

HERITAGE TOURISM DESTINATION: A REVIEW OF SELECT NORTH EASTERN STATES OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Heritage Destination plays an important role in attracting tourist for a region or a country. North East India is endowed with heritage sites representing the rich culture, history and tradition. It is one of the most promising regions of the country in respect of heritage tourist destination with physical, cultural and human diversities. The region's heritage is reflected in the forms of its philosophy, traditions, religion, rites, rituals, festivals, languages, literature, art-architecture, music, dance etc. Despite of such diversities and richness in culture and heritage, most of the heritage destinations of the region are still unexplored. This study is an attempt towards identifying such heritage destination of select North Eastern states, which have the potential to become major tourist attraction and contribute to regional development.

KEYWORDS: *Heritage Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Tourist Destination.*

Introduction

Heritage Tourism is the newer combination of words in tourism industry. It has become one of the most popular forms of tourism. The growing importance of heritage tourism is due to fact that Heritage sites are becoming a major source of attraction for tourist in almost every country. Countries across the world have recognized it as an instrument of economic development and advocacy of local culture and heritage. Heritage scholars described heritage as "contemporary use of the past" (Ashworth 2003). This definition encompasses both tangible and intangible elements of the cultural/heritage environment. Heritage tourism, in fact, occupies a forefront position in the global tourism industry because it involves millions of visitors every year who travel to visit a variety of heritage attractions and sites (Timothy and Boyd 2006).

The North Eastern Region of India comprising the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura possesses great physical and human diversities to project it as one of the most potential areas of the country in respect of tourism promotion. The region is surrounded by the international boundaries. The countries surrounding the region include: Myanmar in the East; China in the North; Bhutan in the North-west and Bangladesh in the South-west, the western side of the North East India is connected to the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent by a narrow land corridor, sometimes referred to as the Siliguri Neck or 'Chicken's Neck'. The lives of the people have been shaped by the major rivers like the Brahmaputra and the Barak, its ancient mountains and the thick tracts of impenetrable jungle. Landscape constituents of the region viz. hills (60%), plateaux (12%) and plains (28%) along with river systems contribute substantially in enriching its scenic component. It is the homeland of a rich variety of ethnic communities. Each community has very special feature distinct from the other. The distinctive cultural resources of each community produce a contrasting effect of racial, linguistic, and cultural varieties (ITDC, 2003). Apart from the well-known temples and shrines the region is fortunate to have a number of magnificent places of scenic beauty, a wide variety of flora & fauna and biodiversity hotspots with potential to attract domestic and foreign tourists in large numbers. As a zone of convergence of diverse ethnic stocks, the region is undoubtedly a showcase of cultural diversity

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(Bhattacharya, 2008). The region is a mosaic of different cultures and heritages developed through centuries of migration from the neighbouring regions, namely Western India, Myanmar and China (Gait, 1926). The entire region is full of scenic beauty which can attract tourists of almost any taste. The region boasts of the biggest river island in the world, which is declared as world heritage sites, besides two other world heritage National Parks of the region. Moreover, the north and eastern most part of the region is regarded as one of the 25 bio-diversity hotspots in the world (Myers, 2001). In this backdrop, it is a review based study attempting towards portraying the rich culture and heritage of the North East India through its heritage destination sites, which are less known and explored.

Conceptual Framework

Heritage is the things of value which are inherited. If the value is personal, it is family or personal heritage; if the value is communal or national, it is of 'our heritage' (Edgell, 2006).

Heritage is also referred to as built heritage which can be classified into three categories (Prentice 1993):

- **Historic and Artistic:** Examples include relics with physical/tangible characteristics.
- **Scientific:** This category refers to elements drawn from birds, animals, rocks etc.
- **Cultural Heritage:** It includes folk, fine arts, traditions, and languages.

Heritage tourism is a personal encounter with traditions, history, and culture. Heritage tourism is based upon the concept that each community has a story to tell. This is a rapidly growing niche market that is directed towards experiencing the local customs, traditions, arts, history, sites, and culture that authentically represent a particular place. Heritage tourism is defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) as "traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources" (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2008). Heritage tourism uses assets — historic, cultural and natural resources - that already exist. Heritage destinations are those which help an understanding of the past; enrich the present and which will be of value to the future generations. For the places of archaeological and architectural values, it is the people and activities that form the cultural heritage (Ahmed, 2006).

