

INFLOW OF TOURISTS IN MEGHALAYA A STUDY FOR THE PERIOD 1997-2004

Dr. Vijay Kumar Shrotryia, Reader
Ms. Priya Juving Rai Dkhar, Research Scholar
*Department of Commerce,
School of Economics, Management & Information Sciences,
North Eastern Hill University, Shillong.*

OVERVIEW

The word "tourism" has its origin in a Latin word "tornos" meaning a tool for describing a circle or turners wheel. From the same Latin word, terms like "round tour" or a package tour have emerged to give essence to tourism. How this term "tour" came into being no one can explain. But a possible explanation was given that the term "tour" meaning a trip evolved from "tower" meaning castle and was referred to going around the parapets of tower for sight seeing and for relaxing. It was only in the beginning of eighteenth century that "tourism" was defined in modern sense, that 'it was a short temporary trip away from home for some pleasurable purposes'.¹ Tourism has been viewed differently by different people. But in India the government is considering it as an industry and placing importance accordingly. Since it has its ancillary fields operating in different other areas of service industry, it becomes difficult to focus on one particular area. However, tourism has been viewed as an economic activity by different academicians and researchers.

Tourism is an important player for the economic and social development of a nation. *Tourism is a major engine of economic growth in most parts of the world. Several countries have transformed their economies using the tourism potential to the fullest...Tourism has great capacity to create large scale employment of diverse kind – from the most specialized to the unskilled and all of us know that generation of massive productive employment opportunity is what India needs the most*². Tourism has become one of the largest growing industries in the world, with the impact of globalization. If this industry is developed and exploited, the problem of unemployment will be solved to a great extent in the North-East in general and Meghalaya in particular. Meghalaya has lot of potential of developing certain identified as well as hidden areas into hot destinations for tourists both from within and outside the nation. Hills have always fascinated the tourists whether from within or outside the country. Meghalaya being one of the hilly States have many things to offer to the tourist. It is very rich so far as biodiversity is concerned. It attracts nature lovers, sport persons, academicians, and music lovers and likes to explore this state. It is unique in culture and has relatively strong infrastructure settings such as hotels and transport system hence has an advantage over the other states in the North-East so far as tourists' priority is concerned. The wettest spot on earth is in Meghalaya, but it is restricted to the course books and on the marketing front the state has not been able to capitalize this location advantage.

However it is still lacking behind other states and is not able to attract more tourists. So exploitation and development in a proper manner of the tourism industry is vital to the state, which not only helps in the economic development but also helps in reducing the problem of unemployment to far extent. Recently the government has shown keen interest in developing this sector and it is expected that in the times to follow, the state would be in a position to lure more tourists whereby earning more revenue. It is unfortunate that the importance national planners are expected to give to this state, has not been given. Tourists are catered by segments like travel agents, tour operators, hotels and airline services. Restaurants and general stores also play a similar role but unfortunately they do not pay due attention to play a role in the development of tourism in the state.

The Government of Meghalaya formulated its first tourism policy as The Meghalaya Tourism Policy (MTP) in 2001. This policy was drafted keeping in mind the potential of the state

and the priorities setup by the central government in the area of tourism. *Tourism development is as significant to Meghalaya, as it has been in the other more progressive states of India where it has grown into a promising industry. In the context, tourism can therefore, be considered to be the gateway to economic development of the state.*³ This statement mentioned in the policy document focuses on considering tourism as an industry. The question is whether the government has been successfully in translating it into reality. The policy document has also mentioned that *..make the state one of the best tourist destinations of the country*⁴. with the help of the data available it is analysed in the further discussion whether the government has been able to make the state one of the best tourist destinations of the country or not.

The government at the centre has started giving more importance to the development of tourism infrastructure which is evident from the 10th plan document: *Development of tourism needs to be taken up on priority basis as India has large untapped tourism potential, which can be successfully harnessed for the benefit of development of areas that have remained underdeveloped despite being potential destinations can be substantial as the activity in itself is labor intensive and also has extensive forward and backward economic linkage.*⁵ World Tourism Organization has projected that annual arrival growth would be around 4.5% by 2020 and international tourist arrivals would go up from 613 million to 1.6 billion, as well as spending during the same period would touch a figure of US \$2 trillion from present figure of US \$ 447 million⁶. China describes tourism as a pillar of the economy⁷. The government also realizes that there are certain barriers which are not allowing this sector to grow as it is growing internationally. It has identified – *absence of consensus on role of tourism, lack of priority to tourism on account of unappreciated potential, relatively low levels of investment, lack of interest on the part of the state governments (the primary players), and an unprofessional ad hoc approach as approach related barriers*⁸.

DATA ANALYSIS:

It is evident from the data available from Directorate of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya that in the last eight years there has been an increase of tourists both domestic as well as foreign. The data available from 1997 to 2004 (Table 1) shows that there is three fold increase in tourists coming into Meghalaya during this period. It is important to mention that after adopting Meghalaya Tourism Policy (MTP) 2001 there was a sharp increase in the annual growth rate (50.5%) in the inflow of tourists between 2001-2002 both domestic (50.27 %) as well as foreign (33.51 %). Unfortunately, the government could not maintain this momentum in the subsequent years as total tourist inflow could only increase by 39.21 % and 17.88 % for the year 2003 and 2004 respectively. However inflow of foreign tourists jumped from 33.5 % in the year 2002 to 97.56 % in the year 2003, 2004 respectively. This must have helped the state to earn good amount of foreign exchange earnings during this period.

