

## POTENTIALITY OF TOURISM IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF ASSAM: A STUDY

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**Abstract:** The southern part of Assam shares a boundary with many North Eastern states of India i.e. Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, and the rest of Assam including one international border i.e. Bangladesh. This region of Assam remains largely unexplored despite its immense tourism potential. This article looks into the attractive tourist destinations of the region, including natural, religious, and historical tourist destinations. Additionally, the article explores the untapped eco-tourism opportunities in the region. To fully harness the tourism potential of southern Assam, the article proposes a comprehensive strategy encompassing infrastructure development, targeted promotion, and community engagement. By implementing these measures southern Assam can unveil its hidden gems and attract tourists from around the globe fostering economic growth while preserving its unique heritage.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Nature, Historical, Religious, Southern Assam.

### **Introduction:**

Tourism is an activity which involves a discretionary use of time and money. In this 21st century, the mode of communication is becoming faster and cheaper and the people moving from one place to another place are becoming more. It may be domestic or international, but the main purpose is to participate in leisure (Ghosh, 2001). Today it has become the fastest growing industry as well as the source of foreign exchange earnings in the world. It is one of the industries where a huge number of employments can be generated. Thus, the Government of India is giving more importance to the tourism sector. The state government of Assam is also no exception in promoting the tourism sector. Thus, to boost the tourism sector, the Government of Assam has launched several schemes like Amar Alohi (Home Stay), and “Asom Darshan” on 6th February 2019. Under this scheme, the tourism department focuses on the development and promotion of various places of tourist interest such as natural beauty, religious places, or historical importance. The Southern part of Assam is no exception in this case. This region consists of three districts namely Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi districts. These districts of Assam share a border with four north-eastern states namely, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura. It also shares an international boundary with Bangladesh. There are many tribes as well as non-tribes who have been living together for long ages. Once, the region was ruled by the Kachari kings known as the Hidimba kingdom. During the British colonialism, the region was amalgamated with the Bengal province. Later in the early 20th century, the region was separated from the Bengal province and amalgamated with Assam. Since then the region has been an integral part of the state of Assam (Bordoloi, 1988). There are many temples, as well as historical remains which were built by the Kachari kingdom. Apart from that the region has scenic beauty. The region has a major river called Barak which flows from Manipur via Southern Assam and reaches in Meghna River of Bangladesh. It has many tributaries which makes the region full of rich flora and fauna. The region has more than 140 small and big tea gardens (Jubair, 2022). The region shares a border with the other north-eastern states along with Bangladesh. On the other hand, some major connectivity projects such as the Kaladan Multi-Model Project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, and railway, projects road construction are going on. These routes will pass through the southern part of Assam and reach Southeast Asia via Myanmar. On the other hand, the region is also the lifeline of some north-eastern states because all the routes have to pass via the Southern part of Assam thus the region can become the hub of tourism.

Overall, the Southern part of Assam has immense potential to attract tourists from neighbouring states of North East India as well as Bangladesh. All the road and railway connectivity of Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura passes through the Southern part of Assam. Even this land can attract particularly Sylhet region of Bangladesh for tourism. The distance from the district headquarters of

Karimganj to Sylhet is about 60 kilometers only. Yet, both the governments of India and Bangladesh have taken the initiative to promote tourism between the Southern part of Assam and the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. Recently in December 2022, the first international festival was celebrated in Silchar (The Sentinel, 2022). In the next year, i.e. in 2023 second round of the Sylhet-Silchar festival was organised in Sylhet Bangladesh. At that festival, both the leaders of the countries are hopeful that people- to-people contact between Silchar and Sylhet will be promoted and tourism will be developed on both sides of the country. Though the region has the potential to promote tourism the region has several problems lack of awareness, lack of connectivity, lack of infrastructure, etc. It is in this context, that the present study deals with the potentiality of the Southern part of Assam and its challenges as well.

**Objective:**

- To study the various prospects of Tourism in the Southern part of Assam.
- To analyze some constraints of tourism in the Southern part of Assam.

**Research Questions:**

- What are the prospects of tourism in the Southern part of Assam?
- What are the challenges of tourism in the Southern part of Assam?

**Methodology:**

The present study is mainly based on secondary data. To study the potentiality of tourism in the Southern part of Assam, the data are collected from the various Newspapers, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of Assam, the statistical handbook of Assam, and the Regional Tourism Satellite Account Assam, etc. Moreover, various e-journals and books have been used for the required information.

**Analysis: Southern Assam as a tourist destination: An Overview Potentiality of Tourism:**

The southern part of Assam is surrounded by hills. The region looks like the English alphabet of C because it is surrounded by Manipur hills in the east, Lushai hills and Tripura in the south, and Jaintia and Borail hills in the North. Except Western side of the region, the entire region is surrounded by hills. Thus, the region is a state of breathtaking scenic beauty. It has hills, dense forests, green gardens, large waterways, and rich bio-diversity which can attract people to come to the Southern part of Assam.

