

# Splendid North-East ! Tourism Perspective & Prospects



Sarat C. Joshi

Splendid North-East! A paradise for tourists of all sorts.

Bestowed with luxuriant natural resources, rich biodiversity, lush green forests, mountains, hills, valleys, rivers and rivulets, lakes and wetlands and varied fauna and flora, entire region provides ample opportunities for adventure seekers, nature and ecotourists, and nature lovers.

A mosaic of different ethnicities, an ideal place for cultural and educational tourism.

Land of monasteries, temples and churches—a unique place for spiritual solace, pilgrimage and religious tourism.

Relish unique and delicious indigenous cuisines; have souvenirs of handicrafts unknown to other places; a place for holidaying and leisure tourism.

The vital information on tourism perspective and prospects is state-wise furnished under the following volumes:

- Asam and Meghalaya
- Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh
- Manipur and Tripura
- Mizoram and Nagaland.

**Dr. Sarat C. Joshi** obtained his PhD in Sociology from University of Rajasthan, Jaipur in 1991. Formerly, Assistant Director at National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD), Regional Centre, Guwahati, currently he is a Senior Faculty at NIPCCD, New Delhi.

A prolific writer, he has authored many outstanding books including **Migration to a Metropolis** (1994); **Sociology of Migration and Kinship** (1999); **Manipur: The Jewel of India** (2002); **Dynamics of Non Formal Education** (2002); **Women Empowerment: Myth and Reality** (2004); **Handbook of Social Work** (2004); **Child Labour: Issues, Challenges and Laws** (2005); **Social Problem: Genesis Causes and Magnitude** (2006); **Human Rights: Concepts, Issues and Laws** (2006); and **Fundamentals of Sociology** (2006).

A keen and seasoned researcher, he has worked on various projects of ICSSR, ICMR, DANIDA, WFP and Ministry of Women and Child Development. About 20 research papers/articles have also been published in various magazines / journals. He has also been acting as Monitor/ Evaluator of different socioeconomic programmes initiated by CAPART and Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

Dr. Joshi's current areas of interest are Migration, Child Care Institutions, Self Help Groups of Women and Environment.

# **Splendid North-East!**

**Tourism Perspective and Prospects**

**Vol. I  
Assam & Meghalaya**

**Sarat C. Joshi**



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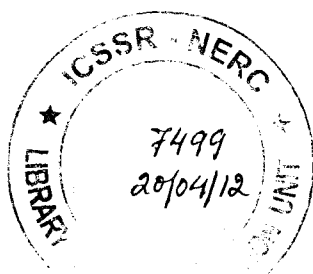
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Ph.: 23263193 / 9811582579 / 09435116718

Fax: 011-23263193

Email: ektabooks@yahoo.com

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# 1

## Northeast India: An Overview

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Splendid North-east! as the title suggests, Northeast region of India is really splendid. Bestowed by the nature with beautiful landscape, hills mountains, rivers and rivulets, valleys, riverine plains, lakes, wetlands, lushgreen forests having abundant biodiversity—fauna and flora—all the more beautiful, simple and hospitable people, North-East is a place, which is virgin to tourists—domestic as well as foreign.

Gateway to southeast Asia—Myanmar, Thailand, China, etc. northeastern states of India have ample potential of tourism of all sorts.

Its salubrious climate, along with a unique masaic of ethnicities, cultural richness, feasts and festivals, excellent yet unique cuisines, indogenous as well as other religious beliefs and faiths make it an ideal destination to visit.

Covering an area of around 255168 sq. kms., and home to 40 million people, North-East India lie deep in the lap of easternmost Himalayan hills in north-eastern part of India. Connected to rest of India by merely 20 km of wide land (at Siliguri, West Bengal), the North-East India shares over 2,000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

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### **Constituents of the North-East**

- Assam
- Arunachal Pradesh
- Meghalaya
- Mizoram
- Manipur
- Nagaland
- Sikkim
- Tripura

Brahmaputra valley land (of Assam) is the most populated, and houses almost half of population of North-East India.

Hinduism, Meitei, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity.

