



P-ISSN: 2706-7483

E-ISSN: 2706-7491

IJGGE 2022; 4(2): 112-117

Received: 18-05-2022

Accepted: 23-06-2022

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Tourism potentials in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council districts (KAAC) of Assam

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/27067483.2022.v4.i2b.123>

Abstract

Tourism in common is referred to the movement of people outside their residence and visiting places beyond geographical boundaries of a country. It is considered as one of the largest industries in terms of foreign exchange earnings and employment generation. It is also an effective tool for bridging different cultures and communal conflicts. Many countries have embraced tourism as it serves the purpose of solving various economic and socio-cultural developments. The study area under Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council districts of Assam, India have been blessed by nature with bountiful natural beauty, rare flora and fauna, ethnic culture, heritage, unique cuisine, customs, fairs & festivals, mesmerizing waterfalls and appealing hills. Major part of the tourism resources available in the districts have not been tapped, remained untouched and undiscovered so far. The study area has the potential to be one of the major tourism hubs in Assam as well as North-East India. In the present context, this paper tried to examine and highlight the various tourism potentials and resources available in the study area which has remained undiscovered and unexplored till date.

Keywords: Tourism potential, foreign exchange, employment generation, heritage, fairs & festivals

1. Introduction

Today, travel and tourism has become a necessity. Escape from work, daily routine, rest, relaxation and recreational activities have become essential to reduce pressure at work mentally and physically. Of late, travel and tourism activities of the world community have gone up due to the emergence of more paid holidays, increase in income, incentives, affordable transportation system and access to remotest tourism destination. Travel and Tourism industry have also contributed to the world's GDP and has generated employment across nations. It is also an effective tool in bridging different culture and religion. As per *World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)* reports 2019, Travel & Tourism accounted for 1 in 4 of all new jobs created across the world, 10.6% of all jobs (334 million), and 10.4% of global GDP (US\$ 9.2 trillion) and international visitor spending amounted to US\$ 1.7 trillion in 2019. The total international tourists' arrivals in the year 2019 was 1,460 million, an increase of 4% and the total international tourism receipts is USD 1,481 an increase of 3%. It is loud and clear from the above statistics that tourism industry is evolving every year. Countries across the world have realized the importance of tourism and embraced it with both hands. India is no different to other countries. With the presence of cultural heritage and diversity, natural attractions, fairs and festivals, multiple cuisine, rare flora and fauna it has all the ingredients to be one of the most important tourism hubs of the world. The present study area, the Karbi Anglong district is the largest districts (10,434 Sq. Km total areas) in Assam. It has all the resources to be a perfect tourism destination in the entire North-Eastern states of India. However, it is at the same time one of the districts which receives less inflow of tourist compared to other districts of Assam. The present study is conducted to examine current tourism scenario and tourism potentials of the districts under KAAC.

2. Literature review

Chutia, (2015) has highlighted in his research paper 'Prospects and Problems of Tourism Industry in Assam' that of late, tourism sector has grown in big numbers. It has generated employment and contributed towards the nation's GDP. The beautiful state of Assam is the gateway to the north-east of India and has been blessed by nature abundantly. The beautiful

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scenery, Blue Mountains, picturesque nature, mesmerizing culture and mouthwatering cuisine draws the attention of tourist from all over the world. Over the years Assam tourism industry has witnessed a considerable number of growth and increase in the number of tourists. Mostly tourist flock into this state for its wildlife tourism (Tokbi, 2017). Tourism industry of Assam if compared with the top ten tourism performing states of India, then Assam would be on that list. The state has the best of the best tourism resources and has the potential to be the tourism hub of North-East India (Saikia, 2018). Apart from the cultural, natural, tradition, wildlife tourism attractions, Assam possesses one of the best hill stations in the north east India. Haflong is also known as 'Scotland of Assam' and a wonderland which has been attracting tourist for various adventure tourism activities (Mukherjee, 2018). Moreover, the various types of tourism prevailed in the region are like nature based, event based, health based, eco-tourism and rural based tourism (Bhattacharjee, 2019). However, of late Assam Tourism Industry has had to go through because of issues related to health, safety and security of tourists. Factors affected the Assam tourism industry like health (Covid-19), political (CAA protests), economic, socio-cultural, technological and legal issues (Saikia & Verma, 2020). The other types of tourism prevailed in Assam are cultural and various fairs & festivals like Dwijing festival and Baukhungri festival in the Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam (Zaman et al., 2021).

