



# Driving Cultural Tourism Growth through Effective Digital Platform Strategies in Guwahati

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## Abstract

This research paper aims to investigate how effective digital platform can drive cultural tourism growth in Guwahati, a city in northeast India. This city also known as the gateway to the north-east, receive a great number of tourists' footfall to move to other states of the region. However they fail to explore Guwahati's full potential as a tourist destination. Guwahati is an ancient city with innumerable mythologies and historical references attached with it. This city is popular among the tourists as a centre of religious tourism around the Kamakhya temple. However Guwahati has much more to offer in terms of culture and heritage. Lack of awareness and consciousness about the same has not been able to showcase its optimum potential.

By reviewing relevant literature and conducting a survey among tourists and stakeholders, this paper intends to identify the scope of digital platforms in Guwahati's tourism promotion. The study will examine how these platforms are leveraged to showcase the city's cultural assets and attract tourists.

Additionally, the research will explore the impact of these strategies on tourists' perception of Guwahati's cultural offerings and their likelihood of recommending the city to others. By providing insights into the effectiveness of digital platform strategies in promoting cultural tourism in Guwahati, this study will offer practical recommendations for tourism stakeholders to enhance their digital marketing efforts and drive cultural tourism growth in the region.

**Keywords:** Culture, Guwahati, Tourism, Digital.

## Introduction

Cultural tourism plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth, promoting local heritage, and attracting tourists to a destination. As technology continues to evolve, digital platforms have become a crucial marketing tool for tourism destinations worldwide. Effectively utilizing these platforms can significantly enhance a destination's visibility, engage with potential tourists, and ultimately drive tourism growth.

Guwahati, the largest city in northeast India, is rich in cultural heritage and offers a diverse range of cultural attractions. However, the city's tourism potential is still relatively untapped due to inadequate promotional efforts and limited use of digital platforms.

Guwahati with its rich cultural heritage has the capability to enthrall the tourists with its various performing artforms like Bihu dance, Kshatriya dance, Ankia Naat (a dance drama), Ojapali, Ali-Ai-Ligang, Deodhani and many more. It also has rich musical background with various tribal musics and indigenous musical instruments like pepa, gogona, xutuli, toka etc. are available. The unique traditions and customs are also great tools in promoting the unique destination Guwahati is. The unique styles and weaves of fabric and garments available worn in unique styles by the locals and tribal are also very intriguing for the tourists.

Apart from this the unique food and beverages of Assam in itself can amuse any tourist travelling to Guwahati. The unique blend of salty, sour, bitter and alkaline taste with healthy subtle and organic flavours, is one of a kind. It is very different from the rich and spice laden food consumed in the rest of India. The local alcoholic and non alcoholic beverages are also unique and impressionable.

Tourists who travel for experiences and are eager to know the originality of the new place travelled are increasing in number. For these kind of tourists Guwahati, Assam is an ideal location with various options to explore and experience culture and traditions. These potentials of cultural tourism may be packaged and marketed digitally to increase its reach and may be found by the right people.

Recognizing the need to leverage the power of digital platforms to promote Guwahati's cultural assets, is essential to establish Guwahati as a potential hub for cultural tourism. Through this research we aim to explore how effective digital platform strategies can drive cultural tourism growth in the city. This study aims to understand the current digital platform landscape in Guwahati's tourism promotion efforts. Furthermore, the research will survey both tourists and tourism stakeholders to gain insights into their experiences, preferences, and perspectives on the city's digital platform strategies. This study will not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the role of digital platforms in cultural tourism but will also provide practical recommendations for tourism stakeholders in Guwahati to enhance their digital marketing efforts, attract more tourists, and drive cultural tourism growth in the region.

## **Objectives**

1. To examine the role of digital platforms in driving cultural tourism growth.
2. To understand tourists' preferences and experiences in engaging with digital platforms for cultural tourism in Guwahati.
3. To propose recommendations and strategies for improving digital platform utilization to drive cultural tourism growth in Guwahati.