Literature Review

The heritage and cultural tourism literature has proliferated in the last decade. Theoretical articles and discussions of major issues such as the role of heritage and culture in postmodern society, heritage/cultural markets and artistic manifestations, planning, interpretation, community involvement and/or authenticity are all well represented within the existing literature. Surprisingly, with the exception of some pioneering work by Prohaska (1995) and Silberberg (1995), there is still little quantitative information on heritage and cultural tourists. Heritage tourism gained attention from the late 1980s and early 1990s and is considered to be a broad field of specialty travel in tourism (Zeppel & Hall, 1991). It is a multifaceted term manifested with a wide range of meanings and, therefore, there are polarized views of it in published literature. Scholarly debate with regard to the nature of heritage tourism still persists, suggesting that heritage is an amorphous concept and a complex phenomenon. Previous research has broadly classified heritage into two categories: tangible and intangible. Tangible heritage is inclusive of all assets that contain a degree of physical embodiment of cultural values (UNESCO 2000). McKercher and Du Cros define intangible heritage as "Traditional culture, Folklore, or popular culture that is performed or practiced with close ties to 'place' and with little complex technological accompaniment" (2002: 83).

Due to the growing importance of heritage tourism, several researchers, academicians, policy makers have paid attention towards the preservation and maintenance of the heritage properties as well as the destinations. Articles and reports related to the heritage destinations of national importance are common in all journals, reports and newspapers e.g. Taj Corridor Case, Ram Setu Case etc. Motiram (2007), "Globalization: Potentials and Prospects of Mass Tourism in India" described the impact of globalization on mass tourism in India that is, Beach Tourism, Mountain Tourism, and Religious Tourism. The study highlights that due to globalization, the tourism industry has generated more employment and more foreign exchange earnings. Researches on tourism in the North-Eastern States of India are very less compared with other parts of mainland India as well as other developed countries. John M, and Prasin. G (2017) highlighted the growth of tourism sector in North East India and highlighted the various problems faced by tourism industry in the region. Dixit, K.S (2014) in his article entitled, "Community Attitude towards Tourism Development: Study of Meghalaya, India" has emphasized on the environmental and economic perspectives of tourism development. Sharma, M. (2015), in his article

“Towards Positioning of Tourist Destination: A Study of North East India” discussed the process of defining the preference level of perspective tourist and measuring their perceptions on the regions as tourist destination.

Study Area & Research Methodology

The emphasis of study is to recognize the important heritage destinations of select North Eastern States in India viz. Assam, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh & Meghalaya which are scattered throughout the region. The study is sourced from secondary data collected from the reports of Government of India, Reports of Ministry of Tourism & Cultural Affairs, tourism operator websites, and as well as articles published in newspapers and magazines etc.

Review of Heritage Destinations of Select North Eastern States

Heritage tourism uses assets - historic, cultural and natural resources - that already exist. Heritage destinations are those which help an understanding of the past; enrich the present and which will be of value to the future generations. For the places of archaeological and architectural values, it is the people and activities that form the cultural heritage (Ahmed, 2006). Hofstede (1997) made the classification of Heritage destinations as Natural, Landscape, Monuments, Artefacts, Activities, People, Mythical Sites, Artists, Royal Families & Festivals. Basing on this classification, the major heritage destinations of the study area are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification of Heritage Destination of Assam, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh & Meghalaya