Research methodology

Aim: The aim of this paper is to study the tourism potentials of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Districts of Assam.

Objectives

1. To examine the current tourism scenario in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Districts of Assam.
2. To highlight the major tourist attractions of the districts.
3. To identify the bottlenecks and suggest measures for the development of tourism in the study area.

Study data: The study is based on primary and secondary data. Qualitative and descriptive study of various journals was collected. The resources searched were from Assam government bulletins, annual reports, tourism magazines, google scholar, semantic scholar and shodhganga.

Study area

Karbi Anglong district was formed by the name 'United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District' on 17th Nov 1951. The district was bifurcated into two separate districts as 'Mikir Hills' and North Cachar Hills district in the year 1970. The 'Mikir Hill' district was renamed as 'Karbi Anglong' on 14th Oct 1976 and therefore a separate district with Diphu as its headquarter was formed. It is one of the largest districts of Assam and located between 25°33' °35' - 26 North latitude and 92°10' - 92°50' East longitude. The district is surrounded by Nagaland and Golaghat district in the east, Hojai district in the west, Golaghat and Nagaon district in the north and Dima Hasao district and Nagaland in the south. In 2016, the Karbi Anglong district was divided into two separate districts as 'Karbi Anglong' with Diphu as its headquarters and 'West Karbi Anglong' district and Hamren as its headquarters respectively. The total geographical area of the undivided Karbi Anglong (East) district is 10,434 sq KM. The West

Karbi Anglong district covers a total area of 3035 Sq. KM and Karbi Anglong district covers 7399 Sq. KM.

Tourism potentials

Karbi Anglong or 'The land of Karbis' is located in the center of Assam. It is a land full of beautiful hills, rare flora and fauna, ethnic culture, unique cuisine and rich in natural beauty, tourist attractions, rivers and waterfalls which have been lying unexplored by many tourists so far. A tourist who visits West Karbi Anglong district would be able to witness beautiful hills, dense forest, waterfall, rivers and streams which flow right from the lap of the Mother Nature. On the other hand, a tourist would be able to witness green hills and meandering streams when he/she visits Karbi Anglong (East) district.

Natural and wildlife tourism.

The district is very famous for its natural resources which have a vast scope for various tourism activities. The district is very rich in wildlife tourism and its rare flora and fauna. There are five wildlife sanctuaries namely Garampani WLS, Marat Longri WLS, East Karbi Anglong WLS, North Karbi Anglong WLS and Nambor WLS. Species found here are unique and are endangered ones. Some of them are one horned rhinoceros, Hollock Gibbon, Macaque, Hornbill, Royal Bengal Tiger, Leopard, Golden Langur, King Cobra, Sambar, Hawk, Deer, Monitor Lizard, Green Pigeon, Myna, Pelicans, and Wood Pecker etc. Flora species found here are Gomari, Sal, Poma, Bonsom, Tita Sopa, Nahar, Badam, Amari, Cham, Bon Am, Neem etc. Tourist of all ages from around the world is attracted to the flora and fauna found here.

