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# Tourism in North East: Problems and prospects

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**Abstract**---Tourism is the world's largest industry and it represents the fastest growing segment of any business. The concept of tourism is new with tremendous potentiality for sustainable developments of nature-based tourist resources including beautiful forest and wildlife. North East India is well blessed by Nature and it lies at the centre of one of the world's richest bio-geographic areas. It is a treasure chest for various economic resources. So, to develop tourism in North East India means, to boost the economy of the region. Boosting the economy of the region through tourism can raise the standard of living, develop the region in infrastructures, increase per capita income and lighten excessive dependence on agriculture. But transportation bottleneck poses a grave hindrance to the development of the region. This paper is an attempt to highlight the problems, prospects, potentiality of the region, infrastructure and the North East region as a whole and the steps that can be taken to help in progressing and prospering the industry and economy.

**Keywords**---Tourism industry, prospects, infrastructure, North East India.

## Introduction

Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It is frequently supposed to be a viable means of raising the economic activity of regions. It is one of the world's fastest growing industries, a major source of foreign exchange earner of a nation and a measure for resolving interstate and inter community conflict.

The tourism industry has different parts. It includes travel such as road transport, airlines, railways and on water. It as well requires places to stay and food to eat. North East India is geographically composed of eight sister states. It is one of the most backward regions in the whole country. Growing insurgent activities, political instability, ethnic clashes, violation of human rights, maladministration and corruptions are common occurrence in North East India.

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Hence, the socio-economic conditions is poor and is characterized by low per capita income, lack of infrastructure, mass illiteracy, excessive dependence on agriculture, social taboos, usage of traditional methods of production and a very backward transport and communication system.

### **Objectives**

1. To help generate revenue, to solve unemployment issue.
2. To help develop infrastructures, transportation and communication and utilization of natural resources.

### **Methodology**

This paper is a form of an explanatory study in analyzing the potentiality from North East India states to bring about economic growth and solve unemployment issues. The present study is based on secondary data collection from various published sources like books, journals, magazines, reports, publications etc. The finding were discussed in the light of published literature.

### **Look east policy to act east policy**

The “Look East Policy” of India was initiated by the former Prime Minister Pamulaparti Ventkata Narasimha Rao (1991-1996) and has continued to enjoy energetic support from the successive administrations of Inder Kumar Gujral (1997-1998), Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004), Man Mohan Singh (2004-2014) and Narendra Modi (2014- ), each of whom represents a different political party in India. [6] The main focus of this policy was to shift the country’s trading focus from the west and neighbours to the booming South East Asian countries. It aims to cultivate economic and strategic relations with the South East Asian nations in order to secure India’s position as a regional power. This Look East Policy is economic integration with the East and South East Asia. In recent years India’s relationship with South East Asia has flourished. Importantly, the Look East Policy envisages three pronged approach towards the countries of the South East Asia- Firstly, it is to renew political contacts and understanding with ASEAN members States. Secondly, to achieve enhanced economic interactions including investment and trade, science and technology, tourism, etc. with Southeast Asian countries, and Thirdly, to strengthened the defense and strategic links with these countries to achieve better understanding. The Look East Policy is also a means of reducing India’s internal development disparity. The North Eastern region lags behind in economic development and this gap has widened since independence because of various reasons. The sense of neglect has resulted in various forms of unrest in the region. With the launch of the policy India sees the region not as cul-de-sac (dead end / blind alley) but as a gateway to the East, thereby attempting to link the North Eastern region with South East Asia through a network of pipelines, road, and rail and air connectivity. This is expected to initiate economic development and help the eight North Eastern States to develop infrastructure, communication, trade, investment, logistic, agro-business and other commercial activities. Knowing full well the potential, the North Eastern States strongly support the Look East Policy is believed to be the new mantra for development of the North Eastern region. India’s Look East Policy represents its