Amidsta variety of languages, Hindi, English, Assamese, Garo, Jaintia, Khasi, Bengali, Mizo, Manipuri, Nagamese, Lepcha, Limboo, Bhutia (Sikkimese), Bhutia (Tibetan), and several other local dialects. are spoken and understood in the region.

Northeast India refers to the easternmost region of India consisting of the contiguous Seven Sister States, Sikkim, and parts of North Bengal (districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Koch Bihar). Northeast India is ethnically distinct from the other states of India. Linguistically the region is distinguished by a preponderance of Tibeto-Burman languages. Strong ethnic cultures that had escaped Sanskritization effects permeate the region. That the eight states form a special category is officially recognized. The North East Council (NEC) was constituted in 1971 as the nodal agency for the economic and social development of the eight states, the North Eastern Development Finance

Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) was incorporated on August 9, 1995 and the Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DONER) was set up in September 2001.

Among the North Eastern states, Sikkim became an Indian protectorate in 1947 and a full state in 1975. The Siliguri Corridor in West Bengal, with an average width of 21 km to 40 km, connects the north eastern region with the Indian mainland. More than 2000 km of boundary is shared with other countries: namely Nepal, China, Bhutan, Burma and Bangladesh.

What is now Northeast India has been added to India during British Raj. Assam (which included at the time of Indian independence, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya) had its own history (though overlapping with the history of Bengal); Manipur and Tripura were princely states that also had their own histories; Arunachal Pradesh was beyond the outer line of British India at the beginning of the 20th century; and Sikkim was not part of the Republic of India until 1975. Most of these areas were incorporated into mainstream India during the British Raj when British colonial authorities annexed traditionally separate border states into Indian territory to form a buffer between their colony and external powers (i.e.: Assam, Manipur and Tripura in the Northeast, and Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province in the northwest). After independence in 1947, extension of the Indian state and political apparatus has been a challenge.

Much of Arunachal Pradesh is claimed by China. Sino-Indian relations degraded during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The cause of the escalation into war is still disputed by both Chinese and Indian sources. During the war in 1962, the PRC captured much of the NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) created by India in 1954. However, China

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soon declared victory and voluntarily withdrew back to the McMahon Line due to Soviet Veto in U.N. and returned Indian prisoners of war in 1963.

The region is known for its unique culture, handicrafts, martial arts, and scenic beauty. Problems include insurgency, unemployment, drug addiction, and lack of infrastructure. Since the beginning of the economic liberalization in the 1990s, studies have shown that this region is lagging behind the others in terms of development.

Northeast India has a predominantly humid sub-tropical climate with hot, humid summers, severe monsoons and mild winters. Along with the west coast of India, this region has some of the Indian sub-continent's last remaining rain forests. The states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim have a montane climate with cold, snowy winters and mild summers.

The isolation of the Northeastern states began earlier as a result of British imperialism, when the region was cut-off from its traditional trading partners (Bhutan, Myanmar and Indo-China). In 1947 Indian independence and partition made this a landlocked region, exacerbating the isolation that is being recognized lately, but not studied yet. Soon it became a captive market for mainstream India.

The northeastern states, having a comparatively small electorate (3.8% of India's total population) are allotted just 25 out of a total of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha (4.6% of the total number of seats).

The northeastern states are home to many ethnic groups, that are engaged in self-preservation. In recent times, some of these struggles have turned violent, leading to proliferation of armed insurgent groups, like the ULFA,

NLFT., NDFB and NSCN. Soon after the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and especially after the rise of insurgency in the region, security influence on policies has increased.

### **Major Communities**

- Assamese
- Bengali
- Bishnupriya Manipuri
- Bodo
- Dimasa
- Garo

The North-East India is home to varied number of tribal groups (almost 166). Each tribes has their own distinct culture, which gives them a unique cultural identity. Numerous of art forms and festivals of the region are intrinsic part of its rich culture and tradition. Many of festivals like Bihu, Jhum Cultivation, Ke Pemplang, Nongkrem, Durga Puja and Karchi Puja are some of the most important festivals, which are mirror to rich socio-cultural life of North-East India.

Dance forms like Garia, Bizu, Hai Hak and Manipuri are essential part of cultural and religious celebration of North-eastern tribes. Performed in groups, music and dance forms of North-east are fine feast for travelers to watch.

