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By Dr. Sherap Bhutia

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Dr. Sherap Bhutia

Abstract- Northeastern part of India comprising the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim possesses great physical and human diversities to project it as one of the most potential areas of the country in respect of tourism. The North-Eastern states of India are lesser explored as compared to the rest of the country, despite their scenic beauty. In the context of a globally growing sector like tourism, North-East India with both physical and human diversities is one of the most promising regions of the country in respect of tourism. Considering the significance of the tourism sector as a catalyst for regional development, an attempt has been made in this article to visualize the trend and development of tourism sector in Northeastern region and focus on the need for adoption of a sustainable tourism development strategy. Furthermore, the present study is also an attempt to address the key determinants of sustainability of tourism industry in the North-Eastern India and to establish the importance of the local entrepreneurship or local community participation in ensuring sustainable tourism development. It reveals from the study that tourism being a multi-dimensional activity, depends on the involvement of many other agencies for its success. Other departments like roads, culture, forest and so on, can play an important role in the development of the total tourism product. Therefore image improvement, infrastructure up gradation, and administrative and security concerns need to be handled for tourism to flourish as a development industry with community participation for sustainable and regional development.

Keywords: north-east region, tourist, states, tourism, development.

I. INTRODUCTION

North East India, called the land of the seven sisters and one brother, is a region which can be best described as virgin, wild and untouched from the modernizations taking elsewhere in the world. It is a region guarded by mountains, the only passage being a narrow stretch of land some 40 km wide, called the Siliguri Corridor. Beyond this corridor lies the seven sister states of North-Eastern India, each state more beautiful than the other, each with its own cultures and beliefs, each having its own charm. Because of the regions inaccessibility from the rest of world, it has been lucky enough to maintain most of its natural diversity.

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Northeastern part of India comprises the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura which possesses great physical and human diversities to project it as one of the most potential areas of the country in respect of tourism promotion. As a zone of convergence of diverse ethnic stocks, the region is undoubtedly a showcase of cultural diversity. Considering the significance of the tourism sector as a catalyst for regional development, an attempt has been made in this article to visualize the present scenario and trends of the tourism sector in North-East Region and focus on the problems and prospects regarding sustainable tourism.

II. GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

North-East India, popularly known as North-East Region (NER), comprises of the eight States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim and geographically situated in the North-East corner of India, at Latitude 21.57°N - 29.30°N and Longitude 88°E - 97.30°E with an area of 26.2 million Sq. Km. It comprises 7.8% of the land area of the country. The North-East Region shares the international boundaries of India with China to the North, Bangladesh to the South West, Bhutan, and Nepal to the North West and Myanmar to the East. This region is connected with the rest of India only through a narrow corridor in North Bengal, known as Chicken Neck, having an approximate width of 33 km on the eastern side and 21 km on the western side.

About 70% of North-East is the hilly region, and the topography varies within each state. Mountains and hills cover most of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and about half of Tripura, 20% of Assam, 90% of Manipur and almost entire Sikkim. The plains of the region are mainly made up of separate landmasses - the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley in Assam and the Tripura plains in the South. In Manipur, the valley is small, comprising only about 10% of the total area of the State. The topography of the hills is generally rugged and vast areas are inaccessible. The flora and fauna of this region is numerous and varied. North-East is regarded as one of the 7 most bio-diverse

regions of the world (hottest hotspots). Many endangered species of fauna like the one-horned-Asiatic rhino, white winged- wood duck, and Golden Langur can be spotted in the reserved forests and National Parks of NER. The North-East States possesses more than 550 varieties of orchids, which is said to be almost 70% of the total orchid species identified so far.

The North-East Region is the home to extraordinarily diverse mosaic of ethnic groups having distinctive social, cultural and economic identity, more akin to their South Asia neighbours than main land India. All the eight states in total occupy an area of 262, 179 sq.km which is 7.9% of the total area of the country. The

largest state in terms of the area is Arunachal Pradesh which occupies an area of 837,43 sq. km followed by Assam which occupies an area of 78,438 sq. kms. The smallest of all the 8 states is Sikkim which has an area of 7,096 sq. kms. The density of the region varies widely due to complex geographical and cultural composition. With a total population of 45.48 million (2011 census) the North-Eastern Region is relatively sparsely populated compared too much of the rest of India. However, population density varies widely among the northeastern states. Assam and Tripura are the most densely populated States with over 350 persons/sq. km, while Arunachal Pradesh is the least densely populated with 17 persons/sq. km.

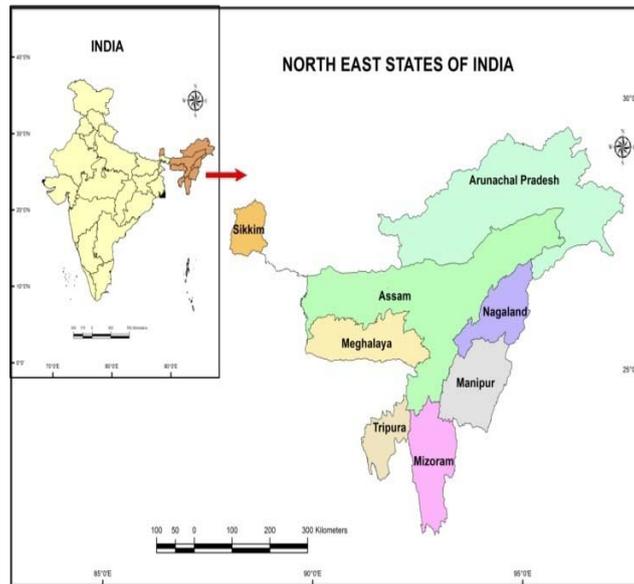


Figure 1: Location Map of North-East States of India

North-East region is a virgin unexplored terrain with vast tourism potential in the form of wildlife sanctuaries, adventure tourism assets, diverse cultural heritage, multi faceted fairs & festivals, world famous

Buddhist Monasteries etc. The primitive culture of at least the Neolithic age now co-exists with the modern and post-modern lifestyle.