efforts to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of South East Asia in order to bolster its standing as a regional power and counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China. One of its areas of concern is facilitating development in landlocked North East India by cooperation with South East Asian countries. This Look East Policy is economic integration with the East and South East Asia. In between, in July 2011, the then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited India and advocated for India to play stronger role in the Asia-Pacific. She coined the term 'Act East' instead of just 'Looking East'. Look East Policy got a momentum in the same direction under the Modi government as External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj confirmed in 2014 that New Delhi is now willing to "Act East". Under the "Act East Policy", India not only expected to bolster its economic engagements with the region; it yearned to emerge as a potential security balancer as well. In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi confirms to the world leaders, including the then US President Barrack Obama, that his government accorded high priority to turn India's erstwhile "Look East Policy" into an "Act East Policy". Modi remarked in his address to the East Asia Summit in the Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw that, "Since entering office six months ago, my government has moved with a great sense of priority and speed to turn our 'Look East Policy' into 'Act East Policy'." Prime Minister Modi's tour of Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Mongolia, Japan, Myanmar, Vietnam, South Korea, Singapore, as well as Japanese Prime Minister's visit to India has brought the Government's Act East Policy into focus, with Modi stressing on the need to have closer relations with the East and South East Asian nations. It aims at the effective implementation of the 'Look East Policy' by developing better relations with the South East Asian nations through bilateral talks, trade and economic ties.

The "Act East Policy" focus is economic and security integration and focused area increased to South East Asia plus East Asian countries. The main objectives of "Act East Policy" are to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at regional, bilateral and multilateral levels; to increase the interaction of North Eastern Indian states with other neighbouring countries; to find out the alternative of the traditional business partners like – more focus on the Pacific countries in addition to the South East Asian countries; to curb the increasing impact of China in the ASEAN region. For India the centrality of ASEAN and South East Asia is essential for peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. Its engagement with the 10 nation bloc is at the core of New Delhi's strategic perspective for the region and it's "Act East Policy". ASEAN and India are the natural partners that share geographical, historical and civilizational ties. India places ASEAN at the heart of its 'Act East Policy' and centre of the dream of an Asian country. India was making efforts on all fronts to enhance physical and digital connectivity with ASEAN. The "Act East Policy" has placed emphasis on India-ASEAN cooperation in India's domestic agenda on infrastructure, manufacturing, trade skill, urban renewal, smart cities, Make in India and other initiatives. India's connectivity and economic integration with South East Asia and the far East initiatives to secure the 'Act East Policy' with particular focus on Indian States in the North East, as well as concerns of increasing Chinese influence in the region. The 'Act East Policy' is now going beyond the immediate neighbours to Indo-Pacific, has now become a significant foreign policy initiatives.

According to analysts, India's consistent reach is pertinent in the backdrop of China's outreach across the globe. As reinventing foreign policy to gain the strategic advantage, India's Act East Policy is very important and the strategic content in India's 'Act East Policy' can be easily ascertained from ASEAN members.

### **India's act east policy and north eastern region of India**

The Northeast is the home to 3.8 percent of the national population, occupies about 8 percent of India's total geographical area and is strategically important with over 5,300 km of international borders has 95 percent of its boundaries surrounded by – China, Nepal, and Bhutan in the North, Bangladesh in the South-West and Myanmar in the East. In the past history, the mighty Himalayas in the North always kept India physically aloof from China. In the North East, treacherous terrain, militia and ethnic tensions made impossible to cross over and coned with China via Myanmar. The North East India, a narrow chicken's neck corridor connects it with the rest of India, and infrastructure connectivity with the mainland as well as the bordering countries needs upgradation for which large investment are needed. In the recent past year's India's growing and evolving relations with South East Asia, it has become imperative that North Eastern region of India would be the pivot of the overall "Look East Policy" given its geographic proximity and socio-cultural and historic ties with the South East Asian region. The main aspects of Look East Policy and North Eastern region have emerged over the year are as follows: [1] Connectivity and Physical Infrastructure that help in facilitating trade [2] Trade and investment protocols [3] Shortfalls in operationalisation of existing assets and facilities [4] Soft aspects of bilateral and multilateral relationships such as in tourism and enhanced people to people interaction through sports, culture, academic and medical research, etc. On July, 2008, Manmohan Singh the Prime Minister of India released the "North Eastern Region Vision 2020", a document which identified various challenges as well as the strategies required to bring about peace and prosperity in the North Eastern region by 2020. The vision 2020 is based on the development strategy– [1] Empowerment of people; [2] Creation of development opportunities; [3] Developing sectors with comparative advantage; [4] Capacity development of the people and institutions; [5] Creating a hospitable investment climate; [6] Significant investment in both public and private sectors; India's "Act East Policy" trajectory towards North East region is shifted. The Act East Policy along with several initiatives launched by New Delhi for rapid economic development of the country 'Make in India', 'Skill India', 'Digital India', promoting energy security, creating infrastructure, and building smart cities can be considered as a strategic plan to generate greater flexibility and political space to contend with the increasing confidence in the region. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has categorically said that the North East would be at the centre of the Act East Policy, whose three key features are connectivity, culture and commerce. The India's Act East Policy is relying on the 3 C's, that is, Culture, Connectivity and Commerce to develop better relations with ASEAN nations. Sushma Swaraj said that these are important markers in our engagement with Southeast Asia, in enhancing our strategic ties with ASEAN across 3 Cs. These 3Cs are Commerce, Connectivity and Culture. The objective of Act East Policy is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the

AsiaPacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing connectivity to the states of North Eastern Region. The Act East Policy recognizes the importance of the North East of India as the gateway of the East countries and it is an extended corridor for growth, progress and prosperity of India thus the development of the North Eastern region is a priority in the policy. The Act East Policy along with several initiatives launched by New Delhi for rapid economic development of the country 'Make in India', 'Skill India', 'Digital India', promoting energy security, creating infrastructure, and building smart cities can be considered as a strategic plan to generate greater flexibility and political space to contend with the increasing confidence in the region. In addition, the Act East Policy serves for the purposes of strong trade and business ties with the South East Asian countries and development opportunities to the North East States of India. The year 2017 marks twenty-five years of dialogue partnership, fifteen years of summit-level relations, and five years of strategic partnership between India and ASEAN. India is widely considered to play a major role in the region and is one of the key stakeholders in the emerging security dynamics of the South and East Asia. As a result Look East Policy or Act East Policy it has been able to mark itself as a nation of economic, diplomatic and strategic consequence in the region. Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 15th ASEAN-India Summit on 14 November, 2017 at Manila, Philippines. The significant initiatives announced during the Summit were as – [1] Enhance our strategic partnership by designating security and economic cooperation in maritime domain as a focus area, [2] Offer of joint exercises and fleet visits of ASEAN countries and India, [3] Offer of coordinated patrols to address traditional and non-traditional maritime threats and undertake exercise to effectively coordinate our response to natural disasters, [4] Offer of Stepping up our economic cooperation in shares maritime domain by enhancing maritime connectivity and by working towards a Protocol on Blue Economy, [5] organise a Start up Festival in India to encourage digital commerce among ASEAN-India youth, [6] Organise an ASEAN-India Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) on them, 'Ancient Route, New Journey: Diaspora in the Dynamic ASEAN-India Partnership', [7] Host a Business Summit and an ASEAN-India Business Council event in January 2018, [8] Host ASEAN-India Connectivity Summit in India and [9] Host the first working group meeting on Civil Aviation at New Delhi.

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peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. Its engagement with the 10 nation bloc is at the core of New Delhi's strategic perspective for the region and it's "Act East Policy". ASEAN and India are the natural partners that share geographical, historical and civilizational ties. India places ASEAN at the heart of its 'Act East Policy' and centre of the dream of an Asian country. India was making efforts on all fronts to enhance physical and digital connectivity with ASEAN. The "Act East Policy" has placed emphasis on India-ASEAN cooperation in India's domestic agenda on infrastructure, manufacturing, trade skill, urban renewal, smart cities, Make in India and other initiatives. India's connectivity and economic integration with South East Asia and the far East initiatives to secure the 'Act East Policy' with particular focus on Indian States in the North East, as well as concerns of increasing Chinese influence in the region. The 'Act East Policy' is now going beyond the immediate neighbours to Indo-Pacific, has now become a significant foreign policy initiatives. According to analysts, India's consistent reach is pertinent in the backdrop of China's outreach across the globe. As reinventing foreign policy to gain the strategic advantage, India's Act East Policy is very important and the strategic content in India's 'Act East Policy' can be easily ascertained from ASEAN members.

