

Sports Tourism –A New Paradigm Shift in the Tourism Industry of Assam

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Abstract

The concept of sport tourism has become prominent in last few years. The tourism resources in Assam are high in terms of all available format of tourism. Sports tourism in Assam has grown drastically in last decade. Assam has worked hard for last many years to make a position at national and international level to present Assam as a hub of Sports and now, it seems possible.

This paper tries to understand the potential of sports tourism in Assam. This paper also aims at contributing to the literature by adding the dimension of tourism to sports.

Key Words: Sports tourism, Adventure tourism, Assam

Introduction:

“The concepts of tourism and sport are related and overlap. Sport is an important activity within tourism and tourism is a fundamental characteristic of sport”. -Hinch, T. D. and Higham, J. E. S.-2001

The tourism industry has started to recognize sport tourism, i.e. the experience of travel to engage in or view sport-related activities, as an important market.

Sports Tourism

Sports Tourism can be described as a tour made which is related with sports. In sports tourism a specific travel being made from one's location to another, in order to be either a participant or an audience in that particular ongoing or upcoming sport event. When sport is the primary reason for travel reinforced by the leisure elements present in the state is also known as sport tourism. In other way, it can also be explained as a combination of sports activities and travel wherein it consists of two broad categories.

- a. **Active Sports Tourism** – it can be stated as a travel for the purpose of participating in a sport, leisure or recreational activity.
- b. **Passive Sports Tourism** – it can be stated as travel for the purpose of visiting a sport, leisure or recreational activity or an event as an audience.

Objectives of the study:

- a. To study the overview of sports tourism in the state of Assam
- b. To study the prospects and problem in the state of Assam in Sports tourism

Source of Data

The data for the purpose of this study have been collected from secondary sources.

Literature review:

Roche, S. et.al. (2013), pointed out sport tourist as a moderating factor which influences tourists' interest in visiting a destination for sports activity and they resulting economic impact on a destination.

Giorgio,A. and Spinelli, G. (n.d), found that the type of visitors in sports tourism is likely to grow in near future, not only in quantitative terms but also and especially in terms of quality.

According a report published by India China Economic and Cultural Council (2014), it was found that India has a grown to a high extent and has huge potential to grow in sports tourism.

There are very limited literatures available on sports tourism particularly in Indian context; hence it is of high importance to undertake such a study in order to fill the gap in the literature from this part of the country.

Overview of Sports Tourism in Assam

Assam has always been a hot destination amongst travellers. There are several tourism attractions in Assam and also there are several types of tourism options are available in Assam. People always tend to travel to the different places of Assam to gain a hand on experience of its natural beauty, historical places and mythological places.

Sports tourism in Assam is not a new idea; it is evident from ancient times. Several sports activity has taken place from time to time in Assam involving all other states of Northeast region. The existence of sports tourism can be proved by linking it with the Asia's first amphitheatre which is also known as Rangghar, located in now the Sivasagar district of Assam. Rangghar is a great architectural monument built by the then Ahom kingdom in eighteenth century. It was build with a purpose to let the commoners enjoy the sports being played at that time e.g. animals fights and other sports. Since then, Assam has developed a lot in terms of flourishing the sports activity. Over the past decade, Assam has made a peculiar entry to register its name as the sports hub of the country. Particularly the gateway to North Eastern state, Guwahati has emerged as sporting hub by hosting several sports activity here. Government of Assam has taken several measures to convert the capital of the state in the sports hub. The dream came into reality by hosting the national games back in the year 2007 and it acted as a catalyst to build up the required infrastructure to organize such events of national and international status. Successful completion of national games gave a boost to emerge as a sport hub leaving behind other cities of the country.

Glimpses of sports activity held in past in Assam

- a. 33rd National Games 2007
- b. 31st Federation Cup 2009
- c. Indian Super League (ISL) 2014
- d. International football match, 2011
- e. FIFA World Cup Qualifier, 2016
- f. 12th South Asian Games, 2016
- g. 13th AFC Cup, 2016
- h. Under-17 FIFA World Cup, 2017
- i. AIBA World Youth Women's Boxing Championship 2017
- j. An India-Australia T20 in October, 2017
- k. 3rd edition of the premier badminton league (pbl) December, 2017
- l. Indian Super League November 2017-March 2018

General benefits of sport tourism in Assam

- a. As the sports tourism started to flourish in the state, several stadiums and hotels have come up. Establishment of these stadiums and hotels has created new job opportunities and other sources of income. Sports tourism has resulted in hotels and restaurants filled with guest.
- b. Sports tourism has created a positive image of state in terms of security, health, food and culture of the state
- c. As a result of sports tourism in the state, visitors also started travelling to other part of the state.
- d. New corporates started investing here.
- e. Sports tourism has created new source of entertainment

- f. Sports tourism has brought competitiveness among the youths of the state and motivated them to take part in sports as a profession
- g. Media house got a chance to earn revenue and spread positives of the states
- h. Overall the sports environment has improved in the state.

