

“Development Possibilities through Tourism Industry in hill areas of Manipur: A Paradigm shift”

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Abstract:

One of the fastest growing industries in the world today is the tourism industry. It is an engine of growth as it generates employment directly and indirectly to several sections of the society. Tourism can be based on wildlife, natural beauty, unique flora & fauna, mountainous region, caves, lush green forests, turbulent and wild rivers, vibrant and colourful tribal cultural festivals etc. The hills of Manipur are endowed with immense tourism potentials, which can be explored as commercial resources. Eco-tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism segments wherein a tremendous thrust may be given by the Government to retain the natural beauty and bounty. Manipur has immense possibilities of growth in the tourism sector with its vast cultural and religious heritage, varied natural attractions, but a comparatively small role in the national tourism scene.

Introduction:

Manipur Tourism Policy, 2014 envisages new initiatives towards making tourism the catalyst in employment generation, environmental re-generation, development of remote areas and development of women and other disadvantaged groups in the State, besides promoting social integration. According to the UN World Tourism Organization, contribution of tourism to economic activities worldwide is estimated at about 5%. India is fast emerging as an important tourism destination in the world. The ‘Incredible India’ campaign, which showcases the best that India has to offer to the tourists, has now attracted worldwide attention. Foreign tourist arrivals in India is also said to have increased from 2.37 million in 1997 to 20.73 million in 2012. During, 2012, the visits by the foreign tourists registered a growth of 6.3% over 2011. Manipur with its inherent tourism potential, rich cultural heritage and vibrant pool of youth, with excellent grip over English language is an ideal combination for promotion of Tourism. Many young boys and girls from Manipur are working in the hospitality industries across the globe. Tourism Industry would create employment opportunities for different job profiles such as luggage handler, Porter, Waiter or Waitress, Front Desk Official, Marketing and HR managers, Accountants, etc. The tourism industry has its own multiplier effect and thus could become the largest employment generator in the State of Manipur. The multipliers of Tourism destination state are **Transportation** (air, road, rail, river), **Tourism suppliers** (catering, construction, attraction activities), **Accommodation** (hotels, resorts, paying guest

etc), **Host infrastructure** (cottage industries, tourist guides, indigenous people), **Commercial intermediaries** (tour operators, travel agents, retailers etc), **Related tourism industries** (culture, nature, religion, theme parks).

Tourism as an Industry:

Manipur tourism was given an industry status in January 1987. Since then, the State Government has been making efforts in developing Manipur Tourism by developing Infrastructures, Hotels & Restaurants, Human Resource, and through active Marketing, Publicity, Promotion Programmes, Market Research, etc. Manipur and its tourism policy become all the more important in view of India's Look (Act) East Policy, the Trans-Asian Highways and the Railways. The Government is keen to take advantage of these developments and therefore, seeks to create a unique brand to market Manipur Tourism as the 'Gateway to South-East Asia' in conformity with its modern outlook, relevance, competitiveness, strategic location and commercial aspects. Being given an industry status has a lot of significance in the journey of tourism industry as the tourism related set ups will be able to access the commercial banks for their capital requirement. Capital being scarce is not easily accessible as it comes with a high cost if the same is borrowed from the private money lenders. Thus, it is not advisable to borrow money from the private lenders as it may result to insolvency at the end of the day for not being able to service the debt. It is felt that once the appropriate infrastructure and services are suitably placed, Manipur is destined to become a popular tourist hotspot in South-East Asia akin to its South-East Asian neighbours. Relaxation and exclusion of Manipur from the Protected Area Regime since January, 2011 has started attracting foreign tourists to the State. Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has conveyed it, in principle, approval for establishment of VISA on Arrival (VoA) facility at Moreh and at Imphal International Airport. Once VoA facilities are operational, many Myanmar people would travel to Manipur, especially for availing medical facilities and also as pilgrimage tour. In normal circumstances, the people of Myanmar would go for their pilgrimage tour to state like Bihar by air from Myanmar to Kolkata and then to their final destination and again back to their country which is a very costly affair. Furthermore, Manipur, where some of the final battles of the World War-II were fought, can receive a big impetus in the tourism sector attracting many foreign tourists, especially from Japan and the Commonwealth countries whose relatives, ancestors and countrymen lost their lives in the battlefield here. Their mortal remains of their country men are rested here and they would definitely love to come and offer floral tributes and pay homage to the departed souls of their brave soldiers.