Table 1: Area, Population & Density of Population in North-East States of India, 2011

NE States	Area in Sq. Km	Population (2011)			Population Density	% Decadal Growth (2001-2011)
		Persons	Males	Females		
Arunachal Pradesh	83,743	1,383,727	713,912	669,815	17	26.0
Assam	78438	31,205,576	15,939,443	15,266,133	398	17.1
Manipur	22,327	2,570,390	1,290,171	1,280,219	115	18.6
Meghalaya	22,429	2,966,889	1,491,832	1,475,057	132	27.9
Mizoram	21,081	1,097,206	555,339	541,867	52	23.5
Nagaland	16,579	1,978,502	1,024,649	953,853	119	-0.6
Sikkim	7,096	610,577	323,070	287,507	86	12.9
Tripura	10,486	3,673,917	1,874,376	1,799,541	350	14.8
NER	262,179	45,486,784	23,212,792	22,273,992	158	14.2

Source: Census of India, 2011

III. ECONOMY OF NORTH-EAST STATES

There are differences among the eight States in the North-Eastern region concerning their resource endowments, level of industrialization as well as infrastructural facilities. The industrial sector has mainly grown around tea, petroleum [crude], natural gas, mining, saw mills and steel fabrication units in other parts of the region. The economy of the region is still primarily agrarian but its full potential is yet to be exploited. The contribution of agriculture to State domestic income is much higher in this region, except for Meghalaya and Nagaland. Mining in the case of Meghalaya and forestry and logging in the case of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland are important contributors to NSDP (Net State Domestic Product). The contribution of construction is also high in this region. The region's economy is generally characterized by low per-capita income, low capital formation, in-adequate infrastructure facilities, geographical isolation and communication bottleneck, inadequate exploitation of natural resources like mineral resources, hydro-power potential, forests etc., low progress in the industrial field, lack of private and foreign direct investment and high unemployment rate among the relatively high literate people.

Tourism in India is a growing industry, and as per World Tourism Organisation predictions, India will be a leader in using tourism as an employment generator. North-East India must be placed in a strategic position to take advantage of this growth. Tourism being a multi-sectoral activity can stimulate different sectors of the economy. It is evident from highly developed states and countries that tourism opens up immense opportunities for economic development, poverty alleviation and income generation. Being labour intensive, it opens avenues for a host of employment opportunities. Tourism can also make a positive impact on conserving the environment, cultural enrichment, development of rural areas and empowerment of women. Tourism has emerged as one of the prospective sectors of industry in the Northeast. The economic development of NER has been greatly influenced by tourism. The growth of tourism industry over the years has nourished and stimulated the development process. The tourism industry has also been able to generate large scale employment opportunities and the development of the region as a whole. The rich natural beauty, serenity and exotic flora and fauna of North-East region are invaluable resources for the development of eco-tourism.

With the increasing intensity of the emergency in the North-East, there is a deep need to devise long-term, sustainable solutions for the region. A large part of the emergence arises from economic need, and hence the solution lies in economic (and social) development of the region. However, for economic development to

take place, several key players need to step up and take the initiative in the region. In recent years, various strategies for the development of the NER-special development packages, the New Industrial Policy including incentives for the development of industry, investment in communications, earmarked funds for the NER, etc. -formulated by the Government and under public pressure have stirred the economy of the North-East. However, concerted measures are needed to inject greater dynamism into the development process so that the region can make up for a lost time and catch up with the rest of the country.

IV. TOURISM RESOURCES IN NORTH-EAST STATES

The North-East States of India is a region rich in varied tourism attractions, some of which are unmatched in terms of attractiveness and pull factor. However because of remoteness, accessibility concerns, high travel time taken, security concerns and a lot of other factors, these barring few have not become established tourism destinations at a national level. Most of the other sites have medium level attractiveness, however not strong enough to become big tourism drivers in themselves. They presently lack the potential to attract tourists at the national and international level. There are many National parks, wildlife resources and other nature tourism sites in this part of India. But the development around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries is minimal, not properly planned or not well regulated. This region is blessed with rich biodiversity, huge forest wealth, fruits and vegetables, flowers, herbs and aromatic plants, rare and rich flora and fauna, India's largest perennial water system, the River Brahmaputra and its tributaries, horticultural products/ plantation crops/vegetables/spices and rare forest products. Some sites would appeal to special interest tourists. Thus it is important to develop tourism circuits, so that these medium level destinations also get tourist attraction and develop.

With more than 220 ethnic groups with an equal number of dialects makes it hugely diverse region. The North-East India is rich in biological diversity and contains more than one-third of the country's total biodiversity. The region has at least 7500 flowering plants, 700 orchids, 58 bamboos, 64 citrus, 28 conifers, 500 mosses, 700 ferns and 728 lichen species. The region is equally rich in faunal diversity. An estimated 3624 species of insects, 50 mollusks, 236 fishes, 64 amphibians, 137 reptiles, 541 birds and 160 mammalian species have been identified so far. The region is also rich in terms of genetic and ecosystem diversity. Some of the important gene pools of citrus, banana and rice are reported to have originated from this region. A wide variety of man-modified ecosystems such as jhum (one way of shifting Cultivation) agro-ecosystem, wet rice

agro-ecosystem and alder based agro-ecosystem contribute towards the rich ecosystem diversity.

The North-East Region has a variety of tourism resources such as heritage, historical, cultural, natural etc. This region is extremely rich in tribal culture and particularly international tourists use to visit to see this. Many tribal communities are residing in North-East India keeping their culture and traditions intact. In Arunachal Pradesh only there are 26 major tribal groups with numerous sub groups. The entire region is extremely rich when it comes to Crafts- particularly handlooms which vary between States, bamboo products etc. The present scenario of tourism does not consider local arts and crafts as a prime tourism resource. However, nationally and internationally, there has been increasing

tourist interest in this. Fair & Festivals are very big colourful attractions and really reflect the strong cultural heritage of the States of North-Eastern Region. At present, Hornbill festival is conducted with full spirit and lot of tourists visit during the time. The region offers almost all kind of tourist activities, Trekking, Mountaineering, Jungle Safari Trails, Adventure Activities, Ornithological Tour Programmes, Buddhist Circuit Tours, Cultural Tours, Exquisite Sea Beaches, Pilgrimage Tours, Tea Tour, and many other options which can lure tourist. These resources are the major differentiators compared to tourism of other regions and hence needs to be protected and properly addressed, in controlled manner.