State	Classification	Places
Assam	Natural	Kaziranga National park, Manas, Pobitra, Majuli, Jatinga, BuraChapori, SonaiRupai,
	Landscape	Panidihing Bird Sanctuary, Chandubi Lake, Bhairabkunda, Laokhowa, Pobha, Garampani, Dibru-Saikhowa, Nameri National Park, Bhalukpong, Haflong, Maibong, Umrangsho
	Monuments	Khaspur, Rang Ghar, TalatalGhar, War Cemetery, National Oil Park
	Artefacts	SankardevKalakshetra
	Activities	DehingPatkai Festival, Sualkuchi, Bhuban Fair, Baruni Festival, State Zoo
	People	Tipam Ethnic Village
	Mythical Sites	Kamakhya,Hazo,Umananda,VashisthaAshram,MadanKamdev,GopeshwarTemple, KamalabariSatra, DakhinpatSatra,SamaguriSatra, , Joy Dol, Shividol, BishnuDol, Devi Dol, GourisagarDol, Agnigarh, Mahabhairav Temple, Batadrawa..
	Artists, Royal Families	-----
	Festivals	BosuDima Festival
Tripura	Natural	Sepahijala Wildlife
	Landscape	Jampui Hills, Rudrasagar Lake, Kamala Sagar Lake, Dumboor Lake
	Monuments	Neermahal, Ujjayanta Palace, Pilak (Jolaibari)
	Artefacts	Heritage Park, Eco Park
	Activities	-----
	People	-----
	Mythical Sites	Unokoti, Kasba Temple, Tripureshwari Temple, Jagannath Temple
	Artists, Royal Families	-----
Arunachal Pradesh	Natural	Phasighat, Bhalukpong, Bomdila
	Landscape	-----
	Monuments	JaswantGarh War Memorial, Dirang Fort, Bhismanagar Fort, Ita Fort, Thembang Fortified Village
	Artefacts	-----
	Activities	-----
	People	Apatani
	Mythical Sites	Tawang, ParashuramKunda, Malinithan, Akashiganga Temple
Artists, Royal Families	-----	
Meghalaya	Natural	Nokrek National Park, Balphakram National Park, Umiam Lake, Nohkalikai Waterfalls, Elephant Fall, Living Root Bridge, Lady Hydari Park
	Landscape	Cherrapunji, Dawki, Mawsynram, Shillong Peak, Wards Lake
	Monuments	David Scott Monument, Khasi Monoliths, Laitlum Grand Canyon
	Artefacts	Don Bosco Museum, Air Force Museum
	Activities	Cherry Blossom Festival
	People	Mawlynnong Village
	Mythical Sites	Christian Cathedral
Artists, Royal Families	-----	

Tourist Inflow

To identify the growth and contribution of tourism to the economy and society, a proper knowledge of tourist inflow is required. Therefore to highlight the prospects and growth of heritage tourism in North Eastern States, a stock of tourist inflow is necessary. Based on the secondary data collected from State tourism departments and the NER data bank of NEDFi (North Eastern Development Finance Cooperation Limited), an overview of tourist inflow of the four selected states of North East is presented below:

- **Assam**

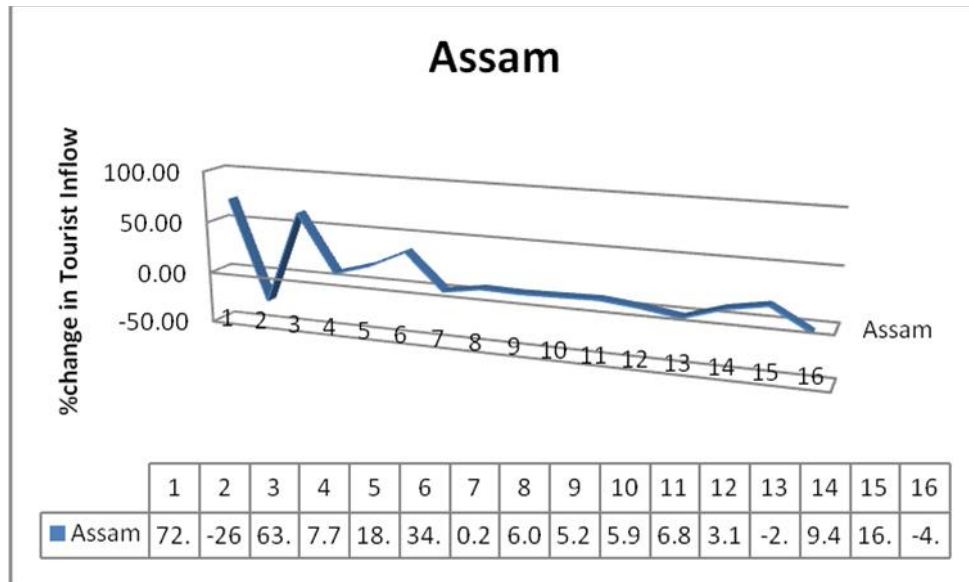
Table 2: Tourist Inflow in Assam

Year	Indian	Foreign	Total
2000-2001	975970	7406	983376
2001-2002	1690672	5211	1695883
2002-2003	1240562	5986	1246548
2003-2004	2030107	6845	2036952
2004-2005	2186250	9365	2195615
2005-2006	2586480	8309	2594789
2006-2007	3479870	13657	3493527
2007-2008	3489814	13799	3503613
2008-2009	3702006	14533	3716539
2009-2010	3895525	14694	3910219
2010-2011	4127447	15633	4143080
2011-2012	4408336	16660	4424996
2012-2013	4544666	17708	4562374
2013-2014	4444393	19086	4463479
2014-2015	4863826	20005	4883831
2015-2016	5642950	26320	5669270
2016-2017	5413877	7209	5421086