**Nature related Tourism:**

**Dolu Lake:**

Daloo Lake is a natural lake located in the Cachar district of Assam, India. It is one of the most beautiful lakes in southern Assam. It is located about 12 kilometers away from the district headquarters Silchar. The lake is about 6 kilometers long and 2 kilometers wide. It can become one of the popular tourist destinations of this region because the lake is surrounded by hillocks and tea gardens. About sixty percent of the total area of the lake is surrounded by Tea gardens and in the rest of the area there is countryside (Discover Indian.d.). Thus, visitors can enjoy both the tea garden as well as the natural beauty of the lake. This lake is a peaceful spot to spend quality time with friends and relatives.

**Son Beel:**

Son Beel is the name of the lake. It is regarded as one of the most popular spots for tourism in Southern Assam. This lake is the second-largest seasonal wetland in Asia. It has a rich bio- diversity with 69 major species of fish found here. The place is located in the Karimganj district in the state of Assam. The lake is surrounded by greenery and is a perfect spot to spend a good time, staying close to nature. During the winter season, the lake converts into farmland for the cultivation of rice till March. However, rest of the months; it turned into a lake again (Govt. of Assam, n.d.). A study was conducted from 2012-15 in Son Beel Lake where it is recorded about 89 species of birds belonging to 32 different families. Few species of birds come even from abroad (Bhattacharjee, 2018).

**Koomber:**

Koomber Tea Garden is located near the Silchar Airport in Cachar district. It is one of the oldest tea estates in Assam. The tea garden was established in the year 1830s. The name of the garden is derived from the term cotton (Goodricke, n.d.). This particular area is also popular as a tourist destination because of its scenic beauty, and natural attractiveness. This tea estate is situated on several small and medium hillocks thus the Borail Hills can be seen vividly from there. Even the tea spot also looks greenery and can be touched. This particular area has the potential to attract the scenic beauty of nature. The location is just about 30 kilometers away from the headquarters of the region i.e. Silchar city.

#### **Religious Tourism Bhuvan Hill:**

Bhuvan Hill is a religious place which is located in Assam's Cachar district. There is a Shiva temple on the top of the hill. The place is about 40 kilometers away from Silchar city. It is located in the tri-junction of Assam, Manipur, and Mizoram. In the eastern side of the border Manipur, the southern part of the border Mizoram is located. It is located about 3000 feet high. This hill is a popular pilgrimage destination, especially for the duration of the Mahashivratri festival. Every year lakhs of people come to this place to seek blessings from lord Shiva. Thus, the government of Assam is planning to develop the Bhuvan Hills in Cachar district, Assam, as one of the major tourist destinations. However, the infrastructure in the area is in poor condition (Bhattacharjee, 2018). The government has allocated Rs 50 lakh to modernize the climbing route up the hills and is also working to make the area free from liquor and cannabis. In the year 2021 under the Asom Darshan scheme, 10 lakh funds have been granted for the construction of the temple (Goswami 2023).

#### **Kachakanti Mandir:**

Kachakanti Temple is located at Udharbond constituency of Cachar district, Assam. The place is located about 9 kilometers from Silchar. It is a Hindu holy place dedicated to Goddess Kachakanti. It is a sacred union of Goddesses Durga and Kali and stands as a symbol of hope, faith, and tranquillity in Silchar, Assam. This temple was built in the early 19th century by the Kachari King (The Readers Time, 2021). The Kachari King Krishna Chandra dreamt a dream that he should construct a temple for worshipping a devi. Later after hearing about the dream the royal priest Sonaram Sarma installed the image of the Kachakanti goddess in the temple at Udharbond. At that time, the area was located in deep forest. Although, there was a tradition of divine-human sacrifice later the tradition of sacrificing humans was replaced with goats and pigeons. Every day thousands of people visit this temple to worship the goddess Kachakanti (Ahmed, 2014).

#### **Siddeswar Mandir:**

Another popular Shiva temple of this region is located at Panchgram of Hailakandi district, Assam. This temple is also known as Kapilashram. It is one of the oldest and most famous holy places in the region. The temple is located about 25 kilometers from Silchar. It is situated on the Silchar-Karimganj highway alongside the river Barak. Every day hundreds of people visit to worship in this temple. According to the sources, every year during the time of Baruni Mela (fair) thousands of people gather to worship lord Shiva. On that auspicious day, the devotees take a dip in the Barak River (The Print, 2023). During that time, hundreds of families came to this temple to immerse the bones after the death of their relatives. The name of that ritual is called Asthi Visarjan.