Table 2: States-wise Tourists Circuits & Destinations in North-East India

State	Tourist Circuits	Tourist Spots	
Arunachal Pradesh	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bhalukpong- Bomdila-Tawang 2. Itanagar-Ziro-Daporijo-Along-Pasighat 3. Tinsukhia-Parasuram Kund 4. Miao-Namdapha 5. Dibrugarh-Roing-Anini 6. Dibrugarh-Tezu-Hayuliang 7. Pasighat-Yingkiong 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Itanagar 2. Tezpur 3. Bomdila 4. Ziro 5. Tawang 6. Pasighat 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Namdapha Wildlife Sanctuary 2. Parasuram Kund
Assam	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guwahati-Phulbari/Jakhalabandha-Kaziranga-Sibsagar 2. Guwahati-Barbeta-Baroma-Manas 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kamakhya Temple 2. Bashista Ashram 3. Nabagraha Temple 4. Ugratara Temple 5. Dirgheshwari Temple 6. Ashvoklanta Temple 7. River Cruise on Brahmaputra 8. Sualkuchi 9. Hajo 10. Tezpur 11. Bhalukpong 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sibsagar 2. Haflong 3. Majuli Island 4. Kaziranga National Park 5. Manas National Park 6. Nameri National Park 7. Orang National Park 8. Pabitora Sanctuary
Manipur	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Imphal-Moirang-Loktak-Lake-Keibul Lamjao National Park 2. Imphal-Ukhrul-Imphal 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Imphal 2. Shri Govindaji Temple 3. Khwairamband Bazar 4. Shaheed Minar 5. War Cemeteries 6. Langthabal 7. Kangchup 8. Waithou 9. Kaina 10. Khongjom 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tengnoupel 2. Moirang 3. Loktak Lake 4. Sendra Island 5. Bishnupur 6. Ukhrul 7. Central Khonghampat Orchidarium 8. Manipur Zoological Garden
Meghalaya	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kaziranga-Guwahati-Cherrapunjee-Shillong 2. Shillong-Mawphlang-Weilloi-Mawsynram-Shillong 3. Shillong-Smit-Nartiang-Thadlaskein-Jowai-Thlu Umwi-Shillong 4. Guwahati-Dudnai-Bajengdoba-Anoggre-Tura Barengapara-Baghmara-Siju-Balpakram-Shillong 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shillong Peak 2. Ward's Lake 3. Lady Hydari Park 4. Lewduh Market 5. Sohpetboney Peak 6. Spread Eagle Falls 7. Sweet Falls 8. Bishop Falls 9. Beadon Falls 10. Elephant Falls 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All Saint Church 2. Umiam Lake 3. Cherrapunjee 4. Mawsynram 5. Mawphlang 6. Ranikor 7. Tura 8. Nartiang 9. Thadlaskein Lake 10. And many Caves

Mizoram	1. Aizwal & excursions in and around the areas	1. Aizwal 2. Durtlang 3. Bung 4. Paikhai 5. Tamdil 6. Vantawang	1. Champhai 2. Phawngpul 3. Saiha 4. Palakdil 5. Dampa Sanctuary
Nagaland	1. Dimapur-Kohima-Wokha-Mokokchung-Tuensang-Mokokchung-Zunheboto-Kohima	1. Kohima 2. World War II Memorial 3. State Museum 4. Kohima War Cemetery 5. Barra Basti 6. Khonoma	1. Dimapur 2. Mokokchung 3. Wokha 4. Phet 5. Zunheboto 6. Intanki Wildlife Sanctuary
Sikkim	1. Pemayongtse-Yuksam-Kewzing-Ravangla-Timitarku-Gangtok-Singtam-Rangpo-Teesta-Siliguri 2. Namchi-Nayabazar-Chakung-Soreng-Buriakhop-Varse-Hilley-Uttarey-Dentam-Burmiok-Legship-Tatopani-Sikip-Namchi	1. Gangtok 2. Mt. Kanchendzonga View 3. Tashi namgyal Institute of Tibetology 4. Tsomgo lake 5. Himalayan Zoological Park	1. Nathu-La Pass 2. Bakkhim 3. Dzongri 4. Pemayangtse 5. Yuksam 6. And many Monasteries
Tripura	1. Agartala-Sipahijala-Neermahal-Udaipur-Matabari-Pilak-Mahamuni 2. Agartala-Dumboor Lake-Unakooti-Jampui Hills	1. Agartala 2. Ujjayanta Palace 3. Kamalagar 4. Udaipur-Neermahal 5. Bhubaneswari Temple 6. Matabari	1. Pitak 2. Mahamuni 3. Dumboor Lake 4. Jampui Hills 5. Unakoti

Source: Compiled from various publications of Tourism Department.

The Region is endowed with diverse tourist attractions and each State has its own distinct features. The attractions are scattered over the entire region and are largely located in remote areas within highly fragile environments. These attractions and the people of the Region constitute the tourism resources at large. All the Eight States of North-East have ample tourist destination, which is given in Table 2. Table 2 shows the various tourist circuits and tourist destination which can be explored by the tourists in this part of the country. Among the eight States, Arunachal Pradesh has 07 tourist circuits, Meghalaya 04 tourist circuits, Assam, Manipur, Sikkim and Tripura had 02 tourist circuits each and Mizoram and Nagaland have 01 tourist circuits each. Likewise, various tourist spots available in this region are also shown in this table. The cultural products for tourism in the region include the visual and performing arts, crafts, traditional ceremonies and costumes, fairs and festivals, oral literature, life and lifestyle, dietary habit, etc. Various fairs and festivals are being organized in respective States, which are major attraction for the tourists and each has its unique special message to the travelers who passes from one State to another. All these festivals highlight the region's rich indigenous culture combined with folk songs, tribal dances, cuisines and handicrafts.

V. TRENDS AND PRESENT SCENARIO OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Travel and tourism is the largest service industry in India. This industry provides heritage, cultural,

medical, business and sports tourism. It is expected that the tourism sector's contribution to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) will grow at the rate of 7.8 per cent yearly in the period 2013-2023. The Indian tourism sector has been flourishing in recent years due to the improved connectivity to and from the country. Also, a better lodging facility at the tourist destinations has been a factor which has contributed to increase in foreign tourist. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has played a very active role in promoting tourism in India. With the foreign tourists arrivals at 7.68 millions in 2014 and India having 0.64% of the world tourists arrivals, India has huge potential to expand its tourism.

Tourism, as an instrument of economic development, will steadily assume an even greater importance in the future. There are grounds for optimism about what sustainable tourism development can mean for developing nations in the 21st century. Sustainability carries the idea of self-regulating societies in which economic and social changes are broadly accommodated. Spread over an area of 262,179 sq. kms, the North-East India has an ecology and lifestyle, and economy that have been shaped by the major rivers of the region - the Brahmaputra and the Barak, ranges of mountains and thick tracks of jungles and heavy monsoons. The North-East of India is a reservoir of rich natural resources & biodiversity and, the amalgamation of different tribes and cultures. This region is a melting pot of variegated cultural mosaic of people and races, an ethnic tapestry of many hues and shades. The folk culture is still vital in this region. Well integrated with life

and nature, the folk artworks have a common element of tune and tone.