## Review of Literature

(Gu, 2022): The authors mention that with the emergence of new tourism trends such as popularized and individualized tourism, the traditional development model can no longer meet the development requirements of the new era. Therefore, the construction of tourism informatization is necessary. The mentioned work aims to highlight the promotion of tourism resources in Zhejiang Province and explore the effective promotion forms and strategies of tourism resources in Zhejiang network media. The construction of smart tourism city (STC) is taken as the research object. First, the evaluation index system and evaluation model of the construction level of STC are constructed. Besides, an empirical evaluation is made with the pilot project of smart tourism city construction determined by the National Tourism Administration as a subject.

(Salvatore Ammirato, 2021-22): The authors suggest that digitalization had a relevant impact on the cultural tourism sector, both demand and supply. When, digital technologies provided tourists with new mobile services able to amplify the cultural experience, on the other hand, they aid the development of new business models by digital enterprises. This paper has dual purpose: to detect business models and key characteristics of mobile apps for cultural tourism and to analyze the offering of app-based services in this sector. The analysis highlights that digital enterprises offering app-based services do not fully exploit advances in technologies about users' value requirements. Hence, the results suggest some directions that digital enterprises may follow to better exploit mobile app technology.

(Wang, 2023): The authors state that Chinese cultural resources carry the unique cultural genes of the and at the same time, they also provide important resources and development ideas for the integration of the culture and tourism industry. Along with the progressive integration of culture and tourism industry, the development mode of “promoting tourism with culture and highlighting culture with tourism” has been widely recognized by all everyone, which has not only enhanced the resources, but also promoted the high-quality development of tourism industry, and tourism industry has also provided important assistance to the restoration of culture. It can be said that the integrated development of culture and tourism is an inevitable trend of the times. The rapid development of the digital economy will set off a wave of transformation in the cultural and tourism industry, and the digital construction and intelligent development of the cultural and tourism industry will also become a new direction.

(Munjal, 2021): The authors suggest that with the growth of number of smart phone users in India, digital interfaces such as android applications are easy to access and operate. While usual websites have been in existence over the past few decades, government schemes as well as non-government organisations have emerged over the recent years that create opportunities for connecting digital interfaces with cultural heritage tourism. The purpose of this study is to attempt to cover the various facets of interaction between the two dimensions, in a try to identify possibilities in the near future. India is positioned to take the leap into the creating unparalleled visitor experiences and opportunities for local communities and other stakeholders through use of technology and digital interfaces that can sustain the cultural heritage resources and create new developmental models that have not been possible otherwise.

(Küçükçivil, 2022): This research mentions the development of digital communication technologies and the increase in the use of digital platforms by people have increased the tendency towards touristic activities. Cultural tourism is one of the emerging tourism sectors of recent times. In this context, tourism management benefits from social media platforms as a tool in marketing their products and services related to cultural tourism. The first of these is the use of social media by tourism management in the marketing of products and services by individual and mass cultural tours and communicating with target clientele.

(Lui, 2020):According to the author cultural tourism industry has become a new economic growth point for China, with the increasing tourist demands for cultural experience and cultural innovations. The cultural tourism policies in China advocate the accelerating inclusiveness of cultural tourism, design, digital technology and cultural innovation. Digital technology can record the knowledge and technical skills of cultural heritage through three-dimensional digitization, digital data processing and storage, archival management, and then convert them into shareable and reproducible digital forms. In China, the digital conversion of ancient rural heritage conservation is still in the stage of data compilation and theoretical projects. This study is based on a digital conservation project,that aims to establish all the data and cloud service platform for the conservation of Chinese ancient rural heritage. After a critical analysis of successful cases on digital conservation, this paper present and discuss the theoretical structure of the digital transition of ancient village heritage conservation, as well as more adequate strategies to better utilize the data for tourists' experience and heritage knowledge.

