

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY: HAFLONG A WONDER LAND OF ASSAM

SAROJ KUMAR KOIRI^{*}, SUBHADEEP MUKHERJEE^{}**

ABSTRACT

As the time horizon passes, the basic nature of mankind is to explore new places, which leads to the enhancement of the tourism industry across the globe. The ministry of tourism of India's report stated that tourism industry is one of the deliciously growing service sectors in India since 2015, but the maturity growth of tourism in the North Eastern region of India is comparatively slower than other parts of the country. North East is well known for its charming nature, dense forests, lush green valleys, streaming rivers and many more adventurous places. The wonderland is none other than Haflong which is situated in the Indian state of Assam. In spite of the divine beauty of nature, till today Haflong is incapable to attract the focus of a substantial number of tourist because of the unplanned tourism management. This study focused on, to understand the tourism market and also to explore the various opportunities and challenges of the tourism sector in Haflong. To achieve the objectives of the study, a survey conducted with structured questionnaire among the tourists and the local residents in Haflong and the neighboring areas.

KEYWORDS: Haflong, Tourism Industry, Tourist, Tourism Management, Service Sector.

PROLOGUE

Tourism industry is the world's largest industry that can perform as a revenue dynamo and as an impetus for the socio-economic improvement of a nation. The conceptualization of tourism is new in the modern era with the amazing potentiality for sustainable enhancement of nature-based on tourist resources which includes fascinating forest, wildlife, and landscapes. The north-eastern part of India is the paradise for tourists' destination. Its alluring hills, clamorous waterfalls, flickering rivers densest forests, heavy rains during the season of

monsoon, myriad varieties of flora and fauna, passel of species of wild animals and plants, esoteric clouds, euphonical folk music, fabulous dances and festivals, diverse kind of delicious dishes, finest handlooms and handicrafts, and above all its opulent green landscape used to draw attention of people from the different parts of the world since time of archaic. Assam is one of the states of the nation, an apotheosis of the natural beauty and grace has been at the center stage of tourist attraction.

* Faculty-Department of Management Studies, National Institute of Technology, Silchar.

Correspondence E-mail Id: editor@eurekajournals.com

Quite up in the craggy terrains theirstance out the queen town of 'Haflong',^[1] the district's headquarters which is located in the hub of natural finesse offering a pleasing look. Because of its wonderful natural environment, one might get tempted to call it the 'Switzerland of the East'. The garland-like Barail Hill or the 'great dyke' extending right from north to east builds-up an impervious wall almost all around Haflong. Haflong is often referred to as the land of blue hills. Many infer that the name Haflong was derived from the word 'Hangklong' meaning enriched land. Whatever may be the background, the fact remains that it is now the only Hill Station in the state of Assam and it bears all the promises of being further developed into an attractive Tourism for the state.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Northeastern part of India is known for its natural beauty. Nature has festooned this place with its hypnotizing beauty. Noticeably it has been found that regardless of all, thenortheast is gaining less attention of the tourists as compared to the other states of India. Today when someone thinks of going for holidays, then Kerala, Goa, Himachal, Rajasthan Andamanetc., are the usual destinations for them. There are very few people who give thought of spending holidays in the Northeastern states of India. This study has been undertaken to understand the tourism market of Assam with special attention to 'Halflong' and to analyze the opportunities and challenges of the tourism industry at 'Halflong'.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To understand the significance of tourism industry for a singular country or state, research articles on 'tourism industry' published in various eminent journals have been studied thoroughly for developing aconceptual understanding of the importance of tourism management and various opinions of the authors have been reviewed from various sourced literature.Surjya Chutiya^[2] (2015)

in her research article titled "*Prospects and Problems of Tourism Industry in Assam*" has focused to highlight the main prospects and problems of tourism in Assam. She has utilized the secondary data to make the reviews and get the findings. She has also highlighted some of the problems that hinder the growth of the tourism industry in Assam, She has concluded saying the opportunities in the resources available in Assam has to be fully utilized to make this sector grow and prosper. Silpi Rani Baruah^[3] (2016) in her study entitled "*Promotion of Culinary Tourism as a Destination attraction of North-East India*" has showcased the importance of the connection between food and tourism stating that the delicious food of northeast can be the main attraction and promotional tool for the development of tourism in North East India. She has done a cross-sectional study using both secondary and primary data. She has concluded saying the Culinary tourism has huge scope and Govt. along with private organizations can make benefit if the sources are properly utilized. The Culinary tourism can be a gainful source of livelihood for the people of the region.Mrinmoy K Sarma^[4] (2003) in his article titled "*Towards Positioning a Tourist Destination: A Study of North East India*" has mentioned about the variables that tourists consider while selecting a destination. From a set of 21 variables, he has taken two factors namely Infrastructure and external influence. He has then conducted a survey among 505 tourists in India consisting both Indians and foreigners. The interviews were conducted in different locations including some of the high tourist visiting destinations such as Manali, Shimla, Goa. He has concluded saying, an image of moderate levels of infrastructure and external influence is the ideal position NE India should look for, and also concerted efforts from all concerned are the perquisites for a successful marketing effort endeavor. Prasanta Bhattacharya^[5] (2008) in his article titled "*Tourism Development in North East India: Changing Recreational Demand, Development*