The tourist arrivals in the North-East from 2005-2014 are presented in Table-3. The table further shows that there has been an increase in tourist arrivals in the NE Region and the rate of growth has been consistent.

It also indicates that tourist arrival in the NE has increased tremendously from 2006. There were a total of 3,553,172 tourists to the North-Eastern States in 2005 with the figure going up to 6,762,100 in 2013. That number further increased to 7,008,467 in 2014. (Figure-2).

Table 3: Tourist Arrivals in North-East Region, 2005-2014

Year	Tourist in Number			Growth Rate in %		
	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total
2005	3515792	37380	3553172	-	-	-
2006	4454266	38496	4492762	26.69	02.99	26.44
2007	4727854	43665	4771519	06.14	13.43	06.20
2008	5212654	47761	5260415	10.25	09.38	10.25
2009	5708878	47595	5756473	09.52	-00.35	09.43
2010	6166269	50950	6217219	08.01	07.05	08.00
2011	6374254	58920	6433174	03.37	15.64	03.47
2012	6663933	66302	6730235	04.54	12.53	04.62
2013	6677280	84820	6762100	00.20	27.93	00.47
2014	6889915	118552	7008467	03.18	39.77	03.64

Source: Tourism Departments, North-Eastern States of India.

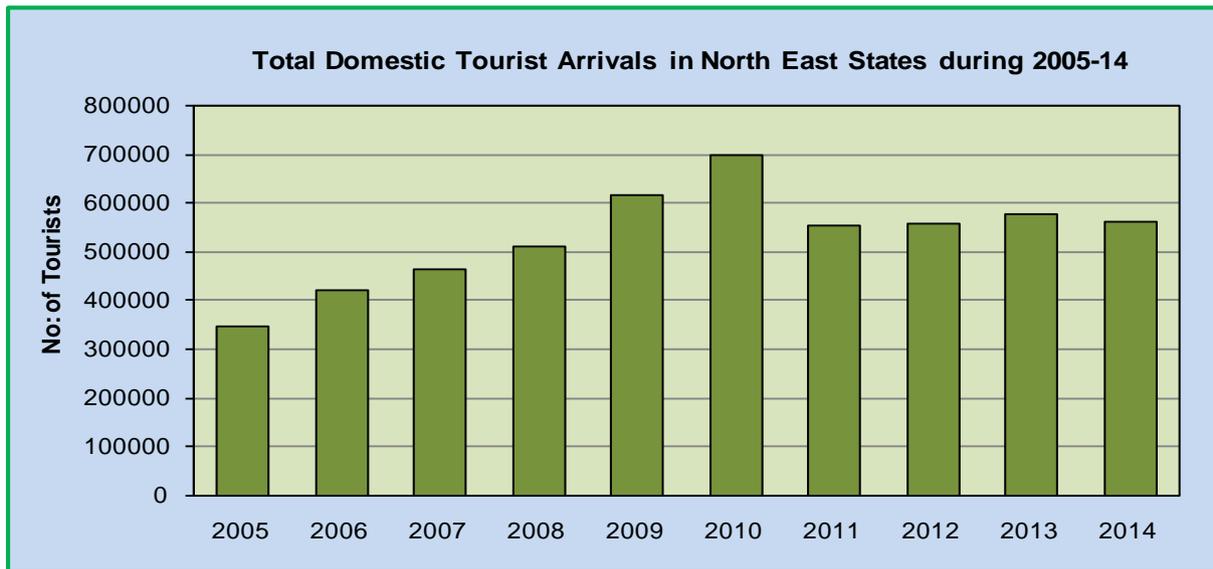


Figure 1: Bar Diagram Showing Domestic Tourist Arrivals in North-East Region

Among the North-East States, Assam attracts the largest numbers of tourists with 4,848,239 (4,826,702 of domestic tourist and 21,537 of foreign tourist) as shown in Figure-3, mainly because of famous Kamakhya temple and Kaziranga National Park. Almost all major centers of both private and Government are available in Assam. Furthermore, since, to go to the other States of North-East Region excluding Sikkim, Assam is the doorstep, it has grasp all the opportunities of tourism and maximum inflows of tourists are concentrated here. Besides Assam, Meghalaya and

Sikkim also attract tourists. Nagaland has been found as the least visited States with lowest tourists' inflows.

State-wise classification of domestic & foreign tourist arrivals is given in Table-4. The figure shows that Assam's contribution in terms of domestic tourist flows outweighs other States. Sikkim has been a destination of preference for foreign tourists followed by Assam. Meghalaya & Arunachal Pradesh have started showing signs of growth, both in terms of domestic and foreign tourists. The domestic tourist visits to North-East have raised from 3,515,792 tourists in 2005 to 6,889,915

tourists in 2014 (Figure-3). It further reveals that Assam was at the first place with 4,826,702 number of domestic tourist arrivals during 2014. It was followed by Meghalaya with 716,469 tourist and Sikkim with 562,418

tourists and the least number of domestic tourist arrivals is recorded in Nagaland with only 58,413 domestic tourists.

Table 4: State-wise Inflow & Growth of Domestic & Foreign Tourist in North-East Region

NE States	2013			2014			Growth Rate in %		
	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	(2013-14)		
							Domestic	Foreign	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	125461	10846	136307	180964	5204	186168	44.24	-52.02	36.58
Assam	4684527	17638	4702165	4826702	21537	4848239	3.03	22.11	3.11
Manipur	140673	1908	142581	115499	2769	118268	-17.9	45.13	-17.05
Meghalaya	691269	6773	698042	716469	8664	725133	3.65	27.92	3.88
Mizoram	63377	800	64177	68203	836	69039	7.61	4.5	7.58
Nagaland	35638	3304	38942	58413	3679	62092	63.91	11.35	59.45
Sikkim	576749	31698	608447	562418	49175	611593	-2.48	55.14	0.52
Tripura	359586	11853	371439	361247	26688	387935	0.46	125.16	4.44

Source: Tourism Departments, North-Eastern States of India.