#### **Shyama Mandir:**

Nagadum is a countryside area near the historical place of Khaspur. There is a famous temple called Shyama Bari temple. In that temple, there is no idol. Ghot puja is performed in that temple. The temple is notable for its unique rule that prohibits women from entering its premises. This rule has been in place since the temple's construction in 1700 A.D. by the Kachari king Tamrodhwaj Narayan. According to local folklore, human sacrifices were once performed at this site, which could be a contributing factor to the exclusion of women. Presently, the old temple has broken thus a new temple has been constructed by the government of Assam. Every Sunday of the week people used to come to worship at this temple (Shil, 2023).

#### **Aadi Kali Mandir:**

The Aadi Kali Mandir is located in the heart of the town of Hailakandi district of Assam. It is one of the oldest temples in the southern parts of Assam. The temple has a rich history that stretches back to the year 1707 A.D. when the queen Rani Induprava Devi, wife of the esteemed Kachari king Krishna Chandra, laid its foundations. Every day, hundreds of people come here to this temple to worship the

goddess Kali (NE India Broadcast, 2019). During the time of Kali puja, there is a huge gathering in this temple. This temple is one of the major tourist attractions not only of this district but also can a major tourist destination of the region.

#### **Sonai Shiva Tilla:**

Sonai Shiva Tilla is also one of the important religious places of this region. According to the sources, the temple was constructed by Joy Singha Barma, the wise minister of the Heramba Kingdom at the advice of the Heramba king Krishna Chandra Narayana. It is dedicated to Hindu god Shiva and it is one of the most important Shiva temples in Assam. The temple is made of red sandstone and it has a single tower. The temple's walls are decorated with intricate carvings of gods and goddesses. The temple is situated on a hilltop, and it offers stunning views of the surrounding countryside. It is a popular tourist destination in Southern Assam (Das, 2022).

#### **Historical Tourism:**

##### **Malegarh:**

Malegarh is located on the India-Bangladesh border at Latu in the Karimganj district of Assam. It is a place where the brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the 1857 mutiny were cremated. On 24th April 1857, the Sepoy Mutiny began in the city of Meerut in the North-Western provinces of India. The mutiny quickly spread throughout India, and Assam was no exception. At Malegarh, local people revolted against the British where more than fifty soldiers lost their lives in the revolt. In this place, people used to visit this historic place. If the local community and government give importance to this place then it can be a famous place in this region (Govt. of Assam, n.d.).

##### **Badarpur Fort:**

Badarpur is a historical landmark situated in the Karimganj district of Assam. This magnificent fort holds great significance. This fort was built on the river bank of Barak. On 6th March 1824, "The Treaty of Badarpur" was signed between the British and the Kachari king Govinda Chandra. According to that treaty, Cachar was declared as a British protectorate and Raja Gobinda Chandra was recognized as the Cachar's ruler. Once, the fort was also used as a trading post as well. The fort is now semi ruined state, but it is still a popular tourist destination. The fort offers stunning views of the surrounding countryside and a reminder of the rich history of the region (Dey, 2020).

##### **Khaspur Rajbari:**

Khaspurrajbari also known as the Dimasa rajbari, is a historical landmark located in the village of Khaspur in the Cachar district of Assam, Bharat. It is the ruins of the palace of the Dimasa kings, who ruled the region since the medieval period. It is built on the plain land. It is made of red sandstone and has a two-story structure. The palace is surrounded by a moat and has several bastions. There are other monuments like Snan Mandir, Ranachandi Mandir, Elephant Gate, Bishnu Mandir, etc. The Rajbari is now semi ruined state, but it is still a popular tourist destination. The ruins offer stunning views of the surrounding countryside and are a reminder of the rich history of the region (Govt. of Assam, n.d.).

#### **Eco-Tourism:**

##### **Barail Wildlife Sanctuary:**

Barail Wildlife Sanctuary is the first wildlife sanctuary in the Southern part of Assam. The area of this sanctuary is jointly shared by the two districts i.e. Cachar district and Dima Hasao district. It is one of the lesser-known protected areas and a hidden treasure amongst the lush green forest in Assam. The sanctuary also has indigenous people who have been leading nature-integrated lifestyles and are keen to showcase their native culture and traditional practices. For the improvement of livelihood opportunities and to generate revenue Borail Eco-camp has established. The tourists can camp there and enjoy the experience of the forest and can interact with the local people. It is run by the Indira Nagar Eco-development Committee was constituted in collaboration with the Cachar Forest division of the Assam Forest Department (DFO Cachar, n.d.).

