tea estates in destinations such as Darjeeling, the Nilgiris, and Assam has been steadily increasing. Since the 1990s, certain tea estates in India have begun to welcome guests in their bungalows, marking the inception of tea tourism in the country. Historically, Assam has held a significant position in the global tea production landscape, ranking as the second-largest tea-producing region in the world after Southern China. Assam, along with Southern China, is remarkable for having native tea plants. Moreover, Assam stands alone as the only region globally where tea is grown in the plains. The development of tea tourism in Assam presents multiple advantages. It not only fosters sustainable environmental practices and preserves the region's rich heritage and culture but also offers substantial economic benefits. This includes the creation of employment opportunities and the strengthening of the rural economy, contributing significantly to the overall growth and prosperity of the state.

OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluating Assam's potential as a Tea tourism hub
2. Investigating the challenges Faced by Assam's Tea tourism sector
3. Suggesting solutions to enhance the Tea tourism experience in Assam
4. Facilitating employment growth through Tea tourism

METHODOLOGY

The research employs exploratory and descriptive methodologies, focusing on qualitative analysis. As this study delves into the prospects and hurdles of tea tourism in the state, the data utilized in this research is primarily sourced from secondary data.

PROSPECTS OF TEA TOURISM

The roots of tea in Assam delve deep into the early 19th century, when Scottish Major Robert Bruce, employed by The East India Company, stumbled upon tea leaves in the dense forests of the region. The local 'Singpho' tribe had been utilizing these leaves for revitalization, and Bruce's discovery proved pivotal as Britain sought to break free from the Chinese monopoly on global tea. Bruce's encounter in 1823 set the stage for tea cultivation, with the East India Company, aided by Assamese businessman Maniram Dutta Baruah (later known as Maniram Dewan), initiating tea cultivation in 1824. The Yandaboo Treaty of 1826 secured British control over Assam, and by 1837, the first tea garden in Upper Assam was established, marking the inception of Assam's thriving tea industry.

In contemporary times, Tea tourism has emerged as a novel concept in India, with Assam positioned as a key player due to its status as the largest tea producer in the country, boasting over 800 tea gardens. Tea tourism, falling under the umbrella of agritourism, presents a unique opportunity for community-based engagement, particularly with the tea tribes and indigenous communities. This form of tourism allows for the direct involvement of the host community, fostering economic empowerment (Sarmah, 2020)

Tourists, seeking to immerse themselves in the culture of the tea tribes and indigenous people, engage in activities and traditions reflective of the local population. This direct interaction enables the host community to offer services to tourists without third-party intermediaries, creating a sustainable source of income. While the concept of community-based tourism has flourished in European countries and some Indian states, such as Rajasthan and Gujarat, Assam stands as a promising destination to leverage its tea gardens for a robust Tea tourism sector. (Das, 2020).

With its vast tea plantations, century-old bungalows, and rich cultural heritage of the tea tribes, Assam offers a multifaceted experience for prospective tourists. The state's tea industry, being one of the largest and oldest, holds immense potential to captivate visitors. From exploring grand bungalows to wandering through picturesque tea gardens and immersing in the cultural richness of the tea tribes, Tea tourism in Assam promises a unique and diverse experience for travellers worldwide.

As Assam charts its course to becoming a global tea tourism destination, the prospects of tea tourism products are vast and varied. The blend of natural beauty, cultural immersion, and the rich history of tea cultivation positions Assam as a leading player in shaping the future of this burgeoning tourism segment, attracting enthusiasts and travellers from diverse corners of the globe.

The charming tea gardens and the various activities that take place in their vicinity:

Assam boasts over 800 significant tea estates and more than 60,000 small tea estates spanning 300,000 hectares of land adorned with meticulously organized tea plants, creating a breath-taking sight. Visitors have the option to stroll through the gardens, revelling in the picturesque views, or actively engage with local tea "pluckers" to harvest tea leaves from the plants. Some of Assam's tea estates even welcome tourists to join their tea workers, allowing them to participate in various stages of the tea harvesting process. This provides tourists with an authentic and unparalleled experience not found elsewhere.