Source: NER databank, NEDFi

Table 2 provides the details of Indian and foreign tourist arrivals in Assam from year 2000-2001 to year 2016-2017. It is observed that tourist inflow has increased 5.5 times more from 983376 tourist in 2000-2001 to 54,21,086 tourist in 2016-2017. As shown in the Figure 1 the tourist inflow increased to a percentage of 72.46 in the year 2001-2002. The annual growth of tourist inflow is positive except for the years 2002-2003, 2013-2014 and 2016-2017.

Fig 1: Percentage Change in Tourist Inflow in Assam from 2000-2001 to 2016-2017



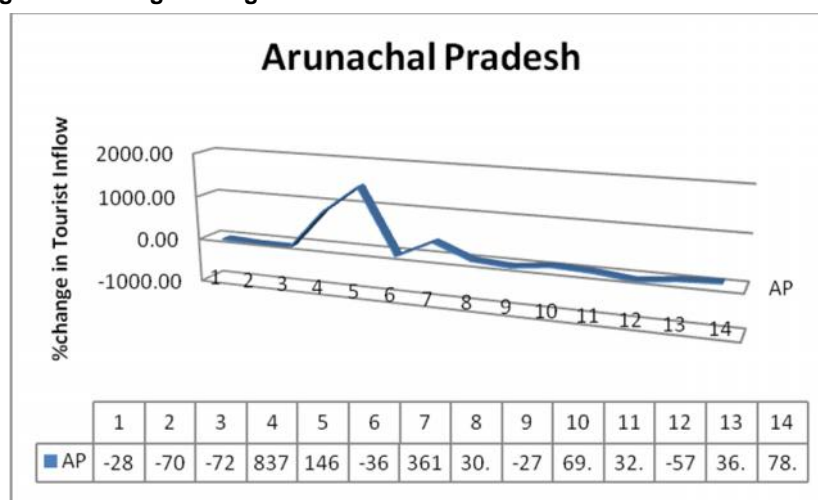
- Arunachal Pradesh**

Table 3: Tourist Inflow in Arunachal Pradesh

Year	Indian	Foreign	Total
2001-2002	5597	480	6077
2002-2003	4200	159	4359
2003-2004	1050	250	1300
2004-2005	NA	354	354
2005-2006	3025	292	3317
2006-2007	50612	1143	51755
2007-2008	31100	1939	33039
2008-2009	149292	3020	152312
2009-2010	195147	3945	199092
2010-2011	139829	3534	143363
2011-2012	237980	4753	242733
2012-2013	317243	5135	322378
2013-2014	125461	10846	136307
2014-2015	180964	5204	186168
2015-2016	326362	5283	331645

Source: NER databank, NEDFi

The tourist inflow to Arunachal Pradesh from 2001-2002 to 2015-2016 is presented in table 3. The state has recorded approximately 54 time rise in tourist inflow during this period. It is observed that compared to Indian tourist, foreign tourist inflow was more steadily growing from 2001-2002 to 2013-2014 except for 2002-2003 and 2005-2006. The two years after year 2013-14, the foreign tourist inflow sharply decreased to half. But as shown in fig. 2 the growth in total tourist inflow to Arunachal Pradesh is not steady as in number of years the percentage growth was less than the previous year.