Tea tourism

As per Government of Assam Tea Tribe, Directorate for Welfare, there are total 15 tea estates within the Karbi Anglong district namely, Banaspaty, Bhagawati, Borpathar, Bokajan, Dhanseri, Deopani, Lengree, Lahorijan, Nambarnadi, Ramanuggar, Subhaneswari, Silonijan, Arunudo, Nirmal Kumar and Sundarpur. There are few tea estates in the district which produces organic tea and green tea and export to other countries across the world. From decades, Assam has been one of the largest producers and exporters of tea in India. Tourist from foreign countries tour Assam to carry research on tea found in Assam. Tea tourism also has a scope to attract tea loving tourist from other countries. In Assam, Karbi Anglong district is also famous for tea plantation, production and export. There has always been a scope to flourish the tea tourism in this part of the country.

Rivers and waterfalls

Karbi Anglong is drenched by perennial tributaries, streams and rivers which flow throughout the year. Some of the most important rivers found here are Amreng, Borpani, Kolioni, Dhansiri, Dikharu, Nambor, Deopani, Jamuna, Patradisha, Longnit and Doigrung. These river bodies are the lifeline for the people of these districts, who rely on them for their agricultural practices, navigation, fishing and other daily needs. Some of the famous tourist destinations, picnic spots, wildlife sanctuaries and natural tourism spots are located within the bank of these rivers, which provide a vast scope for exploring adventure tourism activities. Some of the tourism spots found here are Amreng Tourist centre,

Khanduli Tourist centre, Khanduli Tourist centre, Kohora Tourist centre, Umwang Tourist centre. Moreover, waterfalls found in this part of the region are of tourist's delight. They have been the USP for tourist's attraction from centuries. Some of them are Dikrut, Kathilangso, Langvoku and Tokolangso.

Cultural and tribal tourism

Karbi Anglong is one of the districts of Assam which is very famous for its tribal culture and communities residing within the district. Different tribal communities perform different customs, rituals, tradition and celebrate ethnic culture. The tribal lifestyle, cuisine, dance and music, fairs and festivals draw tourists from round the globe. Some of the major tribes residing within the districts are Karbis, Dimasas, Bodos, Kuki, Thadou, Hmar, Tiwas, Garos, Man-Tai speaking community, Khasis, Chakmas and Rengma Nagas. To explore ethnic culture and tribal tourism, this part of the country is second to none.

Festivals

Festivals and traditional customs performed by Karbis or Karbi people living in the district are unique and are celebrated in the most fascinating way. The festivals are socio-religious and are accompanied by singing and dancing with music and they are ceremoniously celebrated during sowing, harvesting, fishing, wedding ceremonies, death ceremonies, funeral ceremonies and during pujas. Majority of the festivals are performed by elderly people by offering prayers to the greatest Gods, Goddesses and deities of the Karbi people. Rice beer, pork and tea are commonly served to people who come to celebrate these festivals. Some of the most common festivals celebrated here are Chojun puja or Swarak puja, Rit Nang Ching Di, Hacha-Kekan, Minso Kerung, Henpuph-ahi-ki-en, Hang Pung Sokchong, Chang Kaching Nang, Banjar-Kekan, Rongker, Chokk-eroi, Ok-Kipru and Chomankan.

Karbi youth festival

Karbi Youth Festival is known as one of the largest, oldest and most colorful youth vibrant festivals of the North-East India. This auspicious festival is celebrated every year from 15th – 19th of February. It is celebrated in a valley called 'Taralangso' located in the outskirts of Diphu. The main idea of the festival is to showcase the rich ethnic cultural diversity of the region. This tribal folk festival portrays the rich tribal culture of the Karbi tribe and the indigenous tribes of the North-Eastern states of India in over 500 acres of land area, 5000 ethnic artiste, 800+ stalls and exhibitions at 'Taralangso'.



Fig 2: Image of 'Nothengpi', a Karbi Heritage Museum at Taralangso, Diphu.