Tourists also have the opportunity to engage in tea testing, as certain tea gardens in Assam invite them to their testing labs to sample the tea they have produced. This adds another layer of uniqueness to the tourist experience, distinguishing it from other forms of tourism. These immersive activities offer travellers a raw and distinctive encounter, creating memories that are truly one-of-a-kind. Additionally, such touristic engagements not only provide a remarkable and once-in-a-lifetime experience for the traveller but also have the potential to influence others to seek out similar experiences. Consequently, this can contribute to revenue generation for both the state and the local communities hosting these activities.

Bungalow culture:

“The bungalow culture ingrained in the tea estates of Assam carries a profound historical significance, standing as tangible relics of the British colonial era. These bungalows, originating from the 19th century, encapsulate a unique and distinctive identity, embodying the architectural vision of the planters of that time” (Sarmah,2020). “Characterized by a signature style, they feature raised wooden platforms, expansive verandas that envelop the structure, and low buildings with one or two stories. Notably, each bungalow includes a fireplace complete with a visible chimney, while spacious yards adorned with an assortment of flowers, plants, and trees are nestled amidst the natural beauty of the surroundings” (Das, 2021; Sarmah, 2020).

“These bungalows, predominantly constructed by English, Scottish, and Irish planters, aimed to create a personalized haven using local architecture and materials. Each bungalow reflects the planters' aspirations, encapsulating a small world of their dreams within the lush landscapes of Assam. Several of these bungalows have undergone transformation into tea garden resorts, appealing to tourists eager to immerse themselves in the historical charm of the region. Examples include the Mancotta Heritage Chang Bungalow in the Dibrugarh District, the Chowkidindinghee Heritage Chang Bungalow in Dibrugarh, and the Wathai Heritage Bungalow in Tinsukia. Despite these notable transformations, numerous old bungalows within various tea estates across Assam remain untapped for tourist development”. [32]

“Their preservation and restoration hold the key to unlocking a trove of historical and cultural experiences. By strategically developing these bungalows, Assam has the opportunity to attract a significant influx of tourists keen on exploring the unique charm and heritage embedded in these colonial-era structures. The integration of these bungalows into the

burgeoning tea tourism landscape has the potential to create a compelling narrative that transcends time, offering visitors a glimpse into the bygone era of British colonial influence in the picturesque tea estates of Assam”. [32]

Guwahati Tea Auction Centre (GTAC):

“The Guwahati Tea Auction Centre (GTAC), inaugurated in 1970, stands as a bustling and significant hub for tea trading, not only in India but also on a global scale. This auction centre, strategically located in Guwahati, the capital city of Assam, plays a pivotal role in facilitating the trade of tea produced in the region”. [32]

“As one of the busiest tea auction centres globally, GTAC is instrumental in connecting tea producers, buyers, and exporters. Its establishment marked a crucial development in streamlining the tea trading process in the north-eastern part of India, particularly in Assam, which is renowned for its tea production. The centre serves as a marketplace where a wide variety of teas, including the famous Assam tea, are auctioned. The operations at GTAC involve the auctioning of tea in large quantities, attracting participation from various stakeholders in the tea industry. Buyers from different parts of the world converge at the auction centre to bid on teas that meet their quality and flavour preferences. The auction process is dynamic, reflecting the ever-changing demand and supply dynamics of the global tea market”. [32]

“Beyond its economic significance, the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre contributes to the visibility and market positioning of Assam tea. It provides a transparent and efficient platform for tea producers to showcase and sell their products, fostering competition and ensuring fair market prices. The centre’s role extends beyond a mere trading venue; it serves as a meeting point for industry professionals, facilitating networking, information exchange, and discussions on market trends. In essence, the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre is a dynamic marketplace that plays a critical role in the global tea trade, showcasing the diversity and quality of teas produced in Assam. Its establishment has not only boosted the economic activities associated with the tea industry but has also solidified Assam's position in the international tea market”. [32]

Golf courses:

“Many tea gardens in Assam boast golf courses, often accompanied by airstrips, presenting a unique and distinctive feature not commonly found in other states across India. In fact, Assam stands out by offering an impressive number of 24 recommended golf courses, showcasing the state's commitment to providing excellent facilities for golf enthusiasts”. [32]

These golf courses, situated within the picturesque tea gardens, offer not only a recreational activity but also an immersive experience surrounded by the lush greenery and scenic beauty characteristic of Assam. The presence of airstrips adds to the accessibility and convenience, making these golf courses not only recreational spots but also potential hubs for tourism and travel.