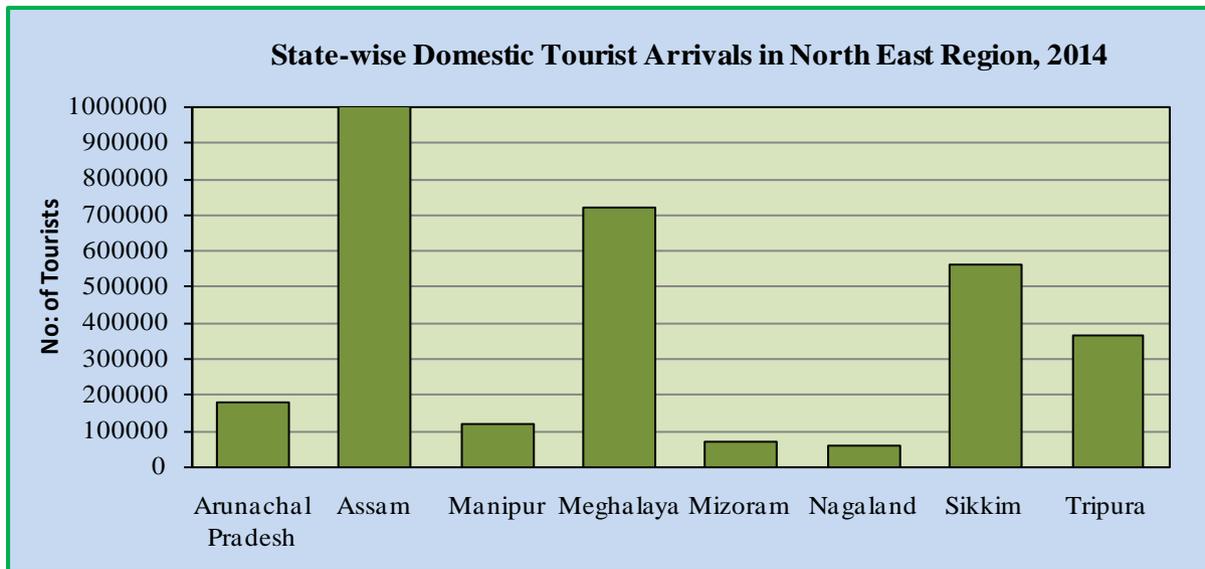


Figure 2: Bar Diagram Showing State-wise Domestic Tourist Arrival in North-East Region

The foreign tourist arrival in North-East has increased from 37,380 persons in 2005 to 118,552 in 2014 (Figure-4). The foreign tourist arrival as per States-wise in the North-East Region is not much satisfactorily. It is the State of Sikkim where the maximum number of foreign tourist use to visit in compares to other States of this region. The Figure-5 depicts that during 2014, Sikkim drew about 49,175 of foreign tourist arrivals followed by Tripura with 26,688, Assam with 21,537, and Meghalaya with 8,664 foreign tourist and rest of the States drew below 6000 tourists. The region has potentiality to become the most favorite tourism destination for International tourist, as it enjoys pollution

free, moderate and pleasant weather throughout the year. But due to mis-information and perception about the situation of North-East, the region is viewed as a highly unsafe region for travel, so the foreign tourist are discouraged to travel in North-East India. This perception need to be changed in order to increase the foreign tourist in North-East region. Besides the old news in social media regarding the abnormal situation in North-East are being circulated discouraging the tourist from visiting the region without knowing the actual ground truth and present scenario.



Figure 3: Bar Diagram Showing Foreign Tourist Arrivals in North-East Region

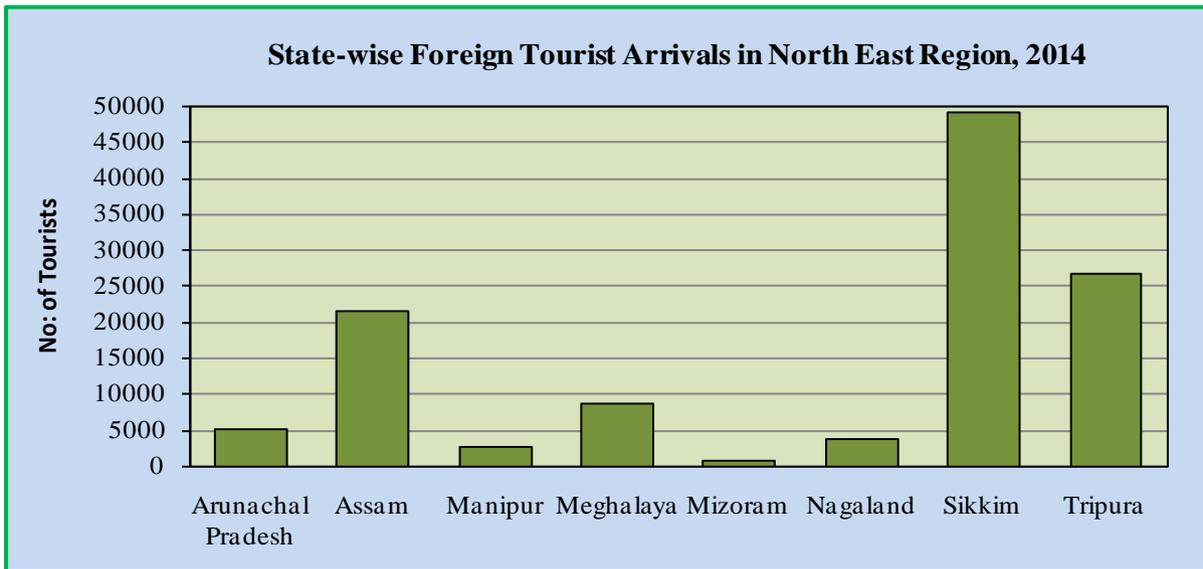


Figure 4: Bar Diagram Showing State-wise Foreign Tourist Arrivals in North-East Region

As per the average annual growth rate of tourists' inflow, the picture is quite different. The overall growth rate of tourist (both domestic and foreign) in North-East was as high as 26.44% during 2005-06 and now this growth rate has decreased as low as 3.64% during 2013-14 as shown in Figure-6. A high and positive growth of 12.53% was registered in foreign tourist visits to North-East States of India during 2012 from 2011, which further rose by more than 100% to register a growth of 27.93% during 2013 from 2012. Foreign tourist arrivals in North-East witnessed a growth of 39.77% during 2014 from 2013, according to data provided from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. The North-East of India is finally turning a new leaf in tourism, as the number of *foreign tourists* has more than doubled in 2014 compared to the previous year.

Among the Eight States of North-East, there is a sudden growth in the flow of foreign tourists to Tripura with 125% growth rate during 2013-14, followed by Sikkim with 55.14% and Manipur with 45.13% and the least was Arunachal Pradesh where there is decline of Foreign Tourist was recorded with -52.02% (Figure-7). Whereas, the total number of domestic tourist inflow to Nagaland increased by 63.91%, followed by Arunachal Pradesh by 42.24%, Mizoram with 7.61%, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura with below 5% growth rate whereas Sikkim and Manipur experience the negative growth rate of -2.48% and -17.90% respectively.