Overview of tourist destinations in Manipur:

Manipur is blended with the majestic Loktak Lake, the strategic location of Moreh town, the uniqueness of the floating Keibul-Lamjao National Park and the Sangai Deer, the beauty of the Dzukou Lilies, along with the naturally formed limestone caves, pristine green hills and valleys, meandering rivers, cascading rapids, exotic flora & fauna complimented by a rich arts and culture, folklore, myths and legends, indigenous games and artistic handloom and handicrafts. All these combination make Manipur a little paradise on earth and an enticing destination for a tourist to explore. The Asian Development Bank has identified the region as a 'Key Area' due to its 'unrealized potential as an eco-tourism product'. With planned and professional harnessing of tourism potential, Manipur is likely to become a preferred tourist destination which in turn would help in increasing both

domestic tourists arrivals as well as generating the much needed employment, socio-economic benefit, revenue and other ancillary benefits to the state.

Tourist inflow in Manipur:

Year-wise Number of Tourist Spots and Tourist, 1990-91 to 2015-16:

Year	No of Tourist Spot	No of Tourist			Revenue (Rs. in lakhs)
		Foreign	Domestic	Total	
1990-1991	29	185	90685	90870	16.79
1991-1992	29	374	91290	91664	21.09
1992-1993	29	221	62374	62595	39.02
1993-1994	29	350	72980	73330	15.68
1994-1995	29	370	82798	83168	1.86
1995-1996	29	288	84025	84313	1.70
1996-1997	29	219	87074	87293	2.11
1997-1998	31	173	91620	91793	5.19
1998-1999	31	294	89664	89958	0.64
1999-2000	29	335	99399	99734	18.55
2000-2001	29	409	103854	104263	0.74
2001-2002	41	131	73842	73973	1.00
2002-2003	41	227	89829	90056	0.70
2003-2004	41	296	93430	93726	0.93
2004-2005	41	248	97054	97302	NA
2005-2006	41	348	93331	93679	NA
2006-2007	42	263	120572	120835	NA
2007-2008	54	460	101000	101460	NA
2008-2009	54	271	115300	115571	NA
2009-2010	54	405	127524	127929	NA
2010-2011	54	431	116652	117083	NA
2011-2012	54	602	133224	133826	NA
2012-2013	57	768	131803	132571	NA
2013-2014	57	2588	143059	145647	NA
2014-2015	57	2900	134584	137484	NA
2015-2016	72	3102	132013	135115	

Source: Economic Survey Manipur 2010-11 and 2016-17

District-wise Number of Tourist Spots and Tourist, 2012-13 to 2014-15:

District/ State	2012-2013				2013-2014				2014-2015			
	No. of Tourist spot	Number of Tourist			No. of Tourist Spot	Number of Tourist			No. of Tourist Spot	Number of Tourist		
		Foreign n	Domesti c	Total		Foreign n	Domesti c	Total		Foreign n	Domesti c	Total
Senapati	5	-	584	584	5	209	347	556	9	212	4466	4678
Tamenglong	3	-	3412	3412	3	08	2576	2584	3	15	3819	3834
Churachandpur	6	-	5601	5601	6	298	4266	4564	10	419	5163	5582
Chandel	3	-	14604	14604	3	30	15217	15247	3	144	24360	24504
Ukhrul	4	-	4687	4687	4	62	3675	3737	4	106	4857	4963
Imphal East	12	108	19145	19253	12	132	17939	18071	16	154	18863	19017
Imphal West	8	660	83770	84430	8	1136	77012	78148	9	1805	73057	74861
Bishnupur	9	-	-	-	9	44	-	44	10	29	-	29
Thoubal	4	-	-	-	4	13	-	13	5	16	-	16
Manipur	54	768	131803	132571	54	1932	121032	122964	69	2900	134584	137484