### **Prospects of Tourism Industry in North-East India:**

Though NE India is a very backward region in the whole country, yet it has the greatest potentiality to develop the region into a potent force through tourism industry. Let us explore its potentiality from various angles. Tourism is one of the enormous service industries in India with its contribution of 6.23 percent to national GDP and 8.78 percent of total employment, witness more than 5 million annual foreign tourists arrivals and 562 million domestic tourists. According to WTTCR 2007, India ranked 6th in terms of price competitiveness and 39th in terms of safety and security. North-East India is well blessed by Nature and it lays at the centre of one of the world's richest bio-geographic areas. It is the treasure house of various economic resources. It has a rich cultural and ethnic heritage that can easily make it a tourist-spot. Tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in North-East Indian states because NE India is not only characterized by the blending of flora and fauna it is also exceptionally rich in bio-diversity. Moreover the wildlife sanctuaries at various places of North-East India can attract the tourists all over the world. For example, the national park of Kaziranga in the district of Golaghat is a gift of Nature which covers approximately an area of 429.93 sq. km. situated on the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra. It is a heavenly place for the tourists because of its world famous one-horned rhinoceros. Herds of rhinoceros, vast grassy and green forests of the park can easily enamor any tourist of the world. Besides Kaziranga, there is the Manas riverine situated towards the western part of the district of Baksa. It is extended to both the banks of the river Manas and covers almost an area of 519 sq. km. It is especially famous for its wild buffaloes and also for other animals and birds. Besides Kaziranga and Manas sanctuaries, the wildlife sanctuaries of Pobitora and Orang can attract the tourists all over the world. Moreover, the golden languor pygmy hog and other endangered species can easily enchant the minds of the tourists. Besides the animals and the birds of various kinds roaming singing and playing in the vast green forest, the region has many ornamental fishes, rare plants, medicinal herbs and exotic orchids. It has

many tranquil lagoons and reverie locations like Bhalukpong, Loktok, etc. that will attract the tourists for angling and boating. There are many other wonders and important things for the tourists in the region. For example, even today, when science and technology have achieved miraculous success in unearthing the hidden things of the world it has totally failed to unearth the mystery of the Jatinga Hill where thousands and thousands of birds commit suicide every year. This mysterious Jatinga Hill is a great source of attraction for the tourists all over the world. Moreover, the world's largest river island 'Majuli' will encourage tourism industry in NE India to a great extent. The various historical monuments and places like 'Rangghar', 'Karengghar', 'Joysagar', 'Joydoul', etc. will encourage tourism in NE India. Besides these, the various historical places like Sonitpur (at present Tezpur)-the capital of Ban Raja, Garhgaon-the capital of the Ahoms, Jerangapathar-a place where Joymati sacrificed her life for her husband, etc. will attract the tourists. Moreover, the various religious places and temples like Kamakhya temple, the Umananda temple, the Agnigarh and the Mahabhairavi temples of Sonitpur etc. will encourage tourism industry in NE India. Besides it, the wooded hill stations like Haflong, Towang, Shillong, Gangtok, etc. will attract the tourists for hiking, trekking and camping. Further, tea tourism and golf tourism of NE India will attract the tourists. The North-East India is also very rich in cultural heritage. It is a heavenly abode of various tribes, castes and communities having their religious and cultural festivals, the 'Bihu' for the Assamese, the 'Bathou' for the Bodos, 'the Cheraw' for the Mizos, etc.