Challenges and Issues associated with Sustainability” has attempted to visualize the trend of the sector in the Northeastern region and focus on the need for adoption of a sustainable tourism development strategy. His research was done on the basis of secondary data. He has concluded saying that the successful development of tourism sector in this region requires better management at the local government level, there should also be proper policy-making and promotion. Adoption of a sustainable tourism strategy is an urgent need to utilize the tourism potential of the northeastern region of India. From the reviewed literature, it has been noted that though a lot of studies have been conducted on Tourism Industry in the context of Northeast, Assam and another part of the nation, there is a dearth of studies conducted with regard to Haflong tourism at Assam. It is an excepted fact that today era, tourism is an important area in the social prospect. Hence in this paper, an attempt is made to identify the opportunities and challenges to this specific topic.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective includes:

- To explore the various opportunities and challenges of the tourism sector in Haflong.
- To understand the tourism market of Haflong in the state of Assam.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology availed for this study are

mentioned below:

- **RESEARCH DESIGN:** The study is descriptive in nature.
- **SAMPLING METHOD:** For this study, structured questionnaire acted as a research instrument which was circulated among 90 respondents of the chosen area on the basis of convenient sampling.
- **TARGETED AREA:** The study was conducted in Assam which included places like Silchar, Barak valley, Haflong, and Guwahati.
- **SAMPLE SIZE:** 90 questionnaires circulated, 8 were rejected. So the total size of the respondents was **82**.
- **DATA COLLECTION:** The study involved of both primary and secondary data:
 - **PRIMARY DATA:** This was collected through a well-structured questionnaire administered for the purpose.
 - **SECONDARY DATA:** Books, Journals, Government Reports, Website of the Ministry of women and child development etc. acted as a potential source of secondary data.
- **PERIOD OF DATA COLLECTION:** Data and information were collected during the month of September 2017.
- **TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS:** The collected data was analyzed through Likert 5 Point Scale. The study was made with the help of S.P.S.S.

The study was made on 82 sample respondents selected from the places of Assam

Table 1. Demographic Representation of the Sample Respondents

	Descriptions	Participants	Percentage (%)
Age (Year Wise)	15-25	53	64.6
	26-35	22	26.8
	36-45	1	1.2
	46-55	4	4.9
	56 & Above	2	2.4
Nationality	Indian	81	98.8
	Non-Indian	1	1.2
Gender	Male	55	67.1
	Female	27	32.9
Marital Status	Married	13	15.9
	UnMarried	69	84.1
	10 th	2	2.4
	12 th	10	12.2
Educational	Graduate	34	41.5
	Post Graduate	34	41.5
Qualification	Doctorate	1	1.2
	Technical Certification	1	1.2
	Others	0	0
Profession	Student	56	68.3
	Service	21	25.6
	Business	2	2.4
	Home Maker	2	2.4
	Retired	1	1.2

Source: Field Study

INTERPRETATION

It can be revealed from the above table that 64.6% of the sample respondents i.e. 53 were in the age group of 15-25 years while 26.8% i.e. 22 were in the age group of 26-35 years. Again only 1.2 % of the sample respondents i.e. 1 of them was in the age group of 36-45 years also only 1.2 % of the sample respondents i.e. 1 of them was in the age group of 46-55 years, while 2.4% of the sample respondents i.e. 2 of them was in the age group of 56 & above years.

As far as the Nationality of the respondents is concerned, it can be observed from the table that 98.8 % i.e. 81 of them were Indians, while only 1.2% i.e. 1 of them was Non-Indian.

About the gender of the respondents, the table shows that 67.1% that is 55 of the respondents were male, while 32.9 % i.e. 27 of them were female.

As far as the marital status of the respondents is concerned, it can be observed from the table that 15.9 % i.e. 13 of them were married, 84.1% that is 69 of them were unmarried.