Source: Economic Survey Manipur 2014-15 and 2016-17 & NER Data Bank (www.nedfi.com)

The above table indicates that the number of foreign tourist visiting Manipur has increased over time. The increase in foreign tourist in about 10 years time is more than 800% from 2006 to 2016, whereas the increase in the case of domestic tourist is about 18% over the last 10 years. The increase in foreign tourist in fact is tremendous and thus offers ample opportunities to the tourism industry. The total increase including both domestic and foreign is about 21% over the last 10 years. Centre has also announced LTC scheme in 2008 for the NE states, a plus point for the tourism industry.

Entry formalities, a Paradigm shift:

All tourists from outside India intending to visit Manipur can visit Manipur as the entire area of the State of Manipur has been excluded from the Protected Area Regime initially for a period of 1 (one) year with effect from 1st January, 2011 subject to the following conditions:

1. Citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals having their origin in these countries would continue to require further approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) before their visit to Manipur.
2. Citizens of Myanmar visiting the state of Manipur beyond 16 kms. from the Indo-Myanmar border would continue to require prior approval of the MHA before visiting the State.
3. All foreigners visiting Manipur will register themselves with the Superintendent of Police (CID/SB), Manipur who has been designated as Foreigners Registration Officer (FRO) of the State within 24 hours of their arrival.

Domestic tourist intending to visit Manipur by road via Dimapur or Kohima requires Inner Line Permit to pass through Nagaland. These are issued by the Liaison Officers of the Government of Nagaland at New Delhi, Kolkata, Guwahati, Shillong and the Sub-divisional officer (Civil), Dimapur and the Deputy Commissioner, Imphal can also issue permits to tourist travelling by road from Imphal to Kohima and Dimapur in Nagaland.

Challenges of Tourism Marketing:

Tourism is defined as the movement of people from one place to another for leisure, pleasure, business etc. which is facilitated by three basic components: accommodation, travel or transport, and attraction. It is possible for a tourist to get a ready made package or a customised offer. Most offers contain a combination of both service and product. A part of it can be physically experienced but not all as in the case of an aircraft which can be physically felt but the pleasure of good service can only be experienced. Product and service features in tourism are **intangibility** (service, cleanliness, timeliness, value, frequency, and connectivity), **tangibility** (coach, comfort of seats/leg space, climate control, and price), **perishability** (unsold seats/room/food on the journey), **non perishability** (physical features/seats/curtains/ac), **separability** (water bottles, towels, pillows, blankets, souvenirs), **inseparability** (seats/rooms, attraction), **homogeneity** (type of facilities such as seat type, leg space or standardisation of rooms in case of accommodation and regular staged events for tourists such as crafts fair/haat in case of attraction), **heterogeneity** (timeliness, behaviour of staff/different theme for each year in case of attraction and variability in room maintenance and service in case of accommodation), **ownership** (right to travel or stay, right to experience in case of attraction) and **non ownership** (transport vehicle, accommodation and attraction). Tourism therefore lies on a continuum between products and services (tangibility and intangibility)

Challenges in Tourism Industry in the hills of Manipur:

The state of Manipur can be divided into hill and valley geographically. About 90% of the total area of Manipur lie in the hill area and is endowed with natural and scenic beauty of hill and mountain ranges. In spite of the vastness of the region and the scenic beauties the hill region has, the infrastructure is still very poor and needs to be developed in order to exploit the tourism potential. Besides, the infrastructure bottleneck, there are also critical areas that need to be looked into such as lack of awareness about the potentials of tourism industry, shortage of accommodation, roads and bridges, transport supplier, road side amenities such as eateries or dhabas, trained manpower such as tour managers or guides etc. The mindset of the youths to start their own enterprises and the hurdles to take up entrepreneurship as alternative career option is still a concern in the developmental process of tourism as lucrative business venture in the hilly areas of Manipur.