The strategic upgrading of these golf courses to incorporate state-of-the-art facilities has the potential to attract golf-loving tourists, particularly from countries such as Japan, the

United States, and various European nations. Golf is a popular sport in these regions, and enthusiasts often seek destinations that offer a combination of challenging courses and stunning natural surroundings. Assam's tea garden golf courses, with proper modernization, can cater to this demand, positioning the state as a desirable destination for international golf tourism. The allure of Assam's golf courses lies not only in the sport itself but also in the unique setting amid the tea plantations. The combination of a round of golf with the ambiance of Assam's tea gardens offers a distinctive and memorable experience for visitors.

Additionally, the potential for golf tourism can contribute significantly to the state's economy, generating revenue through tourism-related activities, accommodations, and services.

In summary, the integration of golf courses within Assam's tea gardens, coupled with the presence of airstrips, positions the state as a potential hotspot for golf tourism. The upgrading of these courses with modern amenities aligns with the preferences of international golf enthusiasts, further enhancing Assam's appeal as a destination that seamlessly combines sport, leisure, and the unique charm of its tea estates.

Tocklai Tea Research Centre:

“The Tocklai Tea Research Centre, a century-old institution situated in Jorhat district, stands as a venerable hub for tea research. With its rich legacy, this research centre possesses considerable international tourist appeal. If appropriately developed for tourism, it has the potential to emerge as a focal point of interest for students and research fellows from diverse geographical locations. The Tocklai Tea Research Center, having traversed a century of contributions to the field of tea research, represents not only a repository of knowledge but also a living testament to the evolution of the tea industry. Its historical significance, coupled with the wealth of information it holds, can transform it into a valuable destination for those eager to delve into the intricacies of tea cultivation and research. The potential for tourism development lies not only in the physical structures and research facilities but also in the opportunity to engage with experts and witness the ongoing advancements in tea research.

The international appeal of the Tocklai Tea Research Centre rests on its status as a renowned institution in the tea industry, attracting scholars, students, and researchers from around the world. By optimizing its infrastructure, providing educational tours, and facilitating interactions with experts, the centre can position itself as a knowledge hub and a unique tourist destination. This strategic development would not only enhance the tourism potential of the centre but also contribute to the broader goals of disseminating knowledge and fostering international collaboration in the realm of tea research”.[32]

Organic Tea Estates:

“In recent times, organic tea has gained prominence as a subject of interest for health-conscious individuals worldwide. Over the past few years, numerous planters in Assam have embraced organic methods in tea cultivation and production. This shift towards organic practices has not only resonated with health-conscious consumers but has also given rise to a unique trend in tourism. Visitors, particularly those conscious of their health, travel from

various parts of the country to explore these organic tea estates. Their interest extends beyond merely enjoying the serene landscapes; they seek first-hand experiences of the manufacturing processes and engage in meaningful interactions with the planters. This emerging facet of tourism adds a new dimension to the region's appeal, showcasing the convergence of health-conscious choices, sustainable agriculture, and the growing curiosity of tourists wanting to witness and understand the organic tea production journey in Assam".[32]

Tea festival and tea Tribe culture:

The tea tribes, constituting the backbone of Assam's tea industry since the 1860s, play a pivotal role not only in tea production but also in shaping the cultural landscape of the region. Over the years, these communities have seamlessly blended Assamese culture with their own traditions, creating a unique cultural identity. Visitors to Assam's tea estates are offered a direct experience of this rich heritage through engagement with the tea tribes. Immersed in music and dance, tourists can learn and participate in routines, with events like the traditional "Jhumur" dance featuring the rhythmic beats of 'Dhol' and 'Manjira' or 'Taal' in Assamese. Such cultural interactions provide an authentic and unforgettable experience.

The Assam Tea Festival, an annual extravaganza orchestrated by Assam Tourism in November, beautifully combines leisure and industry-related activities. Delegates from across the globe convene for conferences addressing crucial tea industry issues, while festivities include tours of lush tea estates and gardens. River cruises offer a refreshing and scenic exploration, and visits to the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre provide insights into the intricate workings of the tea trade. Golf enthusiasts revel in rounds at the Jorhat Gymkhana, the world's third oldest operational golf club.

