

MANIPUR: A Tourist Paradise



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E. Ishwarjit Singh

The book *Manipur: A Tourist Paradise* is a unique milestone of tourism. It reveals that Manipur has unlimited untapped potential for the development of tourism in terms of exotic scenic natural beauty, fascinating wild life, salubrious climate and mosaic of enchanting cultures. If properly conceived and executed, it will prove to be of immense benefit to the state. This work is based on field surveys which were conducted during 2001-2003 to get accurate information. This book deals with the geographical personality of the state, tourist movement, tourist attractions in both hilly and valley areas. Selected tourist sites for in-depth case studies for problems and strategies for the development of tourism in the state has been considered.



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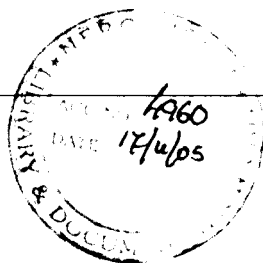


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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<i>List of Maps</i>	vii
<i>List of Plates</i>	viii
<i>Foreword</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>Glossary</i>	xvii
<i>Introduction</i>	xxv
 Part I: Geographical Personality of the Study Area: Manipur	
1. Physical and Socio-Economic Background of Manipur	2
1.1 Physical Background of Manipur	2
1.2 Social Background of Manipur	19
1.3 Economic Background of Manipur	28
 Part II: Opening Manipur for Tourism	
2. Tourist Movement in Manipur	35
2.1 Ancient Period	35
2.2 Medieval Period	38
2.3 British Period	43
2.4 Post Independence Period	46
3. Tourist Attractions of Manipur	50
3.1 Hill Area	53
3.2 Imphal Valley	72

4. Tourist Centres of Manipur: Selected Case Studies	99
4.1 Loktak Lake—Scenic Beauty Site	99
4.2 Keibul Lamjao National Park: Wild Life Site	113
4.3 Dzuko Valley: Biospheric Conservation	119
4.4 Govindajee Temple: Religious Centres	126
5. Tourist Centres of Manipur: Selected Case Studies	132
5.1 Imphal Town (Capital)	132
5.2 Kangla Fort/Old Palace: Historical Site	147
5.3 Ukhrul Town: Hill Station	156
5.4 Moreh Town: Commercial Site	166

Part III: Development of Tourism in Manipur

6. Tourism Strategy for Manipur	179
6.1 Present Status of Tourism	180
6.2 Problems in the Development of Tourism	184
6.3 Strategies for the Development of Tourism	188
<i>Conclusion</i>	193
<i>Bibliography</i>	205
<i>Illustrations</i>	213
<i>Index</i>	230

Introduction

The more we study the arena of tourism and culture, the more we are struck by the great opportunity that the travel and tourism industry, backed by healthy cultural values, provides for creating a new civilization in the 21st century.

Few of us realise that the world has been undergoing a tourism revolution, particularly in the last four decades of the 20th century. In 1964, the number of tourists leaving their home worldwide was 100 million. This number increased to 200 million in 1974, 500 million in 1992 and 700 million in 2001 (*Hindustan Times*, 16th May, 2002). Unfortunately, the two major impediments in the way of tourism development was the disaster of 11th September, 2001 and the general slowdown of the economy. These obstructions were shortlived and the tourism revolution further gained momentum and attained acceleration.

The World Tourism Organisation estimates that tourists spend more than US \$462 billion, which is US \$1.3 billion a day. Tourist arrivals are predicted to grow by an average of 4.1 per cent a year over the next two decades, surpassing a total of one billion international travellers by the year 2010 (WTO, 2002). Tourism is the world's largest employer, generating, directly and indirectly, nearly 200 million jobs or some 10 per cent of the jobs globally (Vania, 2002).

The fastest growing segment in tourism is nature tourism. World Tourism Organisation (WTO) estimates that nature tourism generated 7 per cent of all international travel. Today nature tourism is the largest foreign exchange earner for S. Africa, Kenya, Ecuador and Costa Rica. Moreover, while the tourism industry has an estimated annual growth rate of 4 per cent, nature travel boasts of a growth rate between 10-30 per cent. The argument is that even a fraction of these

revenues, if channelled in the right direction, can go a long way to help the local economy and ecology.

Tourism is not merely leisure or entertainment or physical invigoration or mental rejuvenation but it also serves as potent instrument for eliminating poverty, for ending unemployment, for promoting dialogue among civilizations and for providing channels in which streams of different cultures could meet and mingle and create a new ethicscape on which a fair, just, humane and enlightened order could be built for the humanity.