Though North-East India is very rich in its food culture, but it differs vastly from rest of the country in its taste as well as flavours. Each of states have almost same fooding behaviour. Normally, inhabitants of the region are non-vegetarian, and fond of spice. Bamboo Shoots and dishes prepared from Ducks are in vogue in the region.

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In some part of North-East India, animals are considered to be good diet. In Nagaland, most of the dogs have fallen prey to local tribes. In Tripura and Assam, fish are the favourite dish. While in Assam, various forms of rice are consumed. Recipes like Assam Laksa Stock, Koat Pitha, Bamboo Shoot Fry, Fish Fried Rice, Grilled Shrimps and Poora Mach are some of the most famous cuisine of North-East India.

### **Major Attractions**

Shrouded by mighty Himalayan hills, the entire North-East region is believed to be one of the most beautiful region in South Asia in terms of fetching immense opportunities of ecotourism. The dense forests lying in foothills of Himalayan hills are stunning in their natural beauty, and are home to many of wildlife parks including Manas National Park and Kaziranga National Park, which are natural World Heritage Site. Besides, numerous of lovely waterfalls and caves are another beautiful attraction of the wonderful land of North-East India.

Regarded as one of the best geographical regions to enjoy eco adventurous in the entire South Asia, North-East Asia is indeed paradise for nature lovers. Well off natural heritage including line of Himalayan hills, pervasive dense forests, lovely waterfalls and caves let tourist indulge into a number of activities. The best one can pick up while touring to North-East region is eco adventure activities like Trekking, White Water Rafting, Mountaineering, Wildlife Explorations and Para-Gliding.

In fact, a hidden treasure of India, North-East India is one of the most significant region of South-Asia in terms of availability of ecotourism opportunities. As the whole region is abode to majestic Himalayan hills, beautiful valleys and

dense forests, the opportunity of nature based tourism is immense. Abundance of eco activities like Trekking, Rafting, Nature Walk, Jungle Exploration and Wildlife Viewing indulge tourists predominantly in discovering the exquisite natural heritage of the region.

Due to apathy of government and administration, lack of modern education and infrastructure development, negligent attitude towards local craftsmanship, misuse (even abuse) of natural resources, and continuation of British colonial policy towards region and its populace etc. are major factors impacting the overall development of the region. These factors led to feeling of alienation and hostile attitude of people towards governance. More so the inter- and inter-ethnic clashes, terrorism and socio-political unrest are the result of a faulty policy of government, no doubt.

Though now under changed circumstances, the government of India has taken various remedial steps towards all-round development and prosperity of the region but the disturbed situation is an hurdle to reach the fruits of these at grassroot level. Corruption at public officials is rampant as elsewhere in India.

### **Prospects of Tourism**

As already stated, Nature has bestowed the region with everything, an ample potential of tourism is present in the region.

1. Entire northeast has many excellent places for adventure tourism like para-gliding, mountaineering, river-rafting, trekking etc.
2. Abundant biodiversity, fauna and flora provide enough opportunities for ecotourism.
3. Rich and unique cultural indigenous heritage,

ethnicities, biodiversity etc. can provide opportunities of education tourism in the region if proper facilities for could be developed.

4. Entire northeast is strategically located having international boundaries with Nepal, Tibet, China, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Border-trade can provide ample opportunities of business tourism in the region if a proper infrastructure for this could be developed.
5. Ancient monuments, historic ruins, temples, monasteries etc. provide amply opportunities of religious; heritage or pilgrimage tourism in the region.
6. Picturesque scenic beauty, cool, temperate and salubrious climate provide opportunities for holidaying to nature lovers.
7. If world class hospitals and medical facilities could be developed amidst lofty locales in the region could boost medical tourism.

Here in this work, we intend to elucidate tourism perspective and prospects in the Northeast India, we will treat the subject elaborately taking individual states as special entity.

After having historical and geographical description we will put light on tourism potential in the state, major tourist destinations and attractions. Major cities, worth visit, art and craft, fairs and festivals, wildlife, biodiversity etc. are given an elaborate treatment which every inquisitive tourist or scholar on tourism must know.

Here follows the state-wise description.

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