Fig 2: Percentage Change in Tourist Inflow in AP from 2001-2002 to 2015-2016

- Meghalaya**

Table 4: Tourist Inflow in Meghalaya

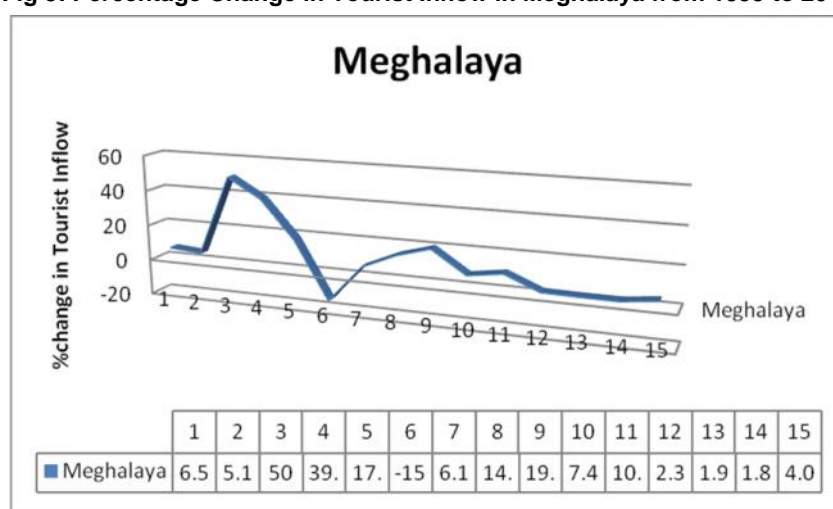
Year	Indian	Foreign	Total
1999	159730	1971	161701
2000	169929	2327	172256
2001	178697	2390	181087
2002	268529	3191	271720
2003	371953	6304	378257
2004	433495	12707	445902
2005	375911	5099	381010
2006	400287	4259	404546
2007	457685	5267	462952

2008	549954	4919	554873
2009	591398	4522	595920
2010	652756	4177	656933
2011	667504	4803	672307
2012	680254	5313	685567
2013	691269	6773	698042
2014	717789	8664	726453

Source: NER databank, NEDFi

The tourist inflow data of Meghalaya from year 1999 to 2014 is presented in table 4, which shows around 4.5 times jump in incoming tourist during his period. Along with the Indian tourist, the foreign tourist inflow has seen equal rise during the presented period. There was continuous growth in tourist inflow to the state except for year 2005. As presented in the fig. 3 the percentage increase in tourist visiting Meghalaya is quite steady since 1999.

Fig 3: Percentage Change in Tourist Inflow in Meghalaya from 1999 to 2014



• **Tripura**

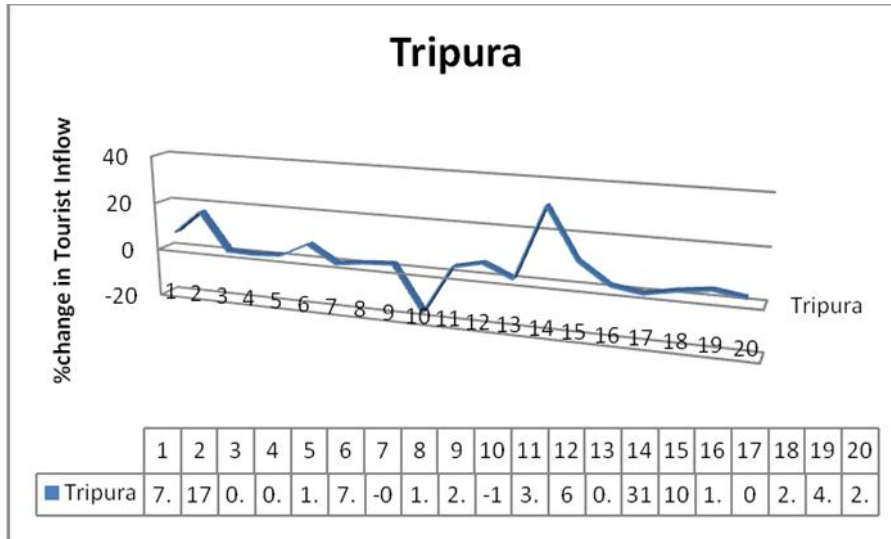
Table 4: Tourist Inflow in Tripura

Year	Indian	Foreign	Total
1995-1996	189251	93	189344
1996-1997	202659	192	202851
1997-1998	236119	806	236925
1998-1999	237804	1194	238998
1999-2000	238998	1250	240248
2000-2001	242036	1353	243389
2001-2002	257989	2564	260553
2002-2003	258089	2360	260449
2003-2004	260493	3684	264177
2004-2005	267023	2847	269870
2005-2006	222200	3091	225291
2006-2007	229621	3177	232798
2007-2008	243527	3358	246885
2008-2009	245745	3410	249155
2009-2010	320931	4763	325694
2010-2011	354006	5290	359296
2011-2012	359731	6550	366281
2012-2013	358625	7817	366442
2013-2014	359995	15376	375371
2014-2015	361581	29086	390667
2015-2016	363828	35619	399447

Source: NER databank, NEDFi

A detail of incoming tourist to state of Tripura including both foreign and domestic tourist is presented in Table 4. It was observed that Tripura has received highest number of foreign tourist in the year 2015-2016 compared to other three states considered for this study. The state has recorded continuous growth in total tourist inflow except for the year 2005-2006. The percentage change in tourist inflow to the Tripura is presented in fig. 4.