(Panoraia Poulaki, 2021):According to the writers, a destination's cultural heritage has a significant role in influencing its visitors' beliefs both now and in the future. This study made an effort to draw attention to the cutting-edge technologies available in museum settings and how they support the growth of cultural tourism. It is a proven truth that visiting museums encourages cultural tourists to learn about their host country and to satiate their spiritual demands.

(Dr. Prem Kumar, 2021):According to the author, A variety of industries, stakeholders, and unskilled to skilled individuals work together to sustain tourism, which gives the local community possibilities for rural entrepreneurship. The focus of rural tourism entrepreneurship is providing visitors with local goods and services. All facets of the tourist industry have been affected by the digitalization process, as State tourism ministries in India and destination marketing organizations attest to. The promotion of rural tourism entrepreneurship in India using various digital platforms is the main topic of this study. The study concluded that in order to reach a wider audience, digital platforms provide advantages for user engagement and content creation. It is also thought to be useful for gathering opinions and recommendations from visitors. It provides advice on which digital platforms to use and highlights their unique advantages for operators of rural tourism.

(Somenath Halder, 2021):The author mentioned thatbecause intangible cultural heritage tourism (ICHT) has two benefits-it boosts the economy and promotes sustainable development— UNESCO has promoted it. On the other hand, ICHT in conjunction with well-established geotourism might potentially strengthen the preservation of geoheritage legacy, enhance its benefits, and create new opportunities for the tourism industry. India used to be highly known for

its snake charmers, but now that it is illegal for them to do so, the majority of them are jobless and have starved to death. Furthermore, in a nation rich in geoheritage, the potential of ICH tourism to benefit this population has never been fully realized. The author methodically presented a marketing plan for the growth of ICHT in conjunction with geotourism, as well as for the long-term, sustainable development of this community after strategic protection of wildlife (such as endangered species of snakes). The study's findings highlight the important areas that still need to be improved for each "zone," and each valuable site will need to be given more thought and better management (from both the public and private sectors) in the near future in order to become more sustainably developed ICH and geoheritage destinations that draw more visitors from both domestic and foreign sources.

### Research Methodology

1. **Research Design:** A qualitative and quantitative approach of data analysis was adopted.

The analysis was done on tourists and tourism stakeholders in Guwahati. They were asked to give the responses towards their perspective through a digitally generated form

2. **Sampling Design:** Primary data was collected from tourists and tourism stakeholders in Guwahati. The questionnaire was circulated among them. In total 186 responses were received and used for data collection.

### Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires are analysed below to understand the outcome of primary data of the research.

**Table 1.**

	<b>Do you feel Guwahati has the potential as a cultural tourist destination?</b>	<b>Do you feel cultural tourism in Guwahati is well represented on digital platforms?</b>	<b>Do you feel cultural tourism in Guwahati can benefit from partnership collaborations between digital platform providers and local cultural organisations?</b>
Yes	176(94.6%)	134 (72%)	180(96.8%)
No	10(5.4%)	52(28%)	6(3.2%)
N	186	186	186
Mean	93	93	93
Standard deviation	83	41	87

The above chart shows that the respondents have agreed on majority that Guwahati has great potential as a cultural tourism destination. The respondents have agreed as majority that even though Guwahati is well represented on digital platform it can benefit from partnership collaborations between digital platform providers and local cultural organisations.

**Table 2.**

	<b>Do you feel cultural tourism can boost Guwahati economy?</b>	<b>Do you feel initiatives to showcase Guwahati cultural tourism has the potential to attract more tourists from across the globe?</b>
Yes	178(95.7%)	170(91.4%)
No	8(4.3%)	16(8.6%)
N	186	186
Mean	93	93
Standard deviation	85	77

The respondents are of the opinion that development and promotion of cultural tourism can boost the economy of Guwahati. And the respondents are also of the opinion that cultural tourism of Guwahati with due initiatives have the potential to be more attractive as a tourist destination across the globe.