The above table depicts that a significant portion of the sample respondent which is 41.5% i.e. 34 of them had their education up to graduation level, again 41.5% i.e. 34 of them had done their post-graduation. 10 i.e. 12.2 % of the sample respondents are of 12th standard level, while mere 2.4% i.e. 2 of them are in the 10th standard level. Again 1.2% i.e. 1 of the respondent is a

Doctorate, and also 1.2% i.e. 1 of the respondent is a Technical Certification holder.

respondents are Students, 25.6% i.e. 21 of them are in service. Again 2.4% i.e. 2 of them are into Business, while 2.4% i.e. 2 of them are homemakers. While only 1.2% i.e. 1 of them is a retired personnel.

The table also gives a clear picture about the profession of the sample respondents. It has been observed that 68.3% i.e. 56 of the

Table 2. Opportunities and Challenges for tourism at Haflong

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t
1. Travellers have a positive view of tourism of Haflong	82	2.3415	.99653	.11005	21.277
2. People at Haflong are very friendly and greet with open arms towards guests	82	2.4390	.86206	.09520	25.620
3. Haflong has its own unique identity in terms of tourism	82	1.9756	.91592	.10115	19.532
4. Natural environment is always the priority at Haflong	82	1.6951	.81178	.08965	18.909
5. Haflong is a safe and secure tourist destination	82	2.8049	1.07081	.11825	23.720
6. Tourists can reach Haflong easily	82	3.0732	1.13072	.12487	24.611
7. Overall cleanliness of the destination is up to the mark	82	2.3780	.85549	.09447	25.172
8. The Nature is unspoiled and climatic conditions are great	82	1.9024	.74717	.08251	23.057
9. The destination has organized local transportation services	82	2.6341	.92312	.10194	25.840
10. There is a good opportunity for shopping, night life, and entertainment	82	3.4024	1.00443	.11092	30.674
11. There is availability of sports and recreational activities	82	2.9146	.89168	.09847	29.599
12. To book a stay at Haflong is easy and convenient	82	2.8659	.97831	.10804	26.527
13. Are You A Frequent Traveller	82	1.4878	.50293	.05554	26.788
14. The prices of additional offer at Haflong (food & drinks, price of handcrafted products, prices of excursions, prices of travel booking etc.) are favourable	82	2.5732	.93003	.10270	25.054
15. The destination has well supported medical facilities	82	2.9146	.91895	.10148	28.721
16. Government is working towards the improvement of Haflong as a tourist destination	82	3.0244	1.13285	.12510	24.175

Source: Field Study

FINDINGS

From the analysis, some of the important findings based on the higher value of t-test are highlighted below:

- The t-test value of the parameter “There is a good opportunity for shopping, nightlife and entertainment” is 30.674, which indicates that there is a good chance for development of shopping, night life and entertainment in Haflong.
- The t-test value of the parameter “There is the availability of sports and recreational activities” is 29.599, which indicates that there is an opportunity for the creation of sports and recreational activities in Haflong.
- The t-test value of the parameter “The destination has well supported medical facilities” is 28.721, which indicates that the medical facilities in Haflong can be further enhanced.
- The t-test value of the parameter “To book a stay at Haflong is easy and convenient” is 26.527, which indicates that if the booking process for stay at Haflong is further enhanced, this can be an opportunity for the destination.

The above data reveals that the values of mean, standard deviations (S.D) and the Standard Error Mean values show consistency in its nature. Also, the t-values are positive (+ve) and statistically significant at 5% level.

The findings with regard to the Problems faced by the sample respondents as represented in Table 2 are mentioned as follows:

- The safety and security in Haflong have is not at par.
- There is lack of organized local transportation services.
- The opportunity for shopping, nightlife and entertainment has to improve immensely.
- It is not easy to book a stay in Haflong.

- There is not much availability of sports facility and recreational activities in Haflong.
- The prices of the additional offer at Haflong (food & drinks, prices of excursions etc.) are not favourable.
- Haflong is not well supported with medical facilities.
- It can also be noticed that the people of Haflong are not very open towards guests.

The following can be regarded as Opportunities based on the opinions of the respondents:

- Travelers have a positive view towards tourism in Haflong.
- Haflong has its own uniqueness in terms of tourism.
- The natural environment is always a priority in Haflong.
- Haflong is easily accessible.
- It is a clean destination, nature is unspoiled and climatic conditions are great.
- Also, the government is working towards improvement of Haflong as a better tourist destination.

EPILOGUE

The study reveals that Haflong which is also considered as the Queen of hills of Assam and the only hill station in Assam, has a lot of opportunity in terms of natural environment, accessibility, uniqueness which can be further enhanced for the upliftment of this location as a preferred tourist destination in the state. Also to make this possible the Government must work towards the betterment of this destination in terms of safety & security, proper local transportation, create new opportunities for games and recreational activities, increase the medical facilities, and also avail for the ease of stay in Haflong. This can also be stated that the tourism market for Haflong has a huge potential to develop the socio-economic condition of the destination along with a support as a revenue creator for the state of Assam.

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