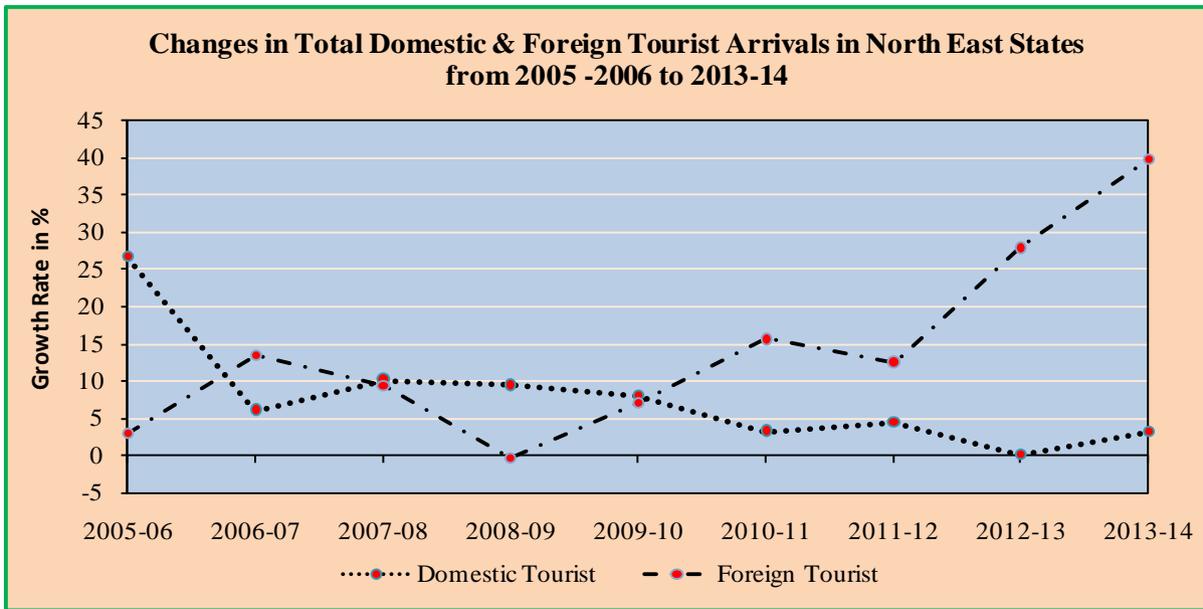


Figure 5: Diagram Showing Growth Rate in Domestic & Foreign Tourist in NER

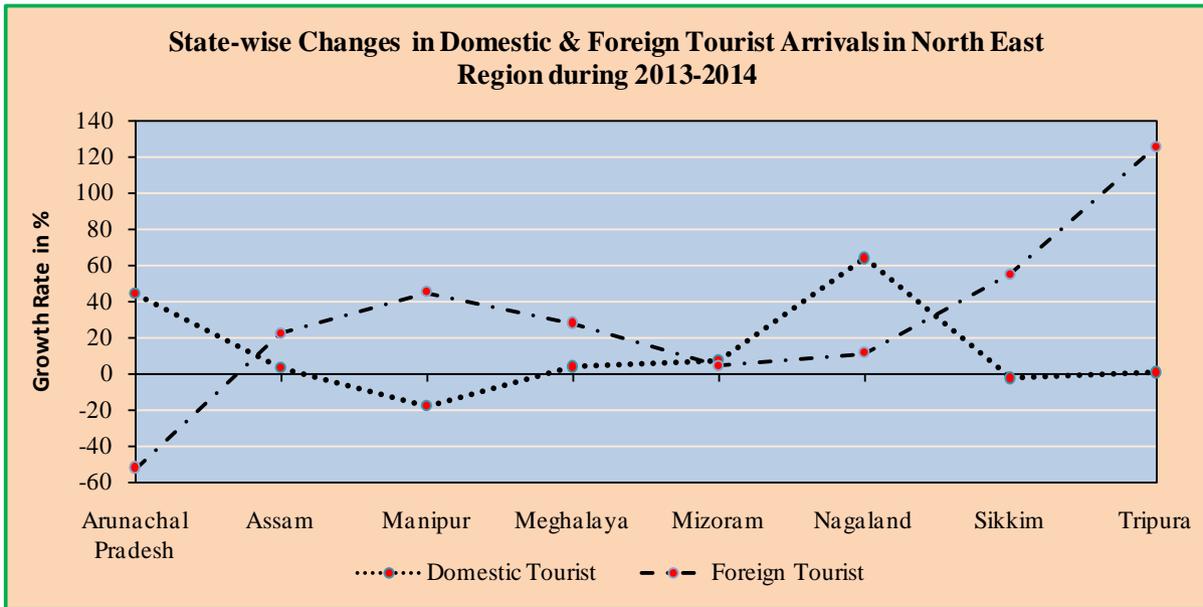


Figure 6: Diagram Showing State-wise Growth Rate of Tourist Arrivals in NER

Despite its vast tourism resources, the North-East Region could not attract only 0.54% of the domestic tourist flow of the whole country in 2014. Even within the North-East Region, around 88% of the domestic tourist arrivals are in the States of Assam, Meghalaya and Sikkim only. The percentage of foreign tourist arrivals in the North-East Region is 0.52% to the total tourists which is negligible in comparison to arrivals in the country. The major constraints for less foreign tourist arrivals in this region is its connectivity to other circuits, less tourism marketing of this region in comparison to the other circuits of the country and perception of safety in the region.

VI. PROBLEMS OF TOURISM IN NORTH-EAST

The North-East India is plagued by multiple problems, from poverty to insurgency, which have rendered it poorer and less connected than the rest of the country. These realities, have thus far, prevented the North-East from realizing its full tourism potential. The region is characterized by limited tourism infrastructure facilities, particularly in terms of quality and experiential/interpretational, and site services in certain circuit and mostly nil elsewhere.

The main problems that are facing for tourism development in the North-East States of India are self-explanatory which can be identified as under:-

Security Threats/Perceptions: The region is viewed as a highly unsafe region for travel. There are reality situations at some parts, but overall there is an image deficit. The North-East is situated in a geographically vulnerable zone. Almost 98% of the North-Eastern borders are international ones – connected to Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. A major risk associated with this unique geo-political location is that of cross-border human trafficking. Adding to the vulnerability are factors of unemployment, gender-based violence, armed conflicts and oppressive social structures. The insurgency problems have repelled many people from entering North-East Region. In some states like Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, etc., issues of insurgency don't come up, but these states are also marred by a generalization and superficial knowledge of the North-East Region. Because of security concerns in certain circuits/sub-regions/sites, the potential tourists outside generally feel whole area is unsafe, this perception needs to be changed through different measures.