Central to the festival is the exploration of the Tea Tribe culture, representing communities transplanted from diverse regions. This cultural mosaic, blending ethnicities and tribal traditions from Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and the Chota Nagpur region of Jharkhand, becomes a captivating research interest and a major attraction for tourists. The Assam Tea Festival emerges not merely as a celebration of tea but as a gateway to delve into the multifaceted facets of the region's culture, industry, and natural beauty. Ethnic fairs, food festivals, and visits to tea heritage sites further enrich the experience, making the festival a comprehensive celebration of Assam's diverse and vibrant heritage.

Result And Discussion

Assam's tea tourism potential is vast, with its rich history, picturesque landscapes, and diverse cultural experiences. By embracing this concept and offering a range of tea tourism products, Assam has the opportunity to attract tourists from all over the world and establish itself as a prominent tea tourism destination. The fusion of nature, history, culture, and the aroma of Assam's exquisite tea can create a truly unforgettable and enriching journey for travellers.

Fig1 : Teatourshelpin promotingtourisminAssam

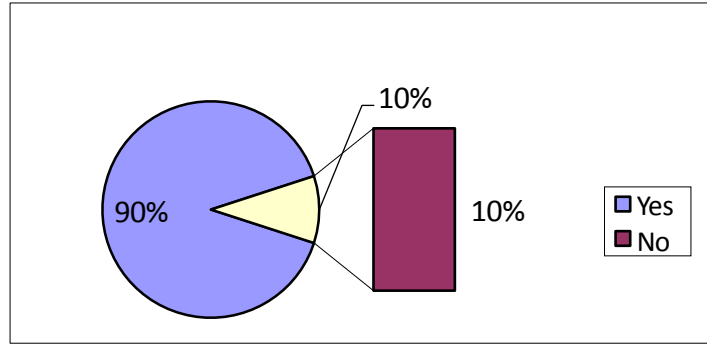


fig 2 : The growth rate in tea tourism

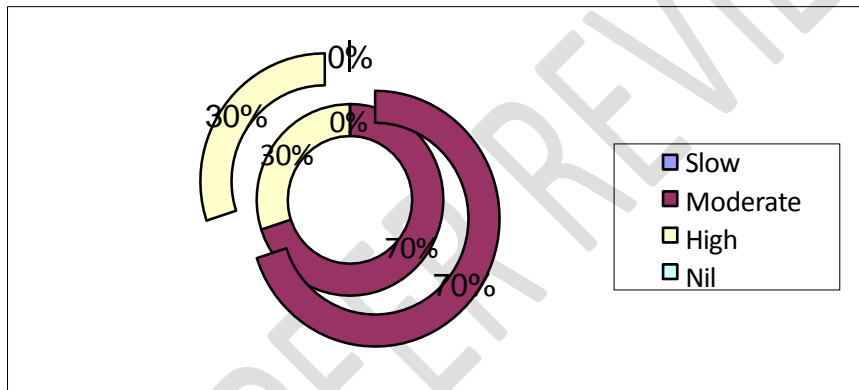
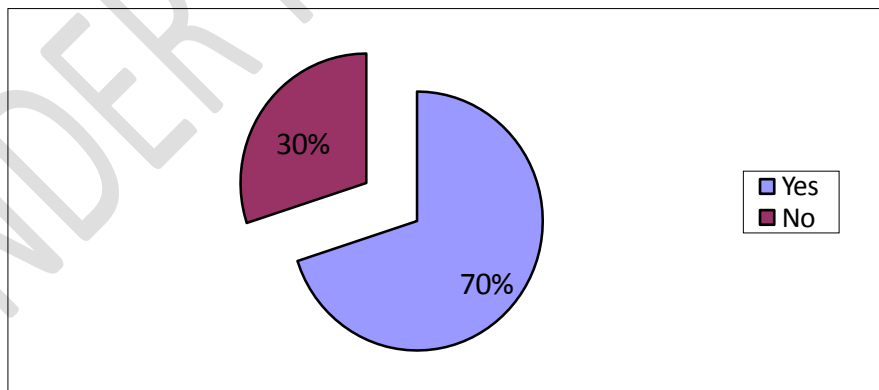


fig 3 : Local participation in Tea Tourism



(Thomas, 2023)

OBSTACLES TO TEA TOURISM

Despite its immense potential in the state of Assam, Tea tourism is encountering difficulties in evolving into a fully developed tourism sector. Several factors are hindering the realization of its potential. The following are some of the key challenges that Tea Tourism is grappling with in the state.