Opportunities galore:

The State of Manipur, though tiny in size has immense scope for promotion of tourism. With the rail link likely to become operational in the near future and the upcoming opportunities as a result of the Act East Policy in addition to the scenic natural beauty of the State, the inflow of tourists is like to increase. Keibul Lamjao National Park on the bank of the Loktak Lake, the only habitat of Brow Antlered Deer locally known as 'Sangai'. INA (Indian National Army) Memorial at Moirang where INA hoisted tricolour flag for the first time on Indian soil, Siroy National Park at Ukhrul, Loktak lake, the biggest fresh water lake in the North-Eastern Region and Khongjom War Memorial, where the last war of Manipur Independence was fought, are the major tourist spot of the state. Besides there are other places which are worth seeing and which possessed immense potential for

developing into a good tourist spot. In order to facilitate the movement of tourist in the state, the Directorate of Tourism, Manipur has been providing various infrastructural facilities for incoming tourists. The Directorate is managing the tourist homes at Sendra, Moirang, Phubala, Churachandpur, Kaina, Khongjom, Tamenglong and Ukhrul for accommodation of tourist visiting the areas. Hotel Imphal at the heart of capital town Imphal has been improved with modern amenities. As per the statistical year book of Manipur 2015, the district wise tourist spots in Manipur are given below:

Senapati district: Senapati, Mao, Makhel Cave Tadubi, Sadu Chiru Waterfalls, Megalith at Willong

Tamenglong district: Zailad lake, Tharon Cave, Barak Waterfalls

Churachandpur district: Behiang, Tipaimukh, Tonglon cave, Cheklaphai Singhat, Kailam hill range

Chandel district: Chandel, Moreh, Tegnoupal

Ukhrul district: Ukhrul, Khangkhui cave, Shiroy hill, Nungbi

Imphal East: Shri Govindajee temple, Ramjee Prabhu temple, Hanuman Thakur Temple, Kangla fort, 2nd WW cemetery at Dewlahlane, Indian army war cemetery at Hatta, khuman lampak sports complex, MMTA at Minuthong, MAASI at Keirao, Kaina, Jiribam, Mutua Museum

Imphal west: Manipur state museum, Saheed minar, Zoological garden, khongampat orchidarium, Langthabal old palace, Ima market, RKCS art gallery, Nupee Lal complex

Bishnupur District: Vishnu temple, Loktak project, Sendra, Phubala, Loktak lake, Keibul Lamjao national park, Red hill (India peace memorial), Loukoipat, INA memorial Moirang.

Thoubal district: Khongjom war memorial, Thongam Mondum Mahadev, Waithou, Serou

There are a lot of opportunities offered and which can be tapped entering into the tourism industry. If the young people residing in the hill areas of Manipur can cash on the economic gains of this fast growing tourism industry, it will definitely help them in the economic development of the local community in particular and the state of Manipur in general. Some of the opportunities that can be tapped are: home stay, tours and travel agencies, souvenir shops, auditorium for cultural shows, road side hotels, resorts, eco & adventure tourism, mountain tourism, village tourism, cultural tourism etc.

Conclusion:

Looking at the potentials of tourism industry in the hill areas of Manipur and the opportunities it provides, development possibilities definitely are there and the youths residing in the state of Manipur may consider taking up tourism related activities as profitable enterprises and may consider the same as viable career options. And for this to happen sooner or later, all the stake holders must make collective efforts to make the industry grow wherein the sector contributes a substantial amount to the state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). And for the service sector to grow and thrive, the state government must step in and put the infrastructures in place. There is

also a need to recast the mentality of the youths so that they can rise above the structured mindset (mantra). The Public Private Partnership (PPP) model of developing tourism industry in the hill districts of Manipur may also be pursued in letter and spirit to ease the growth of the industry. The products and services of the hill districts may be packaged and promoted to attract both domestic and international tourists by finding out the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of each area.

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