Adventure tourism

The topography of Karbi Anglong district is best suitable for adventure tourism activities. The evergreen dense rainforest, rocky hills, turbulent tributaries and rivers, mesmerizing waterfalls pave the way for some of the amazing adventure tourism activities like mountaineering, rock climbing, trekking, horse riding tours, angling, rafting, camping, zip lining, bird watching, safari, kayaking, caving etc. In fact, expeditions are organized and taking place throughout the year in the Singhason hill, which is the highest peak of the district with an altitude of about 1600 mtrs. Singhason hill was developed as an Army-Air-Strip during the World War II by the British soldiers. It is in its original form till date and now is used as camping sites and used as a watch tower of the entire Brahmaputra valley.

Eco - tourism

Karbi Anglong district is blessed by Mother Nature abundantly. The nature, scenic beauty, pleasant climate, blue hills, green forest, environment free from pollution and rare flora and fauna make this one of the best places for eco-tourism. A person who wishes to take a break or escape from daily routine must consider this district as one of the best places for eco-tourism. Some of the fascinating places for eco-tourism within the district are Umswai valley, Arlong-Kundu eco-tourism Park and Kangthilangso eco-tourist Park.

Umswai valley

In Umswai valley, one can purely spend time in the lap of nature with the rural lifestyle of the Tiwa Tribe. This village has a long history or folklores associated from generations which passed on to their ancestors. Every year in the month of March, the Tiwa Tribe here erects Monoliths on top of a small hillock 'Amswai Pinung' in a ceremony called 'Phidri Chongkhong' by village chief called 'Phador and Sangot' and offers prayers and offerings to their spirits and ancestors, which is an integral part of their ceremonial belief. There are more than 2000 rock Monoliths erected in the village and still counting. It speaks out loud about the history associated with the village.



Fig 3: Image of Monoliths erected at Umswai village.

Shikdamakha village

Shikdamakha village located within the vicinity of Umswai valley. It has been declared as one of the cleanest villages in the state of Assam. This village is very unique and has been one of the major eco-tourism destinations of the district. Tourist lodges and homestay facilities are available if one considers experiencing the love of nature in the midst of nature.

Data on tourist arrivals

Assam has been one of the North-Eastern states of India which receives the highest tourist throughout the year.

Domestic as well as international tourist visits Assam to witness and experience the various resources of the state of Assam. As per the *Statistical Handbook of Assam, Govt of Assam*, during the year 2019-2020, the total number of domestic tourists visited Assam was 51, 46,307 and foreign tourist was 18,594. Moreover, the number has been increasing every year. The data of tourist arrivals for the last five years is given below.

Table 1: Domestic and international tourists arrival in Assam, 2015-2020

Year	Domestic	International
2015-16	56,42,950	26,320
2016-17	57,13,156	28,419
2017-18	59,34,3391	31,739
2018-19	60,27,002	41,209
2019-20	51,46,307	18,594

Source:

1. Directorate of Tourism, Govt. of Assam,
2. Statistical Handbook of Assam, Government of Assam.

Role of department of tourism.

The Department of Tourism, KAAC is responsible for the growth, infrastructural development, monitoring, management, procurement and implementation of various tourism related schemes within the two hills districts under the KAAC area. Keeping all these in mind, the department has undertaken various tourism related schemes for the upliftment of the tourism industry. The aims and objectives of this department are as follows.

1. Increase employment opportunities especially in rural areas for employment rural youth.
2. Optimum utilization of the rich tourist resources of the district to attract maximum number of domestic and international tourist.
3. To develop a ready promotion centre for the rich and varied handicrafts to ensure welfare of artisans/artists.
4. To open new vistas in tourism like Adventure Tourism, village tourism, eco-tourism etc.
5. To promote inter-cultural understanding through religious/pilgrimage tourism.
6. Making tourist earnings reach the Below Poverty Line threshold in villages etc.

Infrastructural development

The Department of Tourism, KAAC has been very dedicated and proactive in participating in various tourism infrastructural development and other tourism activities of the districts. Some of the major contributions are as follows:-

Accommodation

Accommodation is one of the most important tourism infrastructures necessary in any tourist destination. The success of a destination hugely depends on the availability of accommodation for all categories of tourists. The department of tourism constructed tourist's lodges at Longsokangthu Tourist Resort and Longnit.