Accessibility & Transportation: Accessibility is the single biggest problem of North-East Region. Railways is the major primary mode of transport for far off destinations by domestic tourists. Railways network is abnormally poor in the region. Railways connectivity is non-existent for most States/sub-regions. Unless railway plans are implemented, it will not lead to large volumes of tourist inflow. Air connectivity is also limited. Roads, which are now the main form of connectivity between States and destinations are in varying grades across. Assam has very good road connectivity in general, hill areas suffer in terms of poor road connectivity and condition. . The distances, hilly roads and the condition of the roads result in high travel time. Accessibility needs to be first addressed not only from tourism perspective, but also for improving security situation and access to markets.

Accommodation Facility: The present accommodation capacity, is extremely lacking both in terms of numbers and quality. Existing lodging facilities are insufficient to cope with increasing demand as well as do not cater to high spending tourists, and quality is very poor. Except in few cities and main destinations, standard quality accommodation is not available elsewhere. There is a need to develop accommodation facilities at most destinations/hubs/nodes, regularise, augment the facility, to become a quality destination and meet the requirements of increased tourist traffic after development of the circuit. There is requirement of professionalism in North-Eastern Region's hotel industry.

Hygienic Food: Standard & hygienic food restaurants and hotels are lacking in North-East Region. To attract quality tourists, hygienic food joints are one of the foremost requirements. Restaurants are required on roads connecting major destinations. The food habits of

North-East are quite different, though this would become an additional interest point for some tourists, standard Indian food is required at all destinations/key circuit routes.

Tourist Amenities: The wayside amenities including toilets, dustbins, drinking water, filling stations, vehicle repair shops etc. are inadequate/non-existent at sites and enroute. Tourist spots/destinations are spread over large distances with no proper wayside amenities. Other tourist's facilities like guide, map, foreign exchange, ATMs, Cyber cafe, signage etc. are also lacking and need to be addressed. There are inadequate entertainment facilities such as, exhibition centres, cultural theatres, shopping haats etc. for tourists. These facilities will increase stay of tourists in North-East Region and their expenditure to the economy.

Tourist Information System: There is need of tourist information system at most of the circuits in the region and outside. A full-scale publicity drive is crucial for making tourists aware of what in worth seeing in the region and the local community to care for proper marketing of its landscape, heritage and skills. Tourist Information offices existing in North-East Region do provide some information on some tourist destinations. However, the information system needs to be strengthened and means diversified by giving information related to tour operators in NER, skilled and authorised guides, places of interest etc.

Brand Image and Exposure: Regional spread of resources is not uniform- there are few attractions which can sell as stand-alone destinations, however there are many attractions which are medium level, however approached as independent attractions, rather than in circuit manner. There is lack of exposure in tourism products which can generate markets in all the destinations and place of attractions. No proper marketing strategy has been implemented so far in the region. Hence there is no distribution network in place; none of the tour operators sell region's tourism products. There is a lack of a brand identity for the region. Ideally, a brand image should be developed for the region, which should be integrated into the highly successful "Incredible India" campaign.

Permit System: Tourists are not allowed to visit some restricted area where the Inner-Line Permits is necessary to be obtained from the respective authority. Ethnic issues as well as the sensitive nature and proximity to the borders of China, Bhutan, and Myanmar deems this permit necessary. This permit is compulsory for both the foreign tourist as well as the domestic tourist. This type of permit system in some states makes it difficult for the independent travellers to make self arrangements for travel or have to travel to certain cities for issue of permits. The present system of issuing permits from few locations is an impediment to tourist travel. Also the manual system is Government office time based. Thus,

it is proposed that permits be converted to an online permit system.

The above mentioned problems of tourism are the underlying foundations for the entire economic development of the North-East Region. To overcome the above constraints and problems, some immediate as well as long-term measures are to be adopted. A strong political will have to be set with extensive leadership for restoration of peacefulness and political stability. The infrastructure required by tourism like transport, communications, water supply and health services etc. are also benefits local communities and can be used for other activities like speeding disaster relief, providing for the local population and fuelling the overall development of the region. Although there are several measures being taken by the State and the Centre to upgrade tourism potential of the North-East but it still remains one of the least preferred choice as a tourist destination. Image improvement, infrastructure upgradation, and administrative and security concerns need to be handled for tourism to flourish as a development industry with community participation.

VII. PROSPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH-EAST

In the context of a globally growing sector like tourism, North-East India with both physical and human diversities is one of the most promising regions of the country in respect of tourism. The North-Eastern states of India are lesser explored as compared to the rest of the country, despite their scenic beauty. The tourism potential of the North-East has not been fully exploited. The Ministry of Tourism calls the region a '*paradise unexplored*'. Global tourism has been booming and future projections show that this trend will continue. The new generations of travellers who are 'money rich and time poor' are increasingly looking for unique experiences. More and more people are looking at tourism as less of a journey and more of an experience – a phenomenon being called the emergence of the 'experience economy'. Tourism being a multi-dimensional activity, depends on the involvement of many other agencies for its success. Other departments like roads, culture, forest and so on, can play an important role in the development of the total tourism product. For achieving maximum coordination, institutional arrangements should be put in place.

For these new and growing breed of tourists the North-East with its variety and uniqueness holds immense attraction. The rich natural beauty and its diversity, exotic cultural and ethnic mosaic, flora and fauna and the serenity of the virgin, unexplored ecosystems provides possibilities of a totally different experience for the tourists. The rationale for a trade led growth strategy for the North-East integrated to the 'look

east' policy has been well explained. The landlocked North-East, it is explained, is ideally placed to link India with ASEAN both in a geographical and commercial sense. The North-East also has strong cultural and historical linkages with the East, which could be exploited to forge economic cooperation. Unfortunately, despite its comparative advantage in this area, tourism is not perceived as an important economic activity. The first task of the governments should be to create awareness about the place of tourism in general and of sustainable tourism in particular, in the socio-economic planning of the region. But such awareness creation efforts can start only when the governments themselves are convinced of tourism's importance and provide it due priority in the planning process.