Table 1			
Arrival of Tourists in Meghalaya			
1997 – 2004			
Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total
1997	115563	1071	116634
1998	136952	1055	138007
1999	159730	1971	161701
2000	169929	2327	172256
2001	178697	2390	181087
2002	268529	3191	271720
2003	371953	6304	378257
2004	433495	12407	445902

Source: Statistical report available with Directorate of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya

If the study focuses on four years before and after adoption of MTP 2001, it provides an interesting fact. The increase in total inflow of tourists in the year 1998 (from 1997) was 18.32 % and more or less the same percentage of annual growth (17.88 %) is observed in the year 2004 (increase from 2003). These small figures primarily might question the viability of having a tourism policy in the state as we have reached to the same level (rather below) after 4 years of adoption of MTP 2001. Further the available data also raises question as to why the government has not been able to lure domestic tourists as compared to foreign tourists. There could be few questions which needs to be addressed as to how tourism can be developed as an important industry in the state.

Table 2

Foreign tourist arrivals					
Year	Foreign tourists in India*		Foreign tourists in Meghalaya**		Composition *** in %
	Number	Annual Growth Rate (%)	Number	Annual Growth Rate (%)	
1996-97	2334000	6.60	1071		0.0459
1997-98	2371000	1.59	1059	-1.12	0.0447
1998-99	2397000	1.10	1742	64.49	0.0727
1999-00	2505000	4.51	2238	28.47	0.0893
2000-01	2699000	7.74	2374	6.09	0.0880
2001-02	2428000	-10.04	2991	25.97	0.1232
2002-03	2454000	1.07	5526	84.76	0.2252
2003-04	2879000	17.32	10881	96.92	0.3780

*Source: Economic Survey 2004-2005, p.156

**The data available with the directorate of tourism was for a calendar year whereas in the national data was for a financial year, therefore an adjustment has been made in the no. of foreign tourists visiting Meghalaya to make it comparable with the national data.

***percentage of tourist arrival in Meghalaya out of tourist arrival in India.

If the inflow of foreign tourists in India is compared with the inflow of foreign tourists in Meghalaya (Table 2) it shows some very positive results as in the year 1996-97 out of the total foreigners touring India merely 0.046 % visited Meghalaya whereas this percentage has gone up to 0.378 % in the year 2003-2004.

The share of foreign tourist inflow in Meghalaya out of foreign tourist inflow in India is same as Indian share in the world international arrivals viz. 0.38%⁹. Except in the year 2000-2001 when there was a slight decrease in the composition, in the last eight years the number of foreigners coming to Meghalaya out of the foreign tourists coming to India has been going up. Interestingly after 9/11 there was 10.04 % decrease in annual growth of foreign tourist inflow in India. On the other hand there was a sharp increase of 25.97 % in the annual growth of foreign tourist inflow in Meghalaya. Even in the succeeding year there was merely 1.07 % increase in the inflow of foreign tourists in India whereas there was an increase in the growth rate of foreign tourists in Meghalaya by 84.76 %. Last year i.e., 2003-2004 has been very positive from tourism point of view both for the nation as well as for Meghalaya State. It witnessed 17.32 % and 96.92 % increases in the annual growth rate of foreign tourists in India and Meghalaya respectively. So far as estimated foreign exchange earnings are concerned, 2003-2004 reached remarkable high as it is estimated to have earned USD 3945 million recording 30.2 % growth rate over the previous year. The data as to

foreign exchange earnings in Meghalaya was not available otherwise it could have made a good comparative study.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

On the basis of the above data, analysis following major findings is derived:

1. Four years before and after adoption of MTP 2001 annual growth rate is more or less same which questions the relevance of MTP 2001.
2. The state has performed better as compared to the country so far as foreign tourist is concerned in the last eight years.
3. The annual growth rate in the last years has been much higher in case of foreign tourist as compared to domestic tourist.
4. The State has not utilized approved plan outlay in tourism sector which could also be one of the reason of fall in the annual growth rate of inflow of domestic tourists.

CONCLUSION:

The above study concentrated on 8 years period and brought out some important issues for discussion. It is surprising to note that the inflow of foreign tourist during the period of study has been quite positive which might provide as general feeling that the available infrastructure such as hotels, transport and restaurants etc, is not that bad as thought. Further if one looks up on the figures of domestic tourist in the state the annual growth rate has not been very good. The researchers feel that may be the state has not been able to build its image to lure more domestic tourists. Further research is required to be done to find out the status of other North Eastern states then only an appropriate comment can be made. The policy makers need to give attention to these issues so that the steps are taken to make the state one of the best tourist destinations of the country.

The central government has also identified lack of interest on the part of the state governments – the primary as one of the approach related barrier. Meghalaya government can take up some initiatives to overcome this barrier and to deliver tourism related services in a way that such notion of the central government is changed since it is the respective states which are primary players in this sector.

REFERENCES:

1. Sajnani, Dr. M.1999. Indian Tourism Business. A Legal Perspective. Gyan Publishing House. New Delhi. Pp: 113-18
2. Vajpayee, Atal Behari. Prime Minister of India addressing the Chief Ministers' Conference on 30th October 2001 (quoted in the New National Tourism Policy 2002. Main Document . Department of tourism, Government of India.p.1.
3. Meghalaya Tourism Policy – 2001, Tourism Department, Government of Meghalaya, p 1.
4. Ibid. p.2
5. Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) Main Document, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi 2002 Volume I p.156
6. Sajani, N & VK Goswami, 2002. Tourism: Growth, Management and Incentives. Kalpaz Publications, N Delhi. P.25
7. Seth, Rabindra. 1999. Tourism: Problems and Prospects. Yojana. August. P.21.
8. Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) Main Document, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi 2002 Volume II p. 821
9. Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) Main Document, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi 2002 Volume II p. 820