### **Challenges of tourism industry and suggestions to improve the scenario in North East India**

From the above findings, it is clear that tourism has a great potentiality for generating income and employment opportunities in NE India. But even then, no perceptible change has been seen in this sector of the economy due to some problems. The main constraints that are coming into the way of its development are self-explanatory which can be identified as (a) Lack of infrastructure, (b) Communication bottlenecks, (c) Geographical isolation, (d) Ethnic clashes leading to political instability, (e) Growth of insurgent activities (f) Lack of fund (g) Absence of leadership and entrepreneurship ability, (h) Indifferent attitude of the Government both at State and Central level (i) Defective socio-economic and political set up (j) Lack of a proper tourism development policy of the Government (k) Lack of people's co-operation and consciousness, (l) Lack of proper friendly investment atmosphere (m) Absence of congenial atmosphere to attract the tourists and such many other factors. VI. Suggestions to Improve the Scenario: In spite of the constraints as listed above, NE India is still maintaining a bright prospect of economic development in terms of tourism industry. But for this, some immediate as well as long term measures, as mentioned below, are to be adopted:

- A strong political will is of excessive in need for the restoration of peace and political stability in the area with a whole hearted efforts including political dialogue with the various insurgent groups working in NE India should be made to redress their grievances within the framework of Indian constitution in a democratic manner.
- Government should make huge investment to break the geographical isolation and remove communication-bottlenecks from NE Indian states.



- Planned efforts are to be made by the Government to build up the required infrastructure of the region.
- Proper tourism development policy is the need of the hour and for this Government should make a thorough survey in the region.
- Moreover, maintenance of a friendly investment atmosphere is very important for attracting foreign investors as well as the tourists. International and national confidence is to be restored for attracting the national and foreign tourists.
- Planned, sustained and well-thought long term efforts are to be made by the Government to improve the socio-economic and political set up of NE India.
- Above all, people's consciousness to develop their own area through the development of tourism-industry is a great need of the hour. People should voluntarily come out and desist the terrorists from doing anti-national activities.
- In short, restoration of peace and tranquility to attract the foreign tourists is of utmost importance for the development of trade and tourism in NE India.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

However, though the process of economic liberalization could not create any impact on the economy of NE India, yet it has widened the scope of the development of tourism industry in the North-East India states. For example, the signing of the MoU with the USA based company "Ogden Energy of New Jersey" by the government of Assam for taking over a lease of the Bongaigaon Thermal Power Station (BTPS) for its renovation, submitting proposals by another US based company named "American Power Gen System Association" for setting up a 300 MW coal based power project at Borgolai, inauguration of NEDFi at Guwahati, entry of some new Indian Company for promoting industrial projects like Premier Cryogenics Ltd., Reliance Industries Ltd., etc. are, no doubt, a strong indication of the restoration of national and international confidence. According to an international agency named "Coopers and Lybrand Report", NE India has the potential to emerge as a strategic base for foreign and domestic investors for two reasons. Firstly, it is argued that the foreign as well as the domestic investors would be encouraged to set up their export-oriented industries in NE India to enjoy the vast potential of contiguous markets of ASEAN countries namely Myanmar, China, Malayasia, Thailand, Phillipines, Combodia, Indonesia, etc. which are regarded as the fastest growing regions in the world and secondly, to utilize its rich and abundant natural as well as human resources. Now it is expected that with the arrival of the region as well as domestic investors in NE India, there will be an influx of tourists into the region from various parts of our country as well as from abroad. Thus, it is expected that the influx of these tourists will directly give a big push to the growth and development of the tourists industry in the region. According to Mr. K. P. Singh, the President of the Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India, NE India has the 17 domestic tourists create one job for NE Indian people. Hence, it is very important to attract the foreign tourists into NE India from the economic point of view. At present 5 million foreign tourists come to India annually and soon it is expected to increase a large percentage of these tourists can be attracted to NE India by

restoring national and international confidence. Thus, the development of tourism industry in North-East Indian states largely depend upon the formulation of a proper tourism development policy and people's co-operation and consciousness. The High Powered Shukla Commission has recommended for establishing a North-East Tourist Development Corporation to develop tourism in the region. It has also recommended to issue Inner-Line Permits relax the Restricted Area Permits as well as to introduce Charter Flights for NE Package tours etc. Moreover, an honest and strong will of the government coupled with people's hearty co-operation will definitely boost up tourism industry in North-East Indian states in near future.

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