Infrastructure and tourist spot development

One of the most important roles of the Department of Tourism, KAAC is to identify new tourist spots, develop and provide necessary facilities required for tourist within the district. Some of the infrastructural development can be

seen in places like Kangthilangso, Silveta, Longsokangthu Eco-tourism, Kaipholangso etc.

Roadside amenities and cafeteria

Auxiliary services like roadside amenities and cafeteria are very important for tourists to rest, relax and refresh. Keeping this in mind the Department of Tourism, during 2018-19 financial year constructed cafeteria building at Longsokangthu and Longnit tourist's centre.

Others

The Department of Tourism, KAAC has also initiated other tourism related activities for the awareness, popularity and publicity of its tourism resources. Some of them are as follows.

- a. Information and publicity:** Literature and other information were published, produced and distributed in order to facilitate the dissemination of information especially the domestic tourists.
- b. Adventure tourism:** Karbi Anglong district has the potential to be the hub of adventure tourism with the presence of rivers, undulating hills, wildlife and rocks which makes a perfect destination for angling, river rafting, rock climbing, trekking, camping, bird watching etc. The Department of Tourism has encouraged its local youth to take up tourism as a genuine alternate source of income and promote adventure tourism at different levels to attract tourists.
- c. Fairs and festivals:** Participation at the District, State and National level in various fairs and festivals for the promotion of tourism has been the topmost priority of the Department of Tourism, KAAC.

Major bottlenecks and suggestions

Karbi Anglong tourism is still in its early stage of development. The districts receive a fair bit of tourists despite having so many bottlenecks. Various initiatives have been taken by the State Government of Assam Tourism Department, Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) and Department of Tourism (KAAC) for the development of tourism industry in Karbi Anglong districts. Major investment in the development of tourism infrastructure has been initiated. However, the footfall of tourist in the district is still scanty. Some of the major bottlenecks and suggestions identified for the development of the tourism industry in the district are as follows:-

Tourism infrastructure

Tourism infrastructure within the districts is not developed when compared with others. Big and small infrastructural development such as all-weather road, accommodation facilities, development and renovation of tourist spots, wayside amenities, proper water and sanitation facilities are necessary. Moreover, auxiliary and emergency services are one of the major requirements for the success of a tourism destination. Proper accommodation, availability of clean and hygienic food, proper sanitation facilities, clean drinking water, waste disposal system and emergency services like hospitals, police stations, bank, electricity etc. are necessary. If these auxiliary services are absent, then the inflow of tourism would definitely be impacted in a large way. These infrastructures are needed to be introduced and developed to make an impact on the tourist's arrivals in the district. It is very essential for the existence and growth of

the tourism industry.

All weather road

Absence of all-weather roads within the district is one of the major issues which are required to be addressed. During monsoon season, it becomes difficult to commute along the road which is currently in a dilapidated state or neglected due to some unknown reasons. Tourists spots located far from the main road are eventually neglected by tourists as travelling on 'kaccha road' is an adventure in itself.

Accommodation facilities

Availability of accommodation facilities for tourists within the district is not adequate. Proper food and lodging facilities should be available with minimum standards and trained manpower in hospitality services. Moreover, along with primary accommodation, supplementary accommodation facilities must be introduced in the rural and areas located near to the tourist spots.

Frequent bandhs

Frequent bandhs because of political unrest, insurgency, agitation and other organizations not only in the district but within the state has been impacting the growth of tourism industry. It must be stopped for further growth of the nation. Government must take strict action to those who initiate or instigate bandhs.