Overlooking its Potential:

Recognizing and evaluating the potential of a product is crucial for its success in the market. Despite the recent emergence of tea tourism as a product, it has not received significant attention in tourism promotional strategies over an extended period of time. Both government bodies and private organizations have faced challenges in acknowledging the capacity of tea tourism to significantly enhance the overall tourism scene in the state.

This lack of recognition could be attributed to various factors, including a limited understanding of the unique offerings of tea tourism, insufficient promotional efforts, or a focus on other more traditional forms of tourism. To unlock the full potential of tea tourism, it becomes imperative for stakeholders to actively identify its distinctive features and actively incorporate it into tourism promotion initiatives. By doing so, the state can harness the economic and cultural benefits that tea tourism has to offer, ultimately contributing to the growth of the tourism sector.

Absence of Government Policies and Initiatives:

In recent times, the state of Assam has introduced two significant tourism policies, one in 2008 and another in 2017. Both of these policies aimed to enhance tourism by categorizing different tourism markets. Unfortunately, tea tourism did not find a place within these identified segments, reflecting a failure to acknowledge its potential as a tourism market in the state. However, this oversight is gradually being addressed, as an increasing number of private tea estates are independently offering sightseeing and other services to attract tourists and generate revenue. This shift has started capturing the attention of the state tourism board. The lack of specific policies and initiatives for tea tourism in Assam might be attributed to a limited understanding of its potential or a historical focus on more traditional forms of tourism. Nevertheless, with the changing landscape and private estates taking the initiative, there is an emerging recognition of the economic and cultural value that tea tourism can bring to the state. This evolving trend emphasizes the need for government bodies to reassess their policies and actively incorporate tea tourism into their strategic plans to harness its untapped potential for the overall growth of tourism in Assam.

Inadequate Infrastructure:

The deficiency in infrastructure is not solely a hurdle for tea tourism but extends to numerous tourism offerings in the state. Challenges such as subpar road connectivity, a scarcity of domestic and international airports, and limited railway networks pose significant obstacles to the overall tourism sector. The state grapples with the repercussions of these infrastructure shortcomings, making potential tourists less inclined to visit even if the destination itself holds promise.

The deficient connectivity hinders accessibility and convenience, deterring tourists from exploring the diverse attractions the state has to offer. The issue of inadequate infrastructure not only impacts tea tourism but also undermines the broader tourism landscape in Assam. Addressing and improving infrastructure, including transportation networks, is imperative to enhance the overall appeal of the state as a tourist destination and unlock the full potential of its various tourism products.

Insufficient Awareness:

A lack of awareness poses a significant challenge for this tourism sector, affecting both potential tourists and the local host community. Many tourists are unaware that Assam offers such an intriguing tourism segment to explore. Simultaneously, the host community within the state is also uninformed about the potential this sector holds, making it challenging to capitalize on its benefits. Elevating awareness among both tourists and the host community has the potential to rejuvenate the tea tourism sector in the state and generate substantial revenue for both the state and the local community.

This lack of awareness could be attributed to inadequate promotional efforts, limited visibility in tourism campaigns, or a historical focus on more traditional forms of tourism. Bridging this knowledge gap is crucial for attracting tourists to Assam's tea tourism offerings and ensuring that the local community recognizes and embraces the economic opportunities it presents. Comprehensive awareness initiatives can play a pivotal role in unlocking the untapped potential of tea tourism in the state.

Shortage of Quality Accommodations:

Despite the availability of well-organized tea bungalows on many tea estates, not all tourists may prefer this type of accommodation for various reasons. The lack of sufficient high-quality hotels or resorts is a prevalent issue across various tourism segments in Assam. In the entire state, Guwahati stands out as the only city with a handful of HRACC-classified five-star hotels. Other tourist destinations in Assam mostly rely on a limited number of three-star hotels, along with private and government lodges.

While there has been a gradual increase in the number of three and four-star hotels in major towns and cities in Assam, the existing capacity falls short of the potential tourism influx. The slow but steady growth of tourism in the state underscores the need for a more substantial increase in the availability of quality accommodations. Insufficient options may deter tourists from exploring tea tourism and other attractions in Assam, emphasizing the critical role that expanding and improving lodging facilities plays in realizing the full potential of the state's tourism sector.