##### **Barak Bhuban Wildlife Sanctuary:**

Bhuban Hill is not only religious tourism but also soon will be another wildlife sanctuary in Southern Assam Barak Bhuban Wildlife Sanctuary. On July 19th, 2022 the governor of Assam declared constitutes 320-kilometre area under the Moinerkhal range of the Cachar forest division. This wildlife sanctuary is about 40 km from the Silchar city. This will be a good move where the government can promote eco-tourism as well as protect the wild animals as well. There is a proposal to reintroduce

some of the extinct animals in this wildlife sanctuary. These are Rhinos, Tigers, Asian Wild Water Buffalo, Gaur (Indian bison), Swamp deer, and other local animals, etc. it is hoped that people starting from Guwahati can come to Shillong and then visit this region as well (Assam Tribune, 2022).

#### **Challenges of Tourism in the region:**

It has been found from the study that though the region has the potentiality of tourism it faces several challenges that hinder its potential for growth and development. These challenges range from infrastructural limitations to socio-economic factors, environmental concerns, and cultural nuances. One of the primary challenges is inadequate infrastructure. The connectivity networks including roads, rails, and airports make it difficult for tourists to access key destinations. The road connectivity between Lumding to Silchar via Haflong Road is not yet completed. From Shillong to Silchar bi-lane road construction is also delayed. Even the connectivity of railway routes is also very slow, especially in the hilly section. On the other hand, there is no dual railway track. This limitation not only affects the convenience of travel but also hampers the overall tourist experience.

Moreover, qualities of accommodation facilities in hotels are comparatively low to other cities in India. Insufficient guest houses and hotels deter the region's ability to cater to the diverse needs of tourists, impacting the overall appeal for potential visitors. Even if there are hotels most of the hotel's employees are not that trained in how to deal with the customers. Thus, improving service and expanding the hospitality sector is crucial to attract a broader range of tourists and enhance their stay. Another challenge of tourism is the lack of awareness about tourism. The localities of these areas are not very aware of the economic opportunities through the tourism sector. Tourism is the only sector where huge employment can be generated, for instance, tours and travel agencies, tour guides, camping, opening resorts, parks, etc.

Furthermore, the security concern also deters potential tourists. Due to the insurgency issue, people are afraid to visit those places. Addressing issues related to safety and security is paramount to instilling confidence in visitors, and encouraging them to explore the region without apprehensions.

#### **Suggestions and Conclusion:**

The importance of tourism is viewed from many angles such as social, political, economic cultural, etc. This sector is now the fastest-growing and single largest industry in the world. This industry has attained impressive growth in the world. Though other parts of Assam are developing in the tourism sector gradually, particularly Southern Assam is not lagging behind. The region has much to attract both international and domestic tourists. Southern Assam's tourist attraction includes natural sites, historical sites, religious place, monuments, forests, tribal spots, etc. It should be noted here that the development of tourism does not only mean earning currency. Rather the number of employments must be generated and the local people should be benefitted and the standard facility must be provided to the tourists. Once, the locality of the tourist spot will be benefitted then they will be more motivated to do good behaviour with the tourists. Thus, it is essential to rightly recognize and explore the potential of this industry in the Southern Assam region immediately. Finally, as tourism development involves multi-dimensional activities, visionary leadership at the national, regional, and local levels is of utmost necessity. It is hoped that the southern part of Assam will quickly move forward to exploit the potential of tourism in favor of its national development. To make Southern Assam a tourism-friendly region following the recommendations must be implemented.

- a. To overcome these challenges, a comprehensive and collaborative approach is necessary. The connectivity issues like delays in work, soil erosion, dual railway routes, day- night air service, etc. must be resolved as soon as possible so that people can come into this region.
- b. All the hotels of Southern Assam should organize a proper training program for the workers who are not trained as well and proper dress coats must be given to them. The government, tour, and travel agencies, as well as the local community, must utilize digital platforms and social media to disseminate information about the attractions, and activities of Southern Assam. There should be collaboration with travel agencies to include Southern Assam in their promotional itineraries.
- c. The local community should organize a Cultural festival to showcase the tourist attractions of the region. The government should conduct workshops and seminars in local communities to

educate residents about the positive impacts of responsible tourism. Emphasize the role they can play in fostering a welcoming environment for visitors.

- d. Along with Government bodies, local communities, and private stakeholders must work together to invest in infrastructure development, promote sustainable tourism practices, and create initiatives that empower residents economically. Even, the local administration should give those tourists potential areas in a lease with minimum revenue to some NGOs, so that they can develop and earn some amount of income.

In conclusion, the southern part of Assam holds immense tourism potential, but diverse challenges must be addressed for this potential to be realized fully. By focusing on infrastructure, socio-economic development, environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and ensuring security the region can create a conducive environment for tourism to thrive, benefitting both visitors and the local communities.

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