Most of tourism planning in the region appears to be ad hoc. It is essential to move away from such an ad hoc approach to draw up definite plans of action, charting out the future directions clearly. Every state must bring out a pragmatic tourism policy, not couched in general terms but clearly defining an implementable action plan. It should indicate the government's commitment to sustainable tourism, the place assigned to tourism in broad development planning, the role of government and other key players. The policy should identify the organizational pattern to implement the policy and a system of monitoring and accountability. Tourism planning for the North-East States, whether aimed at the domestic or the foreign tourist, would be most attractive and cost effective if based on an integrated NE perspective. The attractions of the different States, rather than competing, should supplement each other and enhance the total attraction of the region. If tourism development is not taken up with some urgency and in a planned manner it is quite possible that instead of tourism providing an economic push, in a liberalized atmosphere, the region may suffer from a reverse flow. In tourism, as elsewhere, if the goods cannot meet the competition, the outflow may overtake inflow.

Though North-East States of 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. 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. Tourism has the greatest potential for generating income and employment opportunities in North-East Indian States because NE is not only characterized by the blending of flora and fauna it is also exceptionally rich in bio-diversity. Tourism development of a region endorses overall economic progress and a crucial boost for local entrepreneurial activities. As such, entrepreneurship in tourism is generally considered as means of local business development under sustainable tourism paradigm. Tourism provides direct benefits to the local

community and businesses. It has a multiplier effect on other economic activities, providing jobs and incomes to those serving tourists through the supply chain and also as it is a labour intensive industry.

The North-East handicrafts especially bamboo/cane based and textiles are well known and exclusive. Promotion of these handicrafts would directly benefit the local artisans who are involved in production. Handlooms are a rich village industry in most of the States in the region. This in most of the cases is a hereditary occupation. Some of the handloom products, which are known for their excellent craftsmanship are - carpets of Arunachal Pradesh, Muga silk products of Assam, Lashingphee of Manipur, Shawls of Nagaland and Mizoram. Other common handloom products such as Bed Sheets, Scurf, Jackets are produced in almost all the States of the region. Thus, these products, emerging from a tradition of arts and crafts, have less value within the region, as compared to the rest of the country and for that matter, the world. To allow local entrepreneurs to reach such emerging markets, there needs to be a significant thrust towards the development of a relationship between the rest of the country and people from this region. Such a long-term relationship will not only lead to the creation of a dependable marketplace for local artisans and entrepreneurs but will also help in creating employment opportunities among the masses.

For the formulation of a sustainable tourism strategy in the North-East States of India, tourism planners may need to concentrate on some key areas like -

- (i) Conservation and neo interpretation of natural, archaeological/historical and cultural tourism products,
- (ii) Seasonality aspects of tourism operation,
- (iii) Enhancement of tourist facilities and services (transportation, accommodation etc),
- (iv) Public health and safety,
- (v) Promotion of tourism infrastructure,
- (vi) Focus on community involvement,
- (vii) Allocating/zoning spaces for recreational land use,
- (viii) Extending efforts on need-based tourism education and training,
- (ix) Tourism financing,
- (x) Prioritization of domestic tourism sector and
- (xi) Evolving strategies for better management of the sector.

These strategies take advantage of the developmental opportunities, and try to remove the constraints to develop North-East Region as a tourist destination. As there are lot of tourist destinations within the region and nearby, potential of developing circuits within and with North-East Region needs to be explored. This would help in attracting more tourists to North-East Region and increasing their duration of stay. Circuit(s)

should be developed in a way that tourists can choose the circuits they want to visit depending on the duration of their stay. It is very important to have local community involved-actively engaging the local community in tourism economic activities which will also help in easing out the internal conflicts and lead to safer and more hospitable environment. To generate awareness and commitment of all stakeholders in the industry that a pristine and unspoiled environment is an important resource that provides a rationale for generating sustainable tourism arrivals for the future.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The sustainable tourism development advocates for proper exploitation and explanation of touristic resources and the direction of development should be as per the need but not only of the present but also of the future. The successful development and operation of tourism sector in this region requires better management at the local government level to guide, facilitate and coordinate the process, so that tourism ventures can sustain in the local socio-economic situation and contribute meaningfully in the areas concerned. The North-Eastern Region of India has failed to attract domestic and foreign tourists. The majority of the region is naturally rich but more or less politically disturbed, climatically attractive but geographically tough, culturally diversified but economically unsound.

The present study concludes that the tourism industry in North-East Region is developing but not as expected. Though the Government of India is providing some special care for the North-East Region, it is still the backward part of the India territory because of many constraints. As per the growth in tourists inflows is concerned, Nagaland is higher in average growth in tourists' inflows in 2013-14 as compare to other States of North-East. This growth in the rate of inflows shows a significant improvement in the tourism industry. The major constraints of tourism development in North-East Region are inadequate fund, insufficient transportation facilities, managerial inefficiency, and safety issues, permit issue and so on. It may therefore conclude that the main problem facing the tourism industry in the North-East is the lack of adequate and reliable tourism infrastructure. If tourist amenities, conservation and maintenance not taken care of immediately, North-East Region will never be able to catch up with tourism development as in other areas.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Inspite of many problems for the sustainable tourism development in North-East States of India, the following measures can be made for the future prospects and sustainable development of tourism in North-East Region.

- To increase the growth of tourism and its shares in the regional economy the proper steps should be taken by the Government and all the stakeholders for the development of the tourism industry in the region.
 - The conservation and sustainable use of natural, social and cultural resources is crucial. Therefore, tourism should be planned and managed within environmental limits and with due regard for the long term appropriate use of natural and human resources.
 - The major cities of the North-eastern states should be connected with each other by the means of adequate transportation system and effective communication.
 - Proper campaigning of the region's wide variety of physical and cultural products (the hidden substances for developing tourism) can bring a dramatic change to the present socio-economic situation of the region.
 - The Government should review the policies on issuing Restricted Area Permit (RAP) and Inner Line Permit (ILP) in the region for creating a favourable atmosphere to tourists.
 - The security measures for the tourists should be improved in all States of NER.
 - Tourism exchange programme within North-East States can be conducted for the betterment and promotion of tourism among the States.
 - Tourism infrastructure and amenities should be improved as the present condition is not good.
 - 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.
 - Restoration of peace and tranquility to attract the foreign tourists is of utmost importance for the development of trade and tourism in NE India.
 - Government should make huge investment to break the geographical isolation and remove communication-bottlenecks from NE Indian States.
 - Proper tourism development policy is the need of the hour and for this Government should make a thorough survey in the whole NE region.
 - Planned, sustained and well-thought long term efforts are to be made by the Government and the stakeholder to improve the socio-economic and political set up of NE India.
 - All stakeholders within tourism should be educated about the need to develop more sustainable forms of tourism. This includes staff training and raising awareness, through education and marketing tourism responsibly, of sustainability issues amongst host communities and tourists themselves.
- Seminars, conference and workshops, should be conducted to discuss the problems and prospects of tourism and development at the local, national and international level.

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