**Table 3.**

	<b>Rate the potential of Guwahati as a cultural tourism destination ?</b>		<b>Which of these sources you most likely use while taking travel decisions in Guwahati?</b>
No potential	2(1.1%)	Digital platforms	64 (34.4%)
Little potential	18(9.7%)	Tourism offices	16(8.6%)
More Potential	58(31.2%)	Travel agents	22(11.8%)
High potential	108(58.1%)	Friends and family	84(45.2%)
N	186	N	186
Mean	46.5	Mean	46.5
Standard deviation	40.94	Standard deviation	28.47

The potential of cultural tourism is opinionated to be high by the respondents. And as per the respondents they would primarily consult friends and family for travel related queries in Guwahati, closely followed by digital platforms.

**Table 4.**

	<b>How likely are you to engage in cultural tourism activities in Guwahati if there were effective digital platforms promoting such experiences?</b>		<b>How satisfied are you with the current digital platform strategies promoting cultural tourism in guwahati?</b>
Very unlikely	2 (1.1%)	Not satisfied at all	10 (5.4%)
Somewhat unlikely	4(2.2%)	Somewhat satisfied	82(44.1%)
neutral	58(31.2%)	satisfied	50(26.9%)
Somewhat likely	46(24.7%)	Very satisfied	44(23.7%)
Very likely	76(40.9%)		
N	186	N	186
Mean	37.2	Mean	46.5
Standard deviation	29.51	Standard deviation	25.54

The respondents were of the opinion that they would be very interested to take part in cultural tourism activities in the city and majority of them were not completely satisfied with the cultural tourism promotions through digital platforms.

**Table 5.**

	<b>Digital platforms have the strongest reach among all tourism promotion tools ?</b>
Strongly disagree	6(3.2%)
Disagree	20(10.8%)
Agree	54(29%)
Strongly agree	106(57%)
N	186
Mean	46.5
Standard deviation	38.53

A striking 57% of the respondents were of the opinion that digital platforms have the strongest reach among tourism promotion tools.

Along with close ended questions there were open ended questions asking for suggestions for ways in which cultural tourism can be promoted digitally. The respondents suggested:

- Government Web Pages
- Virtual tours



- Cultural displays organised in tourist places
- Collaboration with local cultural artists for better promotion
- Uploading of cultural festival online
- Showcasing cultural heritage through promotions and exhibitions
- Heritage walks and cultural day tours

The respondents were also asked how they think digital interactions can benefit cultural tourism, the respondents were of view that better interaction on social media platforms and exhibitions of cultural heritage at different locations promoted online. Circulation of special online cultural webinars and conducted tours promoted online can be of great help. They were also of the opinion that traditional cultural practices and cultural artists can be used for promotion of the culture, uplifting the dying art-forms and displaying uniqueness.

## Conclusion

Through this research it can be concluded that Guwahati has immense cultural tourism potential and can be popularised with the help of better digital promotions. Increasing digital interactions and uplifting faces of cultural heritage is going to make a huge mark. Aggressive digital marketing of the tourism product that is ‘Cultural tourism in Guwahati’ can prove to be immensely beneficial for both tourism and cultural enrichment and upliftment.

Digital interaction will also give us an idea of the tourist demands regarding cultural tourism. To provide more custom made tours or whether people prefer all inclusive overview of the cultural tourism offerings of the regions.

Through this research we also found the respondent suggesting that there is no way in which we can promote cultural tourism of the regions without uplifting and bringing our artisans and artists to the forefront and sharing their stories for the world to hear. This has the potential to take Guwahati and its tourism to new heights, for its age old culture, nature friendly though process and healthy seasonal lifestyle. Showcasing its culture will compel the tourists from far and wide to celebrate Guwahati for the rich heritage and yearlong celebration it is.

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