Adventure sports available in Assam

- a. Para Sailing- It's an entirely new concept launched by Assam tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) to attract domestic and foreign tourist as well. North Guwahati and Sadiya in Tinsukia district are the best location for Para sailing.
- b. Hang Gliding- the best place for hang gliding are Kamakhya Hills and hills around Kaziranga.
- c. River Rafting-The mighty river Brahmaputra and its unstable streams like Manas, Jia Bhoroli and Kapili offer huge scope for River Rafting
- d. Boat Racing- It is one of the most admired sports of Assam. Boat racing is often organized here during festive occasions at places like Hajo, Barpeta, Saulkuchi, Guwahati etc.
- e. Angling- The River Kapili, Jia Bhoroli and Manas are the best places for angling.
- f. River Cruise- River cruise start from the bank of river Brahmaputra at Guwahati and sails upto Kaziranga.
- g. Mountaineering- Assam's landscape makes an ideal destination for trekkers, mountaineers and rock climbers. The hills on particular place like, the North Cachar Hills and Karbi Hills are ready to receive tourists for trekking and mountaineering. There is also a familiar trekking route in both the districts. And also a rock hill in Morigaon District known as Elephant Rocks which offer ample scope for Rock Climbing. The Simhasana Hill of Karbi Anglong is also famous for rock climbing. The main city of Assam, Guwahati, is surrounded on three sides with beautiful hills.
- h. Golf- Most of the tea gardens of Assam have golf courses attached to them. All of them are 9 hole golf courses except for Digboi which is an eighteen hole course

Geographical look at the Possible Sports Destination – Assam

Assam has many tourist attractions that have healing abilities capable of providing rewarding experiences of life. Assam is the state located in the north east region of the country. Assam shares its border with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Burma, and Bhutan. It shares its boundaries domestically with Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal. Assam is also known as the gateway to Northeast India. Guwahati (Dispur) is the capital of Assam and it is the largest city of the state. Assam is famous for the availability of natural resources, bio diversity and cultural diversity. The state is also famous for its one horn rhino. There are also several national parks in Assam. There are vibrant categories of tourism available in Assam based on wildlife, natural beauty, religious, eco and medical tourism. Assam has extremely high potential in tourism sector and huge scope to improve it. In recent time, eco tourism has emerged as fastest growing tourism sector in Assam. The climate is pleasant and it is having a scenic landscape. Assam is becoming a popular tourist destination day by day among other states of the country and neighbouring country also.

The major cities of Assam are Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Silchar, Tezpur, Lakhimpur. These cities are well connected by road, rail and air. These cities have also great sports infrastructure and there is also a vast scope of improvement. The latest government policy on sports will definitely give a boost to development of sports sectors in these cities. If planned well, all these cities can be further added to locations for future sports event at national and international stature.

Challenges:

- a. The sports facilities and infrastructure needs to be upgraded from time to time.
- b. The condition of road needs to be improved. To improve the conditions of roads, huge investment is required.

- c. As of now only two five-star hotels have come up and a growing city like Guwahati needs more.
- d. Sports authority and associations should be free from any political interference.
- e. Sports should be run and managed by sportspersons only with able and honest support from the existing government.
- f. The behaviour of crowd should be sporty.

Prospects

- a. The curb on insurgency has helped the state to restore its image, which in turn fuelled the rise of Guwahati as a sports hub.
- b. Assam is always a hotspot for tourists, thus if sports activity are being held here it will attract another trendy crowd.
- c. Assam is full of sports talents. If nurtured in proper manner; definitely it will produce quality players of international level.
- d. As Assam is emerging as sports hub, several corporates may start investing in this region
- e. Sport tourism can strengthen national heritage, identity, and community spirits as local people
- f. People will join hands together to promote their culture.
- g. Low-cost regional airlines are also driving demand for sporting events as flights become more convenient, more regular, and of course, more affordable.
- h. Overall, the sports tourism niche market is expected to grow at a rapid rate for the years.

Government's Initiatives

- a. The government of Assam is working rigorously to develop at least 500 state-of-the-art football fields in the state for holding matches simultaneously in all the venues
- b. A sports friendly policy has been framed by the government of Assam in consultation with the eminent sportspersons of Assam.
- c. The Assam government proposes to utilise the sports infrastructure at Sarusajai sports complex here for grooming sportspersons in the form of a state sports academy.
- d. Government of Assam has allocated Rs 60 crore for the 2017-18 fiscal year for the construction of three proposed state-of-the-art sports complex at Dibrugarh, Kamrup and Lakhimpur districts.
- e. A further budget of Rs. five crore has been allocated for bringing the latest technology and sports materials in order to convert the existing infrastructure into state of the art facilities.

Future of sports tourism in Assam

Scope and future of sports tourism is endless in Assam because of its diverse topography and climatic conditions. People can enjoy on land and water, under water and in air whatsoever form of adventure sports in Assam. Future of sports tourism and adventure sports in Assam is very bright.

Recommendations for future research

This study has highlighted the prospects and problems of sports tourism in Assam, further research can be carried out to measure-

- a. Overall activity being carried out related to flourish the sports and tourism together.
- b. Quality of infrastructure and need of further infrastructure for making the dream come true.
- c. The loop holes in the policy and management, also the management of infrastructure can be considered for further study.
- d. The career advancement programmes adopted (if any) for players from this region.
- e. The proper utilisation of resources allocated for development of sports tourism.

Conclusion

Sports Tourism in Assam is growing rapidly. A large number of investors are willing to invest in it. In order to support their endeavours, the government needs to arrange an overall

sprucing of infrastructure management, security issues and marketing strategies. The travel operators themselves feel the need to introduce more value-added services so as to beckon international tourists to India. If everything goes on as planned, this emerging sports hub of the country will definitely turn into its sports capital in the near future.

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