Fig 4: Percentage Change in Tourist Inflow in Tripura from 1995-1996 to 2015-2016



North East India has witnessed continuous growth in tourist inflow since last decade. According to Union Tourism Secretary Rashmi Verma, “Compared to 2016, the flow of foreign tourists visiting the North Eastern states increased by 16.7 per cent last year while the domestic tourists visiting the region increased by 22.8 per cent,”(Economic Times, Nov, 2018). But despite this increase, tourism in North Eastern States has not reached its full potential. This increase in number of tourists is not significant compared to the overall increase in tourist inflow to India. If we consider foreign tourist footfall, North eastern region receives a very small portion of that. For example, only about 0.5 percent of all foreign tourists to India visited the North East in 2015, according to statistics compiled by tourism departments of various states of the region and other sources. (NorthEastToday, Dec, 2017)

Among all the four states considered for this study, Assam receives more tourists per year. According to annual report of 2017-18 of Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) the state generated INR 4.22 crore last year, surpassing the 2016-17’s report when it incurred INR 2.24 crore (travelnewsdigest.com). To boast tourism in state Assam government rolled an ambitious Tourism policy on 19th October, 2017 by declaring the sector an industry with an aim to increase tourist inflow by at least two to three times within next five years (Times of India, 2017). With this new policy government targeting to establish Assam tourism in the global tourism amp as ‘Awesome Assam’, an all season tourist destination. Meghalaya is second in place in terms of tourist inflow, among the four states considered for this study. The state is gaining a lot of attraction in last one decade as a most sought after hill station in North East. The primary reason for this increase is improved internal security and free publicity of exotic and pristine spots on social networks and in the public domain, according to state tourism officials (Telegraph India, July, 2017). Meghalaya government has launched its tourism policy in the year 2011, with a vision to establish Meghalaya as a tourist destination by taking advantage of its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty.

The state of Tripura is also gaining its momentum to project itself as a tourism hub. Recently Chief Minister of Tripura asked the state tourism department to prepare an action plan with a stress on utilizing technology to promote the state’s tourism inside and outside the country (Times of India, July, 2018). In September 25th, 2018, CM launched the logo of Tripura Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) and said the state has huge potential to develop tourism. Since 2005-2006 the state has recorded steady growth in tourist inflow (Business Standard, September, 2018).

Among the four states considered for this study, Arunachal Pradesh shows most fluctuating tourist inflow. Although the place abundance of heritage sites, poor connectivity and infrastructure is one of major reason for not able to attract tourist. For example, although Ziro cultural landscaping found a mention in the list of world heritage sites, 2014, the place is not much explored by tourist because of bad road conditions (Indian Express, Dec, 2017). On a positive note, state government has initiated various programmes and projects to promote tourism in last few years. The department of tourism, Government of Arunachal Pradesh held its first Arunachal Pradesh Tourism Conclave 2017 in New Delhi (Economic Times, March, 2017). They are organizing theme-based events like the Tawang festival, Ziro festival of music, Arunachal spring carnival, adventure at Mechuka as also the Kameng river festival. Recently in November 23, 2018, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju went cycling with a popular Hindi movie star in Arunachal Pradesh to promote an adventure festival in Mechuka (Tribune India, Nov, 2018). These initiatives and attention from both Central and state government will definitely help to remove the bottlenecks of tourism in Arunachal Pradesh.

Conclusion

This study explored the heritage destination sites of select North Eastern states, viz. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Tripura, which have the potential to become major tourist attraction and contribute to regional development. Heritage tourism if well planned could be raised to an important income and employment generating sector and could also provide an incentive for increasing cultural awareness and activity and therefore produce a wide range of social benefits too. The indigenous heritage tourism of the study sites of the 4 states requires integration of the components, like, the desire of the community to share heritage & cultural legacy with the tourists, an intact cultural resource base which could provide the foundation for a community's cultural heritage product and also an accessible travel market for its growth and development. Further, attention and initiatives from both Central and state tourism department is highly essential to make the destinations as heritage tourist hotspot.

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