We, in India are trying to open hitherto closed doors and find new passages. Our overall effort is to present to the world the wonder that India is. Wonder not only in terms of beauties and bounties of nature but also in terms of an ancient civilization that was born and bred here. A civilization that sprang from an original and powerful mind and created three of the five greatest thought processes in the world—Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. India has rediscovered its vast bounties of nature, art, architecture, culture and religious places. It is also tapping all opportunities for hill adventure, rural and wildlife tourism and placing before the world, through tourist spots its unique techniques of *Yoga*, *Siddha*, *Ayurvedic* and *Unani* system. It is laying down an exchanging network of 572 nature endowed areas—89 national parks and 983 wildlife sanctuaries and 3,606 protected monuments (*Hindustan Times*, 16th May, 2002). We are keen to ensure that tourists to India should get physically invigorated, mentally rejuvenated, culturally enriched and spiritually elevated and on return to his country, he should feel India within him.

For the creation of a better world, the challenge is to encourage attitude and trends and evolve policies and programmes which would substantially increase the flow of tourists from affluent to non-affluent countries, cause reduction in disparities of income and resource distribution and through closer and more frequent contacts, create a deeper understanding.

The National Policy put forward by the Government of India has been the development of tourism in the exotic North-East as the key to all economic and social development in the area. It accepts the concept that economic development

of Manipur can be brought about only through robust tourism industry (Singh, 2000). The potentialities of the state for the development of tourism should be highlighted for popularization and marketing. The state abounds in natural scenic beauties like, alpine meadows, pristine forest, kaleidoscopic landscape, rugged mountains, fascinating landscapes, blue hills, dales, rapids, waterfalls, wetland formation on lofty hills, shimmering lakes with colourful lilies, lotus, elegant islands, exotic orchards, wild orchids, salubrious climate etc. and mosaic of enchanting cultures manifests in the form of graceful dances, traditional songs, festivals, ritual functions, nuptial style, martial art, indigenous games etc. All these resources ensure that Manipur could generate huge foreign exchange and also bring cultural renaissance through robust tourism.

OBJECTIVES

In this book an attempt has been made to focus attention on the fact that development could be generated through tourism in Manipur. This process would be a slow one but ultimately it will bring good results. When money will flow in, when people will get employment, insurgency will be gradually forgotten and politico-economic and social stability will usher in.

The present study has certain specific objectives. They are:

1. To assess the geographical personality of Manipur—its geology, relief, drainage system, climate, flora and fauna; its people, culture, religion and present demography; its economic structure and transport system.
2. To study the tourist movement in Manipur during the ancient, medieval, British and post-Independence period.
3. To assess tourist attractions of hilly area and central valley of Manipur—natural factors, socio-cultural factors, religious and historical places and infra-structural facilities.
4. To examine in detail the selected tourist spots of Manipur having different types of attractions—Loktak

lake as a scenic site, Keibul Lamjao National Park as wild life site, Dzuko valley as a biospheric conservation site, Govindajee temple as a religious place, Ukhrul as a hill station and Moreh as a site of commercial centre.

5. To locate other places of tourist attractions around the selected sites in order to make a package tour of the sites.
6. To assess the perception of tourists for further planning and development of tourist sites.
7. To design and plan strategies for the development of tourism in Manipur. Before designing such strategies, the present status of tourism and problems in the way of development of tourism in Manipur will be examined.

DATA BASE

The data were collected from primary and secondary sources. This study is based on primary sources of data which has been collected through:

1. Field surveys.
2. Survey of selected tourist spots.
3. Questionnaire interviews with tourists, government officials, local people, hoteliers, bus owners etc.

The field work was done during the years 2001-2003. For getting accurate information the selected spots were visited frequently.

Data from secondary sources have been collected from various Government offices, private institutions, tourism departments etc.

METHODOLOGY

The following methods have been used in the present study:

1. Assessment of the places of attraction in Manipur both in the hilly areas and in the central valley was done with the help of both primary and secondary sources

of data. The author conducted field surveys to gather the relevant informations.

2. Eight tourist spots, having different types of attraction were selected for indepth study. A comprehensive survey of these sites were conducted and information regarding its location, history, natural scenic beauty, culture, festivals, dances, drama, sports, handicrafts etc. were gathered.
3. The study is based on primary sources of data which were drawn with the help of questionnaire interviews. Tourists, workers, hotel managers, bus owners, local people, officials etc. were interviewed for getting information regarding their views, attitudes, motives, perceptions, difficulties and constraints.

HYPOTHESES

1. Manipur is a 'Land of Promise'. It abounds in scenic beauty and cultural mosaic which can attract tourists not only from India but from all over the world.
2. There are more problems than beauty in Manipur. Its isolation from the outside world, its backwardness, ruggedness of the topography, insurgency, lack of accessibility, lack of transport and infrastructural facilities are the impediments in the way of development.
3. The closed doors of Manipur should be opened and efforts should be made to present to the world the wonder that Manipur is. Wonder not only in terms of beauties and bounties of nature but also in terms of its culture, festivals, dances, martial art, nuptial style, sport, handicrafts etc. Through tourism, development could be ushered in this state.