?Impact of Social Unrest:

The occurrence of mob lynching, strikes, and insurances in Assam has a negative influence on the tourism sector. These social issues contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity, discouraging potential tourists from considering the region as a travel destination. Effectively addressing these challenges is crucial to establishing a favourable environment for the development of tea tourism in Assam.

Broadly speaking, social unrest disrupts the overall safety and tranquillity of the region, making it less appealing to visitors. Instances of mob violence, strikes, and insurgency create a perception of instability, impacting the state's image as a tourist-friendly destination. Resolving and mitigating these social issues is imperative not only for the safety and well-being of the local population but also for the sustained growth of tourism, including the potential flourishing of niche sectors like tea tourism. A stable and secure environment is fundamental to attract and retain tourists, fostering economic development and cultural exchange in the region.

SUGGESTIONS

The hindrances or challenges alone do not hinder the realization of potential; rather, it is the absence of efforts to overcome these limitations. Every tourism market must comprehend and strategically address the challenges it faces or anticipates in the future. Based on the discussions above and an understanding of the challenges, we have formulated several recommendations aimed at propelling tea tourism in the state of Assam.

1. Recognition of Tea Tourism Potential:

To surmount the challenges, the initial step involves acknowledging the existence of tea tourism and recognizing its potential to emerge as a significant tourism segment in the state. Both governmental bodies and private entities within the tourism sector should collaborate to formulate tea-centric promotional strategies, targeting both domestic and international tourists.

2. Inclusion in Tourism Policies:

The state's tourism board must explicitly include tea tourism in their policies, dedicating efforts to strategize and promote this unique facet of tourism in Assam. Specific solutions and initiatives should be outlined to facilitate the development and growth of tea tourism.

3. Infrastructure Development:

To enhance the overall appeal of tea tourism, significant efforts are needed to improve infrastructure, especially in terms of connectivity. While upgrading connectivity is a complex process that may take time, increased attention to various tea tourism sites can expedite this process and contribute to its improvement.

4. Establishment of Tourist Information Centres:

The absence of tourist information centers is a concern. These centers play a pivotal role in disseminating information among tourists. The state tourism board should prioritize establishing these centers to systematically channel and provide information to visitors.

5. Promotion through Media:

Proactive steps should be taken to generate positive coverage of tea tourism in Assam through news articles and features in both national and international journals and magazines. Bridging the informational gap between tourist destinations and potential visitors is essential.

6. Incorporating Tea Tourism in Promotional Activities:

Skits, road shows, and various promotional performances should actively feature tea tourism. This inclusion serves as both a direct and indirect promotional tool, creating awareness and generating interest among potential tourists.

7. Community Training:

Since tea tourism is a form of community-based tourism, members of the host community should undergo training to effectively interact with tourists. This includes assisting them in getting acquainted with the unique processes and experiences offered by tea tourism.

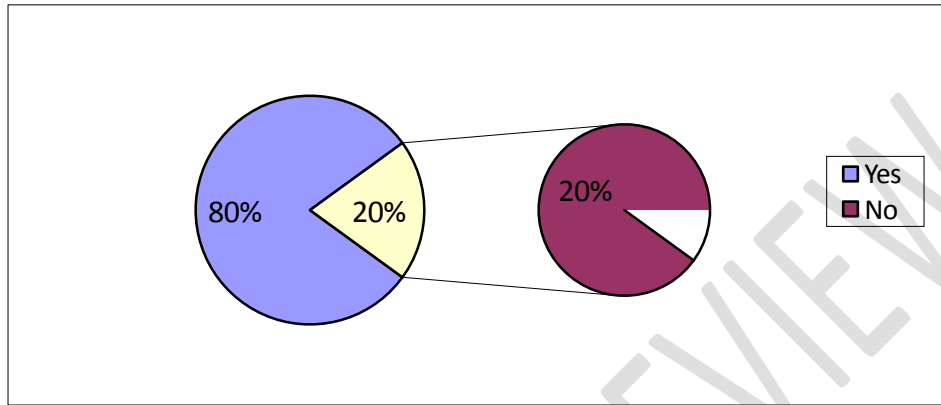
8. Research Initiatives:

Conducting more research on tea tourism is essential to fill the existing information gap between tourists and tea tourism sites. In-depth research will contribute to a better understanding of the unique offerings and attractions, facilitating improved communication between tourists and the tea tourism sector.

EMPLOYEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Tea tourism contributes to an enhanced quality of life, encourages cultural involvement, empowers women, ensures employment opportunities in rural areas, and supports micro-level infrastructural development. Particularly significant in developing nations like India, tea tourism establishes regional tea markets, creating fresh employment opportunities. Interacting with locals, exploring rural life, and participating in cultural events during tea tourism also strengthen social connections.

fig 4 : Teatourismprovides employmentopportunities



(Thomas, 2023)

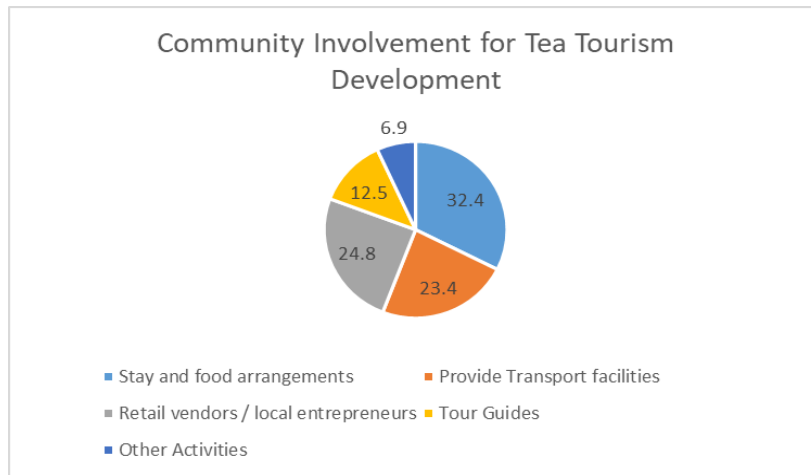
The development of the tea tourism sector has led to the expansion of regions, bolstering income for the local population due to heightened visitor spending. Tea tourism not only contributes to economic growth but also promotes cultural engagement within communities. Its most profound impact is on the economic well-being of rural areas. Consequently, key economic outcomes encompass heightened job opportunities, expanded investments, growth in infrastructure expenditure, augmented tax revenue, the emergence of new business prospects, and positive contributions to people's income and overall quality of life.

Table 1 : CommunityInvolvementforTeaTourismDevelopment

| Involvement for Tea Tourism industry | Percentage Number | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Stay and food arrangements | | |
| Provide Transport facilities | | |
| Retail vendors / local entrepreneurs | | |
| Tour Guides | | |
| Other Activities | | |

| | | |
|--------------|--|--|
| Total | | |
|--------------|--|--|

fig 5



(Thomas, 2023)

Most community members are actively engaged in farming activities, while others are employed in various jobs and enterprises before the development of tourism in the region. Upon involvement in the tourist sector, particularly in tea tourism zones, there is a significant upsurge in revenue, leading to an improvement in their quality of life.

An assessment of the current state of the tourism industry and its impact on communities is presented. Most respondents concur that tourism plays a crucial role in enhancing the economic conditions of the local community, positively affecting the livelihoods of the residents. Additionally, the growth of tourism yields more advantages for the local society than drawbacks. A considerable percentage of participants believe that tea tourism is beneficial for the town. It is noteworthy that there are limited tea tourism business outlets in such areas, but those who do have businesses derive substantial benefits from tea tourism.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Assam's potential as a Tea tourism Hub is undeniable, given its rich tea heritage and picturesque landscapes. However, the sector faces significant challenges, including infrastructural limitations, lack of awareness, and environmental concerns. To truly unlock the full potential of Tea Tourism in Assam, it is imperative to address these obstacles. Implementing strategic remedies, such as infrastructural development, robust marketing campaigns, and sustainable practices, can enhance the overall tea tourism experience. Moreover, the integration of local communities and the creation of employment opportunities within the sector can contribute to socio-economic development in the region. By fostering a

holistic approach that balances economic growth with environmental and community considerations, Assam can position itself as a premier destination for tea enthusiasts, thereby reaping the manifold benefits that come with a thriving tea tourism industry.

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