Advertisement

Proper marketing and advertisement of the tourism products and resources available within the district is not adequate. It has to be looked into very seriously and plan to advertise digitally to draw tourist in a large scale. It is very essential and high time for Karbi Anglong tourism to carry aggressive publicity of its tourism products and services available. It must be advertised both at national and international level through various tourism offices located round the globe and participate in travel marts internationally. Government as well as private organizations which have its umbrella of offices should promote its tourism through print and electronic media.

Transportation

Availability of transportation system to and from the district is sufficient local transportation system are not affordable leaving no option behind as to which tourism couldn't be introduced at a larger scale.

Communication

Lack of proper communication system, mobile network and internet connectivity in many parts of the district and at tourist spots is also a major concern. The state authorities must take initiative by asking the telecom companies to set up Base Transmission System (BTS) for mobile network in areas of tourist importance.

Tourism awareness

Lack of tourism awareness amongst the local people is seen. In that case, education is the only means through which dealings would become easy. Local people must understand that tourism is just another way of earning for a living and for economic growth.

Public-private-partnership (PPP)

Lack of proper coordination in terms of tourism infrastructural development between Government and Private sector organization is visible. We must understand Government alone cannot invest in tourism infrastructural development. Government should provide a platform to private organizations to set up its franchises within the district and state. It must lure private giants to invest in the tourism sector. Private sector companies who have built their image in tourism and hospitality services like, accommodation, cruise, transportation, recreational and theme parks, entertainment industry etc. Single window clearance system for business, financial assistance or loan, incentives, subsidies, discounts in procurement of infrastructure, security etc. will boost the tourism industry.

Government initiatives

Lack of government initiative to promote tourism industry is also an issue. Initiatives with regards to investment in tourism infrastructures, proper coordination with tourism stakeholders, involvement of local bodies and NGOs, training of local youths for tourism and hospitality industry, providing financial assistance, subsidies etc. are necessary to be adopted.

Insurgency

Insurgency is one of the major bottlenecks or trademarks of the district. Last few decades, the districts have witnessed many killings, kidnappings for ransom, fight with security forces and agitations. Lack of job, education, goal in life and opportunities has been one of the major issues for the increase of insurgency problems. The problem of insurgency can be solved through constructive talks, discussion, and bringing them on mainstreams. Government must organize and set programs showing proper path which could otherwise be a challenging task.

Tour operator

Lack of availability of local tour guide or tour operator is another challenge. There must be ever ready tour guide and tour operator for the district as and when required. Training must be imparted in large scale to the local youth who is interested to get trained in 'tour guide'.

Communication skills

People of this district speak their own dialect. Tourist would find it difficult to communicate and understand. The problem of language and communication with local community becomes difficult when languages spoken are different.

Tourism policy

There must be a Tourism policy initiated by the Department of Tourism, KAAC. Moreover, the state's current tourism policy 'Assam Tourism Policy 2017' has the validity till 31st of March 2022, therefore it has become important for the government to come up with new tourism policy, which would encourage the tourism stakeholders to take a leap in the field of tourism industry.

Conclusion

Travel and Tourism industry is growing in numbers over the years. Its contribution to the world's GDP is visible and contributes to the employment of youths to a large extent.

Tourism industry in Assam is no different. It is imperative from the above study that the districts in KAAC have the potential to be one of the leading tourism hubs of the entire North-Eastern states of India. The districts are blessed by nature abundantly. It possesses all the ingredients to be a perfect recipe for tourist's paradise. The district is rich and has potential in natural and wildlife tourism, tea tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, tribal culture, fairs and festivals, waterfalls, gorges, rivers etc. besides it is famous for vibrant youth festivals. Karbi Anglong district is the largest districts of Assam but it is one of the districts which have the lowest number of tourist's footfall. There are many bottlenecks discussed and measures suggested to bring improvement in tourism infrastructure, insurgency, government initiative, tourism policy, publicity and public-private-partnership (PPP model). A new tourism policy should be initiated at the district level by the Department of Tourism, KAAC, looking at the current market, demand, growth and development of the state tourism industry.

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